

SMALL GROUP EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING: A 21ST CENTURY METHOD OF SOUL WINNING

Kingsley Chukwuemeka, ANONABA, PhD
Babcock University,
Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State.

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Abstract:

In the 21st century, traditional evangelism methods have faced different social and moral challenges, which have affected Church growth, membership nurture, and retention in different parts of the world. To address these challenges, small group evangelism and Church planting have emerged as effective strategies for reaching people and disciplining individuals in today's fast-paced, technologically driven world. This approach leverages the power of relational connections, communal unity, and friendly settings to facilitate spiritual growth, membership stability, and mission drive. Small group evangelism and Church planting offer a scalable, adaptable, and sustainable model for 21st-century soul-winning and its impact cuts across religious and denominational biases as it hangs on positive relationship. The research aims to provide insights into optimizing strategies for effective evangelism and sustainable church growth in today's diverse societal contexts. Through a systematic review of literature, this study examines the theological foundations, practical implementation, and outcomes of small group evangelism and church planting initiatives. This research has significant implications for church leaders, evangelists, and Christian practitioners seeking innovative methods to reach and disciple people in today's complex society and will provide training for leaders in relational evangelism and group facilitation.

Keywords: Small group evangelism. Church planting. Relational evangelism. 21st-century evangelism. Soul winning. Discipleship.

INTRODUCTION

The theology of congregational soul-winning in the Seventh-day Adventist Church emphasizes the active involvement of every member in fulfilling the Great Commission.

Drawing from the Scriptures and Ellen G. White's writings, this paper explores the biblical basis for congregational involvement in disciple-making. It highlights the discipleship model of the twelve apostles and the role of small group settings in nurturing their faith and mission focus. Ellen G. White's counsel underscores the importance of organized and trained church structures for effective evangelism. With its objectives aligned with the Great Commission, the Sabbath School is positioned as a key driver for soul-winning efforts. Literature on Sabbath School evangelism and small group ministry informs the implementation of Sabbath School Action Units, providing a framework for spiritual and numerical growth. These units offer a platform for membership care, involvement, and evangelism, contributing to the overall mission of the Church and the realization of its goals.

Since the beginning of religious movements, the Church's main focus has been on evangelization as a response to following the Great Commission. It has been mandated as an unwavering duty of the church till the end of time, and over the ages, the Church's succeeding generations have taken this responsibility seriously. The apostles' fervor for this cause is shown in the Acts of the Apostles, and the early church participated fully in the endeavor as the gospel found its way into every corner of the Roman Empire. In the same spirit, the church experienced a great emphasis on world evangelization during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This paper suggests a modern method and approach for soul-winning and Church membership retention in a post-modern society.

Sequel to Christ's commission to His followers, which demands intentional teaching and spreading of the gospel to everyone for man's salvation, the church has gone through religious and social challenges intended to resist the gospel of Christ. Several Christian denominations and mission policies have been developed to support this mission to date. Different types of evangelism methods have been used at various times and periods of the church mission. For the 21st century and the post-modern era, small-group methods of evangelism and church planting have been the strength of soul-winning and Church membership retention.

Furthermore, small group evangelism and church planting are people-based methods of teaching the gospel to the neighborhood. This method can be stabilized if a lamb Shelter is built in a chosen location and a group of 8-10 persons study the bible together for at least thirty (30) days, a branch Sabbath school can be initiated which later will become an organized Church. With visitations, intercessory prayer, and welfare activities, the new members of such a new Church will be retained.

By implementing Sabbath School Action Units and utilizing resources focused on small group ministry, the Church aims to foster spiritual growth, numerical expansion, and active evangelistic engagement aimed at preparing for Christ's imminent return.

The findings of this paper situate that the influence of technology in the 21st century, though very good, has reduced membership involvement in one-on-one bible study activities. This provision has reduced the usefulness of eye and body contact persuasions which may help in regular bible studies and soul winning. Additionally, the counter effects of secularization and post-modernism

have weakened peoples' desire for God and the knowledge of God. In an era in which almost every human problem can be solved with the help of science and artificial intelligence, man has developed less interest in worshipping God or building a deeper relationship with Him through bible study

Based on the findings of this paper, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the Church's mission. These include prioritizing engagement in local mission fields, training, and mobilizing the pastors and laity based on their spiritual gifts. Effective pastoral leadership should guide departmental leaders to work collaboratively, while leadership seminars can enhance local church capacities.

