

**CHRISTOCENTRIC DISCIPLESHIP:
RETAINING MORE OF THE GAINS**

**Biblical and Relevant Approaches to Keep our Members
Loyal to Christ and His Church**

Sabbath School Ministry Department

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INTRODUCTION

Many factors influence new members' loyalty to Christ and His Church. This seminal work explores how different factors influence new members' faith in Christ and commitment to **His church**. New members' loyalty to Christ and His Church have been a *perennial problem* for church leaders. Church leaders tend to describe the problem. Many books have been written on why the problem exists. This book, *Christocentric Discipleship: Retaining More of the Gains* focuses on *how to increase the retention rate* of new members in local churches. The factors, which influence new members' loyalty to Christ and His Church, also foster the loyalty of experience members. The principles and methods in this book are capable of bringing all age groups into full maturity in Christ.

Members in all age groups are susceptible to changing their allegiance to Christ and His church. In the Inter American Division, new members and youth within the ages 18-30 years are likely to struggle with their loyalty to Christ and His Church. This RMG 500 Virtual Symposium explore principles and methods for sustaining and reinforcing all our members loyal to Christ and His Church. We shall consider new members as a case study in our dialogue of Retaining the More the Gain.

The book has nine chapters. Chapter one explores the biblical foundations for retaining new members. These foundational principles come from the book of Colossians. Chapter two analyses metaphors in the Bible for meanings related to retention. **Characteristics of new members** is the focus of chapter three. Chapter four **traces the process new members follow in leaving church**. **Factors influencing faith in Christ** are assessed in chapter five. Chapter six looks at the influence of ministry structures on maintaining faith in Christ. Chapter seven examines the role of the Sabbath school as an instrument of cultivating faith in Christ and loyalty to the body of Christ. Chapter 8 adds methods that Ellen White wrote in her book *Evangelism* regarding principles in helping new members of the church.

Finally, Chapter 9 gives a summary and conclusion. We begin the biblical assumptions undergirding new members' faith in Christ and their loyal to His Church.

CHAPTER 1

Biblical Foundations of Loyal to Christ and His Church

Loyalty to Christ and His Church is the essence of Christian maturity. In Colossians 1:1-8, Paul argued that the Colossians' **"FAITH IN CHRIST"** inspired him and others to pray for them. The phrase "faith in Christ" conveys the meaning of **loyalty to Christ**. He uses the preposition "in" to indicate the location of the Colossians faith. It is a faith in Christ. He prayed for them because their "faith in Christ" inspired him. He used the attribution **"faith in Christ"** to encourage their loyalty to Christ.

Paul began his mentorship of the New Members in Colosse by evoking in their minds loyalty to Christ. It appears Epaphras told him about the Colossians' faith in Christ; therefore, he used this attribution, "faith in Christ," to establish a rapport with the New Members. Since Paul had not been with them, he used Epaphras's perception of the Colossian Christians to establish a relationship with them. Paul began his *mentorship* of the New Members by evoking in their minds a loyalty to Christ.

Paul explained the **meaning of loyalty** to Christ. It means to be "filled with" (v. 9), "to walk worthy" (v. 10), and "give thanks" (v. 12). He argued that the **"KNOWLEDGE of His will in all WISDOM and SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING"** illuminates the minds of New Members to enable them to make wise decisions for Christ. **Spiritual discernment** inspires loyalty to Christ.

Paul contended/**PRAYER** that the Colossians' *conduct* should reflect their loyalty to Christ. They were to **"walk worthy** of the Lord." This means **"fully pleasing Him," "fruitful in every good work,"** "increasing in the knowledge of God," "strengthened with all might," and "patient and

longsuffering with joy” (vv. 10-11). A consistent lifestyle reinforces the faith of New Members in Christ.

Paul also gives **thanks** to the Father for His goodness. The Father qualified us to be “partakers of the inheritance of the saints”; and “delivered us from the power of darkness.” Christ also gave the Colossians a new life. Paul gave thanks for the goodness to evoke gratitude and loyalty in the minds of the Colossians. What God had done and who He is influenced their loyalty to Him.

Christocentric discipleship fosters loyalty to Christ. In verses 15 to 18 in chapter 1, Paul argued that **JESUS HAD PREEMINENCE** in all things. Jesus is the image of the invisible God, for He is God. He is “first born over all creation” (v. 15), first born from the dead” (v, 18), and was ”the head of the Church” (v. 18). The preeminence of Jesus in *Creation, at Calvary*, and in His *Church* informs our loyalty to Him. Jesus influences **every aspect** of human existence; He is Lord of all **we have and all we possess**. This truth **evokes Christians’ loyalty to Christ**.

Paul reminded the Colossian Christians of **THEIR INDEBTEDNESS TO GOD**. “You were enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled you into His flesh through death” (Col 1:22 NKJV). Paul says they should have gratitude in their hearts as they sense their indebtedness to Jesus. Paul stressed their indebtedness a bit further by arguing that “Jesus reconciles you unto Himself, . . . to present you holy, and blameless and above reproach in His sight” (v. 22). Paul encouraged the New Members to remember the past, present, and future events in their lives. He wanted the Colossian Christians to “continue in the faith” “being grounded” and “steadfast in the hope of the gospel” (v. 23). Paul appealed to the Colossian *memories, indebtedness*, and positions of *divine honor* to inspire their steadfastness in the Lord. **(New Pattern of Discipleship) Who is Jesus, what has He done for you? Why is important to you? How should respond to Him?**

Paul used his ***PERSONAL EXPERIENCES*** to inspire faithfulness to Christ. In verses 26-29 of Colossians chapter 1, he explained his experiences in ministry. First, he rejoiced in his sufferings for Christ and the Church. He viewed **sufferings with nobility and inculcated** in the Colossians a positive attitude toward sufferings. Second, he argued that God made him a minister *to preach* and *to teach* the mysteries of His grace to the Gentiles. God's grace had been hidden, but now is to be revealed to His saints. Paul's view of the mystery was that God saves people from all ethnicities by grace through faith and forms them into one body called the Church. The novelty of these personal experiences renewed the Colossians faith in Christ.

Many factors contributed to the Colossian Christians' steadfastness in Christ. Paul began his discipleship with *prayer* for the New Members. Their new faith in Christ prompted him to begin a ministry of prayer. He prayed that the New Members would behold Jesus in all His glory and appreciate what He accomplished for them at Calvary. The *preeminence* of Jesus in Creation and Calvary inspires loyalty, steadfastness, and reverence for Christ and His church.

Paul also gave *personal experiences* of his loyalty to Christ. He was loyal to Jesus in the midst of his sufferings and considered it a joy to suffer for Christ. Paul presented himself as an example of loyalty to Christ. He shared with the people that God made him a minister to the Gentiles. In spite of his sufferings, he remained committed to preaching and teaching the mysteries of the Gospel to all peoples. He shared these *personal struggles to encourage* the Colossians to *attain a full* "understanding in the knowledge of the mystery of God and Jesus." For in Christ is hidden "all treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:1-3). Christ was to be their strong defense against human philosophy.

