

Original Research Article

Strategies of reclaiming and retaining lapsed members from among the Seventh –Day Adventists Church at Borabu Sub-County, Kenya

Tom Mong'are Nyagwoka

Abstract

Social Science Education Department,
Masinde Muliro University, Dept of
Religion, P.O. Box 190, Kakamega

C/O

Kaimosi University, A Constituent of
Masinde Muliro University of Science
and Technology, P.O. Box 385-50309,
Kaimosi

E-mail: nyagwoka@rediffmail.com

The paper investigated strategies of reclaiming and retaining lapsed members among the Seventh –day Adventist Church. The area of study was Borabu Sub-County in Kenya. The paper was anchored on three objectives (1. To examine strategies for reclaiming and retention of lapsed members of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church (2. To analyze action plans to adopt in the process of integrating and retaining the reclaimed adherents into the life of the church (3. To analyze in what manner each one of them has been incorporated to the dynamics of expanding God's glorious dominion in the world. Descriptive design was preferred for this paper. A mixture approach was suitable which focused on; in-depth interviews, observation techniques and questionnaires. The findings and results were; stimulating worship services, prayer ministry, equipping the congregation internally and externally, discovering the needs of the target members, invoking anthropology in mission, establishing a network of meaningful church relationships, missiology and contextualization in mission and theology. Consequently the paper recommended for the study to investigate on 'the 21st century church in Kenya'.

Keywords: Lapsed, priesthood of all believers, anthropology, mission, missiology and contextualization

INTRODUCTION

In the context of this paper, lapsed members of the Church are those who have for one reason or another become inactive in their church participation, have left the church and have renounced their faith. The word reclaiming as used in this study means strategies of winning the lapsed members back to the church where once they belonged. The Seventh –day Adventist church worldwide registered total lapsing members of 631, 343 between 1988 and 1992. The East African division alone experienced lost and missing members of 8499 (<https://chambersspen.intrenational>). These lapsing scenario presented five gaps (1. The gap on how to reclaim the inactive members, (2. The gap on how to get back the disappeared adherents (3. The gap on winning

back those who have abandoned their faith (4. The gap on how to salvage the former adherent (5. The gap on how to prevent further lapsing.

Methods of Jesus-Visitations

Hodge's (2003) in his article urged the British union to set aside the first Sabbath of October 2003 towards the process of reaching the secular and unchurched members in local communities in the hope of fulfilling Christ's method of evangelism, "the savior mingled with men as one who desired their good and in this he won their confidence (white, 1923: 143. According to Joers

(1975: 11), Jesus infiltrated full and complete over the philosophy of the Jews in His method of reconciliation between mankind, Himself and God. In recouping the lapsed adherents into the church, the ecclesiastical institution ought to trail meticulously how Jesus did it when He was here in the first century and what He instructed the early church. He selected the twelve and educated them on how to get back the lapsed of all categories. The twelve that He chose were all from Galilee with a particular culture typically suited for evangelism only in the Jewish people; therefore, Jesus had to give them a suitable training of reaching into the entire world. He demonstrated to the twelve disciples applied instructions of an all-encompassing gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. He made them competent on how to salvage apostates and lapsed adherents inclusively. Marvin and Stephen (1979: 231) contend that in order for the church to get back the recidivist it has to permeate from side to side the beliefs of the target population. He (*ibid*) also records that the Old Testament of the Christian Bible is presented through the Semitic culture as evidenced in the giving of the Ten Commandments. When giving the Ten Commandments, God transmitted them to the nation of Israel at Sinai in the form of the suzerainty treaty, a culture of the people of Moses' day which God espoused in interacting His commandments to the commonwealth of Israel at Sinai. In suzerainty treaty, the presenter of the covenant was superior to his subjects, and in this case, the king was superior. The expressions of the covenants were read out and the subjects vowed complete submission. The gods were called upon as witnesses. Lastly, the parties involved were asked to sign the agreement reached. Steeph (ibid) distinguished that in order for the religious body to marinate from end to end the newly lapsed converts in the process of reclaiming them, the gospel ought to be incarnated within the philosophy of the target group and left to propagate amongst the societies. Scriptural verses peculiar to targeted group are to be judiciously used in reference to the etymological dynamics suitable for their comprehension.

Enculturation and acculturation

On the same note, the culture of acculturation and enculturation is another method proposed by Conn of restoring the lapsed members. Acculturation is the learning of the appropriate behavior of one's host culture, while enculturation is the learning of the appropriate behavior of one's own culture (Guillermo, 1998: 388.). According Guillermo (*ibid*), the ecclesiastical body is a teaching institution for the mission of restoration and conversion must inaugurate the dynamics of learning the conducts, beliefs and practices of those to be reclaimed so that if it does not compromise the Bible, they are allowed to continue their culture while instructing them

the tenets of the gospel for the formation and effecting appropriate changes. This presented a gap noted in reclaiming converts partly from polygamous homes. In addition, Missionaries in their efforts to evangelize Africa, they faced challenges of enculturation and acculturation and these were responsible for the African resistance to missionary work and European occupation. In his book, Eusebius (1965) records that Christ in his work of redemption invaded the Jewish philosophy and only in this manner he became a competent savior of mankind by substituting his values with the culture of human race. He swapped the sinful humanity with His sinless life to lost man. He was born in the culture of the Jews and participated in the rites of the Jews in order to restore them, so that Jews could incarnate the gospel to all other cultures of the world.

