

**Office of Information and Research  
Report 12**

**North American Attitudes  
toward World Missions**



**DISPLAY COPY ONLY**

To purchase a copy please  
complete an order form.

**Seventh-day Adventist Church**

North American Division of the General Conference  
12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, Maryland 20904

**Monte Sahlin, Director**  
Office of Information and Research  
North American Division

**Roger Dudley, Director**  
Institute of Church Ministry  
Andrews University

**Paul Richardson, Director**  
BBMRC Research Services  
Portland, Oregon

**Dan Savino, Director**  
Church Resource Center  
Pacific Union Conference

#### **Research Consultants**

Harold Lee  
Secretary  
Columbia Union Conference

Carole Kilcher  
Assistant Professor of Communications  
Andrews University

Jose Chavanz-Q.  
Church Resource Center  
Pacific Union Conference

## Executive Summary

### North American Attitudes toward World Missions

Three out of four members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America say that **the world mission program is "run very well."** In fact, it has a higher positive rating than any other major entity of the denomination, including local churches, health care institutions, education system, conferences and unions, and the General Conference.

Almost half of church members feel that the world missions program is adequate to "meet the needs of the world today." Less than **one in three see it as "progressive" and ready for "the needs of the future."** More than one in five are of the opinion that it is already "outdated."

**Two out of three Adventists believe that the world missions program has a Christ-centered impact** in foreign nations, and does not primarily export American culture. Less than one in twenty feel it is primarily an agent of influence for Western technology and ways. About a third see its impact as a mixture of both.

Four out of five Adventists (**81%**) **think that most of their fellow members are interested in world missions**, although only one in ten believe that most would like to go as missionaries. About one in five are of the opinion that most church members are apathetic or negative about world missions.

Three out of five church members (**60%**) **still see a need for missionaries to serve in other parts of the world.** Only two in five feel that missions should be completed turned over to indigenous church workers.

**Four out of five Adventists agree "that a missionary today is sacrificing when he or she goes to the mission field**, although almost as many (70%) feel that mission living conditions "are not generally unhealthful" but may "lack many conveniences."

Three out of four church members (**73%**) **have heard of the new Global Mission program** of the General Conference. Most of these indicate that they know something about the program, while less than one in five say they "know a lot." Significant progress is being made in promoting this new initiative. During the year **between surveys in 1992 and 1993, the percentage of Adventists who say they "know a lot about Global Mission" nearly doubled.** Almost all of these came from the group that indicated they knew something about the program; the percentage of members who say they "never heard of it" did not change to a statistically significant degree during the year. Global Mission promotion is educating those who are interested, but not attracting those who lack interest. Younger adults are more likely to say they have never heard of Global Mission.

The demographically influential Baby Boom generation has changed its views on many aspects of world missions. A 25-year comparison of opinion is made possible by replicating questions first asked in a survey of students at Adventist colleges during the 1966-67 school year. **The attitude of Baby Boomers on some items has changed to a more positive view than that of other generations today.** They are more likely to believe that missionaries make a sacrifice and live in primitive conditions. They believe church members are more interested in world missions and less apathetic. Baby Boomers feel more strongly than ever that the direction of missions should be turned over to national leaders -- a view in which they differ from other generations.

A solid majority of church members **(62%) think that the mission reports they hear in Sabbath School or read in denominational periodicals usually "paint a true picture."** Among those who do not think they can trust these reports, more respondents believe the reports understate conditions than those who believe the reports exaggerate. Baby Boomers are less likely to believe mission reports are accurate, but their attitudes are much more trusting than they were 25 years ago.

A majority of church members **(57%) find most mission reports to be both inspiring and informative.** Baby Boomers are somewhat less likely to say the reports are inspiring, but they have a much more positive attitude about mission reports than did the early cohort of the generation when they were college students 25 years ago. Members most likely to report a positive impression of mission reports include those who live in rural areas, those over 65 years of age, and those with annual household incomes under \$20,000.

Nine out of ten church members want mission reports that present both success and failures; the good news and the bad news. Less than one in ten will tolerate reports that put emphasis on progress, "mentioning failure only as absolutely necessary." Almost none will tolerate reports that present only success. Surprisingly, college students of the 1960s were much more tolerant of reports that lack balance than are any generation today.

Four out of five church members like Mission Spotlight. Two-thirds like the mission videos they have seen. But, the majority **(55%) are dissatisfied with the tradition of reading a mission story** during Sabbath School.

In late 1994, one in three church board members reported that they had used a video in a mission story presentation. Lay leaders who live in small towns are more likely to report use of video. Those who attend congregations with fewer than 100 members and those with more than 600 members are less likely to do so, as are those from ethnic minority groups and those over 65 years of age.

# Introduction

The Office of Information and Research provides regular, up-to-date information about the local congregations and members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America -- demographics, church attendance and involvement, attitudes and opinions related to the goals of the denomination and its varied ministries. More than a score of significant studies have been conducted over the past twenty years, but this is the first permanent, systematic program of survey research established by the church.

Three primary streams of data collection are monitored each year:

- Survey of Members conducted in a panel of 45 churches which have agreed to participate. Each church circulates a questionnaire to their entire attendance on a Sabbath morning, thus providing a random sample of about 1,500 to 2,000 church members.
- Survey of Church Board Members which is conducted by sending a questionnaire by mail to a random sample of 1,000 drawn from the local conference lists of current church officers.
- A Survey of Pastors which is also conducted by mail to a random sample of 1,000 clergy currently assigned to local churches drawn from the local conference employee lists.

In addition, specialized studies are conducted from time to time as requested by the North American Division (NAD) officers, department heads and standing committees. This data bank is supplemented from time to time by the Pacific Union Church Resource Center, Sentinel Research Services, the Baby Boomer Resource Center, faculty and graduate students in Adventist colleges and universities, and denominational staff at all levels.

All of these sources, as well as established systems for retrieving comparative data from the Christian and secular research industries, provide a rich information base for church leaders, their staff and decision-making groups. The Office of Information and Research functions as the clearinghouse for access to this information base. Questions and requests for additional information should be addressed to the office at 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring MD 20904, or by Fax at (301) 680-6464, or by Email at 74617,14 on Compuserve or via the Internet to 74617.14@compuserve.com.

## How the Information in this Report was Collected

This is one in a series of reports published by the NAD Office of Information and Research. It presents information gleaned from several different surveys conducted in

recent years gathered at the request of Gary Patterson, director of the General Conference Office of Mission Awareness.

Where no source is noted, this report presents information collected during the Adventist Family Opinion survey conducted in the fall of 1992. The questionnaire was distributed by mail to an established consumer panel designed to model the known demographics of the Seventh-day Adventist households in the United States and Canada. It yielded 451 usable responses. The sampling error is 5 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

Where the source is indicated as Seltzer Daley 1986, it presents information collected during the spring of 1986 in 701 telephone interviews conducted by Seltzer Daley Companies for the Adventist Health System/U.S. The sampling error is no greater than 10 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

Where the source is indicated as Stirling 1969, it presents information collected during the 1966-67 school year from 947 questionnaires collected from a sample of students on 13 Adventist college and university campuses in North America. The sampling error is no greater than 3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. These data were published in *Attitudes of Seventh-day Adventist College Students Toward Missions* by Betty Stirling (Loma Linda University, 1969).

