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ABSTRACT

MOVING SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCHES
BEYOND THE TWO HUNDRED BARRIER

by

David P. Ripley

Adviser: Ricardo Norton

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ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: MOVING SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCHES BEYOND THE TWO HUNDRED BARRIER

Name of researcher: David P. Ripley

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Problem

Seventh-day Adventist churches have found themselves largely unable to grow beyond the 200-in-attendance barrier. Book membership may continue to increase, yet attendance plateaus. Outside of the institutional setting, there are very few Anglo Adventist churches that have grown beyond the barrier.

Method

The pastors of ten churches that were chiefly Anglo, 300-400 in attendance, and not in an institutional setting were surveyed. Ten churches with less than 220 in attendance and having a book membership of at least 350 were also surveyed. These were compared, looking for features that would make a difference.

Results

Differences do occur between the two groups. The areas that showed the greatest differences were in visioning, staffing, worship style, evangelism, and small groups. These findings were applied to the Northwest Houston Seventh-day Adventist Church. The results were that it grew through the 200 barrier.

Conclusions

If an Adventist church wishes to move through the 200 barrier, it must become a different kind of organization. Prayerful pastoral leadership is vital. Clear vision is critical. It must staff itself for growth. Evangelism should be more relational. Worship styles will tend to be more contemporary. The definition of small groups must be widened.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

MOVING SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCHES
BEYOND THE TWO HUNDRED BARRIER

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
David Ripley
April 2000

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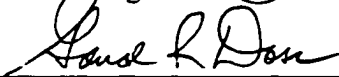
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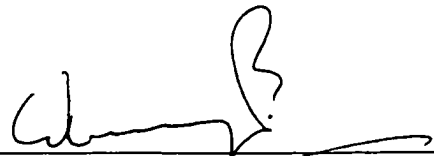
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19).¹ “And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 12:17). Based on these and other passages of the Bible, the Seventh-day Adventist church believes it has a special place in the end-time flow of God working out His salvation for humankind. The name “Adventist” encapsulates the urgency that the church has presented in its historical documents. This urgency to share a last-day message with the world is explicitly stated in the fundamental beliefs of the church.

Seventh-day Adventists Believe The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on the earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness.²

¹All Scripture references are from the New King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

²Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988), 152.

As a pastor for almost two decades, I have witnessed how administration takes seriously the urgency of sharing this last-day message and growing the church. Workers' meetings, where the pastors are brought together, are full of evangelistic language and pastors are pressed to have results in church growth. Those who have baptized large numbers of people are even rewarded sometimes with trips to the Holy Land or some other exotic place. As we shall soon see, more baptisms have not always meant growth in the Seventh-day Adventist church in North America.

Statement of Problem

While Adventists feel we have been commissioned to grow, in North America the church finds itself in a plateau of almost no growth. This is in a time when North America is full of unchurched people. Donald McGavran realized this in his book Understanding Church Growth.

More winnable people live in the world today than ever before. There are far more winnable men and women in Illinois or Canada than there were a hundred years ago. The general population in many states and regions is more favorable to Christ and more open to conversion.¹

There are more winnable people to evangelize than ever before. The Barna Report shares that "one third of the nation's adults (31%) can be deemed 'unchurched' —

¹Donald A. McGavran, Understanding Church Growth (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 51.

a proportion that represents 60 to 65 million unchurched adults.”² These people represent a large mission field for the Seventh-day Adventist church in North America.

According to records produced by the General Conference archival department, the growth of the Seventh-day Adventist church during the year 1998 was 4.75 percent.² Every forty-eight seconds someone around the globe becomes a Seventh-day Adventist.³ Unfortunately, most of these new members are not in North America. Reports show that in 1998 growth in North America slowed to a snail’s pace, 1.75 percent. This is the lowest in almost one hundred years. Yet, Christ said, “Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest?’ Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest” (John 4:35). Bob Moorehead suggests that we need to rethink what we call normal growth. “I am convinced when the 20th century church resumes ‘normal’ behavior, the kind we read about in Acts, we will see ‘normal’ results again (which the watching community would surely call abnormal!).”⁴

¹“Update on the Unchurched,” The Barna Report, April - June 1999, 8. “Unchurched” is defined as someone who has not attended a worship service in the last six months other than a wedding, funeral, or holiday service.

²136th Annual Statistical Report--1998 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1998).

³SDA web site quote in statistics about Seventh-day Adventists, available <http://www.adventist.org/pages/about.html>.

⁴Bob Moorehead, The Growth Factor (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1988), 9, 10.

During my time as a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, I have heard many reasons proposed to explain why church growth has slowed among Anglo churches in North America. A list of reasons would likely include. (1) lack of spirituality, (2) not enough prayer, (3) the time is not right for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, (4) society is not receptive, (5) our members are asleep, (6) we have abandoned our evangelistic roots, and (7) Ellen White spoke out against large churches. I have personally heard church leaders say, “We are the remnant and not supposed to be large.” Although some of the points given above may be legitimate to some degree. Gary McIntosh and Glen Martin remind us in their recent study Finding Them, Keeping Them. “Large is not lethal.”¹

I argue that we will need to rethink how we intend to grow the Adventist Church here in North America. Learning how to grow churches through barriers to growth will assist us in winning and keeping people for Christ. This difference in thinking is all the more important as we think of the Anglo population in North America. Carl George of the Fuller Institute of Church Growth states, “Anglos, who showed the greatest potential for Adventist growth until 40 or 50 years ago, no longer present a recruitable target, at least by current methodologies.”²

Church planting has recently been suggested as the answer to church growth problems in North America for Seventh-day Adventists. One author even asks us to admit we cannot grow churches beyond a certain point.

¹Gary McIntosh and Glen Martin, Finding Them, Keeping Them (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 109.

²Carl George, Empty Pews, Empty Streets (Columbia, MD: Columbia Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), 51.

First, acknowledge that all churches eventually plateau. And that the plateau factor will continue to frustrate our efforts to grow existing churches. . . . We have made repeated, vigorous, and well-meaning attempts to make existing churches larger only to find that no matter what pastor we assign, how much money we spend, or what evangelist conducts the series, the church remains at its plateau.¹

I argue that church planting is not the only way to grow the Seventh-day Adventist church in North America. George Barna states, "Creating more churches will not solve the problem. This is like trying to make people read more by printing more books."² I maintain that one way to turn the trend around for Adventist churches in North America would be to grow churches through the 200 barrier.

We can see the reflection of our own denomination in David Moberg's stages in the life cycle of a church. His theory is that denominations move through five stages from their beginning: (1) incipient organization, (2) formal organization, (3) maximum efficiency, (4) institutional stage, and (5) disintegration.³ George Barna has a chart in his book, The Frog in the Kettle, showing the nine largest denominations in North America and their growth patterns from 1970 to 1990. All but two have significant negative growth and could be classified as being in stage 5.⁴ Upon reading Moberg's description of the different stages, he would likely classify Adventist in stage 4. Unless we address this issue of growth, we may be moving into stage 5 as a denomination.

¹Ron Gladden, "Evangelism and Church Planting," Ministry, October 1999, 7.

²George Barna, The Frog in the Kettle, (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), 139.

³David O. Moberg, The Church as a Social Institution (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1962), 118-124.

⁴Barna, The Frog in the Kettle, 134.

Whether a church was established a long time ago, or newly planted, most church administrators and pastors do not know how to make churches grow in attendance beyond the 200 barrier. Growing the host of small churches through the 200 barrier to larger church attendance would make a marked difference in the total size of the Adventist presence in North America. These local churches would have potential for a greater influence on their communities. In many cases there would be no significant need for increasing infrastructure. I believe that helping Adventist churches grow beyond the 200 barrier should be a major emphasis of the Seventh-day Adventist church in North America.¹ The 200 barrier² is simply an estimated figure at which a church can continue to add names to its membership lists, but the number of people attending worship services is plateaued.

Outside forces, such as a major Adventist institution moving into the area, can press a church through barriers quickly. The Review and Herald Publishing Association's move to Hagerstown, Maryland, in the early 1980s is an example of how institutions can affect church growth. One church in Hagerstown had an attendance of forty to fifty people in 1982. Soon after the move of the Review and Herald Publishing Association it climbed to over 200. A dozen other area churches also had various degrees

¹According to Carl George and Warren Bird, there are barriers at 75, 200, 400, 800, 3,000, and 6,000 attendance. Of course, these are estimations of where these barriers are met. Carl F. George and Warren Bird, How to Break Barriers: Capturing Overlooked Opportunities for Church Growth (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 175.

²Bill M. Sullivan, Ten Steps to Breaking the 200 Barrier: A Church Growth Strategy (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1988), 14.

of growth that were attributable to the institution coming to the area.¹ In the absence of institutional pressures of workers moving into the area, however, churches typically follow a predictable course. They face barriers and either move through them or remain below the barrier indefinitely.

In North America, a typical Christian church begins when a small group of people decide to organize into a Christian community. This is the first stage of growth. The church is usually dominated by a patriarch or matriarch and one dominant family. In the words of Bill Sullivan, "It could be called the 'one big happy family' church."² It will grow until it is around sixty to one hundred in attendance before it finds itself against a barrier. This barrier exists when there is a call from others to share power, and the key person, who has poured his/her life into the church, is reluctant to share leadership. These leaders fear what others will do with that power. Long-time members and those in power may also become fearful of new people because they represent a threat to the status quo. Carl George explains this stage as follows:

People, including Christians, like to be comfortable. If they are convinced that growth will upset the family feeling they associate with "their" church, they may establish a surprising number of turf-protection barricades to keep new members from being absorbed.³

¹Frank Jacobs, interview by author, May 6, 1999. Jacobs is the current treasurer and an elder at the Williamsport SDA church near Hagerstown. He is also an employee of the Review and Herald Publishing Association since the move.

²Sullivan, 13.

³George and Bird, 134.

Sahlin supports this idea of discomfort saying, “Small churches become comfortable with being small and tend to resist growing beyond the size where everyone can know all the members.”¹ Below this barrier is where the majority of Adventist churches in North America stand today. They may have a book membership that soars beyond 200, yet until changes are made they are as large as they will get. According to Paul Richardson, director of the Center for Creative Ministry, of the 4,746 Adventist congregations in North America, 3,000 have under one hundred members. He also reports that the next 1,400 have 100 to 250 members.² Monte Sahlin shares that 2,685 small, single-cell Adventist churches in North America have attendance less than fifty.³

It must be remembered that membership is not the same as attendance. In 1976 Dr. Gottfried Oosterwal, the former Director of the Institute of World Mission, reported that “30% to 35% of our membership is not regularly attending.” That makes attendance at worship in 1976 at just under 70 percent.⁴ Monte Sahlin reported in 1992 that the average percentage of membership in attendance at Sabbath worship services in North America was 55 percent.⁵ This was a drop of about 20 percent in just eighteen years. A

¹Monte. Sahlin, Sharing Our Faith With Friends Without Losing Either (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1990), 191.

²Paul Richardson, Director of the Center for Creative Ministry in Lincoln, NE, interview by author, April 27, 1999.

³Monte Sahlin, “Large SDA Churches: Adventism’s Silent Majority,” *Spectrum*, 22, No. 2, 36. (May, 1992): 36.

⁴Monte Sahlin and Norman Yergen, Why Do Adventists Quit Coming to Church? (Lincoln, NE: Center for Creative Ministry, 1998), 1.

⁵Sahlin, “Large SDA Churches: Adventism’s Silent Majority,” 36.

study published in 1998 stated that the ratio was 50 percent.¹ The ratio continues to drop. Adventist churches are not alone in remaining small. One fourth of all Protestant congregations in North America have an attendance of less than thirty-five, while one half have an attendance of less than seventy-five. “The normative size of a Protestant congregation in the North American culture probably varies between twenty and sixty at the principal weekly worship service.”²

The first issue a church must work through, then, is to examine whether the members truly want to grow. Leith Anderson reminds us of the story of Jesus and the invalid. A church must want to grow and move through the barriers.

One of Jesus’ most surprising questions was when He spoke to a man who had been an invalid for 38 years. Jesus asked him, “Do you want to get well?” (John 5:6). At first hearing, his question sounds offensive. . . . Some sick people don’t want to get well. . . . When the Lord asks a sick church, “Do you want to get well?” the answer is not always obvious.³

If a church is successful in moving through this first barrier, it may find itself comfortable with a shared power structure. Everyone knows who everyone else is. When you come to worship on Sabbath, you can easily spot guests. When a church member is mentioned, you know them personally. Even if book membership grows significantly, there must be significant changes in how the members think about themselves, and how they go about organizing their church in order to grow in attendance. This type of

¹Sahlin and Yergen, 1.

²Lyle E. Schaller, Growing Plans (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 18.

³Leith Anderson, A Church for the 21st Century (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1992), 126.

congregation will find itself held back by what church growth experts call the 200 barrier.

Dan Crawford says, “The most formidable barrier arises when attendance reaches the level of 200 regular adult attenders. Most churches never grow past this barrier.” The 200 barrier is the focus of this study.¹

Protestant churches as a whole have found this 200 barrier very difficult to cross. George and Bird’s study of nine denominations found that 85 percent have an attendance of 200 or less while 94 percent have an attendance of 350 or less.² I argue that the key to why there has been such frustration at not being able to grow through the 200 barrier is that many do not understand that different sizes of congregations are really different kinds of churches. Sullivan explains it this way:

A small church is not a microcosm of a large church but a totally different kind of organization. Just as you would not want to change from being the person you are to being someone else, neither does a church want to give up the family atmosphere and become an organization. . . . The church that grows beyond the 200 barrier is the church that decides to minister to its people in a comprehensive organization rather than a family type fellowship.³

In fact, Carl George and Warren Bird make this interesting statement: “Churches have more in common by their size than by their denomination, tradition, location, age, or any other single, isolatable factor.”⁴ Trying to simply grow a small church into a big

¹Dan R. Crawford, Church Growth Words from the Risen Lord (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 15.

²George and Bird, 130.

³Sullivan, 14.

⁴George and Bird, 129.

church using the same mode will almost always fail. A church must be transformed to grow beyond the 200 barrier.

One last note should be made in this section regarding what makes churches grow. While it is possible for a congregation to make necessary changes to allow a church to move through barriers, there are some aspects of church growth that only God can do. Henry Blackaby and Claude King list these as “Things Only God Can Do”:

1. God draws people to Himself.
2. God causes people to seek after Him.
3. God reveals spiritual truth.
4. God convicts the world of guilt regarding sin.
5. God convicts the world of righteousness.
6. God convicts the world of judgment.¹

This does not mean, however, that one is to simply sit and do nothing, leaving all to God. Alan Tippett warns against this complacent attitude.

Some people start from the presupposition that, as God is sovereign, “whatever will be will be” (as the popular song puts it); and that as long as we exist merely as a Christian presence in the world, we can leave the rest to him. This is surely to confuse the immediate and the ultimate, and overlook our responsibility as servants. Of course the ultimate end lies with God, but in the meantime we may either help or hinder his immediate purpose.²

What we as servants of God can do is to seek God’s dream and vision for His church. We can set the atmosphere for growth, but God brings the harvest. The Scriptures are clear on this. “So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase” (1 Cor 3:7). “Before you entered the mission

¹Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, Experiencing God (Nashville: Lifeway Press, 1990), 68.

²Alan R. Tippett, Church Growth and the Word of God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 50, 51.

field represented by your church, God went first. Before you arrived there he had already sowed.”¹ As Bill Hybels of the Willow Creek Community Church says, “Lost people matter to God, therefore, lost people should matter to me.”² As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe the majority of earth’s people need to be warned of their lost condition. These lost people must matter to us. We must do something to reach them.

The 200 barrier is real. It is important to understand its effects on the Seventh-day Adventist churches across North America. Since churches below the barrier and above the barrier are different types of organizations, we need to study and understand the characteristics of churches above and below the barrier.

Justification of the Study

In the previous section, we saw how North American Adventist churches are experiencing slow to no growth. Under this heading I will share my personal journey and how I became aware of the barriers to church attendance growth. This section will also demonstrate the potential amazing growth and effectiveness if barriers are properly understood. This understanding could allow many small churches to move their attendance through the 200 barrier.

In December of 1995, I accepted a call to the Northwest Houston Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Texas Conference. This church had about 180 people who regularly attended worship. There was a sense among the members, however, that God

¹George and Bird, 36.

²Bill Hybels, quoted in *ibid.*

wanted this church to grow. The church set itself on a course to discover God's dream for this Adventist congregation, spending over a year's time many days of fasting and prayer. The congregation met in several visioning sessions to seek a shared vision. There were small groups and large groups praying and planning together and seeking God's guidance. In business session on January 16, 1998, we voted unanimously to follow our understanding of what God wanted us to do. As part of this vision, we believe God's will for us is to grow to an attendance of 500.

Reading church growth material brought to my attention the reality of the 200 barrier. As a model, I wanted to find some churches that had crossed the 200 barrier. A survey of churches in the Texas Conference not associated with an Adventist institution reveals that out of 208 churches and companies, only 1 or 2 Anglo churches had crossed the barrier. A large population base was no guarantee that the barrier could be breached. Many smaller churches reside in large, growing communities. Informal questioning revealed that churches across the United States with total membership up to 600 or more still have only a maximum of 200 to 250 regularly attending their worship services.

The Northwest Houston Seventh-day Adventist Church needed to know what the characteristics of a church above the 200 barrier might be. The survey was to find the characteristics of churches above the barrier and compare them with churches below the barrier. These would then be used to educate the Northwest Houston Church in what needed to change to allow it to move through the barrier. It is also hoped that this information could be used to help other churches wishing to grow through the barrier.

What could this mean to the Adventist church in North America? An example can be found in the Texas Conference which has 208 churches. Of these churches, 88 are in a large population base that should be able to support a larger church. Church statistics for a recent month reported an average of 19,494 in attendance across the conference. If each of the 88 churches in a large enough population base were to grow to 300 in attendance, there would be an additional 14,252 people worshipping each Sabbath.

If this same type of growth were possible across all of North America, there would be a very large increase in attendance. This growth would make our churches strong resource centers offering community services, family, children, youth-oriented programs, and large evangelistic events. This growth could begin an upward spiral in Adventist church growth. More pastoral staff could train and enable people in ministry. There would be more financial resources for all church programs and continued efforts to reach all the unentered people groups¹ in North America and around the world.

Satan must be pleased when he sees Adventists so complacent, with the majority of our churches plateaued. Each church that remains small in the face of a large potential harvest means there are people who should be worshipping and coming to a greater knowledge of a loving God, yet are not. They may not get another opportunity to know Him. These people will have to go somewhere else or not receive the assistance they may desperately need, whether physical, spiritual, social, or psychological. Tippett points out the urgency of spreading the gospel. "It is because of this tragic possibility, the

¹"Most Protestants simply do not see other segments of the American mosaic, whether of the right or the left, whether of the educated elite or the recently arrived immigrants. Both are, for Protestants, the 'hidden peoples of America'." McGavran, 75.

possibility in our day that men for whom Christ died may yet be lost, that the Christian mission is still an urgent necessity.”¹ Removing barriers and increasing attendance beyond the 200 barrier in many of our churches will bring more people into relationship with God who loves them and is asking them to be a part of His kingdom.

Definition of Terms

Before moving further into this topic, let me clarify how I am using certain terms. Below is a list of terms and meanings used throughout this dissertation.

Adventist: This refers to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Anglo-Adventist Churches: These churches are English-speaking; however, surveys show that they are becoming increasingly multi-cultural, particularly in metropolitan areas.²

Attendance: During my survey work, there was considerable confusion on what was meant when I asked for attendance figures on churches. Time after time, I was presented with book membership figures. Attendance is just what it says: the average number who are actually sitting in the worship services each Sabbath regardless of age.

Barrier: Unless otherwise specified, the use of the word “barrier” refers to the 200 barrier in attendance.

¹Tippett, 49.

²At a town hall meeting recently Conference President Steve Gifford declared, “The Texas Conference is not the Anglo conference, it is the Texas International Conference.” March 21, 1999, Houston, Texas.

Church Growth: Growth in attendance of a local congregation and not merely more names on a church clerk's record, or a larger denomination. Even more specifically, this study seeks to understand moving attendance through the 200 barrier. In Christian churches, church growth refers to the scientific study of what makes churches grow.

Decadal Growth Rate: This is the rate of church growth during a ten-year period. It is often referred to simply as "DGR." It is figured by this simple formula: present membership (M) minus membership ten years ago (M^2) divided by membership ten years ago (M^2) times one hundred: $(M - M^2 \div M^2 \times 100)$. This equals the DGR.¹

Ellen G. White: Ellen White is a co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is believed that she was given special testimonies for the church directly from God by visions and dreams.

General Conference (GC) of Seventh-day Adventists: Twelve world divisions make up the World Field, as divided by the Adventist church.

Homogeneous Unit Principle: This principle states that people like to become Christians without losing their identity as a part of the patchwork of world society. This means that people are more likely to become Christians if they identify closely culturally, socially, and economically with the group or church attempting to evangelize them. This makes potential new Christians more comfortable and therefore more winnable.

¹Bob Waymire and C. Peter Wagner, The Church Growth Survey Handbook (Colorado Springs, CO: Global Church Growth, 1994), 16.

Laity: In the Adventist church this term usually refers to the non-clergy members of the church.¹

Membership: This is the number of members on the church records: persons baptized, joining by profession of faith, and transferring from another Adventist church.

North American Division (NAD) of Seventh-day Adventists: This includes the Continental United States, Alaska, Hawaii, Canada, and Bermuda. The NAD is composed of nine Union Conferences, which are subdivided into fifty-eight local conferences.²

Dissertation Scope and Organization

This section outlines the scope of the survey and organization of this dissertation. This will facilitate the reader's understanding of the dynamics of the 200 barrier in the Adventist church in North America and the use of this information in moving the Northwest Houston Seventh-day Adventist Church through the 200 barrier.

After a careful study of the available literature on barriers to church growth, I designed a survey for the pastors of the twenty selected churches.³ Ten were barrier-breaking churches and ten were below the 200 barrier for comparison.

¹Russell Burrill argues that all are laity. The Greek term simply means "people of God." Russell Burrill, Revolution in the Church (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1993), 33.

²135th Annual Statistical Report--1998.

³A copy of the survey instrument is available in Appendix A.

The survey studied membership and attendance ratios in the congregation. Small groups and prayer meetings were evaluated. Other questions evaluated the use of the church facility including the seating in the sanctuary, the use of Sabbath School rooms, and parking facilities. Location questions assessed the influence this might have on church growth beyond the 200 barrier.

Other questions evaluated the makeup and longevity of church staff, role expectations, and composition of the church board. Vision and goals of the senior pastor were evaluated. How the pastor spent his ministry time was analyzed.

The reader should be aware that the nature of the survey took a snapshot of the 20 churches and did not actually follow the process by which the churches above the barrier moved through the barrier. The desire was to find the characteristics of the churches above the barrier that made the difference in maintaining the larger attendance.

The information gained was filtered through what is currently written on the topic of breaking barriers. The churches above and below the 200 barrier were compared for evidence of trends that might signal reasons why some are held below the barrier.

In this dissertation, chapter 2 will focus on the Biblical basis for large worship services along with the synagogue system as the forerunner of the Christian church. Then, we will look at the writings of Ellen White on large congregations. With this basis in mind, the details of Adventist church growth in North America are examined.

Chapter 3 includes a survey of current literature on church growth with special attention to the significance to church attendance and the barriers that keep churches small. Chapter 4 looks at the statistics as reported in the surveys to the twenty churches.

This will include a section of what I expected to find based on research and experience. This will be followed by what was actually found in the churches above the barrier and below the barrier respectively.

Since churches above and below the barrier are totally different types of organizations as reported by Bill Sullivan,¹ the survey information can be used to guide the changes necessary for a church wanting to grow through the 200 barrier. Chapter 5 reports on how this information was used to successfully move the Northwest Houston Seventh-day Adventist Church through the 200 barrier.

Chapter 6 summarizes the findings and draws appropriate conclusions as to what are factors and restrictions to Adventist churches moving through the 200 barrier. I then conclude with recommendations for moving churches through the barrier.

Limitations and Delimitations

Within this study several limitations and delimitations should be acknowledged. These will be important to keep in mind as we proceed through this dissertation to understand the scope and constraints of the study.

Limitations

1. The study of church growth and barriers is relatively new. Donald McGavran, referred to as the “father of church growth,” tells how this understanding began to be

¹Sullivan, 13.

formulated in 1977.¹ This understanding is still developing and changing. Many new aspects are coming to light about church growth. There may be overlooked issues that could tell us a great deal about the reasons for growth or non-growth.

2. Culture continues to change rapidly. In a sense, church growth principles are being applied to a “moving target.” “Cultural analysts estimate that our culture essentially reinvents itself every three to five years.”²

3. Local churches continue to change. As I have researched through surveys and interviews, it must be remembered that this paper has merely taken a snapshot of the passing, dynamic scenery. The churches I have studied are moving along ever-changing pathways, making continued re-evaluation necessary.

4. I must be careful that preconceived ideas do not guide me into asking the wrong questions and overlooking some important ones in the dynamics around the life of the church. Sometimes it is difficult to see, when so close to the local church, what the true dynamics might be. It is possible to miss significant information because experience says something should not be as it is.

5. First-hand on-site information would have been best. It would have been useful to this study to have been able to take a year off and visit each of these churches on a Sabbath and interview many of the members of the churches. I know I have not experienced first-hand the churches studied.

¹Donald A. McGavran and George G. Hunter III, Church Growth Strategies That Work (Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1980), 20.

²George Barna, The Second Coming of the Church (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1998), 2.

Delimitations

In order to make the topic and subject matter small enough to be manageable, I set several delimitations on the project.

1. The churches I chose to study are all in the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists and are within the boundaries of the Continental United States.

2. In order to eliminate cultural aspects, I chose churches that are chiefly Anglo-English speaking.

3. Institutional influences can press a church through the 200 barrier. I therefore, specified that all the churches studied must not be influenced by a location near a Seventh-day Adventist school, hospital, or conference office, etc.

4. The study was limited to churches that have an attendance between 300 and 400. Sullivan states that a church can reach the 200 barrier between 100 and 300.¹ This is to ensure the church is beyond the 200 barrier. The upper limit was set at 400 because other barriers come into play as a church moves towards the 400 barrier.²

5. The comparison churches below the 200 barrier were limited to churches that have less than 225 in attendance. They also were chiefly Anglo-English speaking congregations. They were not in the institutional setting, and had a book membership of at least 350. The book membership of 350 was chosen to ensure churches that were not merely below the barrier, but being held below the barrier.

¹Sullivan, 14.

²George and Bird, 145.

CHAPTER 2

THE CASE FOR THE LARGER CHURCH

With chapter 2 I will turn our attention to understanding a basis for the desirability of larger churches. First we will look at the Scriptures for an understanding of God's people worshiping together, then the synagogue system--the forerunner of the Christian church, followed by an understanding of large churches in the writings of Ellen White. We will also take a closer look at statistics showing the slow growth of the Adventist church in North America.

Early personal experience as a life-long Adventist taught me a "conventional wisdom" that smaller is better. The example of the New Testament house churches and the counsel of Ellen White about the concerns of Battle Creek Tabernacle solidified this belief that larger is not desirable and should be avoided. Recently, I have questioned this understanding. While God has used and blessed small gatherings of people throughout history, I believe we can also see God working in large movements. These large worship gatherings can instruct us as we seek to understand how God wishes to bless larger churches in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. A primary understanding to moving Adventist churches through the 200 barrier is that God dreams bigger than we do.

that He can work miracles in people's lives, and save people for His kingdom in greater numbers in larger churches.

Larger churches are not foreign to Adventist culture. In fact, according to a Spectrum article, "Actually, more than half of the 775,000 Adventists in North America gather on Sabbath morning in a church with a membership of more than 300. One quarter of North American Adventists meet in churches with 600 or more members."¹ Small churches becoming large churches is to be expected by Adventists as we near the second coming of Christ. In the chapter "The Remnant and Its Mission" included in the book Seventh-day Adventists Believe, there is a discussion of all God's people coming out of Babylon into Adventist churches.

God has His children in all churches; but through the remnant church He proclaims a message that is to restore His true worship by calling His people out of the apostasy and preparing them for Christ's return. Recognizing that many of God's people have yet to join them, the remnant sense their inadequacies and weaknesses when they try to fulfill this solemn mission.²

This would be greatly facilitated by making existing churches larger.

Biblical Basis for Growing Larger Churches

Adventists are people of the whole Bible, New and Old Testaments. While some of the discussions to follow do not have a direct declaration or mandate for larger churches and moving churches through the 200 barrier, they do form the foundation for the New Testament Gospel commission and through this to the solemn mission that

¹Sahlin, "Large SDA Churches: Adventism's Silent Majority," 32.

²Seventh-day Adventists Believe, 168.

Adventists have inherited. A review of salvation history and prophecy will show God's designs for doing things in a big way. We will move through the Scriptures looking at the general atmosphere of life and growth to the more specific instances of the Scriptures where God calls for large groups to assemble to worship. We will see Old Testament worship services in large proportions and New Testament hillside meetings of Christ. We will look at the many large churches of the apostolic times. Finally we will look at the prophecies of large worship services to come after the second coming.

Be Fruitful and Multiply

“Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it’” (Gen 1:28). God’s original plan for His people was to multiply, filling the earth and subduing it. Even after sin, God gave the same command to Noah and his family. “So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth’” (Gen 9:1). Centuries later, the promises to Abraham are an echo of the charge to fill the earth and subdue it. “Now the Lord had said to Abram: ‘. . . I will make you a great nation; . . . and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed’” (Gen 12:1-3). Zechariah predicts groups of foreigners grabbing the sleeve of a Jewish man and begging to go with him to worship at the temple. “Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem” (Zech 8:22). Even in the midst of the terrifying rebuke of Habakkuk about the coming destruction at the hands of the Babylonians, God still reaffirms His determination that all the world will

know of Him. "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Hab 2:14).

Each of the above instances speaks of God filling the world with righteous people and the knowledge of Himself. The Gospel commission has a similar charge to the people of God.

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. (Matt 28:18-20)

From the very beginning the command is given to grow and fill the earth. This is reaffirmed by Jesus before He returns to heaven. The command of God is clearly understood by Seventh-day Adventists. We are to be a growing people in our community and beyond. David Womack puts it this way: "No church is truly Christian that does not engage in an active search for converts, both in its own community and in the unevangelized nations of the world."¹ To Seventh-day Adventists in North America today, this could be greatly facilitated by helping our smaller churches understand how to become larger and move through the 200 barrier.

Large Old Testament Worship Services

In the Old Testament, systematic worship as a community of faith was commanded three times a year for the males of the nation. "Three times a year all your

¹This is in a chapter called "The Cutting Edge" where Womack argues that the local church needs to look beyond its own community in order for it to become large and strong within its community. David Womack, The Pyramid Principle (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1977), 109.

males shall appear before the Lord your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the feast of Weeks, and at the feast of Tabernacles” (Deut 16:16). Other annual feasts were added during the history of Israel. The whole nation came before God during these feasts, or worship services. While this is not speaking of the weekly worship services and is closer to our modern-day camp meetings, it is evidence that God mandated large worship services in the Old Testament.

Christ and Large Worshiping Communities

Christ Himself understood the importance of worship in the synagogue.

Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. (Luke 4:14-16)

Later in this dissertation, I will show how the synagogue system included whole communities, sometimes all the surrounding towns in a given area belonged to a single synagogue. Paul also found the weekly, corporate gathering on the Sabbath important to him. This was true even after his conversion, as is described below in the text.

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures. (Acts 17:1-2)

To Christ, large groups of people were advantageous to worship and teaching.

The Sermon on the Mount is one example.

Great multitudes followed Him; from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan. And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a

mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them. (Matt 4:25-5:2)

The Sermon on the Mount was not an example of weekly corporate worship, yet it shows how Jesus uses the format of a large crowd to bring people to the Father. Christ's church at this time consisted of just twelve members, but his congregation of followers was much larger, swelling at times into the thousands.

The language of Christ's sermons and conversations is full of growth words. Christ expected large numbers of people to become a part of the church. In his book, Church Growth and the Word of God, Alan Tippett shares how pervasive this growth expectancy is in the words of Christ.

The attitude that we must expect slow growth distresses me. It is quite foreign to the New Testament, which, on the contrary, has a rich range of picturesque imagery that shows growth is to be expected—both physical, numerical growth from outside and spiritual, qualitative growth from within. The New Testament nouns and verbs leave no room for static causes. The teaching of Jesus was charged with expectation of growth.¹

Through Christ's stories we see that the imagery of the Gospels is one of life, expectancy, and growth. I argue that God expects no less today. We should expect our churches to be vibrant and growing, even through the 200 barrier.

The Apostles and Large Worshiping Communities

The apostles apparently interpreted the Gospel commission in light of the many statements on growing the kingdom of God. With the blessing of the Holy Spirit on the

¹Tippett, 12. He uses six categories of imagery to point out many examples of this growth expectancy language and gives Scripture references: Quantitative, ingathering, interaction, incorporation, organic, and penetration imagery.

Day of Pentecost, they went and preached with power, which resulted in the almost instantaneous creation of a large congregation.

Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers . . . praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:41-42, 47)

The first 3,000 souls were from all over the world. Many of these left soon and returned to their homelands with the Gospel. Acts 2:42 indicates that many were from Jerusalem also. "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship." Vs. 47 shares the ongoing growth of the church after the feast, "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."

In a short time, the apostles were in charge of a large congregation even by modern standards. "However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand" (Acts 4:4). The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary indicates that this 5,000 is the aggregate number of men who were now disciples. The total did not include the women and children. They would probably swell the number of the congregation to over 10,000.¹

As the church in Jerusalem grew, so did persecution. At the time of the stoning of Stephen, persecution had reached new heights, spreading believers, and thus Christianity and the Gospel, everywhere.

¹"Was about Five Thousand [Acts 4:4]." Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC), ed. F. D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1957), 6:165.

At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. . . . Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. (Acts 8:1, 4)

Large congregations were formed as the Gospel spread. Philip went to the city of Samaria, working miracles in the name of Christ and preaching the Gospel. "And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did" (Acts 8:6). The response was so great that when the elders in Jerusalem heard of the evangelistic success of Philip in Samaria, they sent Peter and John to pray that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Peter and John did not go straight back to Jerusalem, but they traveled, "preaching the Gospel in many villages of the Samaritans" (Acts 8:25). If the results were similar to other places, even these villages produced churches that were large by modern standards. Many likely surpassed the 200 barrier in attendance.