In chapter 2, Paul warned the Colossian Christians of threats to their faith in Christ; however, before he explained the threats, he used relevant metaphors to help them visualize how to remain steadfast in Christ. The words he used were "rooted," "built," and "established." He argued that the

verbs were related to their commitment “in” Christ. Steadfastness in Christ means consistency in behaviors, in beliefs, in values, and a commitment to attain full maturity in Christ. **Full maturity is achieved when the wisdom of God takes preeminence over human philosophies and traditions.**

In Chapter 2, he wants them to know conflict he has them. Note 2:2 – his commitment to loyalty to Christ and His church.

Jesus is the Source of all wisdom. In Him is hidden “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (**Col 2:3**). There was no need for the Colossian Christians to consider any other wisdom, philosophy, or tradition. Jesus, whom they had received, had *all* the wisdom and knowledge of God. All the wisdom and knowledge necessary to sustain their *faith in Christ* came from Him.

Paul warned the Colossians against being “cheated” and “deceived” by philosophies and human traditions, which are patterned after the “basic principles” of the world (v. 8). Paul argued that in Christ dwells “*all* the fullness” of the Godhead. Christ is the beginning and end of the wisdom of the Godhead. Therefore, he reiterates that the Colossians were complete in Jesus. The wisdom of the Godhead takes precedence over the traditions of men.

Jesus ushered in a hidden mystery about God. Paul describes it as the new circumcision “made without hands.” Jesus performed this new circumcision through His death, burial, and resurrection. In this new circumcision, the Colossians were **buried** “*with Him*” in baptism, and were **raised** “*with Him*” through faith in the workings of God. The Colossians, having been dead in sins and uncircumcision, were now **made alive** together “*with Him*” in the new circumcision. Jesus ended an old dispensation and ushered in a new era. All people are saved by grace through faith in Christ. This good news inspired loyalty to Christ and His Church (Col 2:12-13).

The atonement of Jesus accomplished several things. First, it provided forgiveness for sins. Second, it gave new life in Christ. Third, it abolished human traditions by nailing them on the cross.

Those traditions were a shadow of the coming Messiah. At the cross, Jesus fulfilled the meaning of those traditions. Therefore, the Colossian Christians were not obligated to adhere to them (Col 2:16-18).

The Colossians were obligated to be **loyal to Christ**. He had forgiven all their sins. They were then alive in Christ. It was now their obligation to “hold *fast* to the Head, from whom all the body, *nourished* and *knit* together by joints and ligaments, *grows* with the *increase* that is from God” (v. 19). **Christ gives New Members a new life, He keeps them faithful to Him and His church and He to bring them to full to bring them to full maturity in Him.**

In chapter 3, Paul *explained* how New Members can achieve full maturity in Christ. Christian maturity is a process that begins with a new life in Christ. Paul used the word “raised” to convey the idea of that new life in Jesus. Jesus gave the Colossians **Christians new thinking and new affections for Him.**

He urged them to “set” their affection on things above and not the things on this earth. The word “set” conveys the attachment to someone. The Colossian Christians were to “SET” THEIR AFFECTION ON Christ who is “sitting at the right hand of God” (Col 3:2). Christ is the Source of all good things. He is the Source of wisdom, forgiveness, peace, and happiness. These values attract New Members to Christ. Attraction tends to lead to *attachment*.

New Members find their security in Christ. In the words of Paul, “our lives are hidden with Christ.” The phrase “hidden in Christ” conveys the ideas of assurance, storage, investment, and worship. New Members have their security in Christ. He gave His life for us. We reciprocate by investing our lives in Him. In this way, our lives are “*hidden in Christ in God*” (vv. 3-4).

The Colossians found their security in Christ. Their lives were *hidden in Christ and in God*. Therefore, they were not afraid to die. Paul says, “When Christ who is our life appears, you will appear with Him in glory” (v. 4). It is an eternal security. It **begins** with a new life *with* Christ; it continues *with*

our affection upon Christ; and culminates *with* being in glory *with* Christ. It is an eternal journey *with* Christ. (Process thinking) with eyes one future

The *sins of the flesh* (**Internal Variables**) retard maturity in Christ. Paul explained how to deal with sins of the flesh in chapter 3 verses 5-10. First, put to *death* “your members” or the “old man.” He used these metaphors to refer to the “deeds” or “manifestations” of the flesh. He argued that the Colossians were to put to death the “deeds” of the flesh through *beholding* (renewed in knowledge) who Jesus is and what He has done for them. They were to “put off” the old and “put on” the new person.

IT IS BY CONTEMPLATING THE BEAUTY AND DEEDS OF JESUS THAT WE “PUT ON” A NEW PERSON. On the other hand, the OLD DIES AS OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE *PREMINENCE* OF CHRIST GROWS. He is the first born of creation. He is the first born of the dead. He sits at the right hand of the Father. THE *PREMINENCE* OF JESUS *DRAWS* OUR AFFECTION TO HIM. **AS OUR AFFECTIONS ARE DRAWN TOWARDS CHRIST, OUR *DESIRES* TO INDULGE IN THE LUST OF THE FLESH DIMINISH (JOHN 12:32).**

OUR *LOVE* FOR JESUS OVERFLOWS TO OTHERS. Paul admonished the Colossians to demonstrate love for one another. Love is the “bond of perfection” (Col 3:14). It is the *adhesive that unites us to Christ and His Church.* The Church, as the body of Christ, **reenforces our faith in Christ.** Conversely, each **member’s faith in Christ strengthens** the other members in the body of Christ.

Paul urged the Colossians to treat others the *same way* Christ treated them. They were to forgive as He forgave them. They were to show kindness, mercy, longsuffering, and peace. God’s love in us needs to overflow into *wholesome relationships* that strengthen the body of Christ and keep us faithful to Christ.

The “Word” of God and the “peace” of God give stability to our faith in Christ. God’s peace makes us happy **and rules our emotions.** Our sins are forgiven and our affections are focused on Christ.

This assurance gives peace to New Members. On the other hand, the Word of God gives us wisdom on how to sustain our relationships with Jesus and others. The “*Word of God*” and the “*peace of God* helps *New Members* to live victoriously in Christ (3:15-17).

New Members need the “Word of God” and the “Peace of God.” Paul indicates that worship should include teaching and admonition **in *psalms, hymns, spiritual songs,*** and *grace* in our heart to the Lord. **The reading of psalms brings our minds into contact with the wisdom of God. We understand who God is and what He does. Such knowledge *illuminates* our minds and *quicken*s our conscience. This renewal evokes *responses* of singing, prayers, testimonies, and witnessing.** This act of worship *to God brings peace* to the worshipers. The Word of God and the *peace of God* help *sustain* New Members’ faith in Christ.

GOD’S FAITHFULNESS TO US IS THE BASIS FOR OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS. PAUL URGED THE COLOSSIAN CHRISTIANS TO SUSTAIN THEIR ***FAITH IN CHRIST THROUGH HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIPS*** IN FAMILIES AND OTHERS IN THE COMMUNITY. Harmonious relationships in families or organizations reinforce the New Members’ faith in Christ.

There is a reciprocal relationship between the New Members’ faith in Christ and wholesome relationships in their families. One influences the other; therefore, Paul appealed to husbands, wives, children, employers, and employees to ***CREATE A CULTURE OF HARMONIOUS*** relationships to provide support and reinforcement of the Colossian’s faith in Christ.

