



**CHURCH OF REFUGE:
A SUPPORT MINISTRY FOR YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS**

Ron Whitehead
Executive Director, Center for Youth Evangelism
Assistant Professor, Seminary Church Ministries
Assistant to the President for Spiritual Life, Andrews University

With Jeff Boyd
Coordinator, Church of Refuge
Director, WeCare Missions

Abstract

At least 40 to 50 percent of youth and young adults leave the Seventh-day Adventist church. To reverse this trend by helping local congregations meet the spiritual, social and community impact needs of youth and young adults, the Center for Youth Evangelism proposes to launch Church of Refuge (COR). This organization will support churches in incorporating nine principles in their master planning. After demonstrating the inclusion of these principles, local congregations will be certified as Churches of Refuge and will be promoted to youth and young adults through web and print materials.

Issue

Adventist young people are leaving the church at alarming rates. The Youth Ministries Department of the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference states that “they are leaving the church like water between our fingers” (*Global Youth Ministry—7 Strategic Themes & Emphases*, 2006-2010).

Roger Dudley (2000), who has researched the church-going habits of Seventh-day Adventist youth and young adults for over thirty years, reports that “40 percent to 50 percent of those who are baptized members in the midteens will drop out of the church by the time they are halfway through their twenties” (p. 60).

Expanding the analysis to include protestant churches across the United States, Rainer and Rainer (2008) report “more than two-thirds of young churchgoing adults in America drop out of church between the ages of eighteen and twenty two!” (p. 2).

Clearly, this is a national trend that can no longer be ignored. Its breadth and severity mean that we must give our best energy, clearest thinking and deepest prayers to dealing with this problem or this emerging generation will continue to slip through our hands “like water.”

Proposed Solution

In an effort to reverse this trend, The Center for Youth Evangelism is launching a ministry support organization, Church of Refuge (COR), with the purpose of (a) helping churches deliver effective young adult ministry and (b) assisting young adults to find those churches that are prepared to support their spiritual growth. These goals will be achieved by certifying qualified churches and by promoting these churches to young adults via the COR website.

Theological Background

As Israel shifted its focus from the wilderness to Canaan, the promised land, Moses established an infrastructure for justice by calling for three cities of refuge (Deuteronomy 19:1-2). Individuals who had accidentally killed another person could escape vengeful family members by seeking shelter in one of these cities where they would find security and community (19:4-6).

Easy access to a city of refuge was of paramount importance (19:6). Consequently, Moses made three key provisions regarding access. First, he ordered that roads be built to these cities (19:3a) so those on the run would have an easier journey. Moreover, “road signs had to be put up on all crossings showing the way to the refuge... and all roads leading to a city of refuge had to be straight and level and always kept in good repair...” (Skolnik, 2007, p. 742).

Second, the locations of the three cities were strategically placed by dividing the land into three regions (19:3b). This ensured that no one would have to travel a great distance to find rest and security. “The cities of refuge were all upon the level plain or in valleys, in well-known areas. They were at convenient distances from one another, for the benefit of all the tribes” (Nichol, 1976, p. 278).

Third, in Deuteronomy 19:8, Moses made plans for increasing the number of cities of refuge from three to six to match the expanding territory given by God. Because the existence of safe cities was so important, provision had to be made for future adaptations so the population would continue to have access to the desired benefits. The cities of refuge must be where the people were, not simply where tradition had originally placed them.

Moses further confirmed this plan by designating six of the Levite’s 48 towns as cities of refuge—three on each side of the Jordan River (Numbers 35:6, 14). Among other considerations,

he instructed that the cities were to be inclusive; they were for Israelites, aliens and temporary residents (v. 15). Later, Joshua implemented the plan by adding Kedesh, Shechem, Kiriatharba (Hebron), to the three cities originally named by Moses—Bezer, Ramoth Gilead and Golan (Joshua 20: 7-8; Deuteronomy 4:41-43). See Appendix A for a map of these cities.

One significant benefit to using cities belonging to the priests was that these societal refugees could receive training from the religious leaders. “Hence, the place of refuge could become... a source of real blessing to the slayer as the priests and Levites taught him the way of Jehovah” (Nichol, 1976, p. 278).

Following this tradition, *churches of refuge* are inclusive, accepting, community-oriented, strategically placed, safe, spiritual environments for young adults. They are faith communities that accept people for who they are, where they are. That is, friendship and acceptance are not given or withheld due to personal history, appearance, current belief system or other factors. Also, members know they will not be disrespected or excluded because of mistakes, questions or doubts. In these communities designed to meet their needs, young adults can seek God and grow in Him.

Furthermore, CORs are safe places for members to experiment with innovative spiritual expressions and community outreach. Some projects will succeed, while others will not; however, creativity continues to be fostered and appreciated. CORs take seriously Ellen White’s (1946) statement that, “God would have new and untried methods followed” (p. 125).

While the Jewish “cities of refuge were a sanctuary, and thus a type of Christ,” (Nichol, 1978, p. 947), churches of refuge are modern spiritual sanctuaries where young people are free to thrive in Christ.

Organizational Description

Church of Refuge is a ministry organization established by the Center for Youth Evangelism that will perform the functions of consulting, certifying and marketing. The mission of Churches of Refuge is to help churches provide meaningful and relevant young adult ministry with the goal of keeping Adventist youth in the church while also reaching out to those who are not currently participating in an Seventh-day Adventist congregation. The target age range is 18 to 35.

Church of Refuge is also a designation given to a local church that can demonstrate it is following nine principles established by Church of Refuge (described below). These churches are also referred to as COR-certified churches.

Jimmy Phillips (2008) is an example of the type of person who could benefit from a Church of Refuge. Having recently graduated from college and facing a move to California to start a new job, he shares, “I don’t know where I’ll be going to church, or who I’ll meet when I get there.” He has other questions: “And what if I go to church? Will anyone notice I’m new and invite me over for lunch? Will people stop and ask me how I’m doing? I mean, really ask me how I’m doing...?”

