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ABSTRACT

STUDY OF FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE THE INVOLVEMENT
OF BABY BOOMERS IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST
CHURCH IN METRO-ATLANTA

by

Edward E. Wright

Faculty Adviser: Roger L. Dudley

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Report

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: STUDY OF FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE THE INVOLVEMENT OF
BABY BOOMERS IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN
METRO-ATLANTA

Name of researcher: Edward E. Wright

Name of faculty adviser: Roger L. Dudley

Date completed: June 1994

Task

The task of this project was to determine the level of church involvement of Adventist baby boomers in metropolitan Atlanta, to identify factors that contribute to that level of involvement, and to suggest a strategy for intentional ministry to this population.

Method

Questionnaires were sent to 344 households in the metro-Atlanta area identified by pastors as containing young professionals. After three mailings, 260 individual responses were received (a response rate of 54.2 percent). The tabulation process identified an effective survey base of 161 individuals which met the combined requirements of age and income (earning more than \$30,000 per year).

Study bias can be traced to the method of developing the population sample. By relying on pastors to formulate this mailing list, the likelihood of sampling inactive members is decreased while the potential for hearing from active and involved members is increased.

Findings

Most respondents described themselves as "active," claimed to attend Sabbath worship weekly, said they helped with church planning or programming, and held offices or served on committees.

Respondents generally found their church involvement satisfying, rated their local church and its leadership favorably, and were strongly supportive of their pastor. While tithing and giving to the local church tended to increase with involvement, tithing decreased among those in the highest income category. Involvement *increased* with income.

Concerns include weak participation in spiritual disciplines, a fragile friendship base, and marginal support of Adventist lifestyle issues. Personal soul-winning was nearly non-existent.

Implications and Conclusions

Baby boomers seem heavily involved in maintaining a church organization without involvement in its mission. Concerns about retention of this generation and the transmission of values to the next generation appear justified.

Restructuring the worship service or developing innovative marketing and fund-raising techniques may be tempting but superficial remedies.

A practical emphasis on a personal relationship with Christ, a fresh understanding of Adventist doctrines (particularly distinguishing principles from practice), and renewed ownership of vision and mission are suggested.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

STUDY OF FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE THE INVOLVEMENT
OF BABY BOOMERS IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST
CHURCH IN METRO-ATLANTA

A Project Report
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Edward E. Wright

June 1994

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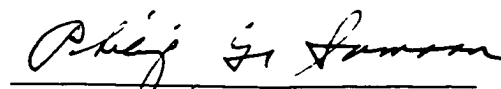
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

History of the Project

Several years ago the church treasurer walked into my office without warning and commented abruptly, “I see a new day coming for this church.”

Hoping that “new” might imply “good,” yet puzzled by the frown on his forehead, I queried, “In what way?”

“The people supporting this church financially are dying off. And people in your generation aren’t picking up the load. Unless something changes, this church is in for some dark days.”

Frequently since, I have reflected on that conversation. Admittedly, young adults are not known for the size of their contributions. That stage in life has always tended to be weak on commitment, anyway. But is there anything unique about **this** generation of young adults? If so, how is it different?

Financial support is only one piece of a much larger puzzle. A waning commitment to Christian education is often lamented these days. Young adults can be critical of the institutional church, unwilling to accept positions of church leadership, and alarmingly liberal in areas of church standards. Are these disturbing trends core problems in themselves, or only symptoms of something bigger?

Disturbing questions such as these proved the impetus to initiate this study.

Justification of the Project

The most crucial moments in any relay involve the passing of the baton. Superior speed, pacing, and endurance win many races. But in the relay, the contest is often won or lost in that exchange.

What is true on the track is also true in parenting, in business, and in the church. For any endeavor to outlast a single person (or generation), fresh resources must be engaged, new individuals enlisted. Communicating information, values, skills, and vision to the next generation has always been important. Today it is vital.

In recent years the Seventh-day Adventist Church has courageously addressed such membership issues. It is now recognized that nearly 50 percent of those who leave the Adventist Church are between twenty and thirty-five years of age.¹ Another 25 percent are thirty-six to fifty years old. "The church is losing its younger people," observes Jerry Lee, a social scientist at Loma Linda University who has researched the problem. This, he continues, is "a dangerous situation for a church which hopes to continue to grow."² The number of inactive members under the age of forty-five is disproportionately large. Numbers published by the Baby Boomer Ministries Resource Center are visually displayed in figure 1 (next page). With sudden alarm the church is recognizing the impact of this exodus.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has historically celebrated youth as "the church of tomorrow." To consider losing significant numbers of "our kids" carries the

¹Monte Sahlin, "Where Are Our Missing Members?" *The Adventist Review*, May 4, 1989, 19.

²Jerry W. Lee, "Seeking the Lost Sheep: A Study of Membership Loss in the Southeastern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists," an unpublished report prepared for and funded by the Southeastern California Conference, 1980, 127-128, quoted in Monte Sahlin, "Where Have All the Members Gone?" *Ministry*, February 1990, 5.

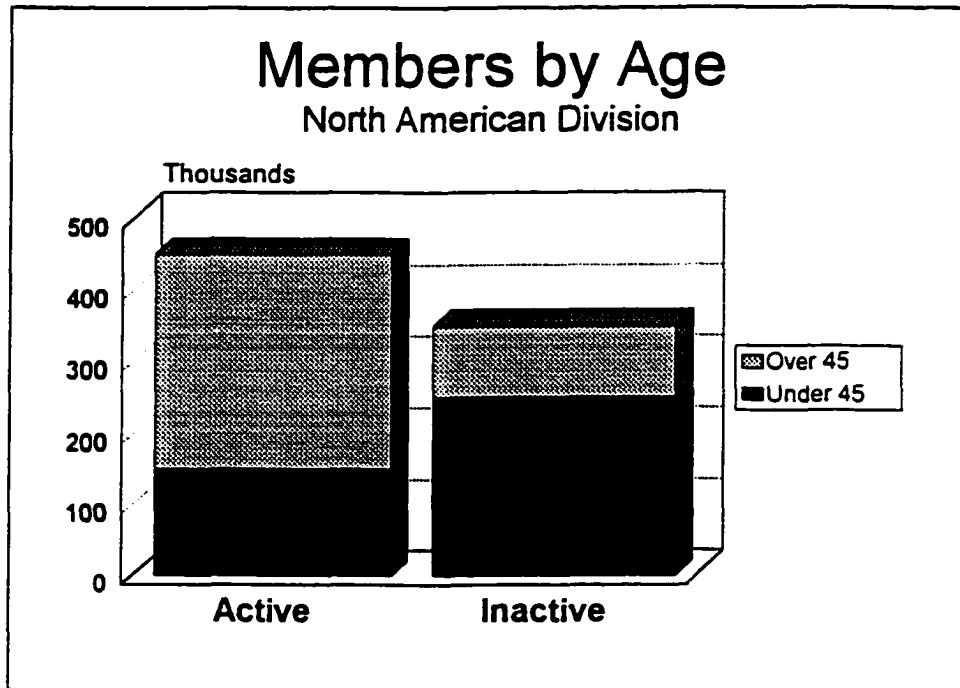


Figure 1: Members, by age and activity level, in the North American Division. From "How Your Church Can Reach & Hold Baby Boomers," a syllabus for the course by the same name (Portland, OR: Baby Boomer Ministries Resource Center, 1992), 76.

emotional weight of parental disappointment and failure. In a very practical sense, non-retention of young adults, and particularly young professionals, will result in a leadership void and reduced financial base that could dramatically affect both the church and its educational system for years to come.

Justifiable questions remain. Has the severity of this problem been exaggerated? What research has been done with Seventh-day Adventist young adults to provide this evidence? What factors contribute to church involvement (or alienation) within this group? Is it possible to retain, involve, and even attract young professionals?

Statement of Purpose

The goals of this study were to determine the level of church involvement of Adventist baby boomers in metropolitan Atlanta, identify factors that contributed to that

that level of involvement, and to develop a suggested strategy for intentional ministry to this population.

Definitions

Baby Boomers: Those born in the years 1946 through 1964, the sociological definition of this generation.

Adventist: Current members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, representing both active and inactive members, currently living in metro-Atlanta.

Professionals: Currently employed in fields within medicine, business, law, applied sciences, and education (generally requiring graduate degrees) with annual family incomes exceeding \$30,000.

Intentional: Ministry, along with leadership and administration in many fields, that is *proactive* (anticipating needs and adjusting to avert the crisis) rather than *reactive* (adapting to meet concerns, objections, or crises as they develop). Some would argue that the church is already in a reactive mode as it relates to baby boomers. Whether that is true or not, by understanding the particular attitudes and issues of this specific population group, an *intentional* ministry can reduce further losses and even attract baby boomers.

Expectations

Expectations of the study included the following:

1. To encourage an intentionalized ministry directed to and involving young Adventist professionals in Atlanta and, possibly, elsewhere
2. To conserve members, including but not limited to the leadership and financial resources that this group represents, and
3. To strengthen my current ministry to this group in the context of the Collegedale Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Preview of Process

Countless conversations are punctuated with personal conviction, opinion, or fear related to young adults and the future of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Could such "anecdotal evidence" be verified? What were the actual opinions of those young adults being discussed?

First, casual reading of current literature relating to these concerns, particularly in the fields of sociology and religion, soon escalated into serious study stimulated by this project.

Upon acceptance of this project proposal, in-depth, scheduled interviews were conducted of twenty-six individuals fitting the above description, both single and married, active and inactive. From the information gained, a survey instrument was drafted. This instrument was returned to those interviewed who were asked to complete the survey, making suggestions for refinement of the instrument. A copy of the final instrument, as approved by the project chairperson, appears in appendix A.

Pastors of Seventh-day Adventist churches within metropolitan Atlanta and affiliated with the Georgia-Cumberland Conference were asked to identify members meeting or approximating the project criteria. Surveys were mailed to this group of 344 households. Two follow-up mailings were sent to those not responding. A complete description of the research methodology follows in chapter 4.

Of the 239 responses received, 161 met the criteria of age and income. These were tabulated and evaluated.

From this information was developed a suggested strategy that urban Adventist churches might employ in ministry to and with young professionals. Direct feedback was provided to the involved congregations in metropolitan Atlanta, identifying successful approaches and possible implications for improved ministry to this group.

Obstacles

Several factors proved challenging. First, pastors provided names and addresses for the mailing list. This increased the likelihood of sampling active and involved members and decreased the potential for hearing from the inactive.

Second, pastors seldom knew the exact ages of members. They were instructed to include names when uncertain, allowing the tabulation process to limit for age and income. Also, in the case of married respondents, two surveys were mailed, though often only one was found to be in the target population. The resulting wide range of birth years among respondents may be attributed to this broad distribution. For analysis, only those meeting the parameters of age and income were considered.

Third, cover letters and envelopes used in the first two mailings were provided by the Georgia-Cumberland Conference. While this provided legitimacy, it also meant undeliverable items were returned to the conference office. In spite of placing my name on every envelope and notifying the conference mail clerk of the possibility, not one undeliverable letter was returned to me. Consequently, I was unable to correct inaccurate addresses for the second mailing. The third mailing was done on personal letterhead. This not only corrected inaccurate addresses, it also may have encouraged responses from those somehow estranged from the church or conference.

Fourth, pastors move. Four key congregations experienced changes in pastors over this fourteen-month period. While this should not have affected survey results, it definitely hindered my ability to follow through with those congregations.

Scope and Limitations

This is not an exhaustive and authoritative study of the baby-boom generation, its characteristics, values, and expectations. I am neither a sociologist nor a statistician. Information gained in personal reading and research can be considered only suggestive.

This study explores primarily the attitudes of married, White, involved members of metro-Atlanta congregations. All findings must be interpreted with this understanding clearly in mind.

The survey instrument itself is governed by normal sampling and response limitations. While the population sample used may be representative of other urban Adventist professionals in North America, it cannot be considered normative. Conclusions reached and strategies suggested apply specifically to those congregations surveyed and are only formative.

Overview of Project Report

The remaining pages of this project report deal sequentially with the following:

Chapter 2 reviews the literature as it relates to an understanding of the baby-boom generation, including the historic development of this population, its sociological characteristics, and its prevalent attitudes and values.

Chapter 3 builds a theoretical foundation for ministry to this group. It explores the generalized ecclesiological response as well as that of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in particular.

Chapter 4 describes the present project in detail; the methodology employed, a description of the research, and a demographic description of respondents.

Chapter 5 evaluates responses in the ten specific areas explored in the survey; areas that are often considered contributing factors in church involvement. Analysis of the data includes exploring correlated issues.

Chapter 6 summarizes the study and its findings, presents conclusions, and offers implications for an improved ministry to Adventist members of the baby-boom generation.

CHAPTER 2

THE BABY-BOOM PHENOMENON

Historic Development of This Population

For more than forty years, America has been struggling to understand and assimilate a generation it did not expect. Over the years, labels have come and gone. War Babies. Spock Babies. The Sputnik Generation. The Pepsi Generation. The Rock Generation. The Now Generation. The Free Love Generation. The Vietnam Generation. The Protest Generation. The Me Generation. The names did not stick because the generation being described continued to age and change. Now demographers, statisticians, politicians, and clergy have come to accept those born between 1946 and 1964 as the baby-boom generation, or more simply, baby boomers.

For two hundred years the birthrate of the world and of the United States steadily declined.¹ One notable exception stands out: the postwar baby boom in the United States.

In May of 1946, exactly nine months after the end of World War II, a record number of babies were born in America—over a quarter of a million. By the end of

¹Landon Y. Jones, *Great Expectations* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1980), 2.

December, an all-time United States record had been set—3.4 million births. “The biggest boom in the history of the world had begun.”¹

Demographers at the Census Bureau had anticipated that fertility would rise after the war, but they were not prepared for the magnitude of that increase. “The 1945 revisions contained three population projections that assumed high, medium, and low fertility. But even the highest predictions fell short when the actual birth count began rolling in.”² This sharp rise in birth rates is shown in figure 2.

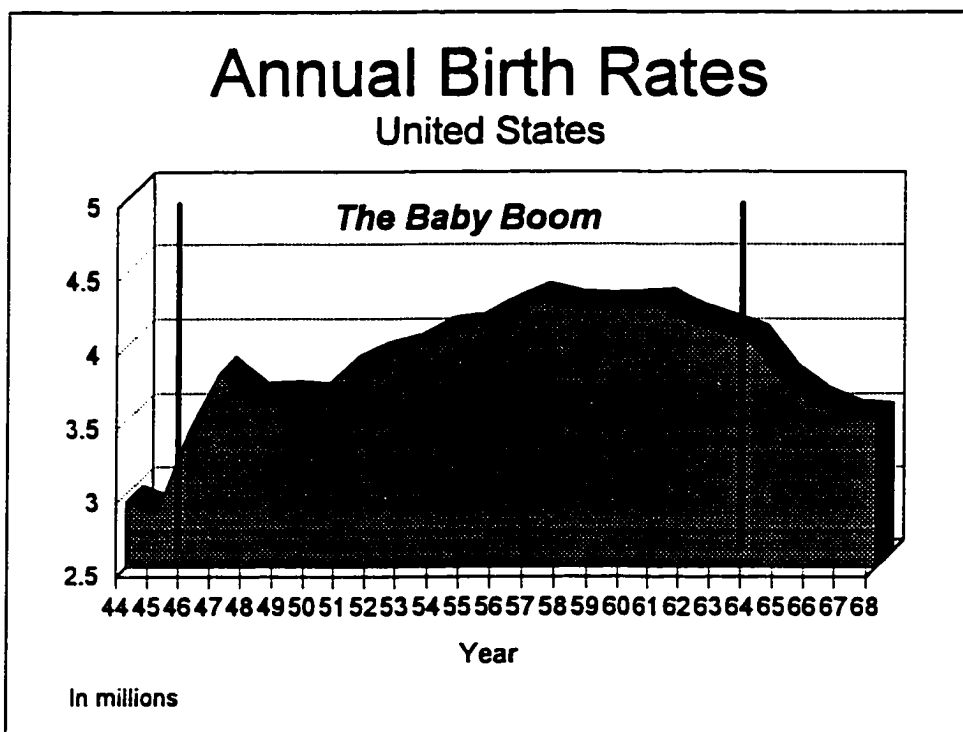


Figure 2: Annual birthrates in the United States. From *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census, 1975), 1:49.

¹ Mike Bellah, *Baby Boom Believers* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1988), 17.

² Judith Waldrop, “The Baby Boom Turns 45,” *American Demographics*, January 1991, 22.

It was not, as is often thought, a short rise in the birthrate caused by returning GIs making up for lost time. It began that way in 1946, but instead of stopping in the 1950s (as in Europe), the tidal wave of births continued, affecting all races and classes with astonishing uniformity. . . . All totaled, 76,441,000 babies—one-third of our present population—arrived in the 19 years from 1946 through 1964.¹

This nation within a nation, a permanent yet moving bulge in the population, was described by Landon Jones as a “pig in a python.”² An uncomfortable yet catchy metaphor, this phrase has described the resulting motion of the baby-boom bulge as it has moved through American society. In this case, both pig and python have felt discomfort and even trauma. As the baby boom arrived at each new stage of life, the demands for age-related products and services has been overwhelming. That process continues.

Not a Monolithic Generation

Before proceeding, it is important to bear in mind that a generation spanning this time frame includes significant diversity.

Given their respective positions in both history and the life cycle, it is best to talk about two baby booms: the old wave, born from 1946 to 1954, and the new wave, born from 1955 to 1964. The two halves experienced a different social and political history and continue to experience a different economic reality. Like the firstborns in a family, the old wave has received the lion’s share of economic and social benefits. Like the later-borns in a family, the new wave has taken whatever is left.³

Socially, younger boomers have ignored many of the issues that concerned those that came of age in the sixties. Between 1967 and 1982, the number of college students who rated being “very well off financially” as an important goal rose from 44

¹ Jones, 2.

² Ibid.

³ Paul C. Light, *Baby Boomers* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1988), 77.

percent to 69 percent. During the same period, the number valuing “developing a philosophy of life” dropped from 83 percent to 47 percent.¹

Differences within both waves of the generation create additional diversity. Such factors include marital status, education, employment, geographic region, and race.² Some of these differences are transitory and disappear with time, while others are more generational, fixed in a collective consciousness by a unique passage through history. All things considered, there is no such thing as a “standard-issue” baby boomer.

While this diversity is significant, it does not eliminate the many unifying factors common to the entire generation. All baby boomers share a common birth date (1946-1964), some common history (civil rights, Vietnam, Watergate, Carter, and Reagan), and some common ideas (tolerance, a rejection of social, political, and religious traditions). Political scientist and author Paul Light lists five shared experiences that unite baby boomers:

They were part of a silent revolution in social values which continues even today. They were raised with great expectations about their future, whether thrust upon them in school or advertising. They witnessed history through the unifying image of television. They experienced social crowding which fueled their desire for individual distinction. And they shared the fears brought on by a new generation of cold-war weapons capable of ending their lives in a moment's notice.³

Analyzed and studied, celebrated and decried, this generation has attracted more than its share of attention. Impossible to ignore, there are now about

¹ Ross E. Goldstein, *Fortysomething: Claiming the Power and the Passion of Your Midlife Years* (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1990), 23.

² Light, 104-107.

³ *Ibid.*, 111-112.

seventy-seven million people in this group within the United States.¹ While this accounts for one third of the total population, it represents approximately one half of all adults! Additionally, because the fertility boom was both preceded and followed by smaller generations, its impact was further amplified.² Landon Jones, editor of *Money* magazine and author of *Great Expectations*--today's standard reference on the baby-boom generation--asserted: "I do not think it overstates the case to say that almost every social and economic issue facing the nation today has a population dimension and that every population dimension has a baby-boom dimension."³

Early Life Influences: First the Good News

Affluence and Leisure

This fertility boom corresponded with the greatest economic expansion this country has ever seen.

In the fifteen years from 1940 until 1955, personal income of Americans soared 293 percent from \$78.5 billion to \$307.5 billion. The gross national product (GNP) had doubled by the mid-fifties and the 6 percent of the world's people who lived in the United States were creating two-thirds of the world's manufactured goods and consuming one-third of the world's goods and services.⁴

Families discovered the limitless possibilities of easy credit. The nation's consumer debt ballooned 55 percent as Americans borrowed to finance split-level

¹ Robert L. Bast, *The Missing Generation* (New York: Reformed Church in America; Monrovia, CA: Church Growth, 1991), 14.

² Light, 27.

³ Jones, 3.

⁴ Ibid., 20.

homes in the suburbs, second cars, boats, travel trailers for their vacations, televisions, and most anything else they desired.¹

It was a period when the public believed they had achieved the American dream. Indeed, according to [pollster Florence] Skelly, “they *assumed* it. Kids could go to college if they wanted; they could certainly have their own rooms; they could live in owned homes; their families had two automobiles, an air conditioner, a refrigerator, you name it.”²

At least early on, members of the baby-boom generation did not have to worry about economic survival. As Ronald Inglehart argues,³ generations raised in periods of affluence have the luxury to wonder about the meaning of life, pursue the need for belonging, and focus on aesthetic and intellectual needs. Tolerance and free expression, equality, environmental protection, and peace become the social values during such historic interludes. By contrast, generations of a more threatening era value jobs, lower prices, tax cuts, nationalism, and a strong defense.

With the widespread availability of technological conveniences, baby boomers grew up in a comfortable environment. Work was reduced, automated, and simplified. Leisure moved from a privilege to an expectation.⁴

Grandparents rebounded from years of depression and war with lavish gifts for their grandchildren. Parents, reacting to a spartan childhood and an improved economy, showered their children with more gifts and attention. “The affluence of

¹ Ibid.

² Light, 113.

³ Ronald Inglehart, “The Silent Revolution in Europe: Intergenerational Change in Post-industrial Societies,” *American Political Science Review*, December 1971, 881-1017.

⁴ George Barna, *The Invisible Generation* (Glendale, CA: Barna Research Group, 1992), 42.

the 1950s gave young baby boomers the notion that just about everything was in their grasp.”¹

National Optimism

The birth years of baby boomers coincided with a time of national optimism which lasted almost as long as the boom itself. That optimism arose in part because of unparalleled opportunities in the work place, in the vastness of consumer goods, and in the enjoyment of life. There was a feeling of inevitable progress. “The sky is the limit,” and “You can be anything you want,” typified the climate of the day.²

Following the Second World War, America’s place in the world was unequalled. The greatest nation on earth, America was not only victorious and invincible, it was morally upright and good. The consequent feelings of security, optimism, and hope for the future only intensified the disillusionment and cynicism of the later years.

Child-centered World

The baby boom occurred during a period of decidedly pro-family values. “Couples were pushed toward a magic number of kids, encouraged to have at least one, rewarded for two, congratulated for three, but exhausted and financially pressed at four or more. Hence, the homogenized, two-child family which so characterized the start of the baby boom.”³

¹ Cheryl Russell, *100 Predictions for the Baby Boom* (New York: Plenum Press, 1987), 38.

² Bast, 33.

³ Light, 25.

Children took center stage. “This generation of Americans enshrined them. European visitors joked knowingly about how well American parents obeyed their children. American parents did seem to be making their kids their religion.”¹

This inclination was reinforced by the child-rearing theories of Benjamin Spock, whose landmark *Baby and Child Care* was first published in 1946.² With over 30 million copies sold, it became the most widely read book in America after the Bible.³ Advocating children as a priority, he influenced countless mothers to devote themselves entirely to raising children. Further, he maintained that these children could become the best, the brightest, the healthiest, the most self-assured ever. “The effect of Spock’s work was to foster the development of a child-centered society.”⁴

Television and Advertising

Baby boomers were the first generation to grow up with television. In 1950 only 9 percent of American households owned a television. By 1965 that proportion had grown to 93 percent.⁵ For most, television became a way of life. Light writes: “By the time the average baby boomer reached the age of sixteen, he or she had watched from 12,000 to 15,000 hours of TV,” or the equivalent of twenty-four hours a day for sixteen to twenty entire months.⁶ Jones reported an even higher total:

¹ Jones, 47.

² Benjamin Spock, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1946).

³ Bellah, 18.

⁴ Bast, 32.

⁵ James F. Engel and Jerry D. Jones, *Baby Boomers and the Future of World Missions* (Orange, CA: Management Development Associates, 1989), 11.

⁶ Light, 123.

24,000 hours watched, on average, by the time a baby-boom child reached eighteen years of age.¹

Light points out the impact of all that viewing: it taught about adulthood without benefit of parent or teacher, it presented a world of remarkable similarity, it crowded out other sources of information, it fostered social separation, and it reduced time spent in conversation and human interaction.²

What the baby boom saw on television portrayed a fantasy world, with a vision of the American family that was both unrealistic and unattainable. Children were watching programs like "Leave It To Beaver," "Ozzie and Harriet," and "Father Knows Best." They saw an idealized world which never encountered difficult problems or raised complex issues. It was a world of white middle-class families whose greatest difficulties could always be happily resolved within thirty minutes. It is not surprising that the baby-boom generation has had so much trouble coming to grips with some of the uncomfortable realities of family life.³

A major element of television's impact came from the advertising viewed there. Expectations were formed early, as commercials incessantly created and stimulated desire.

They [baby boomers] were the first generation of children to be isolated by Madison Avenue as an identifiable market. That is the appropriate word: *isolated*. Marketing, and especially television, isolated their needs and wants from those of their parents. From the cradle, the baby boomers had been surrounded by products created especially for them, from Silly Putty to Slinkys to skateboards. New products, new toys, new commercials, new fads—the dictatorship of the new—was integral to the baby-boom experience. So prevalent was it that baby boomers themselves rarely realized how different it made them. They breathed it like air."⁴

¹ Jones, 140.

² Light, 124.

³ Bast, 35.

⁴ Jones, 51.

This advertising strategy was overwhelmingly successful. “Children could recite advertising jingles before they could speak in sentences, and could identify product brands long before they could read.”¹

This process contributed to the growing economic influence of the baby-boom generation. Fads like coonskin caps, hula hoops, Barbie dolls, Yo-Yo’s, and Frisbees were created overnight. Companies prospered and withered according to the whims of the fad-conscious, media-saturated baby boom. The consumer mentality of television advertising was planted early in this generation.

Advertising serves not so much to advertise products as to promote consumption as a way of life. It “educates” the masses into an unappeasable appetite not only for goods but for new experiences and personal fulfillment. It upholds consumption as the answer to the age-old discontents of loneliness, sickness, weariness, lack of sexual satisfaction; at the same time it creates new forms of content peculiar to the modern age. It plays seductively on the malaise of industrial civilization. Is your job boring and meaningless? Does it leave you with feelings of futility and fatigue? Is your life empty? Consumption promises to fill the aching void.²

Children of the baby boom learned early on that “things” were the key to inner happiness and that their generation had collective power.

Later Shaping Factors: Now the Bad News

Crucial to an understanding of the baby-boom generation is a recognition of the traumatic events of the 1960s. Particularly for those born before 1955, these events had a devastating and cumulative affect.

¹ Bast, 36.

² Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979, Warner Edition), 137.

Fear of Nuclear Annihilation

“As the cold war developed and deepened, many baby boomers came to the conviction that the world would end in a nuclear nightmare.”¹ The Cuban missile crisis in 1962 intensified that fear. The sale and installation of backyard bomb shelters became almost commonplace. For many, the question was not if a nuclear holocaust would come, but when. Paul Boyer maintains that nuclear fear was the shaping cultural force from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s.²

Weekly air-raid drills made a lasting mark on impressionable children. “The baby boomers never forgot the lesson that their world could end in a flash of light and heat while they were crouched helplessly in gymnasiums and basements.”³ These seeds of fear planted in childhood blossomed during the 1960s into pessimism about the future and a preoccupation with the present.

Assassinations

On November 22, 1963, the country was rocked by the devastating news that president John F. Kennedy had been shot. From Friday afternoon until the funeral on Monday, the three major networks gave complete, uninterrupted coverage to the events following the assassination.

For the baby-boom children, this was the most mesmerizing moment of their youth. Time was frozen. They were the television generation and here was the ultimate television event: not even commercials were being shown. Nine out of every ten members of the generation participated by watching it.⁴

¹ Bast, 38.

² Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light* (New York: Pantheon Press, 1985).

³ Jones, 59.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

“It was the most watched and most covered event of all time, even surpassing the Gulf War.”¹

Older baby boomers can tell you exactly where they were when they heard the news. “We can remember because it was the first major trauma we suffered as a group. There would be others—Vietnam, Kent State, Watergate—but this was the first and the one we felt most deeply. It was the beginning of our expectation bust.”²

On Sunday morning, in the middle of that coverage and as millions of Americans watched, Lee Harvey Oswald was fatally shot—while in police custody! It marked the first “live” murder on television. Was *nothing* safe? asked a troubled nation.

That double event shook the confidence of the Western world. For many baby boomers, both security and innocence were forever lost in that tragic weekend.

Yet more was to come. Less than five years later, it happened again. On April 4, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King was killed by James Earl Ray in Memphis, Tennessee. And within two months, Senator Robert Kennedy was murdered by Sirhan Bishara Sirhan at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles. Americans staggered in disbelief as one after another of their public personalities, and the second Kennedy, fell victim to an assassin’s bullet.

Vietnam War

“Probably nothing so crystallized and symbolized a generation as the reaction which most baby boomers had to the Vietnam War, which Jones describes as ‘a generational obsession.’ While they had nothing to do with the decision to wage that

¹ Craig Kennet Miller, *Baby Boomer Spirituality* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1992), 5.

² Bellah, 31.

war, they were the ones who fought it.”¹ For eight years, from birthdays nineteen to twenty-six, students worried about the draft. Those from middle class homes and better went to college. Some protested the war and burned their draft cards. Meanwhile, the poor, the powerless, and the uneducated went to war.²

Vietnam was devastating to millions. “The optimism and hope that the boom generation took into the Vietnam years only made its eventual disappointment more devastating. They had been young and idealistic and Vietnam made them old and cynical.”³

For younger boomers the war, while still unsettling, was more a media event.

It was a crazy time to grow up. For me, “normal” was sitting in front of TV with the family at dinner and watching the body counts from Vietnam being reported like scores in a basketball game on the evening news: Americans 10, Viet Cong 230. It was the only game I knew where the winners tried to come up with the lowest score.⁴

For many baby boomers of all ages, the Vietnam war shattered the belief in both the moral superiority and the physical power of America. “It destroyed faith in leadership and created a permanent distrust of institutions.”⁵

Racial Unrest

Civil rights was a cause quickly adopted by many baby boomers. The civil rights act of 1964 made integration a reality for many. Appealing to the boomer’s

¹ Bast, 40.

² Jones, 94-95.

³ Ibid., 119.

⁴ Miller, 4.

⁵ Bast, 41.

sense of fairness and tolerance, by the time the freedom riders had gone south, the baby boom was largely committed to the principle of civil rights.

The vivid depictions of civil rights workers being harassed and abused stirred the baby-boom generation to anger. Then came the assassination of Dr. King, with its aftermath of riots in the cities, including pictures on television of whole blocks on fire. Once again, it was apparent to them that America is not fair, and that liberty and justice for all is just another empty promise.¹

Family Breakup

In considering shifts in the “traditional” American family, values are clearly the first to be challenged. Interestingly, it was the *parents* of the baby-boom generation that initiated this shift. “Parents began to live by different standards, and found themselves preaching values and ethics which they had grown up believing but were no longer practicing.”² Principles of thrift, sacrifice, and self-denial were drowned in a sea of easy credit and installment payments. Gradually at first, baby boomers began to be unsure of, and even to question, some of the other values of their parents. The merits of hard work, the material success, and competition were soon dismissed. The tide of “counter-cultural” values was on the rise. Many baby boomers determined to chart their own courses and do it their own way. They would not, they determined, be like their parents.

Concurrently, in spite of the glorification of the ideal family and all the focus on marriage in the 1950s, many baby boomers watched as their own parents’ marriages crumbled. Writing in 1980, Jones recorded, “Each year since 1960, the total number of children affected by divorce in the United States, has gone up.”³

¹ Ibid., 41-42.

² Ibid., 30.

³ Jones, 246.

Again, these were the *parents* of baby boomers that were ending their marriages. “Not only did that take its toll in terms of the trauma divorce always causes in children, but it was also one more breach of security, another experience of disappointment, another broken promise, another futile dream.”¹

Watergate

The early 1970s were dominated by the developing saga of Watergate, one of the worst political scandals in United States history.

When five men were arrested at 2:30 a.m. on the morning of June 17, 1972, inside the Democratic National Headquarters which was housed in the upscale Watergate complex, few realized the significance of the event. Within days a trail of suspicion and intrigue pointed directly toward The White House. Astonishingly, the incident and its immediate aftermath was lost on the American public. President Richard Nixon was overwhelming re-elected in November of that year.

Accusations, investigations, and denials escalated as months became years. Minor yet related scandals became headline news. Wire tapping, burglary, invasion of privacy, and money laundering all surfaced within the circle of presidential politics. One after another of Nixon’s administration officials was found to be involved (all told, thirty were eventually found guilty of wrong-doing). Faced with the Supreme Court’s unanimous decision to demand sixty-four crucial tapes and documents, Nixon resigned August 9, 1974.²

While the two-year ordeal was disillusioning for all Americans, it particularly impacted the impressionable baby-boom generation. No one, it seemed—not even the

¹ Bast, 42.

² Sam J. Ervin, Jr., *The Whole Truth: the Watergate Conspiracy* (New York: Random House, 1980).

president of the United States--could be trusted. Disillusionment and cynicism became further entrenched.

Impact on Society

While members of the baby-boom generation were being influenced by the world around them, they were also exerting their own considerable influence on society. The protest movement, rock music, drugs, and free love convulsed and embarrassed their seniors.

Baby boomers flouted faith in marriage, work, family, patriotism, and democracy. Traditional American aspirations for more material comfort were downplayed or dismissed.

They challenged established authority in the larger society in every one of its forms—the law, the police, the universities, the elected officials, the professions, the corporate structure, etc. They countered the traditional social institutions of marriage and church with new styles of communal living and new forms of religious expression. They scrutinized each element of traditional sexual morality for opportunities to try something different. They countered the alcohol culture with the drug culture. They met the old emphasis on private careers with a new craving for community—the list could be continued indefinitely.¹

Not only did the baby boom challenge established religion, Cheryl Merseur observes that the sixties' culture became its own religion.

Pilgrimages? Monterey, the disastrous Altamont, the marches, be-ins, sit-ins. Ceremonies? Write-your-own nuptials held at the edges of creeks. Rituals? Not the sign of the cross, but the peace sign; holy water to fill up waterpipes; you broke bread together by passing a joint to your neighbor. Scriptures? *Rolling Stone, Why Are We in Vietnam?*, *The Whole Earth Catalog*, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, *The Medium Is the Message*, *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Password? Relevant. Transcendental experiences? Acid. Martyrs? Kent State. The persecuted? Soldiers fighting in Vietnam, blacks, women, students. The persecutors? Corporations destroying souls, Agent Orange, Kissinger and Nixon and their friends—the grown-ups who had corrupted the system and the society.

¹ Daniel Yankelovich, cited in Jones, 107.

In addition, like any good religion, the sixties even had its own taboo: the ostentatious pursuit, discussion, or display of money.¹

Not only have baby boomers struggled to understand their world, society has struggled to understand them. The traumatic events of the 1960s turned their world upside down. In the aftermath of this great reversal, many in adolescence and early adulthood felt unable to adjust to society or believed that society could not adjust to them.

If, in looking at the baby-boom generation, we see things we do not understand, or do not approve of, we do well to remember the up and down seesaw ride many of them experienced in their shaping years. Perhaps no other generation has had a higher “high” or fallen so unexpectedly to such a devastating “low.” They are a group which entered adulthood staggered by change, shocked by tragedy, questioning all assumptions, and groping to find their way.²

Generational Issues Unique to Adventism

Additional factors within the Seventh-day Adventist church may have influenced and perhaps complicated the developing relationship between baby boomers and the organization.

As the growing baby-boom generation moved into school age, the silent and GI generations within the Seventh-day Adventist church responded by building schools. First elementary and then academy classrooms bulged with growing numbers of the church’s youth. While educationally protected, these students were not insulated from the world around them. Television and the mass media brought the sights and sounds of a generation in transition into countless Adventist homes.

¹ Cheryl Merse, *Grown-ups: A Generation in Search of Adulthood* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1987), 104.

² Bast, 44.

“Worldly trends” were countered with school rules. Family discussions, Bible classes, youth groups, and student government meetings debated the merits and demerits of issues such as short skirts and long hair, jeans, movies, and music. Guitars and drums were banned from many school programs.

This generation was naturally sensitive to hypocrisy and inconsistency. When faced with an authoritarian emphasis on rules backed by quotes from Ellen White, the resulting perception of a legalistic church was predictable. That atmosphere accentuated the impact of traumas yet to come, especially for older boomers.

From 1973 through 1978 the lingering court cases that became generically known as *Merikay v. Pacific Press Publishing Association* focused attention on denominational discrimination against women, the authority of the church, hierarchical church government, and religious liberty issues.¹

From late 1979 to 1981 the church was convulsed by the issues surrounding Dr. Desmond Ford, Glacier View, and *Evangelica* (these issues included the year-day principle of prophetic interpretation, the investigative judgment, the cleansing of the sanctuary, and the role of Ellen White in doctrinal discussions).²

¹ Tom Dybdahl, “Merikay and the Pacific Press: Money, Courts and Church Authority,” *Spectrum* 7 (1975): 44-53; Robert Nixon, “Church Settles Court Cases,” *Spectrum* 9 (1978): 2-5; Lorna Tobler, “Responses from Readers: On Pacific Press Case,” *Spectrum* 9 (1978): 63.

All told, three suits were filed, only one by Merikay Silver (*Merikay Silver v. PPPA*). The others dealt with closely related yet separate issues brought by other federal agencies. These included *EEOC v. PPPA* (recrimination issues), and *Department of Labor v. PPPA* (Equal Pay Act violations).

² C. O. Granz, “Teacher Given Leave to Prepare Doctrinal Paper,” *Adventist Review*, December 20, 1979, 23; a special double-issue of *Ministry*, October 1980; Walter Utt, “Desmond Ford Raises the Sanctuary Question,” *Spectrum* 10 (March 1980): 3-8; etc.

At nearly the same time (1979-1981), Walter Rea's findings regarding Ellen White's dependance upon other sources was attracting a great deal of attention.¹ To those believing in White's verbal inerrancy, such discussions were faith-shaking. With difficulty the church was forced to re-examine the nature of prophetic inspiration.

Finally, the bankruptcy of Dr. Donald J. Davenport in 1981 cost the church \$21 million in investments (including delinquent interest), revealed a trail of questionable financial practices, and implicated 163 financial officers and administrators in multiple levels of church government nationwide in possible wrongdoing.² Confidence in church leadership was severely impacted.

To a generation already wary of institutions and disillusioned with life, the cumulative effect of these events rocked the personal faith and denominational loyalty of many within the church. While the specific impact of these events has not been documented, particularly with Adventist baby boomers, it could hardly be observed to be positive. As a result, the church has been forced to deal, not simply with baby boomer issues in general, but with the residue of these difficult years within Adventism as well.

The Baby-Boom Generation Today

While it is helpful to examine the societal influences that shaped a generation, that backward glance provides only half the picture. Over the years, new forces have come to bear on baby boomers--economic, occupational, and social. Maturity and

¹ Douglas Hackleman, "GC Committee Studies Ellen White's Sources," *Spectrum* 10 (March 1980): 9-15; "Must the Crisis Continue?" *Spectrum* 11 (February 1981): 44-52; Ellen White special *Ministry* supplement, August 1982, 1-16.

² Neal C. Wilson, "A Report to the Church," *Adventist Review*, August 19, 1982, 4-6, 22-23; idem, "The Davenport Affair: Further Report," *Adventist Review*, March 24, 1983, 6-9.

consequent developmental roles have forced them to reexamine many attitudes and lifestyle choices.

One must consider these present factors to better understand where individuals of the baby-boom generation are today and to more effectively implement a ministry directed to them.

Career

The Vanishing Yuppie

Young, upwardly mobile professionals (or young urban professionals) gained a great deal of publicity in the 1980s. Generally described as upscale, affluent, trendy, professionally aggressive young adults, they were usually pictured driving Volvos and BMWs, enjoying life in the fast lane.

No one wanted to be known as a yuppie in the 1980s, yet everyone tried to live like one. Vacations to Europe and the Caribbean, yellow ties and red suspenders, marinated salmon steaks and Latin American beer were hot. The more expensive the product or destination, the more desirable and impressive it was. . . . Five years ago marketers needed only to regurgitate the shameless principles of yuppie culture with supposedly rhetorical questions like "Who says you can't have it all?" They responded to the fact that between 1982 and 1987--the boundaries of the last recession and the stock market crash--America constructed a two-part national fantasy. Part one was that greed and hedonism were a collective birthright. Part two was that there would never be a payback for part one. Malcom Forbes's self-justifying credo--"He who dies with the most toys wins"--worked its way into ubiquity on T-shirts and bumper stickers.¹

Who says you can't have it all? The answer finally began to materialize in the form of children, credit-card debt, budget deficits, savings-and-loan fraud, weak housing starts, cello lessons, and looming college tuitions. Conspicuous consumption made more sense before children, trips to the orthodontist, and monthly mortgage

¹ Steve Pomper, "Where Have All the Yuppies Gone?" *Working Woman*, February 1991, 63, 64.

payments. Interestingly, few were ever willing to be known as “yuppies,” even among those that were!

