

Factors Affecting Church Growth in East Central Africa Region: The Adventist Concern

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ABSTRACT—The article primarily attempts to verify the importance of church growth by reviewing the existing literature based on the biblical understanding. Secondly, it examines factors which affect church growth through the eyes of various writers whose major concern was why churches decline. The article also presents the findings of the church growth-hindering factors having been administered or tested a set of survey questionnaire within the context of East-Central Africa region with selected volunteer respondents from Bugema University. Thirdly, this article takes special interest in recommending some guidelines to assist both the leadership and the membership of the church in order to raise the Master’s Gospel Banner in response to His great call to all. Section one, the introduction of the article, provides selected and yet the fitting definitions of the church and it also outlines the key messages within the context. Section two addresses the focal question, “Why concern for church growth?” which includes the findings of the survey, church’s primary need and the marks of the growing church. Section three verifies factors that contribute to true church growth including their characteristics. Section four highlights the factors and facts which obstruct true church growth. Section five provides facts and realities of a healthy church growth. Finally, the study concludes with some workable recommendations in order to motivate both the

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leadership and the church membership as well as to enhance the Lord's work for the better move.

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I. Introduction

It is impossible for someone to have a clear picture of what “church growth” is before he or she understands what the church is all about and the purpose for its existence. That causes an immediate question. What is the church? The word church is a translation of the Greek *ekklesia*, which means “a calling out.” The Septuagint, the Greek version of the Hebrew O.T. uses the Hebrew *qahal*, which stands for “gathering,” “assembly,” or “congregation” (Deut. 9:10; 18:16; 1 Sam. 17:47; 1 Chron. 13:2).

The proper definition for the church is “the body of Christ, a community of faith of which Christ Himself is the Head. The church is the bride for whom Christ died that He might sanctify and cleanse her” (*Seventh-day Adventists (SDAs) Believe*, 2005, p.165). Another fitting definition by Carlos G. Martin, professor of Mission and Church Growth, states, “Church is a local community of Christians voluntarily congregated, correctly baptized, and properly organized, which meets to worship God, observe the ordinances, and carry out the Great Commission of Jesus Christ at home and abroad” (Martin, 1995, p. 24).

One of the seven descriptive pictures or metaphoric descriptions of the church is the church as the body of Christ (*SDAS Believe*, pp. 167-170; Towns, 1973, p.67). If we see the church through the eyes of Jesus Christ, the church must exist for purpose. Since the church is the redeemed body of believers (Ac 20:28; 1Cor 6:20; 1Co 7:23; Gal 3:13; Heb 9:12), it has to live to fulfill Christ’s mission. According to Peter, God called His people from darkness of this world into His marvelous light (1Pet 2:9) that His “chosen people,” to “declare” or “proclaim” His glory. His glory may mean all about Him, His kingdom or His gospel (Mat 24:14).

The purpose/mission of the church is to (1) teach biblical doctrines, (2) provide a place of fellowship, (3) observe the Lord’s supper, (4) pray for all church related needs, (5) proclaim the gospel of salvation to all mankind (Mt 28:18-20; Ac 1:8), (6) encourage members of the church to live upright and uncompromising lives (Rom 12:1-2; Eph

4:1; Col 1:10; 1Th 2:12), (7) minister to those in need (Ps 82:3, 4; Mt 19:21; Gal 2:10), and (8) equip believers for gospel ministry (Eph 4:12).

Paul gives an excellent illustration to the church in Corinth that could be identified with the purpose of the church. The church is God's hands, mouth, and feet in this world (1Cor. 12:12-27). We are to be doing the things that Jesus Christ would do if He were here physically on the earth. The church is to be "Christian" and "Christ-like."

In addition to what has been said earlier, the Seventh-day Adventists strongly believe that the church has special missions to accomplish in this end-time. The church undertakes special responsibility of bearing the characteristics of the remnant (Rev. 14:12). That is "the responsibility of proclaiming, just before Christ's return, God's final warning to the world—the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 (Rev. 14:6-12)" (SDAs Believe, 2005, pp. 190, 191). Both the above purposive facts, which are common to most of the mainline Protestant Churches, plus the proclaiming of the three angels' messages, which is the responsibility of the remnant church lead us to the main questions of concern. Is the remnant church meeting its expectations? Is it fulfilling its purpose/mission? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the church in terms of involving believers in its growth processes? Is it possible to overcome the challenges of church growth? What does it take to achieve an incessant church growth? These questions will be addressed in the next section(s), consequently.

The aim of this study is, first, to review other scholars' possible research findings based on why churches are not growing as expected and what possible solutions these researchers suggest. Second, to do some comparative observations with the prevailing situations of the local Seventh-day Adventist churches in East Africa based on the research findings of church growth class of the senior theology students of Bugema University together with the professor's experiences and observations as well as some selected interviews results done with church leadership on why churches are not growing as expected. Third, thereafter, it is intended to recommend some workable suggestions for better and continual growth of the church.

