

Nurture & Retention

Trans-European Division Nurture and Retention Summit

13-14 November 2017, Bečići, Montenegro

Over a period of two days, 13 – 14 November 2017, leaders from across the Trans-European Division met to review statistics, share ideas, and formulate suggestions as to how, at local church, Conference, Union and Division level, we can work together to better nurture the members and contacts we have. To look at ways to regain the trust of those who have left the church, or are on its fringes, and to seek ways to ensure that our current members, children and youth, will increasingly find the church to be a positive and significant part of their lives.

Four out of every ten converts are likely to leave the church, while too high a proportion of our youth drop away from church even before baptism. During the past 10 years, 7,145 members left churches in the TED. If each of those had won just one person, and they in turn had won someone else, our membership today would be 109,001 rather than 87,556.¹

The most important resource we possess as a church, is people. Our property and money are accounted for very carefully, but not so our people. This needs to change. If we really care about our members, the infrastructure for keeping track of them should be at least as strong as that which exists for property and money.

Following the two days of devotionals, analytical presentations, prayer and a series of structured discussions, the Nurture and Retention Summit make the following recommendations:

1. Profile nurture and retention at all major events, such as the European Pastors' Council, and hold regular TED Nurture and Retention summits to highlight initiatives that have been carried out, share research on local membership trends, and to continue to provide an active forum to address retention issues.
2. Create and facilitate safe spaces in which children, youth and young adults can interact with leaders at all levels of the Church; including promotion of iCOR (inter-generational Church of Refuge), Pathfinders, children's and youth clubs as places where they can be nurtured and disciplined, and 'Let's talk'-type events where their

¹ Membership as of 30 September 2017

voices can be heard. Youth and young adults should be included in decision-making bodies at all levels of the Church.

1. Create resources for Union/Conference/Mission and Local Church on Discipleship, Mentoring and Conflict Resolution.
2. Appoint a key person at every Union to lead in the area of Nurture, Discipleship and Reclamation.
3. Request Unions and Conferences to identify three areas from the idea bank generated during the discussions, to develop a strategy as to how they will work with these areas including KPIs, and to report back at the next TED YEM as to the progress they have made.
4. Encourage use of ACMS database for better record keeping and facilitation of transfers within the Division territory, and increased local accountability of the members of the congregations.
5. Promote ongoing and regular redemptive auditing of membership records by local churches for the purpose of identifying people at risk of leaving the fellowship of the church.

Supporting documentation from discussion groups

Ideas Bank Summary:

- A. The studies show that the main reasons people leave the church are relational rather than doctrinal. We need to create welcoming and nurturing churches.
- B. Develop discipleship programmes in every church, for every age group, and at every level of church administration.
- C. Develop ways to keep track of members who have stopped attending, moved away, gone to university, etc., and a system to keep in touch with them regularly.
- D. Develop open and safe environments for members and young people to express opinions and offer advice.
- E. Give young people responsibility and the chance to be involved at every level of church administration. Set mandatory percentages of under-30s to be on church boards and admin.
- F. Set up and support youth groups at every level, particularly conference level, for young people who don't have peers at church. Use social media as well as physical events.
- G. Have programmes in which young people can be involved, in the things they are interested in, i.e. social media, community projects, social activism, etc. Let them organise these, with help and advice from older members.
- H. Encourage older church members to mentor the younger, get involved in their lives, provide listening ears, love without judgement.

