
1998-99
Church Resources
Needs Assessment

Seventh-day Adventist Church
in North America



Conducted by the Center for Creative Ministry for the
North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

Introduction

Each year the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America conducts a needs assessment to determine what new products and services should be developed by the NAD Church Resources system. The system includes the NAD departments and ministries, AdventSource (the NAD distribution center), Plus Line, the recognized resource centers, and the publishing houses. The Church Resources Consortium is a partnership all of these entities, plus the union conferences, and it oversees the resources system. Consortium responsibilities include authorizing and funding specific product development projects based on the results of this study.

The needs assessment uses two information-gathering tools. First, focus group research is conducted with pastors and lay leaders of local congregations to surface specific needs. Second, a survey is administered among the members of the conference executive committees to prioritize the needs discovered through focus groups.

Five focus groups were conducted at representative locations throughout North America in the later half of 1998. There were more than 50 participants, including pastors, elders, and a variety of congregational department heads. The locations were selected so that participants could come from more than a dozen conferences, and to ensure a balance of small and large congregations, urban and small town churches, and various ethnic groups, as well as key geographic regions. Every two years, a focus group is conducted in each of the nine union conferences.

A total of eighteen needs were identified from the focus group research. Based on a careful analysis of language used by the participants, each is described both in terms of a brief label and one or two sentences. (See Table 1.)

In order to quantify the extent to which these various needs are a priority among Adventist Church leaders at the local level, a survey was conducted during the spring of 1999. The sample for the survey is made up of the members of the local conference executive committees. Almost all of these individuals are pastors and lay leaders. Only a few are conference officers, department directors and institutional representatives. This particular sample is used because these individuals are elected representatives of the local congregations and play a key role in establishing denominational priorities relative to the use of funds, adoption of programs, etc.

A questionnaire was sent to the elected Secretary of each of the 58 local conferences in the NAD with a request that it be administered at the next regular meeting of the executive committee. The language in Table 1 is the same as that used in the questionnaire, and respondents were instructed in writing to “read carefully all 18 of the items” and “choose the seven (7) you think are the most important.” There are also a few demographic questions.

By the end of April, 1999, when data processing began, a total of 35 of the 58 conferences had returned questionnaires. This is a response rate of 60% which provides a very reliable indicator of the opinion of the local leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America.

The survey yielded a total of 405 usable responses. When interpreting the results of any sample survey, it is necessary to allow for sampling error. The allowance for sampling error in this survey, at the 95th percentile of reliability, is five percentage points, plus or minus.

Priority Needs

Of the eighteen needs surfaced through focus group research, six were identified in the survey as being important in the opinion of a majority of the respondents. Another five needs were identified as important by a third to 46% of the respondents, while seven of the needs are seen as important to only one in four or fewer of the respondents.

A few needs that are not important in the opinion of a majority of the respondents, are seen as important by a majority among specific demographic segments. For example, 50% of the women among the respondents report that “more member involvement” is important, while only 46% of the total sample agrees.

The graphics in this report include separate displays of data for each of the demographic segments—women and men, denominational employees as compared to those not employed by the denomination, the four adult generations, the four major ethnic groups, and the nine union conferences. (See the section following Table 2.) Consideration must be given to specific needs that are important in diverse segments of the Church, even if those needs are not seen as important by a majority of the total respondents.

Table 1
Felt Needs in the Local Church as Identified in Focus Group Research

Adult Sabbath School Quarterly—This study tool should be made less complex and easier to understand for the members and teachers.

Children in Worship—We need to find creative ways to involve our children in divine worship in ways that are meaningful to all.

Conflict Management—Pastors seem to be regularly involved in arbitrating disputes between members. An outline of steps that should be taken by members to bring healing and peace in such situations would be helpful.

Discipling Program—We need to develop a disciple-making program for the local church that is intentional and easily understood; giving particular attention to incorporating new members into the life of the church.

Evangelism for the 21st Century—We need to explore alternative approaches to evangelism for today's world. This includes finding ways to reach the secular mind and express the Adventist message and mission in relevant and contemporary ways.

Family Support—We need to find ways to help the church support families of all types. This includes doing more to help those members who live in single parent homes and/or blended families where there are stepparents and stepchildren.

Help for Hurting Members—Our churches need to become "safe" places offering unconditional acceptance and emotional support to regular and new members; doing a better job of fostering kindness, social interaction and hospitality.

Help for the Local Church Elder—Many wrongly look at this position as "honorary." It would be good to have a resource and training available that would clearly identify the responsibilities associated with this position.

Including More Single Adults—We need to do more to recognize the contributions single adults already make in the local church and determine ways to include more non-active single members in fellowship and leadership.

Involving Members in Friendship Evangelism—Church leadership needs to find better ways to motivate, enlist, and train members in the area of informal, unstructured, personal witnessing among friends, work associates, neighbors, relatives.

Ministry with Men—In recent years most conference constituencies have established a women's ministry to provide retreats, resources and, in some cases, a help line. It is felt that something especially targeted to the spiritual needs of men needs to be developed.

More Member Involvement in Church Activities—We need to find ways to better involve, motivate and train members to hold church office and/or be a volunteer worker in the church infrastructure and program.

Professional Referral Services and Resources—Given the great strides in technology, we should be able to help our pastors be better "networked" with Christian professionals who are available to serve the needs of hurting members.

Relevant Sabbath Services—We may need to explore alternative approaches to worship-rethinking how we do Sabbath morning services, perhaps even doing a little "reinventing." We need more resources for inter-generational services.

Resistance to Change—In these times of rapid change we need to discover ways to help members handle changes in methodologies occurring in the church without them becoming, critical or discouraged.

Support Groups—We need to have a greater number and variety of support groups in the local church-finding ways to better encourage members to join a cell or small group. This would help "build" the church.

Understanding our Communities—We need to do better at identifying and addressing the felt needs of our communities-getting involved in social action programs such as for the homeless, single parents, teen pregnancy, the poor, and those who grieve.

Youth Needs—We need to strengthen the relationship between the youth and the adults-meeting the felt needs of our young people and intentionally finding ways to keep them in the church.

Table 2
Felt Needs in the Local Church

- 70% — Youth needs
 - 64% — Evangelism for the 21st Century
 - 54% — Help for hurting members
 - 53% — Involving members in Friendship Evangelism
 - 53% — Understanding our communities
 - 52% — A discipling program

 - 46% — More member involvement in church activities
 - 44% — Support for families
 - 41% — Relevant Sabbath services
 - 36% — Support groups
 - 32% — Children in worship

 - 27% — Resistance to change
 - 26% — Help for the local elder
 - 23% — Conflict management
 - 20% — Changes in the adult Sabbath School quarterly
 - 16% — Professional referral services and counseling resources
 - 14% — Ministry with men
 - 10% — Including more single adults
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1998-99 Church Resources Needs Assessment

North American Division
of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

Source of Data

1998-99 NAD Church Resources Needs Assessment

- Focus group research was conducted in five locations across the NAD to surface needs in local congregations as seen by pastors and lay leaders
 - A survey was conducted among the members of local conference executive committees to prioritize these needs
 - ***Continued ...***
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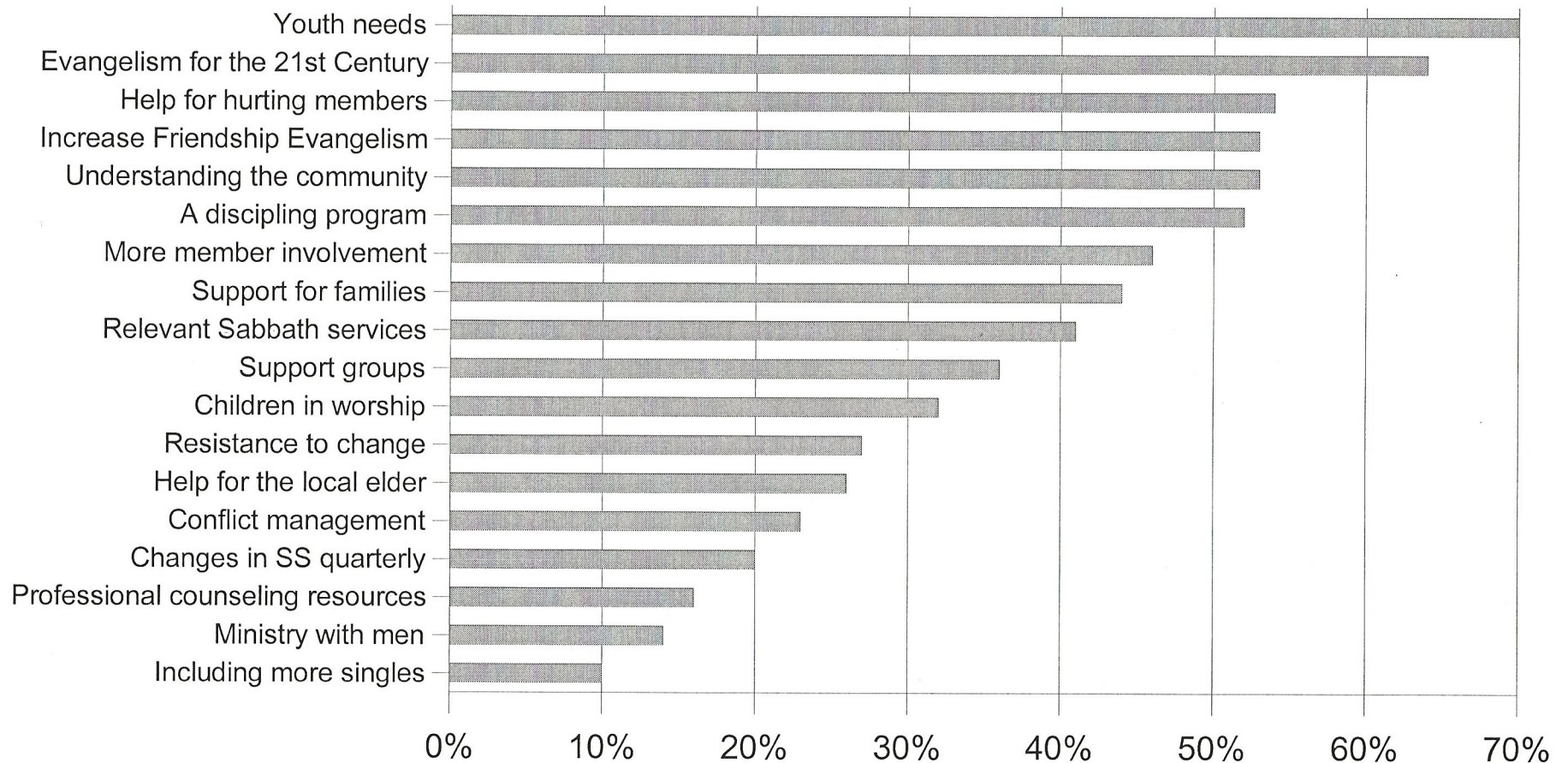
Source of Data - 2