Peter continued to share the Gospel in cities where many accepted Jesus and became disciples. At Lydda, Peter healed Aeneas who had been paralyzed for eight years. The result was that "all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord" (Acts 9:35). At nearby Joppa, Peter raised Dorcas to life "and it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord" (Acts 9:42).

At Antioch the same results were realized. "And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord" (Acts 11:21). Because of the wonderful results in Antioch, Barnabas was sent there to help. Before he went there, he journeyed to Tarsus to find Saul. "And when he had found him, he brought him to

Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people” (Acts 11:26).

Saul and Barnabas were sent out to preach the Gospel. In the city of Antioch in Pisida, they preached to large crowds. “On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God” (Acts 13:44). As a consequence of their preaching, “the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region” (Acts 13:49). At Iconium the results were similar. “Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed” (Acts 14:1). In the city of Derby, Paul and Barnabas found more converts. “And when they had preached the Gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch” (Acts 14:21).

The people Paul and Barnabas preached to were not just hearing and going on their way. Large multitudes of believers were organized into congregations. “So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed” (Acts 14:23). Later, during Paul’s second missionary journey, he and Silas revisited and strengthened these churches. “So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily” (Acts 16:5).

After the Macedonian call, Paul and Silas visited cities there. At Thessalonica, Paul preached in the synagogue with great results. “And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas” (Acts 17:4). It is to this city that some of the disciples were dragged “to the rulers of the city crying out, ‘These who have turned the world upside down have

come here too” (Acts 17:6). This commotion was so great that the brethren sent Paul and Silas away to Berea where, “therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men” (Acts 17:12). Of the work in Ephesus, the Bible says this: “So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed” (Acts 19:20).

Worship on a Large Scale Is God’s Will

The great message we have seen in the Bible thus far is that God’s command to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth will be completed. It will be fulfilled as prophesied in Revelation.

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Rev 7:9, 10)

This worship service will be so large that no one will be able to number it. Is it only a one-time gathering, or perhaps a worship service like the annual feasts of Israel of old? Is it a weekly service? The prophet Isaiah speaks directly of a weekly worship service and prophesies of such a gathering, ““And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me,” says the Lord” (Isa 66:23).

If the second coming of the Lord is soon and we believe that there will be a spreading of the Gospel before Christ’s return, then we should expect New Testament results. Whole multitudes and at times whole communities should be coming together, joining churches, forming large ones out of smaller ones. Sometimes these will be new

churches that will start out large, beyond the 200 barrier. It is essential that Christians understand how to move through barriers to growth. Thousands of small Adventist churches need to be moved through the 200 barrier as we accept the last-day harvest of souls for the kingdom.

Church Growth from God

As we discover the church growth issues and how they effect attendance, a reminder is in order. These are only tools for our use. The increase comes from God. "I [Paul] planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase" (1 Cor 3:6, 7). Conversion is a heart item between people and their God. This is something congregations or pastors cannot do. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil" (Jer 13:23). The rebirth of a person as a Christian is brought about only by a miracle of God. "True Christian religion is not something we do, but something we become. Jesus called conversion a new birth saying, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God'."¹

The rebirth of a person as a Christian is just as much a miracle as when God created man in His own image (Gen 1:27). It is like the time when God said, "Lazarus, come forth!" (John 11:43).

¹Womack, 120.

An encouraging note is shared by George and Bird: "Before you entered the mission field represented by your church, God went first. Before you arrived there, he had already sowed."¹

Church Growth in Cooperation with God

What we can do is prepare the church to receive and hold the people. In the book Natural Church Development, Christian Schwarz shows a cartoon of two men pulling and pushing a wagon. The men are having a difficult time because the wheels are square and do not roll easily. The wagon is full of round wheels. He states that well-meaning church workers can seek to grow the church, yet there is need to make changes, to put on round wheels. At the end of the book Schwarz shows another cartoon. This one is of a wagon with round wheels, two men riding, and the wind pushing a sail, moving the wagon along at a rapid rate.² This wind is the Holy Spirit empowering the church to grow and change lives.

God, we have affirmed, is sovereign. Not only does His sovereignty allow Him to decide how He wants lost men and women brought into His kingdom, but since He is also omnipotent, He obviously has the power to do it any way He decides. . . . But for reasons no theologian completely understands, He has chosen to use human beings as intermediaries.³

¹George and Bird. 36.

²Christian A. Schwarz, Natural Church Development (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1998), 6, 7. 127.

³Wagner, Strategies for Church Growth: Tools for Effective Mission and Evangelism (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1987), 19.

If attendance barriers are to be broken in Adventist churches, we must be willing to cooperate with God. We must prepare so our church is ready and able to hold greater attendance. We must be willing to transform our churches into a different type of organization. In the Scriptures it is evident that preparation must be done before God works His miracles on our behalf. God prepared a garden before He gave life to mankind (Gen 2:8). Noah prepared an ark before God could rescue the animals and all humanity willing to follow His will (Gen 6:14). The children of Israel had to prepare a sanctuary before receiving the special privilege of having God dwell directly with His people (Exod 25:8). The disciples had to go to the temple and begin preaching before anyone heard in their own language.

Measuring Success in Church Growth

How does one measure success in church growth? If a church is large, is it successful? One could argue that Peter was successful on the day of Pentecost when he preached for a few hours. "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them" (Acts 2:41). On the other hand, one could say that Noah was unsuccessful at church growth after preaching for 120 years. God called Noah to do a great work of salvation "and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly" (2 Pet 2:5). Noah is listed as one of the great pillars of faith in Heb 11:7. It seems that the measure of success is not necessarily numbers: the success is in following the will of God. There may be some small churches that are fulfilling God's

will. It has been my experience as a pastor for almost twenty years that there are many small churches that feel the Lord wants them to grow through the 200 barrier, but are frustrated in how to accomplish this. That is why this study is important and why these issues should be addressed by churches that God wishes to grow.

Synagogue System: Forerunner of Christian Worship

The Bible is full of expectancy, growth, vibrancy, and large worshipping communities. Out of an understanding of the Old Testament and salvation history came the synagogue system as an avenue to meet with God. This synagogue system was the pattern for apostolic churches, and our modern churches have our roots there. According to this history, worship was done in a large way, often large even by our standards today.

Evidence does not show us when the synagogue system started, but by the time of Christ it was fully established.¹

The New Testament indicates that the first to become Christians by the preaching of the apostles were brought to the Gospel in the synagogues. This is seen by the way in which Paul, on his missionary journeys, first went to the synagogue to preach. An example of this is recorded in Acts 17:10: "Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the

¹Donald Gowan says, "Logic suggests the time of the exile for the beginning of the synagogue, but history is not always logical and there is no evidence of its existence until many centuries later. Arguments from silence prove nothing, it is true, but it is hard to understand how an institution as important as the synagogue could have existed for three to five hundred years without being referred to explicitly even once in the literature of the period." Donald E. Gowan, Bridge Between the Testaments (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1986), 220.

Jews.” Other references about this approach of going to the synagogue first are recorded in Acts 13:15; 14:1; 17:1; 17:17; 18:4; 18:7; 18:19; 18:26; 19:8.

The above Scriptures indicate that these were gatherings dedicated to worship. The earliest undisputed synagogue buildings are from the third century C.E., long after the apostle Paul journeyed as a missionary. This may be because of the great number of people who were attending the synagogue. A whole Jewish community would necessitate a large structure to house them all. Because of the large number of people, the synagogue service was often held out in the open. This may be the reason we do not find remains of the buildings. Historian Gowan states that “later structures were often built near a river, lake, or seashore since it was a convenience to have a water supply for purification rites.”¹ Gowan goes on to say that this may be why Paul searched by the river at Philippi where, “on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made” (Acts 16:13). Gowan indicates that Paul may have been looking for the synagogue. Even if there was no building, there was a place where the Jews met as synagogue.

The number of worshipers who met together is not known for certain, but there is indication that in the Jewish communities the groups were large. Towns had the entire population in attendance. These were joined by the surrounding villages. According to James Burtchaell.

The first followers of Jesus typically belonged to a local synagogue. In a Jewish town it would have comprised the full population. Villages would be likely to resort to a nearby town-synagogue of which their village was a traditional dependency.

¹Ibid., 221.

Residents of a city with significant Jewish population would have had their pick among synagogues according to neighborhood, preference of dialect or immigrant origins.¹

Perhaps the occasions where Jesus met with large crowds are indicative of what synagogue being held outside might have been like. As Matthew reports, "And seeing the multitudes. He went up on a mountain. and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them . . ." (Matt 5:1, 2).

On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying . . . (Matt 13:1-3)

The feeding of the 4,000 and the feeding of the 5,000 were also such events. Huge crowds being taught by a Rabbi seem to have been a natural worship event for the Jewish people of Jesus' day. These may not have been unusual events, but in fact common to the people as they met in worship in an outdoor synagogue setting.

The evidence from the synagogue system agrees with what we find in the Scriptures. Nowhere is there indication that large synagogues were thought to be unhealthy. Large groups of people worshipping together weekly as a community of believers were common and acceptable. This is apparent in the scriptural record and in the evidence we have from the synagogue system. There is no reason for people today to believe that smaller churches are better and closer to the churches set up by the apostles. There were several house churches in the New Testament and in some places this was the only worship setting available, but there is no evidence that this was the preferred

¹James Tunstead Burtchaell, From Synagogue to Church (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 227.

worship setting.¹ It can be concluded that neither God's original design in Scripture nor synagogue tradition presupposes small churches to be preferred over larger ones.

Ellen White and Counsel about Larger Churches

We now have an understanding of Scripture and the synagogue system and how they do not preclude large worship services but at times even mandate these. The Old Testament feasts expected, or simply report, the existence of large worship gatherings.

There has been some discussion among Adventists indicating a belief that smaller churches are preferred and therefore should be the norm. I have had discussions with people who believe that scripturally, as the "remnant church," Adventists should not expect to have larger churches because "remnant" means small. Others point to Ellen White's writings and say that larger churches are not desirable. This dissertation examines some of these statements to see if they shed light on these beliefs. Seventh-day Adventists are particularly interested in what Ellen White has to say about the size of churches. Seventh-day Adventists believe that Ellen White was given visions and dreams to aid in the formation and continuation of the church. Therefore, we need to examine this topic of growing large churches in the light of what she writes. We will see that she supported large churches by not speaking out when plans were being made to enlarge the already sizeable Battle Creek Tabernacle. She counsels the church to take advantage of the greater resources available in larger churches and to grow the family of God.

¹Some possible examples of worship in homes are: Acts 2:46; 5:42; 10:27; 12:12; 16:32; 16:40; 20:7; 20:20; 28:30-31; Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phil 1:2. Many of the Acts texts seem to indicate a place where they met as elders, or went house to house for Bible studies, whereas the latter references speak directly of a church in a home.

Much of this discussion centers around the Battle Creek Tabernacle. This large church was built to comfortably seat 2,400 and could expand to hold 3,200.¹ In the summer of 1878 when plans were approved for the building of this church, Ellen White was in California. James White presided over the plans, and the committee called for support from the whole denomination since many of the General Conference meetings would be held there.² William White, the son of James and Ellen White, presided over the promotion and even delayed his vacation in July of 1878 to be present in Battle Creek during the fund-raising for the new tabernacle. Ellen White arrived in Battle Creek on August 23 by railroad and prepared to visit the many camp meetings planned in the East.³ The Michigan camp meeting was scheduled for October 2-14, 1878. Ellen White was present and spoke nearly every day, and sometimes twice in a day.

On Wednesday, October 9, 1878, Ellen White joined a special prayer group during which she received a vision which Author L. White calls "a vision of far reaching consequences."⁴ Here is how Ellen White described what took place:

On Wednesday of the second week of the meeting a few of us united in prayer for a sister who was afflicted with despondency. While praying I was greatly blessed. The Lord seemed very near. I was taken off in vision of God's glory and shown

¹Arthur L. White, Ellen G. White, vol. 6, The Later Elmshaven Years, 1905-1915 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982), 124.

²It was called the Dime Tabernacle because each member was urged to set aside one dime a month for funds to finance its construction. Arthur L. White, Ellen G. White, vol. 3, The Lonely Years, 1876-1891 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982), 91.

³Ibid., 93, 94.

⁴Ibid., 96.

many things. I went to the meeting, and with a solemn sense of the condition of our people I made a brief statement of the things which had been shown me. I have since written out some of these testimonies to individuals, appeals to ministers, and in various other articles given in this book.¹

From the beginning Ellen White was aware of the plans for the building of the Battle Creek Tabernacle and its large size. During the summer, James was in Battle Creek making these plans. He reported in a letter written to Ellen, dated June 24, that he had written her every day since leaving her at Healdsburg on May 31, except one so she was well aware of the details.² There is no record of Ellen White denouncing or even cautioning against the plans to build this large church. She arrived for the camp meeting held in October with no counsel about the large church they planned to build in Battle Creek. When she received a vision with multiple testimonies, which she shared at the camp meeting and later in letters to individuals, we have no record of her stating God's displeasure at the plans.

There are other examples of her involvement in large churches. In volume 6 of Arthur L. White's historical work on Ellen White, he tells of the San Francisco earthquake of 1906.

But the large church on Laguna Street, with its accompanying clinic, which James and Ellen White helped to build in the 1870s, was saved. Being a frame building, it suffered only minor earthquake damage, and in God's providence the ravaging fire was held in check two blocks from the church.³

¹Ellen White, Testimonies to the Church, 4:302, quoted in Arthur L. White, The Lonely Years, 1876-1891, 3:96.

²A. L. White, The Lonely Years, 3:90.

³A. L. White, The Later Elmshaven Years, 1905-1915, 6:85.

The Whites were involved in the building of large churches and God was in the business of preserving them.

Much later, 1905 to 1906 when A.T. Jones, John H. Kellogg, and others were scheming to acquire legal control of property including the Battle Creek Tabernacle, Ellen White pleaded that everything possible be done to save the tabernacle.

I wish to sound a note of warning to our people nigh and afar off. An effort is being made by those at the head of the medical work in Battle Creek to get control of property over which, in the sight of heavenly courts, they have no rightful control. . . I have seen that the leaders in the medical work in Battle Creek will try to secure possession of the Tabernacle. Their scheming is so subtle that I greatly fear that this may be accomplished.¹

The large church in Battle Creek was to be protected. There is no counsel that it was better to let it go or that large churches were not desirable.

Ellen White shares her understanding that Paul started large churches. Paul came to the elders and shared his work with the Gentiles and “described the work at Ephesus, which had resulted in raising up that large church in the very stronghold of heathenism, none could listen without interest.”² “Paul’s efforts in Corinth were not without fruit. Many turned from the worship of idols to serve the living God, and a large church was enrolled under the banner of Christ.”³ While the term “large” can be a relative term, we

¹Ellen G. White, MS 79, 1905, quoted in *ibid.*, 6:125.

²Ellen White, Sketches from the Life of Paul (Battle Creek: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1883), 210.

³Ellen White, The Acts of the Apostles (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), 252.

have already seen that the New Testament speaks of some worship services where the whole community came out. This is likely a church well over 200.

The evidence of Ellen White's attitudes towards larger churches goes beyond tolerance, to a defense of them. In an article printed in the Review and Herald, Ellen White asked people not to dwell on the imperfections of large churches, but to look at them impartially. They could even be a benefit to the community around the church as the congregation worked to share the Gospel. Notice the great spiritual blessings coming to the members of the large church in the following quote:

It is not an uncommon thing to see imperfection in those who carry on God's work. Go into any place where there is a large church, where there are important interests at stake, as there are at Battle Creek, and there we may behold the deep plottings of Satan; but this should not lead us to dwell upon the imperfections of those who yield to his temptations. Would it not be more pleasing to God to take an impartial outlook, and see how many souls are serving God, and glorifying and honoring him with their talents of means and intellect?¹

She also argues that large churches can be useful in spreading the Gospel:

I think of the large church at Battle Creek, and of the important interests centered there, which makes it a missionary field in the highest sense. People are coming from all parts of the world to the Sanitarium, and many youth from the different States are attending the College. That field requires the very best methods of labor, that the strongest religious influence may be constantly exerted upon all. God would have men cultivate their abilities, that they may have broader ideas in planning and executing his work. When this is done, the saving power of the grace of Christ will be manifested by those who believe present truth.²

Ellen White even speaks of a special work they could do for youth in larger churches that might be more difficult in smaller congregations. "In our large churches

¹Ellen G. White, "Contemplate Christ's Perfection. Not Man's Imperfection (Concluded)," Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald, August 15, 1893, 6.

²Ellen G. White, Paulson Collection of Ellen G. White Letters, 401.

very much might be done for the youth. Shall they have less special labor; shall fewer inducements be held out to them to become full-grown?"¹

There is some evidence that Ellen White counsels against moving to a large church. However, the concern is only half understood if one believes that the caution is because the large church is not a suitable church community for a Christian. The main concern seems to have been not to leave areas where there are small churches without the light a dedicated Christian could bring, leaving places in spiritual darkness.

The plan of colonizing, or moving from different localities where there is but little strength or influence, and concentrating the influence of many in one locality, is removing the light from places where God would have it shine.²

Ellen White called for a plan of action to bring members of large church communities into active service. There is no call to break up these churches. Instead, the call is to have every member a minister working to bring the Gospel to those around the church. "How many in our large churches come and go like a door upon its hinges, feeling no responsibility for the progress of the work, no interest in the salvation of souls for whom Christ died."³

In our large churches in Battle Creek, Oakland, Melbourne, Adelaide, and in other places throughout the world, there should be some plan set in operation whereby the

¹Ellen White, Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1943), 41.

²Ellen White, Testimonies to the Church (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982), 2:633.

³Ellen G. White, "Awake Out of Sleep," Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald, February 21, 1893, 5.

talents of all may be put to use; and as they learn how to bless others by imparting light, they will be learning what practical Christianity means.¹

The counsel of Ellen White calls for the larger churches to be a center of strength and a place where everyone is a minister for God. A large church is to be a place where youth and guests to the Sanatorium can find the Gospel. They were to be strongholds.

Larger churches, Ellen White continues, are to be helpful to smaller churches, to function as centers where missionaries are trained and sent out to places without churches. “How easily might the large church in Battle Creek appropriate some of its means for the aid of the poorer churches, which are nearly crushed under a load of debt!”

In summary, Ellen White does not speak against the existence of large churches. She calls for reform and more effective organization. All members are to be active in reaching out to people around the church. She does ask for reform in youth programs or for special ministry to guests at our institutions. Large churches are called upon to assist smaller churches. They are to train and send out missionaries to dark areas of the world. Size is not the issue. The Gospel to the world and the ministry of all believers are what is important. Ellen White would wish for larger Adventist churches to strive to become more effective centers, doing what has been detailed from her writings.

Adventist Church Growth in North America

Now we will take a closer look at Adventist church growth in detail and in North America in particular. We will examine the growth rates for the twentieth century and

¹Ellen G. White, “Every Christian’s Work,” Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald, February 28, 1893, 3.

the past ten years. This will help us to understand in detail the desperate need of the Adventist church to comprehend how to move through the 200 barrier and have larger congregations to resume healthy growth rates in North America.

Historically, the Adventist church has grown rapidly. Membership in 1863, the year of organization as a church, is estimated at 3,500.¹ From its beginnings in the United States, to its expansion into a worldwide movement, it has become a body of more than 10 million members. One hundred percent of membership was in North America at first, now it is just under 10 percent of the total membership.

Figure 1 shows decadal growth rates that vary from 12² percent to 57 percent.³ The 1990's have shown a DGR of 22 percent through 1998. These DGRs can be rated by the following scale created by Wagner:

- 25 percent DGR — marginal growth
- 50 percent DGR — fair growth
- 100 percent DGR — good growth
- 200 percent DGR — excellent growth
- 300 percent DGR — outstanding growth
- 500 percent DGR — incredible growth.⁴

¹Russell Burrill. Class outline for NADEI 615 Evangelism and Church Growth. Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 1993, 7.

²This is based on figures for 1903 to 1910. Years 1900-1902 were total world figures only. Between the year end figures of 1909 and 1910 we actually had a net loss of 1,024 members.

³Sahlin. Sharing Our Faith with Friends without Losing Either. 16. The information for the 1990s was added to Sahlin's information.

⁴C. Peter Wagner. Strategies for Church Growth: Tools for Effective Mission and Evangelism (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1987), 162.

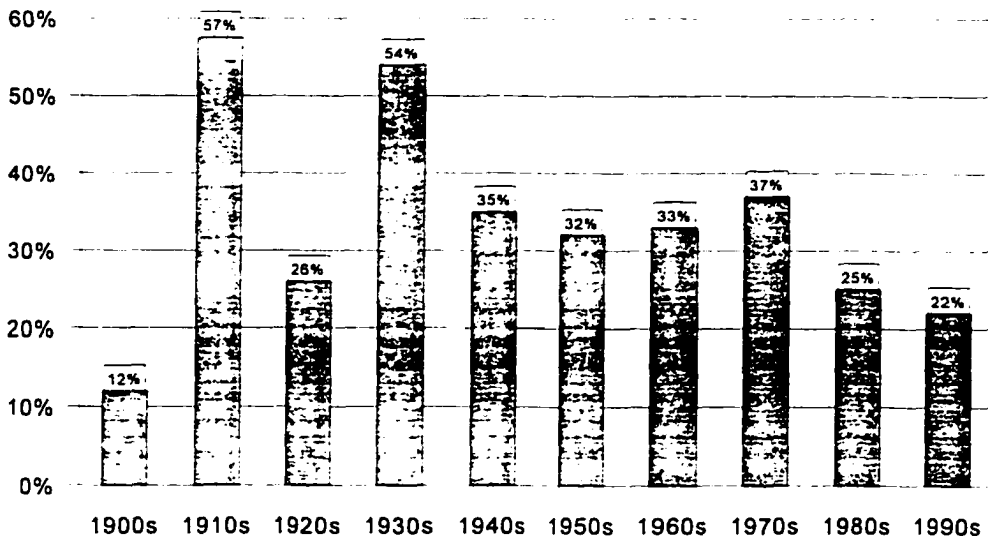


Figure 1. Decadal church growth rates NAD 1900 - 1999. Sahlin. *Sharing Our Faith with Friends without Losing Either*, 16. The information for the 1990s was added to Sahlin's and is based on preliminary figures for 1998.

Annual growth rates for the North American Division show that the church membership has grown slowly over the last ten years. Figure 2 shows the NAD membership growth over the last ten years.

The year 1998 has the lowest growth in the last decade with a rate of only 1.75 percent,¹ the lowest in almost one hundred years. The years 1900 to 1910 were very chaotic for the Seventh-day Adventist church. "In proportion to the size of the church, Adventism in the first decade of the twentieth century probably had more disaffected elements than it has had at any time in its history."² In this work on A.T. Jones, George Knight goes on to detail Jones's attempt to completely disrupt the governance of the church. He also mentions the crises with Dr. Kellogg, and the misleading work of A.F.

¹136th Annual Statistical Report--1998.

²George R. Knight, *From 1888 to Apostasy* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1987), 240.

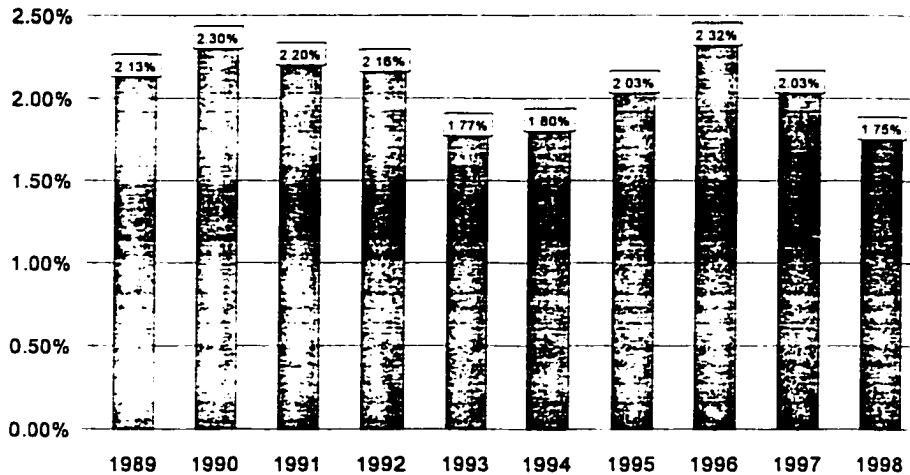


Figure 2. Yearly church growth rates NAD 1989-1998. The figures were obtained by phone from the office of Archives and Statistics of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Ballenger. This is a time the denomination fought to keep the Battle Creek Tabernacle, lost the Battle Creek Sanatorium, the Review and Herald Publishing house burned. The General Conference moved to Washington, D.C., and E.A. Southerland began his radical changes to Battle Creek College, eventually moving it to Berrien Springs, Michigan. Many people left the church, at times whole congregations.¹

We must keep in mind that Figures 1 and 2 are growth rates based on membership figures. The General Conference does not keep a record of attendance. In searching for churches for this study, it was discovered that about half of the conferences in the United States do not keep attendance records. Attendance and membership are not completely comparable. Membership is made up of only baptized members on church record books. Attendance is counted by all present at a worship service. This includes

¹R. W. Schwarz, Light Bearers to the Remnant (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1979), 282-313. Chapters 18 and 19 outline this time well.

adults, youth, children, infants, and any guests who may be present on a given Sabbath. As a lifelong Adventist and a pastor for almost twenty years, I suspect that while membership has grown slowly, attendance has dropped much more rapidly. Adventist churches are not the only churches in North America in this situation. Russell Burrill shows how pervasive a problem this is in the United States:

Between 80-85% of all churches in America are either plateaued or declining. In 1900 there were 27 churches for every 10,000 Americans. In 1985 there were only 12 churches for every 10,000 Americans. . . . There are approximately 340,000 churches in America based on the best estimate and research. We could double the number of churches without overchurching America.¹

Figure 3 shows the year end total number of churches in the North American Division. Even with the room for more churches Russell Burrill indicates above the Adventist church is not growing the total number of churches at a fast rate.

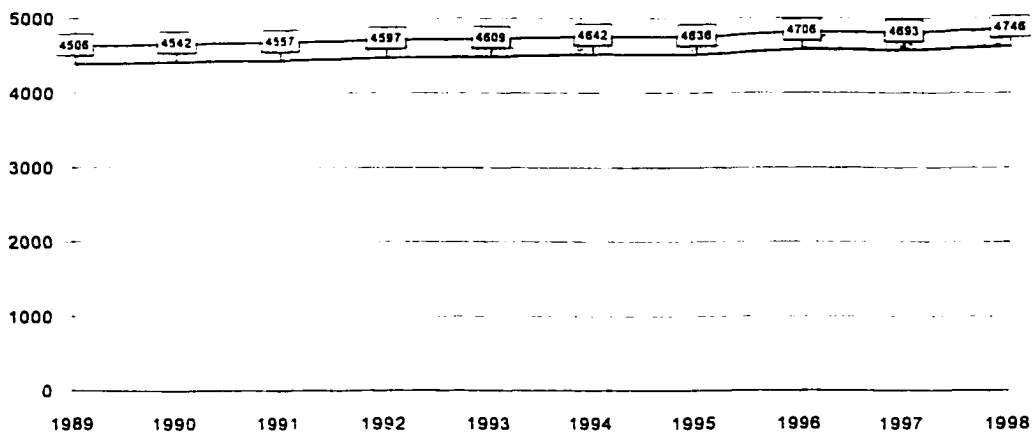


Figure 3. Year-End Number of Churches in the NAD 1989 - 1998. This information was obtained by phone from the office of Archives and Statistics of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist.

¹Russell Burrill, Class outline for NADEI 615 Evangelism and Church Growth, 5.

A look at the number of churches in the North American division is helpful in understanding the growth of the church in the United States. Figure 4 shows the total number of churches at the end of each year for the last ten years. The number of churches is not growing at a significant rate. Moving churches through the 200 barrier will allow the church to grow in spite of the total number remaining plateaued.

CHAPTER 3

CURRENT LITERATURE ON BREAKING BARRIERS

IN ATTENDANCE

Now that we have a better understanding of how the Adventist church has grown over the past century and decade, we turn our attention to more general literature on growing churches. While there are relatively few books specifically on barriers to growth in Christian churches, there is a multitude that will give insights into what makes churches grow in attendance. This section of the dissertation will begin with some general overview of church growth related to growing in attendance. This will be followed by looking at the nine issues specifically related to attendance growth discovered through the research.

Church Growth Issues

Christian Schwarz shares in his book, Natural Church Development, a wonderful illustration of how barriers work in a church. He envisions a barrel with staves that represent quality characteristics necessary for a church to hold more attendance. As the Lord pours more people into the “barrel” the attendance is held up by the staves. Some are longer and some are shorter, depending on the quality of a particular characteristic. He

maintains that a church can hold attendance only at the level of the lowest stave or quality characteristic.¹

My research of church growth literature confirmed this approach. Several elements repeatedly surfaced as hindrances to growth in attendance. These elements I have divided into nine issues that will be discussed respectively later in this paper. These are the issues I tested for in the surveys sent out to the churches.² I expected to see churches above the 200 barrier strong in a majority of these nine issues, while churches remaining just below the barrier with several of the nine issues weak or non-existent. In order to give the reader an overview of what these issues are, I have listed them here.

1. Facility/Structure
2. Location/Demographics
3. Vision/Goals
4. Organization/Roles/Staffing
5. Ministry Training
6. Small Groups
7. Prayer
8. Worship
9. Evangelism.

¹Schwarz, 53.

²The findings of the survey will be shared beginning in chapter 4, "Analysis of Adventist Church Growth Factors in the United States."

Church Size and Church Growth

Another consideration is the definition of a small, medium, or large church. In Church Growth Strategies That Work, Donald McGavran uses attendance as the measure. The smallest churches in America have forty-five or fewer in attendance. Mid-size churches have an attendance of forty-five to 120. The largest churches have an attendance of more than 120 at an average worship service. He warns that a church which perceives itself as small when, in fact, it is large, may hamper its own ability to grow by strongly influencing their self-esteem, dreaming, and planning. McGavran continues and confirms that larger churches are a different organization.

The *social structure* of your congregation is a more important factor than mere numbers, although the two factors are related. We are suggesting that a church that is essentially a *single cell*, in which virtually all the members regularly interact with almost all the others, is rightly designated a "small" church. *Multicell* churches, where a given member interacts with some members all the time, but with others only occasionally or rarely, are not by this definition small churches.¹

Peter Wagner, in his book Your Church Can Grow, argues that larger churches are better equipped to serve. When speaking of the large church he attends, Wagner often meets with the exclamation, "Oh. That's too big!" His reply is, "Too big for what?" He points out how his church is not too big to provide a first-rate pulpit ministry, with professionally-designed worship experiences bringing people to God. It is not too big to have first-rate youth programs, professional pastoral counseling, opportunities for close

¹Donald A. McGavran and George G. Hunter III, Church Growth Strategies That Work (Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1980), 82, 83.

friendship, and casual acquaintances. It is not too big for community involvement and opportunities in Christian service, and missionary programs.¹

Church Age and Church Growth

Lyle Schaller argues that the age of a church is another consideration when measuring the probability that it will grow. He shares that churches grow best before reaching their fifteenth birthday and most small congregations have been in existence for over thirty years.² I would argue that this is a fact because we have not known how to grow smaller churches into larger ones. I believe that the necessary changes to transform a church, properly understood, would allow a large number of small churches to move through the 200 barrier. We will show later how the Northwest Houston Seventh-day Adventist church moved through the 200 barrier. This church was beyond this 15 year mark when we began.

One last caution concerns the uniqueness of each church.

Every church is faced with an absolutely unique set of circumstances to which it is called to minister. You cannot simply locate a growing church, identify the characteristics of that ministry and implement a carbon copy with the expectation of success. In America today, every church that wishes to impact lives has to be sensitive enough to those lives to mold a new, customized ministry dedicated to meeting the unduplicated needs of that target audience.³

¹C. Peter Wagner, Your Church Can Grow (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1981), 87.

²Schaller, Growing Plans, 19.

³George Barna, User Friendly Churches (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1991), 20.

Still, there are things we can learn and apply to our situation. The biblical injunction is to grow. Removing barriers cooperates with God as He fulfills His will on the earth. Let us now look at different aspects of removing barriers to growth in attendance as revealed in current writings on the subject.

Facility Issues

One of the clearest obstacles reported in the literature to increasing attendance in a church is the need to have facilities to accommodate the worshipers. If a church wishes to have 400 people worshipping together on a Sabbath, but only has seating for one hundred, it is difficult for growth to take place. This is especially true for new people who want to fit in quietly and remain anonymous. When people think of a facility that is filled to capacity, it must be remembered that growth is restricted before this occurs. “When 87 of every 100 seats are filled on an average Sunday morning, [we would say Sabbath Morning], worship attendance will begin to plateau.”¹

This is also applicable to the Sabbath School rooms where the children meet. Parents look for adequate facilities for their children as they worship. If the Sabbath School rooms are too small, parents are likely to take their children elsewhere. If this happens, attendance at worship services is hampered and makes it more difficult for a church to move beyond the 200 barrier.

Beyond the issue of sanctuary seating, there is also need to have ample parking. “Your most critical capacity delimiter stems from your parking availability, not your

¹Win Arn, The Church Growth Ratio Book (Monrovia, CA: Church Growth, 1990), 20.

seating capacity.”¹ Ample seating and classroom space may leave some wondering why attendance is not growing and the 200 barrier still has them in its grasp. They need to look no further than the parking lot to find a major structural issue hampering growth.

This need has grown as we have progressed in modern society. When autos were first being used as the way to get to church, only one parking space per family was needed. Today, the mother often comes at one time, the father in another car, and the teens in their own vehicle. This creates a need for parking spaces to accommodate as many as two to three autos per family. Depending on the affluence of the families of the church, this will vary.² To determine whether you have enough parking spaces, “divide your average attendance by two-and-one-half people per car. If you draw a lot of single adults, divide by one-and-a half people per car.”³ When people feel crowded they will tend to go elsewhere or nowhere at all.

Unchurched people view churches in the same way legendary baseball player Yogi Berra described an overcrowded restaurant. “Don’t go there to eat; nobody goes there, because you can never find a seat.” In other words, “They’re so successful that it’s not worth going!” It takes only two seasons to teach an entire community that you do not have room for prospective new members. Even a 5 percent turn-away

¹George and Bird, 137.

