

# *Healing the wounds: Caring and welcoming church communities*

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SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

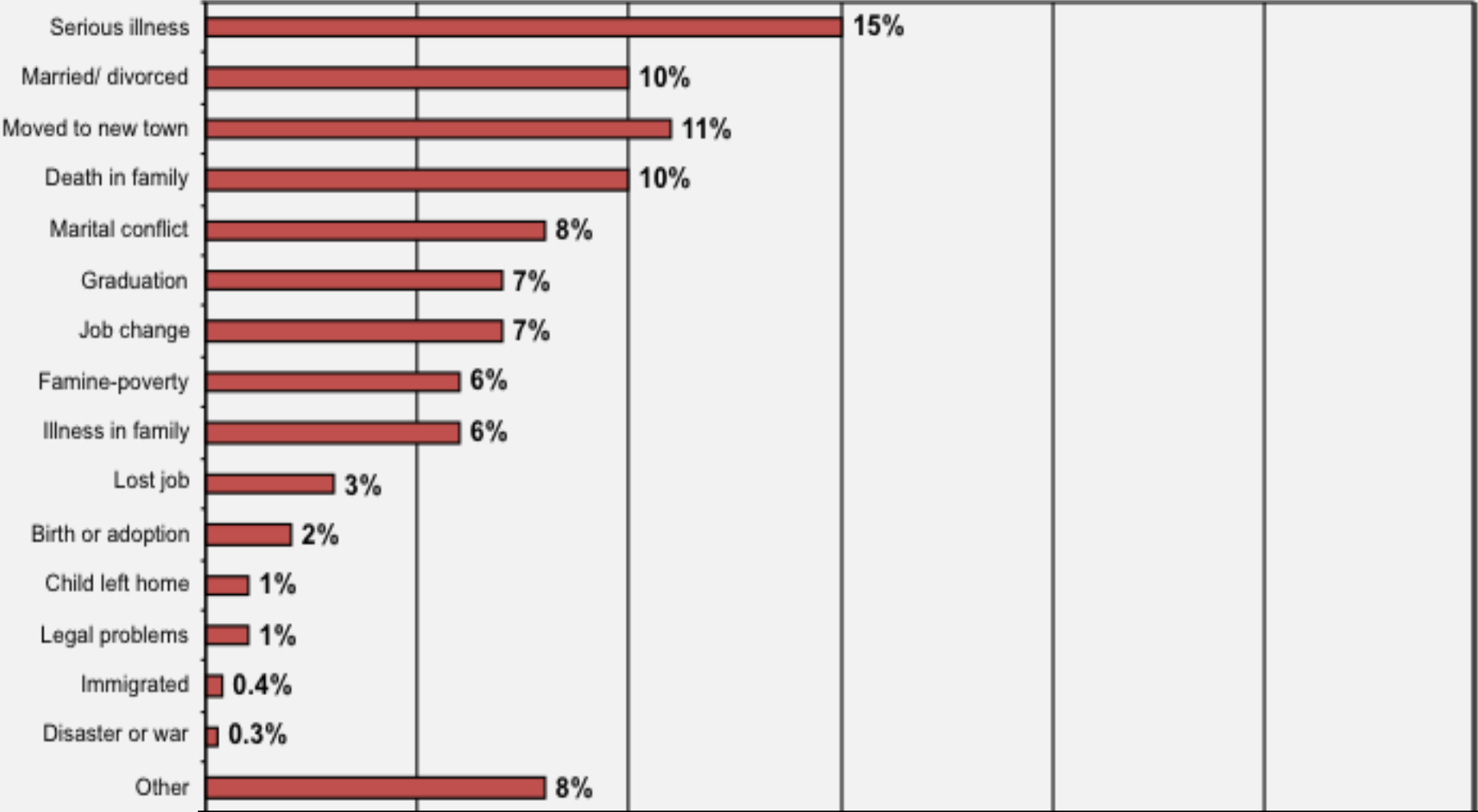
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SECRETARIAT

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



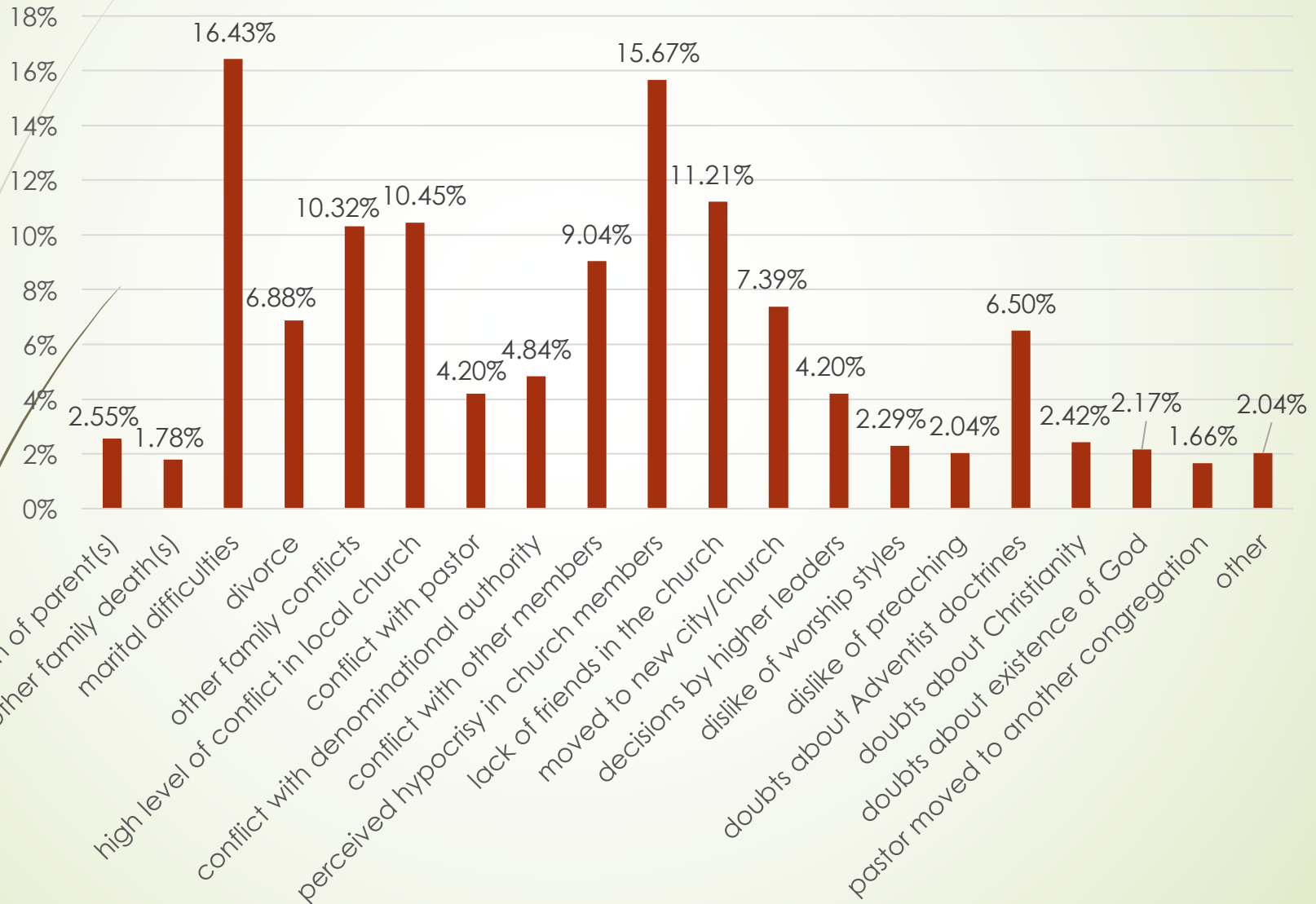
# Most Important Reasons Why Decided to Stop Attending

