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Reynolds Symposium

2013 PROCEEDINGS

The Next Generation: Will it be Adventist?

Mining Qualitative Data from the Adventist Connection Survey

SOUTHERN ADVENTIST UNIVERSITY
School of
Education and Psychology

Proceedings of the
Reynolds Symposium: September 21, 2013

The Next Generation: Will It Be Adventist? Mining Qualitative Data from the Adventist Connection Study

Cheryl Des Jarlais, Reynolds Chair and Compiler
November 2013

Southern Adventist University
Department of Education and Psychology

CONTENTS

1 PREFACE

3 OVERVIEW:
THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CONNECTION STUDY
Doug Jacobs and Mia Lindsey

9 PHASE ONE: NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ADVENTIST CONNECTION STUDY
Cheryl Woolsey Des Jarlais

45 BEYOND BELIEF: WHY MORE ADVENTISTS ARE LEAVING OVER DOCTRINE
Andy Nash

56 THE POWER AND IMPORTANCE OF AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO YOUTH MINISTRY
Tim Cross

65 THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION: WHO ARE WE REALLY?
Mia Lindsey

81 COMING OF AGE IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH: DEVELOPMENTAL CHALLENGES
Ruth Williams Morris

92 GROWING THE CHURCH ACROSS GENERATIONS—A MODEL FOR EDUCATION
Cheryl Woolsey Des Jarlais

PREFACE

The first annual Reynolds Symposium, titled "The Next Generation: Will It Be Adventist? Mining [Qualitative] Data from the Adventist Connection Study" was held September 21, 2013, on the campus of Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee. The Symposium was hosted and organized by the Reynolds Chair, under the oversight of Southern Adventist University's School of Education and Psychology. The Reynolds Chair is a position established by Maurine Reynolds in honor of her parents, for the purpose of providing quality research and instruction in the area of religion and values at Southern Adventist University.

The Symposium welcomed 90 members of Southern's faculty and the community at large to an all-day session that included seven presentations and three panel discussions. The presentations were offered by members of Southern's faculty, Andy Nash, Alan Parker, Ruth Williams Morris, and me; a religion professor from Oakwood University, Finbar Benjamin; pastors from Collegedale Seventh-day Adventist Church, Andy Nash and Tim Cross; and a young adult member of the millennial generation who was the graduate assistant for the Adventist Connection Study, Mia Lindsey. Each presenter was involved with either the Adventist Connection Study or recent similar research on young adults in the Seventh-day Adventist church.

The topic of the Symposium was based on a current research project by the Pierson Institute on the retention of Southern graduates in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Doug Jacobs was the principle researcher on Southern's campus. Finbar Benjamin was the principle researcher on the Oakwood University Campus. As the Reynolds Chair, I was asked to serve on the research team for the Adventist Connection Study, and write the qualitative narrative analysis for the first phase of the study.

The qualitative piece of the research was designed to guide the development of the Adventist Connection Study on-line survey, which was designed and administered in the spring of 2013. More than 1,000 respondents in the target age group of millennial graduates from Southern, Oakwood, and Pacific Union College, and more than 1,000 respondents in older age brackets, completed the survey. The analysis of the data from the survey has yet to be released. However, the narrative analysis of the qualitative data from the focus groups on Southern's campus is included in this publication.

As an extension of the collaborative work that went into the research for the Adventist Connection Study, the Reynolds Symposium was held as an effort to draw on local expertise from a variety of disciplines to examine and reflect on the qualitative data from Phase One of the study. Of the seven presentations, five papers were prepared and are included in these proceedings. The three panel discussions created an interactive environment where the attendees not only asked questions, but also offered their input and suggestions.

I express my sincere appreciation to Burt Coolidge for his foresight and leadership in providing for this type of research and community discussion. John McCoy, dean of the School of Education and Psychology, also offered support and encouragement for the new venue for community discussion and research dissemination that a symposium such as this provides. I am thankful for the guidance of the members of the Reynolds Steering committee: John McCoy, David Smith, Sharon Pitman, Doug Tilstra, John Youngberg, Mark Sargent, Pegi Flynt, Tracy Strong, and Mia Lindsey. Many thanks also, for the tireless work of not only Mia Lindsey, but Wyntre Stout and Shannon Corros, three graduate assistants who made both the research and the symposium possible. Not only the presenters, but also Kevin

Kibble, the chaplain for the university, and Ken Norton, youth pastor at Collegedale Seventh-day Adventist Church, shared their insights during the panel discussions. Each member of the worship team and the young adult panel was deeply appreciated; they were a highlight of the program! And finally, many thanks to my father, Raymond Woolsey, who offered his editorial expertise for this publication.

Cheryl Woolsey Des Jarlais

Reynolds Chair

November, 2013

OVERVIEW: THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CONNECTION STUDY

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Robert H. Pierson Institute of Evangelism and World Missions

Investigators: Douglas Jacobs, Douglas Tilstra, Finbar Benjamin, Cheryl Des Jarlais, Mia Lindsey, Hollis James, Alan Parker, Sharon Pittman, Octavio Ramirez

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Recent research studies have found alarming declines in the number of young adults who are actively involved in a local church. Although very few studies have been completed on young adult retention within the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, developments in culture and religion suggest that this denomination is also experiencing a decline in young adult membership. Almost half of White North American Seventh-day Adventist members are 60 years of age or older (Sahlin & Richardson, 2008), while the median age for the general population of the United States is currently 37 (US Census, 2010). Unless something is done to reverse the trends of the past two decades, the alarming exodus of young people from the church will only intensify.

The purpose of this research project is to help the Seventh-day Adventist Church discover the levels of local church connection or disconnection among recent SDA university graduates, provide some understanding of why connection or disconnection takes place, and, most importantly, provide insights into effective ways to retain and reclaim young adults as active members of local Seventh-day Adventist churches. The Adventist Connection Study (ACS), commissioned by the General Conference Future Plans Working Group and conducted by the Robert H. Pierson Institute of Evangelism and World Missions at Southern Adventist University surveyed graduates between the years of 2001 and 2012 from Southern Adventist University (SAU), Oakwood University (OU), and Pacific Union College (PUC).

The research data collected was not aggregated for individual universities; instead, by including several universities, the data provided a diverse sample of Adventist young adults.

To accurately measure young adult attitudes toward church involvement, the Pierson Institute conducted a two-phase research project. Because there is no established theory that explains why graduates connect or disconnect themselves from the church, researchers used Phase One as an opportunity to listen carefully to young adults before crafting the research instrument. Phase One involved inductive, qualitative research using several focus groups of university students and recent graduates. Phase Two was the development and administration of a deductive, quantitative instrument that was sent to all graduates of participating universities from 2001 to 2012.

One result of the Phase One focus group research was the change in name and focus from the Adventist Retention Study to the Adventist Connection Study. After listening to self-described "active" and "inactive" focus group participants, researchers realized that perceptions of what it means to be an active or inactive member vary widely. Creating a research definition of a church member in regular standing would draw an arbitrary line that would not accurately represent the complexity of today's relationships between Adventist churches and young adults. Every young adult interviewed had points of both connection and disconnection with the church. Researchers decided, in consultation with the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, to focus their research on the various ways that young adults connect and disconnect with both the denomination and with local Seventh-day Adventist churches.

Study Background and Significance

Recent research studies by Adventist and other researchers have found alarming declines in the number of young adults who are actively involved in a local church. Such declines are found even in churches with active youth ministries.

Research Questions

1. Who is most likely to be connected to or disconnected from the Adventist Church?
2. Why do young Adventists think others leave?
3. What correlations, if any, are there to education?

4. What correlations, if any, are there to personal spirituality?
5. What are young adults' perceptions of and attitudes towards the church?
6. What is their current connectedness to the Adventist Church?
7. What does" church" mean to young adults?
8. What are graduates' perceptions of the church's core beliefs?
9. Have their church attitudes changed recently?
    a. If yes, why were these views impacted?
10. How knowledgeable are young adults about Adventist media?
11. What sources do young adults use for staying in touch?
12. What are young adults' present feelings about Adventism?

This research study is classified as exploratory research, and no hypotheses were tested.

Delimitations

Participation in this study is delimited to college graduates who (a) completed their undergraduate degree at Southern Adventist University, Oakwood University, or Pacific Union College; (b) were between the ages of 18 and 40 at the time of completing the quantitative survey in Phase Two; and (c) are current or former members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Methodology

Phase One: Qualitative Study

There were a total of 66 participants; all participants were either alumni or seniors at the universities. Between April and October 2012, potential participants—graduates of SAU and OU between the years 2000-2012—were solicited and recruited based on contact information received from the Office of Alumni Relations. There were ten different focus groups, and they were classified as follows: seven "active" Adventists groups, one "inactive" Adventist group, one of dropout students varying in church activity levels, and one of "former" Adventists. Ten different focus groups were arranged; however, there were a total of 12 sessions held because two groups, an "active" and an

"inactive" group, were invited back for a follow-up because the researchers felt that there was more information that the participants wished to share but may not have had the opportunity because of the large size of the group. Each group had between four and ten participants. Their ages ranged from 21 to 43, and about 56 percent (n=37) were females. The participants self-selected which group they would be in because the researchers did not want to impose a possibly outdated measure or definition of activeness. The dropout students were not included in Phase Two because they did not meet the delimitation criteria, but they were included in Phase One to test for differences in response, of which there were none reported.

The focus group sessions involving SAU students and alumni were held in Market Research Institute, a facility on the campus of Southern Adventist University equipped with audio and video recording capabilities. The focus group sessions involving OU alumni were held on the campus of Oakwood University, either in the C. E. Moseley Complex or the Blake Center President's Board Room, and were audio recorded. The participants were compensated for their time with a free meal, and the dropout students and "former" Adventists also received a $20 gift card. Each session lasted between one and two hours.

Analysis for Phase One

The focus group recordings were transcribed using Express Scribe software. The participants' identities were replaced with a special code based on their group, schooling status, and gender. After the transcription, Atlas.ti software was used to analyze the data and code- recurring themes. The research team, in order to test the validity of the codes from the computer software, held two sessions where they manually read through the transcripts and categorized the data into themes by cutting out phrases and taping them to large white poster pages with theme headings on them. Those present at the coding sessions included not only the primary researchers, but also interested faculty from the University and graduate assistants. The list of codes and narrative analysis is presented as a separate document on pages 10-56.

Phase Two: Quantitative Study

Phase Two took place between the months of January and May 2013. A quantitative instrument was formed based on the language, themes, and topics that came out of the focus groups in Phase One. In February a pilot version of the survey was sent to SAU alumni who were participants in Phase One and to recent SAU alumni from the School of Religion who have experience in youth ministry. The survey was launched on April 2, 2013, and remained accessible for four weeks. The survey was distributed by via links supplied by e-mail, on SAU's monthly alumni newsletter, and the alumni Facebook page. OU included a link to the survey in their weekly public relations emailed announcements. PUC emailed a link to the survey from their Alumni Office and posted a link on their alumni Facebook page. The link was also placed on Facebook and shared virally among faculty and graduates and on a fan page pertaining to the research study.

Analysis

All the results were exported from SurveyMonkey to SPSS. Chi-square tests and one-way ANOVA were performed on the data to discover if there were correlations between any of the dependent and independent variables.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this research study. For Phase One, the focus group involved participants who lived within a 30-mile radius of the universities. Both of these universities are located in Southern states; thus, those from other regions of the United States were not included in the first phase. However, the results from the survey in Phase Two can determine if there were themes and ideologies that are associated with the other locations.

For Phase Two, although there were a large and varied number of responses from the sample, the results seemed to show that those who responded were at a high level of connection with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This study was not able to attract a large response from those who have totally disconnected from the Seventh-day Adventist Church and is limited in being able to describe accurately what is taking place in that population.

Results

Discussion on the analysis and results from Phase Two will be available at a later time, after preliminary reports have been made to primary constituents which requested the study. The data set for this study is very large, and there are many variables to be explored.

PHASE ONE: NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF ADVENTIST CONNECTION STUDY

Cheryl Woolsey Des Jarlais

Associate Professor of Education

Southern Adventist University

Theme 1: Growing Into or Away from the Adventist Church: Identity Issues

Young adults who were born to Adventist parents recognize that they were born into a culture and inherited an educational system. But though they were born into the church, they have to make an informed choice of whether or how religion will be an identifying factor for them. They describe the role that their college experience has had in this process, and the challenges they face in developing a sense of identity. They also describe the conflicts they experience in identifying with the Adventist church. Finally, their comments illustrate several continuums which describe types of identity development. The subtopics for this theme include a) College and Identity, b) Difficulties in Developing a Sense of Identity as an Adventist, c) Conflicts with the Adventist Church, d) Identity Development and Morality, and e) The Continuum of Identity Development.

4.01 College and Identity

Some college students have not really identified what they believed.

> *One of the things that happened with young people in college is that they haven't I guess griped with [what they believe] yet, they haven't made it their own yet, so they can't use it as an identity thing. ASDA1-FS10*

Others feel the pressures of force or feel they are sheltered in terms of what to believe.

> *Well, we have all gone through our own journey to realize the value of what we believe. . . I feel like the average student here . . . probably went to an Adventist high school and now they're here, and I feel like most of them feel like they're spoon-fed their faith. Now they're here and . . . they're like "I still have to go to worships and all that... Ahhhh! " . . .They're so "forced" their own religion that they don't, they haven't been able to make up their own mind about it. They haven't taken the opportunity to do that journey. ASDA1-MS5*

It's because it's an Adventist college you're sheltered from things. I have a lot of friends who were forced to go to church every Sabbath through Southern and then they are like "whew" and don't come back for a couple of years and then they have kids and they're all back in Sabbath School again. We're all in the same Sabbath School whatever you know and it's because they have children and they are like "I want them to have the same thing as when I was little and I loved Sabbath School or whatever." DSDA1-FD8

Not all feel that going to worship services and convocations are harmful. One young adult appreciated them, but feels that they did not really fit him for the real world.

My junior year of college I was in the dorm. That was the only year of college I was in the dorm and a lot of people complain about going to worship and convocation and vespers and this stuff. But for me it was great. It was just easier for me to maintain some devotional life or connection during that time. But then when I graduated, I think that the real world did kind of did hit me. And I felt like I was too tired maybe to go to church or there was a lot going on. It's not necessarily the church, but the college didn't prepare me for the real world. ISDA1-MA5

Another young adult describes how coming back to college helped her decide to remain in the church, though she still has conflicts and concerns.

After a series of really intense, challenging events for me, with folks in the church, some peers, I was grappling with whether or not I want to continue to be a Seventh-day Adventist. Well you could imagine what a difficult, conversation to have with God, especially when my husband works for the church. I've gained myself some sort of pseudo leader(ship role) in the church . .. And so a part of why I went back to Southern this past year was to take that Adventist Heritage class, was to take the Christian Beliefs class and I could not have been in a more perfect environment for helping me examine these things. It's a real shame and a difficult thing for me to understand why I've been an Adventist all this time without any (support). . . I've desperately (been) seeking support, but I haven't really had much and now I had to pay like twenty-two thousand dollars, out of my pocket, to get the answers that I need . . . I'm choosing to continue to be an Adventist, hallelujah, after this past year. But I definitely have some major issues with some of the same shared concerns. ISDA-FA7

Still others have found college and the church a positive influence on their identity development.

College, for one young woman, is a place where she can explore and express different views.

In my hometown and that area I feel restricted in my thinking because I wasn't, out here in college if you have ideas you can tell them. You can discuss them with so many different people with so many different ideas, I feel like it creates a more broad-minded useful type of thinking. More applicable to many different situations cause you get exposed to different thinking. ISDA1-FA9

Another young adult credits the university chaplain for his conversion.

> *_____accepted me exactly where I was at. And of course he didn't have to move me along so to speak, because the fact that he expected, I wanted to move forward. So that's been beautiful. He's the one who made me actually open to religion and finally be converted. And baptized last April. ISDA1-FA9*

Another has high praise for the church pastor.

> *I hope no one misunderstands me to say that's been all my experience with church. I've loved church. God has spoken to me so much through the individuals. Like I don't know if you've been privileged to see --------, but his sermons have touched me in a way that is so profound. ASDA2-MA9*

One notes that the church helped to affirm his speaking abilities.

> *The church was the first place that I was affirmed for my speaking abilities before I knew I had them. So I think that played a big part in my development. So that was always very, very affirming. . . I think a big of my comfort level in front of an audience has a lot to do with feedback that I've got from church members. DSDA-MD6*

4.02 Difficulties in Developing a Sense of Identity as an Adventist

Young adults share a variety of reasons why they are struggling with their identity as an Adventist. These include a) it is not O.K. to struggle to get it together as an Adventist; b) the church is threatened by opposing viewpoints; c) personal struggles to find a sense of purpose.

4.02.1 It Is Not O.K. to Struggle to Get it Together as an Adventist

Some feel that perhaps they are not true Adventists because they have struggles that others do not seem to have, and help is not easy to find. They do not feel their family or the church is open to them as they try to share their struggles.

> *A lot of times I feel like as an Adventist you have to be like perfect or your family is perfect. . . I've never felt comfortable coming to an Adventist or even my parents for that (matter) to say "I'm dealing with this," and there have been times where I was going (through) so much that I couldn't help it, but I would say something and it became over-spiritualized in the sense they'd say "Well, it must be demons or something or it must be Satan" and it's like I'm with ya, but at the same I kind of live on this earth so can we talk a little bit about what I'm dealing with? . . . I just don't have it together like how they do and so it just makes me feel like, I don't have as much of a chance to be a true Adventist because I seem to have it not together and they seem to get through okay. ASDA2-FA4:*

There's one church that would turn me off. (It) is the kind where you go in and you share something like a personal concern, like I'm having a hard time and I don't know what to do. And I get answers like, "Well, the Bible made it plain. You can find all your answers are in the Bible." Or they'll say, "Just pray about it." But wait, you're just dismissing me because you don't want to hear it. And they'll say, "Go to the Bible, go to the Bible." Well, you're giving me my problems here and my answers here [makes a gesture of distance] and I see no steps in between at all. ISDA-FA9

I believe everything that we're teaching. I believe in Adventism, but when I'm sitting there every week and I'm getting this message that if you're having any type of struggle, you're messed up. I'll leave in fury. . . . If I wasn't still struggling, I could leave (the Lord). But it's because I struggle that I stay with him. How can I bring other people here when they are gonna get bashed for being a broken person, instead of reassured that the fact that they are a broken person is why Christ came to save them? DSDA1-MD3

In some seminars that I would go to or some big evangelistic thing that I would go to, it always seemed that people had it all together all the time and it never felt safe. . . . I believe in all the standards that we have for sure and I've always believed in our doctrine, but I've always felt even as a kid, like my struggle through high school , I wonder if anyone else was struggling as much as I was as far as getting this Christian walk right. I don't remember hearing very often about how people they struggle and how they miss the mark. There were always so many things that were confusing but I just kept it to myself or sometimes I would tell them to different people (but) they would think I was trying to fight or be debatable. ASDA2-MA9

4.02.2 The Church Is Threatened by Opposing Viewpoints.

Some feel that they are expected to accept the Adventist viewpoint without the opportunity to explore opposing viewpoints. They feel that the process of exploring other opinions and options is threatening to the church.

Well, you're presented in the church and through college if it's Adventist that our perspective of course is the only right one. And people who don't agree with it are kind of dumb. Like it's so simple. You get out in the real world and you talk to other people and you're like, hmmm, they have a point. *How come I was never told this point? How come they were presented to me as stupid? Now they appear really smart. Am I wrong? And now you have to reevaluate your whole (view). ISDA1-FA9*

When I went to church school, we didn't have the NAD approved textbook for science, (so) we used another science textbook, (but) we completely skipped the evolution chapter. So whenever you have conversations with your friends who may not share the same creationist view as you, they've done their research in looking at both sides, but for some reason, I just feel in the church we don't embrace people looking at both sides. It's like if we're open-minded to other people's

ideas then there is that danger that we might prescribe to those ideas and really stick to them. I think that it works both ways in that, by allowing your youth to know what's on the other side, there is a chance of losing them to the other side but by not allowing them to really interact with the other side then there is that danger of losing them to the other side because they don't know. ASDA2- FA2

Some Adventists are really scared of new ideas and us talking about it. Let's be reasonable with faith, and say this is what is, instead of trying to paint a picture like "The Bible is so clear that alcohol is wrong. Look, it's clear." And then I started realizing myself it's not a hundred percent clear. That's my opinion--I don't drink alcohol, by the way. ASDA2-MA9

I saw my non-Adventist friends and met other non-Adventists and I'm like, "Wow, these people really good Christians," but yet over on this side, on the Adventist side, it's like well, they don't worship on Saturday, they do this they do that, or they don't do this they don't do that, and so they aren't really that Christian. That was the rift that sort of started happening, like I see God here, but these people say that God is not there so that's (not) equating in my head, if I'm making sense. FSDA-MA2

We see it as a threat if someone believes something else than you. ASDA2-MA3

Young adults want the opportunity to be able to examine fundamental beliefs, and not always have everything so definitively answered.

I've had some theological questions at Southern and sometimes I feel like the professor feels like he has to answer my questions, and a lot of times you can tell that he doesn't really have an answer. It's okay to say "I don't really know. That's a really tough question. Here's some things you can thing about." Like there are some stuff in the Bible that doesn't make sense. Because we claim to believe in a God that's bigger than our understanding, so how can we claim to understand Him? Like we can't do that, and if we really claim to believe in this God that is bigger than us, bigger than time itself, then we do and He's bigger than our questions, He's bigger than our doubts, like He can handle it. If He is that big, don't be so concerned. Like He's not fragile, if you throw a doubt at Him, He's not gonna break. ISDA-FA3

4.02.3 Personal Struggles to Find a Sense of Purpose

One young woman shares a number of reasons why she is conflicted about being an Adventist. She feels that as an Adventist she can experience more joy than those in other faiths—but she also feels suffocated and guilty.

> *Sometimes I feel like it's a curse in a way, like knowing so much, just I can't live. Sometimes I feel kind of like I'm glad, because the joy that I can have is so much more than I feel like my other friends of other faiths. But at the same time there are times when I just really feel like it's suffocating. You can't leave it because you know too much but at the same time, you know that if you leave it's not just about your parents and so it's like that's why it feels like a blessing and a curse sometimes. Sometimes I just wish that I could be just as oblivious as the rest of the world sometimes.*
>
> *I have to second guess every little thing I do. Is this movie good? Is that skirt too short? Or if the way that I'm speaking is too not traditional Adventist? Or (do) I believe this because it is my opinion or is it the Bible? Sometimes I just want to see a movie and not feel guilty. Just live without having to wonder "What's God thinking" and I know that sounds really bad, and now I feel bad saying that.*

She feels it is impossible to be a good Adventist.

> *Easier. I would want the church to be easier. Easier in temperament. Easier in its demands. Easier in its understanding of what we believe. Easier in what we think of in even eternal life. Easier in how we read our Bible. Easier in who Ellen White is to us today in 2012. That would be a [starts to cry] a blessing.*
>
> *What makes me emotional is the sense that I feel almost like it's not possible to be the Adventist we're supposed to be. . . . it's impossible to be what I am.*

She can not feel assured of salvation.

> *My battle is always this sense of I'm not gonna make (it). I envy other faiths sometimes because they have this assurance that I feel like I'm not allowed to have as an Adventist and so it makes me feel confused about my church because I obviously feel a sense of loyalty.*

She wonders if religion was just made up to give us a sense of comfort.