²Recently, the Northwest Houston Adventist Church began a building program. The architect had members survey the number of cars in the parking lot and count the number of people in the building every 15 minutes on several Sabbath mornings. This was then extrapolated to the desired number of worshipers each week to determine how many parking spaces were needed. For five hundred worshipers in two services, 218 parking spaces are needed.

³George and Bird, 138.

factor communicates that you are too full. Then the gripe factor comes into play. A satisfied customer tells three people, and a dissatisfied customer tells seven.¹

Demographic Issues

People Differences

The literature points out that certain demographic factors make it more difficult for a church to increase its attendance. Though cross-cultural evangelism goes on all the time, if the church matches its community well, it has a better chance of sharing the Gospel. This is the “homogeneous unit principle.” McGavran states it this way: “The fact is that men and women, high and low, advanced and primitive, usually turn to Christian faith in numbers only when some way is found for them to become Christian without leaving their kith and kin.” He adds that “men like to become Christians without crossing ethical, linguistic, or class barriers.”² “The Gospel is not heard until it comes to people within their own context.” “God meets people where they are. The sacred Word was conditioned by the cultural frailty of human beings.”³

The homogeneous unit principle is supported by Peter Wagner in his book Your Church Can Be Healthy. In it he states: “Research into the way that churches grow has shown reasonably conclusively that evangelistic efforts based on the notion that all kinds of people should be encouraged to join the same local congregation are generally

¹Ibid., 141.

²McGavran, 215, 223.

³Jon Paulien, Present Truth in the Real World (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1993), 18, 25.

ineffective.”¹ This statement from 1979 might need to be questioned in light of the congregations now growing in the “melting pots” of large metropolitan areas. The Northwest Houston Adventist Church is very multi-cultural. In some locations this might be a problem to growth, but the Northwest Houston Adventist Church matches the community and attendance is growing steadily.

There are some places of the world that have, as McGavran states, a lower “people consciousness.” These are typically the “melting pots” of the world in large metropolitan cities.

In ‘melting pots’ or highly individualistic societies, no one cares who marries whom, and therefore these societies are universally those of low people consciousness. . . . Yet even there, marriages out of ‘our kind of people’ encounter considerable difficulty. . . . People consciousness counts everywhere—even in melting pots.²

C. Peter Wagner, in the apologetic work Our Kind of People, defends the homogeneous unit principle by relating that Scripture supports maintaining diversity. One of the interesting references he uses is the Babel story.

Unfortunately, for the understanding of human pluralism, the incident of the Tower of Babel has often been misunderstood and given a negative interpretation. . . . Another reasonable interpretation of the Babel incident sees the people of the earth making an attempt to counteract what they understood to be God’s purpose in diversifying the human race.³

¹C. Peter Wagner, Your Church Can Be Healthy (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 55.

²McGavran, 214, 215.

³C. Peter Wagner, Our Kind of People (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1979), 110.

George Barna calls for a difference in Christian churches. "Until Sunday morning ceases to be the most racially segregated time of the week, the Church will never be a major agent of influence in racial matters."¹

In large metropolitan areas such as Houston, experience shows that there is less identification with a certain cultural or social group. The general mixing that goes on allows for more open mindedness of the people to worshipping and accepting the Gospel in a multi-cultural context. Every where they go, whether it is to the grocery store or a public event, there is a general mix of cultures. This may allow a large city church to share the gospel with a wider range of people from diverse backgrounds. It also challenges a church family to create worship a worship style and ministry style that will bridge a spectrum of people.

The Secularizing of Society

Christians find themselves increasingly in a secular society that does not take the Bible seriously. Adventists say, "The Bible says, 'Saturday is the Sabbath not Sunday'." But the secular person is not convinced that any day, or even the Bible, is legitimate.² In the mid 1960's, 80 percent of Americans believed that the Bible was to be understood literally. By 1994 this had fallen to only 30 percent.³

¹George Barna, The Second Coming of the Church (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), 53.

²Paulien, 35.

³John Fowler, Evangelism Two Thousand (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1994), 11.

George Hunter asks a provoking question: “How was the West lost? And how can the West be engaged by the Gospel again? These questions are important because the West is once again a vast mission field.” He then shares that there are 120 million in the United States who are undisciplined and in need of the Gospel.¹

“The United States has become the largest mission field in the western hemisphere.”² Until Adventists learn how to address the cross-cultural differences, demographic issues will continue to restrict growth in attendance and tend to hold a church below the 200 barrier.

Carl F. Henry, In his book entitled The Twilight of a Great Civilization, contends that today we live in a non-Christian age similar to that of Paul, which he describes as Neo-paganism. According to Henry, this Neo-paganism holds that there is: (1) no fixed truth; (2) reality cannot be known; (3) the concept of personal God is illusion; (4) there is no ultimate meaning or purpose; and (5) there is no final good.³

George Barna goes beyond this to say that American culture is a moving target. He shares how the major elements that make up the fabric of our civilization change dramatically every three to five years. Barna states: “At the risk of sounding like an alarmist, I believe the Church in America has no more than five years—perhaps even less—to turn itself around and begin to affect the culture, rather than be effected by it.”⁴

¹George G. Hunter III, How to Reach Secular People (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 25.

²Ibid., 135.

³John Fowler, Evangelism Two Thousand, 29, 30.

⁴Barna, The Second Coming of the Church, 2, 8.

If Adventists do not keep pace with the understanding of these changes, they will surely affect our attendance and attempts to increase the number in worship.

Age Factors in Church Growth

One way the Homogeneous Unit Principle may be applicable is in relationship to generational differences. Gary McIntosh, in his book Make Room for the Boom or Bust, uses a chart to detail the different attitudes towards religion between the generations.¹ He then proposes six different models for becoming “seeker sensitive” to baby boomers and busters. “Boomers and Busters are ‘white for harvest,’ yet most of them, at least two-thirds, cannot be reached in the same way that the older Builder generation was reached.”² Adventists must understand how each generation is reached by the Gospel in different ways. By serving the Gospel in a manner acceptable and understandable to the different generations, a church increases its ability to grow in attendance and move through the barrier. Yet this does not necessarily call for another congregation, but planning to be inclusive of the different groups.

Age Differential and Church Growth

Another factor that impacts church growth is if a church’s median age is different from the community. A growing church will be less than three years, on average, from the median age in a community. A plateaued church will have over 7.7 years average

¹Gary L. McIntosh, Make Room for the Boom or Bust (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1997), 18-21.

²Ibid., 49.

difference. A church with an 11.9 average year difference from the community is most likely in decline. Socioeconomic differences can also hamper church growth. A growing church is likely to be one-half step above the socioeconomic level of the community. A plateaued church will likely be one-half step below the community level. A declining church is plus or minus two steps, or more, either direction from the social economic level of the community it is in.¹ These statistics can tell a church what part of the demographic strata they may have the greatest results in and where their additional attendance is most likely to come from as they look to break the barrier. Considering age and class tells a church where to concentrate its efforts.

For a church wishing to increase its attendance, it is important to understand that community demographics change, sometimes rapidly. Recognizing change is sometimes difficult, as Barna points out, “When we live in the midst of change, it is often difficult to recognize that change even though it has a very real impact on you.”² The impact of a growing community is felt as a church ministers to a demographic setting that existed ten years ago, but is no longer the same. The language spoken to the bygone community may not be understood at all by the current society.

Ministry Radius and Church Growth

Part of discerning the demographics in order to minister is knowing the church’s ministry territory. McIntosh and Martin offer some practical advice:

¹Russell Burrill, Class outline NADEI 615 Evangelism and Church Growth, 11.

²George Barna, Turn-around Churches (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1993), 33.

First, establish a ministry area. A desire to “save” the word is a wonderful ideal, yet in all practicality improbable. Research has determined that the following is an accurate picture of the typical driving times for most church members.

- 20 percent drive 0-5 minutes
- 40 percent drive 5-15 minutes
- 23 percent drive 15-25 minutes
- 6 percent drive 25-35 minutes
- 5 percent drive 35-45 minutes
- 3 percent drive 45+ minutes.¹

Lyle Schaller, when asked what might be his greatest failure, answered that he had failed to persuade church leaders “that the automobile is here to stay.”² People at Northwest Houston Adventist church are from all over Houston, often driving an hour and passing by one or two other Adventist churches to arrive for worship. Some drive by the NW Houston church to attend in another part of the city. Mobility of modern transportation makes it easy for people to shop for the church where they feel comfortable.

All these things make a complicated, changing, and dynamic cultural setting for sharing the Gospel. Understanding and adapting to changes in demographics is vital to the continued life and vitality of a church. It is even more important to a church that wishes to grow in attendance and move through the 200 barrier.

¹McIntosh and Martin, 106, 107.

²Lyle Schaller, The New Revolution (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 11.

Issues about Vision and Goals

Aubrey Malphurs defines vision as “a clear and challenging picture of the future of ministry as its leadership believes it can and must be.”¹ George Barna suggests the following definition: “Vision for ministry is a clear mental image of a preferable future imparted by God to His chosen servants and is based upon an accurate understanding of God, self and circumstances.”² Robert Dale says: “Vision is the power you have to see, imagine, and perceive things not yet visible and events not yet attempted.”³

Hendricks shares this definition:

A vision is a mental picture of a desired future state, the ultimate goal. It is what you want to achieve, a definition of your purpose. It is the heart of leadership, which earns respect, and that in turn produces trust. Vision also energizes character, mobilizes it, gives it direction and focus, and makes it productive. Without vision, character sits idle, like a piece of workmanship that is admired but not used.⁴

Vision to me is leadership seeking to lead a congregation to discover what God wants for the future of a church family. It may mean we must abandon preconceived ideas of what that future might be like. This vision is then clearly stated in writing and becomes a working document, or guide to develop the future. Vision must be discovered carefully and prayerfully.

¹Aubrey Malphurs, Developing a Vision for Ministry in the 21st Century (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1992), 31.

²George Barna, The Power of Vision (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1992), 28.

³Robert Dale, Pastoral Leadership (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 95.

⁴Howard G. Hendricks, Color Outside the Lines (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), 205.

According to Malphurs, "a vision provides a ministry with direction. It answers the question, Where is this ministry going? It brings the future into focus for both the leader and those who are a part of the ministry organization."¹

Establishing vision for the congregation is important because as Dale Galloway suggest, "People never grow beyond their vision. No church will ever be any larger than its vision. Tell me your vision and I will tell you your future."² A church wishing to increase its attendance and move through the 200 barrier must have this as part of the shared vision of the congregation. A church that does not see the need to grow, that does not feel the Divine urgency of growing its attendance, and wishes not to grow, will certainly achieve its desired results. It will become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Carl George reiterates the importance of vision stating that, "Ultimately whether or not a church demonstrates the care and love of Christ boils down to its vision and structure."³ A great deal of church growth literature deals with the necessity of a congregation to have clear vision and goals. Many books give clear and concise ways of leading a church through the process of discovering what these might be, as well as making direct connections to goals and potential church growth.⁴

¹Malphurs, 21.

²Dale E. Galloway, 20/20 Vision (Portland, OR: Scott Publishing Company, 1986), 13.

³Carl F. George, Prepare Your Church for the Future (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1992), 19.

⁴Another great book on vision by George Barna is Turning Vision into Action (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1996). This book has a nice section of biblical examples of vision beginning on page 50.

Bill Sullivan has this advice for pastors: “The most important step in breaking the 200 barrier is to believe that God wants to build a great church through you.”¹ A pastor must have ownership of a God-given vision for breaking the barrier. This must then be communicated to the church at large so that they will understand and take ownership. George and Bird emphasize the importance of connecting vision and goals effectively.

The leader may generate new views of the future and may be a genius at synthesizing and articulating these new views of the future, but this makes a difference only when the vision has been successfully communicated throughout the organization and effectively institutionalized as a guiding principle.²

It is not enough to just have goals.

Rick Warren asks the question, What drives your church? Tradition? Personality? Finances? Programs? Buildings? Events? Seekers? He believes that the biblical paradigm is to be a purpose-driven church.³ “Plans, programs, and personalities don’t last. But God’s purposes *will* last.”⁴ He outlines the five purposes God has led his church to discover. They are: evangelism, worship, fellowship, education, and ministry.⁵ He shows that a church which is focused on just one or two of these purposes will be

¹Sullivan, 34.

²George and Bird, 43.

³Rick Warren, The Purpose Driven Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 75-83.

⁴Ibid., 81.

⁵Ibid., 125.

unbalanced. Warren makes a convincing argument for becoming a multi-faceted, purpose-driven church.

This idea of being balanced is useful when looking at the different issues in increasing attendance. Being good at one element is not enough to generally bring about an increase in attendance. It is being good at many, if not all, and being balanced in our approach to the world around us that will make a favorable setting where God can bless and do things in a big way.

One question still needs to be asked. Whose vision and goals are they? The vision and goals should not be the pastor's or some other church leader's. The dream, vision, and goals must be God's dream, vision, and goals for a local congregation. The vision must originate with God. Merton Strommen emphasizes this in his study in, The Innovative Church.

Mission does not originate with a congregation. It has its origin in the heart of God. It is God's concern and love for a lost humanity that caused God to send his Son, Jesus Christ, in order that all who believe in him may have everlasting life. . . . The congregation's task, then, is to be clear about God's mission and to discern what God is doing in the community and wants to do through it.¹

Even with this said, it is leadership's obligation to lead the church to the discovery of what God's vision for the church is and to develop ownership throughout a church community. Without vision it will be nearly impossible to increase attendance through the 200 barrier.

¹Merton P. Strommen, The Innovative Church (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 13-14.

Organizational Issues

As a church grows, it must transition its governing and organizational structure. Attendance cannot be maintained and enlarged without changes. The 200 barrier will be elusive to the church that wishes to organize itself in the manner of most small churches. This is just as necessary as in a large corporation. It cannot become successful as a sole proprietorship. Womack underscores the importance of redesigning church organization as attendance grows.

There is a dynamic relationship between the size of the congregation and the development of the ministry and administration of a church. Each increase in congregational size demands a corresponding shift in the operational base. Conversely, a premeditated development in the level of administration will often produce subsequent numerical increase. . . . Many churches have failed to grow because they have not understood the simple rule. Organizational expansion always precedes numerical increase. A church may try to grow past its administrative limitations, but it will always drop back to the level of efficiency of the pastor, staff, and lay leaders.¹

A church board governs the church through elected leaders. For this board to assist a church to grow, there needs to be a continual infusion of new ideas. If the same people govern a church, year in and year out, it will be stifled in growth. As new board members are appointed, new ideas are brought with them and ministries are born where people can exercise their spiritual gifts. These new ideas and new leaders will expand the ministry of the church and will tend to result in greater attendance.

In the Adventist church, leaders are normally chosen by a nominating committee. The committee usually begins with a list of church ministries and offices that need to be

¹Womack, 79, 80.

filled. It would be far better if the church nominating committee were to begin with the members' need to be in ministry rather than the needs of the institution. Russell Burrill, in his book Revolution in the Church, states this philosophy clearly by suggesting we begin with the people.

As a first step in restructuring for lay ministry, begin at least to negotiate how nominating committees function. Usually the process begins with a list of jobs which the committee tries to fill. In the lay-ministry approach to the nominating committee, the process begins instead with the membership list. It considers each person—his or her gifts and desires (which have been submitted to the committee)—as well as the needs of the church. The nominating committee then proceeds through the membership list, placing people into positions that harmonize with their personal needs and spiritual gifts.¹

People need to come before institutional needs. When people feel their importance to the work of God in their church and community, they will make a difference in the lives of many around them. The result will be a dynamic body of the church interested in saving souls for the kingdom instead of simply “playing church” and maintaining the status quo. This should assist in growing the attendance at worship.

Staffing is another important issue in church growth. On average, the recommended rule of thumb is one full-time equivalent staff member for each one hundred to 150 people in attendance at worship services.² These workers do not need to be trained seminary theologians, however. Trained lay leaders can be a part of this ratio.

Dale Galloway shares how he hires his staff almost exclusively from people already successful in ministry within his congregation.

¹Burrill, Revolution in the Church, 91, 92.

²George and Bird, 158.

If you are a senior pastor and you want to build a strong staff that understands your vision and will minister according to your style, then build your staff out of the people who are already being successful in doing the work of ministry in your church.¹

Russell Burrill believes that a major problem with growth in Adventist churches is the “pastors hovering over the churches.” He shares in a quote of A.G. Daniels, then General Conference President, how as late as 1912, we still did not have settled ministers in our churches.² As noted in Figure 1 in the section on Adventist Church Growth in the United States, the lowest decadal growth rate in this century and in our church’s history was the decade prior to Daniel’s 1912 statement.

Lyle Schaller is quoted as saying that small churches can do without a pastor because the members give much of the pastoral care as a small family. All they need is a preacher. He goes on to say a large church is a different type of organization. It cannot get along without a pastor.³

To go beyond the 250 to 300 stage requires a different kind of organization for this is the upper limit of what one pastor can do with a group of willing laymen and an efficient office. To break out of this stage and grow on up to the next level at 400, 600, or 800, the church must add to its ministerial staff.⁴

The role of the pastor is also crucial for church growth. Carl F. George and Warren Bird spell this out in their book How to Break Growth Barriers. In it they use the

¹Galloway, 106.

²Burrill, *Revolution in the Church*, 41.

³McGavran and Hunter, 85.

⁴Womack, 87.

terminology “shepherders” vs. “ranchers.”¹ Basically, the “shepherd” is a pastor who functions as the primary care giver. This pastor does most of ministry personally, and seldom delegates. The “shepherd” sees the church as individuals rather than a community. On the other hand the “rancher” is a pastor who trains and empowers church members to care for others. Seeing the church as a community, the “rancher” seeks to enable people to function well, even when the pastor is away. A “shepherd” can only give care to a limited number of people, this number is below the 200 barrier. George and Bird continue.

Our lack of greater impact stems, in part, from a widespread mistaken notion that I have tried to challenge in chapter after chapter of this book: that Western Christianity, from long-term church member to lifetime denominational executive, assumes that one person, because of an educational degree or an ordination certificate, is therefore rendered capable of meeting the spiritual and emotional needs of one hundred or more people. This shepherd or congregation-sized paradigm is a primary mechanism by which the Western church prevents itself from being a fully effective agent of God’s redemption for our time.²

One person, regardless of training, can only make meaningful connection with a limited number of people.

In a study reported by Doug Kilcher, it was determined who prepared baptismal candidates and what effect this had on growth. It was revealed that laity are very important in sharing the Gospel. The division of the Adventists world church that won the highest percentage of souls had the highest percentage of laity involved. That division had 35.61 percent of the baptismal candidates prepared by pastors and 52.68

¹George and Bird, 88-97.

²Ibid., 184.

prepared by laity. The division that had the least number of baptisms had 70 percent prepared by pastors, while laity prepared only 22 percent.¹ How important is the pastor to church growth and how important is the paradigm he chooses to operate in the church? George and Bird state that, "After almost two decades of careful investigation of the North American Church, it is my growing conviction that the way pastors manage themselves as church leaders is the single most important cause of failure of the churches."² Russell Burrill suggest a model where the primary function of the church is to train people to be ministers for Christ. "Thus as someone has said: 'the church is a mini-seminary, of which the pastor is the dean.'"³

The length of time a pastor is in a church and community also makes a difference in church attendance growth. Wagner argues that, "It is a fact that churches which keep pastors longer are more likely to grow."⁴ In Christian churches, according to George Barna, "the average pastoral tenure at a church has dropped to four years, the average is not good enough."⁵ In the Adventist church, the average stay of the pastor in a church or district is three and one half years in spite of the fact that as Barna shows, "that senior pastors typically experience their major impact during the fifth through fourteenth years

¹Douglas R. Kilcher, Class outline for CHMN606 Techniques in Church Planting, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 1996.

²George and Bird, 106.

³Burrill, Revolution in the Church, 35.

⁴Wagner, Your Church Can Grow, 87.

⁵Barna, Turn-around Churches, 57.

of tenure.”¹ When Adventist pastors move every three to four years, they are leaving just as they reach their best potential to make a difference for church growth.

Even if a pastor stays a long time, according to George Barna, after a church has gone into decline, it is difficult to turn it around. One of the key ingredients necessary to bring about a revitalized church is leadership. He reports his findings in his book

Turnaround Churches:

In our research, we discovered some factors pertaining to the type of person who can turn a church around and have concluded that those pastors are rare. . . .Some of the most important steps are unrelated to growth techniques or strategic planning . . . The death of a church is usually avoidable, but it may take a different type of ministry mind-set than many of today’s church leaders possess.²

Some skills need to be taught to pastors if they are to be successful in bringing a plateaued or declining church back to life and vibrant ministry. Proper training of skills to lead a church as a rancher may be critical to move a church through the barrier.

Ministry Training Issues

If pastors have trained to be effective leaders, they can become trainers themselves. This concept is based on Eph 4:11-12: “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” The survey asked pastors to list training events that the church offered to train people for ministry. This was suspected as crucial for moving through the barrier.

¹Barna, The Second Coming of the Church, 33.

²Barna, Turnaround Churches, 15.

The book How to Break Growth Barriers emphasizes lay training as a pivotal role of ministry in the hope that this “perspective will lead you from being a provider of *care to* your people to being an arranger of *care for* your people.”¹

The work of the pastor is to prepare God’s people to do the work of ministry. It is not the job of the pastor to be the only soul winner in the church. It is not the job of the pastor to do the work of the ministry, but to train the members to do the work of ministry. It is true that the pastor, as stated in the previous chapter, performs ministry. He does give Bible studies, counsel, visit, etc. But whenever he does it, he is acting in the capacity of a layperson and is not functioning as a pastor. What the pastor is paid to do is to train the members. If he is not doing that, then biblically, he is not doing his job.²

If attendance is to grow, laity must be trained for ministry. Specific areas of training should be a priority of the pastor. As John Fowler states, “The pastor’s primary function is to help the congregation identify and develop the gifts God has given to it individually and collectively.”³

Win Arn suggests that one of every three church members should be trained for some type of outreach evangelism each year.⁴ He even puts forth that the members should be classified in the church as Class I or Class II workers. Class I workers are the ones whose ministries involve the life of the church itself. Class II workers are those who are involved in evangelistic activities that take them outside of the church. These are the

¹George and Bird, 72.

²Burrill, Revolution in the Church, 48.

³John Fowler, Adventist Pastoral Ministry (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1990), 59.

⁴Arn, 64.

ones who are sharing the Gospel with the community in various ways. He suggests that there should be three Class I workers to every one Class II worker.¹

It might appear at first glance that a high demand to be involved in ministry on the part of the lay members would discourage church growth because of people fearing commitment. Lyle Schaller says just the opposite: "The churches which project high expectations of their members tend to be growing churches."²

Small Group Issues

Within church growth literature many proponents of small groups feel it is necessary for churches to grow beyond a given number. Others reason churches should only be small groups. Many churches begin as a small group. Dr. Cho says, "I like to describe Full Gospel Central Church as the smallest church in the world as well as the biggest."³ A large church is only large one day a week. Beyond this, it is really made up of small groups. Galloway offers this advice on the importance of small groups:

For maximum growth, for effective evangelism, for discipling, in order to win people and keep them, commit your church to emphasizing cell groups. . . . No matter how good your preaching, your music, or anything else at your church, if you do not get people into some small fellowship group you will lose many of them within a two-year period.⁴

¹Ibid., 12.

²Lyle E. Schaller, Activating the Passive Church (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), 33.

³Paul Yonggi Cho, Successful Home Cell Groups (South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Publishing, 1981), 50.

⁴Galloway, 104.

If we are losing people because of the lack of small groups, growing through the barrier and maintaining the attendance will become very difficult.

The Adventist church historically began as small groups coming together called "social meetings."

The early Adventist social meeting seems to have been very similar to the Methodist prayer meeting that was developing out of the class meeting at the time of Adventism's beginnings. Since Methodism was in transition at this time, we find remnants of both the class meeting, and the prayer meeting in early Adventism. However, this prayer meeting is not to be confused with modern-day prayer meetings. It was the social meeting in Adventism. While Methodism was moving away from class meetings in homes and prayer meetings after a preaching service, Adventists continued both practices. They had social meetings after preaching, as well as social meetings in small home gatherings.¹

The Adventist church has largely abandoned this format today. There are some Adventist churches that have built formal small-group structures, but these are not widespread. Within a church there are informal small groups that meet some of the relational needs of people even if this is not their main purpose. Prayer meetings,² Sabbath School classes, choirs, Pathfinders, Adventurers, Women's and Men's Ministries, and even committees and boards meet some of these needs, if only partially.

Maintaining small groups is currently difficult in North America. The formal small group structure has not been largely successful even in non-Adventist churches.

¹Russell Burrill, The Revolutionized Church of the 21st Century (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1997), 123. This book documents with many quotes historically from Adventist pioneers and E.G. White the importance of the social meeting to the life of the early Adventist movement. Interestingly, Russell points out that Bible study was not a part of these groups, but they were designed to be chiefly relational meetings.

²Sahlin says, "By the early 1980s less than a quarter of Adventist churches in the NAD still had a weekly prayer meeting. Less than 10 percent of the members attended where prayer meeting continued." Sahlin, Sharing Our Faith with Friends without Losing Either, 147.

Barna observes that, "Small groups (cell groups) never really seemed to have caught on: fewer than one out of every five adults is presently active in one."¹ Yet most church growth specialists state that it is absolutely necessary for a church to nurture people effectively in order to grow beyond the barrier. "A lay pastor, under certain conditions, can typically run herd on about twenty names and can keep about ten people coming to a cell group."² Yet small groups are not a panacea to church growth. "Small groups will not save a dying church or rejuvenate a declining one. It is only the Holy Spirit operating within our churches who can bring real change. But small groups may be a major vehicle to facilitate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit."³

Win Arn reveals what studies have shown to be the minimum small group requirements of a healthy and growing church. He states, "A church should have at least seven groups for every one hundred members." Win Arn also argues that "one of every five groups in the church should have been started in the past two years."⁴

Russell Burrill presents his vision of small groups making a difference in the size of Adventist churches in the twenty-first century.

The Adventist church of the twenty-first century will be larger, yet smaller. The reason for this is that the church will function on a small group basis rather than on congregational model. Most present church structure is built around one pastor ministering to a congregation of anywhere from twenty-five to a thousand people. In the church of the future, a pastor will supervise small group leaders, who will in turn

¹Barna, The Second Coming of the Church, 18.

²George and Bird, 169.

³Burrill, The Revolutionized Church of the 21st Century, 16.

⁴Am, 31.

lead groups of ten to twelve people. These lay pastors will be the primary caregivers in the church. The clergy will pastor the lay pastors, and they will in turn pastor the people. The membership will be better cared for by the lay pastors than by the ordained pastor, simply because they will have only ten to twelve people in their care system.¹

Monte Sahlin believes small groups are essential for the Adventist church in the future, stating that, “The small group approach can keep the momentum of the Adventist Movement alive in the 1990s and beyond. Our mission and message will not thrive in the Northern Hemisphere unless it adopts a small group strategy.”²

Carl George is also convinced of the value of these groups:

The small group or cell group—is a crucial but underdeveloped resource in most churches. It is, I contend, the most strategically significant foundation for spiritual formation and assimilation, for evangelism and leadership development, for the most essential functions that God has called for in the church . . . It’s so important that everything else is to be considered secondary to its promotion and preservation.³

Bill Sullivan says that Christians underestimate the number of groups necessary to move through the 200 barrier. “The group life of the church must be multiplied greatly to effect growth. Twice as many groups will not be sufficient. It will take three, four, five, and six times as many groups as used to exist.”⁴ He goes on to share that these are not just study groups, but many other types of groups that can assimilate people into the life of the church.

¹Burrill, Revolution in the Church, 118.

²Sahlin, Sharing Our Faith With Friends Without Losing Either, 137.

³George, Prepare Your Church for the Future, 41.

⁴Sullivan, 57.

Prayer Issues

Today, if we are to grow our churches beyond the 200 barrier we need the power of prayer as part of our ministry in a church community. Pastors and members must be a part of this ministry. Prayer is vital for the growth of a church in order to breach barriers as it reaches them. Ellen White says, "Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to him."¹ We need to bring ourselves "up to Him" as God is the only one who can give power to accomplish the growing of His church. "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me." (John 15:4)

This is the reason for the questions in the survey asking if there was a formal prayer ministry in the church surveyed, and how many hours a week the pastor spent in prayer. We struggle in vain to grow the church of God without prayer for His assistance. "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph 6:12). We must also give God time to talk with us. "Prayer is not so much an effort as a communion. If I do not give God as much time to talk to me as I

¹Ellen G. White, "The Privilege of Prayer," Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald, December 8, 1904, 2.

spend talking to him. I am off balance.”¹ This communion includes personal prayer of the members and pastor, and corporate prayer. Personal prayer, however, will not be enough in the long run to build His church: It will also require corporate prayer.”²

Prayer is vitally important to a congregation that has a will to grow, but it must go beyond this. Bill Sullivan says it this way:

While it is vitally important that both pastor and people pray, they must also work. Prayer is not a substitute for work, it is the foundation for work. Out of prayer comes holy work and holy effectiveness in work. Together they bring dramatic results. As I understand the New Testament, we are not asked to pray until God does the work for us: we are rather exhorted to pray until God gives us the strength and power to do the work He has called us to do. So intensify your personal and congregational praying, while you move out to work and to win the lost. Break the barrier! Hundreds and hundreds of people will be saved, sanctified, and incorporated into the life of the church.³

Prayer is only the beginning, it is the source of power and foundation of work that will grow the kingdom of God, and move church through the 200 barrier. “The Holy Spirit does not function as a substitute for human effort (see, for example, Rom. 10:14).”⁴

Worship Issues

Worship is central to the life of the church. Worship should not be haphazard or entered into lightly. It must be planned and intentional. Worship must be more than

¹This quote comes from a discussion by Carl George about the power of prayer in Dr. Paul Cho’s church in Soul Korea. George and Bird, 39.

²Sullivan, 25.

³Sullivan, 26.

⁴Paulien, 23.

the usual predictable weekly ritual. It should include what one might call “planned spontaneity.”¹

True worship will have a proper focus. God will be its focus. Sometimes Christians forget just what worship is. The people up front are not the performers of worship, but the facilitators. The people in the pews are not the audience, but the performers of worship. The real audience is God. “Our primary purpose for gathering . . . is to ascribe to the Lord the worship and praise due His name.”²

How we approach God is reflected in our worship services. These are often influenced by the mean age of a congregation and stages of life. Sahlin points out that:

When congregations experience a drop in attendance and seek help from a consultant, one of the findings often has to do with the way in which the worship and other church programs are focused entirely around the interest and patterns of middle-aged or senior adults.³

Music is key to worship and church growth. “The larger the size of the congregation, the greater the importance of music.”⁴ Mid-sized churches that want to grow are told to strive for excellence in music. Rick Warren writes that he is often asked what he would do differently if he could start the Saddleback church over again. His answer is instructional.

¹This interesting term was first shared with me by Kingsley Whitsett, who is currently Secretary of the Mountain View Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

²Moorehead, 49.

³Sahlin, Sharing Our Faith with Friends without Losing Either, 60.

⁴Schaller, Growing Plans, 73.

My answer is this: From the first day of the new church I'd put more energy and money into a first-class music ministry that matched our target. In the first years of Saddleback, I made the mistake of underestimating the power of music so I minimized the use of music in our services. I regret that now.¹

A recent study conducted in the Pacific Union of Seventh-day Adventists indicates that while music is important, we may be missing the mark when tailoring it to our congregations. When we consider the different generations, only 26 percent of Busters agree that music used in worship services is "relevant and generally assists me in worship." This rises with previous generations: Baby Boomers, 41 percent; Silent Generation, 48 percent; GI's 57 percent.²

The style of worship makes a difference in how well a church will grow. A question on the survey asked the pastor to rate his worship style on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being traditional and 10 being contemporary. I wished to see if the style of worship showed up markedly different below or above the barrier. I maintain that worship style does influence attendance rates. We should work to adopt styles to correspond to community culture. As George Hunter says:

Secular people, like any tribe in Africa, are reached more effectively through the people, language, liturgy, music, architecture, needs, struggles, issues, leaders, and leadership style that are indigenous to their culture. We know that this cardinal principle of Christian mission applies to other mission fields, of course, but have not yet discovered its necessary application to our western fields because we haven't thought of what we do as "foreign" to unchurched people in the West.³

¹Warren, 279.

²Reaching a New Generation: Report One (Lincoln, NE: Center for Creative Ministry, 1993), 35.

³George G. Hunter III, How to Reach Secular People (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 66.

We have chastised the pioneers of Christian missions for insisting that people accept Western culture along with the Gospel, yet we are guilty of the same with secular people. Because we have not largely connected with our culture around us. Lynne and Bill Hybels point out secular people are looking beyond the church for spiritual answers.

Why, I wonder are contemporary Americans convinced that true spiritual answers are only to be found outside the church? Is it because they seek answers that are self-centered rather than God-centered? Or is it because they have become sincerely disillusioned with a church that for too many years has been more concerned with its identity and traditions than with the concerns of the human heart?¹

How a worship service is perceived will obviously effect attendance.

Contextualized worship is likely perceived differently by secular people we wish to join us than life-long Christians. According to Paulien, “a little reflection indicates that the quality of Sabbath worship is crucial to sustaining church growth, not just among secular people, but in general.”² He goes on to suggest that, while worship must be tailored for secular people to find meaning in church, it is not always wise to radically change the style of worship. “If worship style is to be a central component of outreach to a secular world, it may be better to start a fresh congregation that is dedicated to outreach on a contemporary basis.”³ Offering different worship styles in different worship services within the same congregation would answer this dilemma.

¹Lynne Hybels and Bill Hybels, Rediscovering Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 15.

²Paulien, 178.

³Ibid., 182.

George Barna believes that we should take advantage of technology as a means of evangelism in our worship services. “Realize too, that growing numbers of people now judge the validity and relevance of a church service by the church’s use of technology.”¹ He shares how secular Americans think that if the church is using modern technology it understands the pressures of modern life and offers relevant solutions.

Bob Moorehead reminds us that the main door to the church is the worship service. He sees the worship service as very important to increasing attendance by visitors coming again and again.

If your worship services are totally predictable every time, your church is suffering from a lack of unrestrained worship. How high on the list of church growth factors is proper worship? It has to be very close to the top. Since 93% of all first-time visitors make their first contact with a local church by attending a morning worship service, something significant and awesome better happen there. It can’t be “business as usual.”²

Rick Warren has a helpful chapter on worship in his book, The Purpose Driven Church. He shares that since worship is between God and believers, only believers can truly worship. Unbelievers can watch and observe the joy in others as they celebrate with God. Thus worship becomes a powerful witness to unbelievers.³ Rich Warren says that we should specialize our services according to their purpose. “Most churches try to evangelize the lost and edify believers in the same service. When you send mixed

¹Barna, The Second Coming of the Church, 65.