1998-99 NAD Church Resources Needs Assessment

- A total of 405 useable questionnaires were returned from 35 local conferences
 - ▶ The response rate is 60% which provides a very reliable indicator of opinion
 - ▶ The allowance for sampling error at the 95th percentile of reliability is five percentage points, plus or minus
 - This study was conducted for the NAD by the Center for Creative Ministry
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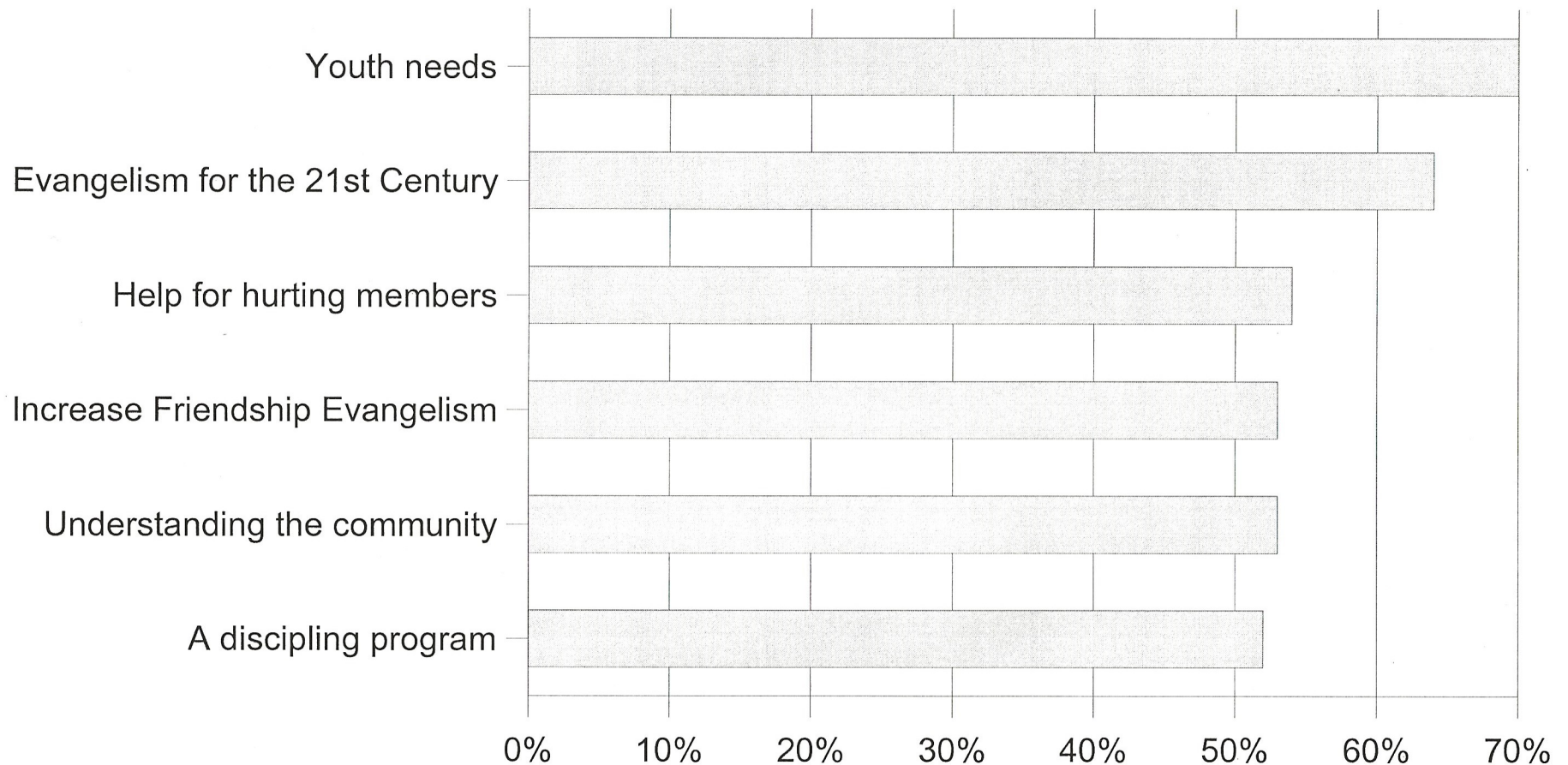
Local Church Needs

