

# The best small-group ministry in the local church

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As a pastor, I've noticed over the years 'pie one of the main i-aisoiis why people stop going to church is the lack of friends and sig-liificative relationships in the e-\_church. Loneliness and church should be an oxymoron.

"The Seventh-day Adventist Church is losing members at an alarming rate. Even though evangelism in our churches is gaining people, we are losing about 49 out of every 100 baptized," writes Kirk Thomas.\* We are losing noiibre membi es because of the lack of meaningful relationships in the church.

Recently, a friend who would soon be retiring and moving away went to visit a church in which no one had any v isual contact with him. The following Sabbath, he went to another church. The people were friendly. One man asked if he had any plans for lunch and told him not to make any other plans, as he was coming with his family to eat. I'd call that a warm welcome!

Our current post-pandelic culture makes it more difficult to develop meaningful personal relationships. The coniiiiercial center is Ainazon. The movie theater is Netflix. The office is Zoom. And the church service is Still' Internet.

## The church as a social club

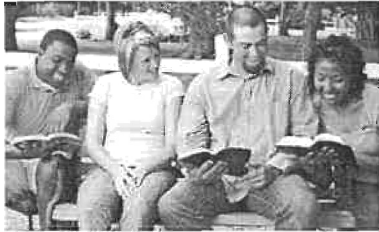
Some say we go to church to meet God and that it shouldn't be used cornliie a social club. I disagree. Acts 2:42 says: "And they persevered in the doctrine and like union of the apostles, and in the breaking of bread and in the prayers" (KJV).

The social aspect in our churches is more \*rand and deeper than we realize. In fact, this verse says that, important as doctrine is, it's not the only thing the early Christians cared about. I As firmly had /roiiiiiiiiri (gi ec for "brotherhood").

Acts 2:46, 47 continues: "They ate bread in their houses and ate together with a joyful and sincere heart, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added daily to their number those who were saved.

People should join the church because of the doctrines (or truth), but they should stay because of the friends they have in the church.

After the pandemic, people felt more disconnected than ever and some of them don't feel the same. But for those who do, there should be a small-group ministry where they feel "relatively immediately" connected - not only for Bible study, but also to socialize and have fun. This little group has been established for more than studying theology - it should also be a place to "go deep" and have fun.



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## Sabbath school classes as small-group ministry

Several years ago, my wife, Janet, and I had just moved to Columbia, Maryland, and were looking for a church to feel at home. In our search, we discovered the one we were looking for, all thanks to the Sabbath School class. They gave us a warm welcome to their class. We join in their potlucks; we go for walks on Sabbath afternoons. We play board games on Saturday nights; we go camping together and celebrate special occasions together. Our Sabbath School class goes beyond the Sabbath morning hour, because it has a koinonia.

If every Sabbath School class were this engaging, many of our churches would need to have a few services. Why? People are looking for meaningful Christian friendships that go beyond Sabbath morning. It should be a requirement for the local church to plug every newly baptized member into an active Sabbath School class.

One day in the month of January this year, Maryland went through a wave of variant COVID-19 Omicron disease, and my wife and I both got sick. Our Sabbath School class showed they cared for us by bringing food. The best remedy for COVID loneliness is an active Sabbath School class looking out for each other.

And for us, going to Sabbath school is not a duty but a pleasure.

\*Kirk Thomas. "Feed, Hold, Recover: Can You Hear Their Cry?" *Ministry*, April 2019,

<https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2019/04/Nurture-retention-1>

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