

A CELEBRATION TRAINING MANUAL

PART ONE OF TWO

Between June 1990 and December 2001, we produced 23 tracts or tract sets on the growing celebration crisis and two on cell groups. You can find a nice collection of some of the best of this in our 1991, 84-page, **Celebration Tractbook** (8½ x 11, \$6.50 + \$3.00). You may also be interested in our 1999, 44-page, **Truth about Church Planting** (8½ x 11, \$3.50 + \$2.50) and our March 2000 **Going to Willow Creek** [WM-1003-1004].

According to the title page, "*Creative Sabbath Morning Alternatives: Revitalizing Sabbath School and Church*" was "produced by the Pacific Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists" in 1991 and is "endorsed for use throughout the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists by the North American Division Church Ministries."

This 49-page (8½ x 11) document consists of three pages at the front, 34 pages of text, two pages of book references, and 10 pages of survey sheets.

Copies are still available to key church leaders and workers, from the Church Ministries Department, P.O. Box 5005, Westlake Village, CA 91359.

This is a training manual for Adventist pastors, to show them how to introduce Sabbath morning celebration worship patterns into their local church. Here is a brief digest of what you will find in it. Everything below is quoted from the training manual, except for items within brackets, which are the present writer's comments. Do not forget that this guide to church worship change was published in 1991, prior to the collapse of several celebration leaders and the rise of "church planting" (Celebrationism is another name.) to take its place. In the following book review, chapter titles have been placed in bold; brackets ours. — *vf*

[Page 1] Introduction . . . [Pages 3-4] The purpose of this booklet is to explore the meaning and mechanism of revitalization of our worship services. We will . . . survey comments by Ellen White and several contemporary Church leaders regarding worship, consider the work of the Holy Spirit, look at worship style, talk about creativity, discuss church music, consider ingredients of a successful Sabbath morning program, focus on several Adventist congregations in North America that have become models of revitalization, share specific ideas you may want to adapt for use in your local church, supply a list of resources and publications, include planning helps and worksheets . . .

[The primary objective is celebrationism; the way to do it is to try new, different things. The "model" churches are those that do just that; the test of excellence is increased attendance. The list of resources consists almost wholly of non-Adventist books and supplies; the worksheets are provided to assist you in radically changing your local church within your local congregation without having a mutiny on your hands.]

[Page 5] Revitalizing Worship . . . Revitalizing

church programs means in some way revitalizing the church itself [changing the members]. It calls members to move out of the spiritual comfort zone and follow God by faith into new territory . . . "New territory" may mean re-examining long-held notions about who God is, what God is like, and the kinds of "family members" that fit into God's house . . .

[Changing what church members think about the basics of religion: how God wants us to live and worship, expanding our understanding of the kind of music acceptable to Him, the special celebration teaching that we were saved at the cross and sin no longer really matters. We are all now accepted by Him, regardless of our present activities.]

"New territory" may mean trying new styles and forms of worship or, at least, making them available to other people. We may find "new territory" sometimes difficult or threatening. One must often pass through a wilderness on the way to a promised land . . . [When a historic Adventist initially enters a celebration church and is confronted by a blast of band music and a gesticulating audience, a Voice tells him to flee from the place. But, according to this training manual, he should accept this as "new territory" and "wilderness" living, on the way to a "promised land" experience.]

[Page 10] Contemporary Adventist leaders look at worship . . . A philosophy of worship includes: visual elements, dramatic elements, verbal elements, activity and participation, continual praise. The celebration includes three active functions: remembering, thanksgiving, and dedicating. The worshipers focus their celebration on the presence of God and victory of Christ . . .

Six elements are always present in growing, dynamic congregations, reports Monte Sahlin, adult ministries coordinator of the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church . . . 1. A pastor with strong relational skills who is able to build a team of lay leaders and infuse the congregation with a sense of mission. 2. An inclusive, supportive, happy fellowship. 3. A more participatory, kinesthetic, and personal style of worship than the liturgy to which conventional Adventism has become accustomed. 4. Christian music in the contemporary idiom. 5. An active, ongoing strategy of small groups. 6. Targeted, permanent ministries instead of events, activities, and short-term programs . . .

