

**RIGHT IN OUR OWN BACKYARD:
THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEERING ON
CHURCH ATTENDANCE AND
RETENTION AMONG SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST FACULTY AND STAFF**

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General
Conference
Summit on
Nurture and
Retention

Nov. 18-20,
2013

PURPOSE

PURPOSE: A preliminary exploration of the relationships between

- § church volunteering, community service, and religious behaviors among Adventist faculty and staff
- § With implications for church nurture and retention

HYPOTHESIS:

- § church volunteering and community service
POSITIVELY ASSOCIATED WITH
church attendance and other religious behaviors

DATA: From 2012 SDA Religion and Public Issues Survey

INTRODUCTION

- **Volunteering** activities in both **church** and **community** service appear to be a **contributing factor** in **church retention**.
- Regular **churchgoers** are better **integrated** within **church-based social networks** than those who never attend church. Being part of such networks enhances the chance to volunteer (Bekkers, 2003).
- Research on church attendance suggests that social networks, **rather than beliefs or church membership**, are a primary motivator in volunteering both within and outside of the church (Becker & Dhingra, 2001).

INTRODUCTION

- Similarly, **church attendance** may **influence** volunteering by **fostering a sense of community** (Park & Smith, 2000).
- The relationship between **church retention** and **volunteering** is **not well understood**, particularly within the **Adventist** church.

METHODOLOGY

- **Random sample** of approximately 1/3 of all **faculty and selected staff** of all **Adventist universities and colleges** in the U.S. **Collegiates** can be considered **thought leaders**.
- **2012 SDA Yearbook** as a source of the sample; SurveyMonkey used for online data collection and slide development, with SPSS used for other statistical analyses
- **Replicates 2004 Religion and Public Issues Survey**
 - § 59 questions taken primarily from:
 - § Gallup Poll, Faith Matters Survey, National Civic and Political Survey of Young People
 - § Additional questions from prior **Adventist religion and public life** surveys conducted by **Dudley and Hernandez**

DEMOGRAPHICS

530 Responses

Gender

- Male

N (%)

264 (49.2)

Age

- 36 to 50 yrs
- 51 to 65 yrs

157 (29.3)

232 (43.0)

Marital Status

- Married

425 (79.0)

Education

- Post College graduate study/degree

N (%)

406 (75.3)

Ethnicity Background

- African American/Black
- Hispanic/Latino
- Euro-American/White
- Asian or Pacific islander

49 (9.1)

28 (5.2)

406 (76.0)

26 (4.8)

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- **100%** of respondents say they volunteer for church work several times a year or more, with **51%** saying they volunteer at least monthly
- **69%** are at least occasionally involved in community or civic projects sponsored by the church
- **66%** served as an officer or committee member for some organization (past year)
- **60%** worked on a community project (past year)

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- 48% are members of a service club that does projects to improve the community (past year)
- 45% worked with someone or some group to solve a community problem (past year)
- 45% were active in outreach or witnessing activities (past year)
- The 2001 World Church Survey revealed that only 29% of Adventists are involved in their community. Findings from the survey are reflected in the “Tell the World Initiative” which included a goal of raising the level of community involvement to 40% by 2010.

