

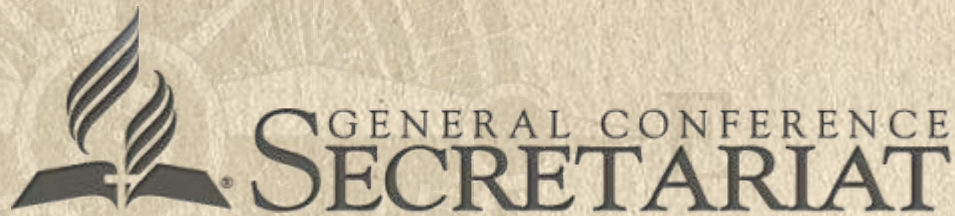
Nurture &
Retention

Foundational Research

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Director of Archives, Statistics, and Research





Nurture & Retention

Why did they leave? *Or: Why they didn't leave*

Research findings from two global surveys
of Seventh-day Adventists



Two Studies of lapsed Adventists

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

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

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Two Studies of lapsed Adventists

2. At the request of the GC Nurture & Retention Committee, a survey was developed by the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASTR), to be administered to members who had ceased being Church members: two versions—one, with a few additional questions, administered to members who had left the church, but have since “returned” to membership (those who have not are “former members”). **785 surveys completed/returned**

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

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Survey Details

- > Basic demographic information
- > Attendance of SDA/Non-SDA schools
- > Five most important causes for initially becoming SDA
- > Reason for leaving SDA church
- > Length of time as practicing members and of regular church attendance
- > 20 possible factors that triggered decision to leave
- > Free-form section on why people decide to leave
- > Length of time since last attended SDA church
- > If returned, length of absence from SDA church

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Areas Survey Explored

- > Possible connections between Adventist education leaving the church
- > Frequency of involvement in community service and spiritual activities
- > Opinions of organized religion
- > Exploration of personal beliefs, including authority of Scripture, gift of prophecy manifested in Ellen White, etc.
- > Degree to which belief in God continued after leaving
- > Nature of current ties to Adventism
- > How they felt about the church when they left
- > Rate of openness to reconnect with SDA church
- > If attending SDA church again, reasons for reconnection

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Two Studies of lapsed Adventists: global variations?

- ✧ Demographic data is largely the same in all divisions
- ✧ Data on reasons why people joined the Church varies, sometimes significantly, between divisions
- ✧ However, **data relating to *why* people stopped attending church is essentially the same in each division**
- ✧ **Human needs and expectations seem to be the same around the globe**
- ✧ On reflection, this should not be surprising:
- ✧ **Sin and its consequences—hurting people—are the same *everywhere***

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Demographics and conversion routes

- Gender and age
- Marital status
- How they became Seventh-day Adventist



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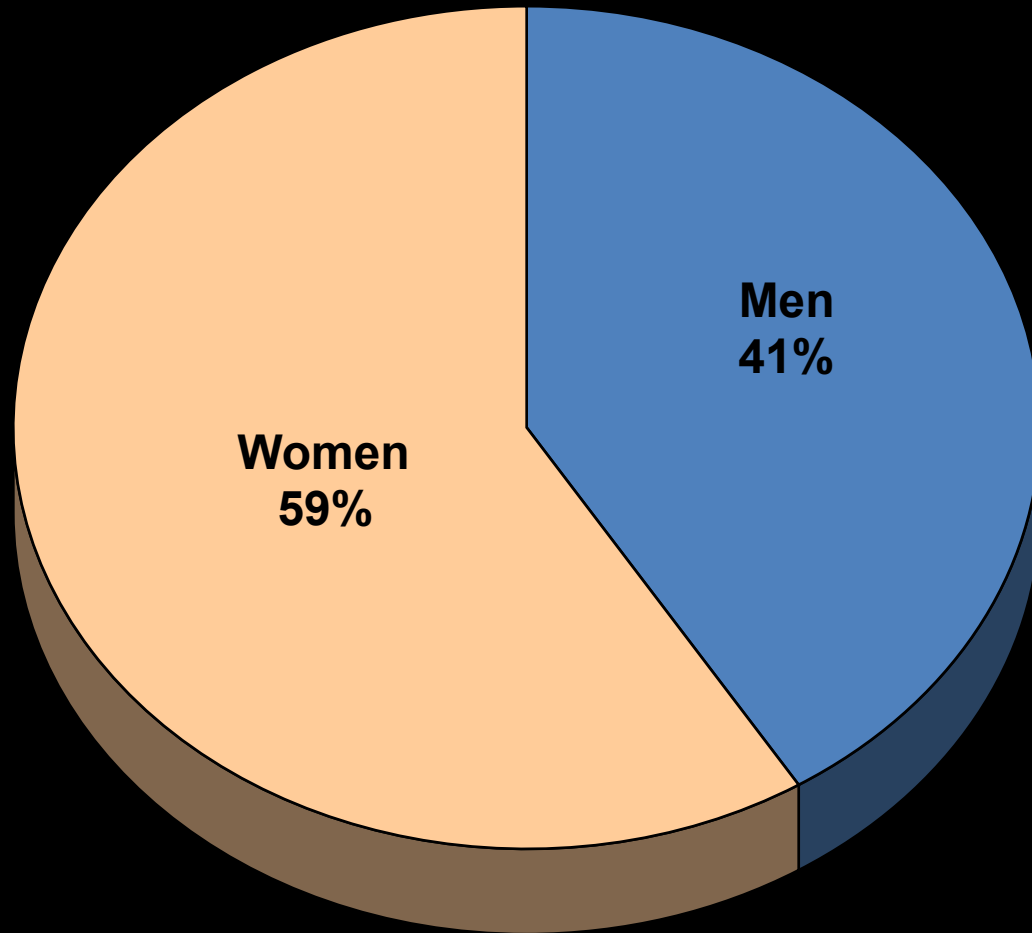
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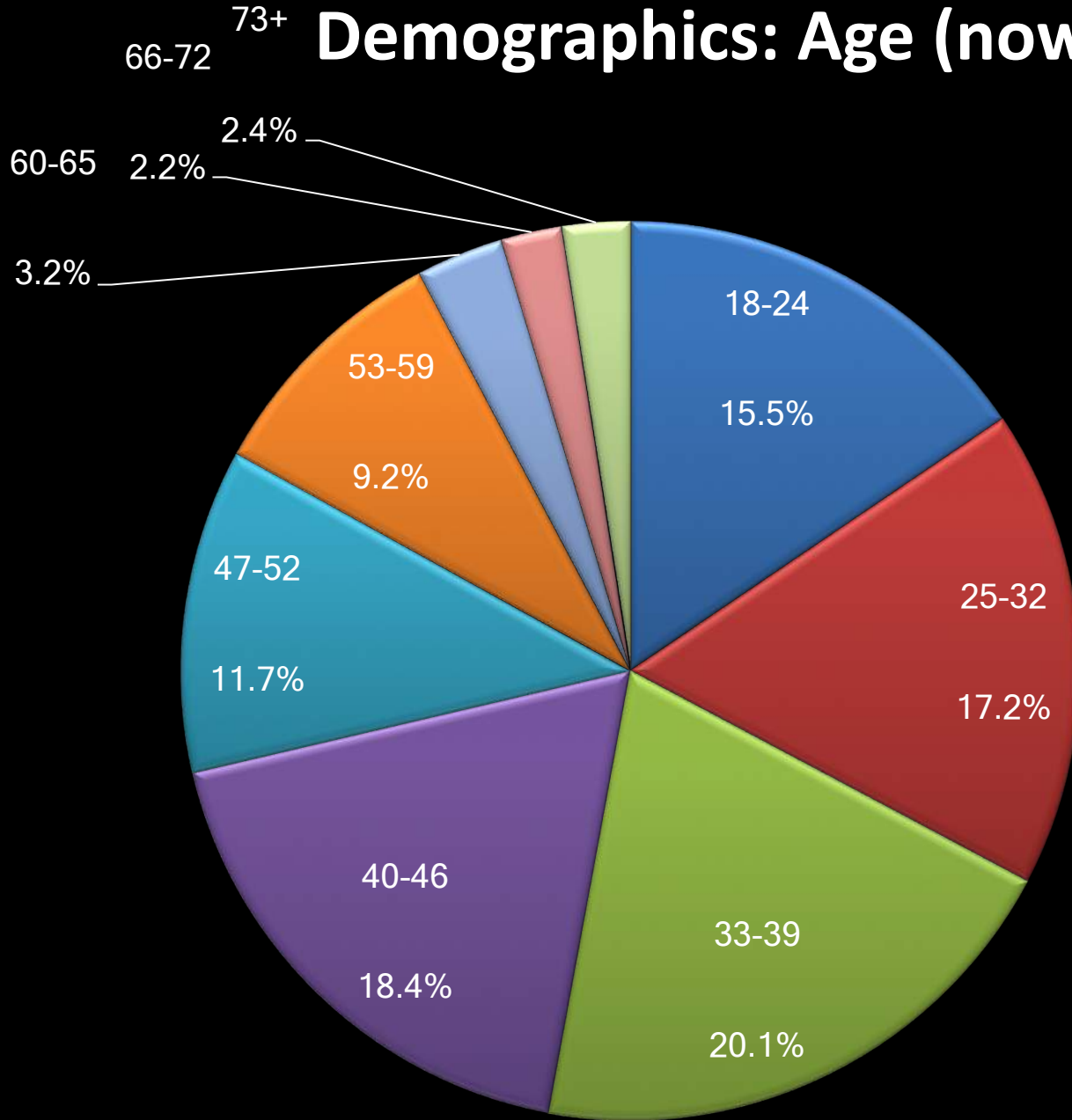
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Demographics: Gender

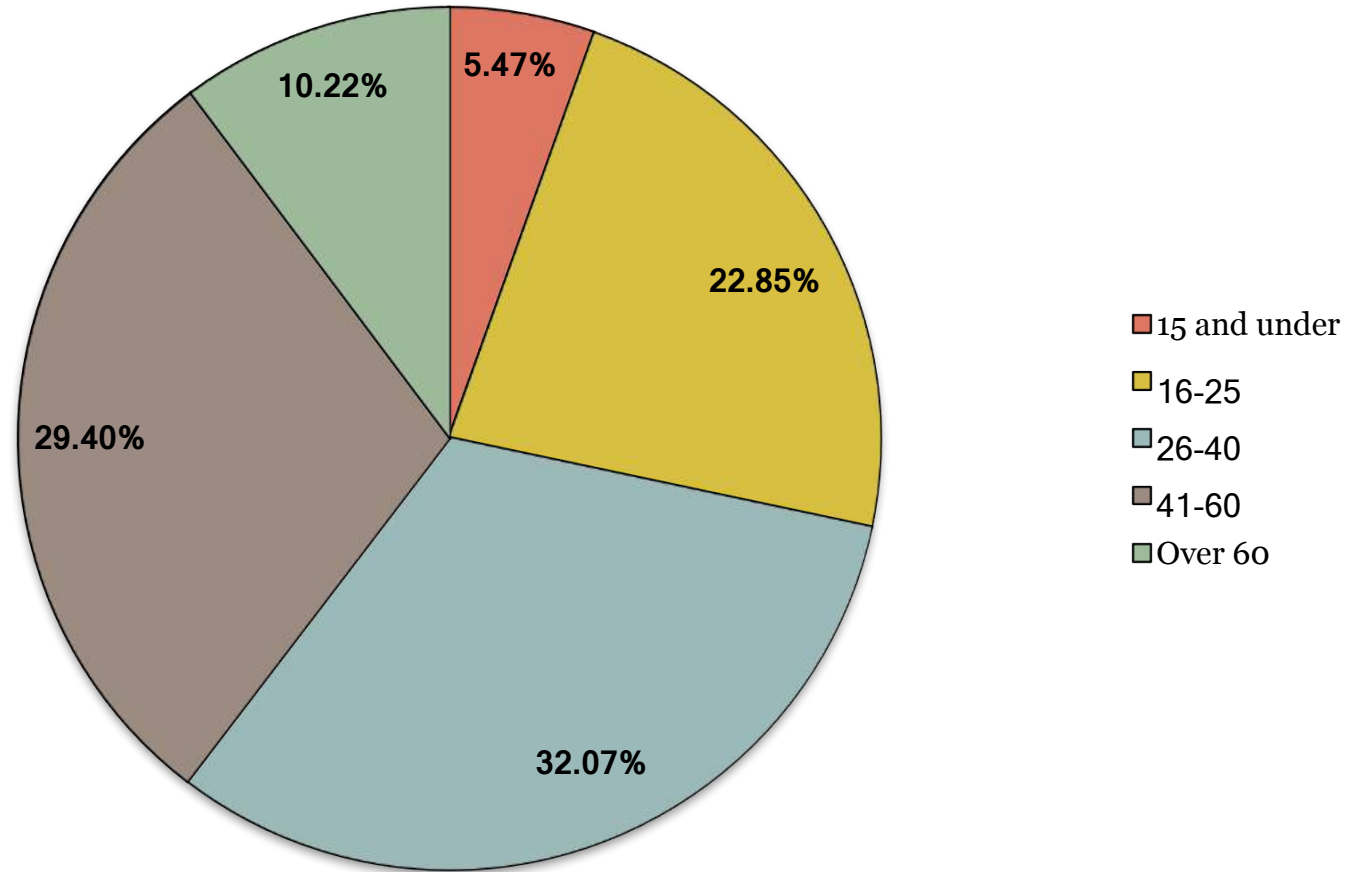


Global church membership: Women 57% Men 43%

Demographics: Age (now)

