

Retention and Reclamation: A priority for the World Church

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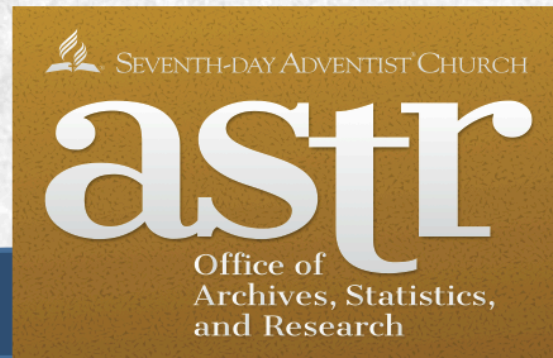
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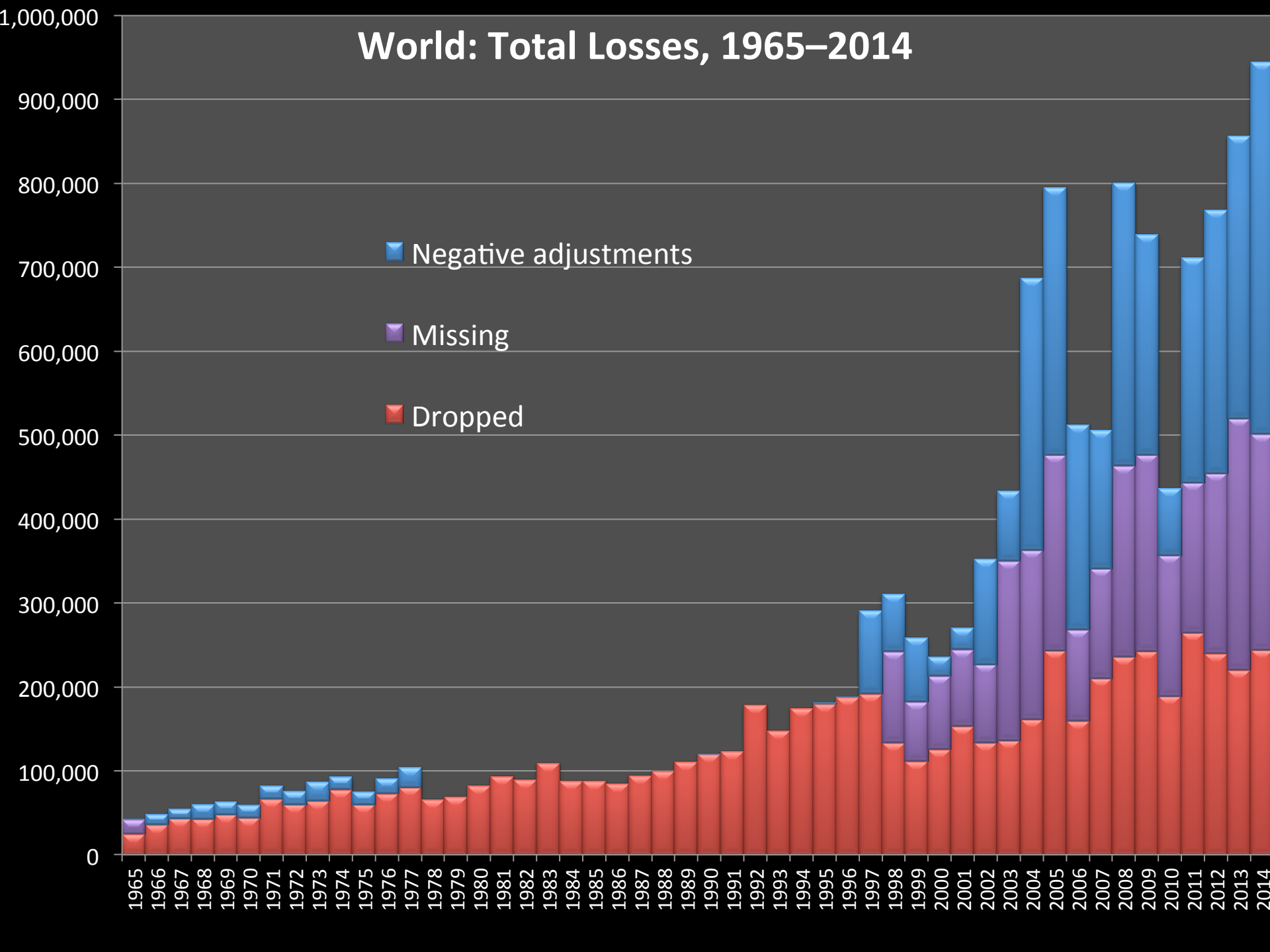

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1. Retention and loss, 1965–2014 (50 years)

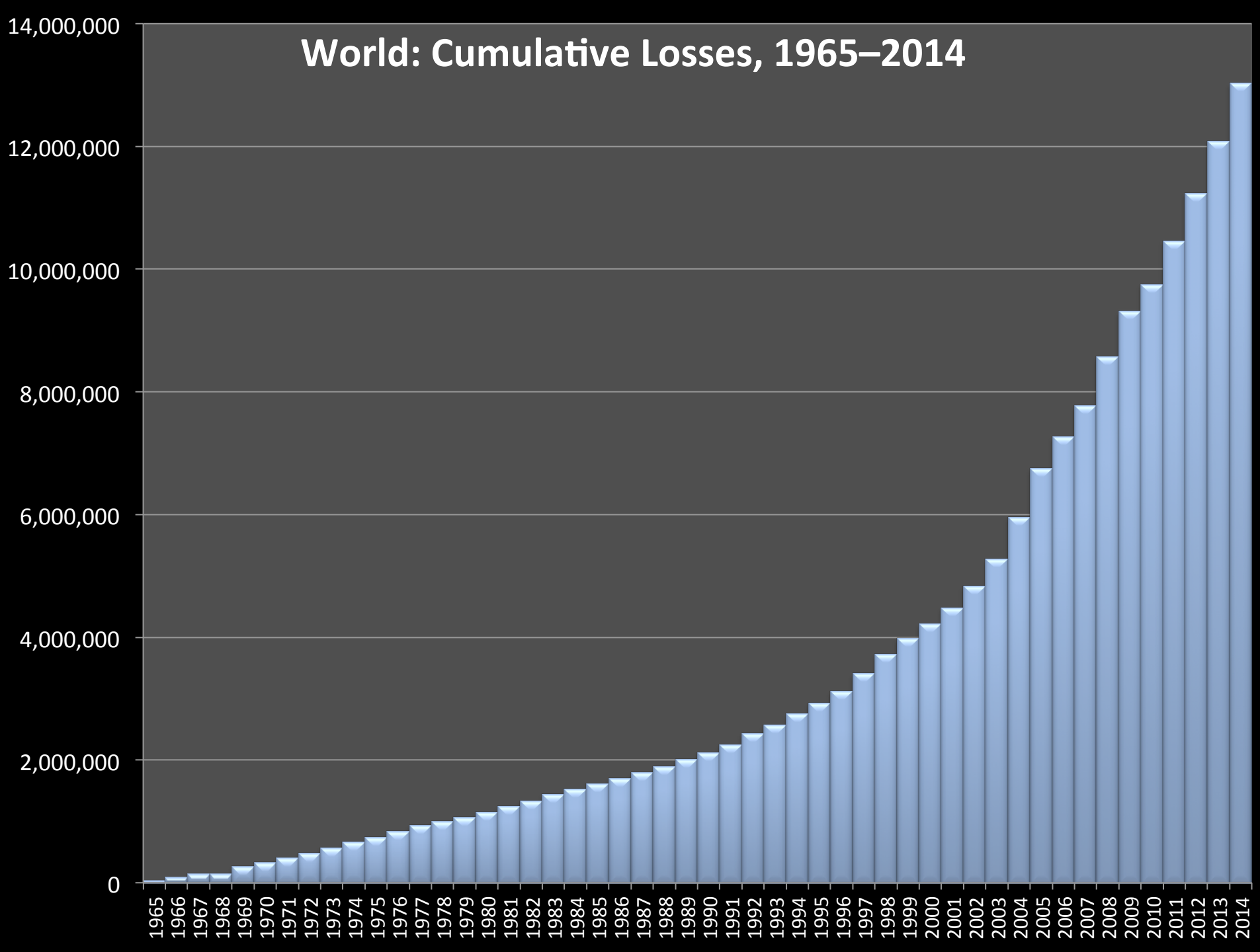
- Anecdotal evidence has for some years indicated that the Adventist Church loses many of its members—including recent converts from evangelistic campaigns
- What are the hard data?
- What picture does denominational statistics reveal?



