

# What We Know & Don't Know About Adventist Evangelism & Church Growth

Research Summary by Monte Sahlin  
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This report was put together at the request of a conference president to help the members of his executive committee and key staff get an overview of the data from research on evangelism and church growth in the Adventist denomination in North America. It has been shared at a number of meetings over several years and we often get requests for copies of the slides.

## Goals of this Summary Report

- What do we really know about *what works* in evangelism and church growth?
- Usefulness of this information to administrators, evangelism coordinators and pastors
- How to identify standards for evaluating evangelism options and plans

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## Contents

- NAD Church Growth Trends
- 1977 Evaluation of Evangelism in Southern California
- 1983 Evangelism Audit in Ohio Conference
- 1986 NAD Marketing Study
- 1989 Focus Group Research on Evangelism Mailers
- 1985-91 Southern Union Evangelism Study
- NET 95-96 Follow-up Research
- NET 98 Survey
- ACTS 2000 Doctoral Dissertation
- Survey of Adult Converts in 2001
- Public Awareness Surveys
- Natural Church Development in Adventist Churches in the NAD
- 2003 Church Growth Study

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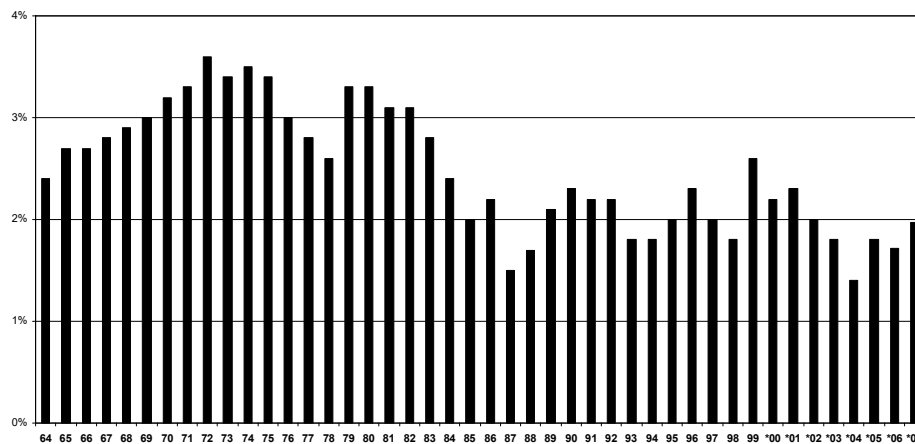
## Prehistory: Beginnings of Adventist Research on Evangelism & Church Growth

- Howard B. Weeks Ph.D. dissertation in the 1960s (historical trends in Adventist evangelism)
- Gottfried Oosterwal in the early 1970s
- Hewitt Foundation survey in 1975
- Johnson D.Min. dissertation on Southern California Conference (1977)
- Magid and Baldassare studies in 1978
- Des Cummings & Roger Dudley, 1981 [*Adventures in Church Growth*]

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## Yearly Church Growth Rate

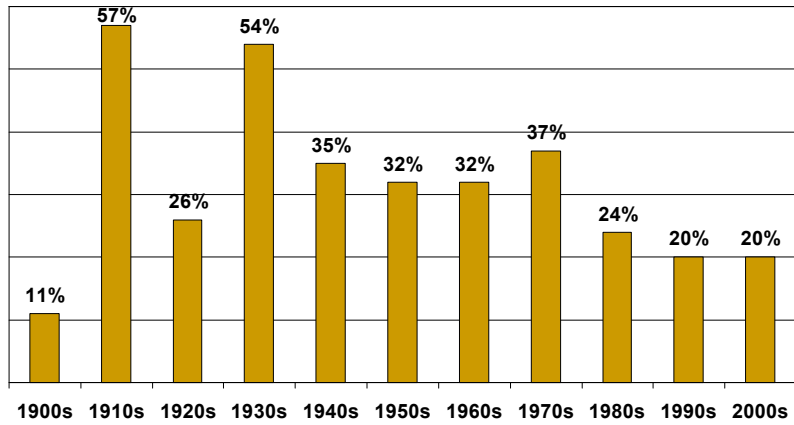
North American Division



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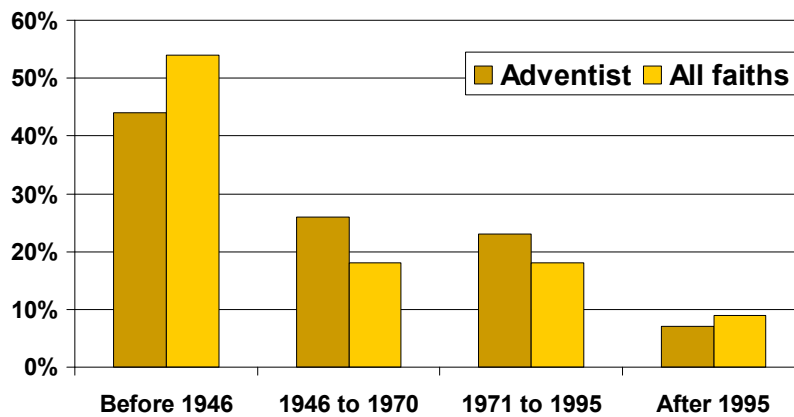
## Decadal Church Growth Rates

North American Division



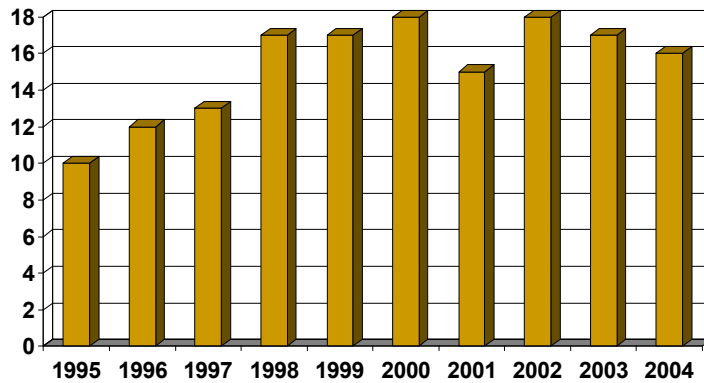
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## Year Congregation was Founded



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### Average Church Plants per Union Conference



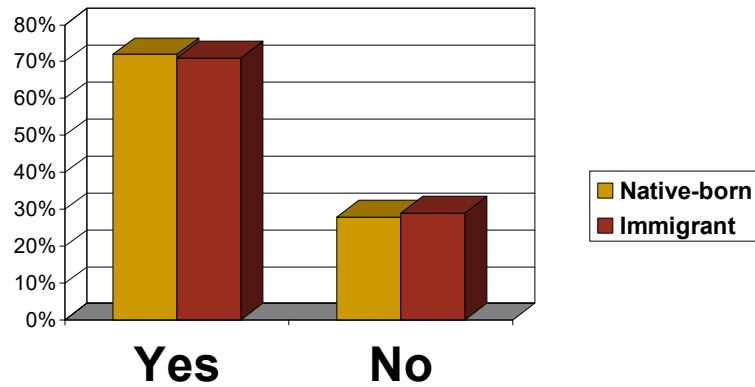
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### Immigrant Churches

- For almost three decades, the majority of baptisms in the NAD each year are among immigrants (except 1995-96).
- What can we learn from these fast-growing churches?

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## Were you raised in an Adventist family?



Source: 2004 Christian Education Survey

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## What is really happening?

- Interviews with hundreds of immigrant pastors reveals that most of the people they baptize are “probably on the books in the country of origin.”
  - *Caveat:* This study was done on the East Coast and this may not be true in the Pacific Union.
- This may be more about migration than evangelism.

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### What we learned from immigrant churches that may be relevant:

- Much greater emphasis on friendship evangelism
- Greater community involvement than most non-immigrant churches
- Almost all baptisms are among the first generation—new arrivals
- Lay leaders often feel empowered to start new groups without permission

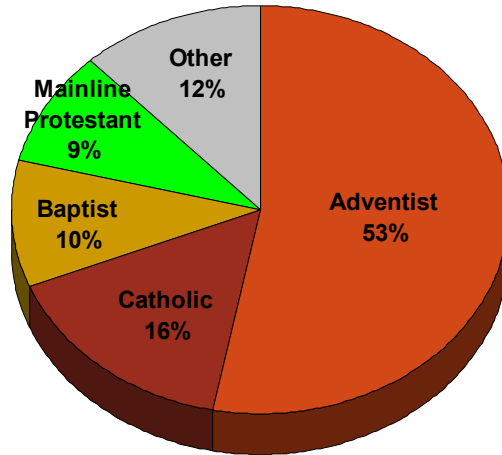
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### **Evaluation of Evangelism in Southern California Conference - 1977**

- Interviews with a random sample of 468 new members

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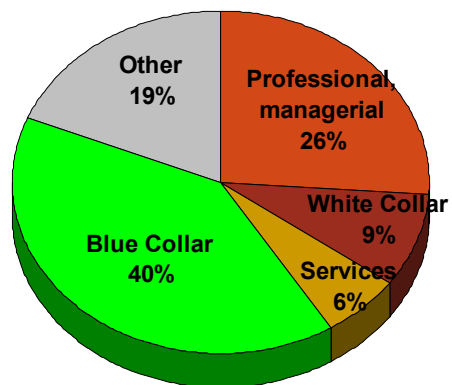
### Childhood Religious Background



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### Occupation of Head of Household

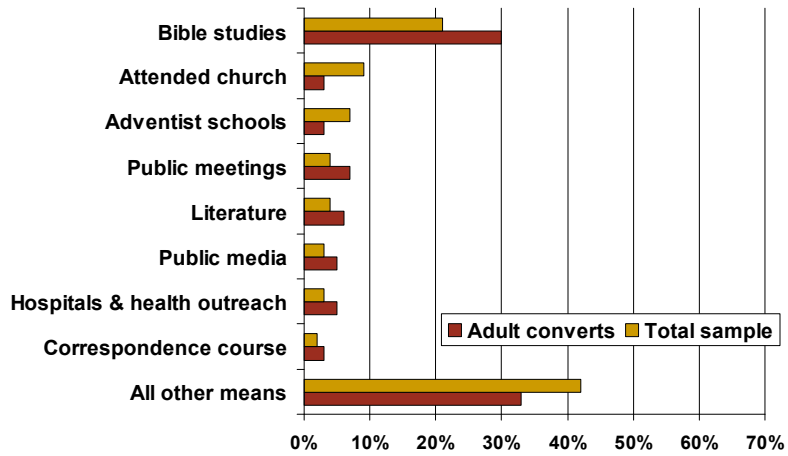
Only the Adult Converts



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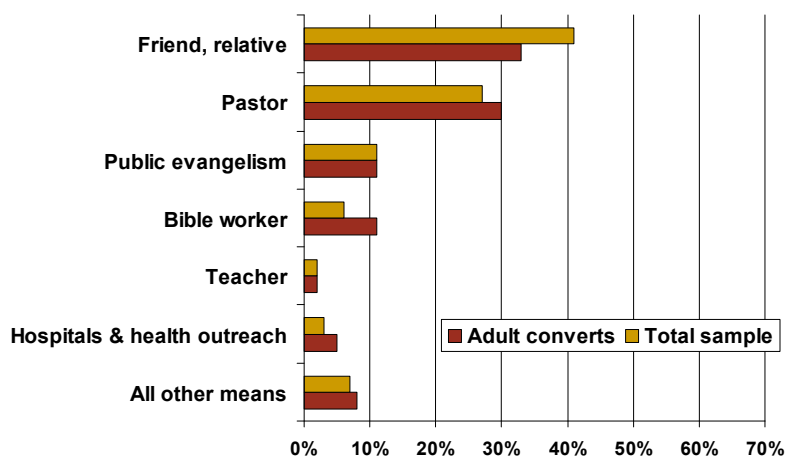


