SOUTHERN
ADVENTIST UNIVERSITY
School of
Education and Psychology

REYNOLDS CHAIR SYMPOSIUM
SEPTEMBER 14 AND 15, 2018

Bonnie Eder, EdD
Reynolds Chair and Compiler

Southern Adventist University
School of Education and Psychology
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History of the Reynolds’ Endowed Chair

Maurine Reynolds was the only child of Clarence and Elva Reynolds. In her last Will and Testament, Reynolds stated, “It is my desire that Southern College of Seventh-day Adventist of Collegedale, Tennessee, use the bequests heretofore made to it to provide quality instruction in the area of religion and values: it is my further desire that a chair of instruction be established in honor of Clarence and Elva Reynolds…it is my desire that any chair of instruction established hereby shall be known as the Clarence and Elva Reynolds Chair.”

Southern College (now Southern Adventist University) voted to establish this chair on February 21, 1995. In consultation with Mr. Herbert (Bert) Coolidge, long-time financial adviser to Maurine Reynolds, a governing document was established for this position. Mr. Coolidge has continued to provide valuable counsel to the School of Education and Psychology regarding the funds and position with respect to the Reynolds’ wishes.

History of the Symposium

The Reynolds Symposium was developed to honor the Reynolds family’s gift and desires. This is a brief history of each of the Reynolds’ Symposia held at Southern Adventist University:

- **September 21-22, 2013**: The first annual Reynolds Symposium hosted and organized by the Reynolds Chair, and sponsored by the School of Education & Psychology. Theme entitled: “The Next Generation: Will It Be Adventist? Mining [Qualitative] Data from the Adventist Connection Study.”

- **September 19-20, 2014**: The second annual Reynolds Symposium entitled “Music and Art Instruction: Promotion of Religion and Values or Just an Added Value to Higher Education?”

- **September 18-19, 2015**: The third annual Reynolds Symposium entitled “Religious Values: Paving the Way to Global Christian Citizenship.” The symposium’s featured academic departments were English, History, and Modern Languages.

- **September 16-17, 2016**: The fourth annual Reynolds Symposium took place in the amphitheater of Hulsey Wellness Center at Southern Adventist University. The theme, “Where is God in the Social Sciences?” was explored by the Psychology and Social Work departments.

- **September 15-16, 2017**: The fifth annual Reynolds Symposium was hosted again in the amphitheater of Hulsey Wellness Center at Southern Adventist University. Professors from the School of Physical Education, Health, and Wellness beautifully articulated the theme: “Exercise Your Faith”.

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Reynolds Symposium 2018

This year’s Reynolds’ Symposium featured a partnering of the School of Religion with the School of Education and Psychology. Dr. Eliezer Graterol, an associate professor of Religion at Southern Adventist University, spoke from his heart on the theme of *Disciples in Secret*. He challenged everyone to live openly and fully for Christ.

Sabbath morning presentations included a very thoughtful presentation entitled, *Collaborative Ministry: School, Church, and Community* by Dr. Scott Ward, a professor from Andrews University. "[Collaborative Ministry] is a relationship theology—relationship with God and relationship with each other,” Dr. Ward shared. He expanded on this theme through a four-fold gospel commission theme.

This presentation was followed by Dr. Douglas Jacobs, research professor in the School of Religion at Southern Adventist University. Dr. Jacob shared findings from a collaborative study conducted with other scholars. This presentation was entitled, *Adventist Millennials: Measuring Emerging Adults’ Connection to the Church*.

Dr. Ward then provided a summary to establish the connections between all the presentations. Michelle Alonso, an inspiring vocalist and composer, inspired all in attendance with special music selections.

We are grateful for the willing assistance of each member of the faculty and staff of the School of Education and Psychology, for Dr. Greg King and his assistance in selecting two of the presenters, for Dr. John McCoy introducing us to Dr. Ward, and for Jeanina Mann, graduate assistant, and her organizational skills.

Bonnie Eder, Ed.D.

Reynolds Chair
September 2018
The heart of the Great Commission, which are Jesus’ last words before His ascension to heaven, involves a mandate to go around the world making disciples (Matthew 28:19). But, what is discipleship? I will examine a definition of discipleship, considering the theme “Forever a Disciple of Jesus,” in the context of one fascinating episode in the lives of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. It took place during the darkest hour of the history of planet Earth, when the Son of God died on the cross as our substitute. Describing the burial of Jesus, the beloved disciple wrote the following:

Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate’s permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus’ body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there (John 19:38-42, NIV).

Joseph of Arimathea

Even though the Bible does not provide many details about Joseph of Arimathea, we know the following description of his life. First, he was a wealthy man (Matthew 27:57). His richness could be the fulfillment of the description alluding to Isaiah 53:9, which states that the Suffering Servant had his death with the rich.

Moreover, Joseph was a prominent member of the council called Sanhedrin (Mark 15:43). In other words, he was a man of influence and power. Some scholars argue that he was a friend of Pontius Pilate. Roman law normally handed over the bodies of executed criminals to
their close relatives but not if they had been executed for sedition. Jesus had been falsely accused and executed for sedition. But Pilate’s conviction that Jesus was innocent might have prompted the governor to hand over the body of Jesus to Joseph, who was not a relative of the deceased but was possibly a friend of Pilate.

A third biblical description is that Joseph was “waiting for the Kingdom of God” (Mark 15:43, NIV). Even though he was a spiritual leader, Joseph was tired of the external ceremonies his religion demanded. He was looking for something better. How do we know this? Joseph broke the Levitical law, the same law he taught. In asking for Jesus’ body, preparing Him for burial, and placing Him in the tomb, Joseph rendered himself ritually impure (Numbers 19:11; Leviticus 21:11). This description is very significant, since the Bible mentions that the most important of all Jewish festivals, the seven-day Passover, would reach its climax on that same night (John 19:14, cf. verse 42).

**Nicodemus**

Nicodemus, who assisted Joseph of Arimathea in providing a decent burial for Jesus, was a Pharisee also a member of the Sanhedrin (John 3:1). He was one of the top leaders of the entire nation. Jesus called him “Israel’s teacher” (verse 10). His name means “Conqueror of People.”

Nicodemus was very concerned about his position and reputation. Perhaps this is the reason why he interviewed the poor rabbi from Galilee at night. Nevertheless, like Joseph, he was not satisfied with his life. Nicodemus was the recipient of two of the cornerstone teachings of Christianity: (1) that “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert” the Son of Man must be lifted up (verse 14, NIV) and (2) the greatest exchange of all, that whoever believes in the Son of God “shall not perish but have eternal life” (verse 16, NIV).
**Why Their Faith Was Secret**

These two prominent men, Joseph and Nicodemus, had many things in common, but what I want to emphasize is the fact that they were both disciples of Jesus but in secret. They knew that their leadership was not influential. They knew that their religion was external. They knew that deep inside, they were empty. They knew that Jesus was the Messiah. But they did not dare to leave everything behind, as Peter, John, and James had. They were not ready to abandon their friends, doctrines, lifestyle, and reputation. In his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer stated that "To follow Jesus means self-renunciation and absolute adherence to him (p.147) and that “The first Christian suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachment of this world" (p. 99).

Even though Nicodemus had earlier defended Jesus in the Sanhedrin (John 7:50-53), he did not confess Him in public. And Joseph of Arimathea was afraid of the Jewish leaders (John 19:38, NIV). Thus, the crucial point of this story is that it is a contradiction to be a disciple of Jesus in secret. Jesus himself said, “Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven” (Matthew 10:32, 33, NIV).

**What Is a Disciple?**

George Barna is founder of The Barna Group, a market research firm specializing in studying the religious beliefs and behavior of Americans as well as the intersection of faith and culture. In his 2001 book *Growing True Disciples*, Barna defines discipleship in this way:

1. A disciple is someone who is completely sold out emotionally, intellectually, physically, and spiritually to the Son of God (Matthew 22: 37).
2. A disciple is someone who is fully committed to seeking and doing God’s will alone.

3. A disciple is someone who has a passion for God.

4. A disciple is someone who has completely submitted himself/herself to the Holy Spirit.

5. A disciple is someone who joyfully shares his/her resources, time, money, skills, information, relationships, and possessions to expand the gospel and to help those in need.

6. A disciple is someone who is an imitator of Christ in thought, in word, and in action.

7. A disciple is someone who has completely surrendered himself/herself to the lordship of Jesus.

8. A disciple is someone who obeys all Jesus’ teachings (pp. 1-10).

If you want to follow Jesus, all these points are not optional. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, “Discipleship means adherence to Jesus Christ alone, and immediately” (p.136).

**Discipleship in the 21st century**

Unfortunately, it appears that many in the 21st-century church lack commitment just like Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus during Jesus’ three years of ministry. Barna wrote in *Growing True Disciples*: “In one recent nationwide survey, we asked people to describe their goals in life. Almost nine out of ten adults described themselves as ‘Christians.’ But not one of the adults we interviewed said that their goal in life was to be a committed follower of Jesus Christ or to make disciples” (pp.7-8). Today, most believers agree their faith matters, but very few invest much energy pursuing spiritual growth. The reality is that the number of individuals who search the Bible by going deeper into its pages is fewer and fewer. As a believer, you must
be convinced of what you believe, why you believe it and where you can find it. Most Christians today do not know what they believe, or why they believe it, or from where they got it. Do you?

Barna continues saying:

Four out five believers said that having a deep, personal commitment to the Christian faith is a top priority for their future but when asked what was the single most important thing they hope to accomplish in life only a small minority (20 percent) mentions anything directly related to spiritual outcomes. In other words, most believers say their faith matters, but few are investing much energy in the pursuit of spiritual growth (Growing True Disciples, p. 34).

In his 2003 book Think Like Jesus, Barna argues how the correlation between born-again Christians and a biblical worldview is decreasing significantly. He states on page 23 and 24:

- “Three out of four Christians overlook the Bible as their shaping worldview influence.”
- “About one out of every seven born-again adults rely on the Bible as their moral compass and believe that moral truth is absolute.”
- “85 percent of America’s born-again adults do not possess either the foundation or the beliefs to qualify as having a biblical worldview.”
- “98% of all born-again teenagers do not have a biblical worldview.”