II. Why Concern for the Church Growth?

As a young man I remember the following facts clearly. My father was a good gentle man that belonged to the Coptic Orthodox Church. He was a very caring man known at least for three things. He cared for (1) his large family, (2) his farm that provided food for family, and (3) his animals that became the source of family supply: plowing oxen, milking cows, calves, sheep, goats, donkeys, and a mule or a horse. He went to school but he naturally learned how to care. For family, his expectation was all of us to grow and live a healthy life. For the farm, he made sure that plowing in the right season, planting, weeding, reducing the unnecessary, and supplying the needful for better harvest was done accordingly. For animals, each animal was provided water, grass, and their health was always observed. Not only he knew how to do what was needful for all, but also he used to teach all of us how to care, as well.

What amazed me about my father is he knew what could bring growth and what could easily hinder growth of his family, his animals and his plants. When he sensed there was a danger or a problem, he fought against that odd until he overcame it. He knew that hunger would come to the family if plants were affected by diseases and lack of water. He made sure that all necessary measures were taken in order to achieve the purpose in living. I always wondered, who taught my father the spirit of caring and vigilance. Why was he so concerned about the growth, improvement, and better change? Now, is there any relationship to church growth and what has been observed above? If a man like this who has nothing to do with Christianity and its growth process knows how to be conscientious for the growth and improvement in life, how much more Christians and the Christian church should be concerned for eternal matters? How does this single situation relate to the church of God today? This leads us to the key question of this study, what is church growth?

The term “Church Growth” is associated with evangelism and/or missionary enterprises that imply outreach to the lost and their incorporation into a church, hence causing local church growth (Towns, 1986, 63). According to C. Peter Wagner, Church Growth is “all that is involved in bringing men and women who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ into fellowship with Him and into responsible church membership” (Wagner, 1972, p. 12).

Let us face the question, “Why concern for church growth?” Being concerned is responsibility because God made His church responsible to do His will on earth. Since Jesus is the Founder of the Church (Mt 16:18) and the Head of the Church (Eph 5:23), He gave us the

command to do His business. We are His messengers (Rev 14:6-12), and co-laborers with Him (Eph 2:10; 2 Cor 6:1; 2 Cor 5:20; 1 Cor. 3:9) to bring other sheep that are not yet in the fold (Joh 10:16). We are His chosen ones, witnesses (Ac 1:8), salt (Mt 5:13), light (Mt 5:14-16), ambassadors (Eph 6:20), evangelists, pastors/ teachers (Eph 4:11; Mk 16:15), equippers (Eph 4:12). After appointing the twelve and seventy others and letting them go two by two, He identified that the harvest is great but the laborers are few that they should pray that the Lord may send out more laborers into His harvest field (Lk 10:1, 2).

Thom Rainer said that true church growth takes place when ‘Great Commission’ disciples are added and are evidenced by responsible church membership (Rainer, 1993, p. 21). Regardless of the debate either for qualitative or quantitative growth, there must be priority—first thing first—to meet the mission of the Great Commissioner—the Lord Jesus Christ. What is the first thing first in church growth?

A. The Primary Focus in Church Growth

The first interest in attempting to answer the question of “primary focus” may lead us through a brief historic review of literature. There are two familiar words in the study of Church Growth: Qualitative and quantitative. What are they? Is the Church Growth Movement concerned for internal (spiritual) or for external (numerical) growth or both? It has been observed that the church growth experts such as Donald McGavran, “founder of church growth institute,” C. Peter Wagner, and others often wrote and talked about both internal and [then] external growth as the important areas of the church life. However, individuals like Charles L. Chaney, Ron S. Lewis, Kent R. Hunter identified four kinds of church growth: (1) Internal, (2) expansion, (3) extension, and (4) bridging growth (Chaney and Lewis, 1977, pp. 19-21; Hunger, 1983, 172-178).

In trying to address the above concern, Elmer L. Towns says that there are at least four types of growth for a local church, not all related to numerical expansion. First, internal growth focuses on two areas, which are evangelism that cares for “already baptized members” inside the church and “the evangelism of unsaved existing church members.” He further says that internal growth also refers to nurturing believers into spiritual maturity.” Second, conversion growth takes places as result of evangelizing the unsaved. The third

and fourth are transfer and biological growth, respectively (pastor's less effort is required) (Towns, 1986, 65).

In support of spirituality as the first priority, Carlos G. Martin lists some realistic principles of church growth: (1) Spiritual renewal precedes and accompanies church growth; (2) a correct theology precedes true growth; (3) growth occurs when emphasis is placed upon presence, proclamation and persuasion evangelism; (4) church growth happens when spiritual gifts are identified and employed through significant ministries; and (5) church growth is directly proportional to the number of members involved in witnessing (Martin, 1995, p. 20).

