

Mission and Retention

Statistics and research data on retention and loss

David Trim

Director of Archives, Statistics, and Research
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

astr

Office of
Archives, Statistics,
and Research



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
SECRETARIAT

Retention and non-retention >
vital issues for mission and for
church growth—unless we do
much better at keeping church
members, we will never reach
the world



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

astr

Office of
Archives, Statistics,
and Research



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
SECRETARIAT

**First a look at objective data —
then at subjective data**

1. What do church statistics tell us?

**Starting in 1965 the church has categorized
“accessions” and “losses”: 51 years of data!**



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

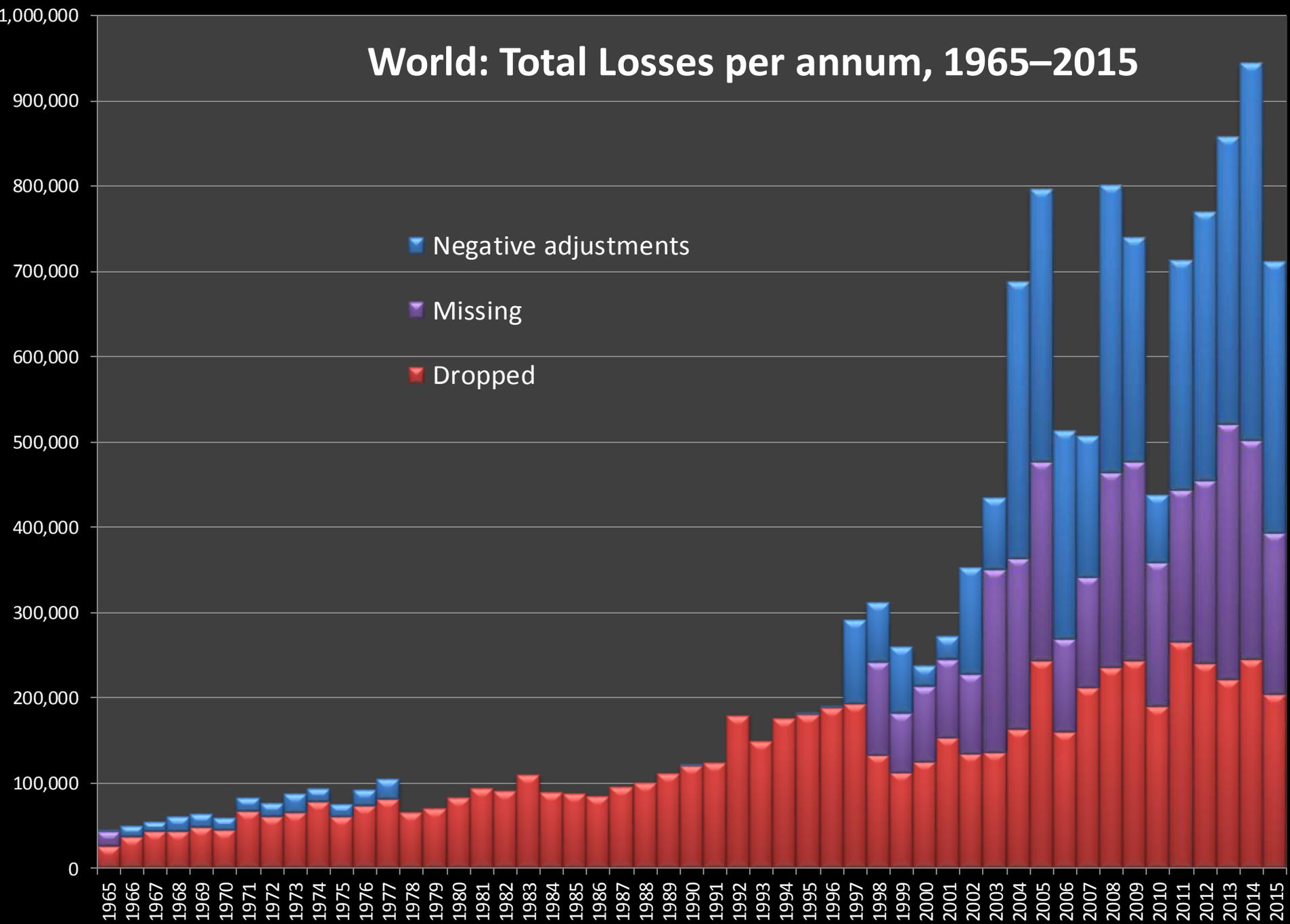
astr

Office of
Archives, Statistics,
and Research

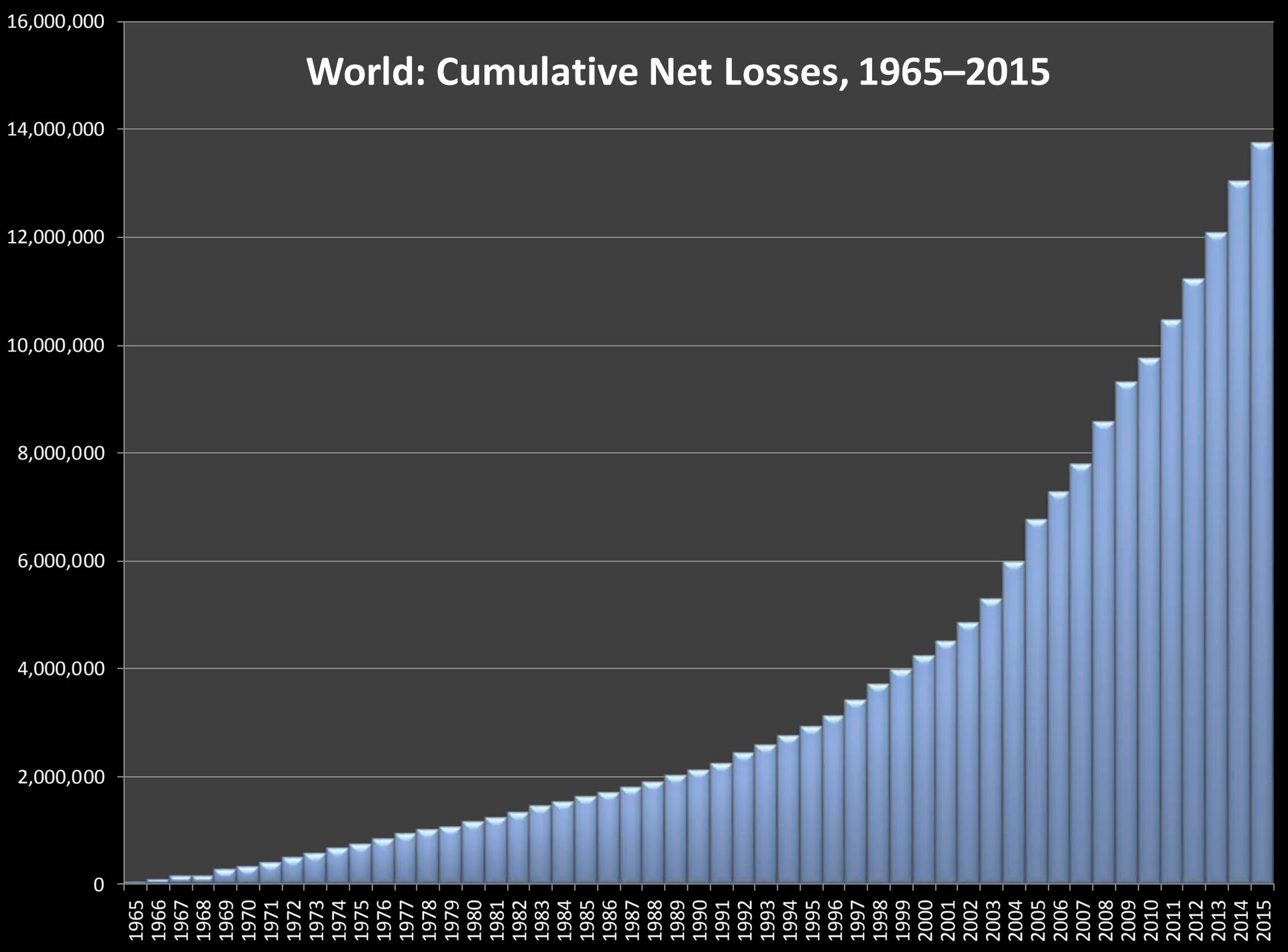


SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
SECRETARIAT

World: Total Losses per annum, 1965–2015



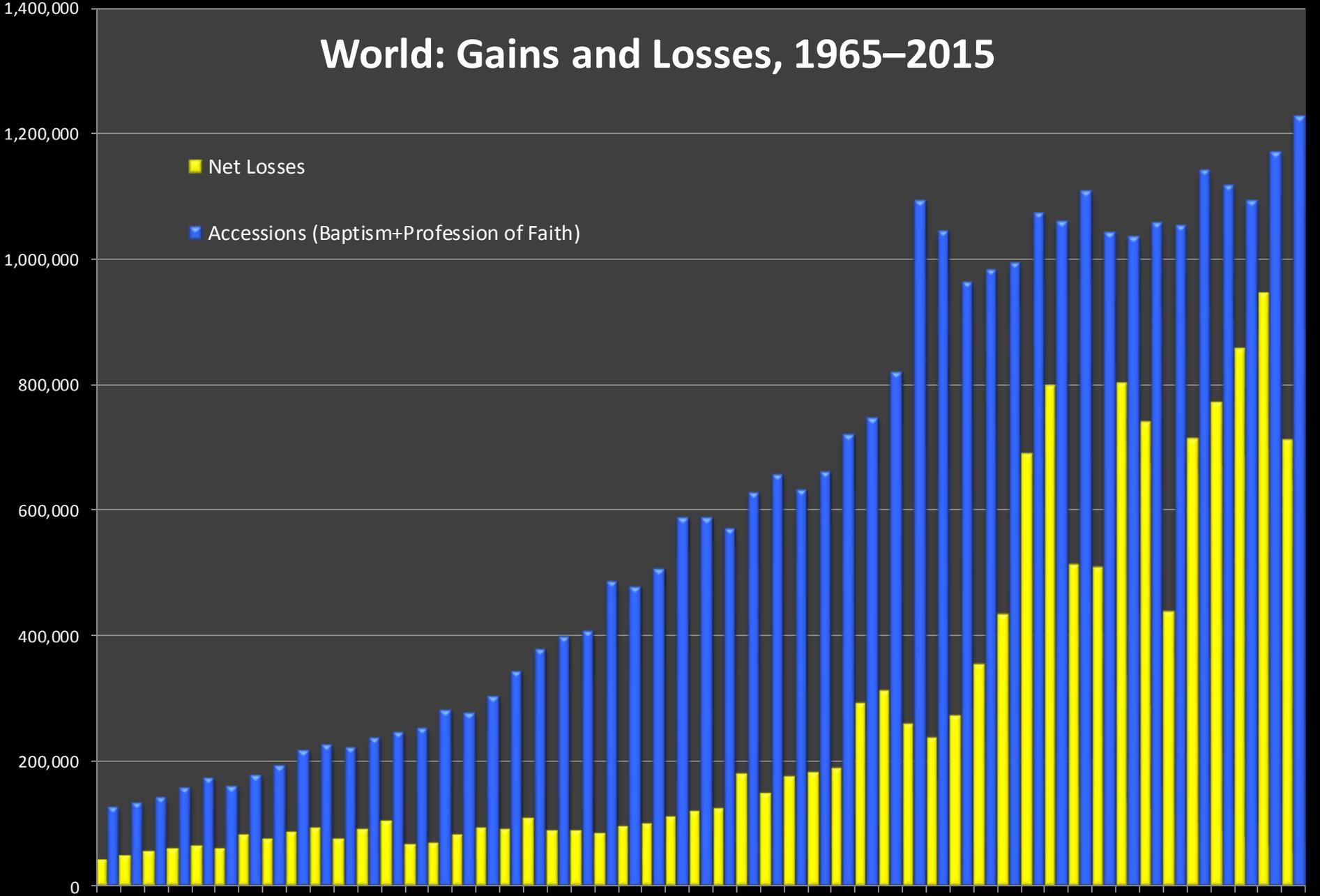
World: Cumulative Net Losses, 1965–2015



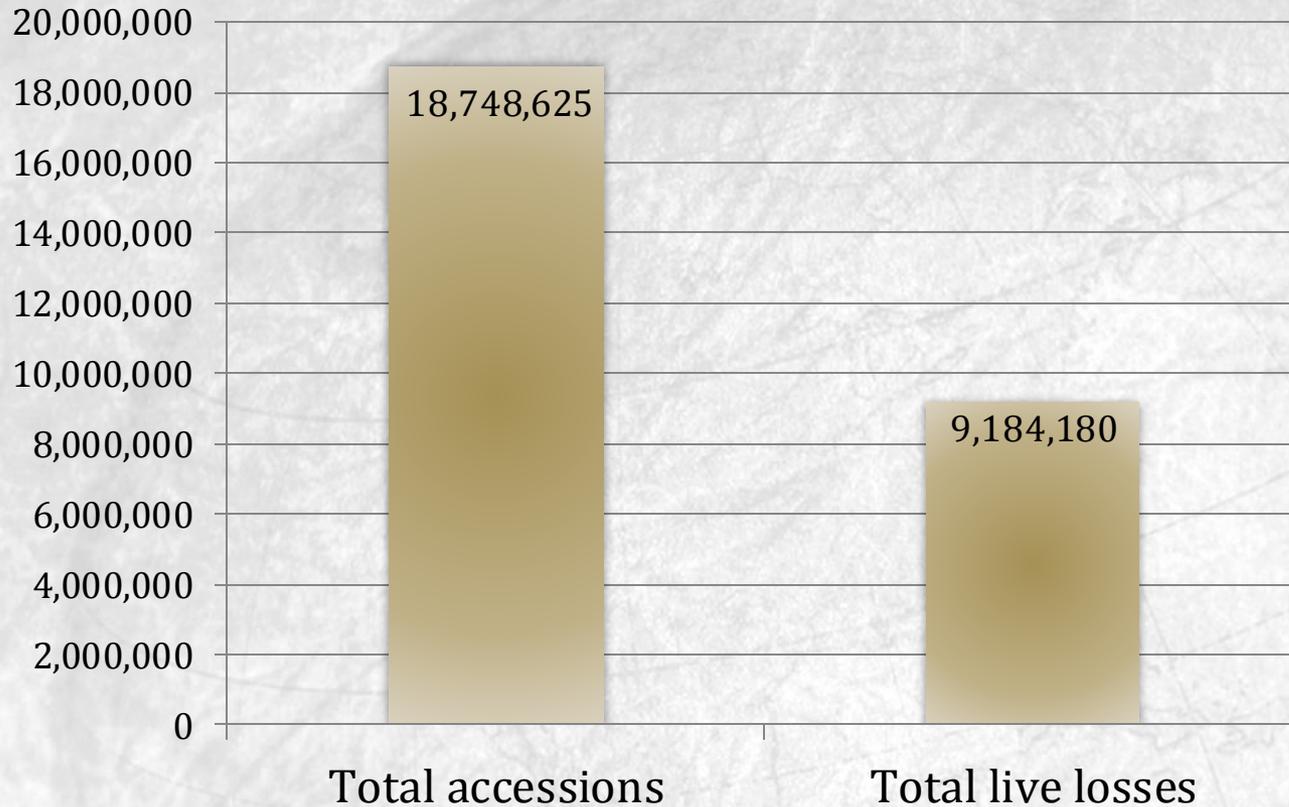
World: Gains and Losses, 1965–2015

- Net Losses
- Accessions (Baptism+Profession of Faith)

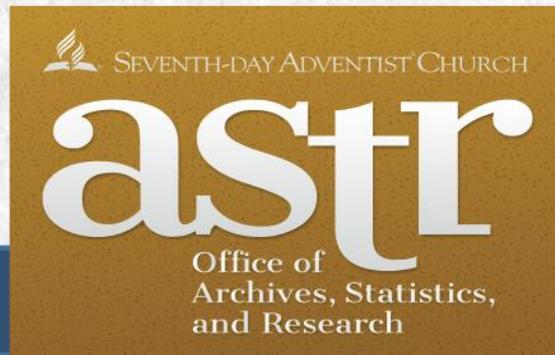
1965 1966 1967 1968 1969 1970 1971 1972 1973 1974 1975 1976 1977 1978 1979 1980 1981 1982 1983 1984 1985 1986 1987 1988 1989 1990 1991 1992 1993 1994 1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015