Overall Priorities of the Total North American Sample



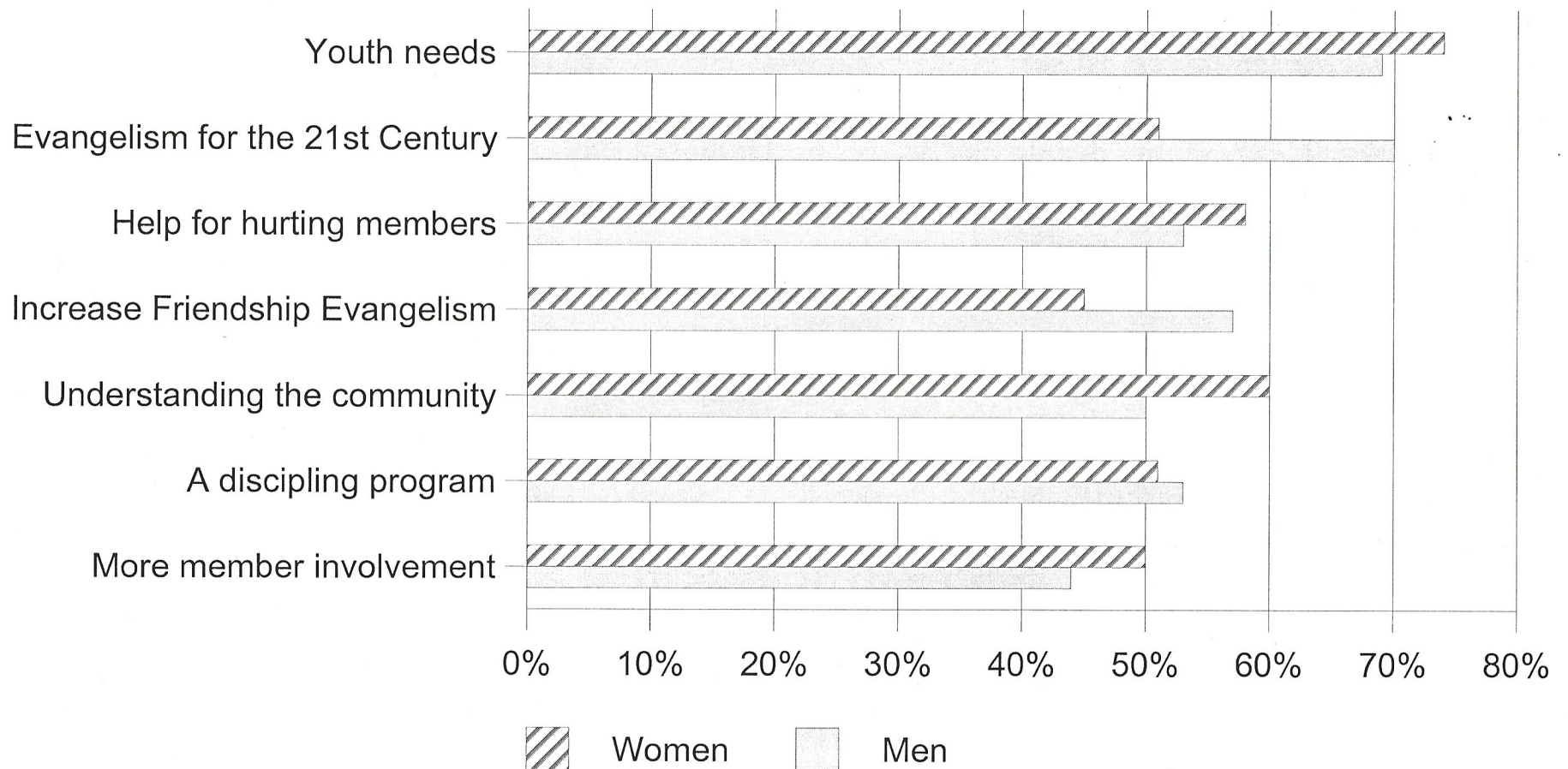
Top Local Church Needs

Needs as Prioritized by Majority of Total NAD Sample



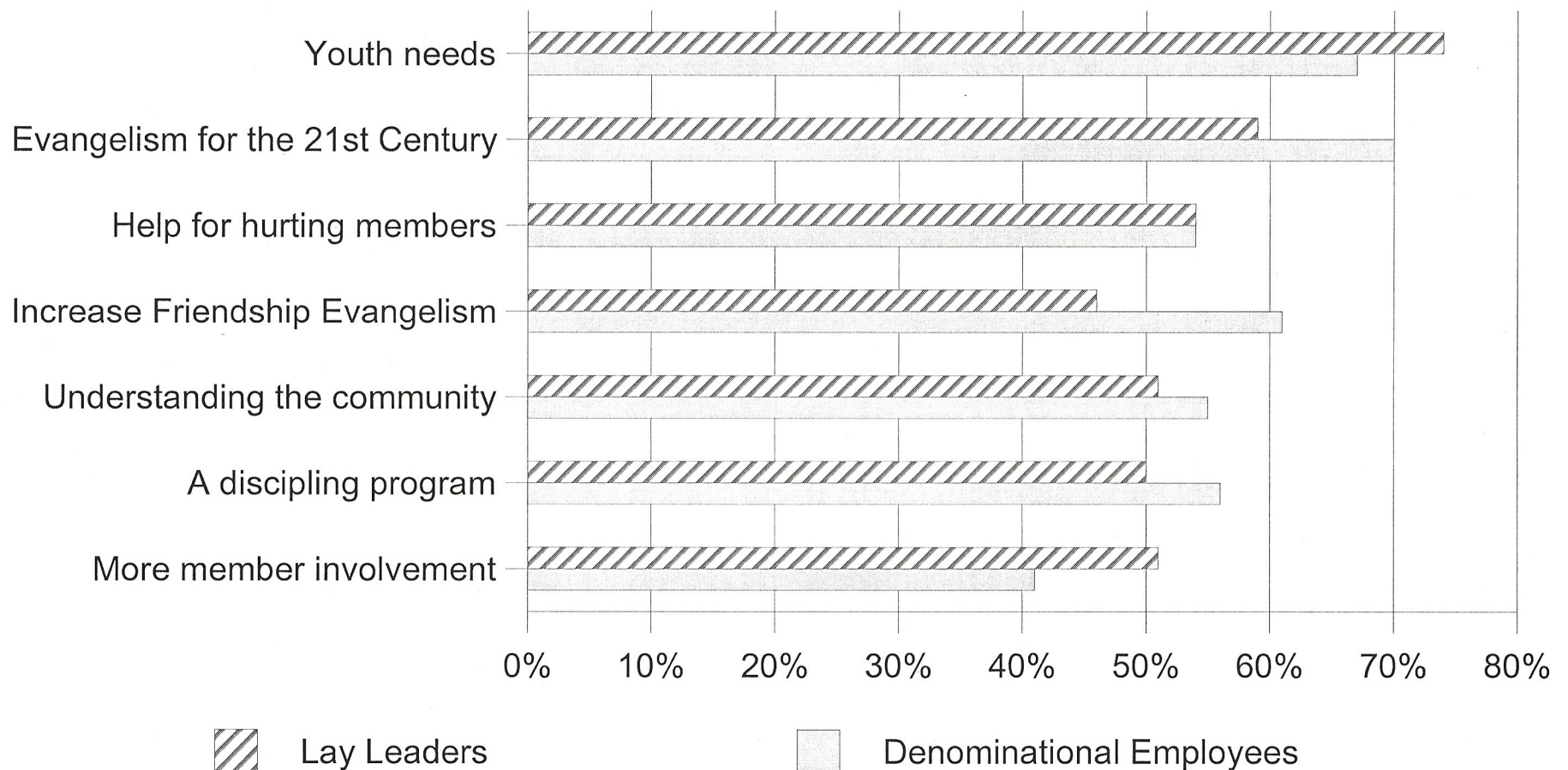
Top Priorities by Gender

Local Church Needs as Prioritized by Men and Women



Top Priorities by Church Role

Local Church Needs as Prioritized by Employees, Members



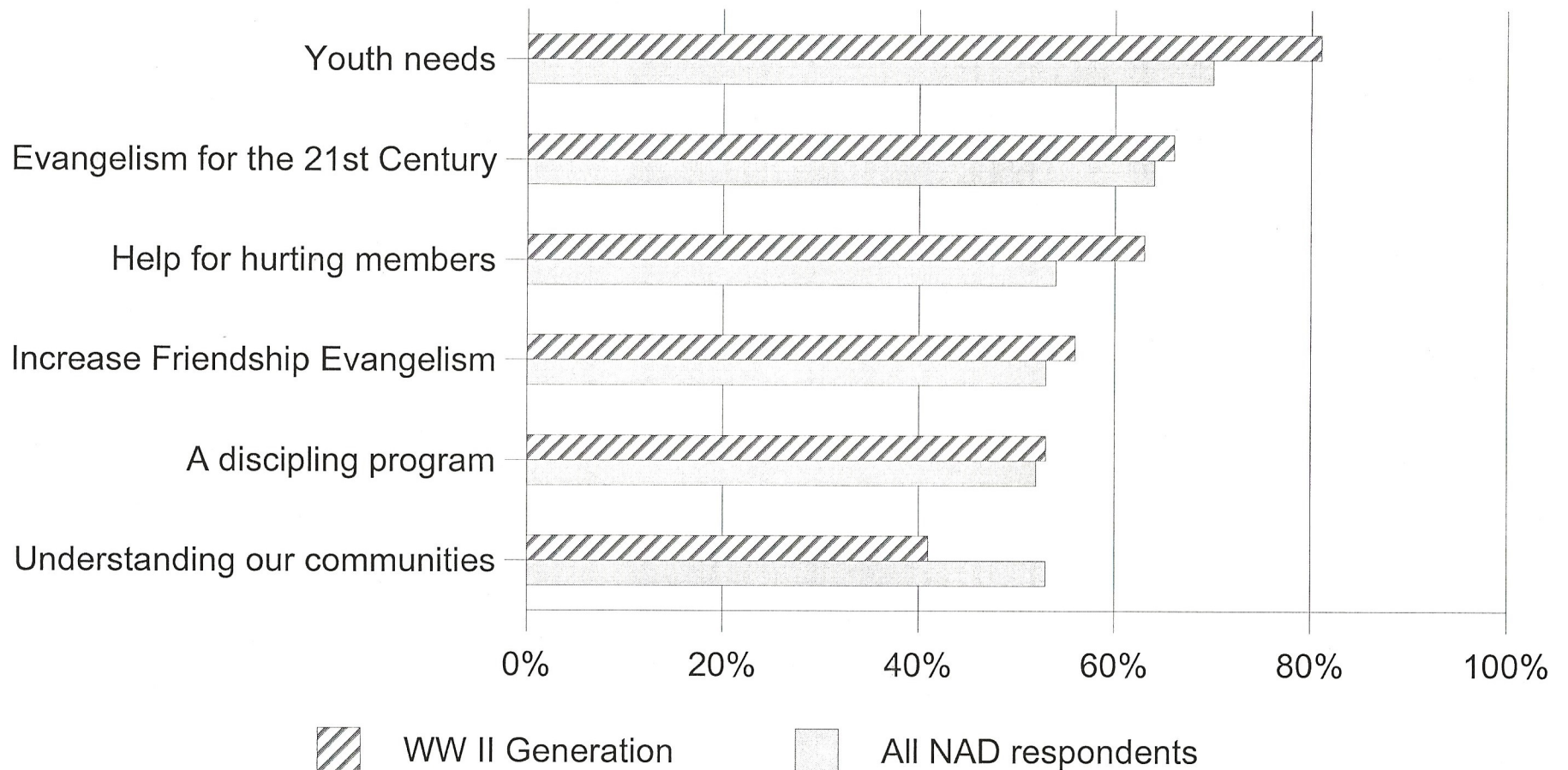
The Generations

North American Generations Today

- World War II generation, born 1900-1929, now 70 through 99 years of age
 - Swing generation, born 1930-1945, now 54 through 69 years of age
 - Baby Boom generation, born 1946-1964, now 35 through 53 years of age
 - Generation X, born 1965-1980, now 19 through 34 years of age
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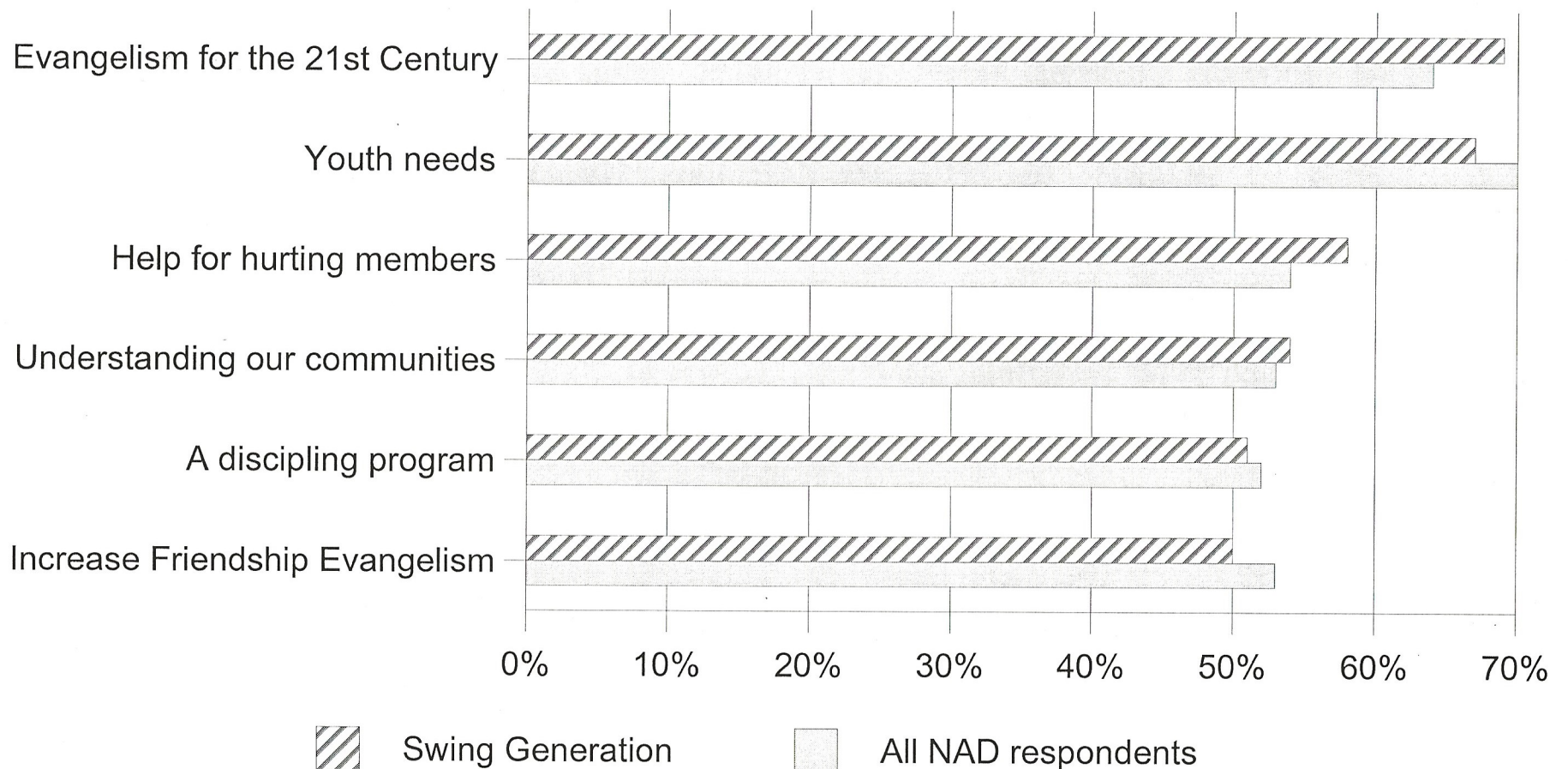
WW II Generation Priorities