## First Factors which Provided Information about the Church



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## Greatest Influence on Decision to Join the Church



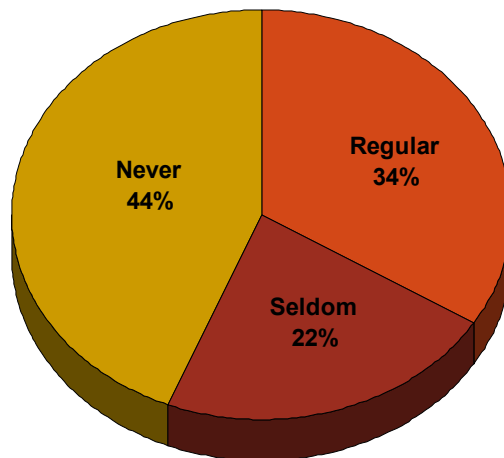
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## Ohio Conference Evangelism Audit in 1983

- Reports from church clerks & treasurers in 26 of the 27 churches where an evangelism campaign was held the previous year, tracking 422 converts
  - 85% still members (10% transferred out, 5% dropped, 1% died)
- Survey of church board members (78 responses from 11 of the 27 local churches)

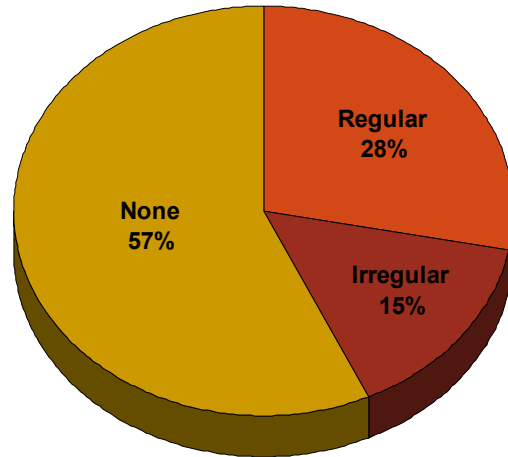
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## Attendance of New Converts



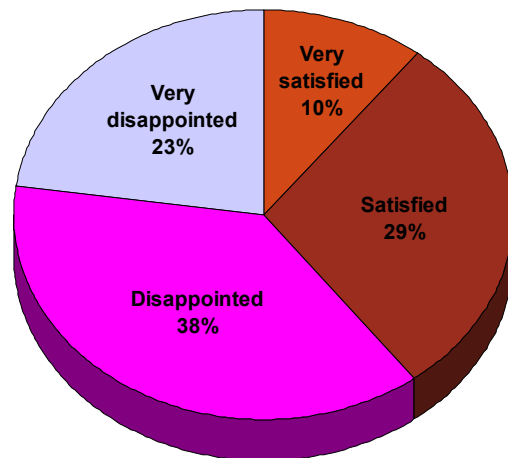
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## Tithing by New Converts



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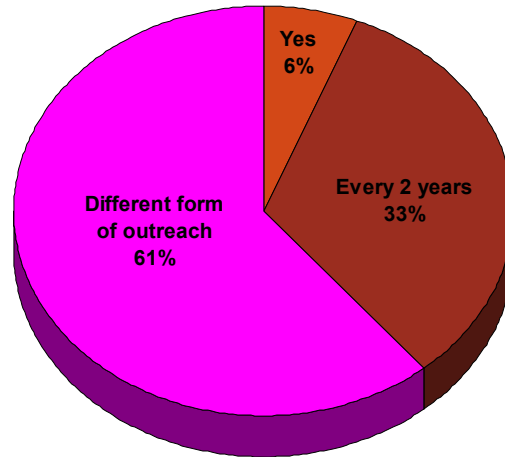
## How Satisfied with Results



Church Board Members

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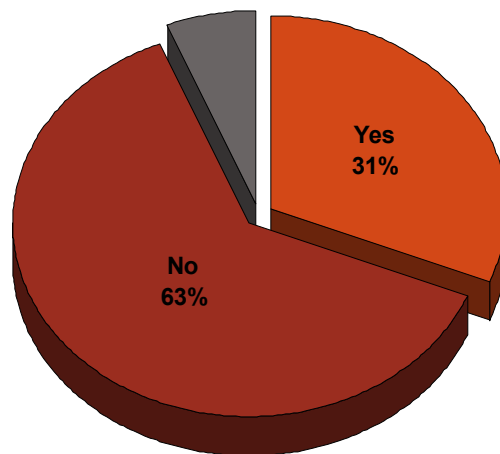
## Would you like another evangelism campaign next year?



Church Board Members

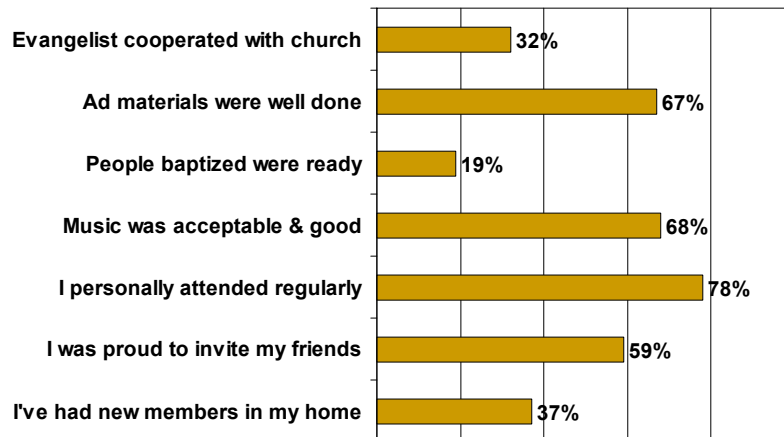
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## If you were in a different church, would you like the same evangelist?



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## Evaluation of the Meetings



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## NAD Marketing Study

- In 1986 the NAD hired Donnelly Marketing Corporation to do a segmentation analysis
  - Membership list for the NAD
  - New converts from 1981-1982 (2 years)
- Donnelly uses a system with 47 “lifestyle segments”
  - More than 600 data points, including census, public records (auto, drivers, etc.), warranty registrations and point-of-purchase data
  - Donnelly identified more than 80% of the names
- Each segment had 1/10<sup>th</sup> to 1/2 of one percent of the population made up by Adventists

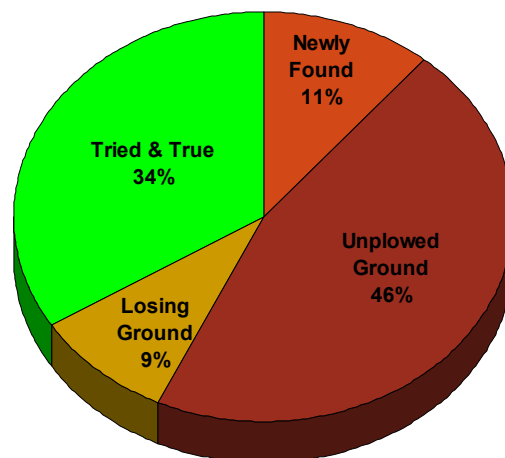
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## Evangelism Segmentation

<b>“Tried and True”</b> 17 segments above average members and new converts	<b>“Newly Found”</b> 5 segments below average members and above average new converts
<b>“Losing Ground”</b> 3 segments above average members and below average converts	<b>“Unplowed Ground”</b> 22 segments below average members and new converts

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## Percent of U.S. Population in Each Evangelism Cluster



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## Evangelism Segmentation

<b>“Tried and True”</b> Lower middle class & Blue Collar workers Secondary diploma & some college	<b>“Newly Found”</b> Immigrants Low-income families Urban
<b>“Losing Ground”</b> Whites in Northeast metropolitan areas Same demographics as above	<b>“Unplowed Ground”</b> Higher incomes Higher education Professionals Fewer minorities

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## Focus Group Research

- Six focus groups held in 1989
- Two each in Clearwater (FL), Thomaston (GA) and Omaha (NE)
- Four groups of the general public and two groups of people who had attended evangelistic meetings
  - General public recruited from 25-45 age group, lower middle class
- Directed by Kermit Netteburg

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## Focus Group Research

- Each group first examined 6 handbills
  - 2 traditional Adventist (end-time emphasis)
  - 2 non-traditional (family life, archaeology)
  - 2 for secular events (concerts, seminars)
- Later they examined 7 evangelistic handbills
  - Various types in actual use by several different evangelists

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## Findings from Focus Groups

- General public could not recall events they had attended in response to direct mail; Attender group recalled immediately the evangelistic meetings—it was a big event in their lives!
- Parents showed interest in the family life brochure
- Florida residents showed interest in the secular concerts

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## Findings from Focus Groups

- Some people in the Bible Belt showed interest in the end-times theme
- Most people were quickly bored with all of the handbills, regardless of type
- People said they were least likely to open the end-times themed handbills
- People identified the prophetic beasts in the artwork with a cult

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## Findings from Focus Groups

- Even in the Attender groups, people did not know anything about the Adventist Church
  - The attenders did not know/remember they had attended Adventist meetings
- One person said the Adventist Church believes in Jesus as Savior (she had joined the church at the meetings); the others did not know if it was Christian

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## Findings from Focus Groups

- Handbills with an end-times theme do reach an audience—a small segment of the population (maybe 5%)
- Branding Adventist evangelism on the end-times theme could be counter-productive—much larger numbers of people identify this theme with cults
- Testing and development of new themes for handbills is needed

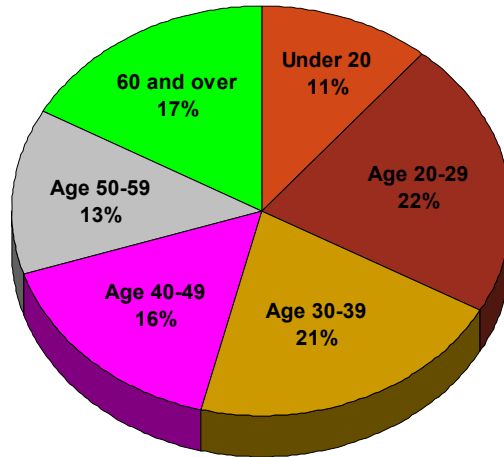
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## Southern Union Public Evangelism Research Project

- Data from 201 campaigns from the years 1985 through 1991
- Primarily focused on response to advertising and cost of ads
- Includes data from more than 12,000 individuals who attended the meetings and were not identified as Adventists

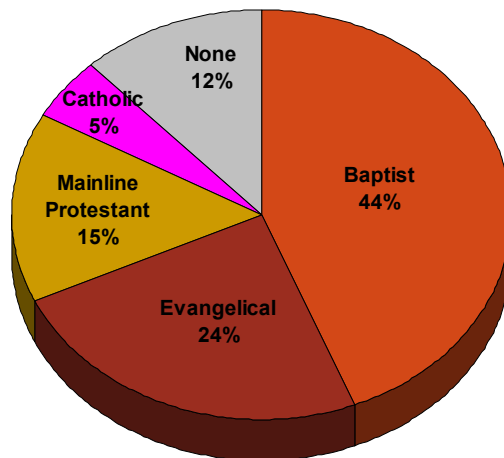
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### Age of Non-members Attending