Sabbath School leaders are encouraged to set baptismal goals, organize quarterly baptismal services, and appoint discussion leaders selected based on their spiritual gifts. In the same vein, monitoring the implementation of Action Units and restructuring them for better collaboration can be an effective catalyst for church growth. Sabbath School Action Units should undertake community projects and establish Branch Sabbath Schools in collaboration with ongoing evangelistic outreaches.

Small Group Activities and Church Planting

In Christendom, many strategic plans have been implemented to aid global evangelization. These plans have been supported by in reach and outreach programs that have helped spread the gospel message throughout nations. Over the years, many church

denominations have established their own evangelistic groups and mission boards, which have done fantastic jobs in this area. To expose people to the word of God, Bible Societies all around the world are always providing copies of the Bible in the native languages of the people. Through missionary radio programs, millions of people who have not yet been reached by resident missionaries have heard the gospel. Additionally, it is known that Muslim countries are receiving Christian broadcasts in either their native tongue or a language that can be partially comprehended achievements notwithstanding more work remains to be done in spreading the gospel of Christ. Within the context of the numerous changes the world is experiencing daily such as political, social, demographic, economic, philosophical, climatic, and religious issues, the Christian Church needs to stand more firmly to her calling to preach Christ and Him crucified. This is one practical way to give hope to the dying world. The planet's population is growing, and new settlements are popping up every day. The globe is getting more interconnected, and we are learning more about the numerous diseases, injustices, issues, and misery that exist throughout the world. The ravages of postmodernism, secular humanism, the advance of other religions, particularly Islam, the HIV/AIDS virus holocaust, the Middle East and Far East nuclear threats, urbanization, crime, the depravity of modern sexuality, isolationism, and moral deterioration in public life have all put additional pressures on the Church. It is against this background that this essay examines the challenges and the future of Christ's Church and soul wining. It makes the case that for the church to fulfill

this commissioned duty successfully, it must constantly develop new strategies for global missions in the twenty-first century.

The Concept of the Church in the Old and New Testament

The terms *qahal* and *edhah* are frequently used in the Old Testament to refer to "a gathering of people, assembly, or congregation." The term *qahal* is also used to describe a gathering of people or nations (Gen 28:3; 35:11; 48:4; Jer 50:9), a group fighting in battle (Num 22:4; Ezek 38:4, 7, 13), a public or civic assembly (Prov 5:14; Job 30:28), an assembly of people for worship or to hear a speaker (Deut 4:10; 9:10; 2 Chr 20:5, 14; Neh 5:13), a group of exiles returning (Jer. 31:8; Ezra 10:12-14; Neh 7:66). The Pentateuch contains twenty-one instances of the term, which is usually connected with the Priestly writer.

The author of Deuteronomy employed the phrase to characterize those who were accepted or rejected from the "assembly of Yahweh" (Duet 23:1-9). According to other accurate translations of Deuteronomy (Duet 4:10; 9:10; 18:16; 31:30), *qahal* refers to the "day of assembly" in Horeb or other assemblies for cubic purposes. The Deuteronomistic history (Joshua through Kings) mainly maintained this cubic usage. In the same vein, the Chronicler refers to the entire assembly of Israel for worship or for feasts or fasts to honor Yahweh (*qahal*; occurs thirty-three times) (2 Chr 1:3,5; 6:3,12; 7:8; 20:5,14; 30:2, 4,13,17,23-25,). The term *qahal* most obviously overlaps with the use of *edhah* in other portions of the Old Testament within this cubic meaning. According to Scripture, there appears to be a distinction between *qahal* and *edhah*, which can be found in passages such as Leviticus 4:13 and Numbers 20:2–10 (Priestly Writer). The former

refers to the group of people, while the latter is used to describe the congregation's gathering on a particular occasion.