Paul urged the Colossians to get involved in ***PRACTICAL MINISTRIES***. He asked the Colossians **to pray for him and other workers** as he constantly prayed for them. He needed their prayers for “God would open to us a door for the word...” (Col 4:2). He invited them to join in a ministry of prayer and mission to the Gentiles.

He also urged them to exercise “*wisdom*” in **their witness to “those who are outside.”** He said, “Let your *speech* always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may *know how* you ought to answer each one” (4:5). **Prayer and witnessing are avenues through which people express their faith in Christ.** The New Members’ faith in Christ influences their ministries to others. On the other hand, their ministries affirm their faith in Christ.

PERSONAL **VISITS REINFORCE** the New Members’ faith in Christ. Paul sent Tychicus and Onesimus to visit the new Colossian Christians. He sent a message to them saying that these brothers will *assess* your needs, *inform* you of my joys and sorrows, and comfort you. The purpose of the visit was to affirm the Colossians’ faith in Christ. The visiting preachers did three things. First, they shared the *foreign news*. Second, they assessed the local conditions of the Colossians. Finally, they gave words of exhortation. The exhortations came last so the brothers could tailor their messages within the prevailing realities of the Colossian Christians (4:7-14).

Paul used many variables to affirm the Colossians’ faith in the Lord. He ended his message to them with greetings and three admonitions. **First**, he sent *greetings* from fellow laborers, namely Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus. Paul wanted the New Members to know that other spiritual leaders were thinking about them. He wanted to affirm their faith in Christ.

Second, he sent greetings from Epaphras who was one of them. He had raised up the church. Paul assured the New Members that Epaphras was always laboring fervently for them in *prayers* so that they would “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” Paul used the *spiritual influence* of Epaphras to affirm the New Members’ faith in Christ. He wanted them to stand “perfect and complete” in all the will of God.

Third, he *admonished* them to remain faithful to the Lord. The Lord had given them a ministry, a ministry of reconciliation. He urged the Colossians not only to *remain faithful* to Christ but also to

fulfill their **ministry to reconcile others** to Christ. Paul knew that as they labored with Christ to reconcile others, they would also **be inspired to remain** faithful to Christ.

This chapter assessed biblical principles and methods undergirding retention of new members.

Retention is faithfulness to Christ and His church toward a journey of full maturity in Christ. Many principles influence the faithfulness of new members. Paul used those principles to sustain the Colossians' faith in Christ and His church. The principles also helped to inoculate the Colossian Christians against internal threats to their faith in Christ. Threats can have debilitating effects on New Members' faithfulness in Christ.

CHAPTER 2

Metaphors of Loyalty to Christ and His Church

Bible writers use analogies to explain the meaning of being loyal to Christ and His Church. An analogy uses the meaning from one subject to explain the meaning of an abstract idea. For instance, “abiding in Christ” is an abstract concept. John, the gospel writer, used “vine and branch” to explain the meaning of “abiding” in the Lord. As the branch cannot bear fruit except it remains attached to the vine, neither can we be loyal to Christ and His church except that we maintain our relationship with Christ.

Christ and New Members are interconnected. He pours His goodness and mercy into their lives to *sustain* their faith in Him, and at the same time, New Members *set* their affections and minds upon Him. One can observe a circular movement here. This circular flow brings forth fruit. It is the fruit of having an abiding faith in Christ. Such an abiding faith influences a new Christian’s loyalty to the body of Christ.

Christ provides the nutrients for spiritual growth. Paul uses the human physiology to explain how spiritual growth occurs among Christians. He argues that ligaments keep all parts of the body connected to each other (**Colossians 2:19**). This interconnectedness fosters *growth, stability, and maturity*. Paul likens the head to Christ and the body to the Church. (**Issue of Faithfulness of God and Church faithfulness to Him**)

Christ and His Church foster spiritual maturity. God provides forgiveness, spiritual gifts, grace, hope, and joy to New Members, using these things to foster spiritual growth. In addition, Christ and His Church unite to bring His people into a *unity of faith, in the knowledge of the Son of God and in maturity to the fullness of God*. God gives the growth, but the Church also has a critical role to play in *supporting and sustaining* the growth.

Christian maturity is a defense against apostasy. It inoculates New Members against “every wind of doctrine, cunning craftiness, and deceitfulness” (Eph 4:14). Paul urged New Members to grow in “unity of faith” and in “spiritual knowledge.” He also added, “There is one Lord, one faith and one baptism” (v. 4).

Unity in doctrine influences social relationships. New Members need to bear one another’s burdens. **Paul uses the phrase “one another” to refer to social support, interconnectivity, and collaboration. Social relationships *reinforce* unity of faith and *unity of faith* fosters social relationships.** Paul used an **analogy of the body to illustrate the *interconnectivity* between *faith* and *social relations* to bringing New Members to full maturity in Christ.**

Peter explained how New Members grow in Christ. He argued that newborn babies (New Members) received the “pure milk of the Word.” He used the word “milk” to mean initial/basic spiritual knowledge. The new believers tasted the graciousness of Christ. Grace is like milk. Milk is the first nourishment new babies receive after birth. Similarly, Grace is pardon for sin. It is the first spiritual nourishment New Members receive at conversion. **New Members are indebted to Christ for grace, which inspires faithfulness to Christ.**

Peter referred to Christ as **the Chief Stone**. He used the word stone to convey ideas of assurance, stability, and dependence. Christ gives New Members the assurance of salvation. Paul said, “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead you shall be saved” (**Rom 10:9**). The New Members’ assurance of salvation comes from Christ as He is the *sure foundation* of their faith.

Peter referred to New Members as living stones, which meant that New Members unite with Christ to build a spiritual house, an invisible place of worship, where God is omnipresence. They worship Him in Spirit and truth. This act of worship affirms their faith in Him.

The people of God are sometime **likened to trees**. Paul used this metaphor to explain the New Members' assurance of salvation in Christ. **Christ is the root**. Roots give *stability* and *nourishments* to trees. The nourishments include nitrates, water, phosphate, potassium, zinc, and others. Similarly, Christ nourishes New Members with His *forgiveness, mercy, and grace*. This good news reinforces and sustains faith in Christ. Grace nourishes and deepens a new believer's commitment to Christ and the Church (Colossians 2:6).

In Ephesians 6, Paul argues that vertical and horizontal relationships reinforce each other. He uses *prepositions (in/as)* to describe the validity of human relationships. Children obey your parents in the Lord; parents train your children *in* the Lord; servants render service *as* to the Lord; masters, be kind servants even as God is kind to you. God's relationship with us influences our relationship with others. On the other hand, our relationships with others strengthen our relationship with God.

Paul urged New Members to be "strong in the Lord" (Eph 6:10). He uses a **soldier's armor** to illustrate the **steadfastness of faith in Christ**. Paul likened "faith in Christ" as putting on the "whole armor of God" The whole armor enables New Members to *withstand* the *wiles* of the evil one and at same time remain steadfast in Christ (v. 13). Paul also visualized how to use the armor of God to withstand "satanic forces" while abiding in Christ. He did this by giving spiritual meaning to each part of a soldier's armor. It is the responsibility of New Members to abide in Christ and learn how to use *spiritual disciplines* to protect themselves against satanic forces.