> *Could I just be wrong? Not only could I be wrong, but could we just all have it wrong? And instead this is just a blankie. Are we really tapping into something or are we just tapping into a sense of comfort? Because you can jump into this other faith from being an Adventist jump to that and really believe it and you would die for that faith, just like I'm saying I would for mine, then maybe we all just have blankies, and they give us comfort and they give us hope, they give us purpose, but they are nothing (but) a blankie.*

But she is afraid to leave God—and the church.

> *I don't think I could leave God-- My fear of it is, how do you settle with the fact that you left everything you know and not feel like "what if I'm going to hell"? And it's not just what if I'm going to hell? What if I'm never gonna like be with God? I'm never gonna ask Him the questions that I wanted to ask Him. That fear is what makes me say, even if I 'm not connected, I will stay until I can feel either "this is why I'm here" or maybe it isn't that big of a deal. But I don't know and I don't want to be wrong, so that's why I stay. ASDA2-FA4*

4.03 Conflicts with the Adventist Church

Young adults share the conflicts they feel in identifying with the Adventist church. These include a) differences in beliefs, b) how the church treats homosexuals and the "least of these," c) differences in values, d) women's ordination, e) exclusivism, f) emphasis on image/appearance, and g) judgmental focus on behavior.

4.03.1 Differences in Beliefs

Some expect differences with people, but have conflicts with beliefs held by the church.

> *Anywhere you go, in any institution, in any place, you're gonna find people that you just don't like or that are just mean or have issues. And that's just the way it is and so in many ways you kind of learn to buck up and plunge on. And part of the reason that I still consider myself a part of the Adventist community is because I know that there are amazing wonderful people in the church. But recently, there have been like certain issues with belief systems in the church that have caused me to feel very conflicted and feel like how I believe concerning this issue makes me feel ostracized in a way. ISDA-FA3*

> *When I took your class and we read the "Ten Left," I remember distinctly noticing, in that small book, that none of those people left for doctrinal reasons. They all left because of some crisis that they had in their life. But I personally did leave the church for doctrinal reasons. For theological inconsistencies. DSDA-MD6*

> *I know people who their whole life ministry is Ellen G. White and it's not the Bible. I think there are certain churches that are perhaps more popular because they are more of the salvation of the once-saved-always-saved, regardless of works. I know some people that have gotten kicked out of this area because of that. I know some churches take more of a stand against that kind of theology. ISDA1-MA5*

Some agree with Adventist beliefs but not the church's presentation of the beliefs or behavior.

> *I love all the Adventist beliefs, but I hate how we present them. I totally believe in the Adventist beliefs, I love them, but the way we're presenting them is what's drawing people away and not allowing people to stay. ASDA2-MA5*

So I agree with what beliefs they stand for. I believe in what the Adventist church believes, but I don't agree with necessarily what the Adventist church does. ISDA-MA5

4.03.2 How the Church Treats Homosexuals and the "Least of These."

I have a hard time with (a) church (that) should be ministering to the "least of these," but then they don't want the "least of these" around. ISDA1-MA5

Some of my best friends are gay and it's so hard to . . . I don't really self-identify as an Adventist anymore because of issues like that. ISDA-FA4

Most specifically, recently had been the issue of homosexuality because of friendships and people that matter to me. I have a hard time reconciling my relationship with them and how I feel that people should treat them and then how I look at the church and how the church relates to them or things of the church would tell them. . . .This has become a very big deal because I haven't found a way to reconcile those things and I feel like saying I'm a part of this thing. It feels disingenuine. I feel like, this might sound very strange, I feel like Jesus would be more happy with me saying I'm not Adventist, than me claiming to be something I'm really not. ISDA-FA3

I don't struggle with homosexuality . . . but I'm struggling with whether or not I want to be a part of the church rather than just end up leaving because I didn't feel like I could talk about it. ASDA2-FA4

As far as Adventism goes, I feel passionate, but disconnected in a way. I still read my Bible and pray every day with Jesus, you know that's cool. But when it comes to a church as an institution . . . I'm not terribly happy with how the church has treated what they, might be termed the "least of these" in these in some ways. And there are so many good-hearted people who do so much and they . . . work their hands to the bone to help people and yet there is so much that isn't being done. I felt when I was being called to do what God was calling me to do, I had to do that in social work and not in the church and maybe the church isn't supposed to do that. ISDA-FA6

To execute homosexuals just for being homosexuals . . . [is] wrong. When you start (lobbying) against people's lives and their civil rights, I can't support that. I can't support that with my money. . . I'm making a list right now of all the other organizations that I [inaudible] because I've never thought of it like that before-- that I need to check out where my money's going. I go Costco, I go to Lowe's. Now I want to check these organizations out and check on where is my money going. It's gonna make me a different kind of consumer. ASDA3-FA4

4.03.3 Differences in Values

I feel like I'm balancing all these different roles in my life, all these different parts. It's an important thing to me that I'm a member of the Adventist church. This is what I have always been and what I intend to always be, yet I'm also a social worker and I very much agree with

social works values for the most part. How do I resolve (these different views). Like what if I have creative endeavors in my life? What if I write a novel or do art? How does that intersect? I don't agree with the way the church is treating various groups of people. I feel a little bit of a disconnect with the values that I hold vs. what the church holds. ISDA1-FA6

4.03.4 Women's Ordination

When people that are in the spotlight of the church are saying things like, "Yeah, women can't be ordained." And they are giving that message to everybody who'll listen, I think it's dangerous and I'm, I'm a true believer in equal rights and if a women can't get ordained in the church, I don't want to be a part of that if they're just gonna be you know, this old man's club. ISDA-FA4

4.03.5 Exclusiveness

There's this cookie-cutter mold that if you don't fit that cookie-cutter mold you're not part of the group, and that's frustrating. ASDA1-MS2:

Instead of trying to reach out to other people, we start picking on things that we would never dream of picking on. Because the only people we're talking to is each other and we still have that like convert mode. And so we start trying to convert someone who's already on board. You're on the same boat. And so you start kicking people off the boat, because they're not quite [makes box shape] how you think the boat should look. ISDA-FA3

One homeschooled young adult feels she was labeled as on the fringe of Adventism.

I think that I have a fairly unique perspective because . . . I was homeschooled from kindergarten until I went to college and then I went to community college for three years before I came to Southern, and so I have a little bit of both. But being homeschooled put me on the fringes of Adventist society, because I didn't go to the institutions, and I wasn't going to the public institutions either. I wasn't a rebel, but I wasn't one of the good ones who went there, I was kind of one of those "O, you think you're better because you follow Ellen White, you're homeschooled..." so I was kind of on the fringes and I think that a lot of what I felt growing up, and maybe other people feel too, is that whole elitism in Adventists. . . Because you had that name Adventist, and we know what that means, we are the remnant, that automatically that puts you into that club and you're in, you're done.... (If) you are one of those Adventists who doesn't follow the little cookie-cutter, whatever, mold . . . then you're on the fringe kind of thing. And it's almost like there is a club (of) Adventists . . . You're in the door, but you're not a club member. ASDA1-FS8

4.03.6 Emphasis on Image/Appearance

Image would make me feel very detached. ISDA1-FA9

I went to a church where I showed up in a suit and tie and I stood out because they had thrown out this dress-up kind of dress code. And it was really hard for me, really hard for me for about

three weeks, until I finally stopped dressing up and I realized really quickly, that when I did put on those clothes (here) was something psychological going on in my own mind. Immediately something . . . came over me was that "better than art thou" mentality and I don't know if our church are really suffering from this or not. Because the church that I went to had no dress code and it was one of the most incredibly loving groups of people. (It was) just getting rid of something that is commonly accepted as has to happen for you to go to church. It was, when I looked at it later, a barrier in my own spiritual life and it just blew my mind. It was amazing. I loved it.

Then coming back here to Southern, I actually stopped attending church, because if I went not dressed up, I would get kind of looked at. It was just, when you come from a place that is so open and so loving and walk into a place that judgment is so quick, or at least it feels like it, why am I even there? So I won't go. ASDA2-MA7

Jewelry is not an issue in other churches, but it is in Adventism.

It's a lot of times it's like we are discussing the same things over and over again like jewelry. And at other churches, it's not even an issue. It's not even a big deal. So when they go there, they are like "I feel so much better here" and you then we go back and we are like "we are discussing this again. We are beating this horse to death." ASDA2-MA5

4.03.7 Judgmental Focus on Behavior

I think the only thing that really turns me off is when from the pulpit, I have heard pastors portray our church in a way that (emphasizes) really strong opinions about our church, or our standards: when they say things like, and I've heard this before, "If you are claiming to be an Adventist and you are not following the practices, and if you are going out and doing this and that, then we don't want you here." I've heard, and it just irks me. It makes me sick because for me, I can move on from that and I can still be a member, but it makes me nauseated that somebody else who isn't connected and plugged in and knows that the church is more than that, then that what's makes me sick, and . . . (makes me feel) that I can't go back. ISDA-FA8

I don't really go to church very much anymore. Not gonna lie, Southern didn't help with the church check every week and I'm just kinda a rebellious person so I'm like 'don't tell me what to do!' So, I don't actually enjoy the church feel that much anymore. But I wouldn't consider myself like atheist or anything, because I definitely still have a personal relationship with God, but I don't, (I'm) not really into the whole church thing. ISDA-FA4

4.04 Sliding out of the Church

Young people who find a niche in the church are more likely to stay than the quiet ones, or those who never find their place.

I think that where we might be losing people, people who were Adventist when they came to college, we're losing them in college. Some are strengthened, if they are leaders and have a special talent. And those people are doing really well, pastoring. Some of them have left pastoring and are in business now and things like that, but a lot of great--but those people that were nurtured while they were here are successful and well-loved and known in the church and, everybody else that was quiet or didn't have a job, or never found their place are at the highest risk I think. ISDA-FA7

Others get out of the habit because they want to be outside on the weekend.

We don't go to church on a regular basis, because my husband and I, we work inside all day long and so when the weekend comes, we want to go outside and play and go rock climbing and hiking and stuff. So we don't attend church as much as I used to. Anyway, but then I do go back. [takes a deep breath] I have missed this. Like this is beautiful. It really fills me back up. And I love it. ISDA-FA8

4.05 The Continua of Identity Development

The process of settling on an identity is not an easy one to plot, nor are the resulting patterns easily labeled. One young adult describes himself as "kind" of an Adventist because that was how he was raised.

I (and) my parents are . . . fourth and fifth generation Adventist and so I sort of grew up in this culture and got baptized and I just kind of went to elementary school and high school and college, all in the Adventist system. So that's kind of how I was Adventist. FSDA-MA2

Another, still in the middle of the process, describes the difficulty of searching and questioning what he thinks he believed.

If being right is all you have left, how do you give it up? You can't even consider the possibility you're wrong if you make your whole life based on the idea that you're right. And so you can't . . . just opening that possibility if what if everything you've lived for is a lie. That's too hard for people to consider. ASDA2-MA6

The same young man describes friends who do not know why they do what they do, and become defensive when questioned.

Just from conversation with friends, they know what to do but they don't know why they are doing it so as soon as you start asking them for reasons all they've ever heard is do this do that they don't know the reason for it. They don't want to go any further because they don't know why and all they know is this is what we do and so you try to say let's think about it and they get

defensive because they don't know why they are just living by what they've been told to do. ASDA2-MA6

Another young man describes how he came back into a relationship with God without help from any person in the church.

When I came back, this happened over a six month period of me in my room reading my Bible by myself and I felt like the Lord led me to my Bible and led me to start reading and touched my heart without a Bible worker or pastor or any one. So I don't think the church is needed for that because God can reach out and touch his people at any time so I feel like we're honestly to be Job on earth. A collection of Jobs. Just say, "You know what? We still get beat up, but we're gonna show our allegiance to the Lord no matter what." DSDA-MD3

Yet another young man connects how he came to understand his identity in the church with a ShareHim series in which he participated.

It wasn't until I went and did a ShareHim evangelistic campaign that I took everything to heart and I got re-baptized. And it made me say, "Wow, that is exactly who I am."ASDA1-FS7

One young adult feels it was more honest to leave the church if it is no longer a good fit.

I almost feel like someone who is at church every Saturday but not listening to the sermon, not listening, not caring about what's going on, just there to see their friends . . . would be more disconnected than someone who had paid attention and said you know this isn't for me and left. Because in some ways if someone decides to pick up and leave the church and say this isn't for me, you can tell that at some point they were engaged with the church and there was something that struck them as this doesn't fit me and so they left the church. DSDA1-MD6

Another identifies with the culture of Adventism, though he no longer goes to any church.

I've been born and raised in the Adventist church, Adventist Collegedale, the Adventist haven of Tennessee, so even though I don't go to church I still don't really do anything on Saturdays. It's nice to be able to still use the Sabbath to rejuvenate, you know, relax, and people in Collegedale understand that, but outside of that it's a little harder. Yeah, cultural Adventist. Ethnic Adventist. ISDA-FA4

4.06 Identity Development and Moral Choices

Some young adults feel that being an Adventist gets in the way of living a full life.

I've always been told to live life to the fullest, but I'm always second guessing what does that mean. I see other people who are not Adventist, (when) something come(s) to their mind, they are like "I'm gonna do it" as long as they're not harming other people. I'm always having to second guess because of what has been taught to me. And it wasn't like a mean- spirited thing. It was just the way I was raised, like, "Oh, let's go enjoy this--but wait a minute, It's Saturday." So that was a little confusing for my young mind when I was growing up, and my parents did try their best to "Let's enjoy the Sabbath," but after a while you start thinking on your own. You start thinking, well I want to live life to the fullest, so grasping that as an Adventist has been difficult. ASDA2-MA5

I couldn't watch anything I wanted to, cartoons, Saturday morning cartoons, and I started, a lot of resentment started breeding, and not just because "Oh, I didn't get to watch cartoons when I was younger," but resentment because I was very involved in sports. And I was good at sports too, but when it came time for me to actually do a conference or a meet for anything, I couldn't (because) it ended up on Sabbath. And when I started thinking about God and Jesus and stuff like that, I started thinking, I don't really feel like He wants us to be miserable observing a day of rest and peace. FSDA-FS3:

Some young adults identify with Adventist beliefs but cannot explain why they thought they were right.

It's like in the shelter of the church we're not necessarily challenged to defend our beliefs. And then you go out into the real world, and at least for me, I can't really defend my beliefs. It's just I think they're right. ISDA1-MA5

Others find a place and purpose in mission and a relationship with God.

With our beliefs and the creed that we have, it's like there's a purpose and an initiative that Adventists have in this world. Not to just stay idle and live our own lives secluded from everybody else but we've been told to go out and to interact and to spread the gospel through different means, and that's something I would say is one of the primary aspects of my attitude towards Adventism. ASDA1-MS9

If we simplified it to our relationship with Jesus, which is where it is for me, I don't worry about the church politics. . . I take into consideration, but I don't let it bother me, that someone believes something different than me. Like I don't let it offend me. And for me it's just my relationship with Jesus. That's how it was at camp and it just wasn't complicated. . . In the times in my life where I had a place and I had a purpose, that's when it was the most meaningful for me. ISDA-FA8

They understand Adventist beliefs in terms of principle and meaning.

I have (my ears) pierced. I wear a wedding ring. I do thing things that I think some older generations do think it's kind of not the way to be an Adventist. Those are just preferences in how you want to live your life. But the principles like what we believe, the way we live our life underneath the caffeine and underneath the earrings, those things can shine through as who you are as an Adventist more than what you look like on the outside. ASDA3-FA2

To me being an Adventist is not about the mustard or the pepper or the caffeine, it's about the doctrinal truth and the belief in Jesus and belief that you stay in the ground when you die, and that Christ is coming back and He's gonna save us all and His Sabbath is important. Those . . . are what I would consider being a good Adventist. ASDA3-MA6

I know that you aren't supposed to base your experience on people will hurt you but I don't blame that on the church. I love the church. I love what we stand on . I think it's amazing that God's entrusted us as far as doctrine 'where we have the proof' that's really good. Speaking from someone who's lived in Collegedale for 16 years. ASDA2-MA9

I go to church for God and my own beliefs. Not for the group. ISDA-FA9

After much study, I believe in the Sabbath. Our church acts as if they don't believe in salvation by faith, but they claim they do, and that's something I believe strongly. It's not works, it's faith. And I mean they don't act that way, but that's according to the beliefs. I do believe now, finally, that drugs and alcohol are wrong. Simply because if they cloud your mind, not because they say "Alcohol is wrong in the Bible" but because it alters your thinking and that interferes with the relationship [gestures upward]. Alcohol is wrong, the Sabbath, and salvation by faith. ISDA1-FA9

Summary and Reflections:

How and why do young people identify with the Seventh-day Adventist religion, or choose to not accept it as an identifying characteristic? How does the college experience impact this relationship? What are the conflicts that young people face as they struggle to sort out their values and beliefs?

Growing up in the church does not equate with identifying with the church. Some college-age young people identify with the church because of various experiences that cause them to consciously choose that they want to identify with the Adventist church. Factors such as being "spoon-fed" religion, or made to attend church, have hindered others in making that journey. One feels it was easier to have a devotional life in college when he was required to attend the worship services and convocations in college, but feels that this structure didn't prepare him for the pressures of the real world.

Young adults struggling to develop a sense of identity as an Adventist feel that it isn't safe to share their issues with the church. Everyone else in the church seems to have it together; they never hear stories of other people who struggled. When they have problems, family and church members don't know how to respond. Leaders offer pat answers such as "Go to the Bible," or "Just pray about it."

Some feel that the church is threatened by differences with its point of view. These young adults grew up believing that Adventism was obviously the only correct belief system, and people who thought differently were stupid. When they discover credible opposing points of view and they don't have a reasonable answer, they feel a loss of credit for a system that they felt had taught them it had all the right answers. They want to be able to ask questions on tough subjects, without always being provided definitive answers.

The struggle for religious identity is a deeply emotional one for some. One young woman wept as she described the curse of knowing too much, and not being able to live without guilt. She wanted it to be easier to be Adventist; she wanted the assurance of salvation that she felt other faiths had. She wondered if religion was just a myth to provide a sense of comfort, but she was too afraid to leave the church, in case it actually was right, and she would miss God.

Young adults share reasons why they are conflicted in their identity with Adventism. Most of these have not left the church, but are struggling with identifying with a church that they disagree with in some way. Some don't believe everything the church teaches. Others agree with church teachings, but not with how the church presents its position, or how it acts. A number of young adults express their concern about how the church relates to homosexuals. Some don't care for the values the church holds. They don't want to be identified with a church that doesn't give equal rights to women in ordination. They don't like the pettiness of having to fit a mold of what they feel Adventists are expected to be like in order to be accepted. Emphasis on image and appearance is a turnoff, as well as a judgmental focus on behavior.

Others have slid out of the church because they are quiet and never have found their niche; or they do other things on the weekend and got out of the habit of going to church, though they find that they miss the community they found in the focus-group discussions.

A number of comments from these young adults demonstrates a wide continuum of identity development. Some identify positively with the church after some kind of "journey" or long-term search and study that helped them feel satisfied that Adventism is right for them.

Others have decided that it was better not to identify with a church that they disagree with. But many of the comments focus on the conflicts young adults feel between loyalty and disagreements they have with the church.

The continuum of identity development also demonstrates various levels of moral development. Some young adults feel that Sabbath especially is restrictive; they can't keep it and do what they want to do. Others know what they believe, but not why. They are loyal to the belief system they grew up with, but are not very conversant with the deeper meaning and principles associated with these beliefs.

Others struggled with questions and doubts, searched out answers for themselves, and finally feel that they have a deeper understanding of why they accept certain doctrines—not because the church teaches them, but because they understand what the Bible teaches and why. They feel there is a meaning and a purpose for their lives. To some, relationships to others in the church are important—and for others, certain principles are even more important than what church members think and behave, or how they are treated.

Theme 2: Perceptions of Church Services

This theme considers how young adults understand and relate to church and other worship services. They describe what they are looking for in a church, and their worship preferences. They discuss worship and church services on the Southern Adventist University campus, and what they feel is missing in the Adventist church in general. The subtopics include a) Expectations for the Church, b) Worship Experiences on the University Campus, c) What is Missing, and d) Rigid and Controlling.

4.07 Expectations for the Church

This section examines what young people are looking for in a church. These include a) Acceptance; b) Openness, Authenticity, and Simplicity; c) A Nitch Where They Fit; d) Community; e) Small Groups; f) More Than Just Sabbath Services; g) Meaningful Connections; and h) Variety and Spontaneity

4.07.1 Acceptance

Young adults are looking for a church that accepts people with struggles.

When I walk into church I want to see people in cutoff jeans. I want to see people smoking at the front door. The church is a hospital for sinners, it's not you know, for people who got it all together you know. Yes, materialism is in a lot of church and if you see the parking lot and everybody is in there suits and all dressed up. But I like to see people walk into church that may have never been in a church before, who knows. ASDA2-MA3

I think the common theme was acceptance there. I think that's an issue that a lot of churches have. Come as you are. I don't think that's a thing really, that a lot of people go with. Come as you are, but take out your earrings and put on a dress of an appropriate length. And shoes that aren't too flashy and then yeah come on in. You know? I think a lot of it is an issue with appearance and things like that that shouldn't matter. ISDA-FA4

4.07.2 Openness, Authenticity, and Simplicity

That's another why I'm going to a particular church because I felt that it was a completely authentic. The people there were just so, I mean they were open, but it wasn't necessarily just them being open. It was the fact that they were broken and just [hands open gesture] that's it. Like and that made me feel like, "You guys must really care about each other because you are being so honest about how you feel in this group . . . You're all real in front of each other. You must feel connected to be able to feel that much trust." o say, I can be honest about the fact that me and my daughter are fighting horribly . . . and you're like "I really can't believe that he

just said that in front of all these people." So definitely when I see authenticity, I think definitely connected and I want to be a part of that. ASDA2-FA4

Everything has to be good on the surface; you have to look like you have everything together so we can go out and evangelize people so that we can look really pretty but then we're having these kind of wars, or we just totally reject anyone who smokes or drinks or has a problem with pornography or has a problem with homosexuality and we don't associate with them, but we have all these fights going on all the time. ASDA3-MA7

When I sit in church or a Sabbath School or other places where I'm being taught by people of the church, it's like they only want the David that fought Goliath there. They don't want the David that met Bathsheba there. They only want Peter, the great evangelist there. They don't want Peter, you know the struggling man, there. And that's what church is for-- the people that are struggling to come in and I get the impression that if I'm not ready to be the great evangelist or the man fighting Goliath, then I have an issue and that points me to start saying "Well, obviously now you're a hypocrite. You don't understand the very meaning of the gospel, you know. So why am I going to listen to you? And why am I going to bring anybody else that I think is a hurting person to you when you are teaching Peter the great evangelist, not Peter the broken man." DSDA1-MD3

When I go into a church, you can tell that they are trying to please the youth too much and it's uncomfortable. And it's like "We're not children." And what we want is real. We don't want so close to the world that we're like this is veggie worldly. I might as well go out into the world and get the real thing. ISDA-FA9

I appreciate simplicity, like you read Acts; these weren't polished people with awesome, pristine buildings and incredible bands. No, these were like a bunch of really poor people who pooled together what they had because their whole purpose was the gospel commission. And you can tell when you walk into a church, sometimes I prefer a church that is small and the little old lady getting up to sing can't even sing well. I'd prefer that than like a place that the music is awesome and everything is perfect, you know what, it's too perfect, and it's obvious that this is here to provide a service and it's not there because people are getting together and saying "What can we do for everybody out there?" ASDA-FA4

There is a certain level of performance. I have sung, I have greeted, I have done all sorts of things. There's a certain, a lot of performance that goes into these things. ISDA-FA7

The turn off would be a performance, you're going to be performed to and that's totally defeating the purpose of why we're supposed to be going to church. ASDA1-FS6

4.07.3 A Niche Where They Fit

They want to be in a church with other young people.

