

PROJECT ABSTRACT

Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: A STRATEGY TO ENHANCE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP RETENTION
IN KABUSUNZU SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH,
EAST-CENTRAL RWANDA CONFERENCE

Researcher: Jean Baptiste Niyonzima

Faculty advisor: Javan Harelimana, DMin

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While the church is committed to baptize and bring as many persons to Jesus as possible to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus (Matt 28:19, 20), the church has issues with retention and making believers disciples. This has become a great challenge which needs to be focused on. Different researchers have shown that the issue of membership loss is an increasing challenge. This hinders the effort of evangelism and the growth of the church. It is often hidden in unreal figures found in implausible statistical reports. When the new converts are baptized they live as they did before. If they do not feel warmly welcomed into a loving church, they tend to backslide or drift here and there, instead of being a dynamic force in the church.

After studying the issue of loss and retention throughout the Bible and God's intention to save all who want to be saved, I performed a literature review to discover

how the retention problem is understood and treated by different writers. Then I investigated Kabusunzu Seventh-day Adventist Church in Kigali to assess the situation. The lifestyle of believers appears to be problematic; if they are not true disciples, they are therefore not prepared to make other disciples. Only regular evangelistic campaigns are organized. The atmosphere is quite warm during the campaigns. People come to attend out of curiosity and are baptized, only to be left alone afterwards. The new church members suffer loneliness. Small groups exist formally, but a large percentage of newly baptized members can disappear within two months without the notice of either church members or leaders, giving the impression that they do not care.

The strategy implemented was based on effective methods to retain members. Evangelistic strategies must provide a personal encounter with Christ. After that, caring leadership ought to find ways to avoid loneliness and inactivity of new members through active small groups. Church members who are brought to understand the process well and are committed to be disciples of their Master Jesus will then come to understand how accountable they are to each other and to God. The nine steps of the program implemented in Kabusunzu Church are based on what has been pointed out by other authors and my own research.

The implementation of a strategy based on loving and keeping one another has led to the good results reported in this study. Believers have been led to understand the real reason for the existence of church, their part to play as Jesus' disciples in church mission, and their accountability to one another. It is hoped that this project will contribute to the efforts of local churches to overcome the issue of member loss.

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A project

presented in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology

by

Jean Baptiste Niyonzima

October 2016

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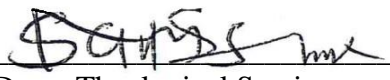
by

Jean Baptiste Niyonzima

APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:



Advisor: Javan Harelimana, DMin



Dean, Theological Seminary
Sampson Nwaomah, PhD



Reader, Anna Galeniece, DMin

Extension Center: AUA Main Campus

Date: November 2016

I dedicate this work to my mother,
my beloved wife, Yvonne Ngutete, and to my daughters, Diane Niwekirezi, Nadege
Isiboyabungeri, Eunice Ingabire, Joy Mariette Irakiza, Jeannette Izere,
Teta Sincère Igisubizo, and my son, Godson N. Irumva

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Rwanda is always seeking strategies to reach all Rwandans with the Adventist message of the Three Angels, as found in Revelation 14:6-12. Pastors and lay people are involved in reaching different areas by preaching the Gospel. As a result, district pastors are reporting baptisms of new converts quarterly. At the same time, they report an important number of missing members. This situation is discouraging to those who volunteer in evangelism; it certainly affects their efforts and the true growth of the church.

The problem is complex in city churches where the lifestyle is challenging to ministers, regular church members, and new converts. After an evangelistic effort is finished and the baptism is conducted, the preacher, church officers, and regular church members tend to go back to their daily activities. It is realized one year or two years later that those who were baptized, and even some regular members, are missing.

Statement of the Problem

From 2005 to 2008, Kabusunzu Seventh-day Adventist Church has reported losses of significant percentages when one compares the baptisms and the losses of one year. Furthermore, about 35 percent of the lost are those about whom the district pastors and church elders cannot explain how or when they left their churches. The

district needs a strategy to enhance the retention of church members, particularly the newly baptized ones.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the reasons why church members in Kabusunzu Seventh-day Adventist Church leave their church. Then the aim was to develop a strategy which could enhance membership retention in the church by at least 20 percent per year.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is that church elders and pastors of the district will find a new strategy to retain their members. Church members will be motivated to play a role in the church program of retention of their brothers and sisters by being the keepers of one another. This motivation will also help church elders to know their church members and be aware of their movement out of the church. Those who leave, seeking a better lifestyle in other places would be encouraged to request a letter of transfer to another church. Thus, the church pastor will be able to obtain clear statistical reports from local churches and be able to make correct statistical reports to the East Central Rwanda Conference (ECRC). This strategy is intended to be a beneficial tool for enhancing member retention for other district pastors who would like to implement it in their districts. The Fields, the Conferences, and the whole Union may have real statistical information regarding church members by implementing the strategy at all levels of local churches under their supervision. Thus, the number of church members will increase.

Delimitation

Mount Kigali District is one of the thirteen districts which make up the Kigali Station. This study is limited to one of its churches, Kabusunzu Seventh-day Adventist Church, considering its high percentage of membership loss.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used in this study and are defined as follow:

Local church, as defined by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, is a united, organized body of believers.¹

Company is a church not yet organized; it is an extension of the church to enter a new area.

District refers to a number of organized churches, some with companies.

Station or Zone refers to a number of districts grouped together under one pastor who assists the Field or Conference.²

Association is also called **Field** and is an organized body of local churches in a state, province, or territory. It comprises many zones (stations).

Conference is a Field which has reached the stage of maturity in self-support.

Union is a body of conferences/associations/fields within a larger territory.

Division embraces local unions.

¹General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Working Policy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000-2001), 47. The *Working Policy* defines the internal organization and discipline of the Church as one body worldwide.

²The Station and District are not known as official levels of the SDA Church but were adopted in RUM to facilitate the work of the president of the Field/Conference. A district is composed of many churches under one pastor. The number of stations differs according to the geographical situation of the field. The local churches and companies are under the supervision of church elders and church committees assisting their district pastor.

General Conference is the largest unit of organization in the Adventist Church, embracing all unions/missions and other church organizations in all parts of the world.

Church Transfer Letter is a form with three parts, used by the church to transfer/receive a member to/from another Adventist Church.

Regular members in this study are members who are not new, who are already members of the local church, baptized or received by transfer earlier.

Church committee is also called **church board** and is composed of church elders and heads of departments in the local church. Its members are re-elected every year and the committee is chaired by the first elder or local pastor.

Church officers, here, refer to all church members elected by their local church to be in charge of different activities of the church. They officiate for a one-year term of office but can be re-elected.

Methodology of the Study

This study used the methodology of program development as has been adopted by AUA in its *Manual for Written Works*.³ Explaining this approach, Vyhmeister said, “In program development research, the researcher determines the need for a program or intervention, establishes its theoretical basis, sets its objectives, designs it, implements it, and evaluates the results.”⁴ In that context, this study was based on the following steps:

1. Chapter 1 contains the definition of the problem of retention of church members in the Rwanda Union Mission (RUM), particularly in the

³Andrew Mutero and Gheorghe Razmerita, *Adventist University of Africa Standards for Written Work* (Nairobi, Kenya: AUA Publications, 2010), 4.

⁴Nancy Vyhmeister, *Quality Research Papers*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 163.

Kabusunzu SDA Church, which is the focus of this study. The purpose and justification of the study are formulated according to the defined problem.

The delimitation of the study is set and terms used are defined.

2. Chapter 2 is based on the theoretical foundations of the retention of church members through biblical history. There follows a brief look at church membership loss and retention strategies in Protestant churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and the SDA Church.
3. Chapter 3 describes the problem of losing church members and the retention methods adopted by the District of Mount Kigali. This district is described in its geographic, historical, and sociological context to understand its problem. Questionnaires and interviews were useful tools to try to reach the reality behind the problem.
4. Chapter 4 focuses on the design, implementation, and evaluation of a strategy fitting the results revealed by surveys and observation of the problem. Then a strategy was implemented in Kabusunzu SDA Church for one year, 2014. After that, the results were evaluated using the forms filled out by different local leaders of the church and cells.
5. Chapter 5 presents a summary of the study and the conclusions drawn. It highlights the recommendations made on the basis of the study.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS
OF MEMBERSHIP RETENTION

This chapter reviews the theoretical foundations of the retention of church members in the Bible, and then takes a brief look at church membership loss. Finally, I consider retention strategies in Christian churches and the SDA Church.

Retention as a Sensitive Topic in the Mission of the Church

Much effort and many strategies have been adopted for churches to lead people to baptism, but there are few commitments to the nurturing and discipleship of both new converts and those who have been in the church for some time. Mallison puts it in these words:

Unfortunately, the Christian church has not always been faithful in its care of new disciples. It has preached the Good News and tried to win people to Christ and rejoiced when people have come to faith in Jesus Christ but often those who have responded have not been properly cared for. Like new-born human babies, those who are ‘born anew’ spiritually need special care to help them become established.¹

In a similar fashion, Mark Finley, an evangelist, also remarks:

Nurturing and discipleship do not happen by accident but must be carefully planned. Without a strategy of discipleship in place, apostasies will be high. If the church does not provide nurturing opportunities for new believers, they will either be weak in the faith for years and create problems in the church or leave the church altogether.²

¹John Mallison, *Building Small Groups in the Christian Community* (West Ryde, N.S.W, Australia: Renewal Publications, 1978), 193.

²Mark Finley, “Evangelism’s Big Picture: From Baptism to Discipleship” (September 2009), accessed 10 September 2012. www.itiswritten.com/store/products/unsealingdanielsmysteriessons.

Retention in the Bible

The Bible is considered by Christians as an authority for their beliefs and practices. This section is about the study of retention throughout the Bible—the book which reveals God’s character to fallen humanity.

A General Aspect: A Relational God Desiring The Salvation of All Humanity

Throughout the Scriptures, three historical events reveal God as a God of relationship with His creatures, a God who takes care of people, aiming at the salvation of *all humanity*. The first is the Sabbath at the end of Creation week (Gen2:1-3), the second is the sanctuary for God to dwell among His people, Israel (Exod 25:8). Finally, and most important, is the incarnation of the eternal Son, Emmanuel, God with His people in the person of Jesus Christ, the Savior of all humanity (John 1:14, Isa 7:14). From the *SDA Handbook of Theology*, it is clear that

In each event the same relational structure is maintained. The biblical conception of God sees Him entering into relation with the world He has created and continuously sustains, not as a hidden force within the depths of nature but rather as a Person who relates with men and women as He dwells with them throughout and within the flow of human history.³

The constant relational nature of God with humanity has the purpose of Salvation for all. Even after rebellion against His law, God’s will is clear: “He wishes none to be lost (2Pet 3:9), but all to be saved (1Tim 2:4), through Jesus’ name (Matt 1:21; Acts 4:12; 1Thess 5:9; Rom 10:13). In sharing human suffering, Jesus has

³Ivan Blazen, “Salvation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, edited by Raoul Dederen, vol. 12, *SDA Bible Commentary* (Hagerstown, MD 21740: Review and Herald, 2000), 117,118.

become the pioneer and source of eternal salvation to all who follow Him (Heb 2:10; 5:9).”⁴

Commenting on this, Haynes wrote:

God brought the world into existence. He upholds it by the word of His power. He is occupied with the superintendence of myriads of worlds and systems. But from the instant that His universe was marred by the introduction of sin, by the revolt against His rule, by the rebellion against His government, His supreme interest has been redemption, reconciliation, recovery. ... So God’s great business with humanity is evangelism. His supreme object is ‘to seek and to save that which was lost.’⁵

Modes of Retention in the Old Testament

Genesis starts by picturing the creation as an act of God, a relational and keeping action. In Fretheim’s view, different evidences show here a God who did not want to be separated from His creatures: (1) man and woman were created, not only with God’s touch (Gen 2:7), but also in His own image (Gen 1:26,27); (2) Adam and Eve were to have communion with God (Gen 2:1-3), they were to take care of His creation (Gen 2:15); (3) God had commanded Adam and Eve to stay away from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which would surely lead them to separation and death (Gen 2:16,17); (4) after the fall, God prohibited them from returning to the tree of life to avoid an eternally painful life (Gen 3:24).⁶ Thus, man was informed and warned by God of the danger and undesired cost of life which could result in separation from God and from God’s ways.

⁴Fernando Canale, “Doctrine of God,” in *ibid.*, 271.

⁵Carlyle B. Haynes, *Living Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1937), 22, 24.

⁶Terence E. Fretheim, “The Book of Genesis: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, 12 vols. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 1:351, 352.

When Eve followed the devil's instructions, her relationship with God was broken. Adam also did the same by following the choice of his wife (Gen 3:6). Thus, calamity followed.

Genesis 3 records God's searching for the lost humans and reconciling with them by the introduction of sacrifices to maintain the relationship.⁷By Noah's time, while every inclination of the thoughts of Adam's descendants was only evil all the time (Gen 6:5), God provided time for grace and made a call to repentance and then gave instructions to prepare an ark for the salvation of anyone who would accept His offer (Gen 6:7).

Being keepers of one another. Considering the question of Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?" with the question of God, "Where is your brother Abel?" there is an established obligation of caring for one another (Gen 4:9). The failure of Adam and Eve to keep together had led them to fall into sin. The same way, Cain killed his brother while God intended him to be keeper of his brother. The intervention of God when Cain got angry, advising him to do what was right (Gen 4:7), shows also that God worked with him to avoid his personal loss. In the OT, not only did God not want to lose anyone of those He had created, but also He accounted those beings responsible to keep one another safe.

⁷Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1958), 69.

Israel as the Chosen People. The aspect of retention and of keeping God's adherents is also important in the call and the life of Israel, the chosen nation. The call of Israel began with the call of Abram in Genesis 12. God's plan was not only to have a people set apart, being His "treasured possession," but also a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation"⁸ (Gen12:1-3; Exod19:4-6). Through the priestly ministry of Israel as a holy nation, God intended to bring back the other nations who were on their way to be lost.

Gibbs observes that "even though God has chosen to limit his disclosures to and through a particular people, His concern was extended to all nations dwelling in the world that He has created. From Adam and Eve the first to be created, He doesn't want to lose anybody."⁹ Further he notes that "Abraham is assigned the role of a mediator of blessing in God's saving plan or all the families of the earth."¹⁰ In living God's holiness and blessings, Israel would attract the perishing world to God. That was the evangelistic model for the times (Zech 8:20-23; Isa 60:1-3).

God's law in the guidance and retention of Israel. From God's call to Abraham to leave his country, his people, and his family, the relation with God is defined by obedience to whatever God says. Abram believed and obeyed; thus he was saved and given promises. While the Lord was about to destroy Sodom, He said:

Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what He has promised him (Gen 18:18, 19).

⁸Unless otherwise specified, all Bible texts are taken from the New International Version.

⁹Eddie Gibbs, *I Believe in Church Growth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), 24, 25.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 25.

Even with the pleading of Abraham, the question was if the Lord would “sweep away the righteous with the wicked.” The answer was that there would be forgiveness for the whole city even if there were ten righteous people (Gen 18:23-32). Throughout the story of Israel as a chosen nation, the breaking of the relationship with God through disregard to His precepts and law always led to destruction and the loss of life. The mission of each prophet was to show God’s concern towards a chosen nation, urging it to come to its senses before the great day of God’s Judgment arrived (Isa 1:2-9, Joel 1:15; 2:2). If Israel returned to God, they would be saved (Hos 6:1-3). The story of Jonah and Nineveh shows the role that God intended for Israel to play in the salvation of other nations as well (Jonah 1-4).

One-another keeping within Israel. The life of Israel after deliverance from Egypt illustrates how the people needed each other. The leadership structure, the Word of God given to Israel, God’s laws and commands that were to be taught and reminded to one another, were all provided to help the chosen people stay faithful to God and not perish. At Mount Sinai God said to Moses: “Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see the LORD and many of them perish” (Exod 19:21, 22). Moses and all other leaders and prophets were to warn and protect God’s people. The priests were to play the role of mediators, but were also warned to keep themselves in God’s holiness to not be consumed (Leviticus). Parents were asked to retain their children in the faith, transmitting God’s will and their testimonies to their descendants (Deut 4:9; 6:1-12).

Talking about the church before Christianity, Howard-Brook wrote:

During the period of Israel’s existence prior to the monarchy, it was the family household and the association of households known as *mishpachah*, or ‘clan’, in which people found their primary identity.... One’s relationships with one’s blood kin for which one was expected to risk death [the case of Abraham engaging himself in a war to rescue his nephew], ...the unity and the solidarity of household and clan were frequently torn apart by needs of Israel’s imperial

regime for workers and wealth. ...The *ekklesia* thus saw itself in continuity with the historical Israelite sense of being called out of empire to be God's own people. Members were expected to see each other as bonded by glue stronger than blood: the very will of the Creator.¹¹

Retention and mutual responsibilities are the lessons we are to learn from the detailed list of the laws given besides the Ten Commandments (Exod 21-24). God expected the children of Israel to consider the life and property of others and to protect it in love, as one would like others to protect theirs (Lev 19:18 cf. Matt 7:12). When God says "eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (Exod 21:24), this was a measure of prevention. God wanted everybody to think highly of others and see if they would like others to act the same towards them. Then one should guard oneself from doing such a thing.