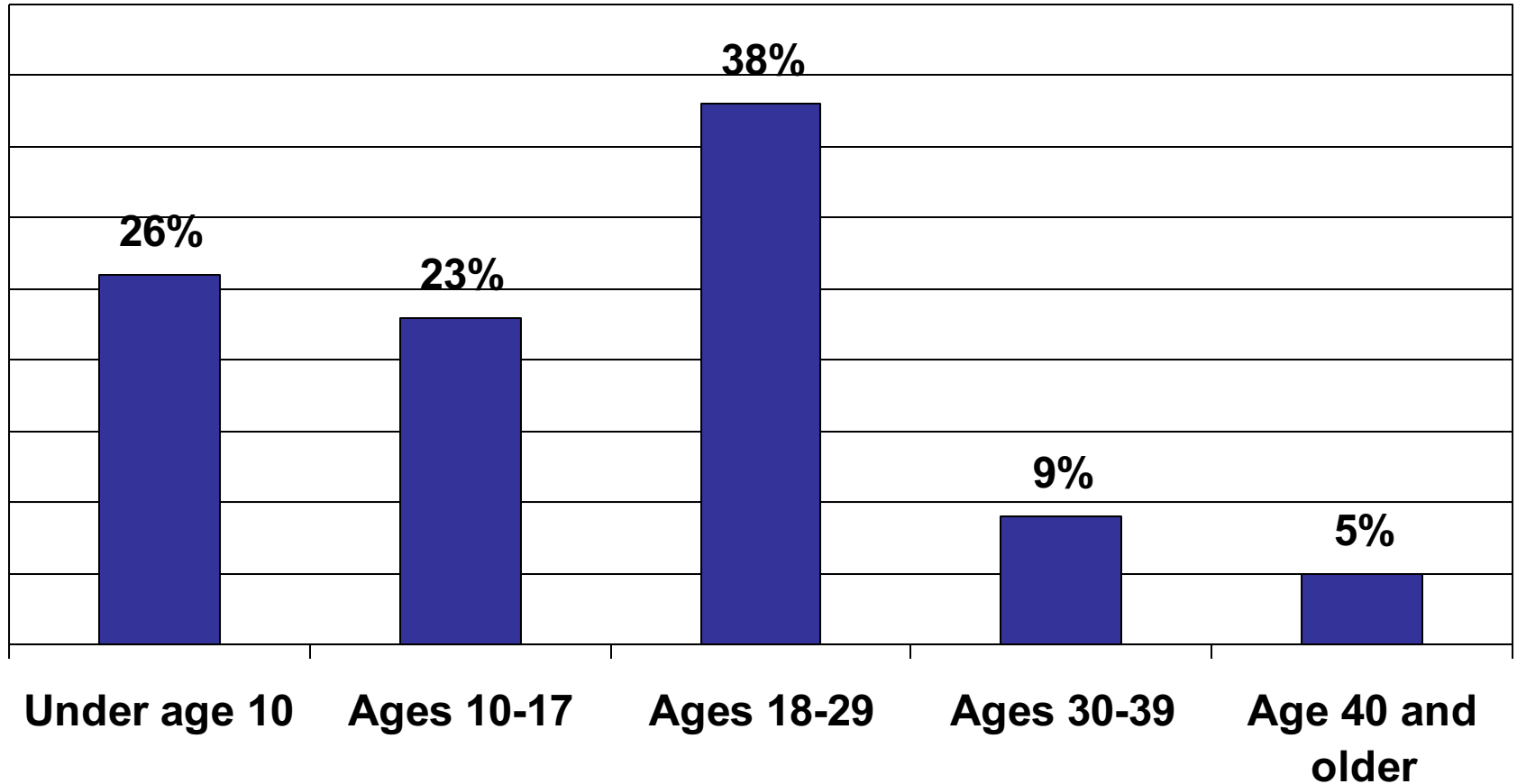


World Church, current members: age distribution

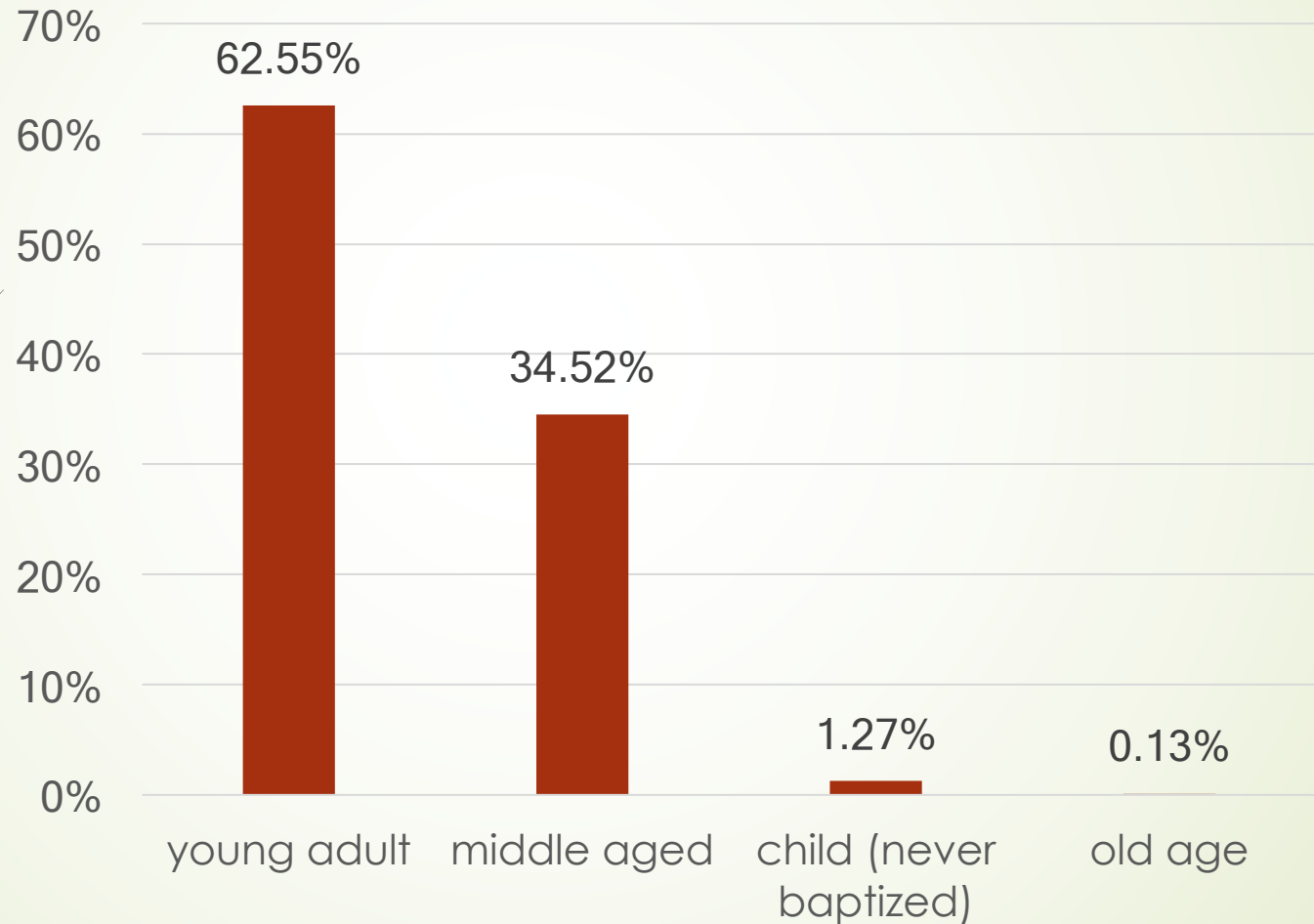


Under 40 = Ex-members 53% | Current membership 59%

Lapsed/ex-members: Age When First Started Attending the Adventist Church

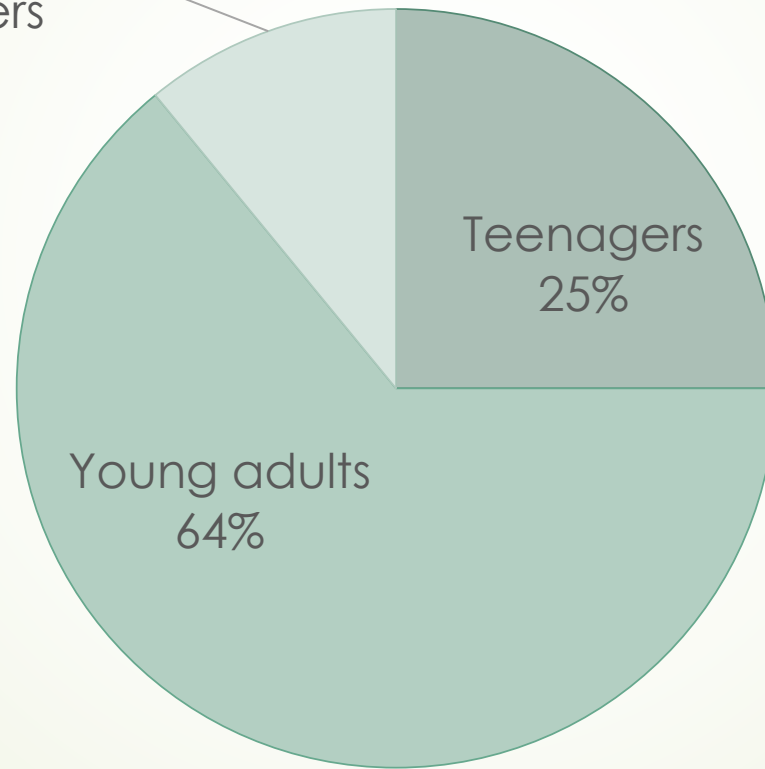


Stage of Life at Departure



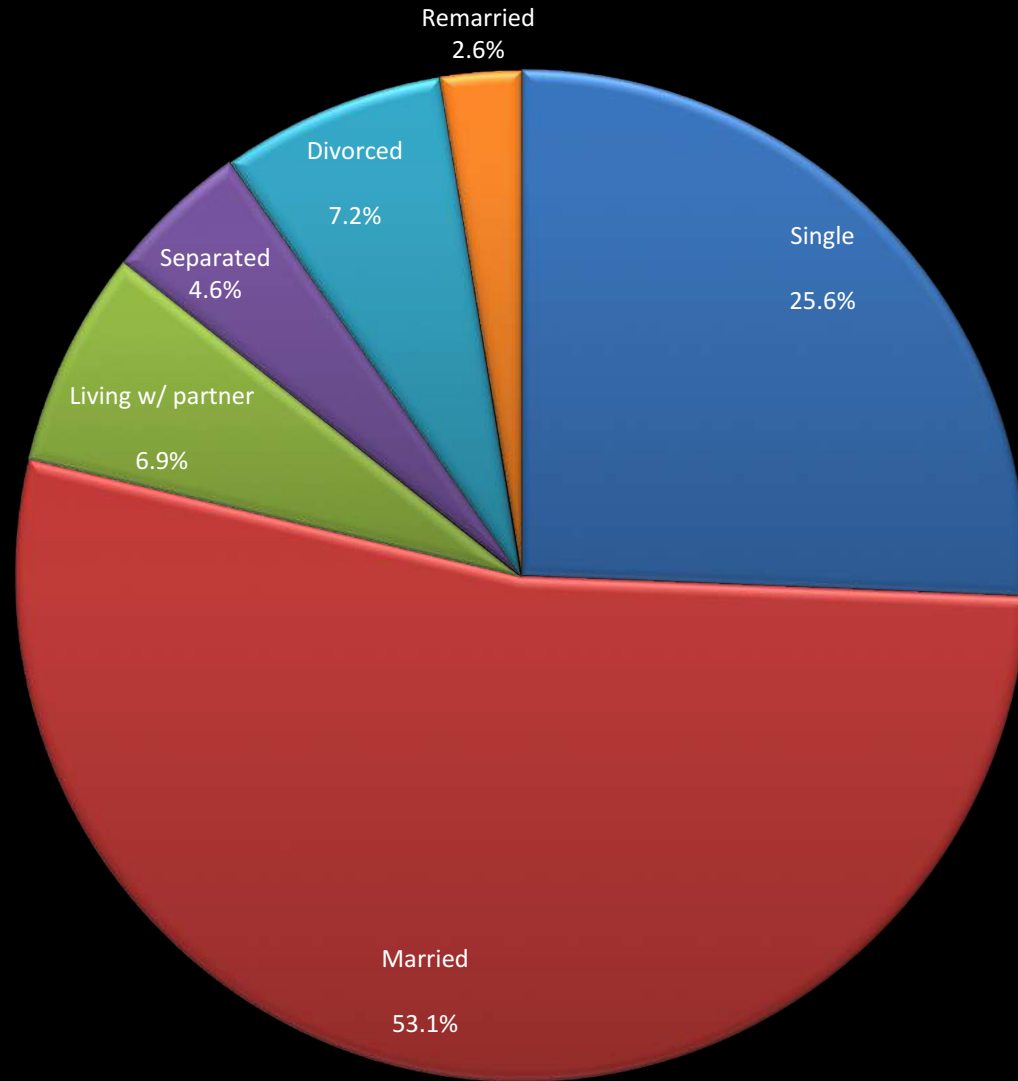
