Nurture, Retention & Disciple-ship: An Integral Part of Evangelism and Witness

David Trim, Director of Archives, Statistics, and Research

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http://www.adventistarchives.org/resources-on-nurture-and-retention

- First global Summit on Nurture, Retention and Discipling
- November 18-20, 2013
- Over 110 attendees, including two delegates from every Division, plus around sixty SDA scholars, and 30 officers and departmental directors from GC and NAD; keynote address by Dr. Ng.
- All the presentations are online at the address above

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1. Retention and loss, 1964–2013

- Anecdotal evidence has for some years indicated that the Adventist Church loses many of its members—including recent converts from evangelistic campaigns
- Stories have been from several divisions, esp. ESD, NSD, SAD, WAD, that suggest high loss rates
- What are the hard data? What picture do denominational statistics reveal?

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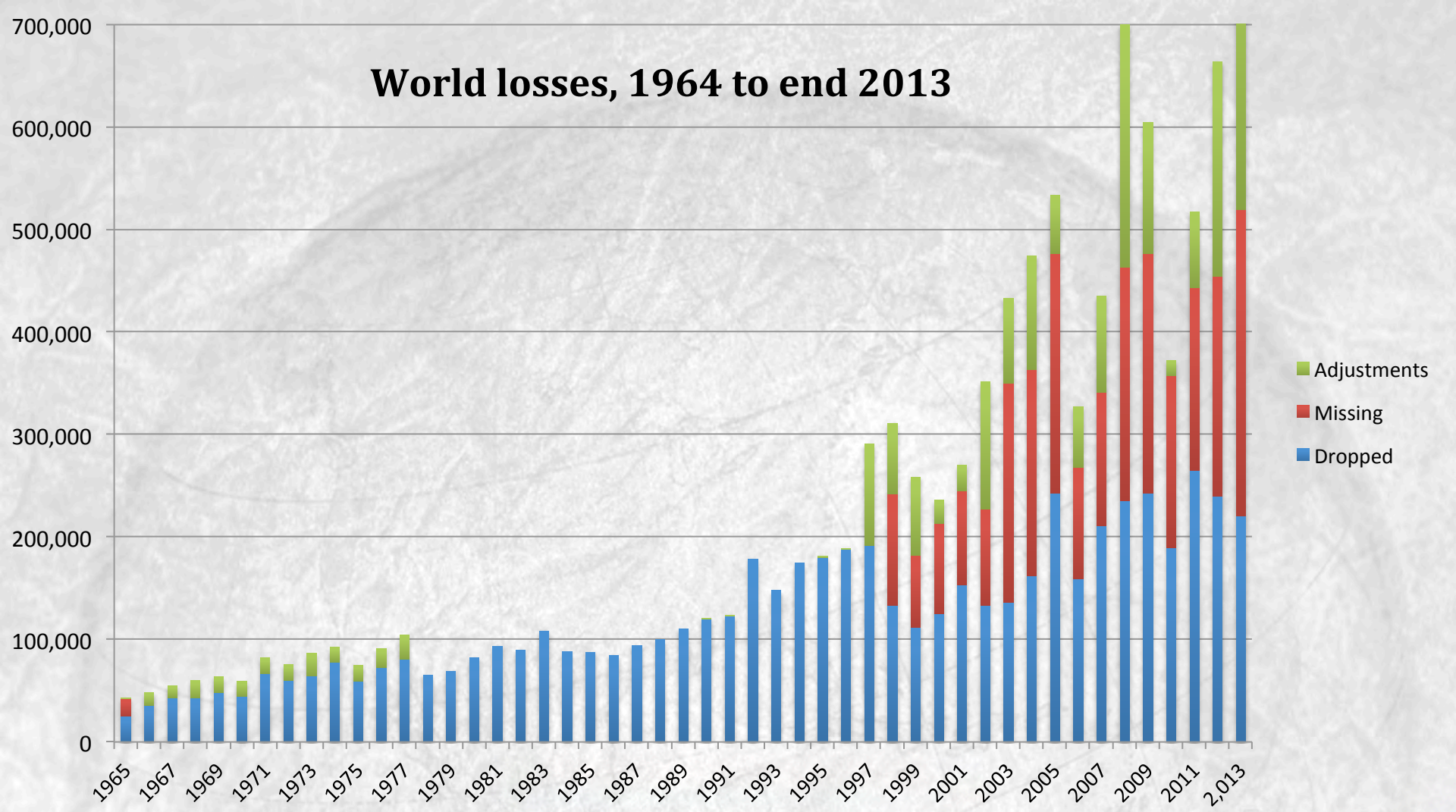
World losses, 1964 to end 2013



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Global membership and loss, 1964–2013

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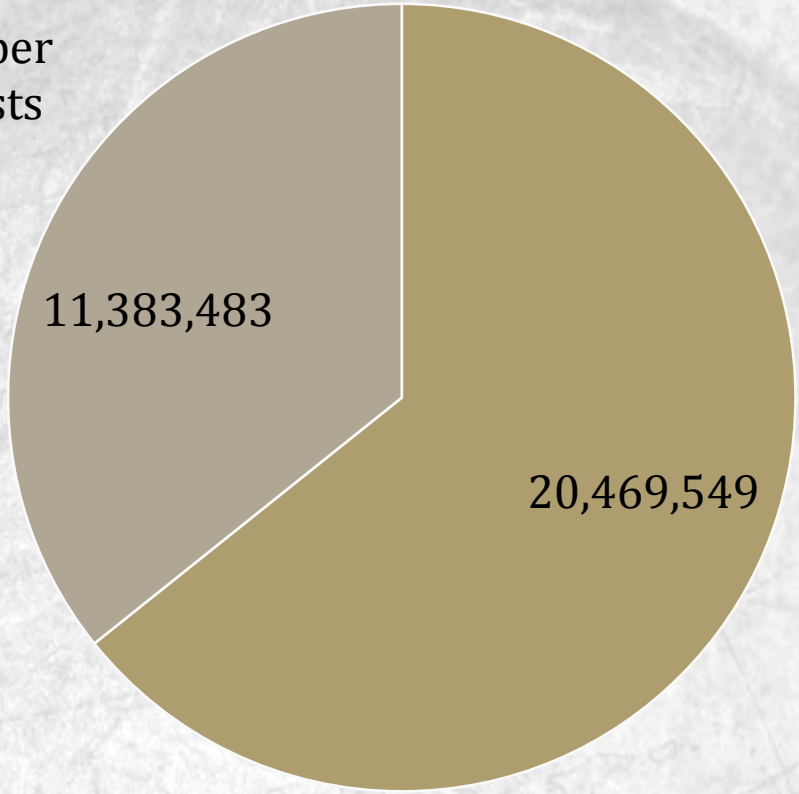
Global membership and loss, forty years to end 2013

in the last 40 years the total number of baptized Seventh-day Adventists
= 31,853,032
Of these, 11,383,483 have left the Church



Net loss rate: 35.73%

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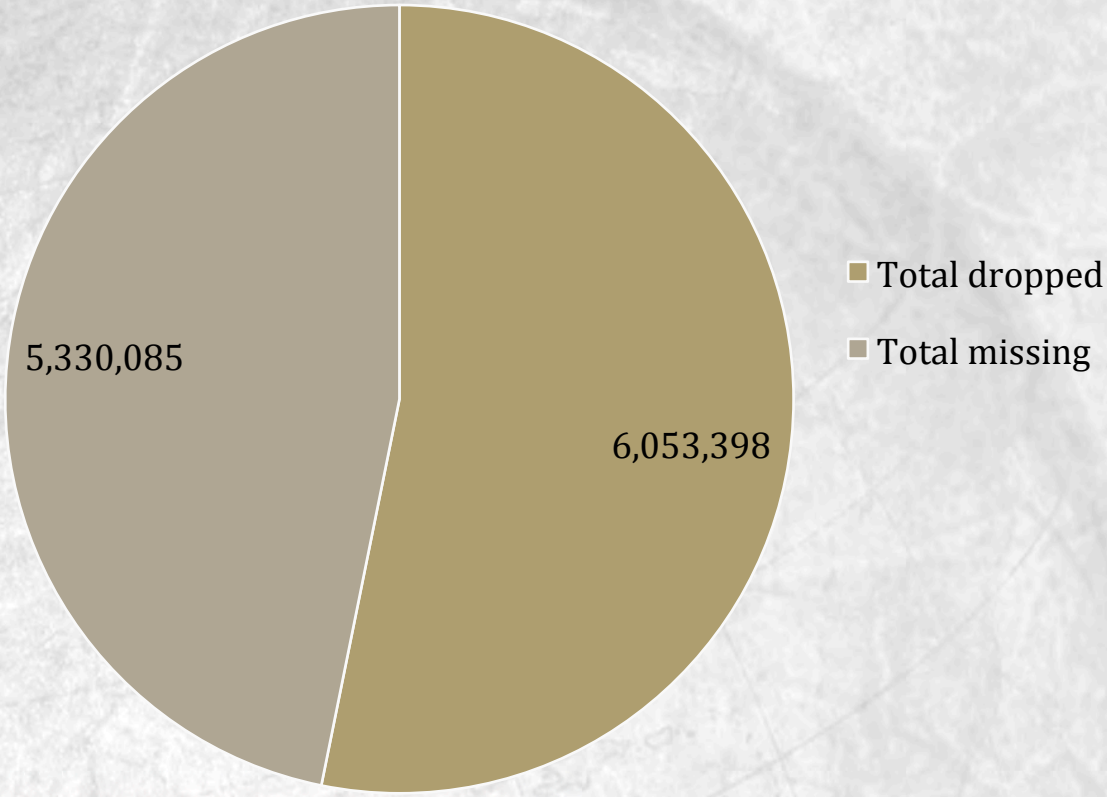
Global: dropped vs. missing, 1964–2013

11,383,483
live losses



Missing as % of total lost = 46.82%

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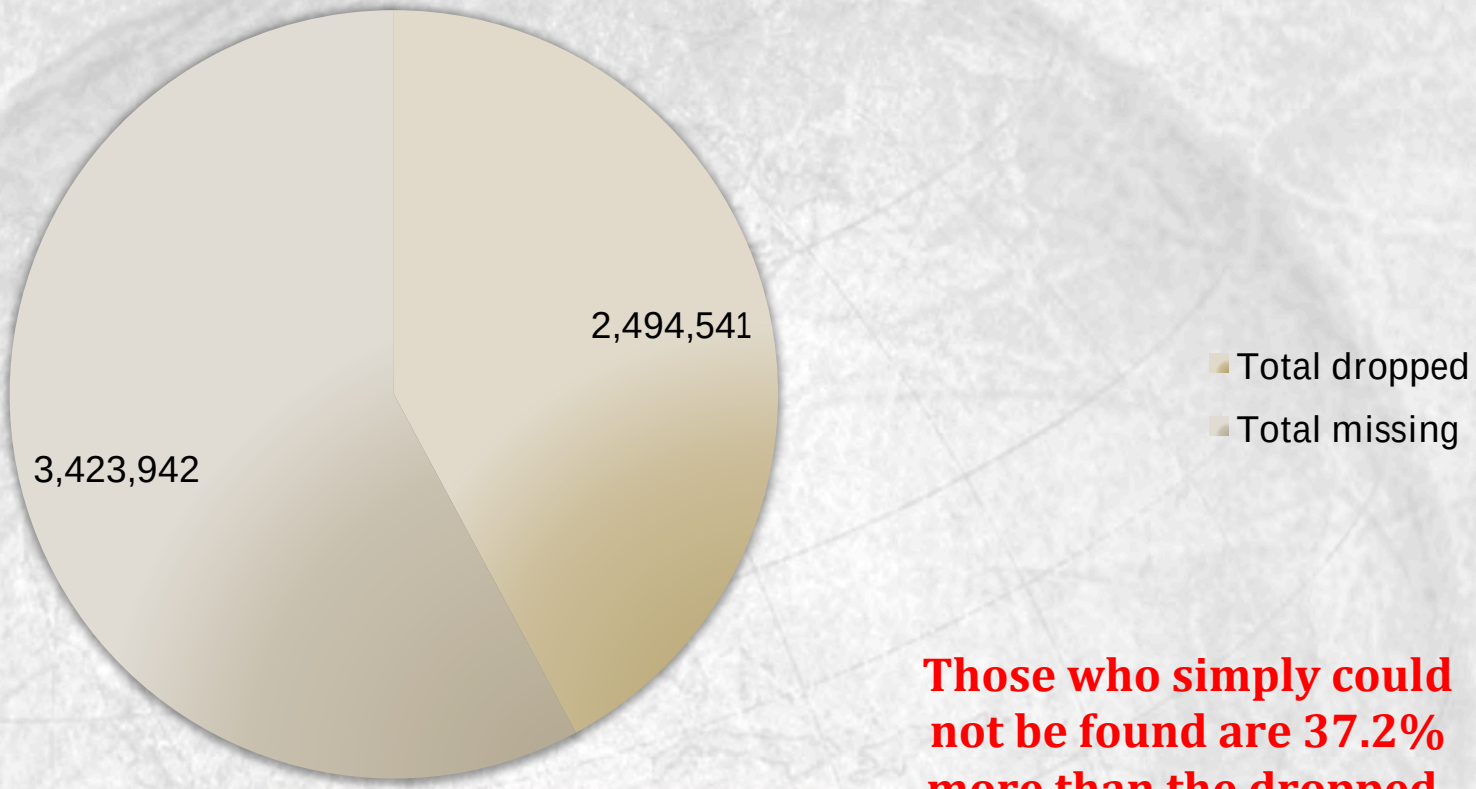
Global dropped vs. missing, 2000s



Those who simply could not be found are 37.2% more than the dropped.

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Church-growth implications

- **Church growth is doubly impacted by lost members—** our numbers are reduced not just by those who leave but also by those who were never won.
- 1963–2013, global net accession rate = 8.4 per cent
- If the 11.4 million lost had "recruited" at the standard rate, and all the souls they won had done likewise, then more than one million extra members over the 40 years
- Of course we will always lose some, so this is only an illustration; but it is a striking one.

2. Why did They Leave? Why Might They Come Back?

Findings from three global surveys of Seventh-day Adventists

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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.

