

## PROJECT ABSTRACT

Master of Arts in Leadership

Adventist University of Africa

Title: A STRATEGY FOR RETAINING NEWLY BAPTIZED MEMBERS  
IN LAKEVIEW AND NTCHEU SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST  
CHURCHES IN CENTRAL MALAWI CONFERENCE

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Date completed: August 2009

The work of retaining newly baptized members plays an important role in accomplishing Christ's great commission. Jesus pointed to Himself as the real keeper of the Lord's flock, "I am a good shepherd; I know my sheep and My sheep know me. My sheep listen to my voice" (John 10: 14–27). This is a powerful pastoral imagery embodied with a caring and retaining spirit. It is a joint effort between Christ and the Christian leaders.

The purpose of this study was to design and implement a strategy for retaining newly baptized members in Lakeview and Ntcheu Seventh-day Adventist Churches in Central Malawi Conference. The study established factors for the loss of members and identified ways for retaining newly baptized members. Among the factors were: spiritual factors, social factors, economic factors and health factors.

An evangelistic program that took six months (22<sup>nd</sup> November 2008–May 2009) was conducted at Lakeview and Ntcheu Seventh-day Adventist Churches. As a

result of this program, 30 people were baptized in Lakeview Seventh-day Adventist Church and 40 people were baptized in Ntcheu Seventh-day Adventist Church. Only 2 people from Lakeview and 4 from Ntcheu left the church, representing 6.25 % and 10% respectively.

Other benefits of the program were more involvement of the newly baptized members in church activities and in discipling others, and a spirit of unity between the old and newly baptized members through the welcome banquets. The extended doctrinal classes on church heritage helped the newly baptized members in the two churches to be grounded in their faith.

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

A STRATEGY FOR RETAINING NEWLY BAPTIZED MEMBERS  
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of the requirements for the degree  
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Moffat W. Botolo

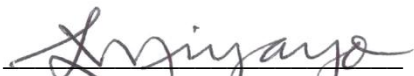
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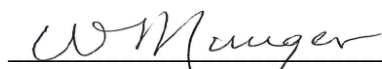
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CMC Central Malawi Conference

KJV King James Version

NIV New International Version

SDA Seventh-day Adventist

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the following who made this project possible: Members and leadership of Lakeview Seventh-day Adventist Church, members and leadership of Ntcheu Seventh-day Adventist Church, Central Malawi Conference secretariat and ministerial secretariat. My thanks go to all of them for sharing their knowledge, wisdom, experience and time.

My advisor, Dr. Lameck Miyayo was supportive in direction and encouragement. I count him as a friend and a colleague in the ministry. He deserves my appreciation. As a Christian leader, my desire is that this effort will enable many more leaders and members in Central Malawi Conference of Seventh-day Adventists to have a passion for retaining newly baptized members.



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Lakeview and Ntcheu are two of the many churches found in Central Malawi Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. This Conference is in the Central region of Malawi. Lakeview church was organized in 1938.<sup>1</sup> The population in this catchment area is 10,650,<sup>2</sup> while the Seventh-day Adventist membership is 435.<sup>3</sup> Ntcheu Seventh-day Adventist church was organized in 1984.<sup>4</sup> The population in this catchment area is 13,800,<sup>5</sup> while the Seventh-day Adventist membership is 505.<sup>6</sup>

The mission of Lakeview and Ntcheu Seventh-day Adventist Churches is to preach the Good News and prepare the people in their areas for the soon coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Since the organization of the two churches, newly baptized members have been added to the church books every year. While it is true that there has been

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<sup>1</sup>Central Malawi Conference 1990 Statistical Records.

<sup>2</sup>Malawi Government Gazette, 2005.

<sup>3</sup>Lakeview and Ntcheu Church Records, 2006.

<sup>4</sup>Central Malawi Conference 1990 Statistical Records.

<sup>5</sup>Malawi Government Gazette, 2005.

<sup>6</sup>Lakeview and Ntcheu Church Records, 2006.

tremendous growth in terms of membership, it is tragic to note that the “backdoor problem”<sup>7</sup> whereby the newly baptized members are quietly walking away is rampant.

According to the Church statistical records of 2000 - 2005, Lakeview had baptized 135 new members and Ntcheu had baptized 152 new members. During this period, 26 newly baptized members (35.1%) and 50 newly baptized (32.8%) were missing in Lakeview and Ntcheu respectively.<sup>8</sup> This was a big loss considering that much money, effort, and time had been invested for the new members to join the church through evangelistic campaigns and personal Bible studies.

Carlos Martin, a church growth expert and writer, had experienced such a loss of newly baptized members. He writes, “I remember discouraging reports after one series of evangelistic meetings I conducted. It seems that most of the newly baptized members had reverted to their old days.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Statement of the Problem**

The statistical reports of 2000 – 2005 of Lakeview and Ntcheu Seventh-day Adventist churches show that 35.1% and 32.8% of their newly baptized members respectively left the church during that period.

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<sup>7</sup>Carlos Martin, *Turning the World Upside Down* (Ontario, Canada: Pacific Press, 2000), 15.

<sup>8</sup>Lakeview and Ntcheu Church Records, 2006.

<sup>9</sup>Martin, 120.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to design and implement a program to retain the newly baptized members in Lakeview and Ntcheu Seventh-day Adventist Churches so as to reduce the percentage loss to 10% in each of the churches.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research will help newly baptized members to be established in the church through a spiritual enrichment program that includes: frequent visitation by pastors and lay leaders and assimilating the new members into church activities. Pastors and elders in Central Malawi Conference will benefit from this research by learning more skills in retaining the people of God. The members in Central Malawi Conference of Seventh-day Adventists will benefit from the findings of this study as they receive spiritual provisions that will enhance their spiritual maturity during Bible classes and special crusades.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

The study was conducted in Lakeview and Ntcheu Seventh-day Adventist churches of the Central Malawi Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

### **Definition of Terms**

- **Apostolic Era:** A biblical period associated with apostles after the ascension of Christ.
- **Assimilation:** To incorporate new believers into the life of the congregation and ultimately employ their spiritual gifts.

- **Baptism:** The event which marks the new believer's entrance into the church – the church being both the body of Christ and the local congregation.
- **Field:** An organized body of Seventh-day Adventist churches in a state, province, region or territory.
- **General Conference:** The largest unit of organization embracing all Unions of Seventh-day Adventists in all parts of the world.
- **Lethargy:** A lazy spiritual state.
- **Local Church:** An organized body of Seventh-day Adventist believers in a particular location.
- **Union:** An organized body of fields /conferences of Seventh-day Adventists in a country /region.

### **Methodology**

To achieve the purpose of the study, the researcher read the Bible, Ellen G. White writings, books and journals by different authors (Adventists and non-Adventists) on the subject of retaining newly baptized members. Then the researcher sought for permission from Central Malawi Conference executive committee, Ntcheu Seventh-day Adventist church board and Lakeview Seventh-day Adventist church board to conduct the study in their churches.

Questionnaires were then administered to pastors/elders, church clerks, departmental leaders and members of Ntcheu Seventh-day Adventist church and Lakeview Seventh-day Adventist church. An analysis of the data collected was done to find out factors for the loss of members and how to keep newly baptized members.

An evangelistic program, with the aim of winning and retaining newly baptized members, was designed, implemented, and evaluated. Conclusions were drawn from the results of the program and recommendations were made to the relevant church organizations.

## CHAPTER 2

### RETAINING NEWLY-BAPTIZED MEMBERS

This chapter presents views from the Bible, Ellen G. White writings, and other authors on retaining newly baptized members.

#### **Biblical Perspectives**

The New Testament gives several instructions on keeping newly baptized members. It portrays Christ as the Master of church membership retention. In John 15: 16, Jesus told His disciples, “I have chosen you, and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit and your fruit should remain.” Christ chose His disciples for a purpose—the bearing of fruit. He did not choose them to live a life apart from the world, but to represent Him in the world. He chose them, first to come to Him, and then to go out into the world.

Christ pointed to Himself as a real keeper of the Lord’s flock when He said, “I AM the Good Shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). Christ was admonishing His disciples to follow His example in keeping His flock. The disciples were to be like shepherds (Hebrew – *ro'im*, from the root *ri'ah*, “to pasture,” “to feed”)<sup>10</sup> responsible for the Lord’s flock. When Jesus is described as a Good Shepherd, the word that is used is *kalos*, not *agathos*. *Kalos* is used to describe the quality of

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<sup>10</sup> “Ezekiel”. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1953-57), 4: 691.

winsomeness which makes it lovely. Barclay portrays a caring picture of Christ. He says “in Him there is more than efficiency and more than fidelity; there is loveliness.”<sup>11</sup> Jesus was the Good Shepherd who so loved His sheep that, for their safety He would risk and one day He gave His life.