[Page 11] Darcy Smith was a junior communications major at Columbia Union College when he wrote “How to Have an Exciting Youth Sabbath School Program” (*Church Ministries Worker, July-September 1990*). It seems that the principles for an exciting youth Sabbath school could make any Sabbath school more attractive.

1. Action—a stimulating, involving atmosphere. 2. Variety in the style, format, and content of programs. 3. Structure. Good Sabbath schools need elements that provide continuity from week to week. 4. Participation—a program by the people for the people. 5. Teachers who are enthusiastic, non-judgmental, and personable, who will speak honestly and prepare well. 6. Discussion—on current, relevant topics. 7. Atmosphere—creative and friendly. 8. Witnessing in innovative, fresh ways. 9. Music—lots of it, from a wide variety of preferences and formats.

[The purpose of the “celebration” format, started about 1987, was to unite both conservatives and liberals into celebration worship services with that “wide variety” of activities and music, from hymns to ultra band music. The “church-planting” method, started about 1995 and now in progress, is to raise up new celebration churches. In this way, the conservatives will not be disturbed and will continue supporting the denomination.]

[Page 12] **Elements of Effective Worship** . . . [This chapter is about “creativity.”] In a training seminar, *Experiencing Renewal through Worship*, leaders of the South Pacific [Australasian] Division Department of Church Ministries explore the process of creativity: The creative process or experience has certain stages or characteristics which are not necessarily concrete. Those stages are: 1. A desire to create and/or be creative. 2. Restless energy; a positive boredom or mild frustration. 3. A shaping of thoughts and energy towards a problem or idea. 4. Intense energy with increasing desire to create. 5. A “letting go” or relaxed detachment, otherwise known as “incubation.” 6. A created product bursts free from a reality all of its own. 7. The blissful, exhausted feeling of holistically realizing that you’ve given birth to something which previously did not exist. An almost childlike wonder at what you’ve created. [In other words, “how great I am, for what I’ve done.” In all that you have read so far, did you sense anything about a genuine relationship with Christ, humility of soul, obedience to the law of God, and a putting away of personal sin?] . . .

[More from Australia:] Blockages to creativity [reasons why people are afraid of celebrationism]: Fear of failure. Preoccupation with order—things mustn’t be changed or done differently. Looking for one right answer instead of alternative answers. Preoccupation with tradition and rules—we’ve always done it this way. Being practical (I’m a realist)—having no dreams. Creativity is being frivolous—worship and a spirit of creativity don’t mix. Don’t be foolish, we aren’t creative—

we can’t come up with anything new and creative. [The point here is stop acting on principle, rules, and norms and make “doing things differently” become the new standard of your thinking. Fear not what (extremes) it may lead to.]

[Intermingled through all of this is the concept that whatever you may do differently in Sabbath school or church is the leading of the Holy Spirit.]

[Page 13] There’s one thing to remember about styles of worship, that they are just that—styles. A style is not a moral standard or ethical principle, but simply a way of doing things that expresses preferences and individuality. [That kind of thinking would cover serving small glasses of liquor to church members as part of the service. It is just a style, nothing really moral here.] . . .

There is nothing sacred or superior about one worship style over and above another. In fact, our attachment to one particular worship style runs the risk of turning worship into a static, spectator event . . . [It is dangerous to stick with historic Adventism, and not change?]

It is not the worship style that makes the worship event a heartfelt, motivating, satisfying experience. It is the spirit that is felt in the congregation. A holy spirit. The Holy Spirit. [Another danger is presented: If you do not change, you might grieve away the Holy Spirit.]

