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**ABSTRACT**

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PROGRAM FOR THE RETENTION  
OF NEW MEMBERS IN THE NEW JERUSALEM  
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH**

by

**Enell O. Hall**

**Adviser: Douglas R. Kilcher**

**ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH**

**Dissertation**

**Andrews University**

**Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary**

**Title: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PROGRAM FOR THE RETENTION OF  
NEW MEMBERS IN THE NEW JERUSALEM SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST CHURCH**

**Name of researcher: Enell O. Hall**

**Name and degree of faculty adviser: Douglas R. Kilcher,  
D.Min.**

**Date completed: February 1999**

**This dissertation evaluates a program that was developed for the retention of new members in the New Jerusalem Seventh-day Adventist Church.**

**One of the greatest needs of new Christians is help in establishing a meaningful relationship within the body of Christ. The church, not the new converts, is primarily responsible for the process of assimilation.**

**Two strategies were implemented at the New Jerusalem Church:**

**1. A study was conducted to analyze the growth pattern of the church for the past ten years. Two groups of members were surveyed--those baptized within the past eighteen**

months and have left the church and those baptized during the same period and still actively involved in the church. The result of this survey laid the foundation for the implementation of the second strategy.

2. A new paradigm for membership assimilation was outlined and implemented in three phases:

Phase 1. Pre-assimilation phase which was all the activities, ministries, and interactions between members and non-members prior to baptism

Phase 2. Membership phase which dealt with significance of church membership, involvement, and expectations of both old and new members

Phase 3. Post-assimilation phase which focuses specifically on the spiritual growth and maturity of the new converts. The church can be very meaningful in the assimilation process of the new converts when it is actually practicing congregational love of sharing, suffering, and discipleship.

To make the project more practical an assimilation model was developed with five levels. The real purpose of the model was to take an individual through various stages of the assimilation process to the point of becoming a serviceable Christian for Christ. We must always be aware of one fact: evangelism is an incomplete process until the evangelized becomes the evangelizer.

The findings from the research and the practical experience of the project suggest that the church needs to

re-evaluate its evangelism relative to the growth and stability of the new converts. What goes on in the lives of the new converts after baptism is of equal importance as what goes on before. A knowledge of Christianity and all lifestyle changes are taught prior to baptism, but from practical assumptions, all lifestyle changes occur after baptism and church membership.

The project had a great impact on the New Jerusalem Seventh-day Adventist Church. There are visible, measurable improvements such as: increased attendance, increased financial giving, and more laity involvement in outreach ministries.

It is my hope that this dissertation can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the local and global church in the entire process of evangelism. It is also my hope that the results of the dissertation can be used as a resource for strengthening this vital aspect of our evangelistic efforts.



**Andrews University**  
**Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary**

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PROGRAM FOR THE RETENTION  
OF NEW MEMBERS IN THE NEW JERUSALEM  
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH**

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

**by**  
**Enell O. Hall**  
**February 1999**

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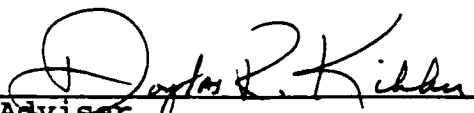
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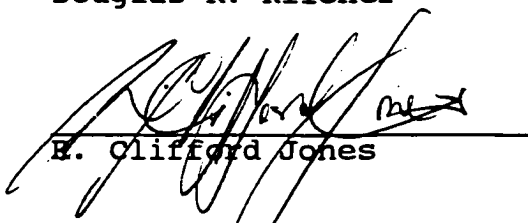
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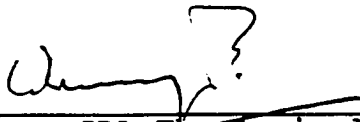
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Greatest of all, my acknowledgement to God who gave me the strength, will-power, and wisdom to undertake and also to complete this project.

"To Him be glory."

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

I have been working as a Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) minister for the past twenty-six years: eight years in the Central Jamaica Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, and fourteen years in the Illinois Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Very early in my ministry I observed that our evangelistic thrust falls short of the biblical mandate of Matt 28:19, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost." According to the SDA Bible Commentary, "teach all nations" literally means, "to make disciples of all nations."<sup>1</sup> Many individuals we baptized over the years have not been nurtured or assimilated to the point of becoming disciples<sup>2</sup>, thus the exodus through the back door is very alarming. We seem to be desperately trying to close the door after the damage has already been done.

---

<sup>1</sup>"St. Matthew," SDA Bible Commentary, ed. F. D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1994), 5:557.

<sup>2</sup>Joel B. Green and Scott McNight, Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospel (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 176.

Often on church boards, among members one would hear the following questions:

"Where is Sister Allen?"

"What happened to that young lady with the two little girls who usually sat in the back on my left?"

"Well, since James got baptized, I have not seen him in church."

The above statements are indicative of the fact that the church does have a major assimilating problem.

Many evangelists, laity, and administrators of our church have expressed deep concern for the lack of an effective program of membership conservation. George W. Brown, writing on the issue of membership assimilation, states that "any evangelistic thrust that fails to retain as well as win souls falls short of the biblical expectation."<sup>1</sup>

Miguel A. Cerna was correct when he stated that "the church ought not only to win members, but must hold its members."<sup>2</sup> "Two basic factors are needed," says Cerna, in order to keep people and assimilate them into the church:

1. Organization of small groups in which new members can be nurtured and develop friendship.
2. Help them by example to understand the joy of working for the Lord.

---

<sup>1</sup>George W. Brown, "Membership Conservation and Authentic Growth," Adventist Review, December 1994, 2.

<sup>2</sup>Miguel A. Cerna, "How to Assimilate Members and Prevent Dropouts," Ministry, December 1993, 24.

Active participation in church activities and soul winning will intensify the believer's first love, will expand their understanding, and also give them a feeling of belonging and the assurance that they are an integral part of the mission of the church. Much is dependent on the church to create the atmosphere for fellowship, love, and understanding among all members.

Jesus emphasizes the importance of love among the community of believers. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, when you have love one to another" (John 13:35). The concept of "one another" is one of Paul's strong motifs in his epistles to the churches he established.<sup>1</sup> The brotherhood of the Christian family was more meaningful than the bond of close relatives.

Our church spends thousands of dollars annually on public evangelism, Daniel and Revelation seminars, etc., however, very little, if any, is budgeted for assimilating these new members into the life and ministry of the church. Total baptisms for the SDA church worldwide for 1995 numbered 659,800; apostasies and missing for the same period were 179,697. The total percentage for 1995 was 27

---

<sup>1</sup>Rom 12:10; Eph 4:2, 32; Heb 10:24-25; Jas 5:16; Gal 6:2.

their baptisms for 1995.<sup>1</sup> (See Table 1.) Membership statistics for 1997 have shown some positive trends toward assimilation.<sup>2</sup>

Some administrators see assimilation of members as the responsibility of the local church. However, the local church and its members constitute just a part of the body of Christ. The leaders and administrators, duly elected, comprise the other part of the body. For assimilation to be effective, there must be a united effort between the local church and its leadership, combining local talents and expertise for the saving of souls. The New Testament concept of assimilation as recorded in Acts 2:41-47 clearly shows that the work was accomplished by the combined effort of laity and leadership of the church.

---

<sup>1</sup>General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Office of Archives and Statistics, Annual Statistical Reports (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1995), 30.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., April 20, 1999.

TABLE 1

MEMBERSHIP GROWTH AND LOSS FOR 1995  
(Losses Given in Percentages)

Category	No.	%
Worldwide Church		
Baptisms & Profession of Faith	659,899	
Apostasies & Missing	179,697	27.23
North American Division		
Baptisms & Profession of Faith	36,122	
Apostasies & Missing	13,351	36.96
Inter-American Division		
Baptisms & Profession of Faith	112,054	
Apostasies & Missing	54,323	48.47
South American Division		
Baptisms & Profession of Faith	114,068	
Apostasies & Missing	46,721	40.96

Some would argue that much is being done to establish new members in the church, e.g., small group ministry, spiritual friend concept, new believer's class, pastor's Bible class, church involvement, witnessing team, midweek prayer meeting, social events, Sabbath School classes, and fellowship groups. However, "when 285 members are added, and 269 are missing by apostasy"<sup>1</sup> in the Illinois Conference for the year 1995, it means that much more work needs to be done for membership assimilation at the local and global level.

This dissertation is needed so that the New Jerusalem SDA Church and its pastors, leaders, and laity of the church

---

<sup>1</sup>Kenneth Denslow, Executive Secretary, Illinois Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, telephone interview by author, April 16, 1996.



family at large can acquaint themselves with positive solutions to our assimilation dilemma.

### Statement of the Problem

This study attempts to develop and implement a program for the retention of new members in the New Jerusalem (NJ) Seventh-day Adventist Church.

### Justification of the Dissertation

1. Evangelism, which can be seen as the lifeblood of the SDA church, must be an ongoing process that leads a person to become an active disciple of Christ. However, in many conferences in North America and the world field, evangelism seems to end with baptism, making it an event rather than a process. Our evangelistic concept must be expanded to include the issue of assimilating new members.

2. There are two ways to enhance the growth of the church: one is to bring more people into the church and the other is to reduce the number leaving church membership.

3. My own experience in public evangelism has convinced me that the emphasis on reducing the number of members going out the back door has historically been soft-pedaled by the Seventh-day Adventist church. I pastored in the Central Jamaica Conference of Seventh-day Adventists for eight years (1970-1978). There I was used by God to lead over one thousand souls to Him through baptism. I joined the Illinois Conference in 1982, and to this point I have

been led by God to direct over five hundred souls to Him through baptism. The low number of members remaining in the church after the first year of baptism in some of the churches that I have pastored has been very alarming. This reflects the general trend throughout the entire North American Division.<sup>1</sup> This dissertation was born out of my deep conviction that somewhere between the pulpit and the pew there is a missing link.

4. There are many Seventh-day Adventist documents that deal with the various types of evangelism that bring people into the church; however, there are significantly fewer resources in the church that deal with the types of discipleship that assimilates members into the life and ministry of the church.

5. The Seventh-day Adventist theological concept of the priesthood of all believers calls for the equipping of the laity, and such equipping is an integral aspect of an effective assimilation process. Churches within the conferences of my study are adversely affected by the lack of an aggressive and effective assimilation program.

---

<sup>1</sup>Carolyn Rochester, Assistant Secretary to Elden J. Baptiste, Executive Secretary of NAD, telephone interview by author, June 25, 1997. She indicated that of the 36,122 individuals received into church membership for 1995, 13,351 were missing by apostasy, or an apostasy rate of 36.96%.

### Description of the Dissertation

1. A study of the theological implications of the church was made from both the Old and New Testament models which reflect God's redemptive act in Jesus Christ for His church as the body of Christ. The role of the church as a loving, caring, and nurturing center was discussed.

2. An investigation of current literature on the subject of assimilation evangelism, spiritual gifts, and the role of the laity was made to determine the lack of an effective program, and then to design a solution to the problem.

3. A new paradigm for assimilation as outlined below was implemented in the New Jerusalem Church as of March 1995, and continued until August 1997.

4. The program was organized in three phases:

a. Phase 1: Pre-Assimilation. Potential members were invited to join small groups in the church and were linked with caring, sensitive members who invited them to be a part of these small groups. This concept created an opportunity for building friendships and relationships prior to membership in the church.

b. Phase 2: Membership. This phase was implemented during the official reception of the newly baptized into church fellowship. At this time a spiritual-friend concept was introduced for every newly baptized person. These spiritual friends were selected

from the caring church members of the pre-assimilation phase who had invited those newly baptized to be part of the church's small groups.

Whereas in the preassimilation phase these members served as a bridge in building relationships, they now assisted the newly baptized in their spiritual growth and maturity, they are now their spiritual friend. This spiritual bonding continued for a minimum of one year (see Appendix A p. 188 for responsibilities of spiritual friends).

c. Phase 3: Post-Assimilation. An assimilation committee was organized from church members who were involved in both phases 1 and 2 of the program. A training seminar was conducted for members of this committee, discussing the objectives, function, and responsibilities of committee members in relationship to the newly baptized. Tools for evaluating effective assimilation were discussed at the training seminar (see Appendix A p. 189 for tools for effective assimilation).

5. A study of the New Jerusalem Seventh-day Adventist Church was conducted, analyzing the growth pattern and apostasy rate for the past ten years (1986-1995). Two groups of church members from the New Jerusalem Seventh-day Adventist Church were interviewed: those baptized within the last eighteen months and were still in the church, and

those baptized during the same period and have left the church (see Appendices B and C for questionnaire).

6. It is estimated that this dissertation will be completed by August 1998.

#### Limitation of the Dissertation

In this dissertation's definition of terms, I define apostasy, backsliding, and dropouts in relation to church members. However, these terms address the issue after the problem is created. Assimilation, on the other hand, is the opposite: it addresses the issue of preventing the problem before it is created.

This dissertation, therefore, is limited to the task of developing a program to assist new members to be fully assimilated in the life and ministry of the church. It does not address the issue of the causes of apostasy or what must be done to reclaim the missing. The main focus of the dissertation is on preventative rather than curative measures.

There were some strategies and methods originally employed in the project, but were eliminated, thus a higher level of focus could be maintained:

1. Four churches were originally involved, but because of impracticality, only one was used.

2. Questionnaires were mailed to respondents, but because of very poor response, a second set of

questionnaires were individually taken to the homes of respondents.

### Results of the Dissertation

1. My ultimate goal for this dissertation is that it may enhance the effectiveness in the retention ministry of the local church.

2. Members of the local church gained a deeper appreciation of being a member and being used by God in building up the body of Christ.

3. The dissertation has helped both old and new members to become effective leaders and also equipped them for ministry.

4. The New Jerusalem SDA Church experienced an increased financial impact as well as cost effectiveness in evangelism.

5. Pastors have at their disposal a field-tested program which will increase their effectiveness in a specialized area of ministry.

6. A greater laity involvement in the ministries of the local church and a better understanding among members relative to the nature, purpose, and mission of the church were achieved.

7. A greater percentage of members remained in the church after the first year of membership.

8. The result of this project will assist members of the local church in the following ways:

- a. Stimulate the need to re-evaluate their relationship both with God and their fellow men
  - b. Equip the church as a whole to re-evaluate its outreach and in-reach evangelistic programs
  - c. Provide a resource for members to be more effective in building up the body of Christ
  - d. Equip the church to provide ministries relevant to the specific needs of its members.
9. Strategies and methods used throughout this project have been very successful.

#### Definition of Terms

Various terms and abbreviations used in this dissertation are defined as follows:

Apostasy is the complete disassociation of a member from the Seventh-day Adventist church. This may be the result of disciplinary measures by the church or the individual may have voluntarily indicated his/her desire to withdraw from membership.

Backsliding refers to failure to conform to the previously accepted beliefs and practices of the church.

Beehive is a scene of swarming, buzzing evangelistic activities<sup>1</sup> such as Meals on Wheels, nutritional seminars, small group Bible study, community prayer ministry, etc.

---

<sup>1</sup>Webster's Third International Dictionary of the English Language (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Meriam Company, 1961), s.v. "Beehive."

Church may be understood as the Christian church as a whole, the Seventh-day Adventist church as a whole, or a local congregation of Seventh-day Adventists.

Disciple is a follower, an ardent student of a great teacher or a religious leader, one whose lifestyle reflects characteristics of his/her teacher.

Dropout a stage of inactivity in which a member has little or no relationship with the church or who has emotionally withdrawn from involvement. This does not mean that such a person has completely abandoned the faith, but recently come to the church.

Former member refers to someone who is no longer actively involved in church life and no longer on the membership role of the church.

Inactive member refers to a church member who for various reasons has either temporarily or permanently interrupted his/her involvement in church activities.

Laiety refers to members of the Christian church as a whole, or members of the SDA church who are not part of the appointed clergy.

Assimilate means (1) a process of incorporation, to transform into a homogeneous part of something; (2) to cause to become more harmonious with someone or something; or (3) to adapt oneself to, to become alike or similar, come into harmony or conformity.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Webster, s.v. "assimilation," 132.



Assimilation is the act or process of assimilating the act, process or result of making or becoming like, a modifying of one thing or element to make it homogeneous or resemble another.<sup>1</sup>

Paradigm is an example, serving as a model or pattern, a train of thought a person follows in order to reason out a problem.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., s.v. "Assimilation."

<sup>2</sup>Christopher Morris, Academic Press Dictionary of Science and Technology (New York: Academic Press, 1997), 1569.

## CHAPTER 2

### EVALUATION OF THE NEED FOR EFFECTIVE ASSIMILATION

This chapter is designed to evaluate the historical development of the New Jerusalem Seventh-day Adventist church in terms of growth rate and apostasy. This task is accomplished through membership survey and tables giving statistics of the specific period being studied, 1986-1995.

Other factors considered in this chapter are:

1. Expectation of old and new members of each other.
2. Assimilation pattern used in the church, if any.
3. Theological implications of assimilation.
4. Christ's method of assimilation and assimilation and the church.

My pastoring of the New Jerusalem Seventh-day Adventist Church began in June 1992. One problem immediately evident was the non-attendance of the new members. The church elders were fully aware of the problem, so I called for a meeting with them. We prayerfully analyzed the situation and resolved that something must be done, but the challenge that faced us was how to deal with the issue.

About that time, I had submitted a proposal for my D.Min. dissertation. The title I proposed was "The Development and Implementing of an Effective Program for Assimilating New Members in Four Select Churches in the Illinois Conference." When I discussed the proposal with B. J. Christensen, President of the Illinois Conference, he suggested that I focus on one particular church instead of several. In fact, he even named the New Jerusalem Church as a possible choice. I believe this was a direct answer to prayer, because I had not even discussed the issue of non-attendance of the New Jerusalem Church with him.

When I turned my focus to the New Jerusalem Church, my new proposal was developed and entitled "The Development of a Program for the Retention of New Members in the New Jerusalem Seventh-day Adventist Church." The proposal was approved by Dr. Douglas Kilcher, chair of my program.

#### History of the New Jerusalem Church

The New Jerusalem Church was established in 1892. It first began as a French-speaking church with about twelve members. For ten years the church grew rapidly; by 1902, the average Sabbath attendance was about 100, however, the membership has plateaued for the past eight years.

One factor that adversely affected the growth of the church was the number of times the church was relocated. Between 1982 and 1992, the church moved five times,

including its present location at 1605 East North Street, Bradley, Illinois. It has a present membership of 130.

Relative to the study of the New Jerusalem Seventh-day Adventist Church, alluded to on p. 9 analyzing the growth pattern, and the assimilation method used, the purpose of the study was to: (1) determine from the active members what factors contributed to their retention in the church, and (2) to determine from the inactive members what factors contributed to their leaving the church. The survey was conducted in accordance with the standard recommendation of the Institute of Church Ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University. Of the 100 questionnaires distributed, 75 were completed and evaluated in this study.

Many factors must be taken into account when analyzing membership patterns of any given church. Table 2 shows some factors that are easily measured: baptism, death, apostasy, and missing, transfer gain/loss total, and year-end membership total of the New Jerusalem SDA Church.

The lifestyle-and-growth experience of a church is not found merely in data information. Data information gives a theoretical insight into the dynamics at work in the life of the church. The growth experience of a church comprises a complex accumulation of many factors, some of which are intangible, but nonetheless very real.

TABLE 2

## NEW JERUSALEM MEMBERSHIP DATA 1986-1995

Year	'86	'87	'88	'89	'90	'91	'92	'93	'94	'95
Baptisms	3	21	11	15	6	7	7	5	2	10
Deaths	2	1	2	3	0	1	1	0	0	0
Apostasy & Missing	0	11	61	0	1	11	2	25	1	4
Transferred & gain/loss	+1	+10	-52	+12	+5	-5	+4	-20	+1	+6
Membership at year end	154	164	112	124	129	124	129	109	110	116

Some of those factors would include the following:

1. The style of pastoral leadership
2. Strength and involvement of lay leadership
3. Structure and facilities of church building
4. The sense of mission and the evangelistic program

of the church.

5. The assimilation and nurture of new members.

The ethnic composition of the church and the age factor also may contribute to the membership growth of the church.

The New Jerusalem Church has a large "baby boomer"

population. Twenty-one married couples (78.8%) of a total of twenty-eight couples are from the a baby boomer group.

For most couples the husband is the primary wage earner, and since most couples have young families the wives remain at home to care for the children. The baby boomer group contributes to the financial stability of the church;

however, their physical presence and active participation in the various ministries of the church are very limited. Some other couples in the New Jerusalem Church have jobs that keep them away from both home and church five to six days each week.

### Growth Pattern

The ethnic composition of the church membership and the age factor (baby boomers) had little or no effect on the New Jerusalem Church in the beginning. At its inception, the church was predominantly a Caucasian and French congregation. As the young families moved to the suburbs, the church experienced a constant population shift. However, in spite of the population shift, the church remained a Caucasian and French congregation for some time.

The ethnic mix came in 1965, when the first African-Americans, Lennie McNeal and his son Ryan McNeal, began to attend the church. Lennie was baptized in 1966, and shortly after a massive ethnic shift followed. The last vestige of Caucasian and French presence totally disappeared in 1996. Today the church is predominantly African-American. These changes in ethnic makeup have had a significant negative impact on the growth pattern of the church over the years.

Fig. 1 shows the net effect on membership of the poor assimilation pattern in the New Jerusalem SDA Church for the years 1986-1995. The net growth pattern of the church for the years in review has not been very significant.

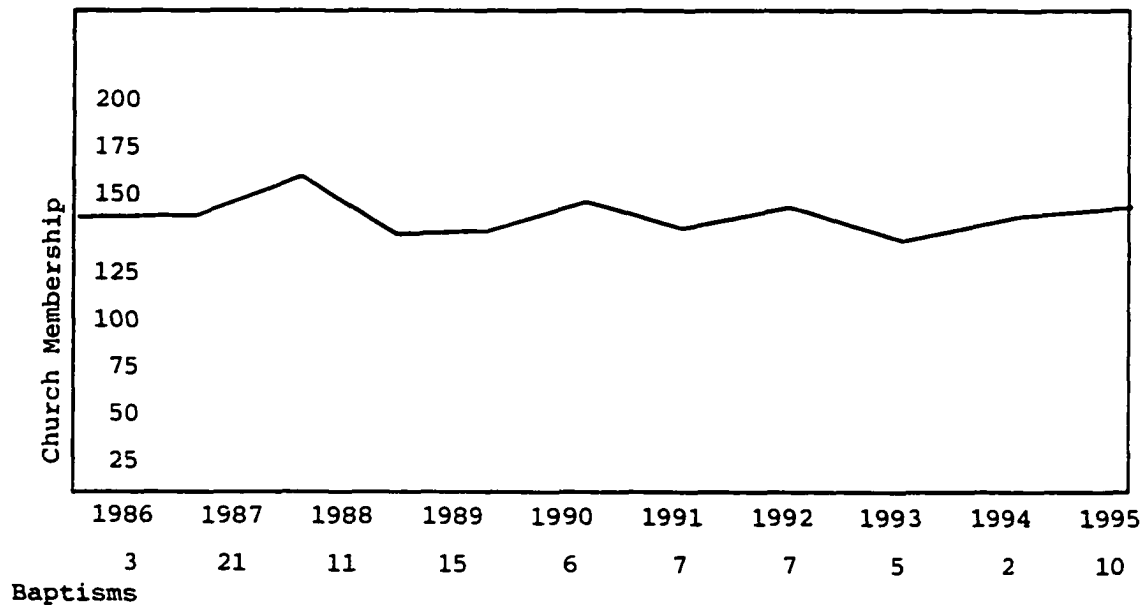


Fig. 1. Net effect on membership at New Jerusalem SDA Church, 1986-1995.

Churches either grow or die. No pastor or member likes to be identified with a church that is not growing either numerically or spiritually. Some church pastors and church leaders are concerned only with maintaining the membership, but there is no passion for evangelism. However, both the Old and New Testaments make it clear that God desires that His church should grow.<sup>1</sup> Church growth is not automatic. Pastors and members must plan, work, and pray, then the Holy Spirit will bless their efforts.

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<sup>1</sup>Acts records a phenomenal growth pattern of the New Testament church: Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14.

Dale E. Calloway states that "90% of all churches remain at a stagnation point."<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, in order for growth to take place, Calloway believes there are "twelve boxes from which every staggering church must extricate itself."<sup>2</sup>

The New Jerusalem Church has experienced many changes during the period under evaluation. One that affected the church most significantly was the frequent change of pastors. During the ten-year period, 1986-1996, three pastoral changes were made.

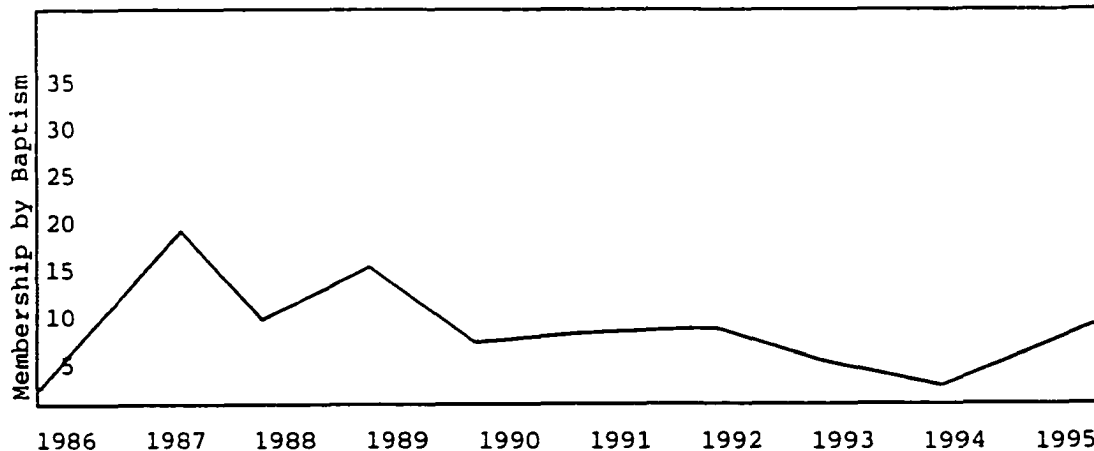
Fig. 2 shows baptisms in the church over the past ten years. The most productive years for evangelism in the New Jerusalem Church were 1987-1989. Twenty-two members were added in 1987 and twenty in 1989.

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<sup>1</sup>Dale E. Calloway, 20/20 Vision (Portland, OR: Scott Publishing Company, 1986), 11-12.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 12-23.





**Fig. 2. Number of baptisms at the New Jerusalem SDA Church 1986-1995.**

The small number of baptisms during most years in the ten-year period seems to indicate a spiritual stagnation in the New Jerusalem Church. However, this spiritual stagnation goes back before 1986 when the church started to experience social, ethnic, and cultural changes. Several factors played a part: impact of the baby boomer mentality, the numerous times the church was relocated, and the frequent pastoral changes.

Members caught in such an overwhelming transition live in a constant state of uncertainty, relative to their ethnic and social identity. At the beginning of the period studied, this atmosphere, evident in the New Jerusalem SDA Church, had a very negative impact on the spiritual and numerical growth of the church.

### Apostasy Rate

In the ten years that I evaluated, the New Jerusalem Church has shown a membership gain, even though the gain is not significant. Two years, 1988 and 1993, show a significant loss in membership. Fig. 3 shows the net gain/loss each per year.

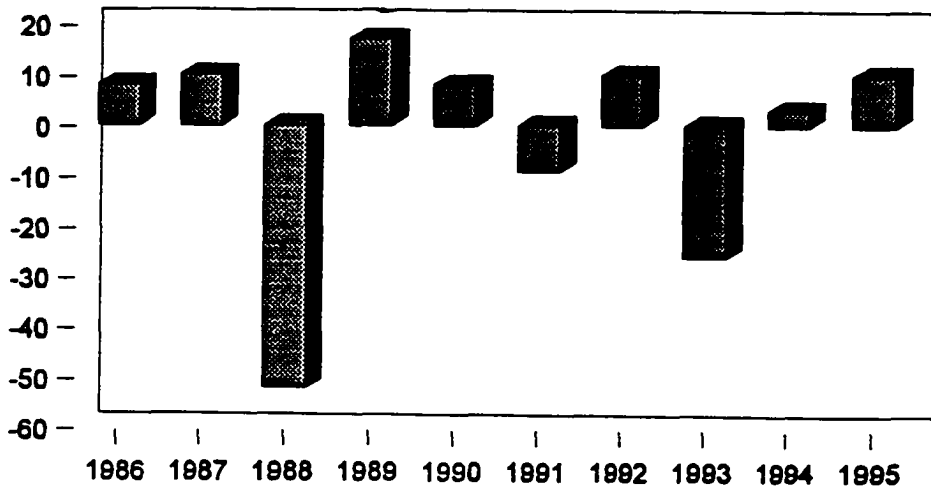


Fig. 3. Membership gain/loss, 1986-1995.

Table 2 shows that 87 members were added to the New Jerusalem church during the period 1986-1995, and during the same period 76 members were dropped. Thus the net gain/loss in membership for 1986-1995 was 11. Interestingly, many of those dropped became members of the church prior to 1986. Some of those dropped were on the grounds of open apostasy or missing, but the greater portion came from an evangelistic crusade conducted in 1984 by evangelist R. C.

Connor of the Lake Union Conference, resulting in 76 baptisms.<sup>1</sup>

The ability of a church to receive, welcome, and assimilate new members is a very important factor in the growth and stability of the church. Joel Heck makes this comment:

The spiritual life of the church is one of the most important factors in the assimilation of the new members. The value that is assigned to Bible study, prayer meeting and the amount of participation in such spiritual activities, is the key. Churches interested in greater effectiveness in assimilating new members will want to do some research in their past performances.<sup>2</sup>

Blaming himself for allowing some new Christians to drop out and get into a church that was cold, unwelcoming, and pathetic, Samuel Chadwick once remarked: "It was like putting a baby in the arms of a corpse."<sup>3</sup> Many churches today are finding that a very cold atmosphere is a real problem when they attempt to assimilate new members into their fellowship.

"I was hungry and you gave me something to eat" (Matt 25:35). This is the ministry Jesus commissioned every Christian to be involved in--finding people with needs, be those needs spiritual or material, and fill them. Many new

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<sup>1</sup>Statistics and historic information obtained from Mollie Banks, church secretary of the New Jerusalem SDA Church, June 10, 1996.

<sup>2</sup>Joel D. Heck, New Member Assimilation (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 19.

<sup>3</sup>Samuel Chadwick, quoted in *ibid.*

Christians experience great changes in their lives--loss of loved ones, loss of jobs, marital difficulty, family relocation, and, above all, religious changes. These changes often are perceived by old members as fabrication, not real, and thus those needs are ignored.

The church must be conscious of these needs in the lives of its new converts and implement ways to meet these needs. Churches that endeavor to meet those needs are simply demonstrating Christian love, which effectively aids the process of assimilation.

One of the most helpful guides in understanding the emotional and physiological needs of people has been provided by the renowned psychologist, A. H. Maslow. Maslow postulated the concept of a "hierarchy of needs."<sup>1</sup>

According to Maslow, the most basic human needs are the bodily or physiological needs. These needs take priority over all other needs. After these, according to Maslow, comes the "need to feel safe and secure." The third set of needs is the need to belong and be loved. This is the level most applicable to the assimilation of new members into the life of ministry of any congregation.

After the above three levels of needs are met, then comes the fourth level of needs, which is the need for self-esteem, and respect for self and others comes into focus.

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<sup>1</sup>A. H. Maslow, Motivation and Human Behavior, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row Publishing House, 1970), 79.

The final stage is the level of self-actualization, where people express the need and desire to give of themselves for the happiness of others. Joel D. Heck was right when he stated that, "It is on the third, fourth and fifth level of needs that the church must respond, if they want to effectively assimilate new members. Sensitive churches, that endeavor to meet these needs, are simply showing Christian love."<sup>1</sup>

Ellen G. White under inspiration also emphasized the importance of members' consecration and dedication to God in order to help new members remain in the church. She states:

If the churches expect strength, they must live the truth which God has given them. If members of our churches disregard the light of truth, they will reap the sure result of both physical and spiritual degeneracy. The Lord does not now work to bring many souls into the truth, because of the members who have been converted, and those who were once converted, but have backslidden. What influence would these unconsecrated members have on new converts?<sup>2</sup>

The manner in which a congregation receives and treats new members gives a vivid indication of the spirituality of that congregation. There is always a need for the willingness of individual Christians to love and reach out to those who are not part of the inner circle of friends.

One of the greatest needs of new converts is to gain a sense of identity and belonging. Very often, new members

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<sup>1</sup>Heck, 31.

<sup>2</sup>Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), 6:371.

experience loneliness after joining the church, and many factors can contribute to this loneliness.:

1. They are leaving their familiar lifestyle behind and moving into a new setting.

2. They are leaving friends behind, and many times moving into a congregation without any established friendships.

3. The new converts are now searching for new friends, and questioning themselves relative to their decision to become members of the church.

This searching process, according to Roy M. Oswald, senior consultant at the Albany Institute, is the first of five stages in the direction of becoming a member of any given congregation. The other four stages are: (1) the testing stage, (2) the returning and affiliating stage, (3) the joining stage, and finally (4) the being sent stage.<sup>1</sup> None of these stages can be ignored in the assimilation process, and those congregations that have a clear understanding of each stage will more effectively assimilate the new members.

