

# 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:
  - i. 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:
  - ii. Nearly 26,000 church members from 6 continents and 9 divisions
  - iii. Almost 1,200 current students/recent graduates—**aged 20-30**—of Adventist universities in North America
- Also:
  - iv. Over 900 ex-SDAs shared the experiences that led to them leaving our ranks
  - v. 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.

# Research for the Strategic Plan



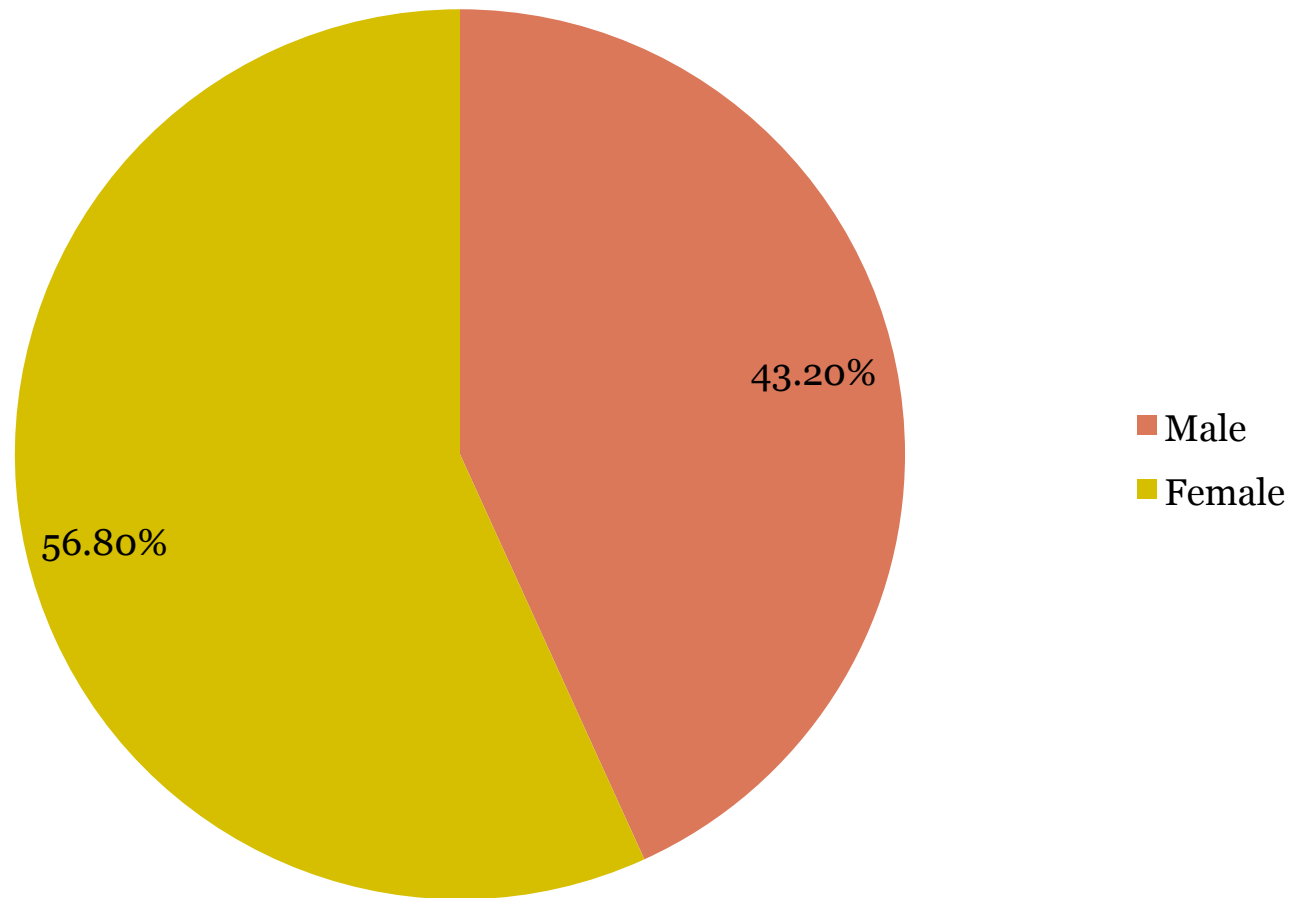
- The research was *only possible with your help*—so thank you for all you did to facilitate.
- An overview of some key trends revealed by the data is being shared now so that when the strategic plan is ready to be considered, you will have a sense of why certain areas were chosen as priorities.

# Data is what it is; what it means is something else

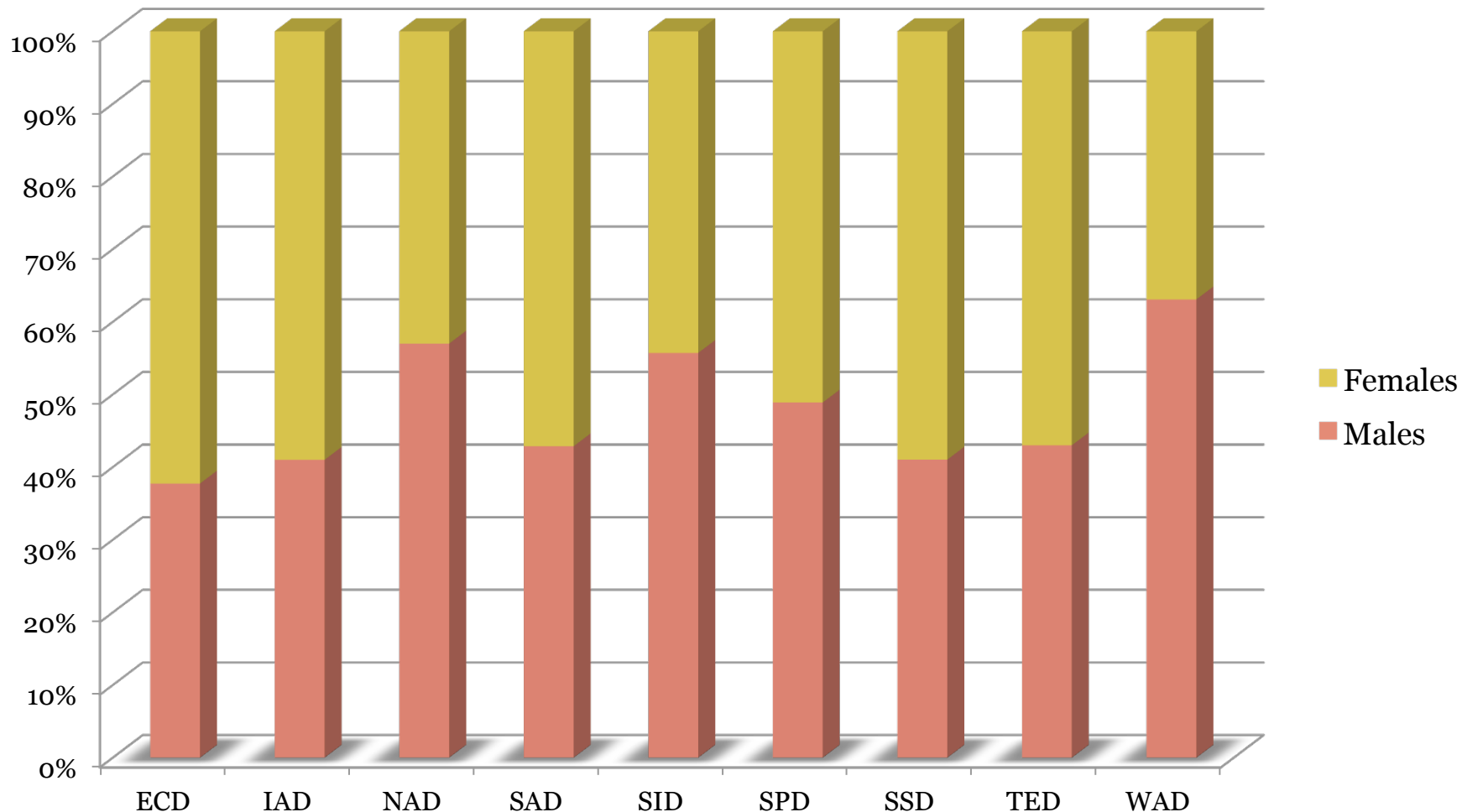


- Don't shoot the messenger...
- There may be multiple interpretations of the data
- But much of what I am about to share with you is not what we would like to see; we may disagree about the whys and wherefores, and maybe even the degree — but the data is there.
- We should prayerfully consider how we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