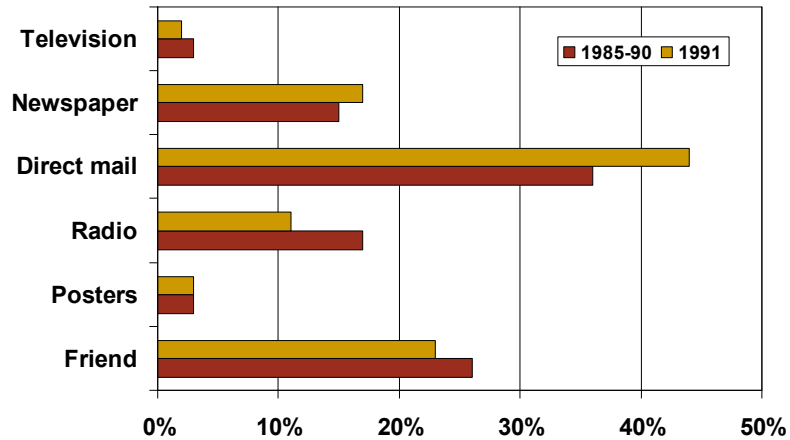
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### Religion of Non-members Attending



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## Response to Ads/Promotion



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## NET 95-96 Follow-up Surveys

- Pastors reviewed the lists 18 to 24 months after baptism and supplied the status of each person baptized
- 85% still attending church
- 10% had dropped out

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## NET 95 Baptisms/POFs

- Median age 43
- A third had been raised as an Adventist
- 29 percent had previously been baptized members
- Two thirds were active in some other denomination at the time they attended the meetings

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## Childhood Religious Background

- 33% Adventist
- 17% Catholic
- 16% Conservative Protestant
- 13% Mainline Protestant
- 6% Other faiths
- 15% Unchurched

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## Church Music Preferences

- 59% Traditional hymns
- 55% Gospel [“moderately upbeat”]
- 37% Contemporary Christian Music
- 23% Classical
- 10% “Jesus Rock”

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## Preferred Bible Translation

- 62% King James Version
- 43% New International Version
- 15% Today’s English Version
- 11% Revised Standard Version
- 2% Jerusalem Bible (Catholic)

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## Recommended Changes

- Two thirds want to see “free flowing discussion” included as a major part of the program.

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## NET 98 Follow-up Survey with Participating Pastors

- A major, announced goal of NET 98 was to reach out to Gen X (young adults at the time)
- 60% of the participating pastors reported no attempt was made to reach out to young adults
- 69% reported that no young adult was baptized

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- 30% reported no non-member young adult attended
- Among the 70% who did have non-member young adults in attendance:
  - Largest number was under 50
  - Average was 3 to 5 per site

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- Yet some did have great success and about one in four of the people baptized were young adults
- An estimated total of 1,814 young adults in 615 churches

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## ACTS 2000 in Los Angeles

- Mark Finley was the lead evangelist
- James Park was the coordinator and wrote his D.Min. dissertation at Fuller Seminar on a follow-up evaluation of this campaign
- Dr. Park is now professor of evangelism and church growth at Adventist Institute of Advanced Studies in the Philippines

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## ACTS 2000 Statistics

- 2,636 people registered at the meetings
- 1,929 were not church members
- 1,142 of these lived in the ministry areas of the participating churches
- 324 rated as “good interests” (28%)
- 65 of these were baptized (6%)
- 54 still active members one year later (5%)

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## ACTS 2000 Converts

- 97 baptized at the Sequoia Conference Center on April 11 and 15
  - 32% children of church members
  - 24% returning dropouts rebaptized
  - 44% adult converts
    - 35% no prior Adventist contacts
    - 9% had Adventist relatives

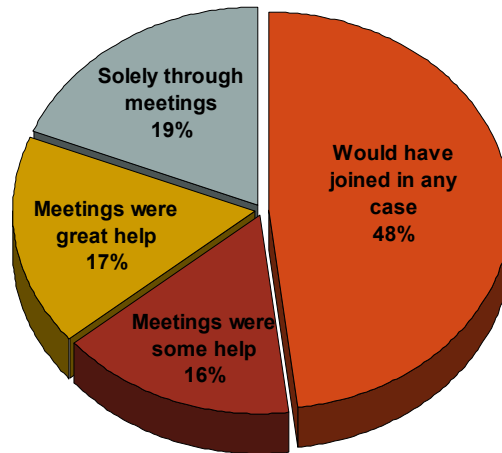
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## Telephone Survey of Pastors

- One year later
- Participating churches had a total of 332 baptisms/POFs in the quarter the meetings ended (according to conference clerk's records)
- Got information on 275 of these from the pastors and their church clerks
- Incomplete or no response from the others

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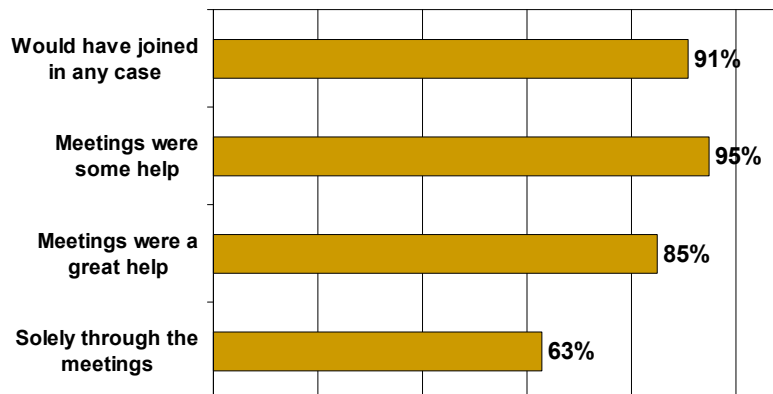
## Pastors' Reports



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## Retention Rate After One Year

For group that ...



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## Survey of New Members

- Average age is 44
- Two thirds are women
- Majority have a secondary diploma and some college, but no degree
- 61% were attending an Adventist Church before the meetings began; 15% a church of another faith; 22% were not attending any church
- 71% were still active members

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## Childhood Religious Background

- 39% Adventist
- 20% Catholic
- 8% Baptist
- 13% other Protestants
- 20% no religion

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## Influenced My Spiritual Growth in the Last Year ...

- 60% worship at church on Sabbaths
- 56% fellowship with church members
- 56% my Sabbath School class
- 55% keeping the Sabbath
- 55% my Adventist pastor
- 53% the ACTS 2000 meetings
- 51% my family
- 41% the It Is Written television program
- 35% involvement in ministry
- 24% the It Is Written Bible worker (by name)

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## Devotional Activities

- 54% attend Sabbath School weekly
- 33% participate in small group weekly
- 33% watch It Is Written weekly
- 30% read the Bible daily
- 26% share their faith daily

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## Influenced Me to Attend Evangelism Campaign

- 34% announcement at church
- 27% personally invited by a friend
- 27% watched It Is Written
- 23% personally invited by the pastor
- 23% direct mail (“handbill”)
- 16% sign at the auditorium
- 15% personally invited by a relative
- 6% newspaper ad

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## Major Survey of Converts

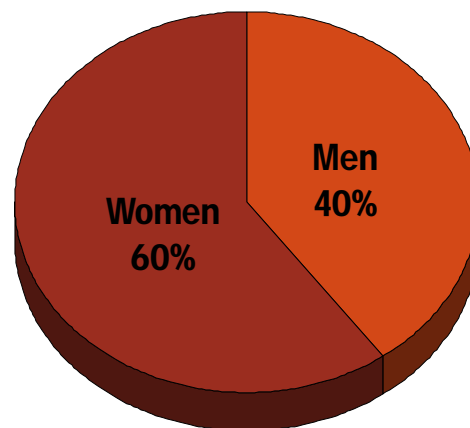
- A total of 296 people were baptized or made Profession of Faith in the Pennsylvania Conference in 1997.
- During 1999 and 2000—about two years after they joined the Adventist Church—interviewers made an attempt to talk to each one.
- Interviews were conducted with 215 of the 296 converts (73%).

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- 25 were confirmed in situations where an interview was not applicable: 2 were deceased, 9 reported that they were long-term members and were not baptized in 1997 (errors in list), 14 had moved out of state
- 15 refused to be interviewed, 11 of whom indicated that their membership was dropped
- 20 Hispanic members who could not be contacted
- 21 for whom no working phone number could be obtained or never answered their phone

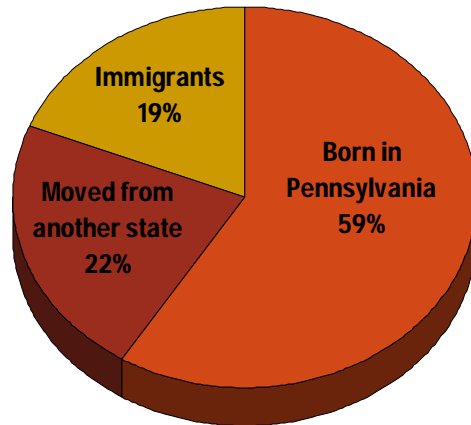
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## Demographics of Converts



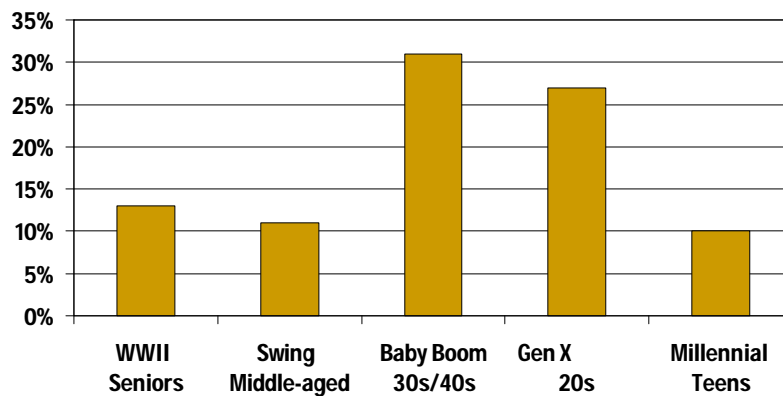
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## Demographics of Converts



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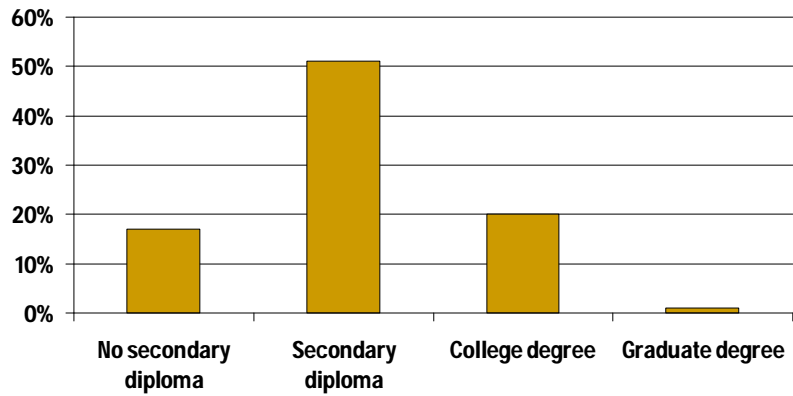
## Age of Converts by Generation