Universality of God's Covenant. Throughout the Bible, God the Creator is a covenantal God. He made a covenant with Adam and Eve about reproduction (Gen 1:28), a covenant with Noah (Gen 9:1-17), a covenant with Abraham and his descendants (Gen 12:2,3; 15:18; 17:9-14), and then a covenant with Israel as a nation (Exod 19:20). Gibbs shows that all the covenants God made with His people, as recorded in the Bible, are universal. The chosen people are drawn closer to their God through obedience to the covenant, but this does not exclude others. Gibbs put it in these words:

While the Mosaic covenant set Israel apart from the nations, it by no means excluded them from its benefits. There are specific provisions laid down for non-Israelites to become members of God's people. The qualification for membership is not birth, but willingness to commit oneself. From the time of

¹¹Wes Howard-Brook, *The Church Before Christianity* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 75,76. He notes that the word used to refer to Israel in their journey from Egypt to Canaan is '*edah*, often translated as "congregation"; but also *qahal* which was translated by the Septuagint translators into Greek as *ekklesia* or *synagogue*, referring to Israel's assembly. This word gives birth to "church" in New Testament (16, 17).

the Exodus from Egypt foreigners formed part of the company (Exod12:38; Num 11:4).¹²

Howard-Brook adds:

One of the purposes of the long narrative of the wilderness wanderings is to make precisely this point: to be true to the covenant, the people must be united in intention and action. The consequences of dissent are rebellion, violence, and eventually the destruction of the entire community.¹³

Overall, looking at the Old Testament and the story of God and mankind, it can be concluded that God, the Creator, worked throughout history, in different ways, even after sin, to preserve the humans He had created in His image. The covenants in Eden and after Eden, the call and mission of the patriarchs, the call and mission of the chosen nation of Israel, and the structure of their life surrounding the Tabernacle show God's willingness to dwell among His people (Exod25:8). The universal character of the covenants He made throughout history, the prophets and their warnings, both to Israel and to non-chosen nations (Isa 56)—all favor viewing God's activities as strategies to keep His people from the devil's determination to destroy God's creation (Job1:9-2:7).

The Church of the New Testament and Membership Retention

The New Testament narrates the coming of Christ the Messiah and the foundation of a new community of believers, the Christian church. Not only is Jesus the founder of the church, but also the head of it. At the same time, church members constitute the different parts of the body and everyone finds value in Christ (1 Cor 12:12-27). He is the living Stone, on which the spiritual house is to become a "holy priesthood," with the mission of mediation through evangelism to non-believers (1Pet

¹²Gibbs, 31.

¹³Howard-Brook, 18.

2:4, 5, 9). The purpose of His coming, as well as the essence of His church, is salvation for all, providing life in full to those who believe in Him, seeking the lost to deliver them from Satan, the liar and thief (John 10:10, 16; 8:44; 3:16,17). The role of the church in the New Testament was to preserve truth and to warn the world, calling everyone to accept God's gift of salvation in Christ (Rev 12; 14:6-12).

Jesus and Church Membership Retention

According to Hall, apostasy in New Testament was rare, due "to the fact that Jesus, the most successful pastor, evangelist, and teacher, started the church on a voluntary basis (Matt 4:18-20). Even with a large group (Matt 10:2-4), He proceeded so that each member received His personal attention (Luke 21:31-32; John 13:26-27)."¹⁴ Hall also notes that discipleship and assimilation were given importance in Jesus' ministry and the disciples were sent out to also make disciples. The fact that Jesus accepted Judas, the betrayer, to be among His twelve disciples, as evident from how He interacted with him during the evening meal before His crucifixion, shows His personal efforts to retain him (John 13). Further, He prayed for Peter when Satan had asked for him; He worked closely with him and assured him of forgiveness when he was tempted by the evil one (Luke 22:31; John 21:15-18).

Roy details the methods of Christ in evangelizing and keeping people in five steps: (1) Christ mingled with people, showing a genuine interest in their well-being; (2) Christ sympathized with people; (3) Christ took time to minister to peoples' needs; (4) Christ won the confidence of the people He mingled with, sympathized with them,

¹⁴Enell O. Hall, "The Development of a Program for the Retention of New Members in the New Jerusalem Seventh-day Adventist Church" (DMin diss., Andrews University, 1999),57.

and ministered to them; (5) Christ invited His friends to follow Him. This was a challenge to be like Him who called them.¹⁵

Almost at the end of His mission on earth, while praying not only for His current disciples, but also for those who were to believe in Him by their message (John 17:20), He could say: “I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled” (17:12). Howard-Mills pointed out that: “Jesus said that He had not lost any of the sheep the Father had given Him. Everyone is important to God! Not even one person is to be lost! No one is just a number. No one should be treated as mere statistic. Interaction is the key to ensuring this.”¹⁶ This is what the New Testament is all about.

The Apostolic Church and Membership Retention

Throughout the book of Acts, the main issue is increasing the number of members or adherents to the newly established Christian church instead of losses. Jesus worked with a small group of twelve (Matt 10:2-4) who received the Great Commission of preaching the gospel to the whole world. The group became 120 before Pentecost (Acts 1:15), then 3120 with the Pentecost event (Acts 2:41), and finally 5,000 plus women and children as the church was active in testimony (Acts 4:4). The Scriptures say that “more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number” (Acts 5:14).

Only four persons in the New Testament are specifically noted to have apostatized: Judas (John 13:34), Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5:5), then Demas (2Tim

¹⁵Ruthven Roy, *A Challenge to the Remnant: Designing Our Mission Strategy to Impact the Real World* (Frederick, MD: Network Discipling Ministries, 2002), 191-192.

¹⁶Dag Heward-Mills, *Transform Your Pastoral Ministry* (Willington, CT: Lux Vergi, 2008), 232.

4:10). Hall in his comments adds “John Mark, who went astray, but later repented and returned,” considering what happened to him with Paul (Acts 13:13, 15-38).¹⁷ Again, for this author, the “secret for such an effective assimilation program” is found in Acts 2:42-44. Then he notes:

This passage gives a list of eleven spiritual dynamics that were evident in the New Testament church, thus creating the atmosphere for effective assimilation: teaching, fellowship, communion, prayer, miracles, pooled resources, commonality, meeting needs, spending time together, praise, evangelism, and total assimilation.¹⁸

This seems to agree with Gane who found in Acts 2:42-47 “four interdependent forces or dynamics that undergirded the growing church community.” These are (1) grace, which is the forgiveness of Christ to His followers; (2) worship, as the early community of believers celebrated together “God’s gift of grace in Jesus;” (3) community, relationships in which individuals were bonded together with Christ and one another; and (4) service, the church being intentional about extending these relationships to others.¹⁹

As the newly-born Christian church was faithful to the Master and lived as a family, worshiping together and being devoted to serving Him, they experienced growth in number and spirituality. It was hard for any of them to leave that kind of fellowship, a kind of active family.

¹⁷Hall, 58.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Barry Gane, *Building Youth Ministry: A Foundational Guide* (La Sierra, CA: Hancock Center, 1997), 52-53.

The Churches of Paul and Membership Retention

After his conversion, Paul accepted his call and became a church planter in different areas of Asia Minor (Acts 9; 1Tim 1:12-14). His warning to the leaders of the church of Ephesus, when he was about to leave them, shows not only how he was carrying an overwhelming burden for preaching the gospel to all, both gentiles and Jews, but also how he cared for the converts, to keep them from backsliding or apostasy. In Acts 20:28-31, he said:

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years, I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

Throughout his letters, Paul's strategy to retain believers faithful to Jesus is found in different activities and procedures such as: (1) commitment in personal pastoral care to church members (Col 1:24-2:5); (2) encouragement of fellowship in house/small groups (Rom 6:5); (3) exhortation to keep one another in love and mutual consideration as brethren and as one body (Rom 12:9-21;14:13; 1Cor 12:12-27); (4) the efficiency of servant leadership; (5) his concern for the believers to become active disciples of Christ, according to their respective spiritual gifts and true to their testimony (1Cor 12:1-11); (6) motivation for the converts to diligent study of the Scriptures (1Tim 3:15, 6; Acts 17:11); (7) instructions on the importance of nurturing and follow-up concerns (Titus 1:5; 2:15). He constantly wrote to the churches to warn them about divisions, order, and spiritual growth. His letters and journeys show that he was not only dedicated to bring the Gospel to new areas, but also was aiming to retain those he had already brought to the Christian message.

Membership Loss and Retention in Contemporary Writings

After considering the issue of retention in the Bible, the research turns now to Christian writings. The following section is based on church membership retention as a great challenge in Christian churches, the causes of dropouts from church, and proposed methods to stop these losses.

Retention as the Great Challenge in Christian Churches

In his book, Clapp observes that “some churches put much energy into bringing people to the church, but have fewer strategies of follow-up to keep them in membership.”²⁰ Smith characterizes the rate of dropout in mainline denomination as a “critical problem.” According to his research, “35 percent of those raised Congregationalists, Methodists, and Presbyterians switched to some other denomination,” while 69 percent of dropouts from the United Presbyterian Church did not join any other church. Also, the number of names removed from membership rolls “was considerably greater than those received by profession of faith.”²¹ Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer note that 70 percent of the young adults “drop out between the age of 18 and 22.”²² Regarding Catholicism in the United States, Alessi writes:

A recent study by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life has found that the Catholic Church has been hit hardest by changes in religious affiliation in the United States. Although Catholicism was found to have a retention rate of 68 percent, a number comparable to or better than other religious groups, the Catholic Church has lost the most members, primarily to the Protestant denominations or to the ranks of the unaffiliated. . . . Almost half of Catholics who are now (48 percent) left Catholicism before reaching age 18. . . . Those

²⁰Steve Clapp, *Overcoming Barriers to Church Growth* (Elgin, IL: Andrew Center, 1994), 67.

²¹Donald P. Smith, “Closing the Back Door: Toward the Retention of Church Members,” in *The Mainstream Protestant “Decline”: The Presbyterian Pattern*, ed. Milton J. Coalter et al. (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1990), 86.

²²Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer, *Essential Church: Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2008), 4.

who have left Catholicism outnumber those who have joined the Catholic Church by nearly a four-to-one margin unaffiliated.²³

Though this research was conducted in America, the authors reflect what is going on throughout the world. The situation may also be the same, if not more challenging, in Africa, particularly in Rwanda, where Christians are about 95 percent of the population. Many of them prefer to hold a Christian identity, but do not attend any church or have gone from one denomination to another. This leads us to study why people leave their churches.

Causes of Dropouts in Christian Churches

Different writers have observed different reasons why Christians leave their churches. They do so either to join other denominations or to remain unaffiliated with any church. Some of those causes are personal, related to the life of the ones quitting; others are related to the church as a body, where they used to belong, and others to the pastoral care or leadership of the church. Based on a research conducted to find why members of Conservative Calvinist churches stay or leave their congregations, Bouma introduces theological reason as a major reason—yet second to problems with the community structure—for members to stay in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC).²⁴

²³Scott Alessi, “Solutions to the Catholic Retention Problem,” *Our Sunday Visitor: OSV Newsweekly*, 12 June 2009, accessed September 2012, <http://www.osv.com/tabid/7621/itemid/4945/Solution-to-the-Catholic-retention-problem.aspx>.

²⁴Gary D. Bouma, “Keeping the Faithful: Patterns of Membership Retention in the Christian Reformed Church,” *Sociological Analysis* 41 (Autumn 1980): 262, accessed 22 October 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3710402>.

Causes related to the church body and its structure. The retention of church members, particularly newcomers, seems primarily to relate to the motivation generated by church life itself. How regular members relate to the newcomers or how they relate to one another brings satisfaction or disappointment to individuals. The study done with CRC members, both those who left the church and those who stayed, resulted in almost the same percentage, thus, confirming this reality. The research showed that the nature of CRC community played a major role in membership loss. Responses from former members showed that “the bonds of attachment to that community were weak.”²⁵ This is also the view of Olson who said: “Churchgoers join or leave a particular church because of their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with various aspects of church life.”²⁶ How the newcomer is welcomed into the congregation, how he or she finds friends, the kind of worship, all make the person to be well assimilated. Once the assimilation problem is resolved, notes Hall, the number of apostasies or dropouts is reduced. He put it in this way:

Individuals love to feel wanted, welcomed, and accepted. . . . Many churches today do not have a clear biblical understanding of the concept of assimilation. This ignorance has contributed to the older members’ attitudes toward new converts. Instead of being a means of support for the new converts, they become a deterrent to the spiritual growth of the new converts. Assimilation, therefore, becomes ineffective in such an atmosphere.²⁷

²⁵Ibid., 263.

²⁶Daniel V.A. Olson, “Church Friendships: Boon or Barrier to Church Growth?” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religious* 28 (December 1989):432, accessed 22 October 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1386575>.

²⁷Hall, 181,182-183.

Worldly and personal causes. The world experiences changes and struggles as decades, milieu, and environment change and differ. Political changes, as well as social and economic changes need relevant adaptability, both for the church process in recruitment methodology or for the process of retaining church members without compromising their faith and doctrines. In Hadaway's view, the negative implication is particularly evident in regards to the youth in the church. He observes:

The bulk of those who became disillusioned with the church simply left. Some gave a shrug of disinterest as they drifted away, while others shook the dust off their feet. Counterculture values also spread in diluted form to the older generation, causing some to drop out. . . . Millions eventually drifted into Mental Member status . . . and others were lost to their churches and eventually were purged from the rolls.²⁸

Jones speaks of people with "character disorders" who need help concerning their family and friends. He puts these among personal causes for leaving the churches.²⁹ Clapp gives the most frequent reasons expressed by former members for their departure: (1) loss of employment, (2) marital separation or divorce, (3) death of a parent or other family member, (4) serious illness, (5) depression, (6) alcohol or other drug problem, and (7) difficulties with children. Beyond these four groups, Clapp thought that some dropped simply out of habit. Once their enthusiasm for involvement in church activities passed, and they fail to attend regularly, new believers are lost, unless they are visited, reclaimed, and reintegrated within six months.³⁰

²⁸C. Kirk Hadaway, *What Can We Do About Church Dropouts?* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1990), 30-31. Defining "Mental Members," the author put them in three categories. The "estranged" consider it optional to be a member of the church and value their freedom. The "Indifferent" are not antagonistic toward the church but they just don't care. The "Nominals . . . not only avoid attending church but they also hold no traditional religious beliefs." They maintain their religious identity primarily for status and cultural reasons.

²⁹Mark S. Jones, *Reclaiming Inactive Church Members* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1988), 53.

³⁰Clapp, 78-81.

Thus, the attractions of the world and the environment of life continue to weigh on new and old believers. When these are not well managed, people end by returning to their old life.

Causes related to pastoral care and leadership of the church. The failure of a pastor to train church members in biblical skills and principles and to make them disciples ready to make disciples for Christ may be the cause of the church's failure to assimilate newcomers. The kind of leadership the pastor or the church elders demonstrate may also lead to frustration, dissatisfaction, disintegration, and finally to a member's leaving the church. Members are encouraged when they find spirituality, unity, and modeling a commitment to doctrines and to God's work in their spiritual leaders. Among the seven laws of Allen Ratta for members' retention, the first one is "Love Them or Lose Them." Members, newcomers, or old timers, all need to be loved, visited, and considered by their pastor. Ratta wrote: "Do members have confidence that their needs will be known and timely pastoral care will be available in their time of need? ...The pastor who takes the development of pastoral care ministries seriously is the pastor who will enjoy the stability of a congregation that sticks around because they feel loved."³¹ In Clapp's research, more than seven percent of former members responded that they ceased to attend the church when their pastor was changed.³² While it may signify the good relationship the pastor had with the congregation, it may also prove the pastor's failure to lead church members to grow into close relationship with one another.

³¹Allen Ratta, "The Seven Laws of Member/Adherent Retention," CEO Connection Power.com (2004), accessed 14 October 2012, <http://www.connectionpower.com/downloads/7LawsofMemberRetention.pdf>.

³²Clapp, 82.

Proposed Methods of Retention in Christian Writings

After listing the different causes which make church members to drop out, this section deals with different methods that churches can use to retain their members, according to different Christian writings.

Leading members to experience a personal encounter with Christ.

Everyone must be involved in the church process of evangelism which aims to gain and retain both old and new members. Unless all of them have personally experienced the love of God and are committed to live and work faithfully for Jesus, as expected from true disciples, theoretical strategies, without a shared vision, may end in vain. This is what Peter seems to underline for those who came to Jesus: “Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Pet 2:1-3). The problem of inactive members has to do with “their view of themselves as followers of Jesus,” wrote Jones. For him, the believer’s profession of faith in Christ ought to be a personal “commitment to His lordship as well as a claiming of salvation truths.” He introduces the words of Jesus Himself in Luke 14:26-33 where believers are warned to have faith not centered in man, but committed to follow Christ whatever happens. He writes: “The cost of discipleship is an all-encompassing surrender.”³³

To prevent a convert from dropping out, that person—whether new or old—is to be led to understand that the issue of faith is a matter of death or life. That person needs to understand that the true model for one’s faith is Jesus, not man. Then that person will conclude with Paul that nothing and nobody will separate them from God

³³Jones, 55.

and His love (Rom 8:38, 39). This was also the view of Martin Luther: “Each one should believe at his own risk and peril.”³⁴

Leading members to become disciples and avoid inactivity. One dictionary defines disciple as coming from *mathēthai*, which involves “too much personal attachment and commitment to be adequately rendered by ‘pupil’.”³⁵ Then for Bill Hull, the Bible’s definition of a disciple is “a mature believer, one who does his part in the body and in the world ...one who abides in Christ, obeys, bears fruit, glorifies God and has joy.”³⁶ The journey begins with entrance into the church. Describing what Jesus recommended in the great commission in Matthew 28:18-20, Monte Sahlin wrote the following:

Making disciples is not simply recruiting church members, doing good, or chalking up baptisms. A disciple is one who has been born again, who has joined the fellowship of believers, who has identified his or her spiritual gifts and accepted a role in ministry compatible with those gifts. And a disciple feels and senses of being called by the Holy Spirit to that ministry without continual external motivation. Making disciples is not a short-term task, nor can it be done by mass production.³⁷

From this point of view, a disciple is a convicted and converted person, determined to follow Jesus and walk in His truth, whatever the cost. Such a person is always busy seeking to draw others to the Master (making disciples). A disciple here is not a burden to the other disciples the person joins, but an active organ of the body. Such a person is not only ready to go church, to become a member, but an unconditional follower of Jesus.