Pastors' perception: What age groups are most likely to leave the Church?

Middle-aged members
11%

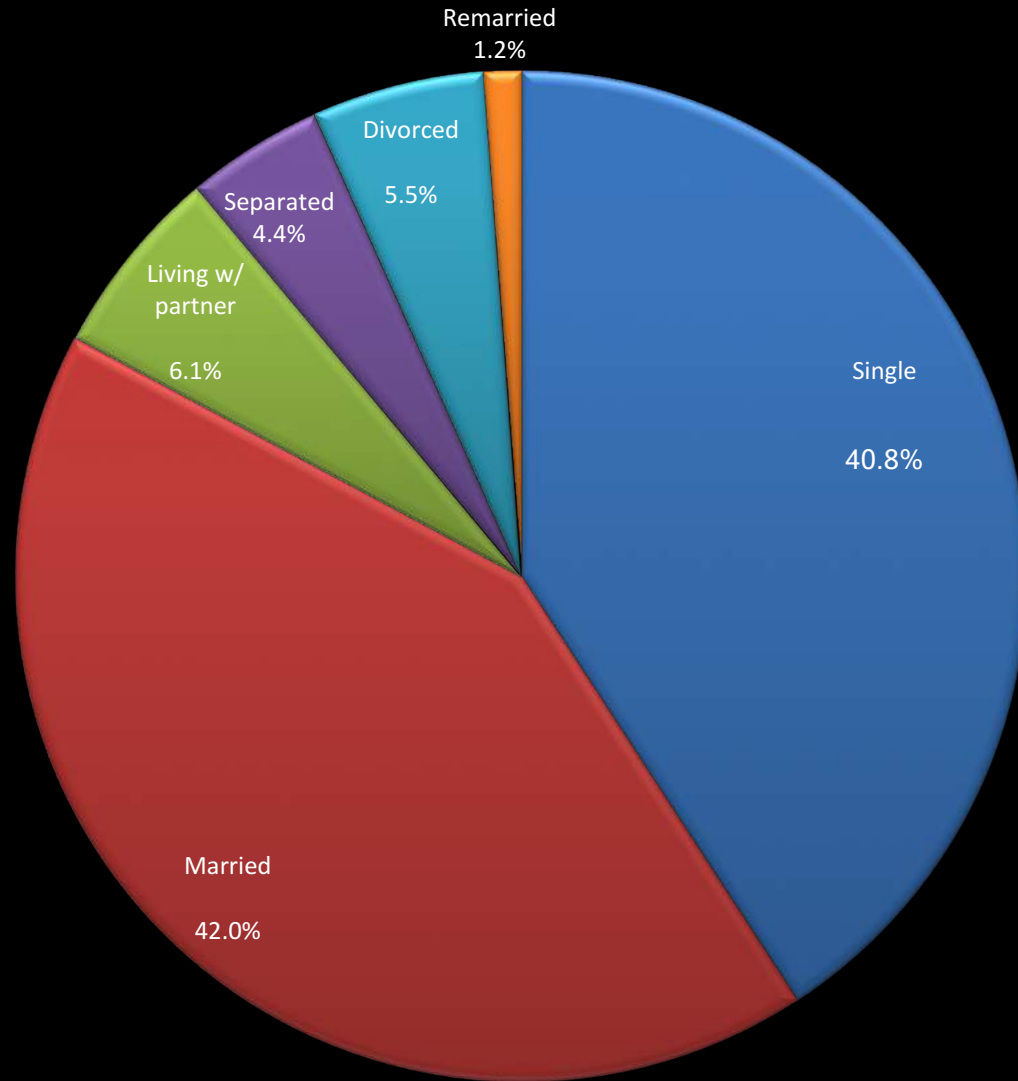


■ Teenagers ■ Young adults ■ Middle-aged members

Demographic Information (Marital Status) – Former Members



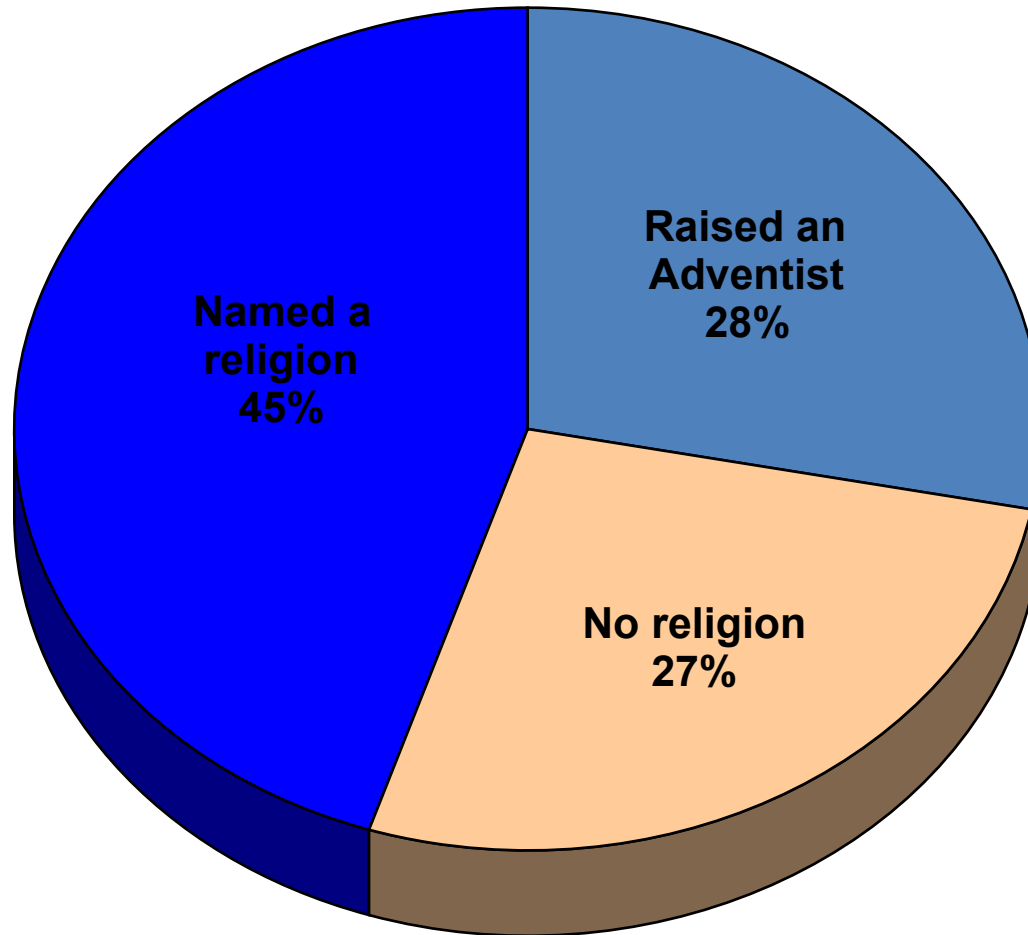
Demographic Information (Marital Status) – Returned Members