Present comparisons of income, education, and career point out that there were never very many “yuppies” anyway (see figure 3 on p. 29). Bast places the number at less than 5 percent.¹ Far more would like to have *lived* like “yuppies”—and did until debt overwhelmed them. The vast majority could be described as the new collar class, skilled workers in industries combining high technology and management with mild physical activity. These are the present middle class of the baby-boom generation.

Ronald Henkoff, writing for *Fortune* magazine, observed, “The conspicuous consumption, cold careerism, and self-centered spirit that made up so much of business as usual in the eighties now come across as a bit tacky at best, ruinous at worst.”² Post-yuppies, as Pomper has labeled them, are pulling back from the excesses of the Eighties, a bit more inclined toward community involvement and the moral ideals of their youth.

Job Switching

As far back as 1984, a new trend prompted David Gelman to write in *Newsweek*, “All over the country, a generation of professionals is career hopping—switching occupations so promiscuously it’s a wonder they don’t collide with each other coming and going. Lawyers are becoming teachers, teachers are becoming accountants, doctors and dentists are going into real estate.”³

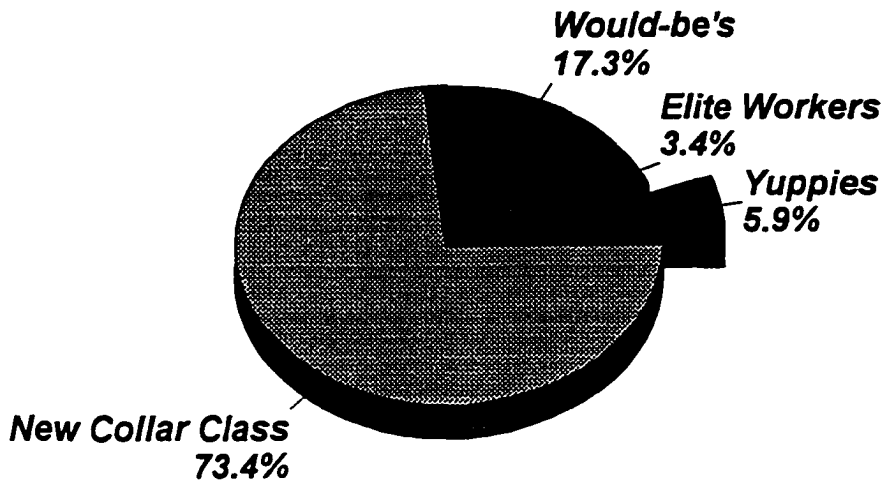
¹ Bast, 43.

² Ronald Henkoff, “Is Greed Dead?” *Fortune*, August 14, 1989, 40.

³ David Gelman, “The Switch Is On,” *Newsweek*, May 28, 1984, 93.

Who Are The Baby Boomers?

Not All Yuppies



In millions

Elite Workers (approximately 2.3 million)

- Annual earnings: \$30,000 plus (in 1985)
- Education: high school and/or trade school only
- Jobs: foremen, plumbers, electricians, other trades

Yuppies (approximately 4 million)

- Annual earnings: \$40,000 plus (in 1985)
- Education: college and/or graduate school
- Jobs: professional, management/executive, doctors, etc.

Would-be's (would like to be Yuppies but are not, approximately 11.8 million)

- Annual earnings: less than \$30,000 (in 1985)
- Education: college or graduate school
- Jobs: teachers, administrators, middle management, etc.

New Collar Class (the middle class of this generation, 30-50 million)

- Annual earnings: \$15,000 - \$30,000 (in 1985)
- Education: both college graduates and non-graduates
- Jobs: computer programmers, word processor operators, school teachers, truck drivers, etc.

Figure 3: Who are the baby boomers? They are not all yuppies. From a study by J. Walter Thompson (*Review*, December 1985, 38-39), quoted in James F. Engel and Jerry D. Jones, *Baby Boomers & The Future Of World Missions* (Orange, CA: Management Development Associates, 1989), 10.

How many were prompted to swap careers? Gelman cited a Bureau of Labor Statistics analysis of one twelve-month period which found that “a third of American workers (excepting farmers, farm laborers and household workers) transferred to another occupation.”¹ Job counselors recognized in 1984 that the average American would migrate through three careers.

Reasons for the migration ranged from “fulfillment,” “growth,” and “challenge” to inadequate preparation by college guidance counselors. Unrealistic career expectations prompted some moves.

That trend continues today. Career-guidance professionals, services, workshops and books proliferate. *What Color Is Your Parachute?* is the name of Richard Bolles’s practical manual for job-hunters and career-changers. It has sold more than four million copies over its twenty-two-year history. On the *New York Times* bestseller list for 288 weeks *so far*, this annually updated guide had its best year ever in 1992, when 25,000 of the disenfranchised picked it up each month. In 1991, Bolles notes, 33 percent of American workers thought about quitting their jobs. Fourteen percent actually did so over a two-year period.² This is not including those laid off, fired, or otherwise forced to quit work; only those who left their jobs by choice. Whether looking for adventure and challenge or “burned out” and looking for peace, fulfillment, and meaning, the trend to swap careers has not abated.

Members of the baby-boom generation, with their reduced brand loyalty and entitlement philosophy, are all too willing to abandon anything, job included, when it no longer “meets their needs.” Employers are being forced to consider issues

¹ Ibid.

² Richard Nelson Bolles, *The 1993 What Color Is Your Parachute?* (Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 1993), 12.

important to their younger workers. These issues now revolve around family, children, and quality of life. More employees, it seems, are now willing to sacrifice a higher paycheck or status-conscious benefits for more esoteric values.¹ When a Chivas Regal poll asked working Americans to identify the most important indicator of success, 62 percent said, “a happy family life.” Only 10 percent responded “earning a lot of money.”²

The service and quality emphasis of good business practice has long focused on the customer. Progressive employers are now applying those insights to personnel issues. To keep good employees, companies must keep them happy. Strangely enough, employees have now become the ultimate consumers.

At first glance, this tendency to change careers would make it appear that the frequent moves and geographic instability often associated with young adulthood would be intensified today. Would churches see young families dropping everything to follow the next bright occupational star?

Instead, the opposite may be true. The willingness to switch jobs to keep from moving, thus protecting family stability, may work in the best interests of churches as well as children. Unwilling to move the family every eighteen months, as young executives of yesteryear were forced to do, these families care about the best environment for their children. Churches can reinforce family values with spiritual values, thus benefiting from this trend.

¹ Henkoff, 49.

² Ibid., 41.

Level of Education

The most educated generation in American history, 85 percent of baby boomers finished high school, 50 percent attended college, 25 percent graduated, and 7 percent went on to graduate school. Of their parents' generation, 50 percent were high-school graduates and only 10 percent finished college.¹

The number of college graduates in a single year peaked at 969,000, with the class of 1984. That means the baby boomers will remain America's most educated generation.

All that education continues to affect the way members of this generation act. Highly educated people . . .

- are more sophisticated in their methods
- tend to make rational decisions
- like making comparisons
- are less brand loyal
- recognize and appreciate quality
- value saving
- make independent decisions.²

Viewing the larger picture, the very process of higher learning has systemically affected baby boomers. Precisely when greater numbers were becoming committed to advanced education, the institutions themselves changed dramatically. Teachers have always influenced students. Prior to World War II, teachers came primarily from the white middle class. During the 1950s, however, a new breed moved into the classroom.

At this point, students began to encounter teachers whose worldviews were radically different. They became exposed to outlooks which previously were unthinkable. Out of this was to grow an all-new attitude of tolerance for diversity.

Teaching methods also changed, and this was to have a major effect. There began to be far less emphasis on rote learning and unquestioned acceptance. Students were challenged to question and to think--to expand their horizons in

¹ Miller, 37-38.

² Bast, 18.

search for new answers. A generation soon became far more open to change than their parents, more suspicious of institutions and traditions, and more prone to challenge the status quo in search of answers and solutions.¹

In addition to the attitudinal impacts mentioned, this highly educated generation then had to face the hard realities of the competitive job market.

The promise was that education would provide a ticket to a guaranteed future, and it seemed to do so, at least for the first of them who moved quickly from college into the market place, and found the promise of their dreams coming to fulfillment. But for most of them, that did not happen.²

Countless baby boomers have since faced the disillusionment of having a college diploma and no job. Available positions were often swamped with over-qualified applicants. This over-saturated job market is consequently linked to other issues, most notably career switching, personal finance, and current retirement trends.

Women in Work Force

Another major shift in American society has resulted in the number of women, especially age twenty-five through forty-five, who are employed outside the home. Russell noted in 1987 that 70 percent were then working, anticipating that number to reach 80 percent by 1995.³ In 1989, Henkoff observed, "Fully 73% of all women age 25 to 34 now work for pay, as do half of all women with babies under a year old."⁴ Bast cites a 1990 study in which "six out of ten mothers of children under the age of five are working outside the home."⁵

¹ Engel and Jones, 13.

² Bast, 42.

³ Russell, 19.

⁴ Henkoff, 49.

⁵ *1990 Almanac of Consumer Markets* (American Demographics Press, 1990), quoted in Bast, 48.

Three important consequences are evident from this pattern. First, many people are experiencing considerable stress. Women feel torn between work and family. Most of them need to work for economic reasons, but are struggling with conflicting emotions, as they are separated from their children. For the first time, perhaps, it is not just women who feel these stresses. They are new to baby boom men, as well. A second consequence is the great need for our society (including the church) to do more about child care. We are woefully short of nursery and day care facilities, and great concern is raised among these young parents about the quality of what now exists. This situation intensifies parental stress. A third consequence is that the church can no longer assume that activities can be planned for or carried out by women as in the past.¹

A Mixed Future

Recognizing the financial uncertainty of Social Security (along with many other retirement and pension plans), persistently rising medical costs, and increased life expectancy, many see a dark future for aging baby boomers. Other factors will brighten the prospect somewhat. LifeSpan Communications, a consulting group specializing in marketing to the maturing baby boom, does not dispute those harsh realities. They examine other elements of the baby boomers' career future in their book, *Lifetrends: The Future of Baby Boomers and Other Aging Americans*.

First, they see an end to the early retirement trend in America. Not only will companies increasingly recognize the value of experience, but improved health will combine with financial need to prompt more workers to work longer. There is no magic in the widely held retirement age of sixty-five. While some will stay on at the company, others will use a retirement option to follow entrepreneurial pursuits, starting their own companies, consulting, or building home businesses.

Second, volunteerism will dramatically increase. This may not flourish in those organizations that tightly manage and control volunteers like unpaid staff.

¹ Ibid., 49.

One can't imagine them [baby boomer volunteers] willing foot soldiers, regimented yet again by large organizations such as the ones that have constrained their freedom since the schools and colleges of their youth--not when increasing age finally offers them some options. Instead, we can expect them to demand a voice in how their services are used, opting wherever possible for working alone or in small groups on projects that provide them with tangible results of their efforts.¹

Finally, part-time and project workers will make up a larger proportion of the work force. As hours are made more flexible and job assignments suited to the skills and interests of older employees, more will be willing to continue in the work environment longer.

These factors impact a church organization which relies heavily on the use of volunteers. Especially when combined with the increased number of women working outside the home, the nature and process of "church work" will certainly be affected.

Personal Finance

The Economic Squeeze

A ballooning workforce combined with inflation trapped many, particularly the younger cohort, in a disillusioning spiral of downward mobility. "Rather than facing social and political change, younger boomers have faced economic loss."²

To a generation raised to believe that they could have it all, that education would guarantee prosperity and affluence, the harsh realities of economic life in the 90s have proven a bitter pill to swallow. "For all the hope and promise of affluence,

¹ Jerry Gerber, Janet Wolf, Walter Klores, and Gene Brown, *Lifetrends: The Future of Baby Boomers and Other Aging Americans* (New York: Stonesong Press, 1989), 85.

² Miller, 9.

most baby boomers have experienced economic hard times. This is particularly true of younger baby boomers.”¹

As boomers entered the 1970s, the twin pillars of the American middle-class dream--affordable housing and an income level to support children--were still within reach. But by the late 1980s and early 1990s inflation and rising interest rates had changed all of that. Katy Butler describes her financial life compared to her parents:

By the '80s, my parents had raised three children and achieved all of the American dream on my father's income alone--and after 15 years in the full-time work force, I could not afford a child and had never owned a new car. . . . Nowhere was the change more striking than in what each generation paid for housing and what they got for it. My parents paid \$190 a month--on a 5 percent mortgage--for a four-bedroom house on an acre of land. . . . Bob and I, with a combined income slightly lower than my father's paid \$1,500 a month--on a 9 percent mortgage--for a five-room bungalow slightly larger than my parents' deck. Yet we felt lucky to afford a house at all.²

To reinforce Butler's observation, it now takes two to build economic security. “‘The ticket to affluence in middle age will be a marriage license,’ writes author Roger Thompson, ‘because even now for most boomers, it takes two paychecks to live a comfortable middle-class life.’”³

“NEBBies” could be the next real-estate nightmare for the nation's lending institutions. That is the conclusion of Sherman Whipple, a Massachusetts-based market researcher, after an intensive study of 1,000 New England households. Whipple defines “NEBBies” as “negative-equity baby boomers.” While these professional and managerial households have incomes above \$55,000, nice houses,

¹ Bast, 42.

² Katy Butler, “The Great Boomer Depression,” *Mother Jones*, June 1989, 34.

³ Wesley G. Pippert, “The Revival of Religion in America,” *Editorial Research Reports*, July 22, 1988, 374.

nice cars, and solid positions in the community, they have also tapped their home equities to finance other luxuries. "They cashed in part of their inflation winnings, in effect, just before the economic bust hit town. Now they're up to--or over--their earlobes in debt."¹ Just how many homeowners are we talking about? An astonishing 53 percent of those surveyed were currently at or near a negative equity position! That is, the cash liquidation value of all their assets--real estate, savings, investments, everything--was near or below their total outstanding debt. While other real-estate markets were not hit as hard, the issue was both volatile and touchy.

Other factors are also at work. *Business Week* identified "The Baby Boomers' Triple Whammy": rising costs for tuition, elder care, and saving for retirement. Calling it "an unprecedented financial squeeze," Amy Dunkin wrote:

Sandwiched between growing children and aging parents, they [baby boomers] need to provide for tuition, their own future, and, in many cases, elder care. The cost of higher education is rising nearly twice as fast as inflation. Retirement living expenses will be only 35% covered by government or corporate benefits when today's workers are ready to quit. And annual nursing-home bills could reach \$70,000. But instead of fattening bank accounts, the go-go '80s left much of the sandwich generation running in place.²

Many are simply dropping out of the race. By October of 1993, *The Wall Street Journal* recorded a new trend in personal bankruptcy: well-educated middle-class baby boomers with big-time credit-card debt. Counter to common stereotypes, bankruptcy is no longer the refuge for high-school dropouts or onetime high fliers now grounded.

¹ Kenneth R. Harney, "NEBBies Give Banks a New Worry," *Barron's*, March 30, 1992, 61.

² Amy Dunkin, "The Baby Boomers' Triple Whammy," *Business Week*, May 4, 1992, 178.

The biggest common denominator . . . is that bankruptcy has become a shared experience of people born between 1946 and 1964. These baby boomers make up 44% of the adult population, but they account for 59% of personal bankruptcies. . . . In that group, the people most likely to be in bankruptcy were between 40 and 44 years old, an age span when middle-class professionals are usually assumed to be economically established.¹

The generational tilt toward consumerism and optimism, without the chastening influence of the Depression, is one noted risk factor. Additionally, an increased reliance on a second income means that a divorce, illness, or job disruption turns what had been reasonable monthly payments into prohibitive amounts without that source of income. For many baby boomers not accustomed to self denial, discipline, and tough times, bankruptcy may be seen as the quick-fix solution of choice.

More recent declines in interest rates may have moderated those trends. During this window of opportunity, more of the baby-boom generation can now consider home ownership. Yet far more influential than loan interest rates is one other prospect looming on the horizon, The Inheritance.

The New Inheritors

The baby-boom generation has always struggled with financial discipline. Some may still be waiting for Mom and Dad to bail them out. And it is true, parents of the baby-boom generation are now well into their 70s. While they are living longer, they will not live forever.

The result will be a social watershed: the biggest intergenerational transfer of wealth in U.S. history. People 60 and older have accumulated a collective net worth of as much as \$6.8 trillion, according to economist Robert Avery of

¹ Wade Lambert, "The New Faces of Personal Bankruptcy: Baby Boomers," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 7, 1993, B1.

Cornell University. As it cascades into the waiting laps of the kids, the American middle class will, for the first time, inherit significant assets en masse.¹

What will happen then? Some inheritances will be squandered, some saved, some invested. To date, boomers have been more noted for their profligacy than thrift. Certainly everyone, Uncle Sam included, will converge with hands out to share the wealth. While some baby boomers may retire early, others may be sadly disappointed. "Even the biggest bundles of parental loot can disappear like so many pinballs. How much money actually will make it into boomers' pockets? There's many a slip 'twixt the crypt and the hip."²

Home and Family

If you believe what Americans say about their priorities and values, then families are doing just fine. "In survey after survey, traditional relationships among parents, children, and siblings are identified as the most important aspect of life. Families are seen as more important than work, recreation, friendships, or status."³ For over half a century, researchers have been asking Americans about their families. Without exception, family takes priority over everything else. The verbal commitment is clear.

But if you watch what Americans do, traditional family relationships are in trouble. If current divorce rates continue, about two out of three marriages that begin this year will not survive as long as both spouses live. The proportion of American adults who are married is decreasing, the share of out-of-wedlock

¹ Alan Farnham, "The Windfall Awaiting the New Inheritors," *Fortune*, May 7, 1990, 72.

² *Ibid.*, 74.

³ Norval D. Glenn, "What Does Family Mean?" *American Demographics*, June 1992, 30.

births has soared, and most children under age 18 will spend part of their childhood living with only one parent.¹

While Americans continue to say they embrace “traditional family values,” actual family relationships have changed dramatically. Historic descriptions of family no longer apply.

To a baby boomer a “family” could mean a number of options. A family could be a divorced man and a divorced woman living together in a trial marriage. A family could be a remarriage on the part of both husband and wife, each bringing along a couple of children, thus making a blended family. A family could be two homosexuals living together, or a single parent with two children. A family could be a baby boomer with two of her children living with her older parents, or it could be a single man, who has never been married, living alone. The descriptions of a family are endless.²

To simplify, students of the baby-boom generation speak of the 3-D effect: delayed marriage, deferred child-bearing, and divorce.³ As individuals in this generation marry later, the number of singles in the twenty-five to forty-five age group increases. When couples do marry, they often postpone children or even decide to have none at all. As the birthrate drops, the average household in the United States has reached an all-time low of 2.62 people. This is about half of what it was a century ago.

Delayed Marriage

The trend to postpone the first marriage continues.

The estimated median age at first marriage in 1989 was 26.2 years for men and 23.8 years for women. The comparable figures in 1970 were 23.2 years and 20.8

¹ Ibid.

² Miller, 16.

³ Bast, 47.

years, respectively. Since 1970, the proportion of persons age 25 to 29 who have never married has tripled for women and more than doubled for men.¹

Gene Anderson, President of Adventist Singles Ministry in 1989, wrote, “The desire to have a good marriage has delayed first marriages and the divorced and widowed are waiting longer to remarry. Many, not wanting the same bad marriage as their parents, are delaying marriage and may choose to never marry.”²

Divorce and Singleness

While the divorce rate appears to have peaked, it has stabilized at a very high rate. Russell estimates that half of all baby boomers will divorce at least once, and despite increased longevity, only 13 percent of baby-boom couples will celebrate a fiftieth wedding anniversary.³

We live in a disposable society. Along with the disposable packaging, table service, and even cameras, we have somehow accepted the notion of disposable relationships. “Probably the most important recent change in attitudes about the family has been a decline in the ideal of marital permanence.”⁴ The Study of American Families, which tracked the same mothers and interviewed them four times over a twenty-three-year period, found a sharp increase in the number of women who said parents who do not get along should split up rather than stay together for the sake of the children. This percentage rose from 51 in 1962 to 82 in 1985.⁵

¹ [Jerry D. Jones], “U. S. Single Adult Population Nears 70 Million,” *Single Adult Ministries Journal*, January 1991, 3.

² Gene F. Anderson, “A New Look at What Family Means in the Church,” *Adventist Singles Ministries Bulletin*, October 1989, 3.

³ Russell, 18.

⁴ Glenn, 31.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

Some would argue that an increased acceptance of divorce may not imply a weakening of family values. A decreased willingness to tolerate unsatisfactory marriages could reflect the importance that people now place on good marriages. Research, however, tends to reflect a much more self-centered explanation of this trend.

Previous generations of Americans saw marriage as an institution to be joined and supported. But today, most people value marriage primarily for what they personally can gain from it, not for what it does for their children, extended family, or community. The goal of "having a happy marriage" currently ranks well above "being married to the same person for life" and even farther above simply "being married." Such ranking indicates that Americans value marriage primarily as a means to individual happiness.¹

A monogamous, life-long union is less likely now than it ever has been. The reduced social stigma of divorce has made that an increasingly considered option. Nearly one-half of all marriages now are remarriages for one or both partners.² Interest in careers is contributing to the devaluing or postponement of marriage. Society is not as suspicious of those who have never married by a certain age, leaving options available to invest in education or career. Baby-boom women are as educated as men and have almost as many career choices. "Experts speculate that as men and women approach economic equality, more and more will turn away from marriage."³

Of all families in America, 23 percent are single-parent families. If this trend continues, 60 percent of all children will live in a single-parent home for some period of their lives.⁴

¹ Ibid.

² *American Demographics*, October 1988, 25.

³ Anderson, 2.

⁴ *Single Adult Ministries Journal*, January 1989, 5.

The result of all this is a dramatic increase in the American singles population. In fact, singles are expected to outnumber marrieds before the year 2000.¹

More than one in three singles (37 percent) are baby boomers aged 25-44. Two-thirds (66 percent) of single baby boomers have never married, and 32 percent are divorced. This group is dominated by single parents and by people whose busy careers make a social life difficult.²

To place the magnitude of this trend in perspective, notice, "*Boomers have a 500% greater likelihood of being single than their elders.*"³

Deferred, Hyperactive Parenting

A growing population of families has chosen to delay parenting (first birth after age 30).

Census figures indicate that while the number of children per woman in the general population is decreasing (down from 3.1 children in 1967 to 2.6 in 1971 to 2.1 in 1983), there is a significant increase among women having their first child after age 30. . . . Further, demographers see delayed parenting as a continuing phenomenon, predicting an almost 50% increase in the number who delay parenting over the next few years.⁴

Contributing factors, while complex, revolve primarily around factors affecting women. They include increased professional opportunities for women, more efficient birth control methods, and broadened life options for women. While all

¹ Carolyn Koons and Michael J. Anthony, *Single Adult Passages: Uncharted Territories* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1991), quoted in [Jerry D. Jones], "U. S. Single Adult Population Nears 70 Million," *Single Adult Ministries Journal*, January 1991, 5.

² Paula Mergenhagen DeWitt, "All the Lonely People," *American Demographics*, April 1992, 44.

³ Engel and Jones, 14.

⁴ Mary Lou Fuller, "Delayed Parenting: Implications for Schools," *Childhood Education*, Winter 1989, 75.

linked to the Women's Movement, these factors allow women to defer having children until they have satisfied their educational and career goals.

The decision finally to have children represents a conscious, child-oriented choice to assume the responsibilities of child-rearing. And most families who delay parenting can allocate resources to enhance their children's lives (whether medical care, music, travel, or computers). Therein lies a problem.

Toddlers in other generations played with blocks and in sandboxes; they learned to read out of big red books propped up in front of first-grade classrooms. Today's well-heeled tykes use Suzuki for learning music and go to computer classes; they often read before they reach kindergarten and swim before they can walk. And if the imagination of their parents flags, magazines, books, and Madison Avenue quickly step in to reinforce the idea that every child needs a jump start in life.¹

Children are definite priorities, but parents are distracted with too little time and too many demands on their incomes.²

Children Lingering Longer

Move out, move back in. Start school, drop out. Get a job, quit the job. Go back to school, change majors. Graduate from school, look for work. Get married, get divorced. Move back in with mom or dad. Martha Riche, national editor of *American Demographics*, describes this process as "boomeranging."

Grown children seem to be having more and more difficulty entering the world of adulthood. Are they spoiled or rebellious? Or simply facing a more complicated and confusing set of choices?

¹ Donna Harrington-Lueker, "Is Life Too Fast for Baby Boomers' Kids?" *Education Digest*, October 1989, 30.

² Cheryl Russell, "On the Baby-boom Bandwagon," *American Demographics*, May 1991, 25-31.

The evidence abounds. People who marry in their early 20s are now as prone to divorce as those who marry in their teens. A shrinking proportion of young adults gets a college degree in the four years immediately after high school. Even high school dropouts are less likely to find a permanent job before their late 20s. And more young adults are living with their parents than at any time since the Depression.¹

Many factors are at work. Because young adults are delaying marriage, they are living with their parents longer. They are living with their parents because they cannot afford to support themselves. They cannot support themselves because most well-paying jobs now require at least a college degree. They have not completed college because high costs have forced periodic forays into low-paying jobs to subsidize their education.² Some have not decided on a career. To help them make that choice they often want to drop out of school, looking for work in fields of career interest. Completing their education is further delayed. They stay at home longer, and the cycle continues.

Making decisions about marriage, education, and work is hard enough in a world full of choice. Earlier generations of young adults could make decisions in all of these areas at once. Today, this tactic can be paralyzing and unwise, trapping people in unhappy situations. For young adults, boomeranging is a logical way to sample the options.³

Parent Care

While children are staying home longer, baby boomers also find themselves facing the issue of caring for their own parents, who are also living longer. In

¹ Martha Farnsworth Riche, "The Boomerang Age," *American Demographics*, May 1990, 25.

² The average college graduate now spends slightly more than five years earning a B.A. degree (*ibid.*, 30). While astronomical costs are a definite factor, increased degree requirements are another.

³ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

addition to all its other labels, the baby-boom generation can now be known as the “sandwich generation.” It is sandwiched between two other generations, their children and their parents, both grappling for time, attention, and money.

In the Western world, our parents’ generation is living longer and we adult children are having our own children later in life. All of a sudden we find ourselves faced with two generations competing for attention. Many of us in this sandwich generation feel cheated, deprived of self-fulfillment, robbed of the opportunity to indulge in pleasures that we have come to look upon as our rights.¹

Families of Choice

In the face of all of these challenges to the stability and future of the nuclear family, still the *ideal* of family is yet strong. Everyone needs an intimate social support network of one kind or another. Where the family no longer fills this need for whatever reason, other kinds of relationships are often invented.

Cheryl Merser observed, “For all the talk about our lonely, isolated society, what I see instead is that we’re sorting ourselves into groups, households, friendships, and kinship networks that connect us to our world.”²

Gerber, too, recognized this trend.

At some point, neighborly ties can shade into something deeper. When age differences between neighbors mimic the status of parent and child or grandmother and grandchild, there is the possibility of the relationship encompassing the roles of those family members--and the ties of affection and loyalty that go with them. Utah State University professor Gerald R. Adams, an authority on family and human development, has noticed the proliferation of honorary “aunts” and “uncles” as adopted family members. He says, “Their numbers are increasing as our society is increasingly mobile, as the number of extended families diminishes, as fewer people live near their blood relations, as

¹ Lissy Jarvik and Gary Small, *Parentcare* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), 4.

² Merser, 166.

more people remain single or childless and find that they want to re-create a family.”¹

Remote matchups seem to have followed a progressive path up the age ladder. Comfortable early on with pen pals, bringing together people of diverse backgrounds, experience, and geography, this generation moved in the eighties to personal ads by people seeking romantic partners. Consider the next stage in this progression, ads placed by old and young alike, describing themselves and what they would like in a friendship or family relationship.

Picture the possibilities in the newspapers in the year 2020: “69-year-old widow, healthy and active, seeks young couple with at least one child for mutual support, division of domestic labor, intergenerational companionship, and all the emotional goodies that used to come with family life. Willing to consider adopting couple and child as heirs.”²

Family as Haven

The role of the family has also shifted dramatically. At one time, the family structure was vital to survival (children provided the necessary workforce) and community stability. Now, that too has shifted.

To take an obvious example, there were no hospitals in colonial New England; it was the family’s job to tend to the sick. Nor were there insurance companies. Families did what could be done to mop up after a tragedy. Families took care of their own then, the way we now rely on nursing homes for the old, shelters for the homeless, schools for the young, and counseling for the troubled. Where early New Englanders would arrange barn raisings, now we’d apply to a bank for a mortgage. Where the colonists were wise to glorify the family as a necessary, productive, and self-sufficient institution, now there are outside institutions--everything from computer dating, the Yellow Pages, and summer camps to fire departments and the Supreme Court--to maintain social order and service the family’s and community’s needs. If the family once was the vital social and economic link *to* the outside world, today there’s no escaping the outside world’s

¹ Gerber et al., 42-43.

² Ibid., 44.

intrusions. Now it's the family's primary role to offer a stable emotional and domestic haven *from* the unstable world outside.¹

To some, the family is now an escape, their homes a castle. "Home has become a mother ship, a high-tech haven," observes Fred Elkind, a marketing forecaster with TrendSights.² Joan McCloskey, editor of *Better Homes and Gardens*, agrees. "It's our base for leisure, rest, and rejuvenation. It's the place where we hide out. We now focus our lives on our children, spouses, and close friends."³

Religion

In the early years of the baby boom, while still aglow with American victory and supremacy, the timing seemed perfect for religious growth and revival. Church attendance rose. Billboards proclaimed, "Families that pray together stay together." When asked today, 96 percent of boomers say they were raised in religious households.⁴ Describing that decade, Princeton sociologist Robert Wuthnow observed:

Faced with the turbulence of later years, writers have often looked back on the immediate postwar period as a moment of unrivaled optimism in American religion, a time of peace and prosperity when people moved to the suburbs, bought Chevrolets, went to bed early, and repopulated the churches. In contrast to the cynicism of the 1960s and the narcissism of the 1970s, it was apparently a

¹ Mercer, 188-189.

² June Fletcher, "Cocoons," *Builder*, July 1989, 102.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Wade Clark Roof, "The Baby Boom's Search for God," *American Demographics*, December 1992, 54.

time when traditional values reigned supreme and popular piety still found expression in the familiar religious establishments of the past.¹

The illusion did not last. Within ten years, assassinations, riots, campus demonstrations, LSD, free love, and the Vietnam war would lead to a new rallying cry in religion, "God is dead." The 1960s became a decade of sweeping upheaval in religious practices, attitudes, and values. "The 1960s marks a turning point in American religious life. Future historians will have to judge how great a turning point it was, but we are convinced that during these years patterns of religion began to change in significant ways,"² wrote sociologists Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney.

Instead of one in every two persons attending church faithfully as in the '50s, by the late '60s only one in three Americans in their 20s attended church regularly. Not all of these dropouts from organized religion abandoned spirituality. Many of them embraced communes, cults and the occult. They pursued alternative political, economic, family and sexual styles.³

As Roof and McKinney described it, "It was the age of Aquarius and a time for 'getting into' a range of experiential frames--from astrology to Zen."⁴ That legacy proved more enduring.

As mainline Protestant churches felt the impact of this exodus, speculation and alarm vied for an audience. Bringing together isolated research and investigation, the Hartford Seminary Foundation sponsored a collection of sociologists, denominational researchers, theologians, and historians to evaluate the disquieting trends. After two

¹ Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 35.

² Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, *American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 11.

³ Pippert, 369.

⁴ Roof and McKinney, 12.

years of working meetings, additional research, and a national symposium, the resulting work appeared: *Understanding Church Growth and Decline: 1950-1978*. The evidence was unequivocal, the organized church was in trouble. Yet they noted even then that this was a relatively short-term trend.¹ Curiously, they also observed that the birthrate in the United States has closely paralleled church participation rates, indicating a connection of underlying values.² Finally, they concluded that denominational membership trends had more to do with temporary, outside, societal factors than it did with individual denominational failure or success.³ Time would seem to vindicate their conclusions on all three accounts.

A 1985 Gallup Poll found little evidence to indicate a warming to religion. Respondents were asked to rate a list of ten social and political institutions without reference to their leaders. "Baby boomers emerged as the least trusting of all age groups toward eight: organized religion, the military, banks/banking, public schools, Congress, newspapers, big business, and organized labor."⁴

In 1986, *Rolling Stone* magazine commissioned a wide-ranging survey of Americans then age eighteen to forty-four. While 22 percent identified themselves as born-again Christians, 50 percent admitted "they were less involved in organized religion than they expected they would be when they were younger."⁵

¹ Dean R. Hoge and David A. Roozen, *Understanding Church Growth and Decline: 1950-1978* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1979), 319.

² *Ibid.*, 322.

³ *Ibid.*, 328-329.

⁴ Light, 160-161.

⁵ William Greider, "The Rolling Stone Survey," *Rolling Stone*, April 7, 1988, 34.

The religious quests of their younger days continued, but not necessarily within the church.

Those born between the years 1946 and 1964 are by no means a monolithic group. Yet the overall evidence suggests that though they are institutionally wary, they are spiritually sensitive and still searching--hungry, in fact, for a reawakening of the idealism of their youth.¹

The Return to Church

Prompted by an article in *The Washingtonian*, Rodney Clapp noted in 1987 that "peak numbers of baby boomers are now maturing, making their own baby boom, and--not so coincidentally--going back to church."²

Among the first to notice was a team of Hartford Seminary researchers, David Roozen, William McKinney, and Wayne Thompson. In 1986 they published *The "Big Chill" Generation Warms to Worship*. They found that the number of older baby boomers, those born between 1946 and 1958, who went to church regularly had risen from 33.5 percent in the early seventies to 42.8 percent in the early eighties. This represented an increase of more than 9 percent, recovering two-thirds of the drop-off in the 1960s and 1970s.³

Many studies confirm the view that baby boomers are more religious now than they were in the 1970s and 1980s. But not all boomers have embraced organized religion. In fact, only a minority have become loyal, committed worshipers. Another segment is still shopping around from one congregation to the next.

¹ Ibid.

² Rodney Clapp, "Bull Market for Religion," *Christianity Today*, April 3, 1987, 15.

³ David A. Roozen, William McKinney, and Wayne Thompson, *The "Big Chill" Generation Warms to Worship: Family Cycle and Political Orientation Effects on Increases in Worship Attendance from the 1970s to the 1980s among the Baby-boom generation* (Hartford, CT: Hartford Seminary, 1986).

And the largest segment of boomers is still exploring spiritual questions in its own highly individualistic way.¹

To determine if these widely held perceptions about a religious revival had any basis in fact, a study was conducted in 1989 and 1990 by sociologists Dean Hoge, Benton Johnson, and Donald Luidens.² Surveys were administered to 1,579 boomers, ages 33 to 42, who were confirmed in Presbyterian churches in Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Michigan, Oregon, and California in the 1960s. Follow-up interviews with 500 respondents asked more questions about moral attitudes, family life, religion, and spirituality.

This survey found that only one third of the boomers who rejected conventional religion when they came of age have returned to the fold. "But the real news is that most of them have not come back. They remain a 'lost generation' to churches, still searching for a meaningful spiritual life."³ Forty-eight percent of the sample were classified as "unchurched," meaning they were either unaffiliated or attended church fewer than six times a year. The *New York Times* subsequently proclaimed, "Protestant Baby Boomers Not Returning to Church."⁴

"This is not a study showing the rejection of religion or even of the major Christian creeds but a pulling away from the institutional church," the *Times* quoted Luidens.

Both inactive and active respondents were

¹ Roof, 50.

² "Future of Mainline Religion," *Society*, March/April 1992, 3; "Protestant Baby Boomers Not Returning to Church," *New York Times*, June 7, 1992, L28; "Defecting Baby Boomers," *Christian Century*, July 15-22, 1992, 673-674.

³ Roof, 54.

⁴ "Protestant Baby Boomers Not Returning to Church," L-28.

nearly unanimous on the desirability of religious instruction for their children. Counterculture activities as marijuana smoking, rock concert going, involvement in the civil rights, anti-war, or women's liberation movements had little correlation with whether or not they were churchgoers as adults.

Two factors did, however, strongly correlate with a drop-off in churchgoing: divorce and distance from the hometown.¹

In considering the same data, Roof singled out these additional risk factors:

Highly educated adults are particularly prone to drop out, and childless married boomers are the household type least likely to attend church. This is a switch from previous generations, when single or divorced adults were more likely to abandon religious institutions.²

George Barna, founder and president of Barna Research Group, has gained wide respect for his own research in religious trends affecting American culture. In the 1991 volume, *What Americans Believe*, he admits, "The Nineties have ushered in an era in which Americans are quite interested in religion--but not as enamored by the Christian faith as in days past. If there is a revival going on--and it seems a real stretch to make that argument--it must be viewed as a religious revival, not a Christian revival."³

Still, many are drawn to celebrate with new hope any signs of a generation's renewed interest in things spiritual.

Reasons to Return

One description of the return to church by Black, female baby boomers is offered by Renita Weems.

¹ "Future of Mainline Religion," *Society*, March/April 1992, 3.

² Roof, 55.

³ George Barna, *What Americans Believe* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1991), 24.

We were not intimidated by anything [in the 1960s]--neither dogma nor traditions nor gods. . . . We'd succeeded in almost everything we put our minds to--except in finding peace within. And that we thought we could buy from our therapist or chant our way into. . . . [Eventually,] I had to confess to myself that I craved something more. I needed to be connected to folks who knew there was something more to life than what they could see, feel, buy, or hoard. . . . Something was missing--inside.¹

George Johnston chronicled his generation's pilgrimage from political indignation, through drugs for some, and into health, "the last emergent post-Christian religion."² Mid-life crises prompted many boomers to shift values again, perhaps earlier than most. "As for the rest," he concludes, "the trance of merchandise is broken now and then, and they look around for something to believe in. For my generation, this urge toward transcendence has generally fastened onto four activities: sex, politics, health, and finally--when nothing else seemed to work--religious faith itself."³

Overwhelmingly, baby boomers who are taking a new look at religion are likely to be in their forties and to have school-age children.⁴

By nearly every measure, church attendance among married adults is tied lock, stock, and barrel to the presence of children in their lives. By this reckoning the return of churchgoing was as predictable as the tides: God didn't die in the early 1970s; the baby boomers simply hadn't had enough children.⁵

¹ Renita J. Weems, "Born Again," *Essence*, January 1988, 51.

² George Sim Johnston, "Break Glass in Case of Emergency," *Beyond the Boom: New Voices on American Life, Culture & Politics* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1990), 53.

³ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴ Roof, "Search for God," 55.

⁵ Clapp, 15.

Other factors beyond life stage are bringing some baby boomers back to church. *Christianity Today* identified several: depression (“the rate of depression among this generation is already ten times that of the previous one”), unrealized expectations, financial overextension, disenchantment, “post-crash conversions” (in the wake of the 1987 stock market crash), renewed social activism, a new openness to institutions, a long delayed but now recognized need for commitment, and a hunger for companionship.¹

Whatever the reasons for this resurgence in religious interest, its long-term significance is by no means clear. Baby boomers appear, for the time being, as the age group most likely to increase religious involvement. If these factors are reflecting just the needs and attitudes of a particular life stage, they may reveal no more about the boomers’ future than they do about their past. On the other hand, we may find within this discussion clues for a significant and sustained religious awakening.

Generational Summary

In any discussion of the baby-boom generation, it is easiest to focus on the unprecedented demographic realities. A historic perspective is incomplete without a review of the numbers, to be sure. But the most significant consideration in understanding this generation is more subjective by nature. Joseph Plummer, executive vice president and director of research for Young & Rubicam, New York, summarized this insight:

I think generations have usually been shaped into how they see the world by economic or geopolitical changes of great scale--world wars, revolutions, depressions, the disappearance of feudalism, the Renaissance, the Industrial

¹ Paula Rinehart, “The Pivotal Generation,” *Christianity Today*, October 6, 1989, 21-26.

Revolution. That didn't happen to this generation at all. The changes were all psychological and technological.

[Even with the Vietnam war] we kill nearly as many people on the highways every year as were killed in Vietnam. It was nothing like World War I or the Civil War--but it did have a powerful psychological effect.

Look at the psychological history of the Boom generation: they entered childhood when all the childhood diseases--polio, mumps, rubella, whooping cough and so on--had just been eliminated. They didn't even know about them. And their parents were different; Dr. Spock told them to be. He said indulge our children a little; don't spank them.

Now say you were born in 1953--that's pretty close to the mid-point of the Boom--and say you're now about 10 or 11. You're thinking, "Hey, this is terrific! I'm healthy, I'm important, I've got friends, America is the greatest country in the world, we can do anything we want." You've got a lot of heroes. Then, suddenly, something happens: the Russians are sending rocket ships up, and they've got missiles in Cuba, and the President just got killed--you know because you saw it on television--and now it's clear that something's very wrong. You thought you had it figured out, but maybe you don't.

Then you get to college--say 1968 or 1969--and the National Guard is coming on campus and killing people, and you find out that down South there are drinking fountains that read "White" and drinking fountains that read "Colored."