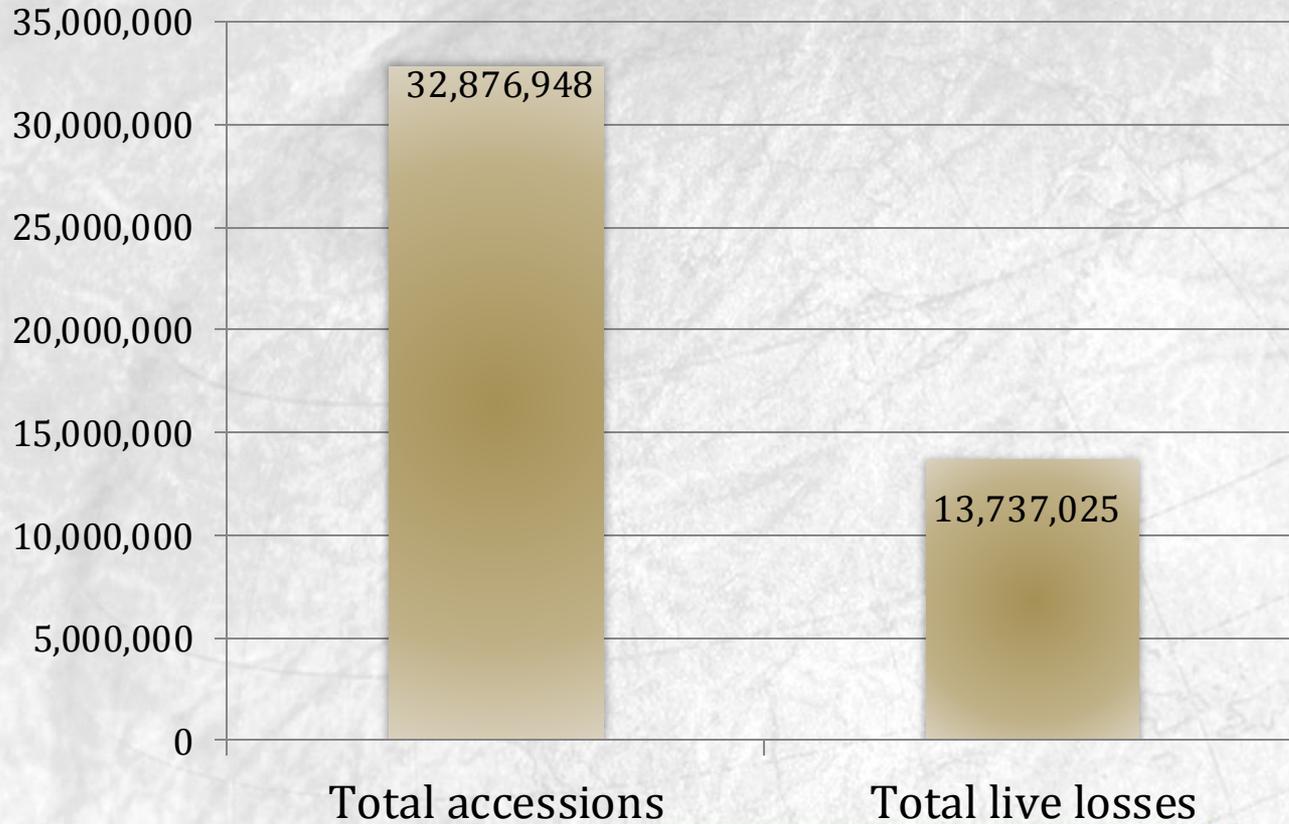
Global accessions vs. lost, 2000–2015



**Loss rate = 49
per hundred
new converts**



Global accessions vs. lost, 1965–2015



**Loss rate = 42
per hundred
new converts**

 SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

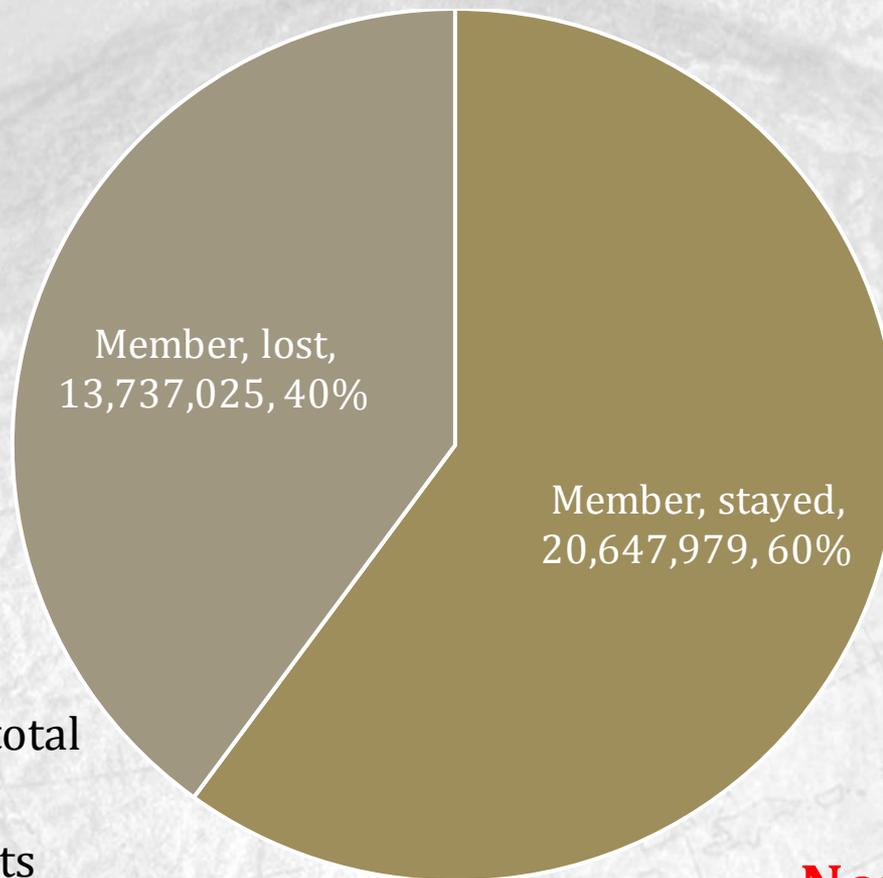
astr

Office of
Archives, Statistics,
and Research



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
SECRETARIAT

Global membership and loss, fifty-one years, 1965-2015



In the last 50 years the total number of baptized Seventh-day Adventists

= 34,385,004

Of these, **13,737,025** have left the Church

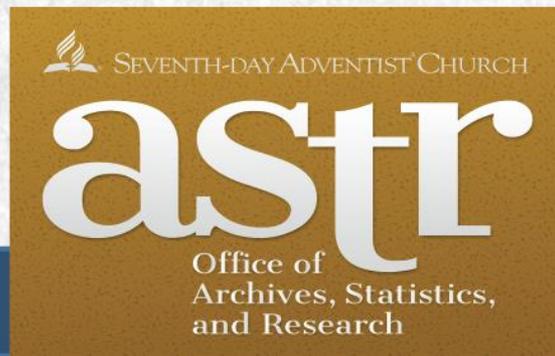
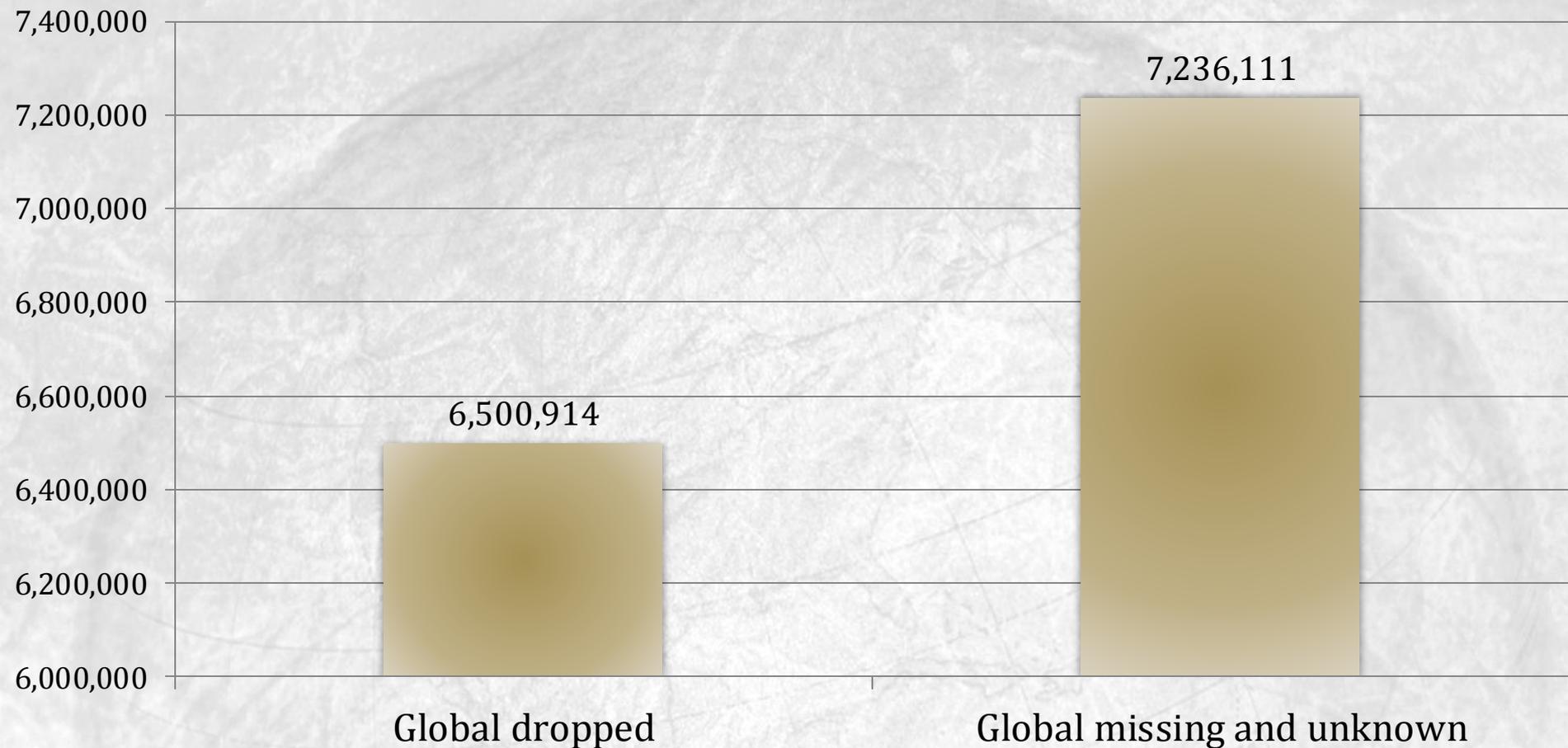
**Net loss rate =
39.95%**

 SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

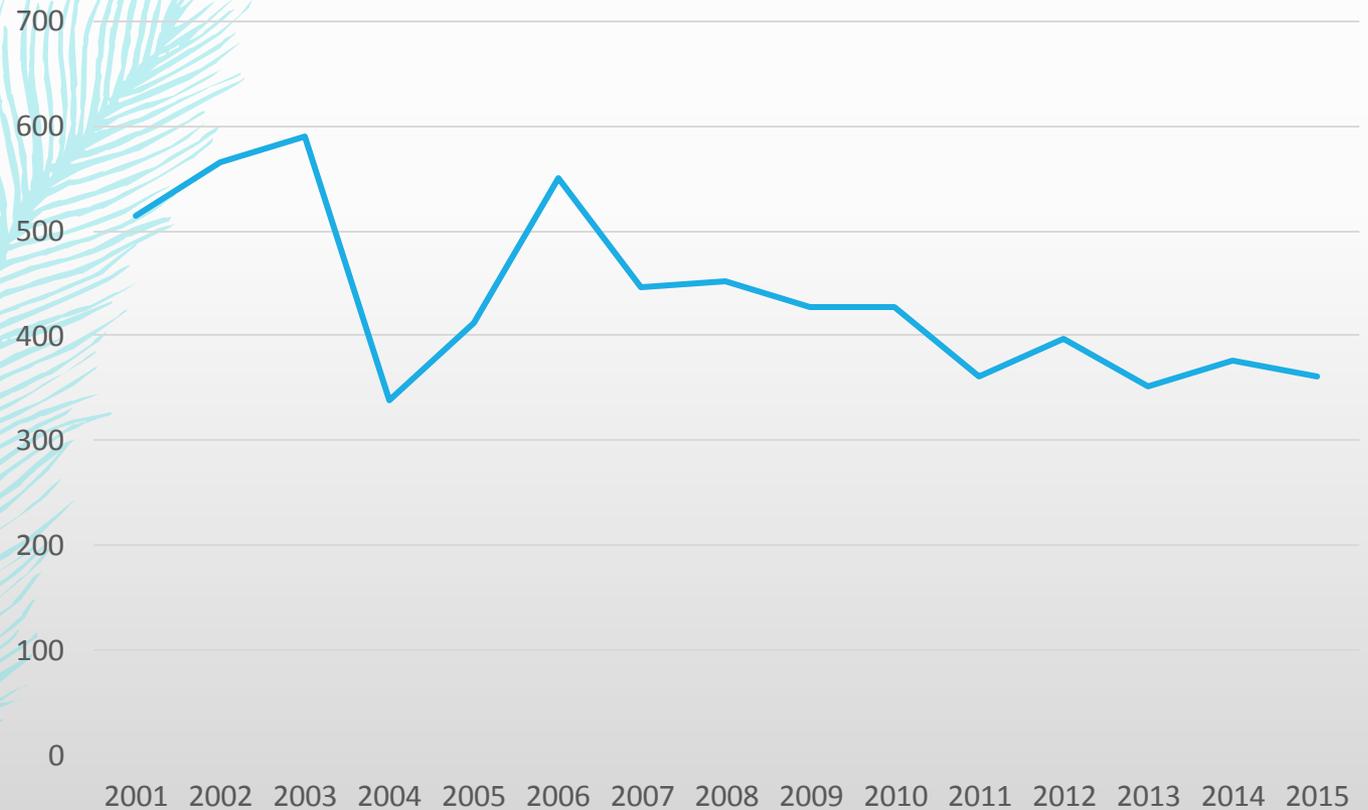
astr
Office of
Archives, Statistics,
and Research


SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
SECRETARIAT

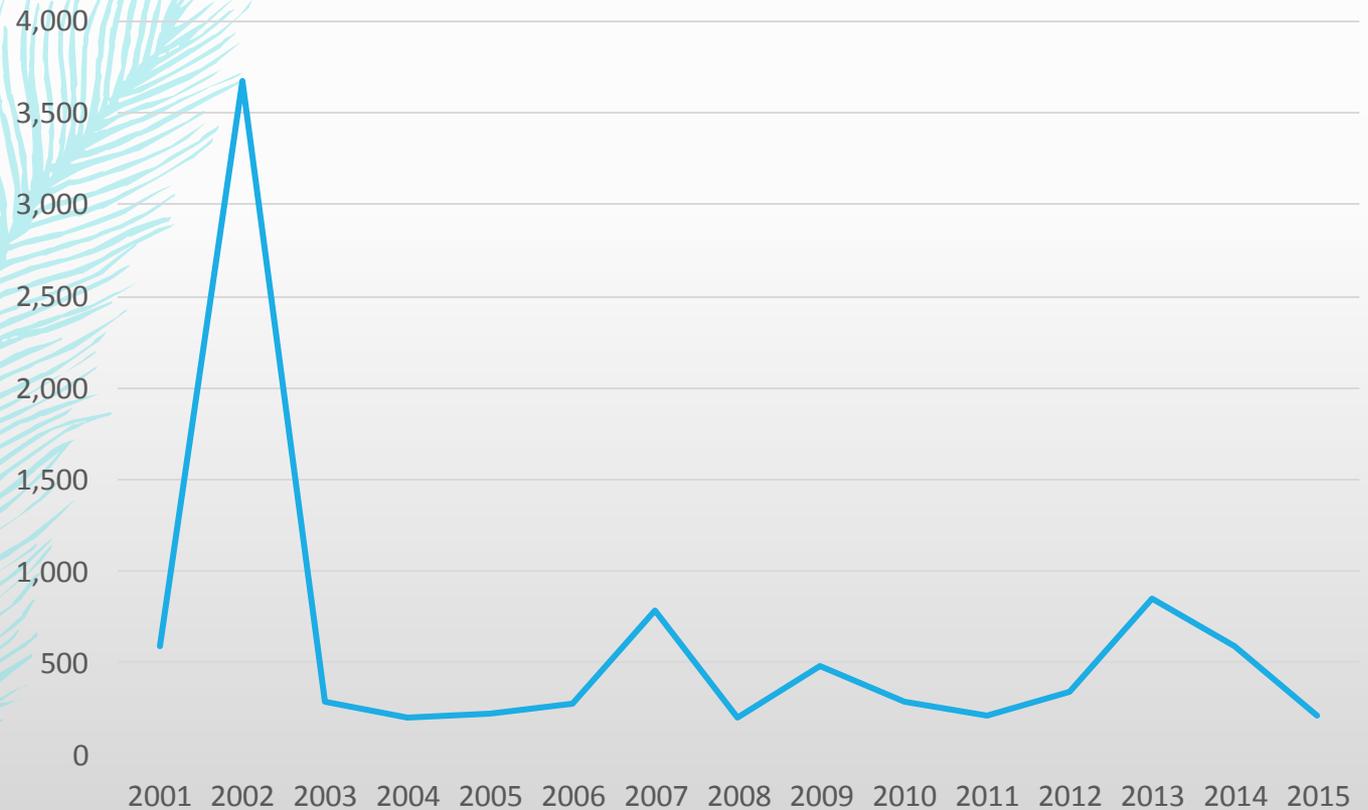
Global lost: dropped vs. missing, 1965-2015



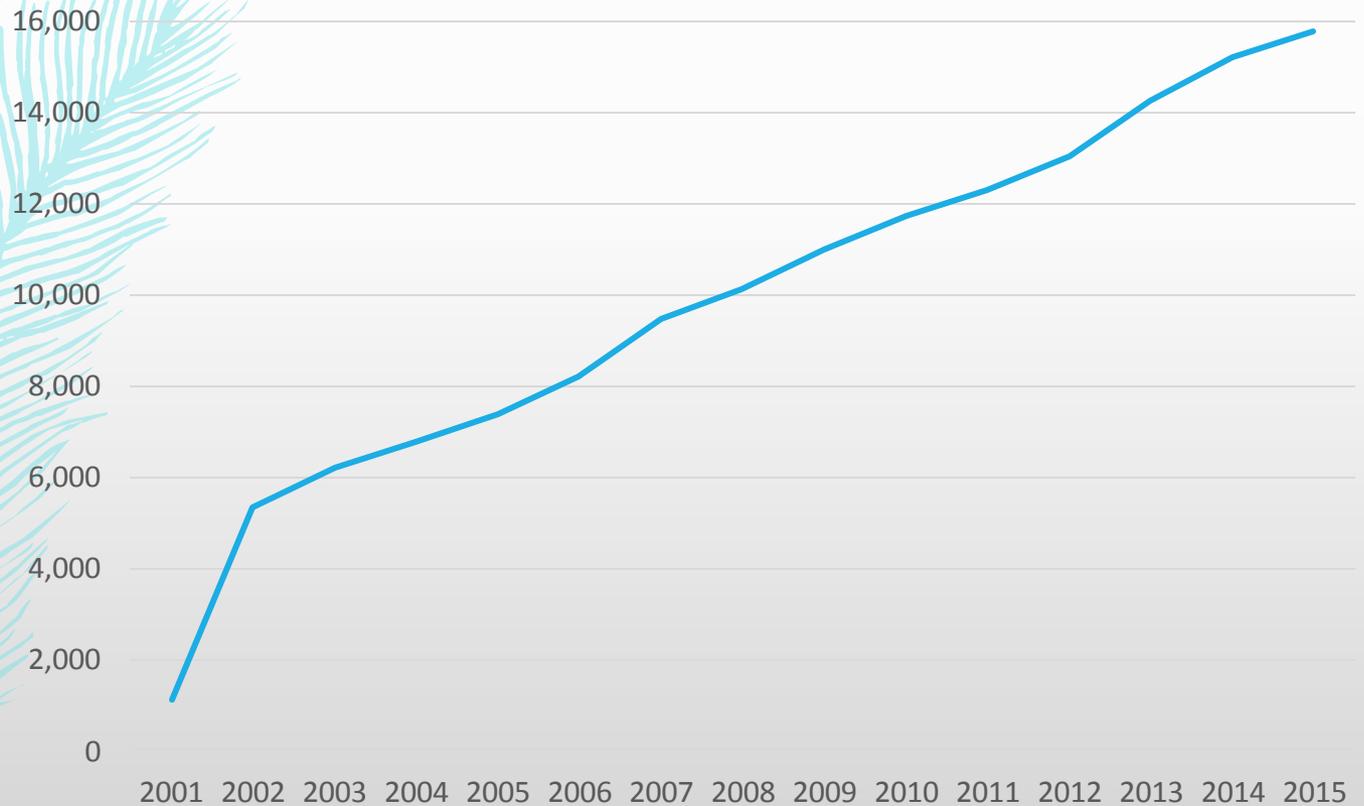
TED: Dropped 2001–15



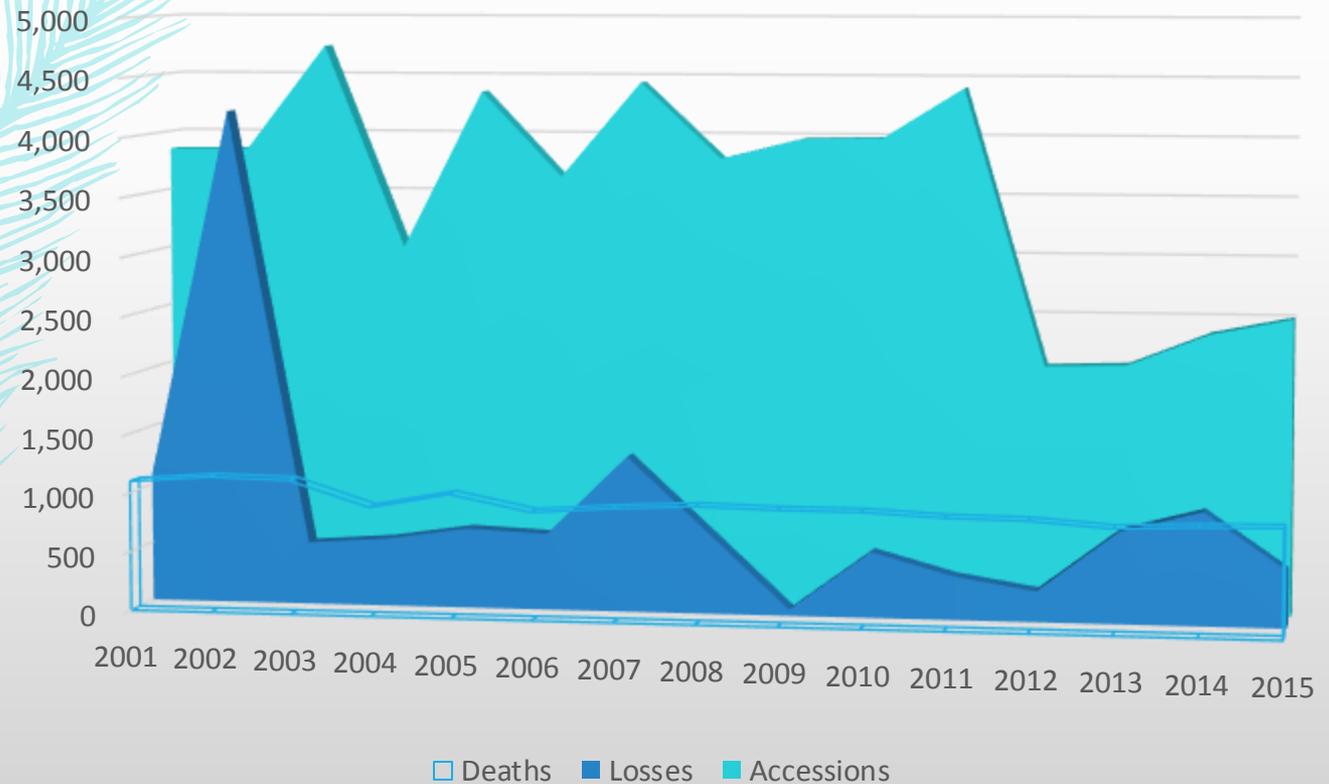
TED: Missing 2001–15



TED: Cumulative Losses, 2001–15



TED: Changes in membership 2001–15



2. The departed

Research findings from
two global surveys of
Seventh-day Adventists



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

astr

Office of
Archives, Statistics,
and Research



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
SECRETARIAT

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 to be summarized in quantitative form.

 SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

astr

Office of
Archives, Statistics,
and Research

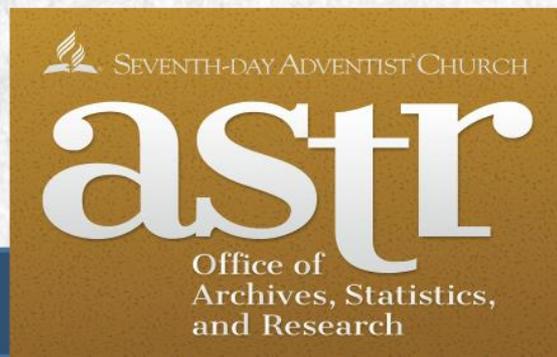


SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
SECRETARIAT

Two Studies of lapsed Adventists

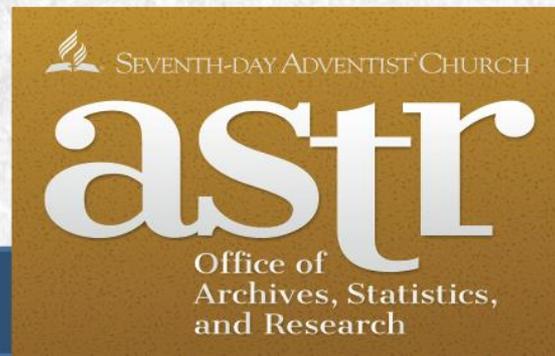
2. Under the leadership of the General Conference Nurture and Retention Committee, a detailed survey was developed by the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASTR) with the purpose of it being administered to members who were no longer attending worship services (“left”), along with a companion (and parallel) survey to be administered to members who had previously left the church for a period of time, but had “returned” to active church membership.

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



1. Strategic planning-related study

A total of 925 interviews were conducted in many parts of the world during 2012. The interviews used a standard interview guide approved by the GC office of Archives, Statistics, and Research. The interviewers were Doctor of Ministry graduates of Andrews University who have participated in research projects both as graduate students and since graduating, as well as experienced staff interviewers.



2. Nurture and Retention Committee Study

Year conducted: 2012

Respondents: 785

First survey: Members who no longer attended worship services (“left”)

Second survey: Members who had previously left the church for a period of time, but began attending church again, or returned to active church membership (“returned”)

 SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

astr

Office of
Archives, Statistics,
and Research



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
SECRETARIAT

Nurture and Retention Study

Survey Details (cont.)

- > 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

 SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

astr

Office of
Archives, Statistics,
and Research



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
SECRETARIAT

Nurture and Retention Study

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, reason for reconnection

 SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

astr

Office of
Archives, Statistics,
and Research



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
SECRETARIAT

Two Studies of lapsed Adventists: global variations?

