



# Feedback

on *ACN Cross Training* Events  
by Local Church Users

December 1997

Conducted by *AdventSource* for the  
Adventist Communication Network and the  
North American Church Resources Consortium

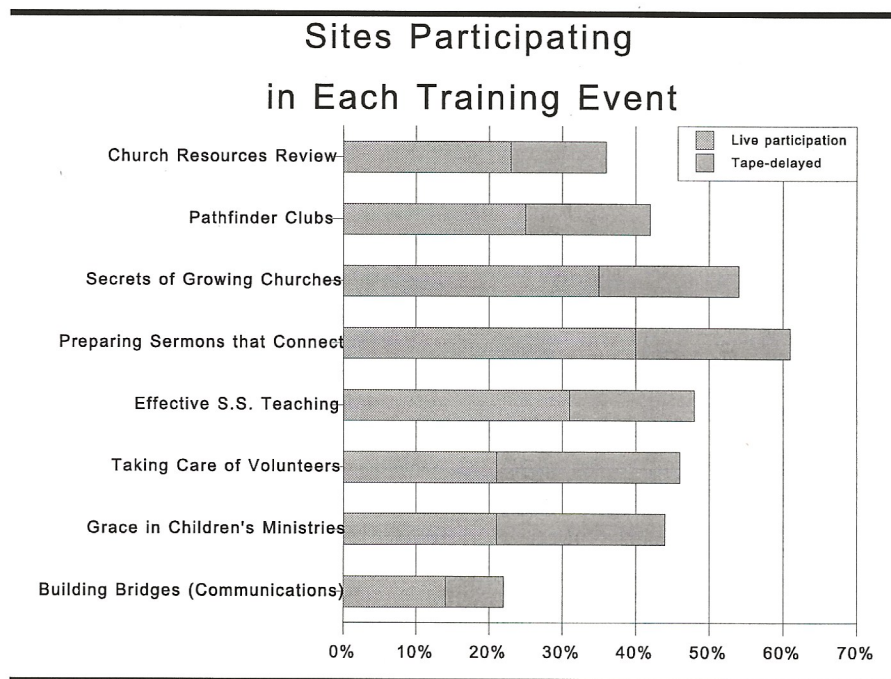
In three out of four *Cross Training* events, the majority of local sites do not participate.

The same is true of almost all satellite-linked events provided over the Adventist Communication Network. (See NAD Office of Information & Research, *Report 15*.)

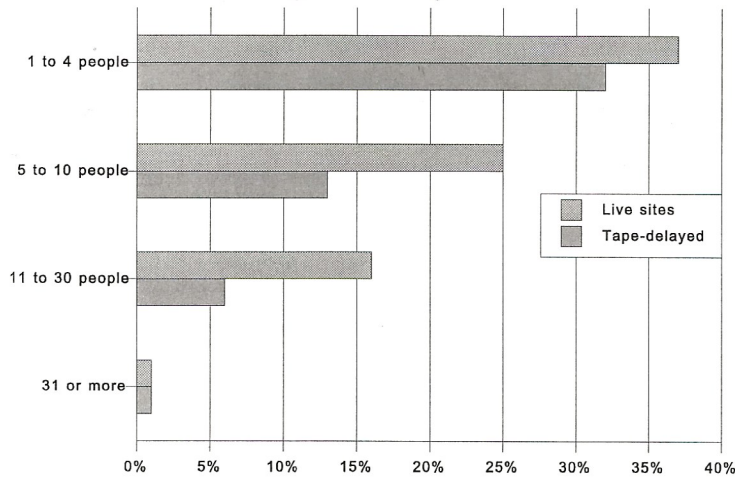
ACN delivers a rich menu of events, and few local churches can or should attempt to utilize all of them. It is not the intention of ACN to completely replace locally

planned and developed activities. In fact, *Cross Training* events, as they are successful in the empowerment and development of local leaders, will very likely tend to decrease the utilization of satellite-linked events by those congregations.

In three out of four *Cross Training* events more sites participate "live" at the time of the uplink than make use of the event through tape delay. Most of the local churches that use training events on tape, delay the usage by a week to a month. About one in ten sites do not have access to a satellite downlink and order the tapes from AdventSource for later use.