These are psychological experiences. And it just keeps happening: Watergate, the energy crisis, computers. . . . It's important to recognize that it's their values that are different--the demographics aren't that different, their buying behavior isn't that different--it's their values.¹

This generation is large, it is complex, and it is influential. The baby boom differs from other generations in its size, its self-perception (as unique, unlike all others), its attitudes (on politics, marriage, drugs, sex, religion, and money), its lifestyles (including social and gender roles), its highly opinionated outlook (whether informed and accurate or not), its tolerance for diversity, and certainly its values.

While it has made history at each life stage, the baby-boom generation will continue to influence American society in the years to come. The church is not exempt from that influence. Both the Christian church in general and the Seventh-day

¹ Joseph Plummer, *The Experts' Guide to the Baby Boomers* (New York: Time, 1985), 16-17, quoted in Engel and Jones, 12.

Adventist Church in particular are now realizing the impact of this generation. The factors just reviewed are crucial to an informed and intentional ministry to this population in the years to come.

CHAPTER 3

A THEORETICAL FOUNDATION FOR BABY-BOOMER MINISTRY

Current Ecclesiological Responses

The church has frequently maintained an uneasy alliance with its young adults. Established leadership is often uncomfortable with a group generally characterized as *immature, inexperienced, not altogether responsible, and alarmingly liberal*.

Baby boomers want to be heard, to participate in the decision-making process, to share leadership in the organization. That is unlikely to happen within an atmosphere of distrust. The transfer of power from one generation to the next is a delicate and difficult process at best. Trends of recent years have only exacerbated these tendencies.

So how should the church minister to this generation? More completely, how should a church *involve* baby boomers in ministry?

A widespread divergence of opinion can be found, both within and without the church, relative to these questions. Some have taken a pragmatic approach: if it works (“keeps them coming”), it should be used. Others have seen the baby-boom generation as a doctrinal mission field (“they don’t know what they believe”). Some emphasize acceptance, fellowship, and activity. Others maintain the need for reformation, discipleship, and a strong theological foundation. The response of the corporate church to the baby boom has taken several forms.

The Popularized Response

Cafeteria-Style Churches

Many religious leaders have realized that the best way to lure boomers back to church is to cater to their diverse lifestyles.

Brentwood Baptist Church in Houston maintains a traditional Sunday School and prayer cells but additionally offers a thriving singles ministry (more than half of the adult members are unmarried, separated, or divorced), prison ministry, AIDS ministry, food pantry, golf club, and various after-school programs for children and youth, including tutoring. "People are in the seeking mode. They are looking for places to get their needs met," says Pastor Joe Ratliff. "Why can't a church be seeker friendly?"¹

Jack Sims, marketing consultant and self-proclaimed baby-boom expert, founded a non-traditional ministry called Matthew's Party. His congregation meets in a restaurant, advertises itself on top-forty radio stations, and makes a point of catering to the interests and lifestyles of young Americans. In a radio commercial, Sims appeals to prospective visitors by claiming: "Matthew's Party is a church without organ music, offering plates, coats and ties, or narrow thinking." Avoiding weekend services to protect limited family time, the group meets Tuesday nights in a rented banquet room at an upscale Anaheim, California, restaurant. Over appetizers, instrumentalists play fusion jazz versions of contemporary Christian songs. A brief, informal Bible study led by Sims is followed by discussion and group prayer. "As Christians we have a spiritual message that's timeless, but we need new packaging,"

¹ Joe Ratliff, quoted in Richard N. Ostling, "The Church Search," *Time*, April 5, 1993, 47.

maintains Sims. "We're still presenting our message in monotone in an MTV world."¹

All Saints Episcopal Church, in downtown Pasadena, California, bills itself as a "peace and justice church." A rare commodity in mainline Protestantism, All Saints is a growing, baby-boomer congregation.

Ninety-eight percent of its 3,000 members attended college and more than half have schooling beyond a bachelor's degree. Less than a third were born Episcopalians, but that hardly matters. This is the 1990s, an age of mix 'em, match 'em, salad-bar spirituality--Quakerpalians, charismatic Catholics, New Age Jews--where brand loyalty is a doctrine of the past and the customer is king.

What counts on the Sabbath Day, if a church or synagogue is to attract its share of the baby-boom market, is not the name on the door but the programs inside.²

All Saints, appealing to the latent idealism and long dormant community awareness of the baby boom, offers at least twenty "ministries of compassion," from the AIDS Service Center and the Union Station Homeless Shelter to GALAS, a gay and lesbian fellowship.

Some successful boomer churches enshrine the secular self-help movements, in particular the twelve-step programs modeled after Alcoholics Anonymous. As Kenneth Woodward observed in *Newsweek*, "In many congregations, the path to God runs through the basement where the addicted gather for twelve-step programs for

¹ Jack Sims, quoted in Brian Bird, "Reaching Baby Boomers in Southern California," *Christianity Today*, August 7, 1987, 45.

² Kenneth L. Woodward, "A Time to Seek," *Newsweek*, December 17, 1990, 50.

recovering alcoholics, workaholics, chocoholics, the divorced, codependents and other victims of the fast-track 1990s.”¹

Unity, an eclectic, New-Age flavored ministry in Chicago, has grown from 10 members to more than 1,200 since its beginning in 1977. It offers a wide range of self-help groups, from Debtors Anonymous and Women Who Love Too Much, to Overeaters Anonymous and a “pet ministry” for adopting stray animals.²

The nine-year-old evangelical Newmarket Alliance Church near Toronto, Canada, features special lighting effects and rock music during its Sunday services. Weekly study groups combine Bible-based discussions of women’s issues with aerobics classes and craft demonstrations.³

The churches that are booming . . . do not resemble buttoned-down temples of WASP propriety. Ministers themselves talk of being “customer oriented” and attend seminars to become “church growth” experts. Jeans are as welcome as suits and ties; theater seats replace pews. Instead of using hymnbooks, congregations sing lively, if saccharine, choruses with words projected on a screen. Worship may include skits, audience participation or applause.⁴

Even older, more established mainline institutions are moving to provide a wider range of functions than in years past, including day care, sports, and non-religious educational facilities.

¹ Ibid., 51.

² Ostling, 47-48; Woodward, 56.

³ Diane Brady, “Saving the Boomers,” *Maclean's*, June 3, 1991, 50.

⁴ Ostling, 47.

The Mega-Churches

What works best, according to the CGM [Church Growth Movement], is a one-stop church complex that offers an array of affinity groups where individuals can satisfy their need for intimacy yet identify with a large, successful enterprise. The ideal advocated by the CGM is the megachurch, a total environment under a single sacred canopy.¹

That concept is not lost at Second Baptist Church in Houston, established for sixty-seven years, which now advertises itself as providing a “Fellowship of Excitement.” Since Pastor Edwin Young and his staff arrived in 1978, the church has experienced phenomenal growth. It now claims 17,000 members, more than half of whom are under the age of forty. Recently, a \$34 million worship center (seating 6,200), educational facility, and family life center were built, and \$17 million worth of additional land was purchased. The forty-two-acre campus now includes three gymnasiums, an eight-lane bowling alley, racquetball courts, pool hall, game room, weight room, aerobics room, 175-seat theater, and crafts center.² A ninety-seat restaurant, Second Helping, offers low-calorie dishes for “saints” and richer items for “sinners.”³ Churchgoers can join one of sixty-four softball teams, forty-eight basketball teams, or eighty-four teams in volleyball, soccer, and flag football, all run by the church.⁴ One can take part in a “Master’s Blast” workout in the glass-walled fitness center and later soak in one of two Jacuzzis. The church even stages an annual wrestling event in which staff members compete.

¹ Woodward, 53.

² Elmer L. Towns, *An Inside Look at 10 of Today's Most Innovative Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), 141.

³ Brady, 50.

⁴ Woodward, 53.

As overwhelming as this description may seem, Pastor Edwin Young attributes Second Baptist's growth to less sensational factors. He cites a constantly renewed vision for growth, an innovative Sunday School, a strong singles ministry, a clear family emphasis, aggressive lay leadership, and a heart for evangelism.

Perhaps the most widely known of the mega-churches targeting the baby-boom audience is Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, a suburb of Chicago. Started in 1975 with an unpaid staff, borrowed equipment, a rented theater, and a clear vision for reaching the unchurched in the Chicago area, it is now the second largest church in America,¹ with a weekly attendance of over 21,000.

Bill Hybels began by conducting a neighborhood survey to determine why people did not attend church. Four responses seemed to predominate: (1) churches were always asking for money, (2) sermons were boring and the services routine, (3) church was irrelevant to real life, and (4) pastors made them feel ignorant and guilty.

With that information, the church created an innovative weekend "seeker service" with drama, multi-media presentations, contemporary music, and relevant messages targeted to a 25- to 45-year-old "unchurched Harry or Mary"--the typical friend of a Willow Creek member. Convinced that seekers want to be left alone, Hybels is willing to promise that guests will not have to sing anything, sign anything, say anything, or give anything.² In a major break with traditional church practice, space and time are allowed for seekers to investigate Christianity, in complete anonymity if desired, and to make decisions at their own pace. Hybels calls Willow

¹ Towns, 44.

² Thomas A. Stewart, "Turning Around the Lord's Business," *Fortune*, September 25, 1989, 120.

Creek a “safe place to visit.” Then he adds, it is also a “safe place to hear a dangerous sermon!”¹

Today 15,000 attend the three weekend services in the \$15 million facility, located on 127 acres, that looks more like a civic center than a church. Another 6,000 worship together at the Wednesday and Thursday evening New Community services for believers. Attending one of the mid-week services constitutes the second step for a new believer, which is most often followed by involvement in a small Bible-study and prayer group, and finally a Network seminar, which meets once a week for a month. Members take a series of informal tests to determine their spiritual gifts and interests and, at the end, meet one-on-one with counselors who give them a list of the church’s ministries (there are ninety or more, ranging from ushers to a group of auto mechanics who fix cars free for the needy). This “job list” shows which ministry groups need people and with which gifts.

In addition to this clearly conceived strategy for reaching the unchurched, Hybels’s philosophy of ministry includes a balance between staffing for growth and a broad utilization of volunteers. Finally, Willow Creek has learned the value of the “point man concept.” “We learned never to start a ministry without a person who can ‘walk point’ and lead the new program effectively.”²

Strengths and Weaknesses

Responses to this paradigm shift toward “supply-side Christianity” has been swift, though mixed.

¹ Towns, 49.

² Ibid., 51.

“Patterning the church after a mega-supermarket can only lead us to failure,” warns Methodist D. Stephen Long, of Duke University’s Divinity School. “I’m not opposed to the churches using some marketing techniques, but I fear what is happening is that marketing techniques are beginning to use the church. We can’t target groups we want for the church simply by locating points of desire. Somewhere there’s got to be some judgment about whether these desires are appropriate.” He rejects the notion that the job of ministers is to keep people happy and the pews filled. “A pastor has to shake things up,” he says. “The point isn’t to accommodate self-centeredness but to attack it. If you don’t, then the Gospel becomes just one more commodity we seek to package.”¹

Speaking of the broader trend toward spiritual interest among baby boomers, Woodward recognized, “Unlike earlier religious revivals, the aim this time (aside from born-again traditionalists of all faiths) is support not salvation, help rather than holiness, a circle of spiritual equals rather than an authoritative church or guide.”²

Theologian David Wells, of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, was equally concerned. Even among conservatives, warned Wells, biblical truth was “being edged out by the small and tawdry interest of the self in itself.” Furthermore, the gospel was becoming “indistinguishable from any of a host of alternative self-help doctrines.”³

Norman DePuy, after reading Woodward’s *Newsweek* cover story, wrote:

These new generations are jumping the denominational boundaries of their parents and shopping for the church that will be the most relevant to their needs--the church that offers everything from bowling teams to support groups for those who have overdosed on support. The article made no direct mention of the chief

¹ Ostling, 48.

² Woodward, 56.

³ David Wells, quoted in Ostling, 48.

end of human beings: the worship of God and the enjoyment of God forever. Worship is not implied in the article's tone or thrust. Programs are everything.¹

Several paragraphs later he lamented, "Church-growth movements too often seem concerned with everything but theology; they seem preoccupied with demographics, sociology and external criteria."²

Woodward himself concluded with a reference to sociologist Wade Clark Roof. Two disturbing tendencies in modern churches are identified by Roof: "The first is that experts are hired to do the work because congregants have so little discretionary time. The second tendency is to create generational churches which ignore believers of other ages or classes whose needs and agendas do not match their own."³

After briefly considering the research presented by Roof and Barna, David Neff observed in *Christianity Today*, "Many of today's churches are not centers for classic Christian teaching about sin and salvation, but are 'full-service' social institutions, which program their public meetings for feel-good 'worship.'"⁴ Neff's suggestion: "Address theological issues head-on . . . and provide compelling answers to the question, 'What's so special about Christianity?'"⁵ Personal faith reinforced commitment, he observed. In fact, "the only solid predictor of adult church

¹ Norman R. De Puy, "Rooted Elsewhere," *Christian Century*, October 16, 1991, 931.

² *Ibid.*

³ Woodward, 56.

⁴ David Neff, "How to Fix Mainline Decline," *Christianity Today*, June 21, 1993, 17.

⁵ *Ibid.*

participation seemed to be 'orthodox Christian belief, and especially the teaching that a person can be saved only through Jesus Christ.'"¹

Commitment has never been popular or convenient, and certainly not now. The consumer ethos of this generation has been captured perfectly by this Unitarian advertising campaign: "Instead of me fitting a religion, I found a religion to fit me."²

"Servicing" the consumer generation is one thing. But can churches take the next step--can they *convert* the baby-boom generation? In reviewing his own church experience, Kenneth Sidey observed the tenuous connection of many baby boomers to the congregation. He estimated that an "average" congregant attended only about twice a month. "At the same time, he or she gives little and serves even less, yet expects a high level of service and support from the church."³

The challenge for churches like ours is to transform these occasional attenders who take a "consumer approach" to religion into "fully devoted followers of Christ," as Willow Creek states as its goal. Without a doubt, the church must continue to develop new approaches to ministry that will appeal to the 40 percent who are still looking for spiritual answers; the church must adapt to the cultures of new generations as well as geography. But we must also remember that part of our calling is to make disciples. Issues such as accountability, commitment, loyalty, and service belong alongside such other sermon and curricula topics as healthy living, interpersonal relationship, and self-esteem.

At the same time, Baby Boomers need to grow up. I speak as a thoroughgoing Boomer myself when I say that many of the character traits this generation is bringing into church--and that churches are accommodating for the sake of outreach--are in direct conflict with the kingdom of God.

The typical Boomer says, "I'll pick what meets my needs and stay with it only as long as it does so." Jesus says, "Take up your cross and follow me." The

¹ Ibid., citing the findings of Roof.

² Woodward, 56.

³ Kenneth H. Sidey, "Boomer Boom and Bust," *Christianity Today*, August 16, 1993, 14.

Boomer looks out for himself. Jesus teaches “love your neighbor as yourself.” The Boomer says there are no absolute truths, only personal choices. Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

We boomers are used to having things *our* way. But part of the process of growing up is learning that some things are more important than our expectations. No social institution has taught us that lesson yet. Perhaps none can, except for the kingdom of God. It is the one institution we cannot mold in our own image. If we ever hope to become spiritually mature, no matter what our age, we must be remade in its form.¹

Doug Humphrey made this distinction: “Most churches haven’t done a good job of responding to a culture that’s changed. We don’t need to change the message, but we can change the way we package it.”²

These are genuine and legitimate concerns. Some are quick to denigrate all change to the work of compromise and evil, unable or unwilling to distinguish between message and package. Others seem blind to any possible dangers. Yet most discern the fallacy of either extreme. Recognizing both potential and risk, Ostling summarized his report by saying:

There is genuine creativity in the reconfigured faiths being fostered by the new seekers. Much is gained when houses of worship address real needs of people rather than purveying old abstractions, expectations and mannerisms. Many of those who have rediscovered churchgoing may ultimately be shortchanged, however, if the focus of their faith seems subtly to shift from the glorification of God to the gratification of man.³

¹ Ibid., 14-15.

² Doug Humphrey, quoted in Ostling, 49.

³ Ostling, 49.

Published Responses

Hershey (1986)

Terry Hershey, due to both the content and timing of his book, has become widely recognized as the dean of young adult ministry. Building on the developmental theory approach of Daniel Levinson¹ and Gail Sheehy,² Hershey constructed a solid understanding of young adults, their unique culture and needs, and identified both barriers and keys to successful ministry with this population group.³

Insistent that copying the successful programs of others and “hoping for the best” were short-sighted and inadequate, Hershey carefully constructed a model for ministry that required more than a devotional life and sincere intentions. He stressed the importance of a strong theological foundation: one that breaks down stereotypes, sees people (not just programs), integrates young adults into the whole of church life, reflects the heart of the church, and equips for service. In the discussion of his “ministry planning arrow,” Hershey guided the reader through the crucial steps of developing strategy, building leaders, targeting needs, and creating an effective structure for ministry. Only then did he move to program principles and ideas.

Intended for the ministry professional, this book included suggestions for group study and a wealth of additional resources that firmly established it as the encyclopedia of viable young-adult ministry for churches both large and small.

¹ Daniel Levinson, *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1978).

² Gail Sheehy, *Passages* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974).

³ Terry Hershey, *Young Adult Ministry* (Loveland, CO: Group Books, 1986).

Bellah (1988)

Directed primarily *to* members of the target generation, Mike Bellah's *Baby Boom Believers*¹ helped disillusioned Christians deal with unmet expectations. Identifying the root of the problem as the affluence of the 1950s, the unreality of television, the false promises of advertising, and the yuppie mentality (to name only a few), Bellah turned to Scripture for its realistic view of the world and what it has to say to an overexpecting generation.

In his discussion of success redefined, Bellah maintained that success is found not in the result but in the process, not in how we start but in how we finish, not in ease but in endurance, not in who serves us but in whom we serve, not in what we accomplish individually but in what we accomplish as a group, not in how visible our success may be but in its authenticity. Gently challenging the assumptions and values of this generation, Bellah spoke effectively to his target: baby-boom believers who were beginning to question their own expectations. Only one chapter, his last, was devoted to "Baby Boomers in the Pew: How the Church Should Respond to Baby Boomers." While helpful, it was brief and generalized. Not intended as a handbook for ministry, Bellah's primary contribution was devotional.

Engel and Jones (1989)

One of the most readable and helpful books reviewed, *Baby Boomers & The Future of World Missions*, reached far beyond the stated purpose: how to nurture and channel the involvement of this generation for the cause of world evangelization. Authors James Engel, of Wheaton College Graduate School, and Jerry Jones, editor

¹ Mike Bellah, *Baby Boom Believers* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1988).

of *Single Adult Ministries Journal*, provided an understanding of the baby-boom generation and offered practical ways to enlist the Christian baby boomer as a financial contributor and volunteer.

The key to winning support, observed Jones and Engel, was building a partnership between the mission agency and the local church.

Boomers want a voice in missions strategy. Leaders in both the local church and the missions agency must come to grips with this point: It is necessary to allow interested boomers to have a functioning part in developing and implementing strategies. They want to “share in the action.”¹

The short-term missions program was the best way to build this partnership, the authors found. Meaningful exposure changed lives and values, built vision, and motivated continued involvement. Specific and concrete suggestions were offered to make the most of a short-term missions experience.

How can baby boomers become financial contributors? The authors recognized that boomers are locally oriented, for the most part, and are not strongly interested in global causes. This underscored the importance of hands-on mission involvement if perspectives and giving patterns were to change.

Specific donor appeals suggested included bringing vision down to earth, communicating from concrete to abstract (not the reverse), and showing clearly how resources were being used to meet needs. Avoid “guilt trips,” overclaims, and appeals to institutional loyalty. And finally, do not be hesitant to ask for support; be clear and specific.

¹Engel and Jones, 34.

McNeill and Paul (1989)

The United Methodist Church, through its General Board of Discipleship, was the next to respond. To equip local leaders and help local churches to “reach for the baby boomers,” a workshop by that name was developed. It was comprised of three basic resources: the presenters, a video, and a workbook.¹ This workbook included sections on boomer demographics, values, discipling, and visioning for the future.

One discussion focused on six strategies for reaching baby boomers. These included: (1) open the doors of the church a bit wider (exhibit tolerance and acceptance), (2) provide some basic handles (verbalize practical, basic concepts of Christianity), (3) provide stability and a sense of connectedness (become a surrogate family to mobile boomers), (4) explore the alternatives (be willing to consider new methods, packaging), (5) work short-term (avoid long-term commitments), and (6) provide a complete and high-quality package.²

***Christian Education Journal* (1990)**

Scripture Press devoted the autumn 1990 issue of *Christian Education Journal* to the relationship of the church to the baby-boom generation. Three articles, in particular, were noteworthy. First, Perry Downs explored the ministry needs of boomers.³ In a relativistic society, Truth is lost, and with it any possibility of

¹ Kirk McNeill and Robert Paul, *Reaching for the Baby Boomers* (Nashville, TN: General Board of Discipleship of the United Methodist Church, 1989).

² *Ibid.*, 30-33.

³ Perry G. Downs, “Baby Boomers’ Ministry Needs,” *Christian Education Journal*, Autumn 1990, 25-32.

authority or ethical stability. The psychological outcome of relativism is despair.

After all, if everything is relative, human worth and dignity are also relative.

The temptation in the church is to take the easy way out and minister to the obvious social needs of the Baby Boomers. This will result in a great deal of activity and the illusion of progress; and no doubt some good would result. But the deeper needs must be responded to on a theological level, because the fight is for the way the Baby Boomers think about reality. Their primary need, I believe, is to have their minds renewed (Rom. 12:2) so that they have reason to give themselves in grateful obedience to God. They need to be freed from the bondage of philosophical relativity, with its moral and ethical quicksand, and be set anew upon the solid ground of the reliability and knowability of God's Truth.¹

Downs then suggested three responses of ministry to the baby boom: helping this generation discover transcendence, significance, and community.

"Evangelism and Baby Boomers" was thoughtfully explored by Neal McBride.² His insights into mission, message, and method remain applicable and relevant (and appear in subsequent sections of this discussion).

Finally, Fred Wilson examined, in considerable detail, forms of volunteerism that would appeal to boomers.³ The basis of his report was a study of 300 baby boomers, asking them to identify what they believed about being called to involvement in ministry, why they were or might become involved, and how their current level of spiritual maturity was related to their current ministry involvement.

¹ Ibid., 28.

² Neal F. McBride, "Evangelism and Baby Boomers," *Christian Education Journal*, Autumn 1990, 41-49.

³ Fred R. Wilson, "Recruiting the Baby Boomer for Ministry," *Christian Education Journal*, Autumn 1990, 51-67.

To summarize his findings, Wilson maintained that boomers should be immediately invited to participate in service, both within and without the congregation. Care should be exercised to match personal interests and unique gifts, provide personal challenge, offer necessary training, and furnish opportunities to grow. Even uninvolved boomers could be challenged to use their idealism for meeting social and crisis needs in the community. Further, Wilson suggested, do not take a “no” to serve from a baby boomer as an unchangeable decision. Comfortable with transition and change, boomers are likely to rethink that level of involvement, perhaps sooner than later.

Gribbon (1990)

The Alban Institute maintained a long tradition of careful treatment of timely issues with the release of the publication, *Developing Faith in Young Adults*, by Robert Gribbon.¹ This volume incorporated revisions and additional research with material previously published in *The Problem of Faith-Development in Young Adults*, *When People Seek the Church*, and *Half the Congregation*.

Speaking from the perspective of developmental theory, Gribbon spoke of the many transitions of young adulthood. His description of faith development was based on Westerhoff,² who suggested that faith grew in four concentric circles like the rings of a tree. The four elements were called *experienced* faith, *affiliative* faith, *searching* faith, and *owned* faith. Supportive ministry that facilitated this process included

¹ Robert T. Gribbon, *Developing Faith in Young Adults* (New York: Alban Institute, 1990).

² John H. Westerhoff III, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976).

simply being there, affirming the inevitable questions along with the questioner, providing mentors and peers, and modeling authentic and vibrant belief.¹

In discussing why and when young adults seek the church, Gribbon built on the research of Savage² and others who had noticed a common spiritual journey. Major steps in this pilgrimage included: (1) church involvement as a child, (2) dropping out (often in the teenage years), (3) a period of non-involvement (lasting an average of eight years), (4) a return to church involvement (often in the mid-twenties), and (5) a possible period of very active involvement, especially when combined with joining a new congregation (sometimes followed by burnout).³ Transitions, both out of and back into the church, were often precipitated by a significant event, or cluster of events, most of which were beyond the control of the church. The transition to involvement could be significantly helped or hindered by witnesses and facilitating people, the atmosphere of the congregation, and certainly the clergy.

In every congregation, even those that tried to downplay the special status of the ordained minister, the pastor was a key figure for those entering congregational life. Liking the minister is frequently cited as a reason for affiliating with a congregation. From what people say, we gather that the pastor's preaching, interpersonal style, manner of conducting services, and manner of life are all evaluated, often unconsciously, by visitors.⁴

¹ Gribbon, 28.

² John S. Savage, *The Apathetic and Bored Church Member* (Pittsford, NY: LEAD Consultants, 1976).

³ Gribbon, 38.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

Barriers to involvement included the following: “strange” worship services, large financial problems in the church, the business or political nature of the congregation, a traditional style, a perceived resentment toward young adults, a lack of communication, difficulty being accepted as a woman, being asked to do too much, a clique of people running everything, prejudices of older members, and a staff emphasis on restraint.¹

Rich with specific ministry suggestions, Gribbon targeted the developmental needs of each young-adult cohort (the twenties, the thirties, singles, young marrieds, etc.). Common to all were these observations: ask young adults their advice; involve them in planning, leadership, and decision making; and incorporate them into the larger congregation. How should churches prepare for change and its resulting conflict?

All parish leaders have experienced resistance to innovation in the church. “We can’t do that because the older members would object” is often heard, but such resistance relates more to the loss of the familiar than to the presence of the new. There is less resistance if activities responsive to young adult needs are added, than if existing programs are changed. . . . Pastors who have successfully incorporated young adults into older congregations say that one key is to make sure older members feel supported and not neglected as change comes about.²

Concluding this very practical study, Gribbon observed:

Looking forward, a study of primarily younger baby boomers carried out by the Lutheran Church in America found, “Traditional church concerns for such things as denominational pedigree, rightness of doctrine, or constancy in the practice of piety do not seem to be what will capture the loyalty of baby boomers. . . . Baby boomers, as perhaps other age groups, seem to prefer a community of believers that helps them feel wanted and needed, offers a friendly

¹ Ibid., 49-50.

² Ibid., 87.

atmosphere, accentuates the positive, at times challenges them physically, spiritually, intellectually, and financially, and includes them in leadership.” Or, as Doug Walrath has put it “outsiders are looking for insiders who are able to help them find a meaningful faith.”¹

Murren (1990)

Pastor Doug Murren moved to Kirkland, Washington, in 1980 to plant a new congregation. What began with a few charter members grew to become the Eastside Foursquare Church with over 4,000 members, most of them baby boomers. His book, *The Baby Boomerang*,² was in part the story of that congregation. It also included what had been learned along the way. Intended for pastors and church leaders, the book spoke directly to issues important in that discussion.

Chapters dealt specifically with singles, the spectrum of addiction, individuality, sermon content and delivery, the quest for personal experience, women in leadership, new forms of music in worship, and fund raising (“Is Our Money All They Want?”). Carefully researched and documented, most chapters included a statement of the issue, a biblical discussion of principles involved, and practical application with suggestions for implementation.

In the single discussion of money and fund raising among boomers, the following suggestions appeared:

1. Put faces on needs.
2. Concentrate on meeting people’s needs.
3. Teach giving in smaller settings and classes.

¹ Ibid., 94.

² Doug Murren, *The Baby Boomerang* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990).

4. Prepare cassette tapes that explain the project in more detail than time in the worship service will allow.
5. Publish a yearly budget.
6. Model a giving lifestyle.
7. Consider delayed development (not always are facility additions the preferred solution).
8. Develop hands-on missions giving.
9. Practice clustering for burdens and passions (allowing individuals to create their own groups around shared interests).
10. Make giving fun.
11. Make accountability systems known.
12. Remember that vision precedes resources.
13. Cultivate baby-boomer hearts and time.
14. Show gratitude.
15. Address unmet financial expectations (offer personal financial seminars).
16. Share the spiritual nature of giving.¹

Other chapters were similarly instructive and practical. While not every suggestion was fully transferable, the discussion was nevertheless stimulating and insightful.

Bast (1991)

The Reformed Church in America released *The Missing Generation* in 1991. Written by Robert Bast, minister of evangelism and church development for the

¹ Ibid., 249-259.

denomination, it was a well documented and carefully prepared examination of the church's ministry with the baby boom.¹

Prerequisites to reaching the baby boom included recognizing the need to evangelize, being able to capture and communicate a vision, having a ministry plan, and making evangelization a priority.

Drawing heavily from Gribbon, Bast described congregations that appear inviting to non-members. Such churches have a warm and friendly climate, as evidenced by the number of lively conversations taking place following an event and in the way people in these groups open their circle to include others. Inviting churches also display an open environment.

Some of those who wish to enter will be different than those who are inside. They will dress differently. Some will be of different races and colors. They will live by different values, and have different life styles. Some will be living together outside of marriage. Some will be poor. They will not agree with all our doctrines and will not accept all the ways we do things. They may speak a different language, and challenge some of ours. They will ask questions, and want to know "why" about many things that are comfortable and familiar to us. Are the doors of our church going to stay open for them? Can we accept all this change and variety, and these people who are different than we are?²

Emphasizing the difference between "acceptance" and "approval," Bast maintained that it is possible to welcome and love people who do things we cannot condone. "Our task is to accept and care for people," he said. "It is God who creates change."³

¹ Robert L. Bast, *The Missing Generation* (New York: Reformed Church in America, 1991; Monrovia, CA: Church Growth, 1991).

² *Ibid.*, 107.

³ *Ibid.*

Other characteristics of inviting churches include a clear congregational identity, recognition of and involvement in community life, and care for church facilities. They must give attention to the central religious task of the church, be committed to excellence, be willing to challenge people, and be oriented to the baby-boom environment.

Effective ministry, for Bast, included mentors, small groups, and the provision for pastoral care. Yet boomers were also invited to participate in ministry through worship service involvement, leadership in nurture, fellowship, and mission.

Easum (1991)

William Easum, senior pastor of Colonial Hills United Methodist Church in San Antonio, Texas, authored *How to Reach Baby Boomers* in 1991. Easum spent little time describing the unique world of the baby boom. Instead, he moved directly to stating his premise:

In order to minister to this diverse, changing world of choices, mainstream Protestant churches need to make basic changes in leadership skills, the quality and scope of ministry, and the method of preaching and worship. Churches can accomplish these changes without abandoning any of the basic tenets of Christianity as defined by the various denominations. Nor do these changes dilute the basic substance of Christianity. But these changes do significantly alter the manner in which pastors and laity proclaim, package, market, and give leadership to the Good News.¹

Easum identified many trends and issues that become important in reaching baby boomers. These include a renewed commitment to the *basics* of Christian faith, teaching more Bible and less theory. *Time* is now as important as money, he

¹ William Easum, *How to Reach Baby Boomers* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 20-21.

maintained. Guard the time commitments of busy people by allowing *short-term* commitments. *Choices* and a wide range of options are appealing. Leadership must be *consultative*; planning must be done with boomers, not for them. Ministry can, at times, afford to be *experimental*; in a changing world, churches need to risk a lot of trial and error. *Flexibility, innovation, and practicality* are valued. A full disclosure of *information* is expected. Boomers may prefer to work in *teams* rather than individually.

Family issues are important; boomers enjoy staying home more. Quality *child care* is expected. Establishing lasting *relationships* is a major drive for boomers; they thrive on fellowship and social involvement.

Finally, opportunities need to be provided for personal involvement in *service* for others. “The more money a church invests in missions and the more hands-on opportunities for mission, the more likely it is that [boomers] are involved in the church.”¹

Easum was convinced that baby boomers can be moved from the pursuit of self-centered self-fulfillment to the biblical understanding of self-fulfillment through self-denial. He offered appropriate leadership styles, programs, and preaching that will appeal to baby boomers and meet their specific needs. Consistently, Easum carefully forced decisions about the tensions that exist between entertainment and proclamation, content and application, and mind and heart.

¹ Ibid., 44.

Anderson (1992)

Leith Anderson pastors the Wooddale Church near Minneapolis, Minnesota. Committed to devising an authentic Christian culture that appeals to baby boomers, Anderson has written scores of articles and four books, the most recent being *A Church for the 21st Century*.

After imaginatively exploring church life in the next century, Anderson pushed for a redefinition of success. It is a right result, he maintained. *How* we do something is important. *What* we do is more important. Success involves how we use our resources. It also includes standards.

In his chapter “What Is Contemporary?” Anderson broke many of the stereotypical definitions of “traditional” and “contemporary.” Specific issues as perceived by pre-boomers, baby boomers, and baby busters were helpfully compared. Then he asked:

What should be done with traditions? Some are just wrong--work on getting rid of them. Some may die from neglect--so don't make a big deal out of them; just starve them out of the church program. Some are wonderful--emphasize and elevate them. . . . In the whole process, aim at establishing (or reinforcing) a strong church tradition of ongoing purpose-driven reevaluation. This is a tradition that helps the church to renew itself.¹

In conclusion, Anderson reminded that church change is normal, that different circumstances require different responses, that core values must be emphasized during transition, and that God can be trusted for the outcome.

¹Leith Anderson, *A Church for the 21st Century* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1992), 161.

Miller (1992)

Baby Boomer Spirituality appeared in 1992, authored by Craig Miller, pastor of Santiago Hills Community Church in Orange, California. In painstaking detail, Miller chronicled ten essential values of the baby-boom generation. Grouping them into three parts, Miller identified brokenness, loneliness, rootlessness, and self-seeking with a quest for spiritual roots. Godliness, supernaturalism, and adventurousness share a common search for God. Finally, millennialism, globalism, and wholeness are directed toward the future.

While Miller's contribution is significant, the organization of the book challenges the reader. Many of the topical chapters share common origins in events, attitudes, and trends. Repetition and circular thought thus make movement and direction difficult to follow.

Bell (1993)

The most complete theological development of baby-boomer ministry came from James Bell. *Bridge Over Troubled Water*¹ does not hesitate to examine the deeper needs of boomers. Beneath the relativism, plurality, and hedonism of individuals seeking community, Bell perceived an anxiety that seeks to be comforted and a human longing for divine presence.

The church need not create bridges of its own design, argued Bell. The incarnation did not end at the cross, but continues to be the bridge between God and humans. Further, Christ becomes a human bridge which reaches into the lonely and anxious heart of every person and creates a connection above the cultural forms

¹ James Bell, *Bridge over Troubled Water: Ministry to Baby Boomers--A Generation Adrift* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993).

which often separate generations. Through the humanity of Christ as the incarnate reality of the transcendent God, Bell suggested that plurality and relativism are drawn toward a center which affirms uniqueness while healing brokenness.

Though it may be tempting for the church to respond to the social, cultural, and consumer-oriented needs of baby boomers by providing faith “a la carte,” Bell maintained that it is dangerous to the health of the church for its ministry to be based primarily on meeting their immediate pragmatic needs. Rather, he argued for a doxologically oriented community life as the bridge to reach this generation, presenting a solid basis for its effective evangelism, nurture, and spiritual formation.

Using the Acts 2:42-47 paradigm of the early church, Bell offered a model of ministry that includes biblically relevant teaching for today’s world, transcendent worship, and healing in the contemporary church.

Seventh-day Adventist Responses

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has not been immune to nationwide boomer trends. It, too, has been impacted dramatically by the growing distance and reduced involvement of this generation.

Although the subject of countless conversations and numerous presentations over the years, it was not until the 1980s that specific concerns relating to the baby-boom generation appeared in print.

Jerry Lee, a social scientist at La Sierra University, prepared a report for the Southern California Conference in 1980. After surveying 229 members and former members he concluded “the church is in danger of losing its younger members.”¹

¹ Lee, 127.

Gradually, that message has dawned bright and clear across the denominational landscape.

Church Publications

Leading the way in opening the understanding of the church to baby-boomer issues (among many others) has been Monte Sahlin. In writing about missing members in mid-'89, Sahlin corrected the myth of the traditional "backslider" as being uneducated, ungrounded, and a recent convert.

Surveys of recent years paint a portrait of a dropout who grew up in the Adventist faith--a younger adult who has gone through a divorce or has never married, has few friends in his or her local church, holds a demanding professional position or white-collar job, and does not find that the program of the local church meets his or her needs.¹

Speaking directly to the age of non-attenders, Sahlin cited Lee's California research. Nearly half of the dropouts were between twenty and thirty-five years of age. Singleness was also a factor, Sahlin continued, as evidenced by an earlier *Review* article.² A high percentage of single members never attended church, many opting for singles functions at churches of other denominations. Garland Day, former president of Adventist Singles Ministries, recognized, "Without exception, our surveys show that singles leave the church because of unfulfilled needs rather than differences over theological issues."³

¹ Sahlin, "Where Are Our Missing Members?" 18.

² Ardyce Sweem, "Why Singles Leave the Church," *Adventist Review*, April 28, 1983.

³ Garland Day, quoted in Sahlin, "Where Are Our Missing Members?" 19-20.

Also in 1989, a complete issue of the North American Division *Church Ministry Reports* was devoted to "The Impact of the Baby Boom on the Adventist Church in North America." Drawing from sources both external and internal to the church, Sahlin carefully described in this fifteen-page monograph both the origin and future of the baby boom, current levels of involvement in the church and personal faith practices, and how the church might win baby boomers. "Nurture ministries," such as family life seminars, small groups, and pastoral care, were identified as important.

The majority of Adventist baby boomers have positive attitudes about their pastor and local church, but there are twice as many as among their parent's generation who feel that their local church is divided and three times as many who evaluate their pastor as ineffective. Much of this negative feeling about pastors seems to revolve around a perception by baby boom Adventists that their pastoral care needs are not being met. Preaching also gets a much more enthusiastic response from the older members.¹

Particularly appealing to Adventist boomers is the holistic mission of the church, equally emphasizing medical, educational, social, and spiritual ministries. Pioneers in the Adventist Collegiate Taskforce and student-missionary programs of the late 1960s, they now are most supportive of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), the "Christian Lifestyle Magazine" telecast, and inner-city programs.

The majority of active members among baby boomers were born into the church, and this is the first generation of Seventh-day Adventists anywhere for which this is true. At the same time, Adventists from the baby-boom generation are less involved in the church than are their parents. Ten to twenty percent fewer report

¹ Monte Sahlin, "The Impact of the Baby Boom on the Adventist Church in North America," *Church Ministries Reports*, 1989, 2-3.

that they hold a church office, engage in some type of witnessing program, get involved in community service, or return Tithes.¹

Sahlin identified eight keys to building a ministry with baby boomers: (1) creativity, (2) quality, (3) sensitivity to social concern, (4) high touch opportunities, (5) help with relational skills, (6) application of faith to human needs, (7) person-to-person involvement, and (8) support-group options.

Sahlin insightfully concluded:

The problems we face in reclaiming the involvement of our own baby boomers are the same problems we face in winning baby boomers into the church. We must learn to separate the Third Angel's Message from the culture of previous generations and powerfully relate it to the deep spiritual needs of this generation. The future of the Adventist Church in North America is dependent upon its ability to make the adjustments in its structure and ministry that will bring a renewal of involvement among baby-boom members and inspire them to win their generation to Christ.²

Early in 1990, the substance of Sahlin's earlier *Review* article reappeared in *Ministry* under the title "Where Have All the Members Gone?"³

Meanwhile, covering one fringe of the baby-boom generation, Christopher Blake, then editor of *Insight*, authored a two-part series, "The Youth Challenge: Why Revival Isn't Enough."⁴ While directed at the needs of youth (assumed to be grades 9 through 12), Blake's observations applied to boomers with stunning accuracy. What was his suggested answer to inactivity? Involvement! Referring to preliminary

¹ Ibid., 3.

² Ibid., 4.

³ Sahlin, "Where Have All the Members Gone?" 4-6.

⁴ Christopher Blake, "The Youth Challenge: Why Revival Isn't Enough--Parts 1 and 2," *Adventist Review*, August 9, 1990, 18-20; August 16, 1990, 8-10.

data compiled by Roger Dudley in a study titled "Adventist Youth Survey 3," Blake noted the difference between activity and interest.

In summary, only *one* fourth of the respondents were enthusiastic members, and only about *one* third were reasonably active in church. That's what makes the next responses so astonishing.

Whatever their appearance, nearly *nine out of ten* youth want to be involved, to run plays, to get spiritual exercise. It's the church's job to help provide worthwhile channels for their involvement.¹

In part two of the same series, Blake offered these suggestions to create a more inclusive environment for youth: (1) livelier worship, (2) friendlier fellowship, and (3) riskier evangelism (community service and short-term mission projects were mentioned).²

Anticipating challenges to youth involvement, Blake suggested seven tips to overcoming obstacles: (1) focus on the positive, (2) do not push for perfect performances, (3) accept them as they are, (4) offer them a religion that makes sense, (5) give them ownership, (6) be committed to youth ministry, and (7) point them in the right direction.³

With few modifications, Blake's observations would have applied to younger baby boomers, at the very least. Equally significant, the editors valued that discussion enough to warrant a major, two-part series in the *Adventist Review* to present it. Denominational awareness and sensitivity are crucial factors, and early signs were already encouraging.

¹ Blake, "The Youth Challenge: Why Revival Isn't Enough--1," 19-20.

² Blake, "The Youth Challenge: Why Revival Isn't Enough--2," 9.

³ *Ibid.*, 10.

In October of 1990, Cyril Miller, president of the Southwestern Union of Seventh-day Adventists, wrote an open letter on the back cover of the *Southwestern Union Record*. In it he noticed the Seventh-day Adventist trend toward becoming a “senior citizens” club which seemed to exclude young adults.

I want each of you to do some reflective and creative thinking about finding solutions for this growing problem. We do not want our older members to step aside, but just make room for additional “young adult” leaders in their churches whose ages range from their late teens to 39 years.

Here are three suggestions which I hope can become effective in all of our Southwestern Union congregations.

- 1) Every department of each local congregation *regularly plan and support young adult ministries!*
- 2) Every congregation *organize a Young Adult Division* according to the New Church Ministries Model.
- 3) Every local church election *include at least “one third” young adults* in all offices. (Elders, deacons, deaconesses, constituency delegates, church and school boards, Church Ministries leaders, etc.)¹

In 1992, *Signs of the Times* published an interview with Hyveth Williams entitled “Boomers and Religion.”² Focusing on the trend to return to religion, Williams identified life-cycle issues (children and mid-life reassessment) as likely reasons. She then shared her own reasons for swapping a career in politics to one in religion, along with factors that kept her involved in the church.

“Baby Boomers and the Adventist Church” appeared in *Ministry* in 1992. Authored by Gary Russell, then pastoring in Dowagiac and Glenwood, Michigan, the article provided helpful background on the baby-boom generation, its history, and

¹ Cyril Miller, “President’s Bulletin Board,” *Southwestern Union Record*, October, 1990, 24.

² Hyveth Williams, “Boomers and Religion,” *Signs of the Times*, October 1992, 14-15.

collective attitudes. Church impact was summarized as follows: boomers have little or no institutional loyalty, are into excellence, and prefer churches that speak well of the God they serve. Boomers want pastors who can preach conviction without authoritarianism; boomers tend to be nontraditional, and they ask questions.¹

“Watch Out--The Boomers Are Coming!” directly addressed these issues again. This 1993 *Review* editorial by William Johnsson cited the presidential inauguration of Bill Clinton, when the baby-boom generation officially “took over America.” After providing a brief generational overview (mentioning the G.I. and silent generations, the boomers and the busters), Johnsson narrowed the discussion to Adventist boomers. Where are they?

Johnsson observed that Robert Folkenberg, General Conference president, was born in 1941. While technically from the silent generation, Folkenberg shares several baby-boomer traits, it was observed. Jim Cress was only forty-three when elected secretary of the General Conference Ministerial Association, and several conference presidents were also boomers, it was noted.

But there’s another side, and we must state it: most Adventist baby boomers haven’t earned the right to lead. Large numbers of them aren’t in church or supporting the church. Adventists of the GI and silent generations have kept--and largely still keep--the church afloat. . . .

When will Adventist boomers take their rightful place in this church? Boomers need the church, and the church needs them.²

Before concluding, Johnsson asked:

¹ Gary E. Russell, “Baby Boomers and the Adventist Church,” *Ministry*, July 1992, 14-16.

² William G. Johnsson, “Watch Out--The Boomers Are Coming!” *Adventist Review*, February 25, 1993, 4.

Are Adventists suspicious of our baby boomers? Are we ready to give them a chance to make changes--within the parameters of what has made us a distinct people?

When will older people let them try?

When will they earn the right to lead?¹

In planning a special baby boomer issue of the *Adventist Review* for June 10, 1993, Johnsson invited Paul Richardson of Baby Boomer Ministries Resource Center to gather responses to the February editorial. The resulting article, "Baby Boomers--Dreaming about Their Church," contained five reactions from differing perspectives.² Issues of leadership, legalism, eschatology, openness, and church membership were addressed.

In reply, fourteen letters were printed in five subsequent issues, few of them sympathetic to the issues raised. While dialog was initiated and differing opinions invited, the article and ensuing responses evidenced alarming polarization on the subject of baby boomers and their involvement in the church.

Also in the June 10 issue of the *Review* appeared a positive and upbeat report of one church's fruitful ministry with young adults in Gentry, Arkansas.³ Subsequent issues carried additional stories of related topics and themes relating to boomer concerns that further reinforced an openness toward discussion, engagement, and

¹ Ibid.

² Paul Richardson, "Baby Boomers--Dreaming about Their Church," *Adventist Review*, June 10, 1993, 8-10.

³ Russ Potter, "Joy in Gentry," *Adventist Review*, June 10, 1993, 19-20.

involvement.¹ Recognition needs to be given to both denominational organs, the *Adventist Review* and *Ministry*, for consistent and honest discussion of these issues.

All the while, other events were taking place within the Seventh-day Adventist Church relative to the baby-boom generation.

Events

With the election of Robert Folkenberg as General Conference President in 1990 came a new emphasis to involve youth and young adults at all levels of church government. In his first major message to the church, the Sabbath sermon at the General Conference in Indianapolis on July 14, 1990, he said:

This church began as a church of young people. If we don't continue to share this church with our young people, we may not have a church to give to them. Let us close the back door of the church by opening the doors of service and leadership to the young. If we give them a piece of the pie, they will stay for dinner.²

That concluding phrase quickly became identified with the new administration's fresh and inclusive approach toward youth and young adults.

Folkenberg established a President's Youth Cabinet that subsequently divided into academy, collegiate, and young-adult focus groups. Meeting for the first time in April of 1991, the young-adult cohort suggested that young-adult outreach leaders be

¹ Angela S. Holdsworth, "Confessions of a Young Adult," *Adventist Review*, August 5, 1993, 12-13; Kathryn M. Stiles, "The Best Vacation They Ever Had," *Adventist Review*, August 19, 1993, 13-15; Leo Schreven, "New Members and the Disappearing Act," *Adventist Review*, October 7, 1993, 12-13; Penny Estes Wheeler, "How to Become a Welcoming Church," *Adventist Review*, November 4, 1993, 14-15.

² Robert S. Folkenberg, "We Shall Behold Him," *Adventist Review*, July 19, 1990, 13.

appointed in each church to encourage boomers in ministry opportunities. They recognized a need for specific young-adult communication, asking that an effective organization and vehicle be developed. Responding to the need for ownership in the church, they affirmed the call to involve young adults in administrative committees at all levels of church governance. Training for involvement in church leadership was requested. Worship services were discussed, with specific suggestions offered. Reclaiming inactive members was identified as a priority. Finally, they observed that for the Cabinet to be effective, it needed to meet twice annually for two years.

Meeting again in September of 1992, the cabinet focused on increased young-adult involvement with Maranatha Volunteers International, ADRA, Campus Advent, Humanitis, and the development of a Mission Training Center.

In January of 1993, the North American Division Youth Evangelism Taskforce met in Denver, Colorado. Proposed action plans targeted developing seeker-sensitive churches; establishing an inclusive community (particularly for Adventists in non-Adventist schools and at-risk members on Adventist campuses); creating "Mission ABC" (America, Bermuda, Canada), a Youth Volunteer Service Corps; and renewing the call to expand youth-ministry leadership.

Adventist View premiered in 1992, a periodical originally targeted for college and graduate students on secular campuses. The masthead now more broadly claims, "A voice of Adventist young adults today." Response from young adults, parents, pastors, and leaders in Adventist and non-Adventist churches has been positive. The Fall 1993 cover story was entitled, "A Conversation With Young Adults: Why We

Left! Why I Came Back! Why I Stay!"¹ A sidebar by Roger Dudley, "Outta Here!" summarized responses from a survey of eighty-six young adults who reported that they were no longer Adventists. When asked why they dropped out, "Lack of fellowship in the church" was the number one response.

The most important factor involved poor human relationships. This shows up not only in lack of fellowship but in those who believe they were mistreated and in those who clashed with the pastor. A second problem area is standards. Those who didn't believe some of the teachings of the church when asked which ones did not list basic doctrines but areas like jewelry, diet, Sabbath observance, and movies.²

In the Pacific Union, TRAC'92 met in the Long Beach Hilton April 24-26, 1992, "To Renew Adventist Commitment" for baby boomers. Sparked by pastors Richard DuBose, Charles Liu, and Randy Skoretz, the idea was eventually adopted by Dan Savino and the Pacific Union Conference Church Ministries Director.

"Listening sessions throughout the Pacific Union revealed a need for the Union to do something specifically designed to increase the commitment to the church from Baby Boomers," stated Savino. "TRAC'92 is one of a number of approaches being made to meet this challenge."³

More than 200 attended the unique convention, reported the *Pacific Union Recorder*, 75 percent of them boomers. The other 25 percent were people wanting to learn how to minister to baby boomers and to be more receptive to their needs.

Also in the Pacific Union, the Church Resource began publication in 1993 of *PlusLine ACCESS*, a bi-monthly newsletter to link lay leaders, pastors, and

¹ Celeste Ryan, "A Conversation With Young Adults: Why We Left! Why I Came Back! Why I Stay!" *Adventist View*, Fall 1993, 6-7.

² Roger Dudley, "Outta Here!" *Adventist View*, Fall 1993, 6.

³ Tamara R. Michalenko, "TRAC'92: Meeting the Baby Boomer Challenge," *Pacific Union Recorder*, June 1, 1992, 6.

conference departmental directors. The September/October, 1993, issue carried three articles directed to ministry with young adults: "Reviving Young Adult Ministry," by John Cress; "Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges: How to Share God's Love with Baby Busters and Baby Boomers," by Paul Jensen; and a page of resources entitled, "Young Adult Ministry Tools."

Clearly, the church has begun to respond to the needs of this particular generation.

Valuegenesis

The landmark *Valuegenesis* study became one obvious evidence of a denominational openness to knowing the truth about its young people, their thinking, their values, and their spiritual maturity. An outgrowth of Project Affirmation, the study developed five different questionnaires for youth, parents, teachers, school principals, and pastors. Search Institute, which tabulated the results, received a total of 16,614 responses, 14,748 of which were considered usable. The magnitude of this project speaks well for the values and priorities of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

While focusing on youth in grades 6 through 12 and dealing heavily with issues of the Adventist school system, baby boomers identified with many of the problems uncovered, particularly as related to their own experience in Adventist schools and churches. The resulting volume, *Faith in the Balance*, concluded:

For Adventist education and for the entire value system of the new generation of Adventist youth, *Valuegenesis* has revealed a golden age, bright with promise. Our young people are intelligent, articulate, and visionary, and our schools have undergirded the Adventist subculture and served the church well. We have much to celebrate.

But *Valuegenesis* has also revealed great perplexities, concerns, and unique challenges. The research has indicated that even with these positive conclusions, the church could still be on the brink of losing a whole generation. The golden

age might easily turn into the darkest nightmare. Concerted and deliberate action is demanded. In the light of all this, What should we do now? Which way to the future?¹

A discussion of twenty-nine suggestions followed; several of which have direct bearing on ministry to baby boomers.

- We need to preach and teach that religion is basically a matter of relationships, with both God and fellow humans, rather than a system of beliefs or a code of behavior.
- We will need to give new emphasis to the practices that make for a rich devotional life.
- We will have to bend over backwards, in our homes, our congregations, and our schools, to get across a grace orientation to salvation.
- Through precept and example, we must do everything possible to clarify grace and to break the hold of legalism.
- We need to decide which behavioral standards are really essential to the heart of Adventism. Historically, we have taught and enforced certain behaviors. Which of these are timeless expressions of Christian commitment, and which are only the preservation of the cultural context in which the Adventist church was born?
- If we find that many of our traditional standards (especially on jewelry, dancing, music, and movies) are still important and desirable, we must develop new ways of engaging the youth in their support. We will have to deal with the sticky issue of consistency.
- When we treat as important what the youth have come to see as trivial, we erode respect for all church standards. When the church teaches what only a few members believe or practice, the whole system becomes a joke. We need to find fresh ways to lead the youth into exploring the principles behind these standards.
- We need to create a warm, accepting, nonjudgmental climate in each congregation.
- We need to help create a thinking climate in our families, churches, and schools.

¹ Roger L. Dudley, *Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance* (Riverside, CA: La Sierra University Press, 1992), 269-270.

- We must be intentional about involving them (the youth) in the lives of our congregations.
- We need to find new and creative ways of teaching stewardship.¹

Beyond the initial findings of the project, *Valuegenesis* has come to represent a new denominational openness toward difficult issues, particularly those revolving around younger generations. The funding and visibility afforded this project have become symbolic of a church honestly dealing with youth, change, and the future.

ABBA and the Baby Boomer Ministries Resource Center

Paul Richardson, an Adventist boomer in secular business, sensitive to the issues facing his cohorts and the church, founded Adventist Baby Boomer Awareness, Inc., in 1988. Concurrently he began publication of *Adventist Baby Boomer Awareness Newsletter (ABBA)*, the introductory issue appearing in October of that year. Without being an official publication of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, *ABBA Newsletter* intended to “network Adventist Baby Boomers . . . together for solidarity; to exchange positive and practical ideas, express opinions, and encourage participation; with a single purpose to bring glory to our ‘ABBA’ God.”²

We’re not an organization. We’re not a lobbying group. We don’t banner any particular cause.

If there’s anything we hold in common, it’s our belief in the diversity of ideas, information, and association.

We have a common heritage, but what we’ve done with it is as varied as each person. In ABBA we want to compare notes on what we’ve done to make our values meaningful personally and collectively.³

¹ Ibid., 270-287.

² *ABBA Newsletter*, January 1989, 2, masthead.

³ Paul Richardson, “Editorial,” *ABBA Newsletter*, January 1989, 8.

Early issues included articles on “Programming Preferences,” “Is Adventism Really Mine?” “Issues Adventist Baby Boomers Are Struggling With” (January, 1989); “An Adventist Children’s Agenda,” “Transferring Values to Your Children,” “Honest Evaluations from Adventist Baby Boomers” (March, 1989); “A New Way to Sacrifice,” “There Is Life after Being a Working Mother” (April, 1989); “Obedience: Commanded or Won,” “Life as a Professional Woman,” “Christians Making a Difference in the Media” (May, 1989); “Back on Track,” “Fragile Freedom” (June, 1989); and “Pro-Choice Not Opposite of Pro-Life” (October, 1989). Letters were lively, varied, and always encouraged.

The Oregon Conference constituency meeting in May, 1989, included a two-hour “break-out” group to discuss the question, “What do we need to do to appeal to America’s young thinkers and excite our own about their church?” A handout that sparked discussion represented a collection of ideas expressed by readers of *ABBA Newsletter*.

For BB’s Attending Church

1. Include many more of us in the decision bodies of the church. From local congregations to the General Conference, invite us “young thinkers” to change the status quo. Purposefully select those who “rock the boat” for they often hold the keys that unlock this generation’s doors.
2. Offer our local churches a long arm of latitude. Especially in a metropolitan area, we need to target our churches to specific audiences and do what is best for them. Urge the pastors to excellence in their spiritual education/ministry and encourage them by your example to decentralize the management and programming leadership.
3. Give our young children an education of excellence. Open Adventist schools to non-members and don’t isolate our kids so that they grow up with a warped sense of the world. Actively seek creative funding to keep costs low and introduce our children to a variety of social action options.
4. Understand that we don’t have the money reserves that our parents enjoyed. After we pay taxes, tithe, a house payment and our children’s education bills we have very little discretionary dollars left. Also realize that the highly

publicized Yuppies are only 5% of us--the rest are "2.7 working adult homes" that are barely living a modest middle-class lifestyle.

For BB's Not Attending Church

1. Identify three basic points of agreement that the church has in common with our generation and communicate them by every means possible (i.e. newsletter, video, conferences, focus groups, etc.). Share information, encourage interaction, co-create action steps as equals and see what results.
2. Let "long distance" communication be enough for now. Refrain from "offering condescending help" or "urging us to return to church" until you really understand our needs and want to meet as equals. Again, make full use of the avenues named in point one to initiate/continue contact.
3. Raise the church management's credibility. Until professionals (trained specifically for the tasks at hand) are employed at all levels of the church, you can count on our generation not offering the church much credence, time, energy, or money.
4. Offer us unconditional love which refrains from commentary on the choices we make--especially our action choices. Jewelry, divorces, sexual preferences, business commitments, abortions, sports, parenting styles, etc. seem to be hot spots that if talked about only bring resentment and alienation. Let's look beyond the "outward appearance" and into the heart, for these are matters of preference and need to remain as such.¹

In an effort to more effectively facilitate the ministry of local churches in their ministry to the baby-boomer generation, Richardson formed the Baby Boomer Ministries Resource Center in 1992. The purpose of the Resource Center was "to provide the most effective, accurate, and up-to-date information, materials and services to Christian leaders who minister to the Baby-boom generation."²

In announcing the Resource Center, *The Southwestern Union Record* quoted Richardson saying,

¹ "A Place to Start: Adventist BB Agenda for the 1990's," *ABBA Newsletter*, July 1989, 4.

² *How Your Church Can Reach & Hold Baby Boomers* (Portland, OR: Baby Boomer Ministries Resource Center, 1992), 2.

Our center is configured similarly to a computer software company. We don't own any hardware (buildings, presses, schools, etc.). We simply provide training and consulting on materials we produce and promote, as well as performing primary and secondary research for organizations and individuals.¹

Still privately funded and managed, the Resource Center was recognized by the North American Division, with whom it often worked on specific projects.

One of the most widely publicized of those projects was a series of six 1-day leadership seminars entitled, "How Your Church Can Reach and Hold Baby Boomers," intended for pastors, staff, and church board members. Host churches in the 1992 series included Tierrasanta Adventist Church, San Diego, CA; Valley Creek Christian Center, San Ramon, CA; Discovery Christian Fellowship, Redmond, WA, with Kirkland Adventist Church, Kirkland, WA; New Hope Adventist Church, Burtonsville, MD; Forest Lake Adventist Church, Apopka, FL; and Elmhurst Adventist Church, Elmhurst, IL. Presenters included Monte Sahlin, Paul Richardson, Warren "Butch" Nelson, Craig Dossman, Margo Pitrone, and Gary Russell.

A quality collection of background material, current research, articles, insight and analysis, the seminars provided a gathering place for those ministering to the baby-boom generation.

Giraffe Society

In 1992, Randal Wisbey launched the Giraffe Society, an association of individuals, organizations, and churches willing to "stick their necks out" for youth and young adults.

¹ Paul Richardson, quoted in "New Resource Center to Reach BB Generation," *Southwestern Union Record*, October 1992, 30.

The Giraffe Society is a grass-roots service network of Seventh-day Adventists from all walks of life: parents, pastors, educators, administrators, laypeople, church officers, and youth and young adults themselves.

Recognizing that surveys such as Valuegenesis place our youth and young adults on the endangered-species list, we commit ourselves to enhancing the lives of Seventh-day Adventist youth and young adults through our efforts, our communication, our money, and our presence. To encourage and support our brothers and sisters is our sole aim.¹

Growing from a recommendation made at the General Conference and North American Division's President's Youth Cabinet meeting of 1990, it is based at the Youth Resource Center at Andrews University. Other affiliations are far-reaching: the North American Division Department of Church Ministries, the Hancock Center for Youth Ministry at La Sierra University, Piece of the Pie Ministries, and the Seventh-day Adventist Youth Ministry Professionals organization are all represented.²

The quarterly publication, *Giraffe News*, identifies resources, program ideas, and ministry opportunities that might appeal to youth and young adults. Stories of individuals making a difference in churches large and small highlight each issue. Through a new identity and positive association, efforts to include and involve both youth and young adults are in this way finding voice.

Progress, Not Victory

The activity just enumerated, while not exhaustive, is representative of an attitude within the denomination of responsiveness to its younger generations. As

¹ "The Giraffe Mission," *Giraffe News*, Summer 1992, 1.

² Randal Wisbey, "The Giraffe Society," *Adventist Review*, December 3, 1992, 21.

ideas are exchanged, needs expressed, issues explored, and questions considered, an atmosphere of acceptance and inclusion is already evident.

This does not mean, however, that all has been done that must be done; that all needs are being met; that all issues have been adequately explored; that all questions have been answered.

As a denomination, there is no doubt that we are committed to the baby-boom generation and a ministry that will actively involve them. Agreeing on a destination is one thing. It is quite another to find consensus on the best road to take us there.

It is now time to clarify both the destination and the route from a scriptural perspective.

Theological Foundation for Baby-Boomer Ministry

Does the Bible have anything to say about ministry to the baby-boom generation? How could it, having been written 2000 years before the generation was born? More accurately, what scriptural principles must be brought to bear on this discussion? For the Christian, and certainly for the Seventh-day Adventist, *theology must inform practice*.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive and detailed theology of baby boomer values or ministry. That discussion would be profitable, to be certain, yet beyond the constraints of this study. What follows is only a reminder of scriptural principles that contain clear implications for evaluation and implementation of ministry involving the baby-boom generation.

God Is Sovereign

Knowing the end from the beginning, God is never surprised. He works in the church as well as in the believer “to will and to act according to his good purpose”

(Phil 2:13).¹ The good that he purposes “does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy” (Rom 9:16). The challenge of a largely unchurched and critical generation is not outside the power and purpose of God. “Belief in the sovereignty of God is not fatalism because God is good and just, and he orchestrates every detail of history to fulfill his ultimate purposes. We participate in god’s sovereign processes and results, but we do not determine them.”²

No matter how circumstances may appear, the Christian church is assured of God’s involvement in history and of his ultimate victory. Standing at this great transition point for both world and church history, God is able to bring all changes together for good (Rom 8:28). Dynamics of the personal spiritual life hold true in the larger corporate experience. The church is *not* thus responsible for the outcome; but it *is* responsible to God for obedience and faithfulness. Ultimate success is in his hands. This applies to the challenge of the baby boom as it does to every other area.

Christ Heads the Church

There is only one head of the body, and there is only one Head of the church, Jesus Christ (Eph 4:15-16; 5:23-24). That church was founded by Jesus, is owned by Jesus, and is run by Jesus. It is a theocracy. His followers are stewards who have been entrusted with the care of that which belongs to another. Not that Christ has abandoned his believers to care for that which is no longer important to him. He is active as ever, controlling, influencing, empowering, discipling, guiding, and

¹ All Scripture citations are taken from the New International Version.

² Leith Anderson, 238.

rewarding.¹ The church will not fade into oblivion as the twenty-first century dawns. As secular as the culture may appear, regardless of the enormity of the task, Christ is still involved in his church.

“One part of us needs to become more serious about the church than we are, recognizing that our accountability is to the Son of God himself. Another part of us needs to lighten up, recognizing that the church is his responsibility and not ours.”²

The Great Commission Continues

Matt 28:19-20 still motivates faithful believers. One simple imperative is embodied in the original statement: “Make disciples!” While the organized church is a significant means for fulfilling that command, the commission did not instruct, “Build the church!” Disciples are characterized by obedience to Christ. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19-20; cf. Mark 16:15).

First, the vision for evangelism is found in the word “go.” Both attitudes and actions are involved. Christ assumes that one who has embraced the Good News will want (attitude) to share it (action) with others. Practically, evangelism must be a dynamic activity in both individual and corporate life. We must care about the lost; in this case a generational mission field.

Second, evangelism is not limited to one group or type of people. Christians are instructed to “make disciples of *all* nations.” Men and women everywhere,

¹ Matt 16:18-19; 23:8, 10; John 15:1-8, Eph 1:10, 22, 23; 2:20-22; 5:30; Col 1:18; 2:19; 3:11.

² Leith Anderson, 239.

without distinction, are to be discipled. This must include baby boomers. It is certainly not limited to them.

Third, the instruction to “make disciples” is the larger, encompassing task. Evangelism begins the process of becoming a “learner,” but cannot be isolated from follow-up, nurture, and growth. It represents the initiation of a continuing process.

And fourth, education is a core process in both evangelism and discipleship. “Teaching them” is essential to our mandate. The need for biblical information is foundational. Change of lifestyle and behavior is expected, and will be effected only when information is communicated in the context of a caring relationship.

The power to accomplish this task is clarified in the restatement of the Great Commission found in Acts 1:8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Certainly Holy Spirit power is the only means by which this overwhelming task will be accomplished. Notice, while again there is no mention of the church, nevertheless, planting churches became a priority of the apostles. The church, throughout the book of Acts, was used by God to make, nurture, and equip disciples.

Should the church target a specific group, namely baby boomers, for special evangelistic emphasis and effort? The debate of the early seventies spawned by Donald McGavran’s principle of homogeneous units¹ could be revived. Yet the question demands an answer. Neal McBride replies:

My response is a firm, unwavering *yes and no*. Permit me to explain my conspicuous inconsistency.

¹ Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984).

If the question is, "Are you advocating evangelism and starting churches among Baby Boomers which by design exclude everyone outside of this target group?" then my answer is no. The evangelism prerequisites . . . prevent me from answering yes. If on the other hand the question is, "Is it acceptable to target (focus on) communities in which Boomers live for evangelism and church planting?" then my answer is yes. In these cases, Baby Boomers are a legitimate starting point, a "Jerusalem" (Luke 24:45; Acts 1:8). To put it simply, it's legitimate to target Baby Boomers for evangelism and church planting if in doing so everyone else who is encountered is given the opportunity to hear about Christ, accept Him as Savior, and join the fellowship of disciples. Focusing on Baby Boomers is no different from those commonly accepted missionary endeavors which focus on a particular nation or people.¹

An *exclusive* ministry is inappropriate; an *inclusive* ministry is encouraged.

Certainly the unchurched among the baby-boom generation qualify among the lost of Luke 15 as much as any other.

Church Change Is Normal

Much has changed since A.D. 33, but the commission continues. Since the job to be done is disciple-making, the primary means is the church, which can be compared to a health clinic where the goal is healthy patients. The means is medicine and surgery, but the clinic must never think that it exists for either medicine or surgery. It exists for health. Although medicine and surgical procedures and forms change, the goal of health stays the same. So it is that the church changes in order to fulfill the Great Commission of making disciples (see 1 Cor. 9:19-23).²

From the outset, change was a part of the early church. Early leaders faded into obscurity; we hear nothing of Andrew, Thomas, Bartholomew, or Matthew after Acts 1:13. Expected leaders failed (Judas). Leaders carefully chosen are never mentioned again (Matthias, Acts 1:15-26). Former enemies became church leaders (Paul). At Pentecost, Jews became Christians by the thousands (Acts 2). When

¹ McBride, 46.

² Ibid., 240.

conflict over finances surfaced, the church adopted a new form of organization to better monitor money (Acts 6). Persecution accomplished what the Great Commission alone failed to do; the church was scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (Acts 8). Peter was reluctant to change the rules and traditions for appropriate behavior until God forced him to in Acts 10. The whole church negotiated uncomfortable change at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15.

Ever since, the church has adapted to different lands, traditions, languages, schedules, and people. Change in the church is normal. If anything, the unchanging church is the anomaly.¹

The Message

The attitudes and lifestyles of the baby-boom generation include disillusionment, compensatory consumption, distrust, and alienation. Is that generation ready to hear another message, a message of hope and purpose? Definitely yes!

Regardless of society's changes, the message of evangelism is the same. The Good News remains attractive and relevant to the real spiritual needs of all people--baby boomers included. The simple facts of this timeless message remain:

1. Eternal life is God's free gift; one cannot earn or deserve it (Rom 6:23; Eph 2:8, 9).
2. As a member of humanity, each one is sinful and separated from God (Rom 3:32; John 7:19; Matt 4:48; Gal 3:10).

¹ Ibid., 240-241.

3. God loves the sinner but must deal with sin, since he is at once merciful and just (John 10:10b; Jer 31:3; Exod 34:7b; Ezek 18:4).

4. As a demonstration of his grace and love, God sent Jesus Christ to live a perfect life, die in the sinner's place, and be raised from the dead to pay the penalty for committed sin (John 1:1-3, 14; 10:10; 1 Pet 2:22; 2 Cor 5:21; Isa 53:6; John 13:30a).

5. The penitent sinner must confess sin and transfer trust to Christ alone (Prov 18:13; John 3:16; 14:6).

6. God promises the forgiveness of sin and the abiding gift of the Holy Spirit (1 John 1:9; John 6:47; 14:16, 26; 16:13; Rom 8:16; 14:17).

7. Jesus will return again, gathering the redeemed to their eternal reward, and creating a new earth to be their home (John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11; Matt 24; 1 Thess 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15:51-54; Rev 19:11-21, 21:1-5).

But while the message is the same, the logic and words we use to share the message must change. Abstract, irrelevant theological jargon too frequently permeates our presentations of the Gospel. For example, valid theological terms such as "reconciliation" and "regeneration" speak to the informed Christian, but sound cold and strange to someone who isn't a believer. . . . Therefore, we are wise to follow the example set by many missionaries in their efforts to reach other cultures for Christ. To communicate the message effectively, we must master the culture's language and use illustrations they commonly understand. The aim isn't to change the message to fit Boomers' mind-sets, but to explain the Good News in such a fashion that the Holy Spirit changes their minds-sets and they "accept Christ as their Savior and Lord" (our way of saying it . . . how would you say the same thing to a skeptical Baby Boomer?).¹

¹ McBride, 45-46.

Simply stated, “a timeless message, communicated in relevant language, disseminated with contemporary methods.”¹

Toward a Theology of Pleasure

Practically speaking, church leaders still feel pulled in two different directions. First, keep the lifestyle standard high. Here the church and its doctrines are like good medicine: Just what is needed but not too appealing.

Or, alternatively, meet this generation where it is. This might demand a softening on lifestyle issues. Shift “action choices” to “matters of preference.” Recognize the baby boom’s consumer orientation, provide a wealth of programs saturated with action and entertainment. With this approach, the response might be significantly greater than the first, but nagging questions remain. What kind of church would be built? How long would it remain “Seventh-day Adventist?” Would it only cater to the egocentricism of its members?

Obviously neither approach is acceptable.

Granted, there is a legitimate and even heightened role in today’s society for pleasure.

Modern life strains us. We get stimulated till we are dizzy. Relationships are brittle; marriages break; families fly apart; business is a cut-throat rat-race, and those not at the top feel themselves mere cogs in another’s machine. Automation and computer technology have made life faster and tenser, since we no longer have to do the time-consuming routine jobs over which our grandparents used to relax their minds. We have to run more quickly than any generation before us simply to stay where we are. No wonder, then, that when modern Western man turns to religion (if he does--most don’t), what he wants is total tickling

¹ Ibid., 46.

relaxation, the sense of being at once soothed, supported and effortlessly invigorated: in short, hot tub religion.¹

Certainly here is where theology must inform the practice of ministry. While many issues demand attention, thoughtful Adventists sooner or later struggle to develop a theology of pleasure.

Almost Right

Certainly, at first glance, a rhythm of life that includes relaxation is right. The fourth commandment (among other foundational passages) specifically mentions that cycle. Alternating hard labor with legitimate recreation is logical, motivating, and seems indeed right. Christ himself so often went to banquets that he was labeled a glutton and drunkard.

Granted, when pleasure is the goal, it is rarely achieved. The paradoxical truth is that to seek pleasure, comfort, and happiness is the surest way to miss them all. These become heart-realities only as by-products of another process; that of focusing on something else (or better yet *someone* else).

Yet spiritually it is true—real enjoyment and real godliness belong together. Should we not emphasize the Christian’s heritage of enjoyment? Distance and ignorance make us fear a God characterized as a hard taskmaster who begrudges every pleasure and requires doing things that no one enjoys. A cosmic kill-joy, God is often maligned as some heavenly scrooge. Should a Christian feel bad when feeling good?

Scripture would indicate the opposite to be true. “You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand” (Ps 16:11). “You give them

¹J. I. Packer, *Hot Tub Religion* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1988), 69.

drink from your river of delights” (Ps 36:8). “God, [you are] my joy and my delight” (Ps 43:4). “I will be glad and rejoice in you” (Ps 9:2). “Happy is that people, whose God is the Lord” (Ps 144:15). “The kingdom of God is . . . righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17). “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him” (Rom 15:13). And “These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full” (1 John 1:4).

Christianity, which some believe brings guilt and gloom, should in fact drive it out. In one sense, sin brings sorrow, but piety produces pleasure. So perhaps hot tub religion has a true instinct at its heart. J. I. Packer, in his similarly titled book, suggested a tentative theology of pleasure formulated upon four points.¹

First, pleasure, like joy, is God’s gift. But whereas joy is active (one rejoices), pleasure is passive (one is pleased). Pleasures are feelings, either of stimulation or of tensions released. Pleasure may also be associated with realization, remembrance, or recognition.

Second, pleasure is part of the ideal human condition. Seeing Eden as God’s pleasure-garden where all was “good,” when redemption is complete, pleasure, total and constant, will again belong to the redeemed. “Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat The Lamb . . . will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Rev 7:16-17). As God created humankind with the capacity for pleasure, so He brings the redeemed to an environment of unending pleasure.

¹ Ibid., 73-76.

Third, pleasure (conscious enjoyment) has no intrinsic moral quality. What makes pleasure right, good, and valuable or wrong, bad, and sinful is what goes with it; its motivation and outcome. Pleasure at what price? And producing what behavioral response?

If pleasure comes unsought, or as our grateful acceptance of a gift providentially set before us, and if the pleasure does no damage to ourselves or others, and if the delight of it prompts fresh thanksgiving to God, then it is holy. But if the taking of one's pleasure is a gesture of self-indulgence, pleasing oneself with no concern as to whether one pleases God, then, whether or not the action itself is wasteful or harmful, one has been entrapped by what the Bible sees as the pleasures of the world, and of sin (Luke 8:14; Heb. 11:25; cf. Isa. 58:13; 1 Tim. 5:6; 2 Tim. 3:4; Titus 3:3; James 4:3; 5:5; 2 Pet. 2:13).¹

Thus the same pleasant experience could be either good or bad, holy or unholy, depending upon other factors both external and internal.

Fourth, in the order of creation, pleasures are meant to serve as pointers to God. Raw pleasure-seeking will, sooner or later, bring boredom and disgust (Eccl 2:1-11). Yet the same authority observed that "a man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?" (Eccl 2:24). So pleasure is also divinely designed to raise one's sense of God's goodness, deepen one's gratitude to Him, and strengthen one's hope of richer pleasures to come in the next world.

Hot tub religion seeks after all of this, and perhaps rightly so. Yet there is more; a great deal more.

¹ Ibid., 74-75.

Radically Wrong

The greatest danger in all of this is in its egocentricity (declining to deny oneself) and eudaemonism (rejecting God's discipline). For Packer, thus, it becomes doubly irreligious.

Egocentricity indicates an unwillingness to see oneself existing for the Creator's pleasure and instead placing self at the center of everything. The quest for personal pleasure, in one form or another, is the driving force of the egocentric life. Pride is the classic Christian label for this self-asserting, self-worshipping syndrome. "My will be done" is the recurring, if not conscious refrain.

In trying to manage God and harness him to one's own needs and goals, religion is reduced to magic. Use scriptural promises correctly and you can extract from God any pleasant thing you wish (some call it the "name-it-claim-it" formula). Prayer is the generally preferred method. Basically, God is reduced to a divine vending machine.

In distinct contrast, Christ demanded self-denial or self-negation as a necessary condition of discipleship (Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23). He is not desiring unthinking, robotic obedience. The required denial is of carnal self; the egocentric, self-deifying urge common to the human race.

Theocentricity must replace egocentricity. Recognizing God's creative and redemptive power, believers worship Him. This is basic to real godliness.

Eudaemonism describes the view that happiness means the presence of pleasure and freedom from all that is unpleasant. In this aberration, it is never in God's will than any should live with discomfort. This false principle loses sight of the place of pain in sanctification by which God readies his children to share his holiness (Heb 12:5-11). Eudaemonism may be appropriate in heaven; it is not safe on earth.

“Heaven is a state of holiness, which only persons with holy tastes will appreciate, and into which only persons of holy character can enter (Rev. 21:27, 22:14f).”¹

Christlikeness in action and reaction (the fruits of the Spirit) are ingrained most deeply through experiences of pain and discomfort. Certainly there is more to sanctification than this, but not less. “Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as a son,” writes the author of Hebrews. “For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. . . . No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (Heb 12:7-11).

Pivotal Concepts

Four theological conclusions demand consideration. First, life should be viewed and lived in terms of two worlds, not just one. Scripture is clearly and consistently two-worldly in its teaching. Jesus spoke often about heaven and hell as the destinies between which men and women choose in this life by the commitments they make, or fail to make.² Basic to New Testament ethics is the belief that Christians should live on earth in the light of heaven, should make decisions in the present with their eye on the future, and should avoid behaving here in a way that would jeopardize their hope of glory hereafter. “Store up for yourselves treasures in

¹ Ibid., 79.

² See Matt 5:22-26, 29f., 6:14-21, 7:13f., 21-27; 10:28-39; 11:20-24; 12:31-37; 13:11-15, 37-43, 47-50; 15:13f.; 16:24-27; 18:3-9, 34f.; 19:26-29; 22:1-14; 24:45-25:46; cf. John 3:14-21, 5:14-29, etc.

heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matt 6:20).

For twentieth-century American society, detachment from the world is hardly understood, let alone practiced. Nowadays, nonconformity to the world is limited to the means that the world adopts to achieve its goals and rarely touches the goals themselves. The world around seeks pleasure, profit, and privilege. So do most superficial Christians today. Lost is the pilgrim perspective of Bunyan’s classic work. The future world must regain its prominence over the present world before values can be reordered.

Second, and similarly, one must distinguish between the world without and the world within. “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father, but from the world” (1 John 2:15, 16). The love of the world is contrasted with the love of God. In this struggle, of greatest concern should not be the evil “out there,” but the evil within. Lust, pride, and selfishness are not external physical problems, but internal spiritual ones.

In the same way, it should be argued, the greatest pleasures are not external, but internal as well. “A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15). “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt 6:33). While external pleasures may be appealing, they are transitory and often beyond personal control. Internal pleasures are far superior in both quality and duration.

Third, love for God and hope in God are life-transforming motivations. One of the earmarks of modern culture is a cool detachment that insulates individuals from

each other and from any issues except private concerns. There is a dearth of deep and sustained thinking that previous generations experienced. “Sustained imaginative reflection is, if I am not mistaken, so rare today that few of us understand its power to motivate, and are not ourselves motivated by it.”¹

“Meditation” is the historic Christian word for focused thinking that motivates. And the apostolic experience and expectation was that the love and hope Godward that the gospel message evokes would radically transform one’s life, both behaviorally, in one’s lifestyle, and motivationally, in one’s heart (Cf. 2 Cor 5:13, 1 John 4:10-19).

Fourth, happiness cannot be found by clinging only to the gifts (pleasures) while neglecting the Giver. The gifts may bring ecstasy, but they are temporary. The Giver is eternal.

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life (1 Tim 6:17-19).

Theology Applied to the Baby Boom

Clearly, the Bible speaks with relevance to the issues of today. To baby boomers who have experienced the extremes of empty consumerism and economic uncertainty, there is reassurance, balance, and depth in a philosophy that looks beyond this present life and reorders all things within the perspective of eternity. As young bodies age, the religion of self-preserving health will quickly lose believers. A faith

¹ Packer, 92.

system that includes the assurance of eternal life in an environmental paradise would prove naturally appealing. Increasingly faced with issues of personal mortality, the truth of another world is a natural consideration as part of mid-life reevaluation.

Second, the maturing process is forcing the thoughtful among the baby-boom generation to consider the emptiness of greed, the tenacity of bigotry and hate, the pervasive pollution of ego and pride. Certainly many are now willing to admit the previously unthinkable--that the world's problems will not be solved by eliminating the evil "out there" but will be addressed one life at a time as evil is confronted within. Conversely, the appeal of inner peace over external pleasure cannot be avoided indefinitely.

Third, the baby-boom generation grew up consumed with a longing for inner spiritual reality and a commitment to life-changing causes. The church that accepts, disciples, and motivates this generation will change the world.

Finally, the hunger for community that has so consumed this generation can be directly addressed by the church. In relationship with God one experiences forgiveness, renewal, empowerment, and motivation to serve others. Authentic relationships with others, both family and friends, are made possible. A sense of connectedness, to God and to others, is a concept deeply appealing to the baby-boom generation.

From Theory to Practice

To this point, this discussion has been primarily theoretical. Ideas, concepts, trends, and philosophies are helpful and enlightening. Specific ministry suggestions are still needed. Yet the theoretical foundation now established must be informed by real life as it is lived.

The questions now to be addressed are these: What do young Adventist professionals in Atlanta think? How was that determined? Who are the subjects of this study? What is their level of involvement? Do their attitudes, lifestyles, and ideas correlate with other findings of the generation?

It is that task that occupies chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

Research Site

This project centered around a direct-mail survey of Seventh-day Adventist baby boomers in metropolitan Atlanta.

Why Atlanta?

Atlanta congregations were selected to more consistently represent the wider urban population. A Chattanooga study, while more convenient, might have been influenced by the institutional environment surrounding Southern College and McKee Foods, both large Seventh-day Adventist organizations and employers.

Atlanta Demographics

With a population nearing three million, metro-Atlanta is ranked twelfth among the fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the United States.¹ In the ten-year period 1980-1990, Atlanta's population increased 36 percent. Atlanta headquarters nine major corporations, among them Delta Airlines, Sovran Bank, and BellSouth. The capital city of Georgia, it is fast becoming the financial capital of the entire south.

Atlanta was chosen as the target of this study for its diversity, its ample population base, its proximity (within the Georgia-Cumberland Conference), and its

¹ *Rand McNally 1992 Commercial Atlas and Marketing Guide*, 123rd ed. (Skokie, IL: Rand McNally, 1992), 44.

Seventh-day Adventist presence. Metro-Atlanta contains over a dozen Adventist churches and companies.

Description of the Research

Development of the Instrument

Formulating a suitable survey instrument became a primary task in the execution of this project. While several studies provided ancillary insight (e.g., *Valuegenesis*; Adventist Youth Survey, Roger Dudley; “Where Have All the Flowers Gone?” Gary Russell; etc.), none specifically targeted involvement factors among Seventh-day Adventist baby-boomer professionals.

Background Reading and Experience

The Collegedale Seventh-day Adventist Church is a large, 2400-member congregation situated on the campus of Southern College, itself a Seventh-day Adventist liberal arts college near Chattanooga, Tennessee. The twin institutions of the college and McKee Foods Corporation, the largest employer in Hamilton County, provide in turn an intellectually stimulating atmosphere and a progressive yet stable source of employment. Consequently, the community includes significant numbers of baby boomers.

Serving the young adults of this congregation for seven years prior to the initiation of this project provided the present researcher with some understanding of the issues involved. During that seven-year period, four Sabbath school divisions targeting young adults were formed. With each came a renewed interest in factors that encouraged or discouraged church involvement among this population group. In discussion of these issues, personal conviction and opinion, reinforced by anecdotal evidence, often surfaced. Could such opinion be verified? Did objective data exist?

Books, journals, and magazines substantiated some theories while calling others into question. Attending church growth seminars and pastors' workshops proved beneficial. Particularly instructive were the Willow Creek pastors' conference (attended in February of 1990) and George Barna's "Marketing the Church" seminar in 1991.

The task of formulating a survey instrument began during the summer of 1992. Roger Dudley, with the Institute of Church Ministry at Andrews University, provided sample instruments, insight, and guidance. Input was also received from Monte Sahlin, then of the North American Division Department of Adult Church Ministries, Paul Richardson, at that time representing Adventist Baby Boomer Awareness, and Randal Wisbey, of the Youth Resource Center at Andrews University Theological Seminary.

Guided Interviews

In the fall of 1992, guided interviews, in-home visits made by appointment, were initiated with twenty-nine Seventh-day Adventist baby boomers in the greater Chattanooga area. These represented both single and married, active and inactive individuals who were not employees of Southern College. The form used in these guided interviews is included in Appendix B.

One of the most positive benefits of this project to date, the process of conducting these interviews, accomplished far more than simply refining the survey instrument. It allowed the opportunity for these individuals to feel a part of attempted change. It communicated a valuing of their ideas and suggestions. It communicated a recognition that their church was responsive to issues important to them. The response was uniformly positive.

At the same time, these visits afforded invaluable opportunities for ministry in a deeper pastoral sense. Often, when the purpose of the visit seemed to be accomplished, conversation would shift to other matters. At times personal, often spiritual, these visits produced a bond with these individuals still evident today. The constraints of time alone forced this phase to a conclusion.

Refinement of the Instrument

The information gained in guided interviews was used to refine the instrument further. It was then mailed to each of the interviewees, as formerly agreed, asking that they actually work through the entire survey, keeping track of time required, and making notations in the margins, clarifying the intent of specific questions, and making any further suggestions. Several important changes were made as a result of these observations.

The survey, as modified, and the proposed cover letter were then cleared by Roger Dudley, the project adviser, in November of 1992. The survey, unchanged for all three mailings, appears in Appendix A.

Formulation of the Mailing List

Early in 1992, the administration of the Georgia-Cumberland Conference of Seventh-day Adventists became involved with the logistics of the project. A current metro-Atlanta mailing list of baptized church members was requested. The original intention was to mail surveys to all Seventh-day Adventists living in Atlanta zip codes, allowing the tabulation process to identify those within the target population. Second, funds were needed to cover stationery, printing, self-addressed return envelopes, and postage going both ways.

Economic constraints forced a target mailing only to those parishioners identified by a pastor as being generally within twenty to fifty years of age. Again, the tabulation process would identify those responses from the target group. Costs were shared among the Adult Church Ministries department of the Georgia-Cumberland Conference, the Youth and Young Adult Ministries Department of the Georgia-Cumberland Conference, and the researcher.

Roy Caughron, Coordinator of Adult Church Ministries, suggested twelve congregations within metropolitan Atlanta representing a combined membership of 3,739 individuals. Pastors were personally contacted--first by phone, then by letter, and finally face to face. Each was invited to indicate on a church membership list those individuals between twenty and fifty years of age. Assuming that pastors would not always know the ages of their members, this age range would allow for some error. Tabulating the returned instruments would be depended upon to filter out those beyond the age and/or income parameters of the study.

Not using a comprehensive mailing list seriously skewed the demographic results. Pastors can hardly be expected to identify inactive members, much less indicate their age. Pastors know best those members who attend regularly. Consequently, this step in the sampling procedure predetermined a demographic pattern of high involvement.

Specific churches involved, with pastors (at the time), total church membership, and the number of households identified are shown in table 1 on the following page. Two churches did not submit names or addresses.

These names were entered into a dBase III+ database. During that process, four addresses were found to be incomplete, resulting in a final list of 344 households.

TABLE 1
CHURCHES INVITED TO PARTICIPATE

| Church | Pastor(s) | Total Membership | Tagged Households |
|---------------------|---|------------------|-------------------|
| Atlanta Belvedere | Al Ellis | 485 | 25 |
| Atlanta Metro | Ken Taylor | 230 | 10 |
| Atlanta North | Greg Ellis ^a | 280 | 37 |
| Atlanta Southside | Rudy Skoretz ^a | 203 | 0 |
| Douglasville | Denny Mitchell | 377 | 76 |
| Duluth | Roy Merrifield ^a | 293 | 0 |
| Feyette | Gary Fordham | 68 | 18 |
| Grandview | Gary Fordham | 87 | 17 |
| Marietta | Jim & Sharon Cress ^a Mike Speegle | 796 | 48 |
| Peachtree City | Terry Benson | 123 | 25 |
| Smyrna King Springs | Paul Hoover | 494 | 72 |
| Stone Mountain | Steve Haley ^a | 303 | 20 |
| Total | | 3739 | 348 |

Note: Two churches did not submit names or addresses.

^aHas since moved.

Mailing of Surveys

First Mailing

Using envelopes and letterhead supplied by the conference, 344 letters were mailed in November, 1992. Each included a cover letter (found in Appendix C), a survey, and a coded, stamped, self-addressed return envelope.

Outgoing postage was affixed via third-class stamps, recommended above a metered imprint. Envelopes were addressed using a mail merge program on a laser printer; no labels appeared.

While the use of conference letterhead provided some legitimacy, it also meant that undeliverable pieces were returned to the conference office. In spite of identifying each envelope with the researcher's name and notifying the conference mail clerk of the possibility of receiving returned envelopes, not a single piece was identified in this way. It is unlikely that the mailing list was completely accurate. Consequently, inaccurate addresses remained uncorrected.

From November of 1992 through January of 1993, 167 surveys were returned (150 of which were usable) from 105 households.

Second Mailing

Follow-up letters with duplicate surveys were mailed in January, 1993, to those not responding. Again, conference letterhead and envelopes were used (the second cover letter also appears in Appendix C). Outgoing postage was affixed to the second mailing with first-class stamps.

This yielded sixty-six completed responses from fifty-one households. Again, the conference mail clerk did not identify a single survey returned by the post office as undeliverable.

Third Mailing

The third mailing was accomplished in November, 1993, to the 190 households which had not responded. Again, first-class postage stamps were affixed, but this time on personal envelopes and letterhead. This was intended to identify undeliverable items and to encourage responses from those somehow estranged from the church or conference.

Twenty-one surveys were returned as undeliverable, dropping the number of households on the master mailing list from 344 to 323.

Completed instruments returned from the third mailing numbered twenty-four (representing nineteen households). Responses from all three mailings are summarized in table 2.

TABLE 2
SURVEY RESPONSE SUMMARY

| Mailing | From Individuals (555 possible) | Cumulative Response Rate | From Households (323 possible) | Cumulative Response Rate |
|---------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| First | 167 | 30.1% | 105 | 32.5% |
| Second | 69 | 42.5% | 51 | 47.7% |
| Third | 24 | 46.8% | 19 | 54.2% |
| Totals | 260 | 46.8% | 175 | 54.2% |

Note: Not all surveys returned were complete or, consequently, tabulated. Thus the discrepancy between those returned (260) and those tabulated (239).

Data from the returned surveys was computer tabulated using the DataIn program supplied by Roger Dudley of the Institute of Church Ministry at Andrews University and written by Jerome Thayer, Director of the Center for Statistical

Services at Andrews University. Data entry instructions for keyboard operators, particularly critical for missing responses, are included in Appendix D.

The resulting ASCII data file was then managed, processed, and evaluated using SPSS/PC+, a widely recognized statistical data analysis program.

Demographics of the Research

Before presenting the opinions, attitudes, and behaviors revealed by the study, it is useful to consider the demographic profile of the respondents.

Age

While respondents varied in age from twenty-four to sixty-four, 184 (80 percent) were between thirty and forty-eight years of age. These individuals born between 1946 and 1964, the years of the baby boom, represented the target population for this study. Figure 4 plots the birth year of all respondents. Interestingly, it also suggests an “early” and “late” population within this sample of the baby-boom generation.

Concerns about the ability of pastors to accurately identify the ages of parishioners are reinforced. Ages significantly beyond the target range may be due to parents or children mistakenly completing the survey, an error possible particularly where first names may be similar.

Birth year was the first filter applied to all responses. To be included in the target group, respondents had to be born between 1946 and 1964. Figure 5 translates birth year into age, a more useful descriptor.

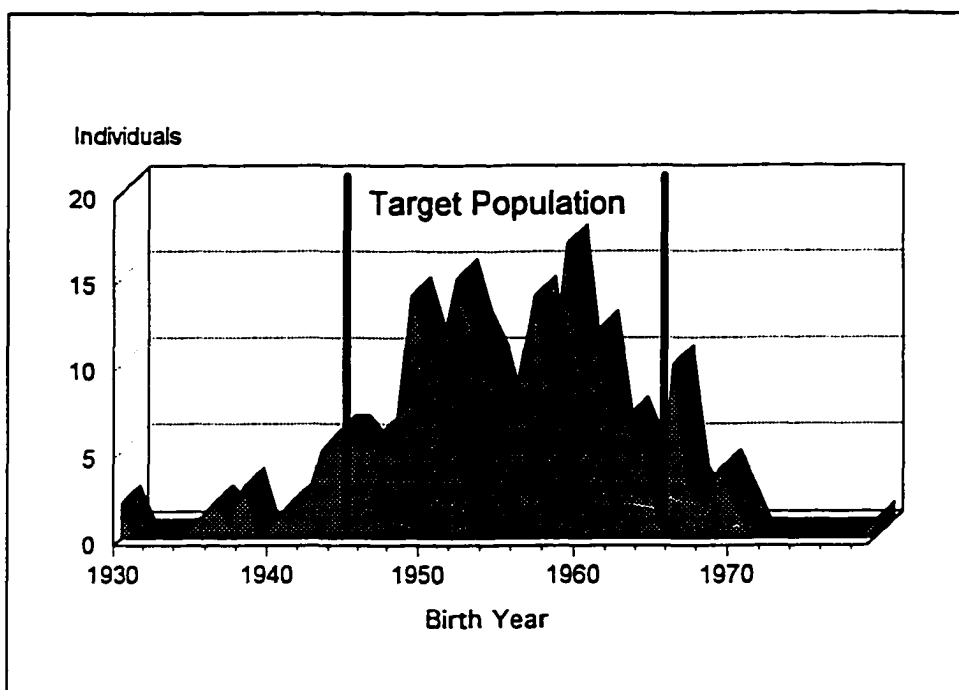


Figure 4. Birth year of all respondents. To compare this population with the annual United States birth rate, consult figure 2 on p. 9.

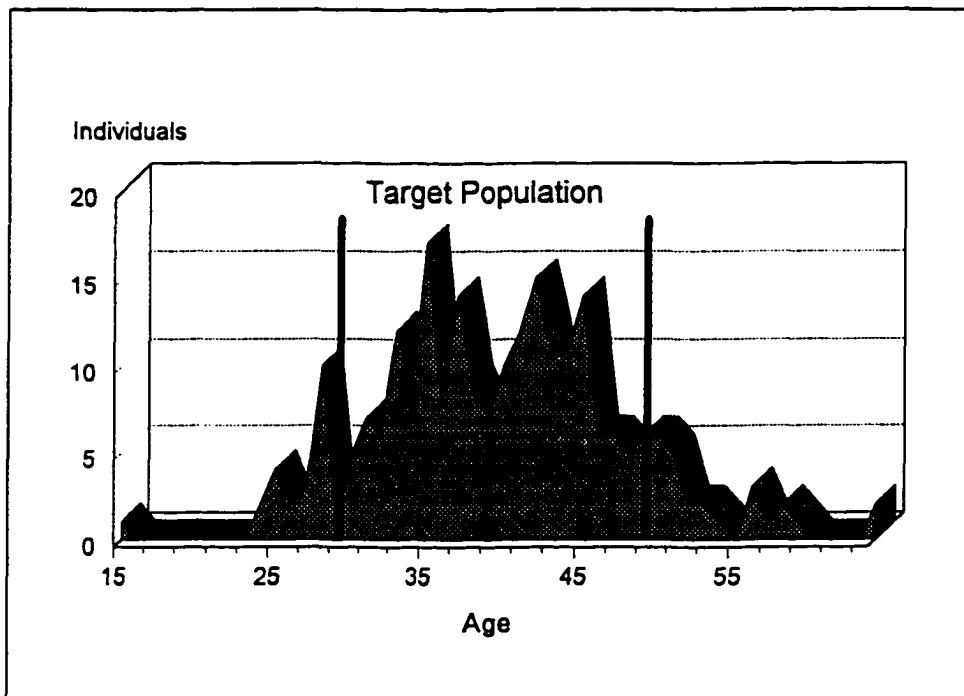


Figure 5. Ages of all respondents as of 1994.

Income

The second filter utilized family income to further focus the study. The target group was limited to those with annual household earnings of \$30,000 or more.

Figure 6 reveals the strong earning power represented by this population. The presence of two wage earners in many households contributes to this description, though the survey did not ask specifically about this variable. Additionally, earning power often, though not always, reflects the level of education received.

These two prerequisites, age and family income, eliminated seventy-eight respondents from the study, producing an effective survey base of 161 individuals.

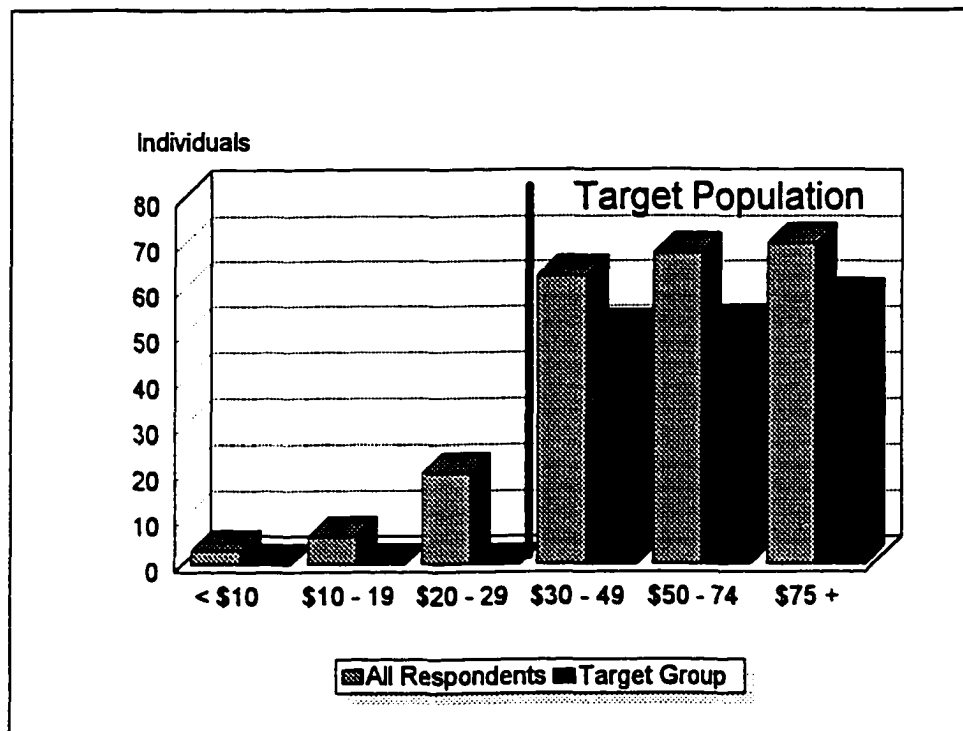


Figure 6. Annual family income, in thousands.

Gender

Not surprisingly, women outnumbered men among respondents. Gender proportions were nearly identical between all respondents and the target group, as figure 7 indicates.

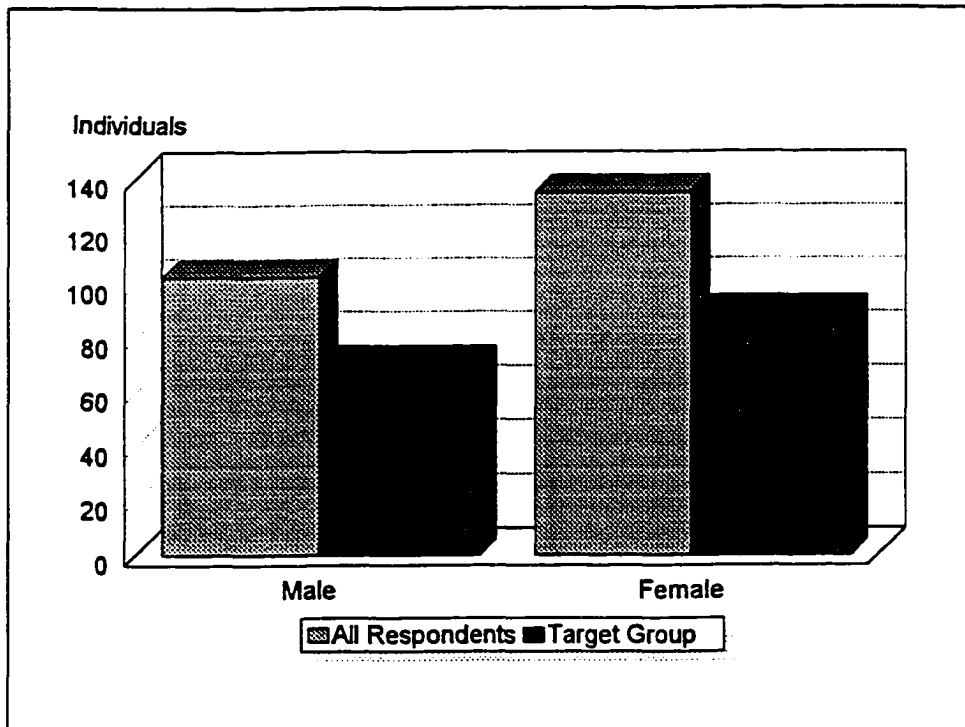


Figure 7. Gender of all subjects and target group compared.

Ethnic Background

Responses came almost exclusively from white members (see figure 8 on next page). The Southeastern Conference, which networks predominantly Black churches, did not participate. Consequently, the racial pattern reflected by respondents applies primarily to participating churches, not to the general population of Atlanta or to all Seventh-day Adventists living there.

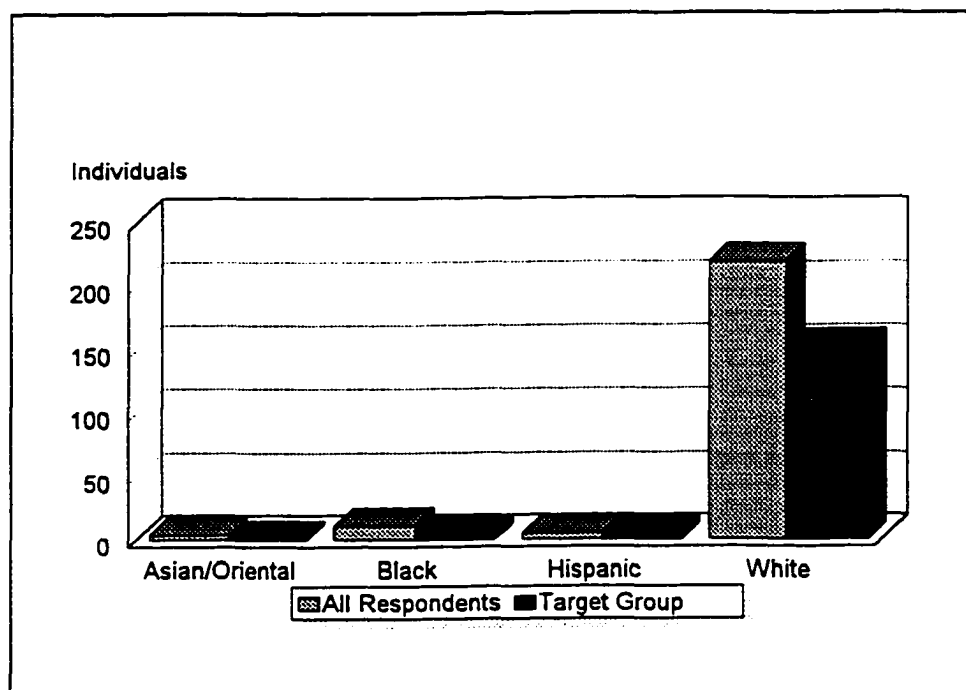


Figure 8. Ethnic origins of all subjects and target group compared.

Marital Status

Just as responses were heavily weighted toward one ethnic background, they represented one primary marital station: marriage. Originally, 31 percent of the master mailing list contained single names. Combining total responses for single, separated/divorced, and widowed yielded only 17 percent of returned surveys. After filtering for age and income, less than 9 percent remained.

For whatever reasons, singles were far less likely than marrieds to complete and return the questionnaires. Figure 9 reveals the preponderance of responses from married members.

Length of Church Affiliation

Respondents tended to be long-time church members (see figure 10). This factor, perhaps more than any other, must be considered in properly interpreting

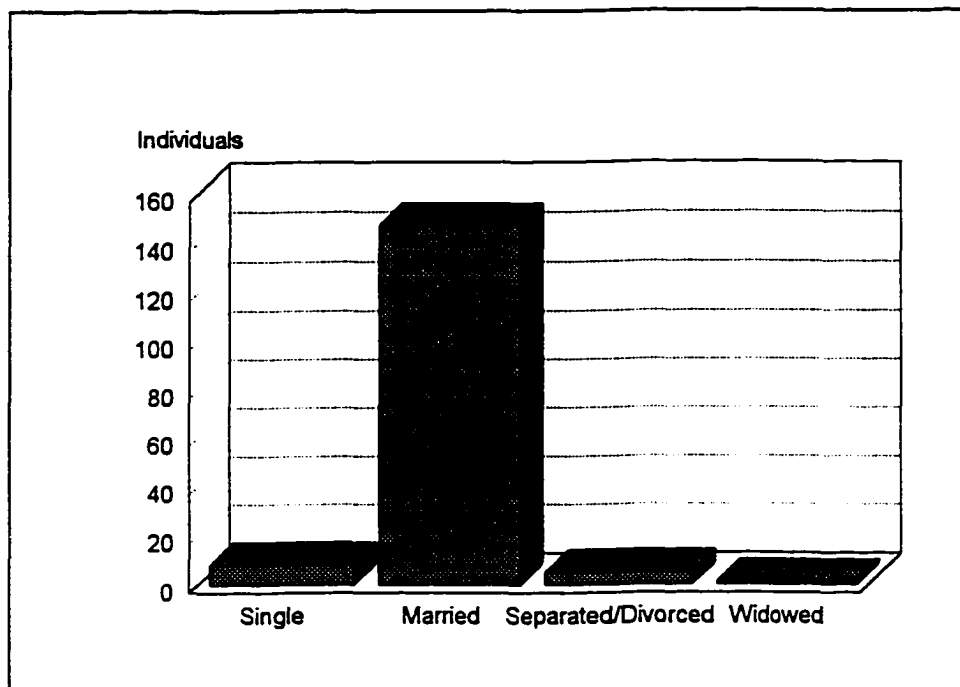


Figure 9. Marital status of target group only.

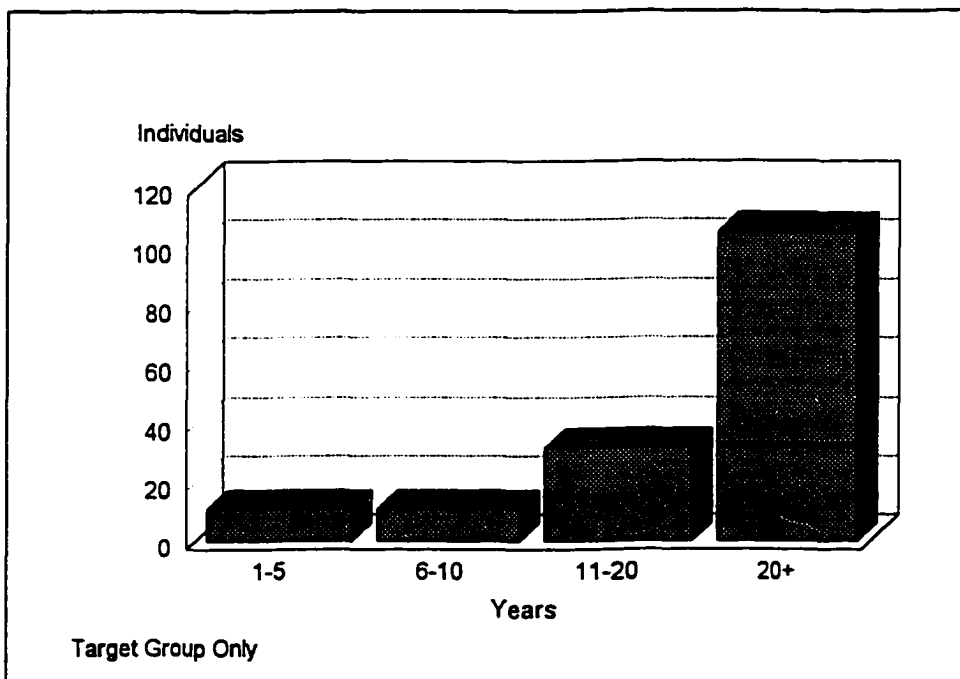


Figure 10. Membership history: "How long have you been a baptized Seventh-day Adventist?"

survey results. It might be anticipated that members of ten years and more (which comprise 86 percent of respondents) would be quite comfortable with their church. The impatient and dissatisfied would either be elsewhere, or, if still within the church, would be less inclined to respond to such a survey. In this case, that assumption appears justified.

Adventist Education

A history of education in Seventh-day Adventist schools tended toward the extremes of “all or nothing.” This appeared true at all educational levels (see figures 11, 12, and 13).

Correlations between educational history and length of church affiliation, along with many other tempting variables (activity levels, involvement issues, worship preferences, devotional practices, the number of friends in the church, inclination toward financial support, etc.) are developed in chapter 5.

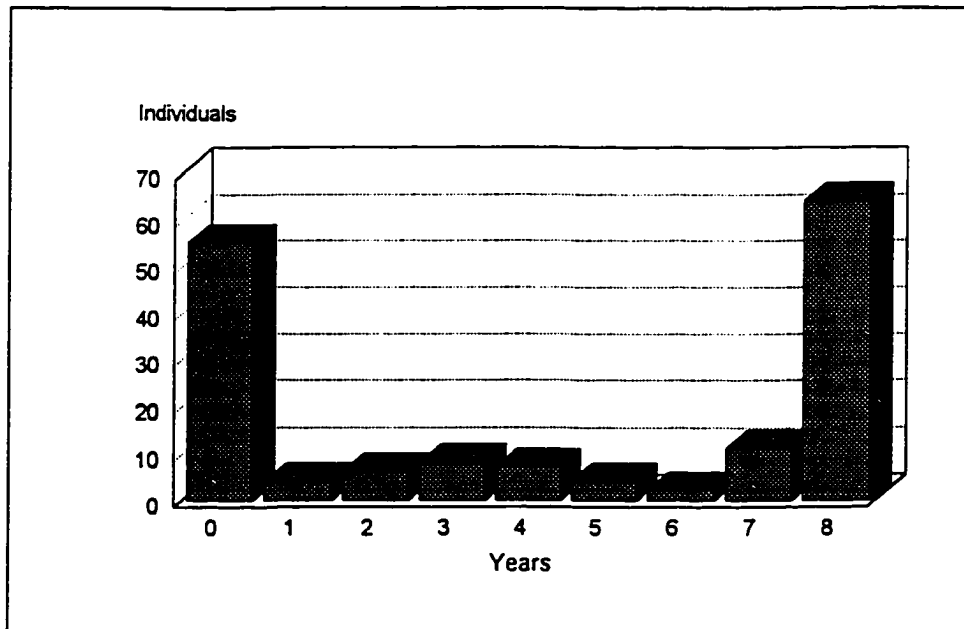


Figure 11. Elementary education—years in SDA elementary schools.

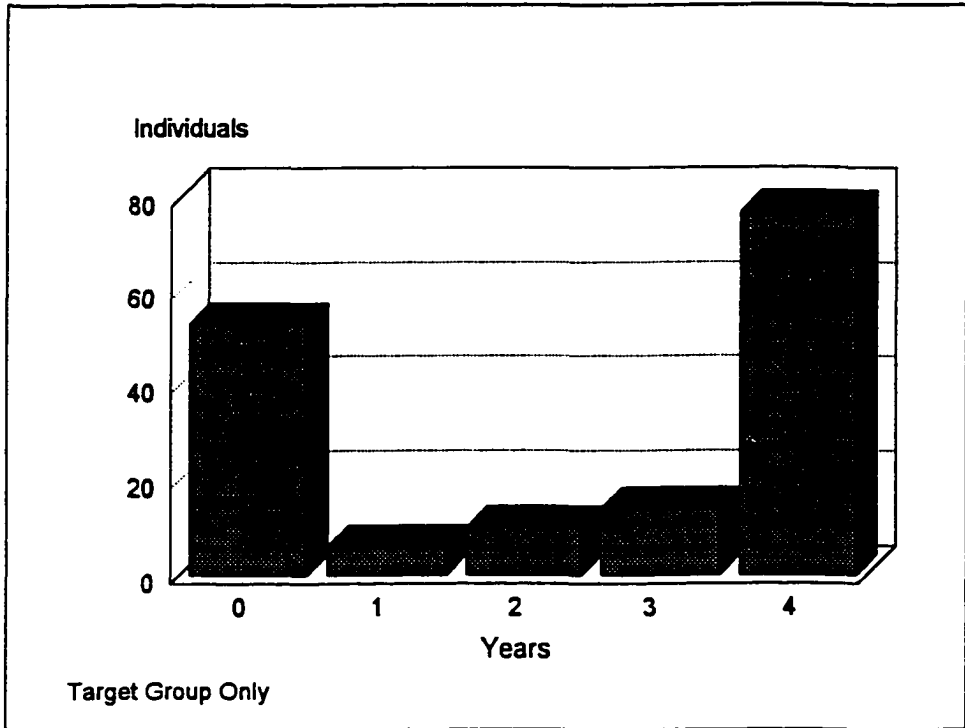


Figure 12. High school education--years in SDA academies.

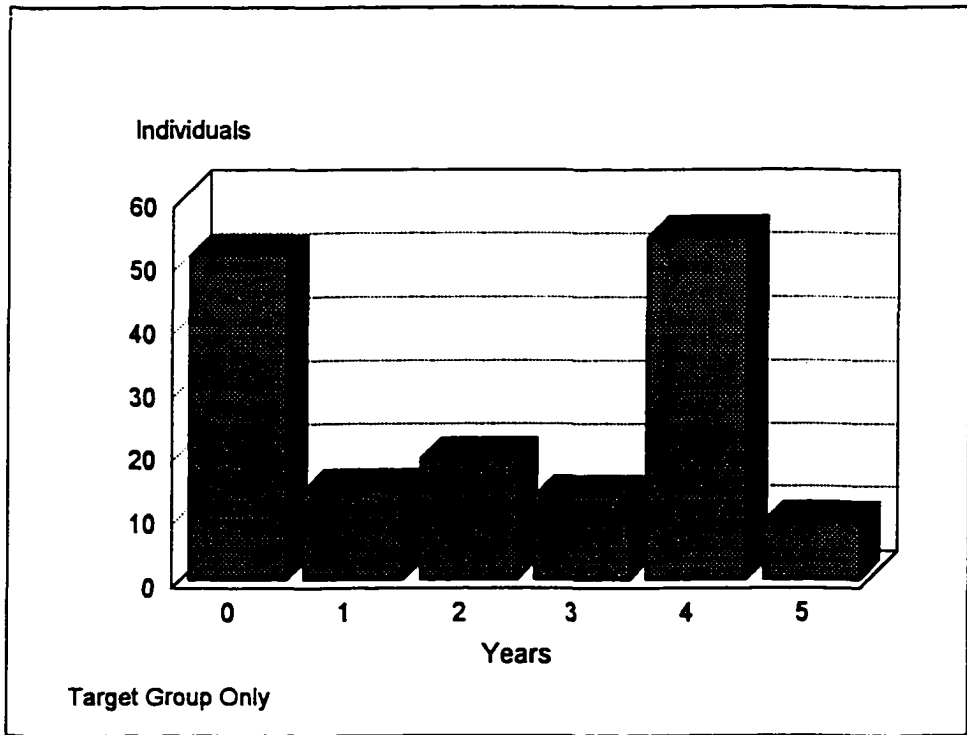


Figure 13. College education--years in SDA colleges.

Church Involvement

The first question on the survey, and at the heart of its purpose, was this: Do you consider yourself an active church member? Notice the overwhelming response as shown in figure 14.

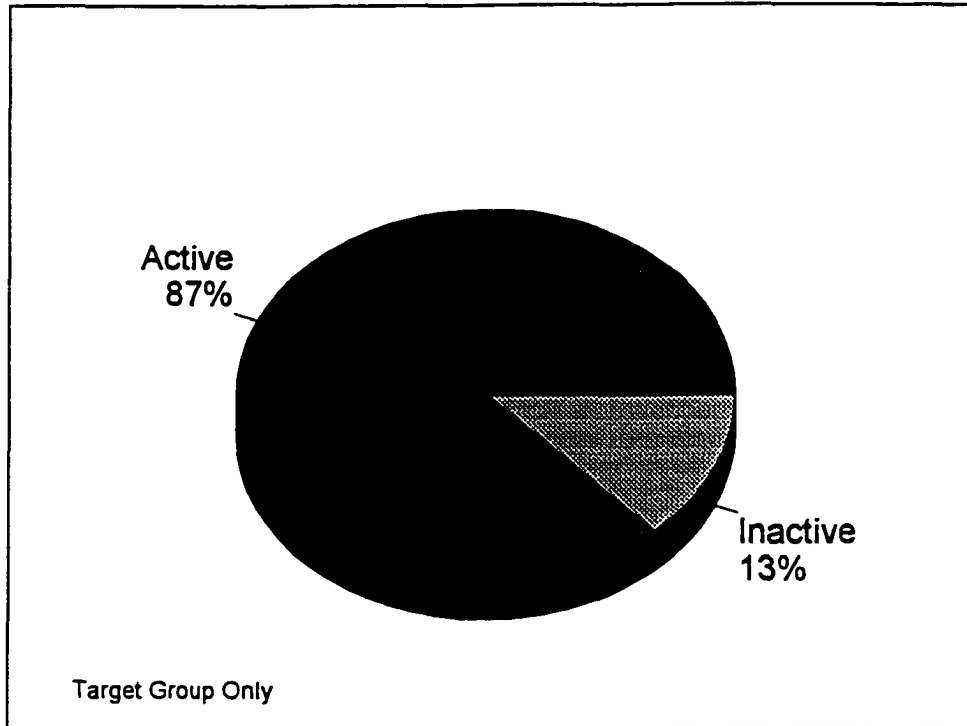


Figure 14. Respondents active and inactive in their church (by their own definition).

To understand how individuals defined “active,” 80 percent said that they helped with planning, programming, or clean-up for church activities or programs. Those officially serving on committees or holding church offices were only slightly lower at 72 percent.

Church attendance also seemed to fit into the respondents’ definition of activity. The overwhelming majority, 83 percent, claimed to attend church regularly

(see figure 15). Pastors and church leaders would be quick to point out that the claim of church attendance might be quite different than actual practice. Also, while attendance may in fact be frequent, it may occur at several different churches.

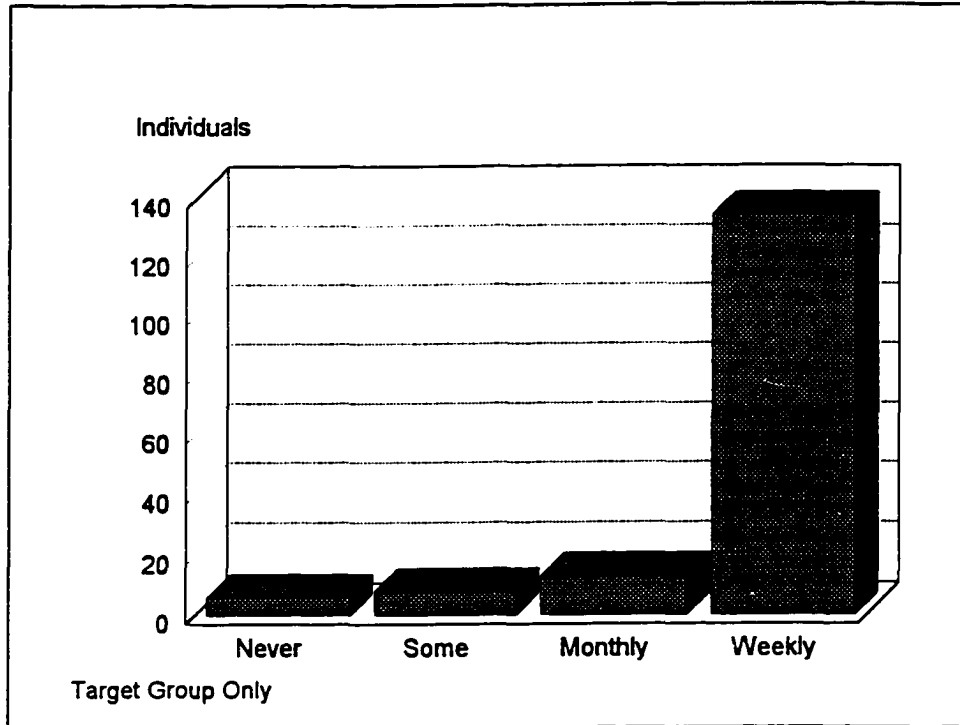


Figure 15. Sabbath worship attendance (may include several different churches).

When asked what level of satisfaction church involvement brought, 47 percent selected “some,” while 42 percent said it was “significant.” Fully 70 percent agreed with the statement, “I don’t want to simply sit and watch; I want to be involved; to make a difference in my church.”

Based on these factors alone, respondents to this survey clearly established themselves as active and involved. Hearing from only half of those polled, however,

demands that one ask, How does the other half feel? Are **all** Adventist baby boomers in Atlanta this enthusiastic?

Mailing Comparison

For reasons that are more fully explored later, the answer is, certainly not. Yet one finding speaks to this particular concern. It is rooted in a comparison of the three mailings. The *number* of individual responses is contrasted in figure 16.

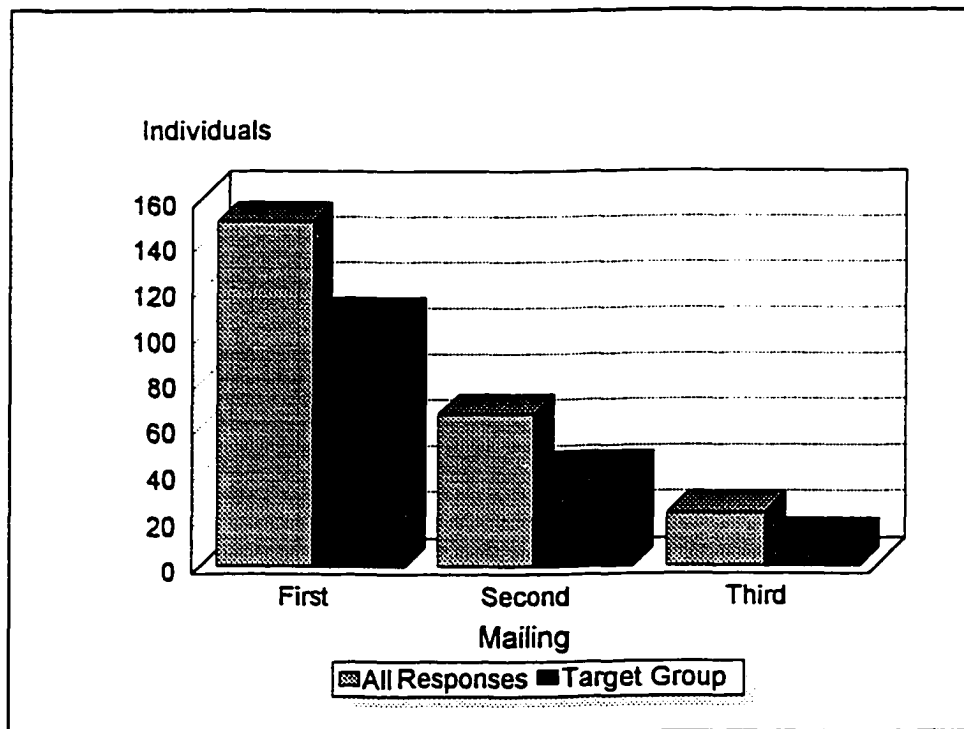


Figure 16. Number of responses by mailing.

How does the *level of involvement* fare from mailing to mailing? Were later respondents *less* likely to be active and enthusiastic?

Combining the responses to four questions¹ yields an *involvement quotient*. Answering affirmatively to all four questions is categorized as “highly involved.” Notice this “highly involved” percentage in each of the three mailings as shown in Figure 17.

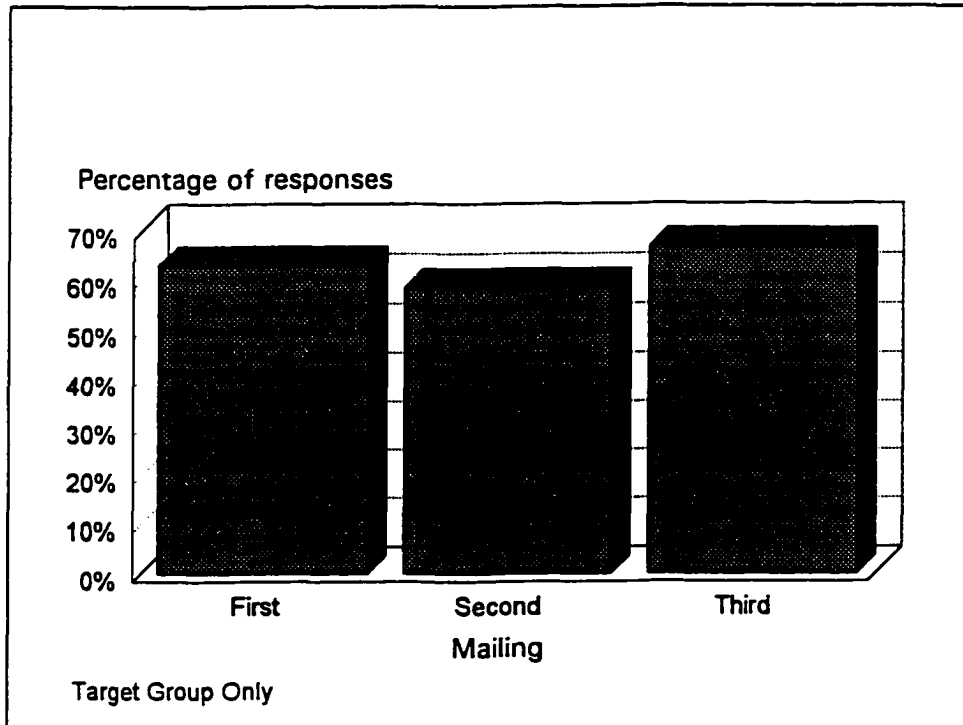


Figure 17. Involvement quotient--those claiming to be highly involved, by mailing.

Instead of later respondents becoming less involved, they actually edged out earlier counterparts. A sampling of this consistency tends to verify its accuracy.

¹(1) Do you consider yourself an active church member? (2) Do you occasionally help with planning, programming, or cleanup for church activities or programs? (3) Do you currently hold any church offices or serve on any committees? and (4) Do you attend sabbath worship weekly?

While that realization may be somewhat reassuring, it cannot be interpreted to mean that *all* potential respondents would feel similarly.

With this background, chapter 5 deals with ten specific areas explored in the survey--areas that are often considered contributing factors in church involvement. It also broadens the analysis, looks for correlating issues, and evaluates the data more fully.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS

Unless otherwise indicated, this chapter examines the data provided by the target population: those respondents born between 1946 and 1964 which earn more than \$30,000 per household per year. While comparisons with the broader population sample might be interesting and instructive, this discussion is confined to the target group.

The material contained in this chapter is better understood when compared with the survey instrument itself. This questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

Involvement Defined

Chapter 4 referred to an “involvement quotient,” specifically as it related to the responses garnered by the three mailings. Since this involvement quotient is applied to various issues in this chapter, it is appropriate to discuss this relationship more fully.

Nowhere in the cover letter or survey were the terms “church involvement” or “church activity” defined. Replies to subsequent questions allowed respondents to clarify the meaning they themselves attached to these phrases.

As reported previously, 87 percent of respondents described themselves as active. Of these, 90 percent claimed that they attended Sabbath worship weekly. Yet being active included more than darkening the door or warming a pew. *Of the active*, 87 percent helped occasionally with planning, programming, or cleanup for church

activities or programs, and 79 percent currently held church offices or served on committees. These relationships are displayed in figure 18.

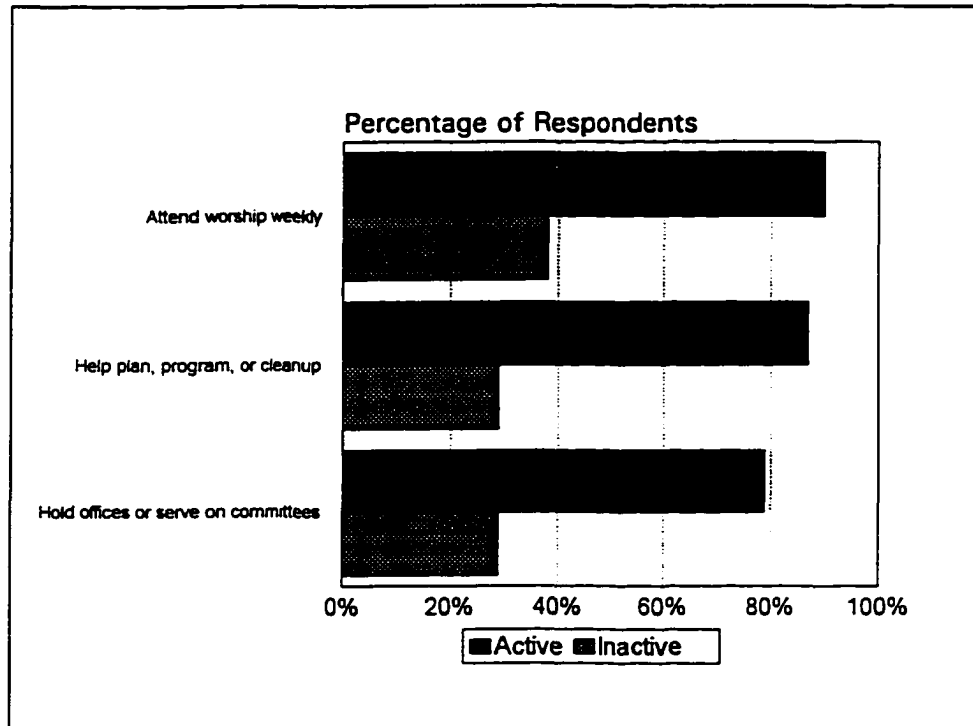


Figure 18. Involvement quotient--church activity compared with related factors.

Because of the strong relationship between these factors, responses to these four questions were combined into an aggregate score, the involvement quotient. When this new variable is compared to other issues in this chapter, the term “involvement” is used. Since it reflects not only activity but planning, church offices and committees, and church attendance, it provides a broader understanding that is at times helpful. This is distinct from references to church “activity” (or “inactivity”) which refer only to the response to the first question, “Do you consider yourself an active church member?”

Involvement Satisfaction

What level of internal reward or satisfaction was associated with church activity? Were highly involved respondents frustrated and dissatisfied? The survey asked “What level of satisfaction does your church involvement bring?” As displayed in figure 19, responses ranged from “Not involved” (6 percent) and “None” (6 percent) to “Some” (47 percent) and “Significant” (42 percent). The overwhelming majority found at least some satisfaction in their present level of church involvement.

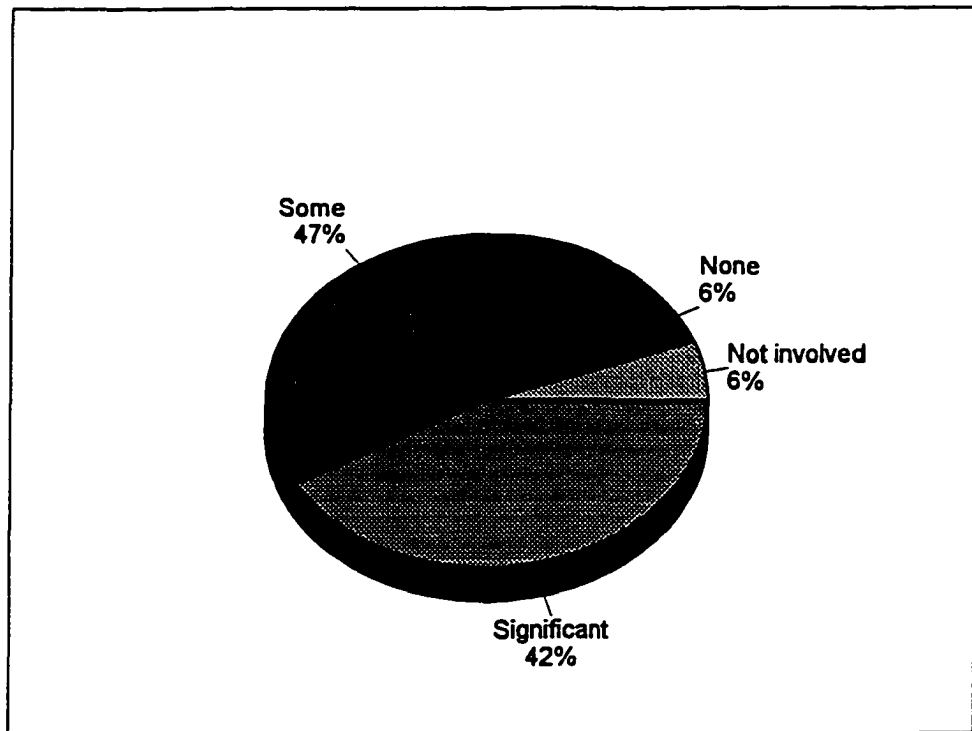


Figure 19. Level of satisfaction found in present church involvement.

Involvement Issues

Respondents were offered thirteen phrases to complete the sentence, “I would be more involved at church if” Most of the issues mentioned attracted scant agreement. Lowest among responses, only 6 percent were embarrassed by the church

building and the way it was kept. Not quite 11 percent mentioned that a “better pastor” would make a difference in their involvement. Having contributions recognized and appreciated was identified by just 12 percent. Barely 14 percent agreed that being disappointed or “turned off” by the church when younger was a lingering factor. Sixteen percent admitted they would be more involved if they were “more comfortable with Adventist doctrines.” A change in the worship service would influence 19 percent. Better children’s programming was considered by 22 percent. More confidence in local church leadership was cited by 24 percent. The same amount would be influenced by a less judgmental atmosphere.

Of the more significant issues, 32 percent would be more involved if the church addressed more relevant and practical issues. Having more close friends at church was found desirable by 34 percent. Similarly, 34 percent would be more involved if they had more confidence in General Conference or local conference leadership. Leading the list by a healthy margin, a stronger personal relationship with God would encourage 44 percent to more actively participate. Responses are ranked in figure 20 (next page).

First, it must be pointed out that these percentages indicate the *effect* these factors would have on church involvement. Respondents may or may not value the issues mentioned on their own merit. Numbers simply indicate the degree to which each item would influence increased *involvement* in the church. For instance, while 22 percent would be more *involved* if the church provided better children’s

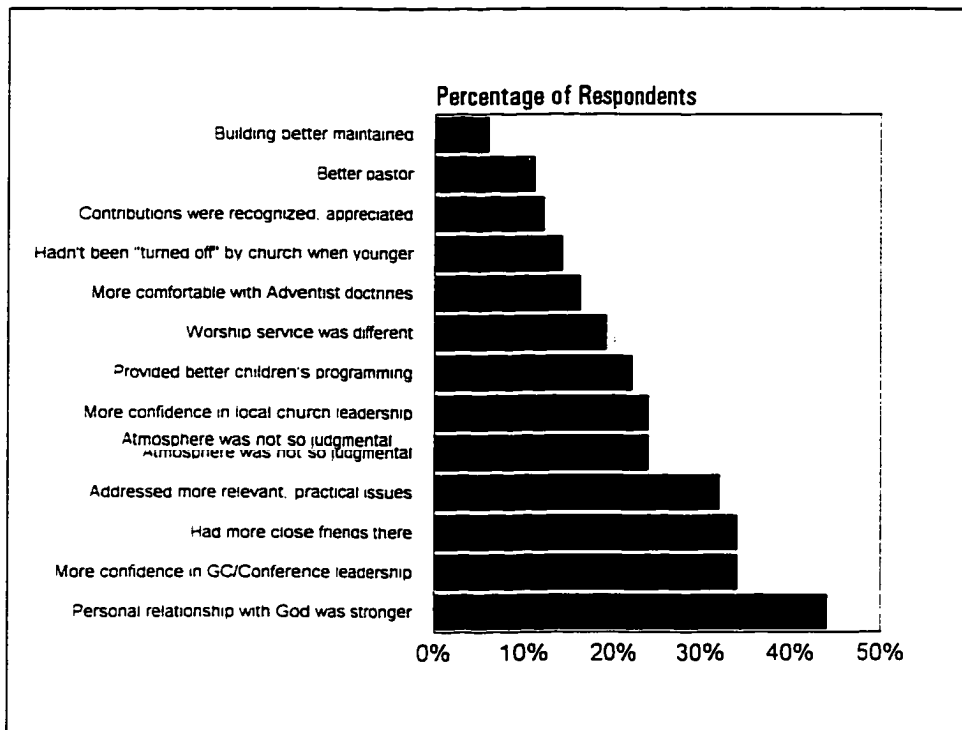


Figure 20. Involvement issues--"I would be more involved at church if the following was true."

programming, that figure may not accurately reflect the percentage that might *appreciate* better children's programming.

Second, these percentages reflect the responses of both active and inactive baby boomer professionals. Those already active might interpret each statement quite differently from those considering themselves inactive. To the active, becoming *more* involved might seem overwhelming. To the inactive, considering involvement of any kind would be quite different. Concurrently, the primary concern of this study is not to determine factors to increase involvement among the already involved, but to identify conditions that might contribute to *any* involvement among the *uninvolved*.

When the responses to those who considered themselves inactive were considered separately, the numbers shifted significantly (see figure 21, p. 146). Some

issues were of less importance to the inactive (building maintenance was not mentioned once, having contributions recognized or appreciated diminished by half, and confidence in General Conference leadership was significantly lower).

Other issues were rated as more significant. A bad experience with the church when younger was mentioned more than twice as often among the inactive (12 percent for active, 29 percent for inactive). Being more comfortable with church doctrines was mentioned more among the inactive by a 20-percentage-point spread (13 percent for active, 33 percent for inactive). A judgmental atmosphere was a factor for 38 percent of the inactive, compared to 22 percent among the active. The two areas that would most influence the inactive to be more involved were addressing more relevant and practical issues (52 percent) and having more close friends in the church (52 percent). These same areas also exhibited the greatest spread between active and inactive members (23 percent and 21 percent, respectively).

Involvement Conflicts

Respondents were asked, "If you have ever declined an invitation to serve in a church office or on a committee, did any of these factors contribute to that decision?" Following was a list of eight possible barriers to involvement.

As figure 22 reveals, only 9 percent were concerned that new ideas would not be accepted, 11 percent were influenced by personal differences with other individuals involved, and 14 percent cited incomplete information about the position or a vague job description. A bad previous experience without support, training, or resources was cited by 32 percent. Others agreed that the position did not fit personal gifts or talents (46 percent) or that they had little interest in that position or activity (51

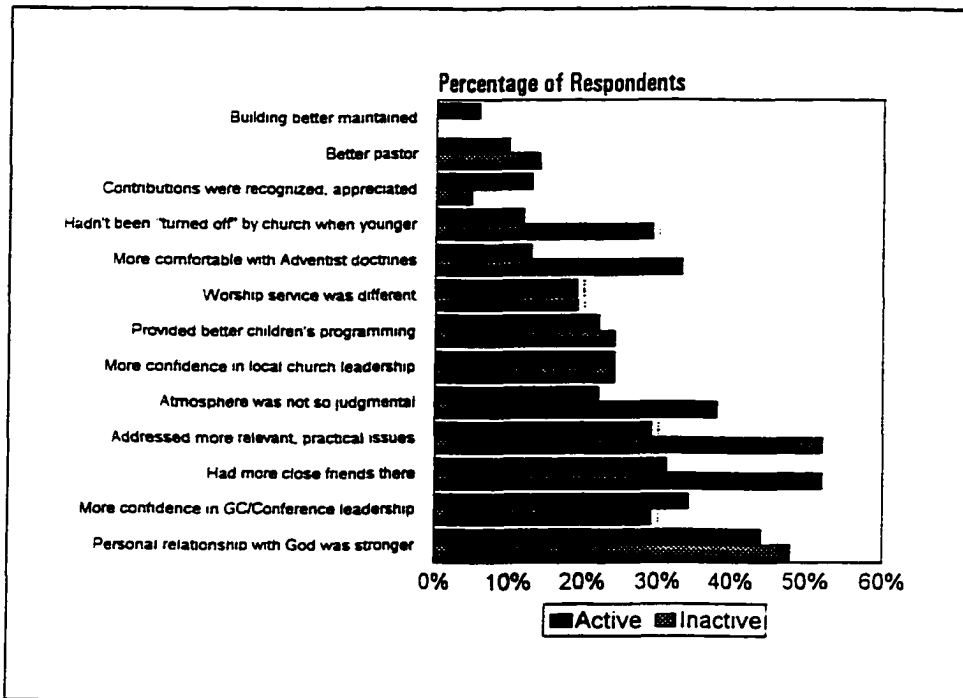


Figure 21. Active vs. inactive, involvement issues compared.

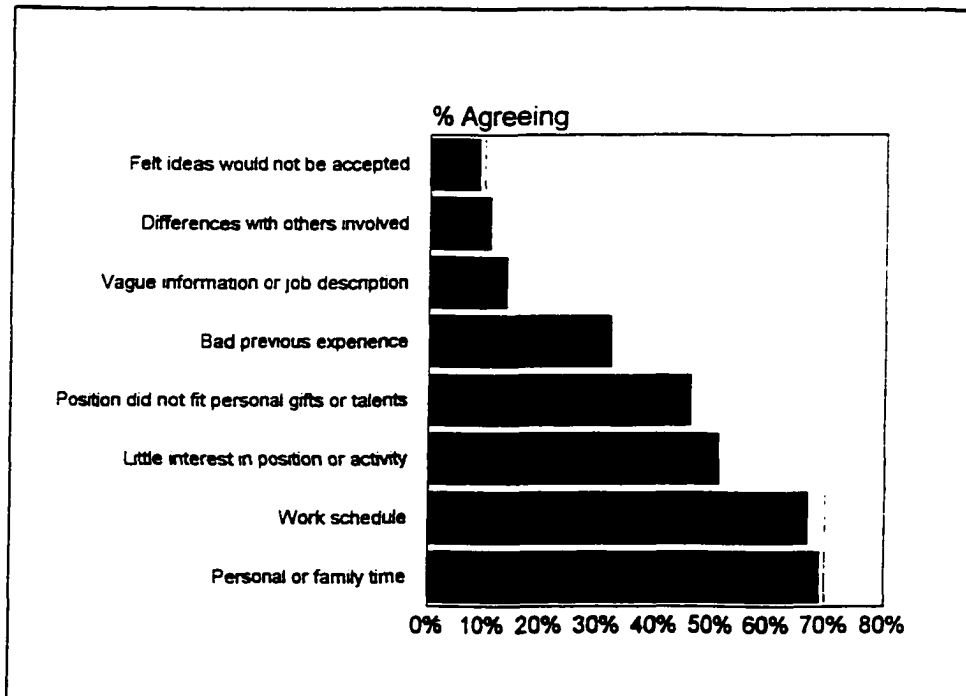


Figure 22. Involvement conflicts--"If you have ever declined an invitation to serve in a church office or on a committee, did any of these factors contribute to that decision?"

percent). The most significant factors included conflicts with work schedule (67 percent) and personal or family time (69 percent).

Time issues would appear to be primary concerns within this population sample. Conflicting demands of family and career easily overwhelm opportunities for church activity. Following time factors, personal interests, gifts, and talents represent a sizable consideration.

The Local Church Environment

How well were these local churches utilizing the skills of young professionals? Two out of three respondents (67 percent) felt they had training and abilities that could benefit their congregations. And 70 percent agreed "I don't want to simply sit and watch; I want to be involved; to make a difference in my church." Yet only one in three (33 percent) considered themselves to be in the core of leadership within their church. And 53 percent admitted that their leadership skills were utilized more in their secular professions than within their congregations. See figure 23 for a summary of these factors.

Time issues reappeared when 44 percent agreed that overwork and burnout were prompting them to cut back on church involvement. And the number wanting to be *more* involved dropped to 37 percent. This brings balance to the 70 percent cited above who shared a philosophy of active participation yet must be satisfied with their current level of involvement. It is one thing to *want* to make a difference at church; it is another to know one's limits. Apparently some of the committed have also learned when to say No. Overwhelmingly, 70 percent were convinced that their help was appreciated at church.

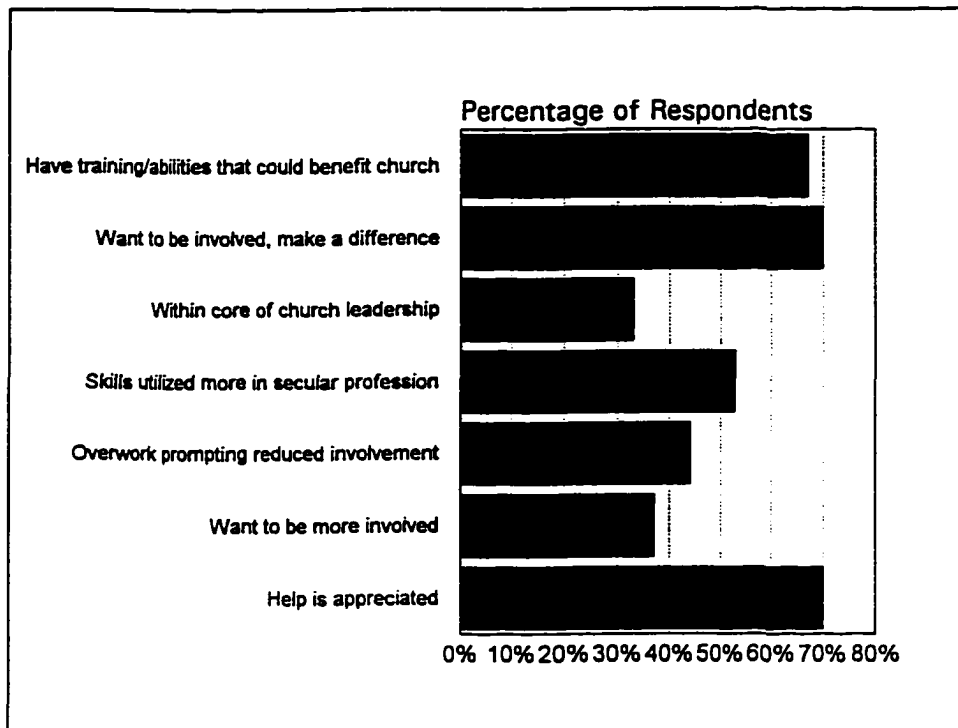


Figure 23. Leadership utilization.

The atmosphere of the congregation was described as “loving and accepting . . . for both guests and members” by 46 percent. Respondents were convinced two to one that their church was “forward-thinking; has a vision and plan for ministry.” A modest yet healthy 51 percent maintained that “the local church is meeting my needs,” a ratio of two to one over those who disagreed. Fifty-four percent agreed they were “encouraged to *think* at church: questions are not only tolerated but encouraged” (only 18 percent disagreed). Local church administration earned high marks; only 18 percent felt that “church leadership seems closed to new ideas.” Approval was highest for church worship services, endorsed by 63 percent as “consistently inspiring” (a subsequent section deals with the worship service in more detail). These factors are ranked in figure 24.

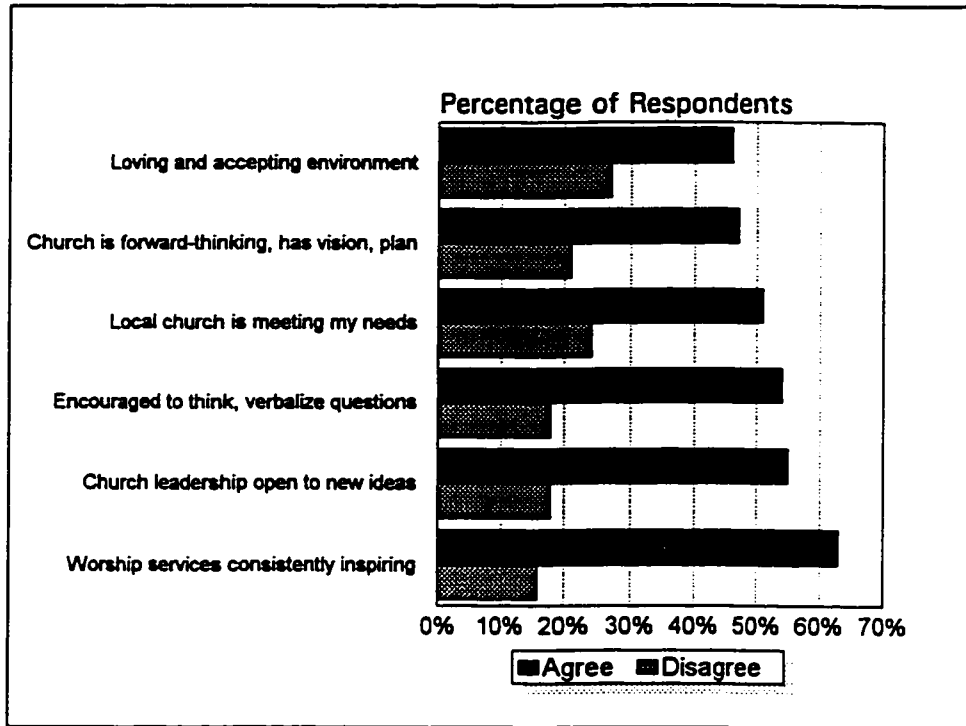


Figure 24. Local church environment.

Overall, the congregational atmosphere appeared consistently positive. Responding young professionals generally supported their local churches, were comfortable with leadership, and were particularly enthusiastic about worship. It is disturbing to recognize, however, that in three important areas the “approval rating” dropped below or near 50 percent. These included meeting basic needs, articulating a vision for the future, and providing a loving and accepting environment. Also, only 54 percent felt that they were encouraged to *think* at church, a vital factor in holding young professionals.

Compared with these figures, how would respondents view their pastors?

The Pastor

By a margin of two to one, respondents felt “safe” talking to their pastor about “new ideas, questions, or personal problems.” Five to one identified the pastor as “sensitive and caring; possessing good people skills.” Seven to one recognized him/her as an effective leader. Showing increasing support, eight to one agreed that the pastor was “able to connect Bible truth with real life; sermons are practical and relevant.” Nearly eleven to one saw their pastor as “a progressive thinker; open to new approaches to ministry.” These responses are displayed in figure 25.

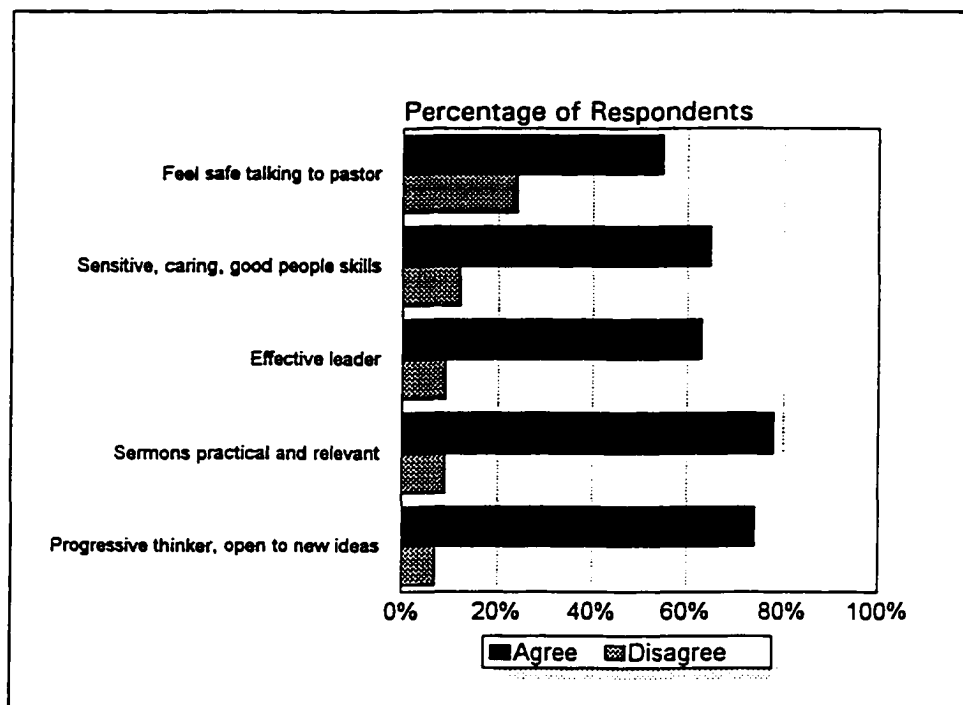


Figure 25. The pastor, as evaluated by parishoners.

Such support would suggest a strong and positive relationship between respondents and pastors. While improvement may be desired, particularly in pastoral approachability and confidentiality, pastors remain one of the strongest links between baby boomers and the church.

What would explain the strength of this relationship? It may be safe to assume that the Georgia-Cumberland Conference places a high priority on providing metro-Atlanta churches with quality pastors. Churches in other less-populated areas of the conference may not fare as well. Additionally, it must also be recognized that the mailing list used for this study was provided by these pastors. That observation does not imply that pastors intentionally skewed the results using enthusiastic members. It is simply unavoidable for the members identified by pastors to share in a reciprocal relationship. In this sample, it proved to be a positive relationship.

What was the experiential base, it might be asked, from which this group made such observations? While they generally considered themselves active, were they among the stereotypical baby boomers wary of long-term commitment? Did they, in fact, have consistent weekly contact with the church, particularly as it came to being present at its services?

Attendance Patterns

One component of church involvement is represented by attendance patterns. An overwhelming 83 percent claimed to attend Sabbath worship weekly, with another 8 percent attending monthly. Sabbath School attracted 73 percent weekly and an additional 10 percent monthly. Responses relative to both services are included in figure 26.

Mid-week worship patterns were almost reversed: 77 percent never attended while 19 percent were present occasionally. Small-group Bible studies fared only slightly better: 71 percent never participated, 17 percent did so occasionally (notice figure 27).

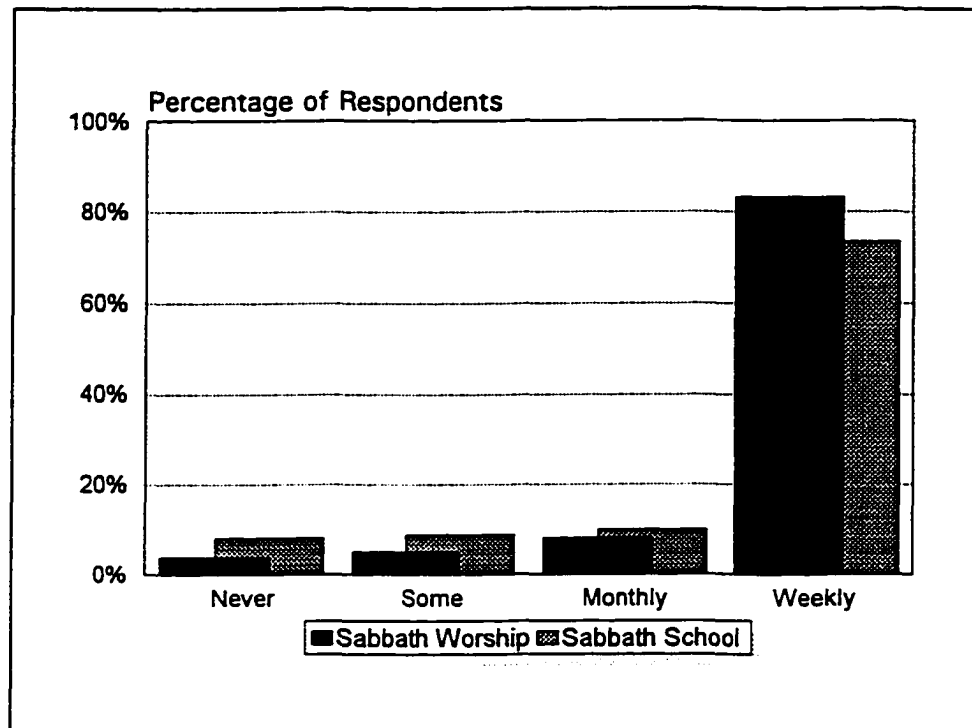


Figure 26. Weekend services--“How often do you attend the following?”

Obviously, the primary contact for respondents came during weekend services. When compared with the perceived time constraints of family and career, it is not surprising that there is little church contact in the middle of the week. Bear in mind, however, that no effort was made to determine how many of these Atlanta churches even offered mid-week services or small-group Bible studies.

What differences in attendance patterns were observed between *active* and *inactive* respondents? As might be expected, among those who considered themselves active church members, 90 percent attended Sabbath worship weekly. Interestingly, however, 38 percent of those who considered themselves *inactive* also claimed to attend church weekly! Sabbath School attendance reflected a similar pattern: among the active, 81 percent attended weekly, while 24 percent of the inactive did so.

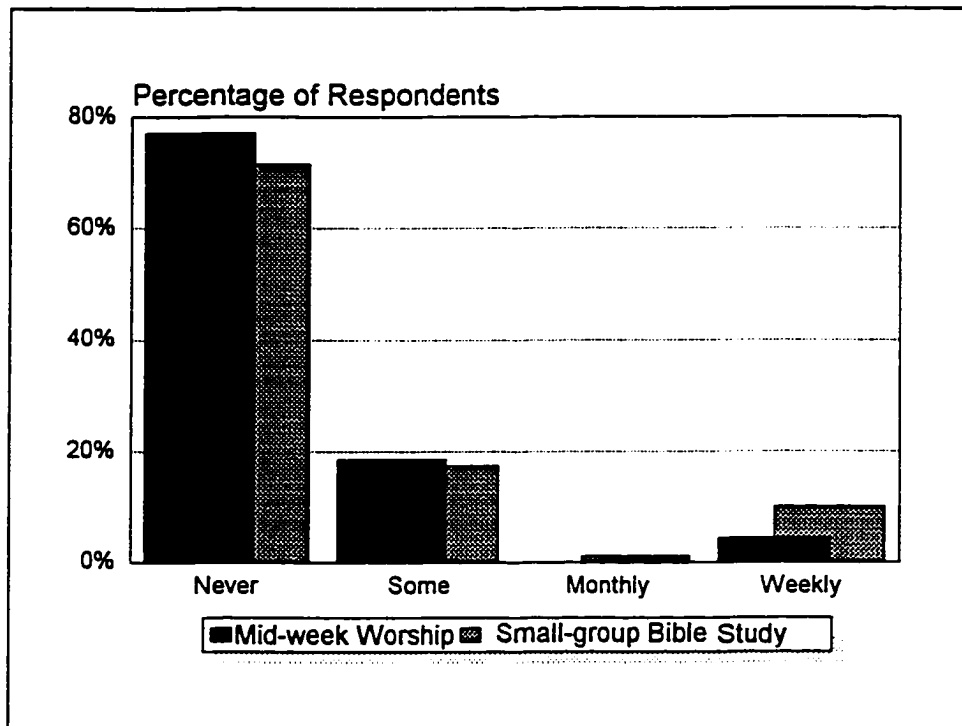


Figure 27. Mid-week services--“How often do you participate in the following activities?”

Were estimates of church and Sabbath School attendance among this group generous? Or does this substantiate the earlier observation that expectations of “activity” were more demanding than simply attending Sabbath School or church?

As to the worship service itself, how did the target group describe what took place during worship? What changes would respondents suggest to make it more meaningful or attractive?

The Worship Service

As a primary focus of the Christian faith and its expression, the worship service is also a pivotal point of contact between the church organization and its constituency. What happens there is crucial in maintaining a positive relationship between church and member.

This study population, as previously noted, evaluated worship services as “consistently inspiring.” They were then asked to characterize the *atmosphere* of worship services, choosing from among four descriptive choices and one neutral statement. Half of those responding described worship as “warm and enthusiastic,” while 31 percent preferred “formal or businesslike.” Eight percent selected “cold and lifeless” while 5 percent chose “chaotic and disorganized.” Seven percent had no opinion (see figure 28).

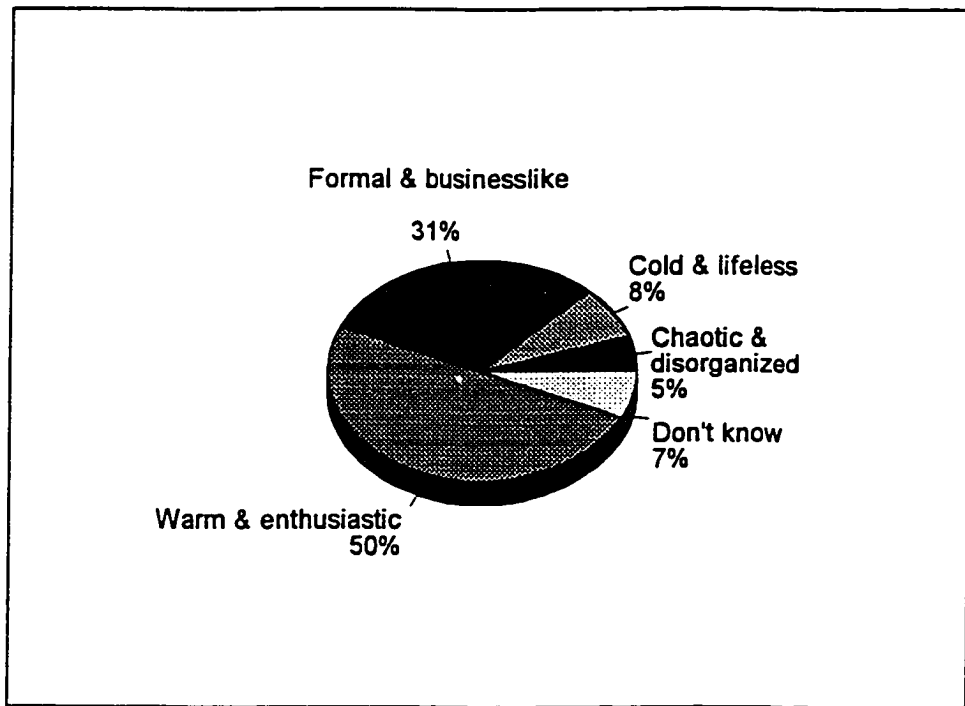


Figure 28. Worship atmosphere--the phrase best describing the church worship service.

When asked what changes would make the worship service more meaningful and attractive the target group was somewhat restrained in their responses. Of least importance were reducing announcements (34 percent) and coming forward to pray

(28 percent). On the other hand, “Interviews with members who are making a difference in their world” (67 percent) and “more opportunity for congregational praise” (53 percent) topped the list. These are ranked in figure 29.

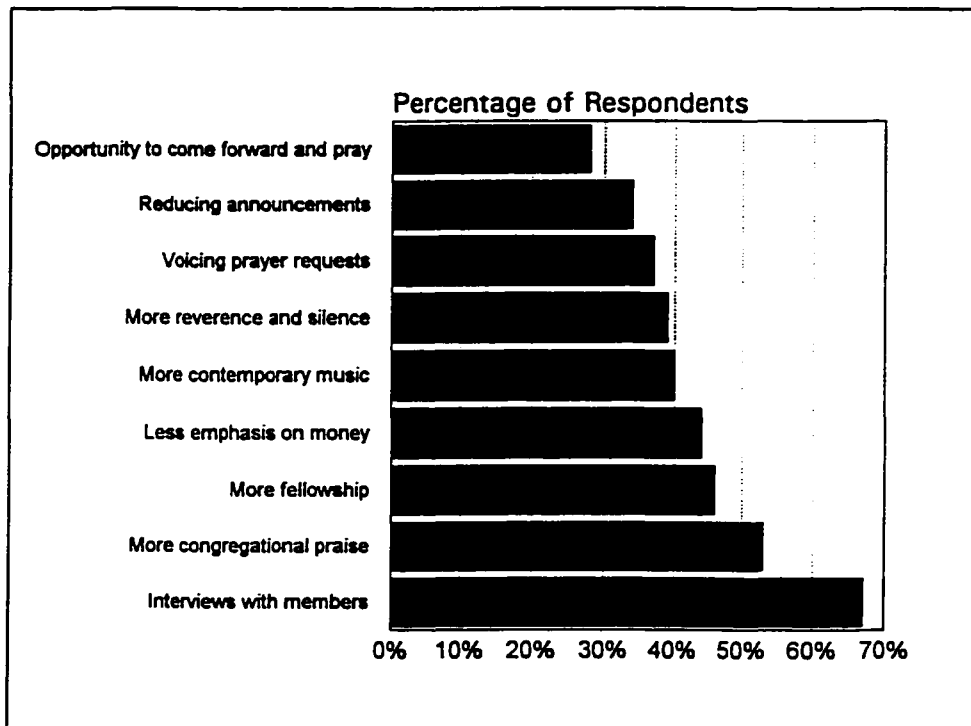


Figure 29. Worship changes indicated that would make the service more meaningful and attractive.

