

“Not every believer is the same. Is profiling possible?”

Why people turn their back at the Adventist church. A case study of the Netherlands.

Research Committee of the NUC

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Presentation for the Summit on Nurture and Retention, 2013

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- ▶ Future research

Research background

▶ Goal research:

- To find factors that are involved when members leave church.
- To develop profiles of those in danger of leaving church.

▶ Focus on:

- Relationship with church
- Activities in church
- Feelings when leaving
- Religiosity

▶ 7 factors identified that play a role when people leave the church

Some numbers

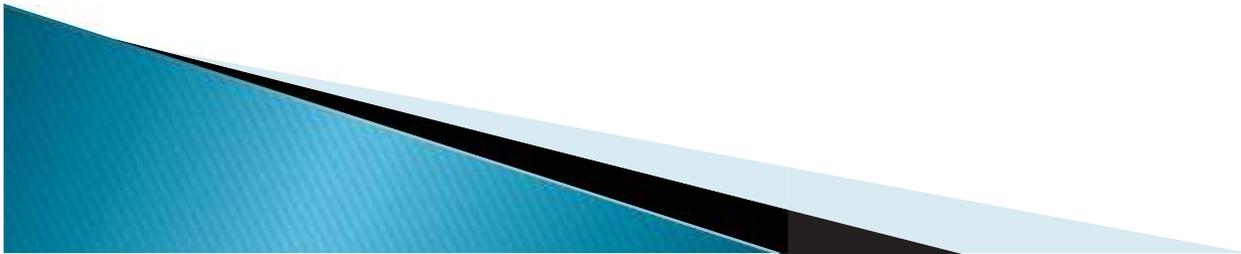
- ▶ Research conducted in 2010–2011
- ▶ Online and paper questionnaires
- ▶ N = 70
- ▶ Difficult to reach group
- ▶ Respondents often reserved due to 'reconversion' issues

- ▶ 71% baptized
- ▶ 41% between 5–10 yrs ago stopped with church attendance
- ▶ 49% attended church between 16–25 yrs
- ▶ 64% higher education/academic

Church leaving or retention

7 factors

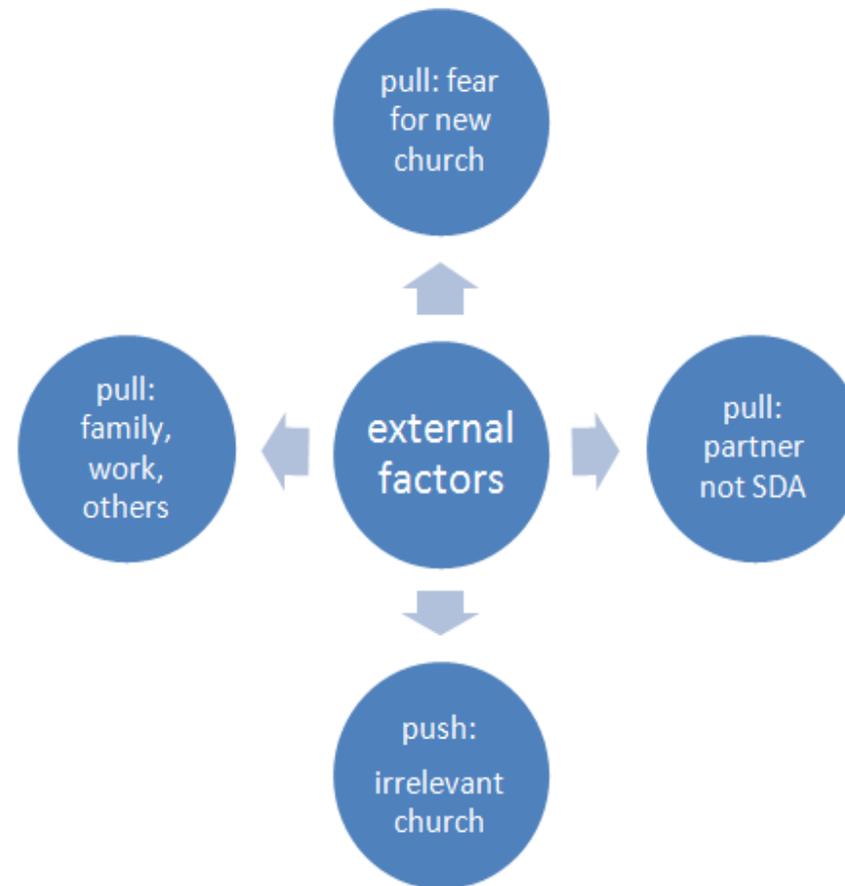
- ▶ 7 different factors involved in leaving church
 - External factors – moving, family
 - Attitudinal factors – no organization
 - Social factors – no friends, acquaintances
 - Life factors – busy, relationship, education
 - Internal factors – conflict, politics
 - Emotional factors – hurt and guilt feelings
 - Spiritual factors – no spirituality in church



