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**Abstract**

**A STUDY OF THE CAUSES OF MEMBERSHIP DROPOUT AMONG  
SELECTED CHURCHES IN THE EAST JAMAICA  
CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS**

**by**

**Horace Ainsley Russell**

**Chairman: Norman K. Miles**

Abstract of Graduate Student  
Research Project

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A Study of the Causes of Membership Dropout Among Selected Church in the East Jamaica Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Name of researcher: Horace Ainsley Russell

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Norman K. Miles, Ph.D.

Date completed: May 1990

This project attempts to investigate the causes of membership dropout among selected churches in the East Jamaica Conference of SDA.

Several New Testament examples are explored in an effort to determine the church's responsibility in behalf of the missing member. The role and function of the church as a loving, caring community in reclaiming and restoring dropouts is discussed. Paul's teachings in 1 Corinthians, Romans, and Ephesians concerning the church as a body and Christ the head also are examined.

A review of literature gives an overview of the

dropout problem from the perspective of various Christian churches in an effort to find possible suggestions for reducing the dropout rate.

The descriptive method used in the study is based upon 176 responses to a questionnaire and personal interviews with persons who have dropped out of the church. The responses were evaluated by the Research and Statistics Department of Andrews University.

The respondents cited a number of reasons for dropping out of the church. The first ten factors are as follows: (1) Violated the commandment on adultery, 45.2 percent; (2) personal spiritual life declined, 42.2 percent; (3) working on Sabbath, 33.3 percent; (4) lack of support in time of crisis, 24.0 percent; (5) members too proud, 23.3 percent; (6) influenced by non-Adventist association, 22.1 percent; (7) lack of fellowship, 18.4 percent; (8) drastic financial change, 18.2 percent; (9) inadequately prepared for baptism, 17.6 percent; (10) members too inconsistent, 16.9 percent.

The responses indicated that 47.9 percent are very likely to become regular active members of the church. This indicates that given the proper encouragement, care, nurturing and visitation, these individuals would return to active membership.

Consequently, the findings of this study suggest that the church needs to give serious consideration to the factors responsible for membership dropout among selected

churches in the East Jamaica Conference of SDA. It is anticipated that the recommended suggestions will be implemented to bring about a significant reduction in the dropout rate.

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

A STUDY OF THE CAUSES OF MEMBERSHIP DROPOUT AMONG  
SELECTED CHURCHES IN THE EAST JAMAICA  
CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

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

by  
Horace A. Russell

June 1990

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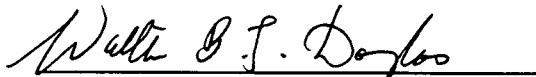
by

Horace Ainsley Russell


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Date approved

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This Doctor of Ministry Project report falls under the category described in the Seminary Bulletin as "Project II" in fulfillment of requirements for an alternate curriculum plan. The candidate prepares two related papers --a theological position paper addressing some issue or problem in the church theologically, and a professional paper addressing this issue from the standpoint of ministerial experience.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

During my eleven years as a pastor in East Jamaica Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, I have observed that one of the problems confronting the church is the relatively large number of members who became dropouts. While this observation is on a local level, the conference secretary has indicated to me that the dropout rate conference-wide is approximately 25-35 percent.<sup>1</sup> I also have observed that shortly after assuming the responsibility as pastor in several pastoral districts, I was presented with a long list of names representing church members who were no longer attending church.

One often hears the following comments in our churches:

"Have you seen the Jones lately?"

"Whatever happened to that young lady who always sat in the fifth row next to the center aisle?"

"Is Harold Johnston still a member here? I don't remember him being at church in a long, long time."

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<sup>1</sup>At the time of writing, the secretary of the East Jamaica Conference of SDA was L. G. Kelly, June 28, 1988. (Personal Interview)

It appears that each statement is an admission that something is wrong. People are missing. Long-standing members have faded from view. Once active leaders are now on the fringes. Some newer members disappear as fast as they come into the congregation.

My private discussions with pastors and at workers' meetings reveal that there seems to be a growing concern about missing members. A similar concern was expressed by Floyd Bresee. He explains that

During the years 1981 through 1985 the following percentages of the number joining the Seventh-day Adventist church were reported as apostasies or missing:

South American Division	9%
Euro African Division	11%
Far Eastern Division	16%
Africa Indian Ocean Division	17%
Eastern Africa Division	21%
South Pacific Division	22%
Southern Asia Division	16%
Inter American Division	29%
Northern European Division	32%
North American Division	40%
All Divisions (average)	25%

Bresee further points out that the apostasy rate tends to be higher in more affluent countries, perhaps because prosperity is the enemy of spirituality. Also, reporting may be more complete in these countries.<sup>1</sup>

C. E. Bradford, writing on the issue of church dropouts, stated that all Adventists have a mutual concern--it is the growing number of church members being

---

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

lost through the "back door"--many of whom were raised in Adventist homes and educated in Adventists schools.

The North American Division Church and Ministries Department, in a recent report, stated that: "A careful review of the records indicates that there are more than 700,000 men and women in North America whose names have been dropped, and at least 300,000 more who are still on the books and never attend church."<sup>1</sup>

Caslow points out:

There is mounting concern regarding membership reversion. We cannot continue to give all attention merely to accessions to the church. Somehow the answer and solution to this, long time persistent, and chronic evangelistic weakness must be found.<sup>2</sup>

Christ was very concerned about the one out of the one hundred who left the fold. He declared:

What man of you having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing.

And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying, rejoice with me for I have found my sheep which was lost.

Just so, I tell you there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. (Luke 15:4-7)

The church should have no less compassion on those

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<sup>1</sup>See appendix II, article prepared at the request of the North American Division Committee by the Church Ministries and Communication Department and Ministerial Association (18 March 1988).

<sup>2</sup>Daniel E. Caslow, Discipling: New Member Ministry (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1982), 52.



who have strayed or dropped out of the church. If Christ as the shepherd was so troubled about one lost sheep, how much more should the church as the body of Christ be concerned about the thousands who leave the church every year.

Some indications that an effort is being made by the church to find solutions to deal with the problem do exist. However, much more remains to be accomplished on the part of each member of the church if the church hopes to see any significant reduction in the number of missing members.

This research project is very much needed so the churches in the East Jamaica Conference of Seventh-day Adventists may become acquainted with which factors, as perceived by the dropouts themselves, cause members to drop out of the church.

#### Statement of the Problem

This study attempts to investigate the causes of membership dropout among selected churches in the East Jamaica Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and to suggest ways to reduce the current rate of dropout.

#### Justification of the Project

1. From my own pastoral experiences in four pastoral districts over a period of ten years and from discussion with colleagues in private conversations and at

workers' meetings, I have found a growing concern about missing members.

2. No previous formal study seems to have been done on this problem in East Jamaica Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Thus a need exists for some degree of assessment and personal examination which in the end will prove beneficial in strengthening the membership throughout the conference.

3. Although personal experience and the general literature show the need for remedial action against church dropouts, very little appears to have been done to improve pastoral skills to deal with the problem and provide a follow-up plan to strengthen the membership. Consequently, this project seeks to identify some of the possible causes for church dropout and to offer suggestions for remedial actions to reduce the rate of missing members.

#### Description of the Project

1. A theological study was made from a number of Biblical models in the New Testament which reflect God's care and redemptive acts in behalf of the missing members. The role and function of the church as a loving, caring community in reclaiming and restoring dropouts is discussed. Paul's teachings in 1 Corinthians, Romans, and Ephesians concerning the church as a body and Christ the head also are examined.

2. An investigation of the literature was

undertaken to give an overview of the dropout problem and to find possible concerns and suggestions for reducing the dropout rate.

3. Interviews and questionnaires were used to identify some of the possible causes of dropout from the churches in East Jamaica Conference. An attempt was made to interview persons who have dropped out of the churches during the years 1985-1987. Also, critical evaluation based on common assessment of the churches was used to identify factors that are most likely to result in the greatest number of church dropouts. A pilot testing of the questionnaire was done involving twenty-five persons of Caribbean origin who are from Seventh-day Adventist background.

4. The study evaluated responses from 380 questionnaires sampling a population of over 5,000. This sampling was in keeping with the standard recommendation by the Institute of Church Ministry Department of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary.

5. The project included a personal visit to Jamaica in June 1988. During this period I interviewed dropout church members and distributed and collected the questionnaire (with the assistance of the pastors and selected church members).

6. Based on the results of the interviews and questionnaires, certain suggestions, with a view to a reduction in the number of church dropouts, are presented.

### Limitations of the Project

1. This study was delimited to selected churches in the East Jamaica Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, one of the three conferences on the Island of Jamaica.

2. No attempt was made to field test the suggestions that emerged from the study prior to the completion of the project.<sup>1</sup>

### Expectations from the Project

The goals sought in the pursual of this project were:

1. To develop a deeper insight into the causes of membership attrition.

2. To become more concerned with the needs of those drifting away from the church and to learn how best to meet their needs.

3. To improve my own pastoral skills by reducing the number of dropouts.

4. To alert the conference personnel as to the need to discuss and plan strategies with pastors. (This would include some recommendations to reduce the dropout rate as outlined in the project.

5. To improve pastoral skills in providing the care and nurture members need to attain to full maturity in

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<sup>1</sup>For information on the requirement for Project I, see Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary 1989-1990 Bulletin (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1989), 58-59.

Christ. (This may be evaluated by the statistical reduction of dropout over a given period after the introduction of processes addressing this problem.)

### Definition of Terms

A number of terms used in this research project are defined as follows:

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

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

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

Dropout refers to a member who has little or no relationship with the church or who has emotionally withdrawn from involvement. This does not mean that such a person has abandoned the faith.

Former member refers to someone who is no longer actively involved in church life.

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

Laity is used in reference to members of the

Christian church as a whole or members of the Seventh-day Adventist church who are not part of the appointed clergy.

SDA is an abbreviation for Seventh-day Adventist also Adventists.

## CHAPTER II

### A THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH

#### The Church, Its Meaning and Function

The term "church" is derived from the Greek word *Kyrios* which came into the Germanic tongues by way of the Gothic translation of the Bible. Hence, "church" signifies the people that belong to the Lord, the *Kyrios*.<sup>1</sup> In the secular Greek world, the word ekklesia was used to mean a "popular assembly."<sup>2</sup> William Barclay describes its usage in the following way:

In the great classical days in Athens the *ekklesia* was the convened assembly of the people. It consisted of all the citizens of the city who had not lost their civic rights. Apart from the fact that its decisions must conform to the laws of the state, its powers were to all intents and purposes unlimited. It elected and dismissed magistrates and directed the policy of the city. It declared war, made peace, contracted treaties and arranged alliance. It elected generals and other military officers. It assigned troops to different campaigns and dispatched them from the city. It was ultimately responsible for the conduct of all military operations.

It raised and allocated funds. Two things are interesting to note. First, all its meetings began

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<sup>1</sup>Bernhard Hanssler, The Church and God's People, trans. Gregory Roettger (Baltimore: Halicon Press, 1963), 24.

<sup>2</sup>Gerhard Kittel, The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT), trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1965), 3:513.

with prayer and sacrifice. Second, it was a true democracy. . . . It was an assembly where everyone had an equal right and an equal duty to the past.<sup>1</sup>

The word ekklesia in the Greek New Testament occurs only twice in the Gospels (Matt 16:18, 18:17); the first is the famous logion or saying of Jesus to Peter: "You are Simon, but you will be called 'Rock' and on this Rock I will build my ekklesia." The other saying in Matt 18 appears in the context of fraternal correction, where the ekklesia is the last court of appeal for the sinner who does not heed the admonition of the individual or a group of witnesses.

Ekklesia also has a Hebrew background. In the Greek Septuagint, it translates the Old Testament Hebrew word qahal, which again comes from the root meaning "to summon." It is frequently used for the "assembly or congregation of the people of Israel, the word occurring over seventy times in the Septuagint and the ekklesia and qahal word groups in the Old and New Testament coming more than seven hundred times."<sup>2</sup>

R. Newton Flew infers that

The word ecclesia is used in the Septuagint to translate qahal, the 'people' of God. Jesus may well have used this Hebrew word or the Aramaic q'hala. Schmidt has advanced an attractive suggestion that the word used was kenushta, the commonest Rabbinic word for 'synagogue.' The Sinaitic Syriac Version translates

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<sup>1</sup>William Barclay, A New Testament Wordbook (London: SCM Press, 1955), 34.

<sup>2</sup>David Watson, I Believe in the Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1978), 6.



ecclesia by Kenushta. It is possible that this word was used not only for the local community meeting in a particular synagogue, but also the whole "Israel of God."<sup>1</sup>

Gerhardt has drawn certain preliminary conclusions from the usage of the term ekklesia which appropriately sums up this section.

1. The church is a body of believers, men called by God for the salvation of the world. The church is continually being called again and again and therefore it is primarily an event, always in the process of development, always "en route."

2. The church is built upon Christ. The Christ event is its sole center. The only reason for its existence is Christological.

3. As ekklesia, the church is concrete, visible, as a local congregation and as the universal church.

4. It is eschatological, that is, tied to the preliminaries of this world, directed to the absolute, open to the future.

5. It is an organized assembly of citizens, that is, of full members with corresponding duties and rights.

6. It is the goal and agent of the individual as well as the cosmic salvation through God in Christ.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>R. Newton Flew, Jesus and His Church: A Study of the Idea of the Ecclesia in the New Testament (London, England: Epworth Press, 1938), 90.

<sup>2</sup>Gohann H. Gerhardt, "Development, Teaching, and Evaluating of a Course in Church Leadership and Administration for the Theological Seminary Marienhoehe,

The Functions of the Church

Richard P. McBrien in Church: The Continuing Quest<sup>1</sup> mentions the three-fold mission of the church in contemporary history. He and others describe the function of the church as kerygmatic, koinoniae, and diakoniae. While I agree with McBrien and his colleagues in respect to these three functions of the church, I believe that they have overlooked one of the most important functions of the church--worship. Clarice Marsurette Bowman supports this view; he states: "A church's first job is to lead people in the worship of God."<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, while preaching, service, and fellowship are all functions of the church, I regard worship as the first function of the Christian church.

Worship

One of the functions and privileges of the Christian church is that of providing for and maintaining the worship of God. Segler asserts that the first order in the church's mission is worship. All other aspects of

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Germany," D.Min. project, Andrews University, 1986, 13.

<sup>1</sup>Richard P. McBrien, Church: The Continuing Quest (Paramus, NJ: Newman Press, 1970), 73.

<sup>2</sup>Clarice M. Bowman, Restoring Worship (New York: Abingdon Cokesbury Press, 1951), 48.

ministry are motivated by worship, and without worship the church will die.<sup>1</sup>

William Temple, in defining worship says,

Worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God. All this is gathered up in that emotion which most cleanses us from selfishness because it is the most selfless of all emotions--adoration.<sup>2</sup>

Worship is the eschatological function of the church. According to Delling, "It is in its very essence the continuing decisive working out of salvation in history which ends in the eternal adoration of God."<sup>3</sup>

The church is charged to proclaim the message of true worship. Note Rev 14:7: "Saying with a loud voice, Fear God and give glory to Him for the hour of His judgement is come; and worship Him that made heaven and earth, and the sea and the fountains of waters."

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

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

<sup>2</sup>William Temple, The Hope of a New World (New York: Macmillan Co., 1942), 30.

<sup>3</sup>Gerhard Delling, Worship in the New Testament, trans. Percy Scott (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 182.

manifestation of His power through the coming of the Holy Spirit.

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

Worship is the life blood, the heartbeat, of the last day church. It is essential for its life and mission. If this church does not worship it will soon disappear in spite of its institutions and programs. The Adventist believer is obliged to worship. . . . For the believer worship is the grateful acceptance of His gifts of grace which sustain and give power for faithful service.<sup>1</sup>

### Preaching

The church has been designated custodian of preaching. Christ founded a community, a church, whose first charge was the preaching of the gospel. Forsythe calls the preaching of the gospel an opus operatum, the central work of the church, the going forward, the "organized hallelujah of an ordered community."<sup>2</sup>

Preaching the gospel is the business of the church. Preaching is the witness of the church to the world. In Tim 4:2, Paul's charge to the young preacher was: "Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season: reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine."

Jesus commissioned the church with the divine mandate to proclaim the gospel in Mark 16:15: "Go ye into

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<sup>1</sup>C. Raymond Holmes, Sing a New Song (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1984), 48.

<sup>2</sup>p. T. Forsyth, Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1907), 88.

all the world, and preach the gospel to every nation."<sup>1</sup>

According to Richard Baxter, the function of the church to proclaim the gospel is indeed an urgent task. He spoke of himself as "a dying man preaching to dying men."<sup>2</sup> The task of the church is a matter of life and death--even of eternal life and eternal death.

### Service

The life of the church is eminently one of service. Christ declared that the characteristic of the new society which He founded, differentiating it from all others, was that its members were servants of one another, following the example of the Son of Man who "Came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matt 20:28).

Service which was costly was the keynote of His whole career. Now those who share His life express it in a similar desire for service. The church became the embodiment of the Servant, hands and feet to carry.

Service is not a duty for Christians, but a life response to what Christ has done for them. The primary work that the New Testament uses to describe ministry is diakonia meaning "service." The other key word frequently used in the New Testament for servant is doulos, meaning

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<sup>1</sup>R. B Kuiper, The Glorious Body of Christ (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 165.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 165.

"slave." Michael Harper makes a distinction between these two words.

The word diakonos is a functional word, meaning a person who renders acts of service to other people, particularly waiting at table. When Jesus said, "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27), He was using this word. But doulos is a "relationship" word. It means literally a "slave," one who is owned by another person, with no rights or independent status whatsoever. Thus, Paul could speak of himself and Timothy as the slaves of Christ (Phil 1:1).