The Holy Spirit makes some Adventists nervous. The idea of “Spirit-filled worship” or a congregation “moved by the Spirit” may inspire the uneasy impression of an unplanned, disorderly display of enthusiasm. [These folk are trying to take us into Pentecostalism while calling it the work of the Holy Spirit.] . . . What more could a congregation want than to be filled with an active, life-giving creative Spirit, the Spirit of love, the Spirit of truth? A congregation filled with this Spirit will sooner or later see growth in its ranks and revitalization in its programs. It cannot be stopped. [Notice that the test of whether it is a “Spirit-filled service” is not whether it leads to the putting away of sin and deeper obedience to the law of God, but increased attendance. **STOP right here and read Great Controversy, 461-478**; this chapter predicts what false “modern revivals” will be like in the last days.]

But back to worship styles. Because they are not an issue of right or wrong, it is possible with any style of worship to have a lively, growing fellowship . . . The spirit of life and creativity—the Holy Spirit—makes the difference here. [Once again, the presence of the Holy Spirit is equated as “creativity” (doing things differently)—rather than clean, godly living.] . . .

[Page 17] Because the congregation is the primary instrument for music in worship, the congregational hymn figures as a significant element in worship music. Heise [an Australian Adventist] offers a number of practical suggestions regarding hymn use:

Plan hymns a month or quarter in advance . . . Don’t be tied to traditional expectations of two or three

hymns every Sabbath morning. Try other patterns . . . Have lead singers and soloists sing stanzas with congregational backing. Use instrumental variations and varied harmonies. Sing stanzas with and without instruments. Use alternate tunes to the hymns or new words for familiar tunes. The careful use of a key change can bring a hymn to a compelling climax . . . Church musicians . . . must supply the modulated transition. Consider using overhead projection transparencies [of song words]. [Always keep things changing. In such an atmosphere, minds are confused and eager for more new things.] . . .

[Page 19] Worship leaders may consider some of the following ways to effectively present the Bible in worship services: . . . Reading from modern translations. “The trouble with the King James or Authorized Version is that it is too full of Familiar Quotations,” writes Frederick Buechner. “The trouble with Familiar Quotations is that they are so familiar you don’t hear them” . . . “If you look *at* a window, you see fly specks, dust, the crack where Junior’s Frisbee hit it,” Buechner concludes. “If you look *through* a window, you see the world beyond. Something like this is the difference between those who see the Bible as a Holy Bore [his wording] and those who see it as the Word of God which speaks out of the depths.” [The problem with some of our leaders is that they continually feed on non-Adventist “religious” books.]

[Page 22] **Models of revitalization.** [Now you will learn how Hyveth Williams got her start: She was willing to say and do daring things, and it caught the attention of people. Resultant church growth made her the darling of church leaders who were anxious to have people crowd into our churches. Not standards and beliefs, but numbers was the objective. [The following was written when Hyveth was still in Boston:] The Boston Temple: When Hyveth Williams began her tenure as pastor of the Boston Temple Adventist Church on September 1, 1989, she inherited a challenge . . . [few members attending] . . . By early 1990, the refurbished church was completed. More than 700 people attended the grand opening celebrations.

[Here are two of her innovations: Once a month having a Sabbath morning “breakfast” and use another part of Sabbath morning to talk about “contemporary issues.”]

Pastor’s Prayer Breakfast, held the first Sabbath of each month from 9:00-10:00 a.m. . . . The pastor arranges the program according to a seasonal or holiday theme . . .

The Church at Study. The church dispensed with the traditional Sabbath school. On Sabbaths when there is no prayer breakfast, the pastor conducts a study of some specific theme or Bible book. [We have printed tracts containing some of the astounding concepts in Hyveth’s presentations. She is not only daring with church services, she is also daring with doctrine.]

Contemporary Issues Class. [For this, the church service, she interweaves the Bible with a discussion of secular news.] Using the Sabbath school lessons as a springboard for discussing contemporary issues . . .

