

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

**THE FAMILY MINISTRY IN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH: A CASE OF
MADINA DISTRICT**

BY

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**THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON IN
PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF MPhil IN
THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS**

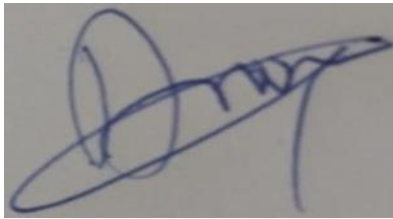


NOVEMBER 2024

DECLARATION

I declare that this research, with the exception of materials quoted from often scholarly works which have been duly acknowledged is the production of research work by Anomwaa Paulina under the supervision of Dr. Harry K. Agbanu and Dr. Lawrence Boakye.

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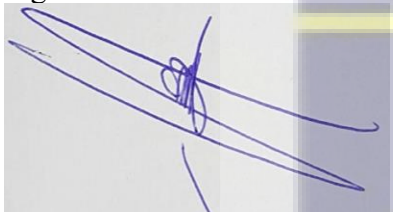


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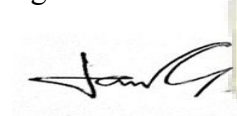


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ABSTRACT

Despite the establishment of the Family Ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church over a century ago, there is limited empirical research on its practical impact at the local church level in Ghana, particularly in addressing contemporary family challenges. This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating the nature, operations, and effectiveness of the Family Ministry within the Madina District of the SDA Church. It explores how the Ministry functions, the strategies it employs to address family-related issues, and the outcomes of these interventions.

Guided by Bowen's Family Systems Theory, the research employs a qualitative case study methodology, drawing on structured and semi-structured interviews with pastors, married couples, and Family Ministry leaders across three congregations in the District. Findings indicate that the Family Ministry plays a vital role in nurturing spiritual growth, promoting marital stability, and supporting families through counseling, education, and youth engagement. However, its work is often hindered by challenges such as limited financial resources, socio-cultural constraints, and inadequate training.

The study also reveals positive outcomes, including increased participation in family devotions and youth involvement in church activities. A review of relevant literature situates these findings within the broader discourse on faith-based family support. Key recommendations include enhancing funding, ensuring confidentiality in counseling, and designing targeted programs for emerging family dynamics. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the Family Ministry's relevance and offers practical strategies for improving its impact within the SDA Church and similar religious settings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

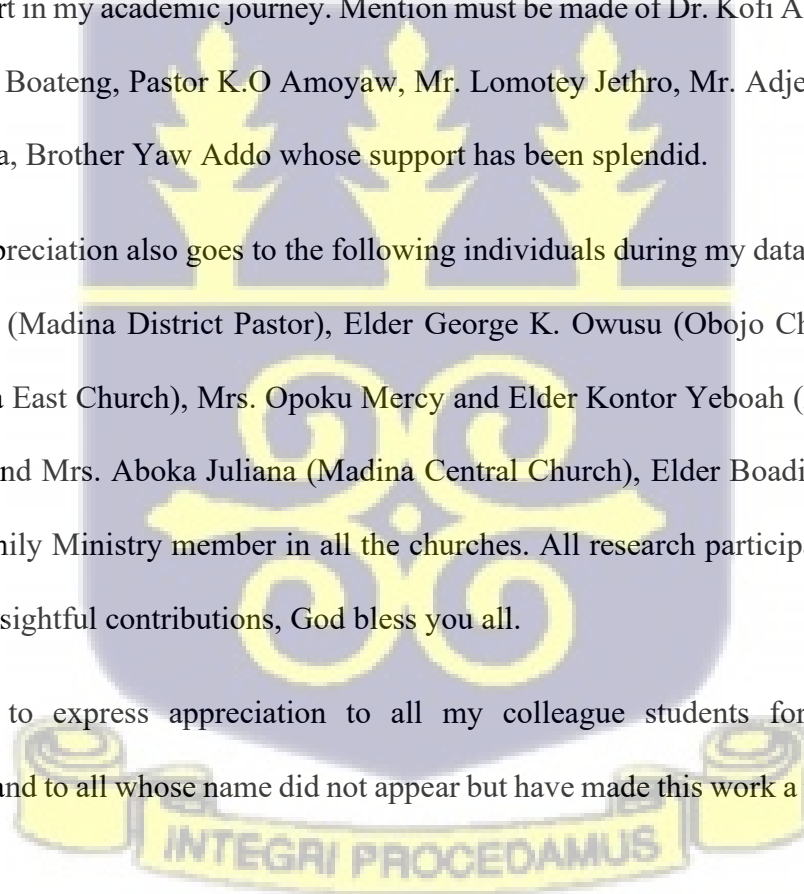
I thank the Almighty God for his abundance grace given to me for my studies.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this piece of work to my mother, Akua Aboagyewaa, Brother Martin Nyanor Dwamena, sister Beatrice Anima Dwamena and all my in-laws for their encouragement and support.

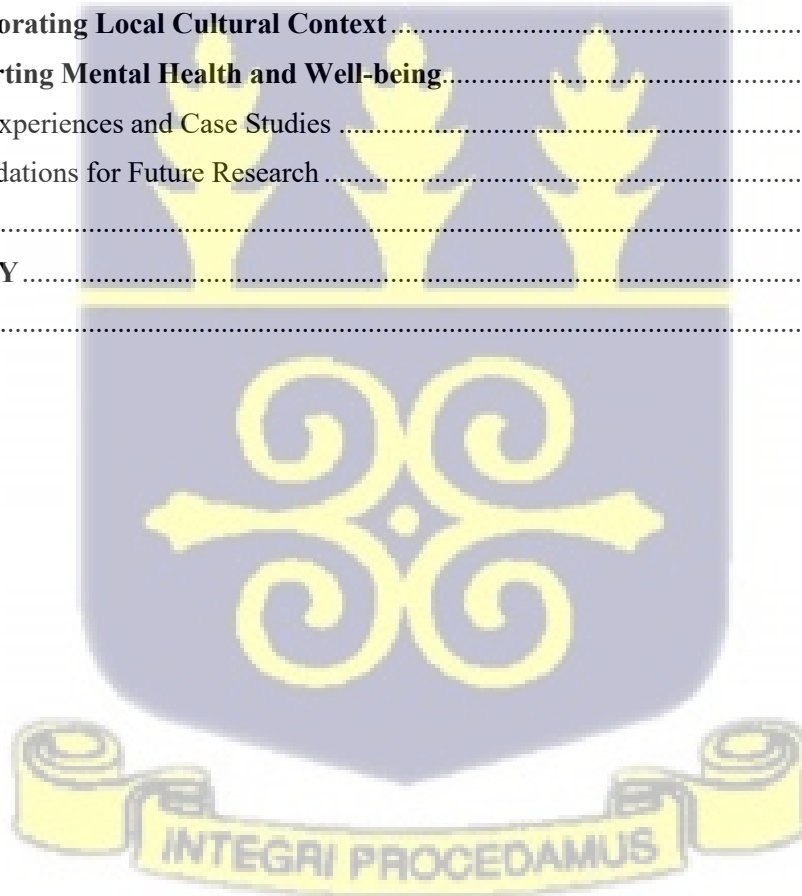


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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

A family can be defined as a group of people who are related to each other by blood, marriage, or adoption, and do not only live together but also share emotional and economic bonds. The family is a fundamental social institution that has been a central aspect of human society throughout history.¹ However, the changing dynamics of society such as; the rise of non-traditional family structures, including same-sex marriages, single-parent households, and blended families, have challenged the traditional concept of the family.²

Religion and family are closely interconnected in many cultures and societies around the world as it plays a significant role in shaping family values, beliefs, practices, and behaviors, influencing family dynamics, relationships, and outcomes.³ One way that religion influences family life is through the promotion of moral and ethical values. Religious teachings often emphasize the importance of love, compassion, forgiveness, and respect for others, which can help to promote healthy family relationships and create a positive family environment. For example, many religious traditions promote the value of marriage and family and emphasize the importance of fidelity, commitment, and sacrifice in relationships. However, religion can also pose challenges for families, particularly when there are differences in beliefs or practices among family members. For this reason, the SDA Church in 1919 established the Family Ministry to promote and support the spiritual growth and well-being of families within the faith community. It involves providing

¹ Sumita. Chudhuri, "SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE FAMILY," *Social and Cultural Development Of Human Resource*, n.d., <https://www.eolss.net/sample-chapters/c11/E1-11-02-04.pdf>.

² Chudhuri, "SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE FAMILY",11.

³ Christopher G. Ellison and Xiaohe Xu, "Religion and Families," *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Families*, no. March 2014 (2014): 277–99, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118374085.ch14>.

resources, programs, and support to help families grow in their relationships with God and with one another.⁴ The theological basis of Family Ministry is rooted in the biblical understanding of the family as a foundational unit of society and a primary context for spiritual formation.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church believes that marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship. The S.D.A. church considers the family as a prime unit within its discipleship to aid in the accomplishment of its goal. The Adventist Family Ministry targets not only families who are members of the congregation but also families in the larger community and world. This vital Department focusing on strengthening families in and out of the Church began in October 1919, when the General Conference Committee created the Home Commission. Adventist Family Ministry support and promote healthy families as they go through life's regular stages and deal with unforeseen life events by focusing on the people in family ties. The church considers family abuse as a serious problem that requires much attention hence the Family Ministry offers hope and support to members who have been harmed and hurt by abuse, dysfunctional families, and strained relationships. The Department encourages individuals, married couples, and families to seek professional therapy when necessary and offers growth opportunities through family life education and enrichment.⁵

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Family life continues to face severe challenges in contemporary society. Issues such as high divorce rates, domestic abuse, juvenile delinquency, substance use, single parenting, and growing disconnection among family members are not only increasing in secular spaces but also within

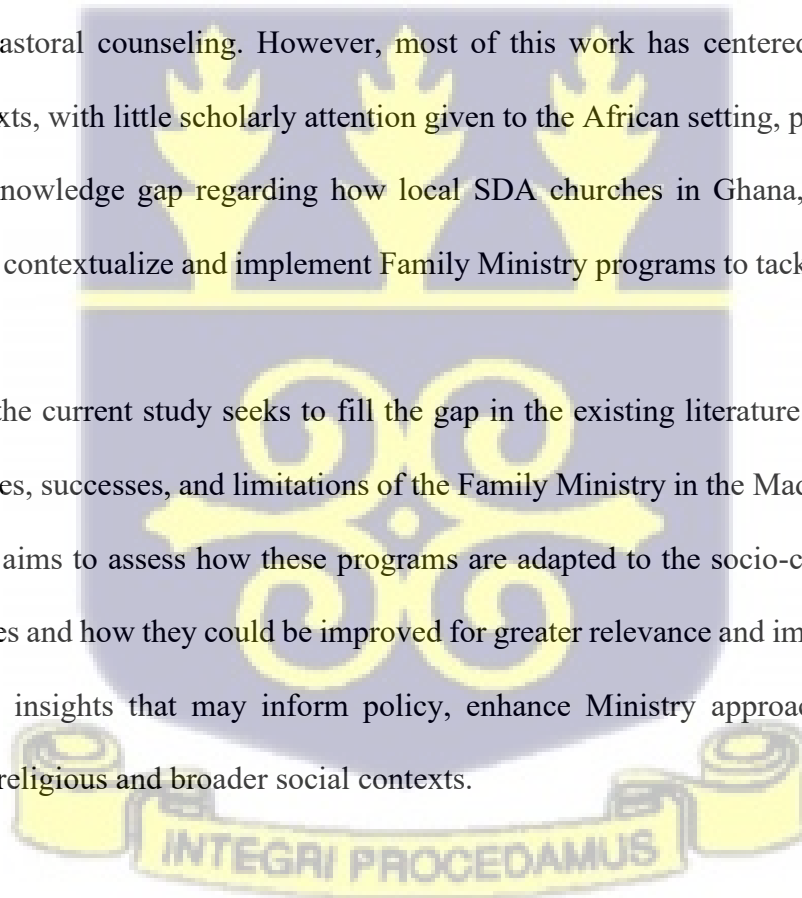
⁴ Timothy Paul, "Perspectives on Family Ministry," *Three Views* (2009).

⁵ Seventh Day Adventist, "Adventist Family Ministries," *Communication: Responsibilities of the Adventist Family Ministry* (2020).

religious communities, including the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church. Several researchers have investigated these concerns in relation to Christian family life and church interventions. For instance, Cleek and Pearson (1985) and Guminski (2005) have identified communication issues, financial stress, and incompatibility as recurring factors contributing to marital breakdown in Christian homes. Margaret Williams (2006) highlighted how even within Adventist circles, domestic abuse and family dysfunction persist despite spiritual commitments.

Scholars like Arthur Spalding, Ronald and Karen Flowers, and more recently Griffith (2016) have explored the historical and functional dimensions of the SDA Family Ministry. Their studies affirm that the Ministry plays a vital role in nurturing family spirituality, promoting biblical family values, and providing pastoral counseling. However, most of this work has centered on Western and Caribbean contexts, with little scholarly attention given to the African setting, particularly Ghana. This creates a knowledge gap regarding how local SDA churches in Ghana, like those in the Madina District, contextualize and implement Family Ministry programs to tackle these persistent challenges.

In light of this, the current study seeks to fill the gap in the existing literature by evaluating the practical strategies, successes, and limitations of the Family Ministry in the Madina District of the SDA Church. It aims to assess how these programs are adapted to the socio-cultural realities of Ghanaian families and how they could be improved for greater relevance and impact. By doing so, the study offers insights that may inform policy, enhance Ministry approaches, and support families in both religious and broader social contexts.



1.3 The Research Objectives

The objective of this research explores the nature, strategies, successes, and challenges of the Family Ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, with a specific focus on its operations within the Madina District. Three sub-objectives are identified below to attain the main objective:

1. To explain the nature and the functions of the Family Ministry in the SDA Church
2. To discuss the strategies employed by the Family Ministry in addressing family problems and assess the effectiveness of these strategies
3. To examine the successes and challenges faced by the Family Ministry in the SDA Church within the Madina District.

1.4 Research Questions

The study sought to address the following questions;

1. What is the nature and function of the Family Ministry in the Madina District?
2. What are the strategies adopted by the Family Ministry in dealing with family problems?
3. How effective are these strategies and what are the challenges confronting the Family Ministry in the discharge of its mandate?

1.5 Theoretical framework

The researcher adopts the Family Systems Theory by Bowen Murray (1988). Bowen's Family Systems Theory views families as complex systems that are made up of interconnected individuals who are constantly influencing and being influenced by each other. The theory posits that families operate according to certain patterns and dynamics and that understanding these

patterns is key to promoting healthy family functioning.⁶ Since Adventist Family Ministry aim at healthy family life, Bowen's theory can offer some valuable insights. For example, the theory suggests that patterns of dysfunction tend to be passed down through generations and that individuals who grew up in unhealthy families may be more likely to perpetrate or tolerate such behaviors in their own relationships. By recognizing these patterns and the ways in which they have been perpetuated, individuals can work to break the cycle of such ills and create healthier family dynamics.⁷

Additionally, Bowen's theory highlights the role of triangulation in family dynamics. Triangulation occurs when a third person is brought into a two-person relationship in order to reduce tension or conflict. In cases of domestic abuse for example, triangulation may occur when an abuser enlists the support of friends or family members to help control or manipulate the victim. By recognizing these patterns and working to reduce triangulation, families can create a safer and more supportive environment for all members. In the context of the SDA Family Ministry, this might involve training individuals and families in conflict resolution and communication skills to reduce the need for triangulation and promote healthier ways of interacting.⁸

Overall, Bowen's theory provides a useful framework for understanding the complex dynamics of family relationships and promoting healthier functioning within the context of the SDA Family Ministry. By recognizing patterns of dysfunction, promoting differentiation of self,

⁶ Frances E. Glasscock and Ann Hales, "Bowen's Family Systems Theory," *The Journal of Nursing Administration* (1998). <https://doi.org/10.1097/00005110-199806000-00008>.

⁷ Samantha Jakimowicz, Lin Perry, and Joanne Lewis, "Bowen Family Systems Theory: Mapping a Framework to Support Critical Care Nurses' Well-Being and Care Quality," *Nursing Philosophy* (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1111/nup.12320>.

⁸ Marianne Riché, "Family Therapy in Clinical Practice . Murray Bowen ," *Social Service Review* (1979). <https://doi.org/10.1086/643713>.

and reducing triangulation, individuals and families can create a more positive and supportive environment for all members.

Bowen's Family Systems Theory is a psychological theory that focuses on the interplay of individual and family dynamics. While it is not specifically a religious or theological theory, it can certainly be applied to various contexts, including Family Ministry within religious organizations like the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church. Here are some reasons for adopting this framework:

Understanding Family Dynamics: Bowen's theory emphasizes understanding the complex dynamics within families, including patterns of communication, roles, and emotional processes. In the context of the SDA Church's Family Ministry, this understanding can help the clergy and family counsellors identify and address issues within families, fostering healthier relationships and spiritual growth.

Differentiation of Self: Bowen's theory highlights the importance of individual differentiation within families. Within the SDA Church, this can be applied by encouraging family members to develop their own beliefs, values, and identities while maintaining a connection to the church and its teachings. This can promote a more balanced approach to faith and family life.

Triangulation: Bowen's theory also discusses the concept of triangulation, where a third party is drawn into family conflicts. In Family Ministry, this can be recognized as the potential for church leaders or fellow church members to become involved in family disputes. Awareness of this dynamic can help clergy and counselors guide families toward resolving their issues within the family unit rather than involving external parties unnecessarily.

Emotional Regulation: Bowen's theory underscores the importance of managing emotional reactivity. This can be applied to Family Ministry by teaching families within the SDA Church

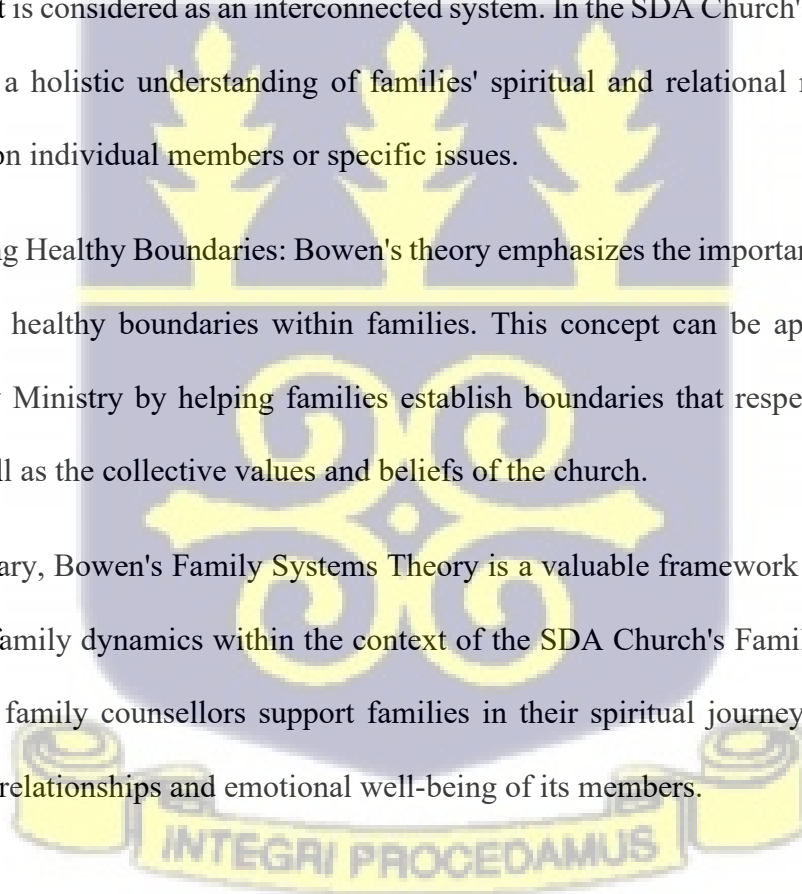
how to deal with emotional challenges in a healthy and constructive manner, drawing upon the teachings and values of the church to support emotional regulation.