John 13 records a graphic display of service. Jesus, before His death as a servant, expresses His oneness with His followers and His desire to offer Himself in a helping way by washing their feet.

John F. O'Grady argues that in all three cases-- the ceremonial foot-washing, the Eucharist, and the Passion and death--Jesus the Christ manifests His oneness with the human race and, in particular, with His followers. He offers Himself in service to all men. In the foot-washing, He joins His followers in celebration as one with them and then dons the towel to wash their feet; in the Eucharist, He joins His followers in a meal and offers Himself to them in symbolic gesture and food; in His Passion and death, He shares the lot of all men in death and offers His death as

the culmination of His life for the salvation of men.<sup>1</sup>

The words of John's gospel make it clear that Jesus is one with His followers and they are one with Him, and in this context He can be their servant and calls them to serve each other:

Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent Him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. (John 13:14-17)

This ordinance of footwashing that Christ introduced as a part of the Eucharist celebration to His followers emphasized the need for humility as a spiritual virtue and the greatest qualification for service.

This concept of servanthood appears to have been practiced by the first-century church. Richard Todd points out that the believers of the early church, when they gathered for worship, knew that they would be going forth to serve. In other words, if the gospel was to be relevant, Christians had to follow Christ's example in the Upper Room and take the wash bowl and towel and begin learning the implications of washing the feet of one another.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John F. O'Grady, "Jesus the Servant," The Bible Today 61 (October 1972): 855.

<sup>2</sup>Richard Allen Todd, "The Circuitry of Church Renewal: A Strategy for Balanced Spiritual Wholeness in the Local Church," D.Min. project, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1985, 74.

Those early members of the church knew that the parable of the Good Samaritan was more than just a story-- it was a model for them to get busy caring for the hurts and needs of the people of the world. Francis of Assisi is said to have invited a monk to assist him in bringing the gospel to a certain village. They spent the whole day in works of mercy and never got around to preaching. Toward evening, his companion inquired of Francis when they were going to begin to preach. Francis replied that they had been preaching all day.<sup>1</sup>

That story can be misinterpreted. No one should think that service to humanity may be substituted for the preaching of the word. Rather, the church that functions to care for suffering humanity is reinforcing the gospel message it proclaims.

### Fellowship

In the New Testament, the most expressive term used to describe the common life lived in the body of Christ is koinania. In its various forms and derivatives, koinonia appears some fifty times in the Greek New Testament and means "that which is held in common." It is translated variously as fellowship, common, contribution, share, participation, partner, partake, partnership, generous. The term is used about equally in the NT to express spiritual sharing, and sharing in a concrete material way.

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<sup>1</sup>Kuiper, 168-169.



Paul tells us in Acts 2:42 of the first-century church: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship."

While koinonia involves the horizontal dimension (people to people), it is not fully understood unless it is linked with the vertical (individual to God).<sup>1</sup> Koinonia involves both the church abiding in the vine for fruitfulness and the body being joined and knit together so that it can build up itself in love.

Being part of a community committed to Christ means we are part of a sharing community where we have the freedom to share feelings without the threat of being rejected as a result of doing so. In fact, if the church functions as it should, there is sharing and weakness, a discovery of gifts, and a rediscovery of bondedness in love and unity. Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book Life Together said "When the morning mists of dreams vanish, then dawns the bright day of Christian fellowship."<sup>2</sup>

In community or in fellowship with other Christians, you cannot be a hypocrite or a play actor, for the accountability system will call us to realness in Christ. In fellowship we discover that we are not marbles bouncing off one another with no interdependence upon one

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<sup>1</sup>John Driver, Community and Commitment (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1976), 28.

<sup>2</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together (New York: Harper & Bros., 1954), 15.

another. According to Richard Todd, "When one person can be removed from the fellowship and it does not really affect the others in the fellowship, then it is not fellowship at all."<sup>1</sup>

1 John 1:6-7 gives a fitting description of the kind of fellowship we need to have functioning within the church as a community. "If we claim to have fellowship with God yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His son cleanses us from all sin."

This was the kind of fellowship that the first believers experienced. A kiononia that broke down barriers. They found it ridiculous to tolerate any man-made devices, because they were united with one another in Christ.

Richard Halverson describes how fellowship functioned in the church of Antioch; he says:

What the first century world saw was the phenomenon of people of all walks of life loving one another, serving one another, caring for one another, praying for one another. Slaves and free men were in that community. Rich and poor were in that fellowship. Roman citizens and non Roman citizens were in that community. Members of the establishment and those violently opposed to the establishment were part of that community. The intelligentsia and the illiterate were members of that community. To the utter amazement

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<sup>1</sup>Todd, 54.

of the world outside, they were bound together in an unexplainable love and unity.<sup>1</sup>

The early Christian church showed a greater quality of love and caring which surpasses anything outside the church in contemporary society. Thus, we do not demonstrate the power of the Gospel unless kiononia (fellowship) takes place in the church, or we find ourselves only talking about intangibles such as "love, caring and unity," but we never experience them. A. Eugene Bianchi states: "The church must be truly gathered in the spirit before it is sent. Meaningful Kiononia (fellowship) must precede and accompany effective Kerygma (proclamation) and diakonia (service)."<sup>2</sup>

Howard Snyder's illustration best shows that kind of fellowship in the church. "When the church is a genuine community experiencing real koinonia, it is the most potent source of community in the world."<sup>3</sup>

### The Church as God's People

The term "people of God" is a basic Biblical conception having to do with the religious community of which the Bible speaks in both the Old and New Testament.

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Halverson, A Living Fellowship--A Dynamic Witness (Zondervan Pub. House, 1972), 62.

<sup>2</sup>Eugene C. Bianchi, Reconciliation: The Function of the Church (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1969), 118.

<sup>3</sup>Howard A. Snyder, "The Church as Community: Subculture or Counter Culture?" Christianity Today 27 (April 8, 1983), 29.

Hans Kung points out that "The idea of the people of God is the oldest and the most fundamental concept underlying the self-interpretation of the ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ."<sup>1</sup> Two words are used to describe the idea "People of God." The first, in the OT Donal Flanagan states, is, "Laos," which distinguished the Israelites from the Gentiles called the ethne or nations. The second word in the NT, ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ, is used to designate the people as a community who are saved because of covenant, and particularly as gathered together for worship."<sup>2</sup>

The term Laos means "a special people," clearly distinguished from other people by its origin, its special loyalties and task, its language and behavior, and its principles and goals.<sup>3</sup>

This difference in origin is especially significant and, therefore, is stressed repeatedly. The laos did not come into existence by its own choice. What made Israel a nation are not historical or natural factors; it is God's choice. His gracious turning to man is the constitutive element (Deut 7:6).

The word laos is used 140 times in the New

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<sup>1</sup>Hans Kung, The Church, trans. Ray and Rosaleen Ockenden (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1967), 83.

<sup>2</sup>Donal Flanagan, The Meaning of the Church (Dublin, Ireland: Gill & Son, 1966), 3.

<sup>3</sup>Gottfried Oosterwal, Mission Possible (Nashville, TN: Southern Pub. Assn., 1972), 108.

Testament.<sup>1</sup> In addition to the literal meaning as people or group of people, there is the transferral to the church of the Old Testament title to be God's laos. From the eth noi God has chosen for Himself a new laos for His name.<sup>2</sup> Proclaiming the proximity of the Kingdom, Jesus inaugurates the gathering of the people of God, His people.

In the New Testament, the Christian community is viewed as the true Israel (Rom 9:6; 1 Cor 10:18; Gal 6:16), the true seed of Abraham (Gal 3:29; Rom 9:7,8), the true circumcision (Phil 3:3), and the true Temple (1 Cor 3:16). This community is taken from the Gentiles. It began with the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10. Community, at times, has reference to both Jews and Gentiles. The Christian community continually takes the place of Israel. It is to this new people of God that the gospel is extended.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the purpose of God in choosing a people is seen to point toward the salvation of all mankind.

In a comment on Mark 10:45, Fridricksen admits:

Here the statement of Jesus opens a universal perspective. Behind the ecclesia, which, was to be the result of his work, stands the whole of humanity. Through the death of the Son of Man the possibility is created to incorporate the whole of the human race, "all people," into the people of God.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Kittel, TDNT, 4:50.

<sup>2</sup>Acts 15:14; 2 Cor 6:14; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet 2:9.

<sup>3</sup>Kittel, TDNT, 4:55.

<sup>4</sup>Anton Fridricksen, Messiah and the Church: This Is the Church, ed. Andress Nygren, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1952), 175.

The new people of God are bearers of a commission to carry the divine offer of salvation won by Christ to the peoples of the world, thus fulfilling God's original purpose in electing Israel to be "a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Isa 49:6<sup>b</sup>).

H. A. Snyder distinguishes five characteristics from the term "People of God": (1) the church as a chosen people; (2) the church as a pilgrim people; (3) the church as a covenant people; (4) the church as a testifying people; and (5) the church as a holy people. Gerhardt deduces the following from the concept of laos:

1. The church is a people chosen and constituted by God.
2. The church is an eschatological people.
3. The church is the gathered people.
4. The church is the people sent into the world.
5. The church is people, that is, diversity within wholeness.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Church as the Body of Christ

The most distinctive Pauline metaphor for the church is the "body of Christ."<sup>2</sup> It has been called "the

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<sup>1</sup>Gerhardt, 15-16.

<sup>2</sup>George Eldon Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1974), 545.

best single analogy of life in mutuality."<sup>1</sup> More fully and more vividly than the brotherhood image, it immediately articulates the interdependence of the members.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, it accentuates more clearly than any of the previous image the continuing organic and social union of Christians with their risen Head.

The term "body of Christ" is original with Paul; it is not found in the Old Testament nor in the gospels. Whether Paul's idea is ultimately of Greek or Jewish provenance, a fact which remains controverted by scholars, it seems certain that the reality behind the formula--the union of Christians with Christ--began to take firm root in his mind at the time of his conversion experience.<sup>3</sup> It was on that occasion that the risen Jesus identified Himself with His persecuted members. "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting";<sup>4</sup> not surprising then that Paul should make this concept a cornerstone of his theology. Indeed, the term "body of Christ" is one of the most significant New Testament images for understanding the nature of the church (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:27; Eph 4:12).

According to Vine, "the word Soma refers to the

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<sup>1</sup>Paul S. Minear, Images of the Church in the New Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 243.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. 1 Cor 12:12-27.

<sup>3</sup>John P. Schanz, A Theology of Community (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1977), 101.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Acts 9:5.

body as a whole, the instrument of life, whether of man living, or in resurrection. The word is also used, metaphorically, of the mystic body of Christ, with reference to the whole church, Eph 1:23; Col 1:18; 22, 24 also of local church, 1 Cor 12:27."<sup>1</sup>

The word soma (in its various forms) is used 142 times in the New Testament, 31 times in connection with the church.<sup>2</sup> Paul varies his imagery of the church body.<sup>3</sup> In Ephesians and Colossians, there seems to be a development from the way Paul uses the metaphor in 1 Cor 12. In Col 1 and Eph 4, Christ is seen as the head of the body; in Eph 4, He is viewed as the husband of the body.

The concept of soma, in addition to being the key to Paul's New Testament ecclesiology, knits together all of Paul's great themes whether used in connection with the church or not. John A. T. Robinson contends that for Paul

It is from the body of sin and death that we are delivered; it is through the body of Christ on the cross that we are saved; it is into His body the church that we are incorporated, it is by His body in the Eucharist that this community is sustained; it is in our new body that its new life has to be manifested, it

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<sup>1</sup>W. E. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1981), 136-137.

<sup>2</sup>Sakae Kubo, A Reader's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1971), 277.

<sup>3</sup>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, S.v. "Body" (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1962), 452.



is to a resurrection of the body to the likeness of His glorious body that we are destined.<sup>1</sup>

The most extensive use of the term body of Christ in the New Testament explains the ways a particular church community ought to see and understand itself.

For just as the body is one and has many members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and all were made to drink of one spirit.

For the body does not consist of one member but of many.

If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. . . . But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as God chose. If all were a single organ, where would the body be? As it is there are many parts, yet one body. . . . But God has so composed the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. (1 Cor 12:12-15, 18-20, 24-25)

The union with Christ that Paul speaks of in the passage quoted above may be understood as a mystical union with Him. Paul's chief concern here is the interdependence of the members among themselves as their responsibility to the body as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

Alan Cole suggests five primary meanings which arise out of Paul's metaphor, yet each has a common thread tying it together with the others. These are: man's common dependence on Christ; joint partaking of His Spirit; interdependence on one another; unity in Christ; and

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<sup>1</sup>John A. T. Robinson, The Body (London: SCM Press, 1962), 9.

<sup>2</sup>Schanz, 101.

responsibility for mutual service.<sup>1</sup> Note the five key terms that he uses: common, joint, interdependence, unity, and mutual. They all signal amalgamation or imply interrelationship.

Paul explicitly states this diversity in unity in 1 Cor 12:12. "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ." The result is an harmonious functioning of the body. Ellen White, commenting on this passage, remarks: "By a comparison of the church with the human body, the apostle aptly illustrated the close and harmonious relationship that should exist among all members of the church of Christ."<sup>2</sup>

For Paul, in the church, there can be no isolated members. Each member serves every other member in the community according to its function, its gifts, and its calling, but no one is independent of the others.

It is important to keep in mind that while the growth is directed by the head, the members of the body have a responsibility in working together. This requires "every joint adding to its own strength, for each separate part to work according to its function" (Eph 4:16). "This unity, moreover, is not external and mechanical, but

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<sup>1</sup>Alan Cole, The Body of Christ (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 26.

<sup>2</sup>Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1958), 317.

internal and organic. It is not superimposed, but, by virtue of the power of the indwelling Christ, proceeds from within the organism of the church."<sup>1</sup> There is a community of operation with a common focus in Him, whose the body is. The unity is the "unity of the spirit" (Eph 4:3). We are united, for the "Christ in us will meet the Christ in our brethren."<sup>2</sup>

Besides unity, common membership in the body of Christ requires mutual responsibility for one another. The members ought to "have the same care for one another," says Paul (1 Cor 12:25). They which are spiritual should restore a man overtaken in any trespass (Gal 6:1). Jesus urges going to the erring brother and seeking to be reconciled with him (Matt 5:23-25 and 18:15-22). This is a spiritual ministry dictated by love, which should be self evident, even if it were not so explicitly stated.

It is this aspect of ministry that involves restoring the dropout member to which this paper is addressed.

#### The Church as a Community

Howard Snyder,<sup>3</sup> in his approach to the church as a

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<sup>1</sup>William Hendriksen, Exposition of Ephesians (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967), 181.

<sup>2</sup>Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, 9 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 8:21.

<sup>3</sup>Snyder, "The Church as Community," 27A:28-30.

community, argues that the church must increasingly take seriously its true nature as a community as well as its nature as counterculture which reinforces and perpetuates its own values. To do otherwise is simply to accommodate to the culture.

The church must be a community with social strength to incarnate values that are antagonistic at key points to the world around it. But merely accepting such a viewpoint means nothing. The church, in fact, must be a community that experiences and reinforces biblical values. No group with values that differ significantly from society can endure long in that society unless the group is a counter community. Christians cannot maintain Christian values in society unless they are part of a community that reinforces those values.

If Christians cease to act like Christians, sooner or later they stop believing like Christians. So community is a crucial concern.

Snyder in The Community of the King explains

that the church as a community emphasizes the local, temporal life of the church in a given cultural context. This involves the business of Christians living together, sharing a common life. Here also we discover the basic fact that true community is essential for effective witness. And here too, as a result, we face the problem of wineskins, the necessity of dealing with structures in order to permit and encourage true community.<sup>1</sup>

According to Snyder, to speak of the church as

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<sup>1</sup>Howard A. Snyder, The Community of the King (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 39-60.

community is to take a somewhat more restricted view, since the church is more than community. It is also the scattered people of God, the leaven of the gospel in the lump of the world dispersed and working in every area of society. But community is essential, for where it is lacking and where there are no working structures to nourish it, the leaven becomes inactive and the salt loses its savor.

He further adds:

It is critically important especially in a worldwide multicultural situation such as the church faces today to be clear that the essence of the church is people, not organization; that is a community, not an institution.<sup>1</sup>

John Driver also sees the church as a community. He says, "By nature the church is a community and experiences communion."<sup>2</sup>

According to Howard R. Macy:

The Christian community is simply sharing a common life in Christ. It moves us beyond the self interested isolation of private lives and beyond the superficial social contacts that pass for "Christian fellowship." The Biblical ideal of community challenges us instead to commit ourselves to life together as people of God.<sup>3</sup>

The church of the Acts and the Epistles was based on the community Jesus had formed. After Pentecost, the disciples simply repeated what Jesus had done with them.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 60.

<sup>2</sup>Driver, 28.

<sup>3</sup>Howard R. Macy, "Community: God's Design for Growth," Discipleship Journal 9,3 (May/June 1989), 20.

The first several chapters in Acts show the pattern. Jesus had provided for the many converts of Pentecost by preparing a community of people.

Jesus gathered a community of believers, working intensively with them so that they would understand who he was and why he had come. They could handle problems as they came, guided by the Holy Spirit and following Jesus' teaching and example.

As Jesus had met with the first disciples in small groups, and as they had met together outdoors and in homes, so did the first Christians. The life of the early church was nourished in homes. First, it was built through normal family life. Second, it was fed through koinonia groups, cells of people who met together for prayer, worship, and the Eucharist and who passed on Jesus' teaching by word of mouth.

The church's experience of community was complemented by its sense of being a distinct people. The Epistles reveal a strong counter-culture consciousness, which developed and deepened as the church spread across the empire. As it expanded, it learned that God's plan was not just for the Jews, but for all peoples, nations, and classes. It began to develop a people consciousness.

