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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR GROWTH IN THE SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST CHURCH IN FINLAND USING THE NATURAL  
CHURCH DEVELOPMENT APPROACH BASED ON  
A CASE STUDY IN THE TURKU SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST CHURCH

By

Aimo Helminen

Advisers: Bruce L. Bauer,  
Rudi Maier

## ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR GROWTH IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN FINLAND USING THE NATURAL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT APPROACH BASED ON A CASE STUDY IN THE TURKU SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

Name of researcher: Aimo Helminen

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Date completed: June 2005

### Problem

The growth of the Adventist Church in Finland stagnated in the mid 1980s and after that the membership of the church began to slowly decrease. There is a need to look at the past growth patterns of the church in Finland to discover the reasons for the present decline in membership and develop and implement a strategy for church growth.

### Method

Current literature was reviewed, including books and articles on the principles and strategies of church growth. These were studied in the context of the Turku Church in order to determine if the principles in the Natural Church Development (NCD) approach

could be contextualized to be used as a careful analysis tool of the problem and also for the purpose of strategy building. The project was planned and implemented as a case study in the Turku Adventist Church.

## Results

The NCD paradigm was chosen as the preferred approach to the church growth problem. A strategy with an action plan based on NCD was developed and partially implemented in the Turku Church. The Church is willing to develop the plan further in order to remove the barriers for growth. The analysis of the NCD survey has given direction for further development in the quality of the church, which is likely to produce quantitative growth in the future. There is greater confidence and enthusiasm in the church although the process is at an early stage of implementation. The lessons learned will be used in the future revisions of the revitalization and church planting strategy of the Finnish Church.

## Conclusion

The early results indicated that with the help of an NCD survey the church will become more aware of the barriers for growth and it can develop a well-structured plan for future growth in quality and quantity. The NCD process will also increase the effectiveness of the leadership as the strategy is further developed and implemented according to the project plan. It is also expected that the strategy will increase the health and growth of the Church.

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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ADVENTIST CHURCH

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

by  
Aimo Helminen

June 2005




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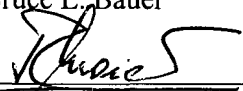
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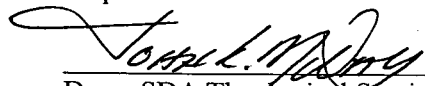
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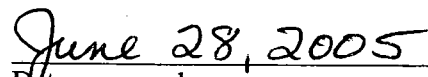
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Dedicated to Kaisu  
Friend, Wife  
and  
Companion in Ministry



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
CP	Church Planting
EC	European Community (became EU in 1992)
EU	European Union
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
NCD	Natural Church Development
NIV	New International Version of the Bible
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
RAMP	Religious and Moral Pluralism
SDA	Seventh-day Adventist Church
SKS	Suomen Kirjallisuuden Seura (Literary Society of Finland)
SLN	Suomen Lähetysneuvosto (Finnish Missionary Council)
STAKES	Sosiaali- ja terveysalan tutkimus ja kehittämiskeskus (National Research and Development for Welfare and Health)
SVKN	Suomen Vapaakristillisyyden Neuvosto (The Council of Free Christianity in Finland)

## PREFACE

The Christian Church was planted in Finland at the beginning of the last millennium and ever since it has been an important part of Finnish society. The development of the Finnish language and culture has been closely connected with the religious heritage of the country. The Church and the nation have been tightly connected. But the world is changing rapidly. Through globalization and intercultural relationships Finland has become more diverse. Traditional religious institutions are losing their importance as urbanization, secularization, and a new emerging culture have made society increasingly estranged and distant from institutionalized religion.

Adventism has been part of the Christian landscape of Finland from the beginning of the 1890s growing most rapidly during times of social unrest. The early pioneers of Adventism were often very conscious of their calling and were willing to suffer hardships because of their faith. But like the emerging new generation, Adventism has changed, just like the world has. The Church has matured in many ways but the new generation seems to have lost some of its missionary spirit.

I have had the joy of being part of the Adventist family since my birth and I have been blessed in so many ways by my parents' home and my own family, by Toivonlinna School and Newbold College, by the churches with whom I have lived and ministered, and by the group of colleagues who have journeyed with me in this Doctor of Ministry Program. God has used all these people to build my life and my ministry. Ten years of ministry in Turku has been a blessing. Thank you all. I am looking forward to

continuing the journey with you and may we have the joy of seeing our ministries multiplied as we serve our God and people near and far.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Purpose**

The growth of the Adventist Church in Finland stagnated in the mid 1980s and after that the membership of the Church began to slowly decrease. The average annual number of baptisms has fluctuated during the last twenty years but generally there has been a downward trend. The traditional methods of evangelism are no longer very effective and the new methods of reaching secular or even religious people have not been productive enough to maintain even the present level of membership. At the same time there has been a decline in the number of pastors working in Finland. Some have left the ministry in discouragement or because of other problems. Many, previously successful evangelists, have retired and the new pastoral workers do not have credible missionary models or seem to lack the vision or ability to break through to challenge the status quo. The maintenance role of pastors is more easily assumed than that of a church planter or an evangelist.

The task of the project is to look at the past growth patterns of the Church in Finland especially from the perspective of the Turku Church, discover the reasons for the stagnation in church attendance and membership and develop and implement a strategy for church growth.



## Justification

The stagnation in the growth of the Turku Church needs to be investigated to determine, if possible, its cause. There are some important contextual factors that have to be understood but there are also institutional factors found within the denomination and the local churches that cause stagnation. A local church has very little influence on the wider contextual factors. The local church can affect some of the institutional factors, but most of all it can review those institutional factors within its own sphere of influence and attempt to overcome the barriers to growth.

There is an awareness of the downward trend in the Church and openness for an honest inquiry into the causes of that trend. There is also a willingness on the part of the church board to enter into this kind of a spiritual and practical process of growing together in order to change the present course of the church. The vision and strategy for church growth presented in this paper is based on theological, cultural, and sociological analyses relevant to the setting of the church and should not be separated from the spiritual formation process of the pastor who is the leader of the church.

At present, the Natural Church Development (NCD) approach, developed by Christian Schwartz, is the most popular church growth tool and is used by more than 38,000 churches around the world. NCD is a major resource providing insight for missiologists and tools for the churches who seek ways of promoting growth in an increasingly secularized mission field. There is a need to find out whether its wider popularity in the world matches its usefulness in the Finnish Adventist context.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The exact number of church profiles done worldwide was 38,198 on 27 May 2005 according to the official web-pages of the Institute for Natural Church Development

This study also has wider implications for the revitalization of the Adventist Church in Finland. The use of the NCD approach in Finland began when its national partner, the Council of Free Christianity in Finland,<sup>1</sup> started to promote its approach in their member churches in 2003. Some Lutheran and other Christian churches also joined the national NCD team to promote it in their congregations.

It is still too early to say whether this project will prove to be successful in practice. There are many barriers to overcome. Revitalising stagnated or even declining churches is difficult and often involves a change in paradigm. Rediscovering core values, developing a mission and vision statement, and a strategy are not optional—they are vital for change. The hope is that it is not too late. Audrey Malphurs notes that, “As difficult as church planting and starting a new curve in a growing work are, revitalization of a declining ministry is the most difficult and the least likely to succeed.”<sup>2</sup> The right

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(www.ncdnet.org). The basic tool for analyzing church health is the standardized NCD survey, which will produce a “Church Profile” and more recently “Profile Plus,” which is a more advanced graphic representation of the survey results. The principles behind the tool are outlined in Schwarz’s three books *Natural Church Development Handbook: A Practical Guide to a New Approach* (Bedford, UK: British Church Growth Association, 1998); *Natural Church Development Implementation Manual* (Bedford, UK: British Church Growth Association, 1998), and *Paradigm Shift: How Natural Church Development Can Transform Theological Thinking* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1999). The Implementation manual was co-authored with Christoph Schalk. There are other materials and training seminars that are provided by the Institute for Natural Church Development and its International Partners for the promotion of NCD.

<sup>1</sup>The Council of Free Christianity in Finland (Suomen vapaakristillinen neuvosto, SVKN) consists of “free churches” (free-standing organizations without any direct links with the state). This group includes the Evangelical Free Church, Methodist Church, Adventist Church, the Pentecostal Church, and the Salvation Army. For more information see <http://www.svkn.fi/>. SVKN is an International Partner of NCD in Finland. NCD Team Finland (hereafter NCD Team) is a task force promoting NCD in Finland.

<sup>2</sup>Audrey Malphurs, *Strategic Planning: A New Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2000), 50.

mixture of leadership skills and spiritual gifts are needed to instigate major changes. It remains to be seen if the process started in Turku and in the wider context of the Church in Finland will succeed. Hopefully it will at least lead the Church in the right direction.

This project, when eventually completed, will give some assistance to the church administrators in their leadership, training, and equipping ministry for pastors and elders, especially in applying NCD principles to revitalization and church planting projects. The goal of this project is to equip pastors and local leaders to train their church members to be involved in the growth of the church.

### **Limitations**

The study focuses mainly on the local church in Turku but also has national applications. This project involves the leaders who are involved in church planting and strategy planning for the Adventist Church planting movement in Finland. Thus the principles of NCD will not only be applied to revitalization projects but also to planting new churches.

This study is limited to a period of approximately ten years prior and four years after the project commencement. All that is referred to outside of this time frame is very selective and only intended as background information. The results of the project cannot be reported in full within the time frame of this study. But some of the early results of the process will indicate where the project is heading. This is just the beginning of a long process, the ultimate success of which can only be evaluated in the more distant future.

## Methodology

There is no single reason for the stagnation of a church but the problems are multifaceted. One solution to the problem is to study, in a broad way, the principles of church growth. For this dissertation current literature was reviewed, including books and articles on the principles and strategies of church growth. These were studied in order to find out if the principles found in NCD are sound and well suited for the purpose of the current project and also for the purpose of strategy building.

Having selected NCD church vitalization and church growth principles, it became evident that the most important analysis tool used for the project was the NCD survey. It was used to determine present quality factors, which indicated the strengths and the weaknesses of the Turku Church. The “Church Profile” and particularly its latest version “Profile Plus” serve as a tool in developing a strategy for the Turku Church. Adventist missiologist Erich W. Baumgartner says that “the Natural Church Development program . . . is, in my estimation, one of the most significant contributions to the field of church growth.”<sup>1</sup>

The preparations for the project started in 2002. Special attention was given in its earlier stages to a spiritual formation process of the pastor and his leadership team in equipping them for the role of becoming change agents. The growth patterns of the Turku Church were studied over the past ten years with all the available information coming from the church records. Also, an informal core group met to discuss and

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<sup>1</sup>Erich W. Baumgartner, “Mission in Europe,” in *Re-Visioning Adventist Mission in Europe*, (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), 44.

envision a revitalization process for the Turku Church and the project plan was also discussed by the church board as it was being developed.

During 2002 the theological and spiritual basis for ministry and mission was formulated, and in 2003 research focused on a cultural and religious analysis. Research data was collected from books, from local and national statistics, from the internet, and from church statistics. Religious and sociological profiles of Finnish society and the city of Turku were studied to determine the major trends in the society regarding values and needs that are dominant. Special demographic groups were studied including student and immigrant communities to find out possible avenues for establishing contacts for evangelistic outreach.

In 2004 an implementation strategy on the local as well as on the national level was developed. A four-year plan was started in 2005. The strategy is outlined in the form of a logframe including an action plan listing what will be done for each of the following years. Specified indicators were determined, which will be used to know if the project has reached its goals or not. The strategic plan started to be implemented in Turku in 2005. The first results of the project will be reported in this dissertation. The project will continue until 2008.

### **Outline**

This dissertation project has five chapters. The first chapter provides an outline of the project. The second chapter describes the personal and theological basis of ministry. The messenger and the message cannot be separated. A spiritual leader, usually a pastor, is not born in a vacuum but comes with a collection of ideas and attitudes of doing ministry which are shaped by his family, church, his theological education, and a host of

other experiences in life. It is essential for him to know why he is a pastor, what his values are, and to also understand the values of his church. It is important to have an authentic spiritual life and a biblical and theological basis that is consistent with the mission of the church in order to implement a sustainable ministry.

Many have criticized the church growth movement and not always without reason. Some even think that the church growth movement is not relevant any more. Therefore, the historical development of the church growth movement will be reviewed in the second chapter and the relevant theological debate on the direction of the movement will also be discussed.

The third chapter discusses the context of this project. The church is in the world surrounded by culture. In Europe and particularly in Finland, the changes in the society have been rapid. These need to be studied carefully in order to use the right methods for efficient church growth and ministry.

The fourth chapter is about strategy. The theory of ministry is of little value without a plan in order to implement the ministries of a church. A strategy, therefore, is an outline of the principles found in Scripture—and in the reality of life that guides in the implementation of an action plan that is in harmony with these principles and that is relevant and contextualized in the setting.

In the last chapter the whole process will be drawn together and the early results of the project will be presented. The problems confronted in the implementation of the strategy will also be discussed in order to redirect the project. Suggestions and recommendations for the stakeholders will be made to facilitate further steps in the implementation of the strategy.

## CHAPTER 2

### PERSONAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR MINISTRY

#### **Introduction**

I have entered this Doctor of Ministry program in order to become a person who is better prepared to take up the challenge of being a pastor of a church that is prepared to live for and witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in a meaningful way in the cultural setting of Finnish society in the twenty-first century. There is a need for spiritual leaders within the Seventh-day Adventist Church who have a vision, who make a meaningful connection to the culture of their audience, and who have a strategy for authentic ministry that arises from the basis of one's own heart, shaped by God.<sup>1</sup>

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is growing but much of the current growth is in Asia (India and the Philippines), Africa, and Latin America. Membership growth in North America has plateaued, and in Western Europe it is actually in decline, except among immigrant communities. Membership in Finland is also in decline. There are numerous reasons for this decline: urbanization, secularism, and materialism are probably

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<sup>1</sup>Reggie A. McNeal, *Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), xi. Heart-shaping is a term used by McNeal in reference to spiritual formation. It involves both human and divine activity. He claims that a leader needs self-understanding, which will help him to be better prepared to lead amid the growing

the greatest. The world is currently living in the midst of the largest mass migration in human history. The east is moving west. The south is moving north. Ninety-five percent of these migrants are moving into cities. Bruce Moyer notes, "Across the globe, non-Christian cities are sprouting as if out of nowhere, blocking the advance of Christian mission. We cannot bypass these cities; we cannot go around them. These are primary targets for Christian mission."<sup>1</sup> Our church is not doing very well in urban contexts. We have an anti-urban mentality and we have consistently neglected the training of urban pastors and missionaries.

Along with urban growth we are faced with increasing secularism and materialism, which is also influencing the Adventist Church. As Bertil Wiklander notes, "The values and attitudes of church members are increasingly being eroded by the process of secularization which operates even in the cultural environment of the church."<sup>2</sup>

Where should we be going as a church? What is the Adventist Christian perspective on mission and ministry that is culturally contextualized for the new millennium? The purpose of this study is to make room for growth and change in the ways of doing ministry. This change involves personal as well as corporate spiritual formation, which according to Robert Mulholland, is "a process of being conformed to

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discontinuities at the dawn of the third Christian millennium. The goal is not primarily becoming a great leader but a great person.

<sup>1</sup>Bruce Moyer, "The Cities," in *Re-Visioning Adventist Mission in Europe*, ed. Erich W. Baumgartner (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), 89.

<sup>2</sup>Bertil Wiklander, "Mission in the Trans-European Division," in *Re-Visioning Adventist Mission in Europe*, ed. Erich W. Baumgartner (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), 28.



the image of Christ for the sake of others.”<sup>1</sup> It will also involve studying the theories and principles of church growth and applying the correct principles and methods for the problems—starting from the life of the spiritual leader and then addressing the problems of the church. Audrie Malphus says that “the person who leads is as important, if not more important, than the process itself.”<sup>2</sup> And consequently “as the pastor of the church grows, so grows the church.”<sup>3</sup>

## Personal Background

### Biography

I was born as the second child of seven to an Adventist family. I am a fourth generation Adventist from my mother’s side and the third generation Adventist from my father’s side. My father had little more education than was customary when he was a youth. He graduated from the Adventist secondary school and became an entrepreneur. He had a keen mind for studying the Bible and teaching it to others in the church. My mother was married to my father at the age of twenty-one, my father being twenty-seven. Together they had seven children. My mother has been a housewife all her life. They are still living in the same house in Nummela village, which has now become a small town, forty-five kilometers from Helsinki, where I spent most of my childhood years. Most of my relatives are also Adventists, including several Adventist pastors.

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<sup>1</sup>Robert M. Mulholland, Jr., *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 15.

<sup>2</sup>Audrie Malphurs, *Pouring New Wine into Old Wineskins: How to Change a Church Without Destroying It* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 57.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 119.

My Adventist heritage has further been strengthened by my education in Adventist schools from the secondary level through university. I was also an active youth leader in the church before I became a pastor. I started to work for the church as a student literature evangelist in the countryside and small cities of Finland during nine summers between the ages of 14 to 23, selling Christian literature from door to door. This experience helped me to get to know people, and understand what some of their concerns were.

The biggest influence on my early childhood was my mother, who prayed for all seven of her children, read the Bible and *Uncle Arthur's Bible Stories*, and taught us how to do missionary work in the neighborhood. She still loves to go to people's homes selling Adventist literature, doing ingathering for Adventist missions, giving literature for people to read, taking religious tapes and videos to people in her neighborhood, and witnessing about her love for Jesus. She has had the joy of seeing some of her contacts become Adventists, having all of her seven children being baptized in the church, with most of them remaining actively engaged in the mission of the church.

My father was an elder in the church for many years and often taught Sabbath school classes. He is still an active member of the church and a loving father to his now grown children and a kind-hearted grandfather to his nine grandchildren.

I married Kaisu, my wife, when I was 21 and she was 19. We had known each other for three years before we married. We have two children, Laura, born in 1987 and Miika, born in 1992. My wife has supported me during all the years of studying and in my ministry for the Adventist Church in Finland. She has her own career as a singer of classical music and as a voice coach. Where there are two working parents in a pastoral

family, stress can exist, but we have tried to be as supportive to each other as possible. Her love and her gift of music and especially singing has enriched my ministry for the church immensely, for which I praise God and give thanks to her.

### Present Ministry

I have worked in the ministry of the Adventist Church in Finland since 1985, excluding one year of postgraduate studies. I started as the Youth Director for the East Finland Conference and after a year of postgraduate studies at Newbold College in England (1985-86), I became a pastor of a 300 member church in Helsinki. I stayed there for nine years until I was transferred to Turku, which is a 340 member church, where I am presently the pastor. The Turku Church previously had a team of two and sometimes three paid ministerial workers, but due to the current shortage of workers and financial resources the conference has not been able to appoint more than one pastor to the church for a number of years. In addition to being the only paid pastor in Turku, I have been asked to be the Family Life Director for the Finnish Union for several years and have taken an active part in the major revision of the *Finnish Adventist Church Hymnal*, a process that lasted about ten years.

In the summer of 2004 I was elected as the Personal Ministries Director for the Finnish Conference. In addition to this appointment I continued as the senior pastor of the Turku Church. Since the fall of 2004, I have an assistant pastor and an intern sharing the ministry in Turku. However, the assistant pastor and the intern are also serving the Toivonlinna School church in Piikkiö, twenty kilometers from Turku. These limitations in human resources could threaten the implementation of this dissertation project but

hopefully the right adjustments can be made to facilitate the successful implementation of the project.

## **Refocusing My Ministry**

### **Call Clarification**

The reason I became a pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has a lot to do with my family of origin. I grew up in a home where the church played an important part and where I had many inspiring role models both in the church and among my family and relatives. But beyond that there was that inner, somewhat mysterious, voice that made me feel that I was being called by God. As McNeal says, “The call is a mystery. It begins and ends with God, but loops through a very human individual. It is personal, but bigger than the person. The call comes out of who we are as well as shaping who we are. It has both being and doing components. The call involves relationship at its core, not just function or task, though it carries clear task components.”<sup>1</sup> God has a very special claim on us for a special purpose. To be called to spiritual leadership is, however, not to be confused with the more general sense of calling to be a disciple of Jesus. I am fully aware that a career and a call are two very different things.

There were times that I have not been able to say “no” to the many demands in the church and I have neglected the needs of my family and myself. I have had to ask myself: “Am I really fulfilling God’s agenda or somebody else’s?” In the end, I believe I responded to God’s call. “There is an Audience of One that I need to cultivate. Only his

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<sup>1</sup>McNeal, 95.

approval assuages insignificance and loneliness and feelings of failure.”<sup>1</sup> God has been patient with me.

### Leadership Development

There is a constant challenge to change our ways of doing ministry and redirect our ministry with the help of different training resources. This present study provides an opportunity to sharpen my vision, refocus my spiritual life, study the culture where I am working, and reformulate a strategy for my ministry and that of my church. McNeal claims that “apostolic leadership” is a new emerging model of Christian ministry for a “new apostolic era.” It is missional and kingdom conscious. Leaders are team players and they are entrepreneurial. Their ministries explode with all kinds of efforts designed to attract people to Christ. They are schooled by the business culture. They are people developers, visionary and spiritual.<sup>2</sup> Baumgartner says: “What we need . . . is not just management and maintenance, but visionary leaders who will lead this church through the perilous waters of change.”<sup>3</sup> This kind of leadership skill is needed for the purpose of deciding what needs to be done, creating capacity to accomplish what needs to be done, and ensuring that it actually gets done. True leaders create vision and strategies but they cannot accomplish the work alone. The goal is to help people understand and buy into the vision. Baumgartner suggests that leaders need to adopt the language of stories and

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<sup>1</sup>McNeal, 113.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 102-7.

<sup>3</sup>Baumgartner, “Needs for Leadership and Training,” in *Re-Visioning Adventist Mission in Europe*, 194.

pictures. People need to be involved in deciding how the church's vision can be achieved. For this purpose the leader needs to provide role modeling, training, feedback, and coaching.<sup>1</sup>

It seems that effective ministry is best done in a team that is praying, working, and also having fun together. Unfortunately this is not always possible in many of our churches where the fulltime pastor works alone. In such circumstances we should create teams consisting of the pastor and lay leaders.

A common problem in pastoral leadership is the lack of empowerment and delegation. "When we examine growth potential in a congregation, we discover that when a pastor primarily does the ministry in the congregation, rather than leading others to do the ministry, growing potential remains small."<sup>2</sup> The ministry and the leadership of the church is a critical point where the church will either suffer immensely or flourish abundantly.

### Holistic Lifestyle

Richard Swenson's book *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to the Overloaded Lives* has helped me to clarify some of my personal goals in a more holistic way. Swenson discusses the role of stress and overload in life. He defines stress as not being the circumstance but our response to the circumstance.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Baumgartner, "Needs for Leadership and Training," 197.

<sup>2</sup>Carl F. George and Robert E. Logan, *Leading and Managing Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1987), 15.

<sup>3</sup>Richard A. Swenson, *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to the Overloaded Lives* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1992), 85.

Among other “overloads” Swenson points out “ministry overload.” He quotes a physician, who counsels pastors, who says that, “Many ministers today are headed toward the mental, physical, and spiritual salvage yard because they expect too much of themselves and most do not have a clear idea of the forces driving them to that tragic end.”<sup>1</sup>

Swenson’s prescription is what he calls “margin.” He focuses on margin in four key arenas—emotional energy, physical energy, time, and finances and offers an overall picture of health that employs contentment, simplicity, balance, and rest.

Restoring margin to our emotional energy is more than welcomed; it is vital to our health. That is why Swenson’s prescription is to be taken seriously. He gives fourteen prescriptions starting from good social support and finishing with love, which is an emotional healer without an equal.

Another important point involves restoring margin to our physical energy, which in many ways is in our own hands. Ellen White’s counsel is very appropriate. She says, “Those who are employed to write and to speak the Word should attend fewer committee meetings . . . they should give far more attention to the preservation of physical health; for vigor of mind depends largely upon vigor of body. Proper periods of sleep and rest and abundance of physical exercise are essential to health of body and mind.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ellen White, *Gospel Workers*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1948), 422-3.