His conclusion is very pessimistic. “Let’s put this in perspective. As of 2003, the United States has about 210 million adults. About 175 million of them claim to be Christians. About 80 million are born-again Christians. Roughly 7 million have a biblical worldview. That is just one out of every 30 adults in this nation” (p. 24).

The tragedy of this situation is found in the fact that if you do not have a biblical worldview, you might call yourself a Christian, but you will adopt another worldview. Therefore,
it is not a surprise to find churchgoers who have a deist, existentialist, postmodern and even atheist worldview.

**The Invitation**

Facing such discouraging statistical realities, what are we going to do? When Joseph of Arimathea could not endure his double life anymore, he decided to express his admiration and love for Jesus, even though his Lord was dead. Here Joseph revealed his true identity. He decided to give Jesus the very best he had. He gave the very best of his time because instead of being in the temple leading people in the celebration of the Passover, he decided to seek for Jesus’ body and prepare it for a decent burial. Furthermore, Joseph gave the best he had when he also purchased some brand—new linen cloth to in which wrap Jesus’ body (Mark 15:46) and placed his body in a new (Matthew 27:60) and expensive tomb.

Nicodemus, the other “secret disciple,” saw Jesus hanging on the cross and immediately remembered the conversation that had taken place in the middle of the night when Jesus told him, “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, the Son of Man must also be lifted up” (John 3:14, NCV). Nicodemus joined Joseph and brought the very best for Jesus: 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes (John 19:39). In his 1983 book *The Gospel of John*, Scottish scholar F.F. Bruce says that “a weight of it must have represented an outlay which only an exceptionally wealthy man could afford” and noted that “to bring such a quantity he must, of course, have had the aid of servants” (p.379). “But why so great a weight of aromatic spices to prepare one man’s body for burial? One would not be surprised if it were for a royal burial—but that is precisely what Jesus’ burial was in the eyes of Nicodemus, and probably of Joseph too. To them he was in fact
what the inscription on the cross had proclaimed him to be in mockery—‘The King of the Jews’” (p.379).

In her book The Desire of Ages, Ellen G. White says of Nicodemus and Joseph: “Gently and reverently they removed with their own hands the body of Jesus from the cross” (p. 774). Why did such affluent and important men not hire a servant to do this culturally despised job? The profound point of this story is that although they had not openly accepted Jesus while he was still living, Nicodemus and Joseph did not care anymore about what others would say about them. They now forgot about their status and about the traditions of their religion. Although such a step would make them unclean and would exclude them from the Sanhedrin and their community, they committed themselves to their Lord. Nicodemus and Joseph took down from the cross, with their own hands, the body of Jesus.

What Happened to Joseph and Nicodemus?

After the crucifixion, both Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus became faithful disciples of Christ—openly, not just in secret! As a result, they were expelled from the Sanhedrin. They lost their jobs, reputation, and status. They confessed with their mouths what they had believed in their hearts, that Jesus was their Savior and Lord. Regarding Nicodemus, White wrote that “After the Lord’s ascension, when the disciples were scattered by persecution, Nicodemus came boldly to the front. He employed his wealth in sustaining the infant church that the Jews had expected to be blotted out at the death of Christ. … He became poor in this world’s goods; yet he faltered not in the faith which had its beginning in that night conference with Jesus” (The Desire of Ages, p. 177).
Let’s be faithful, as Joseph and Nicodemus were in the latter days of their lives. Let’s remember that discipleship means a lifestyle determined by a biblical worldview. Let’s confess—more with our actions than with our words—that Jesus is our Savior and Lord. Let’s be “forever a disciple of Jesus.”

"If you are thinking of becoming a Christian, I warn you; you are embarking on something which is going to take the whole of you, brains and all."

C.S. Lewis
References


Disciples in Secret? Additional Study Guide
Dr. Eliezer A. Graterol | Associate Professor of Religion & Missions | Southern Adventist University

Disciples in Secret?

“Forever a Disciple of Christ”—Reynolds Chair Symposium

✓ Joseph of Arimathaea
1. He was a ______ man (Matthew 27:57).
2. He was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin (Mark 15:43).
3. He was waiting for the ______ of God (Mark 15:43).
4. He ______ the Levitical _____, the same law he taught.
5. What Joseph did there was the decisive moment of his life.

✓ Nicodemus
1. He was a ______, also member of the Sanhedrin (John 3:1).
2. He was one of the top leaders of Israel. He was a ______
3. His name means “_______ of ________.”
4. He was very concerned about his ______ and ________.
5. Like Joseph, he wasn’t satisfied with his life.
6. He was the recipient of two of the cornerstone teachings of Christianity.

✓ Joseph and Nicodemus were ______ of Jesus but in ________

• Crucial point of this story: You cannot be a ______ of Jesus in ______, it is a __________ (Matthew 10:32-33).

✓ What is a disciple?
1. A disciple is completely sold out _______ and spirituality to the Son of God (Matthew 22:37).
2. A disciple is fully committed in ______ and ______ God’s will.
3. A disciple has ______ for God.
4. A disciple has completely submitted himself/herself to the Holy Spirit.

5. A disciple joyfully shares his/her resources, time, money, skills, information, relationships, and possessions to expand the gospel and to help those in need.
6. A disciple is an _______ of Christ in thought, in word, and action.
7. A disciple has completely submitted himself/herself to the lordship of Jesus.
8. A disciple ______ all of Jesus’ teachings.

✓ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship: “Discipleship means adherence to Jesus Christ alone, and immediately” (p. 121).

✓ Unfortunately, it appears that many in the 21st-century church lack commitment just like Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus during Jesus’ three years of ministry.

✓ What you believe in your ______ must make sense in your ________.

✓ You need to be convinced of ______ you believe, ______ you believe it, and ______ you can find it.

✓ George Barna, Growing True Disciples: “Four out of five believers said that having a deep, personal commitment to the Christian faith is a top priority for their future. On the other hand, when you ask believers to identify what was the single most important thing they hope to accomplish in life, only a small minority (20 percent) mentions anything directly related to spiritual outcomes. In other words, most believers say ‘sheer rain matters, but few are investing much energy in the pursuit of spiritual growth’” (p. 34).

✓ George Barna, Think Like Jesus: “Let’s put this in perspective. As of 2003, the United States has about 210 million adults. About 175 million of them claim to be Christian. About 80 million are born-again Christians. Roughly 7 million have a biblical worldview. That is just one out of every 30 adults in this nation” (p. 24).

✓ Ellen G. White, The Desires of Ages, pp. 167-177, 772-775.

✓ C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity: “If you are thinking of becoming a Christian, I warn you, you are embarking on something which is going to take the whole of you, brains and all” (p. 78).
My Context

I like to say that I was born in the heart of the ghetto—an Adventist ghetto,¹ that is—in Loma Linda, California. I was born into a Seventh-day Adventist home there and grew up going to Sabbath school and church every week. I also attended Adventist church schools for a total of 12 years, including time in Adventist elementary schools, academy, and college. After all of this time in Adventist environments and institutions, it seemed like I was a pretty good person until a few years later, when some young adults who befriended me led me down the road to the secular college-party scene. I was not rebellious or looking for trouble; I was simply led astray while hanging out with nice people who got into some bad things during some of the most highly experimental years of growing up. I frequently gave control of my mind over to alcohol while engaging in many of the activities commonly associated with its usage. It’s only by the grace of God and a multitude of miracles that I survived those years of drunken driving and lowered inhibitions. After a couple of years in this decidedly non-Adventist and non-Christian lifestyle, one night after getting home from the bars, God gave me a vision as I slept. He showed me that I would follow Him and work for Him and that He had great plans for my life. Not long afterward, I started going back to church and searching to find the details of God’s call on my life.

As a child in the Adventism of the 1970s, I knew lots of rules and lists and what kinds of behaviors were expected of me. I remember family worships and reading Bible stories, but it seemed to be more in the context of learning about God rather than getting to know Him.

¹“Adventist ghetto” is a slang term for an area around an Adventist hospital or university where a large percentage of Adventist church members are living.
personally. As I’ve gotten to know pastors of other denominations over the years, I’ve learned that Adventists were not the only legalists at that time; it seems to have been a phase many Christians were going through. I was a part of a wonderful community of Adventist church members, but somehow within that context of goodness, kindness, and love, I never learned how to nurture my own personal relationship with Jesus.

When I think beyond those early years to my first couple of years of college, I remember telling myself that I would rather spend time with God, trying to know Him, than to spend time studying the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation to figure out exactly when He was coming back. I figured that if I knew Him, I would recognize Him whenever He did show up. The thing was that at that time, Adventists were not good at teaching people how to nurture a personal relationship with Jesus. The main devotional practices taught then were to merely read a page from a devotional book purchased at the Adventist Book Center and say some kind of prayer—or to study your Sabbath school lesson. Adventists tended to be much better at Bible study than they were at devotions, but the problem is that study time can never effectively replace devotional time. These memories, from my early 20s, are really my first recollections of anything even remotely related to discipleship. I remember feeling an unexplainable desire for a personal relationship with Jesus rather than just information and instruction on how to be a good person.

As soon as God called me out of those drunken college days and into His light, I asked myself how I could have grown up in an Adventist home, church, and school and yet been so innocently and easily led astray by some of my peers. I’m sure it was partly because of my laid-back nature and the fact that I was very introverted and therefore happy to be friends with anyone who showed an interest in spending time with me. But I think that I was also given a
view of God that was not in sync with the culture in which I grew up. The problem is that even though Biblical truth never changes, cultural contexts do. And if we can’t help people apply faith to life, they will not be able to make practical applications of Biblical teachings.

As I have thought about this over the years, I have realized how important it is to present Adventist teachings in a culturally relevant way. I’d like to illustrate this using the example of my own experience and how I believe the gospel and instruction on devotional life were left out of the religious training I received as a child, youth, and young adult.