According to Philip Van Auken, it is possible that when a church lacks spiritual health, its numerical growth declines (Auken, January 13, 2002). Church health requires sensitivity to the spiritual dynamics of service, holiness, outreach, and worship. The Gospel of Luke provides number of insights into the spiritual principles of church health. Beginning in Luke 11, Jesus turned His attention to the church of His day—the synagogue—and leveled a variety of charges against that church (11:45, NASB). Jesus' charges all pointed to a sick, unhealthy church. The church was accused of being internally corrupt, lack of spirituality (11:39), being oblivious to its own faults (see 11:40), getting caught up in ego massaging (11:43), and being spiritually dead (11:44).

The following ten principles of church growth—“health”—as developed by Jesus Christ and recorded by Luke in chapters 11 and 12 picture priority of spiritual growth for church (Auken, *Search*, 1989/2002):

1. More by the quality of its spirit than the quantity of its success (Luke 11:24-26, 12:4-5).
2. More by what it waits for than by what it works for (Luke 10:38-42, 11:5-10, 12:35-38).
3. More by what it proclaims than by its programs (Luke 11:23; 12:8-9).
4. More by its compassions than by its passions (Luke 10:27-37; 11:45; 12:6-7).
5. More by what it is confident of than what it is competent in (Luke 11:11-13; 12:32).
6. More by prayer than by its performance (Luke 11:1-4).
7. More by its discernment than its decisions (Luke 12:54-57).
8. More by its commitment to openness than by its concern for operational efficiency (Luke 11:33-36; 12:2-3).

9. More by its godly priorities than by its human popularity (Luke 11:43; 12:49-53).
10. More by the quality of its motives than the quantity of its money.

In this discourse one thing should be noticed that there is no doubt about the importance of both qualitative (inner—spiritual—growth) and quantitative (the visible—numerical—growth) of God’s church. In fact, we can’t separate qualitative growth from quantitative growth. They are two sides of the same coin. However, qualitative--spiritual renewal—precedes and accompanies numerical growth (Martin, 1995, p. 20). Ellen G. White confirms this point by saying, “Minor matters occupy the attention, and the divine power which is necessary for the growth and prosperity of the church, and which would bring all other blessings in its train, is lacking, though offered in its infinite plenitude” (White, 1904, Testimonies, vol. 8, p. 21).

Jesus is not waiting for the whole world to be converted, rather He waits the whole world to hear His message, the good tidings (Mat. 24:14). He said, “Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Mt 7:21). He also said that there are many who follow the broad way that leads into destruction (Mt 7:13). Jesus’ second coming will be, “When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own” (White, 1900, Christ’s Object Lessons, 69). Paul Young also agrees by stating “When we speak of church growth, the important thing is not an increase in church attendance, or a large number on the church roll, or merely outward professions of faith, but bringing them into God’s Kingdom”(Young, n.d., p. 23].

A reasonable Christian knows that numerical church growth is essential because for that very reason the gospel must be preached throughout the world to every tribe, language, and nation. However, “quality should not be sacrificed for quantity.” After all, it has been believed by genuine Bible students that quality spiritual growth yields quality numerical growth. People are hungry for quality growth than quantity visible growth. The Truth must be told so that He—the Truth—Jesus Christ—will lead His own to His Father (Jn. 14:6). Jesus never told His disciples to count the sheep, rather, He said, “feed my sheep” (Jn. 21:16, 17). These facts lead us to consider some apparent marks of the growing church.

B. Marks of Growing Church

Rick Warren in his book, *Purpose Driven Church*, highlights five points in order to emphasize the primary needs in a true church growth setup: (1) Worship – “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Mt 22:37); (2) Ministry – “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:39); (3) Evangelism – “go therefore and make disciples” (Mt 28:19); (4) Fellowship – “baptizing them” (Mt 28:19, identification with the Christian community); and (5) Discipleship – “teaching them to obey all that I command you” (Mt 28:20; Warren, 1995 & Reviewed by Paul Alexander, 3.5.2010).

Similarly, “The Manifest Ministries Int’l” lists three distinct entities of what a purpose-driven church does: (1) Ministers to the LORD ...in worship, (2) ministers to one another ... in service, and (3) ministers to the world in witnessing” (the Father’s House: The Manifest Ministries Int’l, 2007). If a true church and its individual membership strive to fulfill these aspects rightfully, there is no doubt that His mission will soon be accomplished. The church that worships Him in Spirit and Truth as its prime focus is the church that always has priority (John 4:23; Mat 6:33). Believers are 1st called to worship—total spiritual empowerment—then service as a second step as Jesus identified to Martha (Luk.10:38-42).

Here Ellen G. White who is very familiar with church growth priorities, suggests, “God’s people are to be distinguished as a people who serve Him fully, whole-heartedly, ... by a most solemn covenant they have bound themselves to serve the Lord, and Him only” (9T, p. 17.). “It is whole-hearted, thoroughly decided men and women who will stand now . . . to lay the foundation of the Christian church” (5T, p. 130).