Tents have features which explain steadfastness in Christ. A tent is “a portable shelter made of cloth, supported by one or more poles and stretched tight by cords or loops attached to pegs driven into the ground” (source). The *cords* and the *pegs* keep the tent *steadfast* on its poles.

Isaiah used some of these same metaphors. He asked the Israelites to “lengthen their cords and strengthen the stakes” (Isa 54:2). The *cord presents quantitative growth*. Israel was to make known to heathen nations that the Lord God was one God so the Gentiles could come to that light. This means the conversion of Gentiles to the God of Israel was God’s plan. Isaiah used the word *stake* to convey the idea of steadfastness, stability, and faith in Israel’s God. He said, “Strengthen your stakes” (v. 2). Church growth and retaining the gains are interrelated. Retention of New Members facilitates quantitative growth. On the other hand, quantitative growth reinforces qualitative growth. The *cords* and *stakes* keep the tent anchored firmly to the ground, which is a beautiful picture of the steadfastness God’s people find in Christ and His Church.

Chapter 3

The New Member

New members experience many changes. This chapter assesses the meaning of those changes in order to give readers a holistic perspective of new members. They have new minds, new affections, new energies, and have a new hope in Christ. God transforms every aspect of their lives at conversion and as they continue to grow in Christ.

New members *are born of* the Holy Spirit. Jesus used the phrase “born again” to refer to the beginning of conversion. He indicated that the Holy Spirit begins the work of conversion in the minds of New Members. They are “born of the Spirit” (John 3:6), which means conversion originates from the Holy Spirit. People cannot tell the exact beginning points as the beginning is invisible to the human eye. It is invisible like the wind. Yet, one may hear or see the effects of the wind. We cannot tell when conversion begins but one may see its manifestations.

New Members tend to show *five manifestations* of conversion. First, is a *new mind*. Conversion is a gradual transition from an old life to a new life. The Holy Spirit renews the minds of New Members. Paul admonished Christians to be “transformed by the renewing of their minds” (Rom 12:2). New thoughts should occupy their minds; thoughts that are noble, lofty, pure, and honorable. The mind of Christ permeates their thought patterns. The Scriptures expose New Members to God’s thoughts. The love of God toward sinners has a profound effect on the thinking pattern of New Members. “While they

were yet sinners Christ died for them” (Rom 5:8). Conversion **disrupts** or **changes their thinking** pattern. The love of God elevates their minds. Indeed, God’s love draws out their affections toward Him.

The second manifestation is new *affections*, and New Members have a new affection/love for Christ. While they were yet sinners, Christ *died for them*. They were buried with Him in baptism and rose with Him in the power of His resurrection. They are *now alive* in Christ and this *new affection* gives them *unspeakable joy*.

Paul gives the *reasons* for the new affection: “Therefore being *justified* by faith, we have *peace* with **God** through our *Lord Jesus Christ*: By whom also we have *access* by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and *rejoice* in *hope* of the glory of God” (Rom 5:1-3). In other words, through Jesus, New Members receive God’s *forgiveness, peace, and joy*. They share this joy with an abundance of energy.

The third manifestation is *fervent zeal* for Jesus. New Members have a fresh zeal to labor for their Lord. Love kindles their zeal to participate in the body of Christ. I have observed that New Members are the first to arrive at church services because they are eager to participate in worship services, club meetings, choir, and other ministries. Service is not a duty. It is an act of love to Jesus. In the Bible, there are examples of zeal without love, but there are no examples in the Bible where it talks of love without zeal. For instance, Paul had zeal to persecute Jewish Christians. After his conversion, he channeled his zeal to reaching Gentiles with the Good News about Jesus the Messiah. Love influences our zeal for ministry and relationships with others.

The fourth manifestation is *holy conduct*. New Members strive to be consistent in their conduct. Paul urged the Colossian Christians to *walk* worthy of the Lord, fully *pleasing* him, being *fruitful* in all good work..." (Col 1:10). The conduct of New Members reflects the attributes of Jesus and includes "tenderness, mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, forgiving one another, and bearing one another's burdens" (3:12, 13). New Members live in the hope of a brighter future with Christ.

The fifth manifestation *is hope*. Hope is the anticipation of a reality yet to come. New Members rejoice in hope of the "glory of God" (Rom 5:2) and they anticipate a "city whose maker and builder is God" (Heb 11:10). In that city, God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. This hope affirms and sustains their faith in Christ.

Chapter 4

Process Members Follow in Changing their Loyalty

James Loder (1931) explains stages new members go through in the process of *leaving* the church. These stages include cognitive dissonance, interlude struggle, insights, release or redirection, and verification. If this process is understood, church members should be better able to help New Members *remain loyal* to Christ and His Church. Each stage of the process will be briefly examined below.

Cognitive Dissonance: New Members begin to contemplate leaving the church when internal or external events *trigger cognitive dissonance* in their minds. Cognitive dissonance is a state or feeling of uneasiness. Social scientists argue that the introduction of *new ideas* or *events* into a stable mind create cognitive dissonance. Such ideas could be biblical truths about the Sabbath, what happens when a person dies, or other unique Adventist doctrines. Other events like stress, lies, guilt, shame, criticism, isolations, divorce, death, or a pandemic can also create cognitive dissonance. Some of these triggers originate within a person's mind, while other triggers are caused by external events. If any of these factors cause *persistent* stress, a "reservoir of tension" creates cognitive dissonance in the mind.

Interlude Struggle: New Members often struggle with new doctrines and new lifestyle challenges. These interlude struggles cause uneasiness in their minds. During this stage, New Members consider various options to help them return to a comfortable state of mind. They struggle *for weeks* with this uneasy state of mind before making gradual or radical decisions to resolve their uneasiness.

Insights: This stage of struggle provides the New Members with insights. The insights relate to new ways of resolving the dissonance in their minds. These ways may include absenteeism, isolation, apostasy, and change in beliefs or values. New Members take these actions to resolve emotional or

cognitive disturbances. At this stage, New Members are in a contemplative mood. Many alternatives are considered, but a final decision may be still pending since they are in state of liminality.

In other words, they are in a state of in “in-betweenness” or interregnum. The New Members are at a tipping point and are trying to decide whether to remain in the Church or return to their old ways. It is at this point that they desperately need good Adventist friends to help them sort through their challenges. They need someone to visit them, to encourage them, to act as a sounding board as they consider the various alternatives, they have to resolve their disturbances.

Release or Redirection: This stage involves a set of alternatives. The new Christian can release (give up) the new beliefs and lifestyle of Adventism and return to the old way of living or embrace a redirection of life and grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ. If the Adventists leaders and members fail to *provide practical solutions*, the new Christian can easily follow through on their decision to leave the church and return to their old habits and beliefs.

If the New Members choose to redirect their lives and beliefs, this stage marks the beginning of a new state of mind. They resolved their uneasiness about the Adventist Church and forge ahead with new friends, new beliefs, and new ways of living. However, if they release their frustrations and tensions by returning to their old life styles and beliefs, they are not beyond reconciliation to Christ and Church. Perhaps all they need is more friendship, more encouragement, and more involvement with members who live their faith.

Verification: The final stage is a time of adjustment and verification. The New Christian adjusts to new realities. They have new friends, they go to new places, and they may dress, eat, and act differently. It is a period of adjustments.