### Attendance at Local Sites during Training Events



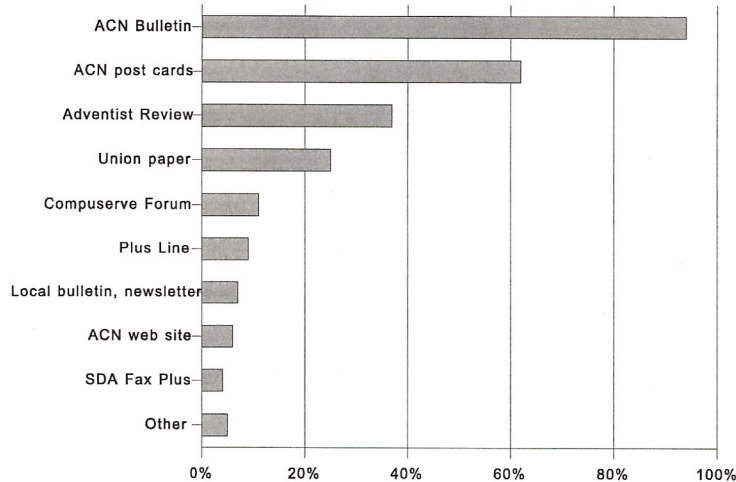
The local audience at most ACN sites during a *Cross Training* event is a small group, although one local church reports that 70 people participated in a tape-delayed training event. In some cases only one person participates. This should not be a surprise for events such as those aimed one particular officer.

The vast majority (73%) of live sites are located at a church, with only a handful of the live participants at home. Among tape-delayed participants, almost

equal numbers are located at the church or at home.

### Advertising Response

What made you aware of the event?



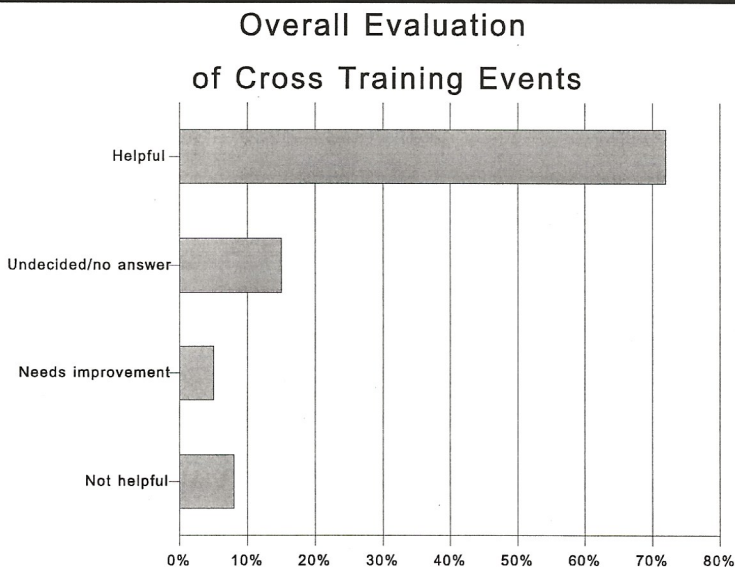
More than nine out of ten respondents (94%) receive information about *Cross Training* events through the *ACN Bulletin*, and nearly two-thirds (62%) were alerted by the targeted post cards sent to the particular local church officers relevant to specific events. This demonstrates the importance of direct mail advertising to the success of *Cross Training* events.

One in three respondents (37%) see announcements of training events in the *Adventist Review*, and one in four see announcements in the news magazine published by their Union Conference. These periodicals also play a key role in reminding local church officers about the training events available over the satellite.

Only one respondent in ten or less mention announcements distributed via various electronic media--the Adventist Forum on CompuServe, the Plus Line telephone help desk, the ACN web site, and the SDA Fax Plus automated fax-back information service. These are new media for the Adventist Church, and have significantly less circulation than do the traditional print periodicals. They are also passive services that require the user to go looking for information, as opposed to direct mail that arrives unrequested in respondents' mail boxes.

Only one respondent in 14 receives information about ACN events through their local church bulletin or newsletter. Even fewer report that they received an announcement of a training event from a department at their local conference office. This clearly demonstrates that ACN and the Church Resources Consortium must continue an aggressive marketing strategy for *Cross Training*. It cannot rely on other church structures to promote this service to potential users.