- ✧ Demographic data varies between all divisions
- ✧ Data on reasons why people *joined* the Church varies, sometimes significantly, between divisions
- ✧ However, **data relating to *why* people stopped attending church and *left* the 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***

 SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

astr
Office of
Archives, Statistics,
and Research


SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
SECRETARIAT

Demographics and conversion routes

- Gender and age
- Marital status
- Religious background



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

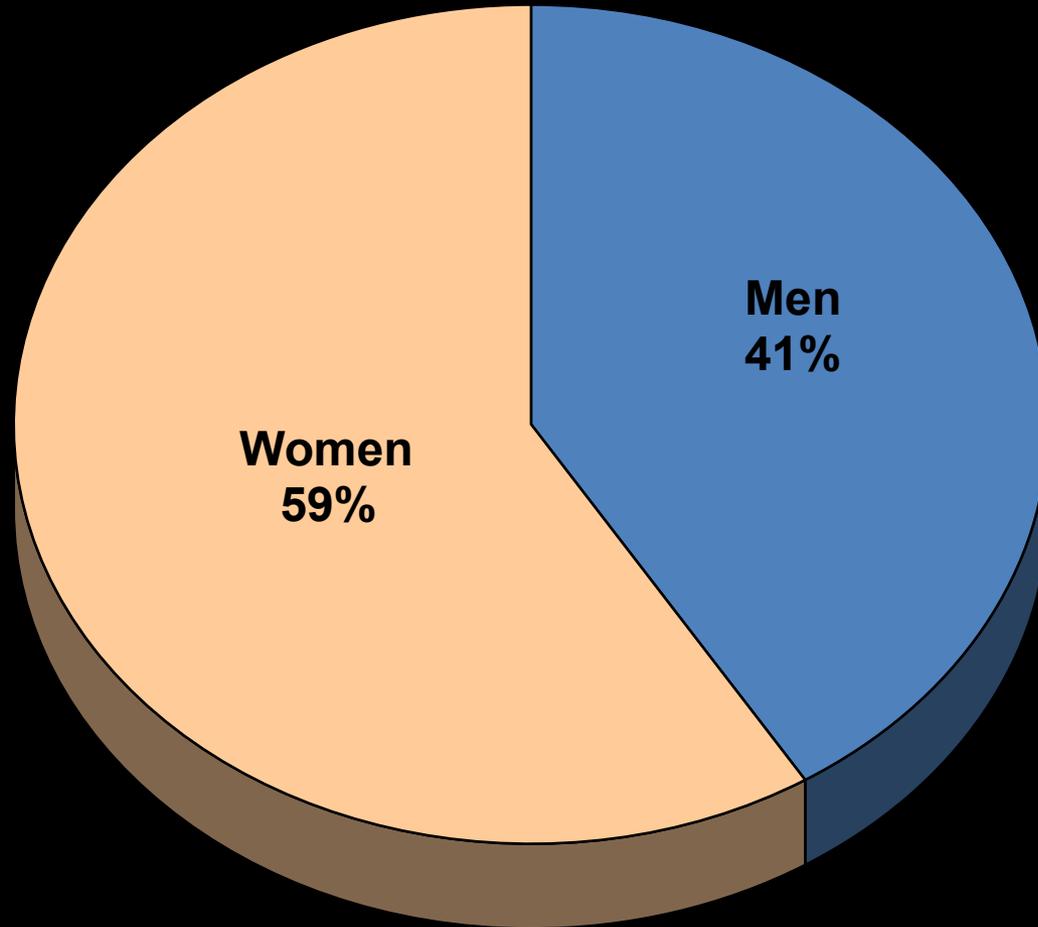
astr

Office of
Archives, Statistics,
and Research



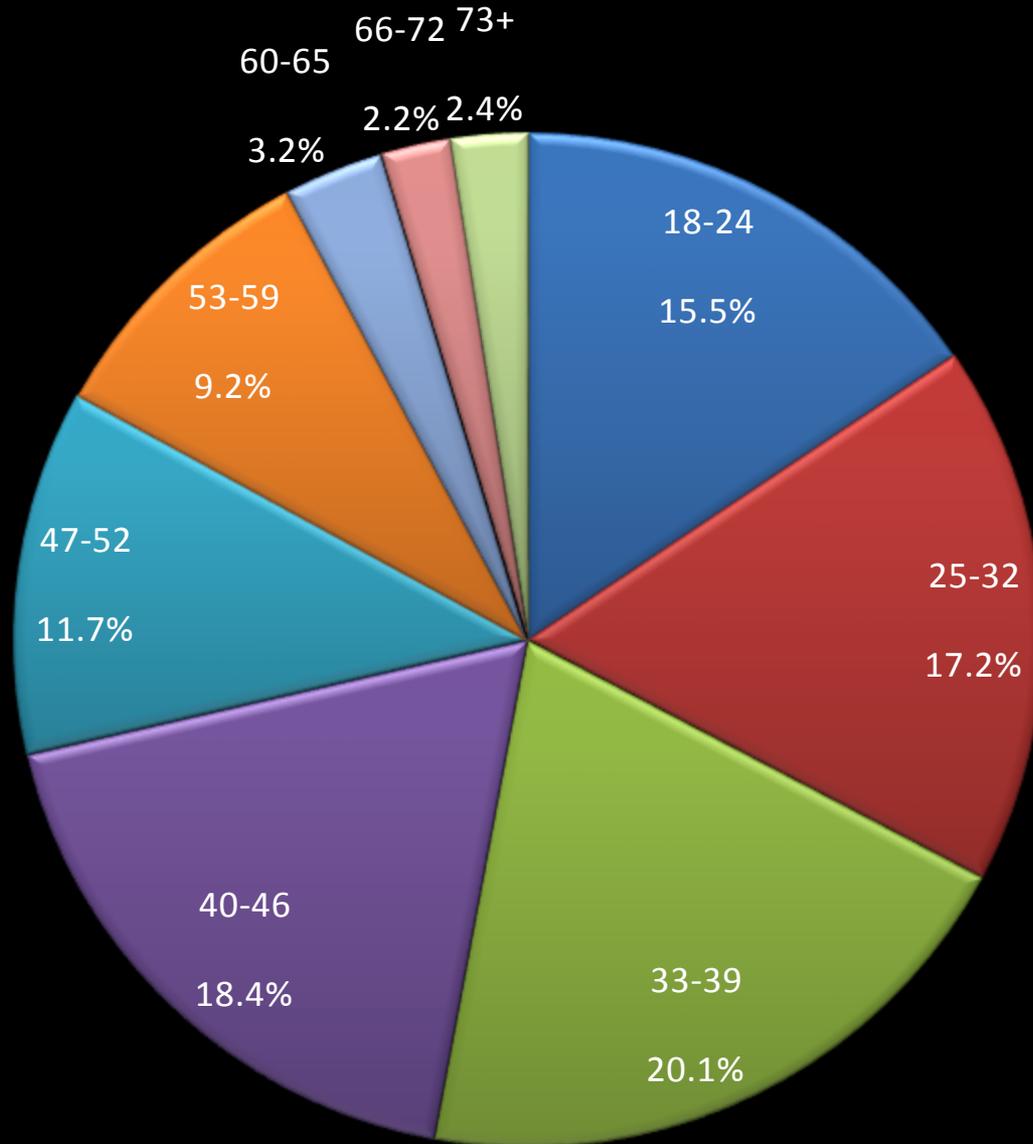
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
SECRETARIAT

Demographics: Gender

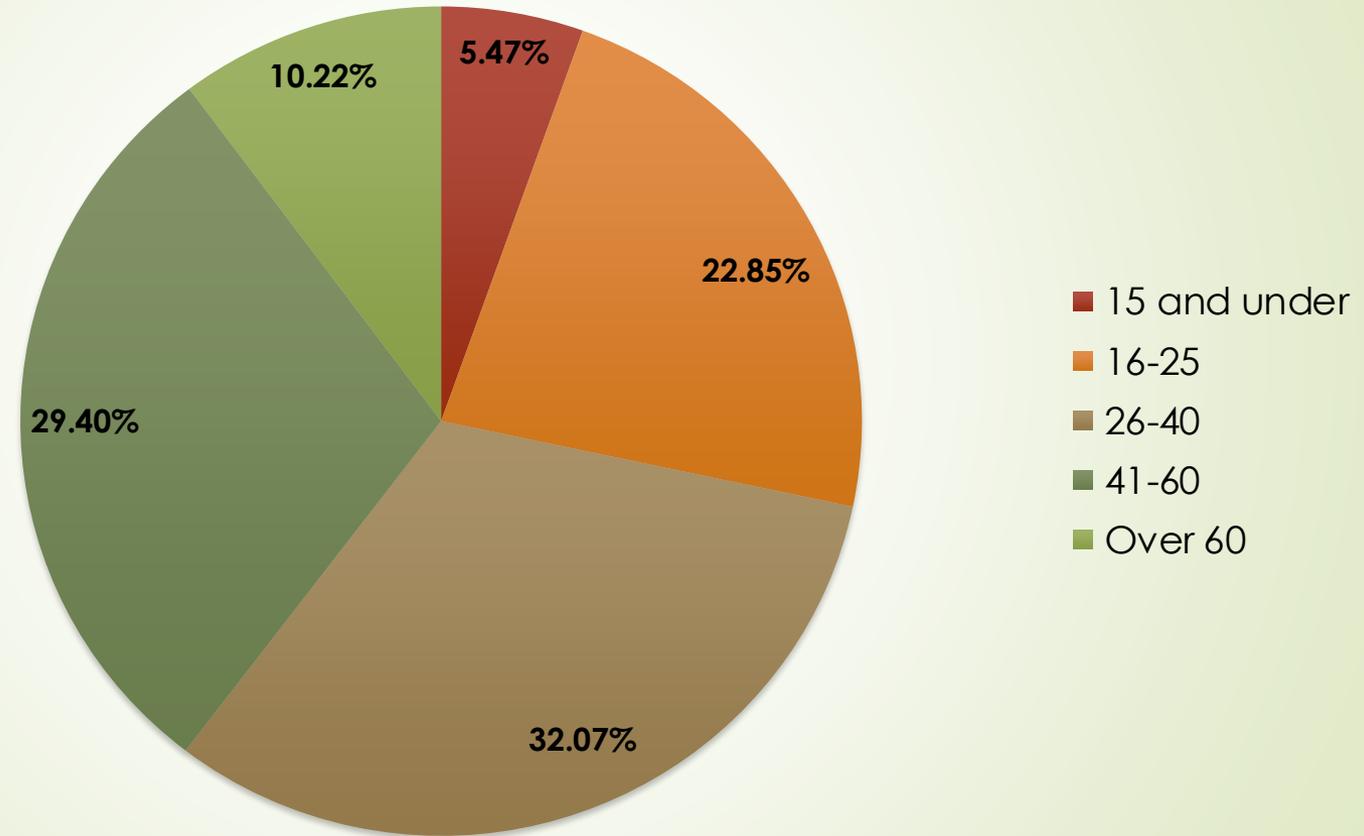


Global church membership: Women 57% Men 43%

Demographics: Age (now)

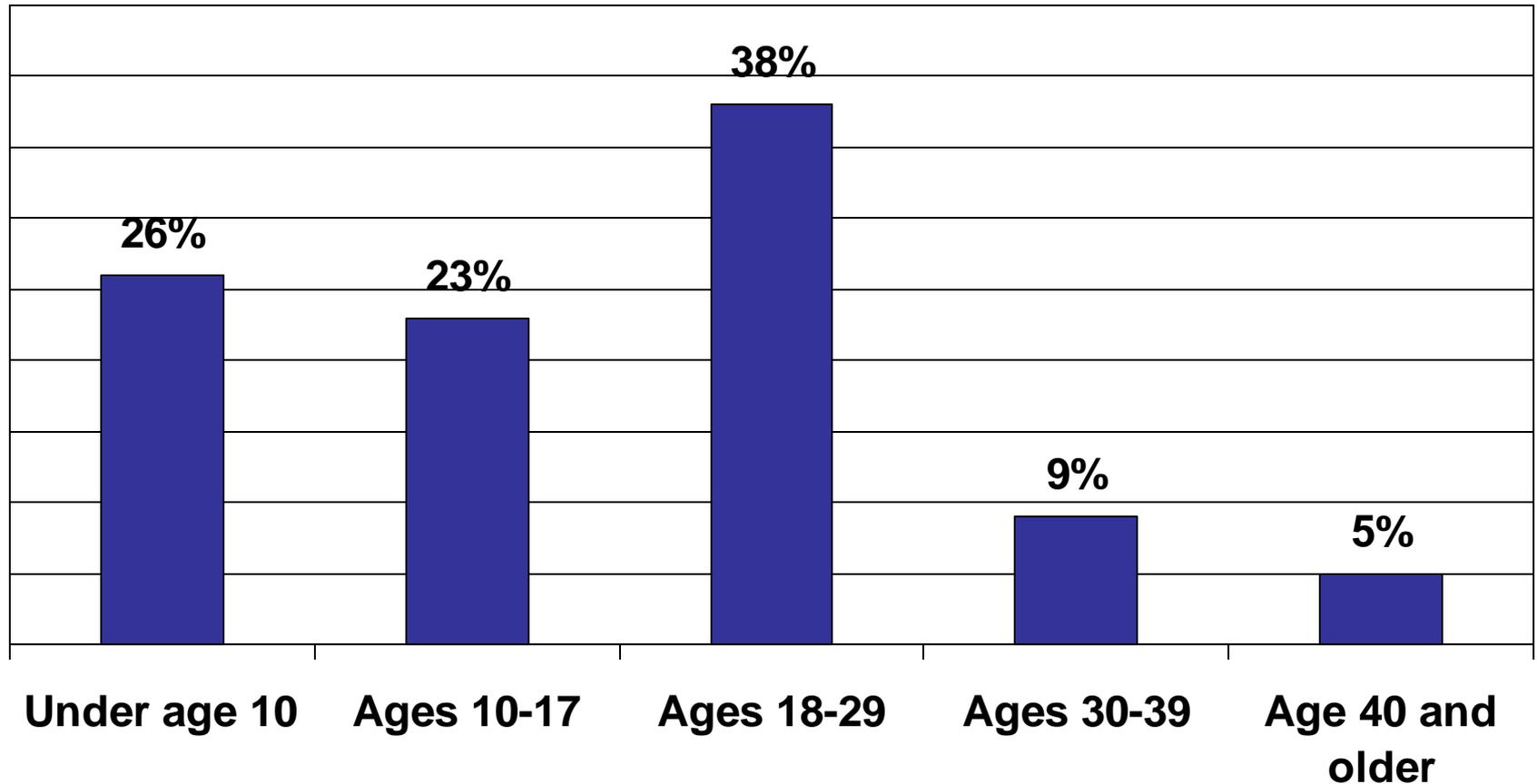


World Church, current members: age distribution

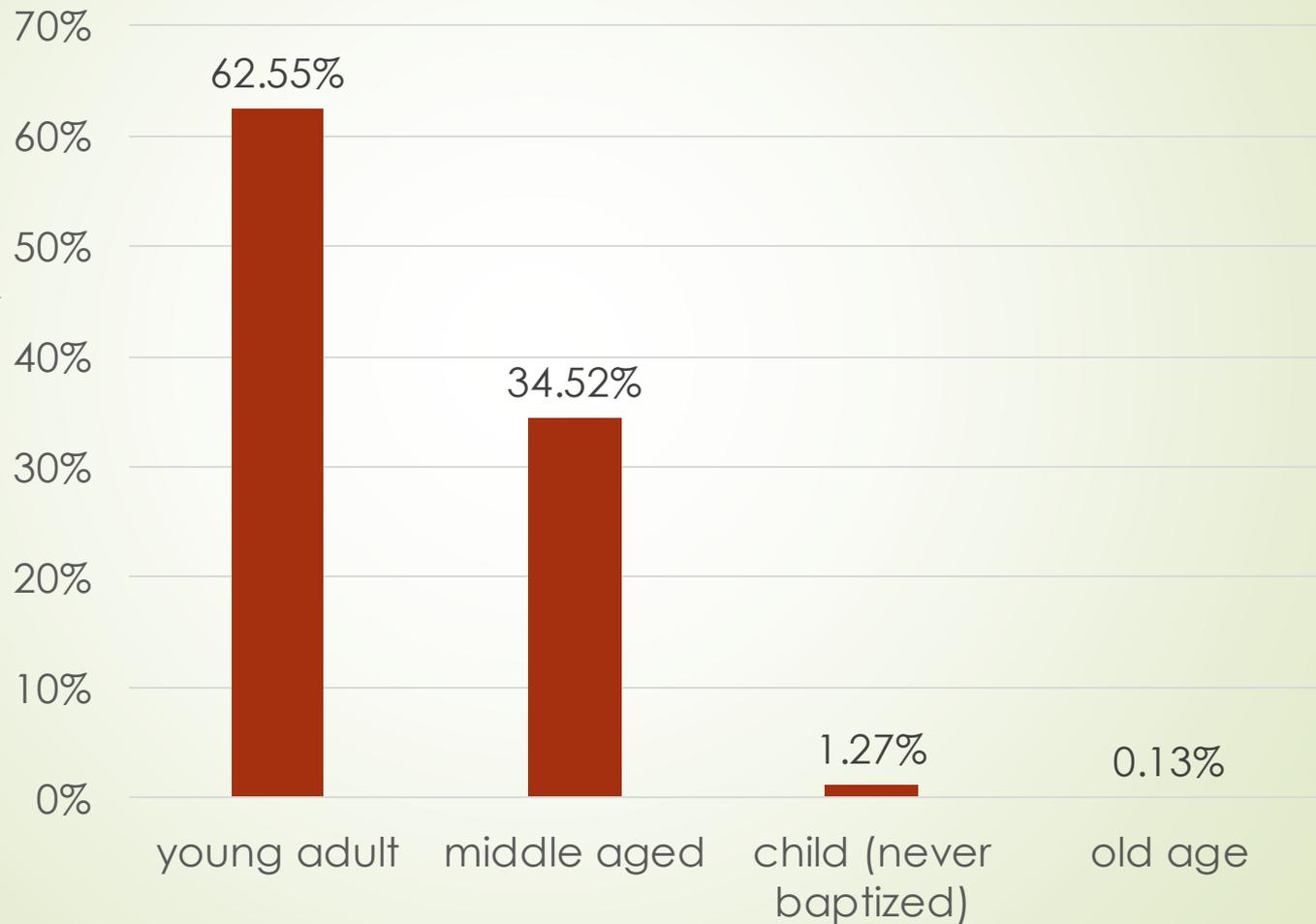


Under 40 = Ex-members 53% Current membership 59%

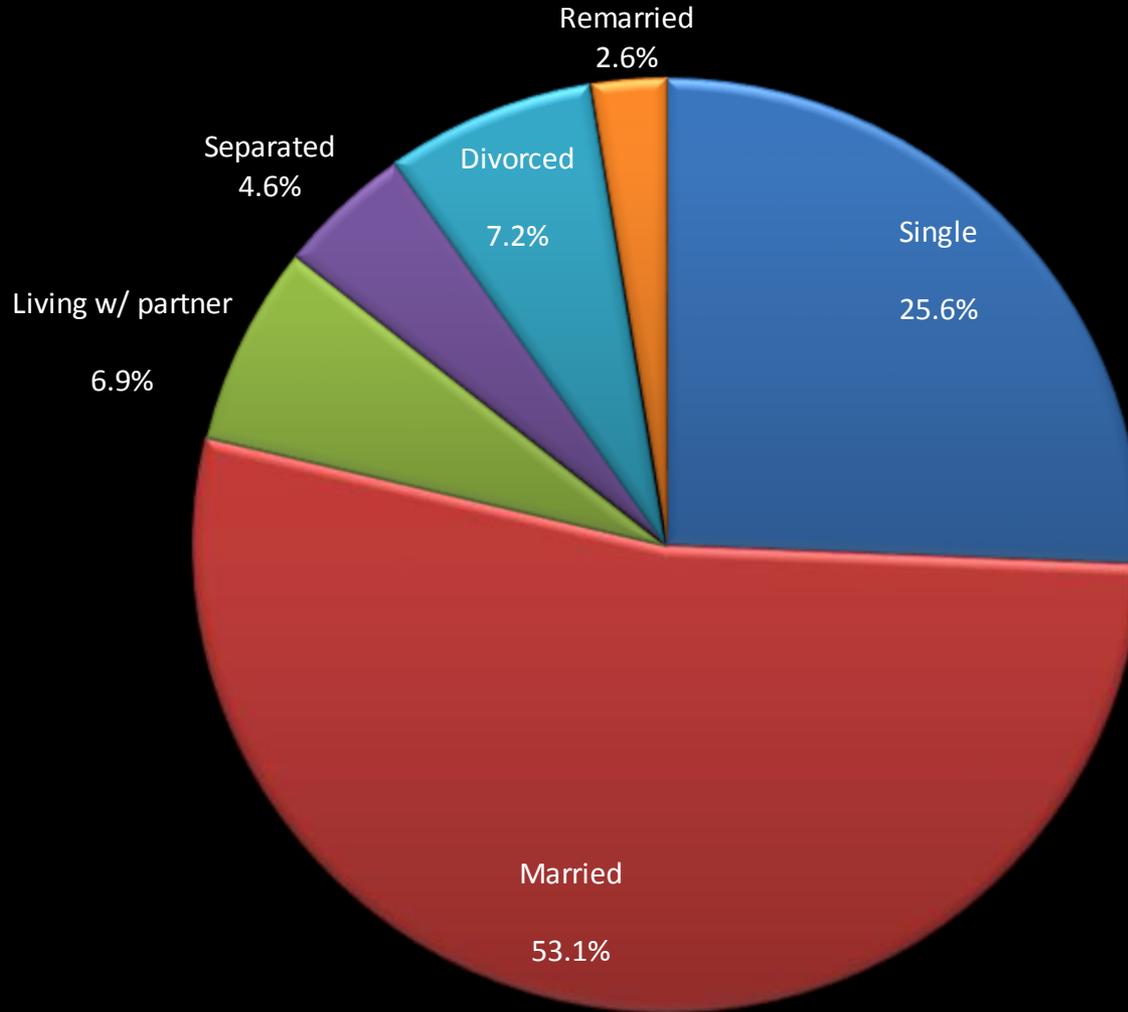
Lapsed/ex-members: Age When First Started Attending the Adventist Church



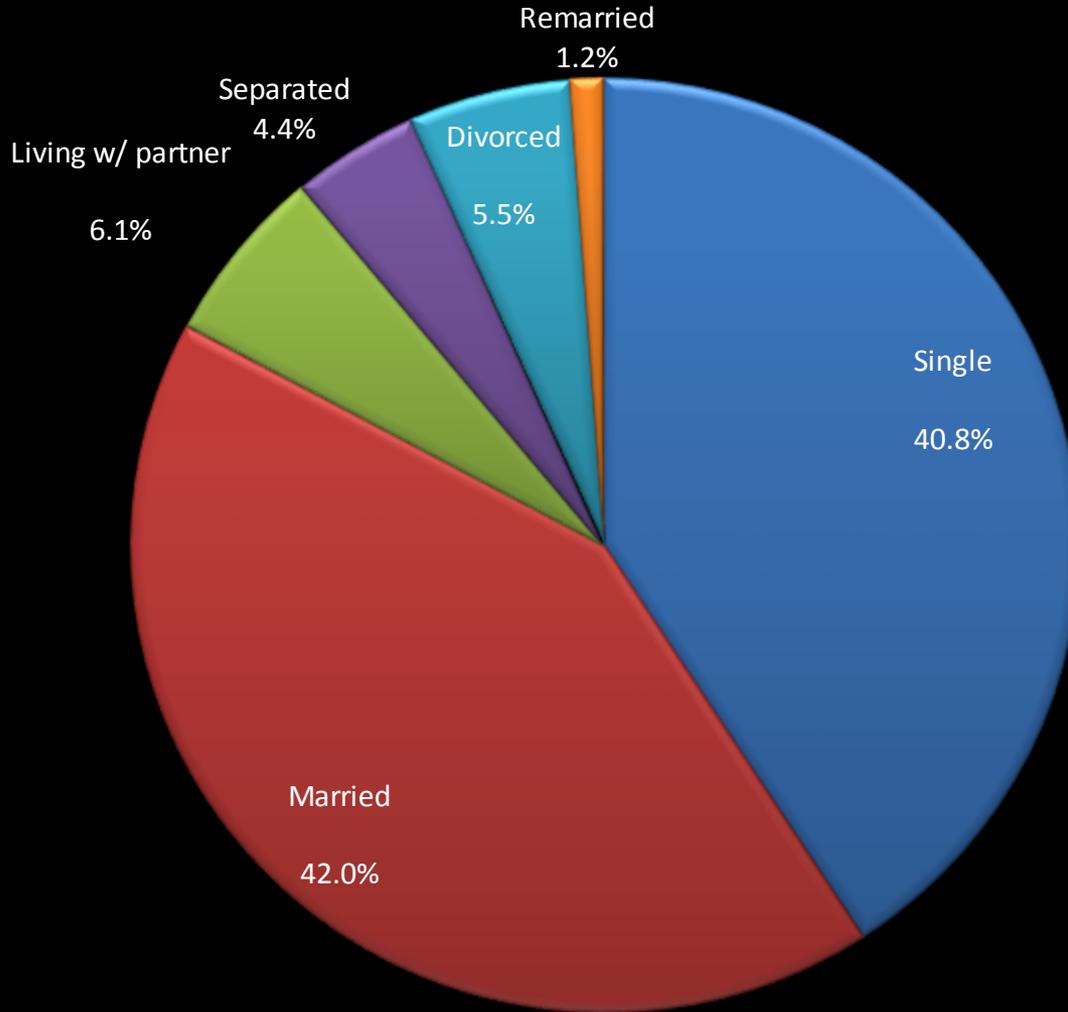
Stage of Life at Departure



Demographic Information (Marital Status) Former Members



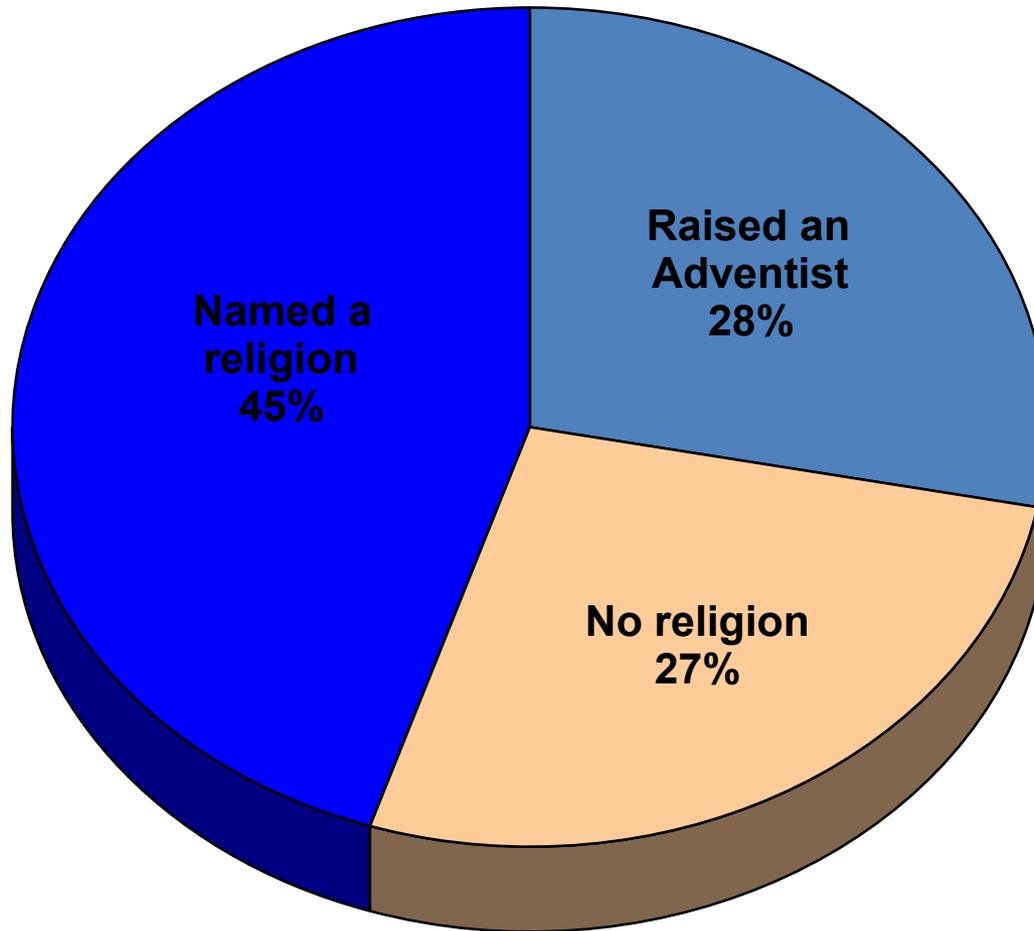
Demographic Information (Marital Status) Returned Members



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



How ADVENTIST *were* they?