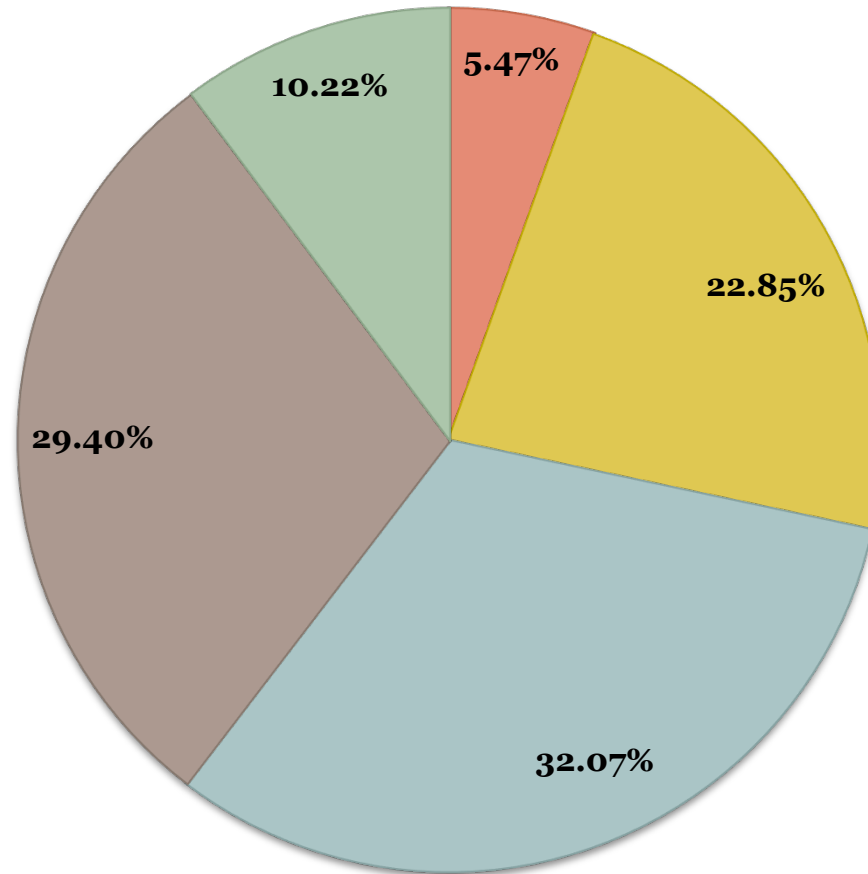
# Gender balance, male and female



# Gender balance, percentages, by division



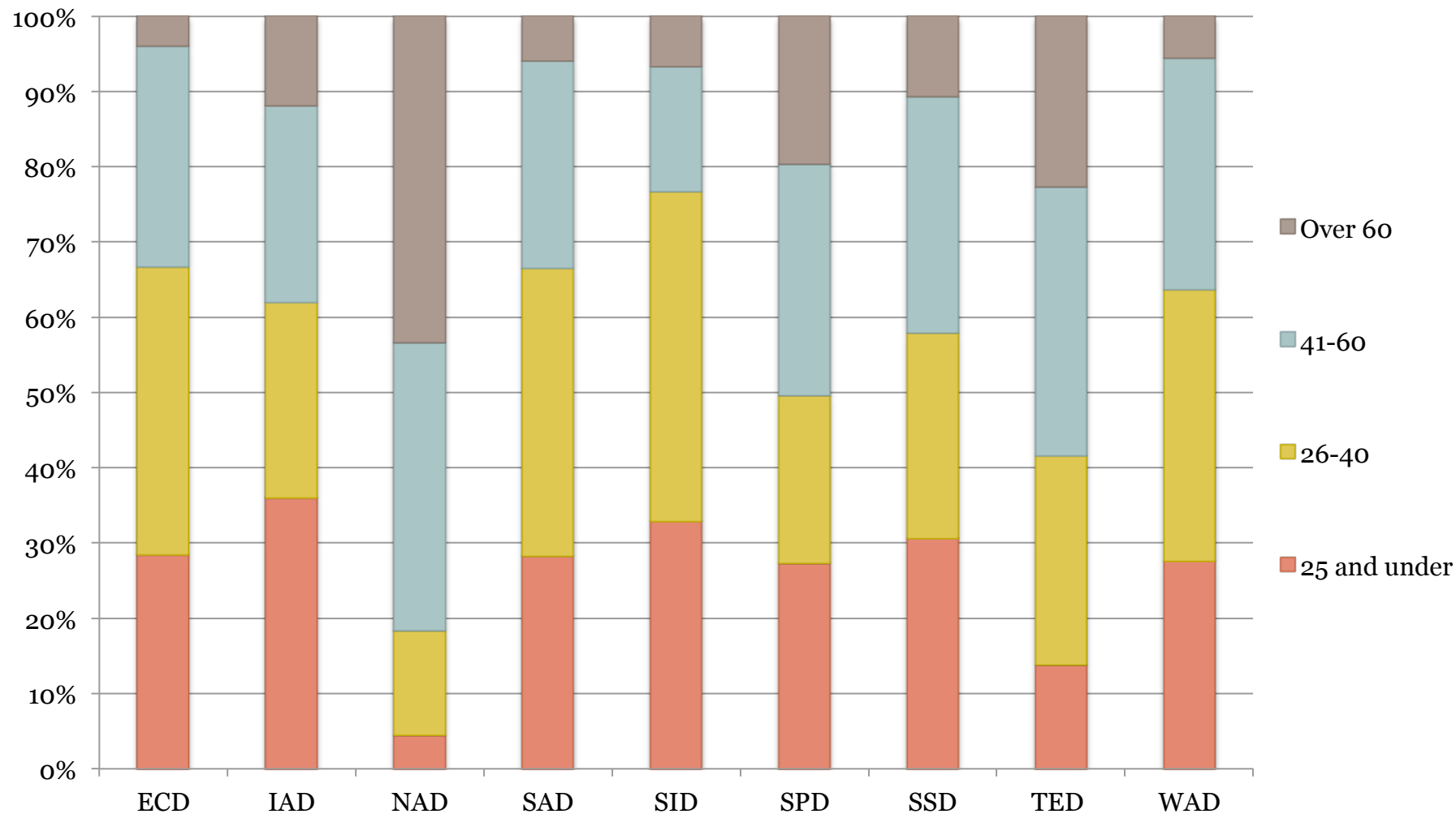
# Total age distribution



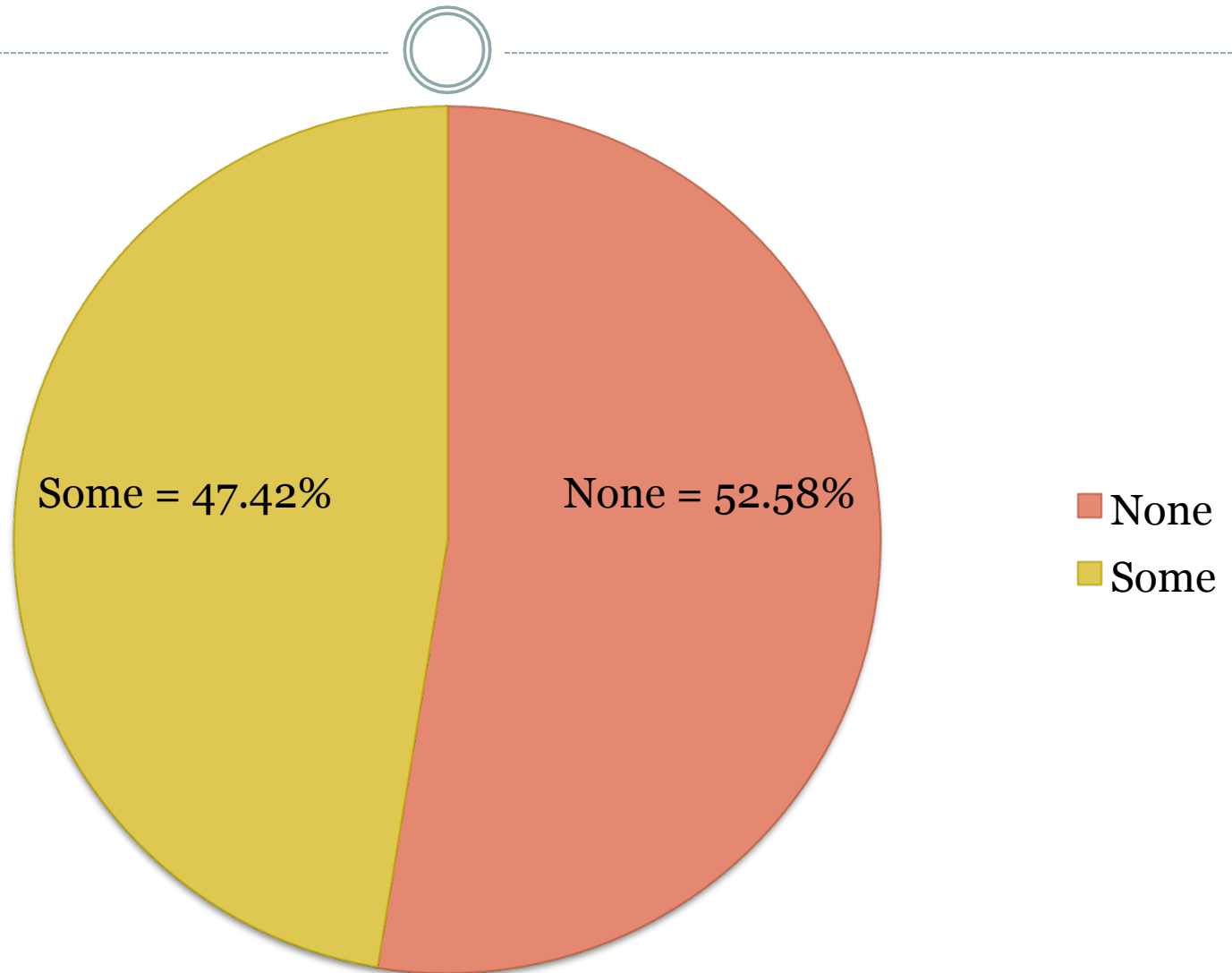
- 15 and under
- 16-25
- 26-40
- 41-60
- Over 60



