

**Attitudes and Experience
with Selected Periodicals
in the
Seventh-day Adventist Church
in North America:
An Exploratory Study**

September 2014



Introduction

An exploratory study of the attitudes of local church leaders in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America was conducted over the past month regarding a number of periodicals that have been published by the Review & Herald Publishing Association. A total of 128 telephone interviews were completed and this is a report on the findings from those interviews.

The individuals interviewed were identified from subscription lists supplied by the publisher and available conference directories. In most cases these are identified leaders who would be considered key users of the periodicals. The individuals were not selected randomly and this is a qualitative research model. Although some information regarding the proportions related to various attitudes are included in this report, these data cannot be used as a probability survey to estimate the overall percentages of the responses across the entire population. That will require further research with larger samples.

This study was conducted by the Center for Creative Ministry under contract with the Office of Strategic Planning, Research and Assessment of the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (NAD). The interviews reported here were conducted by staff and associates of the Center for Creative Ministry under the supervision of Nancy Canwell, project coordinator. Additional research is being conducted on the same topic by the Institute of Church Ministry at Andrews University, also under contract with the NAD. We appreciate the cooperation of the Institute staff.

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Guide Magazine

A total of 21 interviews were completed with Junior Division leaders, children's ministries coordinators, and Sabbath School superintendents across North America. Two Pathfinder Club directors were included and one associate pastor who specializes in family and children's ministries in a large congregation. Although this is a qualitative research project, not quantitative, the interviews included a diverse group representative of the ethnic, gender, geographic and educational profile of lay leaders across the NAD.

Use of Guide Magazine

All of the local churches interviewed, except two, distribute *Guide* to the children who attend the Junior Division. One church is unhappy. The leader said that shipments had stopped coming to the church and blamed it on the fact that the Adventist Book Center in that conference was closed down recently and the delivery of Sabbath School materials disrupted.

One church is using My Bible First, an alternative curriculum published by an independent Adventist publisher. The leader said that she feels that the NAD materials (*Guide* and the Junior quarterly) "is shallow, entertainment driven" and said that this church uses the alternative materials "because it is in the Bible [and] follows the Bible story."

Evaluation of Guide Magazine

All of the local leaders interviewed (with the exception of the one noted above) say that *Guide* is helpful. There is generally a very positive response to this publication. Several of the leaders interviewed said that they "love the stories" and the children "read the stories ... like the stories." Many stated that older young people and adults like the stories. "My 16 and 17-year-old sons read it," said one woman. Another said that the children in her Junior class ask for extra copies. Yet another reported that she gives copies to the children in her neighborhood who are not church members. And another said that families who cannot attend Sabbath School stop by after church service to get copies to take home.

Many of the leaders interviewed also mentioned the back page feature which includes brief "oddball facts" and "current, secular items." One man said, "the kids love the facts on the back."

"Our family loves *Guide*," said a 48-year-old woman with three children, ages 3, 13 and 16, who had been the leader of the Junior Division in her local church and recently became the youth leader. "It has good stories, some continued week by week. The tidbits of information on the back page are a favorite. It is good for the age group, but we all, the whole family, enjoy it!"

“I know the children [in my group] value it,” said a 59-year-old woman who is the leader of the Junior Division in her local church. “They look forward to the stories and puzzles. I save old copies and use them for spur-of-the-moment needs during evangelistic meetings when I need to find activities for the kids.”

“I would be sorry to see it diminished in any way,” said a 50-year-old woman who is the co-leader of the Junior Division in her local church. “I hope *Guide* can weather the financial storms that most, if not all publications seem to be going through these days.”

What Would You Add to Guide?

Almost all of the leaders interviewed said that “they do a great job” or made other affirmative comments. “Don’t change anything” was the most common response. Several said that “our youth should be a bigger priority” and asked that if costs need to be reduced, do not cut the budget for materials for children and youth.

Several of the individuals interviewed asked that the graphics of *Guide* be updated. “Use photography instead of drawings,” said one Junior Division leader. Another leader suggested “graphics like the glossy comics available in bookstores,” referring to what is known as “graphic novels” in the publishing world.

A 43-year-old Junior Division leader with a college degree said the children in her group “enjoy the trivia [but] what I have missed is the depth. I feel like Junior Division is the last shot before they are grown up and there could be more Bible-based content. ... They can get stories elsewhere.”