III. Factors Contributing to Successful Church Growth

As Philip Van Auken stated, “the growth of a local church is the natural byproduct of its spiritual health—the intimate relationship with God” (Phil Van Auken’s website). The church belongs to Christ, the Head of the church. He has a unique growth plan and purpose for each local church that makes up His body. Christ, not man, makes the church grow. Christ has the right motives for His church to grow: (1) love for sinners; (2) a sacrificing lifestyle that is salt and light to the

world; and (3) a total dependence on God. Apostle Paul says, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase” (1 Cor 3:6). Ellen White also states how a successful church growth can be achieved, “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, “Follow Me” (MH, 1905, p. 143).

Here is a church growth question: What are the qualities of a growing church? Church growth experts agree with the researcher that a growing church should possess at least the following qualities: (1) There must be a climate of happiness and loving God and one another in the church; (2) the church must have a Bible-centered atmosphere that demonstrates by its regular and continuous Bible studies; (3) the members of the church must be enthusiastic and become the cause for maintaining enthusiasm; (4) the church must be evangelistic and zealous to win lost souls for Christ; (5) a growing church should be able to claim backslidden members; (6) a growing church should have great faith to practice its vision; (6) a growing church should be a praying church that prays for its spiritual growth and for God’s work throughout the world; and (8) a growing church believes in the Holy Scripture—“Scripture and Scripture alone”—and do and live what it says (Mt 7:21; Lu 6:46; 11:28; Rom 2:13; 1Jo 3:7 Jam 1:22).

There are some variables common to growing churches: (1) The leadership factor. All growing churches have leaders with the ‘gift of faith’ (1 Cor 12:9). Their main function is equipping others for the ministry (Eph 4:12, Col 1:28-29). There are two important leadership-variables: (1a) Leadership style and (2 b) Competence. Others ask questions about it, “Does the church really care?” “Is the preaching good?” (2) The spirituality factor. “Are the people in this church true Christians?” “Is there an authentic obedience to Christ?” (3) The Mission Factor. We are commissioned by our Lord to bring the Good News to a lost world. ‘Conversion growth’ is the healthiest way to grow. (4) The Authority Factor. *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* by Dean Kelly (1986) says that experience shows that most people want their leaders to be certain about their beliefs. (5) The organization factor. You may wonder why your church is not appealing to a particular group. Do the worship services appeal to their more sophisticated tastes? Is there a general lack of creativity? (6) The ‘Ethos’ Factor. What is the most appropriate way to worship,

fellowship, nurture, and evangelize in this culture? (7) The Change Factor. State all the forces that will help this to happen. Then list the hindrances. Refine your list, itemizing the best of these options. Prioritize the important and usable ones.

There are seven characteristics that typify the growing Churches: (1) Grounded in a consistent vision and message, (2) passionately preach the Word of God, (3) love to celebrate God's presence through dynamic worship, (4) fellowship in small groups, (5) quickly assimilate new comers, (6) keep their leaders accountable in personal life and ministry, (7) take the Great Commission seriously.

Personal spiritual growth determines your church's both spiritual and numerical growth. When the entire membership obtains qualitative or spiritual growth, the quantitative growth takes place gradually. God gives great church growth depending on the church's keen interest in its spiritual growth that will bring quantitative growth or membership growth. According to the book *Evangelism* by Ellen G. White, "God does not generally work miracles to advance His truth [He] works according to great principles . . . and set in operation the means [or strategies] whereby God shall bring about certain results" (White, pp. 652, 653). For true church growth God made every believer responsible and accountable. The book *Desire of Ages* says, "Every true disciple is born into the kingdom as a missionary" (White, p. 195). Therefore, the Bible says, "Woe to the worthless shepherd, who leaves the flock!" (Zec 11:17).

Brandon A. Cox suggests four qualities of growing churches (2006): (1) Leadership (Mt 20:20-28), (2) excellence (Mal 1:6-14), (3) truth (2 Tim 3:15-4:5), and (4) worship (Isa 6) (Cox, 1977-2005). Thom Rainer studied 19 churches and discovered four common qualities of successful growing churches: (1) Pastors Set the Bar. The interviews indicate the churches have taken on the vision, priorities, and values of the senior pastor. There are high levels of trust in these pastors. (2) Church Atmosphere. These churches are consistently described as "exciting," "dynamic," "energetic," "upbeat," "friendly," "welcoming," "warm," and "positive." (3) Evangelistic Appeal. More than two-thirds indicate they offer a public invitation at the end of every service and others invite inquirers to fill out a decision cards. (4) Intentional Outreach. The pastors are focused on reaching people for Christ—it is clear that everything is designed with outreach in mind (Rainer, Life Way Research, 2007). Besides the above concepts, successful churches have some unique growth characteristics.

A. Characteristics of Growing Church

More and more studies have been done on the growing churches. George Gallup, Jr. and others did studies on growing churches and discovered some distinct characteristics that are reflected in today's churches. Here is a summary—A growing church: Is Bible Centered, a happy Church, a creative church, a diverse church, an interdependent church, in tune with today and tomorrow, informs its community, intentional in being Lay led, inspirational, willing to change, insists on new members involvement, a healthy group structure, places a high priority on enhancing the individual's Christian experience, evangelistic, has a strong leader, has a great vision, is a praying church, has spiritual power, has ministry for every church department, stands boldly on social issues, participates in strategic planning, provides growth experience, preaches with biblical authority, and uses quality and quantity as measurements (Gallup, Jr. 1990; <http://www.mbc.org>).