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

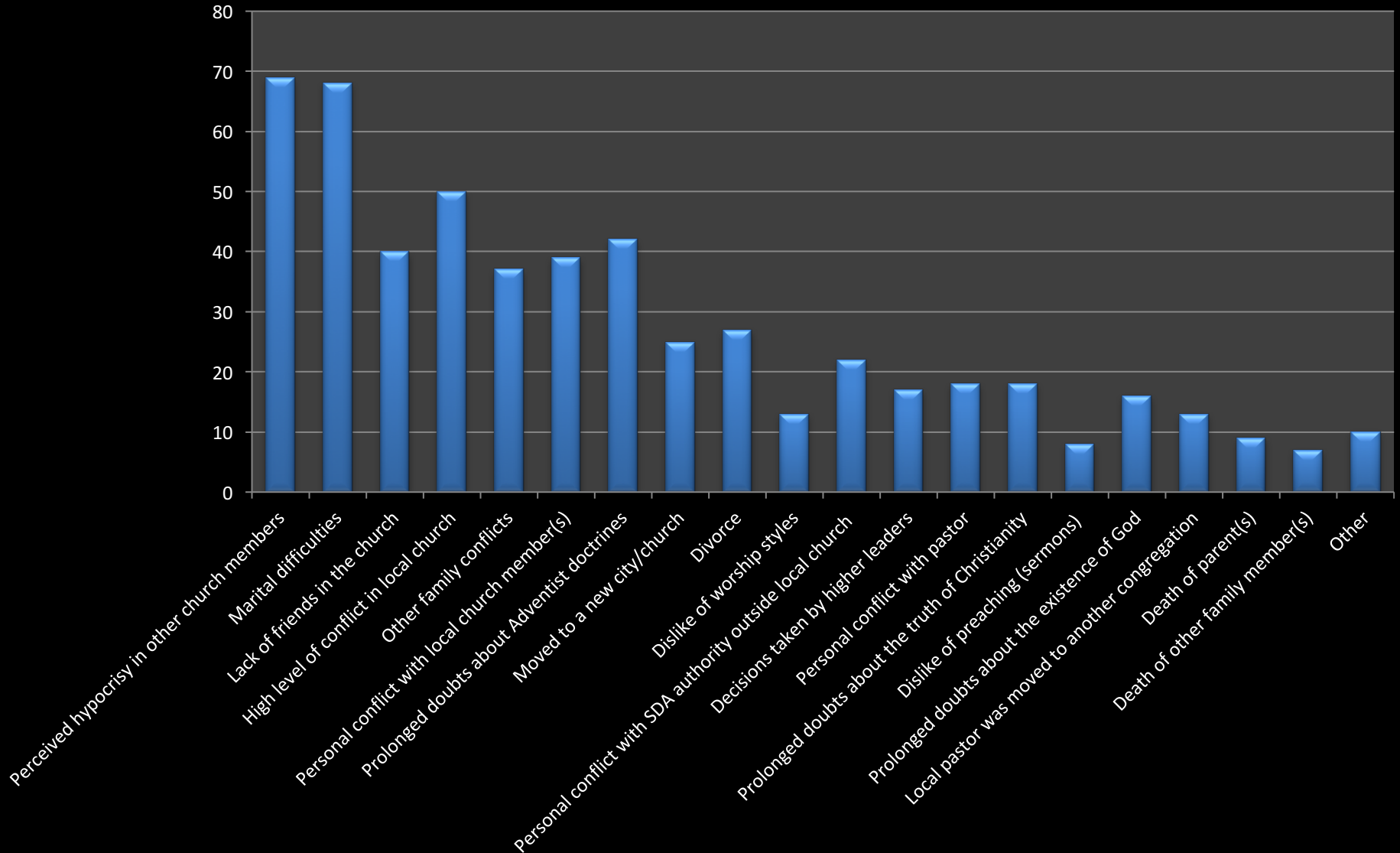
# Most Important Reasons Why Decided to Stop Attending