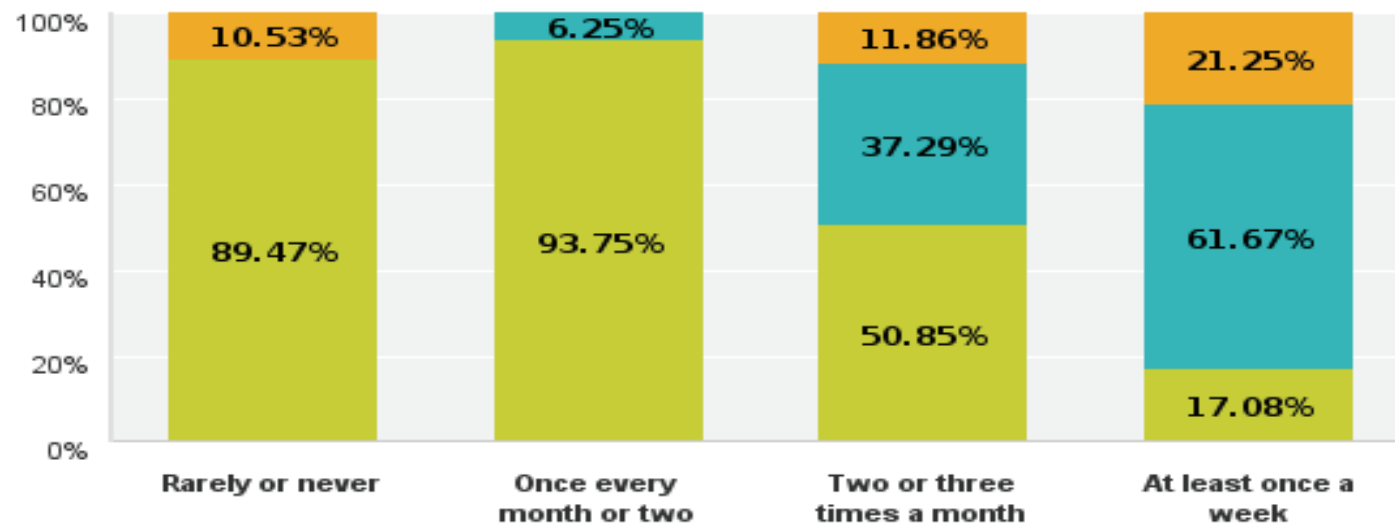
DO VOLUNTEER WORK FOR THE CHURCH

RELIGIOUS BEHAVIORS/PARTICIPATION	Significance Level
Pray privately	.000
Study the Bible	.000
Read religious books/journals	.000
Hold family worship	.000
Attend church	.000
Participate in church-sponsored community/civic projects	.000
Involved in outreach or witnessing	.000
% of income contributed to church/other religious causes	.000
Hold an office/service position in church	.000

CHURCH ATTENDANCE BY VOLUNTEER WORK FOR THE CHURCH

Q39 If not prevented by unavoidable circumstances, how often do you attend church?