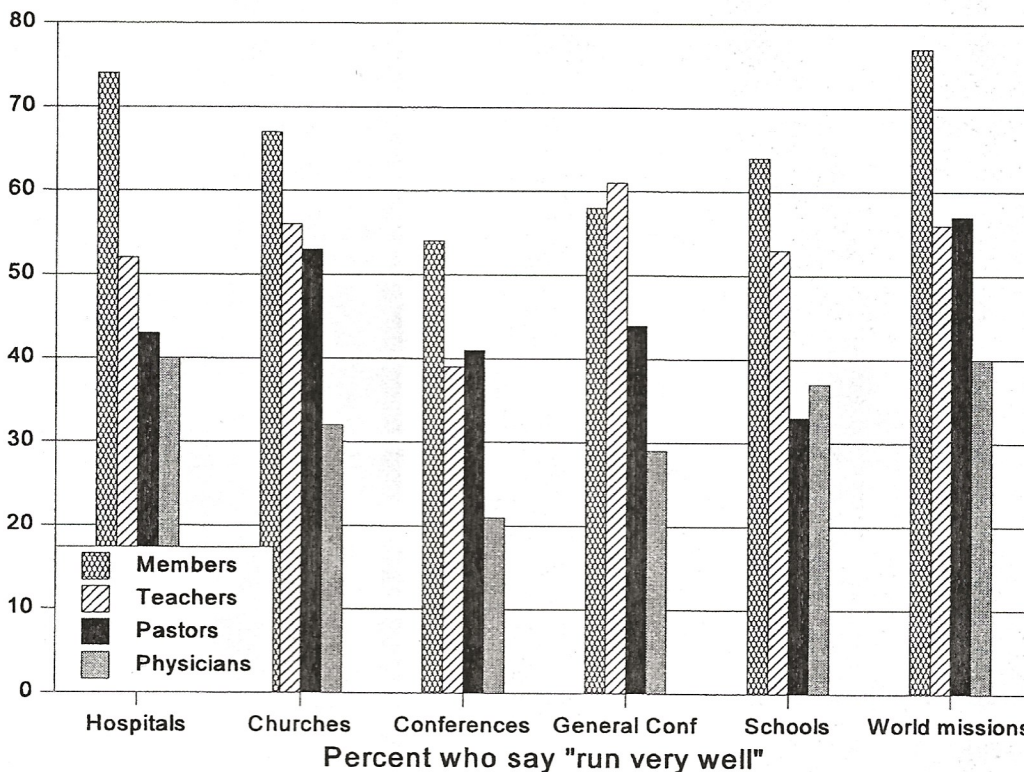
Where the source is indicated as 1993 Survey of Pastors, it presents information collected during the fall of 1993 in questionnaires returned by a stratified sample of 34 pastors conducted by the Institute of Church Ministry for the North American Division. The sampling error is 20 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Where the source is indicated as 1994 Survey of Church Board Members, it presents information collected during the fall of 1994 in questionnaires returned by a stratified sample of 287 local church lay leaders. The sampling error is no more than 7 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Additional information about the statistical sampling method used is provided in the Technical Appendix. I also want to acknowledge the work of Ginger Ellison and Gan Theow Ng, staff assistants at the Institute of Church Ministry; Gail Hunt, former director of market research at the Review and Herald Publishing Association; and Meridith Webster on the NAD staff.

Monte Sahlin  
March, 1996

# Members Give High Ratings to the World Missions Program



Three out of four church members say that the world mission program is run "very well." In fact, it has a higher positive rating than any other major entity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, including local churches, health care institutions, education system, conferences and unions, and the General Conference.

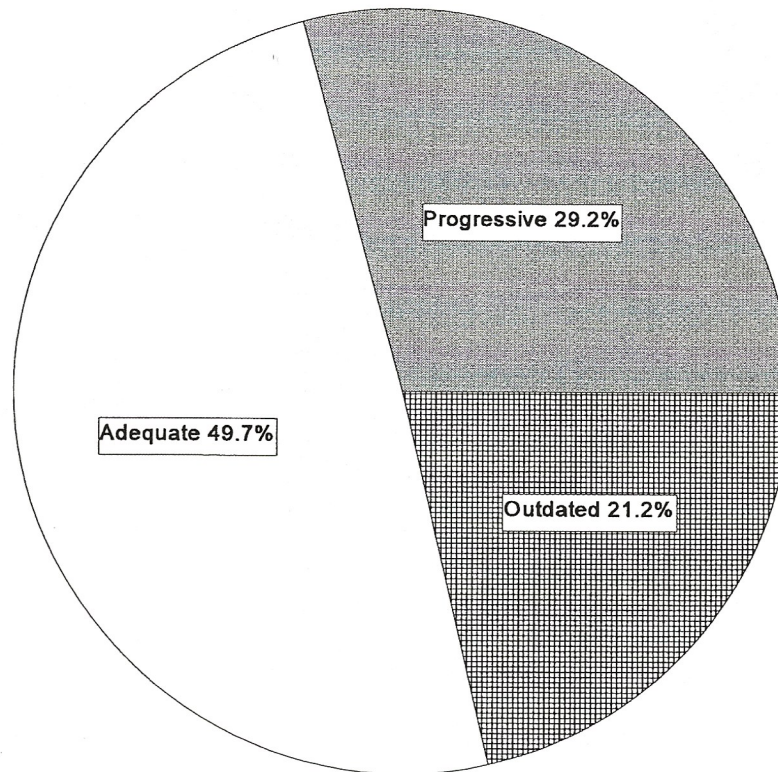
Even the church members most likely to be negative about church-related programs (physicians), rate the world mission program as high as they

rate any Adventist entity. Two in five physicians say that world missions are run "very well" by the Adventist Church.

Pastors rate the world mission program above even their local churches in terms of how well run the programs are. Teachers in Adventist schools rate only the General Conference above the world mission program.

*Source: Seltzer Daley, 1986.*

# World Missions Seen as Adequate, but not Progressive



Almost half of church members feel that the world missions program of the Adventist Church is adequate to "meet the needs of the world today." Less than one in three see it as "progressive" and ready for "the needs of the future." More than one in five are of the opinion that it is already "outdated."