Ideas Bank

- A. The studies show that the main reasons people leave the church is relational rather than doctrinal. We need to create welcoming and nurturing churches.
1. At the EPC next year, offer some useful training for pastors in nurturing relationships, creating nurturing churches, and working with conflicts.
 2. Look at the resources created by *Great Commandment Ministries*, which can help to resource local churches in loving God and loving others. They also have a relational first aid skills package for local churches. These materials are inexpensive and readily available. Or we could commission a team to develop some materials for TED.
 3. Make the retention and nurture of former members a matter of prayer and priority, to stress the importance of the issue for the whole church. The whole church needs to know and understand the ethos of nurture and retention otherwise the biggest worry is working with an individual and then bringing them to a church that will undo the work you have done.
 4. Expose the church to global and local church membership statistics and trends; raise awareness of why people are leaving the church. We need to share membership and retention statistics openly and honestly at all levels of the church. In order to keep the human relational element, these statistics should be accompanied by stories, both positive and negative.
 5. Free up pastors' time from administrative things, to do more things like youth work, training members, reaching unchurched, etc.
 6. Train ministers in conflict resolution, creating a welcoming atmosphere, and how to train their congregation in these things.
 7. Look at the possibility of a full semester of conflict resolution for seminary students/Bible workers. Pastoral training must include a significant amount of pastoral care skills at undergraduate and post graduate levels, as well as for interns. Also, we need to regularly include more of these seminars in pastoral workers' meetings.
 8. The internship programme has too narrow a view. The interns should not be put in small churches far away from young people. It should be possible to have interns work, for instance, in our schools.
 9. Conflict resolution seminars or activities should be part of church programmes.
 10. Create a positive "family atmosphere" in the local church. Provide training for churches in how to make themselves welcoming. Create a culture of social ministry and interest in the church—see the person first, before anything else is done in the church. Greet people; take time to ask about how they are doing and their needs; do things to help.

11. Union/Conference levels: make materials/training available to pastors and elders. At the same time each year, publish an article reflecting good practice. Put it on the calendar.
12. Create brochures explaining different work opportunities in the church: treasurer, pastor, Bible worker, ADRA personnel, evangelism, church leaders, etc. Make known what actually is the work of pastors, etc.
13. Church planting should be emphasised, in order to diversify and make spiritual homes and safe places for different kinds of people.
14. In some areas, churches should be consolidated to make more dynamic communities.
15. Encourage more *daily* Bible Study, even beyond regular Bible study.
16. Arrange age-appropriate Bible study.
17. Have longer time periods before baptism.
18. Use Church of Refuge model, including inter-generational care as well as care of young people.
19. Encourage intentional action through highlighting, modelling, encouraging, and teaching young people, and the Church in general, what is truly important in our journey with Jesus.
20. Teach churches how to treat Sabbath services as an outreach experience.
21. Teach and encourage church leaders to model authentic, vulnerable, listening forums.
22. That the church at every level works through a value statement and promotes it with belonging, believing, behaviour priority.
23. “Radical hospitality” programme - HOMES OF HOPE.
24. Educate the church members on accepting people (what it does and what it doesn’t mean) and how to listen to people and their stories; to approach them as individuals.
25. Prevent deviation (in the form of Bible studies), explaining why something is important (or right or wrong from a Biblical perspective).
26. Create a culture of protection/advocacy—where there is always someone who will stand up against religious bullying.
27. Create a culture of active mission involvement/care helping members to understand the value of an individual.
28. Zero tolerance of negative critique and gossiping. Educate pastors about the dangers of gossip and train them to stand up against it. Prompt/timely response to the difficult issues to prevent further negative development.
29. Speak about dangers and developments of secularism and secularisation.
30. Foster transparency and trust in the church—share relevant information.
31. Clarify ethical issues in the Adventist church, like who can be married in the church ceremony.

32. Rethink evangelising people, by introducing them to God's loving character rather than a series of doctrines.
- B. Develop discipleship programmes in every church, for every age group, and at every level of church administration.
1. Every union to have an active discipleship programme.
 2. Every union to appoint a Nurture and Retention Committee.
 3. Have a Nurture and Retention co-ordinator and produce a regular newsletter (can be e-newsletter) with resources/ideas for nurture/retention/discipling.
 4. Administrators should prioritise discipleship and let pastors know that it's a priority.
 5. Specific training in nurture, retention, and discipling in all ministerial training and seminaries.
 6. Devise an instrument for measuring the process of creating disciple makers, that reflects the priority of disciple-making as indicated by Jesus as the destination goal in Matthew 4:18-20 and 28:18-20.
 7. To prepare a theology of discipleship for all church leaders and members, in order to clarify the purpose of discipleship and to establish shared definitions of discipleship words and concepts.
 8. Annual ministerial evaluations should include questions on retention and follow-up.
 9. To clearly identify how evangelism, baptism and creating disciple-makers, fits together in a theologically grounded discipleship process.
 10. Encourage every regular attendee in the local church to be involved in a ministry.
 11. Encourage every church to use small groups for discipling/retention. Small groups have a vital role to play in nurturing—every new member can be immediately introduced to a new small group for support or a buddy system.
 12. Ministerial accountability: discipleship plan and KPI, tithes and offerings, attendance counts, satisfaction surveys, NCD analysis, Churches of Refuge questionnaire, number of outreach programmes, community involvement programmes.
 13. Encourage the implementation of individual discipleship plans for each person in the church to help them achieve their next step in discipleship.
 14. Pastors need to work collaboratively with elders and members, training them to take responsibility for discipling.
 15. Revive interest in business meetings.
 16. Start a marriage mentoring ministry and training process.