Answered: 334 Skipped: 2



Q38: Do volunteer work for the church: Seldom or never

Q38: Do volunteer work for the church: At least weekly

Q38: Do volunteer work for the church: Daily under most circumstances

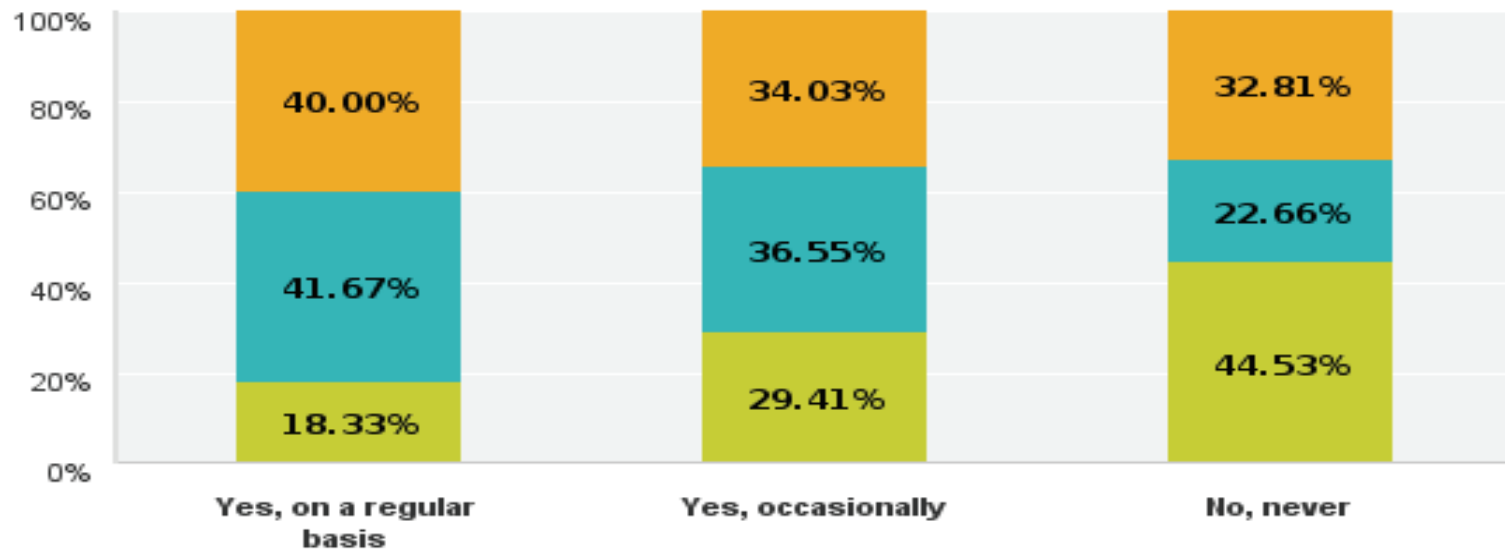
PARTICIPATE IN CHURCH-SPONSORED COMMUNITY/CIVIC PROJECTS

RELIGIOUS BEHAVIORS/PARTICIPATION	Significance Level
Pray privately	.014
Study the Bible	.002
Read religious books/journals	.000
Hold family worship	.006
Attend church	.000
Do volunteer work for church	.000
Involved in outreach or witnessing	.000
% of income contributed to church/other religious causes	.000
Hold an office/service position in church	.000

COMMUNITY/CIVIC PROJECTS BY FAMILY WORSHIP

Q40 Are you personally involved in any community or civic projects sponsored by the church?

Answered: 426 Skipped: 4



Q38: Family worship: Seldom or never Q38: Family worship: At least weekly
Q38: Family worship: Daily under most circumstances