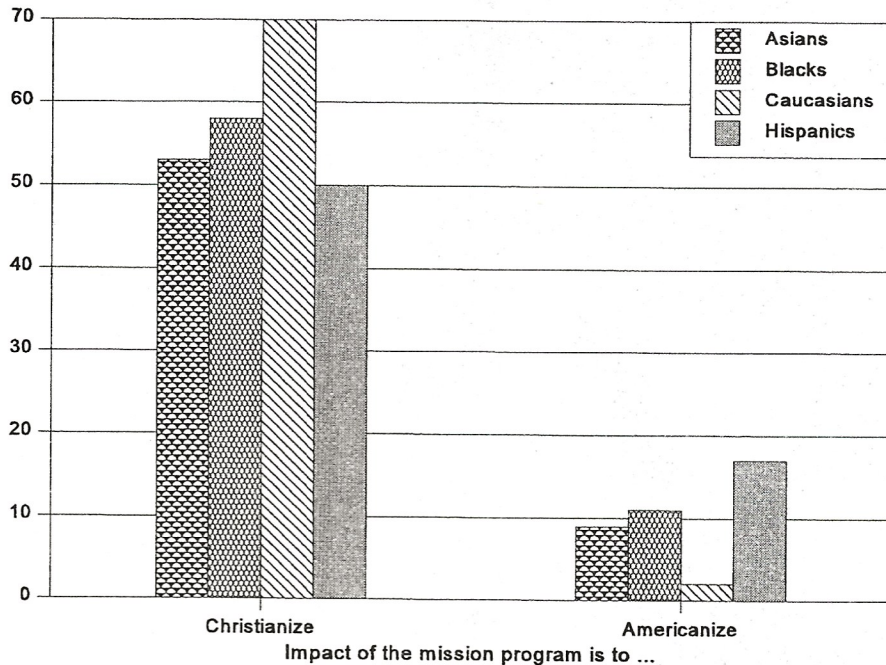
There is a correlation between the size of congregation that a member belongs to and their attitudes on the progressive, adequate or outdated nature of the world missions program. Adventists from congregations with 300 or more members are significantly more

likely to say the world missions program is "outdated." Those from congregations with fewer than 100 members are more likely to say it is "progressive" and future-oriented.

Adventists who live in rural areas, those who are single adults with no children in the home, and Hispanic church members are all more likely to see the world missions program as "progressive." Members with high incomes, those who single parents and Adventists from Canada are more likely to see it as "outdated."



# World Missions Seen as Christ-centered, not Ethnocentric



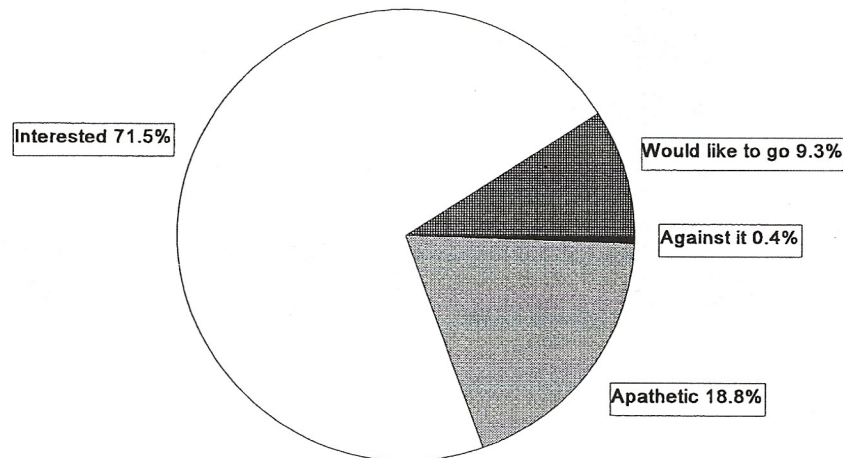
Two out of three Adventists (67%) believe that the world missions program has a Christianizing impact in foreign nations, and does not primarily export American culture. Less than one in twenty (4%) feel it is primarily an agent of influence for Western technology and ways. About a third (29%) see it's impact as a mixture of both.

Church members over 65 years of age, those from congregations with 600 or more members, and single adults are more likely to see the world missions program as primarily a Christianizing influence overseas. The same is true of respondents from

households where at least one spouse is a denominational employee and those from the lowest income families.

When the responses of Caucasian church members are compared with those from ethnic minorities (see graph above), it becomes clear that Adventists who have immigrated to North America from other world divisions have a somewhat different view. They are significantly more likely to say that the effect of the world missions program is to "Americanize" instead of "Christianize." Caucasian members may have a blind spot on this topic.

# World Missions Seen as a Topic of Interest to Adventists



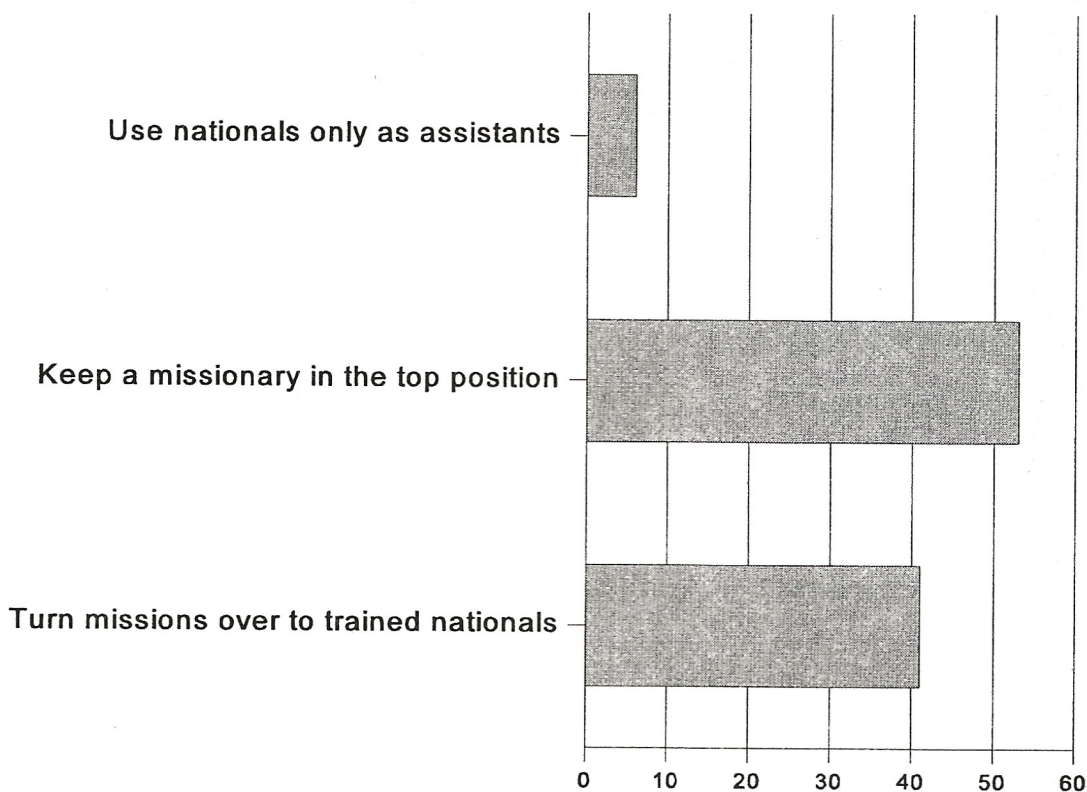
Four out of five Adventists think that most of their fellow members are interested in world missions, although only one in ten believe that most would like to go as missionaries. About one in five are of the opinion that most church members are apathetic or negative about world missions.

Adventists from congregations with fewer than 100 members, African Americans and Canadians are more likely to feel that most of their fellow members are interested in world missions. Young adults, church members with a non-member spouse, those with at least one denominational employee in the household, and Adventists with annual household

incomes of \$50,000 or more are more likely to express the view that most of their fellow members are apathetic about world missions.

Church members most likely to report a great deal of interest in mission service include those who live in large cities, those from congregations with 600 members or more, those with very low incomes, and those from Asian and Hispanic ethnic groups. There is a strong correlation between age and interest in mission service: older respondents are more likely than younger respondents to know church who are interested in going as a missionary.