**In fact, these data indicate that advertising for *Cross Training* should be increased. Significant research indicates that a person must have at least six exposures to an advertising message before it gets their attention. The majority of respondents report that they are aware of only two media carrying *Cross Training*. One in four are aware of four media promoting *Cross Training*, and one in ten are aware of five. Only about one in twenty get six exposures. This is very likely the key reason why more local church officers to not avail themselves of ACN training events.**



*Cross Training* events are valued by the users. Nearly three out of four (72%) say that their overall assessment is that this service is helpful. About one in seven (15%) have not yet made up their minds. One in twenty see the need for major improvements in *Cross Training*. Only one in twelve (8%) do not believe that the service is helpful.

Clearly the usage pattern for training events provided by ACN is due to selective interest in particular topics, and is **not** significantly related to a negative

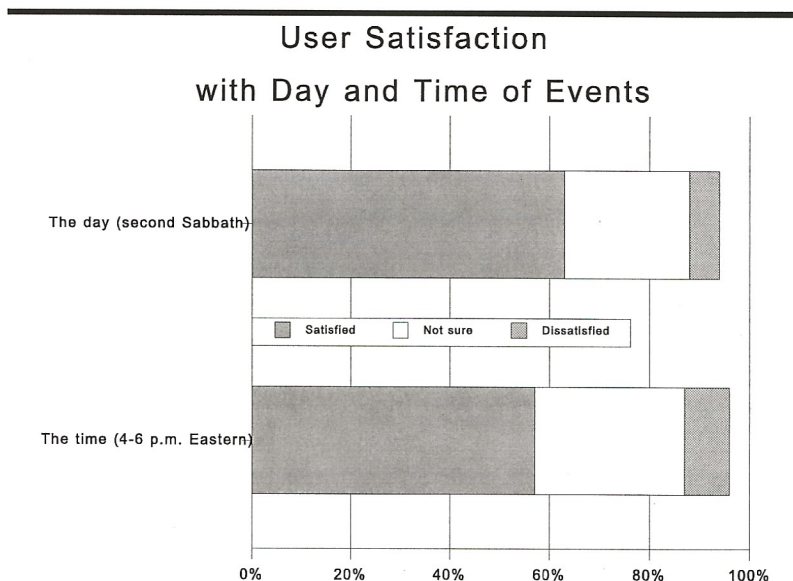
response to the basic concept of satellite-delivered training events or the way *Cross Training* is currently conducted. This is a new product and a new concept, and the Adventist market is a conservative one. It will take several years of continued effort to achieve a real measure of the ultimate potential in market penetration. The current advertising investment is inadequate and ought to be increased significantly in order to attract larger participation in these training events.

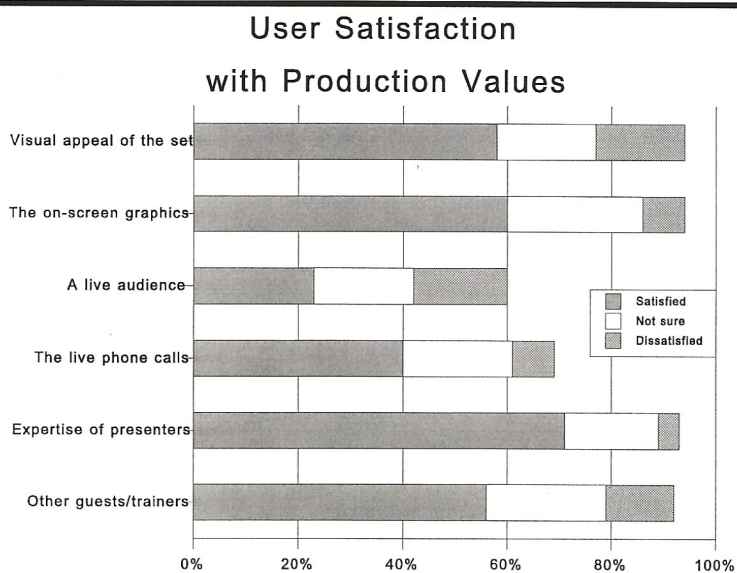
A strong majority of users are satisfied with the schedule for *Cross Training* events--the second Sabbath of each month except December and the summer, from 4 to 6 p.m. Eastern time (3-5 p.m. Central, 2-4 p.m. Mountain, and 1-3 p.m. Pacific). Almost a third are not sure about the schedule, but less than one in ten are dissatisfied.

Perhaps some alternative schedule possibilities should be tested in focus group research. It would be particularly important to conduct this research with leaders in

churches that have downlink equipment, yet make little or no use of *Cross Training* events. The purpose of the research is to test the possibility that there is another market segment which can be reached with a different schedule.