Generational Patterns: Bowen's theory highlights the transmission of generational patterns within families. In the context of the SDA Church, understanding these patterns can help clergy and family counsellors address issues related to faith and spirituality that may be passed down through generations. This can involve exploring family traditions and beliefs and helping families adapt them to current needs and circumstances.

Systems Thinking: Bowen's theory encourages a systems thinking approach, where the entire family unit is considered as an interconnected system. In the SDA Church's Family Ministry, this can lead to a holistic understanding of families' spiritual and relational needs, rather than focusing solely on individual members or specific issues.

Promoting Healthy Boundaries: Bowen's theory emphasizes the importance of establishing and maintaining healthy boundaries within families. This concept can be applied to the SDA Church's Family Ministry by helping families establish boundaries that respect both individual autonomy as well as the collective values and beliefs of the church.

In summary, Bowen's Family Systems Theory is a valuable framework for understanding and addressing family dynamics within the context of the SDA Church's Family Ministry. It can help clergy and family counsellors support families in their spiritual journey while promoting healthier family relationships and emotional well-being of its members.



1.6 Scope of Work

This study is situated within the Madina La Nkwantanang Municipal District in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The Madina District was deliberately chosen due to its rapid urbanization, socio-cultural diversity, and the presence of a large and active Seventh-day Adventist community, which makes it an ideal setting for examining how Family Ministry functions in a dynamic urban Christian context. Among the five main SDA congregations in the District, three were selected for this research based on their active Family Ministry Departments and their willingness to participate in the study.

The intersection between Madina and the subject of Family Ministry lies in the unique social challenges faced by families in the area, including economic pressure, increasing divorce rates, youth rebellion, and influences from secular urban life. These challenges have made the role of the church and specifically the Family Ministry more crucial in offering spiritual guidance, marital counseling, and parenting support. The study focuses on how the SDA Church in Madina is responding to these issues through its Family Ministry, providing a case-specific understanding that can contribute to broader discussions on faith-based family support systems in urban African settings. The target population includes Pastors, Couples, and Family Ministry leaders in the selected churches. Their insights provide an in-depth perspective on the effectiveness, challenges, and contextual adaptations of the Ministry in meeting the spiritual and relational needs of families in the Madina SDA community.

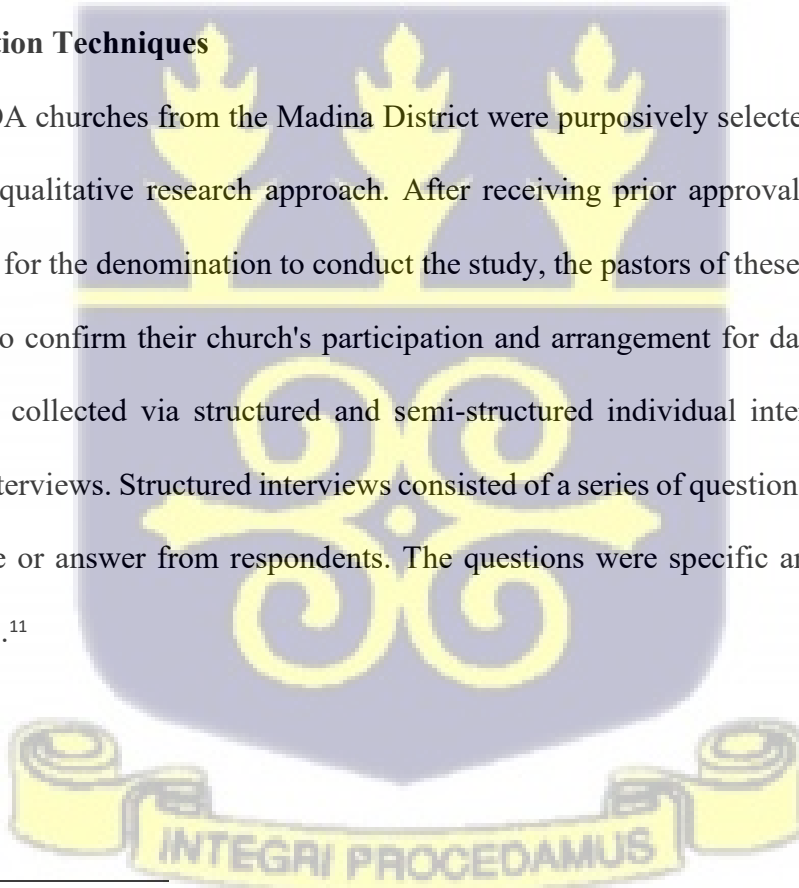
1.7 Research Method

There are several approaches to conducting qualitative studies on the topic under study. Like ethnography, grounded theory, case study, narrative research and phenomenological research.

Creswell (2012). However, in this case, the Case study approach is the most appropriate as it is a detailed study of a specific subject, such as a person, group, place, event, organization, or phenomenon. Case studies are commonly used in social, educational, clinical, and business research. The case study enables the researcher to examine the data within a specific context closely and help get a rich data. This then helps the researcher to have an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, and provide an increase in knowledge, also generalization is possible, and continuous analysis of facts is offered.⁹ According to Yin, case studies, in their true essence, study and investigate contemporary real-life phenomena through in-depth contextual research of a select few circumstances or occurrences and their relationships.¹⁰

1.8 Data Collection Techniques

Three SDA churches from the Madina District were purposively selected to carry out this study using the qualitative research approach. After receiving prior approval from the highest district authority for the denomination to conduct the study, the pastors of these selected churches were contacted to confirm their church's participation and arrangement for data collection were made. Data was collected via structured and semi-structured individual interviews as well as focused group interviews. Structured interviews consisted of a series of questions designed to elicit specific response or answer from respondents. The questions were specific and offered a fixed range of answers.¹¹



⁹ John Creswell and Cheryl N Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design. Choosing Among Five Different Approaches.*, *Journal of Chemical Information and Modeling* (2018).

¹⁰ R K Yin, "Case Study Research: Design and Methods, Applied Social Research Methods Series," *SAGE Publications*, 2009.

¹¹ P. Gill et al., "Methods of Data Collection in Qualitative Research: Interviews and Focus Groups," *British Dental Journal* (2008). <https://doi.org/10.1038/bdj.2008.192>.

Focus group interviews were designed to gather high-quality data in a setting that primarily aided in understanding particular issues from the perspective of the research participants.¹² Five members from each church who consented to take part in this study will be randomly selected making a total population size of 15 participants from the three selected churches. This was because with randomization, a representative sample from a population provides the ability to generalize to a population.¹³ The selected population was stratified in order to ensure equal representation of males and females. The survey was cross-sectional hence data was collected one point per time.

1.9 Literature Review

The literature review was organized based on these thematic areas: religion and family, marital problems in Christian families, family life ministry in the S.D.A. church, its theological basis, their goals, and strategies to support families.

1.9.1 Religion and Family

Religion and family are two important aspects of human life that significantly impact each other. Research has shown that religion can have positive effects on family relationships and can help to promote family values and practices. Similarly, the family can also influence an individual's religious beliefs and practices. According to Teri Brown et al.¹⁴ families who practice religion together tend to have stronger bonds and better communication and are more likely to have positive



¹² Michael Quinn Patton, "Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods. Thousand Oaks," (*Cal. : Sage Publications*, 2002).

¹³ E. R. Babbie, *Types of Study Design* Babbie, E. R. (1990). *Types of Study Design. In Survey Research Methods, 2nd Ed., Survey Research Methods, 2nd Ed.*, 1990.

¹⁴ Teri Brown et al., "Meaning Making across Three Dimensions of Religious Experience: A Qualitative Exploration.," *Counselling and Spirituality / Counseling et Spiritualité* (2011).

family relationships. Religion can also promote pro-social behaviors, such as kindness, forgiveness, and altruism, which can contribute to positive family dynamics.¹⁵

On the other hand, the family can also have an impact on an individual's religious beliefs and practices. Family members can play an important role in transmitting religious values and practices from generation to generation.¹⁶ Parents can influence their children's religious beliefs and practices through modeling, reinforcement, and socialization.¹⁷ For example, parents who attend religious services regularly are more likely to have children who also attend religious services and practice their faith.¹⁸

1.9.2 Marital Problems in Christian Families

According to a study conducted by Margaret Guminski Cleek and T. Allan Pearson¹⁹ both ex-husbands and ex-wives frequently cite specific issues as being crucial to their marriage failure. Communication issues, general incompatibility, adultery, not spending enough time at home, and financial arguments are the most frequently mentioned marital issues. Eight of the nine studies compiled by Gay C. Kitson, Karen Benson Babri, and Mary Joan Roach²⁰ highlighted the importance of extramarital sex, making it the most frequently cited factor in marriage breakdown. From a Global standpoint, the report shows a higher incidence of Domestic abuse within Christian

¹⁵ Justin L. Barrett and Kenneth I. Pargament, "The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory Research Practice," *Review of Religious Research* (1998). <https://doi.org/10.2307/3512468>.

¹⁶ Mary Ann Kanieski and Nancy T. Ammerman, "Congregation & Community," *Review of Religious Research* (1997) <https://doi.org/10.2307/3512185>.

¹⁷ John P. Bartkowski, Xiaohe Xu, and Martin L. Levin, "Religion and Child Development: Evidence from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study," *Social Science Research* (2008). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2007.02.001>.

¹⁸ Annette Mahoney, "The Spirituality of Us: Relational Spirituality in the Context of Family Relationships.," in *APA Handbook of Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality (Vol 1): Context, Theory, and Research* (2012). <https://doi.org/10.1037/14045-020>.

¹⁹ Margaret Guminski Cleek and T. Allan Pearson, "Perceived Causes of Divorce: An Analysis of Interrelationships," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (1985). <https://doi.org/10.2307/352080>.

²⁰ Gay C. Kitson, Karen Benson Babri, and Mary Joan Roach, "Who Divorces and Why: A Review," *Journal of Family Issues* (1985). <https://doi.org/10.1177/019251385006003002>.

marriages in Ghana, and a higher proportion (17%) of female-on-male violence in Taiwan. Using reported cases from 2007 to 2010, 31% of females in Australia have been assaulted by a past or current partner, and the overall proportions are 87% male-on-female, 10% gay or lesbian, and 3% female-on-male; 33% of women in Ghana have been assaulted physically and 30% sexually by a current or recent partner; and in Taiwan 32%. ²¹

In a random sample study of 1,431 Seventh-day Adventists from 70 churches in a five-state region, conducted in 2006, it was discovered that 46% of survey respondents said they had experienced common couple violence, 29% had experienced sexual violence, and 10% had experienced severe physical violence. The bottom line, Dr. Williams emphasized, is that domestic abuse has just become widespread in the church. ²²

The study's findings indicated that the most common reasons for marital difficulties in Christian homes included financial problems, disagreements, and communication issues. ²³ Other frequent challenges included marital tension, interference from extended family, and a lack of humility and forgiveness in the marriage. On the other hand, challenges related to age differences between spouses, substance/alcohol abuse, and infertility were less common. These issues encompassed factors such as instability, reduced marital satisfaction, and difficulty in adapting to marriage. The researcher also discovered that problems in communication between couples could be a significant contributor to marital issues because couples who struggle to communicate

²¹ Elizabeth Koepping, "Spousal Violence among Christians: Taiwan, South Australia and Ghana," *Studies in World Christianity* (2013). <https://doi.org/10.3366/swc.2013.0060>.

²² Adventist News Network, "Family Ministries Celebrate 100 Years of Strengthening the Family Unit.," *Adventist News Network*, 2019, <https://adventist.news/news/family-ministries-celebrates-100-years-of-strengthening-the-family-unit>.

²³ Teresia Njonge, "Influence of Psychological Well-Being and School Factors on Delinquency , During the Covid-19 Period1.9 Among Secondary School Students in Selected Schools in Nakuru County : Kenya" VII, no. 2454 (2023): 1175–89, <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS>.

effectively often find it challenging to come to a mutual agreement when resolving their marital problems.²⁴

1.9.3 Family Life Ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

Family Life Ministry is a specialized area of ministry within many Christian denominations. It is focused on strengthening families in their relationship with one another and with God. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a long history of emphasizing the importance of family relationships and promoting family values. In 1895, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists established a department of "Home and Family" to support families in their spiritual growth and development.²⁵ In 1995, the department was renamed "Family Life" and became a formal division of the General Conference. Today, the Adventist Family Life Ministries Department promotes and coordinates Family Life Ministry activities throughout the world church.

1.9.4 Theological Basis for the Family Ministry

The theological basis for family ministry can be found in several biblical passages and principles, as well as in the broader theological framework of the church. Here are some references to support this idea:

1.9.4.1 The Creation Mandate

One of the foundational theological justifications for Family Ministry is found in what theologians have termed the Creation Mandate. In Genesis 1:28, after creating male and female in His image, the Bible says, "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number;

²⁴ M.M. Nyarks, A. Hipe, "Impact of Effective Communication on a Marriage," *International Journal of Research in Education, Science and Technology* 4, no. 2 (2021): 33–40.

²⁵ Anthony A. Sauve et al., "The Biochemistry of Sirtuins," *Annual Review of Biochemistry* (2006). <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.biochem.74.082803.133500>.

fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." This is not merely a call to populate the earth. It is a divinely instituted commissioning that embeds the family at the heart of God's governance over creation.

The Creation Mandate reveals several profound truths. First, God's command to "be fruitful and increase in number" establishes procreation as a sacred act, not simply a biological function. It affirms the family as the primary context in which life begins, is nurtured, and is educated in the ways of the Lord. This places tremendous responsibility on the family, not just to grow in number but to steward that growth toward godliness and kingdom purpose. Adventist theology holds that every child is a divine trust and that the home is the first school where character is formed for both time and eternity (cf. Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*).

Second, the mandate to "subdue" and "rule" over creation highlights the family's role in stewardship and dominion. This dominion is not one of exploitation but of care, cultivation, and management in harmony with God's character. When a family operates under divine guidance, it becomes a mini-society where values such as love, order, discipline, and compassion are modeled and passed down. Thus, the family does not merely exist within society. It shapes society, functioning as the smallest but most potent agent of cultural and spiritual transmission.

Furthermore, the Creation Mandate lays a foundation for intergenerational faithfulness. Families are not just responsible for bearing children, but for raising generations that will know and walk with God. This responsibility was reiterated in Deuteronomy 6:6–7, where parents are charged to impress God's commandments on their children daily. The family, therefore, becomes an essential platform for discipleship, spiritual instruction, and moral development.

Moving to the New Testament, the mission of the family becomes even clearer through The Great Commission. In Matthew 28:19–20, Jesus said, “*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*” While this text is traditionally applied to church outreach and global evangelism, its application begins at the most basic level—within the family.

The family is the first “nation” to be disciple. If Christian families fail to make disciples of their own members, the larger mission of the church is weakened at its roots. The early Christian home functioned not only as a place of residence but as a center for worship, teaching, and community outreach. This concept aligns with Adventist teachings on home-centered spirituality, where family worship, Sabbath observance, and practical godliness are emphasized as the bedrock of a strong church. Moreover, the structure of the Great Commission reflects the dynamics of family life. It includes baptism, which is often preceded by spiritual instruction within the home; teaching, which mirrors the responsibility of parents to educate children in faith; and ongoing presence, as seen in Jesus’ words, “*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*” This presence reminds believers that they are not alone in their parenting or spiritual leadership within the home. Christ’s presence sustains, guides, and empowers every family that seeks to honor Him.

Adventist scholars such as Ángel Manuel Rodríguez and Ekkehardt Mueller have stressed that the church’s mission cannot be separated from the condition and spiritual health of families. If the family is fractured, distracted, or spiritually malnourished, then the ability of the church to fulfill its global calling is severely compromised. Hence, Family Ministry serves as both a

fulfillment of the Creation Mandate and an outworking of the Great Commission. It prepares individuals to live faithfully within their homes and to extend that witness to the broader world.

1.9.4.2 The Role of Parents

The Bible consistently affirms that parents are divinely appointed as the primary spiritual educators of their children. This principle is clearly articulated in Deuteronomy 6:6–7, where Moses instructs the Israelites: *“These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”* This passage emphasizes the constant, everyday nature of faith transmission. Spiritual instruction is not confined to formal worship settings. Rather, it is integrated into the rhythms of daily life, within the home, during travel, at bedtime, and in the morning.

In biblical theology, this command places the burden of spiritual leadership squarely on the family, particularly on parents. They are not only responsible for the physical, emotional, and educational needs of their children but also for their spiritual growth and understanding of God’s commandments. The Hebrew word used for “impress” in this context suggests deliberate, repetitive teaching like carving something into stone. It reflects the intentional and persistent nature of godly parenting.

This principle is further echoed in Proverbs 22:6, which advises, *“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”* Although not a guarantee, this proverb underscores the formative power of early spiritual guidance. It aligns with modern developmental psychology, which affirms that a child's early years are critical for establishing

moral values, identity, and worldview. In a Christian context, these formative years are when parents are to model Christ-like behavior, instill biblical truths, and nurture faith in God.

In the New Testament, Ephesians 6:4 reinforces this role, stating: *“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”* Here, the apostle Paul highlights both the disciplinary and instructional responsibilities of parents, calling for a balanced approach rooted in love, patience, and biblical principles. It is significant that Paul addresses fathers specifically, not to exclude mothers, but to emphasize the need for active male spiritual leadership within the household an issue that is increasingly relevant in modern society where many families struggle with absentee fatherhood.

The writings of Ellen G. White strongly affirm this biblical mandate. In *Child Guidance*, she states: *“The home is the child's first school, and the parents are the child's first teachers. Here the foundational principles of life must be taught.”* She further insists that no other influence can equal that of the godly parent in shaping the life and character of a child. For White, the family is the central institution where heaven's values are to be cultivated. Parents are entrusted with the sacred task of guiding their children toward eternal life.

Family Ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes this profound responsibility. It seeks to equip and empower parents to fulfill their spiritual roles through training, education, and support systems. Workshops, parenting seminars, Sabbath School resources, and devotional guides are all tools used to strengthen the ability of parents to lead spiritually within the home.

Moreover, this parental role is not merely individual but missional. The faith nurtured in the home is meant to ripple outward; impacting schools, churches, and communities. A spiritually

grounded child grows into a spiritually grounded adult, capable of serving in the church and witnessing to the world. Thus, when parents take their God-given role seriously, the impact extends far beyond the family; it multiplies across generations.

1.9.4.3 The Family as a Microcosm of the Church

In the New Testament, the family is often portrayed as a microcosm of the Church that's a smaller, intimate reflection of the spiritual community Christ has established. This theological concept is most clearly articulated in Ephesians 5:22–23, where the apostle Paul writes, *“Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.”* At first glance, this passage can be misread through a purely hierarchical lens. However, when interpreted within the broader biblical and theological context, it presents a profound model of sacrificial leadership, mutual submission, and spiritual unity that mirrors the relationship between Christ and the Church.

In this Pauline metaphor, marriage is elevated to a spiritual covenant, not merely a legal contract or cultural practice. The husband is called to lead his family in the way Christ leads the Church, which is not through domination but through self-giving love, service, and responsibility. Later in the same chapter (v. 25), Paul clarifies this model by saying, *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”* The implication is that headship within the Christian household is defined by sacrificial care and Christ-like humility, not authoritarian control.

The wife's submission, in turn, is not about inferiority but about trust and voluntary alignment with the family's spiritual direction. In fact, Paul begins the entire passage in verse 21 by urging

all believers to “*submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*” Thus, the Christian family is not structured on worldly power dynamics but on mutual accountability, spiritual leadership, and shared purpose. This vision of the family as a living representation of the Church has profound implications for Family Ministry. Just as the Church functions as a body with many parts working in unity (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12–27), so too does the family. Each member; father, mother, and child has a God-ordained role to play, contributing to the health, growth, and mission of the household. Children are not merely dependents but are active participants in family worship, ministry, and service. Parents are both shepherds and teachers, guiding their family in truth and grace.