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

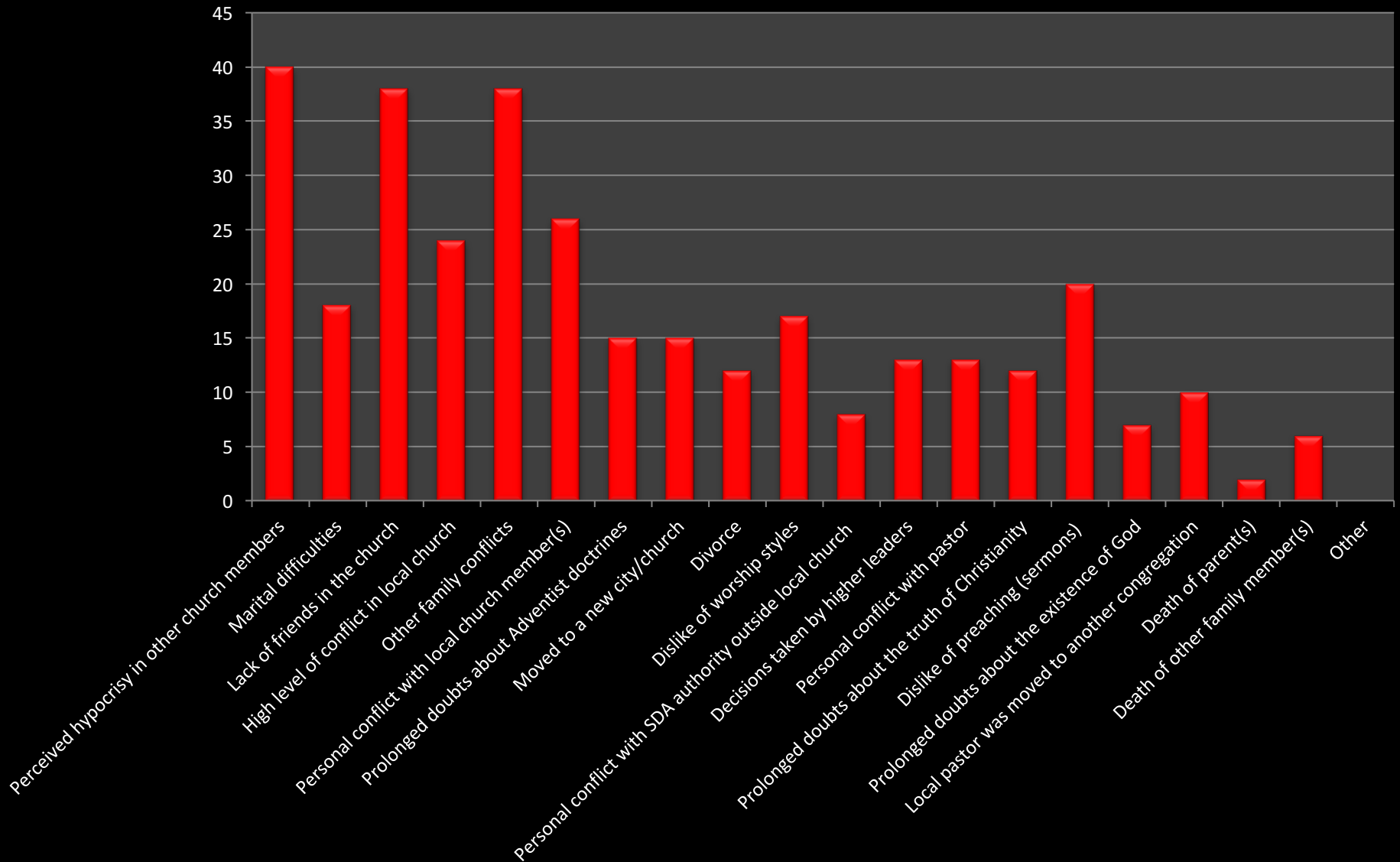
# Primary Triggers for Departure



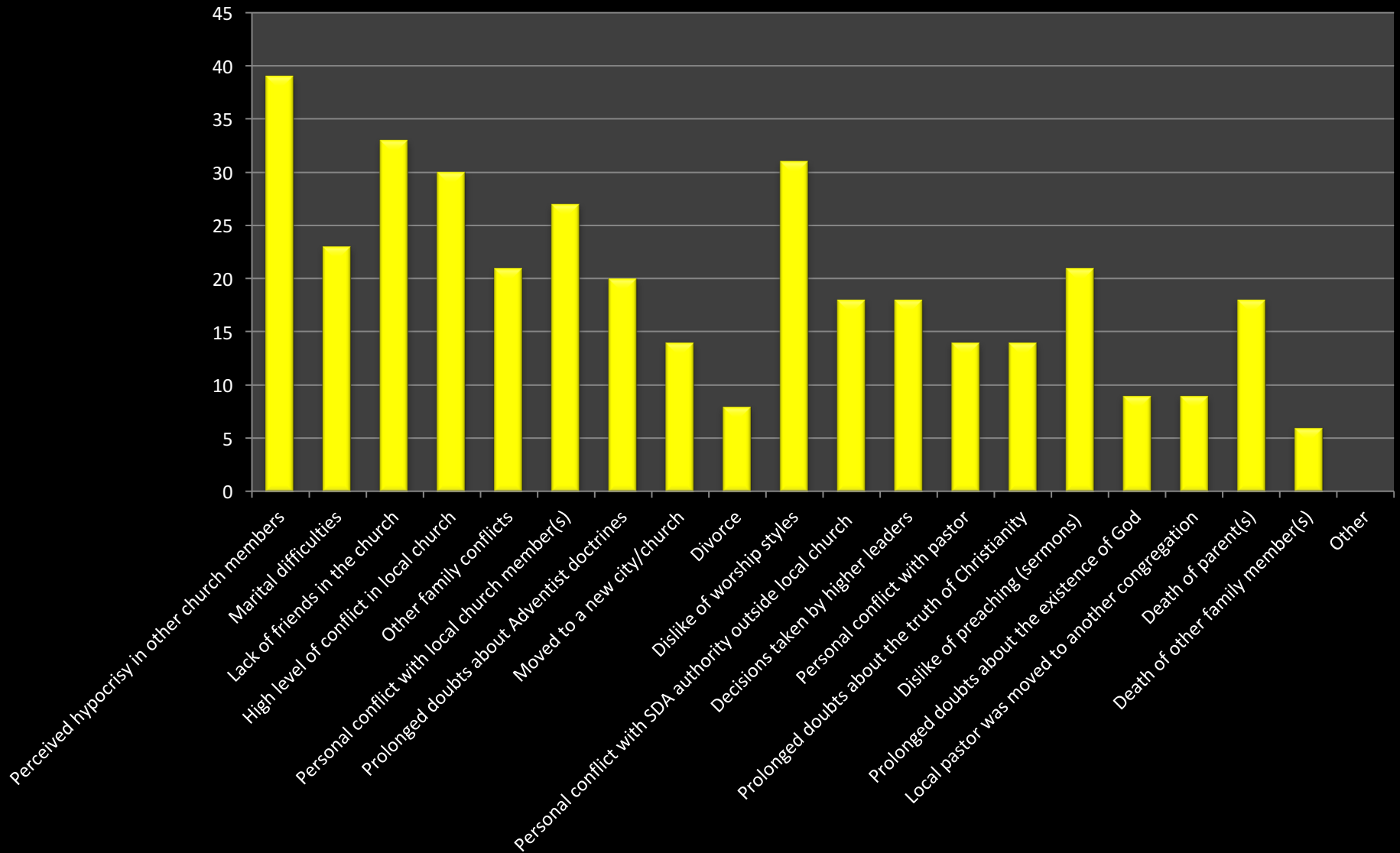
# What event triggered your decision to leave? (Listed in weighted rank order) – Primary