The most important element in a training event is the expertise and credibility of the primary presenter or trainer. Nearly three out of four *Cross Training* users are satisfied with this element of the events. It also attracts the fewest negative responses; only one in 25 say they are dissatisfied.



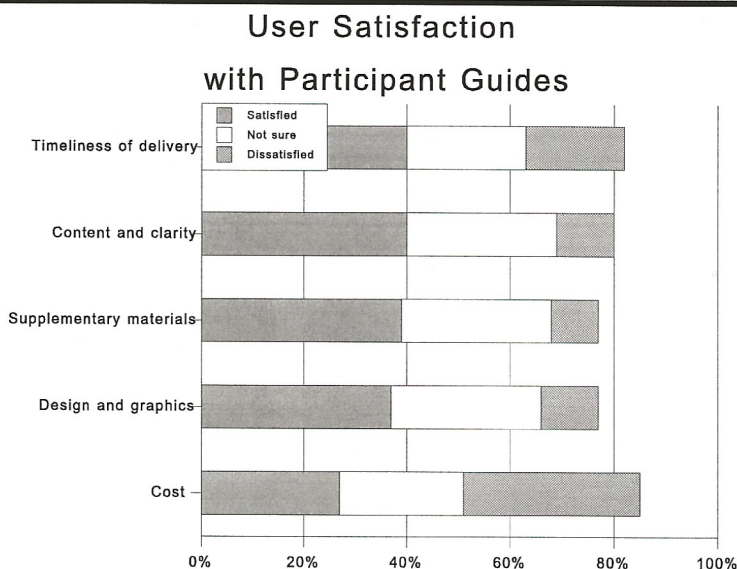


Three in five users are satisfied with the trainers or guests who assist the primary presenter (56%), the on-screen graphics of "bullet items" and diagrams (60%), and the visual appeal of the *Cross Training* studio set or up-link location (58%). Only one in six express dissatisfaction with any of these elements. It is likely that production values which get significant attention by producers and a few users who are media sophisticates do not have much importance to the vast majority of local church leaders who are most interested in the content of the

training and the expertise of the trainer or trainers.

Up to 40% of respondents have not participated in a training event which involved a live audience or phone calls with questions from participants. Among those who have experienced these elements, the majority are positive about the way *Cross Training* handles them. The value of increasing the interactive element in training events needs to be explored in focus group research. It may be true that ACN is presently attracting the segment of the Adventist market that does not place high value on interactivity and prefers to be lectured to. If so, there is data which demonstrates that this only about one quarter of the Adventist membership falls into this category. (See Sahlin, *Adult Sabbath School Needs Assessment*, 1990; Savino and Chavanz, *Sabbath School Revitalization Study*, 1989.)

About half of those who have used the Participant Guides (handout materials) for *Cross Training* events are satisfied with the timing of delivery prior to the event, the content and supplementary materials, and the layout and graphics. This is about 40% of the total sample in each case because one in five respondents have participated in training events but not used the print materials. One in five (19%) are dissatisfied with time of delivery, probably because some packets have arrived too late for local users to have comfortable time to make copies for all of those attending at their site. Local church leaders are busy and many churches do not own a photocopier machine.



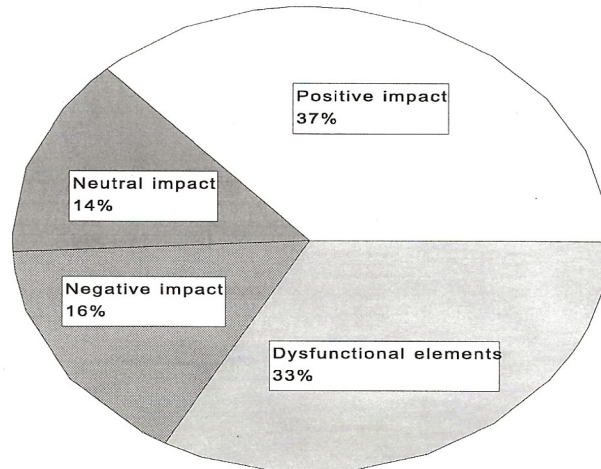
The greatest dissatisfaction is with the cost of the Participant Guide materials. One third of respondents (34%) are negative on this topic. Small portions are not sure or express satisfaction. Something needs to be done to enhance the perceived value of this service, although there are peculiar attitudes in the Adventist subculture that will make it difficult to increase positive feelings on this score. Part of the pricing consideration is the fact that purchasers will be making a number of copies of the material for local use. Many Adventists seem to feel that they should not have to pay for this factor. In fact, a significant portion feel that the denomination should deliver training and resource materials without any charge because of the pooling of Tithes. "We should be getting more for all the money we send up," is a common opinion.