Koranya (October, 1999: 274-276) discerns that acculturation involves both acquiring knowledge and communicating through the philosophy and beliefs of the targeted people and even partaking in the host culture in the process of mission work and missiology. Likewise, White, (1950) chronicles that the good news of the gospel is an institution of the Christian church documented by Christ, the savior of the world. In like manner, Andras (October, 1999), discerned that the contemporary ecclesiastical institution should transform her declarational theology into missiology and etymology in order to reclaim and retain lapsed adherents. Karl, (October, 2005), commenting on this issue says that the doctrine of the trinity has to be fruitful for practical living. Living the message is more powerful than just retelling it from the pulpit without influencing the people. Praxis Theology in Kenya will express divine reformation to ecclesiastical institutions in their attempt to restore the lapsed associates. A gap noted in this review is the absence of a clear strategy towards reclaiming and restoring the lapsed widows, widowers, unchurched, the publicans, polygamous, and the members of other faiths around them and these identified gaps justifies this paper.

Contextualization

In responding to Gospel according to Mark (16:15-16) "and go ye therefore and make disciples of all nation by baptizing, teaching and commanding them to observe all things" the church ought to examine its mission in terms of methodology and achievement. According to Rodrigo (1984:94) contextualization is the progression by which Christian reality is exemplified and deciphered in a tangible historical, cultural, religious and social dimension with emphasis to present moment for the church's mission. The mission of the SDA church is to proclaim the love and sacrificial act of Jesus to the whole world in its attempt to expand God's kingdom on this earth through contextualization as a method of mission.

According to Nkosiyo (2000: 143), the gospel ought to be presented through the context of the target group for its impact to be realized. Jesus used a theology of contextualization in his strategy of reconciling the whole humanity unto Himself (John 1:1-5). In this paper contextualization is a theology of self-financing, self-proclaiming and self-governing. Bearing upon the fact that the Christian Bible is a model of cultures that God used it in His restoration of humanity; the church to a large extent should contextualize her gospel with the objective of reaching all cultures of different communities with the gospel. This is typically noted when God called Abram from a culture of offering sacrifices and told him to offer Him a sacrifice as recorded in Genesis 12ff. The gap identified here is that the contemporary Church has to a more magnitude neglected anthropology and missiology in mission and theology to the painful result of losing members.

When missionaries came to Kenya, they ignored the local structures of the people and replaced them with their own. They failed to start from where they found Kenyans with their knowledge of God. Kenyans had their own places of worship especially along the riverbanks and at the foot of the mountains. They perceived the sun as their god and every morning they performed their regular ritual of worship by facing towards the sun. This was a bridging point of evangelism, which the missionaries ignored, and so they were rejected in some areas. They called the Kenyan culture as 'dark' and their culture as 'light'. Apostle Paul used this strategy in Athens when he encountered the unknown god of the Athenians. He first of all accepted their religious zeal and told them that he also worshipped this unknown god. He captured their attention and slowly revealed to them the God of the universe. Martin (1989: xii) accepts the above factor of the Indian contextualization by saying that "instead of building big churches which are now falling apart, we need to develop 'Ashrams' on the banks of the holy rivers of India in which to lead the life of utmost importance for peace and for the glory of God.

Anthropology in Mission

According to Hiebert (1994), anthropology, which is the science for the study of otherness in cross-cultural encounters, was used by early explorers and missionaries in their endeavor to acquire spheres of influence in Africa and spreading Christianity respectively. It is therefore appropriate to formulate a theology which is informed by mission which is referred to as applied anthropology. This will create a church without walls in Kenya, which will influence the other faiths, the unchurched and the lapsed members. Hiebert further notes that the exploration and the trade of the 17th century led to foreign settlements, missions and eventually the establishment of colonial rule. These

traders and officials of the colonial rule established racial and cultural differences aimed at personal superiority. This means western science and technology were becoming superior to the sciences and technologies of other sciences and technologies. Furthermore, Western governments were conquering other nations and making them their colonies with the aim of giving them a western culture. The question to be filled is whether western culture was Christian over all other cultures. This is so because western cultures were used as a civilizing agent to the rest of the world that the early missionaries called "primitive culture" The other gap identified here and fielded is the failure of both the local church and the new converts to learn the culture of otherness.

The theology of reclaiming lapsed adherents through their culture is evidently suggested in the book of (Mathew 28: 19-20) 'go ye therefore to wholly populaces and disciple them' is a suitable methodology also. The approach here is to influence the individual persons in their philosophy. This is simply identifying yourself with the foreign culture and speaking through it while holding the Bible supreme. Apart from mingling with His people, Jesus also restored the backslidden man unto Himself by emptying Himself and took the nature of sinful humanity and took a form of a servant. The word 'emptied in Greek text is written as kenosis which means making himself powerless. It also means 'empty', heaven remained empty and came down to the level of man. He spoke the language of the poor; He felt the sorrows and joys of the poor, (Lk 1:41, 2:15, 15:2). It is written in (2 Cor 8:9 that although, Jesus was not poor, yet for our sake He became poor. According to 2 Cor 2:6-7) St' Paul says that although Jesus was in the form of God, He did not count equality with God, but, emptied Himself taking the form of a servant. He also humbled himself and became obedient unto death on the cross. In addition, Jesus emptied Himself in Baptism by identifying himself with His own people by repenting with them as man to redeem men in God, (Butrik, 1952: 78). Like Our lord Jesus, the church must lead a life of self emptying by giving up riches in order to identify itself with the poor and oppressed with the objective of building a human community and participate in the struggles and sufferings of the people. It must take the form of a servant. In this incarnational gospel the church comes closer to God because God Himself has pitched a tent in the midst of the poor and the oppressed.

