

***“Insights From Young Adult Focus Groups  
Regarding Church Life, Stewardship and  
Intergenerational Relationships and Their  
Implications for Strategic Planning”***

**The Second Conference of  
SDA Human-Subject Researchers  
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**Presented by  
Larry R Evans, D.Min.,  
General Conference Associate  
Stewardship Director**

# 18 FOCUS GROUPS CONDUCTED IN 3 DIVISIONS

- EUD**
  - Austria (1)
  - Italy (4)
- SPD**
  - Australia (5)
  - New Zealand (3)
- TED**
  - England (2)
  - Hungary (1)
  - Iceland (1)
  - Serbia (1)





# Focus Groups in 14 Countries in 4 Divisions

## EUD

- Austria (1)
- Italy (4)
- France (1)
- Spain (2)
- Switzerland (2)

## SPD

- Australia (5)
- New Zealand (3)

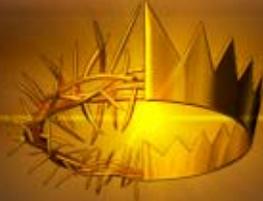
## SUD

- India (1)

## TED

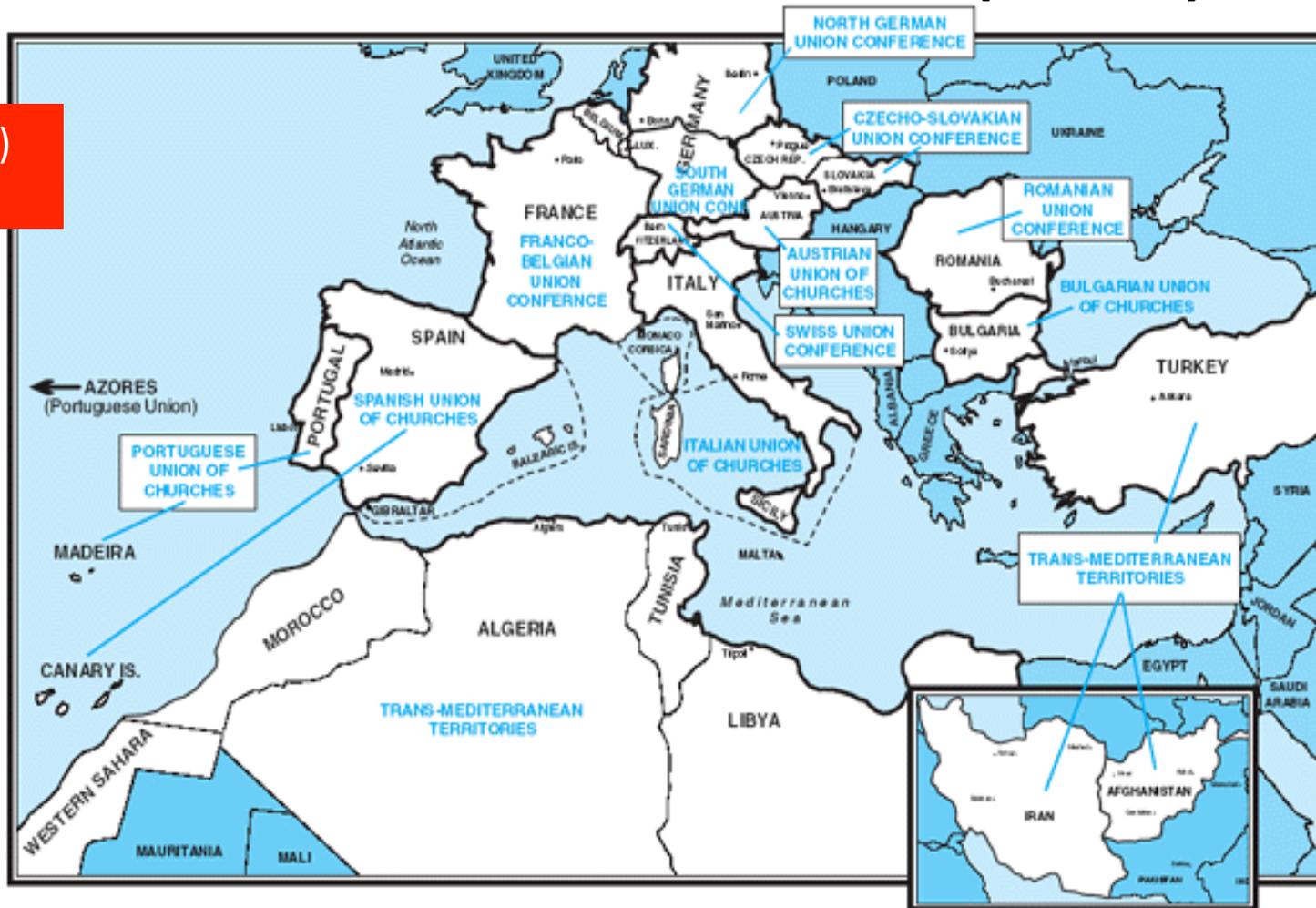
- England (2)
- Hungary (1)
- Iceland (1)
- Serbia (1)