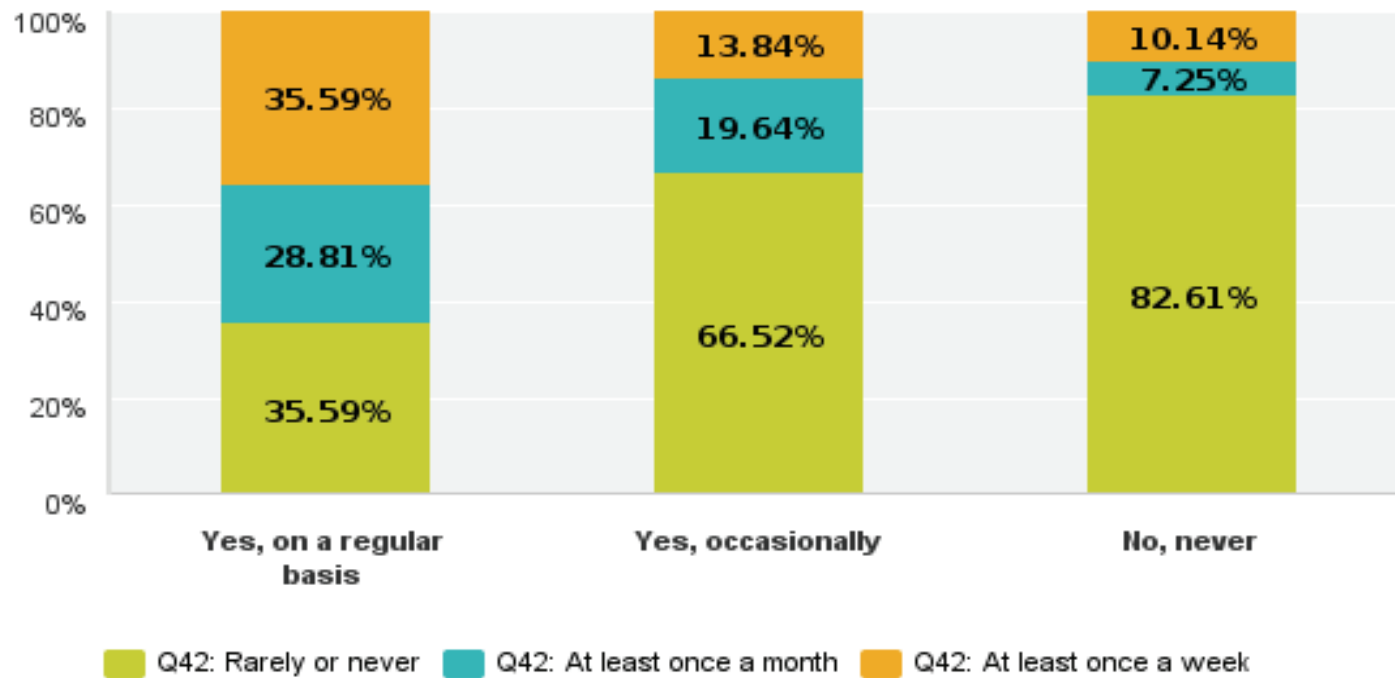
INVOLVED IN OUTREACH/WITNESSING

RELIGIOUS BEHAVIORS/PARTICIPATION	Significance Level
Pray privately	.000
Study the Bible	.000
Read religious books/journals	.000
Hold family worship	.000
Attend church	.000
Do volunteer work for the church	.000
Participate in church-sponsored community/civic projects	.000
Involved in outreach or witnessing	.000
% of income contributed to church/other religious causes	.000
Hold an office/service position in church	.000

CHURCH-SPONSORED COMMUNITY/CIVIC INVOLVEMENT BY INVOLVED IN OUTREACH/WITNESSING

Q40 Are you personally involved in any community or civic projects sponsored by the church?

Answered: 421 Skipped: 2



CONDENSED SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

RELIGIOUS BEHAVIORS/PARTICIPATION	Volunteer work for church	Church-sponsored community projects	Participate in outreach/witnessing
Pray privately	.000	.014	.000
Study the Bible	.000	.002	.000
Read religious books/journals	.000	.000	.000
Hold family worship	.000	.006	.000
Attend church	.000	.000	.000
Do volunteer work for church	N/A	.000	.000
Participate in church-sponsored community/civic projects	.000	N/A	.000
Involved in outreach or witnessing	.000	.000	N/A
% of income contributed to church/other religious causes	.000	.000	.000
Hold an office/service position in church	.000	.000	.000

TITHE AND OFFERINGS

- **FINDING:** Individuals who gave a higher percent of their income to the church or other religious causes were more likely to:
 - § do volunteer work for the church
 - § be active in outreach or witnessing activities
 - § be involved in community or civic projects sponsored by the church
 - § work with someone or some group to solve a problem in their community

TITHE AND OFFERINGS

- **SPECULATION:** Those who give a greater percentage of their income to tithes and offerings:
 - § Have greater commitment to church structure
 - § Are Older
 - § Are more committed to supporting all forms of volunteering
 - § Put their money where their commitment is

- **PROGRAM AND POLICY RELEVANCE:**
 - § Pair service and giving programming together

FAMILY WORSHIP

- **FINDING:** Individuals who are involved in family worship are more likely to:
 - § be involved in church-sponsored community or civic projects
 - § have worked on a community project in the past year
 - § have worked together with someone or some group to solve a problem in the community in the past year

FAMILY WORSHIP

■ SPECULATION:

§ Those involved in the community are more likely to center their family worship discussion around their involvement and discuss the linkage of faith and practice.

■ PROGRAM AND POLICY RELEVANCE

§ Pair service projects with family devotional resources

§ Mae Ellen & Gaspar Colon's forthcoming daily devotional book on community service and involvement

§ Encourage family-based service projects

AGE

- **FINDING:** Individuals over 50 years (esp. 65+) are more likely than those under 50 years to:
 - do volunteer work for the church
 - serve as an officer or committee member of an organization
 - serve as an officer or committee member of an organization
 - have worked together with someone or some group to solve a problem in the community
 - be involved in outreach or witnessing activities in the past year

AGE

■ SPECULATION:

§ Adventist church in North America is aging

§ Older people

§ are more stable

§ have more time available for volunteering, service, and outreach

§ have more status and thus more likely to hold leadership positions

■ PROGRAM AND POLICY RELEVANCE:

§ Encourage seniors to become more active in all aspects of church and community service (reducing isolation)

§ Develop service clubs and small groups that feature service for retired persons

MARRIAGE

- **FINDING:** Married individuals are more likely than divorced or single individuals to:
 - do volunteer work for the church
 - to be involved in outreach or witnessing activities in the past year

MARRIAGE

■ SPECULATION:

- Those who are married are:
 - more stable
 - leading church-centric lives
 - more committed to church structure

■ RELEVANT LITERATURE:

- § “Being married with children and higher education levels both correspond to a higher likelihood of volunteering” (Becker and Dhingra 2001, p. 324)
- § “Busy parents take the time to become engaged in civic life for the sake of their children, and this leads to embeddedness in local institutions such as schools, sports leagues, Scouts, and local congregations” (Becker and Dhingra 2001, p. 331)

■ PROGRAM AND POLICY RELEVANCE:

- § Build faith through service by supporting family involvement in church and community activities

EDUCATION

- **FINDING:** Individuals who have a higher level of education are more likely to:
 - serve as an officer or committee member of an organization
 - have worked together with someone or some group to solve a problem in the community in the past year
 - be involved in outreach or witnessing activities in the past

EDUCATION

■ SPECULATION:

- Those with higher education levels are groomed/expected/seek out leadership positions
- Status and leadership in the community may increase community engagement

■ RELEVANT LITERATURE:

§ The higher one's education and occupational status, the more likely one volunteers (Amato & Booth 1997; Verba & Schlozman 1995; Wilson & Musick 1999)

■ PROGRAM AND POLICY RELEVANCE:

§ Create broader avenues for involvement

DISCUSSION

FOUR NARRATIVES EMERGE

- Volunteering begets volunteering
- Religious behaviors are associated with volunteering and service
- Social networks are key to understanding volunteering and service
- Newer/returning member activist profile

VOLUNTEERING BEGETS VOLUNTEERING

- Direction of relationship is complex
- **Regular churchgoers are better integrated within religious networks** than those who never attend church. Being part of such networks enhances the chance to volunteer (Bekker & Dhingra 2003)
- Volunteering is not driven by **church membership**, but instead by levels of **church attendance** (DeHart 1999; Hodgkinson, Weitzman & Kirsch, 1990, Watt 1991; Wilson & Musick, 1999)
- **Church attendance** (not membership) may also **influence volunteering** through the formation of social networks and a sense of community (Park & Smith 2000)
- **Congregations draw members into volunteering through the social networks** they generate and through members' understanding of the fit between the congregation's identity and mission and their own beliefs and values. (Becker & Dhingra 2001, p. 316)

RELIGIOUS BEHAVIORS ARE ASSOCIATED WITH VOLUNTEERING AND SERVICE

- **Tithing/Family Worship/Prayer/Bible Study/Religious Reading/Church Attendance**
- Church volunteering
- Church-sponsored community service
- Outreach and witnessing activities

SOCIAL NETWORKS ARE KEY

- Church volunteering and community service are tied to social networks (friendship and kinship)
- Relationship is probably reciprocal
 - § Volunteering and community service likely strengthens social networks
 - § Social networks likely make volunteering and community service more likely
- “Congregations are where individuals come together and form close ties of friendship and support.” (Becker & Dhingra 2001, p. 332)
- “The fact that social connections, in particular to one’s family, lead members to contribute to civil society, raises the question of whether congregations are sites for such strong bonds. We find that church attenders choose to volunteer for the congregation if they have strong ties to fellow members and find the congregational identity a good fit for their expectations.” (Becker & Dhingra 2001, p. 332)
- “Social networks rather than beliefs, dominate as the mechanism leading to volunteering, and it is the social networks formed within congregations that make congregation members more likely to volunteer.” (Becker & Dhingra 2001, p. 329)

SOCIAL NETWORKS CONTINUED

- “Being more strongly integrated within networks of religious people makes one more likely to volunteer.” (Ruiter and De Graaf, 2006, p. 192)
- “According to the social network explanation, church members would volunteer more because their social network provides strong recruitment and motivation functions. Given that members are part of close-knit communities, they are more likely to know about existing voluntary organizations, it increases their chance that they are asked to participate.” (Bryant et al. 2003; Musick, Wilson, & Bynam 2000)
- Social networks influence both instrumental and emotional motives for volunteering. Rational motives refer to choices made by weighing costs and benefits of volunteering. (Herzog, House & Morgan 1991) Emotional motives pertain to a sense of oneself as a specific type of person and attachment to others. (Hart Atkins and Ford 1996)

NEWER/RETURNING MEMBER: COMMUNITY-ENGAGED PROFILE

■ Who are they?