**Adventist Cultural Context: 1844 vs. Today**

The Seventh-day Adventist denomination was founded in America during a period of history known as the Great Religious Awakening. The country was alive with the gospel and was characterized as having preachers on every street corner and revivals in churches every night. It was during this time that some youth and young adults who were filled with a love for Jesus began studying their Bibles and, through the leading of the Holy Spirit and visions from God, discovered new and distinctive understandings of doctrines that shed light on the character of God. Some of these new understandings focused on the sanctuary message, the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14, and the state of the dead, along with health reform and proper education.

As the Seventh-day Adventist denomination’s teachings began to develop during subsequent years, beliefs were written down, organized, published, and shared broadly. The problem is that these new teachings and understandings of scripture were written down and shared as the fundamental beliefs of the denomination, the context in which they were formed was not written down. This means that the “on fire” gospel preaching culture and passionate love
for Christ in the hearts of those early pioneers were not captured into a fundamental teaching or belief. It was apparently assumed that this social culture of spirituality and religious fervor would persist, but unfortunately, it has not.

As we look at 21st-century America today, we see that culture is very secular and often times even antagonistic toward Christianity and the gospel. We are no longer living during a great religious awakening, when the majority of people are on fire for Jesus. To use a Biblical illustration, we could say that the soil in which the sower is trying to plant has changed. Rather than sowing seeds of doctrine in a soil that is rich with the gospel, we are trying to plant doctrine in the hard soil of secularism. Because of this, teaching Seventh-day Adventist beliefs as we did during our denomination’s founding years has proven to be problematic. Legalism has developed as a result. When I was a child, it seemed that lists of behaviors were common and that teaching relationship with Jesus was somewhat new, as I mentioned earlier in this paper. At this time of my youth, Morris Vendon and others were just beginning to preach righteousness by faith rather than by works.

One example of an Adventist teaching whose presentation needs to be updated is the three angels’ messages. Most of the time when I ask Adventist preachers the message of the first angel of Revelation 14, they say, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come” (verse 7, NKJV). But if you read verse 6, you will see that this completely skips the first part of the sentence about proclaiming the everlasting gospel to every tribe, tongue, and people. The context of the first angel’s message is primarily about spreading the gospel, which includes a respect (fear) for God and a joy for coming judgment, because of liberation from sin and the ending of a sinful world that comes with it.
As we read the rest of the New Testament, we gain an even fuller understanding of this gospel that the first angel is spreading. Our founding Adventist fathers and mothers seemed to skim over this first part of the message, because it was already known and understood in their culture. But “the everlasting gospel” is not well known in our society today, so we desperately need to put it back into the message in order to reach our contemporaries. We must be culturally relevant with our evangelistic endeavors, if we want to reach people and truly give them the best opportunity to accept Jesus. I also believe that this is one of the reasons why we lose so many of our own Adventist children from our churches. Research shows that we struggle to share the gospel and convert our own kids.

**Discipling in Context**

When God called me out of the foolish mess I had made for myself in my young adult years, He led me into a student literature evangelism summer program. It was during my six years in student literature evangelism work that I first learned to depend on God and to have a relationship with Him. I could feel His presence and witnessed many miraculous actions as I worked with other students to reach out to the general public. I found that I more quickly learned to trust God when I found myself in a position of needing Him and His power. This was the beginning of my lifelong desire to know Jesus and spend time with Him every day. This was also the origination of my commitment to ministry and to helping young people to avoid the mistakes I had made—by helping them to become disciples of Christ through relationship with Him at the earliest age possible.

From the student literature evangelism work, God led me into 20 years of service as a youth pastor. Devotional life and service were my passions and what I taught in every context
possible: mission trips, inner-city homeless ministry weekends, chapel talks, worship,
community service days, mentoring activities at the local Adventist elementary school and
academy, and even establishing Christian clubs on public high school campuses so I could
disciple students there, as well. I am a firm believer in Deuteronomy 6 and the call to teach our
children as we rise up and as we lie down and everywhere along the way. Living life together, as
Jesus did with His disciples, is key.

If you would like to know specifically what I taught students in those contexts, you will
find it written in young adult focused narrative format in my 2012 book, *Authentic: Where True,
Life-Changing Christianity Begins*. I will just provide an overview of the structure of that book
here, because the framework is one that I have found to be effective in discipling young
Adventists. It helps older Adventists to have a better grasp on discipleship, as well, by putting it
in the context of the great gospel commission that drives us, as a people, to share our distinctive
beliefs.

**Relationship Theology and an Overview of the Fourfold Gospel Commission**

During my years growing up, the gospel commission understanding I developed was
based on my experiences in church, and it seemed to me that the commission primarily involved
teaching. Every year or two my church would hire an evangelist to come to town and preach
about prophecy and doctrines for several weeks in the winter. In preparation for the meetings,
members would give extra money to pay for fliers we mailed to the people living in the
communities around our church. I remember my grandmother once inviting some people she
knew. I was only a child, so I don’t remember everything, but those are the basics: mailing fliers
for people to come hear a hired out-of-town preacher, and occasionally someone from church
inviting a non-Adventist person. At the end of the meetings, some got baptized—usually kids from our little Adventist church—including me when I was 11 years old.

Now, looking back, I can see how this would have been great and very successful during the founding years of our denomination, when so many on-fire Christians were looking for truth. But I must confess that it certainly didn’t do much to excite me—especially during my young adult years. By that time I’d heard variations of those evangelistic meetings many, many times over. Once again, it seemed to me that my church’s strategy for fulfilling the gospel commission involved only teaching.

What I have found over subsequent years, and through the leading of the Holy Spirit, is what I like to call the fourfold gospel commission. A few years ago, I was shocked to find that the gospel commission is recorded with distinct differences in each of the four Gospels, and the account recorded in Matthew involves more than just teaching. When I looked at all four accounts, I found what I believed to be a more accurate view of what Jesus really said on the Mount of Olives. Allow me to elaborate by quoting from the introduction to my book, Authentic:

We will first look at the Gospel of John, in which Jesus gave the commission on an intimate and personal level to Peter. Three times Jesus asked him, “Do you love Me?” And three times the disciple answered, “Yes, Lord, You know that I love You” (see John 21:15-17). The commissioning here is based on a love relationship with Jesus, and the commission is stated as Go, “feed My sheep.” The love relationship with Jesus seen here and throughout Peter’s life is the foundation of the overall commission that we are each to take on personally as well.

Next we will look at the commission according to Luke. Luke’s emphasis is to wait for the promised filling of the Holy Spirit before going. Without the Holy Spirit in our lives, we face the danger of sliding into legalistic teeth-gritting effort. But when we are filled with the Spirit of God rather than the spirit of self, the world can be turned upside down, and thousands can be converted in a day!

After Luke we will examine Matthew’s version, with its emphasis not only on teaching but on discipling as well. This last part often gets left out. But without genuinely caring for people in discipling relationships, they will not be able to understand that Jesus loves them
and wants a relationship with them in a personal way too. We are the hands, feet, and face of Jesus’ love to the world.

Then we will turn to the Gospel of Mark. It indicates that the true commission being carried out will manifest itself not only by “disciple making” but through “miracle working” as well. When God’s power is truly unleashed wonders will abound. And wonders do abound right now as we speak. Miracles take place in God’s name the world over.

God led me to this theology, which guided me during my years of church-based ministry, formed the basis of what I taught to the students attending my campus clubs while I was conducting my DMin research on spiritual growth in teenagers, and still guides me today. It’s a relationship theology—focused on relationship with God and relationship with each other. If you would like a much greater understanding of what I’m discussing here, I would encourage you to read the entirety of the book quoted above.

Now I would like to discuss how I am teaching these concepts to seminary students and training them to use these concepts for discipling students at Adventist church schools they may work with in the near future.

A Model for Relationship Theology:

Four Steps for Optimizing Discipling Opportunities in Adventist K-12 Schools

One year ago, my emphasis in discipling students shifted. God very clearly and miraculously called me to teach on the topic of collaborative ministry at the seminary at Andrews University. Here I will introduce you to the four areas of emphasis that I have developed in teaching seminary students—future pastors—how to disciple church school students, specifically in the area of on-campus ministry at Adventist K-12 schools. I have applied
this concept, which is in many ways inspired by the Shema in Deuteronomy 6 as well as by my own journey to faith detailed above, in discipling young people for the past 28 years.  

1. First, I encourage pastors to get involved in their church schools. Pastors who regularly visit the Adventist school and participate in activities can develop caring and supportive relationships with the faculty, staff, and students by simply showing up. The key is for them to get involved in everything—from work bees to teaching baptismal classes to serving as a spiritual companion and mentor for faculty, staff and students. It is vital for pastors to attend school board and committee meetings, to frequently verbalize support for the school, and to share good on-campus experiences at church on Sabbath. Also, it is important for them to make sure the church members know and understand the tremendous benefits of Adventist education and to share the in-depth studies that provide evidence of these benefits.

2. Second, I encourage pastors to work with the school principal and staff to help teach the students how to get involved in community outreach activities. These activities can be either humanitarian (e.g., clean up a local park, run a homeless ministry, or organize a highway cleanup) or overtly spiritual in nature (e.g., help the pastor or an elder to visit shut-in members, or become a partner in giving Bible studies). Students can also learn to go door-to-door in the community around the school, spreading God’s love through simple holiday greetings, baked goods, taking prayer requests, or offering to help needy neighbors with yard cleanup or other chores. These are all excellent ways for pastors and students to work together to let their community know they care. It’s all about mentality breaking out of the fortress and becoming the hands and feet of Jesus in the world around us.

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2 The following two sections are copied from my paper for the 180 Symposium, 2018, sponsored by Andrews University’s Center for Youth Evangelism. The topic of this symposium was “Youth Evangelism.”
3. Third, I encourage pastors and school leaders to invite the community onto campus to experience non-threatening events and opportunities that Ellen White refers to as “dis-interested acts of kindness.” These are events without a “hook,” which means there is no “catch” at the end; we just want to help people for the sake of helping them, no matter where they are in life. Such events can include cooking schools and financial seminars held at the school instead of at the church. In most cases a school campus is a less threatening and a more welcoming environment than the church for non-Adventists to come and get to know us—especially for families that send their children to our schools. Schools can also invite their neighbors to other on-campus activities, such as gym nights, softball games, craft fairs, or even a 5K charity run benefiting a local nonprofit organization.