External factors (1)

First: external factors – push / pull

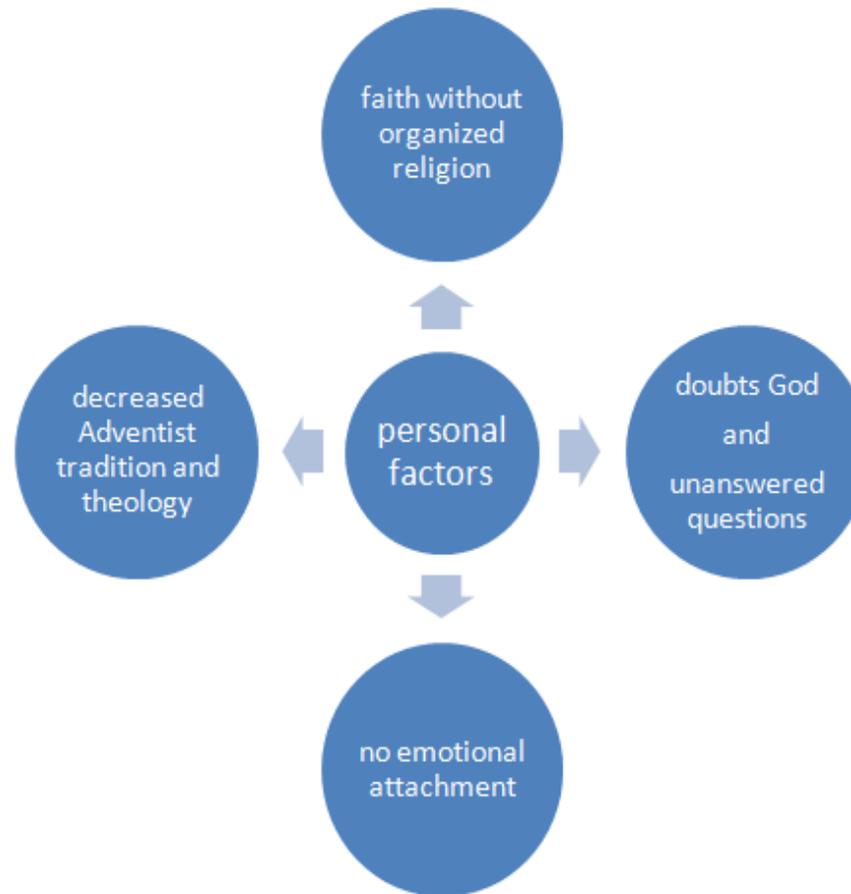
1. Members have moved and find it difficult to go to new church
2. Family, work and other people prevent members from going
3. Partner is not an Adventist
4. Church has become irrelevant for them



Personal religious experience (2)

Second: personal factors, i.e. religious identity

1. Faith without organized religion
2. Decreased importance of Adventist tradition and theology
3. Unanswered questions and doubts about God
4. No emotional attachment