The term "congregation" in Hebrew is *edhah*, "is commonly used as a corporate designation for the people of Israel or the organized gathering of the Israelites for social, political, and, especially cubic purposes." The phrase first appears in Exodus, when the Israelites gathered to hear from Moses and Aaron on issues about the "Passover and unleavened bread (Exodus 12), the supply of food in the wilderness (Exodus 16), and the tabernacle and offerings (Exodus 35)." The phrase is also used about Israel's assembling for worship in Lev 4 and 8 and Num 14–16. The Greek words *ekklesia*, which means "to call out" or "summon," and synagogue, which means "gather together," were frequently employed by the LXX translators for the words *qahal* and *edhah* (Exod 16:3; Lev 4:13).

When the word *ekklesia* appears in the New Testament, it refers to "an assembly or congregation." It communicates the same fundamental idea as the Old Testament word *qahal*, which is a "convoked assembly." When used, "it referred mainly to the people of God gathered in the name of Jesus or the God of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3:21; 5:23; 1 Thess 1:1; 1 Corinthians 10:32)." The New Testament makes extensive use of congregational settings. "Of the 114 occurrences, 109 times the term referred to the community of God's people." The word appears just twice in the gospel texts (Matt 16:18; 18:17), although it appears 23 times in Acts, 46 times in the works of Paul, 20 times in Revelation, and just sporadically in James and Hebrews.

Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians in Macedonia (1 Thess 1:1; 2:14) makes clear the church as a congregation. Further evidence for Paul's use of the term "congregation" to refer to local communities of Jesus' disciples in various localities can be found in his letters, particularly 1 Corinthians, where Paul used it 22 times, often together with the additional description "congregation of God" (1 Cor 1:1; 10:32; 11:16). The term "congregation of the house" or local church also applied to the assembly of Jesus' disciples in their houses (1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:5; 2 Cor 4:15). "In Acts, James, 3 John, Revelation and the early writings of Paul, church is always a particular congregation." The idea of a "church" as a congregation was used to represent the assembly of God's people for celebration, worship, encouragement, and instruction in the name of His Holy Name in both the Old and New Testaments. The congregational gathering also acted as a reminder that the church is a group of believers who are one in God and whose mission is divinely inspired.

Smaller Gatherings as Small Groups

Regardless of the size of the congregation, the body of believers in scripture is frequently referred to as the Church (Acts 7:38; 12:12). The entire story of Noah and his family in the ark (Gen 7:1) can be compared to the Church; that assembly can also be compared to a small group. Another example of a small group selected and given service authority is the calling of the twelve disciples in the New Testament (Matt 10:1-4). J. D. Payne underlined this idea "The Bible is very clear that the apostolic Church met in homes." He referenced instances such as: The assembly of believers in the upper room after Jesus' ascension (Acts 1:12-14); the congregation

of believers in a house during the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (Acts 2:2); the gathering of believers in houses (Acts 2:46); the intrusion of an angry mob into Jason's house to apprehend Paul and Silas (Acts 17:5); the congregation of the church at Mary's house for prayer (Acts 12:12); Paul's greetings to "Nympha and the church in her house" (Colossians 4:15); Paul's greetings to Philemon and the congregation meeting in his house (Philemon 1); Paul's greetings to the congregation meeting in the home of Priscilla and Aquila (Romans 16:5). These instances of house churches in the Bible serve as compelling evidence supporting the theological basis for small group ministries. When adapted to congregational settings, the formation of Sabbath School classes can similarly be seen as a form of small group ministry. These gatherings possess a solid biblical foundation, encouraging the Church to prioritize mission-oriented activities.

