

Dear Attendee:

I am delighted that you are attending the first Adventist summit on nurture and retention. It has been a privilege for the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research to organize, on behalf of the General Conference Nurture and Retention Committee, this unprecedented conference on the absolutely vital subjects of discipling, retaining and reclaiming members of the remnant Church.

Why are these subjects so important? Indeed, why has the world Church decided to hold a global summit on them? Why has the General Conference brought together church administrators and Adventist academics from all around the world?

The starkest answer comes from denominational statistics: from 1965, when apostasies and “missing” members were first reported in official Adventist statistics, through the end of 2012, a total of 10,527,042 baptized Seventh-day Adventists separated from the denomination. In these past 48 years, there have been a total of 30,657,430 baptized church members—so that those who left our ranks were 34.34% of all church members in this period. Even though “retention” is often not regarded as being as important as church growth, in fact it is an integral part of church growth. The Church will not grow as effectively as it should if, along with a flood in through its front door, there is a stream out the back door. One out of three Adventist sheep has been lost to the flock! When we think that the good shepherd leaves everything to search for one lost sheep until He finds it (Luke 15:3-4), these figures can only be a cause of grave concern—and yet they only include baptized church members. We have no idea of how many of our young people—born and raised Adventist but never baptized—have been lost. All these souls were gifts from God and should have been cherished.

Christ’s Great Commission to his disciples was to go and make more disciples (Matt. 28:19). Discipling our church members as designed by the divine “vine dresser” (John 15:2) includes enabling them to become more fruitful—this fact inspired the logo for this summit. It is my prayer that this summit will bear its own rich fruit: that those of us attending, whether scholars or church leaders, by acting together as a community of believers, will identify ways by which we can become more fruitful disciples of Our Lord and better shepherds of His flock.

David Trim, Ph.D., F.R.Hist.S.
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