This consciousness dawned gradually. The Holy Spirit was poured out equally on Jews and Gentiles (Acts 10:44-47; 11:15-18; 19:5-6). Christians began to think of themselves as a third race: neither Jew nor Gentile, but

something new transcending both. Christians were "Neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, but "all are in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28; note also 1 Cor 12:13; Eph 2:14; Col 3:11). This was not merely spiritual renewal; it was social revolution.

The modern tragedy in Snyder's<sup>1</sup> view is that this consciousness has all but evaporated from the church. A sad symptom of the loss of true community is the way Christians easily accept massive gaps between rich and poor as normal, and at least as not a pressing Christian concern. The early Christians took steps so that "there were no needy persons among them" (Acts 4:34) but few Christians are so moved today.

The model for the church as a New Testament community is an authoritative witness to the nature of the church in all times. Therefore, if the church today is to build a genuine Christian community, it must apply the basic biblical principles of church life, and this involves the following aspects.

#### Commitment and Covenant

Christian and community start at the point of commitment and covenant; whether this commitment is formal or informal is secondary. The fact is, Christian community cannot exist without commitment to Jesus as Lord and to one

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 28-30.

another. It must be specific and explicit, involving one's time, energy, and resources.

### Shared Life

The church exists in time and space and so must come together in time and space. Real community means shared time, shared meals, shared priorities, and some level of economic sharing.

Joe Ellis gives a fitting description of the shared life by stating:

This quality became the hallmark of the early church. The astonished world had never seen such a relationship among people. Here was a group of people who sincerely cared for each other as much as they cared for themselves, who were sensitive to each other's feelings and needs, who were together and as "one heart and mind." In this remarkable relationship Christians shared each other's hurts, weaknesses, personal problems, material needs, aspirations, prayer concerns and victories. They associated in a climate of acceptance, openness, encouragement, assistance, support, and trust. They became more truly brothers and sisters than if they had been born of the same human parents. It was as though their lives were wielded together.<sup>1</sup>

### The Dimension of Transcendence

The church transcends mere human community when the horizontal, human dimension is married to the vertical dimension through Jesus Christ. This dimension of transcendence constitutes the church and builds it into a true community of the spirit. It causes the Christian

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<sup>1</sup>Joe S. Ellis, The Church on Purpose (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Pub., 1982), 69.



community to look not just inward or outward, but also upward to God and ahead to the promised Kingdom.

### Service

Servanthood is an essential mark of authentic Christian community and should characterize the church's internal life and its life in the world. Thus, if the church is seen primarily as an institution, its ministry is largely institutional and program oriented. But if it is viewed as a community, its ministry is person oriented, focusing on building structures of human interaction-- family, church, and neighborhood structures that are being undermined today.

These four basic biblical principles of church life mentioned by Snyder--commitment and covenant, shared life, the dimension of transcendence and service--give an explanation of what community means. However, the concept of "shared life" proves whether these principles are practiced by the believer. This concept also demonstrates the church's responsibility to the backsliders, the topic considered next.

### The Church's Responsibility to Dropouts

In keeping with the concept of the church as a community, as was previously addressed, it is the obligation of each member within the community to be his brother's keeper.

E. G. White contends: "Every church member should

feel an interest in all that concerns the human brotherhood and the brotherhood in Christ. We are members of one another; if one member suffers, all the members suffer, with him."<sup>1</sup>

Several Adventist authors have written expressing their concern on the issue of backsliding.

Fordyce W. Detamore remarks:

We must bear some responsibility in the tragedy of backsliding. If we will face our own mistakes and open-mindedly evaluate the backslider's problems and needs, we can help him and ourselves as well. It is dangerous for us in the organization to feel that we are in "need of nothing."<sup>2</sup>

T. E. Unruh asserts:

The missing cannot be "resolved" back into the Sabbath school or church fellowship. They must be searched out and found by those whose hearts are aflame with the love of God.

Some church members blame the evangelist for the high dropout rate: "The baby was stillborn." On the other hand, some evangelists blame the church members. "The baby was born healthy and died because the church family failed to nourish it."<sup>3</sup>

According to Floyd Bresee:

Establishing the blame is beside the point. The point is that baptizing without discipling won't work. We have not overemphasized evangelism, but we have too often underemphasized the nurturing that keeps evangelistic converts in the church.<sup>4</sup>

If the church is not fulfilling its role in a

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<sup>1</sup>E. G. White, Testimonies, 7:292.

<sup>2</sup>Fordyce W. Detamore, Seeking His Lost Sheep (Nashville, TN: Southern Pub. Assn., 1965), p. 10.

<sup>3</sup>Bresee, 19.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 19.

loving, caring manner toward its dropout members, it is failing. Werning sees it thus:

The greatest disservice we can do to inactive Christians is to let them drift away from Christ, unaware of the spiritual sickness taking place in their lives. It is God's will for all sincere Christians that they should be their brother's keeper in matters of faith and life. Only a heartless person would sit and watch a drowning man without trying to save him. How much worse it is to sit and watch a soul sink slowly because of his disregard for the Savior.<sup>1</sup>

In Lee's survey of former Adventists, it was revealed that 60 percent had never been visited during or after the period they stopped practicing the Adventist faith.<sup>2</sup> Nielson reported an almost identical 61.4 percent who said that no one, including pastors, elders, deacons, teachers, friends, or relatives, had called them in an effort to bring them back to the church.<sup>3</sup>

God desires His church to be productive both in bearing the fruit of the Spirit and the fruit of the souls won to Him, but He is anxious that the fruit should remain. Jesus declared: "I chose you and appointed you that you

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<sup>1</sup>J. Waldo Werning, Vision and Strategy for Church Growth (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1977), 68.

<sup>2</sup>Jery W. Lee, "Seeking the Lost Sheep: A Study of Membership Loss in the Southeastern Conference of Seventh-day Adventists," unpublished study commissioned by Church Development Office, Southeastern California Conference, August 1984, 101.

<sup>3</sup>Louis C. Nielson, "Disassociation: An Investigation into the Contributing Factors of Backsliding and Separation from the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Michigan" (D.Min. project report, Andrews University, 1977), 143.

should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (John 15:16).

E. G. White in commenting on the church's responsibility to dropout states:

We must expect to meet and bear with great imperfections in those who are young and inexperienced. Christ has bidden us seek to restore such in the spirit of meekness and He holds us responsible for pursuing a course which will drive them to discouragement, despair and ruin. Unless we daily cultivate the previous plant of love, we are in danger of becoming narrow, unsympathetic, bigoted, and critical, esteeming ourselves righteous when we are far from being approved of God.<sup>1</sup>

The responsibility for caring for the dropout member rests on the entire church family. Mark S. Jones wrote strongly on this issue maintains that:

The very fact that such a significant portion of the members of the churches today are not active stands as an indictment against us. . . . Our preeminent responsibility before God is to be reconciled to those with whom we have fallen out of fellowship.<sup>2</sup>

H. A. Vandeman argues that some souls begin to backslide shortly after they are baptized because the church fails to see its responsibility in helping to establish the new believer.<sup>3</sup>

An examination of Matt 18:12-14 shows Jesus' deep concern for the lost in His appeal to His church to maintain and retain the little ones in the church.

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<sup>1</sup>White, Testimonies, 5:605.

<sup>2</sup>Mark S. Jones, Reclaiming Inactive Church Members (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1988), 64.

<sup>3</sup>H. A. Vandeman, "Let's Stop Those Leaks," Ministry 14 (September 1941), 39.

Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones, for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my father which is in heaven. For the son of man is come to save that which was lost.

How think ye? If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?

And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.

Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.  
(Matt 18:10-14)

For Matthew, Jesus seems to be addressing all his disciples, the officially appointed twelve as well as anyone who has responded to his kingdom demand. He appeals to all to demonstrate the effect of the inbreak of the Kingdom by the way they relate to one another. The little ones, therefore, should be treated as full members with equal dignity. It is as Johnston explains:

Matthew's purpose in relating the parable was not to emphasize the ninety and nine sheep left on the mountains (ἑνὴν τὰ ὄρη) but on the one straying sheep which represents a member of Jesus' church who is in danger of apostasy. His use of the ninety and nine is merely to give perspective to his image of the straying sheep.

The central point in this parable is the seeking of the lost sheep, the rest of the flock are not just now in question. This, no doubt, is the church's mission for its dropout or missing members. The succeeding paragraphs

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<sup>1</sup>Edgar A. Johnson, "Aspects of the Remnant in the Gospel of Matthew," Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1984, 319.

focus on the church's attempt to reclaim and restore those who have dropped out of the church.

The Church's Attempt to Reclaim  
and Restore

Christ's mission to the world was to bring salvation to all mankind. Upon the cross He paid the infinite redemptive price for a lost world. The Saviour's self-denial and self-sacrifice, His unselfish labor, and above all His humiliating death testifies to the depth of his love for fallen man. The Scriptures declare, "Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). "Christ's great heart of love was stirred to its depths for the ones whose condition was most hopeless, and who most need His transforming grace."<sup>1</sup> To those who came burdened down by the guilt of sin to him Christ offered His divine grace that forgives, heals, and restores. "The love of God still yearns over the one who has chosen to separate from Him and He sets in operation influences to bring Him back to the father's house."<sup>2</sup>

In a number of parables that Jesus taught, He attempted to portray how the church should relate to the weaker, erring, wandering members. Each parable brings a clearer understanding of God's plan to restore backsliders.

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<sup>1</sup>White, Testimonies, 5:603.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

The Prodigal Son  
(Luke 15:11-32)

William Barclay calls the story of the prodigal son the greatest short story in the world.<sup>1</sup>

(a) It should never have been called the parable of the prodigal son, for the son is not a hero. It should be called the parable of the loving Father, for it tells us rather about a father's love than a son's sin.

(b) It tells about the forgiveness of God. The father must have been waiting and watching for the son to come home, for he saw him a long way off. When he came, he forgave him with no recriminations.<sup>2</sup>

From this story, the church can learn some important lessons as it applies to dropouts. Note the attitude of the father toward his son was that of forgiveness, love, and rejoicing. The father was not concerned about his son's past life of sin. Rather he was just happy that his son had come home. Observing the elder brother's attitude, we encounter one of selfishness. He represents many within the church who are unloving and unwilling to accept again those who have strayed from the fold.

The return of the prodigal son was a source of greatest joy. The complaints of the elder brother were natural, but not right; yet this is frequently the cause that brother pursues towards brother.

Ellen G. White stresses:

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<sup>1</sup>William Barclay, The Gospel of Luke (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1975), 204.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 205.

There is too much effort to make those in error feel where they have erred, and to keep reminding them of their mistakes. Those who have erred need pity, they need help, they need sympathy. They suffer in their feelings and are frequently desponding and discouraged. Above everything else, they need forgiveness.<sup>1</sup>

This parable gives us a better understanding of reclamation and restoration, and other parables such as, the lost sheep (Luke 15:4-7), the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10), the wheat and tares (Matt 13:24-30), the soils (Matt 13:3-8, 18-23) reveals the concern, care, and love of God for the Lost. In all of these parables, one important fact is brought out; God always takes the initiative to restore the lost. The apostle Paul fittingly brought out the point when he declared: "But God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:6).

Therefore, if the church hopes to see a reduction in the number of church dropouts, it ought to take the initiative in reclaiming and restoring the lost. As H. A. Vandemann suggests, "Our first effort, then, is to hold what we have gained. This will stop the leak in a large measure."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>White, Testimonies, 3:104.

<sup>2</sup>H. A. Vandemann, Let's Stop Those Leaks, 40.



## CHAPTER III

### THE PROBLEM OF CHURCH DROPOUT

#### Review of Research

A pastor sat in his study looking at the latest church pictorial directory. He called out to his secretary, "Who are all these people?" The pastor of a year's tenure could not recognize many of the faces in the directory. Loss of memory was not the problem.

Many members never enter the door of their church. Their names remain on church rolls like inscriptions on tombstones in a country cemetery, forgotten and unknown. A recent study revealed that 29 percent of resident members of Southern Baptist churches are inactive. A majority of pastors consider this a problem of serious to crucial proportions.<sup>1</sup>

Dean M. Kelley writes:

At least ten of the largest Christian denominations in the country, whose membership totaled 77,666,223 in 1967, had fewer members the next year, fewer yet the year after. Most of these denominations had been growing uninterruptedly since colonial times. In the previous decade they had grown more slowly, some failing to keep pace with the increase in the

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<sup>1</sup>Lewis Wingo, Inactive Member Survey (Nashville, TN: The Sunday School Board of Southern Baptist Convention, July, 1985), 2.

nation's populations. And now they have begun to diminish, reversing a trend of two centuries.<sup>1</sup>

The trend is obviously here and observable.

An examination of the statistics of the Presbyterian church in the United States indicates some of the above-mentioned "unevenness," e.g., in 1967 membership totaled 956,486, and in 1968 it totaled 959,430--an increase of 944. In 1969 it totaled 935,174, a decline of 4,256; in 1970 it totaled 953,600, an increase of 426. However, a decline of 8,526 occurred in 1971 to 945,074; and a further decline of 1,462 to 946,536 came in 1972. The statistics of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America shows a continued decline. In 1967, membership totaled 3,268,761, with a decline 39,037 in 1968; 56,964 in 1969; 76,969 in 1970; 74,422 in 1971; and a decline in 104,612 in 1972. This decline in 1972 is the most severe.

The Episcopal church experienced an increase of 3,822 from 1967 to 1969, but then decline set in with a 52,336 decline from the 1968 to 1969, only 29,847 from 1969-1970, and almost double from 1970 to 1971 (49,881). However, the Episcopal church indicated a severe decline between 1972 and 1973 when the decline was 178,734 (3,385,436 to 3,207,702). The decline from 1973 to 1974

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<sup>1</sup>Dean M. Kelley, Why Conservative Churches Are Growing: A Study in the Sociology of Religion (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 3.

was less severe, though great enough--125,766.<sup>1</sup>

John Savage, in his study of the United Methodist church, found that nearly 33 percent of each congregation's membership was in the inactive category. A Gallup Poll revealed the following information about American adults, eighteen years of age and over:

Church members	68%	102 million
Active members	68%	84 million
Attend church regularly	42%	63 million
Born again	34%	81 million <sup>2</sup>

According to Mark S. Jones, it is interesting that 14 percent of American adults consider themselves to be active members of a church yet do not attend regularly! If a regular church attendance is an indication of activity, then according to these figures, 38 percent of adult church members in this country are inactive.<sup>3</sup>

Robert Barrat, describing those who have dropped out of the Roman Catholic church, says:

They leave the church . . . on tiptoe. There is no angry revolt, just a quiet exit. Nor is this new. The real danger to the church lies in . . . the silent haemorrhage which has not stopped draining her life blood for several centuries.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lester S. Gross, "The Church and the Dropouts: Case Studies of Lay People Leaving the Church," D.Min. project report, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, June 1975, 3,4.

<sup>2</sup>John S. Savage, The Apathetic and Bored Church Member (Pittsburgh: Lead Consultants, 1976), 13.

<sup>3</sup>Jones, 9-10.

<sup>4</sup>Robert Barrat, "Schism in France?" Commonweal 82 (September 17, 1965), 652.

It was noted that most of the decline is in Roman Catholic church-goers. In 1964, attendance was 71 percent compared to 38 percent for non-Romans (Protestants). In 1973, Roman Catholic attendance declined to 53 percent. While non-Roman attendance saw an increase from 38 to 39 percent in 1967, it declined to 37 percent by 1973. Roman Catholic attendance showed a constant decline, while non-Roman attendance moved up and down by 1 percent.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the above cited statistics regarding lay persons, there is also a high "drop out" rate for clergymen. One publication reports: "There is no exact figure available, but an estimated 3,500 to 17,500 clergy men, or between 1 and 5 percent of the total number, is known to resign each year."

It was also reported that 33 percent of non Roman Catholic, 23 percent of Roman Catholic, and 43 percent of Jewish clergy have seriously thought of resigning. A high percentage of the clergy are under 40 years old.<sup>2</sup>

Pope Paul VI admitted to the problems in the Roman Catholic church when he said: "The church is in difficulty." He urged a "live, authentic, and working faith" to revitalize it. Pope Paul cited such problems as "desertion from the faith" referred to in this paper as church dropouts. He also noted the decrease in vocations

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<sup>1</sup>Gross, 6.

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

and "faithful" who are no longer afraid of being unfaithful."<sup>1</sup>

It seems quite clear from the observations and statistical evidence that the problem of membership losses is one that demands urgent attention in order to restore and reclaim the lost. One would expect that a problem of this nature, affecting one-fourth to one-third of the membership of most churches, would have received a great deal of attention and research and that methods would have been stated and tested to reclaim those who have become discouraged in their spiritual experience. Sidney Parker points out, "Much has not been written on the problem of church dropouts."<sup>2</sup> Nielsen also shares the same view, he states: "When the bibliographies of religion and church are searched, it is noticed that they rarely present such topics as apostasy, backsliding, defection, disassociation, dropout from the church, and nonattendance."<sup>3</sup>

There are, however, a few individuals who have done research on the subject. This has improved the knowledge of the problem along with providing suggestions for possible solutions. Thus, the remaining portion of this section is devoted to selected literature relating to the works of individuals highlighting the problem of church.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>2</sup>Sidney B. Parker, The Problem of the Church Dropout (New York: Vantage Press, 1971), 14.

<sup>3</sup>Nielsen, 32.

Lester S. Gross<sup>1</sup> investigated the problem of "The Church and the Dropouts," through case studies of lay people leaving the church, for his Doctor of Ministry degree at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary (1975). His paper was concerned with "dropouts" of churches which are considered in the "main line" tradition, i.e., Episcopal, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Lutheran.

