

Barna Group

Knowledge to navigate a changing world

Seventh-day Adventist Church

YOUNG ADULT STUDY

Research Commissioned by:

Seventh-day Adventist

Silver Spring, MD

Research Conducted by:

Barna Group

Ventura, California

Copyright 2013

This information has been produced by Barna Group for the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA). The information is confidential and copyrighted information that belongs to SDA and may not be reproduced in any form or format without the written permission of SDA.

REPORT CONTENTS

Executive Summary 5
Childhood Engagement10
Current Church Engagement21
Faith Views.....41
Discussion Group Themes.....47
Demographic Profile55

Methodology, 58
Guide to Survey Data, 59

INTRODUCTION

This report contains the findings from a series of questions commissioned by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in a nationwide study of 18-29 year old Adventist constituents. In all, 488 online interviews were completed during the third week of September.

The objectives of the question commissioned by SDA were to determine:

- church engagement during childhood
- current faith engagement
- barriers to engagement
- theolographic profile of young adults
- demographic profile of young adults

The remainder of the report provides a summary analysis of the survey data for these questions; a description of the survey methodology; and a summary of sampling error considerations. Detailed (cross-tabulated) data tables are provided in a separate document.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Childhood Engagement

- Half of the respondents went to three or more different congregations (the median is 3.1), but the fact that the mean (or average) is even higher means that a small number of these respondents went to a lot of different churches. The impact of multiple childhood churches is worth further examination, especially because many unengaged participants switched churches even more often.
- While participants did attend several churches as children, there was also a measure of stability. Most participants attended one church for at least 10 years. This was true for engaged and unengaged participants.
- There are consistent differences between the engaged and unengaged participants on nearly every perceptual measure of their childhood church experience. These differences are very consistent, and rather large in many cases.
- The Church as a whole does less well at making young people feel intellectually accepted. Many engaged—and the majority of unengaged—participants agree that the church leaders didn't tolerate doubts, that their church was overprotective of its youth, that it was repressive of people with different ideas or opinions.
- Unlike attitudes and perceptions of church, the behaviors during childhood show very little difference between engaged and unengaged young adults. This is a remarkable non-difference: it indicates that the behavior of children and youth in the church are not at all predictive of whether or not they will disengage from church during young adulthood.
- The most common childhood behaviors are attending services (94%) and Sabbath school (89%). It is also very common for children and youth to attend social functions (76%), attending youth group (67%), tithing (63%), and offerings (52%).

Current Church Engagement

- Once-a-week attendance seems to be the norm among engaged young adults (54%). Only about one in five (21%) attend more often.
- Even among the engaged, about one in four (23%) report a period of life where they disconnected from the church.
- Some of the themes for not attending church regularly were personal conflict with others at the church, feeling rejected or judged for their behaviors, feeling excluded socially, and simple lack of time.
- The majority of engaged young adults are actually involved in quite the variety of activities—not just attending services. As expected, the unengaged are unengaged across the board.
- It should also be noted that fewer than one in five (17%) of unengaged young adults say that they don't plan on ever returning to church. Another one in five (20%) say this is slightly true, but a strong majority (63%) disagree completely that they don't plan to return.
- When it comes to current experiences and attitudes about their local church, the differences we saw between engaged and unengaged in childhood experiences and attitudes are even more pronounced when we ask about *current* experiences and attitudes—which means that these issues did *not* resolve themselves as the person matured.

Faith Views

- Overall, most engaged and some unengaged adhere to standard Christian beliefs. The biggest gaps are the beliefs in the accuracy of the Bible, the nature of salvation, and in a person's responsibility to share his or her faith—fewer than half of unengaged respondents strongly agree with each of these.
- When it comes to the various tenets of SDA orthodoxy, the engaged again are in greater agreement than are the unengaged. The “big three” that engender the greatest levels of agreement (for both groups) are the second coming of Jesus, the state of the dead, and the Sabbath.

- A strong majority of engaged members agree with Church standards for sex in marriage, not using tobacco, keeping the Sabbath, and not using drugs. (Even a majority of unengaged young adults subscribe to each of these, with the exception of sex within marriage.)

Discussion Group Themes

- Intergeneration relationships are a big deal to both engaged and unengaged young adults—and not just in a good way. Those who felt welcome and nurtured referenced older adults, and those who felt judged and rejected also cited older adults.
- Today’s young adults are very comfortable with ambiguity and nuance. In many ways they do not feel the need to develop a comprehensive worldview or philosophy. When it comes to Adventist doctrine and standards, they are sifting through church teachings—even the ones who consider themselves strong members.
- A personal experience with God matters. Many of the engaged in our groups could point to specific stories of when they felt God’s presence. Sometimes it was a miraculous event, and other times it was just a powerful time of personal reflection. Either way, these experiences seemed to calibrate them toward their faith.
- The themes of judgment versus acceptance are critical. One of those two seemed to define their Adventist experience. Many who came to the faith later in life talk about how accepted they felt, while many who grew up in the church talked about how rejected they felt. Sometimes the same person talked about both experiences.
- It is a gross oversimplification to say that all young adults feel judged. The stories of acceptance and belonging were frequent, real, and powerful. While many local churches may have much room for improvement, it is certainly *not* that case that all young Adventists adults feel rejected or judged.
- Among young adults, church involvement seems to be a function of opportunity, leadership support, and peer influence. If one of these is missing it can easily derail a young adult’s desire to become more invested in his or her home church.

Implications

- One of the recurrent themes of this research—seen here as well as in the discussion groups—is that while Adventists seem to place great importance on outward behavior, such behavior is a poor predictor of their relationship with Christ. Time and again we hear from young adults who are deepening their relationship with Christ (and people in the church) during a time when their outward behaviors are not in conformity to the church. In many cases they will later become further committed to the lifestyle standards of Adventist doctrine, but only after internalizing them rather than conforming to them.
- One of the strengths of the Adventist churches is that they have many opportunities for their children and youth to be involved. But there is a difficult transition from child to adult. Young adults have many fewer opportunities. As one person in our post-college discussion groups said, “If you aren’t a child and don’t have a child, there’s nothing for you.”
- The differences we see in current religious thought and activity (between the engaged and the unengaged) are drastic—much bigger than what we saw in their childhood behavior. This indicates that it is their experiences and perceptions of their church as a child, rather than their behavioral engagement with the church, that predicts if they will be behaviorally engaged as young adults. This insight should not be underestimated. Adventist culture currently seems to place high value on the behaviors of its children and youth (and provides many opportunities along these lines), but it cannot neglect their subjective experiences in the process.
- Most of those who were negative toward the church, and who had tempered their involvement, did not see themselves as rejecting the teachings or fundamentals ideals of the church—rather they did not see a clear path for them to engage with and interact with the church. In some ways they felt that the church had left them.
- One key aspect of intergenerational relationships is that they are already happening. The objective isn’t to facilitate intergenerational interaction, because it is already going on; the objective is to make these interactions positive. Because for every positive interaction there seems to be a negative one as well. These will be addressed in the section below on forgiveness and acceptance.
- The combination of this natural tendency of young adults to build a “piece-meal” religious philosophy and worldview with the common perception that the Adventist church is repressive of new or different ideas leads to a strong risk of alienating young adults.

- The local churches should also investigate how they can challenge their young adults to *have* such experiences in the first place. Camps were often mentioned as vehicles for such experiences, as were Pathfinders and Adventurers. But these are designed for youth. What are the young adult parallels that can provoke the kind of transformational change that deepens the relationship both with Christ and the Church?
- One challenge for the local churches to consider is how to leverage negative experiences. Instead of discarding the person or putting up barriers to “protect” others from their influence, how can the church not only embrace them, but also find a way for them—and others—to use their mistakes as learning opportunities?
- The employment percentages indicate that the local congregations may be able to build intergenerational relationships through career mentoring, networking, or apprenticeships. It is worth investigating how the Adventist churches can reach their young adults through informal career services.

CHILDHOOD ENGAGEMENT

Church Attendance as a Child

Most participants in this survey (85%) attended an Adventist church regularly as a child. That is based on their own definition of “regularly”, not based on a specific frequency. The unengaged participants actually attended at a slightly higher rate (91%).

A note on our definitions of “engaged” and “unengaged”, which you will see as columns in the tables: engaged are those who attend services or Sabbath school at least once per month, AND disagreed with the statement that church is not relevant for them. Unengaged could qualify one of two ways: they do not attend services or Sabbath school once per month, OR they agreed that church does not really mean much for them anymore. By design we have more engaged than unengaged in this survey, but we have enough of both groups for reasonable comparisons.

It is surprising to see the number of congregations that these young people attended as children (Table 2). Half of them went to three or more different congregations (the median is 3.1), but the fact that the mean (or average) is even higher means that a small number of these respondents went to a lot of different churches. The impact of multiple childhood churches is worth further examination, especially because many unengaged participants switched churches even more often.

While participants did attend several churches as children, there was also a measure of stability. Most participants attended one church for at least 10 years. This was true for engaged and unengaged participants.

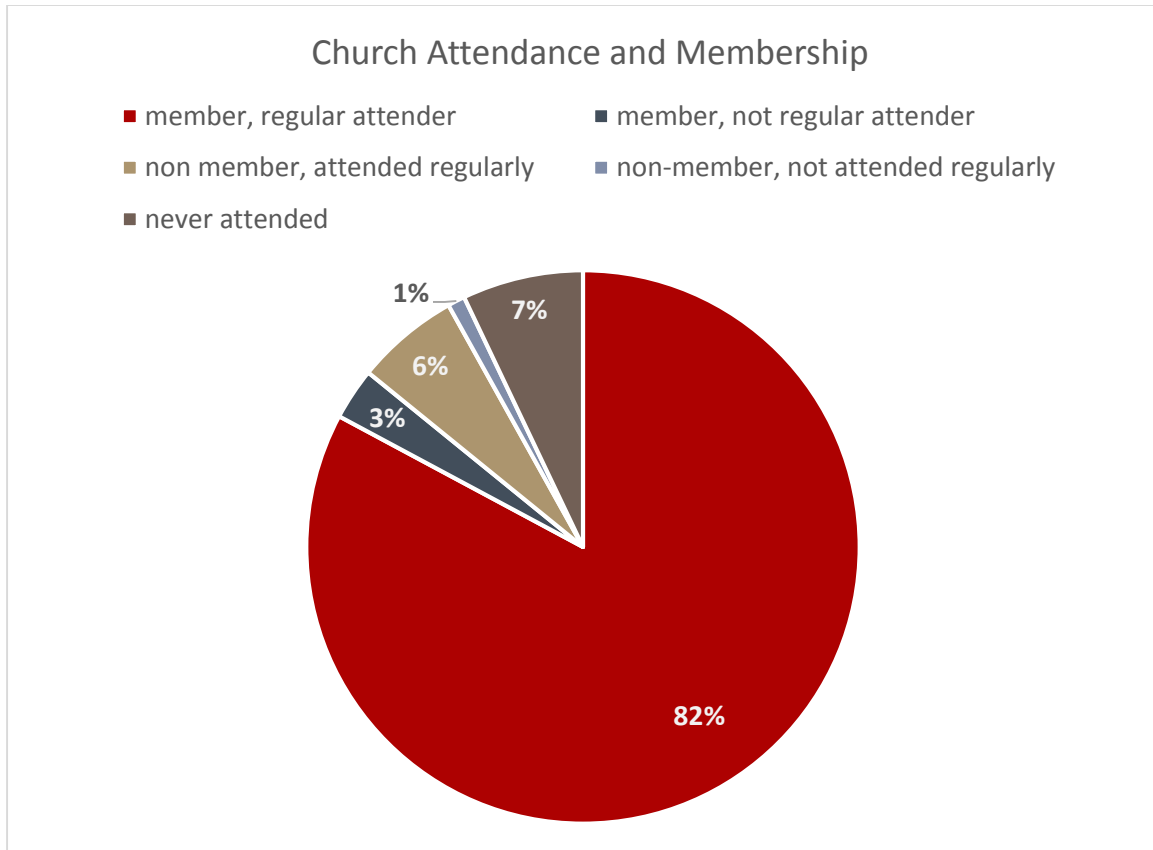


Table 1 – Attendance and Membership during Childhood

Thinking back to your elementary and high school years, which statement best describes your relationship with the Seventh-day Adventist Church during this time?

	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
regular attender	85%	87%	84%	84%	91%
member, attended regularly	82	84	81	80	90
not a member, attended regularly	3	3	4	3	2
not a regular attender	15	14	16	17	9
member, did not attended regularly	6	5	7	6	4
not a member, did not attended regularly	1	1	2	1	2
never attended as a child	7	8	7	9	3
not sure	*	0	*	*	0
<i>n=</i>	488	230	258	381	105

* indicates less than one-half of one percent

Table 2 – Number of SDA churches attended

How many Seventh-day Adventist congregations did you attend before you turned 18?

	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
mean	7.0	6.3	7.7	5.6	12.6
median	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1
<i>n</i> =	477	223	254	376	99

Table 3 – Years attending

Thinking about the church you attended the longest before the age of 18, for about how long did you attend that church?

	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
mean	10.6	11.0	10.3	10.4	11.4
median	10.2	10.4	10.0	10.1	10.5
<i>n</i> =	481	226	255	375	104

Childhood Experiences at church

There are consistent differences between the engaged and unengaged participants on nearly every perceptual measure of their childhood church experience. These differences tend to be fairly large in many cases.

The perceptions on which the Church scored most favorably were related to relationship and belonging. Almost all of the engaged and respondents—and the majority of unengaged respondents agreed with such statements as “I was very involved,” “people showed compassion for the less fortunate,” “I felt like I belonged at church,” “I developed strong relationships with youth [and adults],” and “most of my friends were active at church.” These statements indicate that the Adventist churches often excel at establishing supportive relationships with the children who attend.

Many of the participants in the discussion groups validate this idea. Almost all of them could point to strong, supportive relationships they developed in their childhood. However, the strength of these relationships could work both ways—some positive relationships turned sour, and others were strong but not supportive.

The Church as a whole does less well at making young people feel intellectually accepted. Many engaged—and the majority of unengaged—participants agree that the church leaders didn’t tolerate doubts, that their church was overprotective of its youth, that it was repressive of people with different ideas or opinions. The majority of both groups of respondents think that the teaching they received as children reject what science tells us about the world.

There were ten statements for which differences between the engaged and unengaged young adults were particularly strong. Four of these were negative perceptions, and six were positive perceptions. The dramatic differences in these childhood experiences indicate that these areas may be particularly important for predicting who will be engaged or unengaged in early adulthood. These statements are presented in the chart below.

A later section in this report discusses these same perceptions and attitudes as they related to the respondents’ current church—their young adult experience rather than their childhood experience. But it should be noted now that the differences between engaged and unengaged seem to be exacerbated rather than mitigated in young adulthood.

Experiences at Childhood Church: Gaps between Engaged and Unengaged

% very accurate + somewhat accurate

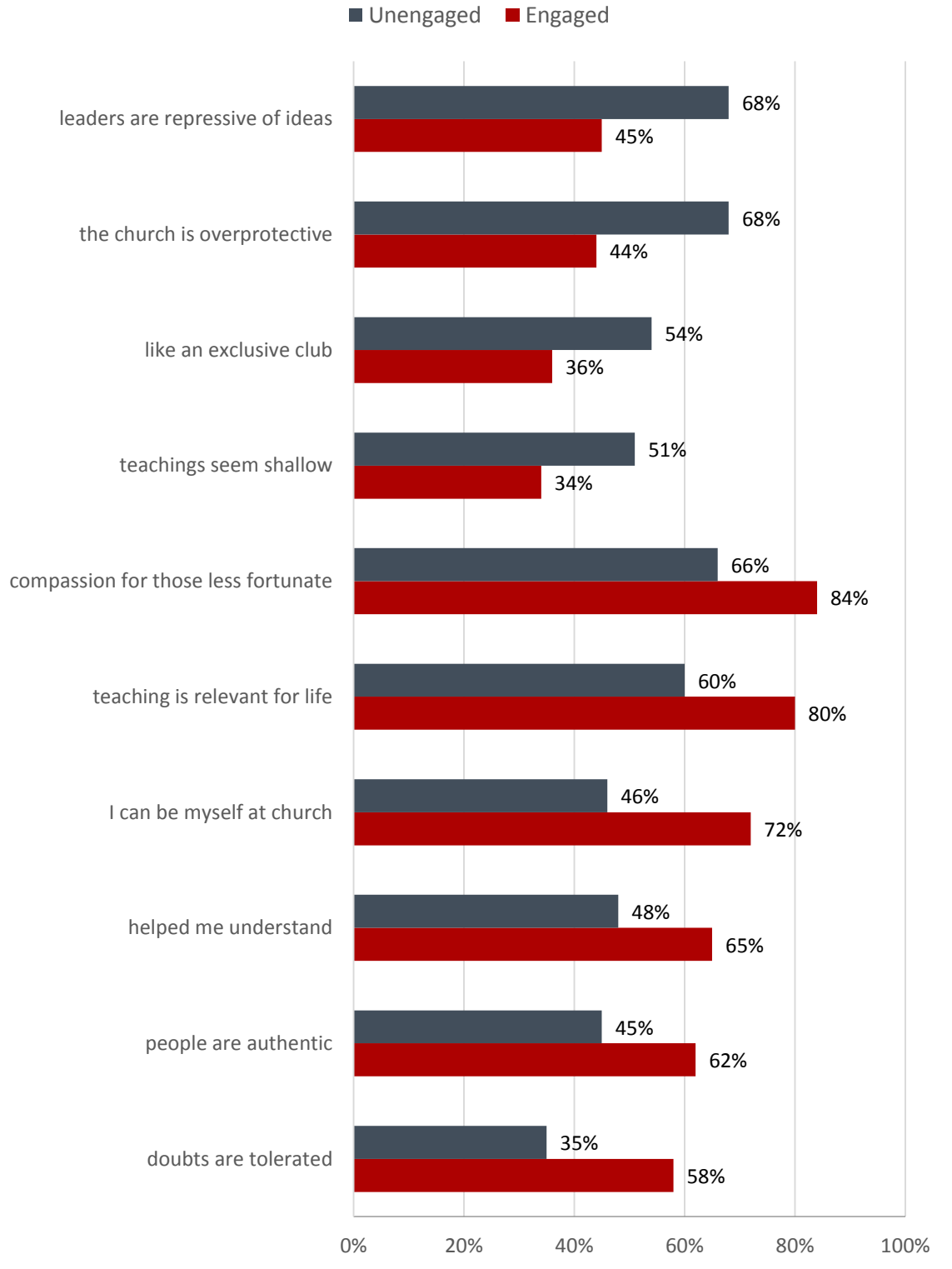


Table 4 – Experiences at church as a child

Think about the SDA congregation you attended most often before you turned 18. How well do each of these statements describe that specific church?

% of those attending as a child	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
I was very involved in the activities of the church					
very	56%	56%	56%	58%	49%
somewhat	28	26	30	28	28
I developed strong personal relationships with other youth at the church					
very	49	47	50	49	48
somewhat	24	24	24	26	18
I felt like I belonged at the church					
very	48	53	45	52	37
somewhat	30	27	33	30	31
I developed strong personal relationships with adults at the church					
very	39	41	37	40	32
somewhat	34	34	34	34	33
most of my friends were also active at church					
very	39	41	36	39	36
somewhat	31	31	31	30	35
the people at the church showed compassion toward those less fortunate					
very	38	43	33	41	28
somewhat	42	40	44	43	38
the church teachings and activities were relevant for my life					
very	34	35	32	37	23
somewhat	41	41	42	43	37
	<i>n=</i> 445	207	238	343	101

Table 4 – Experiences at church as a child (continued)

% of those attending as a child	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
I grew spiritually while attending the church					
very	31	32	31	36	16
somewhat	43	44	42	41	48
I feel like I could “be myself” at church					
very	30%	30%	30%	34%	16%
somewhat	36	40	32	38	30
the church empowered me to live out my faith					
very	27	30	25	30	19
somewhat	37	39	35	38	33
the teachings of the church seem to reject what science tells us about the world					
very	26	26	26	24	32
somewhat	33	30	35	33	33
the church helped me really understand my faith					
very	24	26	22	26	15
somewhat	37	36	38	39	33
the people at that church were authentic rather than hypocritical					
very	17	16	17	18	12
somewhat	42	42	42	44	33
the church seemed too much like an exclusive club					
very	16	14	18	13	27
somewhat	24	18	28	23	27
the church was overprotective of its young people					
very	15	12	18	13	22
somewhat	35	35	34	31	46
n=	445	207	238	343	101

Table 4 – Experiences at church as a child (continued)

% of those attending as a child	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
the church was repressive of those who had different ideas about things					
very	15	12	18	11	29
somewhat	35	37	33	34	38
the faith and teachings I encountered at the church seemed rather shallow					
very	13%	12%	13%	10%	24%
somewhat	25	25	25	24	27
the people at the church were tolerant of those with different opinions					
very	11	13	9	11	9
somewhat	42	43	42	47	26
the church leaders would not tolerate doubts among the membership					
very	9	8	11	8	16
somewhat	31	30	33	30	35
<i>n=</i>	445	207	238	343	101

Childhood Involvement

Unlike attitudes and perceptions of church, the behaviors during childhood show very little difference between engaged and unengaged young adults. This is a remarkable non-difference: it indicates that the behavior of children and youth in the church are not at all predictive of whether or not they will disengage from church during young adulthood.

One of the recurrent themes of this research—seen here as well as in the discussion groups—is that while Adventists seem to place great importance on outward behavior, such behavior is a poor predictor of their relationship with Christ. Time and again we hear from young adults who are deepening their relationship with Christ (and people in the church) during a time when their outward behaviors are not in conformity to the church. In many cases they will later become further committed to the lifestyle standards of Adventist doctrine, but only after internalizing them rather than conforming to them.

The most common childhood behaviors are attending services (94%) and Sabbath school (89%). It is also very common for children and youth to attend social functions (76%) or youth group (67%), tithe (63%), and give offerings (52%). Significant minorities also attended other church meetings (49%), participated in share-your-faith activities (39%), held a church office (34%), and served on a committee (27%).

More than half of all respondents say they volunteered constantly (22%) or often (31%). Again, there is very little difference between those who have remained engaged versus those who have disengaged. About half (49%) of now-disengaged young adults say they volunteered often or constantly.

One of the strengths of the Adventist churches is that they have many opportunities for their children and youth to be involved. But there is a difficult transition from child to adult. Young adults have many fewer opportunities. As one person in our post-college discussion groups said, “If you aren’t a child and don’t have a child, there’s nothing for you.”

There were small differences in the size of the churches that our participants attended. Currently disengaged respondents are twice as likely to have attended a large (500+) church. However, the absolute levels remain low: only about one in five (22%) of disengaged respondents attended a large church, but this is compared to 10% of engaged respondents.

Table 5 – Church Involvement as a child

Which of the following statements described your church involvement when you were under 18?
(MULTIPLE RESPONSE)

% of those attending as a child	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
I attended church services more than once per month	94%	94%	95%	95%	92%
I attended Sabbath school regularly more than once per month	89	87	90	90	82
I attended many of the church social functions	76	73	79	77	73
I attended youth group more than once per month	67	64	69	66	69
I tithed my income regularly	63	59	67	64	58
I contributed offerings other than tithe to church projects	52	49	55	53	52
I attended other meetings (prayer meeting, small study groups, etc.) more than once per month	49	48	50	50	47
I participated in many share-your-faith activities	39	40	38	40	36
I held some type of church office	34	32	37	35	30
I served on one or more church committees	27	24	29	26	29
none of these	2	1	2	1	4
<i>n=</i>	451	211	240	348	101

Table 6 – Church Volunteerism as a child

How often did you personally volunteer to help with the various church ministries before you turned 18?

% of those attending as a child	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
constantly	22%	22%	21%	22%	21%
often	31	31	31	32	28
occasionally	25	26	25	26	26
rarely	16	14	18	16	18
never	6	7	5	5	9
<i>n</i> =	452	212	240	348	102

Table 7 – Size of Childhood church

About how many people, in total, attended the services at the church you went to most often, before you turned 18?

% of those attending as a child	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
100 or less	38%	44%	32%	39%	32%
101 to 499	50	44	55	51	46
500 or more	13	11	14	10	22
<i>n</i> *=	439	203	236	339	98

* don't know has been removed from the base of respondents

CURRENT CHURCH ENGAGEMENT

Membership and attendance

Almost all of the participants in this study are current members of the Church (92%). This was by design—our sampling frame was based on conference rolls and social media activity. So young adults who have truly “left the Church” were not included. This was designed so that we could focus our resources to detect success stories among young adults.

Once-a-week attendance seems to be the norm among engaged young adults (54%). Only about one in five (21%) attend more often. (The differences between engaged and unengaged here are by design—attendance was one of the ways we defined the two groups.)

Even among the engaged, about one in four (23%) report a period of life where they disconnected from the church. Among the unengaged this is almost half. However, it is worth noting that even among those we define as “unengaged”, most (57%) say they have *not* dropped their membership or stopped attending. It may be that they don’t consider themselves unengaged. They might just see their engagement through a different lens.

Those who attend infrequently (monthly or less) provide various reasons. The engaged in this category are too few to draw reliable analysis. But about half of the unengaged did answer this question. Four out of ten (39%) report spiritual struggles, while a smaller group (22%) report that disagreement with the church is an important reason. But most (65%) cited some other reason that was not assessed—further evidence assumptions should not be made about why young people choose not to attend church. However, there is a large margin of error for these responses, so any conclusions should be tentative.

Several issues came up on our discussion groups that may shed light on the “other reason” responses. Some of the themes for not attending church regularly were personal conflict with others at the church, feeling rejected or judged for their behaviors, feeling excluded socially, and simple lack of time.

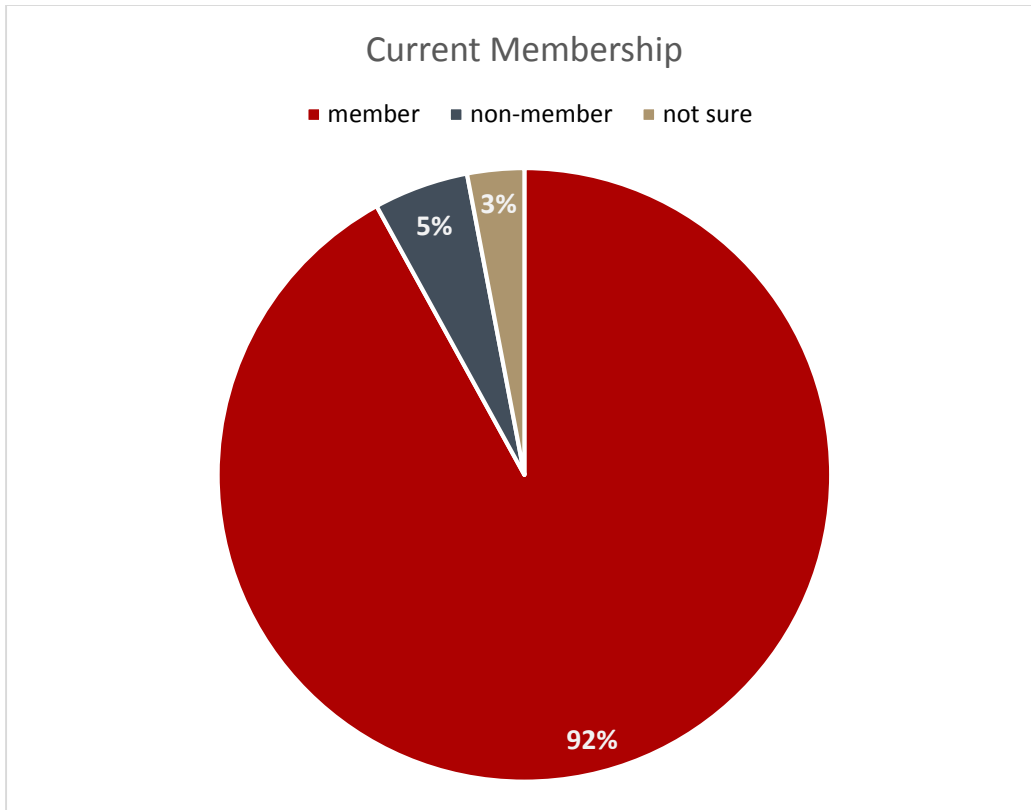


Table 8 – Membership status

Are you at present a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
yes	92%	94%	90%	97%	71%
no	5	4	6	2	18
not sure	3	3	4	1	11
<i>n=</i>	488	230	258	381	105

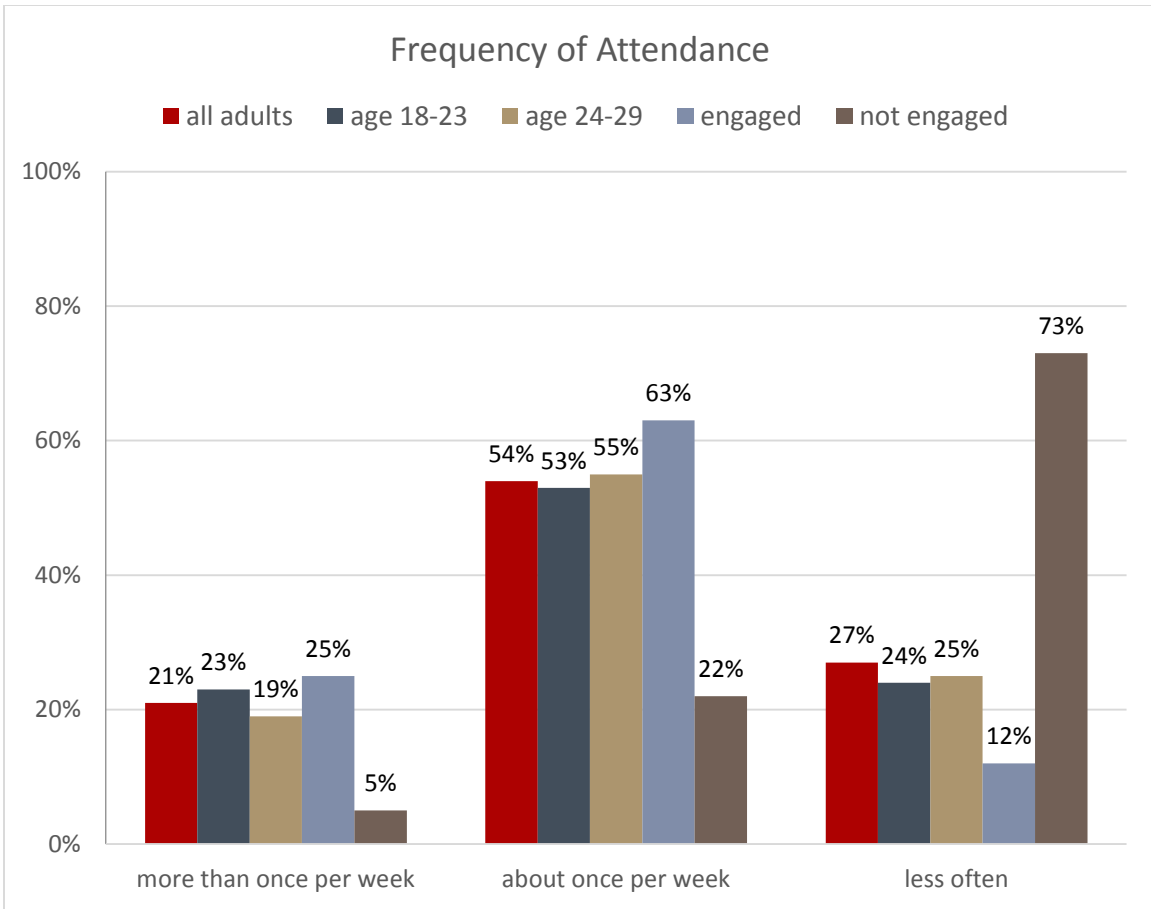


Table 9 – Frequency of church attendance

How often do you attend services at a Seventh-day Adventist Church?

	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
more than once per week	21%	23%	19%	25%	5%
about once per week	54	53	55	63	22
2-3 times per month	9	10	7	9	9
several times per year	5	4	5	1	19
less often	5	5	4	1	16
or never	4	4	3	1	13
not sure	4	1	6	*	16
	<i>n</i> = 488	230	258	381	105

* indicates less than one-half of one percent

Table 10 – Church Disconnect

Did you ever, at some time in the past, drop out of Adventist Church membership or stop attending services?

% attend at least 2-3 times per month	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
yes	23%	15%	30%	21%	43%
no	78	85	70	79	57
	<i>n</i> = 408	198	210	369	37

Table 11 – Reasons for infrequent attendance

What do you think is the main reason that you don't attend an SDA church on a regular basis? (MULTIPLE RESPONSE)

% do not attend at least 2-3 times per month	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
I am struggling spiritually right now	34%	31%	36%	9%	39%
I don't really agree with what the church teaches	19	21	18	9	22
I have other Sabbath obligations	11	7	15	0	14
I go to a non-SDA church	8	10	6	36	2
there is not an SDA church near me	5	3	6	9	4
other reason	65	62	67	64	65
<i>n=</i>	62	29*	33*	11*	51

* small sample size – may not be statistically reliable

Current Religious Engagement

The majority of engaged young adults are actually involved in a variety of activities—not just attending services (Table 12). The majority also pay tithe (71%) and more than half contribute additional offerings (60%), attend Sabbath school regularly (61%), participate in church social functions (60%), or attend other types of meetings (52%). It is less common for them to participate in share-your-faith activities (40%), hold church office (35%), or serve on committees (34%).

As expected, the unengaged are unengaged across the board. About half (52%) do none of these activities. Fewer than one in three attend services more than monthly (29%), pay tithe (26%) or offerings (21%). Fewer than one in six attend Sabbath school regularly (15%), attend social functions (12%) or other meetings (13%). One in ten hold a church office (10%). Slightly fewer participate in share-your-faith activities (7%) or serve on a committee (3%).

When it comes to personal religious activity (rather than church-based activities), we see the same patterns emerge; the engaged are much more active than the unengaged. Almost all (98%) of the engaged have prayed in the last seven days, and a strong majority (79%) have read from the Bible on their own. For the unengaged, a majority (80%) have prayed, but relatively few (33%) have read their Bible in the last seven days.

These differences are drastic—much bigger than what we saw in their childhood behavior. This indicates that it is their experiences and perceptions of their church as a child, rather than their behavioral engagement with the church that predicts if they will be behaviorally engaged as young adults. This insight should not be underestimated. Adventist culture currently seems to place high value on the behaviors of its children and youth (and provides many opportunities along these lines), but it cannot neglect their subjective experiences in the process.

Table 12 – Current Engagement

Which of the following statements are true of you, currently? (MULTIPLE RESPONSE)

	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
I attend church services more than once per month	83%	84%	82%	97%	29%
I pay tithe on my income regularly	62	57	67	71	26
I contributed offerings other than tithe to church projects	52	46	58	60	21
I attend Sabbath school regularly more than once per month	51	52	51	61	15
I attend many of the church social functions	50	49	50	60	12
I attend other meetings (prayer meeting, small study groups, etc.) more than once per month	44	43	45	52	13
I participate in many share-your-faith activities	33	32	34	40	7
I hold some type of church office	29	22	36	35	10
I serve on one or more church committees	27	20	33	34	3
none of these	11	9	13	0	52
<i>n=</i>	487	230	257	381	104

Table 13 – Activities participated in during the past week

Which, if any, of these activities have you done during the past week?

	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
pray to God	94%	95%	93%	98%	80%
attend a church service, not including a special event (wedding, funeral)	73	74	71	84	32
read from the Bible not including when you were at church	69	71	68	79	33
<i>n</i> =	476	222	254	375	99

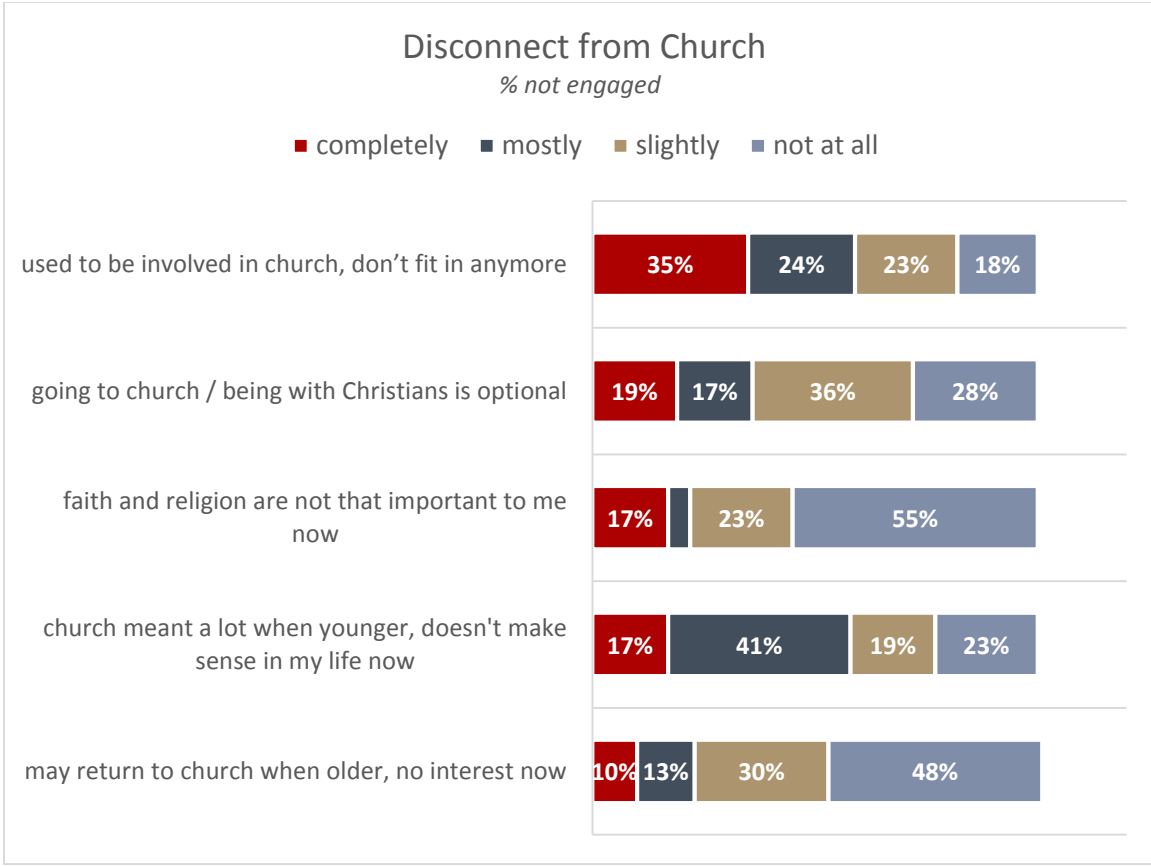
Perceptions of Christianity and the Adventist Church

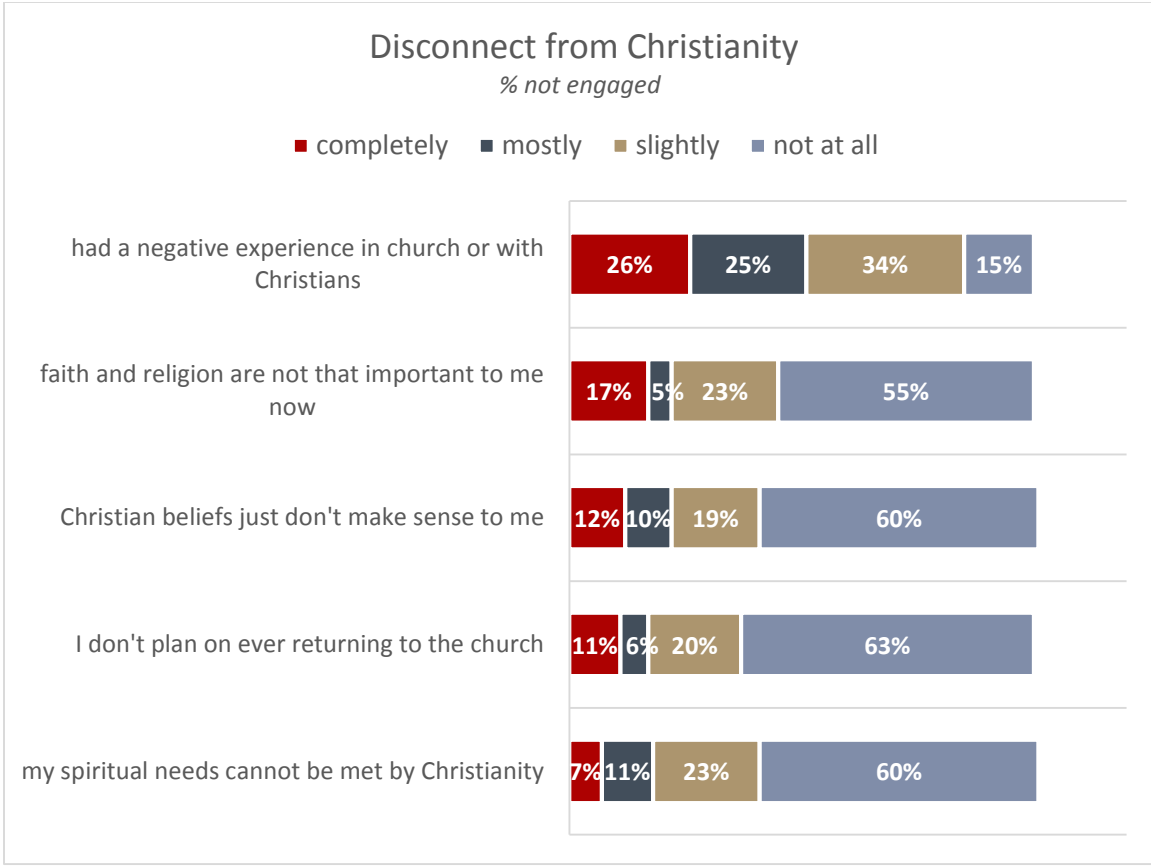
We provided a number of statements about the nature of the Adventist church for participants to respond to. Statements about the church which at least half of the unengaged agreed with are listed below.

- I used to be involved, but don't fit in anymore
- Church doesn't make sense in their lives anymore
- I had a negative experience with church or with Christians
- I want to help the church change to be more like what Jesus wanted (engaged young adults actually were even more likely to agree with this statement)
- I want to be a Christian without separating from the world (48%--almost half)
- God is more at work outside the church than in it (50%)
- Church is a difficult place to live out my faith

It should also be noted that fewer than one in five (17%) of unengaged young adults say that they don't plan on ever returning to church. Another one in five (20%) say this is slightly true, but a strong majority (63%) disagree completely that they don't plan to return.

Again these responses corroborate what we heard in the groups. Most of those who were negative toward the church, and who had tempered their involvement, did not see themselves as rejecting the teachings or fundamentals ideals of the church—rather they did not see a clear path for them to engage with and interact with the church. In some ways they felt that the church had left them.

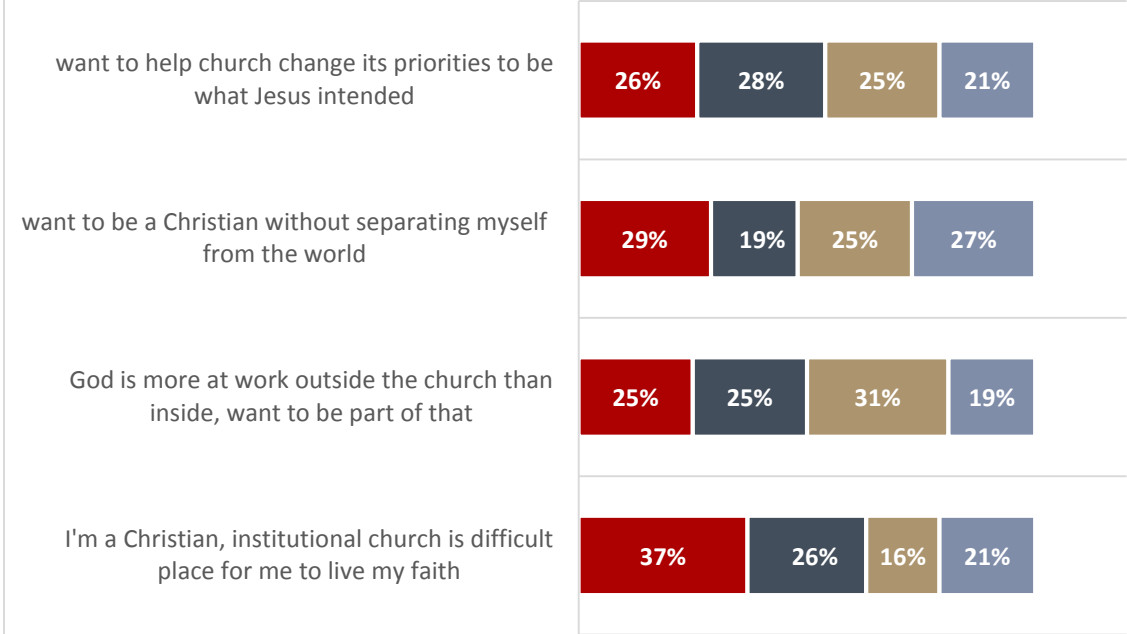




Christians not connected with Cchurch

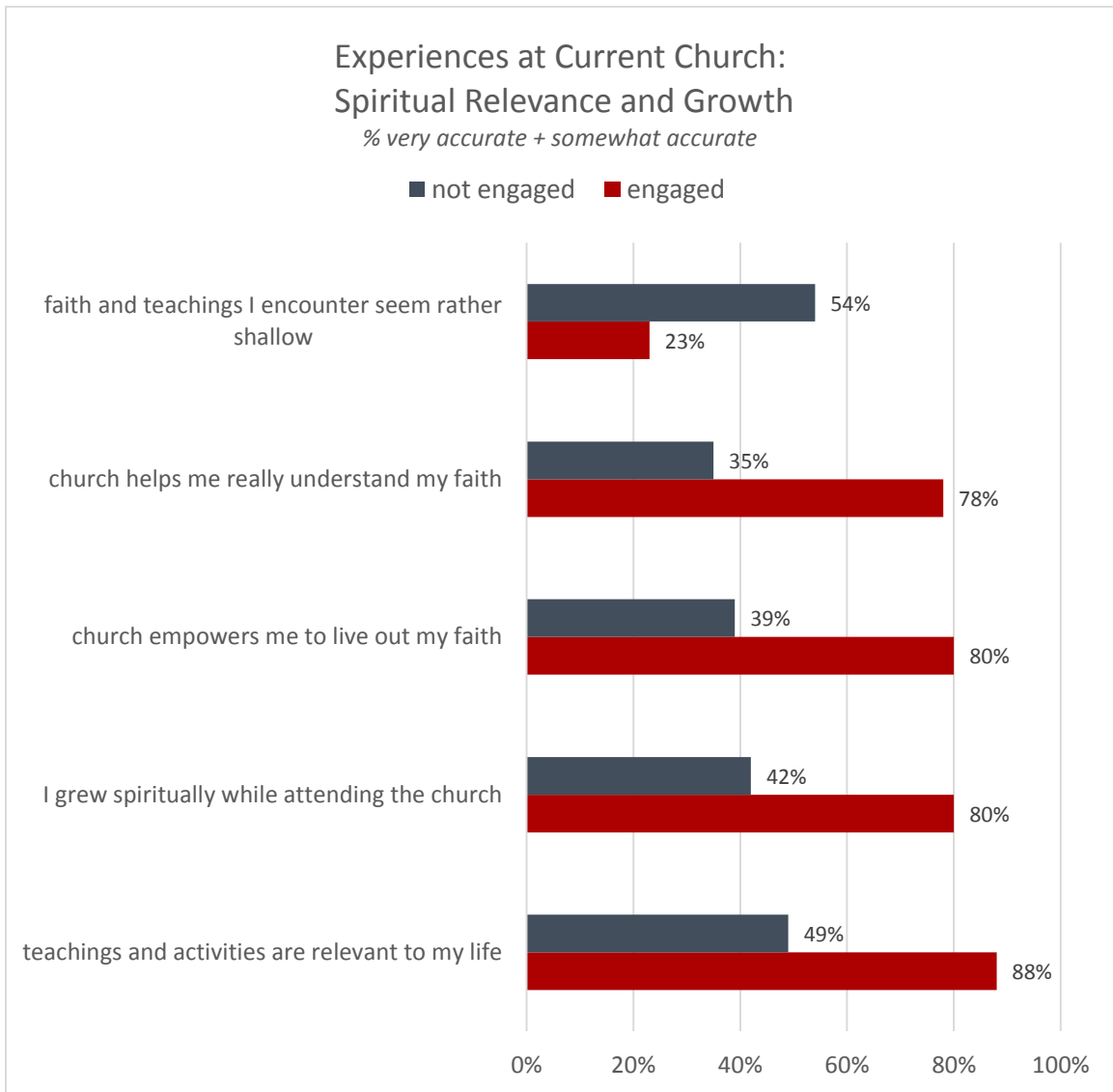
% not engaged

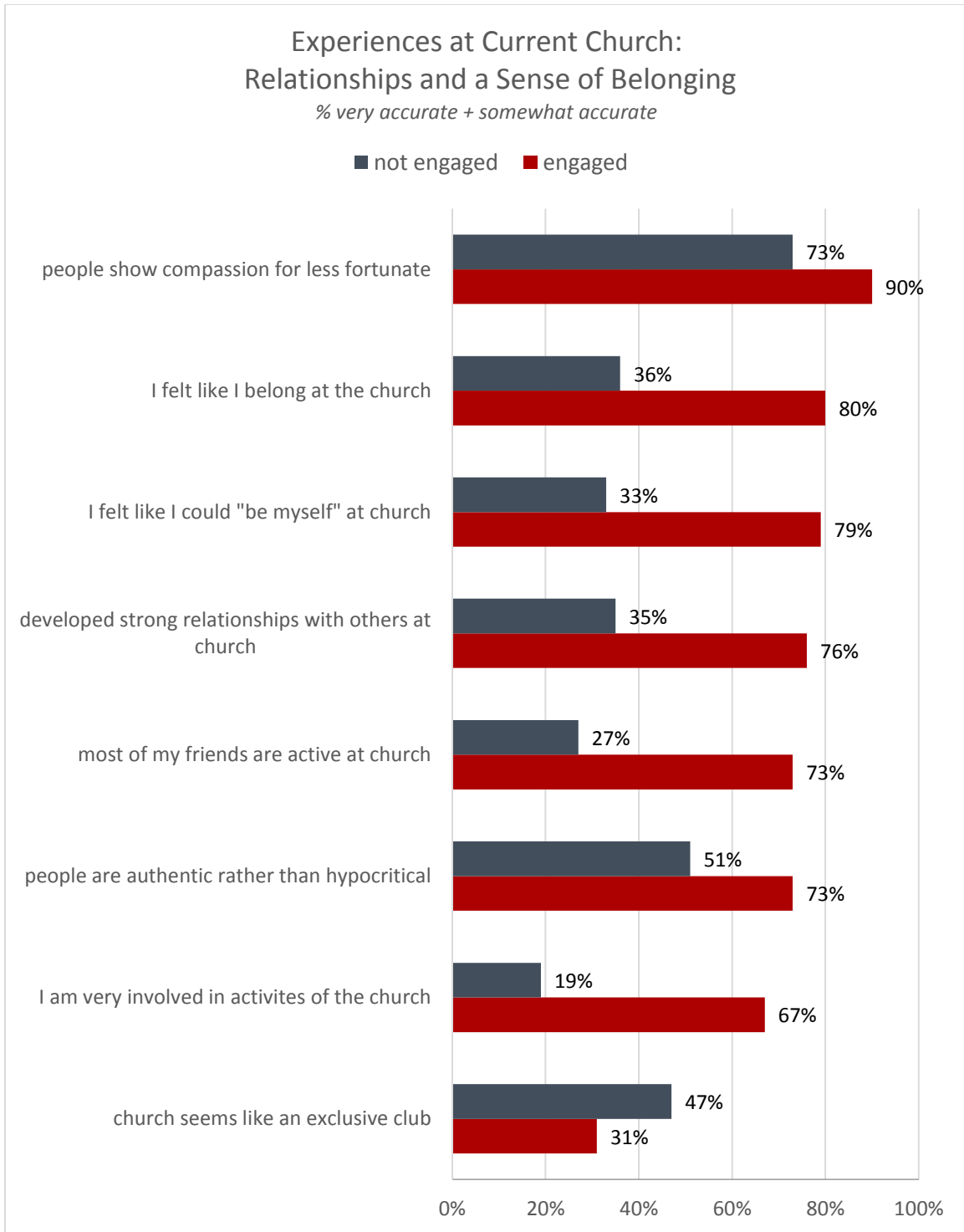
■ completely ■ mostly ■ slightly ■ not at all



Experiences and Attitudes about their Home Church

When it comes to current experiences and attitudes about their local church, the differences between engaged and unengaged in childhood experiences and attitudes are even more pronounced when asked about *current* experiences and attitudes—which means that these issues did *not* resolve themselves as the person matured. The biggest differences between the engaged and unengaged in their current experience are in the areas of spiritual relevance and social relationships. There are fewer differences between these two groups in areas related to rigidity or openness to new ideas.





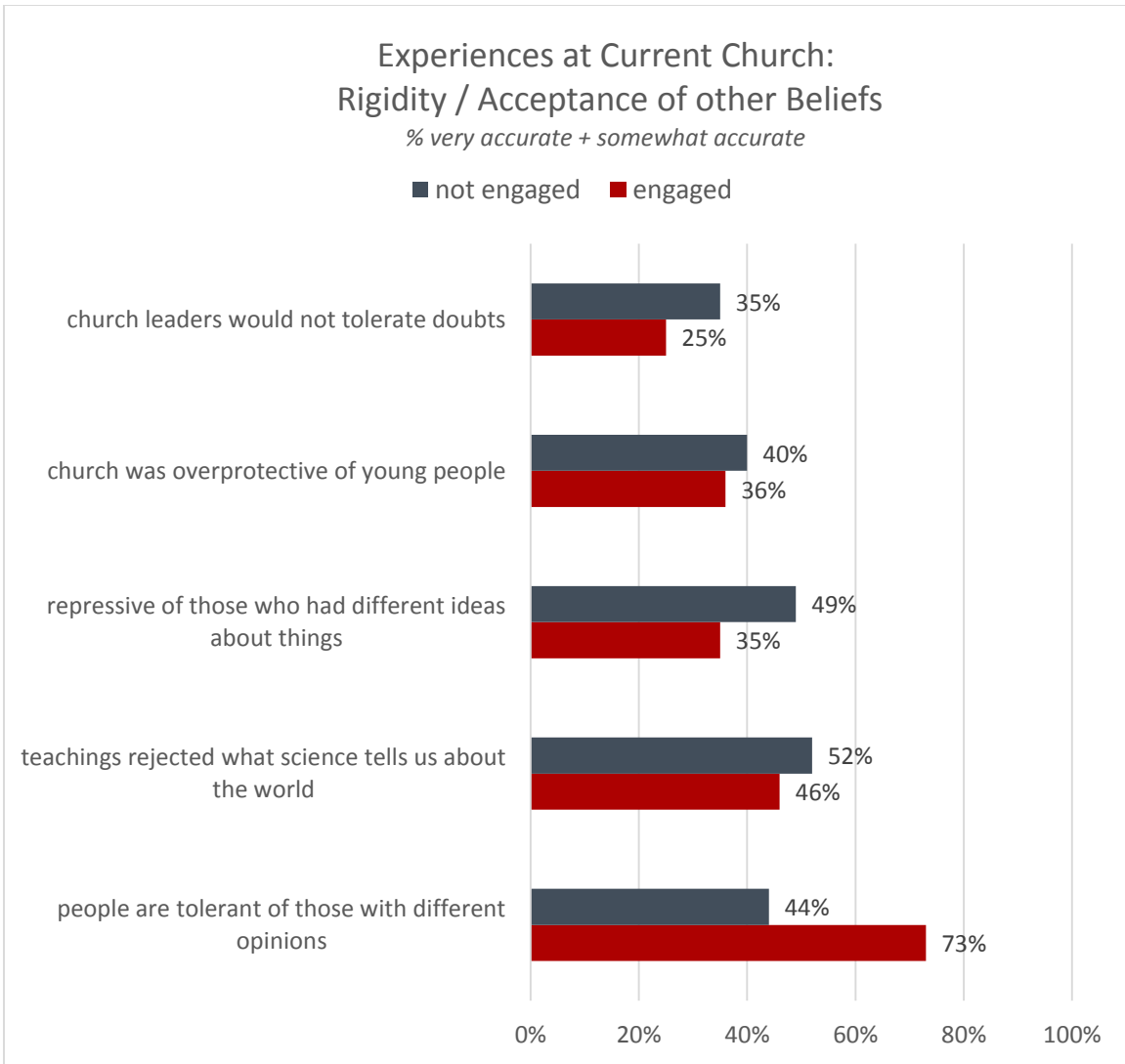


Table 14 – Feelings about Christianity and the church

To what extent are the following statements true of you personally?

	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
I want to help the church change its priorities to be what Jesus intended it to be					
completely / mostly true	74%	76%	71%	79%	54%
slightly true	16	11	20	13	25
not at all true	11	13	9	8	21
I want to be a Christian without separating myself from the world around me					
completely / mostly true	37	39	35	34	48
slightly true	30	30	29	31	25
not at all true	34	31	36	35	27
God is more at work outside the church than inside and I want to be a part of that					
completely / mostly true	34	33	36	30	50
slightly true	34	36	32	35	31
not at all true	32	31	33	35	19
I am a Christian, but the institutional church is a difficult place for me to live out my faith					
completely / mostly true	29	27	30	19	63
slightly true	22	22	21	23	16
not at all true	50	50	49	58	21
I had a negative experience in church or with Christians					
completely / mostly true	29	23	34	23	51
slightly true	35	36	33	35	34
not at all true	36	40	33	42	15
I used to be very involved in my church but I don't fit there anymore					
completely / mostly true	21	21	21	11	59
slightly true	22	22	21	21	23
not at all true	57	58	57	68	18
<i>n=</i>	482	228	254	378	104

Table 14 – Feelings about Christianity and the church (continued)

	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
I think going to church or being with Christian friends is optional					
completely / mostly true	18	20	15	12	37
slightly true	26	27	25	24	36
not at all true	56	52	60	64	28
Church meant a lot to me when I was younger but it doesn't make sense in my life now					
completely / mostly true	13	12	13	0	58
slightly true	15	16	15	14	19
not at all true	72	72	72	86	23
faith and religion are not that important to me right now					
completely / mostly true	7	7	6	2	22
slightly true	8	10	7	4	23
not at all true	86	84	87	94	55
I may return to church when I'm older, but I have no interest now					
completely / mostly true	6	5	6	1	23
slightly true	9	9	9	3	30
not at all true	85	86	85	96	48
Christian beliefs just don't make sense to me					
completely / mostly true	6	5	6	1	21
slightly true	13	13	12	11	19
not at all true	82	82	82	88	60
My spiritual needs cannot be met by Christianity					
completely / mostly true	6	4	7	2	17
slightly true	10	10	10	6	23
not at all true	85	87	83	92	60
<i>n=</i>	482	228	254	378	104

Table 14 – Feelings about Christianity and the church (continued)

	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
I don't plan on ever returning to the church					
completely / mostly true	4%	2%	5%	1%	17%
slightly true	6	6	5	2	20
not at all true	91	92	89	98	63
<i>n</i> =	482	228	254	378	104

Table 15 – Experiences with current church

Thinking about the church you currently attend most often how well do each of these statements describe that specific church?

% among current SDA church attenders	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
the people at the church show compassion toward those less fortunate					
very	46%	48%	44%	51%	26%
somewhat	40	38	42	39	47
the church teachings and activities are relevant for my life					
very	45	44	46	51	21
somewhat	35	35	36	37	28
I developed strong personal relationships with others at the church					
very	41	39	43	46	17
somewhat	28	28	28	30	18
I feel like I belong at the church					
very	40	40	40	46	13
somewhat	32	31	33	34	23
I grew up spiritually while attending the church					
very	39	37	40	44	15
somewhat	34	34	34	36	27
I feel like I could “be myself” at church					
very	36	34	38	41	14
somewhat	35	34	35	38	19
the church empowers me to live out my faith					
very	35	34	36	40	13
somewhat	37	35	39	40	26
I am very involved in the activities of the church					
very	34	30	38	42	2
somewhat	24	24	24	25	17
<i>n=</i>	459	220	239	373	85

Table 15 – Experiences with current church (continued)

% among current SDA church attenders	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
most of my friends are also active at church					
very	31%	32%	31%	37%	7%
somewhat	33	34	33	36	20
the church helps me really understand my faith					
very	31	31	31	36	9
somewhat	39	38	40	42	26
the people at the church are tolerant of those with different opinions					
very	26	24	28	29	13
somewhat	42	46	38	44	31
the people at church are authentic rather than hypocritical					
very	25	24	26	28	12
somewhat	44	46	43	45	39
the teachings of the church seem to reject what science tells us about the world					
very	19	22	16	20	15
somewhat	28	27	29	26	37
the church seems too much like an exclusive club					
very	13	11	15	10	27
somewhat	21	18	24	21	20
the church is overprotective of its young people					
very	11	12	11	10	17
somewhat	25	27	24	26	23
the church is repressive of those who have different ideas about things					
very	11	11	12	10	16
somewhat	26	28	24	25	33
<i>n=</i>	459	220	239	373	85

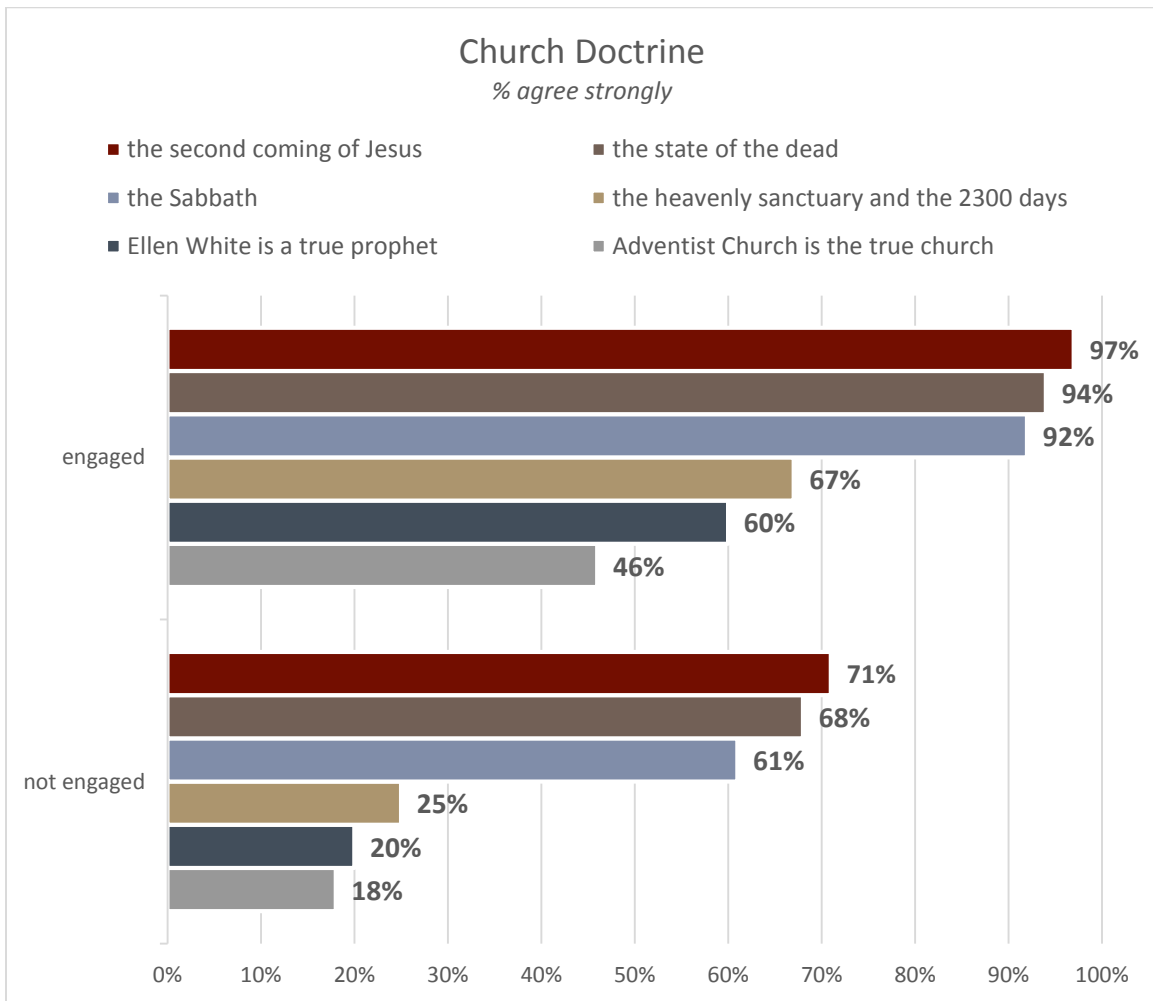
Table 15 – Experiences with current church (continued)

% among current SDA church attenders	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
the faith and teachings I encounter at the church seem rather shallow					
very	9%	8%	10%	6%	20%
somewhat	20	24	17	17	34
the church leaders do not tolerate doubts among the membership					
very	6	6	5	6	4
somewhat	22	23	21	19	31
<i>n=</i>	459	220	239	373	85

FAITH VIEWS

Overall, most engaged and some unengaged adhere to standard Christian beliefs (Table 16). The biggest gaps are the beliefs in the accuracy of the Bible, the nature of salvation, and in a person’s responsibility to share his or her faith—fewer than half of unengaged respondents strongly agree with each of these. But the majority of both groups adhere to appropriate beliefs about the nature of Jesus, God as the Creator, Satan, a personal commitment to Jesus, and the nature of life after death. However there are significant differences in nearly all areas of general Christian belief.

When it comes to the various tenets of SDA orthodoxy, the engaged again are in greater agreement than are the unengaged. The “big three” that engender the greatest levels of agreement (for both groups) are the second coming of Jesus, the state of the dead, and the Sabbath. The other three beliefs tested—the heavenly sanctuary and 2300 days, Ellen White’s prophetic nature, and the SDA as the true Church, were less likely to be held by either group than those first three beliefs.



In terms of SDA lifestyle standards, there are three “tiers” of agreement:

- A strong majority of engaged members agree about sex in marriage, not using tobacco, keeping the Sabbath, and not using drugs. (Even a majority of unengaged young adults subscribe to each of these, with the exception of sex within marriage.)
- A slight majority of engaged members agree about dressing modestly and avoiding alcohol.
- A minority of engaged members agree about movies, dancing, jewelry, and music.
- The unengaged follow the same basic pattern, but with lower levels of agreement across the board. However, on two standards—alcohol and sex—there are even larger gaps between the engaged and unengaged.

BARNA GROUP

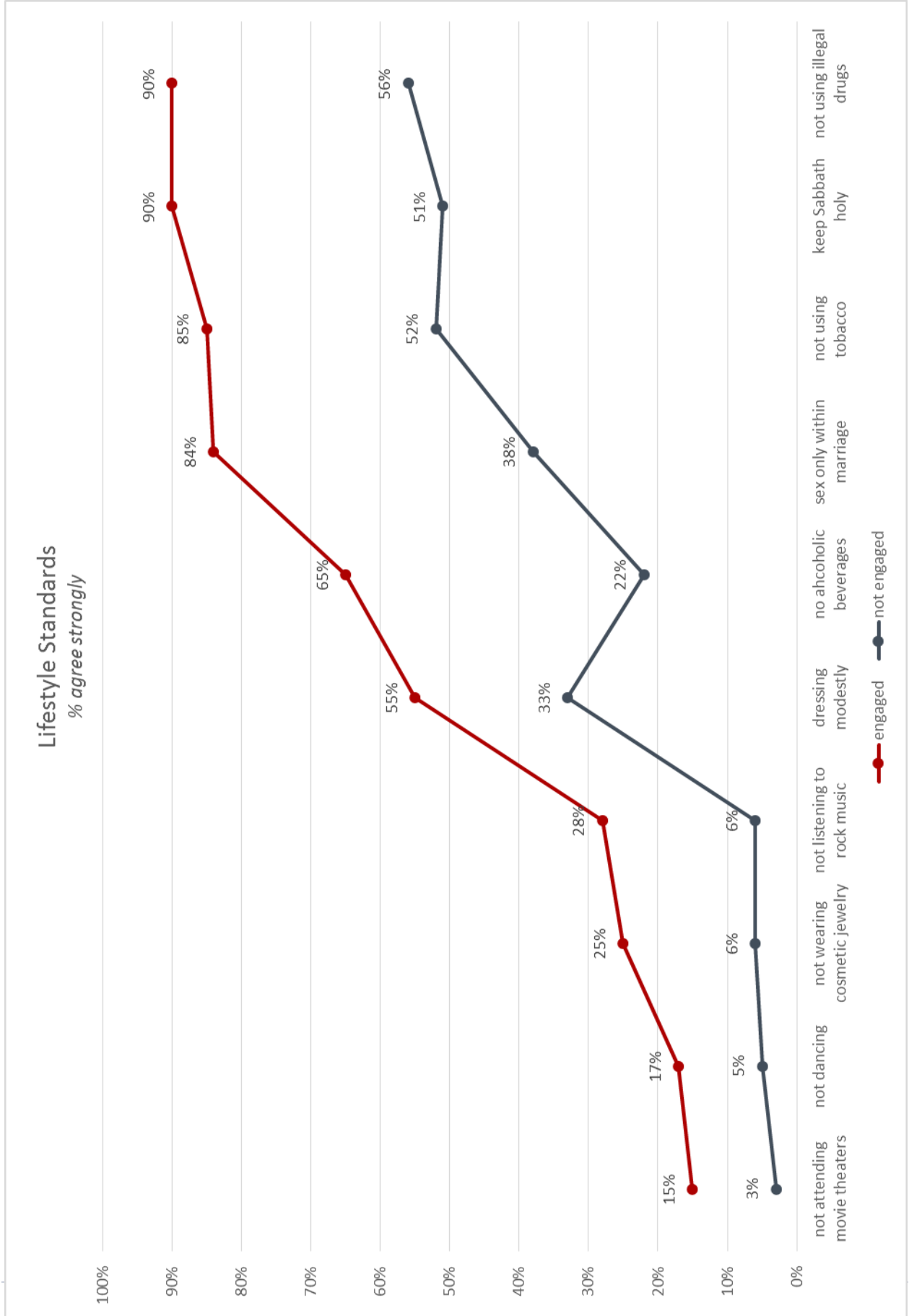


Table 16 – Faith views

Now, please mark whether you, personally, agree or disagree with each statement, no matter what you think other people may believe?

	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
when He lived on earth, Jesus Christ was human and committed sins, like other people (disagree strongly)	86%	88%	85%	92%	67%
the devil, or Satan, is not a living being but is a symbol of evil (disagree strongly)	82	80	83	87	64
your religious faith is very important in your life (agree strongly)	77	76	78	86	47
the Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches (agree strongly)	72	73	70	78	47
if a person is generally good, or does enough good things for others during their life, they will earn a place with God (disagree strongly)	54	55	53	61	30
you, personally, have a responsibility to tell other people your religious beliefs (agree strongly)	48	49	47	57	14
<i>n=</i>	486	229	257	380	105

Table 17 – Belief in God

There are many different beliefs about God or a higher power. Please indicate which one of the following descriptions comes closest to what you, personally, believe about God.

	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
all-powerful, all knowing, perfect creator of the universe who rules the world today	97%	97%	96%	98%	89%
other	3	3	4	2	11
<i>n=</i>	483	228	255	380	102

Table 18 – Commitment to Jesus

Have you ever made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life today?

	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
yes	89%	89%	90%	95%	70%
no	6	5	6	2	18
not sure	5	6	4	3	12
	<i>n</i> = 488	230	258	381	105

Table 19 – Beliefs about live after death

Here are some statements about what will happen to you when Christ returns. Please indicate which one of these statements best describe your own belief about what will happen t you at the second coming of Jesus. When Christ returns...

% among those who have a personal commitment to Jesus	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
you will be with him because you have confessed your sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as your savior	78%	80%	77%	83%	56%
you do not know what will happen to you when Christ returns	12	12	13	9	26
you will be with him because you have tried to obey his commandments	2	2	2	2	3
you will be with him because God loves all people and will not let them perish	2	1	3	1	6
you will not be with him	1	2	*	1	3
you will be with him because you are basically a good person	0	0	0	0	0
other	4	4	5	4	6
	<i>n</i> = 435	203	232	361	73

* indicates less than one-half of one percent

Table 20 – Belief in SDA doctrine

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has some key doctrines. To what extent do you agree or disagree with what the Adventist Church teaches about each of the topics below?

% agree strongly	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
the second coming of Jesus	91%	93%	90%	97%	71%
the state of the dead	88	89	88	94	68
the Sabbath	85	86	85	92	61
the heavenly sanctuary and the 2300 days	58	61	55	67	25
Ellen White is a true prophet	52	53	51	60	20
the Adventist Church is the true church	40	42	38	46	18
<i>n=</i>	477	225	252	374	102

Table 21 – Lifestyle Standards

Now, what about the lifestyle standards of the Seventh-day Adventist Church? To what extent would you say you agree or disagree with each of these standards?

% agree strongly	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
not using illegal drugs	83%	83%	83%	90%	56%
keep the Sabbath holy	81	83	80	90	51
not using tobacco	78	80	77	85	52
sex should occur only within marriage	74	76	72	84	38
not drinking alcoholic beverages	56	59	53	65	22
dressing modestly	50	51	49	55	33
not listening to rock music	24	21	26	28	6
not wearing cosmetic jewelry	21	21	20	25	6
not dancing	15	15	14	17	5
not attending movie theaters	12	13	12	15	3
<i>n=</i>	484	227	257	378	105

DISCUSSION GROUP THEMES

Intergenerational Relationships

Intergeneration relationships are a big deal to both engaged and unengaged young adults—and not just in a good way. Those who felt welcome and nurtured referenced older adults, and those who felt judged and rejected also cited older adults. These interactions seemed more important than peer interactions in creating an atmosphere of tolerance.

Many of those in our groups had tremendous stories of how older adults had impacted them in positive ways. These encounters connected them to their churches in powerful ways.

Laura | When I was younger and we started putting on Christmas plays, there were a group of elderly women who would travel to Florida every year for winter, and they would stay in Canada long enough to see the play. Or when they had difficulty moving about and would stop coming to church regularly, would always make a point of being there when something major happened in our lives like a baptism.

Laura | When I turned 16 my parents decided to allow me to go to Germany for a year for grade 11.... I googled the nearest church, picked a random one 13 kilometers away (despite not knowing how I'd physically get there, there weren't any bus routes in that direction) and called them in my terrible German (I left a message). Someone called back and offered to come and pick me up next Sabbath. These people lived right next to the church (literally). And since that first phone call drove at least 26 pointless (for them) kilometers every Sabbath to pick me up and drop me off. I stayed at their house the entire day and they made me one of the family. With them I realized what God's family is there to do for its members and made me understand the purpose of His church.

Jada | If you just go for the sermon, you can get really good ones online. The music, it's there too. God, he's everywhere. It's the people that make church a truly unique experience.

Jason | I am grateful that there was a season, experienced church leader who knew that young people have potential, have a contribution to make, have an experience to gain that will enable us to grow and develop into leaders, or at minimum positive contributors, in the church ministry today.

Rosa | I would invite [my husband] to spend time with an older SDA couple that were awesome to hang out with. He enjoyed their company and would love to come spend time with them. He would ask them questions expecting them to pass judgement on him, but they instead showed the love of God. Due to them he decided to quit working on Sabbaths and attend church with me.

One key aspect of these relationships is that they are already happening. The objective isn't to facilitate intergenerational interaction, because it is already going on; the objective is to make these interactions positive. Because for every positive interaction there seems to be a negative one as well. These will be addressed in the section below on forgiveness and acceptance.

Peer relationships are important as well, and can have similar positive or negative impact. However, the participants in our discussion groups did not seem to have the same reaction to peer relationships as they did to relationships with older adults.

Independent Thought

Today's young adults are very comfortable with ambiguity and nuance. In many ways they do not feel the need to develop a comprehensive worldview or philosophy. When it comes to Adventist doctrine and standards, they are sifting through church teachings—even the ones who consider themselves strong members. They have no trouble picking and choosing what they will subscribe to (though they may also keep it to themselves at their local congregation). In some cases they mention going to the Bible, and when they can't find certain teachings (movies, jewelry), they decide to disregard that part of Church teaching.

Deena / When I was at a church activity, we watched a few films about the hidden messages in Hollywood movies and popular video games. I thought it was a bit over the top to go searching for hidden messages, when the only purpose of these films and games are only to entertain.... When I heard about the health message at first I found it odd how most Adventists stay away from all meats. It wasn't until I looked into it myself, as well as reading the statistics on the healthy expectancy of Adventists versus the rest of the world, did begin to see the benefits of being a vegetarian. I believe it is more nourishing for the body this way, and although I haven't been attending church regularly for a while now, I still maintain the same diet.

Jonathan / It's a love-hate relationship. I agree with the fundamental doctrines, but get frustrated with focusing on issues that area less important than salvation at inappropriate times.

Laura / I've been trying to figure out the church's standards vs. the Bible's. Personally I love dancing, but I can identify when it's inappropriate (a night club) and when it's good fun (dance party at home! or an official class). Piercings were never something I wanted, I look at my body in awe and I don't like doing anything to it that would alter the Creator's intentions (I grew up in the church). Jewelry is a tough one...it's beautiful. The Bible makes reference to jewelry everywhere, I mean that's what they made the first temple out of. So I keep it in the line of modesty and wear it anyway. Cinemas though. I found out the original reason Ellen G. White denounced them was because back then unsavoury characters would frequent cinemas, and there were bars in them and a lot of

smoking and drinking. Cinemas have really cleaned up since then, so I just consider the movie I'm going to see and leave it at that.

Seka | As a result some of the rules that were being taught I mistook for Biblical truth when in reality, they were more like traditions. The rules themselves were not necessarily based on a faulty foundation but were often heavily enforced as though they were fundamental doctrines/beliefs.

Cecilia | I also agree (with most, anyways) of the 28 fundamentals but dislike the behavior/thinking of its members and leaders. Mainly, I am disappointed in the church's lack of doctrinal growth and failure to "keep up with the times" socially. I don't think a church has to compromise its values to keep itself current.

The combination of this natural tendency of young adults to build a “piece-meal” religious philosophy and worldview with the common perception that the Adventist church is repressive of new or different ideas leads to a strong risk of alienating young adults. This is not to say that the church should abandon its core values and beliefs—but it should be able to differentiate between these fundamentals and mere traditions. The question remains: Do we love our traditions more than our children?”

Renewal and Transformation

A personal experience with God matters. Many of the engaged in our groups could point to specific stories of when they felt God’s presence. Sometimes it was a miraculous event, and other times it was just a powerful time of personal reflection. Either way, these experiences seemed to calibrate them toward their faith.

It was also remarkable how other people’s stories impacted them. In some cases they internalized these as if they were their own. A vicarious experience was a powerful thing.

Elaine | I was in ICU and drifting in and out of consciousness, but I remember lots of prayer going on around me. I remember waking up in the middle of the night and hearing my dad cry as he whispered prayers into my ear. I didn't understand it then, but I knew something was really wrong. I also remember the doctors telling my parents that they didn't understand what happened, but I that I was healed.

Bianca | One of my best friends/cousin's father passed away. She no longer wanted to attend church, she was upset with God for allowing her dad to pass away. She was heartbroken, and who could blame her? Time passed and she was able to accept his death and come back to church even more pumped than before. She would give her testimonies at youth rallies and encouraged others who were going through the same situation she did. Praise God! :) I know this seems more her milestone than mine, I was on the sidelines observing. Her situation made me thank God all the more for all the

blessings in my life. It helped me not take things for granted and appreciate all He has given me. It opened my eyes to the short amount of time we have here on earth.

Victoria | My sister lost faith in God and became a Deist. That really sparked something in me; I just knew in my heart that God existed and that He hears our prayers and answers them. I had no proof or facts to show my sister, though; all I had was the loss of our friend. This seemed to spark my relationship with God because I started to think more about God and everything that He does

Jonathan | At camp, I started getting up early every morning before staff worship and reading some scripture and watching the sunrise with two girls (let's be honest, I was mainly there because I was attracted to the girls). But one morning they had both overslept, and I found myself watching the sunrise alone and reading scripture on my own. For some reason, that morning God spoke to me so clearly. It was the first time that scripture was not just wise words on a page, but real living words that had meaning, that had power.

Chanelle | When a microphone was sent around for people to give prayer requests, I put up my hand and asked if the church could pray for me to find the right puppy so I could get a dog. Everyone chuckled and some said "awe" and I felt embarrassed, but I trusted that God would hear our prayers. THAT WEEK my family and I found, bought, and took home our dog Cookie, who is currently in the kitchen begging my father for pieces of fried fish. :) I still don't understand why having so many people pray for the same thing is so powerful, but now I really do believe in the power of prayer.

The importance of personal stories of transformation and renewal cannot be overstated—it is also a side effect of the intergenerational relationships discussed above. Local congregations should investigate how they can provide platforms for the adults (both young and old) in their congregations to share such experiences.

The local churches should also investigate how they can challenge their young adults to *have* such experiences in the first place. Camps were often mentioned as vehicles for such experiences, as were Pathfinders and Adventurers. But these are designed for youth. What are the young adult parallels that can provoke the kind of transformational change that deepens the relationship both with Christ and the Church?

Forgiveness and Acceptance

The themes of judgment versus acceptance are critical. One of those two seemed to define their Adventist experience. Many who came to the faith later in life talk about how accepted they felt, while many who grew up in the church talked about how rejected they felt. Sometimes the same person talked about both experiences. I asked them more about why they could experience such

different things, and the basic answer I got was that the more people know about you, the less accepted you are. That can't be good.

Deena | When the newcomer begins to open up and confide in the church members what they were involved in, or what they still do, some members expect these people to completely cut off all bad habits and change their way of life, not understanding that people have been living in those situations for most of their lives.

Jada | There is an accepted idea of what a Seventh Day Adventist should look like in the world, and when people step outside that mold others begin to question their integrity or they decide that person is going through trials that they must conquer. I think the idea that all Seventh Day Adventists are alike is dangerous.

Andrea | I can't say I don't wonder sometimes if we aren't holding ourselves accountable enough for the mandate we have: to be living examples of Christ to the rest of the world. If our divorce rates are just as high, our children just as deviant, and, dare I say it, our people MEANER than the general population, then can we really argue that we are somehow morally superior or have some great truth that others don't have access to?

Many SDA Millennials talked about when they went off into the world—and how that time helped them understand how special the SDA environment was. Sometimes it was personal mistakes they had made, and other times it was things they witnessed others doing. In either case it drove them back to their roots. Again, this pattern reinforces that many older (or younger) adults may judge an outward behavior without considering what God is doing in the heart.

One challenge for the local churches to consider is how to leverage these negative experiences. Instead of discarding the person or putting up barriers to “protect” others from their influence, how can the church not only embrace them, but also find a way for them—and others—to use their mistakes as learning opportunities?

Bianca | The biggest "turning point" for me is actually very small compared to others. I was in a relationship with a man who did not attend church whatsoever, a non believer. (i do not recommend!) Being in that relationship did cause me to give most of my time to him instead of God. After prayer, God graciously allowed that relationship to end and ever since then Im trying to get back in my old habits of devoting my time to God

Jana | When I moved to a new city, I went on a cleanse. I purposely never learned the radio stations so I could only listen to my iPod. I took all the secular music off my iPod and only left Christian music and gospel audiobooks. I made daily prayer and bible studying a priority. I started reading more Christ-centric books and listening to more sermons. My faith and relationship with God blossomed exponentially. My character and

deportment just changed all together. Just taking those few small, conscious steps really made a big difference in my personal relationship with Christ.

But it is a gross oversimplification to say that all young adults feel judged. The stories of acceptance and belonging were frequent, real, and powerful. While many local churches may have much room for improvement, it is certainly *not* that case that all young Adventists adults feel rejected or judged. The challenge is to have even more stories like the following ones.

Brian | *I was really excited to find a church that was laid back and more about teaching the Word of God rather than preaching it. The environment was just really friendly and outgoing. It just gets me excited to see that there are churches like this out there.*

Bianca | *I love my home church as well. Our older members are VERY supportive of our youth. Although we are more conservative than wearing jeans to church, we are not so uptight. & find that very relieving.*

Andrea | *She invited me to attend this new church. I went, though I was quiet and uncertain there was acceptance. This new church saw I had thick and tall walls, they accepted me and allowed me the time and space to heal. I finally felt I could be me and that I was not being judged. I even tested my pastor when I told him I was getting a new tattoo (my second at that time, now have 3) his reaction was "cool". I knew then that I was accepted and I could be accepted for who I was and the way I dressed to church (casual dress for me)*

Jada | *The church, in some ways, is like a family to me, so I can't imagine my life without it. I am very active in many ways, I have friends and family all tied into the church.*

I believe Chanelle's two anecdotes below typify the dichotomy that many (perhaps most) Adventist young adults feel in their churches. She experiences nearly simultaneous acceptance and judgment.

Chanelle | *Recently, I overheard someone talking about a young man who was coming to the church and was trying to get a career as a bartender. She said "You have to meet people where they are" and I really admired the way she spoke very neutrally with him, despite thinking that he should not become a bartender. She didn't even let on that she thought it was wrong. She just welcomed him to come closer to Jesus. **She knew that Jesus could do so much better of a job leading the young man on the path his life needed to take than she did** [emphasis added].*

Chanelle | *I once visited to a church near my home church which has a reputation for being really liberal. Everyone was so welcoming and casual (everyone was wearing*

jeans) and I felt so free from peer pressure. They sang a song that said "There is freedom in the house of the Lord" and I just started crying. That afternoon I went back to my home church and one of my dad's friends came up to me ask me why I was wearing jeans and why I didn't go to church

The Value of Sharing

An interesting dynamic emerged from these discussion groups that provided value to the participants. While the purpose of the groups was simply for research, they also served as a platform for the very kind of sharing that was discussed above. Several times one of the participants would share a personal struggle or failing. In some cases another participant would provide a more or less “pat” answer, and the conversation would stop there.

But in other cases another participant would offer affirmation and empathy—perhaps even sharing the same struggle in their own lives. Then the conversation would blossom! This is the pattern that is needed at the local church level. Acceptance and apathy rather than criticism and judgment in the face of personal struggle build a powerful trust and connection.

Kecia | This last one is still happening. I am still coming to terms with it and it has hurt my spiritual walk with God. In one of my past relationships I let my boyfriend take me too far. It went against my beliefs as an Adventist and I really can't forgive myself. I am praying God helps me forgive myself. It is tough to overcome something that has gone against your beliefs and I was stupid enough to let it happen. Each day I pray I can overcome this.

Bianca | Girl, I am right there with you. Even though i knew better, i let my "love" for my boyfriend go before my morals. It happened and theres nothing we can do about it. Dont hold on to the past and beat yourself up about it. God forgives and forgets. I learned a huge lesson from my mistake and i am using it for the better. i plan on not making the same mistakes again which is why i believe God is keeping me single for the time being. Keep holding on strong girl, and know that youre not the only one going through the same situation. God bless!

Kecia | I didn't think of him keeping me single to help me understand how to get over it. Thank you :)

Notes on Involvement

While the emphasis of this group was on relationship and connection with the church, and not “church involvement” *per se*, we did explore some of the factors that seemed to facilitate or mitigate a person’s activity level in the church.

Three basic themes emerged. Among young adults, church involvement seems to be a function of opportunity, leadership support, and peer influence. If one of these is missing it can easily derail a young adult’s desire to become more invested in his or her home church.

Marcia | *It was easy to be involved because there didn't seem to be any limitations on my gifts and talents. The church members were very interested in training youth for service. I was mentored beyond my church duties by the leaders of my ministries.*

Jana | *Even though I began attending church regularly, I never really became active. Roles in the church were already filled and there never seemed to be any room for me to do any work. I remember offering my services several times and no one really seemed to care. There was a slight culture of exclusivity at the church.*

Brittany | *I was least involved in the church during my last two years of college. This was due to a variety of reasons. One of the big reasons was because I was living in a city where the SDA bubble was very close knit.*

Andrea | *I was least involved when I was at a semi-traditional church when I first started to come back to church. Could feel the constant judgement on me, and seeing the tightly knitted groups not opening up. I became more involved a few months after I switched churches*

Melissa | *If you aren't a child or don't have a child, the church doesn't know what to do with you. And growth of the single, no children, 25-35 yr old is really upsetting church ideas and culture. If the church can't deal w this demographic INSIDE the church, how on earth can it evangelize to this demographic outside the church?*

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The demographic profile is of the survey respondents, and is not necessarily the same as the profile of all SDA young adults. By design our sampling was to gather a cross-section of engaged and unengaged adults, with less emphasis on a true probability sample. However, due to the sample size and robust recruiting strategies, it is unlikely that the overall population of SDA young adults is all that different from this sample.

Key demographic characteristics:

- Two-thirds (66%) female, with a median age of 24. It is evenly split between our two target age groups: 47% were college age (18-23), and 53% were post-college age (24-29).
- Most (70%) of those over college age have a four-year degree. This is a very educated group compared to national averages.
- Mostly single and not parents. However, the unengaged are a bit more likely to have been divorced or separated, which might account for why they feel less connected to others in the church.
- Mostly White. However, minorities are less likely than Whites to be unengaged.
- Slightly concentrated in the South (35%) and West (25%), with fewer in the Midwest (17%), Canada (13%), or the Northeast (10%).

Only 42% of these young adults are employed full-time (61% of post-college age). Almost one-third (30%) of college age and about one-fourth (26%) of post-college age are not employed at all. These percentages indicate that the local congregations may be able to build intergenerational relationships through career mentoring, networking, or apprenticeships. It is worth investigating how the Adventist churches can reach their young adults through informal career services.

	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
gender					
male	34%	33%	36%	35%	31%
female	66	67	64	65	69
age					
18-23	47	100	0	48	44
24-29	53	0	100	52	56
<i>median age</i>	24	21	26	24	24
education					
high school or less	24	42	7	25	19
some college	27	31	23	25	33
four year degree or more	50	28	70	51	48
marital status					
married	24	7	39	23	27
never married	74	92	58	76	65
other	2	2	3	1	9
children <18 in household					
yes	18	15	21	18	17
no	82	85	80	82	83
ethnicity / race					
white	60	62	58	56	72
black	22	19	24	24	15
Hispanic	20	21	18	23	9
other	12	10	13	12	11
residence					
Northeast	10	6	14	9	14
South	35	39	31	38	26
Midwest	17	17	17	16	19
West	25	25	25	24	30
Canada	13	13	13	13	11
<i>n=</i>	486	229	257	380	105

	all young adults	age 18-23	age 24-29	engaged	not engaged
employment					
full-time	42%	21%	61%	41%	49%
part-time	32	49	17	33	25
not employed	26	30	23	26	26
<i>n=</i>	486	229	257	380	105

METHODOLOGY

The data contained in this report originated through a research study conducted by the Barna Group of Ventura, California. The study was commissioned by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

A total of 488 online interviews were conducted among the population of young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 who currently attend the SDA church or who attended as a child. The survey was conducted between September 16, 2013 and September 24, 2013. The sampling error for 488 interviews is ± 4.3 percentage points, at the 95% confidence level.

Emails inviting participation in the study were sent to a list provided by the SDA; a hyperlink to the survey website was embedded in each email. Additionally a link was posted on Facebook. The vast majority (394) interviews were conducted with young adults who came to the survey via Facebook and the remaining 91 took the survey through the email invitation. The surveys, which took an average of 16 minutes to complete, were conducted using web-enabled survey software.

In every survey there are a variety of ways in which the accuracy of the data may be affected. The cooperation rate is one such potential cause of error in measurement: the lower the cooperation rate, the less representative the respondents interviewed may be of the population from which they were drawn, thereby reducing the accuracy of the results. Other sources of error include question-design bias, question-order bias, interviewer mistakes, sampling error and respondent deception. Many of these types of errors cannot be accurately estimated. However, having a high cooperation rate does enhance the reliability of the information procured.

GUIDE TO SURVEY DATA

Do you remember reading the results of a survey and noticing the fine print that says that the results are accurate within plus or minus three percentage points (or some similar number)? That figure refers to the "range of sampling error." The range of sampling error indicates the accuracy of the results and is dependent upon two factors: 1) the sample size and 2) the degree to which the result you are examining is close to 50 percent or the extremes, 0 percent and 100 percent.

You can estimate the accuracy of your survey results using the table below. First, find the column heading that is closest to your sample size. Next, find the row whose label is closest to the response percentages observed for a particular question from your survey. The intersection of the row and column displays the number of percentage points that need to be added to, and subtracted from, the observed result to obtain the range of error. There is a 95 percent chance that the true percentage of the group being sampled is in that range.

Result	SAMPLE SIZE											
	100	200	300	400	500	600	800	1000	1200	1500	2000	2500
05% or 95%	4.4	3.1	2.5	2.2	2.0	1.8	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.1	.96	.87
10% or 90%	6.0	4.3	3.5	3.0	2.7	2.5	2.1	1.0	1.7	1.6	1.3	1.2
15% or 85%	7.1	5.1	4.1	3.6	3.2	2.9	2.5	2.3	2.1	1.9	1.6	1.4
20% or 80%	8.0	5.7	4.6	4.0	3.6	3.3	2.6	2.5	2.3	2.1	1.8	1.6
25% or 75%	8.7	6.1	5.0	4.3	3.9	3.6	3.0	2.8	2.5	2.3	1.9	1.7
30% or 70%	9.2	6.5	5.3	4.6	4.1	3.8	3.2	2.8	2.7	2.4	2.0	1.8
35% or 65%	9.5	6.8	5.5	4.8	4.3	3.9	3.3	3.1	2.8	2.5	2.1	1.9
40% or 60%	9.8	7.0	5.7	4.9	4.4	4.0	3.4	3.1	2.8	2.5	2.2	2.0
45% or 55%	9.9	7.0	5.8	5.0	4.5	4.1	3.5	3.2	2.9	2.6	2.2	2.0
50%	10.0	7.1	5.8	5.0	4.5	4.1	3.5	3.2	2.9	2.6	2.2	2.0

Note that the above statistics only relate to the sampling accuracy of survey results. When comparing the results of two subgroups (e.g., men versus women), a different procedure is followed and usually requires a greater sample size. Further, there is a range of other errors that may influence survey results (e.g. biased question wording, inaccurate data tabulation) -- errors whose influence cannot be statistically estimated.