# Members Still See a Need for Missionaries to go Overseas

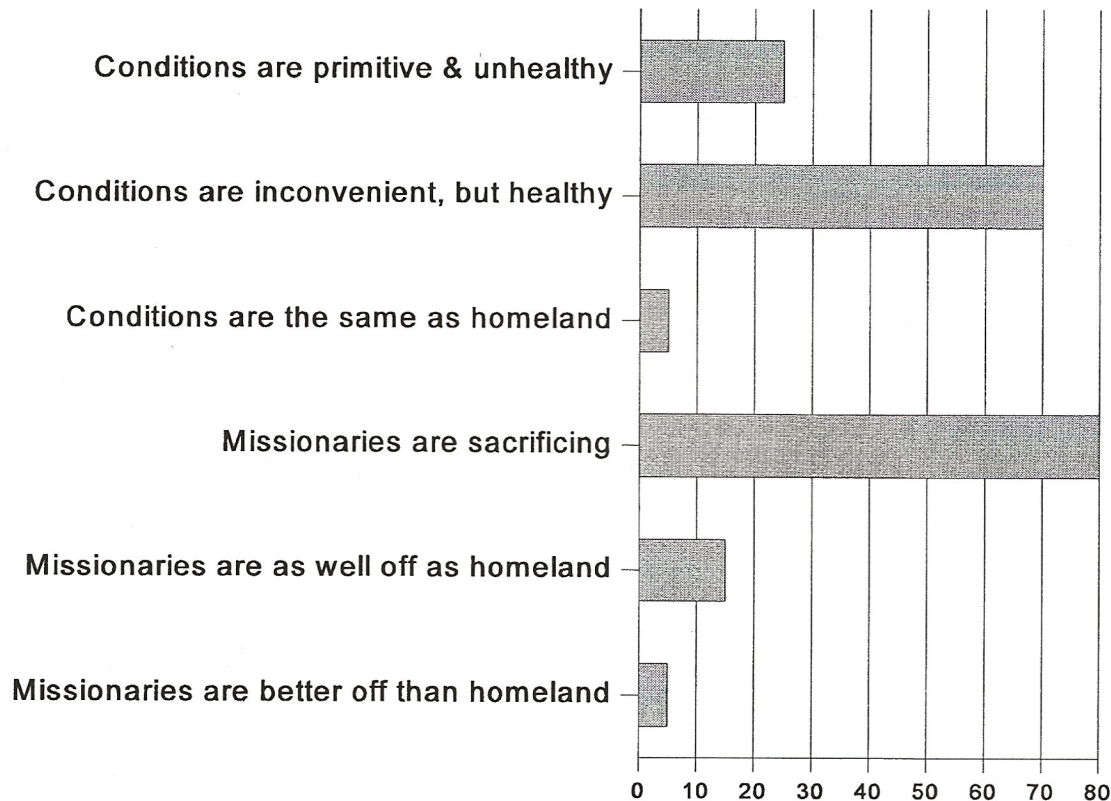


Three out of five church members still see a need for missionaries to serve in other parts of the world. Only two in five feel that missions should be completed turned over to indigenous church workers.

Adventists who are more likely to continue to see a need for missionaries include those from large cities, those over 65 years of age, single adults and those with annual household incomes below \$30,000. Adventists who are

more likely to believe that missions should be turned over to local leadership in each nation include those from rural areas, members from congregations of 300 or more members, those who are married and have children, those from households where at least one person is a denominational employee, those with annual household incomes of \$30,000 or more, and members from the Asian and Hispanic ethnic groups, as well as Canadians.

# Missionaries Seen as "Sacrificing" but Not Living in Primitive Conditions



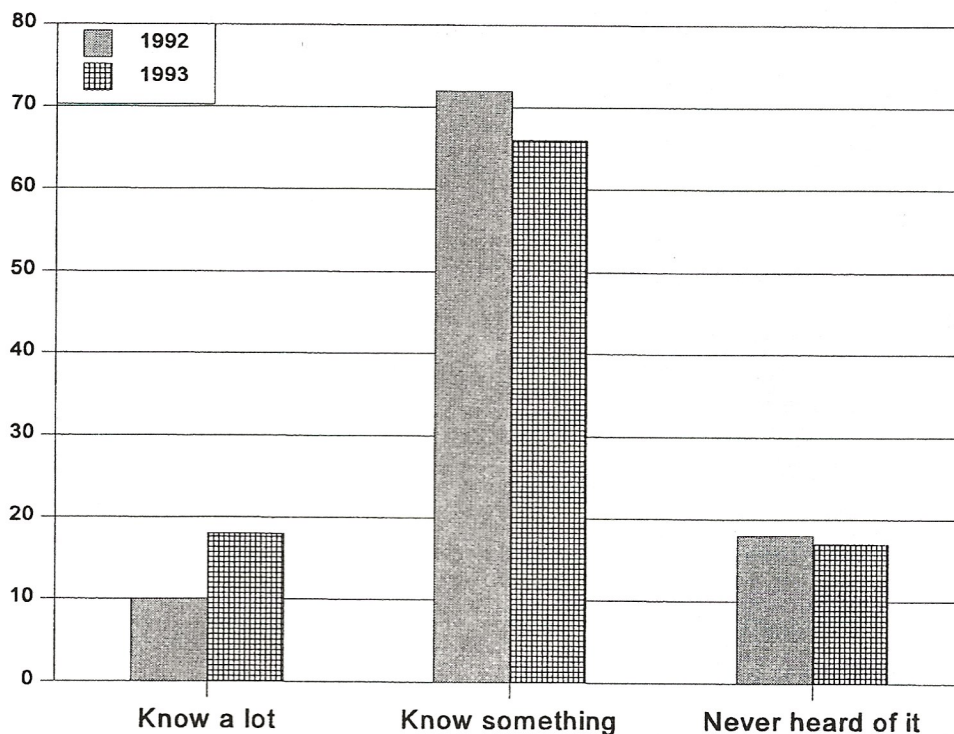
Four out of five Adventists agree "that a missionary today is sacrificing when he or she goes to the mission field, although almost as many (70%) feel that mission living conditions "are not generally unhealthful" but may "lack many conveniences." Only one in four think that missionary life is "more primitive and unhealthful than in the homeland."

Respondents from large cities, those who are single parents, those with non-member spouses, African Americans and Canadians are more likely to feel that missionaries make a

significant sacrifice. Respondents from the suburbs of large cities, those from households with at least one denominational employee, and those with an Asian ethnic background are less likely to agree.

African Americans, Hispanics and Canadians are more likely to say that mission living conditions "are not generally unhealthful" but may "lack many conveniences." Respondents from congregations with 600 or more members are more likely to believe that mission living conditions are "primitive and unhealthful."