Were they *well grounded* in our faith?

Were they spiritually *active*?



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

astr

Office of
Archives, Statistics,
and Research

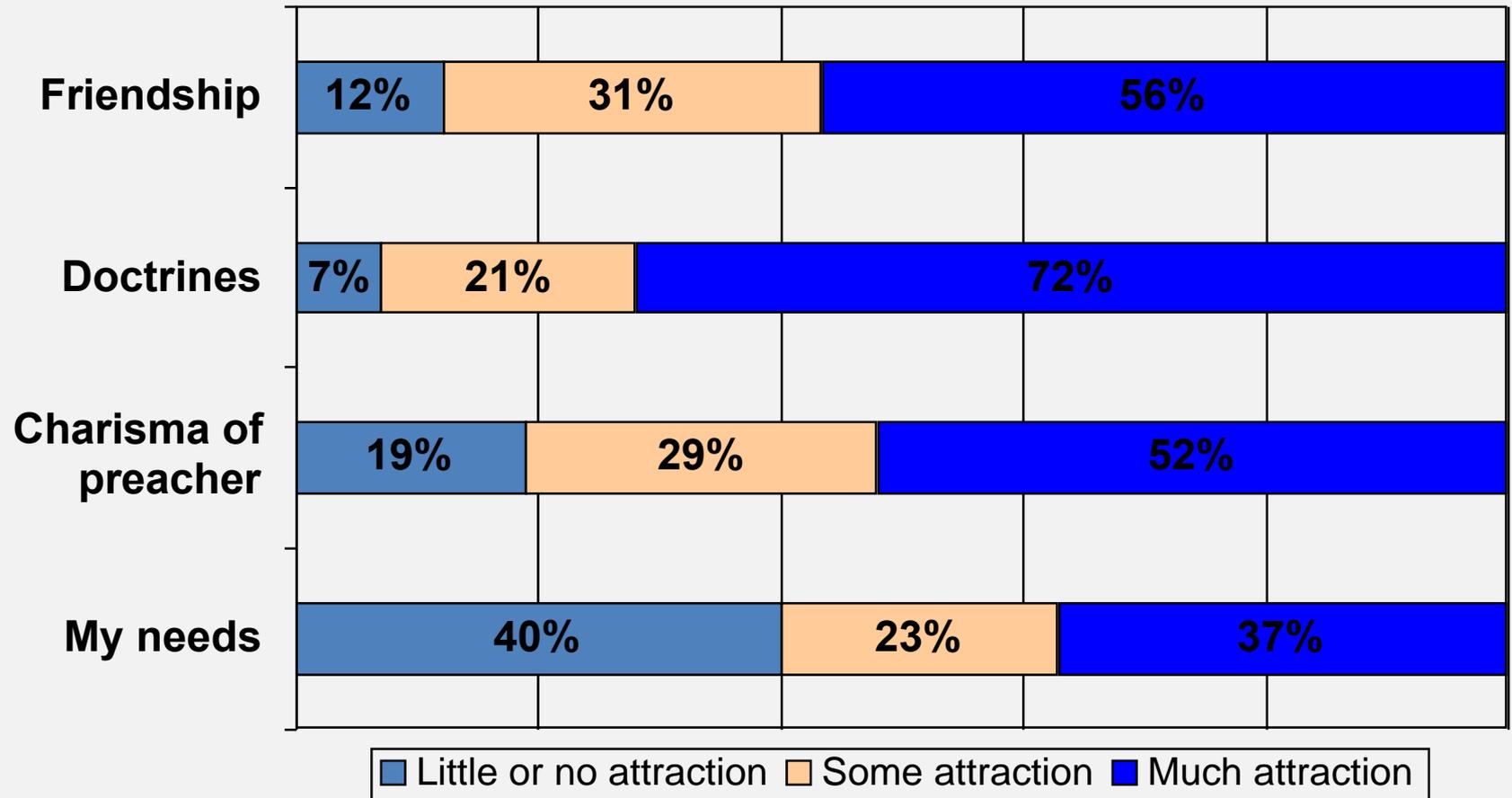


SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
SECRETARIAT

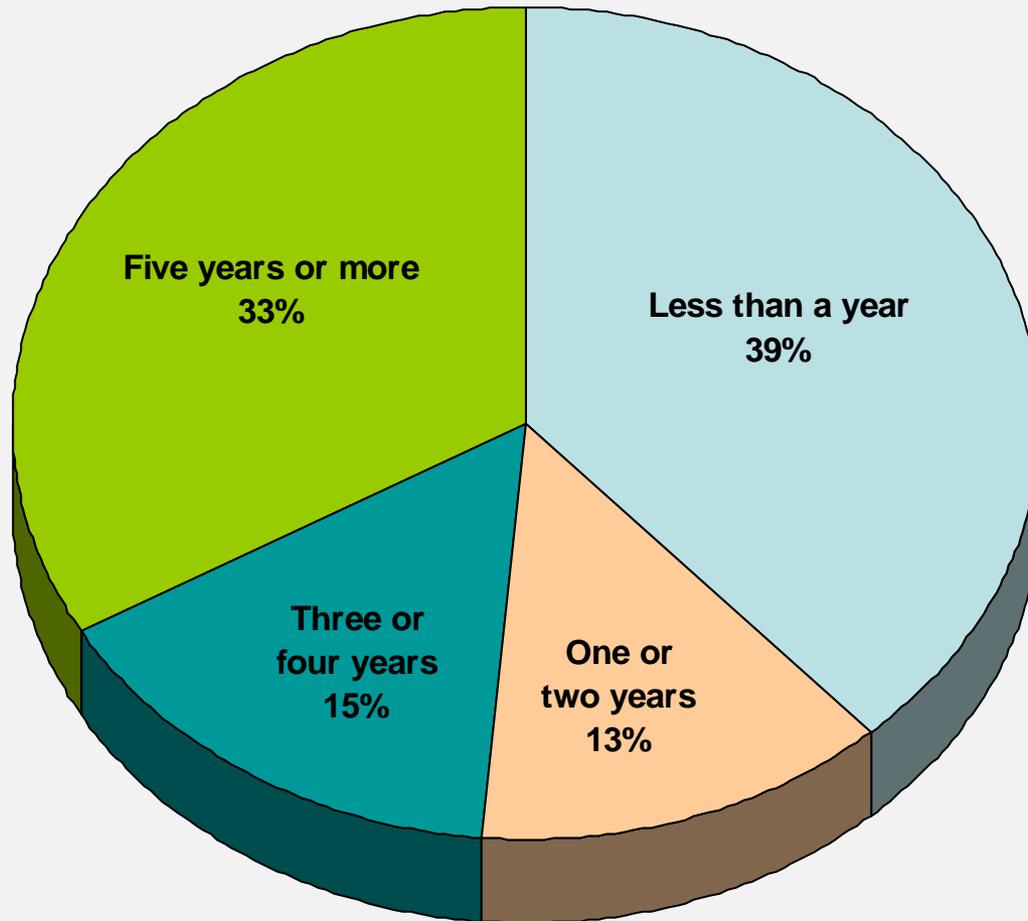
What most attracted you when you decided to join the Adventist Church?

Each = 100%

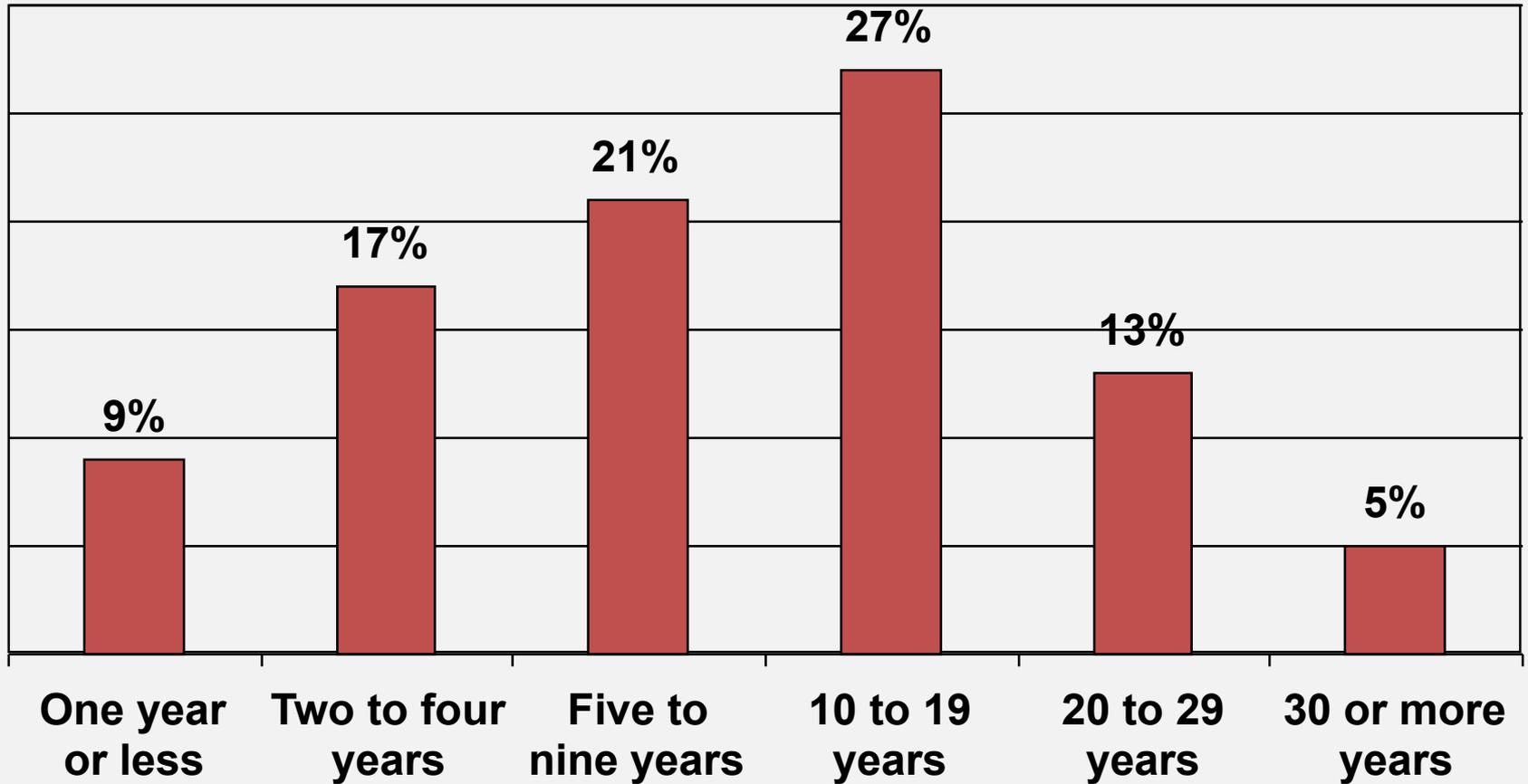
All interviewees were asked to rank all four of these



Time from First Contact to Baptism

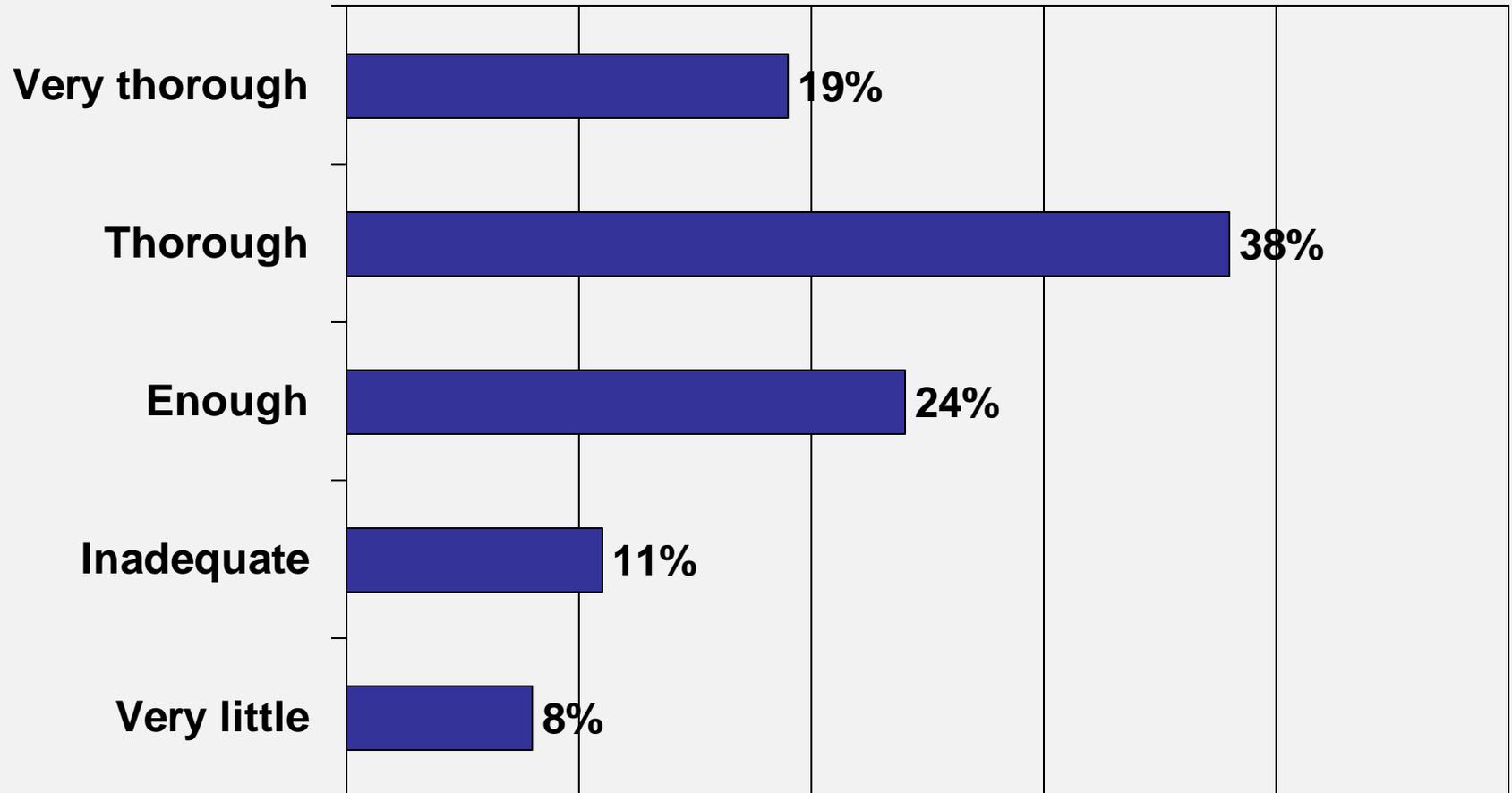


Number of Years Regularly Attended an Adventist Church

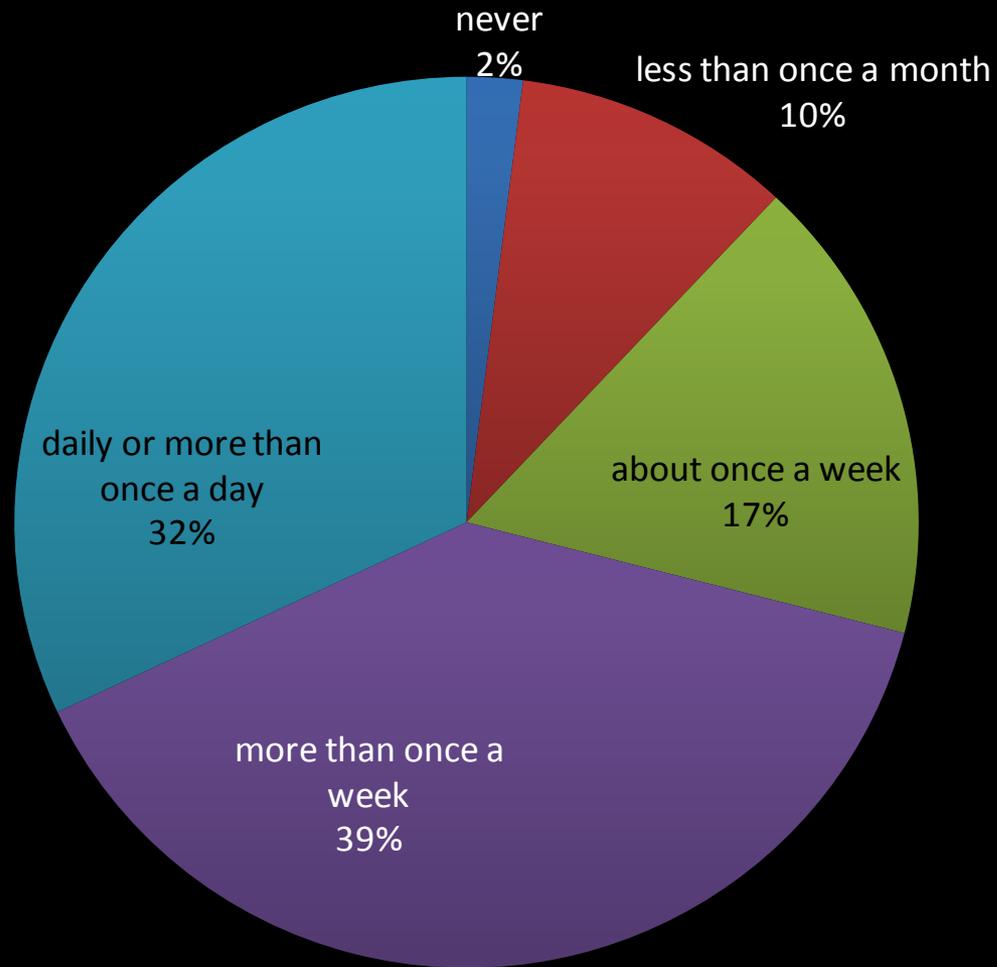


But people who attended fewer years are less likely to have been surveyed

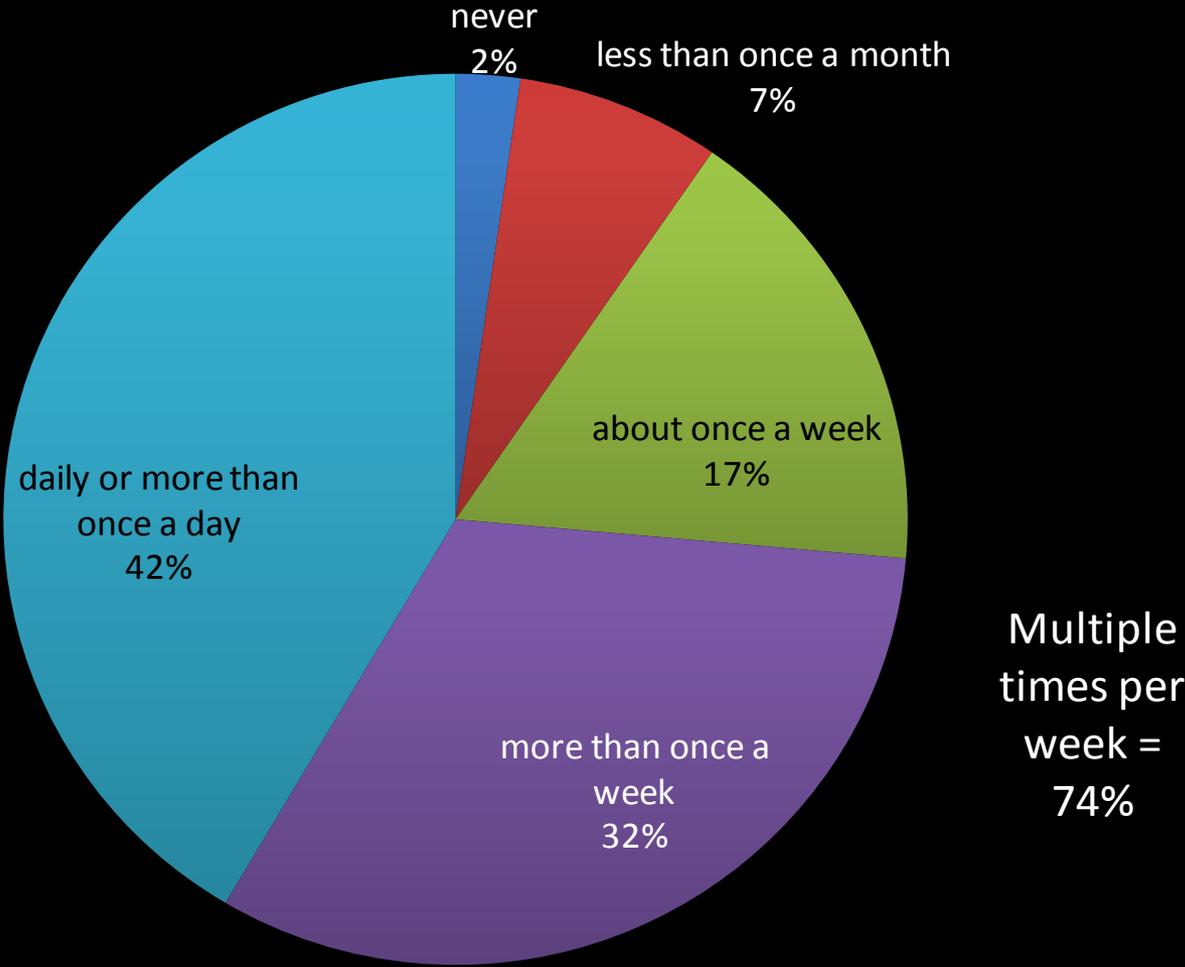
How would you describe the instruction given when you joined the church?