Alternative Media

Only one person suggested moving *Guide* to an online publication. Half of the leaders interviewed stated that it is important to continue to publish the magazine on paper, in part because “children read it during church” and take it home. The majority said that *Guide* should be published both on paper and on line in a computerized format.

Children come to Sabbath School “with iPhones and tablet computers” and *Guide* “needs more electronic media formats; its their world,” said a 44-year-old youth pastor with three kids of his own, ages 3, 14 and 16. “I see paper versions of *Guide* left on the chairs.” He encourages the Sabbath School teachers to “try to include *Guide* content in the class and get the students interested in it.” He suggests, “put *Guide* into an app so his leaders can project content onto the large screen in the class room.”

The magazine should “acknowledge tech,” said a 49-year-old leader of Junior-Earliteen division with to children of her own, ages 8 and 14. “Have a section in *Guide* that would direct kids to a blog online, something that draws them to it. Include music on line, music page that they could participate in.”

Suggestions for the Editor

Specific suggestions made by individuals interviewed: (1) Include “more games and puzzles.” (2) The magazine “needs to be more interactive, using social media” and with “a telephone prayer line.” (3) “Make it practical.” (4) Include “skits and projects to do.” (5) The lesson “needs more substance.” (6) Have a regular section on “how to be close to God.” (7) “Maybe one more activity for kids to do in church during the sermon—a boredom buster—something to draw, like a map.” (8) “Some topics may be too mature for the younger readers, such as pornography, sex, and suicide. I have heard feedback from parents.” (9) “Consider soliciting stories from kids so they can be part of it.”

“Times change,” said a 68-year-old Sabbath School superintendent, an immigrant from the Caribbean with only a high school diploma. “Stories are good, but we need to do something besides read. We need to connect. Have not so many stories and include features to connect [children] with others. ... social media ... but it has to be practical.”

Insight Magazine

A total of 21 interviews were completed with youth workers across North America, including local church youth Sabbath School leaders, youth pastors and other adult leaders of ministries for teens. Although this is qualitative research using in-depth interviews, the 21 individuals included a diverse range of ethnicity, gender, geography and age groups representative of the adult membership in the North American Division.

Use of Insight Magazine

Nearly two out of three of the youth leaders interviewed said that their local church does not currently distribute *Insight* each Sabbath to the young people who attend Sabbath School. This includes churches who have canceled their subscription and churches where the magazines are still being shipped, but the leaders no longer actually hand it out. Some of these leaders say that they personally read *Insight* and use the *Insight Youth Resource* magazine, and some even occasionally use materials out of both publications in their Sabbath School program.

Why have they stopped distributing Insight magazine to the youth? Half of those who reported they no longer distribute the magazine say it is because the teens in their church are not reading it when it is handed out. “They leave it in the room ... on the chairs ... on the floor ... in the trash can,” were the reports of several leaders.

“We are in an age gap in our church,” one leader said. “Right now we don’t have anyone in the teen years, so we have stopped having a youth Sabbath School. There are younger children coming along and we had a good group of teens up until last year when they all left for boarding academy or college.”

“We create our own materials,” said another leader. Another said that his group was using “printed Bible lessons” but did not identify the source. “We need it in Spanish,” said another. (This explanation is complicated. Most teenagers from Hispanic families speak and read English, but often the adult leaders in Hispanic congregations refuse to use English materials.)

“Our teens were not challenged by the lessons,” said a 30-year-old assistant youth pastor. (Not a denominational employee; a local volunteer.) “The themes in the magazine are redundant and not relevant. We use the Collegiate Quarterly and sometimes the Adult Quarterly.”

“It is too expensive for a magazine that lacks content and the kids don’t care about it,” said a pastor who sometimes leads the youth Sabbath School in his church. “You should get youth speakers who already have a strong following among youth to write and appear online for *Insight*.”

Many of the leaders interviewed mentioned many problems with *Insight* and many suggestions for changes. (See below.) One said, “it is simply towing the party line and our teens are in real need.” There is more negative response to this publication than any other included in this study.

Evaluation of Insight Magazine

Twelve of the leaders said that *Insight* is helpful, while six said it is not and three said both, clearly undecided. Two of the leaders said “our kids read it and take it home [and] the articles are relevant to them.” Three of the leaders said “the articles are not relevant for our youth [and] change is needed.” Another leader said, the teens in her group “look through it quickly and discard it; we can’t force them to read it.” Another reported that in his group “only two or 35 teens take it home.”