# Growing Numbers Know About the Global Mission Program



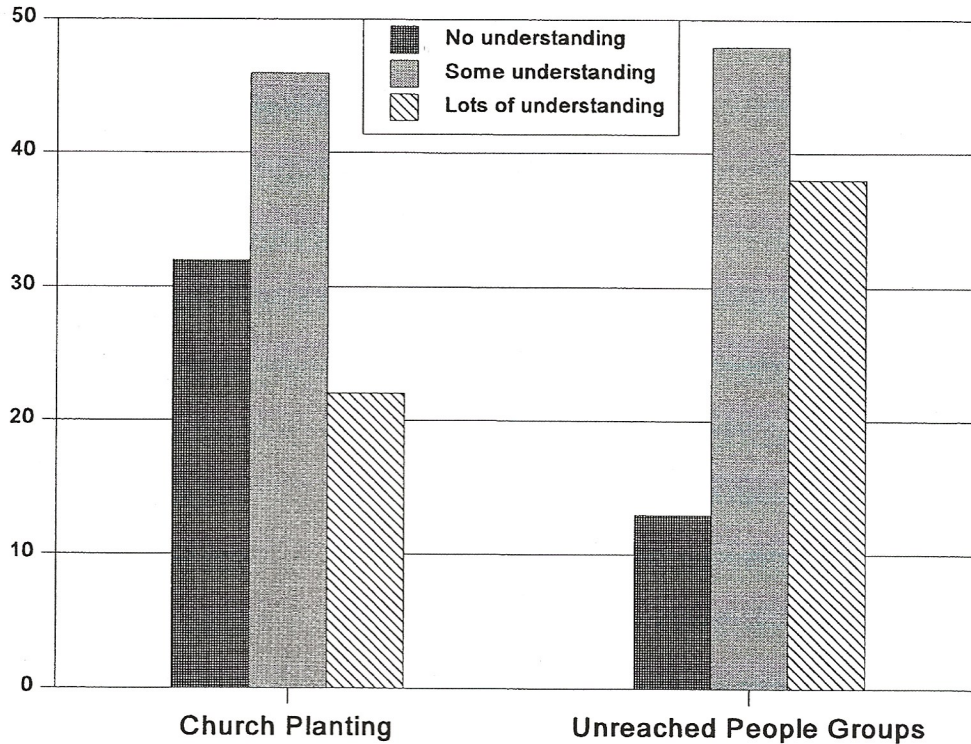
Three out of four church members (73%) have heard of the new Global Mission program of the General Conference. Most of these indicate that they know something about the program, while less than one in five say they "know a lot."

Significant progress is being made in promoting this new initiative. During the year between surveys in 1992 and 1993, the percentage of Adventists who say they "know a lot about Global Mission" nearly doubled. Almost all of these came from the group that indicated they knew something about the program; the percentage of

members who say they "never heard of it" did not change to a statistically significant degree during the year. Global Mission promotion is educating those who are interested, but not attracting those who lack interest.

Younger adults are more likely to say they have never heard of Global Mission. Older adults are more likely to say they "know a lot" about Global Mission. In fact, respondents under 25 years of age are twice as likely to say they have never heard, and respondents over 65 are twice as likely to say they "know a lot."

# New Mission Concepts are Becoming Known to Members



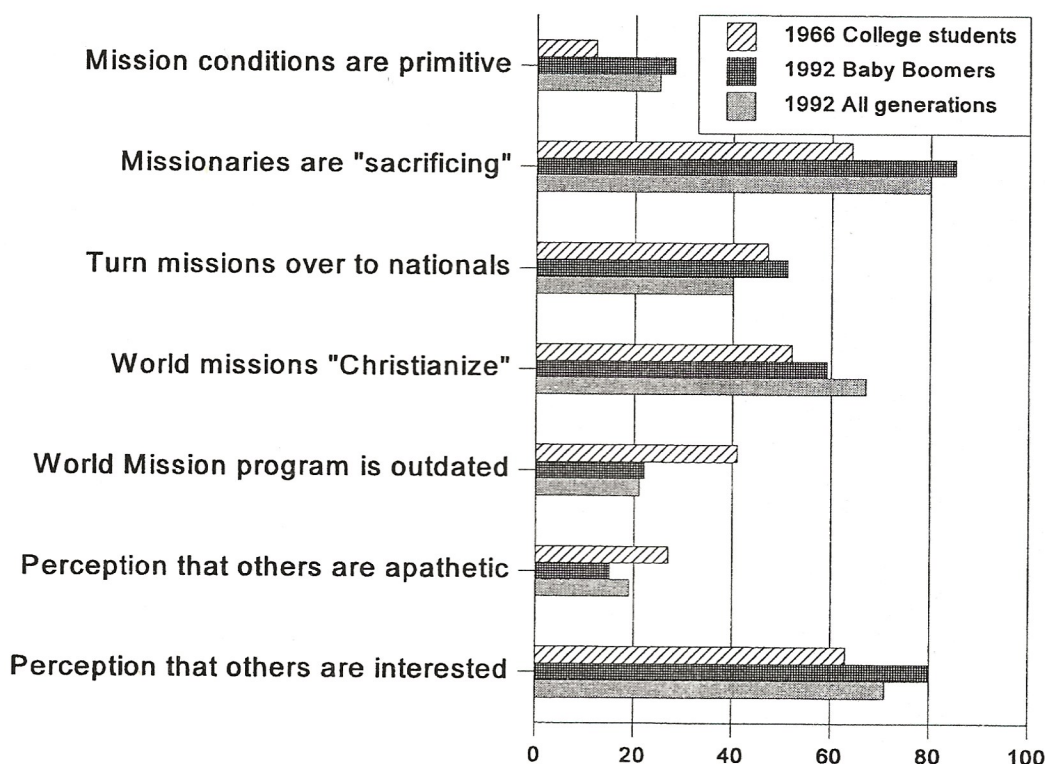
Nearly half of church members (46% and 48%) have only some idea of what "church planting" and "unreached people groups" mean. Almost twice as many have a good understanding of "unreached people groups" than do those who have a good understanding of "church planting." Both of these terms are key elements in the new Global Mission strategy and represent contemporary thinking in missiology.

The "church planting" concept was more likely to be well understood by respondents from the Asian and Hispanic ethnic groups, who are also more likely to be immigrants from

countries where these mission strategies have been used longer than they have been used in North America. Church members who live in large cities and those from households in which at least one person is a denominational employee are also more likely to understand "church planting."

The concept of "unreached people groups" is more likely to be well understood by African American and Hispanic respondents, as well as church members who live in large cities and in households with a denominational employee.

# Baby Boomers have Changed Views of World Missions



The Baby Boom generation is very influential in the life of the Seventh-day Adventist Church today. It has changed its views on many aspects of world missions.

A 25-year comparison of opinion is made possible by replicating several questions. They were first asked in a survey of students at Adventist colleges during the 1966-67 school year.

The attitude of Baby Boomers on some items has changed to a more positive view than that of other generations today. They are more likely to believe that missionaries make a sacrifice and live in primitive conditions.

