WHY SMALL GROUP MINISTRY IS THE FUTURE OF EVANGELISM

By Nathanael Gracia
Foreword By
Ivan Williams

Why Small Group Ministry is the Future of Evangelism
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Dedication

To My Dream Team
Vanessa Sylvain Gracia, my wife, and to Nathan and Farael Gracia

To Nathacha Gracia and Michna Zamor

To Pastor Calvin Watkins Sr., my mentor

To Pastor Mark Finley, Pastor Felicia Philips, Pastor Calvin Preston, Dr. Joseph Smith, Dr. Balvin Braham, Pastor Gerly Germain, Ms. Marrian Allen, Dr. Michael Harvey, Pastor Devon Heath, Pastor Peter Kerr, to the Saint Ann's Bay Church in Saint Ann, Jamaica, and Pastor Debleaire K. Snell.

To my colleagues and friends, Pastor Reynor Danger, Pastor Jacky Georges, Pastor Jean Richard Desir, Dr. Benoit Petit-Homme, Pastor Jirhony Mele, Dr. Frantz Dhaiti, Dr. Arbentz Pierre Antoine, Evangelist Amanda Toussaint, Merlyn Walker, Fabiola Michel, Dr. Moses Primo, Pastor Moses Mitchel, Pastor Glen O. Samuels, Dr. Omar Oliphant, Pastor Frank Harrell.

To The Memory of

Andrée Fleurima Gracia

My Late Mother

"The one who first lit the flame of evangelism in my seven-year-old heart."

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FOREWORD

There are moments in the life of the Church when God calls us to rediscover the simplicity and strength of His original design. *Why Small Group Ministry is the Future of Evangelism* is one such prophetic call. Dr. Nathanael Gracia presents a timely, Spirit-filled, and research-grounded vision that reclaims the biblical model of small groups as the heart of evangelism, discipleship, and sustainable church growth.

We live in an era when traditional methods of outreach, such as large campaigns, public meetings, and mass gatherings, are increasingly challenged by cultural shifts, digital distractions, and societal fragmentation. Yet, even in these complex times, the gospel commission remains unchanged: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). What Dr. Gracia masterfully demonstrates is that the most effective way to fulfill this divine mandate is not necessarily through bigger events, but through smaller circles where relationships, accountability, and authentic spiritual transformation take root.

In the pages of this book, readers will find not only theology but testimony, not only theory but practice. Drawing from the New Testament model of believers meeting "from house to house" (Acts 2:46), Dr. Gracia reminds us that the early church did not grow through programs; it grew through people. It expanded through networks of grace, love, and truth lived out in intimate community. This vision is not nostalgic; it is farsighted. It invites us to imagine a church where every member becomes a missionary, every home becomes a center of light, and every gathering, whether on Zoom or in a living room, becomes an incubator for revival.

As Ministerial Director of the North American Division, I have the privilege of witnessing the faithfulness of thousands of pastors and lay leaders committed to evangelism. Many of them are searching for methods that reach the hearts of this generation, methods that are

relational, sustainable, and Spirit-led. What Dr. Gracia offers here is not a replacement for traditional evangelism, but an expansion of it. He builds on the heritage of pioneers like Mark Finley, C.D. Brooks, and E.E. Cleveland, while calling for a paradigm shift that speaks to our post-pandemic reality. The question he poses is sobering and necessary: Are our churches ready for an evangelism that cannot be stopped by crisis, persecution, or distance?

The answer, as this book powerfully argues, lies in small group ministry. Small groups are, as Ellen G. White once wrote, "a plan that has been presented before me by One who cannot err." They are divinely designed to multiply faith, nurture disciples, and sustain the harvest long after the evangelistic meeting ends. Dr. Gracia shows how these groups create belonging, deepen spirituality, and strengthen retention—the very areas where the church often struggles. His research and ministry experience confirm what many of us have observed: members who engage in small groups remain more active, more connected, and more mission-minded.

