

***“Seventh-day Adventist Young Adult Perceptions
of Stewardship as Revealed in Multiple International Focus Groups”***

A Preliminary Report

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Introduction

The Christian church in North America is deeply concerned about the faith experience of its young adults. They are constantly being challenged by the secular media and education as well as by their peers. As a result, their attitude towards the faith and actions of their Church is being undermined. In North America, as David Kinnaman has pointed out, “The ages eighteen to twenty-nine are the black hole of church attendance; this age segment is ‘missing in action’ from most congregations.”¹ It can be observed that it is often during this time that young adults experience an alternation of their religious convictions. Today’s young adults are “living through a period of compressed social, cultural, and technological change. This environment invites them to live out their faith in new and sometimes startling ways.”² Rapid changes all around them often outpace their ability to think through conflicting implications for their faith leaving them with feelings of ambivalence towards their own fundamental beliefs and values. Kinnaman identifies seven exhibited characteristics held by many of these young adults who are caught in the rapid change of the culture in which they live. He refers to them as “exiles” living in a new and different culture. These seven identifying characteristics are:

1. They are not inclined toward being separate from “the world” because they want to follow Jesus in ways that connect with the world.
2. They are skeptical of institutions but are not wholly disengaged from them.
3. These young adults sense God moving “outside the walls of the church.”
4. They are not disillusioned with tradition; they are frustrated with slick or shallow expression of religion.
5. They express a mix of concern and optimism for their peers.
6. They have not found faith to be instructive to their calling or gifts.
7. They struggle when other Christians question their motives.³

Gabe Lyons suggests that this cultural milieu, which has engulfed much of the next generation, is marked with three dominant characteristics. They are:

1. Pluralism – religiously diverse;

2. Postmodern – a questioning and even rejection of the idea that knowledge is certain, objective and inherently good;
3. Post-Christian – the reduced role of the church in life as a whole.⁴

While the studies of Kinnaman and Lyons are a reflection of many North American young adults, it is likely they would find similar phenomena existing in most western-oriented societies outside of North America. It was this premise that prompted the plan to launch a series of focus groups in those world divisions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that reflected this kind of cultural orientation. Our primary objective was to interview young adults in the 18 to 30 year old age group by using the focus group approach. The goal was to gain a better understanding that this age group has towards stewardship. From insights gained, it is hoped that we in the General Conference Stewardship Ministries Department will be able to be more intentional in meeting the needs discovered in this learning process. The foundation for the research was built on the definition of stewardship used by the General Conference Stewardship Ministries Department. The definition includes both a broad and a more restricted meaning.

“As used of Christian stewardship, in a broad sense, the word refers to man’s responsibility for, and use of, everything entrusted to him by God—life, physical being, time, talents and abilities, material possessions, opportunities to be of service to others, and his knowledge of truth.”

“ . . . In a more restricted sense the word ‘stewardship’ means one’s responsibility for a wise use of the material resources that come into his possession, especially, his responsibility to God with respect to tithes and offerings.”⁵

Research Methodology

Much of the information gathered by focus groups is more qualitative than quantitative. Vital to the success of the focus group approach is for the facilitator to ask the pertinent questions and then allow individuals to respond and on occasion to interact with others in the group. This approach was used for each of the focus groups conducted. At times clarifying questions were asked. At other times summary statements were shared to see if correct conclusions were being drawn. In each group the interactions were marked by openness and candor, which fulfilled one of the primary objectives for using the focus group approach.

Three world divisions, which operate in cultures typically associated with western values, were chosen for the study. Invitations for participation in the research project were extended to the division directors.⁶ They in turn selected countries they felt would best represent our research objectives and then contacted local leaders to see if they would be willing to participate. Eighteen young adult focus groups were conducted in eight different countries⁷ between April and October 2012.⁸ The participants themselves came from more than twenty countries. The suggested size was for twelve to fifteen participants but in the end the size of each group ranged from five to nineteen. Specific guidelines were given as

to the composition of the focus groups.⁹ The division stewardship directors worked with conference and local church pastors to select a diversity of participants. A wide range of perspectives and experience within the church was requested within the age group of 18 to 30 years old. Sixteen questions were developed and reviewed by the General Conference Stewardship Ministries staff, a pilot group of young adults who work at the General Conference complex, the stewardship directors in the participating divisions and researchers who were preparing a global survey of Seventh-day Adventist stewardship practices under the direction of the office of the General Conference Archives, Statistics and Research Center.¹⁰ The focus groups were designed to last approximately 90 minutes but conversations and dialogue sometimes extended beyond that. A casual atmosphere was intentionally established with an abundance of snacks supplied by the local church/conference. Chairs were placed in a circle when space allowed. With the permission of each group a recording was made for transcription purposes. It was agreed that no names would be used in this report and that anonymity would always be preserved.