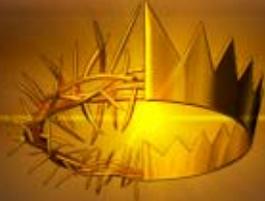




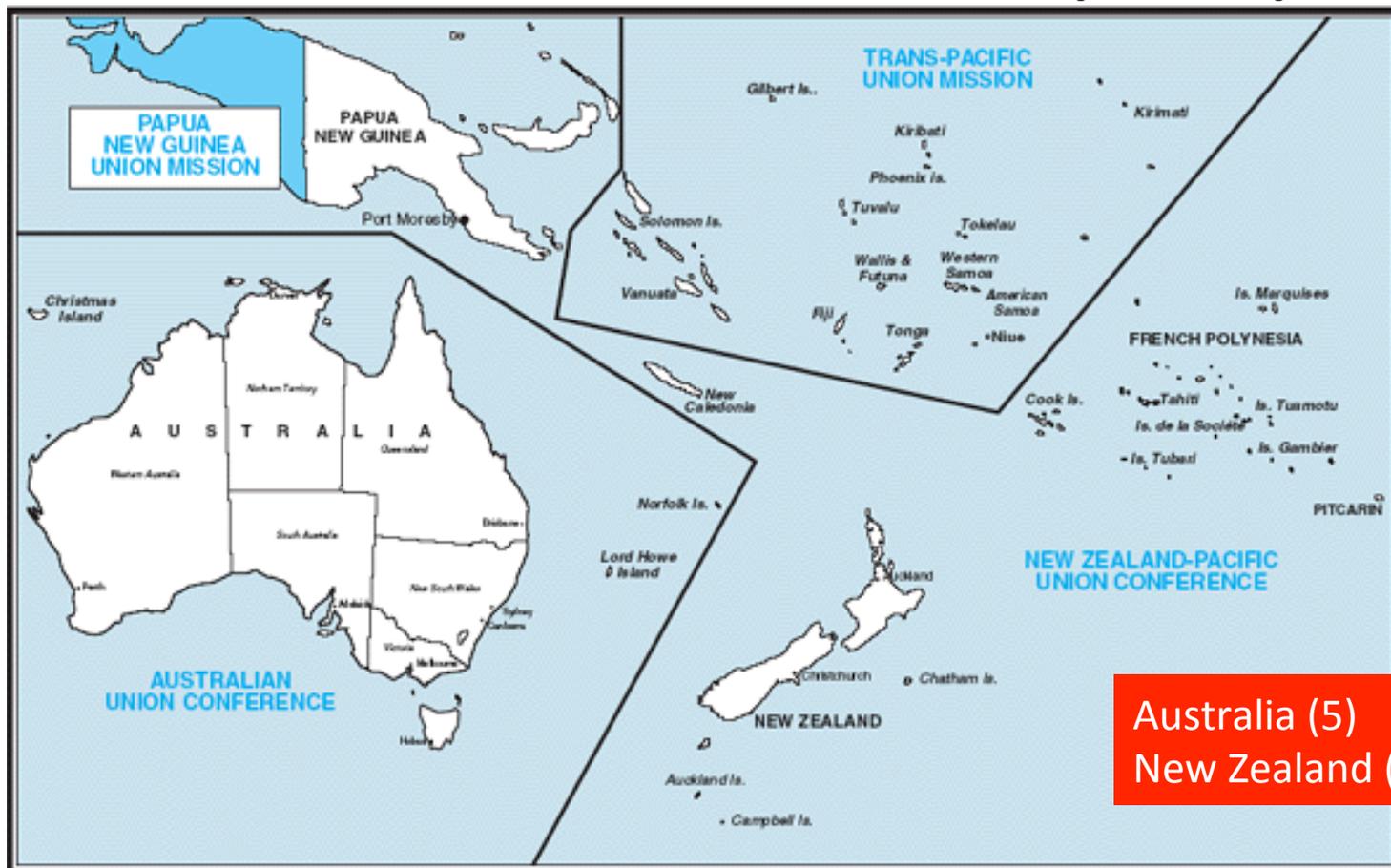
# Euro-Africa Division (EUD)

Austria (10)  
Italy (4)

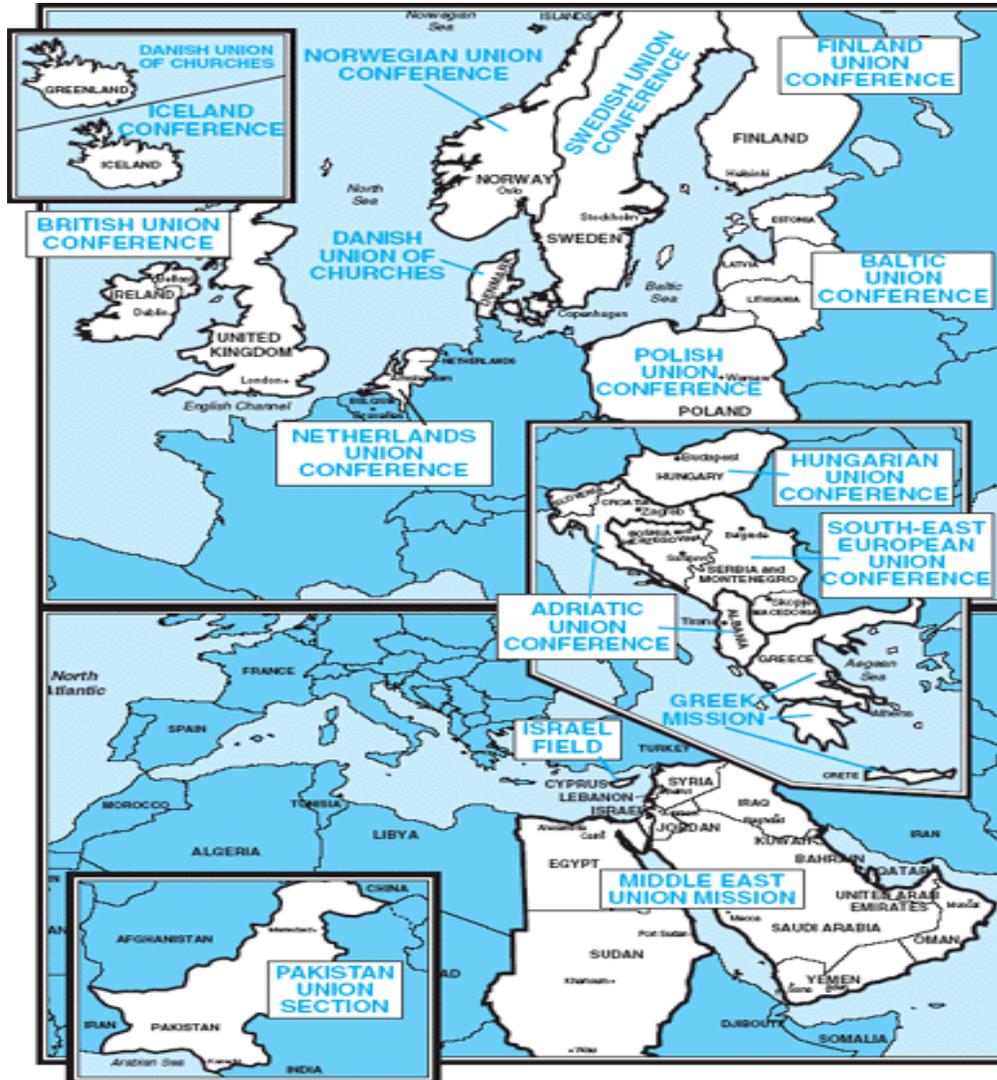




# South Pacific Division (SPD)



Australia (5)  
New Zealand (3)



# Trans-European Division (TED)

- Serbia (1)
- England (2)
- Hungary (1)
- Iceland (1)



## The Early Beginnings

1. Concerns
2. Possibilities
3. Ministry





# INTRODUCTION

“The ages eighteen to twenty-nine are the black hole of church attendance; this age segment is ‘missing in action’ from most congregations.”  
David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, p.22. (Baker:2011)

Today’s young adults are “living through a period of compressed social, cultural, and technological change. This environment invites them to live out their faith in new and sometimes startling ways.”  
I(bid., p. 103.)