The Mission of the Christian Church

The purpose of the church is delineated by its founder, Jesus Christ, as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew 28:19-20, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in name of the Father and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always to the end of the age." This instruction, commonly known as the Great Commission, bestows upon the church its importance in the world. It was established to accomplish God's mission and carry out the actions He would undertake if He were still present on earth. Within this context, Dederen argued that "the church does not merely have a mission, the Church is God's instrument for mission"

God's affection for humanity, despite its fallen state, is unveiled through His mission to redeem mankind (John 3:16). Throughout Scripture, He frequently involved humans by commissioning them to communicate with their fellow humans on His behalf (Jeremiah 26:5; 29:19; 35:15). He spoke to the people of Judah, "From the day that your forefathers left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again, I sent my servants the prophets" (Jer 7:25). Ruthven Roy characterized the mission of the church as "purpose and reason for its existence in a particular community." This principle is exemplified in Jesus' ministry; He "sent out" the twelve, and later the seventy, to proclaim a message about the Kingdom of God (Luke 9:1, 2; 10:1, 9). "To this mandate, Christ added the post-resurrection commission in Matt 28:19-20; Luke 24:46-48."

Paul Borthwick defined the mission of the church as "God's mission." Roy confirmed that stance by stating: "Mission, therefore, is God's enterprise from beginning to end, not ours. Irrespective of her calling, her position in salvation history, or her great accomplishments, the role of the church is solely and completely participatory and not supervisory." When this understanding of mission is fully embraced, the church will no longer view itself as struggling to achieve an insurmountable task; instead, it will obediently collaborate with God in the Great Commission. For this reason, Borthwick remarked:

The mission Dei (the mission of God) embraces all the divine-human activities involved in carrying out God's redemptive purpose to all the world and has as its ultimate objective the complete reconciliation and restoration of the earth and the human race. Mission was born in the heart of a loving God who, in His divine foreknowledge, devised

a plan from the foundation of the world (Rev 13:18) to take care of the catastrophic emergence of sin. Our God is a missionary God. The concept of mission is vividly illustrated in the first coming of Christ (John 3:16).

Roy contended: That while the well-spring of the mission Dei is divine love, the reason for that mission was man's utter lostness and dire need of a Saviour... The Mission Dei, then, grew out of mankind's disobedience, downfall, and impending doom, and God's loving response in expending heaven's best resources to save His creation.

In light of the Great Commission, the church, prompted by the directive (Matthew 28:19-20), collaborates with God in the task of making disciples, baptizing them, and instructing them to follow all of Jesus' teachings, in principle and in practice.

The Focus of Church Mission

Russell Burrill emphasized that the mission remains incomplete until all three aspects (making disciples, baptizing, and teaching) are fulfilled. Only when a church adheres to this three-fold mandate can it truly assert its fulfillment of the gospel commission. Therefore, if a church baptizes individuals without disciplining or teaching them, it deviates from Christ's command. Similarly, if a church focuses solely on disciplining people without baptizing them, it also disobeys. Even if a church diligently teaches the commands either discipline or baptizing, it falls short of fulfilling Jesus' mandate. The command is comprehensive, requiring the church to establish a reproducing community of committed disciples.

As learning from a teacher influences the learner to emulate their teacher, it follows that disciples of Jesus Christ embody all His teachings. Moreover, the term's definition implies that the disciple maintains a relational connection with the one they emulate. “In this relationship, one is to be constantly learning more about that person, while at the same time living in subjection to the person. The word itself does not suggest a rapid conversion to the person, but a slow process by which one is made into a disciple.”

This process entails pledging allegiance and loyalty to a single master. In the Christian context, it necessitates undergoing a spiritual rebirth and a relinquishing of one's self (John 3:3-7; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20). The imagery evokes the image of students gathered around a teacher rather than penitents kneeling at an altar—it's more of an educational journey than a moment of evangelistic crisis, akin to a school rather than a revival. The term's straightforward nature suggests a relaxed approach, conveying essentially: “Work with people over some time in the educative process of teaching Jesus.” Only God holds the power to accomplish significant tasks such as conversion, winning souls, bringing about repentance, or prompting individuals to make decisions—all authority rests solely with him. However, disciples can, should, and will engage in the smaller task of "disciplining" others—that is, they will invest quality time with people, trusting that eventually, the creator of the universe will inspire the prospects to make the decision to be disciples of Jesus Christ through water baptism (or in cultures where Christianity is prevalent, the decision to publicly embrace baptism or profession of faith) and thus follow Jesus.