> *I think the best thing that they could do to include young people is to recruit young people and nurture the young people that they already have, I mean it's a hard thing to build young people when you don't have any young people. Cause then if they come then they are like "Well, there's no other young people here," and they're not likely to come back. ASDA3-MA6*

They want responsibility.

> *I was sitting on church board when we hired that position and I was just like "Finally you guys are realizing that there are people, once we graduate college we don't just cease to exist." ASDA3-MA6*

> *Yeah I don't really know where to get involved, how to get involved, and plus I work night shifts so it's hard to get involved in the church and I really feel like there's not a whole lot. I'm 27. They have the collegiate class, but they're all like 18 to 22. That's a huge thing, but I feel like once you graduate from college it's kinda of like "Oh, here you go ." ASDA3-FA3*

> *I choose to be a Seventh-day Adventist because I do believe in our missions and our efforts to care, and just, you know, what we have to offer the world by way of helping people come into a relationship with Christ and look forward to the Second Advent and etc. and what we're called to do during this short, short life that we have here. So where I have stumbled has been (with) people that I interact with from my own peers within my local church as well as administrators that I have involvement with in our local church, in the conference level. People that are closer to home to me have sent me mixed messages about who I am, what my role is, what my place is, and put a lot of doubt in my mind about why I'm here and if I even belong in "their church." ISDA-FA7*

> *There is actually a church in my hometown, the city I graduated from. They are doing a church plant there. I came in, tried to get involved said you know, "I know a lot people here. Can you give me a chance to try to do something to bring people in? Can you give me Bible studies for the people in the community?" I said to the Bible worker, "If there's a big guy, a drug addict, a drunk or anybody that you are scared of, give them to me, I'm willing to go." And every week he'd stand up and say you " I've got all these Bible studies coming in I need people to take 'em." So I go to him. "Contacts. I want contacts." I go to the pastor, I go to the evangelist, I go to all these different people saying, you know, "I'm not being put in here" but yet every week they say, you know, Ellen White says "when people show interest put them to work. " I'm like, this is my community. This is where I graduated from. I know more people my age with kids here in this community than anyone else does and they've seen a change in my life yet they're not willing to put me to work.*

I'm like this is my community. This is where I graduated from. I know more people my age with kids here in this community than anyone else does and they've seen a change in my life yet they're not willing to put me to work. At that point, I had to say you know what I'm done with y'all. I won't come back. It was actually, I took it personally. It was like there was something about me that they didn't want me a part of the functioning part of their church. So if they didn't want me, I wasn't going to bring my people there. Because I didn't want them to experience the same thing, you know. Because I still believe in Adventist, but I'm not going to expose people to that. DSDA-MD3

Some feel that there is little place for singles in the church.

If you're single you're just completely defective and you need to be fixed. And hooked up with someone immediately. And until this problem is solved you are not safe to sit (with) in a pew because no male anywhere of any age even up to 80 will sit next to you and no female will sit next to you because it's contagious. And so if you're post-college, pre-kids, and you're single, you're not only invisible, you're a problem to fix. ASDA3-MA7

If you're single and you go to a church, especially if it's not your home church, I've been told to move out of a pew because it's not my pew and it's reserved for a family. And it's easier to move a single person than to move a family so if you don't have space, I've been told more than once to get out of someone's pew. ASDA3-MA7

There just aren't single people, usually because nobody wants to come and go by yourself to a new church and get to know people. So even at my church, there's more *young people, but people my age that are single there's two maybe, I think. And they don't always [inaudible] cause sometimes they don't want to be there or they work the night before. ASDA3-MA7*

Being part of a family is better than joining a single's group.

I was gonna say the people that saved a seat for me is a family that has kind of adopted me and that's like the best thing ever because it's not like some people trying to hook me up, it's not a single group where you are just identified as single, which is any group so that's kind of weird. But really when you're single you need like a family because that's what you don't have. Because if you're living by yourself in an apartment or whatever and your parents aren't around or you don't have a relationship with them or whatever the circumstance might be if you are really sick of going to church by yourself, a family is like the most awesome thing ever so if they save you a seat and they have you over for dinner and they go do stuff with you when they do family stuff and include you that's actually better, I think, than just a singles group. ASDA3-MA7

4.07.4 Community

A church community should be a place where you can share and be fed yourself.

> *I think it's good to have a church to help meet people's spiritual needs too. I think humans legitimately have spiritual needs as well as physical, material, emotional, and social, and part of the reason to have a church is so you can have a community where you can share with people who you know, believe as you and can be spiritually fed. Feeding others, but also everyone gets that important part of life. ISDA1-FA6*

> *I've heard these things from a lot of friends too, and it just makes me wonder, if like, we need to go back to the New Testament churches where they are smaller and they're like a community, because it sounds like we're all just like desiring community. ISDA-FA8*

> *Wherever Jesus was He brought together people that would never come together, you'd never see a tax collector and a Pharisee together hanging out, except when Jesus is in the room. Is this a church where that seems to be happening? I think it was Detrick Bonheoffer who was talking about Christian fellowship and Christian community and he says we shouldn't talk about all these lofty aspirations of community, we should just talk about Jesus-- because Jesus is a community and everything else falls into place with that. ASDA1-MS3*

There is more involvement and investment by each person in a small community.

> *(A community is) a group of people, young,old, it's okay. But smaller. More intimate, where you actually know each other, because that's what we're all like talking about. We want people to really invest in each other. But that's what's been hard for me this community actually because I came from a smaller church where the kids took up the offering and we, every single person, was involved in the church and I felt like I was valued at the age of 7. Like I needed to be there, because I played a role and then here it's like, "I'm not needed because there are people that are more talented than me." ISDA-FA8*

> *If someone asked me to do special music at a small church I'd feel pretty good about that but at the Collegedale Church it's kind of like, well someone's better than me, so why should I do special music because someone else could do it better. ISDA1-MA5*

> *I'm thinking of a church we were in two years. We were overseas. Small church and it was all ex-patriots or whatever. Really great community and sense of family there, but they, just the pastor and all the leadership, everybody had to be involved to keep church going you know, there's always people to teach Sabbath or doing some things but you know, just them putting so much belief in you. "Okay, you've been here a month. Go teach the whole children's Sabbath School," and "You're doing a great job." When we go home for the summer or when you're leaving they have a whole program to say goodbye and thank them for all the service they've done and you've always felt good about any little way you could help even it's just bringing meals for potluck. DSDA1-FD8*

Like I went one time and then was gone for like a month and a half and when I went back, one of the ladies that I had sat across me at the table was like "Where have you been?" And then asked all about my trip, invited me and friends over for dinner. Like it's nice to once again be a part of a community where it is a community. There's no point in having a church if no one in the church wants you to be there or cares if you're there. ISDA-FA3

It's easy to get lost and feel useless in a large church and a large community.

I liked the fact that people would rally around each other, like it was important. Like if someone was upset, it mattered. And I think a lot of that comes from the fact that it's a smaller church. There was a few hundred members. Then coming here to this community, where you could literally bounce around to a different church every week and it would take you awhile to cycle through them. ISDA-FA3

Youth are just a transient figure in these communities, and so I think a lot of people tend to not really pay attention. Cause they assume you are gonna come and go, maybe be here for a couple months and then you leave. And so they don't really invest. And I think that, there's only so much that you can sort of, put yourself out, until you feel like I'm just wasting my time I might as well do something else with my time. ISDA-FA3

I found, that when you're in a community of just Adventists all the time, we start trying to convert each other. ISDA-FA3

4.07.5 Small Groups

You can call (the church) whatever you want but it just facilitates the groups that you have within. So if you don't have those it's just a building or an institution where you fight over politics or whatever. That's really what the church does. It needs to facilitate its groups for the Sabbath School or the social groups or the people that are like family or the people that you call in the middle of the week or the middle of the night. If it doesn't facilitate those then you could just take it or leave it I don't really care. ASDA3-MA7

There are a couple guys who call me up on Thursday nights and we pray together, you know, share what's going on during the week and you know a half hour later we're done talking and that's the first time, it started like a month ago, first time in my life I've had anything like that. ASDA2-MA8

We feel very connected to other Adventists because we have a group that gets together two or three Friday nights a month where we get together and we do a pitch-in dinner and there's about six couples and we all know each other and we all pray for each other and so things can be going along in the middle of the week and we'll email the group. So we do feel very connected, not necessarily to Collegedale Community Church but to a group of people who all happen to also go to Collegedale Community Church. ASDA3-FA4

A good small group is intimate and warm, and a safe place to share.

I may be alone in this, but I don't necessarily feel like I need a church. I feel like I have a very supportive group that loves God and supports each other and if the Adventist church were to disappear right now, I would still have that group, I would still have that group that is so close it is like a family. So I don't think I would (need) a church now that I'm established in a group. But I also recognize that I wouldn't have that group if I hadn't gone to Southern. Some of these are friends from high school and friends from college. ASDA3-FA4

4.07.6 More than Just Sabbath Services

I don't know if I would want to transfer my membership or join that church is if they (aren't) open more than Saturday. That's what makes me (ask) "They have what on Tuesday nights?" and "What about Thursday nights?" That's what would make me actually want to transfer, just because I see that they're very, whether it's active with the community or just active with the church or just the church members or whatever, I don't care. Just the fact that I could be bored and be like my church has something to do on Tuesday night. ASDA2-FA4

For me, it has to do with where I am in my life right now, but it would be the engagement of my children. Are there are opportunities for them to play with, fellowship with other kids, parents of kids. Is there kind of this social environment where different ages, their own ages and mixed ages together fellowship with each other. That's huge for me. ASDA2-MA8

4.07.7 Meaningful Connections

The majority of the churches that I've been going to are more like the Collegedale experience and I feel bored with just the experience there, because I feel like I can't be myself. I'm just very naturally outgoing, and I talk a lot and I like meeting people and just getting to know what people's story is and I think sometimes in the churches it's not like that and it's very like "this is my spiritual walk" and that's what bores me. Like we are all there but we are walking past each other and there is no serious connection. ASDA2-FA4

4.07.8 Variety and Spontaneity

They read from the King James Version of the Bible and of course as a kid I'm like what does that even mean? I don't know what that means. And you know the elders are up there and you see one of them nod off and you are like well if the people on the pulpit can't even stay awake then what do they expect me to do? ASDA2-FA2

There is just that frustration that everything has to be in this very, we have to follow what it says in the bulletin. We have to do this, this, this, this, we repeat the fourth commandment here, we do this here, and it's just at some point after a while I sort of wonder, they always talk about this joy but you go into church and it is the least joyful experience. Like nobody smiles. They aren't there. It's so blah. ASDA2-FA2

Predictable. Everything about us Sabbath morning is predictable. You have a uniform you wear. You have amens. You the same answers you give to people. "How are you?" "Happy Sabbath, how are you?" "I'm good, I'm good." Your life could be terrible, but you still say I'm good. And you got opening hymn, your offertory, maybe a missionary story, your sermon, and you're done. You are off for lunch. It's so predictable you almost didn't even need to know who's in your pew. ASDA2-MA7

While I was in Australia as an SM I went to a church (where) the pastor stopped the sermon in the middle of it and said, "You know what, I want anyone that is a doctor to raise your hand and everyone that's around them just put your hands on them and pray." And I was like, this is really weird. ASDA2-MA7

The Holy Spirit is not always super predictable. You don't know what He's gonna do. So in a way it sometimes gives more room for God to actually have His agenda then. But I think we are just so scared of that. ASDA2-MA8

I don't mind the tradition, but it was like so traditional, they don't cater to my age group. And that's what frustrates me. I feel like some churches are like "well this is the way it is" and they don't even try to attempt to make my age group interested in coming, so I probably won't go back to that church. ASDA3-FA3

I think things are just so structured and everything is scheduled. What would we do with diversity? You know, if different cultures, different things, were being presented in front of church or more door-to-door ministry type of things. More spontaneous . . . .My view of the problems sometimes is that we're afraid of the people getting down and dirty. ASDA2-MA9

Just (changing) the time and place brought something I had never seen before and we saw just our attendance in our youth group activities after the service skyrocketed. It just exploded where we had 25 in the beginning of the year, and we had 130 by the end of the year. And that was something that changed even in my own spiritual journey: the idea that we don't need to adhere to these constant traditional, predictable qualities of church. ASDA2-MA7

Some young adults want to change things, but the church doesn't.

I'm not saying (this is) coming out of their mouth but there's this sense (of) "You might be bored with (the church program) but deal with it, because, why? We're right." And so we get bored and it's the same thing. For example, the generation before us, their belief was Jesus was coming in their generation and still we all have that belief. And now we're older and we're like " He hasn't come yet" and we wanna change things. And they're like "Wait, wait, He's still coming," and we have to keep it the same way. And so there's this sense, this confusion. ASDA2-MA5

I totally believe that Jesus is coming, but I see a different approach on how to get that word out. And when my approach is different, that's when they say "Wait a minute, wait a minute, what

are you doing? We are right. Not only in our belief, but also how we do things." And so it's just this disconnect and this fear of like "Oh, they have new ideas and new things are coming in." ASDA2-MA5

4.08 Worship Experiences on the University Campus.

Some worship services such as vespers are a part of the Adventist culture on campus, but are not necessarily a spiritual experience.

Concerning the average Southern student . . . someone was saying they were being spoon-fed. I think for a lot of students it's "the thing to do." Southern has created an environment where the "cool thing to do" is go to vespers. Now they require it, they require vespers, they require worships. The "cool thing to do" on Friday nights is to go to vespers. You know, vespers dates. And I think, how is it any different than a group of public school students going to a party on a Friday night? The only difference is we don't have alcohol at the church and we sing songs about God. ASDA1-MS4

I would say the majority of Southern students go to vespers, to hang out, and to primp up and look good, and I don't just mean the ladies—everybody. When I hand out vespers cards, it's like a fashion show, and yeah the socializing. But I doubt very many people are coming looking for a spiritual (blessing). ASDA1-MS4

If you can hear the speaker sitting in the back of vespers, that's a rare thing. I mean it is so loud, it's why I don't go to vespers anymore, because it's such a social atmosphere. People are just sitting there talking and talking, and you can't hear the speaker. ASDA1-MS2

Religion is switched off after Sabbath services.

After church . . .you go to the cafe, sit in the cafe and you'll forget that it's Sabbath. As soon as the service ends its like you're back in the flow of things. I've seen a lot of students here on campus that view Adventism as a burden. Sometimes they may feel limited by the "rules" that we have, restrictive of what they do and their freedom. ASDA1-MS9

Coming to vespers and church and things like that it's like "Ok, yeah, this is the thing for me to do, be at vespers" but then like Sabbath is like "I'm gonna do my own thing." They don't feel the motivation to go to church for the right reasons. Because I've heard pastors say that you can sort of measure a person's spiritual life by their devotional life. They are only Adventists on the seventh day. And I believe that, I haven't really seen . . . the interworks or devotional lives, of students a lot. It's only revealed during those 24-hours of Sabbath. Other than that it's like they don't, they're not in the same mind set at all. It's like a switch on/switch off back to the week and something like that. ASDA1-MS9

4.09 What Is Missing?

Where is the passion?

> *From Spalding to Collegedale Academy to whatever, I've lived here for a little bit of time. I have to say I get bored at church. I sometimes wonder if I was a non-Adventist or another people outside, like how would they feel that this is appealing at all? I feel like sometimes we just sit in the pews and we just go home and sleep and I feel like the majority of Adventists that's what they do. That's what they do, especially around this community. It's a huge church and it's like where is the passion? And I read this book called "Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire" and I remember reading that and I'm like this is so not what I see in my church. ASDA2-MA9*

Where are the relationships with each other and with God?

> *In my opinion, the church has kind of lost what it is. Because it really should be about fostering. about the relationship and the people and their relationship with the Lord and Savior, and your relationship with people is only proportional to your relationship with Him, and vice versa, you know what I mean? And it's not just going to church and sitting there, to get a blessing or get a message or whatever. Or people always say "Ah, I got this great blessing at church." It's kind of [hand gesture] it's that wrong motivation type thing. ASDA2-MA3*

> *I remember when there was a baptism one Sabbath. . . The person who is getting baptized would go up front, in front of the whole church and they would read through each fundamental belief and you would say I agree. And then once you did that, then and only then, could you go into the water and be baptized. . . The first thing that popped into my head was "What about the relationship?" Was that one of the things we had to check off? I promise to have a relationship with God. Check. I still struggle with that because it just seems like that keeps falling back to everything else. "Are my earrings too big? Are my earrings too small? Gosh I'm wearing earrings. Am I wearing pants to church instead of wearing a skirt or a dress?" There are so many miniscule things. We just keep beating that horse. There is a bigger picture. Let's work on the relationship aspect. The other stuff falls into place once that relationship is really fostered and it's just, but we're still discussing the same things over and over and it's maddening. ASDA2-FA2*

Where is the love?

> *When I came back, I definitely wanted to hear the old hymns that I knew when I was coming up as kid. But then I was exposed to new things as well and it was always kind of like, are people really expressing some kind of love in some way? Or some kind, a true show of emotion? And I appreciated that, no matter which way it really came. If I could really tell that they are rejoicing in the Lord. DSDA1-MD3*

I really believe that where the love has gone, it's that it has been replaced with fear. We're afraid of each other, we're afraid of each other's culture, of each other's differences. We're afraid to engage with each other, we're afraid to take any risks. I think that a lot of people are depressed. ISDA-FA7

Where is our sense of mission?

A lot of my friends, and I'll put myself in this category too, get frustrated with the pettiness. I've been to a couple of churches where I just sit there and listen to what's talked about and I'm just like "You've got to be kidding me, there are people who are literally three blocks away starving and you're stressing over these tiny little issues like how much money.. should we put $30 more in maintenance or put it somewhere else?" and you're like at each other's throats over this and you know we see this, whether you go to board meeting or not, you get this sense of these debates and issues over petty, what seem to be petty, little things and I think there is a real sense of frustration because we have a sense of mission but then we look at the church around us and we're like "It's not being done" and it's really, really frustrating. ASDA1-MS2

I've met people who lived at Four Corners their entire life and don't know what an Adventist is. And that hurts me. It hurts me that we haven't reached out to them. Maybe they should go explore, but maybe we should also leave the valley sometimes and meet our next-door neighbor or whatever, so that kind of shames me a little bit when I realize how old of a church we are, how rich of a community we have and how little it feels like we're influencing people outside of our community. ASDA3-MA5

Where is our devotional life?

Yeah, I think that . . . as Adventists what we are supposed to be doing is spreading the gospel, but in order to do that we're supposed to have like a strong, like I guess devotional life, because if we don't, how are we supposed to share that. We won't have any initiative to share that. Whenever they say like "Oh, man you're Adventist", that's a lot of responsibility, first for me to really get grounded and then to share. ASDA1-MS1

Where is our willingness to listen to others?

We want people to listen to us, but we don't want to listen to them. And it's kind of the approach we sometimes take and we'll do all the evangelistic, but when they get evangelistic on us, "Wait a minute." ASDA2-MA5

Where is a safe place to share?

I think as a people we have not created that safe environment by and large. And while there are many, many fine standpoints, it sometimes feels like the majority of the church falls through the cracks. And it's only, I mean, the guy with the ADD who's in our broadcasting group, we are reaching out and touching his life, but I betcha there are like ten guys just like him that have just

slipped through those doors. I don't know what the solution is but I have felt that is a problem. There is no kind of consistent safety net. Not like material safety net, but as far as your spiritual walk, to share. ASDA2-MA8

There's certain topics that I don't discuss with Adventists. Like the issue of jewelry I don't even go there. . . If I already can tell this is . . . just gonna end up being hurtful I just don't go there. Like homosexuality. I just really don't go there. . . So I don't feel as comfortable talking with Adventist than like with my other friends who are Baptist or Pentecostal, there are some of those that I don't talk to as well, but with Adventists I'm more likely to say I'm not even gonna talk about that. ASDA2-FA4

4.10 Rigid and Controlling.

Adventism is a tight structure, rigid, controlled. ASDA2-MA3

It's a brick-walled box and you can't take any of those bricks out unless it involves falling or you getting kicked out. ASDA2-MA7

The Adventist church seems to control our consciences like the priests in the Roman Catholic church.

But the Roman Catholic church, we're all against priests, there isn't supposed to be someone between us and God and yet it feels often times what we're saying is our conscience isn't enough, it's what does the church say about this. So the church is kind of playing the same role that a priest would. Whereas we would go to them for forgiveness, or to them for what's right or wrong, it's not enough between me and God. ASDA2-MA6

I do believe that there are some truths that can't kill people. Like between me and God, I feel okay with it. I think it says in Romans, in matters of eating and drinking or jewelry, or helping people on the Sabbath instead of going to church, those things that are between you and God. That's where we overstep our bounds and it's not enough to say let everyone's own conscience be clear. We've got to go further and say, "Well, Mrs. White says, or the conference says." We don't recognize different categories of saying "This is between me and God" or "(this is their) conscience and we can't judge." So we don't really have that Romans 14 distinction of what's eating and drinking and what's actually a biblical doctrine that is true in all cases. ASDA2-MA6

Summary and Reflection

In this theme, young adults describe the expectations they have for worship and other church programs, and how they see themselves involved.

Young adults expect the church to accept people who are experiencing struggles. They want a genuine, honest, authentic place where they can be real and accepted for who they are. They want to see other young people in the church. They want to get involved, and have responsible positions.

They feel that there is a stigma about being single in the church; but at least one young person preferred being accepted into a family than looking to a singles program for a solution. They are looking for community, especially in an intimate, warm, small group setting.

Several mention the importance of simple, unpretentious worship services in small churches where everyone is involved, everyone counts, and everyone is appreciated. They feel that in larger communities where there are many churches it is too easy to bounce around and never really have a place where they matter to a particular group. They want to seriously connect. Some feel that church should have something for them other than just on Sabbath mornings; and others are concerned about what the church has to offer their children. A number of young adults commented on the boring, predictable order of the church service, and how much they want to see spontaneity and change. However, they feel that the church isn't open to change; those in leadership prefer doing things the way they have always been done.

While vespers and church on Southern's campus is "cool," some feel that there is a pervasive tendency to not take the spiritual aspects of worship seriously, to "turn off" religion when the services are done. Elements missing from church and worship include passion, variety, spontaneity, and loving relationships between people and God. Young people wish the church could experience and express real emotion. Some feel the church has lost its sense of mission, its devotional life, and its willingness to listen to others. They wish the church was a safer place to discuss issues. There is some concern about its rigidity and the tendency for some in the church to attempt to control the conscience.

Theme 3: Where Is the Love?

This theme compares and contrasts stories of experiences young adults have had in the church. These stories illustrate how they have felt judged for their dress or behavior, or accepted and welcomed, despite the circumstances.

4.11 We Were Judged

In these stories, young adults attending church faced inhospitable greeters and church members.