It is not wise to excel only in one area of life if one ends up with an unbalanced life. As Swenson says, “it is not uncommon to discover . . . a pastor who neglects personal health.”<sup>1</sup> A balanced life will include rest—physical, emotional, and spiritual. Swenson says that physical and emotional margin is derived from margin in time and money. Time and money are questions of stewardship, which is not just about giving more money or time, but is a question of having balance in life. If a spiritual leader cares about the margin in these areas of life he will have peace of mind in doing what is important in his life, and consequently, will have less stress. In the end what matters is our relationships with God, family, and people.

In order to regain or to sustain margin Swenson suggests that one needs contentment and gratitude. God is what we need, things are what we use, and possessions are to be used, not loved. A Christian leader also needs simplicity and balance. Sometimes doing nothing is God’s will. Lastly, there needs to be enough rest.<sup>2</sup> Swenson has challenged me to regain and sustain margin as the most important goal in my personal life. It is so tempting to fill my life with a lot of things, to always keep accumulating possessions, but it takes a conscious effort to set the heart priorities right, which is not possible without having margin in my life.

### Spiritual Needs and Goals

Christians are commissioned to influence the world, but the question is, what are we doing about it? Do I know where I come from, what I stand for, where I want to go,

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<sup>1</sup>Swenson, 217.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 197-98.



and how to take others with me? Am I making bridges to the culture around me? The Bible describes the men of Issachar as those “who understood the times and knew what Israel should do” (1 Chron 12:32). I am a student of my culture, I read local newspapers, follow the news, discuss events with the neighbors, take part in sporting events, go to concerts, and interact with other churches and religious leaders in my city.

I try to build bridges to the community beyond my church. I make contacts with people who are interested in what we believe through evangelistic meetings, worship services, visiting Voice of Prophecy students, and at several church related events. Every year I baptize a number of new believers, but also bury about the same number. Usually I conduct one series of evangelistic meetings in my church annually but still I ask the question of myself, am I placing a high priority on evangelism as a means of introducing people to a loving God who cares for them?

What are the priorities of my life as a pastor? Am I really a spiritual leader who has consistency in his devotional life? I spend quite a lot of time studying, discussing, and praying together with others, but not enough time reflecting on my own life in the presence of God. I need to increase my personal time with God. Mulholland says, “spiritual growth is a continuous and sometimes difficult process.”<sup>1</sup> In a sense all life becomes spiritual formation. Richard Foster, another significant writer on spiritual formation says that we as Christians are always painfully aware of the problem of sin in our lives. More willpower is not what is needed to overcome the habits of sin. Neither do we have to wait for God to come and transform us. Rather, “the disciplines allow us

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<sup>1</sup>Mulholland, 20-24.

to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us.”<sup>1</sup> Our part, according the Mulholland, is to offer ourselves to God in ways that enable God to do that transforming work of grace. Leaders need transparency and accountability in their spiritual lives.

## **Theological Understanding of Ministry and Church**

### Biblical Presuppositions

#### **Biblical Christian Worldview**

To understand Christian ministry we need to start by defining the underlining issues concerning a biblical Christian worldview and some basic presuppositions concerning the relationship between the Bible and theology. Generally, worldview could be defined as a basic foundation and the concepts which underlie all we think and do, or as James Sire says, “A worldview is a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic makeup of our world.”<sup>2</sup> Everyone has a worldview whether it is articulated or not.

Worldviews answer such basic questions as, Who am I? Where am I? What is wrong? What is the solution? The answer to these questions determines our worldview.

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<sup>1</sup>Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), 7. Richard Foster’s book is a classic in the area of spiritual formation. It was written more than twenty years ago and is still widely regarded as an authentic piece of work, which has permanent value for those that are interested in deepening their spiritual lives. It is interesting that the author wrote this book originally 1978 in thirty-three days with its basic structure. He revised it ten years later and it was reprinted in 1998 twenty years after its first publication. Foster’s book is a comprehensive presentation of the classical spiritual disciplines—meditation, prayer, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance, and celebration.

<sup>2</sup>James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 17.

There are basic worldviews: Theism, Pantheism and Naturalism.<sup>1</sup> When we try to define the word “Christian” in connection with worldview we end up having more diversity. There is not a unified worldview that can be called “Christian” except in a very broad sense. But if we add the word “biblical” we narrow down what we mean by “Christian.”

The modern Western worldview is not a biblical–Christian worldview but it could be described as a secular–Christian worldview, which is basically two-tiered. It has its roots in Christianity, but science and worldly problems form the basis of Western thinking and somewhere high up is the mystified religion which is often reduced to religious formalism or even nationalism. The middle is more or less excluded. Even those who claim to have a biblically shaped worldview, such as many Christian missionaries from the West, have no answers to the problems in the “middle level,” which is very much alive in Asia and in Africa.<sup>2</sup>

However, it is not only in the “South” but also increasingly more in our Western societies that people are asking questions which are very much in that “excluded middle.” People ask about the existence of spirits and the occult, and look for reasons for many personal incidents and accidents in life. How much does the unseen world affect our everyday life on earth? What is our theology on principalities, powers, and rulers of the darkness of this world (Eph 6:12)? These questions have to be taken more seriously and

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<sup>1</sup>Humberto Rasi compares mainly secular humanism and biblical Christianity from the Adventist point of view in “The Challenge of Secularism,” in *Adventist Mission in the 21st Century: The Joys and Challenges of Presenting Jesus to a Diverse World*, ed. Jon Dybdahl (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1999), 62.

<sup>2</sup>Paul G. Hiebert, uses this concept in his article “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle,” *Missiology* 10 (Jan 1982), 35-46.

perhaps, we as missionaries to the secular world should also take into account the “excluded middle” and have a more holistic worldview, which accepts that the transcendent God does intervene in our lives in ways that we cannot understand in terms of natural laws.

The healing ministry was part of Jesus’ commission to the disciples and it was one of the spiritual gifts that was working in the early church (Matt 10:8, Acts 4:30, Acts 9:34, 1 Cor 12:28, and Jas 5:16). As Jesus started his ministry, his first sermon in Nazareth was about healing the brokenhearted and setting the captives free (Luke 4:18). These Bible texts show that there is a place for healing ministry in the church that can and should be alive even among secular societies. Prayer for those who are sick and brokenhearted in so many ways is a Christian way of showing that we care about people and that we believe in God who loves and cares about us.

Secularization has produced a large population of unchurched people who have more or less lost contact with organized Christianity but who still maintain their belief in the supernatural. At least they have left their options open. As Humberto Rasi says:

Many of our contemporaries could be better described as practicing secularists. They live unexamined lives, focused on routine work and temporary pleasure, distracted by the entertainment provided by secular media and occasionally shaken by disaster or pain. Unfortunately many Christians also fit that description. Even Seventh-day Adventists are being influenced by secular environment. We may attend church and generally follow the Adventist lifestyle, but on our thought patterns, values, and priorities are not much different from those in surrounding culture.<sup>1</sup>

There is a lot of diversity among Christians because of the influence of various cultures and one’s view on biblical inspiration. But among Christians a set of basic

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<sup>1</sup>Rasi, 69.

presuppositions are usually shared. We believe in a transcendent, triune, personal God. He is the Creator who acts and is knowable by human beings because of his self-disclosure.

In addition, I would add that it follows from God's self-disclosure in the Bible that usually things in this world happen because of natural laws, but sometimes things happen that cannot adequately be explained by known natural laws. There is always an element of uncertainty, of not knowing enough but also openness to the idea of an open universe where God is omnipotent, who acts as he wills despite the real world of evil. A biblical Christian worldview presupposes that eventually God will destroy evil and save those who believe in his Son Jesus Christ for eternal life in the New Earth (John 3:16, 14:1-3; 1 Cor 15: 51-54; Rev 20:1-4).

Accordingly, there is good reason to trust in God that he lovingly guides those who trust in him, according to his eternal purposes, which work for good to those who willingly submit themselves to his mercies. This biblical worldview is basically the worldview that best services any successful ministry, for it fosters spirituality that relates ethical living to the socio-historical context in which we are called to be the people of God.

### **Theology and Scripture**

In any successful ministry it is important to formulate the difference between theology and Scripture. The presuppositions arising from a biblical Christian worldview is that the Bible is a revelation of God and theology is human understanding of that divine revelation. The center of biblical message is the love of God revealed through his eternal Son, Jesus Christ, who died for us. The Bible can also be regarded as a

completely human book, which has nothing to do with God, and which only reflects human ideas about God. At worst, theology can be formal, involving only our head and mouth, but at its best it can be “real” involving our heart and life.

The Bible is central for our understanding of ministry for the world, which is also the mission of the church. John Stott says, “Without the Bible world evangelization would be not only impossible but actually inconceivable.”<sup>1</sup> The Bible claims that the living God has revealed himself, and that the Bible is the inspired record of that revelation. The Bible is regarded as an authoritative source on which we base our Christian theology. Kenneth Howkins says: “The Christian student should therefore find out in detail just what this claim is, and decide whether he is prepared to submit to this authority. Such submission is not an end to thinking: rather it is a basis for thinking, and an intelligent obedience with mind and heart to the living God who has revealed Himself.”<sup>2</sup>

Theology has its beginning in God’s revelation but it is shaped by human understanding of God. It can be said, with good reason, that theology arises out of mission and is a complex interplay of scripture, culture, temperament, worldview, and God’s impact on human life. Our view of the nature of biblical inspiration impacts our view of Christian mission to the world. As John Stott noted, “The degree of a church’s commitment to world evangelization is commensurate with the degree of its conviction

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<sup>1</sup>John R. W. Stott, “The Bible in World Evangelization,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1981), 3.

<sup>2</sup>Kenneth G. Howkins, *The Challenge of Religious Studies* (London: Tyndale Press, 1972), 5.

about the authority of the Bible. Whenever the Christians lose their confidence in the Bible, they also lose their zeal for evangelism. Conversely, whenever they are convinced about the Bible, then they are determined about evangelism.”<sup>1</sup>

To be conservative in biblical beliefs does not mean that you should not be flexible enough to contextualize and adapt your practices and methods in order to communicate better to those of another generation or culture. Stanley Grenz, an evangelical theologian, argues that a doctrinal basis is important since it is part of our tradition based on the message of the Bible, but it should not be our primary avenue in communicating the gospel in this emerging postmodern era. He emphasizes that the community of faith does not exist for itself, but that it seeks to proclaim the gospel and minister to the hurts of needy people. We are on a journey. If we preserve the forms of the old culture, we will lose the essential core of our message. The gospel continually reinvents the way it is presented in the present culture. Core is incarnated in every culture. The Scriptures are still the norm, but community helps us interpret the Scriptures.<sup>2</sup>

In revisioning the sources for theology, Stanley Grenz argues that theology must employ three norms: the biblical message, the theological heritage of the church, and the thought-forms and concerns of the contemporary culture. Only in this way, says Grenz, can theology be in the best sense of these terms, biblicist, confessional, and progressive.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Stott, 3.

<sup>2</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 108.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

This is why there ought to be networks of people who do theology in different cultures, which is an important rationale for studying theology and mission in the cultural setting of various mission fields. Theology is reshaped because of mission, so that the medicine is applied to the wound. Some go with their package of theology to a different culture and mess things up—it will not work. The core of theology may remain but it has to be wrapped in a different package.

For many practical reasons it is evident that any progressive and meaningful Christian ministry must be based on a biblical Christian worldview. There also needs to be a balanced view on the inspiration of Scripture. Any successful ministry is based on the Bible as the core source of truth. Scripture must judge experience since true religion combines head and heart. This means that theology and ministry are integrated. Sometimes, the practical application is even more demanding than creating a theory.

### Biblical Understanding of Ministry

A biblical concept of ministry could be defined as service rendered to God and to people. It has as its goal the edification of individuals with a view toward corporate maturity in Christ. The ministry of the church must center on God and on people.

The concept of ministry is seen in the words *diakoneo* (“serve” as in Eph 4:12) and *douleuo* (“serve as a slave” as in Phil 1:1). The word *hyperetes* indicates one who gives willing service to another. Paul uses this word only once in 1 Cor 4:1 indicating that he is first and foremost a “servant of Christ.” A minister of Christ does not go primarily to be a pastor or to teach or to build up the church or to mend broken souls, but to serve Christ. The issue of the ministry is not finally success. It is faithfulness in obeying Christ and his word. The word *leitourgia* often refers to the OT priestly service.



It is used in the NT figuratively to indicate financial ministry (Rom 15:27) and the pouring out of Paul's life sacrificially in his ministry (Phil 2:17). Here ministry refers to the work of those commissioned to leadership and to the whole body of believers. It is true, as Liefeld says, that there is little indication in most of Paul's letters of an institutional ministry. However, specific functions exercised by elders, deacons, apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers are never set over against the mutual ("one another") ministries of individual Spirit-gifted believers.<sup>1</sup>

What then is the role of the pastor in the work of ministry? One could rightly say that the pastor is different in function but not in value. Everyone born into the kingdom of God is born to be a missionary. The church is essentially a missionary body. All mission work is to help people know Jesus. Witnessing is experiencing something first hand and then telling others about it. The dynamic that drives the church is spiritual and communal. The fundamental New Testament teaching concerning the ministry of the church involves the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2:5, 9). The sacrifice that Christians are called to offer is not bulls, goats, and sheep, but their bodies, which they give in loving ministry for the Master (Rom 12:1). As Russell Burrill shows, "Limiting ministry to clergy is totally foreign to the New Testament church."<sup>2</sup>

This means that we do not need to go to a priest to be forgiven, but it also means that every Christian has a ministry to perform. Burrill makes a strong point in saying,

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<sup>1</sup>W. L. Liefeld, "Ministry," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 721-22.

<sup>2</sup>Russell Burrill, *Revolution in the Church: Unleashing the Awesome Power of Lay Ministry* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1993), 25.

“Let it be clearly stated that the function of the laity, biblically, is the performance of ministry. Whenever people are performing ministry, they are acting in the capacity of laity—even if they belong to the clergy!”<sup>1</sup> Pastors and laity should work together and the pastor should help members find their ministry in harmony with their spiritual gifts. It is very important to take a new look at ministry as it is presented in the New Testament. It is evident that ministry involves the whole body of Christ. The apostle Paul writes: “And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11 f). These gifts of Christ are functions, not offices, within the church.

Daivid Watson notes that “The church can work properly only when all saints are actively involved in the work of the ministry, and not just one or two paid professionals.”<sup>2</sup> We need to stress more the New Testament idea of shared ministry and a shared leadership in the church. In the biblical sense, all Christians are priests and clergy (1 Pet 2:9) and through the gifts of God’s Spirit, various ministries will develop within a local church.

Adventist pioneer Ellen White strongly emphasized the concept of clergy and laity working together as a team. She said: “The work of God in the earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers.”<sup>3</sup> This concept

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>2</sup>David Watson, *I Believe in the Church* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982), 247.

<sup>3</sup>Ellen White, *Gospel Workers*, 351-52.

flourished in the early church, in early Adventism, and is still seen in many parts of the “Third World” among Adventist believers. We need to capture and practice this idea among Western Adventist churches. The Church must be seen as a training center for Christian ministry with every member working as a minister of the gospel, including the pastor.

Should pastors remain “caretakers” of churches or should they rather be entering new areas and establishing new churches? The only reason for pastors to remain in larger churches is if they take seriously their biblical role to equip the saints to do the work of ministry. “The role of the ordained ministry is to serve and service the whole ministry of the people of God.”<sup>1</sup> Michael Harper says, “It is sad to say that often the pastor is the cork in the church. Nobody can go out because the pastor is not perfecting the saints for the work of the ministry. Rather, he is preventing the saints from becoming ministers.”<sup>2</sup>

As Harper notes, Paul in Ephesians 4:12 lists five spheres of ministry: apostolic, prophetic, pastoral, teaching, and evangelistic.<sup>3</sup> These could be described in more detail but the important thing to notice is that Jesus and Paul emphasize the servant attitude that must be present in all of them (Mk 10:45; 2 Cor 3:8; 1 Cor 12:5; Col 1:17,25; 2 Cor 6:4; 1 Tim 4:6). Serving is God’s way of releasing the individual, whereas slavery is man’s way of destroying him. The New Testament model for leadership in the church is that of

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<sup>1</sup>Robin Greenwood, *Practising Community: The Task of the Local Church* (London: SPCK, 1996), 25.

<sup>2</sup>Michael Harper, *Let My People Grow: Ministry and Leadership in the Church* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), 24.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 42-43.

servanthood and humility, which are marks of true leadership. Stanley Grenz says, “Leaders ought never to see their positions as a source of pride or an excuse for dominating others. Rather they are called by God to serve the people.”<sup>1</sup>

A call to pastoral ministry is a call to serve Christ and the members of his body to do the work of the ministry in the world. It is a high calling and requires faithfulness in fulfilling God’s will in our lives. It is the work of the body of Christ to extend the kingdom of God. Christ gave his disciples the commission to preach the gospel to all nations until the end of the world and until the end of time (Matt 24:12; 28:19, 20; Acts 1:8; Rev 14:6-12). Christ established his church to carry forward his mission to the world and every believer has a personal call to do the work of the ministry as a fulfillment of this call.

#### Biblical Foundations for the Church

Christ called the twelve disciples to form the nucleus of his church and then called the seventy sending them to preach the kingdom of God. Before his death he prayed also for those “who will believe in me through their message” (John 17:20). In his prayer Jesus prayed that his “church,” this new community of believers, might be marked by four main things: the glory of God, the word of God, the joy of God, and unity in the love of God. Jesus hardly ever used the word “church”<sup>2</sup> but, instead he used the phrase “the kingdom of God,” which is recorded about a hundred times in the Synoptic Gospels. The

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<sup>1</sup>Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 179.

<sup>2</sup>The only texts in the gospels that use the word “church” are in Matt 16:18 and 18:17. These texts are controversial, but for the purpose of this project it is not necessary to enter into a discussion of the statistical, historical, eschatological, and psychological problems of the texts.

kingdom of God is the underlying principle which contains both the idea of God's rule as the kingdom of grace in the present and as the kingdom of glory in the future.

The apostles developed the doctrine of the church.<sup>1</sup> The word "church" means many things in popular thought. The New Testament word is *ekklesia* which means "assembly" or "church." The New Testament church is the continuation of the Old Testament Israel, though in a much fuller and brighter sense. Therefore, the New Testament assembly is the fulfillment of the Old Testament assembly. The church is the "called out" (from the Greek word "*ekklesia*") people of God. They are called for a relationship with God and are also called to form one large family.

The nature of the church has been widely discussed for the past two thousand years. Some stress the visible church and others the invisible, claiming that the invisible consists of the elect only. In the New Testament both ideas are present and there is a multiplicity of images and concepts that contribute to an understanding of the nature of the church. Historical churches usually stress the fact that the church is to be "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic."

The idea of "remnant" is connected both to Israel and to the church. Rev 12:17 sees the obedience to God's commandments as a characteristic to the remnant. As Dybdahl notes, "One of the most common commandments in the New Testament is the missionary command (Matt 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15, 16; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). . . . Any view of remnant that narrows the self-understanding of the church or tends toward lessening the urgency of mission to all people is pointing us in the wrong direction. The

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<sup>1</sup>Watson, 39.

inward-looking, self-congratulatory, better-than-you syndrome eventually led to Israel's loss of missionary vision and the need for a remnant. Today's remnant must allow nothing to distract it from its mission to the world."<sup>1</sup>

### Relationship between Church and Ministry

The purpose of the church is to "declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet 2:9). The mission of the church is central to its identity. Jon Dybdahl says: "Mission is central to our identity. Jesus did not create a church and then give mission as one of its tasks. The divine sending plan comes prior to the church. Mission gives birth to the church and is its mother. The very essence or nature of church is mission. If the church ceases to be missionary, it has not simply failed in its task, but has actually ceased being the church. It becomes only a religiously oriented social organization."<sup>2</sup> The missionary function of the church is also emphasized by Gottfried Oosterwal. He says: "The church is an instrument, not the goal of God's activity."<sup>3</sup>

### Church Growth as Ministry

Ministry to the world is the biblical mandate for the church growth. Church

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<sup>1</sup>Jon Dybdahl, "Missionary God: Missionary Church," in *Re-Visioning Adventist Mission in Europe*, ed. Erich W. Baumgartner (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), 12-13.

<sup>2</sup>Jon Dybdahl, "Adventist Mission Today: Taking the Pulse" in *Adventist Mission in the 21st Century: The Joys and Challenges of Presenting Jesus to a Diverse World*, ed. Jon Dybdahl (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1999), 17-18.

<sup>3</sup>Gottfried Oosterwal, *Patterns of SDA Church Growth in America* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1976), 14.

growth is God's will since he seeks to save the lost (Luke 19:10; 2 Pet 3:9). Those who are saved are included in God's plan to preach the gospel to others (Rom 10:13-14). Every member of the body of Christ has a task to minister to others. "God wants Christians to be multiplied and He wants churches to be multiplied."<sup>1</sup>

### History of Modern Church Growth Movement

Donald McGavran started the modern church growth movement. As a missionary to India, he began to ask some important questions as to why some churches were growing and others were stagnating and declining. He made this his life study. He studied it in the towns and districts in India, in other countries where his mission worked, and in places where other missions labored. After twenty-six years of studying and working at church growth, in January of 1961 McGavran established the Institute of Church Growth. In the spring of 1965 Fuller Theological Seminary started a Graduate School of World Mission and called McGavran to be the founding dean of the school. He was commissioned to recruit faculty. He called Alan Tippett, Ralph Winter, Charles Kraft, J. Edwin Orr, Arthur Glasser, and C. Peter Wagner, who all added valuable dimensions to the study of church growth. In 1970 McGavran published *Understanding Church Growth*, the first standard textbook for church growth students.<sup>2</sup>

In 1971 C. Peter Wagner conceived the idea that church growth was needed in the United States of America also. He started to teach a group of pastors and laymen

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<sup>1</sup>C. Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow: Seven Vital Signs of a Healthy Church*, rev. ed. (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1984), 25.

<sup>2</sup>Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980).

concerning church growth, and as a result became convinced that church growth was not only greatly needed but also eagerly accepted by pastors in America.<sup>1</sup>

The church growth movement has grown from its early beginnings to a worldwide movement that encompasses the vast majority of all evangelical churches that are serious about evangelizing the world. Erich Baumgartner says, “The church growth movement is one of the most influential schools of missionary thought in the twentieth century.”<sup>2</sup>

### Recent Trends

The old church growth movement is often criticized as being too concerned about setting numerical goals. Some of the later versions emphasized the mega church model. Some practitioners still try to follow a particular model, but it is not easy to transfer a whole model to a completely different setting. Each church is different as is its ministry context. So there is no magic formula that could be used in all situations. There are many examples of highly successful revitalization projects and church plants in the western world. But they are an exception rather than a rule. The reality is that most of the old churches have stagnated or are in decline in Europe and even in North America, which is still a more religiously active continent than Europe. But from these successful

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<sup>1</sup>For a good historical sketch of the church growth movement see C. Peter Wagner, Win Arn, and Elmer Towns, eds. *Church Growth: The State of the Art* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986).

<sup>2</sup>Erich W. Baumgartner, “The Church Growth Movement and the Value of Research,” in *Adventist Mission in the 21st Century: The Joys and Challenges of Presenting Jesus to a Diverse World*, ed. Jon Dybdahl (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1999), 132.



examples it is possible to find out some principles that are useful. Many of the widely published and successful examples come from the United States.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the church growth models are also criticized for being too business like and not taking into account the more qualitative aspects of growth. Eddy Gibbs says, “Marketing insights used in evangelism must be viewed with caution and discernment and that the final determination as to what is to be done should be made on theological, not pragmatic, grounds. Gospel is not a product to be marketed but a lifelong relationship to be established and developed.”<sup>2</sup>

Today there is a growing emphasis on church health and especially on planting new churches rather than adding new members to existing ones. The central task of the modern church growth school is to develop scientific techniques of diagnostic research

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<sup>1</sup>The most often used examples are the Willow Creek and the Saddleback churches in the United States. These two mega churches have become models for many. The founders and the leaders of these churches have written several books and organized seminars for other church leaders and for the general public. The philosophies behind their ministries are explained in their books: Richard Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), and Bill Hybels and Lyn Hybels, *Rediscovering Church: The Story and Vision of Willow Creek Community Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995).