Gross' study was comprised of twenty-five personal interviews with individuals who had dropped out of the church (individuals interviewed were from Gross' Presbyterian congregation and other congregations, i.e. Episcopal, Baptist, Adventist, Church of Christ, and Roman Catholic churches). He used a cassette tape recorder to record the interviews. His source for participants was pastors of churches who submitted the names and addresses of the dropouts from their churches.

Some ministers were reluctant to supply the names and addresses of the dropouts. Gross related an interesting incident that developed in Florida with an Episcopal clergyman who had assured one of his members living in his town and attending his church that he would cooperate with Gross. When Gross visited him and discussed the matter, the pastor indicated that he did not have any members who fitted the description of "dropouts," and hence, he really could not be of any help. The minister's

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<sup>1</sup>Gross, 1.

wife, who was present during the conversation, asked, "What about so and so, and so and so, and so and so?" After a few minutes of this review of the parish dropouts by his wife, the pastor agreed to give Gross the names and addresses. When the list of names was finally delivered by the minister it was too late. Gross was already preparing to leave town the next day.<sup>1</sup> The significance of this incident is to show that church leaders sometimes are not willing to admit that there is a dropout problem.

From the interviews, Gross reported two important findings: (1) All but three of the persons interviewed expect to return to regular church worship. (2) Half of those interviewed indicated that even though they were not attending church, yet they do pray to God, have a sense of relationship, and continue to believe in Him.<sup>2</sup>

In regards to the interviewees' relationship to the church, almost one-third indicated strong feelings in either not attending or not participating.

1. Doctrinal differences were indicated by only 20 percent.
2. Thirty percent indicated they miss receiving the Holy Communion.
3. Twenty-five percent admitted to the problem of laziness.

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<sup>1</sup>Gross, 18-19,

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 75.

4. Thirty percent indicated that they did not feel any sense of community in their church relationship.

5. Thirty-five percent had positive feelings toward the church and the clergy.

6. Thirty percent were anti-clergy in their feelings.

Gross,<sup>1</sup> in summing up his findings, made a number of suggestions.

1. There is need for a deeper commitment which he refers to as being "in Christ."

2. New members ought to be assimilated into the fellowship of the church.

3. The ministers should help their members to grow and become members "in Christ" instead of encouraging personal attachment.

4. The church ought to encourage theological reflection, helping people to think about the issues of life in terms of God.

Ila Zbaraschuk<sup>2</sup> interviewed a group of young teenage Seventh-day Adventists for a church paper to discover their reasons for dropping out of the church. Some of the reasons are as follows:

1. Premature baptism in order for the pastor to reach his quota.

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<sup>1</sup>Gross, 76.

<sup>2</sup>Ila Zbaraschuk, "Why Young Adventists Leave the Church," Insight, September 11, 1973, 10-13.



2. Church too large, no real chance for fellowship.
3. Leaders place too much emphasis on money.
4. Parents are not sincere, committed Christians.
5. Too many inconsistencies and double standards.
6. Religion is just a special word rather than a deep spiritual experience.
7. Indifference to what was going on in church.
8. Concern that they be regarded as hypocrites.
9. Church is not relevant to meet their needs.

She also interviewed teachers and academy girls' deans who were highly favored by the students and were acquainted with the thinking of the students. They said the young people dropped out of the church because:

1. They complain about "misplaced emphasis" in the church.
2. The church is too preoccupied with organization and establishment.
3. They feel that the church services are too boring. They are disgusted with the quality of the sermon and the preaching. To them the sermons sound like reruns.
4. Pastors are too busy playing the role of businessmen, thus, they spend very little time with the young people.

Doctrinal problems were not mentioned as a reason for leaving the church. This is a trend that has been observed in other studies.

Gottfried Oosterwal<sup>1</sup> reports on the findings of his pilot studies on the patterns of SDA church growth in selected Adventist churches in North America. One of the negative aspects of church growth is the loss of church members either through death, transfer, disappearance, or disassociation. Among the findings of his study which relate to this project are:

1. The transfer of membership accounts for a very large percentage of growth or non-growth in certain areas of the United States.
2. People who migrate are more receptive to accept a change of denomination than those who have lived within certain areas all their lives.
3. The age group which is least represented in the church is the 25-40-year-old group who either do not join during this period or drop out of the church during or prior to that time.
4. A common problem for people from this age group seems to be their lack of time for church and their absorption in other interests.
5. A healthier balance between males and females would reduce the rate of apostasy.
6. The church needs to be aware of the problem that a surplus number of women may cause many to leave the

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<sup>1</sup>Gottfried Oosterwal, Patterns of SDA Church Growth in America (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1976).

church in order to marry outside the church or to leave after an intermarriage took place.

7. The church often fails to help the new members relate Adventist doctrines and righteousness by faith, thus causing some to become discouraged, to cease spiritual growth, and to separate from the church.

Dean M. Kelley<sup>1</sup> reported in his book that the mainline churches in the United States have declined in membership and religious activities for the past decade. He contends that church-membership statistics are unreliable, inflated, incommensurable, and invalid. That is, they do not measure what they are supposed to measure. Kelley reminds us that a church may tighten up its standards of membership, resulting in a loss of substandard members (who are not strongly committed to the principles of the church) and a slower or reverse growth rate. That church would be stronger than one whose membership continued to expand with vast accessions of merely nominal adherents.

His argument is that strictness is the only way to conserve the strength of the church. Those who are serious about their faith make high demands of those admitted to the organization that bears the faith, and they do not include or allow to continue within it those who are not fully committed to it.

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<sup>1</sup>Kelley, 1-176.

Louis C. Nielsen<sup>1</sup> conducted a study investigating the contributing factors of backsliding and separation from the Seventh-day Adventist church in Michigan. The study was limited to sixteen churches in three districts in the Michigan Conference. One hundred fifty persons were interviewed and included in the study. They comprise the following four groups: former members, returned members, nonattending members, and other disassociates.

From the personal interviews with the disassociated members, one hundred factors contributing to members leaving the church were perceived and stated by the interviewees. Based on the findings of the interviews, Nielsen made a number of recommendations.

1. The churches should examine their membership record and bring them up to date.
2. Pastors should give more attention and instruction to members on the importance of membership transfer.
3. The churches should appoint special groups of dedicated members to work at reclaiming former members.
4. Ministers should devote some time each month to visit former members and encourage them to return to the church.
5. Church leaders should encourage their local

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<sup>1</sup>Nielsen, "Disassociation: An Investigation into the Contributing Factors of Backsliding and Separation from the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Michigan" (D.Min. project, Andrews University, 1977).

pastors to give stronger spiritual leadership.

6. Special seminars should be planned to discuss strategy to involve pastors and their members in a yearly crusade to reclaim former members.

7. Pastors should help the church members to understand the essence and purpose of the church and the true meaning of church membership.

8. The church should not overemphasize certain standards and regulations out of proportion to the gospel and the doctrines.

9. Church leaders should re-evaluate the present church programs and make them more people-oriented.

10. Pastors should take care not to build up strong feelings of guilt in their members to the point that they drop out of the church.

11. Pastors should attempt to relate the doctrinal teachings of the church to contemporary life.

12. Adventist church members should attempt to be less condemning, judgmental, and critical of those who are different and should practice true Christian love, tolerance, and understanding.

13. Teachers in Adventist schools should help in guiding young people to a greater commitment to Christ.

14. Pastors should take greater care to avoid baptizing young people who are not spiritually and psychologically mature, coercion should be avoided.

15. The church should give serious study on how

the pastors could better serve the people who have difficulties in adjusting to SDA lifestyle.

John C. Alspaugh<sup>1</sup> developed a program which involved the "Caring Ministry Concepts and Methods of Ministry to Inactive Members of the Stone Tower Seventh-day Adventist Church, Portland Oregon." The study arose out of a concern for many inactive and former members who had stopped attending church.

He agrees with researchers that the reasons why people drop out or become inactive are:

1. Factors in personal life
2. Life transitions
3. Life crises
4. Pressure of time and other interest
5. Other factors.

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

From the methods and suggestions growing out of his project, Alspaugh outlined a program that could prove helpful in dealing with church dropouts. His program for

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

implementation involves: (1) developing a caring attitude in the church, (2) identifying inactive members, (3) selecting and interviewing the callers, (4) understanding the dropout, (5) demonstrating caring through listening, (6) learning and practicing the listening skills, (7) dealing with emotions, (8) helping dropouts to return, (9) visitation of inactive members, (10) initiation of the calling program, (11) support groups, (12) membership re-affirmation month, and (13) follow-up.

James H. Smuts<sup>1</sup> examined the causes for apostasy in the Seventh-day Adventist church. He describes apostasy as the forsaking of God and the forsaking of church affiliation by an individual. His sources were from Adventist literature, statistical information, an unpublished report on apostasy among Adventists in England (1943-1947), and the written responses to eighty-eight questionnaires from Adventist ministers.

In his finding, Smuts reported that withdrawal from the church takes place (1) within the first two to three years after baptism (41.9 percent) or (2) after six to seven years (28.4 percent). Another 29.7 percent indicated that apostasies were evenly distributed over the years of membership.

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<sup>1</sup>James H. Smuts, "An Examination of the Reasons Leading Individuals to Apostatize," unpublished master's thesis, the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1950.

Smuts concluded that the major causes of apostasy in the Seventh-day Adventist church were: (1) methods of gaining new members, (2) failure in pastoral activity, (3) lack of true conversion, (4) disinterest in spiritual things, (5) failure to live according to Christian standards, and (6) economic struggles.

James Christensen<sup>1</sup> in How to Increase Church Attendance reports on a study of the reasons why people do not attend and eventually drop out. He conducted a survey using questionnaires in one hundred churches of different denominations. His findings revealed that the most common reasons for people leaving the church are:

1. People do not feel the need of the church
2. Church does not satisfy spiritual need
3. Church is unfriendly and cold
4. Waste of time to go to Sunday school class
5. Live too far away
6. Dislike minister
7. Need rest because of work all week
8. Controversy with member
9. Do not feel at home because of dislike of the people
10. No place to park
11. Church does not need me
12. Do not have good enough clothing

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<sup>1</sup>James L. Christensen, How to Increase Church Attendance (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1961).



## 13. Church is pressing for money.

Christensen feels that "these excuses are only alibis from the uncommitted backwash of many churches. They are neither convincing nor factual." He suggests that "the findings should be a soul-searching inventory for the church itself. For indeed, in most congregations there is so much which gives added strength to the weakest alibis for staying away from church."<sup>1</sup>

Gary D. Bouma<sup>2</sup> conducted a survey of former and present members of the Christian Reformed Church to discover how members are retained.

The Christian Reformed Church (hereafter the CRC) is a small, steadily growing (17 percent in the last decade), non-fundamentalist Christian denomination which proudly proclaims to be conservative in its Calvinism. An analysis of the sources of continuing growth in the CRC has made it clear that the CRC grows because it retains those members which have been born into it, rather than by attracting those who had been raised in another religious tradition. How does the CRC retain its members?

To answer these question, "Exit interviews" with persons who chose to leave the CRC and current members of the CRC were conducted by members of the Department of

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

<sup>2</sup>Gary D. Bouma, "Keeping the Faithful: Patterns of Membership Retention in the Christian Reformed Church-- Sociological Analysis," A Journal in the Sociology of Religion 41 (Fall 1980): 251-264.

Sociology at Calvin College under the auspices of the Membership Loss Committee formed by the 1966 Synod of the CRC. The membership loss study was completed in 1970. All persons who left the CRC over a three-year period (1964-1967) were identified. Of some 1,891 individuals and families, 897 were interviewed.

The findings from the survey conducted revealed that persons leave the CRC because they find that the CRC community is too demanding, constricting, and intolerant. It is also a very tightly organized community with clearly defined norms which are enforced by the giving and withholding of acceptance in the community.

Theological complaints seem to be less important than complaints about the demanding, scrutinizing character of the CRC community. The fact that 26 percent of the former members indicated that their theological needs were better met with the CRC suggests that some found the meaning system acceptable but the structure and community which perpetuates it to be intolerable.

Those who stayed as members of the CRC cited commitment to its conservative Calvinist theology and worship as their primary reasons for continuing. They also mentioned the positive importance of the CRC community to them.

Two factors clearly emerge from this assessment of membership loss and retention. First, members of the CRC stay or go because of the nature of the CRC community.

Second, the factor involved may be called the CRC vision; i.e., members were members because of a commitment to a theological view of life which is being maintained for them by involvement in the CRC community. These two factors are closely bound together. The community is committed to the CRC vision and has organized itself in such a way as to propagate, instill, and maintain that vision.

Marjorie Lewis Lloyd,<sup>1</sup> in Why the Back Door Swings, discusses the feelings and frustrations of new converts listening to twentieth-century preachers convey the gospel using nineteenth-century language and approaches. The temptation comes to all to take the eyes off Jesus and start looking at the ministers, the leaders, and other members who are only too human. This is the first step on the road to defeat, and a defeated Christian soon leaves the church. Lloyd points to another backward step, the failure of members to live up to the expectations of the church because they failed to understand that salvation is by faith in Jesus rather than by works. Lloyd concludes that even if they know and love all the doctrines, they have not permitted the Holy Spirit to transform their lives to His will.

Joseph Akwasi Addai<sup>2</sup> conducted a study of "The

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

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Akwasi Addai, "The Study of the Factors Responsible for and Contributing to the Problem of Apostasy in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in South and Central

Factors Responsible for and Contributing to the Problem of Apostasy in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in South and Central Ghana Conferences." His study was based on 250 in-depth personal interviews (1) with persons who have become disassociated with the church or (2) with those who are active church leaders and lay persons.

From his findings, one discovers that the major factor for both apostasy and inactive membership was problems concerning marriage and divorce. The second most important factor causing people to leave the church was lack of support in times of crisis. Other causes revealed were movement between cities and decline in spiritual life.

Addai made certain conclusions based on his research.

1. Many active members feel that they are defiled if they visit with a person after the crisis of losing membership. Once a person is voted out, no nurturing visits follow.

2. Many churches in Ghana do not exercise enough patience before disciplining an erring brother.

3. Good programs for the assimilation of new members in the church are non-existent.

4. Former members do not want to be associated with the name "Atewohani."

5. The Ghanaian church should give serious

consideration and study to the question of pre-marital counseling and the importance of adoption in the Ghanaian setting.

Bobby J. Scobey (1983)<sup>1</sup> presents a study on a program for the "St. Andrews Community Church: Receiving, Assimilating, and Retaining Members." The purpose of his dissertation is to state the foundational principles and formulate strategies for retaining a higher percentage of additions to the church. According to Scobey, the St. Andrews Community Church during its eleven-year history, has received two members for every one it has retained. In view of this, Scobey argues that successful assimilation in turn rests on the proper reception of members. He contends that with respect to the church receiving members is the foundation, assimilating them is the building itself, and the retaining of members is the roof.

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

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

<sup>2</sup>Win Arn and Charles Arn, "Closing the Evangelistic Back Door," Leadership 5 (Spring 1984): 25-31.

### The Process

The Arns argue that many current evangelistic methods are counterproductive to the goal because:

1. The process is manipulative
2. The evangelistic process that sees its goal as a "decision" rather than as discipleship tends to create dropouts

3. The evangelistic process that presents the gospel one time and asks for a response tends to create dropouts. It should be understood that this is unusual, not the norm. Usually when someone comes to the faith, that person has heard the message again and again and then makes a Christian commitment.

4. An evangelistic process that does not build relationships with local church, its program, and its ministry tends to create dropouts.

### The Crucial Ratios

The Arns also cite seven ratios that have significant effect in closing the evangelistic back door.

1. Friendship ratio
2. Role/task ratio
3. New-group ratio
4. Committee-member ratio
5. Staff ratio
6. Visitors ratio

According to them,

The relatively high mortality rate from some present-day evangelistic methods must not come to be viewed as normal or unavoidable. With adequate training and appropriate methods, churches can see a significantly greater harvest.<sup>1</sup>

Arlon K. Stubbe,<sup>2</sup> in The Phantom Church, discusses certain clues which he hopes will help church leaders and congregations to become more aware of and sensitive to what he calls "the phantom church," which "populates some pews." Rather than react to the problem of church dropouts, he assists church leaders in developing a strategy for conserving membership before they drop out.

He suggests that Phantom Christians need preventive ministry. The best time to minister to the ghosts in our pews, Stubbs contends, is before they vanish completely from sight.

He recommends two types of ministry.

1. The first is a broad approach that redefines a congregation's ministry to all its members, helping to develop a more proactive faith in every person, including phantom believers.

2. The second type of ministry is more immediate; it is focused especially on Phantom Christians, especially those who are on the verge of dropping out.

Finally, Stubbe sees that the task of the church, its congregations, leaders, and people is to promote and

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<sup>1</sup>Arn and Arn, 5:24-31.

<sup>2</sup>Arlon K. Stubbe, The Phantom Church (Lima, OH: C.S.S. Pub. Co., 1986).

facilitate spiritual growth and maturity within each individual and in one another. To the extent we do this, we become, in truth, the body of Christ and cease to be the phantom church.

Monte Sahlin's article, "Where Are Our Missing Members?"<sup>1</sup> points out that the ranks of inactive members or church "dropouts," including both nonattending and former church members, have assumed significant proportions among Adventist congregations in North America. On most Sabbaths less than half of the members are present.

Sahlin says that in his surveys and interviews with missing and former Adventists, three out of four dropouts indicate that they left for reasons having to do with their relationships with people and groups. Fewer than one in five left because they no longer believe in some teaching of the church.

As a solution to reducing the number of dropouts, Sahlin suggests personal contact in face-to-face visitation as the most successful method of reclaiming missing and former members. Literature or phone calls can supplement this personal interview, but letters, cards, and tracts have not been effective when used on their own.