Ellen G. White affirms this perspective in *The Ministry of Healing*, where she writes: “*The home is the child's first church, and parents are the first pastors.*” In other words, the family home is a spiritual training ground, where the values, relationships, and worship practices of the church are to be modeled daily. This theological view elevates the importance of what happens within the four walls of the home. It also means that failures or dysfunctions in the family can have spiritual implications for the life of the Church itself.

From this standpoint, the health of the church is inseparable from the health of its families. If families are spiritually weak, emotionally fragmented, or morally inconsistent, the church cannot flourish. On the other hand, strong, Christ-centered families create a strong, Christ-centered church. This is why Family Ministry is not merely a support system or an optional department but it is a core component of ecclesiology (the theology of the Church) itself. Moreover, the metaphor of the family as a microcosm of the church is also eschatological. Revelation 19 describes the Church as the bride of Christ, prepared for the great wedding feast. This bridal imagery, rooted in love and covenant, flows directly from the biblical understanding of marriage and family. It

reinforces the idea that how families live and love on earth is a foretaste of the divine communion that God desires with His people.

1.9.4.4 The Importance of Community

A crucial aspect of biblical theology is the understanding that spiritual growth is not meant to occur in isolation. The Christian faith is inherently communal, and this principle extends to the spiritual development of families. Hebrews 10:24–25 urges believers: *“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”* This passage emphasizes the interdependence of believers and the essential role of corporate gatherings in nurturing faith. It reminds families that spiritual vitality is sustained and deepened within the broader fellowship of the church.

In the biblical narrative, community has always been central to God's covenant people. From the nation of Israel, organized into tribes and households, to the early church, which met in homes and shared resources, faith was never practiced as a solitary pursuit. Acts 2:42–47 describes how the early Christian community devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. This communal lifestyle helped reinforce doctrinal truths, offer mutual encouragement, and provide spiritual accountability. Families were at the heart of this structure, hosting gatherings, mentoring younger believers, and exemplifying Christian virtues.

For families today, being embedded in a strong faith community serves several important purposes. First, it offers support and resilience in the face of life's challenges. Families often face trials such as financial strain, parenting difficulties, marital conflict, or bereavement. Within the community of faith, such struggles can be met with practical assistance, prayer, encouragement,

and pastoral care. This aligns with Galatians 6:2, which teaches, “*Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*”

Second, the church community plays a key role in intergenerational discipleship. Children and youth benefit from seeing faith modeled by people other than their parents—elders, mentors, Sabbath School teachers, and church leaders. This broader network strengthens the spiritual foundation laid in the home and helps young people integrate their faith into real-world contexts. In *Child Guidance*, Ellen G. White emphasizes that “the influence of association is important.” She advocates that parents should be intentional in surrounding their children with godly role models within the church, reinforcing what is taught at home.

Third, the community fosters collective worship and shared mission, which are crucial for spiritual formation. When families participate together in church life—worship services, outreach programs, small groups, and service initiatives—they learn to practice unity, generosity, and compassion. These activities create a sense of belonging and purpose that strengthens family bonds while contributing to the mission of the church.

In the context of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, community is further reinforced through structured programs such as Family Ministries, Pathfinders, Women’s and Men’s Ministries, and youth-focused services. These Ministries are not isolated; they function best when coordinated under a shared vision that includes the family as a whole. For example, a Family Life seminar on marriage may be most effective when followed up with small group support and church-wide initiatives to build stronger homes.

Moreover, Adventist theology emphasizes that the church is a family of families, echoing Paul’s metaphor of the body in 1 Corinthians 12. Each family represents a vital part of the church’s

life and mission, and when one family is weak, the whole body feels the impact. Conversely, when families thrive, the church becomes vibrant and mission-driven. Therefore, Family Ministry must intentionally foster this interconnectedness, ensuring that families do not feel alone in their faith journey but instead find strength and partnership within the community of believers.²⁶

1.9.5 Goals of the Adventist Family Life Ministry

The Adventist Family Life Ministries Department identifies four key areas of focus for Family Life Ministry: marriage, parenting, single adults, and blended families.²⁷ The primary goal of Family Life Ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist is to support and strengthen families in their relationships with God and with one another. This includes promoting healthy family relationships, providing resources and training for families, and helping families integrate their faith into their daily lives. Each of these areas is supported by a variety of programs, resources, and initiatives designed to meet the unique needs of families in these different stages of life.

1.9.6 Strategies for Supporting Families

There are many strategies that Family Life Ministry uses to support families in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. One important approach is education and training. The Adventist Family Ministries Department provides a wide range of resources and training opportunities for families, including seminars, workshops, and online resources.²⁸ These resources cover a variety of topics related to family relationships, including marriage, parenting, communication, and conflict resolution. Another key strategy is mentoring and support. The Adventist Church encourages families to form small groups and support networks, where they can connect with other families

²⁶ Anthony, Michael J. and Michelle, eds. *Theology for Family Ministries* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2001).

²⁷ Adventist News Network, “Family Ministries Celebrate 100 Years of Strengthening the Family Unit.”

²⁸ Adventist News Network.

and many Adventist congregations also offer mentoring programs for couples, where more experienced couples provide guidance and support to newlyweds or those who are experiencing challenges in their marriage. A third strategy is an outreach and evangelism. Family Life Ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes that healthy families can be a powerful witness to the world, and encourages families to share their faith with others through their relationships and interactions. This includes reaching out to families in the community and offering programs and resources that can help them strengthen their relationships with one another and with God.²⁹

1.10 Organization of Study

This research was organized into five chapters, each addressing key aspects of the research topic. Chapter One introduces the study, beginning with the background that emphasizes the importance of the family unit within the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the role of the Family Ministry in addressing contemporary challenges. The statement of the problem highlights the increasing difficulties faced by families in the Madina District and the need for effective interventions by the Family Ministry. The chapter outlines the research objectives and questions that guide the study, along with a theoretical framework to provide a foundation for analyzing the role and effectiveness of the Ministry. The scope of the study is defined by its geographical and thematic focus on the Family Ministry in the Madina District. The research methodology and data collection techniques are explained, detailing the approaches used to gather and analyze data. A review of relevant literature explores topics such as the relationship between religion and family, marital challenges

²⁹ Adventist Family Ministries, “Domestic Abuse-Being a Part of the Solution,” *Adventist News Network* (2018).

in Christian families, and the theological and strategic foundations of the Family Ministry. The chapter concludes by highlighting the significance of the study.

Chapter Two explores the nature and functions of Family Ministry in the SDA Church. It examines the theological understanding of the family and provides a historical overview of Family Ministry in the SDA Church, describing its development and evolution. The chapter discusses the aims, mission, and objectives of the ministry and its various functions within the church community. The theological basis underpinning Family Ministry activities is analyzed, alongside an evaluation of the Ministry's effectiveness.

Chapter Three focuses on the strategies adopted by the Family Ministry in addressing family problems in the Madina District. It begins with an overview of the Family Ministry's background in Madina, followed by a detailed discussion of the specific strategies employed to tackle challenges such as communication breakdowns, power struggles, and financial management in marriage. The chapter provides an in-depth analysis of how these strategies are implemented and their impact on resolving family problems.

Chapter Four presents the successes and challenges of the Family Ministry in the Madina District. It highlights achievements of the Family Ministry in strengthening family bonds and fostering unity while addressing challenges such as economic constraints, limited financial support, and socio-cultural barriers. These successes and challenges are examined to provide a balanced understanding of the ministry's performance.

Chapter Five summarizes the findings of the study, offering recommendations and concluding the research. The chapter consolidates insights on the effectiveness and challenges of the Family Ministry, suggesting practical measures to address identified issues. The chapter concludes by

proposing areas for future research to further enhance the practice of Family Ministry in similar contexts.

1.11 Significance of the Study

The study will bring to bear the importance of the Family Ministry to all churches as is focus on God's purpose for the family and promote restoration and renewal of Christian family life. The Family Ministry helps families that+ face challenges. Again Family Ministry recognizes the unique needs of the family as a system and seeks to provide the positive interaction and support family units require and it also serves as a winsome evidence of a caring church.



CHAPTER TWO

THE NATURE AND FUNCTIONS OF FAMILY MINISTRY IN THE SDA CHURCH

2.0 Introduction

Family Ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church is a cornerstone of its mission, emphasizing the integration of spiritual belief with everyday family life. Since its inception, the ministry has evolved to address the changing societal dynamics and challenges faced by families. This chapter explores the nature and functions of Family Ministry within the SDA Church, tracing its historical development, examining its aims and objectives, and evaluating its effectiveness in promoting healthy, faith-based family relationships. By understanding these aspects, we gain insight into how the SDA Church supports and strengthens families in their spiritual and daily lives.

2.1 What is the Family Ministry?

The Seventh-day Adventist church has a doctrinally based, holistic perspective of the integration of spiritual belief with all aspects of life. Sharing the valuing of family life with other religions, it expressed its espousal of proactive family support as an essential mission of the church by initially establishing a Home Commission in 1919, which transformed over the intervening

years into Adventist Family Ministries organized in 1995³⁰. By this time both secular society and the church community were challenged by an increasingly individualistic, materialistic, and somewhat disillusioned post-holocaust, post-Hiroshima, Cold War, globally sensitized culture. The social acceptance of changed roles for mothers, possibly due to the combined effect of controlled fertility and the push for gender equality by feminism; together with increasing concern about youth risk-taking behaviors and adolescent delinquency were stimuli that arguably affect the expression of espoused values.

2.2 The Family: Origin, Creation, and Redemption

At creation, God extended His relational love to His children made in His image and desired that they would return His love through their faithful actions and thereby grow closer to Him daily. Tragically, both Adam and Eve chose to exercise faith in Satan's lie instead of God's explicit word. This disobedience resulted in the rupture of Earth's first family, comprised of God and the human pair. However, God, in His tender mercy, provided a way of escape through Christ the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15).

In this first succinct covenant promise the entire plan of salvation was presented, and it was presented to the father and mother of the human race. Their divinely-ordained mission to their family was, in essence, their mission to the world. Hence, our mission to the world begins at home thus bringing the gospel message of redemption to bear fruit for eternity in the lives of each member of our families. Then, from the mission outposts of our homes, our children will be equipped to reach out in love and ministry to the wider world. Adventist families today often resort to various interventions, some of which may be helpful, tending to "go with the flow" of society at large. Though, there are times reaching out to Christian professionals is advisable, such as

³⁰ Adventist Family Ministries, "Domestic Abuse-Being a Part of the Solution," *Adventist News Network*,(2018).

medical problems, mental illness, or substance abuse, yet the Creator of the family unit is the best qualified to resolve our problems.

The Family Ministry has been an important aspect of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church's mission to support and strengthen families in their faith journey and everyday life.

2.3 History of Family Ministry in the SDA Church

The SDA Church has a long history of promoting Family Ministry, which can be traced back to the teachings of church pioneers such as Ellen G. White, who emphasized the importance of family worship and the role of parents in the spiritual development of their children. In the early 1900s, the church began offering Sabbath School classes specifically for children and youth, which helped to promote family involvement in religious education.³¹ In October 1919, the General Conference Committee established the Home Commission, which began its operations in 1922. Arthur W. Spalding served as its director, alongside his wife Maud, until 1941. During their tenure, Arthur W. Spalding developed educational materials for families, including a series of pamphlets called "The Christian Home Series," which covered various aspects of family life. Arthur W. Spalding authored the lessons, while Maud Spalding played a role in grading them. Additionally, Arthur Spalding and Dr. Belle Wood-Comstock co-authored five books within the Christian Home Series, offering guidance on family living. Christian Home Day, initially scheduled for the first Saturday in February, is still observed as Christian Home and Marriage Week, spanning from the second Saturday to the third Saturday of February on the church's calendar.

In June 1941, a General Conference Convention focused on the family, possibly one of the earliest instances of what would later become known as Family Life International. In 1941, the

³¹ E. G. White, "The (Seventh Day) Adventist Home," *Marriage and Family Living*, 1953, <https://doi.org/10.2307/348214>.

Home Commission was incorporated into the Department of Education. Over the following three decades, marriage and family programs were promoted by individuals serving as Parent and Home Education Secretaries, including Florence Rebok (1941-1947), Arabella Moore Williams (1947-1954), Archa O. Dart (1954-1970), and W. John Cannon (1970-1975).³²

During the General Conference Session held in Vienna, Austria, in 1975, there was a recognition of the need for stronger and more stable Adventist families. As a response, the Home and Family Service (HFS) was established, with Delmer and Betty Holbrook chosen as the initial directors. The Holbrooks were responsible for organizing and conducting training workshops for leaders, pastors, and lay members across all world divisions. In 1980, Karen and Ronald Flowers joined the HFS team. D. W. Holbrook served as the director of HFS from 1975 to 1982, after which Betty Holbrook took over as director from 1982 until 1985 when Home and Family Service became integrated into the Department of Church Ministries (CM). Family Ministries remained a prominent component within the Department of Church Ministries, thanks to the efforts of Betty Holbrook, who continued as an Associate Director of CM until her retirement in 1988.³³

In the 1980s, the church established the Family Life Department to provide resources and support for families, and in 1990, it launched the "Family to Family" initiative, which emphasized the importance of families reaching out to other families in the community. Family Ministry has been an important aspect of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church's mission to support and strengthen families in their faith journey and everyday life.

³² Adventist Family Ministries, "Family Ministries," in *General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists*, n.d., <https://family.adventist.org/>.

⁴ "Family Ministry," in *General Conference*

2.4 Aim and Mission of the SDA Family Ministry

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church's Family Ministry Department has a clear mission and aims to support as well as strengthen families in their faith journey and everyday life. According to the SDA Church's Family Ministry Department, the mission of the Family Ministry is to "strengthen and restore relationships in the home, to lead each family member into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ" (Adventist Family Ministries, n.d.). The department outlines four main aims of Family Ministry:

1. To promote and strengthen the marriage relationship
2. To support parents in their role as primary faith educators of their children
3. To strengthen the parent-child relationship
4. To provide resources and support for families facing crises and challenges (Adventist Family Ministries, n.d.).

The SDA Church's emphasis on Family Ministry is based on its belief in the importance of family relationships for spiritual growth and development. As Ellen G. White noted, "The SDA Church believes that the family is the most important institution in human society and that the family is the first school of life where children learn about love, values, and spirituality". Research supports the importance of the aims of the SDA Family Ministry. For example, studies have found that strong marital relationships are associated with better mental and physical health and higher levels of spiritual well-being.³⁴ In addition, research suggests that parents play a crucial role in the

³⁴ Jennifer M Weiss, "Marital Preparation, Experiences, and Personal Qualities in a Qualitative Study of Individuals in Great Marriages," 2014, 140, <http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd>.

spiritual development of their children and that family worship and devotion can have a positive impact on children's spiritual growth.³⁵

Moreover, studies have found that parent-child relationships are important for children's emotional and spiritual development and that positive parent-child relationships can lead to better mental health outcomes.³⁶ Finally, research suggests that families facing crises and challenges can benefit from social support and resources, which can help to reduce stress and promote resilience. By focusing on these aims, the SDA Church is working to promote strong, healthy families and to support families in their spiritual growth and development.³⁷

2.5 Objectives of the SDA Family Ministry

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church has always emphasized the importance of the family unit and the role it plays in the spiritual development of its members. To support this emphasis, the SDA Church has established a Family Ministry whose objectives are centered on promoting and supporting healthy families within the church. One of the primary objectives of the SDA Family Ministry is to provide resources and support for families within the SDA Church. According to Nudd and Meyer, the Ministry aims to provide a range of services that promote healthy relationships and communication within families, as well as to develop programs that help families develop strong bonds and values rooted in their faith. The Ministry also seeks to support

³⁵ Pamela Ebstyn King, Drew Carr, and Ciprian Boitor, *Religion, Spirituality, Positive Youth Development, and Thriving, Advances in Child Development and Behaviour*, vol. 41, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-386492-5.00007-5>.

³⁶ Vivian L. Gadsden, Morgan Ford, and Heather Breiner, *Parenting Matters: Supporting Parents of Children Ages 0-8*, *Parenting Matters: Supporting Parents of Children Ages 0-8*, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.17226/21868>.

³⁷ Vu Anh Trong Dam et al., "Associations between Parent-Child Relationship, Self-Esteem, and Resilience with Life Satisfaction and Mental Wellbeing of Adolescents," *Frontiers in Public Health* 11 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2023.1012337>.

families through various life stages and transitions, such as providing resources for families with young children, adolescents, and adult children.

The SDA Family Ministry also seeks to promote family worship and spiritual growth. According to Willsey, the Ministry provides resources that help families to worship together and integrate their faith into their daily lives. This includes the development of worship guides, family devotionals, and other materials that encourage families to pray together, study the Bible together, and share their faith with others.

In addition to promoting family worship and spiritual growth, the SDA Family Ministry aims to support healthy marriages within the church. The Ministry offers premarital counseling services, develops programs and resources to help couples build and maintain strong marriages, and provides support for couples in crisis. The Ministry also provides training for pastors and other church leaders to help them better support couples in their marriage relationships.

Furthermore, the SDA Family Ministry seeks to engage families in outreach and service to their communities. The Ministry develops programs that involve families in community service projects and other outreach activities. These programs help families to share their faith with others and to serve as positive examples of Christ's love to their communities.

Overall, the objectives of the SDA Family Ministry are focused on supporting and strengthening families within the SDA Church. The Ministry recognizes the importance of the family unit in the spiritual development of its members and seeks to provide resources and support that enable families to thrive. The Ministry also admits that healthy families are better equipped to serve as positive examples of Christ's love to their communities and the world at large.

In conclusion, the objectives of the SDA Family Ministry are multifaceted and are aimed at promoting and supporting healthy families within the SDA Church. The Ministry seeks to provide resources and support for families, promote family worship and spiritual growth, support healthy marriages, and engage families in outreach and service to their communities. By doing so, the Ministry plays a critical role in the spiritual development of its members and the outreach efforts of the SDA Church.

2.6 Functions of the SDA Family Ministry

One of the primary functions of the SDA Family Ministry is to provide resources and education to help individuals build strong, healthy, and Christ-centred relationships. This includes marriage preparation courses, parenting classes, and counseling services. According to a study by the SDA General Conference, marriage preparation programs offered by the SDA Family Ministry have been found to improve communication, relationship satisfaction, and commitment among couples.³⁸ Similarly, parenting classes and counseling services have been found to improve parenting skills, reduce conflict in the home, and promote positive child development.

Another function of the SDA Family Ministry is to provide support and community for families within the SDA church. This includes hosting family-focused events, such as family retreats and conferences, and creating opportunities for families to connect and grow together. A study by the SDA General Conference found that family retreats and conferences have been effective in strengthening family bonds, promoting spiritual growth, and creating a sense of community within the SDA church.³⁹

³⁸ James Madison Pendleton, *Church Manual*, 2010,

https://www.adventist.org/fileadmin/adventist.org/files/articles/information/ChurchManual_2010.pdf.

³⁹ Nancy Morrow-Howell et al., "Effects of Volunteering on the Well-Being of Older Adults," *Journals of Gerontology - Series B Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences* 58, no. 3 (2003): 137–45, <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/58.3.S137>.

The SDA Family Ministry also plays a role in addressing societal issues that affect families, such as domestic violence and addiction. Through education and advocacy, the SDA Family Ministry seeks to raise awareness and provide resources to individuals and families who are affected by these issues. In addition, the SDA Family Ministry partners with other organizations and agencies to provide support and assistance to families in crisis.

One notable program of the SDA Family Ministry is the "End It Now" campaign, which aims to raise awareness and prevent domestic violence and abuse. Through this campaign, the SDA family ministry has developed resources and training materials for churches and individuals to address domestic violence within their communities. The SDA Family Ministry also recognizes the importance of intergenerational relationships and seeks to promote positive interactions between generations. This includes programs and activities that bring together older adults and youth, such as mentoring programs and service projects. Research has shown that intergenerational relationships can promote positive youth development, reduce risk behaviors, and improve mental health outcomes.

Overall, the SDA Family Ministry plays a vital role in promoting healthy and strong families within the SDA church and beyond. Through education, resources, and support, the SDA Family Ministry seeks to improve relationships, build community, and address societal issues that affect families.