<sup>2</sup>Eddie Gibbs and Ian Coffey, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 56. Gibbs lists twelve empirical indicators of a missional church provided by The Gospel and Our Culture Network. These are: (1) It is a church that proclaims the gospel. (2) It is a community where all members are involved in learning to become disciples of Jesus. (3) The Bible is normative in the life of the church. (4) The church understands itself as different from the world because its participation in the life, death and resurrection of its Lord. (5) The church seeks to discern God’s specific missional vocation for the entire community and for all its members. (6) Christians behave christianly toward one another. (7) The church is a community that practices reconciliation. (8) People within the community hold themselves accountable to one another in love. (9) The church practices hospitality. (10) Worship is the central act by which the community celebrates with joy and thanksgiving both God’s presence and God’s promised future. (11) The church is a community that has a vital witness. (12) There is recognition that the church itself is an incomplete expression of the reign of God.

for ailing churches and to design instruments to be used in recommending proper therapy which will restore normal church health.<sup>1</sup> Quality has become a basic issue in recent church growth studies. Robert Logan says: “Those who are suspicious of the idea of church growth and are thinking that we have moved beyond that are correct in saying that church growth is not setting up numerical growth goals. Quality comes before quantity, but quality itself produces quantity. Living, healthy organisms produce other living healthy organisms. Those who still embrace the idea of church growth should remember that we should not get stuck with the idea that the bigger our church grows the better. It is even more important to start planting daughter churches.”<sup>2</sup>

The Adventist Church has also been studying and applying the principles of church growth. There was a time when the Adventist Church was mostly concerned about setting new goals for baptisms and reaching more people for Christ. This is still a worthy goal but now “Global Mission” has added the emphasis on planting new churches especially among new people groups.<sup>3</sup>

The issue of “health” has always been important to Adventists, but the discussion has mainly circled around health principles applicable to individual Christians rather than to whole churches. But according to the Bible the church is a living organism. The view

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<sup>1</sup>Wagner, 45.

<sup>2</sup>Robert E. Logan, *Beyond Church Growth: Action Plans for Developing a Dynamic Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revel, 1989), 25.

<sup>3</sup>Bruce Bauer, “Structure and Mission,” in *Adventist Mission in the 21st Century: The Joys and Challenges of Presenting Jesus to a Diverse World*, ed. Jon Dybdahl (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1999), 160. Bauer says, “Global Mission has been the best thing that has happened to Seventh-day Adventist missions for decades. It has encouraged each of the world divisions to look closely at its territories to find unentered areas and unreached people groups. We have a clearer picture of the task remaining than we have ever had as a church.”

of the church as a living body is by far the most often repeated metaphor used in Scripture (Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:12-27). If the church is viewed in organic terms, made up of living members, could it also enjoy good or poor health? As Robert Folkenberg notes, "We do not seek health for health's sake, for longevity's sake. We seek health because it will better fit us to reach the harvest and in turn bring honor and glory to God. We desire health for the harvest, plain and simple."<sup>1</sup>

### Natural Church Development

Today, the most popular tool in revitalizing old churches among evangelical Christians especially in Europe, Australia, and North-America is the NCD paradigm. The study made by Christian A. Schwarz has been widely applied by many and diverse churches around the world. He is the head of the Institute of Natural Church Development located in Germany. Schwarz has conducted the most comprehensive research project ever on the causes of church growth. More than 1,000 churches in 32 countries on five continents took part in the study. A total of 4.2 million responses have been analyzed with the results published in 1996 in a book called *Natural Church Development Handbook*. By 1999 the book was available in about twenty-five different languages in fifty countries. The Finnish version was published in 2003.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Folkenberg, Jr., *Health for the Harvest: Four Inspiring Steps to Total Congregational Health* (Berrien Springs, MI: North American Division Evangelism Institute, 2002), 9.

<sup>2</sup>Christian A. Schwarz, *Seurakunnan Luontainen Kehitys* (Hämeenlinna, Finland: Päivä, 2003).

Schwarz argues that his “natural” approach to church growth puts the emphasis on God’s power of natural quality growth. The research identifies eight quality characteristics present in growing churches.<sup>1</sup> These are: empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship services, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, and loving relationships. When a church wishes to become a growing church it should concentrate on improving its least developed quality characteristic, called minimum factor. The book presents six biotic principles, which are opposite to the usual technocratic measures, which do not work, according to Schwarz. These biotic principles are: interdependence, multiplication, energy transformation, multi-usage, symbiosis, and function.<sup>2</sup>

Natural Church Development introduces a different theological paradigm, which is called the bipolar church concept that has two poles in harmony, the organic pole and the technical pole, which are in reciprocal relationship. This concept avoids the pitfalls of both the hyper-spiritual paradigm and the hyper-technical paradigm. Schwarz’s ideas of church growth are supported by the bible and current theological thinking among evangelicals. In Adventist context the writings of Ellen White are valued and therefore many Adventists would be interested to know if the principles found through scientific study of growing churches are also supported by her writings. The following section on eight quality characteristics is a brief summary of the NCD church health indicators.

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<sup>1</sup>Schwarz, *Natural Church Development Handbook*, 15-48.

<sup>2</sup>The biotic principles are explained in detail in Schwarz’s, *Natural Church Development Handbook*, 61-82, and in *Natural Church Development Implementation Manual*, 123-194, by Schwarz and Schalk.

## **Eight Quality Characteristics**

1. *Empowering Leadership*—Empowering leadership is about having a mission and a vision for the church and then ensuring that church leaders at every level invest themselves in equipping others to help achieve the stated mission and vision. To improve this quality the leaders need to have a consistent spiritual life. They need to delegate and share ministries, lead through vision, start mentoring and equipping others, and lead the congregation through change. An empowering leader knows his church, the people, and their gifts and is helping others to serve through their gifts.

There is plenty of biblical support for this (Eph 4:11-12 and 2 Tim 2:2). Ellen White has also noted that, "Ministers should not do the work which belongs to the church, thus wearying themselves and preventing others from performing their duty. They should teach the members how to labor in the church and in the community."<sup>1</sup>

2. *Gift-oriented Ministry*—When members serve the Lord in the area of their giftedness, they feel good about themselves and enjoy their ministries. The spiritual gifts are meant for every disciple of Jesus (Eph 4:11-12; 1 Pet 4:10; Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:1, 4-6). Therefore it is important for every leader and every member to know and understand the area of his/her giftedness and match the gifts to the tasks. Ellen White says, "The greatest cause of our spiritual feebleness as a people is the lack of real faith in spiritual gifts."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ellen White, *Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists* (Basle: Imprimerie Polyglotte, 1886), 29.

<sup>2</sup>Ellen White, *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*, 14 January 1868.

3. *Passionate Spirituality*—The key word is “passionate.” This quality is not seen in any particular style of spirituality (charismatic, non-charismatic, liturgical, or non-liturgical) but in the level of “passion” at which faith is lived out among the members. The quality factor deals with the question of how to make the Christian faith a holistic encounter with Christ.<sup>1</sup> Jesus asks us to carry the cross of discipleship and “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind. And you must love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27 NIV). The Apostle Paul challenges us to follow a spiritual path of discipleship and have contagious faith: “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient with affliction, faithful in prayer” (Rom 12:11-12). Ellen White says, “Draw your strength from Jesus. He will give you that which you ask in sincerity. If you seek him with whole heart He will be found of you” Whenever the personal relationship with Christ is intensified the quality of spiritual life is enhanced.<sup>2</sup> The Church should follow a clearly defined discipleship path and help its members grow spiritually and to commit themselves to Christ, to growth, to service and to mission according to the gifts each member has received.

4. *Functional Structures*—Functional structures are all about making sure the church is having a meaningful operational system for optimally carrying out its mission. A clearly defined strategic plan is needed which defines values, mission, vision, and

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<sup>1</sup>Schwarz and Schalk, *Natural Church Development Implementation Manual*, 63.

<sup>2</sup>There are many books which are help in developing personal and corporate disciplines in the area of spiritual life. One of the basic books in the area of spiritual formation is Richard Foster’s book *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989).

goals. The ministries and activities of the church should be outlined accordingly. The system should not be static but flexible to meet the needs of new ministries and mission challenges. The dry branches of the work should be cut off to make space for new ministries that are relevant in the context of the church. “Often churches continue to perpetuate a multitude of complex forms and regulations which may have been useful at the time they were instituted, but which have lost their functionality over time.”<sup>1</sup> The apostle Paul says, “Let everything be done decently and in order” (1 Cor 14:40). Ellen White says, “God works according to great principles which He has presented to the human family, and it is our part to mature wise plans, and set in operation the means whereby God shall bring about certain results.”<sup>2</sup> The key word in functional structures is “multiplication” which is one of the biotic principles of NCD. All the structures should promote continuous multiplication. The goal is not to preserve any structures but to develop the ones that have the greatest potential for multiplication in the environment.<sup>3</sup>

5. *Inspiring Worship Service*—Corporate worship is the time that the church enters into the presence of God, to offer him praise and prayers and hear his word in return. The worship should be a joyful experience which is reflected in the words of psalmist: “I was glad when they said to me, let us go into the house of the Lord” (Ps 122:1). An inspired worship service is one where the Holy Spirit is at work and where people’s spiritual and practical needs are met through life transforming preaching. Ellen

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<sup>1</sup>Schwarz and Schalk, *Natural Church Development Implementation Manual*, 74.

<sup>2</sup>Ellen White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1948), 653.

<sup>3</sup>Schwarz and Schalk, *Natural Church Development Implementation Manual*, 79.

White says, “His service should be made interesting and attractive and not allowed to degenerate into a dry form.”<sup>1</sup>

6. *Holistic Small Groups*—The NCD research has shown that continuous multiplication of small groups is a universal church growth principle.<sup>2</sup> In the early church there were house churches (Phlm 2) and people in Jerusalem gathered both in the temple and “from house to house” (Acts 2:46-47). “The family of God is best experienced in the small group setting. It is in this environment that Christians are best disciplined, trained and mobilized for action. Holistic small groups ensure that the whole person grows and is cared for.”<sup>3</sup> Ellen White says, “The formation of small companies as a basis of Christian effort has been presented to me by One who cannot err.”<sup>4</sup> At best, in these small groups honest sharing and trust is evident and individual needs are cared for. These groups have relevance to daily life and they are open for new people to join. Their purpose is to multiply the kingdom of God and allow active participation of group members.<sup>5</sup>

7. *Need-oriented Evangelism*—Effective evangelism meets the needs of the people and it is communicated in terms they understand. There are people in the church who have a special gift of evangelism. NCD research has indicated that the key to church

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<sup>1</sup>Ellen White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 5 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1948), 609.

<sup>2</sup>Schwarz, *Natural Church Development Handbook*, 32.

<sup>3</sup>Folkenberg, *Health for the Harvest*, 84.

<sup>4</sup>Ellen White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 7, 21-22.

<sup>5</sup>For more information and inspiration in a European Adventist context, see David Cox, *Future Church* (Grantham, UK: Stanborough Press, 2001).



growth is for the local congregation to focus its evangelistic efforts on the questions and needs of non-Christians. This principle worked in the life of the Apostle Paul. He says, “To the Jews I became like a Jew. . . . To those not having the law I became like one without the law. . . . I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Cor 9:20-22). The same principle is also supported by Ellen White: “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then he bade them, ‘Follow Me.’”<sup>1</sup>

The practical consequence of this principle is that the church has to identify special target groups, find out their needs, train members to give personal witness and plan at least one harvest event a year. Some think that the fruit will come in without a harvest and some actually do, but the vast majority of fruit waits for the picking. The methods used can vary but the best way is to get as many members as possible to meet the needs of people in way that the gospel can be understood within their immediate culture. NCD supports the idea that “evangelism is not just an isolated activity in the church, but part of the total long-term development of the church.”<sup>2</sup>

8. *Loving Relationships*—NCD research has indicated that practical love has a divinely generated magnetic power far more effective than evangelistic programs which depend almost entirely on verbal communication. Jesus said to his disciples, “By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35). It

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<sup>1</sup>Ellen White, *Ministry of Healing* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1988), 143.

<sup>2</sup>Schwarz and Schalk, *Natural Church Development Implementation Manual*, 105.

was interesting to discover that there is significant connection between laughter in the church and that church's qualitative and numerical growth.<sup>1</sup> Ellen White says, "If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one."<sup>2</sup> In a growing church there is often an atmosphere of joy and trust; people show affirmation and encouragement to one another. Conflicts are not avoided but resolved in an open and honest manner.

### **Six Biotic Principles**

Schwartz says that, "The key to eight quality characteristics is the release of the "biotic potential" which God has already endowed his church."<sup>3</sup> Quality characteristics help church to discover which area of church life needs to be strengthened. With the help of the biotic principles the church may set qualitative goals to remove the obstacles for growth identified by the NCD survey. "The six biotic principles should be seen as checklist that can be applied to every decision faced"<sup>4</sup> Then the church may exercise its strengths to work on the church's minimum factors and apply the biotic tools to implement a strategy for growth. The idea is to set God's growth automatism loose in the church.<sup>5</sup> Here is a short summary of the biotic principles.

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<sup>1</sup>Schwarz, *Natural Church Development Handbook*, 36.

<sup>2</sup>White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 9, 189.

<sup>3</sup>Schwartz, *Natural Church Development Handbook*, 61.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>5</sup>These principles and their applications are explained more thoroughly in Schwarz and Schalk, *Natural Church Development Implementation Manual*, 123-194.

1. *Interdependence*—The church is a living organism. Its parts are interrelated to each other. Therefore, act upon any single element affects all. Schwarz stated that the manner in which the individual parts are integrated into a whole system is more important than the parts themselves.<sup>1</sup> Training the leaders to see the long-term effects is very important.

2. *Multiplication*—The principle of multiplication applies to all areas of church life. It is most important motivation for planting new churches. The question is not how much you can add to something but how much reproductive capacity you have created. Schwarz takes an illustration from nature to prove his point: “Just as the true fruit of an apple tree is not an apple, but another tree; the true fruit of a small group is not a new Christian, but another group; the true fruit of a church is not a new group, but a new church; the true fruit of a leader is not a follower, but a new leader; true fruit of an evangelist is not a convert but new evangelists.”<sup>2</sup>

3. *Energy Transformation*—According to Schwarz, this principle is concerned with harnessing and controlling the contrary forces of existent nature.<sup>3</sup> The current contemporary culture possesses a strong negative energy towards church. The principle of energy transformation suggests a new possibility, “The church can strategically look for the bridges, portals, and touchstones between contemporary culture and church and

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<sup>1</sup>Christian Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift: How Natural Church Development Can Transform Theological Thinking* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1999), 244.

<sup>2</sup>Schwarz, *Natural Church Development Handbook*, 68.

<sup>3</sup>Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, 45.

redirect the negative energy to the church's advantage."<sup>1</sup> This will be discussed further in section "Gospel and Culture" in the end of this chapter. This principle could also influence the way crises and catastrophes are handled. One must neither passively yield to fate nor obstinately protest against it; but rather ask oneself, "How can I best use the situation for the advance of God's kingdom?" This is also biblical attitude: "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God" (Rom 8:28).

4. *Multi-usage*—In nature everything is recycled. This principle implies that the results of work are transformed into energy, which in turn sustains ongoing work. This is illustrated well by the principle of co-leadership. The actual participation in leadership provides the best training for new leaders. "The initial energy investment is put to multiple use, and ultimately serves towards recruiting new leaders."<sup>2</sup> That was also the model Jesus used in training his disciples for ministry. Thus, one could say that the *refuse* of the energy expended in one season of ministry becomes *fertilizer* for next season's growth.<sup>3</sup>

5. *Symbiosis*—Schwarz describes symbiosis as a close association between different organisms for mutual benefit. He says, that two negative models stand in contrast to this principle: competition and monoculture<sup>4</sup> Transforming this principle to

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<sup>1</sup>John Turner, "A Strategy for Planting a Church in Northeast Cincinnati Using a Natural Church Development Paradigm," D.Min. diss. Fuller Theological Seminary, 2000, 127.

<sup>2</sup>Schwarz, *Natural Church Development Handbook*, 72.

<sup>3</sup>Turner, 133.

<sup>4</sup>Schwarz, *Natural Church Development Handbook*, 74

the church means that a variety of form is far more effective than monoculture. The obvious scriptural basis for this principle is 1 Cor 12:17-21 where Paul discusses the diversity of gifts in one body of Christ. A mutually beneficial relationship happens in the church when the needs of individual Christians (“What do I enjoy?”) and the needs of the congregation (“What will help our church grow?”) complement, rather than compete with one another.<sup>1</sup> Decisions are made in such a way that everybody wins.

6. *Function*—Everything in nature is characterized by their ability to bear fruit. Jesus says, “Every good tree bears good fruit” (Matt 7:17) and “You will know them by their fruits” (Matt 7:16). NCD has two levels of questions concerning fruit: One level is quality: how high is the quality index of the eight quality characteristics? The other level is quantity: is the church growing or multiplying?<sup>2</sup>

It is easy to pinpoint problems in the church, but it is more difficult to correct them. The gospel is sometimes rejected because of the message of the cross itself. Sometimes barriers are erected because of faulty methods. NCD does not offer a ready made model but concentrates on principles that can be contextualized to the church’s setting. Schwarz challenges leaders, not to push and shove a congregation in their own strength, but let God’s growth mechanisms take hold in their churches.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately it is not human work, but the work of the Holy Spirit. The problems in the Church should be seen as opportunities to be used creatively for the Kingdom of God.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 75.

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

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 82.

Table 1. Six Biotic Principles

<b>Biotic principle</b>	<b>Short Definition</b>	<b>Biotic Questions</b>
<i>Interdependence</i>	The domino effect	Are the long-term effects that this measure, step, or decision has on other areas of church organism beneficial for the healthy development of the church or not? Which areas might be adversely affected?
<i>Multiplication</i>	Be fruitful and multiply!	Does this measure, step, or decision contain multiplication dynamics, or does it merely contribute to addition? What is the reproduction capacity here?
<i>Energy Transformation</i>	Go with a flow!	Is this measure, step, or decision utilizing the energy relationships of the church environment or trying to fight them? Who is underutilized or has gifts that would benefit from being involved in the activities?
<i>Multi-Usage</i>	Recycle!	Do the results of this measure, step, or decision show the ministry to be increasingly self-sustaining? What resources do we expect will need to be developed to make each activity self-sustaining?
<i>Symbiosis</i>	Win-win solutions	Does this measure, step, or decision contribute to the fruitful cooperation of different forms of ministry, or does it promote an ecclesiastical monoculture? How will we actively promote cooperation between various people, groups, and ministries?
<i>Functionality</i>	Why in the world...?	Does this measure, step, or decision produce fruit for the kingdom of God, or is it missing its purpose? Are we committed to refocus the activity if it is not contributing?

*Source:* Schwarz and Schalk, *The Natural Church Development Implementation Manual*, 123-194, Folkenberg, *Health for the Harvest*, 28-30, and Campbell, Johnstone, and Schalk, *The NCD Cycle*, 63-67.

## Natural Church Development Initiatives in Finland

The Council of Free Churches in Finland became the NCD national partner in 2002 and the first thirty surveys, required to establish the national norm, were taken in 2003. An Adventist pastor, who was one of the key leaders in bringing the NCD approach to Finland, was also active in promoting it among Adventist churches which resulted in wide Adventist participation on the first pilot round in 2003. After the first round in 2003 the test results were reviewed by the NCD Team and the translation was improved and a few less relevant questions in the Finnish context were left out. I was asked to join the NCD Team in late 2004, when a new pilot round was being planned.

An early problem in many Adventist churches that participated in the NCD surveys in Finland was a lack of understanding and preparation and not knowing how to implement the whole process in an effective way. The proportion of the Adventist congregations taking part in the first round of NCD surveys in 2003 was relatively high: ten out of thirty, but only two out of thirty took part in the second round in 2004, largely because of a lack of understanding or commitment to the principles involved

The process of getting to know NCD paradigm for church growth has been slow among most of the Adventists. But the more I have studied the principles found in NCD, the more convinced I am that this is a biblically based platform that a church can build a successful strategy for growth. It is also flexible enough to accommodate to the cultural setting of the church in Finland. But it needs lots of communication before it is fully accepted. On one hand it is simple but on the other hand it has principles that have depth in them which need to be analyzed over longer periods of time until they are ready to be applied naturally to the decision making processes of the church.

It is possible that many of the churches that dropped out after the first round of surveys, as well as new ones, can catch the vision again and be helped to develop the process further with better coaching. In retrospect, it would have been much better to concentrate on a few pilot projects, do them well, and then use the experiences to find the best possible way to approach the process on a wider scale.<sup>1</sup> But on the other hand these churches that got involved in the first phase have helped establish the national norm for Finland.

Many hope that Schwarz's approach will help the Adventist church in Europe reverse the downward trend of membership loss. Whether Schwarz's growth principles can be applied in Finnish Adventist churches remains to be seen. I will use the NCD process as part of my project in order to analyze the Turku church and hopefully implement a strategy for church growth.

Revitalizing established Adventist churches can be a tedious task. How can you turn around something that has been stagnated for some time? Stagnation is not only a technical problem that can be solved by doing research and using right methods, but is also a spiritual problem, that has many sides to it. The leadership and the structure of the church may also be part of the problem. NCD is meant to be, "not about growth *per se* but about stimulating 'all-by-itself' growth (Mark 4:26-29) resulting in lasting growth in

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<sup>1</sup>Schwarz and Schalk note in *Natural Church Development Implementation Manual*, 244, "A local church can be used as a guinea pig only for a limited time. Church development by trial and error leads to discontent and frustration, destroying even the best motivation of those involved in its ministry." This statement is said in the context of defending the scientific base for NCD as opposed to speculative methods based on "gutlevel" feelings. However, the same statement applies even when correct and proven methods are used but without thorough preparation and commitment to the process by the leaders.



quality (health) and quantity (numbers) over the long term.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, there needs to be revitalization of the person (the leader) and the church by the Holy Spirit to begin to solve the present situation. The church may be too focused on the harvest and forget that constant seed-planting and the nurturing of growth are vital to generating ongoing harvests. The tendency is to lose the organic to the organizational and the mission focus to maintenance.

### Gospel and Culture

We are not born in a vacuum. Culture has a deep impact on us. Language, race, geography, economic status all shape the world in which we live. God uses culture for his purposes so we as his agents must know the culture where we live and work. We are commissioned to influence the culture rather than to insulate against it. Christian leaders need a clear understanding of where they come from, where they stand, and where they want to go as they take others with them. Therefore, it is very important for a Christian leader to also be a student of culture.

It has become a popular idea that the Western world is experiencing a cultural shift from modernism to postmodernism. Postmodernism is not only part of academic theory or classification but it is very much a part of today’s popular culture as well. As

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<sup>1</sup>Ian Campbell, Adam Johnstone, and Christoph Schalk, *The NCD Cycle: A Process for Implementing Natural Church Development Principles* (Brighton, Australia: Direction Ministry Resources, 2003), 17.

Craig van Gelder says, "It appears that postmodernism increasingly represents the cultural air that we breathe."<sup>1</sup>

The premodern medieval worldview was basically magical with a minority being theist. The modern worldview is basically atheist, deist, and secular. The postmodern worldview is again magical and even somewhat medieval in its rejection of an emphasis on the rational and is a combination of worldviews, mixed and fragmented in many ways. The postmodern worldview marks the end of a single, universal worldview and in the area of religion corporate spirituality is doubted.<sup>2</sup> This emerging culture shift is more relevant in the secular Western societies than in the rest of the world and even in the west it competes with the modern world view.

If we contrast the modern and postmodern worldviews, we could say that modernism is more literal and rational, emphasising the individual. In religion it relies on the clergy-experts. Postmodernism is much more interested in symbols, metaphors, stories, and experiences, is communal and pluralistic and in religion is much more interested in the involvement of laity.

"Secularism has lost,"<sup>3</sup> claims McNeal. This might be a controversial claim and needs to be explained. Postmodern people are not primarily secular, though they are not interested in traditional organized Christianity. As Mc Neil says, "Simply put, Jesus is

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<sup>1</sup>Greg Van Gelder, "Postmodernism and Evangelicals: A Unique Missiological Challenge at the Beginning of the Twenty-first Century," *Missiology* 30, no. 4 (2002): 492.

<sup>2</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 11-12.