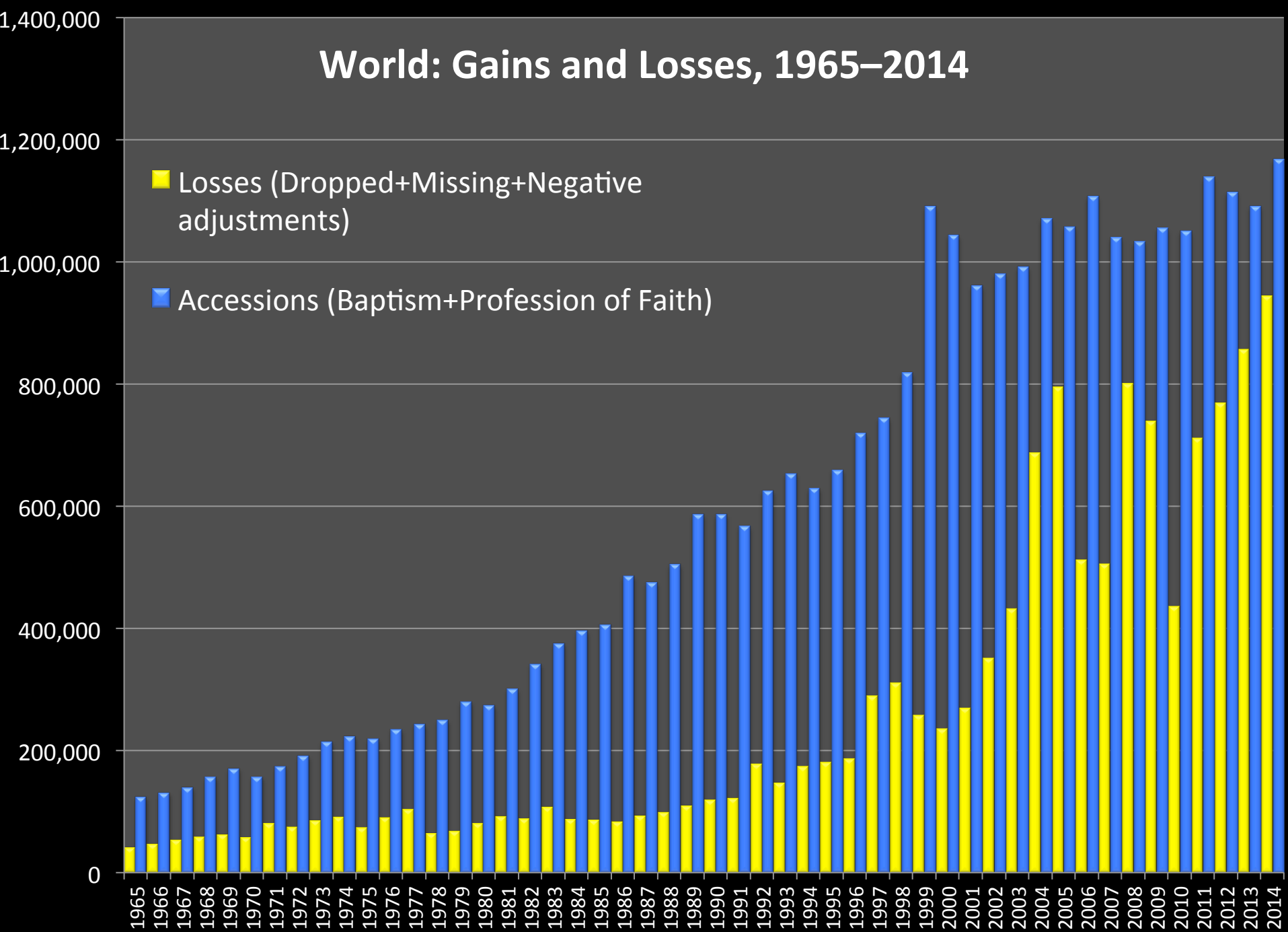
World: Total Losses, 1965–2014



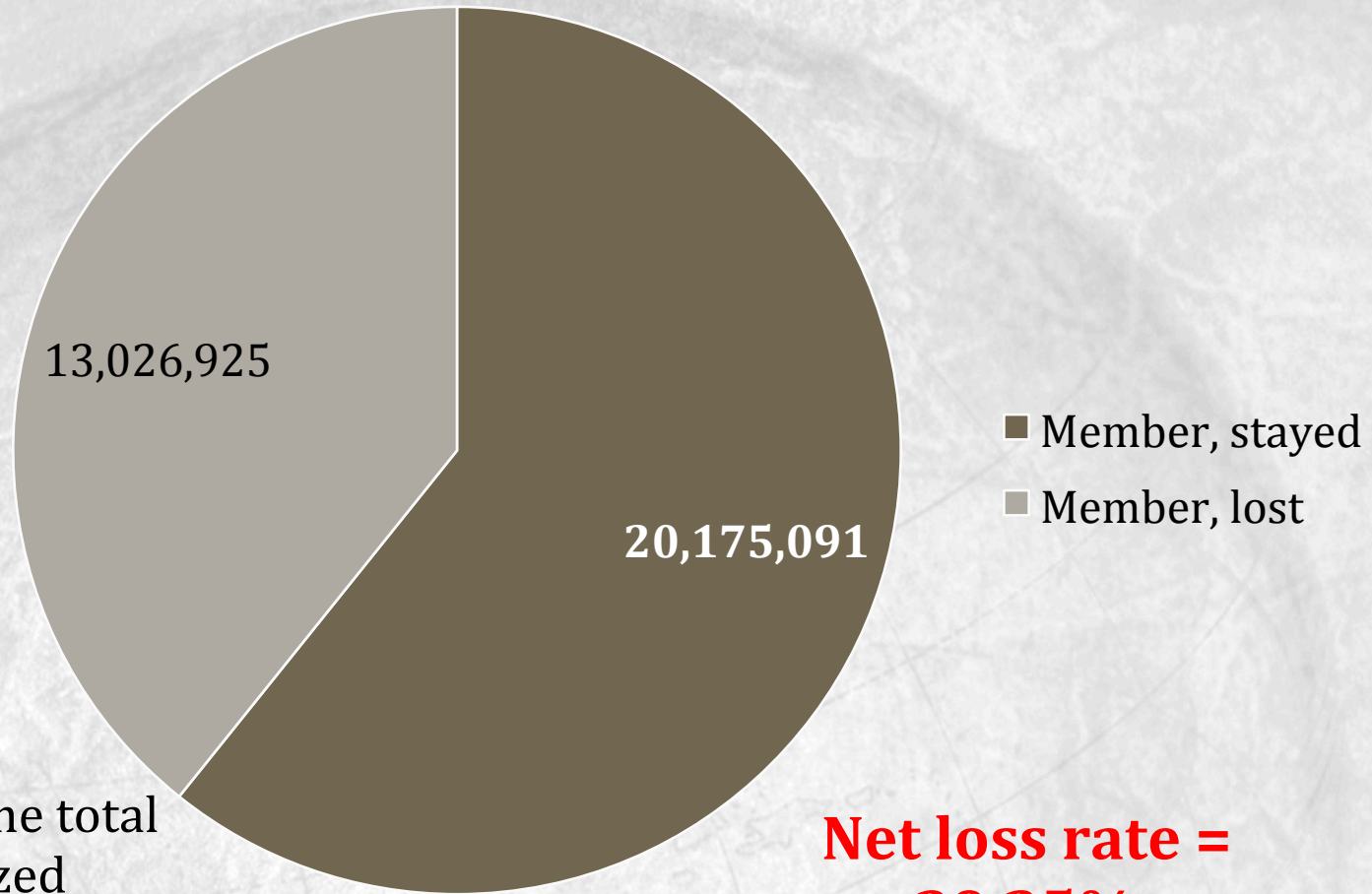
World: Cumulative Losses, 1965–2014



World: Gains and Losses, 1965–2014



Global membership and loss, fifty years, 1965–2014

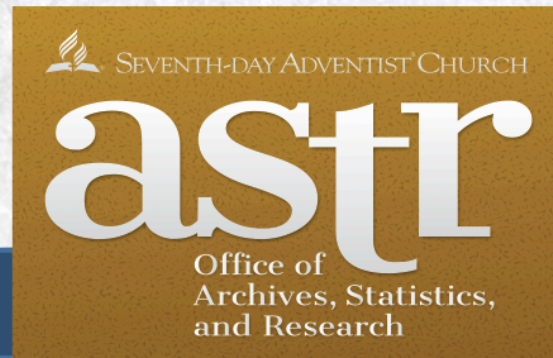


**Net loss rate =
39.25%**

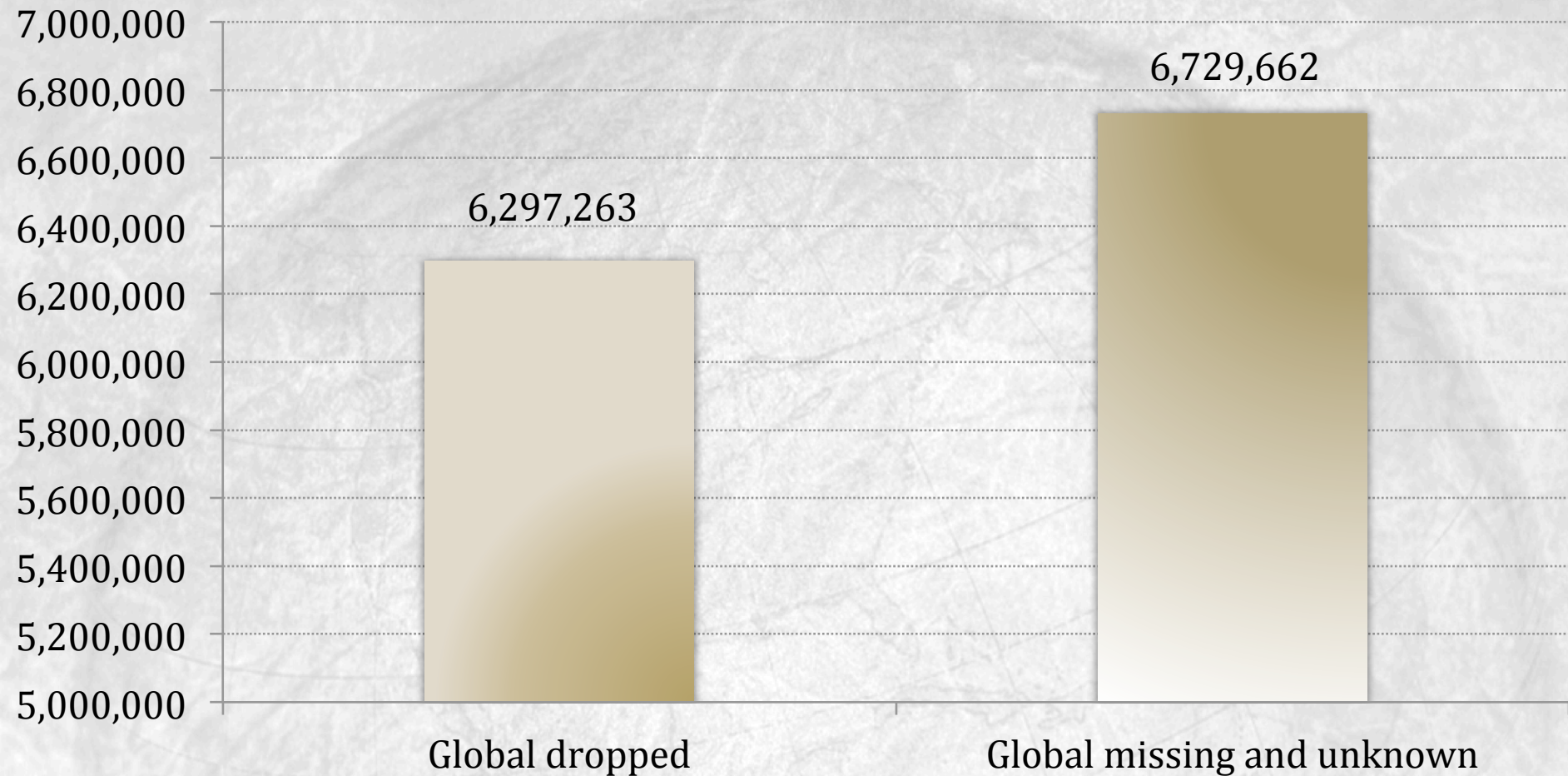
In the last 50 years the total
number of baptized
Seventh-day Adventists

= 33,202,016

Of these, **13,026,925**
have left the Church



Global lost: dropped vs. missing, 1965–2014



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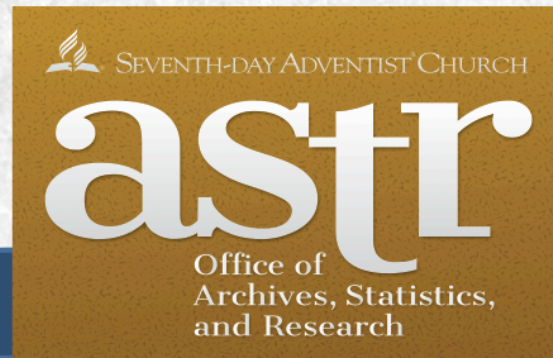
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Church-growth implications

- **Church growth is doubly impacted by lost members—** our numbers are reduced not just by those who leave but also by those who were never won.
- 1965–2014, global net accession rate = 7.9 per cent
- If the 13 million lost had “recruited” at the standard rate, and all the souls they won had done likewise (etc.) then an extra 1.2 million members over the 50 years
- Of course we will always lose some, so this is only an illustration; but it is a striking one.



2. Why did They Leave? Why Might They Come Back?

Findings from two global surveys of
Seventh-day Adventists

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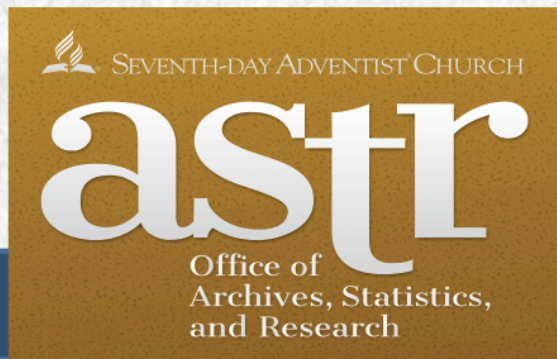


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Two Studies of lapsed Adventists

In 2011, Seventh-day Adventist church leaders, concerned about evidence that a large proportion of its members were leaving the church, decided to carry out worldwide research into the factors that may be involved. Because of the nature of this research, two studies were carried out: one qualitative, one quantitative—both were global.