Robert Kennedy,<sup>2</sup> in an article "Winning the

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<sup>1</sup>Monte Sahlin, "Where Are Our Missing Members?" Adventist Review, 4 May 1989, 18-21.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Kennedy, "Winning the Straying," Adventist Review, 27 July 1989, 13-15.



Straying," mentions a number of reasons why people leave the church.

1. Lukewarm friendships
2. Loss of fellowship
3. Lack of integration
4. Lapse in spiritual growth
5. Laxity in Bible study
6. Liberalization of doctrine
7. Lack of participation
8. Little inspiration from worship
9. Lure of the world
10. Unstable characteristics.

He also suggests what the church can do about persons who have withdrawn from membership:

1. Put up the welcome-home sign
2. Teach active members to practice the art of speaking kindly
3. Make the church into a fellowship
4. Have a homecoming Sabbath
5. Elevate divine love
6. Have special home and fellowship groups
7. Send invitations to every home in the community
8. Encourage members to write down the name of every former SDA member they meet
9. Have a special visitation team for former members

10. Form a prayer team.<sup>1</sup>Review of Seventh-day Adventist PeriodicalsThe Ministry

The Ministry is an international journal of the Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial Association. It is a monthly magazine that has been established since 1928.

Denominational leaders and pastors have for a long time been concerned about the problem of church dropouts, backsliding, and apostasy. Thus, a number of articles on the subject have appeared in Ministry.

T. E. Unruh remarked: "The missing cannot be 'unresolved' back into the Sabbath School or church fellowship. They must be searched out and found by those whose hearts are aflame with the Love of God."<sup>2</sup>

This view is also shared by Vandeman. He wrote:

Many who came into the church are not fully converted, and not instructed. Some are not brought into the Sabbath School, some do not get periodicals, and comparatively few purchase or read our Spirit of Prophecy books. It takes all these factors to make Adventist Christians.<sup>3</sup>

It was pointed out by Robert M. Whitsett the Associate Secretary of the General Conference Ministerial Association in 1952 that

To be exact during the past sixteen years 94,848 people

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>2</sup>T. E. Unruh, "Missing the 'Missing': An Appeal to Leadership," The Ministry, May 1958, 5.

<sup>3</sup>Vandeman, 39-40.

have been dropped from our churches in North America, as having apostatized or been reported missing. Granting that some of these are since deceased, there are surely many others still alive who were dropped from the church prior to 1936. This represents an appalling loss, but these former adherents of the faith are excellent prospects for re-entry into the fold if the church in general and the ministry in particular will manifest a loving interest and tender regard for them.

N. F. Brewer, a General Conference field secretary, states: "One of the most serious problems that we face in the Seventh-day Adventist Church today is how to conserve our membership. For the year 1954 in the North American Division, for every thousand received into the church by baptism and profession of faith, 360 were dropped for apostasy or as missing. This is a 6 percent loss. That is too great a loss." He gave four reasons why people apostatized:

1. Lack of conversion
2. Church members' behavior towards the new believer
3. Looking to other church members as examples instead of looking to Christ
4. Lack of prayer and Bible study.

In the articles written from the 50s and 60s to the present, a new emphasis is noted. Apostasies are no longer blamed on the failure to indoctrinate, premature baptisms, and the lowering of standards of the church to win the

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<sup>1</sup>Robert M. Whitsett, "Missing 90,000," Ministry 26 (September 1953): 11-14.

prospects. The emphasis seems to be on shepherding the flock, reclaiming backsliders, helping members to grow spiritually, restoring those who have dropped out of the church, and the need for programs to retain the members.

Robert H. Pierson, a former General Conference president wrote:

"Love and understanding"--here are two important tools of the restorers. Usually when persons leave this message it is not because they have changed their minds about the doctrine. Many times they leave because they are lonely, discouraged or just plain bored. They need help. They need a friendly visit. They need encouragement. They need a Calvary more than they need a Sinai. They need a restorer. They need you. They need me.<sup>1</sup>

Skip Bell points out that Cleveland, Ohio is home to 3,595 Seventh-day Adventists, 30 percent of whom do not attend church. When these inactive members are added to the persons dropped from fellowship but still living in Cleveland, the number of dropouts in the city grows to more than two thousand. He further stated that "most churches lavish much attention on people entering the church and strangely neglect those leaving. Church growth is holding as well as winning. He proposed nine steps for forming an organized outreach group to reclaim dropout members: (1) vision, (2) prayer, (3) dialogue, (4) precontacting, (5) sounding the call, (6) Lab I Training, (7) group contact, (8) operation of the group (means that the focus is the mission, bringing new members into the group, and providing

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<sup>1</sup>Robert H. Pierson, "Restorers," Ministry (March 1970), 18, 19.

an opportunity for those who have found it difficult to exercise their gifts in that Ministry to leave without feelings of guilt), (9) ending the group (means that once the goal of the group has been achieved no one should feel guilt about terminating a small group that has benefitted church dropouts and provided an opportunity for growth within the active membership of the church).<sup>1</sup>

### Review and Herald

The Review and Herald is a Seventh-day Adventist periodical which began in 1849. It was first called Present Truth, and a year later the name was changed to Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald. Presently it is known as Adventist Review.

The October 22, 1987, issue of the Adventist Review publication focused on evangelism. The articles were geared for the fall Week of Prayer. Floyd Bresee, in his article "Nurturing the Harvest," expressed his concern about the excessive apostasy rates. He wrote:

Evangelism that is not followed by careful nurturing and discipling of new converts will ultimately destroy itself. Some fields went through a period during which frustrated evangelists, sensing that their supporting churches had developed few interests, relied on mass advertising to attract crowds. It seemed to work. People came and were baptized. But a high percentage never really became a part of the church.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Skip Bell, "Caring for Church Dropouts," Ministry, April 1986, 8-10.

<sup>2</sup>Bresee, 19.

John McGraw in the same Adventist Review issue emphasized that

We work hard to gain new members. Too often we think they can mature into full grown Adventists in a short time. But the new members, as well as the long-time members, need nurturing. Membership is a new experience for them and we must be patient and understanding. Too often we lose members in the first weeks, months, or year because the nurturing breaks down.

Finally, McGraw adds that "We should work just as hard to keep members in the church as we do to see them become part of the church."<sup>2</sup>

#### Other Adventist Periodicals

In other Adventist periodicals such as The Signs of the Times, Lake Union Herald, and other local Union publications, the issue of apostasy and backsliding are occasionally referred to. However, these church publications tend to deal with the problem of apostasy and backsliding from a prophetic and historical point of view.

#### Review of E. G. White Writings

Ellen G. White, one of the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist church and recognized by the church as endowed with the prophetic gift, wrote many books which serve as a guide and as a source of spiritual strength to the church.

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<sup>1</sup>John W. McGraw, "Reclaiming the Scattered Harvest," Adventist Review, 22 October 1987, 17.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

In her writings, Ellen White made numerous references to, and commented on the problem of backsliding and apostasy.

According to Ellen G. White, "the work of apostasy begins with some secret rebellion of the heart against the requirement of God's law. Unholy desires, unlawful ambitions are cherished and indulged, and unbelief and darkness separate the soul from God."<sup>1</sup> It is not the fault of the gospel that apostasies occur. Those who apostatize are not truly converted.<sup>2</sup> Apostasy is when character and works do not harmonize with divine truth.<sup>3</sup> The least deviation from right and principle will lead to separation from God, and may end in apostacy.<sup>4</sup> In these days of peril, nothing but obedience keeps humans from apostasy.<sup>5</sup> Ellen White sees Satan as the great general of apostasy. She views an apostate as a traitor to the cause of God,

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<sup>1</sup>"Some Shall Depart from the Faith," Review and Herald, 8 May 1888, 290.

<sup>2</sup>E. G. White, MS 13, 1898, pp. 1,2,5; Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

<sup>3</sup>E. G. White, Testimonies to Ministers (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1962), 151.

<sup>4</sup>E. G. White, Testimonies, 3:579.

<sup>5</sup>Ellen G. White, MS 135, 1902, 9; Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

which is more serious than death; it means the loss of eternal life.<sup>1</sup>

White seems to make a distinction between backsliding and apostasy. She contends that backsliding is the first step on the treacherous path to apostasy; it is when humans carry out their own will in opposition to the requirements of God.<sup>2</sup>

From reading her writings, one observes that she cautioned the church to learn from the repeated apostasies of Israel, the Jewish nation, and the church down through the ages. Failure to heed the warning, God's children today will depart from the faith and be ensnared by Satan's deceptions.

In 1898 Ellen White wrote that prominent men, who had been trusted, would yet fall away when some trial or test came to them. She warned that such experiences would tempt those who remained to feel that, if these prominent ones fall, no one would be able to stand. Such experiences are to be "beacons of warning" to teach those who remain that "the word of God alone can keep men steadfast in the way of holiness."<sup>3</sup> Finally, she concluded that only a

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<sup>1</sup>MS 58, 1897, 7; cf. idem, Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, ed. F. D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review & Herald Pub. Assn., 1953-57), 4:1184.

<sup>2</sup>Ellen G. White, MS 87, 1897, 3; Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI; idem, Review and Herald, 19 April 1897.

<sup>3</sup>Ellen G. White, MS 154, 1898, p. 3,4; Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.



union with Christ, a personal, living experience in the heart of the believer, will safeguard against apostasy.<sup>1</sup>

#### John Savage Model

Dr. John Savage, is a pastor in the United Methodist Church, trained as a psychotherapist and is best known for his research in encountering the apathetic and bored church member.

This research was the basis for his doctoral dissertation and, in turn, led to the publication of his book, The Apathetic and Bored Church Member.<sup>2</sup> As the interest and demand for this knowledge grew, Savage developed two seminars. Lab I is called "Skills for Calling and Caring Ministers" and is a 36-hour training program for lay leaders and pastors, teaching them the basic concepts and skills for ministry to inactive church members. Lab II is an intensive training seminar for experienced Lab I graduates who want to conduct their own labs. It includes leadership skills, lab organization, and advanced training in the concepts and communication skills needed for ministry to inactive members.

Savage points out that his interest in "Ministry to

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<sup>1</sup>Idem, MS 6, 1889, Ellen G. White, Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

<sup>2</sup>Savage, The Apathetic and Bored Church Member (Pittsburgh: Lead Consultants, 1976).

Missing Members"<sup>1</sup> occurred as he viewed the slides of his church members. He was shocked when he noticed that a large number of those who had held key offices in the church in his first year there were now, four years later, those couples who were totally inactive.

These people no longer attended worship (except maybe on Christmas or Easter), made no financial contribution, did not participate in the life of the church, and had a negative attitude about the congregation.

Savage began to wonder how, in just four years, people could move from active involvement in a congregation to total inactivity? What could the church do to prevent dropouts? How could current members be kept active, and inactive ones be enabled to return?

With these question uppermost in his mind, he went to work searching for answers as he pursued his doctorate. Savage designed a research project involving thirteen trained pastors. He invited them to join him in interviewing inactive members from four United Methodist, congregations to find out what caused them to disappear from church life.

From the data the pastors collected, they found that 95 percent of the people had experienced what we now call an "anxiety-provoking event" (an APE). Subsequent

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<sup>1</sup>John S. Savage, "Ministry to Missing Members," Leadership: A Practical Journal for Church Leaders 8 (Spring 1987): 116-121.

research showed that these events usually came in clusters, several APEs compounded within six months to a year.

Savage explains that

Anxiety is the emotional alarm system that is triggered when we're in disequilibrium, when we're going to get hurt. The inactive members we visited revealed high levels of anxiety, which when unresolved drove them from church membership.

Savage has identified four kinds of anxiety common to church dropouts, any one of which may be caused by personal relationships.<sup>1</sup>

(1) Reality Anxiety is caused by events occurring in one's own personal history that produce pain or a sense of disequilibrium. Examples: The pastor congratulates a committee for a job well done and forgets to mention the name of a person who was a member of the committee; or a church member becomes ill and the church fails to respond in a personal way.

(2) Neurotic Anxiety results from thought patterns that produce feelings not based on facts. They are thoughts that may be described as free floating with little or no concrete ties to real events. Example: a person who feels that the pastors' sermons are directed solely at him/her or who sees two people whispering while a member of a group is speaking or making a report, and feels that whispering is about him or her.

(3) Moral Anxiety is when one feels guilty because

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 116-121.

his/her behavior does not confirm to his/her own beliefs. Paul describes moral anxiety best in Rom 7:19: "For the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do." Put differently, the person does not live up to the best in himself or herself.

(4) Existential Anxiety is when one is anxious about the meaning or lack of it in his or her life. Getting old and/or the approach of the end of life is the basis for more existential anxiety.<sup>1</sup>

Anxiety can be helpful when it is in an early warning system prompting change, but it can be dangerous when it produces instability and causes a person's life and faith to collapse. People experiencing anxiety give off signals which sensitive persons recognize as "cries for help." The cry for help may be expressed verbally ("It's no use," "no one cares any more," "It's my fault," etc.) or non-verbally (coming late, not participating, not accepting an office, etc.). It may be subtle or overt and is very often given outside the awareness.

The church needs to be more alert to the cries for help. These cries for help are sometimes heard as criticisms and we become defensive. We take the person's words as face value and fail to hear their message. We tend to be too busy or involved with our own concerns. We do not want to hear another's problem or criticism. We try

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 116-121.

to avoid these persons, hoping that the problem will go away or that someone else will help. However, Savage insists that in so doing we have missed our opportunity for caring by not responding to the cries for help.

Savage describes it this way:

In its initial stages, the anxiety is indicated by verbal signs such as: "It's too much," "It's no use," "I can't take it anymore," "I give up," "Nobody cares anymore," etc. Such phrases indicate a person is quite anxious and moving away from the church. If these signals are not picked up and no one helps resolve the anxiety, the individual becomes angry. When the anger develops, the individual shows more agitated behavior, becoming more aggressive or withdrawn, either striking out at an individual or the institution or becoming depressed and blaming one's self for what has happened.<sup>1</sup>

Anxiety that is not resolved has the tendency to lead to anger and withdrawal in an attempt to return to comfort and balance. Church members can then expect to hear stronger criticism and see more sporadic attendance.

When a member becomes less active because of an unresolved anxiety, there is usually a waiting period of six to eight weeks. During that time, if there is no pastoral care or shepherding, the once active member becomes less active and then inactive. When this happens, the member cuts himself or herself off from the life of the church.

During the dropout process, two distinct personality traits are clearly focused. One may feel helpless to do anything about the event that initiated the

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<sup>1</sup>Savage, Apathetic and Bored Church Member, 57.

dropout process. He begins to blame something external-- the church, the pastor. Savage labels these individuals as "skunks." Again, unless the dropout process is stopped, helplessness is followed by apathy which is the final stage of giving up.

The other personality trait is hopelessness. The person blames him/herself for the event that triggered the dropout process. Savage labels these individuals as "turtles." A person may see him/herself as a failure, feeling that nothing can be done about the situation. Hopelessness leads to boredom, the final stage of giving up.<sup>1</sup>

Charles L. Grey remarks: Dropping out is a way of coping. The dropouts are persons who have been hurt and are still hurting. In their initial cry for help, they are saying: "I am hurting. Doesn't anybody care? No one really cares enough to reach out and share in and listen to my hurt."<sup>2</sup>

From Savage's research, he stated that each of the twenty-three persons interviewed in the non-active group indicated that no one from the church had ever come to find out why they were losing interest or had dropped out. It reinforced their belief that no one cared, and that they

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<sup>1</sup>Savage, "Ministry to Missing Members," 116-121.

<sup>2</sup>Charles L. Grey, Reaching the Dropout Church Members (New York: Program Agency of the World Presbyterian Church, 1981), 10-12.

were not missed. One-third of the group cried during the interview, indicating the intensity of the unresolved feelings.<sup>1</sup>

Eventually, dropouts seal off their pain and totally reinvest their energies. Callers from the church hear statements of indifference, apathy, or denial and may conclude that nothing more can be done. At some point, the inactive member's name is presented before the church business meeting with the report of total noninterest, and the member is dropped. Thus it is that the church unintentionally lets the dropped person sit in pain and isolation. Church members fail to offer the ministry of listening and caring and, in so doing, fail to restore those who might be reclaimed for Christ and the church.

Savage's research reveals that many of the dropouts still profess belief, and some attempt to practice all or part of the church's teachings in their private lives.

In several of the interviews, it was noted that the C groups (the inactives) reported they saw themselves as active Christians, but the locale of their operation was no longer within the institutional church. These persons still maintain a Christian perspective in their lives, although much of the religious piety drops away, i.e., their religious language, the use of the scriptures, and using their faith to help them make decisions. Because

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<sup>1</sup>Savage, Apathetic and Bored Church Member, 57.

they have been hurt and made anxious by the persons within the institutions, they move away from the church but do not seem to give up the central notion of being a Christian witness to the world. Their faith orientation shifts from serving the institutional church to serving persons outside of the institution. At least 50 percent of them still see themselves as servants of God.<sup>1</sup>

In most of the studies of former Adventists, the trend seems to indicate a low percentage in regards to disagreement with church doctrines. Addai reports from his study that such factors as questioned church doctrines (6.9 percent), dissatisfaction with church programs (3 percent), and conflicts with Sabbath keeping (3 percent) ranked very low. He further adds that everywhere one travels (in Ghana), church members have confidence in the validity of the major doctrines of the church.<sup>2</sup>

Anxiety levels are precipitated primarily by rational problems and not theological ones. There were no significant differences between the active or inactive members regarding theological issues. This implies that persons did not leave the church because of conflict over diverse theological matters.

Many Seventh-day Adventists may have reservations

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<sup>1</sup>Savage, Apathetic and Bored Church Member, 60.