A Church of Refuge understands that young adults have options in the area of spiritual growth. A local Adventist church is not just competing with the next closest SDA church for young members. It is also competing with other denominations, religions, social groups and even leisure activities like sleeping, shopping and attending sporting events. Churches cannot presume that college students and young professionals will choose to spend their free time at church simply because it is the right thing to do.

With this insight, CORs strive to meet young adults' spiritual, social and community impact needs. Churches must also develop the support systems that empower young people and makes it possible to meet these important needs. Diagram 1 illustrates how these factors form a model for considering young adult ministry.

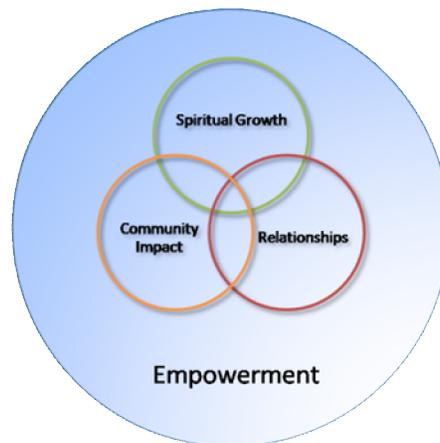


Diagram 1: Young Adult Ministry Factors

Neglecting any one of these areas will result in a ministry set that leaves some vital need unmet, making it more likely that young adults will join a different faith community or no community at all.

The four components of this diagram can be broken down into nine critical factors. *Spiritual Growth* includes (1) the Sabbath experience and (2) discipleship that takes place throughout the week. *Relationships* is composed of (3) acceptance, (4) community and (5) support. *Community Impact* is (6) volunteer service to church members, the local community and the global community. Finally, the primary *Empowerment* factors are (7) leadership, (8) budget and (9) a commitment to change.

These nine principles are supported by biblical teaching, pastoral experience, the writings of Ellen White and original research conducted by the Center for Youth Evangelism. For a

comparison of these nine principles with both the SDA GC Youth Ministries Department Strategies 2006-2010 and Natural Church Development, please see Appendix D.

Principle 1—The Sabbath Experience

“CORs are committed to providing a meaningful Sabbath experience for young adults.” That is, CORs ensure that the spiritual needs of local young adults are met during the Sabbath hours. This may include Friday night vespers, Sabbath School classes, corporate worship, nontraditional worship services, and Sabbath afternoon activities. Because these needs will be expressed differently for each congregation, leaders must plan meetings and events based on the needs and desires of the local young adults. For example, Korean, Latino, urban, rural, and university churches may all be CORs but have very different ministry mixes.

One church may emphasize Friday evening vespers, another group may desire a simple, streamlined and upbeat church service, while yet another church may have discussion groups at a local bookstore before meeting at the church building for a traditional worship service.

Ellen White (1954) encourages us on the topic of Sabbath observance by stating, “All who love God should do what they can to make the Sabbath a delight, holy and honorable” (p. 536). With more details she admonishes (1893/1894):

If there are those who prolong religious exercises to weariness, they are leaving impressions upon the mind of the youth, that would associate religion with all that is dry, unsocial, and uninteresting.... Sabbath meetings, may be, without constant care and unless vitalized by the Spirit of God, the most formal, dry, and bitter mixture.... (p. 47)

To better understand the general needs of young adults, The Center for Youth Evangelism conducted a study that asked respondents to rate the importance of 28 variables in

determining their desire to attend a given church. Table 1 shows the importance of six Sabbath-related factors assessed in the survey (1=Not Important, 2=Somewhat Important, 3=Very Important). See Appendix B for the list of 28 items on the survey with their corresponding scores.

Factor	Score
Preaching	2.73
Worship Service Style	2.46
Music	2.44
Sabbath School – Adult	2.38
Sabbath School – Children	2.24
Greeters	2.15
Parking	1.64
Interior Decoration/Appearance	1.57
Other Facilities (gym, commons, etc.)	1.43
Proximity to SDA Education	1.40
Church Architecture	1.40
Resource Center/Library	1.29

Table 1: Importance of Sabbath-related Factors

The highest score in this category is for Preaching (2.73), and of all twenty-eight factors, it is ranked second only behind Accepting Atmosphere (2.88). Rainer and Rainer (2008) report, “Our research plainly shows that the better a pastor connects with the students of the church through his sermons, the more likely they are to stay in the church” (p. 41). Specifically, their research indicates that during the sermon pastors need “to reach out intentionally to the under-twenty-two age bracket” (p. 41).

While these scores reveal the importance of each element, they do not specify the characteristics valued by each participant. In fact, the range of comments made by respondents demonstrates that there is no single preferred method or way to do each of these things (see Appendix C). This reinforces the need to understand the specific young adults a church is striving to care for.

Principle 2—Discipleship

“CORs are committed to discipleship through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.”

CORs encourage authentic spiritual growth by teaching members how to personally live for and like Jesus. Leaders model authentic spirituality, and members are led to grow in the Spirit as they connect with their Creator and learn to live according to Kingdom principles. It follows that involvement in ministry is a key component of discipleship.

Discipleship is following Jesus and learning to be increasingly similar to him in priorities, motivation and action. This definition includes personal elements, such as solitary prayer, meditation and the study of God’s Word. Ellen White (1907) affirms this need by teaching, “Into the lives of the workers there must be brought frequent periods of reflection, study, and prayer... Now is your time for developing deep spirituality” (p. 11).

Additionally, discipleship also involves the community of faith through informal conversations, formal mentoring relationships, mid-week meetings, home Bible study groups and other collective experiences.