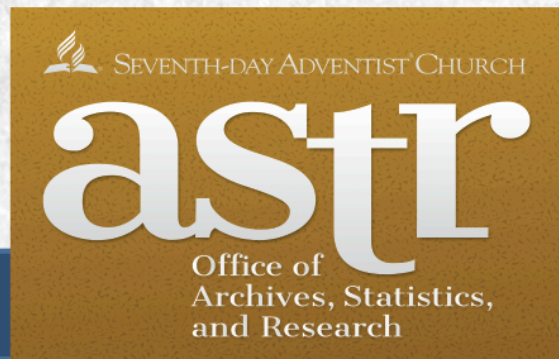
1. The General Conference strategic planning group contracted the Center for Creative Ministry, an American Adventist research group, to carry out qualitative research, consisting of in-depth interviews, but with results to be summarized in quantitative form (n = 925)



Two Studies of lapsed Adventists

2. ASTR developed 2 detailed surveys for the General Conference Nurture and Retention Committee: one was to be administered to members who were no longer attending worship services (“left”), along with a companion survey to be administered to members who have left the church for a period of time, but have “returned” to active church membership; most of the questions in the surveys were the same (n = 782)

Many of the findings of the studies complement each other, which adds confidence to the conclusions. This presentation includes data from both research projects.



Resources

- There is more data in the surveys than can be presented in the available time today
- You can access both reports, on the two studies of former and inactive members, at <https://www.adventistarchives.org/general-resources-on-nuture-discipling-and-retention>
- At the same URL is a copy of my report to 2014 AC and this report to 2015AC, which draw out key findings and statistics

Demographics and conversion routes

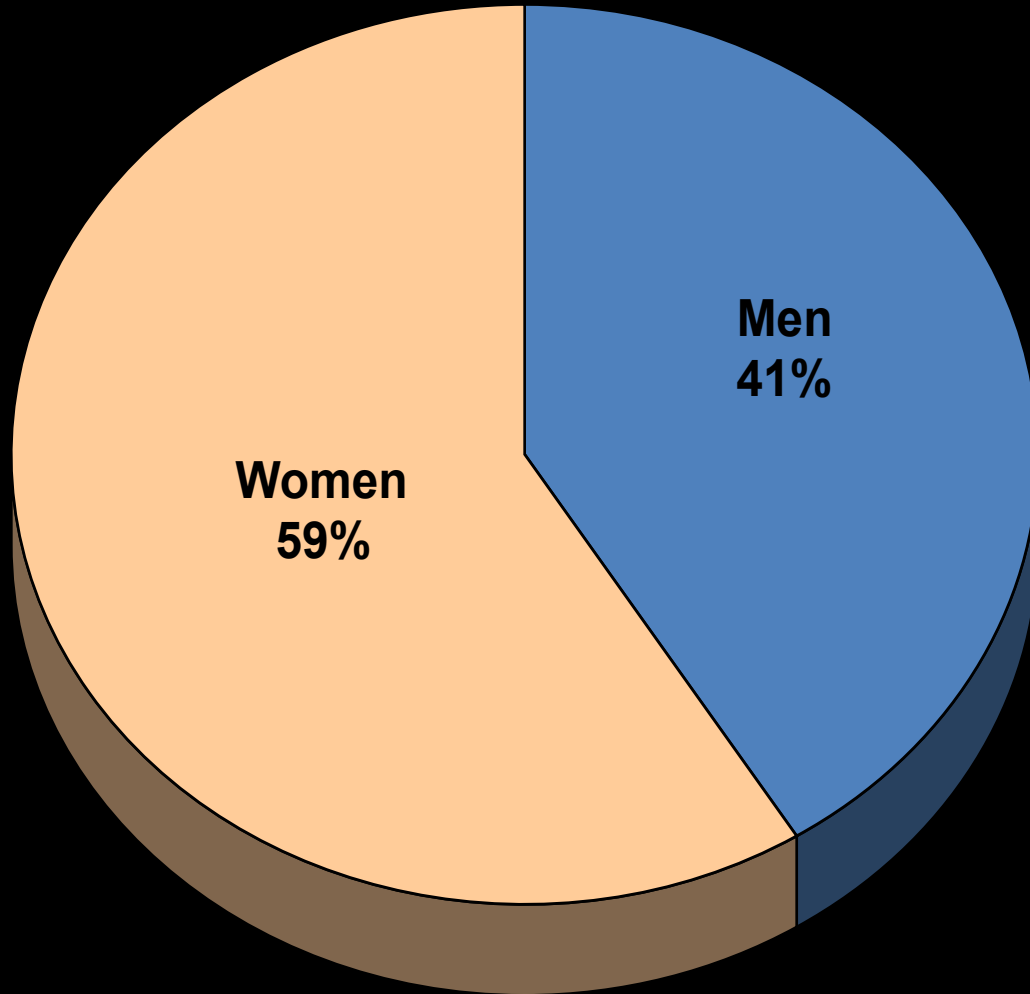
- Gender
- Age
- How they became Seventh-day Adventist

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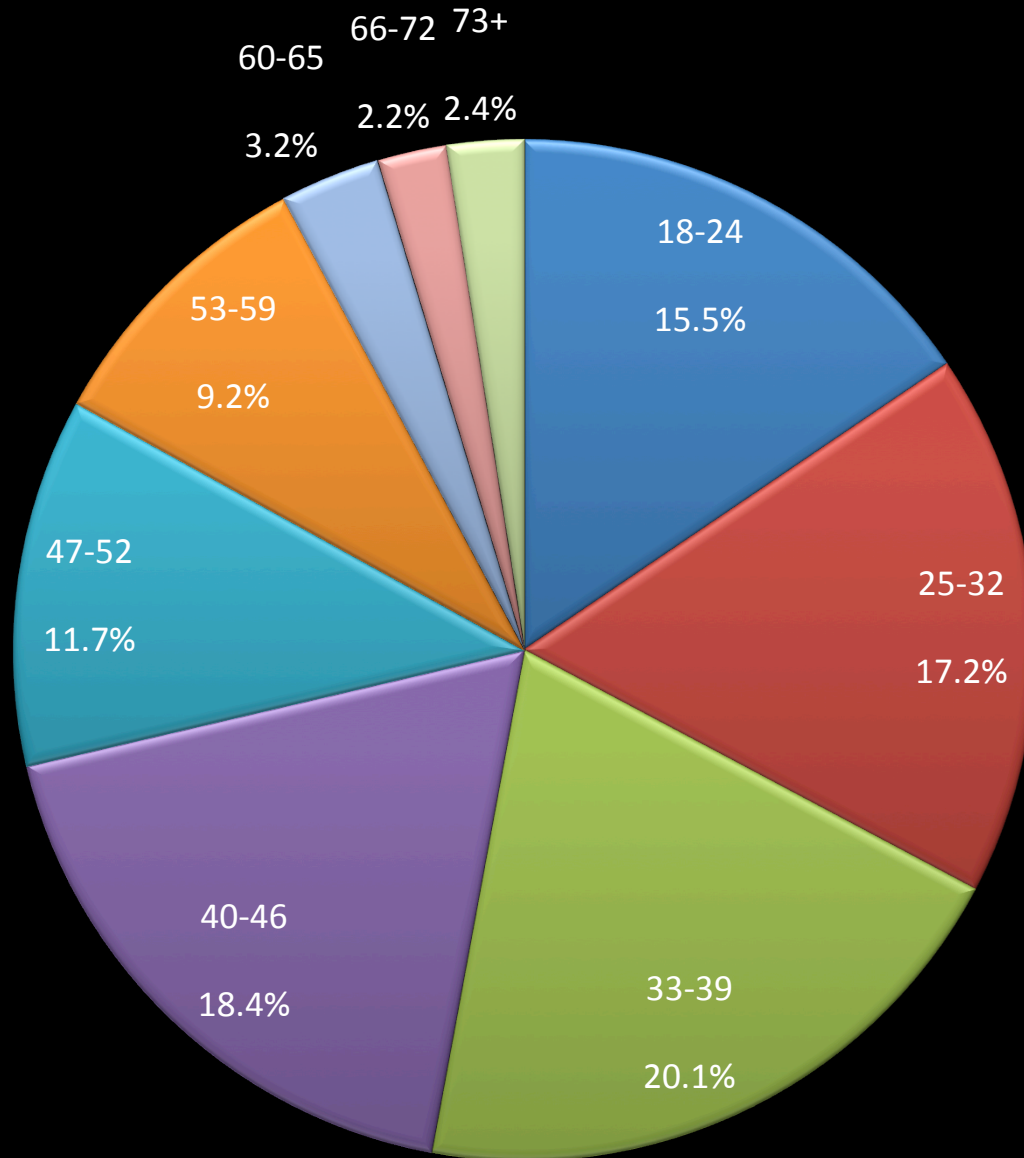

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Demographics: Gender

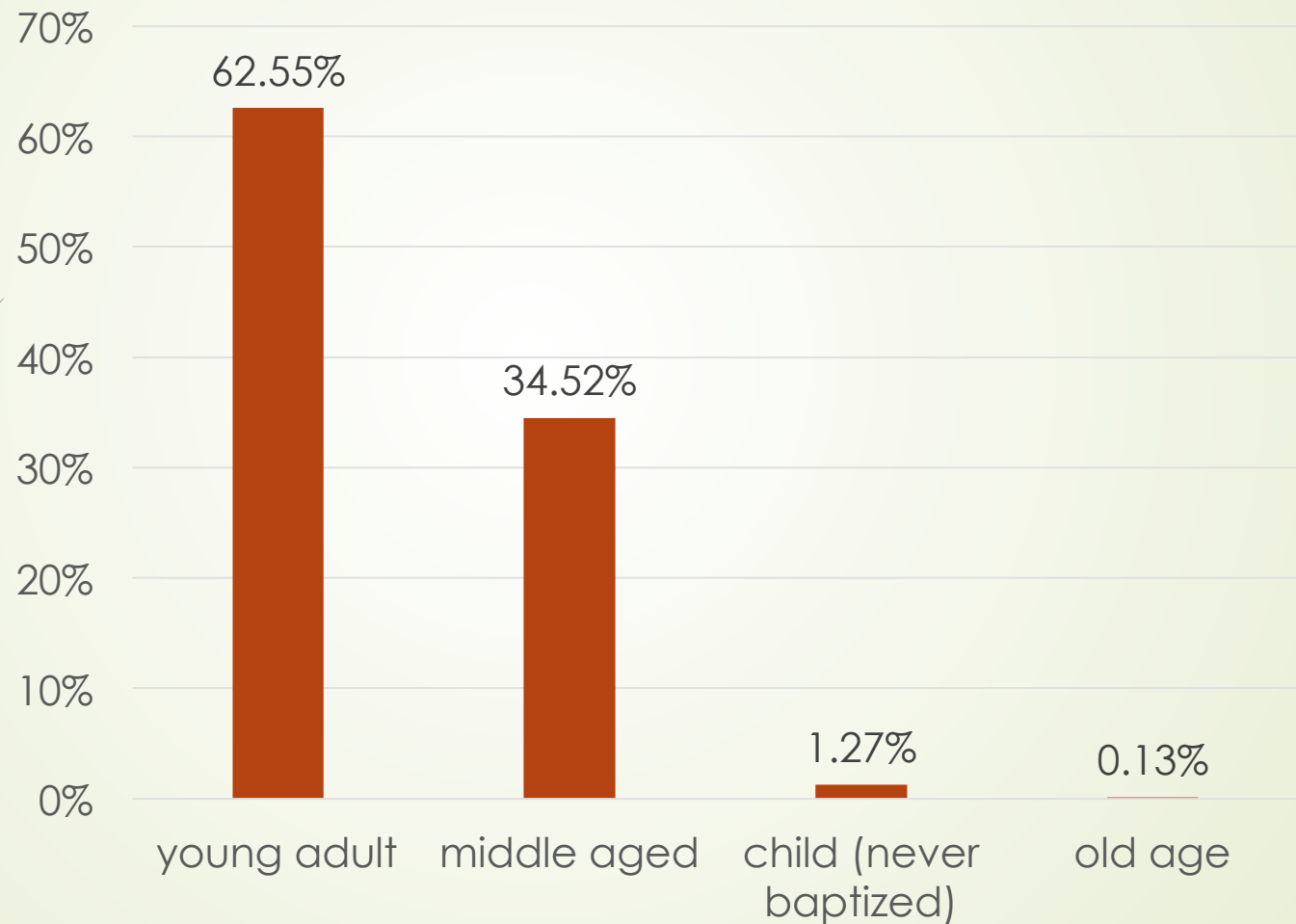


Global church membership: Women 57% Men 43%

Demographics: Age (now)



Stage of Life at Departure



First Contact with the Seventh-day Adventist Church

- 30% Raised as an Adventist
- 28% Through a friend, relative, neighbor or coworker
- 23% Through public evangelism
- 8% Someone going door to door
- 4% Through an Adventist school
- 4% From literature
- 2% Humanitarian and health ministries
- 2% Through an Adventist institution
- 1% From a music group
- 1% From the Internet
- >0% From a radio or television ministry

How ADVENTIST *were* they?