They evaluate every new experience to justify their decision for either staying or leaving the Church. This period of verification is a time of vulnerability. Some of their new beliefs and experiences

may cause conflict with their old moral values. Other experiences may cause cognitive dissonance and stress. It is important to remember that the Holy Spirit uses cognitive dissonance to encourage not only change in behavior and beliefs, but also change at the worldview level of core values and assumptions. During the verification stage leaders and members are important ingredients as they encourage, model, and walk with the New Members.

New Members tend to follow this five-stage process in their decision to either join or leave a local Church. These stages involve uneasiness, struggles, alternatives, new directions, and verification. How much encouragement, friendship, good modeling, and acceptance New Members receive from the local church are important factors that determine whether or not they stay or leave. This highlights several important aspects of what every church member can do to encourage New Members to remain loyal followers of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 5

Factors Which Influence to Loyal to Christ and His Church

Many factors influence the retention of new members. This chapter will examine several factors for their *effectiveness* to keep new members steadfast in Christ. By effectiveness, I mean the degree to which *features* in each factor are successful in retaining members. How these *features* influence new members' steadfastness in Christ and to His Church will be identified and explained.

The **HOLY SPIRIT** is the primary Agent in the retention of new members. The members were born of the Holy Spirit: He began the conversion process in their minds, convicted them of their sins, and revealed to them the love of Jesus. The love of Jesus led them to repentance, which is godly sorrow for sins. They buried their sins in baptism and arose to be alive in Christ.

The Holy Spirit was the One that led this process of conversion to Christ. New members are admonished to “walk in the Spirit so as to not fulfill the lust of flesh” (Gal 5:16). In other words, new members are to submit their lives to the control of the Holy Spirit to remain steadfast in Christ. **The Holy Spirit *begins and sustain* the conversion process; however, new members need to *daily abide in Christ and under the control of the Holy Spirit*. The Holy Spirit gives *supernal power to new members to keep them abiding in Christ*.**

Jesus gives new members their first taste of **grace**. He died that they might receive grace. Grace is pardon for sins. Pardon for sins is a memorable experience. It evokes gratitude and loyalty in the hearts of new members. It is their first taste of the “pure milk” called grace. They discover that the Lord is gracious. He died and arose, that they too may die to sin and arise to live a new life in Christ. This is

grace. It deepens new members' loyalty to Christ. Grace also draws their affection toward Christ in an abiding relationship.

SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE sustains New Members' faith in Christ. Bible study provides them with spiritual knowledge, which comes from the mind of God; He is the source of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. These qualities interrelate with each other, helping New Members to make right choices.

WISDOM gives insights to realities beyond the natural realm. It transcends knowledge. On the other hand, knowledge refers to facts, concepts, and the truths people acquire about God that allows them to make a distinction between the true God and false gods.

UNDERSTANDING refers to people's ability to explain the relevance of facts, concepts, and truths in making right decisions. These qualities come from God. They **interact with each other to help new members make right decisions to remain steadfast in Christ.**

These qualities have a profound influence on new members' **abilities to make right choices.** **Paul prayed that the Colossian Christians “might be filled with the *knowledge* of his will in *all wisdom and spiritual understanding*; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto *all pleasing*, being *fruitful* in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:9-10 KJV).** Leaders should *pray* that new members acquire these qualities through the study of the Bible.

Church leaders are to **PRAY FOR NEW MEMBERS.** Prayer helps to affirm a new member's faith in Christ. For example, Paul always assured new members that he prayed for them. He also asked new members to pray for him. He said to the Colossians “Pray for us that God will open doors for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ” (Col 4:3). Prayers affirm the faith of new members, especially when they pray for others, but also when others pray for them.

Prayer has additional effects on new members. Leaders are able to *commit* them to God through prayer. God is able to “keep them from falling and present them faultless before His throne” (Jude 1). God keeps new members faithful by *sending* the Holy Spirit to be their comforter, teacher, and counselor. He also *releases* angels to help preserve a new members’ faith in Christ. The Godhead does more for newly baptized members when leaders and members pray for them. Prayer *transfers* them into God’s *keeping* and God *releases* His power to sustain their faith in Him.

Paul prayed for God to **give two qualities** to new members. “Give unto [them] the *spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him* (Eph 1:17). These qualities are necessary to enable new members to have *spiritual discernment* and appreciation of their *calling* and *riches* in Christ (v. 18). In other words, Paul prayed that new members would discern who God is and what He has done for them. This revelation would deepen their commitment to Christ.

Paul *asked* new members to **pray for him**. He wanted them to become an *integral part* of his ministry through prayer. Prayer *committed* them **to the cause** for which they prayed. It also allowed them to *experience* God’s answers to their prayers for those **answers would affirm their faith** in Christ and His church.

A new members’ faith in Christ is strengthened through RELATIONSHIPS with the members and leaders in the Church. Social relationships create a **culture of interdependence among members**. Each member learns to bear the burdens of others. This emotional support demonstrates tolerance, love, and interconnectivity in the body of Christ. This social support has profound effects on new members’ steadfastness in Christ. SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS REINFORCE THE NEW MEMBERS’ COGNITIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST. ON THE OTHER HAND, THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOD PROVIDE THE CATALYST FOR WHOLESOME RELATIONSHIPS WITH ONE

ANOTHER. This symbiotic relationship fosters new members' faith in Christ. The divine dimension has profound influence on human aspects of faith in Christ and the Church.

PERSONAL VISITATION connects new members with spiritual mentors for the purposes of *sharing, admonishing, and training*. These variables help to sustain the new members' loyalty to Christ and His Church. Let us examine how each variable reinforces faith in Christ.

New members have **various needs**. Spiritual mentors should visit new members to assess their various needs and should seek to answer **four relevant** questions. First, **What is happening in the lives of the new members?** The question assesses the existing realities new members are facing. Some of those realities may include their *study habits, witnessing patterns, social relationships*, their homes, schools, and local churches. **This question also assesses threats to their faith in Christ.** These threats may come from false teachers or social relationships; however, wherever they originate, the question encourages the new members to **speak about what is happening** in their lives.

The second question seeks to interpret those realities: Spiritual mentors should ask, **Why are those realities happening to the new members?** For instance, if the new members are growing in Christ, mentors need to know the **factors contributing** to the growth. On the other hand, if new members are drifting from the faith, it is important to know why they are drifting. Spiritual mentors need to know and interpret the realities of what is going on in the lives of new members.

The information gathered from the first two questions forms the basis for the third question. What **should be happening** in the lives of the new members? In other words, What are the desired outcomes for those new members? Spiritual mentors search for practical outcomes that are in harmony with Scripture. **The Scriptures may affirm new members' beliefs, values, and practices, or it may condemn their moral behaviors or social relationships.** The spiritual mentor should consult the

Scriptures to determine God's will for new members. Ministries to new members need to synchronize with God's will for them. In order word, the Scripture informs our ministry practices.

Personal visitation gathers information before implementing ministries. Ministries to new members include some general elements. **FIRST, an update on the triumph of the gospel in other communities.** Such news encourages and inspires faith in Christ. It appeals to their sense of belonging to the body of Christ. The update may also include some church leaders' struggles, persecutions, and threats. This kind of news inspires new members to participate in fervent prayer for their spiritual mentors, which deepens their dependence on God.