Some who reported that most of their teens do not read the magazine were wistful about it. “Teens can find hope in it,” one woman said. “Everyone like stories,” said a man. “The adult leaders should share the stories up front,” said another man. “Kids don’t read anything today.”

Only one of the leaders interviewed reported problems with the delivery of *Insight* magazine. All the others said that it comes regularly and on time.

What Would You Like to See Added?

The most common response to this question was urging new online elements for *Insight*. The majority asked for than app be developed so that *Insight* magazine can be accessed on smart phones, tablet computers, etc., as well as the Web. “It lacks an online community,” said one leader. “It must be techie advanced,” said another. Other suggested adding a Facebook page and an 800 number where teen readers can call and talk personally with a youth pastor or counselor. “Keep up with the times and have a strong social media network,” suggested a pastor.

Several of the leaders asked for more personal stories by teens or “testimonies” by teens, as well as mission stories about teens involved in mission trips and similar projects. Others asked for a “question and answer” column “for teens and their issues” and one that would take “a broader approach” than similar material published in the past. Others said that *Insight* should “tackle current issues in the church and in the world,” including “issues being discussed by adult Adventists such as creation.” Other asked for “new layout” and a “more contemporary ... more visual” look.

Three of the leaders interviewed suggested that the weekly lessons be redesigned and repackaged. One specifically suggested that they need to be put into the format of a daily devotional thought distributed online, including Twitter and similar media.

Other suggestions: (1) writing contests, (2) younger writers, (3) more Bible games, (4) interviews with famous people, (5) movie reviews, and (6) PowerPoint files for the leaders and teachers to use.

Alternative Media

One in four of the leaders interviewed said they would prefer that *Insight* be published on line or in PDF, while only one individual expressed a preference for paper. Half of the leaders interviewed said it should be published in both paper and electronic formats at the same time.

Suggestions for the Editor

One person in each case suggested: (1) Address real teen issues, not do's and don'ts. (2) Have articles on peer pressure and how to handle it. (3) Make it practical. (4) Include stronger biblical articles.

The editor "must leave his bubble and connect with teens who are on the edge of leaving the church," said a 60-year-old leader of a youth Sabbath School division with a graduate degree. "It needs to upgrade its relevancy. It should partner with the NAD Youth Department."

"The online magazine is very cluttered," stated a 57-year-old pastor who has served as a youth director in the past and has young adult children. "The articles and columns are way too long. The online magazine is not reader friendly. Take a survey of youth and ask them what they want in the magazine."

A 45-year-old youth pastor complained about the way the ordering of the magazine is handled. "Whenever we want to change our subscription to more or less copies, it takes up to six months," he said. (This relates to the current method used for the ordering of Sabbath School materials through Adventist Book Centers.) He also said, "there is no continuity from week to week" in the magazine and strongly suggested that the NAD should "make it an online resource" instead of continuing to publish it on paper.

Kid's Ministries Magazine

Using conference directories, telephone interviews were conducted with 20 children's ministries leaders across North America. Only a third of them were currently receiving *Kid's Ministries* magazine, although more of them had seen it in the past.

Positive Evaluation, Lack of Promotion

Of those who do currently receive it regularly, most find it "helpful" with "good ideas." One leader said she likes the activities pages and another said that especially appreciated the information about prevent sexual abuse of children.

One in four of the individuals interviewed said they are the Children's Ministries Coordinator for their local church and they have never heard of this publication. Most asked for a sample copy. One said that there needs to be a way that new leaders are told about all of the available resources and can see samples of them; perhaps a "new leaders packet" needs to be sent each year to each local church in the North American Division.

One leader said that it come in the past but when a new leader was appointed last year, it was dropped because that individual thought it was not practical. Now, the interviewee is the leader and had not yet found out how to get the subscription reinstated. This is further evidence of how targeted communication is needed in order to assure that local leaders know about resource publications from the NAD.

Two people said that they are from a small church, one with no regular children in attendance and the other with very few children and no adults willing to lead out in a children's class. There is a need for a publication that specifically addresses the needs of small churches with a handful of children from a wide range of ages; how to lead a multi-age Sabbath School for a small group of children.

Distribution and Cost Issues

Two of the leaders interviewed reported that *Kid's Ministries* magazine does not arrive regularly and on time. It is unclear if this is a problem from the publishing house or an internal problem in the local church in terms of how materials are received, unpacked and distributed.