Were they *well grounded* in our faith?

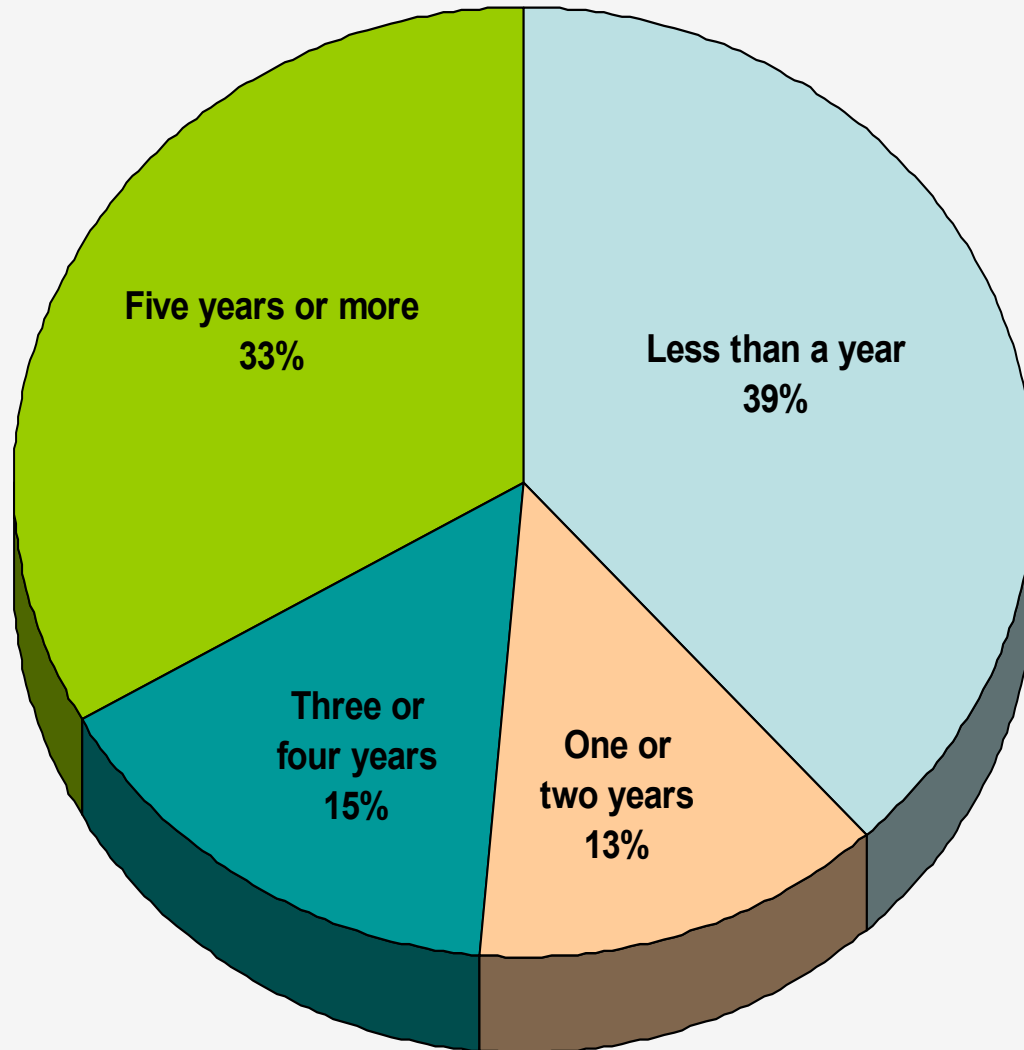
Were they *active* in their local churches?

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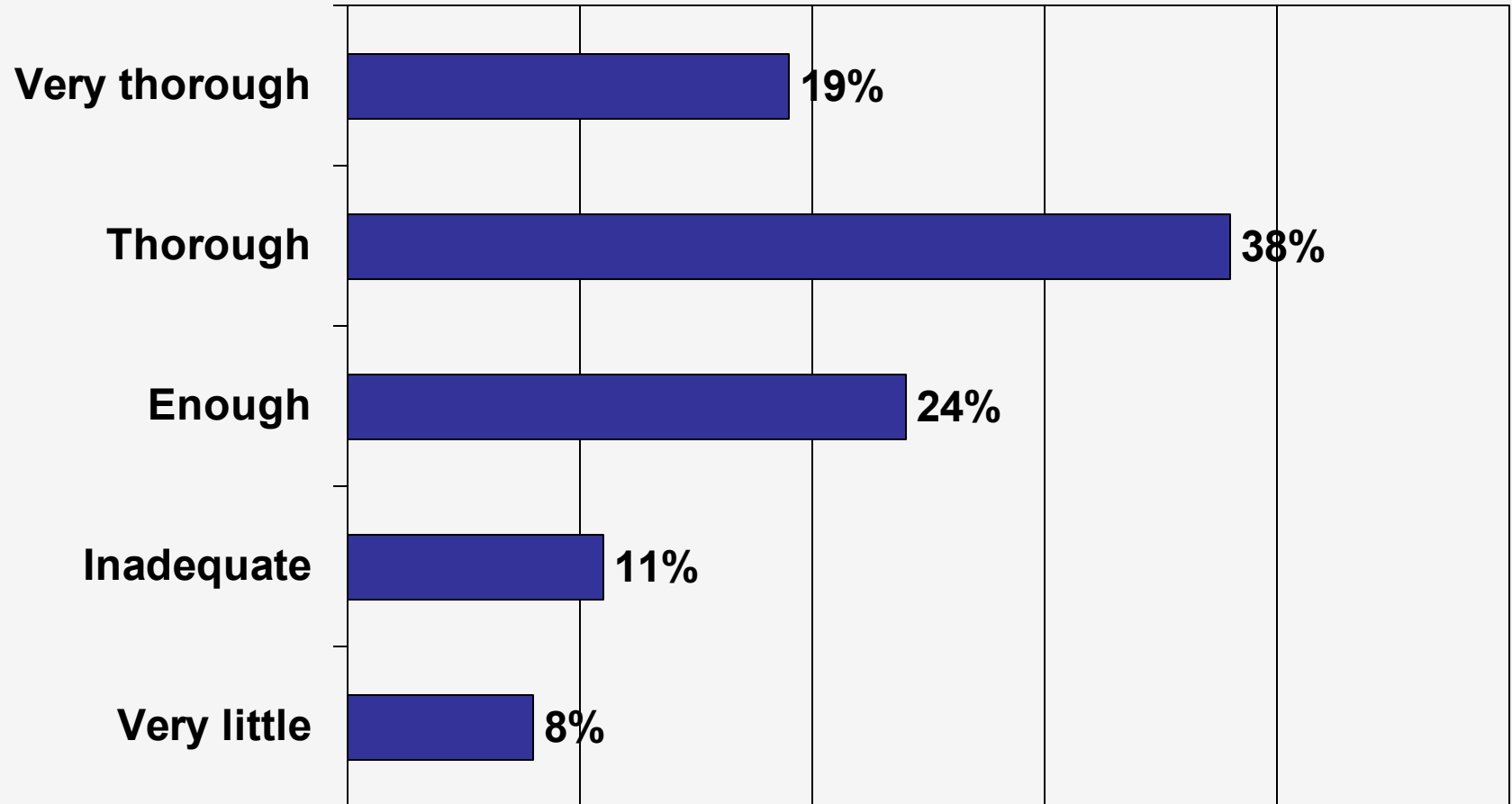
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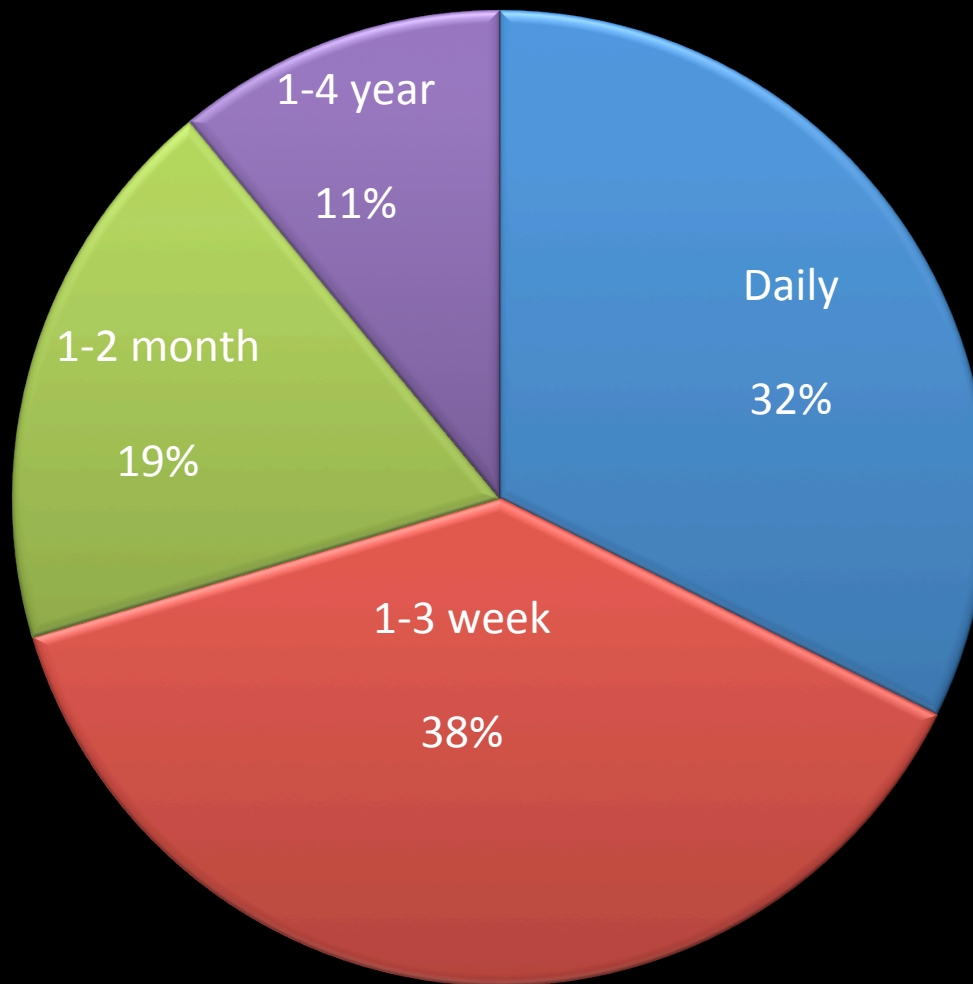
Time from First Contact to Baptism



How would you describe the instruction given when you joined the church?