[Page 23] Celebration Center, an outgrowth of the Azure Hills Church in southern California, offers a spectacular example of a dynamic, growing congregation. [This was Dan Simpson’s church. Its rapid growth thrilled Southeastern California Conference leaders, but all it did was draw in Adventists from surrounding churches and lower their standards. There was no overall increase of conference membership. We earlier printed tracts with eyewitness accounts.]

Under the leadership of Pastor Dan Simpson, the Azure Hills Church went from an average attendance of 500 in 1985 to more than 1,100 in 1988. The following year more than 500 Azure Hills members, along with Pastor Simpson, volunteered to form the nucleus of a new congregation in Colton—the Celebration Center of SDAs. By the fall of 1990 the new church had grown to a membership of 850, with nearly 1,500 members and visitors attending. [A large number of attendees were always drifters from area Adventist churches, curious to hear and see the latest blast of sight and sound at “Simpson’s church.” Eventually, the church withered as people wearied of the novelty of it all. Notice that the above paragraph labeled this as a “spectacular example of a dynamic, growing congregation.” This, unfortunately, is what some leaders see as the ideal for all of us; for we are here quoting from an official publication of the Pacific Union Conference, approved by the North American Division.] . . .

9:45 a.m.—worship for teens and young adults. This is “a service that meets their needs, speaks to them, and sings their songs,” says Simpson. To do this, the church uses a contemporary Christian band with drums, synthesizers, and electric guitars. The senior pastor preaches nearly every week “because the youth are as important as any of the adults in the congregation.”

11:00 a.m.—“our most traditional,” says Simpson. But not traditional in the traditional sense of the word. “Instead of organ music and hymnals, each service features lively [page 24] Christian music with the words projected on a huge, overhead screen,” according to Steve Daily, chaplain of La Sierra University in Riverside, California. “Praise and celebration dominate the service . . . There is a sense of involvement and participation in these services that is uncommon in Adventist worship.” With reference to this vibrancy and enthusiastic congregational participation, Southeastern California Conference president Steve Gifford describes it as “a Black church with White people attending” . . .

[Key points that make these services different than regular Adventist worship services are then listed:] Use fresh, contemporary, relevant music. [The old-time hymns are no longer relevant.] Invest in musical in-

struments and sound equipment to achieve quality in worship. [A “quality” equal to that of a dance band.] Emphasize preparation; spend time rehearsing [skits, band, and solos] and setting up [staging, band equipment, etc.]. Allow worship to flow and build in intimacy by singing a number of songs in a well-planned succession. Encourage the individual to worship as a whole person, with body, mind, and spirit. This is expressed by raising hands, standing, kneeling, singing, clapping, reciting Scripture, praying, etc. Feel free to worship in any setting. [Later, in the description of Snyder’s Milwaukie Church, the same points are listed.]

Celebration Center makes effective use of drama to enhance the worship experience. Steve Bottroff, director of creative ministries [a pretty name for “play acting”], brings to life a descriptive narrative reading with an ensemble of actors using mime to portray the emotions and ideas in the reading. [While he reads something, several people silently walk, jump, move their arms and mouths. The whole thing looks so foolish; the audience watches in rapt attention.]

[Now we come to the church to which the North American Division had local conferences send their pastors for training in celebration service techniques. The *Review* had a full-page portrait photo of him, with a feature story on his outstanding qualities. Years earlier, Snyder had studied theatrics at an outside university. At the Milwaukie Church, he was the denomination’s celebration hero and master instructor—until one day, in anger, he said certain things in the presence of his board of elders which totally shocked them. This got him fired within a couple years after the publication of this booklet we are reviewing. He immediately went over to the Protestants; and, ever since, he has been the pastor of a Sundaykeeping church. Does that tell you something about these men who exalt celebrationism and downgrade so-called “legalism”? They are not really Adventists.]