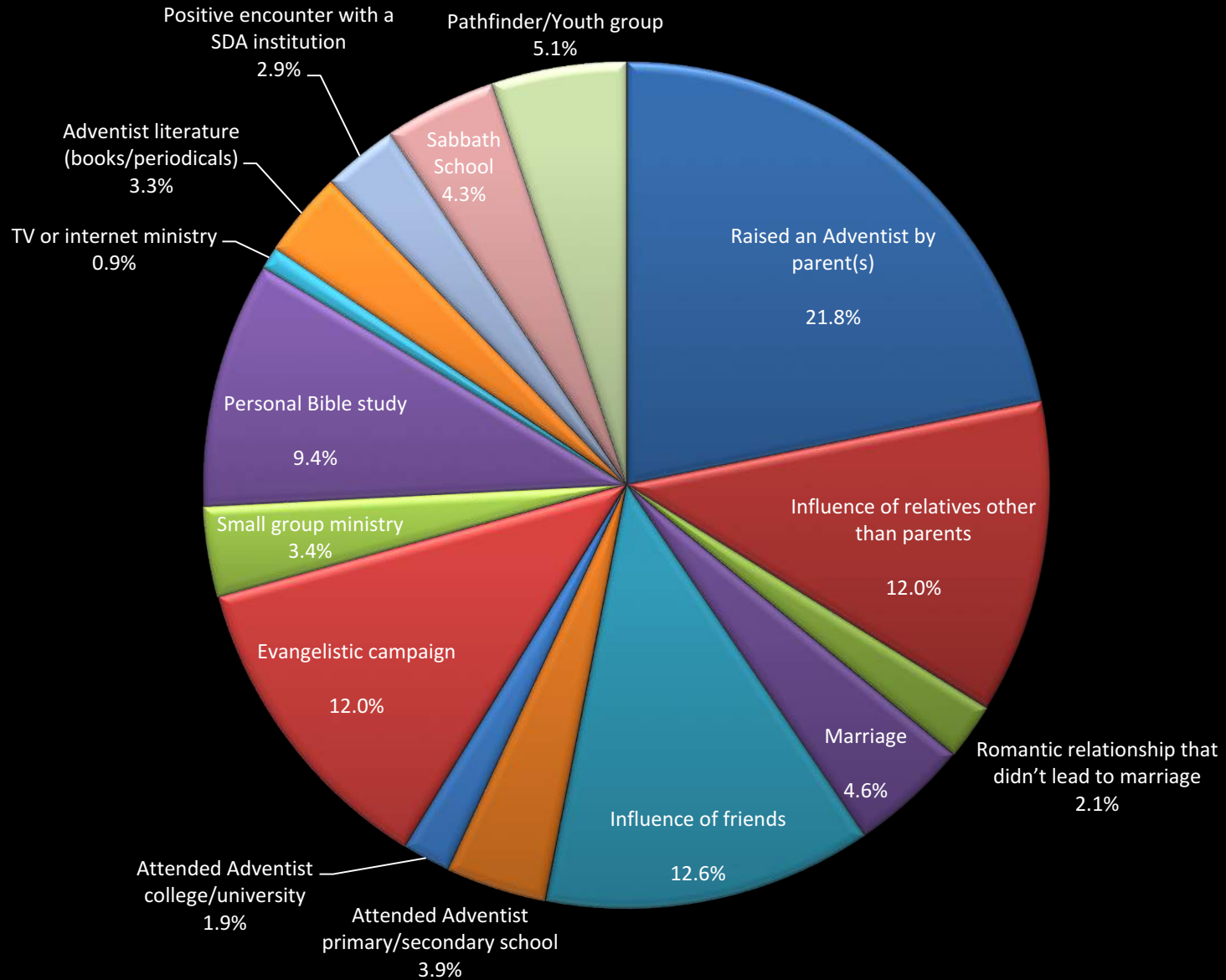
First Contact with the Seventh-day Adventist Church

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

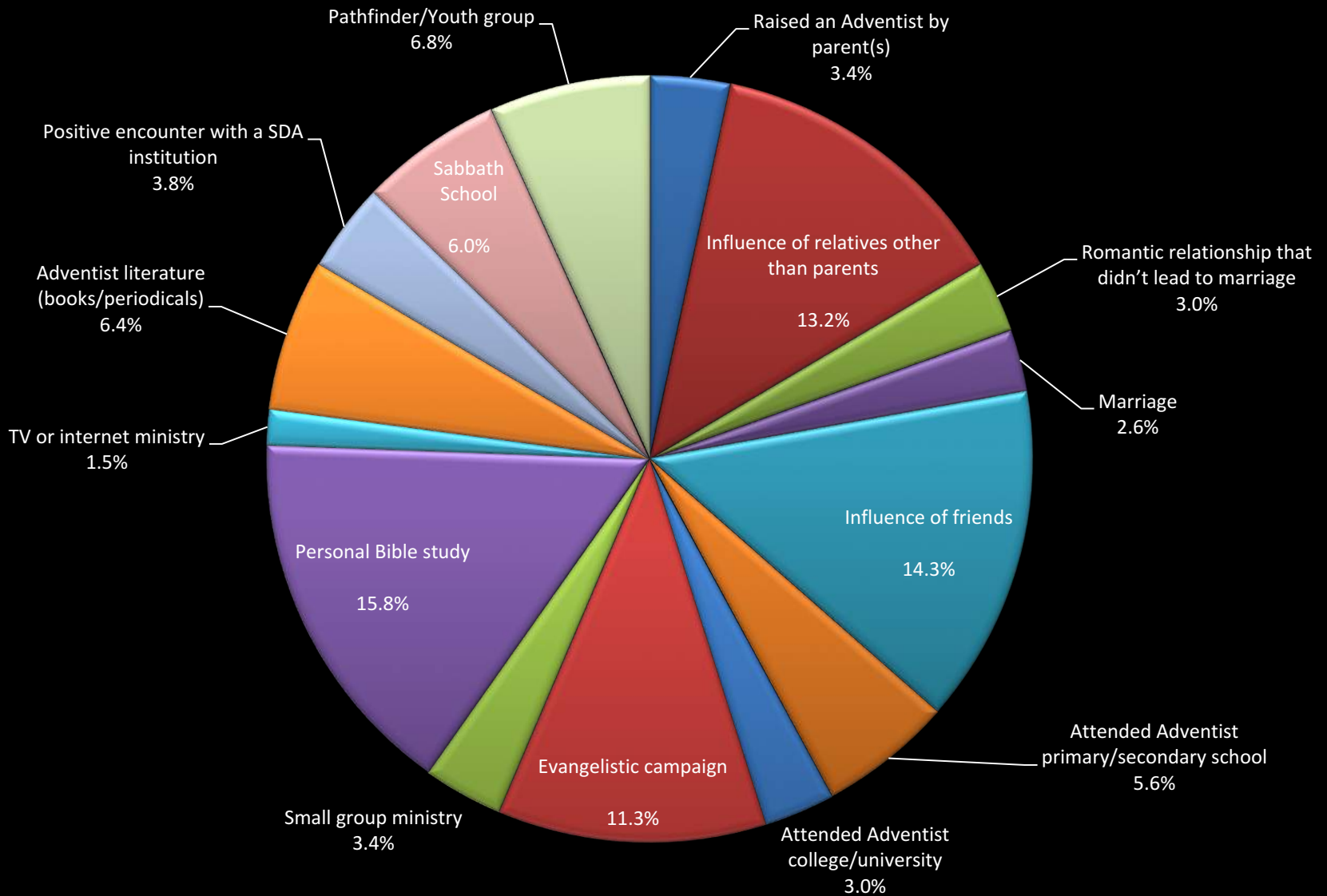
Religion Before Joining the Seventh-day Adventist Church



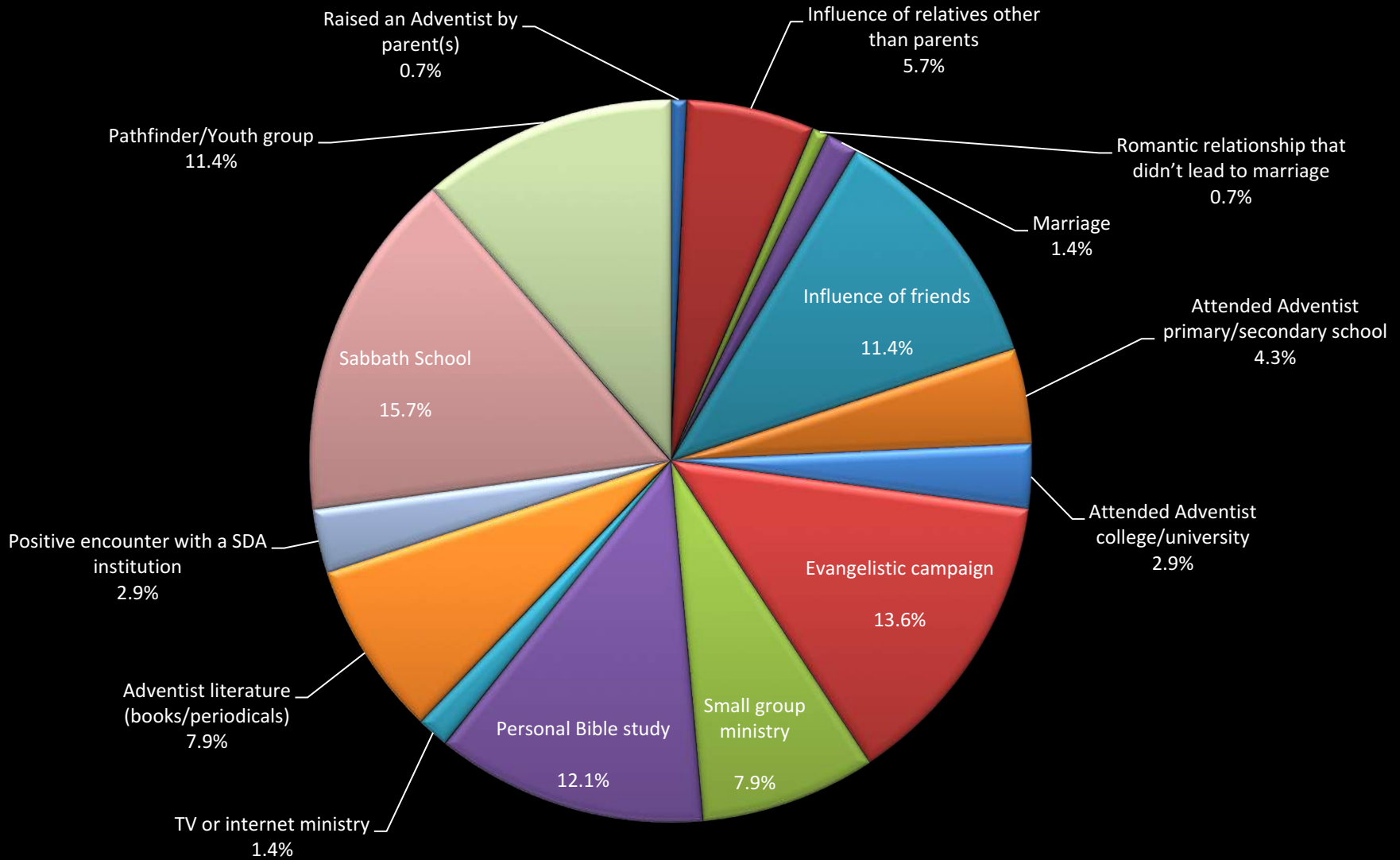
Most Important Avenues to becoming SDA (First ranking)



Most Important Avenues to becoming SDA (Second ranking)



Most Important Avenues to becoming SDA (Third ranking)



How ADVENTIST *were* they?

Were they *well grounded* in our faith?

Were they *active* in their local churches?