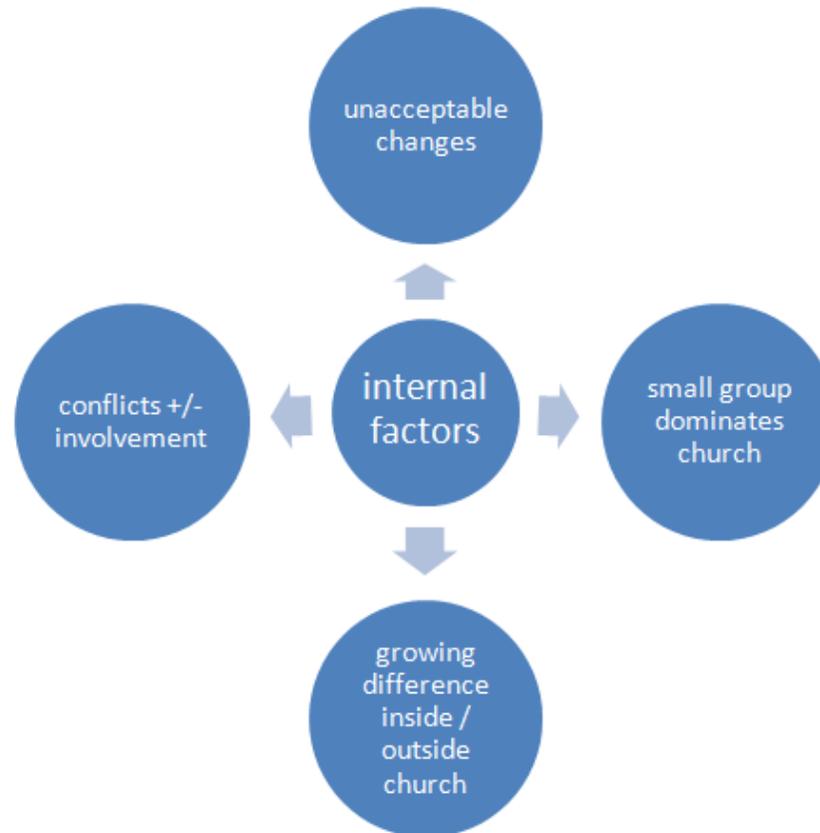


Internal factors (3)

church politics

Third: internal factors

1. Unacceptable changes
2. Small group dominates the rest
3. Involved in conflicts
4. Growing difference between life inside and life outside the church
5. Conflicts in the church

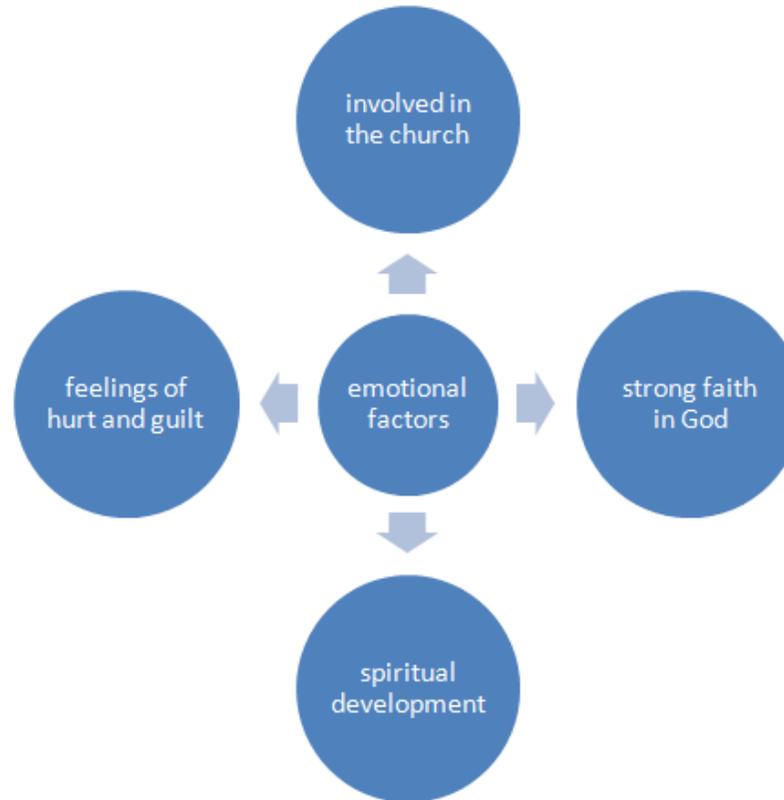


Emotional factors (4)