Finally, ministry involvement is a critical dimension of discipleship. After the disciples had spent time walking, talking, eating and living with Jesus in a safe community, he sent them out in groups of two to begin doing the works they had been observing (Luke 9:1-6; Mark 6:7-13). Upon returning from their mission, Jesus saw they needed rest, so he took them to a quiet place to eat and debrief (Mark 6:30-32). Later he sent out 72 disciples to do evangelism (Luke 10:1). McLaren (2002) connects discipleship and evangelism by stating, “*Making disciples* is the more biblical term for *evangelism* and the original way of saying ‘engaging in spiritual friendship’” (p. 61).

Kimball (2003) reinforces the need to be explicit about discipleship with emerging populations in the context of the church. “*Our definition of discipleship must be clear and known by everyone in our church.* Each church should have a written definition, known by everyone, which serves as a reference point for every decision, program, and strategy” (p. 215).

Table 2 is a summary of scores for the six elements of discipleship (i.e., spiritual growth and ministry) that the Center for Youth Evangelism survey assessed. Again, these scores reveal the importance of each factor where 1 is Not Important and 3 is Very Important.

Factor	Score
Spiritual Atmosphere	2.69
Small Groups	2.19
Ministry Involvement Opportunities	2.13
Variety of Church Programs	2.10
Evangelistic Activities	1.85
Mission Trips	1.83

Table 2: Importance of Discipleship Factors

Clearly, there is some degree of overlap between the principles of Discipleship and Sabbath. Sabbath School, corporate worship and other Sabbath programs influence discipleship. Furthermore, service to the community is certainly an element in discipleship. However, we believe Sabbath programs, discipleship and volunteer work are sufficiently distinct to warrant separate categories for study, development and assessment.

Principle 3—Acceptance

“CORs are committed to accepting people just as Jesus did.” CORs accept people for who they are, where they are. We embrace all humanity regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, personal history, appearance, odor or other characteristic. We worship a God of variety, and we embrace those who are dissimilar to us.

Regarding moral issues, while we do not approve of sin, we do not believe that perfection is a precondition for friendship. As Chris Blake (2007) writes, “*Acceptance does not mean*

agreement. Jesus accepted the woman caught in adultery (“Neither do I condemn thee.”) when He didn’t agree with her behavior (“Go, and sin no more.”). His acceptance was the catalyst that changed her life” (p. 93).

In his analysis of the reasons why young Adventists leave the church, Dudley (2000) found that one “major theme shared by the dropouts was that they feel unaccepted” (p. 61). This pattern contradicts biblical teaching that we must accept one another (Romans 15:7), love foreigners (Leviticus 19:34), not show favoritism (James 1:2), and not judge (Matthew 7:1). Rainer and Rainer (2008), who studied one thousand young people who had left the church, found that the second highest motivation for leaving was “church members seemed judgmental or hypocritical” (p. 3). The only reason more frequently cited by young people was that they “simply wanted a break from church” (p. 3).

Comparatively, Ellen White (1998) points out "Christ ate with publicans and sinners, as well as with Pharisees. When He was invited to their homes, He accepted the invitation. In this He offended the scribes and Pharisees, who thought that a Jew should not thus forget the wall of partition that tradition had erected. But with God there is no sect or nationality" (p. 236). If ethnicity, social status, and level of religiosity were not factors Jesus deemed important when building friendships for the kingdom, then they should not be our criteria either.

In his book *Under the Overpass*, Mike Yankoski (2005) shares personal experiences that highlight the desire for acceptance. Mike and his friend, Sam, chose to live as homeless vagabonds for several months. During this time they were often ignored or treated contemptuously by Christians on the street and even when visiting churches. “Even at church, we felt isolated because of how we looked, how we smelled, and who people perceived us to be. In fact, walking into a church where we hoped to find genuine fellowship only to be met by

condescension or suspicion or disingenuous flattery was the worst kind of rejection” (p. 158-159).

By contrast, one church near the end of their time on the road showed genuine care through small, simple gestures. “When a petite, white-haired woman saw us enter the room, she walked right over. She gazed up at us with honest delight. ‘I’m so glad you two decided to stay for the potluck,’ she said. ‘I’m Carla. We’ve got lots of food here, so come on, grab a seat, and we’ll start in just a couple of minutes. What are your names?’” (p. 206). This warm welcome, which was followed up with more conversation and engagement, showed Mike and Sam the power of friendliness.

Dan Kimball (2003) shares a moving and personal example of acceptance from his early twenties while living in London when he walked into a local church and met Stuart, the pastor.

Stuart took me under his wing. Picture this unlikely combination: an eighty-three-year-old man, and me, dressed all in black with a very tall pompadour, spiked wrist bands, a metal belt, a skull bolo tie, and thick-soled Creeper shoes. Stuart never seemed to see any of that. He looked right past my exterior and showed me Jesus. And it didn’t matter to me whether Stuart dressed in the latest fashion or whether he knew all the bands I was interested in. What mattered to me was that he loved God and that he unconditionally cared about and loved me. (p. 218)

Participants in the Center for Youth Evangelism’s study on church priorities scored Accepting Atmosphere as the single most important factor to them when choosing a church. The average score for this characteristic was 2.88 on a scale from one to three. One respondent strongly asserted, “If this isn’t there, I am not coming to your church,” and another asked, “If you don’t feel accepted then what’s the point?” Adventist churches must take this factor

seriously if they truly desire to reach youth and young adults with the message of God's saving grace.

The invaluable theme of acceptance can be quite difficult to put into practice. It is one kind of miracle for the Holy Spirit to enable us to accept and reach out to people who we find annoying, frustrating or out of the ordinary. It is another kind of miracle when God gives us wisdom on how to deal with those who are sinning outright.

There are four considerations that should be remembered in situations where we feel we must confront someone about sinful behaviors. First, we must be certain that we are truly dealing with sin, and not a personal preference. Kimball (2007) cautions, "we should be careful not to make judgments based on personal opinions rather than on the clear teaching of scripture. I have talked to many wounded younger Christians who left the church because they were confronted in a legalistic way about extrabiblical things" (p 106).