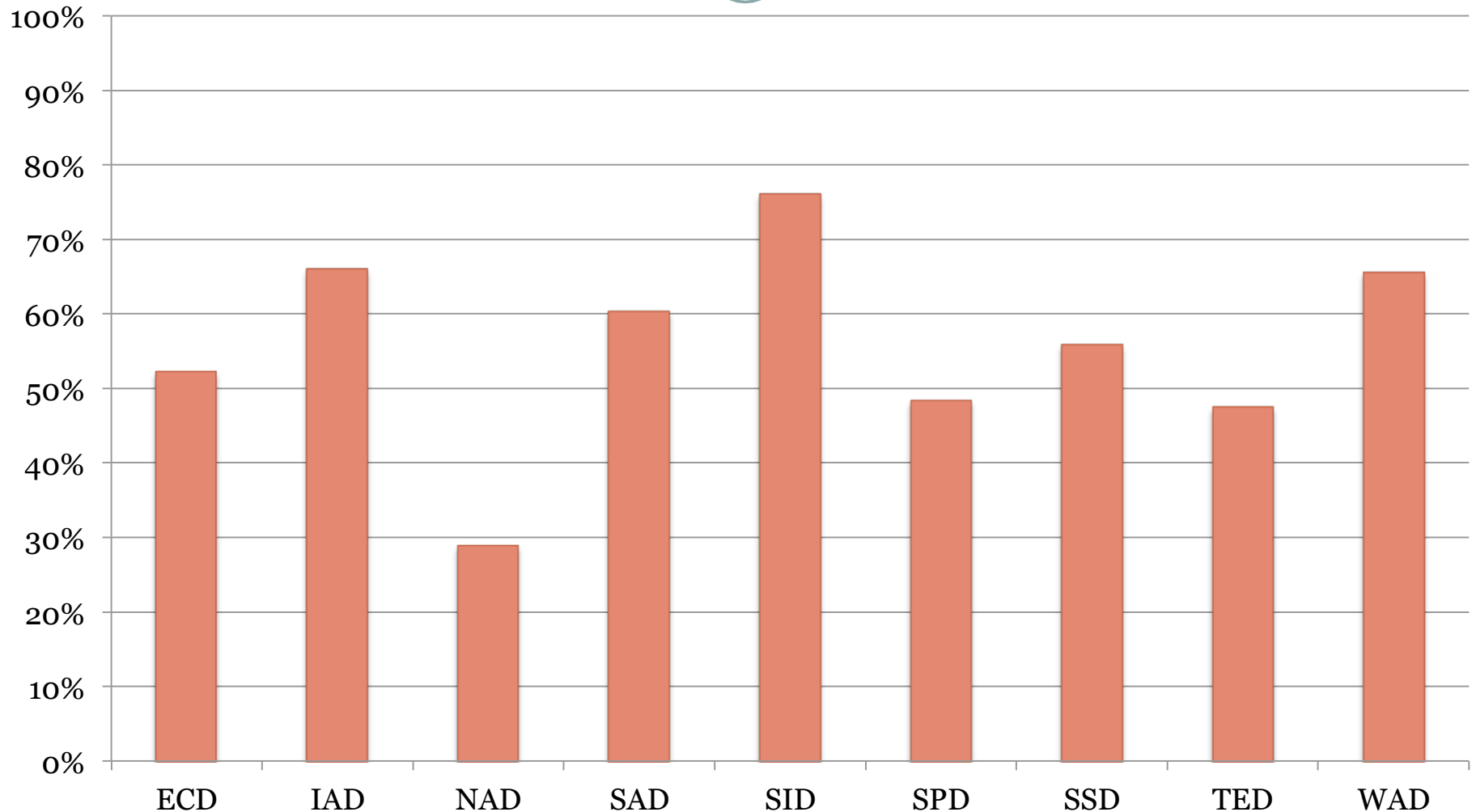
# Age distribution by divisions



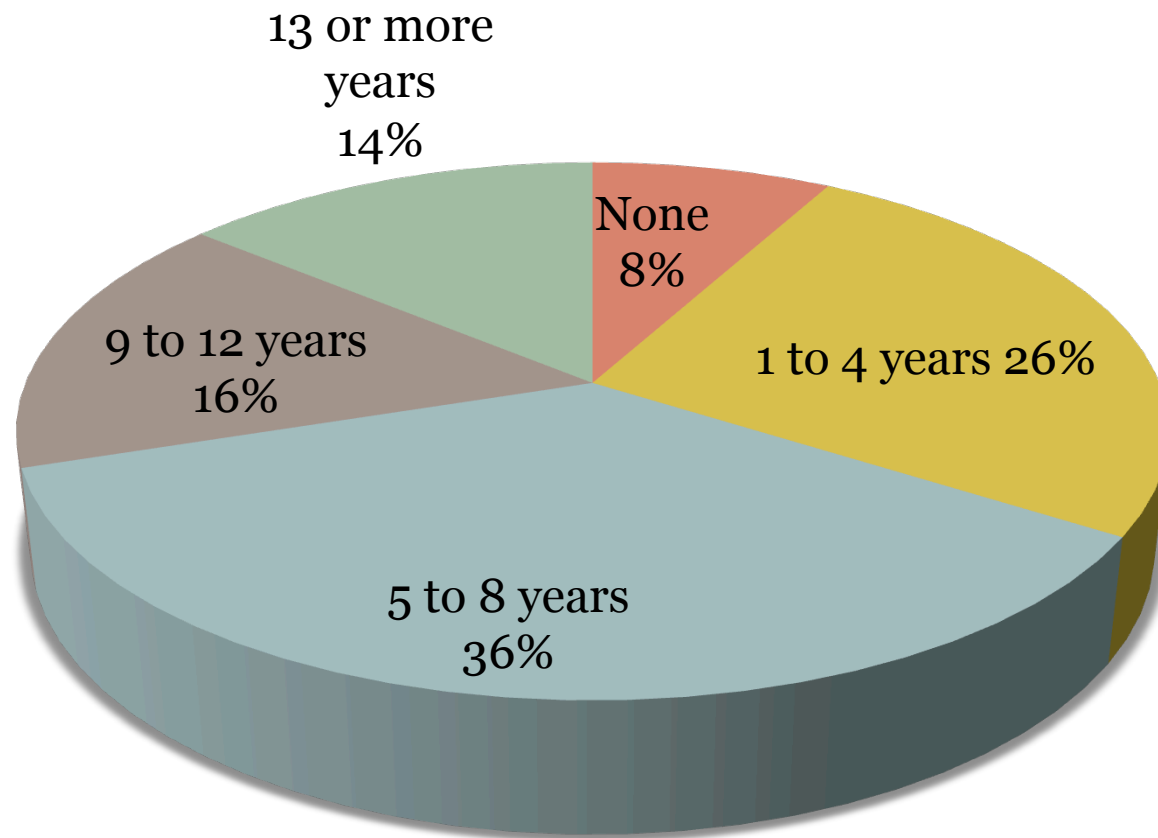