4. Fourth and finally, I encourage pastors to develop a spiritual worship experience to which students and their families can invite their newly found community friends. It could take place any night of the week or on a weekend. Hosting a worship experience on the school campus is an effective way to take the next step in a relationship with those who are now familiar with your campus and comfortable being there. As your sense of community and relationships deepens, newcomers will be more interested in learning about what motivates you to live the way you do. Please note that trying to shift people to the church at this point is a real disconnect, because typically they have bonded with the school, not the church. Always move forward carefully with the leading of the Holy Spirit. In some instances, pastors may want work with their school team to consider a youth or family-oriented church plant.

These four steps I’ve outlined, and the activities they entail, can show the young people at Adventist churches and schools how to get involved in non-threatening forms of friendship
and evangelism. They can also help students develop an outreach orientation that will last throughout their entire lives.

**Testimony to the Effectiveness of These Steps**

I personally experienced the first three steps in my ministry and have documented, as a part of my doctor of ministry program, research in this area that can be found in the digital commons at Andrews University.³ My project was based on qualitative research using focus groups at the end of several months of focused teaching on the devotional life. These teachings were published in my book *Authentic: Where True, Life-changing Christianity Begins*, as mentioned earlier in this paper.

When I served as a youth pastor in Lodi, California, I became heavily involved in overseeing Christian clubs that met at the local Adventist elementary school (grades 7 and 8), the local Adventist academy, and public high school campuses—just as suggested in step one of the model detailed above. I was engaged in spiritually nurturing activities with students every week, and then we moved to outreach, which is step two as outlined above. In some cases we planned outreach activities specific to the particular group, and in other cases I simply encouraged greater involvement in school-sponsored community-service activities. Students claimed that this helped them to grow spiritually.⁴

From there, my students at the Adventist schools became more involved in activities designed to invite the public to campus. One of the initial activities we planned was an annual pet and hobby fair that included a 5K run for a local charity. Since that time, the schools have

⁴ Some of these activities are detailed in the public high school ministry resource center that I created for the North American Division Youth Department, which can be found at livingiths.org.
held more activities like this, and students continue to invite community members to their
campus.

The fourth step in this progression comes from Allan Walshe, chair of the Department of
Discipleship & Religious Education at the Andrews University seminary, who has experienced
the first three steps as well. Walshe describes how the church in Australia voted to close a certain
school, but after much prayer they reopened it and followed the basic steps of our model,
including step four, where leaders planted a youth church on the academy campus. In just a few
years, the campus went from being closed to having 1,000 students, most of whom are non-
Adventists and are learning daily about Jesus and distinctive Adventist truth.

In pursuing the same initial steps detailed here, the Oregon Conference has gone so far as
to hire two full-time outreach coordinators for its Education Department, teaching schools across
the conference how to fully implement step two in a coordinated, conference-wide manner.

Conclusion

As a child I grew up in the best Adventist community imaginable. I was a good person,
and I had a great lifestyle because of the committed Christians around me. But without
discipleship—someone teaching me how to actually have my own relationship with Jesus—my
upbringing didn’t keep me in the church, and it didn’t keep me safe from the world. The
importance of discipling young people in this way simply wasn’t understood at the time.

When I reached young adulthood—the age range where Adventism is losing a huge
percentage of its young people, even today—I fell away, because I had only stories of other
people’s faith. I hadn’t developed my own relationship with God.
We have looked at some cultural influences, and I have suggested possible changes in how Adventists, as a denomination, could disciple our children. We have discussed how these proposed changes have been successful in helping me to disciple many of the young people within the sphere of my influence as a youth worker for the past 28 years. Others have told me that they are adopting this model—either in part, or in its entirety—and finding success, as well. As a seminary professor, I can tell you that the great majority of my current pastoral students are excited about the possibility of helping church schools to become places where they can disciple young people and base outreach activities and evangelism. God seems to be opening many doors and creating much excitement over the prospect of a new day in which Adventist education could once again become vibrant, and grow, and have a greater impact on the world than ever before.
Abstract

Numerous research studies have demonstrated an exodus of emerging adults from Christian denominations. The Adventist Connection Study (ACS) examined how emerging adult graduates of Seventh-day Adventist universities in the United States connect with or disconnect from Adventist churches in the context of identity, community, orthodoxy, and orthopraxy. Through a two-phased mixed methodology approach, researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with self-selected focus groups of recent college graduates, developed an inductively generated survey instrument, and then electronically distributed the survey via email to recent Adventist college graduates. The results suggested several themes for further discussion. Particularly notable is the influence personal religiosity has on the sample’s acceptance of Adventist teachings and faith practice, as well as the negative impact participants’ media usage and transitory lifestyles have on their connection to local churches. Overall, the majority of the sample identified as connected to the Adventist Church, and many who appear to have disconnected from the Adventist Church remain engaged in a variety of nontraditional ways.

Keywords: Seventh-day Adventist, millennials, emerging adulthood, higher education, personal religiosity

Introduction

The transition from adolescence to young adulthood often coincides with less religious involvement (Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 2007; Petts 2009; Kinnaman and Hawkins 2011).
Recent studies on the relationship between millennials and Christianity have found increasing declines in the number of emerging adults who are actively involved in a local church. Rainer and Rainer (2008) found that across Christian denominations in America, the attrition rate of millennials is 70%. More recently, Lizardy-Hajbi (2016) found that 18% of American congregations report no young adult presence at all within their churches, a significant increase from the less than 8% of American congregations in 2010 who reported so.

A similar decline is seen within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United States (US). For example, young adults raised in the Collegedale Church of Seventh-day Adventists in Collegedale, Tennessee, exhibited an attrition rate of approximately 68% (Rainer 2009). Because millennials are the largest generation in American history (Howden and Meyer 2011; Doherty 2013; Fry 2016), their continued disengagement from the Christian faith could alter the viability of Christianity, and likewise Seventh-day Adventism, in the United States (Wuthnow 2007; Cross 2011).

To address this issue, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists asked the Pierson Institute at Southern Adventist University to research the attitudes of recent graduates of Adventist universities toward the Adventist Church. Utilizing semi-structured focus group interviews that inductively guided generation of a quantitative survey instrument, researchers for the resulting Adventist Connection Study explored the issues that graduates of Adventist colleges and universities identified as areas of connection or disconnection. While this study is exploratory, it highlights important themes that emerged from the data. To better understand these results and themes, researchers organized the data into four categories: 1) identity, 2) 

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1While there is some debate over the precise date and age range which millennials comprise, we define “millennials” as those born between the early 1980s and 2000, as demarcated by many demographers and researchers (Strauss and Howe 2000; Stein 2013; United States Census Bureau 2015; Sbanotto and Blomberg 2016; Fry 2016).
community, 3) orthodoxy, and 4) orthopraxy. The research findings are relevant for Adventists but may also contribute to the overall literature as Adventists and Western Christianity experience similar declines in religious participation among emerging adults.

Adventists trace their roots to the “Advent Awakening” of the 1840s when thousands of Christians expected that Christ would return. After the “great disappointment” of their hopes in October 1844, one group of Adventists recognized the seventh day of the week (Saturday) as the Sabbath and their day of worship. This group adopted the name “Seventh-day Adventist Church.”

Today, Adventists number approximately 20 million members worldwide and 1.2 million in North America (Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2018).

Adventists’ unique orthodoxy includes such beliefs as the seventh-day Sabbath; the wholistic nature of man and soul-sleep at death; the imminent Second Coming of Jesus; and the belief that the ceremonies of the Old Testament sanctuary/temple services prefigured Jesus’ roles as Savior, High Priest, and Judge. Adventists’ singular orthopraxy includes its focus on healthful living, including adherence to biblical dietary laws. The unique identity and community of Adventists have been shaped not only by the Adventist Church’s history and the particulars of its orthodoxy and orthopraxy but also by its efforts to create distinct healthcare, education, and community institutions. Adventists operate the world’s second largest integrated network of schools and the largest Protestant integrated network of hospitals and clinics worldwide (Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2018). How the emerging adult Adventists in our study have related to the unique Adventist cultural experience provides for researchers an exploratory case study that reveals a variety of areas which deserve further study.

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2 The name “Seventh-day Adventist” was chosen to represent the church’s celebration of Sabbath on the seventh day of the week and its belief in the soon return (advent) of Jesus (Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2018).
Previous Literature

Adolescent Religious Participation

Decline in young adult religious participation begins with precedents set during adolescence. Smith and Denton (2005:185) suggest, “Viewed in broad historical perspective, contemporary teenage autonomy from adults is unprecedented and astounding.” This detachment that many teens experience from adults could create a structural paradigm for adolescent religious involvement and later religious involvement as emerging adults. If religion is perceived as an adult matter, then teens may likely disregard religion and carry this attitude into young adulthood (Smith and Denton 2005).

Even among religiously active adolescents in the US, which comprise most of American youth (Smith and Denton 2005; Kinnaman and Hawkins 2011), there is still a 43% drop-off rate in church participation between the teenage years and emerging adulthood (Kinnaman and Hawkins 2011). Dudley (2000) estimated a similar attrition rate of 40-50% among Adventist teens in North America. Indeed, most teenagers, regardless of how often they attend religious services, experience decline in religious participation, whether early, late, or gradually throughout adolescence, and thus are less involved in religion by young adulthood (Petts 2009). As the attendance gap between young people and adults widens, the decline of millennial participation in the church should be taken seriously.

Emerging Adult Religious Participation

Smith and Snell (2009) suggested that emerging adults in America can be categorized into one of six different religious or spiritual groups. They identified the six types of American emerging adults as follows: Committed Traditionalists (15%), Selective Adherents (30%),
Spiritually Open (15%), Religiously Indifferent (25%), Religiously Disconnected (5%), and Irreligious (10%).

Previous studies have observed correlations between emerging adults’ religious participation and several factors. These factors include parental religious participation, parental religious salience\(^3\), positive intergenerational relationships within congregations, young adults’ personal religiosity, warmth of church environment, relevance of church programs to young adults, young adults’ participation in church leadership, churches’ involvement in community social justice/service, and young adults’ doctrinal perception (Dudley 1995; Dudley 1996; Martin 2008; Petts 2009; Vaidyanathan 2011; Kimball et al. 2013; Jenkin and Martin 2014; Brown 2014; Brown 2016).