A good Bible student can't miss the fact that any true and successful church growth can't and won't take place without direct guidance, power, and wisdom of the Holy Spirit. The following are the summary of the work of the Holy Spirit in the successful church growth: He teaches, empowers and emboldens believers (John 14:25; Acts 1:8; Acts 4:8), He provides wisdom, He brings the believer and sinner together (Acts 10:19-20), He calls believers to particular works (Acts 13:2), He indwells in the saved child of God (Rom 8:9-11), He calls people to Jesus Christ (1Cor 12:3), He enables workers (1 Cor. 12:4), He breaks down human barriers (1Cor 12:13), He seals the believer (2Cor 1:22), and He produces fruit in the lives of believers (Gal 5:22-25). A growing church is a loving church that displays to all mankind a transferable bond of God's holy love, which in turn produces opportunities for witnessing.

In conclusion of this section, we have looked at various stages of barriers for church growth. Some are bypassed simply and others require carefully planned attention and action. Yet, the fact remains that as believers multiply themselves through their witness and service in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit will build on and in the believers' lives. Without the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, believers can have no growth. For this very reason Jesus said, "He, the Spirit of truth, . . . will guide you into all truth; for He will . . . tell you things to come" (John 16:13). It is also impossible to do right without the power of Christ and His Spirit.

IV. Factors Obstructing True Church Growth

Just as plants, animals, and other living creatures face some distractive and harmful growth obstructions, church growth also encounter some impediments. Church growth hindrances are also growth obstructing factors.

Daniel J. Rode published his findings in the *College and University Dialogue* entitled, “Why do some churches grow and others don’t?” According to this study, church growth specialists such as Peter Wagner, Christian Schwarz, and Ken Hemphill have studied this phenomenon in different countries, cultures, and have developed various models relating to healthy, growing churches. An analysis of these studies and field observations indicated that these congregations have taken 10 specific initiatives. These are: (1) Have a trained and visionary leadership, (2) develop ministries according to gifts, evangelism according to needs, (3) spread great influence of spirituality, (4) follow biblically based priorities, (5) adopt functional structures, (6) plan inspiring worship services, (7) develop a program of cells, (8) be friendly, (9) make disciples, and (10) value differing human aspects (Rode, 2006). According to the above listed findings, the reverse of or lack of each listed item would directly affect the growth of the church and becomes a growth obstructing factor.

According to Clifton L. Holland (2002), R.J. Krejcir (2006) and Worancha (2009), the following abridgments are church growth affecting factors: Ignorance, carnal mindedness, prayerlessness, lack of Bible study, lack of unity, lack of finance, leadership problems, lack of strategy for evangelism, lack of the power of the Holy Spirit, lack of commitment, lack of good management & transparency, sin in the church, people-blindness, theological deviation, arrested spiritual development (materialism, nominalism, tribalism, self-centeredness), and the biggest of all, in Africa particular, lack of nurturing to the newly baptized (Worancha, 2009, pp. 190-252).

The researcher tested the above said church growth affecting factors within the context of the region with selected 76 respondents from East-Central Africa region. Each respondent was taken to represent at least one local Seventh-day Adventist Church where he or she comes from. These respondents are regular standing church members who served and are still serving in various areas of church ministries in such areas as a deacon, deaconesses, church elder, leader

or director of church department, literature evangelist, chaplain, church pastor, youth pastor, evangelist, Bible teacher, global mission volunteer, Sabbath school superintendent and many others. At the time each respondent participated in this research work, he or she was a senior or junior university student often called “pastor in-training.” These “pastors in-training” were exclusively from the main campus of Bugema University, Kampala, Uganda. For the sake of clarity and easy communication to the readers, the researcher used five valid testing scales in the questionnaire: (1) “Strongly Agree,” (2) “Agree,” (3) “Not Sure,” (4) “Disagree,” and “Strongly Disagree.” For the purpose of easy reading and time and space saving, the researcher grouped the above five levels into two categories: the first two grouped as a “positive response” with the use of parenthesis (“strongly agree” followed by “agree,” respectively) and the last three grouped as a “negative response.” Out of 76 respondents 73 are male, while 3 of them are female.

According to Table 1 below, 82.9% (“strongly agree” 38.2% + “agree” 44.7%) of the respondents agreed that ignorance or lack of sufficient knowledge is seriously affecting church growth, while 17.1% of the respondents could not see it as a major issue. Here the biblical support mentions ignorance as humanities’ “blindness of their heart” (Eph. 4:18). This finding coincides with R. J. Krejcir’s findings (2006). Another growth affecting factor is carnal mindedness, which 81.6% (34.2% +47.4%) of the respondents concurred that carnal mindedness affected and is affecting the growth of their churches. This is true that Paul agrees and warns against carnal mindedness. He says, “Carnal minded is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God” (Rom 8:7). However, minority (18.4%) of the respondents did not favor this factor as highly important.