## What event triggered your decision to leave? (Listed in weighted rank order) – Secondary

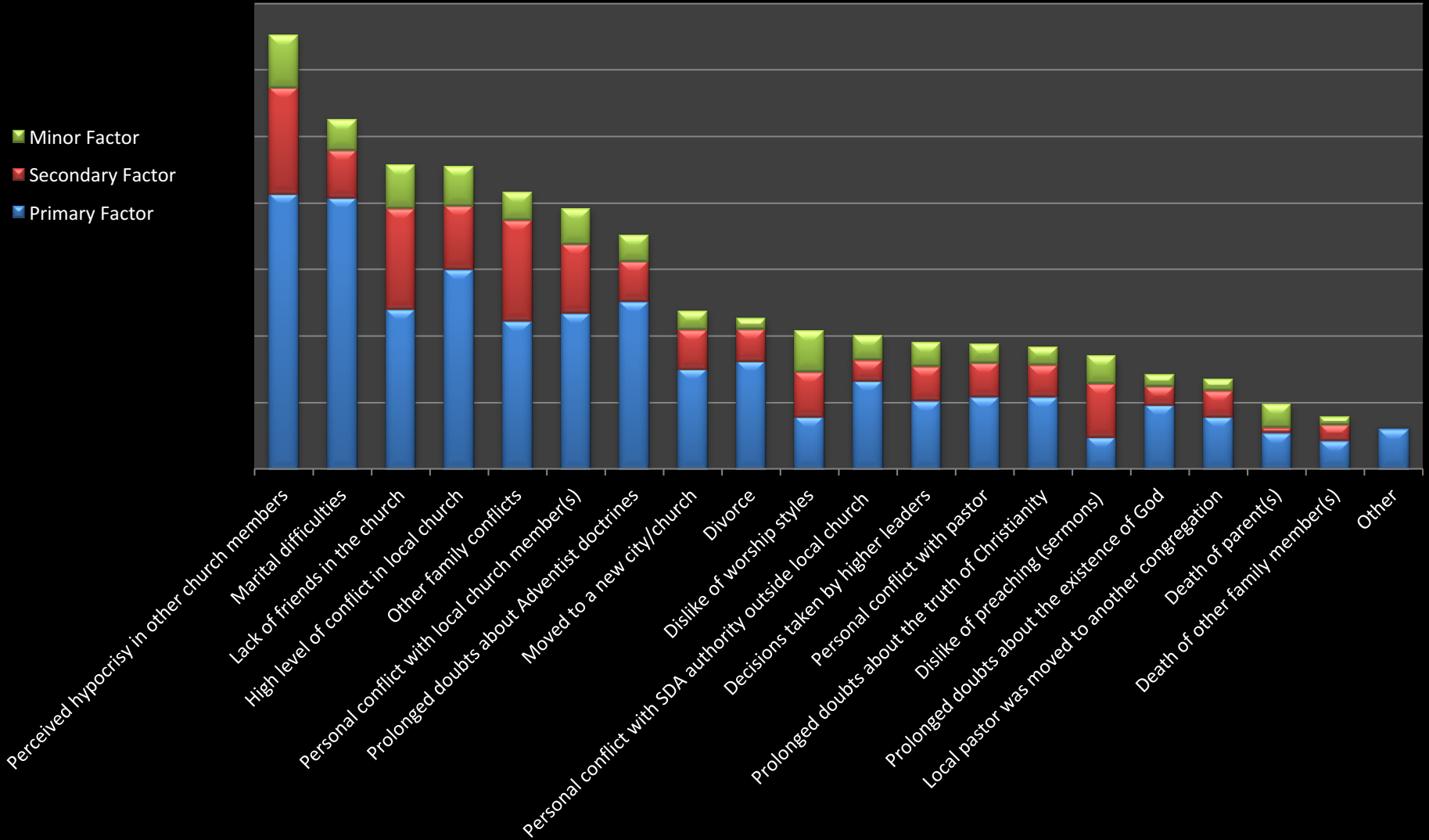


# What event triggered your decision to leave? (Listed in weighted rank order) – Minor Factor





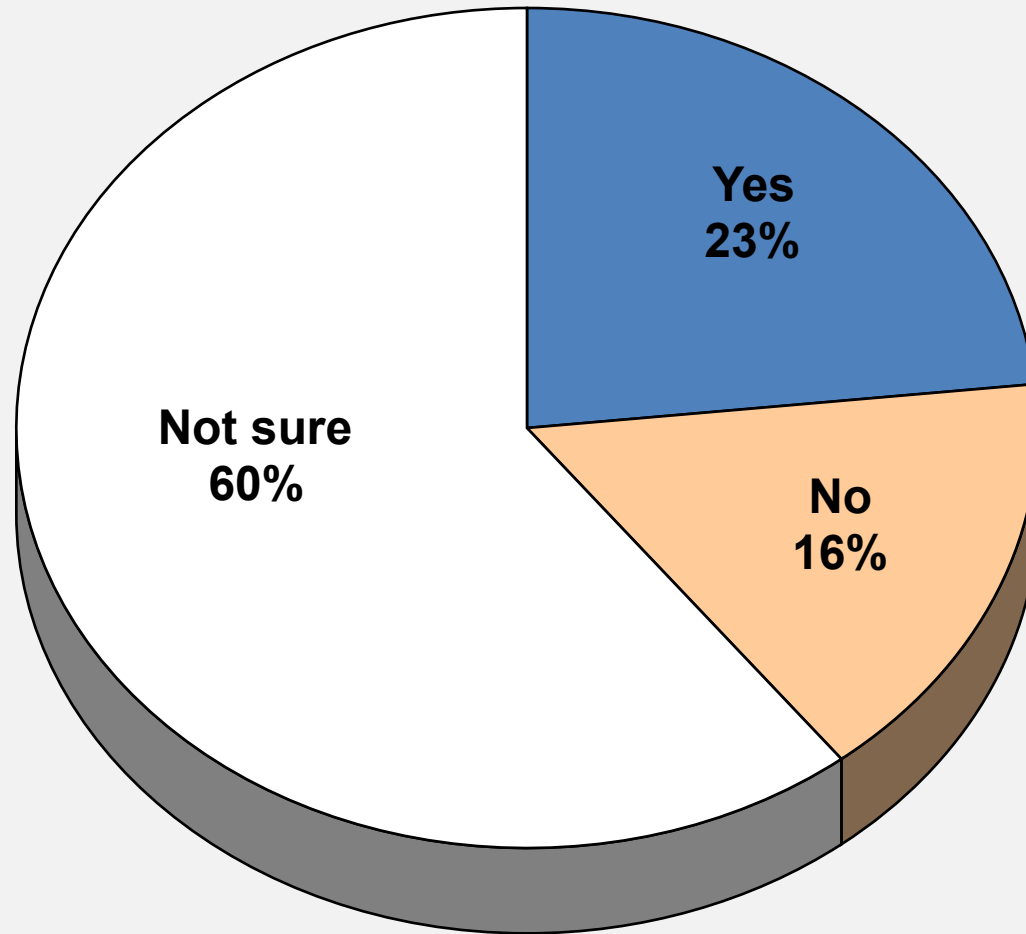
# What event triggered your decision to leave? (weighted)