An Overview of the Responses to the Questions Asked

The sixteen questions were grouped into six categories: Introductions, Mission of the Church, Impressions of the Church, Awareness of Stewardship Concepts, Confidence in the Church's Handling of Finances and Closure or Miscellaneous Statements. There was a total of 226 participants in the eighteen focus groups.

A. Introductions

The **first question** was meant as an icebreaker but it proved insightful nevertheless. It asked who or what had the greatest spiritual influence in the life of the participant. The most frequently mentioned spiritual influencer was the mother but that was not the case for everyone. Other immediate family members were also mentioned as well but so were SDA education, specific pastors, music, Pathfinders and mission trips/summer camps.

“My mother . . . she’s always the one that I turn to when I’m in dire need of spiritual assistance or knowledge, or spiritual protection.” [EUD]

“Probably my grandmother. I talk to her whenever I really need to talk to anyone, and she always gives really good advice on pretty much anything including spiritual things.” [EUD]

*Translator:*¹¹ “She (the young adult) has the joy to study in an Adventist school, but her family wasn’t Adventist. She got influenced through her best friend at school.” [EUD]

“First thing that came to my mind was a pastor that was very nice _____. He was the first thing that came to my mind.” [TED]

The **second question** asked was how many were baptized and how many had been introduced to the Adventist Church within the last five years. Of the 226 participants, a total of nine were not baptized and twenty-two said they had been introduced to the Adventist Church within the past five years. Six others indicated that they could also say they had been introduced with the past five years because of the new experience they have had. Most of those selected to meet in a focus group, therefore, were baptized members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (96%).

The last of the introductory questions was, “How many use some form of social media at least weekly.” Of the 226 only 12 (2.3%) indicated that they did not use some form of social media at least weekly. The leading medium was *Facebook* by a large margin. A few use *Twitter* and *Instagram*. It is clear that social networking is a major communication channel for this age group.

B. The Mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

The **fourth question** had two parts about the participants’ understanding of the mission of the Church. A clear understanding and support of the mission of the Church is vital for the continue financial support given to the Church.¹² Responses can be grouped into three major categories: (1) The Mission of the Church; (2) Be like Jesus and (3) Share the distinctive beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

1. *The Mission of the Church*

“I don’t think the primary mission should be making Seventh-day Adventists out of everyone. The primary [goal] should be making followers of Christ out of everyone.” [TED]

“Spread the gospel.” [SPD]

“We have to bring the Word of God to the world.” [EUD]

“... what is the purpose of the fundamentals, because that’s what I struggle with. See, I don’t care for the fundamentals because I know they’re from the Bible, so if we love God, we love His word, and those things will come naturally.” [SPD]

2. *Be like Jesus*

“Liberation, to free people from all sorts of problems—physical, spiritual, that kind of stuff.” [TED]

“I think discipleship is also very important, where we not only tell people, spread the gospel, but we also disciple them to the point where they know how to continue on.” [EUD]

“... I think our purpose in life is for us to live out our life as a living example of a loving [God].” [SPD]

3. Share the distinctive beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

“To tell others what we believe about the second coming of Jesus.” [EUD]
“In a very strict way, underline the second coming of God.” [EUD]

“I’m kind of new to the Seventh-day Adventist Church . . . From what I’ve seen, I would say the message for me was not only to spread the good news of the gospel, but also to correct the picture of God that we have, the real picture of God, then is to restore us to a real relationship with Him.” [SPD]

“I’ll say teaching the world about the true Sabbath.” [SPD]

“Taking the Three Angels Message to the whole world.” [SPD]

Related to “What is the mission of the Church?” is the next question, **number five**, which asks about how effective they feel the mission is being carried out by helping individuals find “new meaning and hope for their personal lives?” They were asked to express their perspective on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being low in effectiveness and 5 being high. Thirty-two percent rated the effectiveness below the midpoint and 34% felt it was higher than the midpoint. This may be more of a reflection where the respondents were than those whom they are trying to reach. Regardless, this does raise an important question about how well we are relating what the mission of the Church really is.