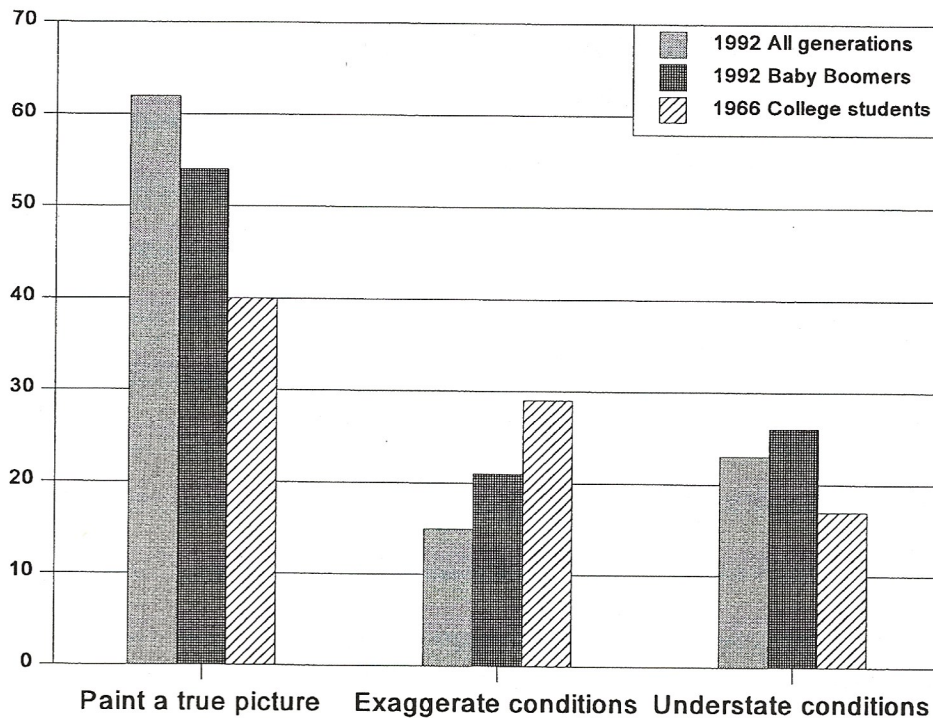
They believe church members are more interested in world missions and less apathetic.

Baby Boomers feel more strongly than ever that the direction of missions should be turned over to national leaders -- a view in which they differ from other generations.

Baby Boomers have moved closer to the positive views of other generations in that they are less likely today to say the world mission program is "outdated" and more likely to see its impact as Christ-centered.

Source: 1966 data is from Stirling (Loma Linda University, 1969).

# Do Church Members Trust Mission Reports?



A solid majority of church members (62%) think that the mission reports they hear in Sabbath School or read in denominational periodicals usually "paint a true picture." Among those who do not think they can trust these reports, more respondents believe the reports understate conditions than those who believe the reports exaggerate.

Baby Boomers are less likely to believe mission reports are accurate, but their attitudes are much more trusting than they were 25 years ago when the early cohort of this generation was attending college. This may be the result of maturity rather than changes in denominational reporting procedures. It is also true that some of the most

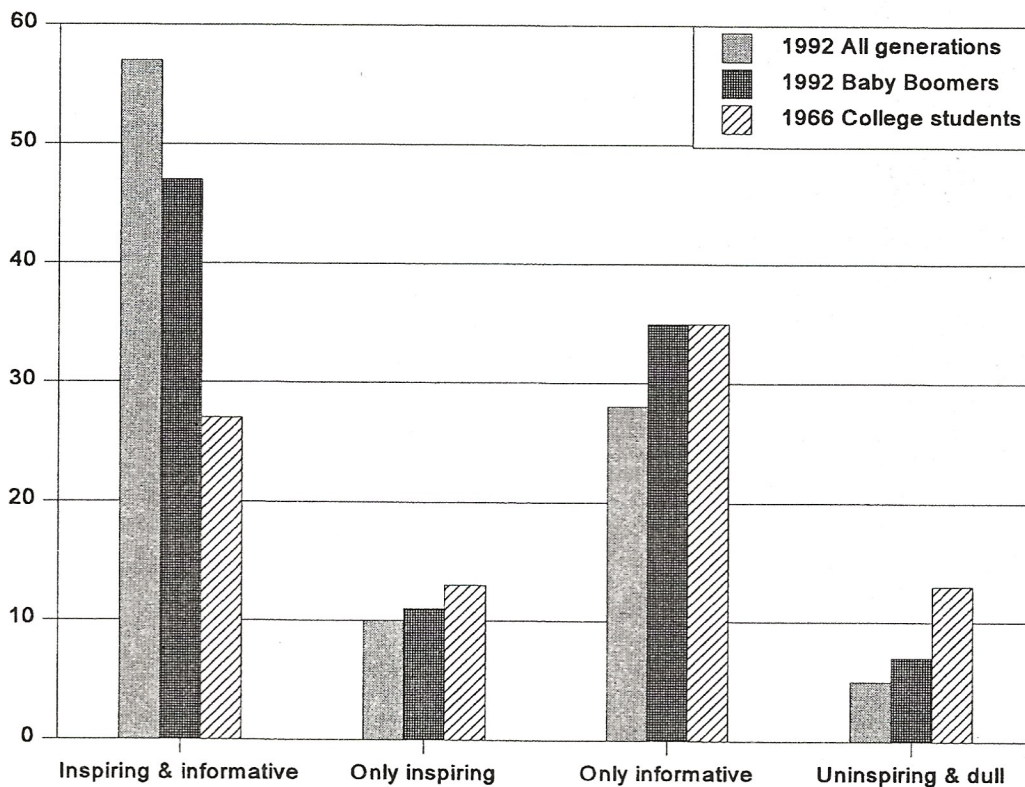
negative college respondents in 1966 have dropped out of the church.

Hispanic and African American church members are more likely to trust mission reports, as are members in Canada, those who live in large cities and those who attend churches with 600 or more members.

Less likely to find reports believable are respondents from households with denominational employees, households with incomes of \$50,000 or greater, and the Asian ethnic group.



# Do Members find Mission Reports to be Inspiring and Informative?



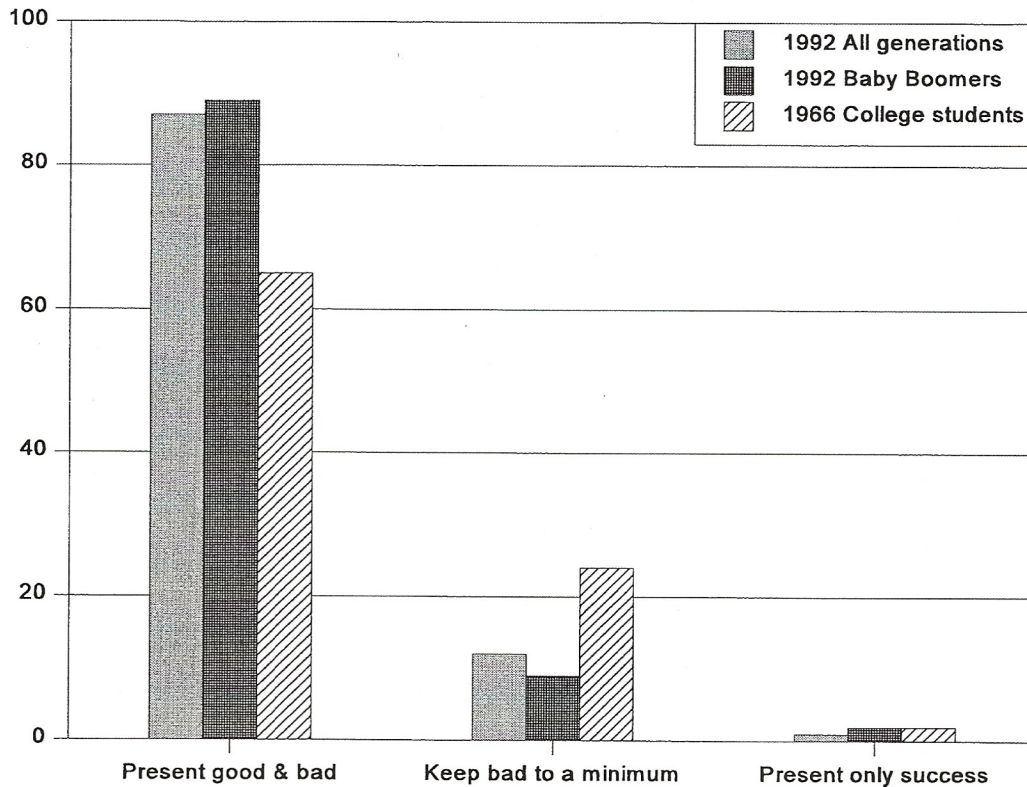
A majority of church members (57%) find most mission reports to be both inspiring and informative. Baby Boomers are somewhat less likely to say the reports are inspiring, but they have a much more positive attitude about mission reports than did the early cohort of the generation when they were college students 25 years ago.