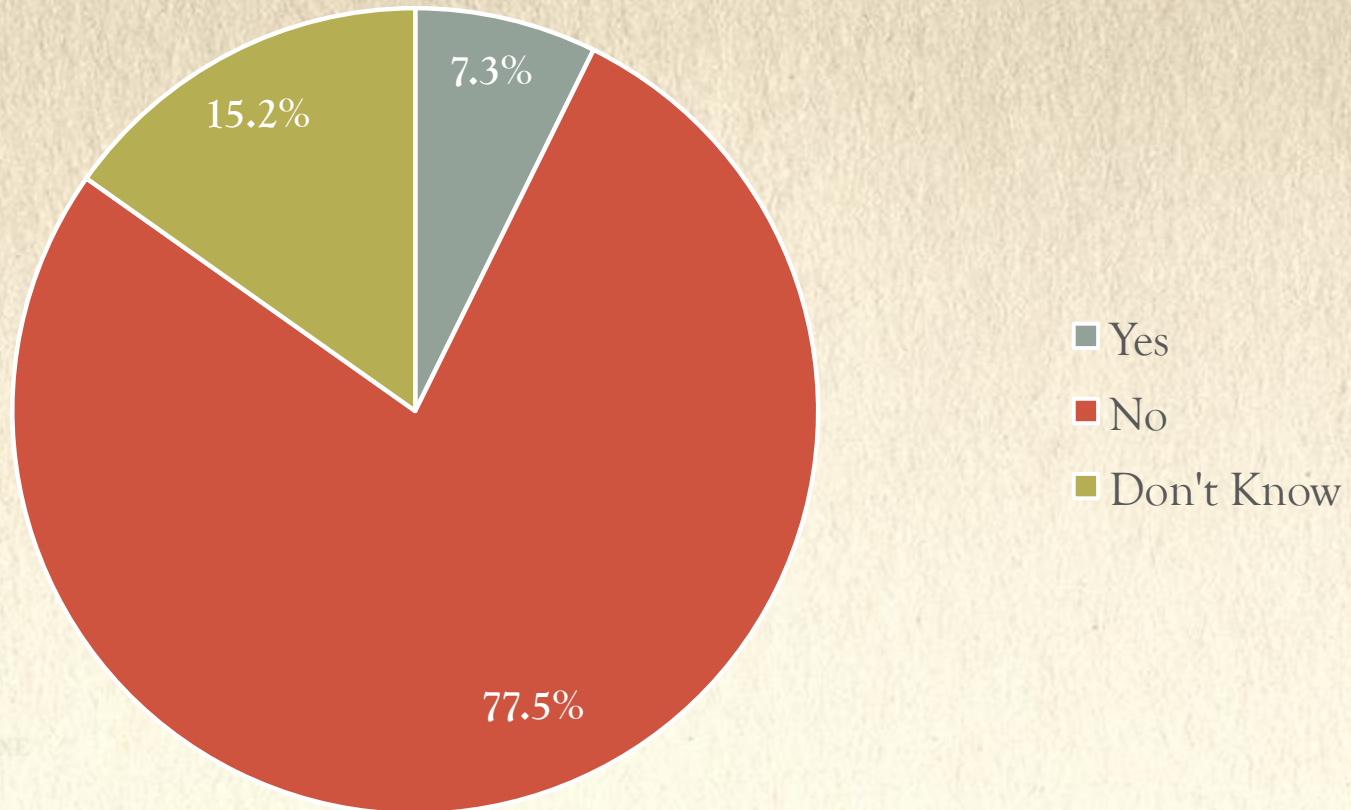
# What Happened When They Stopped Attending Church