Second, we must remember that Jesus, our model, was a friend of sinners (Matthew 9:11 & Matthew 11:19). He was not just their doctor or shepherd, but their actual friend. Am I a friend to this person, or am I merely standing as their judge?

Third, we need to understand that before Jesus told people to go and sin no more, he first showed them unbelievable grace and kindness (John 5:14; John 8:11). We would do well to never "straighten someone out" without first showing them genuine care. The old adage is true, "People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care."

Finally, when confronting sin we must always speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). We need to emulate Jesus' unending patience with emotionally, physically and spiritually hurting individuals. It was the religious leaders who pushed the limits of His patience, not the sick, lost and discarded sheep.

Kimball (2007) argues that we should deal with sin openly with younger generations, but in a context of love and concern. He writes:

The churches that I have seen that are well-populated by emerging generations are by no means holding back talking about sin. When the pastors and leaders teach, they say hard things, calling for repentance and calling out sin, but the context is love. When there are relationships and trust-building, emerging generations respond well to being told about sin and repentance.... So I don't advocate holding back when it comes to talking about sin with younger people in the church, but I am saying that we should do it at the right time with the right attitude. (p 110)

Principle 4—Community

“CORs are committed to building community.” Young adults are looking for more than just biblical information when they attend church; they want to share their spiritual journey with a community. Rainer and Rainer (2008) found that “one of the greatest needs within the young adult generation is building relationships and connecting with one another” (p. 37).

Unfortunately, in his research Dudley (2000) found that many young people “felt their church was irrelevant to their social needs. These young adults felt ‘cut off,’ ‘lonely,’ and ‘estranged’ because of the lack of peers their own age at church” (p. 62).

Ellen White (1952) recognized this shortcoming in her day as well. “Christian sociability is altogether too little cultivated by God’s people... By social intercourse acquaintances are formed and friendships contracted which result in a unity of heart and an atmosphere of love which is pleasing in the sight of heaven” (p. 204). She understood that “the warmth of true friendship... is a foretaste of the joys of heaven” (p. 204-205), and that “If we would humble

ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one" (1909, p. 189).

George Barna has extensively studied *mosaics*, individuals born between 1984 and 2002. Regarding mosaics' motivation for church involvement, he states, "Right now their participation is not driven by spiritual opportunity, it's driven by relational opportunity and desiring experiences with their relational tribe" (2008). Consistent with Barna's findings is research done by Rainer and Rainer (2008), which found that "dropouts left because they felt disconnected from the people of the church; those who stayed did so because they felt connected" (p. 37).

Not surprisingly, Community (2.69) was the third highest priority after Acceptance (2.88) and Preaching (2.73) for those who participated in the Center's survey. As one person put it, "For me this is THE reason for church." No church can achieve its potential for the kingdom if it focuses exclusively on meeting spiritual needs and neglects social factors.

Principle 5—Support

"CORs are committed to supporting young adults with their life challenges." CORs are safe faith communities where young adults find emotional and concrete support when dealing with life's stresses and questions. Young adults face challenges such as finding work, developing lasting relationships, dealing with emotional trauma, sorting through sexual questions and even more basic problems like obtaining medical care and personal transportation.

While COR pastors are not professional mental health workers, they are able to deal with personal concerns with tact and respect. Professional referrals are available for issues requiring special training, such as depression, divorce, gender identity and addictions.

While this area scored lower than the other eight principles, it was highly valued by a sizeable portion of respondents. Forty-three percent of participants rated Emotional

Support/Counseling as Very Important, and an additional 36 percent classified it as Somewhat Important. We believe it is imperative to meet this critical need even though its average score (1.8 on a scale of 1 to 3) was well below the other standards' scores.

We are taught in scripture to encourage those who are struggling. “Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Galations 6:2). “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

Finally, Ellen White (1961) is clear about how we should treat those who are discouraged, especially with those who have made mistakes:

There are souls who err, and who feel their shame and their folly. They are hungry for words of encouragement. They look upon their mistakes and errors until they are almost driven to desperation. Instead of ... reproofing and condemning and taking away the last ray of hope that the Sun of Righteousness sheds into their hearts, let your words fall as healing balm upon the bruised soul. Be not like desolating hail that beats down and destroys the tender hope springing up in the hearts. Leave not the hungry, starving soul in his helplessness to perish because you fail to speak words of tenderness and encouragement. (p. 295)

Principle 6—Service

“CORs are committed to demonstrating God’s love through acts of service.” Young adults should be mobilized and trained to do service projects that are meaningful to them and those being served. Taking care of ‘the least of these’ is our way of showing love to Jesus. We help church members, the local community and the global community through volunteerism and

activism. Activities include prison ministries, advocacy for the homeless, literacy programs, environmental stewardship, child mentoring, home renovation, disaster response or any number of other possibilities.

In *The Emerging Church*, Dan Kimball (2003) asks the question, “What is your church’s response to the poor and needy in your town? This type of preaching (and it is preaching) in a post-Christian culture will go far beyond what our words from a stage or pulpit could ever communicate. We need to see preaching in our worship services as the first step toward what our churches preach with their lives in our communities” (p. 195). Again he states, “With emerging generations, I believe that social action must be locked into our core values and incorporated into how we view our mission as a church, both locally and globally” (p. 224).

Kimball again notes this priority in *They Like Jesus but Not the Church* (2007). He has found that “churches attended by emerging generations usually have a strong emphasis on bringing the love of Jesus to others. You see many emerging churches concerned not only with local and global social justice but also with taking action” (p. 110).