> *(I) get the toddler in, bring the car seat in, and try not to get smacked in the back going in. Ag the lady is standing, and there was a rug and I tripped over it. Didn't fall down, but I did trip and*

found my balance face to face with this woman and she hands me the bulletin and she says, "Well, that's why we don't wear flip flops to church." ISDA-FA7

I did not take offense at (this experience), but it did make me think. I showed up to the camp meeting that they had here for a Saturday program. I just showed up the way I always dress. I had a jean skirt on and it was short, and I just didn't realize it. It was probably a T-shirt I was wearing, a polo shirt or whatever. So I didn't really look, you know, you got your pantyhose, you got your dress on, kind of look. And I was walking in front, behind my friend and the man who was at the door who was saying hello to everybody and handing out flyers or whatever was right in my face. I thought he was gonna give me a flyer or whatever and he totally, totally ignored me and even did this little thing [rolls eyes looks up and down] and I was like did that happen? And my friend was like "yeah! Oh my goodness that is so--are you okay? I am so sorry!" and it didn't offend me because I thought that was silly or whatever and poor him, I felt bad for him but if I was a guest, like truly a non-Adventist, that happens all the time. ISDA-FA2

Our oldest was just a little baby. We were visiting a teeny tiny church, down you know, around Atlanta. And someone had recommended for us to try out this church and [laughs] when they do the children story, they have the children come up into like the choir loft, so like you're facing the congregation, right? So I don't know a soul and I have my little baby with me and I'm like "just listen, just listen." I mean, I'm just on cloud nine, having this experience with my little girl, right? Well, this was clearly a conservative, church. I kept whispering to her, because she was wiggly or "mama" you know, or something. There were ladies in the front row going [points finger making a move gesture] like get off. Get off. And so I was confused, but I was trying to listen to and just have this experience (but) I'm watching these ladies and finally I get down and they meet me on the side and they said, "She needs to be quiet. There's a children's room right down the hall." And I was like [mouth drops open] I mean (it) crushed my spirit, you know? ISDA-FA7

These young people felt judged and pushed away when they needed acceptance the most.

I do remember Pathfinders was always fun, but I look back and remember conflicts that my parents had big issues with, like getting divorced in the church or people wearing jewelry or eating. I realized I felt the happiest memories involved me being very judgmental towards other people. Especially by the time I was an SM, I felt so unsure about everyone else's salvation and so guilt ridden about my own. That's really hard. Being surrounded by everyone else whose like "oh, that's the other; we're the chosen, we're the remnant" and you're like "am I really the remnant? I'm so not sure." And then I started questioning my sexuality and I came out to a teacher here at Southern and she was like "someone convinced you of this?" and I was very devastated because I trusted her and after that I stopped going to church because I saw that judgment also and it was like I had been judging, now I was being judged and I have found people that aren't judgmental but it's very rare. It's more "we'll pray for you." FSDA-FA5

I expect to see men up there saying, I am a fallen man, but through Christ we're working and I'm still struggling. I expect the church to represent a bunch of Jobs and only God knew whether he sinned or not, no one else knew that and he was still getting beat up and it seems like there should be men up there saying, you know, I'm getting beat up. This is life but you know what, I'm still gonna stand here and profess Christ. Even though I'm getting beat, I still know He's my Savior. I still know Christ is working on me. I haven't reached it yet. I mean I was told by an evangelist, we were in an evangelism class, he was saying you can't baptize smokers because they haven't experienced Christ yet and I said I went to the baptistery on drugs but I knew that the only way I was gonna set myself free was making that public connection to Christ. And he looked at me and said "Your baptism was out of line with the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy and therefore no good, so you need to get it redone." And I was like, all right. DSDA1-MD3

I went to the (name of church) first through sixth grade and then I left and then I don't know maybe I was 24, 25 when I started to come back and read my Bible. And just on the conviction of reading the Bible I was convicted of the Sabbath, but there was no way that I (was) gonna show my face in a church around here just because of the shame I felt walking out years before. You know, I had to go to California and there I felt comfortable walking into any church just because no one knew me, no one knew my past. No one knew my past. So I guess that would just be something you might want to think about. DSDA-MD3

4.12 We Were Accepted.

Circumstances looked incriminating, but this young man was accepted anyway.

When I was coming back to the church I was in California. It just happened to be the one church that was there and I walked in the door. The man that was there shook my hand and immediately asked me to lunch at his house. I said yes and then he left me alone so I could sit in the corner by myself, you know. And then when I come out I had a flat tire. I had actually been camping the night before with a couple of people and one of the girls I was with had actually been drinking and left a bottle of vodka in my car. It honestly wasn't mine. I had cleaned up my life. It was nothing to do with me. So when I opened up my trunk and he was there to help me change my tire, I saw that, I was like "oh, I'm gonna take the hit for this one." He pushed it aside, didn't say a word, grabbed the tire and put it on for me. I was like, okay I can deal with it. And had it been any other reaction, I probably wouldn't of shown my face again. DSDA1-MD3

During a divorce, this young man realized his friend was there for both him and his wife.

I remember when my wife decided to divorce me and that was a tremendous crisis in my life for the last several months. I have to say that there are a tremendous number of people out there who deeply care. I never knew that there are that many people that do. Just thinking about one guy in particular. He and I would go and have lunch at one of the local Chinese restaurants very much on a weekly basis for a while when the crisis was the highest. And he was a good guy. We

had a great time. . . . The last time I was over dropping the kids off and I look in the back of the house and the garden had flowers around it and I was like, "hmm. I bet he came over to garden." And sure enough he did. So here's a guy that was gonna be there to support me, talk to me, help me out. But he also was gonna be there for my wife, (weed the) flower(s in) her garden. That's a real Christian. He's not gonna hold it against either of us. He's just gonna be there for us. ASDA2-MA8

The church was a refuge when home life was in turmoil.

My mom is Adventist. She became an Adventist when she was a teenager, but my dad is not and was a semi-functioning alcoholic until I was 17. My home life was always turmoil and at times very difficult and in a lot of ways the church was a refuge for my brother and I. Because there were people there who loved us, who would invite us to things, who knew about our home situation and weren't judgmental about it. They weren't constantly telling us that if we didn't hurry up and convince our dad to become a Christian that he was gonna die and go to hell and we would never see him again and like, I've been told that thousands of times by very well-meaning people, but as a child that is horrifically traumatic. ISDA-FA3

4.13 I Wasn't Welcomed

This young woman felt no one wanted her in the church she was visiting.

> *It was almost like I did not exist. There was no greeter at the door and so I just walked in and then I kind of just stood there 'cause I was like, "well now what?" you know what I mean? 'Cause you are used to them saying "Happy Sabbath" and giving you a bulletin. So I just kind of like stood there for a minute just trying to figure out what am I supposed to do? I saw people there, I don't know if they were visitors too, there were quite a few of them, but none of them even came to me to say, "Are you new here, are you looking for someone?" Like they just literally looked and kept walking and then I felt incredibly uncomfortable. It wasn't just about being black, I was the only minority. I thought can I at least get a Hispanic?*
>
> *I usually sit in the front and I sat down . . . It was like a pretty small church so it could easily look filled, but everyone sat down and I almost felt like everyone was purposely not sitting near me. And this family does end up coming in my pew, but then they moved all the way to the other side of the pew and so I was like "ookaaay, alright. That's cool" and then I just kind of focused on the sermon and praise God, the sermon was good because I was kind of emotional at that point. I was hiding (it) and I'm sure they wouldn't tell that I was emotional, but I felt it and I booked it out of there so fast when they said benediction I was like I'm in my car, turn the key. . . I'm not gonna be like "I'm not gonna go to that church because I'm the only black person" That's not really me. . . Growing up I was always the only black person so it's not really like "Oh, all my friends are white." It's just normal. It hit me more when I felt nobody wanted me there. ASDA2-FA4*

4.14 I Am Welcomed.

This young woman feels that it doesn't matter where you go to church, it was like a family reunion.

> *I think that's one of the special things about being an Adventist is that, you know, in a genuinely warm church you can just drop in and you're family. You know it's like going to a family reunion with very extended family but it doesn't matter cause you're still blood and they just love you and I have had many experiences like that. ISDA-FA7*

Summary and Reflections

Church members are human. These stories illustrate both sides of young people's experiences in the church. Greeters have rolled their eyes at their clothing, but other church members have pushed aside bottles of vodka in order to help fix a flat tire. Professors have judged them for being homosexual or being on drugs when they were baptized, but other church members helped both

parties in a divorce, or supported a child growing up in a chaotic home where a parent was an alcoholic.

These stories and others throughout the themes illustrate the emotions associated with acceptance and rejection. Sometimes it just takes one person who is trusted to damage a vulnerable young adult's image of the church. Others remember Christian friends who could have been judgmental but weren't, or church families who loved and accepted them through the years.

Figure 1. List of Themes and related topics and codes (frequency of codes in parenthesis)

Themes 1:

Growing into or away from the Adventist Church: Identity issues

Inter-generational

- Family (14)
- Parents' role (19)
- People (20)
- Youth (8)
- The members (3)
- Age and generation difference (2)
- Generation (5)
- Spouse (2)

Education

- School (12)
- Education system (3)
- Southern (22)

Choice

- Born vs. drafted Adventist (9)
- Personal choice (10)
- Sense of identity/ownership (7)
- Responsibility (3)

Coming of Age/Identity w/ church separate from family

- Baptism (is it the right age, is it real, is there a two-stage identity) (4)
- Decisive time/rite of passage (3)
- Going with the flow (motions, apathy)/good/front (6)

Seclusion

- Adventist being different than others (5)
- Adventist hub (circles, institutions) (5)
- Sheltered (6)
- Out of touch with world (5)
- Isolation/separation/foreign (11)
- Relationship to non-SDA's (elitism, peculiar people, (7)
- Other denominations (22)
- Stupid (8)
- Non-Adventists (5)

Diversity

- Diverse in people (4)
- Diverse in thought (4)

Sexuality

- Divorce (1)
- Homosexuality (17)

Expectations

- Expectations/High Standard/ Pressure (9)
- Guilt (7)

Image/Appearance

- Look (8)
- Called out on appearance (9)
- Cookie cutter mold (2)
- Dress (24)
- Jewelry (15)

Diet

- Alcohol (8)
- Vegetarian (7)
- Meat (9)
- Food (3)

Liberal/Conservative

- Women in the church (3)
- Liberal vs. conservative (7)
- Politics (6)
- Tradition vs. mainstream (5)

Temporal Challenges

- Materialism (2)
- Work situations (17)
- Regional/cultural differences (7)
- Boredom (8)
- Worldly/secularization (1)
- Single and SDA problems (10)
- Post-collegiate pre-kids (4)
- Tiredness (3)
- Reason for leaving (7)

Tithe

- Tithing (3)

Worship

- Sermon (15)
- Music (13)
- Worship atmosphere (8)
- Dead church (2)
- Worship service (12)
- Worship (11)
- Predictable (2)

Theme 2:

Perceptions of church worship services

24/7 Church

- Activities (4)
- Church (7)
- Social gatherings (5)
- Pathfinders (2)
- Church outside of divine service (5)
- Fellowship/social aspect (6)

Genuineness

- Genuine (25)

Adventism

- Value as an Adventist (7)
- Stereotypes (5)
- Culture (2)
- Good Adventist (17)
- Lingo (7)
- Proud (3)
- Mindset (2)
- Identify with Adventist/Adventism positive (8)
- Identify with Adventist/Adventism negative (6)
- Dispelling false myths, Opinions, stereotypes of Adventists (2)

Church Discipline

- Church discipline (3)

Church vs. Jesus

- Restriction and burden vs. freedom and privilege (13)
- Conflict between church and God (11)

Doctrine

- Doctrines (19)
- Gospel (10)
- Death (5)
- Ellen White (13)
- Second coming (5)
- Creation (6)
- 2300 days (1)
- The sanctuary (1)
- Spirit of prophecy (1)
- Jesus God (6)
- God (12)
- Holy Spirit (3)

Connection

- Connection personal relationships (13)
- Disconnect (10)
- Engage (3)
- Connection (knowing common people) (11)
- Definition: Active (5)
- Definition: Inactive (9)
- Connection (24)

Discipleship

- Pastor (5)

Engagement

- Position in Church (12)
- Media (7)

Groups

- Sabbath School (7)
- Small groups (8)

Knowledge of Bible

- Bible knowledge (18)
- Confusion (3)
- Rightness (10)
- Comfort in beliefs (2)
- Answer-based (7)

Sabbath

- Sabbath (18)

Really know God in order to share Him

- Devotional life (5)
- Love of Christ (1)
- Personal relationship with Christ (18)
- Prayer (4)
- Understanding one's faith (1)

Service/Evangelism

- Mission work (11)
- Forms of evangelism (3)
- Evangelism (7)
- Outreach to community (9)
- Great Commission (9)

Theme 3: Where is the Love?

Acceptance/intolerance

- Acceptance (10)
- Judgment and criticism 8)
- Petty issues, debatable issues, etc. (4)
- Embarrassment/shame (3)
- gossip (5)

Community

- Community outreach (6)
- Community atmosphere (12)

Nurture

- Born in faith (13)
- Baptism (4)
- Childhood (12)
- Familiarity (1)
- Upbringing/raised/grow in church (6)
- Family-like church (11)
- Friends (10)

Safety

- Love (14)
- Fear (1)
- Joy/happiness (3
- Lack of safety (9)

Security

- Believe (10)
- Salvation (16)
- Real vs. spiritual world (4)
- Satan (8)

Talk about similar struggles

- Safety with struggles (8)
- Uncomfortable talking about (5)
- Doubt (9)
- Fear of thought (7)
- Frustration, pettiness (10)
- Close-minded vs. openness (9)
- Struggle/fighting/febating (9)
- Perfection (6)

Welcomed

- Welcoming friendly atmosphere (11)
- Making others feel comfortable (4)
- Nice and friendly (4)
- Welcomed (16)
- Noticed (8)
- Shunning (1)

Beyond Belief: Why More Adventists Are Leaving Over Doctrine

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Picture a Seventh-day Adventist church somewhere with 200 members attending. Over time, 100 of these members will leave the church, and in a sense be replaced by100 new members--and then some. (The Adventist church is one of the fastest growing denominations in the world, and the fastest in the United States.[1])

But the 100 church members who leave--the ones who used to worship and fellowship and eat haystacks and sing "Side by Side" with us: Why do they leave? Past studies indicated that if someone left the Adventist church it was almost always because of bad experiences or relationships, not because they changed their beliefs.

In a 1998 report, "Why Do Adventists Quit Coming to Church?" prepared by the Center for Creative Ministry, Adventist researcher Monte Sahlin wrote, "Three out of four leave for reasons having to do with their relationships with people and groups, while less than one in five leave because they no longer believe in some teaching of the church."

Sahlin cited the work of other Adventist researchers, including Roger Dudley, director of the Andrews University Institute of Church Ministry. "Generally speaking," said Dudley, "poor interpersonal relationships in the church" were the primary reason members left.

"Very few people," added Gottfried Oosterwal, then director of the Institute of World Mission at Andrews University, "indicated that they had left because of a disagreement over doctrine. Many had questions and doubts, but no basic disagreements with the main tenets of the Adventist faith."

Even more emphatic was Harold K. West, Florida Conference ministerial director, based on his 1975 study of departing church members "There was absolutely no proof," said West, "that anybody left the church because they no longer believed in the doctrines."

Interviews with former Adventists supplemented the Center's 1998 report.

"After my baptism," said one former member, "I would wait each week in the foyer. No one would talk to me, no one spoke."

"The church I attended," said another, "was so cold I could skate down the aisles."

"It's the theology, not the people"

While relationships will always factor into any church member's experience, a new study suggests a shifting landscape in which more and more people are leaving the Adventist church primarily because they've changed their beliefs.

The study, "Former Seventh-day Adventist Perceptions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church," was conducted in the fall of 2011 by Southern Adventist University's School of Business under the direction of marketing professor Lisa Goolsby. Goolsby was approached by Pastor Jerry Arnold and member Ken DeFoor of the Collegedale (Tenn.) Community Church about exploring the reasons members are now leaving the church. More than 600 former Adventists from throughout the U.S. were invited to answer questions online; 190 responded.

To the question why they quit attending the Adventist church, 49 percent of respondents cited disagreement or disenchantment with Adventist doctrine, while another 10 percent cited their own lifestyle choices being out of harmony with church teachings. Only 38 percent of responses cited a bad personal experience or "other" reason for leaving. (The respondents were able to cite more than one reason.)

When respondents were invited to give open-ended feedback about their departure from the Adventist church, 68 percent of the comments concerned Adventist doctrine, 47 percent concerned judgmental attitudes or other problems within th e church, 31 percent concerned co-founder Ellen G. White, and 15 percent concerned legalism. (The respondents were able to submit multiple comments, which were then categorized.)

"I could no longer stay within a system," wrote one respondent, "that I knew to be unbiblical and with which I disagreed. . . . The 'tipping point' came when I realized we couldn't expect our sons to tell us the truth if we were modeling a lack of integrity by being active members of a church they knew we no longer believed. . . . We did *not* leave because we were in any way hurt, angry, bitter, or disgruntled. We left with great grief and great loss, and we left because the Lord Jesus revealed Himself to us so compellingly that we knew we could not dishonor Him by remaining in a system that does not know who He really is or what He really did."

"There are many SDA churches," wrote another former member, "that are open, loving and focused only on Christ, but this is not the problem. The problem is with the doctrine of the SDA church. The doctrinal beliefs of the SDA church are completely unbiblical; this is the reason why I will never attend an SDA church again."

"If Adventism," said another, "would catch hold of the truth of Grace and 'It is finished,' it would be a great package. I . . . cherish my memories of growing up in a warm, family-based, healthy, safe environment. Independent Bible study led me down a different path."

Another respondent encouraged "much more investigation into the fact that many have left because of doctrinal [reasons] and often, no other reasons. There is too much focus on people being hurt. . . . Doctrinal issues are ignored."

Doctrinal differences weren't the only reason cited; the experiential element was still very much present. A divorced single mom with special- needs children described feeling ostracized by church members who were "snobbish." She said that members with money seemed more accepted.

Another former member described the church as failing to reach out to his family "in their time of greatest need."

An inactive church member wrote, "Although I consider myself an Adventist, I do not currently attend the local church due to the judgmental, resistant attitudes that prevail in my area."

Still, compared to previous studies, the number of former members who cited doctrine as a reason for leaving the Adventist church was striking. One former member wrote: "It's the theology, not the people."

Asking questions

Pastor Arnold, who helped initiate the study, said the data align with what he's seeing up close and personal. "I have had conversations with many young adults who do not embrace every teaching of the Adventist church," Arnold said. "Some have perspectives that are not reflective of the official teaching of the Adventist church. Some understand the official teaching, and disagree with it on some points."

Arnold said the two subjects that he gets asked about most are the doctrine of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary and the proper use of Ellen White's writings.

"People still leave the church over their feelings being hurt," Arnold said. "But one of the main underlying factors is the mistreatment they got because they were questioning. If we can keep a positive relationship with them while they are processing things, it communicates that they are welcome and wanted in our fellowship."

DeFoor, who left the Adventist church and later returned, said he represents a boomer generation who had difficulty separating salvation in Christ from personal behavior such as Sabbathkeeping. "I know we say that the church doesn't teach this," DeFoor said, "but certain people give the strong impression that it does teach this."

Based on his outreach to other former Adventists, DeFoor said that the Adventist Church needs more emphasis on the teaching and preaching of the gospels. "We need to understand that it must be Jesus first," DeFoor said. "That will lead us to a better understanding of our Heavenly Father."

Goolsby said the Adventist church isn't the only faith community seeing a transient membership. She cites a 2008 Boston Globe article stating that "44 percent of Americans have left the religion traditions in which they grew up." [2]

"Social media has connected our lives," Goolsby said. "We are now more aware of what our friends, family, and contemporaries are doing, thinking, and feeling. If those friends have issues or questions about their church or their belief system, they are generally speaking out through social media. This causes people who might not otherwise have questions or issues to suddenly start asking some of the hard questions."

Goolsby said a fundamental question to consider is whether the Adventist church is a "one size fits all" religion. "Does the member," she asked, "have to take it all or take nothing? And how does that fit with the plan of salvation?"

Sahlin, who wrote the 1998 report, said that his current research also reflects changing perspectives among former Adventists. "The relational issues are not as acute as they were in the '70s, '80s and '90s," Sahlin said. "They are still there, but there is this newer issue of how people experience Christian faith."

Sahlin said that newer faith issues among Adventists are "largely driven by the evangelical critique of Adventism—that it's based on salvation by works because of its insistence on the Jewish Sabbath and because of an extrabiblical prophet from which they get their doctrines."

Many Adventists today, Sahlin said, aren't prepared to handle this critique. "The fallout of our own theological debates of the 1980s and '90s," he said, "was a new generation who are uncertain about their faith and not well equipped to respond to the evangelical critique."

Sahlin said that Adventists have quit making their own biblical critique of the evangelical faith, such as that found in *The Great Controversy*, Ellen White's 1911 work. "We have tried to not be different," said Sahlin, noting that in the more recent church-published *The Great Hope,* critiques of other denominations are largely absent.

A new challenge.

The reality of members leaving because of doctrine poses a new—yet old— challenge for the Adventist church. How should we respond?

We should re-embrace conversations about doctrine.

The Adventist church was founded on doctrine, even at the expense of relationships. In the mid-1800s, members of other Christian churches (including Ellen White, a Methodist) spent entire nights comparing the teachings of Scripture with the teachings of their own churches—including eternal torment in hell, Sunday sacredness, and a new teaching, the secret rapture. When these members left their home churches to become Seventh-day Adventists, their existing relationships were often strained. Ironically, some of their spiritual ancestors are now leaving the Adventist church to return to these same teachings—and experiencing the same relational strain. Rather than feel

defensive or judgmental, we should welcome respectful dialog about Scripture with others. It will benefit all parties.

We must provide the best possible scriptural answers to honest inquiries.

Former Adventists tend to be a sharp-minded group who demand solid exegesis, not pat answers. It isn't enough to say that "the pope changed the Sabbath." We must first show from Scripture alone how Sabbath rest and salvation-rest continue to coexist in the New Testament, just as they did in the Old Testament.[3] We must also be willing to explain the uncomfortable but historical truth that the early Christian Church began to distance itself from the Sabbath largely for the purpose of distancing itself from the Jews.[3] At a time when both Christians and Jews are asking questions sincere questions about each other's faith,[4] the Adventist church is perfectly positioned to teach and model the Judeo-Christian faith of Jesus Christ: one that celebrates "new treasures as well as old" (Matt. 13:52).

We should clear up false understandings.

For a myriad reasons, many former Adventists seem to have serious misunderstandings of Adventist beliefs. One survey respondent wrote: "Keeping the Sabbath does not save anyone." Another respondent wrote that she believed Ellen White was inspired by God—but that she is not our way to salvation. "I don't think you have to believe in her to be saved," she wrote. It's truly sad that these former members were taught so erroneously, that they attended our churches and never learned of the all-sufficient grace of Jesus Christ. We must all bear responsibility for this and give thought to the messages we're sending to our children and our members. Consider, for example, how often we pray "Thank you for the Sabbath" compared to how often we pray "Thank you for Jesus."

Many of the survey comments falsely reflected an impression that Ellen White dreamed up Adventist beliefs, when in reality her own study and writing complemented, and often trailed, that of

other Adventists. Former members, to be fair, need to recognize that it's human nature for gifted spiritual leaders to end up becoming too important to their most ardent supporters. Recently an evangelical congregation decided that a certain woman's teachings had become too influential, so they banned all classes using her materials. The woman? Beth Moore, a leading Christian writer and teacher. The church's problem wasn't Beth Moore; the church's problem was finding a sense of balance. The same is true for us.