theologically and socially induced

Fourth: emotionally sensitivity

1. Involved in the church
2. Feelings of hurt and guilt
3. Strong faith in God
4. Spiritual development

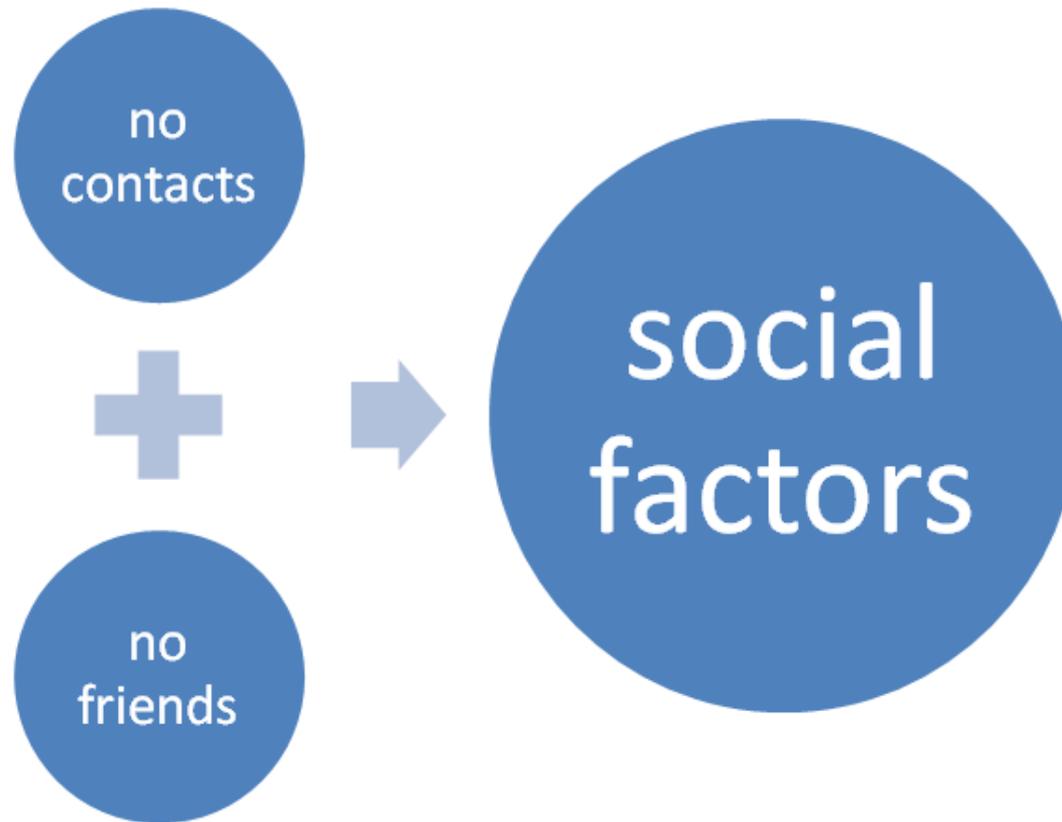


Social isolation (5)