# Generational Change

- Faced by every generation but more compressed today into shorter time periods.
- Each generation is shaped by its own experience and those experiences are becoming more diverse from previous generations.
- Recent study of 12<sup>th</sup> graders – 1976-2007
- Expectations

# Generational Changes

- Faith experience of young adults challenged by
  - Secular media
  - Education
  - Peers
- Critical time, a time when faith convictions are being altered.
- Understanding across generations challenged.

# Factors Driving Change

- Gabe Lyons: Today's Cultural Context
  - 1. **Pluralism** – religiously diverse.
  - 2. **Postmodern** – knowledge is uncertain, trust nothing, believe no one.
  - 3. **Post-Christian** – the reduced role of the church in life as a whole.
    - (*The Next Christians*, pp. 21-27)

**As Commonly Understood**

**STEWARDSHIP: THE UNLIKELY  
GENERATIONAL GLUE**

# Stewardship



“ . . . In a more restricted sense the word ‘stewardship’ means one’s responsibility for a wise use of the material resources that come into his possession, especially, his responsibility to God with respect to tithes and offerings.”

“As used of Christian stewardship, in a broad sense, the word refers to man’s responsibility for, and use of, everything entrusted to him by God—life, physical being, time, talents and abilities, material possessions, opportunities to be of service to others, and his knowledge of truth.” *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, pp. 1425-6. (Review and Herald: 1976)

**What Did We Learn?**





# Spiritual Influence

*“My mother . . . she’s always the one that I turn to when I’m in dire need of spiritual assistance or knowledge, or spiritual protection.”*

*Translator: “She (the young adult) has the joy to study in an Adventist school, but her family wasn’t Adventist. She got influenced through her best friend at school.”*

*“First thing that came to my mind was a pastor that was very nice \_\_\_\_\_. He was the first thing that came to my mind.”*

# he Mission of the Church



*“I don’t think the primary mission should be making Seventh-day Adventists out of everyone. The primary [goal] should be making followers of Christ out of everyone.” [TED]*

*“ . . . what is the purpose of the fundamentals, because that’s what I struggle with. See, I don’t care for the fundamentals because I know they’re from the Bible, so if we love God, we love His word, and those things will come naturally.” [SPD]*

# Be like Jesus



*“Liberation, to free people from all sorts of problems—physical, spiritual, that kind of stuff.” [TED]*

*“I think discipleship is also very important, where we not only tell people, spread the gospel, but we also disciple them to the point where they know how to continue on.” [EUD]*

*“ . . . I think our purpose in life is for us to live out our life as a living example of a loving [God].” [SPD]*

# Share the Distinctives



*“To tell others what we believe about the second coming of Jesus.” [EUD]*

*“In a very strict way, underline the second coming of God.” [EUD]*

*“I’ll say teaching the world about the true Sabbath.” [SPD]*

# Expressions About the Church



## Community:

*“For me consistency. Like, you can go here or South America, and they’re preaching the same message.” [SPD]*

*“To be brothers and sisters and friends, and to know that there is someone who will always be with you if you’ve got problems and can share them and pray together.” [EUD]*

# Expressions About the Church



## Beliefs:

*“I love that in all our doctrines, that Jesus is at the center. And I just love the hope that we have in Jesus and His soon return.” [SPD]*

*“I like that our beliefs don’t change over time, so we have the foundation of the Bible, so we don’t say, like, now believe in another thing.” [EUD]*

# Expressions About the Church



## Service:

*“Honesty. So many people who are not Adventist, they work for some company, they really say, ‘He was very honest.’ The Adventist people have a good reputation.” [TED]*

*Translator: “She likes that it has a social. It puts a foot in helping society.” [EUD]*

# Desired Changes



## Critical/Judgmental Attitudes:

*“I wish I could erase all the differences between conservatives and liberals.” [EUD]*

*“The hypocrisy” [SPD]*

*“...ourselves.” [TED]*

*“I’d like to give a mirror to every Adventist because we like to look at other people instead of looking at ourselves... We find somebody who is worse than us, and we say, ‘Ok, he’s bad and I’m good.’” [TED]*

*“The conflict in generations.” [EUD]*

*Yes, since they (the older generation) criticize us, we criticize them as well. Because we feel oppressed, in a sense.” [EUD]*

# Desired Changes



## Biblical Interpretations or Emphasis:

*“I would change the focus of upholding doctrine and upholding tradition, which is fine, but I would change the heavy focus that we have on that and switching some of it into loving and serving each other.” [SPD]*

*“. . . when people have baptism studies, they get baptized, and then they get left out on their own. So continuing that mentoring.” [SPD]*

*“That whole debate surrounding women’s ordination, and how closed-minded some people seem to be.” [SPD]*

# Desired Changes



## Lifestyle Issues:

*“Before preaching the second coming of Jesus Christ, it would be good to preach to others how Christianity has changed our life and how we love life with Christ.” [EUD]*

*“I think as a church we’re taking it too easy and not really going outside and talking to people and doing proper evangelism, being really motivated and dedicated at this time. Even when we do it, I think we’re not—we go to normal people, and we talk to them about high theology stuff. I’m thinking we should talk to them about things that happen with heart and love first.... So I think as a church we’ve lost the idea of going out and talking to people or doing something for them in order to show them Jesus.” [TED]*

# Concepts of Stewardship



**a. No idea; Not sure (18%)**

*“I’m not sure, I think financial.” [TED]*

**b. Money or Assets; Tithe & Offerings; Giving (31%)**

*“I always associated stewardship with tithing as a child. So my mum would say, ‘So you have put your 50 cents of tithe in the envelope this week?’ And that’s the way I thought of it. It was like, ‘Oh man, I’ve just got 50 cents and I could buy [something special]. . . . I hated tithing.” [SPD]*

**c. Services rendered; Lifestyle; Responsibilities; Total life; Using Spiritual Gifts (19%)**

*“. . . how we should define it, is that the responsibilities of working toward a higher goal, like putting our talents into, all of our talents or whatever talents we have, and using them.” [EUD]*

**d. Taking care of something for someone; Manager (9%)**

*“So he is a person that, his job is to take care of the house that he doesn’t own for the owner, and be sure that everything is OK. So he doesn’t own anything, but he’s taking care of it all.” [TED]*

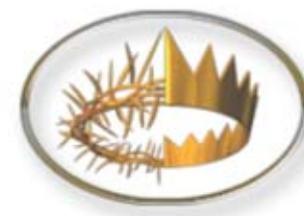
# Concepts of Stewardship



**Question number 10** addresses the confusion that sometimes exists between tithe and offerings as a general concept. It was not possible to arrive at a specific percent as to who viewed tithe and offerings as the same or differently. However, for many they were considered the same.