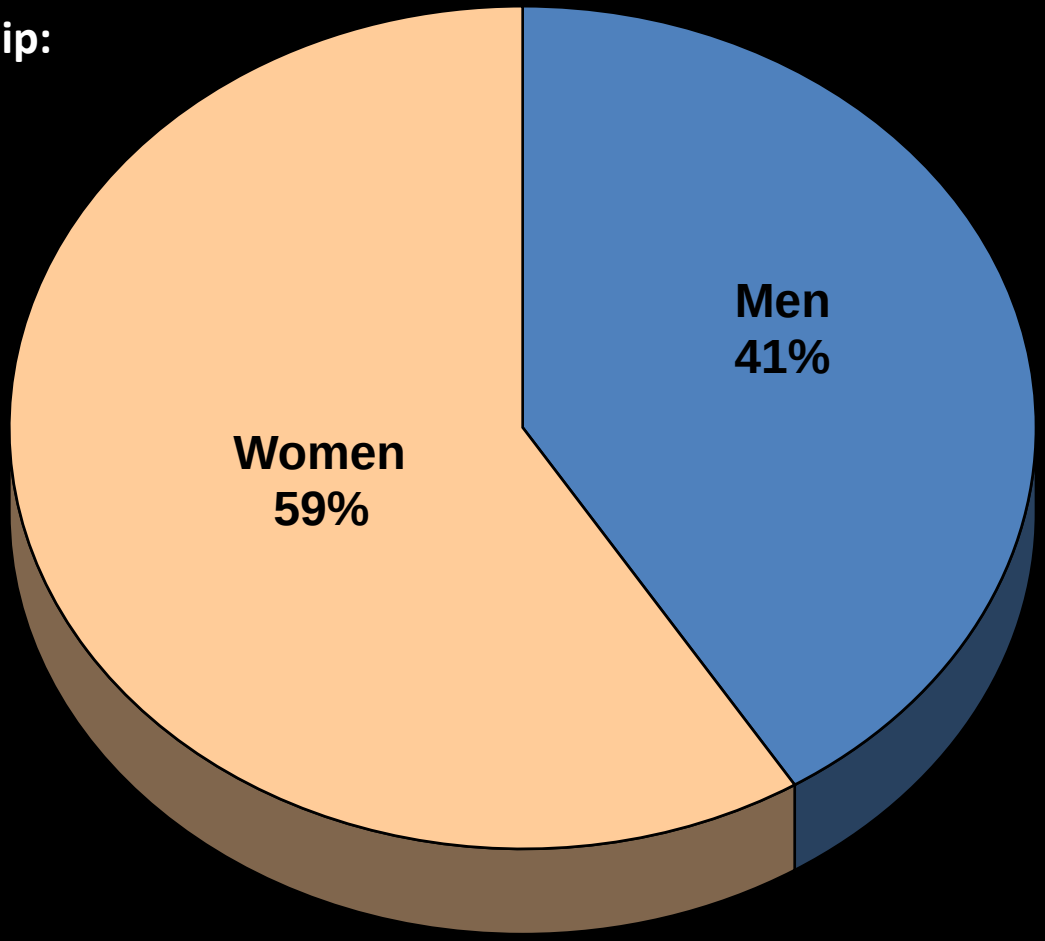
Two Studies of lapsed Adventists

2. Under the leadership of the General Conference Nurture and Retention Committee, TWO detailed surveys were developed by ASTR: one was to be 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.

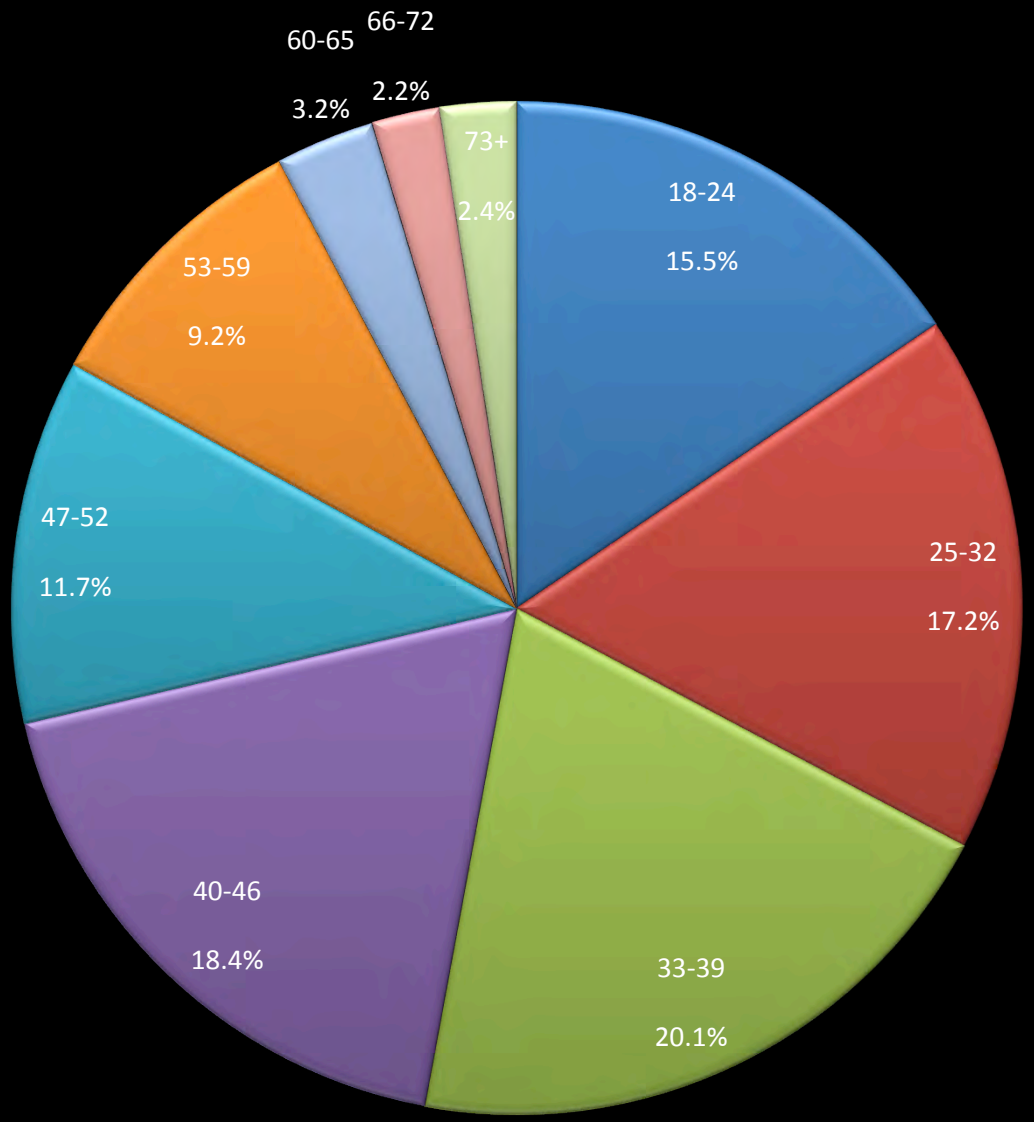
Many of the findings of the three studies complement each other, which adds confidence to the conclusions. This presentation includes data from both research projects.

Demographics: Gender of lapsed/ex-members

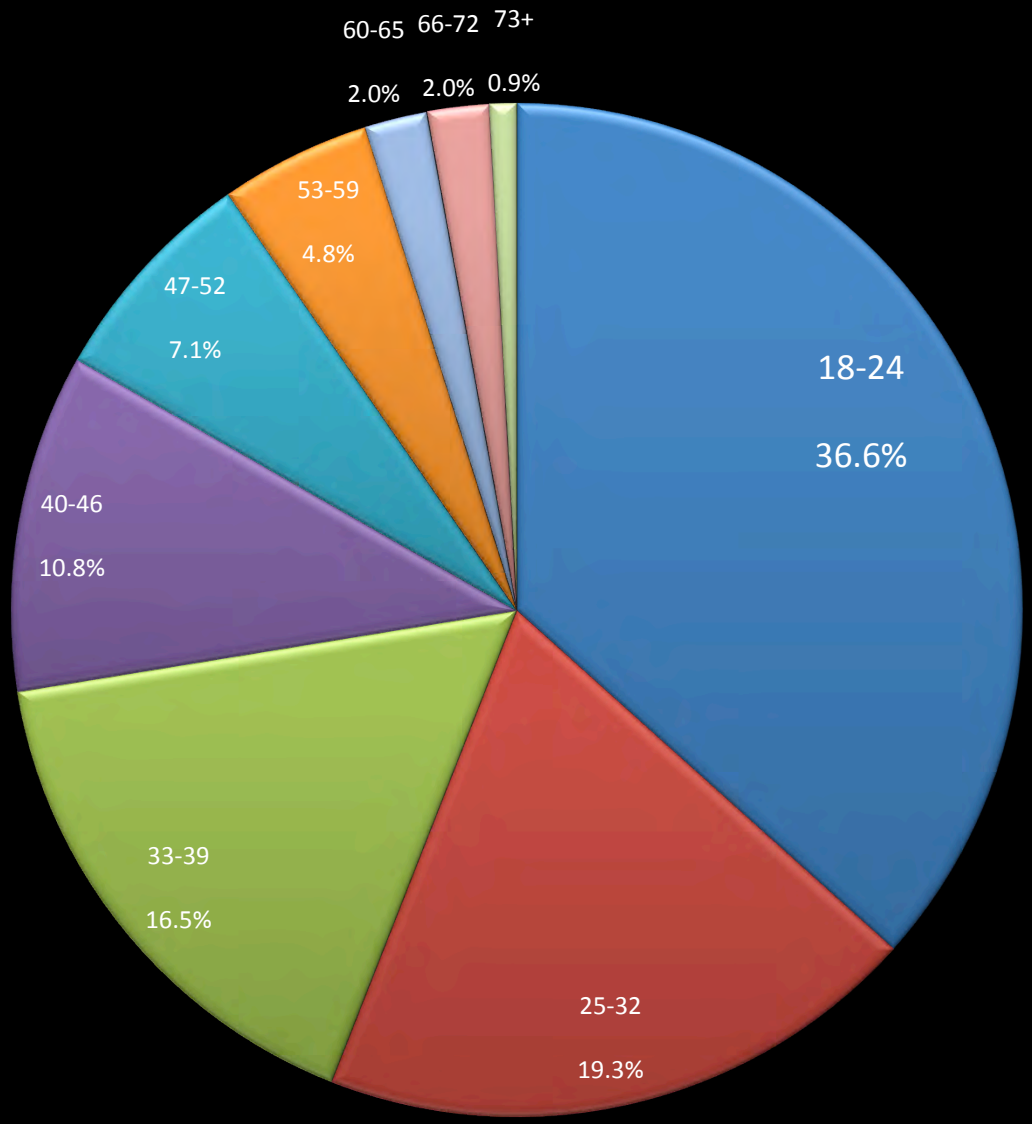
Global membership:
Women 57%
Men 43%



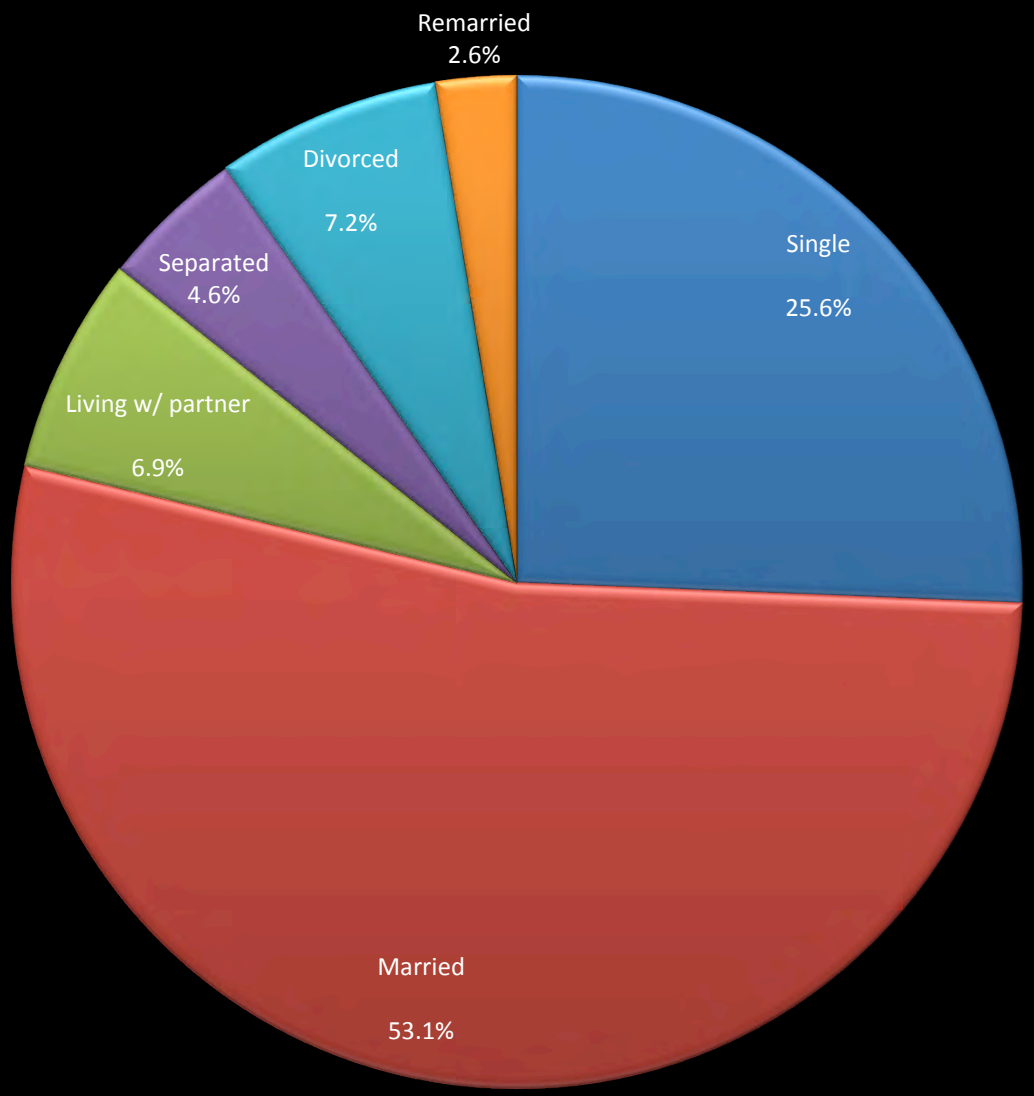
Demographic Information (Age) – Former Members