It often takes time and effort to establish friendships, thus many new converts frequently are left dangling without a positive support system. Nancy Van Pelt states that "when new members are brought into the church,

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<sup>1</sup>Roy M. Oswald, "Effective Incorporation of New Members," Evangelism Newsletter, August 4, 1986, 75-77.

they must receive immediate attention to help them establish good and positive relationships, or else with a few months they will become discouraged."<sup>1</sup>

Lyle Schaller, in Assimilating New Members, lists three ways members are included in the life and ministry of any congregation:

1. By becoming part of a small group before formally uniting with the congregation
2. By becoming part of a small group after uniting with the congregation
3. By accepting a formal role in the congregation, which gives a sense of ownership, belonging, and identity.<sup>2</sup>

Each of these inclusion routes is very important to the new member who is building lasting relationships and also establishing friendships with existing members. The routes allow new members to feel comfortable, welcome, socially accepted, and wanted. Many patriarchs and matriarchs of a Christian congregation are quite blind to the unique problem of new members. Schaller describes this problem as "people void" in the life of the new converts.<sup>3</sup> Arn and Arn see the need for the development of a church "incorporation

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<sup>1</sup>Nancy Van Pelt, Celebration (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1994), 5.

<sup>2</sup>Lyle Schaller, Assimilating New Members (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 75-77.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 76.

consciousness,"<sup>1</sup> and for ways to fill this void. There is no doubt that these opportunities must become an integral part of our assimilation strategies.

Table 2 (p. 8) presents a graphic picture of the nature of apostasy that occurred in the New Jerusalem Church. Ten names were dropped because of death, two by transfer, and 116 were dropped as missing or open apostasy.

Death, of course, is inevitable. As Dr. Leonard Hayfield, professor at Stanford University, once stated: "The word of God has confirmed that man's death resulting from Adam's sin is predetermined within the genetic code of our cells from the day we were born."<sup>2</sup> There is absolutely nothing the church can do to close the back door against death, and not much we can do about members leaving through transfer. However, the church can utilize its resources and develop strategies for effective assimilation. The primary focus of the church should be not merely soul winning, but member assimilation into the life of ministry of the church.

Apostasy accounts for a large portion of the missing members, both at the New Jerusalem Church<sup>3</sup> and the SDA

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Arn and Win Arn, The Master's Plan for Making Disciples (Pasadena, CA: Church Growth Press, 1982), 146.

<sup>2</sup>Leonard Hayfield, "Why Do People Die?" Time, February 16, 1986, 19.

<sup>3</sup>Survey taken from the New Jerusalem Church covering 1986-1995.



Church at large.<sup>1</sup> The focus of my study is not apostasy; however, apostasy is the result of an ineffective assimilation program. Interestingly, as I researched on the topic in the Andrews Theological Seminary Library and compared facts with other seminary libraries, it became obvious to me that other seminaries have done more work on the topic of assimilation than the SDA Theological Seminary. The SDA Church that sees evangelism as its primary focus needs to be cognizant of the real problem, and also the need for a more effective assimilation program.

In a telephone conversation with Carolyn Rochester, recording secretary to Harold Baptiste, Executive Secretary of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, she stated:

Based on the figures reported to our office from all the Divisions around the world during the year 1995, a large percentage of members who joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church were reported as apostasies or missing. The statistics are sent to the local Conferences, then to Unions, and then to the Division.

Table 3 gives comparative membership statistics for the world church for 1994 and 1995. The percentage of apostasies clearly indicates the great need for a more effective assimilation program.

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<sup>1</sup>Floyd Bresee, "Maintaining the Harvest," Adventist Review, October 22, 1987, 18-20.

TABLE 3

**GENERAL CONFERENCE COMPARATIVE  
MEMBERSHIP STATISTICS 1994 AND 1995**

SDA World Membership 1994-1995	Membership beginning of year	Baptism POF	Apostasy & Missing	Membership Close of Year	Percentage in Apostasy/ Missing
Total '95	8,382,558	659,899	179,697	8,812,255	27.23%
Total '94	7,962,210	629,710	174,482	8,382,558	27.10%
<b>Net Gained</b>					
(Decreased)	420,348	30,189	5,215	429,997	17.25%

Many local churches find it very difficult to keep accurate membership records, consequently, the above figures must be considered approximate.

Table 4 reveals that the Inter-American and the South American Divisions had the highest percentage of apostasies, while the Southern Asia Division had the lowest percentage of apostasies during the same time period.

Consistent loss of members in the church has led Roger Dudley, Andrews University research specialist, to state: "Controlling apostasy appears to be the most important single factor in promoting church growth."<sup>1</sup> In every endeavor it is better to prevent problems than to try to

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<sup>1</sup>Roger Dudley, Des Cummings, Jr., and Dan Ritterskamp, "A Study of the Factors Relating to Church Growth in Oregon Conference of SDA" (Andrews University for Oregon Conference of SDA, Berrien Springs, MI, August 1982), 38.

solve them after they occur. Apostasy is a problem that must be prevented by effective assimilation; such

TABLE 4  
MEMBERSHIP STATISTICS BY DIVISION, 1995

Percentage of Apostasies/ Divisions	Membership Beginning of Year	Baptism/ Profession of Faith	Apostasies/ Missing	Membership Close of Year	Missing
African-Indian Ocean Division	1,044,714	53,439	10,949	1,076,833	20.48
Asia Pacific Division	1,011,351	55,327	7,616	1,057,872	13.76
Eastern Africa Division	1,339,014	171,513	24,235	1,478,380	14.13
Euro Africa Division	411,982	29,838	2,916	434,404	9.77
Inter-American Division	1,520,588	112,054	54,323	1,571,162	48.47
South American Division	1,310,538	114,068	46,721	1,371,341	40.96
North American Division	822,150	36,122	13,351	838,898	36.96
South Pacific Division	277,800	13,518	4,741	286,199	35.07
Euro-Asia Division	98,963	21,181	7,977	109,889	37.66
Southern Asia Division	214,562	12,829	137	227,129	1.06
Trans-European Division	88,241	5,824	1,222	91,530	20.98
Southern Africa Union Conference	69,031	2,863	869	69,095	30.35
China	173,624	31,323	4,637	199,823	14.80
World's Total 1995	8,382,558	659,899	179,697	8,812,255	27.23
World's Total 1994	7,962,210	629,710	174,482	8,382,558	27.10
Net Gained (Decreased)	420,348	30,189	5,215	429,997	17.25

assimilation will have a positive effect on the future number of back-door losses in the church.

I believe the problem of apostasy can be controlled; the Southern Asia Division is a fitting example.<sup>1</sup> However, we must be very careful in our acceptance of the validity of these statistics. Lowell Cooper, Associate Secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, points out that "membership accuracy is very inadequate, and one reason for this low percentage loss is that very little attention is given to maintaining membership accuracy."<sup>2</sup> Despite the above factor, Cooper mentioned three contributing factors to the low percentage loss:

1. High level of pastoral leadership.
2. Churches are very small, which lends to a more personalized and family type ministry, and not just a Sabbath community.
3. The identity of the Christian community is very distinct in relation to the non-Christian community. There is always that combined effort in the Christian community as it launches out for Christ.

Ellen White wrote about the need for a united effort between the laity and ministers for the finishing of the

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<sup>1</sup>General Conference Statistics-Southern Asia show baptism/profession of faith 1995 = 12,289. Apostasies/missing 1995 = 137, only 1.06% in apostasy.

<sup>2</sup>Lowell Cooper, Associate Secretary, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, telephone interview by author, March 18, 1998.

work.<sup>1</sup> Effective assimilation, therefore, is an important activity in church growth, and must include the continuous combined effort of both laity and clergy. The ability of any congregation to receive, welcome, and assimilate new members will become a reality only as each member sees the mission of the church as the united effort of pastors and laity working together to prepare souls for the kingdom of heaven.

### Membership Survey

Information and data were gathered at the New Jerusalem Church by at least three different methods:

(1) questionnaire, (2) pastoral visits, and (3) interviews. The pastoral visits and interviews I personally conducted; the questionnaires were delivered either by members of the church or were mailed to the respondents.

Two sets of questionnaires were used: one for members who were baptized within the last eighteen months and are still active in the church (see Appendix B and Tables 9-10) and the other for members baptized during the same period and have left the church (see Appendix C and Table 11). The questionnaire was first given to members of the church board; next, it was given to members attending a duly-called church business meeting. With the assistance of Mollie Banks, the church clerk, who provided me with the names and

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<sup>1</sup>Ellen G. White, Gospel Workers (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1962), 352.

addresses of missing members, I was able to mail questionnaires to absentees or to deliver some of them personally.

One of the most challenging and time-consuming aspects of the entire project was obtaining the returned questionnaires from the respondents. On many occasions I had to supply respondents with a second set of questionnaires, sometimes delivering them myself. I was determined that circumstances would not deter me from accomplishing my objective.

The responses showed that most respondents were suspicious and did not know my real motive behind the questionnaire. However, after I explained my general objective and the purpose of the questionnaire, everyone responded gladly. The responses from the inactive members made it obvious that these members were looking for an outlet or opportunity to express their feelings about the church.

### Results of the Survey

The survey yielded results in several areas:

#### Sex

The survey shows that 69.1 percent of the church members were females and 30.9 percent were males.

TABLE 5

## MEMBERS ACCORDING TO SEX

SEX	No.	%
MALE	30	30.9
FEMALE	67	69.1
Total	97	100.0

## Age

The age category with the highest percentage (39.17%) is the baby boomer group (see Table 6). This seems to be the group that has the strongest impact on the church. One of the challenges the church faces today is the ideological changes of the baby boomers.

TABLE 6

## MEMBERS ACCORDING TO AGE

Age group	No.	%
15-20	15	15.46
21-30	8	8.24
31-40	38	39.17
41-50	8	8.24
51-60	17	17.55
61+	11	11.34
Total	93	100.00

Many times they are disillusioned with the church and walk away in frustration because they feel that the church is not fulfilling their needs. The church must be flexible enough to meet the needs of all the members, while at the same time

it must be firm in maintaining the theological principles of Christianity.

#### Marital Status

The majority of those responding to the survey (41.24%) were single (see Table 7). God's intent is for a family to have a father and a mother. Mothers cannot be fathers, neither can fathers be mothers in the actual sense of the word. Single-parent homes result very frequently from the absence of the father in the home; consequently, the men of the church ought to be fathers to the fatherless.

TABLE 7

#### MARITAL STATUS OF MEMBERSHIP

Marital Status	No.	%
Married	35	36.08
Divorced	15	15.46
Separated	5	5.16
Single	40	41.24
Widowed	2	2.06
Total	97	100.00

Many single parents have come to realize that they need some source outside of themselves to be successful in maintaining their families. Thus the church has become their primary focus, and many have turned to the church for support. Presently, at the New Jerusalem Church we operate a regular "Meal Outreach" program and more than fifty percent of those being served are single-parent families. The church needs to become more conscious of these needs and develop programs to assist these single families.



Tony Evans, in America's Only Hope,<sup>1</sup> mentions three ways in which the church can help single families:

1. Become Christian "Big Brothers" so young fathers can have a proper male image to imitate.
2. Provide "fellowship families" so the single-parent family unit has a dynamic relationship with a nuclear family unit.
3. Provide single mothers with day-to-day needs both in and outside the home.

God created the family to be the primary social institution through which moral values would be transferred. The church, therefore, needs to take definite action to recapture the entire family for the glory of God. If we do not save the family, there is no hope of saving the nation. It is the moral obligation of the church to set the agenda for keeping the family together.

The success of a nation is dependent on the moral, spiritual, and social stability of its families. Thus the agenda must have a biblical standard as its foundation; consequently society will be governed by the church rather than the church being governed by society.

#### Income Level

The socio-economic composition of the church has a direct impact on its stability. The survey of the New

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<sup>1</sup>Anthony T. Evans, America's Only Hope (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 141.

Jerusalem SDA Church (see Table 8)<sup>1</sup> shows that the greatest percentage of those responding were from the lowest economic level.

TABLE 8  
INCOME LEVEL OF MEMBERSHIP

Income	No.	%
\$ 0-\$ 5,000	28	28.30
\$ 5,000-\$10,000	18	18.15
\$10,000-\$15,000	8	8.24
\$15,000-\$20,000	8	8.24
\$20,000-\$25,000	11	12.34
\$25,000-\$30,000	10	10.30
\$30,000-\$35,000	14	14.43
<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>100.00</b>

#### Factors That Keep Members in the Church

More than one factor kept the respondents coming to church (see Table 9). However, the biblical teachings of the church rank as the highest reason for continuing church attendance. Jesus made teaching a very integral part of His ministry. In Matt 4:23 we read: "And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and infirmity."

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is known for its biblical teaching and preaching, and never in the experience of the growth of the church has a vision ever taken the place of an earnest Bible study. As early as 1858, during

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<sup>1</sup>Tables 5-8 carry information on data common to both groups on pages 36-39.

TABLE 9

## FACTORS THAT KEPT RESPONDENTS IN THE CHURCH

Factors	Number	%
Biblical teaching	54	55.67
Caring & committed pastor	35	36.08
Friendly atmosphere	30	33.00
Church involvement	25	25.77
Loving & caring church	28	28.86
<u>Spiritual needs met</u>	40	41.23
<u>Total</u>	212	220.00

the formative years of the SDA Church. Ellen White referred to the collective body of the biblical teachings of the church as the "Present Truth."<sup>1</sup> Truth in the biblical sense of the word is more than a proposition or an abstract thought. Truth is, in reality, a Person, "Jesus Christ." "He is the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6), and we who have heard His voice have become part of the Truth. Daily, as Christians, we witness to the Truth, not only by what we say, but by what we feel and what we do.

Ellen White once commented thus:

When the power of God testifies as to what is Truth, that truth is to stand forever as the Truth. No aftersuppositions, contrary to the light God has given, are to be entertained. Men will arise with interpretations of Scripture which are to them truth, but which are not the truth. The truth for this time, God has given us as the foundation of our faith. He Himself has taught us what is truth. One will arise,

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<sup>1</sup>Ellen G. White, MS 9, 1988, Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

and still another, with new light which contradicts the light which God has given under the demonstration of the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

She also describes such a collective body of biblical teachings as (1) the second coming of Christ, (2) the seventh-day Sabbath, (3) the third angel's message, (4) the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, and (5) non-immortality of the soul as "essential, pillars, firm foundation, and landmarks."<sup>2</sup> These biblical teachings, as revealed through the Spirit of prophecy, did not exclude the pioneers of the church nor today's Christians from a continued diligent study of the word of God. Each Christian needs an individual experience as a basis of knowledge and confidence.

#### Members' Involvement in Church

Church attendance ranked the highest (30.95%) as the members' involvement in church. The second highest (20.61%) was the Role/Task Involvement.

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<sup>1</sup>Ellen G. White, Counsels to Writers and Editors (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1946), 31-32.

<sup>2</sup>Ellen G. White, Early Writings (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1952), 259.

TABLE 10

## RESPONDENTS' CHURCH INVOLVEMENT

<u>Church Involvement</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>
Witnessing/Bible study	15	15.46
Church attendance	30	30.95
Role/task/involvement	20	20.61
Outreach/involvement	17	17.52
Making new friends	15	15.46
<u>Total</u>	<u>97</u>	<u>100.00</u>

The results of the survey seem to indicate that the two strongest indicators of members remaining in the church are their consistency in attendance and their level of involvement. Ellen White attests to these two facts:

We should all be workers together with God. No idlers are acknowledged as His servants. The members of the church should individually feel that the life of the church is affected by their course of action. He who becomes a child of God should henceforth look upon himself as a link in the chain let down to save the world. He is one with Christ in His plan of mercy, going forth with Him to seek and save the lost.<sup>1</sup>

In Evangelism she also states:

When souls are converted, set them to work at once. As they labor according to their abilities they will grow stronger. It is by meeting opposing influences that they become confirmed in the faith. As the light shines into their hearts, let them defuse its rays. Teach the new converts that they are to enter into fellowship with Christ, to be His witnesses, and to make Him known to the world.<sup>2</sup>

"Adult new members," says Schaller, "who do not become part of a group, accept leadership roles, or become involved in a

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<sup>1</sup>Ellen G. White, Christian Service (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 48.

<sup>2</sup>Ellen G. White, Evangelism (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), 355-456.

task during the first year, tend to become inactive and eventually leave the church."<sup>1</sup>

Recently, at the New Jerusalem Church, we conducted a Spiritual Gifts Seminar for new converts. (See Appendix D for Spiritual Gifts Inventory Sheet.) From this seminar, individuals were able to identify their gifts; and the church was able to develop ministries for the utilization of these newly discovered gifts. These new converts are being integrated into the life and ministry of the church; they are actively involved and are reaching out to others.

"My son joined my witnessing team, before he became a member," said one new member. Presently, he is the head deacon, a member of a nursing home band, and a faithful, growing Christian.

It was with this concept of involvement in the mind that Robert Logan once stated:

Psychologists tell us that there is truth in the idea that action precedes commitment. The heart follows the will. The biblical ideal of love makes sense because it is an issue of the will. Involve someone in your church, give him ownership, responsibility and recognition, and his heart will follow. Assimilation does precede commitment.<sup>2</sup>

An assimilated person has many new friends in the church, a significant number of relatives, or both. Consequently, those people who joined the church through

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<sup>1</sup>Schaller, 77.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Logan, Beyond Church Growth (Tarrytown, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1989), 107.

methods other than friends or relatives will feel very lonely. It is the task of the church to seek to build friendships between the old and new members. Arn and Arn call friendship "the most important element in whether a person stays active in the church, or goes out through the back door."<sup>1</sup>

#### Factors That Influence Members to Leave Church

Some respondents indicated more than one factor that caused them to leave the church; however, lack of fellowship ranked the highest (46.39%) and lack of friends was the second highest (30.92%) (see Table 11).

TABLE 11

#### FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE MEMBERS TO LEAVE THE CHURCH

Factors	Numbers	%
Mistreated by members	8	8.24
Legalistic approach to gospel	10	10.30
Overworked syndrome	18	18.56
Disappointed expectations	15	15.46
Lack of fellowship	45	46.39
Cold dead worship	25	25.77
Lack of friends	30	30.92
Lack of support group	15	15.46
Total	166	171.12

People join the church for many reasons--often because of personal anxieties in one form or the other. When a new member comes to the church with his personal baggage, the

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<sup>1</sup>Arn and Arn, 48.

church expects the new convert to make new friends, accept unfamiliar beliefs and practices, learn new social rules, and even become active in the congregation. But the new converts also have legitimate expectations of the church. They are the ones coming to the church hoping to start a new life, hoping to find new friends; thus they need help to become part of the membership. They do not need intimidation or condemnation.

H. L. Rudy, president of the Oregon Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, tabulated the expectations of the church from the new convert's perspective, and also the expectations of the new converts from the church's perspective.

#### Expectations of Old Members

The established members of the church expect the new converts to:

1. Participate regularly in the worship service of church
2. Attend all services of the church regularly
3. Have a consistent devotional life
4. Demonstrate sound stewardship
5. Actively involve themselves in ministries of the church.



Expectations of New Converts

The new converts expect the church to:

1. Have faith in their sincerity
2. Give them adequate instruction in the meaning of church affiliation
3. Provide an atmosphere of Christian education adjusted to special needs
4. Provide an atmosphere for good, wholesome fellowship
5. Enlist and integrate them early into the life and ministry of the church.<sup>1</sup>

Although expectations are present on the part of both, the established church must realize that the new converts are "Babes, desiring the sincere milk of the word" (1 Pet 2:2).

The task of the church is to create an atmosphere and environment through friendship-building activities for the new converts. The church that wants to assimilate new people must do most of the bending and giving and reaching out.

Assimilating people into the life and ministry of the church is much different from helping people to become members. "People," says John Savage, president of L.E.A.D.

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<sup>1</sup>H. L. Rudy, "Receiving and Holding Converts," Ministry, April 1963, 29-30.

Consultants, "need to become part of the church, rather than merely attached to it."<sup>1</sup>

The New Jerusalem Church, as well as the SDA Church in general, consistently falls short of its total evangelistic ministry. Finding people and getting them to join the church does not finish the job. Indoctrination is very important, but the congregation "ought to," say Arn and Arn, "place a high priority on fellowship-building activities such as potlucks, picnics, small group fellowship time, and regular church socials."<sup>2</sup>

Richard G. Korthal calls "Christian fellowship" one of the five adhesives or nails that strengthens the bond between the congregation and new converts. The other four are: (1) spiritual partners for support during the crucial initial period, (2) friends from within the church who understand, can be trusted, and are willing to share, (3) opportunities for Bible study in a different setting, and (4) assistance in finding purpose through discipleship.<sup>3</sup>

Win Arn cites a study conducted in which two questions were asked church dropouts: Why did you drop out? and What would influence your choice of a new church home? According

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<sup>1</sup>John Savage, "The Teflon Church," Leadership 90 (Fall 1990): 31.

<sup>2</sup>Arn and Arn, 148.

<sup>3</sup>Paul J. Foust and Richard G. Korthal, Reach Out: Evangelism for the Joy of It (St. Louis: Concordia Press, 1984), 7.

to Arn, the answer to the first question was, "Did not feel part of the group." The answer to the second question by nearly 70 percent was the "friendliness of the people."<sup>1</sup> The friendship factor, therefore, plays a significant role in the assimilation of new converts into the life and ministry of the church.

### Assimilation Pattern

One of the first assignments, after I assume a new pastoral district, is to visit the members in their homes to ascertain their spiritual status with the church. I was prepared to be consistent in using this method at the New Jerusalem Church. In order to plan my time wisely and to make all visits productive, I asked all members to fill out a visitation information sheet (see Appendix A). They were also asked to fill out sheets for absent and non-attending members.

During my first visit (which I make alone, or with my wife), I generally ask several questions such as:

What responsibility do you have in the church?

How many friends have you made since you became a member?

Who is your closest spiritual friend in the church?

When did you last attend church?

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<sup>1</sup>Charles W. Arn, "The Friendship Factor," in The Pastor's Church Growth Handbook, vol. 2, ed. Win Arn (Pasadena, CA: Church Growth, 1982), 177-80.

How many members have called or visited you?

Are you presently involved in any small group Bible study plan?

The answers I invariably received could be tabulated as follows: To Question 1, None; to Question 2, One, Two, or None; to Question 3, None; to Question 4, I don't remember; to Question 5, One, Two, or None; and to Question 6, No.

These answers vividly indicate that the church had no positive assimilating program. This was my conclusion relative to the New Jerusalem SDA Church.

Our church needs to develop a preventive ministry rather than a healing ministry. "The best place to prevent loss," says George Sweeny, is "at the front door. A guard rail at the top of the cliff is much better than an ambulance service at the foot."<sup>1</sup>

#### Theological Implication of Assimilation

The Oxford American Dictionary defined assimilation as "being absorbed into the body, or into a group system or culture."<sup>2</sup> Robert E. Park and Ernest Burgess define assimilation as

a process of interpretation or fusion in which a person or group acquires the sentiments and attitudes of other persons or groups, and by sharing their experiences and

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<sup>1</sup>George Sweeny, quoted in Heck, 10.

<sup>2</sup>Oxford American Dictionary (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), s.v. "Assimilation."

history, they are incorporated into a common cultural life.<sup>1</sup>

Theologically, Paul used the analogy of the church as the group or body with Christ as the head.

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be subject to their own husband in every thing (Eph 5:24 KJV)

Assimilation, then, becomes a reality when members of the body (church) help people to become part of that body, by acquiring similar knowledge about their Christian life and a similar pattern of behavior. The theological implication of assimilation must be understood within the context of the church, for assimilation fits the very nature of the church and its theology. Peter Wagner, one of the leading authorities in the church-growth movement, asserted that "not only is church growth okay, but it is God's will that the church should grow."<sup>2</sup> He believes that "the first responsibility of Christians in this present age is to get as many people as possible into the kingdom, and under the lordship of Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup>

It is a fact that it is God's will that the church should grow. But what specifically does the Bible say about

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<sup>1</sup>Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, Introduction to Science and Sociology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), 735.

<sup>2</sup>C. Peter Wagner, Leading Your Church to Growth (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1984), 13.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

assimilation? Is there any biblical mandate for Christians to exemplify?

The ministry of Jesus was primarily centered around people and not around programs. He took no time out to publicize Himself, neither did He seek any complex method of reaching the world, but He chose those whom Jewish leaders of His day described as "uneducated and common men" (Acts 4:13).

In rabbinical circles, the disciple would choose his master, but Jesus took the initiative and personally called the twelve disciples (Matt 10:1-4). Our Lord invested His time, ideas, and effort in them to equip them for the work. His personality and characteristics was so reflected in these twelve men that even the critics who accused them of being ignorant and unlearned had to acknowledge one fact: "These men have been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

Ellen White made this comment relative to Christ's method of assimilation:

Christ's method alone will give us true success in reaching people. The Saviour mingled with them as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them; "Follow Me."<sup>1</sup>

Christ, therefore, becomes the most profound biblical model for Christians to exemplify.

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<sup>1</sup>White, Ministry of Healing (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1947), 143.

The inclusiveness of God's plan of salvation is repeated when Peter, quoting the prophet Joel, says, "In the last days, says God, I will pour my Spirit on all people" (Acts 2:17). In Acts 2:39, Peter is quoted as saying, "The promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord will call." In Paul's letter to the Galatians he says:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. . . . There is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal 3:26-29 NIV).

This all-inclusiveness of God's covenant of grace mandates the church to do everything in its power to assimilate non-members into its life and ministry.

The very meaning of the term "covenant," according to J. D. Douglas, implies "restoration, God's self-imposed obligation for the reconciliation of sinners to Himself."<sup>1</sup> This also implies "a sense of homeliness, being a part of, and also having fellowship with."<sup>2</sup> When God made His covenant with Abraham, He wanted to give him and his descendants a "sense of belonging, of being a part of His family."<sup>3</sup> Those who have been embraced by God and have

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<sup>1</sup>J. D. Douglas, "Covenant," New International Dictionary of the Bible (1987), 238.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

become part of His family must now open their arms and embrace those who come to know God.

Reflecting Christ's Method of Assimilation

Assimilating someone into the life and ministry of the church has a totally different impact than merely assisting one in becoming a member of the church. Christ's disciples were not just bodily or physically members of the New Testament Church, they were assimilated into the life and ministry of the church of which Jesus Christ was the head. In Matt 4:19 Jesus said to the disciples, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." "Follow," according to Vine, is from the Greek akoloutheo, a follower or a companion (from the prefix a, expressing union, likeness and keleuthos, a way), hence one going the same way.<sup>1</sup>

Buttrick interprets the phrase "Follow Me" as meaning "to be my disciples."<sup>2</sup> Rabbinical discipleship demanded intimate, daily contact with the teacher, forming or developing the character of the teacher and learning the laws of the teacher, both by precept and example.

Buttrick, commenting on Jesus' exemplary life, states:

Jesus burned with a passion for humanity. If people spoke of harvest, He spoke of human harvest (Jn 4:35). If people mentioned fishing nets, He proposed that they

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<sup>1</sup>W. E. Vine, "Follow," An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words (1967), iii.

<sup>2</sup>George A. Buttrick, "Matthew: Text, Exegesis, and Exposition," Interpreter's Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 277.



be fishers of men. If people talked of wells, He talked of fountains of living waters. Where others saw buildings, governments and battles or laws, Christ saw His brethren. Is there any other concealing of discontent than Christ, and any other satisfying work, than that of being fishers of men for His sake?<sup>1</sup>

The disciples, then, left homes and vocations to be part of a movement which has more than a philosophy, creed, or a guide--it has a person in Jesus Christ.

An effective assimilation program was instituted by Christ as the disciples adapted His ways, lifestyle, and characteristics. Not only were the disciples and other sincere seekers of truth attached to Christ's lifestyle, but they became an integral part of the body of Christ.

Our Lord was a great believer in the principle of spiritual growth, reproduction, and nurturing. Because of such deep conviction, for more than three years, He concentrated on training the disciples in order to reproduce His life and His ministry in them, and this is the basic concept of assimilation. Christ not only trained by precept, but by example. In Jn 13:15, He challenged the disciples at the conclusion of the Lord's Supper: "I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done to you." As Christians, therefore, we are to become duplicates of Christ, the Great Model; consequently, others will become models of Christ by example.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

### Assimilation and the Church

The basic fundamental nature of the church is to belong to God. In 1 Pet 2:9-10, the apostle states that "We are a people for God's own possession." This is not merely a national group, it is for people called out of "every nation, kindred, tongue and people, to constitute the spiritual entity, one great spiritual family."<sup>1</sup> The very nature of the church is to enfold new members into its fellowship and to incorporate them into its body.

The assimilating of new converts into the church is a process that begins with a "one-to-one relationship" long before the person becomes a member of the church. The very first contact a Christian makes with a non-Christian (be it in a worship service or a social setting) sets in motion the "one-another" relationship, which is the starting point of an effective assimilation process.

Throughout the writings of Paul, the unity, fellowship, and oneness of the believers is strongly emphasized by the analogy of the body and its members with Christ as the head. Paul not only stressed the concept of oneness and unity, but he strongly emphasized the motif of "one-another."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>C. John Miller, Outgrowing the Ingrown Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publications, 1986), 43.

<sup>2</sup>According to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance (n.d.), Paul used the word "One Another" at least 34 times in his writings.

In The Master's Plan for Making Disciples, Arn and Arn tabulated some very significant reasons why a church's outreach strategy should identify and use the natural network of relationships. "These strategies," according to the authors, "are the most effective means of assimilating new members."<sup>1</sup> The importance of a sound relationship cannot be overemphasized in the assimilation process. Research conducted by the Institute of American Church Growth in Pasadena, California, shows the percentage of people coming into their new relationship with Christ and the church through each category listed. This is presented in Table 12.

The result of the research, tabulated in Table 12, concentrated on one question asked by the Institute of American Church Growth to over 14,000 laypersons: What or who was responsible for your coming to Christ and your church? The friendship and relative factor made the greatest impact on one's decision for Christ.

In summary of their report, Arn and Arn state that "The conclusion is clear, the majority of people today can trace their 'spiritual roots' directly to a friend or relative as the major factor they are in Christ and the church."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Arn and Arn, 45.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 76.

TABLE 12

CATEGORIES OF INFLUENCE BRINGING  
PEOPLE INTO CHURCH

Categories of influence	%
Special needs	1-2
Walk in	2-3
Pastor	5-6
Visitation	1-2
Sunday/Sabbath school	4-5
Evangelistic crusade	1/2-1
Church program	2-3
Friends/relatives	75-90

Apostasy was rare in the New Testament Church. This is evident from the fact that Jesus, the most successful pastor, evangelist, and teacher, started the church on a voluntary basis (Matt 4:18-20) with a group large enough (Matt 10:2-4) so that each member received His personal attention (Luke 21:31-32; John 13:26-27). Before they talked of any type of outreach ministry, Jesus took time out to disciple them, and when they were well assimilated into His life and ministry, He commissioned them to "go and make disciples of all men" (Matt 28:19 NIV).

The growth of membership was phenomenal after the original congregation was properly assimilated. The first group numbered 12 (Matt 10:2-4), then it reached 120 (Acts 1:15), expanded to 3,120 (Acts 2:41), then to 8,120 (Acts 4:4), and multitudes were then added to the church (Acts 5:14). Even a great company of priests was added to the church (Acts 6:7). It is interesting to note that,

according to the NT church record, only four converts apostatized from the church: Judas (John 13:34), Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:5), Demas (2 Tim 4:10), and John Mark, who went astray, but later repented and returned (Acts 13:13; 15:37-38 KJV).

What was the secret for such an effective assimilation program? The secret is found in Acts 2:42-47:

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

This passage gives a list of eleven spiritual dynamics that were evident in the NT church, thus creating the atmosphere for effective assimilation: teaching, fellowship, communion, prayer, miracles, pooled resources, commonality, meeting needs, spending time together, praise, evangelism, and total assimilation. A church endeavoring to implement the above acts of community involvement will always have something to offer, will hold its own, and will attract others back for more. The great challenge facing the church today is that of fulfilling the biblical mandate of making disciples of all men.

One of the outstanding characteristics of the SDA Church is its preaching of the gospel in the context of Rev

14:6-12. From a small group of just "3500 members and 125 churches"<sup>1</sup> in the mid-nineteenth century, it has grown to a staggering "10,020,533 members and 44,164 churches worldwide."<sup>2</sup> However, assimilating members has always been the great challenge for the church (see Table 3).

Leaders within the Christian church at large, as well as the Seventh-day Adventist Church family, are calling for a ministry that not only will perpetuate the opening of the front door, but will perpetuate also the closing of the back door. In the early pages of his book on discipleship, Caslow states that "There is a mounting concern regarding membership reversion. We cannot continue to give all the attention merely to membership accession."<sup>3</sup> The church must at this time reassess its performance and diligently search for an answer to this long-time, persistent, and chronic evangelistic weakness of apostasy.

Yes, it is embarrassing to admit that we have a very high loss/gain ratio, and that at least one-third of the members are inactive in the mission of the church. But we cannot help these people if we fail to admit the seriousness of the problem and do not put forth concentrated effort to establish and implement an effective assimilating program.