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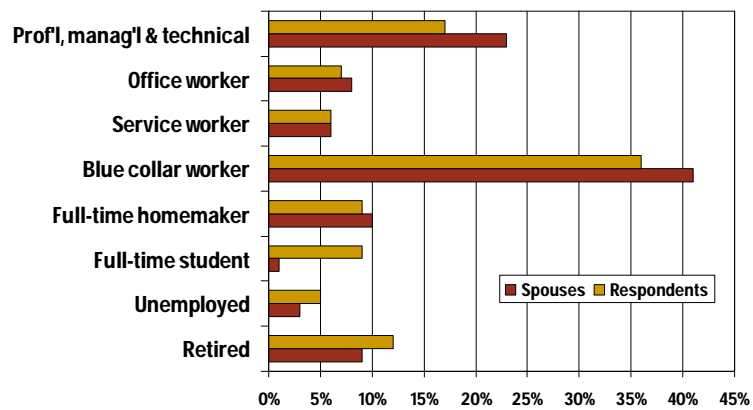


## Education of Converts



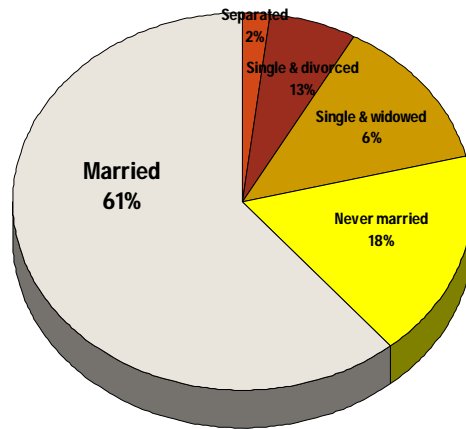
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## Occupations of Converts and Their Spouses



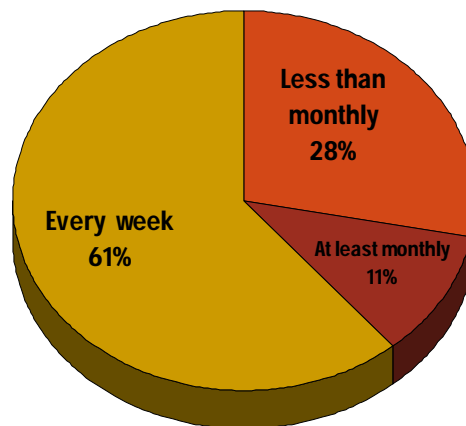
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## Marital Status



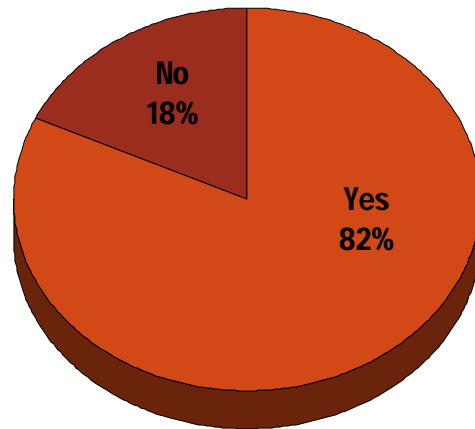
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## How often did your parents attend religious services?



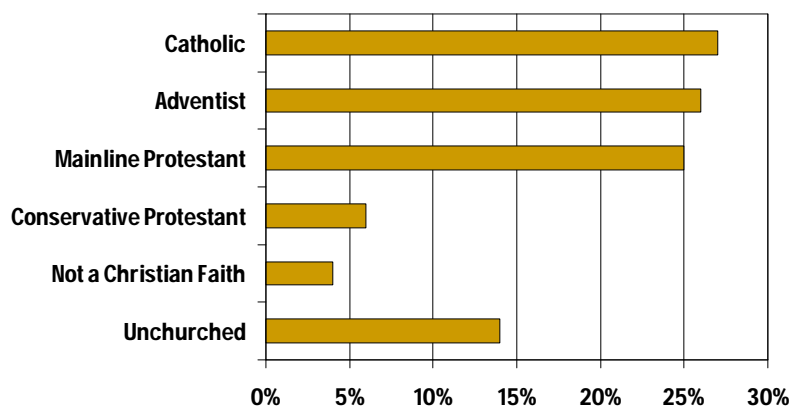
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## Did your parents take you to church or Sunday School?



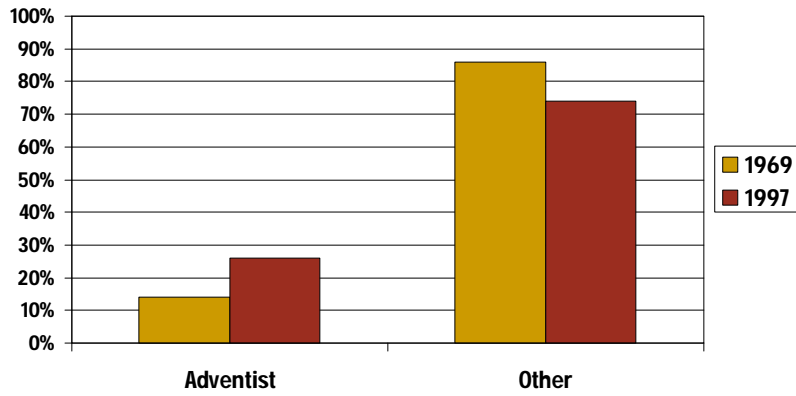
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## Parents' Religious Background



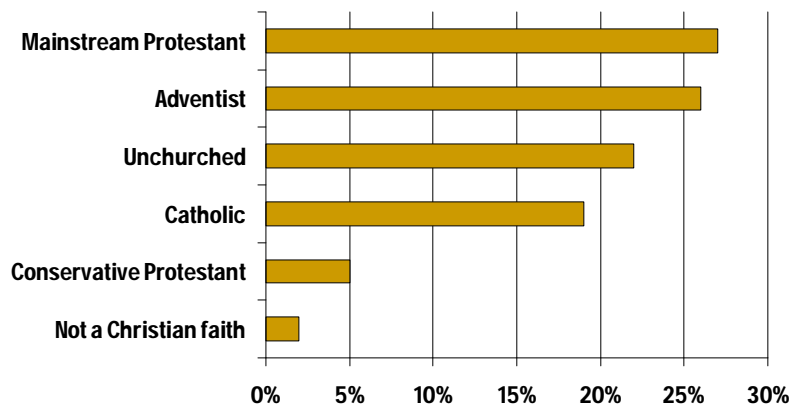
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## Parents' Religious Background



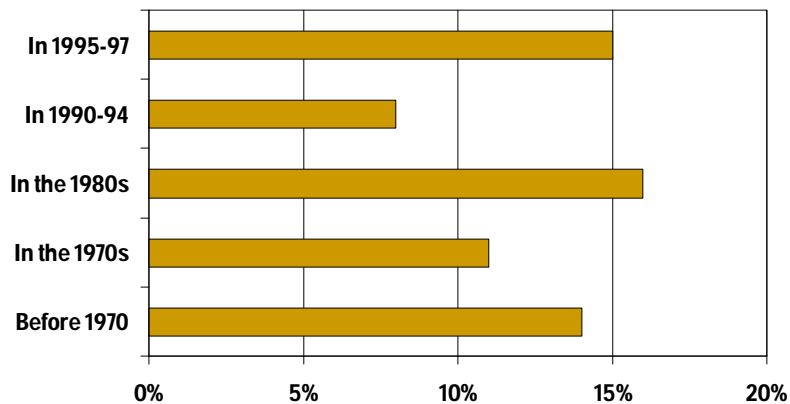
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## Spouse's Religious Background



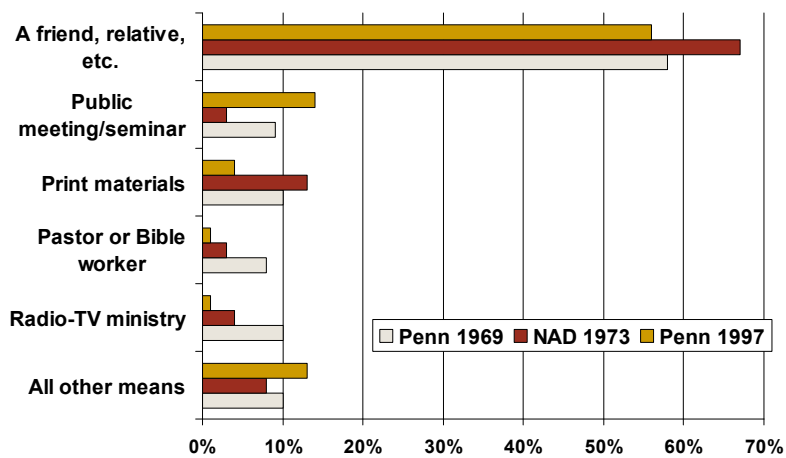
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## When did you first hear about the Adventist Church?



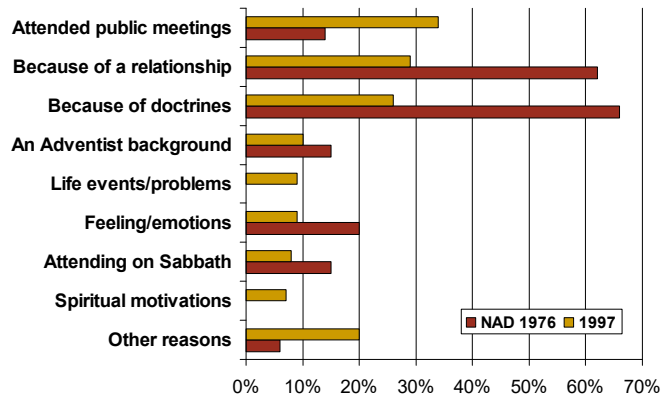
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## How did you first become aware of the Adventist Church?



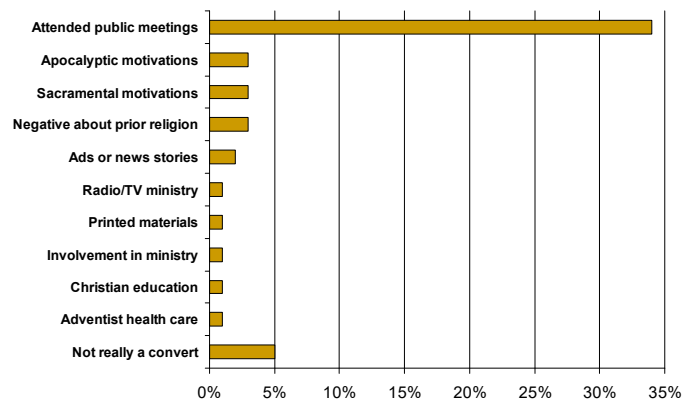
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## How did you decide to join the Adventist Church?



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## “Other Reasons” - 1997



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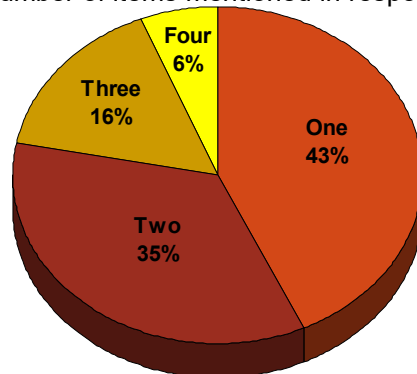
## “Not really a convert”

- This 5% includes people who say that they wanted to be baptized, but did not want to join a church ... or, did not understand that by agreeing to be baptized, they were also agreeing to join the church ... or, simply went along with social pressure from friends and family ... or, quit attending church immediately after baptism.