<sup>3</sup>McNeal, 80.

hot, the church is not. Organized religious efforts hold less and less appeal.”<sup>1</sup> “People want to see spiritual power demonstrated by transformed lives expressed in community.”<sup>2</sup>

Modern Christian apologetics win people with love rather than with reason. Though there are fewer absolutes for postmodern people there is still room for spiritual experience. Postmoderns are open to emotion and intuition and like to be part of community in which they participate and interact. “The optimism that characterized much of the liberal, humanist tradition has given way to pessimism and skepticism. In a pervasive atmosphere of cynicism, postmodernists look for the motives behind truth claims. . . . Postmodernists have abandoned the illusive search for truth, . . . they reject propositional certainty as the ploy of the powerful, . . . they claim that we should celebrate diversity. . . . There is no metanarrative, no grand story to inspire a people, . . . each individual has to create his or her own meaning . . . everyone is entitled to his or her point of view.”<sup>3</sup>

In contrasting the modern and postmodern worldviews Gibbs and Coffey say that whereas the modernist values centralized hierarchies, the postmodernist values decentralized networks, whereas the modernist likes a predictable world, long-range strategic planning, and goal-setting, the postmodernist lives with uncertainty in dealing with the present, and is pessimistic about the future. He goes on to say: “The challenges are daunting because the traditional, modern, and postmodern phases are not sequential

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<sup>1</sup>McNeal, 87.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 86.

<sup>3</sup>Gibbs and Coffey, 29.

but exist side by side.”<sup>1</sup> Is there a place for God in this scenario? What is the future of the church? Certainly, many traditional churches are faced with huge difficulties in sustaining their mission. New churches may flourish as the more institutionalized churches are diminishing. “For the sake of the lost, the church urgently needs to be reinvented for different generations of unchurched, secular people.”<sup>2</sup> Moving a church through the stormy waters of change requires an understanding of the different ways in which systems work in both modern and postmodern cultures. Church leaders must have a clear understanding that it takes good team-building to group people according to vision, gifts, and competences in order to express a clear vision to the many pieces of our fractured world.

Significant changes are taking place in the decision-making process. The new paradigm churches are moving away from a hierarchical pyramid of organization. “Most decisions are operational rather than policy-based, and therefore must be made as close to the operation in progress as possible by those individuals most directly involved.”<sup>3</sup> In the Adventist Church, the denominational hierarchies must recognize that the churches do not exist to support them; they exist to help local churches be effective in their mission, to bring people to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

There is a need for the church in the West to undergo a profound reorientation,

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

<sup>2</sup>Peter Roennfeldt, “The Secular Person as a Target for Mission.” in *Re-Visioning Adventist Mission in Europe*, ed. Erich Baumgartner (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), 61.

<sup>3</sup>Gibbs and Coffey, 84.

turning from a survival mode to a mission mode. Many churches will need to be “turned inside out in order to bring those outside in.”<sup>1</sup> To do this we do not need to imitate the success stories of the mega churches. It is important to study widely, take note of the success stories, and gain insights for refocusing the vision of ministry and the vision of the church. There is a need to invest more time in spiritual formation and strategic leadership. There is a need to restructure the Church for mission in Finland.

### Reflections

The purpose of this chapter has been to analyze my personal and theological basis for ministry and the missionary nature of the church. My worldview has been shaped by my past education and experiences and has some important implications on my theology and praxis of my ministry. There are certain presuppositions that I value as truth and which are also valued by the community of which I am a part. However, my views on ministry and even theology are not static but are developing and even changed as I am studying and interacting with people in my faith community and outside of it.

There are certain general expectations regarding what pastors should do. Since public evangelism has become harder the pastors tend to become more like caretakers of the churches and develop a habit of doing many things that could be delegated to church members. The Natural Church Development paradigm aims at removing these and many other barriers to growth and help the church grow “all-by- itself.” In a spiritually healthier environment the Holy Spirit could empower many more church members for ministry to each other and to the world around them. The present emphasis on church

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 228.

health is well supported by theology and the Bible. When the church becomes a healing community where people are being healed and made whole then there is nothing to stop it growing again.

Adventist churches are usually strong in proclaiming the holistic Bible truth. We have been and are still in some places of the world strong in evangelism. There is a strong belief in the future of the church, also from the perspective of the church in Finland. As I am reflecting on our basis for present Adventist mission in Europe I see more clearly that the Church cannot base present models or ministry mainly on its past methods of church growth and evangelism. The world is changing and the Church should concentrate much more than it has on local church and spirituality, which should also be the base for wider mission consciousness. The structure of the Adventist mission should also be brought closer to the local church.

The Adventist Church has grown rapidly in the developing world but in the West the church is struggling. The church has not really come to terms with the changing world which is becoming increasingly more secular. The cultural shift from modernism to postmodernism has been studied but the practical implications of that change have been widely overlooked.

There is an urgent need for revisioning the Adventist mission in Finland. A healthy church has vital qualities that produce growth. It could be a growing and multiplying church. If the Adventist Church in Turku is willing to become a healing community there is no reason why it could not become a spiritual home for an increasing number of people who are looking for a loving community where they can experience wholeness and in which they can share their faith and hope while waiting for the return of

the Lord. This is also my vision for the future of Adventism in Finland. The next chapter will set the ministry of the church in its sociological and religious context in order to be more authentic in its witness to the community.

## CHAPTER 3

### ANALYSIS OF FINNISH SOCIETY AND THE TURKU SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to present an overview of the basic elements of Finnish society, in order to understand the mission context of the Turku Seventh-day Adventist Church. First, this chapter will present a short history of Finland and its political, economical, social, cultural, and religious changes that are of importance for this project. This study should help in refocusing the ministry of the Adventist Church in Finland and particularly the Turku Church. Special emphasis will be given to the religious trends in society. This chapter will also describe the trends that are presently dominant in Finland and that will effect the future as society moves into the twenty-first century. The growth patterns of the Adventist Church in Finland and the Turku Church in particular will also be studied in order to understand the present state of the church.

Relevant sources of information are consulted, such as demographic data, church statistics, scientific articles, books and doctoral dissertations relevant to the topic. Many of the most current articles are found on the Internet. A good variety of relevant articles are produced by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Church Research Institute of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church. The best source of information



consulted on the current religious setting in Turku was Tuomas Martikainen's recent doctoral dissertation.<sup>1</sup>

### **History of Finland**

Finland is the second most northern country in the world. It is located between Sweden, Norway, Russia, and Estonia. Its border with Russia is also the eastern boundary of the European Union. Two-thirds of the country is covered by forest, one-tenth by water, while less than one-tenth is cultivated land. The mean daily temperature in the southern parts of Finland, which is the most populated part of the country, is below zero (centigrade) from January till March. Summers are usually warm and sunny with occasional rain showers. The most popular holiday time in Finland is usually in July. That is when most of the Finnish people spend their holidays in hundreds of thousands of summer cottages usually situated by lake sides. There are about 188,000 lakes and 179,000 islands.<sup>2</sup>

The geographical factors have shaped the Finnish people and the culture during its history. Finnish people live close to nature which has always been an important part of the Finnish way of life. In the eyes of foreigners Finns are generally regarded as straightforward, hard-working, calm, and honest. The society is well-structured and offers a wide range of high quality social services to its citizens. Finland has a

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<sup>1</sup>Tuomas Martikainen, *Immigrant Religions in Local Society: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives in the City of Turku* (Turku, Finland: Åbo Academy University Press, 2004), n.p.

<sup>2</sup>Statistics Finland, "Finland in Figures," April 2004, [http://www.stat.fi/tup/suoluk/suomilukuina\\_en.html](http://www.stat.fi/tup/suoluk/suomilukuina_en.html) (1 June 2005). A wider range of statistics is published in *Statistical Yearbook of Finland 2001*, vol. 96 (Helsinki, Finland: Tilastokeskus, 2001).

population of about 5.2 million, of which two-thirds live in urban areas. Finland has two official languages, Finnish and Swedish, the latter being the mother tongue of about six percent of the population. English is the most widely spoken foreign language. The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the dominant religion.<sup>1</sup>

Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland are called Nordic countries. Unlike the Scandinavian countries, Finland has a distinct language of its own, albeit Swedish has been the official language in Finland for several hundreds of years. Sweden and Finland have much in common in their economic, political, social, and religious life and for this reason in many comparative sociological and religious studies Finland is usually grouped together with Scandinavia, rather than with Russia in the east. Estonians in the south also have very close historical ties to Finland. Estonians speak a language similar to Finnish, but usually Estonia is grouped with other Baltic countries because of its geographical proximity and historical ties.

Finland shares 600 years of history in partnership with Sweden under the Swedish crown, which lasted till the war between Sweden and Russia in 1808-09.<sup>2</sup> During medieval times Turku was the most important town in Finland, founded in the middle of the thirteenth century. It was also the Bishop's seat, and still is the home of the Lutheran Archbishop. In 1362, Finns were given the right to send representatives to the election of

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<sup>1</sup>A very informative internet site for general information and articles about Finland in English is found in <http://virtual.finland.fi/>.

<sup>2</sup>A useful book on Finnish history, which is translated in English, is written by Eino Jutikkala and Kauko Pirinen, *A History of Finland*, 6<sup>th</sup> rev. ed., translated by Paul Sjöblom. (Helsinki, Finland: WSOY, 2003). In this section of Finland's history I am also indebted to the article "Main Outlines of Finnish History," by Seppo Zetterberg, <http://virtual.finland.fi/netcomm/news/showarticle.asp?intNWSAID=25909> (15 May 2005).

the king in Sweden, and in the sixteenth century this right was extended to include representation in the Swedish Diet. The reformation started by Luther in the early sixteenth century also reached Finland, and the Catholic Church was replaced by Protestantism. The Reformation set in motion a great rise in Finnish-language culture. The New Testament was translated into Finnish in 1548 by the Bishop of Turku, Mikael Agricola (1510–1557), who brought the Reformation to Finland. He also created Finnish as a written language. The entire Bible appeared in Finnish in 1642. Since Swedish remained the official language in Finland and Swedes were often appointed to high offices in Finland, the Swedish language was strengthened and remained an important part of Finnish culture.<sup>1</sup>

When Sweden lost its position as a great power in the early eighteenth century, Russian pressure on Finland increased, and Russia conquered Finland in the 1808-1809 war with Sweden. As a result of the war Finland became an autonomous Grand Duchy of Russia under the rule of the Russian Emperor, whose representative in Finland was the Governor General. Finland's highest governing body was the Senate, whose members were Finns. The Finnish Secretary of State presented matters pertaining to Finland to the Emperor in St. Petersburg.<sup>2</sup>

The Russian Emperor Alexander I, who was Grand Duke of Finland in 1809–1825, gave Finland extensive autonomy thereby creating the Finnish state. The Lutheran Church retained its position in Finland, and Swedish remained as the official language of

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<sup>1</sup>Zetterberg, "Main Outlines of Finnish History."

<sup>2</sup>The Russian period of Finnish history is dealt with more extensively in *A History of Finland*, by Jutikkala and Pirinen.

the country. In 1812, Helsinki was made the capital of Finland, and the University, which had been founded in Turku in 1640, was moved to Helsinki in 1828 after Turku suffered a devastating fire.

The possibility of independence started to arise during the Russian period. J. V. Snellman (1806–1881), who was a senator and professor at the University of Helsinki during the reign of Alexander II from 1855–1881, worked to promote Finnish as an official language alongside Swedish. The Language Decree issued in 1863 by Alexander II marked the beginning of the process through which Finnish became an official administrative language. Although only one-seventh of the Finnish population spoke Swedish as its first language, Swedish retained its dominant position until the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup>

The Finnish Diet was convened again in 1863 after a break of more than half a century. From then on, the Diet met regularly, and active legislative work in Finland began. The Conscription Act of 1878 gave Finland an army of its own. These factors made Finland almost like an independent country within the Russian Empire with its own Senate and its own Diet, its own local officials, legislation, army, money (the mark), and postage stamps. Finland was also separated from the Empire by an official border. This became a sore point to Russian chauvinists.

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<sup>1</sup>The language question has been an issue in Finnish history to the present time. Many new ideologies have come to Finland from Sweden. Also the first Adventist missionaries, who came to Finland, were from Sweden and the first converts to Adventism were from the Swedish speaking population of Finland. For these historical reasons the Swedish Adventist Church in Finland has retained its conference status even with only about 350 members. Zetterberg, "Main Outlines of Finnish History."

During the reign of Alexander II (1881–1894) and particularly of Nicholas II (1894–1917), nationalist circles in Russia gained increased influence. At the turn of the century Russians started to tighten their grip on the internal affairs of Finland. The obliteration of “Finnish separatism,” a policy also known as “Russification,” started during the “first era of oppression” (1899–1905) and continued during the second era (1909–1917).

The 1905 Revolution in Russia gave Finland a short breathing spell, while a new legislative body replacing the old Estates was created in 1906. This was the most radical parliamentary reform in Europe at the time, because Finland moved at once from a four-estate diet to a unicameral parliament with universal suffrage.<sup>1</sup> Finnishwomen were the first in Europe to gain the right to vote in parliamentary elections.<sup>2</sup>

The role of women has been more egalitarian and progressive in Finland than in many other parts of the world. Irma Sulkunen writes: “This history of voting rights, which was so exceptional within the European context no doubt, influenced the future role of women in the political life of Finland. In their distinctively self-assertive manner, women ran for election already in the first elections, for the unicameral parliament and

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<sup>1</sup>More information on the parliamentary reform of 1906 can be found in the book *A History of Finland* by Jutikkala and Pirinen and from Timo Soikkanen’s article, *The Structure and Development of Finnish Political Parties*,” 2 February 2003, <http://virtual.finland.fi/> (20 July 2004). Soikkanen writes: “The 1906 parliamentary reform transformed Finnish party politics. It forced parties to modernize their programmes and organizations.” The two main parties were the Social Democrats and the Agrarian Party (Maalaisliitto). These two parties and their heirs have been the main parties in Finnish politics and usually have formed the main coalition in the Finnish government.

<sup>2</sup>Zetterberg, “Main Outlines of Finnish History.”

with their 19 elected representatives gained a parliamentary foothold, which was not equaled elsewhere in the world for decades.”<sup>1</sup>

During the heat of the Russian revolution in 1917 Finland seized the opportunity and declared its independence. At the end of January 1918, the leftwing parties staged a coup, and the government was forced to flee Helsinki. The ensuing Civil War ended in May with victory for the government troops, led by General Gustaf Mannerheim (1867-1951). Finland became a republic in the summer of 1919, and K. J. Ståhlberg (1865-1952) was elected the first president.

The early years of independence were times of fast development. This was when the Turku Seventh-day Adventist Church was established and enjoyed strong initial growth of membership under the leadership of young evangelist Aarne Rintala, who had been studying in Germany. The independent Republic developed briskly during the 1920s, and so did the Adventist Church in Turku.

The wounds sustained in the Civil War were alleviated by conciliatory measures such as inclusion of the Social Democrats in the government; in 1926-1927 they formed a minority government on their own. The farm tenants could now buy their land from the landowners according to a law that was passed 1922.

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<sup>1</sup>Irma Sulkunen, “*Finland: A Pioneer in Women's Rights*,” 2003, [www.virtual.finland.fi](http://www.virtual.finland.fi) (June 2003). The first women were ordained as Lutheran pastors in 1988. See study made by Kati Niemelä and Kari Jalonen “*Suomalaisten Suhtautuminen Naispappeuteen*” (Finns and Ordination of Women) 2000, <http://www.evl.fi/kkh/ktk/naisp.htm> (June 2005). In 2000, 25 percent of the ordained pastors in the Lutheran Church were women. More than half of the new pastors ordained in the Lutheran Church are women. Also in the Adventist Church women have always played an important role as evangelists, bible workers, and more recently as commissioned church pastors and local church elders. About 30 percent of the Finnish Adventist ministerial workers are women.

Before the turn of the century industrialization was underway, agricultural production had improved; cultural life showed more vitality and the standard of education had risen. However, Finland was still mainly an agrarian society in the early years of its independence but urbanization steadily increased as a result of industrialization. The scars of internal war remained hidden in people's minds and sometimes the relationships between the working class and landowners deteriorated almost to breaking point. In 1929, the Lapua Movement, demanded a ban on communist activities. The ban was voted in the parliament and put into effect by the "Communist Laws" of 1930. In 1932, the Lapua Movement also tried an armed revolt against the government, but had to back down.

In the early 1930s Finland was affected by an economic depression, but even darker clouds appeared from the European sky when Hitler rose to power in Germany. Against these dark clouds the Turku Adventist Church enjoyed exceptionally strong growth and doubled its membership in just one year in 1934-35.<sup>1</sup>

In August 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression pact, which included a secret protocol relegating Finland to the Soviet sphere of interest. When Finland refused to allow the Soviet Union to build military bases on its territory, the latter revoked the non-aggression pact of 1932 and attacked Finland on November 30, 1939, with a plan to march straight to Helsinki and occupy the whole country. Finland's destination was at stake and the people united to defend their country against the Soviet

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<sup>1</sup>Toivo Seljavaara (then Ståhlberg) became the pastor of the Turku Church in 1934. His evangelistic meetings attracted large crowds and after the first year of preaching, 117 people were baptized.

Union in the “Winter War” of 1939-40. Finland refused to give up against the big neighbour, and fought against seemingly overwhelming odds; other countries offered only sympathy and modest assistance. During the war Finnish ski troops inflicted heavy casualties on the Soviet Russian army. Finland's survival against overwhelming Russian forces became legendary all over the world. The war ended with a peace treaty drawn up in Moscow on March 13, 1940, that gave southeastern Finland to the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike all other states on the European continent that were involved in the Second World War, foreign forces never occupied Finland. About 420,000 Finns, mainly from Carelia, were evacuated from their homes during the war and had to be resettled in other parts of the country. This “peace” was only temporary; Finland joined World War in 1941 to regain the lost land from Russia. Most of the people in Carelia returned to rebuild their homes that had been burned during the Winter War. During the war years of 1941-1944 evangelism continued in a strong way in Helsinki under the leadership of Toivo Seljavaara. The Turku Church also experienced an amazingly strong growth spurt during these war years under the young evangelist, Onni Halminen. Finland had entered the war as a cobelligerent with Germany. The “Continuation War” ended in an armistice in September 1944. In addition to the areas already lost to Russia, Finland also ceded Petsamo on the Arctic Ocean. The terms of the armistice were confirmed in the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947. The cost of peace was heavy, not only in terms of lost lives but

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<sup>1</sup>Finland's fight for independence is explained more in detail in the book written by Jutikkala and Pirinen: *A History of Finland*. Jutikkala has also written an article “*The Impossible Happened Thrice*,” December 2001, <http://www.virtual.finland.fi/> (June 2004) explaining the three wars: the War of Independence, the Winter War and the Continuation War. It is a historical “miracle” that Finland could keep her independence through these wars and did not suffer the fate



Finland also lost part of its land to Russia. Finland could still keep its free market economy and independence, but it had to pay heavy war reparations to the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup>

Many Finnish people believed that it was God's special protection (in addition to the brave soldiers who fought fiercely to maintain the independence) that spared Finland from the same fate that all the Baltic countries and the whole of Eastern Europe suffered during the ensuing decades. This experience of war is perhaps one of the reasons why Finnish people are still somewhat more religious than other Scandinavian people. The Finnish economy was lagging behind its Scandinavian neighbors through the years after war. In the latter part of the 1960s many Finns migrated to urban areas but urbanization was still slower than in Scandinavia and this also may have kept Finland more religious than its neighbors.<sup>2</sup>

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of the Baltic and the Eastern European countries, who remained under heavy Russian pressure for decades after the Second World War.

<sup>1</sup>Finland is known as the only European country to have paid its war reparations, amounting to 226.5 million dollars. The last train loaded with war reparations crossed Finland's eastern border in 1952, the year of the Helsinki Olympics.

<sup>2</sup>Steve Bruce, *Choice and Religion: A Critique of Rational Choice Theory* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), 98. Steve Bruce notes a vital difference between Finland and its neighbors that is hinted at in the RAMP data. He says: "Those surveyed were asked to respond to ten versions of the statement 'The National Church should be present . . .' where the sentence was completed by such options as 'at the celebration of the National Day' and 'at festivities among the royal family' All four countries are united in accepting the autonomy of politics. On a scale from 1 to 7, 'at the national conventions of the political parties' scored only between 1.5 for Denmark and 1.9 for Finland. However, over all the possible items, the Finns averaged 3.2 against 2.0 for the Danes, 2.4 for Norwegians, and 2.5 for Swedes. While no other country scored more than 4 on any item, Finland scored over 4 on 3: the celebration of national day, national festivities, and the end of school year ceremonies. The greatest disagreement between the four countries concerns the question of whether the church should be present at a regiment's jubilee celebrations. The Danes scored only 1.7, Norwegians 1.9, and Swedes 2.1. But the Finns scored 3.7." As Steve Bruce suggests, the greater religiosity of the Finns may be related to issues of national integrity and the history of Russian oppression and wars. He also points out that there is also a significant difference in urbanization. In the 1990s Denmark and Sweden were the most urban of

Marshal Mannerheim was made president of the republic towards the end of the war. He was followed in 1946 by J. K. Paasikivi, whose aim was to improve relations with the Soviet Union. The "Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance" (YYA) concluded between the countries in 1948, provided the foundation of what is known as the "Paasikivi Line." That included certain understanding of Finnish geopolitical position and need for maintaining friendly relationships but still remain neutral in world's power politics. In subsequent years, Finland's international position grew stronger. The Olympics were held in Helsinki in 1952, and in 1955 Finland joined both the United Nations and the Nordic Council.

Urho Kekkonen, who was elected president in 1956, worked to increase Finland's influence in foreign policy by pursuing an active policy of neutrality and thus continuing the "Paasikivi Line," This was evident for instance as Finland took the initiative to convene the "Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe" held in Helsinki in the summer of 1975.

The early seventies saw the fourth and last strong growth spurt in the history of the Turku Church. That was the time of the "big move" from the northern and eastern parts of the country to the urban centers of the south and even across the border to Sweden.

When Urho Kekkonen, who had led Finland for a quarter of a century, resigned because of poor health, Mauno Koivisto was elected president in 1982. Mauno Koivisto's father was an Adventist, who was active in the Turku Church, as was his son though he

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the four with 85 and 83 percent of their people in large towns and cities, then came Norway at 73 percent, and Finland was the least urban at 64 percent.

was never baptized or joined the church. After childhood years he was not in touch with the Church until he became the president of Finland and visited the Turku Adventist Church on one occasion for a musical concert that was held in Betel Church, which in 1983 was purchased for the Turku Adventist congregation.

Since World War II Finnish political parties have usually supported the politics of military non-alliance and have worked to maintain good relations with its neighbors. The ruling parties in Finland have been the Center Party and the Social Democrats, which most often formed coalition governments during the post-war years.<sup>1</sup>

Finland benefited economically from its good relations with the Soviet Union. Finnish-Soviet trade flourished. Finland mainly imported oil from Russia and exported industrial products to Russia. This boosted the industrial base in Finland. Finland was also able to compete in the Western markets especially with its timber and paper products but also with its metal industry such as shipbuilding.

Finland's relations have been very good with the other Nordic countries, especially with politically neutral and militarily non-allied Sweden. During the 1960s and 1970s many Finnish people immigrated to Sweden to work there, since the living standard in Sweden was at that time higher compared with the northern and eastern parts of Finland. In fact, in 1969–1970 about 80,000 Finnish people moved to Sweden. During the 1970s urbanization increased in Finland and big suburbs were developed around the large cities of the south.

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<sup>1</sup>More information on the political history of Finland can be found in Timo Soikkanen's article "The Structure and Development of Finnish Political Parties," February 2003, [www.virtual.finland.fi/](http://www.virtual.finland.fi/) (June 2003).

In the 1980s the economy flourished and the standard of living rose steadily, reaching European standards. The increased standard of living has also increased secularization with religion playing a lesser role in people's lives. The diminished influence of religion in the home has created a new generation of young people who have some basic knowledge of religion but no close relatives or friends who practice religion in everyday life. The Adventist Church grew in Finland until 1984 when it reached its largest membership. Since then it has steadily declined with the exception of the years 1989 and 1990, when the church held larger evangelistic campaigns in bigger cities. At the same time, society began to change rapidly. During the turn of the decade Finnish economy overheated and collapsed. So did the communism in the Soviet Union which caused sudden and severe interruption of former trade deals. The loss of trade caused massive unemployment and created an economic crisis in the country. Many companies that had relied on the Eastern trade were severely handicapped.