# Church members with some SDA education



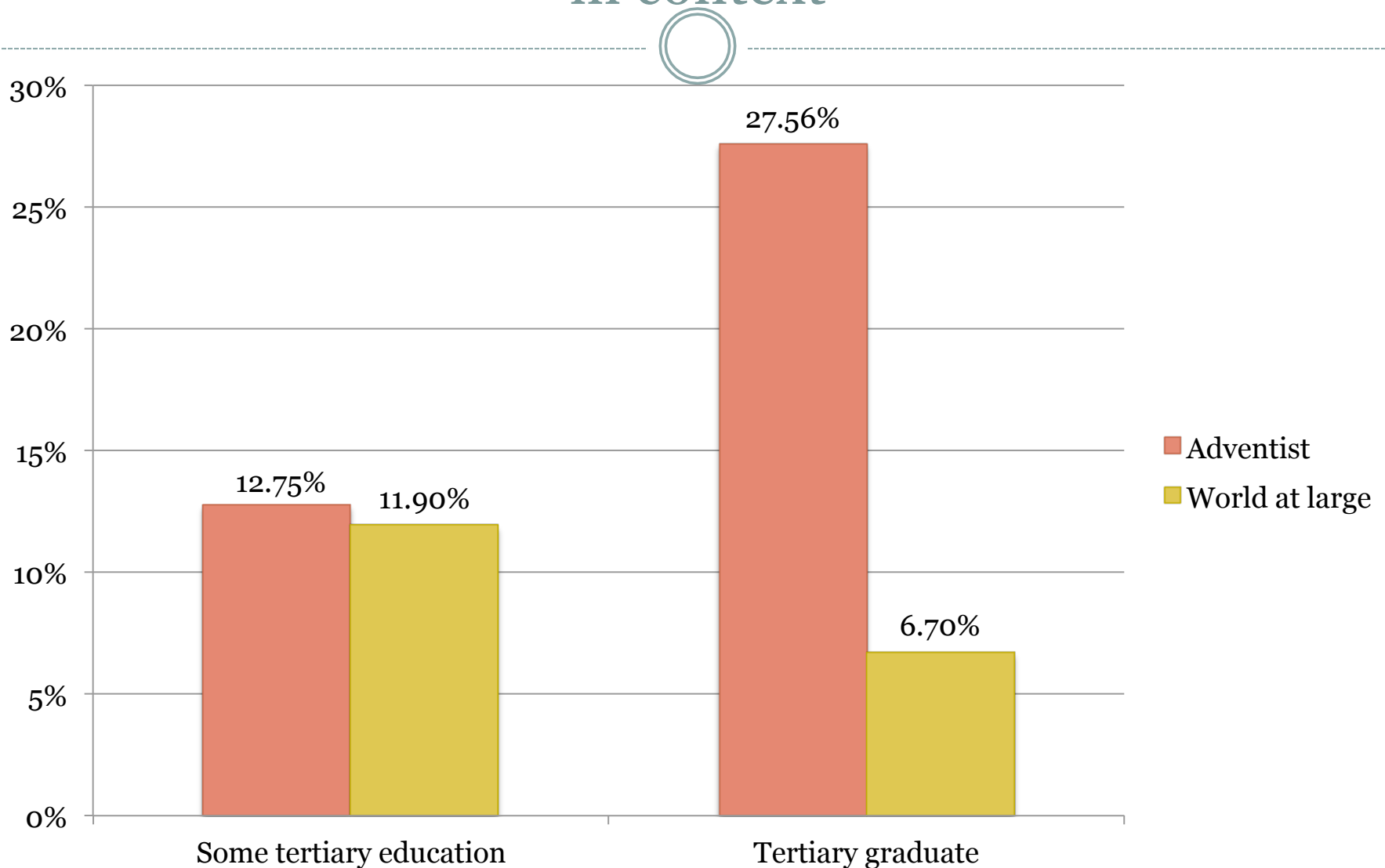
# Percentage with no SDA education by division