Towards the end of His earthly ministry, Christ gave the great commission to His disciples, “go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all thing whatsoever I command you: and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world” (Matthew 28:19, 20).

The focus of Jesus’ mission was to provide for the sins of a dying, lost world. He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). He came that men and women might believe in Him (John 3:16). How did He accomplish this? What was His method? Christ’s method was calling and building disciples. Humans were his method.<sup>12</sup>

### **Definitions of Disciple**

The Greek word for disciple is *matheteuo*, meaning “a follower,” “a learner.” Firstly the disciples were followers of Jesus and learners from Him. The great commission called them to do what He had done. They were to make disciples. This is the primary emphasis of Matthew 28:19. *Making disciples* is the main issue of the verse (emphasis supplied). The other verbs—going, baptizing, and teaching— are subordinate.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Barclay, 63.

<sup>12</sup>Allen Hadidian, *Discipleship: Helping Other Christians Grow* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 11.

The New Testament gives several definitions of who a disciple is. First, a disciple is a learner in the school of Christ. Jesus said, “learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and you shall find rest for your soul” (Matthew 11:29). The disciples of Jesus Christ were humble learners in His school. Jesus reminded His disciples that unless they were converted and became as little children, they would by no means enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3).

Second, a disciple is one who accepts all the truth revealed by the Holy Spirit. The truth and the truth lover were made for each other. When the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth (John 16:13). The problem of the people in Jesus’ day was resisting the truth revealed by Jesus about them, or about God. Jesus said to them, “And because I tell you the truth, you believe me not.... He that is of God hears God’s words” (John 8:45, 47). Paul warned that in the last days many would not “love the truth ... but would believe a lie.” (2 Thessalonians 2:10, 11).

Third, a disciple is one who follows his teacher continually. When Jesus told Matthew to “*follow*” Him (Matthew 9:9), He meant that a disciple would be worth the name only if he would abide in Him and in His word. (John 8:31). Jesus was a real model for those who were to follow Him as his disciples. The Scriptures say that Christ suffered and died, leaving us “*an example*” that we should follow in His steps (1 Peter 2:21). In word and deed, they were to follow His example. As He revealed the Father, so they were to reveal Him. They were obliged to deny themselves in order to follow their Lord, and grow into His likeness. According to the New Testament, becoming a disciple of Jesus is

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<sup>13</sup> Myron S. Augsburger, in Lloyd J. Ogilvie, ed., *The Communicator’s Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 330.



a continual learning of more and more truth—“precept upon precept . . . here a little, there a little.”<sup>14</sup>

Fourth, a disciple is a fisher of men. Jesus said, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). It was a must to all who had shared in Christ’s glory and majesty to share in His ministry (2 Peter 1:16, 17). A true disciple spreads his teacher’s doctrines. This is the main difference between a convert and a disciple. A convert is someone who accepts another person’s teachings. But a disciple is one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrine of another. This is evidenced in Matthew 28:19 where Jesus Himself reiterated: “Go and make disciples of all nations.”

Fifth, a disciple is one who has love for others. Jesus said, “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). This loving concern for one another, Greek *allelon*, is a concept that appears many times in the epistles alone, often in relation to the church body. In Romans 12:10, the disciples are admonished to “be devoted to one another in brotherly love” and to be . . . “in harmony with one another (verse 16); they are also to “serve one another in love” (Galatians 5:13).

Sixth, a disciple is closely related to Jesus. Jesus’ disciples gradually became like Him through a close relationship with Him. They were able to minister as He did. Christianity was caught as well as taught by sharing the truth and living the Christian life. As they were making someone their disciple, the disciples of Jesus were at the same time turning these people into the disciples of Jesus because by their words and examples they were constantly pointing them to Him.

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<sup>14</sup>Ellen G. White, *Adventist Home* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Assn, 1952), 289.

## **New Testament Ways of Retaining Newly-baptized Members**

After His resurrection, Jesus instructed one of His beloved disciples, Peter, to feed His sheep. Christ repeated this statement three times (John 21:15-18). The feeding of Christ's sheep had nurturing embodied in it. It became part of the disciples' job description for the rest of their lives. The disciples were called to retain new members by discipling and nurturing them as did their Master. "I am the Good Shepherd," the Master said at one time, "I know my sheep and my sheep know me." (John 10:14-27). In so stating, Jesus presented Himself as One interested in the welfare of His sheep. This is shepherding at its highest peak. Shepherding is nurturing; and nurturing results in membership retaining and membership growth.

Following Christ's great commission, the disciples received the power of the Holy Spirit that enabled them to baptize 3,000 people in a single day. It was not the great numbers that made Pentecost important, but that "they continued in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship (Acts 2:42). The work of nurturing newly baptized members was taking place at its fullest measure. When we read the Book of Acts in the Bible closely, we can evidently see how the disciples related to one another and carried out the ministry. The following are ways they used for retaining new members and closing "the back door."

### **Fellowship and Relationship**

The disciples "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship" (Acts 2:42). Luke elaborates the continual fellowship and brotherly relationship that existed between the old disciples and the newly made disciples. He says that they shared their meals (Acts 2:46), they visited from one believer's house to another, they prayed

and praised God together (Acts 2:47), they sold their possessions and goods, and shared according to each one's need (Acts 2:45). This was "one anothering indeed."<sup>15</sup>

### **Developing an Atmosphere of Loving Concern**

One of the ways that was used in the New Testament to develop a meaningful relationship with newly baptized members was by being honestly concerned for them; really wanting to be their friends. Paul taught this as one of the important elements in his own nurturing ministry. He described his attitude toward the Philippians saying, "God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:8). It was a challenge for Paul to develop such a loving concern over the new Christians if they were to remain in the Church of God. It was important to have an accommodating kind of love if the disciples were seeking to build friendships with newly baptized members. Jesus applied this kind love as He worked with His disciples (John 13:35). His love and concern for those disciples were the basic tools in their spiritual growth. They knew He loved them and there was never any doubt in their minds. In spite of their failures, they knew Christ's love was unconditional—the agape love.

### **Developing a Relationship Around Christ**

John the beloved disciple of Jesus puts Christ as the focal point of true fellowship. "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son, Jesus Christ" (I John 1:3). He claims that relationships should be developed around knowing Christ. This is

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<sup>15</sup>Zacchaeus Mathema, Class Lecture on the Disciples' Fellowship in the New Testament, Adventist University of Africa.

exactly what Jesus Christ meant when He said, I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John, 15:5, NIV).

### **Follow-Up**

The three thousand converts at Pentecost were immediately involved into the Church life; and this pattern continued daily with others as they were being saved (Acts 4:32). When the lame man was healed at the temple gate, Peter and John kept him with them as they continued their ministry (Acts 3:8; 4:14).

The emphasis given to Paul’s follow-up after his conversion certainly underscores this need. Not only is he taken into the fellowship of the disciples at Damascus, but he is joined by Ananias, a man sent by God to give special instructions in regard to his (Paul’s) ministry. (Acts 9:8-9, 25). Later Paul goes to Jerusalem. Doubtless he learned more during these days than the information he got just from knowing the leaders. He received an indispensable lesson in the care of new believers.

The New Testament records show that for the rest of his life, Paul made a policy to mentor new disciples. Acts 13:43 says that Paul and Barnabas preached justification by faith in Pisidian Antioch, where “many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas. They reasoned with and persuaded the new disciples to continue in the grace of God. After Paul and Barnabas had preached, their duty was not over yet until when they saw that the new converts were established. These follow-ups were done in almost all the places where Paul and the apostles had evangelized.

The Acts of the Apostles shows that it was Paul’s custom to follow-up all new converts. He made different missionary journeys to new lands, but never left his former

places unvisited (Acts 14:19-22). At other times we find him spending extended periods in many places: in Iconium (“for a long time,” Acts 18:11); in the province of Asia Minor (“for a time,” Acts 19:22); and in Greece (“for three months,” Acts 20:2-3). His ministry combined evangelism and nurture. Paul understood the need for personal follow-up. When circumstances were such that he could not give the personal attention he desired, he often arranged for others to take his place, or wrote to those he had converted. Silas and Timothy, for example, were left behind in Berea when he had to leave (Acts 17:14). Timothy and Erastus were sent to Macedonia in response to the Macedonians’ urgent request, since he could not go himself (Acts 19:22). Such missions are alluded to repeatedly in his letters, strongly indicating that follow-up was the heart of his ministry.