All who left—Frequency of Spiritual Activities (before leaving): Personal Bible Study



Current church members: personal Bible-study



How ADVENTIST are they *now*?

(Or, Why they *didn't* leave)

Since many seem to have been active SDAs, the obvious question arises is:

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

 SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

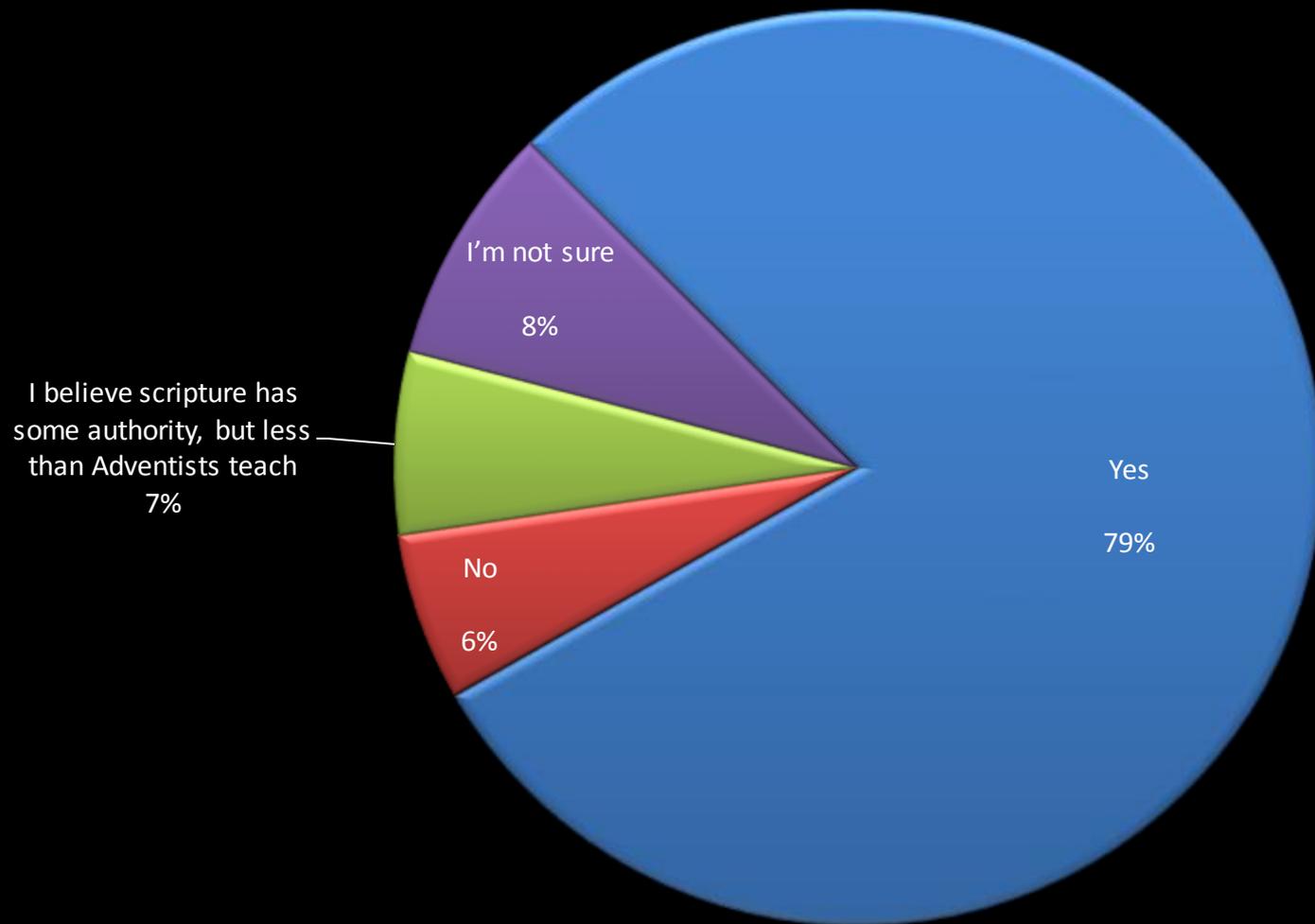
astr

Office of
Archives, Statistics,
and Research

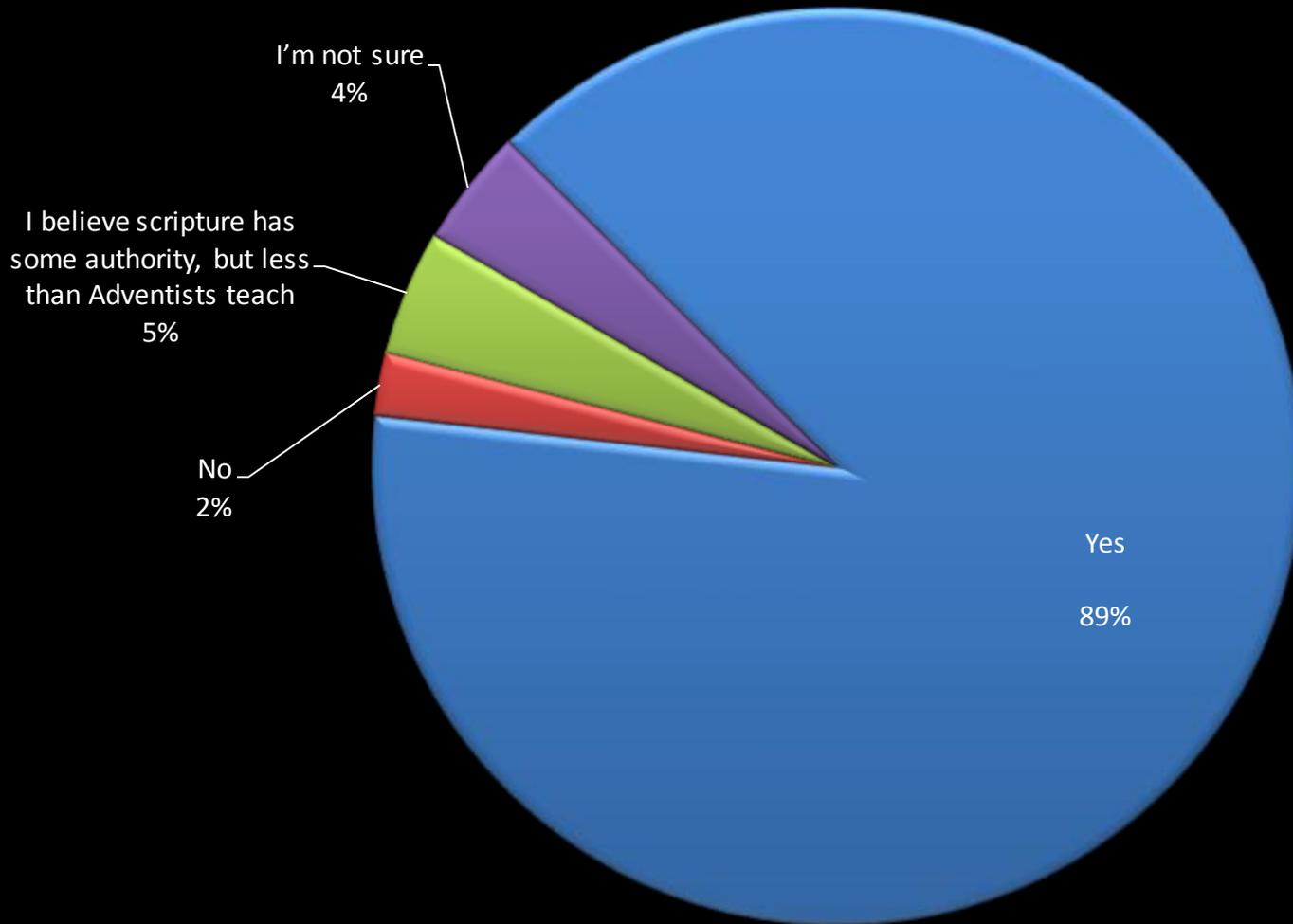


SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
SECRETARIAT

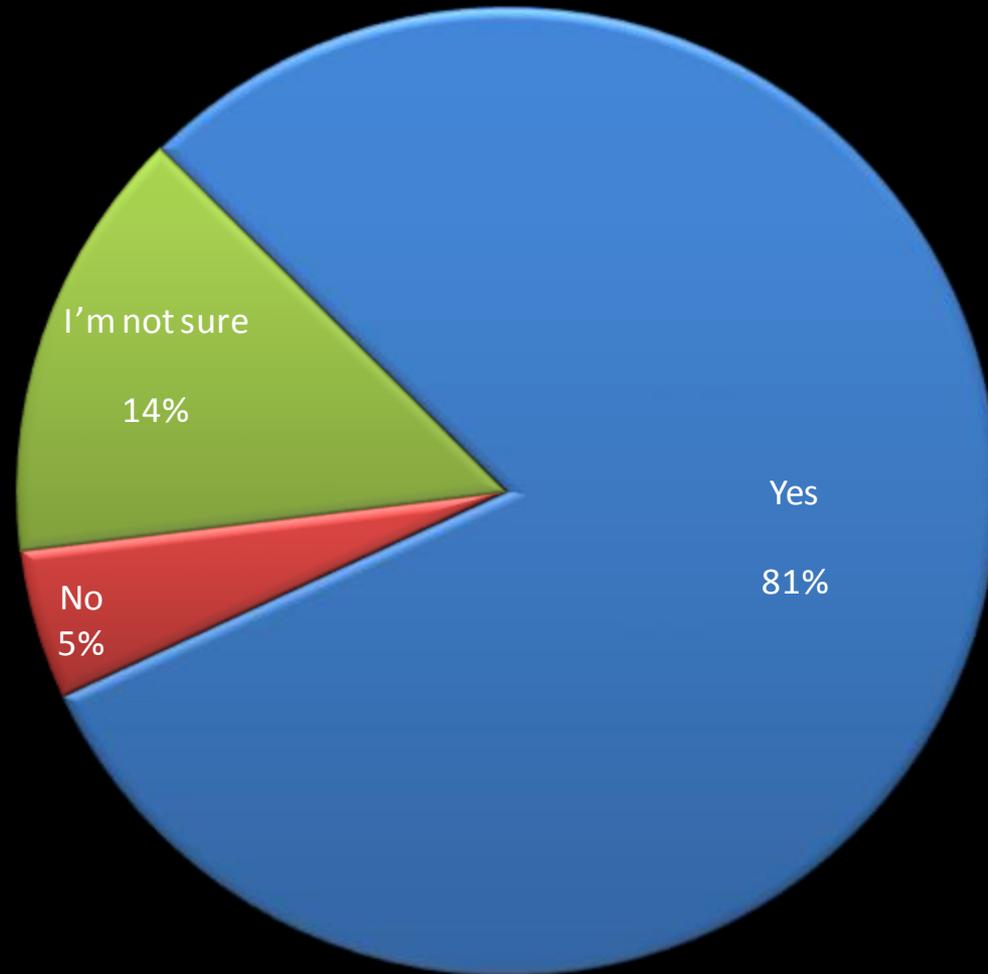
Do you still believe in the authority of Scripture, as taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church? – Former Members



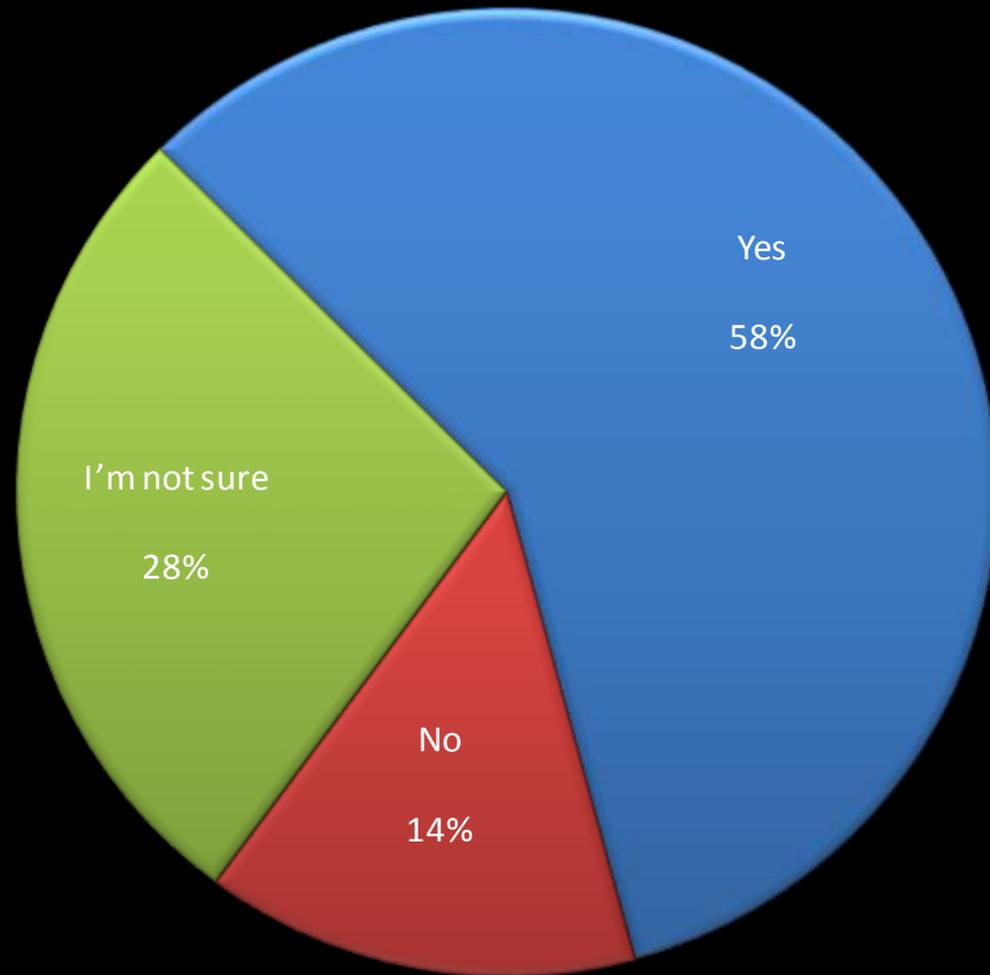
Do you still believe in the authority of Scripture, as taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church? – Returned Members



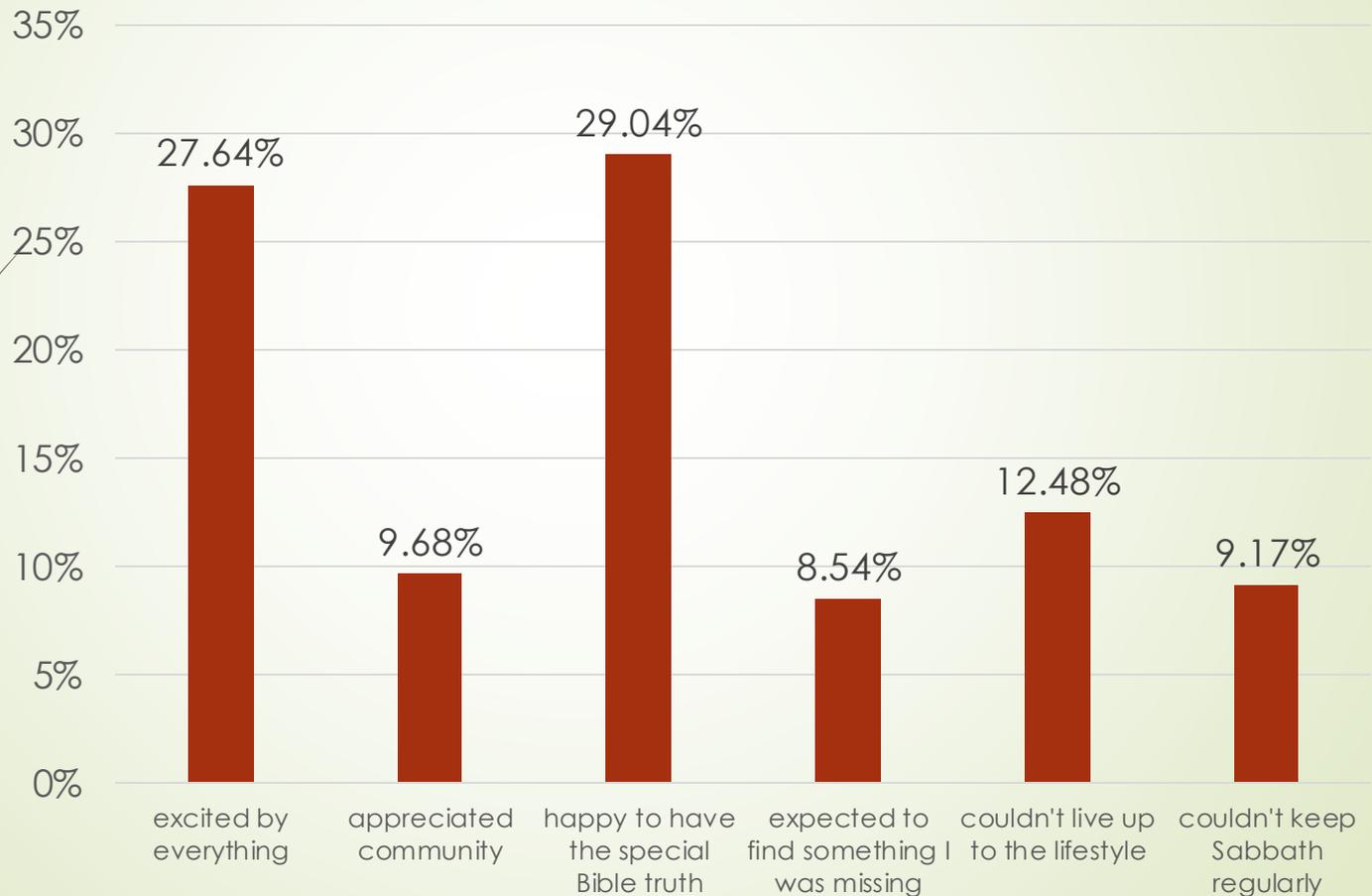
**Do you still believe in the gift of prophecy manifested in Ellen White? –
Returned Members**



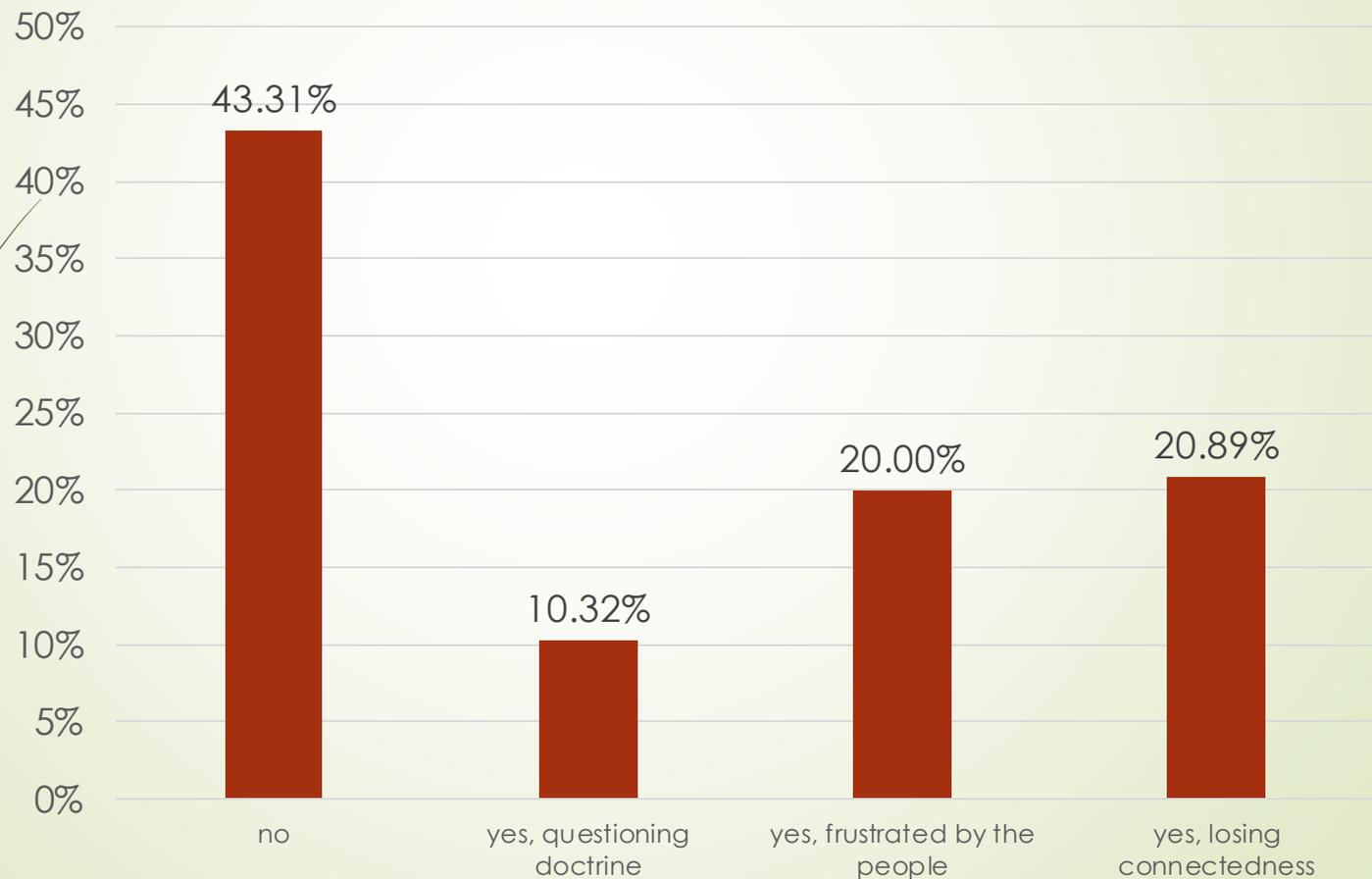
**Do you still believe in the gift of prophecy manifested in Ellen White? –
Former Members**