The Milwaukie Church. The New Life Celebration Church of Seventh-day Adventists in Milwaukie, a suburb of Portland, Oregon, was the first Adventist church to use the word, “celebration,” in its name. Sabbath morning attendance had risen from about 140 in 1982 to more than 1,200 in 1990; about half of those in attendance are in their 20s and 30s. When Milwaukie’s senior pastor, David Snyder, moved there in 1982 he decided to reach out to the thousands of non-attending and former Adventists in the city by focusing on two major problems: “worship services that did not meet spiritual needs” and “a strongly legalistic attitude” that many local Adventists seemed to express. [He reached a large number of former Adventists who wanted nothing to do with diet, clothing, adornment,

other standards, or with the Spirit of Prophecy. Snyder brought in very few non-Adventists; for his services were identical to those of the Sundaykeeping celebration church in which he held his Sabbath services.]

“My challenge to the church board was to look at every facet of our methodology in the light of our stated mission,” says Snyder. “I suggested we abandon anything that was merely traditional, that somehow had lost its meaning and effectiveness.” Snyder replaced the rigid formality with “a warm, happy environment of holy celebration” . . .

People who attend this church [page 25] see “Love, Acceptance and Forgiveness” printed on the front of the church bulletin . . .

Music is an important element in Milwaukie services. “We have a musical group that leads out every time the family of God is together,” writes one member. “Their ministry is an important part of our worship.” Besides lead singers, Milwaukie uses guitars, a keyboard, piano, and a muted set of drums . . . And there is clapping. “We are there to celebrate, and celebration is never boring.”

[What is it that they are celebrating? The teaching that they were saved at the cross in a finished atonement, and there is nothing more that they have to do but accept it. Their sins are all automatically forgiven, even the ones they keep doing. Why do you and I not celebrate? *We rejoice* that we have Jesus and are in Him. But we well-know the battle is not yet over. We must crowd close to His side; hold His hand tightly; and guard ourselves continually, lest we leave His side. Before, we were enslaved to sin. Now we are free in Christ; but, in our freedom, there is the danger of wandering from His side and being captured again by the enemy. The celebrationists live on a different level. Their strength is the emotional charge they experience at the services. *They spend their time trying to believe they have something to celebrate!* And the “trying” requires band music and waving of hands. We, in contrast, have something very real to rejoice about. In this life, you are either *free in (obedience to) the law* through Christ or *enslaved to sin* (out of Christ). Those who despise obedience, by faith in Christ, to the ten commandments are living in a fool’s paradise.]

The Altar of Prayer provides a part of the service where members may come forward and kneel at the front of the church. Everyone else in the congregation also kneels and the musical group sings “Someone is praying for you.” The pastor closes this time of prayer with a brief congregational prayer and then people return to their seats. [Simpson’s church called this weekly activity the “Garden of Prayer.” In both, people come forward and kneel and pray while the pastor and a couple associates quietly walk among them, plac-

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ing hands gently on one head and then on another. As in the Catholic Church, there is a strong need for the approval of a human priest; these people are taught that acceptance by God is automatic and apart from any change in thoughts, words, or behavior. They are trusting that the priest is right, that they are safe; for their consciences do not tell them so] . . .

Milwaukie has strong support from the Oregon Conference . . . "I am personally blessed by the ministry of the Milwaukie Church," Jacobsen continues. [Don Jacobsen was conference president at that time and tried to force every church in the conference into celebrationism. Many of the best believers left the denomination as a result, a condition which exists down to the present time. Jacobsen had loaned the Milwaukie Church a very large amount of money to build a new church. As soon as Snyder was fired, the entire building project collapsed, as most of the members left. It is uncertain if the conference ever regained that money.

Years ago, we published tracts, showing the emotional immaturity of Dan Simpson; Snyder's rapid switch to being a Sundaykeeping pastor; and, more recently, the amazing sermons of Hyveth Williams. Yet they were the ones that pioneered the celebration movement in our denomination. Men and women of strength are those who read the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy; and, in the enabling grace of Christ, they obey what they read. Yet such people are today regarded as the fanatics and legalists who, it is believed, hinder the church from achieving its glorious destiny.]