Factor number three in the list is prayerlessness. The majority of the respondents 88.2% (60.6% +27.6%) confirmed that prayerlessness is a dangerous factor which has affected the visibility of church growth. Jesus’ practiced and referred His church to it that the church or believers should practice prayerful life daily and throughout its life. Ellen White says that “those who are self-sufficient may be apparently active in the work of God; but if they are prayerless, their activity is of no avail” (Review and Herald, July 4, 1893). She also mentions in her book *Message to Young People*, “I would not dishonor my Master so much as to admit that a careless, trifling, prayerless person is a Christian” (1930, p.131).

The highest growth affecting factor, according to this study, is lack of Bible study. 97.4% (68.4% + 28.9%) of the respondents agreed that lack of Bible study hinders the church's expected growth badly. This finding agrees with the finding of Clifton L. Holland (2002). The same study showed that 71.1% (38.2% +32.9%) of the respondents agreed that lack of finance affected the growth of today's church. Interestingly, lack of finance is not as high as lack of Bible study or lack of prayerlessness affect.

Table 1. Summary of the Respondents' Observation on Factors Affecting Local Seventh-day Adventist Church Growth

Factors Affecting Church Growth	Value, Frequency and Percent			
	Positive Response (Strongly Agree + Agree)		Negative Response (Not Sure + Disagree + Strongly Disagree)	
	Freq. N=76	%	Freq. N=76	%
Ignorance	63	82.9	13	17.1
Carnal Mindedness	62	81.6	14	18.4
Prayerlessness	67	88.2	9	11.8
Lack of Bible Study	74	97.4	2	2.6
Lack of Finance	54	71.1	22	28.9
Leadership Problem	72	94.7	4	5.3
Lack of Strategy for Evangelism	68	89.5	8	10.5
Lack of the power of the Holy Spirit	34	44.7	42	55.3
Lack of Commitment	72	94.7	4	5.3
Lack of Good Management	65	85.5	11	14.5
Sin in the Church	40	52.6	36	47.4
People Blindness	36	47.4	40	52.6
Theological Deviation	37	48.7	39	51.3
Arrested Spiritual Development	64	84.2	12	15.8
Lack of Nurturing the new members	72	94.7	4	5.3

The study also indicated three factors, the second highest, with the same rank or percent which affect church growth badly (94.7%): Lack of proper leadership (51.3% +43.4%), lack of commitment (55.3% +39.5%), and lack of nurturing the new members (73.7% +21.1%). Among the three growth-affecting factors, "lack of

nurturing to the newly baptized members” got the highest response “Strongly Agree,” (73.7%), which indicates the problems are severe and it will affect continuously unless some decisive actions taken against them all. Beside the said three, there are two related growth affecting factors: Lack of good management and transparency 85.5% (44.7% +40.8%) and arrested spiritual development (materialism, nominalism, and self-centeredness) 84.2% (47.4% +36.8%).

The study also identified that lack of strategy for evangelism 89.5% (47.4% +42.1%) affected church growth. Since different approaches appeal to different people differently, methods and strategies should be employed in order to improve the expected growth level of the church. This finding matches with the inspired writer, E. G. White, whose advice is to employ Christ’s methods and strategies for success in evangelism: “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people” (MH, 1905, p. 143).

Church Growth Problems or Hindrances	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Negative Attitude	1	2.1	2.1
Lack of Pastoral Care	3	6.4	8.5
Unfaithfulness (Adultery)	3	6.4	14.9
Tribalism	4	8.5	23.4
Education Level Difference	1	2.1	25.5
Lack of regular visitation	3	6.4	31.9
Hypocrisy and pride	3	6.4	38.3
Wrong theology	1	2.1	40.4
Too much conservative	1	2.1	42.6
Poor infrastructure	3	6.4	48.9
Lack of faith or belief in eternal life, God	1	2.1	51.1
Too much work load for the pastors	3	6.4	57.4
Misinterpretation of Scriptures or the Word of God	1	2.1	59.6
Hostile Environment, war and bad climate	1	2.1	61.7
Lack of seminars and training in the church	5	10.6	72.3

Lack of visionary leaders and members	2	4.3	76.6
Church politics	2	4.3	80.9
Lack of love in the church	4	8.5	89.4
Gossip in the church	2	4.3	93.6
Lack of well-organized program	1	2.1	95.7
Lack of specialization in the ministry	1	2.1	97.9
Regular transfer of pastors	1	2.1	100.0
Total	47	100.0	

The last group of growth-affecting factors are: Sin in the church 52.6% (25.0% +27.6%), theological deviation 48.7% (17.1% +31.6%), people blindness 47.4% (26.3% +21.1%), and lack of the power of the Holy Spirit 44.7% (25% +19.7%). The researcher perceives that the last factor in this list, lack of the power of Holy Spirit, was misunderstood by the respondents. Since the Holy Spirit is ever present, the respondents assumed that His power should operate regardless. Though it is true that the Holy Spirit's power is ever present, unless the recipients of the Holy Spirit welcome and waits upon Him, the Holy Spirit does not force anyone to receive His outpouring power (Acts 2). For this very reason the church is required to seek the power of the Holy Spirit.