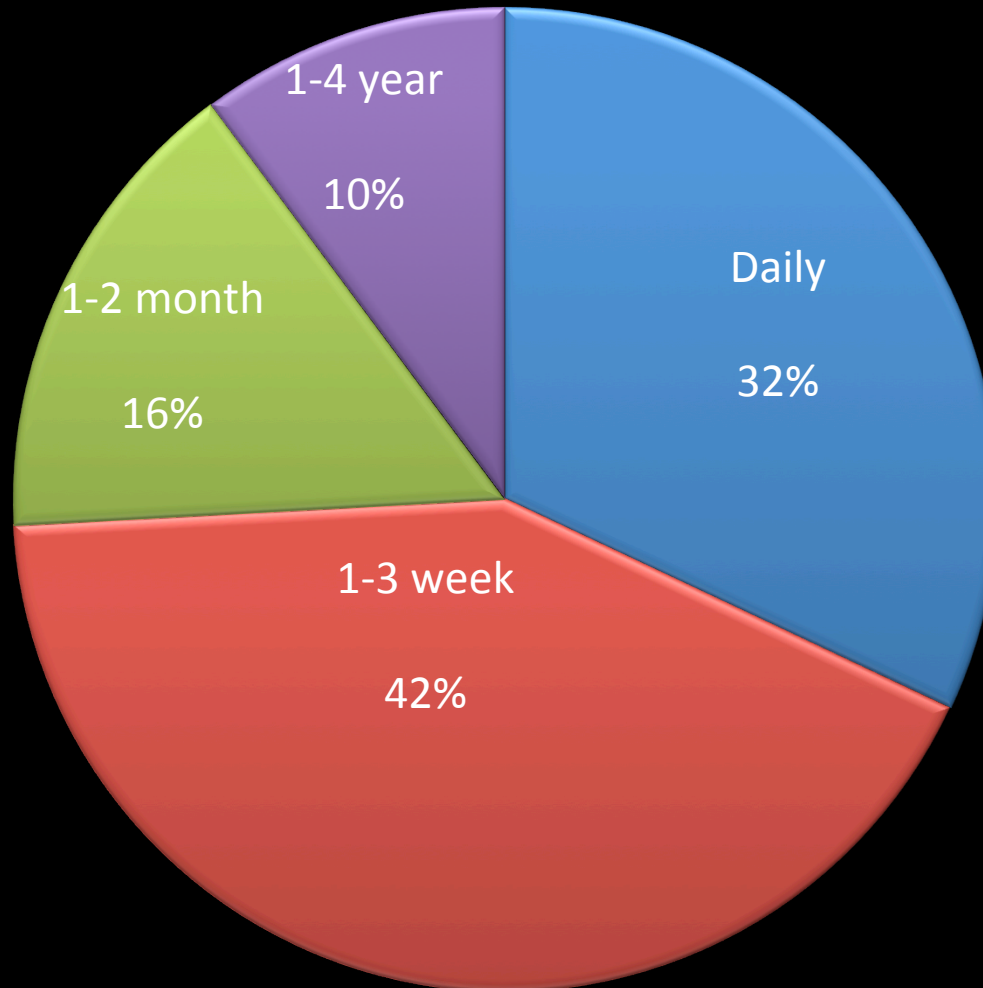


Former Members (while Adventist); Frequency of personal Bible study



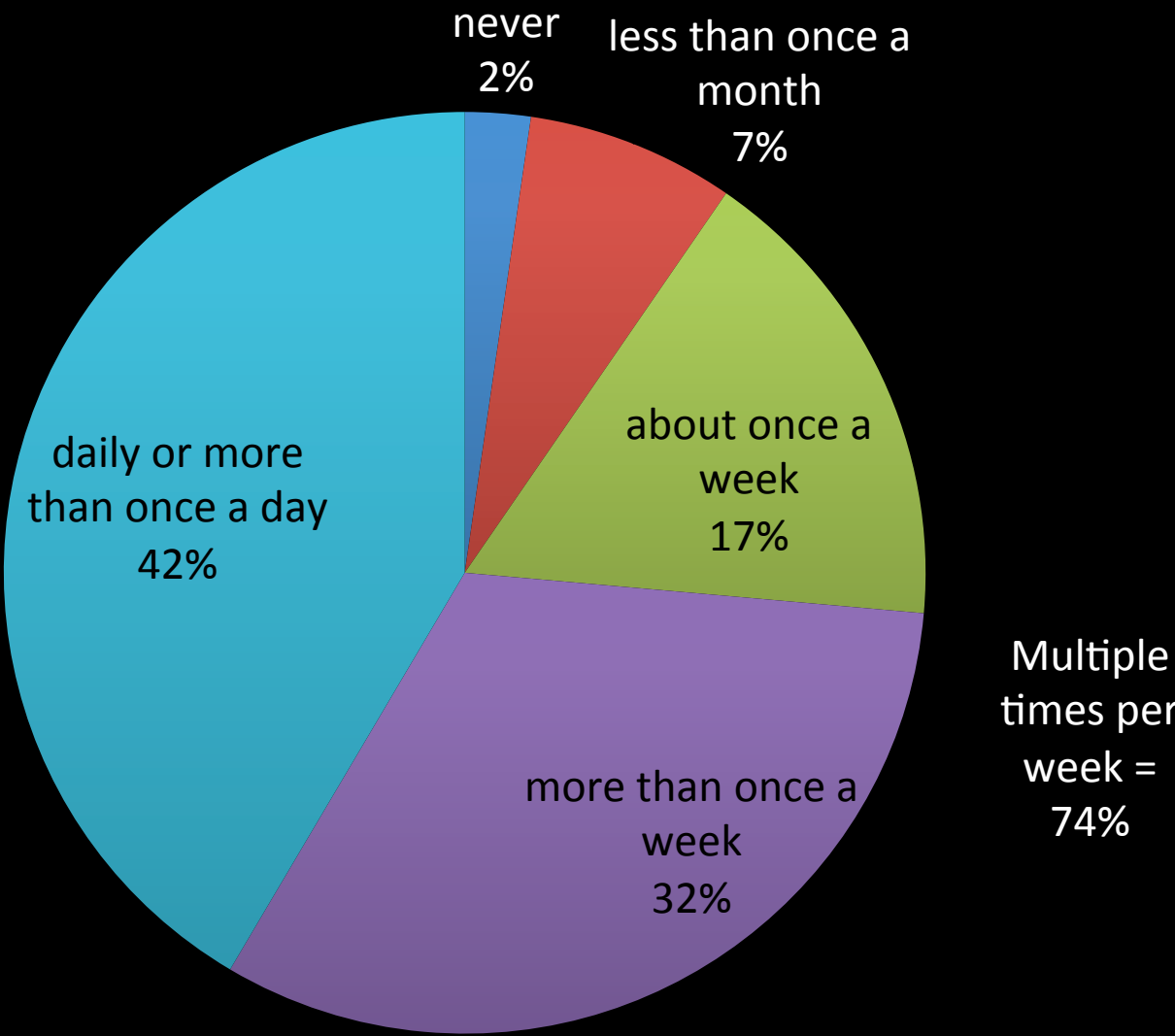
Multiple
times per
week =
70%

Returned Members (while Adventist); Frequency of personal Bible study

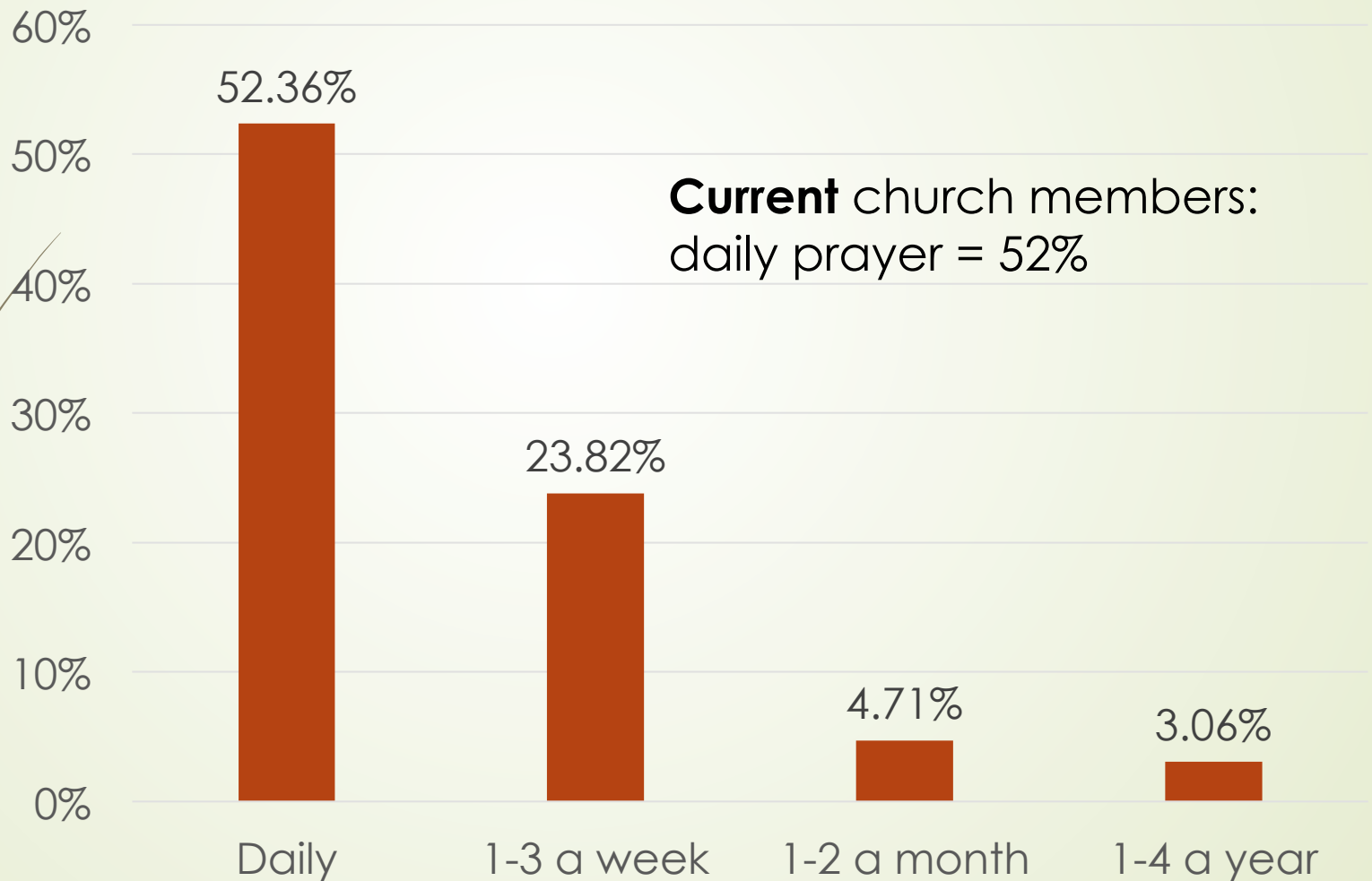


Multiple
times per
week =
74%

Current church members: frequency of personal Bible-study



Frequency of Spiritual Activities: Personal Prayer



How ADVENTIST are they *now*?