Acts 8:14, 15 continue addressing the acts of follow-up as a way of establishing newly baptized members in the Apostolic Era. This time it was Peter and John in Samaria. The apostles believed that once a convert was baptized, it was not over. Carlos Martin says that “early Christians demonstrated much care for the newly baptized believers and for the congregations they planted”<sup>16</sup>

### **Ellen G. White’s Comments on Newly-baptized Members**

#### **The Need for Follow-up and Nurture**

One of the major causes for the backsliding of new members is lack of consistent follow-up and giving of Bible studies (nurture). In our quest for numerical growth, we tend to bypass the fact that those who are converted to the truth were not previously diligent students of the Scriptures. We need to remember that in the modern popular churches there is little real study of the Word of God. The people look to their

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<sup>16</sup>Martin, 116.

ministers in the search of the Scriptures to find the truth. They believe that theirs is to accept and believe what their leaders teach.

Ellen G. White remarks that

Many accept the truth without digging down deep to understand its foundation principles; and when it is opposed, they forget the arguments and evidences that sustain it. They have been led to believe the truth, but have not been fully instructed as to what truth is . . . often their piety degenerates into a form, and when the appeals that first aroused them are no longer heard, they become spiritually dead.<sup>17</sup>

This categorical observation should wake us up from the lethargy of leaving undone the work of assimilating new members into the faith. We need to realize that breaking old habits and acquaintances is very challenging and sometimes discouraging for these new believers. They need our assistance and friendship as they grow. They need follow-up.

### **How to Establish and Hold New Converts**

All evangelistic meetings and methods of soul winning are but the springboard of the heavier and more challenging work of establishing and holding new converts. In this understanding, Ellen White suggests the following ways:

- Visit them often, especially during the first year.

This is because the new members need to feel wanted and accepted into their new faith. As we have seen above, this is exactly what Paul did.<sup>18</sup>

- Appoint spiritual guardians for them.

Many newly baptized persons do not feel a sense of belonging to the congregation where they are members. Friendship with other members is the first

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<sup>17</sup>Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Nashville, TN: Southern Pub, 1955), 368.

<sup>18</sup>Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1946), 388.

step toward their assimilation into the church. According to church experts, each new member should have a minimum of seven friends in the church within the first six months.<sup>19</sup>

- Begin a review of doctrines.

“After the first effort has been made in a place by giving a course of lectures, there is really greater necessity for a second course than for the first.”<sup>20</sup>

- Keep the newly-baptized members attending church services.

This can be achieved by making our church services intensely interesting. “Do it just as

perfectly as if the first effort had not been made.”<sup>21</sup> It also pays dividends to organize a Bible study on Sabbath morning. “Many who listen to sermons, even though the truth be presented in clear lines, learn but little. Often it would be more profitable if the Sabbath meetings were of the nature of the Bible class study.”<sup>22</sup>

It is in human nature that we feel accepted when we are involved in a group’s activities. Bearing this in mind, it is therefore important to involve the newly baptized members in service to the community. “They can be in many lines, according to their several capabilities, useful in helping the church to come nearer to God and working in various ways to act upon the elements outside the church.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Martin, 388.

<sup>20</sup>White, *Evangelism*, 122.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 348.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 355-57.

The new believers also need to develop skills in good devotional habits. From another stance, Ellen White admonishes us to “unite with the Spirit of the Living God to present a bulwark around our people and around our youth.”<sup>24</sup> Let us encourage them to read from the Spirit of Prophecy. “Patriarchs and Prophets and The Great Controversy are books that are especially adapted to those who have newly come to the truth, that they may be established in the truth.”<sup>25</sup>

Another dimension of our work is to pray for and work with the new converts for the conversion of other people. It is also expedient that we have good judgment in dealing with young and new members. “Hasty and inconsiderate actions result from a lack of judgment, and lead to wrongdoing . . . . Let us pray that when the time shall come to act we may be ready”<sup>26</sup> to deal gently with the erring and those still young in the faith.

### **Contemporary Views on Retaining Newly-baptized Members**

The Adventist Church is one of the fastest growing denominations worldwide. This growth rate is high in Africa. For every three individuals who join the Church one member chooses to leave. While many of these individuals have been members for a number of years, far too often exodus from fellowship is made by the new members who have never been fully incorporated into the life of their local congregation.<sup>27</sup> Much

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<sup>24</sup>White, *Evangelism*, 339.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, .366.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 366-67



money, effort and time is invested for new members to join the Church through evangelistic campaigns and personal Bible studies. Carlos Martin, a church growth expert remembers discouraging reports after one evangelistic meeting he had conducted. He writes, “It first seemed that most of the newly baptized members had reverted to their old ways.”<sup>28</sup>

Fred Cornforth and Lale Tim interviewed ten people who left the Adventist Church. One couple, Rick and Kari, were among those who were interviewed, giving reasons why they left the Church. Rick responded that in the first six months, he went through a lot of loss: his marriage broke up and his kids disowned him. Then his mother died. There was a big wave of trauma that came over him. Kari said that because of their choice, people distanced themselves from them. In a way the Church distanced itself from them.<sup>29</sup> Newly baptized members leave the Church on four grounds: spiritual factors, social factors, health factors, and economic factors.

### **Spiritual Factors**

Some newly baptized members leave the Church because of spiritual inactiveness. James Cress lists reasons why new converts left the Marietta Church. The following were among the spiritual reasons: lack of support or little support from the Church members, not being asked to participate, no appropriate ministries assigned to new members, and no spiritual commitments to new members. Guest evangelists seemed to

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<sup>27</sup>James Cress, *You Can Keep Them if You Care* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Ministerial Assn, 2000), 11.

<sup>28</sup>Martin, 120.

<sup>29</sup>Fred Cornforth and Lale Tim, *Ten Who Left* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 2000), 59.

abandon the converts when leaving and established members assumed new members are okay.<sup>30</sup>

### **Social Factors**

Every member has an in-built need for love and nurture in a community. The challenge of a leader and people is to winsomely represent the love and nurture of Christ to newly baptized members in the authentic fellowship of the community of faith. Ron Blake once said, “Ministry is about people.”<sup>31</sup> Man is a social being. He needs friends, love and care from the community and this can be provided by a family, workplace and of course the Church.

The new members of Marietta Church left the Church on social reasons including: no friends, no network relationship, and no sense of belonging. They felt inferior; they could not measure up to standards. Lifestyle changes were too great and the new members of the Church had unrealistic expectations.<sup>32</sup>

### **Economic factors**

In his list, James Cress observed that some newly baptized members left the Church due to economic reasons which were multifaceted: social-economic- educational differences between established members and newly baptized members, poor facilities

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<sup>30</sup>Cress, 86.

<sup>31</sup> Ron Blake, et al. *Effective Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press, 1979), 100.

<sup>32</sup>Cress, 86.

which were overcrowded, and newly baptized members were discouraged because their children could not get into Adventist Schools.<sup>33</sup>

### **Health Factors**

The Church is a community of faith. Newly baptized members expect to benefit from this community when they are sick and have lost their loved ones. Ron Blake believes that the church is the dispenser of grace, hope and redemption. Jesus Christ, through his people (the Church), holds out the answers for needs, including the ultimate needs for life.<sup>34</sup>

### **How to Retain Newly-baptized Members**

New members, like new babies, must be nurtured. James Cress compares the newly baptized members with a newborn baby. While it is one thing to have a baby born, it is quite another to see that the baby grows, develops, and matures. Babies need care, attention, love, correction, and discipline. This is the Church's responsibility. To do anything less will be child abuse.<sup>35</sup> In agreement with James Cress, Rick Warren stipulates that

Spiritual growth does not just happen once you are saved, even if you attend services regularly. Churches are filled with people who have attended services for their entire lives yet are still spiritual babies. An assimilated member is not the same as a mature member.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Blake, 100.

<sup>35</sup>Cress, 29.

<sup>36</sup>Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 332.

The true meaning of nurturing and caring for new members phases out when a community of faith loses its values of Bible study and worship. Cornforth and Tim suggest that the best starting place to deal with any problem is God.<sup>37</sup>

### **Spiritual Enrichment**

Enriching the spirituality of newly baptized members is very vital in their nurturing. Carlos Martin has suggested some spiritual enrichment activities:<sup>38</sup>

- Visiting newly baptized members.

Visitation is paramount for the pastor, Bible worker, or an elder, in the business of nurturing new members, especially during the first three months after baptism.

- Teaching the newly baptized members the Adventist spiritual heritage.

They need to know the stronghold of the Adventist doctrines, such as spiritual gifts, stewardship, health messages, and the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation in the Bible.

- The newly baptized members should be put to work in church services.

This includes inviting the new members to pray and usher people into the Church during the Sabbath school.

- Spiritual enrichment activities should incorporate the new members.

The leadership of the church should enlist and encourage newly baptized members to pray and work for the conversion of souls. This will strengthen them

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<sup>37</sup>Cornforth and Tim, 59.