SECOND, visitation of new members may include exhortation. Spiritual mentors use exhortations, clarifying issues, instructions, or rebukes to affirm faith in Christ. The will of God for new members informs the contents of the exhortations; however, it is necessary for spiritual mentors to know God's will for all God's people as outlined in the Bible.

There is a difference between human needs and God's will. God's will refer to His desired outcomes for His people. For example, obedience, faith in Christ, and unity in the body of Christ. On the other hand, needs refers to deficiencies or gaps in the moral, emotional, or social state of a person. An example is fornication, which is a moral deficiency. However, God's will would be sexual purity. Spiritual mentors place *emphasis* on God's will for a person rather than on their deficiencies.

THIRD, new members need updates on the **global mission of the church.** These updates influence their faith in Christ. Christ ought to be the center of these updates. The providence of Christ in the lives of His people affirm their faith in Him. Older members need to encourage New Members to support the church's mission not only locally, but globally as well. For instance, new members can participate in short-term mission trips. Spiritual mentors can encourage new members to pray for

mission endeavors and support mission projects with their offerings. These activities cultivate an attitude of selfless service to others and strengthens their faith in Christ and His Church.

CONVERSION AT AN EARLY AGE FOSTERS STEADFASTNESS IN CHRIST. I have observed that children who were baptized within the ages of 9-12 tend to remain loyal to Christ. Early *attraction* develops into a *lasting attachment*. Chicks are attached to moving objects, which make the first impression on their minds. In a similar way, children who are attracted to Jesus at an early age tend to remain steadfast in Him.

Children are impressible. They are attracted to acts of love and kindness. The kindness of Jesus attracts children to Him. Kindness appeals to their affection and encourages them to think about Jesus. Children are *attracted* first to Jesus before they are *attached* to Him. The heart comes before the mind. In other words, **EARLY ATTRACTION LEADS TO LASTING ATTACHMENT.**

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES INFLUENCE NEW MEMBERS' FAITH IN CHRIST. A discipline is a persistent behavior that affects positively a person's growth. New members are to cultivate persistent habits to foster their growth in Christ. They have a vital role to play to sustain their faith in Christ. **FOUR DISCIPLINES HELP TO SUSTAIN THEIR FAITH IN CHRIST.** First, Bible study exposes new members to the **wisdom and knowledge of God**. These qualities quicken the mental faculties of new members; therefore, they are able to make right decisions to sustain their faith in Christ. Bible study has a profound influence on the minds of new members. **It illuminates their mental faculties.** It also gives glimpses of God's holiness and mighty acts. **These glimpses elevate their human frailties, inspire their faith, and awaken their gratitude toward Christ.**

SECOND, PRAYER DEEPENS NEW MEMBERS' FAITH IN CHRIST. It enables them to transfer their burdens to the Lord. Through prayer, new members demonstrate their reliance upon God. His answers affirm their faith in Him. This affirmation inspires consistency in prayer. **Prayer is an act**

of reliance on the Lord. This act of reliance brings divine affirmations to deepen the new member's faith in Christ. They express their faith in singing, testimonies, and practical ministries within the body of Christ. Bible study and prayer sustain commitment to Christ.

Third, new members should also be committed to the body of Christ. New members'

INVOLVEMENT IN MINISTRIES OF THE LOCAL CONGREGATION PROVIDE

SATISFACTION. This satisfaction often brings *joy*, and joy fosters commitment to continue service to others.

FOURTH, WITNESSING REINFORCES COMMITMENT TO ONE'S COMMUNITIES.

Paul urged the Colossians to share their faith with others. "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with *grace, seasoned with salt*, that ye may know *how ye ought* to answer every man" (Col 4:6). The contents of our witness are important; however, appropriate communication is also necessary. Appropriate communication produces relational satisfaction between new members and their communities. Witnessing attaches new members to their communities.

THE RETENTION OF NEW MEMBERS IS TRI-DIMENSIONAL. First, new members *commit* themselves to Christ through BIBLE STUDIES, PRAYER, thanksgiving, and singing. Second, INVOLVEMENT in the life and ministries of local **congregations** *commit them to the* Body of Christ. Finally, **WITNESSING COMMITS** new members to their communities. New members have a vital role to play to sustain their faith in Christ. This helps protect them against external threats to their faith in Christ and encourages a growing relationship with Christ.

CHAPTER 6

The Influence of Structures on Members' Loyalty

There appears to be a correlation between church structures and the retention of new members. This chapter explores the *effects* of church structure on the steadfastness of new members to Christ and His Church. Church structures have different functions. These functions include ***NURTURE, ASSIMILATION, AND MENTORSHIP***. Some structures may perform more than one function; however, ministry structures tend to have one dominant function.

In this chapter three structures for the dominant effects on the steadfastness of new members will be examined: Adventist Youth, Personal Ministries, and Sabbath School Ministries.

The Sabbath School has three major objectives: to win, to train, and to hold or retain. The Sabbath School is primarily a holding structure. To hold means to “remain secure, intact, or in position without breaking or giving way.” The Sabbath School has many structures to facilitate the retention of new members. These structures include children, youth, and adult divisions. Others are the pastor’s Bible class, Sabbath School classes, and Branch Sabbath School. These structures facilitate three outcomes. First, the *acquisition* of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. These qualities give internal strength and sound judgment to new members. Internal strength sustains their vertical relation with God. On the other hand, sound judgment enables new members to make wise choices.

Second, Sabbath School structures foster *assimilation* into the body of Christ. These structures facilitate new members’ integration into the ministries of a local congregation. For instance, Sabbath school classes provide an avenue for new members to fellowship, witness, engage in mission projects, and participate in interactive Bible studies. These activities help to integrate new members into the customs, beliefs, and values of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Integration leads to stabilization. Third, Sabbath School structures stabilize new members. This means, they are “rooted and grounded” in

Christ and His church. At this stage, if they are active in their Sabbath School, they are unlikely to leave the church. By attending regularly, they show they are committed to Christ. This commitment influences their assimilation into the body of Christ. On the other hand, assimilation into the body of Christ reinforces the new member's commitment to Christ. Sabbath School structures facilitate the retention of new members by facilitating dynamic interactions between knowledge and assimilation to produce maturity in Christ.

Mentorship also influences the retention of new members. The Adventist Youth structure also tends to influence the mentorship and assimilation of new members. This structure facilitates youth involvement in skill training, faith development, career choices, and memory exercises. The structure facilitating these activities include Adventist Youth Societies, Pathfinders, Master Guide Clubs, and Pathfinder Days. These structures foster the mental, emotional, and spiritual growth of new members.

These structures, however, tend to facilitate assimilation through participation in skill-based activities with a strong emphasis on *doing*. New members acquire knowledge, skills, and new attitudes through doing, yet, the Sabbath School structure facilitates thinking as a *dominant* aspect of assimilation. Thinking influences doing. Youth structures facilitate doing to influence thinking. These two structures and their ministries complement each other. The cognitive process of new members tends to inform their actions; however, their actions also then clarify their thinking. Adventist youth structures foster retention of new members through interactions between *doing* and *thinking*.

Personal Ministries has many activities, which include lay preaching, sharing literature, teaching, compassion, and training models. It appears assimilation is the dominant orientation of this structure. It provides avenues for new members to share their testimonies and also has a focus on doing. New members tend have a lot of zeal, and with this zeal comes new thinking and new affections for Jesus.