Since many seem to have been active and faithful SDAs, the question arises:

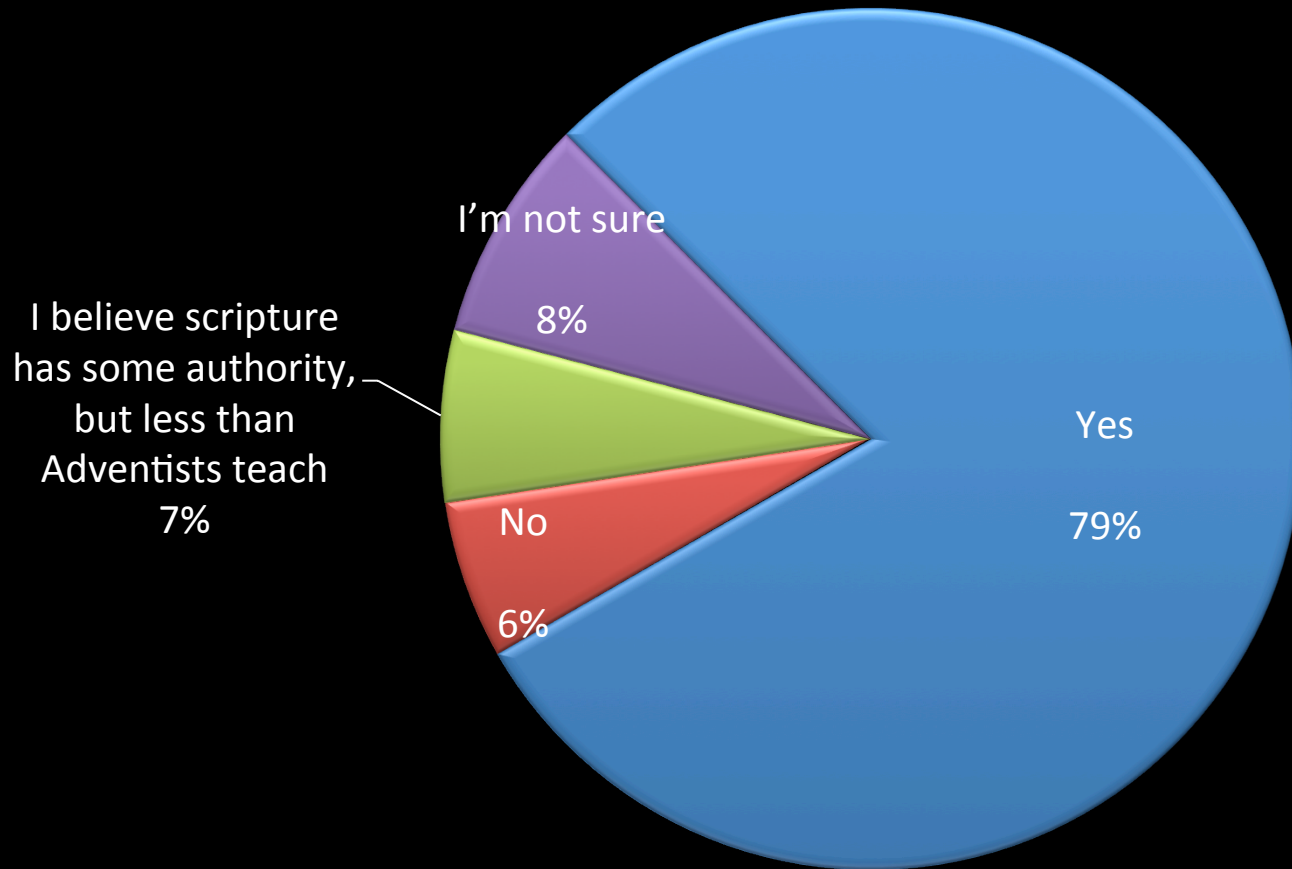
How sympathetic are these ex-Adventists
to what we believe?

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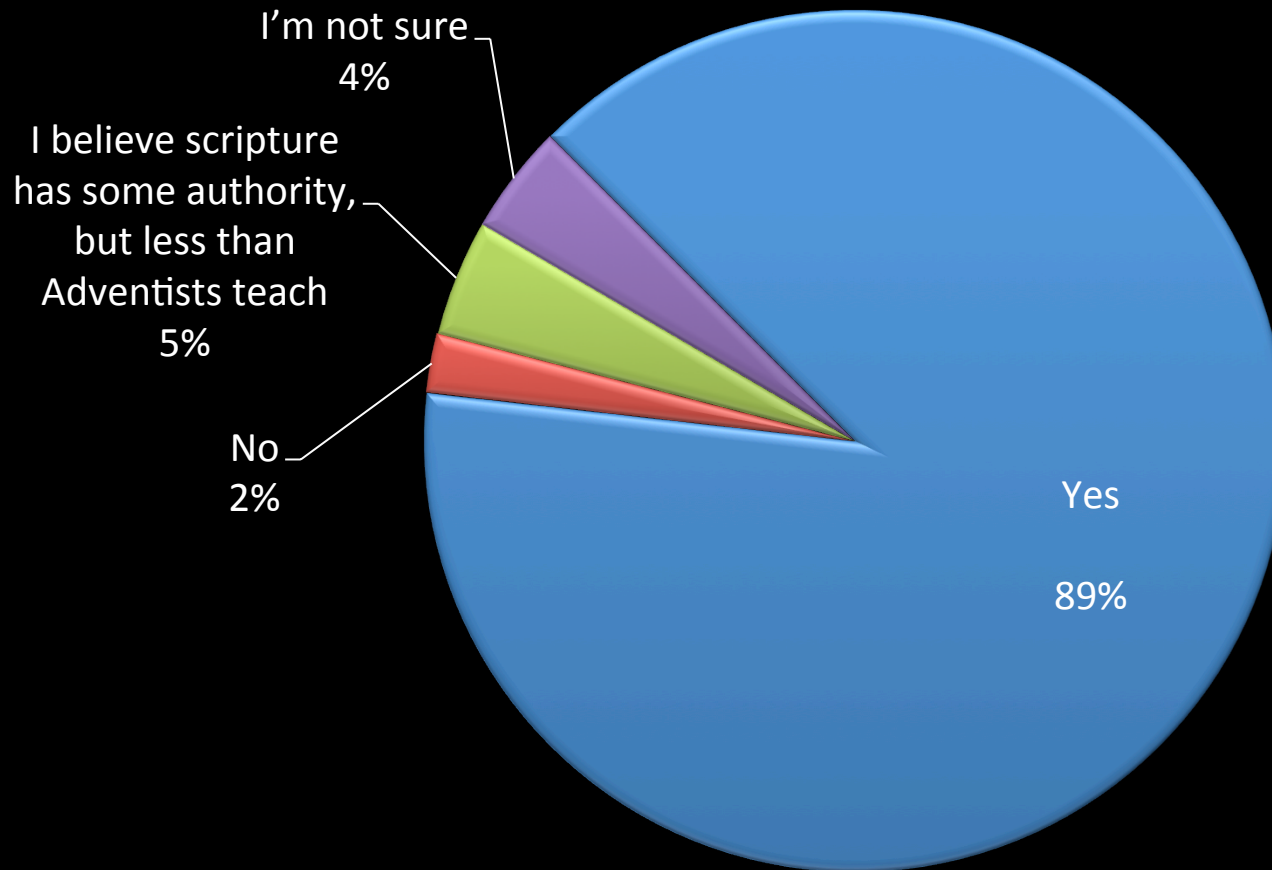
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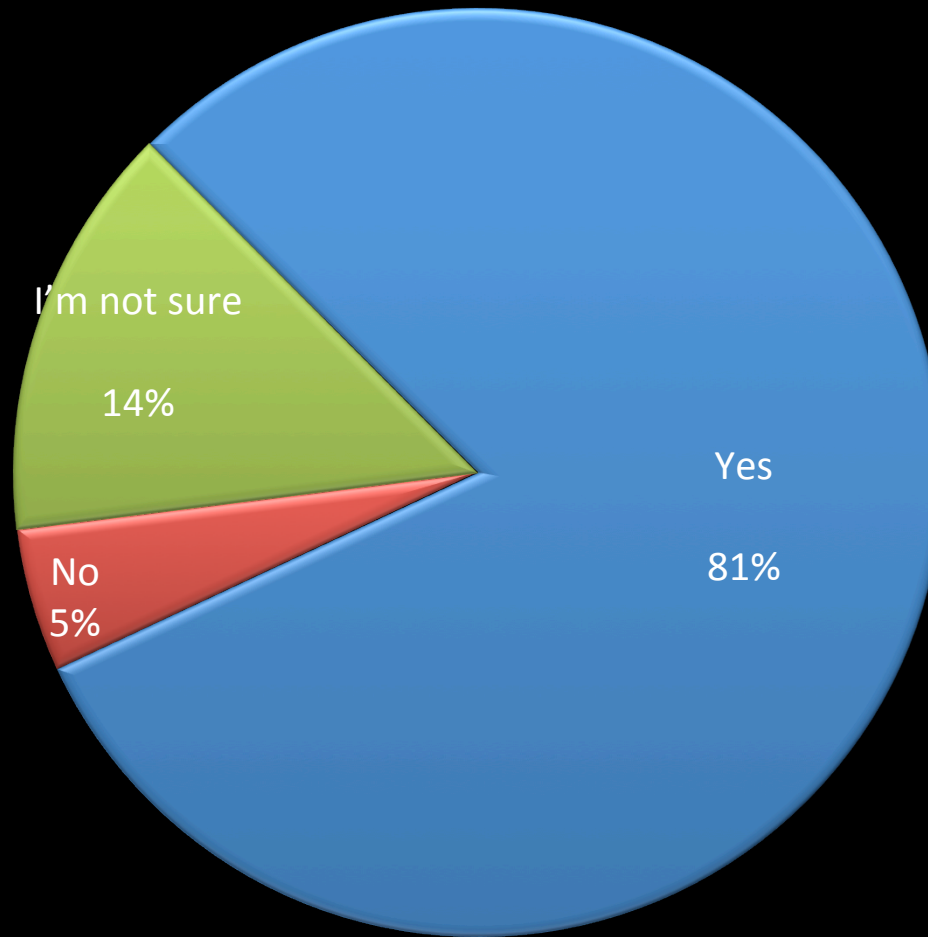
**Do you still believe in the authority of Scripture, as
taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church? –
Former Members**



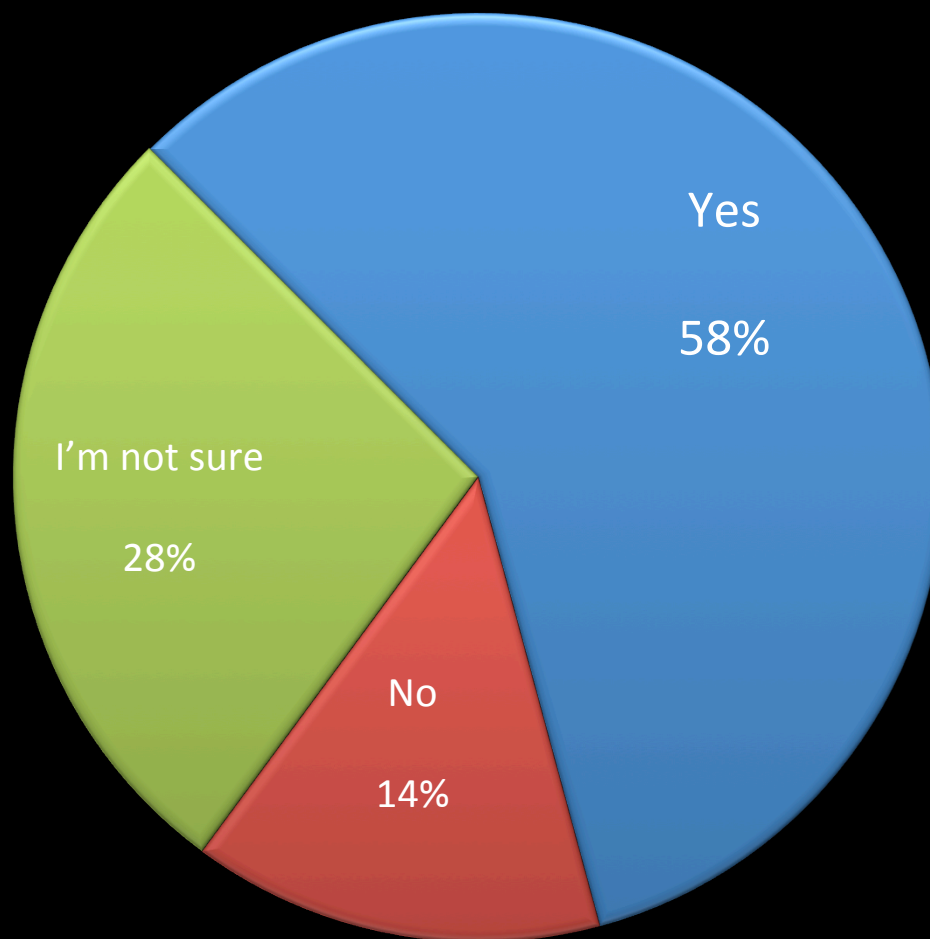
Do you still believe in the authority of Scripture, as taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church? – Returned Members