The dimension of service and social action on the CYE survey received a score of 2.38, meaning it is between Somewhat Important (2.0) and Very Important (3.0) for young Adventist adults when choosing a church. This age group is looking for integration between biblical teachings and lifestyle; they want to make a difference. Not surprisingly, Sahlin (2007) reports a positive correlation between service and church growth (p. 41).

Regarding ministries of compassion, Ellen White (1898) writes, “The followers of Christ are to labor as He did. We are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and comfort the suffering and afflicted” (p. 350). This is consistent with Jesus’ teaching that His true followers do these things, as well as visit those in prison and welcome the stranger who needs a home (Matthew 25:31-46).

Additionally, James states that caring for orphans and widows is pure religion (James 1:27).

These New Testament teachings on compassion echo the voices of Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah and other Hebrew prophets and spiritual leaders who called for justice in no uncertain terms (Isaiah 1:11-17; Jeremiah 22:16; Ezekiel 16:49; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:8; Proverbs 31:8).

Principle 7—Leadership

“CORs are committed to young adult leadership.” Leadership is the first of the three support factors required for a church to empower its young members, and this includes two components. First, young adults need to become leaders in the church, not merely spectators or consumers of spiritual commodities. This will have many benefits, including developing leaders’ skills, increasing ownership, improving the effectiveness of programs and meetings, and fostering young adult integration with the broader church body.

Second, the head pastor plays a key role in young adult ministry. A church needs leadership to set priorities, guide ministry processes and facilitate required changes. If the lead pastor does not hold young adult ministry as a key concern, then there is little hope of developing an effective, broad-based ministry for this group.

The indispensable value of leadership was discovered by George Barna (2002) when researching churches that moved from decline to positive growth, so called “turnaround” churches. “One of the necessary components is that those churches brought in a new individual to be their primary leader...” Barna defines a leader as someone who “is driven by a vision,” whereas “a teacher is driven by an audience who can be affected by information”.

Barna (2002) believes that a lack of leaders “is one of the driving difficulties we have in most churches in America today. We have good people who are well-educated, good-intentioned and called to ministry, but they are not for the most part leaders. They are teachers, preachers,

counselors, they have good skills, and they certainly have spiritual gifts and they can help people, but they can't lead.”

The importance of church leadership was also recognized by those who participated in the Center’s survey; it ranked 5th out of the 28 factors with a score of 2.55.

Principle 8—Budget

“CORs are committed to investing money in young adult ministry.” Money talks. Budgets tell stories and reveal priorities. Spending money on young adult ministry not only meets specific needs, but also shows these individuals that they are valued. Money is needed to purchase educational and spiritual resources, fund social events, and enable creative outreach. Ellen White (1990) states, "Time is short, and I wish to see the money of our people that is tied up in banks put into circulation where it can help the work of God" (p. 392-393).

A Church of Refuge allocates specific amounts of money per year per young adult listed on the books to this ministry. These funds are used according to the priorities and needs of the group.

Principle 9—Change

“CORS are committed to change that leads to improved young adult ministry.” Styles, priorities, mindsets and values change over time; therefore, ministries must change accordingly. Recognizing that new programs, methods, styles and services will always be needed, innovation and creativity are greatly encouraged. Even God enjoys the power of “new things” (Isaiah 43:19).

What works today may not work two, five or ten years from now. Not only is change and variety necessary to keep the interest of existing members, it also increases the chance of meeting the needs of those not yet attending the church. Pastor Bill Bossert (2007) concludes an

article on how his church learned to care for young adults with the statement, “We know that if we keep doing the same thing over and over again, we’re not where He is. He is on the move. We believe we should be too” (p. 12).

Ellen White (1946) also saw the need for new and creative efforts. “We are to study the field carefully and are not to think that we must follow the same methods in every place.” “Whatever may have been your former practice, it is not necessary to repeat it again and again in the same way. God would have new and untried methods followed” (p. 125).

Certification

In order to be granted status as a Church of Refuge, a local church must register as a member of the Church of Refuge Network.

The next step in the certification process is to complete a written description of how the church is performing in each of the nine areas. Descriptions of activities, trainings, events and plans should be included. This report has been reviewed by COR leadership to determine if the church is adequately integrating the nine principles.

Once the certification team is convinced that the church is truly a safe, supportive and engaging community in which young adults can pursue their spiritual growth, it will receive the Church of Refuge certification and be listed on the COR website.

Re-certification will occur on a yearly basis. Churches must submit an updated report annually on their young adult ministry in order to remain a Church of Refuge. This ensures that as changes occur in church leadership, local young adults and the community, the church will remain relevant for ministry to this demographic.

If the report and site visit for a given church do not sufficiently demonstrate that it can be considered a Church of Refuge, the church may remain in the COR network and continue to

strive for certification. Furthermore, leaders will likely find that access to the website is worth the membership fee even if they will not be able to meet all nine standards in the near-term.

COR Website

Church of Refuge will host a website (www.churchofrefuge.org) that will serve two purposes. Firstly, it will function as a marketing tool for certified churches by listing them on the site. Young adults will be able to use the site to locate new churches when moving to attend new schools or pursue new career paths.

Secondly, the site will be a significant communication tool between the parent organization and member churches as well as between church leaders themselves. The COR blog will report on topics relating to ministry and culture. Blog posts will be contributed by COR leaders and members. Also, the COR forum will be a critical mechanism for facilitating communication among pastors, leaders and administrators. This will provide a place for practitioners to share ideas, pose questions and network with other prominent leaders.

Members have access to the information and resources contained on the official website, including praxis ideas for the nine standards, a COR blog, a forum for discussing ministry issues with other leaders, and resources that can be downloaded from the site.

Conclusion

The flight of young people from the Adventist church is serious and well documented. Now we must do all we can to reverse this trend. By helping churches embrace the Nine COR Principles, and by directing the attention of young adults toward these vibrant, active faith communities, we believe that Church of Refuge can play a significant role in combating this tragedy. May each local church do all it can to become a safe, accepting, friendly, active, spiritual community where young people will be able to invite their friends.

