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***Report Two: What We Learned in Focus  
Groups and Individual Case Studies***

# ***Reaching a New Generation***

***A Strategy for the Seventh-day Adventist  
Church in the Pacific States***



***Published by the Center for Creative Ministry for the  
Pacific Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists***

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# The Generations

Four generations of Americans make up the demographic and cultural dynamics of the nation today.

**1. GI generation** born from 1901 through 1924, now 68 to 92 years of age, were 17 to 40 on Pearl Harbor Sunday. Includes Billy Graham, Ann Landers, Lee Iacocca, Jimmy Stewart, Joe DiMaggio and Walt Disney. They have been good soldiers, loyal workers, institution-builders. They came home from a World War that they won and defined "normalcy" in the 1950s after two decades of upheaval and uncertainty.

**2. Silent generation** born from 1925 through 1945, now 48 to 67 years of age, grew up during the depression and World War II. Includes Elvis Presley, Phil Donahue, Walter Mondale, Gary Hart, Andy Warhol, Martin Luther King and Jesse Jackson. This generation has never had one of its cohort in the White House, but has dominated the Congress since 1980. It is small in number and generally less aggressive or expressive than either the GI generation or the Baby Boomers.

**3. Baby Boom generation** born from 1946 through 1964, now 29 to 47 years of age, grew up during the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, the assassinations and the Watergate affair. Includes Oprah Winfrey, Bill Clinton, Spike Lee, Steven Jobs (founder of Apple Computers), Jane Pauley, Woodward & Bernstein, and David Letterman. Raised on television, the space program, "Rock" music; entered young adulthood as computers arrived; continue to live with massive change every step of the way.

**4. Baby Bust generation** born from 1965 through 1981, now 12 to 28 years of age, grew up during the abortion debate, Iran hostage crisis, long lines at gas pumps, Challenger space shuttle explosion, and the collapse of Communism. Includes Mike Tyson, Mary Lou Retton, Brooke Shields, as well as a lot of people whose names are not well known yet. It is small in number and largely disadvantaged; our teenagers and young adults.

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# Introduction

There are now 80 million adults who were born during the years 1946 through 1964. As the Seventh-day Adventist Church plans its evangelistic strategies, it cannot afford to ignore this, the largest segment of the American population today. Born during an "anti-establishment" era, Boomers have not felt it their duty to attend church unless "there was something in it for me."

The Adventist church has had difficulty reaching the Boomer generation. Demographers who study generations find, however, that when members of the Boomer generation have their own babies, there is a strong urge to give their children spiritual training. During recent years many denominations have reported a significant number of Boomers returning to active church attendance. Unfortunately this does not seem to be happening in the Adventist church to the same degree that it is happening in other denominations. Boomers comprise a large number of those who formerly associated with the Seventh-day Adventist denomination and have either become inactive or have dropped out all together.

The Pacific Union Conference commissioned an ongoing study to probe the church attendance and participation patterns of the Boomer generation. The Baby Boomer Ministries Resource Center was asked to help the Pacific Union leadership determine what attracts Boomers to become members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and why a few local churches have had success in winning and holding Boomers.

## ***Purpose and Method of Study***

The BBMRC research team conducted an in-depth study of five local churches in the Pacific Union selected on the following criteria:

1. A majority of membership is Boomers
2. Baptized a significant number of Boomers in the last five years
3. Located in a community with an above average population share of Boomers
4. Located in the Pacific Union Conference

Detailed information was collected on each of these "Boomer churches" including church growth statistics on an annual basis since 1980, church growth statistics on a decadal basis since 1930, and an interview with the pastor.

Two focus groups were conducted in each of the five churches. Focus Group A was made up of six to 12 members who are Boomers, with approximately half being long-term attendees and half being drop-outs who have returned to regular church involvement in

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the last five years. Focus Group B was made up of six to 12 members who are Boomers and who were baptized into the Adventist church during the last five years.

An in-depth, personal interview was also conducted with one single adult or one married couple from each of the focus groups. This provided open-ended information about individual experiences.

The interviewees were told that the interview was being recorded. They were guaranteed anonymity and that their names would not be associated with their remarks. The original voice tapes are treated with total confidentiality. The voice tapes were transcribed into written documentation. Another researcher read and marked all written transcription for reoccurring themes. Themes were selected based on answers to the 14 questions which form the basis of the research design and the objectives of the study:

### ***Interview Questions***

1. What types of Boomers are being evangelized?
2. In what different ways are Boomer converts introduced to the Adventist faith?
3. What factors attract Boomers to the Adventist faith?
4. What amount of elapsed time occurs from the first awareness of the Adventist church until the decision by the Boomer to join?
5. What things are local churches doing successfully to reach out to and win Boomers to the Adventist faith?
6. What kinds of activities do Boomers participate in prior to being baptized or taken in on Profession of Faith?
7. What are some of the motivations, feelings and spiritual dynamics related to Boomer converts?
8. What motivates Adventist Boomers who drop out of the church to return to church attendance and participation?
9. What motivates Adventist Boomers to drop out or decrease their church attendance and participation?
10. What specific things are local churches doing that encourage returns to church?
11. What specific things are congregations doing that encourage Boomer drop out behavior?
12. Considering the demands on life among typically two-career Boomer families, how realistic is it for the church to anticipate regular attendance every Sabbath?
13. Suggestions for ways that the Adventist church can bring back the large numbers of Boomers who no longer attend church or church activities regularly.
14. What impact, if any, did the church pastor have on the decisions to join, return or leave the Adventist church?

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What follows is a composite response obtained from the focus groups and individual interviews, as well as the interviews with the pastors in the five churches.

# ***What We Learned From Focus Groups***

## ***1. The Types of Baby Boomers Being Evangelized***

Relatives of Adventist

Those who just moved from another state and are looking for church fellowship in their new location

People who know an Adventist at work

Individuals who are raised in other denominations as well as those who have no prior church background

Persons who had an addiction to drugs and/or alcohol

Individuals who marry an Adventist

Non-members who send their children to an Adventist school

## ***2. How Baby Boomer Converts are Introduced to the Adventist Faith***

One individual picked up a book on a co-worker's desk.

Several married an Adventist and went to a social activity or church service with them.

Others sent their children to an Adventist school.

Friends brought friends to church activities.

One was a non-practicing Catholic who noted she met an Adventist and "fell in love with his church."

Another was introduced to Adventism by a Bible worker.

One man had a sales competitor who shared his faith and then said, "Now you know what is right. It's up to you to do something about it."

Several were born into the Adventist faith but never made a personal commitment. Later, the time and conditions were right to make a personal choice to be baptized or rebaptized.

Pastors help people through rough times and, in the process, introduce them to the Lord of the Sabbath.

Theology students assisting at a seminar took an interest in a non-member. The students' care and example were influential in leading one to Christ.

A church elder was instrumental in answering Bible prophecy questions and referring one to a Revelation Seminar.

One learned of Adventism through the "Voice of Prophecy" Bible lessons.

Several mentioned that their first contact was at a Revelation Seminar.

A grade school teacher introduced one individual to the Lord.

One gentleman overheard a church elder giving his brother Bible studies and he joined in.

One woman read *Bible Stories* in a doctor's office, filled out the card, and agreed to take the Bible lessons from the female L.E.

One individual's first contact was through the van ministry offered in his community.

Another heard about Adventists while in a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center. A friend who was a former Adventist loaned him some Ellen White books and *Amazing Facts* tapes. Of particular help in his rehabilitation process, were the *Amazing Facts* tapes.

Two men (in two different churches) mentioned being impacted by the fact that the pastor would perform their marriage ceremony. Both were not Adventist and were marrying Adventist women. In both cases, the men developed a relationship with the pastor and later joined the church.