New members should be encouraged to channel their zeal through Personal Ministries activities.

Assimilation takes place by doing. The need to know more increases as new members encounter resistance to their beliefs, values, and traditions. The need to know then motivates them to seek clarification from the pastor and others. It also inspires them to engage in personal Bible study. The acquisition of new knowledge and understanding prepares them to reengage in witnessing endeavors. Again, there is direct interactions between *doing and knowing* in the process of retaining new members. The Personal Ministries structure facilitate assimilation of new members through doing and knowing.

CHAPTER 7

The Sabbath School: An Instrument of Holistic Discipleship

The Sabbath School has its roots in creation, redemption, and eschatology—biblical themes that describe who God is and what He is doing. He made us, redeemed us and assures us of a bright future. We find our origin and wholeness in God. Our significance is derived from Him as He directs our destiny. This is the essence of discipleship and the Sabbath School cooperates with God to make His people whole.

The Sabbath School also reflects the character and ministry of Jesus. It does this through four emphases, three objectives, one goal, and eight or more structures. Let us examine each of these aspects of Sabbath School.

The Sabbath School uses four emphases that are interrelated to reflect the character and ministry of Jesus. The first emphasis of Sabbath School is the study of the Bible. The Bible reveals to Sabbath Schools members the loving character of God. As the members behold Him, their thoughts are elevated and their character refined. The Bible also reveals the marvelous things God has done and is doing for His people.

Daily Bible study helps bring our sinful nature under the control the Holy Spirit. When the flesh is controlled by the Holy Spirit, God's people can live victoriously in Christ. Daily Bible study is like medicine, it brings sin and its manifestations under the control of the Holy Spirit. Sin is a supernatural virus. We curb its infections or manifestations through daily study of the Bible.

The Holy Spirit gives clarity and relevance to the daily study of the Bible. When people study daily, the Holy Spirit gains daily access to their hearts. The Holy Spirit does several things. He convicts,

subdues sins of the flesh, makes us obedient to God, interprets our prayers, and enables us to live victoriously. Bible study is the first priority of the Sabbath School.

The second emphasis fosters fellowship. Fellowship is sharing of common values, feelings, places, times, experiences, and memories. It originates from our innate need for fellowship with God and people. God made us with an inherent desire for companionship. He instituted marriage to fulfill that desire for companionship. The Sabbath School meets every Sabbath for fellowship with God and others. This is a pleasant experience that provides the environment to review and study of the Bible together. Learning occurs best in pleasant atmospheres. Fellowship in Sabbath School fosters unity, encourages sharing, provides emotional supports, it reflects what God does, and makes us vulnerable in a safe environment. Fellowship is at the heart of Sabbath School as it motivates us to share our joy with others.

The Sabbath School promotes evangelism and mission. There are three areas of evangelism in Sabbath School: Branch Sabbath Schools, decision days, and community outreach. Bible study is a catalyst for mission and evangelism. Bible study influences the frequency and quality of students' witnessing activities.

The Word gives zeal for mission and creates an eagerness to share the Word with others. Fellowship in Sabbath School also provides emotional support to share Christ in good times and in times of crisis. Daily Bible study fosters daily witnessing. It is also true that daily witnessing encourages daily Bible study. There is an interrelationship between Bible study and mission. Bible studies fosters mission and mission encourages Bible study.

The fourth emphasis is prayer. Prayer is not the power. Prayer gives the students access to Divine power. Prayer communicates our needs or petitions to the Holy Spirit, Jesus, and to God the Father. The Holy Spirit interprets our petitions. Jesus meditates on our prayer; and the Father releases the answers

according to His will. Prayer gives Sabbath School members access to healing, forgiveness, discernment, understanding, wisdom, and divine power. Prayer enables us to transfer our anxiety, fears, uncertainties, joys, and happiness to the Godhead. Prayer gives us access to the Holy Spirit, while the Holy Spirit gains access to our hearts through daily Bible study and prayer. These three Agents work together to prepare Sabbath School members for the coming of Jesus.

The Sabbath School has one goal—to prepare the people of God to live in readiness for the glorious coming of Jesus. The key word is readiness. Jesus says be ready. The emphases of the Sabbath School influence is from the readiness of the members, but readiness is **not** the goal. The goal is to prepare the members to live in readiness for the coming of Jesus.

The Sabbath School has three main objectives: to win, to hold, to train. First is *training*. Training is integral to the operation of the Sabbath School. It provides the members with new knowledge, skills, and attitudes to perform various functions in the church. It is the responsibility of the Sabbath School council to plan, organize, and conduct quarterly training for officers and teachers. Training increases the skills of the officers and teachers to *retain* the members.

The second objective is to *retain*. The Sabbath School cares for four groups of members: *active members*; *new members*; *missing members*; and *prospective members*. This objective emphasizes *retention*, *reconciliation*, *nurture*, and *discipleship*. Churches should appoint an associate Sabbath director to be responsible for the fulfillment of this objective. This associate director could function on the second Sabbath of each month to give leadership to the discipleship of the Sabbath School members.

The third objective is to *win*. The Sabbath School is a soul-winning ministry. Daily study of the Bible provides a passion to witness. Witnessing and Bible study are interrelated since Bible study motivates God's people to witness. Witnessing encourages daily Bible study.

Churches should appoint an associate Sabbath School director to give leadership to this objective who could function on the first Sabbath of each month to promote Branch Sabbath Schools, decision days, and community guest days.

The Sabbath School has its roots in creation, redemption, and eschatology. These biblical themes give the members a sense of their origin, significance, and destiny. The Sabbath School reinforces these themes of their origin, significance, and destiny through its emphases on Bible studies, fellowship, evangelism, and mission. These emphases are supported by three objectives: to train, to win, and to retain. The Sabbath School or the church board needs to provide officers to give leadership to these objectives in order to realize the goals of the Sabbath School.

CHAPTER 8

Ellen G. White Principles and Methods on Loyalty

It is the *responsibility* of experienced members to integrate New Members into the body of Christ. Ellen White argues that “patience, hope, faith, and charity” have a profound effect on consolidating new members’ faith in Christ and His church. **AFFECTION PROVIDES THE ADHESIVE TO SUSTAIN NEW MEMBERS’ ALLEGIANCE TO CHRIST (EVANGELISM, 285).**

White also contends that everyone “bears the *responsibility of keeping* himself in harmony with the guidance of the Word of God.... **WHILE THE NEW CONVERTS SHOULD BE TAUGHT TO ASK COUNSEL FROM THOSE MORE EXPERIENCED IN THE WORK, THEY SHOULD ALSO BE TAUGHT NOT TO PUT THE MINISTER IN THE PLACE OF GOD. MINISTERS ARE BUT HUMAN BEINGS, MEN [AND WOMEN] COMPASSED WITH INFIRMITIES. CHRIST IS THE *ONE* to whom we are to look for guidance” (*Evangelism*, 286).**

The ministries of the church influence new members’ *assimilation* into the truth. Ellen White purports that being involved in a ministry reinforces faith in Christ and loyalty to His Church. **“MINISTERS MUST IMPRESS UPON THOSE FOR WHOM THEY LABOR... THAT EVERY DEPARTMENT [MINISTRIES] OF THE WORK OF GOD SHOULD ENLIST THEIR SUPPORT AND ENGAGE THEIR INTEREST.... [They] must understand that it is not the hearers of the Word but the doers of the Word that will have eternal life” (*Evangelism*, 286-287). NEW MEMBERS REINFORCE THEIR FAITH IN CHRIST THROUGH ENGAGEMENT IN PRACTICAL MINISTRIES IN THE LOCAL CONGREGATION.**

SKILL-BASED INSTRUCTIONS IN TANDEM WITH *LABORS OF LOVE* help to settle new

members in the truth. Labors of love should precede theological or skill-based instructions. Love tends to prepare the mind for learning. It elevates and ennoble the mind. Church leaders may find easy access to the mind of new members if their **labors of love** precede the religious or **skill-based instructions**.