[Page 29] **Revitalizing Sabbath School** . . . One church moved Sabbath school from the sanctuary into their "fireside Room," provided hot and cold drinks and a continental breakfast, and kept a fire in the hearth during winter. The first half hour (9:00-9:30 a.m.) was fellowship time. The group varied their Sabbath school with discussions of church issues, Bible topics, and presentations by guest experts. [I guarantee that if a local church spent their Sabbath school time reading the Spirit of Prophecy together, they would not be included in a training manual of this nature.]

. . . [Page 30] Some churches are mixing musical styles, using gospel, classical, and Christian contemporary music. Music is becoming such an important element in worship services that in some churches the minister of music is a paid staff member. More churches are integrating music and singing, throughout the service, and incorporating a variety of instruments to accompany the singing. [Entertaining the members is the craze; missionary work is forgotten.]

Revitalizing the Worship Service . . . Many churches project the Scripture reading, call to worship, and praise songs on a screen at the front of the church using an overhead projector or slide projector. [They watch TV at home in their spare time; so they feel more at home having it simulated at church, without having to bother to carry Bibles.] . . .

Young people participate in dramatizing the children's story, sometimes using costumes and sound effects.

For the Garden of Prayer, or Altar of Prayer, the pastor invites members with special prayer concerns to come forward and kneel at the altar [as in a Catholic Church]. Some churches also include more time for intercessory prayer . . .

Some churches celebrate an Agape feast of fruits, breads, cheese, nuts, and other simple foods, in conjunction with the communion service . . .

[Page 31] An urban congregation used the Sabbath nearest Earth Day for a discussion of environmental issues and Christian responsibility to care for the earth . . .

Lab Sabbath, in one congregation, falls on the last Sabbath of each month. This Sabbath provides a time to try innovative worship ideas or changes in the traditional format . . .

One pastor sometimes uses audiovisual aids—rear projection screen and slides—with his sermon . . .

A modified liturgical year serves as the basis for planning in a number of Adventist churches [The "church year" is a prearranged, canned set of topics, used in many mainline Protestant churches. This helps pastors who do not study the Bible very much, to have someone else plan what they should preach about, week after week.] . . .

One church that does not have a set order of service prints and mails its bulletin to each member a week in advance. When attempting something new and different, they diplomatically dub it "an Adventure in Worship" . . .

In order to meet a variety of congregational needs, a number of churches devote their early church service to a praise or "celebration"-style worship, with a traditional service at the eleven o'clock hour.

[Page 32] **Implementing Worship Change** [You will want to read this section carefully. Here is how they plan to change your local church.] How a pastor or local church leader goes about implementing major changes in worship programs largely depends on the administrative structure and the corporate personality of the particular local church. [In other words, the receptivity of the local members, especially those holding key church offices.]

ON THESE TWO PAGES, you will find reprints of part of the complete training manual. At the back of the manual are 10 pages of “worksheets.” They are used to indoctrinate the members into accepting the new-modeled church services.

Reprinted on these two pages are (1) The full-size, top few inches of page one of the worksheets. (2) A reduced facsimile of the first of the two-page list of 40 books which church leaders and pastors should purchase, to help them “improve” local worship patterns. Only six of those books are published by our own denomination. (3) A heavily reduced copy of the title page of the training manual, which is entitled, *Creative Sabbath Morning Alternatives: Revitalizing Sabbath School and Church*. Notice that it has the full backing of the North American Division.

Unfortunately, space is lacking to reprint many of these worksheet questions. So I decided to type out the first three pages, containing 17 loaded questions, designed to push hapless church members into handing over their services to Pentecostalism. The formula: Begin by making them dissatisfied with what they have. Later imply that those not wanting to change may be foolish and somewhat stupid. Here they are:

WORKSHEET 1—1. Would you be satisfied if the quality of your church’s worship experience remained as it is today until Jesus comes? a. Yes. / b. Sort of. / c. I’m not sure. / d. No.