We must recognize that sometimes the enemy is us.

We can all think of toxic Adventist congregations or ministries that we frankly wouldn't recommend to anyone. Rather than urge members (or former members) to endlessly "stick it out" in bad-apple Adventist churches, we should encourage them to find a more healthy Adventist church—or plant a new one full of grace and truth in fresh airspace. New organisms grow faster anyway.

We must also recognize—and so must former Adventists—that every faith community has toxic elements that poorly represent the wider group. The Baptist church deals with deluded members who scream "God hates you" at soldiers and gays. Even when functioning normally, every faith community has its strengths and weaknesses. One former Adventist described her children's experience in their new denomination. "I found the strict rules, severe guilt, and the concept of burning forever in hell a terrifying concept to foist upon children." Truly every church, like every church member, at some point cries out: "Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom. 7:24-25).

We should at least honor the integrity of those who have left.

Right or wrong, it takes courage to leave what you've always known. Even as we grieve the departure of those who used to worship with us, we should honor their integrity—especially when compared to Adventist thought leaders and members who reject the authority of Scripture, stay in the church, and try to force it into their own image. This type of member does much greater damage to the kingdom of heaven than former Adventists who retain a high view of Scripture and are seekers for truth.

In the Adventist church's earliest days, there was no creed but Scripture; the only litmus test was the final authority of Word of God. It should be no different today—as long as someone continues to prayerfully plumb the depths of Scripture, there should be room for them in this church. As one returned Adventist put it: "I had to study my way out of the Adventist church before I could study my way back into it." We should not feel threatened by such journeys.

Perhaps the former members who pose the most confusion are those who now seem to find their identity in being "former Adventists"—not unlike a divorced person forever identifying themselves as someone's former spouse. Ironically, publications and websites centered on being "former Adventists" have grown wearisome even to other former Adventists. "It's like they've just moved their chairs to the other side of the table," said a former member.

The message that seems to emanate from these groups is that Adventists can't possibly know the assurance in Christ that they do. This is a bold assertion to make about anyone. Even as Adventists have been guilty of misjudging other believers, former Adventists should be careful about doing the same toward the people they used to worship with. Members who have left would do much better to keep their focus on Christ and their new Christian communities and avoid the inherently negative spirit of former Adventist groups.

Is it join hands or sing songs?

At the close of the survey, respondents were asked: "Would you try the Adventist church again?" Forty-six percent said they would.

These 46 percent are more than a figure. They're moms and dads who squeezed into tiny cradle rolls chairs next to us. They're old roommates who still show up at alumni weekend. They're boomer men and women who battle lingering frustration about the way they were raised and still aren't sure who the "real" Adventists are. They're good, sensitive people who hated worrying about the time of trouble but who aren't too wild about eternal hellfire either.

They're folks who, deep in their hearts, are fine with most Adventist doctrine, with most Adventist culture, with most Adventist people—but who simply wish for an Adventist church where Scripture is authoritative and where Jesus Christ reigns above all.

They're also the people who can help get us there. We would be blessed to have them back.

References

1. MacDonald, G. Jeffrey. "Adventists' Back-to-basics Faith Is Fastest Growing U.S. Church," *USA Today*, March 17, 2011.

2. Goodman, Ellen. "Shopping for Religion," *Boston Globe*, Feb. 29, 2008, p. A15.

3. For a more in-depth discussion of New Testament Sabbath references, see Nash, Andy, "Unrest Over a Rest Day," *Adventist Review*, Feb. 2, 2012.

4. "Christians must not judaize [sic] by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honouring the Lord's Day; and, if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ."—Cannon XXIX, Council of Laodicea, 364 A.D.

4.In *Why the Jews Rejected Jesus*, Jewish author David Klinghoffer writes: "No authentic Messiah would inspire a religion that ended up calling upon the Jews to reject the manifest meaning of Sinai" (p. 215).

Former Adventists' reasons for leaving the Adventist church:
49% Disagreement/disenchantment with Adventist doctrine

38% Bad personal experience

Former Adventist levels of agreement with Adventist doctrines (highest to lowest):

The life, death, and resurrection of Christ
(71.58 percent support all of the doctrine; 28.42 percent support part or none of the doctrine)

The Trinity (71.05 all; 28.95 part or none)

The Lord's Supper (65.79 all; 34.21 part or none)

Creation (64.74 all; 35.26 part or none)

Second coming of Christ (60.53 all; 39.47 part or none)

The experience of salvation (56.84 all; 43.16 part or none)

Baptism (57.89 all; 42.11 part or none)

New earth (55.79 all; 44.21 part or none)

Unity in the body of Christ (55.79 all; 44.21 part or none)

Marriage and the family (55.26 all; 44.74 part or none)

Death and resurrection (55.26 all; 44.74 part or none)

Spiritual gifts and ministries (52.11 all; 47.89 part or none)

Stewardship (50.00 all; 50.00 part or none)

Christian behavior (48.95 all; 51.05 part or none)

The law of God (47.89 all; 52.11 part or none)

The Sabbath (45.79 all; 54.21 part or none)

Millennium and the end of sin (44.74 all; 55.26 part or none)

The great controversy (44.74 all; 55.26 part or none)

Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary (40.53 all; 59.47 part or none)

The church (36.84 all; 63.26 part or none)

The gift of prophecy (36.32 all; 63.68 part or none)

The remnant and its mission (28.95 all; 71.05 part or none)

--Goolsby, Lisa. *Former Seventh-day Adventist Perceptions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church,* Fall 2011, Southern Adventist University School of Business

The Power and Importance of an Integrated Approach to Youth Ministry

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As the Seventh-day Adventist Church analyzes the *Twenty-First Century Seventh-day Adventist Connection Study*, it seems imperative that the volume of research (Cross, 2011, pp. 29-56) demonstrating the power and importance of an integrated approach of ministry with young people be given serious consideration. By an integrated approach is meant that ministry with young people is done in partnership with the young persons' families and in a way that draws those young persons into the relational heart of their church family.

DeVries captures well the power of influence that parents can have on their children, thereby making their partnership extremely important:

> And when it comes to faith formation, the impact of parents is dramatic. Research now shows that parents who simply talk about faith in the home and who involve their children in serving alongside them can actually double and sometimes triple their children's chances of living out their faith as adults. (2004, p. 63)

An initial evaluation of the *Adventist Connection Study* indicates similar findings.

Rainer and Rainer's research demonstrates that it is not only the parents who are significant in the lives of young people; adults from their church family can also make a vital positive spiritual impact.

> Our research reveals that if a teen has no adult interaction in the church, it's almost a guarantee he or she will drop out of the church. . . . A pastor can reduce the dropout rate of teens from an almost certainty of losing students to only a 50-percent chance simply by getting adults involved in their lives. No complicated process. No cookie-cutter formula. No huge program. No expensive resources. Just start encouraging adults and teens to mix with one another through existing church events. (2008, pp. 124-125)

This research affirms that God's methodology for ministry to young people, as is described in the Bible, is powerful and effective. Deuteronomy 6:4-7 gives the following instructions: 1) the goal of

ministry to young people is to teach them to love God with their entire being, 2) parents, extended family, and the whole community of faith are the ones whom God has commissioned to teach young people to love God, and 3) this training is to be woven into the repetitive routine of everyday life, thus placing the weight of this responsibility on the shoulders of the ones raising the young person.

Ephesians 6:4 narrows that responsibility down to one person, the father. Dad is God's primary youth ministry strategy.

Finally, Ephesians 4:16 indicates that it is God's design for His church family to be closely connected and working together as a singular unit, even in midst of extreme diversity; this would include young people. Current generational diversity can be significant; however, it does not appear to be any greater than the differences that were present between the Jews and Gentiles in Paul's day. There were both Jew and Gentile members of the church in Ephesus. In light of this diversity God's instruction was to work toward unity, not to segregate. They were to work toward unity by being humble, gentle, patient, and loving toward each other (Eph 4:2-3). The prayer of Jesus recorded in John 17 indicates that

the unity of the diverse followers of Jesus can stimulate faith in unbelievers. Unity in diversity is not natural; rather, it is supernatural, thus testifying of God's presence in this world.

Youth Ministry Paradigms

These texts indicate that it is God's design for families and church families to be the ones who lead their young people to love God. However, over time there has evolved a different paradigm for ministry to young people, resulting in the gradual shift away from His plan. This new paradigm highlights the reality of the differences between the generations and emphasizes the importance of delivering instruction to young people in a context and language geared especially for them. While the programming for such a paradigm can be extremely fun and lead many young people to make

important commitments to Jesus, it has a noteworthy downside—it can isolate the young person from family and church family. The image of a cave can serve well for this paradigm. Exploring caves can be an exciting adventure, especially for young people, but those participating can quickly become isolated from everyone else. This isolation, in the context of ministry with young people, then creates the following disadvantages:

1) **It lacks staying power**. When young people graduate from twelfth grade, they often graduate from church because they do not know anyone else in the church, other than their peers who have also graduated from church.
2) **It can increase the feeling that the church is judgmental**. When a young person and an adult are not together in a relationship it is much easier for the adult to become judgmental and for the young person to assume that all adults are critical, simply because of the lack of a friendship.
3) **It lacks the wisdom and maturity that comes from years of life experience**.
4) **The young people are not prayed for, missed, and sought after when they are gone because they are not known.**
5) **It can become extremely expensive**. This reality can make the *cave* approach to ministry with young people a viable option only for large churches that can afford a youth pastor and a large youth ministry budget.
6) **There can be significant dissonance** between programming designed for a young person's tastes that have been developed by modern culture, and the realities of what an authentic walk with God is really all about.
7) **It is impossible to compete with the billions of dollars spent on entertainment for teens in our modern culture.**

Because of these major disadvantages to the *cave* approach to youth ministry, it seems that a bridge could serve as a much better image to reflect God's original design. The family and church family can work together to build a bridge from where a young person is that leads them into the heart of the family and church family. The building of this bridge can require language, context, and programming designed to connect especially with the young person, but the entire purpose is to help span the generational differences and lead the young persons into positive relationships with their families and church families.

This could become the new gauge for all Adventist youth ministry, including our schools. Instead of the programming ultimately leading to a *cave* approach that isolates the young person from their family and/or church family, it is adjusted until it becomes a bridge leading the young into deeper positive relationships with their families and church families.

God's Bridge-building Material

Though the building of these youth ministry bridges can require language, context, and programming designed especially to connect with young people, God's primary bridge-building material is love. Ephesians 4:16 indicates that it is *in love* that the church family is to connect, serve, and grow. The initial presentation of the *Twenty-First Century Seventh-day Adventist Connection Study* appears to indicate that sharing genuine, unconditional love with our young people is the Adventist church's primary growing edge. "All young adults we talked with, regardless of their relationship with the church, feel criticized and judged by older church members" (Des Jarlais, Jacobs, & Lindsey, 2012, Power Point Slide 54). Until young Adventists feel loved rather than criticized there will be monumental struggles in the area of connection and retention in the Adventist church. Perhaps the apostle Paul knew this was the case for the church in Ephesus; maybe that is why he poured out his heart to them in this way: "And I pray that you, being *rooted and established in love*, may have power,

together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:17b-19, NIV, emphasis supplied). Possibly those in Adventist churches will have to have an experience such as Paul describes here before the young Adventists feel loved rather than criticized.

Some may think that the idea of making young people feel loved is equivalent to diminishing or ignoring truth; however, according to Ephesians this is not the case. An accurate translation of a Greek participle in Ephesians 4:15 says "truthing it in love". In other words, people become the full embodiment of both truth and love as they grow in Jesus. Perhaps *truthing it in love* is the best building material available for developing effective youth ministry bridges.

When Jesus interacted with the Samaritan woman who was cohabiting with the sixth man in her life, when the woman was caught in adultery and brought to Jesus for judgment, or when Mary poured extremely expensive perfume on the feet of Jesus, there is no indication that any of them felt criticized by Jesus. In love, Jesus seemed to focus on each individual's heart rather than their behavior. Then, out of genuine compassion for the person, He would reach out to them in kindness. When people in Seventh-day Adventist churches treat others in this way, significant progress will have been made toward making lasting connections with young people.

Seventh-day Adventist Youth Ministry

As consideration is given to using the suggested gauge of a *cave* or a *bridge* approach to ministry with young people, perhaps the following specific examples could be helpful:

Adventist education. Despite all the good accomplished by the Adventist church's educational system, there is a significant structural deficiency revealed when the suggested youth ministry gauge is used to evaluate it. Currently there is no structure in place to ensure a collaborative, synergistic bridge-building partnership that leads young people into the relational heart of their church family. Local school and church administration report to two entirely different superiors at the conference level, which creates the potential for two (or more) autonomous structures working their distinct visions with the same families in the same local setting.

As with the local church's youth ministry program, often the larger the context the more likely the ministry can list toward the *cave* approach to youth ministry. The combination of school trips and programs can cause a young person to lose any meaningful relational contact with his or her church family. This challenge is exponentially more significant in a boarding school situation.

When Adventist schools use a *cave* approach to youth ministry it exacerbates an already significant divide in a local church between those students who attend the Adventist school and those who do not. Because this divide can often fall along economic lines it makes it extremely sensitive to those outside of the Adventist education circle, often significantly decreasing their connection to their church family. It seems there is a missed opportunity.

If the local school and church were united structurally they could more naturally partner with great ministry synergy, working a shared vision and strategy to reach all young people for Jesus regardless of where they attend school. The idea of three separate entities working together for the salvation of our young people; church, home, and school is not biblical. In Scripture, God has given to the family and the church family the responsibility of raising young people to love God; consequently the school is part of that church family. Viewing the school as an extension of the church rather than a separate entity could help initiate functioning in that way.

One final consideration in the area of Adventist education: In many cases, the local Adventist church spends all of their funds for ministry to young people on their school, leaving no funding to help build bridges into the heart of the family and church family in other ways. Consequently, especially in small Adventist churches, the bridge-building enterprises on the local church level can easily become extinct.

Summer camp is another common ministry for young people within the Adventist church. When organized and focused for maximum spiritual impact, summer camp ministry can have a powerful and positive impact for God and His Kingdom in the lives of both staff and campers. However, when the suggested youth ministry gauge is used to evaluate summer camp ministry it appears to be a *cave* approach— completely isolated from the young person's family and church family. Certainly parents and local churches can use their conference's summer camp ministry as part of their bridge-building strategy. Without the bridge, the positive Christian experience of camp often does not have the support needed to be sustainable.

The Pathfinder Club is another ministry to young people in the Adventist church that could be evaluated with the suggested youth ministry gauge. The Pathfinder Club provides an opportunity for the young people to be quite integrated with their families and church family. Some clubs provide that opportunity, some do not; it all depends on how they are directed.

If this simple youth ministry gauge began to be used in each local Adventist church/school context, perhaps it could help make each church/school make a shift more into alignment with the paradigm of ministry with young people described in Scriptures.

Recommendations in Order of Priority

Reduce divorce. Divorce can often destroy each family member's connection with God and church family. Proven strategies need to be implemented in the local church to reduce divorce; this could significantly increase the connection of young people with both their family and church family.

Train and empower men. Dad is God's primary youth ministry strategy (Eph 6:4) but it seems few Seventh-day Adventist ministries to young people include dads; so there appears to be much work to be done in this area. Men need to be trained and empowered to be the spiritual leaders God has called them to be.

Transition environments of local congregations from criticism to love. Initiate a strategy to help transition Seventh-day Adventists from a critical behavioral focus to a "truthing it in love" (Eph 4:15) focus.

Implement a united youth ministry vision. Implement training strategies to transform the paradigm of those who work in ministry with young people to primarily a focus on building bridges to connect with young persons where they are and then to help lead them into the heart of their families and local church families. This would include, but not be limited to, both employees and volunteers in Adventist schools, churches, summer camps, Pathfinder clubs, and Adventurer clubs.

Transform structure to support an integrated approach to youth ministry. Launch a ten-year pilot project wherein the General Conference funds one conference-level salary for every conference in the North American Division. This salary would be designated for an "integrated youth-ministry specialist." This integrated youth-ministry specialist could report directly to the local conference's ministerial director. The integrated youth-ministry specialist could collaborate with summer camp ministries, Pathfinder and Adventurer ministries, and the ministry of Adventist educators in each conference. However, the primary role of the integrated youth-ministry specialist

could be to work directly with volunteers in local churches, coaching them through the process of building bridges in their context; to help their young people connect with their parents and their congregation.

The integrated youth-ministry specialist could work with a maximum of ten churches at a time for a three-year period . Then the integrated youth-ministry specialist could transition to working with a new set of ten churches over a three-year period. Over time, the integrated youth-ministry specialist could develop a regional volunteer administrative team much like area coordinators for Pathfinder ministries. Over the ten-year pilot project the integrated youth-ministry specialist could successfully mentor the volunteers in 20 churches, assisting them in building effective bridges to integrate their young people into the hearts of their congregations. Additionally, the integrated youth-ministry specialist could appoint two volunteer regional integrated youth-ministry coordinators to manage the integrated youth ministry in each of the ten church districts.

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The Millennial Generation: Who Are We, *Really*?

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Millennials. Emerging adults. Generation Y. Twenty-somethings. Boomerang generation. Generation Me. Adultscents. Kidults. These all describe--some word choices are more condescending than others--the group of young adults who were born approximately between 1980 and 2000 (Henig & Henig, 2012). According to U.S. Census Bureau statistics, there are about 80 million Millennials living in America, a quarter of the adult population. (as quoted by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation Emerging Issues Program, 2012).

This group of young adults has captured the attention of researchers with entire studies dedicated to understanding why this generation is so different than any preceding them. These differences are evident in a broad range of areas including personal attitudes, values, political views, work ethic, relationships, and religious beliefs. Although the Millennial generation is in many ways vastly different from Generation X and the Baby Boomers, the differences (five of which will be explored in this paper) can all be linked to the three influences of upbringing, economics, and the Internet, and only time will be able to determine the lasting effects the Millennial generation will have on society.

In order to begin understanding the Millennial generation, it is important to recognize what are the main factors that shaped young adults into who they are today. The first influence, upbringing, refers to how they were raised. As much as many older people try to point the blame to hip-hop, smartphones, and Facebook, it's important to recognize that the first differences were a result of their own doing. Social media and technology definitely play a role, and that will be addressed a little later

on, but the way that Baby Boomers and Generation X raised their children played a large role in shaping the Millennials, also.

The majority of Millennials were born in the '80s and '90s to parents who were determined to invest in their children's future. Unlike their parents before them, Baby Boomers and Generation X spent a lot more time with--and more money on---their children. In *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (2000), authors Neil Howe and William Strauss identify several traits that distinguish Millennials from other generations. The idea of being special was a familiar part of describing youth back when the book was written over a decade ago. "From precious-baby movies of the early '80s to the effusive rhetoric surround the high school Class of 2000, older generations have inculcated in Millennials the sense that they are collectively vital to the nation and to their parents sense of purpose" (Howe & Strauss, 2013, p. 43). This led to a self-confidence and optimism that instilled the idea that they were the best and could do anything they put their mind to. Fast-forward to the present, and these feelings of being special and confident are the reason why so many deeming young adults deem themselves as entitled and are full of high expectations.

The second factor, economics, encompasses all of the changing financial policies and conditions that had an effect on Millennials. When Millennials were going through their adolescent years in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the nation was experiencing one of the greatest financial booms in history. Howe and Strauss (2000) prematurely predicted that the "Millennials may fairly be described as the first generation ever to reach age 18 without even a single recollection of an economy-wide bust" (p. 100).

But then the prosperous bubble burst and America, along with the majority of other countries in the world, was hit with the Great Recession. According to the National Bureau of Economic Research (2013), the United States of America was in a recession between December 2007 and June

2009. The housing market took a turn for the worse, banks had to bailed out, and gas prices rose sharply. This swift change from a time of great financial blessings to financial troubles is in some ways similar to what America went through between the Roaring '20s and the Great Depression of the '30s. The recession perfectly lined up with many of the Millennials college years and contributed to the issues around young adults graduating school into a troubling employment market. Although the Great Recession is over, the country is still recovering, and there are still some lingering effects, which is why the majority of Millennials have made adjustments to certain life choices.

The Internet is the third great influential factor in shaping young adults. Each generation preceding the Millennials had its own technological advances, such as the radio and the television, but when computers were made available to the general public in the late 1990s it brought a change that the older population had only imagined in science fiction literature. Technological advances brought the Internet and it has given people direct access to information on everything, resulting in information overload at times.

As digital natives, Millennials are able to use this technology more quickly and intuitively than the previous generation. The Internet has quickly become an integral part of their lives. Millennials are connected to the Internet through several different platforms with smartphones becoming increasingly popular. The average young adult switches between smartphone, tablet, and laptop about 27 times per hour (Miller, 2013). A 2012 study called the Cisco Connected World Technology Report surveyed 1,800 young adults across 18 countries and confirmed just how ingrained the Internet is in Millennials' lives. Ninety percent tap into the Internet through their smartphones before getting out of bed (Cisco, 2012). Close to 90 percent in this demographic have a Facebook account and 41 percent update it at least once a day (Cisco, 2012). In the 2011 version of the same study, one in every three believed the Internet to be as important as air, water, food, and shelter. Cisco reported that more than half said

they could not live without the Internet and two-thirds would rather have Internet than a car (Cisco, 2011).

Arguments have been made that this over-stimulation by technology has stunted young adults brain power, but the impressive ways they have been able to use technology to create things refutes some of those claims. Instead of spending time memorizing facts, the ability to Google unknown information could allow more attention to be given to other parts of completing a task (Henig & Henig, 2012). Also, a study done with MRI scans has shown the brain activity of a young adult when Googling information is as if they are reading a book. "Google, it seems, might be doing something different to the brains of digital natives, creating a new set of neural connections and engaging young brains in an unprecedented way" (Henig & Henig, 2012, p.143). The lasting effects of the increased stimulation through technology on mental health probably will not be available for decades to come.

These three factors-- upbringing, economics, and the Internet-- when combined have had a powerful influence in shaping Millennials into the individuals they are today. There are five broad trends in young adults' lives that are important to note as being different. Just like the influencing factors intertwine to affect these six trends, many of the trends end up relating to one another.

Higher Education

The Millennial generation is the most educated generation to present. In 2011 an estimated 24 million people were in enrolled at a college (Davis & Bauman, 2013). There has been a steady climb in the number of people graduating college and a noticeably large jump in the increase of female graduates from the previous generation (Wuthnow, 2007). In 2011, 59 percent of undergraduate students completed a bachelor's degree at the same institution within six years (National Center For Education Statistics, 2013). Twenty-seven percent of college seniors in 2010 decided to go straight to grad school, which increased by 6 percent from back in 2007 (Henig & Henig, 2012). From an early age,

Millennials were expected to excel academically, and it is no surprise that so many have graduated college and are pursuing or considering a Master's degree.

The Internet has also played a role in advancing education with the opportunity for online degrees that fit people's busy schedule. Also, as the world continues to advance in technology, more education is needed to stay current even if this means staying in school for a longer period of time (Henig & Henig, 2012)

However, with the increase of education has come the increase of financial burden. According to the Project on Student Debt as reported in *USA Today*, two-thirds of college graduates have an average student loan debt of $26,600 (Hadley, 2013). Even though this number is very large, it would not be so scary a figure if the job market for recent grads were better. The rule of thumb, according to finance experts, is that one's total loan debt should not exceed his/her annual salary (Henig & Henig, 2012). For some career paths it is becoming increasingly difficult to find a full-time job with decent wages. About half of workers aged 25 to 34 earn less than $30,000 a year (Henig & Henig, 2012). "The consequences of a rising debt load may not be immediately noticeable in the years just after students graduate, but the long-term impact could be crushing" (Hadley, 2013). In fact, long-term financial predictions are that in ten years, the amount of debt that college graduates have will equal the median starting salary (Fairchild, 2013).