²Moorehead, 47.

³Warren, 239-241.

signals, you're going to get mixed results."¹ He goes on to suggest that you design different worship experiences depending on the audience you wish to have in attendance and minister to. Worship and style are important issues for a church wishing to grow in attendance. Assisting people to find worship meaningful will bring and keep new people and assist in sustaining beyond the 200 barrier.

Evangelism Issues

In the introduction to his book Sharing Our Faith with Friends, Monte Sahlin documents how evangelism has changed over the life-span of the Seventh-day Adventist church. Until the turn of the century, tent meetings in the rural towns and communities were the general mode of evangelism and growth. By 1900, the tent meetings were only generating meager numbers of new converts. The church began to realize that the urbanization of America and the large number of immigrants created a different context for the Gospel. With difficulty and resistance, the church moved to a more institutionalized and more Christ-centered evangelism approach. This method peaked in the 1970s and began to be less effective as America became more and more secular.

Monte Sahlin suggests:

This third era of Adventist evangelization is emerging as the era of relational evangelism. It will be characterized more by an emphasis on sharing one's faith than on teaching a system of doctrines. Friendships will be the primary tool for bringing men and women to Christ and into the church. Fellowship at a personal level will be more important than large personalities or organizations. The goal will be to meet the needs of people rather than to build up institutional programs.²

¹Ibid., 245.

²Sahlin, Sharing Our Faith with Friends without Losing Either, 14-23.

In the Adventist church, when the term “evangelism” is used, it usually means formal meetings where handbills have been sent across the community. People are invited to the church or some other meeting hall to hear lectures or to take part in a seminar. Evangelism goes far beyond this. God has asked Christians to go to all the world and make disciples. This includes our own world, our community around us. Too often Adventists have had a theology where all are invited to come, and wonder why few actually do. The church must remember that the injunction of Scripture is “to go.”

Bill Hybels uses the illustration of salt from the Sermon on the Mount and shares a great formula for being what he calls a “contagious Christian.” This is a great recipe for success as a witness for Christ. High impact (HP) + Close proximity (CP) + Clear Communication (CC) = Maximum impact (MI).¹

One of the survey questions asked for a list of evangelistic events in the last two years and what the plans were for evangelism in the future. I wanted to discern if churches above the barrier were more involved in evangelism and what impact this might have in maintaining an attendance above the 200 barrier.

The Bible commissions the church to grow. This is both quantitative and qualitative. Allen Tippett says it well:

I have heard men allege that their church growth has stopped for a period of consolidation or quality growth. But quantitative and qualitative growth should proceed together. . . . The biblical concept of growth, as far as it relates to the work of

¹Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg, Becoming a Contagious Christian (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 42.

God, whether we think of it physically or qualitatively, is a continuous process until the final end.¹

Friendship, or relational evangelism, is something the Adventist church is just learning the importance of. Barna observes that “study after study, however, shows that the most believable and best remembered form of advertising is the personal recommendation of a trusted person.”² Jard Deville continues by stating that “love is the key aspect of the positive relationship which allows you to witness effectively.”³ Dr. Winfield Arn has interviewed 4,000 converts in order to learn why they come to church and stay connected to a congregation. Here are his findings:

- 6 to 8 percent just walked in;
- 2 to 3 percent came through church programs;
- 8 to 12 percent were attracted by the pastor;
- 3 to 4 percent came out of a special need;
- 1 to 2 percent were visited by church members;
- 3 to 4 percent came through the Sunday school class;
- 70 to 80 percent were invited by relatives and friends.⁴

Even more interesting is the fact that in growing churches the invitation comes far more often from friends than from relatives. In declining churches, the opposite is found. New members in these congregations almost always share that they came at the

¹Tippett, 25.

²George Barna, Marketing the Church (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1988), 53.

³Jard Deville, The Psychology of Witnessing (Hagerstown, MD: Ministerial Association, 1996), 43.

⁴McGavran and Hunter, 34.

request of a relative.¹ A recent study among a group of successful Adventist churches shows the importance of relational evangelism. Church members were asked to list what they observed to be the best way to bring converts into the church. The order of priority given in the list is significant:²

(1) Friendship Evangelism. (2) Small Groups. (3) Community Service. (4) Recreation and Fellowship. (5) Youth Ministries. (6) Children's Ministries. (7) Revelation Seminar. (8) Pastor's Bible Class. (9) Public Meetings. (10) Video Bible Studies. (11) Bible Lessons.³

This list supports the statements made earlier by Monte Sahlin that the best way to grow church attendance is by relational means. Once a person joins a church he or she must make friends rapidly or they will become inactive members, decreasing the likelihood a church can move through or maintain itself above the barrier. Win Arn believes that this must be done in the first six months or a church is likely to lose the person. He adds that it is necessary for a person to have a minimum of seven friends in the congregation. In defining friends, he is not talking about just greetings as you pass in church. Arn means friendships that have mutual interest and concerns. These are friends who the new member associates with during the week, and misses if they are not at

¹Ibid., 34, 35.

²Reaching a New Generation: Report Three (Lincoln, NE: Center for Creative Ministry, 1997), 16.

³Ibid., 17.

worship. Table 1 shows the importance of friends in the church and their effect on whether a new member becomes active or inactive.

Sullivan reminds us that often, “people aren’t looking for a friendly church, they are looking for a friend.”¹ And Samaan points us back to Christ model for evangelism. “Christ’s program was first and foremost people.”²

Gary McIntosh says: “Think of friendship as having six foundational pillars. The structure will stand with only five. It could even remain intact with four. But a real friend, the kind of friend that people need in our churches, has six characteristics.”³ He uses the acronym FRIENDS to underscore this point: *F*un to be with; *R*elational; *I*nspiring; *E*ncouraging; *N*urturing; *D*evoted.

Table 1. Relationship of Friends and Remaining Active in a Church

Number of New Friends	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9+	Tot.
Active New Members	0	0	0	1	2	2	8	13	12	12	50
Inactive New Members	8	13	14	8	4	2	1	0	0	0	50

Source: Win Arn. The Church Growth Ratio Book (Monrovia, CA: Church Growth, Inc. 1990), 23.

This is not a simple one-time touch of all the houses in a given neighborhood; this is making genuine friendships, so close they will trust you to share the Gospel with them. George Knowles shares that members who are out seeking people to share with

¹Sullivan. 94.

²Philip G. Samaan, Christ’s Way of Reaching People (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1990), 34.

³McIntosh and Martin. 78. 79.

and help in their lives are a powerful evangelistic tool. “It is not a cold, mechanical, dutiful checking off of house numbers, but rather it includes a friendly visit to the neighbor, a welcome to the newcomer, a listening ear for the lonely, and a pot of soup for the family with a sick wife or mother.”¹

Rex Edwards sums it up like this. “Christian witnessing is not something we *do*: it is something we *are*.”² Moorehead clarifies further, “Evangelism is meant to take place ‘out there’ instead of ‘in here’.”³ Christians are to make friends in the world around them. These are not just passing relationships, they are strong friendships that enable people to trust you when you share the Gospel and invite them to trust in and worship God. Friendship evangelism can make a big difference as a church wishes to grow through the 200 barrier and maintain attendance above it. Carl George sees small groups being evangelistic in this way:

Sooner or later a constantly rekindled vision of open cells led by prayerful people replicating themselves through apprentice leaders is going to produce life-changing results—two-to-four converts per year per group. As staff members place priority on the cultivation of the lay leadership necessary to make this happen, the dynamics of cell fertility will inevitably take over, and much fruit will be harvested, including that of numerical church growth.⁴

¹George E. Knowles, How to Help Your Church Grow (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1981), 62.

²Rex Edwards, Every Believer a Minister (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1995), 93.

³Moorehead, 26.

⁴George and Bird, 137.

Monte Sahlin states the need for evangelism to move into the workplace. He cites the growing hours people are working and the decreased free time available. Work is becoming a new frontier for ministry of every believer and a place where we can look for opportunities to share what God has done for us. He suggests that we train people to make friends in the workplace and use these friendships to share the Gospel.¹

One last note is necessary on what Dudley and Cummings call “anti-evangelism.” They maintain that a member who does not leave contributes as much to growth as a new convert.² The problem of people leaving is alarming in the Adventist church. As a church reaches the 200 barrier of the people it can care for, a church transcends to a different kind of organization; there is nowhere for people to go but out.

While all these are good suggestions and may lead to assisting church attendance growth, they are only part of a larger picture called the “200 barrier.” There are answers to the problem of growing churches through the barrier, but the Adventist church will need a new paradigm to do it. Joel Barker, in his book Paradigms, defines a paradigm as “a set of rules and regulations (written or unwritten) that does two things: (1) it establishes or defines boundaries; and (2) it tells you how to behave inside the boundaries in order to be successful.”

¹Sahlin. Sharing Our Faith with Friends without Losing Either, 46.

²Roger L. Dudley and Des Cummings, Jr., Adventures in Church Growth (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1983), 135.

Not only must Adventists work, they must work in a more enlightened manner. Kennon Callahan in his book Effective Church Leadership cites the changes that have come about in how pastors and churches work, compared to several decades ago.

The nature of leadership is missional, not institutional. . . . We must begin again from the ground up. We have tried for thirty years to strengthen various denominations from the top down. . . . We must begin as though this is a mission field. . . . This work will simply not move forward by focusing solely, or even primarily, on those persons who are already participating in current local churches.¹

In this book, Callahan emphasizes that pastors are now in a different world and must work differently. “The day of the professional minister is over. The day of the missionary pastor has come. . . . The day of the local church is over. The day of the mission outpost has come.”² He is not saying that Christians should close local churches, but that a new mission emphasis should be brought to these congregations. “If we can learn how to reach secular people, we’ll soon be able to reach just about anybody.” Today’s world is a secular world and “many Adventists shy away from outreach to the secular mind-set because they do not believe it is ‘doable’.” This secular world is foreign to Adventists. “Another barrier we face in reaching out to the secular mind-set is that Adventists are really much more comfortable in their own cultural setting than they are out in the world.”³

¹Kennon L. Callahan, Effective Church Leadership (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1990), 257.

²Ibid., 3, 22.

³Paulien, 9, 29.

One of the greatest barriers to growth beyond the 200 barrier is in our own mind.

The 200 barrier can be breached; it is God's will.

Since the 50's, 60's, 70's, and the 80's, vast changes have taken place in the world: changes are inevitably reflected in some phases of the church activity and pastoral methods. One must be revising his thinking continually even on those methods which have proved successful yesterday or today.¹

Christian church growth literature is charged with an air of expectancy of growth. Whether it is facility, demographics, vision, organization, training, prayer, worship, or evangelism, these issues keep resurfacing as vital to growing church attendance. We must now ask if these issues actually showed themselves as important in our survey of twenty Adventist churches. Let us now turn our attention to looking at Adventist churches that have and have not crossed the barrier.

¹John Rhodes, Success Secrets for Pastors (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, n.d.), 157.

CHAPTER 4

SURVEY RESULTS: ANALYSIS OF ADVENTIST CHURCH SIZE FACTORS IN THE UNITED STATES

In this chapter, I examine and analyze the information received from the twenty churches surveyed. First, I address the criteria for the two groups of ten churches and why they were chosen. Then, we will look at the two groups of churches above and below the barrier and consider the expectations for the two groups based on experience and reading. This analysis will be followed by an in-depth examination of the churches as they relate to the nine issues. Finally, the chapter ends with a study of what furthers and hinders breaking the 200 barrier by comparing and contrasting the two groups.

Introduction to the Church Growth Survey

I moved to a church below the barrier in December of 1995. This church wanted to move through the 200 barrier. This became a subject of great interest to me as I became aware of the phenomena of the 200 barrier. Since from the survey of literature I understood that churches above the barrier were a different organism from those below, I set out to discover the characteristics of the ten churches below the barrier, and the ten churches above. After extensive reading of church growth literature, several preliminary

assumptions about what might be found in different aspects of these churches came to light. The survey questions were designed to create a picture of what the respective groups above and below the barrier would look like.¹ This information was then to be used to assist the Northwest Houston Seventh-day Adventist Church to know the changes necessary to move through the 200 barrier. Beyond this, the information would be useful in making recommendations necessary for other churches wishing to move through the 200 barrier.

Surveys were sent to fifteen churches below the 200 barrier and fifteen above. Of the fifteen above the barrier, thirteen surveys were returned. Of the fifteen below the barrier, eleven were returned. All the churches were in the Continental United States. The first surveys returned that matched the criteria were the ones used. Churches used in the study were from Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Indiana, Kansas, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Washington.

The survey addressed several areas of structure, leadership, ministry, outreach, and church family life. All of these statistics were compiled for the twenty churches. The two groups were compared looking for variations that might make a difference in the organization and thus the ability to cross the 200 barrier. Marked differences were expected in several of the areas. These can be broken down into nine issues which will be important to the discussion of the characteristics and differences between these two groups of churches:

¹A copy of the survey is available in Appendix A.

1. Facility
2. Location/Demographics
3. Vision/Goals
4. Organization/Roles/Staffing
5. Ministry Training
6. Small Groups
7. Prayer
8. Worship
9. Evangelism.

Churches Above and Below the Barrier

To address the issues related to churches that have not succeeded in breaking the 200 barrier, I had to consider a membership that was numerically significant. Churches must have a book membership of at least 350 to meet this criteria. The number 350 in book membership was chosen to ensure that the church could have an attendance beyond the 200 barrier. Those churches designated below the barrier that were surveyed ranged from a book membership of 370 to 635 with attendance somewhat less. The churches surveyed had to have an attendance that brings them up against, but not through, the barrier. These churches had an attendance that ranged from 170 to 220. All the churches chosen were chiefly Anglo, to eliminate cultural influences on attendance, and were not near an Adventist institution that might artificially push them through the growth barriers.

For the purpose of this study, churches successful in surmounting the barrier required an attendance between 300 and 400. No limit was set on the membership. However, book membership ranged from 450 to 786. These churches were also to be chiefly Anglo, and not located near an Adventist institution.

Three thousand of the 4,746 Adventist congregations in North America have less than 100 members. The next 1,400 have 100 to 250 members.¹ This fact leaves just under 350 churches that potentially meet the specifications for study. Research was done with the intent to find ten churches above the barrier and ten below that could be used for comparative case studies.

While calling conference offices across the United States in search of barrier-breaking churches, it became apparent that they were rare in an Anglo context outside of the institutional setting. Of the thirty-nine conferences in the Continental United States, twenty-seven had no churches that met the specifications as outlined above. It is estimated that over half of the conferences, while keeping membership statistics, do not keep attendance records. This lack of record keeping shows the emphasis on book membership with little regard to the number of people actually engaged in the church family and worship life. Lack of record keeping also shows that there is little understanding of barriers to attendance levels. Part of any plan to move churches through the 200 barrier will have to include bringing awareness to church leadership that the problem even exists.

¹Paul Richardson, Director of the Center for Creative Ministry in Lincoln, NE, interview by author, April 27, 1999.

The total number of churches in the Continental United States, which are chiefly Anglo, not near an Adventist institution, and have an attendance between 300 and 400, was found to be less than two dozen. Some churches that seemed to qualify were eliminated because of their close location to an institution. These were not used to avoid the data being compromised. Other churches were very close to 300 in attendance, but were not used unless they clearly had 300 or more in attendance. A few were too large with over 400 in attendance. Churches over 400 were not used because of different barriers and characteristics that are part of the dynamics of larger churches.

Characteristics of Adventist Churches Below the 200 Barrier

Now this chapter will turn more specifically to the churches below the 200 barrier. Ten representative churches will bring us understanding of the dynamics of this class of Anglo Adventist churches in the United States.

Preliminary Expectations

I expected to find in the typical church that had not moved through the 200 attendance barrier a church family worshipping in a facility too small to seat all who wanted to come. Of those who did come, I expected to find very few children or youth at their one worship service each week. This worship service would be traditional in nature, much more than the churches above the barrier. There would be a lack of parking spaces and Sabbath School rooms would be too small for adequate programs for the children. Only two or three adult classes would be meeting in the sanctuary, with fifty or more in a class.

The church described above would have a formal prayer meeting, but with small attendance. There would be no formal prayer ministry in the church. Small groups might not even be in existence. Any existing small groups would be few with no training or support for the leaders. There would be a large difference in who was responsible for certain ministries around a church, and who actually did them. The pastor would be a shepherd instead of a rancher. The church board would be larger on average than the churches above the 200 attendance barrier, and very few new people would be allowed to become new members of the board.

I expected the churches below the barrier to be led by one full-time pastor who struggled with having at least one other church in the assigned district. The pastor would have been at this church for two years or less, expected to stay for a couple more years, but not five more years and would spend little or no time training laity for ministry. I did not expect to see a clear vision for the future of the church.

Goals would fall into traditional areas of “souls and goals.”¹ This shepherd would spend significant time in primary care elements such as preaching and teaching, visitation and counseling, and attending social and community events. Little time would be spent training others for ministry, supervising others in ministry, communicating the vision for the church, or planning and visioning for the future. Prayer and fellowship with peers would involve a relatively small proportion of time spent in ministry.

¹“Souls” means having a greater emphasis on baptisms and membership than growth of attendance and spiritual welfare of the people. “Goals,” means emphasis on making sure the church reaches its goals handed down by higher levels of the church such as ingathering campaign, church magazine subscriptions, etc., rather than using these tools to accomplish the vision and goals God has for the local church family.

Not all of these characteristics were anticipated in every below-the-barrier church, but an inclination towards them was the expectation. The actual findings were quite different. The churches below the barrier were not unlike those above the barrier, with some important differences. The next task will be to paint a picture of the typical church below the barrier as revealed by the ten churches surveyed.

Findings

Churches below the 200 barrier that were surveyed are scattered across the United States. They are located in Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Tennessee, Minnesota, New Mexico, Ohio, and Oklahoma.¹ Book membership ranges from 370 to 635. Attendance is between 170 and 220. This percentage of attendance compared to book membership is below average for the North American Division. Each Sabbath as people gather to worship across the nation in Adventist churches an average of only 50 percent of the membership is present.² The average attendance for the churches surveyed below the barrier ranged from 34 percent to 59 percent. This gives us an average attendance of 43 percent. The twenty churches were labeled "A through T." The churches below the barrier were labeled "K through T." Below is a table detailing the data comparing membership to attendance for churches K through T.

¹The "raw data" can be found in Appendix B.

²Sahlin and Yergen. 1.

Facility issues

While the church growth literature surveyed suggested that a church below the barrier likely has facility issues restricting capacity, the survey shows this issue is not a problem for these Adventist churches. While the average seating capacity is 465, the average attendance is just 210, or only 45 percent. These churches must feel empty. The attendance ratios range from 38 percent to 57 percent. Three of the churches spread their attendance over two services. This would aggravate the feeling of emptiness. As a pastor for many years, personal experience shows that there is a better corporate worship experience when there is the feeling of the facility being “full.” Figure 4 shows the churches below the barrier and the ratio of the seating capacity to attendance.

Table 2. Comparison of Membership and Attendance Below the Barrier

Church	Membership	Attendance	Ratio
K	400	190	48%
L	395	205	52%
M	635	215	34%
N	410	170	41%
O	380	195	51%
P	515	190	37%
Q	600	212	35%
R	630	220	38%
S	370	218	59%
T	540	210	39%
Average	488	203	43%

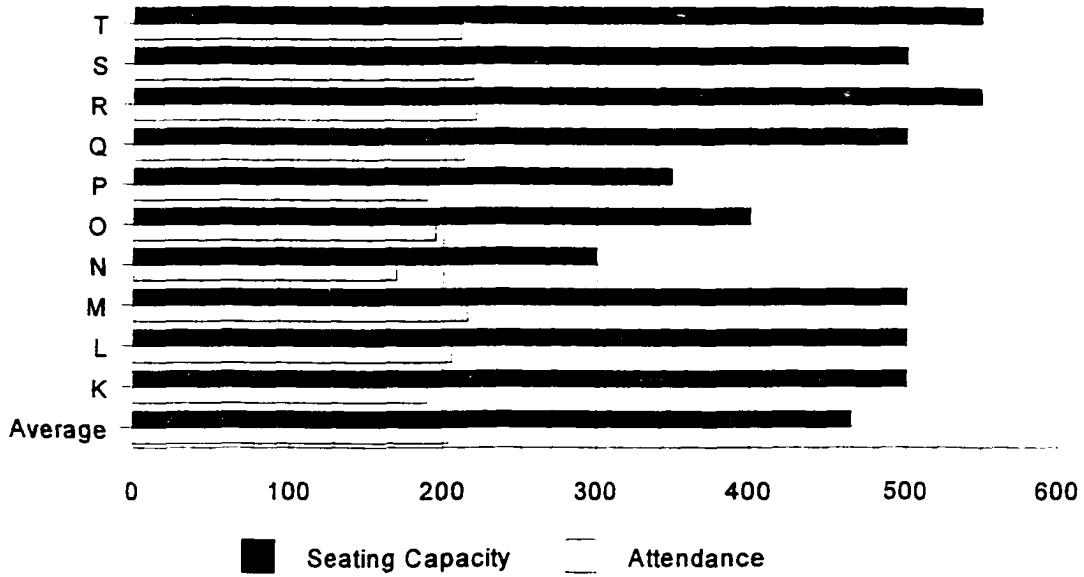


Figure 4. Average attendance compared to seating capacity in churches below the barrier.

Parking was not an obstacle to growth of the churches below the barrier. Two of the churches had enough parking for every man, woman, and child to have their own parking space and still leave extra for guests. The ratio of parking spaces ranged from one space for every .07 people in attendance to one space for every 3.4 in attendance. The average ratio is one space for every 1.8 people in attendance. George and Bird advise churches to “divide your average attendance by two-and-one-half people per car. If you draw a lot of single adults, divide by one-and-a half people per car.”¹ All but one of the churches in this study (church P) have adequate parking for their current members with room for growth. Figure 5 shows the ratio of parking spaces in relation to attendance.

While Sabbath School rooms were being utilized at a comfortable average of 80 percent, four reported their capacity at 100 percent. On average, churches below the

¹George and Bird, 138.

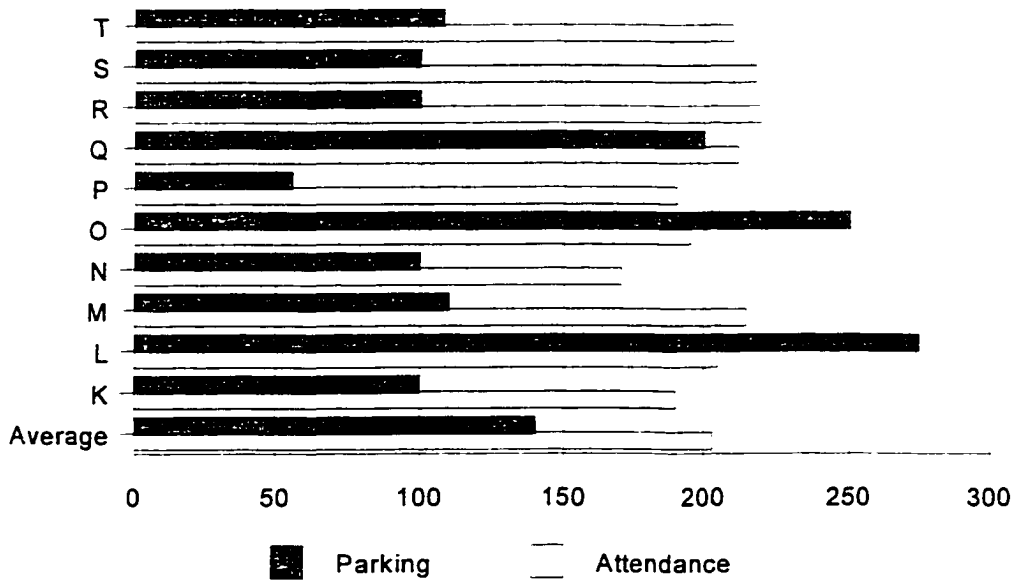


Figure 5. Comparison of attendance and available parking in churches below the barrier.

barrier do not have facility issues that restrict growth. When looking at facility size, the one factor that comes closest to being a restriction to growth is the Sabbath School rooms. On average the Sabbath School rooms are comfortably full but not overcrowded. See figure 6.

Figure 7 shows the comparison of the three major facility issues addressed, demonstrating that they are not at full capacity to restrict growth

Demographic issues

Because of the delimitations of this paper, the churches studied were all chiefly Anglo in composition. In conversation with the pastors of the churches, the congregations are not completely homogeneous, however. All the church pastors

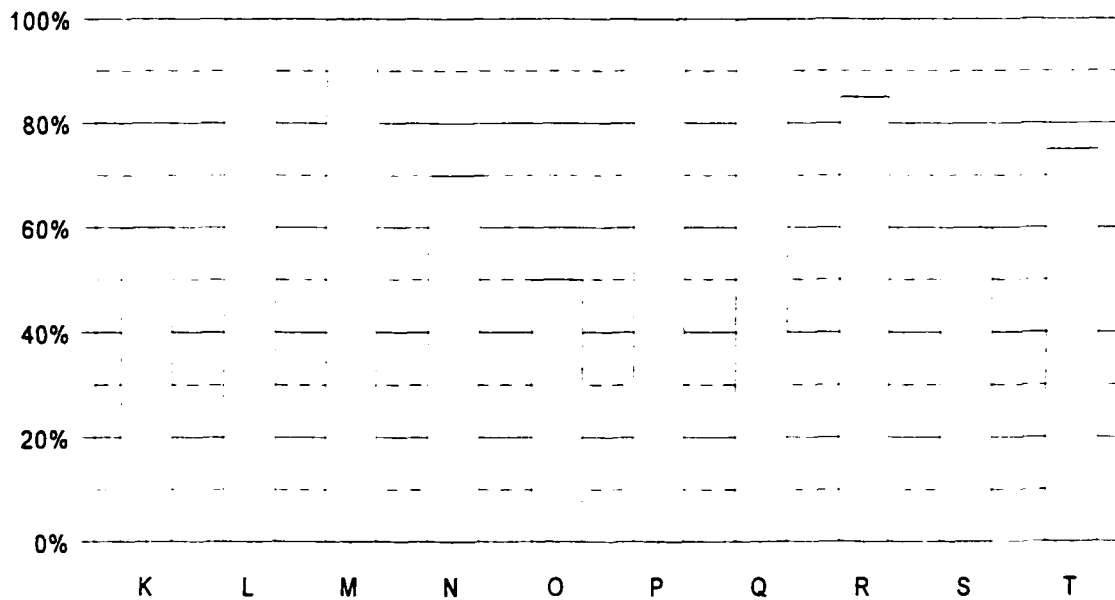


Figure 6. Churches under the barrier percentage of Sabbath School capacity being used.

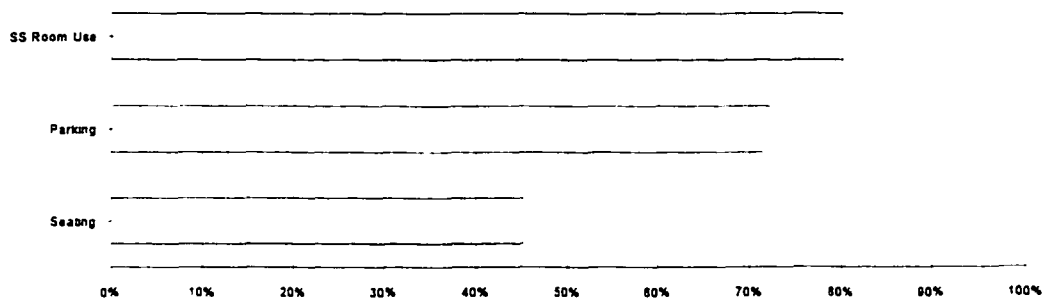


Figure 7. Comparison of average percentage of capacity for facility issues in churches below the barrier. Parking figured by 2.5 times attendance is equal to 100 percent.

indicated that there is a growing trend for the congregations labeled “Anglo” to include a growing group of people from all over the world.

The survey asked for the pastor to indicate whether the church was in an inner city, urban, suburban, small city, or town. Table 3 shows the spread from urban to small city. There were no responses from inner-city churches, or those in towns. One was in a

small city. Nine out of ten of the studied churches were found in urban and suburban areas.

Table 3. Where the Churches Were Found Below the Barrier

Community	Number
Inner-city	0
Urban	5
Suburban	4
Small City	1
Town	0

Urban and suburban areas have been thought to be ideal places for church growth. The results show that even though nine out of ten churches in this portion of the study are in an urban or suburban setting, they have not grown through the 200 barrier.

Vision and goal issues

Though it is somewhat subjective to judge the quality of a stated vision by comparing the statements of the churches above and below the barrier, we can gain insight into a potential attendance-restricting influence. Vision statements show a marked difference in quality. One question on the survey was, "What is your vision for this church?" This question was often answered with a list of goals instead of a statement of vision. At best, the vision statement was often vague and imprecise. Church P gave the only quality vision statement of the ten churches below the barrier. This means that only one out of ten had a functional vision statement. When I was seeking for churches across the country, the Conference Secretary of church P stated, "This church is the one to

watch!” Here are the answers as given by the pastors to the question, “What is your vision for this church?”

Church K -- “I measure my success in ministry by externals such as baptisms. My vision is to get to and sustain a 10 percent growth per year minimum.”

Church L -- “To have an active and growing church.”

Church M -- “A caring, fellowshiping church run by lay leadership.”

Church N -- “To be a healthy, vibrant, mission-oriented congregation.”

Church O -- “Active growing church, increasing attendance and membership, making an impact on the community.”

Church P -- “We aspire to unite as a congregation of servants, committed to bringing the hearts in our community to the love of Christ and providing a place of belonging: a starting point on a journey to a forever with God.”

Church Q -- “To win people to Jesus and disciple them for service.”

Church R -- “To continue to work on training lay people to take the church and run with it.”

Church S -- “A turn around in worship attendance, appreciation, and style. A church that unconditionally welcomes others and has a genuine love and concern.”

Church T -- “More outreach programs, better finances, more involved in the community.”

Next, the pastors were asked to list their goals for the church. The goals were difficult to evaluate. What desired future are the goals supporting? Are the goals harmonizing, or are they working at odds? There is no way to know unless there is a

clear vision. The stated goals of the different churches below the 200 barrier are as follows.

Church K -- "Put accounting practices in order; pay conference back; bring finances into order; increase and meet budget; hold evangelistic crusade each year; put facilities into shape; create more space for worship."

Church L -- "Move church plant; increase giving; active Pathfinders; increase Sabbath School attendance; start prayer ministry; evangelism outreach; help church school grow."

Church M -- "Sanctuary renovation; fellowship committee to increase fellowship in church."

Church N -- "Church had moved towards a more contemporary worship style with emphasis on unchurched people. Went to blended which did not satisfy conservative members and we are back to a traditional format."

Church O -- "City wide evangelism; health seminars."

Church P -- "Launch a drama ministry; launch a building program; expand our small groups; restructure link between church and school; design a welcome brochure; conduct workshops in evangelism and spiritual gifts."

Church Q -- "Pay off debt; reorganize nominating committee; develop small groups; spiritual gifts training."

Church R -- "Church planting; capital improvement goals; evangelism."

Church S -- "Get more people (50 percent) involved in small groups; increase to 70 percent of members coming to Sabbath School; increase giving by 25 percent."

Church T -- "Evangelism; parking lot; Discover Bible school; more members."

My response was to wonder what were these goals to accomplish? Church K has a goal of "creating more worship space" when it only has 190 in attendance in a 400-seat sanctuary. Church R wants to plant churches when it only has 220 worshipping in a sanctuary that can seat 550. Church N apparently moved to a different style of worship to reach outsiders when this was not the shared vision of the church. Most have evangelism and growth in their goals, yet according to several I visited with by phone, they have been the same size in attendance for some time, though book membership slowly grows. Church P is the only one that seems to have a vision and goals to move toward the fulfillment of that vision.

Organization, roles, and staffing

Issues in organization, roles, and staffing were addressed in the survey. The board size and composition, the staff size and makeup, and the expected roles were surveyed. How a pastor spent his ministry time was also surveyed.

An Adventist church is governed by a church board which is elected by a nominating committee. One of the things surveyed was the size of the board and the number of new church board members who served on the board in the last two years. The theory was that larger boards were more cumbersome causing the churches below the barrier difficulty in moving forward. The idea that new members to a board would bring new vitality and therefore allow a church to grow through the barrier with greater ease

was also tested. The churches below the barrier had board membership as is illustrated in figure 8.

The average church board for this group had twenty members, one board member for each ten people in attendance. The boards averaged 5.75 new members in the last two years. Overall, an average of 28.2 percent of the board was made up of new members over the two-year period.



Figure 8. Church board size compared to the number of new members on the board in the last two years in churches under the barrier.

The churches were asked how many were on their pastoral staff and how many staff were part-time or volunteer. These responses were tabulated for each church by assigning one to each full-time staff and one-half to each part-time or volunteer staff member. The question was to evaluate the staffing of the churches and discover the ratio of attendance to staff.

Figure 9 shows the ratio of staff to church attendance. The average staff ratio to attendance of 154 per full-time equivalent will be significant later when we compare the two groups.

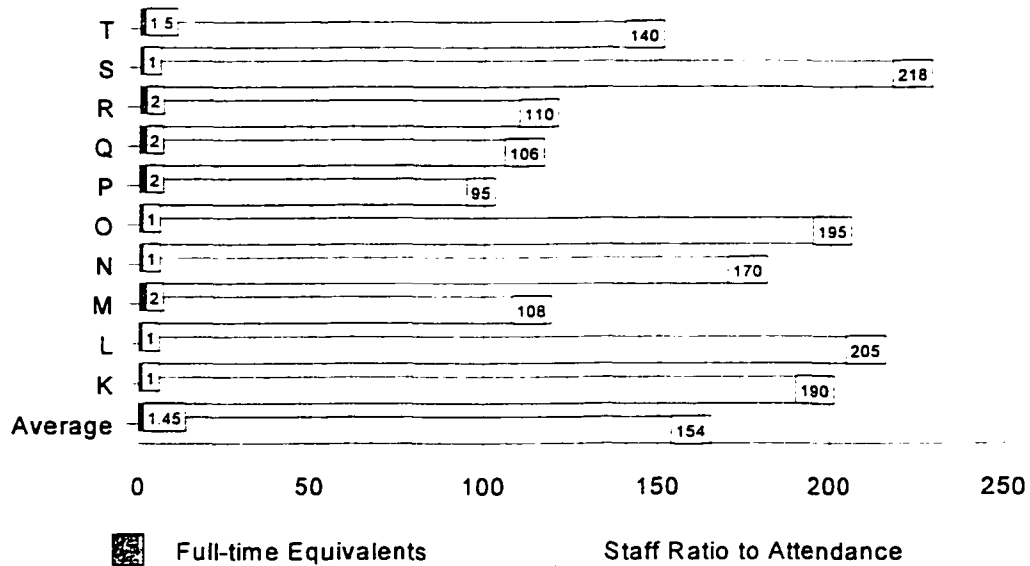


Figure 9. Staff ratio to attendance in churches below the barrier. This ratio was figured by dividing average attendance by full-time equivalents.