Two individuals suggested that the price should be decreased. One said that it is too expensive for small churches with limited funds. The other said she was not willing to ask her local church to spend money on this resource and felt she could get along without it.

Alternative Media

The majority would like *Kid's Ministries* magazine to be distributed both on paper and on line via the Web. Smaller numbers prefer only paper or only online distribution. All together, five out of seven leaders interviewed would like to see it distributed online.

Competition

Just one of the 20 individuals interviewed report that her local church is using resources from a source other than the regular publishers of the NAD. Her church uses "materials from outside Chattanooga" because the "regular materials are too watered down." The identity of the materials this church is using is not entirely clear. Perhaps it is the Kids in Discipleship materials which were initially developed at the Collegedale Church and are not intended to replace the regular materials for Sabbath School. Perhaps it is some other, independent publisher.

Another individual from a different church told the interviewer that her local church had returned to the denomination's official materials for children's Sabbath School and are now happy with them, although in the past some had decided to use alternative materials. The conflict over the new curriculum may be in decline, although it is not entirely gone.

Message Magazine

A total of 20 individuals were interviewed from a list of subscribers to *Message* magazine. A total of 19 of these were members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America and one was a Baptist who is regular reader.

Involved with Outreach Periodicals

A total of 18 of the 19 Adventists said that they are involved with *Message* magazine and other outreach activities in their local church. All of these are sponsors of gift subscriptions and many are serving as Personal Ministries Leader in their local church. All of them said that their local church has an annual campaign for *Message*.

Asked what would make *Message* magazine more effective in their local church, two out of three stated that the annual campaign works fine for their congregation and results in hundreds of subscriptions. A third said there is a need for more or better promotion and one individual said there is a need for a better pricing policy.

Evaluation of Message Magazine

Every person interviewed gave *Message* magazine an excellent rating and find it a helpful resource. Many said it was “very” helpful and one individual said that “many have come in” to their church over the years because of this periodical. Another person said it “feels like it has changed recently, geared to non-Adventists more, fed me spiritually more. It was helpful before, but the change in focus is good.” Another individual said she “likes the new editor” and the periodical “getting more contemporary and friendly to non-Adventists. I really like it!” she said, despite the fact that she is 80 years of age.

Asked if what they would like to see added to *Message*, half the individuals interviewed said that it is excellent as it is and nothing new needs to be added. Three mentioned that they like the fact that *Message* publishes recipes and one man was enthusiastic about the Bible study section and the editorials.

A few suggestions were made by one person in each case: (1) “More readable layout.” (2) “Support for blacks within Adventism and their anxiety about race and how to relate positively toward it.” (3) “Articles for men specifically.” (4) Address issues such as the Hobby Lobby case, persecuted Christians and similar right-wing political issues.

Future of Message Magazine

Every person interviewed indicated that “absolutely, without question” *Message* magazine should continue to be published. They favored producing *Message* on paper over on line or in PDF by a margin of six to one. But the majority would prefer to see it

published in both paper and online formats. Many said this was necessary to attract a younger readership.

Several individuals brought up the need for the magazine to be more multicultural or to have a promotional strategy that includes multicultural congregations. No one wanted *Message* to lose its historic focus on the African American community, but a growing number of Adventist congregations are multicultural and include a significant percentage of blacks although they are not majority African American. About one in five local churches in the North American Division fall into this category and there are an uncounted number of dominantly African American congregations that are not affiliated with the Regional Conferences as well as historically white congregations located in what have become black or multicultural communities. *Message* magazine is an important tool of the NAD that should be used in these settings.

One person suggested that there be a special discount for a bundle of Adventist periodicals. In other words, a person could subscribe to three, four, five or more of the journals published in the NAD at a package price that would be cheaper than simply adding the regular subscriptions of the bundle of magazines.

Another person told the interviewer, "Please don't close our publishing houses." There are a percentage of members in the NAD who are very loyal to the heritage of publishing ministry in the denomination.

Views of a Baptist Subscriber

One of the 20 interviews was with a 64-year-old male in Virginia who is an active member of a Baptist church in Richmond, attending two services each Sunday. He said that he has been "getting it for years" and in recent years has paid for his subscription, but he thinks it got started through a "gift subscription from Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church."

He finds the magazine "concise and relevant with something for everyone." He said that "it helps with Bible study." He said the subscription price is "very reasonable." He believes that *Message* "absolutely, without question" should "continue to be published." He prefers it on paper, rather than online, although he works on a computer all day each work day. "I like to sit back with a magazine and relax and read." He is an African American with a college degree.