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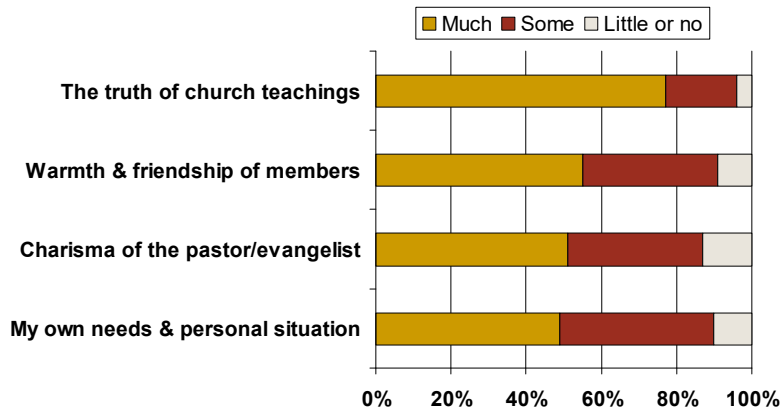
## How did you decide to join the Adventist Church?

Number of items mentioned in response



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## What most attracted you to the Adventist Church?



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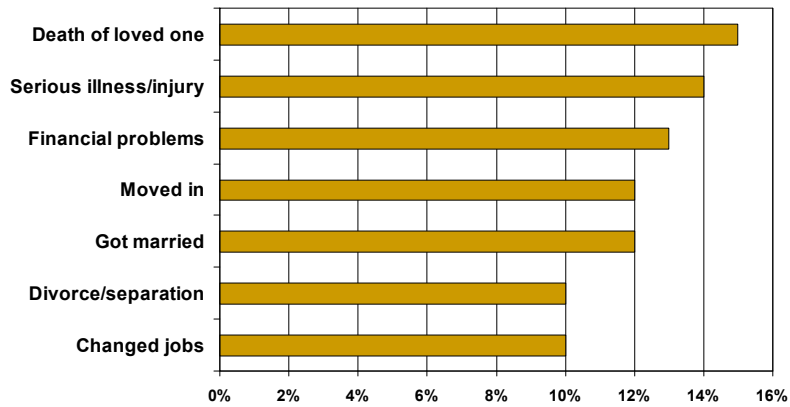
## Was there a strong attraction not mentioned above?

- Most simply re-stated items already on the list
- 3 percent listed specific church ministries
- 2 percent mentioned spiritual motivations
- Less than 1 percent listed a media ministry
- One woman “felt tricked into joining. An Andrews University student asked her to sign a baptism card and she did not know what she was agreeing to. But now, she’s glad she’s a member.” (Less than ½ of one percent)

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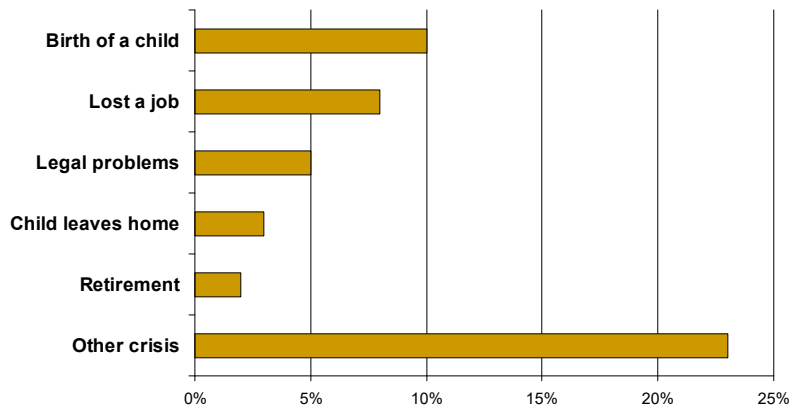


## Life events in year prior to decision to join the church



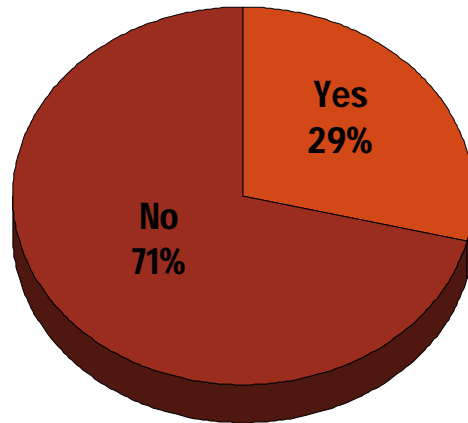
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## Life events in year prior to decision to join the church



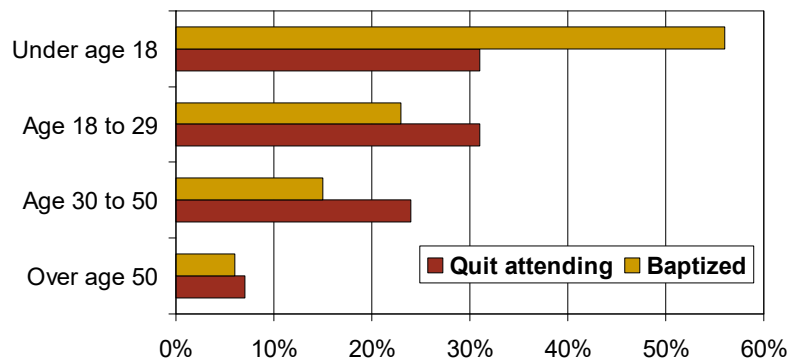
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## Did you ever join the Adventist Church before?



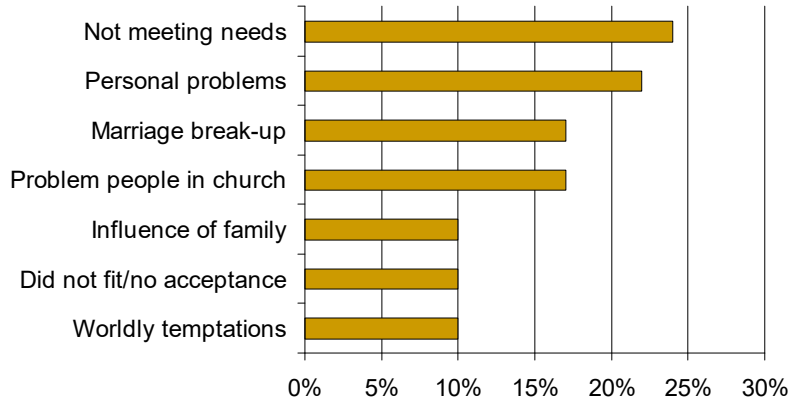
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## Returning Dropouts: Age First Joined and Dropped Out



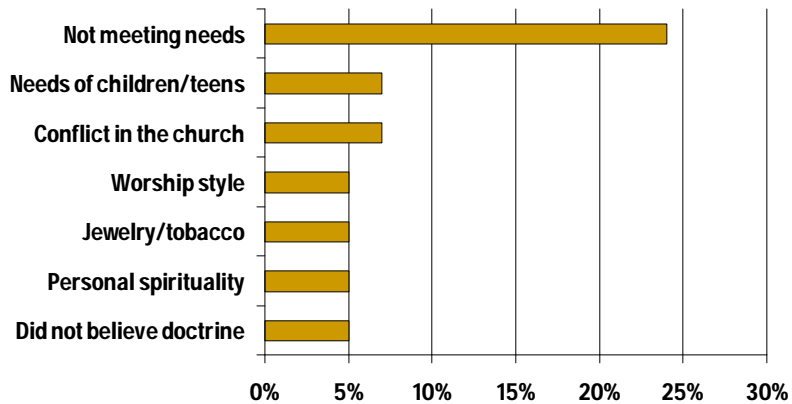
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## Returning Dropouts: How did you happen to quit attending?



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## Returning Dropouts: How did you happen to quit attending?



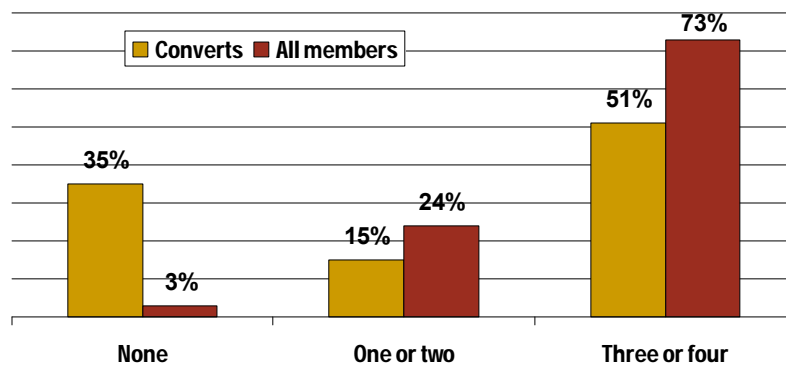
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## Returning Dropouts: How did you happen to quit attending?

- All of the respondents that indicated they dropped out of the Adventist Church because of doctrine are former members of the World-wide Church of God who left that denomination because of its change of teaching on the Sabbath

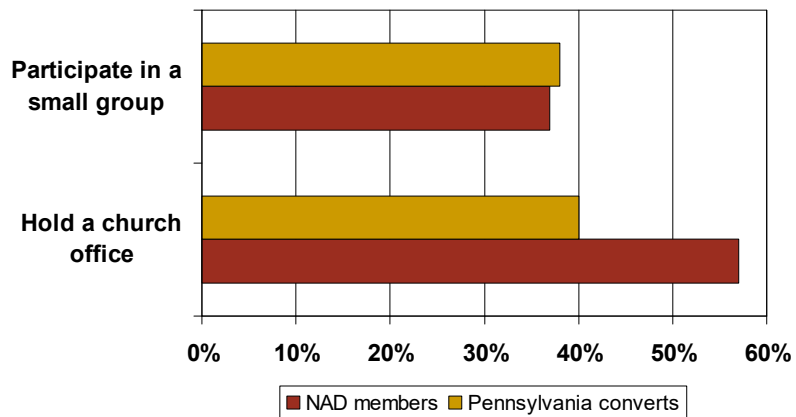
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## Church Attendance Out of the Last Four Sabbaths



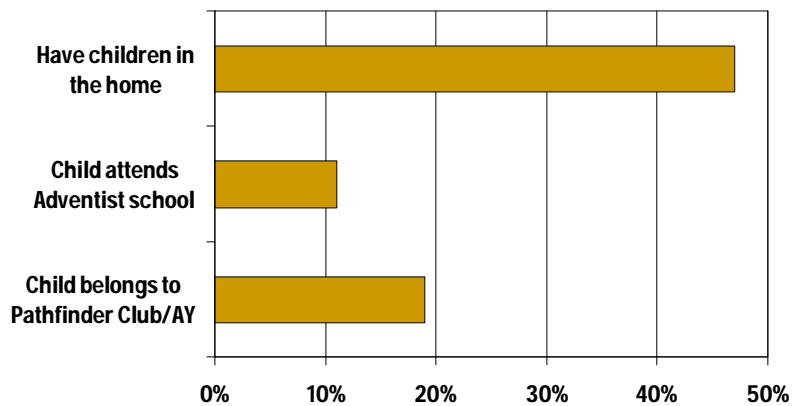
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## Church Involvement