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<sup>1</sup>Don F. Neufeld, "World Statistics 1863-1973," SDA Encyclopedia (1976), 1326.

<sup>2</sup>General Conference Office of Archives and Statistics, World Statistics, 3rd quarter 1998.

<sup>3</sup>Daniel E. Caslow, Disciplining (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1982), 53.

Assimilating members in the church is not an option. We cannot continue to emphasize "soul-winning evangelism," that is, "winning them, dipping them, then dropping them" if we can find them. There must be a nurturing program, which enables new members to maintain their "first love" (Rev 2:4). Dudley and Cummings's studies have led them to conclude:

If significant church growth is to take place, we must find more effective methods--both preventative and remedial--of dealing with this problem. Controlling apostasy is absolutely essential to the mission of the church. A member who does not apostatize contributes as much growth as a new convert.<sup>1</sup>

We must never forget that the only reason a person becomes a Christian and remains a Christian is through the influence of the Holy Spirit on that person's heart through the gospel. However, from a human perspective, well-organized programs, well-disciplined people, and wholesome activities do have an influence on human behavior.

The SDA Church urgently needs to re-evaluate its evangelistic methods in terms of winning and holding new converts. Not only should there be a budget for tent meetings, etc., but there must be a definite budget for effective assimilation. I am convinced that somewhere between the pulpit and the pews there is a missing ingredient that must be discovered and fully implemented.

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<sup>1</sup>Roger L. Dudley and Des Cummings, Jr., Adventures in Church Growth (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1983), 135.

## CHAPTER 3

### A NEW PARADIGM FOR ASSIMILATING NEW CHURCH MEMBERS

Chapter 3 deals primarily with a review of: (1) Seventh-day Adventist periodicals, (2) Ellen White's writings, (3) the works of other proponents of church growth, (4) the method of assimilation most effective in church growth. The chapter concludes with a model for assimilation outlined in five stages.

In the New Jerusalem church we are involved in various kinds of small-group ministries as we will note in chapter 4. There is a strong friendship evangelism ministry coordinated by the usher board, and a well-organized elder's visitation program.

In chapter 2 assimilation was defined as the process of integrating individuals into a group--be it a secular or religious group. Because of the nature of this dissertation, the term "group" must be interpreted within the context of the church. The church, according to 1 Pet 2:9, is a "called out group," separate from all allurements of the world, but it is to impact the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. When one is assimilated into the church,



he or she adopts the lifestyle and disposition of the church.

Over the years as a pastor, I have watched individuals come into the church and then, for one reason or another, go out through the back door, sometimes never to return. This situation prompts me to ask a series of questions.

When does the assimilation process of a new convert begin? Is it before or after one is baptized? Or, do we wait until the new convert is missing for four consecutive Sabbaths, select a non-committee church member or ask for a volunteer, and say to that person, "Please take this name, phone this new convert, and ask him/her, 'What is the matter with you, we have not seen you in church for the past four weeks?'" If that is our assimilation approach to new converts, we are defeating the real purpose of evangelism.

Many church-growth experts agree that the assimilation process ought to begin before one has formal membership in the church. Heck believes that there are two key periods during which the assimilation of new converts can and should take place. The first is the "time before the individual actually unites with a congregation, and the second is the first six months to one year thereafter."<sup>1</sup>

Win and Charles Arn also see the assimilation process as starting long before an individual joins the church. They state: "The friendship established with others in the

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<sup>1</sup>Heck, 33.

church earlier in the disciple-making and friendship-making process, now serves as a natural bridge into the worshiping congregation."<sup>1</sup> Lyle Schaller stresses the importance of small-group ministry in this pre-assimilation process. As far as he is concerned,

the ones most likely to remain active in the church have become part of a small group where membership in that group was very important before formally united with the congregation. They were assimilated before they joined.<sup>2</sup>

Our church must come to grips with the reality that assimilation begins with the very first visit of an individual to our worship services. Most visitors never join the church they initially visited; however, for those who eventually become members, assimilation actually began with that first visit.

Jesus began His assimilation program with the first contact. In Matt 4:19-20, we note Christ's call to Peter and Andrew and their response to the call, "Follow Me . . . and they straightway left their nets and followed Him." The Greek akoloutheo, according to Vine, means a "follower or a companion" (from the prefix a, expressing union, likeness, and keleuthos, a way), hence the meaning, "one going the

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<sup>1</sup>Arn and Arn, 144.

<sup>2</sup>Schaller, 76.

same way."<sup>1</sup> From the initial moment the call to discipleship was made, these men started to go Jesus' way.

Buttrick, commenting on the calling of the Twelve, states:

They were individual men, not twelve copies. They were representatives. Peter was headstrong, Andrew was homespun and loyal, James and John were "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17). Each after his own kind was needed for the enrichment of the kingdom. Jesus did not obliterate their distinctiveness, he gathered their several abilities into one orchestra of praise.<sup>2</sup>

Christ was their leader and they modeled His lifestyle and disposition, both by precept and example.

When does assimilation begin? It begins with the first contact with a non-believer. Daniel Guild, in Ministry, stated that "the church must begin the program of preventing apostasy before a person is baptized, by preparing every candidate very well, socially and spiritually."<sup>3</sup> He was right when he made reference to the fact that we are to "integrate them into various ministries of the church, thus they will feel loved, wanted, and have a sense of belonging."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>W. E. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words (London: Lowe and Brydone Printers, 1969), s.v. "Akouloutheo."

<sup>2</sup>Buttrick, 7:276.

<sup>3</sup>Daniel R. Guild, "Establishing New Converts," Ministry, March 1963, 14.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

In The Master's Plan for Making Disciples, Win and

Charles Arn state:

If after six months to one year the new members can identify few or no close friends in the church, the chances are extremely high that the person will soon be inactive. However, if during the same period the new member has a growing number of close friends who are actively involved in the church, it is very unusual for that person to drop out.<sup>1</sup>

In a ten-year survey conducted by Robert Orr, vice president of Seminars and Consultants Church Growth, Inc., Monrovia, California, he interviewed ten persons who had recently joined the church. He found that of those people who joined a church and then became inactive, 70-75 percent dropped out in the first year.<sup>2</sup> Based on his research, Orr discovered that there are "three major times in the first year at which people tend to leave the church."<sup>3</sup>

The first is within the first several months after joining. The cause of their leaving at this time usually is traceable to an evangelistic method that used a manipulative approach. Such an approach to evangelism totally disregards the power of the Holy Spirit, as recorded in Acts 2:1-5.

The second time is during the fifth to seventh month after joining. People who leave during this time did not get satisfactory answers to such questions as "Can I develop

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<sup>1</sup>Arn and Arn, 148.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Orr, Church Growth, Inc. (Monrovia, CA: Net Result, 1991), 6.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

friends in this church?" "Where do I fit in?" "Am I needed?" Orr sees this group as the second largest that eventually leaves the church.

The third time at which a number of members leave the church, says Orr, is "somewhere between the eleventh to thirteenth month."<sup>1</sup> Individuals leaving the church during this period do so primarily because of unfulfilled needs rather than differences over theological issues. These are individuals who were never bonded with the core group of the congregation, never felt a part of the "inner circle."

Presently, in the New Jerusalem Church (the church in this present study), active, committed members are assimilating non-members into the life and ministries of the church. Various assimilation models are in progress: home Bible study groups, a women's group, social events, mid-week prayer meeting, and prayer groups. Individuals who completed the Amazing Facts Bible study through the Bible study groups already were requesting baptisms and were baptized May 26, 1997. Before baptism, these individuals were demonstrating positive evidences of lifestyle changes and also a deep sense of belonging. I am convinced that a new paradigm for assimilation is a relevant need, not only at the New Jerusalem Church, but also throughout the SDA church in general.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 8.

Review of Seventh-day  
Adventist Periodicals

The Seventh-day Adventist church prides itself on its evangelical emphasis and its biblical foundation. The preaching of the everlasting gospel in the context of Rev 14:6-12 and the winning of souls for the kingdom of heaven always have been the focus of the church's mission. Evangelism, however, involves more than winning souls through baptism, it involves helping individuals to grow and become serviceable Christians for the Lord.

Many articles have been written in Seventh-day Adventist periodicals on various kinds of evangelism: child evangelism, health evangelism, public evangelism, and sometimes personal evangelism. However, a careful study of the literature reveals that significantly few articles deal with the type of evangelism that assimilates members into the life and ministry of the church.

Appendix L has a list of titles compiled from the Review and Herald and Ministry, the international journal of the Ministerial Association of the Seventh-day Adventist church. This list does not reflect the total concern and information of the SDA church on the subject of assimilation. One interesting fact about the articles in this appendix is that the word "assimilation" is not mentioned very frequently, but the concept is embedded in certain words and statements.

Cerna, in "Winning Them and Holding Them," used the term "assimilation" five times. As far as Cerna is concerned, "after baptism our strategy for assimilating new members must help keep them in the church."<sup>1</sup> Other writers use terms such as holding new converts, nurturing new members, establishing new converts, and membership conservation.<sup>2</sup>

Assimilating new members into the church is not automatic. It is an ongoing process with the responsibility resting upon the entire church family. The process involves time, effort, dedication, money, and people. Too often members see the ministry of membership assimilation as the work of the pastor and, sometimes, they are correct. The pastor is the one who wins them; therefore, he must keep them. Soul-winning and soul-holding is the ministry of the entire church, and God has promised to bless such a combined effort. Ellen White was thinking of such a combined effort when she stated: "When there is an entire wholehearted consecration to the service of God, He will recognize such by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit without measure."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Cerna, "Winning Them and Holding Them," Ministry, December 1993, 24-25.

<sup>2</sup>Greg Sandifur, "How to Reduce Apostasy," Ministry, April 1964, 20-22; Daniel E. Caslow, "Nurturing New Members," Workers Action, December 1993, 9-14; Clive Barritt, "Establishing New Converts," Workers Action, December 1993, 7; Brown, 2.

<sup>3</sup>White, Christian Service, 253.

However, she cautions that "such will not be, while the largest portion of the church is not laborers together with God."<sup>1</sup> This then being our mission, the new converts must be the focus of our ministry, particularly in their first year of membership.

The crucial first-year concept is documented by many authors and researchers. Suzanne G. Braden states:

Intentionally helping newcomers move into the life and ministry of any congregation is not easy, but it is an essential task, and an opportunity for growth. The effort to effectively incorporate new members must be at the heart of the ministry of the church. Have a joyful, blessed time as you open your heart and congregation to newcomers, but do it in the first year.<sup>2</sup>

Whenever one goes through the first six months of membership, the questions somehow change significantly. "Are my new friends as good as my old friends?" "Does my group meet my needs?" "Am I needed?" "The issues at stake here," according to Robert Orr, "is not theological, but relational."<sup>3</sup> It is very important, therefore, that when planning assimilation strategy, we take into account some reasons why members stay and why members leave.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Suzanne G. Braden, "Incorporating New Members," in The First Year (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1987), 69.

<sup>3</sup>Orr, 6.



Ministry Magazine

Ministry is the international journal for the Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial Association and is a monthly publication sent to all Adventist ministers and some ministers of Protestant churches. Publication of Ministry started in 1928, but as early as April 1929, C. B. Haynes wrote an article dealing with the question of membership assimilation.<sup>1</sup>

From 1929 through 1961, at least thirty-three articles were written on the subject of membership assimilation. Obviously these articles indicate that our leaders had a deep concern not only for soul-winning evangelism but soul-holding strategies. J. L. McElhany in 1936 wrote about the significance of "sound Biblical preaching and witnessing as necessary ingredients in holding the flock together."<sup>2</sup> It is very important, according to McElhany, that we keep the flock busy, engage in useful service for the Lord, train them to witness to their neighbors, and work for their families. This will strengthen their faith and enrich their spiritual experience.<sup>3</sup>

R. L. Froom, one of the outstanding leaders of the SDA church, saw the church's mission as not only involving

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<sup>1</sup>C. B. Haynes, "Holding Our Members," Ministry, April 1929, 10-14.

<sup>2</sup>J. L. McElhany, "Shepherding the Flock," Ministry, August 1936, 5.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

aggressive soul-winning evangelism, but soul-holding evangelism in assimilating those already won.<sup>1</sup> Froom strongly felt that "the church ought to spend time, money and energy guarding the backdoor in proportion to that which is spent in making the front door attractive. Candidates must be properly indoctrinated before they are baptized."<sup>2</sup>

We must be very careful not to confuse the matter of conversion with that of indoctrination. Indoctrination is a clear understanding of the biblical teachings of the church, while conversion is a process effected through the power of the Holy Spirit.

New converts must be surrounded with love and caring and not with the "do's and don'ts" which tend toward legalism. A loving atmosphere will make room for development and Christian growth and will promote a willingness on the part of the new converts to share such with others. Ellen White stated that "upon all new converts should be impressed the truth that abiding knowledge can be gained only by earnest labor and persevering study."<sup>3</sup>

Assimilation of new converts under the topic "Establishing New Converts" has been discussed at length by George S. Rapp, L. A. Semmens, and A. C. Archibald, to name

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<sup>1</sup>R. L. Froom, "Holding the Flock," Ministry, August 1936, 4.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>3</sup>White, Early Writings, 368.

but a few.<sup>1</sup> They concluded that in order for the church to establish new converts, four principles must be implemented: (1) the church must help new converts develop friendships; (2) small study and fellowship groups must be available to the new converts; (3) the church must give some level of responsibility to the new converts; and (4) the church must have an effective missionary program.

These men strongly emphasized the theological significance of assimilation. However, instead of using the term assimilation, they used phrases from Paul's writing: "established in the truth," "rooted and built up in him," "steadfast in your faith" (Col 2:5-7), "rooted and grounded in love" (Eph 3:17).<sup>2</sup>

Although new converts have acquired enough understanding of the Bible to make an intelligent decision for Christ, the truth of the Bible must be reiterated continuously. Over and over again, I have heard this statement made by new converts about the Seventh-day Adventist church: "What I learned from the Bible during my first six months far outweighed all the time spent in my former church." I believe new converts are one bright target for Satan's attack, and in order for each one to

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<sup>1</sup>George S. Rapp, "Establishing New Converts," Ministry, November 1940, 9; L. A. Semmens, "Establishing New Converts," Ministry, May 1939, 25; A. C. Archibald, "Establishing New Converts," Ministry, August 1961, 14.

<sup>2</sup>Rapp, 9.

remain steadfast and firm, the church must continue its systematic teaching of the Bible after formal membership.

Most churches organize the new converts in a special class called the Pastor's Bible Class, New Members Study Group, or New Believers Class. At the New Jerusalem Church, we use the term Pastor's Bible Class. This class is open to all members baptized during the past twelve months, all visiting friends, and former members. Because of the spiritual significance of this class, I teach it every other Sabbath; in my absence, one of the elders teaches the class.<sup>1</sup>

The real objective of this class is to enable new as well as older members to grow in their relationship with God and their fellowmen. Rapp stated that

steadfastness and Christian growth is not acquired in a day, but it is a gradual process. Mature Christian growth comes only with time. It is one thing to be baptized but another thing to be steadfast to the end.<sup>2</sup>

The pastor's Bible class is considered further in chapter 4 in conjunction with a discussion on assimilation through small groups.

Daniel R. Guild and Earl E. Cleveland both wrote separate articles under the title "Closing That Door."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Kurt Johnson, Lifeline Bible Study Guide, Bk. 1 & 2 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1995).

<sup>2</sup>Rapp, 27.

<sup>3</sup>Daniel R. Guild, "Closing That Door," Ministry, March 1965, 48-51; E. E. Cleveland, "Closing That Door," Ministry, August 1961, 17-18.

Both wrote in defense of the evangelist for the back-door losses. One thing was obvious in both articles. There is need for improvement in our method of soul-winning and soul-holding evangelism.

When we compare the period 1928 through 1961 with that of 1962 through 1990, we find more articles were written in the first period than the second. Soul-winning is a science, but not a new one. Thus, even if we have new and modern approaches to evangelism, the biblical principles remain unchanged. What we need today in our churches are not new ministries but an effective application of biblical principles. I believe that in these closing years of the twentieth century, we have a great need for new approaches in gospel presentation. The Bible underscores such a fact in Dan 12:4: "Knowledge shall increase and men shall run to and fro." However, the church must be careful not to move from one extreme to the other, thus making the presentation of the gospel less effective.

H. L. Rudy wrote an article in which he discussed the relationship between the church and the new converts. He saw that both the church and the new converts have legitimate expectations of each other.<sup>1</sup> The church is an institution for sin-sick souls, and even though the patient (the sinner) cooperates with the doctor (the pastor), for the recovery to be meaningful, there is a greater

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<sup>1</sup>Rudy, 29.

responsibility on the part of the institution (the church). Therefore, I believe the church has a moral and spiritual obligation to see that new converts are fully established in the household of faith and are settled in the church as their abiding spiritual home.

Rudy strongly feels that it is the "church's duty to bring about this joyful, happy experience in the things of God."<sup>1</sup> It is one thing for the church to have expectations of the new converts, but I am convinced that it is more important for the church to be mindful of the things it does, and what it must be for the new converts.

Establishing new converts in the church is a progressive program that goes hand in hand with the new believers and the church.

Greg Sandifur wrote an article focusing on apostasy which analyzed our worship services and their impact on membership assimilation. He stated:

Holding our members is more than association or routinely studying the Sabbath School lesson weekly. Somewhere, somehow, we must inspire our church membership to believe and experience the joy that comes with fellowship with God and with His church.<sup>2</sup>

I agree with Sandifur when he states that "the significance of the worship service must be seen from the fact that it displays the most appropriate representation of church

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Sandifur, 20.

membership."<sup>1</sup> Our worship services ought to be a pivotal point of evaluation when planning an assimilation strategy for the church.

People have left many of our worship services, never to return, unnourished, unmoved, uninspired, and unchallenged in heart, because so many times our worship services are not well planned. More details on worship as an avenue for membership assimilation are covered in chapter 4. Our church today needs a well-coordinated worship service with sound biblical preaching--preaching that keeps the saints coming back for more. It is a general rule that a congregation responds very favorably to spiritual nourishment.

Orley M. Berg addressed the issue of membership assimilation in two articles in 1972. He shared the concern of other writers--the challenge of adjustment facing new converts during the first six to twelve months after baptism. He sees older members as a source of strength and encouragement for the new converts during this critical period. Like other writers, he believes in the spiritual guardian plan (discussed further in chapter 4), and agrees with the concept of immediate involvement for the new converts. Berg closes his articles with a special prayer for the new converts.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

MY PRAYER: Dear Father, we thank Thee for every new child added to the kingdom of God. We pray that as new members come into our fellowship we may have that tender concern so vital at such an important period in their experience. May they ever find within our membership that inspiration and blessing they so earnestly seek. In Jesus' name, Amen.<sup>1</sup>

An effective approach to membership assimilation is through the ministry of small groups. This was the focus of two articles--one by Miguel Angel Cerna<sup>2</sup> and the other by Garrie F. Williams.<sup>3</sup> Both men see small-group ministry as a key factor, coupled with a pre-assimilating program, as one of the most effective ministries in closing the back door to loss of members.

Pastors have to maintain a balance between baptizing members and assimilating them into the church. The task of assimilating members while at the same time avoiding the drop-out syndrome is very challenging. The church is responsible for creating ministries that will enhance the assimilation process. However, there has to be a willingness on the part of the new converts to accept those ministries. "Maintaining a balance," according to Cerna, is a challenging task; thus in the closing section of his article he appeals to the church to "shut the back door and

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<sup>1</sup>Orley M. Berg, "After Baptism, What?" Ministry, October 1972, 22.

<sup>2</sup>Cerna, "How to Assimilate New Members and Prevent Dropouts," 17.

<sup>3</sup>Garrie F. Williams, "Closing the Back Door in the Northwest," NPUC Gleaner, November 1986, 26.



return to the proven group methods of the early SDA pioneers."<sup>1</sup>

### Review and Herald Magazine

The Review and Herald is a Seventh-day Adventist periodical which began in 1850. Originally called Present Truth, the name was changed later to Advent Review and Sabbath Herald. Presently it is known as the Adventist Review.

As one reads the Adventist Review and Ministry magazine, one discovers that much more is said in Ministry relative to membership assimilation than in the Review. Ministry is primarily designed for ministers. The materials and information therein are intended to be an asset to the ministry. On the other hand, the Review is designed to inform pastors and members of the progress of the church, locally and internationally.

George W. Brown, writing in the Adventist Review, discussed the "relationship between evangelism and membership conservation as it affects authentic church growth."<sup>2</sup> He sees evangelism as a failure if it does not satisfy the biblical mandate.

I have spent countless hours reading SDA and other literature on the subjects of apostasy and membership

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<sup>1</sup>Cerna, "How to Assimilate New Members and Prevent Dropouts," 25.

<sup>2</sup>Brown, 2.

assimilation. Certain elements of common concern can be tabulated as follows:

1. Churches today do have an assimilation problem.
2. The real solution to the problem has eluded pastors and church leaders over the years.
3. Churches have failed to utilize biblical principles and proven strategies for effective assimilation.
4. An urgent appeal needs to go out to return to the biblical understanding of the church and its mission to those who become part of the family of God.

The Seventh-day Adventist church suffers from all of the above and there seems to be a lack of immediate action for improvement. How happy we should be to witness new members becoming part of God's family, full of enthusiasm and zeal for the novel experience of being in Christ. However, often right before our eyes, this zeal soon becomes less enthusiastic; it turns warm, then cool, then cold, and finally dies. The question we generally find ourselves asking is, Who failed? The new converts or the church?

My personal pastoral experience and the reading of literature on the issue enables me to conclude that at least 75 percent of the failure must be attributed to the local church. Ellen White made this comment regarding the church's help to new converts:

The new believers should be carefully instructed, that they may have an intelligent knowledge of the various lines of work committed to the church of Christ. . . .

Much is dependent upon the work done by the church for the new convert after they become members.<sup>1</sup>

I believe that after the individual becomes a member of the church, that is the time he or she needs tender love and care.

I was totally disillusioned when I became a member of the Seventh-day Adventist church. My preconceived expectations were shattered, and at the end of a certain Sabbath service, I made my decision vocally and in no uncertain terms: "This is my last Sabbath here!" The only positive thing about my decision was that it was vocalized, and a loving hand was felt on my shoulder with the words: "Brother Hall, I am your friend." I attribute my being in the church to the direct intervention of that concerned member in my struggle at one of the most crucial points in my Christian journey.

#### Other Adventist Periodicals

In other Adventist periodicals such as the Signs of the Times, the Lake Union Herald, and other union publications, the issue of membership assimilation is occasionally mentioned. These church papers tend to deal with issues that impact their individual unions and conferences rather than issues that have global impact on the church. Membership assimilation is a global as much as a local

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<sup>1</sup>White, Evangelism, 338.

problem for the Seventh-day Adventist church. Therefore, whatever strategies are designed to combat the problem must have a positive affect on the church both at the local and global level.

### Ellen White and Membership Assimilation

What was Ellen White's position on new converts and the church? How did she address the issue of membership assimilation? It is interesting to note that she used the word "assimilation" two times in her writing. The statement is identified in both instances.

Like will attract like. Those who are drinking from the same fountain of blessing will draw nearer together. Truth dwelling in the hearts of believers will lead to blessed and happy assimilation. Thus will be answered the prayer of Christ that His disciples might be one even as He is one with the Father.<sup>1</sup>

Even though Ellen White used the word assimilation only twice in her writings, the concept of membership assimilation appears consistently, particularly in the book Evangelism. She made reference to several assimilation models that must be implemented in the church.

### Follow-up Model

The follow-up model is to be a repetition of the doctrines that were initially presented, be it in a Bible study or a crusade. To the new converts, "the truth is new

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<sup>1</sup>White, Testimonies for the Church, 5:101; idem, Testimony Treasures, 3 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1949), 2:13, emphasis added.

and startling," says Ellen White, "thus there is the need to have it presented the second time, in order that the points will become distinct, and be fixed in the minds."<sup>1</sup> She also stated:

Satan is constantly seeking to lead men and women into error. The scriptures are wrestled, taken out of their context and quoted to give falsehood the appearance of truth. The garments of truth are stolen to hide the features of heresy.<sup>2</sup>

Ellen White felt that our follow-up model of assimilation should incorporate both newly baptized and faithful teachers of God's Word. She maintained that "our effort should not cease because public meetings have been discontinued for a time."<sup>3</sup> She felt that

careful planning for follow-up should be implemented which includes indoctrinating the new converts, teaching them that as they embrace truth, they will have to bear responsibilities. Thus they will increase in knowledge and love of truth and may grow to the full stature of men and women in Christ.<sup>4</sup>

#### Visitation Model

Another assimilation model that Ellen White emphasized is visitation. As far as she is concerned, the evangelist

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<sup>1</sup>White, Evangelism, 334.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 358.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 337.

<sup>4</sup>Ellen G. White, "Careful Plans for Follow-Up," Letter 48, 1886, Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

and his team (if there is one) must see that "all new believers are intelligently and well established in the faith and also are instructed in some branch of missionary work, before they move to other fields of labor."<sup>1</sup> New believers are starting a new life and it is the church's and the evangelist's duty to assist them in this process. Visiting with them in the homes, holding Bible studies, and sharing God's love not only will strengthen the newly baptized, but will help older members and leaders as they continue their Christian pilgrimage.

In addition to these assimilation models, Ellen White mentions four significant points on which to establish new members in the church: (1) health reform, (2) spiritual gifts, (3) systematic benevolence, and (4) missionary work.<sup>2</sup> It would be best for ministers to concentrate on quality rather than quantity.

#### Pastor's Role

Ellen White sees the role of the pastor as a very significant model in establishing new believers in the church. It is the pastor's task to feed the flock with the "thus saith the Lord." If members, young and old, are not being fed, they are going to find food in some other places.

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<sup>1</sup>White, Testimonies, 5:256.

<sup>2</sup>White, Evangelism, 343.

Christ said to Peter, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32), and after His resurrection and just prior to His ascension, He again said to Peter, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs" (John 21:15).

Peter did not have much experience as a pastor, he was a fisherman by trade (Matt 4:18-19), but his Christian life would be incomplete unless he learned to feed the lambs, referring to those young in the faith. Ellen White has this to say about the matter: "The charge given to Peter should come home to every minister today. Again and again the voice of Christ is heard repeating the charge to His undershepherd, "'Feed My lambs, Feed My sheep'."¹

Elder Kenneth G. Vaz, professor of religion, West Indies College, Jamaica, once stated that "a minister has only two sources from which to obtain information for his sermon: (1) his Bible and (2) his members."<sup>2</sup> If he does not read his Bible and visit his members, he cannot obtain the information he needs. As far as Mrs. White is concerned,

the minister must visit every family, not merely a guest to enjoy their hospitality, but to inquire into the spiritual condition of every member of the household. Come close to your brethren; seek for them,

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¹Ibid.

²Kenneth G. Vaz, class discussion, West Indies College, Jamaica, July 1971.

help them; come close to their hearts as touched with the feelings of their infirmities.<sup>1</sup>

### Role of the Church

Not only do the ministers have an obligation to the new converts, White agreed with other church leaders that church members have a moral obligation to new converts. To her, "the church has a special responsibility laid upon her to attend to those who have earnestly followed the first rays of light they have received."<sup>2</sup> It is in this context that she mentions the guardianship plan or what we would call the Spiritual Friend or Buddy System or Sponsorship. Whatever term is used to describe the principle, Ellen White, under inspiration, spoke of this assimilation model as early as 1896.<sup>3</sup>

### Role of the New Convert

Because the new convert is a spiritual babe, his or her success as a Christian to a large extent is dependent on the systematic teaching from the pastor, the love and supportive care from the members, and also the new member's willingness to apply him/herself. Ellen White believes that "just as soon as the church is organized, the minister should set the

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<sup>1</sup>White, Evangelism, 347.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 351.

<sup>3</sup>For information on the guardian plan concept, see White, Evangelism, 352-353.



members to work. Personal responsibility, personal activity in seeking the salvation of others must be the education given to all new converts."<sup>1</sup> Allowing new members to sit back in idleness is dangerous. They will become fruitful soil for the devil. But when souls are baptized, they should be set to work at once, to labor according to their talents and ability. I believe that as they labor in this capacity, they will become stronger. It is no wonder that Ellen White states that "the best medicine a pastor can give to a church is not preaching or sermonizing, but planning work for them."<sup>2</sup>

Ellen White sees two great dangers that always face the new converts: fanaticism and error. Satan's settled plan is to lead astray and confuse the new converts with erroneous doctrines presented by professed believers. How can the new converts guard against such dangers? White states:

The Christian must be "rooted and grounded" in the truth, that he may stand firm against the temptations of the devil. Keep a firm hold upon Jesus Christ and never let go. Have a conviction as to what you believe and let the truth of God lead you to devote heart, mind, and soul in doing his will.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>White, Testimonies, 7:26.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>White, Evangelism, 361.

False prophets are one of the eschatological events of the present time (Matt 24:24), and such will only intensify as the eminence of Christ's return draws closer.

### Bible Study

White sees Bible study as another important assimilation model for establishing new converts. To her, "believers must continue to search the Scriptures, not merely to read the Bible, but study it with understanding in order to be established in the blessed truth."<sup>1</sup> She strongly recommended good literature that especially is adapted to the needs of new believers.<sup>2</sup> This, she believed, would enable them to be firmly established in the truth of God's Word. She had a deep concern for the spiritual growth of the new converts, thus she sought to awaken in each one the importance of a daily communion with God through prayer and Bible study. She expressed her deep concern thus:

All newly baptized members should be impressed with the truth that an abiding knowledge of the Word can only be gained by earnest labor and preserving study. Too often, their piety degenerated into a form, and when the appeals that first aroused them can no longer be heard, they became spiritually dead.<sup>3</sup>

The principle of assimilation is not merely an event that just happens; it is a process consisting of a variety

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 366.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. Here White lists several books new converts should study.

<sup>3</sup>White, Gospel Workers, 368.

of unintentional and intentional events and dynamics merging to assist a new church member in his or her assimilating experience. I believe that when all these spiritual dynamics are evident among old and new believers, Christian growth is the result and the church will be kept alive by our love and service to one another.

### Review of Research

The issue of membership assimilation is very crucial to the Seventh-day Adventist church; however, very little research has been done on the subject. One would expect that a problem of this magnitude would have received a great deal of attention and that research would have been done to find ways to close the back doors of our churches.

In a discussion with Warren Johns, Andrews Theological Seminary librarian, he stated that "when the bibliographic sources of religion and other seminary concerns are researched, it becomes very noticeable that very little research has been done in the area of membership assimilation."<sup>1</sup>

Some individuals have done research on topics that are related indirectly to assimilation. John C. Alspaugh developed a program called the "Caring Ministry Concept for Inactive Members" at the Stone Tower Seventh-day Adventist

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<sup>1</sup>Warren Johns, Andrews University Theological Seminary Librarian, interview by author, June 1996, Berrien Springs, MI.

Church in Portland, Oregon.<sup>1</sup> This study arose out of a deep concern for the many inactive and former members who had stopped attending church. He agrees with other researchers that the reasons people drop out or become inactive are (1) factors in personal life, (2) a life crisis, (3) pressures of time and other interests, (4) lack of friends in the church, and (5) other factors.

In implementing the caring-ministry program, Alspaugh used as his basic guide the suggestions from John Savage's Lab 1, Skills for a Calling Caring Ministry. As part of the caring-ministry program, Alspaugh emphasizes listening as the most loving thing one can do for former inactive members.

From methods and suggestions growing out of his project, Alspaugh outlined a program that could prove helpful in dealing with church dropouts. The strategies I believe would be of great help in effective assimilation of new converts are (1) developing a caring attitude in the church, (2) identifying inactive members and involving them in church activities, (3) demonstrating caring through listening, (4) visitation of inactive members, (5) support groups, and (6) having a membership reaffirmation month.

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<sup>1</sup>John C. Alspaugh, "The Caring Ministry: Concept and Methods of Ministry to Inactive Members of the Stone Tower SDA Church, Portland, Oregon" (D.Min. project, Andrews University, 1986), 38.

Marjorie Lewis Lloyd, in Why the Back Door Swings, discusses the feelings and frustrations of new converts who have to listen to twentieth-century preachers convey the gospel using nineteenth-century language and approaches. The temptation comes to all to take one's eyes off Jesus and start looking at the ministers, the leaders, and other members, all of whom are only human. This is the first step on the road of defeat; and a defeated Christian soon leaves the church.

Lloyd points to another backward step: the failure of members to live up to the expectations of the church because they failed to understand that salvation is by faith in Christ (Eph 2:8), not by man or works. Lloyd concludes that "even if they know all the doctrines, they have not allowed the Holy Spirit to transform their lives according to God's will."<sup>1</sup>

Other research information focuses its attention on the issue of apostasy.<sup>2</sup> In my mind, apostasy is symptomatic and not the real issue. Arthur J. Schoonveld<sup>3</sup> addressed the

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<sup>1</sup>Marjorie Lewis Lloyd, Why the Back Door Swings (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1972), 18.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Akowasi Addai, "The Study of the Factors Responsible for and Contributing to the Problem of Apostasy in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in South and Central Ghana Conferences" (D.Min. project report, Andrews University Theological Seminary, 1988).