Finland became a full member of EFTA (European Federation of Trade Association) in 1986 and a member of the Council of Europe in 1989. In September 1990 the government issued a declaration in which it stated that the limitations on Finnish sovereignty in the Treaty of Paris (1947) concerning men in arms and amounts of war materiel had become obsolete. Although there was increasing pressure to amend the Treaty on Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance during 1991, the dissolution of the Soviet Union at the end of that year eliminated any need for change.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Zetterberg, "Main Outlines of Finnish History."

## Changes in Society

### Political

Finland recognized Russia's position as the successor to the Soviet Union and a treaty on good relations between the neighboring countries was concluded in January 1992. Finland and Russia confirmed that the post-war "Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance" was null and void.

The process of European integration was also demanding increased activity on the part of Finland. In May 1992 a treaty concerning the European Economic Area (EEA) was signed by EFTA and the European Community (the EC). The EEA agreement guaranteed EFTA countries greater access to the EC's internal markets. Soon, however, both the need and opportunity for Finnish EC membership increased greatly when Sweden submitted its membership application in the spring of 1991 and the Soviet Union was dissolved at the end of that year. Finland submitted its own application to the EC in March 1992 and the Parliament of the EC (by then the European Union), approved the application in May 1994. In a referendum held in Finland in October 1994, 57 percent of the voters supported membership in EU. Parliament approved Finnish EU membership as of the beginning of 1995.<sup>1</sup>

Two factors added considerable interest to the presidential elections of 1994: the announcement by the incumbent president Mauno Koivisto that he would not seek re-election and the new system of direct presidential elections. None of the candidates gained an absolute majority in the first round and the second round in February pitted

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

Martti Ahtisaari, Secretary of State at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, against Elisabeth Rehn, Minister of Defence. Martti Ahtisaari was elected the tenth president of the Republic of Finland with 54 percent of the votes.<sup>1</sup>

In Parliamentary elections held in March 1995 the Finnish Center Party suffered a crushing defeat and Paavo Lipponen, the new chairman of the Social Democratic Party, formed a unique government by Finnish standards, including the National Coalition (right wing party), the Greens, the Left-Wing Alliance, and the Swedish People's Party. Lipponen's "rainbow coalition" remained in office until the end of its four-year term. Among the government's most important tasks were positioning Finland within the structures of the European Union, improving the domestic economy, and reducing unemployment. The elections of 1999 strengthened the non-socialist majority in parliament, as the National Coalition Party and the opposition Center Party made the biggest gains in the house. The Social Democratic Party suffered losses, but with fifty-one representatives remained the biggest group in parliament. The outcome of the elections did not affect the composition of the new government. Lipponen formed his second cabinet from the parties that had served in his first one. The Center Party again found itself in opposition. In February 2000 Tarja Halonen (Social Democrat) became the first woman to be elected President of Finland.

#### Economic

The early 1990s was a time of deep economical recession. The unemployment figures had risen and the state took heavy foreign loans to fill the budget. Home prices

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

declined and many families were in serious economic trouble. The Finnish currency was devalued and those companies who had foreign currency loans were hit hard. Slowly but steadily Finland started to rise from the recession, which lasted through the first half of the 1990s.

Jyrki Vesikansa mentions two reasons for the recession. First, the disintegration of the Soviet Union caused the final collapse of Finnish-Soviet trade, which had been conducted on a bilateral basis via official channels as was customary for the Soviet system. The second was the 'casino' economics, which overheated the economy in the United States, and then the economies of the Nordic countries.<sup>1</sup> The Nordic welfare state model was questioned, at least to some extent, in both Finland and in its birthplace, Sweden. In Finland, the spiraling national debt was brought under control with a program of budgetary austerity introduced by Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen's Government (appointed in April 1995), and Finland was able to fulfil the EMU (European Monetary Union) criteria with ease. Despite the upward trend in the Finnish economy in the late 1990s, the country continued to have an unemployment rate of around 10 percent. In 2004 it is still around 8 percent.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps best known outside of Finland is its rapid development into an information society. Nokia became the leading company, which became the worldwide

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<sup>1</sup>Jyrki Vesikansa, "*Growth Spanning Fifty Years*," 1992, <http://virtual.finland.fi/> (20 July 2003).

<sup>2</sup>Raimo Blom, ed., *Mikä Suomessa muuttui? Sosiologinen kuva 1990-luvusta* (What changed in Finland? Sociological picture of 1990s) (Tampere: Gaudeamus, 1999), 16.

number one player in mobile telecommunication, and when the company was at its best had almost 40 percent of the world market and in 2005 still holds about 34 percent of the mobile phone markets.

## Social and Cultural

### Population

The population of Finland, will continue to grow steadily partly because people live longer and immigration is likely to continue slowly but steadily. The population of Finland passed the five million mark in 1991. Finland's population figures increase very slowly. The contribution of natural population growth to the increase is falling and net migration is replacing it as the factor with the strongest effect on population growth. People will also continue to move from the small cities to the bigger cities in the south. Demographic data indicates that the Finnish population is aging.<sup>1</sup>

Table 2. Population Projection of Finland

	Unit	2010	2020	2030	2040
Population	1,000	5,310	5,412	5,443	5,367
0-14 years	%	16	16	16	15
15-64 years	%	66	61	58	58
65- years	%	17	23	26	27

Source: *Statistics Finland*

<sup>1</sup>Arvo Peltonen, "The Population in Finland," 2002, <http://virtual.finland.fi/netcomm/news> (June 2004).



This places a growing demand on care of the elderly and on the pension schemes. The average life-expectancy of Finnish women is 81 years and for men is 74 years. The most common causes of death are cardio-vascular diseases, cancer, and respiratory diseases. Accidents account for 10 percent of deaths.<sup>1</sup>

Finland, formerly a source of emigrants, is now becoming a destination for immigrants. Net immigration increased the population of Finland by 0.5 per 1,000. The contribution of immigration to population growth has increased by 2000. In 2000, 17,000 people immigrated to Finland, while 14,000 left the country. The principal Countries of

Table 3. Foreigners in Finland

	1990	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Russia		9,720	20,552	22,724	24,336	24,998	24,626
Estonia		8,446	10,839	11,662	12,428	13,397	13,978
Sweden	6,051	7,014	7,887	7,999	8,037	8,124	8,209
Somalia	44	4,044	4,190	4,355	4,537	4,642	4,689
Serbia and Montenegro	75	2,407	3,575	4,240	4,224	4,243	4,090
Iraq	107	1,341	3,102	3,222	3,420	3,485	3,392
United Kingdom	1,365	1,865	2,207	2,352	2,535	2,651	2,655
Germany	1,568	1,748	2,201	2,327	2,461	2,565	2,626
China	312	1,412	1,668	1,929	2,086	2,372	2,613
Iran	336	1,275	1,941	2,166	2,363	2,531	2,555
Turkey	310	1,335	1,784	1,981	2,146	2,287	2,359
Thailand	239	763	1,306	1,540	1,784	2,055	2,289
United States	1,475	1,844	2,010	2,110	2,146	2,149	2,040
Bosnia and Herzegovina		928	1,627	1,668	1,701	1,694	1,641
Afghanistan			386	719	1,061	1,312	1,588
Viet Nam	292	2,084	1,814	1,778	1,713	1,661	1,538
India	270	454	756	892	1,012	1,169	1,343
Others	13,811	21,886	23,229	24,913	25,692	25,668	26,115
<b>Total</b>	<b>26,255</b>	<b>68,566</b>	<b>91,074</b>	<b>98,577</b>	<b>103,682</b>	<b>107,003</b>	<b>108,346</b>

Source: Statistics Finland, adapted by the author, 26 May 2005.

<sup>1</sup> STAKES, *Facts about Finnish Social Welfare and Health Care 2003, 2004*, [http://www.stakes.info/files/pdf/Raportit/Taskutieto\\_2003eng.pdf](http://www.stakes.info/files/pdf/Raportit/Taskutieto_2003eng.pdf) (June 2005).

origin of the immigrants are Russia, Estonia, and Sweden (in the latter case, most of the Swedes were originally Finnish citizens who are now beginning to return from Sweden).<sup>1</sup>

Compared with other countries in western Europe, Finland has few refugees and asylum-seekers (approximately 3,000 annually). The total number of refugees in Finland then was about 19,000. People of Finnish descent in Russia (e.g., Ingrians) resettling in Finland are regarded as ethnic Finnish emigrants.

Finland is also becoming more multicultural (see table 3); although it is still one of the most homogenous countries in Europe. Having lost more than a million people as emigrants during the previous hundred years, in the 1990s Finland became a country of net immigration. In the years 1990-2002, net immigration to Finland was around 69,000 persons (including returning Finnish citizens). In 2002 Finland had about 152,000 residents born outside Finland, which equals only about 2.9 percent of the population. Of these, nearly 104,000 were citizens of other countries (2 percent). Almost 40 percent of Finland's foreign community is from the former Soviet Union. Of this group about 25,000 are Ingrian Finns and 10,000 are Estonians. The next largest group is composed of Swedish citizens (around 8,000) many of whom were born in Finland, moved to Sweden in 1960s and 1970s, became Swedish citizens and are now moving back again because the standard of living is about the same in Finland as in Sweden, and also because many of their relatives still live in Finland.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Peltonen, "*The Population in Finland*."

<sup>2</sup>Olavi Koivukangas, "Foreigners in Finland," 2003, <http://www.virtual.finland.fi>; (July, 2003).

## Families

Family structure has been changing during the 1990s. Young Finns leave home at an early age. Half of the girls move away from their parents' home by the age of twenty. The boys usually leave a couple of years later. The present high level of social security, helps the young become independent at an early age. Most of these leaving home first live on their own either in student hostels or in rented apartments.<sup>1</sup>

A notable number of young people, however, move at this early stage to live with a companion. Common-law marriages are very popular among the young in Finland. It is rare for a young couple to marry without first having lived together. Finns are getting married later and later in life. The average age for exchanging wedding vows is 29 years for the bride, and 31 years for the groom.<sup>2</sup>

Year by year a growing number of children are born out of wedlock; today the figure is more than one-third. The reason for Finnish women having their children and marrying so late is related to their high level of education. Couples prefer to marry after they have completed their studies and been in their first job for a while. This poses a challenge to a conservative church like Seventh-day Adventists, which holds traditional moral values concerning sex and marriage.<sup>3</sup>

For a western European country, the birth rate in Finland is high among the top

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<sup>1</sup>Leena Kartovaara, "Finnish Families," 2002, <http://www.virtual.finland.fi>; (July, 2003) In this section on Finnish families I am indebted to Leena Kartovaara's article and to Statistics Finland.

<sup>2</sup>Statistics Finland, "Finland in Figures."

<sup>3</sup>Kartovaara, "Finnish Families."

group among EU countries. Labor legislation provides the mother with a safeguard against dismissal from employment during maternity leave. The family's livelihood is secured by long periods of paid maternity leave (nine months on partial pay). In addition, one of the parents has the right to unpaid leave from work to look after the child at home until the child reaches the age of three. Society pays the family a small subsidy during this period. The average number of children in a Finnish family is 2.2.<sup>1</sup>

Finland and Sweden head the divorce statistics in the EU countries. Although divorces and common-law marriages have increased, 65 percent of families with children are still intact (see table 4). The number of married families with children has, however, been declining annually while the number of one parent families and common-law couples with children continues to grow. In 2000, 16 percent of families with children were headed by common-law couples, and 19 percent were one-parent families. The majority of single parents are female with only one of eight single parents being male.<sup>2</sup>

In targeting the ministry of the church, there are more and more people who are living in broken families and who need love and support. More than 40 percent of the households have only one person in the home. Thus, there are many lonely people.

One might have expected an explosion in the number of blended families as a result of higher divorce and remarriage rates. But this is not the case. The proportion of all families with children represented by blended families has remained more or less

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Kartovaara.

stable and stands at 7 percent. After a family has broken up, the threshold for establishing a new marriage, when children are living at home, is relatively high.<sup>1</sup>

Finnish women are well educated and for them going to work is the rule rather than the exception. Family finances are built on two pay checks even when children are small. In the past, mothers often used to stay at home when their children were born, but since the 1970s it has become common for mothers to go to work. In addition to their high level of education and society's efforts towards equality, the high cost of Finnish housing increases the need for women to work which makes family life stressful and allows less time during the week to attend church related activities.

Table 4. Finnish Families and Families with Children by Type of Family at the End of 2000

	All families	Families with children 0-17 yrs	Families with children 0-6 yrs
Married couple, no children	31.1%	-	-
Common-law couple, no children	11.4 %	-	-
Married couple, with children	36.7 %	65.1 %	64.2 %
Common-law couple, with children	7.3 %	15.5 %	21.6 %
Mother and children	11.4 %	17.0 %	13.4 %
Father and children	2.1 %	2.4 %	0.8 %
<b>Total number of families</b>	<b>1,401,963</b>	<b>612,627</b>	<b>291,170</b>

*Source:* Statistics Finland, "Finland in Figures."

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

Families with children tend to have lots of sports and other cultural activities during the weekend, which also makes it quite a challenge for churches to compete with all the possible hobbies that may involve families with children. The question of quality becomes important for churches, too. Is our “product” attractive enough to create an interest in the lives of the younger generation?<sup>1</sup>

An efficient daycare system allows parents to work. A pre-school aged child is entitled to reasonably priced, municipal daycare either in a daycare center or in a family setting supervised by the local authorities. Finnish children do not start school until the age of seven. School children are served a free hot lunch all the way through to the end of secondary school or vocational school, which is a help to the family where both parents are working.

The Finnish public school system has a very high standard, which has been supported by recent international studies.<sup>2</sup> For many years the state was reluctant to subsidize private schools. Toivonlinna Junior High School has been subsidized by the state since 1962, but that was not the case with elementary schools, which started to receive subsidies only during the 1990s. Now it is again more difficult to establish new private Christian schools. An Adventist Christian school, Toivonlinna, is located near Turku and there is a growing interest among some non-Adventist Christian circles to

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>OECD, 1 December 2004. <http://www.oecd.org> (June 2005). OECD news release says, “Finland once again came out top in the OECD’s latest PISA study of learning skills among 15-year-olds, with high performances in mathematics and science matching those of top-ranking Asian school systems in Hong Kong-China, Japan and Korea. . . . More than 250,000 students in 41 countries took part in PISA 2003, the second three-yearly survey of its kind. . . . Finland

establish a private Christian school in Turku. To facilitate this need, Toivonlinna is planning to start a branch elementary school in Turku since it already is an established school.

The Finnish population is ageing and as a result the structure of the family is changing. The proportion of all families that are represented by families with children is declining rapidly. Since families are small and children become independent at an early age, many fifty-year-old couples today only have each other for company in the home. The largest single group in the “without a family” category are widows. In Finland the life expectancy of women is seven years higher than that of men. Since women generally choose older men, the majority of women can expect a long widowhood in their declining years. It is rare in Finland to find a family in which three generations live together. Young couples often do not even live close to their parents. Thus old age often becomes extremely lonely.<sup>1</sup> This means that older females seek friendship and support from the local churches. This is also reflected in the makeup of the Turku Adventist Church.

## **Work**

Finland was a latecomer in industrialization; therefore the change from mainly an agrarian society to an industrial society, and then to a service society and recently to an information society has been very rapid. Finland is also very much a modern welfare society, similar to the other Nordic countries. The state offers fairly extensive services to

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already led in the PISA 2000 reading assessment, and in PISA 2003 it maintained its high level of reading literacy while further improving its performance in mathematics and science.”

<sup>1</sup>Kartovaara, “Finnish Families.”

all its citizens as it strives for equality and solidarity. This means that churches have fewer opportunities for social work. However, there are still plenty of opportunities for reaching out to the community with need-oriented activities.

The Adventist Church in Finland is well known for its long tradition of humanitarian work. "Sympatia," the yearly Ingathering campaign supports many humanitarian projects and with matching funds from the government many ADRA projects receive funding. The Finnish Adventist humanitarian work in Russia and in the Baltic countries has also been well received by the recipients.

"Big move" in the 1960s and early 1970s was a term used by sociologists for three changes that happened in Finland simultaneously: geographical, cultural, and lifestyle.<sup>1</sup> Geographical change happened as people moved from rural to the urban areas and to Sweden. Cities were growing very rapidly, especially the larger cities. Culturally the "big move" meant that family and work values changed as a result of moving to the cities. Lifestyle changes also took place as people had more leisure time after work, watched more television, and had more time for sports, cinema, and traveling. People in the cities tended to lose their contact with the local churches and they became "unchurched," a term popularized by Bill Hybels. Secularism and materialism won ground, especially in the urban areas.

The recession in the early 1990s, resulted in an unstable job market and high unemployment. People had to produce more in the same time so many people suffered because of work related stress. Jobs today no longer are as secure and competition has

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<sup>1</sup>Kimmo Jokinen and Kimmo Saaristo, *Suomalainen Yhteiskunta* (Finnish Society) (Porvoo, Finland: WSOY, 2002), 103-108.



increased. When people feel that their life is uncertain they tend to pray more and they have a greater need for God in their lives. Such people are more likely to be receptive to the message of the church.

Microelectronics, computers, telecommunications, and media have become very much a part of working and private life in Finland.<sup>1</sup> But this is not happening only in Finland for as labor and the consumer market has become global there is less work for unskilled workers. Companies use high technology and automation and have become global actors in the market. Those that use most recent technology survive. The companies that have made the best use of the new technologies are mostly around Helsinki, Tampere, Oulu, and also Turku, Salo, and Jyväskylä. These cities have grown more than other areas. One-third of all Finns live in these fast-developing areas. This also has certain implications for the outreach strategy of churches. The church needs to target the young urban families with good children's programs, with holistic small groups, with alternative worship forms, and with contemporary music.

The result of the recession in the early 1990s was high unemployment. In two to three years close to 500,000 jobs were lost. The most important question then was how these lost jobs could be replaced by new jobs. The government took corrective measures to improve the situation, but the most important factor in creating new jobs was the devaluation of the Finnish currency *markka*, in 1992, which improved the competitiveness of the Finnish export industry. The huge investments in electronics and

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<sup>1</sup>Tommi Melander and Elias Repo, "Finnish Information Technology in Good Form," April 2005, <http://virtual.finland.fi/netcomm/news/> (June 2005). See also Paavo Ahonen, "Finland: A Communications Superpower," June 2003, <http://virtual.finland.fi> (20 July 2004).

communication technology, especially by Nokia, also stimulated growth in the Finnish economy and eventually by the end of the decade Nokia became the major player in the world market and a symbol of success in high technology.<sup>1</sup>

In some areas companies are now facing difficulties in recruiting new skilled workers. On the other hand there are people who have not been re-employed since recession. They can live with the social benefits that society offers but often feel marginalized. The unemployed are a group that the church could minister to since they need to find loving relationships and voluntary work could give meaning to their lives. Those who are unemployed in the church could seek contacts with other unemployed people in the community, make friends with them, and invite them to small groups and eventually to church.

One of the problems the labor market will face in the future is that the age group between 25-54 will decrease significantly within ten years. It is estimated that there will be considerably fewer people in that age category, which means that unless people are willing to work longer and retire later in their life there will be a great demand for skilled workers to maintain development of society. It will become even more important to efficiently mobilize all the available human resources in order to maintain the welfare society. This means also that Finland will accept more immigrants.

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<sup>1</sup>Meinander and Repo interviewed Nokia director Jorma Ollila in an article "*Finnish Information Technology in Good Form.*" Ollila pointed out that the company's market share has inched back up to 34 percent and that Nokia is expecting a new growth period. Finland's IT economy has been boosted by the strong position of Nokia in the world market of telecommunications.

## Recreation

Finland is a sport-loving nation. Finns enjoy sports and exercise. As Leena Nieminen suggests, “If a nation had to be described with a single characteristic, Finns would probably not mind being known as a nation of sports and fitness enthusiasts.”<sup>1</sup> Finns like to take part in organized sports and exercise far more enthusiastically than many other nations. There are about 6,800 active sport associations in Finland, and one in every four Finns belongs to one, although many more people actually participate in the activities. In all, it is reckoned that around two-thirds of all Finns are involved in sport associations in one way or another.<sup>2</sup>

Sports and keeping fit are the most popular leisure activities in Finland; the main motivations today are to maintain health, keep in shape, and be physically active. Nearly 60 percent of all adults consider sports or fitness activities an important part of their lives and engage in such physical exercise at least twice a week for thirty minutes or more each time. Still overweight is a growing health problem. This presents a challenge and an opportunity to the Adventist health message. The church could organize even more health related activities and seminars. Natural and healthy diets are becoming more popular as people become more health conscious.

Sporting activities head the list of hobbies for children and adolescents. Football (Soccer) is the clear favorite among Finnish children and adolescents, in terms of the number of players, both informally and in clubs. The leading non-organized sports and

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<sup>1</sup>Leena Nieminen, “*A Keep-fit Society with Top Level Sport.*” May 2005, <http://virtual.finland.fi/netcomm/news/showarticle.asp?intNWSAID=36591> (June 2005).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

fitness activities include cycling, skiing, and swimming. In sport associations, football is followed in popularity by ice hockey and gymnastics. Ball games have increased their popularity recently, with floor ball accounting for most of the growth. The Adventist favorite sport in Finland has traditionally been volleyball. Youth clubs take part in church related tournaments in Finland and overseas. Some of the sports activities in the church are organized through temperance societies. Churches could build more bridges to society through sports and health related activities. Keeping fit and healthy is a felt need in Finnish society. Some growing churches around the world have realized this and made use of the opportunities by organizing church-related activities in these areas.

The second most attractive entertainment in Finnish society is music. Finnish music has its own flavor and originality. The roots of Finnish music go deep into Finn's unique national heritage. Music education and institutions are well supported by the state and municipalities. Classical music is loved by many even among the younger generation. But so is pop music, which is especially loved by the younger generations.

Traditional hymns are sung in most of the churches. However, the religious hymns sung today have a global Western flavor. The world pop music business is changing the music tastes of Finns and also the music tastes of the people attending contemporary worship services. Contemporary music, mostly "praise songs" accompanied by bands, is becoming more and more popular especially among the new church plants and younger members. A growing church often needs to adapt to cultural changes in its music style without compromising biblical principles.

## Religious Changes in Finland and in Turku

### **Towards Religious Freedom and Ecumenism**

Until the end of the nineteenth century every Finn had to belong to either the Lutheran or the Orthodox Church. It was not until the Nonconformity Act of 1889 was passed that the position of other Protestant churches was made official and membership in them permitted. Full freedom of religion was guaranteed in 1922. The state no longer affirmed the Lutheran faith, thereby assuming a neutral attitude towards religion. The rights and duties of citizens are not affected by the religious denomination to which they belong or whether they belong to any religious community at all. It was not until World War II in 1943, that the Seventh-day Adventist Church registered officially as an independent denomination in Finland.<sup>1</sup>

However, the Lutheran and the Orthodox churches are still regarded as “state churches.” The Lutheran Church is the church of the majority of Finns. A total of 4.4 million people belong to Lutheran congregations in Finland. Around 84 percent of the population are members of the Lutheran Church. Orthodox believers make up one percent of the population. These two churches have some privileges that the other denominations do not have. For example, these churches can collect money from their members through the government tax system and they also receive a share of company

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<sup>1</sup>There was a danger that Adventists would not be allowed to hold public meetings since they were not officially registered as a religion. The registration alleviated some of the prejudices held against Adventists, especially in Helsinki, where thousands of people flocked into public halls to listen to an Adventist pastor, Toivo Seljavaara, a gifted and a powerful evangelist.

taxes. These churches tend to have more inactive members than the other so called “free churches.”

The largest free churches are Pentecostal, which have about 250 congregations in Finland with a total membership of about 50,000. These figures are not shown in the official statistics since Pentecostals had not registered as an official religion until very recently in 2002. The Pentecostal Church has recently become somewhat more open towards ecumenism. Like Adventists, they are not officially members of the Finnish Ecumenical Council, but take part in some of its activities. Instead they are active in the Council of Free Christianity and the Finnish Missionary Council. This latter organization also includes representatives of the Lutheran Church. In addition to this, Pentecostals often become involved in organizing local events together with other churches in their area. Adventists are also members in the Council of Free Christianity, together with some other evangelical established denominations like Methodists, the Free Evangelical Church, and the Salvation Army. Most of these denominations have a history of 100 years or more in Finland.