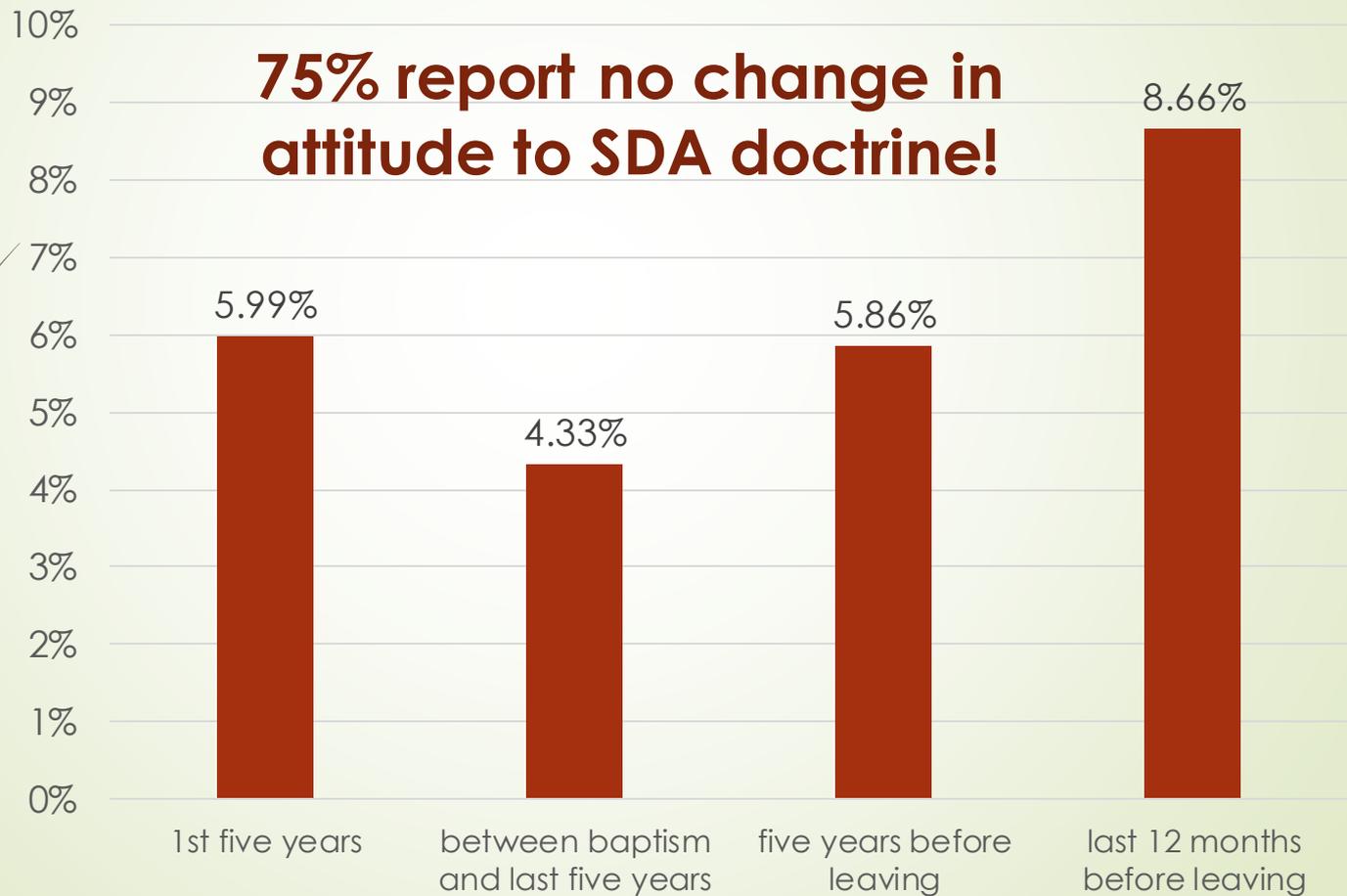
View of Adventist Church: first 5 Years after Baptism



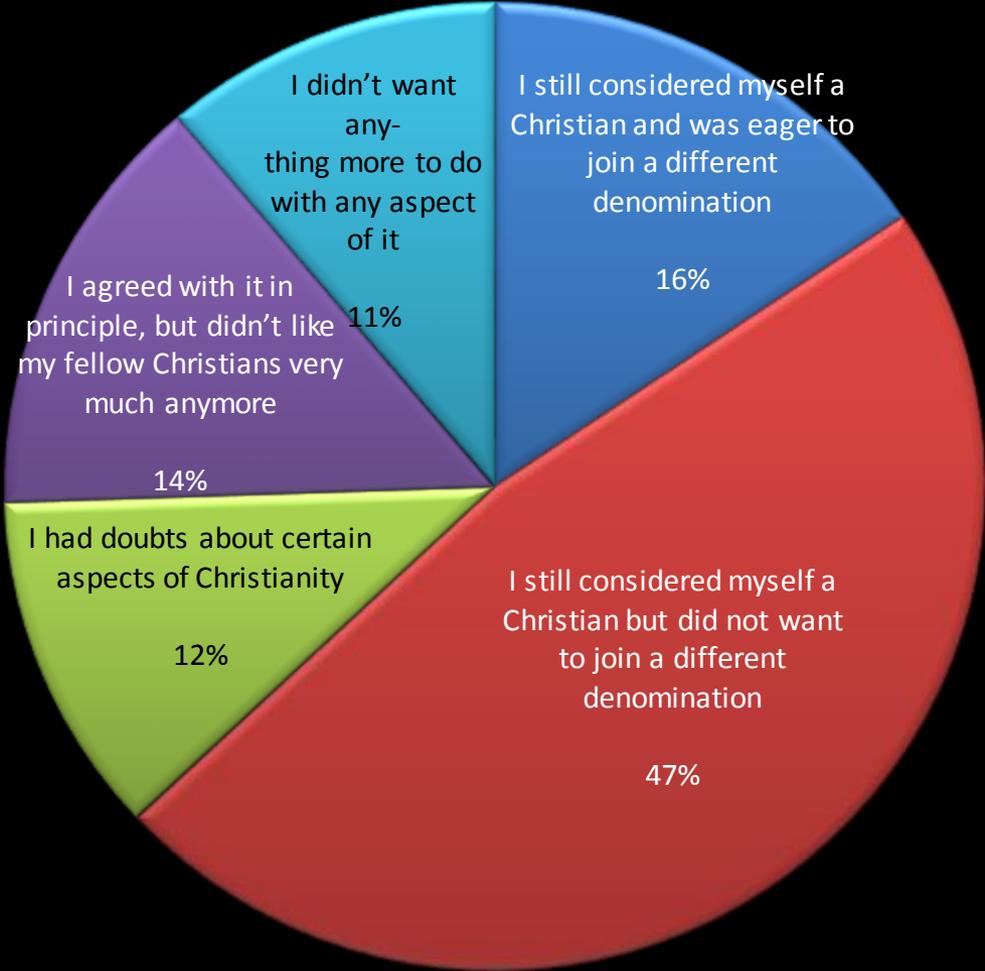
Change in View of Adventist Church: 5 years before Departure?



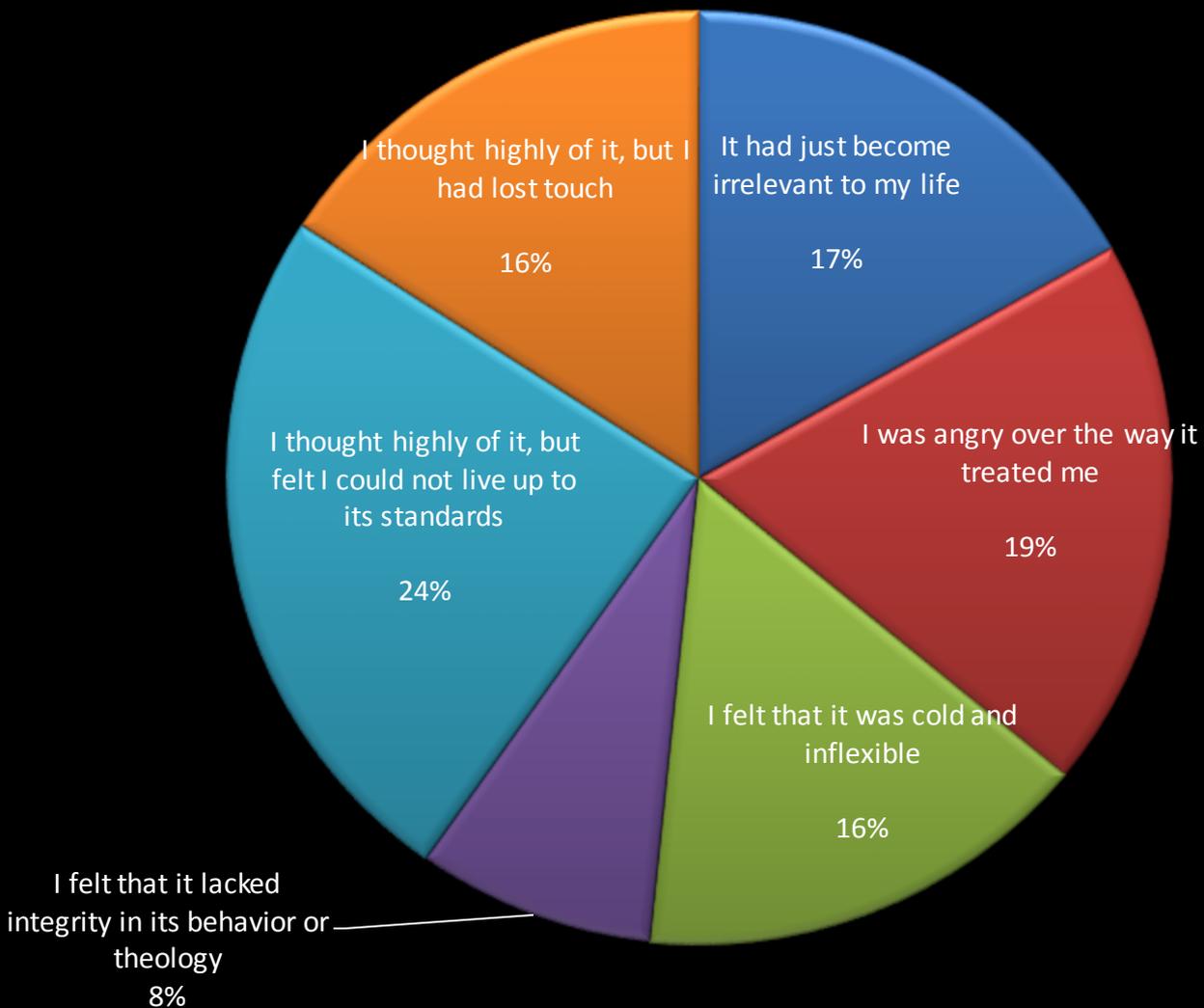
Timing of Change in Attitude Toward Doctrine



What did you think of *Christianity* at the time you left the Adventist church? (All Survey 2)



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



3. Stopping the haemorrhage, healing the wounded

*Creating caring and welcoming
church communities*



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

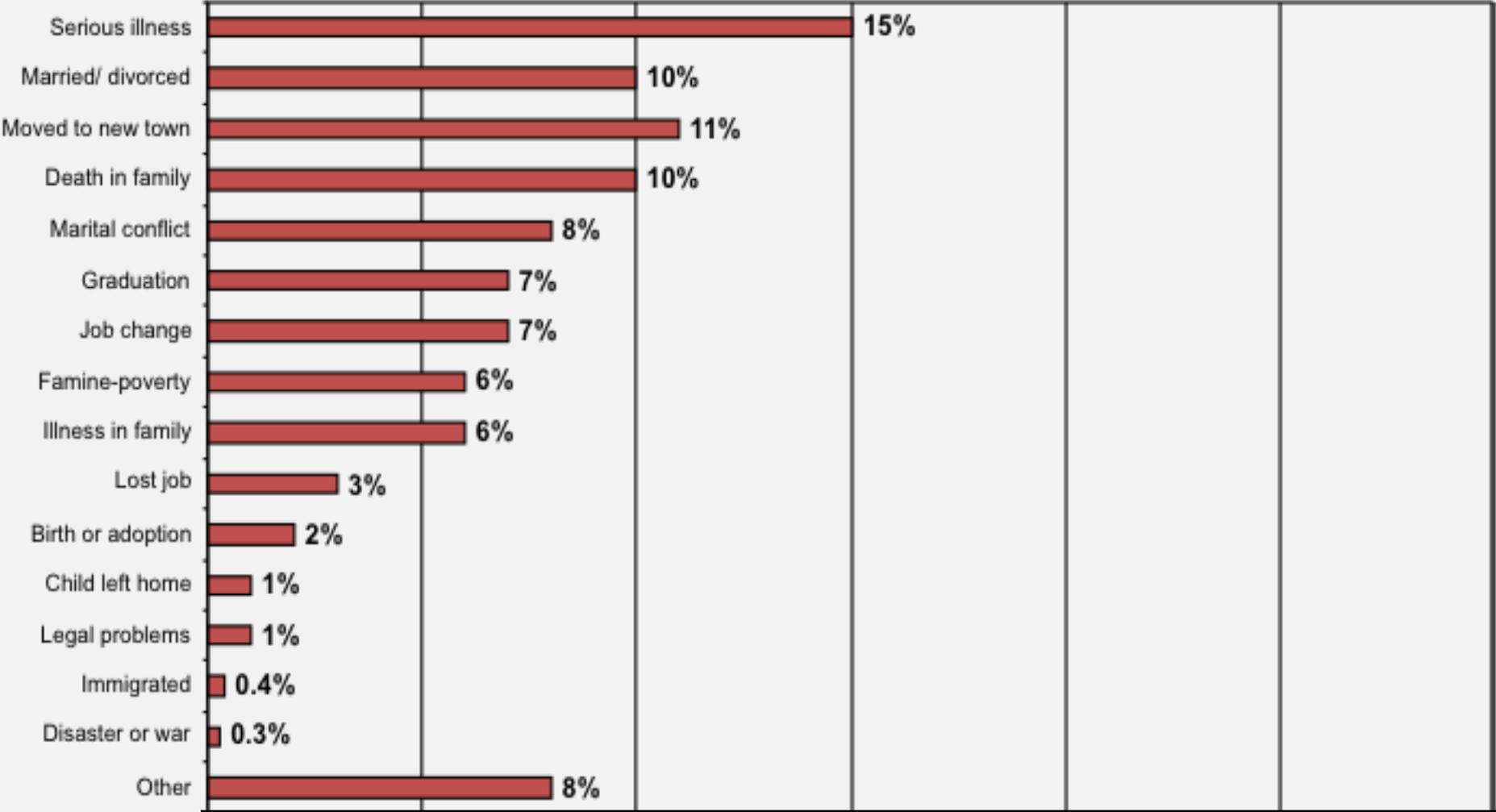
astr

Office of
Archives, Statistics,
and Research



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
SECRETARIAT

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



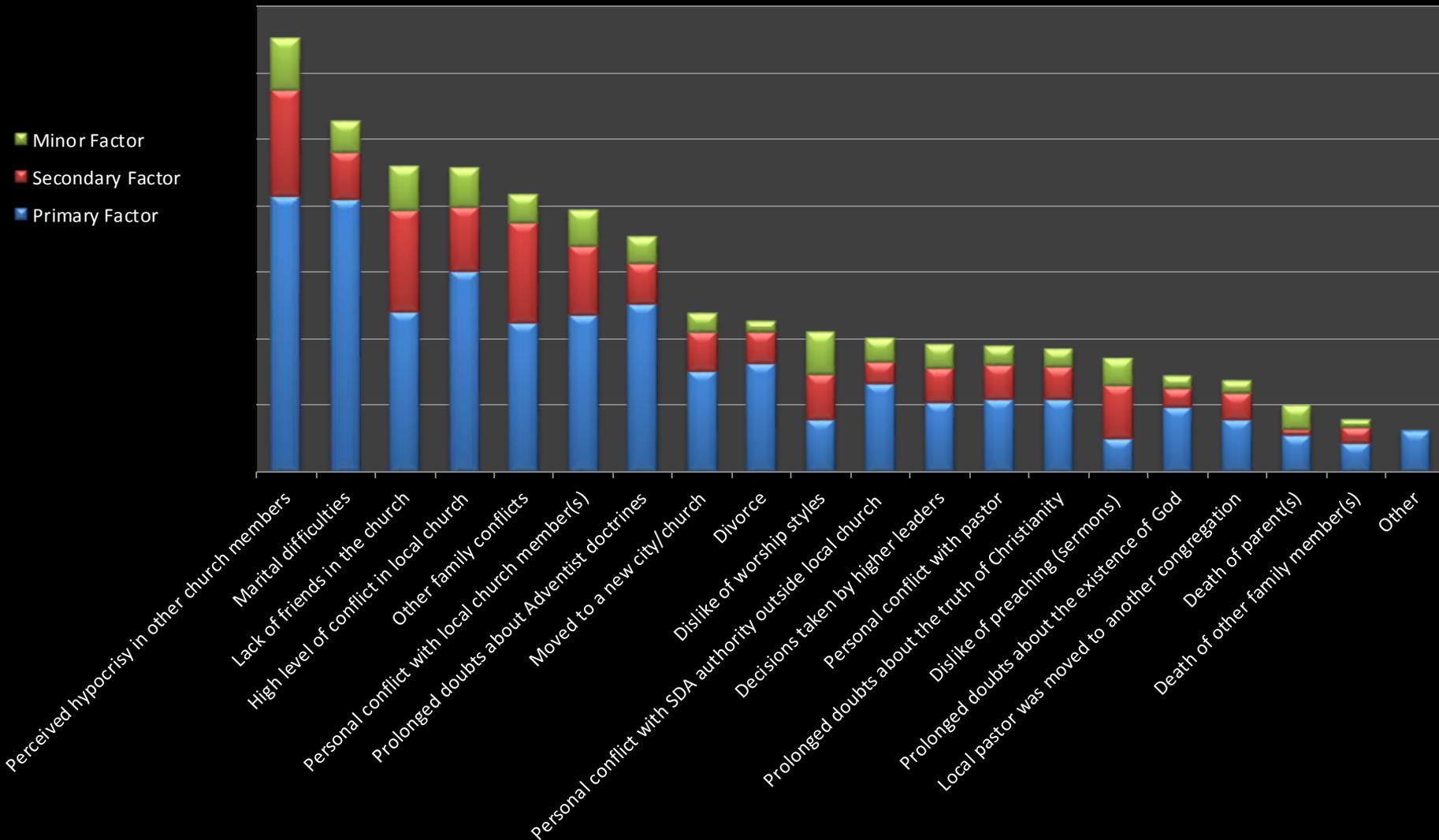
Most Important Reasons Why Decided to Stop Attending

- 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

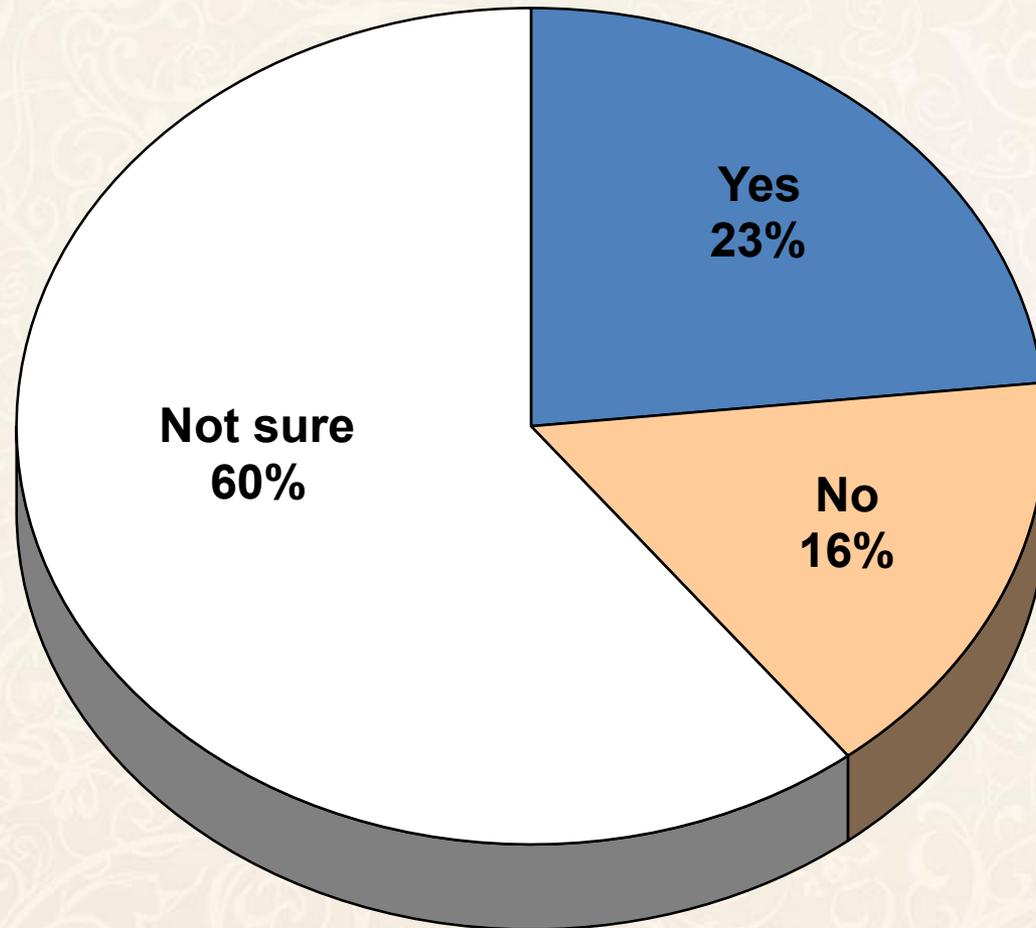
What event triggered your decision to leave? (weighted) (all survey 2)



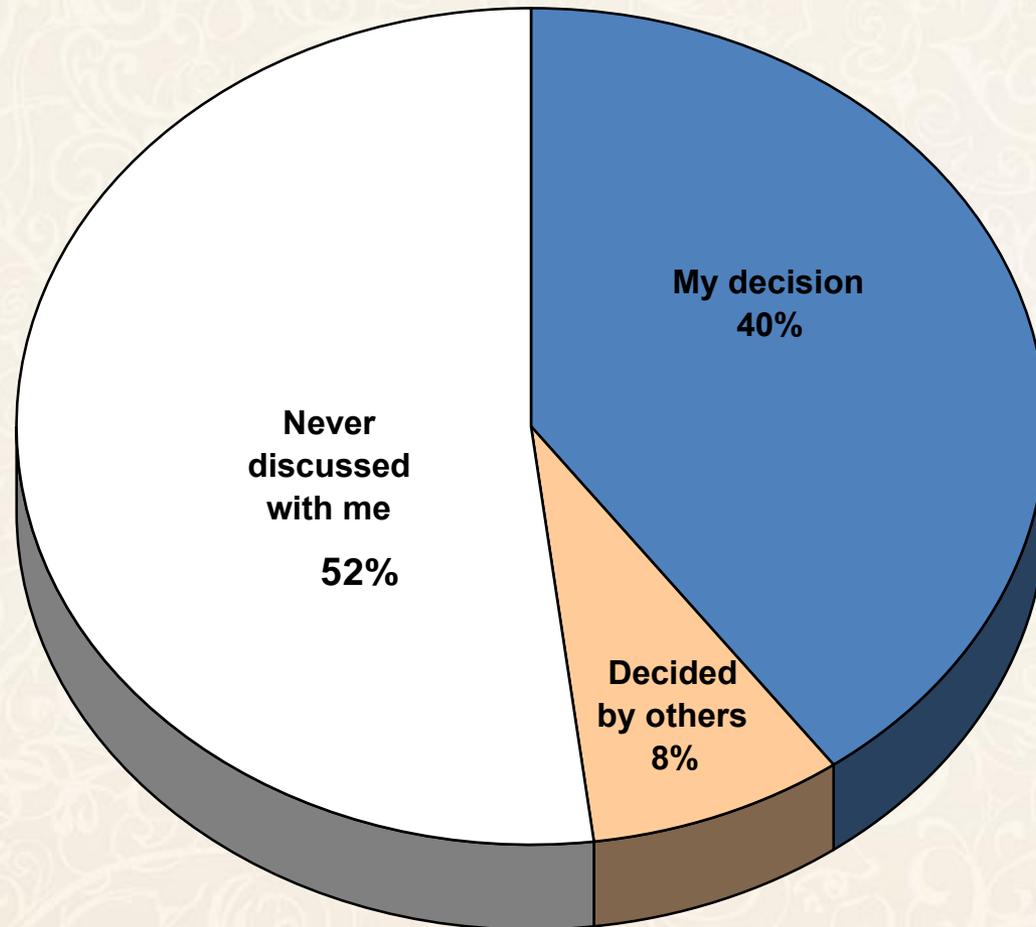
What Happened When They Stopped Attending Church

- 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?