- C. Develop ways to keep track of members who have stopped attending, moved away, gone to university, etc., and a system to keep in touch with them regularly.
1. Words matter—refrain from using words like ‘backslider’ or ‘apostate’.
 2. We should extravagantly but sensitively celebrate the finding of lost members. When members return to church welcome them like the prodigal son.
 3. Prioritise Adventist education from pre-school to university. Those fields which are unable to provide traditional Adventist education should focus on children's ministries and Pathfinderism.
 4. Make contact with former members; offer apologies as appropriate. Members need to be trained in short, easy and meaningful visiting.
 5. We need to deal with compassionately with ‘unchurched people’ who are inside the church.
 6. Attendance recording at church, to identify those not attending. Membership audit to get a true picture of the church, and the actual numbers of the haemorrhaging. Audits should be portrayed as a positive thing, not just cleaning up the books
 7. Nurture and Retention Summit for pastors.
 8. Put a Nurture and Retention Emphasis Day on the calendar.
 9. Development of an early warning system: pastors and elders to categorise members; (green-amber-red) indicators as tools for identifying and dealing with people, such as friendship webs.
 10. Culture creation: walking the talk; each leader to actively do nurture and retention with 1–2 people. Use neutral ways to connect: music, social events, etc. Look for opportunities for church celebrations to create opportunities to invite former members. As well as visitations, the church may arrange low threshold programmes (Christmas programmes, etc), where these members/ex-members can be invited.
 11. Membership/official register to include children from birth.
 12. Name-by-name regular follow up of every contact and member of the church. Job for contact co-ordinator?
 13. Special prayer meetings to pray for those who left the church.
 14. Recognise special dates and events in the lives of former members.
 15. Spend the same amount of time in visiting disconnected members as we do in evangelism.
 16. Make regular contact with youth who are away at university, supporting them with finance to eat together, etc.
 17. Data sharing process to keep track of young people in transition.
 18. Simplify the process of moving membership so that transfer requests can be made instantly using electronic means. Develop an app that makes requests to link to new GC membership system.

19. Create an Adventist "passport" system which identifies the transferring member to the receiving congregation.
20. Use ACMS to track local church members and contacts, and give the local church the responsibility of maintaining a relationship with any member/contact who ceases to attend for whatever reason, and this to be kept up until the person transfers or is removed from the system.
21. Utilise young people who've grown up with peers, as the first ones to get in touch with them.
22. Refresh and revive the old system of contacting the missing members by sending them messages, selfies, group photos of the congregation or Sabbath school classes such as "we miss you in this photo, we wish you were part of it."
23. Potlucks and social events should be a natural and regular part of church life, and perfect opportunities to socialise and fellowship with returning members.