### **3. Factors Which Attract Baby Boomers to the Adventist Faith**

The warmth and acceptance of church members.

A friendliness that spreads from the pastor throughout the whole congregation.

A tolerant and non-judgmental attitude in the congregation.

An invitation by a church member to attend non-threatening church activities away from the church building on neutral territory.

A menu of activities that offered Boomers and their children a wide range of opportunities for involvement and Christian fellowship-from Bible study to fun and fellowship.

An emphasis on Christianity instead of Adventism.



An emphasis on a personal relationship with Christ.

Practical sermons which make sense and relate to Baby Boomer's lifestyle issues.

A pastor who sounds more like a counselor and friend than a preacher.

A stimulating Pastor's Sabbath School class.

A church music program with words to hymns that are meaningful to Baby Boomers.

A persistent Pastor who keeps extending an invitation to study and to visit the church.

People from the church who make it a point to visit and encourage visitors and new members.

A Bible study fellowship group where everyone can speak their minds and share their ideas rather than just sit and listen to what one person believes.

#### ***4. The Elapsed Time From the Baby Boomer's First Awareness of the Adventist Church Until the Decision to Join***

2 weeks	20 years
4-6 mo	20 years
6-8	6 years
8 mo	25 years
12 mo	5-6 years
1 1/2 years	6 weeks
3 years	17 years
17 years	4-6 months
7-10 months	2 years
8 years	3-4 years
less than 2 months	

#### ***5. What These Churches Do to Successfully Reach and Win Baby Boomers to the Adventist Faith***

Focus on a relationship with Christ.

The church "makes you feel forgiven no matter what you've done."

Emphasis on Christianity instead of Adventism.

People in the church "walk the talk."

A perception that "everyone is friendly."

Church members accept people "just the way they are and let Jesus and the Holy Spirit do the changing."

An absence of criticism and condemnation of other people and of one another in the congregation.

Does not enforce or advocate a dress code: "people dressed in shorts feel welcome" ... "men and women wearing jewelry feel welcome."

Regardless of baptismal status, everyone is allowed to participate and help out in church.

People sense a "warm and friendly" atmosphere the first time they attend.

No criticism of other denominations.

A variety of activities to get involved in; such as home Bible fellowship groups, miniature golf outings, choir(s) and other music groups, Sunday morning sports, 12-Step programs, drug alternative programs and other support group ministries.

The congregation is willing to accept the "rejects" of other churches.

Bible study and fellowship take place during the week.

Members invite newcomers to "come sit with us" during the church services.

Provides "under-shepherding" support to new members.

Visitation of new members and prospective members.

Members offer to help with new members' children during worship so the parents can continue to grow spiritually.

Every week someone invites the prospective/new members home to their house for Sabbath dinner.

The pastor and his relevant, spiritual sermons attract and keep new members.

Individuals are "controlled" by the Holy Spirit not by one member or a group of members' imposed "rules."

***The Baby Boomers who want to afford the house, life, and 2.2 kids and send them to school and piano lessons and have a child go to college has to work at least 48 hours a week, both parents don't see themselves as being able to afford to be involved in a church that says they can't work on Saturday.***

## **6. The Kinds of Activities Baby Boomers Participated in Prior to Being Baptized or Taken In On Profession of Faith**

Bible studies	Counseling sessions with the pastor
Small group activities	Ushering
The choir and musical programming	Helping operate the PA/sound system
Sunday morning ball games	Tape ministry
Sabbath School	Leadership team of the Pathfinder Club
The pastor's class	Helpers at Revelation Seminars
The Encounter Bible lesson series	12-step program at the church
Potluck	

## **7. The Motivations, Feelings and Spiritual Dynamics of Baby Boomer Converts**

One Boomer told the interviewer that he had to come to terms with his life and his death. He felt a need for spiritual things during that process and turned to the church for help.

A couple told how they felt "insecure" when they first started coming to church. They preferred to walk in late, sit in the back pew, and walk out early. If there had been a door they could have walked in without being greeted, they would have used it.

One individual got the feeling that the church elders were such "success stories" that she "wanted to be a member of their club."

A couple told how everyone was so friendly to them. At first they felt overwhelmed and "couldn't handle it."

A woman recovering from a failed marriage mentioned how significant it was to her to see happy couples in church who had good marriages. It gave her hope.

One concerned new member asked, "What is it that has made this church focus?" The individual was convicted that we need to talk more about Jesus.

Another individual baptized within the last five years shared that he used to be able to talk to people about Jesus. Now he doesn't know how to witness to people because he isn't sure how to witness to them about Jesus and Adventism at the same time.

One gentleman told how he kept church-hopping. His reason? "Churches always treat visitors real nice." He recounted how people at this church accepted him and his casual dress. He felt accepted, so he joined.

"The first year I was coming here," shared a recent convert, "I would get the sweats and my stomach would bother me. It was a battle just to learn to come to church. I had people problems. I didn't trust people. I didn't like being in groups. It took me five or six years to officially become a member."

"Answered prayer and evidence of the Lord's work in my life helped me to make a commitment to the Lord," shared another. "Also I learned to see Satan's hand in things."

A husband shared: "My wife and I wanted to dedicate ourselves to God before we dedicated ourselves to each other. We got baptized the day before we got married."

One woman shared that Ellen White's books motivated her to join because, as she put it, "They helped make the Bible real to me."

One individual said, "I have a habit of not really caring what I dress like . . . I used to test churches by walking in the door and seeing if I was accepted. When I came here I was very accepted."

## **8. Baby Boomers Share What They Believe the Adventist Church Can Do to Convert More Members of Their Generation**

Provide an atmosphere of "calmness" because Baby Boomers' lives are hectic and they are seeking calm.

Be sensitive to the fact that what one Boomer is comfortable with, another one may not be.

Project to others that you don't judge what is right or wrong for other people. "That's God's job."

Don't twist arms. Just ask, "Is there something missing in your life?" Invite them to come as they are to participate in some Bible fellowship.

Make Bible study fun. It is important to enable the group to share and not just have one person telling others what to think.

Accommodate children in church programming by involving them, or providing child care, or by having their own special activities. There needs to be activities for children during the worship service just like there is during evangelistic meetings.

Find out why Boomers who are former Adventists left in the first place. Then provide what was missing for them.

Don't be so bent on doctrines, rules and laws; promote Jesus.

Provide an opportunity for a sense of "community" and a feeling of belonging.

Hang in there with people. Realize it is a gradual process. Commitment is made over a period of time.

Provide a strong teen/youth program. Boomers will come if there is something for their kids.

Be a resource to fall back on when people loose their jobs or find that their family has crumbled.

Have socials and activities during the week where everyone can be casual, wear jeans, and speak up when on wants to; "opportunities where you don't have to act perfect."

Concerts in the church where members can invite their friends. "Concerts aren't as threatening as a church environment and allow people to mingle and get to know one another on an informal basis."

A message of grace.

Don't give the impression someone is not dressed appropriately; "Let them come as they are and in time they will change."

Let Baby Boomers get involved in the life of the Church as soon as possible through tape ministry, PA room, social committee, etc. Provide practical training.

Help new members find the Sabbath School class they will like and then take them to it.

Don't allow a lot of "empty pew" space. New people often sit with no one around them. This feels cold not warm!

Living the message will attract more people than anything.

The only way to bring them back is to love them back.

Community outreach programs like feeding the poor, grief recovery, divorce recovery, 12-step programs, health programs, singles programs, will help bring them in.

Mingle with people and show a sincere interest in them.

Disciple people in the church so that they can go out and win people to the Lord.