God's gaze Love seeking the lapsed in the parables

The three parables of Jesus recorded in the gospel according to Luke 15 emphasizes about the trinity (White (1949: 407). The father of the prodigal son represents the first person of the trinity; the lost sheep represents the son who is the second person, while the woman represents the Holy Spirit as the third person of the

Godhead. These three parables were reviewed in the process of developing this paper, the first one being the lost sheep. White points out that there is virtually nothing attractive in the missing sheep but that the shepherd left the 99 sheep that were with him safely in the fold and went to seek the missing one. The question here is; would it be appropriate for the growing Church as with Jesus leave the members of good standing and go to search for the one Straying adherent and restore such into the fellowship of the Church?. Concerning the lost coin, the woman swept the floor diligently in the hope that she might hear the commotion of the coin. These are church followers who have lapsed without themselves having the awareness that they have back slipped from grace. They are also referred as to inactive members. This paused another gap for investigation of how to reclaim the inactive members within the church. Moreover, the father of the prodigal son did not search for his boy, but he kept a growing hope that one day this boy would return and have reunion once again with him. He accepted him back as his son, providing him the best and tenderly care of a father by commanding a big banquet for him. This parable illustrates God's attitude towards the lapsed members. It also shows how sin disciplines them to the extent of wearing rugs and how they need a welcome back to the church. The joy of the growing church is to open doors in order to establish the returning backsliders into the Church of the living God.

Statement of the Problem

According to the SDA general conference statistics report (<http://www.AdventistsArchives.org>) the Church registered a total baptism of 33,202,216, of which 13,026,925 left the church for the period of 1965-2014. Those who left the churches were composed of two categories; 6,727,662 missing and unknown and 6, 297, 263 were dropped. These are referred as to lapsed members to whom the paper sought to formulate suitable methodology of reclaiming and retention. Nyagwoka (2016) in his journal article investigated the causes for the backsliding of the new converts from among the SDA church at Nyamira County – Kenya. The gap that arose from this early study and which guaranteed this inquiry is on how to bring them back to the church where they lapsed from. Consequently the study formulated three gaps for investigation and these are; what are the strategies that the SDA church can put forward as the basis for reclaiming and retention of lapsed members? What action plans does the SDA Church have to adopt in the process of integrating and retaining the reclaimed into the life of the church? Besides, in what manner have each one of them been incorporated to the dynamics of expanding God's glorious dominion in the world?

Theoretical framework

The paper was anchored on Fulbright (2014) theoretical framework. He expounds on the great doctrinal blessings recorded in the epistle to the Ephesus church. According to him (ibid) every believer ought to be a dispenser of God's grace in the world. Fulbright records the benefits of reclaiming our identity, our position to Christ, reclaiming the mind to serve others, reclaiming peace through unity, reclaiming wholesome living, reclaiming the will of God, reclaiming Godly marriage, and reconciling our spiritual protection. In the light of this paper, this theory was used in the formulation of the seven strategies for reclaiming and retaining of the lapsed members which included but not limited to; inspiring worship, establishment of the priesthood of all believers, meeting the needs of target group, invoking anthropology in mission and theology, establishing church relationships, application of missiology and contextualization of the gospel.

METHODOLOGY

This section explains how the researcher carried out his research as was guided by research design, area of study, and research instruments.

Research Design

The inquiry adopted a blend inquiry design of both analytical and the descriptive.

Area of Study

The area of study was Borabu Sub- County of Nyamira County in Kenya as illustrated in figure 1. Borabu forms among Kenya's least sub-Counties in terms of both expanse and populace. It is one of the crafted Sub-Counties from Nyamira County. It also hosts one Constituency called Borabu which is one of the 80 new constituencies created by the IEBC in 2012 as a result of the split of North Mugirango/Borabu c/no.210 into North Mugirango (c/n 272 and Borabu (c/no 273). It has a total population of 117,090 with total area coverage of 297.70 Sq. Km. It consists of four administrative county assembly wards which include; see table 1 below. Even though sporadically inhabited, it is fit for farming activities than her neighbors. Largely this area lies within the white highlands previously occupied by European imperialists, on basis of its stability in agricultural produce. (Table 1, Figure 1)