Local Church Needs as Prioritized by the Majority



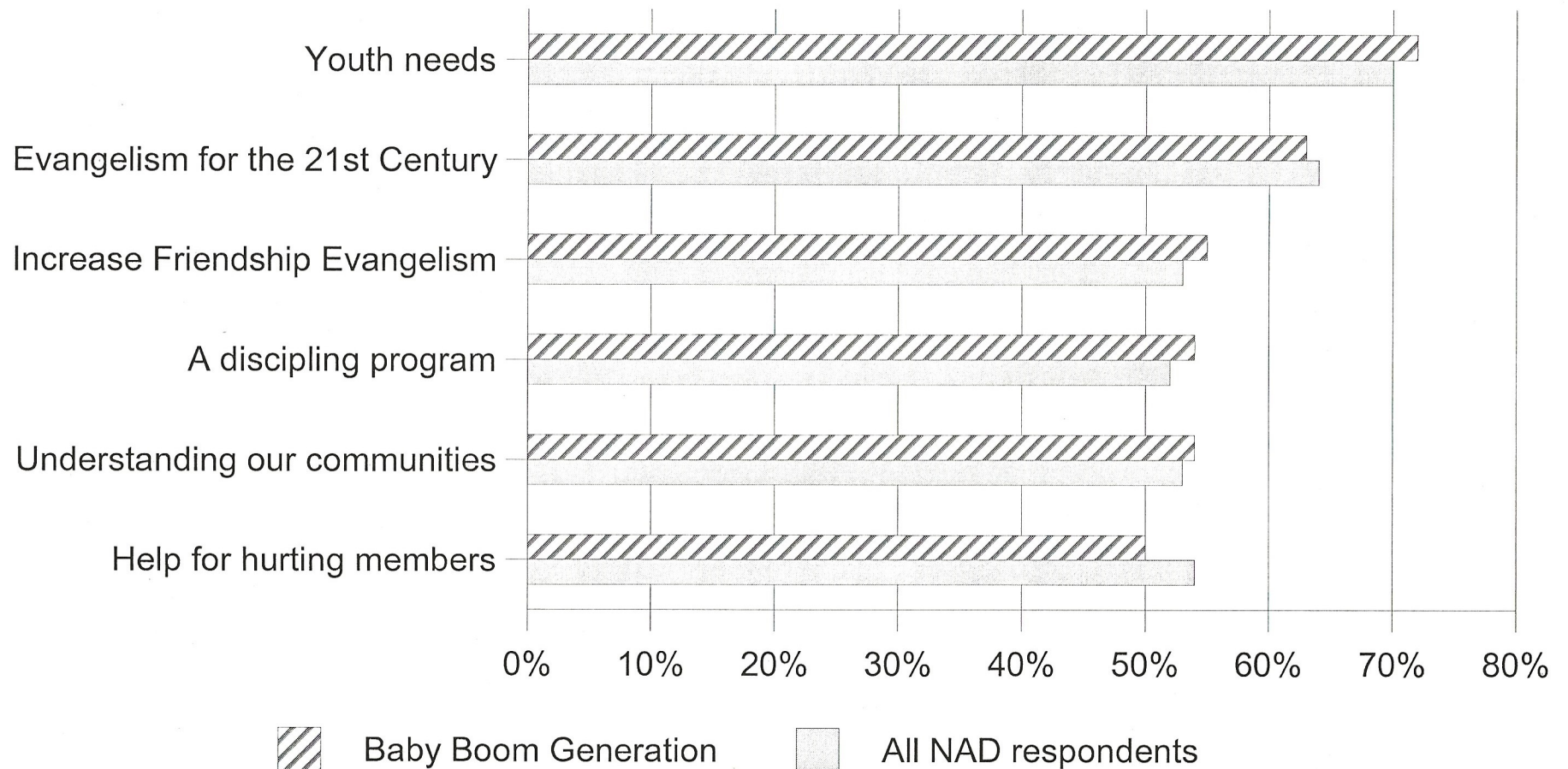
Swing Generation Priorities

Local Church Needs as Prioritized by the Majority



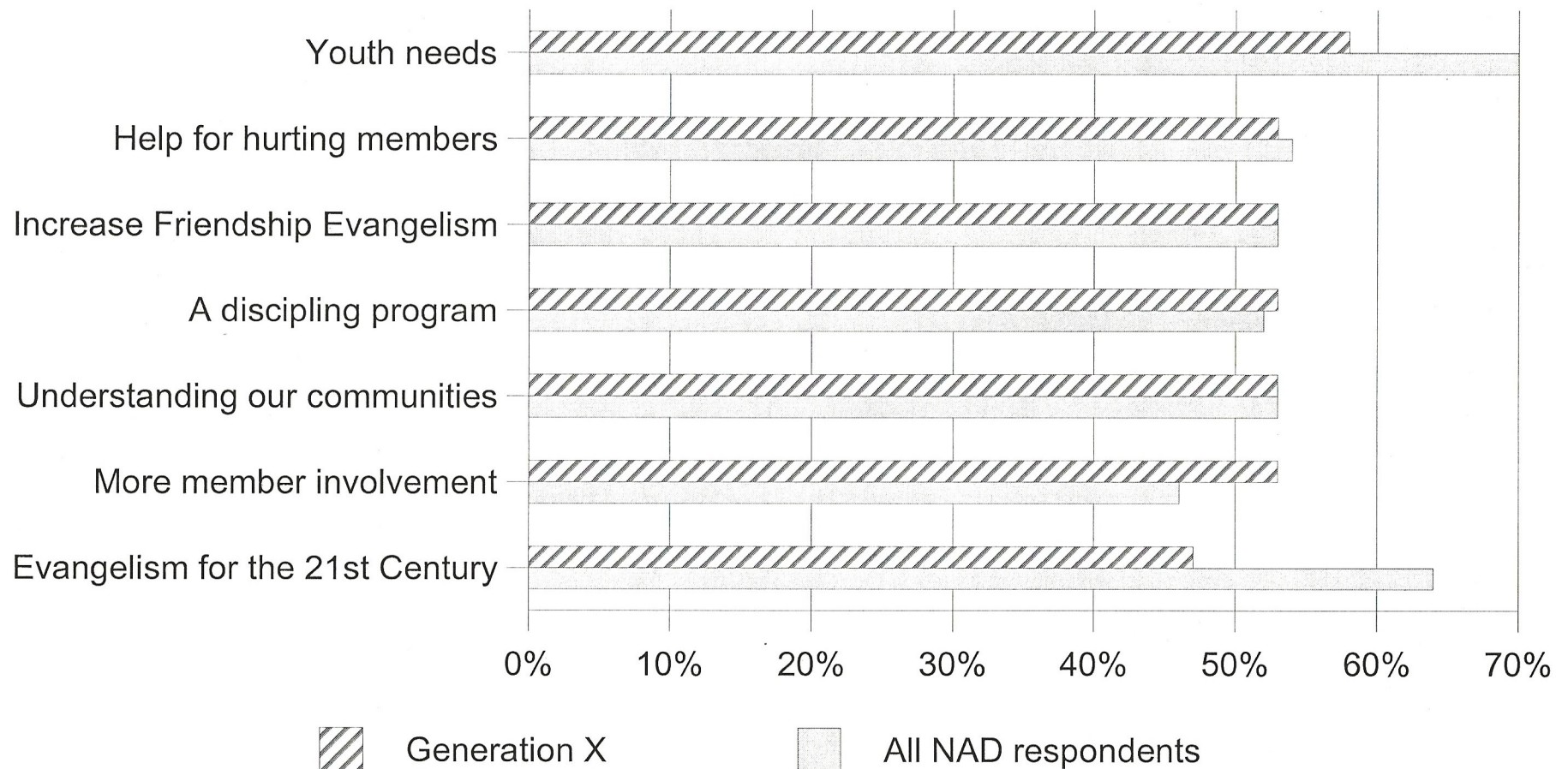
Baby Boom Generation Priorities

Local Church Needs as Prioritized by the Majority



Generation X Priorities

Local Church Needs as Prioritized by the Majority



Major Ethnic Groups

Top priorities of the respondents from each of the major ethnic groups in the NAD:

African Americans, including black immigrants from the Caribbean and elsewhere

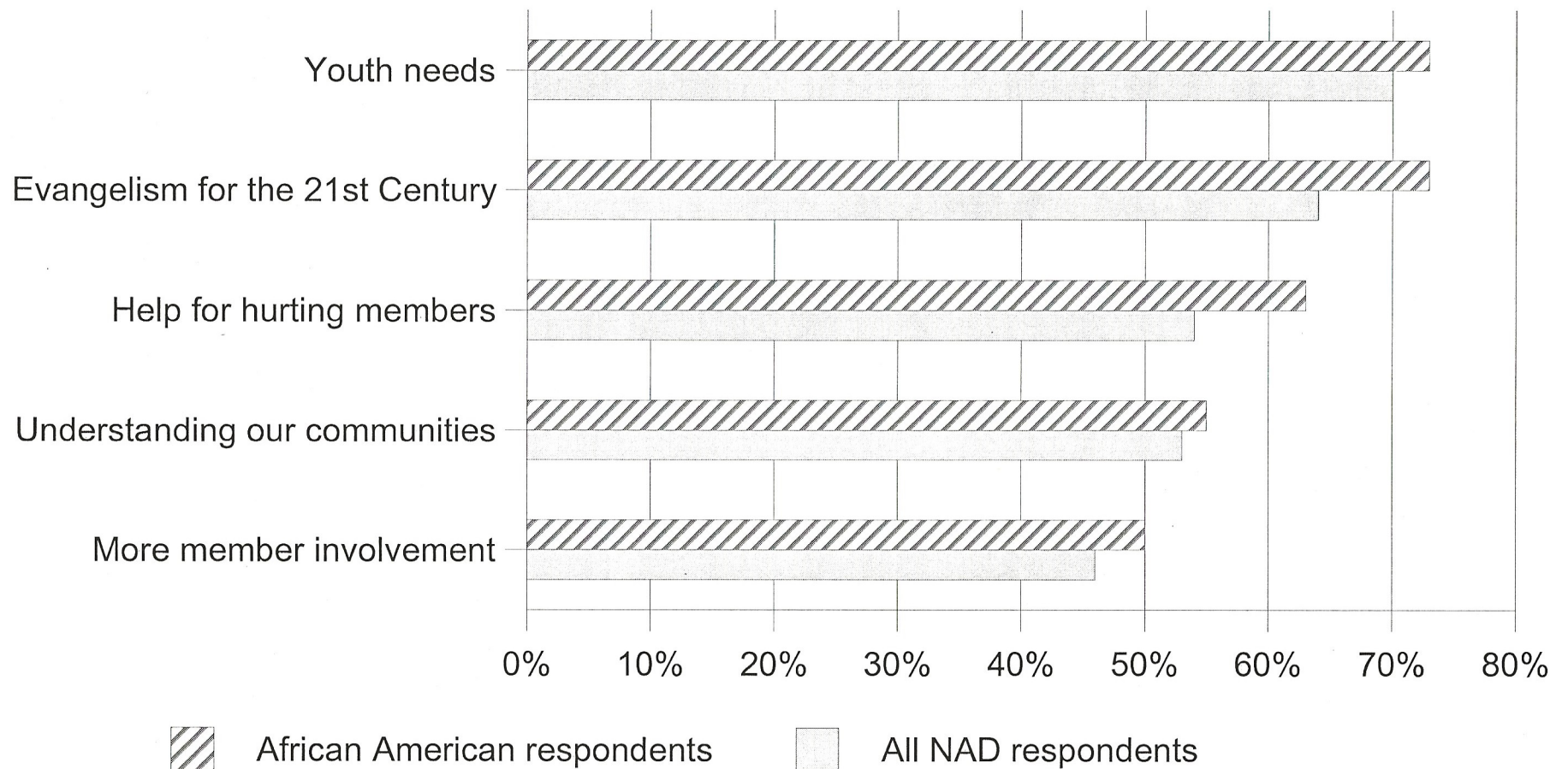
Asians and Pacific Islanders

Hispanics of all races

White, Anglo (non-Hispanic whites)