Have lot of different types of activities. "This helps bring people in."

Become more relevant to the needs of people. "We've always done it in a very traditional way. It has met the needs of past generations. We feel it should meet the needs of this generation. But it doesn't."

***I went to my 20 year reunion. Our class had 89, and in a quick poll, there were only five classmates still in the church. Most of them didn't believe what they had been taught anymore.***

A philosophy of worship. "I think if Adventist had one, it would make a real difference."  
Pray. "Without the Holy Spirit, our efforts are in vain."

The church itself is not the attracting force. "It is personal contact from an individual that does it and then that person draws them to the church."

There is a lot of bad press out there about who Adventists are. "We need to change that."

Help members learn to effectively communicate the truth.

## **9. Adventist Baby Boomers Who Have Been Church Dropouts—Why They Came Back**

Several commented that what drew them back to the Adventist church was the feeling of being truly and genuinely loved by the people and feeling the love of God through them.

Personal friendships were important to several who commented. There was an emphasis on the need to "feel a part of this church family."

One woman noted that she had married outside the church. "I got out of that and started coming back to church because I knew it would please my parents. Out of love for them I came back."

People thrive on acceptance. When they get it they come and they stay; when they don't, they leave.

Baby Boomers need to be able to question without being criticized or thrown out of the Church for doing so.

Many focus group members agreed that people join for friendship.

"My need for fellowship" was another reason for returning to the Adventist church. One in particular liked how there was linkage between Adventists and one could find "someone that knows someone you know" at most any Adventist gathering.

An Amway meeting had a church meeting on Sunday and one woman told how she felt "it was so neat" but she was convicted about the Sabbath. Reflecting on the Amway church meeting she said, "That day I said, 'I wish I could find a church like this which keeps Saturday.'" She felt that this Adventist church had come the closest to that earlier Amway experience.

"The good sermons keep coming back," was a frequent response.

There was a sense by one that "committed compassionate church leaders validate the church's message."

Being convicted about the Sabbath was significant to many who returned. Several pointed to

the fact that this church is the closest church to where they live that keeps the Sabbath. Others said that while they did not agree with the rules and some of the doctrines of the Adventist church, having once been an Adventist spoiled it for them to become a member of any other church as they could never be comfortable in a Sunday-keeping denomination.

One woman mentioned how she was a church deaconess and a leader in the Children's Sabbath School. The couple had a "traumatic experience" and the woman started blaming God. Eventually she dropped out. It was a year before the Pastor called with any concern for why she had not been attending. She started attending a new Adventist church: one of the churches studied, later when her husband became ill.

One individual told of the need to separate the message from the people before he could return. He had been hurt by people and to get away from them, left the church in the process. He returned focused on the message and not the people of the church with the message.

Boomers pointed out the importance of feeling that they were "needed" and encouraged to be involved. One put it this way, "If you are not active in ministry you'll be less likely to stay." Another shared, "It is important for my generation to have a part and be involved in the church body. That is what keeps me coming back."

People get involved at the level of their felt needs.

Individuals interact in areas of their interest and in a particular project.

Another felt, "People won't leave in the first place if they are trained for the volunteer jobs they are suited for and get involved."

## ***10. Adventist Baby Boomers Who Are (or Have Been) "Church Drop-outs" Give Reasons Why They Left***

"I am turned off by the conformity thing which appears to be more important for Adventists than people and relationships. My friends are turned off by that too. Adventists project the message that if you conform to the outward motions and do the right things that makes you Godly."

"I have a couple of friends who no longer attend. During the time they were very impressionable they were taught rules, not principles. They have thrown out the rules and don't have the principles now either."

"I went to an Adventist college and we were required to attend church so that whenever I wasn't required to go, I didn't."

"The rules just didn't wash with me."

"They had a problem with my wedding band and my husband had a problem with that. That made me pull away."

"My friend left because he got tired of the church never letting him think for himself—they just gave him rules to memorize and keep."

"I got tired of being told it was a sin to drink Coke, read novels and eat meat, divorce, or wear earrings."

"I think people leave because they are condemned by the Holy Spirit and aren't willing to change."

"I was smoking and figured I might as well do everything that goes with it."

"As kids, some of us were spiritually abused by those older than we were. We were told we were going to go to hell if we didn't do whatever they thought we should do. I was told that for wearing earrings."

"Some people are given a wrong picture of God—like he's a stern task-master keeping tabs on all you do. They leave so they don't have to hear things like that."

"Some of us had issues with the Adventist schools where we went where the principal was more concerned with the length of our skirts than helping us to change the insides of our hearts. You can't start on the outside."

"Personally, I can't live up to so high standards. There are so many of them that I can't even keep track of them all."

"I thought I was to be filled with joy and happiness when I accepted God and now it seems like a list of do's and don'ts that is the main emphasis of the Adventist church. We're perceived as a bunch of "Sadventists" over here that aren't enjoying themselves."

"I got tired of being the 'oddball' on the block. I couldn't go out Friday nights and I couldn't do anything on Saturdays until the sun went down. I was forced to go to church all through high school but when I was on my own, I didn't go."

"There were a lot of us born into SDA homes and sent to SDA schools who really weren't given a choice; it was you have to go whether you want to or not. Even in school you weren't given a choice—no comparative religion discussions or classes. All of a sudden, there are a lot of choices and you're not really prepared. You meet other people going to other churches who are great people and the things they are saying make so much sense."

"We went to church when we had the emotional and

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physical energy to do so. A lot of times, Saturday was the one time when we just didn't want to get up at all—a day to take it easy."

"A couple we know who aren't coming are too driven by their work."

"I don't have as much time as I use to."

"I never left the Church. I just quit coming! I was just too busy."

"There are a lot of things about this that's really difficult to apply in the working world especially when you have been raised with 'You should not be as the world.' You are fine if you work for the church but if you don't, you don't have the tools that prepare you for life."

"The Adventist churches we visited around here were made up of old people. We were looking for fellowship we did not find."

"We had been to this church a few years ago and quit because of the pastor they had."

"I left because I wasn't getting anything out of church."

"No one called to see why I had not been attending and then I got a letter in the mail telling me that my name had been dropped from membership."

"I realized that some people fit into certain groups and religions and, as it turns out, I don't."

"I feel that the message gets taken for granted because you can drift in and out and still hear the same messages when you come back."

"It's easier to walk away than to stay unless there is something there holding you, giving you care, love, help and ministry. If you're not being ministered to, there's no point in going."

***There are a lot of things about this church that's really difficult to apply in the working world ... You are fine if you work for the church but if you don't, you don't have the tools that prepare you for life.***

"When I first converted to Adventism, I was here a very short time and I slipped through the cracks. It took me seven years to come back and a whole lot of pain. If I had somebody that I could have called at three o'clock in the morning or whatever, that's all it would have taken to keep me. It would have also been nice to have a caring person who called to say 'I missed you'."

"I consider myself to be a Christian. I do not consider myself to be a Seventh-day Adventist any more because I don't buy the liturgy. I believe in the Sabbath, the Advent and the Second coming of Christ. That's it."

"The reason I didn't come was due to guilt—things in my life that made me feel hypocritical about being here."

"Criticism by members of one another and other people and other denominations turned me off."

"I left because I couldn't stand the 'politics'."

"When people try to do the work of the Holy Spirit and judge another person's life, it drives the person right out of the church."

"I dropped out of coming to church because of conflicts that were always happening in church on Sabbath morning. As it turned out, I also needed an 'attitude' adjustment from the Lord."

"This church is in competition with a multitude of different things to do around here. What's the attraction to God when I have everything I need?"