According to the Gospel of Matthew, a disciple embodies both a learner and a follower, tasked with not only imparting the theoretical truths of the kingdom but also instructing others in obedience to all of Christ's commands (Matthew 28:19-20). Though the disciple is summoned to a life of obedience, he “is not portrayed as a superhuman, not as an exemplar of perfection, not immune to failure, not always demonstrating full and complete understanding of the Master and His teaching, but as a simple follower who in radical commitment, practices the way of faithful obedience and love.” In this perspective, George Knight said that “Discipleship in Matthew has never been mere belief or knowledge. Rather, the first Gospel has repeatedly stressed obedience to the will of God in the things of life (Matt 7:21; 25:31-46)”. Not only does Jesus instruct the disciples to teach, but they are also to baptize in the ‘name’ (singular, indicating the basic unity of the Godhead) of the Trinity (Matt 28:19). We find the command to baptize being put into operation in the earliest records of the church mission history after Jesus’ ascension. Thus Peter on the day of Pentecost urges his hearers to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:37, 38).

Roy added that the gospel commission summons us: First and foremost, to make disciples of new believers, and in the process, we are to teach them to observe all things (Matt 28:19, 20). While church membership and Christian discipleship are not mutually exclusive entities, they connote two distinct experiences. Church membership communicates a sense of belonging and inclusiveness. Discipleship, on the other hand, communicates a sense of mission and purpose, and this can be easily lost sight of if there is a preoccupation with the former orientation and interests.

During His discussion with His disciples, Jesus reiterated: “A student [*mathetai*] is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!” (Matt 10:24-25). Those who choose to become disciples of Jesus are tasked with showcasing faith in Him and remaining steadfast

As evidenced in the lives of the early disciples, the summons to discipleship “involved a total commitment to the person and destiny of Jesus himself, even to the point of abandoning the security of vocation, possessions, and home, and repudiating family ties and responsibilities just as Jesus had separated himself from His own family and abandoned vocation and home.”

Jesus also added: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26-33).

This aspect of carrying the cross is intrinsic to discipleship and is connected to the grim reality of crucifixion. “Thus to bear the cross is to... endure without complaint or regret the frown of friends and relatives and to bear the reproach of Christ with patience and humility.” While the call to discipleship is not one of ease and comfort, “It doesn’t mean that the Christian goes through life moody and joyless, but... finds joy in the affliction and trouble caused by his allegiance to Christ, counting it a privilege to suffer with Christ.”

To the believers, Jesus conveyed: “If you hold to my teaching, you are my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32). A disciple is someone who hears Jesus' call and answers by aligning with His teachings and joining His community. Eddie Gibbs, in his book "I Believe in Church Growth," remarked about the term "disciple," stating, in its Jewish context, it carries a much deeper meaning than in secular Greek.

In Greek, "disciple" signified a student, pupil, or apprentice. However, in the New Testament, it denotes complete allegiance. This commitment is reflected in the emphasis on teaching when making disciples. Jesus underscored: “A new command I gave you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34). This demonstration of love is intended to be the ultimate, unwavering measure of one's discipleship. It becomes clear that someone is a disciple when they love unconditionally, just as Jesus does. Burrill fervently advocated: “It does not mean that love is fully perfected, but the agape love of Jesus should be found, at least embryonically in the life of... a disciple.”

When speaking to His followers, Jesus declared: “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples” (John 15:8). Therefore, a disciple is someone who “stays connected to his Master and multiplies himself.” Being connected with Christ establishes a union that inevitably leads to bearing fruit (John 15:5). This is why “The Christian who is not producing by creating other disciples is not really a disciple... Jesus wants us to produce much fruits.” This is arguably the most conspicuous evidence of discipleship.

When someone converts to Christianity, according to Hunter's perspective, and rightly so, he “should grow up to the maturity of discipleship and then reproduce other disciples. Every disciple should be a spiritual parent for other growing disciples, then a grandparent, then a great grandparent.”