Labors of love include tolerance, longsuffering, kindness, humility, faith, and charity.

God holds us *accountable* for the retention of new members. Ellen White argues that with responsibility comes accountability. “The church has a special *responsibility* laid upon her to attend to these souls who have followed the first rays of light they have received; and if the members of the church neglect this duty, they will be *unfaithful* to the trust that God has given them” (*Evangelism*, 293).

Church leaders need to study the *laws* of the human mind. White argues that each person is different. “WE ALL NEED TO STUDY *CHARACTER AND MANNER* THAT WE MAY KNOW HOW TO DEAL JUDICIOUSLY WITH *DIFFERENT MINDS*, THAT WE MAY *USE OUR BEST ENDEAVORS* TO HELP THEM TO A CORRECT UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORD OF GOD, AND TO A TRUE CHRISTIAN LIFE. WE SHOULD READ THE BIBLE WITH THEM, AND DRAW THEIR MINDS AWAY FROM TEMPORAL THINGS TO THEIR ETERNAL INTERESTS” (*Evangelism* 293-294).

Teaching methods should be tailored to address the learning styles of every new member. The learning styles tend to suggest appropriate teaching methods that facilitate skilled-based learning. The learning styles are indications as to how the mind of a person works. Church leaders need to learn the basic laws of the mind.

Church leaders should also use simple methods to instruct new members. In the book *Evangelism*, White identifies *APPROPRIATE METHODS* to keep new members’ faithful to Christ and the Church. *FIRST, INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY. WE SHOULD READ THE BIBLE WITH THEM, AND DRAW THEIR MINDS AWAY FROM TEMPORAL THINGS TO ETERNAL INTERESTS.*

Second, **RESPOND TO THEIR SOCIAL NEEDS.** How carefully should the members of the Lord's family guard their brethren and sisters? Make yourself their friend. If they are poor and in need of food and clothing, minister to their temporal, as well as their spiritual wants. Thus, you will be a double blessing to them.

Third, **ORGANIZE NEW MEMBERS INTO CHURCHES.** Just as soon as a church is *organized*, let the minister *set the members at work*. Some of the new converts will be so filled with the power of God that they *will at once enter the work*. They will labor so diligently that they will have neither time nor disposition to weaken the hands of their brethren by unkind criticism. Their one desire will be to carry the truth to the regions beyond.... Each soul is to be taught of God, line upon line, precept upon precept; he must feel his individual accountability to God to engage in service for his Master, whose he is, and whom he is required to serve in the work of saving souls from death (*Evangelism*, 294-295).

Four, **FAITH IN CHRIST GROWS BY PERFORMING SERVICE FOR CHRIST.** White contends that practical ministries reinforce new members faith in Christ and loyalty to his Church. She cites this principle several times her seminal works.

When souls are converted, *set them to work* at once. And as they labor according to their ability, they will grow stronger. **IT IS BY MEETING OPPOSING INFLUENCES THAT WE BECOME CONFIRMED IN THE FAITH. AS THE LIGHT SHINES INTO THEIR HEARTS, LET THEM DIFFUSE ITS RAYS. TEACH THE NEWLY CONVERTED THAT THEY ARE TO ENTER INTO FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST, TO BE HIS WITNESSES, AND TO MAKE HIM KNOWN UNTO THE WORLD** (*Evangelism*, 296).

The best medicine you can give the church is not preaching or sermonizing, but planning work for them. If *set to work*, the despondent would soon forget their despondency, the weak would become strong, the ignorant intelligent, and all would be prepared to present the truth as it is in Jesus. (297)

THOSE WHO ARE MOST ACTIVELY EMPLOYED IN DOING WITH INTERESTED FIDELITY THEIR WORK TO WIN SOULS TO JESUS CHRIST, ARE THE BEST DEVELOPED IN

SPIRITUALITY AND DEVOTION. THEIR VERY ACTIVE WORKING FORMED THE MEANS OF THEIR SPIRITUALITY. There is danger of religion losing in depth that which it gains in breadth. This need not be, if, in the place of long sermons, there is *wise education* given to those newly come to the faith. **TEACH THEM BY GIVING THEM SOMETHING TO DO, IN SOME LINE OF SPIRITUAL WORK, THAT THEIR *FIRST LOVE WILL NOT DIE BUT INCREASE IN FERVOR.*** (297)

God has entrusted the church with responsibility to sustain new members' faith in Him. This responsibility comes with accountability. Members in local congregations are accountable to God for the spiritual maturity of all new members. We shall stand before the judgment to give an account of the wellbeing of new members, so it is important for the older, more experienced church members to exercise tolerance, kindness, faith, hope, and charity toward new believers. Such labors of love will give insights to the learning styles of each new member. That can then be used to give relevant instructions to the new believers to enlist them to active service for the salvation of others. Such service to others will grow their faith in Christ and strengthen their loyalty to Christ.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

Several factors influenced new members' loyalty to Christ and His Church. Theological education influences the thinking of new members and exposes new members to God's knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. These qualities enable new members to make wise *decisions* related to faith in Christ and loyalty to the Church of Christ. Theological education enables new members to think clearly about their vertical relation with Christ. The acquisition of *wisdom, knowledge, and understanding* cultivates and sustains new members' faith in Christ. However, crisis events can threaten a person's faith in Christ.

New members are vulnerable to crisis events, which are powerful stimuli that cause disturbances in the minds of new members. If these disturbances persist over a long period of time unduly, new members tend to consider alternative ways to reduce the disturbances in their minds. One of those alternatives sometimes include a change in their allegiance to Christ and His Church. Theological education provides new members with alternatives to solve crisis events without changing allegiance to Christ and destroying their loyalty to His Church. Theological education fosters spiritual discernment and critical thinking.

Christ gives new members four qualities: (1) new minds, (2) new affections, (3) new energy, (4) new hope. These qualities influence the holistic development of new members. New members need to develop in all four aspects to *cultivate and sustain* their faith in Christ and build loyalty to His church.

The church plays a vital role to sustain new members' faith in Christ. It engages new members in thinking and doing activities, which can emphasize new ways of living. Thinking and doing are interrelated, so it is important to provide activities that encourage both. Thinking activities foster doing,

but doing activities inspires thinking. This interaction between the mind and the body reinforces the commitment of new members to Christ and His Church. Christ influences the thinking of new members; right thinking produces right actions and right actions reinforce right thinking. A balanced life leads to commitment to Christ and loyalty to His church.

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