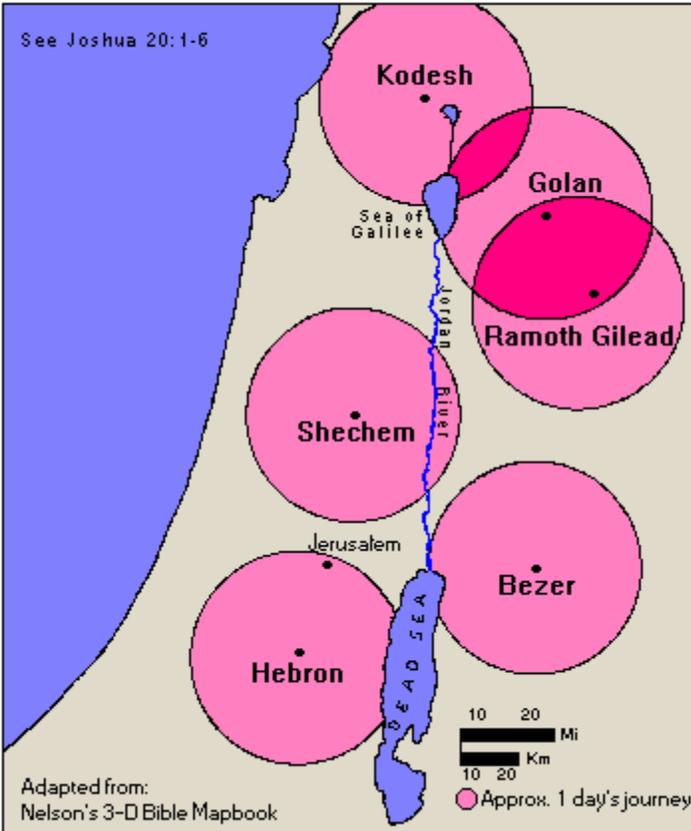
References

- Barna, G. (2002). The Church and the Mosaic Generation. *HomileticsOnline.com*, Retrieved August 20, 2008 from: <http://homileticsonline.com/subscriber/interviews/barna.asp>.
- Blake, C. (2007). *Swimming against the Current: Living for the God You Love*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press.
- Bossert, B. (2007). Frantic plans and desperate measures. *Ministry*, 10, 8-12.
- Coleman, L. (Ed.). (1997). *Serendipity Student Bible, New International Version*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Dudley, R. (2000). *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church: Personal Stories from a 10-year Study*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald.
- Youth Ministries Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. *Global Youth Ministry—7 Strategic Themes & Emphases, 2006-2010*.
- Kimball, D. (2003). *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Kimball, D. (2007). *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- McLaren, B. D. (2002). *More Ready Than You Realize: Evangelism as Dance in the Postmodern Matrix*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Nichol, F. D. (Ed.). (1976). *SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol. 2. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald.
- Nichol, F. D. (Ed.). (1978). *SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol. 1. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald.
- Phillips, J. (2008). The Post-Graduation Exodus. *Adventist Review*, Retrieved August 17, 2008 from: <http://www.adventistreview.org/issue.php?issue=2008-1522&page=29>.
- Rainer, T. & Rainer, S. III (2008). *Essential Church: Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts*. Nashville, TN: B & H.
- Sahlin, M. (2007). *Mission in Metropolis: The Adventist Movement in an Urban World*. Lincoln, NE: Center for Creative Ministry.
- Skolnick, F. (Ed.). (2007). City of Refuge. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd Ed. New York: Macmillan.
- White, E. (1898). *The Desire of Ages*. Boise, ID: Pacific Press.

- White, E. (1907). *Pamphlets/SpTB09*, Retrieved August, 2008 from:
<http://egwdatabase.whiteestate.org/nxt/gateway.dll/egw-comp/section12557.htm/book12644.htm/chapter12647.htm>.
- White, E. (1946). *Evangelism*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald.
- White, E. (1948). *Testimonies*, Vol. 9. Boise, ID: Pacific Press.
- White, E. (1952). *My Life Today*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald.
- White, E. (1954). *Child Guidance*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald.
- White, E. (1961). *Our High Calling*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald.
- White, E. (1893/1894). *Christian Education*, Retrieved August, 2008 from:
<http://egwdatabase.whiteestate.org/nxt/gateway.dll/egw-comp/section00000.htm/book00288.htm/chapter00295.htm>.
- White, E. (1998). *Daughters of God*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald.
- White, E. (1990). *Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 13. Silver Spring, MD: E. G. White Estate.
- Yankoski, M. (2005). *Under the Overpass: A Journey of Faith on the Streets of America*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah.

Appendix A – Map of Six Cities of Refuge

Cities of Refuge



(Retrieved on August 14, 2008 from

<http://www.blueletterbible.org/images/maps/Otest/refuge.html>.)

Appendix B – COR Survey Results (Ordered by Score: Highest to Lowest)

SURVEY RESULTS		
Rank	Factor	Score
1	Accepting Atmosphere	2.88
2	Preaching	2.73
3	Community	2.69
4	Spiritual Atmosphere	2.69
5	Church Leadership	2.55
6	Worship Service Style	2.46
7	Music	2.44
8	People Your Age	2.38
9	Social Action	2.38
10	Adult Sabbath School	2.38
11	Children's Sabbath School	2.24
12	Small Groups	2.19
13	Diversity	2.19
14	Greeters	2.15
15	Ministry Opportunities	2.13
16	Environmental Care	2.10
17	Variety of Church Programs	2.10
18	Evangelistic Activities	1.85
19	Mission Trips	1.83
20	Emotional Support	1.79
21	Formal Support Groups	1.71
22	Potlucks	1.64
23	Parking	1.64
24	Interior Decoration	1.57
25	Other Facilities	1.43
26	Architecture	1.40
27	Proximity to SDA Ed	1.40
28	Resource Center/Library	1.29