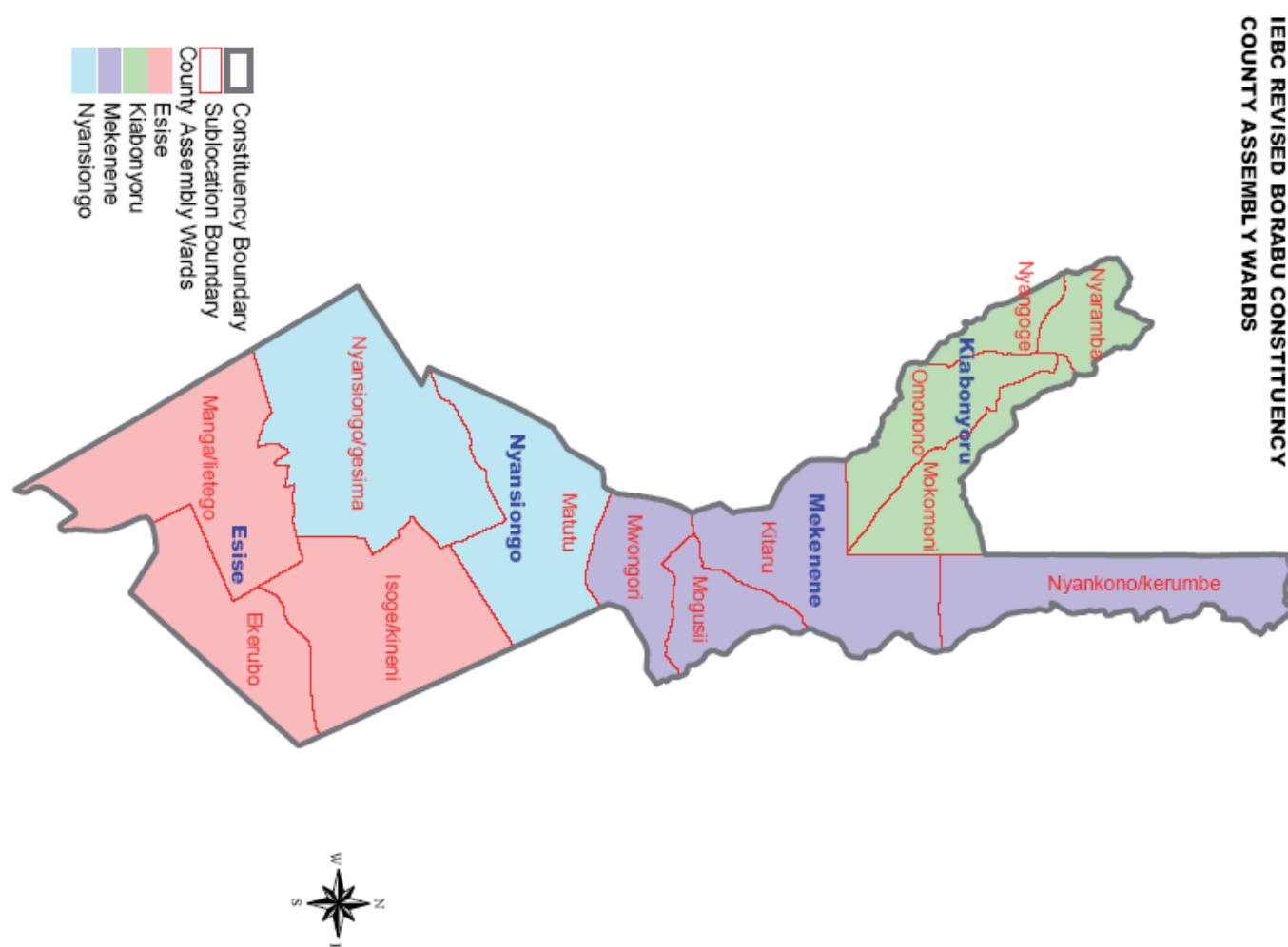
Research Population

A sample size of 42 respondents from two selected SDA

Table 1. Borabu Administrative County Wards

No		Ward Name	Population 2009 national census	Area (SqKm)	Description
1	1362	Mekenene	18,976	77.30	Mwongori, Mogusii, Kitaru and Nyankono/Kerumbe Sub-Locations of Nyamira County
2	1363	Kiabonyoru	43,664	49.40	Omonono, Mokomoni, Nyangoge and Nyaramba-Sub-Locations of Nyamira County
3	1364	Nyansiongo	27,495	74.50	Nyansiongo and Matutu Sub-Locations of Nyamira County
4	1365	Esise	26,955	96.50	Manga/Lietigo, Ekerubo and Isoge/Kineni Sub-Location of Nyamira County

Source: Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) (2009)

**Figure 1.** Map of Borabu Sub-County

Source: Kenya Map 2010

Churches; *Omobirona* and *Mekenene* were appropriately both randomly and purposively selected out of the total target population of 630. Both Lapsed and adherents of regular standing were suitable for the development of this

paper. Interview schedules and copies of questionnaires were administered to those who had left and returned to active service and to regular members of good standing.