When pastors were asked how long they had been at their present church, the range for churches under the barrier was one to seven years. The average was 3.4 years. When asked whether they saw themselves still pastoring there in two years or five years, all expected another two years and all but one saw their work at the church lasting another five years or more. Two of the ten churches below the barrier have another church in the district. One of these multi-church situations is in a multi-staff situation and one is not.

The survey requested that the pastor share how he spent ministerial time. Those pastoring at the ten churches below the barrier averaged 44.35 hours per week in ministry.

Figure 10 shows the breakdown of how pastors of the churches below the barrier reported their use of ministry time.

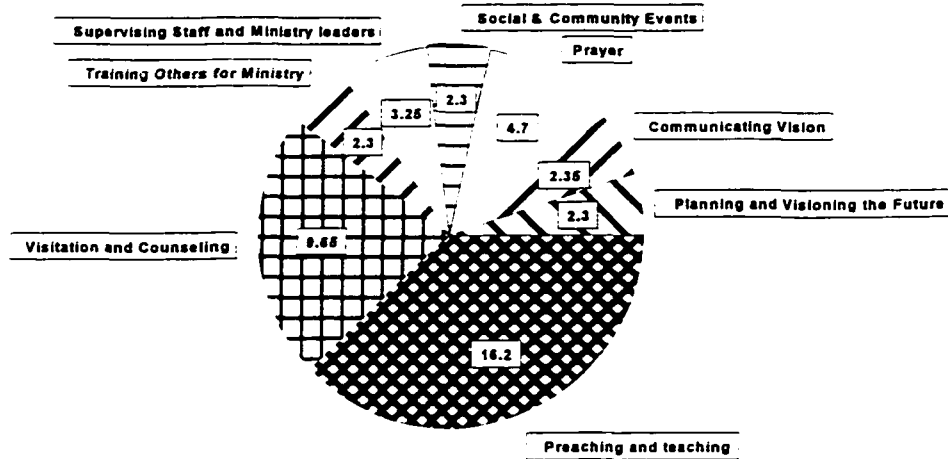


Figure 10. Average usage of ministerial time by pastors in churches under the barrier. Numbers in the box represent hours per week.

Preaching and teaching, including preparation, was the most time-consuming activity. Preaching and teaching was followed by visitation and counseling. As was shown earlier, the quality of vision for these churches is unclear. Time spent planning and visioning for the future was considerably less. Less time spent in planning and visioning may be partially the reason for an unclear vision. Prayer was the third largest use of ministry time for pastors of these churches.

One last item relating to how a pastor spends his time was a list on the survey of specific ministry tasks. Each pastor was asked to share whether lay persons or pastoral staff were directly involved in doing these tasks. There was sometimes a discrepancy seen between who was doing the tasks and who the pastor thought should be doing them. This discrepancy showed a difference between pastoral understanding of roles in church

family life and the understanding of the laity. Churches below the barrier answered an average of three out of fourteen with disagreement between who should be doing a particular ministry and who actually was, according to the pastor.

Ministry training issues

Training of members for ministry was considered a priority by the pastors. When asked the question, "Do you have events to train lay people in some type of ministry?" all twenty churches answered, "Yes." The pastors were asked to list the training events for their churches. The enthusiasm for this was expressed by the pastor of church K. "Union annual ministry expo is held at our church. We use downlink videos for greeters, elders, etc. We do annual evangelism training. We currently have ongoing ACS training. Our regular elders, board, etc. meetings are used as training forums."

Other types of training listed were: children's ministries, prayer, Bible studies, leadership, visiting, greeters/ushers, deacons, small groups, visioning, Gospel presentations, outreach and personal evangelism, friendship evangelism, and church planting. Most of the churches seemed to be quite busy with training events. The question to ask is whether these were in agreement with the vision of the church. Since the vision was often unclear, this is unknown.

Small group issues

In recent years, churches below the barrier have heard the call for formal, organized small groups as the answer to growing the church. In the studied churches below the barrier, the average percentage of the congregation attending worship on

Sabbath morning who were also involved in a small group is 17.4 percent. Figure 11 shows the ratio of those in small groups related to the total in attendance.

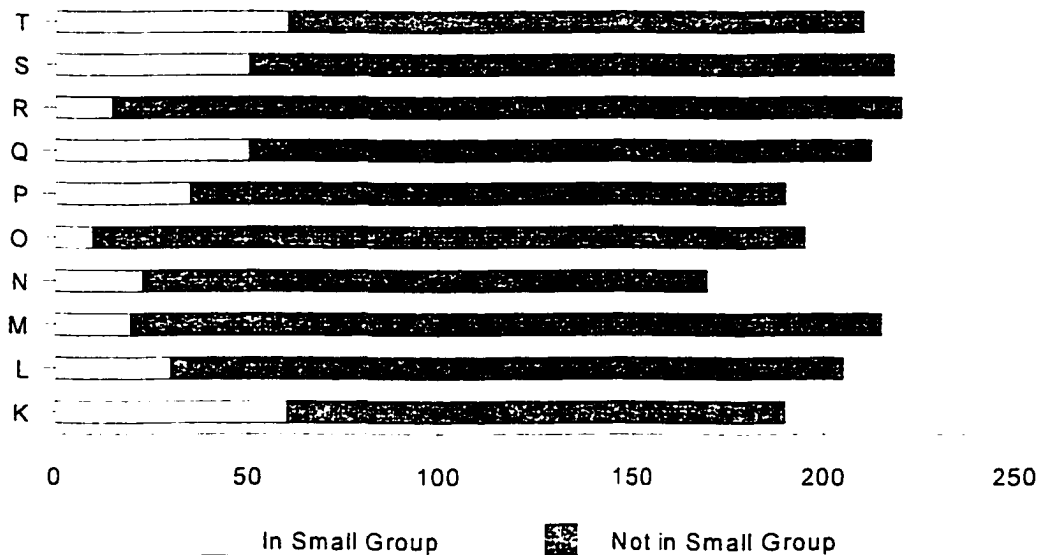


Figure 11. The proportion of attendance involved in small groups in churches below the barrier.

While all the churches below the barrier had organized, formal small groups, only three had training for group leaders, and four had regular support meetings for them.

Adult Sabbath School classes may lend themselves to some of the same dynamics as small groups. The adult classes averaged just over thirty attendees per group. This was figured by taking the average adult attendance and dividing it by the number of adult Sabbath School classes. Because many of the adults would have been involved in children and youth divisions of the Sabbath School, the actual number is smaller. Some families come only to church worship, bypassing Sabbath School.

Prayer meeting could also be considered a small group. Half of the churches below the barrier reported having a regular prayer meeting. The average attendance at

this session was 23.5. This is 11.6 percent of the average attendance at Sabbath morning worship services.

Prayer issues

All but one of the churches below the barrier indicated the presence of an organized prayer ministry. Because of its subjective nature, it is more difficult to discern the effect of prayer on worship attendance. Nine of these churches felt it was important enough to have an organized effort to communicate with God in prayer. Personal prayer time of the pastor was reported at an average of 4.7 hours per week.

Worship issues

On Sabbath mornings when a church family comes together to worship God, the church is at its greatest numbers corporately. The churches below the barrier are using their worship space only at 45 percent on average, yet three churches (M, P, and T) have two services each Sabbath. This is likely an attempt to offer more options for people to experience worship at different times or in different formats.

One survey question asked the pastors to rate their worship service style on a scale of 1 to 10, number 1 being “traditional” while number 10 was “contemporary.” The average was 4.5 for these churches.

Evangelism issues

Adventists have historically taken seriously the command to “go therefore and make disciples” (Matt 28:19). This command is still a foremost consideration today.

Evidence is found in the training events listed earlier. Most of these are outreach training events, instead of specifically to care for present church members. When asked to list types of evangelism completed in the last two years along with ongoing and future evangelism, the responses were extensive.

Church K -- Net programs: Discover Bible Study School; Invite "1" programs; Net '98; Ken Cox Net '99.

Church L -- Three evangelistic crusades with pastor; Revelation Seminar; Discover Bible School; Personal Bible Studies; Signs Boxes; Giving away National Sunday Law book.

Church M -- Net '97; Net '98 Evangelism: Friendship Evangelism; Major evangelism thrust for 2000.

Church N -- Net 98' evangelism; small group patterned after ALPHA ideas.

Church O -- Public city-wide evangelism; Discover Bible School; Health seminars; Fall and Spring evangelism.

Church P -- Friendship evangelism; Seeker-sensitive worship services; Bible instructor ministry.

Church Q -- Net '98; Discover Bible School; Small-group evangelism.

Church R -- Net '98 evangelism; Evangelistic meetings; Ongoing Bible Studies; Cooking schools.

Church S -- Net '98; Revelation Seminars; Live evangelist; Ken Cox series.

Church T -- Net '98 evangelism; Ken Cox, Mark Fox, Leo Schreven evangelism.

Most of these responses fall in the category of directly giving biblical information in public meetings, personally, or by mail. A couple of the items were more relational, such as small groups and friendship evangelism. Two churches were offering felt-needs-oriented services such as health seminars and cooking schools.

This covers the list of issues surveyed in churches below the barrier. Before comparisons are made and final conclusions drawn, we need to look at the ten churches that breached the 200 barrier.

Characteristics of Adventist Churches Above the 200 Barrier

Now our study turns to characteristics found in Adventist churches that have made it through the 200 barrier. These churches are chiefly Anglo, not near an Adventist institution, and with an attendance of 300 to 400. They are found in the states of California, Colorado, Florida, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas, and Washington.

Preliminary Expectations

I expected to find that members in the typical church above the 200 barrier worshiped in a sanctuary that was 70 to 80 percent full. This would feel successful, and yet leave room for guests to find seats without feeling conspicuous. I expected the churches to have a larger proportion of youth and children than the congregations below the barrier. The worship style would be closer to contemporary than the more traditional churches of the previous group. The Sabbath School rooms would also be at 70 to 80 percent of capacity. Parking would be adequate for the number of worshipers.

Other expectations included an abundance of adult Sabbath School classes with smaller numbers per class to give an almost small group atmosphere. The typical church above the barrier may or may not have a formal prayer meeting, but would have an organized prayer ministry. Small groups would be an important part of church life. These groups would have an average of ten to twelve people in each. The group leaders would be provided formal training and support.

The roles of the pastor versus the laity would show a marked difference from the churches below the barrier. The pastor would be a rancher and not just a shepherd. Laity would be doing much more ministry, as well as other duties often left to the pastor of smaller churches. The church board would be smaller on average so it could be more efficient. A greater number of new people would become board members, injecting new ideas and energy. The senior pastor may or may not chair the board.

The churches with 300 to 400 in attendance would have at least two full-time staff members. Together they would pastor only one church. Part-time and volunteer staff would bring the ratio of staff to attendance up to one staff member for every one hundred at worship services. The senior pastor would have been at the church longer and would see himself/herself staying longer than the pastors at churches below the barrier.

This pastoral staff would accomplish the "souls and goals," not by their own energy, but by extensive training of laity. A great deal of energy would be used in training and supporting others in ministry. The senior pastor would have a clear vision for the future of the church, and goals would match and lead to the accomplishment of this vision. Senior pastors would spend on average much more time in prayer and

connecting with God than counterparts below the barrier. Senior pastors would also use connections with peers as support to a greater extent.

The expectations were that each church would do better in some of these areas than others. It was anticipated that, on average, these indicators would surpass the ten churches below the barrier in the surveyed areas of church life. The findings were different than what was anticipated. What follows is a picture of Adventist churches above the barrier as revealed in the ten churches studied.

Findings

The sample of churches surveyed which are above the 200 barrier is estimated to reflect almost one half of the churches in existence that meet the criteria. Book membership ranged from 450 to 786. Attendance ranged from 300 to 400, the limits set by our criteria for this study. The percentage of attendance compared to book membership in these ten surveyed churches is above the North American Division average of 50 percent for all the churches except churches C and E. The churches above the barrier range from 43 to 84 percent. The average is 62 percent for the ten churches.

Table 4 details the data comparing membership to attendance churches A to J.

Facility issues

The church growth literature on facility issues indicated that one reason these churches were above the 200 barrier was the adequate seating provided for the worshipers on Sabbath. Average seating capacity was 423. The range for the ten churches was from 240 to 600. The average was 91 percent of capacity in attendance at worship and ranged

Table 4. Comparison of Membership and Attendance Above the Barrier

Church	Membership	Attendance	Ratio
A	612	400	65%
B	500	400	80%
C	786	340	43%
D	450	380	84%
E	675	320	47%
F	450	300	67%
G	650	400	62%
H	660	400	61%
I	645	362	56%
J	571	300	53%
Average	600	360	62%

from 57 to 167 percent. Instead of what seems to indicate a large portion of the congregation standing in the aisles, four of the churches above the barrier simply used the seats more often by having multiple services.

Figure 12 shows the ratio of seating to attendance. Notice how close several come to capacity, with some attendance exceeding the seating.

Parking for churches above the barrier was much more congested in most cases. Using the 2.5 ratio of parking spaces to attendance, only church C finds itself well below this capacity limit. The average for all ten churches was 2.7 people per car. Church C had enough parking spaces to allow only 1.7 people per car, while church G needed its church family to car pool because of an average of four people per car. One suggestion

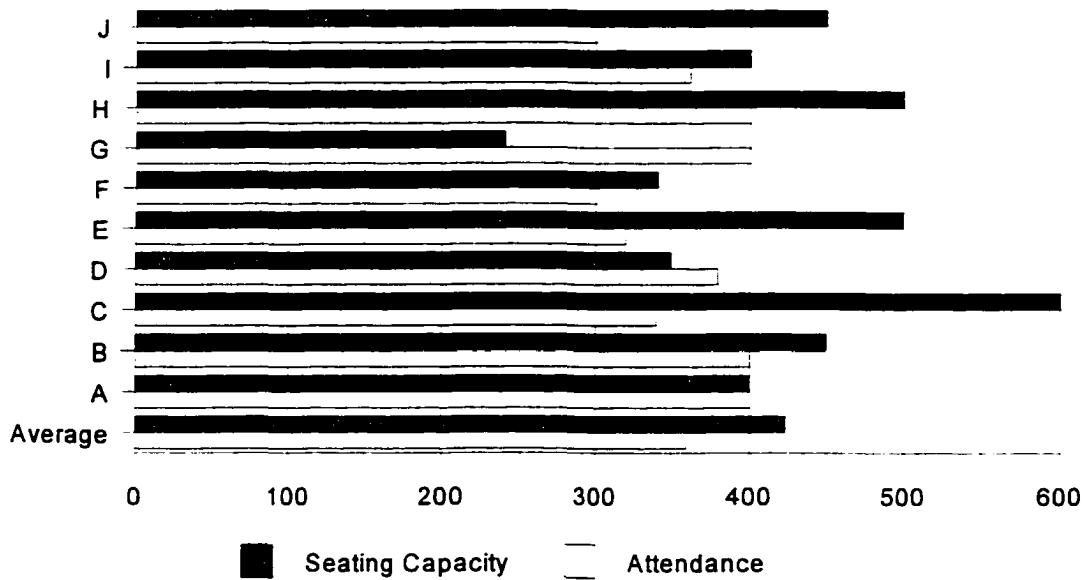


Figure 12. Average attendance compared to seating capacity in churches above the barrier.

might be to alleviate parking issues by multiple services. At the Northwest Houston Church that I pastor, we have two services but still face parking issues because of the overlap created by the Sabbath School time, which falls between the two services. Figure 13 shows the number in attendance compared to the total parking spaces. For the churches above the barrier, having adequate Sabbath School space was a definite problem. On average they were 94 percent full. If the 87 percent rule applies here, eight out of ten reported needing more capacity as shown in figure 14. In all three areas the churches above the barrier are experiencing space problems. According to the literature surveyed, this issue should have a depressing influence on attendance; however, the average attendance is 12 percent above the North American Division average for all churches. A comparison can be found in figure 15.

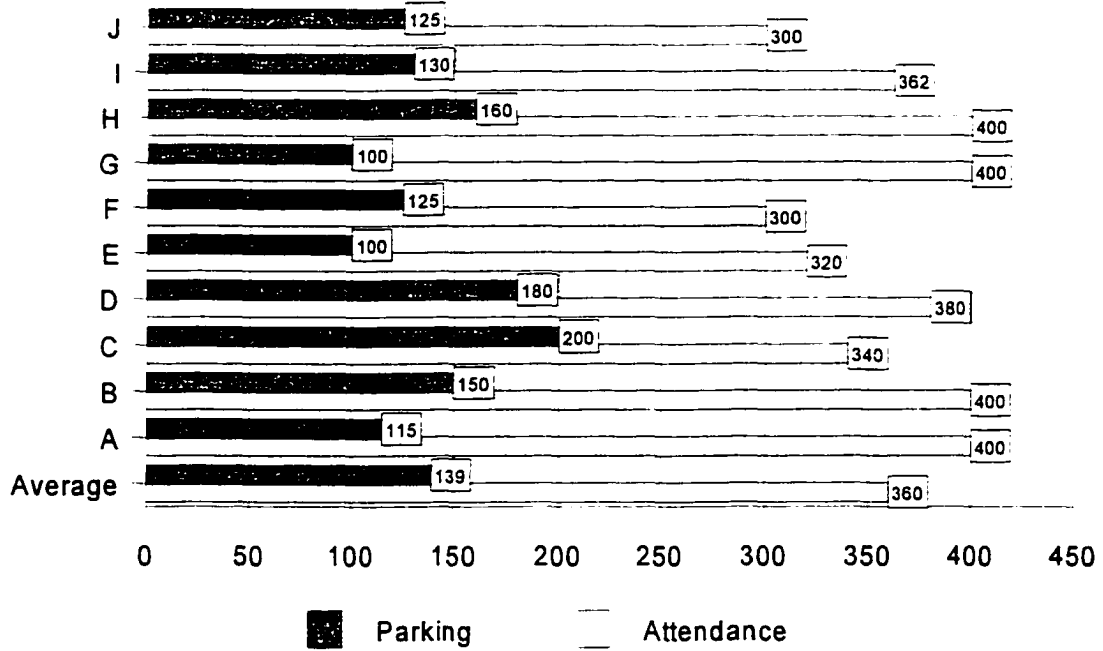


Figure 13. Comparison of attendance and available parking in churches above the barrier.

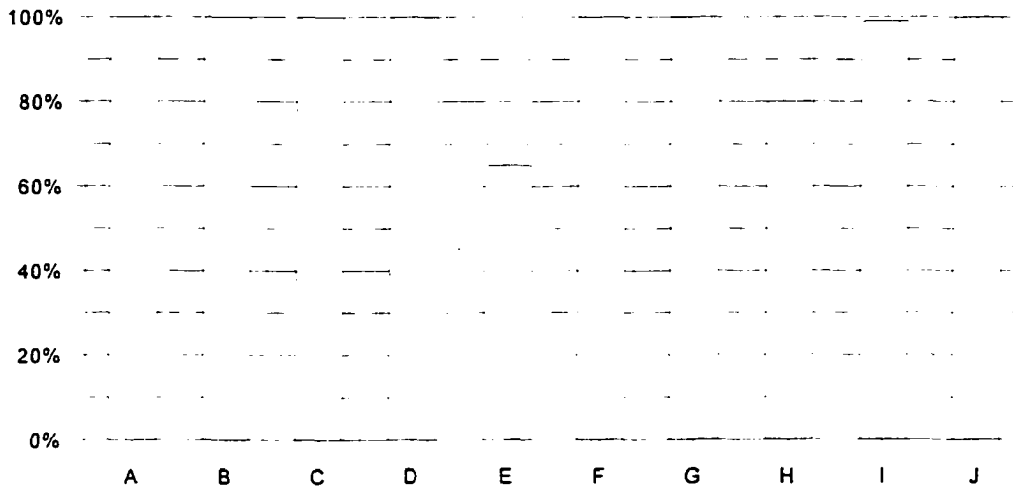


Figure 14. Percentage of Sabbath School capacity being used in churches above the barrier.

Demographic issues

Again, the churches above the barrier were chiefly Anglo, but contained a growing mixture of people from all over the world. The pastor was asked to indicate where his church was located; the results are shown in table 5.

Table 5. Where the Churches Were Found Above the Barrier

Community	Number
Inner-city	0
Urban	3
Suburban	1
Small City	5
Town	1

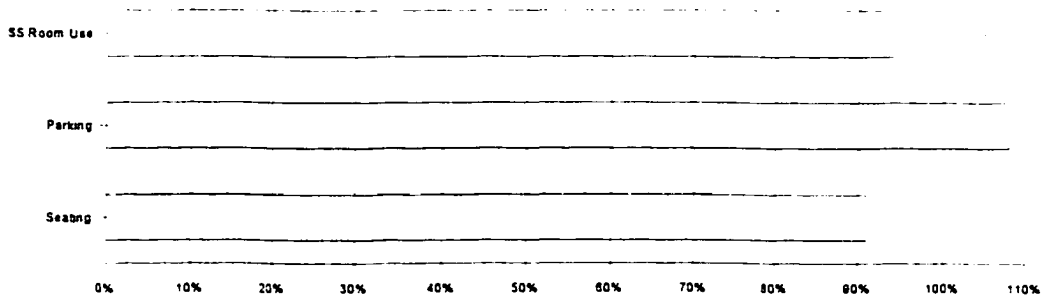


Figure 15. A comparison of average percentage of capacity for facility issues in churches above the barrier. Parking figured by 2.5 times attendance is equal to 100 percent.

The location of these churches was a surprising result. Not finding any of the churches above the barrier in the inner city was understandable. The inner city is a place where Anglo churches have been dying over the last several years. They were expected

to be mostly in urban and suburban areas. Instead, a large portion were found in small cities and towns. A large city population was not needed to host an Adventist church beyond the 200 barrier.

Vision and goal issues

Churches above the barrier were also asked the question, "What is your vision for this church?" This question met with a better quality of answers than those from churches below the barrier. Here are the answers for churches A through J.

Church A -- "To develop God's people into passion-driven servants operating from their gifts for the purpose of reproducing disciples, groups, churches in our area."

Church B -- "To see worship form evolve to reach out to boomers and busters without alienating older saints. To successfully transfer power and leadership from 'old guard' to younger generation."

Church C -- "That this SDA church family will live and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with our community in preparation for His soon return."

Church D -- "Vision -- Build an Acts 2 church within the context of the Adventist message (See Acts 2:42-47). Mission -- Build a biblical community where servant people become fully devoted to Christ."

Church E -- "That every member be involved in soul-winning."

Church F -- "To be a force of love, compassion, and service in our community."

Church G -- "To continue to transform our church into an intentional disciple making church. To grow spiritually, to grow numerically."

Church H -- "Yearly evangelism plans. Possible expansion of church plant. Increasing attendance. Mobilizing greater numbers of lay people in ministries."

Church I -- "To help it focus on fulfilling our mission: to help people know, love, and follow Jesus and prepare for His coming. To get serious about reaching out to non-Adventists (change the way we do things and worship). To build a facility to help us grow to 800 to 1,000 in attendance."

Church J - "To become a church on earth as it is in heaven."

The churches above the barrier were much better at expressing vision for this question instead of a list of goals. Church A was the best of these ten churches with an excellent statement of the future as desired by the pastor (and hopefully shared by the church). Churches C and D did a good job, but could have been a little more specific in stating what they desired in the future. Churches B, F, I, and J did a fair job of expressing the desired future, but needed work on their statements because they appear somewhat vague. Two churches, E and H, did not understand the concept of vision and listed goals instead.

When asked to list goals for the church, pastors responded with a considerable list of tasks.

Church A -- "Define our mission and three objectives: begin, staff, and maintain early church service; plant a church in nearby community; begin leadership letter; effective visitation evangelism annually."

Church B -- "Mission Outreach -- send groups for overseas building projects; redo front of the church, new roof; reach \$500,000 in tithe; 500 plus members."

Church C -- "Establish an on-going 'Divorce Care' program; finish gymnasium for school and increase enrollment; complete church fellowship hall."

Church D -- "Increase attendance in believers' service and seekers' service; 150 in attendance of small groups; additional classrooms; increase church budget."

Church E -- "Raise tithe 20 percent; baptize 20 percent of active membership; double attendance."

Church F -- "Build new sanctuary; have full-time youth pastor; develop community ministry."

Church G -- "Build addition to church school; save money for new church expansion; start a Spanish church within our congregation."

Church H -- "Build renovation and landscaping; new roof on school and church."

Church I -- "Recognize the need to move and expand; transition to a purpose-driven model; to be more giving; to be more focused on others; to transition to where evangelism is not an event, but a lifestyle."

Church J -- "Start prayer ministry; start small-group ministry; reduce nominating committee by using a gifts-based ministry; implement contemporary style of worship."

The stated goals of the churches above the barrier somewhat match the fulfilling of the vision. In some cases the connection is not clear. Perhaps this lack of understanding is because of a lack of context on my part. At least in the churches above the barrier, we have something to compare in eight out of ten statements of vision.

Organization, roles, and staffing

Boards for churches above the barrier were larger than in those below the barrier. The average size was twenty-six. In all twenty churches the pastor chaired the board. The percentage of new board members in the last two years for churches above the barrier was similar to the comparison churches at 30.2 percent. Figure 16 shows the total number on the board compared to the number of new members in the last two years.

Staffing issues for the churches above the barrier proved most revealing. Figure 17 shows the relationship of full-time equivalents to attendance.

When questioned on longevity in the church, the pastors responded with answers between 1 and 10 years. The average was 4.25 years. In all cases, these pastors saw themselves with that particular congregation for five more years.

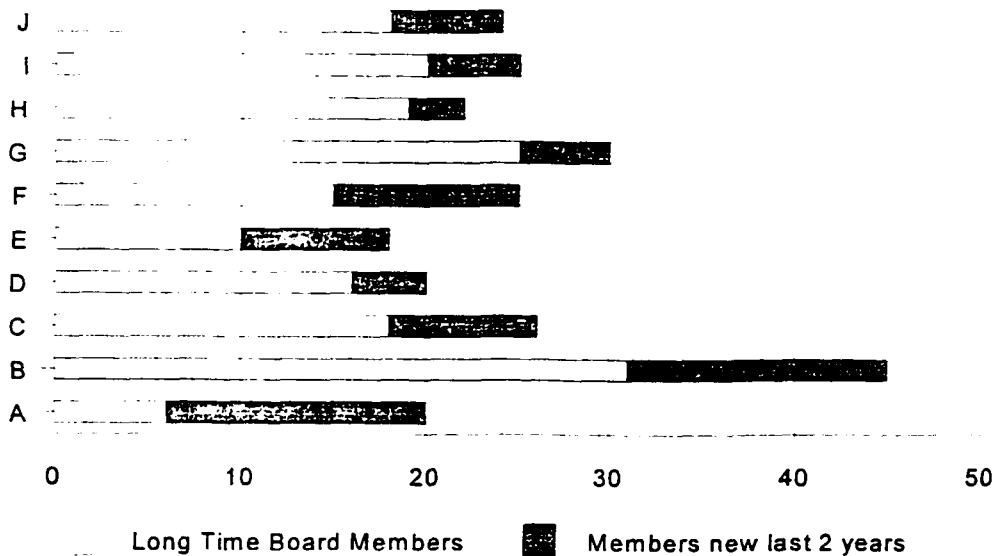


Figure 16. Church board size compared to the number of new members on the board in the last two years in churches above the barrier.

Two of the churches had another church in a district with them. Church F has two full-time and a part-time staff member on its pastoral team. Church I has a full-time and a part-time staff member.

The ministry time reported by churches above the barrier averaged a total of 44.45 hours per week. The breakdown of how these pastors used this time is displayed in figure 18. Visitation, counseling, preaching, and teaching take up half of the ministry time for pastors of churches above the barrier. Supervising staff and ministry leaders takes a greater amount of time than it did for the comparison churches.

These pastors were also surveyed about a series of ministry tasks asking whether these tasks were a pastoral or laity responsibility. On average, these pastors noted only 1.5 times out of 14 in the list of different ministries where they thought there was a difference between who was doing a ministry and who should be doing them. This

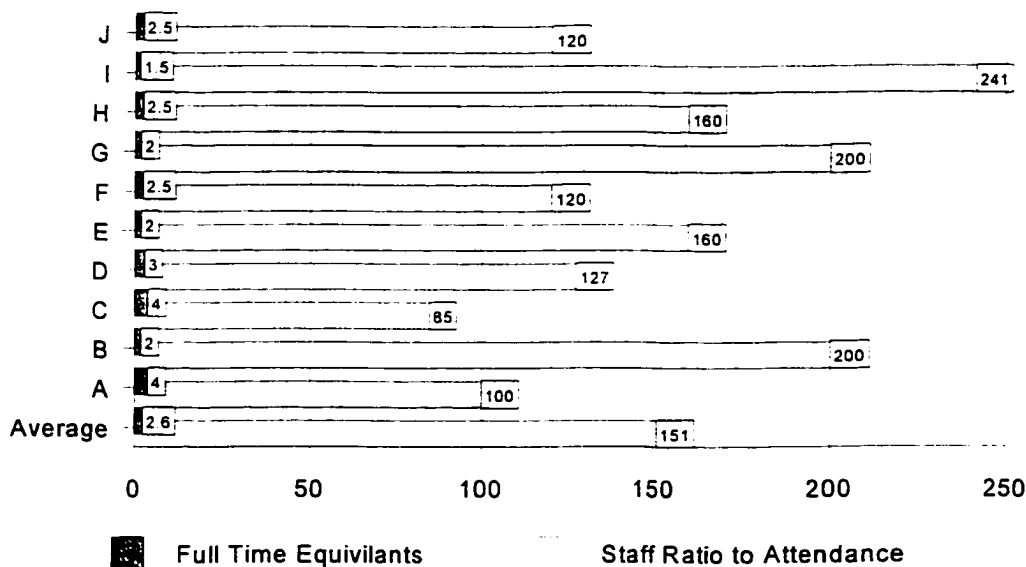


Figure 17. Staff ratio to attendance in churches above the barrier.

finding revealed that pastors of larger churches seem to experience a greater role clarity than the pastors of churches below the 200 barrier.

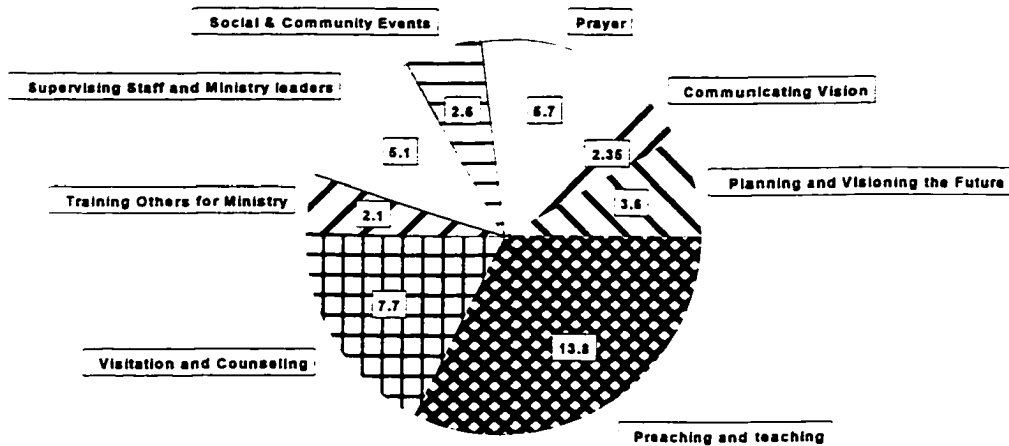


Figure 18. Average use of ministerial time in churches above the barrier. Numbers in the box represent hours per week.

Ministry training issues

All the churches above the barrier indicated that they have events to train members for ministry. Regarding the question asking respondents to list types of training the church offered for ministry, Church A responded: "1. Leadership lifter, quarterly meeting for vision, huddle, and sharing. 2. Connections -- doing a series on small groups. 3. Elders' and Board retreat -- planning and training. 4. Small group training once or twice a year." Other areas of training for these congregations included the following: Making friends; fulfilling the Gospel commission seminar; working with backsliders' workshops; hospitality training for greeters; elder's mentorship; deacon mobilization; spiritual gifts discovery seminar; music workshops; drama workshops; Sabbath School workshops; Willow Creek training; witnessing/personal ministry seminars; prayer

conferences; lay Bible worker seminar; discipleship training; and worship training. Of the ten churches above the barrier, seven indicated training of leadership within the church.

Small-group issues

Three of the churches above the barrier reported no organized small groups in their congregation. Of the churches reporting a small-group ministry, 17.9 percent of the attendance was reported as being involved in small groups. Figure 19 shows the relationship between the total in attendance for these ten churches and the number in organized small groups.

Of the churches who had small-group ministries, five reported that leadership training was available for the group leaders. Three reported ongoing support meetings for them. This is seemingly a contradiction when compared to the church growth literature I have surveyed on the topic of small groups.

Sabbath School classes reported by churches above the barrier averaged 6.6 per church. Dividing the average adult attendance by this figure results in 42.8 adult attendees per class. This number might be inflated because many adults would be in children's Sabbath Schools as leaders or simply come only to worship services. Prayer meeting is a small group for these churches, with six of the churches above the barrier reporting holding a regular prayer meeting each week with average attendance 24.7.