<sup>38</sup>Martin, 121-22.

in their faith when they see others joining the Church they love through their efforts. Let the leadership identify the talents of the new converts and put them into use.

- The church's program should focus on consolidating the new membership.

One of the methods to achieve this is to develop and present a short series of sermons on how to relate to newly baptized members. This series should be presented just before the evangelistic meetings. The sermons should be preached at worship service on Sabbath mornings so that the majority of the church members are reached.

- Organize a family banquet to welcome the new members.

The banquet needs to be planned during the first week after baptism of the members. Each member should be well informed that the feast is for them. All the spiritual guardians should prepare to attend. Plan a short orientation program after dinner. Give a brief history of the beginning of the Church and its organization from the Local Church to the Conference, the Union, and the General Conference. Talk about such things as the tithe envelopes, Church budget, and mission offering. In short, make the feasting be a time to acquaint the new members with the language of the Church

### **Fellowship and Relationship Building**

Many people enter the door of our churches and take their places on the pews with aching needs. These needs range from those present by the fact of human existence, as identified by Maslow's hierarchy "of needs," to the specific need that accumulates through everyday living. The disheartening fact is that many have experienced broken

relationships within the ranks of the church. So fellowship meals make a statement of banishing away the new members' aloneness. Further still one of the efforts of the church is to bring in spiritual healing, since the church is like a hospital where all pain must stop.

Ron Blake says that relationship building and nurturing requires time.<sup>39</sup> Newly baptized members will stay in the Church if they have experienced fellowship and build the relationships which they need. Garry Kuhne offers some practical advice on developing relationship with new baptized members that the Church must develop an atmosphere of loving concern. The newly baptized members will need to be loved with the affection of Jesus Christ, for He Himself said, "You are my disciples if you love one another" (John 17:26). Unless this is done then the relationship will be hindered.

Love is not of human devising; it is a divine attribute. So let all relationship-oriented programs be developed around Christ. From the very beginning of relationship with a newly baptized member, there is need of spending the bulk of one's time to spiritual things. This does not mean lecturing that person. But it does mean devoting most of one's time to spiritual communication, creating an atmosphere of spiritual sharing. Kuhne says that this develops naturally only when it is the way one acts in initial stages of the relationship.<sup>40</sup>

The idea is simply stick-to-itiveness. It is a call to patient endurance in building

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<sup>39</sup>Blake, 97.

<sup>40</sup>Garry Kuhne, *The Dynamics of Personal Follow-Up* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 53.

relationships with the newly baptized members. Friendships will not always grow smoothly, or even at the same rate. Sometimes a newly baptized member might not be responding at all, yet the mentor needs to persevere still. This calls for spending quality time together. Role association plays a greater part in relationship building; and association revolves around spending time together.

Another fact worth remembering is that humans are not wholly spiritual. They also have the physical and social entities whose needs must be met as well. The danger we need to avoid is for the congregation to become overly concerned with the spiritual at the expense of the other entities. Kuhne underscores the fact that the spiritual affects the social, and the social also affect the spiritual. This interrelatedness is found in every person's life, and because of this, mentors are obliged to deal with more than the spiritual need of the newly baptized members.<sup>41</sup>

### **Follow-up and Assimilation**

Newly baptized members, as any other social beings, need to be followed-up and assimilated into the Church in order to retain them. Ron Blake posits that the one key component of successful congregational ministry is assimilation.<sup>42</sup> No matter how effective a leader and a people may be in winning souls to Christ and the Church, follow-up that provides ample opportunities to become part of the congregation's care network is vital.<sup>43</sup> Each newly baptized member must experience a sense of belonging that can be achieved through assimilation, an arm of follow up. If we follow the guidelines

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<sup>41</sup>Kuhne, 53.

<sup>42</sup>Blake, 101.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid, 101.

elaborated above, and give serious attention to assimilation, a minimal number of people will exit the Church through the infamous “back door.”

### **Small Group Ministry**

The idea of a small group is a popular one in many faith groups. Ron Blake defines it as “a connection for people that are proven effective in numbers without reach, growing Churches.”<sup>44</sup> Dale Galloway describes the small group as:

our tender loving care group where people gather in Christ’s name and really care for one another. It’s belonging and being loved by others. It’s being accepted where you are and giving acceptance to other people who come into the circle. It is where heart to heart fellowship takes place. It is where the circle of is continually being enlarged to take in one more person.<sup>45</sup>

The small groups have a two-fold purpose: to evangelize and disciple. They also provide an environment where people can connect through care and relationships.

Galloway stipulates ten characteristics of tender loving care of small groups:<sup>46</sup>

1. A Close Family.

There is a deep love that develops in one for the other in tender loving care groups. There is this deep comradeship of belonging one to the other.

2. Application of the Bible to Daily Life.

In the home cell meeting, questions are asked and dialogue and discussion take place. There is not only knowledge in the hearing of the Word of God, there is practical application to the daily life.

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<sup>44</sup>Blake, 101.

<sup>45</sup>Dale E. Galloway, *How to Create a Successful Church* (Portland, OR: Scot Publishing Company, 1982), 140.

<sup>46</sup>Galloway,



3. Sharing of Life's Testimony.

An important part of Christian life and growth is the sharing of life through testimony. Life lived is worthy many sermons. As people share their life and victories with one another, they also get involved in praying for each other and helping each other.

4. Effective One-on-one Pastoral Care.

The tender care loving group is an effective way to give one-on-one pastoral care to unlimited number of people.

5. Encouragement and Edification.

Sometimes every one of us gets discouraged or down, the members of a small group encourage one another. They also continually edify one another.

6. Unlimited Opportunities for Meaningful Service.

The small group provides unequalled opportunity for lay people to participate in meaningful service.

7. Non-threatening Friendship Evangelism.

Many, who will not attend a church because it is too threatening, will come to a home meeting. They are made to feel welcome and comfortable.

8. Discipling of New Converts.

Unless new converts are loved and cared for, it is not easy to disciple them.

9. Spiritual Growth.

People's spiritual growth is accelerated many times when they become part of a dynamic cell or small group.

10. Development of Strong Leadership.

As lay people are used in leading tender loving care groups, they develop their leadership skills.

Carlos Martin suggests that small groups within the church should be started at least six months before an evangelistic meeting.<sup>47</sup> The small groups should be divided according to geographical locations. All newly baptized members should be placed in small groups after the evangelistic meetings are over. However, Martin cautions that great care should be taken in matching the new members in the small groups.

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<sup>47</sup>Martin, 120.

## CHAPTER 3

### LOCAL SETTING OF LAKEVIEW AND NTCHEU SDA CHURCHES

#### **Why Newly Baptized Members Left Lakeview and Ntcheu Churches**

A survey of the local situation of Lakeview and Ntcheu Seventh-day Adventist Churches as to why newly-baptized members left the church revealed that it was due to spiritual, social, economic, and health factors.

#### **Spiritual Factors**

Most of the newly baptized members in Lakeview and Ntcheu Seventh-day Adventist Churches left the church due to spiritual lethargy that came as a result of neglecting Bible study and family worship. Due to lack of a reading culture, most of the newly baptized members did not have a Bible. If they did, they would only read their Bibles on the Sabbath day, thus denying themselves the spiritual food that could have nourished their spiritual lives. The consequences of such spiritual inactivity led many into compromising their Adventist life style.

As time went on, the newly baptized members lost confidence in leaders whom they thought were more spiritual than them. When they were given any church responsibility, they became disillusioned after seeing the imperfect inner workings of the church.

## **Social Factors**

There had been a kind of stress on the newly baptized members due to:

1. Marital problems and family or personal disappointments.

For those who were not fully converted, promiscuous life style was the order of the day. As a result, their marriages were affected and ended up in separations, divorces, and remarriages. For most of the unmarried newly baptized members, cases of fornications and pregnancies out of wedlock were witnessed within the two churches.

2. Tradition or cultural heritage crisis.

As every African community have their own inherited traditions, members of Lakeview and Ntcheu churches were not an exception. Most of the newly baptized members struggled to come out of this cocoon when they embraced Adventism. Traditions like Gule Wamkulu (Nyau)<sup>48</sup> traditional dance, consulting the ancestral spirits, death rituals, and rites of passage ceremonies, tempted many newly baptized members to exit the church quietly. They did not want to lose their sense of belonging as far as tradition or cultural values were concerned. This often occurred a few months after they failed to replace friends from their old life with friends in the congregation.

## **Health Factors**

The HIV/AIDS pandemic brought discouragements and spiritual lethargy to some of the newly baptized members through opportunistic chronic illnesses and death of their

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<sup>48</sup>This is a traditional cultural dance that is prevalent in the Central Malawi region, where Lakeview and Ntcheu Seventh-day Adventist Churches are located.

loved ones. Ignorance on information about HIV/AIDS derailed some of them to believe that they had been bewitched and ended up consulting witch doctors.