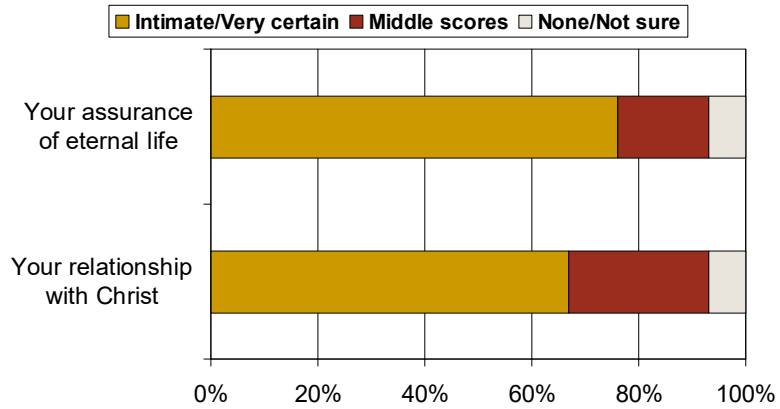
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## Participation in Children's and Youth Ministries



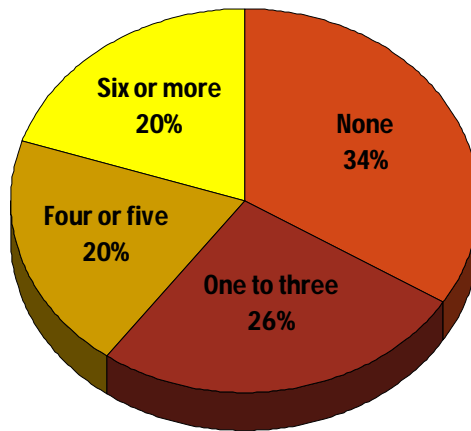
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## Spiritual Strength of Converts



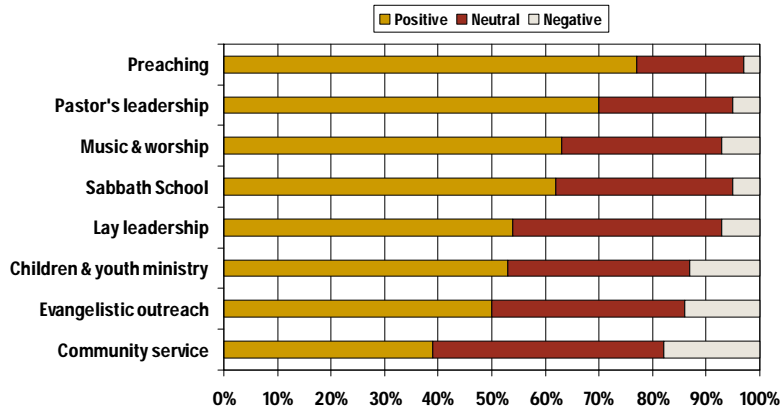
89

## How many personal friends do you have in the church?



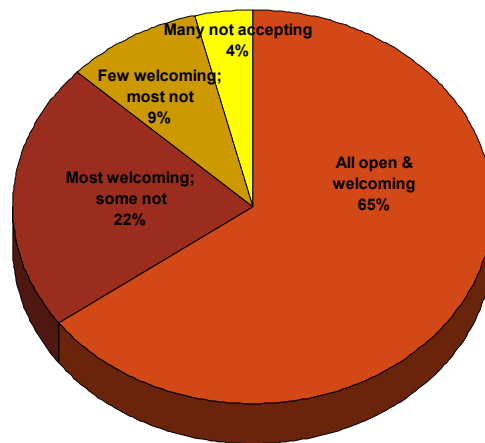
90

## Converts' Evaluation of their Local Church



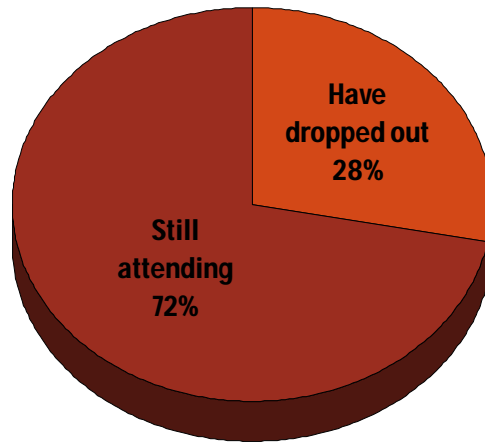
91

## Evaluation of Inclusiveness of the Congregation



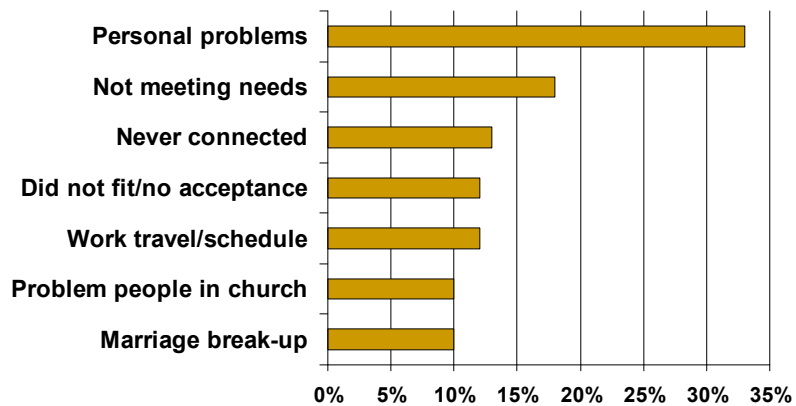
92

## How many have dropped out?



93

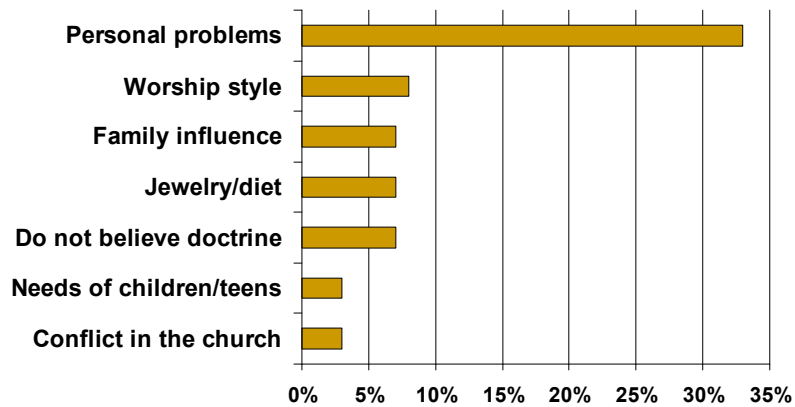
## Dropouts: How did you happen to quit attending?



94



## Dropouts: How did you happen to quit attending?



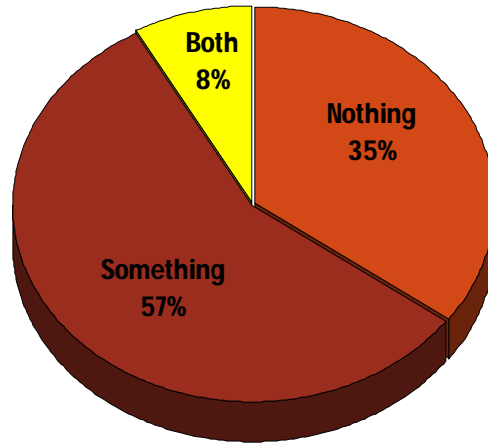
95

## “Never connected”

- One pastor reported, “Many people baptized at Leo Screven’s meetings did not understand that baptism meant joining the Adventist Church.”
- In a few other cases, the dropout indicated that they attended church once but then decided they did not want to join; they did not see baptism as joining the church.

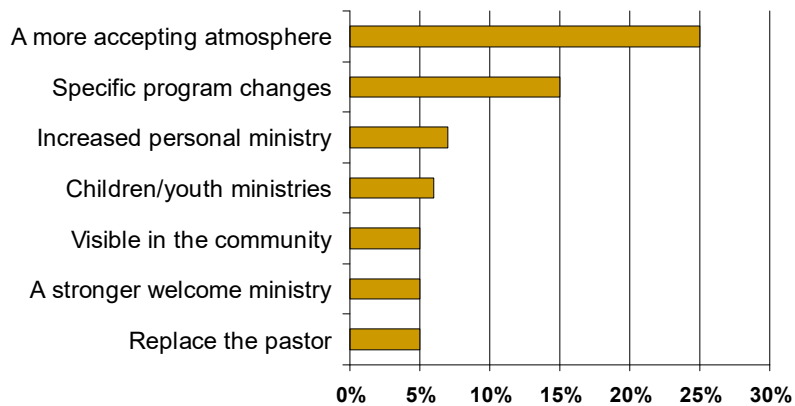
96

## What would help you feel more “at home” in the Church?



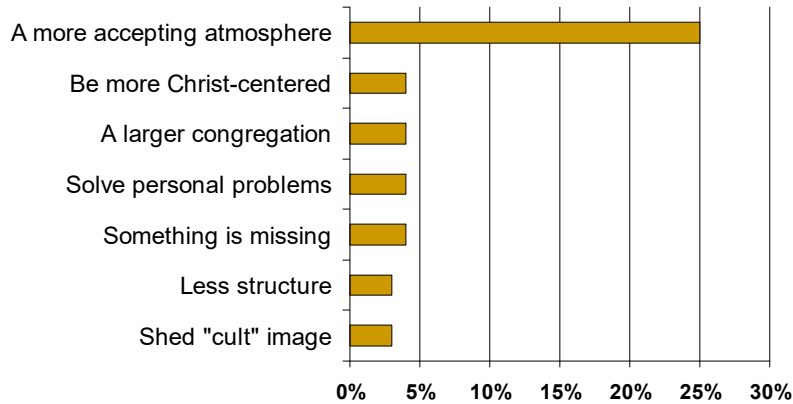
97

## What would help you feel more “at home” in the Church?



98

## What would help you feel more “at home” in the Church?



99

## What would help you feel more “at home” in the Church?

- 3 respondents mentioned specific issues about dress (“pants suits,” etc.)
- 2 respondents said, “Don’t force vegetarian diet at fellowship dinners.”
- 2 respondents mentioned doctrines they do not agree with
- 2 respondents said, “Congregation should be more accepting of change.”