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

# Is your name still on the membership list?

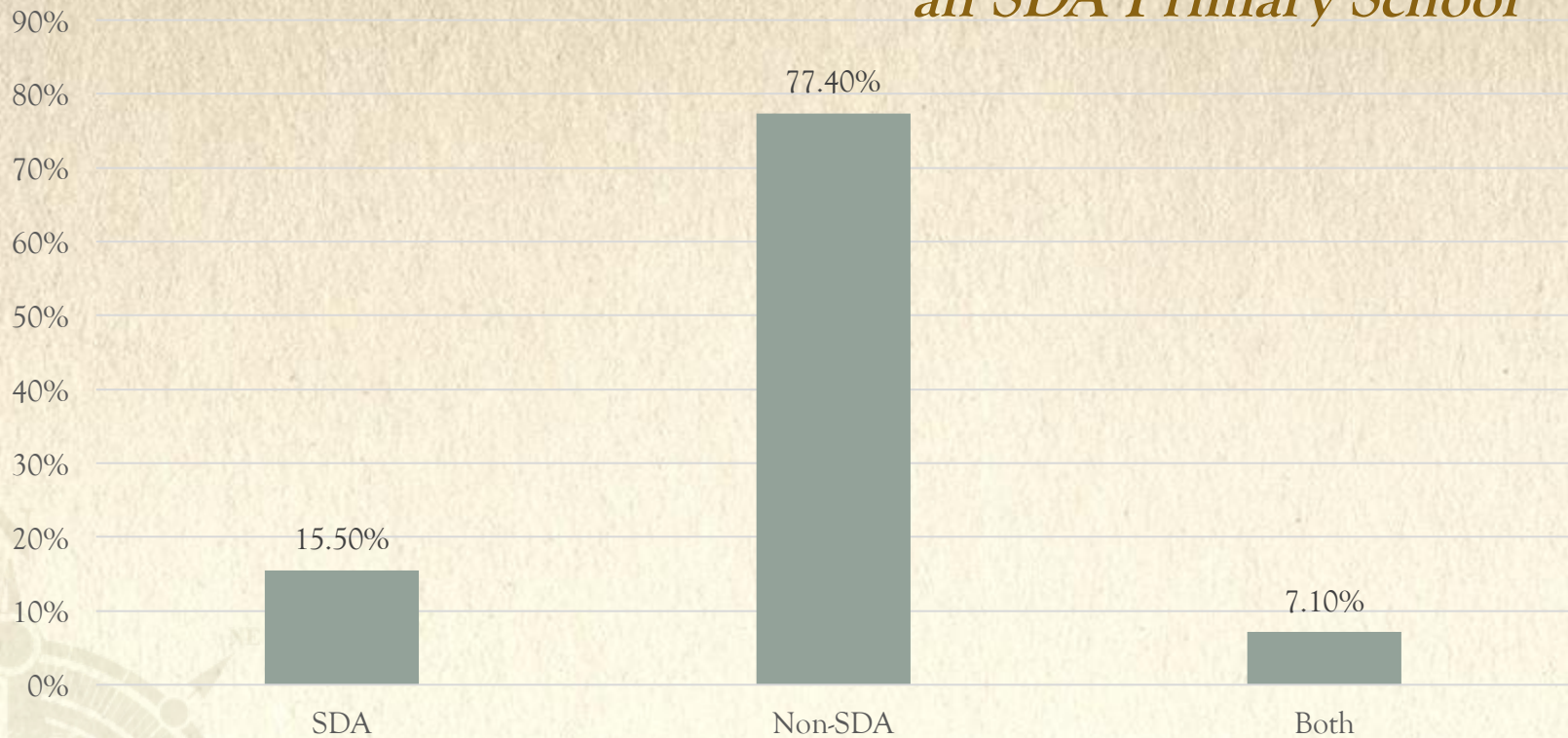


# Was attending Adventist school(s) a factor in deciding to leave the Church?



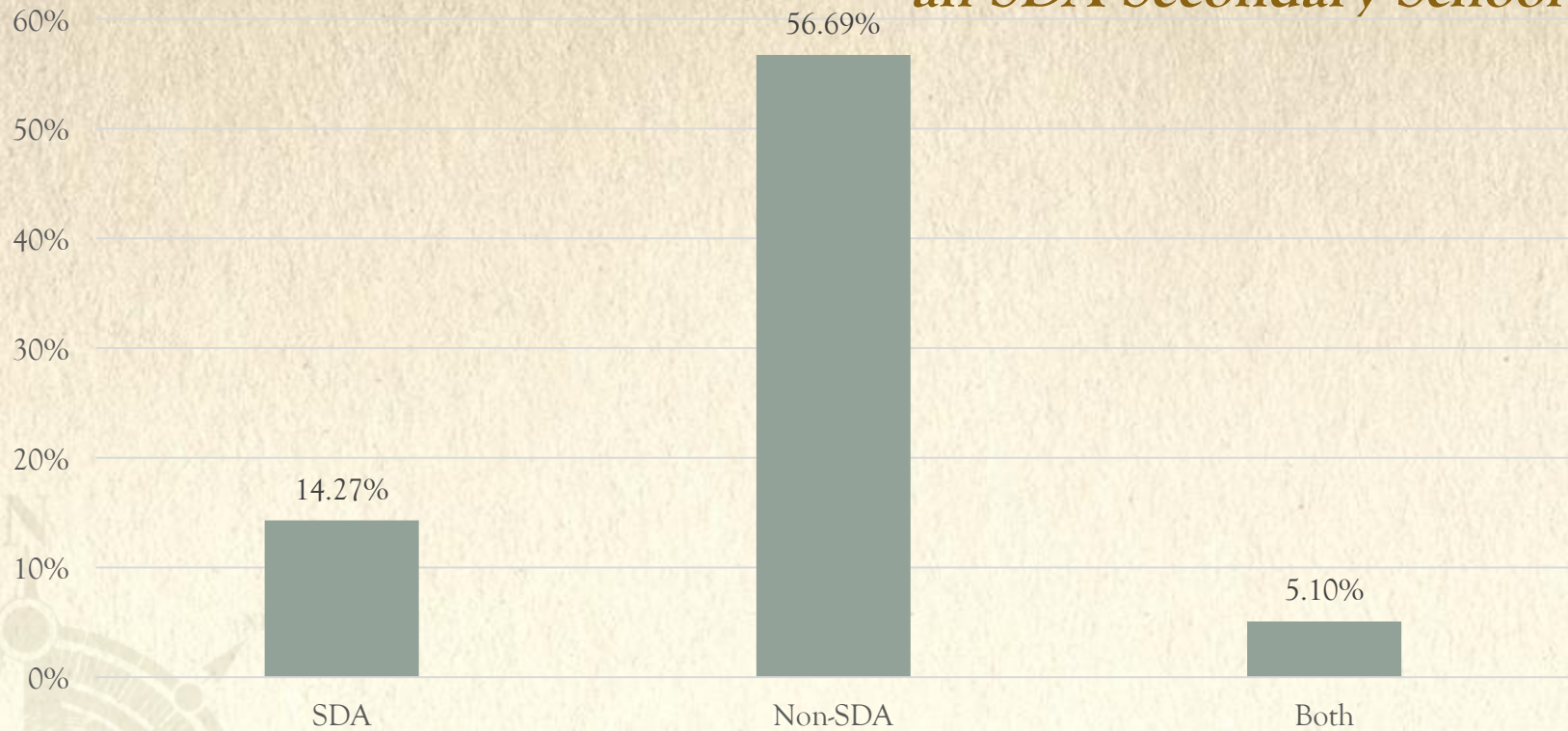
# Ex-Members: Attended Primary (Elementary) School

*Current Members = 46% Attended an SDA Primary School*



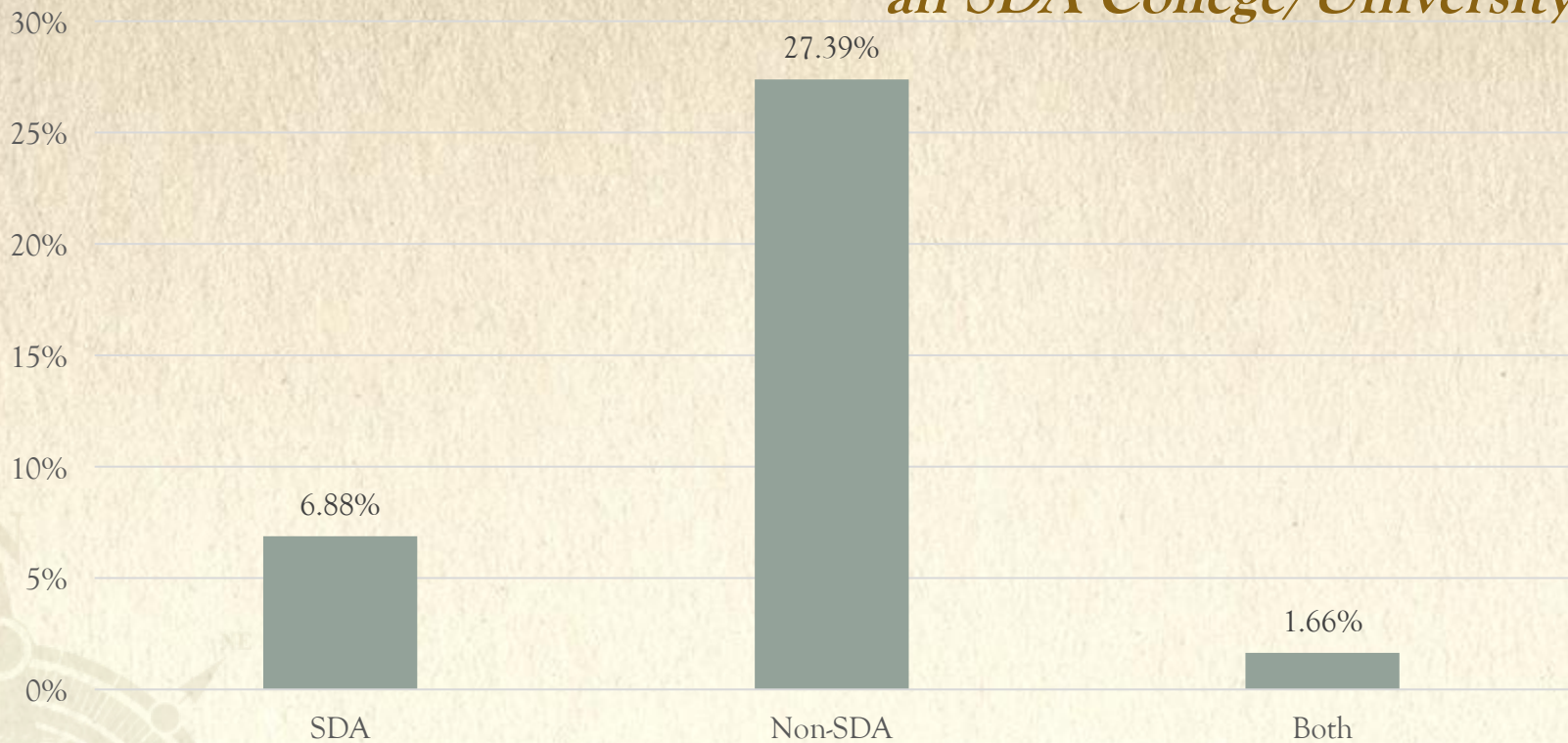
# Ex-Members: Attended Secondary (High) School

