1. DESCRIPTION OF THE MINISTRY CONTEXT

The Breath of Life Seventh-day Adventist Church is an African American congregation located in the Hickory Hill neighborhood in Memphis, Tennessee. It was started in 1976.
through an evangelistic campaign with 116 newly baptized members. It currently has a membership of 638 with and weekly average attendance at Sabbath worship of about 275. According to a study of the church done by Monte Sahlin in 2012, its membership is made up of 75% women. The generational breakdown is 44% Baby Boomers, 21% Gen-Xers, 17% Millenials, with only 3% Seniors. The church is 93% Black with 10% immigrants from the Carribean Islands and Africa. With 60% of the church making less the $50,000 per year and 20% making over $75,000 annually, in 2013 the tithe was $485,000 with $342,000 being given in local offerings. The church is part of a six church constituency of the Alcy SDA Junior Academy. In 1997 Breath of Life opened the Barron Heights Transitional Living Center which houses on average between 30-50 homeless veterans each month.

I became the senior pastor in October 2013. My focus is to begin to build and foster a greater sense of unity and instill the value of building relationships.

The Hickory Hills area of Memphis is a 60% black neighborhood whose percentage of college educated is slightly higher than the national average but whose median income is a little lower. It has a higher than average religious involvement. This area of Memphis experienced great growth in the 1990’s but it has leveled off since.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Breath of Life SDA Church is a vibrant church with exciting worship and many ministries and activities, but who’s attending and active membership has stagnated. While in the past 10 years about 200 people have been baptized, the attendance and active membership has remained the same or even declined. As a result there is a lot of activity and energy expelled with no net numerical growth or observable spiritual growth. People are baptized but do not truly become a part of the Body. The major reason for this is that there is
not an intentional plan or process in place to build the kind of relationships that assimilate people into the life of the church and transform lives.

III. STATEMENT OF THE TASK

The task of this project is to develop, implement, and evaluate a relational approach to discipleship based on the model presented in Acts 2:41-47. It will be evaluated to determine whether there is observable growth in the members of the Breath of Life SDA Church.

IV. DELIMITATIONS

This project will be limited to members and attendees of the Breath of Life Seventh-day Adventist Church.

V. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT PROCESS

A. Our theological reflection will focus on the theme of relationship from the Bible and writings of Ellen White. We will study: (a) relationship as the theme of the salvation story (1 Cor. 5:17-20), (b) relationship as the essence of discipleship (John 13:34-35), (c) relationship as the role of the church focusing on Acts 2, (d) a call back to relationship as a key role of the church in the last days (Heb. 10:23-25).

B. Current literature will be reviewed, and will include research in the areas of postmodern thoughts on relationship, first century church life and cultural norms, psychology of relationship, effectiveness of small group ministry, and the causes of church attrition.

C. A plan of educating the members on the need and importance of relational discipleship will be developed. This will include sermonic emphasis, teaching through prayer meeting and seminars and a Leadership retreat where the vision will cast. An action research team will then be organized to develop and propose a new relational model for ministry built
around the example of the early church presented in Acts 2:41-47. This model will be centered around a small group home ministry where the heart of relational discipleship will take place focusing on prayer, fellowship, the Word, support and accountability. Host homes will then be identified and group leaders will be recruited and trained. The plan will first be presented in a church wide 40 day campaign where group studies will correspond with the Sabbath message for those six weeks. There will be host homes scheduled in various parts of the Memphis area and on varying times and days of the week. All members will be encouraged to join a group of their choice based on convenience of time, location or simply by preference. After the initial 40 day campaign, small groups will continue as a core element of relational discipleship and church life at Breath of Life.

D. This model will be implemented in the Breath of Life Seventh-day Adventist Church in Memphis, Tennessee for a period of two years.

E. The effectiveness of the model will be evaluated by a survey of a select cross section of 30 members at the beginning of the process who have been in the church at varying lengths of time and are on various levels of spiritual maturity. This same group will be surveyed again at the end of the project to measure behaviors related to relational discipleship.

F. This project will be completed by December 2017.

VI. PROPOSED PROJECT DOCUMENT OUTLINE

A. Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Description of the Ministry Context
2. Statement of the Problem
3. Statement of the Task
4. Delimitations of the Project
5. Description of the Project Process
6. Definition of Terms

B. Chapter 2: Theological Reflection
   1. Relationship As the Theme of the Salvation Story
   2. Relationship As the Essence of Discipleship
   3. Relationship As the Role of the Church
   4. Relationship As an Approach to Eschatology

C. Chapter 3: Literature Review
   1. Postmodern Thinking on Relationships
   2. First Century Church Life and Cultural Norms
   3. Causes of Church Dropout
   4. Effectiveness of Small Group Ministry
   5. Psychology of Relationships

D. Chapter 4: Description of the Initiative
   1. Preparing the Church
      a. Sermon Teaching Series
      b. Relational Leadership Retreat and Visioning
   2. Selecting and Organizing An Action Research Team
   3. Selecting and Surveying the Target Group
   4. The 40 Day Campaign
a. Recruiting and Training Home Hosts

b. Recruiting and Training Group Leaders

c. Setting and Advertising Times and Locations

5. Incorporating Small Group Ministry as a Core Element of Church Life and Relational Discipleship

E. Chapter 5: Narrative of Initiative Implementation

F. Chapter 6: Evaluation and Learnings

1. Method of Evaluation

2. Results of Evaluation

3. Observations on Learning

4. My Transformation as a Ministry Professional

G. Appendix

H. Reference List

I. Vita

REFERENCE LIST