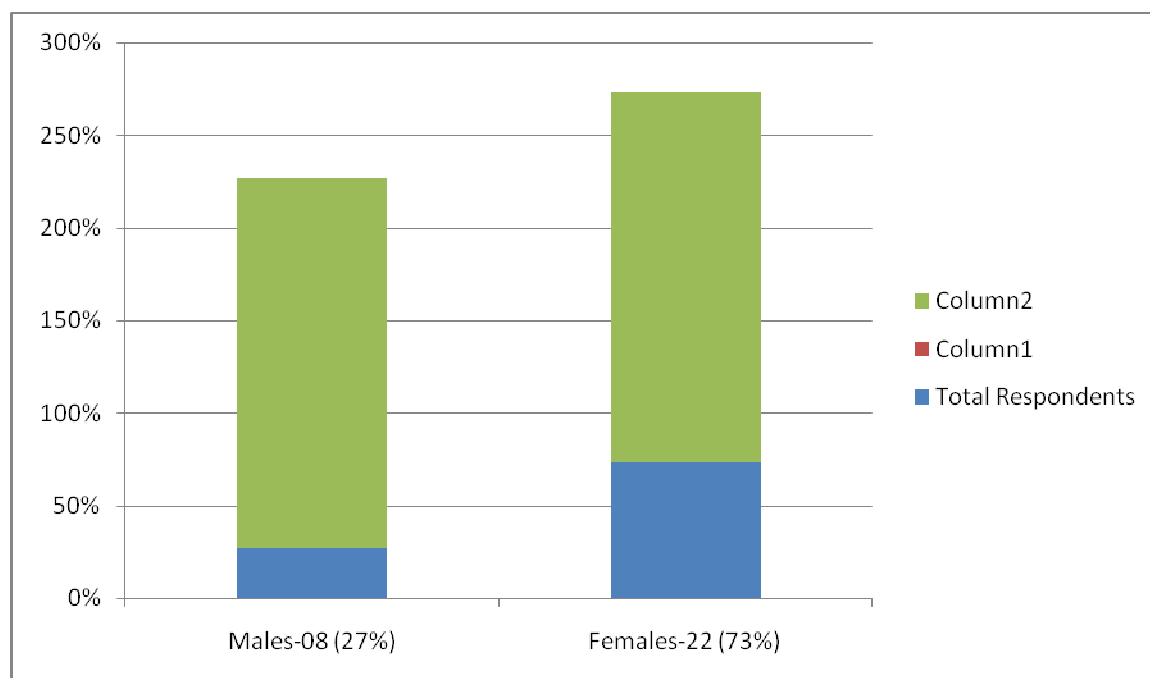


Figure 2. Gender

Source: field data (2006)

Instruments and techniques of data collection

In-depth interviews were suitable for qualitative data directed towards the 10 purposively identified respondents. Interviews, interview schedules, focused group discussions, tape recording cellphone interviews and observation techniques were found to be appropriate. Questionnaires were also found appropriate for quantitative data and were administered to 32 randomly selected respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Data collection process and return rate was considered good on the basis of the 92.3% participation. All the 42 sampled members participated in the study.

Demographics

Retention according to gender

The paper gathered particular common facts from the social set up which was vibrant for the development of the paper and these included but not limited to age, gender, experience and religious/denominational. From the findings in figure 2, it is evident that 27% of the study populations were masculine whereas 73% formed feminine respondents. Even though the findings showed that the ratio of male and female sampled groups were

different, all sexes were epitomized while carrying out the study.

Retention According to Age

From the results in figure 3, it was exposed that the investigator's populace of between 50-70 ages designed the biggest retention percentage while the respondents between the ages of 35-49 formed 36.7% retention rate. Adherents of 15-34 years had the least retention rates of 2% however, in-depth interviews with this group revealed various reasons responsible for their poor retention rates. This finding of 2% retention of members between ages 15-34 in figure 4 is in agreement with Trim (<http://www.AdventistsArchives.org>), who transcripts that subsequently the youth between 15 -34 form a bulk of students who either are in high school or have finished secondary education. As a result, majority of them lapse from church by the influence of either searching for appropriate institution of learning or occupation. However, in the long run they are made to return to church by some traumatic occasions such as say matrimony, infertility, illness and bereavement. The assignment of the religious organization is to trail them where on earth they may be and reclaim them as per the great commission strategies. Many adherents lapse occur during this life stage.

The primary religious question is: how can the church reclaim, retain and restore this group of volatile ages?