C. Impressions About the Church

Regardless of the age group, how much energy and even financial support one is willing to give can easily be influenced by one’s likes and dislikes of the church – whether it be local, regional and/or global. **Questions 6 and 7** address the points concerning what young adults like most about their church as well what they would like to see changed.

1. What do you most appreciate about the Church? Responses to this question can be grouped into three categories.

- a. *Sense of community locally and/or globally; fellowship and a sense of belonging; unity, the care extended for the members themselves.*

“For me consistency. Like, you can go here or South America, and they’re preaching the same message.” [SPD]

“A sense of community.” [TED]

“To be brothers and sisters and friends, and to know that there is someone who will always be with you if you’ve got problems and can share them and pray together.” [EUD]

“In a sense, the feeling of being one big family. Wherever I go in the world, when I go to an Adventist church, I feel like home.” [TED]

b. Beliefs, doctrines, teachings.

“I love that in all our doctrines, that Jesus is at the center. And I just love the hope that we have in Jesus and His soon return.” [SPD]

“I’ll go with the Bible, as how we understand the Bible to make sense of things.” [TED]

“I like that our beliefs don’t change over time, so we have the foundation of the Bible, so we don’t say, like, now believe in another thing.” [EUD]

“So for me it’s the hope that we have.” [SPD]

c. Service to others; caring for those outside the Seventh-day Adventist Church

“Honesty. So many people who are not Adventist, they work for some company, they really say, ‘He was very honest.’ The Adventist people have a good reputation.” [TED]

Translator: “She likes that it has a social. It puts a foot in helping society.” [EUD]

d. Our Bible Teachings and Evangelistic Outreach

2. **Question number seven** dealt with what the young adults would like to see changed in the Church. Four categories of response seemed to emerge although there was overlapping and several miscellaneous issues did surface.

a. Less criticism/judgmentalism; fewer conflicts; more love and fewer rules

“I wish I could erase all the differences between conservatists and liberalists.” [EUD]

Translator: “They are saying that the adults should pay attention to us, because we are the present but also the future of the Church. This attitude would change.” [EUD]

“The hypocrisy” [SPD]

“I’d like to give a mirror to every Adventist because we like to look at other people instead of looking at ourselves. . . . We find somebody who is worse than us, and we say, ‘Ok, he’s bad and I’m good.’” [TED]

“If there was anything we could change about our church, I think it would probably be ourselves.” [TED]

“I’d say that the old people should be more understanding with the young people.” [TED]

“The conflict in generations.” [EUD]

“Yes, since they (the older generation) criticize us, we criticize them as well. Because we feel oppressed, in a sense.” [EUD]

b. Certain biblical interpretations or emphasis.

“I would change the focus of upholding doctrine and upholding tradition, which is fine, but I would change the heavy focus that we have on that and switching some of it into loving and serving each other.” [SPD]

“... when people have baptism studies, they get baptized, and then they get left out on their own. So continuing that mentoring.” [SPD]

“That whole debate surrounding women’s ordination, and how closed-minded some people seem to be.” [SPD]

c. Lifestyle issues; music; Too strict or need to be more strict.

“Before preaching the second coming of Jesus Christ, it would be good to preach to others how Christianity has changed our life and how we love life with Christ.” [EUD]

d. The kind of relationship some have with those outside the Church.

“I think as a church we’re taking it too easy and not really going outside and talking to people and doing proper evangelism, being really motivated and dedicated at this time. Even when we do it, I think we’re not—we go to normal people, and we talk to them about high theology stuff. I’m thinking we should talk to them about things that happen with heart and love first. . . . So I think as a church we’ve lost the idea of going out and talking to people or doing something for them in order to show them Jesus.” [TED]

D. Awareness of Stewardship Concepts

Five questions, **numbers 8-12**, were asked that directly addressed stewardship. The first three dealt with stewardship as a concept whereas the last two deal with the application of stewardship concepts.

