

PROJECT ABSTRACT

Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: A STRATEGY TO RETAIN MEMBERS IN MBITA CENTRAL SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH, KENYA LAKE CONFERENCE

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Date completed: June 2016

It has been observed that many members are leaving Mbita Central Seventh-day Adventist Church. Yet there seem to be no specific strategies that the leaders of the church have put in place to nurture and retain members. The aim of this study, therefore, was to discover the reasons why members join the church and leave it after a short time. The researcher designed integrated programs which eventually results in reaching many members and bring them back to the church as well as retain them as active members.

The designed programs intended to enable church members to be participants in the church life rather than spectators. The programs were implemented at Mbita Central Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, some other activities required the researcher to move out of the church to other places deemed relevant for the study. The designed program targeted several different groups of people, including those who had left the church and the current members.

After developing and implementing an integrated strategy, the program not only reclaimed former members but also added other new members to the church. Many church members and leaders became more knowledgeable of the church policy and doctrines as the level of participation by local church members increased by 62%. Recommendations were made to Mbita Central SDA church and Kenya Lake Conference on matters pertaining to adoption of the designed program in times of church membership challenges, good management of church finances and bursaries, embracing new scientific age and advancement in all facets of church life and involving youths for active participation to enhance effective church growth.

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A project

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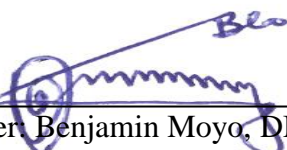
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Dedicated to God for providing me with good health and understanding of my work,
to my beloved wife, Hellen, and my dear children, Barkey, Leezah, Joy,
Leenar-M, Anne-K, and Junior Charles for their support, and to my
beloved parents Margaret and Habakkuk who sacrificed to pay
my high school education costs that later propelled me to
acquire tertiary and university education.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Program design and implementation requires the input and involvement of many people, and this research project is not exceptional. I am, therefore, grateful and indebted to the following people for their various efforts and contributions, and without whom the success of this work could not have been attained. Hellen, my beloved wife, encouraged me in every step of the work, especially on matters that touched on women and children. Her patience, experience, and facilitation during seminars bore fruits to the work. Our children, Barkey and Leezah, typed the manuscript, while Joy, Leenar-M, Anne-K, and Junior Charles sacrificed particular times that we always shared together. Dr. Nathaniel Walemba, my project advisor, in close collaboration with my project reader, Dr. Benjamin Moyo, continuously encouraged me and consistently navigated me throughout the research work. Mbita Central Seventh-day Adventist Church allowed me to undertake the research program in their church. The cooperation I got from the church leadership and members is worth appreciation. Former members of the church played an integral part in the work. The Kenya Lake Executive Committee gave me invaluable moral and material support any time I needed it. My mother, Margaret, even though not able to clearly understand what all these entailed, persistently and consistently prayed for the work. To my work mates, friends, fellow students with whom I interacted a lot, and my siblings and other relatives, thank you all.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Mbita Central Seventh-day Adventist Church is about 70 kilometers from Kenya Lake Conference headquarters, the place where the Seventh-day Adventist Church started operating in Kenya more than 105 years ago. The Church started as a Company in 1961 with a membership of 46. It was organized and dedicated in 1984 and 2001 respectively. The membership of the church at the time of the organization was 228. This membership increased up to 421 when the church was dedicated.

Several evangelistic campaigns have brought the total to 648 regular members as of June 2014. There are other 128 Sabbath school members excluding children aged below 12 years unevenly spread in other two companies making up Mbita Central Church, namely Nyamanga and Kombe. The annual average of new members received into the church through baptism, transfer, and profession of faith at Mbita Central SDA Church was recorded as 74.

However, according to the church records of June 2014, only 186 church members and 64 un-baptized Sabbath school members are active. Considering this trend, it is projected that the church's yearly membership growth and drop will be about 346 active members against 1,314 registered members by the year 2020 which would translate to about fifty-eight percent drop in percentile measure.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the seemingly steady growth in membership at Mbita Central SDA Church, a task force survey done by the nurture and retention committee between the years 2012 and 2014 indicated that many members have left the church. The trend showed that the most affected group of membership is the youth whose church membership, according to Orondo [with permission],¹ constitutes 62 percent. The record shows that 48% of young widows have also left the church.

Orondo confirms that an average of 44 members leaves the church every year. From his annual membership statistical report, the number of members who left the church through apostasy averages 18, while another 7 members leave the church through death. The records further indicated that annually, 6 members leave the church by letter of transfer while the whereabouts of 13 other members remained unknown.

It is observable that while many members come into the church, many others leave through the back door, which has drawn the researcher's attention to the need for membership retention strategy for Mbita Central SDA Church.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study, therefore, was to develop a program that enabled church leaders to retain members in the church. The study enhanced the researchers' understanding of the reasons why many members entered and then left the church after a short time and also the relationship between satisfaction with attributes of worship and church member characteristics.

¹ Philemon Orondo, Church Clerk, Mbita Central SDA Church, interview by the author, Mbita, 12 July, 2014.

The designed strategy will help to retain new and current members by increasing their participation levels. It focused on maintaining enthusiasm, participation of all members in church programs, projects, continuous learning, and fellowship activities by 90% in two years' time. This ultimately allows members to identify, develop, utilize their spiritual gifts, skills, and talents and become responsible disciples.

Significance of the Study

Considering the fact that study and program development to nurture and retain members of Mbita Central Seventh-day Adventist Church seems not to have been formally done or implemented, the church administrators could find the results of the study useful in understanding the factors that influence a member's decision to leave the church. Kenya Lake Conference administration may use the designed program in other churches faced with similar challenges. The strategy will also help in reclaiming the former members and retain them for effective evangelism.

Delimitation of the Study

While membership retention is said to be a problem in the whole West Kenya Union Conference, the focus of this study will be on Mbita Central Seventh-day Adventist Church only.

Methodology and Procedure

In order to develop and implement a program of membership retention at Mbita Central Seventh-day Adventist Church, the researcher used both qualitative and quantitative approaches to find facts. He, therefore, scrutinized the existing church records for such facts, particularly on church membership, baptisms, transfers, deaths, and discipline to help reach authentic conclusions.

In chapter two, the researcher focuses on several theoretical foundations of retention as found in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible and other literary works of notable authors. In chapter three, the researcher outlines the discussions held with the old and youthful church members on the subject (See Appendix A). He conducted interviews to find out why particular members left the church. The results were a valuable addition to membership retention program strategy.

Local church leaders are an integral human resource in matters pertaining to the daily spiritual life, management, and retention of church members. Accordingly, the researcher conducted interviews with the leaders in regard to the general trend of members leaving the church and, as well, relied on some other authentic sources.

In order to get to the root of the problem and challenges to membership retention, the researcher developed questionnaires as shown in Appendix B and administered them to some former members and present members of the church. The responses they gave provided authentic sources for reference and consideration.

In chapter four, the researcher presents a program designed for implementation that is intended to enhance retention levels. The recommended strategy is based on facts gathered with details shown in Appendix C, discussions, questionnaires, oral interviews, and existing church records. Emphasis is put on the implementation of the developed program. After the full implementation of the said program, the researcher performed an evaluation of the project program.

Finally, in chapter five, the researcher summarizes the work, makes the necessary observations and formulates recommendations to the local church and conference for adoption and future implementation in other local churches that could be faced with the same challenges.

Definition of terms

Actual Members – Church members who are physically present and participate in church activities.

Back door – Expression indicating baptized members leaving church.

Baptism – Being fully immersed into water as a public demonstration and confession to be a follower of Christ.

Believers – Those who confess to be followers of Christ especially through baptism.

Church – Members worshipping together at a distinctive agreed place or a building where Christian members assemble to worship together and perform sacred services.

Church Membership – A number of baptized members in a church.

Company – Church branch that has not yet been organized and not voted nor received into the sisterhood of churches.

Disciple – Active baptized member of the Christian church.

Fellowship – Sharing together as members of a Christian congregation.

Front door – Expression indicating baptized members coming into church.

General Conference – The highest church administrative level that oversees the operations of the Seventh-day Adventist Church worldwide.

General Conference Executive Committee – A group of elected members of the church usually voted at a session at the General Conference to oversee the operations of the church globally in between sessions.

Jua Kali Sector – Informal organization of local artisans in different vocations. Jua Kali literally means “Hot Sun” signifying the artisans’ open air environment of work.

Local Conference – Church administrative entity that oversees the operations of the congregations in a given geographical area.

Local Union – Church administrative entity that oversees the operations of local conferences and fields in a given geographical area.

Nominal Member – A church member who seldom participates in church activities and programs.

Organized Church – Church members consecrated and set aside to work as an organized community of faith.

Retention – To have members stay in church as they actively participate in church activities.

Sabbath Day – The biblical day of worship/rest.

Sabbath School Membership – All members worshipping in a church with no regard to baptism.

Sabbath School Program – The first programs on Sabbath morning conducted just before the divine hour service and considered as the “Heart of the Church” because of the Bible Study that takes place.

Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual – An authoritative manual that contains procedures and the SDA Church beliefs.

Spiritual Maturity – Expression indicating that members are able to well understand and execute whatever is required of them as faithful disciples of Christ.

World Divisions – Regional branches of the General Conference of SDA Church that supervise Unions.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF THE STUDY

This chapter focuses on the theoretical basis upon which the study builds. Its first concern is a biblical foundation for retention and nurture found in both the Old and New Testaments. It starts with a brief definition of retention according to the understanding of notable authors. It then focuses on Moses' concept of retention in dealing with the rebellious Jews and on Jesus and His dealing with Nicodemus and Zacchaeus. The chapter also looks at the views of the SDA Church in matters pertaining to retention of members with particular focus on the views of Ellen G. White and other SDA authors. The chapter concludes by making special considerations of literal works and views from scholars and authors from the Catholic Church in regard to the needs and challenges of retention of church members.

Membership Retention

Definition

McMullen [2005] observes that all voluntary organizations, growth and vitality are as a result of twin processes: recruitment and retention.¹ He asserts that this is especially true of religious congregations as both clergy and laity struggle to not only bring new members through the front door, but also to retain them as contributing participants in the life of the congregation. He further says that we

¹L. G. McMullen, *Keeping Members in Church* (Chicago, IL: Hancock Center Publications, July 2005), 83.

should, therefore, not only make enormous efforts for membership growth, but also put more emphasis on membership retention.²

The pertinent question, therefore, is: What is membership retention? Both Wikipedia encyclopedia and Webster dictionary define retention as the act of keeping in your possession, the act of withholding, restraint, and keeping personnel or members within an organization from departing. These give a simple definition of membership retention as a condition of keeping members [in the church]. Membership retention is, therefore, the ability to maintain the current members while initiating or continuing the process of overall membership growth.

Importance of Retention

Davis [2012] explains why retention of members in our churches is important. He says that “retention of members provides continuity [and] development for leaders.” He emphasizes that “a strong membership base allows the church to meet the service needs of our community.” Davis notes that pastors have a great deal of influence among the members in church, yet they cannot manage everything themselves³ [without the efforts and support of the local church membership]. He believes that for a church to achieve its membership goals, it should “develop a retention plan that focuses on maintaining high levels of enthusiasm.”⁴

² Ibid., 83.

³ Steve Davis, “Membership Caring and Retention,” accessed August 28, 2012, www.stevedavis.org/membershipcaringandretention.html

⁴ Ibid.

Moses and Retention

In the Old Testament, efforts to nurture and retain even the most rebellious and idolatrous members of Israel community can be seen in Moses' ministry.

These were the words of God to Moses: "Go get thee down [for] thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves: they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it" (Deut 9:12, KJV).

The Israel community had rebelled against Him. Matthew Henry's Bible commentary asserts: "That was a sin so heinous, and by several aggravations made so exceedingly sinful, that they deserved upon all occasions to be upbraided with it [since] it was done in the very place where the Law was given to Moses. The situation at Mount Sinai indicates how God's covenant with His people had deliberately been disannulled."⁵

And God told Moses: "Let Me alone, that My wrath may wax hot against them, and I may consume them: and will make of thee a great nation" (Deut 9:14 KJV).

And God told Moses: "Let Me alone, that My wrath may wax hot against them, and I may consume them: and will make of thee a great nation" (Deut 9:14 KJV).

The Interpreter's Bible explains that "world literature contains few finer spiritual portraits than that of Moses agonizing in prayer for his people, to seek forgiveness for their sins, to contend with God for them, even to ask to be blotted out

⁵ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Genesis to Deuteronomy* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co.), 378.

if they must be rejected.”⁶ Moses besought the Lord his God, and said: “Lord, why doth Thy wrath wax hot against Thy people, whom Thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and mighty hand?” (Deut 9:26 KJV).