*"I think it depends on what your emotional state is, or your monetary state. If you're giving, say, your last pennies or whatever, it's an offering. Whereas, if it's every week you give \$20 because you've earned so much, that's tithe. But a lot of the people in my group, it's the same thing. They put one certain amount in and they say it's the tithe, but it's also the offering. There is no distinction."* [SPD]

# Concepts of Stewardship



**Question number 11** was searching for suggestions as to how to relate with the issue of inconsistent giving: “Sometimes people forget to tithe. Is this an issue with those in your age group? If it is, “How would you suggest that they be helped to remember?”

*Translator: “Maybe one of the reasons is because many people think, ‘What are they going to do with my money? I work and I earn it, and then I have to give them my money. What are they going to do with it?’” [EUD]*

*Translator: “She said what they can do is deduct it from the salary.” [TED]*

“I don’t think it’s a topic brought up a lot. A lot of pastors don’t preach on tithe, why to tithe, the benefits of tithe, the importance of it.” [SPD]

# Concepts of Stewardship



**Question 12** used a case study to clarify the use of tithe. [A close friend's home burned down destroying everything. Would the young adults use the tithe that they had just put aside to take to church Sabbath to help the person out.] No other question generated as much discussion, reflection and at times disagreement with others in the group.

*"...Jesus example...about David who went in and ate the shewbread and it was not lawful for anyone but the priests to eat it. So in some situations like that, even though the priests were the only ones who were allowed to eat the shewbread, it was OK in that situation for David and his men to eat it. . . . I do think circumstances vary things. I think the Bible is more into the principles." [SPD]*

# Confidence in the Church



How important is it for you to know how offerings are to be used before you contribute?

- *42% thought it was very important and 32% did not.*

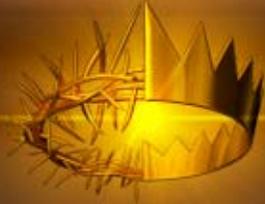
How important is it for you to receive reports of how offerings have been used?

- *47% thought it was very important, 27% did not think it was.*

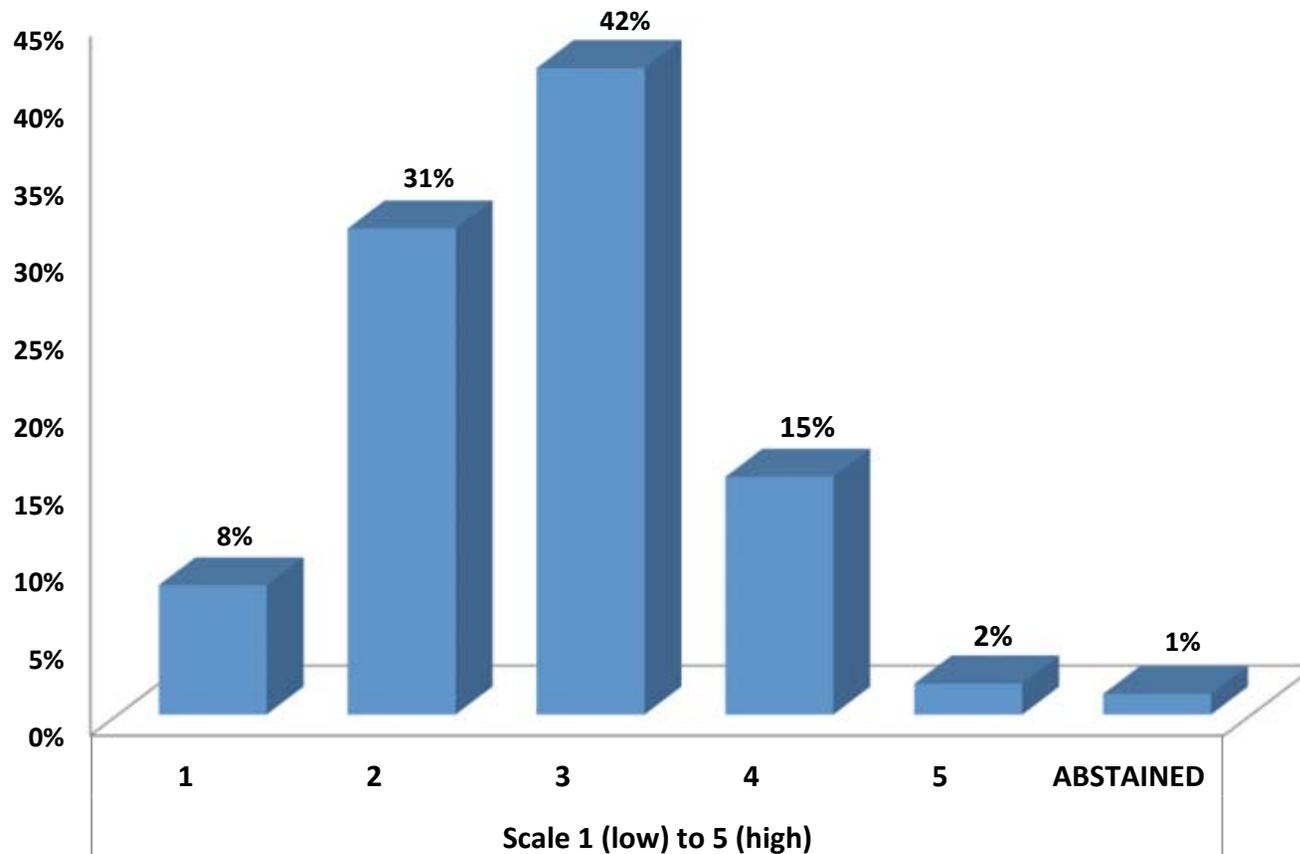
How would you rate the confidence you have that the Church is handling its finances responsibly?