Did you decide to withdraw or were you expelled from the church?



Pastors need to be equipped and trained—and then they can train elders and church-members

In light of these statistics, which show pastors engage very little with members who stop attending church, it is not surprising to find that 53% of global pastors say they never received training in nurturing and retaining members in their first degrees; the same proportion (53%) say that they also received no training in these areas in postgraduate study.

 SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

astr

Office of
Archives, Statistics,
and Research



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
SECRETARIAT

Other factors affecting retention and loss

EDUCATION



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

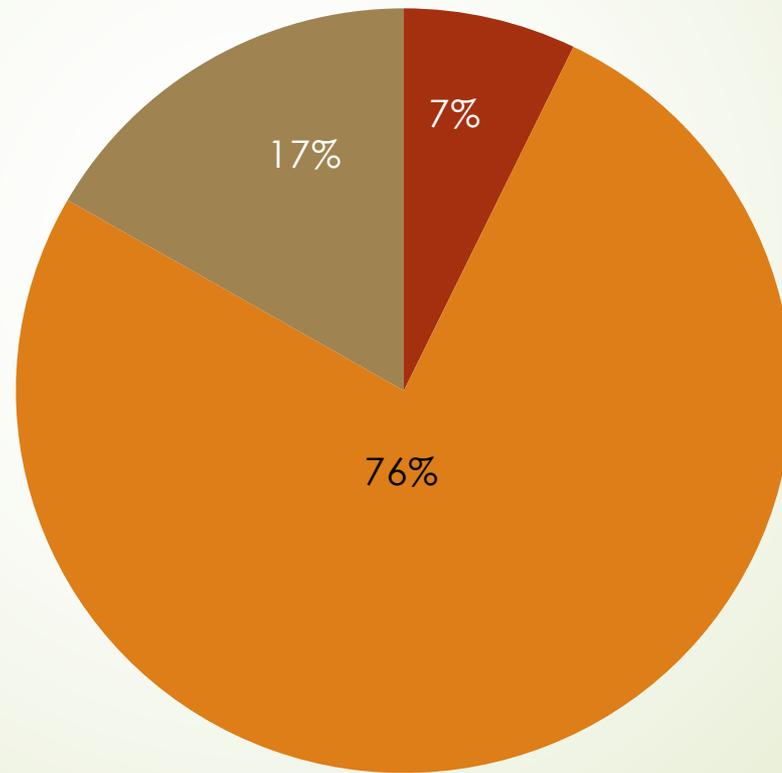
astr

Office of
Archives, Statistics,
and Research



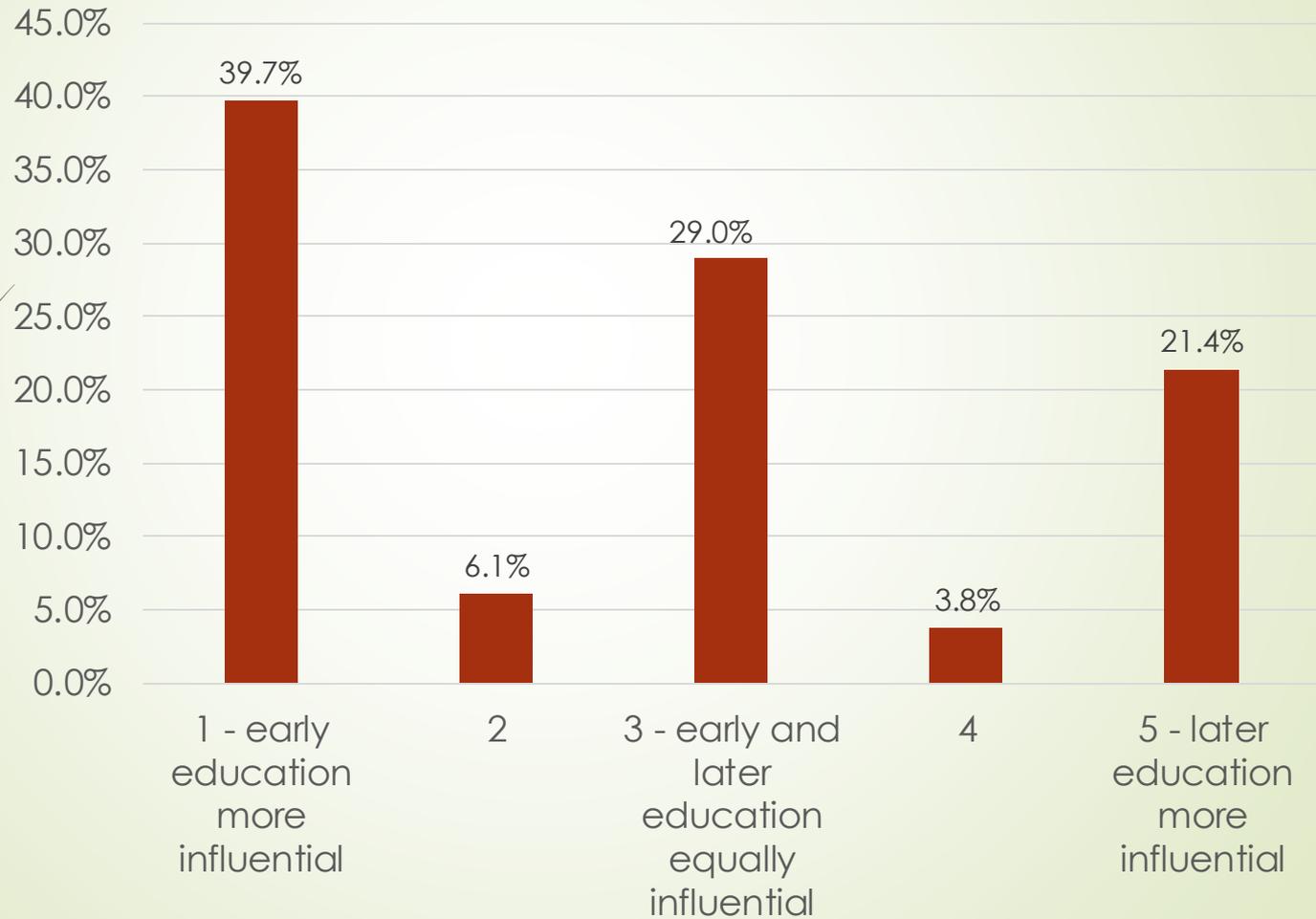
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
SECRETARIAT

Adventist Education a Factor in Departure?

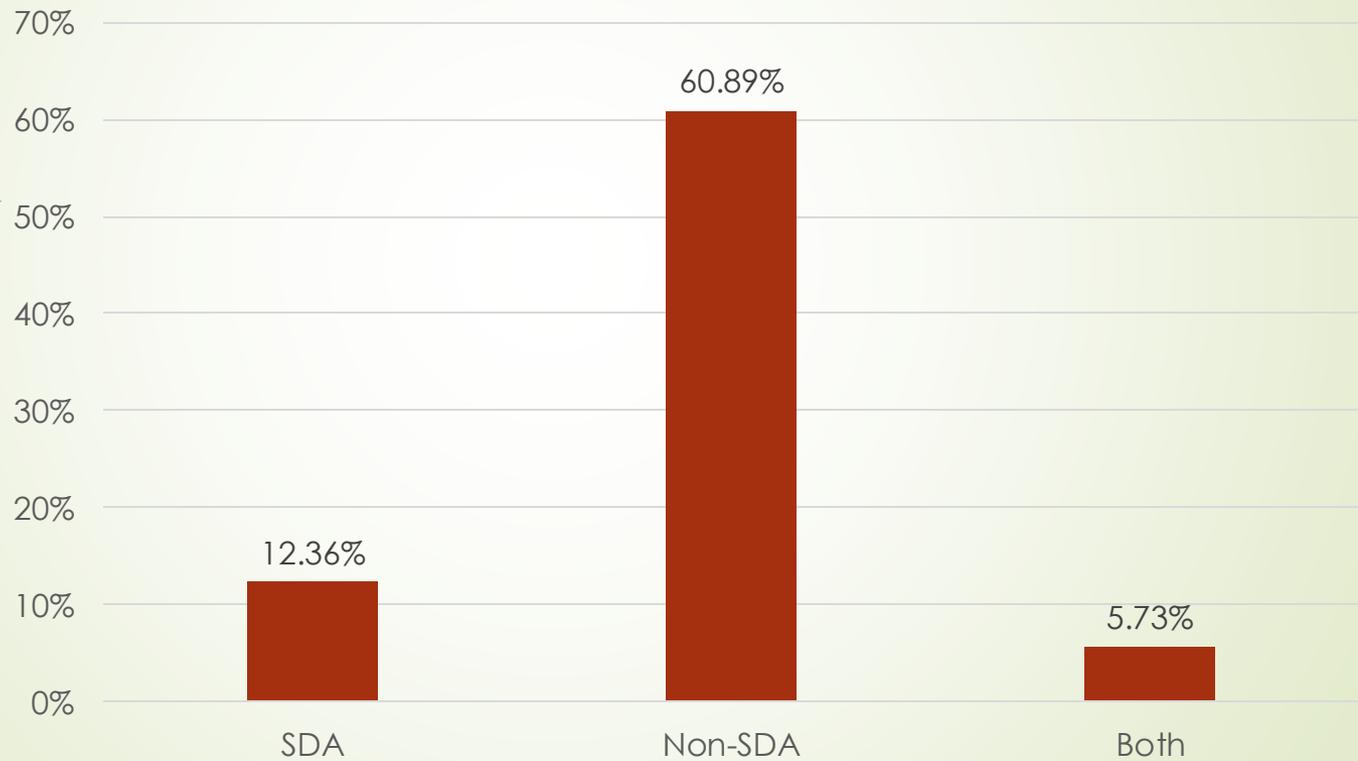


■ yes ■ no ■ don't know

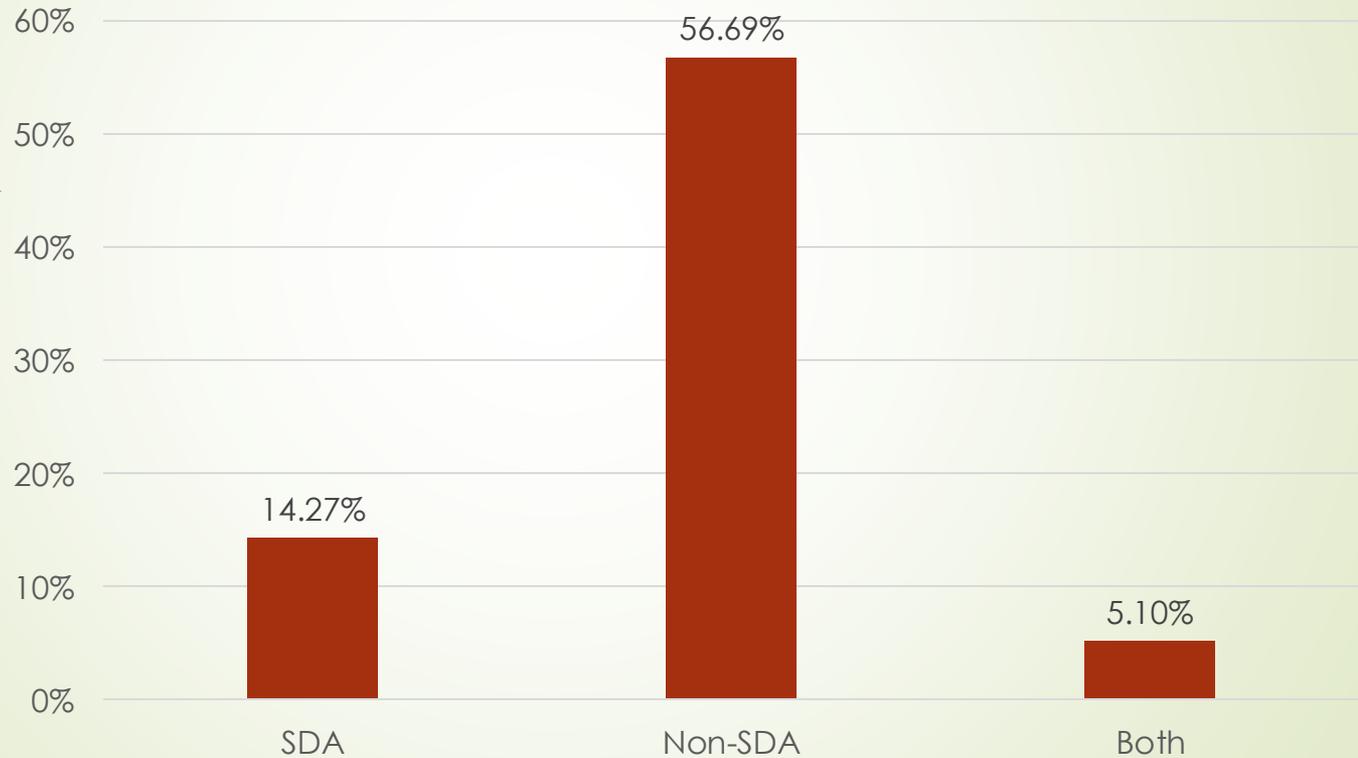
Educational Influences to Stay



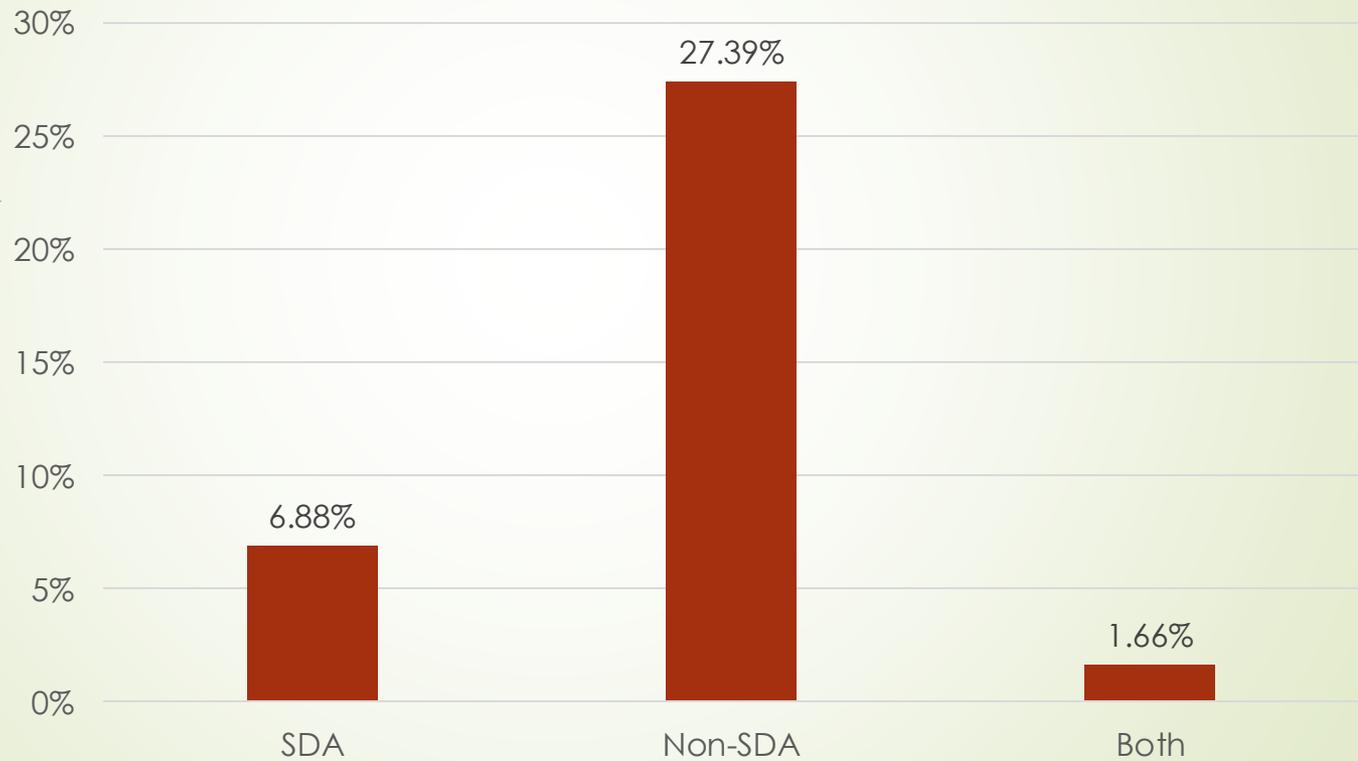
Type of Educational Institution Attended: Primary



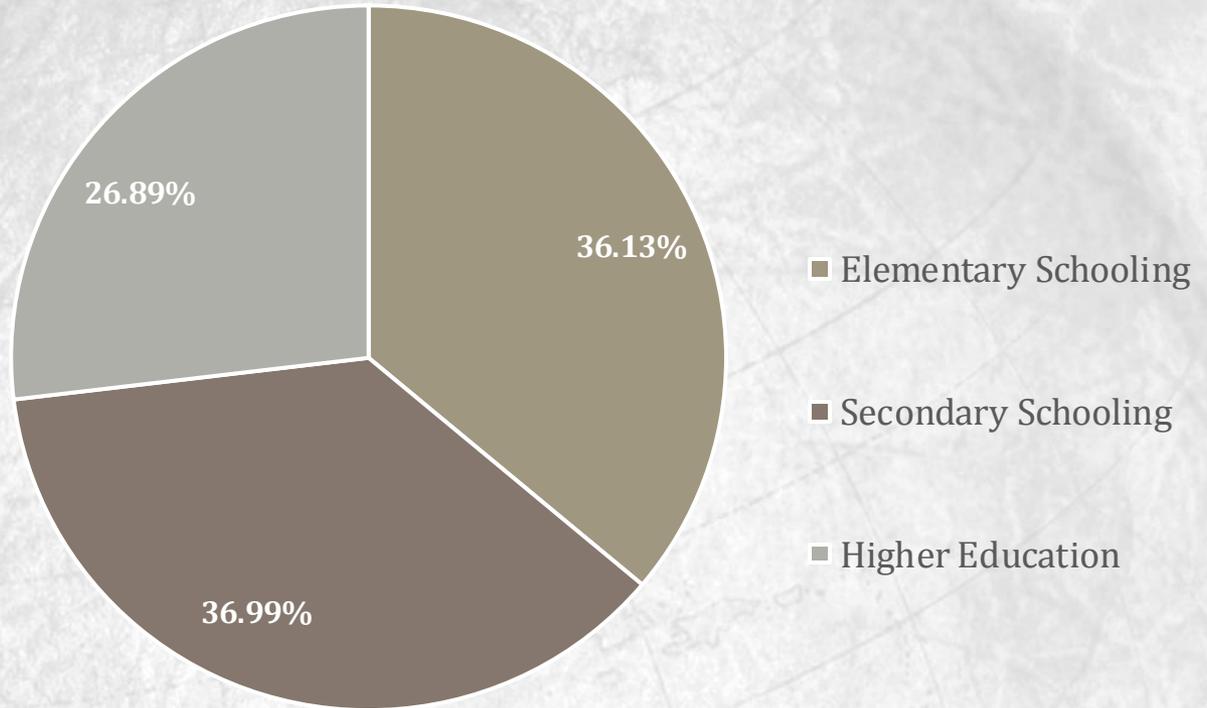
Type of Educational Institution Attended: Secondary



Type of Educational Institution Attended: Tertiary



Percentage of church members (worldwide) with different levels of Adventist education



 SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

astr

Office of
Archives, Statistics,
and Research



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
SECRETARIAT

Adventist education helps to keep members in the Church

People who have left the church are proportionately less likely to have experienced Adventist education, at all levels, than the majority of church members.

To improve retention: prioritise Adventist education!

 SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

astr

Office of
Archives, Statistics,
and Research



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
SECRETARIAT

Factors affecting reconnection and reclamation

Might they comeback?