³⁴Ellen G. White, *The Great Hope* (Nairobi: East-Central Africa Division, 2012), 122.

³⁵Walter A. Ellwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nded. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 235.

³⁶Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 2005), 92.

³⁷Monte Sahlin, *Sharing our Faith with Friends without Losing Either* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1990), 34.

Taking advantage of small groups in the church. David Githii traces the beginning and importance of small groups from Eden, when God created Adam and Eve. Then “God worked through family groupings and other forms of small groups to establish His purposes.”³⁸ John Stott, who shared that idea, underlined its value: “The value of the small group is that it can become a community of related persons, and in it the benefit of personal relatedness cannot be missed. ... The person’s growing into maturity, according to the purpose of God takes place in the context of a family group.” The church in the New Testament also benefited from these groups.³⁹

Small groups lead to effective growth and evangelism that wins and retains people. About the size and fellowship, Mark S. John adds that “intimacy takes place in the context of small groups. These groups are between eight and twelve persons. In these small groups deep and meaningful experiences of Christian living are shared.”⁴⁰ God did not create a person to live alone, in isolation of others.

John Mallison speaks of a variety of small groups with a common purpose: “There are many kinds of small groups that function within the church. In main, if they are in any way vital they have one common factor—they exist to meet the needs of the persons involved.”⁴¹ Among these groups, a church may have friendship or

³⁸David Githii, *How to Grow a Healthy and Vibrant Church through Small Church Groups* (Nairobi, Kenya: Frangancia Books, 2008), 23.

³⁹John Stott, *The Living Church: Conviction of a Lifelong Pastor* (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 92.

⁴⁰Jones, 45.

⁴¹Mallison, 37.

contact groups, interest groups, social groups, prayer groups, Bible study groups, *koinonia* groups, outreach groups, and spontaneous or organized groups. All of these “help each member to find his place and to exercise himself in using and growing his or her spiritual gifts for the benefit of others.”⁴² Because of the importance and the role small groups play, Dale E. Galloway, remarked that “to put church members into small fellowship groups is an imperative; otherwise many will be lost within two years.”⁴³

The loving-and-keeping-one-another strategy. With small groups in a church, members learn to be accountable to God and to one another. From the fellowship that reigns in that small cell, friendship and interdependence between members are also developed that spread out to the whole congregation. Unlike the answer given by Cain to God in Genesis 4:9, every member must be trained to become a keeper of his brother or sister. Not only will a person feel lost when absent from the group, the group will not rest until they find the one who is absent. This is the primary characteristic of an active cell group. Heward-Mills said that church members must be encouraged to make friends and invite each other to their homes. He wrote that “Once people have friends in the congregation, they will be glued to the church. Leaving the church becomes a little more complicated. Leaving the church now means leaving all your friends. Interaction between church members is truly a key to stabilizing the congregation and encouraging church growth.”⁴⁴

⁴²Ibid., 37-43.

⁴³Dale E. Galloway, *2020 Vision: How to Create a Successful Church* (Portland, OR: Scott, 1986), 104.

⁴⁴Heward-Mills, 247.

Effective pastoral care and dynamic leadership. For a church to be effective there is need for its church elders and the pastor to be effective first. Defining that effectiveness, John F. MacArthur says that a pastor or another leader of the church is effective when he or she is godly, fascinated to live Jesus' model in holiness, in leadership, and in gaining souls. This pastor's role is to draw old and new-comers to Jesus and to His Word, not to himself.⁴⁵ Effective leadership will train and motivate believers to be disciples (active followers of Christ) not spectators. Through motivated fellowship in active cell groups and visitation, believers will be led to a sustainable relationship with their Master Jesus. Thus they will be protected from loneliness.

Friendship evangelism motivated. For people to come and stay in the church, the pastor may consider motivating friendship and interaction among members and between regular members with outside people to reach them and bring them to salvation. Heward-Mills, in his advice to church pastors, noted: "Dear Pastor, do not forget this! People may join the church for various reasons. However, people stay in church because of the people they know and the friends they make! This is what I call church cement."⁴⁶ A good pastor will make his church a dynamic one, not holding on to traditions, making it effective for either youth or old people without compromising the doctrines. Such a pastor will consider adequate approaches in evangelism and nurturing, depending on whether the church is located in a town or in

⁴⁵John F. Macarthur, *The Master's Plan for the Church* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1991), 101-104.

⁴⁶Heward-Mills, 232.

a city.⁴⁷ The pastor's role is to be a trainer of both other church leaders and the congregation, leading members to be disciples and disciple makers. Every believer, as a true disciple, ought to have a burden for Jesus. God's desire is to save people and make them instruments of salvation to others. Friendship evangelism finds its foundation in love. The love with which God loves people motivates them to love others and work hard for their salvation.

Ellen G. White and Membership Retention Advice

According to Ellen G. White's writings, the backsliding or lack of growth in faith of church members results from poor pastoral care. In the churches, there is inactivity of newcomers and older church members, as well as a misunderstanding by members of the great commission given by Jesus to all His believers, calling them all to be missionaries, as well as keepers of the brothers and sisters in the body.⁴⁸

Different considerations have been raised to face the challenge:⁴⁹ (1) a follow-up model which consists in indoctrination and repetition of the doctrines presented for the new converts to understand clearly and fix in their mind, (2) members of the church being active in home cells (cell groups) and showing themselves enthusiastic and interested in assimilating the newcomers into their churches, (3) pastor's role which is first to "set members at work"⁵⁰ (ancients and new ones) and then by

⁴⁷John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 167.

⁴⁸Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1946), 334-383. There is a whole chapter on "Establishing and Holding New Converts," which summarizes her view of how to deal with members, particularly the new ones. Many of her other letters and books are quoted there.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 7:20.

organized visitations to be close to every heart but also to feed the flock well, (4) the importance of a “guardianship plan,” which consists of one-another motivation, that is friendship and caring, benefiting both old and new members in what is called “home missionary work,”⁵¹ and (5) the newly baptized being impressed and motivated for constant and diligent study of the Bible, in order to search for and abide in the truth, so they will be preserved against spiritual death or false teaching.⁵²

Membership Losses and Retention Strategies in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

As with other Christian denominations, the SDA Church is facing the challenge of significant dropouts or missing members which occur after a particular effort in bringing in new members. The following section of this study concerns the general situation, as well as the causes of the losses and the strategies that the church is trying in order to overcome that challenge.

Losses and Retention in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

From an official document recommended and voted at the General Conference Session in April 2007, “Conserving Membership Gain—Appeal,” the concern of the church is noted as follow:

Although the Seventh-day Adventist Church baptized over 5 million people from 2000-2005, membership losses during that time equaled nearly 1.4 million. Current indications are that annual membership losses, for reasons other than death, equal approximately 28% of membership accessions. Some membership loss occurs among recent converts; however, this tragic outcome is not limited to new members.⁵³

⁵¹White, *Evangelism*, 353.

⁵²Ibid., 361-362. Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1962), 368.

⁵³General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, “Conserving Membership Gain—An Appeal” (CMGA), Silver Spring, Maryland, April 10, 2007, accessed 20 August 2012,

Furthermore, from the General Conference Executive Secretary report in 2007, it was noted that “for every 100 new members in 2006, the lost were 45.”⁵⁴ Mark Finley, the Adventist evangelist who has conducted many campaigns throughout the world, also remarked about these losses, saying that the problem of “apostasy is shown in that 50 percent of the recorded church members do not attend church.”⁵⁵ Recently, G. T. Ng, secretary of the Adventist World Church, at the yearly General Conference session held in October 2014, still qualified the situation as “serious losses” in his report.⁵⁶ All these leaders’ statements show how the issue is to be considered seriously.

<http://www.adventist.org/information/official-statements/documents/article/go/0/conserving-membership-gains>. Find this document in Appendix A.

⁵⁴General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, “Church Reports Largest Membership Growth-rate Since 2002 Audit,” *Adventist News Network*, October 14, 2007, accessed 20 August 2012, <https://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2007-10-13/church-reports-largest-membership-growth-rate-since-2002-audit/>.

⁵⁵Mark Finley, “Tell the World,” *Ministry Magazine*, February 2006, accessed 19 August 2012, <http://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2006/February/tell-the-world.html>.

⁵⁶Andrew McChesney, “Church Membership Reaches 18.1 Million,” *Adventist News*, October 12, 2014. This online report summarized GC secretary G. T. Ng’s concern as follows: “Church membership has swelled by 1.5 percent to reach 18,143,745 million, up from 17,881,491 a year earlier, according to data that he presented. For the 10th year in a row, more than 1 million people joined the church—1,091,222 to be exact—but at the same time a decade-high 828,968 people were removed from the books after dying, leaving the church, or disappearing. ... Without the audit, church membership would stand at 25 million today. ... 31.8 million people have been baptized over the past 40 years, while 11.4 million have dropped their membership or gone missing. The figure does not include those who died”, accessed 22 October 2014. <http://www.adventistreview.org/church-news/church-membership-reaches-18.1-million>.

Causes of Membership Losses in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

From the worldwide international survey conducted for the GC Archives, Statistics, and Research Office in 2013, the highest percentage (28%) of the people who stopped attending the church had no big issue; they “just drifted away.” But 25 and 19 percent, respectively, left for reasons such as “lack of compassion for the hurting” and “moral failure on my part.”⁵⁷ Meanwhile, the same survey showed that 40 percent of those who left the church reported that “no one contacted me” after dropping out. From another research conducted by Role on the African continent, a “cold and unfriendly church” was the first factor to cause people to leave the church.⁵⁸ In his paper, Javan Harelimana underlined the lack of or weak nurture as the important factor for church newcomers to dropout.⁵⁹ In addition to that, Skip Bell talks about inactivity of the church members, particularly of the new converts.⁶⁰

⁵⁷General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, “Survey of Former & Inactive Church Members: International Survey Conducted for the GC Archives, Statistics and Research Office by the Center for Creative Ministry,” 2013, accessed 18 November 2013, <https://www.adventistarchives.org/exit-interviews-an-international-survey-of-dropouts-from-the-seventh-day-adventist-church.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Elisabeth M. Role, “Spiritual Life Patterns, Attitudes, and Beliefs of SDA Church Members in the African Continent,” *Adventist Research*, 2013, accessed 18 November 2013, <http://www.adventistarchives.org/the-church-members%E2%80%99-survey-in-the-three-african-divisions.pdf>.

⁵⁹Javan Kamanutsi Harelimana, “Soul Conservation in a Growing Church,” paper presented to the Summit on Nurture and Retention, Discipling, Retaining and Reclaiming, Silver Spring, Maryland, November 2013, accessed 18 November 2014, <https://www.adventistarchives.org/soul-conservation-in-a-growing-church.pdf>, Maryland, accessed 18 November 2013. <https://www.adventistarchives.org/soul-conservation-in-a-growing-church.pdf>.

⁶⁰Skip Bell, “Caring for Church Dropouts,” *Ministry Magazine*, 1986, accessed 19 August 2012, <http://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1986/April/caring-for-church-dropouts>.

Detamore presents seventeen reasons for backsliding. The most prominent are worldliness, poor church assimilation, and marriage with unbelievers.⁶¹

To summarize, dropouts in the SDA Church are particularly due to the lack of belonging and the inactivity of the members, particularly the newly baptized ones. New members come, but because they are not assimilated, they feel alone with a new and challenging lifestyle and are easily tempted to return to their old life and friends. The official Adventist document on losses and retention put it in this way: “research on why members leave SDA Church fellowship suggests that social and relational factors are much more significant than disagreement with denominational teachings.”⁶²

Strategies to Face the Challenge of Retention in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

On strategies tried or recommended to enhance the retention of church members, the well-known Adventist evangelist, Mark Finley, points out what he calls “three critical aspects in the life of the new believer.” These are “the convert’s relationship with God, with the church, and with the community.” Finley bases this assertion on “a careful study of the Acts model.”⁶³To match these three aspects, he proposes a “spiritual guardian,” a “friend and mentor,” who will help the new convert to grow spiritually, participating in active cell groups. A special class before and after baptism is imperative. There are other motivating elements: the study of the Word of God, prayer, and fellowship. Finally, inactivity must be avoided by involving

⁶¹Fordyce W. Detamore, *Seeking His Lost Sheep* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1965), 38.

⁶²CMGA, 1 (see Appendix A).

⁶³Finley, “Evangelism’s Big Picture: From Baptism to Discipleship.”

everyone in outreach activities. For Finley, “Christian growth and Christian witness are indissolubly linked.”⁶⁴

The *Adventist News Network* (ANN), a weekly news bulletin, reported on November 22, 2010, a meeting of church officials in Russia and Eastern Europe on the missing members’ issue. While delegates voted to conduct a “region-wide membership audit,” leaders instructed delegates “not just to check our records, but to evaluate our circle of interest and responsibility.” This could lead to “responsible evangelism, where fledgling members are welcomed into a church family and disciplined for ministry.” In that meeting, the secretary of the Adventist World Church urged leaders and local churches to keep “honest membership records,” disregarding the possibility of hurting pride because of low numbers.⁶⁵

In the *Ministry* magazine in 1965, Guild proposed “concrete suggestions for keeping the back door closed” as follows:⁶⁶ (1) preparing candidates for baptism seriously is preventing apostasy before they are baptized; (2) visiting both new and old members often is for a pastor an occasion to insure the spiritual condition of every member of the household; (3) staying close to members in order to be aware on time of the seeds that Satan may sow and being a caring pastor on time; (4) keeping record of attendance on Sabbath morning, which can be done by dividing the church list among different responsible deacons; (5) making contact with the new members’

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵Elizabeth Lechleitner, “In Euro-Asia, Adventist Leadership Connects with Missing Members”, *Adventist News Network*, November 22, 2010, accessed 3 June 2016, <https://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2010-11-22/in-euro-asia-adventist-leadership-connects-with-missing-members/-/2010-11/>.

⁶⁶Daniel R. Guild, “Shut the Door, *Ministry*, 1965, accessed 19 August 2012, <http://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1965/March/shut-the-door>.

destination leaders as they move to a new area; (6) assimilating new members and getting them acquainted with old members who are to understand their role and feel accountable to one another; (7) keeping every new member active in missionary work because when people go out to win others they cement their own union with Christ; (8) keeping the church active and busy in outreach activities; (9) preaching sermons relevant to the practical life of Christian living; (10) keeping new members in a special Sabbath School class at least six months after baptism; (11) encouraging members to grow spiritually by daily fellowship with Christ in Bible study and prayer.

The official church-voted document mentioned above (CMGA) put in it what they call essential factors to retain new members: (1) be able to articulate their beliefs, (2) have friends within the congregation, (3) engage in a personally-meaningful ministry.⁶⁷

Summary

This chapter presented a study of church membership losses and retention throughout the Bible, Christian authors, and the Adventist Church in particular, beginning with Ellen G. White writings.

Even though the word retention is not in the Bible, the idea of keeping believers safe and saved is evident from Genesis to Revelation. God is the Creator, the One who gives life and always desires to preserve and save man from sin, and thus from perishing. The tree of life before sin, the call of Israel, the law and precepts prescribed by Him, together with His covenants, all share the concept of salvation and keeping created human beings for Himself. Israel was chosen to make a difference,

⁶⁷CMGA, 2 (See Appendix A).

not only by its obedience to God the Creator, but also to shine for others and bring them back to God.

The New Testament begins with Jesus, the promised Emmanuel, who comes to seek the lost by mingling and sympathizing with people, asking them to come to Him and be kept from eternal death. Paul's journeys were not only for new church planting, but also, and particularly, to care for new believers. The New Testament is about adding new souls to the existing membership, not much about losing members. The new believers are fascinated by having become true disciples and bring disciples to Christ in their home churches. Leaders are called to watch for the flock.

As Christianity grows into different denominations later in history, the structure of the church makes many believers spectators, with a lack of total assimilation of newcomers. Uncaring leadership, together with uncertain motivation to join the churches, causes dropouts and leads to many backsliders, as is noted in different Christian writings. An evangelistic approach which leads to a personal encounter with Christ, not simply joining a certain denomination, together with an understanding of what is to be a disciple and make a disciple is vital. To summarize, responsible and spiritual leadership of the churches—being accountable to God and to each other in active small groups—are the proposed possible remedies for the actual challenging situation of losing many members, both old and new. The situation in the SDA Church, as in other Christian denominations, has been characterized as “serious” by Church leaders.

Having discussed retention in the Bible and found it to be a great challenge in Christian churches, including the Adventist Church, methods of retention are vital. The following chapter deals with the situation of losses and retention in Kabusunzu SDA Church in Kigali.

CHAPTER 3

KABUSUNZU SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH AND MEMBERSHIP RETENTION

Chapter 3 deals with the setting and profile of Kabusunzu SDA Church. It starts with the general setting of Rwanda and particularly Kigali, and then takes a brief look on the general profile of the SDA Church in Rwanda. The profile and life of Kabusunzu SDA Church are described by the results of the survey, which had special emphasis on the causes of dropouts or missing members of the church. The chapter ends with the summary of its content.

The General Setting of Rwanda

Rwanda is a small country of 26,338 square kilometers, located in Central Africa with Uganda to the north, Tanzania on the east, Burundi to the south, and the Democratic Republic of Congo to its west. It is a land of many hills with a population living mostly from agriculture. Poor living conditions, such as the lack of enough land or plots too small for individuals to survive, unproductive land, and the search for employment cause people to migrate from the country to the cities. The rate of urban population growth in 2008 was estimated at seven percent, while the urban population in general was sixteen percent of the country's population.¹ The cities and towns,

¹Canisius Gakwandi, *Impact of Rural-Urban Migration on Development in Kigali*, accessed 22 October 2014, <http://uaps2007.princeton.edu/papers/70442>.

particularly Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, are consequently facing social, economic, and environmental challenges due to the demographic explosion.

The mobility and the general life of the people living in the city impact the life of the church. A brief look at the situation of Kigali may facilitate the understanding of the life of the church located in this city and the problems facing this research.

Kigali, the Capital City of Rwanda

Kigali was founded in 1907 under the German colonial rule, but became the capital city of the Republic of Rwanda at its independence in 1962. At that time, the population was between 5,000 and 6,000 people living on three square kilometers. Currently its population is estimated at around one million, sharing 722.3 square kilometers of land.²It is located in the heart of the country at a latitude of 1°58'S and a longitude of 30°07'E. The city is divided into three official districts: Nyarugenge, Gasabo, and Kicukiro. The rapid growth of this city, especially after the 1994 genocide, has led to challenging socio-economic situations, both for the city leaders and the local population. Njeru resumed the situation as follows:

The challenge facing Kigali right now is modernization so that it can take the face of a true capital city, create jobs for all who are capable, making the city a place that is attractive to, and supportive of, business and investment, both within the Central/East African region and within the world's economy. The city lacks basic social facilities such as clinics and schools because population density long surpassed the social service facilities meant for it in almost all sectors. In addition, the urban market status does not support the rural-urban influx and results in a severe unemployment crisis. ... The majority of urban dwellers are lacking knowledge and skills to be economically productive.³

²Ibid. Kigali City Official Website, "Overview: Kigali in Brief, "accessed 22 October 2014, http://www.kigalicity.gov.rw/spip.php?article76&varr_chercheeconomic%20situation.

³Purity Njeru, *History of Kigali*, accessed 22 October 2014, <http://www.africanexecutive.com/modules/magazine/articles.php?article=768>.

Because of this situation, the life of the population living in Kigali is becoming more and more difficult as days pass. Church members, like other inhabitants, are mobile, moving from place to place, looking for a place where they can earn a living more easily.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Rwanda

The SDA Church in Rwanda have its roots in the arrival of pioneer missionaries such as the Belgian David Elie Delhove, the Swiss Henri Monnier, Alfred Matter, and Dr Sturge. Delhove found out about Rwanda while scouting the region as a spy for his country in World War I. He returned as an SDA missionary with Monnier in August 1919. He founded Gitwe mission station and the first baptism of five people took place in 1922.⁴

Meanwhile, Monnier and Matter were exploring the North of Rwanda. They arrived in Ruhengeri in 1921. On furlough in Europe, Matter took a course in tropical medicine and on his return, he and Monnier founded the Rwankeri dispensary. The first baptism took place in 1924. Birikunzira reports the following about Monnier:

He presented the biblical message of salvation as winsomely as possible. He reinforced close personal contact and set a good example. He did this at the fireside or while working and walking and formally in teaching and preaching. The natives knew that he understood and loved them. They loved him too.” ... Henri Monnier, aided by other missionaries, united the Rwankeri community in Christian love and dedication to God. ... It was realized that at the Rwankeri mission station, the situation was beyond the ability and resources of the mission staff. ... The church leaders feared that chaos might result from this situation of massive conversions.⁵

⁴Jérôme Ngabo Birikunzira, “Implantation and Growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Rwanda,” (MTh thesis, University of South Africa, 2008), 73-77.

⁵Ibid., 87.

Dr Sturges, who came from Songa Hospital in Zaire, and Alfred Matter then moved West and founded the third mission station of Ngoma, with a medical treatment approach. The fourth mission station was founded in 1965 at Nyamirambo, in Kigali, under the leadership of Pastor Stephen Baraburiye, a Rwandese. The sixth station was Butare in 1967.

In 1984, the Rwanda Union Mission was organized, led by an American missionary, Pastor Robert Peck, with 142,381 church members.⁶ From April 2010, Rwanda Union Mission was made up of seven Fields. In 2014 two of them became Conferences (East Central Rwanda Conference, based in Kigali, and the North Rwanda Conference based in Ruhengeri). According to the statistical report of September 2015, the membership of the North Rwanda Conference was 87,094⁷ and the East Central Rwanda Conference had 115,118 members.⁸

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Kigali

Seventh-day Adventist beliefs were introduced in Kigali by people coming from the Central Rwanda Field in 1956. Among these were Pastor Mico Joel, who was accompanied by his son Niyibikora Jérôme. He did home visitations and held the first evangelistic campaign at Gatare in July 1956, followed by the first baptism there. He moved there in September. Mico was then moved to Nyarugenge in Butare, to be

⁶Ibid., 91. See also, “Rwanda,” *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1996), 2:486, 487.

⁷Online Yearbook Statistics, “North Central Rwanda Conference,” accessed 8 June 2016, <http://www.adventistdirectory.org/ViewAdmField.aspx?AdmFieldID=NRWA>.

⁸Online Yearbook Statistics, “East Central Rwanda Conference,” accessed 8 June 2016, <http://www.adventistdirectory.org/ViewAdmField.aspx?AdmFieldID=ERWA>.

succeeded by other pastors evangelizing the Kigali area, among them Pastor Zephania Rutwa, who was able to penetrate first in Nyarurama and Nyamirambo in 1969.⁹

The Kabusunzu Church Setting and Its Membership Statistics

This section deals first with the geographical and historical setting profile of Kabusunzu Church. A study of its lifestyle and membership fluctuations follows.

Geographical Setting

Kabusunzu SDA Church is one of the three churches and three companies in Mount Kigali District, in the East-Central Rwanda Conference. It is located in the Nyakabanda sector, in the official District of Nyarugenge, in the city of Kigali.

History of the Church

In 1982, church members who lived in this area became part of a company of the Nyamirambo Church under the leadership of Jérôme Karera. The intention was to establish a new church there. Twice, at the end of 1982 and then in 1984, that desire failed and church members had to return to Nyamirambo, the mother church. In 1986, a group of people organized in the *Ababibi* Choir (Sowers' Choir) from Rwampara, the neighboring sector, came to support a special cell of persons led by Paul Kanyenzi and Eliab Kabanda, who volunteered to give regular Bible studies, first in Kanyenzi's home and later in an open field near the road. "Clouds of people came to listen to the Word of God those evenings. Leaders of the church from the Union, Kigali Field, and then from the Nyamirambo Seventh-day Adventist Church came to see if what was

⁹Niyibikora Yoram, District Pastor in Central Rwanda Field, contacted by telephone, 3 June 2015. This information complemented what Musuhuke Sylvestre, a church elder in the Kabusunzu Church informed in an interview on May 24, 2014. Sylvestre was among the pupils of Pastor Rutwa. Nyarurama is on the opposite hill from Nyamirambo (mother church of Kabusunzu Church), and is one of organized churches of the Gikondo District.

going on was in conformity with the doctrines of the SDA Church,” reported Sylvestre, a church elder interviewed.¹⁰

From these meetings, a company was organized on 1 July 1992, and then became an organized church on 14 November 1992, with 70 members. It became an Evangelistic District on 16 March 1994, with Nelson Sabayesu as the first pastor.

Statistics of Membership Growth and Losses

In the statistical report at the end of 2013, Kabusunzu Church was reported to have 1,274 church members. In 21 years, it had grown by 1,204 members, an average of 60 persons per year. The increase was due to new baptisms and the transfer of believers who came to reside in the area as they searched for a better life. From the statistical reports of the years 2005 to 2010, and comparing the gains and losses of church members, the dropouts and missing are a high percentage. This makes for a low percentage of growth. Table 1 shows the situation in the Mount Kigali district, of which Kabusunzu Seventh-day Adventist Church is an important part. The growth rate is low (from -1.7 percent in 2005 to +18 percent in 2009) in the district.¹¹ Simply counting gains and losses, in 2007 there were more than twice as many losses as gains (175 gains, 356 losses). It is evident that there was an audit that year. Even in the other years there were more losses than gains in the district.

Table 2 shows the memberships of Kabusunzu Church. Here, the growth from 2005 through 2010 was not high, with the highest being eleven percent in 2009. In

¹⁰Musuhuke Sylvestre, Church Elder at Kabusunzu Church, interview by the author, Kigali, 27 May, 2014.

¹¹In the interviews with both the Pastor of the Mount Kigali district and the first elder of the Kabusunzu SDA church, both separately affirmed that it was no more accepted to report the real losses. As a result, the statistical reports given to the higher organizations are not correct. Thus the loss/retention problem is inexistent and does not bother church leaders.

2007, the year of the audit, there was a general loss of 28 percent. If one considers the relation of church gains to losses, the loss appears even greater. In 2005 and 2006, nearly half as many as entered the church were lost (44 and 46 percent, respectively). In the last two years, the losses reported were much lower.

There was a difference of numbers between Kabusunzu Church numbers and the Conference numbers. In the statistical report given to the Conference at the end of the year 2013, Kabunsuzu Church reported 1,274 church members, while in February 2014 the register book had only 1,038 names. My investigation done on Sabbath, 8 February 2014 showed 534 members present at the church services; that number included those who could be identified as known absent that Sabbath.

Kabusunzu Church was divided into cells. These were organized to facilitate missionary work, as well as to provide opportunity for increased spiritual growth among their members. Table 3 shows the groups as well as the number of real believers participating.

Eneas Habiyambere, Mont Kigali District Pastor, and Twagirayesu Antoine, Kabusunzu first elder. Interview by the author, 16 February 2014.

Table 1. Membership Gains and Losses in the Mount Kigali District, 2005-2010

Year	Gains					Losses				Percentage Growth
	Members on Jan 1	Baptisms	Profession of faith	Transfers in	Transfers out	Members dropped	Members missing	Deaths	Members on Dec 31	
2005	1510	58		14	47	23	19	09	1484	-1.7%
2006	1484	81		14	15	28		01	1535	+3.4%
2007	1535	175		11	10	21	356		1334	-13%
2008	1334	74	06	08	31	11	22	07	1351	+1%
2009	1351	219	08	40	12	10		01	1595	+18%
2010	1595	173	14	30	16	13	12	4	1767	+11%
		780	28	117	131	106	409	22		

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Table 2. Membership Gains and Losses in Kabusunzu Church, 2005-2010

Year	Gains					Losses				Percentage Growth
	Members on Jan 1	Baptisms	Profession of faith	Transfers in	Transfers out	Members dropped	Members missing	Deaths	Membership Dec 31	
2005	993	45		05	19	13	07	06	998	+0.5%
2006	998	32		13	07	13	02		1021	+2%
2007	1021	34		05	07	09	312		732	-28%
2008	732	28	05	05	09	08	04	04	745	+ 2%
2009	745	73	01	15	05	05			824	+11%
2010	824	30		22	16	04			856	+4%

Table 3. Number of Kabusunzu Believers in Their Active Cells, February 2015

Subdivision (<i>igihande</i>)	Cells for older people		Youth Cells		Total real number of believers
	Number of Cells	Real number of believers	Number of cells	Real number of believers	
Kamuhaza	15	126	4	40	166
Munanira	9	81	5	41	122
Katabaro	3	27	0	0	27
Ntaraga	5	46	4	22	68
Kabusunzu I	7	56	4	33	89
Kabusunzu II	4	37	3	25	62
Total	43	373	20	161	534

Kabusunzu Seventh-day Adventist Church Membership Survey

In addition to the statistical reports just presented, data were gathered at Kabusunzu Church by two methods: questionnaires and interviews. Two types of questionnaires were distributed, both in the Kinyarwanda language spoken commonly by these people. One was given to 60 active members of Kabusunzu Church in different cells, together with some leaders of the church. Then, aided by volunteers and regular members of the church who knew at least one person who had dropped out of the church, another 30 questionnaires were sent to backslidden believers living in the Kabusunzu Church area and other former believers.

One hundred percent of the active members returned their questionnaire. Of the backsliders, 24 (80%) returned theirs answered, meanwhile two others (6%) returned the questionnaires without marking anything. Table 4 shows the status of the respondents, both active church members and those who dropped out. The highest

number of backsliders was between the ages of 23 and 50, while those older than 50 were the second group. The survey showed that these backslidden persons mostly entered the church between the age of sixteen to 22 (48%); the second group entered between the age of 23 to 35 years old (32%); none of them was older than 51. Of the backsliders, 63 percent were not yet married at the time of their baptism; 79 percent were baptized at Kabusunzu church.

Table 4. Age and Gender of Respondents to the Two Questionnaires

Status	Active church members		Backsliders	
	Number	%	Number	%
Male	26	43	10	42
Female	34	57	14	58
Age 12-22	27	45	4	17
23-50 years old	26	43	12	50
51- above	7	12	8	33

Kabusunzu Seventh-day Adventist Church Membership Lifestyle

The educational level of church members needs to be taken into account to comprehend the lifestyle of the church. Table 5 shows the education of the two groups of respondents. Interestingly, the backsliders had a higher percent of uneducated persons: 50 percent versus eighteen percent. Of the 60 active members, nineteen (32 percent) had had university education, whereas only three of the 26 (13 percent) had received any university education. Table 5 shows that 50 percent of the backsliders in Kabusunzu Church had not been to school or had done only the primary level. On the other hand, the majority of respondents in the active membership group had at least some secondary education. Having a membership with a majority of non-educated

people, particularly in the city, may be the origin of a special challenge in leadership. These people do not have regular work or a secure occupation; they move frequently from place to place, seeking simple jobs such as housework. They have left their families in the village or live with them in difficult situations in the city. With this mobility, they do not care about letters of transfer and may be reported missing after disappearing without any notice, while, possibly, they are attending another church, whether neighboring or distant, as irregular members. To this, one might add the meager knowledge of the discipline in church organization, particularly in transfer issues and inactive or careless cells or groups. The unstable lifestyle of the urban inhabitants may also contribute to their dropping from the church and going back to the old life, seeking companionship with old friends of the secular world.

Table 5. Respondents' Education

Educational level	Active members		Backsliders	
	Number	%	Number	%
None or primary	11	18	12	50
Secondary level	27	45	8	33
University	19	32	3	13
No answer	3	5	1	4

Occupation is related to the educational level of people, as is shown in the Kabusunzu Church report. Table 6 shows that 47 percent of the church members who responded to the questionnaire are people who have their own businesses. However, 21 (35 percent) reported having no regular work. According to the responses of the dropouts, 42 percent had no work. The precarious status of people accompanies a hard

life. The result of this precarious employment can be backsliding, particularly when their constant mobility is beyond anyone's control.

Table 6. Respondents' Occupations

Occupation	Active church members		Backsliders	
	Number	%	Number	%
Civil/NGO agents	11	18	5	21
Personal business	28	47	7	29
No regular work	21	35	10	42
No response		0	2	8

Ways of Entering the Church and Remaining in It

Another aspect to examine was how people entered the church, how they accepted baptism into the SDA Church. These results suggest the church's vision in evangelism. According to Table 7, most of the Kabusunzu Church members came through public efforts; 79 percent of those who dropped out and 65 percent of those who remain in the church entered that way. Of the dropouts, the baptism of 21 percent was related to marriage and 13 percent were simply following the religion of their parents.

Table 7. Ways of Conversion and SDA Relations

	Active church members		Backsliders	
	Number	%	Number	%
Parental religion	0	0	3	13
Efforts of parent or of a relative	27	45	4	17
Efforts of a church member	9	15	3	13
Evangelistic campaign	39	65	19	79
In campaign but were not invited	21	35	8	33
SDA coworker	3	5	0	0
Marriage-related	2	3	5	21
Other interest-related	0	0	2	8
Had relatives in SDA Church	46	77	10	41

Table 7 shows that only three of the 24 backsliders were brought to the church by the efforts of other members, while, as is indicated in Table 8, 92 percent of them declared that they had not brought even one person to baptism in all the time they were in the church. Furthermore, none of them had been trained in personal evangelism.

Table 8 shows the results of questions related to participation in church activities of different kinds. It is clear that current church members were more actively involved in church activities than had been the dropouts. Yet, 92 percent of the respondents in that group reported not being trained to win new members. Another

noticeable response was that the percentage of active church members in small groups was much greater than that of the dropouts (73 percent versus 45 percent).

Table 8. Participation in Church Activities

	Church members		Backsliders	
	Yes %	No %	Yes %	No %
At least one person baptized from my effort	39	65	8	92
At least one person brought to church as a visitor	42	58	15	85
At least one dropout visited	23	77	4	96
Trained to win souls by myself	8	92	0	100
Have or had responsibility in church activities	57	43	25	75
Are or was active in church small groups	73	27	45	55
Consider the SDA Church as friendly	37	63	4	96

The Church and Its Mission

The life of the church is also defined by how its members understand the mission of the church and carry it out. Table 9 shows a failed understanding of the complete carrying out of the church's mission at Kabusunzu Church. The observation of both current active church members and the dropouts was that most activities were done to fulfill formalities. While the integration before baptism is evaluated as well done by four percent of members, it was considered at 0 percent by backsliders. Only thirteen percent of both categories considered the baptismal class well done. Seventeen percent of members felt that the reclamation of backsliders was well done, while none of the backsliders considered it well done. In short, the information obtained suggests that Kabusunzu Church was not actively pursuing mission.

Particular Causes to Remain in the Church or Drop out

A study of church membership retention must take into account factors that make people who come to church remain and those which cause to drop out. In Table 10, the Kabusunzu Church respondents highlighted the biblical doctrines and teachings of the SDA Church as the first motivation for them to remain and hold on to the church (93%). The satisfaction of their spiritual need comes ranked second (85%), while being involved in the church activities comes as the third reason to remain (70%). On the backslider's side, they deplore having never being involved in any church activity at an important percentage (75%) in Table 8.

For survey respondents in both groups, the relational factor seems to be lacking in Kabusunzu Church. This disagrees with the modality encouraged by Paul, which Hall noted as follows: "Throughout the writings of Paul, the unity, fellowship, and oneness of the believers is strongly emphasized by the analogy of the body and its

members with Christ as the head. Paul not only stressed the concept of oneness and unity, but he strongly emphasized the motif of ‘one-another.’”¹

Table 9. Kabusunzu Church and Its Mission to Its Members

Missionary activities	Active church members’ observation Expressed in percentages			Backsliders’ observation Expressed in percentages		
	Rare or non-existent	As a formality	Well done	Rare or non-existent	As a formality	Well done
Church interest in and care for visitors	35%	40%	25%	29%	67%	4%
Follow-up of interested persons	14%	33%	53%	24%	63%	13%
Integration prior to baptism	71%	25%	4%	83%	17%	0%
Assimilation after baptism	41%	42%	17%	29%	54%	17%
Adequate baptismal class	40%	47%	13%	46%	41%	13%
Effective indoctrination follow-up class	20%	25%	55%	29%	33%	38%
Concern for reclaiming backsliders	58%	25%	17%	79%	21%	0%
Pastoral and leadership care and equipping	28%	55%	17%	33%	50%	17%

¹Hall, 55.

Table 10. Factors that Kept Respondents in the Church

Factors	Non-existent or weak reason	%	Good/Strong reason	%
Biblical doctrines and teachings	4	7%	56	93%
Spiritual needs met	9	15%	51	85%
Church involvement/active	18	30%	42	70%
Loving and caring church	32	53%	28	47%
Leadership and pastoral caring	36	60%	24	40%
Church follow-up strategies	40	77%	20	33%

Table 11 shows that respondents who left the church indicated more than one important factor that caused them to leave. However, loneliness ranked the highest (92%), and disappointment in what they expected from the church body was ranked second (77%). Personal reasons took the third place (74%). The climate among believers also was cited as the fourth cause for people to leave the church (57%). This may explain why, even though most of them still agree with the teachings of SDA Church (77%), only eight out of 24(33%) see the possibility of returning to the church.

Table 11. Factors that Influenced Dropouts to Leave the Church

Factors	Not/weak/ somehow reason	%	Good/Strong reason	%
Aloneness in difficulties	2	8%	22	92%
Disappointed expectations	5	33%	19	77%
Personal causes related	6	26%	18	74%
Lack of fellowship and support in small groups	7	29%	17	71%
Mistreatment by members	10	43%	14	57%
Problems related to pastoral and leadership	12	50%	12	50%
Worldly influences	14	38%	10	42%
Disagreement with teachings	18	75%	6	25%
Adherence to another church	20	83%	4	17%
Return is possible	16	67%	8	33%

Summary

In summary, this chapter started by describing the setting of Kabuzunsu Church in Rwanda and Kigali, particularly. It was noted that the lifestyle of the population in the city, with its demographic explosion, modernization, and the unemployment of many people are often mobile in searching a better life. This greatly affects the life of Kabusunzu Church located in Kigali.

The chapter also presented statistical reports of Kabuzunsu SDA Church; these reveal losses and poor strategies to retain members, particularly newcomers.

Loneliness, inactivity, and lack of real understanding or interest in the mission of the church—by both local leaders and church members—constitute the basic aspects of the failure to retain the members or control their mobility. The survey revealed poor teaching before and/or after baptism among newcomers. People enter the church

mostly unprepared through public evangelism and are left alone without the church to assimilate them.

A new strategy is needed for Kabusunzu SDA Church to improve member retention. Learning from responses to this survey, Chapter 4 proposes a strategy that could solve the problems found.

CHAPTER 4

A STRATEGY TO ENHANCE MEMBERSHIP RETENTION IN KABUSUNZU SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

After having learned about the challenges of care and retention of the regular and new members in Kabusunzu Church, chapter 4 is designed to explain the method used to enhance this retention, based on one another accountability. This program was implemented in 2014. The first section deals with the initial steps to establish the new members' retention program in Kabusunzu Church.

Personal Preparation

Before beginning this program, the author received approval from the East Central Rwanda Conference and the local church, as well as the Mount Kigali district pastor. The author wrote two letters on August 20, 2013: one to the conference president and another to the district pastor.¹ Then the author had an appointment with the conference president, discussed with him the issue of retention in the church today, and expressed a need to research this at Kabusunzu SDA Church. After considering the issue and qualifying it as of "great importance," he gave his verbal assent. He then connected me with the conference evangelism director and the district pastor for them to be aware of the program and support it.

¹In appendix B, see the written letters. The conference president told the author in his office that he did not need to write a response since he was giving a positive verbal response.

Steps for the Retention Strategy

In implementing the new strategy for retention of believers, particularly the newcomers to Kabusunzu Church, different but interconnected steps were proposed.

Share the Concern with Kabusunzu SDA Church

After receiving a telephone call from the Mount Kigali district pastor confirming that he and the local church board had approved the program to take place at Kabusunzu Church, the author went to see him in November 2013 and agreed to start the program in December 2013. The next step was to apply the questionnaire and interview pertinent people. During the months of January and February, different meetings were organized with local church leaders and seminars were held with them and other believers for a common understanding of the losses and retention concern. On Sabbath 11 January 2014, the author began with a sermon on how all of us are accountable to God for how we use the time, talents, and opportunities given to us in this life. The presentation was based on Isaiah 38 and 39, and on Ellen G. White's statement that "every individual has a soul to save or to lose," in relation to how we use our time, talents, and opportunities every day of our life.²

Then on Sabbath 18 January 2014, after agreement with local church elders and the Sabbath School program coordinator, the author separated the believers into

²White, *The Great Hope*, 282.

the existing *ibihande*,³ then in small groups according to where they lived. The first thing leaders and believers noticed was that those entities existed in formality, rather than reality. Many believers found it difficult to know or meet their SDA neighbors. Elders were asked to take a moment to identify the limitations of their *ibihande*, and then to help divide the group into cells of seven to twelve persons, the youth and the adults separately.

Another thing which surprised the members was the number of members present, compared to what the statistics reported and what was in the church register (see this information in Chapter 3). As the statistical reports do not show losses (missing members or dropouts) after 2009, the problem was for them non-existent. It was proposed to the church to join the author on another Sabbath in examining the presence of those added by baptism in 2012 and 2013. The author took the list, reading the names of those newcomers, but again, both believers and leaders of the church were surprised and felt concerned by this reality. The information given to the church appears in Table 12. It became evident that not reporting the losses proved to not be helpful to retention, but led to worsen the situation. The loss among the newly baptized for 2012 were 22 persons (35% of the number baptized), and nineteen in 2013 (33% of the number baptized). In addition, this investigation revealed that even of those who had joined the church on 14 December 2013—only two months later—the whole church, leaders and believers included, could not identify ten persons and did not know when or where they had gone.

³The Kinyarwanda word *ibihande* is the plural of *igihande*, which means a subdivision of a local church, larger than what is known as a small group. It may have a number of cells (small groups), according to how large it is or the number of believers the church has in that area.

Table 12. Losses, 2012 and 2013

Year	Entered by Baptisms	Entered by Transfer	Presences justified	Known to have moved no transfer	Dropped/ Missing	% Loss
2012	63		37	4	22	35%
2013	53		37	2	19	33%
2012-2013		12	12	0	0	0
Total	116	12	86	6	41	

Another discovery was that six of the newly baptized and five who entered by transfer letters were not registered anywhere. That is what these members claimed after the author had finished reading the list from the church register.

This was done on Sabbath, after the Sabbath School program. Most of the believers, and particularly the church leaders and the district pastor, were touched. Together we were convinced that something needed to be done. We all shared the concern and wondered what to do to reverse the situation.

Becoming Accountable and Keeping One Another

As the problem was now understood and shared, the next step was to find a solution to ameliorate the situation. All leaders and believers of Kabusunzu SDA Church were invited to attend a seminar that Sabbath afternoon. At that meeting the author shared with them a presentation based on Genesis 4:8, 9, the story of Cain, Abel, and God. The emphasis was on God’s question, “Where is your brother Abel?” Are we not repeating Cain’s answer, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” when we do not take care of (1) our neighbors erring far from the truth that we know? (2) our brothers and sisters who left the church without any effort or tears on our part to protect them?

(3) our newcomers who enter and find us indifferent and then return to their old life and perdition? From this point of view, it was noted that God intends for us to be each other's keepers in this busy, challenging life.

Taking Advantage of the Good of the Active Cells (Small Groups)

The following Sabbath, February 1, 2014, the author organized another conference. Its purpose was to attain a better understanding of the benefits of active cells (small groups) and decide how to implement them in Kabusunzu Church, to keep each other in faith and courage, avoiding the lonesomeness of the challenging city life. Now the groups were to be active cells, instead of being the instrument of leaders to control the tithing and other church offerings. They should become the centers of (1) fellowshiping together, (2) praying for each other according to everyone's concerns, (3) encouraging and counseling each other, (4) helping each other according to the capacity of those in the cell, (5) exercising each one's talent for the salvation of the surrounding people, and (6) integrating and keeping the new converts. At the same time a booklet in Kinyarwanda, prepared by the author, was distributed to each cell. It contained what the Bible and Ellen G. White state about the importance of small groups. Instructions on the formation and management of the group were provided in the booklet. Guidelines to prevent the entrance of false teachings are also given.

Real Understanding of a Campaign: Reap Where We have Sowed

The next step was practical. As the active cells were now restructured with a new purpose and most of church members understood the need to be accountable to God for the salvation of others, the author spoke the following Sabbath about how to make more effective our evangelistic campaigns as the principal gate for new people

to enter the church. Church members had previously understood that an eloquent preacher, excellent choirs, and a good sound system were enough to bring many people to the truth; not much personal involvement was needed. After a sermon calling people to a personal revival and to rejoice in working as partners with God, engagement cards were distributed to every volunteer in the church who wanted to join the author in the preparation of the coming evangelistic campaign. These cards had two parts: (1) a personal vow determining to seek God in all aspects of life, preparing for His coming kingdom; (2) a personal commitment to pray for and visit five people, with place for their names; these would be persons the individual would pray for and would visit, aiming to bring them to Christ and see them baptized into the church.⁴

For the whole month of February and part of March, every active cell was asked to read and practice the content of the booklet the author had prepared, fellowshiping together in support of both spiritual and day-to-day life. They met twice a week: on a day of their choice and in Sabbath School. A form was filled reporting their cell life, including goals and activities. These forms were then kept in the church office.⁵ Names written on the personal commitment cards were included in the group report and the progress in personal evangelistic activities was regularly noted. At every meeting, while fellowshiping together, everyone's concerns and joys were shared. Members of the cell were encouraged to pray for each other and bring to God everything that happened in their cell.

⁴See Appendix D.

⁵Appendix E contains the form and information to be filled.

The author then proposed to the church an evangelistic campaign for March. The church voted it for 22 March to 5 April. The author trained the church leaders on the three principal parts of campaign: (1) preparation for the campaign, (1) activities during the campaign, (3) follow-up activities after the campaign. The active cells were encouraged to own the campaign and prepare for a great baptismal ceremony, as they would for the birth of their own children.

The following six steps, emphasizing member involvement, were proposed:

1. To baptize 100 converts we need to have at least 150 in the baptismal class.
2. To have 150 candidates in the baptismal class we must have at least 200 responses to the preacher's call.
3. To have 200 responding to call we must have at least 300 visitors attending the meetings.
4. To have 300 visitors we must invite at least 600 persons.
5. To invite 600 persons every active cell must go and invite at least 80 of our friends recorded on the forms.
6. To invite 80 in one cell/small group all must do their part.

Everyone realized that they were sowing and the harvest would depend on their efforts. The more the church was busy witnessing to others, praying and working for a changed life of others, the more they sought God and their own spirituality grew. Members of cell groups, whether old members or new, became attached to their groups. Even if they had to move, they did not quit their fellows without notice.

When the time of the campaign came, the author was the speaker. Every church elder and chief of *igihande* had to follow up on how the strategies learned were put into practice in their respective *igihande* and active cells. Sixteen of the *New*

Beginnings presentations were used for the evening campaign.⁶ The gathering place was on the elementary school grounds, 300 meters from the church. The three Sabbath service sermons were the author's compositions and intended to motivate believers to understand God's plan better and give themselves more fully to partnership with God in the salvation of others.⁷ Before every evening's presentation, the author evaluated how believers had brought their friends to the meetings. Some were rewarded because of having brought more visitors than others.

The third day of the campaign, a baptismal class started. This class was directed by two elders under the supervision of the local pastor, following the lessons provided.⁸ The problem was that there were new candidates every day and some cells members in charge of those persons tried to help their new friends. Also, as a person's interest was known, they were contacted by telephone and were given *Discovery Bible lessons (Genzura)* to read at home. The strategy was that all of the newcomers would find at least one friend in the church and obtain basic knowledge of Adventist beliefs. A difficult task was to get to know the visitors not invited, but who came each evening. They were identified, sat together as much as possible, and registered and their cards given to neighboring cells, according to where they lived. Then the learning process continued with the active cells.

⁶ Adventist-laymen's Services Industry, *New Beginnings: African Kinyarwanda* [DVD], Silver Springs, MD: Review & Herald, 2002.

⁷Appendix F contains the sermons to motivate and form the church. Every evening a coordination meeting sat to evaluate how every cell was doing its part. Different committees (prayer, visitation, program, security, and others) gave their reports and brought their concerns. Aided by the local pastor, my role was to train, inspire, and instruct them, answering questions related to the new process.

⁸The teachers of the class were given a hard copy of the sermons already presented. All the sermons came from the book *New Beginnings*.

Baptism: A Doctrinal Conviction and a Celebration Day of the Church as a Family

During the campaign, every cell was not only busy working on their friends and visitors, but they were also preparing to give birth to baptism. A committee of two was set up to work with the baptismal class, to talk to everyone, lead everyone in the right decision. Finally, the pastor and the elder in charge of evangelism or the first elder must talk to all candidates to understand their background and be aware of the motivation for the decision. These leaders needed to know how to handle every situation, even if it meant postponing someone's baptism if the motivation was other than the conviction of biblical teaching and a life surrendered to Jesus, and to do so without discouraging the person.

The campaign ended on 5 April 2014 and 43 persons decided to be baptized. Before the baptism, every *igihande* grouped their candidates. There was one ashamed *igihande* without even one person for baptism; another one had only three. Special forms were provided for records: one for the *igihande* and another for the pastor and his elders. The one for the *igihande* would help them in following up their own, while the others would serve as a reference for the leaders of the church, regarding the ones baptized that day, to verify that everyone would be registered in the church book and given two mentors, for at least a year's follow up. The baptism was made a special day with decorations, with joy and hymns, and a meal shared after the baptism with leaders at all levels.⁹

Thereafter, each cell took to their homes those who had become their children. They were advised not to spend there too much time; 20 to 30 minutes would be

⁹The forms are in Appendix E. Note that of the two mentors, one must be the person who brought the new member to Christ, while the other one is selected by his/her active cell or is a regular member that the newcomer knew and was in relation with before the baptism.

enough, with one or two songs, a biblical passage, for example 1 Peter 1:3-5, 6. Then a prayer should be offered and the group would move to another new believer's home.

Post-Baptismal Integration and Follow-up Activities

Since it is evident that doing much follow-up after baptism will not always retain the newly baptized, this strategy put emphasis on activities before baptism. Usually the preacher of the evangelistic campaign leaves and church members go back to their busy and challenging life, but the friendship established earlier lasts. The newly baptized member regularly meets the cell members at their chosen time and feels part of a new and caring family. The *igihande* leader evaluates the newcomers every Sabbath, contacts the mentors and the cell if needed, then takes immediate measures if any absence or signs of backsliding are revealed. Beyond that, if the person desires to move, the family cell to which he or she belongs advises the person about the transfer issue and together with the leader of *igihande*, they know where to find a place for that new member. It was aimed for Kabusunzu Church to be a caring church like Webb defines it:

A caring church, one that continues to care, is a place where each individual is focused upon his or her personal relationship with Jesus. The church has a clear concept of the value that Jesus places upon each individual. Closing the back door involves getting close to people, discovering their needs as they are willing to share, and meeting those needs when appropriate. This is something no church program can provide. *Only loving, caring individuals can* (emphasis mine).¹⁰

Preventing Inactivity and Effective Mentoring

After each baptismal ceremony, members form a team and are motivated to organize different activities, which continue to bind them together and lead them to

¹⁰Joe A. Webb, *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide: Evangelism and Witnessing*, 2nd Quarter 2012 (Kendu Bay, Kenya: African Herald Publishing House, 2012), 154.

find their place in the existing congregation.¹¹ They elect five persons to make a special committee in charge of the organization of (1) visitation of group members, according to where they live in the *igihande*; (2) coordination of the team in preparation for different activities that the church wants them to be responsible for; (3) establishment of the strategies which can help them to keep one another in the new faith or to be able to trace where the members have gone when absent; (4) personal introspection on how each one of them is participating in the regular duties of a true Seventh-day Adventist believer. They are also given commitment cards where they write the names of persons they want to work with, to bring them to biblical truth, as should any true disciple of Jesus. Among them, a choir is organized, and when it is their turn to prepare the Sabbath School program, we encourage them to present at least one item all together as a team of those born again on the same date. Ellen G. White recommends to all ministers that members should avoid inactivity:

It is a universal principal that whenever one refuses to use his God-given powers, these powers decay and perish. Truth that is not lived, that is not imparted, loses its life-giving power, its healing virtue. . . . Every true minister feels a heavy responsibility for the spiritual advancement of the believers entrusted to his care, a longing desire that they shall be laborers together with God. . . . Earnestly and untiringly he seeks to inspire the believers with a desire to win souls for Christ, remembering that every addition to the church should be one more agency for the carrying out of the plan of redemption.¹²

¹¹To maintain active church members, all cell groups rotate in different activities, such as being responsible for Sabbath school program, visiting, and assisting at the neighboring Kabusunzu Health Center. These activities are specifically given to newcomers as a team, sometimes aided by an elder and leaders responsible for new baptismal class members.

¹²Ellen G. White, *The Acts of The Apostles* (Seoul: Everlasting Gospel Publishing, 2001), 216,217.

A Post-Baptismal Class

In His Great Commission (Matt 28:19, 20), Jesus said He wanted us to make people His disciples, baptize them, and then teach “them to obey everything I have commanded you.” So, a special after-baptism class followed the baptismal ceremony. It was directed by two selected teachers, willing and able to teach and live the Seventh-day Adventist doctrines. An intensive three-month study followed, with sessions two days a week: one on a day of their choice and the other during the regular Sabbath School program. The author provided instructions to follow and a book to consult.¹³ At this step, monitors of this special class brought to the attention of attendees the existence of quarterly Sabbath School lessons and different books of Ellen White, as tools of God’s church to nurture members. Every one bought his or her own quarterly lesson and a spirit of caring was created when the group was encouraged to buy quarterlies for the ones not able to pay for them. The parent cells also offered support when needed.

Records for Tentative Resolution of Statistical Problems

Throughout the steps of this strategy, different forms were used. These covered cell group activities, a baptismal record and mentors form, a follow-up form with the baptism class, and the *ibihande*. All of these made sure that none of the new members’ names was missing. The church secretary referred to them to be sure that all newcomers were registered before finishing the statistical report at the end of the quarter. Those who came by transfer were also immediately added to the baptism form of the quarter, on the Sabbath they were confirmed as new members.

¹³Appendix G is about those lines of quick lessons. The books of inspiration for the two monitors are *The 28 Fundamental Beliefs* and *Answers to your Questions*, both in local languages.

Evaluation of the Strategy

As this study considered the statistical reports and from the survey, from 2005 to 2013, those who dropped out of the church were from 33 to 46 percent of those who had entered, either by baptism or transfer. The year 2007 was particular with the highest losses—nine times as many left as came in. This was followed by an interdiction to report any losses in the following years. An investigation showed that the problem persisted, though hidden until the year of the implementation of the new strategy to face on the situation. Since aloneness and inactivity were the most visible characteristics of Kabusunzu church, to end that kind of losses, the proposed strategy was based on involvement and accountability to one another.

The steps narrated above were followed by four major baptismal ceremonies at Kabusunzu Church throughout 2014. The author worked with the district pastor and local church elders, together with members of the church, to involve and motivate all members as part of the strategy aiming a good and long lasting result. After the campaign described in this chapter, the author worked with the members to own the strategy.

To make an evaluation of the program, in order to know whether it had succeeded or failed, it was proposed to the church and its leaders to have a “Yearly Evaluation and Motivation Day.”¹⁴ This must be a great day for the whole church: (1) the church or the chosen place of the celebration is well prepared, impressively decorated; (2) the newcomers of the year are sitting in reserved sits wearing white and black, *igihande* by *igihande*; (3) the heroes of the year are also sitting behind the ones

¹⁴Appendix I contains the document explaining the goals of the day and its activities.

they brought to church during the year; (4) the church committee has prepared rewards for those who worked hard to retain members.

After the idea was shared and understood, the church executive committee voted this day for 13 December 2014. The author invited the conference president and the conference evangelism coordinator to give value to the occasion with their presence and be aware of the strategy the church had adopted. Thus, if judged successful, such a plan could be carried out in other churches of their conference.¹⁵ Prior to the date, another form was given to the leaders of each *igihande* as a tool of evaluation, to be filled referring to the baptism form.¹⁶ The presence of each newly baptized person was mandatory, unless that person was very sick or making an urgent trip. This day was their time to be shown love again and integrated into the family, that is, the church. Also, it was an opportunity for the church members and their leaders to evaluate themselves, to see if they had done their mission well, and to see if those reported as added to the church were really there.

The first presentation recalled the retention problem at Kabusunzu Church since 2005 and the steps followed during the year 2014 to implement the new strategy in order to remedy the situation. Then followed the reports by the elders and leaders of each *igihande*, showing how many were baptized in their respective cell groups. These stood up as the report was given. Dropouts or missing persons were noted. Time for questions and comments followed. The congregation was then asked to select the church elder to be rewarded for having, more than others, visited and cared

¹⁵The letter inviting the conference leader is in Appendix B.

¹⁶Appendix E contains the form. It shows the names of those who entered their *igihande* in the different baptismal ceremonies the church had held throughout the year.

for his members. Each leader of a cell or an *igihande* leader, whose newly baptized members were remaining in the church and were present, was noted. At that date, 30 of the 43 newcomers were also rewarded for having also brought people to baptism (some had brought up to three persons to Christ).

Following is the summary of the report as a result of the strategy (even this kind of evaluation-motivation day is another step of the strategy):

- In 2014, Kabusunzu SDA Church was active in their cell groups with many people listed on commitment cards for whom to pray and work for their salvation.
- In 2014, Kabusunzu SDA Church organized four evangelistic campaigns, which ended with four baptismal ceremonies (April 5, June 21, October 25, December 12), plus an added ceremony on November 15.
- In 2014, Kabusunzu SDA Church had a total of 114 newly baptized members from these ceremonies (respectively 43, 32, 22, 01, and 16).
- In 2014, only 2 persons dropped out of the church and went back to their ancient life (one in Kamuhoza and another in Ntaraga *igihande*). Their mentors and the leaders of *igihande* are still working to reclaim them. They have not yet been removed from the church membership list.
- In 2014, Kabusunzu SDA Church had two missing persons among the newly baptized who could not be located.
- In 2014, three persons among the newly baptized moved to other churches and the transfer is in process.
- In 2014, none of the 534 church members recorded on the active cell group forms went missing or dropped out during the year.

Because of the hard work of some of the members in their cell groups and the leaders of different categories, the result is encouraging and motivating. Considering the dropouts and the missing, the loss has decreased from the minimum of 33 percent that the church used to have to 3 percent in 2014.

The ceremony of the day and the results obtained impacted the whole church positively. Members and leaders testified of their commitment for the future and their

intention to adopt the strategy again. The Conference president was present at the evaluation ceremony and expressed surprise at the results. He then recommended to the evangelism coordinator that the strategy be adopted by all the districts in his territory. He decided to take it to the executive committee for adoption.

A picnic was organized by the church to welcome again the new comers of the year. Chapter 5 presents the summary, conclusion, and recommendations of this study.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In chapter 4, the strategy to enhance membership retention in Kabusunzu Church was described. Chapter 5 summarizes the study and draws conclusions from what was learned. To finalize, recommendations for improving the program are made.

Summary

Maintaining new members in Kabusunzu SDA Church was the concern of this project. The dropouts and missing members from the church, particularly of newcomers, increased from 2005 to 2010. During this period the lowest number of losses was 43 of every 100 who entered the church. The highest number of losses was in 2007, when losses were nine times the number of those gained. Since then, statistical reporting has changed and it does not appear that accurate reports exist. An additional study of 2012 and 2013 revealed that the situation was getting more critical, with a loss of 33 percent of newly baptized members disappearing within two months.

This situation necessitated studying a new strategy that could help Kabusunzu Church retain all its members, particularly the newcomers. For a strategy to be effective, certain points needed to be considered:

1. Mobility as the lifestyle of people living in Kigali, where Kabusunzu Church is located.
2. The need for church members to become aware of the retention problem in order to be effective for mission.

3. The need for education and motivation of church members for them to become keepers of one another, as well as true disciples.
4. The need for a revision of the small-group system and its meaning, so that the groups would become a place where members could find fellowship and family to avoid the loneliness that many members were suffering.
5. A careful review of the characteristics of a fruitful evangelistic campaign, reconsidering the place of church members and leaders before, during, and after the campaign.

In order to design a strategy that enhances retention, applying the theoretical information read for this study, a number of activities were planned in nine different but interconnected steps:

1. Bring the church and its leaders to see the problem and share the concern.
2. Call for the personal accountability of members as disciples of Christ, not only to God the Creator, but also to each other.
3. Reorganize and redefine the small group cells, making them active and beneficial to all.
4. Redefine and practice public evangelistic campaigns so as to no longer reap where the church had hardly invested or sowed.
5. Celebrate baptisms as parents would celebrate the birth of a wanted child.
6. Establish follow-up activities that bind newcomers together and to the existing church members, thus assimilating them into the church.
7. Assign mentors to newcomers and involve these in different church activities in order to avoid inactivity.
8. Continue to teach newcomers, leading them to comprehend that salvation is a personal decision with personal loss or gain.
9. Record and keep statistical data for relevant statistical reports.

The introduction and implementation of this program lasted throughout the year 2014. Four evangelistic campaigns were organized with special focus on church members' personal involvement and commitment. As a result, the number of baptisms that year went from 53 in 2013 to 114 in 2014. The retention of newcomers increased

from 66 percent to 97 percent, while none of those recorded won by the cell groups in 2014 dropped out or was missing at the end of the year.

Conclusion

Retention of church members, particularly the newly baptized, is a great challenge to Christian churches. Kabusunzu SDA Church developed and implemented a program of retention in nine steps to overcome the situation. This program may not be the final response to retention issues in Kigali, but it has greatly contributed to enhancing retention in Kabusunzu SDA Church. If this program is considered and owned, not only by the district and the conference, good gains should be observed.

Because changes in lifestyle challenge SDA believers, they need to be motivated by loving and caring leaders to keep united in active small cells of those who live in the same locality and care for one another. Each person should understand that faith is a matter of life and death, so they must fight a good fight and keep their eyes and hearts lifted up to God and to His coming Kingdom. Evangelism is to be understood as a mission of every disciple, wherever and whenever. Thus, organized and planned evangelistic campaigns will be to harvest where believers have sowed the seeds. Newcomers will be the good fruits, ready to witness and bear other lasting fruits. Prior friendship with the persons targeted to be evangelized and living what we believe and what we teach to others are important. Mentoring the newcomers after baptism, as well as avoiding their loneliness and inactivity will create a sense of Christian life. This will raise personal interest in old or new members of the church to belong to the church community.

Recommendations

From what brought success to this program and enhanced the retention of church members in Kabusunzu SDA Church, it is clear that much can be achieved when a definite plan and process are shared and owned by all church members and their leaders. Thus, the following recommendations are made for the reduction of dropouts and missing church members.

1. Church members must be educated and motivated through seminars on how God intends them to be accountable to one another within the church and to those outside church. Retention should not be understood as only the responsibility of leaders or a selected team of individuals.

2. Emphasis should be put on friendship-based personal evangelism, while public campaigns harvest where everyone in the church has sowed, whether that be where they live or where they work.

3. Leaders of the churches, together with members of the churches, need to embrace a new understanding of follow-up for retention, which begins before baptism by assimilating the newcomers into local, active, small cell groups before baptism.

4. In addition to this research, another study should be done about the issue of recording the transfer of church members, as many members may spend much time in a neighboring church without being transferred, and may be reported by the church of origin as missing or dropout members.

5. Further study is needed to make the small cells groups more dynamic, finding a new understanding of these groups, and increasing the church members' interest in the fellowship that can bind the members together, to face the challenges of life together, work together, and share the blessed hope of Jesus' return.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

CONSERVING MEMBERSHIP GAINS DOCUMENT

Recommended

- To approve the following appeal to the world Church regarding membership retention and the reclaiming of former members; and further
- To encourage widespread circulation of this appeal to church leaders and local congregations.

Conserving Membership Gains--An Appeal

Seventh-day Adventists around the world rejoice in the rapid membership growth of recent years. The Church views this as evidence of Holy Spirit-led movements and a fulfillment of Bible prophecy (Matthew 24:14, Revelation 14:6, 7). Although the Seventh-day Adventist Church baptized over 5 million people from 2000 - 2005, membership losses during that time equaled nearly 1.4 million. Current indications are that annual membership losses, for reasons other than death, equal approximately 28% of membership accessions. Some membership loss occurs among recent converts, however, this tragic outcome is not limited to new members.

Members leave the Seventh-day Adventist fellowship for a variety of reasons. It is unrealistic to expect that the Church will reach a point where the membership retention rate is 100%. This, however, should not excuse the Church from consciously creating and maintaining a nurturing environment for all members. Research on why members leave Seventh-day Adventist Church fellowship suggests that social and relational factors are much more significant than disagreement with denominational

teachings. In fact, many who leave denominational fellowship remain supportive of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs and even maintain church practices for some time following their departure.

The reasons most frequently cited by persons who leave local church fellowship are found in the realm of relationships, the absence of a sense of belonging, and the lack of meaningful engagement in the local congregation and its mission. Therefore, the loss of members for these reasons should be preventable.

Seventh-day Adventists understand that last-day events will be accompanied by multiplied thousands turning to God, seeking spiritual foundations for life, and identifying with a community of believers that holds fast to biblical teaching. Church members and leaders around the world continue to place a great emphasis on evangelism and church growth believing that even greater and more rapid membership growth lies just ahead.

To prepare the Church for this large influx of new members, to reclaim members who have left, and to prevent current membership losses, the General Conference Executive Committee voices an appeal for members and leaders everywhere to give renewed emphasis to the matter of membership retention and reclamation. This involves understanding the reasons for membership loss in each local church and focusing on how to develop the capacity of the church to attract, reclaim, retain, and engage its members in the mission of the church.

While the specific response to this appeal will vary from place to place and reflect cultural diversity that is so evident in the global Church family, certain specifics are universal. For example, an individual's spiritual life must be fed through Bible study and prayer. We also know that to retain new members, the following factors are essential. If one of these factors is missing, the member is weakened, but

may survive. If two factors are absent, they almost certainly will leave the fellowship of Church members.

1. They must be able to articulate their beliefs
2. They must have friends within the congregation
3. They must engage in a personally-meaningful ministry.

Every member, whether or not recently baptized, should be able to experience an atmosphere in which to grow spiritually, to know a sense of belonging and identity, and to use their spiritual gifts in the advancement of mission. Creating such an environment requires more than a program. It necessitates the creation of a loving atmosphere with each member taking a personal interest in others.

Persons who join the Seventh-day Adventist Church come from widely varied backgrounds and experiences. All members are not at the same point of spiritual development. But all should find within church fellowship a place to continue their growth. Peter urges, "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another, without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (1 Pet 4:8-10, NIV).

The following actions will help to bring this into reality.

1. Along with their annual planning and budgeting for evangelism, executive committees and local church boards should assess the membership retention capacity in their territory. This will require careful review of membership care measures along with accession and loss patterns. Analysis of the situation should be followed by deliberate steps to address the circumstances that lie within the church's ability to change.
2. Repeated instructions of basic Bible teaching should be provided for all newly-baptized members in an intentionally-designed follow-up for a period of months after their baptism.
3. Ensuring that the outreach methods used by the Church take into consideration how new members will become integrated into the life of the church family and advance in the pathway of discipleship. Such planning should include the formation of friendships, fellowship in small groups, active participation in

witnessing, and recruitment into specific roles and responsibilities as a member of the local congregation.

4. Designing ministry that addresses the developmental and spiritual needs of children, youth, and young adults, affirming their value to the Church by training them for, and entrusting them with, responsibility.
5. Making certain that the provision of adequate places of worship is an integral part of the evangelistic initiative which brings people into church fellowship. No programs should be permitted that do not honor this essential requirement.
6. Training members in how to re-connect with those who have discontinued church fellowship. In many cases, the return to fellowship of former members is more challenging to the congregation than the acceptance of new converts. Careful attention is needed to facilitate the healing of relationships and the realization, between persons, of the reconciliation that flows from the forgiveness and acceptance received through Jesus Christ.

The General Conference Executive Committee praises God for the rapid growth that is taking place in many areas. Evangelism is the mission of the Church. Leaders and members are commended for making this the priority in planning and budgeting. This we must continue and, while so doing, demonstrate the loving concern of the Good Shepherd for His sheep who may have strayed.

This Appeal was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Spring Meeting in Silver Spring, Maryland, April 10, 2007. It is available at <https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/documents/article/go/-/conserving-membership-gains/>

APPENDIX B
CORRESPONDENCE

Pr Jean Baptiste NIYONZIMA
C/O SDA Rwanda Union
Box 367 Kigali, Rwanda.
Mobile: 0788466410

Kigali August 20, 2013

Pastor Isaac Ndwaniye, President
East Central Rwanda Conference

Re: Requesting Permission to do my Research Project in the
Kabusunzu SDA Church, Mont Kigali District

Dear Pastor President.

Since July 2010, I am privileged to continue my studies at AUA in the Master's Program (MA in Pastoral Theology). As part of requirements, I have to write a research project. My desire is to do a research on one of the greatest challenges in Evangelism, the retention of church members, particularly the newcomers. I wish to diminish the causes of losses (backsliding, missing or only dropping out).

If permission is granted, Pastor President, I wish to do this research at the Kabusunzu Church, in the district of Mont Kigali; and would start as soon as the answer is given to me. I hope the outcome of the research will not only help the Kabusunzu Church but also the entire Conference, Union, and the church in general.

While waiting for the answer to my request.

Regards,

Pr. J.Baptiste NIYONZIMA
A student in AUA.
CC: Pr. Eneas Habiyambere, District Leader of Mont Kigali District
and Chairman of the Kabusunzu Church Board

Jean Baptiste NIYONZIMA

Student at AUA
c/o SDA Church
Rwanda Union Mission
niyonzimajb@yahoo.fr

Kigali December 9, 2014

Dear Isaac Ndwaniye
President, East Central Rwanda Conference

Re: Invitation to attend the special program for the yearly baptized in Kabusunzu Church on December 13, 2014.

Pastor President,

I am taking this opportunity in order to address my thanks to you and to the Conference Committee for having allowed me to experience my strategy in church membership retention for the year 2014 at Kabusunzu, Mont Kigali District, in your conference area.

As now I am at the last step of my study, which is evaluation, we have prepared what I call "Yearly Evaluation and Motivation Day". It is an organized Sabbath for a great day for all people baptized during the year 2014. A special program is elaborated to just to see how, with the strategies adopted and taught to the church, the "*ibihande*" and the "small groups" were able to retain their members gained during the year. Also, it is another occasion to affirm those who are remaining after baptism, to thank those regular members who played their role in bringing and keeping others to the church and to motivate the rest of the Church behaving as spectators. This program is set for Sabbath of December 13, 2014.

I wish, Pastor President, you would attend the meeting personally as your presence may allow you to see what has been done and, if judged successful, to implement it wherever needed in your Conference. It will be a motivation both to the church and to its leaders.

While waiting for your response,

Humble Regards.

Pr. Jean Baptiste Niyonzima

APPENDIX C
QUESTIONNAIRES

(These questionnaires were written in Kinyarwanda and have been translated into English.)

A STRATEGY TO ENHANCE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP RETENTION OF
KABUSUNZU SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH, EAST CENTRAL
RWANDA CONFERENCE

Dear Sir/Madam

I am a student at Adventist University of Africa, pursuing Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology, and the principal researcher invites your participation in this Study: “A strategy to enhance Church membership retention of Kabusunzu Seventh-day Adventist Church, East Central Rwanda Conference”, by giving the answers to the questionnaires. The purpose of this questionnaire is purely academic. Your responses will be treated confidentially, and will not be used in any way against you. Your cooperation will be highly appreciated.

INSTRUCTIONS

Do not write your name and address anywhere on this questionnaire

Write short statement in the space provided for the questions that require statements and for questions that require ticking.

I. Please mark your chosen answer. Very few questions can have more than one.

1) Gender

Male () Female ()

2) Age

() Under 14

() Between 15-22 years old

() Between 23- 35

() Between 36 – 50

() Over 50

- 3) Occupation
- Home helper or not defined work
 - Agent in Public service or in NGO
 - Work for the SDA Church
 - Have my own business
- 4) Studies :
- Zero to a Primary level
 - Secondary level (even if not finished)
 - Also University level
- 5) Do you have relatives who are SDA members? Yes (); No ()
- 6) If Yes, what is the relation :
- Dad
 - Mom
 - Stands for my parents
 - Spouse
 - Brother or sister
 - My child / children
 - Grandparent/s.
 - In-laws / other family relation
- 7) How did the SDA message come to you?
- Invited by a unknown church member
 - Invited by or by effort of one of the above relatives.....
 - Invited by an SDA friend of mine
 - Heard of and attended the campaign, no one invited me.
 - I was born in SDA family or grew up in an SDA milieu
 - My boss / leader at work influenced me
 - An SDA worker under my responsibility or coworker
 - Through another way which was
.....
- 8) What most motivated you to decide for baptism? Possibility of more than one answer:
- Parent church
 - Related to the wedding
 - Warm fellowship among church members
 - Church programs and choirs
 - Touched by the leadership of the SDA Church
 - Behavior and testimony of life of SDA members I lived/worked with.
 - Biblical evidences and authority taught to me
 - How I was welcomed at my arrival to the SDA meetings/Church
 - Others, Please state:
- 9) Age and situation at Baptism? More than one answer here :
- 10 – 15 16 -22 23- 35 36-50

- 51 and over.
- I was attending SDA School
- I was not married yet and was not related to the marriage
- I was already married
- I got married soon after.
- I was not yet in this town

10) Location of your baptism and membership?

- Kabusunzu Church
- I came to be Kabusunzu member by transfer letter
- After baptism, I had been worshiping to more than two churches.
- Have never been transferred to Kabusunzu Church
- Didn't know how to go through with transfer issue

11) How long have you been SDA member?

- A few months
- Less than 5 years
- Since before 2010
- Came to be SDA member after 2010
- Live here with my family
- My family (spouse and or children are not living with me here
- Live here in Kabusunzu and am not yet married
- Do not live in Kabusunzu area but worship there

12) Your denomination before becoming an SDA member

- None
- Catholic
- Protestant, of?
- Muslim
- Other, Please state

13) Activity and responsibilities you occupied in the church wherever you were?

- None
- Head of department (s)
- Elder / deacon
- Other responsibility given by the Nominating Committee.
- Only in my Small group meeting
- If you were requested to be active in the church, how long after your baptism/arrival was it
- Less than 3 months
- About one year
- Don't remember

14) Since your baptism, is there at least one person who was baptized from your effort Yes ; No

- If yes, how did it happened?

- Through visitations and friendship established
- Not much done, just an invitation
- Is that person still attending the church
- She/he dropped out
- I don't know anything about him/her now

- If Not

- In my understanding, that was not my responsibility
- Don't have time for that
- I am not trained for that, so was afraid of where to start
- Even these days, I am still helping some to come

15) From what you have seen, how do SDA members relate to each other?

- Badly, all alone
- Much the same as others
- They try to live as a family but not much.
- Very good, they share each other's sorrow, pain, and joy
- I would prefer not to answer.

II. Please circle your answer to the following questions:

1. How do you estimate the enthusiasm of the SDA church in welcoming new comers
 - a) Very good and it makes you want to come again
 - b) Just an ordinary welcome, nothing special
 - c) It is discouraging

2. Referring to what happened to you, how do you judge the welcome and follow-up for a new comer to the SDA Church when he has responded to the call after a sermon, before baptism?
 - a) A follow-up was established to the address given
 - b) They take note of your address and that is all, you never hear or see them
 - c) I prefer not to answer

3. How have you estimated the relationship establishment before and after baptism (assimilation process)?
 - a) The program was well established in small groups
 - b) The small group where I live worked to integrate me into church life.
 - c) The church only showed interest in me on the day of my baptism

4. Does your church have a baptismal class?

Yes; No

- Is the time allowed to the baptism class prior to baptism enough?
 - a) Yes ; is 1 month ; 3 months ; over 3 months
 - b) Lessons are well prepared and well taught
Yes ; No
 - c) Capable and modeling teachers:
Yes ; No
- 5. How do you evaluate the teachings given in baptismal class? Are they good enough to strengthen newcomers and help them to see the difference with other denomination's false teachings?
 - a) Yes, they are clear with the 28 SDA beliefs
 - b) Some important doctrines or issues are forgotten or not considered
 - c) They only aim to baptize a large number for their report, but do not care about the quality
- 6. Does your church have a special class for newly baptized people? How do you evaluate it:
 - a) Yes, we have it
 - b) No, it does not work anymore
 - c) We never had it in my church, according to my knowledge.
 - d) It takes Months
 - e) The problem is with the teachings, which are not clear or complete
 - f) The problem is incompetent and or not modeling teachers
- 7. How do you estimate the losses of the new comers after their baptism?
 - a) They are few, between 1 and 15 %
 - b) It is critical enough, between 16 and 50 %
 - c) It is horrible, as they may reach to more than 50%
 - d) I don't know, it is the business of our leaders
- 8. Have you been personally involved in retention activities to avoid dropouts or missing members?
 - a) Yes, I did it within these 2 last years
 - b) Yes, I did it but 2 years ago
 - c) Yes, I did it but do not remember when
 - d) No, I have never participated in such activities
 - e) No, because no one trained me to do it
 - f) No, because of time, always too busy to do it
 - g) No, I thought it is the business of our pastors or other leaders.

III. Choose the following factors that made you to stay in the church until now (1: not the reason; 2: very weak reason, 3: somehow contributed; 4: good reason; 5 strongest reason)

1. Factors related to the teachings and doctrines	1	2	3	4	5
2. Factors related to my spiritual satisfaction and growth	1	2	3	4	5
3. My pastor/pastor's effort and modeling	1	2	3	4	5
4. The support of other leaders of my church	1	2	3	4	5
5. Another fellow believer who watched me	1	2	3	4	5
6. The spiritual life and fellowship in my small group	1	2	3	4	5
7. Life and fellowship in the church	1	2	3	4	5
8. Being active in the church, never a spectator	1	2	3	4	5
9. How my church cares for newcomers	1	2	3	4	5

IV. Do you think that the SDA Church does what is necessary to retain their members in the church () Yes; () No

V. If the answer is no, what would you advise them to do:

Again, thanks for the time spent on this questionnaire. You have done much to support us in trying to find the solutions to a challenging question of the church.

A STRATEGY TO ENHANCE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP RETENTION OF
KABUSUNZU SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH,
EAST-CENTRAL RWANDA CONFERENCE

This survey was written in Kinyarwanda, the language spoken in Rwanda.

Dear Sir/Madam

I am a student at Adventist University of Africa, pursuing Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology. As the principal researcher I invite your participation in this Study: A Strategy to Enhance Church Membership Retention of Kabusunzu Seventh-day Adventist Church, East Central Rwanda Conference, by giving the answers to the questionnaires. The purpose of this questionnaire is purely academic. Your responses will be treated confidentially, and will not be used in any way against you. Your cooperation will be highly appreciated.

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I. Please mark your chosen answer. Very few questions can have more than one.

1) Gender

Male () Female ()

2) Age () Under 14

() Between 15-22 years old

() Between 23- 35

() Between 36 – 50

() Over 50

3) Occupation

() Home helper or not defined work

() Agent in Public service or in NGO

() Work for the SDA Church

() Have my own business

4) Studies

() Zero to a Primary level

() Secondary level (even if not finished)

Also University level

5) Do you have relatives who are SDA members?

Yes ; No

6) If Yes, what is the relation:

- Dad
- Mom
- Stands for my parents
- Spouse
- Brother or sister
- My child / children
- Grandparent/s.
- In-laws / other family relation

7) How did the SDA message come to you?

- Invited by a unknown church member
- Invited by or by effort of one of the above relatives.....
- Invited by an SDA friend of mine
- Heard of and attended the campaign, no one invited me.
- I was born in SDA family or grew up in an SDA milieu
- My boss / leader at work influenced me
- An SDA worker under my responsibility or coworker
- Through another way which was
.....
.....

8) What most motivated you to decide for baptism? Possibility of more than one answer:

- Parent church
- Related to the wedding
- Warm fellowship among church members
- Church programs and choirs
- Touched by the leadership of the SDA Church
- Behavior and testimony of life of SDA members I lived/worked with.
- Biblical evidences and authority taught to me
- How I was welcomed at my arrival to the SDA Meetings/Church
- Others, Please state:

9) Age and situation at Baptism? More than one answers here:

- 10 – 15 16 -22 23- 35 36-50
- 51 years old and over.
- I was attending SDA School
- I was not married yet and was not related to the marriage
- I was already married
- I got married soon after.
- I was not yet in this town

10) Location of your baptism and membership?

- Kabusunzu Church
- I came to be Kabusunzu member by transfer letter
- After baptism, I had been worshiping to more than two churches.
- Have never been transferred to Kabusunzu Church
- Didn't know how to go through with transfer issue

11) How long were you an SDA member before dropping out?

- A few months
- Less than 5 years
- Since before 2010
- Came to be SDA member after 2010
- Live here with my family
- My family (spouse and or children are not living with me here
- Live here in Kabusunzu and am not yet married
- Do not live in Kabusunzu area but worship there

12) Your denomination before becoming an SDA member

- None
- Catholic
- Protestant, of ?
- Muslim
- Other, Please state

13) Activity and responsibilities you occupied in the church wherever you were?

- None
- Head of department (s)
- Elder / deacon
- Other responsibilities given by the Nominating Committee.
- Only in my Small group meeting
- If you were requested to be active in the church after your baptism, how long was it:
 - Less than 3 months after baptism
 - About one year after my baptism
 - Don't remember

14) After your baptism, is there at least one person who was baptized from your effort Yes; No

- If yes, how did it happen?

- Through visitations and friendship established
- Not much done, just an invitation
- Is that person still attending the church
- She/he dropped out

- I don't know anything about him/her now
- If No
 - In my understanding, that was not my responsibility
 - Don't have time for that
 - I am not trained for that, so was afraid of where to start
 - Even these days, I am still helping some to come

- 15) From what you have seen, how do SDA members relate to each other?
- Badly, all alone
 - Much the same as others
 - They try to live as a family but not much.
 - Very good, they share each other's sorrow, pain, and joy
 - I would prefer not to answer.

- 16) Time since you dropped out of the Church
- Just months
 - Between 2 and 5 years
 - More than 5 years

- 17) Tell us of why you left the Church?
- Just my simple and personal decision
 - The Church voted it
 - I was under discipline of the church
 - The church didn't visit me
 - It happened progressively till I found myself no more attending

- 18) What happened after you dropped out of the Church?
- No one showed interest to bring me back to worship
 - It was a big concern for my fellow believers and they worked on it
 - The pastor himself tried to bring me back to fellowship
 - The elders of the church worked on my return
 - The small group to which I belonged worked to bring me back
 - We didn't have small groups
 - Small groups existed but only to measure tithing of members

- 19) Have you joined another denomination? Yes; No
 - Which one _____

II. Please circle your answer to the following questions:

1. How have you estimated the enthusiasm of SDA church in welcoming new comers

- a) Very good and it brings interest in coming again
- b) Just an ordinary welcome, nothing special
- c) Discouraging

2. Considering what happened to you, how do you judge the welcome and follow up to a newcomer in the SDA Church when he has responded to the call after a sermon, before baptism?

- a) A follow up were established through the given / noted address
- b) They take note of your address and that is all, you never hear or see them again!
- c) I would rather not respond

3. How do you consider relationship establishment both before and after baptism (assimilation process) ?

- a) The program was well established in small groups
- b) The small group where I belonged worked on me to integrate me in church life.
- c) The church showed interest on the day of baptism, that was all

4. Did your church have a baptismal class ? Yes ; No

- Was the time allowed for the baptismal class prior to baptism enough?

- a) Yes. is One month ; 3 months ; over 3 months
- b) Lessons were well prepared and taught: Yes; No
- c) Capable and modeling teachers: Yes ; No

5. How is the expectation for you to come back to the SDA Church

- a) It is possible
- b) I am not sure for now
- c) Never

6. Changes that would make you come back to SDACHurch :

- a) Change in leadership of the church
- b) More love and compassion between members

- c) If God provides solutions to personal problems that are hurting me these days
- d) Others:

7. Factors that had negative impact after your baptism

- a) Did not really trace the difference with other denominations
- b) Lack of love and fellowship in my local church
- c) No one was in charge to help me after baptism
- d) Very demanding church, many reports
- e) Continued with former friends
- f) Disappointment by the behavior of older believers
- g) Problems related to poverty / illness / personal family
- h) My work constrained me to work on Sabbath
- i) Others:

III. Note the following factors on how they impacted you, influencing you to leave the church: 1: Not the reason; 2: very weak reason, 3: somehow contributed; 4: good reason; 5 strongest reason

1) Factors related to other believers	1	2	3	4	5
2) Factors related to my pastor or other pastors	1	2	3	4	5
3) Personal friendship and connections with worldly people	1	2	3	4	5
4) Other leadership of the local church	1	2	3	4	5
5) Another fellow believer	1	2	3	4	5
6) No spiritual life in the church	1	2	3	4	5
7) Lack of love and fellowship in the church	1	2	3	4	5
8) Disappointment in what I expected from the church	1	2	3	4	5
9) Lack of church support in my problems	1	2	3	4	5
10) Disagreement with some teachings	1	2	3	4	5
11) Disappointment in unexpected experiences	1	2	3	4	5
12) None felt concern about my absence	1	2	3	4	5
13) Loneliness suffered in the Church	1	2	3	4	5

IV. Do you think that the SDA Church is doing what is necessary to retain their members in the church () Yes ; () No

V. If the answer is no, what would you advise them to do:

Again, thanks for the time spent on this questionnaire. You have done much to help us find solutions to a challenging question of the church these days.