### **Economic Factors**

Work or employment opportunities affected some of the newly baptized members, especially the youth, who had just finished school/college. When they got an employment that demanded them to work on the Sabbath day, the work took an upper hand. Shortage of food in the years 2000 to 2005 was an economic blow that made most of rural poor Adventists to compromise their Sabbath values for the sake of hand-outs that were being distributed on Sabbath days. Another economic factor that caused many new members to leave the two churches under study. Most Malawians in rural areas lived on less than one United States dollar a day.<sup>49</sup> This forced a number of Adventists to embark on tobacco growing, which is a number one economic source of the country, but a prohibition in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

### **Suggested Ways of Retaining Newly-baptized Members**

Eleven district pastors and the executive secretary/ministerial secretary in the Central Malawi Conference of Seventh-day Adventists suggested the adaptation of the following ways of retaining newly baptized members as presented by Rajmund Dabrowski.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Malawi Government Gazette (Zomba, Malawi Government Press, 2006), 142.

<sup>50</sup> Rajmund Dabrowski, *Statements, Guidelines, and Other Documents of SDA Church* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 2005), 221-36.

## **Spiritual Enrichment**

Frequent visitations by the pastor/elders, at least two times every quarter. If the pastor/elder cannot make it, they should send those who have been trained in how to visit newly baptized members. Every church should be a training center for imparting nurturing knowledge that will assist to retain both old and new members.

Older members should be trained on how to visit the newly baptized members. The guiding principles for such a training should have a content of “Five Ws and H,” i.e. what, why, who, where, when, and how of the visitations. The personal ministries department should be responsible for this training.

Members should be trained on how to visit the newly baptized members according to their profession, age, education, etc. One pastor called this method, “Send a doctor to win a doctor” visitation program.

The visiting team should have the relevant information of the newly-baptized member to be visited well in advance from the Pastor/Church Clerk. The information should be comprised of: full names, marital status, location (residential area), house number, occupation, favorite hymns and Bible promises if any and hobbies etc. Newly-baptized members have to be taught the Adventist spiritual heritage including Stewardship, the books of Daniel and Revelation, Health message, and spiritual gifts. They need to know the stronghold of the Adventist movement.

These should be taught at the early stages of the newly baptized member’s interaction with the church. The lessons should be taught by individuals who are well vested in the teachings of the church. The approach should be simple and practical. Three months after baptism the newly baptized member should be involved in praying and

working for the conversion of souls. Encouraging newly baptized members to pray and work for the conversion of souls will strengthen their faith when they see others joining the church they love.

**At least two sermons every quarter should be preached.** An evaluation should take place every two weeks after baptism to see whether the older members are practicing what they have learnt from the sermons. The sermons should be preached by the pastor or one who has homiletical skills.

**Plan a welcome to the family banquet.** The banquet needs to be planned the first week after baptism of the newly baptized members. Send out special invitations to all of them and their spiritual friends that have been selected. The church board members should be invited. Plan a short orientation program after dinner. Give a brief history of the church and its organization from the local church to the Conference, Union, and the General Conference. Talk about such things as the tithe envelopes, church budget, and mission offerings.

**Conduct a well-organized revival meeting at least once every quarter.** Choose a theme for the whole week. The theme should address real spiritual issues centered on Jesus Christ. Announce the meeting right after planning and voting of the revival meetings. Make them so convenient that every newly baptized member can attend.

**Organize a music Sabbath day once every quarter.** Music is a powerful instrument of persuasion in the spiritual and secular realms. A well organized music festival can enhance the spirituality of the newly baptized members. Local music groups should be mobilized for this important function. If possible invite good singing groups from other churches. Every music Sabbath day should have a specific theme.

**Re-emphasize all Adventist doctrines through Bible studies.** After the first efforts have been made in a place by giving a course of lectures, there is really greater necessity for a second course than the first.

**Tackle problems which the newly baptized members are going through.** It is quite evident that the church cannot be able to address all problems which the newly baptized members are going through. However, there are some that could be tackled by the church. A good example is encouraging old members to visit and pray for newly baptized members when they are sick or have lost their loved ones.

### **Fellowship and Friendship**

Assign newly-baptized members to older members as counselors (guardian plan) for at least six months after baptism. Many newly-baptized persons do not feel a sense of belonging to the congregation where they are members. Friendship with other members is the first step towards their assimilation into the church. The church should spend at least one to two hours per week in developing an atmosphere of loving concern for the newly baptized members. When seeking to build friendships with newly baptized members, it is important to have an accepting kind of love.

The church should spend quality time together with the newly-baptized members outside church setting. This is the essence of a truly effective follow-up where the newly baptized member often becomes most open and honest about his/her victories, defeats, problems, etc. Examples of these informal times could be: sports days, Sunday tea times, church cleaning days, and church wedding receptions.

The relationship should be Christ –centered. Christ should be the main focus in the relationship between the newly baptized members and the spiritual guardian. Patience



should be exercised by the older members in dealing with the newly baptized members throughout the process of relationship building. Never criticize the newly-baptized member but assist him/her with love. Take care of the newly baptized member's personal needs.

### **Follow-up of Newly-baptized Members**

Incorporating the newly baptized members into small-group ministry is an effective method of follow-up. Just as the disciples had followed Christ's command in "going and making disciples," the newly made disciples made other disciples too. In this way their growth was sustained. The newly baptized members should indeed be incorporated in prayer bands, singing groups, witnessing groups etc.

### **Social Solutions**

The church should present at least two "family alive" seminars every quarter addressing relevant subjects that do affect the newly-baptized members e.g. how to relate to a non-Adventist friend/spouse. Plan and organize youth counseling during the same period on topics like: how to choose the right life partner, dating, relating with in-laws to be etc. An evaluation of these seminars should be to trace the impact on the newly baptized members.

Educate the newly baptized members through Bible studies on the difference between tradition or cultural heritage (e.g. polygamous marriages, traditions attached to death, ancestor religion and worship of spirits etc) and the church values (from biblical perspective).

### **Health Solutions**

The church should plan and organize a support group of men and women who will share their experiences, strengths and hopes with each other. This is done with the view that they may solve the problems and help the newly-baptized members and their relatives materially and spiritually. This should be done when they have been affected with chronic diseases like HIV/AIDS and cancer. The church should also address the issue of stigma positively. Let the church be a den of hope for the newly baptized members.

### **Economic Solutions**

The church should plan and provide training for the unemployed members on small business and entrepreneurship which may include bee-keeping, vegetable gardening, bakery etc. The church should invite experts in these areas and should also source funding from non governmental organizations to loan to the trainees. The church should embark on youth skills seminar which may lead to self-employment.

To assist the newly baptized members in keeping the Sabbath, the church should plan and organize Sabbath keeping seminars. The focus should be Christ the Lord of the Sabbath by virtue of creation. Preparation of the Sabbath should be among the subjects to be addressed.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROGRAM DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

This chapter presents the program design, implementation, and evaluation of a strategy for retaining newly baptized members in Lakeview and Ntcheu Seventh-day Adventist Churches. The program was to run for six months, November 2008 to May 2009.

#### **Program Design**

A number of activities were planned for retaining the newly baptized members. Two months before the program, the researcher was to conduct two-hour training for Lakeview and Ntcheu members on the retaining of newly baptized members. Two months later, in conjunction with Lakeview and Ntcheu church boards, the researcher was to examine their baptismal candidates for baptism. Then these candidates were to be baptized .

The first activity for the newly baptized members was the spiritual guardian plan which included assigning families to nurture them and a ‘replacing friends’ seminar. The spiritual guardian plan was to be followed by several spiritual enrichment and follow-up activities. These included: extended doctrinal classes that would assist members to internalize Adventist doctrines; two music Sabbaths, one each quarter within the six-

month period; a one-week revival meeting, two months after baptism; and a Sabbath keeping seminar.

Newly-baptized members were to be deployed in the work of the church within the six months. Furthermore the following seminars were to be conducted: two “family alive” seminars, a ‘welcome to the family’ banquet, ‘HIV/AIDS and Stigmatization’ seminar and an ‘economic empowering and stewardship’ seminar.

### **Implementation**

On 20<sup>th</sup> September 2008, two months before the baptism of candidates for this program, the researcher conducted training for all the church members of the two churches on the retaining of newly baptized members. Invitations were done through church announcements two Sabbaths before the training. It was a two-hour training program focusing on:

- a. Residence visitations
- b. Teaching Adventist heritage
- c. Involving the newly baptized members in church work
- d. Planning and presenting a series of sermons on how to nurture newly baptized members by the church leadership
- e. Plan a welcome banquet
- f. Plan well organized meetings at least quarterly
- g. Re-emphasize Adventist doctrines through Bible study

More than half the congregation that was present in the morning attended the two hours training (3-5 p.m.). The members showed interest and eagerness to welcome and nurture the newly baptized members to be.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2008, seventy members were baptized by the district pastors in both churches. The new membership comprised of 52 youths and 18 adults. Some plans were to be implemented within the next six months.