“God was pleased with Moses’ faithfulness, his simplicity of heart, and his integrity and He committed to him, as a faithful shepherd, the great charge of leading Israel to the Promised Land.”⁷ In the same vein, Ellen G. White indicates that “the Lord was very angry with Aaron to have destroyed him (Deut 9:20). But in answer to the earnest intercession of Moses, his life was spared; and in penitence and humiliation for his great sin, he was restored to the favor of God.”⁸

Worancha sees the spirit of membership retention in Moses. He claims:

But later, as the Holy Spirit convinced him [Moses], he became a great witness not only in Egypt but also in times of direct confrontation between God and His rebellious people, and if not, he was not afraid to request God to remove his own name from the book of life as well (Exod 32:32). What a love and concern for an unlovable, disobedient nation!⁹

Burrill gives Jethro’s suggestion [to Moses] as a very simple example of the Old Testament member caring [nurturing]. He regards Jethro’s model as an effective strategy that provides people with the power to care for each other. This enhances retention since every member participates in the service of member caring. He says: “Jethro immediately noticed major problem with Moses’ leadership style. He had reverted to the pyramid style of leadership with which he had grown up in Egypt. As a

⁶ G. Ernest Wright, *Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon, 1953), 2:394-395.

⁷ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1970), 1:338.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Gebre Worancha, *I Must Preach this Gospel: God’s Mission and Accountability of His Church in this End-time* (Pajusi, South Korea: Everlasting Publishing, 2009), 19.

result, Moses was exhausted and had no time for his family; and the people were not in community with each other or with God.”¹⁰

He feels that

In the Jethro model, Moses went from being the one who passed judgment to being one who oversaw the judgment of others. [And] as the churches adopt the Jethro model of leadership, the pastor/church leader will no longer be the chief care giver and decision maker in the church. Instead, leadership will be diffused among the people and all the people of God will be empowered [retained] for ministry.¹¹

The Jethro model enhanced retention. Every member was taken care of by fellow members. Spiritual and physical needs were met at the right time. In the event, members grew in faith and were in community and fellowship with each other and God. It can clearly be concluded that despite the fact that the Israelites were a stubborn and rebellious community, Moses retained them until his [Moses’] death.

Retention: Jesus and Nicodemus

White [2001, 139] says this of Nicodemus:

Nicodemus held a high position of trust in the Jewish nation. He was highly educated and possessed talents of no ordinary character, and he was an honored member of the national council. The lessons that had fallen from the Savior’s lips had greatly impressed him, and he desired to learn more of these wonderful truths. He greatly desired an interview with Jesus, but shrank from seeking Him openly ... but resolved upon a secret interview ... and waited until the city was hushed in slumber, and then sought Him. He received the lesson from Jesus, and carried it with him. He searched the Scriptures in a new way, not for the discussion of a theory, but in order to receive life for the soul. He began to see the kingdom of heaven as he submitted himself to the leading of the Holy Spirit.¹²

¹⁰ Russell C. Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Books, 1998), 98.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

¹² Ellen G White, *Desire of Ages* (Harare, Zimbabwe: Eastern Africa Division Publishing House, 2001), 139-140.

White further explains that, in a council of the Sanhedrin, when the course to be pursued toward Jesus was considered, Nicodemus advised caution and moderation. He urged that if Jesus was really invested with authority from God, it would be perilous to reject His warnings. The priests dared not disregard this counsel, and for the time they took no open measures against the Savior.¹³

It is notable that retention through discipleship produces a mature member who will continue winning souls even amidst spiritual peril. Such men and women will be able to proclaim the truth despite any opposition and pressure. Nicodemus was nurtured and fed with truth by the Savior to propagate to all.

White explains that

Jesus was acquainted with the soil into which He cast the seed. The words spoken at night to one listener in the lonely mountain were not lost. For a time, Nicodemus did not publicly acknowledge Christ, but he watched His life, and pondered His teachings. In the Sanhedrin council he repeatedly thwarted the scheme of the priests to destroy Him. When at last Jesus was lifted up on the cross, Nicodemus remembered the teaching upon Olivet: ‘As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.’ The light from that secret interview illuminated the cross upon Calvary, and Nicodemus saw in Jesus the world’s Redeemer.¹⁴

White concludes this by asserting that

After the Lord’s ascension, when the disciples were scattered by persecution, Nicodemus came boldly to the front. He employed his wealth in sustaining the infant church that the Jews had expected to be blotted out at the death of Christ. In the time of peril, he who had been so cautious and questioning was firm as a rock, encouraging the faith of the disciples, and furnishing means to carry forward the work of the gospel. He became poor in this world’s goods; yet he faltered not in the faith which had its beginning in that night conference with Jesus.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid., 140.

¹⁴ Ibid., 146.

¹⁵ Ibid., 147.

Jesus firmly laid the spiritual foundation that remained a compass point in his spiritual journey. Being a highly placed member of the clergy initially opposed to the Christian movement, Christ's teachings nurtured him to the everlasting truth and retained him to be an ardent member of the Christian movement after Christ's death and ascension.

Retention: Jesus and Zacchaeus

Zacchaeus is described by White as

The chief among publicans, a Jew and detested by his countrymen. His rank and wealth were the reward of a calling they abhorred, and which was regarded as another name for injustice and extortion [But] beneath the appearance of worldliness and pride was a heart susceptible to divine influence.¹⁶

Zacchaeus had heard about Jesus, the One who had borne Himself with kindness and courtesy toward the proscribed classes. White believes that "only a few miles from Jericho, John the Baptist had preached at the Jordan, and Zacchaeus had heard of the call to repentance. Now, hearing the words reported to have come from the Great Teacher, he felt that he was a sinner in the sight of God. Yet what he had heard of Jesus kindled hope in his heart."¹⁷

Jesus cared for those in need and for those rejected by society. Having accepted Jesus' initiative, Zacchaeus becomes generous with his resources, even seeking to make restitution for past wrongs. According to White, "Zacchaeus began at once to follow

¹⁶ Ibid., 482.

¹⁷ Ibid., 483

the conviction that had taken hold upon him, and to make restitution to those whom he had wronged.”¹⁸

White says that

The streets were crowded, and Zacchaeus, who was small of stature, could see nothing over the heads of the people and [therefore] climbed to a seat among the boughs [of a fig tree], whence he could survey the procession as it passed below. Suddenly, just beneath the fig tree, a group halts, the company before and behind come to a standstill, and One looks upward whose glance seems to read the soul [and says], Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house.¹⁹

As sinful as Zacchaeus could be regarded in the sight of the people, a call to ministry is extended to him by One whose love to a repentant sinner is beyond measure. He is to be retained among the pious disciples to testify of the love of God.

Wheat and Tares: Jesus' Version

Christ in a parable to hearers said of a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while the man slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.... Jesus concluded His parable by saying that “Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.” (Matt 13:24-30). This is a model of nurture and retention for the church. No member should be discouraged from participating in church programs because of assumed sin or weakness. All are invited to be disciples and candidates of heaven until the time when the Master Himself will receive His selected saints.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Christ calls the elderly and the spiritually mature members to nurture and retain the young and new members of the church. This will enhance church growth and discipleship (Titus 2:3-5). This must be done at the family level and the church. The character of every believer must be distinctive enough to call non-believers into church.

The church, as apostle Paul writes to the Thessalonians church, must comfort the feeble minded, support the weak and be patient toward all men. This is a nurture and retention strategy that made this church to grow to spiritual maturity (1Thess 5:14-15). Likewise, Paul exhorts the Galatian church that it is brotherly love that fulfills the Law of God. Every believer is required to bear one another's burden and to fulfill the Law of Christ (Gal 6:1-2, 1 Pet 5:1-3, John 20:18-20, Rom 14:1).

The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Retention

In November 2012, Andrews University's Office of Research & Creative Scholarship, sponsored by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists' Office of Archives, Statistics & Research, hosted the first Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Human-Subject Researchers, titled "Towards New Horizons in Adventist Research". There, about 50 attendees from Andrews University and other Adventist universities gathered for two days on Andrews' campus for a number of presentations in fields including psychology, sociology, Christian leadership, and informatics. Many of the presentations focused on the behavior of Adventist youth populations, global church communities, and pastoral families. These presentations provided valuable data for the General Conference, and helped them institute new policies or modify existing ones to promote the wellbeing of their members.²⁰

²⁰ Andrews University, Office of Research and Creative Scholarship, "Towards New Horizons in Adventist Research," November 2014, accessed 3

As Andrews University conference reached its conclusion, a second conference was planned for November 2013 and was held at the General Conference Headquarters in Silver Spring, MD. Its focus was “Discipling, Retaining & Reclaiming: Summit on Nurture and Retention.” It included Adventist scholars, church leaders, and representatives from all 13 world divisions of the church.²¹

This first global summit focusing on Seventh-day Adventist Church membership retention revealed the rate and reasons why members slip out of the back door. The participants/leaders looked at the reality of church exodus ... and examined data, which is offering a clear picture of trends beyond long held assumptions gained from anecdotal evidence.²² This was the first time the matter was spotlighted in such a major way, prompting church leaders to renew their emphasis on making fruitful and growing disciples of Christ. The global summit organizers realized that the Adventist World Church, now with nearly 18 million members, had lost at least one out of three Seventh-day Adventist members in the last 50 years. It was also noted that during this century the ratio of people lost versus new converts is 43 to 100.²³

Monte Sahlin says: “The reasons people drop out of the church often have less to do with what the church does and its doctrines, but with problems people experience in their personal lives, marital conflicts, or unemployment.”²⁴ Sahlin

February 2015, http://www.andrews.edu/services/research/research_highlights/research_brochure/2013_brochure/human_subject_researchers/index.html.

²¹ Ibid.

²² General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, “At First Retention Summit, Leaders Look at Reality of Church Exodus,” *Adventist News Network*, accessed November 12, 2013, <http://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2013-11-19/at-first-retention-summit-leaders-look-at-reality-of-church-exodus>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

continues to say that the notion of people dropping out because of something the church does or a doctrinal disagreement is not apparent in the data [since] it's been shown that a member of a church board is just as likely to disagree with one of the church's 28 Fundamental Beliefs as someone who's been disfellowshipped.²⁵

Several presentations in the summit showed that the Adventist Church has learned how to better conduct more realistic outreach from the past examples. For example, the summit realized that when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, many Adventist groups sponsored extravagant evangelism events, supported by mass choirs and large multi-screen presentations. But while many sponsoring organizations were eager for the once-in-a-generation chance, many newly baptized converts joined the church thinking it was their ticket to gaining their own wealth. The church there lacked a long term strategy and denominational infrastructure, and most of those new converts soon stopped attending church.²⁶

Inflating baptismal numbers by pastors was identified as another factor that may indicate an increase in membership, but in actual sense not true. Lack of consistence in reporting, therefore, contributes to immense "membership drop" in most occasions. It was observed that, at times, there were pressures from higher organizations which made pastors inflate such baptismal numbers in order to benefit from the inflated number as appropriation of church resources is dependent on membership.

In the same vein, the Research Director, Trim, revealed that "30 percent of church clerks in one particular Division [of the World Church] had been pressured to

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

inflate baptismal numbers.”²⁷ The summit emphasized the need to increase membership audits by Divisions as a way out of combatting incidences of membership inflation in some regions. Several regions have made the audits a priority, including South America, South East Asia, and West Africa.²⁸

Ellen G. White’s Views on Retention

“The real character of the church is measured, not by the high profession she makes, not by the names enrolled upon the church book, but by what she is actually doing for the Master and by the number of her persevering faithful workers.”²⁹ She further explains that “personal interest and vigilant individual effort will accomplish more for the cause of Christ than sermons or creeds.”³⁰

White feels that each member of the church has a role to play in retaining fellow church members. She reminds us as children of God to be our brother keepers as the Lord holds the church responsible for the souls of those whom they might be the means of saving.³¹

She expects every follower of Christ to do missionary work. This would bring light to the perishing world and help retain the members who have already received the light. She says that every follower of Christ has to do missionary work for Christ

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ellen G. White, “Scattered Churches,” *Review and Herald*, September 6, 1880, accessed 8 July 2014, <http://egwtext.whiteestate.org/publication.php?pubtype=Periodical&bookCode=RH&lang=en&year=1881&month=September&day=6¶grahReferences=1>.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ellen G. White, *Historical Sketches* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 291.

in the family (the church), in the neighborhood, in town, or city where he lives. All who are consecrated to God are channels of light. God makes them instruments of righteousness to communicate to others the light of truth.³²

White further states that “we [believers] are to be consecrated channels, through which the heavenly life is to flow to others. The Holy Spirit is to animate and pervade the whole church, purifying and cementing hearts.”³³

She continues to attest to the fact that in as much as there are souls outside to be saved, there are several souls in the church that also need to be saved and retained for service. She, therefore, feels that

“Every soul is to be a bright and shining light, showing forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. We are laborers together with God. Yes, laborers; that means doing earnest service in the vineyard of the Lord. There are souls to be saved, souls in our churches, in our Sabbath schools, and in our neighborhoods.”³⁴

White believes that when church members work for others, they become more grounded and retained in the faith as she says: “It is in working for others that they will keep their own souls alive. If they will become co-laborers with Jesus, we shall see the light in our churches steadily burning brighter and brighter, sending forth its rays to penetrate the darkness beyond their own borders.”³⁵

She continues to explain that “well organized work must be done in the church, that its members may understand how to impart the light to others, and thus

³² Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 2:632.

³³ *Ibid.*, 9:20.

³⁴ Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, 24 March 1891.