The second largest Free Church is the Evangelical Free Church of Finland, which has about 13,000 members. Its roots are in a revivalist movement within the Lutheran Church of Sweden from the 1870s, which emphasized personal decisions in matters of faith and the importance of a congregation of believers. At first the movement attempted to reform the Lutheran Church from within, but it later ended up separating from it. The Evangelical Free Church has also been impacted by international influences, particularly from Anglo-Saxon Christianity.

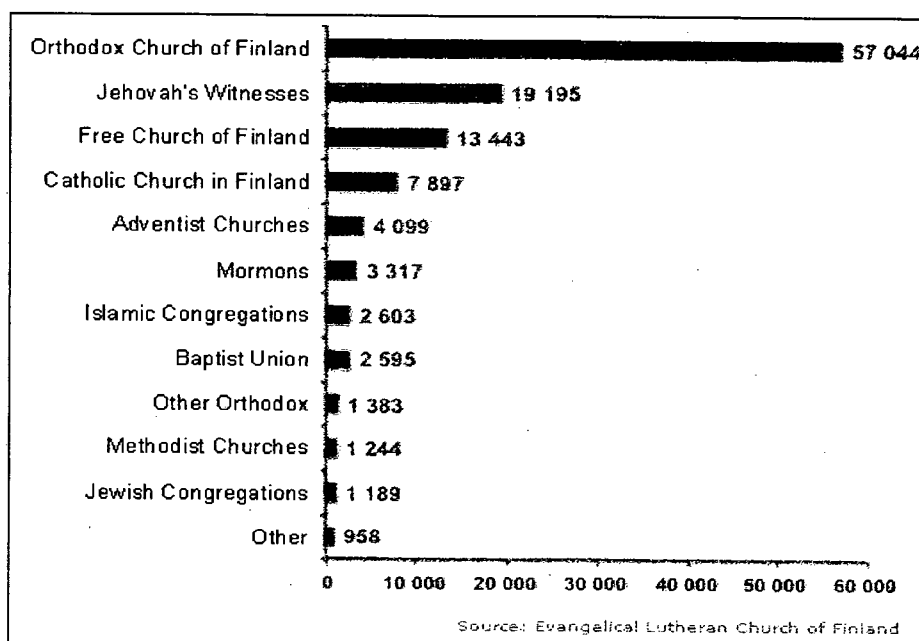


Fig. 1. The Membership of Registered Religions Other than Lutherans In Finland at the End of 2003. *Source:* The Church Research Institute.<sup>1</sup>

Other Christian communities in Finland include Baptists (2,600 members), Methodists (1,200 members), the Salvation Army, a few independent Lutheran churches, Quakers, and some new Christian groups which tend to be of a charismatic nature. There are also a number of interdenominational church organizations. The Adventist membership in Finland reached its peak at the end of 1984 (6,413 members) and has started to decline. By the end of the year 2003 the membership declined to 5,315, and the downward trend is continuing.<sup>2</sup> The official registered membership of 4,099 (see table

<sup>1</sup>Kirkon Tutkimuskeskus (The Church Research Institute of the Finnish Lutheran Church), *Kirkko Muutosten Keskellä: Suomen Evankelis-Luterlainen Kirkko vuosina 2000-2003*, 2004, <http://www.evl.fi/kkh/ktk/nelivuotiskertomus> (June 2005).

<sup>2</sup>The Seventh-day Adventist Church, General Conference, Office of Archives and Statistics, *World Church Statistics*, June 2004, <http://www.adventiststatistics.org/> (June 2005).

4) is smaller, because some Adventists want to keep their records in the Lutheran Church and are only members at the local Adventist congregation but not in the registered Adventist Church called "Suomen Adventtikirkko."

The Adventist Church has accepted the double membership in order to make it easier for people with Lutheran families to be baptized and join a local Adventist church. The majority, however, resign from the Lutheran Church when they join the local Adventist church and most also want to join the official Adventist Church.

### **Religions in Turku**

The city of Turku is the oldest town in Finland and it is the central economic, administrative, and educational locality in south-western Finland. The area is particularly known for its places of interest such as Turku Castle (Turun Linna), the Cathedral (Tuomiokirkko), beautiful river banks, seashores, and the archipelago. Christianity came to Finland mainly through Sweden. Turku became the most important commercial and religious center in the Finnish part of the Swedish kingdom. "In cultural terms, Turku is a major centre for both immigrants and for the Swedish-speaking population of the country."<sup>1</sup> Together these groups constitute close to one-tenth of the local population. In the city the total population is 174,824 and, with surrounding districts, has a total population of almost 300,000 people.<sup>2</sup> Turku is the fifth largest city in the country. Tuomas Martikainen says, "In comparison to other Finnish cities, Turku can be

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<sup>1</sup>Martikainen, *Immigrant Religions in Local Society*, 143.

<sup>2</sup>Statistics Finland. "*Finland in Figures*."



described as politically conservative, highly educated and as a strong regional centre of its own.”<sup>1</sup>

Turku is also one of the most international cities in Finland, having an immigrant population of about 10,000, with the largest groups coming from Russia and the Balkans. The international flavor of the city is increased by the influx of students from other countries. Turku has three universities with about 25,000 students. Tuomas Martikainen, who has done extensive mapping of the religious field in Turku, says: “The presence of three universities is not insignificant with respect to immigrants either. The universities have many foreign employees as well as students, and have initiated a joint programme for English language studies in different topics which brings many foreign students to the city.”<sup>2</sup>

About 80 percent of the people living in Turku are Lutherans, however, regular attendance at worship is not very common. The local Protestant free churches are numerous, but small. Some of them are working together and thus become more visible in the media. Several of them have formed an “A&O network,” which publishes and distributes a tabloid produced by these congregations. The Turku Adventist Church is part of this network. Protestant free churches have over 3,000 members, ca. 2 percent of the population. By far the largest of them is the Pentecostal church, which has 1,700 members.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Martikainen, *Immigrant Religions in Local Society*, 144.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 155.

The Adventist Church in Turku has 347 members with an additional 550 members in three churches in the area (Turku, Toivonlinna, and Piikkiö). These three churches share many ministries and also pastors.

### **Religious Attitudes**

Since World War II, secularization has increased its hold on all the Nordic countries, blurring the demarcation between the sacred and the profane. Values based on religion have lost status in society, and have been replaced by new sets of values and morals that have only tenuous links with religion and the church. In Finland, secularization has made the greatest inroads in the large urban centers such as Helsinki, Turku, and Tampere.

However, recent years have seen a reawakening of interest in religion. The late 1990s saw a marked increase in the number of those believing in God in accordance with Christian doctrine (see table 5). In 1999, half of the population said they believed in God as taught by Christianity, while at the beginning of the 1990s only a third had expressed such a belief. In addition, a quarter of the population said that they believed in God in a different way from that taught by the church. Seventeen percent were uncertain of the existence of God. The number of those rejecting the notion of God's existence was only 6 percent. Even among those belonging to no religious community, there is a substantial proportion of religious people.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Kati Niemelä, "Suomalaisten Uskonnollisuus Vuosituhannen Alussa," 2001, (The religiosity of Finns at the beginning of new decennium), 2003, <http://www.ev1.fi/kkh/ktk/uskonnol.htm> (June 2005).

Finnish religiosity is a private matter. Praying is the most common form of religious activity among Finns. More than half (55 percent) said that they pray at least once a month, but only 8 percent indicated that they took part in organized worship once a month. A typical Finnish churchgoer attends divine service a few times a year, particularly on the big feast days. Although the Finns are not very active participants in public religious practice, Christianity is nevertheless a significant component of many people's daily lives. Religious faith is not reflected in regular churchgoing, but is present as an undertone of private religiosity. Even a latent form of religiosity may be activated during a crisis or in other exceptional situations.

Table 5. Belief in God in Finland 1976–2002

Response	1976 %	1982 %	1984 %	1987 %	1991 %	1993 %	1994 %	1999 %	2002 %
Believe in God as the church teaches	51	44	47	44	33	37	38	47	39
Believe in God, but differently than the church teaches	22	23	24	27	30	30	25	27	31
I don't know if I believe in God or not	17	13	15	15	18	17	18	12	17
I doubt that God exists	4	4	5	4	5	7	8	5	5
I don't believe God exists	5	6	5	9	8	7	8	6	6
Can't or will not say	1	10	4	1	6	2	3	3	1

Source: Kati Niemelä, "*Suomalaisten uskonnollisuus vuosituhatennen alussa*," translated and adapted by the author.

Statistics show that Finnish people are more religious than people in other Nordic countries. These studies show that Finnish people believe in a personal God and the Bible as an inspired book more so than people in other Nordic countries. Finns score relatively low in church attendance as do other Nordic countries but there is a significant difference in that Finnish people pray more and regard certain basic religious rites as more important than the people in other Nordic countries.<sup>1</sup>

Religious participation is complemented by an interest in spiritual and ecclesiastical matters presented by the media. Half of the Finnish population read a Christian periodical at least once a year. Religious television programs and radio broadcasts are watched or listened to by the majority of Finns.<sup>2</sup> Ethical questions and problems related to daily life are perceived as issues affecting the future of the human race, an awareness that has spurred the church to open a dialogue with different ideologies and schools of thought. Although many of the traditional functions of the church have weakened, they have been replaced by other, often entirely new ones.<sup>3</sup> As table 5 indicates, about one-third of Finns (31%) believe differently about God than the church teaches. For them God is not personal but some kind of spirit or power of life.

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<sup>1</sup>Harri Heino, "*The Status of Traditional Religiosity in the Nordic Countries*," Updated September 1998, <http://www.evl.fi/kkh/ktk/norden.htm> (15 July 2003). In Finland 41 percent pray every week (in 1998) but in Sweden only 17 percent.

<sup>2</sup>Kati Niemelä, "*Suomalaisten Uskonnollisuus Vuosituhannen Alussa*." 2003, <http://www.evl.fi/kkh/ktk/uskonnol.htm> (June 2005).

<sup>3</sup>Kimmo Kääriäinen, "*Religion and Churches in Finland*," February 2002, <http://virtual.finland.fi/netcomm/news/showarticle.asp?> (20 July 2003).

## History and Description of the Turku Adventist Church

### The History

The first Seventh-day Adventist missionaries came to Finland in 1892 and the first church was established in Helsinki in 1894. The first Adventist missionary to Turku was Olof Johansson, the leader of the Swedish Adventist Church. He started to work in Turku in the fall of 1894 just two years after he had started to work in Helsinki, which marked the beginning of a permanent Adventist presence in Finland.<sup>1</sup>

Since he spoke Swedish he needed an interpreter in order to speak to the Finnish audience. His interpreter was an Adventist literature evangelist, K. L. Östring, who had on his journey to Paimio, visited the Baptist Church in Turku. Östring was allowed to speak about his faith in the meeting. People were open to hear more about the Adventist message and so Östring was invited by the church to come and speak to them during each night of the following week. After a week he invited Olof Johansson from Helsinki to speak with him. Also a Bible worker, Matilda Lindgren, joined them and helped them in the meetings. Before long their activities aroused opposition and another preacher from Sweden was invited to speak against them. They had to change the meeting place but the listeners followed them and a number of them became Adventists.

After the first introduction of Adventism in Turku, John Hoffman, a Swedish born Adventist pastor from the USA, became the leader of the work in Finland in 1898. He

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<sup>1</sup>Three main sources of history of Adventism in Turku, consulted in this section are: Toivo Ketola, *Hengellisiä Liikkeitä: Historiallinen Tutkielma Suomen Adventtiliikkeestä* (Turku, Finland: by the author, 1952), and Sulo Halminen, *Turun Seurakunnan Vaiheita* (Turku, Finland: Turku Seventh-day Adventist Church Archives, 1999), Photocopied, and Turku Church Records and Archives.

held meetings in Turku in 1903. More people were baptized, but the church was not established until several years later when there was a real breakthrough in Turku and the church was organized in 1919.<sup>1</sup>

When pastor Aarne Rintala came to Turku with a bible worker, Laina Lehti, in 1918 there were only six women in the Adventist group. Finland had just become independent and an internal war between “whites” and “reds” had just finished, but the First World War was still continuing in Europe. Rintala rented the biggest and the best hall in the town. His first topic was “Jesus of Nazareth—God or man?” Hundreds of people crowded the hall and even a policeman came to ensure the order in the meeting place. Rintala held meetings throughout the winter and the following summer held the first baptism. On the 5 August 1919 the Turku Adventist Church was established with seventy-three members. The Finnish Conference had been established in 1909 and Wilhelm J. Sucksdorff (1851-1934), a former professor at Helsinki University, had become the leader of the conference. He was the first Finnish citizen appointed to that position.

Rintala’s work in Turku lasted about two years and in those two years the church grew to 160 members becoming the largest Adventist Church in Finland. A Swedish congregation was also established in Turku in 1924 and has existed alongside the Finnish congregation until the present time using the same church building as the Finnish church. The Swedish congregation is too small to have regular worship services so most of the remaining Swedish members attend the Finnish church services and activities.

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<sup>1</sup>The minutes of this meeting are still preserved in the archives of the Turku Church.

There are at least forty pastors or bible workers who have worked in the Turku Church during its eighty-five years of existence. In addition, there have been at least fifteen preachers who have conducted evangelistic campaigns. Among the forty workers at least six were originally Swedish speaking pastors or bible workers who worked in Turku. The Church has grown during its history in spurts. It experienced its strongest growth rate during the times of Aarne Rintala (1919-1922), Toivo Seljavaara (1934-1937), Onni Halminen (1943-1947), and William Aittala (1970).

Toivo Seljavaara (1902-1974), who moved from Pori to Turku in 1934, was known at the time by the name Ståhlberg. His preaching aroused strong interest in Turku. In the summer of 1935, 117 people were baptized in a single baptismal service in Kupittaa pool. Rintala, Seljavaara, and Lähdemaa performed the baptisms. Membership increased by almost 200 in the three years (1934-1937).

Onni Halminen, a young man from an Adventist family in Turku started to hold meetings in 1943. He was not a pastor at the time, but worked as a serviceman in the Finnish army in Turku. He started to hold meetings on Sunday nights coming always straight from his work dressed in the army uniform. Later on meetings were held two times a week with many young people joining the church. From the beginning of 1945 Onni Halminen became the pastor in the Turku Adventist Church and continued his work there until 1947 when he moved to Oulu. As a result of his work and the work of his colleagues more than 200 people joined the Church during his time in Turku.

It is interesting to note that when the Church grew the most, Finland and the world were experiencing times of unrest. In Rintala's time the nation was just recovering from the internal war and there were still wars in Europe. In Seljavaara's time Europe

was heading towards World War II. People were anxious and many were worried about the future. During Onni Halminen's time the nation had experienced the Winter War and the Continuation War and its aftermath. People were looking for hope and consolation.

During Wiljam Aittala's evangelistic meetings in 1970 the situation was different. The country was experiencing more peaceful times, though the "big move" was on the way. More and more people were moving to the cities; people were becoming more secularized. There was a need to use special means to attract people to religious meetings. Australian evangelist J. F. Coltheart brought colorful slides and his archaeological approach to Finland to illustrate his evangelistic sermons. In Helsinki the halls were filled with people and in the end more than 100 people joined the Church. Aittala tried the same method in Turku with good success. The Turku Church baptized forty new members and the work of Aittala's colleagues brought another thirty to the Church.

During its history the Church has met in various places in Turku. At first it met in Ukkokoti, an old people's home, then the church moved to Toivo II, which was situated on the corner of Kaskenkatu and Itäinen katu, and from there it moved to its own building at Jarrumiehenkatu 5, which was purchased in April 1936. An old wooden house was converted to a 300 seat auditorium. The church was dedicated by the president of the Scandinavian Union, G. A. Lindsay, on 7 November 1936. In November 1984 the church moved to Betel-church, built in 1906, which had been purchased on 10 February 1983. The interior of the church was completely renovated and it was dedicated on January 1985.



Turku Church has been one of the most influential churches in Finnish Adventism. Many of its members have worked in the ministry of the Church, as mission workers, teachers, literature evangelists, Bible workers, and pastors. Some of them have served as leaders of the church, like Arvo Arasola (1907–1955), Wiljam Aittala, Onni, and Sulo Halminen. Unto Hongisto (1918–1997) was a long time leader of the literature evangelism department in the Finnish Adventist Church.

Music has also played an important role in the church. By the 1920s Matti Vanhakangas had created a good base for the choir and music activities in the church that was continued under his son, Aarne Vanhakangas (1914–1999), for many years. Aarne Vanhakangas was also an influential musical figure who impacted the whole Finnish Adventist Church.

The Turku Church in partnership with the Toivonlinna Church also planted a church in Piikkiö. There have also been times of crisis in the history of the Church. At the end of the 1940s there was quite a lot of discussion about the issue of righteousness by faith. Many came out of the crises with a clearer understanding and a Christ-centered belief, which caused a sense of freedom and rejoicing. Arvo Arasola, who was born in Turku and at the time served as conference president, felt that the message of Christ's righteousness and the baptism by the Holy Spirit should be preached in all the churches. Unfortunately some members, who found "new light," left the church because of these issues.

## Present Status

### **Leadership**

I have been the pastor of the Turku Church since September 1995. I work also as the Personal Ministries and Sabbath School director of the Finnish Conference. The pastoral team also includes an assistant pastor and an intern, who share their time between Toivonlinna and Turku churches. Unfortunately the intern has chosen not to continue in ministry, at least for the time being. There are eight elders including two retired pastors, two medical doctors, and some other professional people, one of who is a female elder. Half of the elders are retired and the other half are working full-time. None of the elders are younger than 50. Four of them are between 50 and 60 and two of them are over 80. There are other younger leaders who are in charge of children, pathfinders, and youth, but it is clear that the Church has not been able to elect new leaders from the younger generation as well as it should. This is one of the most serious weaknesses of the Church. Loosing the intern pastor, who worked with the youth, is another setback to establishing younger leadership. Challenges in the leadership area need more attention.

### **Church Building**

The church is an old Lutheran Mission Church, right in the center of the city. It has easy access to public transport and since the church has a parking lot it provides good access for people with cars. The church can seat about 500 people which is more than is needed for the present size of the church. But for special occasions it is still good to have that much space. On weekdays the church's temperance society operates a vegetarian restaurant on the premises.

## **Worship Services**

The Church presently has two services each Sabbath, one in the morning and the other in the late afternoon. The style of the morning worship service varies, but it is usually quite traditional with hymns and organ music. The afternoon service is an alternative service, which is more informal and meets in a smaller room in the basement of the church. Contemporary music is well accepted by the afternoon group but is not used much in the morning service. There are some who would prefer a more lively style of worship service, but most people are happy with a traditional type of service even though the Church is open to experimenting with different styles of worship. The youth meetings and the afternoon worship service are more relaxed in style and use more contemporary music. The afternoon service is often led by young people, but is not primarily a youth service and at present it is not held every Sabbath.

The Bible is studied in several Sabbath School classes for children, youth, and adults, and recently an English class was started which may open a way to reach the immigrant communities in Turku. For the last five years the average worship attendance has stayed around 115 of which 15 are children. There are 15 to 20 young people who attend the services on a fairly regular basis. On special days there could be 170–200 people attending with many visitors from the Piikkiö and Toivonlinna churches which are sixteen and twenty-one kilometers from Turku. Every Sabbath there are visitors and unfamiliar faces who join the worship in the Turku Church.

## **Membership**

The membership has stayed around 340-347 for the last five years. Over the last three years the church has had a slight increase in membership reaching 347 at the end of

2004. This is a positive sign and it should encourage the Church to a more positive outlook for the future. There are, unfortunately, a fair number of people who are inactive or have moved away but want to keep their membership records in Turku. Since the Church has been in existence for eighty-five years there are also people who live in local retirement homes or who are too weak to attend, but there is one exception—a sister as we call her who is 97. The lady's non-Adventist daughter always brings her mother to the church when I am preaching, which is an encouragement to me and I am sure to many others also. And, I can see that she enjoys being with her church family.

Approximately ten different small groups meet in the church or in various homes. Most of the groups are very informal nurture and friendship groups without any clear mission objectives. There has been talk about starting a youth and student project which would eventually lead to new church plant. That would be funded as a Global Mission project. Unfortunately, the intern pastor resigned before the plan could be realized so it has not been started yet.

Turku Church is an old church with middle aged and elderly people as the most prominent groups. The demographics show that the Church is becoming older (fig. 2). Only about 25 percent of the baptized members are under forty years of age.

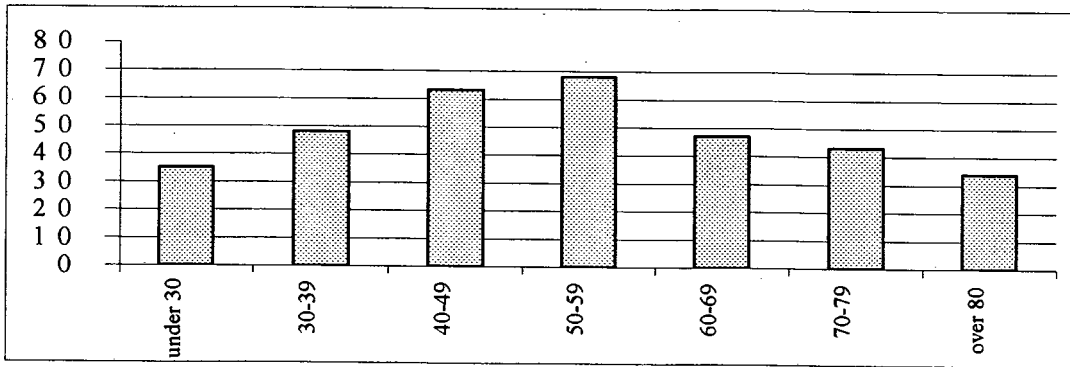


Fig. 2. The Turku Adventist Church Age Profile at the end of 2003  
 Source: The Statistics of the Turku Adventist Church.

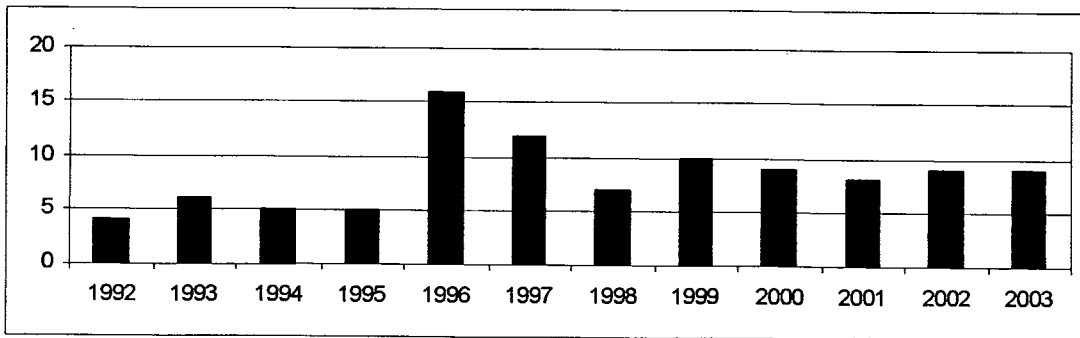


Fig. 3. Yearly Deaths of Members in the Turku Adventist Church  
 Source: The Records of the Turku Adventist Church.

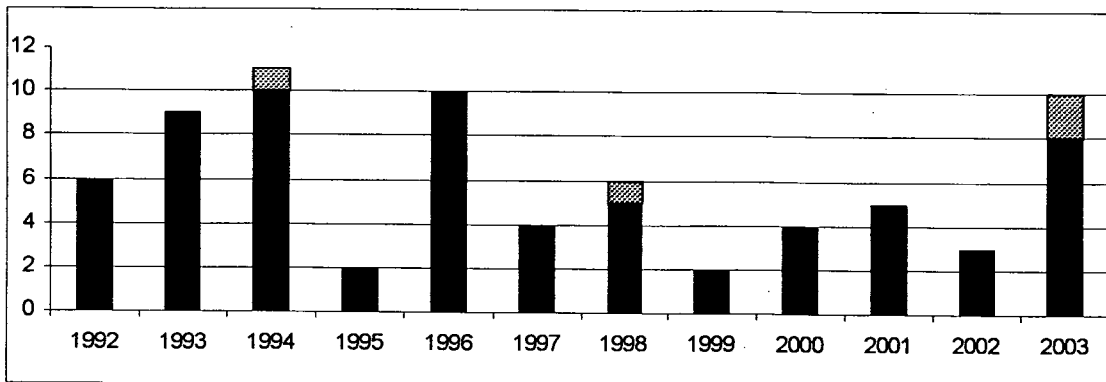


Fig. 4. Baptisms and Professions of Faith in the Turku Adventist Church  
 Source: The Records of the Turku Adventist Church.