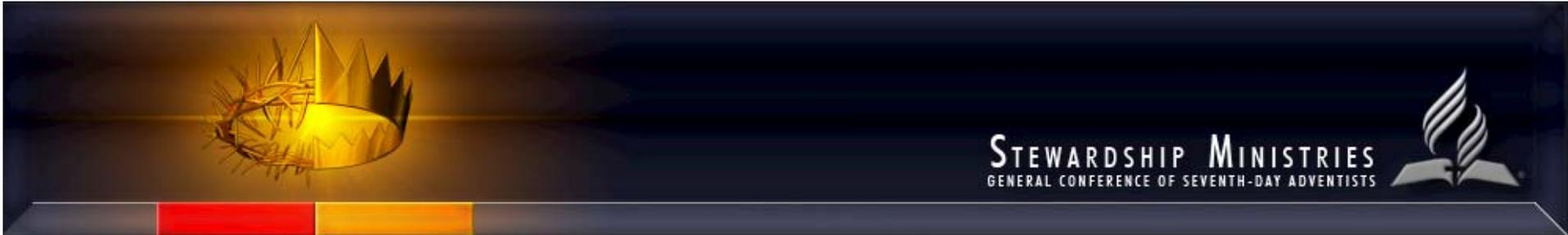
- *44% the Church was handling the finances very well whereas 24% did not believe it was.*

*“I was hoping you would ask that question. The way I see the problem, the reason why I’m raising this question, is not all people have confidence that if you give to the church you’re giving to God. I’m not the first one to have that issue.” [EUD]*

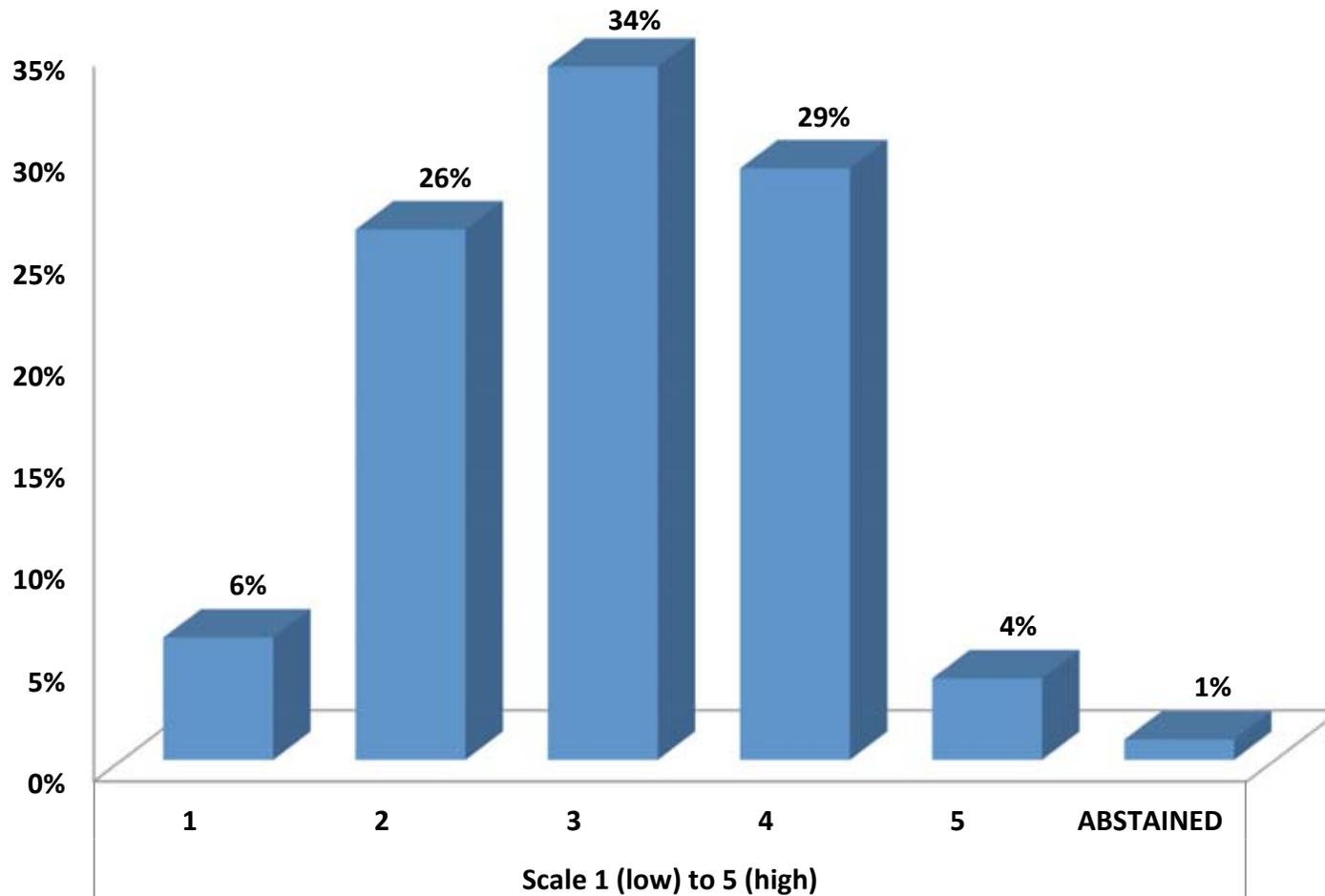


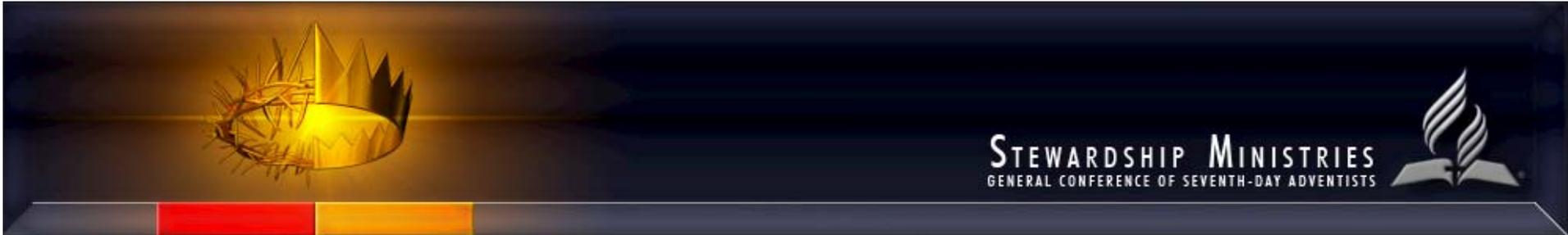
## How Well The Church Communicates Its Mission