³⁵ White, *Historical Sketches*, 291

strengthen their own faith and increase their knowledge. As they impart that which they have received from God, they will be confirmed in the faith.”³⁶

White has a strong conviction that “a working church is a living church. We are built up as living stones, and every stone is to emit light. Every Christian is compared to a precious stone that catches the glory of God and reflects it.”³⁷

She believes that every member of the church is to be nurtured [for spiritual growth] and retained in the church no matter how sinful he/she may seem. White thinks the same about Judas, the disciple of Jesus. She wrote: “The Savior did not repulse Judas. He gave him a place among the twelve. He trusted him with power to heal the sick and to cast out devils. But Judas did not come to the point of surrendering himself fully to Christ. He did not give up his worldly ambition or his love of money.”³⁸

Christ’s forbearance was manifested when He assigned the very sensitive position of maintaining and keeping all the accounts in His ministry to Judas. He knew from onset that Judas would indeed betray Him. But Christ designated this important portfolio and others in the same way He did to other disciples presumed closer to him. The Christian church today should emulate Christ’s model. He loved Judas and never removed him from the ministry. White observes that

At the Passover supper, Jesus proved His divinity by revealing the traitor’s purpose. He tenderly included Judas in the ministry to the disciples. But the last appeal of love was unheeded yet Jesus spoke no word of condemnation. He looked pityingly upon Judas, and said, for this hour came I into the world.

³⁶ White, *Testimonies*, 6:435.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 630.

A murmur of surprise ran through the assembly. With amazement they beheld the forbearance of Christ toward His betrayer.³⁹

White strongly feels that the church membership should consist of spiritually mature members who will not only stay in church but also make active disciples to proclaim the Word. To her, large numbers entering the church would not be of higher focus than when these new converts and old members may be endowed with some virtues that can make them participate actively in the church. She, therefore, says that

Our success must not be judged on the basis of numeric growth but on our faithfulness to the Lord's instruction. If you lower the standard in order to secure popularity and an increase of numbers, and make this increase a cause of rejoicing, you show great blindness. If numbers were an evidence of success, Satan might claim the pre-eminence; for, in this world, his followers are largely in the majority. It is the virtue, intelligence, and piety of the people composing our churches, not their numbers that should be a source of joy and thankfulness.⁴⁰

Other SDA Authors' Views on Retention

Roughly sixty percent of Americans reared in what is defined as the "Adventist Family" of churches, a grouping of Protestants dominated by Seventh-day Adventists, remain in that family as adults.⁴¹ Based on interviews with more than 35,000 Americans aged 18 and older, the survey found out that religious affiliation in the U.S. is at once "very diverse and extremely fluid. However, all Protestant denominational families lose a considerable number of childhood adherents to the ranks of unaffiliated."⁴²

³⁹ Ibid., 633-635.

⁴⁰ White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, 94.

⁴¹ Mark A., Kellner, "Adventists Often Stay Adventist, Pew Survey Shows," *Adventist News Network*, 27 February 2008, accessed 13 May 2013, <https://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2008-02-27/adventists-often-stay-adventist-pew-survey-shows/>.

⁴² Ibid.

Worancha says that

The Bible clearly indicates that baptism is NOT the end of preaching or end of duty and responsibility. Rather, Jesus continued saying teach them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). So, something should be done for this new person or new believer to become mature. What he/she lacks is maturity in his/her new Christian experience toward Christian perfection in Christ. For this reason Jesus said that ‘Teaching them to observe all things.’ [To make them stay in faith and church], (Emphasis supplied).⁴³

Worancha’s further concern is that the world church, the Christian community, is facing great challenges of losing hundreds and thousands of newly baptized members of the church as they leave the church or backslide. I have seen and heard stories about hundreds of converts being baptized and brought into church membership. Unfortunately, fifty to sixty percent of them leave the church within the shortest time possible.⁴⁴ It takes a lot of time, energy, prayer, hard work and finance to bring one person to the baptism pool and then to church membership. But I remind you that it is very easy or it takes just a day or the shortest time possible for majority of the converts to leave their faith in God and in their new church. Therefore, ... [there is a need] to set up or establish some quality methods to assist the church in order to close the back doors of the church from allowing members to backslide or leave the church and at the same time lead others to join the church. These attempts can be helpful for both new and old church members.⁴⁵ To produce a quality Christian Church takes dedicated committed minister of the Gospel, dedicated church members, officers, good programs, and good working relationship. It takes quality time, means, persons, thinking, effort, commitment, relationship, talking, and involvement of

⁴³ Worancha, 199.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 195.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

members. If the church members do their part in caring and sharing their lives with the newly baptized brothers and sisters, certainly the new members will love to stay in the church. Not only staying but also they will serve their God and their people sincerely by following the old members' example.⁴⁶

The 151st GC of SDA Church Annual Statistical Report for 2013 and 2014 indicate that in 2014, a total of 1,167,796 people became Seventh-day Adventists by baptism and profession of faith—an average of 133 every hour across the whole year. The report further shows that the global program of membership audits in the 2010-2015 quinquennium has had a major impact on statistics. It indicates that, in all, 3,068,141 church members were dropped from membership or recorded as missing over the last five years (2010 through 2014), while 261,888 deaths were reported. The report says that in the same five years, a total of 5,563,377 church members were added by baptism or profession of faith. The report sadly concludes that while we praise God for these souls, we are chastened by the loss rates.⁴⁷

In the same General Conference session, Gustin, a veteran missiologist and one of the delegates, alerted the listeners that we have to constantly remember that evangelism is not an event, it is a process. The nurturing process [to retain members] is ongoing, even for us today. We must never give the impression that once someone comes into our fellowship that it's all over.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Ibid., 207.

⁴⁷ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Office of Archives, Statistics and Research, *151st GC Annual Statistical Report for 2013 and 2014* (Silver Spring, MA: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2015).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Another vice president at the session, Michael L. Ryan, added that the difference between areas where new congregations thrive and those where the local church falters is that, in successful areas, there has been a developed culture of nurture [to retain members]. Not only are the members retained, but the congregation will grow, and you can see it as a very prominent trait in some areas of the world.⁴⁹ Ajibade, a West African region delegate, noted that “the church should measure growth by the number of disciples created, not just baptisms.”⁵⁰

While contributing to the Ministry magazine of June 2010 on the topic “Sharing the Hope Again,” Folkenberg gives the example of Upper Columbia Conference of SDAs “which has focused their training and mobilized their efforts on resourcing to organize local outreach teams that fanned out across the community, knocking on doors, doing surveys, and starting many Bible studies”⁵¹ with the ultimate aim of retaining members.

Gane, a prominent author on youth ministry, believes that “the dynamics of a caring and serving Christian Community fosters retention particularly amongst the youth.”⁵² He asserts this on such a community: “Community [entails] relationships in which individuals [are] bonded together with Christ and one another. There is an atmosphere of warmth, love and acceptance; sacrifices are made for the good of

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Barry Gane, *Building Youth Ministry* (Riverside, CA: Hancock Center Publications, 2005), 53.

others. Spiritual growth is nurtured through the Word and the teaching of the apostles.”⁵³

This enhances retention. The back door is closed for any exit from church membership. The SDA Church Manual, which is the authoritative church policy book on doctrine and biblical principles, states that

The Savior’s commission to the church to carry the gospel to the entire world (Matthew 28: 19, 20; Mark 16:15) meant not only preaching the gospel but ensuring the welfare of those who accepted the message. This involved shepherding as well as housing the flock, and also meeting relationship problems.⁵⁴

Zackrisson explains the concept of discipleship as “the process of church membership to involve the entire experience of the old and new members.”⁵⁵ He further asserts that

The process does not stop at the moment of baptism, as is all too often the case. Local churches and districts need to develop ways and means of including full discipleship process in their regular ‘church life’ ... the ultimate goal of any retention program is the on-going development of discipleship in the lifestyle of the church member. ... Church membership should produce dynamic changes in lifestyle, attitude, understanding and commitment to the cause of the Lord.⁵⁶

In their final draft, a special committee formed by the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to look on ways to conserve Membership Gains through membership retention and the reclaiming of former members reported that

Although the Seventh-day Adventist Church baptized over 5 million people from 2000 – 2005 ... membership losses, for reasons other than death, equal

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 18th Ed. (Hagerstown, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), 28.

⁵⁵ W. James Zackrisson, “Assimilating and Retaining New Members in the Church,” Temporary Internet Files/OLK10.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

approximately 28 percent of membership accessions. Some membership loss occurs among recent converts, however, this tragic outcome is not limited to new members.⁵⁷

In their report, they emphasized:

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 [by] 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.⁵⁸

Ravhengani, in his article, “*Effective New Members Retention Strategy Must Go Beyond Programs*,” rightly observes that “a series of outreach events and activities are not enough to keep new members coming to church. Instead, our initiatives should focus on transforming the life and the conduct of the local church. And [therefore] we need a retention strategy.”⁵⁹

He further reasons that

The influence of the local church environment on new members cannot be underestimated. If we view the church as a fish tank, public campaigns and other forms of evangelism equal [to] catching fish [and] bring them back to our “fish tank.” If the tank is contaminated, it doesn’t matter how well we feed the fish or how much we lecture the existing fish to accept the new ones. Our concern is often the most obvious—those fish that die in our tank, or who leave the church.⁶⁰

Other Authors’ Views on Retention

Burrill appreciates the role of John Wesley’s Methodism and its impact on revivals, member caring and retention when he says:

⁵⁷ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Executive Committee, “Conserving Membership Gains – An Appeal,” Silver Spring, MD: 2007.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ravhengani Mashudu, “Effective New Members Retention Strategy Must Go Beyond Programs,” 02 November 2010, South Africa.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

The Wesley revivals in America have left an indelible mark on American religious history. Their methodical way of not just preaching Christ, but organizing the new believers into classes or small groups where members provided care for each other, was probably the reason for the lasting impact of Methodism on the American scene.⁶¹

Burrill explains that great revivals also followed preachers like John Whitfield. He asserts that

However, many of his [Whitfield] converts did not endure. One possible reason may well have been the fact that Whitfield's was a clergy revival and failed to follow up with ministry of the laity [to provide member care]; whereas Wesley's revival resulted in converts being retained. This was no doubt due to the fact that Wesley organized class meetings led by laity [that enhanced member care and retention].⁶²

It is, therefore, evident that in the early Methodist class meetings, the emphasis was not on doctrine, but on discipleship [that would enhance retention].⁶³

The whole purpose of these meetings was to hold people accountable. He formed these classes so that his converts could grow into spiritual maturity. The emphasis was clearly relational and the purpose was discipleship.⁶⁴ He implanted a strong desire [in members] that Christians do not merely accept Christ as Savior, but that they mature in their relationship with Him.

Stewart [2001], in his work, "100% Convert Retention Action Guide," reminds the believers of the Savior's Great Commission: "Go ye therefore ... and teach all nations ... baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the

⁶¹ Russell C. Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church*, 141.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 141.

⁶³ David Lowes Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1987), 57.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

Holy Ghost. [And] I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and [that] your fruit should remain (Matt 28: 19, 20 and John 15: 16).

Stewart explains that Christ has commissioned us to go forth and baptize, not to be barren or unfruitful, nor to swell the rolls of inactive [members] while racking up impressive looking baptismal statistics ‘on paper,’ but to build the church meaningfully through the teaching, baptism, and retention of true converts who have undergone real and life-changing conversion to the gospel of Christ.⁶⁵

He asserts that inactivity is a great cause for concern among both missionaries and the general membership of the church.⁶⁶ Referring to the Mormons Church’s Missionary Department Statistics, he states that “in some areas of the world, 30-40% of new converts never return to church after baptism ... and that 80% of convert inactivity occurs within the first two months after baptism.”⁶⁷

We speak of great future harvests, when the frequent reality of the present is that the considerable majority of those modest numbers who are baptized are leaving out through the back door of the church almost as quickly as they are brought in through the front door.

Stewart quotes Hinkley, the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS), who has the conviction that a convert is a precious person. He or she will make a tremendous decision in coming into the church. Retention will primarily be the work of the local [church]. There is no point of baptizing people if they do not become solid members of the church. There is no point in the missionaries

⁶⁵ David Stewart, “100% Convert Retention Action Guide,” accessed January 3, 2015, <http://missionaryhelper.com/retention.htm>.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

baptizing people only to have them come into the church for a little while and then drift off.⁶⁸

What does it profit the missionary to baptize someone who leaves the church within six months? Nothing is accomplished. In fact, damage is done. We have pulled them away from their old moorings and brought them into the church, only to have them drift away. Nobody gains when there is baptism without retention. The missionary loses; and while the church gains statistically, the membership suffers and the enthusiasm of the convert turns to ashes.

Stewart quotes Elder Russell who also believed that we cannot establish the church unless we have real growth—not simply numbers on paper.⁶⁹ He continues to assert that retention of new converts should never be left to chance or circumstance. We simply cannot play dice with the souls of men. Thus, for the welfare of new converts and of each non-member who has not yet had an opportunity to hear the gospel, it is incumbent that missionaries and members work together to ensure that each conversion is meaningful and lasting.⁷⁰

Osborne, a senior pastor of North Coast church in Vista, California, categorically says that “when it comes to growing a healthy church I don’t survey the front door to see how I can attract large crowds and wow them with a special program. For the most part, [my] eyes are glued to the back door. That’s because so many churches have been losing people, and some, without even noticing.”⁷¹

⁶⁸ President Gordon B. Hinkley, LDS Church News, Saturday, July 4, 1998.