## ***11. Things that Each Congregation is Doing that Encourage Returning to Church***

We had quit coming but some people who found out we were Adventist invited us to dinner. We decided to give church a try again. At least now we have a place we feel comfortable coming.

They (the church) welcomed me back like an old friend.  
People are nice, kind, warm and support me.

This church has close contact with its members.

Everyone is on fire, open and honest and vulnerable to one another. There is freedom to talk about your problems.

I like this church because it doesn't matter how I am dressed.

People at this church are Christian first and SDA second.

I was drawn to the good mix of social and Bible study opportunities this church offers.

The church has a lecture series and musical program and that's wonderful.

This church has a goal of having 50 percent of its membership involved. People who come here get involved.

There is nothing more attractive to me in our services than the variety. Our format changes almost on a quarterly basis. You know that if you're not entirely comfortable with the way it is in three to six months you'll see one more change. I like that.

The reason I came back is that I think the pastor is an excellent speaker.

The church needs to work to define its music multi-generationally. What's going to work for somebody in their 60's is not necessarily going to appeal to somebody 18. I don't think the

older generation should always be the ones to get their way. I feel like we are trapped in the 50's era and its time to move the church forward in time.

I really appreciate that there is a class at this church for those married to non-Adventists. My husband is not an Adventist and the pastor was trying to meet the needs of the non-Adventist spouse. He had a class with them and explained doctrine to them. It was not as a means of converting them but so that they would better understand where the spouse who was an Adventist was coming from and what was motivating and driving them.

I would have to say that the "culture" of being an Adventist is one of the reasons I returned. You have a circle of friends with you wherever you go.

They are a praying congregation.

I felt God's presence here and that's what drew me to this particular church. I saw healing, cleansing and changed people at this church and I was one of them.

## ***12. Things that Each Congregation is Doing that Encourages Drop-outs***

We were here for weeks and nobody spoke to us. We quit coming because we felt people here were snobbish.

Immediately after we transferred our membership we were called and asked if we would like to contribute to a gift for the pastor for Christmas. Prior to becoming members when we were visiting, no one ever called. I guess we felt alienated and went away.

I got tired of being asked to sign in the guest book every time we came. We were members who transferred our membership here but no one seemed to care. I could go to the worst church in the US and if people were concerned and caring and really showed an interest in me, I'd join. We never got feedback so we quit coming.

I couldn't take the criticism I was getting for the way I did things in my work with the Pathfinders. I was just a volunteer.

I know about 20 people in this congregation and if they were the only ones here it would be an absolutely safe place to bring my friends. Unfortunately I think there are those who understand the commission of Christ to nurture baby Christians and then there are those people who believe the church is to be a sanctuary against the world. I do think those that make it an unsafe place are more vocal.

When we first came to church the pastor made us aware of stuff like make-up and jewelry. I have a real problem with that. Is God going to say, "You can't come into heaven because you wore earrings?"

There are people in this church who tell me, "If you don't do this you'll go to hell" and yet there

are people who are very loving, caring people. It is easier to hear the condemnation rather than the care.

I've seen people in ragged clothes come to church who want to be here more than anything in the world. Yet people look down on them so they don't come back. I don't think that's Christian love to look at others like that.

I had been attending the same church since I was two. I got pregnant when I was 16 and I had no support from the church people which would have helped me a lot.

I don't think we should keep track of numbers like who studied the lesson every day or how many were baptized this month. That really troubles me.

The pastor's sermons go way too long—I don't want to get out of here at 1:30. That was another reason I wasn't particularly thrilled about coming back.

You come to church and you're here 20-30 minutes and they are asking for this and that. One church I went to didn't take offerings until the end.

The length of our service is too long. I brought my girl friend and she said, "I can't sit on these pews for two hours." Boomers aren't used to coming to a two hour service. About 20 minutes for a sermon is our limit.

It wasn't this particular church but the other church I went to is where I dropped out. I switched from church school to public school. I had been real popular in the church school. But when I went to public school and came back to Sabbath School, my friends would see me but it's like they didn't know me any more. They did small talk stuff and then would go right on past me leaving me standing there. I felt like an outsider so I stopped going.

Adventists have the tendency to kind of be cliquish.

Just last Saturday my wife asked me if there was another door we could go in to where we don't have to do through this reception line. People look at us and ask, "Where have you been?" I want to tell them, "It is none of your business."

When I got on my own I questioned where not going to church would make me any less of a good person or good Christian. I wondered if I was going just out of habit or if I really was gleaning something for going. So I stopped and still do consider myself a good person.

### ***13. Considering the Demands of Life, Is It Realistic to Anticipate Going to Church Every Sabbath?***

Physically and emotionally, some Saturdays I am out to lunch and don't come.

I live a long ways from church. My husband believes in God but isn't an Adventist. We both work so much it's like sometimes we'd like a little bit of quality time together.

I find I need times to hike in nature.

Sometimes I stay home to pray.

It's hard with all the pressures during the week to loose one day of a weekend.

Three out of four Sabbaths is reasonable.

Two weeks out of four or three weeks out of five is enough.

I feel you should be there every week.

Every week is not too much to expect.

Half the time is more realistic but not necessarily reasonable.

Attendance is not mandatory to salvation.

My father is very sick and I need to drive up and visit him at least one weekend a month.

We like to visit other churches, too.

We go out of town and schedule other things.

I have to visit my Dad one week and my Aunt another so I'd have to say twice per month for me.

I'm the first to admit that there are times when I have to work . . . and I am sorry.

I have to work at least one Saturday each month. Three times a month is good for me.

Even if I don't attend regularly and live up to my Sabbath belief, I couldn't make a commitment to a Sunday church because it would be denying my belief.

## ***14. Ways that Adventist Churches Can Bring Back the Large Numbers of Baby Boomers Who No Longer Attend***

Retreats are working to attract Baby Boomers back to church.  
Small group ministries which provide that personal touch.

We are looking for a church that is relevant to our every day needs.

Assist with our stress.

Don't try to enforce/impose beliefs on other people. Show them Jesus and let them decide what to believe.

De-emphasize the perfection point of view. It makes no sense to Boomers.

Make sure you are not so isolated that you don't have an understanding about what boomers are dealing with every day in their lives. It is hard for me to understand how Adventists feel they can be an example to the world when they isolate themselves so much from people.

Realize that Boomers have a strong need for community.

One barrier to bringing my Boomer friends into the church is the perception that we have our own personal prophet and our own personal bible like the Book of Mormon. We need to change that perception.

Recognize that legalism drives away our generation; reducing and emphasis on that may bring them back.

Be intelligence-based not emotion-based.

Offer something for the kids.

Shorten the length of the worship service.

Offer two different styles of worship—one contemporary and one traditional—then let people choose which they prefer without condemnation for choosing the one they did.

Show unconditional love and acceptance. That's why this local church has experience so much growth.

Make each person feel as important as any other.

We need to treat people like we want to be treated.

Remember that people who have been in the church and have left know where to come back when it's time to come back.

We need to offer mentoring/sponsors, someone a person can look up to and has something that individual wants.

Provide a place where people can share personal things and have people listen, support, care and pray for each other.

Begin a ministry to high risk teens as well as one for battered wives.

Start a ministry for fathers who are no longer involved in the day-to-day lives of their children.

***If you are physically and emotionally exhausted when you come to the end of the week, the last thing you need is one more two-hour meeting. If it's no longer a social group or a spiritual re-fresher, it's not fulfilling so you stop going.***

Adventists need a men's ministry; I've seen it work in other denominations.

We need to go where they are and not expect them to come to where we are.

Music is the most powerful form of communication. We need to update and become more contemporary.

