

Research Proposal Title:

MEMBER RETENTION IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCHES OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Purpose of the Study:

The need to understand the above issues on members attrition and reasons for positive retention give purpose to this study, and how the Seventh-day Adventist Church in PNG, especially its leadership can have an informed perspective and response.

Demographical Trends

Of the 856 that took part in the research, 422 were women and 415 were men, an equivalent of 50.4 and 49.6 percent respectively, thus confirming a balance gender voice. Secondly, majority of the participants were baptised between the ages of 16-25 (37%) and 10-15 years (30%) and 26-35 years (17%). So those who baptised into the church between 12-25 years, an equivalent of 67 percent, remain Adventist longer, retention percentage is quite high. Majority of them went to public schools from elementary to colleges and university. The SDA school played little or did not feature a lot with their education and learning. Attempts were made to help discover causes to their decision for baptism. The study confirms that the main cause to their baptism is that they were raised by Adventist parents.

What Kept Them in Church

Most participants have been members for more than sixteen years. We want to know what was it that kept them in the church for six months and to now (2024). For the first six months of their church life, what kept them in church were leaders' 1) kindness and pastoral care, 2) Sabbath school classes, 3) Small groups bible studies, 4) social activities and 5) bible study on Daniel & Revelation. For longer than six months are local church programs, lively worships and good preaching, the doctrines of the church, bible studies and friendships.

Participants And Their Spiritual Lives

In this section the researchers wanted to know something about the spiritual lives of the participants. Responses came with these results—their devotional life (daily prayer and bible study), family worships, attend worship every Sabbaths, and participation in church programs as a local church leader or member. They are involving themselves with community outreach and evangelistic programs.

Loyalty to The SDA Church—Bible, Doctrines and Leadership.

The issue of loyalty to the church, the bible, doctrines, Ellen White is intact except for leadership. With leadership, there is an increase percentage (34%) that shows remorse to leaders. There is need for a follow-up qualitative research to determine causes to this decline. The Seventh-day Adventist church in Papua New Guinea is here to stay for a long haul. This year, the church in Papua since 1908 and New Guinea, 2024 would be 116 years and a century old respectively.

Summary and Recommendations

In the last ten years according to the General Conference Archives and Statistics shows that the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Papua New Guinea is experiencing exponential church growth with a great challenge on retention, the cause to this research. For example, in the last ten years from 2013-2022 the membership gain total is 295,588 at an average of 29,500 baptisms per year. However, on a sombre note, the same corresponding period the church lost 154,272 memberships at an average of 15,427 annually. The total gain of 141,316 in a decade carries a burden of substantial loss and poor retention.

The retention research suggests that there are many who have been in the church longer and remain healthy members because of family values, regular Sabbath attentions, their leaders-pastors are friendly and weekly group bible study (doctrines, Daniel-Revelation and Sabbath school lesson). They kept returning each Sabbaths because of good sermons and lively worships experiences.

One key finding is that those who baptise earlier in life (10-25 years old) remain in the SDA church longer and their retention chances is high. This calls for families, schools, churches and those involve in young people ministries to step-up in developing program for families, children, youth and young adults, that's if the church wants increase retention rate in the Seventh-day Adventist church in Papua New Guinea.