Belonging

Fifth: socially isolated

1. No contacts
2. No friends

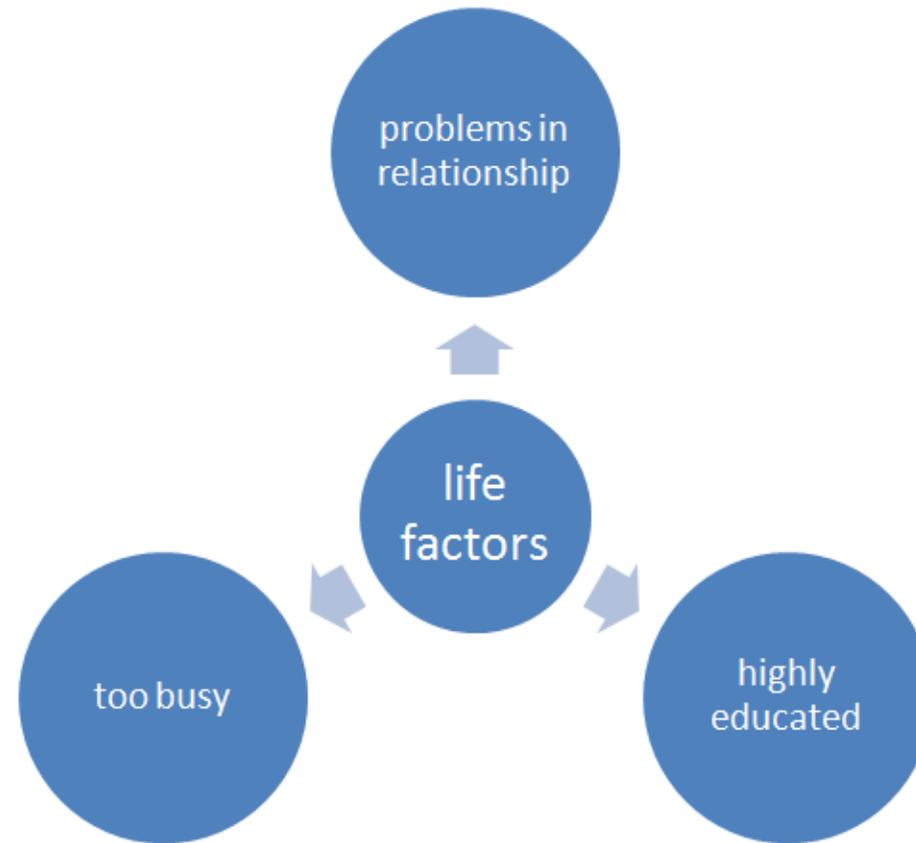


Other demanding issues in life (6)

church is too much

Sixth: life's demands

1. Problems in relationship
2. Too busy
3. Highly educated

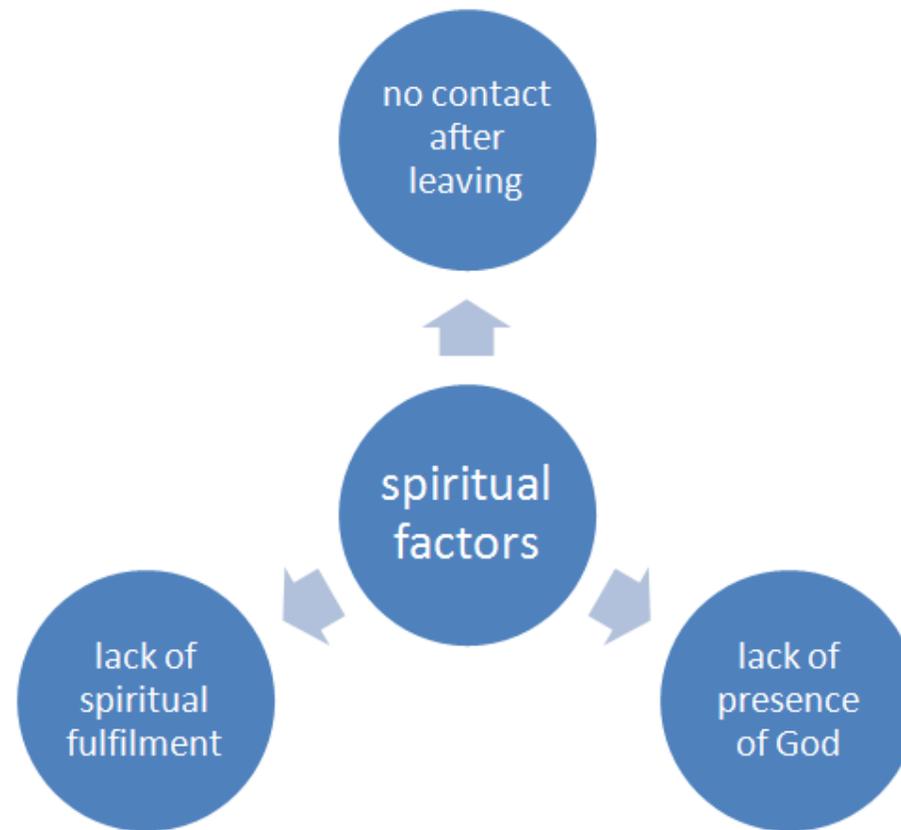


Spiritual factors (7)

growing awareness

Seventh: spirituality in church

1. Church members don't contact when someone stops attending
2. Lack of spiritual fulfillment
3. Church is not the place where God is present