What impresses me most about this work is its integration of scholarship, spirituality, and practicality. Dr. Gracia writes not only as a theologian and psychologist but as a pastor who has seen both the triumphs and the shortcomings of traditional evangelism. He does not critique from the sidelines; he speaks from the field. His vision is born out of experience, prayer, and a deep love for the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Reading this book, one cannot help but sense that the Holy Spirit is calling the church to "think big" for small groups, so that our church may grow stronger and larger, adding to our crowd evangelism and connection evangelism. It is a call to reimagine our Sabbath schools, prayer meetings, and Bible studies as mission centers. It challenges us to equip every member to lead, serve, and disciple within the context of meaningful relationships.

I believe that *Why Small Group Ministry is the Future of Evangelism* will become a benchmark resource for pastors, elders, and ministry leaders across our division and beyond. It is a book that deserves to be considered, discussed, and applied at every level of church life. More than that, it is a call to renewal, a reminder that evangelism begins not with an event, but with an encounter.

The world is changing rapidly, but the gospel remains timeless. If the church is to remain relevant, it must also be relational. In that sense,

Dr. Gracia's message is both revolutionary and restorative; it takes us back to the Book of Acts while propelling us forward into the mission fields of the twenty-first century.

My prayer is that this book ignites a movement of small-group discipleship across North America and around the world. May every reader hear the Spirit's whisper: Start small. Dream big. Love deeply. Multiply faithfully. For in doing so, we will rediscover the divine genius of the early church and prepare the way for the final outpouring of the Spirit.

Indeed, small groups are not simply the future of evangelism; they are essential for the future of the church.

Ivan L. Williams, Sr., D.Min.
Vice President, Strategy and Leadership
Director, Ministerial Association
North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists

INTRODUCTION

This publication is born of the conviction that the New Testament church's model of evangelism through small groups is not only biblically grounded but also providentially suited to the challenges of the modern age. What you hold in your hands is more than a ministry manual—it is a prophetic invitation to recover the apostolic fire that once turned the world upside down. Rooted in my doctoral research, pastoral ministry, and decades of practical fieldwork, this volume explores the theology, strategy, and spiritual power of small group ministry with the earnestness of a shepherd who has seen the harvest and refuses to remain silent.

We live in a time when traditional approaches to outreach often fall short in addressing the emotional, spiritual, and relational needs of today's seekers. The steepled sanctuary, the public evangelism event, the broadcast sermon—while each carries its place in the economy of grace—cannot alone reach the lonely soul in a crowded apartment, the wounded heart behind a polished smile, or the questioning mind that will never walk through the doors of a church without first being invited into someone's living room. The early church understood this instinctively. It grew not through events but through relationships—communities of believers who met from house to house, broke bread together, and taught doctrine in intimate, transformative fellowship. They did not merely announce the Gospel; they embodied it in the texture of daily life.

To read the Acts of the Apostles is to witness an ecclesiology of proximity, a Spirit-empowered movement that advanced not on the strength of institutions but on the courage of ordinary men and women who opened their homes, their tables, and their hearts. The explosive growth recorded in the book of Acts was not the product of sophisticated programs or polished productions. It was the fruit of small, Spirit-saturated

communities of faith that loved one another visibly and winsomely enough to make the watching world take notice.

I draw from the insights of scholars such as William Beckham, whose groundbreaking work on the two-winged church challenged an entire generation of pastors to reimagine the relationship between celebration and cell. I also reach back to the spiritual reformers of centuries past—among them John Calvin, who understood the ever-present danger of religious complacency and called for a more personal, Spirit-driven church experience. Across these voices runs a common thread: that genuine transformation happens not in the anonymity of the crowd but in the accountability of community. I also incorporate the bold and prophetic appeals of Ellen G. White, who urged believers with apostolic urgency to "sow the seed" in and out of season—in marketplaces and neighborhoods, in kitchens and living rooms—never permitting comfort or convenience to silence the call to share the Gospel.