⁶⁹ Conversion and Retention Satellite Broadcast, August 29, 1999.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Larry Osborne, quoted in Lillian Kwon. Read “How to Keep People from Quitting Church,” *The Christian Post Magazine*, October 13, 2008.

He continues to observe that

As long as the front door is larger than our back door or even equal, we often think things are okay. And if the front door is larger, we are excited that we are growing. ... Rather than reaching 100 people, 20 of which we keep, I'd rather reach 50 people, 40 of which we keep. [My] heart, instead, lies with making people stick for long term spiritual growth. It's about keeping people by closing the back door of the church and developing a 'sticky church'.⁷²

The Sign Post magazine quotes from Pr. Osborne's book, *The Sticky Church*:

We've discovered lots of ways to reach people, but we've often become so focused on reaching people that we've forgotten the importance of keeping people. Churches have often attracted record crowds during Christmas and Easter when they typically conduct fancier services or put on special shows. But after the fancy lights, music, and guest speaker are gone, the new comer is likely to feel underwhelmed and possibly slip back through the back door. And larger churches are most likely to be unaware of the back door because of the many people who come through their wide front door.⁷³

He rightly notes that

When we keep people for only a short time, what we've done is more likely inoculate them to Christianity rather than help them get the real disease. Once someone has been to church for a while, kind of connected and then fades out, it is really hard, outside of a major crisis in their life, to reach him/her again. After all, Jesus didn't call churches to draw big crowds or just sign people up. He told us to make disciples. [And] the Sticky Church concept is about discipleship, not [mere] church growth.⁷⁴

Pr. Osborne concludes by testifying that "historically, [my] church's back door has been so small that if someone leaves for reasons other than moving [or death], it will usually be on the agenda in one of [our] senior staff meetings."⁷⁵

Schwarz, the founder and president of the Institute for Natural Church

Development (NCD), explains that

In Natural Church Development, we don't ask the question: 'How do we get more people to attend church?' Nor do we set goals for the numerical size of

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

the church, such as, ‘By the end of 2008 we will have 2,600 people.’ What we do, however, is to focus on the quality of the church. In this area, we set precise goals and are eager to reach those goals. We want to see our churches grow in quality and we want to experience the effects of that quality. One of these effects is that churches that improve in quality grow in quantity as well.⁷⁶

He also believes that “the quality of a church is the quality of its people, and nothing more.”⁷⁷ He stresses this in his book’s concluding expression through a question and answer approach:

After all, what is the church? The church is people. What determines the health of a church? The health of heads, hands, and hearts of those people. How can we enhance the health of a church? By enhancing the health of our heads, hands, and hearts. The results? Growing churches that fulfill their God given purpose that develops their own individuality that influence and transform society.⁷⁸

The Roman Catholic Church and Retention

The Catholic Church has not escaped the challenge of members leaving the church. In some areas, the effect is visible by the few old people who remain in the church. The youths run away from the church as they cite different reasons ranging from the boredom of the church programs to the non-involvement in church activities by the adults and church leaders.

In his article published in *Sunday Visitor Newsweekly*, Alessi refers to a recent study by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life of the Catholic Church which 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

⁷⁶ Christian A. Schwarz, *Color Your World with Natural Church Development* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2005), 25.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

Catholic Church has lost many members, primarily to protestant denominations or to the ranks of the unaffiliated. Those who have left Catholicism outnumber those who have joined the Catholic Church by four to one margin.⁷⁹

When interviewed by the *Newsweek* magazine on the same topic, Sister of Notre Dame Susan Wolf, Executive Director of Paulist National Catholic Evangelization Association, feels that

Many people who were baptized Catholics grew up with a weak sense of Catholic identity. As adults who live busy lives, they have to make choices about how they will spend their time. It also tells us that our parish communities are not helping people to build connections that will keep them coming back.⁸⁰

On what can be done to bring and retain more people to the Church, Susan Wolf suggests that “most of all that we have to do is to help those who are active in the faith, and those who are present [to retain them], to realize the gift that we have in our faith to foster a gratitude for that faith and an appreciation for it and to seek ways to share it with others.”⁸¹

Wolf’s view above would, therefore, mean that as members share together, they are involved and at the same time participate actively in church activities. This would motivate them and enhance their spiritual participation. They would be retained for God’s work as they continue receiving and providing spiritual nourishment.

⁷⁹ Scott Alessi, “Solutions to the Catholic Retention Problem,” *OSV Newsweekly*, 3 June 2009, accessed 13 May 2013, <https://www.osv.com/OSVNewsweekly/Story/TabId/2672/ArtMID/13567/ArticleID/8911/Solutions-to-the-Catholic-retention-problem.aspx>.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

In the same newsweekly magazine, McCarty, Executive Director of the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, says that the Catholic Church is losing [many] young people. He reveals that

Almost half of Catholics who are now unaffiliated (48 percent) left Catholicism before reaching the age of eighteen! When I hear this result, I wonder how many of those kids left because their parents left. I am going to guess that many of these kids were mirroring their parents and if their parents weren't involved in Church, it's a pretty good bet that the kids are not going to be involved. My bet is that we have not engaged our parishioners the way we are challenged to do so. The Church needs to have a more intentional outreach, not only to teenagers, but to the family. We have to engage parents, because if we engage them, we engage children and then we will retain them into their adult years.⁸²

Kelley Kathy says that among lifelong Catholics, weekly church attendance dropped from 86 percent during childhood to 69 percent during adolescence and continued to decline between adolescence and adulthood to 42 percent.”⁸³

While reporting for the *National Catholic Magazine*, Allen also refers to the 2008 Religious Landscape Survey from the Pew Forum which documented a remarkable fluidity in religious affiliation in America where almost half of American adults have either switched religions or dropped their ties to religion altogether. In this survey, he reports that

For Catholicism, the banner headline was that there are now 22 million ex-Catholics in America, by far the greatest net loss for any religious body. One in three Americans raised Catholic have left the Church. Were it not for immigration, Catholicism in America would be contracting dramatically: for every one member the Church adds, it loses four.⁸⁴

⁸² Ibid., 2.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ John L. Allen Jr., “In America's religious marketplace, the real Catholic problem is new sales,” *National Catholic Reporter*, Feb. 11, 2011, accessed 13 May 2013, <http://ncronline.org/blogs/all-things-catholic/americas-religious-marketplace-real-catholic-problem-new-sales>.

Elsewhere, in reviewing the report by the same survey, Kellner says that the group that has experienced greatest net loss by far is the Catholic Church. Overall, 31.4 percent of U.S. adults say that they were raised Catholic. Today, however, only 23.9 percent of adults identify with the Catholic Church, a net loss of 7.5 percentage points.⁸⁵

Allen further explains that “on the other hand, the study also found that the Catholic Church has a higher retention rate than other major Christian denominations, and that 2.6 percent of the adult population is composed of converts to Catholicism, representing a pool of nearly six million new Catholics.”⁸⁶

The Catholic Church’s reaction to the survey is that in America’s religious marketplace, the real Catholic problem is new sales. The church claims that “her struggles are not really with pastoral care, but missionary muscle. Overall, Catholicism serves existing members fairly well, as measured by the share that chooses to stick around; what it does not do nearly as well is to evangelize.”⁸⁷

To sum up, retention of members and nurture, therefore, remain prerequisites to spiritual growth that enhances members’ discipleship to the ministry. It enables the member to be a participant in the ministry rather than a spectator. The member will be a valuable resource that will not only remain in the church but will also proclaim the Lord’s Great Commission and draw people to Christ. It is the framework of the church. It is the pillar that holds and makes the church grow.

⁸⁵ Mark A. Kellner, “Adventists Often Stay Adventist, Pew Survey Shows.”

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

DESCRIPTION OF THE LOCAL SETTING

Kenya is one of the major African Christian countries found south of the Sahara. Its population according to CIA world Fact Book was 45 million by the year 2014 as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Population of Kenya by 2014¹

| Age | Percentage | Population | |
|--------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| | | Male | Female |
| 0-14 | 42.1 | 9,494,983 | 9,435,795 |
| 15-24 | 18.7 | 4,197,382 | 4,202,399 |
| 25-54 | 32.8 | 7,458,665 | 7,302,534 |
| 55-64 | 3.7 | 751,296 | 910,523 |
| 65 and above | 2.7 | 548,431 | 708,048 |

Kenya has 42 different ethnic groups that are un-evenly distributed in the whole country. About 2/3 of Kenya is arable and is considered as the country's economic backbone. There are arid and semiarid vast lands which mostly cover the northern and eastern parts of the country that serve the nomadic pastoralists.

The rains are unevenly distributed in many parts of the country. Agriculturally productive areas are densely populated while areas with scanty and unreliable rainfall are scarcely or not populated. There is consistent urban immigration mostly by the

¹ www.indexmuli.com/kenya/demographic_profile.html.

youth and the educated persons. Prominent business enterprises thrive better in cities and upcoming urban areas than in rural parts of the country.

Several disasters and calamities consistently strike the country at different unspecific times of the year and places. These include floods, fatal road accidents, famine, diseases and pandemics, ethnic strife and violence, local and international terrorism, drought, fire outbreaks in institutions of learning, slums, and criminal activities in both urban and rural areas.

In spite of being one of the most striving economies in Africa, Kenya is grouped among the most corrupt countries not only in Africa, but in the world as a whole. Its Gross Domestic Product [GDP] is expected to rise to 6.9% according to the *Business Daily* magazine. About 67% of the population lives below poverty level, while 40% are jobless.²

Kenya has progressed well in industrialization and Information Communication Technology programs since it attained political and economic independence from the British colonialists in 1963. Most notable is the Jua Kali sector that has employed many young and old people. Also, the M-Pesa, which is a simple banking service originally initiated in Kenya and managed by the Safaricom company, has hastened the receiving and transfer of money near and far. This is a simple banking transaction that is done through cell phone and does not require formal documentation processes or signatures to receive or send money.

Education is generally accepted as a prerequisite to development and has therefore been one of the government's main agenda. Free education to primary school children and subsidized secondary school education has well been integrated

² Ibid.

into the ministry of education's curriculum and policy. Basic education, by law, is compulsory to every child; while tertiary, college, and university education have been liberalized to enable the government and the private sectors to provide effective learning in every faculty of life. This has enhanced adult literacy levels to 61.5% by the end of year 2014. Considered as one of the growing democracies, Kenya is politically and geographically divided into 47 "autonomous" county governments which are under a unitary government at the national level. Each county is managed by a politically elected governor who is assisted by several technocrats of different professional backgrounds. These counties are distributed in the whole nation as per population, administrative, geographical, and political boundaries of given areas and places.

Freedom of worship is enshrined in the country's constitution. There are several religious groups in the country. Christianity is the dominant religion with approximately 82.5% of the country adherents. Other religious groups that include Islam, Hindu, Buddhists, African Traditional Religion, and others constitute 15%, while the un-affiliated groups form about 2.4.³

The Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church of Kenya, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Baptist Convention, the Methodist Church, and the Presbyterian Church are the notable large Christian missionary church organizations that have many members. Other indigenous African independent churches including African Inland Church, Legion Maria, Roho Israel Churches and Voice of Salvation and Healing are commonly present mainly in the rural areas.

³ Wikipedia, "Mobile Desk Top," accessed 22 August 2012, <http://www.en.wikipedia.org>.

The Missionary Christian churches were started during different years in the 19th Century. These denominations run schools, colleges, universities, hospitals and other humanitarian institutions that are unevenly distributed in the country.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, in particular, has more than 25 church-maintained primary schools and 22 church-maintained secondary schools. The church also has 6 church-maintained colleges, universities, and branches.

The Kenya Union Mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as of 2013 statistical report indicated that there were over 716,446 baptized members and 4,523 organized churches. These are unevenly distributed in various organized churches and companies, the majority of which are in the rural parts of the country. This constitutes about 1.6% of the national population. The statistics further indicate that women form a fairly larger church membership (36%) than men who are estimated at 22%. Youth and children are estimated at 48%.

Local Setting of Mbita Central Seventh-day Adventist Church

Mbita Central SDA Church is in the County of Homa Bay in the town of Homa Bay, which is a bay and town on the south shore of Winam Gulf of Lake Victoria, in Western Kenya. The church is located near Gembe Hills and Ruma National Park. The latter is noted for Jackson's hartebeests and roan antelopes.

Mbita Township is the headquarters for the Homa Bay Sub County, according to the promulgated new Kenya constitution of 2010. According to 2009 National Housing and Population Census, the total population of the township is 68,000 people. The women population is recorded as 21,000, while that of men is 19,000. Children's population is 28,000. The dominant ethnic community of the Township is the Luo tribe who speak Dholuo language. The Suba ethnic community, which has

suffered assimilation by the Nilotic Luo community in terms of language and culture, also forms a fairly big population of the town. Statistics show that the Luo community has the largest population in the township and is estimated at 78%, while the Suba community constitutes 20% of the total township population. Other ethnic communities account for 2%.

The ancestors of the Suba community can be traced to Uganda. They speak Basuba language. A bigger percentage of this community lives on Lake Victoria Islands of Mfang'ano and Rusinga. However, a substantial percentage lives on the mainland. Some are also scattered in other counties.