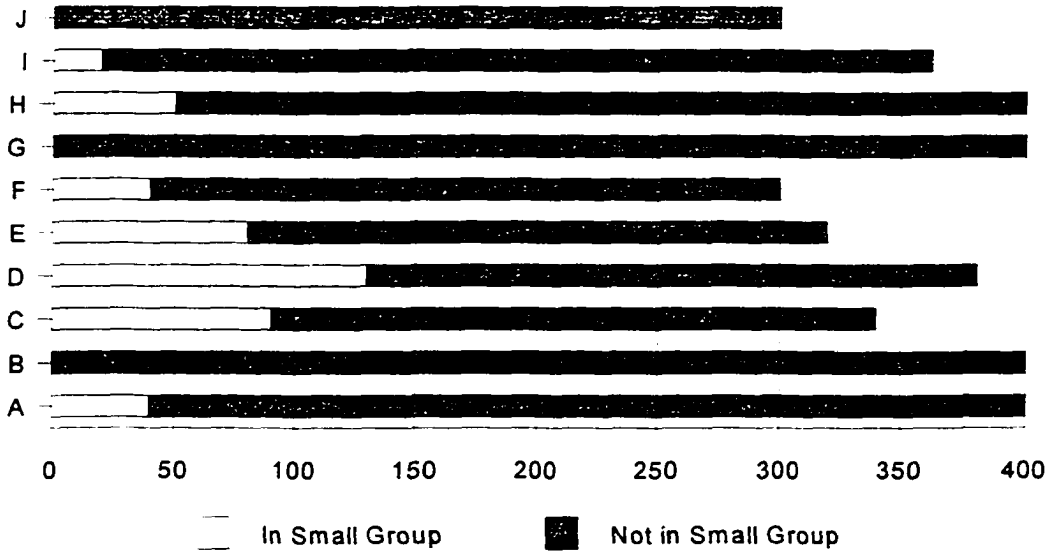


Figure 19. The proportion of attendance involved in small groups in churches above the barrier.

Prayer issues

All of the churches above the barrier reported an organized prayer ministry. Personal prayer time for these pastors averaged 5.7 hours per week. This is one hour more per week than pastors in churches below the barrier. Perhaps the better quality and understanding of vision by these pastors can partly be attributed to this extra hour of prayer per week.

Worship issues

There were six churches with one service per week, three with two services per week, and one with three services. A scale was set up in the survey with 1 being traditional, and 10 being contemporary. The pastors were asked to rate their church for

its worship style. The churches above the barrier ranged from 3 to 9. The average for the churches was 6.4.

Evangelism issues

The churches above the barrier had a different concept when listing evangelism events for their congregation. They did have the traditional evangelism meetings and seminars, yet there was an element of “felt-need” evangelism that was more prevalent than in the comparison churches. Here are the answers to the questions, “Please list types of evangelism completed in the last two years.” and, “Please list any ongoing or future plans for this church”:

Church A -- Net '96; Beyond 2000; visitation evangelism: city-wide large campaign with It Is Written speaker; young-adult evangelism and visitation.

Church B -- Net '95, '96, '98; Conference evangelist; cooking school; church school is biggest evangelistic project.

Church C -- Divorce care program; Net '98; major series with major evangelist; Discover correspondence program; global mission trips; cell groups; Jesus I Never Knew seminar; summer youth day camp.

Church D -- Main 11:30 A.M. service reaching church dropouts, unchurched, and disenchanting. Open House; Seminar on personal evangelism, contagious Christianity; seeker service; want additional pastor for discipleship.

Church E -- Two Bible study programs 97/98; reaping meeting with evangelist; public meeting every year; ongoing friendship evangelism.

Church F -- Bible Classes; one-on-one studies; reaping meetings in fall.

Church G -- Net '96, '98; personal Bible studies; Spanish evangelistic series; train members to share faith in Jesus; disciple members into reproducing disciple makers; future Net satellite events.

Church H -- Net '98; healthful cooking school; Stress Seminar; Breathe Free; pastor's evangelistic meetings; other evangelistic meetings.

Church I -- Net '97; Daniel/Prophecy seminar; intentional evangelism.

Church J -- Friendship.

The churches above the barrier did have a great deal of intentional public evangelistic outreach. There was also an added dimension of friendship, using the worship service for evangelism. and even the use of church school as an evangelistic tool. Filling "felt-needs" was a common theme. Being "contagious Christians" with friendship evangelism was also a common thread through most of the churches.

Now we will turn our attention to comparing the two groups and drawing conclusions from the survey results. A picture should emerge of what a pastor and his congregation must consider if they wish to grow through the 200 barrier to have more people worshipping on Sabbath morning.

Similarities and Differences Affecting Church Growth

This section takes the nine issues and compares similarities and differences in order to understand what might be limiting the churches under the barrier from surmounting it. By comparing the two groups, a picture should emerge of how a church

can organize to transform itself and move through the 200 barrier. Table 6 shows a summary of major issues comparing churches above and below the barrier. Greater detail is available in the survey results in Appendix B. All answers are an average of the ten churches in a group.

The North American Division average attendance for all churches is 50 percent of membership. Figure 20 compares the two groups in graph form.

Figure 20 shows that churches above the barrier have a greater percentage of their membership in attendance. In the following nine issues, it will become clear where a church must concentrate its efforts. The church must adjust in order to be able to reach a greater percentage of its book membership and to create a worship and church family life that is more meaningful for them. In the nine issues to follow, there were some surprising results. Some issues that church growth literature spoke of as absolutely necessary, became less important. Others were revealed to be an important focus for church growth and maintenance above the 200 barrier. A church under the barrier should concentrate on these points if it wishes to obey the scriptural command to grow the family of God.

Facility Issues

Three areas surveyed were seating capacity compared to attendance, parking compared to attendance, and percentage of capacity of Sabbath School room for children and youth. The theory was that these might be filling up and restricting growth.

Churches below the barrier might be held back simply because there was not enough room to facilitate worship and church family life.

Table 6. Comparison of Major Issues as Indicated in Survey

Issues	Above	Below
Ratio Attendance-Membership	62%	43%
Ratio Youth/child-Adult	24%	27%
Attendance % of Seating Capacity	91%	45%
Parking Spaces Used (2.5 per car)	108%	72%
Number of Worship Services	1.5	1.3
Sabbath School Room in Use	94%	80%
Ministry Role Agreement Variance	11%	21%
Full Time Equivalents	2.60	1.45
Pastoral Longevity	4.25	3.4
Attending Members in Small Groups	17.9%	17.4%
New Members on Board	30.2%	28.2%
Evangelistic Events Past 2 Yrs	3.1	3.4
Worship (1=Traditional 10=Contemporary)	6.4	4.5
Total Ministry Hrs by Pastor Per Week	44.45	44.35

Seating capacity

When considering seating capacity, the churches below the barrier were not restricted at all in having enough seats for worship services. On average, the seating capacity was used only at 45 percent. Even the fullest church below the barrier (church N) was only 57 percent full at its worship services. Guests and potential returning

members would have no problem finding a seat in any of the churches surveyed that were below the barrier.

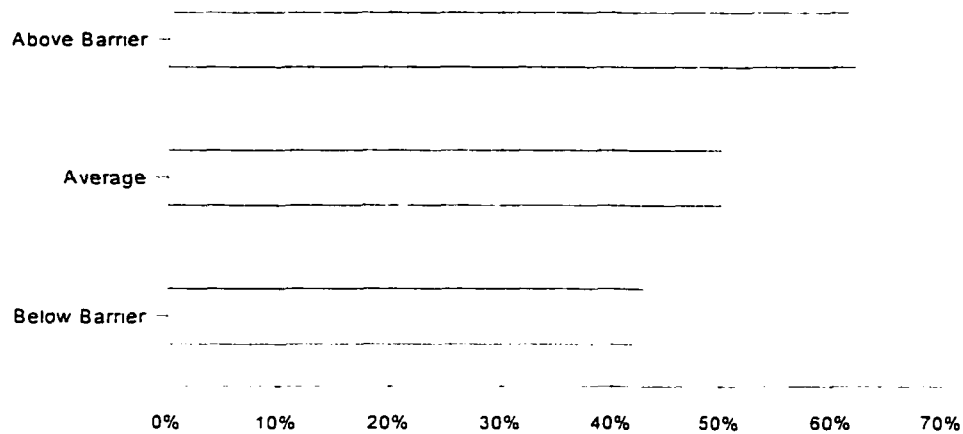


Figure 20. Comparison of percentage of membership that is in attendance at worship services.

The opposite is true for the churches above the barrier. Seven of the ten churches surveyed were at over 80 percent of capacity for worship. Church G is at 167 percent of capacity, Church D is at 109 percent of capacity, and Church A is at 100 percent of capacity. According to the church growth literature studied, this should limit the ability of these churches to hold attendance at such high levels. However, these churches dealt with the problem by having multiple services so that each seat was used more than once on Sabbath for worship.

Parking capacity

On the issue of parking, again, 2.5 people per space is considered 100 percent of capacity. Parking for the churches below the barrier was not a problem for any except

Church P, which has a ratio of 3.4 people per parking space. The average figure was 1.8 people per parking space. Parking was clearly not a problem for the churches below the barrier. Lack of parking capacity was not a factor in the churches' low attendance.

Churches above the barrier were just the opposite. Eight of the ten churches were at near or above the 100 percent capacity ratio of 2.5 persons per parking space. The average was 2.7 people per parking space. Even with multiple worship services, this would still be a problem because of the overlap of Sabbath School and people arriving and leaving. In conversation with these pastors, they shared how they had overcome this problem in creative ways. Some had a Sunday-keeping church next door and shared parking lots with them. Two churches had prepared grassy fields or lawn space for cars to park on. In most cases the parking problem should have restricted growth and hampered these churches from maintaining the present attendance at worship services, but did not.

Sabbath School room capacity

In churches below the barrier, Sabbath School space was not a problem for six of ten of the churches. Four churches reported being at 100 percent of capacity. The average was a comfortable 80 percent full.

Sabbath School capacity was a problem for churches above the barrier. Eight of the churches reported being at 100 percent of capacity, an average of 94 percent for this group. This should have been a restriction for maintaining attendance, yet somehow these churches were able to work with their capacity full.

Figure 21 compares the facility issues for the two groups.

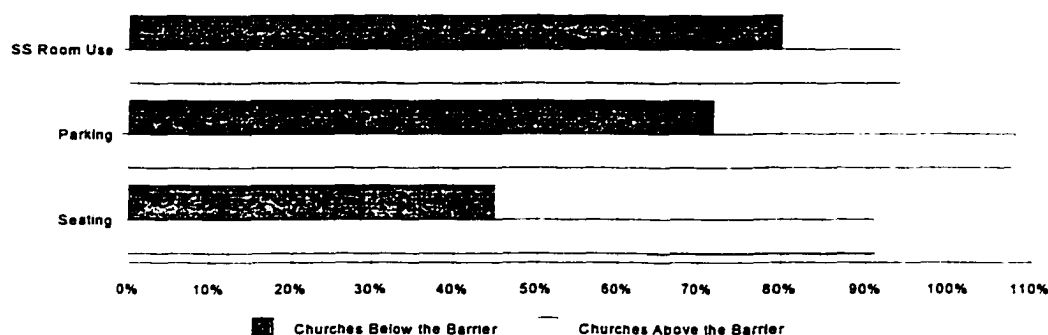


Figure 21. Comparing average percentage of capacity for facility issues in churches above and below the barrier. Parking figured by 2.5 times attendance is equal to 100 percent.

Seating, parking, and Sabbath School room capacity were not found to be a reason for restricting churches below the barrier from being able to maintain attendance at higher levels. Churches above the barrier should have been challenged in all three areas, thus restricting their ability to have attendance at this level. Apparently these churches above the barrier were able to deal creatively with these issues and have an attendance above the barrier in spite of the pressures.

Demographic Issues

Anglo-Adventist churches have followed demographic trends of Anglos moving from the inner city to the urban and suburban areas. Churches in small cities and towns have complained that many of the members have moved to urban and suburban parts of the larger cities for work or educational reasons. Monte Sahlin writes in 1992 that some 140 churches, largely Anglo, with memberships of 400 to 800 are among our largest

churches. He goes on to detail how another 50 large urban churches that are traditionally Anglo are becoming multi-cultural and thriving in urban America.¹ It is expected that the churches above the barrier would be clustered in the urban to suburban areas of the country. It is also expected that the churches below the barrier would be found in the inner city, small cities, or towns. It was a surprise to find the opposite. See table 7.

None of the twenty churches reported being in the inner-city, although churches above the barrier were in an urban to suburban area four out of ten times. Churches below the barrier were located in these areas nine out of ten times.

Table 7. Where Churches in This Study Are Located

	<u>Churches Above Barrier</u>	<u>Churches Below Barrier</u>
Inner City	0	0
Urban	3	5
Suburban	1	4
Small city	5	1
Town	1	0

Another question on the survey asked how many adults and how many children and youth were present at worship services. The theory was that a younger congregation would be better able to maintain itself above the 200 barrier. The opposite was found. While churches above the barrier reported that 24 percent of the worshipping congregation were children and youth, the churches below the barrier reported 27 percent. This is clearly not a factor in keeping some churches below the barrier.

¹Sahlin, "Large SDA Churches: Adventism's Silent Majority," 34, 35.

Churches below the barrier attract members who are on the books in almost as impressive numbers as did churches above the barrier. Yet the actual attendance being at these churches places them below the barrier. From this survey it can be concluded that being in an urban or suburban area is not a factor in assisting churches to attain a membership between 300 and 400 in attendance at worship services. Churches below the barrier located in small cities and towns can be assured that growth to attendance above the barrier is possible. Demographic location is not a hindrance to the existence of larger churches.

Vision and Goals Issues

My favorite definition of vision comes from George Barna, "Vision for ministry is a clear mental image of a preferable future imparted by God to His chosen servants and is based upon an accurate understanding of God, self, and circumstances."¹ The reason this definition appeals to me so much is the God element. This definition recognizes that vision must not originate in the pastor or church, but in God.

The lack of vision is a real hindrance to growth. Galloway reminds us. "No church will ever be any larger than its vision. Tell me your vision and I will tell you your future."² The lack of vision brings about predictable results. Someone once said, "Aim at nothing and you will surely hit it!"

¹Barna, The Power of Vision, 28.

²Galloway, 13.

The pastors were asked, "What is your vision for this church?" A study of the answers reveals a great deal about this important issue. Of the churches below the barrier, only one of the ten had a vision for the future, whereas eight of the churches above the barrier had at least a fair statement of vision.

Churches under the barrier flavored their vision statement, such as it was, with "goals" and "souls." Church K stated, "My vision is to get to and maintain a 10 percent growth per year minimum." Church T envisioned "more outreach programs, and better finances." Churches above the barrier had a more encompassing vision. Though they did include evangelistic elements, they were also envisioning a future where people grow spiritually (as stated by church G) and can be of service to the community (as stated by church F).

On the back of the survey from church D there was a list of "Things that have made a difference." Among the suggestions were three that pertained to vision. These are, "Clear mission and vision (the word "clear" was double underlined), well-thought-out 5-year plan, and visioning often to leadership and members."

It is not possible to compare the goals of the churches below the barrier with their vision, except for church P. In church P and the eight churches above the barrier that have a vision statement, there is high level of agreement between the goals and the vision. Some of the goals cannot be judged without being on location and being an integral part of the church, but enough is revealed to show that a significant number of the churches above the barrier have a vision and the goals to accomplish that vision.

The time reported as spent communicating vision was exactly the same in the churches above and below the barrier. What the communicated vision was and how it fit the activities and goals of the congregation must have been of different quality and in varying agreement with the vision.

Shared vision and appropriate goals to facilitate the vision are an important part of whether a church is above or below the barrier. This area has been shown by the survey to make a great difference in church attendance.

Organization, Roles, and Staffing Issues

One of the areas surveyed was the size and composition of church boards. The theory was that larger boards would be a clumsier and slower way to make necessary changes. It was also proposed that new members on a board would bring new ideas and vitality. Boards for the churches below the barrier proved to be about 25 percent smaller than boards for churches above the barrier. They were also about 30 percent smaller in relation to attendance. New board members were at about the same percentage for all twenty churches. Churches above the barrier had about 30 percent of the members of the board who had become members in the last two years, while the new members in those below the barrier were 28 percent of the boards. This was only a 2 percent difference. In accordance with this, this survey and study did not reveal any connection between the size of a church board and the influence it might have on size of church attendance. The issue of new board members and the vitality they might bring did not show itself as an influence on the size of the congregation on Sabbath morning. Whatever new ideas they

might have brought with them to the church board had no influence on whether a church found itself above or below the 200 barrier.

Staffing in the churches was closely related to attendance as figure 22 shows.

There is a definite connection shown in the study between the number attending worship on a Sabbath morning and the number of full-time staff equivalents. Churches below the barrier have an average of 203 people in worship on Sabbath. These churches have an average of 1.4 pastoral staff per church. This staffing makes one full-time equivalent staff for every 154 in attendance. Churches above the barrier have an average of 2.6 pastoral staff members per church. This staffing makes one full-time equivalent for every 151 in attendance. These figures indicate that one full-time pastor is needed to support every 150 in worship on Sabbath morning. I would contend that even this amount of staffing is survival level and not optimal. As George and Bird predicted, "The ratio, then, breaks down to one pastor for every 100 to 150 people in attendance."¹

These churches are already at the higher end of the spectrum.

The pastor of church G wrote on the back of his survey, "In my opinion the reasons most Adventist churches do not break the 200 member barrier are as follows: A. Our conferences do not staff churches to grow beyond 200." Staffing seems to be a major issue when a church below the barrier considers growth.

Longevity of the pastoral staff may also make a difference. When questioned on how long the pastor had been at this church, those below the barrier reported an average of 3.4 years. The churches above the barrier reported 4.25 years, almost a whole year longer. One pastor wrote, "Pastors don't stay long enough in a church to lead them into

¹George and Bird, 158.

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¹George and Bird. 158.

one of the reasons this church has grown is that the pastor before me was here for 12 years. I am in my 6th year.” Figure 23 shows how ministry time was used by the pastors

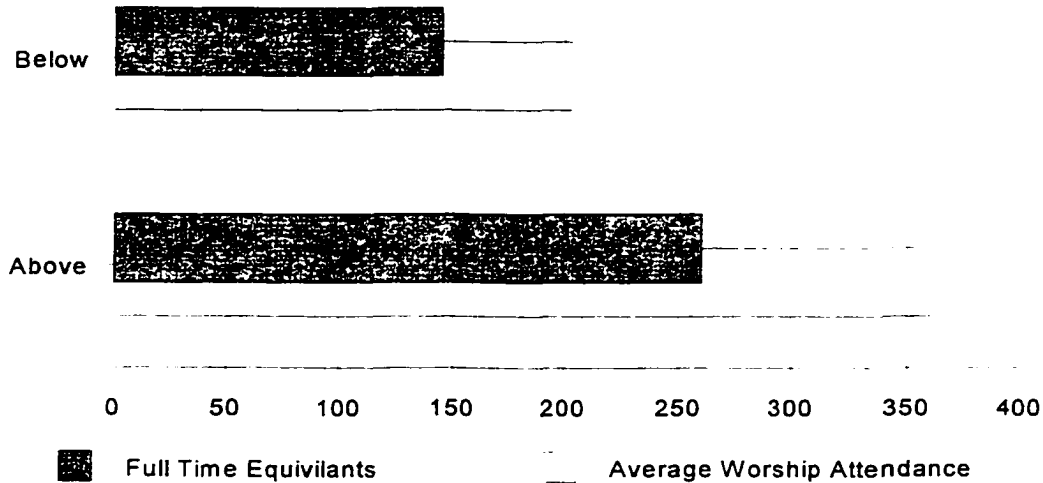


Figure 22. A comparison of staff to attendance for the two groups. Full time equivalents below the barrier averaged 1.45 while above the barrier the average was 2.6. When average attendance is divided by the number of full-time equivalents, there are about 150 in attendance for every full time equivalent.

When asked how the pastors used their ministry time, there was little difference in the average. Below the barrier, the average total time is 44.35 hours per week. Above the barrier, it is only slightly more, at 44.45 hours per week.

In the areas of preaching and teaching, visitation and counseling, pastors in churches below the barrier averaged several hours more per week than pastors in churches above the barrier. Less time was spent by the former in supervising staff and ministry leaders, as would be expected with less personnel to supervise. Pastors below the barrier spent more time at community and social events than planning and visioning

or communicating the vision. Pastors above the barrier spent, on average, one hour more per week in prayer.

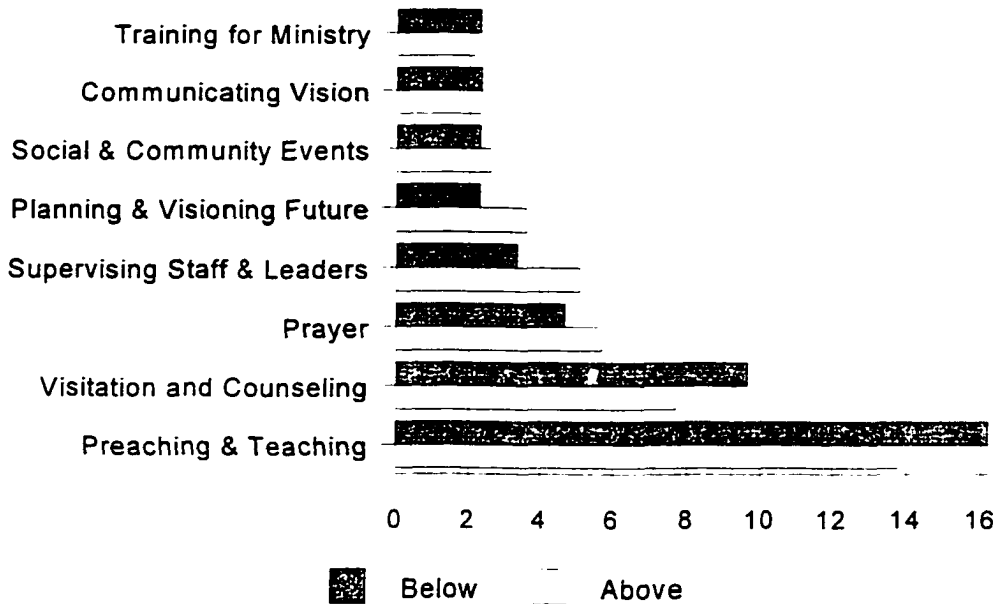


Figure 23. Average use of ministerial time by pastors. Comparison of churches above and below the barrier.

On the issue of ministry role agreement, pastors were asked to indicate in a list of fourteen ministry tasks who should be doing the tasks and who was actually doing the tasks. Churches below the barrier averaged three instances where the pastors thought that there was a difference. Above the barrier, the rate was almost halved to an average of 1.6 incidence of disagreement per pastor. This might indicate pastors and congregations working together in greater harmony and understanding of each other.

In the areas of organization, roles, and staffing, the greatest and most crucial issue is simply having enough pastoral staff to cover the church. The suggested number

would be one full-time equivalent staff for every 100 to 150 people expected to attend worship service on Sabbath morning.

Ministry Training Issues

Of the group below the barrier, pastors reported spending slightly more time on ministry training than did the group above the barrier. The group above the barrier reported 2.3 hours per week while the pastor of churches above the barrier reported 2.1 hours. In churches above the barrier, leadership was a major theme of the training. A note on the survey of church G said, "About a year ago we decided and announced in church we would stop spending so much time trying to train the congregation, and to spend time training the leaders in the church." While this may at first seem to contradict expectations, the ministry training emphasis seems to make a great difference. Also the focus the churches above the barrier have on a vision for the church should direct the training in specific ways instead of training in various directions.

Churches above the barrier often used training events to develop leaders. This is a difference between churches above and below the barrier. It would indicate that pastors wishing to have attendance above the barrier must emphasize training leadership more than the general congregation.

Small-Group Issues

Regarding small groups in growing churches Carl George said, "It's so important that everything else is to be considered secondary to its promotion and preservation."¹

¹George, Prepare Your Church for the Future, 41.

Monte Sahlin speaks of small groups as the only salvation for our church in North America. "The small group approach can keep the momentum of the Adventist Movement alive in the 1990s and beyond. Our mission and message will not thrive in the Northern Hemisphere unless it adopts a small group strategy."¹

George Barna states that the small-group movement has been largely unsuccessful in incorporating people into Christian churches across America. "Small groups (cell groups) never really seemed to have caught on: fewer than one out of every five adults is presently active in one."²

Barna was right. In churches above the barrier, 17.9 percent of the average attendance were involved in small groups. Churches below the barrier had a slightly lower ratio with 17.4 percent of the average attendance involved in small groups.

At first glance, this would seem to have no effect on the size of the worshipping congregation. Both groups appear to be involved at about the same level. The surprise comes when we realize that all ten churches below the barrier had formal organized small groups, while only seven of the churches above the barrier had organized small groups in the church. It would have been expected that small groups were necessary to maintain attendance above the barrier.

Prayer meeting was held regularly by six churches above the barrier. This dropped to five in churches below the barrier. The average attendance of 24.7 and 23.5,

¹Sahlin. Sharing Our Faith with Friends without Losing Either, 137.

²Barna. The Second Coming of the Church, 18.

respectively. is little more than another small group. This indicates that prayer meeting, or the lack thereof, is not a significant issue in having a larger church.

Churches below the barrier had more Sabbath School classes per capita, with 30 percent smaller attendance in each class than the group above the barrier. If these were similar to small groups, they would tend to be more effective with smaller classes and more classes per attendance. Again, this lessens the importance of organized small groups in the church and their importance to the size of the church attendance.

Yet most church growth experts share the view that small, or cell-groups are absolutely necessary to breaking the barrier. C. Peter Wagner states it this way, "The major difference between a church under the 200 barrier and one over the barrier is fellowship groups."¹ I argue that we must expand our definition of small groups to encompass more than just formal organized Bible study groups. I deal with this in greater detail when I share the experience of the Northwest Houston Seventh-day Adventist Church and its movement through the 200 barrier in chapter 5.

Prayer Issues

Christians recognize the need for the powerful force of prayer as they seek to be in harmony with the will of God. Bill Sullivan, in his book Ten Steps to Breaking the 200 Barrier, maintains that to break the 200 barrier you must intensify your praying. He

¹C. Peter Wagner, Church Planting for a Greater Harvest (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), 130.

states. "While it is vitally important that both pastor and people pray, they must also work. Prayer is not a substitute for work, it is the foundation for work."¹

Part of that work includes using the foundation of prayer as a basis to understand the vision God has for the local church. Pastors from churches below the barrier spent an average of 4.7 hours per week in prayer. Those in churches above the barrier spent one hour more, at 5.7 hours on average. This is only a quantitative measure of prayer. Perhaps quality as it relates to the church is revealed in the quality of the vision. Prayer is the third largest portion of time spent by the pastors of both groups.

Worship Issues

The number of churches that have only one service is similar for the two groups. Above the barrier, six churches have only one service, while below the barrier seven churches have only one service. The number of worship services does not seem to influence whether a church is above or below the barrier.

The question on style of worship service might shed more light on differences between the two sides of the barrier. The churches below the barrier were considerably more traditional than the churches above the barrier. This information may be an indication that growth through the 200 barrier may necessitate that a church consider a more contemporary worship service. Figure 24 shows the difference on average between the two groups on the style of worship.

¹Sullivan, 26.

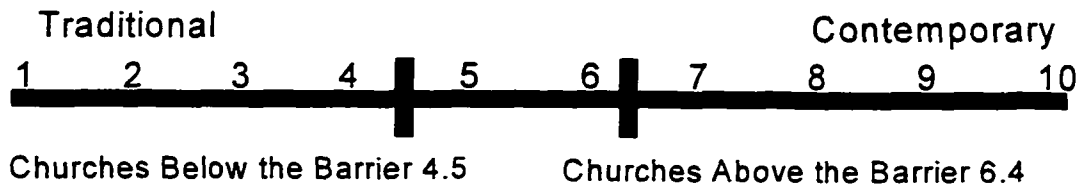


Figure 24. Worship style average for churches above and below the barrier. Vertical bar indicates the average worship style for the two groups.

Evangelism Issues

The churches above the barrier reported an average of 3.1 evangelistic events in the last two years. They also reported an average of 2.3 planned events for the coming year. The churches below the barrier did better with 3.4 events reported, on average, which had been completed in the last two years and 2.6 planned for the future. Churches below the barrier were not in that position because they avoided evangelism. Their zeal for evangelism seems to exceed that of the churches above the barrier.

But when we look at the methods churches listed for evangelism, we find a difference between the two groups. The evangelistic features for the churches above the barrier include an emphasis on sharing biblical knowledge, but there was also a strong emphasis on relational, friendship, and felt-needs.

If a church wants its evangelism to affect its attendance, it must look closely at its emphasis. Sheer number of evangelistic events is not the answer to moving a church above the attendance barrier. Evangelism must be combined with several other things. A church must recognize that to maintain attendance above the 200 barrier the church must become a different type of organization. Beyond evangelism, the church will need to

look at its worship style, staffing, fellowship groups, and facility capacity. Leadership is also key. The pastor will need to pray more and focus on a vision, God's vision for the church. The pastor will need to train leaders more than training the church. It is not a single note, but a complex melody that the leader of the church must play to maintain attendance above the 200 barrier.

Summary

Thus now we see that churches above the 200 barrier are a different type of organization. Churches below the barrier are not being held back by lack of worship seating, Sabbath School space, or parking places. The number of people in formal, organized small groups and the percentage of the attendance is about the national average closely paralleling the churches above the barrier. The boards have new leadership at a only slightly lower percentage than the group above the barrier. Churches below the barrier excel in evangelistic events and their pastors spend almost an identical number of hours in ministry each week.

The differences as indicated in the survey show that churches above the barrier are able to maintain on average 62 percent of their book membership in attendance, while the churches below the barrier only 43 percent. The churches above the barrier do this in spite of struggling with seating capacity, Sabbath School classroom capacity, and parking space. I would argue that the difference lies in leadership. There was a sizable difference in the worship style, yet I propose that the greatest difference was leadership.

1. Leadership must have a vision of the future for the church and share it successfully with the lay leadership and congregation. A clear vision was found in eight out of ten churches above the barrier, while below the barrier it was found in only one.

2. Leadership must plan to stay longer in one congregation. While almost all twenty church pastors said they saw themselves still in the congregation two to five years hence, on average, the pastors above the barrier had been at their present church 25 percent longer than the pastors below the barrier.

3. With a combination of full-time, part-time and volunteer pastoral staff, churches below the barrier averaged 1.45 full-time equivalents while churches above the barrier averaged 2.60 full-time equivalents. When this is compared to attendance, the average for both groups is one full time equivalent for every 150 members in worship.

4. While both groups were almost identical in the number of hours spent in ministry each week, the pastors above the barrier divided it differently. The pastors above the barrier spent an hour more in prayer and 1.3 hours more in planning and visioning for the future, and 1.85 hours more in working with staff and ministry leaders.

Can a pastor use all the information we have collected to change a church into a new kind of organization and make it a church with attendance above the 200 barrier? I believe so, and I will now share with you the story of how this was done, how what we now know was used to move the Northwest Houston Seventh-day Adventist Church through the 200 barrier.

CHAPTER 5

MOVING THE NORTHWEST HOUSTON SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH THROUGH THE 200 BARRIER

The Northwest Houston Seventh-day Adventist Church has grown through the 200 barrier in the last four years. In this chapter, I first share a short history. Next I share the journey of transformation as the church reorganized itself to move from plateau through the barrier. I look at the influence the church growth literature and the survey information showing characteristics of churches above the barrier had on the growth process and how the church related to the nine issues shown above.

Historical Sketch

The Northwest Houston Church began in the mid-1970s when several members of the Houston Central Church felt there should be an Adventist church in the Northwest part of this large city. It was officially chartered as a church in 1980 with 44 original members. It began in a store front, but within six months the congregation rented a Methodist church. Six months later the church family moved to a third location, renting Cypress Creek Community Center. They would stay at this location for eleven years. In 1992, the congregation purchased its present location on Spring-Cypress Road.

From the beginning, the church clerk's records indicate the Northwest Church planned to grow. Evangelism was high on the agenda. The church began to seek property to build its own facility in 1981. Property was actually purchased in 1989. An architect prepared plans for a new sanctuary. Funds were raised. Building was scheduled to begin in 1990. In 1992, the congregation had still not broken ground, and decided to purchase the existing church building. The Northwest Church broke ground on December 5, 1999 for a new multipurpose facility. It is expected that the new infrastructure will be completed in the fall of 2000.

In the first six years, the church was led by five different pastors as it more than doubled its attendance to about 110 at its weekly worship service. The next pastor was here at Northwest for five and a half years. Attendance grew to about 160 during his tenure. The following pastor was well liked as a leader even as the church began to plateau with the worship attendance growing only slightly to about 170. After about three and a half years, this pastor devastated the congregation one Sabbath morning by announcing that he no longer believed as an Adventist. He had made arrangements to become a pastor in another denomination. The next pastor left after less than six months and was in conflict with church leadership on a regular basis.

On December 1, 1995, I became pastor of the Northwest Houston Seventh-day Adventist Church. The attendance was about 175 each Sabbath. Until I came, the church was always in a church district with at least one other church. As 1999 ends, we sometimes have over 300 in attendance and average 280 each Sabbath in worship. Worship attendance for earlier years was gleaned from clerk reports, and interviews with

several members who were here during most, if not all of the church's history. Figure 25 shows the growth in attendance over the twenty year history of the Northwest Houston Church. Notice the classic pattern starting under fifty and steadily growing over several years until it slows in the 150+ area into a slightly inclined upward plateau. As the church transformed into a different type of organism, we see the attendance rise through the 200 barrier.

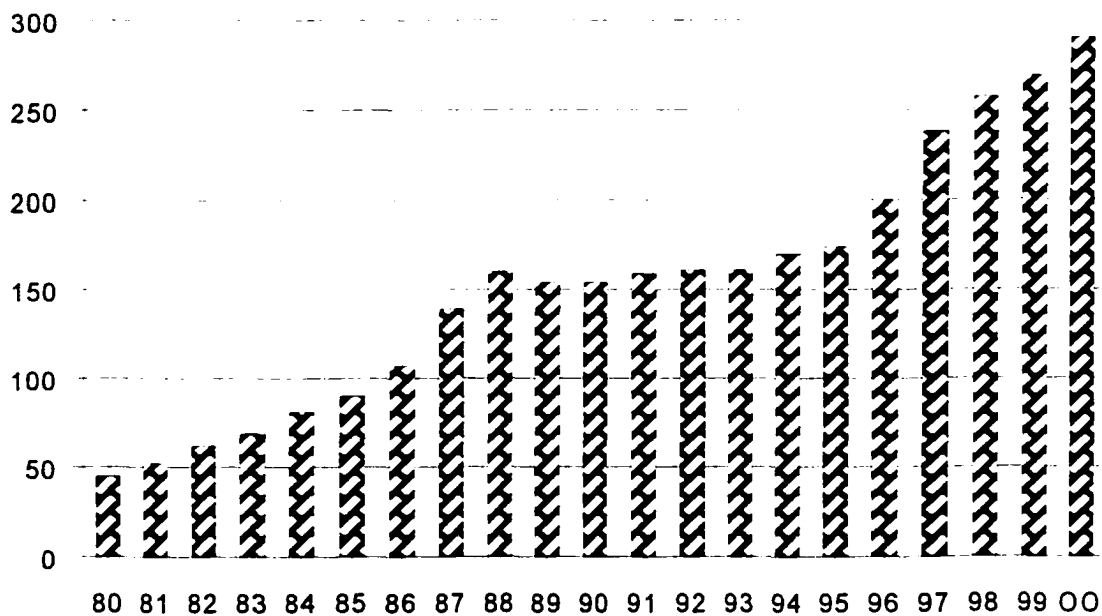


Figure 25. Northwest Houston Seventh-day Adventist Church attendance at the beginning of year 1980 - 2000.