We are good at reaching out to other Adventists but I don't think that we have looked at what our community needs. It could totally change our focus and ministry.

We need to meet them in a completely secular setting on neutral ground.

Have the men and women in upper level administration get in touch with what a contemporary Christian is.

## ***15. Role of the Pastor in the Decision to Join, Return to, or Leave a Church***

He was persistent with us.

When he preached he was more like a friend talking with us rather than "preaching" at us.

He is a very organized and efficient person.  
The pastor is the reason I am here today.

He uses things from our everyday life as sermon illustrations. His examples are very pertinent.

He knows who we are.

The pastor is really accepting and does not appear to favor anyone over any others.

The friendliness of this church begins with the pastor and spreads throughout the congregation.

The pastor needs to teach people to be ministers, teach them to do some of the work that he cannot do himself so that when he leaves, the church doesn't fall apart.

Ministers need to model righteousness by faith and acceptance of people. The pastor of this church knows how to model.

My pastor sends personal letters to us naming certain days that he will be praying for us and asking for our requests.

My pastor is a "hands-on" pastor who is willing to try new things. He can light a fire under people. He is sincere and it isn't just a job. He has a real burden for people.

The pastor has to have follow-through and not let "I'll come visit you" be just words. I have a

friend who was told by a pastor that he would come and visit with him. He never did and my friend has never forgotten that.

I had a hard time relating to the person delivering the sermon. It wasn't a personality conflict; I just didn't feel his message was compassionate enough. His sermons weren't Christ-centered enough.

I want more Christ-centered messages, not pop psychology type of stuff.

When I look at Andrews University and the theology program at Pacific Union College I find that our pastor is the exception rather than the rule of what they are turning out. He is one of few attempting to make the church appeal to the contemporary mind. He'll probably get criticized by the conference for doing that . . .

By the time the pastor gets up to preach, we have been sitting here one hour solid. We may have stood once and knelt once otherwise we've been sitting. In my opinion, asking a Boomer to sit another hour to listen to a sermon is expecting too much.

I am a son of a pastor who feels that we have sort of created this very protected cult that our clergy grow up in and they lose touch with what the rest of us are experiencing on a daily basis. They become insulated and isolated from our world. That is what starts losing me. We go seek spiritual satisfaction elsewhere.



# ***What We Learned From Pastors of Adventist Churches Who Are Attracting Baby Boomers***

## ***1. About the Pastoral Staff and Their Role***

Our church has three full-time staff, several part-time and lots of volunteers active in leading the church. The pastor is the only conference employee.

I see myself as the primary fund-raiser, visionary articulator and motivator of staff and volunteers.

A senior pastor who makes it a point to visit the entire congregation every 4-6 weeks.

Pastors use a consensus leadership style. They believe that every person should have a voice and promote a decentralized organizational structure.

Active in the city through the Ministerial Association which has created a team spirit among denominations.

A pastor had a desire to plant a church where he would be more free to initiate innovative programming but didn't have the staff or money to do so.

A pastoral team works to support one another.

A senior pastor is determined to find out what a "long-term" pastorate is like (and has told the conference of his desire) and felt that was an important part of a ministry to Baby Boomers.

## ***2. The Worship Service***

The worship service has been de-formalized: more singing, more "meaty" sermons sometimes lasting as long as 90 minutes. Technology is freely used in the worship service e.g. videos, overhead projectors and audio. They need to have three services but lack of space allows them to only have two.

The pastor emphasizes a grace-based ministry where love, acceptance and forgiveness are valued.

The worship service is innovative with an emphasis placed on celebrating grace vs performance.

We feature two worship styles—one traditional and the other a more contemporary praise service.

The worship service is full of spiritual meaning and intensity.

The worship service is seen as unique for Adventist churches in the area.

We want all adults and children to be involved in the Communion Service.

The preaching is strong and appreciated for its very solid, spiritual, meaty content—very relevant to the felt-needs of the people and in response to their prayer requests.

There is a contemporary music group and a part-time Minister of Music. Overall we enjoy a variety of music styles.

### ***3. The Ministries Provided by the Church***

The pastor senses Boomers need affordable Christian counselors for individuals, couples, and recovering groups. The church refers out to those they trust, but having counselors on the premises if there was space would be ideal.

One church has a high school drama team and once each month sponsor a "Children's Church."

Prayer and praise are the two themes that are foremost. Pray takes place before, after, and during church meetings. There is a prayer phone line available 24 hours a day. Request are taken off the machine by a group that meets every morning. It is a very care-intensive ministry.

Programming for the church is very people-based.

There is variety in the options for Sabbath School classes.

Innovative socials, a newsletter and a monthly calendar full of activities.

One church has made an inventory of area businesses and asked owners and managers what are some of the needs of the community that the church might fill. The businesses appreciated the visits.

One church has a day care, church school and a strong ministry with children. Parents in the neighborhood drop their kids off every week.

One church sponsors mission trips and people who participate are supported with prayer, money and recognition. They have gone to Russia, Mexico and done quite a few projects in the United States.

A regular prison ministry, small groups, a food pantry and a thrift store.

One pastor encourages attendance at seminars or the use of self-taught materials so that the lay people are equipped to minister.

One church is ministry-based, not community-based.

Developing a book store in the church complex; run a retreat center away from the city, a school and a bakery/deli and wellness center.

#### **4. Factors the Pastors Feel Influence Church Growth**

A grace orientation is attractive because all of the other Adventist churches in the area are fortresses of conservatism and legalism fostering very fearful views of God.

Invite people to bring their needs and problems with them to church.

One pastor believed that three factors had increased the membership of his church: the city is growing and brought transfer growth, close proximity to an Adventist institution, a new sanctuary and church campus are an attractive drawing card.

One pastor believes that it is the music, Biblical preaching and fellowship that bring people to his church. He also feels it is the paid and volunteer staff and keep them coming back.

One church draws people who want activity, high commitment and innovation. It has a reputation for providing a "family feel."

One pastor sees his longevity (13 years in the same congregation) as one of the factors that wins Boomers.

It took a pastoral change to develop a Baby Boomer outreach program in one church.

It is the grace orientation, not the programming that has changed the atmosphere within one congregation.

An emphasis on "quality relationships and a quality link to God" is the reason why people come . . .

A strong emphasis on prayer. One pastor believes that because they pray for one another there is a reduction, if not elimination, of behavior undermining the efforts of others and it curbs criticism throughout the congregation.

One church has integrated more young people and women into church leadership positions. This congregation emphasizes a small group ministry.

One church has a high school drama team and once each month sponsors a "Children's Church."

## **5. General Comments by Pastors**

One pastor and his congregation have received some criticism for their innovation. The pastor's perspective on this is, "We don't battle with anyone. We let those who criticize know that we have a specific audience we serve, and that there are many other Adventist church they can attend that will meet their expectations—so please attend there."

One pastor knows his congregation is beginning to be a leading-edge congregation with all the pluses and minuses which that brings.

One pastor feels that his leadership requires "buy-in" by the church board. He and his associate move no faster with change than the board is ready.

One pastor wishes the world church would help provide more material on small groups and positive Adventist lifestyle topics that are less shame-oriented than what we now have. He feels the need for more material that describes the mission of the Adventist church.

One pastor feels the need for more help in planting "tons more" churches.

One pastoral staff is planning for "contemporary evangelism" which emphasizes follow-up and asked the interviewer if there was something he could put in their hands to help them through the planning stages.

One pastoral team feels that before growth can take place, they will have to be able to keep the tithe and staff for growth.

One pastoral staff would like to have conference leaders link them via computers and modems with information that would make their work more effective and efficient.

One pastoral staff feels the need to use more tithe money for training programs for members such as other churches do by sending their people to Christian Leadership Training conferences and workshops.