The questionnaire also provided an open question for the respondents to provide if any growth-affecting factor is left out. The respondents suggested a total of 47 church growth-hindering problems (Table 2). Out of 47 suggested additional church growth problems or hindrances, the following have got three and above emphasis or repeated respondents: Lack of seminars and training in the church (5), tribalism (4), lack of love in the church (4), poor infrastructure (3), lack of pastoral care (3), unfaithfulness, adultery (3), lack of regular pastoral visitation (3), hypocrisy, pride (3), and too much workload for the minister (3).

A. Growth Hindrances in the Bible

Jesus made a profound statement about whoever hinders the spiritual growth of a person, a believer in Him. He said that whoever causes one of these little ones—humble or lowly ones—who believe

in Him to sin, it would be better for that person if he or she were drowned in the depth of the sea (Mt 18:6). That means it is God's perfect plan that none of His believers should perish (Mt 18:14). Rather everyone through Him might be saved (Lu 9:56; Joh 5:45; 8:15; 12:47; 1Joh 4:14). The term "little ones" does not only embraces children who have learned to believe in Christ, but all lowly and humble disciples or followers of Jesus Christ (People's New Testament Commentary on Mat. 18:6). We are talking about a person's or the body's spiritual growth. When spirituality is failing to grow, nothing is growing in a person.

Even though the Bible does not use the term church growth directly, it always implies the importance of His church, His body. The church on earth is God's central focus of salvation. The Bible mentions several aspects that affect church growth. Here are a few to mention: (1) Ineffective preaching (2 Tim 4:2; Acts 20:27)—when preaching is not inline with God's instruction, it contradicts and fails the requirement; (2) ineffective leadership (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5)—when leadership fails to put things in correct order per His great guidelines, it hinders the expected growth of the church; (3) lack of love among the members (Gal 5:22; John 13:34,35)—when no love is exercised in the church, the church is refrained from its expected progress; (3) contentious spirit (Jude 3; Titus 3:9)—when minds are divided—not settled on the Rock of salvation, growth is tampered; (4) uncontrolled tongues (James 1:26; James 3:6; Rev 21:8; Pr 26:28)—when believers spent much of their God-given tongue and time in gossiping and talking non-sense business than glorifying God, they failed His standards; (5) lack of commitment (Mat 16:24; Jos 24:15; John 4:34; 6:38; Mat 26:39; Acts 21:12,13; 2 Cor 8:1-5)—whoever does not do the Lord's will, hinders the work of the Lord.

The following five points can sum up what the Bible says about church growth hindrances: (1) Nominal Christianity practiced among both leadership and church body—not wanting to practice the Master's offer and lifestyle (Luke 9:23; Mark 1:16-17); (2) not willing to pay the price to accomplish the purpose for which we were created (Eph 2:9-10; Luke 14:25-34; Col 1:16); (3) not willing to address the real problems and applying the unchanging principles of God's truth (John 12:26; 13:12-17; Eccl.7:10; Phil. 3:12-13); (4) lack of passion for others, being self-centered rather than Christ-centered in attitude and actions (Mat 9:35-38; Phil. 2:4-11); (5) lack of actively praying for God's power (Luke 24:44-48; Acts 1:8; 2:42-47; 4:32-34; Col 1:28-29).

The above lines of reasoning agree together with Peter Wagner's axioms or preconditions for church growth ("axiom: an established principle, a statement that needs no proof because its truth is obvious"): (1) "The pastor must want the church to grow and be willing to pay the price," (2) "The people [believers—church members] must want the church to grow and be willing to pay the price," and (3) "The church must not have a terminal illness"—persistent, continuous, contagious growth hindrances—(Wagner, 1982, p. 51). The next section will close by highlighting the truth of the matter and healthy church growth, expectations, and what it should and shouldn't practice.

V. Facts and Realities of a Healthy Church

The key question to ask could be what does a healthy church look like? And the possible answer is God knows and we can find His knowledge about His church from His book, the Bible. The church belongs to Christ (Eph. 4:15; Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18). He knows the best and offers the best and he who follows His will, His ways and trusts in Him for His cause will find it fully! Christ alone can make it grow (1Cor 3:5-8).

Christ is interested in man's right motives for growth: love for sinners; a sacrificing lifestyle to the world (Mat 5:13-16); total dependence on His wisdom—on the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). And He calls us to labor in a number of overlooked fertile harvest fields: growth in corporate, ceaseless prayerful life and patience; growth in heartfelt, genuine worship; growth as the committed men and women who do the work of the church and make it our own daily choice business; growth in totally convicted, converted, and convinced congregational diversity (mature Christians); growth as devoted members who are true disciples of Christ; growth in loyal and sacrificial leadership; growth as dedicated partners in ministry for others.