Demographic Information (Age) – Returned Members



Demographic Information (Marital Status) – Former Members



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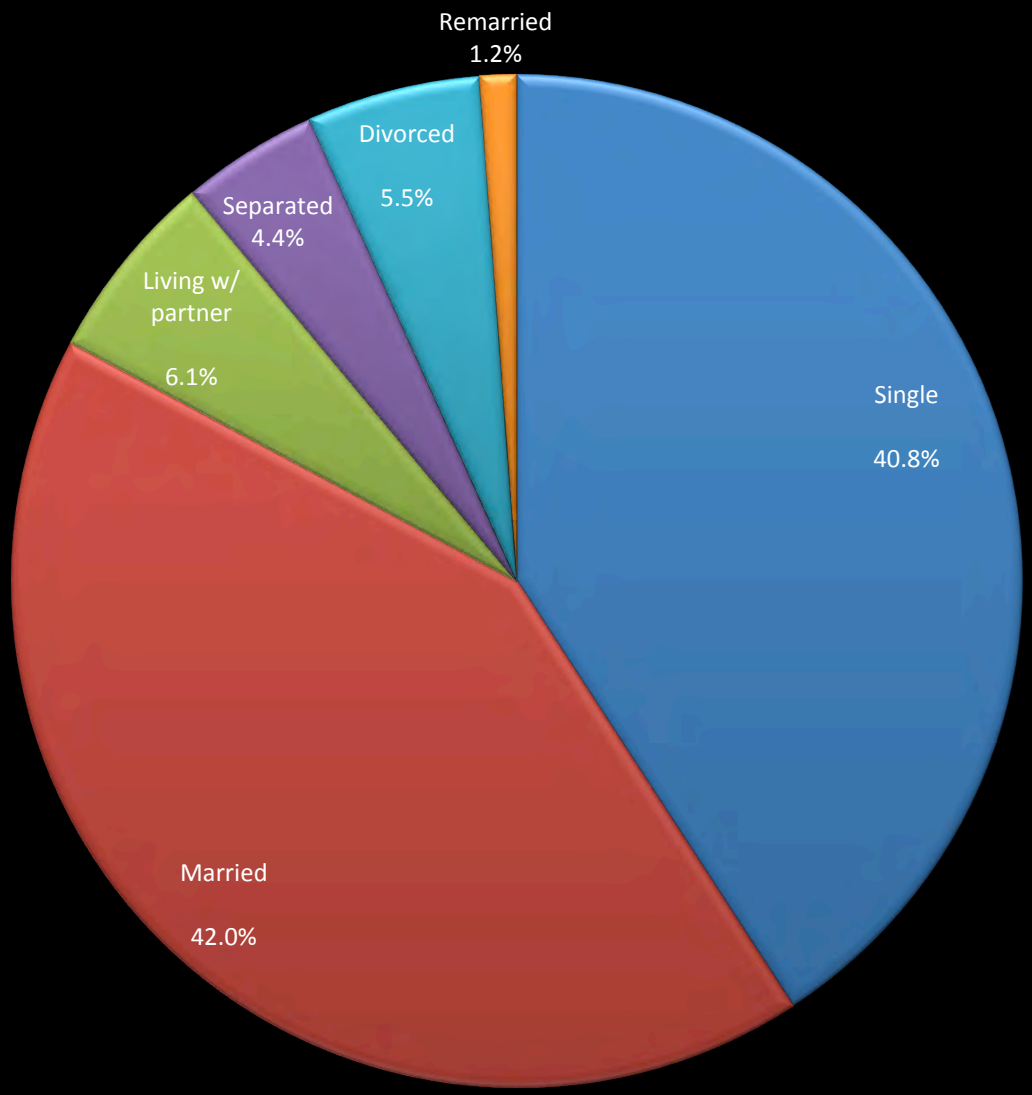
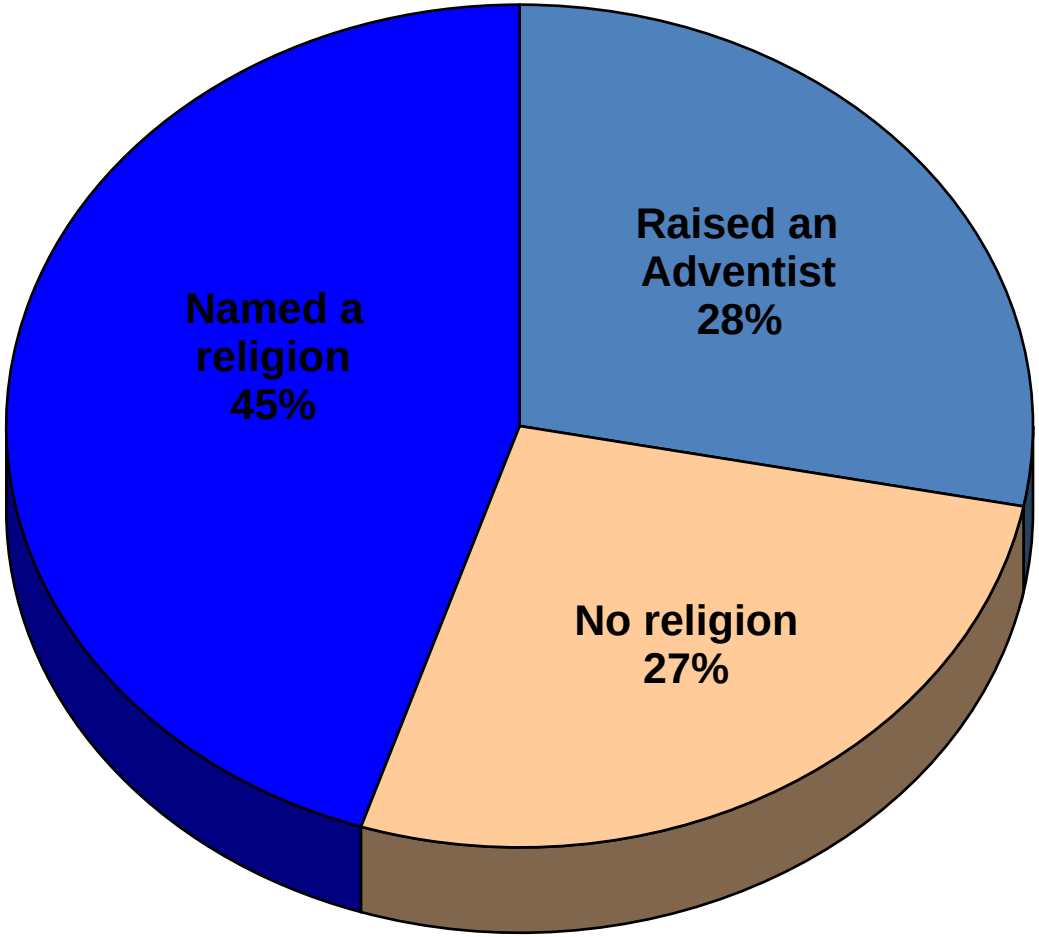


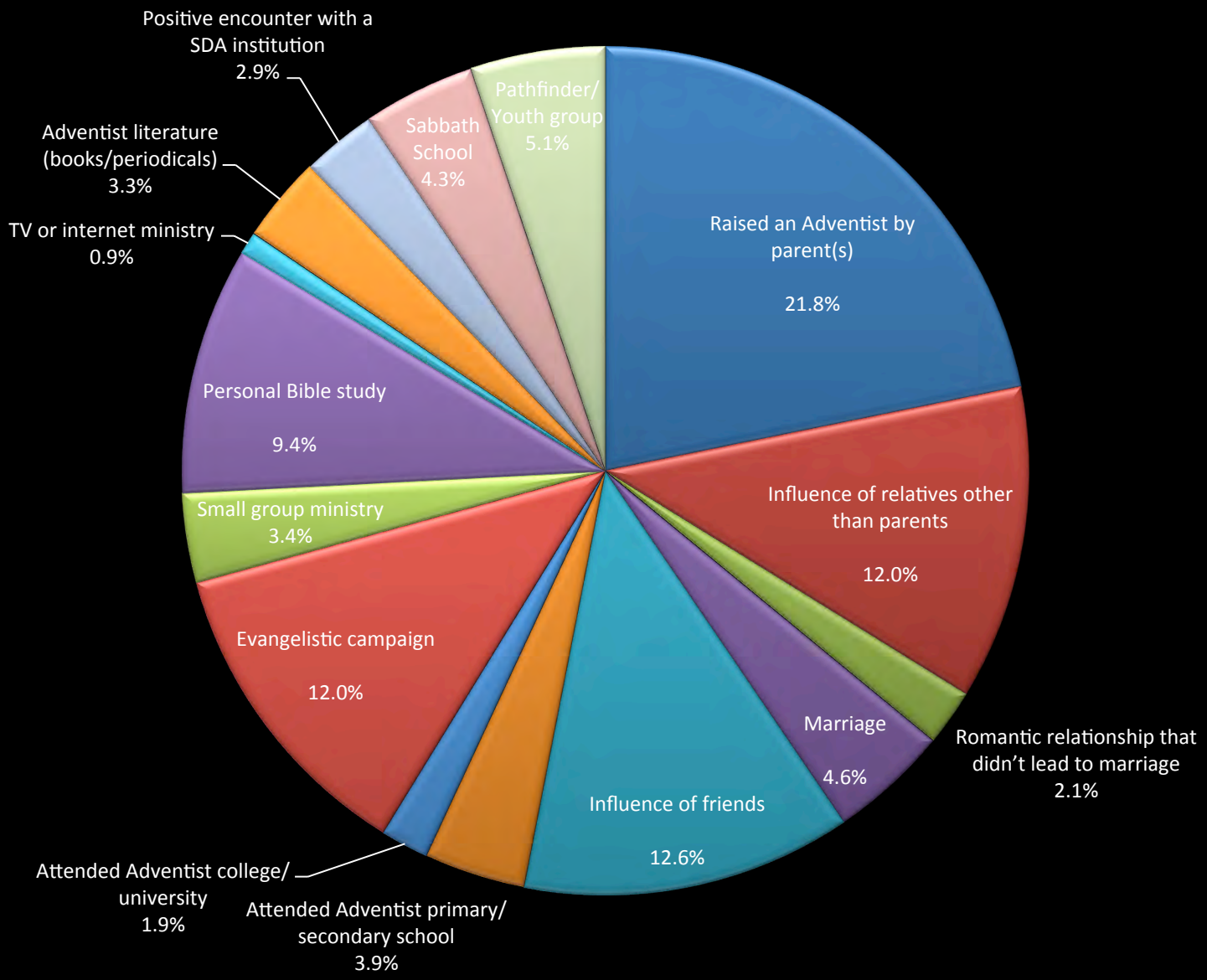
First Contact with the Seventh-day Adventist Church

- 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
- >% From a radio or television ministry
- 4% Other things

Religion Before Joining the Seventh-day Adventist Church



Most Important Avenues to becoming Seventh-day Adventist

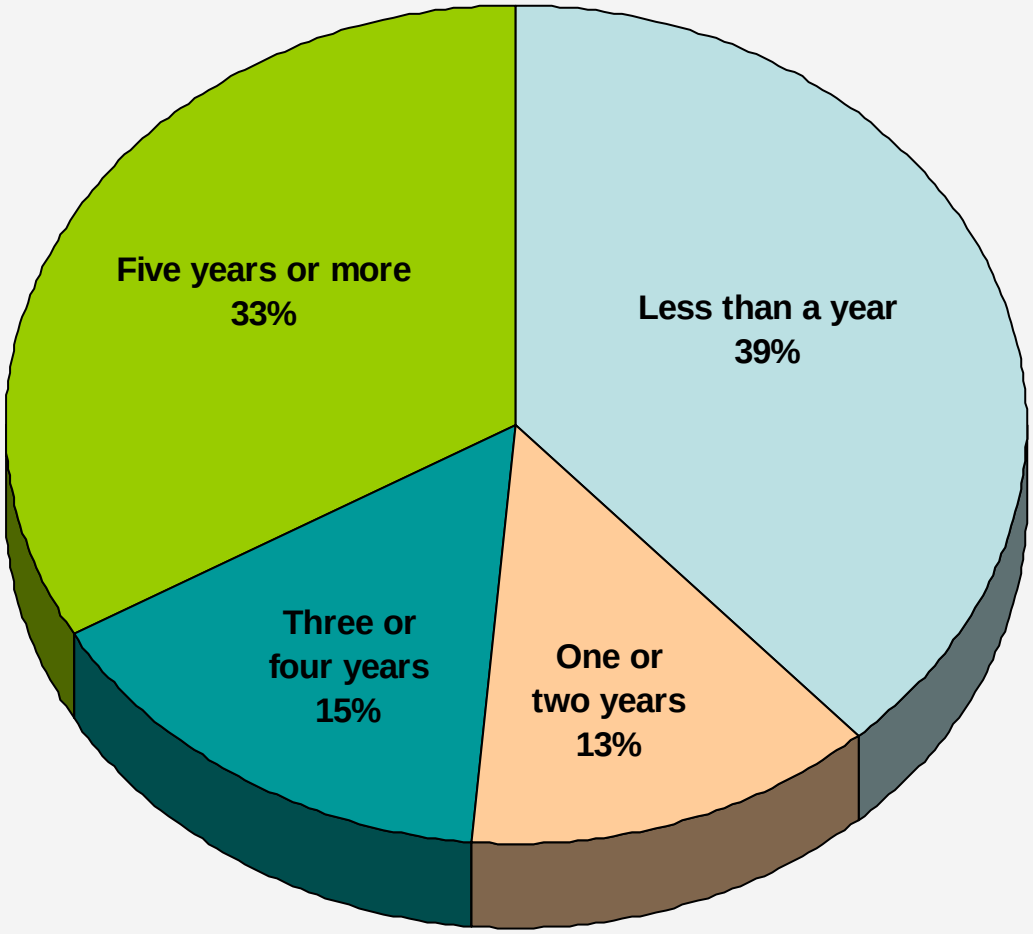


How ADVENTIST *were* they?