The fast growing cosmopolitan township of Mbita also has people from other ethnic communities who are either employed as civil servants in Non-Governmental Organizations or doing private businesses. Some of the residents are involved in casual labor and fishing. These constitute a recognizable percentage of membership in the town.

During some seasons in the year, when fishing is low, the population goes down because of the mass exodus of fishermen and businessmen to other areas deemed to thrive better in fishing and business. This movement in search of fish has a devastating effect on the business industry and the education sector since the fishermen move to new places with their families which include children of school age. Thus, the fishing industry is believed to control the economy of Mbita Township.

Background of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Mbita

The SDA Church is the dominant church in Mbita Township. The churches are under the Kenya Lake Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church administration. Kenya Lake Conference has about 800 organized churches and 680

companies with about 98,000 baptized members as of December 2014.⁴ The SDA Church is synonymous with good organization and orderliness in undertaking activities and programs. It has distinctive and special health messages, family life programs, diet reform, mode of dressing, stewardship emphasis programs, observance of the seventh day of the week as the holy Sabbath of the Lord, and sweet gospel songs. The church discourages the use of ornaments by its members.

There are other Christian churches in Mbita region which also command big membership. The Catholic Church and the Anglican Church lead in this group, even though collectively, African affiliated churches including Roho Holy Ghost, Roho Israel, Roho Mowar, Legio Maria, Voice of Salvation and Healing, Miracle Land, Christco, Half Share, and others enjoy massive following.

Pastor Arthur Carscallen, a Canadian born SDA Church minister, and a Malawian catechist, Peter Nyambo, who went to study theology at Newbold College, England, were sent by the world church to Kenya and arrived at the Ogango hills in Kendu Bay in 1906. They were the ones who established the first SDA Church in the country. In 1911, a missionary known as Pastor Watson who had joined Pr. Carscallen in mission work, was sent to Rusinga Island to start the church work in the region. He settled at the present Rusinga Got SDA Church in Rusinga East SDA District. He was accompanied by elder Daniel Onyango, a native and a devout Christian from the island.⁵

⁴ Kenya Lake Conference Secretary's Office documents, reached on 12 February 2015.

⁵ Isaac Okeyo Rapar Midamba, *Mar Donjo Injili E East Africa* (Kendu Bay: Africa Herald Publishing House), 2.

Initially, it was very difficult for the missionary to convert old people into the faith. This was because of the cultural and racial diversity. Children and youth were given the freedom of choice by their illiterate parents, even though some restrictions were attached to that freedom.

As years passed, many boys and girls joined the church. The old people were not very happy with this because it was seen as a taboo. These young boys and girls were regarded by the older members of the community as outcasts. This brought a lot of pain to the parents as they could not freely have control of their children. At times, parents were forced to cane and chain them in order to restrict their association with the white missionary. But the most painful of it was that they could no longer get dowry for their married daughters because of the Christian lifestyle they had adopted. It was more of a problem than a blessing to them.⁶

In 1914, as the church continued to steadily grow on the island and as well as it spread to the adjacent communities, war broke out between Germany and Britain. The war spread to the Eastern Africa states of Kenya and Uganda which were British colonies and Tanzania which was a German colony. The church growth felt a big blow when Pastor Watson and other white missionaries from the Adventist faith declined to join World War 1. The missionaries were arrested and taken to Kaimosi Pentecostal Mission where they stayed until the end of the war in 1918. Despite all these, the church in the island continued to grow under the leadership of the native African catechist, Daniel Onyango. Waondo SDA Church, which is in the mainland part of the region and not far from the island, was established during that time.⁷

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

In 1962, Mbita Central SDA Church was established as a branch of Nyamasare SDA Church. In 1984, it was organized as a church. It then became the leading church from the mainland adjacent to the island. On 16th October, 2001, Mbita Central Church was dedicated by the East African Union of SDA Churches.⁸ By November 2014, the church had organized 9 other churches; namely, Kisui, Mbita Point, Milimani, Happy Ministries, Nyahera, Kirindo, Kombe, Nyamanga, and Laos. These churches were grouped into two and formed two autonomous church entities called Mbita District which consists of Mbita Central, Kisui, Kombe, Kirindo, and Nyahera. The other entity is called Mbita West District which consists of Mbita Point, Happy Ministries, Laos, Nyamanga, and Milimani with the District Headquarters and Pastor's residence at the Mbita Central church compound. A viable distribution of physical infrastructure, number of churches, camp centers and church membership was done upon the split. The sub-division was a result of the district's consistent infrastructural, spiritual, leadership, and membership growth.

But in November 2012, a task force consisting of two youths, two adult males, two adult females, and the local pastor was constituted to look into the membership status at Mbita SDA Church. A report presented by the task force in 2013 indicated a massive church membership dropout. The percentage of the youth leaving the church was realized to be high. Another study that followed and which was done through questionnaires and oral interviews in 2014 confirmed the dropout rate to be alarmingly high. Several different categories of people including present members, former members, youths, women, widows, and orphans were interviewed.

⁸ Mbita Central SDA Church, "Minutes of Church Business Meeting," (Mbita, Kenya: Mbita Central Church, 12 May, 2012), Min. No. MC/221/2012/05.

Factors Leading to Membership Dropout

Several reasons that made some members leave the church were discovered. Even though reasons of dropout vary between the young and the old, it was noted that some reasons were common to all categories of church members. These reasons were noted to be economical, social, spiritual, lack of involvement in church activities, lack of integrated youth programs, doctrinal, and cultural.

Economic Reasons

In this category, young people are the most affected. Several random oral interviews done to the youths from the church indicate that they needed economic empowerment by securing steady jobs that would assure them survival in harsh economic conditions. The interviews further indicate that they needed scholarship as they aspire to be responsible citizens and parents in the future. Their overwhelming numbers, enormous energy, diverse talents, professional skills, and knowledge must be tapped to attain improved economy.

A former Sabbath School Superintendent who had been very active, and who had passed his high school examination with flying colors but lacked scholarship to campus was one victim who left the church. When he was offered scholarship to study zoology in the local university by a non-Christian foreign missionary who had been introduced to him by a cousin, he readily and happily accepted. The only condition was to accept the non-Christian faith and embrace its doctrines as taught by the foreign missionary. He felt obliged to join that faith and is not willing to re-join Mbita Central SDA Church.⁹

⁹ Interview by the author, Mbita, 12 February, 2014.

A trained painter and sign writer who left the church five years ago was also interviewed. His reason for leaving the church was economical. He said that the additional responsibility of rearing their four children in contrast to their family's meager and unreliable income made him search for greener pastures elsewhere. Besides this, the wife focused on learning a vocation for life and needed more money for college fees. When George secured a job in another city as a painter, he left Mbita town with the whole family to the city. His new employer is an atheist who believes in a 24-hour economy. George, therefore, has no time to attend church on Sabbath. In as much as the family nostalgically remembers their sweet moments in the church, they cannot establish whether they will come back any time soon. They still need their employment.

A 27-year-old man asserts that his new church offered his family financial support when they really needed it. Besides this, his new church offered him employment as a waiter in their café in town. His wife was also employed as a housekeeper in the same café. They are proud that they can now effectively make family budget together with the reliable little monthly wage. The wife confirms that the family's income and spending has positively improved since securing employment. They do not think of re-joining the SDA Church in the near future.

There are other young people who have almost similar problems with the church. For instance, a very active youth with a vision to improve his education had received admission in a private university to study environmental science. When he asked for financial assistance from Mbita Central SDA Church in 2009, never did he know that it would be the cause of his leaving the church he loved as a result of insults and insinuation about his personality. He reports:

I could not imagine that the fundraising I'd asked for could be the instrument used to make me leave the church of my heart! I loved the church so much so

that I considered it my home and the members were like my immediate family. But some of them including some leaders that my family had trusted for a period of time talked recklessly about the assistance offered to my family to an extent that we felt that we could betray our conscience as a family by continuing to worship in the same church with these hypocrites. One party had to give way. We decided to do that. I'm still uncertain of what will happen in the future, whether my family and I would come back to the church as members or not.¹⁰

A middle-aged church member decided to leave the church in 2005 when she realized that the demand for money to the church had become too much for her. Being a peasant farmer with limited income, she felt that it became so much hard on her during tough times of the season. She says she feels well in as much as she is not churched presently. She says:

One time it was money for development, another time it was a congestion of programs requiring money; tithes, offerings, burial, benevolence, education, choir uniform, Dorcas Society uniform, and several festivals and seminars concurrently planned without considering the middle person's income! "I wonder whether there are planners in the church who consider the fate of poor people in the church and how to balance such important programs so that all would fit in and benefit from the art of giving."¹¹

Another middle-aged man, decided to leave the church in 2002. When interviewed by the researcher, he asserted that the church requires leaders of integrity. He believes that donations to church projects and programs are sacrificially given and, therefore, calls for transparency and accountability for both leaders and members. He feels that much funds donated to the church are not accounted for by the people responsible. He asks:

How can we keep on giving money towards projects and programs and we are not given back reports? We are donors and when we get reports we are motivated to give more but when there are no reports; we get demoralized. The isolated few reports are not depicting the real picture of how money is received and used in the church! I'm willing to rejoin the church but I wonder

¹⁰ Interview by the author, Mbita, 21 June, 2012.

¹¹ Interview by the author, Mbita, 12 September, 2012.

whether there will be transparency and accountability in finance management in the church.¹²

Social Reasons

When a young mother's 2-year-old twin children tragically passed away as a result of wrong administration of drugs by the clinician, no church leaders or members were actively involved in consoling the young family. Her husband who did not go to church was keen on this and observed the behavior pattern of the church members towards their family. They needed the church most at that time, but church members were hardly available. The young mother and her two older children deserted the church and joined another Christian movement that accompanied them all through during the bereavement session. The pagan husband also joined them, and he is active in the new found church.

Two thirds of all the respondents from the interview done through questionnaires felt that the Mbita SDA Church informally practices a class form of worship. This has affected the church population and spiritual growth. A middle-aged man asserts that he can no longer congregate with people who consider class as a form of worship. He observes that the rich associate more with their fellow rich members leaving the poor and unfortunate members to suffer social consequences. The plight of the poor is neglected while there is a trend to force participation of all church members to matters that impact negatively the rich people. Decision making is negatively skewed against the poor, while the rich enjoy the monopoly of leadership. Participation in church activities is limited to only few individuals with monetary

¹² Interview by the author, Mbita, 13 January, 2013.

strength. He concludes that “the barrier that exists between church members is the class syndrome where one only associates with another person in relation to social status.”¹³

Spiritual Reasons

“Spiritual matters are spiritually discerned” as a seemingly disappointed person illustrates. But in our church, it is the opposite of this, he says:

Spiritual matters are discussed everywhere including market places and even pubs! The church leaders have not done much to reduce this and they even fall prey to this kind of snare. Church board resolutions and deliberations are reviewed in such odd places including very sensitive and classified matters of the church. Election of church leaders is done prior to election date and time at people’s houses leaving no room for the Holy Spirit to guide in choosing church leaders. This leaves the art of worshipping God to be only a formality to attain the Sabbath day’s drawn program without spiritual nourishment at all. Many people come to church when they are spiritually hungry and thirsty and go back home more hungry and thirsty. Wrangles which in most occasions are open and confrontational is the order of every worship and meeting times. There is no respect for leaders at all. I therefore decided not to be in such a spiritually decayed assembly.¹⁴

The formal church programs in most occasions fail to fulfill my spiritual needs, observes a businesswoman who was converted to Mbita Central SDA Church when she heard the three angels’ message at the age of 17 years. She claims that at her present age of 42 years, her concentration level has steadily gone down. She may not be able to attentively listen to a speaker for one whole preaching period without “switching off.” She claims that the church programs lack variety tastes of programs to keep listeners active and participative. They are spectators in church programs and

¹³ Interview by the author, Mbita, 12 July, 2012.

¹⁴ Interview by the author, Mbita, 17 August, 2012.

not participants since participation in church programs is restricted to only the chosen few. She believes that active participation in church programs enhances worship.

Another woman concurs and adds that her spiritual needs are only met when some particular activities and programs are incorporated into the worship programs. According to her, the pathfinders and music sessions give her highest levels of active participation. The Dorcas Society sessions and outreach activities boost her spiritual growth and nourishment. And she regrets that “they are given least time allocation” in the weekly church programs. “I wonder whether I’ll remain an active member of the church in the near future.”

Lack of Youth Involvement and Participation

Youths form a fairly bigger percentage of the entire Mbita Central SDA Church membership and yet there is no formal integrated program in place that would involve and take care of most of their physical and spiritual needs. Despite the fact that youths are considered a mighty army of the Lord, I realized that they remain idle with nothing to do most of the worship hours as the elderly dominate in doing the tasks and activities of the church. One youth alleges that the elderly are always suspicious of the youth associating with each other. They see that such association is not sincere and they relate it with immorality.

“The youths need a designed program where they can feel, touch, and use their enormous strength where necessary,”¹⁵ asserts a 24-year-old school leaver. I interviewed several youths through questionnaires and 88% of the interviewees unanimously agreed that there is no formal program that involves the youths in the daily church activities. The respondents claimed that idleness makes the youths join

¹⁵ Interview by the author, 9 September, 2012.

other denominations that are ready to involve them. Some of such youths finally, as the researcher established through the questionnaires, leave the church and join bad groups that are not Christian.