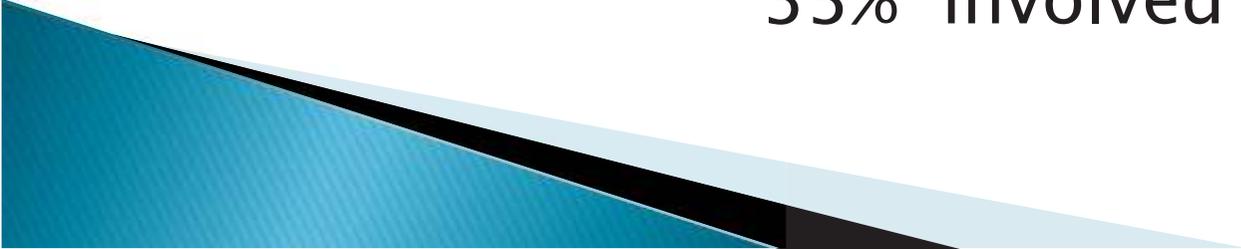


Profiles

- ▶ From the 7 factors profiles can be made of those in danger of leaving
- ▶ 4 profiles of church leavers extracted:
 - The involved church member
 - The postmodern individualist
 - The young adult
 - The ‘frustrated’ conservative church leaver

Profile

the involved churchmember

- ▶ Attended church for long period (30 \bar{x} rs)
 - ▶ Had one or more tasks (31%)
 - ▶ Highly dedicated church member who works with youth. 24% has been youth leader
 - ▶ Guilt motivated to work for God
 - ▶ Has lost trust in the spirituality of the church
 - ▶ Has high sensitivity for conflict
 - ▶ Youth Leaders 85% conflicts in local church
28% involved in the conflict
 - ▶ Other functions 66% conflicts in local church
33% involved in conflict
- 

Profile

the postmodern individualist

- ▶ 30% does not believe in organized denomination
- ▶ For 33% the Adventist theology plays a role in not attending church
- ▶ 51,7% of respondents says that they could not find answers they were looking for in the church



Profile

the young adult

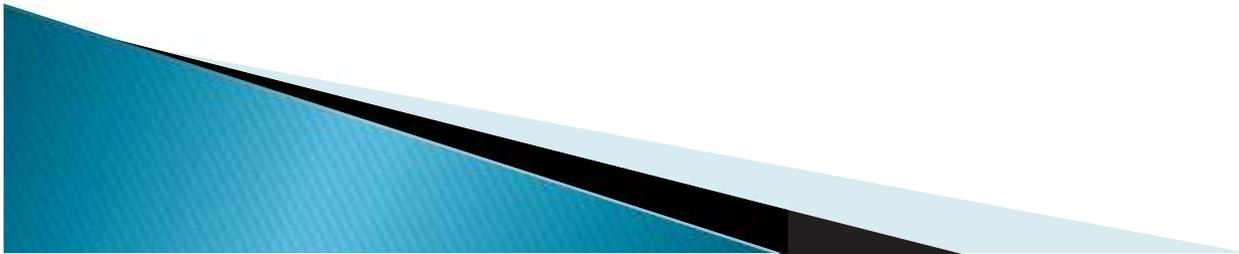
- ▶ 19% finds it difficult to find a new church when leaving home and move for study and/or work
- ▶ 60,4% notes that their live outside the church is becoming distanced from their live in the church



Profile

the 'frustrated' conservative church leaver

- ▶ 22,7% says that there were unacceptable changes in church
- ▶ 50,9% says that the church does not change in accordance with modern times
- ▶ Influences of multicultural elements and 'forcing change' too fast also often cited as reasons for leaving



Conclusions

- ▶ Long involvement with the church
 - ▶ Active in multiple functions
 - ▶ Is still religious, but not within a specific denomination
 - ▶ Specific Adventist trade marks are (becoming) less important
 - ▶ Bible study (individual or in a group) and keeping the Sabbath stay relative important
- 

What's next?

- ▶ After 2010 new programs were developed aimed at supporting, coaching and training
- ▶ Existing programs were revitalized
- ▶ In the NUC policy 2012–2017 retention is named explicit as one of the goals

Future research

- ▶ Which factor is the main trigger and how this could influence other factors
- ▶ Are nurturing and prevention programs developed working?