This book is the fruit of prayer, pastoral tears, and hard-won wisdom gathered from churches that dared to believe that a small group of committed disciples, sitting in a circle with open Bibles and hungry hearts, could shake a neighborhood, transform a family, and ultimately change the world. It is written for the pastor who has grown weary of watching his congregation plateau, for the lay leader who senses a calling that far exceeds a committee assignment, and for the church planter who is not afraid to start small because they serve a God who specializes in doing great things with little. This is an urgent, biblical, and Spirit-breathed call to rediscover the power of small-group evangelism: not as a supplemental ministry to be bolted onto an already overburdened church calendar, but as God's primary design for church growth, spiritual formation, and mission building.

The kingdom of God, our Lord once said, is like a mustard seed. It begins small, almost imperceptible. But in the right soil, under the right conditions, with the right tending, it grows until the birds of the air find shelter in its branches. That is the promise embedded in every small group that gathers in His name. And that is the promise this book is written to help you claim.

Chapter 1
THE NEED FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT

"A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty." -Winston S. Churchill

I have lived the great disappointment in recent days. Just a few months before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, It Is Written and the Georgia Cumberland and South Atlantic Conferences of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were preparing a massive outreach for summer 2020 that would have taken place live in Metro Atlanta and reached the world through the media. The budget was voted on; the field preparation was set. It was an exciting time for me to travel from Atlanta to Tennessee to attend the planning committees' sessions. I was chosen to be the speaker for the French-speaking community alongside John Bradshaw, the director of It Is Written ministry. This was a flashback to Atlanta Good News in 2010. I was daydreaming of a repeat, this time with Pastor Bradshaw. I could picture the results. I went into an intense season of sermon preparation. The field was being prepared, and I was praying for this event's success.

The Disappointment

Suddenly, everything had to come to a nightmarish halt. COVID-19 arrived with its life-ending campaign. The pandemic silenced the voice of prophecy for that period. This was a great disappointment to me; I could not believe that, because of COVID-19, God's plan could not proceed.

We were so unprepared for a pandemic. We hadn't even planned for an alternate meeting site.

Similarly, God's plan cannot go forward in some places around the world today. Not only is another pandemic a threat to Christian gatherings, but the aftereffects are also a threat. The socio-political atmosphere of our world makes public religious gatherings a constant, fragile undertaking. For example, research revealed that government restrictions on religion take many forms around the world. Particularly restrictive governments often limit religious expression by banning certain groups from gathering, including entire faiths, social movements, or political organizations that have ties to religion. In fact, 41 countries—or around a fifth (21%) of those evaluated—banned at least one religion-related group. This is according to a Pew Research Center analysis of laws and policies in effect in 198 countries in 2019, the most recent year for which comprehensive data is available. Organized religious groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and believers, were among the most frequently banned groups. The Middle East-North Africa region had the highest share of countries (55%, or 11 of 20) with bans on religion-related groups.

We should be very concerned about these restrictions, whether we are Christians or not. Restrictions on religion anywhere are a threat to religion everywhere. Just as Martin Luther King Jr. eloquently proclaimed about injustice: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."

But can God's plan really be stopped? Isn't this a theological dilemma? God asked us to be witnesses, to preach the Gospel in season and out of season. He even promises that He will accompany us until the end: "Lo, I am with you until the end of the world." Matthew 28:20. With such a guarantee, what can be done to avoid disappointment if a major setback like another pandemic should strike? Is there an evangelistic plan that is discrimination-, disaster-, or even pandemic-proof?

Henri-Frédéric Amiel said, "Common sense is the measure of the possible; it is composed of experience and prevision; it is calculation applied to life."

Reflection on a Plan B for Evangelism

More than a century before the rise of religious extremist hostility and long before the recent pandemic, an inspired recommendation was given by the servant of the Lord, Ellen G. White:

> Let companies be organized to search for souls. Let the church members visit their neighbors and open the Scriptures to them. Some may be set to work in the hedges, and thus, by

> wise planning, the truth may be preached in all districts. With perseverance in this work, increasing aptitude for it will come, and many will see fruit of their labors in the salvation of souls. These converted ones will, in turn, teach others. Thus, the seed will be sown in many places, and the truth be proclaimed to all (Review and Herald, January 25, 1912).