# Pastors: Years of Adventist Education



# Adventist experience of tertiary education in context



# 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.

# Sabbath School—a success story



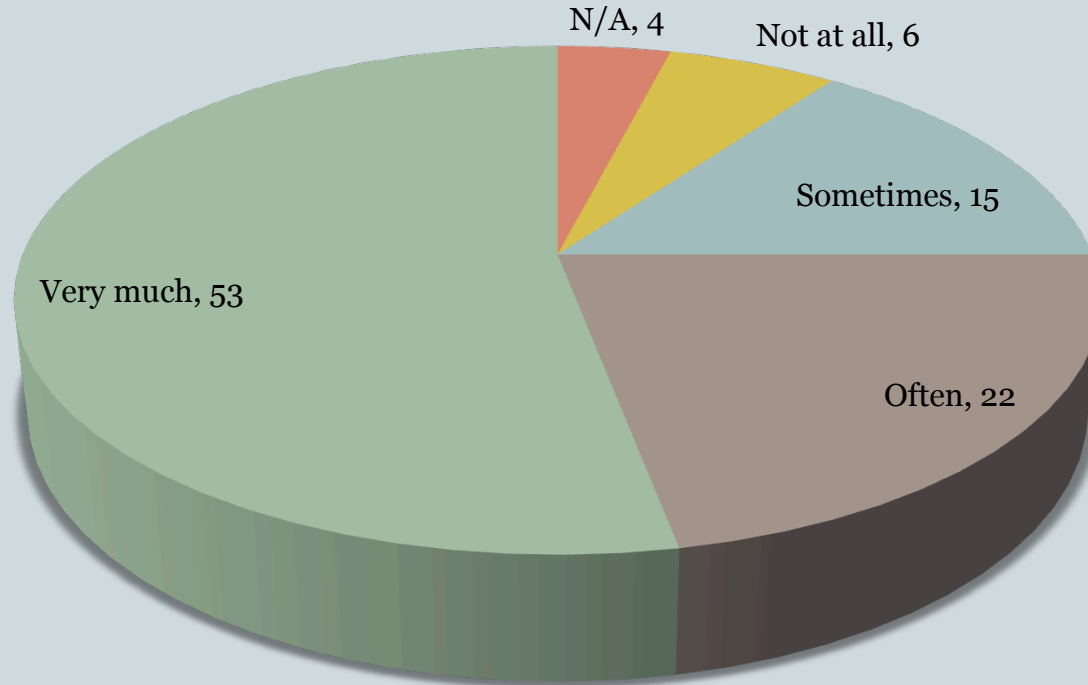
- The church—members' survey asked 27 questions about what has “helped to develop your religious life”, with answers on a five—point scale ranging from “Very much” to “Not at all” and “Does not apply to me”.
- They were asked to assess Sabbath School, the adult Bible study guide, church worship service, 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”.

# Sabbath School lesson—a success story



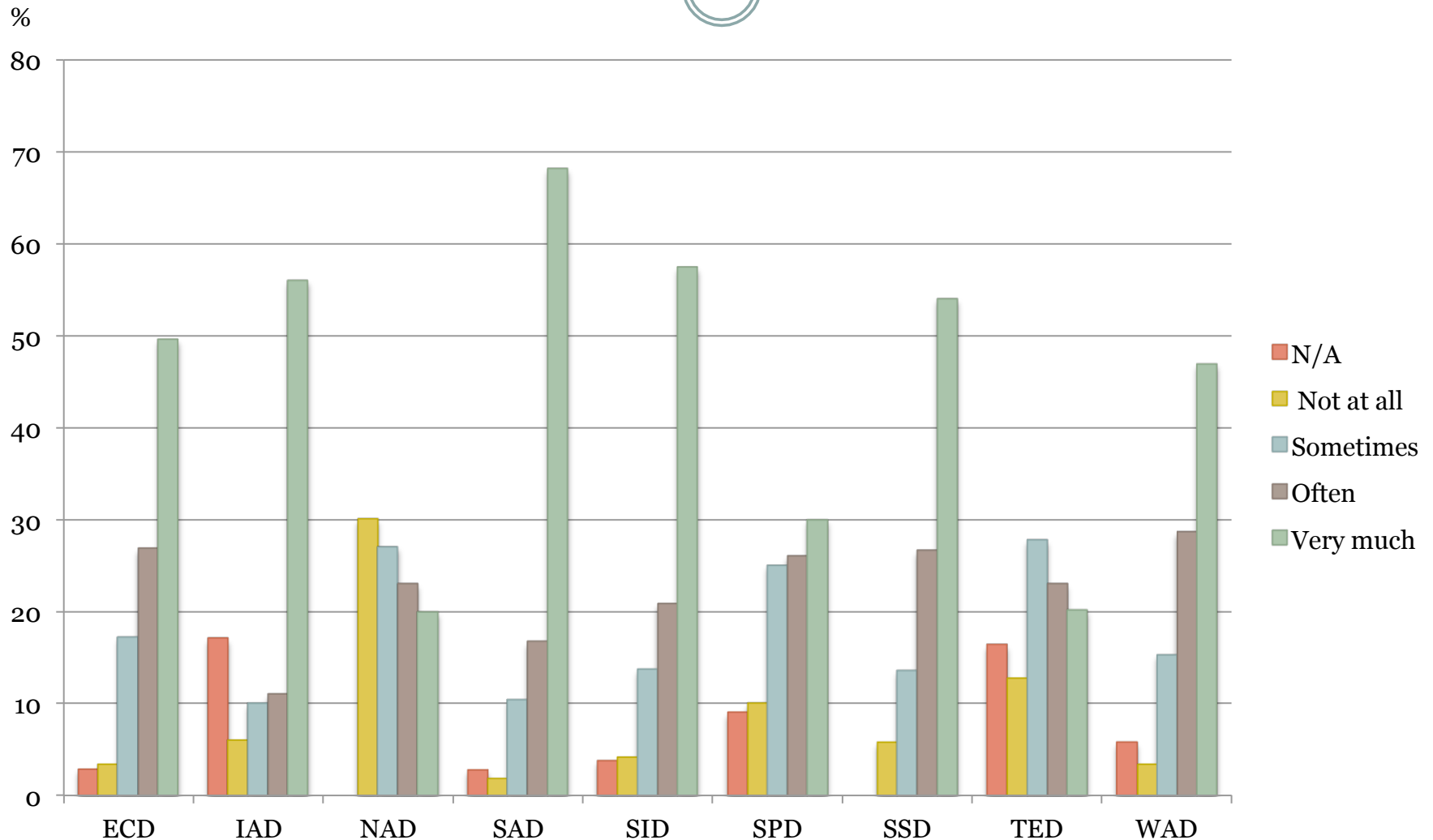
Question: *How much has the Adult Bible Study Guide helped you develop your religious life?*