Doctrinal Reasons

A young man who was born in an SDA family observes that “the fundamental beliefs that the world church is grounded on are very detailed enough and in true sense provide the basis of what we believe in.” But he says that some of these fundamental beliefs are very technical and theological and require a professional interpretation. He wonders:

If matters pertaining to issues such as Trinity, Heavenly Sanctuary, Sabbath, God Head, Ordination of Women, Death and Resurrection, are contentious among learned theologians, how can lay persons who in most occasions minister to the majority of members during Sabbath programs and other related activities understand such issues and teach the truth about them? There is a high possibility of unconsciously teaching the contrary as the truth is compromised by such innocent lay ministers.¹⁶

Another man and wife jointly express their disappointment in the force and rigidity by which the lay leaders and preachers use to teach the fundamental beliefs of the church:

These are men and women who will not convince you by theological facts but only force their little knowledge on members. At times the force is too strong and even combative that the only way out is to leave the church and find solace elsewhere. Furthermore, they are too rigid to apply even the situational ethics where it could be applicable in the event of breaking any of the church doctrines and beliefs.¹⁷

Cultural Reasons

¹⁶ Interview by the author, Mbita, 24 August, 2012.

¹⁷ Interview by the author, Mbita, 12 September, 2012.

A 29-year-old widow for eight years, claims that the local culture has slowly permeated into the church system of operation. She says that, as a widow, she thought that “Jesus’ yoke could be lighter and soft” but it turned out to be the “heaviest and roughest.” “Literally, I’m denied active church participation simply because I’m a widow and I discarded some cultural practices which, to these hypocrites, I was to undergo despite the fact of my being a converted and devout Christian,” she laments.

Insistence on non-practicable church rules was learnt to have negative impact on members staying in the church. A 24-year-old widow is seriously considering her staying in the church because the church leadership maintains that she must get a single young man and a member of the church to re-marry her. She highlights that

This, culturally, is impossible because no single young man will accept to “inherit” some dead man’s wife as she and her offspring will never be considered his wife and children at all by the society’s cultural belief. This, in essence, means I will remain single for the rest of my life if I want to maintain my church membership, but remember I’m young.¹⁸

Elderly members of the church seem to be assimilated into the local culture to an extent that it is so difficult for them to distinguish between what is Christian culture and what is societal culture. For example, the biblical text from the book of Leviticus 15:19 indicates that women are unclean when they are in their monthly periods. Likewise, the local cultural belief considers women ceremoniously unclean and they are not allowed to perform any church duty when in their periods. In any case, the societal belief and the church commandments are in concurrence in this area. But some women, mostly those who are not enlightened deeply in biblical teaching, feel that it denies such women active participation and only enhances segregation against them.

¹⁸ Interview by the author, Mbita, 4 November, 2012.

When women are bereaved, there are rituals according to the local community culture that they are to undergo in order to be *judged clean* to be involved in church activities. In this sense, women fall victims of circumstances as cultural practices have slowly and steadily permeated the daily church operations.

A young woman who became a widow after only two years in marriage, and has since left the church, laments that “the church of God has slowly turned into a den of atheists!” This is because of the cultural rites she is demanded to perform in order to be allowed to involve in church activities.

She feels that her expectations of the church, especially when bereaved, have not been realized at all. Some of the most respected church members and leaders have demonstrated a different stand from what the church teaches, particularly, on death and resurrection. “No church leader or member was ready to help me construct a new house in my expected new home after the death of my beloved husband because, as they indirectly claimed, I had to find some special person who was to stand in as my ‘inheritor.’ The person was expected to perform some special tasks including being the first to cut the pole[s] to be used in the construction of the house, being the first to dig the hole where the poles were to be inserted, being the first to put mud to the wall and being first in doing all sorts of things including ‘sleeping’ in the house!” To me this was cultural practice that I thought I had run from when I was baptized into the church.”¹⁹

Applying church policy and doctrines with bias makes some members of the church to leave the church through the back door. For example, a family had very meager resources that could not be able to meet his wedding expenses. He had

¹⁹ Ibid.

approached several people and friends but they could only raise some little money that could not meet even a quarter of the total estimated wedding budget. But all the same, there was pressure from the church leadership that, as a Pathfinder Club's leader, he must wed. He claims that "the pressure was so intense that I decided to marry the lady I loved following our local culture in order to avoid the rigorous and strenuous activities and expenses synonymous with wedding ceremonies. Then I was considered 'fallen' and I was required to come back to the church through re-baptism. I felt betrayed by the church leaders who, in true sense, knew my family's economic background especially after the sudden demise of my father some ten years back."²⁰ He has since not been allowed to participate in any capacity in the church activities. He claims that his spiritual development has been seriously eroded and that he is not experiencing the urge and freedom to worship God as before. He prays that such an experience should not occur to any young member of the church in the future because it discourages the young people from a happy marriage life.

Another young man had not taken cows as dowry to his fiancée's paternal home in accordance with the community cultural practices. They had undergone courtship for a period of two years. He knew about the dowry rule and was prepared to meet all the obligations he was required to because he loved his fiancée. But his fiancée's parents were not devout Christians. They insisted that dowry in form of cows could not be brought to this marriage because the same had not been done to their first daughter. Culturally, this was unacceptable. These parents accepted other forms of dowry including money but not cows at all. He and his fiancée consented to this but the church leadership and the officiating minister insisted on the payment of

²⁰ Interview by the author, Mbita, 12 February, 2014.

dowry in form of cows as the only license to a wedding ceremony that would formalize the marriage! The two considered this as the greatest hypocrisy because most of these leaders did not undergo such strict unwarranted rules in a Christian marriage.

Tables 2 and 3 below indicate the church membership trend from the year 2010 to the year 2014. Table 2 shows the number of members added to the church each year, and Table 3 shows the number of members leaving the church each year. It can be seen that, on a yearly basis, there are almost as many members who join the church as there are members who leave the church. As a result, the church is not really growing.

Table 2. Church Membership Trend in Five Consecutive Years

| DESCRIPTION | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | TOTAL |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| Reg. members | 540 | 610 | 648 | 686 | 718 | N/A |
| Actual members | 406 | 433 | 468 | 503 | 526 | N/A |
| Members added to the church | - | 27 | 35 | 35 | 23 | 120 |

Table 3. Total Church Members Leaving

| DESCRIPTION | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | TOTAL |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| Youth | 8 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 3 | 27 |
| Widows | 4 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 16 |
| Whereabouts unknown | 11 | 12 | 13 | 13 | 13 | 62 |
| Reported deaths | 5 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 32 |
| Members leaving the church | 28 | 26 | 30 | 28 | 25 | 137 |

CHAPTER 4

PROGRAM DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION, AND EVALUATION

The reasons why many people leave Mbita Central Seventh-day Adventist Church were many, as enumerated in the previous chapter. This discovery motivated the researcher to develop an integrated strategy to retain and nurture church members. The researcher concurs with McMullen that, in all voluntary organizations, growth and vitality are a result of twin processes: recruitment and retention. Retention, therefore, is the main focus of this chapter. The researcher has, therefore, divided this chapter into three parts, namely program design, program implementation, and program evaluation. The rate of members leaving Mbita Central Church must be contained so that they stay in the church and enhance church growth and vitality. This chapter's content and design is based on personal observation, study of existing data, and also responses from interviews.

The program had the following objectives:

- To help the church know and understand the importance of retention of members to enhance growth and vitality.
- To train the church on the strategies to retain members.
- To train the church leaders and members to know and understand how to nurture and retain the available members.
- To train the church leaders and members to know and understand how to reclaim back the ones who left the church.

- To train leaders and members to know and understand the difference between cultural and religious matters.

Program Design

In order to get authentic results, the researcher noted that it was important for every stakeholder at Mbita Central Church to be involved in the program. Thus, local church leaders and local church members were all to take part in the implementation of the program. After getting permission from the local church board and church business, the researcher held several meetings with church leaders, some randomly selected groups of church members including youths, children, women, men, widows, and widowers. The valuable suggestions resulted in the development of the following programs:

- Regular training of church leaders on issues about church doctrine and church policy
- Church heritage lectures
- Regular training of church leaders and members on retention
- Involvement in church activities
- Small Group Ministry
- Effective small prayer cells
- Vocational training for youths
- Small scale income generating projects
- Education and Bursary schemes for destitute and orphans
- Effective outreach programs
- Personal Ministry for different groups of members
- Tapping available resources

- Tapping gifted hands and minds
- Active church welfare program

The program was conducted at Mbita Central church compound. This was because of its centrality to most expected participants and also of the available relevant resources that would facilitate learning and understanding of the tasks before the participants. The outlines of the programs are in Appendix C.

Program Implementation

Phase 1: Christ's Method

Christ's method illustrates nurture and retention as the foundation for discipleship. Christ requires all His followers to be shepherds of His sheep and lambs. He tells Peter that "Son of John, if you love me; feed my sheep." He repeats this three times and finally tells Peter that "Son of John if you love me; feed my lambs" (John 21:15-17).

White rightly asserts that

Christ sought the people where they were and placed before them the great truths in regard to His kingdom. As He went from place to place, He blessed and comforted the suffering and healed the sick. . . . Small companies are to go forth to do the work to which Christ appointed His disciples. While laboring as evangelists they can visit the sick, praying with them and, if need be, treating them, not with medicines but with the remedies provided in nature.¹⁰⁹

Christ's disciples brought people to the fold closer to them. There must be closeness with the people. We are to go to them. We are to know and understand their physical and spiritual needs. We are to listen to them, talk to them, understand them, sympathize with them, and we will heal them as we meet their needs.

¹⁰⁹ Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1951), 58.

An outreach program was drawn and agreed upon places to be visited. The two local health facilities, Mbita Level 4 Hospital and Kisui Health Center, were identified as the priority areas in this category. Many members who were afflicted with diseases could be easily available in the facilities. Furthermore, visiting all the patients at the health facilities as some food items and commodities are distributed to them would not only help their physical needs but also revive their spirituality.

Two beaches, Uyoga and Forest, were also identified as strategic points of entry. These beaches were to be visited by the Women Ministry Department in collaboration with Health Ministries, Adventist Men Organization, and Youth Departments on an agreed date. Several items were lined up for presentation including music, pathfinders in action programs, distribution of assorted commodities to the needy, and the old and some brief sermons and counseling sessions. Health services to the sick and first aid services including some lectures on contagious and psychological diseases were presented in the two-day-long outreach program. Professionals from relevant governmental and non-governmental departments were scheduled to preside over technical areas. Where necessary, referrals to other health institutions and counselors were done.

Phase 2: Training

The implementation of training programs comprised of lectures, discussions, questions, answers, active participation, involvement, and resolution formation sessions. The seminars focusing on the general theme, “To Have and to Hold,” took place at the church compound from the evening of Thursday, 2nd February, 2014 up to the afternoon of Sunday, 9th February, 2014. A total of 128 members, including leaders, attended. These intensive and rigorous residential seminar and training sessions were financially supported by three Norwegian non SDA ladies.

There were 36 women, 40 youths, 28 men, and 24 children. The participants were drawn from different interest groups, and they represented the whole church. The presence of the children who were in their group, performing practical tasks and exercises, was of interest. This was to show that the children also had an active role to play in the life of the church. The major language used during the seminar and training sessions was English even though Kiswahili and the local language, Dholuo, were also relevantly used when there was need and in particular for children and old members. Due to the big number of participants, the discussions were mostly done in eleven small groups with group leaders and the researcher as the convener. This organization aimed at enhancing active participation of all members. Each group was given discussion guides on topical subjects and met in a panel session after stipulated time to discuss group reports and resolutions. Relevant handouts were provided to each participant after each lesson.

Phase 3: Church Doctrine and Cultural Matters

The researcher discovered through interactive method and interviews that there were several members who left the church because there seemed to be conflict in interpreting and understanding the contextual and theological meaning of some biblical texts in regard of the Seventh-day Adventist fundamental beliefs. Most leaders and members seemed not to have a clear interpretation of the texts. Furthermore, cultural beliefs seemed to have unconsciously permeated into the church operations.

The 28 Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs book was intensively followed as the basis of the training. At given times, the cultural issues in contrast to biblical point of view were brought forward for discussion. The facilitation during the training was done by experienced local conference leaders and local church leaders. The lessons brought a clear understanding and

distinction between church doctrine and cultural practices. Further deeper training on the same was suggested for both trained and new church members, at regular times, to enhance the spiritual growth.

Phase 4: Mission and Heritage of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

According to the Holy Scriptures, Seventh-day Adventists believe that their church is a movement that was called from the world with a mission to fulfill the Lord's Great Commission of proclaiming the Good News to the world, by baptizing, teaching and making active disciples in His vineyard (Matt 28:19, 20). The responsibility of the church, therefore, is to bring in, nurture, and retain members.

However, the researcher realized that many members had been brought to Mbita Central Seventh-day Adventist Church, but at the same time, many of them had left the church. The researcher noted that one missing key element was a general ignorance of many members about the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It was established that knowing where we came from could point to us where we are going. This knowledge would motivate members to understand the mission of the church.