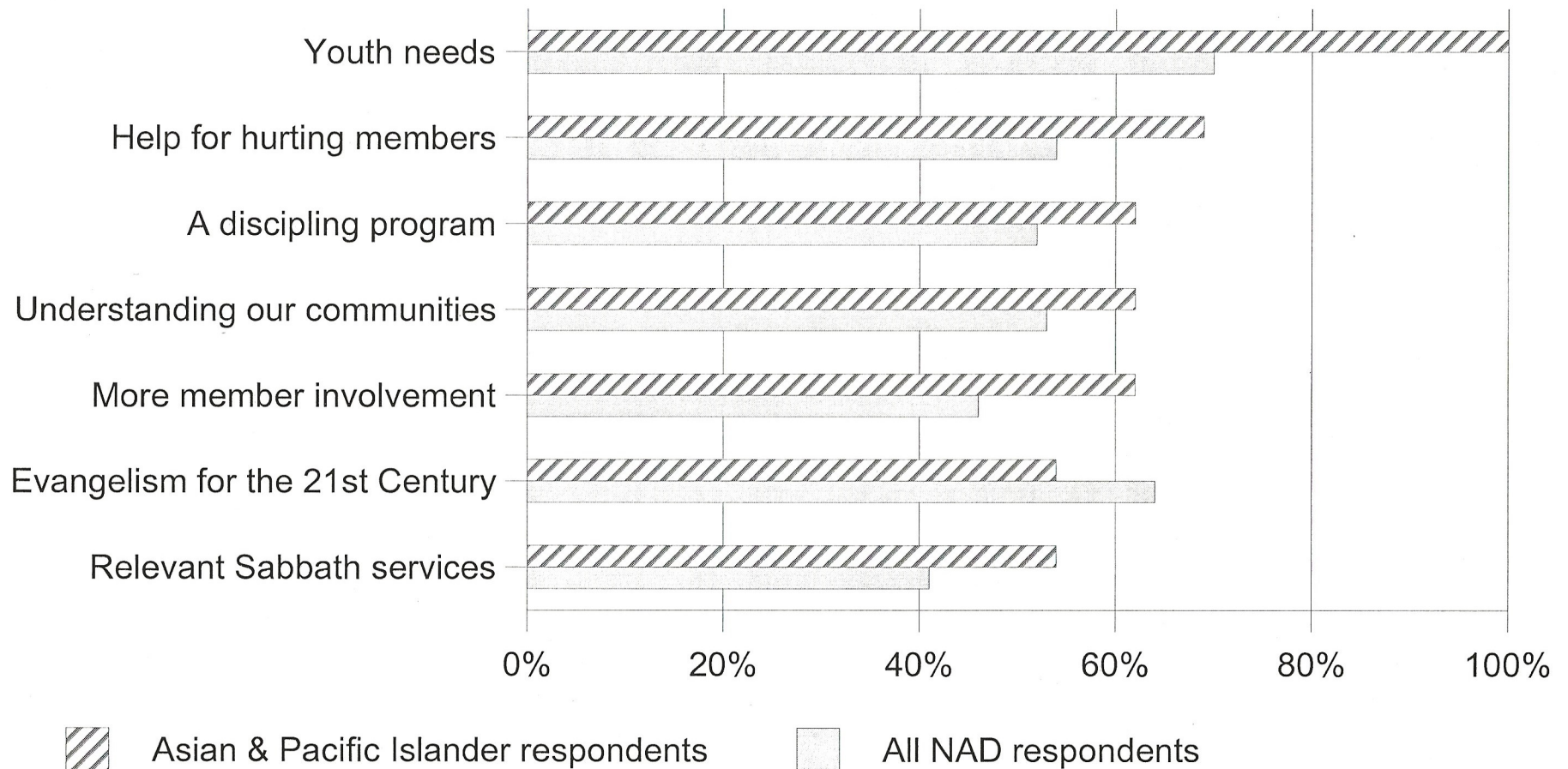
African American Priorities

Local Church Needs as Prioritized by the Majority



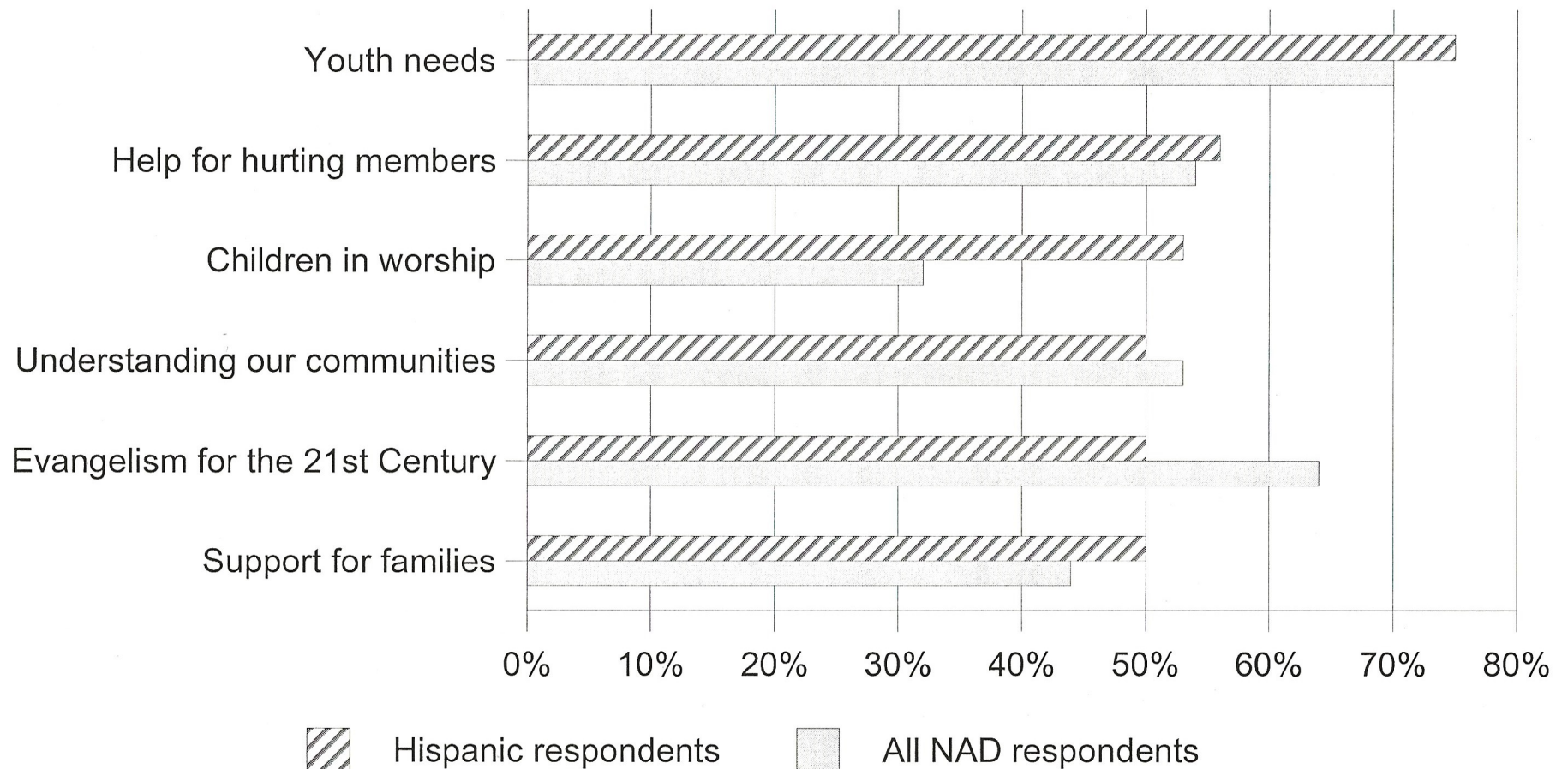
Asian/Pacific Priorities

Local Church Needs as Prioritized by the Majority



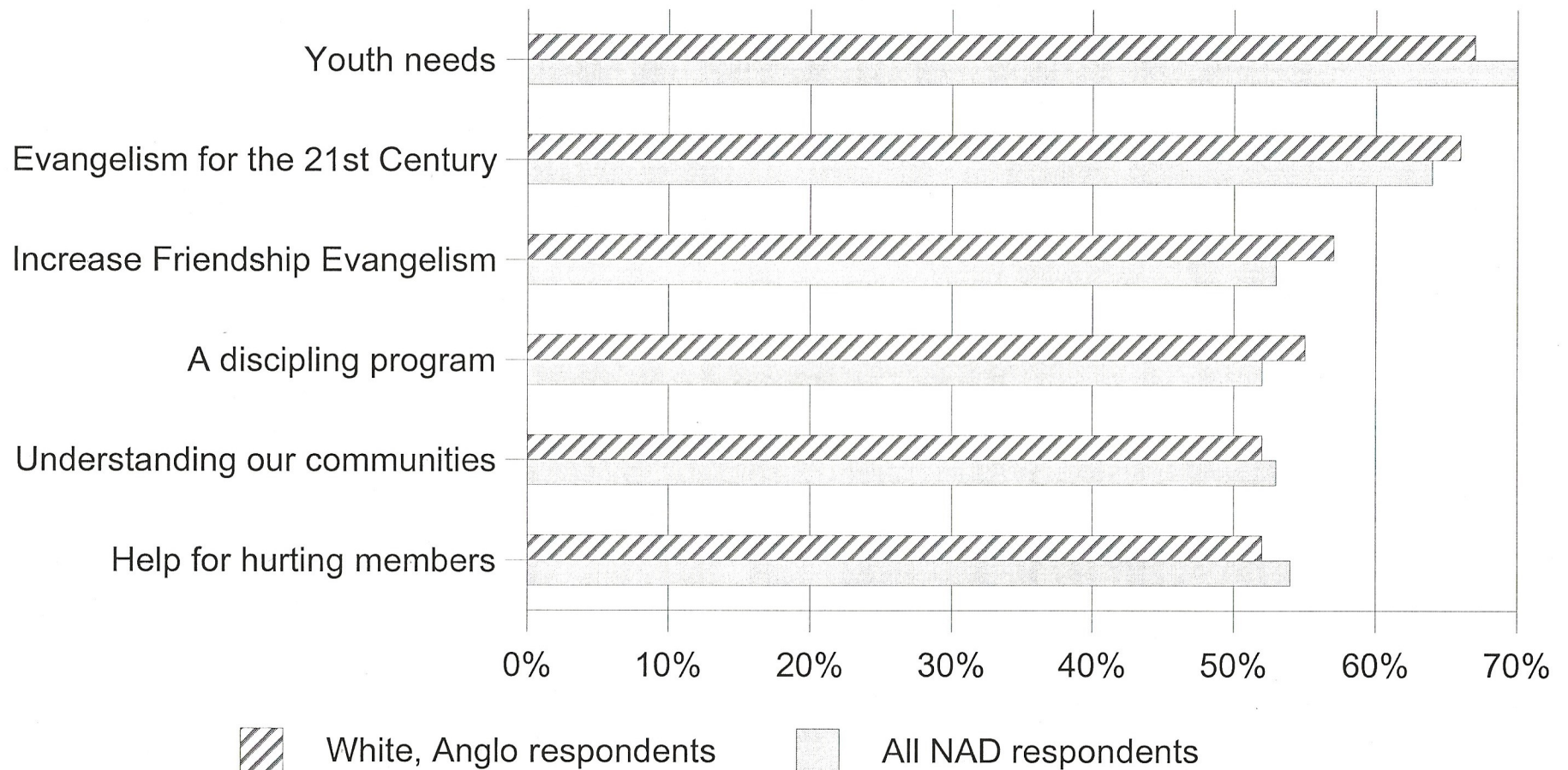
Hispanic Priorities

Local Church Needs as Prioritized by the Majority



White, Anglo Priorities

Local Church Needs as Prioritized by the Majority