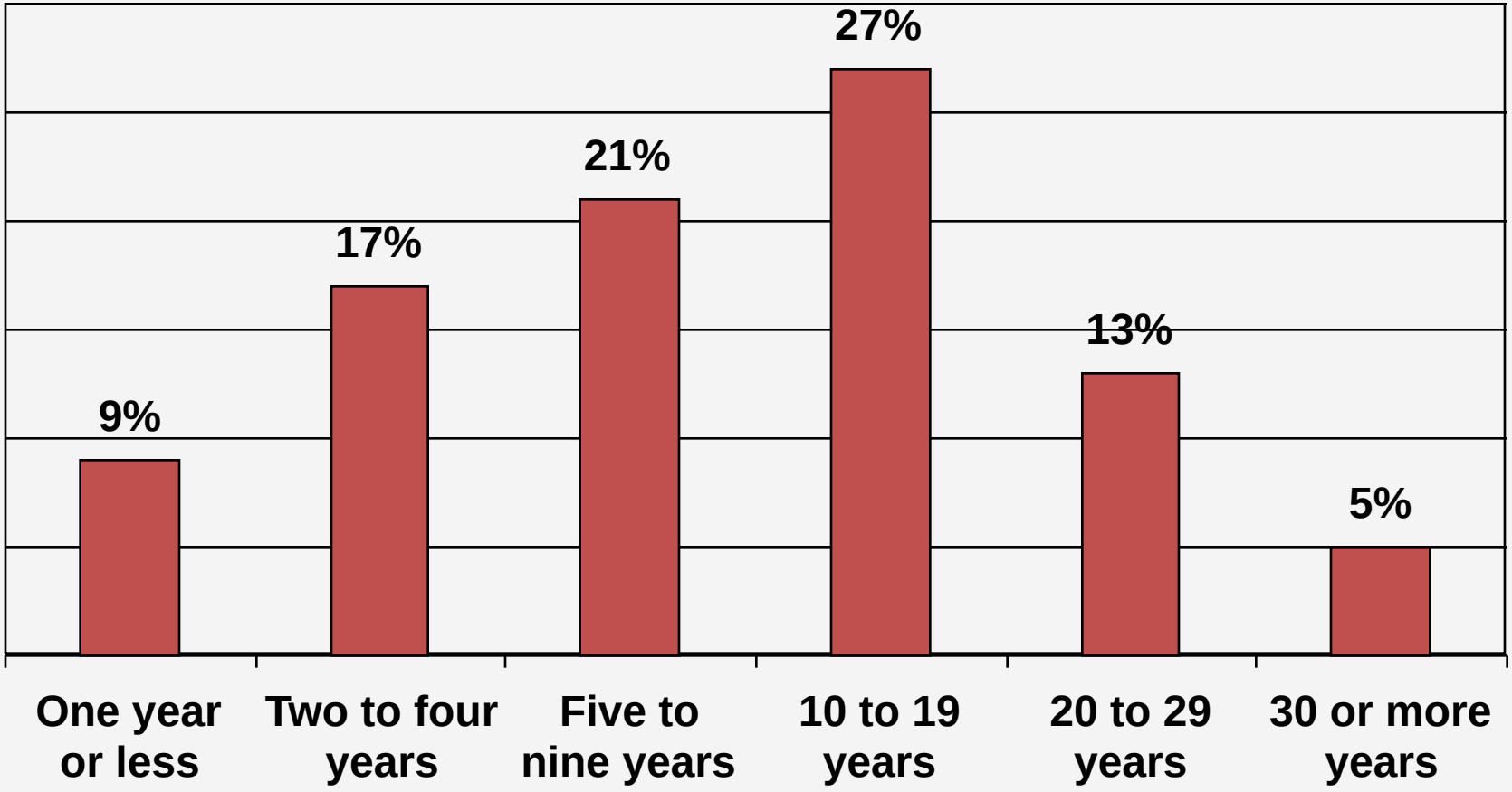
Were they well grounded in our faith?

Were they *active* in their local churches?

Time from First Contact to Baptism

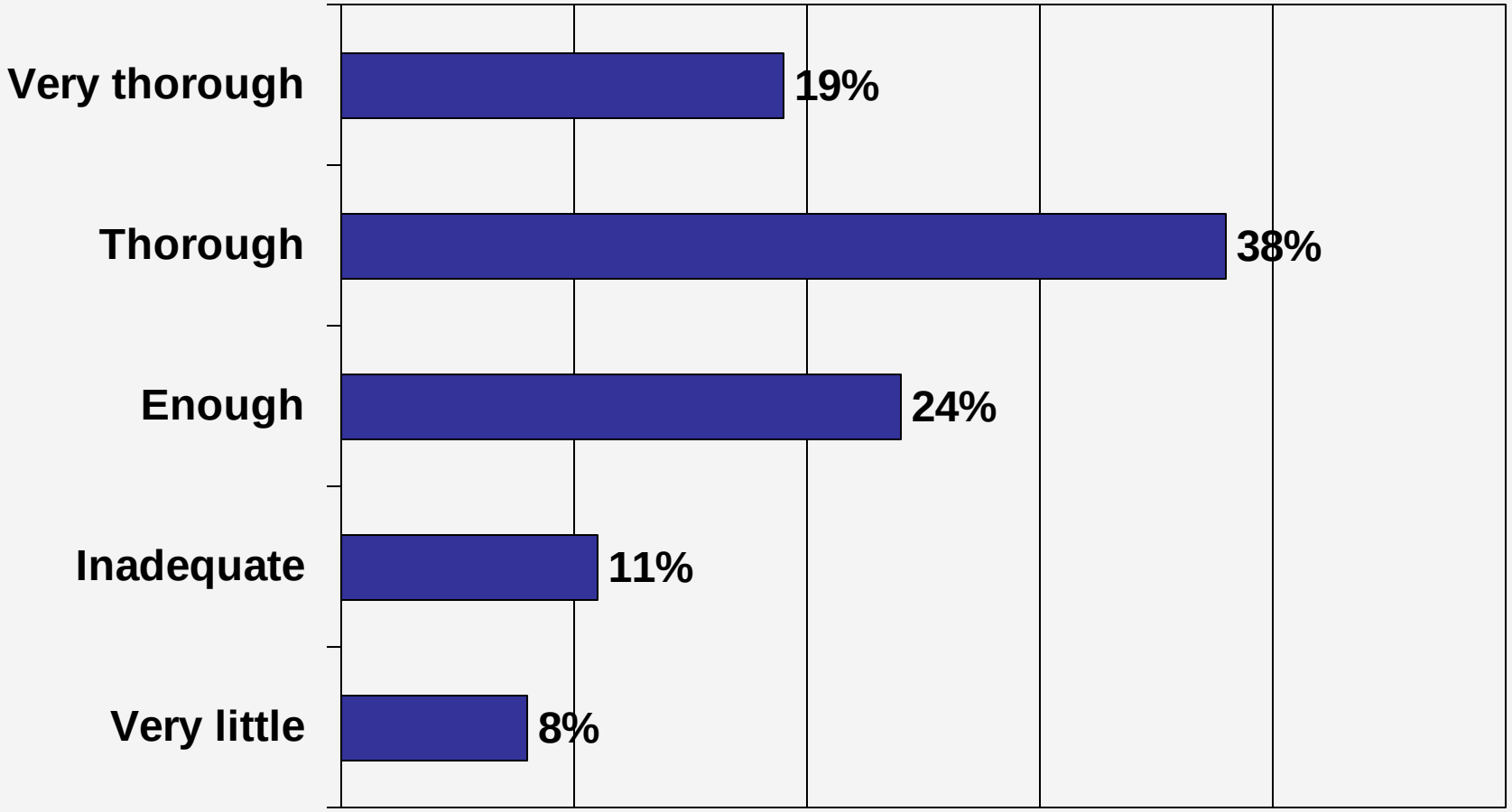


Number of Years Regularly Attended an Adventist Church

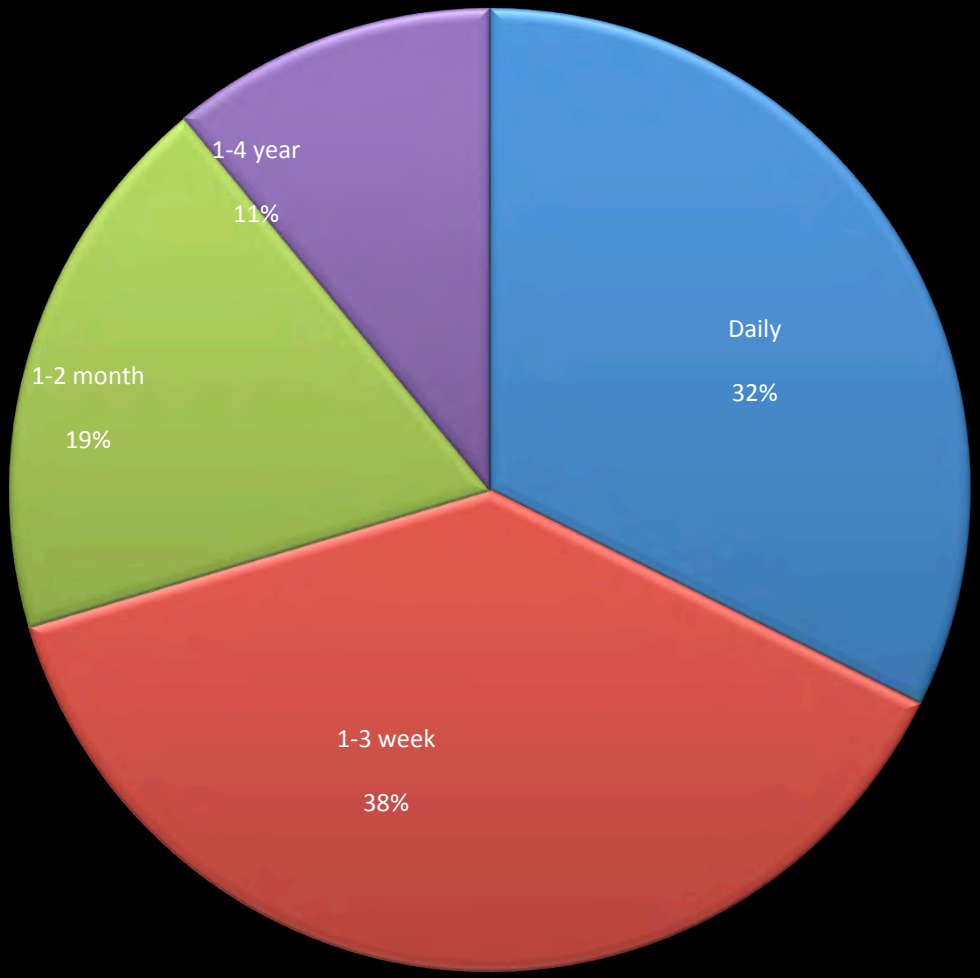


But people who attended fewer years are less likely to have been surveyed

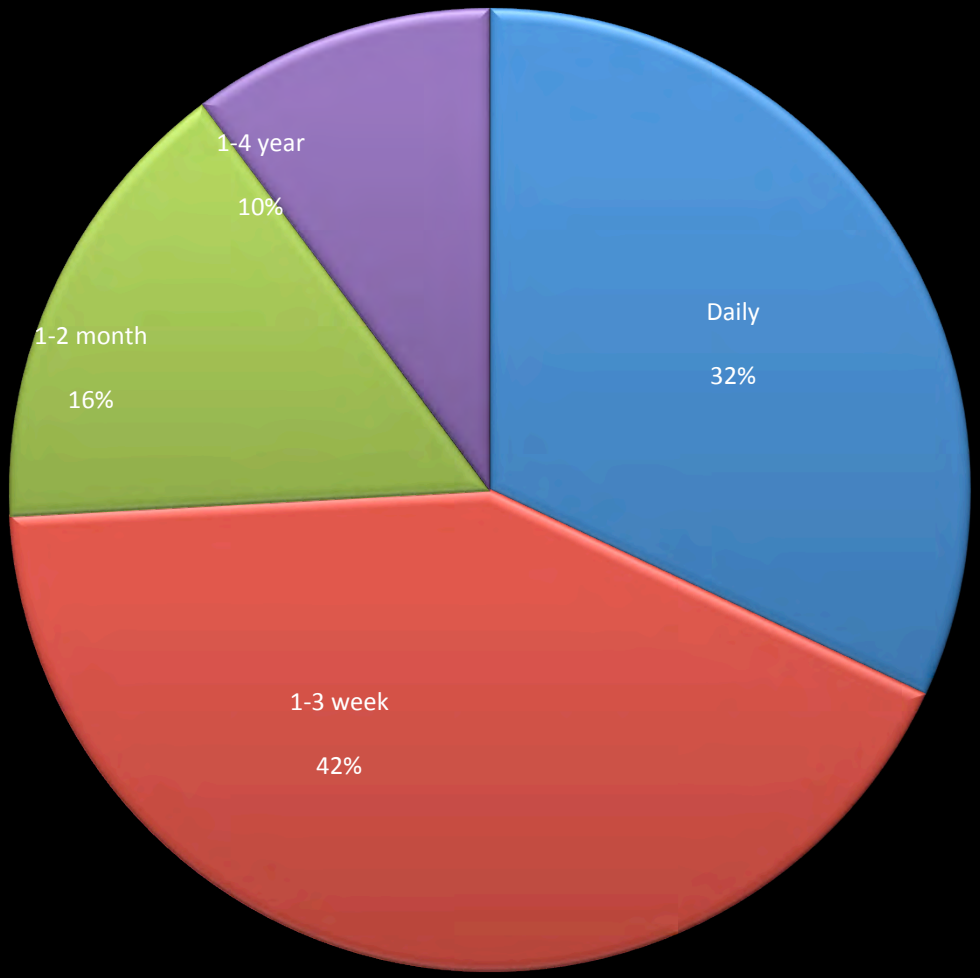
How would you describe the instruction given when you joined the church?