An analysis of these passages concerning the topic of discipleship has unveiled the following insights into Jesus' teaching on what it entails to become a disciple:

1. A disciple is someone prepared to endure persecution and scorn for Christ's sake.
2. A disciple is someone who lives in complete allegiance to Christ's lordship, ready to relinquish everything—possessions, family, friends, etc.—for the sake of Christ.
3. A disciple is someone who comprehends and adheres to the fundamental teachings of Jesus.
4. A disciple is someone who loves unconditionally, with the same agape love as Jesus.
5. A disciple is someone who bears fruit by making other disciples for Jesus.

Discipleship in a Small Group Context

When Jesus summoned His twelve disciples, He assembled them as a chosen group to empower them for service (Matthew 10:1-8). Having been called out from lives of sin and ungodliness, they required the company of Jesus to learn about the new lifestyle of a believer. Jesus exemplified this new way of life through His conduct. He assumed the role of a teacher, while they became learners. In their student capacity, the group setting afforded them the chance to develop in discipleship and Christian maturity.

Robert E. Coleman, in his book "The Master and His Plan," proposed eight principles of Jesus' approach that served as a blueprint for discipleship within a small group setting. These principles are:

1. **Selection:** Jesus focused on training a select few who were willing to learn, ensuring quality leaders to continue the kingdom's work in His absence.
2. **Association:** Jesus employed an informal teaching approach, allowing His disciples to accompany Him closely. They observed, discussed, questioned, and listened to His teachings.
3. **Consecration:** This principle emphasized a life of obedience and commitment as the disciples spent time with Jesus.
4. **Impartation:** Jesus demonstrated selfless love, enabling His disciples to learn how to love others.
5. **Demonstration:** Jesus modeled a life of prayer, reliance on Scripture, and evangelism.
6. **Delegation:** The disciples were sent into the community to share the gospel.

7. **Supervision:** Jesus monitored the disciples' progress to facilitate their growth and maturity.
8. **Reproduction:** This principle stressed the importance of disciples bearing fruit.

The Church, an Instrument of Soul-Winning

Acknowledging the importance of the church and the pressing need for organization in service, Ellen White remarked: “Time is short, and our forces must be organized to do a larger work.” She reminded God’s people: “The church of Christ on earth was organized for missionary purposes, and the Lord desires to see the entire church devising ways and means whereby high and low, rich and poor, may hear the message of truth.”

When addressing the leadership of the Church, she offered this advice: “Those who have the spiritual insight of the church should devise ways and means by which an opportunity may be given to every member of the church to act some part in God’s work.” Reflecting on the model of the early Church, she reminded today's church that “it was in the organization of the twelve that the first step was taken in the organization of the church that after Christ’s departure was to carry on His work on the earth.” Ellen White's emphasis on congregational soul-winning continues to inspire the Church to leverage on its existing structure to accomplish its mission. She emphasized that “the organization of the church at Jerusalem was to serve as a model for the organization of the churches in every other place where messengers of truth should win converts to the gospel... Every member was exhorted to act his/her part well. Each was to make a wise use of the talents entrusted to him.”

Ellen White's emphasis on organizing the congregation for soul-winning adopts a comprehensive approach to ministry that directs the Church toward its mission. By highlighting the collective efforts of pastors and laity, utilizing their spiritual gifts for evangelism, she echoes

Paul's analogy of the Church as a body in which every member has a role of responsibility (Romans 12:4-8). Acknowledging this, she advised the Church: “The work of God in this earth can never be finished until all the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work, and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers.”

To achieve this objective, ministers are reminded of their responsibility to their congregation: “Let ministers teach church members that to grow in spirituality, they must carry the burden the Lord has laid upon them, —the burden of leading souls into the truth.” Therefore, “every church should be a training school for Christian workers. Its members should be taught how to give Bible studies, how to conduct and teach Sabbath school classes, how best to help the poor, and care for the sick, how to work for the unconverted.” Ellen White's contribution to the theology of congregational soul-winning in the Seventh-day Adventist Church has laid a foundation for growth and development as a Church. Her Christ-centered approach to evangelism and her profound insights into the operation and mission of the Church remain sources of inspiration and motivation for both Church leaders and members.