While many of the above studies sampled a variety of religious traditions, few have examined Seventh-day Adventists. Dudley’s (2000) seminal longitudinal study provides valuable insight into religious involvement among Adventist adolescents/emerging adults from Generation X (Gen Xers). He found that the strongest predictors of retention included teens’ intention to remain active Adventists once they are on their own, their mothers’ regular church attendance, and the number of years they attended an Adventist day or junior academy. Gillespie et al. (2004) furthered his study, comparing Gen Xers and teenage millennials. While many factors impacting Adventist Gen Xers’ religious participation seemed to also correlate with that of Adventist adolescent millennials, Gillespie et al. emphasized the collective relationship of the family, church, and school environments. However, given the differing attitudes and values between Generation X and millennials (Sbanotto and Blomberg 2016) and shifts of religious

\(^3\) We define “salience” as “the importance of God in one’s life” and “religiosity” as “religiously devoted,” measured by the extent of faith practices including Bible reading, prayer, Christian book reading, family worship, and discussion of spiritual topics (Miller, Mundey, and Hill 2013).
participation that occur between adolescence and emerging adulthood (Regnerus and Uecker 2006; Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 2007), more recent insight into today’s Adventist millennials is needed.

Barna (2013) found that the strongest predictors of retention among Adventist millennials are positive experiences with older Adventist members and church leadership, particularly as children and teens, and a sense of acceptance within the church environment. Sigvartsen, Sigvartsen, and Petersen (2014) observed that most Adventist millennials affirmed the fundamental beliefs of the Adventist Church, particularly as they interpreted those beliefs to provide personal benefit and practical guidance for their religiosity. However, these benefits and applications “also had to be believable, consistent with the compassionate and tolerant sociocultural attitudes of young adults, and able to withstand the application of informed critical thought” (Sigvartsen, Sigvartsen, and Petersen 2014:43).

While these studies present helpful observations regarding millennials’ religious participation within the Adventist Church, existing research needs to be expanded. Research that inductively generates questions based on young adults’ identification of relevant issues could help reduce researcher bias and enhance confirmability. Also, research that samples those who attended Adventist colleges could provide added insight as attendance in religiously affiliated institutions tends to mitigate social mechanisms that might liberalize theological belief and decrease preferences for institutionalized religion (Hill 2011). Thus, graduates of Adventist higher education could provide unique perspectives as they experienced environments that endorsed critical thinking while neutralizing factors that might lead to moving away from traditional belief or faith practice. Sigvartsen, Sigvartsen, and Petersen’s (2014) study examined students of only one Adventist university. Sampling students of multiple Adventist universities
could improve transferability. The Adventist Connection Study sought to contribute to current understanding of emerging adults’ connection to the Adventist Church by addressing the above limitations.

Addressing the Research Gap

The Adventist Connection Study surveyed graduates between the years of 2001 and 2012 from Southern Adventist University (SAU) in Collegedale, Tennessee; Oakwood University (OU) in Huntsville, Alabama; and Pacific Union College (PUC) in Angwin, California.

To discover which factors correlate with recent graduates’ religious involvement within the Adventist Church, the Pierson Institute conducted a two-phased research project. The first phase involved inductive, qualitative research using several focus groups of university students and recent graduates. Phase One was used as an opportunity to listen carefully to recent young adult graduates’ reasons for connecting with or disconnecting from the church before crafting the research instrument. Researchers defined “connection” as any factor (a belief, memory, church program, etc.) that strengthened a participant’s relationship with the Adventist Church and “disconnection” as any factor that weakened that relationship. Phase Two included the development and administration of a deductive, quantitative instrument that was sent to all graduates of classes 2001 to 2012 of participating universities.

The following research questions were used:

1. What perceptions of and attitudes towards the Adventist Church does the sample have?

2. What perceptions does the sample hold of the core beliefs of the Adventist Church?
3. What perceptions does the sample have of the Adventist Church’s teachings on lifestyle and faith practices?

4. How does the sample’s lifestyle and faith practice compare to the Adventist Church’s teachings?

Participation in this study was delimited to college graduates who (a) completed their undergraduate degree at SAU, OU, or PUC; (b) were between the ages of 18 and 40 at the time of completing the quantitative survey in Phase Two; and (c) were current or former members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This research was classified as an exploratory case study, and no hypotheses were tested.

Methodology

Phase One

Qualitative Methodology

Phase One consisted of focus groups (n = 10) with diverse participants (n = 66) recruited from graduates of SAU and OU between the years 2000-2012. Between April and October 2012, a total of 12 focus group sessions were conducted. Each session lasted between one and two hours, and each focus group included between four and ten participants. Their ages ranged from 21 years old to 43 years old, and about 56% (n = 37) were females. The focus group transcripts were electronically and manually coded to find emergent and recurring themes.

Quantitative Methodology

Phase Two took place between the months of January and May 2013. A quantitative instrument was generated based on the language, themes, and topics from Phase One focus
groups. About half of the survey questions were original questions, and the other half were adapted from items in the European Valuegenesis Questions (1999), the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey (Pew Research Center, 2010), and the Southern Adventist University Student Spiritual Life Survey (Center for Creative Ministry, 2010). After performing standardized reliability tests, a pilot version of the survey was sent to selected SAU alumni who were participants in Phase One and to recent SAU alumni from the School of Religion with experience in youth ministry. After revision, the survey was again tested for reliability. It contained 70 questions which took the average participant 25 minutes to complete. The final survey was created in SurveyMonkey™, an encrypted online survey tool.

**Distribution of the Survey**

The final survey was launched on April 2, 2013. Information about accessing the survey was distributed by several methods. Using a neutral email address not affiliated with the university, SAU emailed a survey link to the 3,494 graduates of the 2002-2012 classes. A survey link was also included in SAU’s alumni newsletter and posted on the alumni Facebook™ page. OU included a survey link in their public relations email announcements. PUC emailed a survey link to their alumni and posted a link on their alumni Facebook™ page. The link to the survey was also shared virally among faculty and graduates. At the time of the first cut-off date, a total of 3,311 surveys were started, with about 68% of surveys (n = 2,251) completed entirely. After filtering responses to include only those within the demographic parameters delimited in this study, 1,153 surveys were used for data analysis.
Sample Demographics

Participants included in this analysis were 62% female, which is close to the average percentage of females among the schools’ graduates (Table 1). The mean age was 28.11 years old. The race with the highest representation was Whites or Caucasians (68%), and the largest minority was Blacks or African Americans (11%). A little more than half reported that they were married, and less than 25% of respondents had children. The majority (approximately 90%) of respondents lived within the United States. About 47% identified as from the South, 29% from the West, 10% from the Midwest, and 4% from the Northeast.

Table 1. Summary of Sample of Demographics

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Where respondent lives

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Limitations**

The methodology must be considered in light of some limitations. Because of differing alumni contact methods between participating universities, the distribution methods had low response rates. Although a total of 1,153 surveys were used, many of the figures reported for individual questions are less than the total because some participants only partially completed their surveys. These partially completed surveys were included in the study. In addition, due to a technical error, many individuals skipped Question 9: “Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services?” More than half of the sample (n = 645) answered the question, but correlations may have been missed among those who did not answer this question. However, all other survey questions did not exhibit such a significant difference in response rate.

**Data Analysis**

Survey results were exported from SurveyMonkey™ to SPSS. A univariate analysis was done using Pearson’s Chi-square Test for the categorical dependent variables and one-way ANOVA for the quantitative dependent variables. A significance level of 0.01 was used to determine significant associations. Due to the large amount of statistical output and in keeping with the purpose of the study, only the most relevant correlations were reported. The independent
variables studied included Adventist education; parental marital status; church involvement of mother, father, and grandparents; personal devotional life; baptismal age; generation of Adventism; media consumption; and church size.

Survey questions were also grouped into different scales: identity (the respondent’s measure of identification with the Adventist Church), community (church experience/life), orthodoxy (doctrinal beliefs of the Adventist Church), and orthopraxy (the respondent’s lifestyle as it relates to his or her faith and practice). The identity, community, and orthopraxy scales were further subdivided based on the nature of the questions. For example, the identity questions were subdivided into those that pertained to an inward sense of identity and those that pertained to an outward sense of identity. A total of 15 scales resulted. Cronbach’s alpha was used to measure the internal consistency and reliability of each scale. One-way ANOVA tests were performed using the various scales as dependent variables and using the following independent variables: Adventist education, graduation date, media consumption, gender, age, ethnicity, and geographical region.

Results

Identity

There were statistically significant associations between the sample’s Adventist experiences and the number of years spent in an Adventist elementary school (F[3,844] = 4.17, \( p = 0.006 \)), as well as the Identity Scale and the percentage of years spent in an Adventist

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4 These scales and other tables that support this study’s findings can be obtained by going to https://knowledge.e.southern.edu/acs/.
5 All behaviors were defined by the sample unless otherwise defined within the Adventist Connection Study questionnaire. Results described here can be accessed by their corresponding tables at https://knowledge.e.southern.edu/acs/.
day academy \( (F[1,587] = 8.22, p = 0.004) \). The more years a respondent spent in an Adventist day academy, the stronger his or her Adventist identity was.

The more involved their mothers \( (F[4,1032] = 7.82, p = .000) \) and fathers \( (F[4,1009] = 6.51, p = .000) \) were in church, the more likely the sample said they would remain members of the Adventist Church in the future. In addition, their fathers’ church involvement positively correlated with the sample’s unique Adventist identity \( (F[4,883] = 4.93, p = .001) \).

Personal devotional life \( (F[3,1042] = 111.63, p = 0.000) \) was another factor that was strongly associated with Adventist identity and the decision to remain in the Adventist Church, with those having their personal devotions once a day or more showing the highest mean and lowest standard deviation \( (M = 4.83, SD = 0.60) \).

Media consumption \( (F[5,922] = 3.17, p = 0.008) \) and the Identity Scale were statistically significantly associated, with fewer hours spent on media consumption correlating with a stronger Adventist identity.