D. Develop open and safe environments for members and young people to express opinions and offer advice.

1. Give thought on how to support music ministry and "thinking environments" for congregations, since data shows these are important to young people.
2. Detect the needs of young people and create a safe space for them to discuss their needs/challenges. Create a listening culture. "Let's talk" programmes in each church—Paulsen as an example. We need to take them seriously. They need to feel comfortable, secure and they need to trust the person they are going to talk to. Listen to opinions, encourage culture of asking questions, expressing frustration.
3. Reaffirm that churches are grace-centred and safe places to ask questions freely.
4. Encourage creation of small groups that function as safety zones for young people, where they are accepted and supported.
5. As pastors and church leaders, be actively involved in the life of young people—thus fostering the feeling of belonging.
6. Family ministries to help train parents to know how to listen and dialogue.
7. Individual pastoral work with young people—when and where young people feel comfortable to open-up—connecting with them.
8. Create an atmosphere where young people can meet around relevant topics which are interesting and challenging (role for family, health issues, relationships): can find answers from reading the Bible and it can become a lively experience for them. Topics do not need to be church-related, but of interest to humanity.

- E. Give young people responsibility and the chance to be involved at every level of church administration. Set mandatory percentages of under-30s to be on church boards and admin.
1. TED ExCom— have one member that is under 30 from each union. Church boards, conference, etc. have a certain percentage below 30 years old.
 2. Encourage involvement of young people in church work/boards/services. Bring youth representatives to higher level meetings. Have youth representation at every level of church administration.
 3. The TED needs to discuss and design a ministry-led programme in church, instead of the old church board nominations. Young people need a challenge, but they may not be interested in the leadership roles that tie them down to being on the church board; they will more readily get involved in a ministry for a short period of time, e.g., a three-month family life project and will get more activity out of some youth than if they were the head of the family life department.
 4. Create leadership/discipleship pathway to encourage participation in church, from at least age 12. Invite young people to see how church business is done and listen to recommendations on how things could be improved and changed. Make sure that they are kept safe and their views are valued. Put young adults on selected decision-making committees.
 5. Invest money in leadership of youth. Leaders fund, help organise, and attend youth events. Local church needs to love the young people. Have structured, systematic preaching on God's love. Involve the young people at an organisational level. Give them something to do! Bribe them! (raising funds for youth congress etc.)
 6. Annual council for young people; more frequent division-wide youth congresses; regional youth meetings (town hall meetings) for youth who are interested in how the church is run, which are circulated for young people to attend and ask any questions that they want and engage them in the wider church. Then if new programmes are needed, those programmes should come from the young people themselves—this is more powerful. Encourage the youth to take ownership of a programme to build something in the environment that will address a particular problem.
 7. Send a letter of congratulation to all who finish high school in order to keep contact with youth: local church, conference
 8. Hold homecoming Sabbaths.
 9. Churches to verbalise, that we trust youth in leadership positions.
 10. Redefine church leadership positions.
 11. AVS calls and some local church service positions could be made available to young people who have been recommended by their local church board, rather than insisting on Church membership. Youth need to feel they belong and are invested.

12. Young people need to be challenged to take responsibility and not just wait for someone to give it to them.
 13. Children preaching once a month. Give the young meaningful tasks, e.g., take responsibility to prepare a Sabbath School programme.
 14. Have activities in which young people can engage, especially with worship. Let them take pictures for the projection, or support in other ways.
 15. Get the church on board with the youth plans from the very beginning and let them be included in those plans.
 16. Encourage each church to be intentional about youth engagement, e.g., develop a love challenge at their local church; find something to encourage/love, e.g., five things to do or five things about another person in the church that is positive or good, e.g., Kindness project (Karen Holford).
 17. Non-baptised youth to be mentored into church roles.
- F. Set up and support youth groups at every level, particularly conference level, especially for young people who don't have peers at church. Use social media as well as physical events.
1. Create Facebook forums for different subjects that would interest young people.
 2. Hold regional gatherings, especially for smaller churches. Hold regional youth camps for small local churches that have fewer than 5-7 young people (conference helps with finances).
 3. Organise safe forums in homes or weekend retreats.
 4. Have Sabbath School lessons that focus on healthy relationships.
 5. An annual (union/conference level) Youth forum to listen to and dialog with young people.
 6. Prayer conferences with the young on the internet, where they can share their challenges and problems and be prayed for.
 7. Online programmes, e.g., Skype on a Friday night to engage and connect with isolated youth.
 8. Gather resources to help young people, e.g., charities, blogs, websites that have useful information that could be circulated and used on a regular basis.
 9. Our churches with 30-40 members are usually not the places where young people thrive, usually there needs to be a large congregation with enough young members to create the environment—and to create these key places there should be someone hired to take responsibilities.
 10. Use public holidays for special meetings where youth can get together.