A plan B for evangelism is no longer merely an option for churches in a post-pandemic world. It is essential. Small group evangelism is pandemic-proof.

Perilous Times and Dangerous Men

Churches often only realize the need for a contingency plan for evangelism when crisis strikes. However, the question isn't if a crisis will strike, but when. The same gospel we preach tells us that there will be perilous end times: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come" (2 Timothy 3:1).

It is a matter of time, and that time is here. Luke 21:25 says, "And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring."

And we need not fear, for Paul tells us the reward will be multiplied: "Now he who supplies seed to the Sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness" (2 Corinthians 9:10).

The love movement is a provision for the Sower. We just need to think out of the box.

American television host and businessman Jimmy Ray Dean once said, "I can't change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination." Adjustment is necessary. We may have the same mission we always have, but with new visions. No wonder the Lord said that in the last days the young will see visions ("we do know that this work will finish with the work"); in other words, the young, supplied with new visions, will carry the movement forward.

After 9/11, flying is not the same. The main objective of airline companies has always been to fly passengers safely from one location to the next. That sounds like the plan of salvation taking us to heaven. The smart move that the airlines and the airport authority made was to adjust how people fly. Same objective, new method. They made new plans to create an

environment that would make passengers feel safer. The Transportation Security Administration took this mission to a whole new level. When it is obvious that the goals cannot be reached, don't adjust the goals; adjust the action steps.

Churches that are serious about their main purpose, which is evangelism, should have a contingency plan for times of distress and confusion. These times can be an opportunity, if we are proactive in thinking and planning.

"Victory comes from finding opportunities in problems." -Sun Tzu

If earthly enterprises with temporal objectives do have plans for rainy days or snowy seasons, the church with an eternal purpose should be ready in season and out of season.

The Bible admonishes us to preach in season and out of season. This is a call to our conscience as disciples. We have to seize the post-pandemic era to unfold one of our best evangelism weapons.

Even in the pre-pandemic era, small groups were an answer to common questions:

- Why is the church so ineffective at confronting the desperate needs of our society?
- Why are so many church leaders experiencing burnout?
- How do we shift from just making converts to making disciples?
- Can we really experience the church we read about in the book of Acts?

Didn't Christ say that if His disciples "should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out"? Christ has a ready plan to keep His glory going. When our crowd and our usual medium of preaching and proclaiming the kingdom become silent, can we discover this ready plan? Let us reflect on this question with the saying of Peter Drucker: "The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence; it is to act with yesterday's logic."

The Big Picture: Evangelism

Evangelism is the act of sharing the Gospel, or good news, of Jesus Christ with others. It is the practice of spreading the Christian faith through preaching, teaching, and living a life consistent with the teachings of Jesus. In Christianity, evangelism is the commitment to, or act of, publicly preaching the Gospel with the intention of sharing the message and teachings of Jesus Christ. Christians who specialize in evangelism are often known as evangelists, whether they are in their home communities

or living as missionaries in the field, although some Christian traditions refer to such people as missionaries in either case. Some Christian traditions consider evangelists to be in leadership positions; they may be found preaching at large meetings or serving in governance roles. Christian groups who encourage evangelism are sometimes known as evangelistic groups or evangelists.

The word evangelist comes from the Koine Greek word εὐαγγέλιον, transliterated as euangelion, via the Latinized evangelium, as used in the canonical titles of the Four Gospels, authored by or attributed to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, also known as the Four Evangelists. The Greek word εὐαγγέλιον originally meant a reward given to the messenger for good news εὖ = "good," ἀγγέλλω "I bring a message"; the word angel comes from the same root and later "good news" itself. The verb form of euangelion, translated as "evangelism," occurs rarely in older Greek literature outside the New Testament, making its meaning more difficult to ascertain. Parallel texts of the Gospels of Luke and Mark reveal a synonymous relationship between the verb euangelizo (εὐαγγελίζω) and the Greek verb kerusso (κηρύσσω), both meaning "to proclaim."