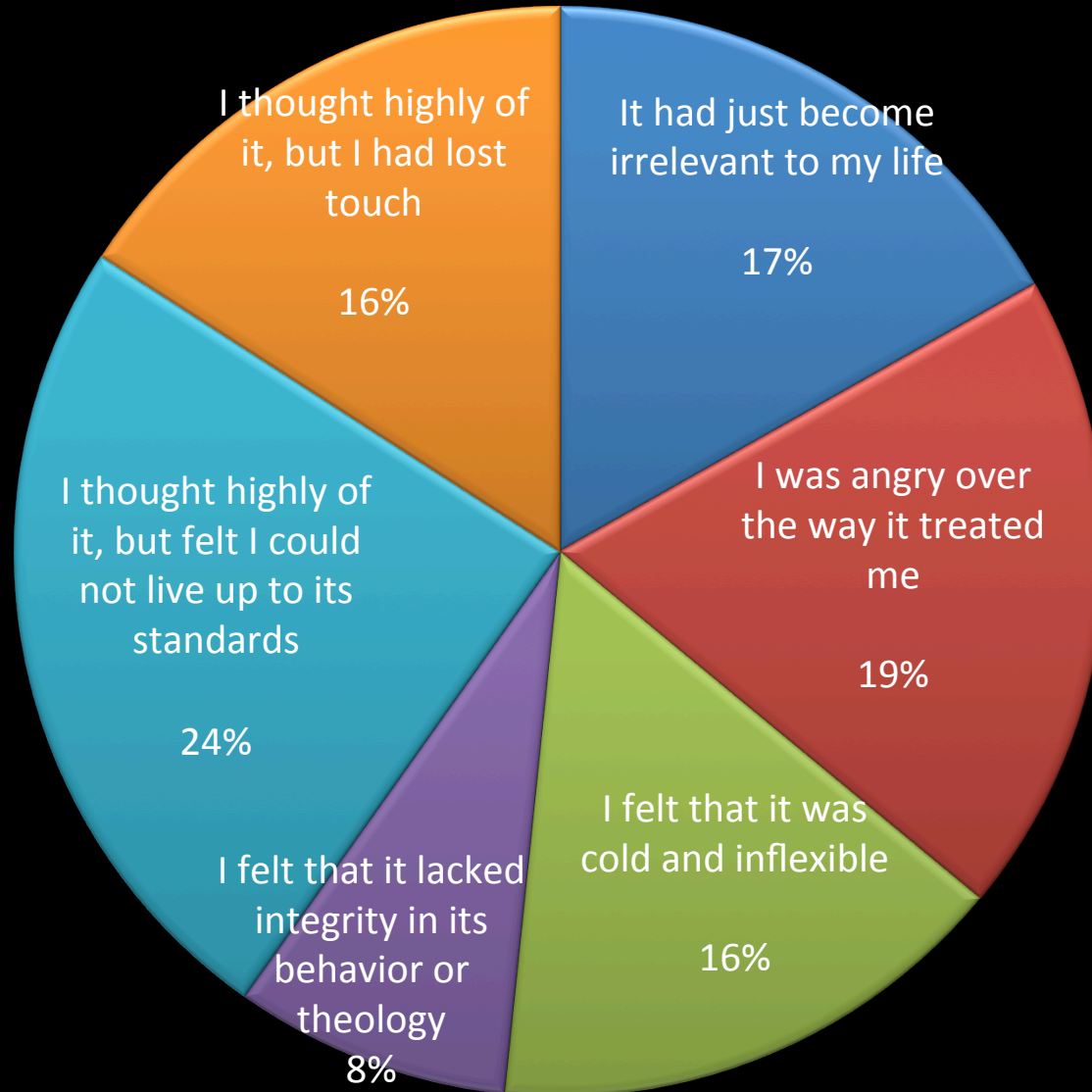
Do you still believe in the gift of prophecy manifested in Ellen White? – **Returned Members**



Do you still believe in the gift of prophecy manifested in Ellen White? – Former Members



What did you think of the Adventist church at the time you left it?



So why did they leave?

If they are sympathetic to our theological views,
why did they leave?

And why have so many not come back?

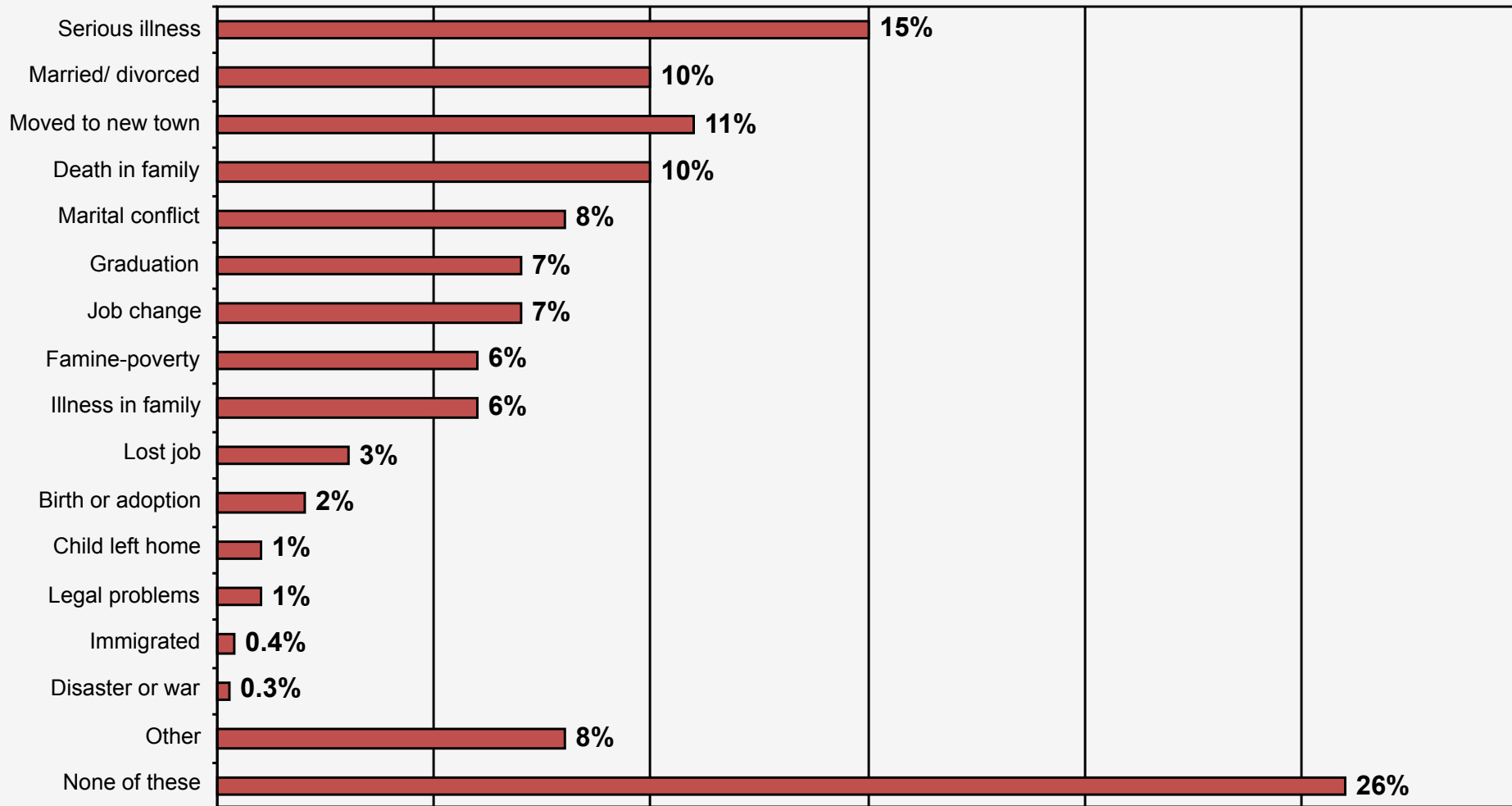
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Life Events in the Year Leading Up to Decision to Stop Attending



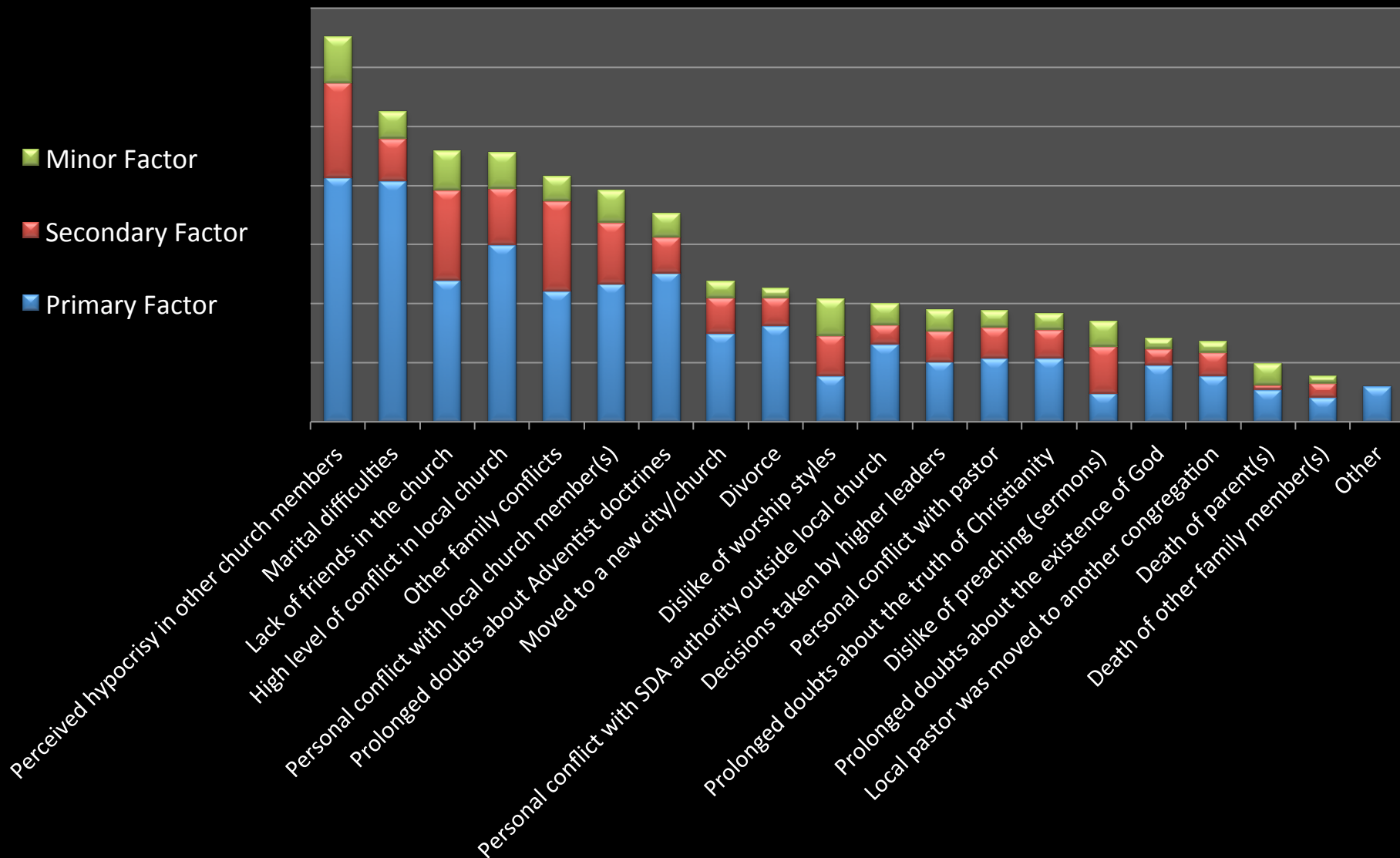
Most Important Reasons Why Decided to Stop Attending