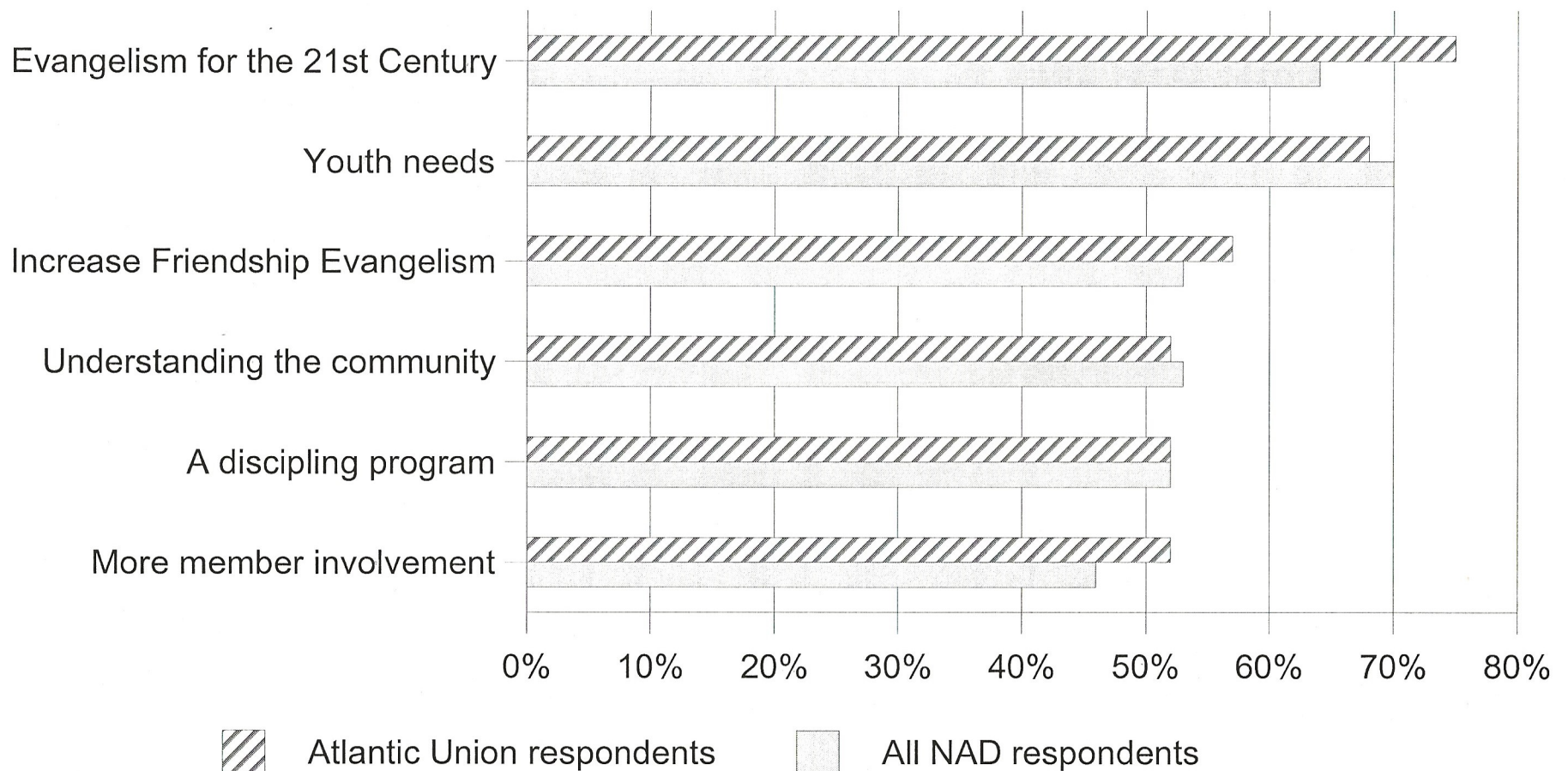


The Union Conferences

Top priorities of respondents within each
Union Conference in the NAD

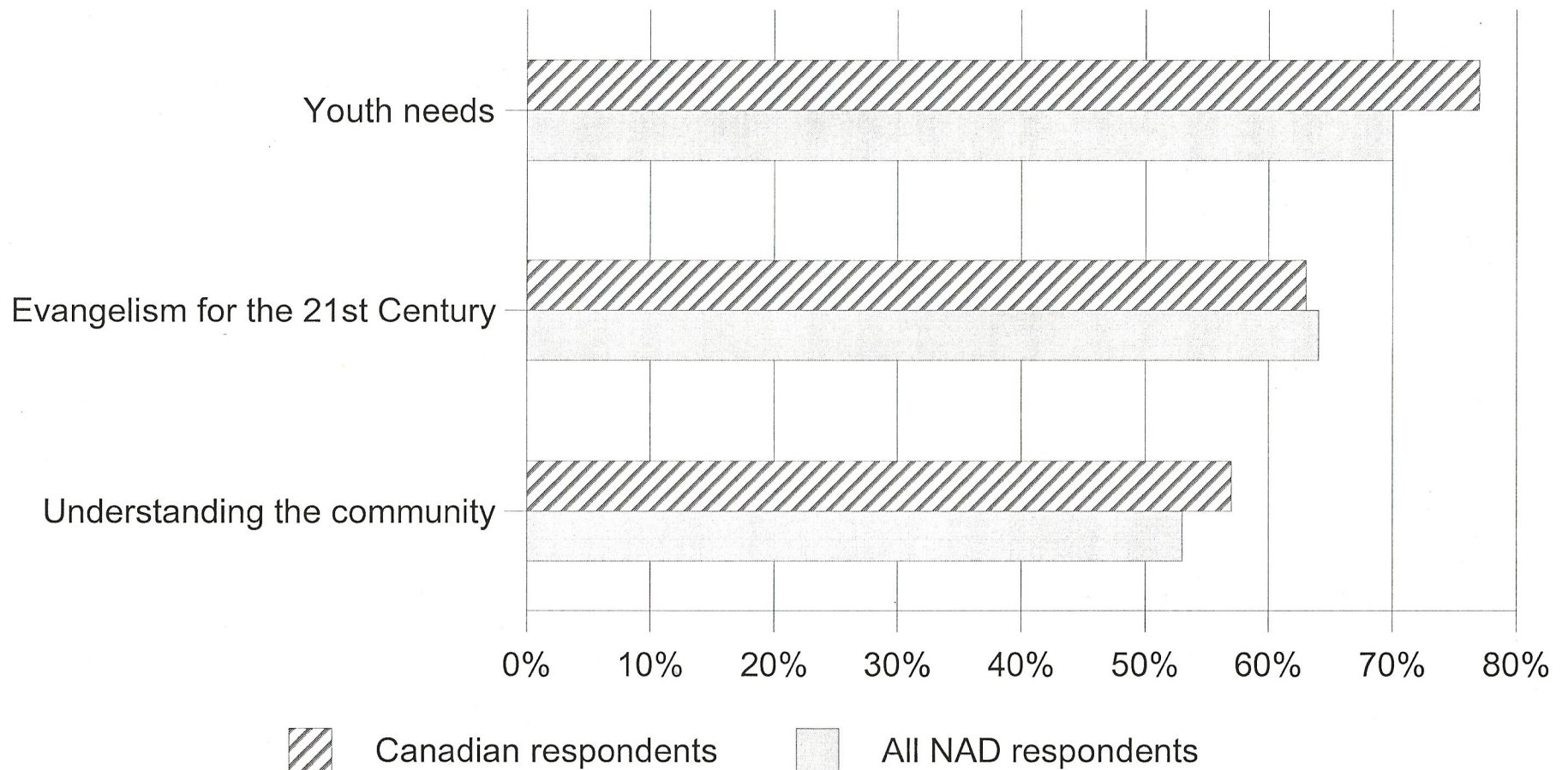
Atlantic Union Priorities

Local Church Needs as Prioritized by the Majority



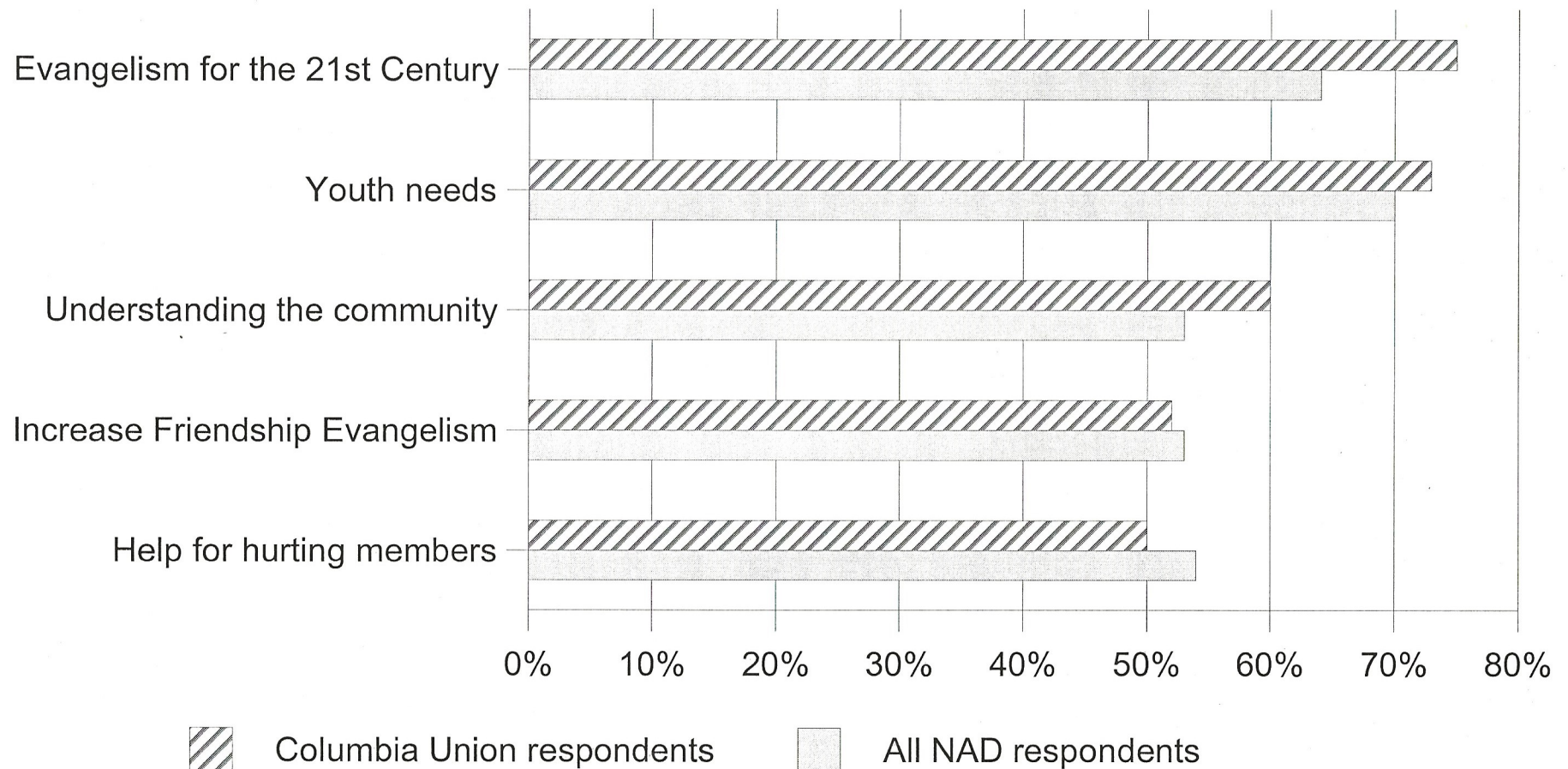
Priorities in Canada

Local Church Needs as Prioritized by the Majority



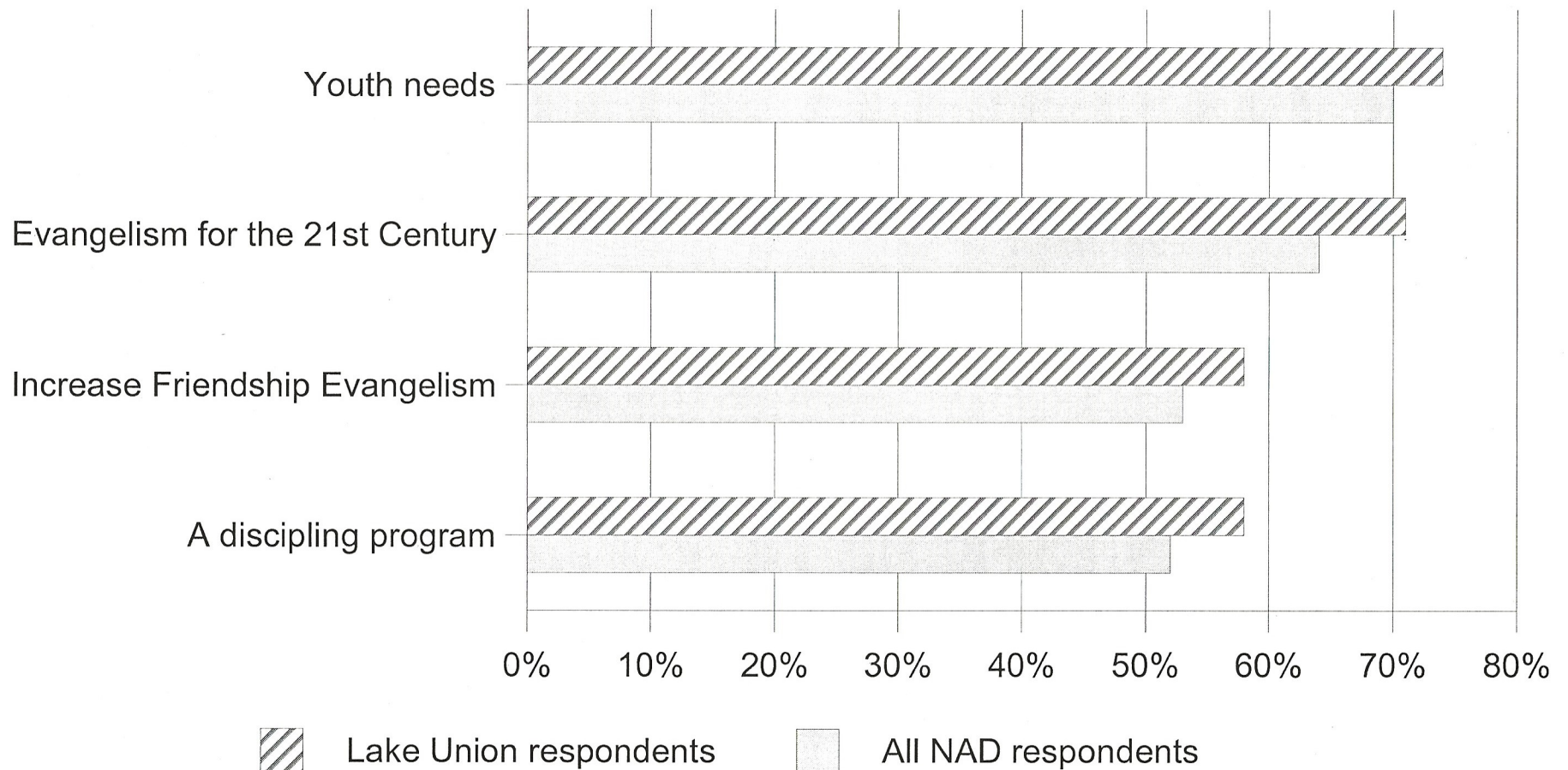