**Number = %**





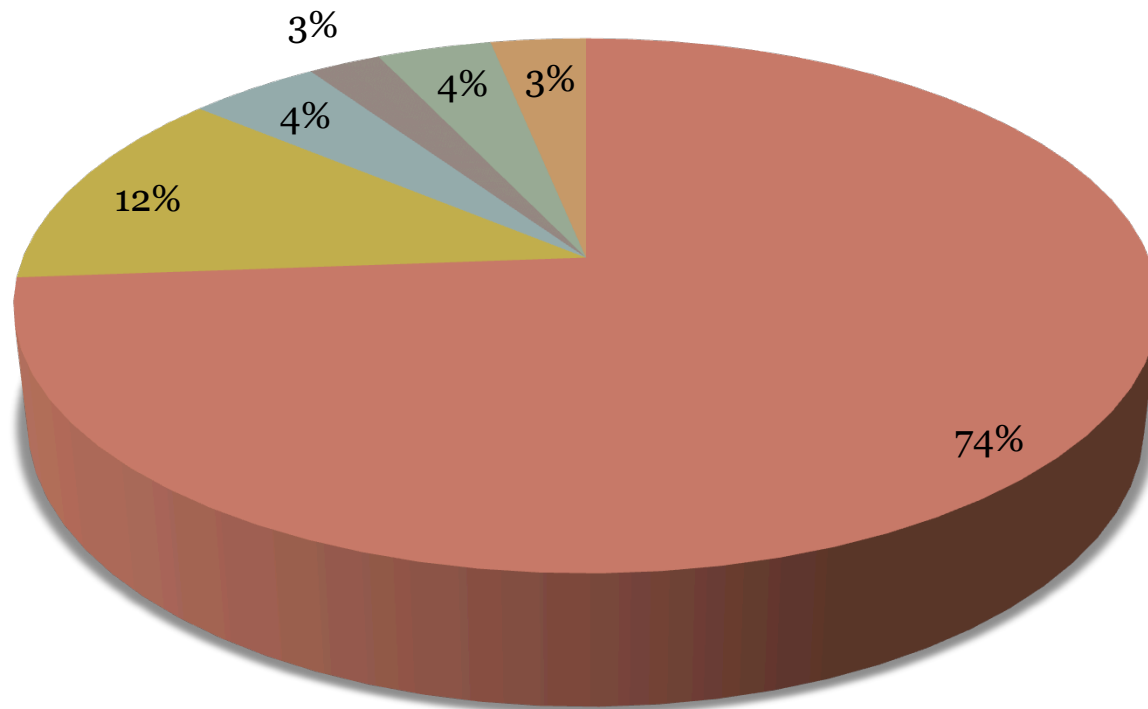
# Sabbath School lesson—a success story



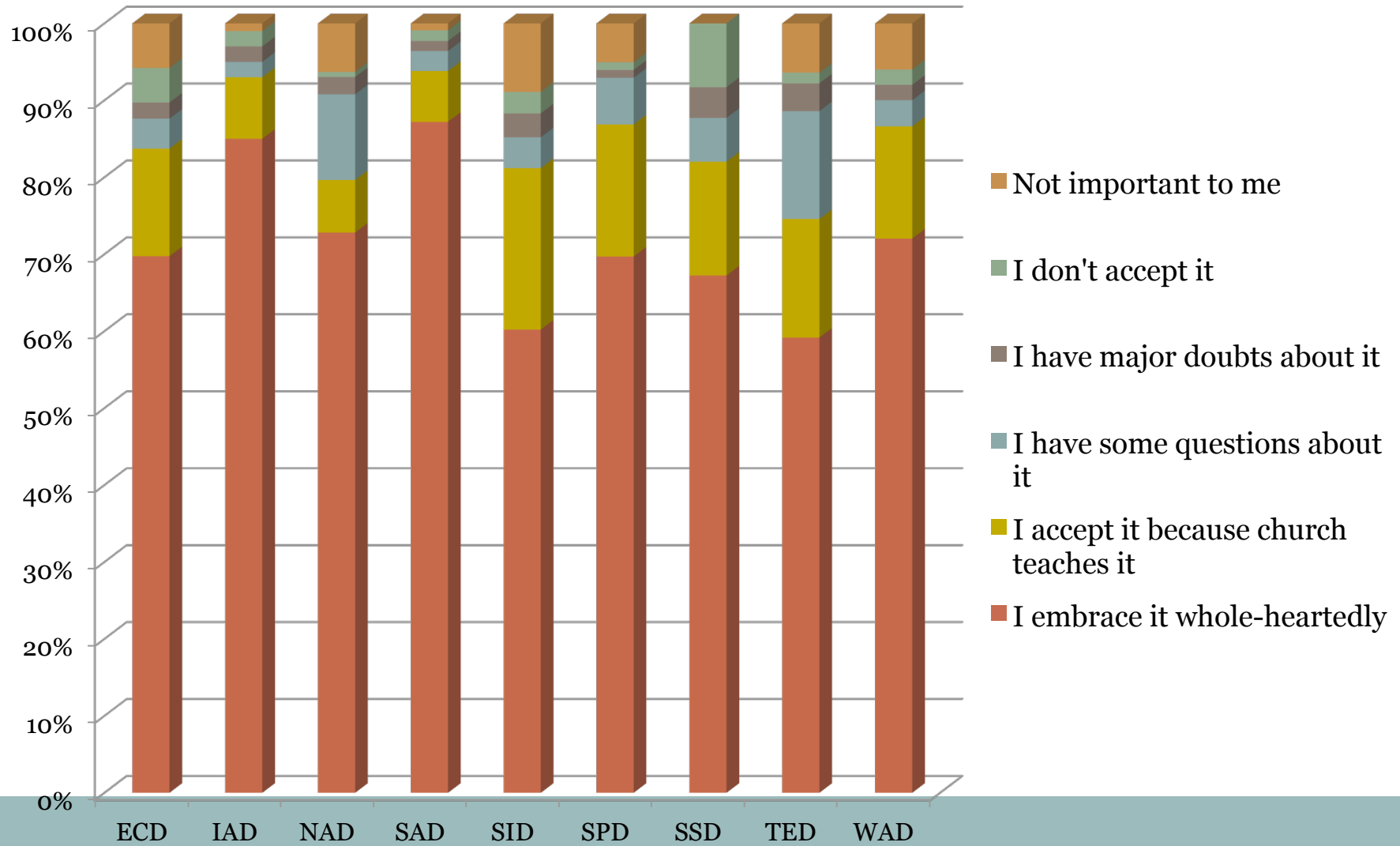
# Confidence in Ellen White's prophetic gift



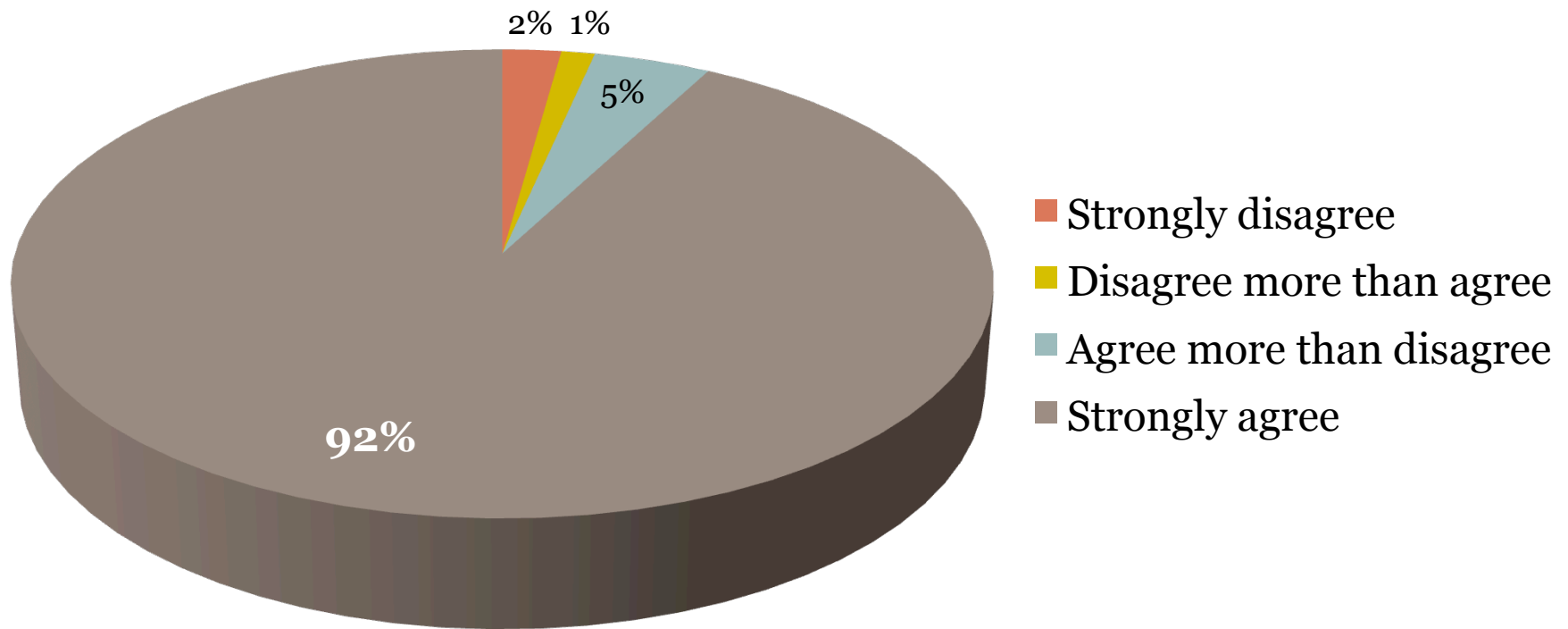
- I embrace it wholeheartedly
- I accept it because the church teaches it
- I have some questions about it
- I have major doubts about it
- I don't accept it
- Not important to me