*Current Members = 35% Attended an SDA Secondary School*

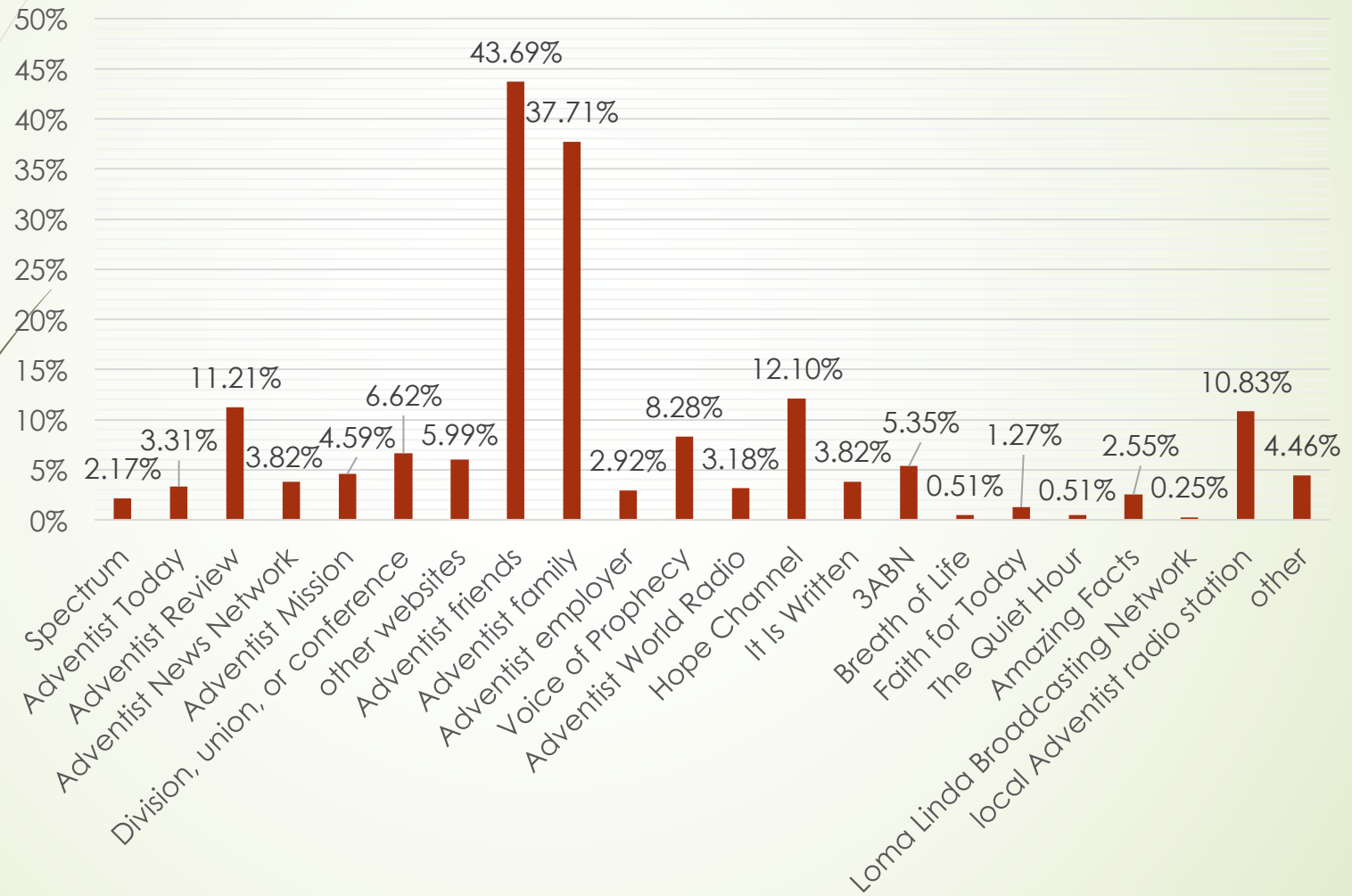


# Ex-Members: Attended college or university (tertiary/further/higher)

*Current Members = 13% Attended  
an SDA College/University*

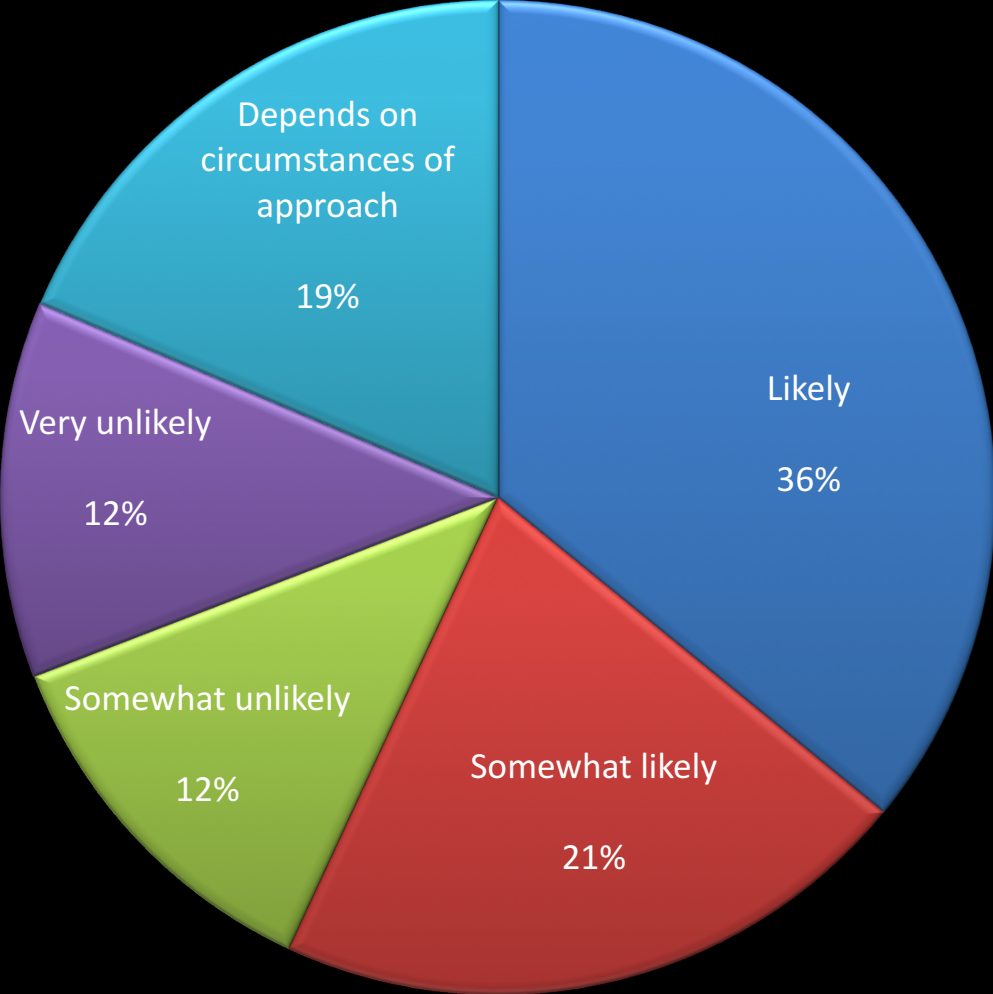


# Sources of Information

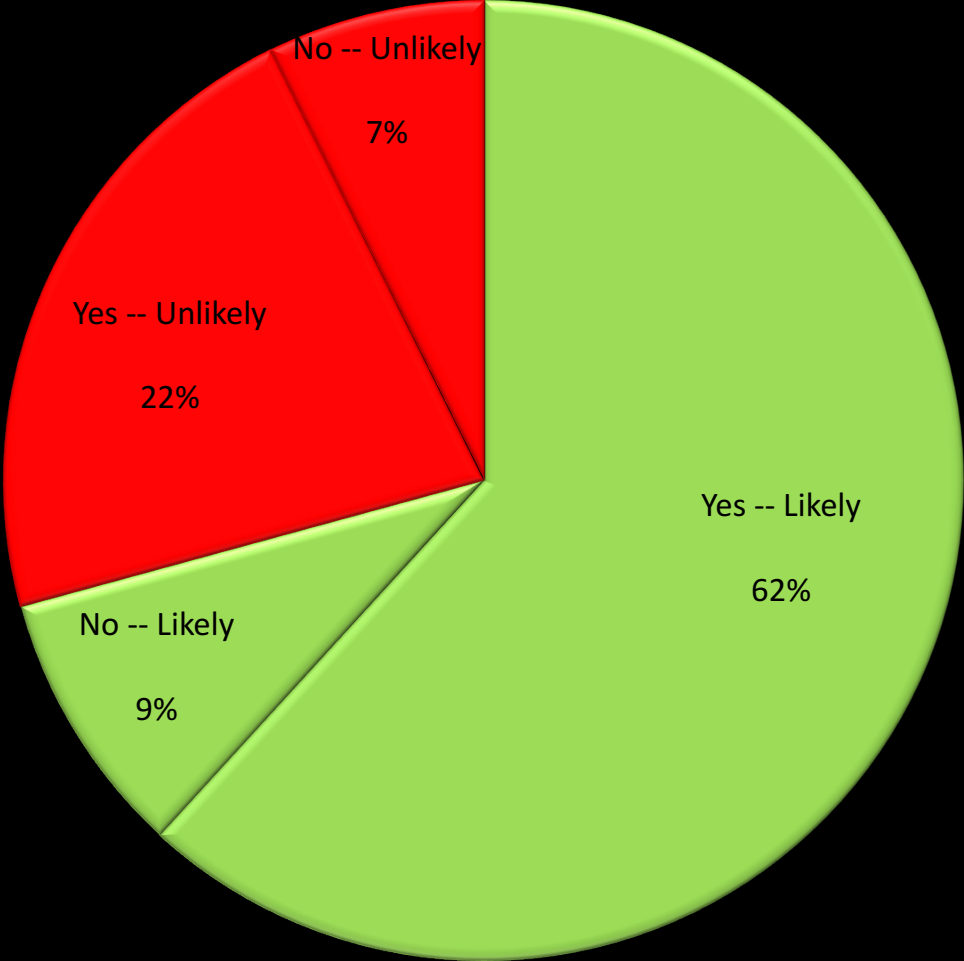




# How would you rate your openness to reconnect?



# Correlation between Visitations after leaving and openness to reconnect with the Church



## A Lesson from Scripture

Luke 15:4–6

“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he

## A Lesson from Scripture

calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’

“I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

# Lesson from the Spirit of Prophecy

“The shepherd who discovers that one of his sheep is missing, does not look ... on the flock that is safely housed, and say, “I have ninety and nine, and it will cost me too much trouble to go in search of the straying one. Let him come back and I will open the door ... and let him in.” No; **no sooner does the sheep go astray** than the shepherd is filled with grief

# Lesson from the Spirit of Prophecy

and anxiety. He counts and recounts the flock. When he is sure that **one sheep is lost, he slumbers not.** He leaves the ninety and nine ... and goes in search of the straying sheep. The darker ... the night, and the more perilous the way, the greater is the shepherd's anxiety, and the more earnest his search. **He makes every effort to find that one lost sheep."**

## The Lesson of Scripture

God's desired retention rate?

100%!

We are missing many more than one sheep out of every hundred.

**Are we unwilling to follow our Lord and Saviour's example?**

# The Good Shepherd

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

Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 187



*What should we do?*



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# “How then should we live?”

- **Administrators** need to prioritize discipleship and let pastors know that is a priority
- **Pastors** need to work **collaboratively** with their **elders** and with church members
- **Small groups** have a **vital** role to play
- South Philippines Union: suffered terrible attrition and introduced a new measure: *every* new member, the moment after baptism, is introduced to a small group which will be their spiritual family

# How then should we live?

- If you don't see someone in church for a while, call them up and see how they're doing
- Make contact with former members of your local church—offer an apology for anything you or other church members may have done to offend and tell them they are always welcome
- Use neutral ways to reconnect: e.g., music
- And when former (or current!) members who have not attended church for a while *do* come, *welcome* them, like the father of the prodigal son