1. “When you hear the word stewardship what does it mean to you?” Responses to the first question in this series can be grouped into four major categories with a miscellaneous grouping with some lesser trends.

a. *No idea; Not sure (18%)*

“I’m not sure, I think financial.” [TED]

b. *Money or Assets; Tithe & Offerings; Giving (31%)*

“I always associated stewardship with tithing as a child. So my mum would say, ‘So you have put your 50 cents of tithe in the envelope this week?’ And that’s the way I thought of it . It was like, ‘Oh man, I’ve just got 50 cents and I could buy [something special]. . . . I hated tithing.” [SPD]

“Administration of money.” [EUD]

c. *Services rendered; Lifestyle; Responsibilities; Total life; Using Spiritual Gifts (19%)*

“ . . . how we should define it, is that the responsibilities of working toward a higher goal, like putting our talents into, all of our talents or whatever talents we have, and using them.” [EUD]

d. *Taking care of something for someone; Manager (9%)*

“So he is a person that, his job is to take care of the house that he doesn’t own for the owner, and be sure that everything is OK. So he doesn’t own anything, but he’s taking care of it all.” [TED]

e. *Miscellaneous/Other trends (23%)*

2. **Question number 9** asks, “Do talents and spiritual gifts have anything to do with stewardship? For some it was a new idea yet for others it was not totally new. For most, however, while acceptable the concept had not developed to any great degree—that is talents, spiritual gifts and the management of money.

3. **Question number 10** addresses the confusion that sometimes exists between tithe and offerings as a general concept. It was not possible to arrive at a specific percent as to who viewed tithe and offerings as the same or differently. However, for many they were considered the same.

“I think it depends on what your emotional state is, or your monetary state. If you’re giving, say, your last pennies or whatever, it’s an offering. Whereas, if it’s every week you give \$20 because you’ve earned so much, that’s tithe. But a lot of the people in my group, it’s the same thing. They put one certain amount in and they say it’s the tithe, but it’s also the offering. There is no distinction.” [SPD]

“I think some people choose not to. We had a discussion with my friends, and one friend told me, I don’t think we should pay tithe, because I’m not really sure where

this money's going.' So I told him in my own way, I will put the money aside and use it, you know, send it to someone who needs it instead of doing it through the church." [SPD]

4. **Question 11** was searching for suggestions as to how to relate with the issue of inconsistent giving. *"Sometimes people forget to tithe. Is this an issue with those in your age group? If it is, "How would you suggest that they be helped to remember?"*

Translator: "Maybe one of the reasons is because many people think, 'What are they going to do with my money? I work and I earn it, and then I have to give them my money. What are they going to do with it?" [EUD]

Translator: "He thinks that it should teach people even to have a better relationship with Jesus, to understand why we should give it, because it's something that's important to Him." [EUD]

Translator: "She said what they can do is deduct it from the salary." [TED]

"I don't think it's a topic brought up a lot. A lot of pastors don't preach on tithe, why to tithe, the benefits of tithe, the importance of it." [SPD]

5. To help clarify the understanding the groups had regarding what a tithe is and how it is used, we presented both a question and a case study (**Question 12**). The case study involved an emergency situation in which a close friend's home burned down destroying everything. Under these circumstances, would the young adults use the tithe that they had just put aside and use it to help the person meet the emergency created by the fire? No other question generated as much discussion, reflection and at time disagreement within some groups. Here are a few responses in regards to the use of the tithe presented in the case study.

"It doesn't belong to them. Maybe they could lend it." [TED]

"I was just thinking of Jesus' example when he talked about David who went in and ate the shewbread and it was not lawful for anyone but the priests to eat it. So in some situations like that, even though the priests were the only ones who were allowed to eat the shewbread, it was OK in that situation for David and his men to eat it. So even though the tithe was only for the priests or for those you know, doing God's work . . . I do think circumstances vary things. I think the Bible is more into the principles." [SPD]

"I would not pay tithe for this month, or whatever." [EUD]

In one group we asked for a show of hands—only one of thirteen said it would be ok to use the tithe to meet this need. [EUD] In another group twelve out fourteen were willing to support the family that had lost their

home with their tithes. In the same division but in a different group five said they would and two said no because it was money for God. [SUD]

E. Confidence in the Church's Handling of Finances

Questions 13 and 14 address both indirectly and directly the issue of confidence in the Church's ability and practice of handling finances—the tithes and offerings received. These were answered by their indicating where their position could be found on a scale of 1 to 5.

- a. *How important is it for you to know how offerings are to be used before you contribute?* (42% thought it was very important and 32% did not think it was.)
- b. *How important is it for you to receive reports of how offerings have been used?* (47% thought it was very important and 27% did not think it was important.)
- c. *How would you rate the confidence you have that the Church is handling its finances responsibly?* (44% the Church was handling the finances very well whereas 24% did not believe it was doing very well.)