Sabbath School Toolbox

The interviewers exhausted all of the available lists and could only find six Sabbath School superintendents in local churches who had ever heard of this publication and were willing to answer questions about it. This report is a summary of six interviews including five individuals who are currently the Sabbath School superintendent in their local churches and one man who recently became an elder, but was the Sabbath School superintendent earlier in the year.

Do You See Sabbath School Toolbox Regularly?

Two of the six people interviewed said Yes, three said No and the other said that she saw it when she first became Sabbath School superintendent but it has not come to her recently. One of the problems with the distribution of this publication is that it is not mailed to the homes of the individuals, but is sent to the church address. Many local churches no longer have a functioning Sabbath School secretary that distributes this publication.

Why have three of the superintendents decided to stop getting this publication? "It is not beneficial to me," said a 76-year-old man, a life-long Adventist. "I am too busy and have health problems," said another senior citizen. Both of these individuals have been leaders in Sabbath School for many years and seem to think they know the routine and do not need "helps."

A third man told the interviewer that he uses "the online helps by Attorney Cameron." (He is referring to the Web site www.sabbathschoollessons.com, and independent resource operation conducted by Bruce N. Cameron, who teaches an adult Sabbath School class in the local church in Virginia where he is a member. He is employed as an attorney for a right-wing political organization. He solicits a five-dollar-a-month donation from the users of his online service. The material he produces is an outline for teaching the lesson, but does not include materials for the Sabbath School "program.")

Evaluation of Sabbath School Toolbox

Two of the individuals interviewed said they find this publication helpful and three do not. The sixth individual said, "I don't use it regularly enough to evaluate it."

"Sometimes it has changed my perspective," said a 26-year-old man with a college degree who recently became an elder in his historically African American local church.

"I don't consider it a very effective resource for busy people," said a senior citizen with a college degree who has been active in the Adventist Church for more than 20 years.

No one reported problems with the delivery of *Sabbath School Toolbox* from the publishing house. None of the leaders interviewed knew what the price is for this resource.

What Should Be Added?

Suggestions from the leaders interviewed: (1) "More stories that teachers can tell." (2) "More ideas." (3) Access "to download" on the Web "the Sabbath School Handbook and *Counsels to Sabbath School Workers*" by Ellen G. White.

Alternative Media

Three of the leaders interviewed said they would prefer that *Sabbath School Toolbox* be delivered via the Internet. Two prefer something printed on paper and delivered through the post office. One person did not answer this question.

One of the three leaders who prefer online distribution said that she already gets *Sabbath School Toolbox* "from the Web site," not through the church. There may be some confusion on this item.

Bottom Line

Sabbath School Toolbox is a relatively new publication with a very narrow and specific target audience. It is likely that much of the lack of awareness about this publication and the negative views of a number of the leaders interviewed is due to how new it is; it has not been around long enough to establish a tradition and many of the people who hold the role of Sabbath School Superintendent in local churches in the North American Division are older people. Previous research has shown that younger adults are more interested in the discussion of the Sabbath School lesson than they are the opening ceremonies of Sabbath School. Generally, it is the senior citizens who are willing to invest the time and energy to participate in the opening ceremonies.

It may be that this publication should be given more time to establish itself before it is evaluated. It may also represent an opportunity to shift it to the Web and save the production costs.

Vibrant Life

A total of 20 individuals were interviewed from the subscription list of *Vibrant Life* magazine. Out of these 20 interviews, 18 were members of the Adventist Church, while two were not. Of the 18 church members, only seven indicated that they are involved with health ministries in their local church. One couple reported that they are involved in leading health ministries in their church. He is an M.D. and M.P.H. and she is an R.N. He directs an Adventist Health Clinic in the local community and they teach many health classes together. The other six indicated that they help with cooking schools and other health seminars from time to time.

How Local Church Supports Vibrant Life

Half of the Adventists interviewed said that their local church does nothing to support *Vibrant Life*. Several described a variety of ways in which individuals give copies to friends and neighbors or use copies of the magazine in health classes, etc. Two people reported that their local church sends subscriptions to people who attend health classes and two other individuals said that copies are made available in the church lobby.