- § New members who have been active in former denominations or in community affairs as volunteers or professionals
- § Returning members who have been active in community affairs as volunteers or professionals

■ Questions and anecdotal observations

§ Newer member activists

- § Social networks as a way into the church or a blocker – difficulty of breaking into established networks
- § May be engaged in other social networks that may bring contacts or material resources into the church

§ Returning member community-engaged individual

- § The welcome – friendship and kinship ties critical
- § But there may be blocking suspicions? (As in...What have you been doing while you were gone?)

§ Motivations?

LITERATURE ON NEWER/RETURNING COMMUNITY-ENGAGED MEMBER

- Commitment to social institutions IN GENERAL has changed in the U.S. (Lichterman, 1996)
 - § “Loose connections” based on meeting instrumental needs regarding emotional attachments
 - § So social institutions not as important in fostering volunteering as in the past

- In the 1950s a sense of general social responsibility guided volunteering (Wuthnow, 1998)
 - § Now replaced by individualistic instrumental and emotional motives
 - § Contribute to” loose connections”
 - § Weakened long-term attachments to local community of place

- Some questions
 - § Traditionalists vs. progressives?
 - § Commuter church members related to weaker ties?
 - § Issue-oriented rather than institution oriented – i.e. healthcare, gun control, religious freedom, etc.

LITERATURE ON NEWER/RETURNING COMMUNITY-ENGAGED MEMBER

- No difference in volunteer levels across Christian denominations BUT difference in **motivation** (Becker & Dhingra, 2001)
- *Evangelicals* – “To become more Christ-like, I must serve.” (Becker & Dhingra, 2001)
 - § “Evangelical congregations offer volunteers a space within a secular environment where they can express their spirituality and form ties with other members. This makes them distinctive from other organizations and may make them more competitive in attracting members’ time vis-à-vis competing community organizations. A spiritual component strengthens people’s connections to the organization since it provides a motivation to volunteer for it versus other groups – more privatized than that of religious liberals.” (Becker & Dhingra, 2001)
- *Liberal Protestant/Catholic* – “I have an obligation to serve others as citizens”; “I serve because it is the right thing to do.” “To make society run, you have to put in your time.” (Becker & Dhingra, 2001)
- Both motivations are valid

ELLEN G. WHITE: CORE MOTIVATION FOR SERVICE

- “There is a work to be accomplished for many to whom it would not be of the least good for you to tell the truth, for they could not comprehend it. But you can reach them through **disinterested acts of benevolence**. There are outcasts, men who have lost the similitude of God, who must first be cared for, fed, washed, and decently clothed.”

Welfare Ministry, p. 244

DISCUSSION

- Faculty and staff are more likely to be involved in their church than in the outside community.

- Possible causes:
 - § “In the world, but not of the world”
 - § Taking care of one’s own
 - § Staying inside personal comfort zone
 - § Opportunities more obvious and apparent in churches
 - § Someone asked them to donate time for church

DISCUSSION

- Adventist faculty and staff are actively involved in church volunteering; less so with community service.
- As church attendance, prayer and Bible study increase, so do both church volunteering and involvement in church-sponsored community and civic projects.
- Early analyses do not allow us to understand if religious behaviors increase volunteering or if volunteering increases religious behaviors. Or is there a reciprocal effect?

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Focus on individual and group involvement – involvement begets involvement
- We have to re-orient the way we “assimilate” new members to wire them into the friendship/kinship networks
- Tie in prayer, Bible study, family worship, witnessing into the theme of “involvement in the church and in the world” They are related.
- For congregations to recruit volunteers, they must not only offer unique programs but also make members feel connected, since social bonds encourage stronger connections. (Becker and Dhingra 2001)

PROGRAM AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Pair service and giving programming together
- Link service projects with family devotional resources
- Encourage family-based service projects
- Encourage seniors to become more active in all aspects of church and community service
- Develop service clubs and small groups that feature service for retired persons
- Build faith through service by supporting family involvement in church and community activities
- Create broader avenues for involvement

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