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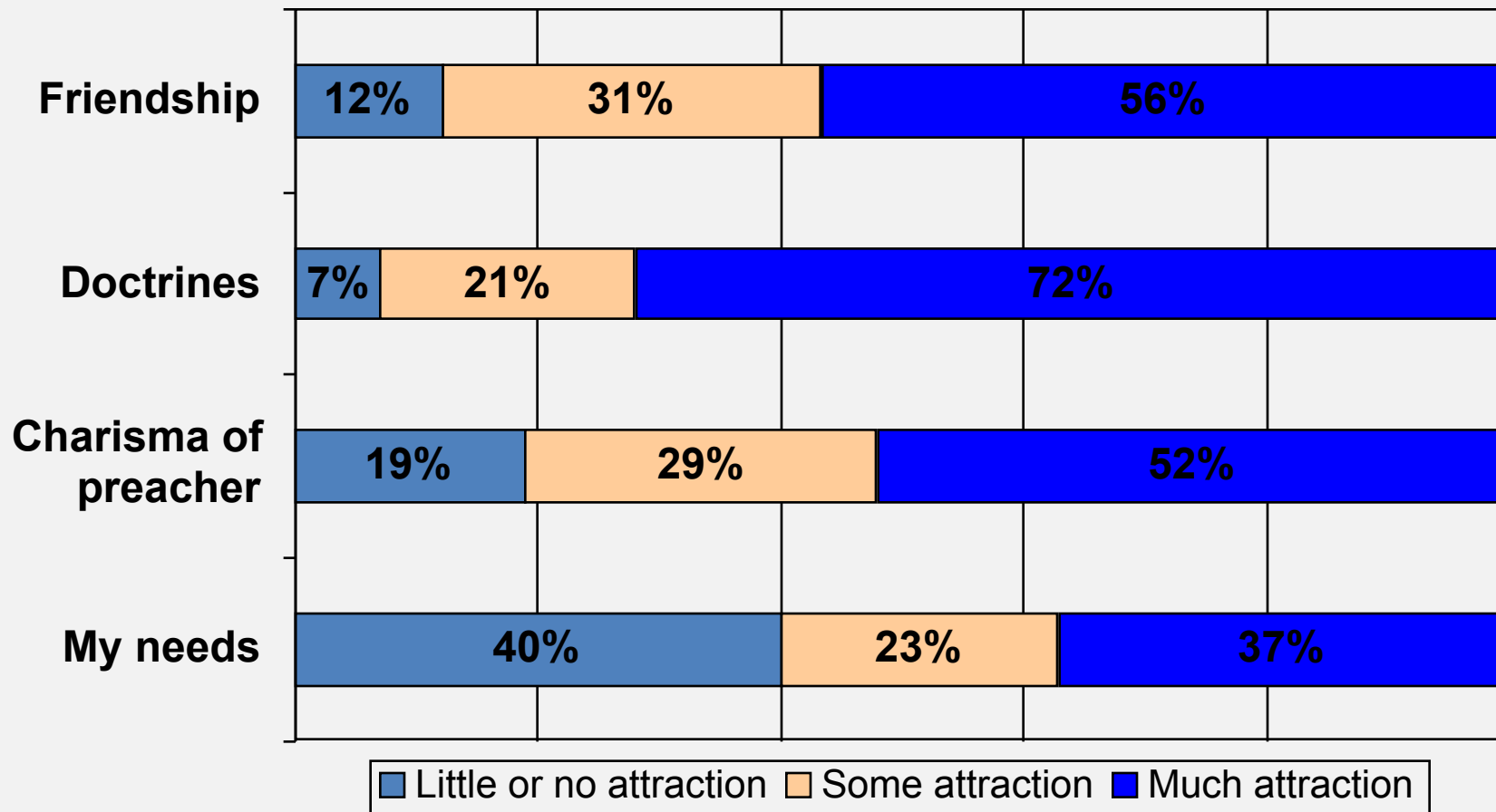


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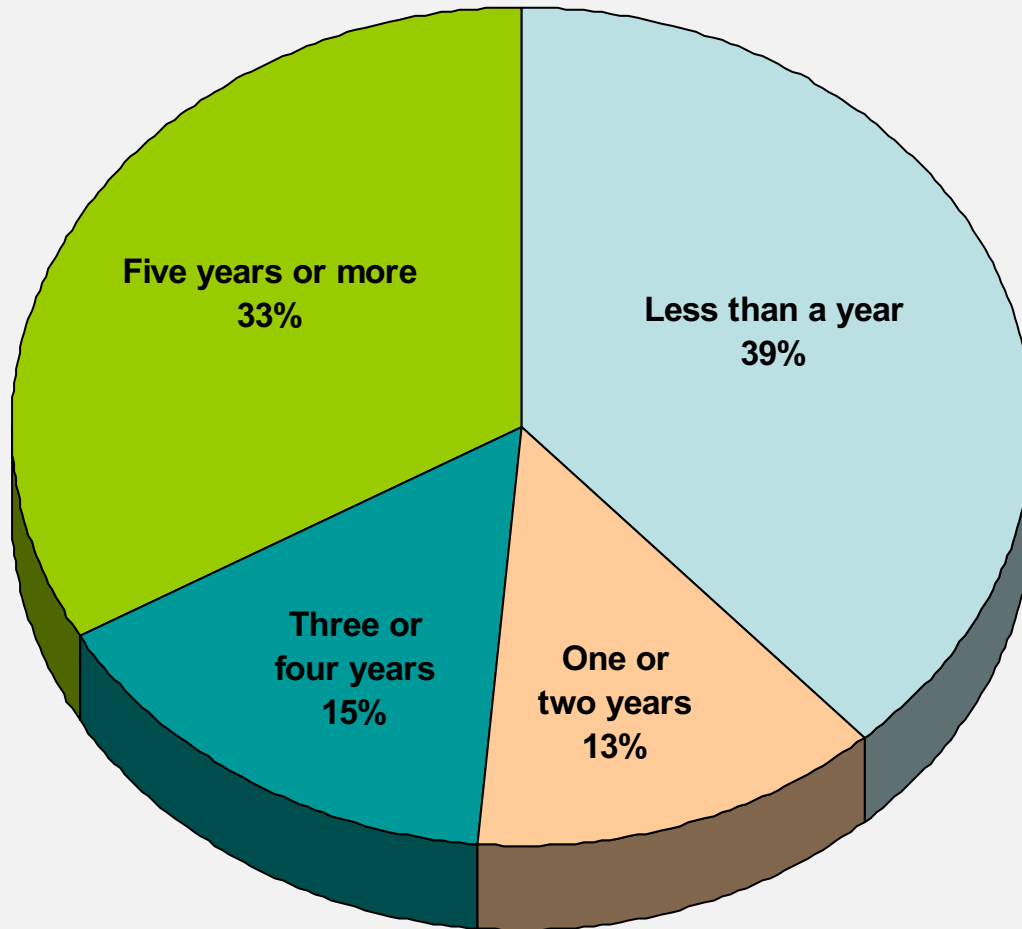
What most attracted you when you decided to join the Adventist Church?

Each = 100%

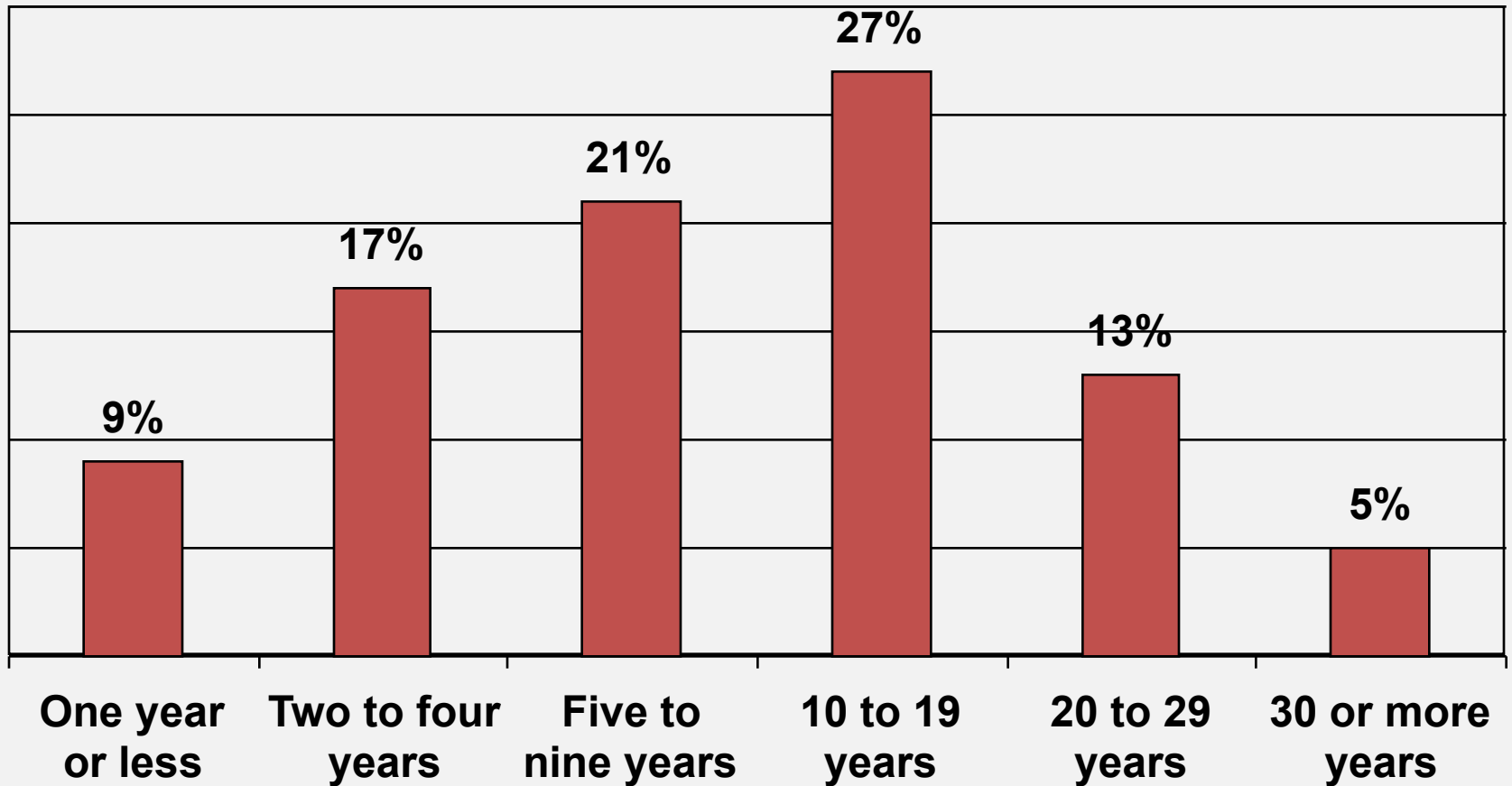
All interviewees were asked to rank all four of these