The congregation expects to grow to a worshipping community with about 500 in attendance. Then it will use this strong base to plant churches in other parts of Houston and continue to grow by multiplication.

Transition to a Different Type of Organization

I want to remind the reader that while ministers may be used as tools, it is God who wishes and facilitates growth in a church. My efforts to transform the congregation is but a cultivation of the field so God could bring forth a harvest. What we did at Northwest Houston Seventh-day Adventist Church was not without its learning curve and frustrations. But God blessed in spite of our mistakes and frailties. He brought about something that is somewhat rare in the North American Division. There is now one more church to add to the very few churches that are chiefly Anglo, not in an institutional setting, and beyond the 200 barrier. Now I will share how the different issues were addressed by the Northwest Church as it transformed and moved beyond the barrier.

Facility Issues

When the Northwest Church moved into its present building in 1992, the facility was just about the right size but lacked room for future growth. Sabbath School rooms were at full capacity. The Earliteen and Youth departments were combined in an old trailer in the back of the church and needed to be separated. The sanctuary could pack in 200, yet felt full with the 170-180 in attendance. Soon after I arrived and we began to grow, we were placing chairs in the isles, and eventually opening the doors and placing chairs in the foyer. It was a clear indication that God planned to grow the church and something had to be done. In my survey of churches, the group above the barrier was the one most challenged by facility issues. We were certainly experiencing those issues too.

Parking was another issue. With a parking lot of thirty spaces and 180 in attendance, parking was in short supply. Our ratio was six people per parking space, far above the recommended 2.5 per car. The congregation continued to come and simply used the grassy area to park. We have over four acres, but when it rained, we ended up having to pulling cars out of the soft sod. As the new pastor of the church, this was of great concern. I had read George and Bird and their warning, "Your most critical capacity delimiter stems from your parking availability, not your seating capacity."¹ I urged the church to create more parking spaces. The church was somewhat reluctant at first until other parts of the transition began to be felt. Eventually parking was planned to have 208 parking spaces. God intervened and allowed us to postpone this part of our construction by having the public school office building next to us build about 80 new parking spaces. We had an agreement that they could use our parking spaces during the week, and we were allowed to use theirs on Saturday. As we have grown, people are still parking on the grass. Our new construction will soon bring us another 90 parking spaces.

Sabbath School space use quickly rose to critical levels. In 1997, we purchased two used portable classrooms. These were brought to our property, set up, and remodeled. This gave us 2,880 square feet of new space. The new space was divided into six rooms to house most of our children's divisions. We now have ample capacity for children's Sabbath Schools to last until our new multipurpose building is finished in the fall of 2000.

¹George and Bird, 137.

Seating capacity was an even more challenging problem. A large planter in the foyer was removed to make room for more chairs during worship and more room for people entering or leaving the church. Foreseeing the continued growth in worship, I urged the church leaders to consider going to two services. Leadership was resistant. I did know of Bill Sullivan's warning:

Generally in breaking the 200 barrier, conducting two services is not a very good option. You don't have enough people for two services. It has been done successfully, but more frequently it hasn't worked because it reduces the size of both groups below acceptable levels and tends to demoralize instead of to increase morale.¹

We had considered a video feed into our fellowship hall. This idea was dismissed. We felt that for it to be successful, it would require state-of-the-art video equipment, great sound production, and a costly refurbishing of the fellowship hall to create a better worship atmosphere. Even after all of this, it would still be less personal. We considered simply taking a wall out of the existing building and expanding our present worship facility. This idea was discarded after we saw that we could only add perhaps another eighty seats. This was far below our stated vision of how many were to eventually be worshipping at Northwest. The large outlay of money for such projects was not reasonable when it could be used to build a new facility large enough for our needs.

Finally, after a year the church agreed to go to two services on a trial basis for six months. The greatest fear expressed about going to two services was the fear of loss of fellowship. I often heard, "What if I come to first service and my friend comes to second?" Looking back, I recognize that the church was struggling with the issues of

¹Sullivan, 46.

how to become a new organism. In reality, by changing and growing, we now have more people and new opportunities for fellowship. This decision to move to two services became a critical factor that determined whether we would move forward and change. Three years later, we still have two services. People now wonder why we waited so long to go to two services. We have a first service that sometimes has more than 90 in attendance. At the second service we are again having to place chairs in the aisles.

After this struggle for change, other changes, though not easy, have raised fewer fears. The surveys indicated that churches above the 200 barrier did struggle with facility issues, yet found creative ways to overcome them. The Northwest Houston Church also faced these facility issues while creatively planning and building larger new facilities. We officially broke ground for our new building on December 5, 1999.

Demographic Issues

Houston is the fourth largest city in the United States. For several years, Houston has had a growing economy. Many people are moving to Houston from all over the world. Northwest Houston is one part of the city, but not the only part, that is growing strongly. While many older parts of the city are predominately one culture or another, in the suburbs where Northwest is found, it is very culturally diverse. The Chamber of Commerce says that the median age of the Northwest Houston community is 30.3 years. Its people come from all over the world.

The Northwest Houston Church matches its community well. Although it is still predominately an Anglo American church, many of the new members are originally from

different places around the globe. They have come for the employment opportunities. Some have argued that Northwest Houston Church is growing because of its location in a healthy economic setting and growing population base. I argue that this is not the reason we have grown. I would point out that there are seven other congregations in Houston which are chiefly Anglo and are in portions of the city with growing populations and an advancing economy. Yet they are no larger in attendance than when I arrived in Houston four years ago. The reason these churches are not growing in attendance is they do not realize that location is not the only answer. The answer lies in the church understanding that larger churches are a different kind of organization. They have to be willing to transform. The survey of churches above the barrier showed that the churches above the barrier were located in a variety of locations. Northwest Houston Church joins church C as the only one in a suburban setting. The variety of localities shows that churches are not necessarily held below the barrier because of location.

Vision Issues

I would define vision for churches as: "A God-given view of the future sharing His desire for a particular church congregation to be used as a road map for the journey of sharing the love of God with each other and beyond the church walls."

A long-time pastor once shared with me that you need to have a vision, then come to a church and convince the church of its validity. I argue that the vision does not necessarily originate with the pastor, but it is his job to assist the congregation in discovering what God has asked them to do and in finding out how to do it. When I

arrived at Northwest Houston Church. I set out to do just that. I told the congregation I had not come to impose a vision and mission on them, but to help them discover God's dream for the church and help them determine the best way to fulfill that dream.

We set January 13, 1996, as a special day to discover the vision God had for the church. Leading up to this time, we began an emphasis on prayer. We held an all-day prayer session. Through a letter to the congregation, I attempted to communicate what we were about to do. I selected church leaders to lead out in the session groups. After the worship service and dinner, we met together in prayer. Then we divided into groups of 8 to 10 around tables. Seven questions were listed on the top of large sheets of paper.

1. What do you see as unique about the NW Houston SDA church?
2. What do you see as the main purpose of the NW Houston SDA church?
3. What do you like most about the NW Houston SDA church?
4. What do you see as a challenge to NW Houston SDA church?
5. What are your hopes and dreams for the NW Houston SDA church?
6. What are the main ways the church can reach out to the community?
7. What are the best ways for the church to minister to the church family?¹

Each group was to write suggestions out on the large sheets of paper during a brainstorming session. Each question used a separate sheet of paper. After answering all the questions, the groups went back, and by consensus, they chose the three best answers in each group. They then placed a star by these answers. These were placed on the wall.

¹Burrill, Class Outline for NADEI 615 Evangelism and Church Growth, 9-17. This list of questions was adapted from the class syllabus.

We all saw there was a great deal of commonality. The starred answers were compiled on a sheet. This was used to create a statement of vision and mission. Our combined vision and mission statement begins with "Joining God's Vision -- Every Member Every Soul." Then follows the document that has guided what we have implemented to move the Northwest Houston Church through the 200 barrier.

Because:

- Scripture challenges us to share God with our world.
- This is done through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- We believe in the priesthood of all believers and the call to ministry of every disciple.
- The diversity, rapid growth and strategic setting of this church uniquely places us where we can minister effectively.
- Our community is growing rapidly with people who need to hear the good news of God's love.
- God has brought us together here, by His providence, a diverse group of talented, gifted people equal to the task.
- God has shown us His dream and vision for this church family.

Therefore:

- We will grow the family of God to five hundred people worshiping and growing together. We will provide the necessary facilities.
- We will intentionally reach out to our community on a continual basis with the Gospel and the good news of Christ's return.
- We will seek to remove any barriers we may have created and pray for God's intervention to remove those beyond our control.
- This church will strive for excellence in all its worship, teaching, and fellowship activities. The healing of people and preparation for ministry will be our goal.
- We will foster an atmosphere of openness and inclusiveness to involve our circle of friends, family, and the community around us.

- Through the blessing of the Holy Spirit and the completion of the mission given to us by God, we will celebrate together on the Sea of Glass the multiplied increase of the family of God in Northwest Houston.
- The Holy Spirit is promised powerfully just before the Second Coming. Let it begin here.

This vision/mission statement was posted on the bulletin board, sent out to the church family in a letter, and printed on our own offering envelopes. Even with this, enthusiasm began to wane. By early 1998, after struggling with the anticipated large cost for the new facilities and people beginning to feel other changes that were being made to transform, the vision seemed too difficult to reach. Resistance to growing and transforming began to rise from many in the church family. Some even transferred to another Adventist church in town. Meeting with the head elder at that time, he said to me, "There was a time we could have completed the vision and grown, but the momentum is lost. We cannot now accomplish it."

Through prayer and planning together the head elder and myself decided perhaps we could revitalize the vision and mission of the church. We decided we would look at the vision/mission statement together and reach consensus. After this, we would invite a couple of families we felt were good thinkers and church leaders to another session to work on a consensus again. This happened on March 7, 1998. Over the next five months, we slowly enlarged this group, meeting six times over a period of five months. Each time we reached consensus we placed it in writing. On June 21, 1998, we invited the whole church together in a business session to discuss one more time the results of this process. The church discussed this document at length. Then we voted unanimously to accept it as our vision for the future. Since this process of revitalizing of the vision and

mission of the Northwest Houston Church, the vision has remained strong, even in the face of other challenges to accomplish it. We still find ways to continue to refresh in our minds the vision and mission for this church. Without a clear vision the Northwest Houston Church would never have moved through the 200 barrier. Our vision was a vital element to break the 200 barrier. It has become our road map to the future God desires for this church.

Organization/Staffing Issues

From the reading and research, I had discerned that churches above the barrier had transformed into a different organization. While we were still below the barrier, I felt it would be important to make changes before we actually made the passage through the barrier. As I shared this concept with the leaders of the church, most could see wisdom in this because many worked in large businesses on a daily basis. They knew that large corporations could not be operated on the basis of small business principles.

Beginning in late 1997, we set up a task force to study and develop a plan to bring a different organizational structure to the church. Traditionally, the church board has been used to make decisions on everything from developing a budget to when to order paper towels for the restrooms. Our vision was to have the board spend its time on strategic planning, general oversight, and visioning for the future. The day-to-day operations were to be moved to lower levels of the organizational structure. The board would plan to meet quarterly, while the lower-level teams would meet more often. An executive committee would take care of necessary items between sessions of the board.

The twenty churches in the survey all had church boards that were chaired by the senior pastor. When I arrived at the Northwest Church, the head elder chaired the church board. This arrangement is now mandated by our new organizational document. This has allowed me to approach the board as a spiritual advisor and allows me to more easily remind everyone of God's dream for the church.

We developed four teams to oversee the regular business of the church. (See figure 26). A Finance Team would develop budgets and oversee the general finances of the church. The Ministry Team would oversee worship and other events happening within the church building itself. The Growth Team would be responsible for the assimilation of new members into the life of the church and for evangelistic outreach. A Resource Development Team would work with the Ministry Team and the Growth Team as they assisted members into ministry. This team would take up some of the duties formerly assigned to the Nominating Committee. The Nominating Committee would meet each year to elect the elders, deacons, deaconesses, treasurer, clerk, and the chair of each of the four teams. The rest of the ministries, including Sabbath School department leaders, are chosen within one of the four teams. On February 9, 1999, the Northwest Houston Church met in business session and voted unanimously to accept this new governance structure. The wide acceptance of this proposal to the well-attended session I believe is evidence that the church is accepting its transition to a different type of organization. The new structure will keep attendance above the 200 barrier.

Organizational Structure for the NW Houston SDA Church - February 9, 1999

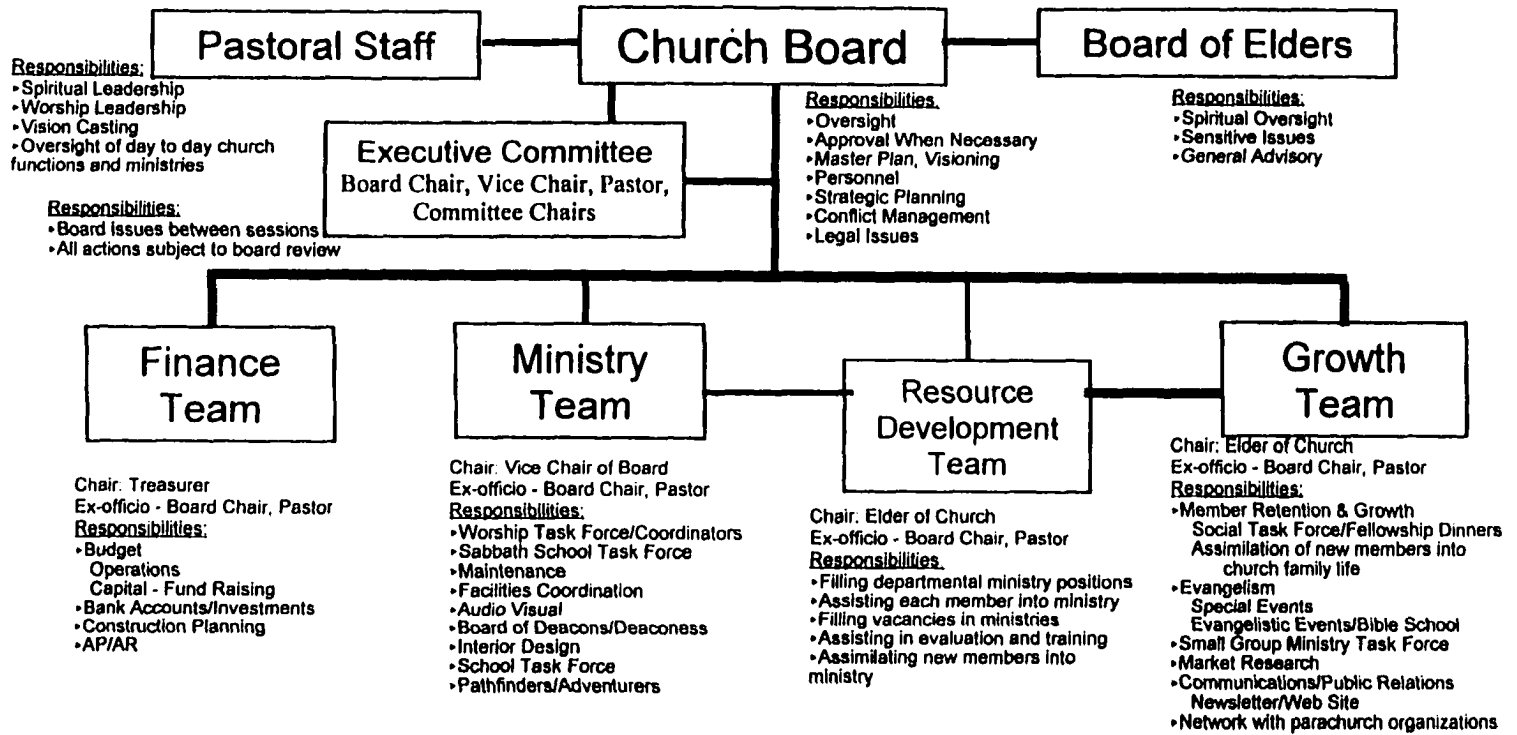


Figure 26. Flow chart for new governance structure for the Northwest Houston Seventh-day Adventist Church.

I believe these changes have had a marked impact on assisting the Northwest Houston Church to move through the 200 barrier. Our new organizational structure has assisted the church board in visioning for the future instead of becoming bogged down in the present or the past. It has kept top leadership in the church looking at the bigger picture instead of the details. This change in organizational structure has opened up many new leadership positions. It allows new creative ideas to emerge from people formerly not in power or who were not deeply engaged in the church. The change has allowed the streamlining of the decision process in a smaller team setting. It has placed oversight and support of the ministry leaders in the hands of lay people. I believe these changes will assist the Northwest Houston Church in maintaining attendance above the 200 barrier and allow us to continue to grow.

I also saw the importance of increasing staffing in view of moving through and maintaining attendance above the 200 barrier. I understood we would need one full-time staff member equivalent for every 100 to 150 we wished to have worshipping here each week. Northwest Houston took two tracks in meeting this need. The first part was to use volunteers. I believe that a major item in the job description of a pastor is to create leadership and make these leaders successful. Our new organizational structure has created a great deal of leadership opportunities. Many things I would have done as pastor in a smaller church are now being dealt with directly by these new leaders. An example of this is situations that have arisen in the operation of the Sabbath School. These challenges have successfully been addressed without my direct involvement. In the area of worship, we have created a great leadership team which I describe below in "Worship

Issues.” While all churches have volunteer lay leadership, our survey dealt only with pastoral full-time equivalents. I would estimate that the Northwest Houston Church lay volunteers perform many of the traditional pastoral-type ministry items that equal more than one full-time pastor equivalent.

The second approach to increasing pastoral full-time equivalents was to work to creatively increase our professional pastoral staff. My wife, Lynn Ripley, has a B.A. in Theology from Southwestern Adventist University. She has always worked hard in the church in a volunteer status. She was not allowed to become as deeply involved as she would have liked because she was holding down a full-time job as a registered nurse. Beginning in February of 1998, we were able to make arrangements for a half salary shared equally by the conference and the local church. This has allowed her to leave her nursing job and become the associate pastor of the Northwest Houston Church on a full-time basis. This additional staff has greatly increased the pastoral ministry that is being accomplished at the church.

These staffing issues at Northwest Houston Church now give us full-time equivalents of at least 2.5. The churches below the barrier had full-time equivalents averaging 1.45. The churches above the barrier were at 2.60. An average of both groups above and below the barrier gives one full-time equivalent staff members for every 150 in worship. Northwest has one full-time equivalent for every 112 in worship. We feel this will be sufficient to carry us up towards 400 in attendance. The church board recently commissioned a task force to look at staffing issues for the church. It is commissioned to bring back recommendations on how to increase the staffing for our targeted 500

attendance, to look at ways to finance new staff, and to recommend skills desirable in this staffing, and the timing to search for and bring on board additional pastoral staff. This emphasis on staffing has been a vital key to moving the Northwest Houston Church through the 200 barrier.

Ministry Training Issues

“The work of the pastor is to prepare God’s people to do the work of ministry. . . . If he is not doing that, then biblically, he is not doing his job.”¹ The survey of the twenty churches found all of them had training events for their congregations. Northwest Houston Church is no exception. Several training events have been brought to our city by the conference. Some were held within our church building. Many of our training events have focused on helping the church to be ready for the increase in attendance. Special training for greeters in GuestCare has brought better awareness of how to properly care for new people when they step through our doors. Mentoring is a major way we have trained church members. For example, our new worship coordinators were asked to first walk through worship services with an experienced coordinator before they were allowed to plan and lead a service on their own. The church was divided into what we called “Flocks.” A leader was placed over each Flock. Our associate pastor would accompany the leader to visit people in the Flock. Music teams have trained people through practice sessions. Sabbath School departments have trained people by having them work with an experienced leader.

¹Burrill, Revolution in the Church, 48.

Pathfinders and Adventurers have taken advantage of conference training events and have successfully mentored new people in these ministries. In the year 2000, we wish to begin an emphasis in training people more for outreach and evangelism. I believe our emphasis on training has assisted us to grow. Ongoing training will allow us to maintain attendance above the barrier. Our new Resource Development Team will become a major force in training and placing people into ministry. A renewed emphasis on evangelistic training will assist us to continue to reach out.

Small-Group Issues

Upon arrival at Northwest Houston Seventh-day Adventist Church four years ago, I was determined to create a larger church using a cell church model that has been so successful in some locations. Church growth authors and teachers in classes I have taken often presented the cell church model as the key to success in growing churches and maintaining larger attendance. Through sermons, I promoted this as a biblical model. At church board meetings and to church leadership, I shared the necessity of the Northwest Houston Church having an organized cell or small-group structure to fulfill our vision and mission.

We chose a small-group coordinator and began four cell groups in different sections of the city. We promoted these groups to the congregation. We personally invited church members, neighbors, and friends. After a year, we had about 15 percent of the congregation involved in formal cell groups. A majority of the congregation either ignored our urging for them to be involved in small cell groups, or acted coldly to

invitations. Some would try it once or twice, and then never return. I became quite concerned to have only 15 percent at best involved in this part of the church life. I understood the need for close personal and spiritual interaction for the people to continue to be engaged in the congregation and to continue to feel nurtured and supported. This, I believed, would foster the need to come and worship as a congregation. I was hearing the feelings of loss of fellowship that people were expressing as we grew and moved to two services. I felt organized small groups would fill this need of fellowship.

Then the information began to come in from my survey. Of the churches above the barrier, three had no formal small groups, and another four had five or fewer groups. Only one of the twenty churches had a significant number of its people in organized small groups. All the churches below the barrier had official small-group meetings, yet they were still below the barrier.

This information caused me to spend a lot of time in prayer and contemplation of the reasons for this seeming contradiction. I believe the problem has been that churches have too narrow a definition for a small group. Win Arn advises that there be seven groups for every 100 in worship attendance in his book The Church Growth Ratio Book. When Arn suggests how many small groups to have in order to have a healthy growing church, he gives a much wider definition than most to the term "small group." This is how he defines a group: "A 'group' is described as a face-to-face fellowship of persons (normally 10 - 30) who meet at least monthly."¹ Arn then lists eight different types of groups.

¹Arn, 25.

When looking at Northwest Houston Church. I realized I had been emphasizing only one type of small group. Under Arn's definition. I suddenly saw many more groups in the church and a much larger portion of the congregation was involved. The official small cell groups were good, but they represented only one kind of group that made up the structure of the congregation at large.

"A 'group' is described as a face-to-face fellowship of persons (normally 10 - 30) who meet at least monthly." Under this definition our adult and children's Sabbath Schools were small groups. Northwest Houston has increased its adult classes from two to five and would have more with available space. In addition, we now have a collegiate/early careers class, and have divided the youth and earliteen departments. We could quickly add the Pathfinder and Adventurer programs. The list continues to lengthen with new groups within the last three years. Women's group, men's fellowship, adult choir, children's bell choir, several prayer groups, our Creation and Earth's History forum, some service groups such as our inner-city ministry called Partners 5/West, our bookstore called Spiritual Gifts, and our soccer teams are all small groups. Our new organizational structure has created small groups in the four Teams and the church board itself. Our emphasis on excellence in worship has created several groups working together. We have a worship team and several praise music teams that are discussed more fully below.

It is easy to quickly count thirty-five such groups. Even with the overlap of many in more than one group, we have a major portion of those attending worship in one

group or another. Sullivan shares his experience in moving churches through the 200 barrier.

The group life of the church must be multiplied greatly to effect growth. Twice as many groups will not be sufficient. It will take three, four, five, and six times as many groups as used to exist. In addition to traditional kinds of groups, study groups, mission groups, recreational groups, music groups, fellowship groups, and a multitude of other groups will be required to assimilate the people into the life of the church.¹

The multiplying of groups in the church has greatly aided in moving the Northwest Houston Church through the 200 barrier. While the churches above the barrier in our survey did not have the great emphasis in official small cell groups I would have anticipated, I believe further research would show many more groups that are not small cell groups, but are giving a social structure to the larger congregation.

Prayer Issues

All the churches in our survey above the barrier had organized prayer ministries. Only one church below the barrier lacked this important ministry. Northwest Houston Church feels this is very important to the life, vision, and future of our church. There are three groups that have regularly met which have a primary focus on prayer for the church: one during the week, and another two each Sabbath morning. The church has developed a prayer tree where requests are called to one person and then shared for prayer out to the spreading branches. A Garden of Prayer has been instituted as part of our worship service where people can bring their praise and requests to the front of the sanctuary on Sabbath morning, lifting them in conversational prayer together before the Lord. A special

¹Sullivan, 57.

weekend emphasis on prayer instituted a group of people who would call the pastors on a regular basis for prayer.

Prayer has been a priority especially for our church board. This emphasis on prayer has been especially important as we have made some of the major decisions and changes that have allowed the church to transform into a different kind of organization. The leaders at Northwest Houston Church are aware that only God can grow a church. We may be used as tools to accomplish moving this church through the 200 barrier and beyond, but we must stay in communion with God for this vision to become reality. Prayer is of major importance to make us able servants to lead this church into the future.

Worship Issues

Worshiping with excellence is essential for the church to grow in attendance. Northwest Houston Church has made worship a priority. We have spent much time in educating the congregation in how to worship. We have emphasized the importance of worship in sermons and training sessions. We have featured a God-centered worship. The audience recognizes that they are the performers of worship, while the people on the platform are the facilitators, and God is the focus of worship and for worship to happen. preparation must take place during the week.

In my survey, churches were asked to rate their style of worship on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being traditional and 10 being contemporary. Churches below the barrier were more traditional on average at 4.5, while churches above the barrier were more contemporary at an average of 6.4. The Northwest Houston Church has two services and

they vary only slightly. I would rate the first service as a 7, while our second service is a 6. This would make our rating 6.5, close to the ratings of the churches above the barrier.

A great deal of talent and resources are poured into helping us to facilitate excellence in worship. The focus of what is done at worship is to make the preaching of the Word more powerful. In order to facilitate the planning of worship, I have developed an annual preaching schedule. It lists the sermon topics for the whole year. I have attempted to preach sermons in series with the same theme or topic so we can focus even better with banners or special bulletins.

At least quarterly, the worship committee will get together for a morning of prayer and worship planning. At this meeting, the sermon schedule is presented and the Sabbaths are divided among the coordinators. I share with the coordinator, often in written form, the sermon title, the Scripture the sermon is based on, and a thesis statement or short outline. From this information, the worship coordinator will choose the opening and closing hymns, arrange the order of service, prepare any features such as a sketch, responsive reading, interview, choir, and/or special music. The coordinator is also responsible to consider the timing of the service to fit within our time frame. The worship coordinator will also be at both services to make sure all parts come together in a seamless flow. Our music teams will also take the topic or Scripture and use it to choose songs for our Worship in Song segment. This is a special time of singing praise songs projected on the screen. These songs lead us into our Garden of Prayer.

Another feature that typifies our worship service at Northwest Houston Church is the use of visual presentations projected on the screen to illustrate the sermons. When I

first came to this church, there were announcements during the welcome segment. These announcements would take twenty or more minutes at times. We felt this large amount of time spent in announcements was a deterrent to the proper worship of God. Northwest Houston no longer does announcements during the worship service. They must be placed in the bulletin or on a bulletin insert, or shared before the worship service begins. At first, this concept was resisted as many departments and ministries in the church wanted the full attention of the congregation. Now that we have experienced the benefit to worship of not having a long announcement time, we are glad for the stand we have taken against the interruption it caused.

Our worship services are on the contemporary side of the spectrum and match the average of churches in the survey above the barrier. We do not follow this format for worship as a result of the surveys. We arrived at our style of worship because we took the time to prayerfully work through the questions: "What type of worship service will be meaningful for the people who are here and the people we anticipate God will send here from our community? What will say 'worship' to them?" The answer to this question just happened to fall on the contemporary side. In other venues, the answer to these questions might be more traditional. We feel our emphasis on excellence in worship has greatly assisted our move through the 200 barrier.

Evangelism Issues

Any plan to move through the 200 barrier would naturally need to include evangelism as a high priority. During the four years I have pastored here in this church

we have attempted to reach out evangelistically. We live in a relatively young community. It is highly mobile with many people moving in and out. It is thought that people in transition are more open to Gospel evangelism. The Northwest Houston Church has found it difficult so far to gain members from this community.

During Net '96, the satellite presentation featuring Mark Findley, the Northwest Houston Church decided to be a host church downlink site. We began with a Discovery Bible School with over 100 students. Each of these was sent a personal invitation to the series. We sent out advertising flyers to over 10,000 homes. Opening night, we were quite pleased to have a church full with many faces we did not recognize. When information began coming in, we soon realized most of the guests were from other Adventist churches that did not have satellite dishes. We had a total of four guests from the community: none of these finished the series. We surmised that Net '98 with Dwight Nelson might fit our community better since it targeted younger professional adults. Dwight Nelson was the pastor of a university church. The results of this series were almost identical to Net '96.

Another approach we attempted was to send out cards for Bible studies to the community. These were followed up by delivering to the door a lesson and a copy of an evangelistic video tape. We had about 140 respond to this mailing. About 40 finished the series, yet only 4 people have even attended one worship service.

One of the four teams for our new organizational structure is the Growth Team. This team will be meeting and planning for future events. We are currently dialoging with a professional evangelist. We are planning a large series in the fall of 2000.

Since traditional evangelism has been largely unsuccessful, the question arises, where did the people come from who have moved the Northwest Houston Church through the 200 barrier? Figure 27 shows the breakdown of point of origin of members of the Northwest Houston church.

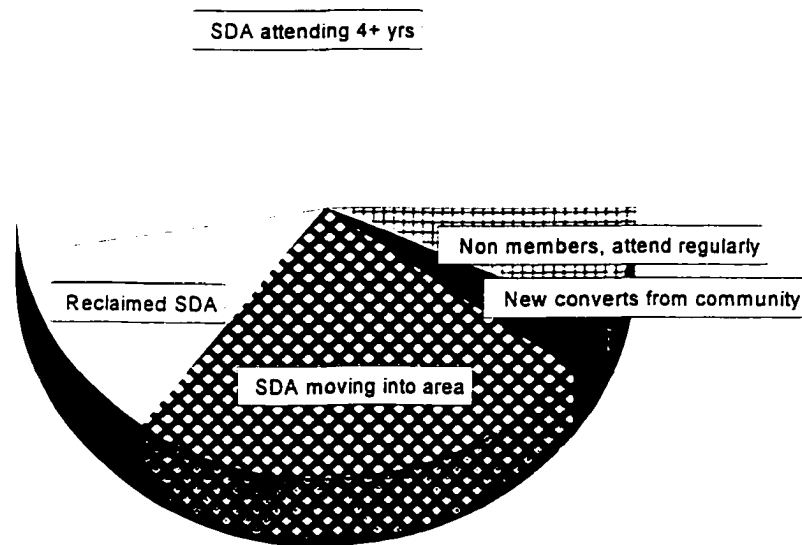


Figure 27. Source of attending congregation since December 1995, Northwest Houston Church.

From figure 27 you can see that Northwest Houston Church has most of its growth from people who are already affiliated with the Adventist church and moving into the area for employment. It is significant that a sizable portion have been nonactive Adventists who have found Northwest Houston church a welcome place to worship. The alarming statistic is the small slice that represents the few new Adventists who have joined from the community. This is the subject we will need to address if we are to

continue to grow the church and the family of God in Northwest Houston. The Growth Team will meet on January 8, 2000, with just this in mind. The Northwest Houston Church must now learn how to evangelize this particular community.

Comparison of Northwest Church to Survey

The Northwest Houston Church has changed into a different organism. These changes have made the difference in moving through the 200 barrier. Table 8 compares the Northwest Houston Church to the survey churches.

Table 8 shows the major issues and considerations for the twenty survey churches compared to the Northwest Houston Church. Notice that the Northwest Houston Church more closely resembles the churches above the barrier. This was not so four years ago.

We have now seen the Northwest Houston Seventh-day Adventist Church and how it transformed itself to move through the 200 barrier. Adding this information to that already collected in Scripture, church growth literature, and the information from the surveys, is there valid information we can use to help other churches understand what is necessary to move through and maintain beyond the 200 barrier? I believe so! This is the topic of chapter, the final chapter.

Table 8. Comparison of Northwest Church and Survey Churches

Issues	Above	NW Houston	Below
Ratio Att-Membership	62%	104%	43%
Ratio Youth/child-Adult	24%	26%	27%
Att % of Seating Capacity	91%	145%	45%
% of Parking Spaces Used	108%	258%	72%
Number of Worship Services	1.5	2	1.3
% of Sabbath School Room in Use	94%	85%	80%
Ministry Role Agreement Variance	1.6	2	3
Full Time Equivalent	2.60	2.50	1.45
Pastoral Longevity	4.25	4.10	3.40
% Att Organized Small Group	17.9%	15%	17.4%
% New on Board Last 2 Yrs	30.2%	30%	28.2%
Evangelistic Events Past 2 Yrs	3.1	2	3.4
Worship (1=Trad 10=Contem)	6.4	6.5	4.5
Total Min Hrs by Pastor Per Week	44.45	45	44.35

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is my desire that other church leaders and pastors find the information from this study useful in assisting their church to grow through the 200 barrier. The important issues are leadership, staffing, vision, and worship. While evangelism finds new members, transformation of a church is necessary to hold attendance. Now let us look at a summary of what we have studied and learned, followed by the conclusions that can be drawn from these facts. This is followed by recommendations for moving Adventist churches through the 200 barrier.