2. Comparing your local congregation to a body, what part of the body is strong? Weak? Healthy? Sick?

3. When it comes to realistically seeing itself, my local congregation’s eyesight is: a. nearsighted. / b. 20/20. c. farsighted. / d. going blind.

4. Concerning the survey results revealing the four desires people have about their Sabbath school experience (on page 1), I: a. concur. / b. would reorder them. / c. see it differently.

5. How important is it to recognize the need for implementing traditional, fellowship, study, social action, and multi-interest Sabbath school classes? Which type of class meets your needs?

6. What happens if a local church only allows for

one kind of Sabbath school class experience?

7. Think of your most satisfying Sabbath school class experience. a. Was it as a child, teen, or adult? / b. What qualities did the teacher have that made it worthwhile? / c. How were you encouraged to participate in the class? / d. Which benefits did you experience that kept you coming back? / e. How did that experience affect your relationship with God?

WORKSHEET 2—1. On a scale of 1 (meaningless) to 10 (beneficial), how would you rate your overall experience in church when you were: a. a child. / b. a teen. / c. a young adult. / d. an adult.

2. [Question about Value Genesis Survey, an earlier poll taken by the Pacific Union Conference.]

3. Brother and Sister Quo [means “Status Quo”] don’t see what the fuss is all about. They like things at your local church just the way they are. “We’re satisfied,” they say. “Why change?” Why should any congregation consider changes in their Sabbath school and worship experience?

4. How do you feel about your church’s efforts to minister to those with different spiritual needs than your own?

5. In your experience, when does the allowance for variety become extremism?

6. What price will we pay if we fail to allow for variety?

7. What price will we pay if we fail to coordinate a united fellowship? [Notice that three earlier questions were about the great need for variety and differentiation to meet varied needs while this and later ones are about the need to unify and all make the same changes together.]

8. [Another question about Value Genesis Survey.]

9. When I think of my local church’s situation, I feel like: a. a bull in a china shop. / b. giving thanks. / c. an explorer in need of a map. / d. a craftsman in need of skills. / e. a kite in need of wind. / f. a teddy bear in need of a hug.

10. As I anticipate working through the rest of this Revitalization Handbook, I feel like: a. let’s do it. / b. who needs this? / c. hoooo boy! / d. we need this. / e. trouble, trouble, trouble! / f. at last!

You may find the following suggestions useful as you go about implementing change in Sabbath school and worship formats:

It may be a good idea to begin by establishing focus groups to discuss the congregation's worship needs and brainstorm new ideas. You may want to involve the worship committee, Sabbath school council, or elders in such discussion.

[At the turn of the 1990s, the pastor received his celebration instruction at Snyder's church. Today, his conference sends him to Bill Hybels' Willow Creek

Church, in Illinois, for training. Arriving back at his own church, he begins by telling key people in his church that they have "worship needs." Group planning sessions are then held, during which he carefully instills the ideas he was taught; his members think they developed them.]

As you lay specific plans for change in your church's Sabbath school and worship format, you may want to work closely with the worship committee, Sabbath school council, or elders, or form a special taskforce dedicated to the worship revitalization process in your church.

You may choose to implement an all-new program all at once or phase in worship changes in several stages.

Throughout the process, keep your church board well-informed of new worship plans.

Remember that the change comes harder for some personalities than for others. You may prepare your congregation by announcing and explaining planned changes in advance of their debut. Help members understand the collaborative process through which this plan was created. Also make clear why you and other local church leaders believe change is necessary. Don't feel threatened by questions or hesitate to answer them as completely as possible.

[Fortunately, the pastor knows he has the conference president on his side; any complaining member will receive no sympathy at the conference office. Why is the conference president on his side? He has to be

or he will not later be promoted to higher offices in the denomination. In fact, if he is too recalcitrant to going along with the latest policies, the union president (who chairs the biennial conference constituency meeting) could work to have him replaced in a forthcoming election.]