Respondents were asked three open-ended questions. Two are designed to gather information about the impact of *Cross Training* events in the life and ministry of the participating local churches. The third asked for general comments and suggestions.

Asked about the immediate, short-term impact of *Cross Training* events in their local church, more than a third of respondents (37%) described positive results. "It has helped us grow in evangelism and closeness among ourselves," says one leader. "Improved [S.S.] teachers ability to communicate," says another. "Gives ideas that people can then do," reports a third church. *Cross Training* is "helping small groups to bring about change" in another congregation, and provides "stimulation of thought processes ... encouragement of creativity ... confidence based on availability of resources" for leaders in yet another local church.

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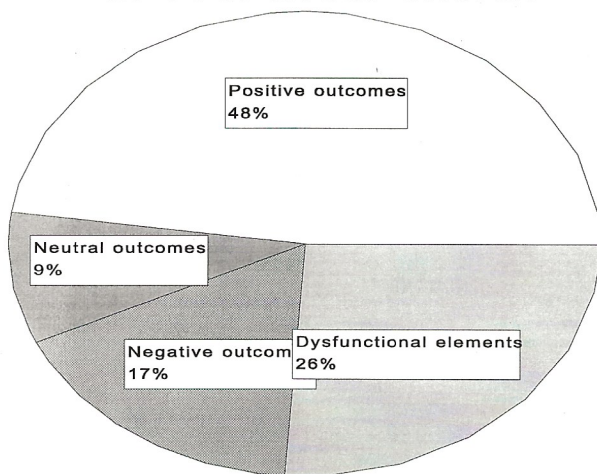
### Immediate Impact of Cross Training in Your Local Church



A third of the respondents describe dysfunctional conditions in their local church that are not directly related to the *Cross Training* delivery system, but make it difficult for a congregation to benefit from training. These elements would probably inhibit training in these churches whether or not the satellite linkage were involved. There is "not enough vision as to how these programs can help improve what we do as a church," says one leader. "At first, the pastor and I were excited about incorporating some ideas, but it has pretty much gotten lost along the way," says another lay leader. The even on sermon preparation "was good," says a pastor, "but those who are willing to [preach] are established in their patterns of preparation." Change in the local church is difficult under any conditions, and when new ideas arrive through a series of satellite-mediated training events it results in what one pastor describes as "a glut of good, expensive, unused videos." And there is little that different approaches to television production, training methods or promotion can do about these realities. They require the local intervention of a skilled church consultant.



## Long-term Hopes for Cross Training in Your Local Church



Less than a third (30%) gave negative or neutral responses. Examples of negative responses include the respondent who said, "both programs we viewed were poorly orchestrated--the format was poor--they were not designed to interest even the active leader in the church." Another described the impact on his church as "none," and yet another said the impact was "very limited." Examples of neutral responses include comments such as, "no comment at this time, [my] church has not used [the] programs on a regular basis." And, "hard to tell."

In the second open-ended question, respondents were asked what they feel will be the "long term differences ... made in your church as a result of *Cross Training*" events. Half the sample provided a comment, and when the focus is shifted further into the future, the respondents are more likely to be positive.

About half (48%) described positive outcomes they believe will result from long-term use of the *Cross Training* service by their local church. "It will help in [the] education of members for work in the church," says one leader. His church will have "a better program winning souls," believes another leader. Her congregation will be "more grace oriented" hopes a third respondent. *Cross Training* will help his church in "implementing change and new ideas, focus on a grace-filled ministry," says a pastor. It will "bring our small church up to speed on new methods, fresh approaches" believes another leader.

Comments about dysfunctional elements in their local church which keep training events from having much benefit is the response from one in four. *Cross Training* will have no impact in her church "until the pastors get past their own ego's and become active in participating and supporting the events," states one leader. "Pastors tend to be threatened by the lay people becoming aware of how the church operates and becoming active." A pastor reports that in his congregation members do not seem to want to get involved. "After viewing two super programs, I could not persuade anyone to express interest in future programs. I do, however, applaud the concept." Reflecting on how difficult it is for churches to change, "a few new ideas may be incorporated" eventually is the modest outcome another leader hopes for. Another makes the point that for *Cross Training* to have maximum impact it needs to be undergirded with an infrastructure in the church organization. It "almost requires a full-time coordinator."