A Church Growth Review

I now review what has been discovered through this study, revisiting the problem of the numerical barrier in attendance in Adventist churches in the North American Division. I sketch what Scripture, Ellen White, and church growth literature say relative to growing larger churches. I then review some high points from the church growth survey. Finally, in this section, I summarize how this information aided the Northwest Houston Church through the 200 barrier.

Adventist Church Growth Today

As a pastor for more than eighteen years, I can attest to the fact that the Adventist church and its leadership have placed sharing the Gospel through evangelism first and foremost on its agenda. While the urgency is still in the hearts of Adventist pastors and administrators, the reality of growth statistics shows the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America has virtually stopped growing.

With a growth rate in North America of 1.75 percent, Adventists must be very frustrated with the difference between the mission and the results. Only 50 percent of these new converts continue to attend worship on a regular basis, making our attendance growth rate in North America just .88 percent in 1998.

The call for planting churches which began in 1996 has not yet had time to show itself as a powerful phenomenon in church growth in North America among Adventists. It is hoped that it will make a great difference in the growth of the North American church. While some are ready to give up on making smaller churches into larger ones, I believe that, properly understood, moving churches through barriers will be a welcome and successful strategy for growth in attendance in the North American Division.

My personal journey in coming to pastor the Northwest Houston Church has shown me it is possible to move a church through the 200 barrier. Seeking to find churches as models of what it takes for a church to grow above the barrier, I searched across the Adventist conferences in the United States for churches to study. This information would tell our church what it must do to transform into a church above the barrier.

The Scriptures and Growth

The Scriptures are full of the anticipation of growth. The Old Testament has many examples of worship taking place in large groups. Christ Himself used the context on many occasions of worshiping and sharing the Gospel in the context of a large group. The Gospel commission emulates expectations of enormous growth affecting all nations. The time of Pentecost brought thousands from around the world to understand the Gospel, and within a few days the Jerusalem church itself was quite large. Paul himself started and organized a number of large churches. Revelation and Isaiah speak of the future in heaven where worship will be in the context of a huge group of God's creatures meeting together before His throne.

Ellen White and Large Churches

The Adventist church began as small groups, but under the watchful eye of Adventist pioneer Ellen White, large churches emerged. Her vision of what these churches could be was one of strong centers where smaller, weaker churches could find resources and strength to fulfill the Gospel commission in the remotest of places. These larger churches were to be mission centers to send out workers across the country and around the world.

Current Literature on Breaking Barriers

Church-growth, as a science, has been a relatively new phenomena beginning in the 1960s. It was popularized in 1970 by Donald McGavran's book Understanding

Church Growth. Since then many works on the subject have been published. Two excellent works that deal directly with this subject and the 200 barrier in particular are Bill Sullivan's Ten Steps to Breaking the 200 Barrier written in 1988, and the 1993 work called How to Break Growth Barriers published by Carl George and Warren Bird.

While the other church-growth literature surveyed did not deal with the 200 barrier in depth, it has often aware of the barrier. Most of the information was directed at removing specific hindrances to growth, or general strategies to grow. The hindrances dealt with fell into what I have categorized as nine issues.

The most important lesson learned from the literature was that a church above the barrier is not like a church below the barrier. Those above differ in more than attendance, they are a different kind of organization.

Church Growth Survey

The twenty churches from across the United States gave a profile of two classes of churches. In comparing the two groups, the churches above the barrier and below the barrier were similar in some ways. None of the twenty churches were found in the inner city. The ratio of youth and children to attendance was similar. The number in organized small groups were a little over 17 percent for both groups. Both groups had two churches that were in a multi-church districts. Below the barrier seven churches had only one worship service, while above the barrier six only had one worship service. Both groups of churches had about the same percentage of new members on the church board in the last two years. Churches below the barrier averaged 3.4 evangelistic events in the last

two years, while above the barrier the average was 3.1 events. Pastors of all twenty churches reported spending about 44.4 hours per week in ministry.

The differences were also evident. The ratio of attendance to book membership was 43 percent below the barrier while it was 62 above. The churches struggling with facility issues such as seating, parking, and Sabbath School space were above the barrier, not below as expected. The full-time equivalents of pastoral staffing were greater above the barrier having on average 2.60 per church compared to 1.45. The pastors of the churches above the barrier had been at their present church for almost 1.5 years longer than their counterparts. All of the churches below the barrier had formal small-group meetings while above the number was seven out of ten. Worship style on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being traditional and 10 being contemporary, differed significantly. While the pastors of all twenty churches spent on average about the same 44.4 hours a week in ministry, the pastors above the barrier used their time differently. On average they spent less time in preaching and teaching, visitation and counseling, while spending more time in supervising staff and ministry leaders, planning and visioning for the future, and more than an extra hour per week in prayer. Only one church below the barrier had a clear statement of vision, while most of the churches above the barrier had a vision statement.

The Northwest Houston Seventh-day Adventist Church

Chapter 5 was an application of the information found in the research and literature as the Northwest Houston Church transformed itself and moved through the 200 attendance barrier. This journey took about four years. The church designed a new

governance structure. When the Northwest Houston Church began to look at itself as a different organization, the transition became easier, but never easy. The transition needed a vision and leadership to continue to focus and move the church forward.

While facility issues were a great challenge, it was not necessary to conquer all of these before we were able to move through the 200 barrier. Keeping the vision and dream alive, and creating and supporting leaders in the church allowed the church to make the changes necessary for the transition. I believe the experience of the Northwest Houston Church could be repeated many times over across North America.

Barrier Breaking Conclusions

Now that we have encapsulated the findings of this study, I would like to draw some conclusions that I believe will be important to understand how to move a church through and maintain above the 200 barrier. While what was found is likely to have universal application, it must be remembered that there was a restricted sampling used in the study. When the churches for the study were sought out, they were restricted to one cultural setting in one location of the world. Further study would be necessary to see if the same principles hold true in a different cultural setting or outside of the United States. Further, we studied only one numerical barrier, the 200 barrier. Church-growth experts call this the most difficult barrier. The study did not assess other numerical barriers below or above the 200 barrier. A church would be wise to face any lower barriers and transform itself beyond these before facing the 200 barrier. I wish to share the conclusions that I believe have been revealed within this study. I will now look at the

nine issues and draw conclusions based on the research, literature, and experience of the Northwest Houston Church. I will show how they impact a church transforming itself, moving through the 200 barrier, and maintaining its attendance.

Facility and Structure Issues

While the literature speaks of crowded facilities as a hindrance to maintaining attendance above the barrier, in the survey, churches maintained attendance beyond the barrier in spite of crowded conditions. We must not say, "We can begin to grow as soon as we build a new church facility or parking lot." The churches below the barrier had a great deal of extra capacity, yet this was no guarantee of growth. Crowding is not a guarantee that growth will be arrested or reversed. Growth can come first and the problems dealt with along the way as growth occurs. This is the experience of the Northwest Houston Church. We were crowded four years ago. We continue to deal with these issues as we grow. Our building program will greatly increase our capacity, yet we desire to continue to be challenged by the need for more parking, seating, and rooms.

Location and Demographic Issues

While urban and suburban locations are beneficial for growth, small cities and towns are also ripe places where churches above the barrier already exist. Churches above the barrier are not there because of their location or because the congregations are younger on average. These churches are able to sustain attendance above the barrier in a multitude of locations because they have transformed into a different kind of organization. None of the twenty churches were found in an inner-city setting. While we

may speculate that the same principles could exist in the inner city to make a large church. more research and experimentation are necessary before knowing for sure.

Vision and Goal Issues

Pastors and staff, along with church leadership, must truly understand the concepts in visioning for the future. Vision and goals must not be confused one for the other. A vision is a view of a desired future: goals are measurable steps along the way to attain the vision. These concepts must then be communicated continually to the church family. The pastor's understanding of the vision is critical for a church to be able to move through and maintain attendance above the 200 barrier. The leadership and the congregation must see it as God's will that they grow.

The experience of the Northwest Houston Church emphasized the necessity of vision for the church. A clear vision, discovered by the church, and constantly communicated to the church allowed them to be willing to do what was necessary to transform and grow. Without a clear vision and constant communication the Northwest Church would still be worshipping with an attendance of 180 to 200.

Organization, Roles, and Staffing

Leadership is key to a successful push through and sustained attendance above the barrier. This cannot be stressed enough. If the survey showed us anything, the future of the church depends on leadership. Leadership must discover, stimulate, and communicate the vision on a continual basis.

The experience of the Northwest Houston Church shows the importance of looking at the way the church is organized. Since a church above the barrier is a different type of organization, it cannot expect to maintain above the barrier while operating as a small church. The process of developing a new organizational structure, voting, and implementing it was the act that crystalized the church into thinking of itself as a different organization. It helped to transform us into the church above the barrier that we find ourselves to be today.

The staffing of a church is critical to growth through and maintaining above the barrier. The literature spoke of one pastoral staff member for every 100 to 150 in attendance. The survey showed that on average in both groups there was one full-time equivalent for every 150 in attendance. The Northwest Houston Church found this to be so with a full-time equivalent for every 112 in attendance.

The survey showed that on average the churches above the barrier had pastors almost a year longer. The experience gained at Northwest Houston Church shows that moving through the barrier takes longer than the 3.5 years on average that Adventist pastors have stayed at one church in the North American Division.

Ministry Training Issues

Professional pastors should spend more time and emphasis on training lay leaders for ministry. This would bring them less role frustration as lay leaders take on greater ministry responsibility, and multiply instead of just add to pastoral effectiveness in the church. Pastors are to truly become ranchers and not just shepherders.

The survey indicated that all twenty churches were offering training events to the members. The group above the barrier tended to offer a wider range of training events. Some were evangelistic and others were more nurturing in nature. The group below the barrier tended to offer more traditional evangelistic training events. The Northwest Houston Church's focus on mentoring, creating leadership, and seeing these leaders to success has been a great asset in training and contributed greatly in moving the church through the 200 barrier.

Small-Group Issues

The small-group movement has led many in the church to believe that without a formal, organized small-group ministry in the congregation, the church has no hope of growth or maintenance of attendance in numbers in the range of 300 to 400. While I recognize the great churches that have been built on this basis, the survey revealed that formal, organized small-group ministry is not a factor in maintaining attendance above the 200 barrier. This seems incongruent with the literature that shows the importance of interpersonal relationships in holding people in the life of the church.

The literature was almost unanimous in its voice as to the importance of small groups in the church. Yet George Barna states that small groups have only been incorporated less than 20 percent in the United States among all Christian churches. The survey showed both groups were just over 17 percent, right in line with Barna's findings.

I believe we can conclude from the literature and experience that relationships are completely necessary to moving and maintaining above the barrier. We must also

conclude that our definition of a group must widen beyond the formal, organized small-groups. We must look at formal, organized small groups as important, but only one portion of the groups that are necessary. Beyond this, a pastor should foster a wide range of opportunities for people to be engaged in a relational setting of ten to thirty people on a regular basis. Small groups are absolutely necessary. They should take many forms.

Prayer Issues

Scripture, church-growth literature, and church leaders in general understand that any plan to grow the church of God involves communion with God in prayer. Christ spent large amounts of time in prayer in order to complete His mission. This provides us our example. The survey indicated that all but one church below the barrier had an organized prayer ministry. The difference revealed by the survey came when we saw that the pastors above the barrier spent an average of one hour longer in prayer per week. Our experience at Northwest Houston Church shows that when the people were deeply involved in prayer, we were able to move forward. I would conclude that a church wishing to move through the 200 barrier needs to intensify its prayer life. After all, it is God's dream, vision, and mission we wish to follow.

Worship Issues

The survey indicated that a more contemporary mode of worship is part of a church that is above the barrier. When America was largely a Christian nation, Adventists developed methods and worship modes that were highly successful in making Christians into Adventists. Today, this pool of Christians in the United States is

shrinking. We now find ourselves needing to find ways to make secular people, nominal to non-Christians, into Seventh-day Adventists. What was comfortable before and said "church" to people is often no longer valid. Many of the people we desire to have in fellowship and worship with us have no context to compare except the professional meetings of the world. We see in Scripture how worship style changed over the course of the Bible as it met different cultures and situations. Younger and more secular people will find that a more contemporary style speaks to them about God. This should be a target audience of any church-growth strategy. The experience at Northwest Houston Church revealed that it was necessary to rethink our liturgy and make worship an important priority for the church. We must worship with excellence.

Evangelism Issues

God ordained evangelism. In the Old Testament the world was to be blessed through the decedents of Abraham. In the New Testament the command was to "go and make disciples." The survey of churches above and below the barrier showed that just an emphasis on major evangelistic events was not enough for growth and maintenance above the barrier. The churches above the barrier tend to have a wider definition of evangelism. The experience of the Northwest Houston Church showed that evangelism in a secular, highly mobile society cannot be done with traditional advertising for people to come to a set of meetings. Evangelism today that will help churches to move through and maintain above the 200 barrier must be innovative. We need to be willing to think outside of the box. The literature suggests that a more relational approach would assist evangelism

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problems that arise and provide support during difficult times when change and transition place strains on the life of the church.

Church administrators must recognize the need for proper staffing to enable growth and maintenance above the 200 barrier. If the desire is to have a church with 300 to 400 worshipping every Sabbath, then staffing needs to be done in a manner to guarantee enough full-time equivalents for each church. In the Adventist church system some might think this is not a practical goal. Some of this should be professional pastoral staff. Others can be volunteer or stipend staff. It should not cost the conference a great deal more if done creatively. Income in tithe should increase as the church grows. The extra tithe income will likely be greater than extra staffing costs.

The leadership of local conference administrators is key to making a sizable impact on attendance in the conference by making small churches into larger ones. The coordination of the central office could facilitate the atmosphere which encourages many churches moving through the 200 barrier instead of only one here and there.

Recommendations to Growth Church Pastors

While conference administrators can be catalysts for churches that are moving through the 200 barrier, the local leadership and especially the senior pastor are key to success. The 200 barrier is called the most difficult, and the senior pastor must be willing to face the challenge.

The pastoral staff needs a strong relationship with God. The vision and dream are God's, therefore the pastoral staff must constantly be talking to the Source. The

pastoral staff needs to maintain their faith through personal devotional time. Beyond this, the personal well-being of their family needs to be closely monitored to maintain good health. Moving a church through the 200 barrier is a challenging ministry and a pastor needs to focus on foundational vitality so he can focus more powerfully on the task at the church. The pastoral staff should spend time reading widely about church growth, especially in relation to vision and barriers.

The senior pastor must lead the congregation in prayer and discovery. Once the church has discovered the vision God has for them, the information must be re-communicated again and again. The pastoral staff needs to creatively find multiple ways to continue to bring the vision before the people. Once the vision is clear, goals can be stated to accomplish the vision. These should be measurable, doable, even with a faith element, and paced over a reasonable time frame. The pace must be monitored by the pastoral staff so the stress level brought on by change does not rise too high and flood over the vision to grow.

It would be in the interest of the pastoral staff to regularly meet with others who are in growth churches moving through the 200 barrier. These face-to-face meetings would bring a sharing of ideas and support needed in this challenging phase of ministry. I believe shared experience of this type would have shortened the learning curve and moved the Northwest Houston Church through the barrier in less than the four years it has taken.

The pastor should determine to be a rancher rather than a shepherd. The major responsibility of the pastoral staff is to recruit, train, mentor, and support leaders in

the church. Their goal is to make these new leaders successful. These new leaders should be recruited and trained for nurture of the congregation and outreach ministry to evangelize in the community.

Recommendations to Growth Churches

The administration can be very supportive, and the pastoral staff can be visionary, yet the people must be willing to accept the changes needed to transform the church. Even leaders, handpicked by God, cannot bring a congregation to fulfill the vision of God if they are not willing to accept the changes necessary. Moses discovered this very fact at Kadesh-Barnea.

First and foremost, the congregation needs to renew its relationship with God. Then, as a church, they can watch to see where God is at work and simply join Him in what He is already doing. Blackaby and King remind us of this concept in this way:

God hasn't told us to go away and do some work for Him. He has told us that He is already at work trying to bring a lost world to Himself. If we will adjust our lives to Him in a love relationship, He will show us where He is at work. That revelation is His invitation to us to get involved in His work. Then, when we join Him, He completes His work through us.¹

The church must join the pastoral staff in special prayer and seeking the vision of God for this particular congregation. The church leaders should join the pastoral staff in studying and understanding barriers to growth and attendance. Once the vision is clear, goals should be chosen that will assist in reaching God's vision. Those that do not lend

¹Blackaby and King, 67.

themselves to the completion of the vision, no matter how admirable they may be, should be eliminated.

Experts share that even good things are stressful. Inheriting a large sum of money, getting married, and Christmas are good things to have happen but they are stressful. Transforming a church through the 200 barrier is a good endeavor, but it is stressful. The congregation needs to remind itself that the stress is because the church is making a good transformation.

The fear of losing fellowship as so many more people come and worship with the congregation needs to be placed in perspective. The larger congregation, while you may not be personally acquainted with every one, will afford many more opportunities for new fellowship you did not have before the attendance grew. This is the reason it is necessary for the church to develop relational groups. One kind of relational group is the formal small group. Many other groups must be formed to tie people together in Christian fellowship, meeting the needs of the different personalities and ages of the church and community.

When a church transforms to a different kind of organization, it needs a new governance structure. I recommend that the process to design the new structure begin early in the growth experience instead of waiting until the need is felt, as the Northwest Houston Church did. In other words, design the structure for what you are wanting to become, instead of what you are. This new structure will give many opportunities for new leadership to emerge and new, fresh, innovative ideas to come before the church.

The current facilities should be evaluated and plans set in motion to create a worship and ministry center to fit the size of congregation in the vision. The facilities need not be in place in order for growth to begin. Creative ways can be found to meet the challenges of needed parking, seating, and classrooms. Caution should be noted that a building program should not become the vision. God's vision is always people. Facilities are tools to serve people as they come to God, worshipping Him, celebrating His salvation, and fellowshiping with God's family.

Worship should become a focus of the churches' family life. Strive for excellence. This priority of worship calls for careful evaluation and planning. It is not recommended that a congregation go out and find a "successful contemporary" worship service and simply copy it. God may not intend a particular style in any one place. A congregation must do it the hard way, on their knees before God, in the study of the Word, and in counsel with each other. They should seek to find a worship style for their local church. This worship style should say, "worship God!" to the people who are in attendance and to those in the community whom the church desires to have in attendance. If these two groups are at too great a distance, two services can creatively reach a larger and more diversified potential church family. The congregation should be taught to actively prepare all week for worship. On Sabbath, they become the performers of worship, the people up front become the facilitators, and God is the audience.

A church should be innovative when it comes to staffing. The proposal of having one staff for every 100 to 150 in attendance is necessary to maintain attendance above the barrier. Not all of the staff need to be full-time paid personnel. Retired

pastors, volunteer ministers, and part-time staff who are properly trained and working together could fill the needs of moving the church through the barrier. Some funding will likely come from church expense to facilitate adequate staffing. A sharing of the cost between the local church and the conference assisted the Northwest Houston Church to increase its staffing. Volunteers mentored and trained have filled the remaining immediate needs for staff.

When a church wishes to grow, evangelism must be high on its agenda. All twenty churches in my survey were involved in regular evangelism. The churches above the barrier tended to have a wider view of what evangelism is. In our secular society, evangelism needs to be more relational and needs-oriented. Evangelism should be tuned to assisting the membership into ministry while remembering that this is more than just delivering knowledge. Evangelism today means helping the “Caring Church” in theory to become the caring church in reality.¹ It means the church members need to become “contagious Christians.” It means becoming friends with secular people -- such good friends that they will trust you to share the Gospel with them. Evangelism in a church that is to grow through the 200 barrier must be innovative: it may be “drawing outside the box.” Instead of taking an evangelism approach that worked great in another setting, place, and/or time, the church should spend time discovering God’s way of evangelism for their particular community.

¹The term “Caring Church” is the title which was used for a church program on outreach a few years ago.

The Final Word

This study gives a glimpse into factors in growing Anglo Seventh-day Adventist Churches through the barrier. Perhaps future researchers may wish to look further into this topic. I would recommend that beyond the study I have done it would be helpful to observe churches as they move through the barrier and observe the process. I would further urge that the demographic changes going on in Anglo churches be studied. Beyond this the background of other cultural churches may give some insights into churches growing through the 200 barrier. A closer look at small groups with a wider definition might also be revealing.

The Scriptural command is to "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19). The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been commissioned to grow, even in a time of spiritual warfare. It is called the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan. "And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev 12:17).

Christ said He would come quickly. He said this three times in the final chapter of the bible, Rev 22. This is today's context for the Adventist church. The church must not slumber and be content with slow growth and small churches. I believe a major way for the Adventist church to significantly and even phenomenally grow is to have churches learn how to join with God in moving through the 200 barrier. Adventists

should pray for, expect, staff, vision, worship, and plan for thousands of churches with 300 to 400 in attendance. I believe it is biblical. I believe it is God's will.

My prayer is that in the near future this study will be obsolete. My hope is that someone will be finding it necessary to study. "Moving Seventh-day Adventist Churches Beyond the Four Hundred Barrier."

APPENDIX A
CHURCH GROWTH SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Church Growth Survey

Dear Pastor,

Thank you for taking time for this important survey. Please answer the questions with the best information available to you. The answers you give will be kept confidential, and will not be used in a way that will allow you or our church to be identified. Your information will be compiled and used to seek out common elements in church growth.

Church Average Attendance: Adult: _____ Children Youth: _____ Seating Capacity: _____
 Number of church services per week: _____ Book Membership _____
 Number of Parking Spaces: _____ Number of churches in this district: _____
 Prayer meeting? _____ If so, average attendance: _____ Number of Adult Sabbath School
 Classes _____
 Size of pastoral staff: Full time: _____ Part time: _____ Volunteer: _____
 How long has the current pastor been at this church? _____
 Do you see yourself as the pastor of this church 1 year from now? _____ 2 yrs? _____ 5 yrs _____
 Location of church: Inner city: _____ Urban: _____ Suburban: _____ Smaller city: _____ Town: _____
 Sabbath School Rooms: Adequate for current use? _____ % of Capacity in use _____
 Are there small group meetings during the week as part of your church life? _____
 How many? _____ How many people involved? _____
 Do you have special training for small group leaders? _____
 Do you have ongoing support meetings for small group leaders? _____ How often? _____
 Number of people on the church board: _____ Who chairs the board? _____
 Number who are new board members in the last two years: _____

Worship Service Style: (circle one) Traditional 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Contemporary

Please indicate with a "P" for pastor or an "L" for Lay person in the first column who in your church is doing the following ministry tasks. In the second column, please indicate who you feel should be doing these ministry task.

Is Doing		Should Be Doing
_____	Preside over committees	_____
_____	Call repairman if furnace needs repair	_____
_____	Visioning for the future	_____
_____	Hospital Visitation	_____
_____	Arrange special music	_____
_____	Give Bible studies	_____
_____	Regular home visits of the members	_____
_____	Assist in Dorcas activities	_____
_____	Lead out in children/youth departments	_____
_____	See everyone is present and ready for the platform	_____
_____	Train greeters	_____
_____	Make sure janitor is doing his job	_____
_____	Operate stop smoking clinics	_____
_____	Youth Ministry	_____

Do you have events to train lay people in some type of ministry? _____
 Please list:

Does your church have an active prayer ministry? _____

What is your vision for this church?

Please list some specific goals your church has had for the last two years. Please indicate with an X the goals that have been achieved.

Please list types of evangelism completed during the last two years.

Please list any ongoing or future evangelism plans for this church.

How you spend your ministry time:

Please indicate the average hours per week you spend in the following:

- _____ Preaching, teaching - including preparation
- _____ Visitation and counseling
- _____ Training others for ministry
- _____ Supervising staff and ministry leaders
- _____ Communicating your vision to the church
- _____ Social and community events
- _____ Prayer
- _____ Planning and visioning for the future
- _____ Fellowship with peers - other pastors

Thank you for your time and effort. Should you have any other insights you feel would be valuable for someone wanting to grow their church, please include these on the back of this sheet of paper. It is my desire that the information you are sharing will make the difference between success and failure for those who are visioning to grow their church for God.

APPENDIX B
CHURCH GROWTH SURVEY DATA

Church	Location	Book Membership	Average Attendance	Ratio Attendance-membership	Adult Attendance	Youth/Child Attendance	Ratio Youth/Child to Att	Seating Capacity	Att % of Seating Capacity	Parking Spaces	Ratio Spaces to Attendance	Number of Services	% of Sab Sch Room in Use	Number of Adult SS Classes	Ratio Classes to Attendance	Number Churches in District	Ministry Role Agreement	Full Time Staff	Part Time Staff = .5	Volunteer Staff = .5	Full Time Equivalents	Staff Ratio to Attendance	Pastoral Longevity - Years	Continue 2 Years?	Continue 5 Years?	
A	Urban	612	400	65%	300	100	25%	400	100%	115	3.5	2	100%	6	50	1	1	2	1	3	4	100	4	Y	Y	
B	Sm city	500	400	80%	325	75	19%	450	89%	150	2.7	1	100%	7	46	1	4	2	0	0	2	200	3.5	Y	Y	
C	Suburban	786	340	43%	200	140	41%	600	57%	200	1.7	1	100%	6	33	1	2	3	1	0	1	85	7.5	Y	Y	
D	Sm city	450	380	84%	300	80	21%	350	109%	180	2.1	2	100%	5	60	1	0	2	0	2	3	127	5	Y	Y	
E	Sm city	675	320	47%	250	70	22%	500	64%	100	3.2	3	65%	7	36	1	2	2	0	0	2	160	2	Y	Y	
F	Urban	450	300	67%	200	100	34%	341	88%	125	2.4	1	100%	6	33	2	3	2	0	0	2	200	6	Y	Y	
G	Town	650	400	62%	350	50	13%	240	167%	100	4.0	2	100%	9	39	1	0	2	0	0	2	200	10	Y	Y	
H	Sm city	660	400	61%	325	75	19%	500	80%	160	2.5	1	80%	7	46	1	0	2	1	0	0	2.5	160	1	Y	Y
I	Urban	645	362	56%	312	50	14%	400	91%	130	2.8	1	99%	9	35	2	3	1	1	0	1	241	2.5	Y	Y	
J	Sm City	571	300	53%	200	100	33%	450	67%	125	2.4	1	100%	4	50	1	1	1	2	1	2.5	120	1	Y	Y	
Averages		600	360	62%	276	84	24%	423	91%	139	2.7	1.50	94%	6.6	42.8	1.2	1.6	1.9	0.70	0.70	2.60	151	4.25	Y	Y	
K	Suburban	400	190	48%	145	45	24%	500	38%	100	1.9	1	60%	5	38	1	3	1	0	0	1	190	2	Y	Y	
L	Urban	395	205	52%	130	75	37%	500	41%	275	0.7	1	100%	5	41	1	2	1	0	1	1	205	2.5	Y	Y	
M	urban	635	215	34%	175	40	19%	500	43%	110	2.2	2	100%	5	35	1	4	2	0	0	2	108	2	Y	Y	
N	Suburban	410	170	41%	130	40	24%	300	57%	100	1.7	1	70%	6	22	1	1	1	0	0	1	170	7	Y	Y	
O	Urban	380	195	51%	120	75	38%	400	49%	250	0.8	1	50%	4	30	2	1	1	0	0	1	195	4	Y	Y	
P	Suburban	515	190	37%	115	75	40%	350	54%	56	3.4	2	100%	7	16	1	2	2	0	0	2	95	3.5	Y	Y	
Q	Sm city	600	212	35%	170	42	20%	500	42%	200	1.1	1	100%	6	28	1	5	2	0	0	2	106	1	Y	Y	
R	Suburban	630	220	38%	175	45	20%	550	40%	100	2.4	1	85%	5	35	2	5	2	0	0	2	110	4	Y	Y	
S	Urban	370	218	59%	170	48	22%	500	44%	100	2.2	1	60%	5	34	1	4	1	0	0	1	218	6	Y	Y	
T	Urban	540	210	39%	165	45	21%	550	38%	108	2.0	2	75%	7	24	1	3	1	1	0	1.5	140	2	N	Y	
Averages		488	203	43%	150	53	27%	465	45%	140	1.8	1.3	80%	5.5	30.3	1.2	3	1.4	0.1	0.1	1.45	154	3.4	Y	Y	

Church	Prayer Meeting?	Prayer Meeting Attendance	Small Groups?	Number of Groups	Number in Attendance	Average Number in Group	Small Group Leader Training?	Leader Continuing Support?	Number on Church Board	Attendees Per Board Member	Number New Last 2 Years	Worship Trad=1 Contem=10	Layity Training?	Prayer Ministry?	Future Vision?	Goals Attained?	Evang Events Past 2 Years	Future Planned Evang Events	Pastoral Ministry Time	Preaching & Teaching	Visitation & Counseling	Training Others for Ministry	Supervising Staff and Min Leaders	Communicating Vision	Social and Community Events	Prayer	Planning and Visioning the Future	Fellowship With Peers
A	N	45	Y	5	40	8	Y	N	20	20	14	7	Y	Y	Y	Y	4	2	15	8	15	1.5	1	3	6.5	5	1	
B	Y	90	Y	9	90	10	N	N	45	89	14	6	Y	Y	Y	Y	4	4	15	20	7.5	0	1	1	5	4	0	
C	Y	130	Y	14	130	9	Y	Y	20	19	4	5	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	4	10	6	10	3	3	8	2	8	1	
D	N	80	Y	7	80	11	N	Y	18	17.8	8	7	Y	Y	N	Y	2	2	23.5	5	15	1.5	2	2	10	2	1	
E	Y	40	Y	2	40	20	N	Y	25	12	10	6	Y	Y	Y	Y	2	1	10	15	10	5	5	2	7	7	2	
F	N	50	N	5	50	10	N	N	30	13.3	5	5	Y	Y	Y	Y	4	3	10	1	5	0	0	4	3	0	4	
G	Y	20	Y	2	20	10	Y	Y	22	18.2	3	6	Y	Y	N	Y	4	3	17.5	10	10	4	2	1	1	2	5	
H	Y	30	Y	5	30	6	Y	Y	25	14.5	5	7	Y	Y	Y	Y	1	1	12	4	4	0	2	4	4	15	2	
I	Y	30	Y	2	30	10	Y	Y	24	12.5	6	6	Y	Y	Y	Y	1	1	10	3	10	1	7	0	10	2	0	
J	Y	30	N	2	30	10	N	Y	24	12.5	6	6	Y	Y	Y	Y	1	1	10	3	10	1	7	0	10	2	0	
Averages		24.7		6.29	64.29	11.1			25.5	14.9	7.7	6.4					3.1	2.3	13.8	7.7	2.1	2.1	5.1	2.35	2.6	5.7	3.6	1.5
		Percent of All in Small Group		% Board New Last 2 Years	30.2%													Total Ministry Hours Per Week										
K	Y	22	Y	3	60	20	N	N	18	10.6	3	4	Y	Y	N	Y	3	4	11	5	5	5	1	2	4	8	5	0.5
L	Y	22	Y	2	30	30	Y	N	25	8.2	8	5	Y	Y	N	Y	7	5	15	10	15	2	2	5	2	8	1	1
M	Y	22	Y	2	20	10	N	Y	30	7.2	7	3	Y	Y	N	Y	3	2	20	15	15	2	3	3	3	1	2	2
N	Y	20	Y	2	23	11	Y	Y	15	11.3	7	4	Y	Y	N	Y	2	1	20	8	8	2	2	2	3	4	3	2
O	N	20	Y	1	10	10	N	N	18	10.8	3.5	4	Y	Y	N	Y	2	3	16	10	10	2	2	2	1	6	2	1
P	N	35	Y	7	35	5	N	Y	17	11.2	3	5	Y	Y	N	Y	3	3	11	6	6	1	4.5	2	1	5	2	2
Q	N	50	Y	8	50	6	N	Y	18	11.8	7	5	Y	Y	N	Y	2	1	12	10	10	6	12	5	2	3	2	2
R	N	15	Y	2	15	8	N	N	25	8.8	6	4	Y	Y	N	Y	4	4	15	10	10	2	2	5	2	3	2	2
S	N	50	Y	6	50	8	N	Y	23	9.5	8	7	Y	Y	N	Y	4	2	24	7.5	7.5	1	2	0.5	1	4	1	1
T	Y	60	Y	5	60	12	N	Y	15	14	5	4	Y	Y	N	Y	4	1	18	15	15	1	2	1	2	5	1	0.5
Averages		23.5		3.8	35.3	12			20.4	10.3	5.75	4.5					3.4	2.6	16.2	9.65	2.3	2.3	3.25	2.35	2.3	4.7	2.3	1.3
		Percent of All in Small Group		% Board New Last 2 Years	28.2%													Total Ministry Hours Per Week										

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VITA

Personal Focus:

Full Name: David Paul Ripley Born: December 23, 1952, Dallas, Texas.

Spouse: Patricia Lynn Ripley Associate Pastor Houston NW SDA Church. B.A. Theology Degree May 1991 SWAU Pursuing M.A. Min. through SDA Theological Seminary Extension Program. 60 hrs completed.

Children: Daughter Jimi; Administrative Assistant in Houston, TX. Daughter Heather; Associate Pastor at Cleberne, TX. Son David; Sophomore at SWAU.

Education:

M. Div. Degree December 1988 - Andrews University SDA Theological Seminary Assisted in research and writing for G. Damsteegt in preparing a chapter in the book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe... 27 Beliefs*.

BA Degree May 1982 - Southwestern Adventist College: Keene, Texas 76059 Major: Theology Minor: Business. Providing care for small church in Bowie, TX.

Ministry Experience:

November 1995 - Present - Texas Conference of SDA Senior pastor of the Northwest Houston SDA Church. Membership of 250 with attendance often approaching and exceeding 300. Helped to facilitate an inner city renewal ministry and a Christian bookstore.

July 1992 - November 1995 - Mountain View Conference of SDA Pastor of Parkersburg District. Preparation & successful execution of major evangelistic effort with Russell Burrill from NADEI and field school for Seminary.

January 1981 - July 1992 - Texas Conference of SDA December 1988 - July 1992 - Pastor of Sherman\Denison District. Trained several in homiletics for district churches.

August 1986 - December 1988 - Seminary - M. Div. Degree.

December 1982 - August 1986 - Federicksburg\Kerrville District Ordained to the Gospel Ministry May 31, 1986. Increase church attendance from 10 to 50. Established successful church school.

May 1982 - December 1982 - Annville, Corpus Christi Associate Pastor. Stabilized and guided church out of poor financial situation. Assisted in two evangelistic campaigns.

January 1981 - May 1982 Bowie SDA Church Student Pastor: Responsible for weekend church services and visitation.