# GC N&R Committee Recommendations

1. Every union to have an active discipleship program: General Conference recommends “Growing Fruitful Disciples . . .



**Discipleship is life.**

<http://growingfruitfuldisciples.com/>

# Recommendations

1. Every union to have an active discipleship program (appropriately contextualized)
2. Adopt attendance counts as standard, to focus attention on the issue of who is attending—and who is not
3. Implement ACMS membership software in **all** fields: keeping track of members will help pastors and elders know who is slipping away

# Recommendations

4. Specific training in nurture, retention and discipling to be part of all ministerial and theological education programs
5. Implement comprehensive, practical training in **conflict resolution and reconciliation** at all levels: for union and conference/mission employees and in all local churches

# Recommendations

6. Each division to organize conferences on nurture, retention, and discipling:

One involving administrators and academics, then further conferences in territories, sharing data and good practice with pastors and elders



# Recommendations

7. Every union to appoint a Nurture and Retention Coordinator; and to establish a Nurture and Retention Committee, chaired by one of the officers, with the Coordinator as secretary, and including the following departmental directors:

Children's Ministries, Education, Family Ministries, Ministerial, Sabbath School & Personal Ministries, Women's Ministries, Youth Ministries

# First global Summit on Nurture, Retention, and Discipling

All the presentations given at the 2013 World Summit on Nurture, Retention, and Discipling are available:

[http://www.adventistresearch.org/nurture\\_home](http://www.adventistresearch.org/nurture_home)

(along with audio recordings of the discussion sessions that followed each presentation)

# Other Resources

[http://www.adventistresearch.org/research\\_reports](http://www.adventistresearch.org/research_reports):

Under “Retention Studies”:

Full reports on the two studies of former and inactive members that are summarised in this presentation

[http://www.adventistresearch.org/astr\\_presentations](http://www.adventistresearch.org/astr_presentations)

Copies of David Trim’s reports to Annual Council in 2014 & 2015, which draw out key findings and statistics

# Other Resources

[http://southern.libguides.com/c.php?g=490463&p=3853417:](http://southern.libguides.com/c.php?g=490463&p=3853417)

A report on American graduates of Adventist universities & their sense of connectedness to the Seventh-day Adventist Church

<http://www.adventistresearch.org/sites/default/files/files/Revised%20Adventist%20Youth-Connected%20and%20Disconnected%20Oct%202013.pdf>

A presentation by Galina Stele which brings together data, from several studies, on young Adventists around the world and factors affecting their retention