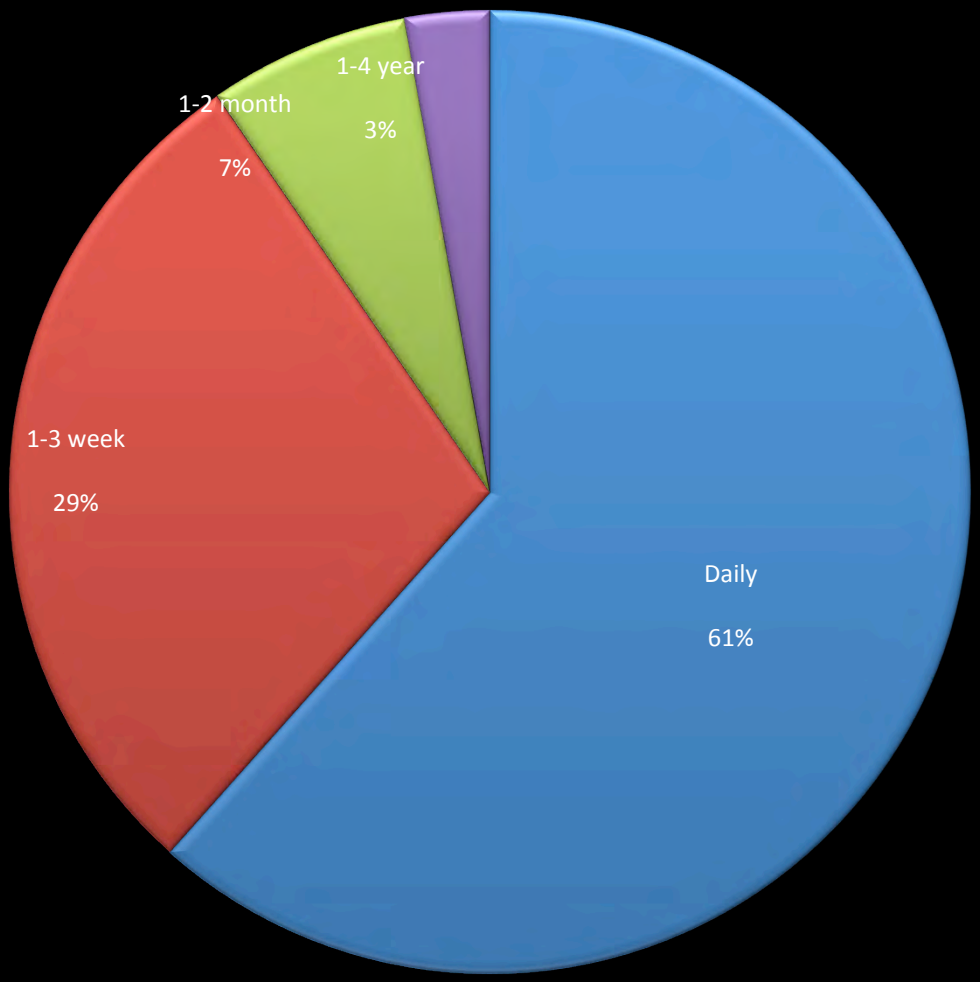
Frequency of engagement in spiritual activities while Adventist: Personal Bible study – Former Members



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



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



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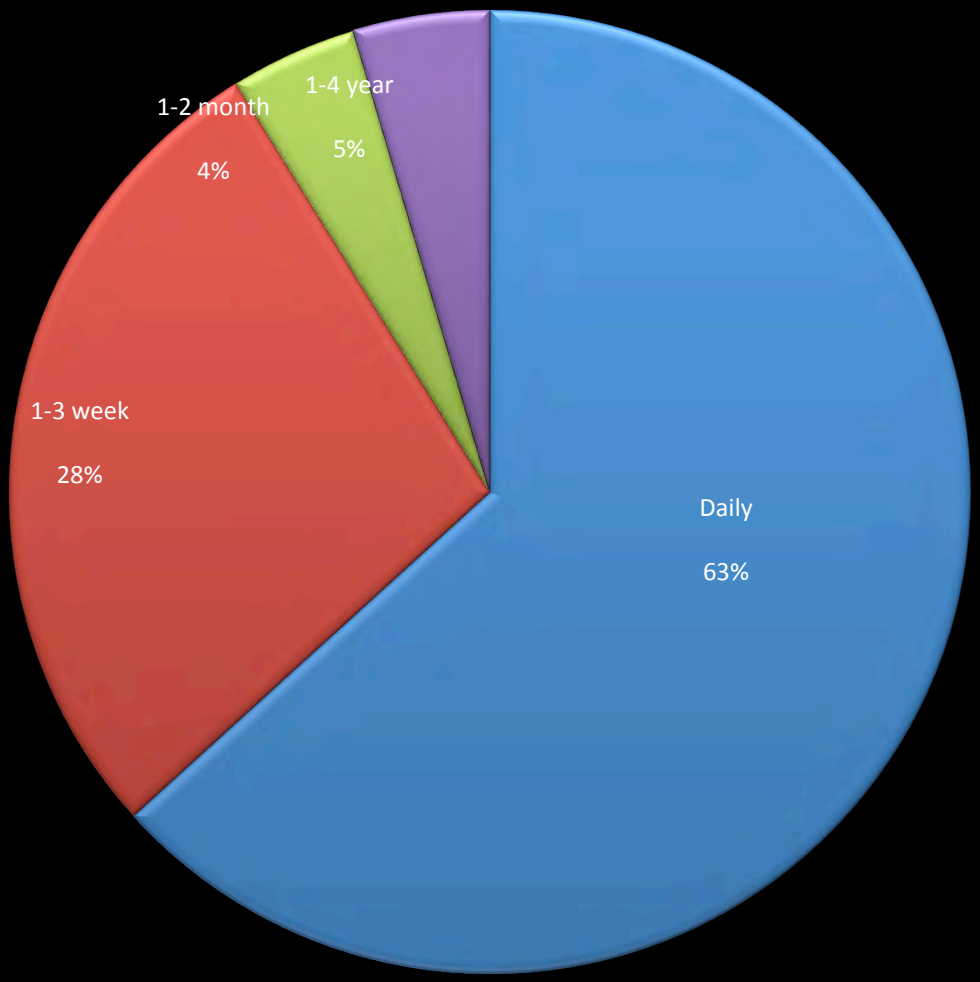

How ADVENTIST *are* they now?

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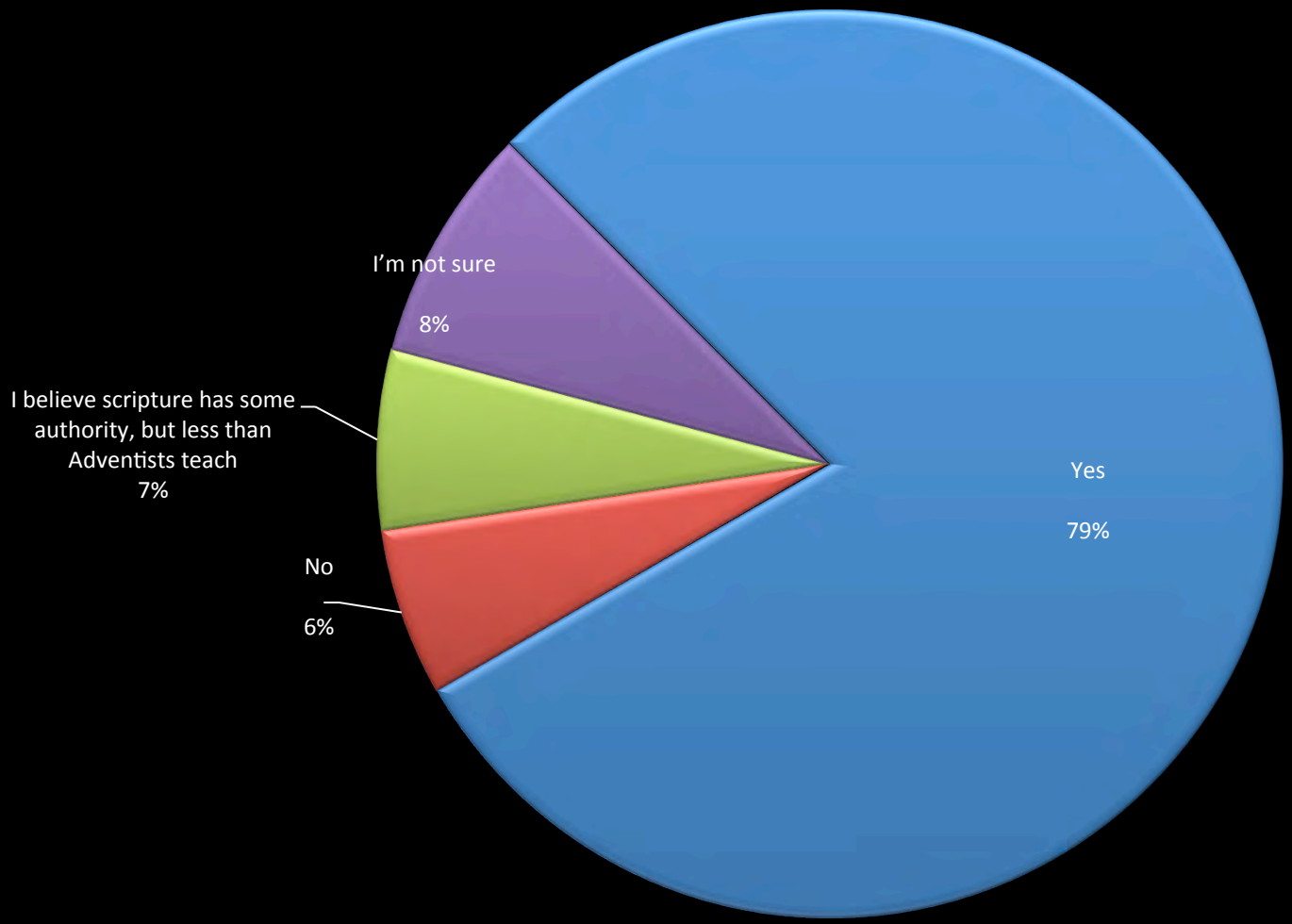
Do you still believe in the authority of Scripture, as taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church? – Former Members



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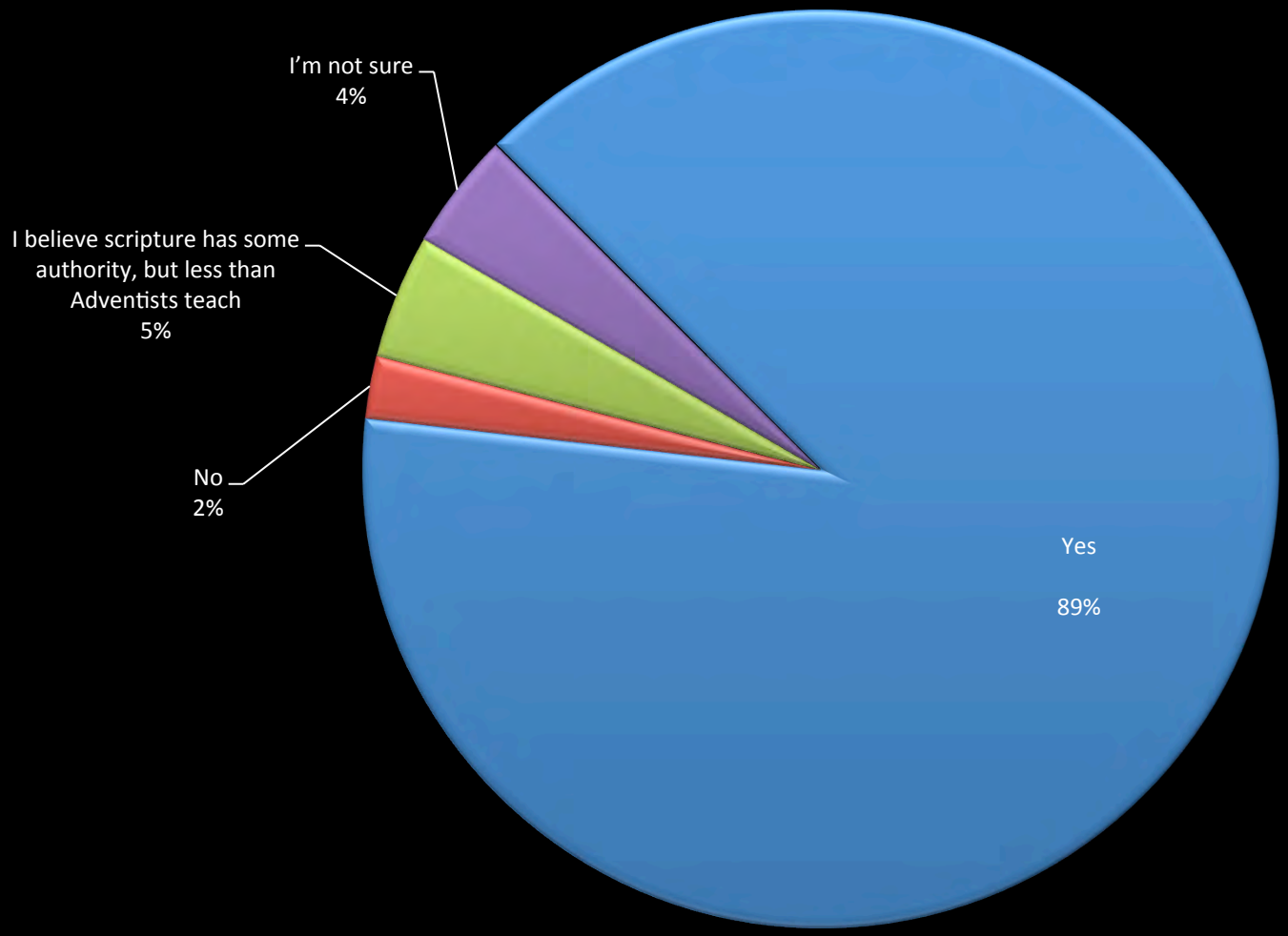
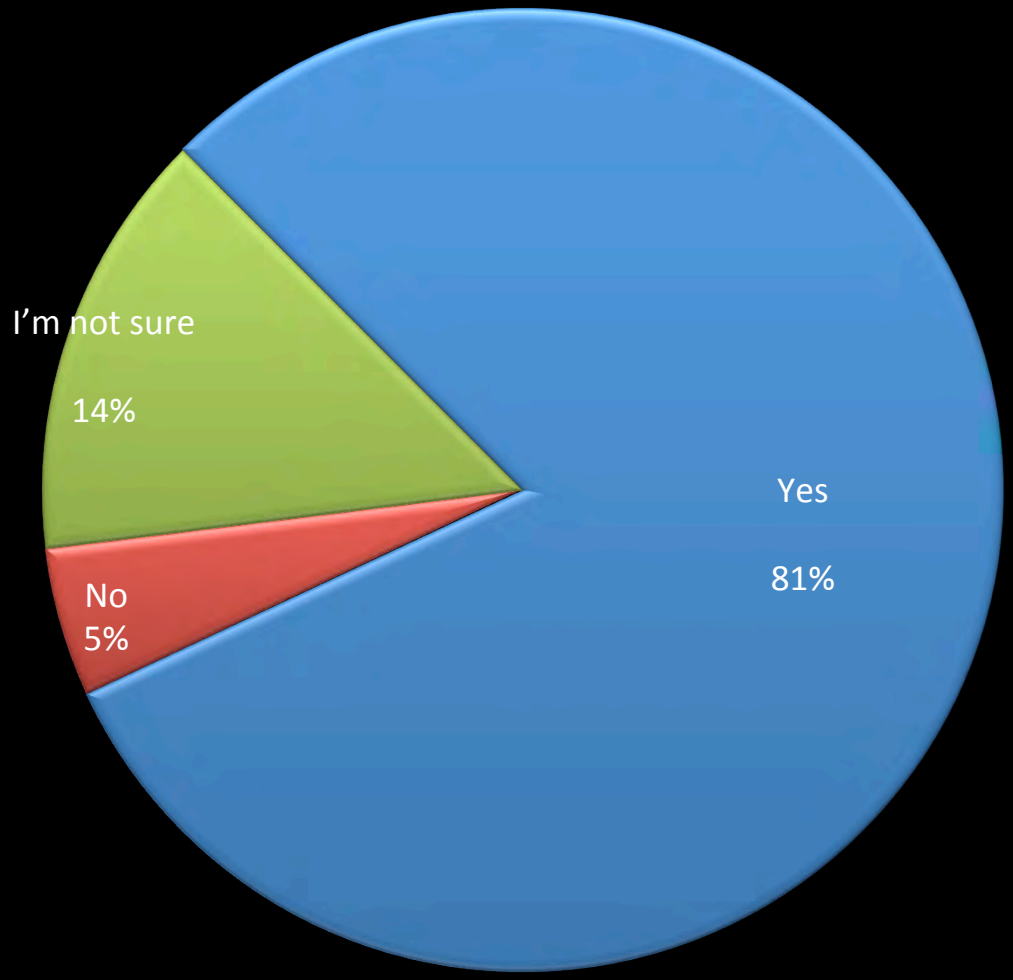