[Page 33] **Dealing with Criticism.** With such a variety of individuals making up the church, it is unlikely that any one worship plan will please all the people all the time. And if change is hard, it is especially so with something so personal and so deeply ingrained as one's custom of worship. Be prepared for some of your members to be unhappy about the changes you make, and be prepared to hear about it . . . Constructive criticism can help you make your program better. Destructive criticism will derail your church from its purpose, divide your congregation, wither your spirit, and tempt you to seek another line of work. You will deal best with criticism if you are clear about your congregation's goals . . .

The best way to deal with your problem critics is to: 1. Listen. 2. Reassure them you're not doing anything out of harmony with Seventh-day Adventist principles and theology. 3. Remind them that God peopled the church with a diversity of personalities and talents. Emphasize that you're trying to create a way for all kinds of people to come together to worship Christ in a way that is meaningful to them. 4. Emphasize that we gather together to fight sin and death, not to fight about worship styles. Our reason for coming together is Jesus. 5. Tell all critics on every side of an issue that your church has more than one congregation and that it needs all of them. 6. After a certain point, just carry out your plan and give the critics a chance—maybe six months or so—to get used to it. 7. If criticism persists after that, and you do not find it valid or constructive, learn to ignore it. Focus on supportive comments and constructive criticism.

[Page 34] **Continuing Growth.** [This is the last chapter and page in the main text of the booklet.] Worship revitalization is the beginning of an exciting spiritual journey that we may find satisfying in and of itself. As a worship leader, you must be in touch with the wants and needs of your congregation and community . . . Worship revitalization is the adventure of a community together to create something good . . . Working together toward a common, challenging goal builds community and fellowship.

[The special word here is "community." The new form of worship will help unite the local Adventist church with the community around it.]

That concludes the text of the training manual. The remainder of it consists of (1) **Resources** [pages

35-36], a two-page listing of 40 books for further study, six of which are published by our denomination (*the first page of which is reproduced on page 7 of this tract study*). (2) Ten pages of so-called **Surveys**, designed to win over the members in the local congregation to accept the coming changes. (*See page 6*).

The hidden objective of church leaders is to make our local churches more attractive to people in the community with little or no Christian experience. This is done by having the services imitate the excitement and novelty of nightly television, as well as by instructing the newcomers that everyone is immediately accepted in Christ, just as they are, with the implication that they can remain that way. This may not be overtly stated. But the idea is conveyed that confession of sin or the change of standards, behavior, or beliefs is not necessary, with emphasis on acceptance and forgiveness; little or no mention is made of anything needing to be done now or later. Such teaching essentially changes us into a free-will, Sabbatarian Baptist church. Celebration services are notorious for their heightened emphasis on emotions, with nothing about special doctrines concerning the Sanctuary, standards, diet, etc., or the Spirit of Prophecy.

When initially introduced into a local church, a few key leaders are talked into it; and, from that point onward, it is called "the plan of the local church." A foundation principle of celebrationism is that church services with their eye-blinking excitement are as equally acceptable worship in the eyes of God as are the tame ones. Entertainment for entertainment's sake is a good way to live. Adventist Pentecostalism (although never called that) is not only wholesome, but it is actually a superior way to worship God. It is actually hedonism. There are always a few key members in each local church anxious to please the conference and rally to the support of any new project or campaign. And there is generally a fair amount who do not care what happens. Division leaders decided, in the mid-1990s, to switch over to "church planting" because a sizeable number of the concerned minority eventually leave the church and start entirely new celebration congregations in order to avoid conflicts in existing churches.

What they will ultimately accomplish is Adventist churches which are "look-alikes" to Protestant and Pentecostal churches,—with no distinctive teachings or standards (except for the Sabbath; and we are now drifting toward Sunday morning worship services). In the late 1980s, a Protestant church growth specialist told a gathering of our church leaders in Atlanta that it was a well-known fact that the only denominations with rapid growth are those with distinctive teachings which require sacrifice of some kind. — *vf*