<sup>3</sup>Arthur J. Schoonveld, "Can We Close the Back Door?" (D.Min. project report, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Danefield, IL, 1991), 134.

question: "Can we close the back door?" in his dissertation at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. The purpose of his study was to analyze the problem of assimilating new members in the Christian Reformed Congregation. According to Schoonveld, the problem is the gap existing between old members and new converts. The older members are set in their ways of operating the church. Somehow they try to impose their lifestyle on all who come into the fellowship of the church. He suggests five key elements that will move any congregation toward a partial solution: (1) a hospitality committee, (2) a diaconal ministry, (3) friendship evangelism, (4) celebrative worship, and (5) small-group ministry.

Brad Johnson in his dissertation concerning the Living Hope Baptist Church dealt with the issue of assimilating new adult members into the Living Hope Baptist Church. As far as Johnson is concerned, "assimilation is not a mere accident, it takes a variety of events and dynamics merging synergistically to assist the new member in the process."<sup>1</sup>

Bobby J. Scobey presents a study on a program called the "St. Andrews Community Church." The purpose of his dissertation is to state the foundational principles and to formulate strategies for retaining a higher percentage of

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<sup>1</sup>Brad S. Johnson, "Assimilating Adult New Members at the Living Hope Baptist Church" (D.Min. project report, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Bowling Green, KY, 1990), 98.

additions to the church. According to Scobey, the St. Andrews Community Church, during its eleven-year history, has dismissed two members for every one that it has retained. In view of this, Scobey argues that with respect to the church, receiving members is the foundation, assimilating them is the building itself, and retaining members is the roof.<sup>1</sup>

Win and Charles Arn investigated the cause of spiritual dropouts. In their articles on "Closing the Evangelistic Back Door," they point out two key areas that produced significant increase in lasting discipleship and growing churches. The first is process and the second, ratios.<sup>2</sup>

#### Process

The Arns argue that many current evangelistic methods are counter-productive to the goal because

1. The process is manipulative.
2. The evangelistic process sees its goal as a decision, rather than as a discipleship which tends to eliminate dropouts.
3. The evangelistic process that presents the gospel one time and asks for a response tends to create dropouts.

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<sup>1</sup>Bobby J. Scobey, "St. Andrews Community Church: Receiving, Assimilating and Retaining Members" (D.Min. project, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1983).

<sup>2</sup>Win Arn and Charles Arn, "Closing the Evangelistic Back Door," Leadership 5, Spring 1984, 10.

4. An evangelistic process that does not build relationship with the local church, its program, and its ministry tends to create dropouts.<sup>1</sup>

### The Crucial Ratios

Arn also cites six ratios that have a significant impact on closing the evangelistic back door: (1) friendship ratio, (2) role/task ratio, (3) new-group ratio, (4) committee-member ratio, (5) staff ratio, and (6) visitor's ratio (see Appendix G). The Arns believe that the relatively "high mortality rate from some present-day evangelistic methods must not come to view as normal or unavoidable. With adequate training and appropriate methods, churches can see a significantly greater harvest of souls."<sup>2</sup>

Arlon K. Stubbe, in The Phantom Church, discusses certain clues which he hopes will help leaders and congregations to become more aware of and sensitive to what he calls "the phantom church," which "postulates some pews." Rather than react to the problem of church dropouts, he assisted church leaders to develop a strategy for conserving membership before people drop out.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Arn and Arn, 26.

<sup>2</sup>Win Arn, Your Church Growth Ratio Book (Pasadena, CA: Church Growth Press, 1987), 16.

<sup>3</sup>Arlon K. Stubbe, The Phantom Church (Lima, OH: C.S.S. Publishing Co., 1986).



He suggested that phantom Christians need preventive ministry. The best time to minister to the ghost in the pews, as Stubbe contends, is "before they vanish completely from sight."<sup>1</sup> He recommends two types of ministries:

1. A broad approach that redefines a congregation's ministry to all its members, helping to develop a more proactive faith in every person, including phantom believers.
2. An immediate ministry which focuses on Christians, and especially phantom Christians, who are on the verge of dropping out of the church.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, Stubbe sees that the task of the church, its members, and its pastors is to promote and facilitate spiritual growth and maturity with each member of the congregation. To the extent that the church does this, it becomes, in truth, the body of Christ and ceases to be a phantom church.

Monte Sahlin's article, "Where Are Our Missing Members?" points out that

the ranks of inactive members in church dropouts, including both non-attending and former church members, have assumed significant proportions among Adventist congregations in North America. On most Sabbaths less than half of the membership is present.<sup>3</sup>

Sahlin says that

in his surveys and interviews with missing and former Adventists, three out of four dropouts indicate that they left for reasons having to do with relationships

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 38.

<sup>3</sup>Monte Sahlin, "Where Are Our Missing Members?" Adventist Review, May 4, 1989, 19-20.

with people groups. Fewer than one in five left because they no longer believe in the teachings of the church.<sup>1</sup>

The church-growth movement of recent years has been a major factor in helping to increase the awareness of the need for effective new-member assimilation. The writings of Peter Wagner and Lyle Schaller have been of enormous value in preparing pastors to lead churches in a program of assimilation. Church-growth experts such as Wagner and Schaller advocate the procurement of a system of caring within the church family to provide proper assimilation. Therefore, if church growth is to continue and assimilation is to be effective, an orderly and well-established system of caring and sharing must be developed.

#### Peter Wagner's View

Wagner states:

Many churches have active and productive evangelistic programs, but at the same time members are drifting away. The front door is wide open, but many who enter it soon find their way out the back door. I believe effective assimilation will close the proverbial back door.<sup>2</sup>

One method of effective assimilation emphasized by Wagner is called the homogeneous-unit principle. This concept states that people will be more prone to attend church with other people of similar backgrounds, interests,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>C. Peter Wagner, Your Church Can Grow (Ventura, CA: G/L Press, 1976), 88-89.

cultures, and socioeconomic standards.<sup>1</sup> Delos Miles concurs with Wagner's assessment. Miles writes: "People will go to church where they feel at home and where they feel they belong. The homogeneous-unit principle realistically recognizes this sociological fact of life."<sup>2</sup>

#### Lyle Schaller's View

Schaller provides church-growth students the necessary tools for developing and implementing an effective program of assimilation. He writes from a background of lifelong study, which has enabled him to evaluate a variety of assimilative techniques through the years.

Schaller contends that one of the most severely overlooked areas in church growth is new-member assimilation. He writes: "All too frequently, church leaders assume that when a new member takes the vow of membership and unites with that congregation, it is the end of the process."<sup>3</sup> In reality it is not the end but the beginning of the process. There is a significant gap between the time a new member joins the church and when that member develops a sense of belonging.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 65.

<sup>2</sup>Delos Miles, Church Growth: A Mighty River (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1981), 96.

<sup>3</sup>Lyle E. Schaller, "How Do You Invite New Members into the Tribe?" Church-Growth America, November/December 1979, 8.

Schaller also shares the conviction of others that in order for the church to effectively assimilate new members, special emphasis must be given to the small-group life of the congregation. Congregations who are serious in their desire to assimilate new members must give attention to the development and expansion of small groups, such as Bible-study groups and other common-interest groups. The larger the congregation, the more important the implementation of small groups becomes.<sup>1</sup>

#### Assimilation Through Friendship

One of the primary methods of assimilating new converts is through relationship. Relationship has both a spiritual and social dimension; consequently, the establishment of meaningful relationship which involves a friendship factor is, according to Peter Wagner, "a very high priority in church growth."<sup>2</sup> He states:

Part of being a Christian and member of the Body of Christ is to develop relationship with other Christians. Many churches do not grow, because they do not satisfy the deep need for fellowship that men and women have, and the satisfaction they hope for when they join the church.<sup>3</sup>

Many churches today are very inclusive in their outreach mission, yet at the same time they are very exclusive in

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>2</sup>Peter Wagner and Richard L. Gorsuch, "The Quality Church (Part 1)," Leadership, Winter 1983, 31.

<sup>3</sup>C. Peter Wagner, Your Church Can Be Healthy (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 109.

fellowship and relationship. People at times can be reached, baptized, and brought into membership and not be incorporated into the friendship structure of the church.

Schaller notes:

There is considerable evidence which suggests that at least one-third, and perhaps as many as one-half, of all Protestant church members do not feel a sense of belonging to the congregation of which they are members. They have been received into membership, but have never felt they have been accepted into the fellowship circle.

Evangelism and receiving new members into a congregation are two separate actions.<sup>1</sup>

Some churches are unconscious of this inner circle which only the elite can enter. This can stem from the family factor that dominates the church's life throughout its history. However, there are members in churches today who are consciously tearing down those walls of separation. An elder once said to me, "I have been leading for years; let somebody else take the leading role of the church."<sup>2</sup>

#### Two Concentric Circles

Lyle Schaller vividly illustrates the membership and the fellowship factor of the church with the principle of the two concentric circles, shown in figure 4.

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<sup>1</sup>Schaller, Assimilating New Members, 16.

<sup>2</sup>Discussion with church elder during pastoral visit at the New Jerusalem SDA Church, March 1992.

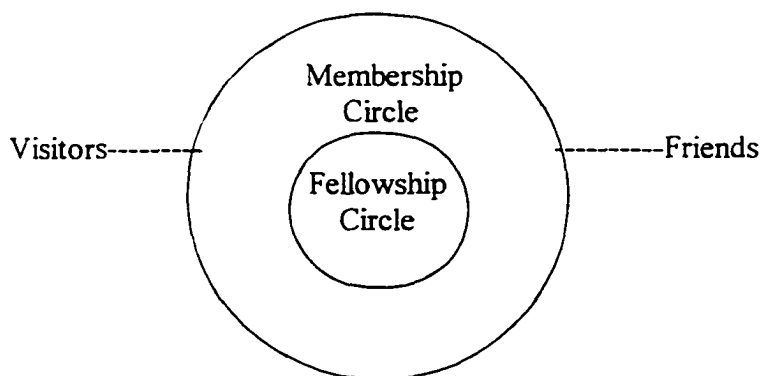


Fig. 4. Schaller's concentric circles.

Schaller writes:

The whole theory is that every congregation can be described in terms of two concentric circles. The larger outside circle is the membership circle and every member is within that outer circle. The smaller inner circle includes members who feel a sense of belonging and who feel fully accepted in the fellowship of the called-out community. One of the means of distinguishing between those within the fellowship circle and those outside the circle is by the terminology used; the former are very comfortable in using the pronouns we, us, and ours when referring to that congregation, while the latter tend to use they, them, and theirs more frequently.<sup>1</sup>

The reality of this research is that two distinct and separate levels of inclusion exist. "One," according to McIntosh and Martin, is "the superficial level to which most Christians in the church find themselves belonging."<sup>2</sup> On this level members feel comfortable in worship service, but

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<sup>1</sup>Schaller, Assimilating New Members, 16.

<sup>2</sup>Gary McIntosh and Glen Martin, Finding Them, Keeping Them (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 76.

the pastor's Bible study group and other small-group involvement are avoided because there is not a feeling of acceptance.

The second level is much more of a relational type, and the authors see this as being "very significant in the life of an assimilated member."<sup>1</sup> It is on this level where the new believer develops a sense of belonging and accountability. This is the level where involvement in various small-group ministries and active service on the part of the new convert become evident.

Many churches find it very difficult to develop the second level of friendship. One strong contributing factor to the problem is the patriarchal and matriarchal system existing in some churches. Some churches are made up of first-, second-, third-, and fourth-generation Adventists, and any attempt to infiltrate the inner circle is always conceived as a threat to authority. "Pastor," says a member of the inner circle, "we are many in this church, as you can see, and any changes to the program will be met with very strong resistance."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Statement made to me on March 4, 1997, following a pastoral visit to the home of a member of the New Jerusalem Church.

The New Jerusalem Seventh-day Adventist Church, over the years, has developed into a one-family church.<sup>1</sup> However, today a genuine openness in terms of leadership and authority exists, with at least 60 percent of the decision-making authority outside the patriarchal family. Most of the small-group ministries are coordinated by members who were once in the outer circle of the church family.

One of the goals of the New Jerusalem Church is to provide ministries for acceptance, fellowship, and involvement, which are effective tools for membership assimilation. The need for acceptance, fellowship, and involvement is a basic and universal human need. Such needs transcend all national, ethnic, language, or cultural barriers. Clive Barritt once stated:

Any church in any part of the world that will offer its new members loving acceptance, warm fellowship, a sense of belonging, and involvement will be more than rewarded. It is the kind of climate conducive to membership assimilation and Christian growth.<sup>2</sup>

#### Friendship Factor

Experts in the church-growth movement have discovered through years of research that the most frequent reason why people join the church for the first time is the influence

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<sup>1</sup>Information obtained from church secretary, Mollie Banks, indicates that the first Afro-American was baptized in 1965. Today, one family of four generations makes up 60% of the church membership (July 1997).

<sup>2</sup>Clive Barritt, "Establishing New Members," 7.



of friends or relatives.<sup>1</sup> Heck stated that "some 75-90% of people who join churches today do so primarily for this reason."<sup>2</sup> Schaller agrees with that idea for he states that "between two-thirds and nine-tenths of the members of any given congregation will indicate friendship or kinship as their primary reason for joining a particular congregation."<sup>3</sup>

Arn and Arn state:

Friendship with others in the church is one of the most important keys in binding members to each other and to the church. The stronger and more meaningful the relationships become, the more assured you can be that these people will become or continue as active Christians in the church.<sup>4</sup>

We cannot for one moment deny the power of the gospel and the working of the Holy Spirit upon the person's heart. "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes" (Rom 1:16), and the Holy Spirit "reproves or (KJV margin, convinces) the world of sin, and of righteousness and of judgment" (John 16:8). The Holy Spirit uses people and programs to deliver the gospel message, so in reality the new convert is responding to both the gospel and Christian love. Friendship, therefore, is merely a

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<sup>1</sup>Arn and Arn, The Win Arn Growth Report (Pasadena, CA: Institute of American Church Growth, n.d.), 2, 4.

<sup>2</sup>Heck, 21.

<sup>3</sup>Schaller, Assimilating New Members, 74.

<sup>4</sup>Win Arn, The Pastor's Church Growth Handbook, vol. 2 (Pasadena: Church Growth Press, 1982), 177.

recognition of this fact. Arn and Arn see friendship as "the most important element in whether a person remains active in the church or goes out through the back door."<sup>1</sup>

Friendship involves respect and trust, and new converts must arrive at that point in the assimilation process where they respect and trust their Christian friends. According to Dr. K. G. Vas, there are four levels of friendship: (1) acquaintance--involving occasional contact, (2) casual friendship--where common interests and activities are discussed, (3) close friendship--where life's goal and project involvement are shared, and (4) intimate friendship--where there is a motivation for character development and the freedom to correct each other.<sup>2</sup>

An assimilated person is one who has experienced close and intimate friendship with others in the church. There are many who become members of the church through other means than friends and relatives; therefore, the church has a moral and spiritual obligation to create ministries within which these new converts can establish lasting friendship.

Each new convert should be able to identify at least seven friends in the church within the first six months. Friendships appear to be the strongest bond cementing new converts to their congregation. Roy M. Oswald feels that

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 148.

<sup>2</sup>Kenneth G. Vaz, class discussion, West Indies College, Jamaica, July 1971.

"if new converts do not soon develop meaningful friendships in their church, they will likely return to former friendships and activities outside the church."<sup>1</sup>

Flavil Yeakley arrived at the same conclusion after viewing the results of a study on new-member assimilation within the congregation. Yeakley compared fifty new members who were active six months after joining with fifty members who were inactive after six months. The new members who remained active were incorporated into the life and ministry of the church and each had made seven or more new friends. Those who were inactive said they had made fewer than two friends in the same time frame.<sup>2</sup> One of the best ways to help new members make new friends is to involve them in friendship-building activities of the church.

Allan McGinnis, author of many books, offers five rules for lasting and genuine friendship: (1) assign top priority to your friendship, (2) cultivate transparency or openness, (3) dare to talk about feelings, i.e., your liking for the person, (4) learn the gestures of love, i.e., a weekly lunch, golf date, or an annual fishing trip, etc., and (5)

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<sup>1</sup>Roy M. Oswald and Speed B. Leas, The Inviting Church: A Study of New Member Assimilation (Washington, DC: Albany Institute, 1987), 58.

<sup>2</sup>Flavil R. Yeakley, Why Christians Grow (Colorado Springs: Christian Communicators, 1979), 54.

create space in your relationship. Do not "possess your friend; give him room for independent growth."<sup>1</sup>

### Friendship Evangelism

Dr. Martin Keuning of the Christian Reform Church once stated that the "changing times demand a change in our approach to friendship evangelism."<sup>2</sup> There was a time when what he calls "confrontational evangelism" was effective. During the late sixties and early seventies, it was possible to call on people in their homes, we could approach people on the street, or in other public places, but with the coming of the nineties, this is no longer possible. Says Keuning:

Because of high rise apartments, secure condominiums, working mothers, scared latch-key kids, the high rate of rape and loose morals, it has become almost impossible to conduct confrontational evangelism. It is as unsafe for the caller as it is for the frightened home-owner.<sup>3</sup>

Today there is a great need for the local congregation to make friends within their spheres of influence with relatives, neighbors, classmates, fellow employees, and business associates. Friendship Evangelism works two ways, according to Kaufman: "It aims at helping the more mature Christian develop meaningful contacts with new Christians,

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<sup>1</sup>Allen McGinnis, The Friendship Factor (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1979), 34.

<sup>2</sup>Martin Keuning, Seminar presentation to the staff of the Faith Reformed Church, Summer 1989, Grand Rapids, MI.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

and helping the new convert in his Christian growth and witnessing."<sup>1</sup> He states:

Many people do not find the friendship they seek and need in the church; however, the church should be one of the seedbeds for deep friendships. Our Lord expects us to become friends with those with whom we come into contact, just as He became the friend of sinners. Yet in many of our established congregations it is often extremely difficult to form any kind of friendship.<sup>2</sup>

One of the reasons for such a dilemma is the fact that we sometimes confuse friendliness with friendship. The New Jerusalem Church is a "friendly" church. First-time visitors often comment, "We enjoy the friendliness of your church, your greeters make us feel at home." The church does have intelligent and loving greeters, and very few visitors, if any, get away without being greeted by an usher or a member of the usher team. Visitors are welcomed personally to our services, and they are invited to join church members in their homes for refreshments after our services. But in some instances our friendliness does not get translated into a more lasting friendship. Why? Because of the simple fact that many times we confuse friendliness with friendship.

Jerry and Mary White warn against that dilemma when they write:

We must not confuse friendship with the simple act of being friendly. We should be friendly to everyone in

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<sup>1</sup>Roger S. Kaufman, "Hospitality Evangelism," class presentation, Grand Rapids, MI, summer 1989.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

the church, but we can be friends with only a limited number of people. Friendliness is an action. Friendship is a continuing relationship. Christian fellowship revolves not around activities, but around relationship.<sup>1</sup>

Friendships involve a one-to-one relationship. Thus, as members we must individually find a new convert and begin the process through friendship-building activities.

Strong and lasting friendships depend on mutuality. To be friends we need each other. And that explains the reason why in some of the older congregations it is so difficult for newcomers to make friendships. Those who have been around for a generation or a lifetime do not need new friends. They have their family ties, their own circle of friends and acquaintances, and, quite often, even though they are willing to include new people in their circle of friends, it often does not last because it is done as a favor to the newcomers. Friendships cannot survive on favors.

#### Pathways in Making Friends

Having said all of the above on friendship, how do we improve this ministry? How do we go about making friends? What can be done in some inactive churches? What specifically will it take for us as Christians to follow Christ's example and become friends to those both within and outside the church?

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<sup>1</sup>Jerry White and Mary White, Friends and Friendship (Colorado Springs, CO: NAV Press, 1982), 155.

1. We must make a commitment to make friends with some of the people God places on our path.

2. We must make friends with some of the people we encounter in everyday situations, such as business associates, co-workers, suitemates, teammates, neighbors, and other possible contacts.

3. We must be where it becomes possible for us to make friends with the unchurched. We should become part of a homeowner's association, a P.T.A., neighborhood get-togethers, little leagues, and boards of public institutions. We must crawl out of that cocoon and mix with people who have a different background. We do not need to turn our backs on former friends. We simply have to widen our circles as Christ demands of us.

4. We should use our homes to establish friendships. As I write this chapter, eight girls are sleeping in my basement with my two daughters. They had a social and "sleep over" last night, and this group is made up of old and new members. There are also families at the New Jerusalem Church who count it a joy to open their homes to new converts and visitors. Our homes can provide the most natural setting to form friendships with those without friends, thus aiding in the process of effective assimilation.

5. We should look for special needs to establish friendships. People who have special needs in their family

or personal lives often are ready to accept the friendship of others. Loss of loved ones always creates an emptiness which at times can be filled only by the friendship of others.

6. We must accept people as they are. One of the questions often asked by Christians who want to reach out is, "But how can we associate, much less be friends, with people whose lifestyles are so radically different from ours?" What about those people who, according to the Bible, are living in sin? And what about those irritating habits like smoking and drinking when you are convinced that you should not smoke? We must never forget from whence we came. There was a time when we were involved in sinful lifestyle, but the Lord came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10) and that includes every repentant sinner. Let us see in every individual, therefore, those qualities which when placed under the control of the Holy Spirit will make us candidates for the kingdom of Heaven.

7. We must make friends not because they are potential converts, but because they are people made in the image of God about whom God cares and about whom we care.

8. We must use our friendship with the unchurched as an opportunity to present them with the gospel. We first make friends with them and then, because we are their friends, we share with them the most important gift we know



about: the gift of salvation. Leading someone to Jesus is the ultimate act of friendship.

9. We must introduce our new friends to other members of the church to widen their circle. Only by so doing can we ever expect to incorporate newcomers into our congregations. Small groups are an excellent tool to help accomplish this.

Friendship is one of the most natural and most effective tools God has given us to strengthen our faith, to build His church, and to keep people from leaving through the back door. The local church should hold periodic seminars on friendship evangelism, conducted by people who have firsthand experience of the effectiveness of genuine friendship in attracting and assimilating newcomers and visitors.

There is a great need for a balance between friendliness and friendship in our churches. Friendship must go beyond the church services when members gather to worship and praise God. The best way to establish friendship is to be a friend to someone: "I went outside to find a friend but friends were nowhere. I went outside to be a friend and friends were almost everywhere."

#### Assimilation Through Worship

One of the functions and privileges of the Christian Church is that of providing for and maintaining the worship of God. Segler asserts that "the first order in the mission

of the church is worship. All other aspects of ministry are motivated by worship, and without worship the church will die."<sup>1</sup> The church is charged to proclaim the message of true worship. Note Rev 14:7: "Saying with a loud voice, Fear God and give glory to Him for the hour of His judgment is come; and worship Him that made heaven and earth, the sea and fountains of water."

This call for a return to the true worship of the Creator is essentially the celebration of the God in history--His creation, His providence, His covenant of redemption, His redemptive revelation through Jesus Christ in the incarnation, the cross and the resurrection, and the manifestation of His power through the coming of the Holy Spirit.

C. Raymond Holmes in describing worship as an important function of the church says:

Worship is the life blood, the heartbeat, of the last day church. It is essential for its life and mission. If this church does not worship, it will soon disappear in spite of its institutions and all its programs. The Adventist believer is obliged to worship. . . . For the believer worship is the grateful acceptance of His faithful service.<sup>2</sup>

When individuals depart from our worship services, they should feel that they were in the presence of heavenly beings and the saints of God.

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<sup>1</sup>Franklin M. Segler, Christian Worship (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1967), 1.

<sup>2</sup>C. Raymond Holmes, Sing a New Song (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1984), 48.

Worship is very crucial to the life of a new convert. This is because of the religious complexities and cultural differences associated with the act of worship. Individuals becoming members of the church today are products of either a celebrative or a reflective style of worship. Logan defines reflective worship as "remorse, self-flagellating and humdrum," while celebrative worship is nothing but "happy, happy, happy and never gives participants the opportunity to reflect upon their relationship with God or to grieve over their sins."<sup>1</sup>

The problem with many churches is that there is no balance in the worship service, thus the new converts cannot find a comfort zone in the worship setting. Many times the songs are unfamiliar, worship is closed to congregational participation, sermons are lengthy and very boring, so new converts quickly lose interest and sometimes walk away never to return. True worship is not a static activity. It is a dynamic process of receiving from God. Allen and Borrer see worship "as an active response to God whereby we declare His worth."<sup>2</sup> True worship is always in tension between celebrative and reflective worship.

The church needs to bring worship into focus and to evaluate its cultural relevance as it seeks to meet the

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<sup>1</sup>Logan, 79.

<sup>2</sup>Ronald Allen and Gordon Borrer, Worship (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1982), 16.

spiritual needs of both old and new members. Warren Wiersby sums up the cultural relevance of worship:

No two Christians have the same worship experiences, even though they participate in the identical worship service, at the same time, and in the same sanctuary. Christian worship is both congregational and personal. Led by the Spirit, we have the right, even the responsibility to express our praise to God in the manner that best reflects our individual personality and culture.<sup>1</sup>

The above statement hits home to the very core of the dilemma of many churches. Members are running from one church to another searching for the style of worship that best fits their spiritual need.

The Seventh-day Adventist church is known for its evangelistic thrust, and hundreds of converts are added annually to the church family. These individuals have come into the church from various religious backgrounds with forms of worship that are relevant to their cultural and biblical understanding. It would be an injustice for the church to polarize all these saints into one standardized form of worship, thus denying them the opportunity to enjoy their cultural heritage.

The above situation was evident at the New Jerusalem Church. Members coming on Sabbaths saw themselves as a captive audience. After discussing the matter with the elders and members of the music department, the church board organized a music committee with the task of making

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<sup>1</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, Real Worship, It Will Transform Your Life (Nashville: Olive Nelson Books, 1986), 25.

recommendations for improved music ministry and worship service.

As a result of the recommendations from the worship committee, we now have a more flexible and balanced worship service. Members are encouraged to praise God within the biblical framework that best fits their culture. There are liturgical restraints on our worship service but that does not negate the working of the Holy Spirit, which is the power that prepares hearts for the preaching of the word. The preaching of the word forms a very important aspect of the worship service. Walter L. Pearson sees "the sermon, as still the most important element of the worship service."<sup>1</sup>

It is the goal of the New Jerusalem Church to make the worship service God-centered and God-directed. The psalmist leaves no doubt in our minds that God is at the center of all acts of worship. Says David in Ps 95:1-3:

O come let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise unto the God of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

Worship, according to David, must be celebrative and filled with joy. A gloomy, sad, and dead worship service is an obstacle to effective assimilation, but when the worship service is punctuated with joy, gladness, and a spirit of

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<sup>1</sup>Walter L. Pearson, "Why I Have Hope," Adventist Review, February 1997, 8.

praise, assimilation of new members will be less challenging.

### Assimilation Through Ministries

There is a great need in our church for the total mobilization of the laity to a combined ministry with the pastors and leaders. However, this will become a reality only when the church has a clear understanding of spiritual gifts. The church is a living organism, with Christ as the head. Each part of the body must function effectively if it is to remain a healthy organism. Equally important, therefore, is the fact that when a new Christian, particularly a new convert, exercises his/her spiritual gift in some role or task within the church, there is a much greater potential for effective assimilation.

Peter Wagner provides a workable definition for spiritual gift: "A special attribute given by the Holy Spirit to every member of the body of Christ, according to God's grace for us within the context of the body."<sup>1</sup> Wagner was voicing what Paul under inspiration had penned almost nineteen hundred years ago.

Paul outlined some biblical principles for one who seeks a proper understanding of the nature and function of spiritual gifts.

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<sup>1</sup>C. Peter Wagner, Your Spiritual Gift Can Help Your Church Grow (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1979), 42.

1. Every Christian is given at least one spiritual gift (1 Cor 12:7-11; 1 Pet 4:10).
2. We do not all have the same spiritual gift (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:7-12; Eph 4:11-12).
3. The purpose of spiritual gifts is to build up the body of Christ (Eph 4:8-13). Eph 4:13 mentions the "perfecting of the saints," and that is to ensure that the purpose of the body is fulfilled and that each part functions properly. If and when that occurs, the body matures. Vs. 16 indicates that unity in the body occurs only when every part is working properly. In other words, the individual person who uses his or her gifts rightly enables the body to grow.

Win Arn has established an acceptable ratio whereby one can measure the effectiveness of assimilation by roles or tasks in the church. He defines role or task as a "specific position, function or responsibility in the church (choir, committee member, teacher or usher, etc.)."<sup>1</sup> These roles, according to Arn, are not just "busy work, but kingdom work. These are ministries that must focus on meeting needs, changing lives, and touching people with Christ's love and care."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Win Arn, The Church Ratio Book (Pasadena, CA: Church Growth Press, 1987), 10.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 58.

## Spiritual Gifts Seminar

Whenever a new member is welcomed into the New Jerusalem Church, he/she is given a new believer's package which includes a spiritual gift inventory sheet (see Appendix D). One question that is asked by the new convert is: "Pastor, what is my spiritual gift?" This tells me that members are willing to work only if they know how.

Ellen G. White, in commenting on the need to equip members, states that

many are willing to work if they were taught how to begin. They need to be instructed and encouraged. Every church should be a training school for Christian workers. Its members should be taught how to give a Bible study, how to best help the poor and to care for the sick, and how to work for the unconverted.<sup>1</sup>

Our church needs to take the biblical concept of spiritual gift very seriously, and, in response to the willingness of members wanting to be of service, it should structure ministries accordingly. Often pastors and leaders place individuals in positions without first identifying the task God has called him/her to fulfill. In many cases such an approach leads to discouragement, non-attendance, and finally back-door exit. In the process of assimilation from the standpoint of roles and tasks, we lovingly must guide new converts into ministries appropriate to their talents and abilities. Such an approach greatly will enhance the

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<sup>1</sup>Ellen G. White, Ministry of Healing (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1947), 149.



spiritual growth and maturity of the new convert: he/she will feel a sense of belonging, being loved and wanted.

### Assimilation Through Small Groups

In his book 20/20 Vision, Dale Calloway states that

no matter how good the preaching, or the teaching, or the music in any particular church, unless the members are gotten together in some kind of small fellowship groups, they will leave the local church and then move on to another place.<sup>1</sup>

The truth of the above statement became very real as I observed the few members attending prayer meeting at the New Jerusalem SDA Church. My observation revealed a definite relationship gap between members. This prompted me to conduct a relationship survey which was followed by a group survey (see Appendix F).

One of the purposes of the church is to provide ministries whereby members can experience a caring fellowship within the body. "Small group ministry is one of the chief vehicles," said Skip Bell, "to help the church to be what God intends it to be."<sup>2</sup>

Ellen White, writing of the benefits of small groups, suggests the following.

Let small companies assemble together in the evening or early morning to study the Bible for themselves. Let them have a session of prayer that they may be

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<sup>1</sup>Dale Calloway, "How to Create a Successful Church," in 20/20 Vision (Portland, OR: Scott Publishing Co., 1986), 16.

<sup>2</sup>Skip Bell, "Creating Christian Community in Small Groups," in Together in Christ (n.p., n.d.), 1.

strengthened and enlightened and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. . . . Let little companies meet together to study the scripture. You will lose nothing by this but will gain much. Angels of God will be in your gathering, and as you feed upon the Bread of Life, you will receive spiritual sinew and muscle. You will be feeding, as it were, upon the leaves of the tree of life.<sup>1</sup>

Small groups have the built-in capacity to change the climate within a given congregation, to aid in the process of changing our mind-set and our mentality, and at the same time to make newcomers feel wanted and give them a sense of belonging. Thus small groups are necessary not only for new members but also for life-long members of the church.

Lyle Schaller, in speaking of small groups, asserts that

thousands of church members have been assimilated into the life of what initially was to them a congregation of strangers through one of these face-to-face small groups.

The quality of a group life may be the most important single factor in the church's ability to assimilate new members.<sup>2</sup>

Peter Wagner expresses the same sentiment when he says, "The new believer must be assimilated into the fellowship of Christ's visible church by means of a small group or else there is a strong chance that he may slip away."<sup>3</sup>

Gary McIntosh and Glen Martin in Finding Them, Keeping Them gave five strategies for assimilating new members, and

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<sup>1</sup>Ellen G. White, This Day With God (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1979), 11.

<sup>2</sup>Schaller, Assimilating New Members, 12.

<sup>3</sup>Wagner, Leading Your Church to Growth, 12.

small-group assimilation is one of those five strategies. He felt that "small groups can contribute to overcoming the preoccupation with things and create within us a desire to build up one another."<sup>1</sup> Churches have tried other methods but with little success. However, churches with small groups in which new members develop a positive kind of respect and trust for each other will become one of the most powerful tools in the process of membership assimilation.

New members who are not involved in any kind of small-group ministries are the most vulnerable. They have special needs in their early stage of membership, and, like babes, they need special attention and care. Commenting on their needs Ellen White states:

New converts will need to be instructed by the faithful teachers of God's Word, that they may increase in a knowledge and love of the truth, and may grow to a mature believer in Christ. They must be surrounded by the influence most favorable to their spiritual growth.<sup>2</sup>

That kind of ministry is not possible in a congregation of one or two hundred members, but in a small group of twelve or fifteen where "acceptance and personal communication," says David Seemuth, "are essential elements."<sup>3</sup> The mark of a well-maintained small group is its ability to assimilate

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<sup>1</sup>McIntosh and Martin, 99.