<sup>2</sup>Addai, "A Study of the Factors Responsible for and Contributing to the Problem of Apostasy in the SDA Church in South and Central Ghana Conferences."



accepting this position because those who dropout of the church adopt a lifestyle that is contrary to the church teaching. They take to wearing jewelry, smoking or drinking, Sabbath breaking, and worldly associations.

According to Alspaugh:

These actions might be better understood as non-verbal cries for help, as a way to establish or protect one's separate identity. Very often the former member feels very guilty because there is an incompatibility between the beliefs retained deep inside and the lifestyle he or she is living.<sup>1</sup>

I believe that the Savage approach can enable the church to better understand the dropout experience and constructively, creatively reach out in love to the dropout member. The problem of church dropout needs to be given more attention if those who have dropped out are to be reclaimed. Therefore, any program that can bring about a reduction in the number of dropouts will make a valuable contribution to church life.

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<sup>1</sup>Alspaugh, 80.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS OF FIELD RESEARCH

#### Method

This chapter of the research project will focus primarily upon the individual who drops out of the church and the factors contributing to such dropout as perceived by some who have dropped out. As previously indicated in the "Definition of Terms" there is a difference between one who has apostasized, backslidden, or dropped out. Consequently, questions 8 and 11 in the questionnaire (appendix III) do not have a direct application to this study which deals primarily with church dropouts.

Three basic procedures were followed in the development of this project.

1. A theological study was made in the related areas of membership dropout, the church--its meaning and function, the church as God's people, the church as the body of Christ, the church as community, the church's responsibility to dropouts.

2. An investigation was undertaken to identify the different views regarding church dropouts and the steps involved in reclaiming the lost and how the steps may be applied to the practice of ministry.

3. A questionnaire was prepared to identify the factors which resulted in church dropout. An investigation of the problem was done by a review of the appropriate literature; and consultation with church leaders, members and Dr. Roger Dudley, the Director of the Institute of Church Ministry Department of Andrews University Theological Seminary of SDA.

4. An analysis of the questionnaires was done to identify the causes of church dropout in selected churches of East Jamaica Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, and, based on those findings, suggestions for a reduction in church dropouts were recommended.

#### Population for the Study

The population for this project involved 380 church dropouts from selected churches in the East Jamaica Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The churches chosen were selected on the basis of the statistical report of the secretarial department, the geographical location of the churches--ensuring a wide cross-section of sampling throughout the conference--and my personal knowledge of the churches.

#### Development of the Instrument

The questionnaire was developed after the research and literature were reviewed, and key dropout assumptions were identified and incorporated into the instrument. The general objective of the questionnaire was to enable the

dropout to ascertain the reasons for his/her leaving the church. The questionnaire was structured to help give direction to the areas that need attention in order to bring about a reduction in membership losses.

A pilot study was conducted among students and individuals from the various Caribbean islands who have been actively involved in the church in their homeland. This pilot was done to ensure that the instrument used was understood and the questions asked were relevant to the study.

The instrument was finally refined with the guidance of Dr. Roger Dudley, Director of the Institute of Church Ministry Department of Andrews University Theological Seminary of SDA.

#### Distribution and Collection of the Instrument

To ensure full cooperation and support for the distribution and collection of the questionnaires, I informed the president and secretary of the conference of the plan regarding the field study. After securing approval, I went to Jamaica from June 25-August 6, 1988, to supervise the distribution and collection of the questionnaires. The conference president invited me to be the devotional speaker at the workers' meeting (a quarterly meeting where all the ordained and licensed pastors and Bible instructors are present). I introduced my research project and explained the questionnaire and its importance

to the project. I then inquired how I might obtain the names and addresses of those needed to participate in the study.

After discussion with the pastors, it was decided that the church clerks who have the official records of church membership would best be able to help me find names and addresses of dropouts. This method often proved unsuccessful. Many such members had left the area without leaving a forwarding address, some had migrated, some were married or remarried, and others were deceased.

Because obtaining names and addresses that were up to date proved unreliable, another method of acquiring the information was sought. Subsequently, it was found that the most reliable source for current addresses was present church members. Therefore, the churches involved in the study were visited and a personal appeal was made asking members to assist in the study by providing the needed names and addresses of former members.

The questionnaires were dispatched to various churches throughout the conference. The number of questionnaires distributed depended on the size of the church membership. Altogether 380 questionnaires were given out to the churches. Of these, 176 were returned. Responses came from each of the churches where the questionnaires were dispatched. Also the data analysis indicates that the survey was representative of every segment of the church membership. The associate pastors,

church elders, and Bible instructors played an important role in supervising the distribution and collection of the questionnaires since it was impossible for me to accomplish all the required distribution and collection of the questionnaires. One of the associate pastors continued to coordinate the program of distribution and collection of the questionnaires after my departure.

### Territory of Study

The East Jamaica Conference of Seventh-day Adventists falls under the supervision of the West Indies Union which is one of the two English-speaking unions of the Inter-American Division of SDAs.

East Jamaica Conference was organized in 1903 and reorganized in 1944 and 1962. Its territory contains East St. Mary, Kingston, Portland, St. Andrew, and St. Thomas. The present membership is approximately 46,813<sup>1</sup>

### Questionnaire Review

The data analysis followed the procedure developed for the purpose of the study, and the appropriate computer evaluations were done by the Research and Statistics department of Andrews University which serves to identify:

1. The reasons perceived by the respondents as to the main causes of church dropout.

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<sup>1</sup>F. Donald Yost, 125th Annual Statistical Report 1957, compiled by Office of Archives and Statistics General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 6840 Eastern Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20012, USA.

2. The issues which will develop an awareness of the subject and result in the creation of new programs to reduce the dropout rate.

The survey results are addressed as follows:

Sex

The study shows that from the survey result 31.6 percent were men and 68.4 percent were women (see table 1).

TABLE 1

DROPOUTS--ACCORDING TO SEX  
(Expressed in numbers and percentages)

Sex	Number	%
M	55	31.6
F	119	68.4

The high percentage in female responses shown in table 1 reflects the strong composition of female presence in the churches.

Age

TABLE 2  
 DROPOUTS--ACCORDING TO AGE  
 (Expressed in numbers and percentages)

Age Group	Number	%
21-25	64	38.3
26-35	41	24.6
36-50	29	17.4

Table 2 indicates that the highest attrition rate occurs in the 21-25 age group.

Marital Status

The study shows that of those responding, the majority (70.5 percent) were single (see Table 3).

TABLE 3  
 DROPOUTS--ACCORDING TO MARITAL STATUS  
 (Expressed in numbers and percentages)

Status	Number	%
Single	124	70.5
Married	38	21.6
Divorced	6	3.4
Separated	6	3.4
Widowed	1	.6



Income

Of the responding group, the largest number (46.6 percent) had incomes under \$6,000. Only 4.3 percent had incomes from \$26,000-\$50,000 (see table 4).

TABLE 4

DROPOUTS--INCOME LEVEL  
(Expressed in numbers and percentages)

In Jamaican \$	Number	%
Under \$6,000	54	44.6
\$6,000-\$9,995	22	19.0
\$10,000-\$14,995	13	11.2
\$15,000-\$24,995	18	15.5
\$25,000-\$50,000	5	4.3

(US\$1.00 = JA\$7.00)

According to table 4 the highest percentage of dropout occurs in the income bracket of under \$10,000. From tables 1, 3, 4, it can be concluded that the highest dropout rate occurs among single female members of the church who are in the lowest income bracket.

Educational Level

The educational background of the respondents as shown in table 5, indicates that 28.9 percent completed the elementary level. Another 43.4 percent had completed secondary school.

TABLE 5

DROPOUTS--EDUCATIONAL LEVEL  
(Expressed in numbers and percentages)

Educational Level	Number	%
Elementary	46	28.9
Secondary	69	43.4
College	15	9.4
Teacher Training College	6	3.8
Commercial Trade School	20	12.6
University	3	1.9

The large percentage of respondents with elementary and secondary education is not indicative of the general educational level of the church membership at large. I have observed that the highly educated individuals are adequately represented in the membership of the church and, to a large extent, assume responsible leadership positions.

Religious Background

The respondents were asked which factor attracted them most to the Adventist church. Those responding indicated that 36.4 percent were raised as Adventist, 34.1 percent were influenced by the truth and beauty of the church's teachings, and 9.2 percent were attracted as a result of the warm fellowship. Another 12.7 percent noted their interest through personal contact with a church member (table 6).

TABLE 6

FACTORS WHICH ATTRACTED RESPONDENTS TO THE ADVENTIST CHURCH  
(Expressed in numbers and percentages)

Factors	Number	%
Raised as Adventist	63	36.4
Truth and beauty of church teachings	59	34.1
The warm fellowship among Adventist believers	16	9.2
The charisma of the minister/evangelist	11	6.4
Personal contact with a church member	22	12.7
Adventist Radio program	2	1.2
Other	3	

Responding to the question "Before you became a Seventh-day Adventist, what was your religious background?" 28.2 indicated no religious background; 37.6 percent were raised as SDAs; and 14.7 percent noted affiliation with some Protestant group (see table 7).

TABLE 7

RESPONDENTS' CHURCH AFFILIATION BEFORE BECOMING ADVENTIST  
(Expressed in numbers and percentages)

Early Church Affiliation	Number	%
No religious background	48	28.2
I was raised as an SDA	64	37.6
Protestant--Methodist, Anglican, Baptist	25	14.7
Catholic	8	4.7
Others--Pentecostal/Salvation Army, Jehovah Witness	25	14.7

Disruptive Factors Leading  
to SDA Membership

Table 8 illustrates the response to the questions:  
Did any of the following events disrupt your regular life  
pattern during the 12 months before you became an  
Adventist?

TABLE 8

RESPONDENTS RESPONSE TO EVENTS THAT HAVE DISRUPTED THEIR  
LIFE PATTERN BEFORE BECOMING AN SDA

Factors	Yes	No
Personal illness or injury	10.0	90.0
Death or serious illness of a close friend or relative	7.5	92.5
Marriage	9.1	90.9
Divorce or marital problems	1.4	98.6
Severe financial difficulties	30.0	70.0
Began serious Bible study	40.0	60.0
Concern for welfare of children	14.7	85.3
Witness another person's change of life	26.9	73.1
Dream	16.2	83.8
Moved	17.7	82.3
Job loss	9.7	90.3
Personal crisis	23.8	76.2

Adequacy of Indoctrination

In response to the question, How would you describe  
the kind of instruction you received before joining the  
Adventist church? the majority of the respondents replied  
satisfactory (65.7 percent) or very thorough (12.8  
percent). These responses may be due to the number of  
respondents who were raised as SDAs (see table 9).

TABLE 9

ADEQUACY OF INSTRUCTION BEFORE JOINING THE  
 SDA CHURCH  
 (Expressed in numbers and percentages)

Factors	Number	%
Very thorough	22	12.8
Thorough	21	12.2
Satisfactory	113	65.7
Inadequate	14	8.1
Very Inadequate	2	1.2

Tables 6, 7, and 9 seems to indicate that emphasis on doctrines and being brought up as an Adventist are not in themselves guaranteed deterrents to attrition.

The responses to one question, How long did you evaluate the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist church before you became a member? illustrates that the majority (31.4 percent) were raised in Adventist homes (table 10). Table 7 also shows a similar trend noting the majority of respondents were raised in Adventist homes (37.6 percent).

TABLE 10

LENGTH OF TIME RESPONDENTS STUDIED DOCTRINES  
BEFORE BECOMING CHURCH MEMBERS  
(Expressed in numbers and percentages)

Factors	Number	%
I can't say, I was raised as SDA	53	31.4
Less than 2 months	28	16.6
3-11 months	47	27.8
1-3 years	23	13.6
More than 3 years	18	10.7

### Self-evaluation Questions

Table 11 illustrates a series of self-evaluation questions--35.5 percent rate their witnessing as average, 44.3 percent attended church regularly, and 23.9 percent were partly active in church life.

TABLE 11

RESPONSES TO SELF-EVALUATION QUESTIONS CONCERNING  
WITNESSING, ATTENDANCE, AND INVOLVEMENT  
WHILE ACTIVE IN THE CHURCH  
(Expressed in numbers and percentages)

Factors	Number	%
Witnessing in daily activities	54	35.5
Church attendance	74	44.3
Involvement in church life	37	23.9

### Church Atmosphere

What kind of fellowship did you find in the

Adventist Church? Would you say the atmosphere was warm or cold? To these questions, 85.1 percent responded warm, 14.3 percent responded cold. In conjunction with this, one can note below (table 14) that respondents responding to the factors which influenced members to dropout of the church, 18.4 percent mentioned a lack of fellowship in the Adventist church.

From a list of various feelings towards the church, respondents were asked, Did you have any of these feelings at the time you stopped attending the Adventist church? The responses are presented in table 13.

TABLE 12

EVALUATION OF THE RESPONDENTS FEELINGS  
WHEN CHURCH ATTENDANCE CEASED  
(Expressed in numbers and percentages)

Factors	Yes Responses		No Responses	
	Number	%	Number	%
Bitterness	29	36.3	49	61.3
Guilt	60	57.7	43	41.3
Relief	18	25.7	22	74.3
Sorrow	48	57.8	35	42.2
Frustration	70	63.6	40	36.4
Confusion	49	52.7	44	47.3
Rebellion	8	11.8	60	88.2
Hurt	40	48.2	43	51.8
Emptiness	61	64.9	33	33.1
Indifference/Boredom	50	56.2	39	43.8

Factors Influencing Dropout

The respondents were asked to indicate how much of an influence each source presented in table 14 was towards

his/her decision to drop out of the church? The responses were conveniently arranged and are presented in table 14.

TABLE 13

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE MEMBERS TO  
DROP OUT OF CHURCH AS PERCEIVED BY DROPOUTS  
(Expressed in percentages and shown  
in descending order)

Factors	%
Violated the commandment on adultery	45.2
Personal spiritual life decline	42.2
Working on Sabbath	33.3
Lack of support in time of crisis	24.0
Members too proud	23.3
Influenced by non-Adventist association	22.1
Lack of fellowship	18.4
Drastic financial change	18.2
Inadequately prepared for baptism	17.6
Members too inconsistent	16.9
Worship program did not meet spiritual need	15.0
Conflict among the church members	14.8
Marital problems	14.5
Church program too strict and demanding	13.2
Travel too far to church	12.8
Disapproval of the leadership in the church	12.5
Members too emotional	9.3
Disagree with church doctrines	8.8
Death of a friend or relative	8.6
Loss of job	8.6
Marriage to non-SDA	8.0
Personal or family illness	7.5
Other	5.3
Unpleasant experience with pastor	3.8

### Church Visitation

Table 16 indicates the response to the question, What effort does the church make to bring you back into full fellowship?



TABLE 14

EFFORT BY THE CHURCH TO BRING THE RESPONDENTS  
BACK INTO FULL CHURCH FELLOWSHIP  
(Expressed in numbers and percentages)

Factors	Value	Number	%
Pastoral Visit	1 yes	46	46.9
	2 no	52	53.1
Member Visit	1 yes	104	73.8
	2 no	37	26.2
Literature or Letters	1 yes	15	21.4
	2 no	55	78.6
Phone	1 yes	1	1.6
	2 no		

According to table 16, one should note the limited pastoral visits indicated. It should be remembered that pastors supervise more than eight churches over a wide geographic area. This affords pastors very little time for visiting church members.

#### Join Other Denominations

When asked, Did you join a church of another denomination? Respondents gave a positive answer only 11.8 percent of the time. Negative answers accounted for 82.6 percent of the respondents. This suggests that the majority of Adventists are convinced about the truth of the church teachings and do not readily embrace the teachings of other religious denominations.

Table 17 indicates the response to the question, Do you have any SDA relatives?

TABLE 15

RESPONDENTS' RELATIONSHIP TO ADVENTISTS  
(Expressed in numbers and percentages)

Factors	Number	%
Father	36	85.7
Mother	68	91.9
Brother	32	84.2
Sister	46	88.5
Spouse	11	64.7
Son	11	64.7
Daughter	16	72.7
Other	42	91.3

Return to Active  
Adventist Status

Table 18 shows the response to the question, What are the chances that you might again become a regular, active Seventh-day Adventist.

TABLE 16

RESPONDENTS' CHANCES OF BECOMING A  
REGULAR ACTIVE SDA  
(Expressed in numbers and percentages)

Factors	Number	%
Very likely	80	47.9
Likely	47	28.1
Don't know	25	15.0
Unlikely	9	5.4
Very unlikely	6	3.6

From this survey, it appears that 47.9 percent are very likely to become regular, active Seventh-day Adventists again. This would indicate that given encouragement, care, nurture and visitation, these individuals would return to active membership.

When asked, Is there anything that stands in the way of your their return to membership and active participation in the church? respondents gave a 62.0 percent positive answer and 36.8 percent responded negatively.

To follow-up this question, the respondents were asked to describe their present personal relationship with Jesus Christ. "Good" was the response of 23.8 percent; and 75.5 percent responded "poor."

Respondents were also asked to: State briefly the main things that could have been different and could have encouraged them in their experience with the Adventist church? The respondents cited a number of issues which were not evaluated in terms of percentages. They are as follows:

1. More forgiveness
2. More fellowship
3. More love
4. More support in problems
5. More visitation from members
6. More understanding from senior members
7. More encouragement to return

8. A steady job
9. Improved financial situation
10. If I was married and settled
11. If my life was not mixed up in co-habitation
12. Less restrictive worship atmosphere
13. More involvement in Adventist youth programs
14. More interest in social problems
15. More recreation for the youth

### Interviews

Interviews were conducted with a number of individuals who had dropped out of the church. The questions asked in the interviews were similar to those used in the questionnaires. The following statements summarize their responses.

1. They indicated that they do not feel welcome in the church, which they attribute to a lack of fellowship among the brethren.