"I was hoping you would ask that question. The way I see the problem, the reason why I'm raising this question, is not all people have confidence that if you give to the church you're giving to God. I'm not the first one to have that issue." [EUD]

Question 15 raises the question of contributing tithes and offerings by using the internet which is not available for all areas under study. When it wasn't we asked if it were if they would consider contributing that way.

"That's how I do it regularly." [SPD]

"I think this is even better, because Jesus, when He was talking about the Pharisees, they were always showing how much they were giving, and this is the best way to give." [TED]

"As a believer, I want all my tithes to go directly to the church and not in a bank. (a reference to charge for a donation given this way.)" [EUD]

F. Miscellaneous Statements and Closure—*Do you have any additional insights or thoughts you would like to add?*

"... it seems that as a generation we find it very important because we value authenticity and transparency. So for me to give, in one respect it's God's money, you can relax with it, and that's fine. But for me, as part of this generation, I value knowing where money is going, and if I know it's going to a particular place and

where I believe it's furthering the gospel, I'll be more likely to give. I think that if we see our church leaders having these particular beliefs and doing what they can practically to facilitate that, like for themselves, actually following through, and facilitate those beneath them to have the opportunities to participate in that, and if we see the authenticity and the transparency, I think it's going to be a lot easier to follow in their path." [SPD]

"I'm curious to know how much emphasis do we put, when it comes to stewardship. We talk a lot about helping people. From my experience, we look at hospitals, orphanages and that kind of stuff. How much emphasis do we put on stuff like environment? Is there a department that sort of deals with stuff like that? How important do we view that? Because I don't hear enough spoken at church." [TED]

Summary Reflections

There is a distinct advantage of traveling to eight different countries, conducting eighteen diverse focus groups comprised of 226 young adults representing over 20 countries. At times we worked through translators but openness and candor did not seem to be inhibited. Perhaps one of the greatest strengths and privileges of this approach was to be able to listen to so many different young adults with varied backgrounds in person. Much can be learned with this this kind of interview. Often the interactions within the groups themselves were as valuable as the answers to the questions we asked. The young adults were cooperative and once they felt at ease they were willing to share quite openly. The transcriptionist¹³ often punctuated her manuscripts by putting in brackets the word "laughter" which indicates the relaxed atmosphere present during the focus groups.

It did become apparent that we do have a problem. The uniqueness of the Adventist mission is ambiguous to many young adults. In addition, while the generational differences certainly do exist apparent the divide didn't appear to be as formidable as we had been led to believe. Communication difficulties and feelings of judgmentalism were frustrations that were raised. Questions were often asked about church finances. For some the distinction of purpose between tithe and offerings is blurred. This confusion led to questions about how tithe is actually spent. Some groups not only raised those questions but also expressed complaints that stewardship is seldom talked, taught or preached. While generational conflicts have impacted perceptions of the Church, examples of appreciation for specific older adults were also mentioned. It seems that much strategic planning for young adults has been overly influenced by the segmentation used by commercial marketing. It is now common for churches to refer to such terms as Mosaics, Millennials, Gen Xers and Baby Boomers as a means of differentiating the generations. No doubt such referencing is helpful for understanding some perceptions but they can also place an unnecessary wedge between generations, which in turn can hinder joint endeavors.¹⁴ It appears that such terms, while helpful in one sense, can easily over emphasize the differences and, therefore, miss opportunities that could build ministries on commonalities. In other words, such exaggerations in some regions can limit mission possibilities. Note the observation made by David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Institute.

“The concept of dividing people into various segments based on their birth years is a very modern contrivance, emerging in part from the needs of the marketplace over the last hundred years. . . .

“As a by-product of this approach the next generation’s enthusiasm and vitality have been separated from the wisdom and experience of their elders.

“Rather than being defined by segregated age groups, however practical they may seem, I believe we are called to connect our past (traditions and elders) with our future (the next generation). Christians are members of a living organism called the church.”¹⁵

Such division into groups is not new to the Christian church. Over time such similar divisions have resulted in a confusion of vocation as evidenced with the use of the term “the laity.”¹⁶ Paul faced a similar challenge and felt he had to remind his generation that division by nationalities, economic status and genders was a hindrance to the mission of the church. It seems that each generation finds some way of segmenting itself from the body that can easily weaken the mission of the Church.