Several historical and theological literary works and notes were used to provide this knowledge. Autobiographies of several Adventist pioneers were studied. Challenges and achievements by the pioneers were noted and appreciated. The main mission of calling people from the world into the church and retain them for Christ's second coming and judgment was clearly visible from the scriptures and as laid down by the SDA Church. It became the most interesting and challenging lesson. Participants were able to see where they came from and where they were destined to go. They were entitled to bring in as many members as possible and retain them to wait for the Master.

Phase 5: Membership Retention Strategies

Mbita Central SDA Church has some informal ways to bring people into the church, but does not have any formal strategy to make them stay in church. Considering the church membership pattern of coming into the church and leaving it after a while, the need to formulate strategies to stop church membership exodus was felt. In regard of authentic sources of reasons why members left the church, several strategies were put in place to keep members in church and make them disciples. These were a) involvement and active participation of members in various church programs and activities, b) programmed church activities especially those related to money, c) formation of small group ministries and prayer cells, d) vocational training programs for the youths, e) small scale income generating activities for special cases, f) bursary scheme for destitute and orphans, g) reaching those who left the church, h) tapping gifted hands and minds, and, finally, i) using Christ's method to reach the needy.

Small outreach groups were formed to follow up identified members who left the church. Assorted food items and other basic personal effect materials were carried along for distribution to the needy during outreach programs. One to one discussion questions and guideline was drafted and was used during the outreach sessions.

Phase 6: Church Finances and Accountability

Our God is a God of order. Everything done in the church must be orderly and must follow a particular pattern that is aimed at enhancing the life of the church and its members. One of the major concerns cited by several members both in church and those who had left the church was the need for a strategy that would control church finances. The active church life is dependent on money, but there must be regulators to control the entire system. There must be a yearly financial plan that is wisely spread throughout the year. The projects, as voted by the

church business and boards, must be implemented according to priorities over the year.

Emergencies are isolated cases and must be accepted by the majority of church members.

Regular financial reports must follow every collection and usage of money to inculcate transparency and accountability. Non-partial appreciation and commendation to all donors/members must be done appropriately.

Activities and programs presented by different church departments must be balanced in order to meet the different spiritual needs and tastes of members with diverse spiritual interests. One program must not be monotonously presented at the expense of other programs and activities.

Phase 7: Small Group Ministry and Prayer Cells

Life in the early Adventist Church was simply maintained through small groups and social meetings. Members were well cared for. They did not rely on a pastor to care for them, but they provided mutual care for each other according to the New Testament model. The early Adventist Church was organized as an indigenous church, where members cared for each other in small relational groups, while the clergy was free to evangelize and plant churches.

Burrill confirms that the social meeting and small groups served to meet relational needs of the early Adventists. He says that it was a time when people could be open with each other, without being judgmental. They felt safe to share their problems and seek the help of others, knowing that they would receive help without condemnation.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Russell C. Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church*, 201.

Based on the Adventist's heritage, the church voted to start small groups and social meetings that were not primarily Bible studies. They were meetings that were expected to motivate members to share what was happening in their personal and spiritual lives. Their main purpose was to help members to share community. Their primary function was for edification.

Members of the church as people must, therefore, be actively engaged in ministry of some kind. This was necessary for their spiritual strength and Christian growth. Thus, a strategy could be to put the members to work.

Considering the above understanding, the church was divided into 37 small pilot groups headed by a leader. Consideration and emphasis were given to balancing these groups through random selection according to age, church responsibility, secular engagements and job, education, professional background, gender, ethnicity, God-given gifts and talents, social status, and spiritual maturity. Every group had an average of twelve members even though other groups were slightly bigger. Other groups would be formed in the future when the pilot small groups' effectiveness and demand from members would have been evaluated.

The prayer cells were made even smaller. Members were given the option of freely choosing members of their respective groups. Most of the formulated cells had an average of seven members. The cells had the choice to increase membership but were advised not to exceed nine members. These cell members were to meet at their places of choice which could be conducive to their scheduled prayer times. The small group and prayer cell leaders in collaboration with other members would direct the operations of their respective groups. All members were involved in their groups. Rules were formulated to guide the groups. These rules are identical, but with minimal differences according to their individual group needs. List of the items are agreed upon prior to meeting times as given by small group and prayer cell leaders.

Phase 8: Involvement in Church Activities

The researcher found out that many members left the church because of non-involvement in church programs. Humans are social beings and need to participate in activities that may bring them closer to other people. After meeting collectively and individually with leaders, it was realized that involvement and participation of members was mandatory. Several church departments and their relevant activities were identified. Restructuring of membership and leadership of the church departments was done. The church membership was examined in its entirety with several talents identified.

Talented youths were assigned leading roles in the pathfinder club, church choir, outreach programs, Bible study guides, youth clubs, and other informal church affairs. Other gifted people including young women and children were included in the daily church programs. Newly baptized members were not left behind. They were incorporated into various church programs under closer supervision of older church members and leaders.

Phase 9: Vocational Training

Many young men and women are spiritually manipulated because they lack professional vocations. To this effect, they economically fall prey to the wealthy unbelievers who influence their spiritual path negatively. Many young people expressed their need to acquire professional skills that would help them in their needs. The church voted that they would implement the program in three phases because of financial constraints. Because of this, 28 young people were chosen to be included in the initial pilot program. The selection of the first batch was a result of interest shown and their readiness to immediately start the program.

Most of these young people showed interest for training in various vocations such as Information Communication Technology , Business Management, Textile and Garment Making, Automotive engineering, Carpentry and Joinery, Masonry, Electrical, Plumbing, Welding and Fabrication, Secretarial, Food and Beverages, Teaching, and Pastoral Training Programs.

Considering the academic qualifications of every person, and in regard to individual vocational interest, relevant colleges were approached for admissions. Because a big amount of funds was to be involved, there was an urgent need to put in place a formal consistent financial plan that would cover the needs of the trainees. The financial plan to meet the training fees was to be orderly and non-partial. Upon receipt of admission letters and fee structures from different training institutions, a budget was drawn. A total of 286,000.00 Kenyan shillings would be annually required to meet the fees in different learning and training institutions. This continued for a period estimated to be three years. The first step towards a well-established financial program was to identify voluntary sponsors from among the financially able members of the church. There were 20 people who were willing to sponsor 20 students for the whole course period. These sponsors randomly picked the candidates from the list they were given depending on the total amount of fees and the sponsor's ability to pay.

The second step was to involve the entire church in soliciting funds for the program. Individual sponsors collectively contributed 148,000.00 Kenyan Shillings. The church was asked to contribute the remaining 138,000.00 Kenyan Shillings, which they did. Several strategies were put in place by the church to attain the part of the total amount they collected.

Fundraisings were held twice on the last Sabbath day of the months of April and September every year. A special funds kitty and committee was launched in February 2012 as an individual monthly subscription. A total of 68 members registered and deposited their cash

contributions to the kitty. Many people pledged to submit their contributions within the month. Contribution in kind was encouraged and any such donation was to be translated into cash money as soon as possible and deposited into the relevant education account.

Phase 10: Income Generating Projects

In order to economically establish church members, small scale income generating activities were voted and launched on May 2, 2012. Several income generating activities were identified. Interested members were encouraged to register with church groups. A total of 42 members were registered. This number consisted of 28 young women and 14 young men.

Members were trained on how to initiate and maintain small scale income generating projects. The training was facilitated by the Local Cooperative Society staff for four consecutive days. Laws governing the project were formulated and approved for guidance. Membership into the small scale income generating projects included registration and a monthly share contribution according to the ability of individual members. This was to be calculated and given out as loans in regard to accumulated number of shares that a particular member had. After paying back the loan, the individual member would re-apply for a new loan. In essence, the beneficiaries are empowered economically since local circulation of money amongst the members is enhanced.

Phase 11: Bursary Scheme for the Destitute and Orphans

Most young people dropped out of school and college because their family's economic background was weak. And it is to such background that the church voted for the formation of a seven-member Bursary Committee to oversee the operations of the plan. Every year, the last two Sabbath days in the months of February and June were designated to be special Sabbaths for the

collection of education funds. The entire church would participate in these programs as an annual church activity.

A needs assessment committee was also formed to look into the applicants needs and to recommend to the larger Bursary Committee those who qualify for the assistance. Priority was given to the most deserving. Rules and laws governing the bursary plan were formulated and were to be respected at all levels. The funds distribution was to be as per voted year plan. The source of funding would be majorly from the two designated high Sabbaths, contributions from local church members, and soliciting funds from any other source as approved by the church.

Program Evaluation

The evaluation of the program was realized after one year of implementation. A total of 24 youths who had left the church were reclaimed back. Twelve widows who had left the church also re-joined. Out of the 28 former members who were visited, eighteen showed willingness to come back and join other members. The number of nominal members who were motivated and became active in the church increased to 26, while 82 new members joined the church through baptism.

The daily attendance on ordinary Sabbath grew from an average of 242 to 420. The adjustment, balancing, and review of church activities and programs were noted to have facilitated punctuality and members' participation. This was a big contrast as compared to previous Sabbath days when members came to church majorly for the divine service.

Out of the 62 members randomly selected and interviewed, 58 expressed satisfaction and happiness about the present daily and weekly Sabbath activities. Involvement and active participation of members was observed to have gone up by 62%. Weekly offerings grew from an average of 2,250.00 Kenyan shillings to 8,480.00 Kenyan shillings. Many church leaders could

easily follow and narrate the Seventh-day Adventist heritage. The members were able to distinguish between doctrinal and cultural issues.

Income generating activities in different fields were thriving and, as a result, gains for the respective members went up with more than 72%. More to that, some other members attained professional skills. Besides, a total number of eight orphans and four destitute youths benefitted from the church bursary scheme in the year 2014 while another six were to receive similar assistance in the year 2015. Four young males and three young females have been sponsored to join Waondo youth polytechnic, Mbita, and Bugema University, Uganda, to train in different vocations.

During the implementation process, it was noted that the number of members who dropped out decreased tremendously.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study was devoted to investigate the alarming trend of members leaving Mbita Central SDA Church. The purpose was to find a solution to the problem and then develop an integrated strategy of reclaiming the members who have gone out of the church and, at the same time, nurture and retain the available members by training them to be Disciples of Christ. From the beginning of this study, the researcher found out that, on the average, 24 members left the church annually—an indicator that, in the future, the church would greatly suffer in membership gains and retention levels.

The researcher, therefore, developed a strategy to reclaim, nurture, and retain the former and available church members using several methods. The methods included lectures and trainings which enlightened the members on the understanding and knowledge about Seventh-day Adventist Church doctrines and cultural matters so that no doctrinal or cultural conflict would be experienced to interfere with the faith of the members. Other areas included understanding the mission and heritage of the SDA Church, formulation of membership retention strategies, well-balanced church programs particularly those that relate to funds and other church activities, and formation of small group ministry and prayer cells. Several programs that included active involvement and participation of all members in vocational training, income generating activities, bursary scheme for the destitute and orphans, reaching those who left the church,

tapping talents from respective members through gifted hands program, and finally emulating and using Christ's method were introduced and done. At the end of the program, the following major accomplishments were recorded.

A total of 6 lecture sessions and training on membership nurture and retention strategies were conducted with 126 members in attendance. According to church records, the program reclaimed 22 members who had left the church and brought 82 new members within two months of implementation. There is good harmony between different members of the church as a result of prayer cells. Fourteen small groups were formed and are still active in the church. There are five active departments of the church through involvement and active participation of members as opposed to past times.

More church leaders are able to clearly distinguish between doctrinal and cultural issues. The mission and heritage of the SDA Church is clear to three-quarters of the church members. The programs and activities of the church after being restructured are done as per schedule and the number of members who actively participate has gone up by 62%.

Conclusion

From this study, several factors relating to lack of formal nurture and retention program, lack of active involvement in church programs, use of, control of, and soliciting for church finances contributed much to Mbita Central SDA Church membership dropout. Segregation according to social class, economic disability and ability, and ignorance about many facts about the SDA Church at large also contributed to the dropout. Since the life of any church depends on the number of members who come into the church and are participants rather than spectators, an integrated program has been designed specifically for the purpose of making Mbita Central Church become vibrant and lively in its daily programs. This integrated program can achieve

significant results not only by bringing many members into the church, but also by nurturing and retaining them. As many disciples are consistently made, the church will remain active and vibrant from generation to generation.

Recommendations

Even though the seemingly large number of members at Mbita Central Church could be confused with steady church growth, this study clearly showed a church with membership retention challenges. In an effort to address the challenge of retention, the following recommendations are made:

- Kenya Lake Conference and Mbita Central SDA Church leadership should adopt the designed program and use it to continue enhancing the effective nurture and retention of its members who have been reclaimed as well as to win souls for Christ.
- One major and common factor noted from the study revolves around money collection and usage initiatives. Low income had a devastating effect on spirituality. Thus, members with low income must be supported by the local conference and local church through small income generating activities and seminars. Local church leadership should disburse local bursaries to the destitute and orphans without bias.
- The local church leadership must appreciate and accept new scientific age and ideas and incorporate all possible different relevant activities in all its facets of worship programs through trainings for the benefit of the local church growth.