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

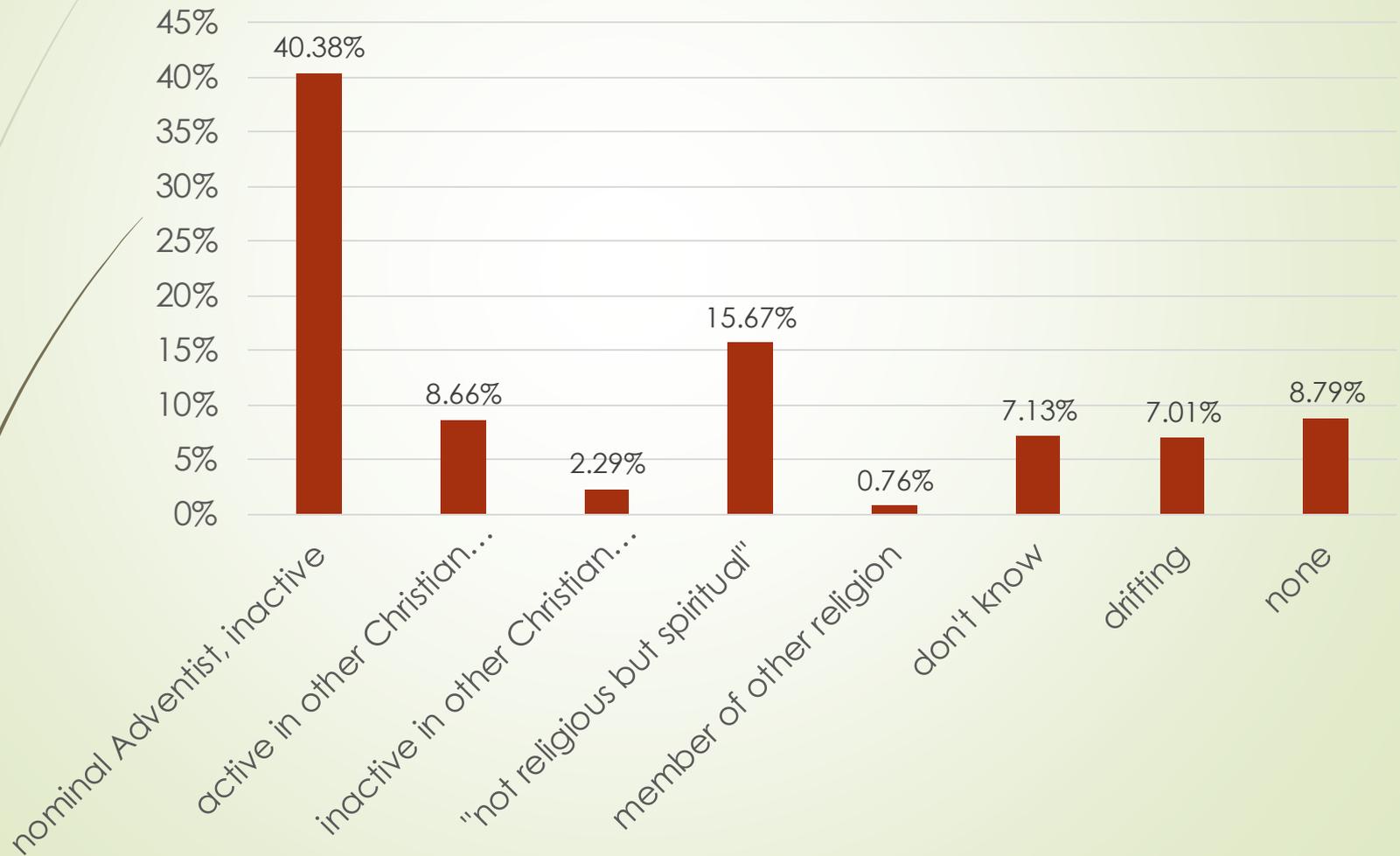
astr

Office of
Archives, Statistics,
and Research

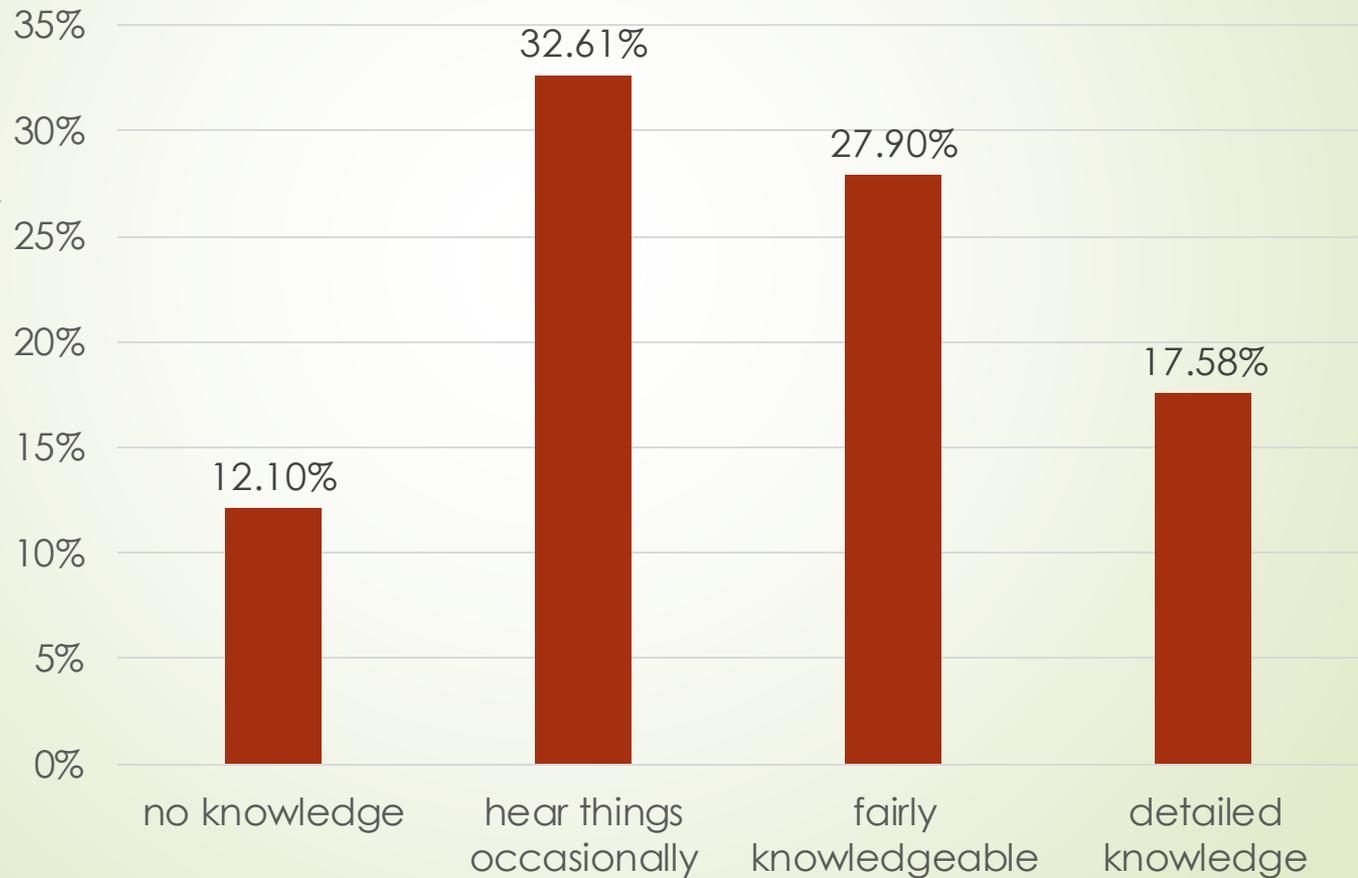


SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
SECRETARIAT

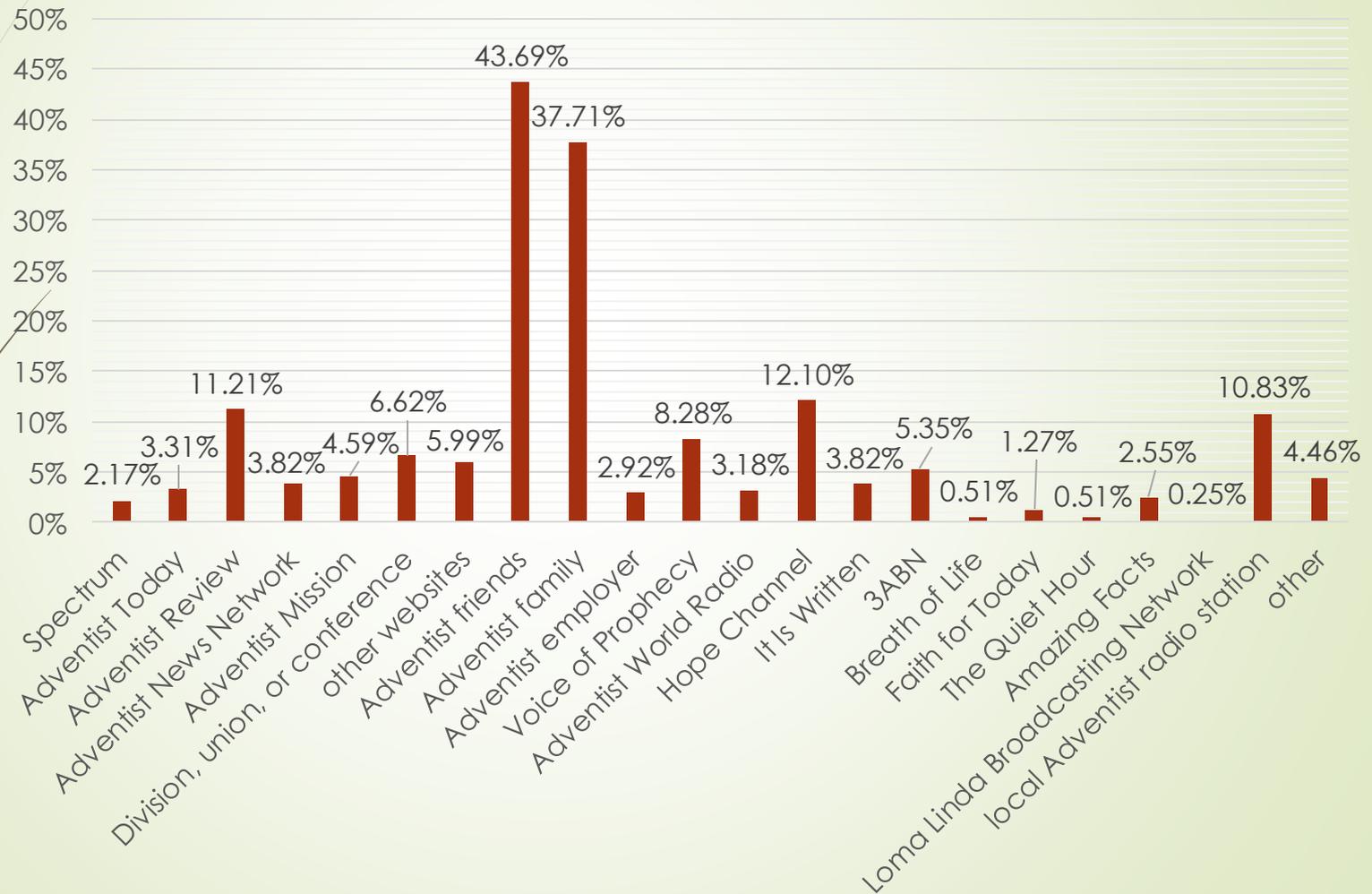
Religious Affiliation After Stopped Attending Church



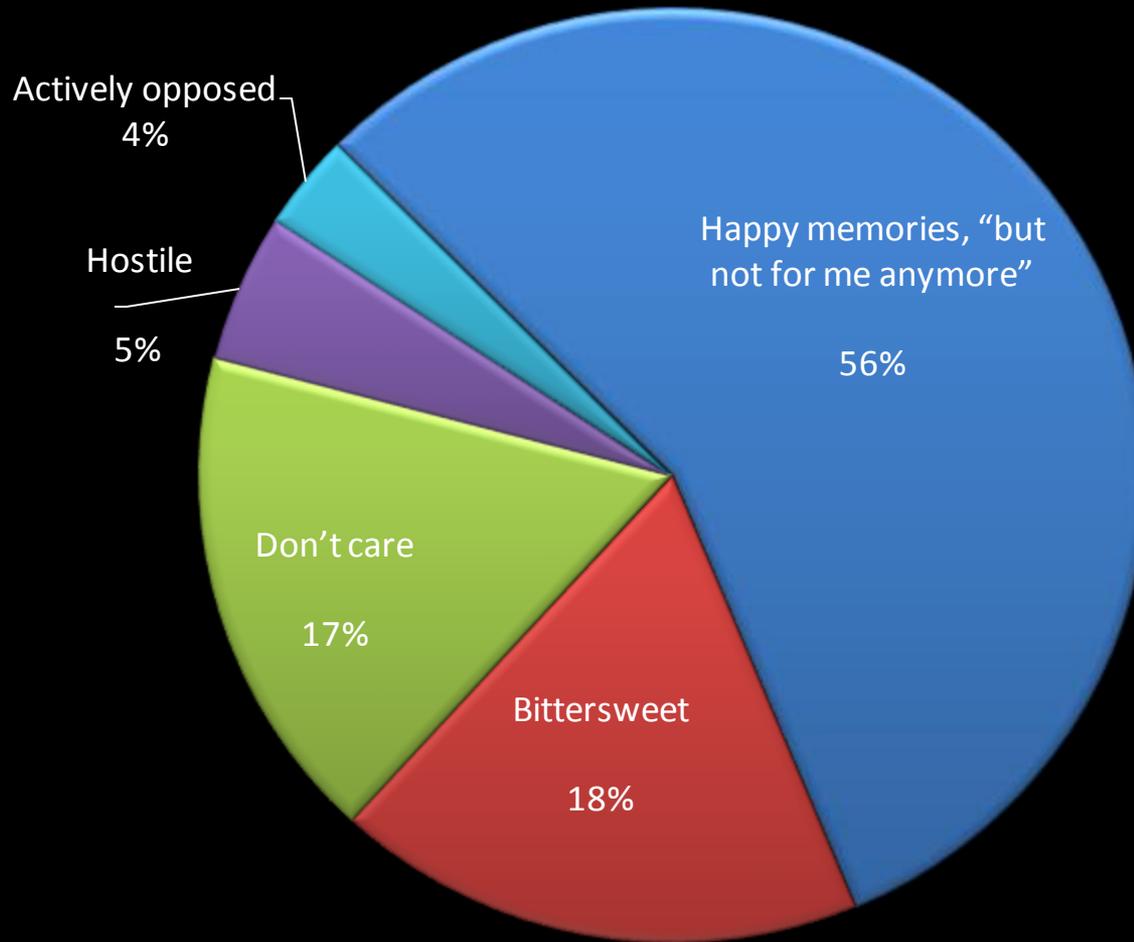
Awareness of Developments in Adventism



Sources of Information



How do you presently feel about Adventism? (Former Members)



How would you rate your openness to reconnect? (Former Members)

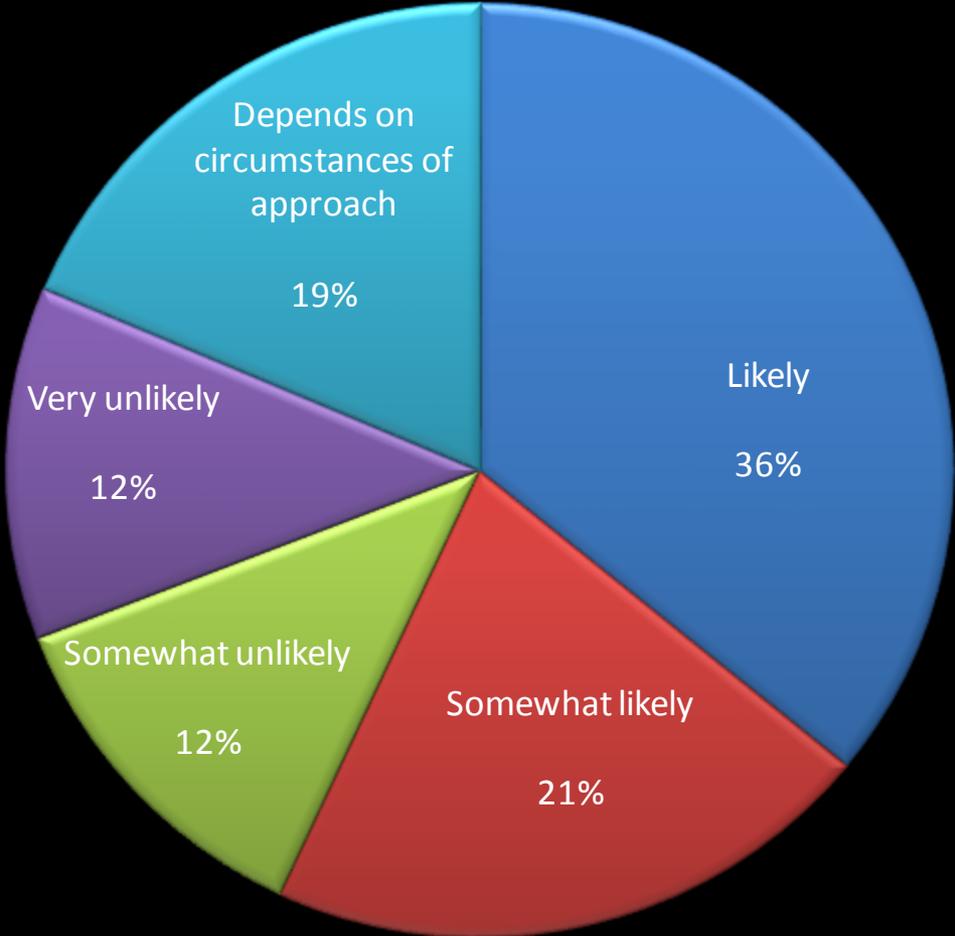


Table 37: Correlation between Visitations after leaving and openness to reconnect with the Church – Former Members

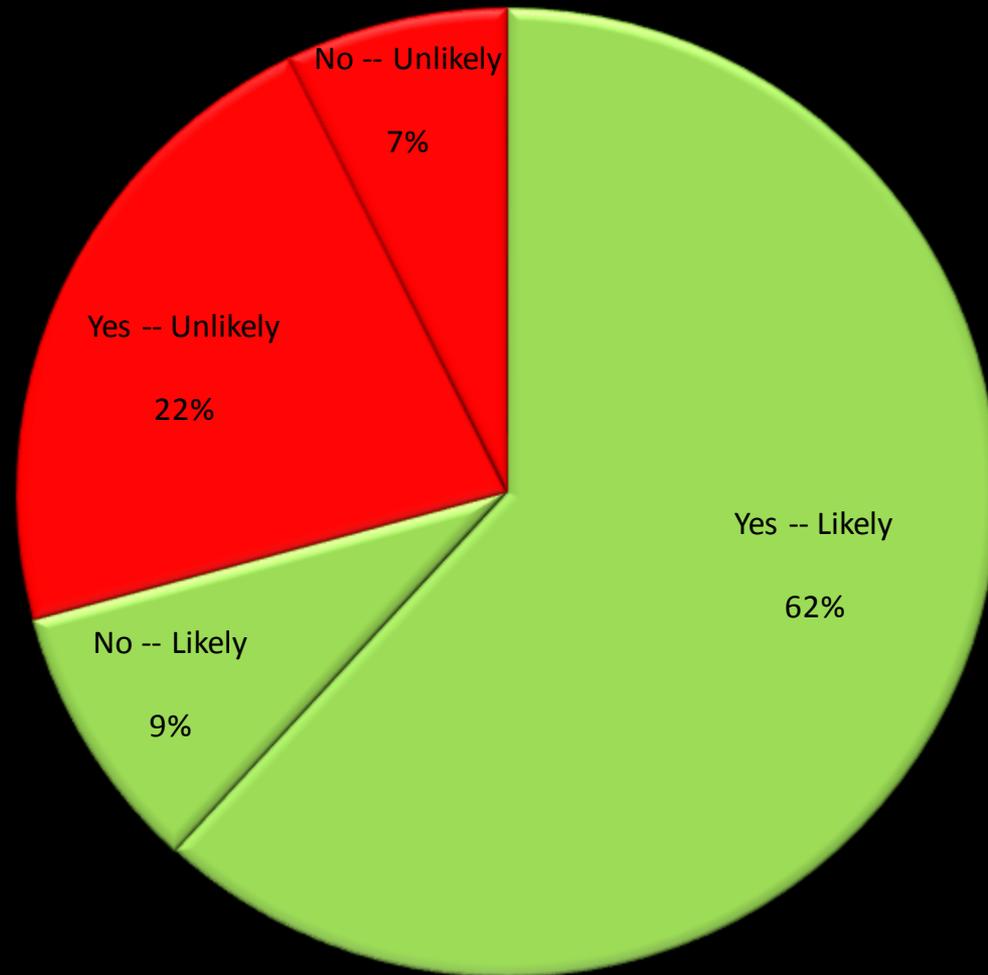
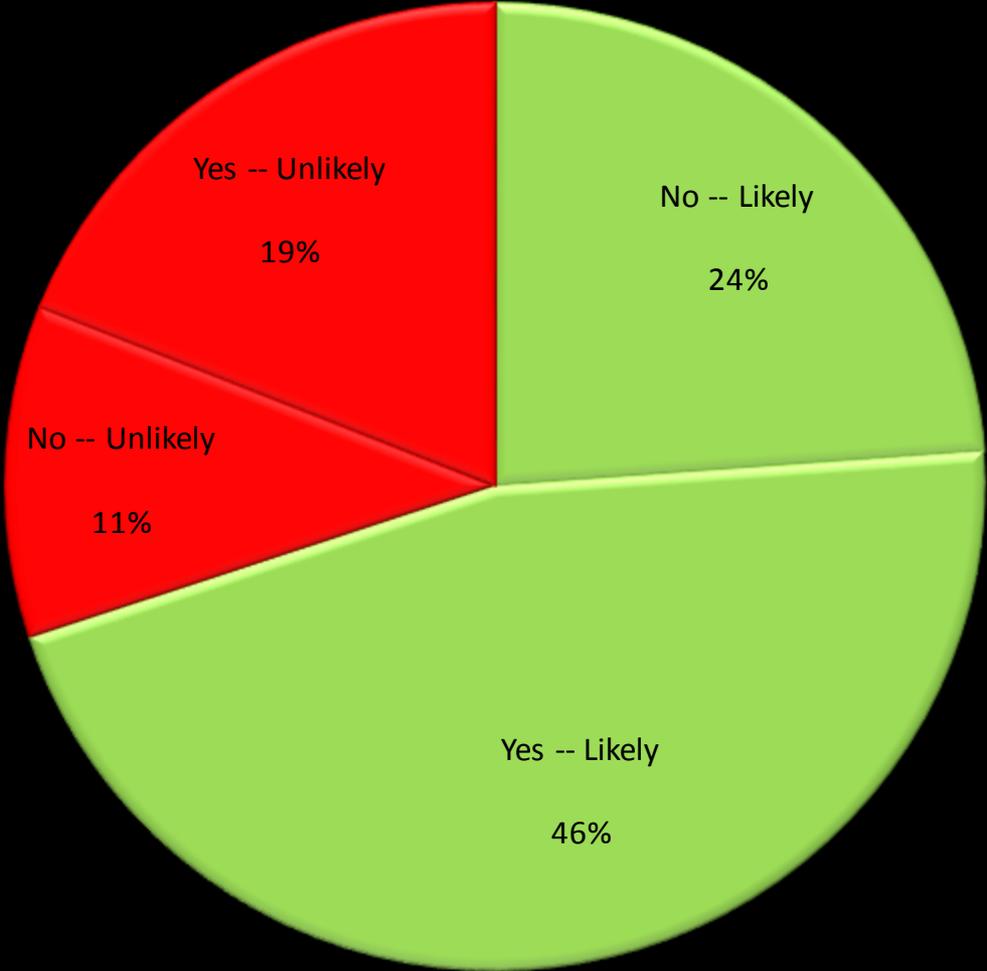


Table 38: Correlation between social relationships with Adventists and Openness to reconnect – Former Members



Guidance from the Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy

 SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

astr

Office of
Archives, Statistics,
and Research



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
SECRETARIAT

The Lessons of Scripture

1

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

The Lessons of Scripture

1

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.”

Lessons 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

Lessons 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."**

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 187

Lesson to be learned

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 Lessons of Scripture

2

John 21:15–17

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”

The Lessons of Scripture

2

John 21:15–17

He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.

Lesson to be learned

Meaning:

If you love Me, then you will feed my sheep.

How much do we love Our Lord?

Final lesson: 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?

Recommendations



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

astr

Office of
Archives, Statistics,
and Research



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
SECRETARIAT

Strategies

- **Administrators** need to prioritize discipleship and let pastors know that is a priority
- **Pastors** need to be encouraged/trained to work **collaboratively** with **elders** and 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

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 a discipleship program: GC recommends “Growing Fruitful Disciples” (adapted to local contexts).
2. Adopt attendance counts **as standard**, to highlight the issue of who is attending — and who is not
3. Adopt membership software for keeping records of members, to help pastors and elders be aware of who is slipping away

Recommendations

4. Specific training in nurture–retention–discipling to become part of ministerial education at Newbold and any other seminaries in TED
5. Implement comprehensive, practical training in **conflict resolution and reconciliation** at all levels: union and conference/mission employees and in 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 to include 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:

<https://www.adventistarchives.org/summit-on-nurture-and-retention-2013> (along with audio recordings of discussion sessions that followed each presentation)

Other Resources

http://www.adventistresearch.org/research_reports:

Full reports on both studies of former and inactive members summarised in this presentation

http://www.adventistresearch.org/astr_presentations

Copies of my reports to Annual Council in 2014 & 2015 which draw out key findings and statistics

<https://www.adventistarchives.org/ay-connect.pdf>:

Report on factors affecting retention and sense of connectedness among Adventist young people