Community

The size of the church that the sample regularly attended was significantly associated with regular church attendance \( (X^2 [15, n = 646] = 33.92, p = .003) \) and areas of connection with the church, such as activities outside of the worship service \( (X^2 [5, n = 1017] = 17.14, p = .004) \) and potlucks \( (X^2 [5, n = 1017] = 33.77, p = .000) \). Small churches showed a higher percentage of connectivity in both aforementioned areas of connection than medium or large churches. Of the factors that attracted the sample to connect with a local church congregation, the following were significantly related to church size: sermon style \( (F[5, 1028] = 6.92, p = .000) \), sermon relevance \( (F[5,1030] = 3.49, p = .004) \), personality of the pastor \( (F[5, 1032] = 5.85, p = .000) \), having
family or close friends who attend ($F[5, 1030] = 3.69, p = .003$), start time of the service ($F[5, 1029, n = 1035] = 5.42, p = .000$), programs for children ($F[5, 1021] = 3.53, p = .004$), and integration of media ($F[5, 1029] = 3.13, p = .008$). Large churches had a higher scale average than small or medium churches with respect to sermon style, sermon relevance, the personality of the pastor, having family or close friends who attend, and children’s programs.

The level of parents’ religious participation, including church attendance, correlated with participants’ connection to the Adventist Church. The more involved their mothers ($X^2 [8, n = 1,043] = 38.80, p = .000$) and fathers ($X^2 [8, n = 1019] = 27.64, p = .001$) were in church, the more the sample said that they felt connected to a local church.

Personal devotional life was strongly correlated with feeling connected to a local church ($X^2 [6, n = 1050] = 298.09, p = .000$), with those having personal devotions more frequently also feeling more connected.

**Orthodoxy**

Significant correlations existed between media consumption and several beliefs and behaviors. The less time spent on the Internet or playing video games, the more the sample felt connected to a local church ($X^2 [10, n = 1053] = 45.13, p = .000$). The more media consumed, the less likely participants agreed with Adventist doctrines ($F[5,1084] = 3.74, p = .002$) and Adventist standards ($F[5,1085] = 10.48, p = .000$) and the less likely they were to have an active personal devotional life ($F[5,1080] = 11.89, p = .000$).

There was also a statistically significant association between their mothers’ involvement in church and participants’ strength of agreement with Adventist doctrines ($F[4,1061] = 6.03, p = .000$). Participants’ fathers’ involvement in church correlated significantly with other variables,
such as belief in the Bible’s inspiration ($\chi^2 [16, n = 1031] = 45.87, p = .000$), agreement with Adventist doctrines ($F[4,1036] = 6.95, p = .000$), and belief in church standards ($F[4,1035] = 5.22, p = .000$).

The results showed a greater acceptance of Adventist standards with the more time spent in Adventist elementary schools ($F[3,995] = 3.97, p = .008$); however, there was no statistically significant difference in belief in fundamental Adventist doctrines based on years of elementary school attendance ($F[3,1010] = 1.10, p = 0.346$).

Orthopraxy

Personal religiosity, which includes Bible reading, prayer, Christian book reading, family worship, and discussion of spiritual topics, demonstrated the strongest correlations with the sample’s connection to the Adventist Church. Regular personal devotional practices had a high level of significance ($p = .000$) and correlated positively with having a conversion experience ($\chi^2 [6, n = 1135] = 198.17$), personal standards and beliefs ($F[3, 1087] = 131.24$), confidence in personal religious beliefs ($F[3, 1145] = 167.98$), and a positive relationship with God ($F[3,1143] = 224.98$). Participants with a more active devotional life demonstrated a higher agreement with Adventist Church doctrines and standards, better satisfaction and connection with the church, a stronger personal relationship with God, and more favorable views of Adventism.

Media consumption correlated with the Orthopraxy scale of personal standards and beliefs and Adventist standards ($F[5,922] = 10.67, p = .000$) as well as with the Orthopraxy scale, including activities such as tithing, evangelism, and church leadership ($F[5,922] = 10.37, p = .000$), and the Orthopraxy scale concerning one’s personal devotional life ($F[5,922] = 7.77$,
p = .0000). The less media consumed, the more respondents were likely to uphold Adventist standards; have high personal standards and beliefs; be involved in tithing, evangelism, and church leadership; and have a more regular personal devotional life.

There were also significant differences in the Orthopraxy scale of personal standards and beliefs and Adventist standards with regard to geographical region (F [1,1689] = 29.59, p = .000). Respondents living in the South had a higher mean and varied less (M = 3.72, SD = 0.67) than respondents living in the West (M = 3.40, SD = 0.83).

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to further understanding of how recent graduates of Adventist universities in the US connect with or disconnect from the Adventist Church by developing a survey instrument generated inductively through focus group interviews. The researchers found several statistically significant results related to their research questions.

In answer to the question “What perceptions of and attitudes towards the Adventist Church does the sample have?”, researchers found that most respondents identified as connected to the Adventist Church today. In general, they expressed support for Adventist teachings, including Adventists’ understanding of biblical inspiration, healthful living, the Sabbath, and salvation. They attended church regularly as well as returned tithe regularly. Overall, the sample had positive views of Adventism. These findings corroborate Barna (2013) and Sigvartsen, Sigvartsen, and Petersen (2014) in most respects, specifically millennials’ general acceptance of Adventist beliefs and simultaneously unique perspectives regarding some Adventist doctrines and lifestyle teachings.
Additionally, much of the sample expected to remain connected to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Dudley (2000), Gillespie et al. (2004), and Barna (2013) had similar findings: despite some negative perceptions they may have of the Adventist church, many emerging adults have not completely rejected religious commitment to the Adventist Church.

Researchers found that respondents’ attitudes towards the Adventist Church were influenced by their parents. The more their mothers and fathers were involved in the Adventist Church, the more likely the sample connected with local Adventist churches, doctrines, and standards and stated that they would remain members of the Adventist Church in the future. Petts (2009) and Vaidyanathan (2011) saw a similar direct parental effect on their children’s religiosity into adolescence and young adulthood. Youth who resided with two biological parents and in a family that modeled “a consistent religious message” had a higher likelihood of attending church throughout adolescence (Petts 2009:568). Particularly among evangelical Protestants, young adults exhibited a lower decline of church attendance when their parents both regularly attended church and exhibited faith practices at home (Vaidyanathan 2011). Thus, parents have a direct influence on their children’s future religious participation. Churches may want to not only prioritize strengthening youth’s religiosity but their parents’ as well.

The size of a church also plays a role in the connection of the sample to Adventist churches. Respondents preferred to attend medium- to large-sized churches which have full-time pastors. Barna (2009) and Lizardy-Hajbi (2016) found similar results. Young adults’ preference for larger churches may be attributed to these churches’ tendency to be in urban or suburban areas where many young adults already live in the surrounding community (Lizardy-Hajbi 2016).
The transitory lifestyle of many of the respondents negatively correlated with their connection to local churches. About half of the sample were single, three-fourths did not have children, and many were in graduate school. The transitory nature of this life stage, representative of most millennials (Arnett and Tanner 2006, Sbanotto and Blomberg 2016), made it difficult for them to connect with local Adventist churches. Responses in the comments section of the survey revealed that many participants did not feel like their lives were settled enough to commit to a church. This unsettled period of life was a major reason why many respondents’ official membership was not at their current church.

The Adventist Church and Christianity in general must think strategically about how to connect with the realities of a generation that is increasingly mobile and unattached. Specialized connection strategies should be developed to provide a place of refuge and stability for those whose lives are constantly shifting. Many Adventist churches have no programming or other connection points for young adults in the period between college and married-with-children.

Results from the orthodoxy scale helped answer the research question “What perceptions does the sample hold of the core beliefs of the Adventist Church?” While this sample showed strong support for some Adventist doctrines, their support for other Adventist doctrines seemed to be weakening. Table 2 shows that many respondents maintained their belief in God as Creator, Jesus as Savior, the Sabbath as the seventh day of the week, and the continuing applicability of the law of God. While the majority of the sample agreed with many Adventist fundamental beliefs, doctrines which had less support included a six-day literal creation, the sanctuary, the pre-Advent judgment, and the remnant doctrines. Gillespie et al. (2004); Barna (2013); and Sigvartsen, Sigvartsen, and Petersen (2014) all had nearly identical findings.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Doctrinal Statement</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God created the world.</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without Jesus’ death on the cross, all humanity would be lost</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ten Commandments still apply today.</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The true Sabbath is Saturday, the seventh day of the week</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a real, unseen battle taking place between God and Satan regarding God’s</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sovereignty, law, and character.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal persons.</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When people die, they cease to exist; their bodies remain in the grave until the</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resurrection. There is no immortal soul.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanity has inherited sin, along with all its consequences, from the first man and</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>woman, Adam and Eve.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage was established in Eden by God to be a lifelong, loving union between a</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man and a woman.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Old Testament sanctuary illustrated the work of God in heaven.</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God created the world in exactly six 24-hour days in the relatively recent past.</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God gave Ellen White the gift of prophecy.</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The pre-advent judgment defends the character of God against Satan’s accusations.</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Since 1844, Jesus has been conducting a pre-advent judgement while He continues His work of forgiving sins.

Marriage is a loving union that should be entered into only by people who share the same beliefs.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is God’s last-day church with a message to prepare the world for the Second Coming of Christ.

Declining support for belief in a six-day literal creation may be due to declining acceptance of super-empirical beliefs that often accompanies higher education (Hill 2011). Thus, creation ex nihilo may not be perceived as credible as alternative explanations. Decreased agreement in the sanctuary and pre-Advent judgment doctrines could be attributed to lack of clear understanding of these beliefs and their pertinence in daily life (Sigvartsen, Sigvartsen, and Petersen 2014). Less endorsement of the remnant doctrine may likely be due to exclusivist interpretations of this belief (Gillespie et al. 2004). The Adventist Church could better translate the relevance of these doctrines to contemporary culture.