2.7 The Theological Basis of the Family Ministry

Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Family Ministry is based on the belief that God established marriage and family as a foundational institution for human society and that the family unit plays a crucial role in the spiritual growth and development of individuals. The theological basis for SDA Family Ministry can be traced to several key biblical principles and Adventist beliefs.

First among them is the Creation Account. The foundation of the SDA Family Ministry's perspective on marriage can be traced back to the Bible, particularly to the book of Genesis. In Genesis 2:18-25, the creation narrative unfolds, highlighting the special act of God in forming the first man, Adam, and subsequently creating the first woman, Eve, from his rib. God's purpose in creating Eve is made clear in verse 18: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Genesis 2:18, ESV). This divine act of creation establishes the concept of marriage as a union between a man and a woman. The biblical account of creation and the establishment of marriage as a foundational institution is a key theological basis for SDA Family Ministry. In his book, *The Family*, Mark Finley, a prominent Adventist evangelist, writes that "the Bible reveals that God is the originator of marriage and that it is a divine institution"⁴⁰. He underscores the biblical teaching that God is the originator of marriage and that it is a divine institution. In this view, marriage is not merely a human social contract but a sacred covenant established by God Himself. This perspective emphasizes that the Creator designed marriage as a foundational and essential institution for human flourishing and companionship. This view is supported by other Adventist authors, such as Ellen G. White, who wrote that "God celebrated the first marriage"⁴¹.

Ellen G. White, a co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and a prolific Adventist author, provided additional insights into the divine institution of marriage. In her writings, particularly in *"The Adventist Home,"* she elaborates on the sacredness of marriage. White affirms that God celebrated the first marriage, referring to the union of Adam and Eve as a divine act and a model for all subsequent marriages. Her writings emphasize that marriage is "one of the first

⁴⁰ Peter Landless, "Mark Finley," 2014.

⁴¹ Katrina B Blue, "Union with Christ in the Writings of Ellen G. White," 2015, 1–283, <http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/dissertations>.

gifts of God to man" and that it was instituted by the Creator Himself before the entrance of sin into the world. This perspective underscores the enduring and foundational nature of marriage within the Adventist faith.

Secondly, the fall of humanity. The effects of sin on marriage and family are a central concern of the SDA Family Ministry. In the book, *The Adventist Home*, Ellen G. White and her son, William C. White, write that "the entrance of sin has marred God's perfect plan for the family"⁴². They go on to discuss the various challenges that families face as a result of sin and provide practical advice for overcoming these challenges. The core premise put forth by Ellen G. White and William C. White is that sin has introduced disruption and brokenness into the family unit. Before the fall, God's design for the family was one of perfect harmony and unity. However, sin shattered this harmony, leading to a host of challenges within families. The very act of disobedience by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden marked the introduction of sin into human existence, affecting all aspects of life, including marriage and family however, through faith, prayer, love, forgiveness, Christian education, and service, families can strive to overcome these challenges and work toward the restoration of God's intended harmony within the family unit.

Thirdly, Redemption through Christ. The redemptive power of Jesus Christ stands as a central and foundational theme within the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Family Ministry. This belief, eloquently expressed by Mark Finley in his book *The Family*, asserts that Christ is the ultimate source of restoration for marriages and families, bringing them back to the original divine plan.⁴³ This perspective is further fortified by the writings of Ellen G. White and other influential Adventist authors, who underscore the significance of Christ's transformative work in the context

⁴² Sadana Devica, "The Adventist Home," *Pengaruh Harga Diskon Dan Persepsi Produk Terhadap Nilai Belanja Serta Perilaku Pembelian Konsumen* 7, no. 9 (2015): 27–44.

⁴³ Landless, "Mark Finley."

of human relationships, particularly within the family. At its core, this belief reflects the SDA understanding that the entrance of sin into the world disrupted God's intended harmony for families. Families often grapple with issues such as selfishness, conflict, and communication breakdowns, which are seen as direct consequences of sin's influence. However, the redemptive power of Christ is seen as the antidote to these challenges.

Through Christ, SDA Family Ministry teaches that forgiveness and healing are attainable for individuals and families alike. Christ's selfless sacrifice on the cross offers the promise of reconciliation and renewal within family relationships. It is believed that Christ's redemptive work not only forgives past wrongs but also empowers individuals to overcome their inherent sinfulness and selfishness, transforming their hearts and minds. This transformation is pivotal in addressing the root causes of conflicts and disharmony within families. Ellen G. White's writings, deeply influential in the SDA tradition, provide profound insights into the redemptive influence of Christ. She emphasizes that Christ's love and grace have the power to redeem and transform even the most wayward souls. By connecting with Christ through prayer, repentance, and faith, individuals can experience a profound change in their character, attitudes, and behavior. This transformation, White argues, has a ripple effect on family life, promoting love, unity, and spiritual growth within the home.

A Christ-centered home, as emphasized by White, becomes the bedrock of SDA Family Ministry. When families prioritize Christ as the central figure in their lives, His redemptive power can permeate their relationships. The practical implications of this belief are reflected in SDA families' commitment to prayer, faith, forgiveness, and reconciliation. They strive to mirror Christ's forgiveness and seek to reconcile relationships within their households. Furthermore, SDA families often engage in acts of service and outreach as a way to share Christ's redemptive love

with others. This not only fulfills a sense of mission but also strengthens their own relationships by encouraging selflessness and a shared sense of purpose.

Fourthly, the Sabbath. Within the Seventh-day Adventist faith, the observance of the Sabbath stands as a deeply cherished and foundational belief. This day, occurring from Friday evening at sunset to Saturday evening at sunset, holds a special place in the hearts of Adventist families.⁴⁴ It is viewed not only as a day of rest but also as a time for worship and spiritual renewal, where families come together to nurture their faith and strengthen their bonds. Ellen G. White and William C. White, in their book, *The Adventist Home*, underscore the Sabbath's importance as a day of joy and spiritual growth for the family. They emphasize that it should be the happiest day of the week, a time when the family can set aside the pressures and demands of everyday life to connect with God and one another in a unique way.

The Sabbath is first and foremost a day of rest—a divine gift to provide respite from the toils and stresses of the workweek. Adventist families are encouraged to prepare in advance by completing necessary tasks so that the Sabbath can be a time of true rest, not just physically but also mentally and spiritually. Crucially, the Sabbath is a day of worship. Families gather for worship services at church, engaging in communal singing of hymns, studying the Scriptures, and listening to sermons. This corporate worship experience strengthens the spiritual fabric of the family and the larger faith community. Yet, the Sabbath is not limited to corporate worship alone. Ellen G. White and William C. White emphasize that it should be a day of family bonding. Parents and children spend quality time together, engaging in activities that nurture both their physical and

⁴⁴ Blue, “Union with Christ in the Writings of Ellen G. White.”

spiritual well-being. This might involve reading the Bible, discussing spiritual topics, and praying as a family, fostering unity and spiritual growth within the home.⁴⁵

Additionally, the Sabbath is a time for reconnecting with nature. Families are encouraged to spend time outdoors, appreciating God's creation and finding spiritual renewal in the natural world. Leisurely walks, picnics, and outdoor activities become cherished Sabbath traditions. Hospitality also plays a role in Sabbath observance. Many Adventist families invite guests to share a Sabbath meal, extending the blessings of the day to others and fostering a sense of community and fellowship. The Sabbath serves as an opportunity for spiritual growth and renewal. By setting aside worldly cares and focusing on matters of the spirit, Adventist families seek to deepen their faith and their relationship with God. It becomes a time for introspection, prayer, and personal reflection.

Fifthly, the Sanctuary. The SDA belief in the sanctuary holds a sacred place within their theological framework, offering a profound understanding of the plan of salvation and the role of Christ as the High Priest. The sanctuary message draws a parallel between the Old Testament earthly sanctuary, with its rituals of cleansing and atonement, and the heavenly sanctuary, where Christ intercedes on behalf of believers. This theological concept goes beyond the theoretical and has significant implications for how Adventist families approach their relationships with God and with each other.

M.L. Andresen's assertion that the sanctuary message directly impacts the family underscores the belief that it provides not only spiritual depth but also practical guidance and support for families. At its core, this message emphasizes forgiveness, reconciliation, repentance,

⁴⁵ Devica, "The Adventist Home."

and holiness, all of which are integral aspects of family life within the SDA tradition.⁴⁶ In the context of family relationships, the sanctuary message underscores the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation. Just as sins were confessed and forgiven in the Old Testament sanctuary, families are encouraged to create an atmosphere of grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation within their homes. This practice fosters harmony and unity within the family unit, reflecting the central theme of Christ's work as the ultimate reconciler.

Repentance and transformation, key elements of the sanctuary message, are seen as vital for family life. Families are encouraged to create an environment where members feel safe to acknowledge their shortcomings, seek forgiveness, and commit to personal and spiritual growth. This fosters positive change and personal transformation within the family, aligning with the principles of the sanctuary where sins are replaced with righteousness. The concept of sanctification, central to the sanctuary message, encourages families to set aside time for spiritual growth, Bible study, and prayer. This commitment to holiness as a family unit helps align their lives with God's principles and fosters spiritual maturity. In this sense, the sanctuary message becomes a blueprint for cultivating a spiritually vibrant family life.

Furthermore, the sanctuary message emphasizes the role of Christ as the High Priest, interceding on behalf of believers. In a parallel manner, parents in Adventist families are often seen as spiritual leaders and intercessors for their children. They provide guidance, teach spiritual truths, and mentor their children in their faith journey, mirroring Christ's intercessory role. Unity in worship is another aspect of the sanctuary message that carries over to family life. Families are encouraged to gather together for corporate worship, whether at church or within the home, as a

⁴⁶ Koberson Langhu, "A Critical Evaluation of The Last Generation Theology (LGT) of (L) ML Andreasen Through the Lens of The Scriptures and The Writings of Ellen G. White," *Spicer Adventist University Research Articles Journal*, (2022).<https://doi.org/10.56934/sauraj.v1i2.124>.

way to strengthen their spiritual bonds and deepen their understanding of Christ's role as the High Priest. These moments of collective worship become opportunities for family members to grow in their faith and draw closer to God together.

Sixthly, the Three Angels' Messages. The message of the Three Angels in Revelation 14:6-12 holds a pivotal place within Adventist theology, and it is often considered a cornerstone of their faith. These messages emphasize the imperative of establishing a personal relationship with God and a steadfast commitment to living in accordance with His divine will. In *The Three Angels' Messages*, a work authored by C. Mervyn Maxwell, a respected Adventist theologian, it is articulated that these messages provide not only spiritual guidance but also serve as a foundational framework for family life.⁴⁷ This perspective underscores the belief that the *Three Angels' Messages* offer profound insights and principles that can help families harmonize their lives with God's divine plan.

The *Three Angels' Messages* is a call to faith and righteousness. They summon individuals to worship the Creator, acknowledge His sovereignty, and adhere to His commandments. These messages underscore the importance of living a life in harmony with God's will, which, when applied to family life, becomes a guiding principle for Adventist families. Central to these messages is the concept of fearing God and giving glory to Him, emphasizing the need for a deep and personal relationship with the Divine. In family life, this translates into nurturing a strong sense of reverence and awe for God within the household. Families are encouraged to center their lives on God's principles, acknowledging His authority and sovereignty in all aspects of daily living. Moreover, the messages also call for repentance and the turning away from sin. In the

⁴⁷ M William, "Toward a Biblical and Missiological Framework for Transformational Advocacy in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church," 2023.

context of family life, this principle encourages families to cultivate an environment where confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation are integral. It fosters an atmosphere of grace and mercy within the family unit, allowing family members to grow spiritually by acknowledging their need for God's transformative power.

The *Three Angels' Messages* also emphasize the importance of keeping God's commandments, including the observance of the Seventh-day Sabbath. Within Adventist families, this serves as a blueprint for the sanctification of time and the nurturing of spiritual growth. Families set aside the Sabbath as a day of rest, worship, and spiritual renewal, aligning their lives with God's commandments and deepening their commitment to living in harmony with His will. The messages further call for endurance and faith in Jesus, emphasizing the need for unwavering trust in Him, especially in times of trial and tribulation. In family life, this principle encourages families to support one another in their faith journeys, offering strength and encouragement in times of adversity.

Lastly, the Spirit of Prophecy. The Spirit of Prophecy, embodied in the writings of Ellen G. White, occupies a distinctive and esteemed position in the theological fabric of Seventh-day Adventism. Within her seminal work, *The Adventist Home*, Ellen White imparts a profound perspective on the significance of the home, affirming that "the home should be to the children the most attractive place in the world." This statement encapsulates a core tenet of Adventist belief: that the family is not just a social unit but a divine sanctuary where love, nurture, and spiritual growth should thrive. Ellen White's teachings emphasize the pivotal role of the family in molding the character and faith of its members. Her words resonate with the deeply held conviction that the family, with its unconditional love and spiritual nurture, ought to be a refuge where children

experience acceptance, security, and spiritual nourishment.⁴⁸

"The Role of Parents: According to the teachings of the Bible, parents bear the primary responsibility for nurturing the spiritual development of their children. In Deuteronomy 6:6-7, it is stated that these commandments should be deeply ingrained in their hearts and passed on to their children. This involves discussing and emphasizing these commandments while at home, during travel, before sleep, and upon waking up."

"The Family as a Microcosm of the Church: The New Testament depicts the family as a miniature representation of the church, wherein the husband assumes the role of the household leader, while the wife and children are regarded as integral members of the family unit. Ephesians 5:22-23 states, 'Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.'"

The Significance of Community: The Bible highlights the significance of community in the spiritual development of believers, which extends to families as well. Hebrews 10:24-25 advises believers to actively support and motivate each other to love and engage in virtuous actions. It emphasizes the importance of regularly gathering together and encouraging one another, particularly as the anticipated day approaches. These biblical principles form a sturdy basis for collaboration between churches and families in fostering the spiritual growth of households.⁴⁹

2.7 Current Practices in SDA Family Ministry

Today, the SDA Church continues to prioritize Family Ministry through a variety of programs and initiatives. The Family Ministries Department provides resources and support for

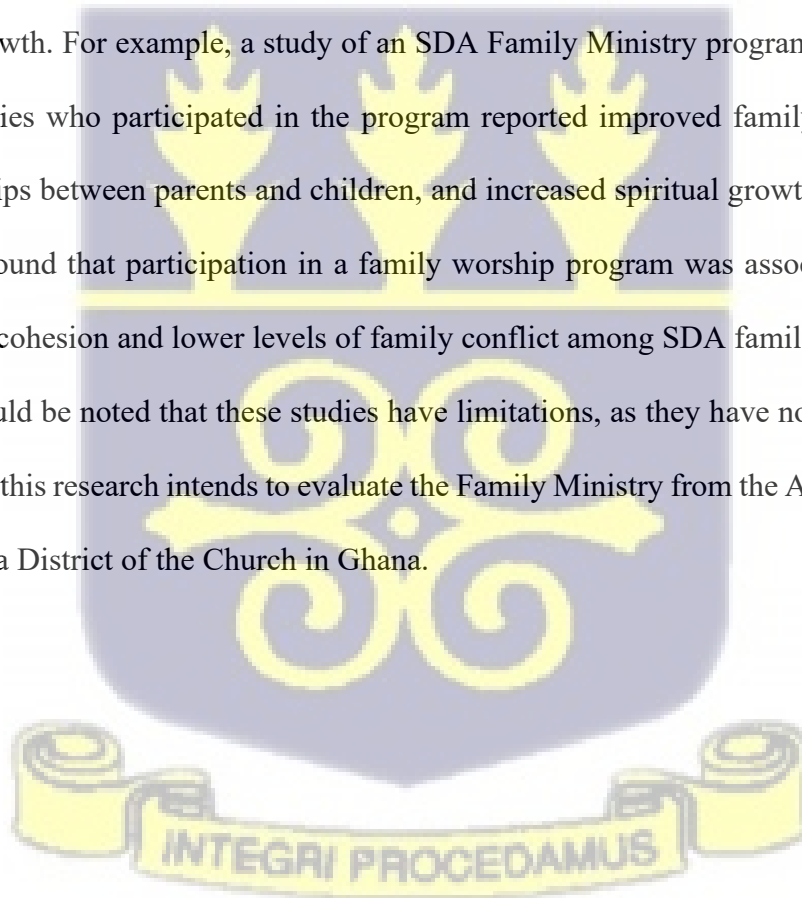
⁴⁸ Theodore N. Levterov, *The Development of the Seventh-Day Adventist Understanding of Ellen G. White's Prophetic Gift, 1844-1889*, (2016). <https://doi.org/10.3726/978-1-4539-1422-9>.

⁴⁹ Anthony, Michael J. and Michelle, *Theology for Family Ministries*, eds. Michael and Michelle Anthony (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2001).

families, including marriage and family counseling, parenting workshops, and resources for family worship and devotions. The Adventist Family Ministries website offers a wealth of resources on topics such as parenting, marriage, and family worship, as well as information on upcoming events and conferences. The church also encourages families to participate in Sabbath School classes together, and many local churches offer Sabbath afternoon programs for families, such as games, crafts, and family-friendly movies.

2.8 Effectiveness of SDA Family Ministry

Research on the effectiveness of Family Ministry in the SDA Church is limited, but some studies suggest that Family Ministry programs can have a positive impact on family relationships and spiritual growth. For example, a study of an SDA Family Ministry program in the Caribbean found that families who participated in the program reported improved family communication, better relationships between parents and children, and increased spiritual growth (Griffith, 2016). Another study found that participation in a family worship program was associated with higher levels of family cohesion and lower levels of family conflict among SDA families in Brazil⁵⁰. However, it should be noted that these studies have limitations, as they have not covered African situation. Hence this research intends to evaluate the Family Ministry from the African perspective using the Madina District of the Church in Ghana.



⁵⁰Anthony M Reid and Curtis Fox, "Improving Family Satisfaction Through Conflict-Management Training for the Immanuel Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Toronto, Canada," Canada, (2019). <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/dmin/673>.

CHAPTER THREE

STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY THE FAMILY MINISTRY IN DEALING WITH FAMILY PROBLEMS IN THE MADINA DISTRICT

3.0 Background of the Family Ministry in Madina

The Family Ministry within the Madina District of the Seventh-day Adventist Church traces its roots through a diverse and dynamic history, reflective of both organizational changes and the socio-religious landscape of its context. Originally established as a part of the Labone District within the Southern Ghana Conference in 1975, the Madina District has undergone several transformative phases, eventually becoming an integral component of the Meridian Ghana Conference in 2012.

During its formative years, the Madina District encompassed a network of 23 churches and companies, serving a congregation comprised of individuals hailing from varied family backgrounds and societal contexts. Recognizing the imperative to foster strong familial ties within the church community, the leadership embarked on the establishment of the Family Life Department, later rebranded as the Family Ministry Department, to provide comprehensive support and guidance to its members. The inception of the Family Ministry Department within the district can be attributed to the visionary efforts of District Pastor David Narter, whose commitment to solidifying the department's presence across all churches was instrumental. Pastor Narter, supported by a cadre of dedicated lay leaders, tirelessly worked to embed the department's activities within the fabric of the community. Through mentorship initiatives and strategic planning, he laid a sturdy foundation for the department's subsequent growth and outreach efforts.

Successive leaders, including Pastor Charles Abbey and Dr. Andrews L. Ewoo, further propelled the mission of family ministry forward, particularly during periods of expansion and external

challenges. The district faced significant hurdles, such as the emergence of charismatic churches, which posed threats to the established Seventh-day Adventist community. However, under the leadership of Pastor Ewoo, innovative strategies, including special prayer seasons and outreach programs, were implemented to mitigate these challenges and fortify the spiritual resilience of the congregation. The torch of leadership was then passed on to Pastor Joseph William Yao Asare, Pastor S. Addo Kwakye, and Pastor J. A. Daitey in subsequent years, each contributing unique insights and initiatives to advance the cause of Family Ministry within the district. Seminars, workshops, and community engagement activities became integral components of the department's repertoire, aimed at addressing the evolving needs of congregants and fostering a culture of familial unity and spiritual growth.