APPENDIX D

COMMITMENT CARD

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
MONT KIGALI DISTRICT
KAGASUNZU CHURCH

DISCIPLESHIP COMMITMENT No

As a disciple of Jesus who tasted the goodness of God, and of the blessed hope I have in Him, I find joy in aiming to behave like Christ. I want to respond to His call accepting to be a partner with Him in seeking the lost sheep. Helped by Him, I want to commit myself:

- To living like Christ wherever I will be and whatever I do in this life.
- To continue seeking God in earnest prayers and reading the Bible
- To be the keeper of my fellows in this pilgrim journey in my cell group
- To intercede for the following people and work with the Holy Spirit for their salvation (Dan 12:3, Ac.1:8;Ps 34:9-11):

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

My name: Signature

APPENDIX E

EVALUATION AND RECORD FORMS

PARTNERSHIP WITH JESUS IN WINNING AND KEEPING SOULS
CELL ACTIVITIES AND CONCERNS FORM

FIELD/CONFERENCE OF :
 CHURCH :
 MOTIVATING NAME OF THE CELL:

MEMBERS OF OUR ACTIVE CELL (Period From To.....)

	All names	Baptism Date	Regular member Y/N	Other important information	Move to /Date Transferred to
01					
02					
03					
04					
05					
06					
07					
08					
09					
10					
11					
12					

LIVING DISCIPLESHIP TO JESUS (Luke 10:1, 9, 16; Rev 22:17)

Interested persons (Who came as visitors, have been given a book, receiving Bible lessons ...)				List of our intercessions / Decision for baptism					
No	Names	His/her church	Tel. or mail	No	Names	Response on	Tele.	Baptism on	Move on / Dropping?
01				01					
02				02					
03				03					
04				04					
05				05					
06				06					
07				07					
08				08					
09				09					
10				10					

(Verso)

Interested persons (Who came as visitors, have been given a book, receiving Bible lessons ...)				List of our intercessions / Decision for baptism						
No	Names	His/her church	Tel. or email	No	Names	Response on	Tele.	Baptism on	Move on / Dropping?	
16				16						
17				17						
18				18						
19				19						
20				20						
21				21						
22				22						
23				23						
24				24						
25				25						
26				26						

FELLOWSHIP TOGETHER / SUPPORTING OR SYMPATHIZING ONE ANOTHER ... (Social activities)

DATE	ACTIVITIES TO REMEMBER	OBSERVATION

LEADERS' VISITS TO OUR CELL / IGIHANDE

Date	Leader title	Topic discussed

Date	Leader title	Topic discussed

OTHERS :

.....

BAPTISM AND MENTORING FORM

**SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
MONT KIGALI DISTRICT
KABUSUNZU CHURCH**

Baptism date: Church Elder in Charge of Evangelism:

No	NAMES OF BAPTIZED	Phone number	His/her <i>Igihande</i>	Cell belonging	MENTORS
					1.
					2.
					1.
					2.
					1.
					2.
					1.
					2.
					1.
					2.
					1.
					2.
					1.
					2.
					1.
					2.
					1.
					2.

Note: - *One (or both) of the mentors should be the one who worked for his/her conversion, or a friend.*

- *The other mentor should come from his/her home cell (or both if none of the above).*
- *This form is filled at every baptism, classified at church and district office.*

SEVENTH-DAY CHURCH / RWANDA UNION / ECRF
MONT KIGALI DISTRICT: KABUSUNZU CHURCH
Retention of New Church Members by Keeping One Another Strategy

Igihande name.....**Chosen leader among baptized:****Date of Baptism:**
Igihande leader : **Tel.**

NB. *Every Sabbath concerned leaders in a retention board meet to evaluate the situation, record the information here and come up with strategies to face the actual situation.*

No	Baptized from your Igihande and its cells	Birth date	Personal Telephone	Occupation	Inhabitant location	Belonging Cell (Home active cell)	Tel. monitor	13 Sabbaths following the baptism													OBSERVATION What he/she needs to be assisted for (spiritually or in everyday life)
								- Present to Sabbath worship?	- Present in New Baptized Class /SS?	- Active in his/her active cell group?)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
01																					
02																					
03																					
04																					
05																					
06																					
07																					
08																					
09																					

NB. After every Igihande leader fills the form every Sabbath, it is kept in a destined folder in church's office.

Kabusunzu Seventh-day Adventist Church
YEARLY EVALUATION FORM FOR RETENTION

Church of District
Field/Conf.
Igihande : Its church elder
Igihande leader.....

This form is filled at the end of the year by both the elder responsible of that igihande and the leader of it. It is exposed/explained during the organized day of evaluation and motivation at the end of the year, while planning and fixing goals for the next year.

Baptism Date	Persons added during the year • B: Baptism • T: Transfer	Cell	Registered number	Still active	Church he/she	Transfer letter issued	Lost ? How ?	Backslidde	Dead ?	Other Observation
Total										

Delivered date: Igihande leader and elder's signatures.
Church comment:

APPENDIX F

CAMPAIGN SERMON TOPICS AND SCHEDULE

Theme: HUMURA, HARI IBYIRINGIRO bizima NUHITAMO NEZA

Speaker : Pr Jean Baptiste Niyonzima

N°	Day	Date	Topic : need one hour of presentation	Ref
01	<i>Friday</i>	21/03/2014	The Great Escape	03
02	<i>Sabbath Divine S.</i>	22/03/2014	<i>The Greatest Project of God, who can support</i>	
03	<i>Sabbath evening</i>	22/03/2014	How to Know the Future	01
04	<i>Sunday</i>	23/03/2014	Signs you can't Ignore	02
05	<i>Monday</i>	24/03/2014	Why so Much Suffering ?	06
06	<i>Tuesday</i>	25/03/2014	Born to Live Forever	08
07	<i>Wednesday</i>	26/03/2014	What Happened to Right and Wrong ?	10
08	<i>Thursday</i>	27/03/2014	Facing the Judgment with Confidence	
09	<i>Friday</i>	28/03/2014	Created for Something Better	11
10	<i>Sabbath Divine S.</i>	29/03/2014	<i>The Secret in Exodus 1:8-12</i>	
	<i>Sabbath Camp.</i>		Millions fooled by Myth	12
11	<i>Sunday</i>	30/03/2014	How to spot a Fake	17
12	<i>Monday</i>	31/03/2014	Forever Marked	18
13	<i>Tuesday</i>	01/04/2014	Choice	22
14	<i>Wednesday</i>	02/04/2014	Making a New Start	16
15	<i>Thursday</i>	03/04/2014	Set Free by the Truth	20
16	<i>Friday</i>	04/04/2014	Surviving the Coming Tribulation	23
17	<i>Saturday D.S</i>	05/04/2014	<i>Don't Return to Egypt, there is no refuge</i>	
18	<i>Sabbath End Camp.</i>	05/04/2014	The Best is yet to Come	25

Other extra activities:

- Church members Revival on different issues. 5:20 to 6:20 am
- Answering questions : 10 min before Presentation OR in Biblical School.
- Visiting some families and offer prayers in need ...
- Preparing Baptism with Local Pastor and Church Elders (special class)
- Every new convert is to get new friends and keepers from the church before baptism, particularly from his/her home active cell area.

Personal Day Scheduler:

- 4:30 – 5: 00 am Reading and Personal Meditation

- 5:20 – 6:20 am *Church Revival*
- 7:00 – 8:00 *Breakfast time*
- 8:30 – 12:30 *SERMON PREPARATION and updates / Office work.*
- 1:00 – 3:00 pm *Lunch Time*
- 3:30 – 4: 30 pm *Today's Sermon Review; visitations on terrain*
- 5:00 - 7:00 pm *PROGRAM and PRESENTATION*

NB. Every new convert - baptized person should get a Bible and a *Steps to Christ* book for nurturing, a Great Controversy book to mature his /her knowledge.

Done by J.B.Niyonzima

APPENDIX G

QUICK SYSTEMATIC LESSONS ON SDA DOCTRINES FOR NEW BELIEVERS

I. General objective:

To found out biblical studies guide that should build, strengthen in faith and motivate new comers into SDA Kabusunzu Church to continue growing in their new faith and continue searching to know more about the SDA doctrine. To make them as equipped and zeal disciples ready to join the church in witnessing and explaining to others about their beliefs.

II. 13 Themes to be discussed within 13 weeks following the baptism :

- (1) The Bible: Our only guide and light, we as SDA believers
 - 2 Tim 3:15-17 teach us and make us true God's people
 - 2 Pet 1:19-21 The light in what and how to behave as God's.
 - Rev 22:18, 19 Prohibition to add or take any word away!
 - Matt 4; Even Jesus gained the battle by "It is written"
 - Consider the book *Ibisubizo by'Ibibazo Byawe* 7-8
(Answers to your Questions)
- (2) How bad is sin and justification in Christ alone
 - Rom 3:23; 6:23 sin equal death, only salvation in God's grace
 - Es 59:2; Gen 3 Sin separates us from God.
 - Eph 2:8-; Rom 3:24-26 Through faith we are saved in Christ.
 - Our three periods of life : Life in sin – The gospel and justification– The new life of a born again and sanctification
- (3) Jesus, the only model for every true Christian in faith, and facing tribulations.
 - 1Tim 1:15; Matt 1:21 Why Jesus came: to save us.
 - Luke 2:52; Phil 2:5-8 But also to live a model life. It is possible to live on this painful and challenging earth but remain faithful to God.

- (4) Every day godliness and endurance, growing in faith through earnestly and continued prayer life.
- John 15:1-5 Nothing good can come out of us, we have to be always connected to Jesus, the true and source of righteousness.
 - *Consider the book Ibisubizo by'Ibibazo byawe* 15-16 (Answers to your Questions)
 - John 16:5-15; Gal 5:16-26 The leading of the Holy Spirit = Becoming a new creature.
 - Learning from Jesus in prayer life, 1 Tess 5:17
 - Read *Kugana Yesu* (Steps to Christ: Amahirwe yo Gusenga (the good of prayers).
- (5) The 28 fundamentals beliefs of SDA, training ourselves on how to resume them with at least 5 verses and explanation.
- The book of the doctrines in well translated into Kinyarwanda.
- (6) The Earthly Sanctuary and Christ
- Consider the book *Ibisubizo by'Ibibazo Byawe* 36-41
 - The structure – emblem and tools – service and priests and how they all relate to Jesus service and sacrifice.
- (7) Christ in Heavenly Sanctuary: Grace time and Judgment.
- Heb 8;9
 - 1John 2:1,2
 - Lev 16
- (8) The long prophecy in the Bible: 2300 days in Dan 8:13, 14 and how it is related to the birth of SDA Church.
- Details in the book *Ibisubizo by'Ibibazo Byawe* 29,30
 - We are born by prophecy, must hear and see the signs of the prophecy and call others to follow God, “fear Him and give Him glory” (Dan 2:7) as the prophecy fulfills.
- (9) The SDA Church and its structures. Their interconnection and the issue of Transfer of a church member; issue of church discipline.
- Consider and refer to the Church Manual
- (10) The Desired Role of each Church Member in God's Church Mission.
- Exodus 9:1 God call and save His people to serve Him
 - If our talents, time, wealth and bodies are not serving God, then they are promoting Satan's kingdom!
 - What is tithe – for what – and why?
 - What is offering – for what – and why?

- God recommends tithing and offerings which come from a loving and willing heart, to that He promise blessings (Ex 35:1,2,5,20- ; Mal 3:7-)
- (11) 3 Angels Messages as SDA Mission to the World. Preparation to the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus.
- Rev 14:6-12
 - *Ibisubizo by'Ibibazo byawe* 42-48
- (12) Particularity of beliefs in SDA vis a vis other Denominations
- The Remnant Church has its specifications:
 - All Commandments of God are relevant forever.
 - The Sabbath on 7th Day: a royalty to God's government
 - The state of the death
 - God's Plan of Salvation and the Sanctuary
 - The visible and soon return of Christ and the first Resurrection with the saints.
 - Daniel and Revelations Prophecies: The Great Controversy
 - The Millennium in Heaven, The second resurrection of the wicked and the New Earth.
 - Temperance as the fruit of the Spirit.
- (13) What is Temperance and why?
- When the Spirit leads us.
 - Temperance in all sphere of life: A choice
 - It is the fruit, not the essence of Salvation
 - Consider life in Eden, after sin in degradation, in Heaven where we long to go...

* Every theme takes a week. Beside readings and home work that the teacher may provide, it is expected that the team meet twice a week, on Sabbath and on any other day and location to their choice and convenience.

APPENDIX H

YEARLY EVALUATION AND MOTIVATION DAY

Gaining and Retaining Souls for Christ
 Evaluation and Motivation Day
 KABUSUNZU, December 13, 2014

Time management	Item	Responsible	Monitoring
9h-10h	SS Reports and Lessons	Kabusunzu Church	Church Elder
10h00-10h15	Entering in the church	SS Clerk	
10h15	Leaders to their sites		District leader
10h15-10h20	Welcome remarks	District Pastor	
	CH: Bringing the		
	Prayer		
10h30 – 11h00	Presentation : Loss/Retention problem – Strategy steps followed during the year 2014 in Kabusunzu	The Researcher	Researcher
11h – 11h 30	IGIHANDE/ CELLS INVOLVEMENT AND THE RESULTS IN NUMBER AND FACTS	Each <i>Igihande</i> Leader with Cells coordinators	Researcher
	Testimonies: - A member who brought others to baptism - New Baptized who brought others		
11h30 – 11h 45	Awards to different heroes : - 1 st Regular member to bring and keep others to Christ - 1 st New convert to bring and keep others - The 1 st Cell to bring and keep - Elder who visited the most of the families of <i>IGIHANDE</i> - The <i>igihande</i> which didn't lose any of their regular and new comers	Researcher	Researcher
	Observation and church planning	First Church elder	

11h 50 -12h15	- Planning for the year 2015 - Conference Remarks	District Pastor Conference President	
	Special items (2)	Choirs	
12h 30	Offering		
12h40-13h10	Sermon :		
	Closing prayer / Fellowship and Church Picnic next day.		

Evaluation and Motivation Day

Objective and Guideline Document

1. To be able to evaluate and celebrate the church's effort in evangelism and retention of its members, an evaluation and motivation day should be organized once every year. It will be also to motivate those members whose involvement was absent or inadequate the past year. Having it in December or January is better, as it also serve to establishing the plans for the coming years. On that day, the whole church celebrates the joy of the "heroes of the year," who are those who championed in the planned goals of the year in bringing and retaining the new people in the church. It could be on Sabbath or on Sunday. This will be organized at the local church level but can be held also at District, Station/Zone, Field, and Union levels
2. **Heroes of the year:** the believers who worked for the salvation of others and have at least one person baptized, retained, or reclaimed during the past year. The Evangelism Committee of the church could add others judged to be heroes referring to how they supported the campaigns, built the churches or helping purchasing land, or in any other remarkable was supported the mission of the church and the salvation of others.
3. It will always and first of all be « the big and great day of those born again in the church during the year. Sitting together, cell by cell, *igihande* by *igihande*, with the heroes who brought them in. If possible, as the church and its area are decorated, people could also were special clothes. For example being in white and black. The church leadership will award the first heroes, particularly the new comers who also brought others to Christ.
4. If and when judged possible, they could organize also a pic nic
5. The elders and head masters of the *ibihande* are the ones who present their reports, showing what they have done and benefited the church within their serving time, before being reelected. They will also report on all the church members they had at the beginning of the period, how many they gained or the losses with explanations on each name lost.
6. Leaders of the cells and or *ibihande* who championed for the year could be also rewarded by the Church Executive Committee.
7. A budget for such an event should be set apart every year by the Church's leadership.

8. The event is to be considered and understood as pre-figuring and motivating towards the coming great day when heroes of God will enter Heaven with all those they have led to salvation. Then Jesus will then say to each of them “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!”

Prepared and proposed by

Pr J. B. Niyonzima

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VITA

Personal Identification:

Surname: NIYONZIMA
First name: Jean Baptiste
Date of birth: December 20th, 1966
Place of birth: Gakenke, North Rwanda Province
Spouse: Yvonne NGUTETE
Children: 4 daughters, 1 son, and 2 foster daughters

Education:

1971-1980: Primary School
1981-1984: Secondary School at *Groupe Scolaire Zairoise de Kigali*
1984-1987: Secondary School at *Gitwe Adventist College* (D6 in General Education)
1987-1990: BA Theology at Adventist University of Central Africa
1991-1993: MA Religion (Summer Courses) with Andrews University at AUCA (Mudende) *interrupted by the war in 1994*
2010-2016: Attending AUA for MA Pastoral Theology

Work Experience:

1990-1994: District Leader in East Rwanda Association (Kibungo District, then Muhima District)
1995-1998: Working as a Volunteer in God's Vineyard
1998-2000: Religion Teacher in Secondary School at APADE Kigali (Association des Parents Adventistes pour l'Education)
2000: District Leader and Religion Teacher in APADE District
2001-2005: Gikondo District Leader
2006-2008: Ministerial Secretary and Evangelism Coordinator in Rwanda Union Mission
2008-2010: SS/PM Director, Union Evangelism Coordinator
2011-2015: Dept Director: Evangelism and AM, Ministerial and Revival in Rwanda Union Mission
2016- Present: Dept Director: Evangelism and Adventist Mission, Revival in Rwanda Union Mission