G. Have programmes in which young people can be involved, in the things they are interested in, i.e. social media, community projects, social activism, etc. Let them organise these, with help and advice from older members.

1. Leaders to fund, help organise, and attend youth events. Hire youth workers/youth pastors locally to start and involve the young in church programmes. Union/conference need to be intentional regarding hiring practices – and the funding can come from TED and all levels of organisation.
2. Youth leaders to work at the local church level, to create programmes in which the young can be involved. Needs to be larger congregations for young members.
3. Create programmes where young people can help others in need—social ministries. Visit places where other people’s needs can be met by the church.
4. Create a variety of churches, church plants, and forms of worships, where young people can find a place to make their own.
5. Create programmes where young persons can learn how to help others in need, social work, and to visit places where they can experience other people’s living conditions and what the church do to help these change.
6. Sometimes there is a need to start from scratch and build up a church from the bottom up in order to change old tracks/ways. A new church plant might be a solution.
7. Parallel services, multiple services. Make different times for groups. Doesn’t have to be Sabbath School time.
8. Musical events. Make them outreach—they can invite friends.
9. Listening forums—authentic leadership—teach leadership to do this.
10. Church works through a values statement at every level.
11. Coaching/mentoring track.
12. Separate talks, Q&A with pastors/admin.
13. Be transparent and authentic. Show trust to them by giving them responsibility.
14. Encourage Creativity in young people at the local church level.

H. Encourage older church members to mentor the younger, get involved in their lives, provide listening ears, love without judgement.

1. Educate members about different lifestyle issues and relative importance. Educate on accepting people, how to listen to their stories.
2. Turn the dynamic around—asking them questions.
3. Older people “adopt” younger members—cross generational.
4. Let them know you love them.
5. Train members to see beyond exterior of youth.

6. A coaching/discipleship mentoring programme for young people. Values-based mentoring and training of young people to grow strong characters and a values-based life. Train youth mentors and ensure all youth have a mentor.
7. iCOR could help generations within the church to be more open to one another.
8. Understand more about what is happening in a teenager's brain and what they are experiencing during this time. Respond to those who grew up in uncertain circumstances and have "lost" their capacity to recognise love, and whose attempts to cope with the stresses in their lives are indicated in their externals. We need to accept them as a person, as they are, in that moment. We need to pray for the Holy Spirit's strength and wisdom to know how to approach them.
9. Training parents and whole church about how teenage/young person's brains are developing through video by Dan Siegel such as <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1pf1xTMUng>. This helps us all to understand what is going on and why they make mistakes and do risky things at times—their brains are being rewired and things are not always connecting properly.
10. Inter-generational worship. The older generation may feel disrespected—we need to educate both in the importance of inter-generational respect. This relates to trust.
11. BELLS—bless someone else each week, eat with someone else, listen to someone, learn from someone and share by telling the story of Jesus—we need to introduce young people to this programme.
12. Age swap—young people share their lives for a week and then older people do the same and then evaluate the outcomes.
13. Older people need some training in understanding young people today, mental health is a growing issue.
14. Intentional intercessory prayer ministry for members and youth who are on the margin, inactive, or have not yet found their place.

I. Misc

1. A recommendation from Division administration and EXCOM to all union administrations to hold conferences for pastors: in addition to a Division summit, that shares data, there should be meetings for pastors (*and* elders) organised by unions.
2. Write into the Church Manual about how we should treat each other, especially young people.
3. What can we do, as an organisation, to practically show God's love—guidelines on ethical situations that reflect God's love, including in the area of church standards.
4. Have further meetings like this, with specific TED info, and also feedback from those who have implemented such projects, to keep momentum going.

5. Sabbath School quarterly on how to have healthy relationships.
6. As we now operate in a complex multi-cultural environment, cultural factors should be taken into account in any future nurture and retention survey.
7. Could we make a warm/funny/positive video highlighting the issues of nurture and retention in a gentle but informative way?