<sup>2</sup>White, Evangelism, 337.

<sup>3</sup>David P. Seemuth, How Dynamic Is Your Small Group? (Wheaton, IL: Victory Books, 1995), 14.

new members, and new people are not easily integrated into the life of any group unless they feel wanted and accepted.

Small groups provide a sense of belonging and community. In today's impersonal society people crave a deep sense of belonging, and the interactions and personalized dimensions of small groups can help each member to realize who they really are, and also to accept each other for what they are. Richards states that "we are all persons who are the object of God's love, and we come to accept and love each other because we are loved."<sup>1</sup>

By providing a sense of community, the small group serves a dual purpose: it makes new members and visitors feel at home, while on the other hand, it makes life-time members of the church feel at home with those from different backgrounds and this is as crucial to any other dynamics in the process of assimilation. If we are to accept people from different backgrounds into our local congregations, we need to know how they see us, we need to interact with them, listen to them and understand their lifestyle. This is happening presently at the New Jerusalem Church, where Catholics, Lutherans, the unchurched, and members of our church are listening to each other and are learning from each other in a small-group setting. One of the most rewarding experiences of this program is to witness people

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<sup>1</sup>Lawrence O. Richards, Sixty-Nine Ways to Help a Study Group and Keep It Growing (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), 56.

from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds developing tremendous appreciation for the other person's heritage, beliefs, and opinions.

Before an individual becomes a member of any of our churches, he/she is a visitor. According to statistics given by Cerna, "seventy to ninety percent of all visitors attend the church because someone invited them."<sup>1</sup>

We must begin there, by training our members to bring and receive visitors. Then after their baptism, we need to hold them, through assimilation strategies. Nothing is as powerful or as simple in winning and holding new converts as the fellowship and training of small groups.<sup>2</sup>

Our church needs to catch a new vision and a new spirit of commitment as we make ourselves subject to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Kemp sees the "small group as a vital factor in church renewal and membership assimilation."<sup>3</sup> If the church is to maintain its effectiveness in winning and holding new converts, he sees the need for the formation of many small groups of committed people who are honest and true to God, and open to each other in fellowship and love characteristic of the New Testament church."<sup>4</sup>

Several different kinds of small groups can be organized in any given congregation. However, the

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<sup>1</sup>Cerna, "Winning Them and Holding Them," 24.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>3</sup>Grotten C. Kemp, Small Groups and Self-Renewal (New York: Seabury Press, 1971), 19.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

organization of such groups must be within the framework of the needs of that particular congregation. In this section we discuss some of the groups that are presently functioning at the New Jerusalem Church and serving as effective tools for assimilation.

### Pastor's Bible Class

The pastor's Bible class, as the name suggests, is a class taught every Sabbath by the pastor or his associate. Because I am a two-church pastor, I teach this class every other Sabbath. In my absence, my first elder is the teacher.

Members of this class are members baptized within the past twelve months, all visitors, and former members of the church. Church members can attend this class only if they bring a friend with them to church and that friend automatically becomes a member of this class. The purpose of the class is to acquaint visiting friends with the biblical teachings of the church and to re-emphasize the teachings to those who recently have become members.

This class serves as the teaching center of the entire church family. Every member baptized in the church should spend the first twelve months of membership in this class. During these twelve months, I endeavor to cover four biblical areas of teaching in the church: (1) doctrine, (2) Christian standards, (3) prophecy, and (4) evangelism. At the end of the twelve months, these members are transferred

to a regular Sabbath School class, or, more preferably, a new class is formed with a teacher selected from the group.

This class is pivotal to the assimilation process of the new converts. It is an interaction group rather than a reaction group. Members are free to ask questions, and genuine bonding through friendship and caring is established. Assimilation must begin before membership, and many new converts see the pastor's Bible class as an ideal environment to continue this process.

I have seen members who were vacillating relative to the Christian lifestyle and the changes that involves.

"Pastor," one member said, "you are taking away my life."

"No," was my response, "you are just exchanging that for something much better."

After an open class discussion on that certain issue with the answers coming from the Bible, the member responded, "That does it for me, Pastor, the Bible has answered my doubts."

The importance of this class cannot be overemphasized, thus I have made it a part of the covenant pledge for membership prior to baptism. Members and friends who attend these classes can develop lasting friendships which play a key role in the incorporation of new members into the life and ministry of the church.

### Home Bible Study Group

Presently, the New Jerusalem Church has five home Bible-study groups in operation. These groups meet once a week in designated homes with the owner of the home serving as host. These meetings are conducted by church members trained for the task and are held in an informal, non-threatening atmosphere.

The purpose of these groups is twofold: (1) to enable members and visitors to become involved in a regular weekly meeting, and (2) to help each one to blend into the fellowship of the church. The format for study is always flexible, freedom of expression is entertained, and love and caring are vividly demonstrated at all times. New members at times feel intimidated and fearful of giving themselves totally until there is the feeling of confidence and trust. A small group in which new members develop that kind of trust and confidence can become one of the most effective tools in membership assimilation.

### Women's Group

The women's liberation movement is emphatically championing the rights of women today, and the cry for liberation can be heard in social, political, and spiritual arenas. Churches, therefore, are establishing ministries that deal specifically with the needs of women, both in the church and the community. The Seventh-day Adventist church has caught the vision, and, from the General Conference down



to the local church, women leaders are elected who coordinate all needs and concerns of women in the church family.

In many churches, the women's ministry coordinator selects a group of dedicated women, thus a Women's Group Ministry Team is organized. The real purpose of this group is to be supportive to all women of the church in times of crisis and also to reach out to women in the community. Crises such as divorce, death in the family, loss of job, and single parenting can be very devastating. Nancy Potts sees "the grief that accompanies divorce as similar to that which accompanies death. The only difference," according to Potts, is that "in a divorce, the corpse is still walking around."<sup>1</sup>

The women's group at the New Jerusalem Church has been very active, both in the church and in the community. Visitors are now attending our church, all because of the ministry of the women's group. Members who had experienced separation through divorce and stopped attending church are now, because of this ministry, becoming very regular at Sabbath services. A visitor, after attending a women's retreat, remarked, "I enjoyed the fellowship in this church, and I will be always coming back." Her assimilation process

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<sup>1</sup>Nancy Potts, Counseling with Single Adults (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1978), 100.

has already begun, even though she has not yet become a member.

There must be diversities of groups in our churches to meet ethnic, cultural, and linguistic needs. Joel Heck once stated:

A strong small group ministry in the local church is a recognition of the diversity of the American society, a diversity that will be reflected in the membership of most churches. Such ministry will do a more effective job because of the better opportunity to know a few people better.<sup>1</sup>

Like other small groups at the New Jerusalem SDA Church, the Women's Ministry Team serves as a model for effective assimilation.

It was Logan who stated that "when you involve someone in ministries, and give him/her a sense of ownership, his heart and mind will follow."<sup>2</sup> This was the case with Debra Lee who came to the New Jerusalem Church two years ago. She expressed her desire to be involved in some type of outreach ministry. The Personal Ministry leader involved her with the Witnessing Group. Today she is a baptized member of the church, the Personal Ministry Secretary, and a member of the church board.

One of the fallacies of the Adventist church is that an individual has to become a member before he/she can hold an office or be involved in ministries. Our Lord strongly

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<sup>1</sup>Heck, 26.

<sup>2</sup>Logan, 107.

denounced such thinking among the disciples when He said, "Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against me is on our part" (Mark 9:39-40 KJV). F. D. Nichol stated that this man "was not one of the regular acknowledged disciples of Jesus. But if he was found doing the same work Jesus did, it must be that God was working with and through him."<sup>1</sup>

#### Men's Group

This group came about because of a certain awareness among the men and boys--a need for more role models for youth of the church, the need for involvement in the lives of each other, and the need for support in lifestyle changes. McIntosh and Martin agree with the concept of support in small groups when they say that "support is more than a good influence, people are drawn to the happy, useful life that is unselfish."<sup>2</sup>

One very significant area of support practiced by the New Jerusalem men's group is the area of accountability. "People need constant help," says McIntosh and Martin, "they need to know how to study the Bible, how and where to read,

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<sup>1</sup>"St. Mark," Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1980), 5:636.

<sup>2</sup>McIntosh and Martin, 99.

and how to pray."<sup>1</sup> The spiritual-friend concept has been adopted by the men's group, and each man is held accountable for the growth and development of a brother in the church. The New Jerusalem Church believes in the church-growth studies which state that "for a church to have an effective assimilation program, that church must have an average of seven small groups to every one hundred adult members."<sup>2</sup>

#### Other Groups

Four kinds of groups discussed here are being used at the New Jerusalem Church as tools for effective assimilation of new members. However, other types of small groups can be organized based on the cultural, social, economic, and spiritual needs of that particular church. Small-group ministry plays a significant role in membership assimilation, and any church might have a need for a single-parent group or a support group for lifestyle changes or other kinds of ministries. However, whatever the needs of a church are, each church should evaluate seriously its spiritual and social structure and organize small groups for the fulfillment of these needs.

#### Assimilation Model

The new paradigm for membership assimilation is a system with five levels. (See fig. 5.) Level 1 is merely

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Heck, 64.

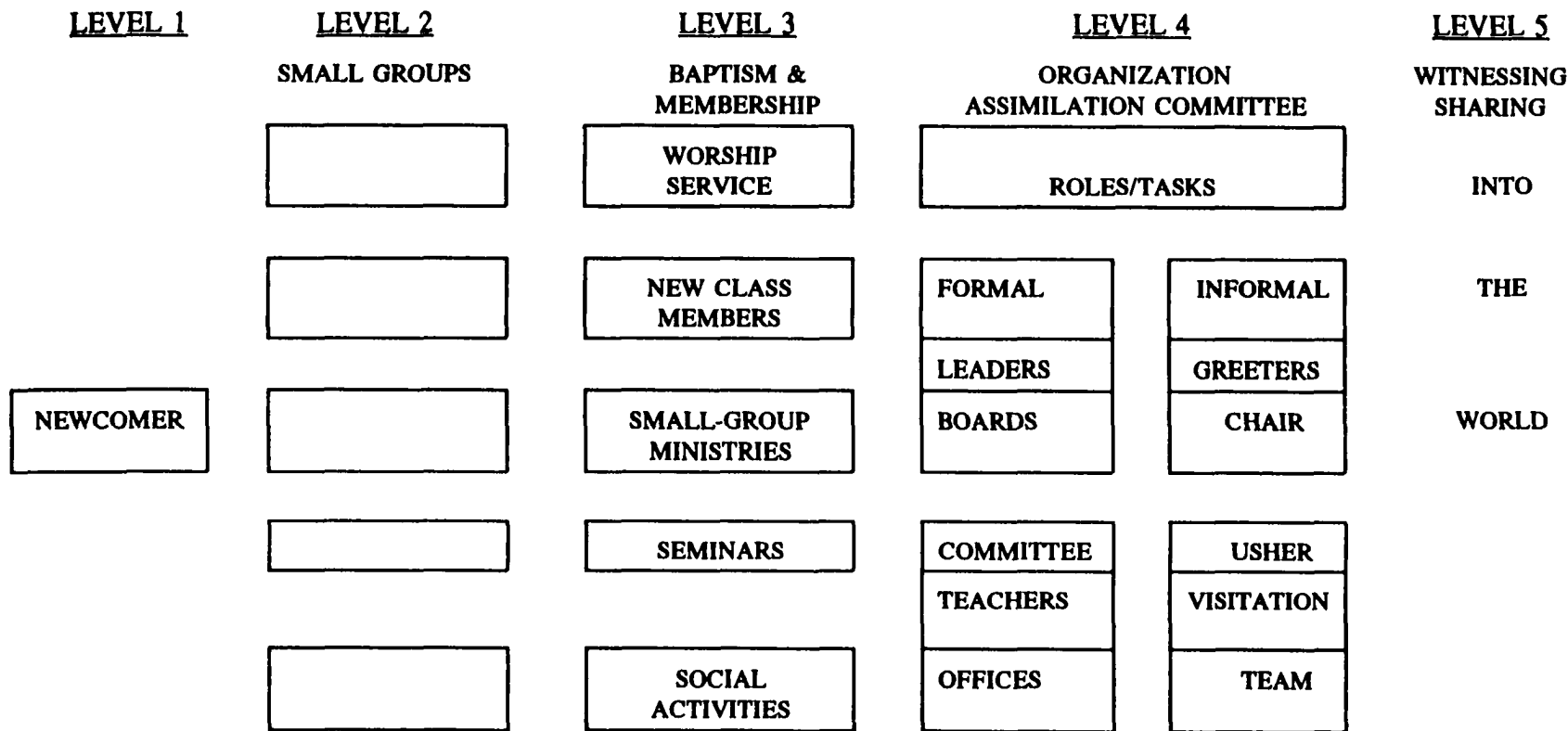


Figure 5. An Assimilation Model for New Jerusalem SDA Church, Kankakee, Illinois.

an introduction to levels 2 and 3, while level 5 can be seen as the closing phase of level 4. The real purpose of this model is to move new converts from one dimension to another in their Christian growth. The desired outcome of this model is total assimilation and reproduction, or genuine discipleship of the new converts.

Level 1 is where it all begins. Individuals are invited by church members to small-group meetings. This invitation is termed "Newcomer's Pathway."

Level 2 is the most important segment of the model, for it is on this level that personal relationship is established and needs are met. Individuals today have basic human needs and they are searching for answers to these needs. Congregations are not designed primarily for assimilation, neither can a congregation be personalized. Therefore, if individuals can be organized into small groups where their needs are met on a personal level, where they share a sense of acceptance and belonging, the likelihood is much greater that they will be assimilated into the life and ministry of a worshiping congregation.

Baptism, church membership, and other spiritual dynamics are all the components of level 3. In addition to these dynamics, the small group and relationship emphasis of level 2 becomes a continuous, vital ingredient in levels 3 and 4. Barriers must be eliminated before individuals can worship God "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24), thus it is

on this level that the new converts begin to experience the joy of worship.

Level 4 describes the preparation for service, both in the church and out in the world, and level 5 is the target, which is the world.

Christ did not send His disciples into the world until they were fully assimilated into the church and were ready to rightly represent Him. As a church, we cannot and should not be anything less in our evangelism, assimilation, and discipleship-making process. We should always be very cognizant of the fact that evangelism is an incomplete process until the evangelized becomes the evangelizer.

In summarizing this chapter, one will note that articles were written on the subject of assimilation, however, the main emphasis of the chapter is on the methods of assimilation and how they can be effectively implemented. The concept of assimilation must be an on going process starting with the very first contact with a non-Christian.

This will be the main focus of chapter 4 as we implement the assimilation model in the New Jerusalem church.

## CHAPTER 4

### IMPLEMENTING THE ASSIMILATING PROGRAM

#### Assimilation and the New Jerusalem Church

Chapter 4 is designed to explain the method and procedure in implementing the program. After the concept was approved by the conference and the local church, sermons, seminars, and discussions were used to encourage the church towards an awareness of the need for an effective assimilation plan.

The remaining portion of this chapter is designed to explain:

1. The implementing of the program in its three phases
2. Obstacles to effective assimilation
3. Church involvement
4. How to identify an assimilated member.

#### Conference Approval

To proceed with my plan, I had to obtain conference approval to use the church as a laboratory for my study. I made an appointment with B. J. Christensen, then President of the Illinois Conference, and found him favorable to my plan. He suggested some modification of my proposal and



said he saw no reason for the conference executive committee to reject my request.

Implementation of the program was delayed about six months because of a change in presidents in the conference. The new president, Elder James Brauer, had been the executive secretary of the conference when I discussed my project with B. J. Christensen. Thus he was fully aware of the communication between the former president and myself. Since the study was to be centered at the New Jerusalem church, Elder Brauer officially informed the church on October 6, 1993, of the study (see Appendix E for letters).

#### Church Board Approval

The church board met on November 12, 1993, and the letter from the conference president was read. The board voted to approve the program and selected the members for the Assimilating Committee. Members chosen for this committee were individuals who were already involved in small-group ministry, who had a passion for souls, and who were willing to commit time and effort to this discipling process.

#### Church Approval

The final stage before implementation was to secure the approval of the church family. It is an almost impossible task to obtain 100 percent support of any program of the church, but the recommendation from the church board was formally accepted, the letter from the president was read,

and the church voted approval at a church business meeting on January 15, 1994. The remaining portion of this chapter outlines in detail the three phases of the implementation of the Assimilation Program.

Three Phases of Implementing an  
Assimilating Program

In implementing the assimilating program, one of my first tasks was to create in the minds of the members of the New Jerusalem Church an "incorporation consciousness." As I evaluated the church's overall program on Sabbaths, it became obvious that the most appropriate place to begin this assimilation awareness was with the ushers or, as some churches term this group, the greeters.

The goal of the greeters is to extend a warm welcome to anyone who is attending our church, especially visitors. To assist our ushers in doing their job effectively, I conducted a training program that used the seven objectives outlined by McIntosh.<sup>1</sup>

- G - Generate a comfortable atmosphere.
- R - Respect a person's anonymity.
- E - Extend a hand of friendship.
- E - Express your genuine interest.
- T - Treat others like the Lord would.
- E - Encourage them to come back.
- R - Request to meet their needs.

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<sup>1</sup>Gary L. McIntosh, "Assimilating in Changing Times," The McIntosh Church Growth Network 8, no. 10 (1996):

Our ushers are the first ones to meet the guests coming to our services. Sometimes they are the last ones the guests are in touch with as they leave a worship service. Therefore, a receptive, warm, and friendly atmosphere of a church is an excellent way to tell our guests that we do care about them.

The ushers were told to do everything possible to make guests feel welcome and an important part of the congregation. Ushers used cards to obtain a mailing address and to solicit other needs of the guests. The cards were given to the first elder so he/she could welcome the guests publicly at the beginning of divine service. Next, the card was turned over to the interest coordinator, who mailed a letter (Appendix E) to the guests within forty-eight hours after the first visit. This letter is simply a "thank you" letter on behalf of the pastor for visiting our service. Finally, one member was assigned to personally visit the guest, take some literature (not doctrinal information), again express the pastor's appreciation of the visit, and invite the guest to worship with us again.

As the pastor, I endeavored to make regular visits<sup>1</sup> to the homes of our guests. One comment generally made by our guests is, "This is the first time a pastor ever visited me in my home." Many of our first-time guests returned a

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<sup>1</sup>Regular visits are planned (bi-weekly) visits made by the pastor to the homes of guests who have visited the church.

second and some a third time to join us in worship; some eventually became members. One very faithful member of our church once said to me, "It was because of the letter the church sent me, and the visit from Bro. Powell that I am a member of the church today."

I believe assimilation should begin with that initial contact, and that it should sow the seed of lasting friendship rather than mere friendliness.

After briefing the ushers, I turned my attention to the church family to invigorate them regarding the importance of membership assimilation. I developed and preached a three-part sermon entitled "My Brother's Keeper." These three sermons were preached over a period of six weeks (since I pastor two churches).

Soon I could see symptoms of awakening interest. One member remarked, "Pastor, I was a little skeptical about the whole idea, but I have committed myself to the success of the program." Members even started to invite their friends to Sabbath church services.

Our church board meetings, Personal Ministry Council, and Church Business Meetings were three places where we discussed very openly and lovingly our deep concern for missing members. My main concern was not how to get them back to church but how to prevent them from leaving the church in the first place. That concern opened the door for more discussion on assimilation.

It was evident to me that the church was becoming a fruitful field for the implementation of a membership-assimilation program.

In chapter 3 I mentioned that a relationship survey was conducted in the church. Twenty-five members indicated their willingness to be involved in some form of small-group ministry. Consequently, four small groups were organized. These groups were supplied with a detailed outline of the function and the purpose of small-group ministry (see Appendix F for small-group format). The officers of these groups were chosen on a volunteer basis and a three-week training session was scheduled, which would help each officer to be fully aware of his/her obligations. At the end of the training session, each officer and member was given the opportunity to sign a covenant pledge (see Appendix F for covenant cards). The signing of the covenant card was by free-will. The encouraging part of the process was that all members who indicated their desire to be in small-group ministry along with those who already were in the program gladly signed the covenant card.

#### Phase 1: Pre-Assimilation

Phase 1 of the program involved the members of the church who were actively participating in small-group ministry. They were encouraged to invite friends and families to be part of their small groups. I was not an official member of any group, but attended meetings on a

regular basis. However, I did become the leader of one group--the group comprised of the leaders of all existing small groups.

The real purpose of the small groups was to provide avenues for friendship-building and to build relationships prior to church membership. It was emphasized strongly that before a person was baptized and received into church fellowship, he or she should be encouraged to join one of the small groups. However, these visiting friends were not arbitrarily made active members of a group. The opportunity for involvement was extended to them, and those who responded were given secondary assignments such as assistant hostess, assistant secretary, and telephone coordinators.

The weekly activities of the small groups included: Bible study in an inductive setting with a high level of affirmation from leaders to each group member, friendship-building opportunities, weekly fellowship time with refreshments, birthday recognition for members, anniversary and other memorable events of group members. Condolence cards signed by all members of the group were given to group members who lost loved ones. At times the meetings were transferred temporarily to another member's home for the celebration of a "house dedicating party." The concept behind all these activities was to establish genuine friendship prior to church membership, and small-group

activities is a key ingredient in the assimilation of new members.

The pastor's small group also met once every week. I conducted this meeting twice each month and an elder took over the other two weeks. The objectives of this group were different from those of the other groups. The real purpose was to teach leaders how to teach their group members. Human personality traits were discussed in this group as well as how to identify those traits and how to deal with them. Here it was also necessary to identify positive and negative leadership traits.

For one to lead, one must develop the vision, the quality, the effectiveness, and the faith to lead. Engstrom once stated, "When God creates a leader, he gives him the capacity to lead."<sup>1</sup> Consequently, in the first phase of the assimilation program, each small group becomes a little congregation, with the group leader as the "pastor." The "Jethro concept" of leadership was strongly emphasized (Exod 18:13-27). As a result of the training sessions for the group leaders, one leader is presently the Personal Ministries leader of the New Jerusalem SDA Church.

Another objective of the pastor's small group was the responsibility to evaluate group performance. To be objectively effective, each group leader was given a

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<sup>1</sup>Ted W. Engstrom, The Making of a Christian Leader (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 19.

standardized group-evaluation form (see Appendix F). The leaders were also given opportunity to report on progress and the needs of the groups. This was also the time when we filtered group information, so each leader was able to keep his/her group informed on all relevant events.

These small groups also were used effectively as a bridge between the church and its programs. Guests attending these group meetings were always invited by their friends to attend special church events. In addition to the regular and our "high visibility"<sup>1</sup> events, we generally had a small-group event once each quarter. This special event was the climax of our series of studies which generally ran for twelve or thirteen weeks.

Involvement in this day's events was very significant to all members of the small groups. The regular members of the church would be less visible, thus making room for the members of the small groups to be the participants. Even the fellowship dinner and the afternoon events were planned by the members of the small groups. Our objective was to have these guests involved in religious activities in a church setting, thus giving them a sense of assurance and identity.

We avoided discussion on doctrinal issues at these group meetings. However, the Seventh-day Adventist

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<sup>1</sup>"High Visibility Programs," programs planned by the church with high community publicity. Civic and political leaders are personally invited.



doctrines must be presented and clear biblical understanding must be evident before baptism and church membership takes place. Whenever doctrinal questions were asked (and they usually were), we set a time outside the group's meeting schedule and appointed the friend of the one asking the question to give the answers through a series of Bible studies. Friendship had already been built in these group meetings, and we wanted to use all the dynamics to strengthen these friendship bonds. Decisions for baptism are much easier and less threatening in these friendly settings than in an atmosphere where all are strangers.

#### Phase 2: Membership

Bible studies generated during phase 1 of the program culminated in baptisms and membership in the church. These baptisms created the opportunity for the membership phase of the assimilation program.

During the pre-assimilation phase, church members served as a bridge to build friendships and relationships with the visitors. In this phase, their role is somewhat changed; they now assist the newly baptized in their spiritual growth and maturity. This friendship and bonding continues at this level for one year or until another friend is added to the two through baptism and membership.

The reception of the newly baptized into church membership is a high point in the membership phase. Immediately after baptism, a pastoral letter is sent to the

newly baptized members (see Appendix E) congratulating them on their decision to follow their Saviour. The letter also instructed them on possible adjustment challenges they might meet, but also assures them of victory through God's word. A special invitation to an official reception was included and all newly baptized members are invited to bring family and friends. The reception ceremony was carefully planned. In this case, it was planned by Thelma McNeal, the Personal Ministry leader, Alma Vaught, the Bible worker, and myself. We organized a "New Believers" packet for each new member. The packet contained information on the New Jerusalem Church, the community, and the SDA church worldwide. It also contained a certificate of baptism and a copy of Twenty-Seven Fundamental Beliefs of the SDA Church.

At the reception ceremony each newly baptized member is given a spiritual friend. This is the same church member who invited him/her to the small-group meeting and has been with this person throughout the pre-assimilating phase of the program. At the baptism this is the friend who walks with the newly baptized person to the baptistery and walks with him/her from the baptistery to the dressing room and back to the church service. The spiritual friend is then introduced to the church as the one who has committed time and effort to make him/herself available to this member.

In some cases, spiritual friends are members of the Assimilating Committee, to be discussed later. However,

because the work of the spiritual friend differs from that of the members of the Assimilating Committee, I met separately with them to discuss their responsibilities (see Appendix A). This meeting of the spiritual friend group is not a regularly scheduled meeting. It convenes only when new members are added to the church. Actually, most members of the spiritual friend group are also members of the Assimilating Committee, and each member is given a list of all newly baptized members.

The work of the spiritual friend is very important to the growth of the newly baptized member. As the pastor, I have to instill in the minds of those chosen for this task the importance of their responsibility. At the same time a letter is sent to the newly baptized person welcoming him/her into the church, a letter is sent to each spiritual friend congratulating him/her that the church has chosen him/her to be the spiritual friend of a specific, newly baptized person. They are reminded also of the significance of the work they have been chosen to accomplish (see Appendix E). On the date of implementation, a charge is given to both the newly baptized member and the spiritual friend.

### Phase 3: Post-Assimilation

The third phase of the assimilating program was the post-assimilating phase. What happens after baptism is very important, thus this phase deals specifically with the new

convert's life and spiritual growth and church involvement after baptism. The Assimilating Committee selected earlier in the program becomes a key factor in the success of this post phase. The members of this committee are composed primarily of those who have gone through phases 1 and 2. They are already involved in small-group ministry and some have become spiritual friends of newly baptized members in phase 2. Obviously, these committee members already have established a friendship, a bonding, that is needed to assist the new convert in his/her spiritual journey.

Because of the importance of the Assimilating Committee's work, a training seminar was organized in which members were given insight in dealing with human personalities. A person's mental and spiritual picture of him/herself is the key to personality development. Even Engstrom sees "personality traits as the primary qualification for successful leadership."<sup>1</sup> Assimilating Committee members were taught how to recognize these qualities in new believers and lovingly to assist them in the development of these qualities.

A chairperson, elected for the committee, met with the group once every week to evaluate the growth progress and watch for danger signals of all the newly baptized. Each committee member was given Tools for Measuring Effective Assimilation (see Appendix A).

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<sup>1</sup>Engstrom, 93.

The committee members were taught the symptoms of apparent backsliding such as: those who are always late for church services, those who begin to question the teachings of the church and find fault with the established principles, those who sit alone in service and are always quick to leave at the end of any given service, and those who are non-involved, friendless, and who seldom refer to the church as "our" or "my" church, but "their" church. These people need special attention.

This Assimilating Committee was not left to operate on its own, it was accountable to the board of elders, and the first elder was answerable to the church board. Thus once every month the board would be informed of the spiritual progress of all newly baptized members. If there are problems in social and spiritual matters, the spiritual friend is encouraged to make an initial visit taking with him/her a friend of the church family.

The reason for the inclusion of the church member is to widen the base of ministry and foster more involvement from the church family. If that approach does not produce a positive result, the pastor or the first elder with the spiritual friend visits the home.

This has always been a very sensitive area of our assimilation program. Extra caution must be taken when dealing with weak and erring members. The biblical guidelines of Matt 18:15-17 have always been the norm in

dealing with those in need. At times when the committee felt the need of praying for particular needs, they spent hours in prayer interceding for wisdom and understanding to deal with their fellow saints.

As pastor, I was an ex-officio member of the Assimilating Committee, and I met with them on a regular basis. I deliberately removed myself from official membership status so members assume more of a leadership role in the church. It is one thing to win souls, but quite another to keep them in the church. Only the combined effort of the pastor and the members can make it possible. Ellen White sees this combined effort of ministers and laity as the only solution in reaching the world for God.<sup>1</sup>

Another reason for removing myself from official membership is the fact that programs and members stay in a church; the pastors go. Pastors have to accept the fact that they are pilgrims, that they have to move on to some other shores. Pastors can take the concept or principle of any program with them as they move on, but the actual program remains with the church. Thus, in the implementing of any program, pastors must be careful to involve members of the church so that when the time comes for a pastor to leave, the program will have the leadership and potential for its continued success. The success of any good leader is the ability to make leaders while leading.

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<sup>1</sup>White, Christian Service, 68.

Church Involvement

One of the most challenging areas of ministry is to have a high percentage of membership involvement in church activities, be it outreach ministry or departmental activities. One rule of thumb by which we can evaluate the health of any church is by the percentage of members involved in the ministry of the church. "Many growing churches," according to Martin and McIntosh, "will have at least 60% involvement in specific ministries." Smaller churches, they feel, "may have larger than a 60/40 ratio involvement."<sup>1</sup> As a minister, I have strong doubts about those figures. However, I am in agreement with both men when they state that "many churches today fit into the typical pattern of involvement in task or roles. There is a 80/20 rule--20 percent doing the work for the 80 percent of the church members."<sup>2</sup>

This typical environment was at the New Jerusalem Church when we first discussed the concept of assimilation and small-group and outreach ministry. Members who had been in the church for many years thought they had seen everything tried and failed; this was just another of those failing programs.

One member boldly confronted me with these words:  
"Pastor, I don't know what you are trying to do, but I have

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<sup>1</sup>McIntosh and Martin, 91.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

seen it all, it has never worked before, and I have my doubts whether it will work now." I commended the member for her openness, but assured her that "God did not ask us to be successful, He just asks us to be faithful." Success in God's sight does not always translate into quantity or numbers, but in quality.<sup>1</sup>

Interestingly enough, those who responded to the survey indicating their willingness to be involved in small-group ministry was about 20 percent.<sup>2</sup> This group formed the nucleus of the ministry in the church. We were determined to involve as many members as possible. Thus, each Sabbath, during Personal Ministry time and the divine service hour, we promoted the program and invited the non-participating members to get involved. The working group made personal visits and contacts with members, encouraging them to become part of this ministry of the church.

Somehow, it was clear that we were not going to have the 60 percent involvement as noted in some of the growing churches. Thus, in working with this group, the truth of the following quotation became very evident.

Church Growth specialists say that 10% of the church should be involved in direct evangelism. This is a worthy objective, but it will take great persuasiveness to achieve that goal. It does no good to complain

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<sup>1</sup>Gideon and the 300 men (Judg 6:1-22) is a fitting example of God's power to triumph with quality.

<sup>2</sup>Survey taken at the New Jerusalem SDA Church for small-group involvement, August 16, 1997.



about those who do not cooperate. Work with the willing ones, and the number will grow.<sup>1</sup>

Members who were very skeptical about the program initially are now actively involved, giving Bible studies, leading out in small-group ministry, visiting with the nursing home team, and inviting friends to church on Sabbath.

### Defining an Assimilated Member

Every church has a desire to see members added to its congregation, becoming involved in different ministries, and, above all, being assimilated into its fellowship. But what is an "assimilated member"? What are some characteristics that identify an assimilated member? What can the church do to assure that the new members become assimilated members?

In order for the church to define the term as it relates to new members, it must define the term as it relates to itself. The first question then must be, "Does the church have an assimilating problem?" Arn and Arn gave a list of questions that every church must honestly answer, and if the answer to most of the questions is "yes," that church does have an assimilating problem and should consider

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<sup>1</sup>North American Division Church Ministries, Duties of the Personal Ministries Leaders (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1988), n.p.

ways to resolve it.<sup>1</sup> The questions, according to the authors, are:

1. Are there large numbers of "transfers out" who keep the same residency?
2. Are there more than 50 percent of the people in your church with no specific role, task, or small group identification?
3. Is there a large gap between church membership and average worship attendance?
4. Is there a large gap between Sunday School enrollment and Sunday School attendance?
5. Is there a high percentage of the members whose worship attendance is one Sunday per month or less?
6. If you were to ask them, would many of the members feel "left out?"
7. Are there large numbers of visitors who do not come back?
8. Is there a high percentage of new members who have not been exposed to the ministries and people of your church prior to their joining?
9. Are there large numbers of new members who do not have a friend or relative in the church already?
10. Are there members whose level of involvement suddenly declines?

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<sup>1</sup>Arn and Arn, The Master Plan, 147.