Do you still believe in the gift of prophesy manifested in Ellen White? – Returned Members



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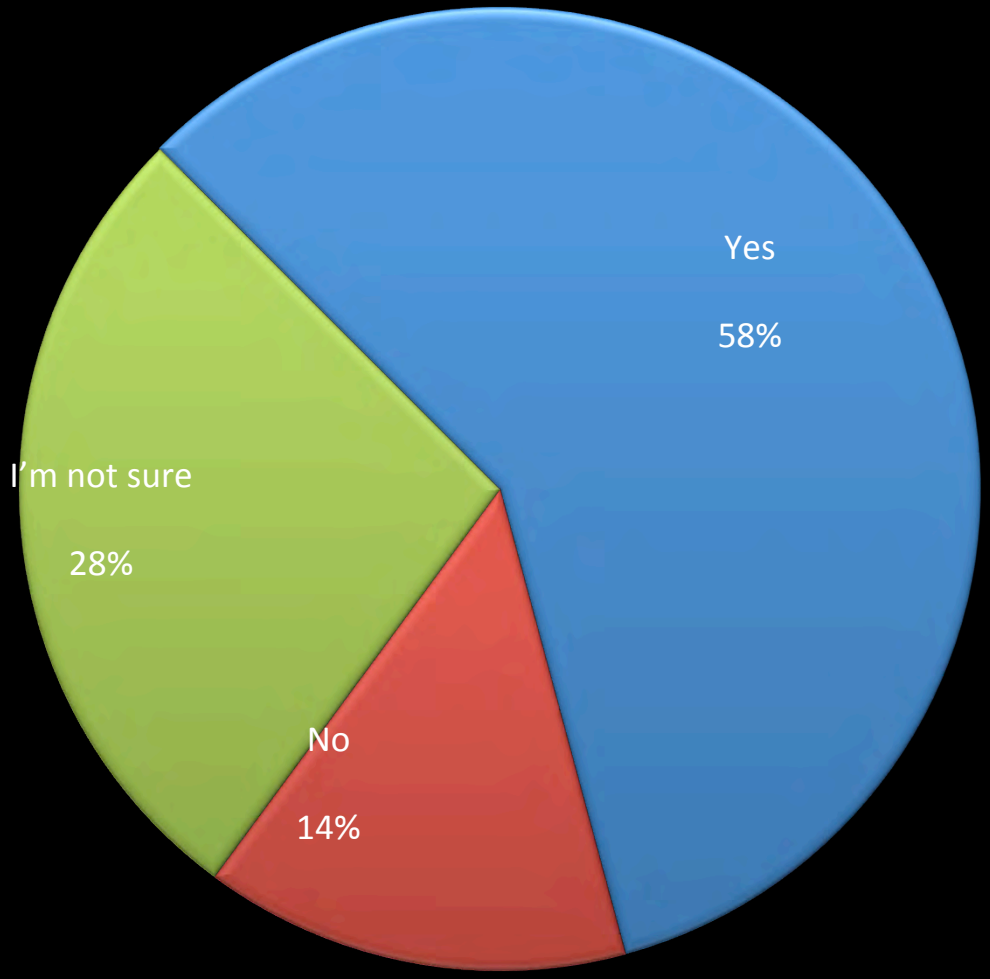
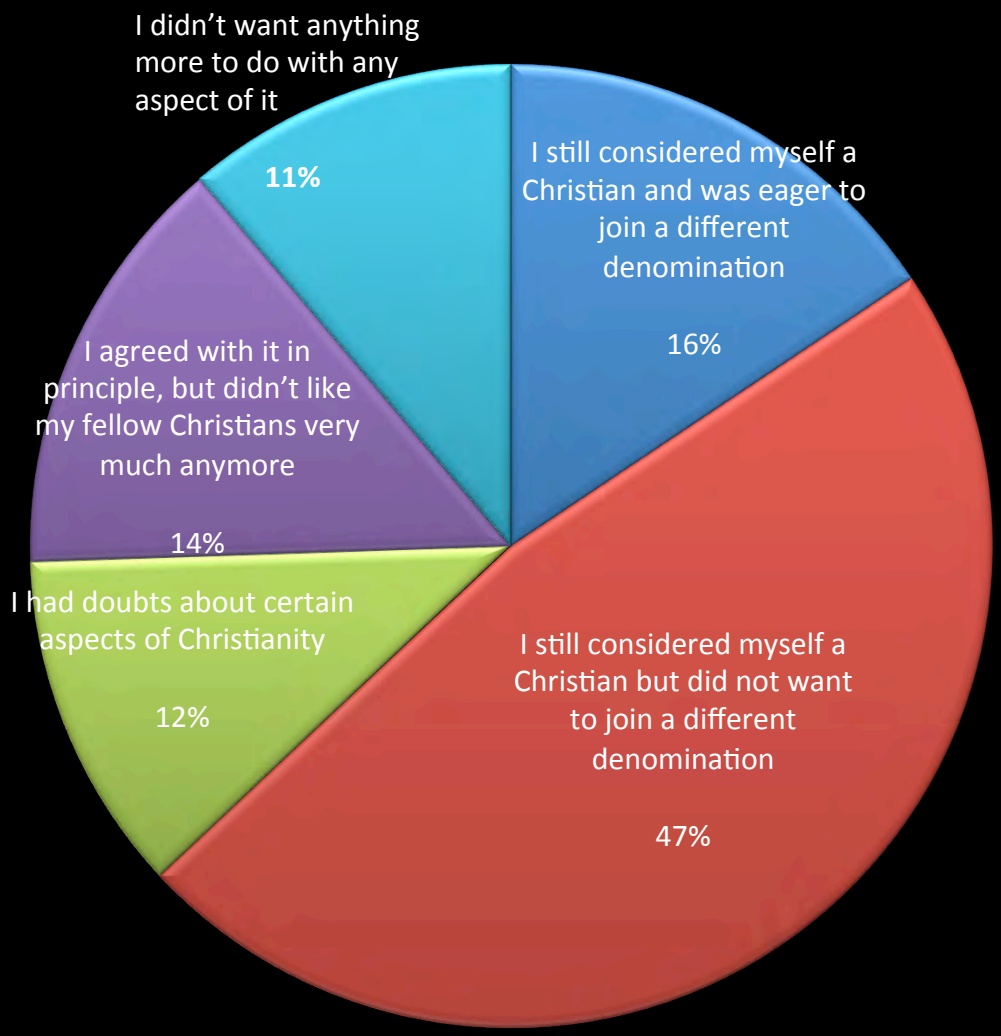
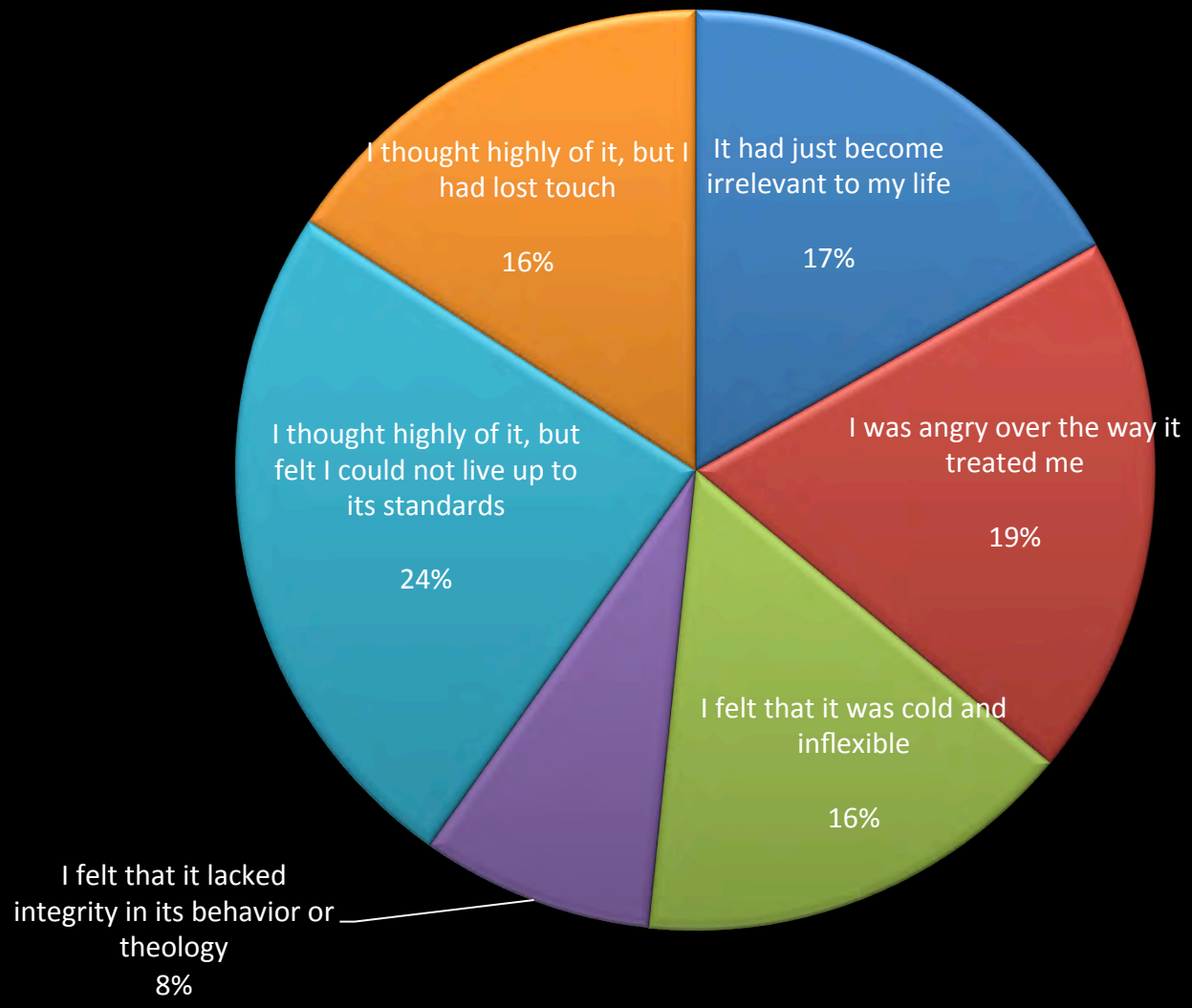


What did you think of Christianity at the time you left the Adventist church? (Former Members)