Without objective data regarding present practice as it relates to these worship elements, specific conclusions are limited. Desiring “*more* contemporary music” is a relative wish; difficult to quantify or define. It would appear that respondents were generally satisfied with their present worship experience. Many notations supported the notion that no change was needed.

It is noteworthy that only 44 percent would appreciate less emphasis on money. As a hallmark of the baby-boom generation, one might expect that

discomfort level to be higher. Notice as well that a distinction is made between congregational praise and contemporary music, which was supported by 40 percent.

It is *not* surprising to recognize interests in practical application (personal interviews, 67 percent) and personal expression (more opportunity for congregational praise, 53 percent). Forty-six percent desired more opportunity for fellowship in the worship service. Taken together, these three concerns reflect a craving for community, a generally recognized value of the baby-boom generation.

Did the concerns of the uninvolved differ from those of the involved? What worship options might be most attractive to those currently disengaged from the congregation?

The opportunity to come forward and pray held one-third the appeal to the uninvolved as it did for the involved. Reducing announcements was somewhat less important, as was the opportunity to voice prayer requests. More contemporary music held no more appeal. A marked reduction in interest was also experienced by the choices "more opportunities for congregational praise" and "interviews with members who are making a difference in their world." The last two, while less important to the uninvolved than to the involved, nevertheless remained near the top of their interest list.

In two areas, distanced members showed significantly more interest than their participating counterparts. Providing more opportunities for fellowship in the service proved to be a high priority (important to 57 percent of the uninvolved compared to 44 percent of the involved). But the number one issue for the uninvolved (mentioned by 64 percent)--the single change most mentioned that would make the worship service more meaningful and attractive--was reducing the emphasis on money. Figure 30 summarizes these responses.

The uninvolved in Atlanta seem to be sending a message characteristic of the baby-boom generation. First, respect our desire to remain anonymous at times. Allow us to watch and observe without demanding too much involvement (do not ask us to come forward and pray). Second, allow more opportunity for strengthening friendships without pressure (more fellowship). And third, clarify a commitment to people over an interest in finances (less emphasis on money).

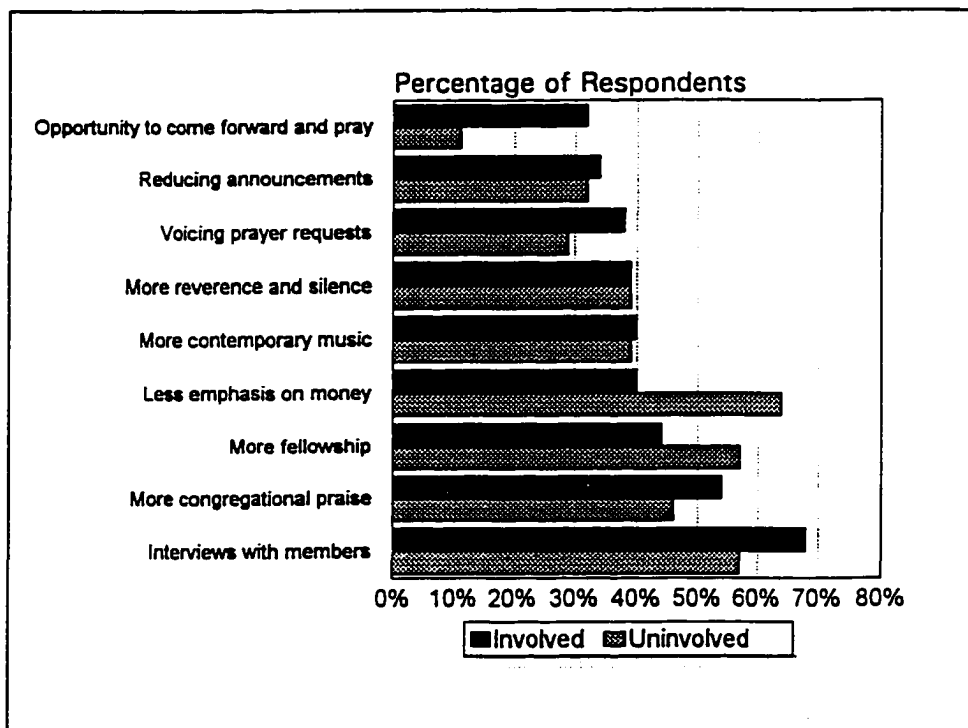


Figure 30. Involved vs. uninvolved--worship changes desired.

Issues of Desired Emphasis

"How much emphasis do you think the Adventist church should place on each of the following?" the survey asked. Responses are ranked in figure 31. Not surprisingly, lifestyle issues (jewelry, entertainment, etc.) garnered the least support.

In fact, a majority (53 percent) thought they deserved little or no emphasis. Environmental issues, elsewhere popular with the baby-boom generation, were not felt to be worthy of much emphasis within the Adventist church. Forty-eight percent gave this area little or no support.

At the other extreme, the top-rated concerns were family relationships (72 percent would give them much emphasis), how to live a Christian life (81 percent), and knowing Christ personally (93 percent). The generational concerns for family values and personal spirituality are overwhelmingly substantiated by these responses.

When the concerns of the uninvolved were considered, priorities shifted somewhat (see figure 32). Environmental issues and social concerns (abortion,

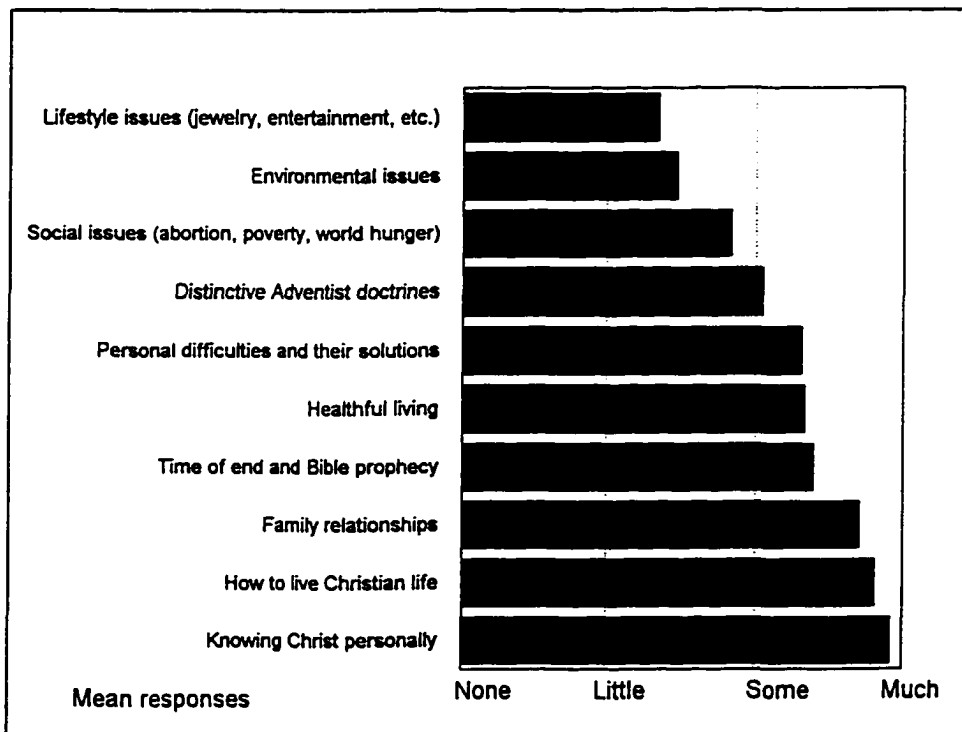


Figure 31. Issues to emphasize--“How much emphasis should the church place on the following?”

poverty, world hunger, etc.) were twice as important to the uninvolved as to the involved. Interestingly, non-participants also preferred more emphasis on distinctive Adventist doctrines and healthful living. Most surprising of all, interest in end-time events and Bible prophecy surpassed the area of family relationships for the uninvolved. How to live the Christian life and knowing Christ personally still topped the list in both groups, however.

It should be noted that the above percentages reflect the number of respondents choosing “much emphasis” over “some,” “little,” or “none” in each of the categories.

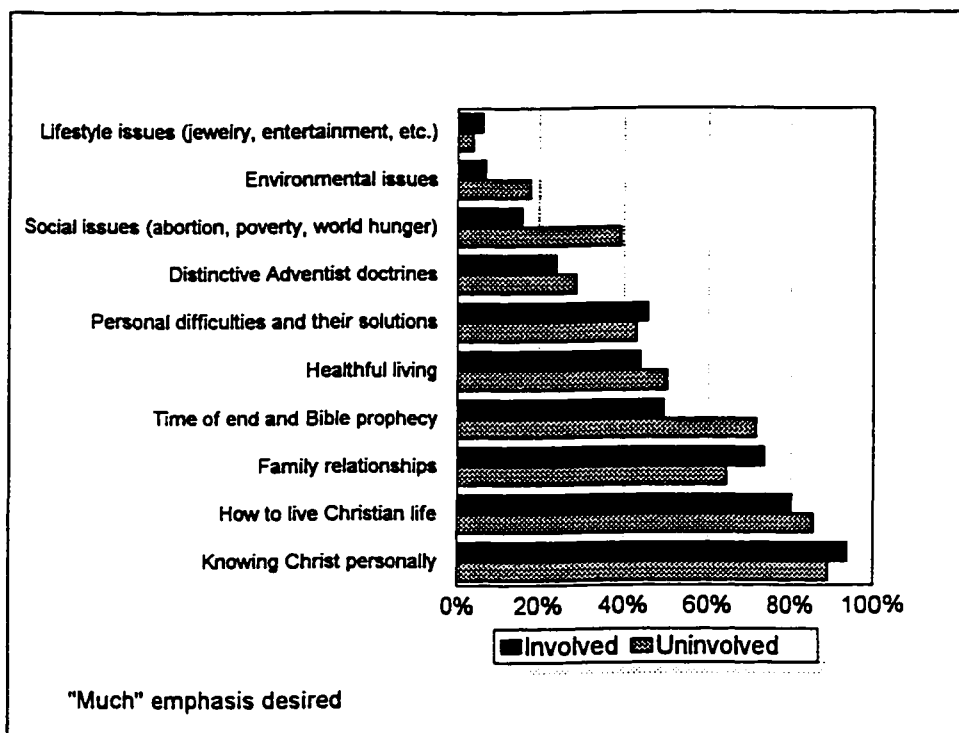


Figure 32. Involved vs. uninvolved--“How much emphasis should the church place on the following?”

Financial Contributions

Church members “vote with their feet and their checkbooks,” it is often observed. If this is true, then monitoring attendance and giving patterns would provide one indicator of congregational health. Eight survey questions were targeted toward the area of personal contributions. Four areas of giving were examined: tithe, Adventist projects outside the congregation, local church needs, and other charities (“United Way, Nature Conservancy, school alumni association, etc.” were mentioned as examples).

The largest group (44 percent) reported monthly tithing in the \$201-\$500 range. Ten percent did not tithe at all, while 20 percent placed the monthly amount at \$500 or more.

Local church needs attracted significantly smaller monthly gifts. Thirty-four percent gave \$1-\$50, 31 percent gave \$51-\$200, and 21 percent gave \$201-\$500. Significantly, only 5 percent gave nothing to the local church, half the number who paid no tithe.

Adventist projects outside the congregation and other charities averaged much less. The median in both areas was roughly half of that for local church needs (see figure 33).

Respondents were then asked what they would give to the same areas “if conditions in your local church were ideal.” Surprisingly, three respondents would give *less* if conditions were ideal. Perhaps these felt they were carrying a disproportionate share of the financial load. Such responses, however, were atypical.

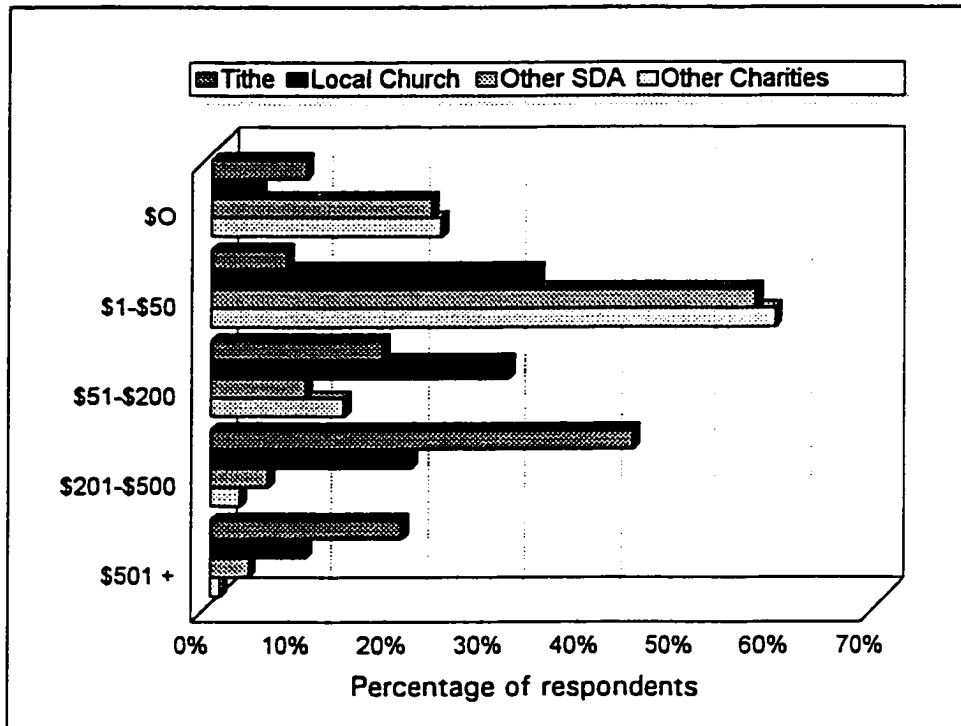


Figure 33. Average monthly giving.

A clear majority, more than 70 percent, reported that their giving patterns would not change. Common notations at this section read “I give to the Lord, not the church,” and “I don’t understand what conditions in the local church, or at any other church level, have to do with my returning to the Lord what He has given me.”

Overall, however, the monthly average rose incrementally in every category, as shown in figure 34.

How did giving compare with household income? Did those with higher incomes give proportionately more in contributions?

Annual household income was requested in categories. Those meeting the income parameters required of the target group fell into one of the upper three divisions: \$30,000 to \$49,000, \$50,000 to \$74,000, or \$75,000 or more.

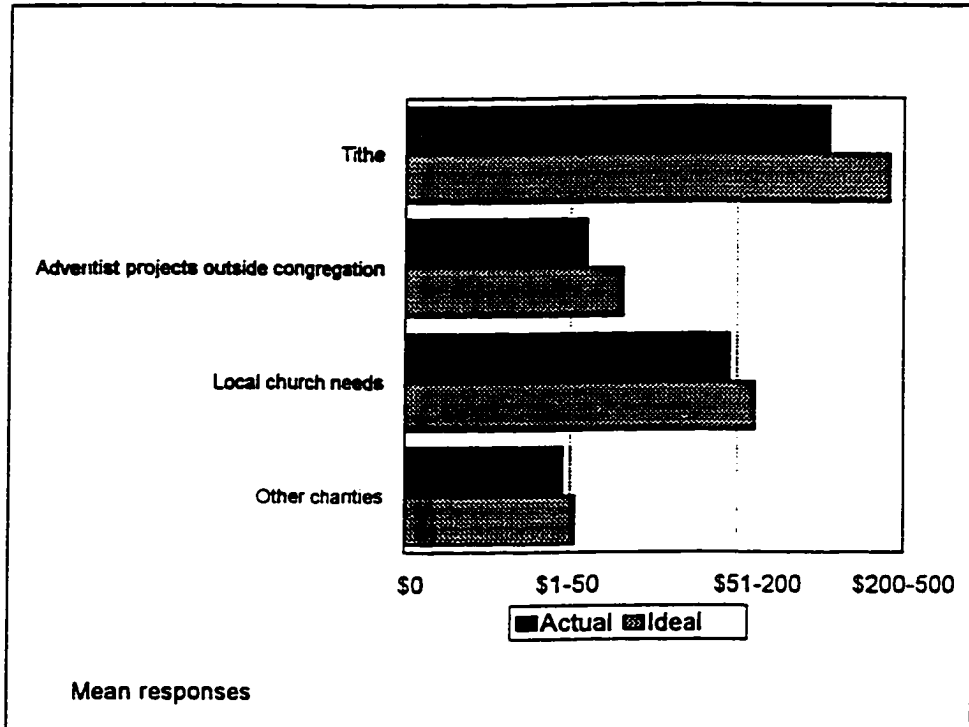


Figure 34. Actual vs. ideal--average monthly giving.

Respondents were fairly evenly distributed among the three levels (50, 50, and 58, respectively).

Tithing increased between the first and second categories, as would be expected, but dropped off slightly among those earning more than \$75,000 per year. This reflected the disproportionate number (18 percent) from that income group which gave nothing to tithe. Non-tithers in the other two income categories were 8 and 4 percent, respectively.

Local church giving followed household income more closely. Apparently wealthier members were more responsive to the needs of their local congregations. These relationships are clarified in figure 35.

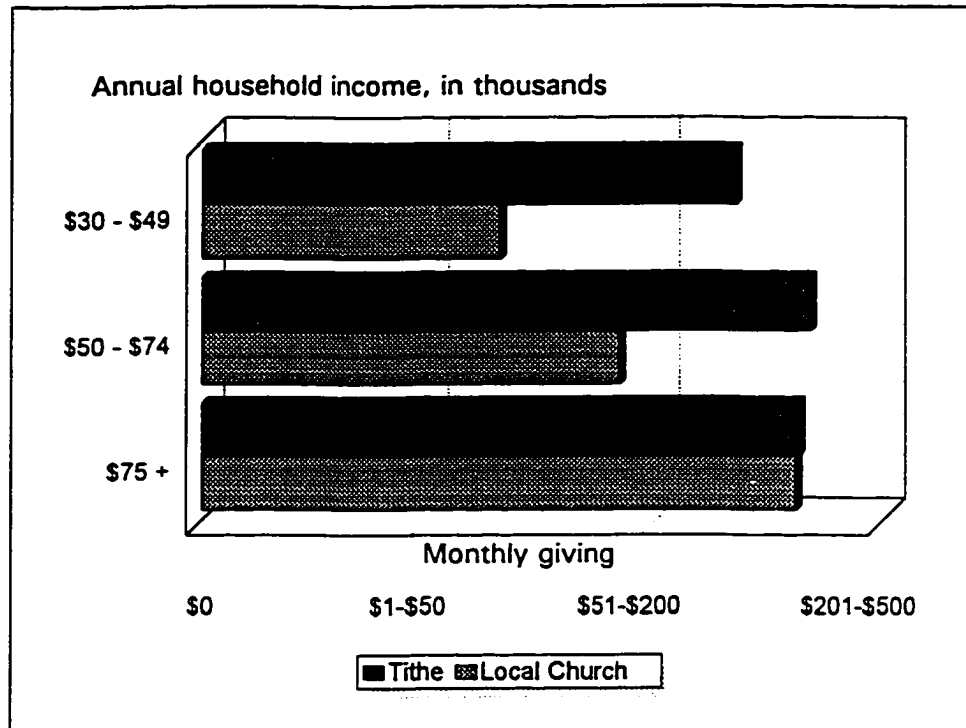


Figure 35. Giving by income level.

How did the level of involvement affect giving? Those *moderately* involved gave the most per-capita tithe, while those *highly* involved led the number of givers to the local church (see figure 36). Tithe may be linked to other issues (the level of spiritual commitment, total earnings, even moral obligation, perhaps) while local church giving follows more closely interest and involvement. Not surprisingly, the more an individual was involved in the local church, the greater that person's financial support of it.

What would explain the slight drop in tithe for the highly involved? Might some be tempted to divert tithe as they became increasingly aware of local needs? Certainly it is the leaders that know the most about the church budget--how much is needed, and how it is distributed. That information must have some effect on giving.

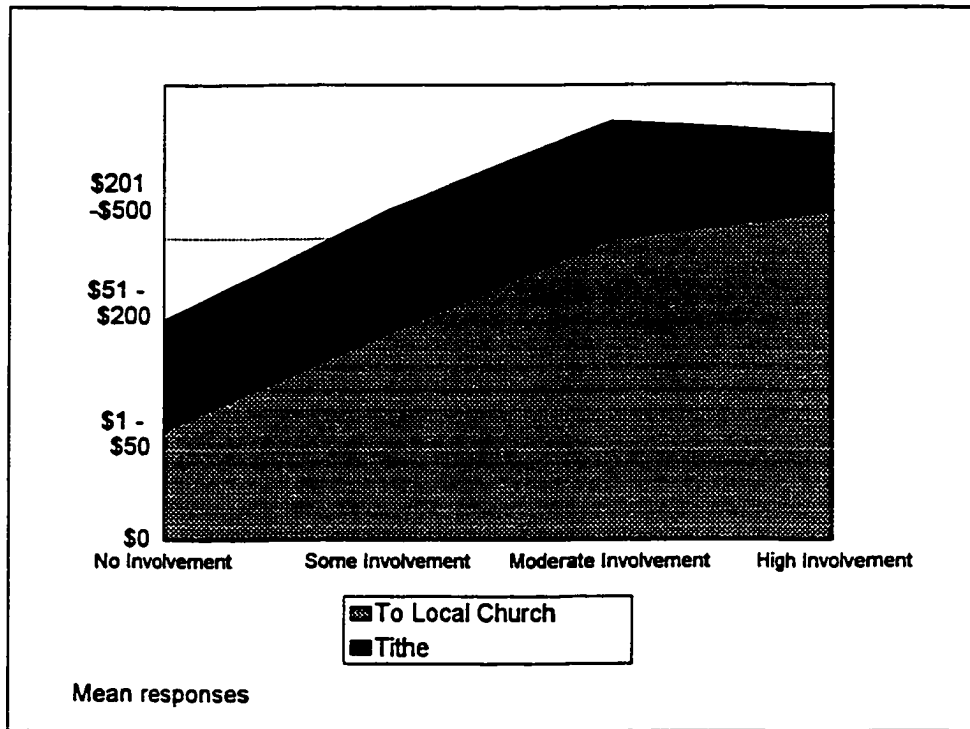


Figure 36. Giving and involvement--average monthly amounts to tithe and the local church.

Local leaders often pay personally for items needed in their departments, never reporting these items to the church for reimbursement.

Some might suspect that those with the most demanding (and lucrative) careers are too busy to be involved in the local church. Such does not appear to be the case. Those with higher family incomes (\$75,000 per year and above) tended to participate more, with 42 percent highly involved. Among households earning \$30,000 to \$49,000 annually, 30 percent were highly involved. While this is explored more fully later in the chapter, suffice it to say that increased earnings correlated with increased involvement.

As might be expected, questions relating to finances and personal contributions generated the most missing responses, annotations, and objections.

Eleven individuals (7 percent) refused to answer some questions in this area. One wrote, "I find this question not only annoying but I question both the motive and direction implied by so much emphasis on finance!"

Spiritual Disciplines

What were the devotional practices of those who responded? Sixty-two percent recorded praying daily. By contrast, only 19 percent claimed daily personal Bible study. While 17 percent listened to *Christian radio or tapes daily* and 8 percent read other Christian devotional books or magazines, 6 percent recorded daily study of the Sabbath School lesson. Reading books by Ellen White was practiced least of all, claimed by 3 percent (see figure 37).

For the average respondent, Bible study occurred slightly more than once weekly. All other objective sources of spiritual direction were consulted less frequently.

As might be expected, those more involved consistently participated in each of the individual spiritual activities more than their uninvolved counterparts (see figure 38). The reading of works by Ellen White, while least influential, was nevertheless closest between the two groups. The widest margin appeared in the reading of other Christian books or magazines, where the involved were twice as active as the uninvolved, reading at least several times per week.

Friends

Social ties are a significant factor in member retention. How many close friendships would respondents identify? How many would be members of their local church? How many would be members of other churches? How many would be non-members?

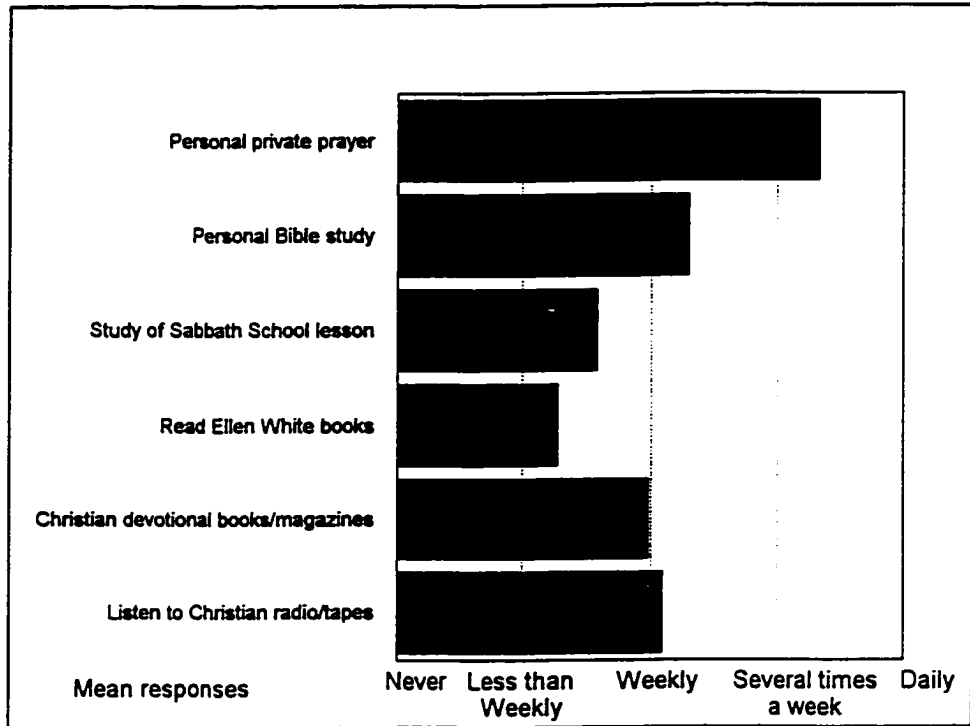


Figure 37. Spiritual disciplines of Adventist baby boomers.

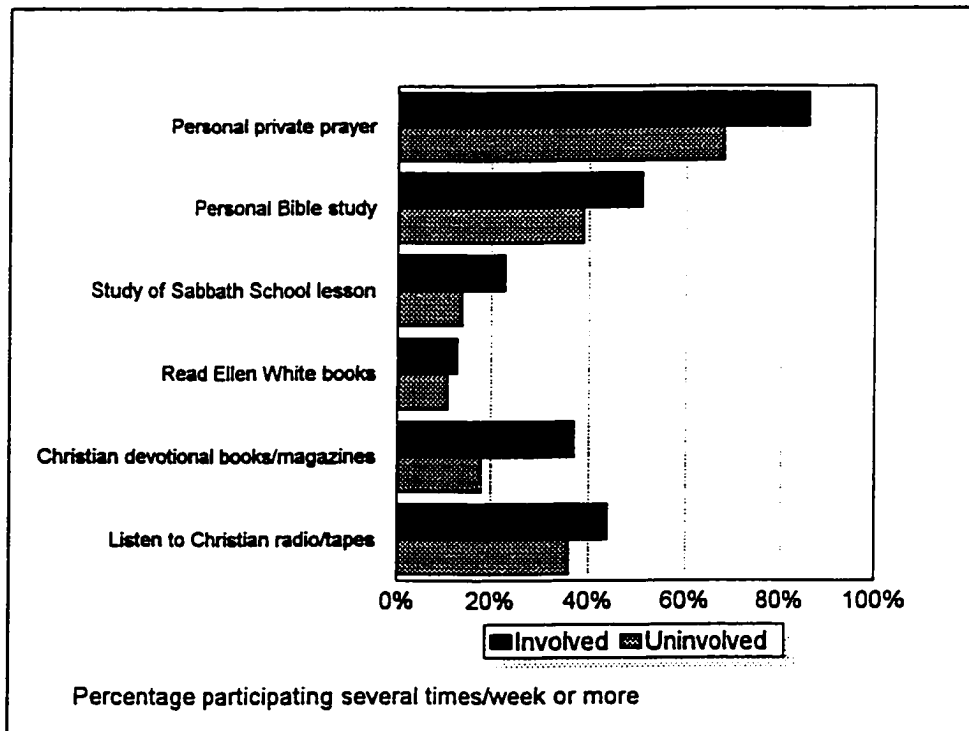


Figure 38. Spiritual disciplines-- involved vs. uninvolved.

While 45 percent could name six or more close friends within their local congregation, and 29 percent identified two to five, 19 percent recorded *none*. When asked how many close friends were members of other Adventist churches, the figures improved but only incrementally. Forty-nine percent identified six or more, the same amount (29 percent) chose two to five, while 14 percent still said they had *no* close Adventist friends.

“How many of your *close* friends are non-Adventists?” asked the survey. Here, 45 percent indicated six or more, 39 percent two to five, and 9 percent recorded none.

Non-Adventist friends would be seen by some to be potential risks for involvement, liabilities luring otherwise faithful members into at-risk behaviors, reduced church attendance, and ultimate inactivity. Others would view friends outside the church as evangelistic opportunities, potential assets to be developed, and thus highly desirable. Certainly the influence goes both ways.

When comparing responses from the involved with those from the uninvolved, a predictable pattern develops. The involved were more inclined to have friends within the church, while the uninvolved found their close friends outside the church (see figure 39). This correlation does not indicate cause. Non-Adventist friends cannot be said to *cause* inactivity.

In the most practical sense, friendships are a product of time. The amount of time invested in shared activities strengthens relationships, not only because of common interests thus indicated, but also through the resulting pool of shared memories. The more time spent in church activity, the more likely one is to find others who share similar religious values, and the less time one has available for nurturing friendships with non-members.

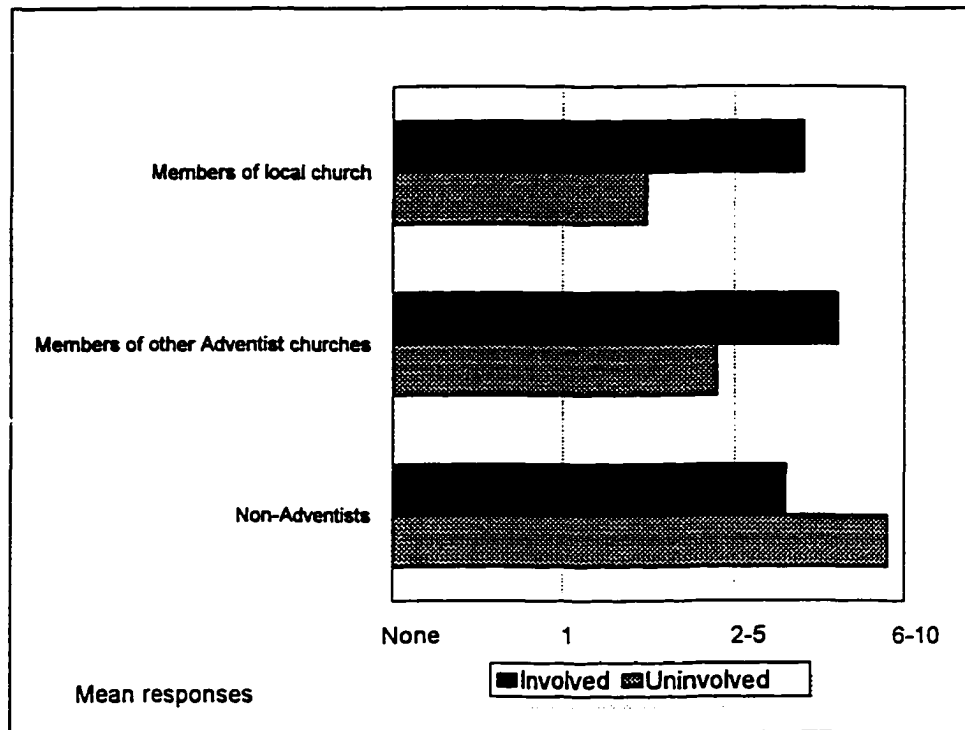


Figure 39. Friendship base--involved vs. uninvolved.

Evangelistic Activity

It is one thing to find friends *at* church; it is quite another to invite friends *to* church. While 45 percent had invited two to five friends in the last three years (an average of less than two friends per year), fully 22 percent had invited none.

When asked, "How many people have you been partially responsible for bringing into the church in the last three years?" the response was more limited yet. Twelve percent could identify one friendship that resulted in baptism. Nearly three fourths of all respondents (73 percent) could think of no one that they had influenced to join the church. Here, in particular, the difference between the involved and the uninvolved was insignificant (notice figure 40).

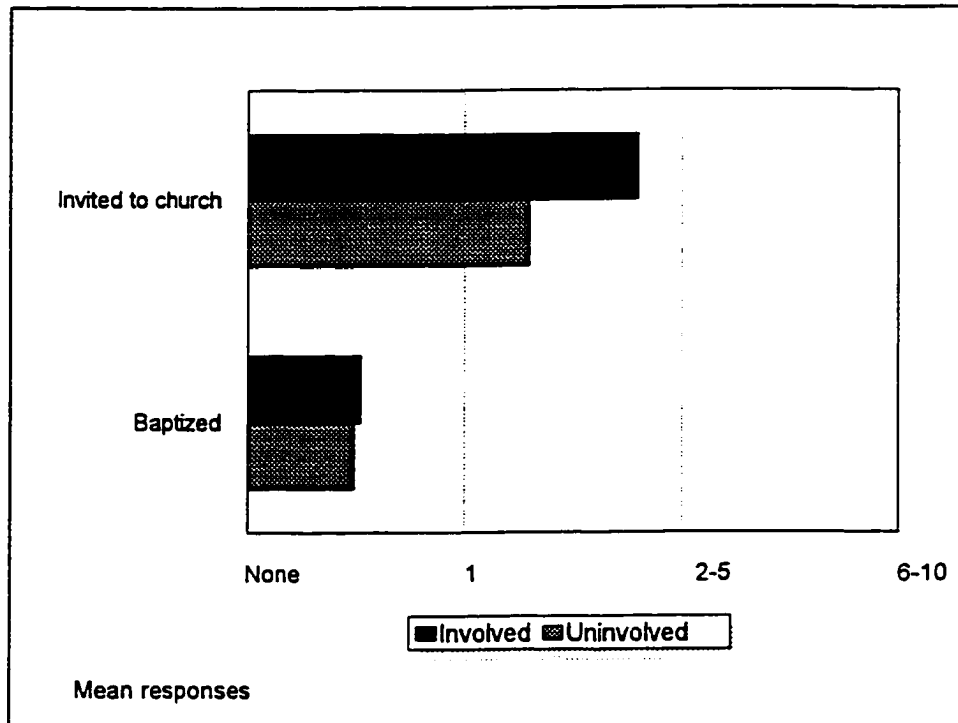


Figure 40. Evangelistic activity--number of individuals influenced in the last three years, by level of involvement.

The Involvement Quotient and Demographics

The relationship between involvement and gender was “significantly inconspicuous.” Contrary to the prevailing notion that men participate in church less than do women, this sample showed nearly identical involvement patterns (82 percent of males, 83 percent of females).

The ethnic background of respondents was so uniform (94 percent White) that no significant involvement relationships could be attempted.

When linked to marital status, however, the involvement quotient reinforced the perception that the church is a family-oriented enterprise (see figure 41). For married respondents, 86 percent were involved. For those separated or divorced, the number dropped to 60 percent. And for those never married, only 38 percent were

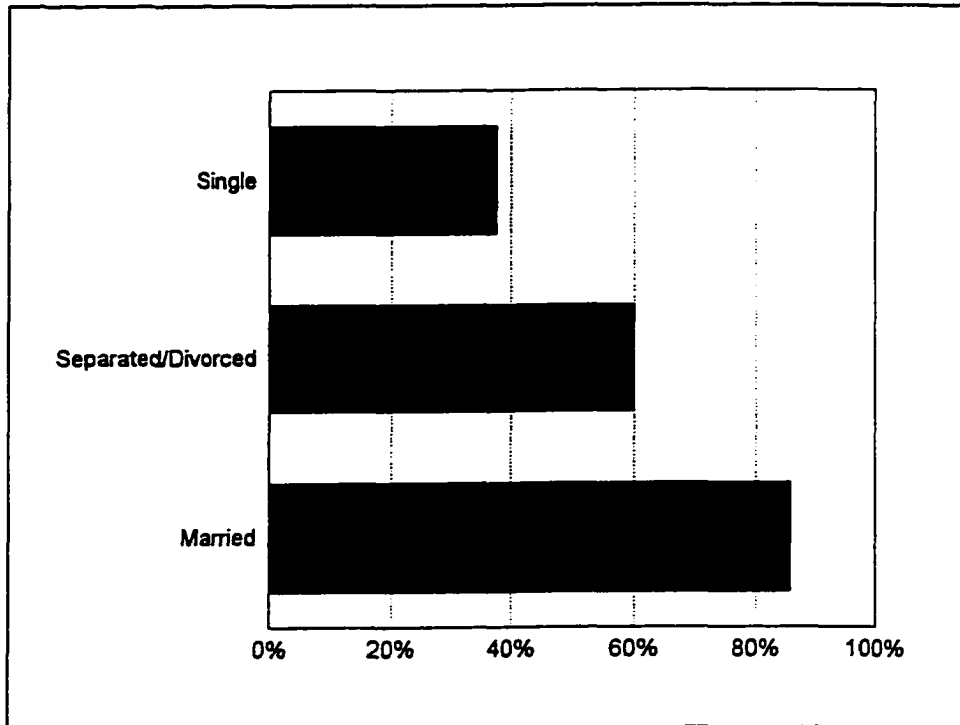


Figure 41. Church involvement by marital status.

involved. For complex reasons not explored here, singles struggle to feel accepted and find involvement within the church.

Finally, an interesting correlation existed between involvement and annual family income. As earnings increased so did the level of involvement, from a low of 77 percent involvement with yearly income of \$30,000 to \$49,000 to a high of 90 percent when earnings topped \$75,000 (notice figure 42). Again, correlation is not causation. The exact nature of the link is impossible to determine, though fascinating to consider. One possible explanation could center in the number of wage earners in the household. The middle class is increasingly dependent upon at least two salaries. Discretionary time in such households is minimal. More lucrative careers, on the other hand, may allow more time to be involved in church activities.

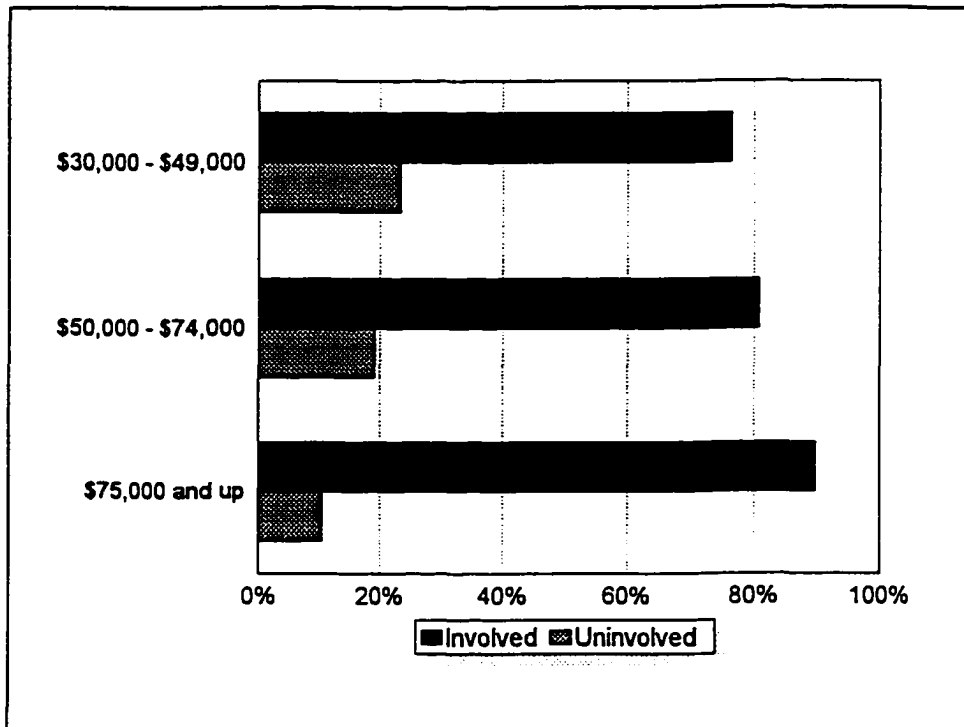


Figure 42. Church involvement by annual income.

Church involvement was also compared to the amount of Adventist schooling reported by respondents. Certainly one purpose of a parochial school system is to conserve and retain church members. How did Adventist schools fare in this study?