But unless there is a clear increase of new members the downward trend will eventually continue as it has in the past. There are several reasons why the church membership is in decline. Fig. 3 shows the yearly number of deaths among members as an indication of the ageing of the church. When the yearly number of deaths is compared with the yearly number of baptisms (fig. 4) it is easy to see the challenge the Church is facing. If the Church is to grow again it would need an average of more than twelve people a year to join the Church through baptism or profession of faith just to maintain the level of membership since the Church loses an average of nine to ten people through death and one to two people through apostasy.

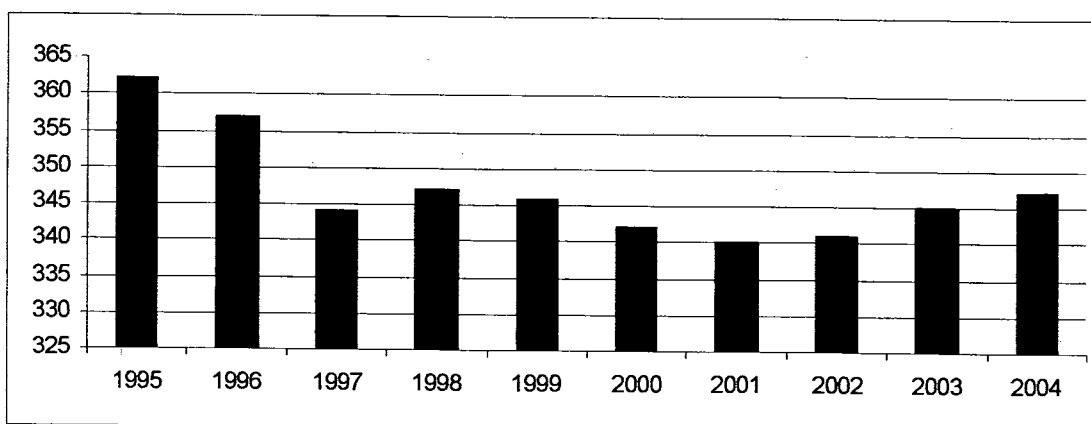


Fig. 5. Membership of the Turku Adventist Church  
*Source:* The Records of the Turku Adventist Church

The Church also receives slightly more members through letters of transfer than it loses in transfers to other churches. This explains partly why the Church has actually stopped declining in recent years (fig. 5). The Church has now more members than it had in 1997. The net gain in transfers has been an average of two members a year.

## **Major Milestones of Past Ten Years**

Ten years ago in the summer and the fall of 1995 the previous pastoral staff (a senior pastor and a female pastor) left the church for new appointments and the new pastor arrived in late November 1995. That year was particularly low in baptisms. In addition to that, the Church's headquarters moved from Turku to Tampere taking several active members with them in the move. In 1996 ten people were baptized, but unfortunately sixteen members died. That year, a pastoral assistant from the Union office, who was near retirement and who did not want to move to Tampere, was appointed to assist the new pastor, but she left after two years leaving the senior pastor as the only paid worker in Turku. The church membership has stabilized after 1997 even though the average loss of members is greater than in previous years. The older the church gets the more difficult it becomes to have substantial growth again.

In 2003, the Adventist Church received negative news coverage regarding allegations of sexual misconduct by some of its workers. In Turku the negative news did not seem to do serious damage.

Small group activities have increased and the afternoon worship service started in recent years. A vegetarian restaurant was started in October 2004 and has been well received in the city. An average of about 70 meals is sold each working day. The restaurant has received extensive publicity in the press and brings a lot of new people to visit the Church. It remains to be seen how the Church can build bridges of friendship with these contacts and see them come to faith.

The Church has also sponsored some youth and music festivals on its premises. A worship service was broadcast on national TV and another time on radio in recent

years. The Church has also been active in social work by distributing food and clothes and helping to send clothes and money to Russia. It has sponsored poor students in Pakistan and taken part in the Ingathering campaign for ADRA and for national projects.

Net' 98 attracted a reasonable number of people, although baptisms were scarce. The Bible correspondence school, Bible camps, and baptismal classes for youth, and evangelistic campaigns conducted by the pastor have brought a number of new people into the Church in recent years. But there is much more that the Church could do.

A new approach to church growth was introduced in Finland 2003. The Turku Church was among the first who started the NCD process in 2003 by working on a church profile. As a result of the survey the church addressed its minimum factor at time, "inspiring worship service." This led to experimenting on different aspects of worship renewal. The process was somewhat superficial at the time due to the inadequate understanding of the process and it also lacked a clearly defined strategy. This process early on was more like a thinking process than an actual plan partly due to the lack of a NCD coach to help the church through the process. The situation has improved since coaches have received more adequate training to more effectively apply and implement NCD in Finland. My own preparation and understanding concerning the NCD approach to church growth has also improved considerably through formal training and seminars.

### Challenges for Ministry in Turku

Finland has established itself as a modern, technologically oriented country with a high level of education and social security for its citizens. Yet, Finland is not without its problems. Material success does not always correlate with contentment and happiness in life. What makes Finns happy? Many people place a high priority on interpersonal



relationships. Honest and trusting relationships score high on the list of the top ten Finnish feel-good factors.<sup>1</sup> The survey indicated that many felt the home should be the center of happiness, but unfortunately many Finns experience difficulties in their marriage relationships and end up divorced. Alcohol consumption is relatively high and not without its negative side effects. Drug problems are not as challenging as in many other European countries, but the society cannot ignore the problem. Un-employment and loneliness is still a problem for many.

There is a clear need in society for a caring and honest community where trusting friendships can be nurtured in an informal home setting. Formal organized religion has less and less appeal in an increasingly postmodern society. People are not so much interested in finding out who is right in explaining religious doctrines, but many would like to know where they can experience a meaningful relationship. This is clearly a challenge to our church in Turku to create a holistic small group ministry with motivated lay leaders.

People are not so much estranged from God as they are from the churches. The surveys have shown that 70 percent of Finns still believe in God and that the Bible is inspired. Half of the people pray at least once a month, yet they have not found a community where their faith might grow and where they could have a nurturing spiritual

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<sup>1</sup>A popular Finnish magazine, *Seura*, commissioned an extensive survey to find out where happiness lies. The magazine used a sample of 1,015 individuals, who were each given 678 questions to answer. That produced 688,170 items of information. The top ten Finnish feel-good factors were: (1) Home sweet home, a home of one's own, (2) sunny weather, (3) an honest relationship, (4) trusting relationship, (5) freedom to be oneself, (6) freshly cleaned home, (7) friendship, gestures/words in a relationship, (8) friendship, actions in a relationship, (9) fidelity in a relationship, (10) security in a relationship. Joe Brady, "What makes a Finn Happy?" 22 March 1999, [www.virtual.finland.fi](http://www.virtual.finland.fi) (July 2004).

relationship with other believers. It is interesting to note that according to a survey commissioned by the Church Growth Institute (Seurakunnan kasvury) in Finland, and conducted by Suomen Gallup, only 30 percent of Finns could not think of being an active participant in a local church.<sup>1</sup> This again shows that there is a need which the churches have not been able to meet.

The Lutheran Church has been part of Finnish Nationalism during these decisive years. Thus it is often called “the Finnish Church” or “the church of the people.” The Lutheran Church has a stronger position in Finland than in any other Nordic Country. In the early 1990s society suffered from a financial recession and the rise of unemployment, creating considerable uncertainty among people. The church, as an institution, again became more important in society. According to *Gallup Ecclesiastica 1999* only 3 percent of the members of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church could think of leaving the church. In Finland the members of the church see church as being more close to their sphere of life than in Sweden, Norway, or Denmark. According to the RAMP (Religious and Moral Pluralism) survey only 13 percent of Finnish Lutherans have distanced themselves from the Church and have no spiritual or practical commitment to it, while in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark such members amounted to 30 percent. The Finns felt that their local church was close to them. Only 19 percent of the Finns felt no

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<sup>1</sup>Marko Mäkinen, “Seurakunnat suurennuslasin alla, Tutkimus kristinuskon tilanteesta 2000-luvun Suomessa,” *A&O*, December 2002, 2.

attachment to their local church whereas 49 percent of Danes, 38 percent of Swedes, and 37 percent of Norwegians had the same attitude.<sup>1</sup>

This upsurge of religion was seen by a clear increase of those who believed in God as the church teaches. However, there was no increase in church attendance. This seems to lend support to the basic secularization theory that suggests that when things are going well people tend to feel less need for religion and when material circumstances deteriorate people seek more consolation from religion and from the church as an institution. Such an upsurge of religious interest might not, however, show itself in an increase in church attendance.<sup>2</sup>

What makes Finland different from other countries of Europe is that Finnish people pray more than Europeans do. Only one-fifth of the Finns say that they never pray, when (according to World Values survey) one in three in Europe say they never pray. One-fourth of the Finns (23 percent) pray every day and half of all Finns (47 percent) pray at least once a month. In comparison to other Europeans, Finns come across as a people who could be characterized by the saying, “believing but not belonging.” Religion is a private matter for Finns. Religious rituals are still important for Finns: especially baptism (88 percent of children are baptized) and confirmation (91

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<sup>1</sup>Kati Niemelä in “*Suomalaisten Uskonnollisuus Uuden vuosituhannen vaihteessa*” citing Susan Sundback, “*Medlemskapet i de lutherska kyrkorna i Norden.–Folkkyrkor och religiös pluralism–den nordiska religiösa modellen.*” ed., Göran Gustafsson & Thorleif Pettersson (Stockholm: Verbum, 2000), 50, 65.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

percent of 15 year olds are confirmed). Religion is taught in schools and religious hymns are sung in school festivals.<sup>1</sup>

### Reflections

Research has shown that there is a need to be in tune with the cultural changes in society and find contemporary and relevant evangelistic methods that speak the language of the people. The crucial factor is to learn to understand the people under forty years of age. If the churches fail to reach the younger generations the church will die. The Adventist Church in Finland has somehow lost its focus and it has become a declining church for the past twenty years. It is indeed a difficult task to turn around such a trend. The church has to critically evaluate its ministries and redirect its resources in a way that serves best the growth of the church. In order to accomplish that, the Church and the pastor have to strive to seek renewal for ministry, which will eventually lead to a renewed Turku Adventist Church, and eventually the Adventist Church in Finland. This is not, however, a one-man effort. There needs to be a community of believers who share the same vision and are ready to make a humble but tough commitment to seek the answers until they are found and acted upon.

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<sup>1</sup>Niemelä.

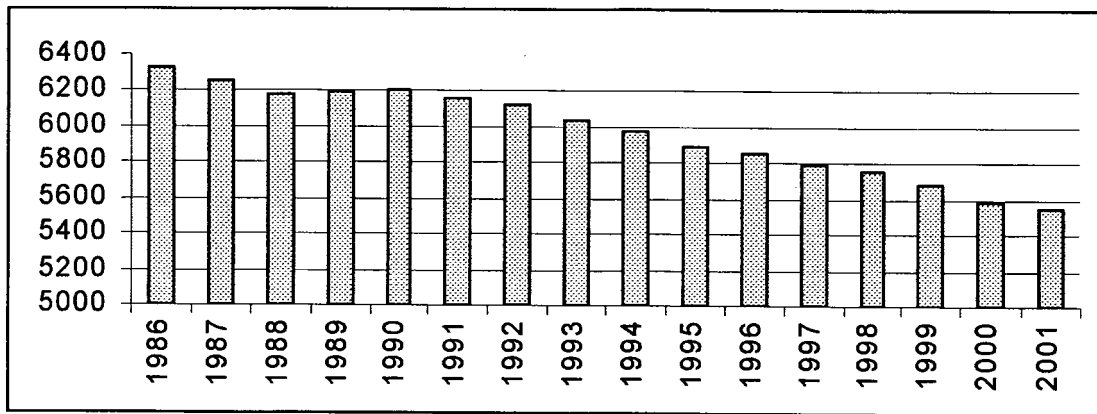


Fig. 6. The Membership of the Finnish Union Conference: 1986-2001

*Source:* The Statistics of General Conference of SDA

There is still room for Adventist Christian witness in a society that thinks of itself as increasingly secular but one that is also marked by a confused yearning for the truth that can only be satisfied by Jesus Christ. The strategy that is outlined in the next chapter seeks to answer that yearning.

## CHAPTER 4

### A STRATEGY FOR GROWTH IN THE TURKU SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this project is to create a strategy for revitalization of the Turku Adventist Church. For that purpose, a theological basis of ministry and mission of the Church was developed and the growth patterns of the Adventist Church in Finland, especially from the perspective of the Turku Church, were studied. The main causes for its past growth and present stagnation were looked at. This chapter will present a strategy incorporating the Natural Church Development paradigm, expecting that it will help the Church to grow again.

The goal of changing the growth pattern of the whole Adventist Church in Finland is more difficult to achieve than changes in a local church. National church growth also needs to be addressed since the necessary changes cannot wait too long since the loss in membership is accelerating. The leadership of the Finnish Adventist Church is willing to refine its strategy for revitalization and church planting. This project in Turku is developed as a case study for the revitalization and church planting initiatives of the whole church in Finland. Multiplication is one of the biotic principles of NCD and the

last step in the original ten-step plan to implement the NCD cycle.<sup>1</sup> Therefore the lessons from this case study will be used as widely as possible.

Obviously, there is no quick and easy solution for a church that is lacking vitality. The problems are multifaceted and have been developing for many years. If the church is not healthy and growing it is not for us to be doctors and heal the church. There is only one healer who can do it. What is our responsibility is for us is to remove the barriers in our thinking and attitudes that often block growth and prevent God from doing his work of healing. If a church is healed, it will grow and nothing can stop it.

Pastoral ministry is not done in a vacuum. The social and religious background in a society influences the pastoral leadership roles. There is a continuous need to evaluate the effectiveness of pastoral leadership roles. A pastor needs to stay on the cutting edge of ministry. Therefore, it is important to build a strategy that is based on a culturally relevant understanding of biblical theology for the church and ministry. It is also important to be more aware of those particular God-given gifts in the ministry context to which a pastor is called and appointed to work.

If a pastor wants to become a change agent he needs to face the natural resistance for change, be prudent and persistent in communicating his vision, and strengthen the positive trends by helping to develop a workable strategy.

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<sup>1</sup>Schwarz, *Natural Church Development Handbook*, 124.

### Description of Tools

In planning and managing this project a number of tools will be used. A Logical Framework Matrix Approach (LFA) will be used to present in summary form the overall outline of the strategy. LFA is a useful roadmap in defining the project structure, and a tool widely used for planning and managing development projects. It aims to present information about the components of a project in a clear, concise, logical, and systematic way. It summarizes in standard format, what the project is going to achieve, what activities will be carried out to achieve its outputs and purpose, what resources (inputs) are required, what the potential problems are which could affect the success of the project, and finally how the progress and ultimate success of the project will be measured and verified.<sup>1</sup>

Before explaining the Log Frame Matrix for the project it is necessary to explain some of the key terms used. The LFA itself consists of a table, which has four columns and four rows (see table 7). The first vertical column identifies the project objectives. It is best to start reading the first column from the bottom with the activity section. If certain activities are undertaken, then desired outputs would be achieved, which will contribute to the specific project purpose, which in turn will contribute to the overall objectives, which is the ultimate goal to which the project is contributing.

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<sup>1</sup>See European Commission, *Project Cycle Management Training Courses Handbook* (Freiburg, Germany: PARTICIP Gmph, 2001) and W. K. Kellogg Foundation, *Evaluation Handbook: Philosophy and Expectations* (Battle Creek, MI: Kellogg Foundation, 2004).



Table 6. Definition of Logframe Terms

**Model components: Definitions:**

Intervention logic	The strategy underlying the project. It is the narrative description of the project at each of the four levels of the “hierarchy of objectives” used in the Log frame.
Overall Goal	The overall goal refers to wider objectives to which the project is designed to contribute. These will not be achieved by the project alone, but will require the impact of other factors and projects as well.
Project Purpose	The project purpose is the change that occurs in terms of sustainable benefits to the beneficiaries or target group if the project outputs are achieved
Outputs	The outputs are specifically intended results that the project has achieved by undertaking a series of activities by its completion date.
Activities	Activities are tasks required producing the desired outputs.
Assumptions	Assumptions are external factors, which may influence the project but cannot be controlled by the project management. These conditions must be met if the project is to succeed
Objectively Verifiable Indicators	Indicators refer to the quantitative and qualitative framework against which the achievement of outputs, purpose, and overall goal will be monitored and evaluated
Sources of Verification	Sources of verification refer to the data required to assess progress against indicators for monitoring and evaluation.
Milestones	Key events that provide measure of progress and a target for the project team to aim at.



## Description of Strategy

### Overall Goal

The overall goal of the project is to contribute to the development of a healthy and growing Adventist Church in Finland. The project purpose describes a case study from the Turku Church and is directly and vitally linked to the overall goal. Though the project will concentrate on the revitalization of the Turku Church, the lessons learned will be used in supporting other revitalization and church planting projects to contribute to the overall goal but are beyond the scope of the dissertation project.

### Project Purpose

The purpose of this project is to increase the health and vitality of the Turku Church and to support the church planting and revitalization movement in the FUC by providing some lessons and guidelines for strategy development. A renewed vision and strategy with a clearly defined implementation plan is needed in order to have this purpose realized and fully implemented in the Turku Church and in the FUC in four years time.

*The objectively verifiable indicators* to measure the success of the project are: (1) the average worship attendance increased 10 percent by 2009, (2) baptisms increased by 50 percent per year by 2009, (3) two new churches, or sustainable ministries established in the Turku Church by 2009.

*The sources of verification* are the worship service attendance, baptisms, and membership records of the Turku Church and the Project Director's Log book (a binder where all the data is gathered from observations, surveys, interviews, coaching records, along with all essential material prepared for the project).

Two important *assumptions* must be included in the plan at this general level. It must be supported by the Turku Church board and the lessons learned will be shared with leaders at the national level.

### Outputs

There are two outputs this project seeks to achieve. If the activities are carried out as planned, the NCD strategy in Turku will be fully implemented through four consecutive cycles by the end of 2008.

The most important *verifiable indicator* for the first output is the improvement of the minimum factor (the lowest quality characteristic in the church), based on the NCD survey. It is expected that the qualitative indicator will be 50 (the national average based on at least 30 NCD surveys) by the end of 2006 and 55 by the end of 2008. The project is also aiming at multiplication and therefore a verifiable indicator to measure the success in this regard would be two new growing satellite churches or clearly targeted and successful ministries started by the end of 2008 in the Turku area. These indicators can be verified from the statistics of the Turku Church and from the baptismal reports of the new church plants or ministries.

*Sources of verification* for these indicators include program timetables, church planting project plans and reports, calendars of events, surveys and interviews conducted on target groups in 2006 and at the end of 2008, and assessment and coaching reports.

*The assumption* is that at the local level the Conference committee will appoint an assistant pastor and a youth pastor/church planter to work for the project in the Turku Church. Since it is unlikely that these two individuals will be working full-time in Turku,

it is assumed that both of them would be able to contribute at least half-time to the project. The rest of the leadership needs will be met by an enhanced lay leadership team.

It is assumed that the church elders and other key leaders will respond positively to the plan and support it. It is also assumed that enough funding will be provided by the conference and the local church to support the implementation of the project. It is expected that the leaders commit themselves to the project along with a majority of the active church members.

The project cannot be a one-man effort; there needs to be a good balance and common interest among the leadership to realize this project. Special individuals, lay members, and pastors are also needed who are willing to be equipped and coached to become church planters.

### **Implementation of Strategy**

#### **Activity and Resource Schedules**

In this section the implementation of the project will be outlined. In order to be able to set the project in a manageable form an activity and a resource schedule will be presented. The completed logframe matrix (see table 5) provides the information for these schedules but further planning is necessary to outline the timing, sequence, and duration of the project activities. The logframe “can also be used to identify milestones for monitoring progress, and to assign responsibility for the achievement of milestones.”<sup>1</sup>

The following initial steps need to be taken in order to complete an activity schedule. The main activities, which are listed in the logframe matrix, can be used as the

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<sup>1</sup>*Project Cycle Management Training Courses Handbook*, 69.

basis for the preparation of the schedule. These activities need to be broken down to manageable tasks. Then the sequence of these tasks can be determined as well as how these activities depend on the start-up or completion of any other activity. Next, the timing needs to be specified by making a realistic estimate of the duration of each task, and by establishing the start-up and completion date of each task. And finally, it will be useful to define different milestones which provide the basis by which the project implementation can be monitored and managed.

In the following section the activities schedule will be developed in more detail in order of the focus. Table 8 shows the detailed activities of the first year. Table 9 shows the basic outline of activities for the remaining three years in a condensed form.

First, the local focus in Turku is developed in more detail although the national focus already runs parallel with the Turku case study (see table 8). As the project continues in Turku through to 2009 (see table 9), the lessons learned will be used to revise the FUC church planting and revitalization strategy in 2006 and again in 2008. Some of the activities continue throughout the whole time frame of the project, while others are much shorter in duration. Some activities are repeated at certain intervals during the project. The duration of main activities are shown in the activities plan with certain important milestones, which serve as times for evaluation and even celebration when the short-term goals are achieved.

A separate chart, called the resource schedule (see table 10), shows the financial and personnel input required for completing these activities. Since most of the activities are within the scope of the work of the paid pastoral staff no operating expenses were budgeted.







Table 10. Resource Schedule

Activities	Financial		Personnel		
	Cost*	Pays	PD	TU	SIT
<b>Result 1: A strategy based on NCD approach implemented in the Turku Church</b>					
<b>Activities:</b>					
<b>1.1 Prepare for the survey</b>			L	S	
<b>1.2 Complete the survey</b>	120	FUC	L	S	
<b>1.3 Analyze the results</b>			L	S	
1.3.1 Explain the survey results			L		
1.3.2 Diagnose the minimum factor			L		
1.3.3 Discuss the results in the leadership team			L		
1.3.4 Define the major barriers to growth			L		
1.3.5 Set qualitative goals			S	L	
<b>1.4 Develop an action plan</b>			L	S	
<b>1.5 Implement an refine</b>			L	S	
<b>1.6 Review and start a new cycle</b>	150	FUC	L	S	
<b>1.7 Plan for multiplication</b>			S		
<b>Result 2: A strategy for church planting and</b>					
<b>Activities:</b>					
<b>2.1 Understand and follow a clearly defined church planting (CP) and revitalization strategy</b>					
2.1.1 CP and revitalization strategy revised by the FUC			S		L
2.1.2 Provide training for all SIT members	6000	FUC	S		L
<b>2.2 Foster commitment to CP and NCD strategy</b>			S		L
2.2.1 Events to inspire for CP and NCD	1000	FUC	S		L
2.2.2 Articles and news on church planting and NCD			L		S
<b>2.3 Recruit and assess church planters and teams</b>					
2.3.1 Recruit and assess new teams			S		L
<b>2.4 Equip &amp; Inspire CP and NCD teams</b>			S		L
2.4.1 Church planting "launch pad"			S		L
2.4.2 NCD training and surveys	550	FUC	L		S
2.4.3 Church Planters X-Change	5000	FUC	S		S
<b>2.5 Coach and support CP and NCD teams</b>					
2.5.2 Assign coaches to CP and NCD projects			S		L
2.5.3 NCI-support system in place			S		L
<b>2.6 Cultivate a movement of CP and renewal</b>					
2.6.1 Assist revitalized churches to start CP			L		S
	<b>* 12.820</b>	<b>FUC</b>			
PD = Project Director	S = Support Role				
SIT = Task force and Union President	FUC = Finnish Union Conference				
L = Leading Role	*All costs in Euros for the first year				

The NCD cycle forms the basic outline for the activities. Schwartz outlined the cycle in ten steps, Ian Campbell and Adam Johnstone narrowed the main steps to six and Robert Folkenberg Jr. condensed the steps into four catchy phrases.<sup>1</sup> I will mainly follow Campbell and Johnstone but will add one more step from the original ten. Folkenberg's book is also very applicable to an Adventist context. The content of all these approaches is basically the same, differing only in order and emphasis. This strategy attempts to take the best ideas from each of the implementation plans and contextualize them in the best possible way for the Finnish Adventist context.