In one church, the pastor felt they would be able to take slow steps toward innovative ministries to attract Boomers but that they would only be able to go "so far" before being "picketed" by those opposed to change.

# ***What We Learned From Individual, In-depth Interviews with Boomer Converts***

## ***Case Study #1***

### ***She Made Friends with People at a Revelation Seminar and They Invited Her to Visit Their Church***

She was raised in a Presbyterian home. In her late teens she was introduced to some guys from an Adventist college—one of which became her husband. He had been raised in an Adventist home but “wasn’t into church at that time.”

When his job forced a relocation, she felt alone in a new city and started to seek out people at various churches. She did attend an Adventist church, but found it “too small and smothering.” She did, however learn of a Revelation Seminar that was to take place. She attended and enjoyed what was presented. She made friends there with individuals from another Adventist church in town. Upon visiting there, she felt the difference. People were more friendly but not in a pushy way. She noted that the younger people were more open and the older members more closed-minded. She felt this church had a warmer atmosphere than the other Adventist church in town.

She completed a pew card requesting Bible studies from the new pastor that she really liked. The pastoral team didn’t respond quickly to that request but she didn’t feel abandoned. Later she did study and was baptized. Her husband got more involved with the church after she was baptized. Now, both she and her husband are actively involved in the church. The pastors empower the members. She like that. She also likes the compassion, mutual respect, variety in programming, the pastoral openness and attitude that they “meet the people where they are.” This woman is very sold on her church home.

## **Case Study #2**

### **Her Adventist Co-worker Invited Her to Church; and His Trucking Friends Who Were Not Adventists Encouraged Him to Go Back to Church!**

She doesn't have an Adventist background; he does. His parents converted to Adventism when he was a year old and he attended until he was 16. He had been invited to join some of his Protestant friends in some of their church activities. When leaders of his Adventist church found out, they were very vocal in their displeasure at what he was doing. His attitude toward their protest was to say, "Forget this!" He began doing drugs with some of his friends and when they signed up to go to Viet Nam, he did too.

She got acquainted with some religious people she went to school with and helped in their Vacation Bible School. She remembers her grandfather saying he was praying for her. She studied with a priest for a while, but found his values foreign to her way of thinking. She did some experimenting with drugs, Jesus people and speaking in tongues.

These two met and became a couple. When their children were born in the mid-1980's, they started thinking about church but didn't ever get around to going.

In 1989 a co-worker asked her what was stopping her from making a commitment to Jesus. She said she had to think about that one. Weeks later she told this friend at work that she wanted Jesus in her life. The friend invited her to an Adventist church. She and her daughter attended but she missed her husband attending with her. He had no interest in attending an Adventist church! She made it a matter of prayer.

He was a truck driver. One week several drivers he had met the week before talked openly about their friendship with Jesus. That impressed him and the next Sabbath he went with his family to the Adventist church. He felt the pastor preached a sermon just for him and he committed his life again to Jesus.

Both were baptized into the little church after a Revelation Seminar in 1990. They soon found that the church they had joined was far less accepting than they first thought. After some heartbreaking experiences which they did not describe, they read a article about this church. They liked what they had heard about the pastor's perspective and so went to visit. Upon learning this, some people from the little Adventist church started "bad-mouthing" the larger church which is all the encouragement they needed to start attending on a regular basis. "We believe that since coming to this church our lives have gotten better and better."

#### **What Message Would They Like to Send to Denominational Leaders?**

- Teach us how to do small groups.
- Help us to fund group ministries in ways that we can provide day care for parents with children.
- Supply more programming for Boomers.

- Give us more information about how to transfer values to our children—infants through teens.
- Help local Churches with ways to do a lot more reclaiming of former and inactive members.
- Money is always appreciated—given to us—not taken from us.

### **Case Study #3**

## **Neighborhood Children Introduced Her to the Pathfinder Club and to Adventism**

She was interested in spiritual things as a child but had no church background. Neighbor children that she got to know invited her to go to a Pathfinder Club. She joined Pathfinders when she was 12. She really wanted to go to an Adventist school but her foster parents wouldn't let her. They became resistant of her Sabbath meetings. She made sure to do extra work during the week so to make sure she could have Sabbath off. Eventually her parents softened and during her junior and senior years in high school she attended an Adventist school.

She married an Adventist boy. They had children and after she helped put him through Loma Linda University Medical School, he left her and they divorced. During this time in her life, she became bitter about how the church related to her. The pastor where they were attending came to her and accused her of ruining the marriage. He had not talked to her before he accused her, or, had he talked to her ex-husband. This weakened her faith in the church and she decided it was time for her to sew her wild oats. She had always been "good" and tried to make everyone happy. She says, "I did everything and it was fun for awhile."

She had some friends who were supportive and invited her back to church for a weekend seminar. She was convicted that weekend of a need for change. She started visiting Adventist churches. She was invited to visit this church and was most impressed with the spiritual people in the Sabbath School. Members invited her to their home for Sabbath lunch and were "very real" with her as well as helpful and encouraging.

She attended a camp meeting and, in her vulnerable state, was taken in by the "far-right conservatives" that were there. After camp meeting she did not return to this church but joined the conservative group's fellowship. She was impressed with their knowledge of Scripture and Ellen White. She met a man there who seemed very committed and religious. They married. Later she found out that he was a "religious addict." She says, "I now see the mind control that was happening and that I was taken in by." The group fell apart and he began living the life she had once lived. She knew she needed to get back into a healthy environment so went back to the Sabbath School class at this church.

Once again she met up with the couple in the class that had been so friendly to her. There was a new pastor and he was very caring. She names the couple in the Sabbath School Class and the pastor as her key reason for her return and baptism into the Adventist church. She is active in the singles and small groups ministries.

### ***What Message Would She Like to Send to Denominational Leaders?***

- We need help in training small group, Sabbath School, and support group leaders.
- We need to understand how to bring quality to our meetings.
- We need to know how to take a social event and bring it to a spiritual experience.
- We need more sermons and guest speakers who talk about practical things.
- We need to learn how to be more warm and genuine.

### ***Case Study #4 Her Children Introduced Her to Adventism***

After one unplanned pregnancy and two failed marriages, she told how she really "hit a wall." Her children were Adventists and invited her to their church. She was baptized and married someone in the congregation who was a former Adventist. The Pastor's sermons had convinced her new husband to return to Adventism and he was rebaptized in this church. They both are especially grateful that their pastor "preaches the Word." His challenging and inspiring sermons keep them coming back. The support of their small group encourages them.



# ***What We Learned From Those Who Were Once Members and No Longer Attend Church***

## ***Case Study #5***

### ***She Was Raised Adventist and He a Jew. Getting "Shot Down" Turned Them Off***

She was raised in what she termed, a "Jerusalem Adventist home." All the rules were kept to the letter of the law. Sabbaths depressed her.

He was raised Jewish and attended the Adventist academy in their home town because his parents didn't want to send him away to school. He received some literature from the Voice of Prophecy. He like it and this started him on what he calls "my religious research."

As a couple, they have dabbled with the Adventist church over the years. The legalism, ethnocentrism, lifestyle fixation and pressure to be perfect has been "too much for us." They also don't agree with the concept of the Adventist church being the remnant church.

They did visit this church and attended for awhile. He was a deacon and she helped in the nursery. They tried to help the church develop innovative programs for children but, "We got shot down. We don't feel that children should be told it is a sin if they do not sit perfectly quiet in church." The couple are not active in the church any more.

### ***What Message Would She Like to Send to Denominational Leaders?***

- Sabbath School is boring, please fix it.
- Start more care groups and don't cut their momentum once started.
- Add a lot of warmth to every Adventist church across the country.
- "We want to be needed."