Columbia Union Priorities

Local Church Needs as Prioritized by the Majority



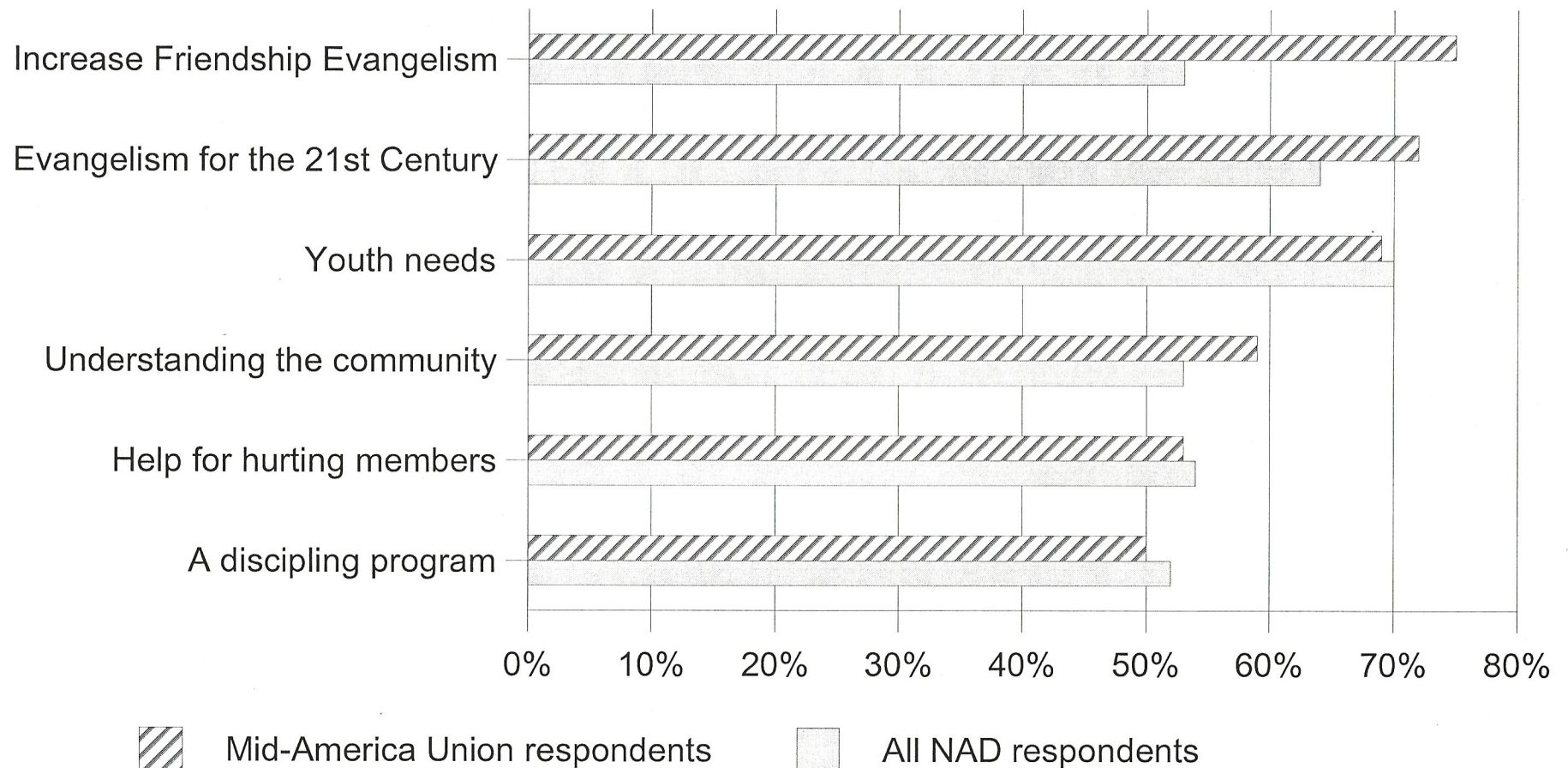
Lake Union Priorities

Local Church Needs as Prioritized by the Majority



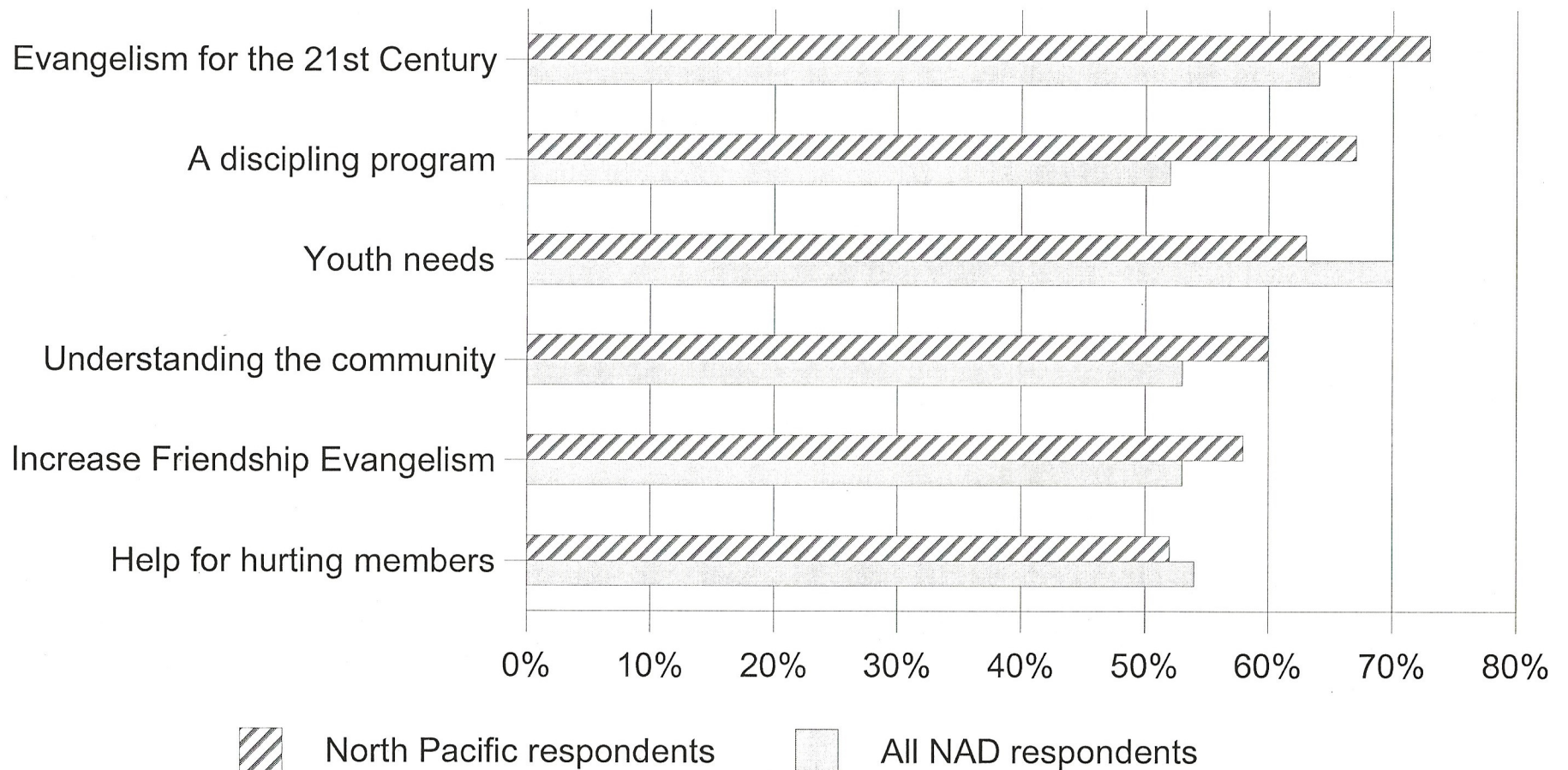
Mid-America Union Priorities

Local Church Needs as Prioritized by the Majority



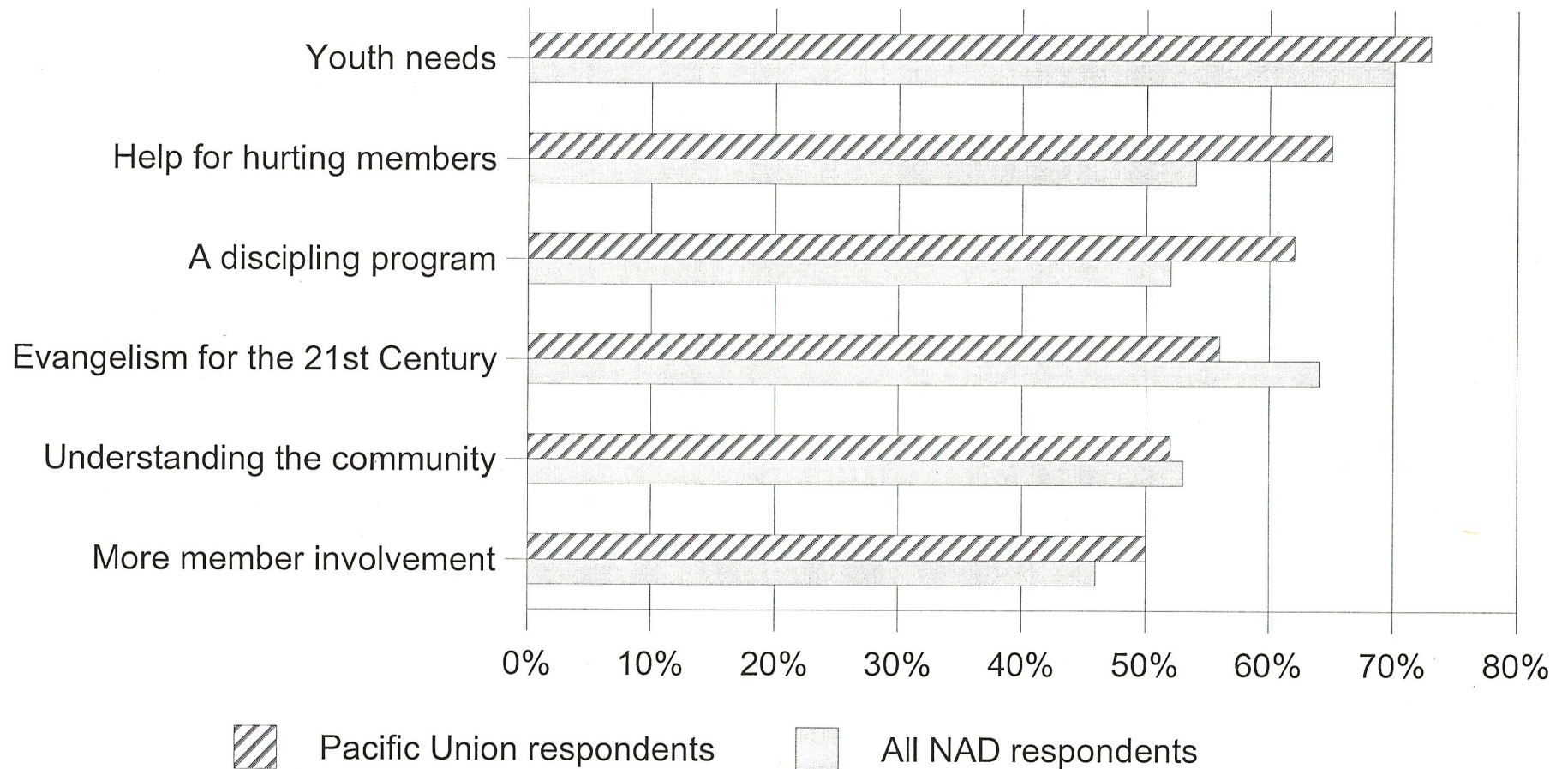
North Pacific Union Priorities