Members most likely to report a positive impression of mission reports include those who live in rural areas,

single adults with no dependents in the home, those over 65 years of age, and those with annual household incomes under \$20,000.

Members least likely to report a positive impression of mission reports include married respondents with children, those from households with denominational employees, and those with annual household incomes of \$50,000 or more.

# What do Members Expect from Mission Reports?



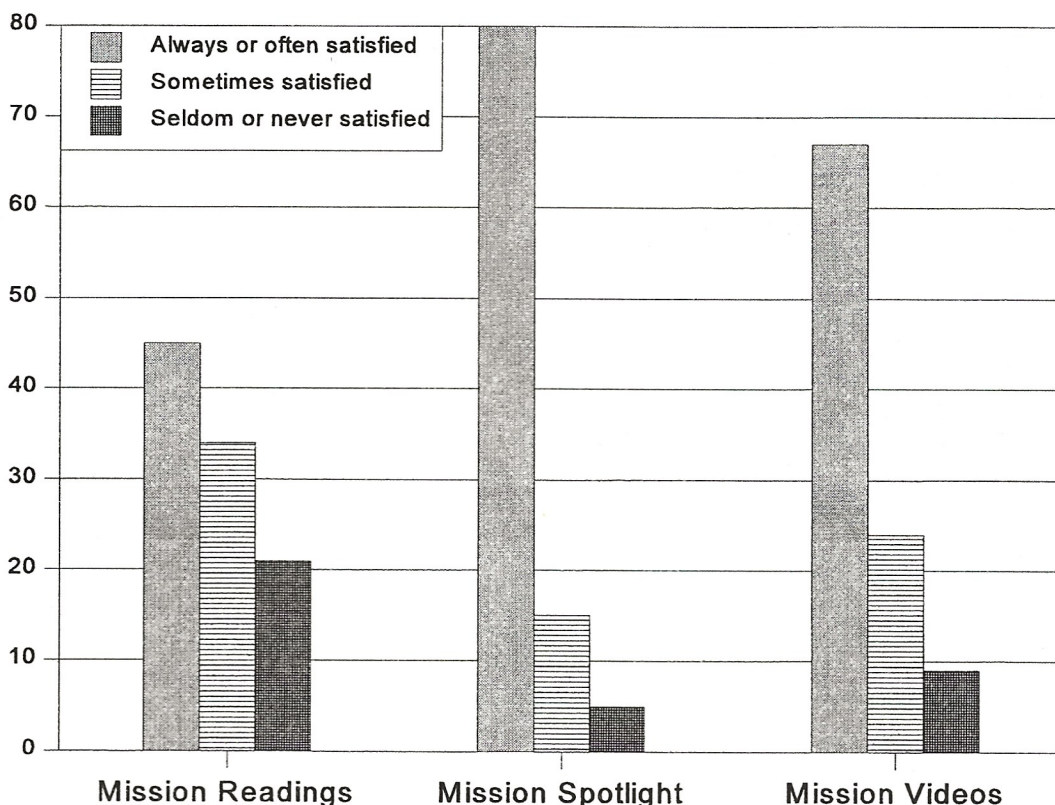
Nine out of ten church members want mission reports that present both success and failures; the good news and the bad news. Less than one in ten will tolerate reports that put emphasis on progress, "mentioning failure only as absolutely necessary." Almost none will tolerate reports that present only success.

Surprisingly, college students of the 1960s were much more tolerant of reports that lack balance than are any generation today. The portion of Baby Boomers willing to accept reports that

present only success or mention failure only when absolutely necessary has declined by more than half as compared with the 1966 college students.

No demographic segment in the 1992 survey data is less likely to demand balanced mission reports. In-depth, accurate information that presents a picture of missions which includes both success and failure is absolutely necessary for mission reports to be believed by church members today.

# Church Members Evaluate Specific Mission Report Media



Four out of five church members like Mission Spotlight. Two-thirds like the mission videos they have seen. But, the majority (55%) are dissatisfied with the tradition of reading a mission story during Sabbath School.

All demographic segments are positive about Mission Spotlight. Only respondents from the Asian and African American ethnic groups are more likely to express dissatisfaction. This may relate to the sensitive issues of how people of color are portrayed.

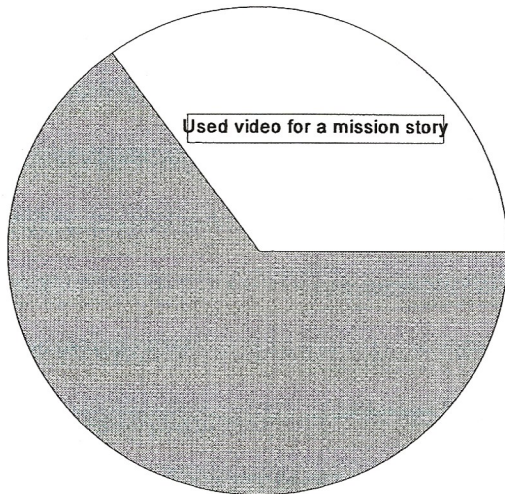
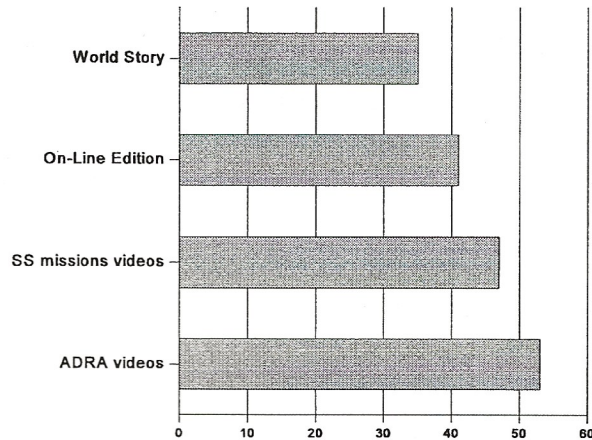
Mission videos get a positive

response from almost all demographic segments. Dissatisfaction is more likely to be expressed by members who live in large cities, older women, those from households with annual incomes of less than \$20,000, and African American members. These may be those who have less access to video equipment.