The orthopraxy scales were developed to answer the question “What perceptions does the sample have of the Adventist Church’s teachings on lifestyle and faith practices?” and the question “How does the sample’s lifestyle and faith practice compare to the Adventist Church’s teachings?” Researchers found statistically significant correlations in three areas: personal religiosity, sexuality, and interaction with media.

Among the ACS sample, the strength of respondents’ personal religiosity had a clear correlation to their acceptance of Adventist doctrines and lifestyle. The stronger the sample’s religiosity, the more likely they endorsed fundamental Adventist teachings and orthopraxy.
However, while most respondents practiced prayer, fewer spent time in regular Bible study. Dudley and Gillespie’s (1992) and Dudley’s (2000) studies both from more than a decade ago found similar results. Churches should prioritize strengthening emerging adult religiosity to help connect millennials to their faith.

One area of disconnect between the sample and the Adventist Church was in the area of sexuality. While they generally accepted church teachings on heterosexuality, respondents questioned the Adventist Church’s stance on homosexuality. While they did not support sexual practices such as premarital sex or homosexual relationships/same-sex marriage, they expressed slightly more favor towards homosexuals than towards persons who engage in other sexual practices. For example, respondents were slightly more accepting of practicing homosexuals as members and leaders of the Adventist Church than of cohabiting couples as members and leaders. The sample may feel that the average Adventist church is not “gay-friendly,” and this may become a point of disconnection from the church for those who have homosexual friends and family.

Though millennials are highly media-savvy, many respondents were unaware of Adventist media. Most did not interact with Adventist TV programs, magazines, smartphone applications, or other church-sponsored media outlets. However, the sample was involved in other forms of media, including social media, video games, and surfing the web.

The more media they consumed, the less connected respondents were to local Adventist churches, doctrines, and standards and the less likely they participated in measures of personal religiosity such as Bible reading or prayer. Miller, Mundey, and Hill (2013) had similar findings:

6 Adventist Church affirms marriage between one man and one woman and does not condone homosexual relationships or same-sex unions, neither does it permit Adventist pastors or congregations to provide wedding services for same-sex couples. The Adventist Church also does not allow into membership those practicing any sexual behavior incompatible with biblical teachings (General Conference 2014).
the more often young adults practiced Bible reading, the less they held memberships with or used social networking sites. This may be due to a preference for solitude than for social interaction as scripture reading is generally solitary in nature. However, frequency of private prayer time did not pose the same correlation.

This difference between prayer and Bible reading may be because private prayer does not compete for leisure time like Bible reading and social network use do. The latter practices typically take more than the few minutes that private prayer usually does (Miller, Mundey, and Hill 2013). Because millennials are highly engaged with media in general (Miller, Mundey, and Hill 2013; Sbanotto and Blomberg 2016), Adventist media has the potential to more effectively connect this demographic to the Adventist Church.

Limitations

Findings must be considered in light of several limitations to this study. In Phase One, focus groups involved participants who lived within a 30-mile radius of participating universities. Both SAU and OU are in southern states; universities in other regions of the United States were not represented in the first phase. PUC was only available to participate in Phase Two. Several Adventist universities were invited to participate, and those who accepted were included in the study.

The results seemed to show that the sample already maintained a high level of connection with the Adventist Church. This may have resulted from the design of the study which targeted millennials who recently graduated from Adventist higher education. Individuals who graduate from Adventist universities may be more inclined to remain connected to the Adventist Church. The study did not attract a large response from those who have totally disconnected from the
Adventist Church, and thus its findings cannot accurately describe what is taking place in that population.

The research also consists of disproportionate samples from each school. More than double the number of participants graduated from SAU (n = 864) than from OU (n = 115) and PUC (n = 174) combined. Over-representation from one school may have impacted the results.

Due to the exploratory nature of the research and the voluntary response sample, extrapolation of the results to a wider population may be limited. However, the findings offer valuable insights and understanding into possible reasons for high attrition rates of young adults from the Adventist Church and provide an important foundation for further research both within the Adventist Church and in the wider Christian community.

Finally, self-reported data could threaten validity (Stone et al. 2000). Although participants were encouraged to give honest answers, there is the possibility that they under-reported behaviors perceived as inappropriate and/or over-reported behaviors they thought researchers would like to see.

**Conclusion**

The current literature on millennials’ religious participation within the Adventist Church limitedly addresses the influence of Adventist higher education on connection to or disconnection from local Adventist churches and the Adventist Church at large. The ACS addresses this limitation by measuring factors that the sample of recent graduates of Adventist universities described as areas of connection or disconnection. The results reveal that the majority of this sample identified as connected to the Adventist Church. Their religious participation was demonstrated both in traditional ways, such as affiliation, weekly church
attendance, and overall endorsement of Adventist orthodoxy, as well as in non-traditional ways, such as changing attitudes towards institutionalized religion and towards sexuality.

Among the most important findings was that the survey instrument developed for the Adventist Connection Study is reliable and can be used in future research studies. Twelve of the created scales concerning identity, community, orthodoxy, and orthopraxy had a Cronbach’s alpha between 0.814 and 0.942. The three remaining scales (all related to community) had a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.610, 0.768, and 0.776 respectively. Overall the scales had good internal consistency and accurately measured the variables of interest. Hence, the research instrument created for this study is of value and can be used in future studies as well as serve as a guide to researchers who may want to build on this work.

Future research would benefit from expanding this study to a randomized sample of Adventist students and graduates who attend schools not affiliated with the Adventist Church. Such analysis could give researchers better access to millennials who have disconnected from the Adventist Church, thus affording opportunities to more accurately describe what is occurring in that population. Since many in the ACS identified as third- and fourth-generation Adventists, more study may also be done on first- and second-generation millennial Adventists to discover if any differences in connection/disconnection exist between recent millennial converts to Adventism and life-long millennial Adventists.

Additionally, future research would do well to further develop the themes discovered in this study, including: what methods are most effective in strengthening millennials’ religiosity, why some Adventist doctrines are less supported by millennials than other Adventist doctrines, how the legalization of homosexual marriage has impacted millennials’ views on homosexuality in light of Adventist teachings on marriage and sexuality, why Adventist media does not connect
with millennials and how this media could more effectively appeal to millennials, and what strategies are most effective in connecting with the transitory lifestyle of many millennials today. Further research is also recommended to develop correlations found in this study, such as how parental religious participation in the Adventist Church influences young adults’ connection to the church and how geographical region might play a role in the Adventist standards and beliefs that young adults adhere to.

While millennials are a diminishing demographic within the Adventist Church, most in this sample had not given up completely on the church. In comparing the participants in this exploratory case study to Smith and Snell’s (2009) six major religious types, most are Committed Traditionalists or Selective Adherents with a few Ex-believers in the irreligious category. There seems to be among the sample an unmet desire for the church to listen to their questions, concerns, and opinions. One respondent wrote, “As I am filling out this survey, I am hesitant to be contacted, but if I change my mind, I'll email the above address. I would enjoy dialoguing with someone about my experiences (as long as there’s no pressure to ‘please come back’), but I really haven’t found the right person/people with which I can open up that conversation.” Millennials’ desire for open dialogue could be a significant opportunity for Adventist Church leaders and members to begin reclaiming young adults (Powell, Mulder, and Griffin 2016). If Adventist and all Christian leaders and congregations can listen to millennials without bias or judgment, they may find the single greatest point of connection they can achieve with young adults.
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Adventist Millennials: Measuring Emerging Adults Connection to Church PowerPoint
Dr. Doug Jacobs | Research Professor in School of Religion | Southern Adventist University

Adventist Millennials: Measuring Emerging Adults Connection to Church
Douglas Jacobs

Christians live in three worlds:
- The World of the Bible
- The Modern World
- The particular world in which we are called to live.

“God calls us to discover truth in the Bible and in our 21st century world.”

“Truth is what it is, no matter what we think or believe. We need the truth even when it hurts. This is why my colleagues and I developed the Adventist Connection Study. Jesus said, “The Truth will set you free” (John 8:32).”

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Adventist Connection Study Goal:
To find factors that are associated with recent graduates’ connection to or disconnection from the Adventist Church.
Definition of "Connection" & "Disconnection"

"Connection" = Any factor (a ballad, memory, church program, etc.) that strengthens a participant's relationship with the Adventist Church.

"Disconnection" = Any factor that weakens that relationship.

Definition of Disciple

"Disciple" = "pupil", "mother", etc. - A learner, a pupil.

- "The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher." (Luke 6:40 NIV)
- "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:35)

Biblical Texts

- "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, just as your fellow Jews and Greeks who believe." (Acts 11:26)
- "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children." (Ephesians 5:1)
- "With what measure you measure, it will be measured to you; and again, with what you use as a standard, it will be measured to you." (Matthew 7:2)
- "We know that you are the God who loves us and who has shown us your mercy." (2 Corinthians 6:14)
- "And when his disciples heard it, they were amazed, and said, "Who can this be that even the Bennetts of Judah are mighty in speech!" (Mark 3:23)

Phase 1 Focus Groups

- Ten Focus Groups
  - Six held at 5AM
  - Four held at 9AM
  - 56 senior at 8AM participants

- Types of Focus Groups
  - Seven "active" Adventist
  - One "inactive" Adventist
  - Two "informal" students
  - One "active" and one "inactive" group were invited back for follow-up sessions

Phase One Quotes

A lot of times I feel like as an Adventist you have to be like perfect or your family is perfect. … I’ve never felt comfortable coming to an Adventist or even my parents for that [matter] to say, "I’m dealing with this,"

I believe everything that we’re teaching, I believe in Adventism, but when I’m sitting there every week and I’m getting this message that if you’re having any type of struggle, you’re messed up. I’ll leave in fury … If I wasn’t still struggling, I could leave [the Lord]. But it’s because I struggle, that I stay with him. How can I bring other people here when they are gonna get bashed for being a broken person, instead of reassured that the fact that they are a broken person is why Christ came to save them?

I just feel in the church we don’t embrace people looking at both sides. It’s like if we’re open-minded to other people’s ideas then there is that danger that we might prescribe to those ideas and really stick to them. I think that it works both ways in that, by allowing your youth to know what’s on the other side, there is a chance of losing them to the other side but by not allowing them to really interact with the other side then there is that danger of losing them to the other side because they don’t know.
I love all the Adventist beliefs, but I hate how we present them. I totally believe in the Adventist beliefs, I love them, but the way we're presenting them is what's driving people away and not allowing people to stay.