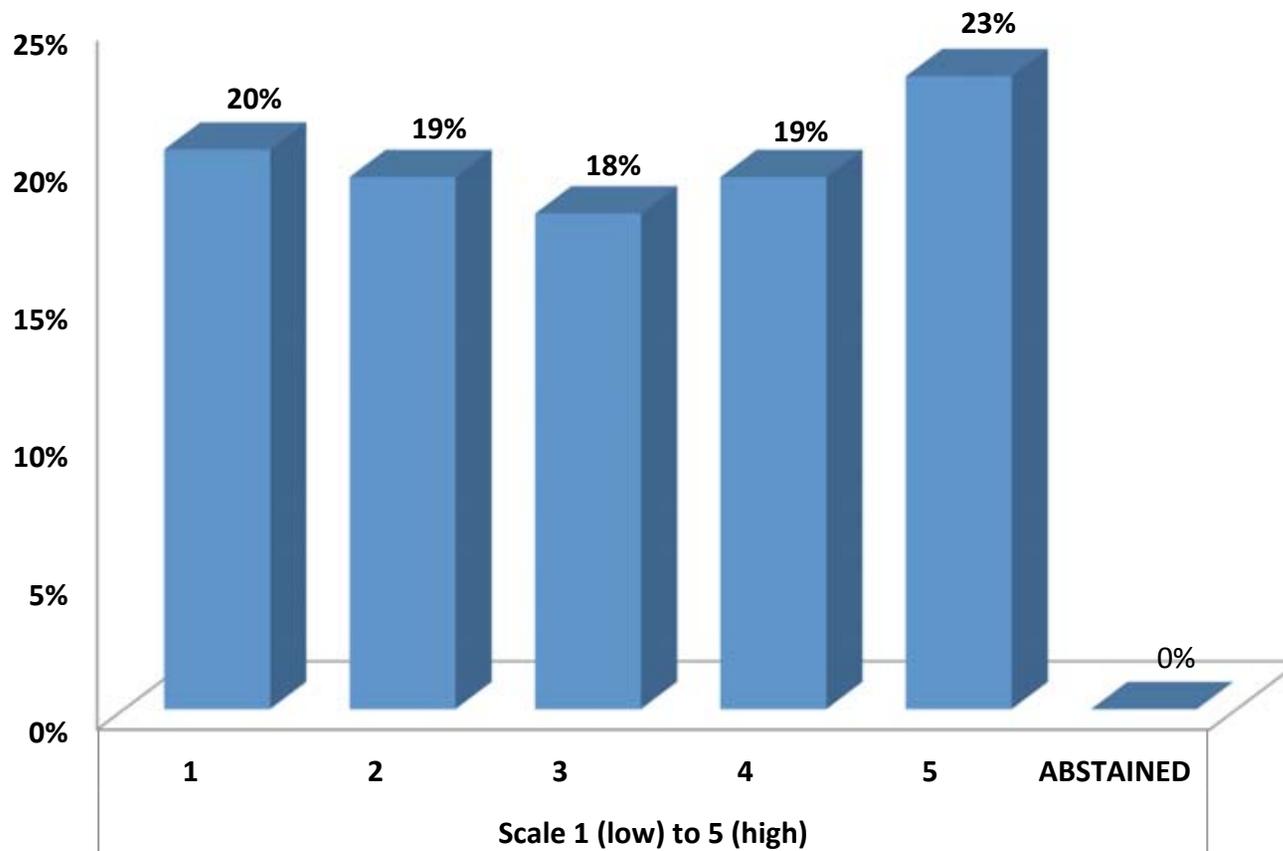


## How Effective Is the Church In Helping Individuals Find New Meaning



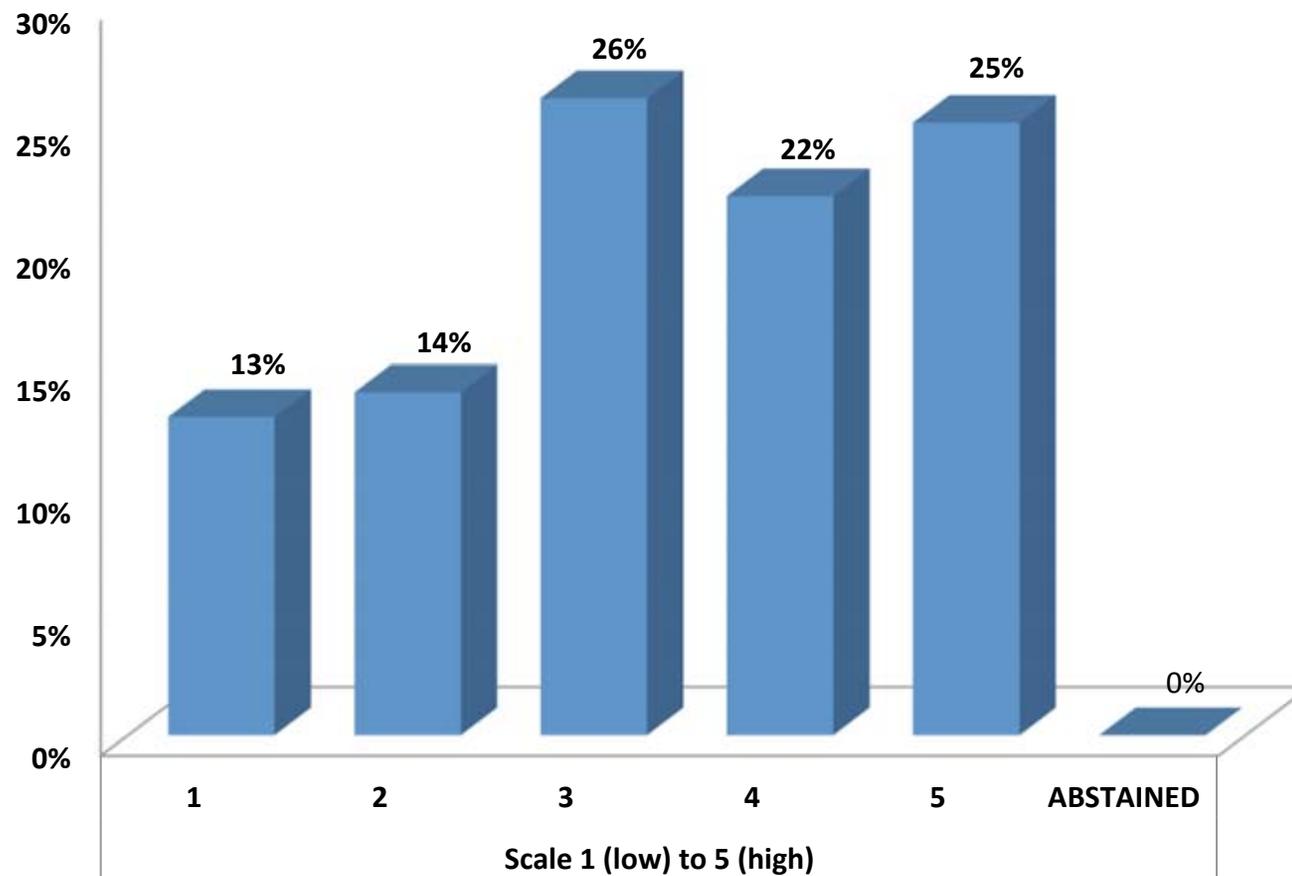


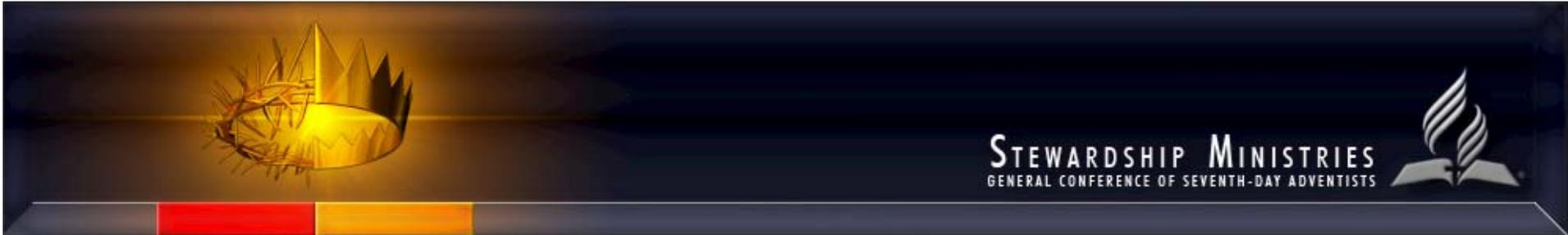
## Prefer to Have Foreknowledge of Offering Disbursement



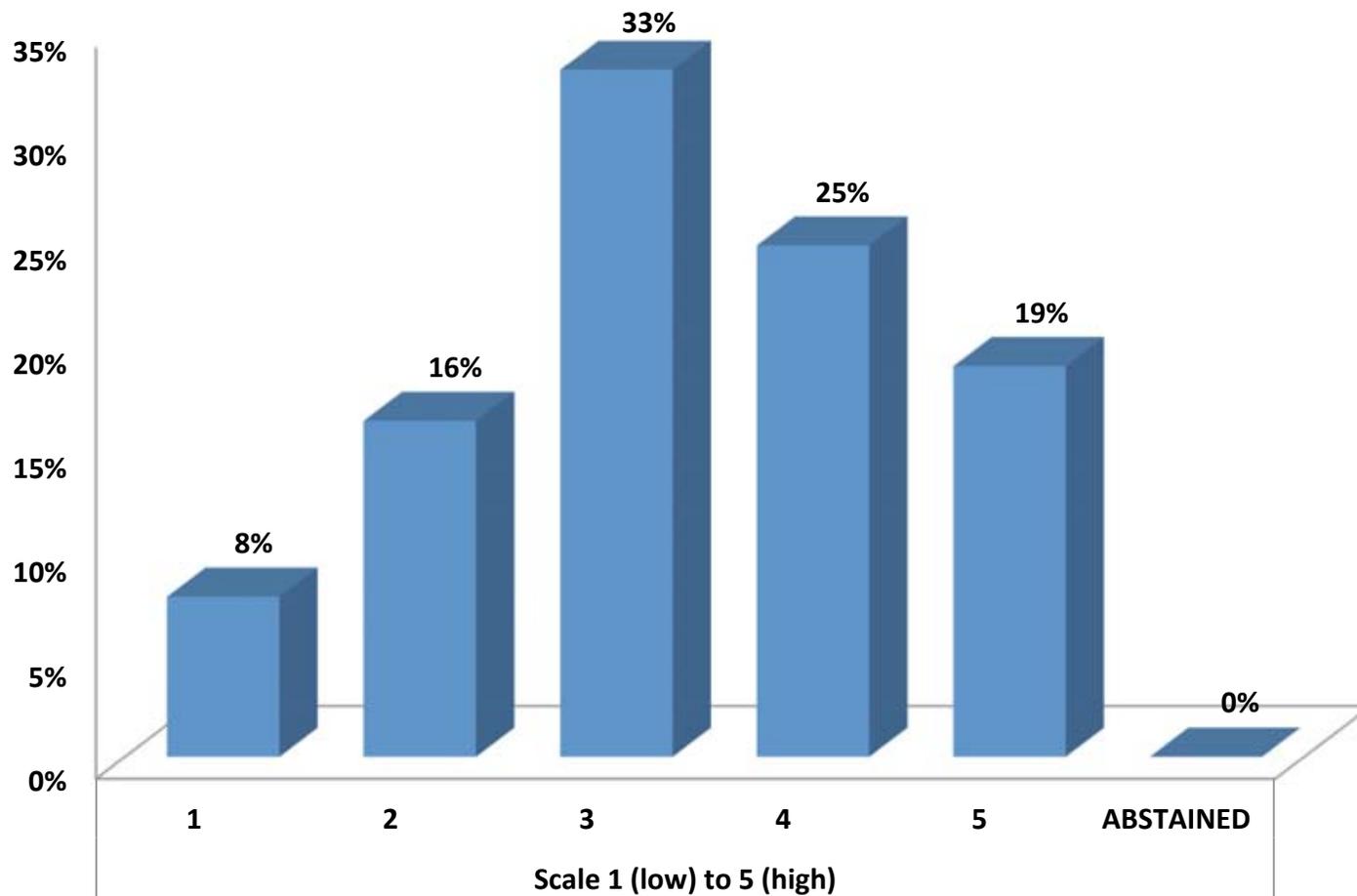


## Importance of Receiving Reports on Offerings Usage After Contributing





## Confidence that the Church Handles Finances Responsibly



# Tithing via the Internet



*“I think this is even better, because Jesus, when He was talking about the Pharisees, they were always showing how much they were giving, and this is the best way to give.” [TED]*

*“As a believer, I want all my tithe to go directly to the church and not in a bank. [a reference to charge for a donation given this way.” [EUD]*

# Closing Comment



“... it seems that as a generation we find it very important because we value authenticity and transparency. So for me to give, in one respect it's God's money, you can relax with it, and that's fine. But for me, as part of this generation, **I value knowing where money is going, and if I know it's going to a particular place and where I believe it's furthering the gospel, I'll be more likely to give. I think that if we see our church leaders having these particular beliefs and doing what they can practically to facilitate that, like for themselves, actually following through, and facilitate those beneath them to have the opportunities to participate in that, and if we see the authenticity and the transparency, I think it's going to be a lot easier to follow in their path.**” [SPD]

# Closing Thoughts



*“I’m curious to know how much emphasis do we put, when it comes to stewardship. We talk a lot about helping people. From my experience, we look at hospitals, orphanages and that kind of stuff. How much emphasis do we put on stuff like environment? Is there a department that sort of deals with stuff like that? How important do we view that? Because I don’t hear enough spoken at church.” [TED]*

Six overlapping word-  
concepts that surfaced in the  
focus groups

# **#1. *Identity.***

“Who am I?” and “Who are we?”

