Seventh-day Adventist
Global Data Picture

REPORT ON GLOBAL RESEARCH, 2011–13

TRI-UNION LEAD CONFERENCE,
SOUTHERN ASIA–PACIFIC DIVISION
DAVAO CITY, FEBRUARY 2014

DAVID TRIM
Five major research projects

- 41,000 interviews or completed questionnaires from all around the world:
  - 4,260 pastors from all divisions and 93% of unions shared about their experience in ministry
- Two surveys on beliefs, attitudes, experiences in the local church, and spiritual-life practices:
  - Nearly 26,000 church members from 6 continents and 9 divisions
  - Almost 1,200 current students/recent graduates—aged 20-30—of Adventist universities in North America
- Also:
  - Over 900 ex-SDAs shared the experiences that led to them leaving our ranks
  - 9,000 church-members on four continents responded to surveys as part of a detailed study of tithing and stewardship practices
Research for the Strategic Plan

- The research was carried out to inform the global strategic-planning process.
- Based on this research, and on assessments provided by the world divisions, drafting of the 2015–2020 strategic plan has begun.
- Divisions are working with GC and it is hoped that a draft will be shared at Spring Meeting.
The research was *only possible with your help*—so thank you for all you did to facilitate.

An overview of some key trends revealed by the data is being shared now so that when the strategic plan is ready to be considered, you will have a sense of why certain areas were chosen as priorities.
Data is what it is; what it means is something else

- Don’t shoot the messenger...
- There may be multiple interpretations of the data
- But much of what I am about to share with you is not what we would like to see; we may disagree about the whys and wherefores, and maybe even the degree — but the data is there.
- We should prayerfully consider how we can effect positive change.
Gender balance, male and female

- Male: 43.20%
- Female: 56.80%
Gender balance, percentages, by division

ECD  | IAD  | NAD  | SAD  | SID  | SPD  | SSD  | TED  | WAD  
0%   | 10%  | 20%  | 30%  | 40%  | 50%  | 60%  | 70%  | 80%  | 90%  | 100% |

Legend: 
- Females
- Males
Total age distribution

- 15 and under: 10.22%
- 16-25: 22.85%
- 26-40: 32.07%
- 41-60: 29.40%
- Over 60: 5.47%
Age distribution by divisions

- ECD
- IAD
- NAD
- SAD
- SID
- SPD
- SSD
- TED
- WAD

Key:
- Over 60
- 41-60
- 26-40
- 25 and under
Church members with some SDA education

- Some = 47.42%
- None = 52.58%
Percentage with no SDA education by division

- ECD
- IAD
- NAD
- SAD
- SID
- SPD
- SSD
- TED
- WAD
Pastors: Years of Adventist Education

- None: 8%
- 1 to 4 years: 26%
- 5 to 8 years: 36%
- 9 to 12 years: 16%
- 13 or more years: 14%
Adventist experience of tertiary education in context

- Some tertiary education: 12.75% Adventist, 11.90% World at large
- Tertiary graduate: 27.56% Adventist, 6.70% World at large
Sabbath School—a success story

- In the church-members’ survey, respondents were asked to rate the extent to which their pastors, elders and Sabbath School teachers knew them well, were warm, friendly, caring, and had a positive impact on their spiritual lives.

- In all surveyed divisions, more than 50% of respondents gave their Sabbath School teachers the highest rankings in these categories.

- In most divisions, the SS teachers were consistently ranked above other local church officials.
The church–members’ survey asked 27 questions about what has “helped to develop your religious life”, with answers on a five–point scale ranging from “Very much” to “Not at all” and “Does not apply to me”.

They were asked to assess Sabbath School, the adult Bible study guide, church worship service, personal prayer and Bible study, and family worship.

In 7 out of 9 divisions, more than 50% gave Sabbath School the highest ranking of any of these: it helped “Very much”.