The church must be in the world to save those in the world (John 17: 6-19). Phil Van Auken says that spiritually healthy churches must make room for the non-Christians, the immature and backslidden Christians that they may come to Him who saves them (<http://pipl.com/directory/people/Phil/Van%2520Auken>). Growth requires the church to be all things to all people (1 Cor. 10:33). Disciples of Christ must get beyond the comfortable walls of the local

church and go out into the world where people are hurting and searching for forgiveness and a fresh start in life.

Below are few selected facts for a healthy growing church:

1. Conflict, gossip, politics, tribal issues, pride, selfishness, the love of money, unfriendliness, partiality, immorality, lack of Godly love are prime killers of church growth. Avoid them!

2. The Bible must be taught constantly and regularly in such a way that it is real and can be applied to the lives and situations of the people! The best growing churches in the world have solid Biblical preaching and teaching at their core.

3. There must be a well thought out, empowered vision and mission statement with a clearly defined purpose, and strategies on what God has called you to do and to be. The vision and mission with their intended purpose must be implemented as well as evaluated at the end of every term how much of them have been accomplished.

4. Teach and model passionate spirituality. The Christian life is not meant to be dry and monotonous. The leaders' job is to convince the people to grow beyond just doing their duty to achieving spiritual passion and conviction. It must be heaven bound (Phil. 3:7-11).

5. Training, equipping, recognizing, and encouraging are critical roles for the pastor. (Rom 7:4-6; 1 Cor 10:14-16; 12; Eph 4:9-16).

6. Confront sin, evil, and heresy in the church immediately (Phil 2:14).

7. Each church member should be guided and be able to know his or her spiritual gifts and the church can achieve the extraordinary when the people serve in their area of their spiritual gifts (Rom 12; 1 Cor 12; Eph. 4).

8. Evangelism is the church's primary focus and the pastor and his leading team together with the members of the church are enthusiastic participants in the activities of the planned effort.

9. Unity is another key element that the church should maintain, promote, talk and live about it (John 17)—united the church stands and divided it falls.

10. Reading church is a growing church! Therefore, it is the pastor's and leaders' duty and responsibility to talk, teach, and encourage every church member from children to adult to read at least a book in a month and everybody must be required and requested to share the read knowledge to the congregation regularly, especially in the Sabbath afternoons.

11. Regular evaluation is a good motivating factor for active church growth. There must be some official evaluation forms

prepared by the church departments and each departmental activity as well as spiritual maturity should be evaluated in kindness for the sake of spiritual growth—not for criticism or for mockery. It would be very helpful if members can evaluate the leading team including the pastor as well as the leadership evaluates the members.

12. Balanced carefully and highly organized social and recreational gathering as well as outing would promote members' and leadership's connectedness and even for friendship evangelism.

VI. Conclusion

The God who created (Gen. 1:27; 2:7) and redeemed (Luk 1:68; Gal 3:13; 1Pe 1:18; Rev 5:9) His Church and formed the believing community has no pleasure to leave His own people parentless. Just as a good gardener cares for his plants as well as a good business man knows how to take care of his business in order to make a good profit for his family (Ps 103:13; Mal 3:17), the God of all humanity cares much more for His community of all believers (1 Pet 5:7; Ps 37:5; 55:22; Mt 6:25; Lu 12:11,22; Php 4:6; Heb 13:5). The Bible puts it clearly that our Savior is the Good Shepherd and He knows His sheep and cares (Joh 10:11, 14). Since He is the God of freedom and He does not force anyone to obey Him without his or her free will, He only leads whoever is willing to be saved (John 3:16, 17; 14:15; 15:4, 5).

It is God's perfect and eternal plan that His church should grow in spirit continually. However, the enemy of God's people has been fighting mankind to fail in every aspect of life. Furthermore, he (Satan) succeeded by causing hostility among the believers such as the spirit of carelessness, failure in spiritual life, untruthfulness, lack of interest in any good work, making them envious to one another, lazy for any good work, lie to each other, and making one suspicious and doubtful to the other and, above all, to the leadership.

As result of the above and many others not mentioned contentious/or nominal living of the believers, the church growth has been declining in its spiritual expectations—quality performances. Having discussed several factors and facts which caused unpleasant church growth declination, all the concerned body of believers including the leadership have been reminded as well as invited for total participation in reconstructing the new church growth plan and in its implementations as God wills.

Lastly, if an incessant church growth is cherished as important as salvation for sinners is, both the church leadership and the membership of God's remnant church should determine to take the risk of modeling Christ and willing to comply and complete the Master's Marching Order (Mat 28:18-20; 24:14; Acts 1:8). For this great mission of our Lord, we God's faithful and co-laborers vow (Joshua 24:15) to fight the above odds as long as the Lord keeps His breathe of life in us. Let God's church grow!

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