Time from First Contact to Baptism

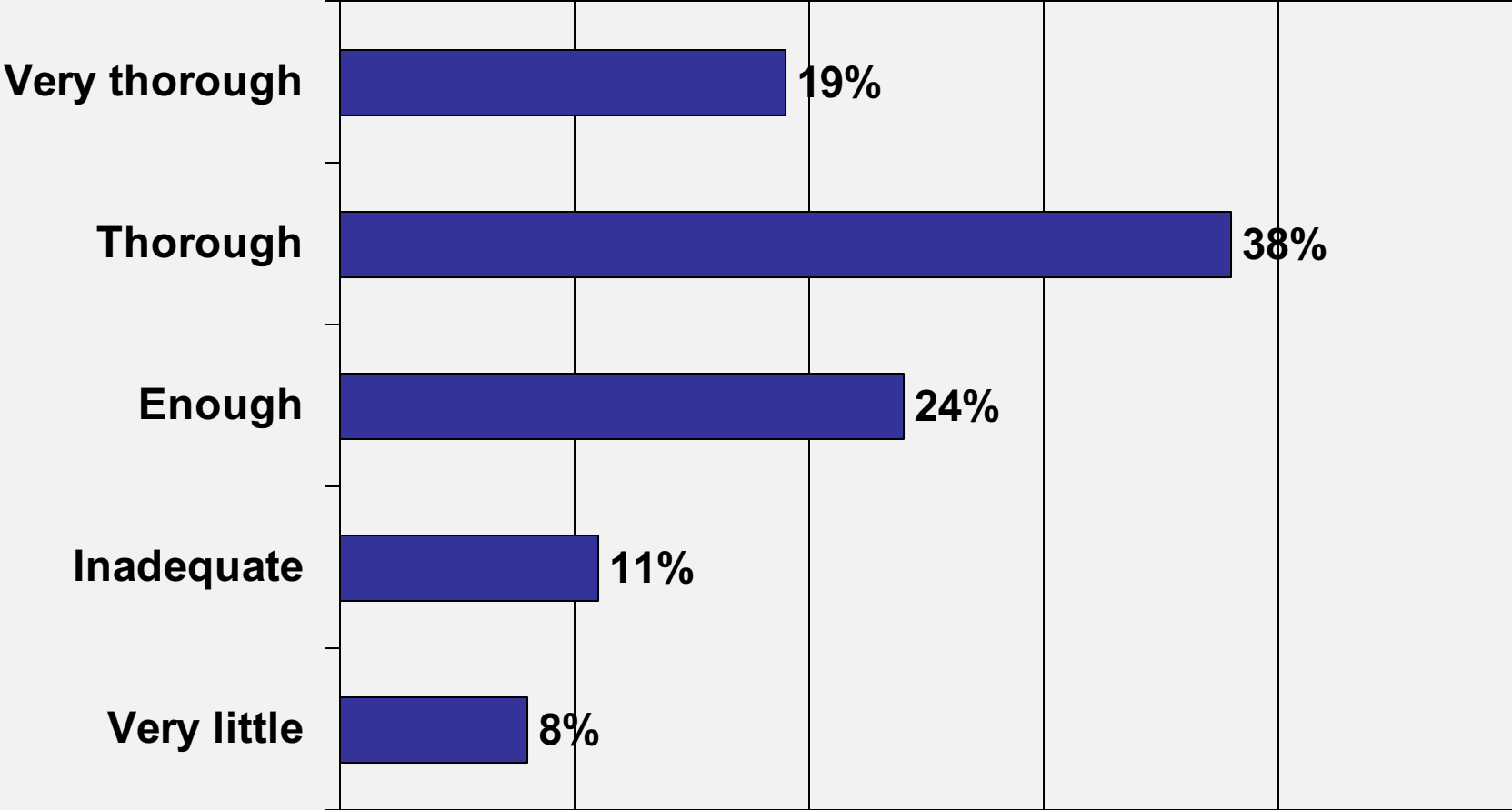


Number of Years Regularly Attended an Adventist Church

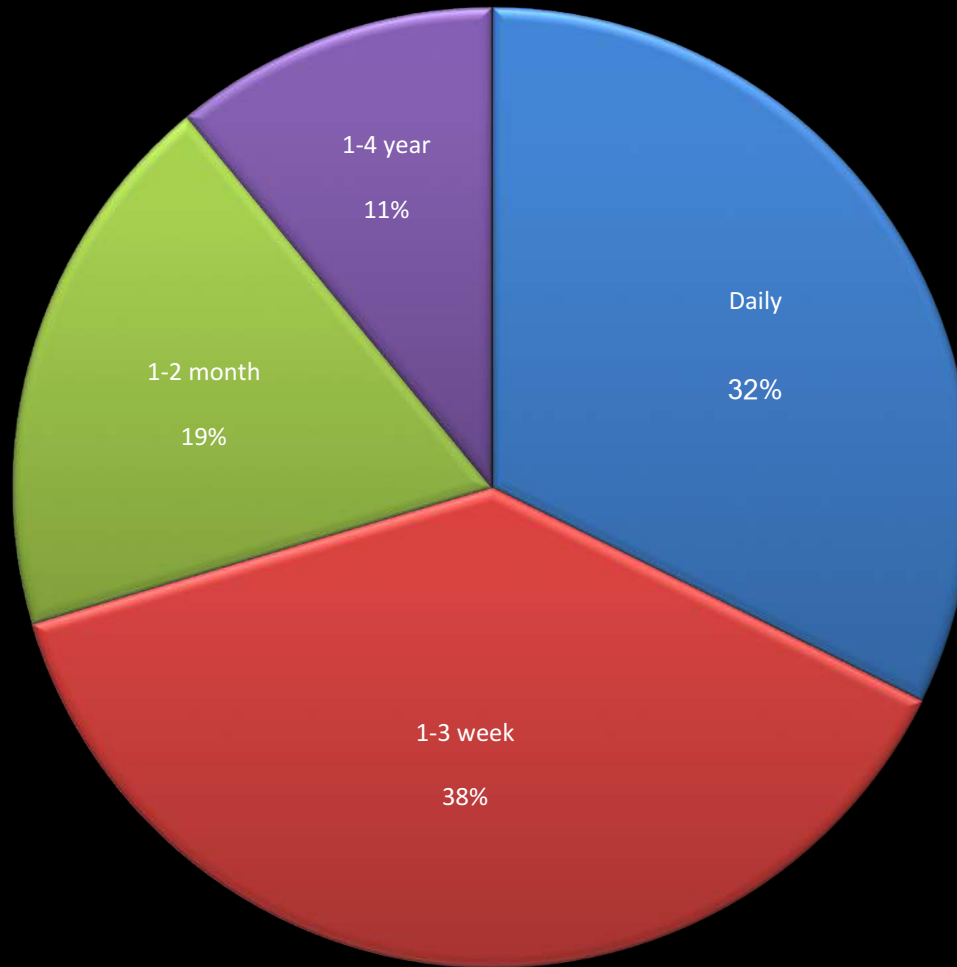


But people who attended fewer years are less likely to have been surveyed

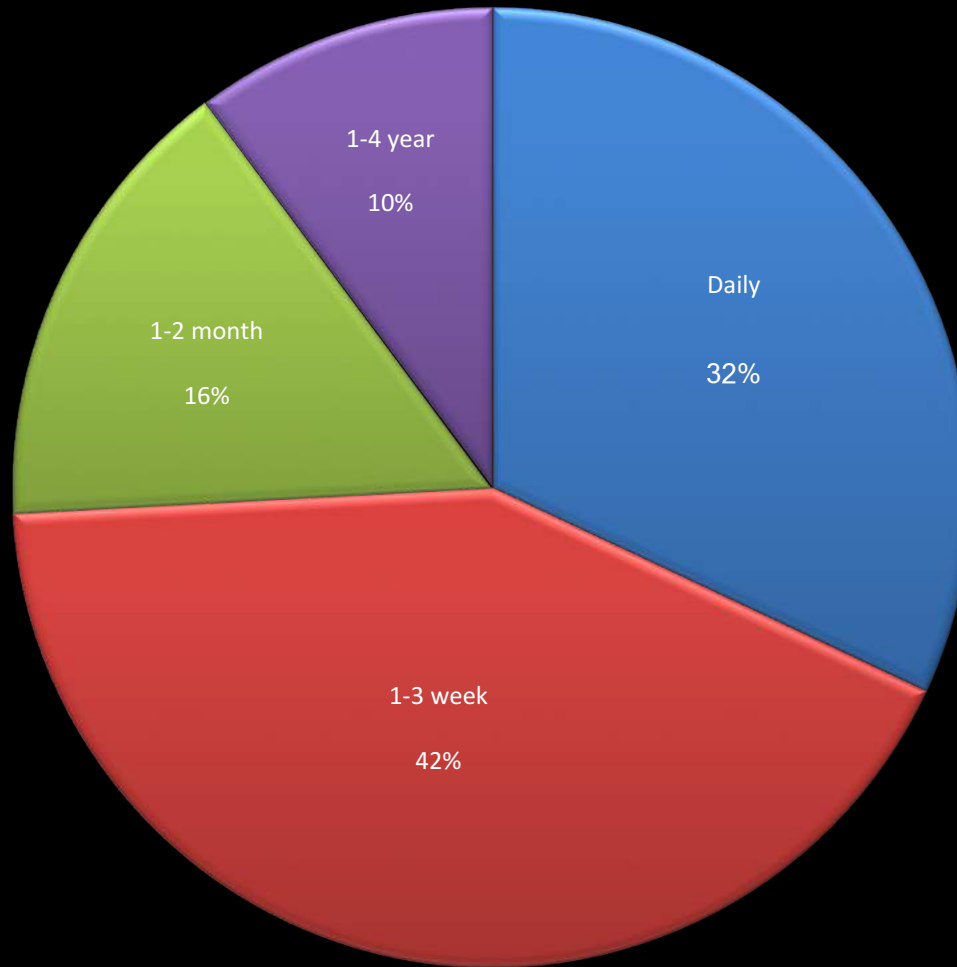
How would you describe the instruction given when you joined the church?



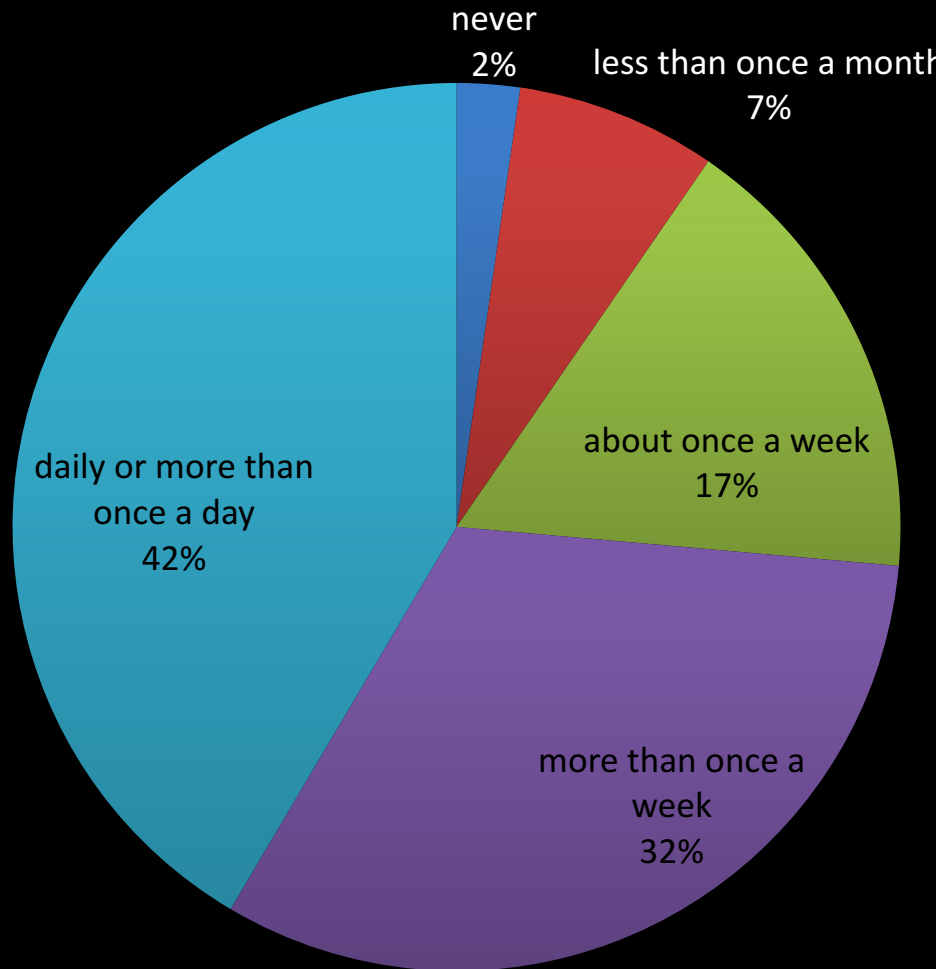
Frequency of engagement in spiritual activities while Adventist: Personal Bible study – Former Members



Frequency of engagement in spiritual activities while Adventist: Personal Bible study – Returned Members



Current church members: personal Bible-study



Multiple
times per
week =
74%

How ADVENTIST are they *now*?