Instability

The twenty-somethings have become a time for testing all the different options presented to Millennials. This transitional period is the source for a lot of the worries for researchers and parents alike. Jeffrey Arnett, a professor at Clark University who coined the phrase "emerging adult" to describe young people between the age of 18 and 25, outlines these five features of emerging

adulthood: identity explorations, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and a sense of possibilities (Arnett & Fishel, 2013).

This identity exploration and instability is evident in careers. The average young person holds seven different jobs during his 20s (Arnett & Fishel, 2013). "According to U.S. Census data, it takes college grads four years to find a job they will keep for five years or more; for high school grads, finding that five-years-or-more job takes six years, and for high school dropouts it takes seventeen years" (Arnett & Fishel, 2013, p. 182).

The transience of jobs however, also could be related to the fact that more post-grads are working in jobs unrelated to their degree. A recent poll found that 33 percent of those with four-year college degree and 29 percent with graduate degrees were not working in their chosen profession (Henig & Henig, 2012); therefore these individuals are constantly looking for a new job that will better align with their career goals.

Instability also extends to Millennials' place of residence. Rent in 2009 took 32.1 percent of income as compared to their parents, who in the 1980s put only 23.7 towards rent (Henig & Henig, 2012). The student loan debt constantly haunting them does not help the situation either. More and more young adults are signing joint leases with friends and acquaintances to help share the burden of living expenses. This also partly explains why cohabitation is continuing to rise in popularity.

Those who cannot afford to live on their own following graduation return to live at home with their parents; thus the nickname, "Boomerang generation." In 2002, 36 percent of all Millennials were living with a parent; the percentage was more than 50 percent for those between the ages of 18 and 24. This figure includes those who live in dorms but return home on vacations (Pew Research, 2013). This temporary living arrangement is a way for young adults to save money or pursue experience at a

low- or no-paying job. If the option to live at home were not available, demographers estimate that the poverty rate for Millennials would be around 43 percent (Henig & Henig, 2012).

Related to instability is the new idea of a quarter life crisis where in the mid- to late-20s, young adults suddenly have an urge to take a completely different path in life. In *Twentysomethings: Why Do Young People Seem Stuck?* (2012), mother-and-daughter duo Robin and Samantha Henig share anecdotal stories about friends who did just that. One example is a young adult fresh out of law school who decides that he no longer wants to be a lawyer and becomes a park ranger.

Not only is the quarter life crisis related to careers, but it can also make its appearance in other life choices. "It involves twentysomethings stepping outside the flow of their lives, taking time out to assess who they are and where they're heading. It can be destabilizing to re-open options and start all over again, especially if that means undoing some prior commitments by getting divorced, moving to a new country, or going back to school" (Henig & Henig, 2012, p. 145).

All of this unsettledness may seem like a lack of concern for the future, but perhaps it is the complete opposite. Lev Grossman writes in an article in *Time,* "It's not that they don't take adulthood seriously; they take it so seriously, they're spending years carefully choosing the right path into it" (2005).

Delay in Starting Families

In light of these trends of instability and the increased time spent in school, it is less of a shock to realize that the average age at which young adults get married and start a family has increased. The 2010 U.S. Census reported that the average age for a first time marriage was 26.8 for women and 28.2 for men. There are multiple reasons behind the delay of marriage. Arnett and Fishel (2013) suggest, "They want to finish their education and pursue their career goals. They don't think they can afford the

big wedding they envision, or they're not yet ready to have children. They want to travel, stay unfettered, be their own person" (Arnett & Fishel, 2013, p. 161).

One of the major reasons in the delay is school. The average undergraduate student takes five years to graduate; this puts him or her around the age of 22 or 23, which is around the age most Baby Boomers and Generation Xers originally married for the first time. Then there are the additional years that come with those who pursue Master's degrees. However, the Millennials who do not attend college are usually the ones who marry and have children at a younger age. A longitudinal study that followed a group of kids into adulthood found that among those who put off higher education, 73 percent were married and 57 percent had children (as quoted in Henig & Henig, 2012). Therefore, there is perhaps a correlation between getting education and the time of beginning family.

Another reason is the financial burden that comes with starting a family. Again, the average Millennial is graduating from college with debt and more are considering the weight of entering a marriage with it. A recent survey found that 25 percent are delaying getting married and 30 percent are delaying having children because of concerns with money (Henig & Henig, 2012).

Also there is less pressure on timing with both finding a mate and bearing children. The age of 30 is no longer the ultimate deadline to have everything in place. In the past, if one did not find a suitable partner in school, at church, or at work, by a certain age, the chances of finding someone decreased rapidly. However, the Internet has brought with it the opportunity to find love at a later age.

As for bearing children, modern technology has been able to extend the age at which women begin having children. The process of *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) makes it possible for women to have babies closer to the age of 40. Since the creation of IVF, around 600,000 women over the age of 35 have birthed a baby (Henig & Henig, 2012). The idea of adoption is becoming increasingly popular

among young adults as well. The option of delaying childrearing until later is being taken advantage of by ambitious, career-oriented women. "In all but three of the 150 largest cities in the United States, twentysomething women who are single and childless make more money than men at their age ... every year of delaying pregnancy means a significant bump in wages, hours worked, and total lifetime earnings" (Henig & Henig, 2012, p. 118).

The rise in the number of sexual encounters before marriage and the popularity of cohabitation among young adults is also a factor behind the delay in marriages. The idea of casual sex that began in the 1960s and 1970s is being perpetuated by the Millennial generation. In the National Survey of Youth and Religion, 73 percent of unmarried 18-to- 23-year-olds had already engaged in sexual intercourse, with the average first-time experience at the age of 16. (Smith, 2011).

Cohabitation, unmarried partners who make residence in the same household, adds to the increased sexual activity. Although there are numerous reports on the negative side effects of cohabitation before marriage, such as less marital satisfaction, worse communication, and less commitment (Henig & Henig, 2012), more and more individuals are open to the idea. In 2010, there were 6.8 million unmarried partners living under the same roof (U.S. Census, 2012). Cohabitation allows for a trial run of marriage without the lasting commitment, and very few would consider adding children to the situation. With opportunities to engage in sexual intercourse and have companionship without marriage, Millennials are choosing to opt out of marriage for now.

Even though there is obvious evidence of a trend in delaying marriage, the majority of young adults still want to get married someday. Arnett discovered from his work with the national Clark University Poll of Emerging Adults (CUPEA) that 86 percent of young adults plan to get married. Statistics expect "that by age 40, 85 percent will be wedded, and another 5 percent living together--a

statistic that neatly matches the 90 percent of their parents' generation who married " (Arnett & Fishel, 2013, p. 156).

Changed Dynamic of Relationships

Millennials are experiencing several major differences when it comes to relating to other people. For one thing, this generation is much closer to their family, especially their parents. Perhaps it is the fact that a large percentage of them are still living at home with parents, but at any rate, Millennials and their parents are enjoying being co-adults. "Baby boomer parents wanted to be closer to their children than they had been to their own parents, and for the most part, they succeeded. Most parents today can talk to their grown-up kids as friends, about topics they never would have dreamed of broaching with their own parents" (Arnett & Fishel, 2013, p. 17). Boomer parents are learning to text, Skype, and Facebook in order to stay in touch with their children. A study by AARP found that 31 percent of young adults talk to their parents more than once a day and 70 percent are comfortable discussing deep emotion issues with their parents (Huber, 2012). This connection between parents allows for wise counsel to be passed onto the younger generation, but at the same time, there is the risk of stunting their maturity with over-involvement, such as the mothers accompanying their adult children to job interviews.

While Millennials are closer to their parents, it seems that they are more distant from each other. Young adults are more connected to friends via social media than in real, personal contact. Arnett and Fishel (2013) point out, "Isolation feels more acute in the midst of constant connectivity, and sometimes, intimacy seems harder to achieve" (p. 129). The average Facebook user has 245 friends and friends-of-friends (Hampton, Goulet, Marlow, & Rainie, 2012).

This large network of online friends, however, is a positive tool for many young adults. The constant updates on Facebook, Twitter, and other social networks allows for friends to be in touch.

Millennials may not be calling or writing letters as often as previous generations, but they are posting "Happy Birthday" messages on friends' walls and "liking" status updates on important milestones in life. People usually only add friends that they have met in real life or have mutual friends in common.As Henig and Henig (2012) write, "In a decade of quick career changes and romantic reshuffling, expansive friend networks improve your chances of making the connections that could precipitate life changes" (p. 170).

Decline in Religion

Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (2010) recently reported that one in four Millennials do not affiliate with any religion. Millennials are praying, reading the Bible, and attending church less than Baby Boomers and Generation X (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2010). The decline is taking place in all denominations, although historically, African-American Protestant churches do not appear to be suffering as sharply in decreasing figures as the others.

What is behind this mass exodus of young adults from the religion in which they were raised? David Kinnaman of the Barna Group says that there is no exclusive reason behind young adults dropping out of church (2012). One of the reasons may be, however, that young adults were not raised to really experience true faith and develop a personal relationship with God. Dean writes in *Almost Christian* (2010): "We have successfully convinced teenagers that religious participation is important for moral formation and for making nice people ... yet these young people possess no real commitment to or excitement about religious faith" (p. 6). Churches who used entertaining programs and upbeat music to attract the Millennials as teenagers are now losing them as young adults because there was no real substance to the gospel message as they were growing up.

Parents play a major role in determining if young adults will remain connected to church. "The best way to persuade children of the value of your faith is to show the fruits of it in your life, including

your capacity to forgive your sons and daughters for not believing what you believe" (Arnett & Fishel, 2013, p. 240). Even young adults who are not religious will, out of respect for their parents' beliefs, attend with them on holidays or keep certain religious traditions. However, if the religious lives of older adults are seen as hypocritical, insincere, and judgmental, this will only further turn Millennials off of religion.

Millennials' more tolerant, liberal viewpoints do not fit a religious lifestyle. Premarital sex has become widely acceptable among youth. Sixty-three percent of Millennials believe homosexuality should be accepted by society (Pew Forum On Religion & Public Life, 2010). Both of these sexual practices are taboo by most religions' standards. Christian Smith (2011) discovered the theme of moral individualism among the majority of young adults. Millennials felt that it was not their right to judge whether their moral views were better than someone else's, but to have a tolerant, leave-alone approach to others' views. "Even emerging adults who themselves truly believe that other people's behaviors are definitely morally wrong also believe they should keep their views to themselves (Smith, 2011). Moral individualism clashes with most religious systems because there are moral absolutes in the Bible or whatever holy book and teachings followed.

The Internet has also made an impact in the declining religious affiliation. "As a new form of information technology, the Internet permits people to seek information, including information about religious and spiritual practices or ideas" (Wuthnow, 2007, p. 209). Wuthnow (2007) identifies that the majority of young adults tinker with their personal views, borrowing from what their parents taught, what their friends told them, and what they discovered from Google. As young adults turn to the Internet for answers to some of life's most pressing questions, religions that do not have a strong web presence will find themselves losing authority and influence to other, more prominent systems of beliefs.

These aforementioned factors may be leading young adults away from church, but there also does not seem to be anything of interesting at church to keep them there. The majority of programs at church are geared to married couples with children--which does not match the demographics of Millennials--and only six percent of even the most youthful congregations have something for single adults (Wuthnow, 2007). Many of the Baby Boomers who are leading the worship services are stubborn in giving up control of church. Millennials will not choose to keep attending church where they are expected to just sit and not participate. "Congregations could be a valuable source of support for young adults. They could be places where young adults gravitate to talk about the difficult decisions they are facing or to meet other people of the same age. Congregations could be guiding the career decisions of younger adults or helping them think about their budgets and their personal priorities. But . . .this potential is often going unrealized" (Wuthnow, 2007, p. 13).

These new trends in education, stability, family, relationships, and religion will indeed impact the Millennial generation as they age, but there are many uncertain variables that may change the current trajectory on which young adults are headed. The economy, as unpredictable as it is, could turn in the favor of Millennials. With every medical advance, the average lifespan continues to rise. A few additional years dedicated to establishing oneself during the 20s will not seem as long and unstable if people are living healthily into their 90s. The later ages at which people begin families could result in less divorce.

Online relationships have the underestimated power to effect change, such as the Egyptian revolution, which started on Facebook. These relationships could end up influencing foreign affairs among nations. Among Millennials who reported being religious, Pew Forum On Religion & Public Life (2010) found that "the intensity of their religious affiliation is as strong as generations today as among previous generations when they were young" (p.5). Data trends show that people become more

religious as they age and settle down, so there is a strong possibility that this will occur within the Millennial generation.

Who really knows what the future holds for this generation? Many of the recent facts and trends presented pose for a bleak future, but amidst all the possible negative outcomes, there is a quality about the Millennial generation that will allow them to handle the current hardships: optimism. These young adults who were encouraged to have high expectations and self-confidence at an early age may have what it takes to make it in the long haul. The majority of Millennials still look toward the future with a bright outlook. CUPEA reported that 90 percent of young adults were confident that they would one day get what they want out of life (Arnett & Fishel, 2013). "Although most emerging adults experience struggles and disappointments and dead ends in the course of their twenties, nearly all of them make a more-or-less successful transition to a self-sufficient adulthood by around age 30, with stable commitments in both love and work" (Arnett & Fishel, 2013, p. 244).

Generations past had their own doubts about the rebellious youth growing up in the 60s and 70s, but as history has shown, they grew up and things continued to progress forward. The history of what the Millennials will accomplish has not yet been revealed. The Millennial generation will move up the workforce, fill government positions, create innovations, and change the world. Society will just have to wait and see.

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Coming of Age in the Adventist Church: Developmental Challenges

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"We only become what we are by the radical and deep-seated refusal of that which others have made us." -Jean-Paul Sartre

Merriam-Webster offers two major definitions for the term "coming of age." One denotes this as a period of time when an individual becomes an adult. The second definition involves "the attainment of prominence, respectability, recognition, or maturity" (Merriam-Webster.com). Implicit in both of these descriptions is the notion of "becoming," the idea of development, and the concept of some type of process that moves one from one point to another in terms of some desired goal or end point. It is reported that as of 2011 there were more than 15 million Seventh-day Adventists in the world (adventiststastics.org). Of those who were born into Adventist homes, those who "grew up" Adventist, those who were socialized in Adventist environments within the first 18 years of their lives, how did they "come of age" as an Adventist? For those now younger than age 18, those on whom older Adventists are setting their sights and hopes of their remaining Adventist, what is the "coming of age" for them?

The purpose of this paper is to describe some psychological accounts of how young people develop religious and faith identities and how these trajectories of development might engender both risk and opportunity in not only "becoming" but also "remaining" Adventist through the period of adulthood. Many Seventh-day Adventists are concerned with what they see as a growing trend of young people leaving the church. By "young people" they usually mean those individuals who are in the period of 18 to 25 years of age. Psychologists now refer to this time as Emerging Adulthood, which

they see as a transition from adolescence to adulthood, a time they say is fraught with the challenges of experimentation and exploration (Arnett, 2000). Four theorists have outlined how people develop: Erik Erikson, James Marcia, James Fowler, and William G. Perry.

Erik Erikson and Psychosocial Development

Erikson (1950) postulated an explanation of how individuals move through their lifespans as a consequence of navigating eight stages or what he termed "crises." From birth, according to Erikson, the individuals have one of two opposite outcomes to achieve. Based on the nature of the social environment, the type of interactions that the child has with the significant others in his/her life, the die will be cast on either a positive or a negative pole. In the first year of life Erikson sees the crisis of trust versus mistrust, followed by autonomy versus shame and doubt, initiative versus guilt, and by age 12 industry versus inferiority. It is during adolescence (12-18 years) that Erikson sees the conflict or crisis involving identity versus confusion. Young adulthood brings the crisis of intimacy versus isolation, middle adulthood spawns generation vs. stagnation and the last stage of life presents the individual now old and grey with the crisis of ego integrity versus despair.

How do these basic conflicts or crises play a role in the religious development of children? Erikson posits that for each chronological stage there are important life events that dictate whether the outcome will be positive or not. For example, during elementary and middle school (ages 6-16), school experiences and the social interactions that the child experiences determine outcome. Children must learn new skills, reading, writing, arithmetic, following rules, adhering to social mores. There develops a critical sense of competence and a "Yes, I can" attitude or a dampening sense of failure, incompetence, and from thence inferiority. In adolescence, it is the nature of peer relationships that appear to help shape the teenager's sense of identity in terms of major life aspects: religion, sex-roles, occupations, politics, familial and cultural identity.

If intimacy must triumph over isolation in young adulthood, then from the first year of life, the individuals must have had loving trusting relationships with parents or caregivers. This would have developed through the meeting of the infant's needs consistently, with the dawning realization that the world is a safe place where he/she will be loved and protected and can expect to have his/her basic needs met.

The infant who learns trust moves on to gain control over body functions in the toddler years and realizes the he/she will not be shamed and so will have no doubt that the physical, cognitive, and social skills of walking, talking, and bodily control can be attained. The toddler who learns autonomy can become more assertive during early childhood and take the initiative to learn, grow, and explore without "going too far," with having boundaries and controls set by caregivers so that guilt does not result. It is interesting that E. G. White talked of the first lessons of life being those of "love, trust, and obedience" and that young children should be "trained" and young people "educated".

Erikson's Psychosocial View and Coming of Age as an Adventist

Erikson did not specifically address Emergent Adulthood or the age period from 18 to 25. However, analyzing the first six stages of his psychosocial development allows us to make some conjectures of the implications his "conflicts/crises" concept might have for raising Adventist children, children who will stay in the church after they reach the longest period of the lifespan—adulthood.

Beginning from birth, Adventist parents show what God is like by meeting the physical needs of the baby in a warm, comfortable, and loving atmosphere. As love is demonstrated, the child learns to associate authority figures with love and caring. This presupposes that all the early experiences, including the first forays into Sabbath school will be such that both home and church show how "Jesus loves me" by the loving actions of all the adults involved. Preschool, elementary school, and middle school add opportunity for more loving Adventist adults (church

school teachers, Sabbath school teachers, pastors, Pathfinder Club leaders, "fathers and mothers in Israel," etc.) to provide the basics of being and behaving "Adventist" through their implementation of curricula, programs, activities, and events.

The Adventist Connection Study reveals that about 64 percent of the respondents were baptized between ages 10 to 13. This age group coincides and overlaps with Erikson's stages of Industry versus Inferiority and Identity versus Role Confusion. Do these children and early teens view baptism as an accomplishment, a new role to play, something wherein they can be viewed as competent? Has a 13-year old had sufficient time to truly develop an identity as an Adventist? Is the act of baptism sufficient to provide the reality of a "coming of age" as an Adventist? Specifically, what changes after the baptismal service? What new roles and responsibilities accompany the baptismal certificate? Do the children and early teens just get wet in public, and for "one brief, shining moment" experience a Camelot experience that quickly fades as the adults and the programs of the "old" quickly return to business as usual?

One respondent in the study put it this way:

I remember when there was a baptism one Sabbath. . . The person who is getting baptized would go up front, in front of the whole church and they would read through each fundamental belief and you would say 'I agree.' And then once you did that, then and only then, could you go into the water and be baptized. . . The first thing that popped into my head was What about the relationship? Was that one of the things we had to check off? I promise to have a relationship with God.

James Marcia and Identity Achievement Statuses

Marcia (1966) elaborated on the work of Erikson by delving deeper into what it means to achieve identity by dividing his identity conflict/crisis into four states or statuses. Marcia saw the period of adolescence (12-18) not as a stage but rather as a set of processes that the teenager has to go through. Each process is determined by two major life questions:

1. Is the teen exploring alternatives in the search for his/her true identity?
2. Has the teen made a commitment to an identity?

Marcia theorized that if an adolescent does not go the process of exploration but blindly accepts the identity and value system provided by the significant systems in his life (e.g., home, church, school), then he can be considered in the state of Identity Foreclosure. In other words, the teen self-identifies as being a Seventh-day Adventist because he was born an SDA and has never considered being anything else or knows why he is one. He is Adventist without the search or crisis.

Identity Moratorium refers to the situation when the adolescent has made a vague, tentative commitment but is still in the process of exploring alternatives. There are certainly the beginnings of commitment, but not the final definitive stance. This teen will state that for the time being, he/she is casting his/her lot with the Adventists but is not yet completely sold on why he/she should be SDA over being a member of some other religious organization.

The third state or status for Marcia is called Diffusion. This is the individual who has neither a commitment nor a crisis. He/she may have had a beginning struggle at some earlier point but was never able to come to terms or grips with the solution or a definitive conclusion and so has given up. Persons in diffusion neither commit nor search. When asked their religious affiliation, these individuals may provide a nonchalant shrug or "Whatever. I don't know and I really do not care at this point." They may be physically present in church or around Adventists but are totally indifferent to the significance of that stance.

Identity Achievement represents the fourth and final state that Marcia proposed. In this process the teen or emerging adult has developed a set of values and self-assessments and descriptions that stem from a belief system that has been "tried in the fire" of a personal search or crisis. This identity is not necessarily static but can continue development during the adult stage, but the basic foundation is present. These individuals "know in Whom they believe" and are "persuaded that He is able to keep that which they've committed unto Him." Such persons have committed to an Adventist ideology, identify with Adventists, and are committed to what they believes it means to be Adventist. This is the status for which we hope and pray. This is the true "coming of age." Oh, yes, I am one of them today!

A participant in the Adventist Connection Study shared the following:

After a series of really intense, challenging events for me, with folks in the church, some peers, I was grappling with whether or not I want to continue to be a Seventh-day Adventist. Well, you

could imagine what a difficult, conversation to have with God, especially when my husband works for the church. I've gained myself some sort of pseudo leader [ship role] in the church... And so a part of why I went back to Southern this past year was to take that Adventist Heritage class, was to take the Christian Beliefs class and I could not have been in a more perfect environment for helping me examine these things. It's a real shame and a difficult thing for me to understand why I've been an Adventist all this time without any (support). I've desperately (been)] seeking support, but I haven't really had much and now I had to pay like twenty-two thousand dollars, out of my pocket, to get the answers that I need . . . I'm choosing to continue to be an Adventist, hallelujah, after this past year. But I definitely have some major issues with some of the same shared concerns. ISDA-FA7.

James Fowler's Stages of Faith Development

Fowler (1981) outlined a six-stage developmental journey that an individual goes through across his/her lifespan that is related to growth and change in one's faith and spirituality. Reflecting the work and themes of other psychologists such as Jean Piaget, Erikson, and Lawrence Kohlberg, Fowler interviewed people who shared their religious beliefs. This led to Fowler's descriptions of the development of spiritual beliefs.

Using a stage/chronological approach, Fowler commences his description with what he termed a "pre-stage." This corresponds to the period of infancy, during which the baby develops basic trust based on the quality of interactions he has with his primary caregivers. This trust is called an Undifferentiated Faith. The first state, Intuitive-Projective Faith, characterizes children from age 2 to 7 and illustrates young children believing as their parents believe and teach them. Young children tend to use their imagination and fantasize about religious figures, angels, Satan, Jesus, etc. During stage two, the Mythical-Literal stage, children are concrete and literal in their thinking. They fail to grasp any symbolic underpinnings of religious themes.