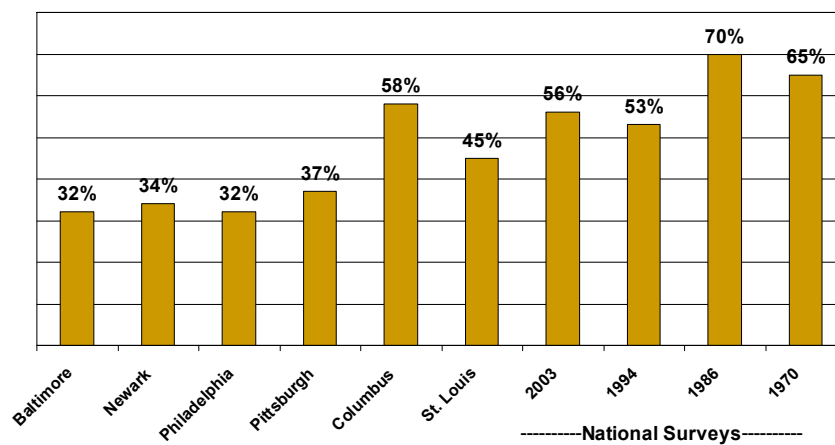
100

## Public Awareness Surveys

- Four national surveys, each with a random sample of about 1,200 telephone interviews with the general public
- At the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile of reliability allowance for sampling error is three percent (plus or minus) conducted by the Center for Creative Ministry and Gallup Poll under NAD contracts
- Six metro area surveys conducted 2000 through 2006 for the Columbia and Mid-America unions with samples of 250 to 500

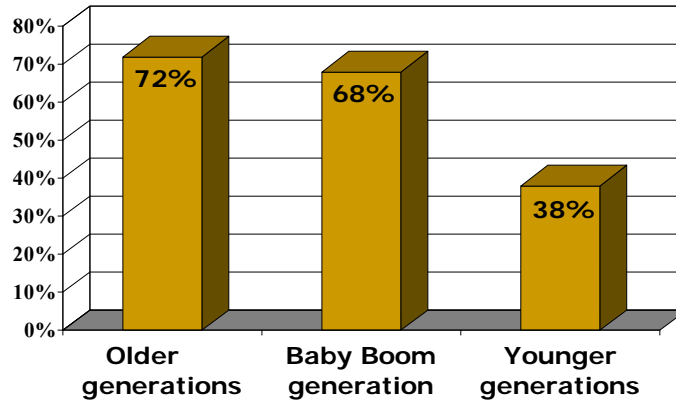
101

## Name Recognition of the Adventist Church by the General Public



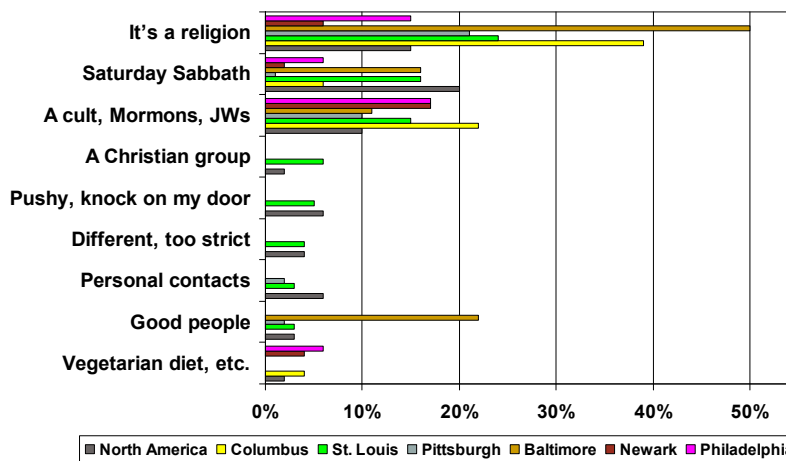
102

## Name Recognition by Generation



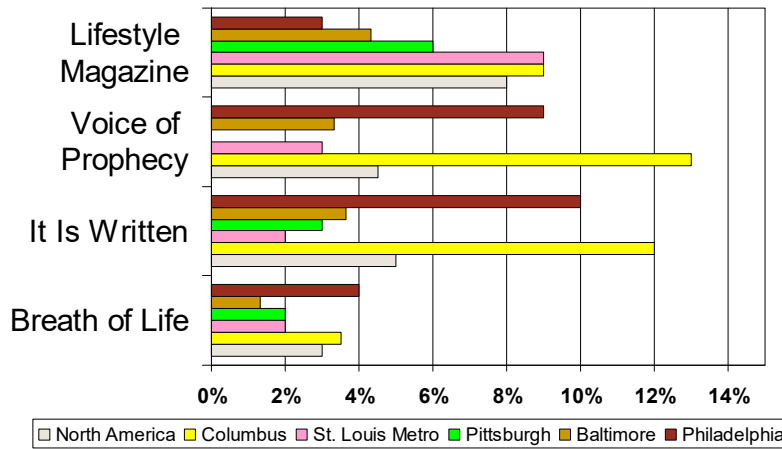
103

## What comes to mind?



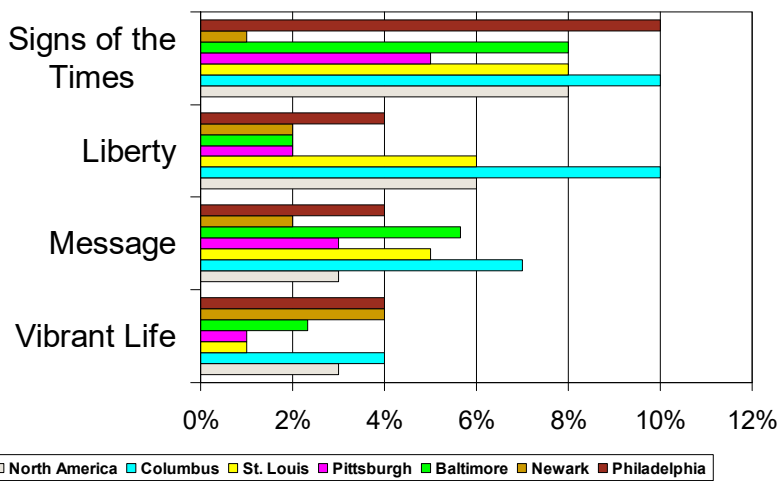
104

## Name Recognition of Adventist Media Ministries



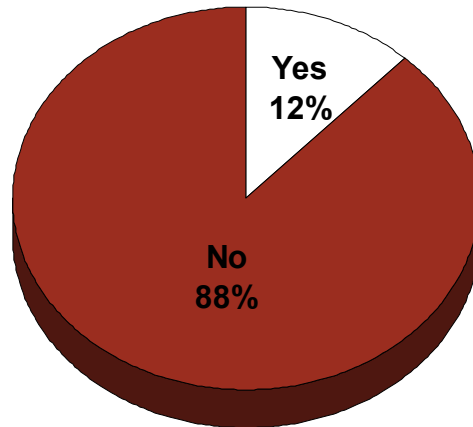
105

## Name Recognition of Adventist Journals



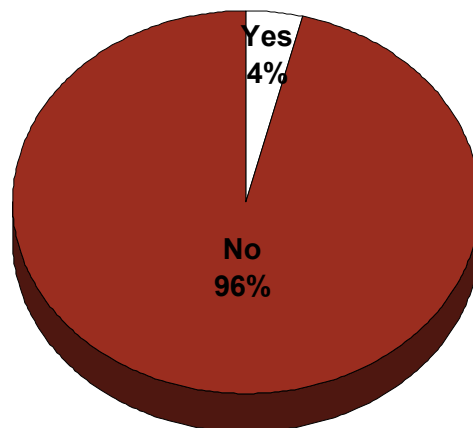
106

**Do you know anyone who is an Adventist?**



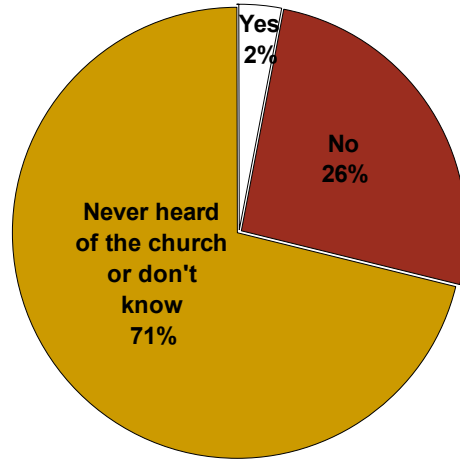
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**Have you ever visited an Adventist church [or meeting]?**



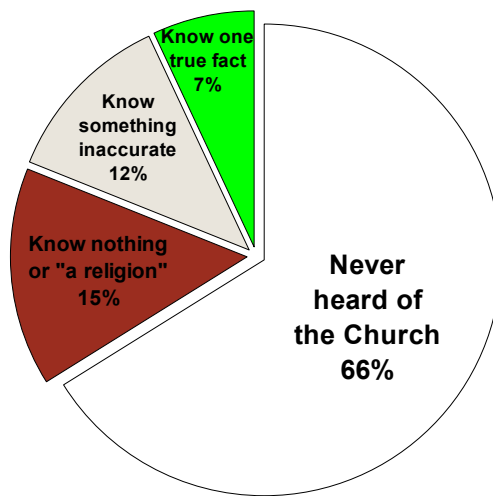
108

**Is the Adventist Church active in local community causes?**



109

**Summary of public awareness in the major metropolitan areas**



110



## What do these data mean?

- The Adventist Church is largely invisible in North America today
- The problem is greater in the cities of the East than it is in the Sunbelt
- The average person is not likely to respond to a message coming from an organization they don't know
- The Adventist Church is increasingly marginalized and “preaching to the choir”

111

## What can be done about public perceptions?

- Break out of the “religious ghetto” into mainstream, secular media
- What the Mormons are doing
- NAD has experimented with public awareness spots in Tulsa, Spokane and Indianapolis
- Major barrier; cannot raise money in a spot strategy

112

## What can be done about public perceptions?

- Increased community involvement by the organization, *not* individuals
- Establish Adventist public service/ public affairs agencies in major metropolitan areas
- Make contributions that gain media attention and “street cred”

113

## What can be done about public perceptions?

- The credibility of a church and the plausibility of its message is judged differently by new generations than in the past
- Past: institutional strength, education of the clergy, substantial publications
- Now: significant humanitarian activities in the local community, creativity of worship experience, authenticity

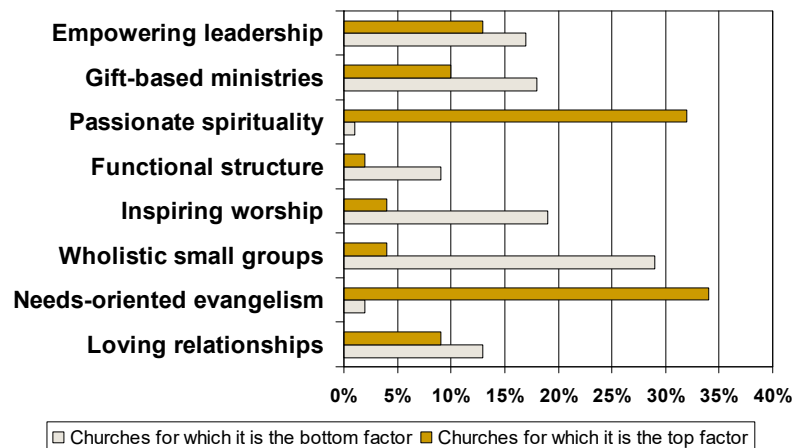
114

## Natural Church Development

- An “asset-based” approach to developing readiness for church growth created by Christian Schwarz, an Evangelical leader in Germany
- His current research director is an Adventist minister—Dr. Petr Cincala
- NAD Evangelism Institute has been promoting NCD in America

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## NCD in Adventist Churches in North America



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## NCD in Adventist Churches in North America

- Does it work?
- Remember, this is **not** a random sample, but a self-selected cluster. It *does not prove anything* for any other church.
- The average church has an AAG of 2%.

<b>Overall score</b>	<b>Average Annual Growth</b>
Under 36	9%
36 to 64	10%
65 and above	22%

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## What this does prove:

- Any pastor and congregation that will consistently follow through on any one of the many assessment and change processes—of which NCD is one—will increase its growth rate significantly over a period of years.
- Most failure is in follow-through; Adventist clergy have too short an attention span.