“Sabbath School” in Soul Winning

Since its establishment as a significant department of the Church in 1901, Sabbath School has adhered to its stated objectives, serving as a compass for its relevance and operational role at both local and Conference levels. The manual articulates that:

The Sabbath School was developed to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ in response to the command of Jesus, and the setting of the three angels' messages. In loyalty to this original purpose, the Sabbath School continues to communicate the good news with objectives to win, hold, and train for Jesus Christ, men, women, youth, boys, and girls, in the world. However, these objectives manifest in the following dimensions faith emphasis, fellowship emphasis, and community emphasis.

World Mission Emphasis

When put into action, these objectives align with the Great Commission outlined in Matthew 28:19-20, and function as disciple-making strategies in preparation for the second coming of Christ. Leaders are urged to integrate these objectives into the Sabbath School ministry at all levels of planning and execution. Often, Sabbath School may veer towards programs that do not directly relate to the outlined objectives. While these programs may contain valuable moral lessons and spiritual content, they frequently lack the focus and relevance necessary for Sabbath School. When planning Sabbath School activities, leaders should consistently remember the purpose of Sabbath School and intentionally utilize the established objectives as a roadmap for effective planning.

Small Group Method of Soul-Winning

In the context of church growth, the terms "small group" and "cell group" are often used interchangeably, while there may be subtle differences in the definitions of each term, their fundamental characteristic remains consistent: a deliberate emphasis on evangelism. Jeffery Arnold, in defining small group ministry, said: "A small group is an intentional gathering of three to twelve people who commit themselves to work together to become better disciples of Jesus Christ." He further stated, "The goal of small group ministry is discipleship... And the structure of small group ministry is community."

Cell group ministry, on the other hand, is characterized as follows: It entails a church that has made small group activities central to its ministry. Cells are inclusive, evangelism-oriented small groups deeply integrated into the church's activities. They convene weekly to nurture one another as members of the Body of Christ and to propagate the gospel to those unfamiliar with Jesus. The primary objective of each unit cell is to replicate itself as the group expands through evangelism and subsequent conversions. Scott Boren advocated that "cell groups are simply a form designed to create a place where people experience a radical connection with other brothers and sisters, where they enter into a life of unity with one another, where they learn to sacrifice for one another."

Based on the approach to Sabbath School evangelism, the definitions and perspectives provided by Comiskey, Arnold, and Boren align with the Action Unit model implemented in Sabbath School. Phrases such as "evangelistic-focused small groups," "integrated into the life of the church," "weekly gatherings to support one another," "spreading the gospel," "self-

multiplication," "expansion through evangelism," "intentional gatherings of three to twelve individuals," "discipleship," "deep connection," and "unity with one another" are all practical terms employed in Sabbath School evangelism, particularly as they pertain to the Sabbath School Action Unit. The perspectives expressed also align with the objectives of Action Units.

For more emphasis, Ellen G. White strongly advised: "If there is a large number in the church, let the members be formed into small companies, to work not only for the church members but for unbelievers." The dual purpose of small group ministry resonates with the objectives of the Action Units. Members are urged to nurture those within the household of faith while simultaneously laboring for the salvation of the lost. Mrs. White's directive underscores the need for the church to be structured for service. She stated: "Let there be in every church, well-organized companies of workers to labor in the vicinity of that church." In Sabbath School evangelism, prioritizing community outreach stands as one of the primary objectives and is more effectively accomplished through the application of the small group approach.

In small group ministry, "There are five fundamental small group tasks within the framework of the Christian community: **study, worship, prayer, evangelism, and mission...** at its core community involves... relationships between God and a group of believers." These fundamental tasks are closely linked to the objectives of Sabbath School, which include the study of God's Word, community outreach, emphasizing world missions, and fostering fellowship. Given these interconnected roles, the Action Units essentially function as small group ministries.