### **Guardian Plan**

In the afternoon of November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2008 from 3-5 pm, 32 families who had attended the training on how to nurture newly baptized members were assigned to one newly baptized member each. Their main responsibilities for the next six months were:

- a. To visit their spiritual son/daughter as often as they could. If the newly baptized member did not attend any church activities they would check on them and report to their chosen supervisors (elders).
- b. To counsel the newly baptized members in all matters of spirituality following what they had learnt in the training.
- c. To befriend them. As observed from investigations made, chances of leaving the church by newly baptized members are high when they cannot replace old friends with new friends within the church. As a transition, the guardians acted as a bridge between the newly baptized members and friends of their own choice.
- d. To assist new members to join small groups. Lakeview and Ntcheu Seventh-day Adventist Churches had a number of small groups including: the morning watch prayer band, a number of singing groups, youth net, Samaritan women Bible study groups, and “Jesus way” groups.

On December 20, 2008, from 3-5 pm, I conducted a “Replacing Friends Seminar.” The theme was “Holding the New Caring Hands Forever.” One month after baptism, the newly baptized members were able to choose new friends within the congregation. The seminar was just an endorsement of replacing new friends. Almost all the new members had new friends. The meeting was announced one Sabbath before 20<sup>th</sup> December 2008. Over 173 and 196 members of Lakeview and Ntcheu respectively attended the meeting which was facilitated by the district pastors.

### **Spiritual Enrichment and Follow-up**

Nine days before baptism, I asked the pastors to allow me to attend one of their scheduled elders’ council meetings. We discussed an agenda to extend doctrinal classes of the newly baptized members so that they would be grounded in Adventist doctrines and heritage. The curriculum included lessons on stewardship, the book of Daniel and revelation and the Adventist heritage.

The classes began 9 weeks after baptism, and were to run for six months. The church elders of each church were elected to be the teachers of the classes under the supervision of the district pastors. The classes met during the Sabbath School lesson discussion time. The attendance was not 100%. There were about two to four members who came in late or missed the class altogether. The spiritual guardians were informed about this development. Follow-up measures were applied. Three members started attending punctually and consistently.

## **Music Days**

On 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2009, we organized a music festival Sabbath in both churches. The churches invited renowned singing groups within Central Malawi Conference. The theme was, “Let’s Praise Him in Love and Adoration.” The festival was advertised on the Malawi Adventist Radio. The attendance was 1300 and 600 people from Lakeview and Ntcheu respectively. Some came from sister churches within the catchment area.

On 5<sup>th</sup> March 2009, we had a music extravaganza. The theme was “Singing —“A Foretaste of Heaven.” Groups from the two churches and neighbouring ones sang the whole Sabbath. Five newly baptized members joined the singing groups.

## **Sabbath Keeping Seminar**

On January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2009, during the preaching hour, I preached a sermon entitled “The Sacredness of the Sabbath” and conducted a Bible study in the afternoon on “Sabbath Observance” at Lakeview Seventh-day Adventist Church. I did the same at Ntcheu Seventh-day Adventist Church on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2009. Both topics targeted newly baptized members as part of induction, welcome, consolidation, and nurture. The new members were divided into groups for discussion.

Older members were divided into their own groups. Issues discussed were: Why is the Sabbath so important for us? Why did God institute the Sabbath? What is holy time? Who or what makes the Sabbath holy? How can we make Sabbath keeping a delightful and meaningful experience? The outcome of this seminar was an impact on both the newly baptized members and the older members.

## **Revival Meeting**

We staged a revival meeting as one way of enriching the spirituality of the newly baptized members from 11<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> January 2009. We invited a guest speaker from South Malawi field to grace the occasion. The meetings were commencing at 5.30 and ended at 6.30 p.m. daily from Sunday to Friday. We had a great celebration and fellowship on the whole Sabbath day. The attendance was marvelous and rewarding. Sixty-eight of the 70 new members attended the meetings every day. The theme of the meeting was “Branches and Roots.” The key text was Hosea 4:6, where God laments that “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”

## **Assimilation and Fellowship**

Two months after baptism, Lakeview and Ntcheu Seventh-day Adventist church elders were mandated to plan and monitor the involvement of newly baptized members in church work. According to the original plan, two months after baptism the newly baptized members could be given to pray either in Sabbath school program or in the worship service. At the end of the month, the elders reported that not all of the newly baptized members took part in this exercise of assimilation. Some were shy and scared, while others did exceptionally well. Some newly baptized members were assigned as Sabbath school ushers. A majority of them enjoyed being ushers and expressed their gratitude to the church leadership for giving them an opportunity to get acquainted with older members and visitors.

Three months later, the church elders of both churches involved the newly baptized members in praying and working for the conversion of souls. It was so motivating to some of the newly baptized members to accompany older members in



praying and later in sharing the Word, after watching their leaders as they went from house to house.

On 27<sup>th</sup> December 2008, in both churches, we organized a “Family Alive” seminar. The topic of discussion in the adult section was, “How to Relate to Non-Adventist Spouses and Relatives.” The youth had “How to Choose the Right Spouse” as their topic. This seminar was advertised through the 11 o’clock announcements two Sabbaths before the day of the seminar. We began the seminar at 3 p.m. and finished it at 5.30 p.m. We had about 41 non-Adventists who attended this seminar through invitations.

The second “Family Alive” seminar took place on March 14, 2009. In the adult section the theme was “Biblical Bonding,” and in the youth section, “Biblical Dating.” Some newly baptized members brought their spouses and friends. The district pastors facilitated in the youth section in both seminars and I facilitated in the adult seminars.

The newly baptized members were socially welcomed in style. One week after baptism, the newly baptized members and their spouses/friends were invited to a welcome banquet which took place on 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2008, from 12.30 p.m. to 2.00 p.m. The older members, including spiritual guardians and others, were asked to bring a special dish with extra food for three people. The occasion was arranged in such a way that the newly baptized members were climbing their first ladders of assimilation. All the newly baptized members were present except for one who had malaria. Some could not believe the warm atmosphere of friendship and social fellowship they experienced on this special day.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 2009, we invited Adventist medical personnel from Malamulo Hospital to facilitate and elaborate more on the topic of “stigma” under the theme,

“HIV/AIDS versus salvation”. Both the older and newly baptized members were invited to attend in the afternoon, from 2 – 4 p.m. The aim of the seminar was to remove prejudice, marginalization, and entanglements of the HIV/AIDS stigma amongst old and newly-baptized members.

On April 19, 2009, the churches organized a youth economic empowering seminar. All youths including the newly baptized members were invited. Adventist experts in the area of economics were invited. They focused much on small business entrepreneurship. They advised the church leadership to process loans for the unemployed youth of the church. One week after the seminar, we invited specialists in agriculture and animal husbandry who offered important advice on vegetable growing and poultry keeping. The seminar was open for all age groups.

## **Evaluation**

### **Interviewing Church Officers**

The researcher interviewed twelve church officers from Lakeview and Ntcheu Seventh-day Adventist Churches to evaluate the program that began on 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2008. In response to a question on how effective the program was, both to the newly-baptized members and the older members, four officers said that the whole church was revived. Six reported that if the program had been implemented earlier, the “back door” problem would have been finished and old church members would have been using their spiritual gifts properly. Two church officers said the level of spirituality had improved for both the old and newly baptized members. This was measured by an increase in participation in church activities.

Nearly all twelve officers interviewed responded that the goal of the program was achieved. Out of the 70 newly baptized members only 6 left the church. The percentage of newly baptized members leaving the church dropped from 35 to 8.6 percent. Half the officers interviewed commented that the participation was very encouraging because over half of the church participated in almost all activities of the program. Six officers reported that it was the first time they saw aggressiveness and eagerness in participation at Lakeview and Ntcheu. When asked how they found the program as far as the church was concerned, eight officers said that there was much zeal and determination among the church members. Four officers stated that some had had doubts whether the program would work.

All twelve church officers did not hesitate to respond affirmatively when they were asked whether it was necessary to continue with the program. Their reasons were different though. Six said they believed that this was the only program that could make newly baptized members stay, two said that this is the only way to produce quality and mature church members, and one said that through the program every member can be a worker for God. All twelve interviewees agreed that the content, setup, and period were superb.