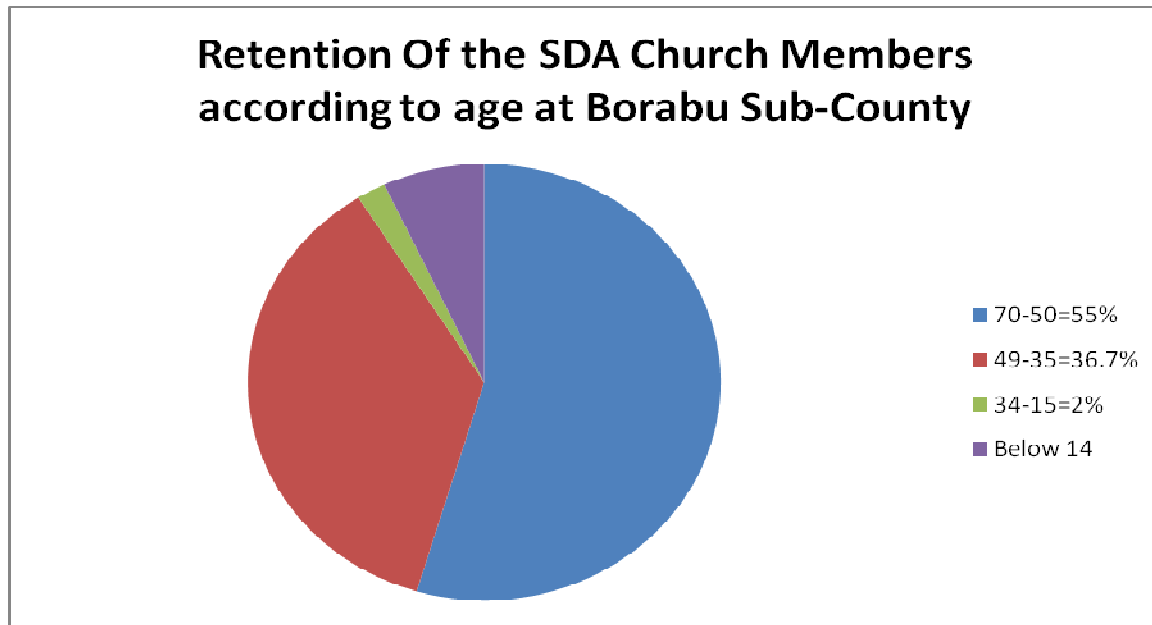


Figure 3. Retention according to age

Source: Research data 2006

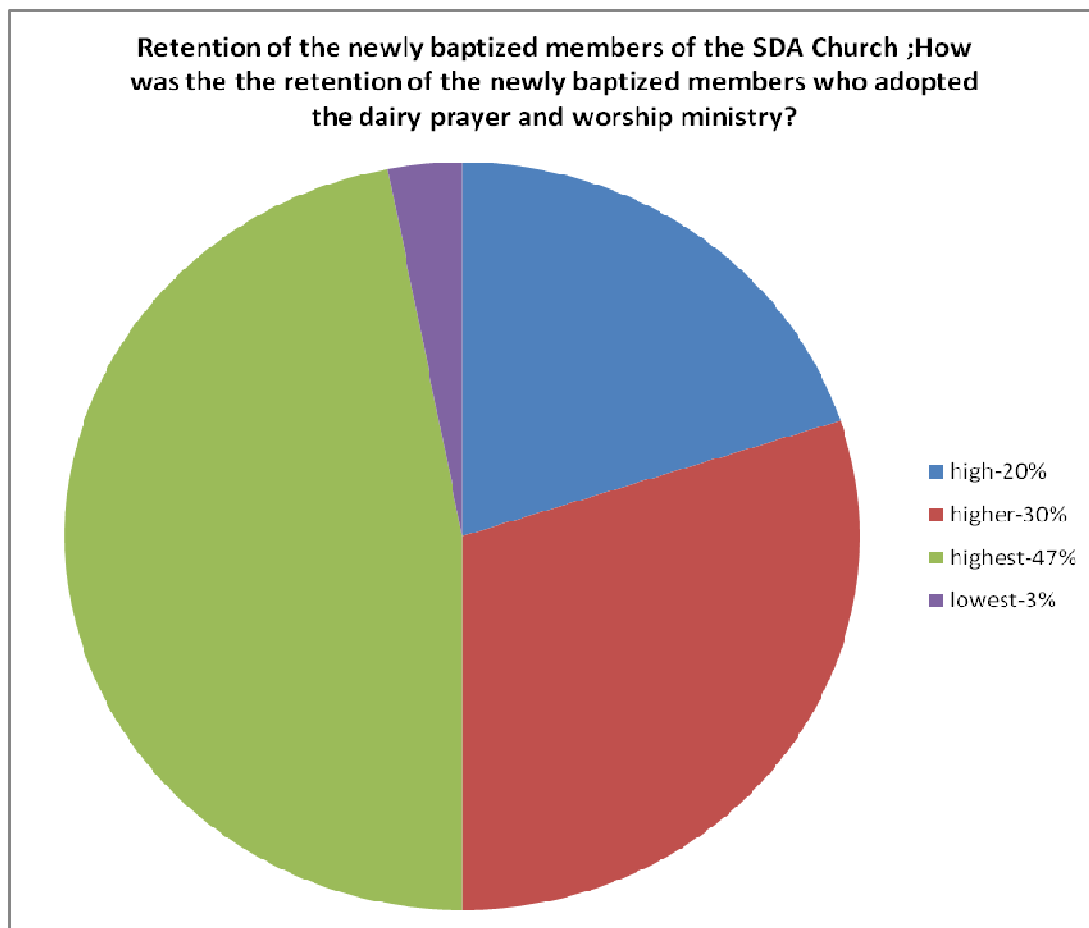


Figure 4. Retention and reclaiming according to worship and prayer ministry

Source: Field data 2006.