## #2. ***Communication.***

Networking is vital.

# #3. *Transparency.*

Corporate integrity and personal openness is vital but is questioned.

## **#4. *Participation.***

A desire to be a part  
—beyond being  
entertained; service  
with a purpose.

## #5. *Vocation.*

What is God asking me  
to do with my life?

## #6. *Mission.*

Want to be part of  
something bold. . . to  
make a difference.

# Recommendations

# Recommendations

**#1. Listen to  
Each Other**



# Recommendations

**#2. Prioritize the Discovery of Vocational Identity**



# Recommendations

**#3. Keep  
Everything We  
Do Christ-  
Focused**



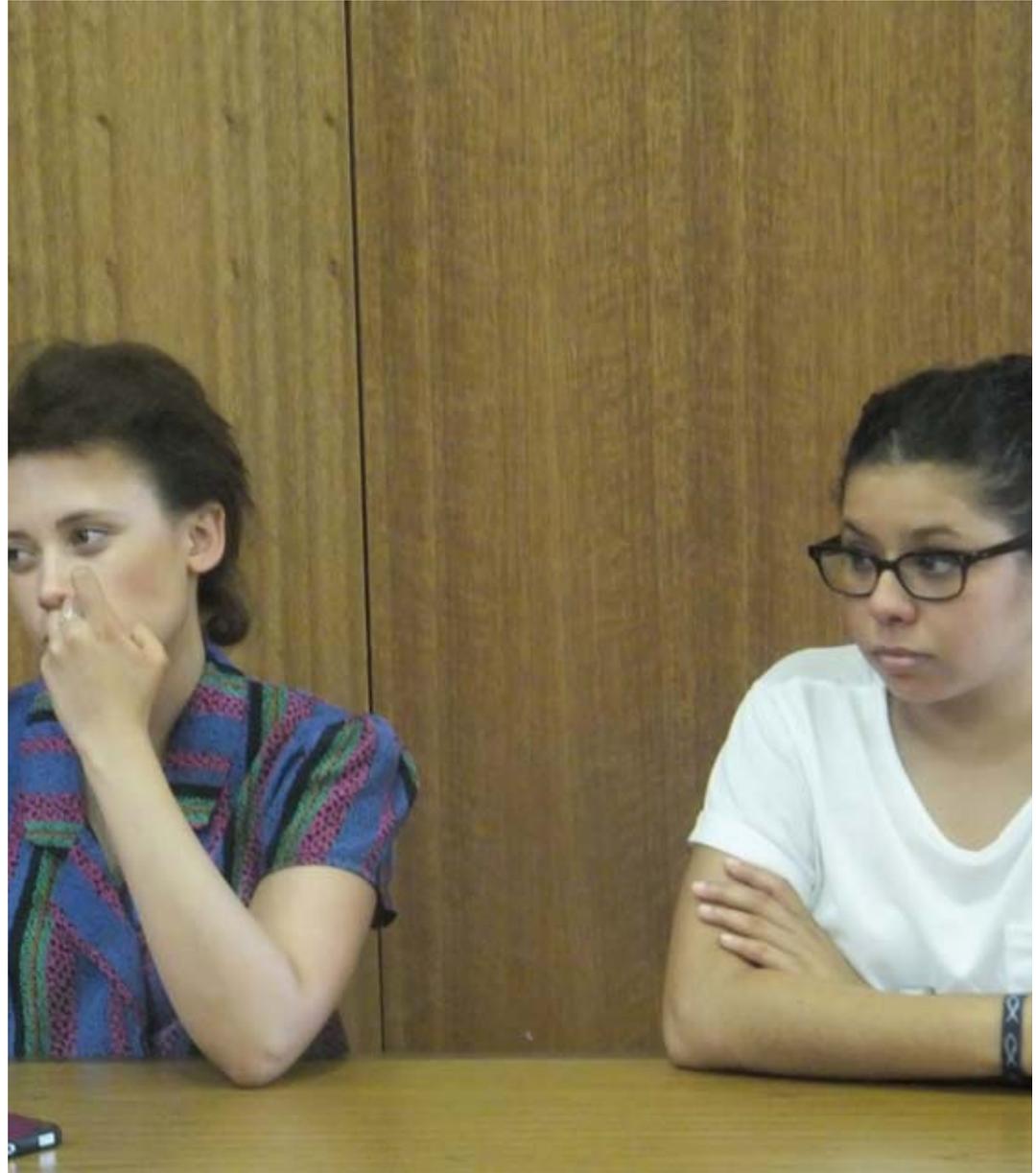
# Recommendations

## #4. Build on the Positives



# Recommendations

## #5. Inform



# Recommendations

## #6. Form Ministry Teams of Mentors and Apprentices



**BUT INTERGENERATIONAL MINISTRY  
ISN'T JUST ABOUT UNDERSTANDING  
EACH OTHER AND RESPECTING OUR  
DIFFERENCES.**

**IT'S ABOUT MISSION!**

It's Not Enough to Talk About Sin and the Cross; It's About Telling  
All of God's Story

**“RESTORATION” AS PART OF GOD’S  
STORY . . . AND OURS.**

“Instead of simply waiting for God to unveil the new heaven and the new earth, **the rest of us can give the world a taste of what God’s kingdom is all about**—building up, repairing brokenness, showing mercy, reinstating hope and generally adding value. In this expanded model, everyone plays an essential role.” Gabe Lyons



concept of dividing people into various segments based on their birth years is a very modern contrivance, emerging part from the needs of the marketplace over the last ~~by-product of this approach~~ **hundred years**. The next generation's enthusiasm and vitality have been separated from the wisdom and experience of their elders. . . . I believe we are called to connect our past . . . with our future.”

(David Kinnaman in *You Lost Me*, p.203)

# Generations Will Come Together in Mission . . .

**Some Day**  
“See, I will send you the prophet  
Elijah before that great and dreadful  
day of the Lord comes. **He will  
turn the hearts of the fathers  
to their children, and the  
hearts of the children to their  
fathers;** or else I will come and  
strike the land with a curse.”

Malachi 4:5,6

Time has come for an intergenerational mission  
to bring a new hope to a broken world.