Fowler describe the third stage as being Synthetic-Conventional and contends that though developmentally this occurs about the time of puberty, many individuals never seem to go beyond this stage in their faith development. This is the stage of conforming to rules and regulations, and abiding by what is considered good and proper in the social/religious order. There is an inherent fear of ambiguity, doubt, conflict, and inconsistencies, and so the child never questions or critically analyzes his/her belief system.

One participant in the Adventist Connections Study quipped: "To me being an Adventist is not about the mustard or the pepper or the caffeine; it's about the doctrinal truth and the belief in Jesus and belief that you stay in the ground when you die, and that Christ is coming back and He's gonna save us all and His Sabbath is important. Those . . . are what I would consider being a good Adventist." ASDA3-MA6.

If evidence of "coming of age" is baptism between 10 and 13 years of age, then one could conclude that this represents simple conformity to Adventist beliefs, and in the higher stages the individual may be seriously challenged in conceptualizing and coming to terms with what and who an Adventist *really* is.

The last three stages, Individualtive-Reflective Faith, Conjunctive Faith, and Universalizing Faith, usually begin in the mid-20s with conflict or struggle. The person is aware of conflicts, has doubts, and, according to Fowler, experiences "a genuine move" from a "reliance on external sources of authority" to "a relocation of authority within the self" (p. 179). This is a significant shift and shows one's capacity to think for one's self and to choose that which lead to his/her own self-fulfillment. In the fifth and sixth stages, the individual becomes more tolerant of other viewpoints, finds serving others an important activity, and beings to search for less specific religious values but more universal truths as justice, mercy, and love.

Could it be that after high school/academy, and after four years of college, young Adventists find themselves moving beyond simply complying to rules, regimens, and the views of others to what Micah 6:8 says: "He has showed you, Oh man what is good, and what does the Lord require of you? But to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God?" What if, for many young Adventists, they find no place in their old churches for now they have a new understanding of the text, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27, KJV)?.

Another Adventist Connections Study respondent declared,

As far as Adventism goes, I feel passionate, but disconnected in a way. I still read my Bible and pray every day with Jesus, you know that's cool. But when it comes to a church as an institution . . . I'm not terribly happy with how the church has treated what they, might be termed the "least of these" in these in some ways. And there are so many goodhearted people who do so much and they . . . work their hands to the bone to help people and yet there is so much that isn't

being done. I felt when I was being called to do what God was calling me to do, I had to do that in social work and not in the church and maybe the church isn't supposed to do that. ISDA-FA6.

William G. Perry's Cognitive and Ethical Development

Perry (1981), an educational psychologist, spent his entire career studying the cognitive development of college students. His interest in the thinking of emerging adults resulted in his construction of a model for understanding how young people come to "know." Perry outlined a nine-position progression from a basically Dualist perspective to finally Relativism and then Commitment or Constructed Knowledge. A summary of these nine positions, which can be further categorized into four connecting groups, are as follows:

1. There is absolute right and wrong. This knowledge has been given and the Authorities know it.

2 .Authorities fall into two camps: true and fraudulent. The true authorities are right.

3. There are uncertainties and there are also conflicting solutions but the true Authorities realize this and they are working to reconcile or fix these inconsistencies.

4. There are different opinions and each person has the right to his/her own opinion. The Authorities are not necessarily interested in receiving right answer but in having one think in a particular way.

5. There are no absolutes. Everything is basically relative but not everything is of equal validity.

6. It is important that one makes his/her own decisions.

7. On a particular issue (e.g., a religious belief) a person makes his/her first commitment: thinking for his/her self.

8. On multiple topics/issues (e.g., in religion) an individual makes several commitments.

9. Post-commitment. This represents an on-going approach to living and knowing and learning that unfolds at different times and in different ways but at its core is the belief in one's own ability to think and hold and own beliefs and values, the respecting of others' beliefs and values, and an openness to explore and learn new way of thinking and knowing.

An Adventist Connection Study participant posited,

> *Well, you're presented in the church and through college if it's Adventist that our perspective of course is the only right one. And people who don't agree with it are kind of dumb. Like it's so simple. You get out in the real world and you talk to other people and you're like hmm they have a point. How come I was never told this point? How come they were presented to me as stupid? Now they appear really smart. Am I wrong? And now you have to reevaluate your whole (view). ISDA1-FA9*

In Summary

Psychological developmental theory offers that human beings develop spiritually, ethically, and morally in tandem with their physical, cognitive, social, and emotional growth. Essential for this development is relationship: interactions with others, especially significant others such as parents, peers, and teachers. Children learn from the concrete to the abstract, from total and unquestioning acceptance of life to the questioning, sometimes doubting, and challenging stance to know and believe for one' self. This process appears to be developmental.

It is thus clear from the accounts of human cognitive development that moving from the literal to the abstract, from dualism to relativism and universal principles, from focusing on self and conforming to focusing on others and serving are all important aspects of the human journey. If this is true in how we come to know and believe and value all things, then it is true in how we develop in our faith walk. Could it be then, that doubt, skepticism, and searching is as important a part of the "faith walk" as accepting, valuing, believing, and behaving? Does conforming to rules and "doing of good works" precede but must also proceed from the one who has truly "come of age" in the sense that he/she has been converted? Could it be that facing the gray twilight of doubt, feeling assailed by inconsistencies and ambiguities, and then finding the Light at the end of the proverbial tunnel is what is truly meant by staying "in" church?

Could it be that we, the older generation of Adventists, have forgotten our own journey? Could it be that too many of us have remained in Marcia's Moratorium and Perry's Synthetic-Conventional faith, that we have neither understanding of nor sympathy with those who have the need to question so that they can grow? So that they can stay? Those of us who have stayed, are we comfortable with

the questions for which we have no good answers? Do we prefer to not just think at all, to not just feel at all, to exist in the same continued state of "quiet desperation"?

Is there a need for discipleship programs based on the model of the *Kids in Discipleship* (K.I.D) ministry that equips parents, mentors, and teachers in helping young people grow in a personal relationship with God and one that extends beyond the elementary and high school years into the post-secondary period of young Adventist lives (MacLafferty, 2012)?

These questions are both challenging and sobering. They also give us hope. Not all of the children are gone! There are those who stay. There are those who have found that being a Seventh-day Adventist and *staying* a Seventh-day Adventist have some powerful positives to offer:

> *With our beliefs and the creed that we have, it's like there's a purpose and an initiative that Adventists have in this world. Not to just stay idle and live our own lives secluded from everybody else but we've been told to go out and to interact and to spread the gospel through different means, and that's something I would say is one of the primary aspects of my attitude towards Adventism. ASDA1-MS9*

> *If we simplified it to our relationship with Jesus, which is where it is for me, I don't worry about the church politics. . . I take into consideration, but I don't let it bother me, that someone believes something different than me. Like I don't let it offend me. And for me it's just my relationship with Jesus. That's how it was at camp and it just wasn't complicated. . . in the times in my life where I had a place and I had a purpose, that's when it was the most meaningful for me. ISDA-FA8*

It rang true and vibrant when proclaimed many decades ago, it still rings true today: "God will accept the youth with their talent and their wealth of affection, if they will consecrate themselves to Him. They may reach to the highest point of intellectual greatness; and if balanced by religious principle, they can carry forward the work which Christ came from heaven to accomplish." (White, 1913, p. 512).

Challenge, risk, and opportunity; there's still great hope for our Millennials and beyond!

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Growing God's People Across Generations—A Model for Education

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The concept of God as a parent is not new. Isaiah 46: 3 describes God as bearing Israel from His belly, carrying them from the womb. Isaiah 1: 2 notes, "I reared children and brought them up, but they rebelled against me." As we seek to understand the process that God goes through in rearing the infant nation of Israel, the people that He calls His own, we quickly recognize that this is not a cut-and-dried process. There are many challenges that arise in the parenting of a people, and we can find similarities in the challenges we face as we raise and educate our own children.

Each stage of development provides a foundation for the next level of development. It is also important to remember that by the time children develop into young adults, they represent a spectrum of developmental stages. Individuals may not reflect typical development for their age, since their development may have become fixated at any one of the earlier levels.

As we identify stages of development of God's people that correspond with human development, we can also identify methods God used at each stage. These methods can give us direction and wisdom in our own work not only with young people, but with issues relating to church growth and development.

In the Desert

Ages 0-2

After great trouble and "travail" in Egypt—witness the ten plagues—Israel was brought through the Red Sea as an unformed people whom God cared for as though they were infants. This care was

specific, consistent, and responsive, critical for the development of attachment and a sense of trust. God fed them manna from heaven on a daily basis, and provided water directly through His own providence—often from a rock. He was visually present in the form of a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, and was visible in the middle of their camp in a sanctuary as a cloud hanging above the Most Holy Place. When the cloud moved, they moved, and when the cloud stopped, they stopped.

Discipline was concrete and corporal in the form of plague, fire, earthquake and the ground opening up, and poisonous snakes. The children of Israel could not enter the Promised Land until they submitted to God's leading. A whole generation that balked at God's direction was laid to rest in the wilderness. It was the next generation that *submitted to God's will*, and only then was able to follow God into Canaan through the river Jordan.

This period roughly corresponds to the period of infancy, or 0 to 2 years of age. Erik Erikson, in his psychosocial stages of development, identified "Trust versus Mistrust" and "Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt" as important developmental crises during these early years. Piaget titled this stage "Sensory Motor," acknowledging the role of the senses and manipulation of materials as the foundation of cognitive function. Babies grasp and wave, pound and squeeze, drop and tear materials as they explore their environment with all the senses of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching on full alert. They must *experience things themselves* in order to understand the world. You may tell a baby, "Don't touch—it's hot." But they don't know what hot is—until they touch something hot.

While sensory motor experiences are the only way babies learn, we never outgrow this absolutely fundamental requirement for learning. All learning is connected to the affect, the emotions. Learning must be connected to prior experiences, what has personally been felt and tasted, smelled and heard and seen. We learn primarily through the senses, by manipulating materials and events and

seeing what happens as a result. Trust is the foundation for the development of conscience and social relationships, and fundamental to understanding the role of authority in our lives—not only for the very young, but for all ages.

2 Peter 1: 5-7 outlines a list of traits of character that can be viewed as a ladder of development. For the very young, the first two are most important. "Make every effort to add to your faith, goodness." Faith corresponds to trust, critical in the first stages of development. The next trait, goodness, also is part of early character development. Proverbs 20:11 says, "Even a child is known by his actions. He is known by whether his conduct is pure and right." When children submit their will to parental authority and do what is right, they are doing what is good. They are obeying. The hymn "Trust and Obey" (*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, No.590) reiterates these two fundamental traits of character, which are taught while infants are still in-arms.

Prophets and Kings

Ages 2-7

Once the children of Israel were in Canaan, God gave explicit instructions for their behavior. Although they had learned to submit to God's leading in some circumstances, they still hadn't learned the critical lesson of obedience as a people. God spent the next several hundred years demonstrating the importance of relying on Him for direction, and following His law. Over and over, the people disobeyed God's law and did their own thing. God used natural and logical consequences to demonstrate the cause and effect of their actions. When they obeyed, things went well. Jericho fell. They won battle after battle. When they left God, He left them to suffer the predations of the marauding peoples around them. When they were too miserable to stand their circumstances and turned back to God, He raised up leaders to remind them of His power and authority and His ability to make things right, and peace came back again.

Eventually, after hundreds of years of increasing apostasy, the ten tribes of Israel were lost. Even the two tribes of Judah were captured and exiled to Babylon. This was a very long time-out—a logical consequence—and resulted in the loss of their sovereignty. But a remnant came back, 50,000, compared to the two million that came out of Egypt. As this remnant stood in the rain, whole families together listening to Ezra reading the law, they recognized as a nation that keeping God's law was essential to their well-being, and they vowed to keep it. They learned to *submit to the law of God.*

The ages of 2-7 roughly correspond with Erikson's stage of "Initiative versus Guilt" and Piaget's stage of pre-operational cognitive functioning. Peck and Havighurst (1960), researchers in the development of character, identified this stage of character development as expedient, which corresponds with Kohlberg's pre-conventional stage of moral development. Children may obey, but for their own purposes—to gain reward or to avoid punishment. Motivation for keeping rules is still often external, coming from outside the child.

Piaget noted that young children must *create their own knowledge*. The world and knowledge don't evolve or change as children manipulate them, but as young children splash in the water, make mud balls, and do all the messy explorations that we call a child's work, their brain subconsciously constructs a schematic of how things work, the laws by which the world operates.

A 5-year-old may agree that two balls of clay are equal in size. When one is formed into a long roll, however, the young child will insist that there is more in the roll, because it looks like more. The same child at 7 will understand that even though the roll looks like more, no clay was added in the process, so there is still the same amount. We call this mental growth the development of logical thinking–in this case, the conservation of mass. The child's manipulation of materials as well as a degree of maturation of the brain helps him or her develop an understanding of the natural laws of the

world in which we live. The child may not be able to articulate all the rules their subconscious mind is busy constructing, but they are coming to a knowledge of how the world works, how people work, how language works, and how God works.

Our children were raised in Montana, near a pathway regularly traveled by grizzly bears. The children took bears for granted. When he was 5, my oldest, Josh, insisted that a bear lived in the "dark spot," about 12 feet of space beneath the slanted ceiling, next to his bedroom on the second floor. I tried to explain that if a bear actually lived there, we would hear it moving around. How would it get food and water without regularly coming up and down the living room stairs? How could a bear get in and out of the house without us seeing it? But all my explanations and arguments never shook his confidence that a bear lived in the "dark spot." Then one day when he was 7, Josh came thundering down the stairs in great excitement. "There isn't any bear in the dark spot!" he exclaimed.

"There isn't?" I said. "How do you know?"

"Because I went from one end of the dark spot to the other, and there isn't any bear!!" Time—and his own personal experience—finally accomplished what all our arguments could not do.

2 Peter 1: 5-7 notes that to goodness is added knowledge, and to knowledge is added self-control. The character traits of knowledge and self-control are important areas of development in the pre-school years. As young children create their own knowledge of how the world operates, they also must learn how to respond appropriately to events around them, learning to respond with self-control rather than impulsive behavior. "Strength of character consists of two things—power of will and power of self-control" (E. G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 161). White urges that "Too much importance cannot be placed on the early training of children. The lessons that the child learns during the first seven years

of life have more to do with forming his character than all that it learns in future years" (*Child Guidance*, p. 193).

Christ Faces His People

Ages 7-12

After the 70-year exile in Babylon, the return to Judah, and the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls and Temple, there is a period of profound silence regarding the Jewish people in the Scriptures. The first 490 years of their experiences are described in great detail—the next 490 years are not. The Biblical narrative is picked up near the end of this second chance for the Jews, when the long-awaited Messiah shows up on the scene. Jesus finds His people well versed in the law. They don't have a problem with keeping commandments; they have created so many laws that only the most privileged, the most holy of the holy people, can hope to keep them all. The challenge for the leadership and for the people of Israel now is, can they recognize the reason for the law? Do they acknowledge and love the Giver of the Law? Can they recognize and accept Christ as their Creator, their personal Savior, the King of their nation?

"You tithe the mint and the cumin, which is right and good, but you don't recognize mercy and righteousness and justice," Jesus told them (Matt. 23:23). "You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life" (John 5:39, 40).

Not only was it important for His people to identify and accept Him as the One promised to them as their Savior and Messiah, Jesus was also trying to help them recognize that the kingdom He was trying to set up was a spiritual kingdom. He was trying to help them understand the principles behind the rules. He explained that calling someone a fool was breaking the law as much as murder because it damaged someone else, perhaps forever (Matt. 5:21, 22).

Thinking an adulterous thought was all it took to break the law, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," because it violated the principle of health and happiness on which the law was based (Matt. 5: 27, 28). A rule that people didn't have to help their parents if they gave their property to the Temple, violated the right that parents had to expect support from their children (Mark 7: 9-13). Loving and serving people was more important than following tradition and programs. God's law was a description of how He expected His children to love and serve Him, and to love and serve each other. The law of God described the principles of justice and mercy, and if you find yourself violating these principles in following your idea of law, Jesus was saying, you need to be doing something different.

By the time most children reach 7 years of age, they have a wide variety of material and social experiences under their belt. These personal, hands-on experiences help them mature to the point where they can think logically, the concrete cognitive operations that Piaget identifies. Many school-aged children understand the need for rules; they like things to be fair, and they like games with rules. This is the stage of conformity, as Peck and Havighurst (1960) identified it, or conventional moral development, as Kohlberg labeled it.

Children may stay in the expedient stage of development rather than move on to the conforming stage. We all know people who have grown to adulthood but still behave expediently. They are still primarily concerned about their own needs and perspectives, and comply with rules only when they can't get away with ignoring them. However, many school-age children do develop a sense of social responsibility, and a willingness to follow social and moral laws that enhance the ability of everyone to get along well together. Erikson identified the development of "Industry versus Inferiority" as important during this time, when children *develop competence* in more and more complex social, physical, and mental skills.

The ages of 7-12 is a relatively quiet stage of development that falls after the spectacular development of logic, and before the challenging years of puberty and young adulthood. This is the period when we find most decisions for baptism are made. These children understand that they owe their life to the God that made them, and they want to love and serve Jesus with all their hearts.

Baptism is a public and physical act, demonstrating that we *submit to the cross of Christ.* We accept His death on our behalf. We die to self, and accept the life of Christ as our own. We announce our personal decision to accept God's Word as truth, and our desire to identify with the body of Christ. However, as we examine people (adults!) in Jesus' time who learned to identify themselves as followers of Christ, we can see that this process isn't a simple formula of development.

Nicodemus, a sincere and devout Pharisee, met secretly with Jesus, trying to figure out who He really was and what He was really about. Jesus didn't flatter His secret visitor, a prominent leader of his people. "You need to be born again," Jesus told him. And what was it that would bring about conversion and new birth? Confrontation with Jesus on the cross. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me!" Jesus declared. For two years Nicodemus studied Jesus as He went about His work. God on earth, Master Teacher that He was, took two years to convince Nicodemus of His true identity—and it was in finally seeing Jesus crucified that did it.

Peter was an outspoken believer in the true identity of Christ. But it took his own weakness and betrayal of Christ, and Christ's humility and compassion toward him during the farce of a trial, to break Peter's heart, and to convince him that there was nothing he could do to save himself from his pride and self-centered nature. It was this utter brokenness and recognition of his utter need for Christ that led to Peter's full conversion.

A person may or may not be fully converted at baptism. When and how conversion happens is different for each person, as it was for Nicodemus and Peter. Part of the conversion process is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but this also may not be an easily identifiable part of baptism by water and conversion. Jesus promised the gift of the Holy Spirit after His return to His Father. This special event happened on the day of Pentecost, 50 days after the Passover and Christ's crucifixion, when the Holy Spirit appeared as tongues of fire on the 120 followers of Jesus meeting together in an upper room. The gift of the Holy Spirit was the early rain, and preceded the explosive growth of the early church. We are now praying for the latter rain, which will precede the final harvest of God's people in the last days. In preparation for that last great work of the Holy Spirit on earth, however, each of us needs the early rain, a daily baptism of the Holy Spirit whose work in our life prepares our heart for the latter rain. (*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers,* p. 506-512).

Baptism, conversion, and the gift of the Holy Spirit may happen at the same time or they may come at different times over years of growth. In the case of the Gentile Cornelius and his family and close friends, Peter argued that since they had obviously already received the Holy Spirit while Peter was talking to them, they should be baptized (Acts 10:44-48). The new birth, spiritual rebirth, is a process that should keep happening on a daily basis. The heart that once was stone, God makes into flesh, sensitive and responsive to His ways (Eze. 36:26). The laws that were external now become internal principles that guide the life in the process of sanctification.

The progression of character traits described in 2 Peter 1: 5-7 adds perseverance and godliness to the initial list of faith, goodness, knowledge, and self-control. The later years of childhood are a prime time to focus on perseverance, a term similar to Erikson's "industry." This is a time of consolidation of earlier skills, and an on-going, unwearied refinement of them. This is a time when children learn to be efficient, to work hard at a accomplishing a goal, and developing competence.

Godliness, or piety, comes from growing a relationship with God, a religious devotion to Him. Identifying with Christ's death and life signified in baptism, conversion, and a daily baptism of the Holy Spirit are critical steps in the development of a godly life.

The Young Church

Ages 12-30

On His first visit to the Temple at the age of 12, Jesus observed the sacrifices of the sanctuary services. It was then that He began to more fully understand His role as the Lamb of God. "Should I not be about my Father's business?" He asked His parents when they came to find Him. Yet the Scriptures are quiet about the time of Jesus' development between the ages of 12 and 30, except that He went home and was subject to His parents. We know He worked in His father's carpentry shop during those years.

We have a better idea of what happened between the years of 17 and 30 in Joseph's period of development, which may give some insight into Jesus' life. Jesus, like Joseph, had brothers who made life hard for Him. Nazareth was a wicked town, and it took a great deal of patience and integrity to faithfully follow the carpenter's humble calling for 18 years, before God called Him to public ministry.

In character development, the move from conformity to what Peck and Havighurst called altruistic behavior (Kohlberg's stage of conventional morality, is a move from obeying because it's the rule, toward understanding why a rule is good, and obedience based on commitment to principles of right and wrong. It involves a willingness to challenge or change a policy or person-made rule when it is no longer beneficial, in an attempt to selflessly do whatever is right and caring for others. This takes the ability to think abstractly, what Piaget called formal cognitive operations.

The ability to think abstractly may happen sometime after a child turns 12, but not necessarily. As you recall, development may fixate at any stage. Peck and Havighurst (1960) conducted their research on character development with children who were 10 years and older, and found that character development had already occurred by the age of 10. Only rarely did it change after that age—usually because of some relationship that drew the person to another level of character development. Less than half of the young adults who enter college are actually thinking formally during problem-solving situations (Day, 1981).

For the Jewish nation, 30 was the age when a man was called into priestly ministry. We have just begun to understand why 30 is an important age in terms of development. Researchers of the adolescent brain have learned that the explosion of brain development, in terms of the production of neurons, what we once thought only happened in infancy happens again during adolescence. During this time, the brain is in such a state of fluid development that it is particularly vulnerable to drug use and genetically staged diseases such as schizophrenia. The brain doesn't fully mature until around the age of 25. This is the age when young adults are best able to think strategically (Albert & Steinberg, 2011).

Adolescence and young adulthood is a period when many young people begin to search for an understanding of the bigger picture of life on this planet—who they are, why they are here, what is freedom and goodness and beauty. They are idealistic. The Jewess writer and poet Hannah Senesh immigrated alone to Israel when she was 17. She was dedicated to Zionism and the growing nation of Israel. She stayed on to work in a kibbutz. But when Nazi Germany threatened her home country of Hungary, she had what she termed in her diary the "sudden idea" that she should help her fellow Jews in Europe, especially her mother, who was still in Hungary. The sudden idea turned into what she felt was a calling.

Hannah and 25 others parachuted into several countries in Eastern Europe. Just as the German tanks rolled onto Hungarian soil, Hannah crossed the river from Yugoslavia into her home country. She was immediately captured. In the ensuing process of being jailed and tried, she was deeply distressed to find that in her attempt to save her mother she had put her mother in even graver danger. Hannah was executed within months. The last poem she wrote was found concealed in her clothing, along with a farewell note to her mother. "Now, in the month of July, I am 23 years of age. In a daring game of numbers I placed my bet, the dice rolled, I lost." (The Hannah Senesh Legacy Foundation).