## **Case Study #6**

### **They Feel a General Dissatisfaction With "Church People."**

She was born into the church and attended regularly until college. He was converted into the church through a Revelation Seminar. He had been a Christian but not a regular church attender until after the seminar. Since academy, she has resisted how strictly Adventists keep the Sabbath, how formal the worship services are and that there is no room for innovation. There is an emphasis on "externals" rather than a relationship with God. So church became boring, formal, a fashion show, a time to "display your status in society" and she wants no part of it. He fully admits he has followed her lead regarding church.

When they moved to their current home, they did shop around for churches looking for peers to make friends with. They found most of the Adventist churches to be "near death" with none of their peer group in attendance. They did try one Adventist church for a while and did discover some from their age group. They found making friends "useless" and gradually attended less and less. They enjoyed "mountain church" or a visit to "box springs" or just taking a day off. They say their lives are very busy and they like "a day of rest." They did visit this church again after a new pastor came. They still found the same issues: pettiness over applause in church, jewelry, who slighted whom, etc. They feel a general dissatisfaction with "church people." They are also childless and they sense that among their age group the congregation is primarily couples with children.

#### **What Message Would You Like to Send to Denominational Leaders?**

- Recognize that people aren't saved by works (legalism) they are saved by God's grace.
- Don't put so much emphasis on Ellen White's writings.
- Realize that our lives are difficult. We don't need more condemnation at church.
- Quit passing out guilt.
- Give us more information and let us learn to make our own decisions instead of leaders who think they need to make them for us.
- We Boomers need to know how to take care of ourselves as we age.
- Recognize that for most of us, church is not fun. Allow more informality.
- Make sermons interesting, not so dull.
- Pastors should do what the people want, and not vice versa.
- Allow non-clergy professionals to lead the church.
- Use drama—it gets right to the heart of things.

## **Case Study #7**

### **"Get The Woman Off Her Back " and She'll Return!"**

As a result of an Adventist book her physician gave her and the treatment she received in an Adventist hospital, she converted to the Adventist faith. She was baptized and later met a single man at church. They dated and got married. They had a problem with religious addiction in their marriage. He had a double life.

Her pastor at that time was from a country where a man's wife is to be submissive to her husband. With the pastor's advice, and his own abusive tendencies, her husband began to physically abuse her. She sought help in women's shelters to avoid his abusive behaviors. The counselors helped her realize that her husband's actions were encouraged by the pastor's attitude. When she would be beaten by him, she would blame the pastor. She discounted her association with the church because of this.

Approximately five years later, another Adventist pastor invited her to attend another Adventist church in her area. She did and got involved until she met a woman with whom she has had conflict which she has not been able to resolve. She has been worn down again and has resigned her church responsibilities. She feels that she hasn't received the help necessary to help her resolve the issue.

### ***What Would Have to Happen for Her to Become a Regular Attender Again?***

- "Get this woman off my back!"

### ***What Message Would She Like to Send to Denominational Leaders?***

- Cut the politics and the power monopoly that happens in local churches.
- Provide a lot of awareness and education about abusive families and push to have that diminished in the church.

## ***Case Study #8 She Perceives that People in this Adventist Church Are Not In Touch With Real Life Issues.***

She is the daughter of an Adventist minister. She was born into the Adventist faith. She was the "good little girl" from her early days right on through college and helped her husband through school. She was in music groups and gave little talks at Weeks of Prayer.

When her husband announced that he was leaving her for someone else, she became active in the self-actualization movement. In her disillusionment, she latched onto their point of view. She attends a therapy group where they talk about religious abuse. She is now enjoying the "teenage years I never knew."

She has attended this church off and on but feels the people here are "out of touch with real life issues." She admits that she is a cynic and has not found any compelling reason to change. She has no friends in the church, is not close to her family (who are still active members), and she is not close to any of her friends from academy or college.

### ***What Message Would She Like to Send to Denominational Leaders?***

- Get your heads out of the sand.
- Deal with real issues.
- Support people who are hurting and don't stab them in the back when they are down.
- Realize that there are many points of view and many good people in this world; Adventist are not the only ones!

### ***Case Study #9 When She Stopped Attending, Only One or Two People Called.***

She attended an Adventist church from the time she was six until she was 28, but was never baptized. Because of a job transfer she moved and attended a church where she felt involved, where she knew people, where she felt a sense of belonging. She was active for a year or two but slowly began to start feeling like an outsider. All the young people were getting married and she felt left out. She feels that the church doesn't accept that there are changes in society. She stopped attending and only received one or maybe two calls of concern.

### ***What Would Attract Her Back?***

- Maybe a singles program.
- Maybe a small group where she could connect with people who have a similar interest.
- A relaxed, non-judgmental environment.

### ***What Message Would She Like to Send to Denominational Leaders?***

- Allow diversity in points of view.
- Address members and visitors as individuals.
- Become relevant. Accept that the world has changed.
- Take women's issues seriously.

### ***Case Study #10 She Is Not Willing to Be Controlled (or Have Her Family Be Controlled) By Other People.***

This couple was converted to Adventism twelve years ago as a result of the It Is Written television ministry. Someone from the local church came with Bible lessons to study with them. They attended for 10 years. Because of a job transfer, they transferred to this church. They are not sure if it is the church's fault or their's but they haven't been actively attending for quite some time.

They have good memories of the other Adventist church. At the other church the health programming, marriage seminars, child care and all the other programs were better. At this church the couple feel like you are either "part of the in-group or you're watching from the outside." Other factors which have discouraged them from attending include the following: "Not long after we came to the church, the pastor's wife told our daughter that it was wrong for her to get braces on her teeth! We were also told that if we sat down to eat a meal with even clean meat we shouldn't ask grace over the meal because God wouldn't bless it. At a beach outing we attended, all the women wore dresses and scornfully said to my daughter, 'You're not going to wear that swimsuit, are you?' Our girls have become increasingly uncomfortable with the church, and so have we." The couple feel like all the right choices they had been making for their family to be "right with Adventism" were somehow now all wrong with the church people.

They are a close family and the girls are in public school. The family is struggling as they want to support their girls in their activities and meet their friends. They feel caught between keeping the Sabbath in the traditional way with no "secular" activities or "break the Sabbath" to do activities with their girls and friends.

### ***What Would Attract Them Back?***

- They feel people are closed-minded at this church so it would be difficult for them to return under those circumstances.
- They do not have any "true" friends here.
- The wife commented, "What would have to change in me to return to this church is that I would have to be willing to be controlled by other people, and I don't want that."
- The couple firmly believe in the teachings of the Adventist church and couldn't join a church of any other denomination.

### ***What Message Would They Like to Send to Denominational Leaders?***

- Drop the traditions that push people out. People who are Christians should be closer to the Lord and should therefore love unconditionally."
- "Teenagers are looking for love and acceptance, not criticism and rules."
- "Keep the health principles, but present them in contemporary ways."

# ***What We Learned From Those Who Had Dropped Out and Returned***

## ***Case Study #11***

### ***The Reputation of This Congregation for Innovation, Acceptance, and Leadership Style Won Him Back to Active Attendance.***

He was baptized into the Adventist church and is related to Ellen and James White. During college "apathy" and "lack of reverence for church" impacted him. As he tells it, "Church was a non-event for me."

He finished school, married, had kids and taught in public schools. After 20 years away from Adventism, he started attending this church because of its reputation for innovation, acceptance and an open leadership style. He sensed that the members wanted and needed him and his family.