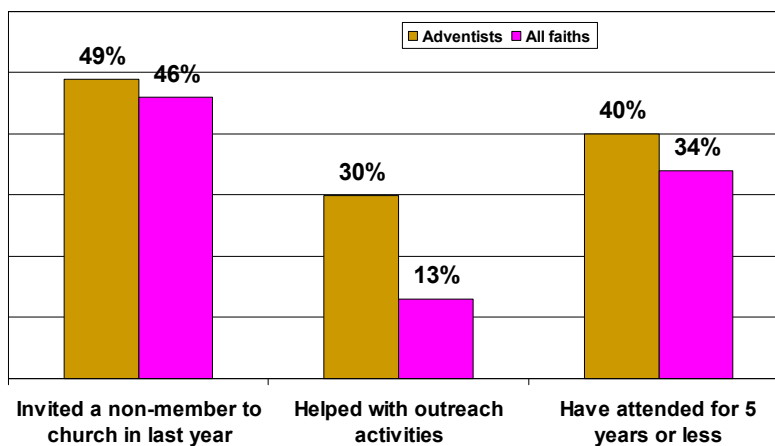
118

## 2003 Church Growth Study

- Data from three surveys analyzed by using a statistical tool called regression analysis (cluster correlations)
- Faith Communities Today (FACT) research partnership Adventist sample
- Published in *Adventist Congregations Today* (2003, Center for Creative Ministry) and *Ministry* November 2004

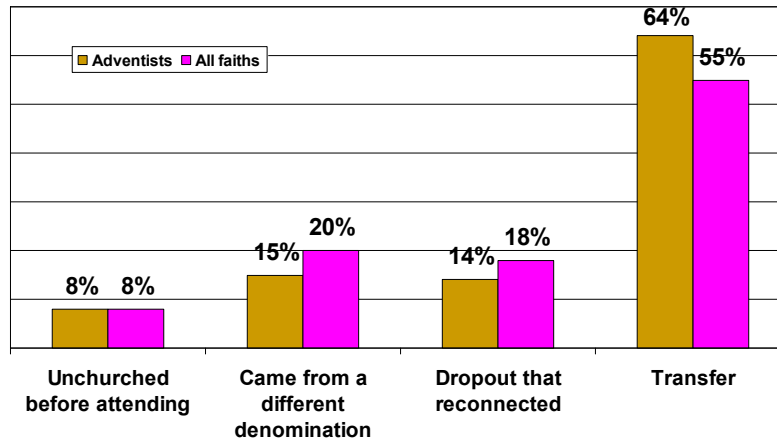
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## Sample of Attenders



120

## Attended Here for 5 Years or Less



121

## How to Measure Church Growth

- Adult attendance as a percentage of book membership
- Youth attendance as a percentage of book membership (teens & young adults)
- Change in number of active, adult participants over previous five years
- Percentage of adults involved in activities that strengthen faith in addition to worship

122

## **Possible Predictors of Church Growth**

- Worship experiences
- Congregational identity
- Evangelistic outreach activities
- Community service
- Christian education
- Items specifically related to church growth

123

## **Church Growth Measured by Adult Attendance**

- Members excited about the future of the church
- Church helps members deepen their relationship with God
- Church sponsors a community service of employment counseling and/or job training
- Church sponsors a community service of a senior-citizen feeding program

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## **Church Growth Measured by Youth Attendance**

- Church sponsors a community service of employment counseling and/or job training
- Church helps members deepen their relationship with God
- Church sponsors a community service of a homeless shelter or housing project
- Church sponsors a community service of a substance abuse program

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## **Church Growth Measured by 5-year Increase in Adult Adherents**

- Church is spiritually vital and alive
- Members excited about future of the church
- Special worship services are conducted for the non-churched (“seeker service,” etc.)
- Members believe the local church has potential for growth
- Local church sponsors a community service of family counseling services

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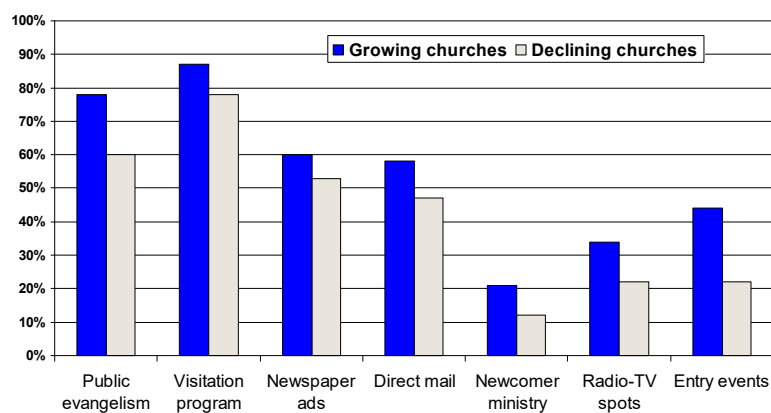


## Church Growth Measured by Involvement in Spiritual Growth

- All church activities are coordinated to focus on church growth
- Church helps members deepen their relationship with God
- Congregation welcomes innovation and change
- The local community is well-informed about church activities

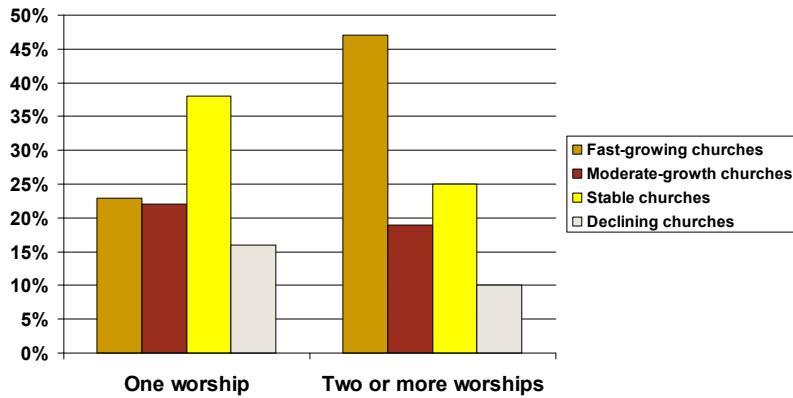
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## Church Growth & Evangelism



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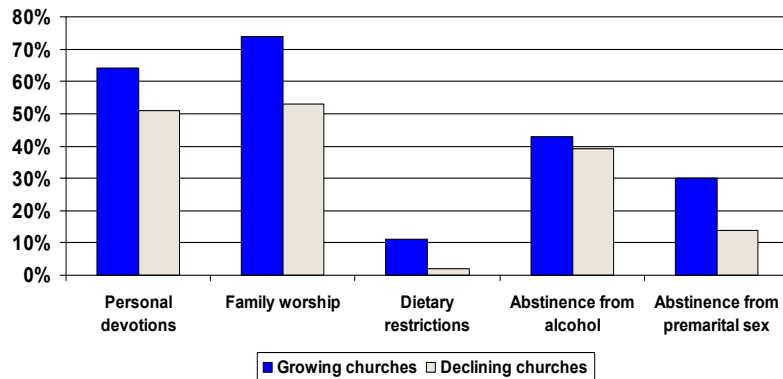
## Church Growth and Additional Worship Services



129

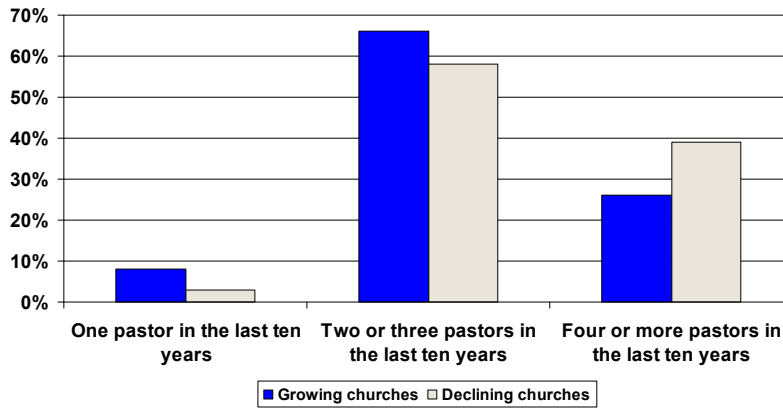
## Church Growth and Teaching Spiritual Disciplines

Give considerable emphasis to ...



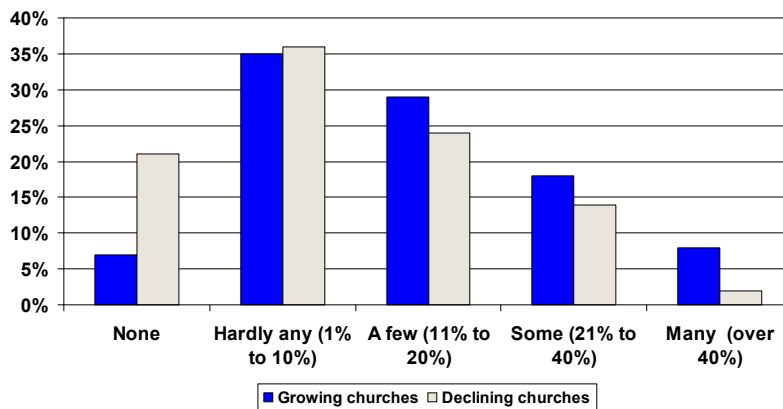
130

## Church Growth and Pastoral Tenure



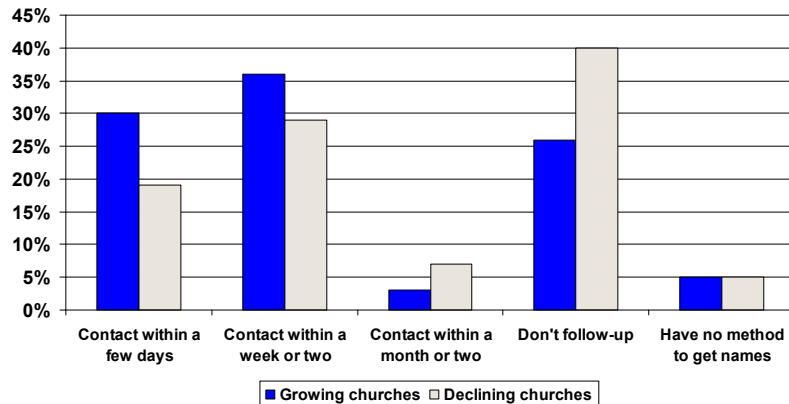
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## Church Growth and Small Groups



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## Church Growth and Follow-up with New Attenders



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## Supplementary Survey

- Original Research Design
  - Attender survey – 5,596 respondents
  - Church survey – 413 local churches
- Supplementary survey – 42 churches with 1,312 members responding
  - Attempted to confirm several existing paradigms for church growth
- We got essentially the same findings from all three surveys

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## Summary of Findings

- 5 of 9 items are related to community involvement
- “Church deepens relationship with God” correlated in 3 out of 4 clusters
- Atmosphere in the congregation, intention to grow and Sabbath evangelism are also important

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## New Paradigm for Church Growth in Adventist Churches

<b>Spirituality</b>	<b>Community involvement</b>
<b>Intention</b>	<b>Atmosphere</b>
<b>Sabbath events for the non-churched</b>	

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## Ellen White wrote ...

Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior *mingled* with men as one who desired their good. He *showed* His sympathy for them, *ministered* to their needs, and *won* their confidence. Then He *bade* them, "Follow me."

*The Ministry of Healing*, page 143

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## "Christ's Method"

<b>"Mingle"</b> present, involved, observing	<b>"Show"</b> demonstrate or act out	<b>"Minister"</b> service, caring, compassion
<b>"win their confidence"</b>		
<b><u>then</u></b>  <b>ask them to "follow" Jesus</b> be a disciple, learn, grow – study the Bible, pray, share		

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## “Christ’s Method”

Community assessment	Community visibility	Community service
Friendship Evangelism		
Discipleship Program		

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## What Next?

- What findings are useful to the needs of the Pacific Union Conference?
- What pieces are missing?
- The need to calibrate data specifically to the Pacific Union (and maybe each local conference)
- Possibilities for an evangelism research and information system

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