The majority of those participating in the focus groups shared their support of the Church and its mission. They also shared their frustrations, some of which had to do with the older generations. Regardless of the country, similar sentiments of belief and frustration often emerged.

Conclusion

The majority of young adults with whom we met have not lost their interest in “spiritual” things but neither are they easily satisfied with answers that sound institutionalized. They spoke fondly of those who had early spiritual influences in their life. Mothers seemed to lead the list but fathers, grandparents, siblings, friends, pastors, teachers and such institutional programs as Pathfinders and mission trips were also mentioned. So often it was not just what individuals said but how they lived that provided the deepest and most lasting impressions. Some who at first glance seemed disinterested often spoke most strongly and conservatively about spiritual values. At some point in their life someone/something influenced them about Christian ideals and it has not been forgotten. This age group, 18-30 years old, is obviously a time when values taught at an earlier age are now being tested. The filtering grid of everyday work and social experiences is often having a major reinterpreting influence upon the values once accepted in the past. If spiritual values are to remain relevant reinforcement of those values from those they respect and trust is critical.

If the church is to retain, and in some instances regain the respect and trust it once had, church leaders need to be authentic in their own spiritual experience and counsel and exhibit a sense of transparency. When it came to stewardship, those interviewed showed much greater reception to the idea of stewardship-as-life rather than limiting stewardship

to the giving of offerings. There was a keen interest in knowing where the money called for would be going and then how it would be used. Motivation for giving seemed to be centered in what would be accomplished and not simply based on giving out of a sense of responsibility or obligation. This has significant implications for offering appeals that are made.

The focus groups also verified that the young adult generation is serious about electronic networking. An estimated 98% of those who participated in the focus groups use social media on a weekly basis. *Facebook* is by far the dominant social media being used. This phenomenon cannot be ignored. Communication is critical to this generation and we will need to devise ways of communicating with them through social media.

Current literature is replete showing the connection between belief in mission and personal sacrifice. Our interaction with the young adults indicated that there is confusion and ambiguity in this area. Understanding the role of Seventh-day Adventists in our contemporary world and among other Christian churches is not clear to them. While the issue of identity is not limited to only this generation it is clearly an issue that needs to be explored and met.

Attitudes towards their own local church seemed to cast impressions about the world Church as well. One of the leading “likes” was the sense of unity and family that young adults feel in their own local churches. A number stated that they appreciated the similarity in beliefs with other Adventist as they visited. Many commented that they appreciated the fact that the Church’s teachings were biblically based. This was an important characteristic for many. Some expressed appreciation for what the Church was doing to help the unfortunate. In contrast, what they didn’t like was whatever would cause a feeling of disunity. They had no time for hypocrisy. As would be expected, there was a dislike for conflicts that sometimes arose between generations. However, at the same time many spoke warmly about those who were older and who lived a sincere and devoted Christian life. Several cited judgmentalism and an attitude of criticism, as traits they felt were serious negatives in their churches. In some cases it was dramatically stated. When it came to more global issues such as women’s ordination bewilderment might best describe the reaction. Opposition is neither understood nor appreciated. It is clear that the spirit they find within their church is significantly impacting them.

Where Do We Go From Here?

All of this raises the question: “Where do we go from here?” We share the following as insights and recommendations based on our focus group interviews.

1. *Listen to each other.* We would encourage the fostering of inter-generational relationships by listening to one another and by working together on mission projects and not just relegating some of them to young adults. So often designating a Sabbath as “youth Sabbath” does this. While we are not necessarily discouraging this kind of recognition, it would seem that another model needs to be fostered built on inclusivity. This could be done by mixing age groups as they

work on common projects within the church and by encouraging more intentional apprenticeships within the church. It is often said that the youth need to be “given a piece of the pie.” While this might be an improvement we do not feel it answers the greater need. We would suggest that what is really needed is for “the pie to be shared” by both young and old. This implies that it should be done at the same time and doing more together and not in isolation from each other. While such relationships cannot be forced the seed can be planted and nurtured.