An Overdue Paradigm Shift

"Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything." -George Bernard Shaw

A paradigm shift refers to a fundamental change in the way a particular concept, belief, or model is understood or approached. It often involves a significant shift in thinking, perspective, or methodology within a specific field or discipline. The origin of the concept can be traced back to the philosophy of science and the study of scientific revolutions. The term "paradigm shift" was popularized by Thomas Kuhn in his book The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, in which he argued that scientific progress is not always gradual and can involve radical shifts in understanding.

I believe we need a paradigm shift in our approach to evangelism. Many have written and spoken about this need. But as we think, we must also create; there is a correlation between creativity and thinking. It's not a coincidence that the word creer in Spanish, meaning to think, to imagine, means to create in French. In doing some creer about evangelism in the Adventist church, we will find that we need to step up. We will not reinvent the wheel, but rather, amplify the wheel—make it run more efficiently. We should advance the cause.

Telecommunications has exploded since the advent of the telephone. We can trace its evolution from early experiments and innovations. In the 1830s and 1840s, inventors such as Charles Bourseul, Antonio Meucci, and Innocenzo Manzetti proposed transmitting sound over electrical wires. Alexander Graham Bell successfully used a diaphragm and an electromagnet to convert sound waves into electrical signals, which could then be transmitted over a wire and converted back into sound at the receiving end. He patented and commercialized the first practical telephone in 1876. This invention revolutionized communication by enabling people to speak with one another over long distances, eliminating the need for physical travel or written messages.

Bell's invention laid the foundation for the modern telecommunications industry and paved the way for further developments in communication technology. The same evolution needs to occur in the social sciences, which have not progressed as much as the applied sciences.

This book is, in a nutshell, an inquiry towards a paradigm shift in evangelism. I have applied rather scientific thinking to this social matter. We summarize scientific thinking with the following specific practices: (1) asking questions and (2) developing and using analogies and models. Experiment Space Search involves planning and carrying out investigations. Finally, (3) evaluating evidence by (a) analyzing and interpreting data and then (b) constructing explanations. I did all that for the past four years, looking at more efficient ways or approaches to sustainable evangelism.

For church growth, we need to identify our mission and goals by reflecting on the following questions:

1. Where have we come from? Why was this church started, and what has been achieved in the past?
2. Where are we now? What kind of church are we? How well do we know each other? What are we doing? Do we like what we see?
3. Where are we going? What would we like to achieve within the next three/five/ten years, and how could we best achieve it?
4. How will we get there? How are we going to get from where we are to where we want to be? What changes must we make? What must we do, going forward, that we are not doing now to make the vision a reality?

By identifying specific areas of weakness and need, and by facing our specific challenges and goals, leaders and members can all see more clearly

how small groups will help make the church what God really wants it to be.

The scientific thinking I have applied in preparing my dissertation on evangelism and retention has led me to propose a paradigm shift. I call it an overdue evangelistic paradigm.

I concur with Theodore Roosevelt who said, "It is not the critic who counts… The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena…" Credit to my hero pastor, Mark Finley. Each time I meet him, I am inspired by his countenance, which is amazing and transformative. One cannot speak of impactful evangelism within the Seventh-day Adventist Church without highlighting the legacy of Pastor Mark Finley, the Billy Graham of the remnant, a true role model in the global mission of soul-winning. Baptized at the age of seventeen, Pastor Mark Finley's passion for sharing the Gospel quickly transformed into a lifetime of service. As a pastor, author, and international evangelist, his influence has spanned over 100 countries and led to tens of thousands of baptisms – over 200,000 souls baptized. He has touched millions for Christ; his leadership as GC vice president, his long tenure as Speaker/Director of It Is Written, and his pioneering work in satellite evangelism (most notably through NET '95 and NET '96) brought prophecy and salvation messages to millions worldwide. Through his innovative vision and commitment to Christ's method of ministry, Mark Finley elevated small group training, health outreach, and Bible study into powerful tools of evangelism. Even in retirement, his role as a mentor and trainer at the Living Hope School of Evangelism, and his continued work through HopeLives365, testify to a life wholly devoted to discipleship. For today's evangelist, Pastor Finley exemplifies what it means to blend conviction, compassion, and innovation in reaching the world for Christ.