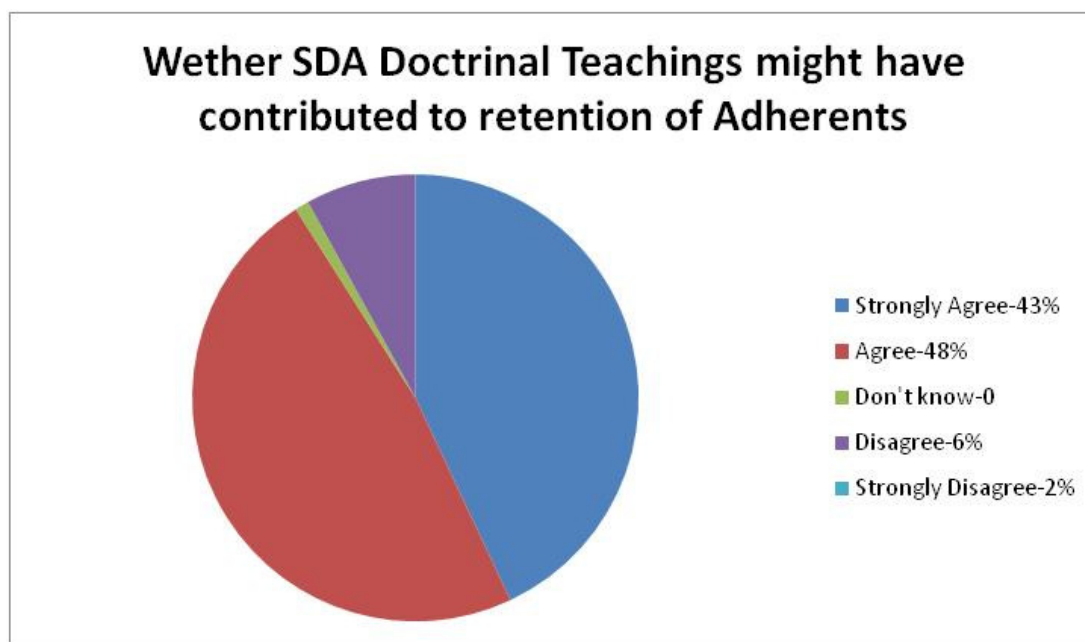


Figure 5. Retention and reclaiming according to SDA doctrinal teachings

Source: Field data 2006

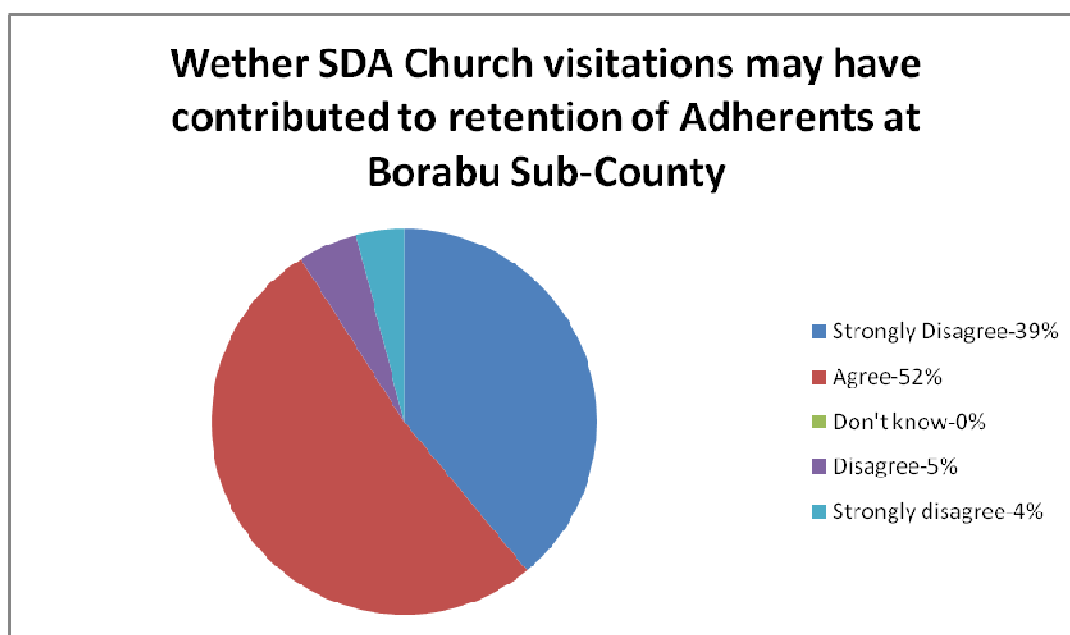


Figure 6. Retention by Church visitations

Source: field 2006

Whether Worship ministry and dairy prayers strategy had an impact on retention

An interview schedule was conducted to purposive sampled inactive and active members in order to find out major factors responsible for retention of adherents in the SDA Churches at Borabu Sub-County, Kenya. The

results were recorded in figure 5. The leading question was; how has been your dairy personal worship and prayer services? (highest = 5, higher = 4, high = 3, lowest = 2).

According to figure 4, 97% respondents disclosed that members who practiced dairy prayers and worship ministry retained their membership against 3%

respondents who lapsed and rejoined the church at a later time. The prayerful members narrated that they petitioned their dairy needs to the Lord in heaven and expect their fulfillment within the church life as recorded in the Christian bible, "Our father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven, give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sin as we forgive those who have wronged us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one", (Mathew 6: 9-13). In the light of these investigation Church followers who are not practicing the ministry of prayer and worship are either lapsed or inactive.