SCORING
3 - Very Important
2 - Somewhat Important
1 - Not Important

Participant Ages	
18 - 25:	16
26 - 30:	14
31 - 35:	13
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS:	43

Appendix C – COR Survey Comments

COR Survey Results & Comments	
Item + Comments	Score
1. Architecture	1.40
2. Interior decoration/appearance	1.57
--Clean and fresh.	
3. Resource center/library	1.29
4. Parking	1.64
--Plenty of spaces available.	
5. Other facilities (gym, commons, etc.)	1.43
--The ability to congregate at the church for other activities is paramount.	
--More potential for community bonding is better.	
6. Proximity to SDA education	1.40
--If I had kids it would be more important.	
7. Greeters	2.15
--Friendly, nonjudgmental, attentive.	
--Intentional, genuine.	
--Spirit of love.	
--Smiling and ask how you're doing.	
--If the whole church behaves like greeters that is an awesome church... just having someone designated, not so important.	
8. Sabbath School classes – Adult	2.38
--The community aspect must be top notch here. Not just any leader!	
--The sabbath school class is one of the most important things to me because it is a place to discuss the bible together.	
--Small groups in areas where all can talk and participate.	
--I don't go to Sabbath School if it doesn't involve me practically and personally.	
--I am an adult, I need adult classes.	
--I like classes which are smaller and give room for lots of discussion. They need to be open so people can feel free to share their ideas and opinions without judgment.	
--More than 1 choice if large church.	
9. Sabbath School classes – Children	2.24
--Children's church is a good idea.	
--Children's classes need to be engaging and have good resources.	
--Our kids need a positive experience.	
--Would be important if I had kids, I guess.	
--The best place to plant the seed.	
10. Music	2.44

<p>--If the music is too loud or lacks a sincere approach and makes me feel uncomfortable, i would probably try to avoid it. it's better to err on the side of too calm or quiet, since you can't be offended by that.</p> <p>--Songs that are familiar for all and engaging.</p> <p>--Not so much cool music, just quality over quantity. And Relevant. Doesn't have to be the newest thing nor old hymns but both are nice and should be appreciated. Use transitions!! Don't ruin a good song by saying "Amen" and thank you and move on. Use it as a transition.</p> <p>--Lots of good music/talent!</p> <p>--The best possible depending on age.</p>	
11. Preaching	2.73
<p>--I like sermons that read and delve into at least 5 consecutive bible verses, preferably 15 or higher. and i strongly dislike altar calls. i also dislike long secular stories that are not directly tied into a bible story - that's called watching a movie or reading any old book or magazine.</p> <p>--I get bored easily if the sermon is bad. I'd rather go home.</p> <p>--Humorous and to the point, intriguing, stimulating my thoughts about my relationship with God.</p> <p>--Relevant. Real. Honest. Grace (Christ) centered.</p> <p>--None of the old-school fire and brimstone preaching. But this is secondary to the church family.</p> <p>--Preach some truth that's going to actually take people out of their comfort zone. Preach on the books of Paul adn the gospels. A lot of sermons tickle people's ears and I'm tired of it.</p> <p>--Varied mesages, open, honest, fun, lively.</p> <p>--Really, it's how much I like the pastor.</p>	
12. Worship service style	2.46
<p>--I strongly dislike services that are too showy or loud.</p> <p>--Switch it up, always the same and I am asleep.</p> <p>--Transitions please. Remove stuff that doesn't flow and isn't relevant. Make announcements fun or weed out the unimportant ones. Keep it Simple.</p> <p>--Good flow, spiritual experience.</p>	
13. People your age	2.38
<p>--Cross generational church.</p> <p>--Everyone likes people their own age.</p> <p>--10-15; not so many that I get lost.</p> <p>--It is nice to have people around the same age in order to make friends and have people who are going through similar experiences.</p> <p>--Plenty to have small gatherings with.</p> <p>--Church is all about community, and it's easier to bond with people your age.</p> <p>--But I like diversity in ages as well.</p>	
14. Diversity	2.19

<p>--Cross cultural as well as inclusive of females. --I like people from all backgrounds. --Love diversity and appreciate feedback from all angles and peoples. --A diverse church family is good because it then provides people to be mentors and people to share their experiences. --For postmodern society and soon return of Jesus. --Diversity is nice, but that is about it. --If there is diversity in the community. --If [it] is cultural diversity.</p>	
15. Community	2.69
<p>--People who care about each other. --If i'm new and the people won't befriend me, I might as well read at home. --A feeling of "family" is important. --That's the #1 reason I go to church. --If this isn't there, I am not coming [to] your church. --Flying solo is a bad idea. --A cross-generational community experience. --If there isn't a church community, it is hard to keep the faith. Being active together makes people stronger. --How the people treat each other and interact is my barometer for the health of a church. --Relationships are key. --For me this is THE reason for church.</p>	
16. Accepting atmosphere	2.88
<p>--Nonjudgmental and yet accountability is key. --I don't like the stress of worrying about offending people. --[again] If this isn't there, I am not coming to your church. --If you don't feel accepted then what's the point? --Always a must, okay for who you are. --This is a problem in a lot of churches. There needs to be an accepting atmosphere if the church is to keep members and gain members. People need to be welcoming no matter what a person dresses like or talks like. --People don't trust the church. --No judging... if possible. :) --Accepting of other's personalities, beliefs, ideas. --10 [score]. Oh, I mean 3. --Depends on definition of "accepting atmosphere." If you're talking about the watered-down religion of modern churches so as not to make anyone feel uncomfortable, etc., then I rate 1. If you are talking a sincere, loving Christian acceptance, then I rate 3.</p>	
17. Potlucks	1.64
<p>--Food is very important, I love it, do it every week. Stimulates community. --FOOD! Is always important! --I LOVE potlucks. It's a good way to fellowship and eat great food.</p>	
18. Evangelistic activities	1.85