“It used to be promoted from the pulpit at my church, but not recently,” said a 67-year-old man. “That is how I first heard about it and started to subscribe.” Another man said that he “used to get 100 to 150 copies of each issue” because he has 130 employees in his business. He has reduced the number he is now buying because “so many get tossed.” But, he said “front what I hear people like the variety. The health science is balanced. It is not Christian propaganda and that’s good.”

What Would Help Vibrant Life be Used More Widely?

The majority of the Adventists interviewed said that *Vibrant Life* needs more promotion in order to achieve wider circulation. Only two individuals said that it needs more appealing content and just one individual said that it needs improvement in its delivery. No one complained about the price. Most knew that it costs \$19 a year and all said it is worth the cost.

The one complaint about the financial side of the publication came from a man 80 years of age who sponsored 10 gift subscriptions. “They expired and I was not told. I should be notified so I can renew them,” he said.

Evaluation of Vibrant Life

A strong majority of the Adventists interviewed said that *Vibrant Life* is an excellent publication, very helpful to meeting the needs of individuals and as a witnessing tool for members and an outreach tool for congregations and ministries. “It is my favorite magazine; I read it cover to cover,” said one woman. “The articles are wonderful,” said another.

Six of the Adventists interviewed specifically mentioned the recipes as a feature that they particularly like. Several stated that they give copies of the magazine to friends, relatives, neighbors, work associates, etc.

“I like that its balanced, not pushy or guilts you. It is presented well, although sometimes I wish the articles would go into more depth ... but I am an R.N.,” said a 59-year-old woman with two young adult children who helps teach cooking classes for her local church.

Only one woman was negative about the magazine. She said she had decided to cancel her subscription because “it is too preachy.” She also said that she does not like the fact that some issues of the magazine are focused on a single topic; “a magazine needs to have variety.”

Suggestions for Things to be Added

The Adventists interviewed made a number of suggestions: (1) Articles about “people living at too frantic a pace.” (2) Material about aging. (3) Put the ads and articles that are not appropriate for non-Adventists in the back part of the magazine, but not on the back cover. (This suggestion came from an individual who places *Vibrant Life* in the waiting room of his physical therapy office.) And include more ads. (4) More emphasis on exercise. (5) “Look at Martha Stewart’s magazines to get ideas.” (6) Provide a discounted price for bulk purchases.

Alternative Media

Two thirds of the Adventists interviewed said that *Vibrant Life* should continue to be published only on paper. Two individuals said that it should be published both on paper and on line. No one suggested publishing the magazine only via the Web.

The reason given (by several individuals) for the preference for a paper publication is that it makes it possible to hand copies to friends and acquaintances. This was the only reason given for the overwhelming preference for publishing on paper.

Should Vibrant Life Continue to be Published?

Three out of four of the Adventists interviewed said, “Absolutely, without question” *Vibrant Life* should continue to be published. Three other indicated, “Yes with some changes.” Only one Adventist said, “No, it is not needed.” This was the one woman in the group who consistently expressed a negative view.

The changes mentioned included one person who said that *Vibrant Life* should be cut back to a quarterly publication schedule and another person who said it should be changed to a monthly publication. The third person suggested that the page size be

reduced to the half the current size, closer to the page size used by the *Signs of the Times*.

Opinions of the Non-Adventist Subscribers

Two subscribers were interviewed who are not members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Their opinions are not much different from the Adventists who were interviewed.

One woman said that her mother-in-law pays for her subscription. "I am vegetarian and into organic food," she said. She likes the "health advice, the tips and recipes" in *Vibrant Life*. She preferred for it to be published on paper and "absolutely, without question" wants it to continue to be published.

The second woman is 69 years of age and dropped out of the Adventist Church 31 years ago, but continues to subscribe to *Vibrant Life*. She likes "the recipes, the articles on exercise, and the nice mix of topics." She attended a CHIP program in her community and a sample copy of *Vibrant Life* was handed out during the program, and liked it and subscribed. She thinks it is "a little pricey and the price should be reduced some." She likes getting it on paper, but she has a Kindle and would like to be able to get an electronic version there too.

Churches with No Subscriptions

A total of 20 interviews were completed with leaders in congregations that have no subscriptions on record to the periodicals included in this study. In each case the specific church office(s) were confirmed and the fact that the individual knew something about the Sabbath School and outreach materials used by the church.

Children's Sabbath School Papers

The leaders interviewed were asked, Do you have any idea why your church is not getting any of the children's Sabbath School magazines to hand out? Five said they were not aware of this and thought they had seen these materials at the church facilities. Some of these stated that perhaps what they had seen were old materials.