In recent years, under the stewardship of Pastor Obed K. Obeng, the Family Ministry Department has undergone comprehensive structural reviews to align with the evolving objectives outlined by the General Conference. Notable achievements include the detailed categorization of members based on familial roles and the intensified focus on evangelizing families in preparation for the anticipated return of Christ. Moreover, the department has modernized its approach to encompass a diverse array of programs, ranging from interactive marriage seminars to engaging discussions, thereby garnering increased popularity and participation within the community. The integration of family-centric themes into Sabbath School curricula, worship services, and other church activities underscores the department's unwavering commitment to nurturing robust familial bonds and fostering spiritual enrichment among its members.⁵¹

⁵¹ SDA Madina District, "HISTORY OF MADINA DISTRICT FAMILY MINISTRIES DEPARTMENT," *Madina District Family Ministiries Department* (Accra, 2024).

3.1 Key Family Problems in the Madina District

Over the past few decades of its establishment in the Madina District, the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) community confronts significant challenges regarding family violence and abuse. It acknowledges the prevalence of family violence and abuse within its community and the imperative to address these issues with compassion and resolve. Despite affirming the dignity and worth of every individual, instances of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse persist, challenging the principles of love and acceptance central to Christian belief. Reported cases range from physical attacks, emotional manipulation, sexual coercion, and neglect, leaving deep scars on the affected individuals.⁵²

Recognizing the global scope and devastating effects of family violence, the Family Ministry Department of SDA asserts its commitment to active intervention and support for victims, as well as efforts towards prevention and reconciliation. Such behavior contradicts the essence of Christian teachings, which emphasize love, respect, and equality among all members of the human family. The Family Ministry stands against any form of abuse, affirming the sanctity of every person's body and spirit.

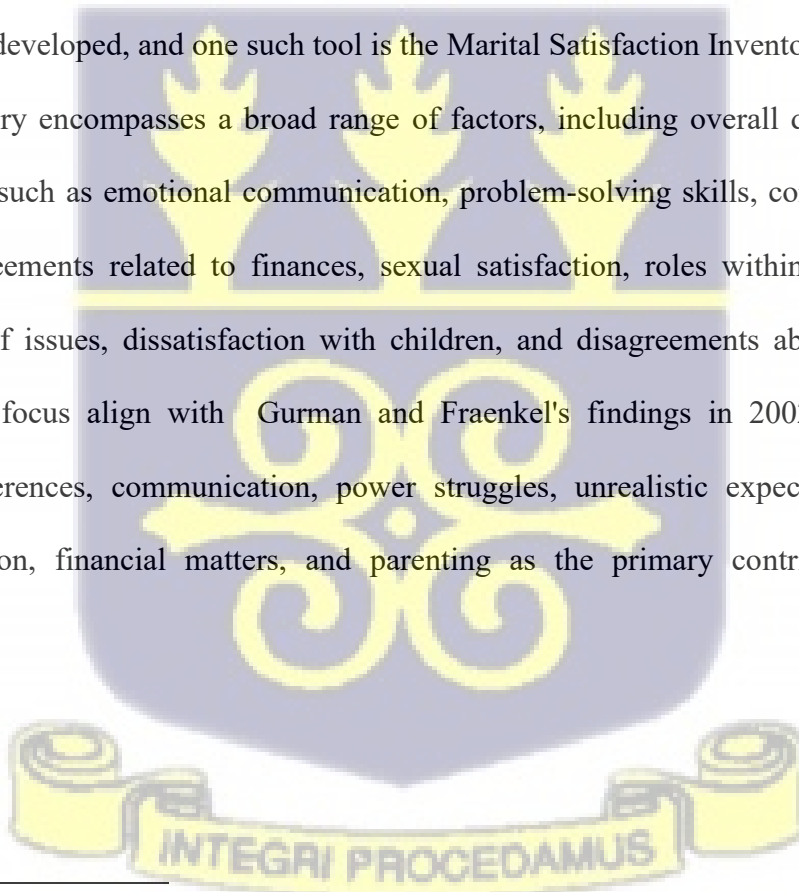
3.2 Strategies adopted by the Family Ministry in dealing with Family Problems

Family life professionals play a crucial role within the Seventh-day Adventist Church community by offering essential educational support to address family issues effectively. Family problems are regarded as a significant threat to the harmony and togetherness of married couples and their children. These issues often result in disagreements that couples perceive as challenges to their respective needs, interests, or concerns, leading to conflicts and disputes between spouses

⁵² René Drumm, Marciana Popescu, and Robert Kersting, "Effects of Intimate Partner Violence among Seventh-Day Adventist Church Attendees," *Critical Social Work*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.22329/csw.v10i1.5805>.

who have differing needs, ideas, beliefs, values, or goals. In a troubled world, the family unit has faced substantial challenges, with many couples giving up on their relationships, treating marriage more as a contractual arrangement rather than a sacred covenant. It is disheartening for clergy members to witness couples they have united in matrimony subsequently going through divorce, annulment, or separation.

In a study on marital satisfaction,⁵³ it was found that a partner's contentment tends to be at its highest around the time of the wedding but gradually decreases afterward. This decline has led researchers to explore what distinguishes a happy marriage from an unhappy one, a question that has long been a subject of interest in the research literature.⁵⁴ To address this question, various tools have been developed, and one such tool is the Marital Satisfaction Inventory-Revised (MSI-R). This inventory encompasses a broad range of factors, including overall distress levels and specific aspects such as emotional communication, problem-solving skills, conflicts, time spent together, disagreements related to finances, sexual satisfaction, roles within the relationship, family history of issues, dissatisfaction with children, and disagreements about child-rearing. These areas of focus align with Gurman and Fraenkel's findings in 2002, which identify intellectual differences, communication, power struggles, unrealistic expectations, intimacy, conflict resolution, financial matters, and parenting as the primary contributors to family problems.⁵⁵



⁵³ Gilad Hirschberger et al., "Attachment, Marital Satisfaction, and Divorce during the First Fifteen Years of Parenthood," *Personal Relationships*, 2009, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6811.2009.01230.x>.

⁵⁴ John M. Gottman and Lowell J. Krokoff, "Marital Interaction and Satisfaction: A Longitudinal View," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 1989, <https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-006x.57.1.47>.

⁵⁵ Alan S. Gurman and Peter Fraenkel, "The History of Couple Therapy: A Millennial Review," *Family Process*, 2002, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.2002.41204.x>.

3.3 Educational and Intellectual Differences

The prevalent viewpoint among church members is that modern marriages place considerable importance on intellectual capabilities, which differs from the past. They unanimously agree that couples who share similar educational backgrounds, beginning at least with Ordinary Level education, tend to hold their marriages in higher regard compared to couples with educational disparities. According to all church members, intellectual abilities are seen as a potential solution to various socio-economic challenges. However, they also recognize that persistent intellectual disparities between spouses can lead to socioeconomic problems. Among young couples, significant educational gaps between spouses are viewed as a notable concern by some church members. A few members emphasize that in cases of substantial intellectual differences, especially when the husband is more educated, it becomes difficult for them to accept advice or input from other church members. In such instances, wives may feel compelled not to involve outsiders in their marital matters.

Study shows that children raised in households where both parents have similar educational backgrounds may benefit from a more cohesive approach to education and intellectual development. Consistency in parenting styles and values related to education can create a nurturing environment that fosters academic success and a positive attitude towards learning. Additionally, when parents share similar levels of education, they may be better equipped to support their children's educational endeavors, providing guidance and resources that align with their own experiences.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Ardita Ceka and Rabije Murati, "Parents' Perspectives: The Role of Parents in the Education of Their Children," *Journal of Education and Practice* 7, no. 5 (2016): 61–64.

Conversely, significant educational gaps between parents may present challenges in terms of parenting styles and expectations for their children's academic achievement. Children may experience disparities in the level of support and encouragement they receive regarding their education, potentially leading to feelings of inadequacy or resentment.⁵⁷ Moreover, if one parent feels marginalized or disempowered due to their lower educational attainment, it could strain the marital relationship and indirectly affect the family's overall well-being.

The majority of church leaders stressed that intellectual abilities are a fundamental aspect of every Christian marriage's foundation. When asked to elaborate on how differences in intellectual capabilities might pose challenges to Christian marriages, the prevailing sentiment was that Christian churches encourage their members to address such disparities by promoting ongoing learning, both through formal education and informal self-improvement.

The Family Ministry hereby focuses on empowering couples with varying levels of intellectual abilities, with a focus on teaching them to provide support and encouragement to each other rather than engaging in conflicts. However, a minority of church leaders held the belief that intellectual differences do not necessarily lead to negative consequences when couples fulfill their respective duties toward each other, as outlined in Paul's guidance to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 7:3-5).

When comparing individuals who have completed at least secondary school education with those who have not, it becomes evident that those with a secondary education tend to exhibit enhanced intellectual performance and, consequently, have a reduced likelihood of undergoing divorce. Investing in education, as a result, serves as a solid foundation not just for securing better

⁵⁷ Zahra Zahed Zahedani et al., "The Influence of Parenting Style on Academic Achievement and Career Path.," *Journal of Advances in Medical Education & Professionalism*, 2016.

employment opportunities but also for building a stronger marital relationship. Research conducted underscores the close relationship between the level of education and intellectual development.

This variable holds significant predictive value when evaluating the risk of divorce among African Christian couples, as higher education levels are linked to decreased divorce risks. Similarly, Bumpass et al. (1991) observed that highly educated women experienced lower rates of relationship breakup, even when accounting for their age at marriage. In 1993, Kurdek also found that marriages involving spouses with lower levels of education were more likely to end in divorce, especially within the initial four years of marriage. However, in contrast, it was discovered that wives with higher levels of education had an increased likelihood of divorce. Therefore, rather than solely emphasizing education as an absolute measure, it is also essential to examine the educational differences within couples.⁵⁸

Divorce rates tend to be lower when the husband has a higher level of education compared to his wife, as opposed to couples with similar educational backgrounds⁵⁹. Conversely, divorce rates are highest when the wife has a higher educational level than her husband. Christian churches widely promote their message, encourage members to enhance their intellectual capabilities through both formal and informal means. This emphasis on personal growth is not limited to attracting educated and ambitious individuals but also extends to those with limited education living in economically disadvantaged areas.

⁵⁸ A. J. Kposowa, "The Impact of Race on Divorce in the United States," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 1998, <https://doi.org/10.3138/jcfs.29.3.529>.

⁵⁹ Larry L. Bumpass, Teresa Castro Martin, and James A. Sweet, "The Impact of Family Background and Early Marital Factors on Marital Disruption," *Journal of Family Issues*, 1991, <https://doi.org/10.1177/019251391012001003>.

The Family Ministry provides an alternative pathway for individuals in the family unit to overcome socio-economic poverty, using motivating phrases like "breaking through" and "victorious" to inspire the family to transcend their personal and societal challenges. Efforts have been made to understand the connection between education and divorce. However, research has discovered that lower levels of intellectual performance were linked to increased reported issues related to jealousy and substance abuse, both of which are predictive of divorce. It is important to note that intellectual ability often serves as a substitute for other socio-demographic factors, such as income, premarital births, parental divorce, and cohabitation.

Christian churches in Africa are actively encouraging success among their members and supporting them, placing a particular emphasis on fostering ambition and determination.⁶⁰ Pentecostal movements have faced criticism for not addressing external social issues. However, paradoxically, women are drawn to these movements because of the internal opportunities they offer, such as job prospects within the Church's structure and the sense of freedom and hope that is nurtured within the framework of family harmony. This applies to both Christian and non-Christian couples, regardless of their level of education.⁶¹

3.2 Communication in Marriage

According to a study conducted by Whisman, Dixon, and Johnson in 1997, therapists frequently identify communication issues as the primary concern addressed in couples' therapy⁶². In 2005, Litzinger and Gordon emphasized the crucial role of effective communication in marital

⁶⁰ Walter Ihejirika, "Research on Media, Religion and Culture in Africa: Current Trends and Debates," *African Communication Research* 2, no. 1 (2009): 1–60.

⁶¹ Geoffrey Johnston and Paul Gifford, "Christianity and Politics in Doe's Liberia.," *The American Historical Review*, 1994, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2168903>.

⁶² Mark A. Whisman, Amy E. Dixon, and Benjamin Johnson, "Therapists' Perspectives of Couple Problems and Treatment Issues in Couple Therapy," *Journal of Family Psychology*, 1997, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.11.3.361>.

satisfaction, stating that it plays a central role in the family' overall happiness⁶³. The researchers also discovered that couples who are unhappy seem to lack the necessary skills for effective communication, and this deficiency significantly contributes to their dissatisfaction in marriage⁶⁴. Dr. John Gottman, a seasoned psychology professor, and researcher with over 25 years of experience, has claimed that he can accurately predict whether a couple will stay together or divorce with more than a 90 per cent success rate by simply observing their interaction for as little as five minutes.

Effective communication within the family directly influences the family environment and ultimately shapes the experiences of children growing up within that context. Children are highly perceptive and sensitive to the dynamics between their parents, including how they communicate with each other. Witnessing healthy communication patterns can serve as a model for children, teaching them valuable skills for navigating relationships in their own lives.⁶⁵ Conversely, exposure to negative communication patterns, such as constant conflict, passive-aggressiveness, or stonewalling, can have detrimental effects on children's emotional well-being and interpersonal skills.

Research consistently shows that children raised in homes with strong communication between parents tend to exhibit better socio-emotional development, academic performance, and overall mental health outcomes.⁶⁶ They feel more secure and supported within their family

⁶³ Samantha Litzinger and Kristina Coop Gordon, "Exploring Relationships among Communication, Sexual Satisfaction, and Marital Satisfaction," *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*, 2005, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00926230591006719>.

⁶⁴ Litzinger and Gordon.

⁶⁵ Erlynda Ayu Kusumawati, Ega Listianingsih, and Ratna Hidayah, "Parents Communication Patterns to The Development of Children's Personality," *Social, Humanities, and Educational Studies (SHEs): Conference Series*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.20961/shes.v2i1.38116>.

⁶⁶ Mamta Roy and Regina Giraldo-Garcia, "The Role of Parental Involvement and Social/ Emotional Skills in Academic Achievement: Global Perspectives," *School Community Journal* 28, no. 2 (2018): 29–46, <http://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org/SCJ.aspx>.

environment, which contributes to their overall resilience and ability to cope with life's challenges. Conversely, when communication between parents is strained or dysfunctional, children may experience heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and confusion. They may struggle to understand or express their own emotions effectively, leading to difficulties in forming healthy relationships and managing conflict later in life.

Given the crucial role of communication in marital well-being, one prominent strategy the church use to address communication issues in the family is the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) approach. This approach, designed for couples' education and therapy, has promoted the use of active listening as a communication technique⁶⁷. Active listening involves employing empathetic comments, asking appropriate questions, restating, paraphrasing, and summarizing to ensure understanding⁶⁸. In 2006, McKay, Fanning, and Peleg emphasized that communication is a collaborative process involving both parties, even if one person appears to be the primary talker. They go on to suggest that genuine listening goes beyond simply remaining silent while your partner speaks; it hinges on your intent. If you intend to comprehend, enjoy, gain knowledge, or assist your partner, then you are truly engaged in active listening. Therefore, the primary objective of active listening is to gain a clear understanding of the speaker's concerns and also to effectively convey the listener's interest in the speaker's message.⁶⁹

In 2003, Hafen and Crane proposed that the active listening technique in marriage serves the purpose of assisting couples in managing conflicts by preventing common pitfalls in

⁶⁷ McArthur Hafen Jr and D. Russell Crane, "When Marital Interaction and Intervention Researchers Arrive at Different Points of View: The Active Listening Controversy," *Journal of Family Therapy*, 2003, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6427.00232>.

⁶⁸ Hafen Jr and Crane.

⁶⁹ David McNaughton et al., "Learning to Listen: Teaching an Active Listening Strategy to Preservice Education Professionals," *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 2008, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0271121407311241>.

communication, such as escalating tensions, disregarding each other's viewpoints, and withdrawing from discussions.⁷⁰ However, Gottman, Coan, Canere, and Swanson from their publication in 1998, hold a different perspective, suggesting that active listening does not reliably predict marital happiness or stability. Consequently, they recommend replacing the active listening model with one focused on fostering greater empathy and kindness during conflicts, de-escalating tensions, rebalancing power dynamics in favor of the husband being more open to influence from his wife, and promoting emotional soothing within the couple⁷¹.

In contrast, Hafen and Crane⁷² argue for conducting further research to replicate Gottman's findings before completely discarding the active listening approach, as neither its proponents nor its critics have presented a definitive case. Additionally, due to its widespread utility, it is advisable to retain active listening techniques as a valuable tool in every couple's toolkit to enhance their marital satisfaction⁷³. It is important to note that the key to maintaining a happy marriage lies in the connection between couples, which is rooted in a strong friendship, rather than solely relying on their active listening skills. Gottman and DeClaire also recommend that couples pay close attention to each other's facial expressions during their interactions, as the face reveals a person's feelings towards us, themselves, and the world around them.

Moreover, facial expressions play a significant role in making and responding to bids for connection, highlighting the importance of understanding how we use our faces to convey emotions. Among all the parts of the human body, the face is the most powerful reflector emotions.

⁷⁰ Hafen Jr and Crane, "When Marital Interaction and Intervention Researchers Arrive at Different Points of View: The Active Listening Controversy."

⁷¹ John M. Gottman et al., "Predicting Marital Happiness and Stability from Newlywed Interactions," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 1998, <https://doi.org/10.2307/353438>.

⁷² Hafen Jr and Crane, "When Marital Interaction and Intervention Researchers Arrive at Different Points of View: The Active Listening Controversy."

⁷³ Hafen Jr and Crane.

Couples do not experience disconnect because of poor communication; rather, they have communication issues because they are already disconnected.⁷⁴

3.5 Power Struggles in Marriage

In a study conducted by Whisman et al. in 1997, therapists note that power struggles ranked as the second most frequently addressed issue in couples' therapy. Power struggles occur when two individuals engage in conflict to shield themselves from feelings of shame and fear. They often attempt to dominate or coerce one another, leading to increased resentment and hostility because people generally resist being made to submit.⁷⁵

Research conducted by Simmons et al. in 2005 reveal that families that prioritize a strong sense of togetherness tend to find more positive, effective, and mutually satisfying solutions to problems. This "we-ness" approach in both marriage and problem-solving could explain why these couples experience lower rates of long-term marital distress and divorce compared to others⁷⁶.

Furthermore, demonstrating this sense of "we-ness" can be achieved through an approach described by as being "firm and friendly" when dealing with power struggles within the relationship⁷⁷. Being "firm" signifies maintaining self-respect, while being "friendly" communicates respect for one's partner. It involves having a good grasp of the current situation and being willing to respond appropriately. It's important to clarify that being "firm" does not mean insisting on changing one's partner or dictating their actions, nor is it about imposing one's views

⁷⁴ John Gottmann, "John Gottman, Joan DeClaire - The Relationship Cure - A 5 Step Guide to Strengthening Your Marriage, Family, and Friendships," 2011, 1–6.

⁷⁵ Whisman, Dixon, and Johnson, "Therapists' Perspectives of Couple Problems and Treatment Issues in Couple Therapy."

⁷⁶ Rachel A. Simmons, Peter C. Gordon, and Dianne L. Chambless, "Pronouns in Marital Interaction: What Do 'You' and 'I' Say about Marital Health?," *Psychological Science*, 2005, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2005.01639.x>.

⁷⁷ Kopp, "It Just Takes One: Resolving Power Struggle in Love and Marriage," *The Journal of Individual Psychology* 3, no. 63 (2007): 270-278.

on what the partner should or should not do. Instead, being "firm" involves focusing on personal growth, changing one's perspective on the situation, and determining how to act in a way that benefits the relationship, whether that means stepping away from the power struggle or actively working together to solve problems and enhance the relationship.

