

Nurture and Retention

A paper presented at meeting on Nurture and Retention

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Nurture and Retention has its foundation at evangelism. Naturally people Join church for a purpose. Purpose dominates decision while joining the church. When purpose is fulfilled commitment might weaken, that is where backsliding begins. A classic example from Exodus of Israel from Egypt is note worthy. "Mixed multitude went up with them. In the multitude were not only those who were actuated by faith in God of Israel, but also far greater number who desired only to escape from the plagues or who followed in the wake of the moving multitudes merely from excitement and curiosity. This class was ever a hindrance and a snare to Israel." *Patriarchs and Prophets*. P.281. Joining church and conversion to Christ are two different schools. The purpose of evangelism is to make disciples for Christ. This paper is developed in the light of Indian Evangelism and Church growth. The objective of this paper is to either re-discover the biblical principles of evangelism and discipleship or invent evangelism methods that suit post modern secularism. For an India Context the first option, re-discovering the biblical principles of evangelism and discipleship is sufficient. Moses and Paul wrote to the churches on backsliding. "People will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break covenant I made with them." Deut 31:16(NIV) "For I know that after my death you are sure to become utterly corrupt and turn from the ways I commanded you. in days to come." Deut 31:29. (NIV) These are statements from the writings of Moses on the spiritual condition of people of the covenant after their liberation from bondage. It had happened the way it was predicted by Moses. While they were in slavery they cried to the Lord for deliverance and God in his mercy set up a plan to liberate the slaves that were more than a century in bitter slavery. God spoke to Moses to initiate the process of redemption. The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying because of the slave drivers, I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them." Exodus 3:7, 8 (NIV). What happened to the covenant they made at

Sinai and how did they forget the liberation experience? When the purpose is fulfilled there is a possibility to backslide. That was what happened with the children of Israel. Paul said, "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort truth in order to draw away disciples after them." Acts 20:29, 30 (NIV). These are the passages with illustrative examples for the modern Christians to be watchful. Whatever the situation in the past or at the present the church has a challenge to put plans in writing to handle the challenge of Nurture and Retention.

Evangelism and Nurturing

Bible workers, pastors and evangelists need to re-orient the methods of evangelism around the study of the scriptures. The larger evangelistic meetings and the attractive arrangements are saturated with simplicity of gospel and biblical outreach methods. The accession rate through large evangelistic meetings is very high but retention is much lesser. The newly joined members attracted through the outward show shall look for the same ostensible majestic and grand excitement after they join the church. Bringing a person to experience the power of salvation shall keep him attached to Church with lifelong commitment to follow Christ. And Personal or small group evangelism shall bring lasting results for the church growth. Small group evangelism gives opportunity to know the spiritual needs of an individual. Making disciples through personal studies is one of the best methods in bringing a person to the truth. The following methods are to be used in evangelism and in nurturing new converts as well as old members. Documents are to be prepared on the following topics

1. Doctrinal conviction through Bible study and prayer sessions.
2. Doctrinal study that leads to salvation experience and discipleship help a member to remain faithful to his commitment.
3. Be careful with quick conversions: Focus conversion to Christ rather than conversion to church. Romans 6
4. Pre-conversion care or ministry-Emphasize revival and reformation.
5. Post-conversion care or ministry: Outline challenges new believers face and provide them the assurance through the scriptures.
6. Financial provision and personnel for pre and post conversion care.
7. Care for back sliders-A challenging task. Luke 15 outlines the methods.

8. Influence of evolution on the youth - emphasize creation with biblical evidence
9. Involve new converts in evangelism and church activities. (educate existing members to cooperate) Christ used new converts in outreach. (Luke 8:1-3)
10. Value new members (Matt 20)
11. Teach Adventist history and heritage to the new members.
12. Church invites new members to its fellowship and learns to accept them who they are.
13. Small group ministry for pre and post conversion events. Accession rate in small group ministry might be normal but retention rate is higher.
14. A special plan to be prepared by the local conferences to care for the members come through larger evangelistic campaigns)

People Join church for a purpose

1. Emotional and physical needs
2. Belongingness for comfort and confidence
3. Peer pressure
4. A group decision (in a tribal set up)
5. Family influence (parents and relatives)
6. Facilities : Job, fellowship and community
7. Emotional decisions

Case study on back sliding

Several years ago a person come to one of the churches in a city in India, expressed his desire to become a member of the church. At that stage he was in search of a job for survival. Initially he was prompt in all the activities of the church and outreach programs. At that time membership of the church was small. Later on he found government job which provided him for all his physical needs, and a fellowship that catered his spiritual needs. He paid tithe and kept Sabbath. He made a point to follow the Adventist doctrine to its core. As years went by he was elevated in his office and finally he was appointed as one of the gazetted officers. He has facility to attend church on Sabbaths. But slowly he developed apathy towards spiritual life and church activities. He lost interest in fellowship with church into which he came to find solutions to his challenges. His needs are met but lost interest in religion and spiritual life.