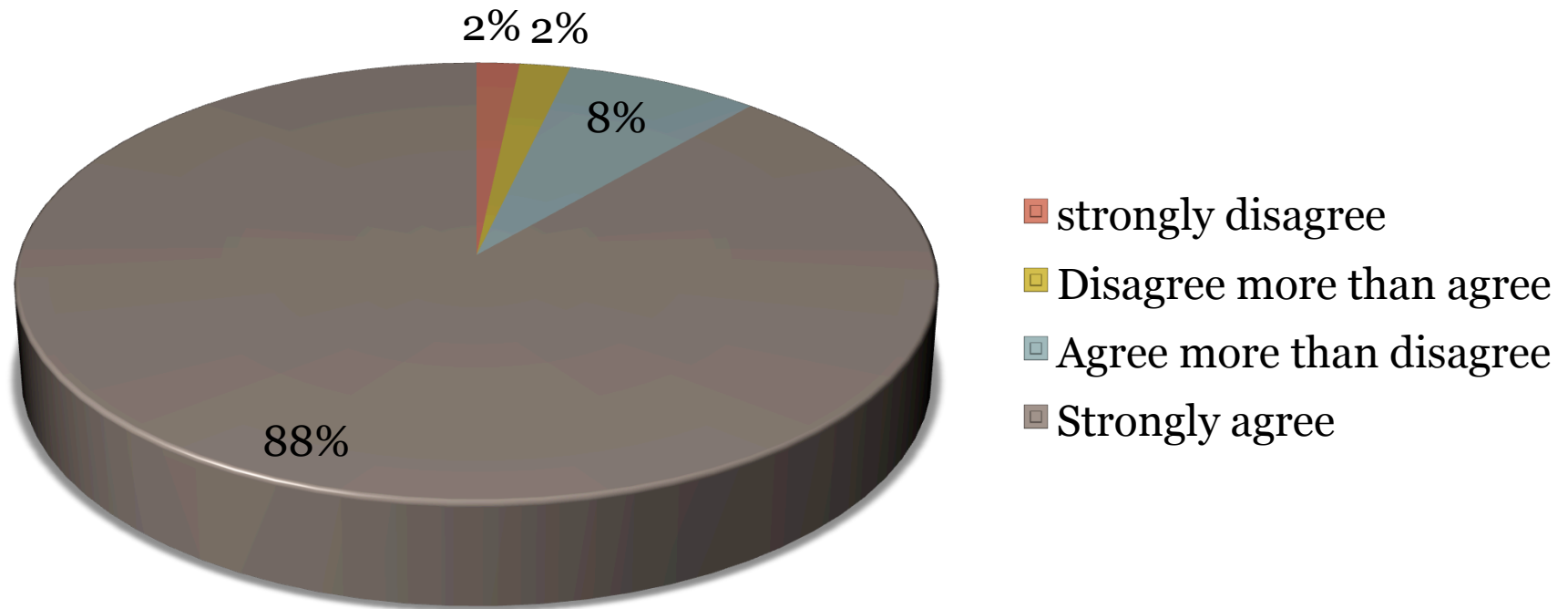
# Confidence in Ellen White's prophetic gift



# Certainty that the seventh-day Sabbath is the true Sabbath: global percentages



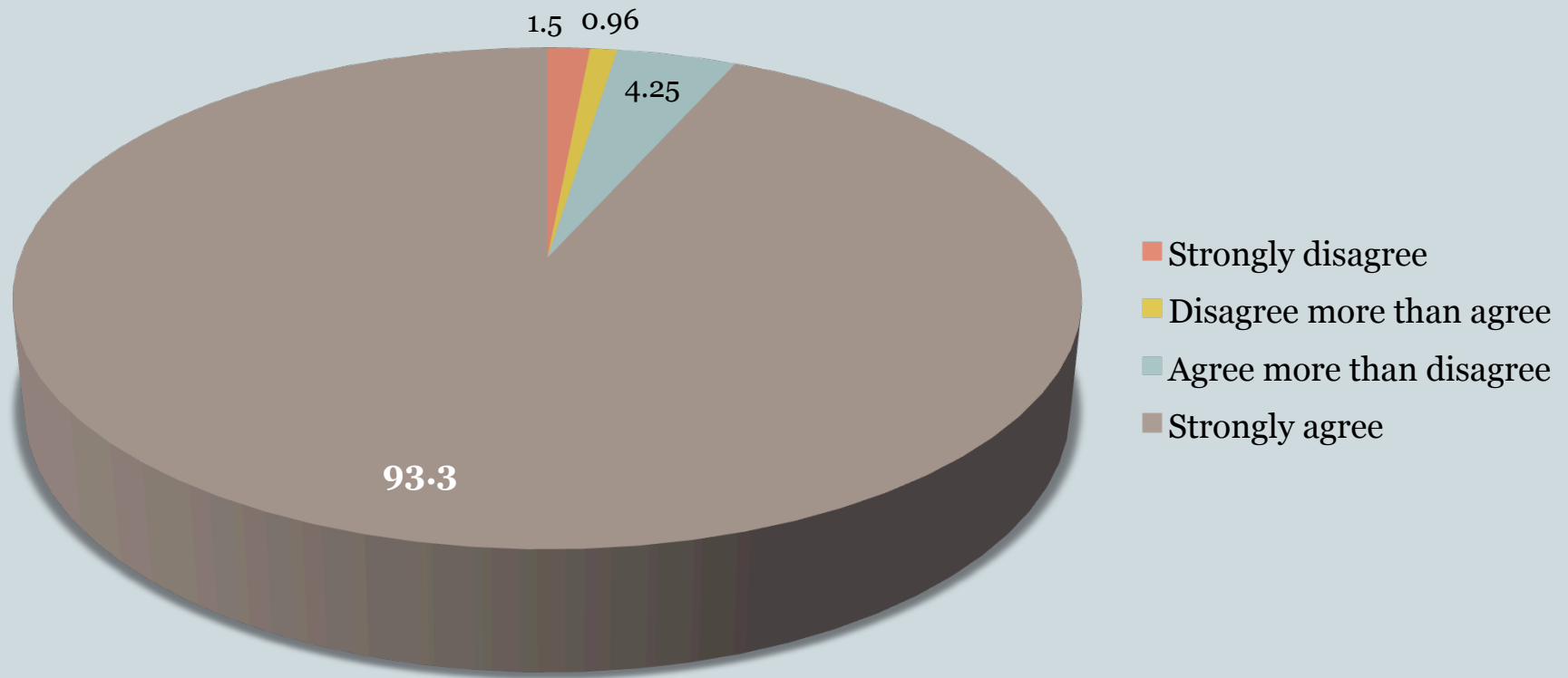
# Confidence in the Seventh-day Adventist Church as the remnant Church with an end-time mission: global %