<p>--Purpose. --These always feel strained. --I feel like #23 [Social Action] is the evangelistic effort... getting to know people in the community and working with them to help others.</p>	
19. Small groups	2.19
<p>--Sm grps in Sabbath School would be cool. --Good for growth. --Home churches can meet a lot of needs that the traditional church can't meet. Needs that people have come to believe can and should be met by the traditional church i.e. church pastors/staff. --I think small groups are very important for Bible study and Sabbath School. --Small groups are an extremely effective way to build community. --Important to me, but it doesn't have to be organized by the church.</p>	
20. Variety of church programs	2.10
<p>--Once again, keep it fresh, or I am asleep. --Simple is best. We are all usually overworked and stressed to the point that another "church activity" becomes more of an obligation instead of a desire to serve or be in community. --For youth, young and old! --Programs are great ways for people to connect.</p>	
21. Formal support groups	1.71
<p>--People helping others with addictions. --I would love to be a part of a church that is helping its members with their biggest life struggles. --Not sure if they need to be church lead. but our church rents rooms to 12 step groups. Also finance groups, etc. are good ministries for church members and those outside the church.</p>	
22. Emotional support/counseling	1.79
<p>--Good hospital visitation, counseling, grief groups. --I think this is a highly neglected area and that people doing it may not have the time, the gifts, the experience, nor the education to do this ministry. A counseling pastor could focus on such needs. --People with professional training (not pastors) need to be available for people who are struggling. Pastors can be of help, but sometimes they do more damage. --Real people have issues.</p>	
23. Social action/community service	2.38
<p>--Feed homeless, do community activities free. --I think this is the best way to evangelize--by action, not words. --If the church can't impact its own community, how can it expect to impact the world? --Doing things together builds community. --This makes a real difference. --To explain what is VERY important to me is to see church members involved with non-SDA community service opportunities.</p>	
24. Ministry involvement opps	2.13
<p>--How can a church not have opportunities for involvement. --We all need to grow.</p>	
25. Mission Trips	1.83

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Do missions in the neighborhood. --Always great! --To everywhere possible, in state and out. --Sow and we shall reap. 	
26. Environmental care	1.98
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --No littering, recycle bin for bulletins. --Goes along with my general philosophy of life and faith. --Very important. We are stewards of the earth. Co-creators with Christ. --Environmental care? 	
27. Church leadership	2.55
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Compassionate, secure with themselves, loving, good listener. --If the leadership sucks, the church sucks. --If we don't have a clear goal, missio,. or vision, then we won't know where we're going or what we're trying to do. Also we need open communication and contact with pastoral staff. Also, the head Pastor should have strong leadership skills in order to encourage, equip, and grow his own staff. --A church needs effective, caring leadership. --There does need to be a defined leadership, otherwise things fall apart. --Without effective leaders, the church dies. --Strong leadership, strong church. --If a church is environmentally irresponsible I might hold that against it but I really don't see that as relevant to my church-going experience. 	
28. Overall spiritual atmosphere	2.69
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Openness, honesty, authenticity and deeply spiritual and intentional. --If i feel the worship service is too showy and superficial, it kills the atmosphere for me. --If the other stuff is in line, this should happen. --A must. --God needs to be the center of the church, not the people or the pastor. --Difficult to Judge. More activities don't really mean more spiritual. How people treat each other. --Authentic Christianity. --I'd like to give this a three, but I've been to some churches where their spirituality seemed to get in the way. --Spiritual atmosphere is up to me so I can't say that I can even really have an opinion about a church's spiritual atmosphere. It's like saying that what I need from a church is a good night's sleep. 	
29. Other	

--Acceptance of people where they are, not making them feel guilty for having doubts, fears, short-comings, basic humanity.
--Inclusive (vs. exclusive)
--Not implying that someone's depression, substance abuse, basic questioning, etc., is a matter of lack of faith, lack of prayer. Sometimes 'I'll pray for you' is a blow-off, a way to not connect with what someone really needs.
--Willingness to try new things and get rid of things that don't work.
--Positive community presence.
--Church unity--connection more important than carpet color.
--Sacrificial givers.
--Spirit of service throughout.
--Friends and family attend. I can't go to a church w/o family or friends.
--Breadth of knowledge from pastoral/ministry staff members
--Striving for biblical lifestyle and theology. This is by far the MOST IMPORTANT to me. If they don't have that, they can score 100% in every other area and I have no interest in going.
--A church that is looking upward and toward Christ rather than spending time trying to "fit in" to this world.
--God centered.
--Bible centered.
--Child's program is number one important and it should be actively engaging, as well as educational.

Appendix D – Matrix—COR Principle/YMD Strategies/NCD Categories

COR Principle	SDA GC Youth Ministries Department Strategies 2006-2010	Natural Church Development (Christian Schwarz)
1. Sabbath	ST3 – Emphasis #1 ST4 – Emphasis #3, 5	Inspiring Worship Passionate Spirituality
2. Discipleship	ST2 – Emphasis #1-8 ST3 – Emphasis #6, 8 ST4 – Emphasis #4 ST5 – Emphasis #3, 6	Passionate Spirituality Holistic Small Groups Gift-oriented Ministry
3. Acceptance	ST3 – Emphasis #7	Loving Relationships
4. Community	ST3 – Emphasis #3	Loving Relationships
5. Support	ST4 – Emphasis #2	Loving Relationships
6. Service	ST7 – Emphasis #1-4	Need-oriented Evangelism
7. Leadership	ST5 – Emphasis #1	Empowering Leadership
8. Budget	ST7 – Emphasis #4	Functional Structures
9. Change	ST4 – Emphasis #3	Functional Structures