So I agree with what beliefs they stand for. I believe in what the Adventist church believes, but I don't agree with necessarily what the Adventist church does.

I totally believe that Jesus is coming, but I use a different approach on how to get that word out. And when my approach is different, that's when they say, "Well, we're not sure, what are you doing?" We're not sure. Not only in our belief, but also how we do things," and so it's just this disconnect, and the fear of the, "Oh, they have new ideas and new things are coming in.

I really believe that where the love has gone, it's that it has been replaced with fear. We're afraid of each other, we're afraid of each other's culture, of each other's differences. We're afraid to engage with each other. We're afraid to take any risks. I think that a lot of people are depressed.

Who participated in the study?

Participation in this study was delimited to 2001-2012 college graduates who:

- completed their undergraduate degree at SAU, OU, or PUC
- were between the ages of 18 and 40 at the time of completing the quantitative survey in Phase Two
- were current or former members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

After filtering responses to include only those within the demographic parameters delimited in this study, 1,153 surveys were used for data analysis.

Most Recent Statistical Analysis

Survey questions were grouped into different scales:

- Identity: questions pertaining to the respondent's measure of identification with the Adventist Church.
- Community: questions pertaining to church experiences/life.
- Orthodoxy: questions pertaining to the doctrinal beliefs of the Adventist Church.
- Orthodoxy: questions pertaining to the respondent's lifestyle as it relates to his or her faith and practice.
- A total of 15 scales resulted

Some of my best friends are gay and it's so hard to… I don't really self-identify as an Adventist anymore because of issues like that.

Adventism is a tight structure, rigid, controlled.

It's a brick-walled box and you can't take any of those bricks out unless it involves falling or you getting kicked out.

Who participated in the study?

Limitations

- Due to the exploratory nature of this study, extrapolation of results to a wider population may be limited.
- The research consists of disproportionate samples from each school (most from SAU).
- Responses from each school were aggregated, but when comparing responses by region, there were some significant differences between regions.

I. Results for Identity Scales

The more years a student spent in an Adventist day school, the stronger his or her Adventist identity was (p=0.004).

The more involved their parents were in church, the more likely the sample said they would remain members in the future (p=0.000).

Personal devotional life was strongly associated with Adventist identity and the decision to remain in the Adventist church (p=0.000).

Media consumption and the Identity Scale were statistically significantly associated, with fewer hours spent on media consumption correlating with a stronger Adventist identity (p=0.008).
2. Results for Community Scales

- More than 71% of sample attended church at least once a week.
- Of those who attended church, the majority attended medium to large-sized churches.
- Of those regularly attending, only 47% had their official membership at the church they currently attend.

3. Orthodoxy Scale Results

- Most of the sample had a high level of certainty in their beliefs:
  - 52% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I have a personal relationship with God."  
  - 56% also found hope and comfort in Adventist beliefs.
  - 59% claimed that even if theirtimelines with Adventist church beliefs, they still believe in the doctrines.
  - About 87% stated they had a vibrant personal relationship with God.

Correlations between media consumption and beliefs and behaviors

- The more time spent interacting with social media, mainly Facebook, the more likely participants supported female ordination (p=0.000).  
- The less time spent on the Internet or playing video games, the more likely participants supported Sabbath School classes and felt connected to a local church (p=0.004).
- The more media consumed, the less likely participants agreed with Adventist doctrines (p=0.002) and Adventist standards (p=0.000) and the less likely they were to have an active personal devotional life (p=0.000).

4. Orthopraxy Scale Results

- Although more than 65% of recent graduates of Adventist universities reported that they pray at least once a day, only about 30% read the Bible at least once a day.
- About half (46%) reported that they experienced conversion at some point in their lives, while 26% reported that they were unsure if they had or not.

Personal Religiosity and Connection to the Adventist Church

- Personal religiosity includes Bible reading, prayer, Christian book reading, family worship, and discussion of spiritual topics.
- Demonstrates the strongest correlations with sample’s connection to the Adventist church.
- Regular personal devotional practices have a high level of significance (p=0.000) and correlated positively with:
  - having a conversion experience
  - personal standards and beliefs
  - confidence in personal/religious beliefs
  - a positive relationship with God.
Themes for Discussion
1. Identity - Most young adults in this sample identified as connected to the Adventist church today.
2. Community - The transient lifestyle of many young adults negatively correlates with their connection to local churches. The Adventist church must think innovatively about how to connect with the realities of a generation that is increasingly mobile and unattached.

Themes for Discussion cont.
3. Orthodoxy - While this sample of young adults showed strong support for some Adventist doctrines, their support for other Adventist doctrines seemed to be weakening.
4. Orthodoxy - The strength of the sample’s personal religiosity had a clear correlation to acceptance of Adventist doctrines and lifestyle.

Themes for Discussion cont.
6. Orthodoxy - While they generally accepted its teachings on heterosexuality, this sample of young adults questioned the Adventist church’s stance on homosexuality.
7. Orthodoxy - While this sample is largely not engaged with Adventist media, interaction with media in general correlates negatively with the sample’s connectedness to church teachings and practices.

Conclusions
The survey instrument is reliable and can be used in future studies.
- Three of the created scales correlate. Identity, Community, Orthodoxy, and Orthodoxy had a Cronbach alpha of 0.814 and 0.842. The three remaining scales (related to Community) had a Cronbach alpha of 0.810, 0.742, and 0.774. Researcher. This shows that overall the scales had relatively good internal consistency and accurately measured the variables of interest.
- Hence, the research instrument created for this study is of value and can be used in future studies as well as serve as a guide to researchers who may want to build on this work.

Future Research Possibilities
- Re-do study using random sampling methods
- Expand this study to Adventist students and graduates who attend schools not affiliated with the Adventist church.
- Explore how geographical regions may play a role in connection/disconnection

Call to Listen to Young Adults
- There seems to be among Adventist young adults a huge, unmet desire for the church to listen to their questions, concerns, and opinions. One respondent wrote,

  "As I am filling out this survey, I am hesitant to be contacted, but if I change my mind, I will email the above address. I would enjoy dialogue with someone about my experiences as long as there is no pressure to "please come back" but I really haven’t found the right person/people with which I can open up that conversation."
• If Adventist leaders and congregations can listen to millennials without bias or judgment, they may find the single greatest point of connection they can achieve with young adults.
• We need to exponentially increase connection points with young adults and we must update the often outdated connection points we still have.

The Elijah Mission is Our Mission

And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—
"to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."
(Luke 1:17 NIV)

The End
The symposium topic in 2018 was “Forever a Disciple of Christ.” This topic is indeed timely, as we are beginning to understand more fully the importance of discipleship and what it truly entails for the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. It is something we have not understood well in the not-so-distant past.

On Friday night, September 14, we were blessed with a warm welcome from Bonnie Eder, EdD, the interim dean of the School of Education and Psychology. Professor Eder’s welcome was followed by a heartfelt praise and worship time led by Melany Orellana and Daniel Esperante. Bert Coolidge then gave a fascinating and somewhat entertaining telling of the history of the Reynolds Chair Symposium and his relationship to the generous donors who funded the position and event, both located at Southern Adventist University.

After a beautiful, original special musical performance from Michelle Alonso, our first symposium speaker was Eliezer Graterol, DMin, who serves as associate professor of religion at Southern Adventist University. He provided a participant handout for his presentation, titled “Disciples in Secret?” so that those in attendance could follow along and make notes. The “secret” disciples Professor Graterol focused on were Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. He talked about how they stayed in the background, partially because of their positions of power and influence. Professor Graterol brought out the fact that no one can truly follow Jesus in secret, because true discipleship involves joyfully sharing time, money, skills, information, relationships, and possessions to expand the gospel and help those in need. Since it would be
impossible to accomplish all of these things in secret, a true disciple does these things publicly, in Jesus’ name.

On Sabbath morning, September 15, after another song service with Melany and Daniel, we heard the first presentation of the day from the symposium’s off-campus guest, Scott R. Ward, DMin. Ward serves as an assistant professor of discipleship and religious education at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. His presentation was titled, “Discipling Through Collaborative Ministry: School, Church, and Community.”

Professor Ward discussed the cultural context of Adventism and how popular culture in North America has shifted dramatically since the time of the great religious awakening in the mid-1800s. He asserted that this cultural shift has created the need for a more overt focus on the gospel, since the “on fire” gospel fervor of the 1800s has now turned into a Laodicean atmosphere. Professor Ward also discussed how to use discipling in Adventist K-12 schools to build upon the gospel foundation that originally brought great life to our denomination. He laid out a four-step process for revitalizing Adventist education that puts the gospel, outreach, and evangelism back into the culture of our schools.

Next we were treated to a mini-concert by Michelle Alonso, who sang heartfelt songs and shared a testimony of how God is blessing her with the ability compose and sing for His honor and glory. Her music blends her Brazilian roots with a variety of styles, creating an eclectic yet cohesive soundscape that appeals to the intellect while enveloping the heart.

The final presentation of the symposium was “Adventist Millennials: Measuring Emerging Adults’ Connection to Church,” by Douglas Jacobs, DMin, who is a research professor in the School of Religion at Southern Adventist University. He shared three key findings from important research he has conducted for the Adventist Connection Study through the Robert H.
Pierson Institute at Southern Adventist University. Professor Jacobs stated: “Particularly notable is the influence that personal religiosity has on the sample’s acceptance of Adventist teachings and faith practice, as well as the negative impact that participants’ media usage and transitory lifestyles have on their connection to local churches.” He also found that Adventist millennials are connecting spiritually with the church in many nontraditional ways. These findings indicate how important discipleship is in the lives of our young people and show the foundation it lays for their young adult years and their continued connection to the church.

All three symposium presentations, along with their corresponding papers, show through Biblical study, ministry experience, and research how critically important discipleship is across an Adventist’s lifespan. In recent years we have been making progress in teaching discipleship, but this certainly needs to remain a clear focus moving forward, as well.