

Complete Executive Summary

Telephone Interviews of
Seventh-day Adventist Pastors

Interview Dates:
December 9, 1997 –
February 24, 1998

*Conducted by Curtis Rittenour
Resource Development
AdventSource*

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Pastoral Interviews

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Interview Dates: **December 9, 1997 – February 24, 1998**
Number of Calls in this Report: **50**
Number of Conferences Represented: **17**

THE QUESTIONS

***Question 1.** Have you heard of the alternatives to Ingathering in the North American Division (ADRA Appeal and Campaign for Community)? What comments do you hear your members make about these?*

About 50% of pastors appear to have knowledge of these two alternatives. I use the word “appear” since over the course of the interviews it became apparent to me that knowing about “ADRA” and knowing about “ADRA Appeal” are two different things. Almost all pastors know about ADRA (and say their members are very favorable toward it), but confuse fund-raising letters they receive in the mail with ADRA Appeal. And so, when asked, “Do you know about ADRA Appeal?” most will say “Sure” but not realize they are unaware of the alternative programs to Ingathering.

Two pastors indicated their churches were involved with Campaign for Community and the response is enthusiastic. Reactions by church boards toward both alternatives are mixed. Some are enthusiastic, some see it as “the same old thing in a new wrap”, and some are happy with the old Ingathering program (mostly white, elderly members).

It appears to the interviewer that conferences serve as gatekeepers of information. Good shares of these pastors know nothing about Ingathering alternatives. A percentage of churches want to instigate change but are getting resistance from their conference. Perhaps more awareness of alternatives could happen along with a clarification between ADRA Appeal and the fund-raising letters sent out by ADRA to Adventist members.

***Question 2.** Do you conduct any type of mid-week meeting? Why or why not? What are you using? What is your basic format?*

Forty-seven of 50 pastors conduct a mid-week service in at least one of their churches. More than half emphasize “nurture”, a fourth focus on “outreach” and another four emphasize a mix of the two (rough estimates). A small percentage (perhaps two pastors) focus on training during these services.

The most common place to meet is the church sanctuary, followed by the fellowship hall, followed by meeting in homes. The format ranges mostly from a semi-formal, “classroom” approach (with presentation, dialogue, Question and Answer) to an informal small group approach. Some members meet around tables in the fellowship hall, others in homes.

The Bible is the most commonly used resource for these meetings, followed by the Spirit of Prophecy. Books by Ellen White mentioned (in order of frequency) include Steps to Christ, The Desire of Ages, Great Controversy, Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, and Patriarchs and Prophets.

The next most commonly used resource are Bible study guides (Amazing Facts, Don Gray’s, The Bible Says, Seminars Unlimited material, etc.). Video resources are also used (Ken Cox, Doug Batchelor, Mark Finley) most often for outreach purposes. Some use other Adventist books (Garrie Williams on the Holy Spirit, A.T. Jemison, etc.) or nonAdventist books (Jerry Cook on Love, Acceptance, Forgiveness, and Blackaby on Experiencing God). Two pastors mentioned nonAdventist resources (Lutheran Kerygma program, and a Methodist Discipleship series).

A couple pastors focus on training at prayer meeting and have used Permission to Worship, Prayer Warriors, and Making Friends for God series. One pastor uses Keith Miller’s “Hunger for Healing” resource and basically runs a 12-step support group for prayer meeting.

Question 3. If a resource existed that would help revolutionize your church, what would it change/what would it do?

Three major areas came from this question: Motivating members to share their personal faith, deepening members’ personal walk with Jesus, and mobilizing members for service in the church.

Hands down the most common response was, “I wish my members were more excited about sharing their faith in Jesus with others.” The frequently used word here was “outreach.” Pastors would like their members to be more involved in personal evangelism. Somewhat tied to this “mobilization” response was a general interest in seeing more members involved “anywhere” in the church. Several spoke of the impact Russell Burrill’s book has had on them.

Also high on the list was members' personal walk with Jesus (or the spiritual disciplines, etc.). Many pastors want their member's faith in Jesus to be strengthened. Some spoke of the need for "primitive godliness" and "conversion" and "cultural Adventists needing to be born again", etc. Another bent on this was the concept of members having a "vision."

A string of other responses came as well. Here's a sample: Worship, small groups, church atmosphere, personal issues, reaching Gen Xers, creating vision statements, money and fund raising, and the change process.

In the words of one articulate pastor regarding a revolutionary resource, "It would help our churches discover the power of grace. And when they do, I see them being more forgiving, more flexible, and more willing to trust the leading of the Holy Spirit."

Question 4. *Do you have a satellite dish? Do you use A.C.N. for training lay leaders? If 'yes', how? If 'no', why not?*

Thirty-four of 50 pastors say they have at least one satellite dish in their church district. Nineteen of 50 pastors say they have tapped into A.C.N. training events. Almost all the pastors record the programs. About 1/3 show live programs, and about another 1/3 pass around tapes to selective groups or show them at a later date. One pastor is very intentional about creating resource packs for his officers after nominating committee, including tapes of A.C.N. programs that are applicable. Another pastor uses A.C.N. tapes (along with other resources) for the first half of every board meeting.

Why don't pastors use A.C.N. more? Most frequently they complain that people don't show up for the programs. Many are discouraged at poor turnouts. The other dozen reasons include things like: no feed, low quality program, my dish is set only to receive 3ABN, question the value of the programs, bad time of day to show live, etc.

Factors in churches that successfully utilize A.C.N. programming include a clear vision in the heart of the pastor for using the resource, a point person who assists the pastor with technical issues, and a desire on the part of members to come together. Of the latter, in a few churches that really enjoy A.C.N. programming, the sense I get is that it's a "family gathering" time, not just a focus on the content.

Question 5. *Have you ever called PlusLine (1-800-SDA-PLUS or 1-800-732-7587) or AdventSource? Do you know if your church leaders use Adventist PlusLine or AdventSource? If so, which ones generally use it?*

Twenty of 50 pastors say they have called PlusLine. Fourteen pastors say they think members have called. Reasons for calling include: Youth ministry resource ideas, AYS material, locating a telephone number, needing grief recovery resources, questions about

new satellite technology, information about an Adventist college, and questions from personal ministries leaders.

Thirty-six of 50 pastors say they have called AdventSource. Twenty two pastors say they think members have called. Reasons for calling include: Pathfinders, Family life, Youth ministry, Children's ministry, Sabbath school, Adventurers, Connections, grief recovery, logo kit, 1st Wednesday, Net material, VBS material, Small groups, Community services, and Personal Ministries.

Starting with this set of questions, the interviewer offered a color brochure on "Questions? Answers!" for inserting in bulletins when he sensed a low knowledge, high interest on the part of the pastor. Seventy five percent of pastors (approximately) were offered these brochures to be sent to their homes and all of them responded affirmatively.