

## **A Study of Small Adventist Churches in Mid-America**

A study of 109 small Seventh-day Adventist churches in the Mid-America Union was recently completed under the direction of the Center for Small Church Development of the Mid-America Union Conference. Fifty-five of the fastest growing small churches and fifty-four of the fastest declining churches in the Union were selected for the 48 question-study. Between September 12 and September 25, 2000, telephone interviews were conducted by members of the NAD telephone research team who contacted 102 pastors, five first elders, one church clerk, and one deacon.

### **Results**

There are 15 markers that distinguish growing churches from declining churches in Mid-America:

1. The pastor and members are involved in community activities.
2. They are located in towns of 2,500 people or more.
3. They are fewer than 10 miles from a Wal-Mart store.
4. The population is in transition: people are moving in and out.
5. They are pastored by younger individuals.
6. Growing churches are "very friendly"; declining churches are "friendly".
7. The growing church is open to change and new methods.
8. Outreach and evangelism is the number one priority of the church and the pastor.
9. The atmosphere of the church is open and safe for visitors.
10. The church delivers multiple children's programs.
11. Mentoring and training activities are employed for new members.
12. There is a higher percentage of members involvement in ministry.
13. Evangelism is the strongest skill of the pastor of a growing church and the third highest skill for a declining church's pastor.
14. Guests are welcomed and treated as though they are members.
15. The church has written plans and goals.

### **The Bottom Line**

Further review of the information in this study also seems to point to four areas that divide the growing from the non-growing small churches:

#### **1. Vision**

- a. The church has a clear concept of the future.
- b. It is willing to create the future (instead of allowing the future to determine its viability).

#### **2. Vitality**

- a. The pastor has a clear vision for the church and can lead people toward a goal.
- b. The church has the capacity to do ministry in the community.
- c. The church is in incline rather than recline, or decline.
- d. There is a large enough population to work with. People are moving in and out of the area.

#### **3. Values**

- a. The church really values the lost.
- b. There is a cultural match among church, community, and pastor.

#### **4. Validation from God (divine activity)**

- a. The positive activity of God can be clearly seen during the past two years in the church.
- b. There are no issues of unresolved sin or conflict in the congregation.