Power struggles between parents can create an unstable and stressful environment for children, leading to feelings of insecurity, anxiety, and confusion. Witnessing frequent conflicts over power and dominance can instill negative patterns of behavior and communication in children, potentially affecting their own relationships and emotional well-being later in life. Moreover, children may become unwitting participants in power struggles between their parents, being used as leverage or pawns in attempts to assert control or gain advantage. This can have profound psychological effects on children, eroding their sense of safety and trust within the family unit. On the other hand, marriages characterized by a strong sense of togetherness and mutual respect tend to provide a more stable and nurturing environment for children. When parents prioritize collaboration and unity in decision-making, children learn valuable lessons about cooperation, compromise, and conflict resolution.

The most effective strategy to handling power struggles is the adoption of a "firm and friendly" stance while resisting the urge to engage in conflict or completely yield to the other party's demands (p.272). This strategy, as described by Kopp in 2007, aligns with the concept of differentiation introduced by Schnarch⁷⁸. Differentiation involves the process of becoming more authentically oneself while maintaining healthy relationships with those we care about. It requires a delicate balance between two fundamental life forces: the desire for individuality and the need

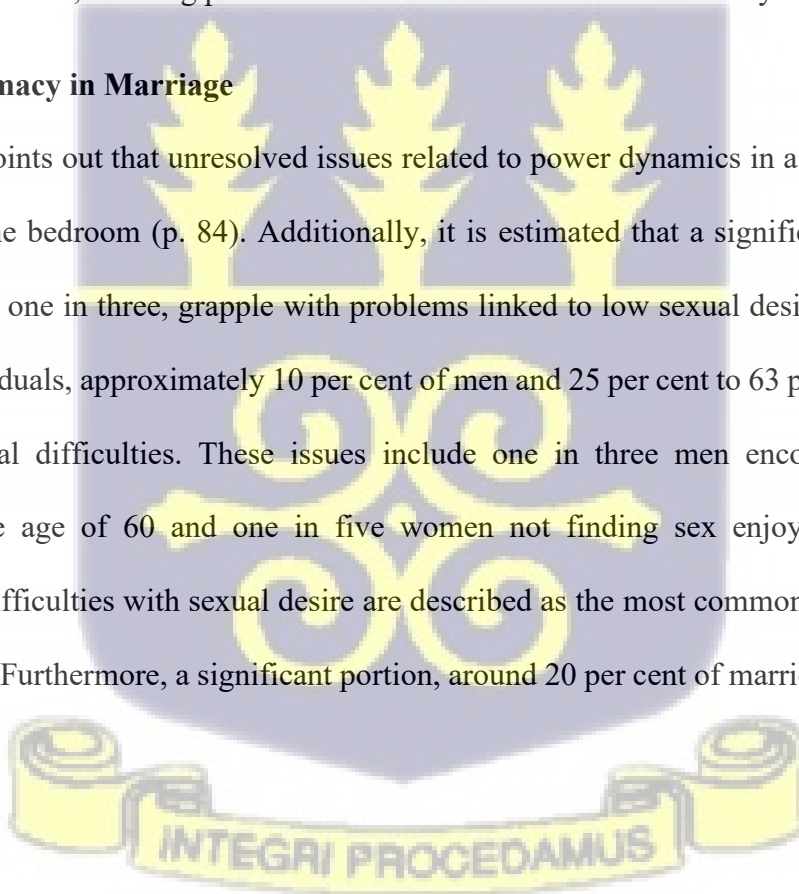
⁷⁸ D. Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage.*, New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1997.

for togetherness. Individuality pushes us to follow our path, establish a unique identity, and make independent choices, while togetherness draws us toward following the lead of others and being part of a group. Surrendering one's individuality for the sake of togetherness, or vice versa ultimately diminishes both the individual and the relationship.⁷⁹

At the core of differentiation is the skill of harmonizing individuality and togetherness. Consequently, a marriage characterized by well-differentiated individuals tends to prioritize unity we-ness over separateness, leading to higher relationship satisfaction.⁸⁰ This underscores the importance of both partners having an equal say in making significant decisions within the marriage. Furthermore, "sharing power is one of the cornerstones of intimacy".⁸¹

3.6. Sexual Intimacy in Marriage

Larson (2003) points out that unresolved issues related to power dynamics in a relationship often spill over into the bedroom (p. 84). Additionally, it is estimated that a significant proportion of couples, roughly one in three, grapple with problems linked to low sexual desire.⁸² A substantial number of individuals, approximately 10 per cent of men and 25 per cent to 63 per cent of women, experience sexual difficulties. These issues include one in three men encountering erection problems by the age of 60 and one in five women not finding sex enjoyable (pp. 14-15). Consequently, difficulties with sexual desire are described as the most common sexual complaint among couples. Furthermore, a significant portion, around 20 per cent of married couples engage



⁷⁹ Schnarch.

⁸⁰ Benjamin H. Seider et al., "We Can Work It Out: Age Differences in Relational Pronouns, Physiology, and Behaviour in Marital Conflict," *Psychology and Aging*, 2009, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016950>.

⁸¹ J. Larson, "The Great Marriage Tune - up Book.," 2003.

⁸² M. W Davis, "The Sex-Starved Marriage" (New York, 2003).

in sexual activity fewer than ten times a year, and concerns related to low desire rank as the top issue presented to sex therapists⁸³.

To enhance sexual satisfaction in couples who previously had a strong desire for each other, except when facing medical sexual dysfunction that requires professional attention⁸⁴, McCarthy and McCarthy (2003) propose that couples address their diminished sexual desire head-on. He suggests that couples should work on becoming more differentiated in order to nurture this desire and ultimately achieve both passionate sexual experiences and deep emotional intimacy.

In 2003, McCarthy⁸⁵ proposes that sexual functioning involves four key components: desire, arousal, orgasm, and satisfaction. Desire encompasses the positive anticipation and the belief that one deserves sexual pleasure, while arousal pertains to being open and responsive to physical touch and genital stimulation. Orgasm involves allowing the natural build-up of arousal to reach its peak, and satisfaction relates to feeling emotionally and physically connected after a sexual encounter. Among these four phases of the sexual response, "desire is the most vulnerable to disruption. Positive anticipation is the foundation of desire, and if that foundation is compromised, it affects the entire sexual process"⁸⁶.

Hence, the central role in addressing sexual disruptions lies in the brain rather than one's hormones or physical organs. Schnarch suggests a comprehensive approach to tackle these issues, using a framework known as the Quantum Model.⁸⁷ This model provides an understanding of how various complex elements of human sexuality, including health, physical stimulation, intimacy,

⁸³ Davis.

⁸⁴ Davis.

⁸⁵ Barry McCarthy and Emily McCarthy, *Rekindling Desire, Rekindling Desire*, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203497616>.

⁸⁶ McCarthy and McCarthy.

⁸⁷ D Schnarch, "Resurrecting Sex: Resolving Sexual Problems and Rejuvenating Your Relationship" (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002).

desire, eroticism, passion, and love, are all interconnected. In essence, it seeks to answer the question: What factors are necessary for sexual organs to function and reach orgasm? The concept here is that the body operates akin to a device capable of detecting electrical signals; the more sensitive the device, the more signals it can perceive. Similarly, the human body, as a sophisticated signal-detecting apparatus, operates on a similar principle.⁸⁸

The Quantum Model posits that your body processes stimuli through your nerves, muscles, spinal cord, and brain. It reacts when it identifies sexual stimulation. Once you reach a level of sexual arousal that triggers the complex bodily processes, your genitalia respond accordingly⁸⁹. The crucial point here is that you need to be adequately sexually stimulated for your body to react. It is important to note that achieving sufficient sexual stimulation in humans is more complex and nuanced than simply relying on sensory input and some mental fantasies. Therefore, if you are feeling upset, angry, unable to stop thinking about unrelated issues, or have unresolved emotional concerns, it becomes challenging to infuse your sensations with meaning that enhances your pleasure and arousal during sexual experiences⁹⁰.

According to Schnarch, aside from the Quantum Model, common interventions in sex therapy include techniques like "sensate-focus," where you and your partner take turns concentrating on your physical sensations while being touched, and another method that encourages fantasizing about having sex with someone other than your partner as a way to bypass negative feelings towards your mate⁹¹. Additionally, there's the "squeeze" and "start-up" approach, used to address premature ejaculation, in which your partner pauses during sexual activity to apply

⁸⁸ Schnarch.

⁸⁹ Schnarch.

⁹⁰ Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*.

⁹¹ Schnarch, "Resurrecting Sex: Resolving Sexual Problems and Rejuvenating Your Relationship."

pressure to your organ, delaying ejaculation. Unlike the Quantum Model, which emphasizes intimacy, these other approaches to sexual satisfaction undermine intimacy with your partner because they overly focus on genital performance (p. 22).

3.7 Managing Finances in Marriage

Differences in financial matters consistently rank as one of the primary factors contributing to divorce. Couples who are dissatisfied with their financial situation often view their entire relationship as a failure⁹². Since money is crucial for achieving a couple's life goals, financial matters will always be an ongoing and inescapable aspect of the home. This can become a significant source of stress in a marriage⁹³. Research conducted by Papp, Cummings, and Goeke-Morey in 2009 demonstrated that money plays a central role in couple relationships, and conflicts related to finances can act as predictors of marital distress and, ultimately, divorce⁹⁴.

Notwithstanding, financial stress and disagreements within a marriage can create a tense and unstable environment for children. As children witness constant arguments or anxiety over money, it can lead to feelings of insecurity and fear about the family's stability. Moreover, financial strain may restrict opportunities for children, such as access to education, extracurricular activities, or basic necessities, which can impact their overall well-being and future prospects.⁹⁵ Conversely, when parents effectively manage their finances and work together as a team, it creates a sense of security and stability within the family. Children learn valuable lessons about financial

⁹² John Dakin and Richard Wampler, "Money Doesn't Buy Happiness, but It Helps: Marital Satisfaction, Psychological Distress, and Demographic Differences between Low- and Middle-Income Clinic Couples," *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 2008, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01926180701647512>.

⁹³ Margaret Shapiro, "Money: A Therapeutic Tool for Couples Therapy," *Family Process*, 2007, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.2007.00211.x>.

⁹⁴ Lauren M. Papp, E. Mark Cummings, and Marcie C. Goeke-Morey, "For Richer, for Poorer: Money as a Topic of Marital Conflict in the Home," *Family Relations*, 2009, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2008.00537.x>.

⁹⁵ Christopher G Davis and Janet Mantler, "The Consequences of Financial Stress for Individuals, Families, and Society," *International Journal of Multidisciplinary and Current Research*, 2004.

responsibility, budgeting, and the importance of communication and cooperation in resolving conflicts. Additionally, parents who prioritize saving and planning for the future can provide better opportunities and resources for their children, fostering a supportive and nurturing environment for their growth and development.

According to Shapiro, money triggers anxiety because it is closely tied to feelings of accomplishment, competence, safety, security, and societal acceptance.⁹⁶ Furthermore, financial stress can lead to cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses that affect the relationship, resulting in increased hostility between spouses and a decline in marital warmth, satisfaction, and stability.

Wallace suggests that couples should approach financial matters with an awareness that people naturally have differences, leading to disagreements that may or may not have solutions. In line with this, it was proposed that before entering a relationship, partners should evaluate each other's spending habits and financial behaviors to ensure they align with their financial values. Couples should contemplate creating a shared financial budget and engage in ongoing discussions before making significant financial decisions. Neglecting to address financial behaviors before entering a relationship can result in reduced satisfaction due to conflicting perceptions of financial conduct.⁹⁷

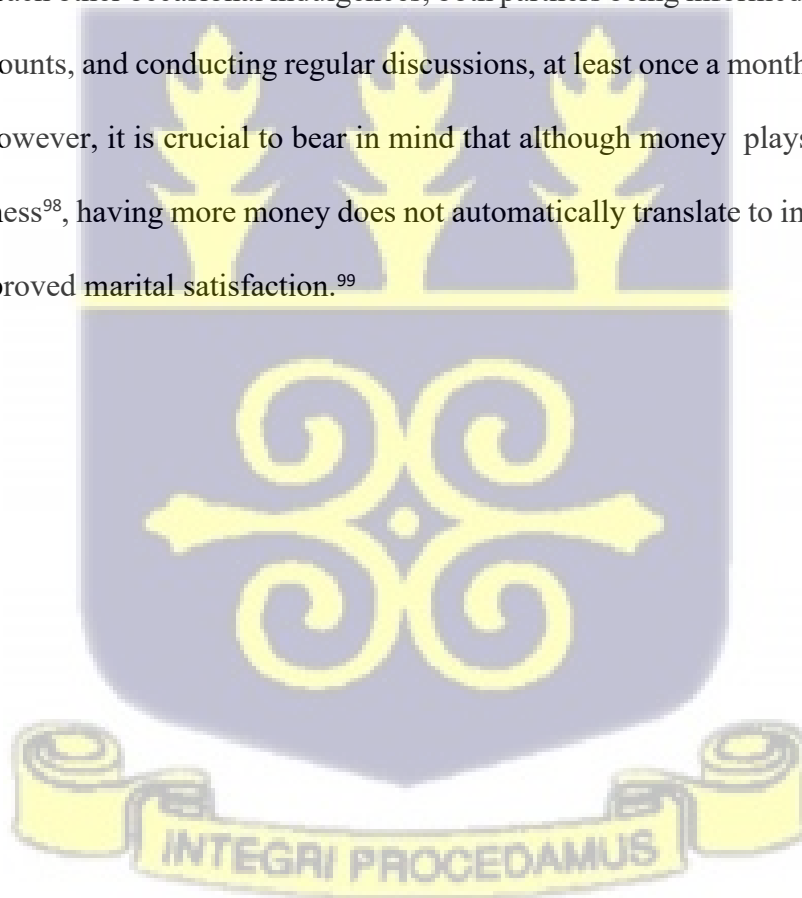
Furthermore, Gottman and Silver in 1999 advised couples to work together as a team to effectively manage their financial issues. They should openly communicate their concerns, needs, and aspirations with each other before formulating a financial plan. In this process, both

⁹⁶ Shapiro, "Money: A Therapeutic Tool for Couples Therapy."

⁹⁷ Sonya Britt et al., "The Influence of Perceived Spending Behaviours on Relationship Satisfaction," *Journal of Financial Counseling and Planning*, 2008.

individuals must be clear about elements they consider non-negotiable when crafting the plan. The plan should encompass both partners' current expenditures, thoroughly assess their incomes and assets, and establish a method for regularly handling bill payments.

The financial plan should also encompass their long-term financial goals, which include defining clear financial objectives and identifying potential financial crises they want to avoid. Several other prudent practices, such as assigning financial responsibilities based on each partner's interests and abilities, saving 10 per cent of their income, establishing an emergency fund, using credit judiciously, ensuring prompt bill payments, reaching agreements on individual spending limits, allowing each other occasional indulgences, both partners being informed about the location of their bank accounts, and conducting regular discussions, at least once a month, to assess income and expenses. However, it is crucial to bear in mind that although money plays a significant role in marital happiness⁹⁸, having more money does not automatically translate to increased happiness or guarantee improved marital satisfaction.⁹⁹



⁹⁸ Dakin and Wampler, "Money Doesn't Buy Happiness, but It Helps: Marital Satisfaction, Psychological Distress, and Demographic Differences between Low- and Middle-Income Clinic Couples."

⁹⁹ Vani K. Borooah, "What Makes People Happy? Some Evidence from Northern Ireland," *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 2006, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-006-9008-3>.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUCCESSSES AND CHALLENGES OF THE FAMILY MINISTRY

4.0 Introduction

This chapter delves into the successes and challenges faced by the Adventist Family Ministry. Through a detailed examination of various initiatives, the chapter highlights the Ministry's successes under the following headings: Promoting regular family devotions, encouraging many youths and adults to marry in the church, enhancing the unity and relational well-being of families, empowering families to serve as models in society, passing on the heritage of Faith to successive generations. It also explores the significant challenges that hinder the Ministry's efforts which were categorized under the following headings: Financial constraints, marital issues, socio-cultural barriers, external influences, and the migration and disintegration of families. By analyzing these aspects, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of the Family Ministry and offer insights into potential areas for improvement. This discussion is based on both qualitative data from interviews with Ministry leaders, couples, members and relevant literature, providing a balanced view of the successes and challenges. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing strategies to enhance the effectiveness of the Family Ministry and support the spiritual and relational well-being of families within the Adventist community.

4.1 Successes of the Adventist Family Ministry

4.1.1 Promoting regular family devotions

"Family devotions are a cornerstone of spiritual growth within the family unit, and the Family Ministry of the Madina District has been successful in promoting this essential practice. This

sentiment was expressed by one of the respondents, who is a leader in the Family Ministry of the Madina District SDA Church." While the traditional "read, pray, sing, and serve" formula serves as a valuable framework, the SDA Family Ministry of the Madina District has successfully fostered a culture of creativity in family devotions, recognizing that diverse approaches cater to the unique dynamics of each household. This was key information highlighted by interviewed participants who were asked to highlight some of the successes of the Family Ministry in the Madina district. This response backs findings from some other previous studies. As Ellen G. White emphasized, "If ever there was a time when every house should be a house of prayer, it is now."¹⁰⁰ This intentional gathering of families for worship encapsulates a multifaceted approach, encompassing Scripture reading, prayer, hymns, and collective ministry endeavors.

In the broader landscape, statistics generated from research on the Barna Group of the Adventist Church underscore the importance of family devotion in nurturing spiritual growth. Despite the acknowledgment by 85 per cent of parents regarding their primary responsibility for their children's moral and spiritual development, a significant gap existed in the implementation of regular family worship sessions, particularly within "churched" families.¹⁰¹ However, within the Adventist community, the SDA Family Ministry has made notable strides, with 27 per cent engaging in daily worship and 33 per cent participating weekly, showcasing a commitment to fostering spiritual connectivity within households. Through tailored guidance and resources, families have been empowered to cultivate environments conducive to spiritual growth, bridging the gap between belief and practice.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Calif: Pacific Press Pub, 1948).

¹⁰¹ Barna Group, "Parents Accept Responsibility for Their Child's Spiritual Development But Struggle With Effectiveness," 2003, <https://www.barna.com/research/parents-accept-responsibility-for-their-childrens-spiritual-development-but-struggle-with-effectiveness/>.

¹⁰² Group.

Central to the success of family devotions within the SDA framework is the emphasis on inclusivity and engagement across all age demographics. Recognizing that meaningful participation fosters a sense of ownership and spiritual development, the Ministry encourages active involvement from all family members, irrespective of age or ability.¹⁰³ From encouraging children to lead worship sessions to incorporating interactive elements tailored to diverse learning styles, the SDA Family Ministry ensures that family devotions transcend mere routine, evolving into cherished moments of spiritual communion and growth.

Moreover, family devotions serve as a cornerstone for instilling foundational principles of faith within the younger generation. By fostering an environment where children learn to worship God from an early age, families equipped with SDA resources lay the groundwork for a lifelong journey of spiritual resilience and conviction. Through regular engagement with Scripture and communal prayer, children are fortified against the secular ideologies prevalent in modern society, emerging as stalwart ambassadors of faith.

4.1.2 Encouraging many youths and adults to marry in the church

The current research interviewed several couples who emphasized that the Family Ministry of the Madina District has proactively addressed the challenge of young Adventists marrying outside their faith community. These couples, who are themselves products of this initiative, noted that the Ministry's efforts have significantly impacted individual spiritual growth and strengthened the church community's cohesion. Also in the focus group discussion, one of the Family Ministry members said that in a year, 12 young adults can marry from the church. A seminal study conducted by Alfred G. Marundu in October 2014 shed light on the efficacy of strategic

¹⁰³ Aundrea A Thompson, "Digital Commons @ Andrews University Intergenerational Mentorship Model for Membership Revitalization and Involvement at the Guelph Seventh-Day Adventist Church," 2024.

interventions aimed at promoting same-faith marriages within the Jericho Church District. Marundu's research, titled "A Strategy to Increase the Number of Young People in the Jericho District Marrying Members of the Adventist Faith," underscores the gravity of the issue, citing the detrimental consequences of familial division and decreased church attendance resulting from marriages with non-Adventists.¹⁰⁴

Employing a multifaceted approach, Marundu's study amalgamated biblical precepts, insights from Ellen G. White's writings, and contemporary Christian literature on marriage to formulate a comprehensive strategy tailored to the socio-cultural context of Kenya and the Jericho Church District. Through a structured program encompassing sermons, Bible studies, seminars, and targeted outreach initiatives, the SDA Family Ministry effectively equipped church members with the requisite biblical principles and guidelines for fostering healthy, same-faith marriages.