11. Are there needs among your members which are appropriate for the church to meet, which are not being met?<sup>1</sup>

Many churches undoubtedly will answer "yes" to most of the above questions, therefore Arn and Arn's seven-point strategy for an effective assimilating program is highly recommended:

1. Develop an "Incorporation Consciousness."
2. Build an Incorporation Structure.
3. Provide friendship-building activities.
4. Provide a special class for new converts.
5. Structure need-meeting ministries.
6. Create new roles and tasks.
7. Monitor assimilating results.<sup>2</sup>

The church that assesses its effectiveness in terms of the assimilating strategies and questions above will be better able to identify and define an assimilated member.

Assimilating new members into the body of Christ can be one of the most challenging aspects of the evangelism process. At the New Jerusalem Church, the Assimilating Committee is selected to coordinate this challenging task. Many church-growth specialists feel that this group is essential to the success of an assimilating program even

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 146-151.

though they may use a different term to describe the group.<sup>1</sup> One thing that is common about this committee's work is that its main focus is to monitor the assimilating process of new converts.

The work of the Assimilating Committee and the tools for accomplishing its task are outlined in the appendix. However, I am concerned with the characteristics of an assimilated member. These qualities, as outlined by Robert Logan<sup>2</sup> (see fig. 3), and their progress or danger-symptom scores should be observable in the new converts during the first year of church membership.

An example of an assimilated member is described by Logan:

For example: Newcomer Harry is not yet a member, but does attend worship regularly. He has made five new friends, is aware of his spiritual gifts, but is not using them in ministry. He is in a cell group, but has no identifiable role or task in the church. He gives regularly, and in conversation with the pastor refers to the church as "your church." His total score on this assimilation continuum is forty--partly assimilated, but teetering on the edge of the danger zone. Get Harry in a membership class and involved in a ministry position using his spiritual gift, and he'll probably begin referring to "my church" or "our church." You'll have moved him a long way toward healthy assimilation. Convince him to be a tither, on top of that, and you'll have it all sewed up.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid. Win and Charles Arn identify this group as a "New Member Tracking Committee,"--a group of laypersons with the exclusive concern of overseeing the first nine to twelve months of the new convert's life in the church.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Logan identifies this group as an "Assimilation Tracking System" that monitors the worship attendance and follows up new members to help incorporate them into the church (116).

ASSIMILATING CONTINUUM

Member?	SCORE
Yes = +10, No = -10)	_____
Worship service attendance? (Regular = +10, Irregular = -10)	_____
How many new friends? (0 = -10 +5 points for each maximum 50 points)	_____
Aware of spiritual gifts? (Yes = +5, No = -5)	_____
Using gift in ministry? (Yes = +10, No = -10)	_____
Member of cell group or support ministry? (Yes = +20, No = -5)	_____
Identifiable role or task in the church (Yes = +10, No = -5)	_____
Financial giving (No = -5, sporadically = 0, regularly = +5, generously = +10)	_____
Refers to the church as "my" church (Yes = +10, No = -5)	_____
Total Score	_____

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0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
or less									or more	

KEY:  
 0 - 30 = DANGEROUS ZONE  
 30 - 70 = NEEDS MORE WORK  
 70 - 100 = NO PROBLEM

Figure 3. Robert Logan's assimilation tracking system. Robert Logan, Beyond Church Growth (Tarrytown, NY: Fleming H. Revell & Co., 1989), 109-110.

Just as the new member must possess qualities of an assimilated individual, the church itself must possess some qualities of synergistic relationship with those of the new believers. The church, therefore, must possess several qualities. Consider these:

Love. Christ said to the disciples, "By this shall men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). The church members must have the spirit of loving submission, rather than members criticizing one another, backbiting, complaining, and murmuring.

Vision and Faith. The church must have specific direction and attainable goals that are very exciting to both old and new members. It should celebrate landmark events with "High Visibility" programs filled with expressions of praise and thanksgiving to God.

Friendliness. The quality of friendliness should be translated quickly into friendship with the new members. Logan feels strongly that a church with all these, other positive communication skills, and a momentum for growth will exhibit all the components of a healthy church.

#### Obstacles to Effective Assimilation

Every congregation, consciously or unconsciously, has certain barriers around it which inhibits assimilation. One is intentional, the other unintentional. Not only do the barriers become evident on the part of the congregation, but they are evident also on the part of the new converts.

## Old Members' Attitude

Many Christians feel that the problem of assimilating new members is one that belongs to the new members. They feel it is the responsibility of the new members to become involved in the life and ministry of the church. This attitude is one of the main contributing factors to the problem of assimilation facing the church. George E. Sweazey once stated:

On that melancholy evening when the church officers meet to purge the roll (and what a dreadful expression that is!) they are likely to be in a critical mood-- "These people never kept their vows; they were unfaithful." *In all honesty it is more likely to be the church which broke its vows and was unfaithful.* If we treated newborn babies as carelessly as we treat newborn Christians, the infant mortality rates would equal the appalling mortality of Church members. The obstetrician must be followed by the pediatrician (emphasis added).<sup>1</sup>

Sad to say, this self-centered attitude is common of many of our churches today.

Members in our churches must never forget from whence they came. There was a time in their Christian experience when they needed the understanding, sympathy, love, and care that these new converts now need, and they must now do unto others as others had done unto them. I am in total agreement with Heck who states that the "attitude of older church members that assimilation is the responsibility of

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<sup>1</sup>George E. Sweazey, quoted in Heck, 13-14.

the new converts is one of the key obstacles that churches have inadvertently erected to effective assimilation."<sup>1</sup>

Churches where evangelism is done by the congregation rather than by the pastor find assimilation an enjoyable ministry. Some churches where members have a passion for lost souls and have rescued one such soul from the fire will do all that it takes to protect that member. Members of our churches can understand the worth of a soul only as they actively are involved in the process that brings that soul into church membership.

H. A. Vandeman argues that some souls begin to backslide shortly after they are baptized because the church fails to see its responsibility in helping to establish the new believer.<sup>2</sup>

An examination of Matt 18:10-14 shows Jesus' deep concern for the lost in His appeal to His church to maintain and retain the little ones in the church.

Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones, for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my father which is in heaven. For the son of man is come to save that which was lost.

How think ye? If a man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray.

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<sup>1</sup>Heck, 14.

<sup>2</sup>George Vandeman, "Let's Stop Those Leaks," Ministry, September 1941, 39.



And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.

Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.  
(Matt 18:10-14)

For Matthew, Jesus seems to be addressing all His disciples, the officially appointed twelve as well as anyone who has responded to His kingdom demand. He appeals to all to demonstrate the effect of the Kingdom on these lives by the way they relate to one another. The little ones, therefore, should be treated as full members with equal dignity.

#### New Members' Attitude

Before the assimilation process can be clearly developed, church membership must be understood from the new convert's perspective. New members always come to the church with high expectations and apprehensions. If these are not dealt with in a loving and Christ-like manner, the assimilation process will be hindered.

One great obstacle new members face in being assimilated in the church is fear--fear of making mistakes, fear of not being able to live up to the standard ethics, and fear of the old members' assessment of them. Hemphill and Jones state:

There is an unwritten code of conduct for the new Christian which basically states that the person is a new person and no longer excused for sinful acts. The attitude of many Christians toward new Christians seems to be a "let's wait-and-see attitude." This attitude

is sometimes very judgmental, and the criteria for living up to the attitude is based on a churchly culture, not biblical teachings. The new Christians have great pressure to conduct themselves in such a way that they are seen as different than they were before their conversion experiences. To be sure, there will be changes in the life and life-style of the new Christian but to expect that the new Christian will not slip up, make mistakes, and sin is to consider the new Christian to be something other than human.<sup>1</sup>

This kind of fear is very detrimental to the spiritual growth and assimilation of new converts, because it places undue pressure on the person not to make mistakes. When one becomes fearful of not making mistakes, he/she totally is immobilized and unable to move forward.

Another great fear the new converts encounter is the fear of being rejected. There is a big difference in being accepted and feeling accepted. Older church members sometimes ask, "Why are these new members not assimilated in the church? They were given love and acceptance." "A person can be accepted by a group," says Hemphill and Jones, "but unless the person feels accepted, senses the acceptance spirit, the reality is rather insignificant."<sup>2</sup> This kind of fear can only be overcome by genuine love. The apostle John said, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love casts out all fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love" (1 John 4:18, KJV).

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<sup>1</sup>Ken Hemphill and R. Wayne Jones, Growing an Evangelistic Sunday School (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1989), 159.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 161.

Another obstacle to effective assimilation for the new converts is the lack of concern on the part of the church relative to assimilation ministry. Sometimes we expect new converts to find a place in the church on their own initiative. One older member once remarked, "Pastor, don't you think we are not giving the new converts the chance to help themselves in the church?" If the church fails to help the new converts, we are saying, "You are no longer a babe, you are an adult." That is the opposite of biblical teaching (1 Pet 2:2).

Hemphill and Jones tabulated four "musts" that are imperative for the church in order for new converts to be fully established in the church family:

1. The church must understand the urgency of making the new members feel welcome and do everything possible to make it occur.
2. One-on-one relationships and small-group relationships must be fostered by the church.
3. Friendship must be established very quickly.
4. Informal fellowship activities must be scheduled regularly for both old and new to get acquainted.<sup>1</sup>

Our program for assimilating new members and for conserving evangelism must be consistent and effective. We cannot say we truly have evangelized until we truly have assimilated those we have evangelized. Conserving and

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

assimilating the results of evangelism form the backbone and foundation of the entire process. It is the key not only to effective church growth, but of continued spiritual growth in the life of every individual evangelized.

Chapter 4 gives a very practical insight in the assimilation program as implemented in the New Jerusalem church. Opportunities for involvement through various ministries were evident. Many members utilized the opportunity to get involved with their non-Christian friends.

This program has been in operation for at least one year. Chapter 5 focuses on the result of the activities, and how it impacts the church both locally and internationally.

## CHAPTER 5

### PROJECT EVALUATION

#### The Project Goals

The purpose of this project was to develop a program for the retention of new members in the New Jerusalem Seventh-day Adventist Church. This would be based largely on: (1) a historical study of the church over a stated period--1986-1995, (2) surveys of attending and non-attending members, and (3) a pattern of assimilation used in the church during the period being studied.

In order to accomplish these objectives, five goals related to the project were established.

1. A new paradigm for assimilating new members would be implemented.

2. There would be greater laity involvement in ministries of the local church.

3. More people would be ministered to as a result of this project.

4. The project would be practical, meaningful, and relevant to the New Jerusalem Church.

5. The project would have a positive impact on evangelism and assimilation ministry of the New Jerusalem Church.

In order to evaluate the project objectively, two sets of questionnaires were randomly given to members of the church. One set for evaluation purposes was given leaders of the church and members who were involved in the project (see Appendix G). The other set was given to individuals who became members of the church as a result of the project (see Appendix H).

The evaluation questionnaires were rated on a scale of 1, low, to 5, high. Below is the result of the survey as related to the five goals.

Relative to goal 1, ten of the fifteen randomly selected respondents gave a rating of 5. This is a positive indication that the new paradigm for membership assimilation was adequately explained and implemented.

Concerning goal 2, six of the fifteen respondents gave a rating of 5. They felt that opportunities for involvement were evident, thus to them it was a good ministry. However, seven of the fifteen respondents gave the project a rating of 4. They felt that opportunities for involvement were somewhat limited.

In rating goal 3, eight of the fifteen respondents gave the highest rating, 5. This is an indication that individuals in the church (old members as well as new

members) were ministered to as a result of this project. This new dimension of ministry was evident in many ways. First, new groups were created, which greatly increased the number of people participating, and second, there was mutual sharing, love, and fellowship on a one-to-one basis in these groups. Prior to this project, there was basically one type of class, a Sabbath School class, and the ministering was done by one individual--the teacher.

Goal 4 deals with the relevance of the project to the church family. Eight of the fifteen respondents gave the project the highest rating, 5. This is an indication that the project was very relevant to the life and ministry of the New Jerusalem church. This conclusion is strongly supported by the pattern of growth, the apostasy rate, and the method of assimilation that was carefully evaluated in the early stage of this project (see pp. 19-22).

Relative to goal 5, seven of the fifteen respondents indicated that the project was very beneficial to the church. The church (as is noted in detail in the conclusion) has seen spiritual, economic, and social benefits as a result of this project.

The responses concerning the goals and other questions on the project seem very reasonable. They indicate that members of the church developed a willingness to be involved. I am convinced that many members in our churches are willing to utilize their talents and abilities if they

only know what to do. In the New Jerusalem Church even the patriarchs and matriarchs put aside their own agenda and united their efforts with others for the saving of souls for the kingdom of heaven.

The second set of questionnaires were randomly given to ten individuals who became members of the church as a direct result of the project and others who have joined the church within the past two years. This questionnaire was divided into five categories: (1) gender and marital status, (2) relationship with the church before and after baptism, (3) involvement in the church, (4) spiritual growth, and (5) personal opinion.

As far as gender and marital status are concerned, six were female and four were male, six were married and four were single.

In terms of relationship, six had no friends in the church when they first attended, while four just had casual friends. All the respondents attended the church for at least one to two years and eight of the respondents were able to identify six or more friends within the first six months of church membership.

Concerning their spiritual growth, five of the ten respondents gave the church the highest rating of 5 in helping them to better understand the Bible and also the biblical teachings of the church. They saw themselves as growing in their spiritual life and development, and also



involvement in the church. Four of the respondents felt that the church could do less preaching and more teaching. However, they still saw themselves as growing in their understanding of the Bible and the biblical teachings of the church.

Relative to church involvement:

1. All ten, or 100 percent, belong to some relationship group in the church.
2. Nine, or 90 percent, have some role or task in the church.
3. Seven, or 70 percent, feel very much a part of the church.
4. Eight, or 80 percent, cited some specific events or interaction with a member that caused them to feel accepted.

The top three suggestions respondents gave for improving the New Jerusalem Church were:

1. Make sure all visitors are recognized personally.
2. See that all new members are given some support system and some ministry in the church.
3. Make sure that the ushers are well trained and the greeters develop a loving concern so that visitors and new members feel at home when they attend church.

Other comments mentioned on the survey were mainly concerning two areas: Some felt that there are cliques in the church, lots of small "exclusive" groups, which tend to exclude others, thus making the job of assimilation more

difficult. Others felt that if you are not aggressive and outgoing, you will always be in the outer circle.

### Impact on the New Jerusalem Church

#### Strengths or Positive Impact

This project has been an overwhelming revelation to the New Jerusalem Church. Members who were very skeptical about the consistent back-door loss have come to believe that an effective assimilation program can conserve membership in the church. However, a proper evaluation of the project should consider some specific areas of positive impact on the church.

First was the impact on Sabbath School attendance and involvement. Many baby boomers are now occupying leading roles in the Sabbath School Department such as superintendent, adult class teacher, and division leader. Each leader has an urgency to be on time for his/her responsibility, thus the attendance at Sabbath School has greatly improved.

One very strong contributing factor to the improved attendance is the early morning, small-group prayer meeting which meets each Sabbath at 8:30 a.m. Members view this ministry as an important way to begin the Sabbath morning worship. Many who have always viewed Sabbath School as boring and lifeless now are attending on a regular basis.

Second is the surge of enthusiasm in small-group ministries and other outreach programs. Presently, there

are at least fifteen small groups functioning in the church fulfilling both spiritual and social needs. Individuals leading out in these groups have become members of the church within the last twelve months. While writing this section (November 1997), I was interrupted twice as two members leading out in small groups telephoned to share their excitement of plans for their groups.

Relative to our outreach ministry, our Personal Ministry leader, who was once a group leader, is organizing a "Beehive" multi-faceted program for community outreach. This program will climax in an evangelistic meeting in May and June 1998.<sup>1</sup> The principles implemented in this program are those applied throughout the assimilation project-- small-group ministries and friendship evangelism. It is the deep conviction of the leaders that "if each one wins one" we will double the church membership during 1998.

Third is the financial impact, both in the local expense of the church and faithfulness in tithing. Comparative figures for 1995 and 1996 showed an increase in tithes of \$6,500 or 7.5 percent, and an increase of \$7,300 or 6.25 percent in local church expense. Even unfaithful members have felt the spiritual conviction of settling the old accounts with the Lord.

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<sup>1</sup>Statistics received from Mollie Banks, church secretary, August 3, 1998. She indicated that the crusade was conducted by Pastor Gordon Jones as was planned (June-July 1998), and 42 individuals were baptized.

Evangelism in the church now is very cost-efficient, based on more laity involvement in outreach ministries. Members have been impressed to give more for evangelism because they are convinced that it will take the combined effort of laity and pastor to accomplish the task of soul-winning and soul-holding. The evangelistic theme chosen for 1997 and 1998 is "Each One Reach One" and the focus is on friendship-building strategies.

The fourth area of improvement is the sense of pride members have now taken in their church. A comprehensive remodeling program is in progress at the estimated cost of \$35,000. The church was listed for sale, but at the last board meeting it was voted to cancel the "For Sale" agreement, and members are now saying, "This is our church, we want it to be the best church, both physically and spiritually, in the community."

The fifth area of positive impact was leadership awareness. Church elders and other leaders are thinking much more in terms of assimilating new members. They are thinking in terms of why assimilate (theologically), as well as how to assimilate (methodology). Leaders are much more concerned about missing members, particularly new members, and as soon as one is missing, plans are formulated to contact such a one either through a phone call, "we miss you" card, or personal visit by the spiritual friend.

Visitation ministry also became one of the strengths of the project. Our spiritual-friend ministry is developed and in operation. All newly baptized now have a spiritual friend, trained for the task, and each one receives a weekly visit or phone call from the spiritual friend, the pastor, or an elder of the church. "I am very happy for my spiritual friend," remarked a newly baptized member. "We are in touch weekly, praying together and encouraging each other."

Members of the church are now able to differentiate between friendliness, which is the result of an event or an action, and friendship, which develops through a relationship. Our church is awakened to a renewed sense of a caring and sharing ministry, and a definite program for assimilating new members is being coordinated by the assimilating committee.

Finally, there was the impact in the area of the general spiritual atmosphere of the church. Our worship services have become more participatory, and members joyfully share in testimonies of what has been done and what God is doing in their lives. A young sister who had experienced a very unfortunate marital journey had left the church for some time. However, she recently started to attend again and, seeing the new spiritual awakening in the church, she called the Sabbath school superintendent and inquired, "Is there something in the Sabbath school that I

can do? I want to be involved." Today she is the Sabbath school chorister. "Our church is growing spiritually," says Frutsy Gathings, the nursing home leader.

#### Weaknesses or Negative Impact

There are specific areas of negative impact which can be tabulated as follows.

Opportunities for involvement seem to be a weakness as indicated by the survey (6 out of 15 gave a rating of 5, while 7 out of 15 gave a rating of 4). Members at times are very skeptical about activities and involvement not fully tested and proven. This was evident at the New Jerusalem Church, however, membership involvement has been on the increase as the project continues to prove successful.

The project was centered around the assimilation of newcomers who began to attend church when the project was launched. This was a narrow focus with a specific goal in mind. The project failed to recognize those members in the church who were baptized at least one year prior to the launching of the project. These members should be an integral part of the initial launching of the project. These members were later added and became involved as the project progressed.

The implementation of the project did not satisfy the needs of all members of the church. This might not in itself constitute a weakness; however, it does bear

consideration, for feedback and evaluation were randomly selected from the church family.

The project did not take into account the financial ramifications that would exist from implementation. It was apparent after launching that there would be printing and material costs. This cost was dealt with by contributions, from the church's outreach budget and from individual contributions.

The evaluation survey produced some very significant factors, both positive and negative. For the most part, the greater portion of the comments were positive, but a number of respondents conveyed the idea that short-term results will not determine the validity of the project, but long-term results (three to five years) will best tell the story.

#### Contribution to My Ministry

This project has greatly enhanced my ministry in the following areas:

1. The ultimate goal of evangelism is not merely to baptize individuals into the church, but to genuinely assist them through an effective assimilating process in their Christian development.

2. Greater emphasis must be placed on that process of evangelism that goes on after baptism, particularly in the first twelve months of the new convert's experience. John Fowler made this comment on the crucial, after-baptism period:

More loving and patient work for individuals is necessary after baptism than before. This is the time when new converts are most vulnerable to the attack of the devil. When this concept is lost sight of, the individuals baptized are usually forgotten, and sometimes lost forever.<sup>1</sup>

3. Effective assimilation of members into the church family is part of the evangelistic process that begins with the initial contact made rather than the contact made after baptism. Historically, we have been emphasizing baptism results, but very little has been said about the process that leads up to baptism or what goes on after baptism.

4. There is a clear distinction between friendliness and friendship, and friendship factors are indispensable to the process of assimilation.

5. The church needs to be systematically educated on the real significance of assimilation, when it begins, and how each member can be involved with the concept.

6. The theological significance of small-group ministry and the integral part this ministry plays in the process of evangelism and membership assimilation has become very clear. One distinction of small-group ministry is the fact that individuals in these groups already have found a place of acceptance and belonging which serves as a springboard into the larger fellowship of the church.

7. The process of evangelism requires time, effort, financial resources, and dedicated persons. It is the

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<sup>1</sup>John Fowler, "Caring for New Converts," Ministry, April 1970, 4.



perennial work of the entire church family and not a special work for a special group at a special season.

It is very important that the church return to the New Testament method of evangelism (Acts 2:1-5, 41-47). At that time, members were added to the church on a daily basis, and these additions were the direct result of the working of the Holy Spirit and the house-to-house work of the saints.

This is not to say I am advocating a total disregard for public evangelism. Ellen White, under inspiration, strongly advocated the significance of evangelism. She advised us to "enter new territory with tents and give the last message of warning to the world."<sup>1</sup> "Camp meetings and tent meetings are to be held, that the truth of this time is proclaimed."<sup>2</sup>

It is interesting to note that Ellen White also talked about the importance of "personal work being done by pastors, visiting members in their homes, studying the Bible and praying with them."<sup>3</sup> "God," she said, "works on the minds in the homes while Bible studies are given."<sup>4</sup> Members, therefore, should "do more house-to-house labor in giving Bible studies and distributing literature."<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup>White, Evangelism, 61.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 349.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 489.

<sup>5</sup>White, Testimonies for the Church, 5:127.

church needs to re-evaluate its evangelistic methods and place more emphasis on personal evangelism such as friendship evangelism, health evangelism, small-group evangelism, and house-to-house ministry.

The leadership of the church is not to be blamed for the lack of effective assimilation of new converts, neither do I hold the local church accountable. It is the method that has been passed down through the years of the church's existence. Consequently, I believe a new paradigm is needed that is relevant to the entire evangelistic process. Fowler states:

When the apostasy of new converts is discussed by the pastor or church members, they usually blame the evangelists. If the evangelists are discussing the problem, they often blame the pastor and the church. Such pointing of fingers serves no valid purpose. Why endeavor to place blame on each other when the very process tends to alienate and divide the church.<sup>1</sup>

I have come to see evangelism as a personal effort, not merely a collective mission. Concepts like relationships and friendships cannot be implemented on a collective basis, they must be implemented on a personal basis. It is no wonder Elder Raymond H. Woolsey saw evangelism as "one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread."<sup>2</sup>

The ministry of evangelism conservation is much more challenging than that of soul-winning. It is apparent,

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<sup>1</sup>Fowler, 4.

<sup>2</sup>Raymond H. Woolsey, Evangelism Handbook (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1972), 11.

therefore, that ministers are trained to win souls. However, our ministerial training must go beyond soul-winning to nurturing, discipling, witnessing, and Christian maturity.

The insight I gained during the development of this project has afforded me greater knowledge of the complexity of the assimilating process facing the church today. My exposure and involvement in this project has facilitated the improvement of my ministry and enlightened me relative to the clear biblical understanding of membership assimilation.

#### Relevance of the Study to the SDA Church

One of the greatest challenges facing the SDA church today is how to make ministry relevant to the times. Marjorie L. Lloyd in Why the Back Door Keeps Swinging postulated that the church is using a nineteenth-century approach to the process of evangelism in a twentieth-century society and that has turned away many from the doors of our churches. I am not here to suggest a radical swing from conservatism to liberalism, but I do suggest gradual modification within biblical guidelines that contemporary minds can identify with.

Our survey of inactive members revealed some startling statistics: 41.23 percent of those surveyed were single parents (see Table 11), 46 percent left the church for lack of fellowship, 30.92 percent left the church for lack of friends, and 25.77 percent left the church because of cold,

dead worship services (see Table 10). In terms of relevance to the church, two factors became evident: (1) as a church, we are not relating to members on the level of their personal needs, a lack that accounts for the absence of fellowship and friends, and (2) in our preaching and worship services we are trying very hard to fit a nineteenth-century approach into a twentieth-century mentality. That is why younger members complain about dead and cold worship services.

People are of more importance than programs and institutions. If the church is going to assimilate those who come through its doors, it must endeavor to be in tune with their needs. We may learn their needs by identifying with them socially and spiritually and letting the new converts not only know but feel that we care about them. A one-to-one relationship is part of the missing ingredient that now exists between the pulpit and the pews. The relevance of this study will become a reality only as church leaders and members unite their efforts in bridging the gap.

My research of SDA literature has revealed that not much work has been done on the topic of assimilation. In an interview, Professor Johns pointed to some theological reasons for lack of interest (see chapter 2). Much has been done by the SDA Theological Seminary recently to establish a theological balance between theory and practice, but much more can and ought to be done. Ministers going back to

their fields of labor, be they local or international, ought to be able to make their ministry relevant to the needs of their congregation.

Recently, when planning for evangelism for 1998 at the New Jerusalem Church, we implemented a beehive multi-faceted community outreach program. We had already interacted with the community so most of their needs were made known to us through surveys and visitations. Each ministry is being tailored to these specific needs. None of the programs will be conducted in the church. The needs now are in the community where the people are. Thus, the church is moving into the community to satisfy those relevant, basic needs. Every initial contact that has been made has set into operation an assimilation process for the New Jerusalem SDA Church.

#### Suggestions for Future Study

When one compares the subject of apostasy with assimilation, it becomes obvious that more study has been done relative to apostasy than assimilation. Assimilation, a very significant segment of our evangelistic process, has been historically soft-pedaled by our church. Some suggestions concerning assimilation could be the following:

1. Pastoral courses taught in the Seminary should be analyzed to determine the theological balance between theory and practice.<sup>1</sup>

2. A study could be launched as to why there are so few D.Min. dissertations completed by students at the SDA Theological Seminary on the subject of membership assimilation.

3. Further study should be undertaken to learn what factors cause some members to be assimilated in the church, while the same factors cause other members to leave the church.

4. Consideration should be given to establishing an appropriate balance between old and new members' expectations of each other.

5. Conferences and church evangelistic programs need to be re-evaluated, thus a balanced emphasis can be placed on evangelism and assimilation when it comes to budgeting.

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<sup>1</sup>Russell Burrill, Director of the North American Division Evangelism Institute, interview by author, September 24, 1998. He indicated that there are no specific classes being taught in the Seminary solely on assimilation, but interwoven in many classes for evangelism are discussions on assimilation. He further stated that just about six to eight class hours are devoted to the subject of assimilation.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to develop a program for the retention of new members in the New Jerusalem Seventh-day Adventist Church. The study used two sets of questionnaires: (1) to find out from inactive members which factors caused them to stop attending church, and (2) to find out from active members those factors that kept them coming to church. These findings were used as effective tools for the development of the assimilation program.

The study also developed and implemented a three-phase assimilation program between voluntary, dedicated members of the church and their friends and relatives. These relatives were invited to the program by the members of the church, but no pressure was applied to make them attend. The first stage of the program laid the foundation for the second stage; the second phase was the basis for the third stage.

The project was based specifically on the ongoing evangelistic process in the New Jerusalem SDA Church. No computerized data were collected; however, visiting friends were evaluated periodically by surveys and questionnaires to determine their progress or need for encouragement.

The evaluation of the project was done by fifteen individuals randomly selected from leaders of the church and members who were involved in the project.

Very few studies have been done on this subject, thus our findings were limited to terms of comparison and

analysis. This study, along with denomination statistics on membership and apostasy, clearly revealed some interesting facts.

In summary, these facts can be tabulated as follows:

1. The assimilation problem. The Seventh-day Adventist church has a major assimilation problem (see p. 19).
2. The relationship problem. Over 46 percent of the members left the church because of lack of fellowship; 31 percent left because of friendlessness. Even though no single factor causes the assimilation problem, lack of loving human relationships is certainly an important factor.
3. Membership expectations. There is a gap between the expectations that old and new members have of each other. In some cases, neither of the two groups is willing to surrender his/her traditional way of thinking. Each side must be willing to yield to some extent. However, the greater yielding must be on the part of the older members of the church. Members who have left the church often say they are willing and ready to return to the church. Most of them state: "If only the church is willing to adapt its ministry and preaching to fit our needs, we would return."
4. Church involvement. Individuals love to feel wanted, welcomed, and accepted. Many members in the New Jerusalem Church did not feel welcome or wanted because the patriarchs and matriarchs with their family clans had



dominated the church for thirty-five years. In this program, those members outside the inner circle who expressed their desire to be actively involved were immediately given the opportunity. Today they are growing in Christ, are actively involved, and are assisting others in their Christian growth.

5. Friendship factor. Friendship was the key ingredient in the first phase of our assimilation program. Many of the earliest visiting friends have become members and are now reaching out to other friends. Now we are about to start the process the second time around. The church that is serious about membership retention must have a clear understanding of the underlying difference between friendliness and friendship. Friendliness can result from an act or an event; friendship is the result of a genuine relationship.

6. Evangelism. Evangelism must be seen as a process involving human dynamic and interactions. Assimilation is an integral part of evangelism. Consequently, both factors must be interwoven into the entire process from the very beginning.

7. Assimilation. Many churches today do not have clear biblical understanding of the concept of assimilation. This ignorance has contributed to the older members' attitudes toward new converts. Instead of being a means of support for the new converts, they become a deterrent to the

spiritual growth of the new converts. Assimilation, therefore, becomes ineffective in such an atmosphere.

8. Finally, in my candid opinion, the church has not put forth enough effort, resources, or expertise in this important aspect of evangelism.

### Recommendations

My ultimate expectation of this project is that it will enhance the retention ministry of the church. I hope this project will motivate members towards a clearer understanding of evangelism as a continuous process, not just an event or an act. I hope that insights from this project will motivate the church to more effectively use all its resources for evangelism and assimilation.

With the above expectations in mind, I tender the following recommendations to reduce the number of people leaving church membership.

1. A new paradigm for evangelism and assimilation should be instituted with friendship and relationship evangelism as the foundation.

2. Church members should be educated through seminars and workshops relative to the theological significance of assimilating new members into the church family.

3. Pastors should assist the members to differentiate between friendliness and friendship. The best way for a pastor to accomplish this task is to model what he/she wants his/her members to be.

4. Specialized training for ministers at the Seminary level should include not only soul-winning but pre- and post-assimilation stages of the evangelistic process.

5. Churches should receive some monetary assistance as they prepare for public evangelism. To a large extent, the success of an evangelistic series depends on the preparation that goes on before the meetings.

6. The evangelism process must not end after baptism. Here it is time for the final assimilation phase to be implemented, where old and new members work together for the spiritual growth and maturity of each other.

7. Before being baptized into church membership, the convert should be encouraged to be a member of a small group that will meet his/her needs.

8. More emphasis must be placed on friendship evangelism; such a friendship bond will create an acceptable atmosphere for membership assimilation.

9. Whenever a person becomes a member of the church, he/she should be given a spiritual friend unless he/she had one prior to membership. New members should be given a role or task in the church and should be included in some small-group ministry.

### Conclusions

A program for the retention of new converts has been developed and implemented in three phases at the New Jerusalem SDA Church. This project is not conclusive or

comprehensive, however, it has motivated greater laity involvement in various ministries of the church and created a better understanding among the members relative to the nature, purpose, and mission of the church. It is my hope that the program implemented will be part of the ongoing study which concerns itself with the assimilation of new members, not only in local churches but also on a global level.

Assimilating someone into the life and ministry of the church is totally different from helping them to become a member. Of all places where people should be included and have a sense of belonging and acceptance, it is the church. New members should not find assimilation into the church family, its activities and ministries, in any way difficult. The church should be a loving, caring, compassionate congregation.

In our churches evangelism and assimilation must be seen as one process leading people to maturity in Christ, not just getting a decision, and this process involves the entire church. The theological basis, the philosophy, and methodology of assimilation need to be constantly communicated to the church. This is a responsibility of the church that does not begin after someone is baptized, but it begins with the very first contact with that individual.

To radically change one's lifestyle is no small accomplishment. It can be achieved only by the grace of God

and the tender love, care, and compassion of the church. Then a person can hope to realize life-changing transformation. The grace of God is available to the church at all times through the medium of the Holy Spirit. The church must refocus its evangelistic endeavors and take the challenge of membership assimilation very seriously. Pastors, laity, and leaders must all come to the full realization that the entire process of evangelism is incomplete until the evangelized become the evangelizers.

**APPENDIX A**  
**ASSIMILATION INFORMATION**

## RESPONSIBILITIES FOR SPIRITUAL FRIEND

Realizing that God has called me to be a light to those in darkness and also those who have accepted the Gospel, I commit myself to the following as a spiritual friend for one year.