2. Some expressed the view that they were not properly prepared for baptism. As a result they do not know the teachings of the church.

3. It was expressed by some that the present economic situation in the country makes it difficult for them to remain in the church. They feel that they can make life better by not being a Christian. The prosperity of many non-Christians serves as a strong attraction.

4. The lack of support in times of crisis was

cited by a number of individuals as a reason for leaving the church. They emphasize the need for more pastoral care, visitation, counseling, and being sensitive to the needs of those in difficulty.

5. Some individuals contend that when they migrate from the rural parts of Jamaica to the urban areas, they tend to get careless in their spiritual life. They do not become members of the Sabbath School, they just drift from church to church and have no place to which they feel accountable, and they stop attending church regularly.

6. Others share the view that there is no consistent coordinated follow-up program for converts after baptism. They express the desire to be visited and request special Bible classes for them. It is also their desire to be actively involved in the various areas of church life.

7. Some indicate that they dropped out of the church because they are constantly being reminded of their past mistakes, even after they have been baptized.

8. A number of individuals said that they joined the church hoping to find a spouse. When this does not happen, they become discouraged and leave the church.

9. Some indicated that they leave the church because, prior to baptism, they saw joining the church as a means of obtaining financial support. However, after baptism, they did not receive the help they had anticipated. Consequently, they stopped attending church.

10. Some of those interviewed pointed out that

they dropped out of the church because during a period of personal illness no one from the church visited them.

11. The view was expressed by a number of the unmarried mothers that they dropped out of the church when they became pregnant. After the baby arrived they did not have the courage to face the members because they are too embarrassed.

## SUMMARY

According to the data collected, I have drawn the following conclusions.

1. The problem of church dropout appears to be affecting most of the churches in the East Jamaica Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

2. The survey points out that those who dropped out of the churches in the East Jamaica Conference of SDA do so for various reasons; such as:

- a. Violating the commandment on adultery
- b. Personal, spiritual life decline
- c. Working on Sabbath
- d. Lack of support in time of crisis
- e. Members too proud
- f. Influenced by non-Adventist association
- g. Lack of fellowship.

These and other factors comprise the list of reasons given for leaving the church.

3. Pastors have very little time to devote to the visiting members due to the size of districts, evangelistic commitments, and administrative duties.

4. Pastors and church leaders need to re-evaluate the present church programs to ensure that they are meeting the felt needs of the members.

5. Based on the responses to the question in the survey, "What main thing could have been different and would have encouraged you in your experience with the Adventist church? several needs are revealed. These include:

- a. more forgiveness
- b. more fellowship
- c. more love
- d. more support in problems
- e. more understanding from senior members
- f. more encouragement to return.

6. Church pastors were not found to be in conflict with the members. However, more pastoral care is desired in the area of counseling, visitation, and sensitivity to the needs of those in difficulty.

7. The church records were not a reliable source in providing information concerning those who have dropped out of the church because they were not always up-to-date.

8. According to the information received from the interviews, it was revealed that:

- a. There is need for more fellowship.
- b. The present financial situation that faced some of the members makes it difficult for them to remain in the church.
- c. There is a lack of support in times of crisis.
- d. The moving of the members from the rural areas to the city affect their spiritual life.



e. No consistent follow-up program is used after baptism.

f. Members who had made mistakes are constantly being reminded of their past.

g. Some who join the church to find a spouse are disappointed and leave when this does not happen.

f. The majority of the members who dropped out of the church still express the desire to return to full active participation as members of the church.

The task of the church members, therefore, is to nurture that spark of love so that it may be rekindled.

Ellen G. White counsels:

Never, never become heartless, cold, unsympathetic, and censorious. Never lose an opportunity to say a word to encourage and inspire hope. We cannot tell how far-reaching may be our tender words of kindness, our Christlike efforts to lighten some burden. The caring can be restored in no other way than in the spirit of meekness, gentleness, and tender love.<sup>1</sup>

In an effort to reduce the problem of church dropout, I have forwarded a number of suggestions which I hope will help pastors and lay leaders to bring about a reduction in the number of church dropouts.

The recommendations that have been proposed have not been tested. Therefore, it is my intention to have them implemented and to make the necessary adjustments in my own pastorate.

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<sup>1</sup>White, Testimonies, 5:613.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this research project, I make the following recommendations which may prove useful to the church in bringing about a reduction in the number of church dropouts. The recommendations focus on the first ten items listed in table 13.

In view of the very high percentage concerning those violating the commandment on adultery (45.2 percent) as reflected in item 1, I suggest that the West Indies Union of Seventh-day Adventists set up a task force to investigate the problem and implement programs to correct the situation.

The problems and recommendations include:

1. Violating the commandment on adultery (45.2 percent).
  - a. Seminars and lectures should be planned for each pastoral district to address the issue of "sex" in view of the liberal concept that exists in society regarding the subject. These seminars and lectures should focus on the building of high moral standards and preparing the young adult for marriage. Issues such as marriage, family life, singles should be addressed. Each church should have a family life coordinator.

- b. Regular social and recreational events should be organized both at the church and conference level to foster a wide range of interaction with young people from different churches.
2. Personal spiritual life decline (42.2 percent)
    - a. Specially trained members of the church should be assigned to provide a caring ministry for the missing and non-attending members.
    - b. The same or similar trained members should help members of the congregation with personal, marital, and family problems.
    - c. Church members should learn to be less condemning, judgmental, and critical of those who may be spiritually weak. They should be encouraged to practice true Christian love, tolerance, and understanding.
    - d. Pastors should be encouraged to give stronger spiritual leadership, improve preaching, and create worship services that will give more warmth and fulfillment to the members and to create more personal involvement in worship.
    - e. Attendance records should be kept in churches of those who are present so follow-up practices can be activated for those persons whose worship patterns change.
  3. Working on Sabbath (33.3 percent).
    - a. The church should examine the possibility of

setting up technical schools for training young people in skills that will allow them more opportunities in the job market.

- b. Instructions in matters of personal finances and business opportunities should be organized and directed by trained personnel in the field with the support of the church.
  - c. Each church should establish a scholarship fund for young people who need financial assistance to go to college. This will enable the young people to choose careers that will offer more options on the job market.
4. Lack of support in time of crisis (24.0 percent).
- a. Contact should be made on a regular basis with every member. Pastoral calls as well as visits by lay leaders should be made to the newly baptized to assure them that the congregation is glad for their membership and stands ready to help them when trouble comes. Building relationships during stable times (when no crisis exists) paves the way for effective ministry when real needs do emerge).
  - b. Support groups should be organized in each church and made available to all members. A number of persons that meet regularly for Bible study, prayer,, and mutual help can be a significant element in assisting a person's faith to grow.
5. Members too proud (23.3 percent) and lack of fellowship

(18.4 percent). These items can be considered together as the recommendations can apply to both.

- a. Welcoming rituals should be used at each worship service. A five-minute period should be allotted, preferable during the Sabbath School or at the beginning of the 11:00 a.m. worship service to give everyone a warm welcome. This practice offers a meaningful sharing time and gives a strong signal that everyone present belongs to the community.
- b. An inductive bible study group should be organized in each church as a means of assimilating new members into the church. The group's purpose would not be to teach doctrine but to foster spiritual growth and fellowship. The leader of the inductive Bible study group should facilitate the group's effectiveness by good group management dynamics; by making sure each is welcomed; by keeping in touch with each participant during the meeting by watching for verbal and non-verbal communication; by not allowing a few to dominate the group; by arranging the seating so that maximum eye contact is possible; by encouraging friendships between group members and facilitating verbal interaction among them; and by treating every contribution as important even when one does not agree fully.
- c. Each Sabbath School class should have no more than twelve persons. The group should be encourage to

study the lessons, share their views regarding the topic being discussed, and become better acquainted with each other. In fact, the missing or sick members of the class should be visited by his/her fellow class members and a report be made to the Sabbath School leaders.

- d. A Sabbath School superintendent should be assigned to keep a record of the missing members. A quarterly report should be given as to how many have been visited and the number that have returned to active church participation.
  - e. The reception of new believers should be highlighted as a time of recommitment for every member, by providing an opportunity for all persons present to renew their own vows of membership. This serves to strengthen the bond of fellowship.
  - f. Pastors should involve the youth in the entire life of the congregation, young people should be encouraged to hold positions closely aligned to youth such as teachers, board members, Pathfinder club directors, and worship leaders.
  - g. A senior citizens group should be organized to foster fellowship and interaction among themselves.
6. Influenced by non-Adventist association (22.1 percent).
- a. A singles association should be organized under the guidance of the youth department of the conference to foster meaningful relationships among the sexes.

- b. The youth should be encourage to prepare themselves educationally in an Adventist college. This offers a wide range of association for the young people.
  - c. Visiting other Adventist churches should be supported as this provides a broad scope for social interaction.
7. Drastic financial change (18.2 percent).
- a. I would recommend that the members organize corporate partnership, credit unions, and other financial organizations to help them achieve economic independence.
  - b. A fund should be set up in the local church budget to provide financial assistance to those in real need.
8. Inadequately prepared for baptism (17.6 percent).
- a. The conference should examine the possibility of employing more trained Bible instructors. They should be assigned to visit missing and non-attending members, reclaiming former members; ministering to the newly baptized members; and working with people on the church interested list.
  - b. A pastor's indoctrination class should be organized in each church. This class would serve to strengthen the new members as to the teachings on the doctrines of the Bible. The class should be open so that prospective members could enroll at any session during the course of doctrinal

teachings and then continue into the next doctrinal course to cover all the doctrines necessary for them to become members of the congregation.

9. Members too inconsistent (16.9 percent).

I would suggest that members be encouraged to practice exemplary Christian conduct bearing in mind that the new believers are looking to them as role models.



## CONCLUSION

The factors contributing to church dropout among selected churches of the East Jamaica Conference of SDA have been identified and addressed during the research and development of this project. Consequently, information gained during this study has afforded me a deeper insight into the complexity of the issues faced by the dropouts and the churches that have lost their fellowship. This exposure has facilitated the improvement of my pastoral skills and has enlightened me regarding some appropriate measures to pursue to ameliorate the problem(s) in my own pastorate.

This study should not be viewed either as a conclusive or comprehensive document. It is a part of the ongoing study which concerns itself with the retention of church members.

It is anticipated that this study will eventually evolve into a relevant and meaningful resource document.

The material presented here could also assist in training pastors and church leaders of the East Jamaica Conference of Seventh-day Adventist in the area of membership retention.

APPENDIX I

LETTERS



# ANDREWS

UNIVERSITY

March 4, 1988

Philip Hosten  
 East Jamaica Conference of  
 Seventh-day Adventists  
 74 Constant Spring Road  
 Kingston 10  
 JAMAICA - WEST INDIES

Dear Pastor Hosten:

I am currently working on my dissertation entitled "A Study of the Causes of Membership Dropout Among Selected Churches in the East Jamaica Conference of Seventh-day Adventists." It is anticipated that the findings from this research will be beneficial to our Conference in further establishing and nurturing members in the churches.

Consequently, I am requesting your cooperation in my executing this project. I am planning to visit Jamaica to undertake this study and I hope that with approval and assistance from you and your staff, I will be able to receive the necessary statistical and secretarial information pertaining to these studies.

I would appreciate an early response to this letter so that I can make my plans to be in Jamaica to carry out this study.

Respectfully yours,

*Horace A. Russell*

Horace A. Russell  
 Doctor of Ministry candidate

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# East Jamaica Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

TELEPHONE: 92-41061-3.  
P.O. BOX 181,  
74 CONSTANT SPRING ROAD,  
KINGSTON 10, JAMAICA, W.I.

OFFICE OF THE

May 2, 1988

Pastor H.A. Russell  
Andrews University  
Berrien Springs, MI 49104

Dear Pastor Russell:

Christian greetings!

I am delighted to be informed of your progress in your program of study leading to the Doctor of Ministry. I have no doubt that your findings will prove quite beneficial to the administration in developing a strategy for retaining and reclaiming members in our churches.

I am pleased to advise you that I have instructed the Executive Secretary, Pastor L.G. Kelly, to give you the necessary cooperation and assistance that will enable you to conclude your study successfully, and, as far as possible, problem free.

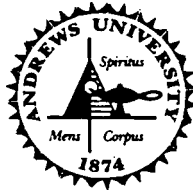
We are looking forward to your presence with us for the duration of your investigation, and are confident that your contribution will add to the stability of our members in East Jamaica.

Sincerely yours,



Philip N. Hosten  
PRESIDENT  
EAST JAMAICA CONFERENCE

PNH: eet



# ANDREWS

UNIVERSITY

March 7, 1988

L. G. Kelly  
East Jamaica Conference of  
Seventh-day Adventists  
74 Constant Spring Road  
Kingston 10  
JAMAICA - WEST INDIES

Dear Pastor Kelly:

I have started working on my dissertation entitled "A Study of the Causes of Membership Dropout Among Selected Churches in the East Jamaica Conference of Seventh-day Adventists." It is anticipated that the findings from this research will be beneficial to our Conference in strengthening the members in the churches.

To enhance the progress of my research, I am planning to visit Jamaica in another few weeks at which time I hope to gather the relevant statistical and secretarial information with regards to this study. However, without your cooperation I will be unable to make the project a success. Thus, I will be seeking your assistance in this matter.

Looking forward to meeting with you.

Sincerely,

Horace A. Russell  
Doctor of Ministry candidate

st

# East Jamaica Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

TELEPHONE: 92-41061-3.  
P.O. BOX 181,  
74 CONSTANT SPRING ROAD,  
KINGSTON 10, JAMAICA, W.I.

OFFICE OF THE Secretary

April 7, 1988

Pastor Horace A. Russell  
Doctor of Ministry Candidate  
Andrews University  
Michigan, U. S. A.

Dear Pastor Russell

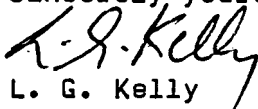
Christian Greetings.

It is with a sense of joy and satisfaction to hear that you have started working on your dissertation "A Study of the Causes of Membership Attrition and Suggestions for Remedial Action among selected churches in the East Jamaica Conference of Seventh-day Adventists."

This is a well needed study and certainly will provide much information for all concern.  
I will be very happy to assist you with all the relevant statistical and secretarial information with regards to your study.

Wishing you all the success in your dissertation.

Sincerely, yours,

  
L. G. Kelly  
Secretary

LGK:gg



**ANDREWS**  
UNIVERSITY

June 1, 1989

James R. Patterson  
30 Charlemont Ave.  
Kingston, 6  
JAMAICA - W.I.

Dear Pastor Patterson:

I have received the questionnaires along with your letter. I very much appreciate the tremendous effort you are putting out to collect the data from the various churches around the conference.

Kindly collect the remaining questionnaires by August 31, 1989. I am planning to conclude the study at that time with whatever data has been collected up to that point.

Thanks for your kind assistance in advance.

Yours respectfully,

Horace Russell  
500 Garland, D4  
Berrien Springs, MI  
49103

APPENDIX II

FORMER-ADVENTIST INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE



## FORMER-ADVENTIST INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire to evaluate the reasons for membership loss among former Seventh-day Adventists.

Your response will help in discovering some of the possible causes why people leave the church, and based on these findings corrective measures will be suggested for implementation.

1. Which factor most attracted you to the Adventist Church?  
Circle the number.

1. I was raised as an Adventist
2. The truth and beauty of the church's teachings
3. The warm fellowship I found among its believers
4. The charisma of the minister/evangelist
5. Personal contact with a church member
6. Adventist radio program
7. Other \_\_\_\_\_

2. Before you became a Seventh-day Adventist, what was your religious background? Circle the number.

1. No religious background
2. I was raised as a Seventh-day Adventist
3. Protestant (Please specify denomination) \_\_\_\_\_
4. Catholic
5. Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. Did any of the following events disrupt your regular life pattern during the 12 months just before you became an Adventist?  
Circle 1 for yes and 2 for no.

- | Yes | No |  |
|-----|----|--|
| 1   | 2  | Personal illness or injury                             |
| 1   | 2  | Death or serious illness of a close friend or relative |
| 1   | 2  | Marriage   |
| 1   | 2  | Divorce or marital problems                            |
| 1   | 2  | Severe financial difficulties                          |
| 1   | 2  | Began serious Bible study                              |
| 1   | 2  | Concern for welfare of children                        |
| 1   | 2  | Witness another person's changed life                  |
| 1   | 2  | Dream  |
| 1   | 2  | Move to another area                                   |
| 1   | 2  | Loss of job  |
| 1   | 2  | Personal emotional crisis                              |
|     |    | Other _____  |

4. How would you describe the kind of instruction you received before joining the Adventist church?
1. Very thorough
  2. Thorough
  3. Satisfactory
  4. Inadequate
  5. Very inadequate
5. How long did you study and evaluate the teachings of the Adventist church before you became a member?
1. I can't say, I was raised as an Adventist
  2. Less than 2 months
  3. 3-11 months
  4. 1-3 years
  5. More than 3 years
6. On a scale of 1 to 5, at the time when you were most fully committed to the church, how would you rate your:
- |                                 |           |   |   |              |   |
|---------------------------------|-----------|---|---|--------------|---|
| Witnessing in daily activities? | 1         | 2 | 3 | 4            | 5 |
|                                 | Never     |   |   | All the time |   |
| Church attendance?              | 1         | 2 | 3 | 4            | 5 |
|                                 | Irregular |   |   | Regular      |   |
| Involvement in church life?     | 1         | 2 | 3 | 4            | 5 |
|                                 | None      |   |   | Active       |   |
7. What kind of fellowship did you find in the Adventist church?  
e.g. Would you say the atmosphere was warm or cold? Did you feel comfortable with them? Did you make some Adventist friends?
- 
- 
- 
8. For how long were you a member?
1. Under 1 year
  2. 1-5 years
  3. 6-10 years
  4. 11-20 years
  5. 21 years or more
9. Did you have any of these feelings at the time you stopped attending the Adventist Church? Circle 1 for yes and 2 for no.
- | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> |             | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> |                      |
|------------|-----------|-------------|------------|-----------|----------------------|
| 1          | 2         | Bitterness  | 1          | 2         | Confusion            |
| 1          | 2         | Guilt       | 1          | 2         | Rebellion            |
| 1          | 2         | Relief      | 1          | 2         | Hurt                 |
| 1          | 2         | Sorrow      | 1          | 2         | Emptiness            |
| 1          | 2         | Frustration | 1          | 2         | Indifference/Boredom |

10. Please indicate how much of an influence each source listed below was toward your decision to leave or stop attending the Adventist church. Circle the appropriate number.