The tangible outcomes of Marundu's intervention are striking, with the Jericho Church District witnessing a remarkable surge in attendance and active participation in church services. Notably, the Buruburu Central church experienced a significant increase from 60per cent to 85 per cent attendance, while the Jericho church saw attendance surge from 30per cent to 70per cent. Moreover, the incidence of same-faith weddings exhibited a notable uptick, rising from zero and two in 2009 to three and seven in 2013 in the Buruburu Central and Jericho churches, respectively.¹⁰⁵

Crucially, Marundu's study underscored the pivotal role of pastoral leadership and congregational engagement in effecting meaningful change within the church community. Through the concerted efforts of pastors, elders, and dedicated church members, the program gained traction,

¹⁰⁴ Alfred G Marundu, "A Strategy to Increase the Number of Young People in the Jericho District Marrying Members of the Adventist Faith," 2014.

¹⁰⁵ Marundu.

transcending initial challenges to emerge as a catalyst for transformative growth. The palpable increase in afternoon attendance and participation attests to the program's efficacy in fostering a culture of shared commitment to faith-centric marriages within the Adventist community.

4.1.3 Enhancing the unity and relational well-being of families

Some members of the Family Ministry in the Madina District highlighted that the Ministry organizes monthly programs with unique themes to educate and support couples and this has significantly promoted unity and peaceful coexistence among families. For over 35 years, the General Conference Family Ministry Department has focused on enhancing the spiritual as well as the relational well-being of families, strengthening the broader church community. This vision is put into practice through various initiatives that support Family Ministry leaders and congregants worldwide in achieving their goals.

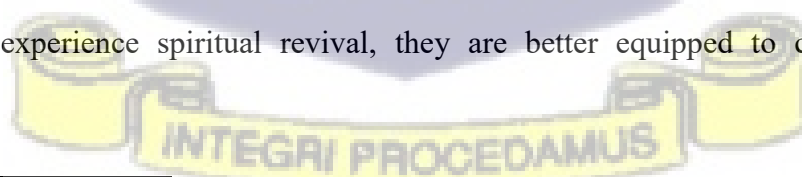
A key component of these efforts is the annual production and distribution of the comprehensive Family Ministries curriculum, known as the Plan Book, through Advent Source. Designed for use within local congregations during special periods like Christian Home and Marriage Week in February and Family Togetherness Week in September, the Plan Book includes a diverse array of resources such as sermons, workshops, children's literature, reprinted articles, and book reviews. These resources are indispensable for churches globally, helping to strengthen marital and familial bonds.¹⁰⁶ Marriage strengthening, training, and evangelism have emerged as pivotal priorities within the ambit of the Family Ministries Department. Notably, the conduct of marriage conferences across diverse geographical locales has been a hallmark of this initiative.

¹⁰⁶ Elaine Oliver and Willie Oliver, "Building Family Memories," 2014.

Furthermore, the certification of numerous union conference directors in Family Ministry for the facilitation of such conferences underscores the department's commitment to capacity-building within its ranks. Additionally, the proliferation of training programs such as PREPARE/ENRICH, a renowned resource for premarital education and marriage intervention, among hundreds of local pastoral and church leadership cohorts, serves as a testament to the department's dedication to equipping its cadre with requisite skills and knowledge.¹⁰⁷

A seminal development within the purview of the Family Ministry Department is the widespread adoption of family-to-family evangelism across all 13 divisions of the world church. Exemplified by the proactive involvement of directors Willie and Elaine Oliver in conducting four family evangelism series across four world divisions over the ensuing four years, this initiative underscores the imperative for Adventist families to embody gospel values as tacit yet potent witnesses in contemporary society. Acknowledging the pervasive secular worldview prevalent in contemporary society, the department recognizes the indispensable role of Adventist families in epitomizing the ethos of the gospel. Within this context, a strategic array of initiatives has been marshaled to advance the cause of Jesus Christ on earth and foster the advent of His kingdom of grace.¹⁰⁸

Integral to this discourse is the seminal insight of Ellen White, who underscores the significance of familial and communal responsibilities, emphasizing their pivotal role in uplifting humanity. As individuals experience spiritual revival, they are better equipped to cultivate healthier



¹⁰⁷ citation and similar pap Marks, James Paul Liberty Theological Seminary Christian Premarital Training in the Local Church Setting: A Study of The Effectiveness of The Symbis Model in Reducing Divorce and Producing Stable and Satisfying Marital Relationships Core View metadata and Ac Uk, "Christian Premarital Training In The Local Church Setting: A Study Of The Effectiveness Of The Symbis Model In Reducing Divorce And Producing Stable And Satisfying Marital Relationships," 2007.

¹⁰⁸ J. Adamson, "Total Family Involvement.," *The Australasian Nurses Journal* 9, no. 6 (1980).

relationships, thereby embodying the essence of discipleship and serving as effective witnesses of Christ's love.

4.1.4 Empowering families to serve as models in society

Within the corpus of Adventist Family Ministry, a prominent achievement resonates in its endeavor to empower families to serve as models within their societal contexts. While acknowledging the existence of Christian families in Africa grappling with crises and the dearth of foundational values, the Ministry has undertaken a concerted effort to instill a culture of mutual love and loyalty, which holds profound implications for surrounding communities. Some members of the Madina district who were interviewed stated that, the Family Ministry has been successful to some extent in nurturing parent-child relationships that resonate with divine commandments, glorifying God and serving as tangible manifestations of His ideal for familial dynamics.

The writing of Ellen G. White underscores the transformative potential of a well-ordered and disciplined family, extolling it as a living testament to the efficacy of Christianity. Despite the prevalence of conflicting family norms, Christian families are endowed with the capacity to epitomize virtues such as love, mutual respect, faithfulness, perseverance, humility, forgiveness, and contentment. Crucially, this involves a conscious prioritization of the imperatives of the gospel above the seductive allure of cultural and modern influences.¹⁰⁹ In contemporary society, where traditional family values are eroding, the Adventist Family Ministry remains steadfast in its conviction regarding the transformative potential of Christian families. By serving as virtuous exemplars, these families bear witness to God's boundless love and offer hope and healing to a world ensnared in despair and disillusionment.

¹⁰⁹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies of the Church*, Vol 4 (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948).

4.1.5 Passing on the Heritage of Faith to Successive Generations

Within the Adventist Family Ministry, a noteworthy accomplishment lies in the concerted effort to empower Christian families in Africa to perpetuate the rich heritage of faith across successive generations. Rooted in biblical narratives and fortified by the insights of Ellen G. White, this endeavor underscores the pivotal role of familial transmission in nurturing a vibrant, enduring faith among descendants.

Central to this achievement is the biblical example set forth by Lois and Eunice, the grandmother and mother respectively of Timothy, as chronicled in 2 Timothy 1:5 and 3:13. Their unwavering commitment to instill and nurture Timothy's faith serves as a compelling paradigm for contemporary Christian families, challenging them to emulate their steadfast dedication to spiritual legacy.

In consonance with the biblical mandate, responses from interviewed participants from the Madina District emphasized the imperative for Christian parents to proactively inspire and transmit saving faith to their children and subsequent generations which the Family Ministry has been successful in promoting to some extent. The admonition of Proverbs 22:6 resonates profoundly within this context, underscoring the significance of laying a firm foundation for the development of the Christian faith within the familial framework.

Moreover, Ellen G. White's counsel serves as a clarion call for parents to prioritize the spiritual upbringing of their children. She highlights the dire consequences of neglecting religious training, cautioning against the perilous assumption that children will naturally gravitate towards

a religious experience as they mature. Her words, found in reference, ¹¹⁰ underscore the urgent need for intentional cultivation of faith within the familial sphere.

In response to these admonitions, Family Ministry endeavors to equip families with the tools and resources necessary to fulfill their sacred mandate of passing on the heritage of faith. Through educational programs, seminars, and pastoral guidance, families are empowered to create nurturing environments conducive to spiritual growth and maturity. By embracing their role as custodians of faith, these families contribute to the perpetuation of God's redemptive work ensuring that the flame of faith continues to burn brightly across generations.

4.2 Challenges Confronting the Adventist Family Ministry

4.2.1 Economic Challenges

Economic hardship was highlighted in the interview with the Family Ministry leaders as a significant challenge confronting the Madina District of the Adventist Family Ministry. This was characterized by low wages, and the rising cost of living putting immense pressure on families and affecting their ability to meet their basic needs and participate actively in church activities. Also, financial stress was highlighted to strain marital relationships and hinder effective parenting. Several interviewees highlighted the impact of economic challenges on their families. One participant noted, "When you are struggling to put food on the table, it becomes difficult to focus on spiritual matters. Many families are more concerned about survival than anything else."

Studies have shown that families contend with precarious economic conditions, characterized by fluctuating incomes, high unemployment rates, and limited access to essential

¹¹⁰ Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2001).

resources.¹¹¹ In this context, families grapple with the daunting task of meeting basic needs and providing for the welfare of their members amidst economic uncertainty. The pervasive influence of poverty increased familial stressors, fostering an environment where financial concerns loom large and economic hardships loom large.

Moreover, the pursuit of financial stability often necessitates difficult choices and sacrifices, impacting familial relationships and dynamics. Marital discord may arise from financial strains, as couples navigate competing priorities and limited resources. Additionally, parents face challenges in providing adequate education, healthcare, and opportunities for their children, further compounding familial stressors. The pressure to secure financial stability also strains inter-generational relationships, as families grapple with the expectations and obligations associated with caregiving and support for aging relatives. Inadequate access to social safety nets and support systems further worsens the vulnerability of families facing economic hardship.

In confronting these economic challenges, the Family Ministry has been playing a crucial role in providing support, guidance, and resources to empower families to navigate financial adversity with resilience and faith. Through initiatives aimed at financial literacy, income generation, and community development, the Ministry seeks to alleviate the burdens of economic instability and foster holistic well-being within Ghanaian Christian households.

4.2.2 Limited Financial Support for Ministry Activities

The Adventist Family Ministry often operates with limited financial resources, which hampers its ability to organize programs and provide support to families. Funding constraints

¹¹¹ Terri Friedline, Zibei Chen, and So'Phelia P. Morrow, "Families' Financial Stress & Well-Being: The Importance of the Economy and Economic Environments," *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10834-020-09694-9>.

affect the Ministry's capacity to conduct workshops, seminars, and counseling sessions, which are essential for addressing the various challenges faced by families. One Family Ministry leader explained, "We have many ideas and plans to support our families, but without adequate funding, it is challenging to implement them. We rely heavily on donations and contributions from church members, but these are not always sufficient." Others said they needed money to solve minor monetary issues in some families. Also, a couple of participants complained about the Family Ministry not having a well-furnished office of their own and usually meeting under trees and other places which are not conducive. Most members do not want to visit them in these places as people can easily speculate what they are there for. This was evident in the distracting background noises from the interview recordings.

4.2.3 Marital Issues

Marital conflicts were recorded by the research as one of the prevalent challenges confronting the Family Ministry. Many couples struggle with issues such as communications breakdown, infidelity, financial problems, and lack of emotional intimacy. These challenges have led to separation and divorce, which have had far-reaching consequences for the family and the church community. Interviewees highlighted the need for more effective marital counseling and support. One respondent noted, "Many couples in our church are going through difficult times in their marriages. We need more trained counselors and programs to help them resolve their issues and strengthen their relationships." One of the Family Ministry members who happened to be a lawyer was commended for his support in promptly assisting with marital issues requiring legal advice or counsel.

4.2.4 Inadequate Premarital Counseling

The lack of comprehensive premarital counseling was identified as another challenge that contributes to marital problems. Premarital counseling helps couples prepare for marriage by addressing important topics such as communication, conflict resolution, financial management, and spiritual growth. However, many couples in the Madina District do not receive adequate premarital counseling, which leads to unpreparedness and subsequent marital challenges. A Family Ministry member during the focus group discussion emphasized the importance of premarital counseling, saying, "We need to invest more in premarital counseling to ensure that couples enter marriage with a strong foundation. This will help reduce the incidence of marital conflicts and divorce in our community." Additionally, some members raised concerns about the lack of thorough background checks on prospective couples before they get married. One member highlighted, "Leaders often rush into getting couples married without proper investigation into crucial matters like their ability to bear children, whether the woman is already pregnant, and if the couple already has children before coming together." Ignoring these vital investigations often leads to post-marital issues that could have been addressed beforehand. Some couples also suggested post-marital counselling.

The absence of comprehensive premarital counseling and detailed background checks highlights the need for a more robust approach to preparing couples for marriage. Addressing these challenges requires the Family Ministry to implement structured premarital counseling sessions and ensure that leaders conduct thorough background checks on prospective couples. This proactive approach can significantly reduce the incidence of marital conflicts and enhance the overall stability of marriages within the Madina District.

4.2.5 Socio-Cultural Barriers

One significant socio-cultural barrier highlighted from the interview responses was the rigid gender roles and expectations prevalent in many African societies, even in the church. These roles often dictate the responsibilities and behaviors of men and women within the family, sometimes leading to inequality and discrimination. In many cases, women are expected to be submissive and bear the brunt of household chores and child-rearing, while men are seen as the primary breadwinners and decision-makers. The interviews revealed that these traditional gender roles often create tension and conflict within families, making it difficult to promote the biblical principle of mutual submission and partnership. A female respondent shared, thus, "In our community, men are often reluctant to participate in family devotions or share household responsibilities. This mindset needs to change for our families to truly reflect Christian values."

4.2.6 Traditional Beliefs and Practices

Another challenge faced by the Family Ministry is the prevalence of traditional beliefs and practices that conflict with Christian teachings. Many families within the Madina District of the Adventist Church seem to adhere to cultural norms that sometimes contradict biblical principles. For instance, practices such as polygamy, ritualistic ceremonies, and patriarchal dominance can undermine the Christian ideals of monogamy, spiritual equality, and mutual respect within the family unit. During the interviews, several members expressed concerns about the deep-rooted traditional beliefs that still influence family dynamics and decision-making. One respondent stated, "Our culture is rich and diverse, but some aspects of it do not align with our faith. It becomes challenging to convince families to let go of these practices and fully embrace Christian values."

4.2.7 Differences in values and perspectives (generational gaps)

Generational gaps present a significant challenge in promoting family unity and spiritual growth. Younger generations often have different values, perspectives, and lifestyles compared to their parents and grandparents. These differences lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and a disconnect between family members. Interviewees frequently mentioned the difficulty of bridging the gap between older and younger family members. One parent remarked, "Our children are growing up in a different world than we did. They are influenced by modern technology, social media, and different cultural values. It is challenging to maintain a balance between our traditional beliefs and their modern way of thinking."

4.2.8 Negative Media Influences

Christian families confront an additional challenge emanating from the pervasive influence of negative media representations, which inundate homes with anti-Christian cultural narratives. The phenomenon of globalization has facilitated the unrestricted dissemination of alternative value systems, undermining traditional family ethics and eroding cherished values. In this digital age, children are inundated with cultural messages and norms propagated by media platforms, shaping their perceptions and judgments of societal values. The authority of parents is often undermined by prevailing non-Christian ideologies, perpetuating discordant familial dynamics.¹¹²

Interviewees from the Family Ministry of Madina District expressed concern about the impact of secular media on their families. One parent noted, "Our children are constantly exposed to secular media that promotes values and behaviors contrary to our faith. It is challenging to shield them from these influences and instill Christian values in them." Others complained about the fact

¹¹² Stuart R. Poyntz and Michael Hoechsmann, "Children's Media Culture in a Digital Age," *Sociology Compass* 5, no. 7 (2011): 488–98, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2011.00393.x>.

that some youths have purposed not to marry within the church and insist on marrying from other denominations or faith. This they attribute to the pervasive presence of secular values and lifestyles in the media that undermine Christian teachings and values, leading to moral and spiritual decline within families. Television shows, movies, music, and social media often promote materialism, individualism, and behaviors that are contrary to biblical principles.

4.2.9 Migration and Disintegration of Families

The Family Ministry grapples with the formidable challenge of migration of its members and the resultant disintegration of communal and corporate living structures; the Madina District is no exception. As noted by scholars Betty Bigombe and Gilbert M. Khadiagala, internal migration constitutes a significant aspect of the livelihood strategies adopted by millions of families across the continent. Over the years, the shift from rural to urban areas has served as a crucial avenue for accessing job opportunities, upward social mobility, and income augmentation. The demographic landscape reflects this trend, with the proportion of sub-Saharan Africans residing in urban areas surging from 11 per cent in 1950 to 32 per cent in 1996. Projections by the United Nations suggest that nearly half (49%) of sub-Saharan Africa's populace will be urban dwellers by 2025.¹¹³

One of the Family Ministry leaders of the Madina District during an interview, specified, “our ministerial engagements and counseling sessions with families corroborate the profound impact of migration on Christian families in Africa. The surge in rural-to-urban migration, driven by aspirations for improved economic prospects, has precipitated a surge in absentee spouses within the church. This phenomenon has given rise to a proliferation of “long-distance” marriages, where one or both spouses seek employment opportunities either in urban centers or overseas.

¹¹³ Betty Bigombe and Gilbert M. Khadiagala, “Major Trends Affecting Families in Sub-Saharan Africa,” n.d.

Consequently, the fabric of marriage, family values, and parenting is often compromised as families' grapple with the financial pressures exacerbated by geographical separation".

A study by Sampson Nwaomah in 2014 in the "Challenges and Opportunities of Youth in Africa revealed that, the ramifications of migration-induced separation extend beyond financial strain, permeating into the realms of interpersonal relationships and familial dynamics. Breakdowns in communication, instances of infidelity, delegated parenting with adverse outcomes, domestic strife, and even marital dissolution emerge as distressing consequences of prolonged geographical separation.¹¹⁴

In confronting the multifaceted challenges engendered by migration, Family Ministry is compelled to adopt proactive measures aimed at bolstering familial resilience and cohesion. By addressing the underlying stressors and providing holistic support mechanisms for families navigating the complexities of migration, the Family Ministry endeavors to mitigate the adverse effects and foster the preservation of familial bonds amidst geographical dispersion. Through targeted interventions and pastoral care initiatives, the Family Ministry strives to fortify the familial fabric and uphold the sanctity of marriage and parenting within the African context.

Conclusion

This chapter delved into the successes and challenges faced by the Adventist Family Ministry in the Madina District. The Ministry's successes were highlighted through initiatives such as promoting family devotions, encouraging church marriages, enhancing family unity, empowering families as societal models, and passing on the faith heritage. These efforts significantly foster spiritual growth, cohesion, and resilience within the Adventist community.

¹¹⁴ Sampson M Nwaomah, "Challenges and Opportunities of Youth in Africa," *US-China Foreign Language* 12, no. 6 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.17265/1539-8080/2014.06.009>.

Conversely, the chapter also explored substantial challenges such as financial constraints, marital issues, socio-cultural barriers, external influences, and family disintegration. These obstacles highlight the complex socio-economic and cultural dynamics the Family Ministry must navigate to support families' spiritual and relational well-being effectively. The analysis, based on interviews and relevant literature, provided a balanced view of the Family Ministry's current state. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing strategies to enhance the Ministry's effectiveness and support the Adventist community's spiritual and relational well-being.



CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed synthesis of the findings, recommendations, and conclusions drawn from the research on the Family Ministry within the Seventh - day Adventist (SDA) Church, with a specific focus on the Madina District. It builds on the preceding chapters by summarizing the effectiveness of the Ministry, the challenges faced, and suggesting actionable steps to improve its operations. The recommendations are designed to enhance the Ministry's impact on family well-being, spiritual growth, and community engagement, and to address key issues such as youth disengagement, confidentiality, and resource constraints. The chapter concludes by highlighting the significance of the findings and suggesting future research directions to explore the long-term impact of the Family Ministry.