Again, one in four (26%) have a negative or neutral response. Examples of negative comments include, "not much [will change]" and "virtually none" in the way of long-term outcomes. The presentations "need ... visuals of [teaching] points in action," responds another local leader. "Let us see what you are describing." This suggests the power of video vignettes of skills being modeled and documentaries of example programs. Of course, these are much more expensive to produce than the current events. Consideration should be given to allowing the producers of *Cross Training* to search the data base of more than 400 short segments that have been produced to date for *First Wednesday* and its predecessors to see if existing tape can be incorporated into training events to achieve this kind of teaching stories and case studies. It may also be true that with little extra expense a volunteer drama troupe could be organized which could work with at least some presenters to model the skills being taught.

The importance of the suggestions in the paragraph above is underscored by one of the common threads in the answers to the last question--an open-ended request for comments and suggestions. "More practical examples, less theory," says one respondent. "You're asking participants to get involved while they watch people sit around a studio with little or no movement," says another. "We need direct showing of some of the points being made." Another leader says of Sabbath School training, "I would like to see actual Sabbath School teachers and learn what works for them." Yet another respondent reminds that "a picture is worth a thousand words." Another says that "hands-on demonstrations [of] how-to's" are needed in each event. "Pictures of Pathfinder activities would have cut the monotony," comments another individual. "We have not participated in a program since."

The comments also reveal how television has changed the perceptions and viewpoints of even church leaders. "Use a faster pace with more hard-hitting specifics," says one respondent. "Too long ... make it one hour, or less," comments a third person. "I would really appreciate it if [the] speakers were more comfortable in front of the camera," says another. "Most are artificial ... read the cue cards or act stilted." Of course, few Adventist departmental and resource specialists ever thought they would need the skills of a television performer! Yet, as one pastor points out, "a TV generation will not accept sub-par programs."

If *Cross Training* attempts to meet all of these wishes, it may fall into the major problem with television news. What one author calls "eyewitness news"--shallow, quick to jump to conclusions, without real value and depth. Is there a way for training events to re-frame their intentions so as not to be compared with broadcast television? The language of these verbatim comments is interesting. These users "view" *Cross Training* and "watch" the events. The events are labeled "programs" time and time again, and never referred to as activities, events or seminars. Respondents want to "cut out the phone calls," and "have all the handouts on the screen."

ACN runs the risk of becoming television to watch at church. Especially if it does not resist suggestions such as the person who comments that instead of training for narrow, focused categories, *Cross Training* should provide "topics of interest to the whole church--health,

prophecy, prayer." And "timing the programs during Sabbath School."  
Several other comments do not fit neatly into any category or theme, but deserve a hearing:

"Lack of communication and promotion from the conference and pastors seems to be our problem."

Trainers need to place "more emphasis on inspiration." Participants must be "motivated to put effort into" what they learn, or it is useless.

"My church does not have a *Cross Training* coordinator. I would appreciate any information [regarding] qualifications and responsibilities for that position."

"I would like to see more Sunday noon sessions."

"Get the pastors to be more upbeat about this fabulous training."

### Survey Data

This report is based on 84 local church leaders who registered their church for one or more of the eight *Cross Training* events offered by ACN in 1997, and purchased a set of masters for the handouts. The allowance for sampling error is 12 percentage points, plus or minus, at the 95th percentile of reliability.

Nearly two-thirds of the respondents (64%) are male. Nearly half (48%) are in their 20s, 30s or 40s. Another 42% are in their 50s and 60s, and 10% are in their 70s and 80s.

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### Specific Topics Suggested for Future *Cross Training* Events

Small groups (several times)  
Youth ministry (several times)  
How to give Bible studies  
Alternative Sabbath School programs  
Getting youth involved  
Conflict resolution  
Developing worship for unchurched people  
Use of drama in worship  
Reaching the community  
How to make an impact in our city  
Practical community service  
Men's ministry  
Training for elders  
Training for deacons and deaconesses  
Children's activities  
Friendship Evangelism  
Public evangelism  
Explain the many perspectives on the Second Coming, secret rapture, etc.  
Bible study dynamics; the problems involved with various methods  
The roles of various church officers and their potential for ministry beyond the stereotypes

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