Local Church Needs as Prioritized by the Majority



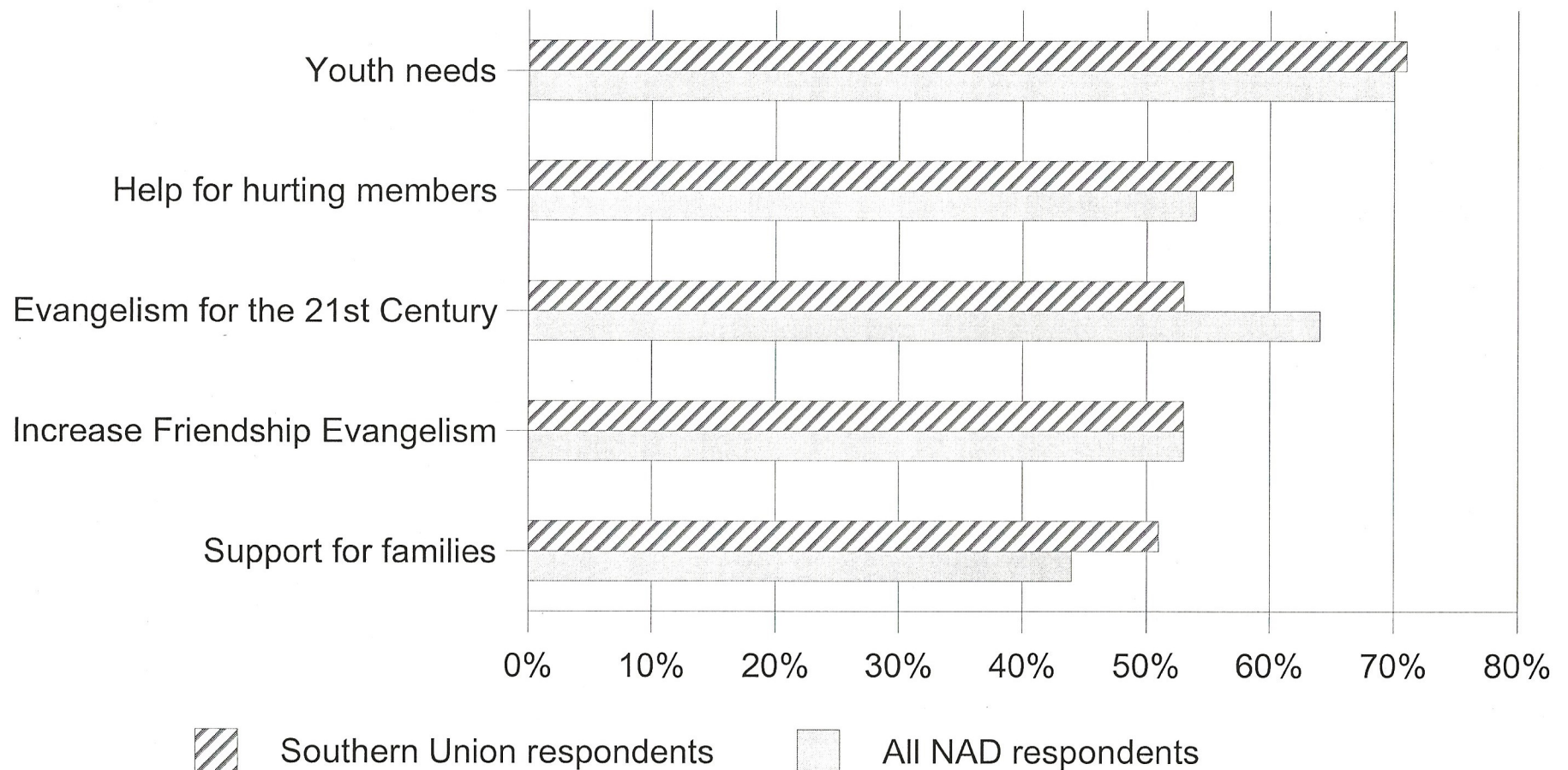
Pacific Union Priorities

Local Church Needs as Prioritized by the Majority



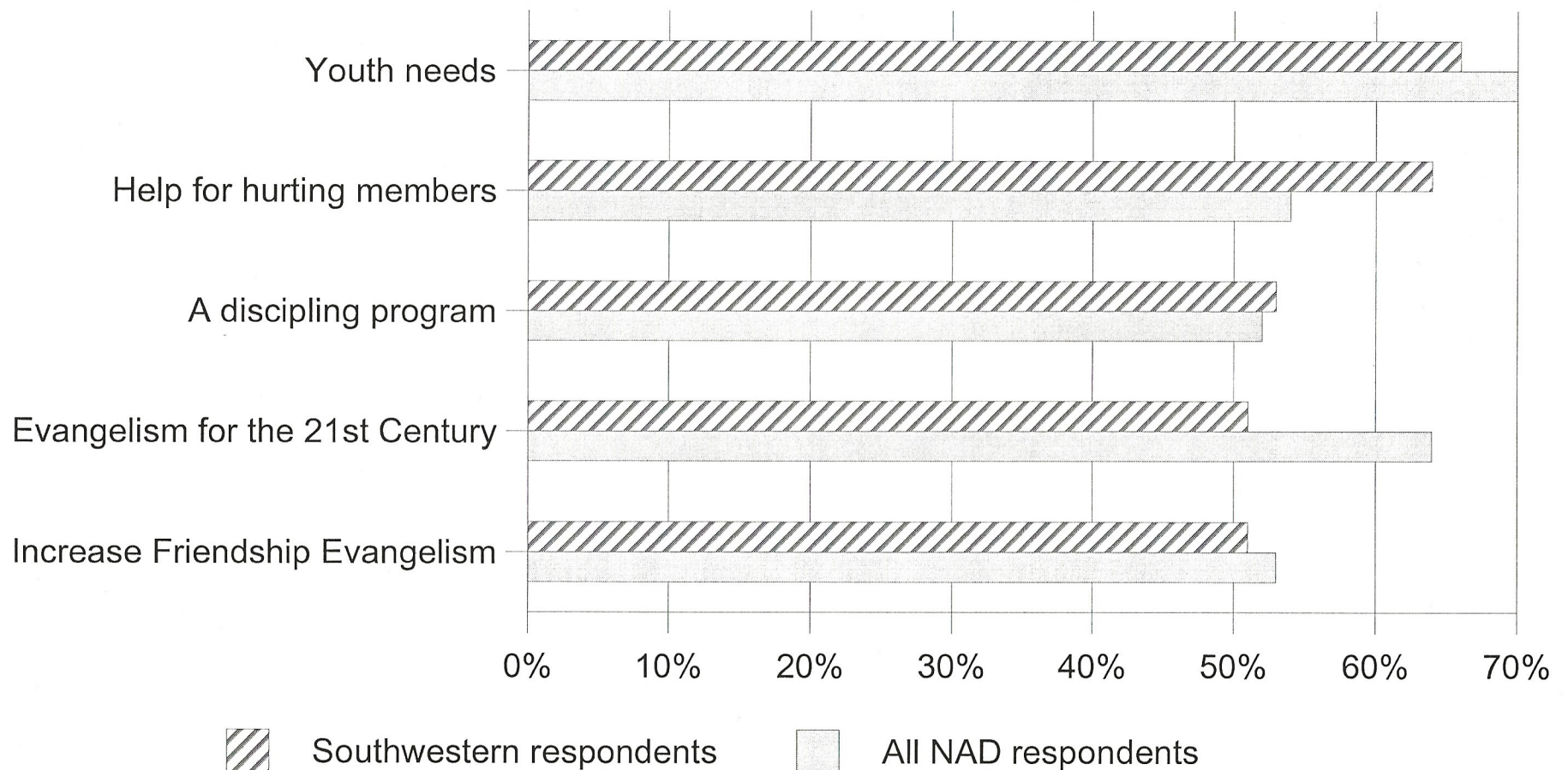
Southern Union Priorities

Local Church Needs as Prioritized by the Majority



Southwestern Union Priorities

Local Church Needs as Prioritized by the Majority



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