### **Survey of Newly-baptized Members**

Another survey was conducted for the evaluation by the newly-baptized members and the following were the results. Responding to a question on how often they were visited by their spiritual guardians for the six previous months, 86.9% of the 70 surveyed responded that it was more than twice per month, 10% stated that it was twice every

month and 3.1% said that it was once every month. Because of the intensive visitation by the spiritual guardians a high percentage (over 94 percent) was retained.

Asked whether their spiritual guardians counseled them with love in all matters of spirituality, 90% of the 70 newly baptized members responded affirmatively but 10% responded negatively. The aspect of counseling them with love improved the percentage of retention.

In regard to friendship, 36.9% stated that it took them more than one month to find a new friend within the congregation, 46.9% said that it was within a month and 16.9% reported that it took them less than a month to have a friend. This indicated that there was an improvement in befriending the newly baptized members than before the retention program was implemented.

Concerning the small groups, 100% of the newly baptized members said that it was important to join a small group in the church and in fact all of them had joined a small group. This proved that the small group ministry was important for membership retention.

With respect to the doctrinal classes, 93.9% of the 70 newly baptized members surveyed responded that the extended doctrinal classes were very valuable but 6.1% said it was of some value. Extended doctrinal classes had an impact on membership retention.

Regarding the music programs, 90% of them agreed that the music programs improved their level of spirituality, while 10% said they were not sure. Music programs proved to be effective in retaining the newly baptized members.

Asked whether they were willing and prepared to be involved in serving two months after their baptism, a big percentage responded favorably to be involved in serving two months after baptism as an indication of a timely motivation.

About the family seminars, 23.9% of the newly baptized members surveyed said yes when asked if the family seminars had improved their relations with their spouses or friends, but 76.1% said 'no.'

All 70 newly baptized members reported that the welcome banquet was very valuable as far as their assimilation was concerned. It gave them confidence, courage and much needed interaction to remain in the church.

Responding to a question whether the newly baptized members had the right perspective of Sabbath keeping from the Sabbath keeping seminar, 93.9% said 'yes' but 6.1% said 'no.' The seminar impacted their lives so much that a number of them were able to testify of their stand on the Sabbath issue.

With regard to the revival meetings, 86.9% stated that the meetings were spiritually very important, 3% responded that they were very important, but 10.1% said they were marginally important. The newly baptized members were not the same. They were reformed and revived.

In view of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, 100% of the newly baptized members surveyed agreed that the HIV/AIDS versus salvation seminar changed their perspective of those who are infected by the pandemic. They could now see them as candidates for heaven. Hope and assurance for those who were infected illuminated.

Regarding the economic empowering seminar, 83.9% of the newly baptized members responded that economically, the economic empowering seminar was very

helpful to them, 10% reported that it was minimally helpful, and 6.1% said it was of little help. The seminar assisted a bigger percentage to be self-reliant.

The program as whole, according to the 70 newly baptized members (100%), had grounded their faith in Jesus Christ. This was enough evidence that the program was a success.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Summary**

The purpose of the study was to design and implement a strategy to retain newly baptized members in Lakeview and Ntcheu Seventh-day Adventist churches in Central Malawi Conference.

According to a survey conducted at Lakeview and Ntcheu Seventh-day Adventist Churches, the situation of losing big numbers of newly baptized members was real. The situation was due to four factors: spiritual, social, health, and economic. Solutions were suggested by a group of eleven district pastors, the executive secretary and ministerial secretary of Central Malawi Conference and lay leaders of the two churches.

The program designed took six months, from 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2008 to 31<sup>st</sup> May, 2009. The members of the two churches took part in implementing the program. Seventy people were baptized and only 6 people (8.6%) left the church. Twelve church leaders from Lakeview and Ntcheu churches commented that the program was a spiritual booster both to the old and the new members.

#### **Conclusions**

The program was a success as evidenced by a number of reasons. Firstly, the social standing of the newly baptized members was improved. Previously newly

baptized members could not feel the sense of belonging in such a short period. Through interaction with old members and through many activities, the newly baptized members were stable.

Secondly, the newly baptized members were spiritually active because they had been assimilated into small group ministries. Some had joined soul winning groups, morning watch prayer band and singing groups.

Thirdly, there was a strong bond that had been created between the newly baptized members and old members through the spiritual guardian plan and 'Replacing Friends' seminar. House to house visits between the newly baptized members and the old members had been reported by the spiritual guardians.

Lastly, the program was a success because the desired goal was reached. Seventy people were baptized and within a period of six months only four newly baptized members left the Church. The program also assisted the old members in improving their own spirituality as they were ministering, interacting, sharing and fellowshiping with the newly baptized members.

### **Recommendations**

1. The researcher recommends to the pastors and elders of Lakeview and Ntcheu Seventh- day Adventist churches to continue the program of retaining newly baptized members in their churches.
2. The researcher recommends to the pastors and elders of other local churches in Central Malawi Conference of Seventh- day Adventists to adopt this program of retaining newly baptized members in their churches.



## APPENDIX A

### LETTERS

From: Pastor Moffat W. Botolo, Adventist University of Malawi,

P.O. Box 148, Ntcheu.

To: The Chairperson, Ntcheu SDA Church Board, P.O. Box 32, Ntcheu.

**Subject:** Permission to conduct a survey for a research paper.

Date: 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2008.

Dear Sir,

This note serves as an application of the above mentioned subject. I am a student of the Adventist University of Africa studying for a program in masters in leadership. I have chosen Ntcheu SDA church as one of my areas of study. I intend to establish reasons of losses of newly baptized members and investigate possible solutions to retain the largest percentage possible. I will conduct surveys targeting the lay leaders. The study will go up to 2009.

Your favorable response will be greatly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

Pastor Moffat W. Botolo.

From: Pastor Moffat W. Botolo, Adventist University of Malawi,  
P.O. Box 148, Ntcheu.

To: The Secretary/Treasurer, Central Malawi Conference.

Private Bag. B-516, Capital City, Lilongwe 3.

Subject: permission to conduct a survey for a research paper.

Date: 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2008.

Dear Sir,

This note serves as an application of the above mentioned subject. I am a student of the Adventist University of Africa studying for a program in masters in leadership. I have chosen to do a research on a problem that has existed in your field for quite some time that of losing a large percentage of newly baptized members.

I intend to establish reasons of losses and investigate possible solutions to retain the largest percentage possible. I will interview you sir, the ministerial secretary and eleven district pastors within your field. The study will end in 2009.

Your favorable response will be greatly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

Pastor Moffat W. Botolo.

From: Pastor Moffat W. Botolo, Adventist University of Malawi,  
P.O. Box 148, Ntcheu.

To: The Chairperson, Lakeview SDA Church Board.

P.O. Box 48, Mlangeni

Subject: Program Development and Implementation

Date: 8th July, 2008.

Dear Sir,

This note serves as an application of the above mentioned subject. I am a student of the Adventist University of Africa studying for a program in masters in leadership. As you were aware before I handed the district over to you, I had chosen Lakeview SDA church as one of my areas of study (rural church) within Central Malawi Conference. In continuation of this study, I intend to develop a program and implement it in your church.

I request to conduct training on how to nurture newly baptized members to the entire church two months before conducting a baptism specifically in November of 2008. Thereafter I will involve the whole church in nurturing of the newly baptized members for a period of six months.

Your favorable response will be greatly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

Pastor Moffat Botolo.

APPENDIX B  
QUESTIONNAIRE

SURVEY ON RETAINING NEWLY BAPTIZED MEMBERS  
IN LAKEVIEW AND NTCHEU SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCHES

A. SPIRITUAL FACTORS

1. LACK OF SPIRITUAL ENRICHMENT

How often are the newly baptized members visited by their pastor/elder?

( ) more than twice a month

( ) twice a month

( ) once every month

Any

other.....

2. How often do other church members receive training on how to visit newly baptized members?

( ) more than twice quarterly

( ) twice a quarter

( ) once every quarter

Other.....

3. What percentage of newly baptized members left the church because they were not visited?

more than 40

30 – 40

20 – 30

15 – 20

less than 15

4. What percentage of the newly baptized members has remained in the church as a result of frequent visitation by the pastor, elder or trained members?

more than 40

30 – 40

20 – 30

15 – 20

less than 15

5. How does the church value teaching the newly baptized members Adventist spiritual heritage?

Very valuable

not valuable

4

3

2

1

6. What percentage of newly baptized members is well grounded in Adventist spiritual heritage?

30 – 40

20 – 30

15 – 20

less than 15

7. How long after baptism does it take to put newly baptized members to work?

- two months
- three months
- six months
- more than six months.

8. How does the church rate the value of encouraging newly baptized members to pray and work for the conversion of souls?

- |                            |                            |                            |                            |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Very valuable              |                            |                            | not valuable               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 |

9. How often does the church leadership present a series of sermons on how to relate to newly baptized members?

- more than twice quarterly
- twice a quarter
- once every quarter

10. When does the church plan a welcome banquet for the newly baptized members?

- first week after baptism
- two weeks after baptism
- rarely plans one

Other.....