The Impact of Small Group Method on Church Growth

Robert Logan, in his book *Beyond Church Growth*, emphasized: “Fulfilling the Great Commission should be the focus of all that we do together as a church.” Although Logan's discussion may not have specifically targeted Action Units, his concern is relevant to all initiatives undertaken by the Church. Upon reflection, the introduction of the Sabbath School Action Unit represents a deliberate endeavor to fulfill the Great Commission. This revolutionary approach has the potential to challenge existing norms and may encounter resistance from some quarters. However, Del Dunavant, in his book *"From Membership to Discipleship,"* offers four strategies to enhance member motivation for ministry, which, when implemented, pave the way for the benefits of Action Units in local Churches as follows:

1. To promote the roles of small group activities in Church growth, and total Church membership participation.
2. Provide a clear job description, provide appropriate training, and ongoing support.
3. Develop mutually agreeable goals that utilize the members’ specific gifts.
4. Provide training according to the member's learning style and availability.”

When Dunavant's recommendations are applied to the small group structure as practiced in Sabbath School Action Units, it can become one of the most effective approaches to fulfill the Church's mission. This approach fosters the active involvement of group members in vision casting and mission development by fostering an atmosphere of open dialogue. Additionally, it communicates to the group the value and appreciation for their dedication to a shared vision of

the future and underscores the benefits of engaging in specific ministries. This approach fosters group consensus, whereupon agreement, the group collectively becomes owners of the vision and shares responsibility for its mission. The small group concept further offers opportunities for each member to be assigned a role, enabling everyone to cultivate their talents within a supportive and non-intimidating environment. To facilitate this process, both the local church and the Sabbath School leadership must offer training for the diverse categories of ministry leaders and their respective roles. Through collaborative efforts, members should be motivated to foster a team spirit ensuring continuous support for one another within the group.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The theology of congregational soul-winning in the Seventh-day Adventist Church underscores the vital role of every member in fulfilling the Great Commission. Rooted in Scripture and guided by the writings of Ellen G. White, this theological framework emphasizes discipleship, small group ministry, and organized church structures as essential components of effective evangelism. With its established objectives aligned with the Great Commission, the Sabbath School emerges as a strategic vehicle for soul-winning efforts. The Church can foster spiritual growth, numerical expansion, and active engagement in evangelism through the Sabbath School Action Units approach and drawing on resources that address small group ministry.

After reviewing the findings presented in this study regarding the biblical principles guiding the Church's mission, several recommendations are proposed:

1. Encourage Seventh-day Adventist congregations to prioritize and actively engage in the mission of reaching their respective territories. Pastoral involvement in training and mobilizing the laity for ministry based on their spiritual gifts is essential.

2. Provide pastoral leadership that guides and empowers departmental leaders in local churches to work collaboratively as a team to fulfill the mission of the Church. Leadership seminars aimed at enhancing the skills and capacities of local church leadership would be beneficial.

3. Instruct Sabbath School leaders to establish baptismal goals and assign these goals to Sabbath School Action Units, with clear communication of objectives at the beginning of each calendar year.

4. Schedule quarterly baptismal services in coordination with the pastor to ensure a systematic approach to evangelism and discipleship within the Sabbath School framework.

5. Appoint Sabbath School Discussion leaders based on their spiritual gifts and willingness to collaborate as a team to achieve common goals.

6. Monitor the implementation of Action Units and related initiatives by Sabbath School coordinators to ensure alignment with overall objectives.

7. Restructure Sabbath School Action Units to promote effective collaboration among members with shared interests, such as families, age groups, or geographical proximity. This

restructuring process should involve input from the Sabbath School council and discussion leaders.

8. Encourage each Sabbath School Action Unit to identify a community project as a mission focus, coordinated by the Sabbath School Council and supervised by the Sabbath School coordinator.

9. Initiate the establishment of Branch Sabbath Schools under the auspices of each Action Unit to expand evangelistic outreach efforts continuously.

10. Provide comprehensive training for Sabbath School officers, comprising six to eight hours annually, facilitated by the local pastor and Conference Sabbath School ministries director, to enhance their effectiveness in ministry leadership roles.

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