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

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

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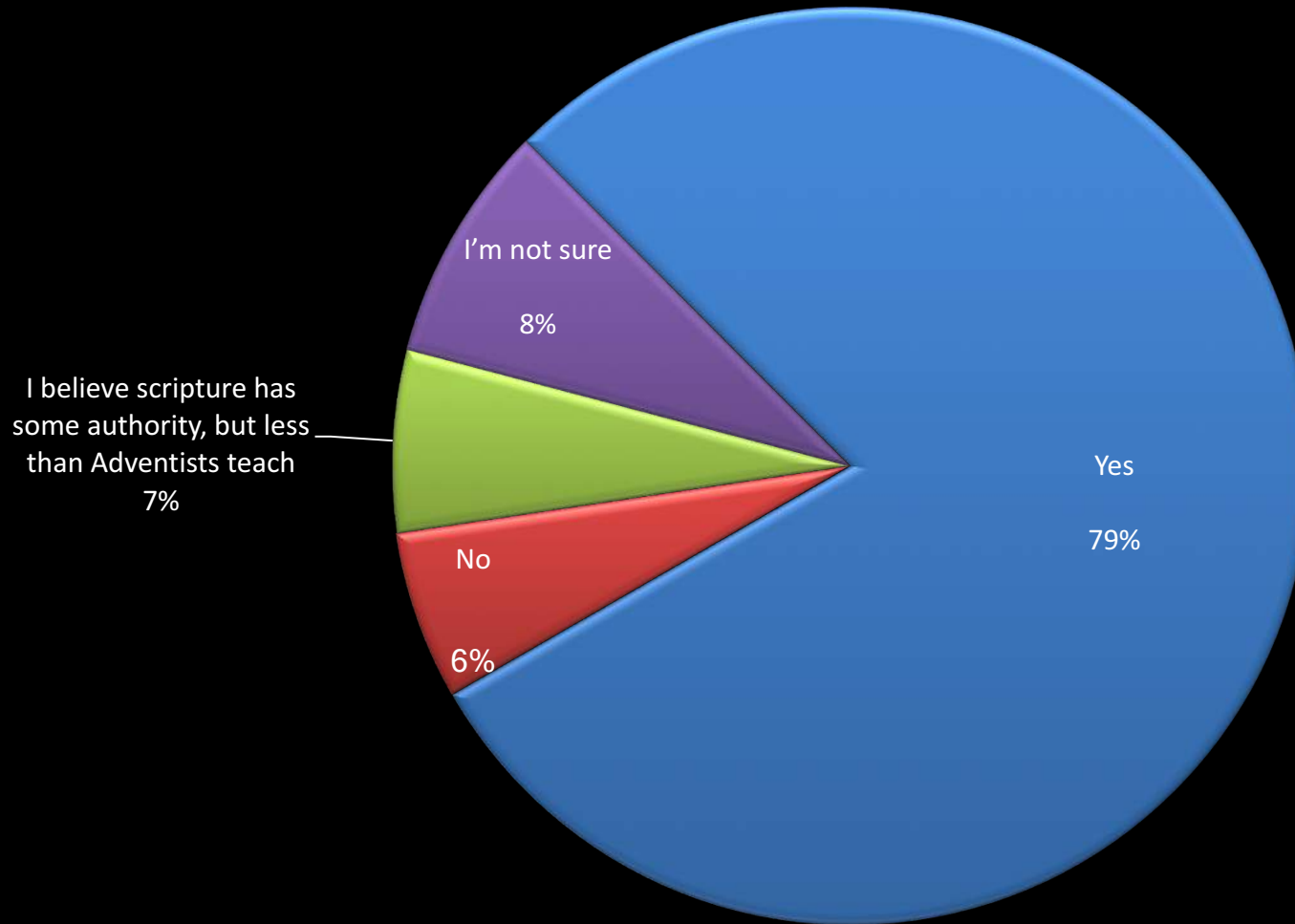
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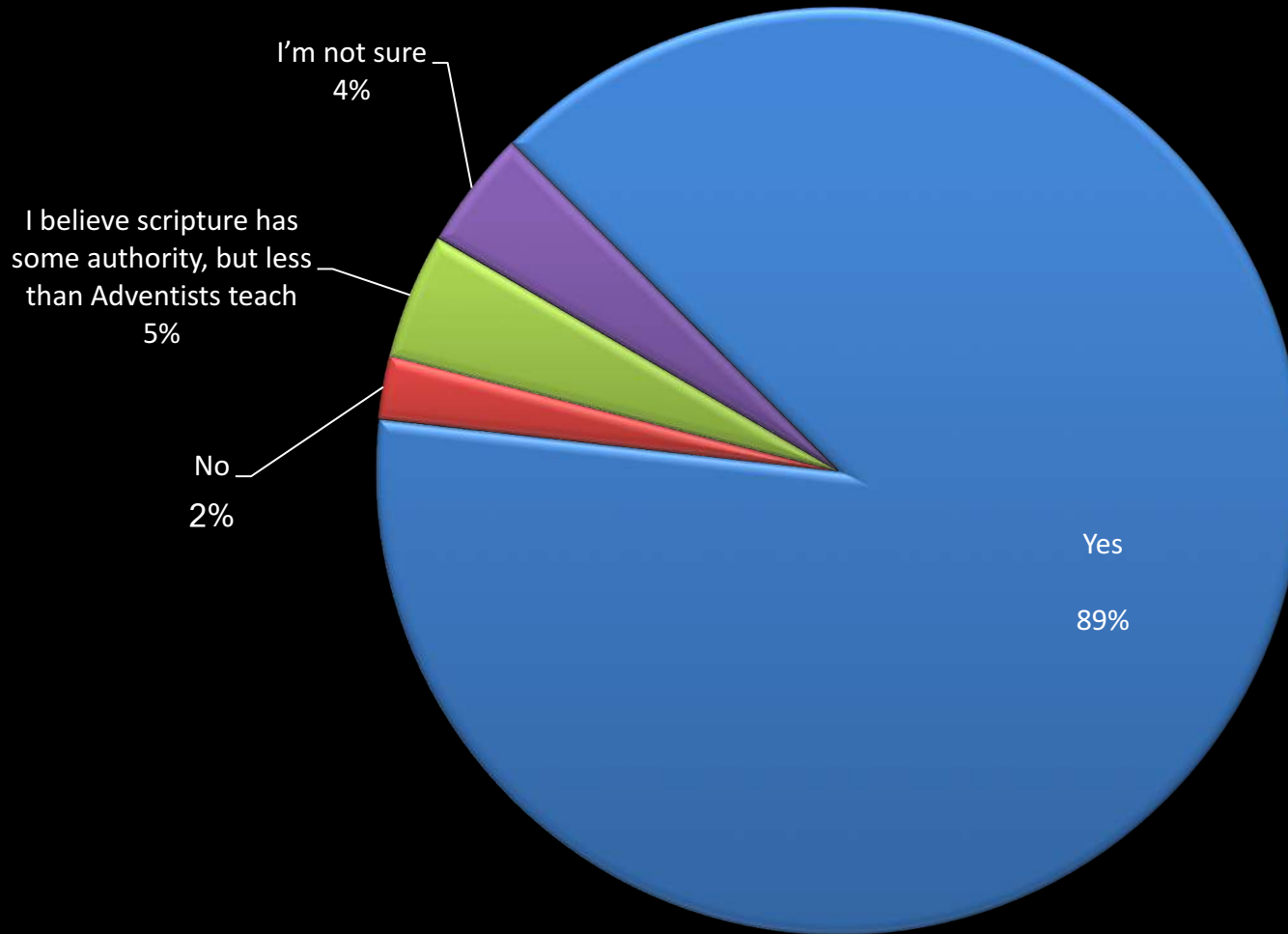


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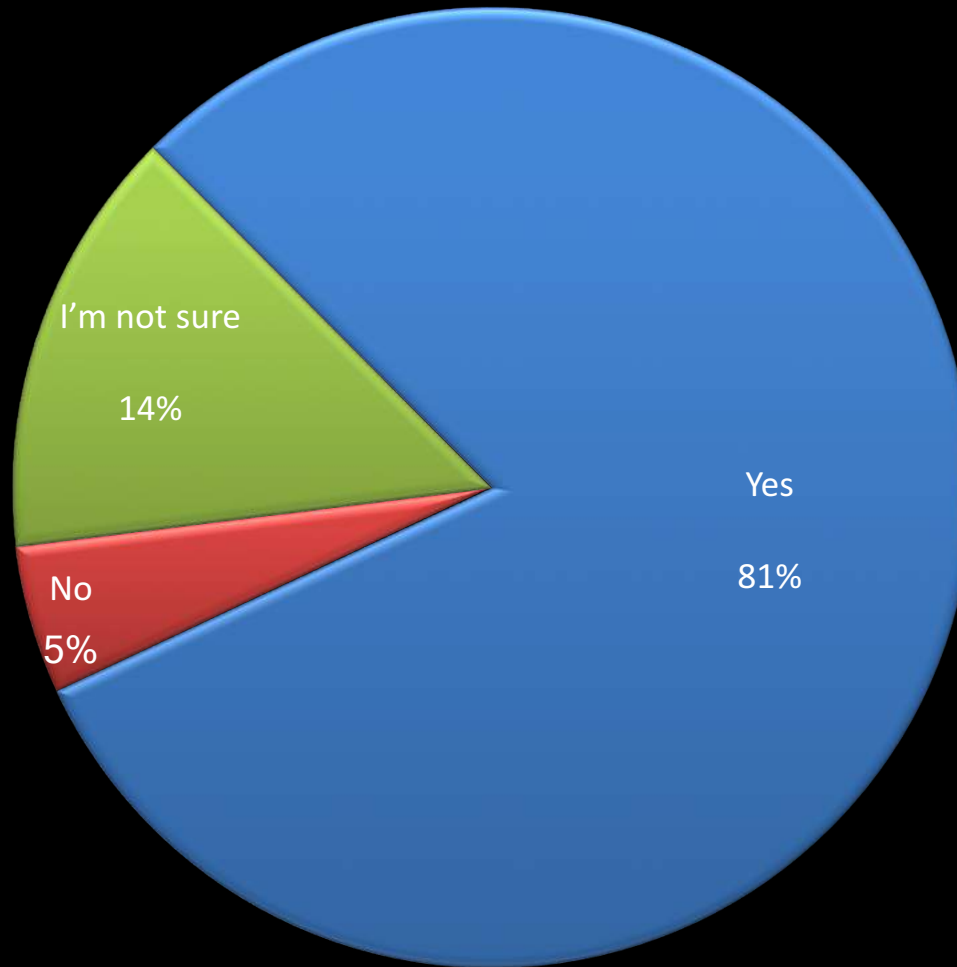
Do you still believe in the authority of Scripture, as taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church? – Former Members



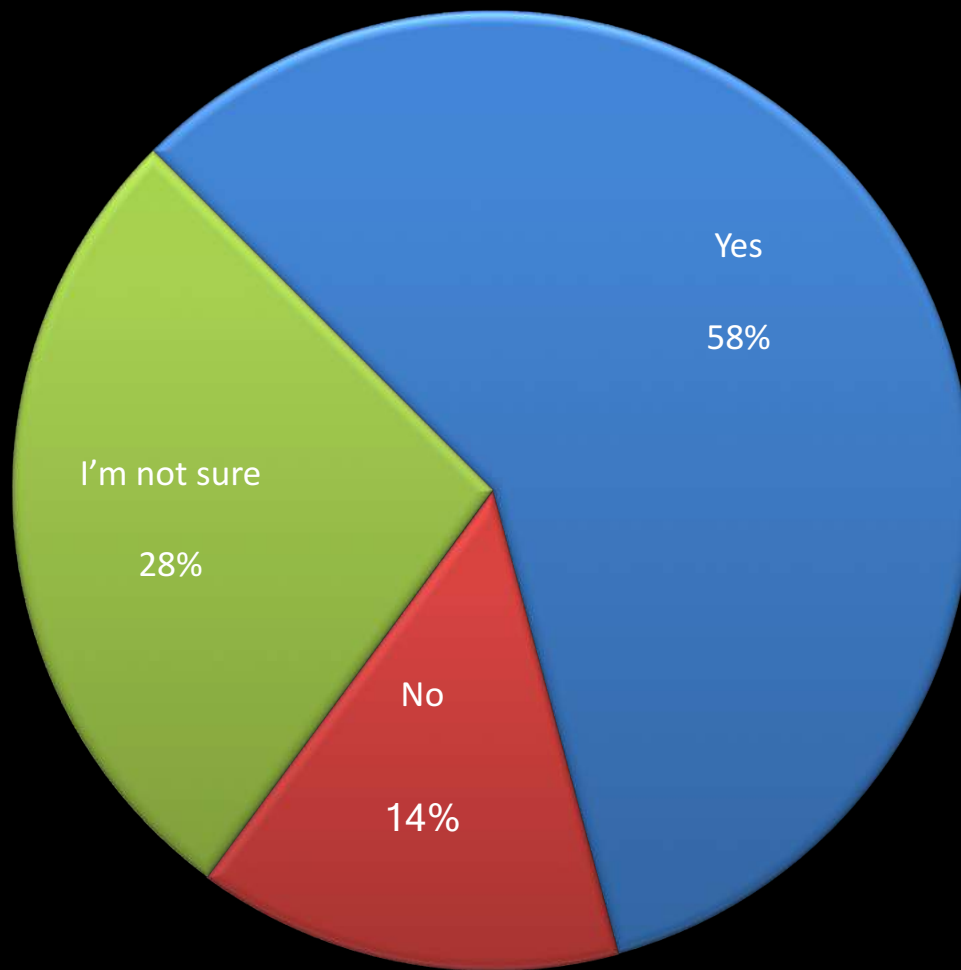
Do you still believe in the authority of Scripture, as taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church? – Returned Members