1. Develop loving care and concern for my spiritual friend.
2. Be available to my spiritual friend in time of need.
3. Spend time in private devotion for myself and my spiritual friend.
4. Visit with my spiritual friend as often as possible.
5. Watch for drop-out signals such as:
  - (a) Habitual absence from church
  - (b) Late arrival at church and early leaving
  - (c) Referring to church as "your" church and not "our" church
  - (d) Negative statements about the church
  - (e) Always want to sit alone
  - (f) Non-involvement in church activities
6. Introduce my friend to other members of the church.
7. Sit with my friend as much as possible in church and other activities.
8. Always encourage my friend to focus on Jesus Christ.
9. Be quick to alert the Assimilation Committee of danger signs evident with your friend.
10. Be committed to your friend for at least one year.
11. Should you move out of the community, please contact your pastor, thus some other member can be assigned the role.

Please remember that Christians are always seeking for ways and means to express loving concern and hospitality.

**TOOLS FOR EFFECTIVE ASSIMILATION**

<b>MEMBER</b>	<b>SCORE</b>
(Yes = +10; No = -10)	
Worship service attendance? (Regular = +10, Irregular = -10)	_____
How many new friends? (0 = -105 points for each, maximum 50 points)	_____
Aware of spiritual gifts? (Yes = +5; No = -5)	_____
Using gift in ministry? (Yes = +10; No = -10)	_____
Member of cell group or support ministry? (Yes = +20; No = -5)	_____
Identifiable role or task in the church? (Yes = +10; No = -5)	_____
Financial giving? (No = -5; sporadically = 0; regularly = +5; generously = +10)	_____
Refers to the church as "my" church? (Yes = +10; No = -5)	_____
<b>Total Score</b>	_____

**ASSIMILATION CONTINUUM**

0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
										or more

**KEY:** 0-30 = Dangerous zone; 30-70 = Needs more work; 70-100 = No problem



VISITATION INFORMATION

Please help me, your pastor, be more effective with my time for visitation. Your answers to the following questions will be very helpful.

- 1. Which day would normally be the most convenient day for me to visit in your home? A call for appointment will be made.

Please circle your choices

Sunday Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Sabbath

- 2. What time of day would be most convenient? (Circle choice below)

8am 9am 10am 11am 12pm 1pm 2pm 3pm 4pm 5pm 6pm 7pm 8pm 9pm

- 3. What phone number can you be reached at? Days \_\_\_\_\_

a. If at office, can you receive calls without any problem?

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Call only if an emergency \_\_\_

b. List your phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Private, please do not give out: Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

- 4. Please print the following information:

Family name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City and Zip code \_\_\_\_\_

- 5. Please print directions to your house from the church, being as specific as possible.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. If applicable, can you be visited at your office? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_  
If yes, address and directions:

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7. Is there anything the pastor should know about your particular family situation that may be of help to him?

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**ASSIMILATION COMMITTEE**

**MEMBERS:**

**OBJECTIVE:**

Assist in the spiritual maturity and growth of newly baptized for a period of one year.

**FUNCTION:**

Function under the authority of the Board of Elders. At least one elder should be a member of the committee, with all other elders and the Pastor as Ex officio members, and may attend any meeting of the committee.

**PROPOSED JOB DESCRIPTION:**

To provide opportunities for new members during the first year of membership to build relationship with other members of the church, so that a strong sense of belonging is cultivated, spiritual growth occurs, and information about the church is gained, resulting in the unity of the Spirit in the body of Christ (Eph. 4:3-6; 1 Cor. 12:12).

**TERMS OF SERVICE:**

All committee members shall serve for a period of one year, but 60% of the original committee members can serve for two consecutive years.

**AUTHORITY:**

All major decisions made by the Assimilation Committee should be submitted to the Board of Elders through the elder on the committee, for approval before implementation.

**FREQUENCY:**

The committee shall meet once monthly on a day mutually agreed upon by the committee members.

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS MUST:**

**Keep in touch with spiritual friend of newly baptized  
Be aware of drop-out signals shown by newly baptized  
Have periodic evaluation of assimilation process  
Be totally committed to the task of discipleship**

**I went outside to find a friend  
but friends were nowhere  
I went out to be a friend  
And friends were everywhere**

**APPENDIX B**  
**ACTIVE MEMBERS QUESTIONNAIRE**

**QUESTIONNAIRE TO BE USED FOR ACTIVE  
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST MEMBERS BAPTIZED  
WITHIN THE PAST FIVE YEARS**

**INSTRUCTION: Please check your responses.**

1. SEX: Male ( ) Female ( )
2. AGE: ( ) 15-25 ( ) 41-50  
( ) 21-30 ( ) 51-60  
( ) 31-40 ( ) 61+
3. PRESENT OCCUPATION:  
( ) Farmer ( ) Unskilled worker ( ) Businessman  
( ) Homemaker ( ) Professional, teacher, etc. ( ) Skilled, carpenter, tailor, etc.  
( ) Clerical worker - secretary, government worker, etc.  
( ) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
4. MARITAL STATUS:  
( ) Married ( ) Divorced ( ) Separated ( ) Single ( ) Engaged
5. YEARLY INCOME:(✓)

\$0.00 - \$ 5,000		\$30,001 - \$35,000
\$5,001 - \$10,000		\$35,001 - \$45,000
\$10,001 - \$15,000		\$45,001 - \$50,000
\$15,001 - \$20,000		\$50,001 - \$60,000
\$20,001 - \$25,000		\$60,001 +
\$25,001 - \$30,000		

6. HIGHEST DEGREE EARNED:  
( ) Certificate "A" ( ) Nothing ( ) S.C./G.C.E.  
( ) B.A.; B.Sc. ( ) M.A.; M.Div. ( ) Ph.D.; Th.D.  
( ) M.D.; D.Min. ( ) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
7. DO YOU HAVE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST RELATIVES? ( ) Yes ( ) No

## 8. IF YES, PLEASE INDICATE ALL THAT IS APPLICABLE:

- |                                     |   |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Father     | <input type="checkbox"/> Sons/daughters | <input type="checkbox"/> Cousins                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mother     | <input type="checkbox"/> Uncle          | <input type="checkbox"/> Grandparents             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sister(s)  | <input type="checkbox"/> Aunt           | <input type="checkbox"/> Parents-in-law           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brother(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> Nephew         | <input type="checkbox"/> Others (specify, please) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spouse     | <input type="checkbox"/> Niece          | _____   |

## 9. YOUR AGE AT THE TIME OF BAPTISM INTO THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH:

- |                                |                                |                                |                                |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 10-15 | <input type="checkbox"/> 16-20 | <input type="checkbox"/> 21-30 | <input type="checkbox"/> 31-35 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 36-45 | <input type="checkbox"/> 46-50 | <input type="checkbox"/> 51-60 | <input type="checkbox"/> 60+   |

## 10. HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN A MEMBER OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH?

- |                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3-5 years | <input type="checkbox"/> Six months to one year |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2-3 years | <input type="checkbox"/> Three to six months    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 years | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than three months |

## 11. RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION BEFORE BECOMING A SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST:

- No religious background  
 Raised a Seventh-day Adventist  
 Protestant (specify denomination, please) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Roman Catholic  
 Muslim  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

## 12. FACTORS THAT MOST ATTRACTED YOU TO THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH: (Please answer all that are applicable)

- Raised in a Seventh-day Adventist home  
 Biblical authenticity of the church's teaching  
 Warmth and fellowship among church members  
 Organizational structure of the church  
 Charisma of ministers and evangelists  
 Total gospel presentation  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

## 13. FACTORS THAT GREATLY INFLUENCED YOUR DECISION TO BECOME A SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parents                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> My wife              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Relatives                               | <input type="checkbox"/> My husband           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friends                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> My children          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Evangelistic preaching of<br>the church | <input type="checkbox"/> Adventist literature |

## 14. FACTORS IN YOUR LIFE THAT CAUSED YOU TO THINK VERY SERIOUSLY ABOUT SPIRITUAL MATTERS:

- Death of a friend or relative
- Divorce or marital problems
- Began serious Bible study
- Dream or vision
- Loss of job
- Others: \_\_\_\_\_
- Illness
- Move
- Personal problems
- Witness of another person's changed life
- \_\_\_\_\_

15. LENGTH OF TIME EVALUATION CHURCH BEFORE BECOMING A MEMBER:

- Less than three months
- Three to six months
- Six months to one year
- One to two years
- More than two years
- Raised a Seventh-day Adventist

16. ON A SCALE OF 1-5 (5 being the highest), HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOURSELF IN TERMS OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES:

- |                             |       |   |   |   |        |   |
|-----------------------------|-------|---|---|---|--------|---|
| 1. Witnessing & Bible study | 1     | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5      |   |
|                             | never |   |   |   | always |   |
| 2. Church attendance        | 1     | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5      |   |
|                             | never |   |   |   | always |   |
| 3. Role/task involvement    |       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4      | 5 |
|                             | never |   |   |   | always |   |
| 4. Outreach involvement     | 1     | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5      |   |
|                             | never |   |   |   | always |   |
| 5. Making new friends       | 1     | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5      |   |
|                             | never |   |   |   | always |   |

17. ON A SCALE OF 1-5 (1 being the weakest and 5 the strongest) RATE THE FOLLOWING FACTORS IN TERMS OF YOUR DECISION TO REMAIN IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH:

- |                              | WEAK |   |   |   | STRONG |
|------------------------------|------|---|---|---|--------|
| 1. Biblical based teachings  | 1    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5      |
| 2. Spiritual needs satisfied | 1    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5      |
| 3. Caring & committed pastor | 1    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5      |
| 4. Friendly atmosphere       | 1    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5      |
| 5. Church involvement        | 1    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5      |
| 6. Loving & caring church    | 1    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5      |
| 7. Strong missionary program | 1    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5      |



**APPENDIX C**  
**INACTIVE MEMBERS QUESTIONNAIRE**



## 8. IF YES, PLEASE INDICATE ALL THAT IS APPLICABLE:

- |                                     |   |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Father     | <input type="checkbox"/> Sons/daughters | <input type="checkbox"/> Cousins                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mother     | <input type="checkbox"/> Uncle          | <input type="checkbox"/> Grandparents             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sister(s)  | <input type="checkbox"/> Aunt           | <input type="checkbox"/> Parents-in-law           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brother(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> Nephew         | <input type="checkbox"/> Others (specify, please) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spouse     | <input type="checkbox"/> Niece          | _____   |
- 

## 9. YOUR AGE AT THE TIME OF BAPTISM INTO THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH:

- |                                |                                |                                |                                |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 10-15 | <input type="checkbox"/> 16-20 | <input type="checkbox"/> 21-30 | <input type="checkbox"/> 31-35 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 36-45 | <input type="checkbox"/> 46-50 | <input type="checkbox"/> 51-60 | <input type="checkbox"/> 60+   |

## 10. HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN A MEMBER OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH?

- |                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3-5 years | <input type="checkbox"/> Six months to one year |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2-3 years | <input type="checkbox"/> Three to six months    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 years | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than three months |

## 11. RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION BEFORE BECOMING A SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST:

- No religious background  
 Raised a Seventh-day Adventist  
 Protestant (specify denomination, please) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Roman Catholic  
 Muslim  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

## 12. FACTORS THAT MOST ATTRACTED YOU TO THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH: (Please answer all that are applicable)

- Raised in a Seventh-day Adventist home  
 Biblical authority of the church's teaching  
 Warmth and fellowship among church members  
 Organizational structure of the church  
 Charisma of ministers and evangelists  
 Total gospel presentation  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

## 13. FACTORS THAT GREATLY INFLUENCED YOUR DECISION TO BECOME A SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parents                              | <input type="checkbox"/> My wife              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Relatives                            | <input type="checkbox"/> My husband           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friends                              | <input type="checkbox"/> My children          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Evangelistic preaching of the church | <input type="checkbox"/> Adventist literature |

14. **FACTORS IN YOUR LIFE THAT CAUSED YOU TO THINK VERY SERIOUSLY ABOUT SPIRITUAL MATTERS:**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Death of a friend or relative | <input type="checkbox"/> Illness                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Divorce or marital problems   | <input type="checkbox"/> Move                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Began serious Bible study     | <input type="checkbox"/> Personal problems           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dream or vision               | <input type="checkbox"/> Witness of another person's |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____                   | changed life   |

15. **LENGTH OF TIME EVALUATING CHURCH BEFORE BECOMING A MEMBER:**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than three months | <input type="checkbox"/> One to two years               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Three to six months    | <input type="checkbox"/> More than two years            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Six months to one year | <input type="checkbox"/> Raised a Seventh-day Adventist |

16. **RATE THE FACTORS THAT STRONGLY INFLUENCED YOUR DECISION TO STOP ATTENDING THE CHURCH: (1 being the weakest, 5 being the strongest)**

	WEAK					STRONG
1. Ministered by members	1	2	3	4	5	
2. Social pressure from non-Adventist	1	2	3	4	5	
3. Unpleasant experience with pastor	1	2	3	4	5	
4. Legalist approach to the gospel	1	2	3	4	5	
5. Over-worked, burnt-out syndrome	1	2	3	4	5	
6. Disappointed expectations	1	2	3	4	5	
7. Lack of fellowship	1	2	3	4	5	
8. Don't believe some teachings of the church	1	2	3	4	5	
9. Lack of church support in times of personal crisis	1	2	3	4	5	
10. Lack of friends in the church	1	2	3	4	5	
11. No program for my age group	1	2	3	4	5	

17. **WAS IT YOUR DECISION TO WITHDRAW OR WAS YOUR NAME DROPPED WITHOUT YOUR CONSENT?**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> My decision                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Church's decision with my consent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Church's decision without my consent | <input type="checkbox"/> I was not even consulted          |

18. WHAT EFFORT HAS THE CHURCH MADE TO BRING YOU BACK INTO FELLOWSHIP?

- None
- Pastoral visits
- Phone calls
- Quarterly newsletter
- Members visit
- Invitation to special events
- Invitation to Small Group Ministry

19. ARE YOU A MEMBER OF ANOTHER CHURCH?  Yes  No

20. IF YES, WHAT CHURCH? \_\_\_\_\_

21. WHAT ARE THE CHANCES THAT YOU MIGHT BECOME A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH AGAIN?

- Very likely
- Likely
- Unlikely
- Don't know
- Very unlikely

22. CHANGES THAT WOULD ENCOURAGE YOU TO RETURN TO THE CHURCH:

- Contemporary music
- Relevant preaching
- More Christ-centered preaching
- More "do's" and less "don'ts"
- More love and compassion shown
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

23. FACTORS THAT HAD A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON YOU AFTER BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH:

- Did not fully understand the doctrines
- Was forced to make a decision
- Weak support immediately after baptism
- Needed more time to study teaching of church
- Rigid rules of the church
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

24. DO YOU THINK THE CHURCH IS DOING ENOUGH TO INCORPORATE NEWLY BAPTIZED MEMBERS INTO THE LIFE OF ITS MINISTRY?

- Yes
- No

25. IF NO, WHAT AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT WOULD YOU SUGGEST?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX D**  
**SPIRITUAL GIFTS INVENTORY**  
**FORMS**

**KEY TO INVENTORY**

<b>ROW</b>	<b>GIFT</b>
<b>A</b>	<b>PROPHECY</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>SHEPHERDING</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>TEACHING</b>
<b>D</b>	<b>WISDOM</b>
<b>E</b>	<b>KNOWLEDGE</b>
<b>F</b>	<b>EXHORTATION</b>
<b>G</b>	<b>DISCERNMENT</b>
<b>H</b>	<b>GIVING</b>
<b>I</b>	<b>HELPS</b>
<b>J</b>	<b>MERCY</b>
<b>K</b>	<b>APOSTLESHIP</b>
<b>L</b>	<b>EVANGELISM</b>
<b>M</b>	<b>HOSPITALITY</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>FAITH</b>
<b>O</b>	<b>LEADERSHIP</b>
<b>P</b>	<b>ADMINISTRATION</b>
<b>Q</b>	<b>MIRACLES</b>
<b>R</b>	<b>HEALING</b>
<b>S</b>	<b>TONGUES</b>
<b>T</b>	<b>INTERPRETING</b>

**DISCOVERING YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFT**

This statement has been experienced in my life:

much	-	3	Little	-	1
some	-	2	not at all	-	0

1. Proclaiming the truth in inspired and enthusiastic way.
2. Shepherding the growth of a group of Christians.
3. Enabling persons to learn biblical truths in detail.
4. Putting the truth into practical effect in my own life.
5. Discovering biblical truths for myself.
6. Encouraging the wavering and troubled with kind words.
7. Tell the difference between truth and error.
8. Ability to manage money well so that I can give generously to the Lord.
9. Assisting key leaders in the church, freeing them to attend to their essential job.
10. Working joyfully with persons ignored by the majority.
11. Adapting well in a different environment in order to evangelize.
12. Leading others to accept Christ.
13. Opening my home to those in need.
14. Believing God will fulfill His promises to me in spite of an impossible situation.
15. Persuading others to fulfill biblical objectives,.
16. As a leader in the church, delegating responsibilities to others.
17. In the name of the Lord miraculously changing circumstances,.
18. By faith in Christ, healing diseases.
19. Having spoken in an unknown tongue with a special message for the church.
20. Interpreted a tongue to make its message clear.
21. God has given me insight into the future at various times.



(Much - 3; Some - 2; Little - 1; Not at all - 0)

22. Sacrificially expending time to establish new believers or reclaim straying Christians.
23. Clearly explaining truths of Bible.
24. Making good decisions which stick.
25. Gaining insights into truth which bring conviction to my heart and life.
26. Being an instrument to remove complacency, and helping the wayward to face up to their responsibilities.
27. Judging wisely between good and poor alternatives.
28. Possessing a free spirit which does not begrudge giving to the church and needy causes.
29. Ushering, or preparing and cleaning church facilities.
30. Helping the undeserving.
31. Communicating the gospel effectively in a new area with the intention of raising up a new church.
32. Sharing joyfully what Christ has done for me.
33. Enjoy opening my home to guests.
34. Convicted that God is really at work in the daily affairs of my local church.
35. Knowing the direction to take in church work.
36. Able to organize ideas, people and things for more effective ministry.
37. Casting out demons in Christ's name.
38. Healing the emotionally sick for Christ.
39. Being able to preach in a foreign language in a miraculously short time.
40. Edifying the church by the gift of interpreting a tongue.
41. Communicating the truths of Scripture in a gripping, compelling, clear fashion, so that people are convicted they have received a message from the Lord.
42. Being understood by those I serve and guide.
43. Making obscure doctrines and understandable to others.

(Much - 3; some - 2; little - 1; not at all - 0)

44. Usually choosing an effective solution to various problems.
45. Acquiring the mastering facts and the biblical principles behind texts.
46. Verbally challenging the spiritually apathetic.
48. Cheerfully giving to extend God's work.
49. Typing, filing, or recording minutes or figures for the Lord.
50. Happily visiting in hospitals or homes for the elderly.
51. Being able to begin new churches in a different culture.
52. Explaining well what it means for Christ to be not only Savior, but Lord.
53. Having the knack of making strangers feel at home.
54. Trusting in the presence and power of God for the impossible.
55. Influencing others while serving with them to reach biblical goals.
56. Having the ability to plan action goals for ministry with others.
57. God has intervened to do impossible things in my life.
58. Treating spiritually sick in the name of the Lord.
59. Feeling uneasy over lack of speaking in tongues in our churches.
60. Praying for interpretation if someone should speak in a tongue.
61. Preaching effectively for decisions.
62. Enlightening fellow believers by guiding them to selected Bible verses.
63. Conveying biblical truths to others enabling changed in knowledge, values, attitude, or conduct.
64. My nominating others for positions prove to be good selections.
65. Finding it easy to learn bible truths.
66. Effective counselor of the perplexed, guilty, or addicted.
67. Able to identify that which is not in harmony with the Bible,

(Much - 3; some - 2; little - 1; not at all - 0)

68. Earning much money to give to the Lord.
69. Distributing church literature in the community.
70. Caring for the shut-ins, taking them for drives, etc.
71. Soul-winning among various classes.
72. Speaking the essentials of the Gospel.
73. Having a genuine love for, and appreciation for each guest in my home.
74. Allowing God himself to answer my prayers for other Christians.
75. Guiding others through difficulties in church tasks.
76. Able to lead a committee to make good decisions together.
77. Being an instrument through whom God supernaturally changes lives.
78. Praying for others and healing occurs.
79. Deep interest in the subject of tongue-speaking.
80. Experienced interpreting a tongue.
81. Giving messages of doom or judgment with calls for repentance.
82. God is restoring backsliders.
83. Training Christians in obedience.
84. Seeking God's will in all decision making.
85. Able to recognize key and important facts of Scripture applying to live.
86. Comforting a suffering or afflicted Christian.
87. I have the ability to see through a phony before his pretense is clearly evident.
88. Giving things freely with delight.
89. Able to aid a teacher in Sabbath School.
90. Cheerfully visiting with the lonely or prisoners.

(Much - 3; some - 2; little - 1; not at all - 0)

91. Having the ability to learn foreign languages.
92. Often associating with unbelievers in order to win them to Christ.
93. Not forgetful to entertain strangers.
94. Trusting in reliability of Jesus as God.
95. Others tend to follow me because of my expertise in build-up of the church.
96. Able to recruit Christians to exercise their spiritual gifts.
97. Through the power of Christ, able to open blind eyes.
98. Effectively helping the feeble minded.
99. Believing that tongues are a sign for unbelievers.
100. Desiring to interpret to unbelievers.

SPIRITUAL GIFT INVENTORY

ROWS:	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	TOTAL:	GIFT
ROW A	1	21	41	51	61	81		
ROW B	2	22	42	52	62	82		
ROW C	3	23	43	53	63	83		
ROW D	4	24	44	54	64	84		
ROW E	5	25	45	55	65	85		
ROW F	6	26	46	56	66	68		
ROW G	7	27	47	57	67	87		
ROW H	8	28	48	58	68	88		
ROW I	9	29	49	59	69	89		
ROW J	10	30	50	60	70	90		
ROW K	11	31	51	61	71	91		
ROW L	12	32	52	62	72	92		
ROW M	13	33	53	63	73	93		
ROW N	14	34	54	64	74	94		
ROW O	15	35	55	65	75	95		
ROW P	16	36	56	66	76	96		
ROW Q	17	37	57	67	77	97		
ROW R	18	38	58	68	78	98		
ROW S	19	39	59	69	79	99		
ROW T	20	40	60	70	80	100		

My gift with the highest score is: \_\_\_\_\_

- Please list all gifts you have over a score of ten:
1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. \_\_\_\_\_
  4. \_\_\_\_\_
  5. \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX E**

**LETTERS**



October 6, 1993

ILLINOIS  
CONFERENCE OF  
SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTISTS

Church Board  
NEW JERUSALEM SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH  
1605 East North Street  
Bradley, Illinois 60915

Dear Board Members:

As you may be aware, your pastor, Elder Hall, is currently in final phases of completing his Doctorate of Ministry program at Andrews University. He has asked for permission to enter into a special relationship with the New Jerusalem Church members to cooperatively work on his doctoral project. His project will be of great assistance to you since he is specifically focusing on implementing a new-member retention plan and studying ways to make it more effective.

This issue is of importance to all of us, and I can only hope that Elder Hall is able to identify some very meaningful and effective ways of helping our new believers to stay in the church. You and I would certainly not ever approve of child abuse, so it is also important that we make sure that there is no child abuse going on in the spiritual realm as well.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me. We look forward to hearing of positive results from this study.

In His service,

Jim Brauer  
President

JBja

3721  
Prairie  
Avenue  
Brookfield  
Illinois  
60513  
Telephone  
708-485-1200  
Fax  
708-485-0211

*New Heights Seventh Day Adventist Church*

*1212 1/2 Ave. N  
Minneapolis, MN 55412*

Monday August 1, 1994

Dear *Mr. [Name]*

Greetings on behalf of your church family at the New Heights Church. There are four notable things you have done recently that make you a very special person in God's sight.

1. you have decided to do a real and meaningful thing to live for Christ only.
2. You have said that the wonderful truth about God's eternal Sabbath (His life-gift to you) is clear in your thinking.
3. You have accepted the challenge to make your life real meaningful and significant by accepting and fighting for the truth in these last days.
4. You have been brave enough to and wise enough to request membership in God's Remnant Church, and this was accomplished by your baptism last Sabbath July 30, 1994.

These four heroic things you have done on your free will have given confidence in your commitment to the Lordship of Christ. They tell us that while the majority of people in the generation are hesitant shiftless and untrustworthy, you yes you are the person that we can trust and on whom the Lord can depend.

So congratulations". You are one of God's special people. Sabbath August, 6, 1994 we will be having a formal reception ceremony for all those who were baptised last Sabbath. At that time you will officially welcomed into the church family. You will be given your baptismal certificate, a special gift package from your church and a spiritual friend with whom you will walk hand in hand in prayer, Bible study and witnessing.

God's blessing for you as you prepare for this special ceremony on Sabbath August 6.

Yours for a better Church,

*Enell O Hall*  
Enell O Hall (Church Pastor).



Dear

You have been chosen by your church and by God for on of the most important and rewarding positions-Spiritual Friend for one of our newly baptized members, . Your responsibilities will have both a present and future implication. Hand in hand you must proceed to the kingdom of heaven.

I know you have the dedication and committment necessary to enable the spiritual growth and stability that our newly baptized member needs. God bless you as you accept this honor and thrilling challenge. The president of the Illinois Conference will write you and send you an outline of the responsibilities.

Sabbath, at 11:00 a.m.. We will be having an official reception for the newly baptized. You are invited to be a part of this ceremony and at that time the charge and challenge will be read to you. Begin now to pray for a special blessing on Sabbath.

Realizing the imperfections of man, and the deceptive approach of the devil, let me give a word of caution; don't give the impression that you are the perfect saint and you cannot sin. Don't be shocked or critical when your friend makes mistakes-even resorting to immoral acts. As a freind, always exercise a spirit of love, understanding, concern and tenderness. Never be critical or judgmental on irregular behavior.

God granted you the disciplined mind to contemplate the magnitude and the profound honor of such an experience.

God bless you.

Yours in Christ's Service,



Enell O. Hall

"To all the World"

*New Heights Seventh Day Adventist Church*

*15201 South Lexington*

*Harvey, Illinois 60426*

*799-6988*

August 2, 1989

Elder B. Christensen, President  
Illinois Conference of S.D.A.  
Brookfield, IL

Dear Elder Christensen:

In order to be approved as a candidate for the D.Min. program at Andrews University I need among other recommendations one from the president of my conference.

Enclosed, Elder, is an evaluation from from the Seminar. May I request of you to have it completed and returned to the office of admissions.

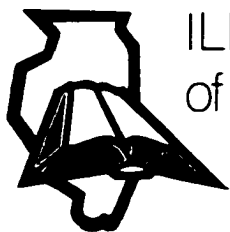
Thank you for your support and interest in my educational goal.

Respectfully yours,

Enell O. Hall

EOH/

Enclosure



ILLINOIS CONFERENCE  
of **Seventh-day Adventists**

Office of the President

February 14, 1989

Elder Enell Hall  
3936 W 168th Place  
Country Club Hills, IL 60477

Dear Enell,

The Administrative Committee of the conference has approved your request to pursue the Doctor of Ministry degree through Andrews University.

This approval, however, comes with some conditions. First of all, participation in classes should not interfere with conference activities. The class you mentioned in your letter for this upcoming summer would be a conflict. Hopefully there is some way to start into the cycle at a different time of the year.

Secondly, it is our request that you make known to your two churches your interest in participating, indicating to them that you would be absent from the district a total of three weeks during the year for classes. Although I am not expecting a formal, positive response from the churches, I do want you to communicate to them of your plans.

Thirdly, the maximum time allowed per year for classes in the Doctor of Ministry program is three weeks.

Fourthly, any expenses related to this program will come under the continuing funds for pastors, which currently is \$200 per year. If you utilize these funds for the Doctor of Ministry program, there, of course, would not be funds available for other meetings which you might want to attend.

It is our hope that the classwork in which you engage will be beneficial to your ministry.

Yours in Christ,

*B. Christensen*

B. Christensen  
President

**NEW JERUSALEM SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH***1605 East North Street, Bradley, IL 60615**(815) 933-2005*

Dear

Thanks for your recent visit to our church.

It is the constant desire of all of us at the New Jerusalem Church that the ministries of the church may be used by God to strengthen us in our Christian journey, and to point us constantly to Jesus Christ, who is both Lord and Savior of our lives.

It is a delight to have you share in this ministry on Sabbath last, and we sincerely hope that you received a rich blessing from our worship services. We look forward to seeing you returning to worship with us as often as you can.

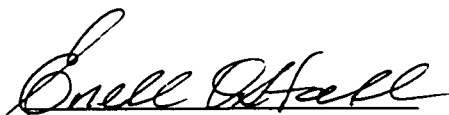
One of our members will be visiting you to say thanks for your visit, to present you with a complementary gift on behalf of our Pastor and to offer you one of our free Bible study courses. The lessons are free and you are under no obligation towards us. However they will offer you a rich and rewarding experience as you learn more about the treasures of God's word. A beautiful certificate will be given to you upon completion of the course.

May I extend to you the opportunity to share in the ministries of the church in whatever areas you are most comfortable. If you are new in the area, or just looking for a church home, we invite you to make the New Jerusalem Church your home church.

Our Pastor, Enell O. Hall is available to all those who desire his service. If there is any information about our church that you desire to have, or any services that we can render, please feel free to phone his office for an appointment, he will be glad to meet with you.

God's blessings for you as you continue to allow Him to lead.

Yours in Christ,

  
(Church Pastor)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Interest Coordinator)

*New Jerusalem Seventh Day Adventist Church*

P O Box 1701

Kankakee, Illinois 60901

(815) 933-2005

December 21, 1995

Dear

This letter is to solícite your assistance in my endeavour to find some solutions to one of the most challenging issue facing the Seventh day Adventist church today. That is the problem of membership assimilation; How to fully establish members in the life and ministry of the church after they are baptized.

I have prayerfully selected this task as my dissertation project for my Doctor of Ministry study at Andrews University. It is my hope that the findings from this project will be an effective tool in the hands of Pastors and local church leaders for a more effective assimilating ministry in the church.

I have chosen to use your church as a laboratory for my study, after consultation with the President of the Conference. The success of my study will be dependent upon two groups of individuals in your church. And I am happy to tell you that you are in one of those two groups.

Enclosed, please find a questioner (self-explanatory), I would appreciate you taking some time out fill out the questions and return to me at your most convenient time. Whatever the result of my study, you will be an integral part, for without you I will not be able to successfully complete this project.

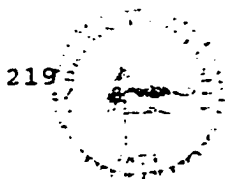
I am aware of the busy schedule each one has and you are no exception. However I want to let you know that I value very highly your involvement and participation in this project.

Looking forward to a very positive responses.

Yours Respectfully



Enell O. Hall



ANDREWS  
UNIVERSITY

March 9, 1990

Enell Hall  
3936 W. 168th Place  
Country Club Hills, IL 60478

Dear Brother Hall:

The Doctor of Ministry Committee met recently to consider your application for admission. I am happy to report that after full evaluation of all materials submitted, the committee voted your acceptance into the program.

We extend our best wishes as you make plans to enter this course of study which undoubtedly will be both challenging and rewarding.

Please be assured of our desire to be of assistance in any way possible.

Sincerely yours,

C. Raymond Holmes, Director  
Doctor of Ministry Program

P.S. Please note the enclosed "Doctoral Handbook"--D.Min. section. You are responsible for carefully following the procedure as outlined in the Handbook.

**APPENDIX F**  
**SMALL-GROUP INFORMATION**

## ACTION IDEAS.

<u>THE RELATIONSHIP</u>		<u>MY PRESENT EXPERIENCE</u>
1. RECEIVING (Rom. 14:1)	I know others who accept and value me as I am.	1 2 3 4 5
2.	I freely accept and appreciate others, even when they seem "different" from me.	1 2 3 4 5
3. PROVOKE (Encourage) (Heb. 10:24)	I have friends who encourage and late me to keep on growing when I feel low.	1 2 3 4 5
4. ""	I am being used to motivate others to fresh trust when they are discouraged.	1 2 3 4 5
5. FORGIVE (Eph 4:32)	I freely confess my faults to others	1 2 3 4 5
6. "	I have found great freedom in forgiving others, even though they hurt me.	1 2 3 4 5
7. ""	I am very close to others who do ask my forgiveness when they hurt me.	1 2 3 4 5
8. BEAR BURDENS (Gal. 6:1)	I am praying for burdens others have shared with me.	1 2 3 4 5
9. IMPACT	I have a warm feeling that I am not alone in my Christian life-- I am experiencing what it means to be one of many brothers.	

On the scale of 1 through 5 under "MY PRESENT EXPERIENCE" rate yourself in terms of your relationship with other members of your church.

45-50 Excellent

40-45 Very Good

30-40 Good (Interpersonal relationship needed)

30 and below Strong interpersonal relationship work is needed.



**GROUP SURVEY SHEET:**

Do you feel the need for a deeper relationship with other Christians?

Do you need encouragement in deepening your relationship with the Lord?

Is there a need in your life for a better understanding of the Bible?