The majority of church members who express dissatisfaction with mission readings comes largely from a particular demographic segment -- Baby Boomers, suburban residents, those with annual incomes over \$30,000.

# Use of Mission Videos by Congregations & Lay Leaders

"Have you shown any of these videos in your church in the last three months?" pastors were asked in late 1993. Half reported the use of an ADRA video or a video for a Sabbath School mission report. Two in five mentioned On-Line Edition, and a third indicated they had shown World Story. It is likely that there is some confusion about the last product since its subscription circulation precludes such wide-spread use.



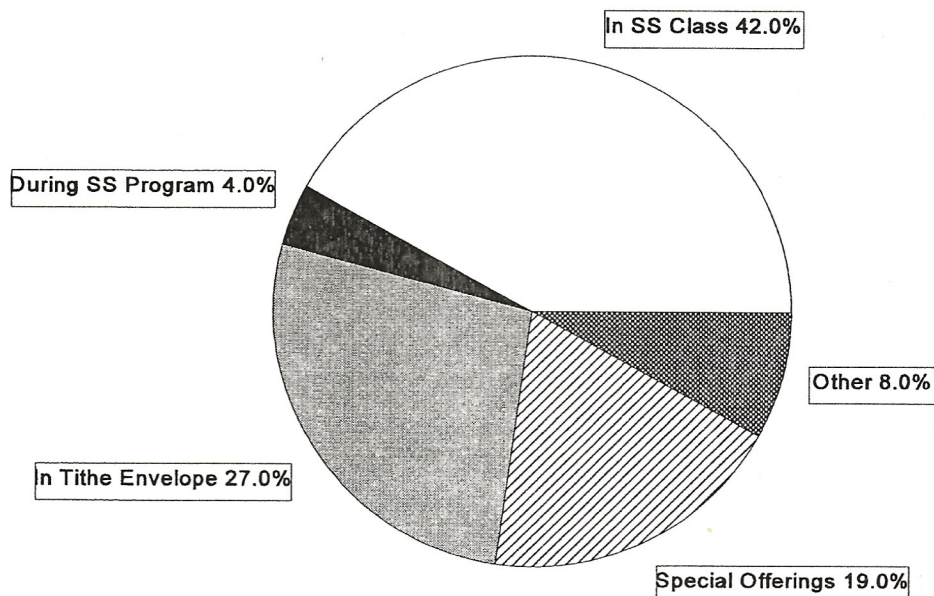
"What videos have you used in your responsibilities in your local church?" church board members were asked in late 1994. One in three reported that they had used a video in a mission story presentation.

Lay leaders who live in small towns are more likely to report use of video. Those who attend congregations with fewer than 100 members and those with more than 600 members are less likely to do so, as are those from ethnic minority groups and those over 65 years of age.

There is a strong correlation between the usage of video and congregations with a strong growth rate. Declining congregations are significantly less likely to report the use of videos.

*Source: 1993 Survey of Pastors and 1994 Survey of Church Board Members.*

# How Members Give to World Missions



Nearly half of Adventist members give to world missions in Sabbath School. Most do so during the Sabbath School class and a smaller number during the opening program.

More than a quarter give to world missions via the tithe envelope. Perhaps this reflects those givers who intentionally plan their offerings.

It is interesting to note that 17% of members said they gave tithe to an overseas organization, reflecting a base of members that is relatively small but especially committed to world missions. Asians and those with an ethnic background of "other" are those most likely to divert tithe to overseas organizations.

One in five members given to world missions through special offerings scheduled as part of the Sabbath worship offerings throughout the denomination. This is essentially the same percentage of members who said the opportunity to give to specific mission projects is a very effective motivator (20%). With more than three out of five members favorably impressed by the use of media presentations and specific appeals, these avenues could be used more extensively to increase giving to world missions.

*Source: 1991 Survey of Members (Previously published in Office of Information and Research Report 10.)*

## Technical Appendix

In interpreting survey results, it should be borne in mind that all sample surveys are subject to sampling error. That is, the extent to which the results may differ from what would be obtained if the whole population had been interviewed. The size of such sampling errors depends on the number of interviews or questionnaires.

The following tables may be used in estimating the sampling error of any percentage in this report. The computed allowances have taken into account the effect of the sample design upon sampling error. They may be interpreted as indicating the range (plus or minus the figure shown) within which the results of repeated samplings in the same time period could be expected to vary, 95 percent of the time, assuming the same sampling procedures, the same interviewers and/or the same questionnaire.

Table A shows how much allowance should be made for the sampling error of any percentage reported. This table would be used in the following manner: If a reported percentage is 33 for a groups includes 1,250 respondents ... then, go to row "percentages near 30" in the table and go across to the column headed "1250." The number at this point is 3, which means that the 33 percent obtained in the sample is subject to a sampling error of plus or minus 3 points. This means that very probably (95 chances out of 100) the true figure would be somewhere between 30 and 36, with the most likely figure the 33 obtained in the survey.

In comparing survey results in two sub-samples, for example, men and women, the question arises as to how large a difference between them must be before one can be reasonably sure that it reflects a real difference. Table B and Table C indicate the number of points which must be allowed for in such comparisons to make them "statistically significant." Table C is for percentages near 20 or 80. Table B is for percentages near 50. For percentages in between, the factor to be allowed for is between those shown on the two tables.

Here is how these tables are used: If 50% of men respond a certain way and 40% of women respond that way also, for a difference of 10 percentage points between them, can we say that the 10 point difference reflects a real difference between the two groups on that question? Let's say the sample contains about 750 of each gender.

Since the percentages are near 50, consult Table B. Since the total sample is 1500, look for the number in the column headed "1500." Since the two sub-samples are 750 persons each, look for the row designated "750." Where the row and column intersect, you will find the number 5. This means that the difference between the two groups must be greater than 5 percentage points to be "statistically significant." In other words, we can conclude with considerable confidence that a real difference exists in the answers of men and women to this question.

**Table A**  
**Recommended Allowance for Sampling Error**

Size of Sample ....	1500	1250	1000	750	500	250	100
Percentages near 10	2	2	2	3	3	5	7
Percentages near 20	3	3	3	4	4	6	10
Percentages near 30	3	3	4	4	5	7	11
Percentages near 40	3	3	4	4	5	8	12
Percentages near 50	3	3	4	4	5	8	12
Percentages near 60	3	3	4	4	5	8	12
Percentages near 70	3	3	4	4	5	7	11
Percentages near 80	3	3	3	4	4	6	10
Percentages near 90	2	2	2	3	3	5	7

**Table B**  
**Recommended Allowance for Sampling Error of the Difference  
In Percentage Points for Percentages near 50**

Size of Sample ....	1500	1250	1000	750	500	250	100
1500	4						
1250	5	5					
1000	5	5	5				
750	6	6	6	6			
500	6	6	7	7	8		
250	8	8	9	9	9	11	
100	13	13	13	13	13	14	17

**Table C**  
**Recommended Allowance for Sampling Error of the Difference**  
**In Percentage Points**  
**For Percentages near 20 or Percentages near 80**

Size of Sample ....	1500	1250	1000	750	500	250	100
1500	4						
1250	4	4					
1000	4	4	4				
750	4	4	5	5			
500	5	5	5	6	6		
250	7	7	7	7	8	9	
100	10	10	10	10	11	12	14