**II. Fellowship**

11. Does the church give attention to relationship building as a way of nurturing newly baptized members?

- yes
- no

12. On the average, how much time does your church spend each week developing an atmosphere of loving concern for newly baptized members?

- more than three hours
- one to two hours
- one to one and a half hours
- from thirty minutes to one hour
- less than thirty minutes

13. Does the church have a Christ centered relationship towards nm?

- yes
- no

14. Developing relationships with newly baptized members requires an ingredient of patience

- disagree
- not sure
- agree

15. Is the church prepared to spend quality time together with newly baptized members?

- not prepared
- a little prepared
- very prepared

16. Is the congregation interested in more than just the spiritual life of the newly baptized members?

- not interested
- a little interested

very interested

**III. Follow-up**

17. How often does the church establish acts to follow-up as a way of nurturing newly baptized members?

more than twice a month

twice a month

once every month

Any other.....

18. Friendship with other members is the final step towards assimilation of newly baptized members into the church.

disagree

not it sure

agree

19. Does the church have small group ministry that incorporates the newly baptized members for outreach ministry?

yes

no.

**B. Social factors**

20. What percentage of newly baptized members has left the church due to marital problems?

more than 40

30 – 40

20 – 30



15 – 20

less than 15

21. What percentage of newly baptized members has left the church due to family or personal disappointment?

more than 40

30 – 40

20 – 30

15 – 20

less than 15

22. Traditional or cultural heritage conflict with church values is one of the major social factors that has caused newly baptized members to the church.

disagree

not it sure

agree

23. When the newly baptized members fail to replace friends for their old life with friends within the congregation, chances of their leaving the church are high.

disagree

not it sure

agree

C. Health factors

24. What percentage of newly baptized members has left the church due to the effect of HIV/AIDS pandemic on them and their families?

more than 40

30 – 40

20 – 30

15 – 20

less than 15

25. Chronic illness and deaths of their loved ones made some of the newly baptized members to the church.

disagree

not it sure

agree

D. Economic factors

26. What percentage of newly baptized members left the church due to unemployment or loss of employment?

more than 40

30 – 40

20 – 30

15 – 20

less than 15

27. Poverty level is another cause of loss of newly baptized members.

disagree

not it sure

agree

28. How often has food shortage crisis caused loss of newly baptized members in your church?

more than twice every six months

twice every six months

once every six months

Any other.....

29. What percentage of newly baptized members has left the church due to buying and on Sabbath day?

more than 40

30 – 40

20 – 30

15 – 20

less than 15

Interview questions on how to nurture newly baptized members in CMC

1. What percentage of newly baptized members left the church in the period of 2000 – 2005?
2. Why this percentage? Give possible reasons.
3. What solutions could be put in place to retain the largest possible percentage?
4. Have you ever thought of spiritual enrichment as a solution for nurturing newly baptized members?
5. Can you list the activities which you have been following as a way of enhancing spiritual enrichment?
6. How often do you visit the newly baptized members?

7. Do you have a yearly plan for teaching your members how to nurture newly baptized members?
8. As a pastor/elder, do you plan and teach Adventist spiritual heritage?
9. How long does it take to invite the newly baptized members to participate on the platform?
10. Has the church ever put in place a program of encouraging the newly baptized members to pray and work for the conversion of souls?
11. Does the church leadership present a series of sermons on how to relate to newly baptized members? How often does this take place?
12. In what form does the church socially welcome its newly baptized members? Have you ever thought of a welcome banquet for the newly baptized members?
13. How does the church value relationship building as a way of nurturing newly baptized members? Explain.
14. How much time do the church members spend each week in developing an atmosphere of loving concern for the newly baptized members?
15. Has the church ever experienced a Christ-centered relationship with the newly baptized members?
16. Developing relationships with newly baptized members involves an ingredient of patience. In what ways does the church show patience towards the newly baptized members?
17. Does the church spend quality time together with the newly baptized members? Explain.

18. Is the congregation interested in more than just the spiritual life of the newly baptized members? Explain.
19. How has the church closed the “back door” for the newly baptized members?
20. Has the church established any acts of follow-up as a way of nurturing newly baptized members? What are they?
21. How long has it taken for the newly baptized members to establish friendships with older members as a way of assimilation?
22. Has the church ever planned to have small group’s ministry that will incorporate the newly baptized members? Give examples.
23. What percentage of the newly baptized members has left the church in 2000 – 2005 due to family or personal disappointments?
  - a. Numerically, how many newly baptized members were abandoned by their relatives after baptism?
  - b. Numerically how many left failing to meet their anticipated spiritual or material expectations?
24. What percentage of the newly baptized members has left the church in 2000 – 2005 due to marital problems?
  - a. Numerically, how many were divorced?
  - b. Numerically how many were separated?
25. Traditional or cultural heritage conflict is one of the major social factors that has caused some newly baptized members to the church. How has this affected your church? Cite some examples.

26. Have you experienced loss of newly baptized members through lack of social friends within the church? To what extent?
27. With the rising crisis of HIV/AIDS, has the church put in place plans to assist its affected newly baptized members to stay in the church? Explain.
28. What percentage of the newly baptized members has left the church in 2000 – 2005 due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic?
  - a) In what ways did they affect the church?
29. Chronic illnesses and deaths of their loved ones could probably impact newly baptized members to the church. How true is it?
30. How has lack of jobs or employment opportunities affected the newly baptized members?
31. What percentage of the newly baptized members has left the church in 2000 – 2005 due to job loss or employment?
32. Has the poverty level caused any loss of newly baptized members in your church? How?
33. Currently, is your newly baptized membership involved in buying or selling of commodities on the Sabbath day?
34. How was the newly baptized membership affected by this problem in the period of 2000 – 2005?

EVALUATION SURVEY FOR  
THE NEWLY-BAPTIZED MEMBERS

1. How often were you visited by your spiritual guardian for the past six months?

More than twice a month

twice a month

once every month

Any other.....

1. Did your spiritual guardian counsel you with love in all matters of spirituality?

Yes

no

2. How long did it take you to have a new friend within the congregation?

More than one month

within one month

less than one month

Any other.....

3. Do you see the importance of joining a small group in your church?

Yes

no

1. Have you joined any small groups?

Yes

no

2. How do you value the extended doctrinal classes?

Very valuable

of some value

of little value

3. The two music programs organized by the church improve the level of my spirituality. Do you agree?

Disagree

Not it sure

Agree

4. Were you willing and prepared to be involved in serving God two months after your baptism?

Yes

Not Sure

No

5. Did the family a seminars improve your relationship with your spouse or friend as a newly baptized person?

Yes

No

6. How did you rate the welcome banquet as far as your assimilation into the church was concerned?

Very valuable

not valuable

4

3

2

1

7. Did you get the right perspective of Sabbath keeping from the Sabbath keeping seminar?

Yes



No

8. Spiritually, how important were the revival meetings to you?

Very important

not important

4

3

2

1

9. The HIV/AIDS versus salvation seminar changed my perspective of those who are affected by the pandemic to see them as candidates for heaven. Do you agree or disagree?

Disagree

Not it sure

Agree

10. Economically, how helpful was the economic empowering seminar?

very helpful

of some help

not helpful

11. Has the whole program grounded your Jesus Christ?

yes

no

Evaluation interview questions for church officers

1. How effective was the program both to the church and the newly baptized members?

2. In your opinion, did the program achieve its goal? If yes, how?

3. How would you rate the participation of old members in this program?

4. How prepared was the church as far as this program was concerned?

5. Do you think it is necessary to continue with this program? If yes, why?
6. What did you like most about the program?
7. What should be added or subtracted the next time the program is presented?

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

### PERSONAL DETAILS

NAME: MOFFAT WONDERSON BOTOLO  
DATE OF BIRTH: 30<sup>TH</sup> JULY 1962  
MARITAL STATUS: MARRIED  
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Position: University Chaplain and Associate Lecturer, 2007 to present

Academic: BA Degree, University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, Kenya, 2002.

Ministerial Diploma, Lakeview, Ntcheu, Malawi, 1990.

Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE), Chichiri Secondary School, Blantyre, Malawi, 1984.

Work Place: University Chaplain and Associate Lecturer, Adventist University of Malawi, 2007 to present.

Acting Dean of Students, Adventist University of Malawi, 2007 to 2008.

District Pastor, Lakeview.2006 to 2007.

Stewardship Director, Central Malawi Conference, 2004 to 2006.

District Pastor, Ntcheu, 1998.

District Pastor, Mchinji, 1994 to 1997.

District Pastor, Salima, 1992 to 1994.

District Pastor, Kawale, 1991.