By comparing the number of years a respondent had been a church member with the amount of Adventist schooling received, an attempt was made to filter out adult converts who would not have experienced church education and thus might skew the results. Those who had been members ten years or less were thus eliminated.

A correlation did exist between years of church-sponsored schooling and continued church involvement. Generally, the more time an individual spent in Adventist schools, the more likely to remain an involved church member. Interestingly, if all or most of a student's education was in an Adventist classroom,

whether that classroom was in an elementary school, high school, or college, 92 percent of those students remained involved in the church.

Credit cannot be claimed by Adventist schools alone. This finding may say as much about the parents as it does about the schools. The level of parental commitment demanded to keep students in private education must certainly have influenced the students that came from those homes. Also, the effect may be cumulative. Eight years of elementary school would certainly have an impact. But that impact would seem to be reinforced by four years of academy followed by four years of college. While 34 percent of respondents claimed an Adventist primary and secondary education (all of elementary and high school), 20 percent graduated from an Adventist college, as well.

One notable and disturbing exception demands notice. The level of present church involvement for those that experienced *one or two years* of Adventist academies dropped to 60 percent (notice figure 43). That is 23 percent *lower* than the 83 percent involvement reported by those who went to public high schools for all four years. Possible explanations are again varied, but must include the student, the home, and the school. This does, however, substantiate the findings of Lee's 1980 study of inactive Adventists in the Southeastern California Conference. "If individuals reported attending SDA schools in grades seven through eleven . . . they are now more likely to be in the group of former members,"¹ he observed. It would appear that certain associations with Adventist high schools harbor an element of risk.

¹ Lee, 124.

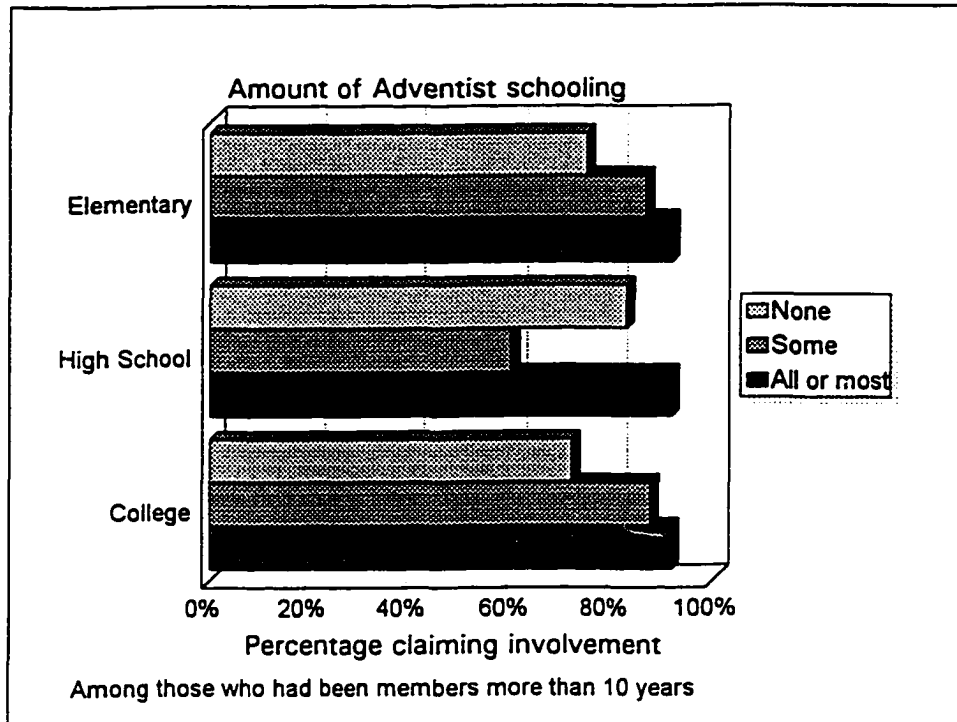


Figure 43. Church involvement by amount of Adventist schooling.

One final correlation was explored: that between church involvement and occupation. Careers mentioned by respondents were grouped into nine categories: business and finance (the largest, with 51 individuals), education, homemaking and child care, law, medicine and health care, social services, trades, applied sciences, and other. The findings, summarized in figure 44, show some variation but little of consequence. Law, the one career enjoying 100 percent church involvement, reflects responses from only two individuals. Education, which is rated second with 92 percent, undoubtedly includes teachers within the Adventist educational system in Atlanta.

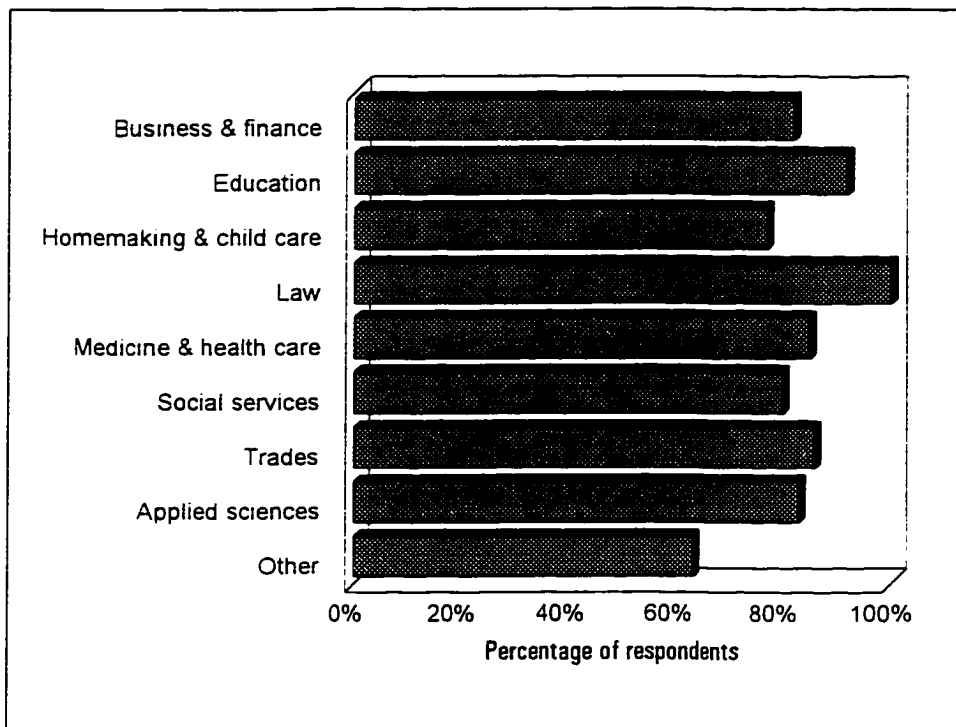


Figure 44. Church involvement by occupation.

What is to be learned from all of this? What suggestions might be made to Atlanta area churches? Can any implications be identified for an improved ministry to young professionals? What strategies might any church serious about retaining young professionals employ? These and other concluding issues are addressed in chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary of the Study

Design

Questionnaires were sent to 344 Seventh-day Adventist households in the metro-Atlanta area identified by pastors as containing baby boomers. Of these, twenty-one were returned by the post office as undeliverable. Of those homes actually receiving the surveys, 54 percent (175) returned them as the result of three separate mailings. Since some households contained two individuals, individual responses totaled 260.

The tabulation process further reduced that number, eliminating those that did not fall within the target population: those born between 1946 and 1964 with annual household incomes of \$30,000 or more. This produced an effective survey base of 161 individuals.

Possible Study Biases

Questionnaire studies share one inherent source of bias. Even with good return rates, the possibility exists that those who did not return the survey were somehow different from those who did. With a return rate in this study of 54 percent, that possibility is significant.

Comparing the involvement quotient among the three mailings is reassuring (figure 17, p. 138). Yet common sense questions the level of activity, participation,

and involvement found. This study may well document the opinions of the involved. However, conclusions drawn about the uninvolved must be far less reliable.

It is assumed that those with significant concerns toward the church, those who have been deeply hurt, and the impatient have already left. Their names no longer appear on church membership lists. And therefore, nothing was heard from the “hard-core” inactive. The subjects surveyed, by the very fact that they are still members, must to a large extent like the church the way it is. In this sense, this survey appears to have been “talking to the choir.” Change will be difficult for this group.

The possibility of a skewed sample is further amplified by the method of developing the original mailing list. As has already been mentioned, by relying on pastors to formulate this list, the likelihood of sampling inactive members is decreased while the potential for hearing from active and involved members is increased. Such realizations do not neutralize all findings of the study, they simply moderate the strength with which they are stated.

Findings

The majority (87 percent) of the respondents described themselves as “active.” Similarly, 83 percent claimed to attend Sabbath worship weekly, 80 percent said they helped with planning, programming or cleanup for church activities or programs, and 72 percent currently held church offices or served on official committees.

Respondents generally found their church involvement satisfying, rated their local church and its leadership quite favorably, and were extremely supportive of their pastor. Specific changes were suggested for the worship service and issues identified as being important and worthy of emphasis.

While giving to tithe and the local church tended to increase with involvement, tithing actually decreased among those in the highest income category.

With the exception of personal private prayer, participation in the spiritual disciplines was weak. On the average, the Bible was read just over once a week. All other devotional reading, including the Sabbath School lesson and books by Ellen White, was less frequent.

While 45 percent of respondents could name six or more close friends within their local congregations, and 29 percent identified two to five, 19 percent recorded *none*. While the “relational glue” is strong for 74 percent, significant concern could be expressed for the one in five who maintained that they did not have a single friend at church.

Asking about friends *outside* the church, 45 percent identified six or more friends, 39 percent two to five, and only 9 percent recorded none. Since friendship is one of the most powerful influences in conversion, this would indicate a strong evangelistic potential. Yet when asked how many individuals they had invited to church in the last three years, 45 percent had invited two to five (an average of less than two friends per year), and 22 percent had invited none. When asked “How many people have you been partially responsible for bringing into the church in the last three years?” the response was more limited yet. While 12 percent could identify one friendship that had resulted in baptism, nearly three out of four (73 percent) could think of no one that they had influenced to join the church.

Conclusions of the Study

The findings (just summarized but presented more fully in chapter 5) suggest specific implications for metro-Atlanta churches wishing to develop a successful ministry to and with baby-boomer professionals.

Specific Suggestions

Provide Relevant and Practical Ministry

The issues addressed must find application and meaning in real life as it is lived six days a week outside the somewhat artificial world of the church. Developing a vibrant interior faith will produce more than inner peace, theological purity, and right thinking. It will change the way executives approach the board room, the way employers relate to employees, the way bills are paid and purchases made, the way husbands treat their wives, the way single mothers relate to their children and ex-husbands. In short, being a Christ-follower impacts every other relationship in life.

When the church answers questions that are not being asked, when it emphasizes issues that exhibit no obvious connection to life in today's world, it does so at the peril of becoming irrelevant and out-of-touch. In the Atlanta study, this issue topped the list for inactive members. Fifty-three percent indicated that they would be more involved at church if it addressed more relevant and practical issues (see figure 21).

Sermons, Bible studies, Sabbath School discussions, and countless other programs will benefit if required to answer the questions, "So what? Why is this important? What difference will this make? How does this find application in everyday life?"

Such an emphasis is no enemy of theological truth or doctrinal purity. It is instead its strongest defender. The logical conclusion of any belief system is in application.

One natural way of correlating faith and life is through interviews of members who are making a difference in their world (see figure 30). Hearing another's experience stimulates personal application in ways that "sermonizing" cannot.

Encourage Social Connections

Having close friends at church means a great deal. To the inactive, this is the second most significant factor in considering increased involvement (see figure 21). Allowing more opportunity for fellowship in the worship service is also desired by a majority of the uninvolved (see figure 30).

Finding connection and a sense of belonging seldom happens by accident. The traditional worship service does not usually allow time or a mechanism for friendships to be established. Some congregations have responded to this need by incorporating a time of greeting and fellowship into the opening of worship. Others offer refreshments in some designated space following the service. Greeters, particularly when matched with the target age group, may help, though an "assigned greeting" is seldom perceived as genuine.

Friendship needs are, by their very nature, not likely to be met in the worship service. Sabbath School classes and small-group Bible studies are more conducive to fellowship and personal interaction. Strong bonds often develop between members of such groups.

Social needs are also effectively met by "secular" events sponsored by the church. Church socials, picnics, camp-outs, clubs, craft classes, and recreation

programs are often credited with effective personal ministry as individuals form friendships that reinforce tentative ties with the church.

Clarify Elements of Personal Spirituality

Both active and inactive members in the Atlanta study agreed that a stronger personal relationship with God would encourage increased church involvement (see figure 21). The two issues most deserving of emphasis were “knowing Christ personally” and “how to live the Christian life” (see figure 31). At the same time, these baby boomers also indicated a marginal commitment to such spiritual disciplines as personal Bible study and devotional reading (see figure 38).

Certainly the pace of life militates against a daily “quiet time.” Yet some may simply be uncertain as to how to go about it. Practical and specific suggestions might prove helpful, while at the same time reinforcing the value of such practices. Sermons could be substantiated with seminars or classes dealing with such topics as intercessory prayer, Bible study, journaling, Christian meditation and the discipline of silence, practicing the presence of Christ, Scripture memorization, or music and praise.

For a generation sensitized to inner spiritual awareness, this area would appear to be of natural interest and obvious need.

Do Not Dodge Doctrines

As a balance to spiritual experience, doctrinal instruction provides both stability and direction. Particularly among the inactive, discomfort with Adventist doctrines is seen as a major barrier to increased involvement (see figure 21).

Historically, the church’s method of teaching doctrine may be to blame for today’s widespread antipathy and disinterest. In days past, becoming a Seventh-day

Adventist was the logical culmination in a process of discovering “The Truth.” While other more charismatic denominations appealed to the heart, Adventism spoke to the mind. The systematic presentation of Bible truth created logically “air-tight” cases for the seventh-day sabbath, the state of the dead, end-time events, or healthful living. Right thinking produced right behavior. A perception began to grow: doctrine was associated with sterile legalism and narrow religiosity.

Doctrine received another blow when lifestyle issues such as movies and jewelry became entangled in debates of inconsistency. For some, practice became confused with principle. In the resulting discussion, the baby (principle-based, Christ-centered doctrine) was often thrown out with the bath water (inconsistency and legalism).

While it may not be easy or naturally appealing, the great doctrines of the Christian faith and the Adventist church can be presented with authenticity, with relevance, and within a personal, life-changing relationship with Christ. The church must find new and effective ways of presenting solid biblical teaching and the formulation of clear doctrine to baby-boomer believers. The tension between experience and instruction will ultimately produce a vigorous spiritual foundation.

Actively engaging young professionals in this dialogue will also speak to a parallel concern—creating a *thinking* environment where questions are not only tolerated but encouraged (see figure 24). Doubt is not always the enemy of faith. It is often its leading edge. By stimulating discussion and exploration, the church will attract those who value intellectual honesty. Truth has never been afraid of careful examination and will in fact benefit from it.

Additionally, the *uninvolved* were more interested than the involved in “the time of the end and Bible prophecy” (see figure 32). Those are doctrines whose application and importance are apparently evident.

Evaluate the Environment

Only 46 percent of respondents described their congregation as providing “a loving and accepting environment for both guests and members” (see figure 24). The inactive, in particular, were concerned about the judgmental atmosphere they encountered in the church (see figure 21).

An issue as ephemeral as “church atmosphere” is hard enough to define. It is more difficult still to control. It is not established by vote of the church board. Worst of all, it takes only one or two harsh individuals to poison the environment of an entire congregation.

Periodic self-evaluation combined with interviewing members transferring to other area churches and a reclaiming ministry to inactive members will help to identify problem areas. Change may involve a decision-making body, such as the church board. More often it will be modeled by church leadership. Occasionally, individual “toxic” members must be approached or even confronted.

Money Matters

The worship change most desired among the uninvolved was “less emphasis on money” (see figure 30). Whether jaded by crisis fund-raising strategies, the scandal factors of recent years, or the age-old problem of selfishness, baby boomers are often cynical about giving. That does not alter the harsh reality that quality ministry costs money or the spiritual truth that human hearts benefit from the experience of giving.

How a church approaches financial concerns makes a difference. Willow Creek will often preface the offering with words such as, "If you are visiting with us today, you are our guest; we do not expect you to participate in the offering. But for those of us who have benefited by the ministry of this congregation, we are glad to support it financially."

Others will communicate, "*You* are more important than your money. Whether or not you can give to this ministry, your value as a part of this congregation is unchanged."

Additionally, as a congregation concentrates on meeting needs, finances will generally follow. Caring ministry is a crucial preparation for contributions. As a church publishes a yearly budget, expenses are thus associated with ministry plans. Vision precedes resources. Motivating people to give involves the ability to share a vision. It is also appropriate to put faces on the need, thus personalizing the appeal. From time to time the spiritual nature of giving must be taught. Church leaders and administrators must remain positive, verbalize gratitude and appreciation, and at the same time make accountability systems known.

These and other suggestions may be appropriate and profitable, yet the broadest and most disturbing conclusion follows.

The Missing Mission

The overall picture that emerges from this study reveals a group of busy young professionals heavily involved in maintaining a church organization. With definite opinions about the worship service, the congregation, and the pastor, they attend worship faithfully and even support the church financially (though they may feel some discomfort talking about the latter). They dislike judgmentalism and wish

for a more loving and accepting church environment. They would like to know Christ better, yet find it difficult to read their Bibles. They maintain close friends outside the Adventist church but are hesitant to invite them to attend church. Personal soul-winning is nearly non-existent. This appears to be a church without a mission.

Such an inner focus cannot be maintained within a church for long. With a mission no larger than church maintenance, commitment will soon wane. The focus will become increasingly myopic. Without a mission, what is left to communicate to the next generation but rules, a hollow enthusiasm for what used to be, and a few cherished songs?

On the other hand, if vision can be refocused, if mission can be revived, if a personal relationship with Christ can be renewed, then the future is bright with promise. Attitudes and behaviors will change. Churches will be transformed. Petty concerns and financial crises will be replaced by a growing sense of unity, enthusiasm, and commitment. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, those in church leadership will play a pivotal role in redirecting church energies.

A Suggested Ministry to the Baby-Boom Generation

Based on information uncovered in the survey and gleaned in the research, the following general suggestions are added for those looking to implement or improve ministry to the baby-boom generation.

Understand Baby-Boomer Issues

An awareness of issues unique to this generation is an obvious starting point. Many of those attitudes, values, and circumstances have already been enumerated. Ministry must adapt, where possible, to the present and prepare for the future.

Some things appear clear at this moment in time. Baby boomers will pioneer new institutions and create new relationships. They will reject rigid, authoritarian control. They will sit on church boards and want to be heard. Additionally, they will make a difference. Boomers will fight empty traditionalism. If they become uncomfortable or frustrated, they will go elsewhere. Boomers will be open to using new methods to do ministry, wanting to reach their own generation, with their own tools, and in their own way. Boomers are responsive to biblical objectives and biblical principles. They will submit to Jesus Christ and will serve his church.

While these are issues presently identified, others will unexpectedly arise which will demand flexibility and constant reevaluation. The key prerequisite is an attitude of openness, enthusiasm, and acceptance. This is not necessarily approval. Nor is it generalized social acceptance of the inevitable. The pivotal understanding is evidenced by a heart of caring and love for individual members of this generation.

Create an Inviting Church

A church that is appealing to baby boomers will *provide options*--options of worship service times and styles, of Sabbath School classes and formats, of weekday activities and service opportunities. It will *speak to the diverse needs* of young and old, men and women, the pressures and dysfunctions of today's world, and through it all will consistently offer hope and encouragement.

An inviting church will *remain relevant and practical*. It will *recognize social needs* to be important and legitimate, providing opportunities to build community and strengthen relationships. It will maintain a *commitment to quality and excellence* that will consistently communicate the importance of the message.

Consider New Worship Styles

Boomers are more inclined to choose a church based on its style of worship or its philosophy of ministry, and less inclined to denominational loyalty. Even Adventist churches, which have traditionally been somewhat insulated from this trend due to their unique day of worship, are now facing this reality. Increasing numbers of young Adventist professionals are willing to rationalize Sunday worship if it provides the worship style and ministry philosophy which they prefer.

Allow for more participation without demanding it. Boomers may at first prefer the freedom to simply observe with anonymity. Be willing to *protect anonymity* without an attempt to gain name or address for guest follow-up. Once comfortable, members will want to join in active worship, even participating in worship planning.

Dramatic elements capture attention and powerfully communicate truth. This might include antiphonal Scripture readings, dramatic monologues, or full-blown sketches. Particular care must be exercised to build thematic progression in the worship service, with every element contributing to a consistent message.

Contemporary music is an important worship element to many, although boomers may be more broad-minded and flexible in musical taste than older members.

Minimize financial appeals during worship, utilizing many alternatives for stewardship education. Sabbath School classes, church newsletters, published financial statements, and audio or video tapes explaining a congregation's financial priorities might all be considered.

Particularly in the worship experience, an emphasis on quality and excellence, careful realization of time issues, and thematic progression are crucial. Seldom is radical change of the worship service constructive. Gradual development and exploration is generally better received, particularly when done within the unique

liturgical style of a particular congregation. Change is often threatening, especially when it is perceived to be precipitous and reactive.

A distinct change in worship style is more easily accomplished when adding a new service. By providing a choice in worship time and format, a broader range of needs and preferences can be accommodated.

Renegotiate Leadership Roles

From Minister to Equipper

Baby boomers will respect strong pastoral leadership. This describes neither dictatorial control nor the process of drifting toward neutral consensus. Pastors must lead churches in soul-winning, yet not become the only soul-winner in the church. Pastors must lead churches in ministry, not become the only one serving God. They need to lead in stewardship, prayer, and vision. Yet everyone in the church needs to be active in Bible study, in service, in discipleship, and in ministry. The New Testament model of ministry develops the spiritual giftedness of every member.

From Male-dominated to Gender-Inclusive Leadership

Women as well as men are gifted for ministry and leadership within the church. Including women in positions of influence and administration is not only politically correct, it is historically accepted, biblically sound, and currently expected.

Maintain Credibility

Pastoral leadership must accurately communicate to a diverse and educated membership. If illustrations are inaccurate or if terminology is misused, credibility

suffers. Preaching pastors must consequently be widely read, attentive to detail, and willing to consult a professional *before* the sermon if in doubt.

Credibility goes far beyond accuracy in reference and terminology. It also includes ethical propriety, complete authenticity, and careful self-disclosure. Congregational leadership must remain at once human (understandable) and exemplary. Particularly to boomers who are naturally suspicious of authority, wary of hypocrisy, and distrustful of institutions, today's pastors must model authentic leadership.

Develop New Infrastructure

From Hierarchical Infrastructure to Management Team

In some ways the church should operate like a business. That is not to say that the church should *be* a business, but that it should be *businesslike*. Churches and businesses both value image, marketing, cost-fund accounting, job descriptions, performance evaluations, and institutional goal-setting. At the same time, neither efficiency in ministry nor success (whether measured in dollars, members, or baptisms) is the bottom line of a church. The church is called to a "people ministry," whether that ministry is popular or profitable.

To find balance between business efficiency and ministry is the calling of today's church. Neither extreme is appropriate. The church that cares about people while ignoring its business processes will not long be able to pay its bills. At the same time, a management-oriented church that abuses its employees or ignores obvious need because it is "after hours" is equally obtrusive.

Good organization will utilize trained personnel and appropriate processes to coordinate effectual ministry. Good organization can help a church reach more

people and reach them effectively. Good organization honors God and is what God expects of a church.

Keep Time Commitments Short

Crowded time schedules and competing demands are leading more churches to consider short-term project teams instead of standing committees. The life of the team matches a particular ministry. When the task is completed, the group celebrates its accomplishment and automatically disbands. This keeps the infrastructure current and vital, not cluttered with outmoded and inactive committees.

A similar approach can work with church officers. While Sabbath School personnel, for instance, may be elected for one year, they may serve intensively for short periods, say "on duty" every Sabbath but for only two months of the year. Or leadership in a department may be given more latitude to develop their own leadership team.

Whenever possible, keep time commitments short. This is true for officers, volunteers, and members expected to participate or attend. Six- or eight-week commitments are easier to schedule, promote, and staff.

New Face for Volunteers

Baby boomers, by and large, are willing to become involved. They want to apply personal training and skills to make a difference in those causes that appeal to them. The church must become more sensitive in matching individual skills and interests with jobs. When the right match is found, personal fulfillment and internal motivation will often continue that relationship far beyond the agreed time period. Conversely, when a forced match is attempted, frustration, non-participation, and guilt often mar the relationship.

In some congregations, a slightly formalized process of “networking” has completely replaced the traditional “nominating committee” approach to harnessing volunteers. To be effective, the networking process must include the discovery of personal gifts, equipping for ministry through the use of those gifts, a matching of job opportunities and individuals, and periodic review to clarify expectations, provide feedback, and exchange information.

Encourage Church Bonding

At one time Americans “joined” churches like they joined Rotary, the Chamber of Commerce, or the Boy Scouts. Church membership was described as an obligation--something one must do.

In the old days, “paste” was the adhesive of choice. It simply stuck two things together. In the same way, church membership described the adhesive that held the member to the church. It specified what a member must believe or how a member must behave.

A comparable term now in use is “bonding.” Super Glue absorbs itself into the elements of both surfaces so that the two actually fuse or melt into one. While paste might weaken and break with time, wood secured with Super Glue will splinter before the bond will break. Towns suggests three steps in this process that bonds a member to a church: interfacing, buying, and ownership.¹

Interfacing

Interfacing brings the person face-to-face with the church. It involves recognition, relating to the church through communication, and making an initial

¹ Towns, 229.

contact with the church. Later within this first step prospective members will be involved face-to-face in a small group where ideas and feelings are communicated (something that does not generally happen in the traditional church membership class).

Buying

The second step, buying, is similar to a person walking into a store and purchasing an item or service. The concept of buying includes: (1) need, (2) desire, (3) knowledge, and (4) paying the price. What at first may be a subconscious attraction must at some point become a conscious choice. When a church is offering a needed ministry, communicates the availability of that ministry, and clarifies any commitment required to participate, the necessary prerequisites are in place for a healthy relationship. Mutual expectations are verbalized and clarified.

Ownership

Ownership is the final step in bonding. This implies transferring ownership from the seller to the purchaser. At this stage, an actual transfer of permission and authority takes place. When an individual buys into a church, he or she not only has permission to be a member but also has authority to be a member with all the rights and privileges of membership. Now that person feels it is no longer the pastor's church--it is "my church."

Ownership assumes both responsibility for and accountability to the church. Certainly, the member is also accountable to God. But in relationship to the local congregation, when a person bonds to a new church he or she gains the ownership of excitement, of worship functions, and of doctrine.

Bonding thus represents the reciprocal relationship that comes to exist between the new member and the church. When it is successfully accomplished, the relationship can be lasting and effective.

Building Bridges into the Future

The challenge of building bridges of ministry into the twenty-first century is risky and expensive. It may consume vast amounts of time and energy. Success is never guaranteed. Setbacks will occur, and delays are inevitable.

Those that attempt it must be equipped to respond in meaningful ways to the religious needs of skeptics, seekers, searchers, inquirers, and pilgrims. Not all will attempt the crossing. But when honest travelers find reliable passage, the word will soon spread. And the rewards of a vibrant baby-boomer ministry will make these well-traveled spans well worth the cost.

APPENDIX A

METRO-ATLANTA ADVENTIST CHURCH INFORMATION SURVEY

Metro-Atlanta

Adventist Church Information Survey

Please circle the *number* of the answer you choose

- | | Yes | No |
|---|---|----|
| 1. Do you consider yourself an active church member? | 1 | 2 |
| 2. Do you occasionally help with planning, programming, or cleanup for church activities or programs? | 1 | 2 |
| 3. Do you currently hold any church offices or serve on any committees? | 1 | 2 |
| 4. What level of satisfaction does your church involvement bring? | 1. Not involved 2. None 3. Some 4. Significant | |

I would be more involved at church if:

- | | Strongly Agree | 2 | 3 | 4 | Strongly Disagree | 5 |
|--|----------------|---|---|---|-------------------|---|
| 5. the worship service was different. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| 6. I had more close friends there. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| 7. I was more comfortable with Adventist doctrines. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| 8. my personal relationship with God was stronger. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| 9. it provided better children's programming. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| 10. I had more confidence in local church leadership. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| 11. I had more confidence in the Conference and General Conference. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| 12. I hadn't been disappointed or "turned off" by the church when I was younger. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| 13. we had a better pastor. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| 14. it addressed more relevant and practical issues. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| 15. I wasn't so embarrassed by the church building and the way it is kept. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| 16. the atmosphere was not so judgmental. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| 17. my contributions were recognized and appreciated. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 |

If you have ever declined an invitation to serve in a church office or on a committee, did any of these factors contribute to that decision?

- | | Yes | No | Have never been asked |
|--|-----|----|-----------------------|
| 18. Work schedule | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 19. Personal/family time | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 20. Little interest in that position/activity | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 21. Position didn't fit my gifts or talents | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 22. Because of other individuals involved | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 23. Felt my ideas would not be accepted | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 24. Not informed of the purpose/responsibilities of the office | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 25. Bad previous experience (no support, training, or resource person) | 1 | 2 | 3 |

| How often do you attend the following services or activities? | never | some | monthly | weekly |
|---|-------|------|---------|--------|
| 26. Sabbath worship | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 27. Sabbath School | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 28. Mid-week worship | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 29. Small-group Bible study | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Indicate your responses to the following statements:

1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = undecided or no opinion, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 30. I consider myself to be in the core of my congregation's leadership circle. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 31. My leadership skills are utilized more in my secular profession than in my church. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 32. I would like to be more involved at church. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 33. Overwork and burnout is prompting me to cut back on my church involvement. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 34. My church leadership seems closed to new ideas. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 35. My pastor is a progressive thinker, open to new approaches to ministry. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 36. My pastor is an effective leader. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 37. My pastor is able to connect Bible truth with real life; sermons are practical and relevant. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 38. My pastor is sensitive and caring; possessing good people skills. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 39. I feel safe talking with him/her about new ideas, questions, or personal problems. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 40. My congregation provides a loving and accepting environment for both guests and members. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 41. I am encouraged to <i>think</i> at church; questions are not only tolerated but encouraged. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 42. Worship services at my church are consistently inspiring. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 43. My church is forward-thinking; has a vision and plan for ministry. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 44. I have training and abilities that could benefit my congregation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 45. My help is not appreciated at church. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 46. I don't want to simply sit and watch; I want to be involved; to make a difference in my church. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 47. My local church is meeting my needs. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

48. The atmosphere in our worship service is best described as:
1. Cold and lifeless
 2. Chaotic and disorganized
 3. Formal (businesslike)
 4. Warm and enthusiastic
 5. Don't know

Would you like to see the following changes made to make the worship service more meaningful and attractive?

| | Yes | No |
|--|-----|----|
| 49. More opportunity for congregational praise | 1 | 2 |
| 50. More reverence and silence | 1 | 2 |
| 51. More opportunity for fellowship in the service | 1 | 2 |
| 52. Interviews with members who are making a difference in their world | 1 | 2 |
| 53. Less emphasis on money | 1 | 2 |
| 54. More contemporary music | 1 | 2 |
| 55. An opportunity to come forward and pray | 1 | 2 |
| 56. More opportunity to voice prayer requests | 1 | 2 |
| 57. Reducing announcements | 1 | 2 |

How much emphasis do you think the Adventist church should place on each of the following items?

| | None | Little | Some | Much |
|---|------|--------|------|------|
| 58. How to live a Christian life | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 59. The time of the end and Bible prophecy | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 60. Distinctive Adventist doctrines | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 61. Knowing Christ personally | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 62. Healthful living | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 63. Lifestyle issues (jewelry, entertainment, etc.) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 64. Family relationships | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 65. Social issues (abortion, poverty, world hunger) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 66. Personal difficulties and their solutions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 67. Environmental issues | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

How much is your family's average monthly giving to the following:

| | \$0 | \$1-50 | \$51-200 | \$201-500 | \$501 & up |
|--|-----|--------|----------|-----------|------------|
| 68. Tithe | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 69. Adventist projects outside my congregation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 70. Local Church needs (Church Expense, Building Fund, etc.) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 71. Other charities (United Way, Nature Conservancy, School Alumni Assoc., etc.) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

If conditions in your local church were ideal, what would your family give in an average month to the following:

| | \$0 | \$1-50 | \$51-200 | \$201-500 | \$501 & up |
|--|-----|--------|----------|-----------|------------|
| 72. Tithe | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 73. Adventist projects outside my congregation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 74. Local Church needs (Church Expense, Building Fund, etc.) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 75. Other charities (United Way, Nature Conservancy, School Alumni Assoc., etc.) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

How often do you participate in the following practices?

1 = daily, 2 = several times a week, 3 = once a week, 4 = less often, 5 = never

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 76. Personal private prayer | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 77. Personal Bible study | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 78. Study of Sabbath School lesson | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 79. Read Ellen White books | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 80. Read other Christian devotional books/magazines | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 81. Listen to Christian radio/tapes | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| Circle the <i>number</i> of the answer you choose | | None | 1 | 2-5 | 6-10 | 11+ |
|---|---|------|---|-----|------|-----|
| 82. | How many of your <i>close</i> friends are members of your local church? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 83. | How many of your <i>close</i> friends are members of other Adventist churches? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 84. | How many of your <i>close</i> friends are non-Adventists? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 85. | How many individuals have you invited to your church in the last three years? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 86. | How many people have you been partially responsible for bringing into the church in the last three years? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

87. What is your gender? Male Female
88. What is your ethnic background?
1. Asian/Oriental
 2. Black
 3. Hispanic
 4. White
 5. Other
89. What is your marital status?
1. Single (never married)
 2. Married
 3. Separated/Divorced
 4. Widowed
90. How long have you been a baptized Seventh-day Adventist?
1. Less than 1 year
 2. 1 to 5 years
 3. 6 to 10 years
 4. 11 to 20 years
 5. over 20 years

How many years have you attended Adventist schools on each of the following levels?

91. Elementary _____ years
92. High School _____ years
93. College _____ years
94. Graduate School _____ years
95. Please circle the number of your yearly family income.
1. Under \$10,000
 2. \$10,000 to \$19,000
 3. \$20,000 to \$29,000
 4. \$30,000 to \$49,000
 5. \$50,000 to \$74,000
 6. \$75,000 or over
96. What is your occupation? _____
97. In what year were you born? 19 _____
98. Do you have any further comments? They are always welcome! To protect your anonymity, please include them on a separate sheet of paper.

PLEASE ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS. The researchers are not aware of your identity.
THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

APPENDIX B
GUIDED INTERVIEW FORM

8. Is it time for us to move away from some issues (by giving them less emphasis)?
9. Where do you find the bulk of your friends (work, neighborhood, from school years, church)? Are you comfortable with that?

| 10. How important are the following? | Not at all | | Very |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|---|-------------|
| "Feel" of worship service | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Variety in worship service | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Stimulating/thinking climate | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Loving/accepting environment | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Quality children's programming | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Doctrinal accuracy | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Church facility & appearance | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Pastoral leadership | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Elected congregational leadership | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Being involved in programming | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Being included socially | 1 | 2 | 3 |

APPENDIX C
COVER LETTERS



November, 1992

Greetings!

I am writing to young professionals whose opinions about the Adventist church are important to its future. You may or may not consider yourself an active church member now. But I am guessing that you have reasons for your level of involvement. I am asking you to help me understand what keeps you involved or what keeps you from getting involved in the church.

As a pastor, I am convinced that these are crucial issues. This church desperately needs people like you. Yet I often wonder if we understand your concerns. Have we asked the right questions? Do we know what is important to you? Have we really listened to what you have to say? Too often we as pastors and church administrators make decisions based on personal perceptions and opinions, without objective evidence of what our members really think. Perhaps it's time we did more. As a doctoral project, I am surveying people like you throughout metro-Atlanta. This conference, in helping to fund this project, is interested in what you have to say. Your pastor gave me your name. And I greatly appreciate your help.

The enclosed survey can be completed in 15 or 20 minutes. It should be completed by each young adult in your household; married couples will find two surveys included. For this study, young adults are defined as those aged 28 through 46 -- the baby boomers. You may then return the survey(s) in the stamped envelope provided.

Your opinions are important. As a church, our future will be dramatically affected by our ability to retain and involve you. Please take this assignment seriously. *Please be honest and spontaneous.* Your responses are entirely confidential and will never be attached to your name. The code number on the envelope is only for checking in the questionnaires (I must send a second mailing to those who don't respond), and it will be discarded as soon as we get your survey.

I know your time is valuable. And I sincerely appreciate your willingness to help.

Sincerely yours,

Ed Wright
Pastor of Family Ministry, Collegedale Church

Enclosures



January, 1993

Hello Again!

I really need your help! As a young professional, your opinions about the Adventist church are important to its future.

As you may remember, I wrote to you in mid-November. A survey was enclosed dealing with factors influencing your level of involvement in the church. I know the holidays can be overwhelming in their activity. You may have simply overlooked this request amid the rush. Would you be willing to try again?

To remind you briefly, my doctoral project includes surveying people like you throughout metro-Atlanta. This conference, in helping to fund this project, is also interested in what you have to say. As a church, we need to listen to your concerns and better understand the issues that are important to you. I received your name through your pastor. And I greatly appreciate your help.

Enclosed you'll find another survey (or two for married couples). *Responding will take only 15 or 20 minutes.* You may then return the survey(s) in the stamped envelope provided.

Your opinions are important. As a church, our future will be dramatically affected by our ability to retain and involve you. Please take this assignment seriously. *Please be honest and spontaneous.* Your responses really are confidential; I record the code numbers on the envelope. Then I separate the envelope from the survey. Later, when the survey answers are entered, there is no indication whatsoever as to who is responding.

I know your time is valuable. I wish I could adequately thank you for your willingness to help.

Sincerely yours,

ED WRIGHT

Ed Wright
Pastor of Family Ministry, Collegedale Church

Enclosures

Ed Wright

November, 1993

Thanks for opening this letter!

We don't know each other, but I am asking for your help in two ways: I need your opinions and twenty minutes of your time. I know both are important, so let me get to the point.

First, your opinions. What do you think about church right now? What do you like and dislike? What keeps you from attending more? What would you change if you could? Is there any connection between what happens at church and life in the real world? I am intensely interested in your thoughts on these and related issues. As a doctoral student, I am surveying Adventists in metro-Atlanta. Consequently, this letter to you.

Second, your time. *Would you take 10 or 15 minutes right now to complete the enclosed survey (two for married couples)?* At this point in time you may or may not consider yourself a part of what goes on at church. In fact, you may not have attended in years. **Yet your opinion is crucially important.** You're already thinking about it; why not do it right now?

Please be honest and spontaneous. Your responses are entirely confidential and will never be attached to your name. The code number on the envelope is only for checking in the questionnaires (I must account for every survey). You may return the survey(s) in the stamped envelope provided.

I wish I could adequately thank you for your willingness to help.

Sincerely yours,

ED WRIGHT

Ed Wright,
Pastor of Family Ministry, Collegedale Church

Enclosures

9927 Pennywood Lane • Ooltewah, TN 37363 • (615) 396-2656 • Fax (615) 396-9509

APPENDIX D
DATA ENTRY INSTRUCTIONS

Data Entry Instructions

Atlanta Church Information Survey
1993

Enter Data

1. Record subject number in upper right corner of front page
2. **First Line**
Q1-80 Enter number of response
Second Line
Q81-86 Enter number of response
Q87 Male=1, Female =2
Q88-90 Enter number of response
Q91-94 Enter number of years (0 if blank)
Q95 Enter number of response
Q96 1=Business, finance, computers
2=Education
3=Homemaker, child care
4=Law
5=Medicine, health care
6=Social services: counseling, social work, etc.
7=Trades
8=Applied Sciences
9=Other
Q97 Enter 2 digits of birth year
Last space 1=first mailing
2=second mailing
3=third mailing
3. Re-enter data. When verified and saved, place check in upper right corner of front page

If No Response (left blank)

For all "Yes/No" questions (1-3, 49-57) = 2 (no)
Q4 = 1 (not involved)
Q5-17 = 3 (neutral, no opinion)
Q18-25 = 2 (no)
Q26-29 = 1 (never)
Q30-47 = 3 (undecided, no opinion)
Q48 = 5 (don't know)
Q58-67 = 0 (no response)
Q68-75, 82-90, 95-97 = 0 (no response)
Q76-81 = 5 (never)
Q91-94 = 0

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VITA

Edward E. Wright

June 1994

Born November 4, 1951, and raised in the home of a Seventh-day Adventist minister and educator, Ed Wright attended elementary and high schools in Hawaii, Arizona, and California. He graduated with a BA degree in theology from Pacific Union College in 1973 and from Andrews University with a Master of Divinity degree in 1976. He was married to Marilyn Ketzner in June of 1974 and has four children.

Between college and seminary, Ed pastored in the Turlock/Livingston district of the Central California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Upon concluding seminary he returned to the Central California Conference where he served as Youth Pastor at the Fresno Central Church in Fresno, California, from 1976 to 1984. He was ordained to the gospel ministry by that conference in 1979.

Since 1985 Ed has served the Collegedale Seventh-day Adventist Church as Pastor of Young Adult and Family Ministries. The Collegedale church, located near Chattanooga, Tennessee, serves the needs of students and staff of Southern College, a Seventh-day Adventist liberal arts college, and a sizable community membership.