Many of the revolutions of this world have been fought by young adults on fire with what ought to be. Perhaps they are a bit egocentric, as they charge forward in the conviction that they are the ones to bring about world change, and perhaps short-sighted, not considering the cost if their dreams fail. But how much ground has been gained because of their passion and energy--how much inspiration from their courage and selflessness.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church was established by such young people, who faced great odds in their determination to search out the truths of the Bible and build a church on this foundation alone. They left the churches of their parents and faced tremendous difficulties in funding and building the early church ministries in publishing, education, and health, at great personal cost.

The period between ages 12 and 30 is a time when young adults are struggling to identify who they are. Erikson identifies the developmental tasks of this period as "Identity versus Role Confusion," and "Intimacy versus Isolation." Relationships to others become more and more important. The physical changes and the hormones of puberty create tumultuous feelings that can be hard to understand.

Pressures arise from peers and parents as well as from within themselves toward conformity and toward resistance to conformity on a multitude of issues. How do they relate to their parents, their friends? How do they know who—and what--to believe? What are they good at? What do they really want to do with their lives? Where should they go to college? What should they major in? Whom should they marry? When? What jobs should they go after? Where should they live? Should they have children? Should they go to church? Why? How do they fit in with the church?

All these questions deal with identity and relationships, critical issues during adolescence and young adulthood. None of them are answered easily and quickly, perhaps even less easily and quickly during these days of earth's history than for past generations.

It is a small wonder that young adults are constantly questioning themselves and questioning the institutions that they grew up with. These are the developmental tasks appropriate for this stage of their lives. They may seem egocentric because of all this introspection, and they do tend to challenge authority, because of their circumspection of the boundaries and prescriptions that have outlined their world. But not only are these important tasks for the young adult, this work is also critical for the health of society.

Thomas Jefferson once described the need for rebellion every 20 years or so, even if it was based on ignorance. He argued that if people had misconceptions and didn't get upset because of them, it was due to lethargy, and the next step was death for public liberty (Jefferson, 1787). When young adults wonder why our church services need to be so predictable, or why we don't talk to other people sitting on our same pew, or why we shouldn't wear jewelry, or what's so important about being a remnant people, we as a church body have to look at ourselves through younger eyes, and rethink what we've gotten used to doing and saying, or not doing and not saying.

Young adults mature at different rates because their natures and experiences are each so different. My youngest child, 26-year-old Sarah, is a naturalist. She has always had a scientific turn of mind; I remember when she was 5 she gazed for many minutes into a little puddle of water, walking slowly around it, touching pieces of rock with her toe. She was supposed to be helping her brother and sisters carry jugs of drinking water from the spring to the car. But because she was so deeply involved with her observations at the little pool, I didn't disturb her. She was fascinated with the pool—and I was fascinated with watching her depth of concentration and introspective deliberation.

At 17, Sarah went into a deep depression that lasted for much of three years. For many months she was away at academy, and every time she called home, she was crying. She didn't understand grace. It didn't matter how I explained it, she couldn't believe me. She didn't understand surrender. She felt even worse because she had grown up Adventist, and she figured she should understand this better—but she didn't feel loved and accepted by God, no matter what she did, or what anyone else said to help.

During her senior year at academy, a pastor and his wife shared 13 weeks of lessons on grace. "I began to understand grace as we studied these lessons," Sarah says now. "But it wasn't until I had to prepare a ShareHim sermon on the topic of grace on a student mission trip to Bolivia that I really understood what grace is." That trip occurred during the spring of her senior year. She still didn't feel accepted and loved by God, however. At the end of the summer, she was riding bareback. The horse suddenly changed gait and took off, leaving Sarah behind. "As soon as I hit the ground I knew two things; I knew was very badly hurt." (The fall had broken her back.) "And I knew that God loved me."

I share the stories of Josh and the bear, and Sarah and grace, to illustrate the need for time and personal experience, and how these blend to support maturation in both young children and

adolescents. Comments that illustrate similar struggles in the development of a relationship to God and the church come from a young adult woman in one of our focus groups. In these comments you can hear the effort to conform to rules with little evidence of an understanding of the principles behind the rules, or of a relationship with God that makes sense and brings meaning and purpose and joy into the life.

> *Sometimes I feel like it's a curse in a way, like knowing so much, I just can't live. Sometimes I feel kind of like I'm glad, because the joy that I can have is so much more than I feel like my other friends of other faiths [have.] But at the same time there are times when I just really feel like it's suffocating.*
>
> *Sometimes I just want to see a movie and not feel guilty. To just live without having to wonder 'what's God thinking' and I know that sounds really bad, and now I feel bad saying that. Easier. I would want the church to be easier. Easier in temperament. Easier in its demands. Easier in its understanding of what we believe. . . That would be be a [starts to cry] a blessing. What makes me emotional is the sense that I feel almost like it's not possible to be the Adventist we're supposed to be. . . . it's impossible to be what I am.*
>
> *Could I just be wrong? Not only could I be wrong, but could we just all have it wrong? And instead this is just a blankie. Are we really tapping into something or are we just tapping into a sense of comfort?-- ASDA2-FA4.*

This young woman has deep, agonizing questions. No pat answers can help her. She is on a search, a journey that she must make with God toward an intimate relationship and development of a knowledge of God. This journey can take a long time. Some crises may urge her development toward a more mature understanding of God—or they may result in a decision that turns her away him

(Matthew 19:15-17). It is painful for us to listen to this struggle. But young people long for listening ears. They are telling us that they have a hard time finding the opportunity to share their perplexities, their hard questions, their confusion, and their grappling with various aspects of their beliefs, without parents and church members expressing judgment and impatience at the process.

The more we ourselves have struggled in similar ways, the more empathetic we are likely to be in accepting and listening and loving those who are in the grip of this battle. Marcia (1993) notes several states of development of a sense of identity. Identity diffusion is a state in which a person has not been able to come to an integrated sense of identity. Moratorium is an active search for identity, though a person may put the search somewhat on hold to become a part of a university student body or a member of the armed forces. Foreclosure is where a person accepts the identity of their parents or other persons as their own, rather than forge their own sense of identity; identity achievement happens when an integrated sense of identity is achieved through a conscious process of examining and accepting or rejecting various aspects of belief and cultural systems as his or her own.

Persons who have come to a sense of identity through foreclosure tend to be judgmental, inflexible, and close-minded. Since they haven't questioned their beliefs and defining cultural practices, they don't understand others who do. They also avoid situations and sources that threaten their beliefs, protecting themselves from information that might cause them to question the beliefs they hold (Baltazar & Coffen, 2011). The judgmental attitudes that young adults may be feeling from the church at large may be coming from adults who haven't explored their own belief systems for a long time, or may never have gone through that process, and are deeply uncomfortable with questions that challenge the foundations of their faith.

Not only are young people working on understanding who they are, what they believe, and what they want to do with their lives, but at the heart of this process of identity development is learning to understand what God has called them to do for Him. The church is Christ's body on earth, and He has given to each one of us gifts "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4: 7-12). It is often within the church itself, as it accomplishes the work of Christ, that young people are called to fill a position that helps them recognize what is the work that Christ has prepared for them for them to do (Ephesians 2:10). Young adulthood is an important time for them to *find their niche*, and to *submit to the work God has called them to do,* as they become active in the work of the church.

The importance of relationships during this period of development corresponds with 2 Peter 1:7, which adds brotherly kindness to the list of character traits. During this time, young people become very sensitized to issues of social justice. Today, the treatment of homosexuals in the church is a particularly polarizing issue between young adults and older members of the church. Homophobia is the new racism for this generation, and young adults struggle with being part of a church that they perceive has little compassion for their friends and family members who face a terrible fight to be understood and loved, who have a terrible time understanding and loving themselves, because of their homosexual orientation.

The Mature Church

Ages 30 +

The last stage of development of God's people that we will consider, is the mature church. Erikson identifies "Generativity versus Stagnation" as a stage where most adults contribute to society. Ephesians describes the gifts that God gives as preparing His people for works of service, "so that the

body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12, 13). "Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Eph. 4: 15, 16).

Unity and the work of the church, promoting the glory of God to the universe, is where individuals and members of the body of Christ find their greatest meaning and fulfillment. The individual gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 find their outcome in building up the church. God's intent, Paul notes, is that "through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 3:10, 11). This is the goal, the plan God has for His church.

Young adults need mentoring from older adults who have had much experience in the ways of God, who *keep the faith*. Young adults benefit from the perspective of elders in the church, the patience of those who have seen that some things take time. The church needs the wisdom of leaders who have persevered in trenches, who have endured long dry seasons where their faith was tested, and who have seen their faith rewarded: leaders such as Abraham, Jacob, Job, Moses, Daniel, and Paul, and leaders such as Ruth, Deborah, Esther, Mary, and Ellen G. White. Young adults have little patience with the church's hide-bound tendencies to grow more conservative as the years advance, forgetting that God's ways are always fresh and innovative, sensitive, not bound to cultural traditions.

The seven churches in Revelation document the various challenges that mature churches face. These include false teachers and doctrine, loss of passion and sense of mission, secularism, complacency, and little recognition of their need for God. There are threats to churches that don't

match up to God's calling; God threatens to spit the Laodicean church out of His mouth. We know that God will eventually be victorious in developing a people that mirror His character, but we don't know just how the Laodicean church will improve its condition except by complying with God's demand to buy *from Him* raiment and ointment and gold refined in the fire. This is an interesting command, considering this church is rich and does not consider it has much of any need at all; unless, perhaps, it sees itself not only reflected in the eyes of God, but in the eyes of its children.

Many passages in the New Testament deal with the law and righteousness by faith, helping the developing church understand the relationship between the two. As late as 1888, however, the Adventist church at large has struggled with understanding the limits of the law, and the critical importance of relying only on Jesus' righteousness for salvation and His power for sanctification. Are we making progress in understanding this as a people? The term "irrational conscientiousness" is used to describe an incomplete understanding of moral principle. In some things a person may understand deep principles of right and wrong, but in other things they are still bound by rigid and immature concepts that keep them from being consistently selfless and loving.

Kohlberg believed that only a few people, such as Gandhi and Christ, ever reached full moral development. However, Christ promises that He will have a spotless church, a fully developed people that will perfectly represent Him. And only He has the power to accomplish this. However, His people must *submit to the discipline of pruning,* as Christ cuts away what is dead and unproductive in His church, in order to allow for new and fruitful growth (John 15: 1, 2).

Not only do young adults face their own issues in developing a personal relationship with God and a recognition of their unique gifts and how these gifts add to the body of Christ, but the idealism of young adults can be shaken when they realize that the body of Christ isn't perfectly developed, or may

even be in a state of decay. It can be a challenge to recognize that the church is faulty because each of us, just as faulty as the next person, are the church! It is our individual responsibility to fulfill God's calling, His purpose for us, to build up the church, so that together we may attain "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12). The church is all of us, a family growing up together. We need to learn from each other, support each other, and love each other, taking lessons from Christ's love for us.

"For this reason," Paul declares, "I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" Eph. 3:14-19.

1 Peter 1: 7 ends the list of character traits with love. Love is the over-arching expression of God's character that fulfills the law of God (Rom. 13:10). The compassion of Christ in His response to the woman caught in sexual sin illustrates how love is mercy and justice in balance. Christ's first reaction to the confrontation was to bend over and write in the dust. His second was to say, "The one without sin should cast the first stone." Again He wrote in the dust. He never answered the arguments, determined blame, or sorted out consequences. His response reduced the heat and tension.

After the accusers left, Jesus asked the woman, "Where are your accusers? He repeated the question until she affirmed that they were gone, and then He replied that He didn't condemn her either. Four times it was stressed that she was free of accusation and condemnation before she was

free to go. However, Jesus told her, go and sin no more. He didn't justify the sin or approve a lifestyle of sin, but over and over offered understanding and acceptance without judgment.

How does God value those He has saved from such evil?

Describing the final coronation of Christ in *The Great Controversy,* Ellen White writes: "Nearest the throne are those who were once zealous in the cause of Satan, but who, plucked as brands from the burning, have followed their Savior with deep, intense devotion. Next are those who perfected Christian characters in the midst of falsehood and infidelity, those who honored the law of God when the Christian world declared it void, and the millions, of all ages, who were martyred for their faith. And beyond is the 'great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, . . . before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.' Revelation 7: 9" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 665).

If older church members and young adults could learn to respond to homosexuality and other sins as Jesus responds to them, might we be less polarized on these issues?

It is God's love that awakens and strengthens all the traits of character whereby we reflect the glory of God to the universe, and we need each other in order to demonstrate this principle to the universe. It is through family, other earthly relationships, and God, that love is grown and tested until it becomes a compelling illustration of God's redemptive power, goodness, and selfless love for all creation.

Biblical Model of Development Illustrated through the History of God's People

God's People	Hebrews in the Desert	Prophets and Kings	Christ Faces His People	The Young Church	The Mature Church
Age of the Developing Individual	0-2	2-7	7-12	12-30	30+
Stage of Character and Moral Development (Peck and Havighurst and Kohlberg)	- Expedient - Pre-Conventional	- Expedient - Pre-Conventional	- Conforming - Conventional	- Altruistic - Post-Conventional	—
Traits of Character 1 Peter 1: 5-7	- Faith - Goodness (Trust and Obey)	- Knowledge - Self-Control	- Perseverance - Godliness	Brotherly Kindness	Love
Stage of Cognitive Development (Piaget)	Sensory Motor	Pre-Operational	Concrete Operations	Formal Operations	—
Stage of Psychosocial Development (Erikson)	- Trust vs. Mistrust - Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt	Initiative vs. Guilt	Industry vs. Inferiority	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Generativity
Developmental Task	Experience things themselves	Create their own knowledge	Develop competence	Find their niche	Keep the faith
Spiritual Task	Submit the will	Submit to God's law	Submit to the cross	Submit to the work God has called them to do	Submit to pruning that promotes growth

A Model for Education

How might a biblical model of development and growth inform our educational practices?

The Importance of the Family. We need to remember that the family has always been the chosen medium of education in God's plan of development. Even the Savior, in training His 12 disciples, lived with them, and they worked beside Him as He ministered. We need to partner with our families, however they choose to educate their children, whether through homeschool, church school, or public school. Our schools are to support families, not the other way around. In order to make a lasting difference with our children, we need to do everything we can to lift up, strengthen, and edify their parents, rather than view them in an adversarial role.

We also need to respect our church school teachers who recognize the importance of homeschooling their own children, yet labor to serve families who choose to send their children to school. These teachers are acting on some of the highest principles of education and should be prized, instead of denied employment.

We are beginning to recognize that isolating groups of children by age is rarely a good way to minister to them. They need connections to the church, and the church needs them. We need to pull together. "See," Malachi prophesies, "I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord Comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse" (Mal. 4:5, 6).

Developmentally Appropriate, Person-Centered, Individualized. Developmentally appropriate practice recognizes that what we do in education should respond to the child's needs at their stage of development, rather than require the child to fit in with a generally prescribed program. This is person-centered rather than program-centered educational practice, and is critical at every level of

education, from infancy through graduate school. Person-centered education acknowledges that the purpose of education is not to cover a certain amount of content or curriculum. It is more than mental or physical training. It helps each person develop "breadth of mind, clearness of thought, and the courage of their convictions," to achieve "everything good, and pure, and noble," along a path of continual progress toward redemption and fitness for life in heaven (White, 1952, p. 13-19).

Every child is different, and each stage of development may take a different path for each child. As we help each young person find and fulfill his or her special place in the body of Christ, we recognize that they need many practical opportunities to seek God's will for their own lives, and make the individual choices and decisions that help them fulfill the purpose for which God created them.

An emergent curriculum uses a student's interests as a spring board into the study of God through His word and His second book nature, as each student develops a saving relationship with Him. This process follows logically from the first goal of education; "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this; 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Mark 12: 30, 31). In the process of working with their parents, teachers, and other community members in response to local, national and international community and environmental challenges, students learn the practical skills they need to serve the church and the world. In this model, content is the servant, not the driver, of education.

The more we externally motivate and control our children's educational processes, the less opportunity we give them to internalize the value of learning and own the responsibility to learn what they need to know (Lepper & Greene, 1975). Christ Himself was quite autonomous in His understanding of His purpose and educational needs from the age of 12. We know that He refused pressure from His brothers and mother to become a part of the accepted schooling practices of the

day. We need to re-examine general education practices and the long period of dependency we are enforcing on our young people at great financial expense, and at the expense of developing maturity and purpose. Our young people are capable of owning their own learning at a much earlier age. They are capable of doing real work and service much earlier than we have been giving them the opportunity, and it is this real experience in the real world that leads to the development of maturity and a sense of personal mission and purpose (November, 2012; Pink, 2009).

In the educational world today, we are seeing a polarization on this topic. Fast on the heels of No Child Left Behind and high-stakes testing, comes the widespread adoption of Common Core Standards among the states, creating an even stronger push toward a one-size-fits-all standardized education. On the other hand, psychologists and educators such as Daniel Pink (2009), Alan November (2012), Sir Ken Robinson and Lou Aronica (2013), and Yong Zhao (2009) are warning that this standardization will fail to produce thinkers and movers and innovators so necessary for today's global economy.

Zhao (2013) urges that "We need to shift from a paradigm that ensures that every student achieves the same standardized knowledge and skills to one that enhances every student's individual strengths and nurtures his or her passions and interests." There are three critical pieces to this new paradigm:

> "First, learning experiences should be personalized, following each student's interests and enhancing his or her strengths because today any talent, when fully developed, can be valuable. Second, learning should be product-driven, ensuring that students are engaged in creating products and services instead of simply consuming information. Finally, learning should occur

in the broad context of globalization, and technology should be used to expand students' learning beyond the school to the globe." (Zhao, 2013, p. 59)

An early Seventh-day Adventist college educator, E.A. Sutherland (2005), writing in the early 1900's, commented on the importance of allowing choice in college course work. "It encourages the early choice of one's life work; it develops individuality; it gives a chance for individual choice and guidance; it gives opportunity to teach what the student most needs; it best holds the interest of the student; it will early reveal the capacity of the student" (Sutherland, 2005, p. 37).

Practical. Practical. Practical. The model of the practical apprenticeship as demonstrated by Christ in the training of His disciples is a model that is under-utilized in our education of young people today. How many teachers actually go into the field and, together with their students, put to use what they are teaching? Offering hands-on, process-oriented lessons take more time than simply covering content.

Bernice McCarthy's 4MAT framework for lessons advocates a four-part approach to learning, only one of which is focused on content. Three-quarters of 4MAT lessons relate learning to past experience and the senses, practical application, and synthesis of understanding expressed meaningfully through creative expression. It is tempting for teachers, however, to minimize the process and just cover content, because high stakes testing (and most other tests) stress content.

Despite counsel that our schools should provide training in as many as possible of the most useful trades, that it is indispensable that every young person become proficient in at least some trade or handicraft, that students should become self-sustaining rather than incurring debts or depending on the sacrifice of their parents, many of our own Seventh-day Adventist schools have stopped offering

most industrial education classes. We are offering students fewer opportunities to work their way through school. Student debt is rising, and our schools are becoming less and less affordable.

In *Education,* E.G. White (1952) notes "Even from the viewpoint of financial results, the outlay required for manual training would prove the truest economy. Multitudes of our boys would thus be kept from the street corner and the goggery" (White 1952, p. 218). We are finding that young men especially, across the nation and in such countries as China, are suffering under the high academic content load of our schools, offered at the expense of a practical, hands-on education (Zhao, 2009; Farrar, 2013).

A PBS Parent on-line article, "Understanding and Raising Boys: Boys in School," comments that more sit-down tasks, higher expectations for literacy at an earlier age, less hands-on learning opportunities, and less time to move and play, result in fewer boys achieving school standards. They have less opportunity to develop fluency, they have to fake more as they move up in grade levels, and the feeling of deficit becomes a part of their identity. Quoting statistics from the National Center for Educational Statistics and the U.S Board of Education, the article notes that 30 percent more boys flunk or drop out of school, two-thirds more boys are identified with special education needs, and boys are five times as likely to be identified as hyperactive. There are now more girls in higher education than boys. (PBS Parent)

Emphasis on content in schools is not necessarily producing a better product for boys or girls. In an interview by Ron Brandt on what it takes to support authentic learning, Howard Gardner referred to a study done on Harvard graduates in physics as they were throwing their caps in the air at graduation. They were asked "Why is the earth warmer in the summer than in the winter?" Despite

their very expensive, high-class education, they gave the answer of a 5-year-old: "The earth is closer to the sun in summer than in winter" (Brandt, 1993).

Five-year-olds may have very bright answers for a wide variety of things because of their extensive, hands-on experiences. But in many areas, they are a long way from understanding how things work based on logic and more abstract concepts that aren't visual and concrete. They need on-going real experiences to continue the kinds of authentic learning that change the brain. Once children go to school, however, their learning becomes much less hands-on and process-oriented. Gardner argued that much of elementary, secondary, and higher-education learning is so much powder on top of the incomplete engravings left on the child's brain by the hands-on, concrete, though limited, experiences of the preschool years. This cosmetic powder is easily dislodged, but the original engravings are not (Brandt, 1993).

Gardner described his own graduate classes he was teaching on cognitive development. He gave two assessments periodically throughout the year--one on content and one on understanding, where he changed the paradigms and looked to see if students were understanding the concepts that they were learning. He said, "Over the course of the term, the students' master of content zoomed up. Their understandings, on the other hand, were exactly the same: they didn't change at all. How humiliating! I could just see the headlines, 'Harvard Professor of Well-Regarded Courses Documents That His Own Students Don't Understand'" (Brandt, 1993, p. 7).

Gardner's recommendation? "We've got to do a lot fewer things in school. The greatest enemy of understanding is coverage. . . You've got to take enough time to get kids deeply involved in something so they can think about it in lots of different ways and apply it—not just at school but at home and on the street and so on" (Brandt, 1993, p. 7).

In *The Global Achievement Gap: Why Even Our Best Schools Don't Teach the New Survival Skills Our Children Need—and What We Can Do,* Tony Wagner (2010) comments that in today's world, content by itself is not what is critical for a rigorous school program. "It's no longer how much you know that matters; it's what you can do with what you know." It is a practical education that is in great demand today, the ability to use common sense and divergent thinking in a variety of situations to problem-solve real challenges in the real world.

We are teaching students what to think, and not how to think. When it comes to assisting young people establish religious identity, Baltazar and Coffen (2011) recommend that educators promote the following kinds of activities in the context of sincere relationships:

1. Adventure-based activities that allow exploration of individual and team roles.
2. Promote dialogue with friends and admired adults beyond the group mentality.
3. Avoid slogans that stall identity development, such as WWJD or Jesus Saves.
4. Model and support consideration of alternative perspectives and free choice.
5. Show the deep philosophical nature of religion, rather than focus on behavior.
6. Guide youth to confront and resolve doubt, rather than avoid or ignore doubt.

Our blueprint for Adventist education has always included elements of the importance of the family, and a developmentally appropriate, person-centered approach to education with an emphasis on the whole child that is both individualized and practical. However, we are at a crossroads where we need to seriously consider past trends in not only society's educational traditions, but our own. As we consider the needs of our youth today, and the future of the church, we can gain great insight and hope from the model of Christ as Parent and Educator as throughout the Scriptures.

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