- Youth involvement and participation in the church activities and small group ministry programs must be considered and practiced by both the local church leadership and members to enhance effective church growth.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

LETTERS

Date: 12th February, 2012

Dear Respondent,

I am a M. A. Pastoral Theology student at the Adventist University of Africa, Ongata/Rongai, doing a research project on **Membership Retention Strategy** at Mbita Central SDA Church, Mbita, Kenya. This research project is aimed at assisting in understanding the main reasons why **some** members of Mbita Central SDA Church decided to **move out** of the church. It will also help me to formulate a strategy that will make people grow and be responsible disciples who **stay in** the church. It is for this reason that I have contacted you, as a **member/former member** of Mbita Central SDA Church who may be endowed with some knowledge on this very important and sensitive issue, to complete the attached questionnaire by providing relevant answers that will help me understand these very important reasons.

I therefore count on your response as major information source that will not only give my research work valuable shape, but also add to its authenticity. Feel free to express your opinion and ideas without reservations whatsoever as confidentiality in the whole process of the research project is assured. Do not write your name on the questionnaire.

Yours sincerely,

Pr. Charles A. Nyangia

Mbita – 0725-341-347



Seventh Day Adventist Church

Mbita Central

P.O. Box 47

Date 24th

November 2011

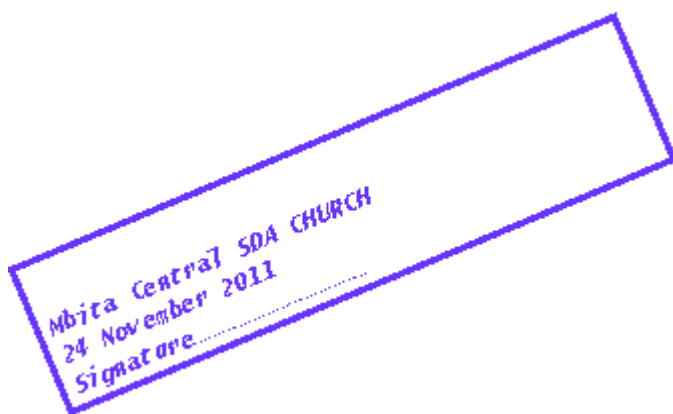
Dear Sir,

RE: **YOUR PROJECT RESEARCH**

In reference to your letter dated 2nd November 2011. The church board and church business reference MIN/1/21/11/2011 and BIS/ 1/22/11/2011 respectively, approved your research studies at our church and therefore you are allowed to conduct it, access the church documents as well as interview the individual church members and different groups.

Kindly contact us for further information to facilitate your research studies at your convenient time

Yours sincerely



Philemon Orondo

Church Clerk

P.O. Box 43,
KENDU BAY.
02-11-2011
The Church Clerk,
Mbita Central Church,
P. O Box 47, MBITA

Through District Pastor,
Mbita District

Dear Sir,

RE : PROJECT RESEARCH WORK AT MBITA CENTRAL SDA CHURCH

Greetings. I am a M.A. Pastoral Theology student at Adventist University of Africa. After realizing that several members of Mbita Central Church leave the church to join other denominations and surrender their faith altogether, I became interested to establish the reasons why this takes place. I therefore chose 'Strategy To Retain Members of Mbita Central SDA Church' as my research project.

I therefore intend to do the research work at the church with a far fetched objective of using the attained data to nurture and retain the members if implemented. I therefore ask that you allow me undertake the project research in the church. I also ask that you allow me interact freely with the church members as I orally interview some of them. I intend to use questionnaires at some given points. Church data especially on membership will be of great value to my research work and I ask authority to access them with a promise of high confidentiality.

I hope for positive consideration, moral and material support from you where and when necessary.

Yours sincerely,

Charles A. Nyangia

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRES

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE FOR

FORMER MBITA CENTRAL SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

MEMBERS

1. What is your: a. Age _____ b. Sex _____ [Male, Female]. Tick one
2. What year did you join Mbita Central SDA Church? _____
3. Did you join the church through baptism [Yes, No] Tick one.
4. If baptized later, what year were you baptized into the church? _____
5. What made you join Mbita Central SDA Church?

6. During your time as a member, what interested you most at the Mbita Central SDA Church?

7. What do you feel **did not** interest you at Mbita Central SDA Church?

8. During your time as a member of Mbita Central SDA Church, were you **involved** in the Church activities and programs? [Yes, No]. Tick one.
9. If yes, which particular activities?

10. Which particular activities were you interested in **but** was **NEVER** involved in

11. How did you feel about Mbita Central SDA Church **services** and **programs** of worship such as: [Select **either** of the following to explain: [Very interesting, Interesting, NOT Interesting, Boring, Very Good, Good, Poor, Very Spiritual, Spiritual, NOT Spiritual]
 - a) Song services _____
 - b) Prayer services _____
 - c) Divine [Sermon] services _____
 - d) Bible study program _____
 - e) Sabbath School program _____
 - f) Outreach/visitation program _____

12. What is your view on the **interpersonal relationship** at Mbita Central SDA Church
[Choose one: Excellent, Very good, good, average, very poor, poor]

13. What is your view on the general church membership involvement in church activities
and programs in Mbita Central SDA Church

14. When did you **stop** being a member of Mbita Central SDA Church? [Year]

15. Why did you **stop** being a member of Mbita Central SDA Church?

16. Did Mbita Central SDA Church **leaders** or **members visit you when you left?**

17. If yes, **who** visited you?
18. If no, **why** do you think they did not

19. **How** did you feel about the visit?

20. Do you feel you may **re-join** Mbita SDA Church?
21. **Why** do you think so

22. If yes, **when**

23. If no, **why**

24. During your times as a member of Mbita Central SDA Church, which **department** of
the Church did you feel to be **most active**

25. **Why** do you think so

26. Which **department** of Mbita Central SDA Church did you feel **NOT** to be active

27. **Why** do you think so

28. What do you think was **very interesting** at Mbita Central SDA Church that is not in
your **new Church**

29. What is **very interesting** to you in your **new Church**

30. During your time as a member of Mbita Central SDA Church, what was very
disappointing to you

31. What do you think are the **strengths** of Mbita Central SDA Church that could be tapped to enhance both physical infrastructures and spiritual growth of the church and members respectively?

32. What do you think are the **weaknesses** of Mbita Central SDA Church that need improvement to enhance both physical and spiritual growth of the church and members respectively?

33. In your opinion, what **improvement** to the church services and programs should be made at Mbita Central SDA Church to make it more interesting

34. What is your opinion on:

a. Local Church **Finance** soliciting and Management

b. Tithes/Offerings **promotion** and Management

35. In your opinion, why do you think some members of Mbita Central SDA Church decide to leave the Church? -

36. In your opinion, what is your feeling about the church **leadership and membership** of Mbita Central SDA Church

37. Give any **additional comment** and suggestions on Mbita Central SDA Church.

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE FOR MBITA CENTRAL SDA CHURCH

MEMBERS

1. What is your:
 - a. Age _____
 - b. Sex _____ [Male, Female].
2. When did you become a member of Mbita Central SDA Church [Year] _____?
3. Have you been baptized? [Yes, No] – Tick one.
4. If yes, when? _____ [Year].
5. Do you hold church leadership position presently? [Yes, No] – Tick one.
6. If yes, which leadership position(s) _____?
7. Had you held any church leadership position in the past [Yes, No] – Tick one.
8. If yes, which leadership position(s) _____?
9. When? [Year] _____ ?
10. As a church leader, which retention [of members] challenges do/did you have?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
11. What is your view(s) on the Mbita Central SDA Church activities particularly on:
 - a. Sabbath Schools programs _____
 - b. Divine Service [Sermons] _____
 - c. Bible Study _____
 - d. Outreach programs _____
 - e. Stewardship [Tithes/Offerings] _____
 - f. Unity _____
 - g. Fellowship _____
 - h. Prayer _____
 - i. Music _____
 - j. Youth programs _____
 - k. Pathfinders _____
 - l. Adventurers _____
12. Do you think church members are involved in church activities [Yes, No]. Tick one.
13. Do you think youths are involved in church programs [Yes, No]. Tick one.
14. Do you think women are involved in church programs [Yes, No]. Tick one.
15. Do you think widows [especially young ones] are involved in church activities [Yes, No].
16. Do you feel there is good worship environment conducive to spiritual growth at Mbita Central Church [Yes, No]. Tick one
17. According to your answer, why do you think so?

18. What is your personal view on interpersonal relationship at Mbita Central SDA Church? _____

19. What is your personal view on **member care** at Mbita Central SDA Church particularly on these different groups: [Fill either of the following in the spaces provided; Excellent, Very Good, Good, Average, Low, Poor]
- a. New members _____
 - b. Youths _____
 - c. Children _____
 - d. Women _____
 - e. Men _____
 - f. Old persons _____
 - g. Young/old widows _____
 - h. Widowers _____
 - i. Orphans _____
 - j. Bereaved families/persons _____
 - k. The sick _____
 - l. The rich _____
 - m. The poor _____
20. What is your personal view on church leadership at Mbita Central SDA Church? _____

21. What is your opinion on:
- a. Local Church Finance soliciting and Management

 - b. Tithes/Offerings promotion and Management

22. What interests you most at Mbita Central SDA Church services and programs of worship?

23. Do you feel to stay longer as a member of Mbita Central SDA Church [Yes, No]. Tick one.
24. If yes, state reasons

25. If no, state why

26. If you intend to join non SDA Church, state which

27. Why this particular church _____

28. What does NOT interest you most at Mbita Central SDA Church services and programs of worship?

29. How best, according to your opinion, do you think the church services and programs of worship at Mbita Central SDA Church can be improved to enhance spiritual growth?

30. In your opinion, what activities and programs can be undertaken at Mbita Central SDA Church to make people grow and **stay in** the church?

31. In your opinion, what are some reasons why some members of Mbita Central SDA Church decide to **move out** of the church?

32. What do you think are the strengths of Mbita Central SDA Church that could be tapped to enhance both physical infrastructures and spiritual growth of the church?

33. What do you think are the weaknesses of Mbita Central SDA Church that need improvement to enhance both physical and spiritual growth of the church?

34. Any other comment

APPENDIX C

LECTURES

Lectures and Modules

In 2012, after finding out that there were many people leaving Mbita Central SDA Church, I introduced this problem to the church. I presented to them the entire program and retention strategy that I intended to initiate in order to increase membership retention. This prepared the church for the program implementation.

In preparing for the program, I first designed sessions that involve lectures on topical areas. The lectures were meant to benefit the whole church membership to make them understand the situation in the church and the low retention levels. The attendance was overwhelming and participation was effective.

Lecture One

Topic: Discipleship

Duration: 4 hours

Objectives: To teach the church membership about retention strategies

Specific Objectives:

1. To teach the biblical context of discipleship
2. To explain the main aim of retention
3. To make a contrast between the members received into the church through baptism and the members who leave the church
4. To identify some reasons why some members leave the church
5. To identify and use some methods Christ used to retain members

Teaching Method: Lectures, interactions, discussion, questions, and answers

Resources: The Holy Bible, Bible Commentaries, Personal experiences, human resources

Activities: Reading of Bible texts that relate to the topic, answering questions, giving additional insight and suggestions

Lecture Two

Topic: Small Groups and Prayer Cells

Duration: 4 Hours

Objectives: To understand the effectiveness of small groups and prayer cells

Specific Objectives:

1. To form small groups and prayer cells
2. To formulate rules and regulations to be followed in meetings
3. To identify some of the activities that would be undertaken in the groups and cells
4. To identify members of the small groups and prayer cells
5. To establish through nomination/election of the small group and prayer cells leaders

Teaching Method: Lectures, interactions, discussions, questions, answers

6. Resources: Holy Bible, Bible Commentaries, human resource

Activities: Nominating small group and prayer cells leaders, grouping members into recognizable small groups

Lecture Three

Topic: Small Scale Income Generating Projects

Duration: 6 Hours

Objective: To understand the importance of Small scale Income Generating Projects

Specific Objectives:

1. To identify viable small scale income generating projects
2. To understand and learn how to initiate and maintain small scale income generating projects
3. To formulate rules and regulations to direct operations of the small scale income generating projects' activities
4. To form individual and group interest groups
5. To understand the positive and negative effects of all forms of loans

Lecture Four

Topic: Bursary Scheme For Destitute and Orphans

Duration: 4 Hours

Objective: To initiate a bursary scheme to cater for destitute and orphans

Specific Objectives:

1. To understand and know that assisting the destitute and orphans is commissioned by Christ Himself
2. To identify sources of funding to the bursary kitty
3. To formulate rules and by-laws to direct the operations of the kitty
4. To identify the relevant possible beneficiaries from the kitty

Lecture Five

Duration: 6 Hours

Topic: Economic Empowerment through Vocational Training

Objective: To understand that vocational training will ultimately enhance individual and Communal economy

Specific Objectives:

1. To influence the youth in particular to embrace vocational training
2. To identify some affordable and quick to learn vocations
3. To identify sources of funding and sponsors
4. To identify some willing youths to join vocational training institutions
5. To formulate rules and regulations to govern the initiative

Teaching Methods: Lectures, open discussion, group responses

Activities: Group discussions, Questions and answers

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VITAE

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1987 – 1991: Kenya Technical Teachers College

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Work Experience

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Workshops and Seminars Attended

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1990: Redd Barna Africa Community Involvement & Participation Workshop, Harare, Zimbabwe

Facilitations Done

2014: KLC Personal Ministries Laity Congress, Kwoyo

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