2. *Prioritize the Discovery of Vocational Identity.* Stewardship must be seen as more than simply the giving of tithes and offerings. One’s total life is a vocation and young adults need to understand the meaning of having a vocation regardless of one’s occupation.¹⁷ A true Christian vocation is not about tasks to do but a sense of personal calling and identity. Cultivation of this awareness will take a combined effort of home, school and church. It is an opportunity for the wisdom of the older generation to mix with the enthusiasm of the younger. Vocation does not end with oneself but extends oneself in service to and for others. Young adults seem ready for this kind of challenge but it begins first with an awareness of God’s calling. A much greater emphasis needs to be given to the whole subject of personal vocation regardless of one’s occupation.
3. *Keep Everything We Do Christ-Focused.* Young adults placed this theme as a priority when discussing theological issues.
4. *Build on the Positives.* While it may not be unanimous, there is a large percentage of young adults whose frustration with “the Church” is not their final word. They have not given up on the Church. The transparency and openness of one put it well when he said, “If there was anything we could change about our church, I think it would probably be ourselves.” This kind of openness and transparency can be the building block for future relationships.
5. *Be Informed and Share.* Young adults generally want to be supportive of needs. However, they desire to be informed of specific needs and how funds given are used to meet those needs. More intentional efforts need to be made showing how offerings are used and what results come as a result of their financial contributions. For many the issue of transparency is or should be linked to requests for any kind of commitment and especially financial expectations.
6. *Build Ministry Teams of Mentors and Apprentices.* When we asked one group if they would like to be doing what I was doing as the facilitator of stewardship focus groups the answer was an enthusiastic “yes.” As a result of this response a pilot program is being formed to train and equip inter-generational teams who will do stewardship seminars in schools and churches

The same Elijah that spoke about robbing God of tithes and offerings also spoke of generations being reunited. Perhaps stewardship will be one important medium through which this will take place. “See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that

great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.” Malachi 4:5,6. The focus groups made it clear that we have a window of opportunity to introduce a new paradigm to teaching stewardship but the principles learned could be applied to numerous other fields as well.

¹ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, p.22. (Baker:2011)

² Ibid., p. 103.

³ See Kinnaman, pp. 77-78. Slightly paraphrased.

⁴ Gabe Lyons, *The Next Christians*, pp. 21-27. (Double Day: 2010)

⁵ *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, pp. 1425-6. (Review and Herald: 1976)

⁶ Four divisions had originally been selected for the study but the North American Division requested that it not be included in 2012 because of another pending research project.

⁷ Euro-Asia Division: Italy, Austria; Trans-European Division: Iceland, England, Hungary, Serbia; South Pacific Division: New Zealand and Australia.

⁸ This project would not have been possible without the assistance of the colleagues from the three divisions. Paolo Benini, Corrado Cozzi, Raafat Kamal, Roger Govender, Jean-Noel Adeline and Adeline Teina.

⁹ See attached “Guidelines for Conducting a Focus Group.” This is a sample of the kinds of information that was shared with those who help organize the focus groups.

¹⁰ The professional researchers that provided invaluable insights were: David Trim, Steve Currow and Robert McIver.

¹¹ Where “*Translator*” is used it is meant to show that the translator in the group translated the young adult’s comment.

¹² J. Clif Christopher in *Not Your Parents’ Offering Plate*, pp. 11-20 (Abingdon: 2008) makes reference to Jerold Panas’s book, *Mega Gifts* which identifies three factors that strongly influence contributors: (1) Belief in the mission of the institution, (2) a high regard for staff leadership, and (3) the fiscal responsibility of the institution.

¹³ Out transcriptionist, Ruth Wright, transcribed over 25 hours of focus group recordings. We are indebted to her invaluable assistance in this project.

¹⁴ Peter Drucker as quoted by Gabe Lyons in *The Next Christians*, p.171 (Doubleday:2010). “the purpose of management of the church is not to make it more businesslike, but to make it more churchlike.”

¹⁵ Kinnaman, pp. 203, 203.

¹⁶ “A distinction between church members and clergy was first made in A.D. 9 by Clement of Rome, who applied to believers the word *laikos* (from laos, people; 1 Clem.40:5). The original emphasis was simply that all belonged to the *laos*, the –people.” O. Flender in *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology* (vol.2, p. 457), ed. Colin Brown. (Zondervan: 1980). See also Gooftfried Oosterwal in *Mission Possible*, pp. 103-118. (Southern Publishing:1972)

¹⁷ Kinnaman, “Vocation is a clear mental picture of our role as Christ-followers in the world, of what we were put on earth to do as individuals and as a community.” (p.207)