Similarly, Pastor Alejandro Bullón has led hundreds of thousands to Christ, especially in the Spanish-speaking world, through massive campaigns and media outreach. The Caribbean apostle, Dr. Glen O. Samuels, President of the West Jamaica Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, leads the Footprints of Hope Evangelistic Series, a significant initiative through which he continues to turn Jamaica and the Caribbean upside down, bringing thousands of souls every year. Pastor C.D. Brooks, a legendary voice of Breath of Life, baptized more than 20,000 souls, while Pastor E.E. Cleveland not only baptized over 16,000 himself, but trained thousands more to do the same. Pastor Kenneth Cox brought thousands into the faith through Revelation seminars, and Pastor Doug Batchelor has reached multitudes through Amazing Facts and global media evangelism.

Adding to this legacy, Pastor Carlton P. Byrd, notably, during his tenure as Speaker/Director of the Breath of Life Television Ministry, led a significant evangelistic campaign in Tanzania, resulting in 15,124 baptisms, while Pastor Calvin Watkins Sr., evangelist par excellence with a countless baptism record across the world, currently serves as a Vice President of the North American Division (NAD) of Seventh-day Adventists, overseeing Evangelism and Regional Liaison. In this capacity, Pastor Watkins provides strategic leadership for evangelistic initiatives across the division, including programs like Pentecost 2025, which aims to mobilize churches and members for widespread Gospel proclamation. These evangelists are not just names in history; they are living proof that faithful, Spirit-filled preaching can still move the multitudes and fulfill the Great Commission in every generation.

Closer to my backyard in Atlanta, where my four years of research on the effectiveness of our evangelism method were conducted, is a known trend-setter, Dr. Ron Smith, a prolific evangelist and the Southern Union President, who lives by example with an exceptional baptismal record. Keeping up to six campaigns per year with "The System for Survival" series, Dr. Smith has transformed thousands of lives. Dr. Smith's service to this part of the world has also helped us survive the attrition that might be worse without his public evangelism programs. They are exciting; they appeal to both members and visitors; they are reviving; they are life changing.

We need this sustenance in our churches. Some may criticize public evangelism and nullify its relevance. I don't criticize it. I can't. I won't. I believe that if we did not have this method, the Christian church would have died slowly by now. Dwight L. Moody put it this way: "It is clear you don't like my way of doing evangelism. You raise some good points. Frankly, I sometimes do not like the way I do evangelism. But I like my way of doing it better than your way of not doing it."

It is obviously unethical for those who don't practice evangelism to judge those who do. I don't have to tell you more to convince you that the book of Numbers matters to my canonical perspective. However, I am convinced that we can do even better. We must do better. Even if you believe we are doing well, we can still move from good to great, especially if evangelism is our main purpose. All Christians exist to bring forth the good news. In the words of D. Elton Trueblood, "Evangelism is not a professional job for a few trained men, but is instead the unrelenting responsibility of every person who belongs to the company of Jesus. This thought should be a call to efficient, purposeful Evangelism."

The alarming attrition of our church membership must compel us to deeply study the root causes of our membership attrition. Since 1965, more than forty million (40,421,554) people have been members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Thanks be to God! Tragically, the number who have left the church since then has now passed 16 million, and our net loss rate has now ticked above 40 percent. Worse, this number is without a thorough cleaning of the books, according to David Trim, director of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASTR), during Annual Council 2020, as part of the Secretariat report to members of the General Conference Executive Committee on October 8, 2020.

Many of those taken off the books (or, these days, off the database) actually left years, even decades, ago. The most reliable metric we currently have is accessions, because we have confidence that baptisms, rebaptisms, and professions of faith are being reported fairly accurately, and, of course, accessions are the headline when considering spiritual growth.