### **Preparing for the NCD Survey**

Spiritual preparation is not a short distance run but more like a marathon. The vision has to be clear. The preparation of the leader involves a personal spiritual check-up, and a clear plan to develop leadership skills.

The church board and those who are interested will be informed about the NCD process and what it takes to get the church involved in a process of change. A decision will have to be made in the church board to start a fresh cycle of NCD and it

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<sup>1</sup>Schwarz presented the original ten steps in *Natural Development Handbook*, 16-125: (1) Build spiritual momentum, (2) Determine your minimum factors, (3) Set qualitative goals, (4) Identify obstacles, (5) Apply biotic principles, (6) Exercise your strengths, (7) Use biotic tools, (8) Monitor effectiveness, (9) Address your minimum factors, (10) Multiply your church. Ian Campbell and Adam Johnstone, outlined the cycle in *The NCD Cycle*, 14, in six main steps: (1) Prepare for the Survey, (2) Complete the survey, (3) Analyze the results, (4) Develop an action plan, (5) Implement and refine, (6) Review the cycle. Folkenberg in *Health for the Harvest*, 13, presented four simple steps, (1) Check-up, (2) Tune-up, (3) Change-up. (4) Follow-up.

will have to make a commitment to the plan for four years. A specific date will be determined for the survey to be taken.

A number of key people in the Church will take part in a seminar where the NCD approach and the process is explained. The team will spend time in prayer and the pastor will share his vision and plans. Although the leaders in the Turku Church are already aware of the eight quality characteristics and six biotic principles of the NCD, the understanding of this approach is still rather rudimentary and needs more clarification. The key members will be provided with a small booklet which explains the process. The leaders will discuss the future of the church and the pastor will challenge the leaders to think and visualize what the church could be in four years time. The pastor will also challenge them to have a vision for their own ministry and to commit to a personal spiritual development plan.

### **Completing the Survey**

Thirty church members will be recruited to fill out the church survey, and it will be conducted according to the guidelines provided with the survey. There is a criteria that should be followed in selecting these thirty people. It is important to include the leadership of the church, people who are involved in small groups, and active members representing the various demographic units in the church. Before the survey a short summary introduction will be presented to the group. Then the surveys will be administered for analysis.

## **Analyzing the Results**

The results will be analyzed by the pastoral team and the church board. Those who have filled out the survey will be given an opportunity to share and discuss the findings. A task force will be elected by the church board to review the relevant data and develop an action plan to address the Minimum Factor. The last chapter of this project will give an analysis of the first findings and make recommendations to the task force.

NCD International has developed a "Profile Plus" tool, which is not yet the standard profile for Finland but most likely will become the standard. The Profile Plus will be used in analyzing the Turku Church. The guidelines will benefit all the participating churches in Finland. The Profile Plus tool identifies more accurately existing or potential barriers impeding healthy growth especially when a church has taken at least two or three consecutive tests. Profile Plus clarifies the comparison of the trends. The Profile Plus also breaks down into detail the individual quality indicators for the purpose of analyzing the results of each question and showing how each question affects one of the eight quality characteristics. It also looks at all the quality characteristics, showing the bigger picture and developing trends.

## **Developing an Action Plan**

At this stage it is important to ask the questions, What are we aiming to achieve? and How are we going to get there? The qualitative goals need to be set for each of the barriers found in the analysis phase. There needs to be a willingness to work hard in applying the biotic principles and removing the barriers for growth.

The project leader will make some recommendations as to how to proceed with the planning. It is evident that some leaders are more open to change than others. The

task force should also include young potential leaders who have a passion for the mission of the church and for church planting. The task of this group is to make definite plans to improve the minimum factor of the church within the first six months. The results of the survey taken in March 2005 will be analyzed in the next chapter with recommendations to the Turku Church board and to the NCD task force. The idea is to implement an action plan applying biotic principles in order to improve the minimum factor.<sup>1</sup>

Alongside this, the church's mission and vision statements should be revised. This task force will spend time in prayer and brainstorming. Some of the tools and principles of appreciative inquiry will be used for the interviews of church members. It is expected that when positive questions are being asked the seeds of change are already implicit in the questions asked. Therefore affirmative topics will be chosen.<sup>2</sup>

Vision should not depend on one person, but should be a compilation of multiple stories, shared and woven together by all the people involved. Prayers, brainstorming, and networking will help achieve widespread involvement in the project. By picturing a positive image of the future, transformation occurs by living in the present what we most desire for the future. If we vision the church as a loving, vibrant, and growing community in the future we should start being loving and vibrant today.

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<sup>1</sup>Schwarz, *Natural Church Development Handbook*, 114. Schwarz suggests, "The biotic principles should be seen as a checklist that can be applied to every decision we face."

<sup>2</sup>The method is widely used by business organizations but the principles of Appreciative Inquiry could also be used in a revitalization process for a church organization. The method is presented in a book by Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom, *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2003).

Pressure should be avoided in this process. It is assumed that when people are free to choose the nature and extent of their contribution they will be more productive. Church members should be given a choice according to their giftedness, where they could best serve the church. People should not be forced to take part, since without choice people resist, no matter how desirable the change. There should be a sense of joy and voluntarism in all the activities that are presented as possible involvement in the different ministries of the church.

The way these interviews are conducted should bring out the best in people. It is important that these views are not just collected through questionnaires that people fill out but through affirmative interviews conducted by several people in the church. This will help in creating an atmosphere where people are known in relationship rather than in role, where people are heard, where they have a chance to dream and share their dreams. Everyone should be supported to act in a positive way

The plan for addressing the minimum factor and renewing the vision and mission statements will have to be ready by the end of September so that the activities to improve the minimum factor can begin to be implemented in October 2005.

The church in Turku has a set of strengths and weaknesses. But it is possible to turn the obstacles to challenges and eventually possibilities for change. I can imagine what our church could be in the future. But it is not just wishful dreaming or even positive thinking. It is based on vision and hope that will be realized through the power of the Holy Spirit who will bring change, if we let him.

### **Implementing and Refining the Plan**

The revised vision will be communicated to the whole church and the plan will be implemented. It is estimated that the full six-month plan will be officially launched on the Sabbath, 8 October 2005. The completion of activities list formally completes the diagnosis and planning stage and focuses the congregation's attention on the least healthy area of church life, while allowing the pastor to re-emphasize the church's strengths.

The plan will be monitored regularly by the leaders and NCD team and reviewed after three months in January 2006. The idea is to monitor the activities that are actually happening, know when they will be completed, and who is responsible for them. The review seeks to find out what barriers still exist or have emerged and need to be removed. The positive signs of growth are celebrated and the action plan is refocused for the following three months.

### **Reviewing the Cycle and Beginning a New One**

A year after the last survey it will be tempting to move on to the next survey and begin focusing on the new Minimum Factor. However, it is vital to pause to review the current cycle which is an extension of the review session that took place during the implementation of the action plan. In this session each of the activities for each goal will be reviewed. The review group is encouraged to note what biotic principles they saw at work and any growth that was happening during the past six months. Such critical questions as What went wrong? or What could have been done better? should also be asked. The leaders and the support group should also analyze what impact they expected on the Minimum Factor and how much they estimate the scores will change in by the

next survey result. A time will be set for the next survey to take place and a new cycle will begin in April 2006 with another current profile completed.

### **Planning for Multiplication**

Church planting is emphasized as an important part of the revitalization process. For aging churches change is difficult, but older churches can be taught to understand that giving birth to a new “baby church” will not kill the mother church, but rather revitalize it. Within living organisms multiplication is a natural phenomenon and therefore when seeking church growth it is necessary to plan for multiplication at all levels of church organization. Multiplication does not always imply planting a separate church, it can also happen through the cell church model. Whichever way multiplication is sought it is important for the church to develop new leaders and ministries that respond to the needs of younger generations. For new churches it is usually easier to adapt to emerging cultural changes which are already prevalent among the youth, but older congregations can also adapt.

Therefore, it is important for the success of this plan to start fostering the idea of a new church plant. The plans for multiplication will be discussed in the leadership team and NCD support team. Assuming that Turku Church will have a youth pastor he will have a chance to develop youth ministry so that it will have a chance to develop the outreach for youth and student communities with a view to establishing a church plant. A church plant could also be developed into one of the neighbouring towns, which does not have a local church, or as an English speaking international church in Turku.



### Action Steps on the National Level

The second output of this project is an implemented support system for the church planting and revitalization movement in Finland. While the national focus does not belong to the main thrust of this dissertation, it is still in line with the purpose and overall objectives of this project. The last action step in the NCD cycle is multiplication and it is such an important principle in NCD that its implications cannot be ignored even though the main thrust of this project is on the local level.

Every living thing created by God is designed to multiply itself, to increase in number. One of the first commands God gave in Genesis was “be fruitful and multiply.” Healthy organisms reproduce: this holds true in nature, for individual believers, and for the church itself.

A team of trained church planting and revitalization coaches (SIT), will design a national strategy for training and coaching which will be in harmony with the strategy of the Trans-European Division of SDA who was responsible for organizing training for national teams. This national team will look at some of the lessons learned from the Turku Church pilot project. Various events will be organized, articles written, and a video and a leaflet produced to support revitalization and church planting. New church planters will be recruited, assessed, and trained. The building of a coaching system to support new church plants is an output of this project.

The project will also aim at organizing national church planting and revitalization seminars and will identify at least twelve potential revitalization projects or new church plants. These will be given special support in terms of training and coaching. Also financial support will be supplied for these initiatives. A special church planting manual

is already translated into Finnish but other material from the local perspective will be added during the course of this project to supplement the basic manual. A manual for implementing NCD in the Finnish Adventist context will be written in 2007 in light of the practical knowledge gained from this and other Adventist NCD projects in Finland.

The second input of this project requires at least four coaches at the national level and a budget to provide for the seminars, surveys, and other materials that will be produced as part of this project. The FUC already employs people involved in training and coaching so there is no need for additional money. At the local level the most important input is the voluntary work done by local leaders and active church members. Money is needed and it is expected that the conference will supply part of the expenses for the outreach programs.

The activities at national level are only outlined in the activities schedules as they need further development and are outside the main thrust of this dissertation. The experiences gained in Turku will be used to inspire and teach other churches how to multiply and become church planting churches. As Schwarz says, "In the context of natural church development, church planting is not to be understood as aggressiveness towards existing churches, but rather a normal and desirable consequence of organic development process."<sup>1</sup>

### **Evaluation plan**

This project will be more useful as a learning experience if the strategy includes a pre-planned evaluation process that is already in place before the implementation.

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<sup>1</sup>Schwarz and Schalk, *Natural Church Development Implementation Manual*, 39.

Evaluation provides consistent, ongoing collection and analysis of information for use in decision making during the life cycle of the project. Thus, the data collected will help in directing and even redirecting the program as it evolves.

The primary purpose of evaluation is to identify problems and opportunities and to provide leaders and other stakeholders with reliable information from which to address problems and build on strengths and opportunities.<sup>1</sup> Evaluation makes monitoring and data collecting necessary throughout the process.

It is important to understand the relationship between monitoring and evaluation. Monitoring is an ongoing process done mainly by management and an evaluation is reflection on lessons learned. During the midterm evaluation it is possible to refocus the project. And even in the final evaluation it is not just a question of determining whether the program succeeded or failed in terms of achieving the expected results and fulfilling the project purpose. Something can always be learned through the process of evaluation, which might benefit similar projects in the future.

Since the NCD process is built on a scientifically tested survey, the survey will be used as an ongoing tool for monitoring the qualitative progress of the church.<sup>2</sup> Therefore the improvement of the minimum factor is the measurable qualitative factor that will be monitored every year. In order to monitor how effective the measures for improving the minimum factor have been a new church profile survey will be taken every year and it will be compared to the results of the previous one. The quality, according to the survey,

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<sup>1</sup>W. K. Kellogg Foundation, *W. K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook: Philosophy and Expectations* (Battle Creek, MI: Kellogg Foundation 2004), 2.

<sup>2</sup>Schwarz and Schalk, *Natural Church Development Implementation Manual*, 37.

will be analyzed with the help of Profile Plus, which is a more analytical monitoring instrument. Therefore, this project includes four NCD cycles and five surveys and profiles.

Every year, when the current Minimum Factor has been analyzed, the leadership team will define qualitative goals for the following six months or for whole year depending on the objective and when the next survey will be taken. A qualitative goal is a specific objective which is focused on removing a specific Minimum Factor barrier and therefore raising the health or quality of the Minimum Factor.<sup>1</sup> These goals are set up by leadership team and they are monitored quarterly throughout the process. These qualitative goals may change when new survey is taken and the Minimum Factor has been discovered.

It is expected that quality produces quantity and therefore the most important quantitatively verifiable indicators in this project are: worship attendance, growth rate, baptisms, and number of churches planted. These can be verified from the worship attendance records and secretary's reports in the Turku Church.

It might also be useful to have an external evaluator, who does not have a stake at the project. The external evaluator needs to understand all aspects of the project. Therefore, it is important that the collection of data be done a systematic way. A possible external evaluator for this project could be the Trans-European Division ministerial secretary.

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<sup>1</sup>See several practical steps in setting up these goals in Campbell, Johnstone, and Schalk, 34.

The project director will have a filing system for data collected to assist with evaluation. The file will include the strategic plan and the records of each set of activities. The data collected could also include the number of activities, the number of participants, the results of the NCD surveys conducted, membership and attendance records, sermons preached, articles written, and schedules of training events or any other information thought to be important for evaluation purposes. The file will also have the logframe and activities schedule since they serve as an important road map for the evaluation. Evaluation becomes easier because the logframe has outlined the scope of work that is to be evaluated at the end of the program.

The first NCD survey, which is conducted in the beginning of the project, serves as an important baseline survey for future surveys. It is also important to establish the essential statistical indicators at the beginning of the project to monitor the project development more accurately at the midterm and at the end of the program. Other baseline data needed include membership and the worship attendance records.

Progress will be reported monthly to the Turku church board, and quarterly to the evaluation team at the national level. The midterm evaluation will be conducted by the TED evaluator in February 2007. An interim report of this project will be included in the following chapter of this dissertation project, which will include the assessment of the initial progress of the project and the final conclusion of this project paper. The final results of the project will be evaluated when the project has been completed at the end of 2008. It may even take additional time to see the wider impact of the whole project.

### **Future Projection**

The purpose of this chapter was to develop a strategy for growth in Turku. An important part of the strategy development was an evaluation plan which has been incorporated into the strategy. A secondary purpose of this project is to build a support system for other churches that are willing to put into practice the important principle of multiplication. In revitalization and church planting there is a need for support between similar projects. The exchange of ideas and experiences are essential to the implementation of new paradigm churches. Church planting and revitalization are life and death questions for the entire Adventist Church in Finland; therefore, this project also has included a wider application section in order to support similar projects elsewhere.

This project is a serious attempt to find the best possible way to implement a strategy to create healthy churches in Finland, in the form of a case study based on the NCD paradigm. Whether it will or not depends partially on the paradigm itself but also on the ability and commitment of the Turku Church to implement a culturally and theologically contextualized strategy to produce quality in all eight quality areas of church health. In writing this chapter I realize that many things in the plan can go wrong, but the success will be more certain if the monitoring and evaluation process is well planned and followed during the implementation phase of the project.

The action plan for the project is challenging and it is assumed that not everything in it will work out as planned, but that should not hinder the planning team from trying to lay out a detailed plan. Even more detailed plans will be laid out during each NCD cycle or church planting projects that will be part of this project. These plans will also have a benefit from using the LFA project planning tools as they have been applied and used in

this type of a church growth project. It will then be easier to see where the plan failed and what should be done differently in the future.

In the last chapter of this dissertation the assessment of this project will be reported from the first months of the project implementation. The results of the Profile Plus will be reviewed and analyzed shortly and some recommendations will be made to the Turku church board which will most likely establish a task force to address the current Minimum Factor with clearly defined goals and plans to remove the existing barriers for growth.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Introduction**

The strategy implementation began in January 2005 with preparations for taking the NCD survey. In February a church planting and revitalization training seminar was held in Toivonlinna, with several groups participating including a group of leaders and two young potential leaders from the Turku Church. The NCD approach to church growth and church planting were taught and experiences of other revitalization projects and church planting projects were presented and discussed. The time was also used for brainstorming, vision casting, and spiritual preparation for the revitalization process in Turku. The Turku core group outlined a timetable for the survey in February and the survey was taken in March. The results came back in May 2005 giving the Church a better understanding, and helping it prepare to take further steps in implementing a strategy for improving the health and vitality of the Turku Church.

The Profile Plus has been calculated and the leadership team has started to analyze the results. The leadership team has defined some major barriers to growth and is starting to set qualitative goals. The results have been presented to the church board and discussed while this final chapter is being written. An action plan will be outlined as the project suggests by the end of September and implementation will begin in October.



Simultaneously with the NCD project in Turku a national focus will also be launched. A team of four leaders are already in the process of developing a strategy for church planting and revitalization for the Adventist Church in Finland. I am the secretary of this team, which is headed by the Union president. The strategy is being developed in consultation with the ministerial secretary of the Trans-European Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

### **Lessons Learned**

Within the limits of this project I am only able to report the early stages of the strategy and make some tentative recommendations to the stakeholders as to the lessons learned so far and where the process should be heading. According to the strategy outlined in the last chapter the Church is presently analyzing the survey.

In March the NCD process was explained to the Church and twenty-eight people and the pastor completed the survey. However, we missed some of the elders and some other key ministry leaders, who should have participated. The questionnaires were given out after the main weekly worship service and anybody could come and fill out one. Not quite thirty members remained after the service. Therefore, the following Sabbath the remaining survey questions were given to the additional members with twenty-eight questionnaires eventually being returned. Unfortunately, the recipients did not answer all the questions, which weakened the reliability of the test. In future the importance of answering all the questions should be emphasized. The selection of people asked to fill in the questionnaires should also be done more carefully according to the criteria outlined in the survey instructions. It is better to individually notify those who should fill in the survey. It would also be better if the whole group filled in the survey at one time.

Despite the weaknesses in the process of selecting the target group, the test will give valuable information as to how to proceed in the process of change in the Turku Church. The survey has given a clear signal where the Church should be heading.

The minimum factor, according to survey was "empowering leadership" (33) and almost as weak was "loving relationships" (34). The strongest factors were "functional structures" (62) and "passionate spirituality" (59). The average for all eight factors was 49 when the average in 2003 was 58. These two tests are not completely comparably. It is anticipated that future comparisons of survey results will become more reliable when approximately the same group will be tested each year and the test situation more carefully prepared and the national norm has been stabilized with more test results analyzed.

When analyzing the minimum factor "empowering leadership" the following were predominate responses: (1) The pastor does not look for enough help from lay people to complement his gifts. (2) The leaders of the church prefer to do the work themselves rather than delegate. (3) The pastor has too much work.

When analyzing the second lowest factor "loving relationships" the following were predominate responses: (1) People feel that in the church it is not possible to talk with other people about feelings and problems. (2) The atmosphere in the church is not strongly influenced by praise to one another and when someone in the church does a good job people are slow to respond with compliments. (3) There is not enough joy and laughter in the church, nor enough social contacts between fellow church members outside the formal meetings of the church.

When analyzing the highest factor “functional structures” the following were the predominant responses: (1) The church has a leader for every ministry. (2) The structure of the church is not hindering the growth. (3) Lay people are trained frequently.

When analyzing the second highest factor “passionate spirituality” the following were the predominant responses: (1) Spirituality is reflected in faithful paying of tithes and giving offerings. (2) Members enjoy reading the Bible on their own and it is regarded as the most important authority in the decisions of their everyday life. (3) Members firmly believe that God will work even more powerfully in our church in the coming years.

This is encouraging for the church still has leaders for different ministries, members pray for their friends and relatives, and at least the members participating in worship services read the Bible and are faithful in tithes and offerings. But the church needs improvement especially in the area of leadership development. There is also a clear signal that spiritual gifts are not fully understood nor applied to the life of the church. The lowest score from a single survey question was “I know my spiritual gifts.” There needs to be more people discovering their spiritual gifts and opportunities to serve according to their gifts. Leadership needs more team building and responsibility has to be delegated more widely.

The goal is to continue the NCD process until the end of 2008. A new profile will be produced each year within the project time frame. It is still too early to say whether the project will be a success in the final analysis, but I expect that this project will help the pastor develop his leadership and equipping skills. It is assumed that this project will help also the Turku Church and hopefully other Adventist churches in Finland to refocus

their strategies for the purpose of reversing present decline in membership. It is anticipated that greater growth will occur in the future, but this new emphasis has already helped the church to be more intentional what it does. During the last three years we have seen a slight positive turn in the growth pattern of the Turku Church. This project has also provided a more structured way of doing ministry and has helped in setting goals that are reasonable and reachable.

The Church in Turku can and will change, eventually, if there is a committed team of leaders to show the way. For me it is a question of faith, prayer, and perseverance. I am determined to be changed and to become a change agent, who is dedicated to equipping other leaders for this task. I know that God is not dependant on one man or one woman. If I am not ready for change there will be others who are. The hope for the future of the Adventist Church in Finland is change. This change should focus on two primary areas of ministry: church planting and church revitalization. Under these general headings there are several subheadings that will contribute to the success of these goals. The most important seems to be the development of pastoral leadership for the purpose of empowering the members for ministry. The process of change has already started and the future will reveal whether or not the changes were for the good of the church or not.

### **Recommendations**

Although the implementation of the actual strategy has just begun the development and nurturing of the planning process started in 2002. Therefore, it is possible to make a few recommendations to the stakeholders.

Based on an analysis of the Turku Church the two lowest factors presented are “empowering leadership” and “loving relationships.” These two quality factors should be the main emphasis for the six-month period starting from the launch of the action plan in October. In September the leadership team and the support team will have to determine the barriers to growth in these quality areas and then establish clearly defined qualitative goals for removing these barriers by developing an action plan. The church board should then accept the plan in the end of September. It is strongly recommended that a leadership training program for pastors, elders, and ministry leaders will be included in that plan. For my part this starts from 2 September. The leadership seminar that I am planning to take part runs through three years and involves two two-day seminars each year and the idea is to teach the material of this leadership training program to 15-25 other leaders in Turku area.

It is also recommended that youth ministry should be given more attention and pastoral guidance. The church should also develop a plan to reach other young people in the community, especially the students and the youth. NCD principles could be used for creating a strong youth ministry in the church, which eventually could lead to a new church plant. For this purpose a core of young leaders should be encouraged to start visioning where they want to be with Christ in their discipleship path in four years time. Even if that process would not lead to a new church plant it will develop their spiritual gifts and leadership skills. The church needs new leaders for ministry.

On the basis of the research in this study it is recommended that the leadership of the Adventist Church in Finland study and analyze the role of pastoral leadership more thoroughly in the Finnish Adventist context and develop a more precise strategy for

improving the efficiency of pastoral leadership. It is also recommended that the NCD paradigm be further developed and implemented within the Adventist context in Finland with a clearly defined coaching strategy and that continuing training, coaching, and resources be committed to implementing new initiatives in the area of church growth.

A momentum for change requires large amounts of positive affects, and social bonding, hope, inspiration, and sheer joy. Our church in Turku and the Adventist Church in Finland needs something to celebrate. If the church keeps looking back at losses, failures, and inefficiencies it is bound to decline, but if the focus is towards the future and on positive things that are just about to happen then the church is already well on its way to reach these desired goals of future church growth.

The vision for my ministry is to become a leader whose spiritual path is consistent with the high calling of ministry, not to become a great leader and a master in everything, but a person whose heart is shaped by God to serve and equip others to have a meaningful life as they serve God and minister to other people. I will do my best in applying the principle of John the Baptist in my ministry for God and to people: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). I am not gifted in everything, I need others. We all need one another for support in ministry. By coming close to God I will come close to people in order to witness for Jesus in a meaningful way. As the apostle Paul said, “But none of these things move me, neither count my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God ” (Acts 20:24).

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