People encourage one another. The congregation realizes that they are all "going through similar stuff." What impresses him? "They call, they care, they accept you. They invite you to become an active leader but you don't feel guilty if you can't." He likes the informal, high-touch feel of the church which has a worship format that changes frequently. He couldn't say enough good about this Adventist church that has won him back to active attendance.

## ***Case Study #12***

### ***An Adventist Church Which Attracts "All the Losers" Brought Her Back.***

She grew up in the Adventist church. She went to Adventist elementary schools and started academy. While there she became disillusioned with the way the teachers insisted the students keep so many rules. They she would see the same teachers doing some of the things that the students were told not to do. It didn't make sense to her.

Eventually she got kicked out of academy for what she called "being a teenager." She was later disfellowshipped from the church for smoking. Later, she got pregnant. She did not go to

church much after that. No one called or wrote to say that she was missed. It was her perception that no one cared. One of her boarding academy teachers did keep in touch with her from time to time. He would call and express confidence in her. She hung on to that acceptance and genuine care throughout her troubled years. All through this time she kept believing in the Sabbath and continued to pray.

She took her GED at age 18 because her parents would not allow her to go to any public school. She classified her parents as "very traditional Adventists." She pointed out that whatever the church's "party line" was, her parents kept it and insisted that their children did also.

At the time of the interview, she had been through five failed marriages and insists that she has tried everything. During her last marriage she heard about another church. It's reputation in town was that it was progressive, that it had "rock and roll music" and that "all the losers were going there." She figured that fit her description so she went. She found the love that had been missing in her life—unconditional love. She liked the music, the reverence, the relationships she built there. The sermons were insightful to her.

Before she moved to another state, she inquired at her church to see if there were any Adventist churches like it in the new area. Someone knew about this church and she attended as soon as she moved. She found the people to be very loving, the sermons excellent, but she missed the style of music from the other church. She got involved in soul-winning activities and has benefited by the ministry of those who introduce friends to friends at this church. She appreciates that "being real" is important here. She senses that the friendliness of the people has lasted. The people are not judgmental. They talk about the goodness of Jesus, not about one another or church politics. "This church" she says, "is my family. These people are my only support."

### **Case Study #13**

## ***A Baby Shower Given to This Single Mom by Her Church Brought Her Back.***

She was baptized into the Adventist church at age 12. As she put it, "Everyone my age was doing it." After she left college, she attended church less and less. She attributed the decline in attendance to the experience she had in college to the following reasons: The local church was cold. The pastor was not personable. His sermons were dry. Students didn't like him. Some community people did—that's why he stayed.

Eventually she didn't read the Bible, didn't pray, didn't socialize with church people. She realized she needed God in her life but she didn't know how to have a personal faith. No one had ever showed her how. About this time she got into a bad relationship and "all she got out of it was pregnant." Just before her boy was born, the Adventist members at her home church had a baby shower for her. She was shocked. She found she had a lot in common with other new mothers.

She started taking her new son to Sabbath School. The church has a pastor she really likes who encouraged her to read her Bible two times a day for two weeks. she said, "Those two weeks

gave me a new perspective on my life; "a miracle happened to me." I haven't been the same since." Although she would prefer to be in a smaller congregation, she is tied into this church now because of the good preaching and the care of her Sabbath School class teachers who have taken a real interest in her.

### ***What Message Would She Like to Send to Denominational Leaders?***

- Help the Sabbath School teachers to give more thought-provoking presentations.
- Keep the church "simple."
- Make fewer demands on your pastors. "They have less and less time for the local church because of the Conference demands placed on them."

## ***Case Study #14 A Comparative Religion Class in a Community College Brought Her Back.***

She was raised an Adventist, went to Seventh-day Adventist schools, and began attending church less and less in college. Her parents divorced and the pain that she experienced from that event, made her think about her need of God. She started thinking about the Adventist church—thinking that "maybe it was okay." She believed that involvement in a small church and observance of the Sabbath was important even though she didn't attend regularly. She also had gone back to college and was attending one in her community.

Her comparative religion professor challenged her belief in the Bible and the writings of Ellen White in front of the class. This event shook her up and made her study what she believed and why! She found this Adventist congregation and returned to a warm church that "wants the young people back." She is now an active member and key leader in this congregation.

### ***What Message Would She Like to Send to Denominational Leaders?***

- Encourage acceptance and forgiveness, not judgment.
- Promote fellowship. "People are looking for bonding with other Christians, not TV personalities."
- Make sure church is functional and genuine.
- Offer more than one worship service at a church so that if one type is offensive to someone, the other one may not be.
- Educate people on how to help other people. People want to help but really don't know how to.
- Be real with the people you lead. Allow innovation, and be humble.
- Attitude is more important than activities.



## **Case Study #15**

### ***An Accepting Atmosphere in a Congregation with Contemporary Programming Brought Them Back.***

She had been raised an Adventist. He had not attended any church during his childhood. She dropped out of the Adventist church after her academy graduation when she married. She started missing church and got involved in the local Pathfinder Club. She convinced her husband to help. She had a very positive experience and fond memories of being a Pathfinder when she was a child.

She and her husband enjoyed working with the kids but found the information offered the children to be as she puts it, "way out of touch, full of denial, and non-functional."

The couple asked the conference youth department for assistance with this problem and when they pressed a little were told they were "way out of line." They were also dumped on by the parents and felt little support from the pastors. They hit what they called "burnout" and quit helping.

The couple continued to attend church but they felt that they were in an "us vs them" atmosphere. They were never made to feel a part of the church family. Even when the husband's father died of cancer, none of the members nor any pastor contacted them (they were aware of the illness and death). Three months after this man's father died, the Adventist pastor showed up wanting to talk to them about the death. This made them feel hostile to him. They wondered where he had been when they needed him? They quit attending.

Then they heard about this Adventist church. When they visited they found a very accepting atmosphere with contemporary programming. They were impressed that the church used leadership training from other denominations. The people were sincere, they felt the integrity of the leadership and felt the unconditional love from everyone. She especially like the leadership opportunities that she felt were equally available to anyone who wanted to participate. They both liked the family counseling services and seminars offered by the church. They are beginning to have that family feel they need in a church congregation.

#### ***What Message Would They Like to Send to Denominational Leaders?***

- Update the Pathfinder curriculum!
- Value volunteers just as much or more than paid employees.
- Allow locally funded leadership to be without Conference control.
- Provide more training and resources to people at the local level so they can be specifically qualified for what they do for the church.
- Follow through with the questions we raise—don't pass us off just because we are volunteers.
- Quit spending money on yourselves with large expensive office buildings, racquetball courts, lots of unneeded trips, etc.
- Quit mismanaging our money.
- Tell us your mission statement (Conference and Union)

- They would like to know, "Conference, Union, Division, General Conference leadership—Are you really ready to change?"
- Do a sociological and longitudinal study that answers the questions—What really happened to the Baby Boomers and church? If we learned what went wrong with the Boomers, maybe we could apply that to the Baby Buster and Echo generations.
- Do a family study to find out: What are our Adventist family values? What are the important things that happen in family? What are we learning about abuse in the Adventist church?

## ***Questions the Interviewees Would Like to Know the Answer to:***

Why are Boomers not very spiritual?

Why are Boomers more driven to be successful than other generations?

Why is the Adventist church stuck?

What is the Adventist church so apathetic?

Why isn't the church more spiritual?

How long should a sermon be? How long is too long?

What is the large vision for Adventism? "That is not clear to us at the local level. If we had a clear vision, we would then find a way to fit into it as local churches."

We need more materials on small groups and spiritual gifts as ways of organizing the church.

Can you remember a time in your developing years when you felt God was close to you—that God was trustworthy, really your friend? What took that feeling away?