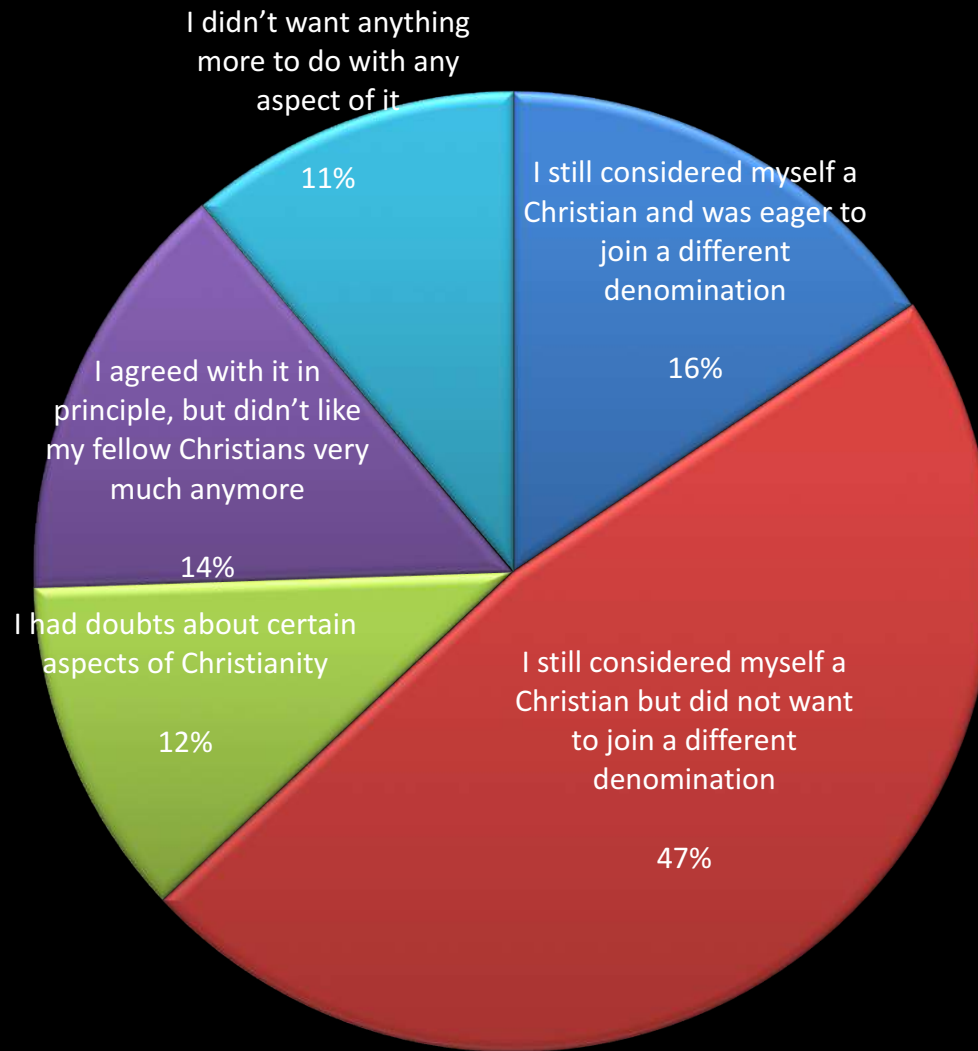
**Do you still believe in the gift of prophecy manifested in Ellen White? –
Returned Members**



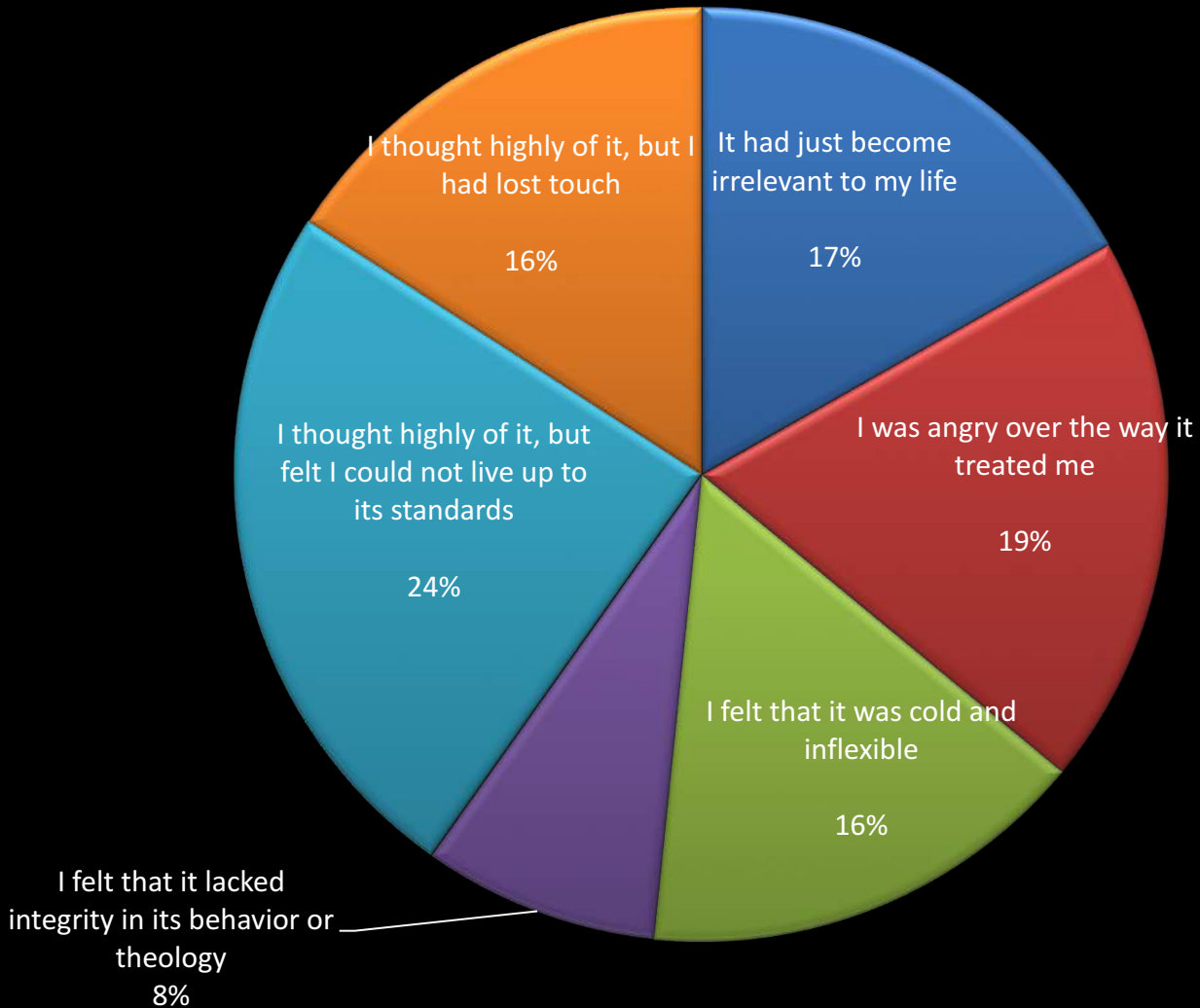
**Do you still believe in the gift of prophecy manifested in Ellen White? –
Former Members**



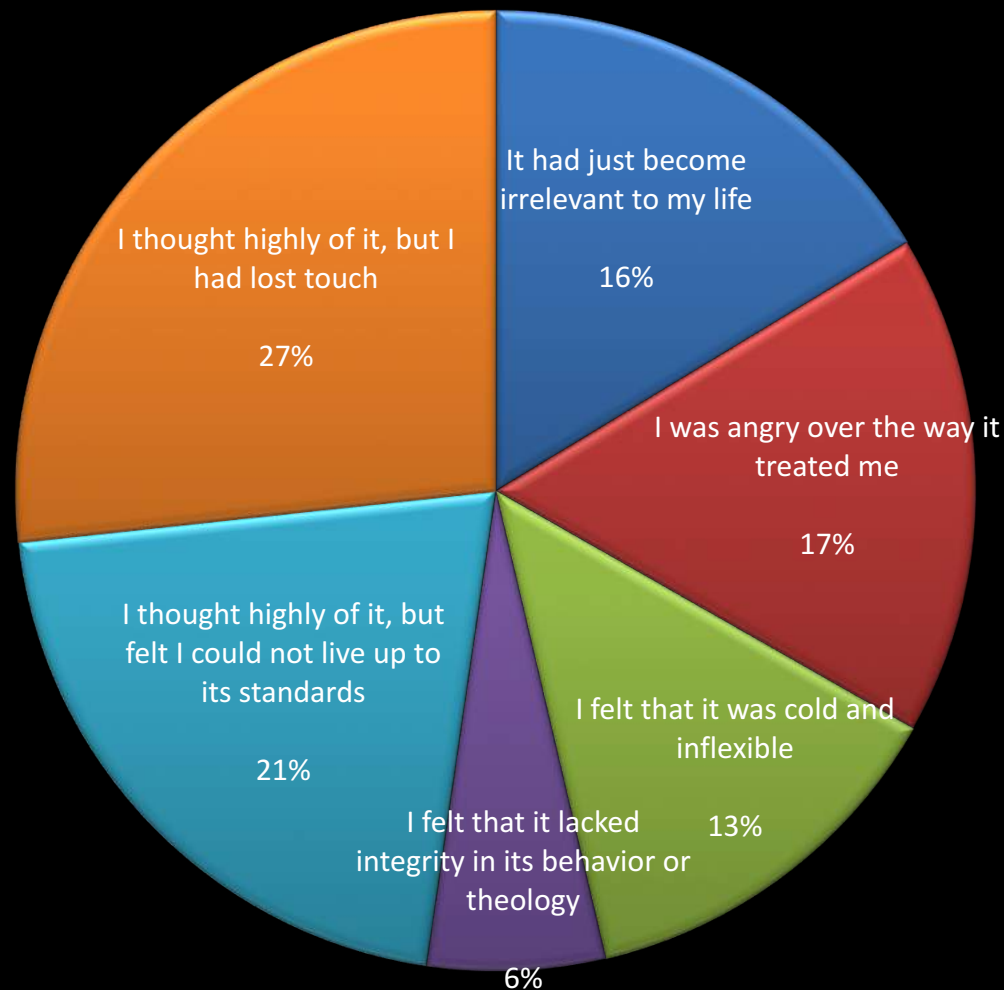
What did you think of Christianity at the time you left the Adventist church?



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



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



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

Other Resources

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

Other Resources

- <http://southern.libguides.com/c.php?g=490463&p=3853417>

A report on American graduates of Adventist universities and how connected they feel to the Seventh-day Adventist Church

- <http://www.adventistresearch.org/sites/default/files/files/Revised%20Adventist%20Youth-Connected%20and%20Disconnected%20Oct%2013.pdf>

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