Notes:

Slide 1:

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<http://www.linkedin.com/in/amstaal>

Research committee Netherlands Union Conference: Jurriën den Hollander MSc, Fiona Slond MSc, André Staal MA, Matthijs Nagtegaal B, Daniëlle Koning PhD

Source material:

Research and case study for the social research committee of Seventh-day Adventist church The Netherlands:

Church Abandonment (2009–2010). Quantitative and qualitative research among church leavers.

Motivations for adult baptism (2006–2007). Case study into motivations for adult baptism among church goers.

Presentation held by ds. J. den Hollander from the at the Research committee, Netherlands Union Conference for the Trans Europe Division (November 2010)

See also:

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Davie, G. (2001) 'The persistence of institutional religion in modern Europe', in Woodhead Linda, Heelas Paul and Martin David (eds). *Peter Berger and the Study of Religion*, p. 101–111. Routledge: London.

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Hollander, J. den, A. Staal, F. Slond, D. Koning. D, & M. Nagtegaal (2011). *Waarom mensen de adventkerk de rug toe keren. De ene gelovige is de andere niet*. Advent, 110 (2), 28–31.

Norris, P. & R. Inglehart (2nd ed.) (2011) *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Notes:

Slide 3:

About the Research committee

The research committee tries to inform local and national policy of the SDA church in the Netherlands. It does this by conducting empirical socio-cultural (human sciences) research. The research committee exists of a core group of members from different backgrounds and academic disciplines (such as sociology of religion, anthropology, psychology and theology) and works with external subject matter experts if external expertise is required. As of January 1, 2013 the research committee is non-active. It shall remain so, until the research committee and / or the board of the NUC deems necessary that the committee shall be reactivated in the interests of the church. Or if internal and external developments make reactivation of the committee necessary.

Slide 4:

Due to the limited size of the research, no generalizations can be made to the total group of church leavers within the Adventist church in the Netherlands. However the findings are systematically pointing towards the same directions and findings of previous research on this subject in the Netherlands among other denominations.

Slide 6:

Reasons for dropping out

1. Moving to another place, new church threshold
2. Family, people outside the church, and work situation, prevent from going to church
3. Partner doesn't have the same faith
4. Their religiosity
 1. experienced spiritual development in the church
 2. feelings of guilt
 3. Christian but not dedicated
 4. feeling that Church doesn't adjust to changes in society

► Opportunities for retention

1. Follow up of people moving to other places
2. Strengthening ties with the church

Notes:

Slide 7:

Reasons for dropping out

1. Adventism is not special anymore
2. No belief in organized religion
3. Problems with Adventist theology
4. Questions unanswered
5. Didn't miss church when leaving
6. Doubts about God
7. Believes but doesn't need the church

► Opportunities for retention

1. Creation of Adventist free churches

Slide 8:

Reasons of dropping out

1. Unacceptable changes
2. Small group dominates the rest
3. Conflicts with or without involvement
4. Growing difference between life inside and life outside the church

Opportunities for retention:

1. Train pastors in change management
2. Care and attention for those without power
3. Develop conflict resolution strategies

Notes:

Slide 9:

Reasons of dropping out

1. Strong faith
 1. involved in the church
 2. strong faith in God
 3. experience spiritual development
2. Feelings of hurt and guilt

Opportunities for retention:

1. Guilt: perfectionism, high standards, not the right gifts
2. Hurt: sense of holy obligation, love covers all

Reasons for dropping out

1. Very little contact with people in church
2. No friends in the church

Slide 10:

Opportunities for retention

1. Cell groups
2. Buddy system
3. Training churches in being inclusive

Notes:

Slide 11:

Reasons for dropping out of church

1. Relational problems
2. Too busy
3. Differing educational level

▶ Opportunities for retention

1. Family ministry
2. Creative spiritual moments, i.e., sms, mail, etc.
3. Create special gatherings for highly educated

Slide 12:

Reasons of dropping out

1. Church members don't contact when someone stops attending
2. Lack of spiritual fulfillment
3. Church is not the place where God is present

Opportunities for retention:

1. Develop value of integrity
2. Develop value of real friendship