There is, however, no consistent upward trend in the number of accessions. But the church is increasing its membership every year, so we should reasonably expect net accretions to increase as well. Yet they are not.

Dr. Kirk Thomas advanced that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is losing members at an alarming rate. Even though evangelism in our churches is winning people to Christ, we lose about 49 of every 100 baptized. This hemorrhaging of our members cannot continue. It is expected to get worse, especially in countries where soul-winning is difficult, and if it continues, entire conferences may close for lack of members.

General Conference Secretary G. T. Ng, concerned by this threat, made a grave declaration: "This 49 percent apostasy rate is alarming and is a serious drain on the human and financial resources of the church. What happens to an army with 49 percent desertion among its soldiers? What happens to a school when 49 percent of its students drop out of classes? What happens to a factory when 49 percent of its employees decide to defect?"

And that becomes clearer when we look, not at actual numbers, but at rates of increase and decrease, and if we look, not at 10 years, but at 20 years. To be clear, we are talking about accessions, not about membership. And thus, what we see here is not actually a "growth rate"; it shows

the percentage increase or decrease in accessions each year. There is considerable volatility, which is to be expected, but it is striking that, in the last 10 of 20 years, accessions were lower than in each preceding 12 months. And yet, remember, the church membership has increased in all 20 years. We might expect a couple of years in which accessions declined, but not 10 of 20.

Our success in soul-winning seems to be plateauing. We have more members than ever, but they are not noticeably winning more souls for Christ.

Dr. Joseph Smith, my first employer and mentor, once shared a thought-provoking story with our group of lay leaders. A woman came forward enthusiastically to share her testimony about her conversion to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. She explained that she had previously been a Jehovah's Witness, and what attracted her to Adventism was, in her words, the absence of requirements for door-to-door outreach or personal evangelism goals. She said it was easy to make the transition because, after attending the SDA church for some time, she noticed that no one expected her to engage in any form of active evangelism. What sealed the decision for her, she said, was the realization that she could attend, Sabbath after Sabbath, without being noticed, challenged, or bothered. "I love the freedom to just be myself and do nothing," she said.

To be honest, I've often been the kind of leader who, by her definition, gives "trouble"—trouble in the form of encouraging members toward outreach, participation, and service. But her words left me with a sobering question: Have we unintentionally created a culture where inactivity is acceptable, and discipleship optional? A paradigm shift in evangelism is long overdue because, quite frankly, our current methods are not working as efficiently as they should. And let me be honest: I love numbers—perhaps more than anyone reading this book. I once served as the Ministerial Director for the rapidly growing North Jamaica Conference. As part of my responsibilities, I presented monthly baptismal reports at the (then) West Indies Union meetings, often in the presence of Pastor Glen O. Samuels. At the time, he was my Union Ministerial director, one of the most dynamic preachers that I have met and, more importantly, an extraordinary motivator. Every time I left his presence, I felt empowered, ready to conquer the world for Christ.

I am a second-generation Seventh-day Adventist. At just seven years old, I began leading Bible studies for adults, some of whom were baptized as a result. By the age of 12, I was conducting cottage meetings and baptizing

dozens of new members. I officially became a Bible worker at age eight, working alongside my devoted mother, Andrée Fleurima Gracia. She was not only a benevolent colporteur, but also a head deaconess and associate director of Personal Ministries. We ministered together as a team.

Throughout my life, I have traveled the world as an evangelist, preaching across continents. This is not a boast; I share these experiences to establish context. You'll understand their relevance as you continue reading. I've inspired many at conventions and evangelistic campaigns. I've had the privilege of baptizing three pastors and bishops from Sunday-keeping churches, each from different cultural and denominational backgrounds. One of the most memorable moments was baptizing the well-known bishop Koran Haystein during a tent evangelism event. I've also baptized politicians while they were still in office.