5.1 Summary of Findings

5.1.1 Effectiveness of the Family Ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

5.1.1.1 Awareness and Engagement

- Knowledge of the Ministry

A significant number of church members from the three SDA congregations (Churches A, B, and C) reported being well aware of the Family Ministry's existence and purpose. The ministry is known for offering counseling, educational programs on marriage and family

life, and for guiding members preparing for marriage. This high level of awareness demonstrates that the ministry has effectively positioned itself as a vital resource for addressing marital challenges and fostering stronger family relationships within the church.

- **Participation in Programs**

Most couples interviewed actively participate in Family Ministry programs, which include open forums on family issues, marriage education seminars, and peace-building initiatives within homes. These programs have been instrumental in helping families resolve conflicts, learn from others' experiences, and gain new perspectives on marital roles and responsibilities. The practical application of biblical principles shared during these sessions has proved effective in strengthening marriages and promoting harmonious family dynamics.

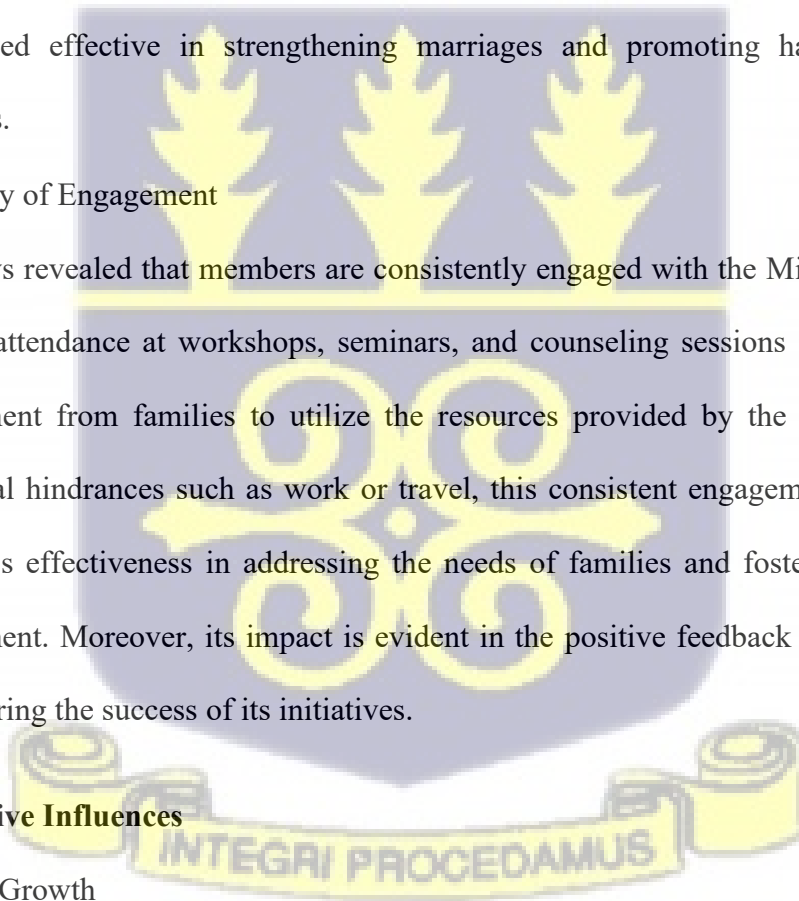
- **Frequency of Engagement**

Interviews revealed that members are consistently engaged with the Ministry's activities. Regular attendance at workshops, seminars, and counseling sessions indicates a strong commitment from families to utilize the resources provided by the Ministry. Despite occasional hindrances such as work or travel, this consistent engagement highlights the Ministry's effectiveness in addressing the needs of families and fostering a supportive environment. Moreover, its impact is evident in the positive feedback from participants, underscoring the success of its initiatives.

5.1.1.2 Positive Influences

- **Spiritual Growth**

The Family Ministry is successful in fostering spiritual growth within families by promoting Christ-centered homes. Couples reported that the Ministry's emphasis on



regular family devotions, Bible studies, and prayer has had a profound impact on their spiritual lives. The teachings encourage families to prioritize their relationship with God, which in turn strengthens their relationships with one another.

- Overall Well-being

Programs that address responsible living, the upbringing of children, and maintaining peace at home have contributed to the overall well-being of families within the Madina District. Specific teachings, such as from Colossians 3:18, which emphasizes marital harmony and respect, have been particularly influential. Many families expressed gratitude for the practical guidance offered by the Ministry, which has created more harmonious households and strengthened family bonds.

5.2. Challenges Facing the Family Ministry

Despite the positive outcomes, several challenges continue to hinder the full effectiveness of the Family Ministry in the Madina District.

5.2.1 Youth Disengagement

Findings from the study reveal that youth disengagement is a critical issue facing the Family Ministry. Many younger church members perceive the Ministry's programs as outdated and irrelevant to their lives. This perception stems from several factors:

- Perception of Irrelevance

The youth feel that the Ministry's focus on traditional family structures and values does not adequately address their contemporary concerns, such as building careers, navigating modern relationships, and managing mental health in a digital world. The Ministry's

current programming does not seem to resonate with their unique experiences and challenges, which leads to a decline in participation.

- **Generational Gap**

There is a clear generational disconnect between the Ministry's leadership and the youth. Most leaders are older and may not fully understand the evolving needs of younger members. This lack of representation has led to feelings of alienation among the youth, who feel that their voices and concerns are not adequately addressed within the Ministry.

5.2.2 Confidentiality Concerns

Another finding shows that confidentiality is a major concern for many couples and families seeking counseling through the Family Ministry. Some participants expressed reluctance to share personal information due to past breaches of trust. In some cases, sensitive information has reportedly been shared within the church community, leading to embarrassment or further conflict. This breach of confidentiality deters families from seeking the help they need, particularly for deeply personal issues such as marital strife or abuse.

5.2.3 Resource Constraints

Limited financial resources are a significant barrier to the Ministry's ability to expand its programs and services. Findings reveal that, the Ministry often lacks the funds to organize frequent events, hire professional counselors, or develop new educational materials. This lack of funding also impacts the availability of private counseling spaces, exacerbating concerns about confidentiality and limiting the Ministry's capacity to serve all members effectively.

5.2.4 Resistance to New Ideas

Resistance from older church members and leadership poses a challenge to adopting new approaches within the Ministry. Findings from the study revealed that, traditional practices are

deeply entrenched, and there is often skepticism toward more contemporary methods of counseling or youth engagement. This resistance limits the Ministry's ability to evolve and address the changing needs of its congregation, particularly in areas such as mental health support or digital literacy.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed to improve the effectiveness of the Family Ministry in the Madina District.

5.3.1 Improving Youth Engagement

One of the most pressing challenges is the disengagement of the youth. To address this, the following strategies are recommended:

- **Tailored Programs for Youth**

The Ministry should design programs that are relevant to the current needs of younger members. Topics such as career planning, mental health, relationships in the digital age, and social media pressures should be incorporated into the Ministry's offerings. Interactive workshops and social events could help make these programs more appealing. Including topics that directly relate to the challenges and realities faced by the youth will help bridge the gap between generations.

- **Youth Leadership Involvement**

Integrating youth representatives into the Ministry's leadership structure can help ensure that their voices are heard and their concerns addressed. By involving youth in the decision-making process, the Ministry can create a sense of ownership and responsibility among younger members. This approach will also help build trust between the youth and the ministry's leadership, fostering greater engagement.

- Utilizing Technology

Leveraging technology is another way to increase youth participation. The Ministry should consider creating digital spaces, such as social media groups or online forums, where youth can engage with one another and with Ministry leaders. Virtual seminars, webinars, and podcasts could also provide more flexible options for participation, especially for those who are unable to attend in-person events.

5.3.2 Enhancing Confidentiality and Trust

To address concerns about confidentiality, the Ministry must take concrete steps to ensure that all counseling sessions and personal interactions are handled with the utmost discretion.

- Confidentiality Training

All Family Ministry leaders and counselors should undergo confidentiality training to ensure that they fully understand the importance of protecting personal information. This training should include guidelines on how to handle sensitive issues and clear protocols for reporting any breaches of confidentiality.

- Private Counseling Spaces

The Ministry should prioritize the creation of private, secure spaces for counseling sessions. This could involve repurposing existing church facilities or seeking external funding to construct new spaces dedicated to counseling. Ensuring that couples and families have access to confidential environments will encourage more members to seek help without fear of exposure.

5.3.3 Addressing Resource Constraints

To overcome the financial limitations currently hindering the ministry, the following steps are recommended:

- Fundraising Initiatives

The Ministry should explore new fundraising opportunities, such as organizing charity events, seeking donations from local businesses, or applying for grants from religious or community organizations. These funds could be used to develop new programs, hire professional counselors, and improve the Ministry's infrastructure.

- Partnerships with External Organizations.

Forming partnerships with external organizations, such as NGOs or mental health institutions, could provide the Family Ministry with access to additional resources. These partnerships could also open up new avenues for professional development, allowing ministry leaders to receive training on issues such as mental health, family dynamics, and counseling techniques.

5.3.4 Overcoming Resistance to New Ideas

Resistance to change within the church is a common challenge, particularly when it comes to introducing more contemporary approaches to ministry.

- Engaging Church Elders

To overcome this resistance, it is essential to engage church elders in discussions about the future direction of the Family Ministry. By involving them in the decision-making process and presenting evidence of the benefits of new approaches, such as case studies from other congregations, the ministry can build support for innovation.

- Implementing Pilot Programs

implementing pilot programs that incorporate new ideas on a small scale can help demonstrate their effectiveness without causing widespread disruption. If these programs

prove successful, they can be gradually expanded to include more members of the congregation.

5.3.5 Incorporating Local Cultural Context

Understanding and integrating local cultural factors into the Family Ministry's programs is crucial for their success.

- **Cultural Sensitivity Training**

Family Ministry leaders should undergo training in cultural sensitivity to ensure that they are aware of the unique challenges faced by families in the Madina District. This training should focus on the cultural norms and values that shape family dynamics in the local context, and provide leaders with strategies for addressing these challenges in a respectful and effective manner.

- **Tailored Programs for Local Communities.**

The ministry should develop programs that are specifically tailored to the cultural context of the Madina District. For example, addressing common issues such as extended family dynamics, the role of traditional marriage practices, or the influence of local customs on parenting can greatly enhance the Ministry's relevance to the community. By aligning its programs with the specific cultural needs and expectations of the Madina District, the ministry can foster deeper engagement and build stronger relationships with its members.

5.3.6 Supporting Mental Health and Well-being

Given the increasing awareness of mental health issues in today's society, the Family Ministry should prioritize incorporating mental health support into its programs. This is especially relevant

for addressing youth disengagement and supporting families facing emotional and psychological challenges.

- Mental Health Awareness Campaigns

The Ministry should organize mental health awareness campaigns to reduce the stigma around mental health issues within the church. These campaigns can involve workshops, seminars, and guest speakers from mental health professionals who can offer guidance on coping strategies, stress management, and emotional well-being.

- Professional Counseling Services

Given the complex nature of some family and marital issues, the Ministry should consider employing or partnering with professional counselors or psychologists. These experts can provide specialized support for families dealing with mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, or trauma, which may be beyond the scope of traditional pastoral counseling.

5.4 Real-Life Experiences and Case Studies

The research findings are made more relatable by the inclusion of real-life experiences shared by members of the Family Ministry in the Madina District. These narratives highlight both the successes and challenges faced by the Ministry, and provide valuable insights into how it affects the lives of its members.

Case Study 1: The Story of Kofi and Ama

Kofi and Ama, a married couple in their mid-30s, have been active participants in the Family Ministry for several years. They credit the Ministry's counseling services for helping them navigate a difficult period in their marriage. "We were on the verge of separation," Ama recalls.

"We were arguing constantly, and it felt like there was no way out." They attended a series of counseling sessions offered by the Family Ministry, where they were able to openly discuss their issues in a supportive and non-judgmental environment.

"The counselor helped us see things from each other's perspective," Kofi explains. "We started to understand that our problems weren't just about who was right or wrong, but about how we were communicating." Over time, they were able to rebuild trust and restore their relationship. Today, they are not only still together but also volunteer as mentors for younger couples in the church, sharing their experiences to help others who may be going through similar challenges.

Case Study 2: Addressing Youth Disengagement – Michael’s Experience

Michael, a 25-year-old member of the church, had stopped attending Family Ministry programs because he felt they did not speak to the challenges he was facing as a young adult. "I did not see how marriage seminars were relevant to me," he says. "I was more concerned about figuring out my career, dealing with social media pressures, and managing stress."

However, after the ministry introduced a new series of workshops focused on issues relevant to young adults – such as personal development, career building, and mental health – Michael’s interest was rekindled. "It was like the Ministry finally understood what we, as young people, needed," he says. Today, Michael is an active participant in these programs and is even ready to joined the Family Ministry committee, to help shape future events for his peers.

Case Study 3: Overcoming Confidentiality Concerns – Nana and Efua’s Journey.

Nana and Efua, both in their 40s, had avoided seeking help from the Family Ministry for years due to fears about confidentiality. "We had heard stories about people’s private issues being

discussed outside of counseling sessions," Efua explains. "We didn't want to risk our personal problems becoming church gossip." When the Ministry introduced new confidentiality protocols, including private counseling spaces and mandatory confidentiality training for all counselors, Nana and Efua decided to give it a try.

"We were relieved to find that things had changed," Nana says. "Our sessions were completely private, and we felt safe opening up about the issues we were facing." The couple received the help they needed and have since encouraged other families to take advantage of the Ministry's services, emphasizing the importance of trust and discretion in seeking support.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Research

While this research has provided valuable insights into the operations of the Family Ministry in the Madina District, there are several areas that warrant further exploration. Future research could focus on:

1. **Long-term Impact Studies:** Investigating the long-term impact of Family Ministry programs on family dynamics, spiritual growth, and community engagement. Longitudinal studies would provide deeper insights into the sustained effects of the ministry's interventions.
2. **Youth-Centered Research:** Conducting in-depth studies focused on youth perceptions of Family Ministry and their specific needs within the church. Such research could help develop more targeted programs to prevent youth disengagement.
3. **Comparative Studies:** Comparing the effectiveness of Family Ministries across different districts or regions within the SDA Church. This would help identify best practices and

areas for improvement, as well as provide a broader understanding of how cultural and social factors influence the success of such Ministries.

4. **Mental Health Interventions:** Further research into the role of the Family Ministry in addressing mental health issues within families. Exploring partnerships with mental health professionals and the potential for integrating mental health support into Ministry services could significantly enhance the Ministry's overall impact.
5. **Impact of Digitalization:** Studying the potential impact of digital tools, such as virtual counseling, online workshops, and social media engagement, on the effectiveness of Family Ministry programs, particularly in reaching younger generations.

By continuing to adapt and evolve, the Family Ministry can remain relevant and effective in addressing the needs of families within the Seventh-day Adventist Church and beyond.

5.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the Family Ministry of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in the Madina District plays a vital role in supporting families, promoting spiritual growth, and strengthening relationships within the community. Through its various programs and services, the Ministry has helped many families navigate challenges, deepen their faith, and foster harmony in their homes. However, there are still significant areas for improvement, particularly in addressing the needs of younger members, ensuring confidentiality, and overcoming financial and resource constraints. The findings of this research underscore the importance of adapting the Ministry's programs to meet the evolving needs of its congregation, particularly the youth. By incorporating relevant topics such as mental health, career development, and modern relationship dynamics, the Ministry can become more inclusive and accessible to all members. Additionally, by improving

confidentiality protocols, enhancing resource availability, and encouraging the adoption of new ideas, the Ministry can continue to be a powerful force for good within the SDA Church and the wider community.



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APPENDIX

Department for the Study of Religions
University of Ghana,
Legon.

29th June, 2025

The Dean,
School of Graduate Studies,
University of Ghana.

STUDENT RESPONSE TO MEMO

I, Anomwaa Paulina, write to express my deepest appreciation to the School of Graduate Studies, University of Ghana, and the Department for the Study of Religions for the assistance provided towards the completion of my thesis and for the comments specified in the reports received from both the Internal and External Examiners.

I would like to assure you that all corrections were made under the supervision of Dr. Harry K. Agbanu as per the examiner’s comments indicated in the report.

Please see the following:

Examiner 1

NO.	COMMENTS	STUDENT’S RESPONSE TO COMMENTS
7v	The thesis cannot be published in its present form. It needs much editorial work which should take care of the stylistic errors as well as a few grammatical flaws (MARKED IN THE THESIS). Besides, the slip-+ups listed below should be rectified.	A comprehensive editorial revision has been done to address all stylistic inconsistencies and grammatical flaws identified in the thesis.
Additional comments	FROM THE ABSTRACT: The problem of the thesis is hardly stated. What is the lacuna you want to fill up? This should be	The abstract has been revised to explicitly state the research problem and the specific gap the study seeks to

<p>FOR RESTRUCTURING AND AMENDMENT</p> <p>(1)</p>	<p>incorporated in the first paragraph.</p>	<p>address. In response to the examiner's comment, the following sentence has been incorporated into the first paragraph: "There is limited empirical research on its practical impact at the local church level in Ghana, particularly in addressing contemporary family challenges. This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating..." This revision ensures that the lacuna is clearly articulated and situates the study within the broader academic context. Additional modifications were made throughout the abstract to enhance clarity, coherence, and alignment with the study's objectives.</p>
<p>(2)</p>	<p>STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM (p.3): Missing from this section are the following: (i) Who and who have worked on this subject matter previously? (ii) What did they say about the subject? (iii) What is the missing gap which you are trying to study?</p>	<p>The Statement of the Problem section has been revised to address all three aspects identified by the examiner. First, relevant scholars who have previously worked on the subject of Family Ministry; particularly within the Seventh-day Adventist context have been cited. Second, their major contributions and findings have been summarised to provide a scholarly foundation for the current study. Third, the specific research gap has been clearly identified, as reflected in the revised statement: "In light of this, the current study seeks to fill the gap in the existing literature by evaluating the practical strategies, successes, and limitations of the Family Ministry in the Madina District of the SDA Church." These revisions aim to position the research within existing academic discourse and clarify its relevance and contribution.</p>

(3)	UNDER THE SCOPE (p.7): (i) State clearly the reason for your choice of Madina; (ii) What is the intersection between the place and the subject of discussion?	The Scope of the Study section has been revised to clearly justify the selection of the Madina District. Additionally, the intersection between the place and the subject of discussion is now clearly articulated
(5)	The authors mentioned in the related literature and in other chapters should be critically interrogated one after the other	The literature review and other relevant sections of the thesis have been revised to ensure a more critical and analytical engagement with the authors cited
(6)	Stick to British orthography. Write centred instead of centered, programme instead of program, Youth Centred Research instead of Youth Centered Research and so on.	The entire thesis has been carefully reviewed to ensure consistency with British English orthography, as recommended. Corrections have been made to terms such as “centered” (now “centred”), “program” (now “programme”), and similar expressions throughout the document. All spelling and usage now conform to British English standards.

Examiner 2

NO.	COMMENTS	STUDENT’S RESPONSE TO COMMENTS
7ii	iii. Citations and references. Citations and referencing are poorly done with most citations lacking page numbers, some lacking publishing details, inconsistency in author details etc. Some of these are underlined in the manuscript for the candidate’s attention.	The issues raised regarding citations and referencing have been thoroughly addressed. All in-text citations have been reviewed to ensure the inclusion of page numbers where applicable, complete publishing details, and consistency in author names and formatting. Particular attention was given to areas marked in the manuscript. Additionally, the reference list has been updated to align fully with the required citation style (Chicago), ensuring academic rigour and accuracy throughout the thesis.

Yours faithfully,

Anomwaa Paulina

Supervisor's Name: Dr. Harry K. Agbanu

Supervisor's Signature:

