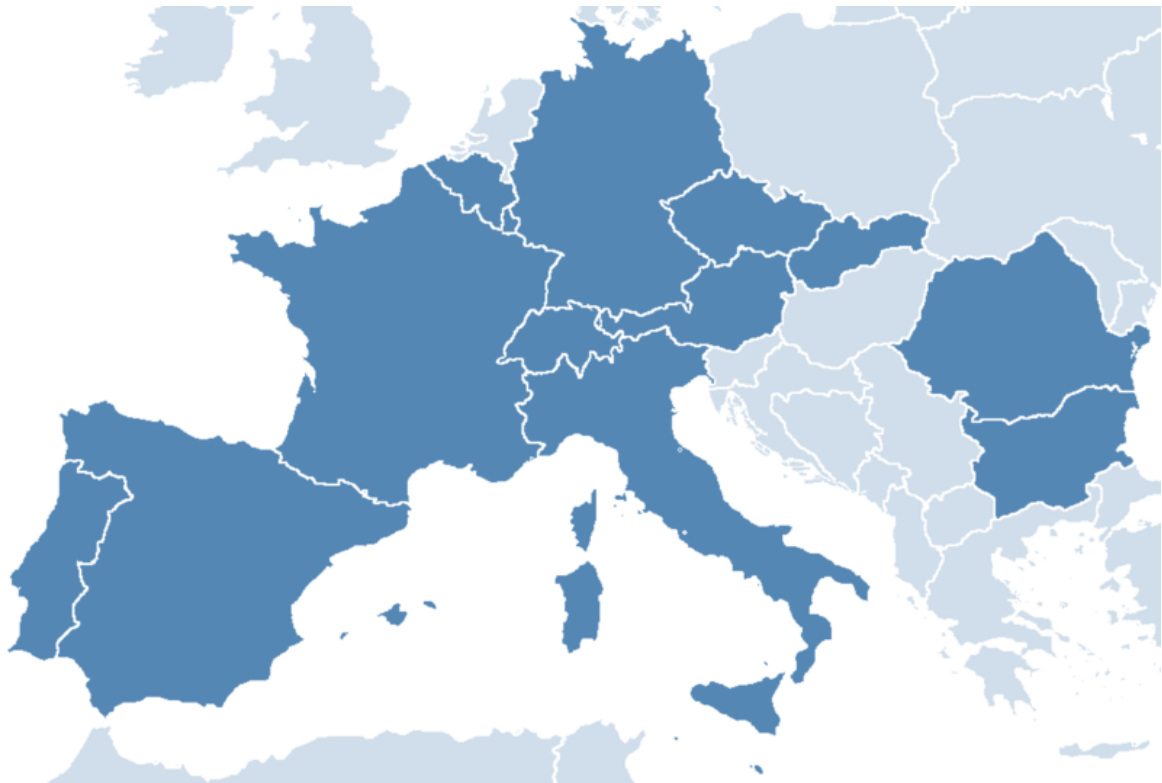


Final Report

Global Church Member Survey 2021-2023

Inter-European Division (EUD)



Theologische Hochschule Friedensau

Principal Investigators:

Prof. Andreas Bochmann Ph.D.

Prof. Dr. Thomas Spiegler

March 2023

This page intentionally left blank.

Content

1	Introduction.....	1
2	Methodology	2
2.1	Sampling	2
2.2	Data collection.....	3
2.3	Response rate and margin of error	3
2.4	Data cleaning.....	4
2.5	Weighting	4
2.6	Errors, misunderstood questions and wrong answers.....	6
3	Demographics.....	7
3.1	Gender.....	7
3.2	Age.....	7
3.3	Education.....	8
3.4	Migrant status	9
3.5	Marital status and household size.....	10
3.6	Role within the local church	10
4	Religious Demographics	12
4.1	Household and children	12
4.2	History (of the family) with the SDA church.....	13
4.3	Baptism.....	13
5	Religious Behaviors and Roles	15
5.1	Church involvement	15
5.2	Engagement in religious activities with others	17
5.3	Awareness and engagement in GC initiatives	19
5.4	Engagement in individual religious activities	20
6	Religious Attitudes and Experiences	23
6.1	Experience of the local church and its members	23
6.2	Expected continuation of being Adventist	27
6.3	Spiritual and mental well-being	28
7	Beliefs	31
7.1	Overview of agreement with Adventist beliefs.....	31
7.2	Areas of unity and points of dissent.....	33
7.3	Dissent within churches or just European diversity?	36
7.4	Concepts of inspiration	40
7.5	Sermon topics.....	43
8	Adventist Health Message	45
8.1	Dietary preferences	45
8.2	Attitudes towards and consumption of alcohol and other substances	45
8.3	Beliefs and practice related to the health message	47
8.4	General perspective on the health message.....	48
9	Conclusions and Outlook.....	49

1 Introduction

The Inter-European Division of Seventh-day Adventist (EUD), while one of the smallest in terms of territory and membership (just over 180,000) numbers, probably is one of the most diverse divisions of our church in terms of language, cultures, and history. In its territory across central Europe, you find former communist countries and historically “Western” countries, as well as neutral Switzerland and the unusual construct of the Vatican State. Some of its regions are predominantly Protestant, many more Roman Catholic, some Orthodox, while some regions are considered the most secular regions in the world. The EUD is organized in 11 Unions (6 Union Conference, 5 Unions of Churches) and provides “resources for 20 countries and in 18 languages” (<https://www.eud.adventist.org/session2022/>).

Conducting a Global Church Member Survey in a territory like this requires careful planning in terms translating all materials, logistics and efficiency (especially in light of an appropriate ratio of effort and benefit, including, but not limited to, financial resources). Friedensau Adventist University was assigned the task for this survey in the territory of the EUD and approached it in close cooperation with various offices of the EUD which provided translations and networking with the Unions. We would like to express our gratitude for supportive EUD officers and workers who strengthened our efforts to complete the assignment, despite the challenges experienced.

This report will follow the order of topics of the questionnaire itself. It will limit itself to descriptive analyses and generally will withhold recommendations or value judgements on the data. However, in light of the overall experience, the principal investigators (both with ample training and experience in research methods and statistics) would like to caution against overinterpreting the results presented in this report. Not only was the response rate considerably lower than anticipated (presumably due to various factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the length of the instrument and varying support at Union level), there also is a bias to be expected towards church members who are highly committed and active in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

At the same time, this report on the whole can be seen as a fair document, providing insights into a rather diverse church in Europe with strengths and struggles to be celebrated and worked on.

2 Methodology

2.1 Sampling

A stratified random cluster sampling was applied. The EUD provided complete lists of churches from all Unions including the number of member in each church. The lists of churches were sorted by number of members for each Union. From each list every xth church (starting at a random point and running through the whole list) was chosen as a participating church. The value of x depended on the overall number of members targeted as participants of the Union. In this way churches of all sizes had the same chance to be included.

The planned number of members was not a fixed percentage for all unions. It was calculated separately for each Union in order to reach a margin of error between 3 and 4% with the expected maximum response rate (50 % of the members in the selected churches).

The following table gives an overview of the relevant figures for sampling and response (figures after cleaning of data set, see below).

Union	selected churches	members in selected churches	expected maximum of answers (50 %)	received answers online	received answers paper	received answers total	percent of expected answers
Austrian U.	16	1.164	582	130	0	130	22%
Bulgarian U.	24	1.607	804	107	0	107	13%
Czecho-Slovakian U.	27	1.675	838	303	24	327	39%
Franco-Belgian U.	21	2.433	1.217	130	0	130	11%
Italian U.	19	1.372	686	196	3	199	29%
North German U.	33	2.299	1.150	199	8	207	18%
Portuguese U.	13	1.479	740	93	0	93	13%
Romanian U.	54	3.928	1.964	376	520	896	46%
South German U.	25	1.867	934	142	0	142	15%
Spanish Union U.	14	1.843	922	303	18	321	35%
Swiss U.	16	1.280	640	227	35	262	41%
Total	262	20.947	10.474	2.206	605	2.814	27%

The list of chosen churches was shared with the responsible person in the respective Union. In some cases, there was a need to correct the selection, e.g. when the data did not reflect the current situation of a specific church or when a church was chosen with a very specific, atypical profile. In such cases another church was selected which was in the list of all churches next to the originally chosen church. By this, it was guaranteed that churches of all sizes had the same chance to be included.

2.2 Data collection

The data was collected primarily through an online survey. We used the professional survey software Sphinx-Survey. For answering the survey, the respondents could choose the language they prefer and complete the questionnaire on a desktop computer, a tablet or a mobile phone.

The access of the survey was possible via a website (www.gcms2021.eu) which included further material about the project and a promotional video with an invitation for participation by the Secretary of the Division.

The local pastors/elders in the selected churches were asked to encourage all members to participate in the survey. Instructions for the procedure was provided in all languages. (See appendix 1).

As an alternative to the online survey the Unions could download a paper version of the questionnaire in their language and print it for those who did not have the necessary technical equipment.

The material was sent out to the Unions at the end of Oct 2021. The originally planned end of data collection (December 2021) was postponed to March 2022 due to slow response.

2.3 Response rate and margin of error

The above shown table includes an overview of the response rates in the separate Unions. It is clearly visible that in all Unions the response rate remained much lower than the expected maximum of 50% of the members. On average 27% of the expected number of members answered, representing approximately 13.5% of the listed members in the selected churches.

We see four reasons for this low response rate:

- In social research it is a general trend over the past decades that response rates decline. Most of the major international or national surveys face this problem. The GCMS is no exception at this point.
- The attention and support by the responsible persons in some Unions, Conferences or selected churches for the project was than expected lower in some cases, i.e. the low response rates cannot be ascribed to the church members only.
- The former point might be linked to the fact that COVID-19 lockdown restrictions were still in place in some regions while the survey was conducted. This limited the communication, and went along with absence of church members, consequently limiting the options to present the survey as a common project in the church. Last but not least the responsible persons had other challenges to deal with during this pandemic.
- On the level of the participating members it can be assumed that the length of this survey hindered many to complete the questionnaire and to send their answers. On average it took the respondents over 1 hour (62 min) to go through this survey and to answer the questions. From our point of view, for a voluntarily self-administered survey this is definitely too long. As the online survey used an easy-to-access-policy and did not include individual links with passwords, the survey had to be completed in one session (a disadvantage compared to a paper version).

With the collected answers the sample reaches a margin of error of 1.8% (at 95% level) for the Division. However, this is only true if the group of participants is a random sample. With the low response rate in the local churches and the demanding survey, it has to be assumed that this criterion is not fully met, but that highly dedicated, active and involved members are overrepresented. In this case the true margin of error is higher.

Union	Margin of error at 95% level	
Austrian	8.5%	For the unions, the final margin of error is much higher due to the limited response rates. On average it is 7.1%. This means (taking the Austrian Union as an example) if 50% in the Austrian sample agree with a certain statement, we can assume that the true figure for this item is (with a likelihood of 95%) in the range of 50% \pm 8,5%, i.e. the range will be 41,5% to 58,5%.
Bulgarian	9.4%	
Czecho-Slovakian	5.3%	
Franco-Belgian	8.6%	
Italian Union	6.9%	
North German	6.8%	
Portuguese	10.1%	
Romanian	3.2%	
South German	8.2%	
Spanish Union	5.4%	
Swiss	5.9%	

For lower shares of percentages, e.g. 10%, the margin of error is a bit lower, in the case of Austria it would be \pm 5.1%.

2.4 Data cleaning

The complete data set was analyzed for missing values. The following table gives an overview.

Missing values per case (categorized)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0-30	2004	71,2	71,2	71,2
	31-60	392	13,9	13,9	85,1
	61-90	176	6,3	6,3	91,4
	91-120	98	3,5	3,5	94,9
	121-150	56	2,0	2,0	96,9
	151-180	53	1,9	1,9	98,8
	181-210	32	1,1	1,1	99,9
	211-240	3	0,1	0,1	100,0
	Total	2814	100,0	100,0	

70% of the respondents had no more than 30 unanswered questions. At the other end of the spectrum there are a few cases that answered only very few questions. We decided to remove all cases where less than 20% of the questions were answered. This means, all cases with more than 216 missing values were removed. This was the case in only 43 cases, or 1.5% of the original data set.

This changes the total number of cases from 2857 to 2814.

2.5 Weighting

The response rates for the Unions differ remarkably. The following table gives an overview. For example the Franco-Belgian Union represents around 10% of the church members in the EUD but less than 5% in the GCMS data set. On the other end we have the Swiss Union which represents 2,7% of the EUD but more than 9 % in the data set. Factors highlighted in red indicate that the Union is underrepresented in the sample, factors marked green indicate overrepresented Unions.

Union	Churches	Membership	% of EUD	Respondents	% of total	Weighting Factor
Austrian	55	4.288	2,4%	130	4,6%	0,519
Bulgarian	117	7.008	3,9%	107	3,8%	1,030
Czecho-Slovakian	192	9.716	5,4%	327	11,6%	0,467
Franco-Belgian	171	18.669	10,4%	130	4,6%	2,259
Italian Union	108	9.388	5,2%	199	7,1%	0,742
North German	330	19.120	10,7%	207	7,4%	1,453
Portuguese	94	10.012	5,6%	93	3,3%	1,693
Romanian	1.074	62.934	35,2%	896	31,8%	1,105
South German	224	15.615	8,7%	142	5,0%	1,730
Spanish Union	110	17.319	9,7%	321	11,4%	0,849
Swiss	57	4.818	2,7%	262	9,3%	0,289
Total	2.532	178.887		2.814		

Partially this bias is based on differing response rates in the Unions. But even with equal response rates the data would not perfectly represent the Division, as the different size of Unions resulted in an unequal share of members that needed to be targeted to reach the same margin of error in each Union.

To balance the biased response rates and make the dataset more representative of the EUD, weighting factor were used. The table above gives the factor for each Union. The weighting factor is included as additional variable in the SPSS file. The total number of respondents does not change due to the weighting, but the separate Unions get a different weight.

Table 4: Comparison weighted and original frequencies

	Frequency original data	Frequency weighted	Percent weighted	Percent of Members within EUD
Austrian Union of Churches	130	67	2,4	2,4
Bulgarian Union of Churches	107	110	3,9	3,9
Czecho-Slovakian Union Conference	327	153	5,4	5,4
Franco-Belgian Union Conference	130	294	10,4	10,4
Italian Union of Churches	199	148	5,2	5,2
North German Union Conference	207	301	10,7	10,7
South German Union Conference	142	246	8,7	8,7
Portuguese Union of Churches	93	157	5,6	5,6
Romanian Union Conference	896	990	35,2	35,2
Spanish Union of Churches	321	273	9,7	9,7
Swiss Union Conference	262	76	2,7	2,7
Total	2814	2814	100,0	

In the following report, the calculations are based on the weighted data set.

2.6 Errors, misunderstood questions and wrong answers

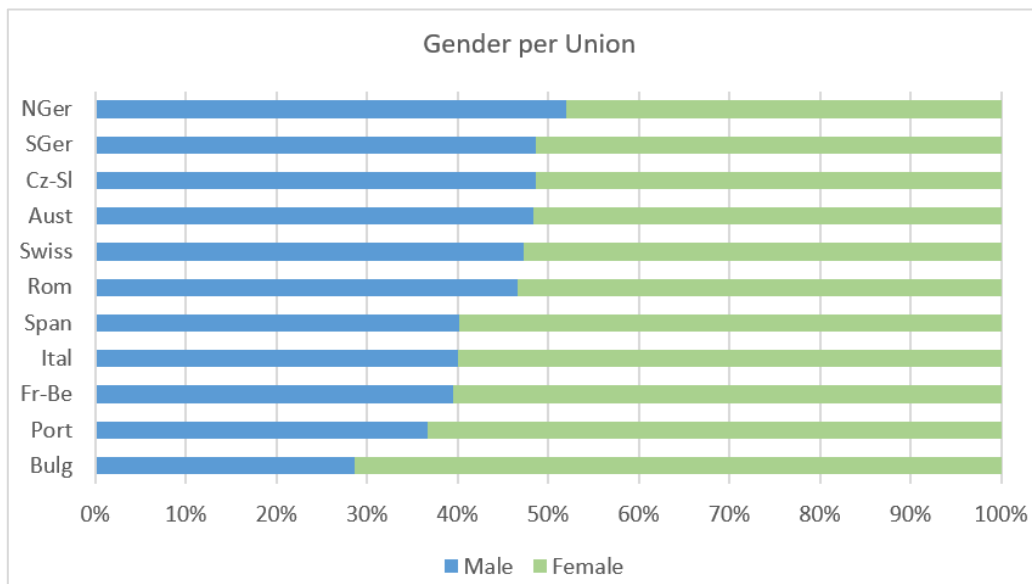
In a data set of this size, it is normal that some of the answers are not correct or at least very unlikely to be true. Sometimes the errors are visible, most times they remain hidden. The following gives a few examples.

- Respondents were asked how many people live in their household and how many of those “observe the Sabbath”. 52 respondents gave a higher figure for the latter than for the former, which shouldn’t be possible. Probably the wording of this question was for some respondents too complex.
- Four respondents accidentally gave a year for their baptism that was prior to their year of birth.
- 13 of the respondents who answered with “Yes” on the item that at least one of their biological children is still a child or teenager living at home said in the following question, that they do not have children. These inconsistent answers came from respondents in the age range between 19 and 61.
- Around 800 respondents answered that they are first generation of Adventists in their family. However, 22% of them answered in the following question, that at least one of their parents is or was Adventist. The next question asked for grandparents, 10 % of the 800 who described themselves as first-generation Adventist claimed to have at least one Adventist grandparent. 25 respondents who claimed to have four continuous generations of Adventists (from themselves up to the great-grandparent) declined having an Adventist grandparent. Probably a more visual approach, where respondents just mark in a family tree who of their ancestors was Adventist, could have produced more reliable answers at this point.

3 Demographics

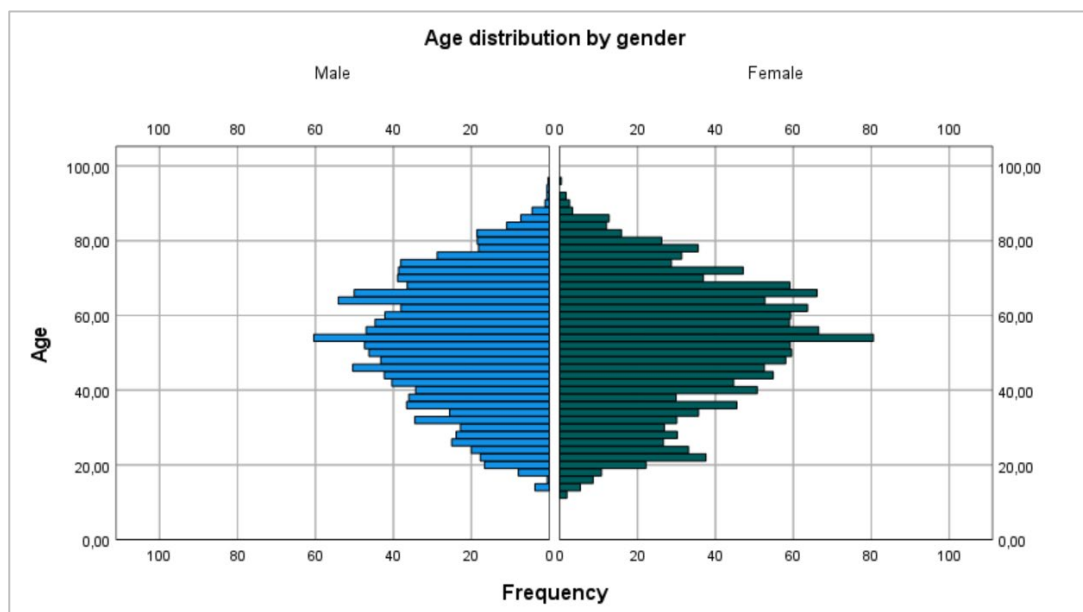
3.1 Gender

55% of the respondents in the EUD are females. The gender ratio varies remarkable between the Unions. In the North-German Union the share of males among the participants was 52% whereas in Bulgaria it was only 29%.

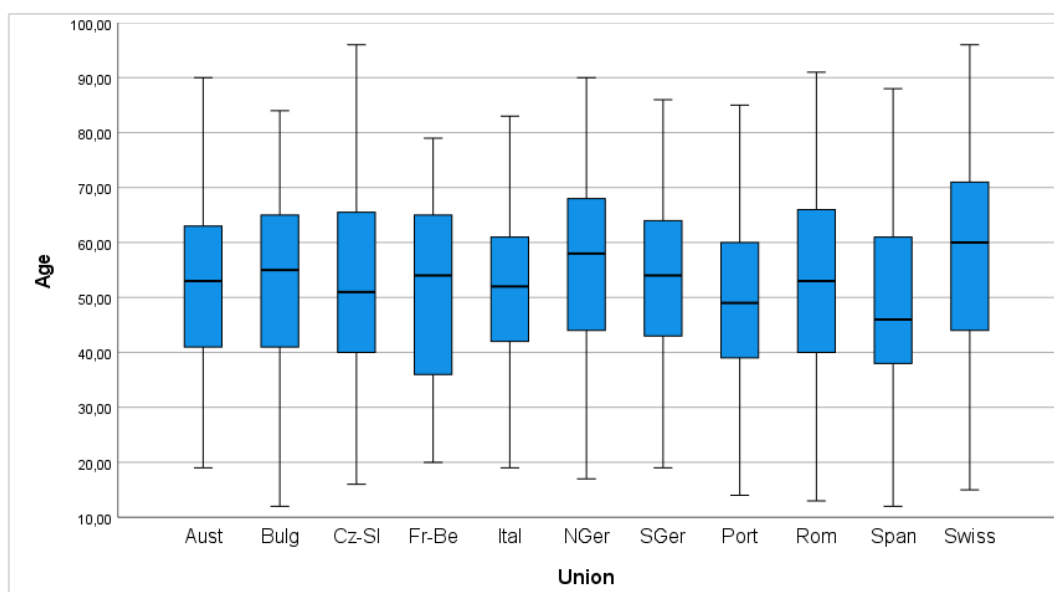


3.2 Age

The following graph shows the “age pyramid” for all participants separately for males and females. As mentioned above, it is visible that more females took part in this survey. For both sexes, the highest numbers of participants are in the range between 40 and 65 years. A little bit more than 50% of all answers came from this age group. The youngest participant was 12 and the oldest 96 years. Between males and females is no difference in the age statistics (median = 53; SD = 17).

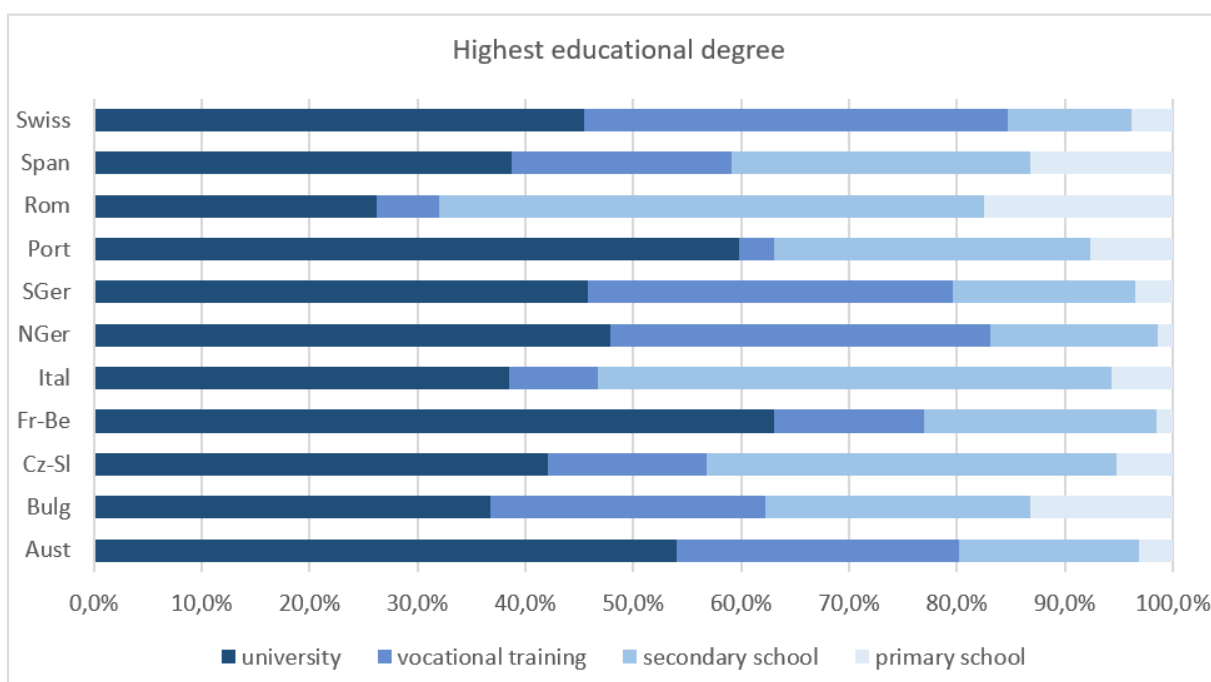


The Boxplots show the age distribution per Union. The median age varies between 46 years (Spanish Union) and 60 years (Swiss Union).



3.3 Education

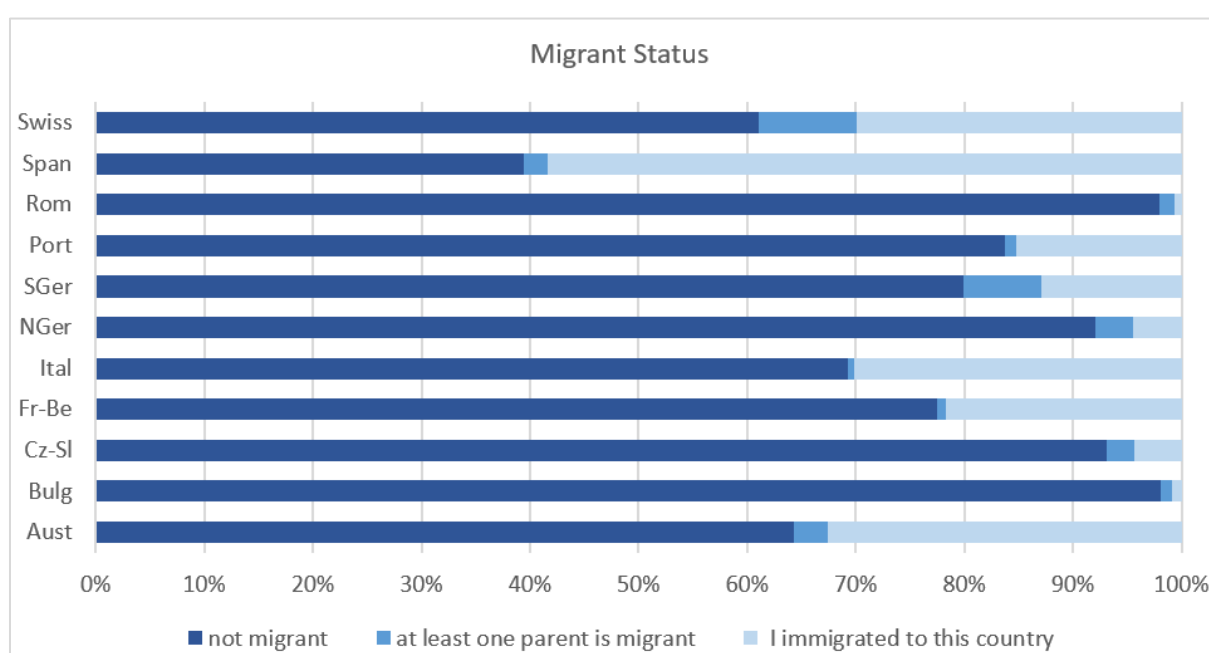
The bar chart shows the highest educational degree of the participants per Union. The original nine answering options of this question were combined here to four categories. This became necessary, as the number of cases in some of the original categories was very low (all options lower than secondary education). Furthermore the differentiations made in the answering options did not fit well with the educational systems of the respondent, e.g. differentiating university degrees by Bachelor and Master level, was introduced in many European countries within the last 20 years.



In total, 40 % of the respondents have university education. As expected, the share of respondents with a vocational training is highest in the German-speaking Unions as in this country vocational trainings play an important role. The results of the Unions are not directly comparable due to the differences in the educational systems within Europe.

3.4 Migrant status

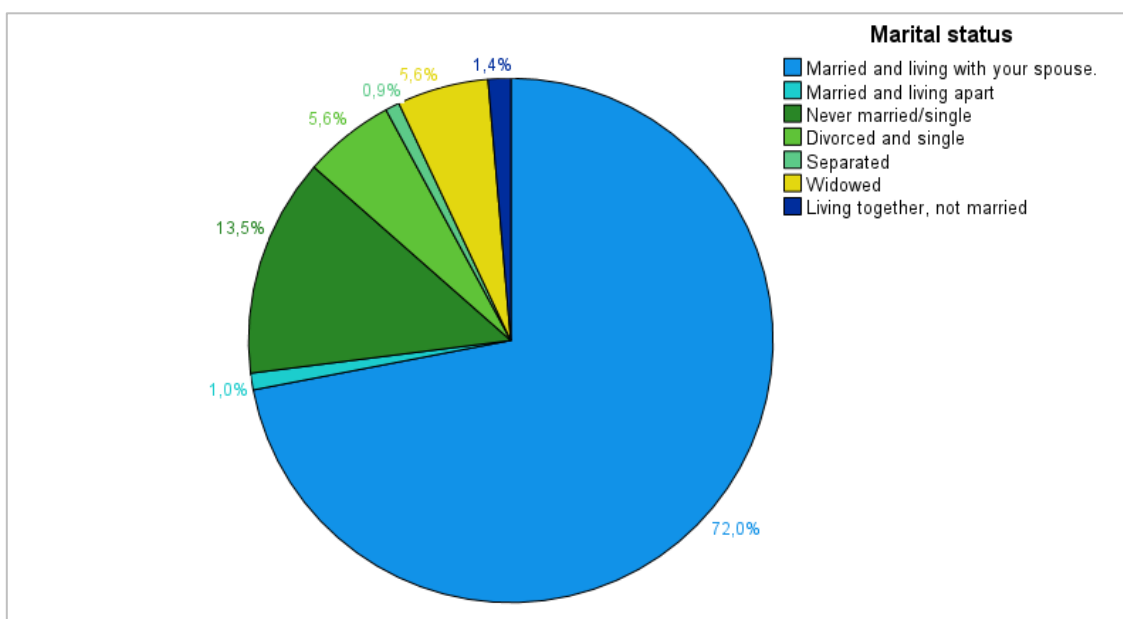
Around 83% of the respondents have no migration history. The majority of the remaining migrated themselves in the country they are currently living in. The composition of the participants varies between the European countries in this matter a lot. The graph shows the data for each Union. Due to a low number of cases in the cells, the answering options “I migrated before age 18” and “I migrated after age 18” are combined into one category.



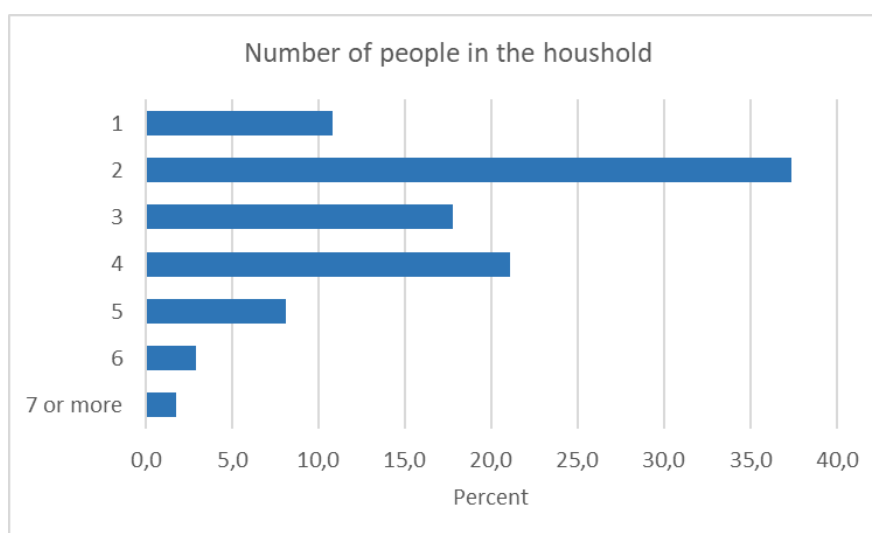
As expected, the share of migrants in the Eastern countries Bulgaria and Romania is the lowest, and in Spain and Italy much higher. The percentage of surveys answered in Romanian outside of Romania is highest in Spain (9%) and Italy (8%) for all Unions in the EUD, documenting migration flows within Europe.

3.5 Marital status and household size

Nearly three quarter of the respondents are married. Two third of those who are never married are younger than 40 years. Around 85% of those, who are widowed are older than 65 years.



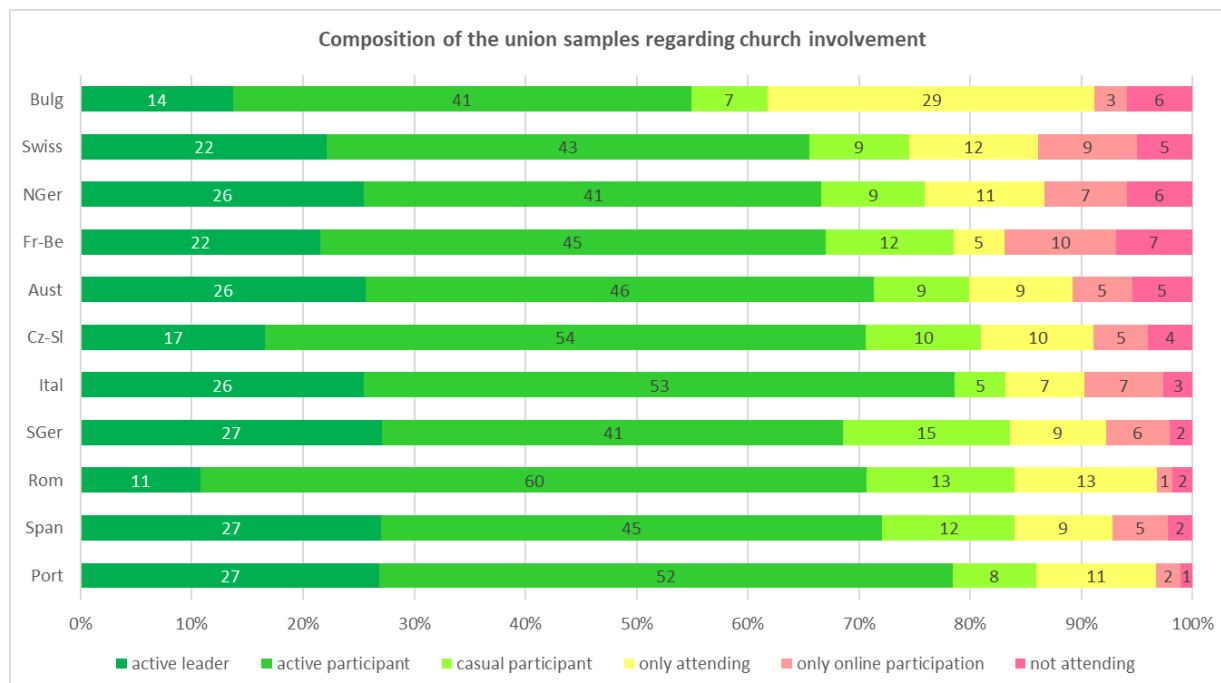
The most common household size in the sample is a two-people-household. Around 37% of the respondents live in a household of two person. 11% live alone, the majority 52% live in households with at least three people.



3.6 Role within the local church

The question on how the participants see their role within their church is discussed in greater detail in section 5.1. Although this is one of many questions regarding the involvement in the local church, it can also be seen as a characteristic of the sample, especially if we look at the samples by unions. There is no doubt, that in most of the churches we find some members with leadership roles, some active

participants, some that just attend and also some that have attended in former times but do not so at the present. The following graph shows that the share of participants with regard to these roles differs considerably between the unions. The sample of Portugal includes with 87% the highest share of those who see themselves as active or at least casual participant (green categories), in Bulgaria this share is 25 percentage points lower.



There are different explanations possible for these differences:

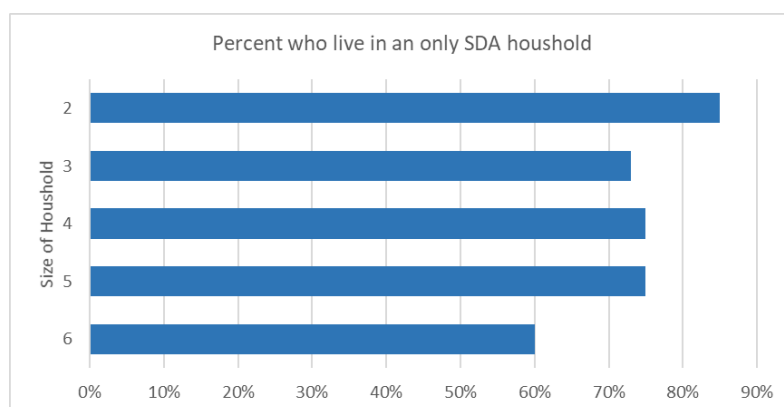
- Some unions have a higher share of church members, which are only attending, while other unions manage to create a higher degree of involvement. This assumes that the data are a representative picture of all church members in the respective union.
- The unions differ in the extent to which less involved members were invited or encouraged to participate in the survey. The differing percentage are a result of differences in the composition of the sample – caused by non-response bias in the local churches.
- The differences are just random variations. Due to the low response rates and the high margin of errors for the union data (on average 7%) only large differences are statistically significant. Regarding the above shown graph, Bulgaria differs significantly from Portugal (Chi-square, $p=0.005$) and even from the Swiss Union ($p=0.001$; lower p due to higher n for Swiss), but the difference between Portugal and Switzerland is not significant ($p=0.11$).

Based on the existing data it cannot be decided, to what extent each of these three possible explanations contributes to the final result. The role within the local church is related to many other variables, and we cannot rule out the possibility that differences in the participation patterns play a relevant role here. Therefore differences between Unions have to be interpreted with care and under consideration of the above described patterns.

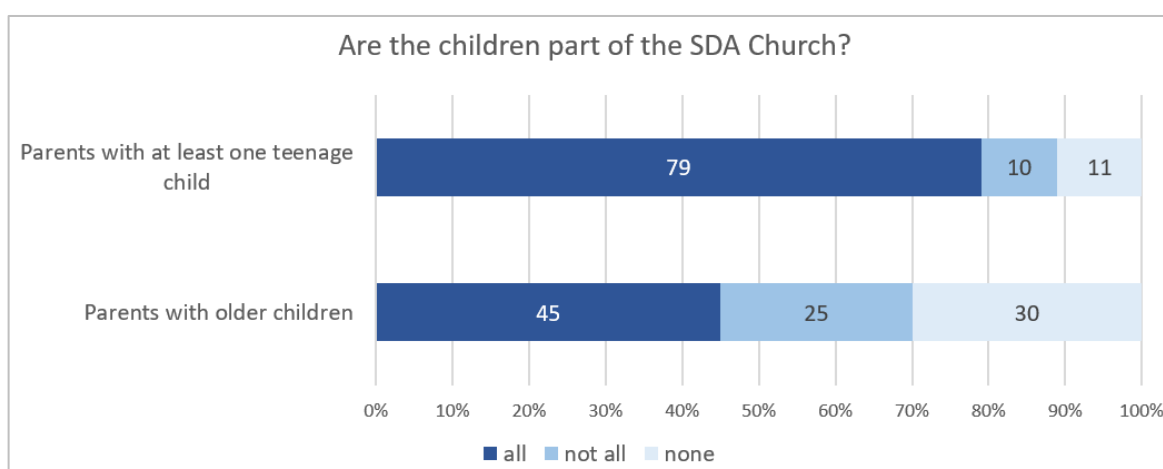
4 Religious Demographics

4.1 Household and children

This section takes a closer look at the composition and history of the households and families of the respondents regarding SDA membership. The graph below shows how many percent of the respondents live in a household where all persons share SDA beliefs (The question here only asked about “observing the Sabbath”.) Respondents who live alone are obviously not included. The data show, that, depending on household size, the share of those in an only-SDA-household varies between 60% and 85%. Overall, around 23% of those from a non-single household have a non-SDA in their household.

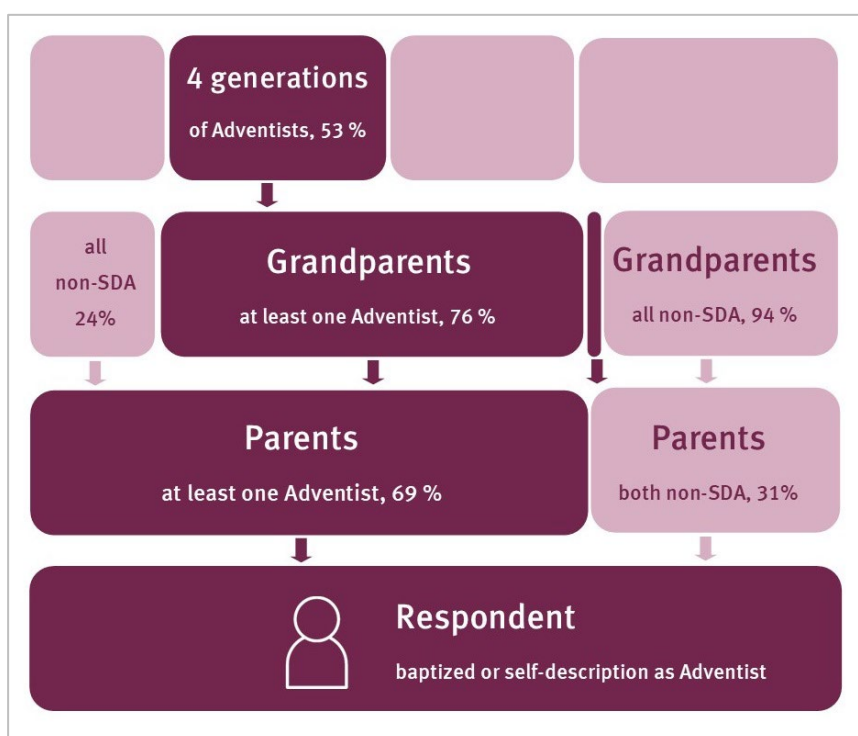


The experience that children of SDA Members leave the church is widespread. The following graph shows the data separately for parents with younger and older children. Among those parents, whose children are all adults, the majority (55%) has at least one child, which is not part of the church. For parents with younger children this share is smaller (21%). This does not surprise, as the exit happens often after the teenage years. A comparison by Unions is not possible at this point, as the numbers of cases per Union are too small in this subsample and cannot provide reliable information.



4.2 History (of the family) with the SDA church

In section 2.6 it was already pointed out, that the quality of data regarding this set of questions has limitations. The answers of participants are not fully consistent. Nevertheless, the following graph gives an overview of the history that the participants have with the SDA-Church in the preceding generations. Even if it is taken into consideration that the separate percentages may be a little bit higher or lower (depending on filtering of inconsistent cases and on whether the analysis is done separately for each generation) the general picture seems reliable.



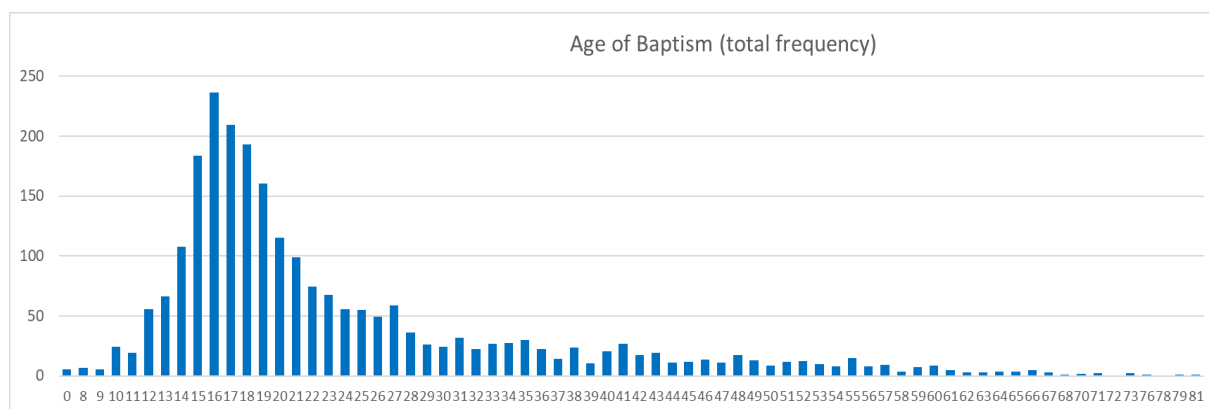
The 53% of those with at least one Adventist grandparent who can look back to an Adventist family tradition of even four generations form around a quarter of all respondents.

According to the data, not all of the 69% who have at least one Adventist parent, grew up with a connection to the church. Only three quarter of this group said that they grew up in the church, the other quarter joined the church during childhood (8%) or later. Nevertheless, these data underline the important role that intergenerational transmission has for the development of religious convictions and denominational belonging.

4.3 Baptism

The age of baptism varies between 0 and 81 years.¹ The median age of baptism is 19 years, the middle 50% (interquartile range) have been baptized between the age of 16 and 27. The data show that the majority of baptism happen at the transition between youth and adulthood. This corresponds with the results from the section before (4.2) that the intergenerational transmission of Adventist beliefs within families is the central pillar for generating membership.

¹ The question asked for the year of being baptized for the first time.

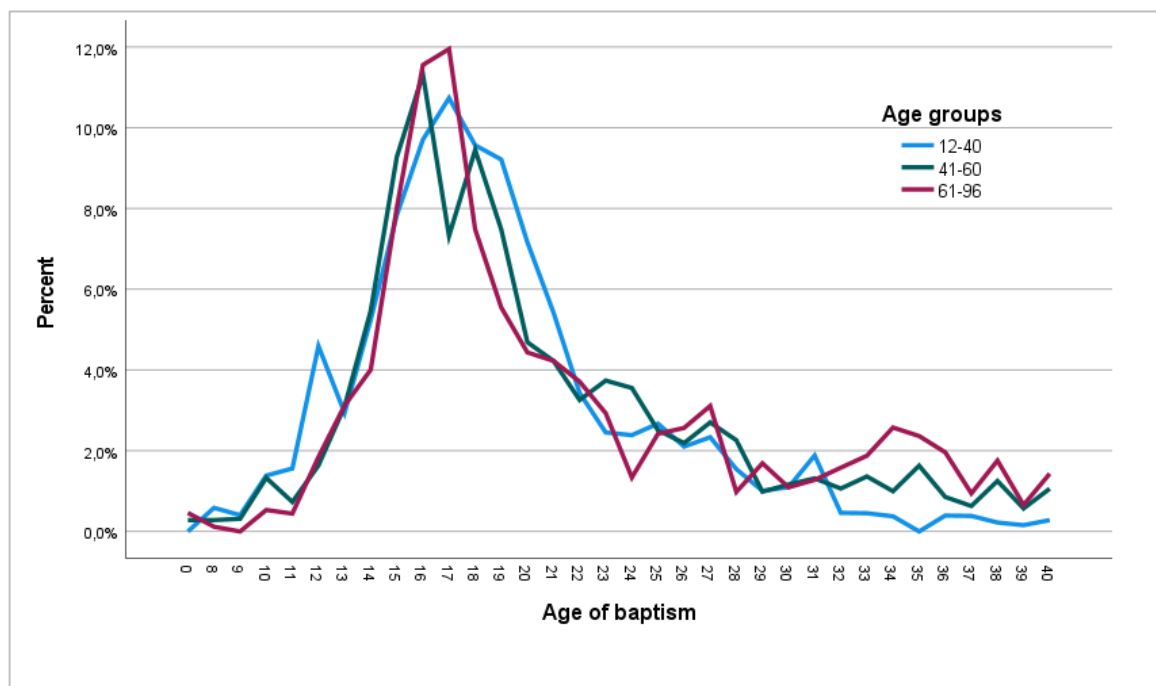


If we compare the age of baptism for different age groups, it becomes apparent that there is a significant relation (ANOVA, $p=0.000$) between age group and age of baptism. The youngest cohort has a lower age of baptism on average and the oldest cohort has the highest age.

Age group	Average age at baptism in years ¹
12-40	19,0
41-60	20,4
61-96	21,4

¹ To keep the data comparable the analysis was reduced to respondents with an age at baptism not higher than 40, as this is the maximal possible age at baptism in the youngest group.

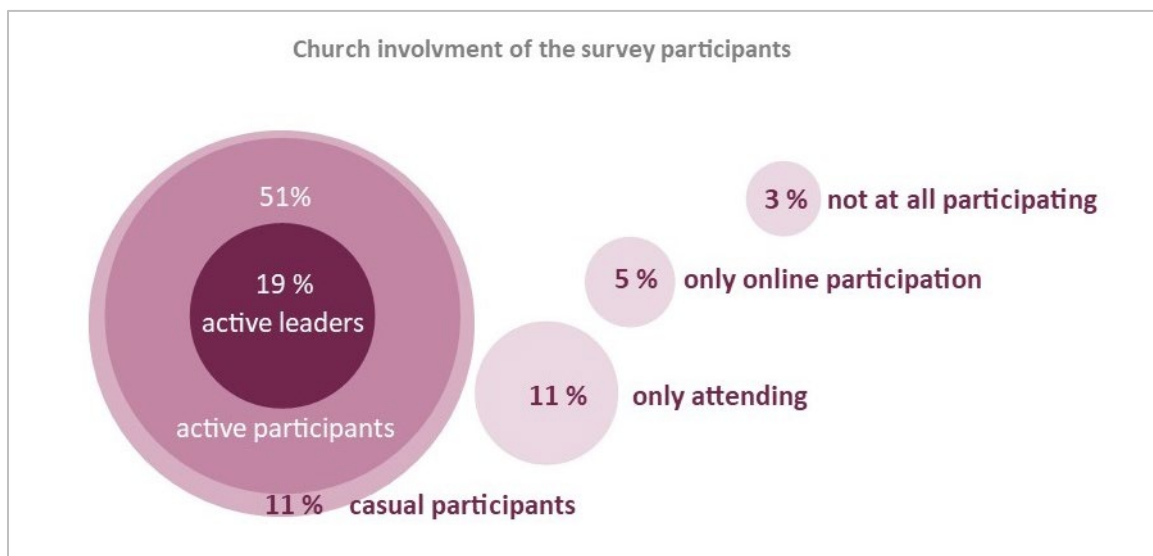
The following graph shows the frequency distribution for age of baptism for all three groups. At the first glance all three lines look very similar. The mean difference is caused by some more cases that had been baptized very young (< 13) in the blue group, and the fact that we find for the oldest age group a higher share of baptism of people in their thirties.



5 Religious Behaviors and Roles

5.1 Church involvement

Respondents were asked about their current involvement in the church.² The following graph shows the results. It has to be kept in mind, that these data represent only those who voluntarily participated in this survey. It is probably not a correct picture of the involvement of the total membership. It is assumed that the data of the survey are to some degree biased towards those with a higher involvement.

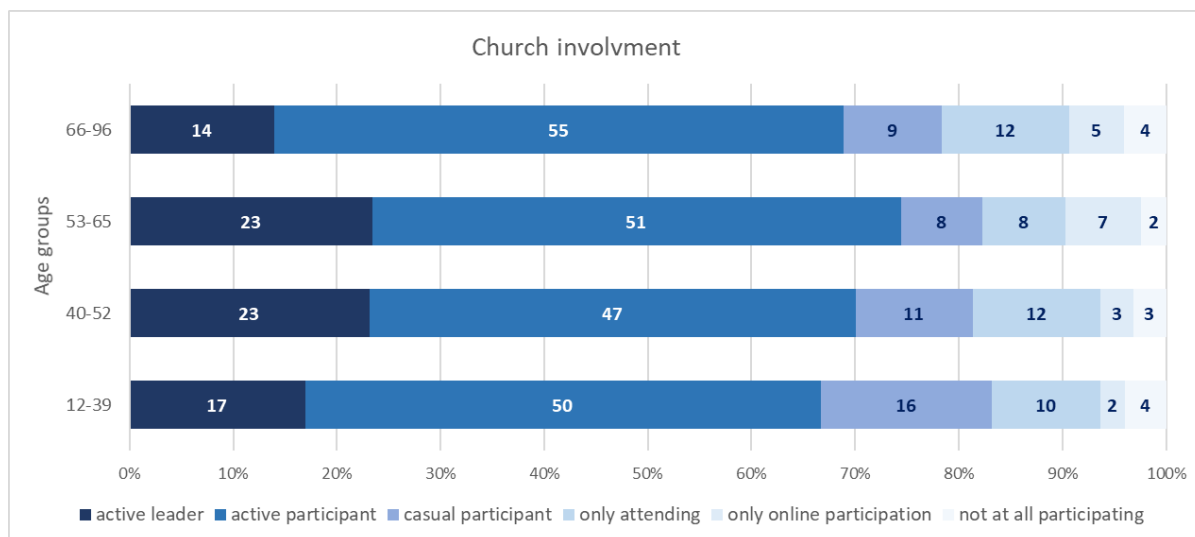


In relation to gender, the biggest difference can be found in the composition of the active leaders. Among the male respondents 27% see themselves as active leaders, whereas among the females only half of this share (14 %) describe themselves as active leader. To balance this out, the percentages of those who belong to all the other involvement categories are a few percentage points higher among females compared to men.

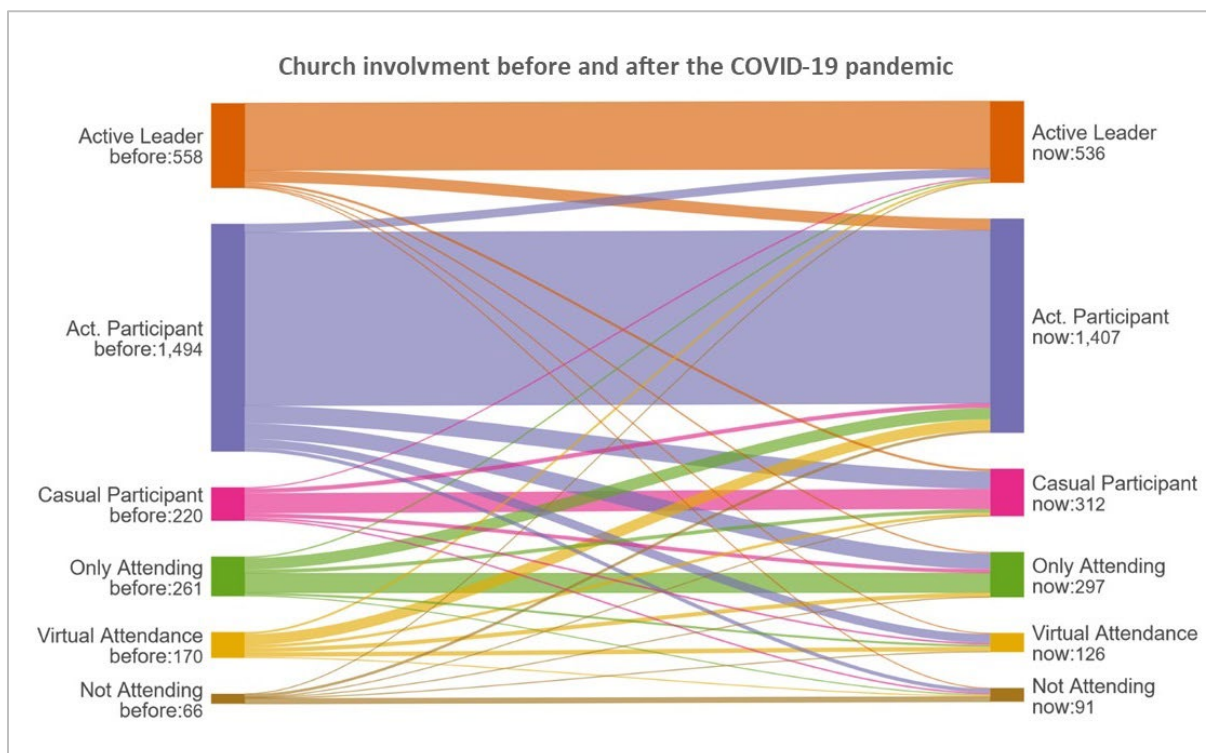
The following graph compares the age groups regarding their involvement in church. Leadership roles can be found mainly among members between 40 and 65 years. A more distant relation with the church (category “attending only”) is more common in the youngest age group.

² The full text of the answering options is too long to be shown in the graphs. The six available options were:

- 1) I consider myself an active leader in my church.
- 2) I consider myself an active participant.
- 3) I attend church activities and services, but rarely participate or interact with church members.
- 4) I consider myself a casual participant.
- 5) I attend church through recorded or live-streamed audio or video, but otherwise do not interact with the church.
- 6) I do not attend church or participate at all in church activities.



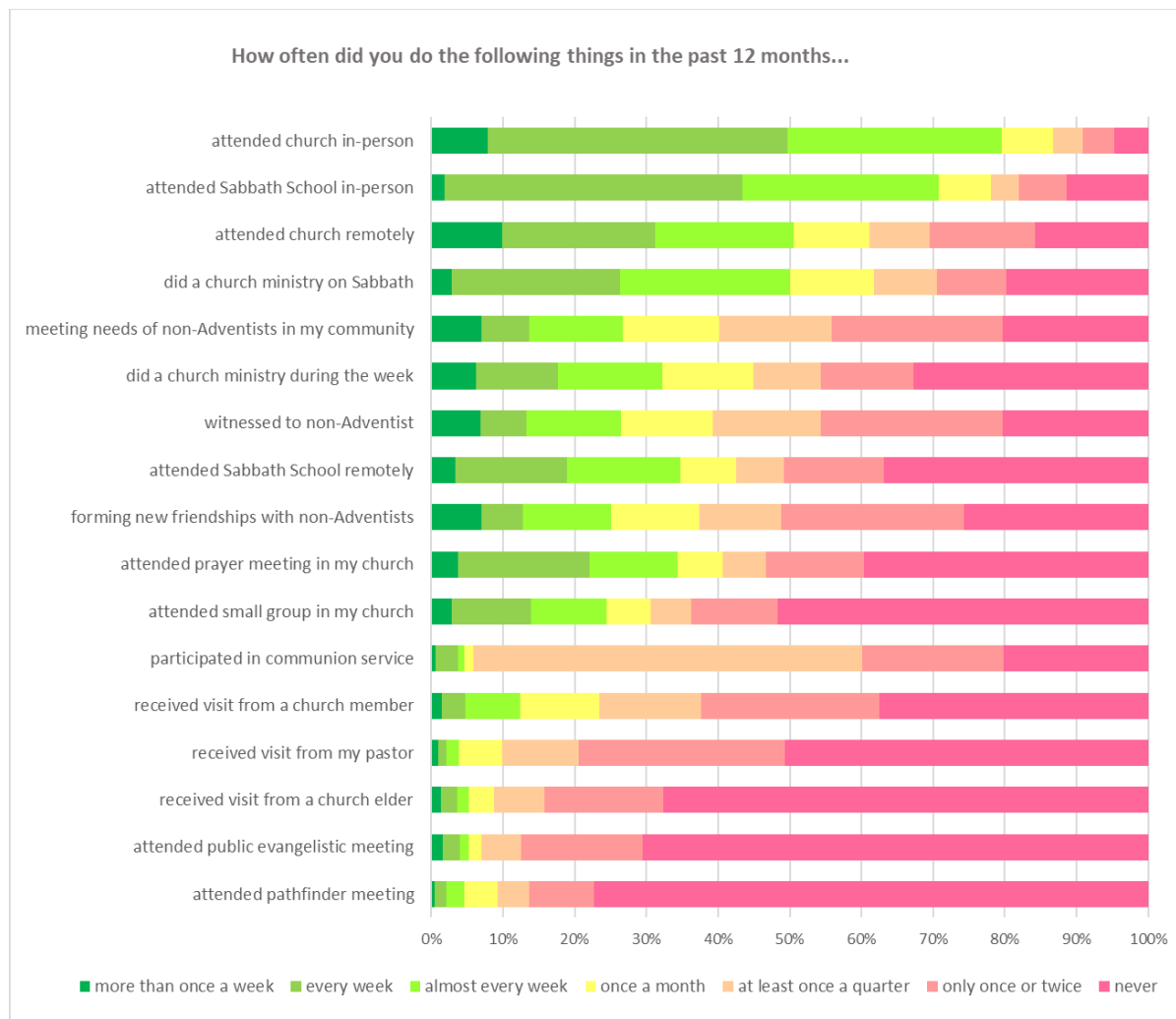
The data collection for this survey took place at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic had changed the way that some people participate with their church. The survey asked one question about the involvement in the church before the pandemic started. The following Sankey diagram shows the self-reported flows of church involvement between before and after the COVID-19 pandemic.



Among the participants of the survey, the number of active members (active leader plus active participants) declined slightly by around 5%. A surprising result is, that the number of those who said that they “attend church through recorded or live-streamed audio or video, but otherwise do not interact with the church” (virtual attendance) was higher before the pandemic than at the time of data collection at the end of the pandemic.

5.2 Engagement in religious activities with others

Respondents had been asked about their engagement in religious activities with others using a list of 17 items. The following graph shows the results, sorted by average frequency. The most frequent done activities are on the top, the least frequent at the bottom of the chart.

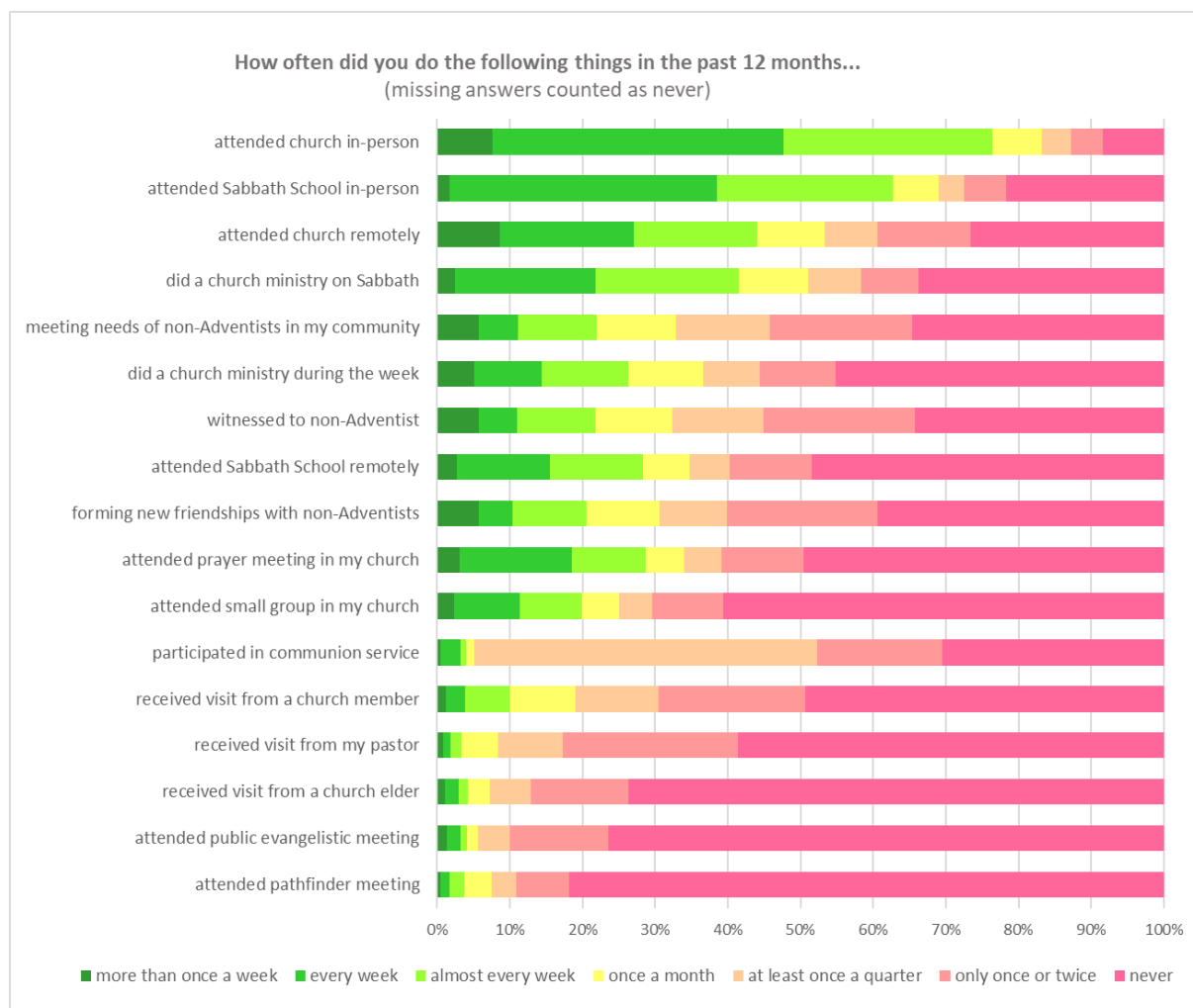


The results are not easy to interpret. Some activities are mentioned twice, once as an in-person attendance and a second time as online attendance. How often the one or the other was available depends highly on the local circumstances during the pandemic. Other activities are not offered in every church (pathfinder, public evangelistic meeting...). Here it is not clear whether the individual even had the chance to attend.

Another difficulty is, that in this item block many items were not answered. Only two third of the respondents answered all 17 items. The other third answered only a part of this items and left in sum around 7850 items unanswered. This raises the question what an unanswered item in this context means. It could mean that this activity was not done by the respondent or that it had not been offered or that the question does not apply. To read it just as withholding information is not very plausible if items before and after had been answered.

Based on these considerations a second analysis was done, in which all non-answered items are counted as “never”. This is based on the assumption that respondents would answer at least all the item with activities they clearly remember having done. The following graph shows the results. On

average, the percentage for “never” is now 10 percentage points higher. It is hard to say which of the both graphs is closer to the true involvement patterns of the participants. Most probably, the “correct” answer lies somewhere in between.

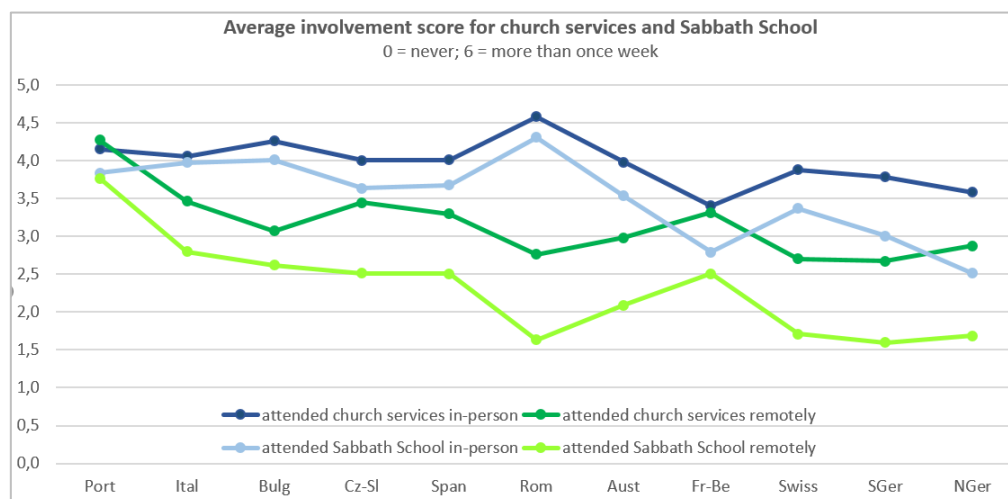


Attendance at church services and Sabbath School

The general pattern is the same in both graphs. The most common activity is attending a church service in-person. Nearly 80% say that they do so almost every week. The second most frequent activity is participation in Sabbath School, although the participation here in general is lower than attending church services. Around 50% of all respondents report a lower frequency for attending Sabbath School than for attending church service.

The following graph shows the average involvement scores separately for each union for in-person and remote participation at church services and Sabbath School.³ The blue lines represent participation in-person and at it becomes visible, that it is in all Unions higher for church services than for Sabbath School. The same pattern can be found for remote participation (green lines). The differences between Unions should be seen in the context of the influence of the COVID-pandemic. The possibility to meet in-person or remote varied between regions and times.

³ As these variables have ordinal level the arithmetic mean is here only a rough indicator and not an average that can be interpreted meaningful directly. However the higher the score the higher is the share of respondents who do a certain activity often.



However, the general pattern is the same everywhere: We find higher scores for church services than for Sabbath school. To illustrate the abstract means with some percentages: The 0.5 mean difference we see for church service participation in Austria (dark and light blue line) represent a situation where 80% said they attend at least almost every week a church service in person, but only 67% said the same about Sabbath school. In the North German Union, where the mean difference is 1.1, these percentages are 65% (at least almost every week church service) and 46% (at least almost every week Sabbath school)

Gender differences regarding church involvement

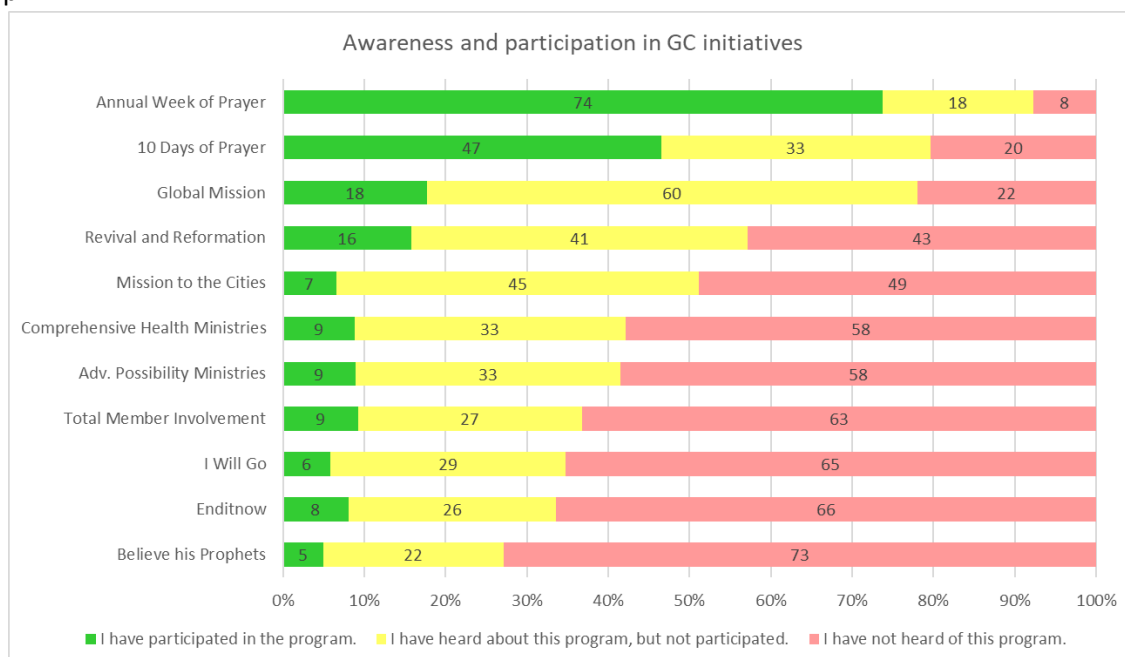
In the former section (5.1) it became apparent that among the male respondents the share of those who see themselves as an active leader of the church is twice as high as among females (27% to 14%). The question about “holding a church office at the local church” was answered by 66% of the men and 59% of the women with “yes”. This is not a big difference, but still in-line with the pattern for active leader roles. In the 17 items about church involvement presented above, we find the biggest gender difference in the item “I helped with a church ministry on Sabbath”. 54% of the females but only 45% of the males said, that they do so at least once a month or more often. This pattern (higher active participation rates for females than males) is visible in many denominations and becomes apparent here also in regards to roles in the local churches. Men dominate in leadership roles, while women contribute more to the regular tasks of keeping a church running.

5.3 Awareness and engagement in GC initiatives

The questionnaire asked the respondents regarding a list of General Conference initiatives, how many of these they have heard about or participated in. The following graph shows the results. Well known is the annual week of prayer, which more than 90% had heard of and around 75% of the respondents participated in. Half of the respondents say they have already participated “10 Days of prayer”.

The remaining nine initiatives do not play an important role for the majority. For most of them less than 10% participated and for six initiatives the majority said they never heard of it. This “never heard of” category is probably underestimated, as 19% of the respondents answered this block incomplete, meaning they answered at least one item, but skipped others. As a result, there are 10-15% missing values per item. It seems more likely that the respondents skipped those items they had never heard

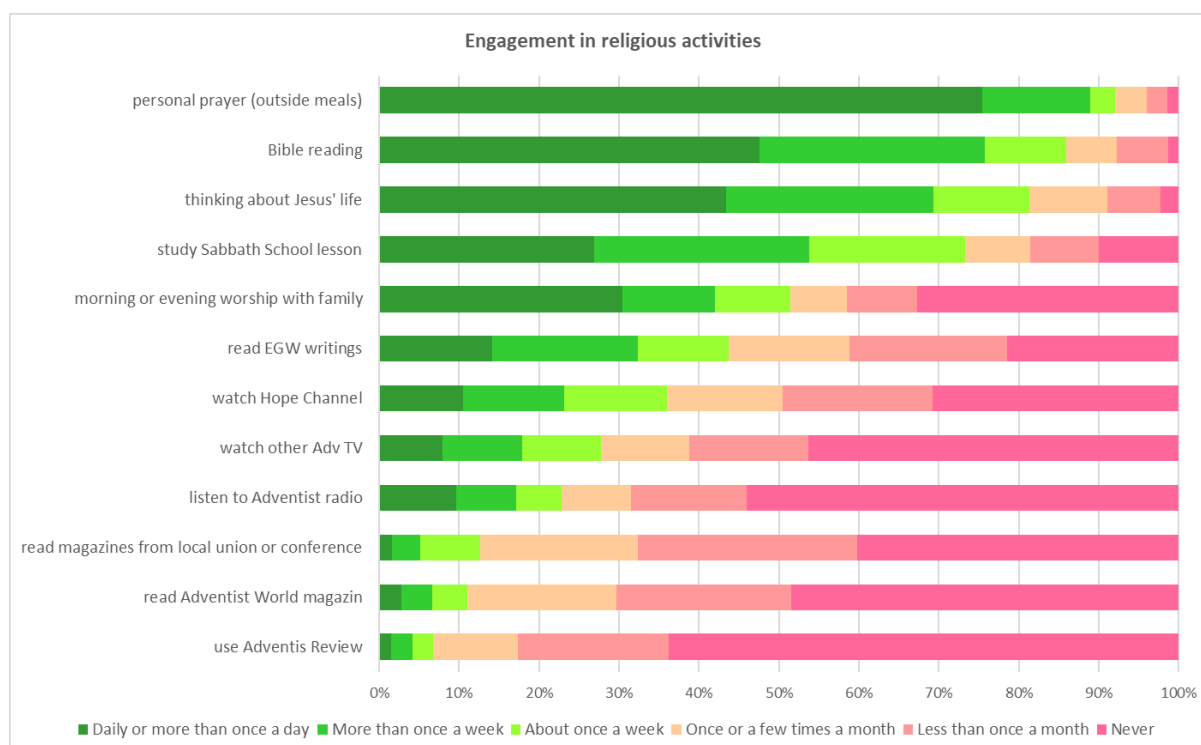
of, than those they have already participated in. Therefore, it could be assumed, that the percentage of those have not heard of these initiatives is around 10 percentage points higher than reported in the graph.



The age groups do not differ much regarding the above presented awareness of and participation in the listed GC initiatives.

5.4 Engagement in individual religious activities

In addition to the “social religious activities” respondents were asked about their more individual religious activities that are usually done in private or within the family context.

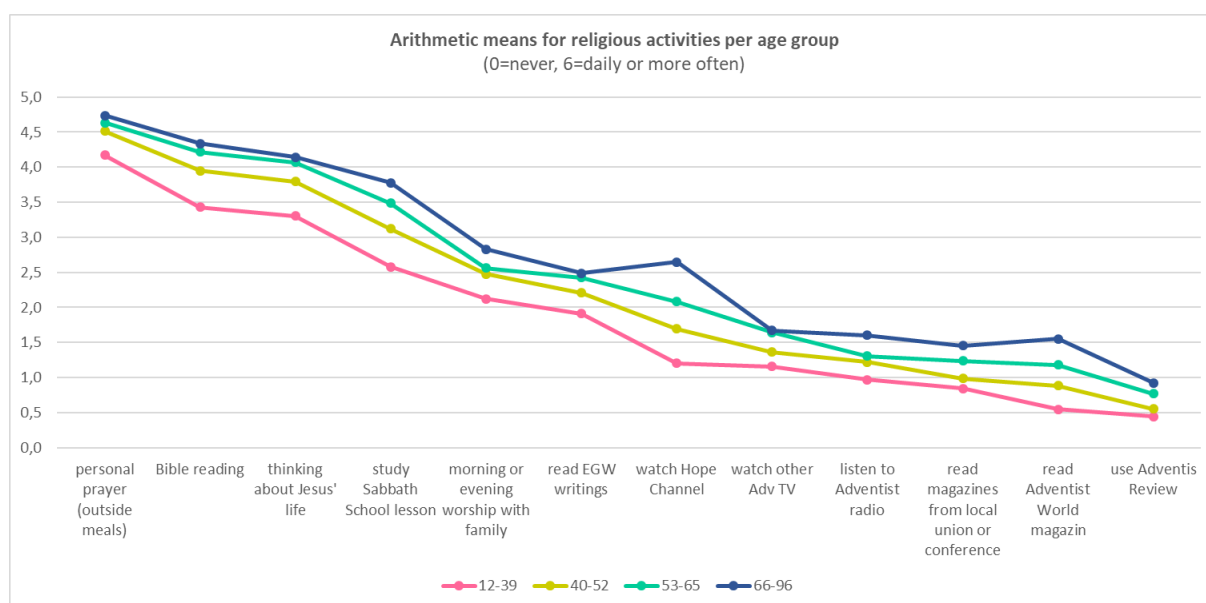


The graph compares the frequencies of all 12 items. Like in the former presented data, we find here a remarkable share of nonresponse. Apart from the first item “Bible reading” which nearly all participants answered, the percentage of missing values per item ranges between 9% and 17%. In total, only 75% answered all 12 items. This means, that in the following chart the category “never” probably presents the lower bound, depending how non-answering should be interpreted, a face-to-face, detailed questioning may have revealed that the percentages for “never” are 10-15 percentage points higher than reported in the graph.

Next to praying, the most frequent activities are Bible reading, thinking about Jesus’ life and studying the Sabbath School lessons. The items partially overlap, e.g. the latter (studying Sabbath School lesson) usually includes Bible reading and often also thinking about Jesus’ life. Furthermore, an interpretation should take into consideration that not all items have the same likelihood to be done very frequently. E.g. if unions or conferences publish local magazines once a month, a reading of these magazines “once a month or a few times a month” seems completely adequate and demonstrates a constant interest in these materials.

Regarding gender, the data do not show relevant differences. Men tend to read more often Adventist magazines, and report on average a higher frequency for having morning or evening worship with family members⁴; however the differences in the “never” category are in all these cases less than 10 percentage points.

The following graph shows the arithmetic means for all the items per age group.⁵



Two general patterns are clearly visible. First: The oldest age group (> 65) has the highest means for all items, and the youngest age group has the lowest values. The two other age groups lie perfectly in between. On average, older church members do these activities more frequently than younger ones.

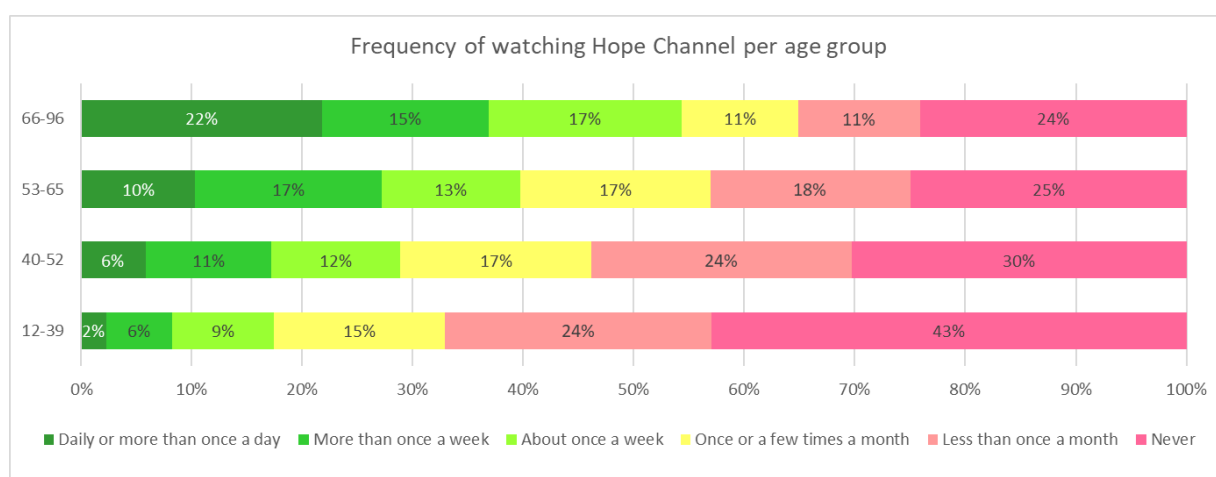
⁴ The share of females living in a one-person household is significantly higher compared to males (13% compared to 8%), but the pattern of more frequent family worship among men remains visible even if the analysis is reduced to cases who live in a household with 2 or more persons.

⁵ The items have ordinal level, which means the arithmetic means cannot be directly be interpreted as a frequency. Nevertheless, they serve as a heuristic measurement to give an idea whether a certain item got more answers at the one or the other end of the range from never to daily.

Two examples may illustrate what these differences in percentages mean. For reading E. G. White writings, (mean difference between youngest and oldest group around 0.6) we have 20% in the oldest group who say that they never do this, while in the youngest group this share is around 30%. Studying the Sabbath School lesson (mean difference 1.2) is done by 85% of the oldest group once a week or more often, in the youngest group the share is 55%.

The second general pattern that becomes visible is the fact that the prioritization between these activities seems to be the same in all age groups. The lines are quite parallel. The age groups might differ concerning how often certain things are done, but they have reveal a similar ranking order.

The biggest difference between the age groups can be found in regards to watching Hope Channel. The following graph shows the results. The share of those who never watch Hope Channel is nearly twice as high in the age group below 40 as in the age group 66+ (43% to 24%). More than half of the oldest group watch Hope Channel at least once a week (including everything higher than once week), in the age group below 40 this is only a third of this share (17%).



6 Religious Attitudes and Experiences

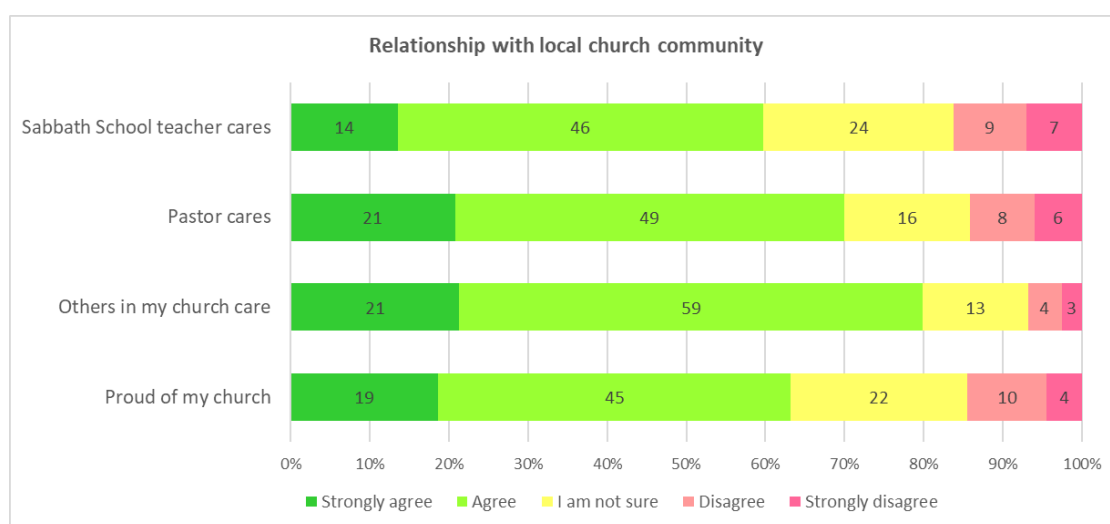
6.1 Experience of the local church and its members

Relationship with the local church community

Some questions asked for the relationship that respondents have with their local church. In the following, we focus on the first four items in this list:

- My Sabbath School teachers or leaders care about me. (A1.01)
- My pastor cares about me. (A1.02)
- Other people in my church care about me. (A1.03)
- I feel proud of my local church and its role and reputation in my community. (A1.04)

The frequency distributions of these four questions do not differ very much. For each item between 60% and 80% agree in some way (agree or strongly agree) with the given statements.



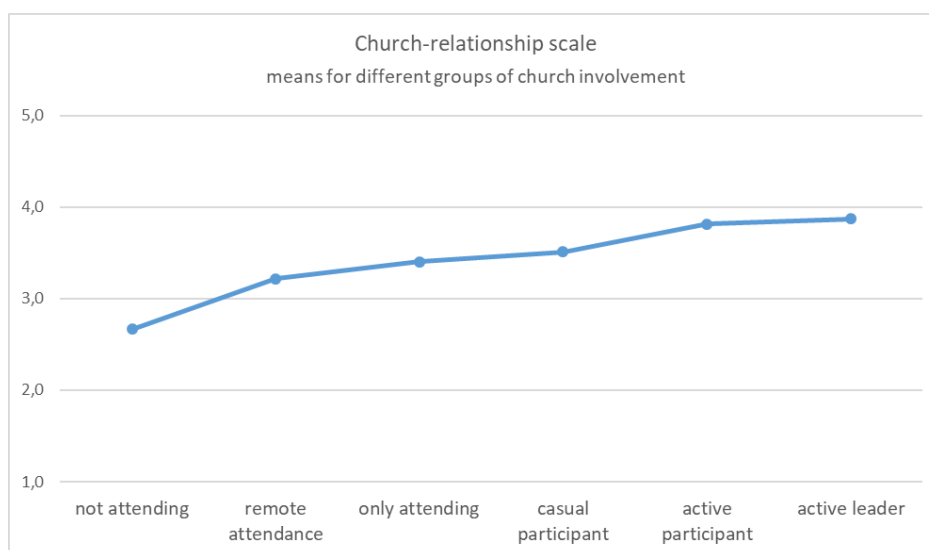
For further analysis, the four items were combined to a church-relationship scale.⁶ This scale is the arithmetic mean of these four items. Strongly disagree was coded with 1, strongly agree with 5; therefore a high value on this scale indicates that the respondent has the impression that the church cares about him/her and feels some proud of the own church.

The total average is 3.7, a value that would fall between “I am not sure” and “agree”. There is no difference between males and females or between respondents from small and big churches. The Unions do not differ much on this scale. The means range from 3.5 (Fr-Be, Ital, SGer) to 3.8 (Rom, Port). Although the comparison of the age groups shows a clear and statistically significant pattern, the differences are very small. The older the age group, the higher is the mean on this scale. The youngest group (12-39) has a mean of 3.6, the oldest group (66-96) has a mean of 3.79. The two groups between fit into this pattern (3.65 and 3.67).

Probably not surprising, there is a correlation between church involvement and the church-relationship scale that is shown in the following graph. Those who are more involved feel more cared about.

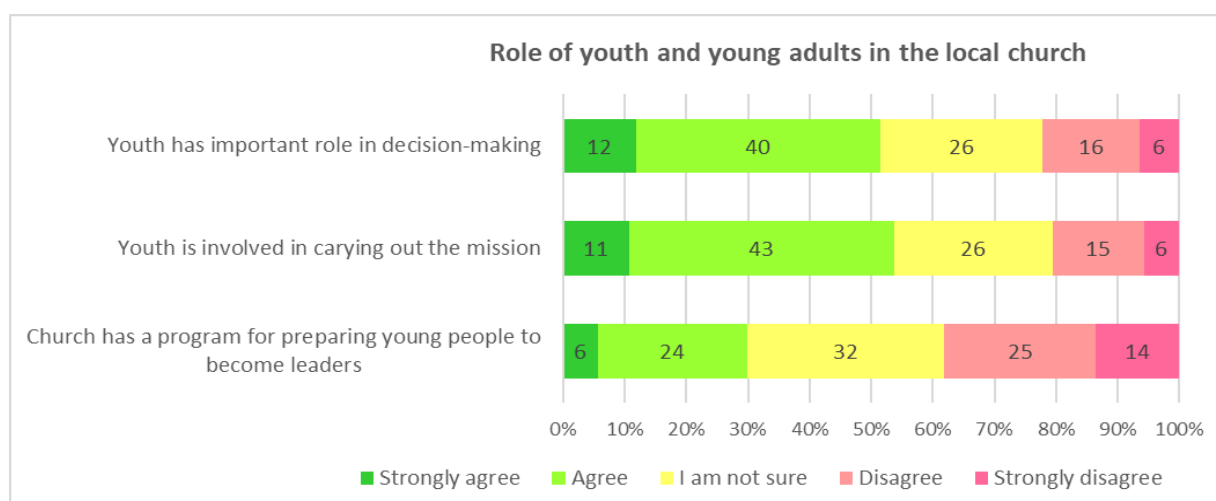
⁶ This scale has an acceptable reliability (Chronbach alpha = 0.76). This value could not be improved by deleting any of the four items from the list.

From this correlation (Spearman's rho 0,27) it is not possible to conclude the direction of a potential effect here. Most likely this is a bi-directional relationship.



Perceived youth orientation of the local church

Some questions asked about the way in which youth and young adults are integrated or supported in the local church. Around half of the respondents agreed that youth and young adults are involved in their church.

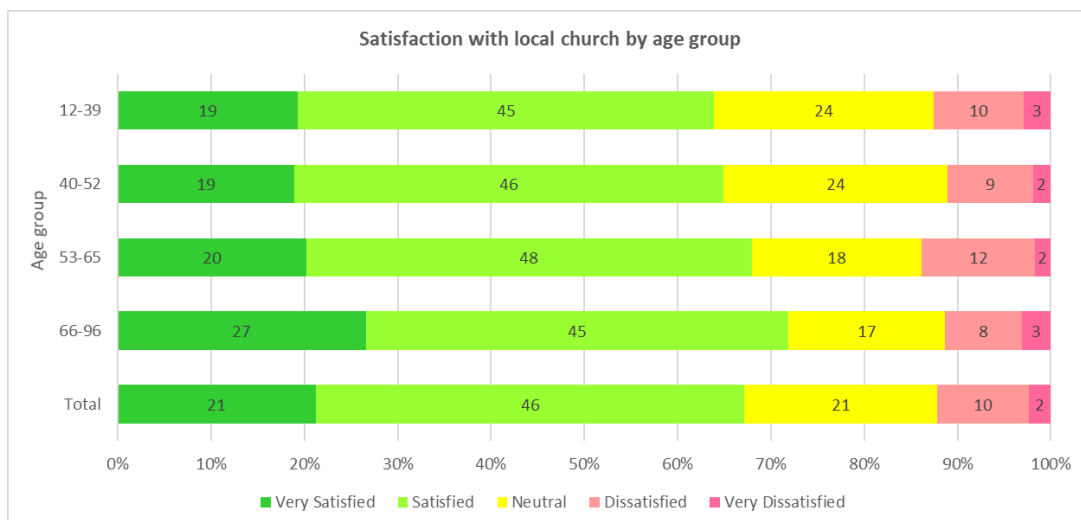


The disagreement with these statements is a bit higher in the youngest age group than in the oldest. Of those younger than 40 years 26% deny that the youth has an important role in decision making in their church, among those older than 65 this share is 19%.

Not surprising is the finding that the youth and young adults seem to be more involved in bigger churches. In churches that are attended on a typical Sabbath by less than 25 people, 42% agree that youth and young adults are involved in decision-making. This share is increasing with church size, for churches with an attendance above 100 people it is 55%. This pattern can also be observed if the unions are analyzed separately. It might partially be caused by the fact that in some of the small churches there is not any youth that could be involved.

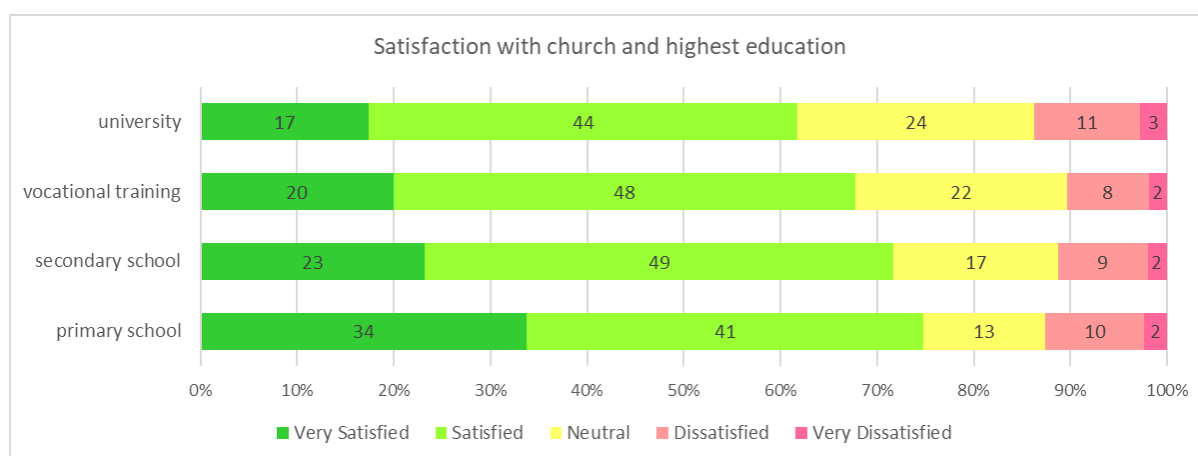
Satisfaction with the local church

One question asked for the overall satisfactions with the local church (A5). In total, two thirds of the participants in this survey said that they are (very) satisfied with their church. As the graph below shows, there is a slight difference between the age groups. Satisfaction is highest in the oldest group (72%) and lowest in the youngest group (64%).

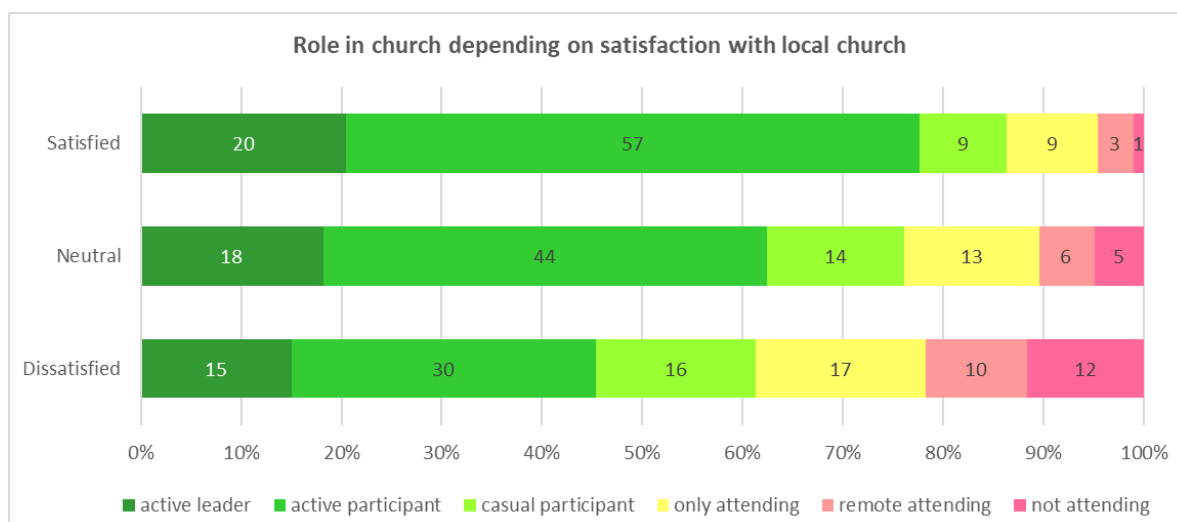


There is no gender difference in the question of satisfaction with the local church. The size of the church has only little impact regarding this point. The share of satisfied members is the same in all church-size categories. The dissatisfied (dissatisfied plus very dissatisfied) have a slightly higher share in churches with less than 25 attendees (16%) compared to churches with more than 100 attendees (9%). But this is balanced out in the group of those who describe themselves as neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

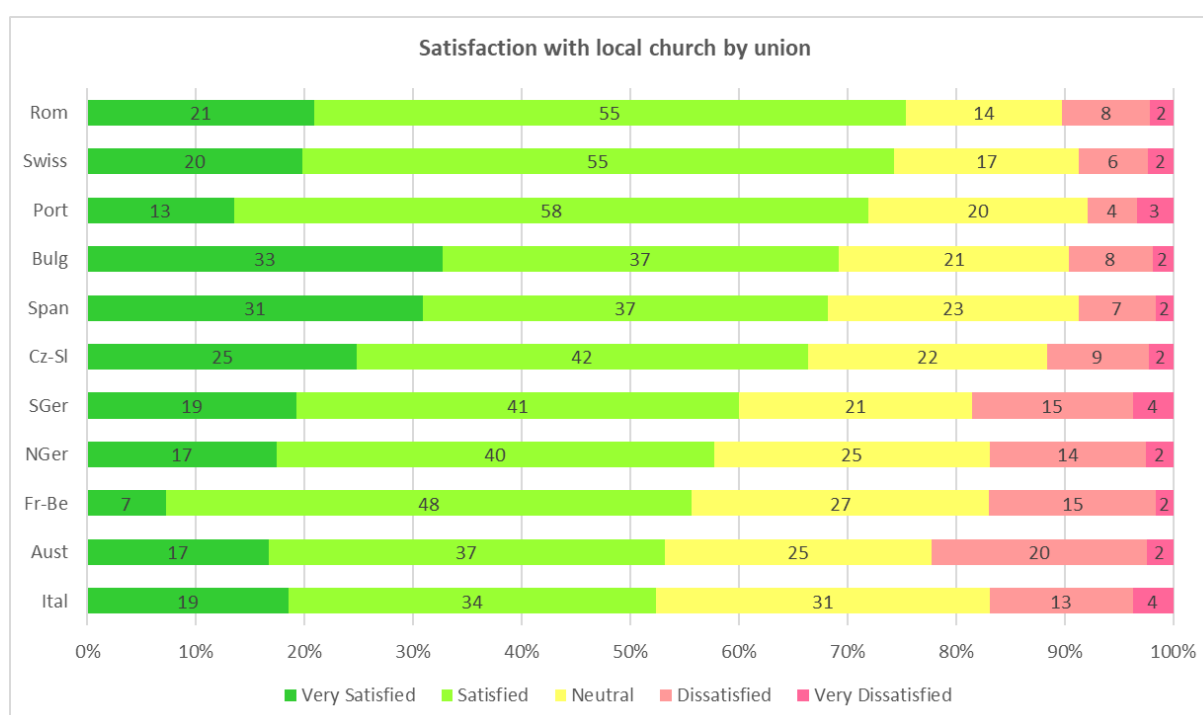
The highest educational degree correlates more clearly with satisfaction. The following table shows the results, separately for the four educational groups. Taking both satisfied categories together, we have among those with the lowest educational degree 75% satisfied respondents, among those with a university degree this share is 61%. The share of dissatisfied participants is nearly the same in all groups.



The data show a clear relation between satisfaction and the role within the church. The following graph shows the role of the respondents depending on satisfaction level.⁷ The probably not surprising result is that those who are satisfied are more actively involved in the church. Among the dissatisfied only 45% are active members or leaders, in the group of the satisfied this share is 77%. The difference is mainly caused in the category “active participants”. It is worth noting that even among the dissatisfied, 15% are leaders. If the percentages are calculated the other way round we can say that 10% of the active leaders are dissatisfied and another 19% of the leaders are neutral.



Comparing the separate unions (see graph below) the share of satisfied respondents varies between 53% and 76%. Even taking into consideration that uncertainty resulting from the high margins of error at the union level, the differences cannot be primarily attributed to the differences in the sample composition regarding active role in the church (see section 3.6).

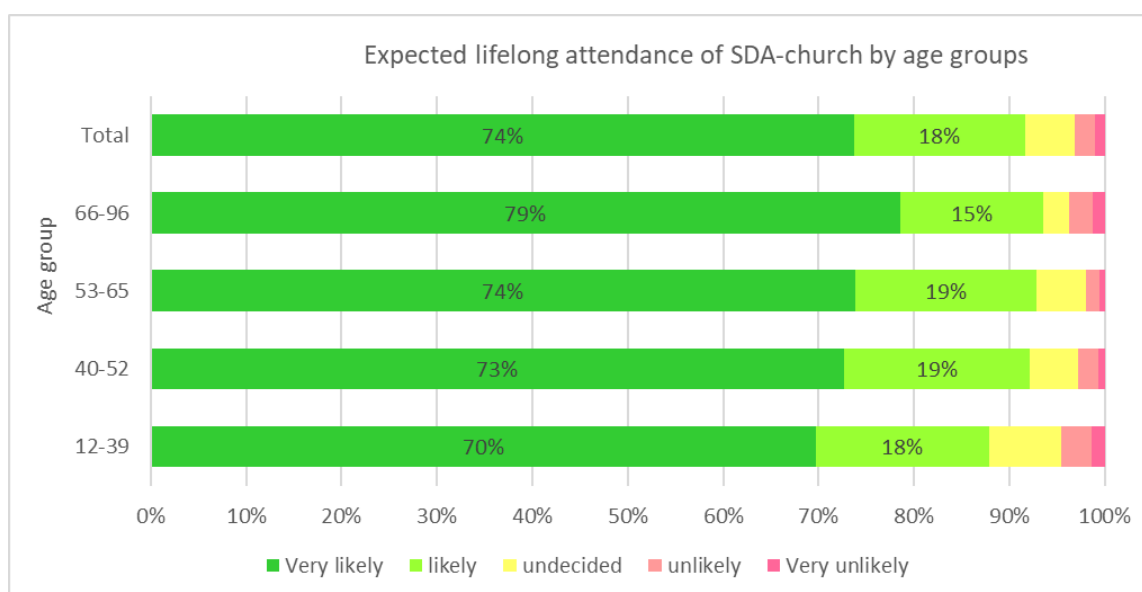


⁷ Satisfied includes very satisfied as well and dissatisfied includes very dissatisfied.

The two unions at the lower and upper end in the table below (Romania and Italy) have a very similar share of active or casual participants in their sample. Thus further research would be needed to explain these differences. One factor may be cultural differences in terms of voicing discontent.

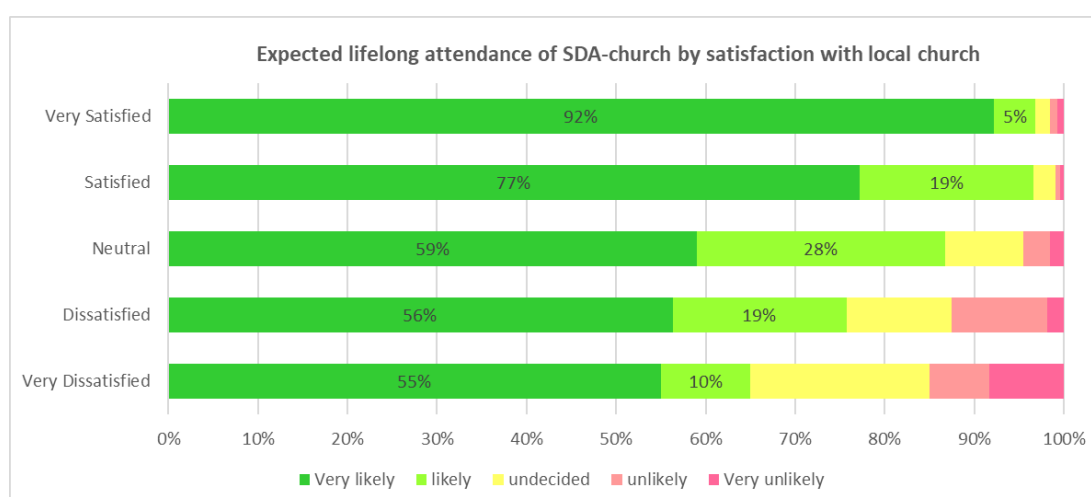
6.2 Expected continuation of being Adventist

Next to the satisfaction with the local church the questionnaire asked the participants how likely it is that they will be attending the Seventh-day Adventist Church for the rest of their life. In total the vast majority of respondents (92%) see this as (very) likely. As the chart below shows, there is a weak relation with age. Among the youngest age group 88% see it as (very) likely, in the oldest age group this share is 94%.



No significant differences are found between males and females and between respondents from different church sizes. In regards to highest educational degree, only very small differences become apparent. Among university graduates around 10% are undecided or see it as unlikely, in the other educational groups this share is around 7%.

A finding that might not surprise is the strong relationship between the satisfaction with the local church and the expectation to remain Adventist in future. Among those, who are very satisfied, over 92% see it as very likely to stay in the church. Among the very dissatisfied, this share is only 55%.



6.3 Spiritual and mental well-being

Spiritual growth and spiritual struggles

The questions in the section about spiritual well-being asked the participants for their experiences in the last 12 months. The items can be divided into two groups. A reliability analysis shows for both subgroups an acceptable Cronbach's alpha (0.86 and 0.74). In the following the subgroups are titled "spiritual growth" and "spiritual struggles"

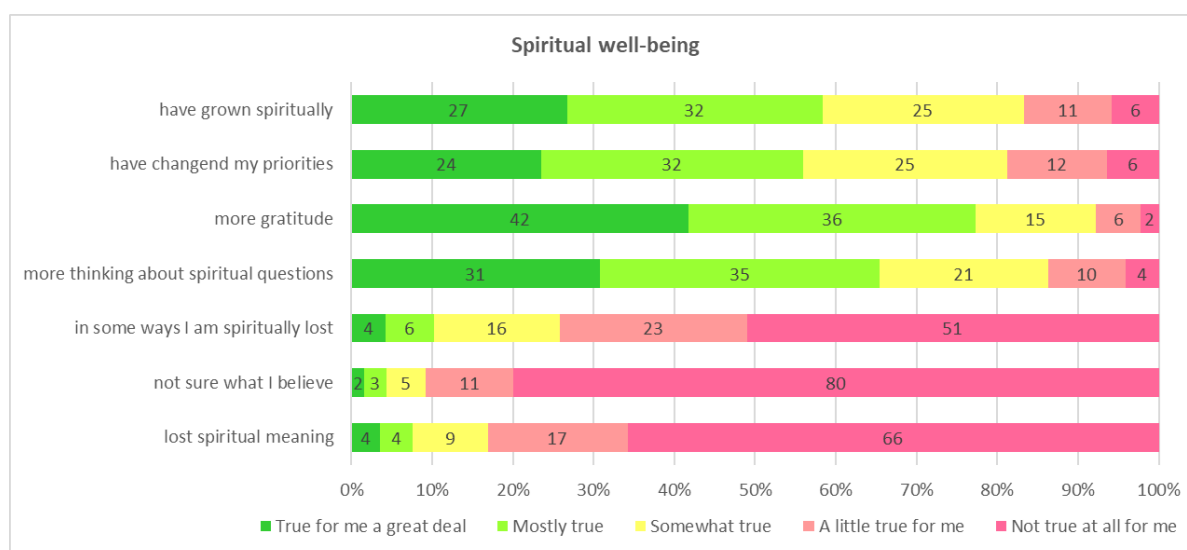
Spiritual growth

- A10.1 I have grown spiritually.
- A10.2 Because of spiritual changes I have been through I have changed my priorities.
- A10.3 I more often have a sense of gratitude.
- A10.4 I spend more time thinking about spiritual questions.

Spiritual struggles

- A10.5 In some ways I think I am spiritually lost.
- A10.6 My faith has been shaken and I am not sure what I believe.
- A10.7 I feel I have lost some important spiritual meaning that I had before.

The comparison of the frequencies for the single items (see graph below) demonstrates the clear divide in the answer patterns. The majority sees the statements about spiritual growths as true for themselves and rejects the items about spiritual struggles.



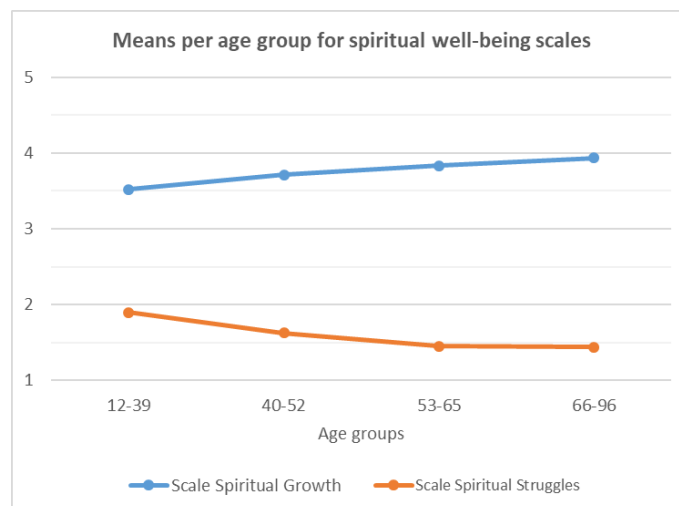
For allowing a deeper analysis, both subgroups were transformed into scales that represent the arithmetic mean⁸. The following table gives the overall descriptive statistics for both scales.

Descriptive Statistics Spiritual well-being scales			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Scale Spiritual Growth	2476	3,75	0,93
Scale Spiritual Struggles	2416	1,60	0,80

⁸ The value 1 stands for "not true at all" and 5 represents "true for me a great deal"

Females have a slightly (but significant) higher mean on the spiritual growth scale (3.8 compared to 3.7) compared to males, but there is no difference regarding the spiritual struggles.

For both scales we find significant mean differences (ANOVA, $p=0.000$) between the age groups. As the graph below shows, younger respondents report more spiritual struggles and older respondents more spiritual growth.



The mean score for spiritual growth is lower for respondents with higher education. It falls almost linear from 4.1 (only primary school) to 3.6 (university degree). No clear relation with education is visible regarding the scale about spiritual struggles.

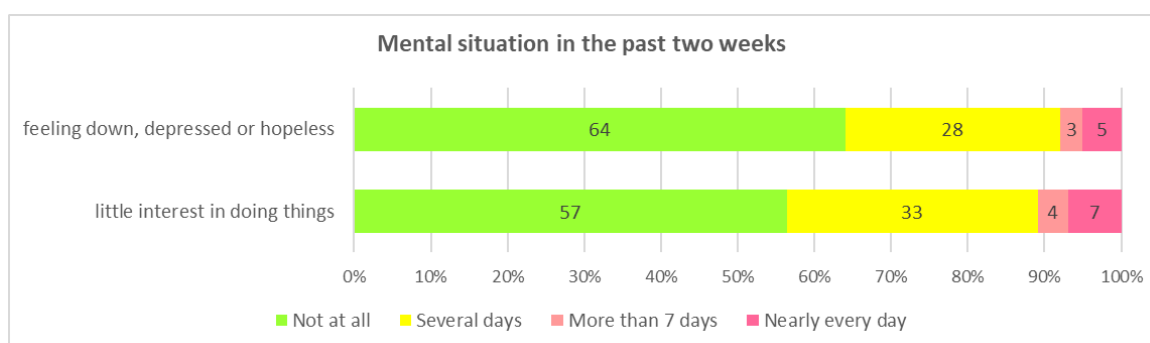
The means on the scale related to spiritual struggles correlate clearly with the church involvement. Those who do not attend church have a mean of 2.1 on this scale, the casual participants reach 1.9 and the active leaders 1.4. The stronger the experienced struggles, the lower is the church involvement. The differences on the spiritual growth scale are smaller and do not follow a clear pattern.

Mental well-being

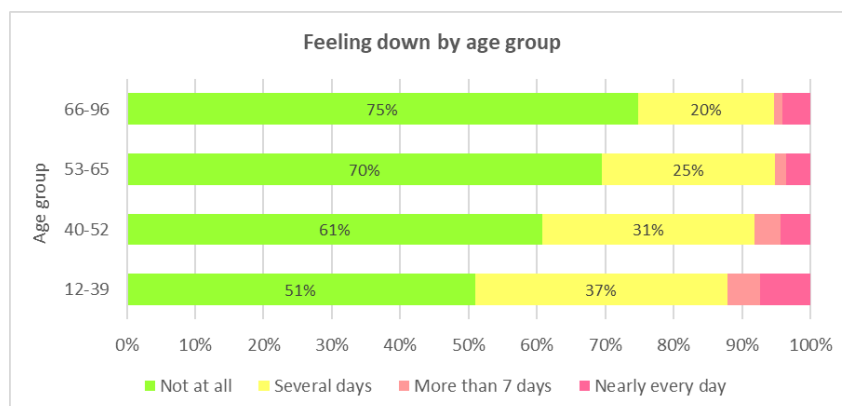
Respondents were asked, how often they “had been bothered by any of the following problems” in the past two weeks.

- A11.1 Little interest or pleasure in doing things
- A11.2 Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless

The following graph shows the distribution of the frequencies. Around 60% report that they did not experience any of these at all, the remaining respondents vary in the number of days they felt like this.



While in general increasing age is often associated with a higher risk of depression⁹, the findings in this survey show for both variables a reverse pattern. The following graph gives the results for the item A11.2.



A possible explanation could be, that this data set provides only self-reported data that are not based on a valid diagnostic tool. Probably the awareness of such feelings and the willingness to address them as such is higher in the younger generation than in the older.

For both items, the share of respondents who says that they have felt like this several days or more often in the past two weeks is higher among women than among men. For “feeling down” the numbers are 41% as compared to 30%, for “little interest in doing things” it is 46% as compared to 40%.

Suicidal thoughts or attempts

Five percent of the respondents said that they had suicidal thoughts during the past 12 months. Eleven respondents (0.4%) stated that they attempted suicide within the last year. For the interpretation of both it is important to keep the limited time period in mind. The share of Adventists who had to deal with the one or the other in the past decade is probably much higher.¹⁰

The suicidal thoughts are remarkably overrepresented in the youngest age group. The respondents under 40 build around 23% of all respondents, but 43% of all who said having had suicidal thoughts in the last year belong to this group. These are 10% of this age group. Even within this group suicidal thoughts are reported more among younger respondents. Among those under 30 years the share who answered this item with “yes” is 14%. This share declines with each older age group and is only 2% among those older than 65 years.

The difference between males and females is very small and not significant. Looking at the Unions separately shows, that the share of reported suicidal thoughts is higher in southern Europe (Spain 9%; Italy 8%).

A more detailed look at the 11 cases who answered that they had attempted suicide confirms the above described pattern. Half of them are younger than 25 years, 9 of the 11 are younger than 35 years, no one is older than 60. They are equally males and females. Regarding the local context, the above mentioned pattern becomes visible here as well. The 11 cases come from 6 different Unions, only two Unions have more than one case, this is the Spain with four and Italy with three.

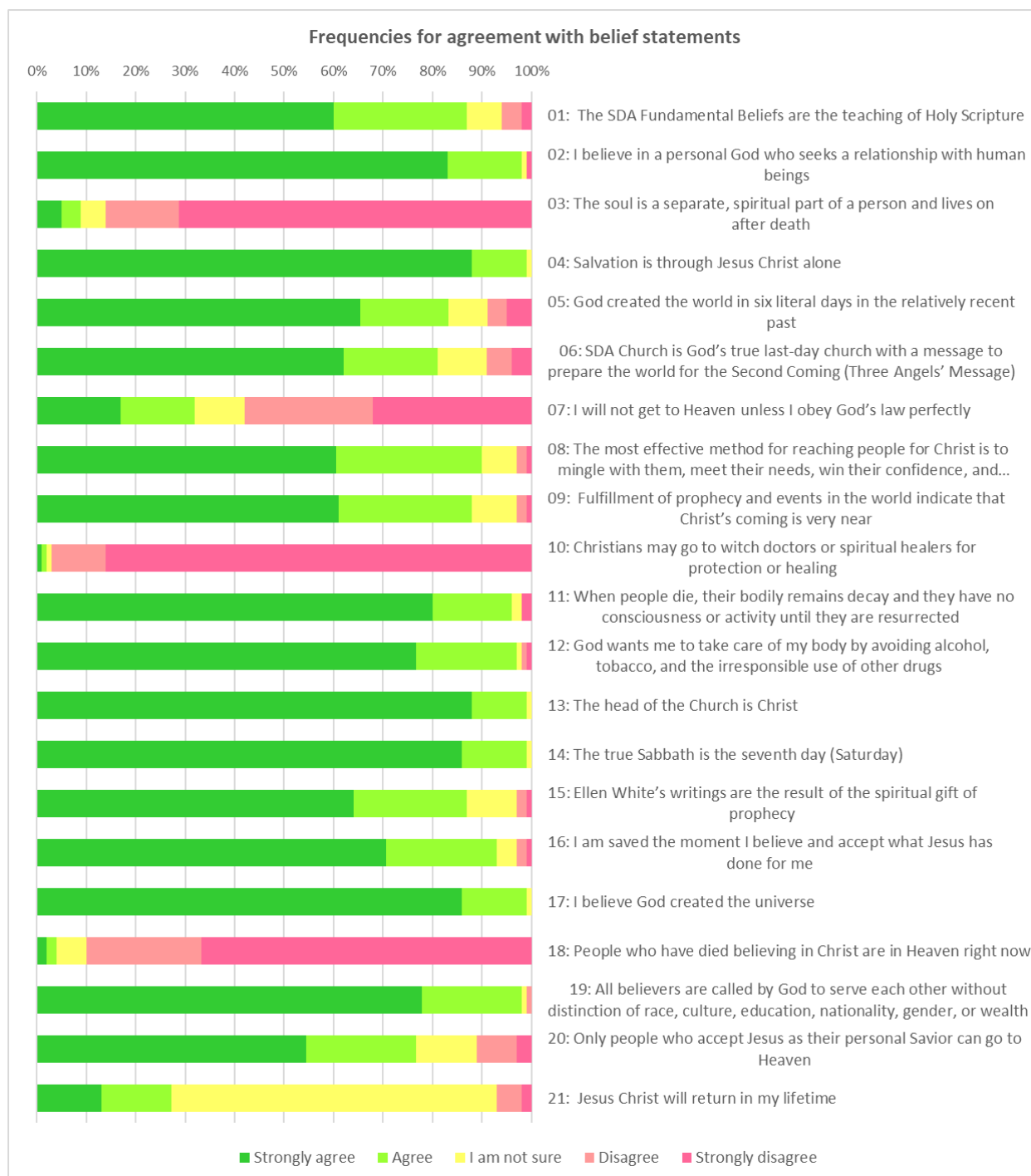
⁹ E.g. Stordal E, Mykletun A, Dahl AA. (2003) The association between age and depression in the general population: a multivariate examination. *Acta Psychiatr Scand.* Feb;107(2):132-41.

¹⁰ And obviously a survey like this cannot cover those who committed suicide.

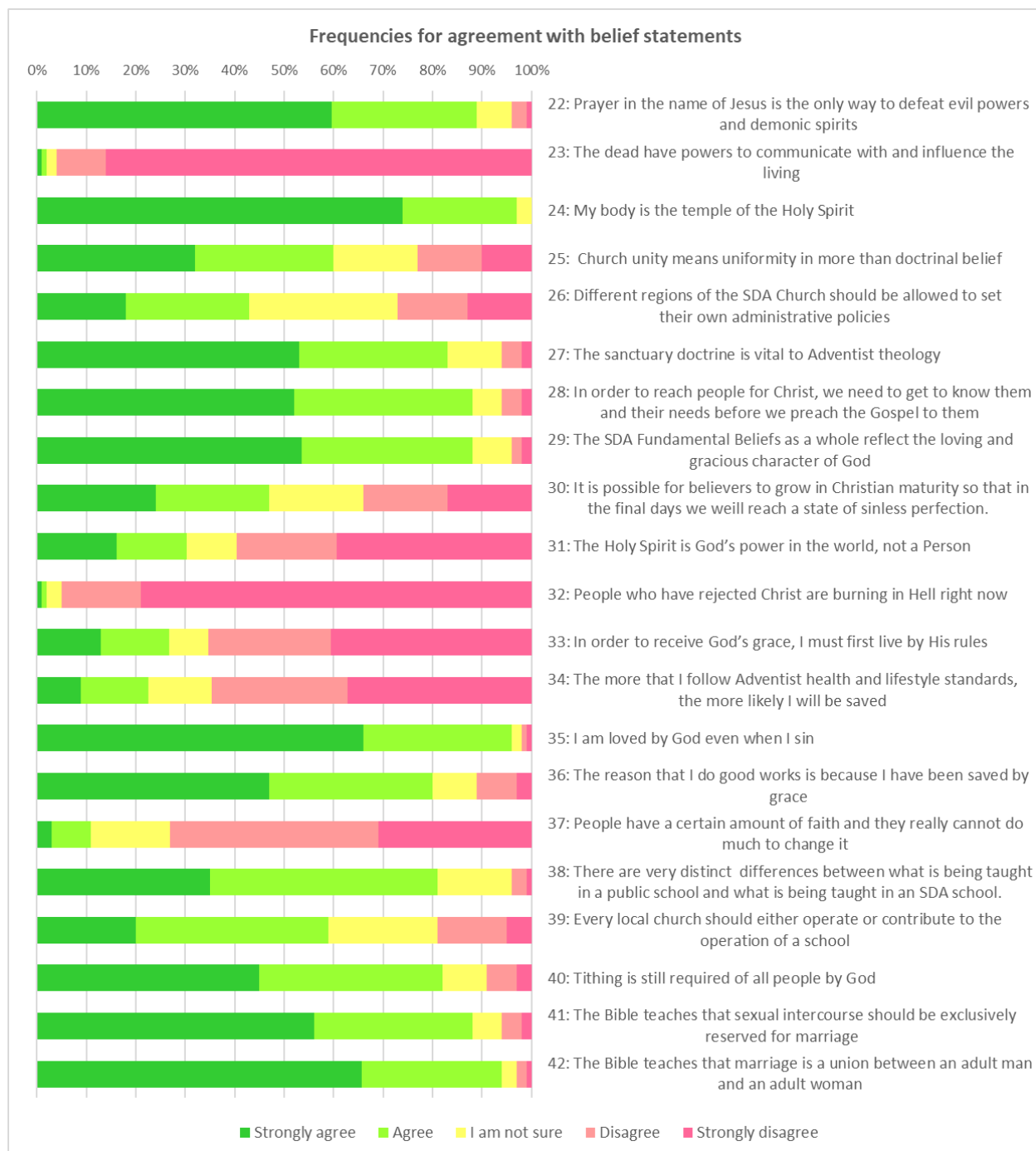
7 Beliefs

7.1 Overview of agreement with Adventist beliefs

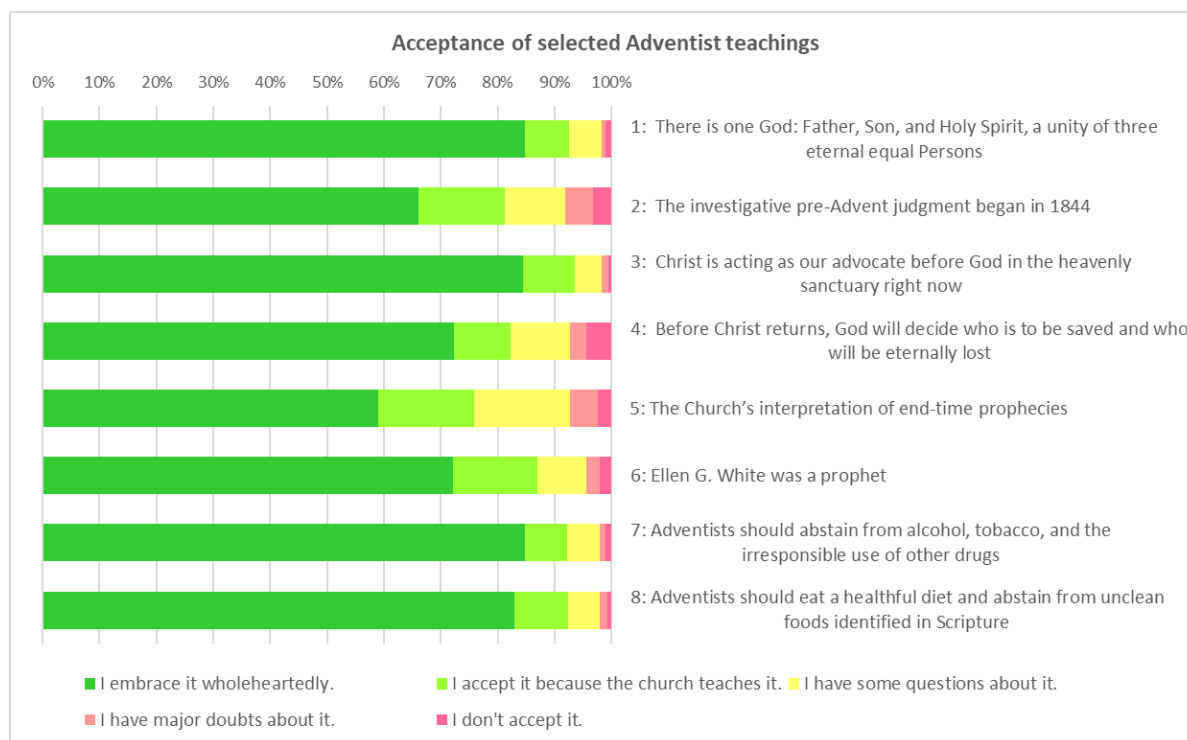
The main part of this section are 42 statements related to Adventist beliefs. Most items deal with certain aspects of Adventist doctrine; while some are related to mission strategies or church policies. For each item, the respondents could indicate to which extent they agree or disagree with this statement. The following two tables give a first overview of the distribution.



As the graphs shows, some items were asked in reverse direction, so that a disagreement with the item demonstrates conformity with the Adventist doctrine (e.g. 03: a soul continuing to live after death, 10: going to witch doctors or 23: the dead communicate with the living).



Next to these 42 items was a separate block of questions¹¹ in this section of the survey that asked specifically to what extent the respondents accept individual teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. An overview of the answers is presented in the following graph.



As can be seen, each item got at least 60% wholeheartedly acceptance. The point that raises the most questions is the Church's interpretations of end-time prophecies. The following section will look at this in more detail.

7.2 Areas of unity and points of dissent

To analyze each of the 50 items (42 belief statements + 8 Adventist teachings) in detail would go beyond the scope of this report. In this section, we therefore focus on the two ends of the spectrum that is presented here. On the one end items, where nearly all respondents seem to have the same opinion and great unity becomes visible. After this, a closer look at those topics is presented where the beliefs or attitudes differ most.

Areas of unity

As a measure of unity we used the standard deviation.¹² The following list presents the 10 of the 50 items, in which the respondents agree most with each other (lowest standard deviation comes first).

¹¹ Unfortunately these questions had a different answering scheme than the before presented 42 items which had a scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Now we have a scale ranging from "embrace wholeheartedly" to "do not accept it". This makes a direct comparison difficult. In the following analysis we try to look at both sets together as they cover similar topics and both are measured on a 5-point ordinal scale. However, due to the different meanings connected to these scales the calculations are to some degree only a heuristic approach to understand the underlying patterns.

¹² We experimented with other, more complex measures as well. The results of different approaches differed not much in the final ranking of the items. Therefore, we decided to continue with the simple standard deviation, being aware that the application of this measurement to an ordinal scale has limitations.

In the above shown graphs, these items are easily to detect as those bars that are either nearly completely green or completely red (depending on the direction of the item).

- I believe God created the universe. B1.17
- Salvation is through Jesus Christ alone. B1.04
- The head of the Church is Christ. B1.13
- The true Sabbath is the seventh day (Saturday). B1.14
- I believe in a personal God who seeks a relationship with human beings. B1.02
- My body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. B1.24
- Christians may go to witch doctors or spiritual healers for protection or healing. B1.10
- All believers are called by God to serve each other without distinction of race, culture, education, nationality, gender, or wealth. B1.19
- The dead have powers to communicate with and influence the living. B1.23
- God wants me to take care of my body by avoiding alcohol, tobacco, and the irresponsible use of other drugs. B1.12

For most of these items over 80% of the respondents strongly agreed or strongly disagreed (the latter for B1.10, B1.23). The topics of all these items could be summarized as “*general fundamental Christian beliefs plus Sabbath and health*”. God as Creator, Jesus as savior, a personal God and a universal message – all these are Christian core beliefs that Christians in other denominations share. The Sabbath-item represents the most accepted belief of the specific Adventist doctrines, the two health-related items (body as temple and avoiding drugs) demonstrate a high acceptance of this topic as doctrine. As the in-depth analysis of the health-related questions in chapter 8 will show, this the acceptance of the doctrine does not automatically mean that it is put into practice in exactly the same way.

Points of dissent

The following list presents the 10 of the 50 items in which the answering patterns are most diverse (highest standard deviation comes first). In the bar chart, these items are characterized by the fact that red and green bar sections have a relevant size in the same item.

- The Holy Spirit is God’s power in the world, not a Person. B1.31
- I will not get to Heaven unless I obey God’s law perfectly. B1.07
- In order to receive God’s grace, I must first live by His rules. B1.33
- Because Jesus was able to live without sinning, it is possible for believers to grow in Christian maturity so that in the final days of Earth’s history we will reach a state of sinless perfection. B1.30
- The more that I follow Adventist health and lifestyle standards, the more likely I will be saved. B1.34
- Church unity means uniformity in more than doctrinal belief. B1.25
- Different world regions of the Adventist Church should be allowed after consultation with the worldwide church to set their own administrative policies. B1.26
- Every local church should either operate or contribute to the operation of a school. B1.39
- Only people who accept Jesus as their personal Savior can go to Heaven. B1.20
- I believe God created the world in six literal days in the relatively recent past. B1.05

For the top item (Holy Spirit B1.31) it should be questioned whether the data really reflect a strong theological difference or whether the item was answered so differently because it was not fully understood, or not completely read by the respondents.¹³ Another item that stands out is B1.39 (operating schools) which is not directly related to beliefs but more an opinion about the fields the church should operate in. Regarding the remaining eight items in this list, three points seem noteworthy and are commented in more detail below:

First: Dissent about what it needs to be saved.

Five of the ten items deal with the question of salvation. Even though there was great unity about the belief that salvation is through Jesus Christ alone (second item in the unity list) we find here several items that reveal contradicting positions about further conditions for salvation. Obeying the law perfectly, living by God's rules, growing to sinless perfection and following lifestyle standards describe what some of the respondents see as possible and necessary in order to receive grace, go to Heaven and be saved, while others reject these ideas.

A comparison of the basic demographic characteristics of those who agree to the statements with those who disagree allows a deeper understanding of the divide that is visible here.¹⁴ Item B1.07 (not get to Heaven unless I obey God's law perfectly) correlates with education and Union. The agreement with this statement is highest among those with only primary school (60%) and lowest among university graduates (18%). Among those who disagree Germany, Austria, and Switzerland are overrepresented and the agreement for the statement is most likely to be found in Romania, Bulgaria and Spain. No relevant differences are visible regarding gender and age. If we run the analysis with the item B1.33 (In order to receive God's grace, I must first live by His rules) very similar patterns emerge.

Second: No unity about how much unity is needed.

Two items in this list deal with questions about church unity (B1.25, B1.26). 43% are in favor of the possibility to allow different administrative policies in different regions. 27% of the respondents are against this idea. A closer look at the underlying demographic differences related with this item (B1.26) reveals similar patterns as in the section above. Italy, Germany and Switzerland are overrepresented among those in favor of the possibility of regional policies; Romania and the Franco-Belgian Union have the highest share of disagreement. Having a higher educational degree goes along with higher support for the possibility of regional policies.

Third: Unity and dissent about creation.

The belief that God created the universe was the one with the highest agreement among the respondents and ranked top in the unity list. The topic of creation appears in the dissent list as well. 17% of the respondents do not agree with the statement that the Creation took place in six literal days in the recent past. From the fact that the idea of God as Creator was highly accepted, it can be concluded

¹³ Suspicion about the reliability of the figures for this item is supported by the comparison with item B6.1 ("There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three eternal equal Persons"). 82% of the respondents answered, that they wholeheartedly embrace this doctrine. However, more than a quarter of these 82% agreed with item B1.31 (The Holy Spirit is God's power in the world, not a Person), which differs regarding the position on whether the Holy Spirit is seen as a Person or not. Probably many respondents expected "positive" items and were not aware of the negation at the end of the latter item. The wording of the question is actually even more tricky, as the first part of the statement ("God's power in the world") is ostensibly in-line with the church doctrine.

¹⁴ For this analysis, the answering categories "agree" and "strongly agree" were combined to agreement, and "disagree" and "strongly disagree" to disagreement.

that the rejection of this item is based on the specific references to the time in the second statement (six days in recent past). A closer look at the data reveals that around 96% of those who reject the recent-six-literal-day-creation agreed to the statement that God created the universe. Regarding the relation with the above mentioned demographic variables, we find a similar pattern here. No relevant differences exist between age groups and gender. Agreement with a recent six-literal-day creation is much lower among those with a university degree. Regions play a role as well, disagreement is overrepresented in the Franco-Belgian Union, Italy, North Germany and Portugal, agreement is more likely to be found in Bulgaria and Austria.

7.3 Dissent within churches or just European diversity?

The closer look at the items with diverging opinions revealed, that there are remarkable differences between the Unions of the Inter-European Division. The fact, that an item is controversially answered on the Division level, does not automatically mean that we find the same divergence in the separate Unions. Europe is a cultural diverse continent, societies differ remarkable in certain values and former research confirmed, that the general differences between societies are reflected in the diversity we find within the Adventist Church.¹⁵ This raises the question to what extend the described differences are really a dissent that is visible within the churches in one region and what part can be attributed to diversity within Europe in general.

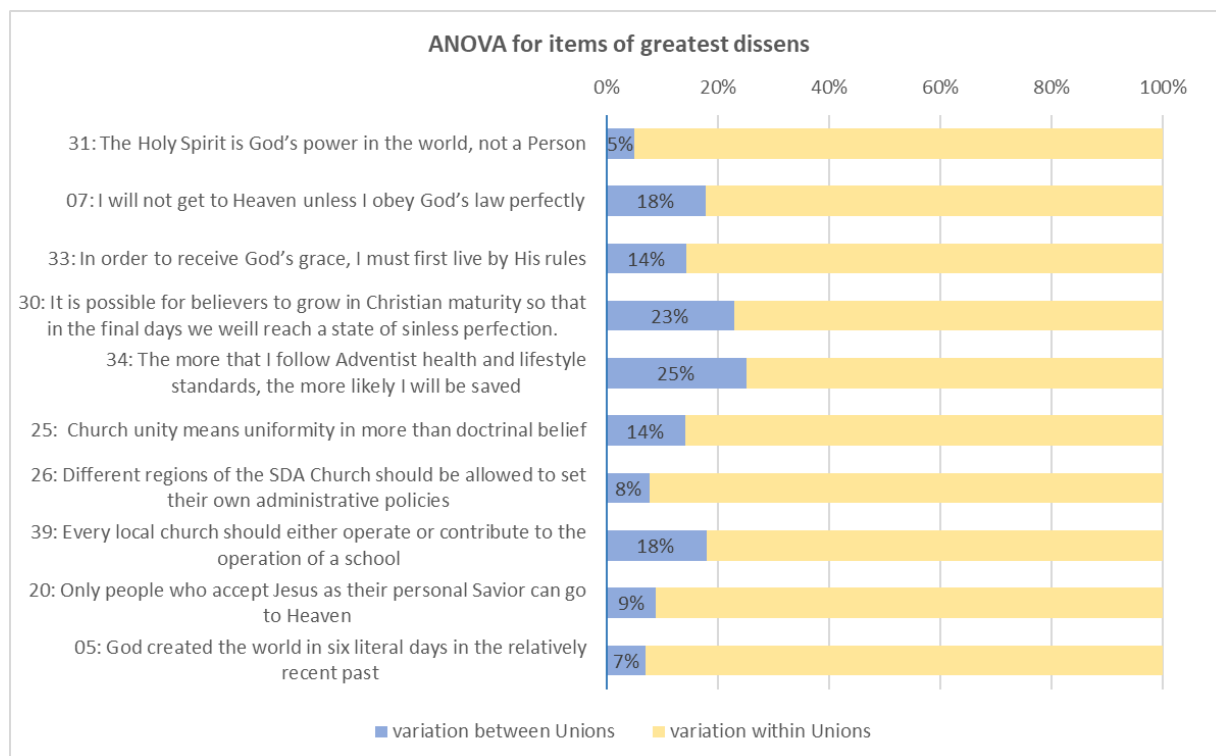
Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the most diverging items

A simple approach to get an idea what share of the variation comes from within the Unions and which share is generated by differences between the Unions is an ANOVA¹⁶ for the relevant Variables. The following graph shows the results for the above discussed ten items in which the answers differ most.

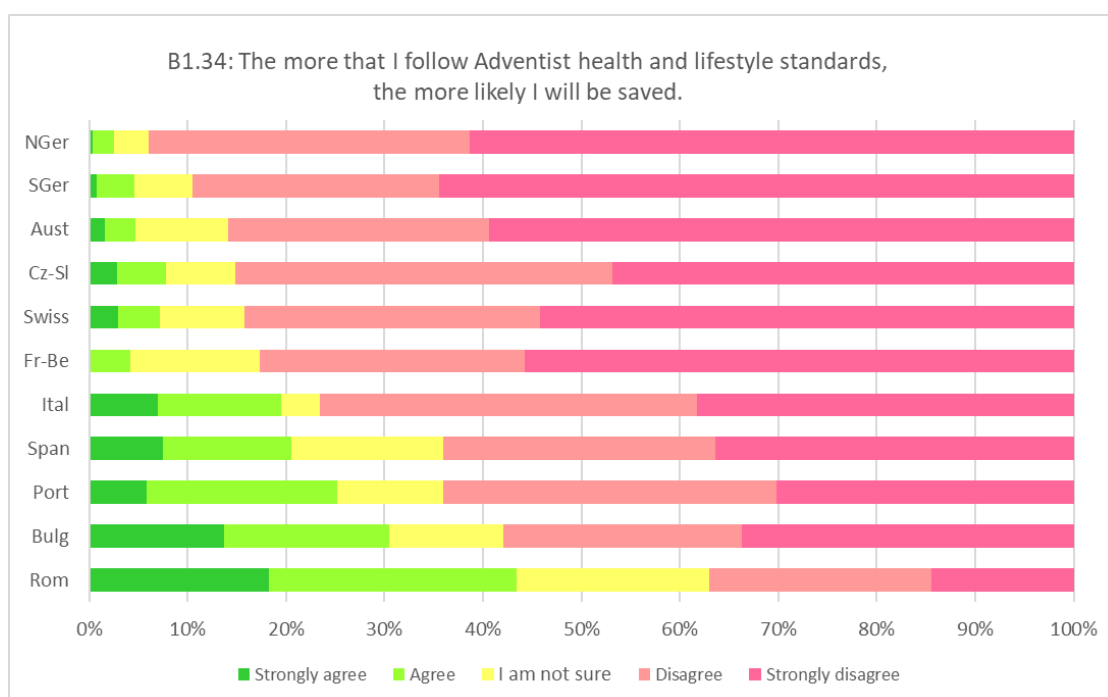
It becomes visible that the share of variation that is explained due to differences between the Unions varies. For some items (31, 5) it is quite small, while for others a quarter of the differences can be attributed to differences between the Unions. The highest difference between Unions can be found in the question whether following Adventist health and lifestyle standards contributes to being saved (34). This is followed by the item about the possibility of reaching sinless perfection (30) and the statement that it needs perfect obedience of God's law in order to get to Heaven (7).

¹⁵ Spiegler, Thomas & Stephan Sigg (2013): Valuegenesis Europe: Values and Ethics. Spes Christiana 24, S. 47-80

¹⁶ An ANOVA compares several groups and calculates what part of the variation of a variable can be addressed to differences between the groups and what part has to be addressed to differences within the groups. For better understanding here a simplified example: If the Division had only two Unions, and in each Union exactly the half of the respondents agrees, and the other half disagrees with a certain statement – than all the variation we see is variation within the Unions, and we have no variation between the Unions. Looking at the Unions separately would show us the same variation (half in favor, half against) as the picture of the whole Division. If instead of this, in one Union all agree with this statement while in the other all disagree, then we have no variation any longer within the Unions (because all in a given Union have the same opinion) and all the variation is created between the Unions.

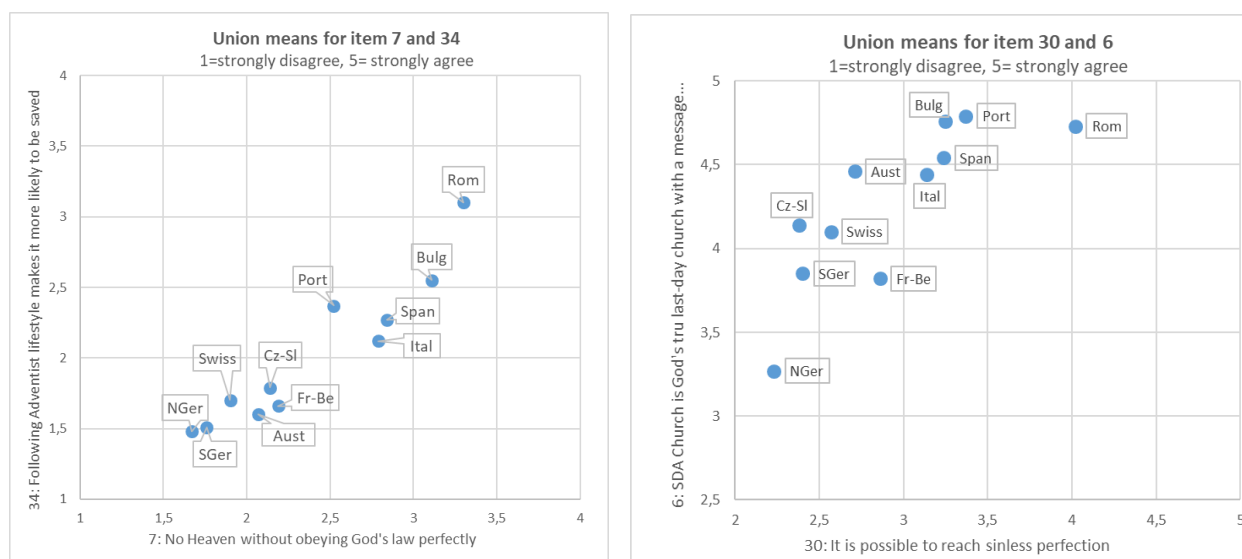


The following graph shows for the item with the highest difference between the Unions (B1.34) what this means in percentages. While at the one end we have over 90% who reject the idea of reaching sinless perfection (North German Union), the statement finds at the other end of the spectrum agreement by more than 40% of the respondents and another 20% say that they are not sure (Romanian Union).



The two following graphs visualize the differences using the arithmetic means for four items that have a high share of variation between the Unions. It is clearly visible in both scatterplots that the items correlate: in Unions with a higher agreement for one item, the other item finds higher support as well.

In the left chart, the distribution of the Unions shows a clear spectrum. At the one end, we find the German speaking Unions with the highest disagreement for both items. At the other end, we have the East-European Unions Romania and Bulgaria where both items find the highest agreement. The pattern in the right chart shows a great deal of similarity. At the one end German speaking Unions, at the other Romania and Bulgaria.



The differences between Unions can be understood as a diversity that is not necessarily visible in the local Churches, but results from different cultures and religious traditions in the broader societies that constitute the EUD.¹⁷

Areas of unity and dissent per Union

The former section focused on the items that showed the most diverse answering patterns on the level of the Division. An alternative approach is to look at the Unions separately to find out what are the most uniformly and the most controversially answered items in each Union.

The table below shows for each Union the top five items that are answered most unanimously¹⁸. It is not surprising, that many of the items that appeared among the top ten unity items on the level of the Division come up in this list again. If there is nearly no variation on the level of the Division, not much diversity is possible between Unions.

¹⁷ Different than the Valuegenesis survey, the GCMS unfortunately did not include items related to values that are used in representative international surveys as well. With these, it would have been possible to show on the one side in detail the relation between the values in the broader society and the attitudes of church members and to reveal on the other side the visible effect of the Adventist faith by putting the positions of the participants in its context. (Spiegler, Thomas & Stephan Sigg (2013): Valuegenesis Europe: Values and Ethics. Spes Christiana 24, S. 47-80)

¹⁸ For most of the items unity means a unanimous agreement with the statement, only B1.32 (burning in hell) and B1.10 (going to witch doctors) work in the other direction, here it is an overwhelming majority that disagrees with the statement.

Items that were answered in the Unions most unanimous											
	Swiss	NGer	SGer	Cz-Slo	Aust	Fr-Belg	Ital	Port	Rom	Spain	Bulg
God as Creator (B1.17)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	
Salvation through Christ (B1.4)	●	●	●	●			●	●	●		●
Sabbath (B1.14)				●	●		●	●	●	●	●
Christ is head of Church (B1.13)	●		●	●			●	●	●	●	
personal God seeking a relationship (B1.2)	●	●			●	●					
Who rejects Christ is burning in hell now (B1.32)		●	●		●	●					
witch doctors and spiritual healers (B1.10)		●		●		●					●
abstain from unclean food (B6.8)					●				●		
body is temple of Holy Spirit (B6.7)										●	●
Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit (B6.1)							●				●
body is temple of Holy Spirit (B1.24)						●				●	
the dead can communicate (B1.23)			●					●			
Christ as advocate in the Sanctuary right now (B6.3)									●		
loved by God even when I sin (B1.35)	●										

More relevant for the question discussed here is to find out whether the areas of dissent on the Union level differ from those on the level of the Division. The next table presents an overview on this issue. As before, for each Union the five items were selected that showed the highest standard variation among the 50 items from these two blocks of questions.

Items that were answered in the Unions with the highest variation											
	Swiss	NGer	SGer	Cz-Slo	Aust	Fr-Belg	Ital	Port	Rom	Spain	Bulg
Holy spirit is God's power, not a person (B1.31)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
it is possible to grow to sinless perfection (B1.30)	●	●	●		●	●	●	●		●	●
no Heaven without obeying the law perfectly (B1.7)				●	●		●	●	●	●	●
to receive grace I have to live by God's rules (B1.33)				●			●	●	●	●	●
unity is more than uniform beliefs (B1.25)	●	●		●		●	●				
allowing regional differing church policies (B1.26)	●		●	●					●		
Heaven only for those who accept Jesus (B1.20)	●				●			●			
adv. lifestyle makes being saved more likely (B1.34)									●		●
recent six-day-creation (B1.5)			●			●					
Tithing is required of all by God (B1.40)					●						
before Christ's return God decides who is saved/lost (B6.4)						●					
1844 began investigative pre-Advent judgement (B6.2)		●	●								
SDA is God's true last-day church with a message (B1.6)		●									
soul lives on after death (B1.3)										●	

One item falls under the top five divers answered questions in *all* Unions – the statement about the Holy Spirit being God's power but not being a Person. As mentioned above (Footnote 13), the reliability of this item should be questioned and therefore it is not further discussed here.

In nearly all Unions, we find a high variation regarding the statement that it is possible to grow and to reach in the final days a state of sinless perfection. The differences between Unions explained already a great deal of the total variation in this item, but even within most of the Unions it seems to be a highly controversially answered question. The next two items in the ranking belong the same area. The dissent about what it needs to be saved appears to be a key characteristic that shapes the beliefs held by the church members. The official doctrine (item B1.4 salvation only through Christ) is nearly unanimously accepted (98% agreed), but obviously, this does not hinder a relevant share of members, to imagine other things they can or should do in order to increase the likelihood of being saved. Obeying the law perfectly, living by God's rules or following an Adventist lifestyle appear to be for some a necessary contribution believers have to make on their way to Heaven.

The next topic that was likewise present on the Division level and is still visible as point of dissent within the Unions is the question of how much uniformity is needed to ensure unity. In seven Unions at least one of the two items related to this question belongs to the top five points that were answered controversially.

In the two German Unions and the Franco-Belgian Union we find items among these top five that deal with specific Adventist teachings (investigative judgement, SDA as true last-day church) and the question of an recent six-day creation. To illustrate what this dissent could mean in percentages, here is one example: The share of respondents who indicated having some doubts, harboring major doubts or who do not accept the teaching of an investigative judgement that started in 1844, is at least 30% in the three mentioned Unions; in the Northern German Union, it is around 50%.

United even in what divides us

This section started with the question: To what extent are the described differences really a dissent that is visible within the churches in one region, and what part could be attributed to diversity between the Unions? The analysis revealed that for some items we find remarkable differences between the Unions. In Europe different cultures and (religious) traditions live very close to each other and it is no surprise that this diversity shapes the EUD as well. Although up to 25% of the variation of some variables can be attributed to differences between the Unions, the very same items belong likewise to the most controversial topics in most of the Unions. Even though the topics of biggest dissent differ to some degree from Union to Union, there is an overall pattern that cannot be ignored. Adventists in the EUD are not only united in the many points upon which they agree, but also regarding the main topics that are discussed controversially. Outstanding are two areas: What does it need to be saved and how much uniformity is needed within the church. The perspectives on these topics vary between the Unions, but in most Unions proponents and opponents of a certain position are very likely to meet in the same church.

7.4 Concepts of inspiration

Two questions took a closer look on how the respondents see the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White in relation to inspiration.

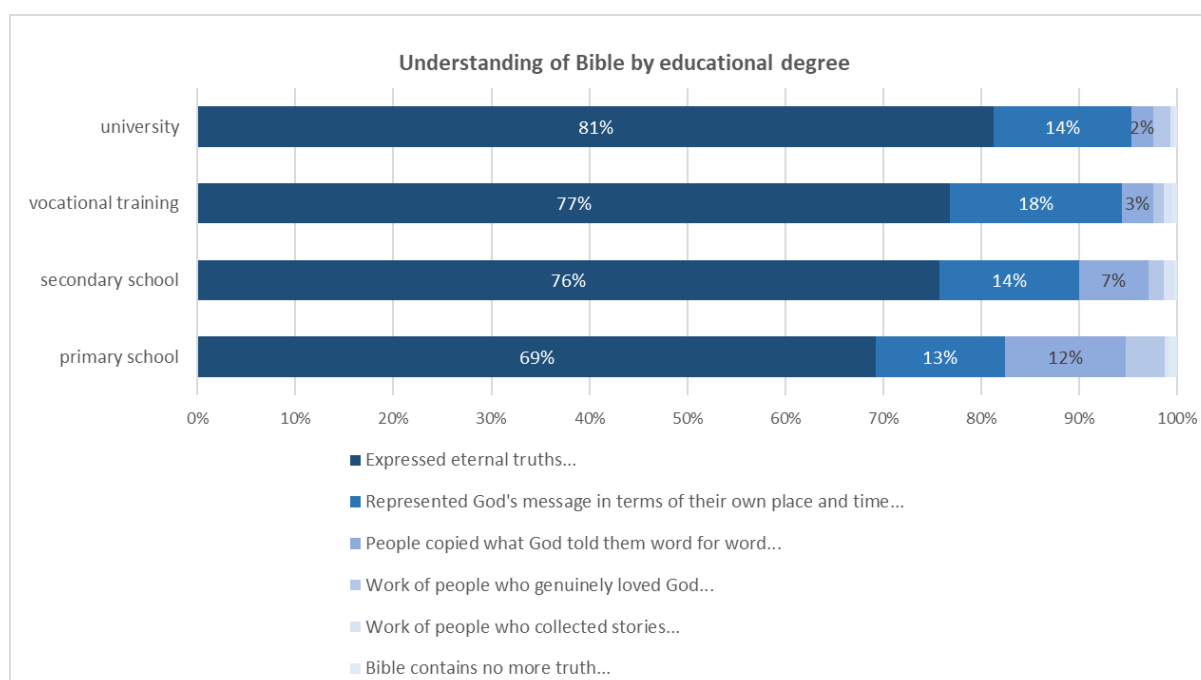
Perspectives on the Bible

The question offered six longer answering options and the respondents were asked to mark only the one statement that comes closest to their understanding. The following table shows all the answering

options and the frequency distribution. Around three quarter decided for the last option that sees the Bible as eternal truth written by people inspired of God.

Understanding of the Bible, Frequencies for EUD	
The Bible contains no more truth or wisdom than do the religious books of other world religions.	0.4%
The Bible is the work of people who collected stories that had been created to explain the mysteries of life. It contains a great deal of wisdom about the human experience.	0.8%
The Bible is the work of people who genuinely loved God and who wanted to share their understanding of God's activity in the world.	1.7%
The Bible is the work of people who copied what God told them word for word, and who wrote without being influenced by their own place and time.	4.9%
The Bible is the work of people who were inspired by God and who represented God's message in terms of their own place and time.	14.7%
The Bible is the work of people who were inspired by God and who, though expressing their message in terms of their own time and place, expressed eternal truths.	77.5%

There is no relevant difference between age groups, and males and females do not differ as well. The graph below shows the differences that become visible between groups with different educational degrees. Respondents with a higher educational degree choose the last option from the table above more often; and the lower the educational degree, the more often the item was selected that describes the Bible as verbally inspired text. This pattern is also visible if we look at the Unions separately.



Although this finding seems to be in-line with other relations between education and certain perspectives presented in this report, it might be possible that the complexity of the question plays here a role as well. The answering statements are quite long. To answer correctly it was necessary to read them all, to memorize the main points, to recognize the slight differences and finally to mark the one that comes closest to the own position. It is even more complicated as the items are not presented in a clear logical order from not at all inspired to word-by-word inspired. And some of the items that do not match completely with the official Adventist doctrine, do not sound totally wrong.

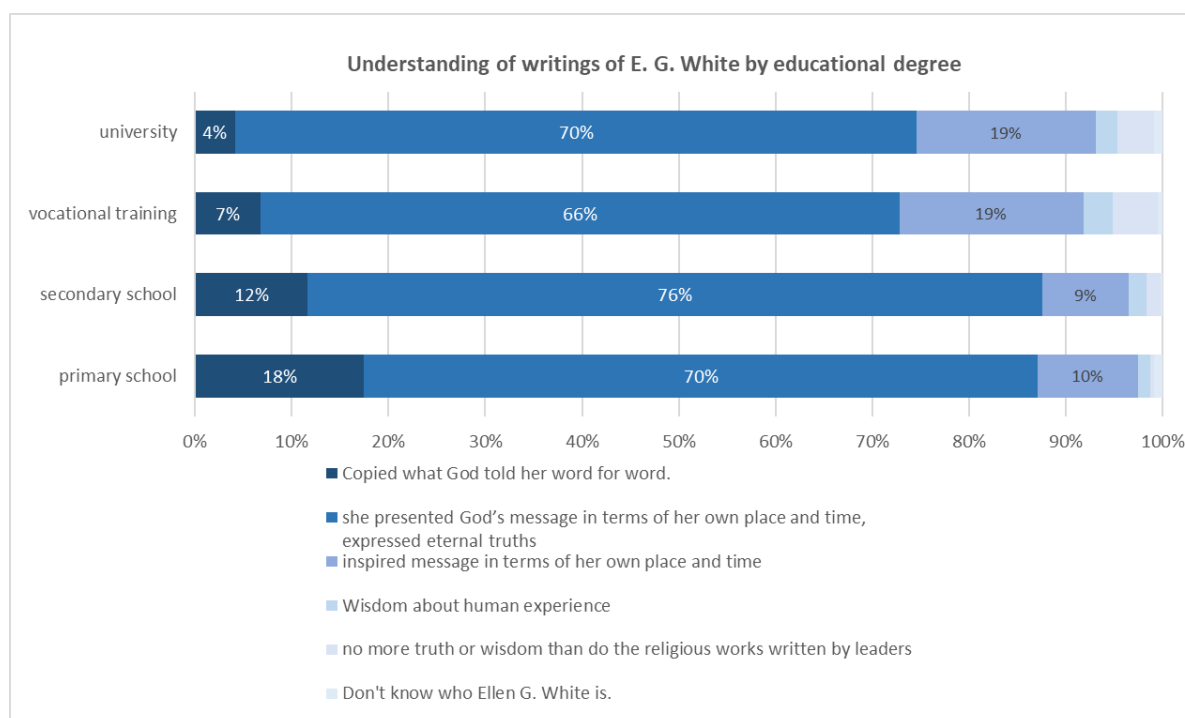
Perspectives on the writings of Ellen G. White

The question regarding the understanding of the writings of E. G. White differed from the former, as here the items were presented in a clear order from not knowing her up to seeing her writings as a message she had received word by word from God. The following table shows different answering options and the total percentages.

Understanding of the the writings of E. G. White, Frequencies for EUD	
I do not know who Ellen G. White is.	0.6%
Ellen G. White's writings contain no more truth or wisdom than do the religious works written by leaders of other denominations.	2.9%
Ellen G. White was a person who created stories of supernatural guidance in order to explain the mysteries of life. Her writings contain a great deal of wisdom about the human experience.	2.1%
Ellen G. White was inspired by God and presented God's message in terms of her own place and time.	14.6%
Ellen G. White was inspired by God and though she presented God's message in terms of her own place and time, expressed eternal truths in harmony with and pointing to the Bible.	71.4%
Ellen G. White copied what God told her word for word, and wrote without being influenced by her own place and time.	8.4%

As before, there is no difference between the age groups or gender. For the variable educational degree, a similar pattern becomes visible (see graph below). The higher the level of formal education, the lower is the share of respondents who understand the writings of E. G. White as word by word inspired. This pattern in the total data is replicated on the levels of the Unions as well.

The consistency of the answers on these two items is not very high. Only 13% of those who see the writings of E.G. White as inspired word by word, say the same about the Bible. And only 22% of those who see the Bible as word by word God given, say the same about the writings of E. G. White.



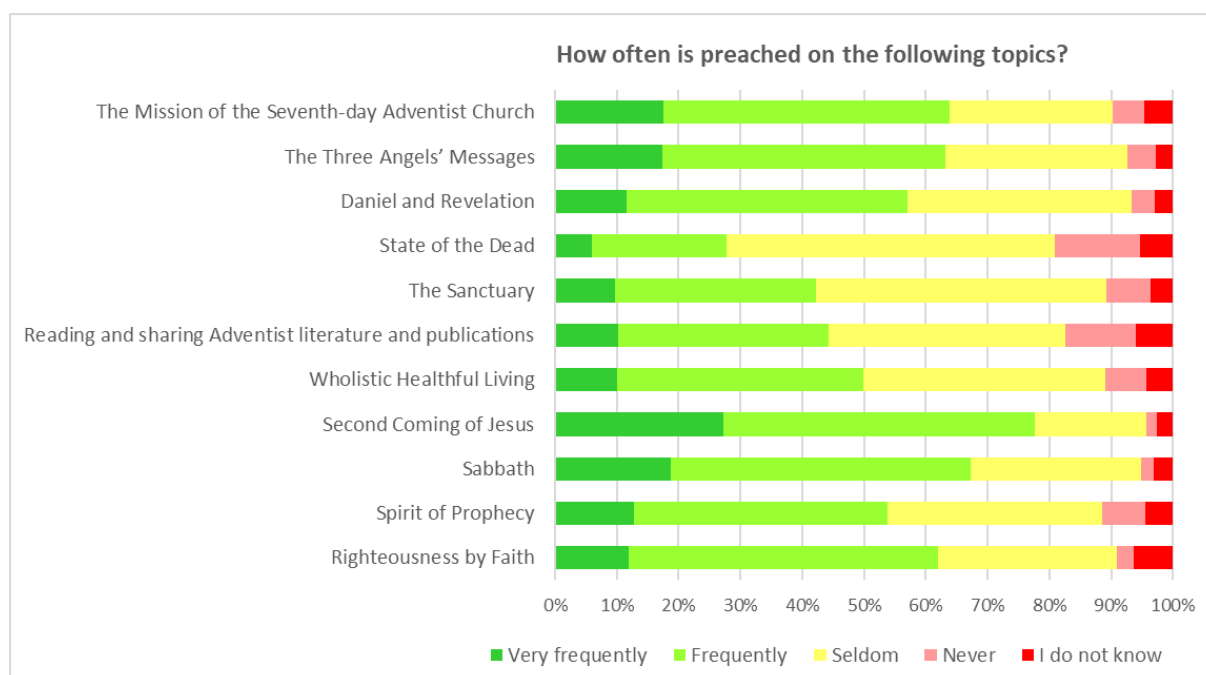
In general, if a variable correlates with level of education, it is possible that this might be partially an effect of age as well. The participants with a university degree are the youngest subgroup (mean 47 years). They are on average 18 years younger than those with only primary school education, and still 9 years younger than those with a vocational training as highest level achieved. If the higher educated

participants see a certain issue in a less traditional way, it might be an effect of the education or/and their younger age or even influenced by the variable Union.¹⁹ The latter is possible as the distribution of the educational degrees is not the same in all Unions. In Romania and Bulgaria, the share of respondents with only primary schooling is the highest, in the Franco-Belgian and the North German Union it is the lowest. Therefore, effects of level of education can be theoretically also (to some degree) effects of the regional differences.

For the two variables discussed here, both effects can be ruled out. Age has no significant effect and the differences between the different levels of education are on the level of the Unions²⁰ even bigger than in the total data set. It seems that the level of education clearly effects the way in which the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White are seen.

7.5 Sermon topics

Question B4 asked the participants how often certain topics are addressed in sermons in their local churches. The following graph presents a general overview. The “Second Coming” got the highest frequency, the “State of the Dead” is the least frequently heard topic. Overall, the differences between most of the 11 topics are not very big. A closer look at the data reveals that a remarkable share of respondents crossed the same box for nearly all topics.²¹ 11% varied their answers not at all, and another 7% altered the answer only for one item one category to the right or left. Given the variety of themes in the list it is hard to imagine that really all topics are covered in the sermons with the same frequency.

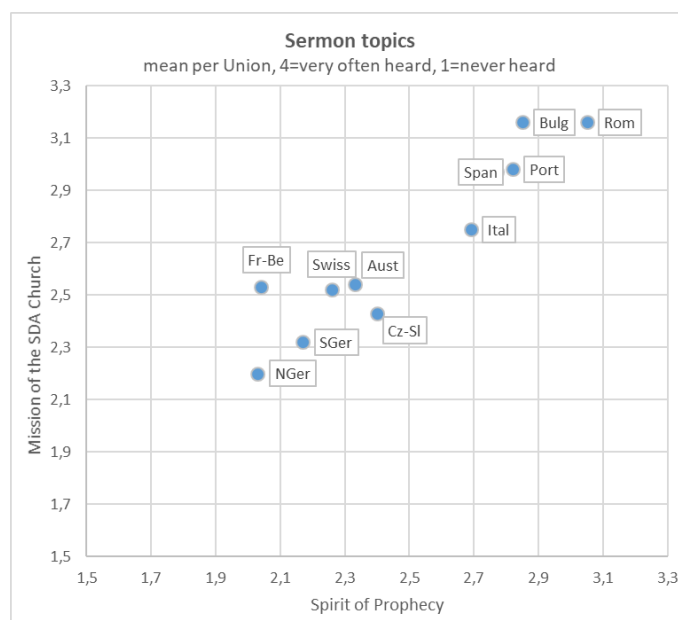


¹⁹ Therefore for some relations presented in this report a regression analysis was performed as well, to make sure that the interpretation of the percentages is not misleading.

²⁰ Especially in Romania and Bulgaria.

²¹ Probably it played a role that the question is quite challenging and respondents had more or less to guess as most of them probably do not keep track of sermon topics. Furthermore, the question is close to the end of the questionnaire, after nearly an hour of answering questions maybe some just rushed through this list without thinking too much about it.

Between the Unions some differences become visible. In Romania and Bulgaria we find for all topics a higher frequency reported, Germany and the Franco-Belgian Union are positioned at the other end of the spectrum, here the overall reported frequencies are the lowest. In the following graph two items are used to illustrate the spread between the unions. The scales represent the arithmetic mean, cases which answered with “I do not know” are excluded here as this would give a biased result.



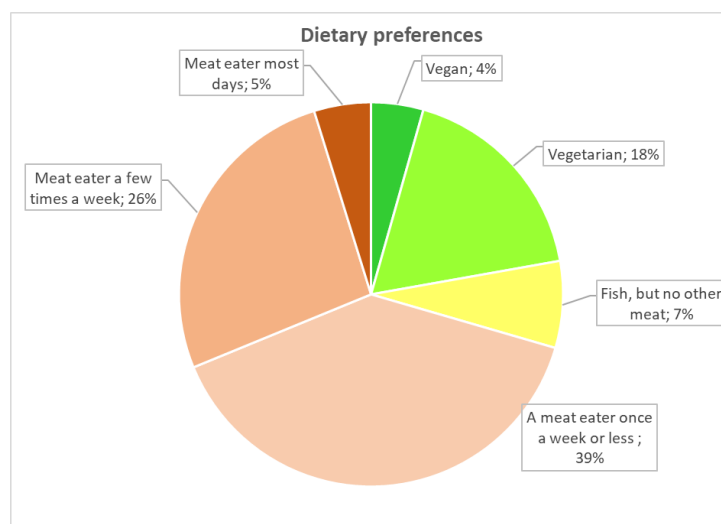
Surprisingly women and men did not answer these questions exactly the same way. On average for all the 11 topics, the share of women who answered with “very frequently” is one third higher than the share of men.²² Age is related with this questions as well. The youngest group (<40) reports on average for all topics a lower frequency than the oldest age groups. On average, respondents from small churches (<25 attendees) report a higher frequency for having heard these topics than respondents from bigger churches (>100 attendees).

²² For this analysis, the dataset was reduced to the six unions with the most equal share of men and women in the sample in order to avoid biases of the variable Union through the unequal share of men and women within the Union samples.

8 Adventist Health Message

8.1 Dietary preferences

The last section of the questionnaire focused on issues related to the Adventist health message. The following graph shows the dietary preferences of the respondents. In total, a little bit less than a quarter prefers a vegan or vegetarian diet. The share varies considerably between Union samples, it is highest in Austria (42%) and lowest among the respondents of the Franco-Belgian Union (15%).



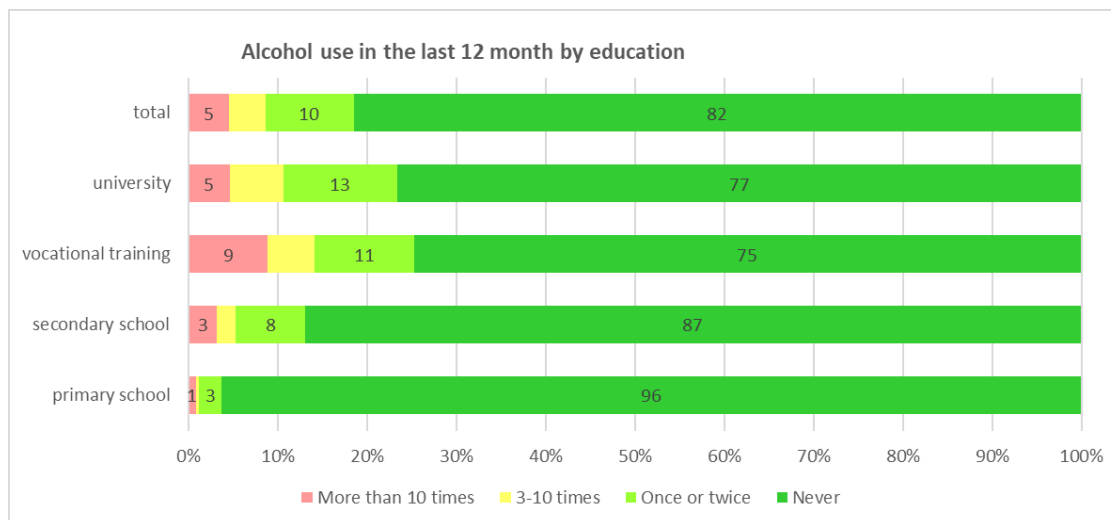
Among females the share of vegetarians/vegans is only two percentage points higher than among males, and there is only a small difference between the age groups (25% in the youngest group, 21% in the oldest). The difference between the educational groups is in the same range, 19% of those with only primary school are vegan/vegetarian and among those with a university degree this share is 25%. It seems that the strong emphasis on the health message in the Adventist church affects most of the members, irrespective of their socio-demographic background. The effects that sociodemographic characteristics have on eating vegetarian are visible in the church as well, but they seem to be smaller than outside in the general population.²³

8.2 Attitudes towards and consumption of alcohol and other substances

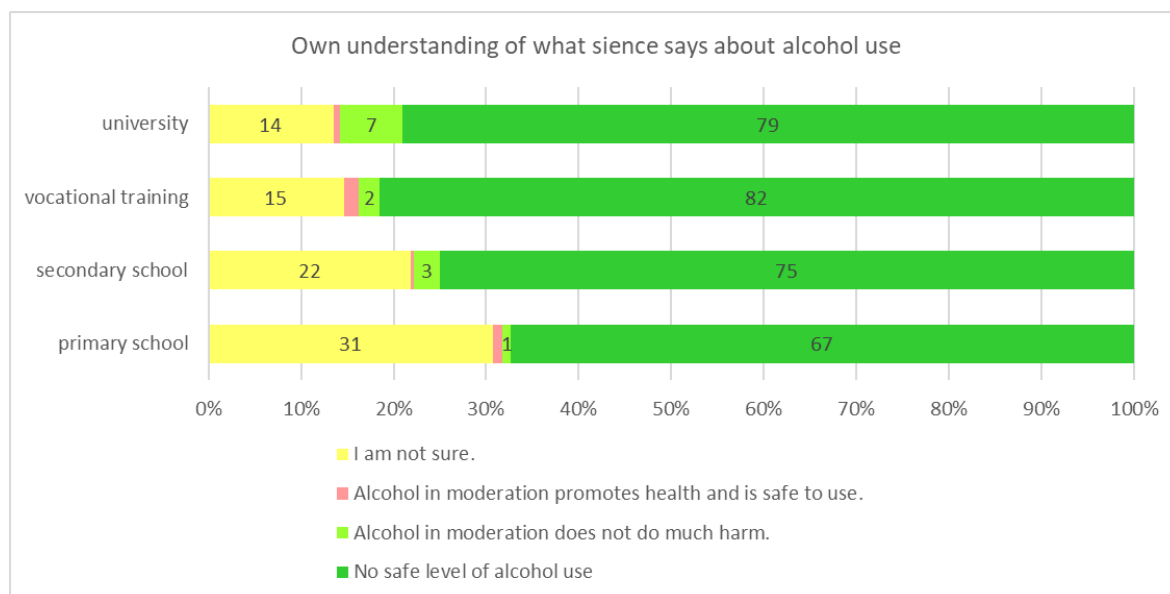
The next block of questions asked for the use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and other opiates. For the latter three substances 99% or more said that they did not consume any of these in the past 12 month. Only for alcohol, the data show some variance. The following graph gives the results in total and separately for the level of education.

²³ As one example, in Germany is the share of vegetarians among females twice as high compared to men (15% to 8%). 19% of the under 30-years old do not eat meat, in the age group >60 this share is only 8%. (Forsa, 2023. Pflanzenbetonte Ernährung. Ergebnisse einer repräsentativen Bevölkerungsbefragung)

The percentage of those who abstain completely from alcohol is lower among those with a higher educational degree. Between males and females the data show no relevant difference and the age groups differ not significantly in this matter as well.



The question about the risk alcohol use shows a different pattern at first glance. The graph below presents the data on the question: “Read the following statements carefully; then mark only one statement that is closest to your understanding of scientific research on alcohol use.” From respondents with a higher education a greater share sees no safe level of alcohol use. However, at the same time we have the highest share in this group who choose the answer, that alcohol in moderation does not do much harm.

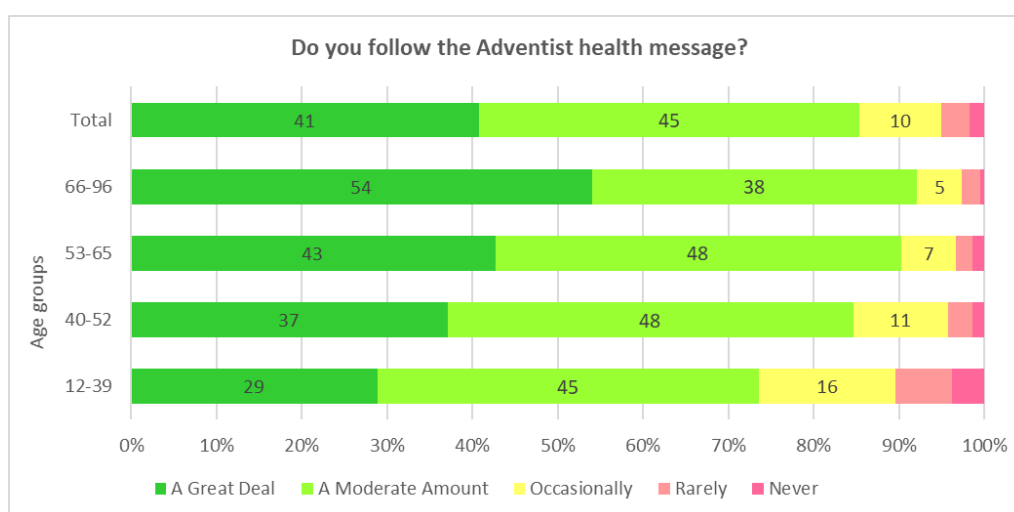


These data are hard to interpret, as the question did not ask for the opinion of the respondents, but rather what they believe to be the current state of scientific research. The given answers do not have to match with the personal opinion of the respondents. This most likely also explains the much higher share of people responding “I don’t know” in the groups with a lower educational level. They probably have a personal opinion on this issue but do not claim to know the current state of research in this area.

8.3 Beliefs and practice related to the health message

Respondents were asked whether they follow the Adventist health message. The graph below shows the total results and the answers separately for the age groups. The chart reveals a clear relation between age and the degree of following the health message. The younger the respondents, the lower is the share of those who say to do so “a great deal” and the higher is the share who answered with “occasionally”, “rarely” or “never”. The latter three options combined are 8% in the oldest age group, but 27% in the youngest age group.

No significant differences are visible between males and females and the level of education has no clear effect on this variable as well. Between the Unions we find remarkable differences in the percentage of those who stated that they follow the health message to a great deal. The highest percentages have the Austrian (66%) and the Swiss Union (61%), the lowest percentages can be found in Portugal (23%) and Bulgaria (24%).²⁴



The section about beliefs (section 7) included two questions that are related to health:

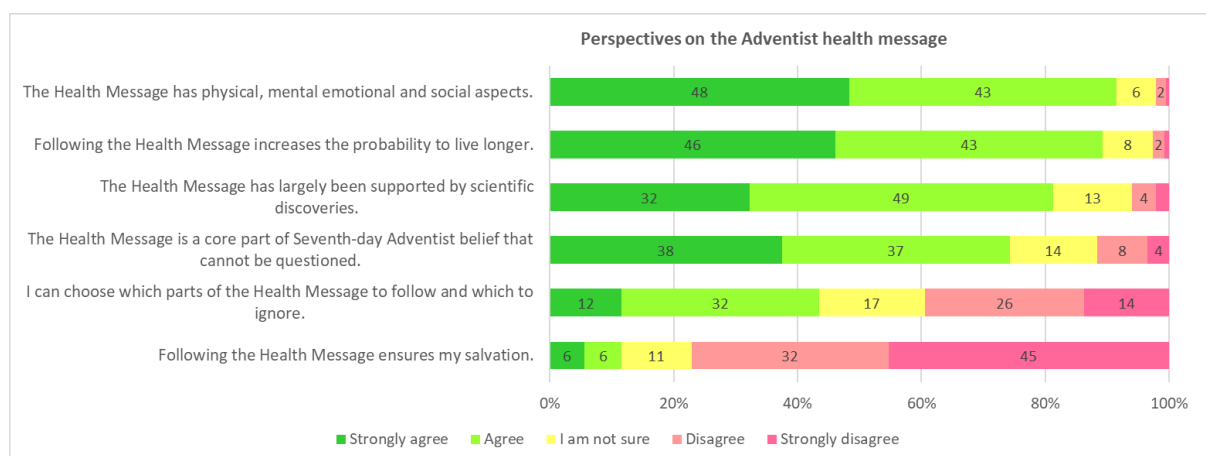
- God wants me to take care of my body by avoiding alcohol, tobacco, and the irresponsible use of other drugs. B1.12
- Adventists should abstain from alcohol, tobacco, and the irresponsible use of other drugs.

Both items were accepted by over 90% of the respondents. However, out of those who strongly agreed with the first item only 45% said that they follow the health message “a great deal”. For the second item the pattern is the same. Out of those who said that they “embrace the statement wholehearted” only 44% said that they follow the health message a great deal. Around 4% from those accepting the beliefs completely answered that they never or only rarely follow the Adventist health message.

²⁴ It might be questioned whether these figures truly portray the practice of the church members in the Unions. Probably it was not possible to translate the English term “a great deal” really with the exact same meaning in all languages. E.g. this term was in the last GCMS survey translated to German with the term “fast immer” which means “nearly always”. 43% had chosen this answer at that time. In the current survey, “a great deal” was translated with “zu großen Teilen” and 52% picked this answer. This translation sounds closer to the English wording but it means definitely a lower frequency than “nearly always”, closer to a meaning like “in the majority”. However – it is still hard to say which German version comes closer to the English “a great deal”.

8.4 General perspective on the health message

The final block of questions asked for the perspective that church members have on the Adventist health message. The following graph shows the six items²⁵ and their frequency distribution. The highest support is given to the idea that the health message has to be understood as a holistic concept and that following this health message can increase life expectancy. The statement that following the health message ensures salvation finds less agreement here (12%) than the item discussed in chapter 7 that following the health message makes it more likely being saved (22% agreement). The most controversial item appears to be the one about choosing for themselves, which parts of the health message to accept and which to ignore. 44% agree and 40% disagree with this statement. With this variation it would fall under the top ten items with the biggest dissent that were listed in section 7.2.



In the comparison of the Unions for this item, we find the typical pattern that already occurred before. Agreement is highest in the German speaking Unions (NGer: 78%, SGer: 64%, Swiss: 63% Aust: 62%) and lowest in Portugal (19%), Romania and Bulgaria (both 26%).

In contrast to what could have been expected based on other relations described previously, we have the highest agreement in the oldest age group (52%) and the lowest in the youngest age group (28%) for this item. The differences regarding educational level do not show a clear pattern.

²⁵ The full text of the first item in the graph was: "The Adventist Health Message emphasizes all of the following: physical health (e.g. diet, exercise), mental health, emotional well-being, social support, and relationships as a part of spiritual growth."

9 Conclusions and Outlook

Overall the result of the survey conducted in the diverse territories of Inter-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church appear to demonstrate a notable diversity in beliefs and behaviors and a great loyalty towards the church. Some of the diversity is to be expected, due to the diversity of histories and cultures – yet some are troubling. That there are large regions in effect agreeing to righteousness by works or even perfectionism should be a concern to a church that likes to describe herself as heirs of the protestant reformation.

The differences between younger and older age groups are not really surprising. They are to be expected. Nevertheless, in terms of the future of the church the results among younger generations will need to be read and appreciated with great interest. Differentiating between age groups certainly has provided a clearer picture of the status of the church.

Gender differences, on the other hand, were much smaller than often assumed. Apart from a somewhat patriarchal leadership pattern, there hardly were any differences between males and females in survey results. This may need to be appreciated for future development of church policy when it comes to leadership structures and church governance.

For further research projects of this scope and content, it may be worthwhile to strengthen efforts to reduce the participant bias (active members are more likely to participate). This might be accomplished by reducing redundancy of items and/or devising different sampling strategies with considerably shorter questionnaires. Proper sampling strategies might even allow for splitting the survey into several questionnaires.

Finally, publishing the findings of such research projects among participants and demonstrating how results are utilized to further develop the church may further enhance motivation to participate. After all, a cumulative one third of a year (24/7) was spent just on answering the survey in this one division of our world church.²⁶ It will be our responsibility to make this sacrifice worthwhile and fruitful.

²⁶ The online tool utilized by us measured the time taken to complete the survey.