If these are your needs you may want to meet with other individuals for ministry in small groups who feel the same needs

Just fill out the following and drop in the offering plates or give to the ushers.

---



---

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

---

**PLEASE INDICATE YOUR DESIRE BELOW:**

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like to be trained for a leader of a small group.

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like to be an AST. Leader for a small group.

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like to be an Host/Hostess for one of the small groups.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

---

SMALL GROUP CONTRACT  
FOR THE  
NEW JERUSALEM S.D.A. CHURCH

**PURPOSE:** To experience a journey of deepening relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ, and with each other through mutual accountability and sharing, in an atmosphere of love, caring personal trust and support.

**GROUP SPECIFIC GOALS** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**STUDY MATERIALS:** We intend to study the \_\_\_\_\_

**GROUP COVENANT:** We have covenanted to meet together for the next \_\_\_\_\_ weeks, covering the months of \_\_\_\_\_ through \_\_\_\_\_ 1993.  
We will meet each week on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_, and the location of our meeting will be:

**GROUP AGENDA:** Nightly program will include:

- a. Singpiration
- b. Announcements
- c. Recognition of visitors
- d. Members accountability (Missing members)
- e. Sharing time (Testimonies)
- f. Prayer time (Conversational & Intecessory type).
- g. Study time
- h. Other item deem necessary by leader

You will become as small as your controlling desire;  
or as great as your dominant aspiration; so . . .

SEE great things for God  
ATTEMPT great things for God  
and REALIZE great things for God.

DALE W. CALLOWAY. p. 41

**STAFF MEMBERS RESPONSIBILITIES****COORDINATOR:**

1. Meet with staff members once every two weeks.
2. Organize ongoing training Seminar for leaders etc.
3. Responsible for study materials.
4. Review study materials with staff at meetings  
Keep goals and objectives of group before leaders continually.

**ASST. COORDINATOR:**

1. Coordinate all programs in the absence of coordinator.
2. Work closely with leaders, asst. leaders and outreach coordinators.
3. Coordinate all events for groups:
  - a. Group Celebration Day
  - b. Group Retreat
  - c. Group Fellowship meals
  - d. Group fasting
  - e. Group Prayer Chain
  - f. Group Socials

**What the church needs is an army general like Joshua, who know God and could pray and shout things to pass rather than blow them to pieces with atomic energy.**

**OUTREACH COORDINATORS:**

1. Systematic working with non-attending members to incorporate them into already established groups.
2. Work out visiting schedule with leaders and asst. leaders.
3. Be resource person for leaders and asst. leaders.
4. Be an active attending member of the group.
5. Be sensitive to group needs not visible to group leaders and make recommendations to group leaders.
6. Attend weekly Staff meeting and report on progress of outreach ministry:
  - a. INACTIVE MEMBERS ATTENDING
  - b. VISITORS ATTENDING.
7. Media representative for groups.

**VOICE OF PROPHECY  
IT IS WRITTEN  
Faith for Today**

**TO VISIT OR NOT TO VISIT:**

V= Vital  
 I= Interest  
 S= Sends us  
 I= Into  
 T= The Homes

**GROUP LEADER.**

1. Coordinate and facilitate all group Bible studies.
2. Create the climate for group Bible study and other discussions.
3. Be sensitive to non-involve members of the group and involve them in all group activities
4. Attend weekly staff meeting and give report relative to the progress of the group.
5. Keep focus of the group away from controversial or doctrinal topics during Bible discussion time.
6. After two absents of a member organize visit with outreach coordinator.
7. KEEP MEETING WITHIN GIVEN TIME LIMIT-----?
8. Your absent members should be called either after the meeting on the following day.
9. Pray regular for your group members.
10. F.A.T people make the best leader.
  - F --- Faithful to God and your fellow group members
  - A --- Available, having and being willing to spend time.
  - T --- Teachable, open to instruction and learning.

**ASSISTANT GROUP LEADER:**

1. Lead out in the absence of group leader.
2. Lead out in group preliminaries e.g.. singspiration etc.
3. Work closely with group Leader and other staff members.
4. Attend weekly Staff meeting.
5. Assume Leadership of original group when group divides.
6. Keep update record of prayer requests

**CHRIST AS THE LEADER:**

<b>L</b> - oving	<b>HEBREWS 2:10</b>
Because He has made the way at such a cost.	
<b>E</b> - essential	<b>PHILLIPPIANS 4:19</b>
Cannot do without Him.	
<b>A</b> - bsolute	<b>JOHN 21:22</b>
Must let Him lead altogether.	
<b>D</b> - ivine	<b>JOHN 14:6</b>
He knows the way.	

**E** - xcellent

**PSALM 23:2-3**

Good company and He cannot err.

**R** - eady

**ISIAH 48:17**

But only becomes ours when we accept Him.

### HOSTESS/HOST

1. Prepare your home for Small Group meeting place.
2. Be genuine in warmth, love and acceptance.
3. Refreshment optional (Discuss with Leader, Asst. Leader and Outreach Coordinator).
4. Physical setting for group study-semi-circle and always with a vacant chair
5. All distractions must be handled by host/hostess

### HEBREWS 13:2

DO NOT NEGLECT TO SHOW HOSPITALITY  
TO STRANGERS, FOR THEREBY SOME HAVE  
ENTERTAINED STRANGERS (Angels)  
UNAWARES

Christians are always to seek ways and means to express love, concern and hospitality.

I went out to find a friend  
And friends were no where  
I went out to be a friend  
And friends were everywhere

**HOW TO BEGIN YOUR GROUP:****FIRST MEETING:**

- Get Acquainted Time...(1st. Base)
- History giving
  - Reason for becoming a member
  - Expectations from group.

**SECOND MEETING:**

- Affirmations and goals...(2nd Base)
- Sense of belonging
  - Membership bonding
  - Where do we go from here

**THIRD MEETING:**

- Redefine goals and commitment Time (3rd Base)
- Written goals and commitment
  - Demonstration of Lesson
  -

**FOURTH MEETING:**

**GO FOR IT (Home Base)**

Fellowship with Christ as : fellow saints in Home Bible Study Groups.

**GROUP PHILOSOPHY****SPIRITUALLY:**

Continual Christian growth and a deeper relationship with God and our fellowmen through Bible study, prayer and sharing.

**SOCIOLOGICALLY:**

Creation of opportunities for greater interaction, deeper level of sharing, fulfilling basic needs and achieving common goals.

**NO CHURCH CAN BEGIN TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT GOD IS CALLING THEM TO DO WITHOUT A POWER CENTER OF PRAYER. AND THERE IS NO GREATER JOY THAN THE JOY OF KNOWING GOD AND BEING IN LOVING FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM.**

20/20 Vision, p. 60.

PRAYER SCROLL

5:00 AM					
5:30 AM					
6:00 AM					
6:30 AM					
7:00 AM					
7:30 AM					
8:00 AM					
8:30 AM					
9:00 AM					
9:30 AM					
10:00 AM					
10:30 AM					
11:00 AM					
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9:00 PM					
9:30 PM					
10:00 PM					
10:30 PM					

## MY COVENANT AS A GROUP MEMBER

Depending on God as my guide and stay, I make a covenant with the members of my group to exercise the following disciplines:

1. Give priority to attending my group meetings, unless something inevitable occurs.
2. Participate freely in the Bible study and all activities of my group.
3. Cooperate with the social and spiritual activities of my group, knowing that it is the way by which God will use my group to keep me spiritually awake and growing.
4. Commit at least two hours weekly to the needs of my group.
  - a. Study my lesson for group discussion
  - b. Pray with my prayer partner
  - c. Pray for my group members by name and their needs
5. Actively involve in the Prayer Ministry of the groups.
6. Watch over and care for the member for whom I am a spiritual partner.
7. To incorporate at least one non-Christian into the fellowship of our group, thus helping him/her to have a clear knowledge of the goodness and love of God.

**I will try with God helping me to be a regular, caring  
and faithful member of this group.**

---

(Signature)

---

(Date)



## GROUP COVENANT:

As members of this group, for the next \_\_\_\_\_ weeks, we agree to the following disciplines:

- ATTENDANCE:** Priority be given to group meetings. Every member will faithfully attend all group meetings unless prevented by illness or other significant reasons.
- PARTICIPATION:** To be actively involved in all activities of the group thus creating a community of caring and concern individuals.
- PUNCTUALITY:** We begin our meeting on time, and if at all possible end on time.
- ACCOUNTABILITY:** If a member is missing, leadership will immediately implement absentee strategy so as to demonstrate love and concern for the missing.  
 First time missing....Phone call by leader or member.  
 Second time missing....Visit by leader and elder.  
 Additional strategies will be implemented as needed.
- CONFIDENTIALITY:** Keep whatever is shared in the group very confidential. Broken confidentiality is the fastest way, and the easiest route to destroy a group unity, its relationship and its ministry.
- PRAYER MINISTRY:** Directly involve in the prayer ministry of our group on a daily basis both for our individual group and the other groups in our church family.
- BIBLE STUDY:** We will familiarize ourselves with the study materials before coming to meetings.
- AFFIRMATION:** We will endeavor to see the goods in others at all times and positively speak of them.
- ACCESSIBILITY:** As group members we give each other the right to call upon one another for spiritual help in times of temptation and need--even in the middle of the night.
- EVANGELIZATION:** Both absentees and the unsaved will be of primary concern to our group.

**GROUP EVALUATION SHEET**

Below are tools for evaluating your group, performances. Please use the scale to indicate how well you evaluate the overall performance of your group.

- 5.....Superior
- 4.....Above average
- 3.....Average
- 2.....Below average
- 1.....Very poor

- ..... Meeting started promptly and ended on time.
- ..... Full participation of all members in group discussion.
- ..... Discussion was always focus on the topic or lesson under discussion.
- ..... Unclear statements were promptly clarified by leader.
- ..... Order and control were maintained throughout the meeting.
- ..... Physical setting were very appropriate.
- ..... Visitors were always welcome and they feel at home.
- ..... Leaders always stimulate creative thinking.
- ..... Leaders were always prepared for lesson discussion.
- ..... Group objectives were always kept before the group by leader.
- ..... Personal warmth and a sense of humor was always displayed by leader.
- ..... Discussions were free and open to all members, and there was always full participation from members.
- ..... Personal application was always made at the end of lesson discussion.
- ..... A real sense of closeness was experienced in our group.
- ..... We share a lot of our problems, but not much of God's grace.
- ..... A deep sense of caring and sharing were developed in our group.
- ..... Our group could deal more with situations within the group rather than outside the group.
- ..... We always affirm each other in our group discussion.
- ..... We found conversational prayer to be ideal for small group.
- ..... All our missing members were well cared for either by visit or by phone call.
- ..... In our group I learn to relate to both men and women without any hang-ups.
- ..... In my group I receive a lot of support for my problems.
- ..... I would like to see my group.....
- ..... Please write your response to questions on back of page.

**A LOOK AT YOUR GROUP**

Examine the quality of your group structure, and rate the following Dynamics in terms of being fulfilled within your group.

<b><u>ELEMENTS</u></b>	<b><u>USUALLY   SOMETIMES   SELDOM   RARELY</u></b>			
Teaching...Learning and applying God's Word	5	3	1	0
Fellowship...Building supportive, mutually accountable Relationship	5	3	1	0
Worship...Praising God for who He is, what He has done and is doing	5	3	1	0
Prayer...Listening to and sharing intimately with God, and interceding with God for one another	5	3	1	0
Power...Experiencing the filling and outpouring of the Holy Spirit	5	3	1	0
Caring... Group becomes the primary agency for meeting one another needs	5	3	1	0
Sharing...Group allows time for members to share what God is doing in their lives	5	3	1	0
Ministry...Utilizing spiritual gifts to bless the members of group	5	3	1	0

Evangelism...Sharing the  
good news, of  
salvation, so  
that People  
become Christ's  
disciples

5                      3                      1                      0

TOTAL

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### EVALUATION CONTINUUM

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0      10      20      30      40      50

#### KEY:

0-25====DANGEROUS ZONE  
25-35====NEEDS MUCH IMPROVEMENT  
35-40====NEEDS SOME IMPROVEMENT  
40-45====KEEP UP GOOD WORK.

## SUGGESTED PROGRAM

Group dynamics develop through interesting Bible study, worship, prayer, fellowship, sharing and opportunities to fulfill the mission given to the church. Ninety minutes is the time allotted for the meetings and the efficient group leader will see that the ten points of the program below fit nicely within the time frame for the meeting.

### 1. WELCOME:

The group leader gives a cordial welcome to each member and visitors to the meeting. He then invites God's presence by either praying or ask a member of the group to pray. (2-3 minutes).

### 2. ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Information from the Pastor will be conveyed to the head elder who in turn will convey such to the elders of each group who will in turn convey such to the leaders who will in turn convey the information to the members. Other group announcements are made at this time. (2-3 minutes)

### 3. RECOGNITION OF VISITORS:

Personal recognition by group leader and the setting is established for reception of new members into group fellowship. Every effort should be made to let visitors feel welcome. (3-4 minutes)

### 4. REVIEW OF COVENANT AND GOALS:

Individuals become member of the group by signing the covenant. This covenant must be kept in the member's notebook and this must be reviewed every week by the group leaders. To vary the format the leader might select other members at times to explain different points of the covenant. (2-3 minutes)

### 5. PRAISE, SHARING AND TESTIMONIES:

The group is like a family that meets once every week, and every member is interested in the welfare of the family. Members therefore take time out to share joys, victories, sorrows and concerns. These can be group related or personal concerns. (10-12 minutes)

### 6. PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:

After testimonies are given, the group takes time out to praise God for the blessings. Prayer can be done either individually or in a conversational style. Whichever approach is taken care should be exercised to include basic elements of confession, adoration, thanksgiving, intercession, petitions and submission to God's will. (5-7 minutes)

**7. OUTREACH PLAN:**

The actual progress relative to evangelism is reviewed

- a. Amt. Bible study in progress
- b. Visitors attending meeting
- c. Homes in community target to be reached
- d. **ABSENT MEMBERS REACHED**
- e. Visitation plan for non-attending church members  
(Elders are to give update report on visitation plan).  
(2-3 minutes).

**8. OFFERING:**

This is not a prerequisite for membership, however, this is worship and each one should be given the opportunity to worship God in giving. Special group envelop should be made available for the offering and the secretary should keep a record of all funds turned in to the church treasurer. (1-2 minutes)

**9. STUDY OF BIBLE LESSONS:**

No individual or group Christians can experience growth without the Holy Spirit and a solid study of the Bible. Regardless of the time of the other activities the time for Bible study should never be sacrificed. The leaders must remember that this period is not a preaching or teaching period, but an inductive study of the Bible sharing of the thoughts and ideas the Holy Spirit reveal to each one (30-50 minutes)

**10. CLOSING EXERCISE:**

Closing remarks and Prayer. (2-3 minutes)

Refreshments optional, but not on our time

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**APPENDIX G**  
**PROJECT EVALUATION FORM**

**PROJECT TITLE: The Development of a Program for the Retention of New Members in the New Jerusalem Seventh-day Adventist Church**

**MINISTRY EVALUATION FORM**

Your honest evaluation regarding Pastor Hall's Doctor of Ministry project is greatly appreciated. Please respond on the scale of one (1) to five (5), one being the lowest and five being the highest. Thanks.

1. Was the new paradigm for membership incorporation adequately explained and implemented?  
 Unclear 1                      2                      3                      4                      Very clear 5
2. Do you sense that individuals had the opportunity to be involved and minister as a result of this project?  
 No ministry 1                      2                      3                      4                      Good ministry 5
3. Do you sense that individuals were ministered to as a result of this project?  
 No ministry 1                      2                      3                      4                      Good ministry 5
4. Were you adequately able to help in carrying out these ministries?  
 Inadequately 1                      2                      3                      4                      Very adequately 5
5. How relevant was the project to the life and ministry of the New Jerusalem Church?  
 Irrelevant 1                      2                      3                      4                      Very relevant 5
6. Has the congregation benefitted from this project?  
 No benefit 1                      2                      3                      4                      Great benefit 5
7. Do you believe the congregation has an adequate understanding of evangelism and member assimilation?  
 Inadequate 1                      2                      3                      4                      Very adequate 5
8. Do you sense any noticeable improvement in the life of the congregation in their ability to incorporate new people?  
 No improvement 1                      2                      3                      4                      Great improvement 5



9. Do you sense that new members are being incorporated more effectively into the life and ministry of the church as a result of this project?

No improvement				Great improvement
1	2	3	4	5

10. List at least three positive strengths as a result of this project.

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11. List at least three suggestions for improvement.

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**APPENDIX H**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THOSE WHO JOINED THE**  
**CHURCH AS A RESULT OF THE PROJECT**

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THOSE WHO JOINED THE  
CHURCH AS A RESULT OF THE PROJECT

1. What is your gender:  
 Male  Female
2. What is your marital status?  
 Single  Divorced  
 Married  Spouse deceased  
 Separated
3. Income level:  
 \$ 0,001.00 - \$ 5,001.00  
 \$ 5,001.00 - \$10,000.00  
 \$10,001.00 - \$15,000.00  
 \$15,001.00 - \$20,000.00  
 \$20,001.00 - \$25,000.00  
 \$25,001.00 - \$30,000.00  
 \$30,001.00 - \$35,000.00  
 \$35,001.00 - \$40,000.00  
 \$40,001.00 - \$45,000.00  
 \$45,001.00 - \$50,000.00  
 \$50,001.00 - \$55,000.00
4. Before you came to the New Jerusalem church, what kind of friends did you have here?  
 Close friends  No friends at all  
 Casual friends  Other
5. How long have you been attending the New Jerusalem church?  
 Years  Months
6. How many friends can you identify in the church after the first six months?  
 0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8 or more
7. Does the church via this project help you in better understanding your Bible?  
Inadequately  1  2  3  4 Adequately  5
8. Does this project enable you to have a better understanding of the doctrines of the church?  
Inadequately  1  2  3  4 Adequately  5
9. How would you rate your spiritual growth and involvement in the New Jerusalem church?  
 Progressive  Much improved  
 Weak  Uncertain

10. Do you belong to a relationship group in the church where friendship is being built?
- |                          |                      |                          |               |
|--------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|---------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Sabbath School Class | <input type="checkbox"/> | Choir         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Board/Committee      | <input type="checkbox"/> | Men's group   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Bible study group    | <input type="checkbox"/> | Women's group |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Other                |                          |               |
11. Do you have a specific role or task in the church?
- |                          |                 |                          |           |
|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Elder           | <input type="checkbox"/> | Deacon    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Deaconess       | <input type="checkbox"/> | Secretary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Usher           | <input type="checkbox"/> | Teacher   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Witnessing team | <input type="checkbox"/> | Outreach  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Other           |                          |           |
12. How much a part of the New Jerusalem church do you feel?
- |                          |              |                          |          |
|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Very much so | <input type="checkbox"/> | Somewhat |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Growing      | <input type="checkbox"/> | Adequate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Not at all   | <input type="checkbox"/> | Fringe   |
13. If you feel a part of the church, how long did it take you?
- |                          |       |                          |        |
|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------|--------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Years | <input type="checkbox"/> | Months |
|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------|--------|
14. What was your first impression of the New Jerusalem church?
- |                          |           |                          |             |
|--------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|-------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Favorable | <input type="checkbox"/> | Unfavorable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Neutral   | <input type="checkbox"/> | Uncertain   |
15. How do you feel about the church now?
- |                          |                        |                          |                |
|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Spiritual satisfaction | <input type="checkbox"/> | Uncertain      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Growing                | <input type="checkbox"/> | Need more time |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Friendly               |                          |                |
16. How friendly do you feel that the New Jerusalem church is toward visitors?
- |                          |                 |                          |             |
|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Beyond services | <input type="checkbox"/> | At services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | In general      |                          |             |
17. Please list your three top suggestions for improving our ministry at the New Jerusalem church.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX I**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PASTORS**  
**REGARDING ASSIMILATION**

**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PASTORS  
REGARDING ASSIMILATION**

1. What is your denominational affiliation?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. How long have you pastored your church?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Average recent Saturday morning attendance?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Current membership: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Do you have a Pastor's Class for membership? \_\_\_\_\_  
If so, state length of course and primary features:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Do you have an evangelistic outreach ministry in your church? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, a brief description:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Do your members wear name tags? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Are there directional signs throughout your facilities?  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Do you have adequate off-street parking? \_\_\_\_\_
10. What kind of church advertising do you do?  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. Do you believe your church is staffed to grow, plateau, or decline? \_\_\_\_\_
12. Do you have greeters at the doors for your services?  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. Do you supply visitor information packets to newcomers?  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. Do you have a visitation program to visit newcomers to your church? \_\_\_\_\_
15. Please state an approximate number of small groups within your church (such as Bible studies, discipleship groups, special interest groups, shepherding groups, Sabbath school, choir, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

16. Do you sense that newer people are finding their way into these groups? \_\_\_\_\_ Please state an approximate percentage: \_\_\_\_\_
17. Approximately how many new groups have been started during the past two years in the church? \_\_\_\_\_
18. Do you sense that newer people are being appointed to leadership boards and committees? \_\_\_\_\_ Please state an approximate percentage: \_\_\_\_\_
19. Do you have a system or committee for helping newer people find their way into smaller relational groups and/or leadership and ministry roles and tasks in the church? \_\_\_\_\_
20. Do you sense that church members are inviting newcomers to events within the church? \_\_\_\_\_
21. Do you consider your facilities to be adequate for numerical growth? \_\_\_\_\_
22. Approximately how many visitors do you average per Saturday? \_\_\_\_\_
23. How do you minister to first-time visitors in the service? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
24. How do you minister to first-time visitors once Saturday has passed? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
25. What percent of first-time visitors would you sense return for a second or third visit? \_\_\_\_\_
26. Why do you believe some newcomers stay at your church? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
27. Why do you believe some newcomers do not remain at your church? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
28. Does your church follow up dropouts? \_\_\_\_\_
29. What is your satisfaction level concerning the job you are doing in assimilating new members?
- |             |   |   |   |   |           |
|-------------|---|---|---|---|-----------|
| Unsatisfied |   |   |   |   | Satisfied |
| 1           | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |           |

30. State three areas in which you are doing well concerning assimilating new people:

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---

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31. State three areas that need improvement concerning assimilating new people:

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**APPENDIX J**  
**A PROFILE OF THE NEW JERUSALEM**  
**SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH**

**A PROFILE OF THE NEW JERUSALEM  
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH**

**Location:**

1605 E. North Street  
Bradley, Illinois 60915  
(Mailing address)  
P. O. Box 1792  
Bradley, IL 60915  
Phone: 1-815-933-2005

**Affiliations:**

Illinois Conference of SDA Churches  
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

**Staff:**

Enell O. Hall	Church Pastor
Ryan McNeal	Elder
Molly Banks	Secretary
Shirley Douglas	Treasurer
Denise McLain	Custodian (part-time)
Don McNeal	Organist

**Church Boards and Committees:**

Administrative Board  
Shepherding Elders  
Administrative Elders  
Christian Education Board  
Board of Finance  
Evangelism Board  
Shepherding Deaconesses  
Nominating Committee  
Music Committee  
Outreach Committee  
Women's Ministry Team  
Usher Board  
Men's Ministry Team  
Worship Committee  
Children's Ministry Council

## History:

Historical information about the New Jerusalem Church is very vague until shortly after 1892. A pioneer known only as "Sheppler" returned from Europe to visit his family and friends. He had taken the Sabbath truth and the American dream to Europe and there he shared it with his friends. They became very interested to the extent that many migrated to the United States, subsequently swelling the membership of the church.

By the early 1890s more than one hundred individuals were in attendance at services, however, by 1942 it declined to twelve members. In 1951 Reverend Walter A. Kolmodine called a meeting to propose the disposal of the property. The property was sold in 1952, and the old and aging group met in a temporary building.

During the closing months of 1954, an evangelistic meeting was conducted by Evangelist John R. Caslow, and numerical growth of the church was evident. By August 1955, two lots were purchased for the construction of a church building, and as early as 1958 construction began. Then on May 16, 1958, the church was officially opened for worship. In 1962, under the leadership of Elder Roger H. Ferris, all indebtedness of the church was cleared and dedication was held December 1962.

Elder Ferris served the church until the end of 1962, when Elder Roland M. Smith became the first local pastor. Elder A. R. Friedrich, the district leader, assisted Elder Smith in an evangelistic series. There was a steady growth in membership, however, one factor that adversely affected the church was the number of times it was relocated. Between 1892 and 1992, the church was relocated five times, including its present address: 1605 E. North Street, Bradley, IL.

In 1965 the church began to experience an ethnic shift when the first African-American, Lennie McNeal, and his son, Ryan, began to attend the church. Lennie was baptized in 1965 and shortly thereafter a massive ethnic shift followed. Today the church has a predominantly African-American congregation, with a membership of 146.

Pastors Who Served the Church:

Elder Sheppler	1892-1900
	1900-1942 <sup>1</sup>
Elder Walter A. Kolmodine	1942-1951
Elder Victor R. Brown	1951-1955
Elder John R. Caslow	1955-1960
Elder R. H. Nasvall	1960-1962
Elder Roger H. Ferris	1962-1968
Elder Roland M. Smith	1968-1969
Elder R. H. Francher	1969-1971
Elder V. W. Esquilla	1971-1973
Elder A. R. Friedrich	1973-1975
Elder M. Sharp	1975-1977
Elder D. Wright	1977-1979
Elder R. Schone	1979-1980
Elder Marvin Humble	1980-1982
Elder R. Petterson	1982-1985
Elder L. Coleman	1985-1992
Elder E. O. Hall	1992-present

Surrounding Community:

The New Jerusalem Seventh-day Adventist Church is located on the east side of Bradley in Kankakee Township. Bradley is predominantly a Caucasian community with just about five percent Afro-Americans and Hispanics. New buildings, including houses, a recently built shopping mall, restaurants, and a proposed international airport northwest of Kankakee are very evident in the area. New Jerusalem SDA church is located in the fast-growing area of the township. Most of the families moving into the area are part of the baby boomer group with young families. Many of these families are professional people. Bradley borders the once flourishing city of Kankakee, and the New Jerusalem SDA Church lies two miles north of the city of Kankakee.

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<sup>1</sup>No written historical record can be obtained for the period 1900-1942. Information obtained from Molly Banks, church secretary, October 14, 1998.

**APPENDIX K**  
**BOARD RATIOS OF THE NEW JERUSALEM**  
**SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH**

## BOARD RATIOS AT NEW JERUSALEM SDA CHURCH

One (1) in every five (5) board members should have joined the church within the last two (2) years.<sup>1</sup>

<u>Boards</u>	<u>Last Two Years</u>
Elders	0:4
Evangelism Board	1:6
Shepherding Elders	0:4
Deacon Board	1:6
Mission Board	1:4
Deaconess Board	1:5
Education Board	1:6
Youth Council	<u>1:5</u>
Totals	6:40
Recommended	8:40

This information is based on the church statistics for August 1998.

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<sup>1</sup>Win Arn, The Church Growth Ratio Book (Pasadena, CA: Church Growth, Inc., 1987), 14.

**APPENDIX L**  
**LIST OF TITLES COMPILED**  
**FROM MINISTRY**

LIST OF AUTHORS DISCUSSING THE PROBLEM OF MEMBERSHIP  
ASSIMILATION IN MINISTRY FROM 1929-1997  
ARRANGED CHRONOLOGICALLY

Author	Article	Date	Page
McElhany, J. L.	Shepherding the Flock	4/1929	15
Patterson, N. C.	Holding Our Converts	4/1929	10
Hayes, C. B.	Holding Our Members	4/1929	10-14
Campbell, M. N.	Curbing Membership Loss	4/1936	19
Cardey, E. L.	Accountability for Baptisms	4/1938	13
McElhany, J. C.	Holding the Flock	8/1936	5
Froom, R. L.	Holding the Flock	1/1936	4
Cardey, E. L.	Accountability for Baptisms	5/1938	14
Benton, L. R.	Distributing Responsibility	6/1938	13
Shuler, J. L.	Conserving Evangelism Results	1/1939	7
Rapp, G. S.	Establishing New Converts	11/1940	19
Ross, J. R.	Preventing Back Door Loss	12/1940	20
Vandeman, H. A.	Let's Stop the Leak	9/1941	24
Wright, J. F.	Conserving Evangelism Gains	4/1943	15-16
Froom, L. E.	Souls Retained	5/1943	15
Wright, L. E.	A Grave and Sobering Challenge	3/1944	3-4
Froom, L. E.	Working for Quality Not Quantity	1/1947	22
Carchich, Th.	How to Check Our Apostasies	8/1947	27
Williams, G.	The Pastor's Responsibility	12/1950	21
Christensen, H.	Reducing Apostasies	5/1951	9-10
Untersehen, W. J.	Helping Flock to Grow	12/1953	11-12
Strickland	Helping Weak Members	6/1954	18-24
Brewer, N. F.	Conserving Our Membership	12/1955	9-45
Rudy, H. L.	Receiving and Holding Converts	9/1963	29



Cleveland, E. E.	Closing That Door	8/1961	41
Archibald, A. C.	Establishing New Converts	8/1961	14
Larson, R.	Holding Our Members	4/1957	40
Sandefur, C.	How to Reduce Apostasy	4/1964	20
Guild, D. R.	Shut That Door	10/1965	48
Wilson, J. O.	Shepherd of the Flock	2/1965	33-35
Beck, R.	A Work of First Importance	12/1966	15
Burnside, G.	Reducing Apostasy	2/1967	17-20
Fowler, J.	Caring for New Converts	4/1970	4-5
Pierson, R.	Restorers	3/1970	18-19
Berg, O. M.	After Baptism, What?	11/1972	22
Berg, O. M.	Put the New Converts to Work	10/1972	20
Butler, W. A.	Rooting and Grounding New Converts	7/1980	18
Crena, M.	How to Prevent Dropout	11/1993	24
Cress, J.	New Members Needs	12/1993	26
Guild, D.	Establishing New Converts	4/1994	14

**APPENDIX M**  
**CRUCIAL RATIO FORMULA**

## CRUCIAL RATIO FORMULA

Friendship Ratio	1:7	Seven friends to every new member within first six months of membership
Group Ratio	1:5	One new group to every five existing groups in the church
Visitor's Ratio	1:100	Five in every one hundred in attendance should be community visitors
Staff Ratio	1:150	One full-time staff member to every one hundred and fifty members
Role/Task Ratio	60:100	Sixty specific roles to every one hundred members of the church
Committee Member Ratio	1:5	One in every five committee members should have joined the church within the past two years

**APPENDIX N**  
**MEMBERSHIP STATISTICS BY DIVISION, 1997**

**MEMBERSHIP STATISTICS BY DIVISION, 1997**

<b>Percentage of Apostasies/ Divisions</b>	<b>Membership Beginning of Year</b>	<b>Baptism/ Profession of Faith</b>	<b>Apostasies/ Missing</b>	<b>Membership Close of Year</b>	
<b>Africa-Indian Ocean Division</b>	1,169,680	117,376	25,841	1,236,142	22.02
<b>Eastern Africa Division</b>	1,579,726	159,803	38,259	1,655,091	24.00
<b>Euro-Africa Division</b>	456,155	25,243	3,067	475,032	12.15
<b>Inter-American Division</b>	1,654,683	146,195	43,674	1,703,467	29.87
<b>South American Division</b>	1,433,612	131,151	44,045	1,513,438	33.58
<b>North American Division</b>	1,858,364	35,493	13,390	875,811	37.73
<b>South Pacific Division</b>	291,776	13,492	5,377	249,019	39.85
<b>Euro-Asia Division</b>	114,868	21,039	7,655	126,357	36.38
<b>Southern Asia Division</b>	239,887	24,299	271	264,778	1.1
<b>Trans-European Division</b>	42,841	2,931	2,581	92,100	87.88
<b>Southern Africa Union Conference</b>	72,229	3,455	461	69,628	20.66
<b>China</b>					
<b>World's Total 1997</b>	9,296,127	744,798	191,661	9,702,834	25.73
<b>World's Total 1996</b>	8,812,555	719,679	187,833	9,296,127	26.10
<b>Net Gained (Decreased)</b>	+53,371	25,121	3,828	406,707	15.29

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## VITA

**Name:** Enell Oswald Hall

**Date and Place of Birth:**  
December 22, 1939  
Manchester, Jamaica

**Primary and Secondary Education:**  
St. Jago Elementary School, 1946-1952  
West Indies College High School, 1965-1966

**Undergraduate and Graduate Schools Attended:**  
West Indies College, Mandeville, Jamaica, 1967-1970  
Andrews University SDA Theological Seminary, 1978-1981  
Loma Linda University School of Public Health, 1981-1982

**Degrees Awarded:**  
Bachelor of Theology, 1970  
Master of Divinity, 1981  
Master of Public Health, 1982  
Doctor of Ministry, 1999

**Professional Experience:**  
Intern pastor, 1970-1971  
Pastor, Southwestern Manchester circuit of churches, 1971-1975  
Pastor, Linstead circuit of churches, 1975-1978  
Pastor, Beverly Hills Church (pastoral staff of three and school with enrollment of 43), 1982-1990  
Pastor, New Height & New Jerusalem SDA Churches, 1987-  
Associated Chaplain, Riverside Hospital, Kankakee, IL  
Member of Conference Executive Committee, 1995-