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



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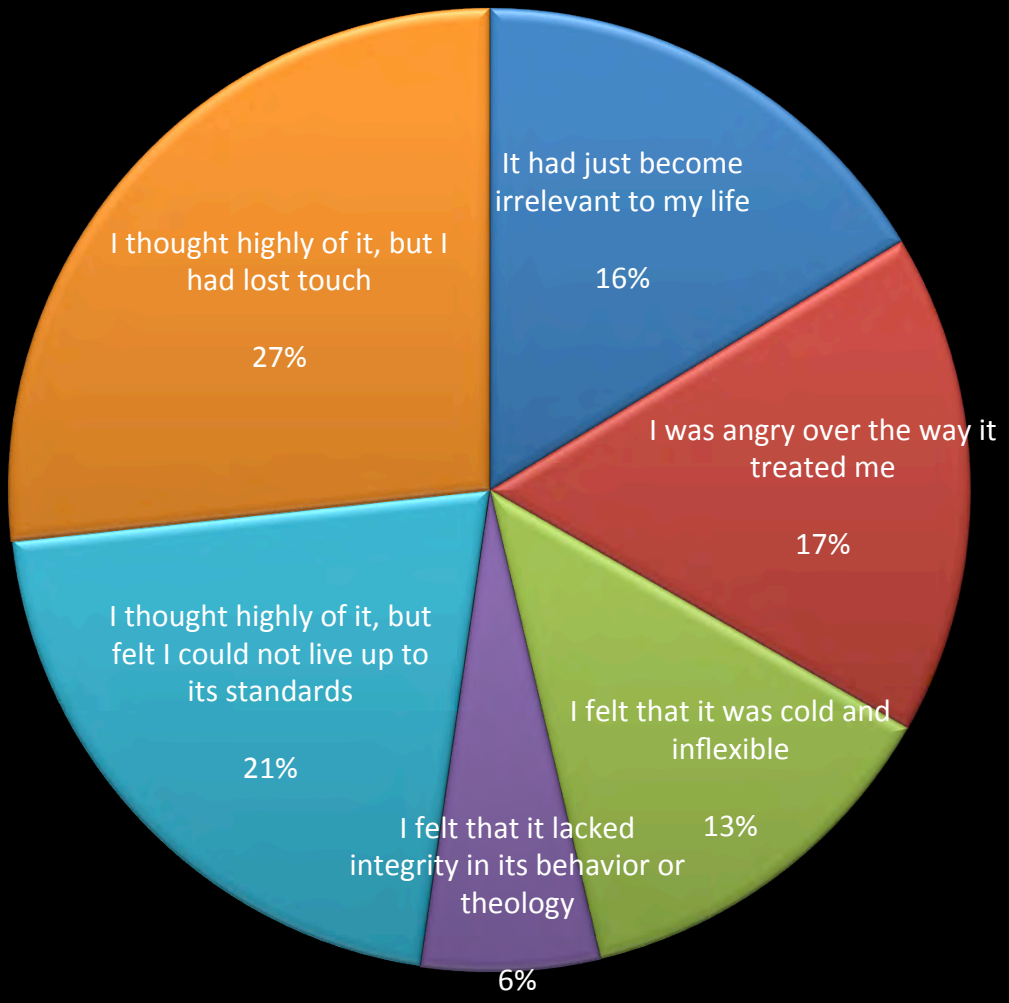
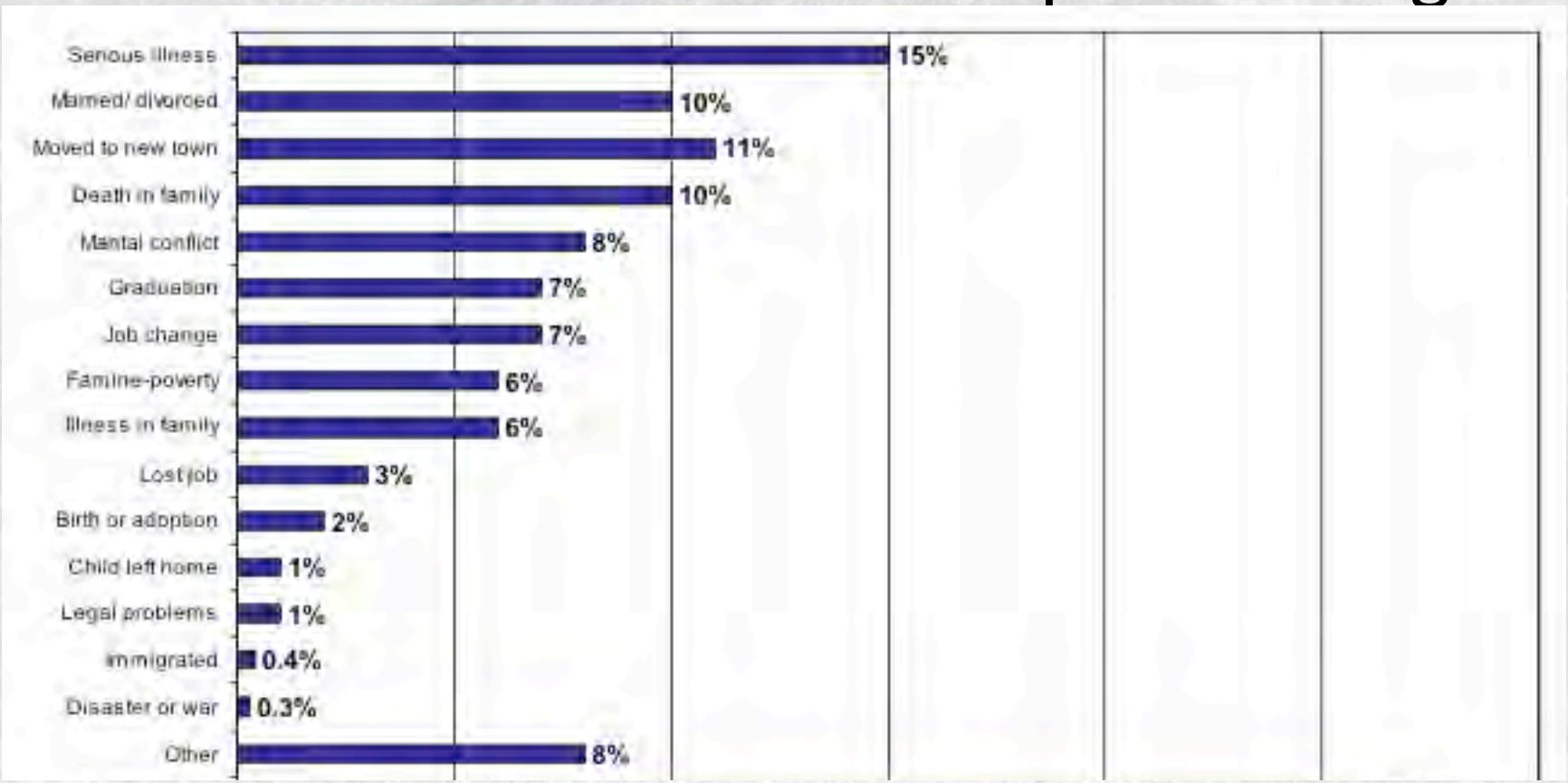


Most Significant Life Events in the Year Before the Decision to Stop Attending



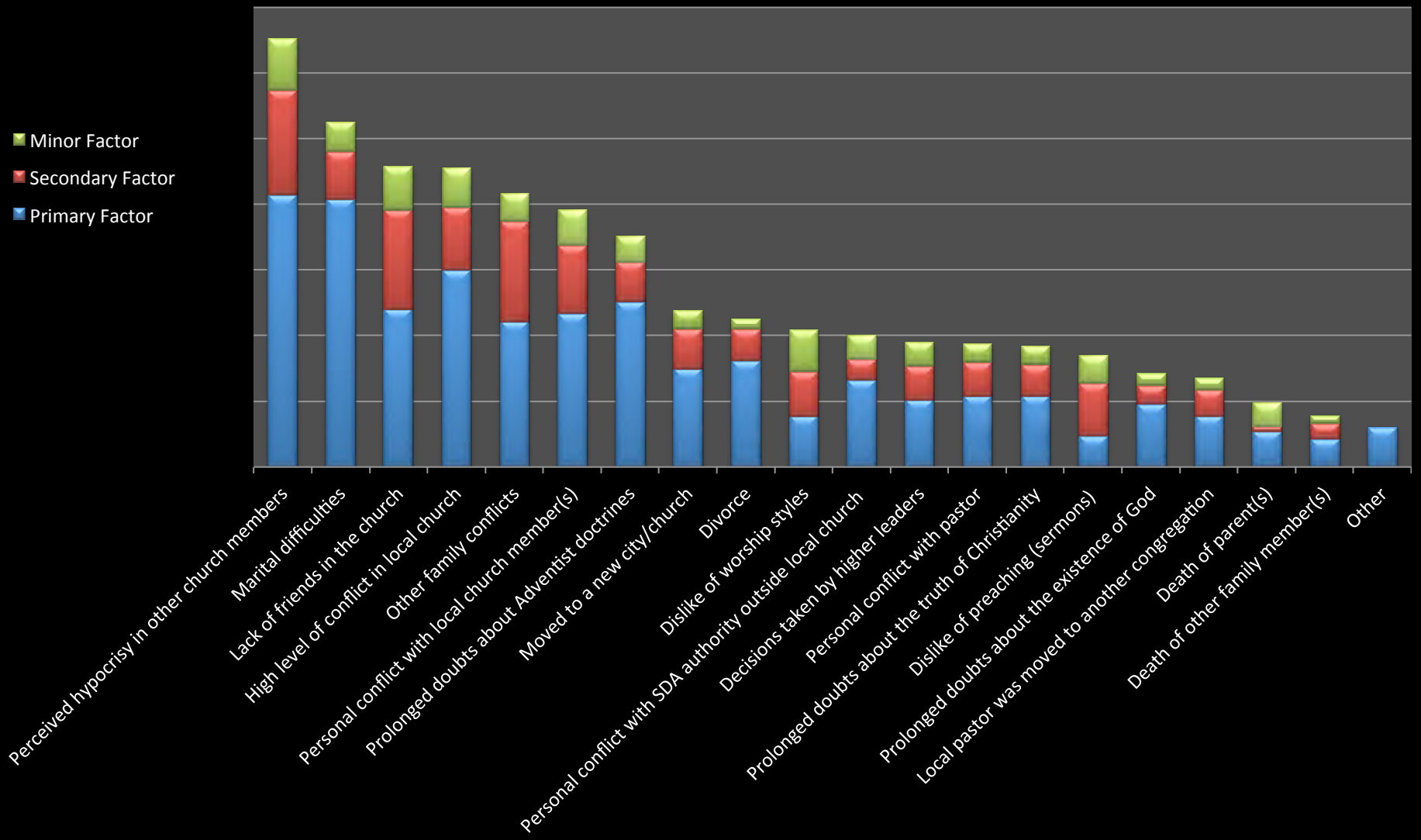
Most Important Reasons Why Decided to Stop Attending

- 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

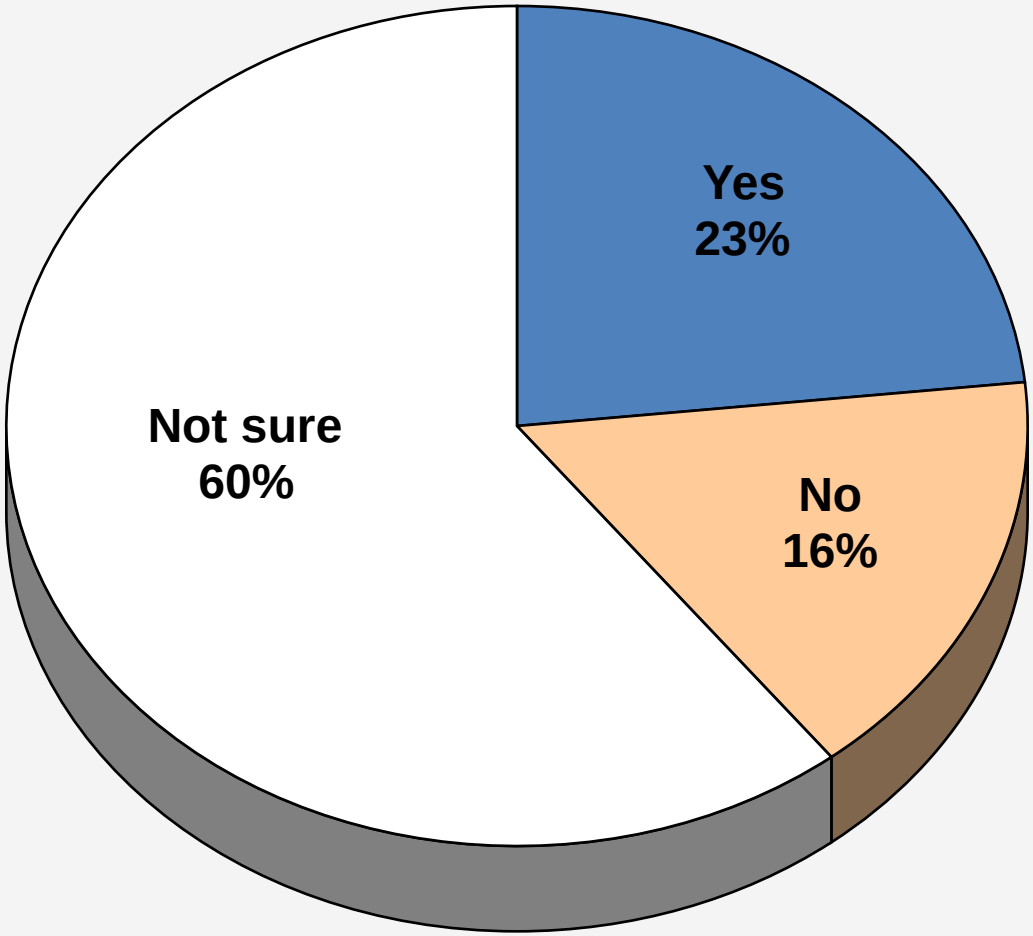
What event triggered your decision to leave? (weighted)



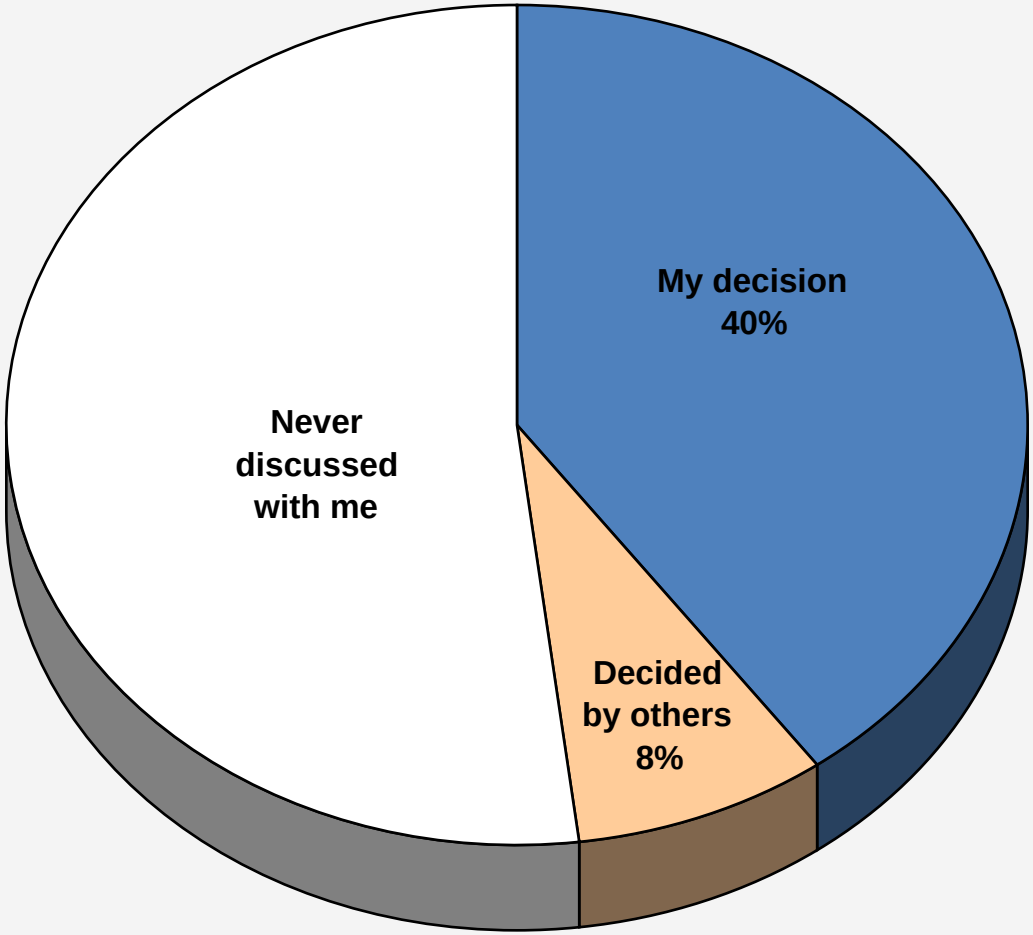
What Happened When They Stopped Attending Church

- 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
- O.3% Printed material was mailed to me

Is your name still on the membership list?