In-depth interview sessions with this group indicated seven major ways to curb lapsing and dormancy of Church members at Borabu. Dormant members are those who stop participating in church activities such as giving tithes and offering and programs of the church. The first of these was revealed as providing stimulating worship services which inspire worshipers closer to God. In the book of the apostle Paul (1 Cor.14:40), records that we love Him because He first loved us. The second strategy is to internally and externally equip the Church for ministry by providing them with elementary education and training on the dynamics of evangelism. Added to this internal establishment of the adherents is the external preparation of the entire congregation on the dynamics of seeking the lapsed members in the process of realizing the priesthood of all believers. This findings concurs with Manson (1958: 63-65) who stated that the church ought to establish the ministry of priesthood of all believers in her attempt to make all adherent active and attached to one another. In line with this findings, White (1950: 351-357) approved the priesthood of persons who are yet to be anointed to an office "The Lord employs numerous tools for setting up of His purpose; while some with special talents are chosen to devote all their energies to the work of teaching and preaching the gospel, many others who have never been ordained are called to act in soulsaving". Burtner and Chiles (1954) observed that in an attempt to overcome the problem of ordination as the prerequisite for mission, John Wesley accepted laymen in ministry in order to overcome the deficient of preachers.

The third approach identified was discovering the needs of the target members. This third strategy is in harmony with *Anderson* (1975), who recorded that when the needs of the newly baptized members are ignored they become inactive and get out through the back door. The forth and fifty strategies were identified as invoking anthropology in mission in the process of identifying appropriate networks for interaction, and establishing a network of meaningful church relationships spontaneously flowing from Jesus's agape love. This in line with *Kobialka* (1989), who noted the importance and influence of culture in mission work with the guiding principle of incarnating the gospel to the target group.

The sixth and seventh strategy of this study is the application of missiology and contextualization in mission and theology. This finding concurs with *White* (1970), who while commenting on the issue of contextualization, chronicled that the coming down of the Holy Spirit recorded in the book of Acts 2 demonstrated to the entire creation by what means the Lord contextualized the communication of Pentecost inscribed in Acts 2 through the lens of the etymological Jerusalem malt-racial church. All those who had gathered in Jerusalem on this Pentecostal day perceived the Jews/ Galilean followers of Jesus communicating in diverse tongues of all the populations assembled at Jerusalem for the yearly ritual of the Passover. The gap identified at this point and fielded is that for a long time the church has been operating on ethnocentric gospel, which had been inappropriate and foreign to particular cultures, which *Jard* (1986:40) calls nonessential and speculative. Therefore, the church ought to change from ethnocentric to acculturation theology for effective reclamation and retention of adherents.

Respondents whether SDA Doctrinal Teachings might have contributed to Retention of Adherents

According to outcomes in figure 5, 91% of the respondents agreed that those members who were instructed on the 28 doctrinal teaching of the SDA church remained active and faithful to the church as opposed to 8%.The SDA church subscribes to the 28 fundamental beliefs which form the basis of their doctrinal teachings. According to www.adventist.org (2015) the 28 doctrinal teachings of the SDA church include; the written word (psalms 119:105),the trinity (Mathew 28:19-20), the father (Genesis 1:1) ,the son (John 1:1-3), the Holy spirit (Isaiah 61:1), the nature of man (Romans 5: 12-17), Great controversy (Genesis 3:6-8), the life, death and resurrection of Christ (genesis 3:15), growing up in Christ, (1 chronicles 29:11), the church (Genesis 12: 1-3), the remnant and its mission (Daniel 7:9-14), unity in the body of Christ (psalms 133: 1), baptism (Mathew 28:19-20), the Lord's supper, (Mathew 26: 17-30), spiritual gifts and ministries (Acts 6: 1-7), the gift of prophecy (numbers 12:6), the Law of God (exodus 19: 1-17), the Sabbath (Genesis 2:1-3), Stewardship (Genesis 1: 26-28), Christian behavior (Genesis 7:2), marriage and the family (Genesis 2:18-25), Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary (Leviticus 16), the second coming of Christ (John 14: 1-3), Death and resurrection (Job 19: 25-27, the millennium and the end of sin (Jeremiah 4:23-26) and the new earth (Isaiah 35).

These findings were interpreted that teaching adherent the tenets of the SDA doctrinal teachings is in line with the second equally important ingredient of the greet commission recorded in Mathew (28: 19-20), "and go ye therefore... baptize, teach and command them to

observe all things". This outcome agrees with Grims (1952: 89) who recorded that the church ought to impart and expounds, as the fulfillment of its mission. Instruction is the major aspiration of religion as an institution and religion that abandons this purpose equally has misplaced the value of restoring, retaining and reclamation. The finding also augments Holf (April 2006:103), who had reached a decision similar to this when he accounted that the foundation of all theology lies in the mandate to teach what Christ has given his disciples. In this proselytization, individuals will be reclaimed to the Lord in His Godhead, besides learning and becoming conscious of their sin and looseness.

Retention and reclaiming according to Church visitation

Whether SDA Church visitations might have contributed to retention of adherents, the results were recorded in figure 6. These findings in figure 6 showed that 91% of the respondents agreed that the church that involves all her adherents in intra-church visitation experiences low levels of lapsing members. Those respondents who were of regular and good standing in church narrated that their continued stay in church is attributed to church visitation. They were visited and they also participated in visiting others. Some of the lapsed members attributed their lapsing to uncaring church. In line with the third ingredient of the great commission, church visitation is the most appropriate avenue through which the church achieves the felt needs of the target group. This finding agrees with (Anderson: 59), who argues that declaring the good news by societal accomplishment is a suitable methodology towards the mission of reclaiming and retention.

RECOMMENDATION

i. The paper recommended for a study to be done on 'the mission of the Seventh -day Adventist Church in Kenya In the 21st century'.

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