Question: How much has the Adult Bible Study Guide helped you develop your religious life?
Sabbath School lesson—a success story

%  
80  
70  
60  
50  
40  
30  
20  
10  
0  
ECD  IAD  NAD  SAD  SID  SPD  SSD  TED  WAD  
N/A  Not at all  Sometimes  Often  Very much
Confidence in Ellen White’s prophetic gift

I embrace I wholeheartedly: 74%
I accept it because the church teaches it: 12%
I have some questions about it: 4%
I have major doubts about it: 3%
I don't accept it: 4%
Not important to me: 3%

74%
12%
4%
3%
4%
3%
Certainty that the seventh-day Sabbath is the true Sabbath: global percentages

- Strongly disagree: 2%
- Disagree more than agree: 1%
- Agree more than disagree: 5%
- Strongly agree: 92%
Confidence in the Seventh-day Adventist Church as the remnant Church with an end-time mission: global %

- **88%**: Strongly Agree
- **2%**: Agree more than disagree
- **2%**: Disagree more than agree
- **8%**: Strongly disagree
Question statement: *I believe God created the world*

- Strongly disagree: 1.5
- Disagree more than agree: 0.96
- Agree more than disagree: 4.25
- Strongly agree: 93.3
Conviction that God is Creator of the Universe: global percentages

Question statement: The Seventh-day Adventist Church is God’s true last-day church with a message to prepare the world for the Second Coming of Christ

- Strongly disagree: 1.7%
- Disagree more than agree: 2.0%
- Agree more than disagree: 7.7%
- Strongly agree: 88.6%
Creeping Secularization

- The qualitative study of lapsed Adventists indicates clearly that the majority still accept the doctrines which brought them into the Church.

- Most were just not noticed when they slipped away, or were not treated with compassion in times of crisis.

- The problem of “not being noticed” is one we will come back to, but another factor is the creeping influence of secular values—and these are no limited to the Western world.
Creeping Secularization

The report on interview with lapsed SDAs concluded:

*The vast majority of the inactive and former members of the Adventist Church are not rejecting the message and mission of the Church, but are moving with strong dynamics in contemporary society away from established forms of religious activity; the fabric of most Adventist local churches is not sufficient to stem this tide.*

EVIDENCE OF THIS CREEPING SECULARIZATION CAN BE SEEN IN ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS
1. Episodic Bible-reading patterns

- Daily or more than once a day: 42%
- More than once a week: 32%
- About once a week: 17%
- Less than once a month: 7%
- Never: 2%
1. Episodic Bible-reading patterns
2. Very limited reading of Spirit of Prophecy

- Daily or more than once a day: 16%
- More than once a week: 21%
- About once a week: 19%
- Less than once a month: 25%
- Never: 19%
2. Very limited reading of Spirit of Prophecy

- Daily or more than once a day
- More than once a week
- About once a week
- Less than once a month
- Never
3. Decline in family worship

- Daily or more than once a day: 36%
- More than once a week: 22%
- About once a week: 14%
- Less than once a month: 12%
- Never: 16%
3. Decline in family worship

- Daily or more than once a day
- More than once a week
- About once a week
- Less than once a month
- Never

ECD | IAD | NAD | SAD | SID | SPD | SSD | WAD
Comparison of three devotional practices

- **Bible reading**
- **Reading of EGW**
- **Family worship**
Devotional practices among current and recent college/university students

Several times a day
- Pray: 9%
- Read Bible: 14%
- Read Ellen White: 7%

Once a day
- Pray: 9%
- Read Bible: 21%
- Read Ellen White: 14%

Several times a week
- Pray: 19%
- Read Bible: 25%
- Read Ellen White: 12%

Once a week
- Pray: 4%
- Read Bible: 13%
- Read Ellen White: 11%

Less than once a week
- Pray: 6%
- Read Bible: 23%
- Read Ellen White: 37%

Never
- Pray: 5%
- Read Bible: 9%
- Read Ellen White: 31%
4. Uncertainty about the Sanctuary Doctrine and the Investigative Judgment