I was honored to be part of the "Lord Transform Me" initiative in Haiti, a visionary project led by the evangelism genius Dr. Balvin B. Braham. In 2018, he invited me to lead a team of pastors from the United States. Together, by God's grace, we witnessed more than 13,000 baptisms. I spoke in that stadium, and yes, miracles happened. I also preached at the Atlanta Good News Pre-General Conference public evangelism event, sharing the platform with Mark Finley and Alejandro Bullón. Over the years, I've received numerous plaques and prizes for reaching centurion baptismal goals, but I find myself asking—where are the nearly 4,000 souls who were once baptized? How many are still in the pews, growing, serving, and staying connected to the church family? Only 38% of them have remained. I have been part of the system. I have contributed to how it currently runs. This is why I share my previous experiences. It is to admit that I am not pointing fingers, but instead, reflecting on the outcomes of our church. These questions weigh heavily on my heart, not as criticism of the effort, but as a call for reflection. Evangelism cannot end at the baptismal tank. The real challenge is not just winning souls, but keeping them. Are we truly discipling? Are we surrounding new believers with the relationships, systems, and support they need to thrive in Christ?

I believe it's high time to ask: Is there a more systematic, Spirit-led way to ensure long-term retention, spiritual maturity, and engagement? If so, what does it look like, and how do we implement it with excellence, consistency, and compassion?

There is a Solution: A Paradigm Within Our Standard

If getting people into the church is not the major problem, and we are cognizant that evangelism is our divine mandate, then we recognize,

subliminally or deliberately, that we have to keep people on their path to the kingdom. Keeping new converts and making disciples of them is the real issue. Even so, focusing solely on retention would not be the best tactic, because a team that plays only defense will lose sooner or later. This is where organizing small groups will help address the retention issue. I thank God for the solution that has always been there and has proven effective, even if it hasn't been fully utilized. We have approached that solution timidly; for too long we have used the easier road; the road most traveled.

The paradigm shift I propose is a system that functions at the local church level as a catalyst for sustainable growth. This system, which is the love revolution, can be summarized as an intentional pursuit of souls delegated to every member in a small group setting. In a future chapter we will explain how to implement it. Small group evangelism divides the church into cells with the purpose of growth, nurturing and retention.

The family love circle is about small group evangelism within the local church that intentionally evangelizes. The family love circle is a method of sharing the message of the Gospel and engaging in discipleship within the context of small groups. These groups typically consist of a small number of individuals, often ranging from 5 to 12 people, who gather regularly to pray, to study the Bible, and to support one another in their spiritual journeys, with a special emphasis on practical love and care. With the love movement of small group evangelism, focus is on creating a more intimate and interactive environment where participants can openly share their personal stories, discuss their faith, ask questions, and grow together. It will provide an opportunity for believers to deepen their understanding of the Word, develop personal relationships, and encourage one another in the Christian walk. Small group evangelism, in a nutshell, is an intentional effort of a church to reach out to the local community or to specific target groups through small groups. This outreach can take various forms, such as organizing community service projects, hosting social events, or offering other specific programs tailored to the needs and interests of the community. The goal of small-group outreach is to build relationships, demonstrate God's love through practical acts of service, and create opportunities for individuals to explore and experience the Christian faith in a convivial, loving, caring, welcoming, and nonthreatening environment.

The small group is designed to foster a sense of community, provide support, and share the message of love in a more personal and relational way than larger church gatherings.

I humbly propose that our churches make small groups official, just like Sabbath School, because I will show you that small groups are not only an evangelism tool but also one of the best retention tools.

As you read the next chapter, you will see the rationale behind this proposition. Our leaders should request a list of small group activities from each pastor at the end of each year. Back in the day, we used to examine the knowledge base of baptism candidates before baptismal vows. Wouldn't it be helpful to involve neophytes and baptismal candidates in some organized evangelistic venture? Not all circumstances will be the same; their involvement can be retroactive. If their baptism happens during a public evangelism series or in a spontaneous altar call, we should, by no means, stop such individuals from coming to the Lord.

However, believers considering church membership should be assigned some evangelistic activities. There should be a system in place to foster such practice. The church should become an evangelistic machine, or else we will not survive the next two decades.

Spread the good news. Your product works. Tell the world that it is working. Share what really matters. Be relevant. Make a difference.

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