No Influence	Some Influence			Fair Amount of Influence		Great Deal of Influence	
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
1.	2.	3	4	1.	2.	3	4
1	2	3	4	1.	Members too emotional		
1	2	3	4	2.	Members too proud		
1	2	3	3	3.	Lack of fellowship		
1	2	3	4	4.	Church too strict and demanding		
1	2	3	4	5.	Members too inconsistent		
1	2	3	4	6.	Lack of support in time of crisis		
1	2	3	4	7.	Worship program did not meet spiritual need		
1	2	3	4	8.	I had to travel too far to church		
1	2	3	4	9.	Influenced by non-Adventist association		
1	2	3	4	10.	Disagreed with church doctrines		
1	2	3	4	11.	I was inadequately prepared for baptism		
1	2	3	4	12.	Death of a friend or relative		
1	2	3	4	13.	Started working on Sabbath		
1	2	3	4	14.	Conflict among the church members		
1	2	3	4	15.	Had marital problems		
1	2	3	4	16.	Violated the commandment on adultery		
1	2	3	4	17.	Unpleasant experience with pastor		
1	2	3	4	18.	Disapproved of the leadership in the church		
1	2	3	4	19.	Drastic financial changes		
1	2	3	4	20.	Personal spiritual life declined		
1	2	3	4	21.	Personal or family illness		
1	2	3	4	22.	Loss of job		
1	2	3	4	23.	Marriage to non-SDA		
1	2	3	4	24.	Other		

11. Was it your decision to withdraw your membership from the church or was your name dropped without your consent?

0. Question not applicable  
 1. My decision  
 2. Church's decision with my consent and agreement  
 3. Church's decision without my consent and agreement  
 4. I was not even consulted

12. What effort has the church made to bring you back into full fellowship?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	
1	2	Pastoral visit
1	2	Member visit
1	2	Literature or letters
1	2	Phone calls

13. Did you join a church of another denomination? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

If so, which one? \_\_\_\_\_

14. Do you have any SDA relatives? If answer is yes, please state number as well.

	1. Yes	2. No	3. Number
1. Father	___	___	___
2. Mother	___	___	___
3. Brother	___	___	___
4. Sister	___	___	___
5. Spouse	___	___	___
6. Son	___	___	___
7. Daughter	___	___	___
8. Other	___	___	___

15. Please state briefly the main thing that could have been different and would have encouraged you in your experience with the Adventist church? \_\_\_\_\_

16. What are the chances that you might again become a regular, active Seventh-day Adventist?

- 1. Very likely
- 2. Likely
- 3. Don't know
- 4. Unlikely
- 5. Very unlikely

17. Is there anything that stands in the way of your return membership and active participation in church? \_\_\_\_\_

18. How would you describe your present personal relationship with Jesus Christ? \_\_\_\_\_

19. Your sex:                    1. Male                    2. Female

20. Your age group:

- 1. 10 and below
- 2. 11-15
- 3. 16-20
- 4. 21-25
- 5. 26-35
- 6. 36-50
- 7. 51-65
- 8. 66 and over

21. Your marital status:

- 1. Single
- 2. Married
- 3. Divorced
- 4. Separated
- 5. Widowed

22. Your yearly family income:

- 1. Under \$ 6,000
- 2. \$ 6,000 - \$ 9,995
- 3. \$10,000 - \$14,995
- 4. \$15,000 - \$24,995
- 5. \$25,000 - \$50,000
- 6. Over \$50,000

23. Educational level completed. Circle the number.

- 1. Elementary
- 2. Secondary
- 3. College
- 4. Teacher Training College
- 5. Commercial Trade School
- 6. University

24. Do you have any other insights, comments, or ideas you would like to share that could help former Adventist return to active membership participation.

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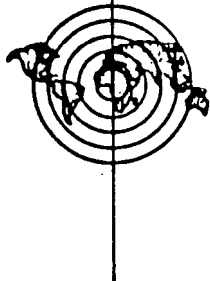
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APPENDIX III

ARTICLES ON CHURCH DROPOUTS PREPARED AT THE  
REQUEST OF THE NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION



Office of the President  
NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION  
March 1, 1989

General Conference of

# Seventh-day Adventists

CHURCH WORLD HEADQUARTERS: 6840 EASTERN AVENUE NW, WASHINGTON, DC 20012 USA  
TELEPHONE: (202) 722-8000 • CABLE: ADVENTIST, WASHINGTON • TELEX: 440186

PASTORS  
FIRST ELDERS  
NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION

Dear Fellow Leaders:

We have a mutual concern—it is the growing number of church members we are losing through the "back door"—many of them raised in Adventist homes, educated in our schools.

It will not help to wring your hands, commiserate, or give way to despair. The time has come for action. The 1988 NAD Year End meeting adopted a homecoming strategy to address the matter during 1989 and 1990. There are literally hundreds of thousands of former Adventists in NAD—many of whom indicate by survey that they are open to an invitation to return. The homecoming goal is that every congregation across the NAD will visit the former and non-attending members in their territory. I trust you will buy into this goal and encourage your local church to make it their goal.

Please have your church board consider this goal and make a decision as to how your congregation will become involved. Enclosed is information about the need, the results of the field testing of methods of responding to the need, and the resources available to help local churches minister to missing members. We are talking about "enabling the congregation."

Your conference staff is committed to be a resource to your church in this venture—providing materials and training experiences. All departments are working together. We are your servants as you serve Christ in study of the Word, worship, fellowship, and service.

Good things are happening in NAD. Enthusiastic, Christ-centered worship is attracting a growing number every Sabbath; pastors and lay persons are preparing men and women for baptism in Revelation Seminars and home Bible studies; thousands of Adventists are sharing their faith where they work—in the community and among friends and relatives. This is exciting and encouraging.

Because of your faithfulness and the blessing of God, NAD will reach its Harvest '90 goals—thousands newly baptized, thousands returning to the fold. We are with you all the way. Let us know what we can do to facilitate the work in your field.

Sincerely,

C. E. Bradford, President

cc: Union and conference presidents  
Union and conference departmental staff

# Homecoming Emphasis 1989-90



North American Division  
Year of Evangelism



Local Church  
Planning  
Guide

A careful review of the records indicates that there are more than 700,000 men and women in North America whose names have been dropped, and at least 300,000 more who are still on the books but never attend church. Polls conducted by various organizations indicate that perhaps another million people claim to be Seventh-day Adventists although we have no record of them. All together they represent a vast pool of persons already sympathetic to our mission, already convinced of our message and already inclined to identify with our church.

The following goal was voted by the Union and Local Conference Presidents assembled at the NAD Year End Meeting in Minneapolis in November, 1988:

That each local church in the North American Division will visit each of the missing and former members in its territory during the next 18 months.

Each church board is asked to consider this goal and discuss the possibility of adopting it. Does this goal relate to a need in your congregation? How high a priority is it? Unfortunately not every local church will buy into this goal because local needs and priorities will differ from church to church.

How many inactive members do you have? \_\_\_\_\_  
 What percentage is this of your total membership? \_\_\_\_\_  
 How many former Adventists do members know? \_\_\_\_\_  
 How many former members in your prospect file? \_\_\_\_\_

A simple and effective way to evaluate the need in your church and gather the names of former members is to organize a telephone survey of your active members. Ask them how many former Adventists they know of and get as many addresses and phone numbers as you can.

In most churches this can easily be done by a phone committee of two or three people, working on their own at home over a period of two weeks or so. In larger congregations, a committee of six, eight or twelve may be needed.

An 18-minute video explaining how to make the calls and a sample worksheet for the phone committee members can be obtained from the NAD Distribution Center, 5040 Prescott Avenue, Lincoln, NE 68506. One copy per district is free of charge if it will be shown to a phone committee or other group.

Because some of the names that will be found in this survey are outside your local area, a clearinghouse has been established to exchange names with the nearest local church. If names are from your local conference territory, send them to the conference office to the attention of the missing member coordinator. If names are from outside your local conference, mail them to the Adventist Information Ministry, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI 49104 or dial 1-800-253-3000.



# The Dropout Problem

It is estimated that there are between one and two million former and non-attending Seventh-day Adventists in North America. Six major studies of this group have been completed by Adventist researchers since the mid-1970s and much has been learned.

## Who Are the Dropouts?

The surveys paint a portrait of a dropout who grew up in the Adventist faith, a younger adult who has gone through a divorce or never married, has few friends in his or her local church, holds a professional or white collar job that is very demanding, and does not find that the program of the local church meets his needs.

One of the most widely held myths about dropouts is that they are the result of quick, high-pressure public evangelism. In fact, half grew up in Adventist homes and only one in seven came into the church through public evangelism. Four out of five spent more than two months in preparation for baptism, and the majority have attended regularly for six years or longer.

Method of conversion has little influence on whether or not a person will drop out of the church, but age is a powerful predictor. Nearly half of the dropouts are in the 20 to 35 age group, and another quarter are 36 to 50 years of age. "The church is losing its younger members," says Jerry W. Lee, a researcher at Loma Linda University.

"Individuals in the missing and apostate group are also more likely to report having been divorced," states Lee. Dropouts are three times as likely as active members to be divorced and remarried, and four times as likely to be divorced and single.

Half of the former members that Lee surveyed were single at the time

they dropped out. Perhaps as many as half of our single members never attend church.

## Why Did They Leave?

Three out of four leave for reasons having to do with their relationships with people and groups; while less than one in five leave because they no longer believe in some teaching of the church. In fact, Lee found that 37% of former members say they are still practicing the Adventist faith; 75% still believe in the Sabbath; 69% still believe in the second coming; 53% still believe in the inspired role of Ellen White. The dropouts are people who never bonded with the core group of their congregation, never felt a part of the inner circle.

"There was absolutely no proof that anybody left the church because they no longer believed in the doctrines," says Harold K. West of a study of 1,500 former members he conducted while ministerial director of Florida conference. "They left the church because of the way the church treated them . . . People drop out of the church because the church no longer meets their needs or the church disappointed them."

## What Can be Done About It?

From hundreds of interviews that have been conducted with inactive members over the past five years during pilot projects in the Columbia Union Conference, the Carolina Conference and other places, it is clear that the only truly effective means of reclaiming missing and former members is the personal touch. This includes at least two essential elements:

1. Face-to-face visits by church members who have been trained to listen rather than preach or simply make social calls. Literature and other media may supplement this personal interview, but these methods have not been effective when used on their own.

2. Preparation of the congregation so the members present a receptive attitude of love, acceptance and forgiveness toward the returning dropout. Our churches must learn to build an inclusive atmosphere.

Those local churches that have followed this approach report that up to half of the former and missing members they contacted have been reclaimed. A summary of all the facts from these studies has been published as a chapter by Monte Sahlin added to *Finding His Lost Sheep*, the recently republished book by Fordyce Detamore. You can obtain a copy from the Adventist Book Center.

In order to equip and enable church members to make these visits, it is helpful to clear time in the church calendar for the purpose of training, visiting and reporting. In order to focus the attention of the entire congregation on being receptive toward returning members, it may be helpful to schedule one or more "Homecoming Sabbaths." Full detailing is laid out in the planning worksheet in this folder, with many practical suggestions in the resources listed.

# Holding Members Who Return . . .

Unless their needs are met, and they feel wanted and needed in the congregation, the former and inactive members you reclaim will soon drop out again. What will you do to help new members become "adopted" into the church family? What plans does your congregation have to meet the needs of young adults, singles, and others who may feel excluded? How will church members be educated regarding Christian family life?

Proven tools have been developed for assimilating new members. *Welcome to the Family* is a seven-lesson course that tells new members about Adventist lifestyle, language, history and ways of doing things. It can be taken as a correspondence course, used in one-to-one Bible studies or taught in a new members class in Sabbath School or midweek meetings. The basic course and instructor's guide can be obtained through your local Adventist Book Center or directly from Home Study International, the school operated by the General Conference, at 6840 Eastern Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20012.

*Discipling* by Dan Caslow (1981, Pacific Press) is a handbook describing

how to set up a new member committee and operate a new member class. It, too, can be obtained through your local ABC.

Most of the dropouts are younger, second and third-generation Adventists, sometimes called "Baby Boomers." A packet of information on "Reaching the Baby Boomers" can be obtained through your local conference Church Ministries staff or from NAD Church Ministries, 6840 Eastern Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20012.

Many of the dropouts returning to your church will be single adults. They report that few churches provide activities for singles. Adventist Singles Ministries (ASM) is an organization that can help. You can write to them at 4467 King Springs Road, Smyrna, GA 30082. There may already be an ASM chapter functioning in your conference.

Also, you can obtain a leaflet from your conference Church Ministries office entitled *The Ministry of the Singles Coordinator* which describes how to organize a singles ministry in your local church.

Conflict and breakup in the family is a key cause of people not attending

church. In order to prevent dropouts, your church must have a strong family life program. A number of family ministry resources are available through your conference Church Ministries staff, including an introductory video entitled *Caring for the Family*, a leaflet describing the ministry of the local church family life coordinator, and a handbook for family life activities.

In order to become a more inclusive church, where everyone is made to feel safe and comfortable, it is essential to find a way to meet a wide variety of needs. A number of different kinds of small groups are needed for midweek meetings, and a number of different kinds of Sabbath School classes on Sabbath morning. Resource materials for starting small group ministries and alternative Sabbath Schools are available through your local Church Ministries Department.

Being an inclusive church is more than activities and programs. Each member must learn to put away judgmental and intolerant attitudes, and "bare one another's burdens" in times of crisis and pain.



Prepared at the request of the North American Division Committee  
by the Church Ministries and Communication departments  
and the Ministerial Association.

# Resources Available . . .

**Finding His Lost Sheep** is the recently republished and updated version of the classic volume by veteran Adventist evangelist Fordyce Detamore. You can get a copy from your local Adventist Book Center or the ABC Hotline, 1-800-325-8492.

**Reaching and Reclaiming Missing Members** includes a user's guide, training video and another video entitled designed to be seen by inactive and former members. This resource can be used to help interested church members become comfortable in working with missing members. Cost: \$24.95. Available from the NAD Distribution Center, 5040 Prescott Ave., Lincoln, NE 68506.

**Missing, but Not Forgotten** is a 14-minute video suitable for introducing this topic to your local church during the "King's Business" or personal ministries time. It can be obtained for \$10 from the Southern Union Conference Ministerial Association, PO Box 849, Decatur, GA 30031.

**Signs of the Times, El Centinella** and **Message** magazines are publishing special issues targeted at former members. The **Adventist Review** is preparing a special issue aimed at non-attending members whose names are still on the books. These make excellent items for visitors to take with them as they contact missing members. Extra supplies of these special issues may be obtained through your Adventist Book Center. Special subscription plans for sending missionary magazines to former and missing members have also been developed. You can get information about these from your local conference Church Ministries office.

**Learning to Care** is a two-part training package to equip a group of lay visitors to make effective house calls on inactive and former members. A number of certified instructors are available across North America. For the name of the nearest instructor contact your local conference Church Ministries office.

**Lab School in Parish Visitation Skills** is a 40-hour training process to equip clergy and lay leaders to make house calls on the inactive member and reactivate them in church attendance. For the name of the Adventist instructor nearest your church, contact your local conference Church Ministries office.

**Reclaiming Missing Members** is a continuing education package designed for use by pastors and lay leaders. It provides a complete overview of the problem and a comprehensive review of the skills needed to do something about it. Earns two Continuing Education unit credits. It can be purchased for \$27.95 through the NAD Ministerial Association, Central Distribution Center, 6840 Eastern Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20012. (Specify catalog number HCM 7264.)

**A Kindness Crusade & Spiritual Guardian** packet includes materials for a concept which challenges church members to expand their caring and friendship, as well as helps for a hospitality ministry and maintaining contact with new members. Produced by the NAD Ministerial Association and available for \$3 from the NAD Distribution Center, 5040 Prescott Ave., Lincoln, NE 68506.

# Missing Member Strategy Of The

DATE TO BEGIN: \_\_\_\_\_

Committee in charge: \_\_\_\_\_

Chairperson: \_\_\_\_\_

Members: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Committee: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Possible Visitors: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## TRAINING PLANS

What type of training will we use?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Who will conduct the training?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Who will be invited to be trained?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How will the invitations be made?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

When and where will training be done?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# S.D.A. Church

## VISITATION PLANS

What visitation plan will we use?

One Sabbath afternoon a month.

Six weeks of prayer meeting nights.

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

ng  
89

all  
89

ng  
90

## HOME COMING CELEBRATION PLANS

How will we educate our members to be inclusive in their attitudes and create an atmosphere of love, acceptance and forgiveness in our congregation?

Possibilities:

- Sabbath School programs in April or May 1989.
- Sermon series.
- Ask the Sabbath School classes to discuss it.
- Sabbath afternoon workshop with videos.
- Use "King's Business" or Personal Ministries time.

When will we schedule Homecoming events?  
What special sermon topics, speakers and activities will be included?

Spring  
1989

Fall  
1989

Spring  
1990

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