- I embrace it wholeheartedly: 62%
- I accept it because the church teaches it: 13%
- I have some questions about it: 10%
- I have major doubts about it: 6%
- I don't accept it: 5%
- Not important to me: 4%
- I accept it because the church teaches it: 13%
- I embrace it wholeheartedly: 62%
4. Uncertainty about the Sanctuary Doctrine and the Investigative Judgment

Among NAD college students and alumni, “Not important to me” is 14%
5. Growing uncertainty about a recent and literal creation week as described in Genesis 1–2

I believe God created the world in 6 days of 24 hours each, in the relatively recent past

“Disagrees” come to 13%

![Pie chart showing percentages of agreement and disagreement on the creation week.]

- Strongly disagree: 4%
- Disagree more than agree: 9%
- Agree more than disagree: 13%
- Strongly agree: 74%
5. Growing uncertainty about a recent and literal creation week as described in Genesis 1–2

Among current/recent college students in the US, just 55.7% strongly agree; 11.3% disagree or strongly disagree.
Comparing beliefs in a literal Genesis-described Creation, God as creator, and the 7th-day Sabbath

- Strongly agree
- Agree more than disagree
- Disagree more than agree
- Strongly disagree

- God created the world
- Relatively recent creation, days of 24 hours
- 7th day Sabbath
6. Uncertainty about the State of the Dead

Question: *When a person dies their body remains in the grave and their soul sleeps until the resurrection*

- Strongly agree: 79%
- Disagree more than agree: 3%
- Agree more than disagree: 8%
- Strongly disagree: 10%
6. Uncertainty about the State of the Dead

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree more than agree
- Agree more than disagree
- Strongly agree

ECD
IAD
NAD
SAD
SID
SSD
SPD
TED
WAD

[Bar chart showing the distribution of responses for each category.]
7. Skepticism about imminence of 2nd Advent

Question statement: *I expect the world to end within the next twenty years*
7. Skepticism about imminence of 2\textsuperscript{nd} Advent
Comparison between “The Seventh-day Adventist Church is God’s true last-day church with a message to prepare the world for the Second Coming of Christ” and “I expect the world to end within the next 20 years.”

- **SDA church is a true church with a message to prepare the world for the 2nd Coming of Christ**
- **I expect the world as we know it to end within the next 20 years**
Comparison between Second Coming within 20 years and Adventist doctrine of the State of Dead

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree more than agree
- Agree more than disagree
- Strongly agree

%
8. In the West, growing tolerance of heterodox practices, as well as doctrinal beliefs

Acceptance* of non-practicing and practicing homosexuals and cohabitating couples in church:
Survey of current and recent university students (aged in their 20s)

*Based on number of responses that said "always" or "usually acceptable"
SDA education: a safeguard against secularization

- In the survey of lapsed and ex-Adventists, 83% reported no experience of Adventist education, but the equivalent figure for all church-members is 56%.
- Thus, there is clear evidence that those who have not gone through denominational education are disproportionately more likely to become inactive or leave.
- Furthermore 60% of pastors report that members who have not experienced Adventist higher education are more likely to leave the church.
- This is why the fact that less than half of all Adventists have had any Adventist education (noted earlier) is important.
We need to care for our church members

- In addition to the creeping influence of secularization, in the “Global South”, as well as the more secular and affluent “Global North”, there is evidence that, simply, not enough attention is paid to nurturing & discipling our members—caring for the sheep God has given us.

- Interviews with lapsed Adventists:
  - After they stopped attending church, just 9% were contacted by their pastor
  - Some were visited by elders or church members;
  - But for 40%: “No one contacted me”
Pastors need to be equipped

- In light of these statistics, and the findings from the survey of ex-Adventists that nobody contacted them, it is perhaps not surprising to find that 53% of global pastors say they were never trained in nurturing and retaining members in their BA courses; and the same proportion (53%) state they had no training in these areas at seminary.

- It is time for us to develop comprehensive member-care strategies, to resist the tides of secular culture, and to ensure no more of our sheep just drift away.