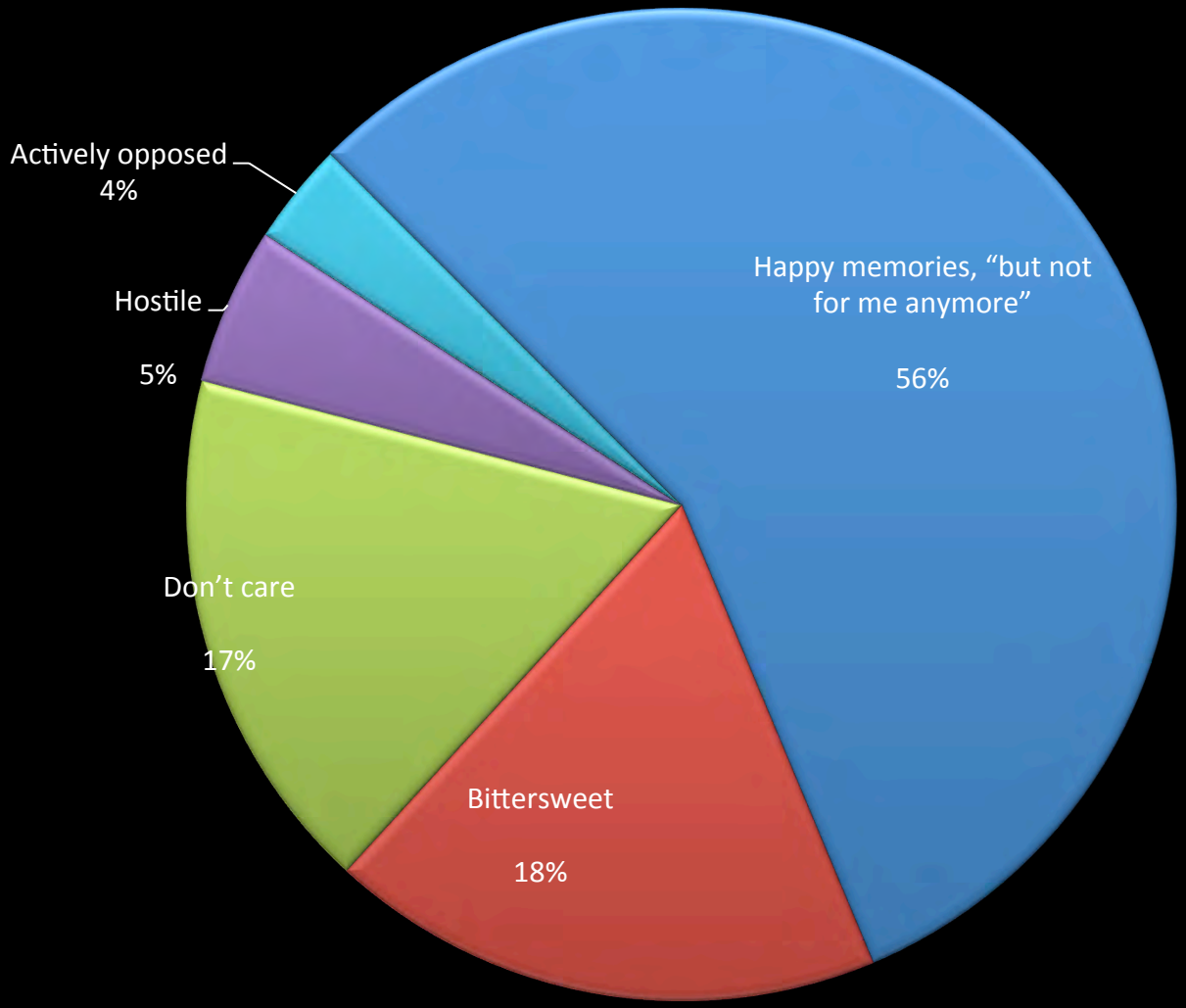
Did you decide to withdraw or were you expelled from the church?



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

In light of these statistics, 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.

How do you presently feel about Adventism? – Former Members



How would you rate your openness to reconnect? – Former Members

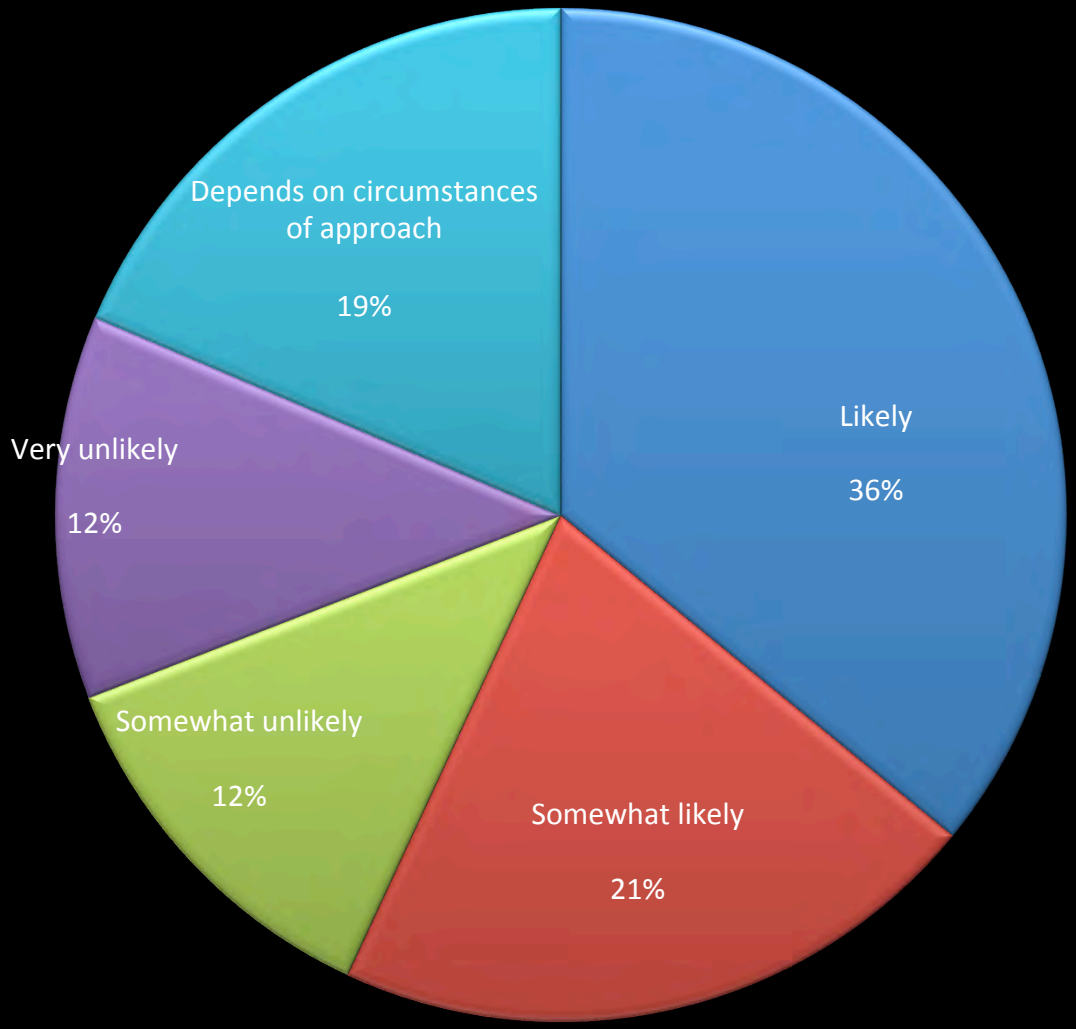


Table 37: Correlation between Visitations after leaving and openness to reconnect with the Church – Former Members

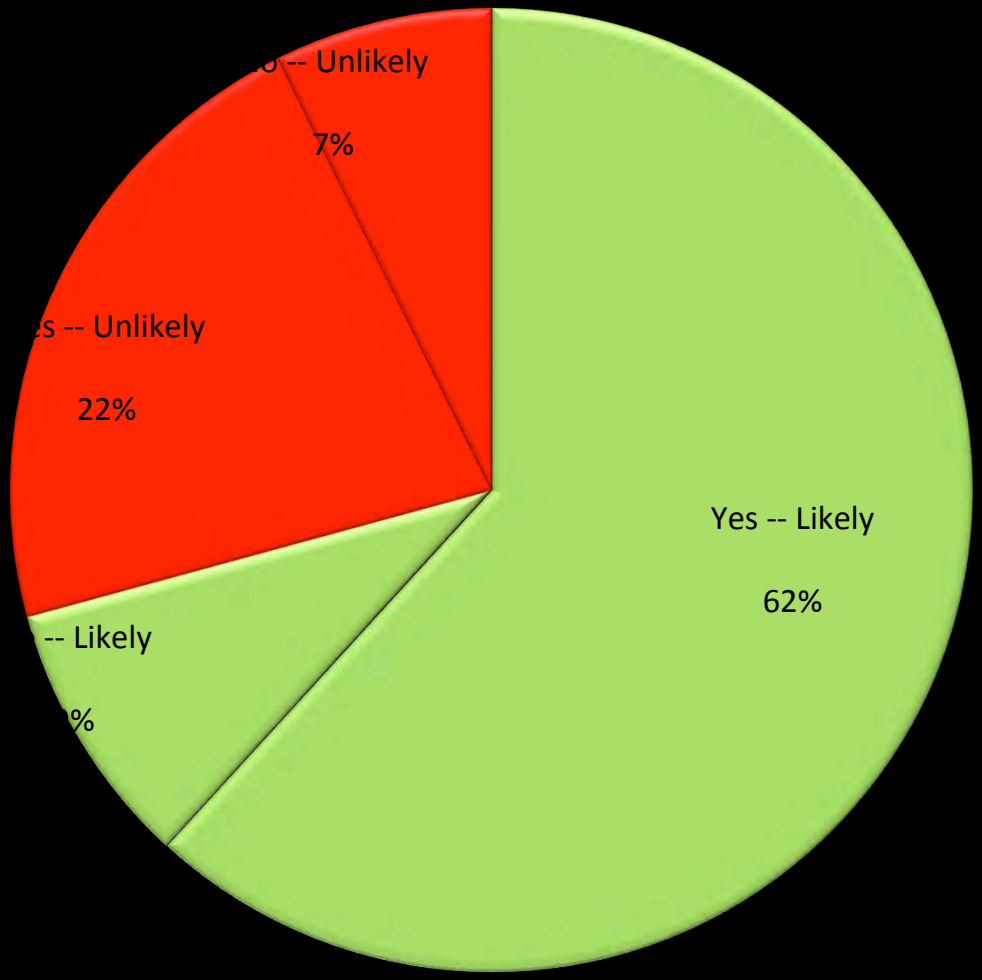
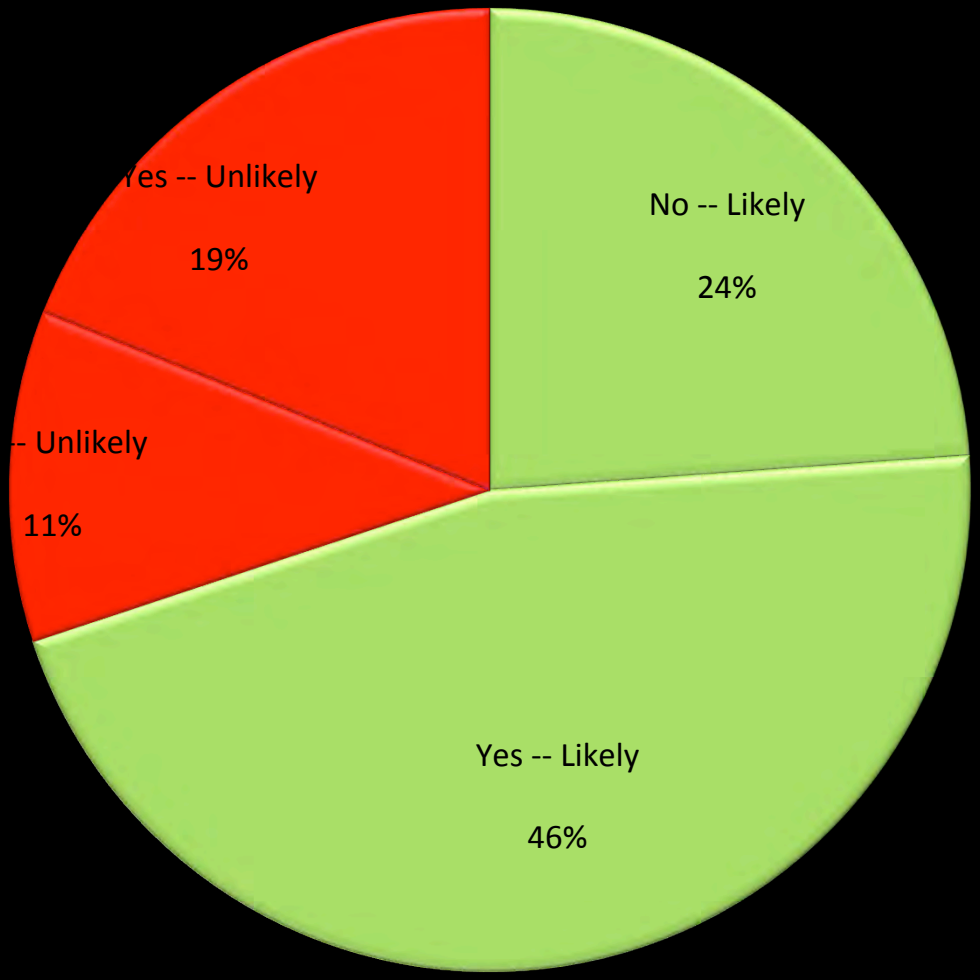


Table 38: Correlation between social relationships with Adventists and Openness to reconnect – Former Members



Discipleship is life.

http://growingfruitfuldisciples.com/

The lesson of scripture

- Luke 15: 1–7 – when *one per cent* of the flock is lost, the Good Shepherd searches tirelessly & relentlessly until the sheep is found, then bears it on his shoulder homeward and calls friends in to celebrate.

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

- Can we do less than Our Lord?