- 28% No big issue; I just drifted away
- 25% Lack of compassion for the hurting
- 19% Moral failure on my part
- 18% I did not fit in
- 14% Too much focus on minor issues
- 13% Conflict in the congregation
- 12% Moral failures of members
- 11% Moral failures of leaders
- 11% Pressure from family or friends
- 10% Race, ethnic or tribal issues

Most Important Reasons Why Decided to Stop Attending

- 8% Few members of my age group
- 7% Legalistic attitudes
- 6% Pastor was dictatorial
- 6% Church did not do much to help the poor
- 5% I did not believe some doctrines
- 5% Unrealistic demands on members
- 4% Low standards
- 3% The worship was not very spiritual
- 3% Too much asking for money
- 2% Church voted to drop me from membership
- 1% Apostate ideas were promoted

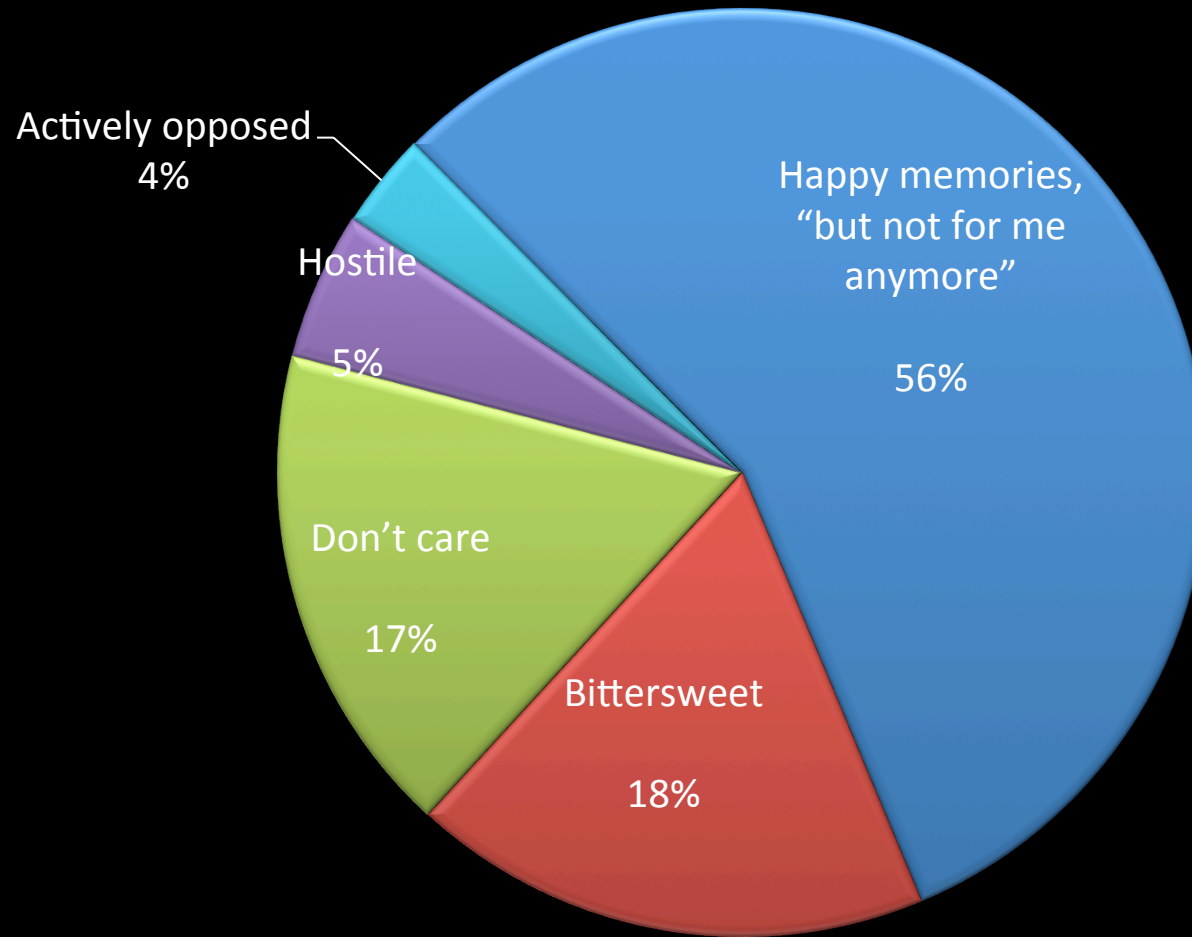
What event triggered your decision to leave? (weighted)



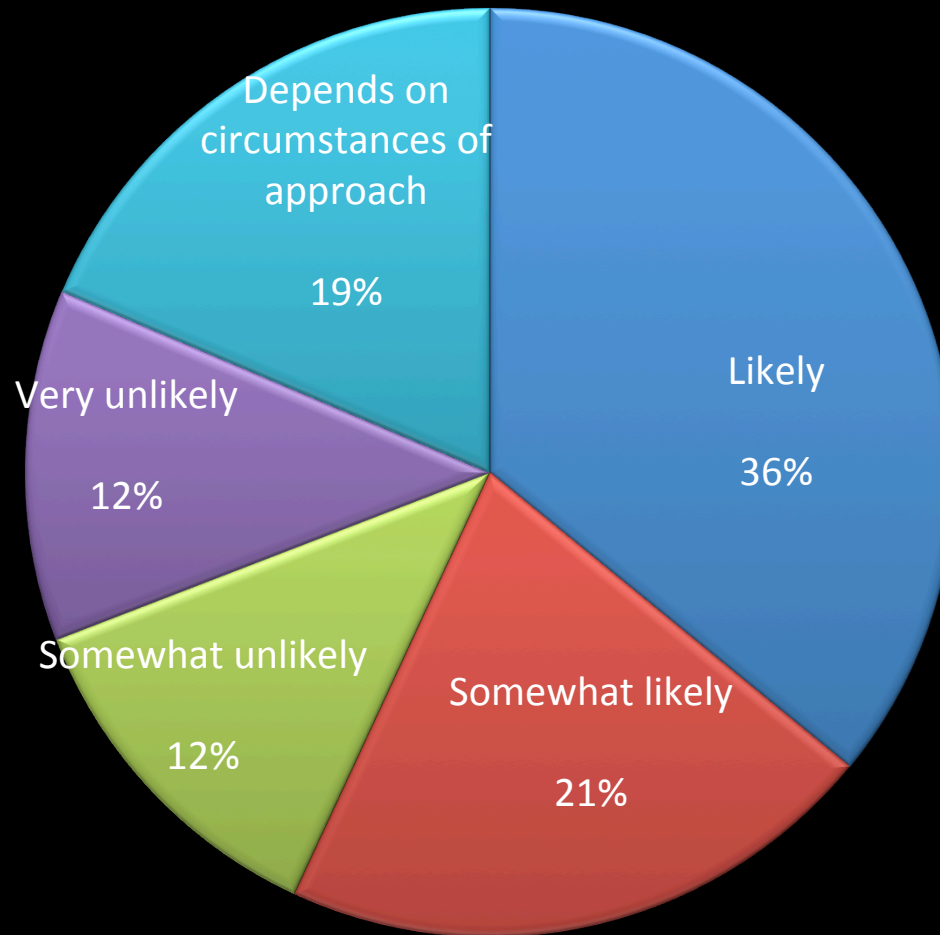
What Happened When They Stopped Attending Church

- 40% No one contacted me
- 19% A church member came to visit me
- 17% A local elder came to visit me
- 15% A local church member contacted me by phone
- 10% An Adventist relative made contact
- 9% The pastor came to visit me
- 6% The pastor contacted me by phone or Email
- 3% An Adventist, not a local member contacted me
- 2% I received a letter in the mail
- 0.3% Printed material was mailed to me

How do you presently feel about Adventism? – Former Members



How would you rate your openness to reconnect? – Former Members



The Lessons of Scripture

- Luke 15:1–7 – when *one per cent* of the flock is lost, the Good Shepherd searches tirelessly & relentlessly until the sheep is found, then bears it on his shoulder homeward and calls friends in to celebrate.
- We are missing many more than one sheep out of every hundred.
- And many of the missing sheep really would like to be found—but they aren't sure how to come home



Jesus, the good Shepherd

- *The sheep that has strayed from the fold is the most helpless of all creatures. It must be sought for by the shepherd, for it cannot find its way back. So with the soul that has wandered away from God; he is as help-less as the lost sheep, and unless divine love had come to his rescue he could never find his way to God.*

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 187

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Jesus, the good Shepherd

- *In the parable the shepherd goes out to search for one sheep — the very least that can be numbered. So if there had been but one lost soul, Christ would have died for that one.*

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 187

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Recommendations

1. Every union to have active discipleship program: the General Conference Nurture & Retention Committee recommends “Growing Fruitful Disciples” ...

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Discipleship is life.

<http://growingfruitfuldisciples.com/>

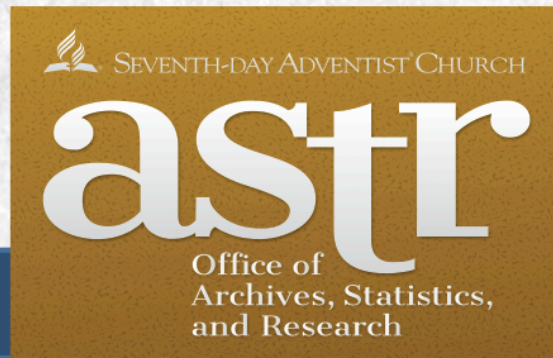
Recommendations

1. Every union to have an active discipleship program: the GC N&R Committee recommends “Growing Fruitful Disciples” (adapted to local contexts).
2. Adopt attendance counts as standard, so that pastors and elders know who is slipping away
3. Specific training in nurture/retention/discipling, as well as evangelism, in **every** ministerial training program



Recommendations

4. Implement comprehensive, practical training in *conflict resolution & reconciliation* throughout the world Church
5. Each division and each union to hold a conference on nurturing, discipling, retaining and reclaiming, in which data and good practice are shared with conference and mission leaders, pastors and elders (GC and Divisions to help provide resources and materials)



First global Summit on Nurture, Retention, and Discipling

- At the World Headquarters: November 18-20, 2013
- Over 110 attendees, including two delegates from every Division, plus around sixty SDA scholars, and 30 officers and departmental directors from GC and NAD; keynote speakers included Dr. G.T. Ng



First global Summit on Nurture, Retention, and Discipling

- All the presentations given at the 2013 World Summit on Nurture, Retention, and Discipling are available: <https://www.adventistarchives.org/summit-on-nurture-and-retention-2013> (along with audio recordings of the discussion sessions that followed each presentation)



Other Resources

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