The other 15 leaders agreed that, to their knowledge, their local church was not subscribing to these materials; *Insight*, *Guide*, etc. The most common response was that the church did not currently have any children among the regularly-attending members.

Four of the individuals interviewed said that their church had decided to get resources from independent Adventist publishers instead of the denomination's publishing houses. Three of these specifically mentioned the My Bible First materials. "The content [of the materials published by the denominational publishers] concerns us," said a 49-year-old church secretary with a college degree, a life-long Adventist. "We lean toward the conservative side and don't like cartoon style materials. We like My Bible First and Young Disciple."

Two individual said that the problem was the cost of the materials. Two others said that the periodicals were not being read by the children or taken home, but left in the pews. Two stated that their local church was an immigrant church and the adults insisted on purchasing only materials in their language despite the fact that most of the young people could only read English.

One pastor explained that his church was a relatively new church plant under the sponsorship of a large, established church. They get their materials through the mother church and have not yet set up an account under their own name.

Despite the fact that a significant number of churches are not subscribing to the periodicals for children and youth, 18 out of the 20 leaders interviewed said that this is an important priority for the denomination. A total of 16 indicated that it is "essential" and two indicated that it is "somewhat important." No one said it was not important.

Helps for the adult Sabbath School leaders are equally important in the view of a 37-year-old pastor who said, "People in my church who use the resources teach much better than those who don't. Those who wing it don't do so well."

Outreach Magazines

Half of the leaders interviewed reported that their local church does not have an annual campaign to promote *Message* magazine or *Signs of the Times* or one of the other outreach magazines. Eight said that their church did have a yearly promotional campaign.

Asked why they were not promoting the outreach periodicals, most of those who do not do so said that they did not know why. It is just something that their congregation no longer did. Three of the individuals interviewed gave a specific explanation: (1) "We are using *Balance* magazine right now for a health outreach and have set aside the others." (2) The promotional campaign has been replaced by a few volunteers who regularly stock five *Signs of the Times* distribution boxes in the community. (3) The first elder "doesn't like top-down programs" from the denomination and refuses to allow it.

Evaluation of Outreach Magazines

Six of the leaders made very positive general comments about *Signs of the Times*. They said it is "awesome ... very good ... very informational" and has "variety." Two people said they like the small page size. One person mentioned that they like the program of "news boxes" to distribute *Signs*. Another said it is Christ-centered, while another stated that it is "more spiritual because it talks about last day events."

One person mentioned that they like the recipes in *Message* magazine. Another person said that *Signs* is less popular in his congregation than *Message*. Another person mentioned *El Centinela* is "very good."

Without naming a specific journal, two individuals stated that they like the fact that the outreach magazines have articles that they can pass along to friends and relatives. A third person affirmed that these periodicals are helpful to the outreach of their local church.

Asked what they would like to see added to the outreach periodicals, the majority stated that they are good as they are and they have nothing to suggest. One person stated that they "need to stay up to date."

Alternative Media

Should the outreach magazines be published on paper or in electronic formats? About equal and small numbers of the leaders picked one medium or the other. They majority asked that they be published in both forms.

Other Periodicals the Adventist Church Should Produce

The leaders interviewed were asked if there are other publications that the denomination should be producing. Seven individuals responded to this question with these suggestions: (1) A family magazine. (2) A Web site like those provided by some of the mega churches. (3) A periodical on creation/evolution issues. (4) An Adventist magazine “relevant for my college-age grand kids.” (5) Periodicals for the smaller immigrant groups in various languages. (6) Short Bible stories for children like the Discover Bible lessons and the Storacles on the Amazing Facts Web site. (7) “There are conservative independent Adventist ministries who cover topics/issues that were not being addressed, especially in the 1990s, but that is happening now.”

Suggestions for the Editors

Two of the individuals interviewed suggest that something needs to be included in the periodicals designed for the teens from Adventist families who are in public schools “to keep them in church as young adults.” Two others expressed concern for protecting the “identity” of the denomination and urged editors to “remain faithful to what it means to be SDA and present it attractively.”

One individuals in each case made the following suggestions: (1) More discussion questions that apply to real life. (2) Lots of mission stories. (3) Material for small churches where there is one Sabbath School class for a few children with a wide range of ages. (4) “Let the mission of the church guide you.” (5) There is “a grass roots movement against cartoons” in Adventist publications. (6) Provide material for the different learning styles.