# Conviction that God is Creator of the Universe: global percentages

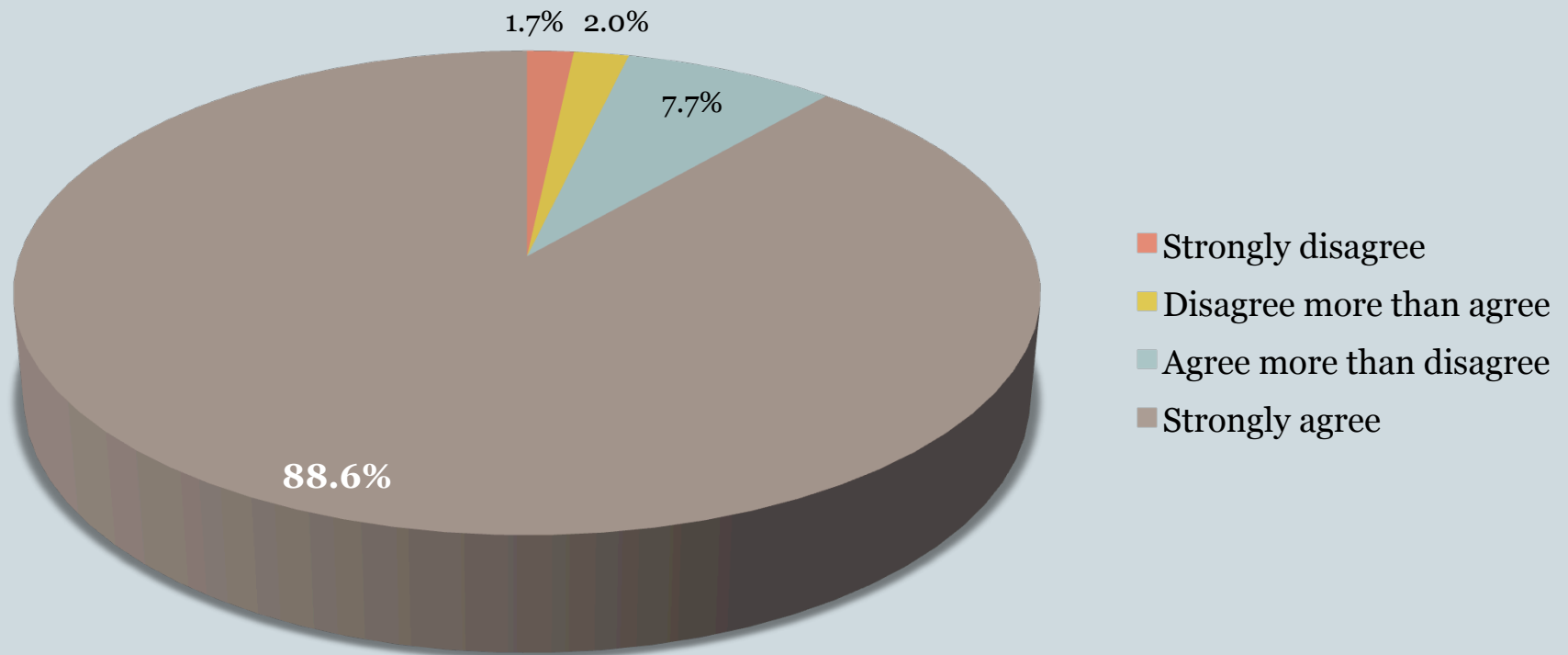


Question statement: *I believe God created the world*



# 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*



# 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

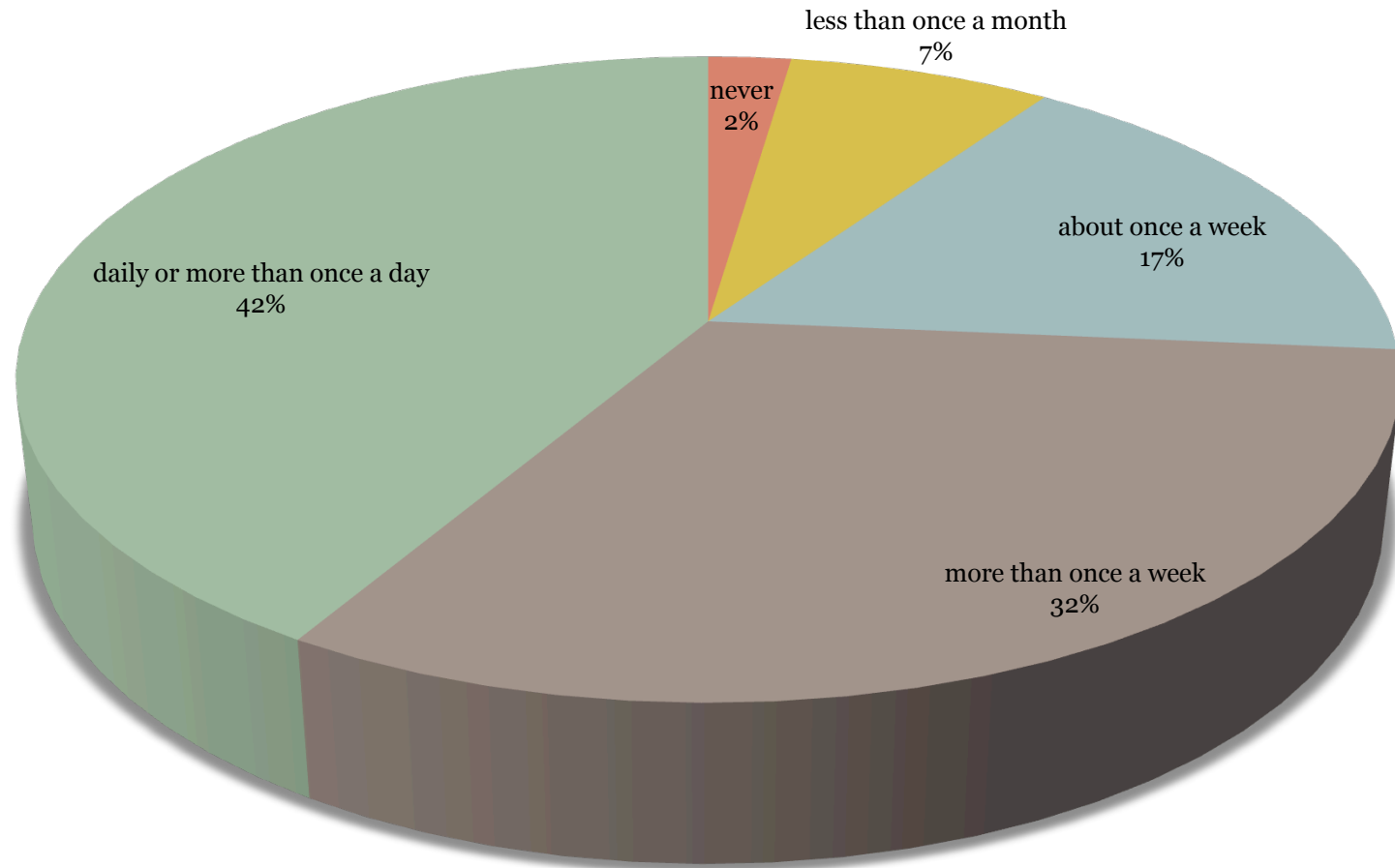


The report on interview with lapsed SDAs concluded:

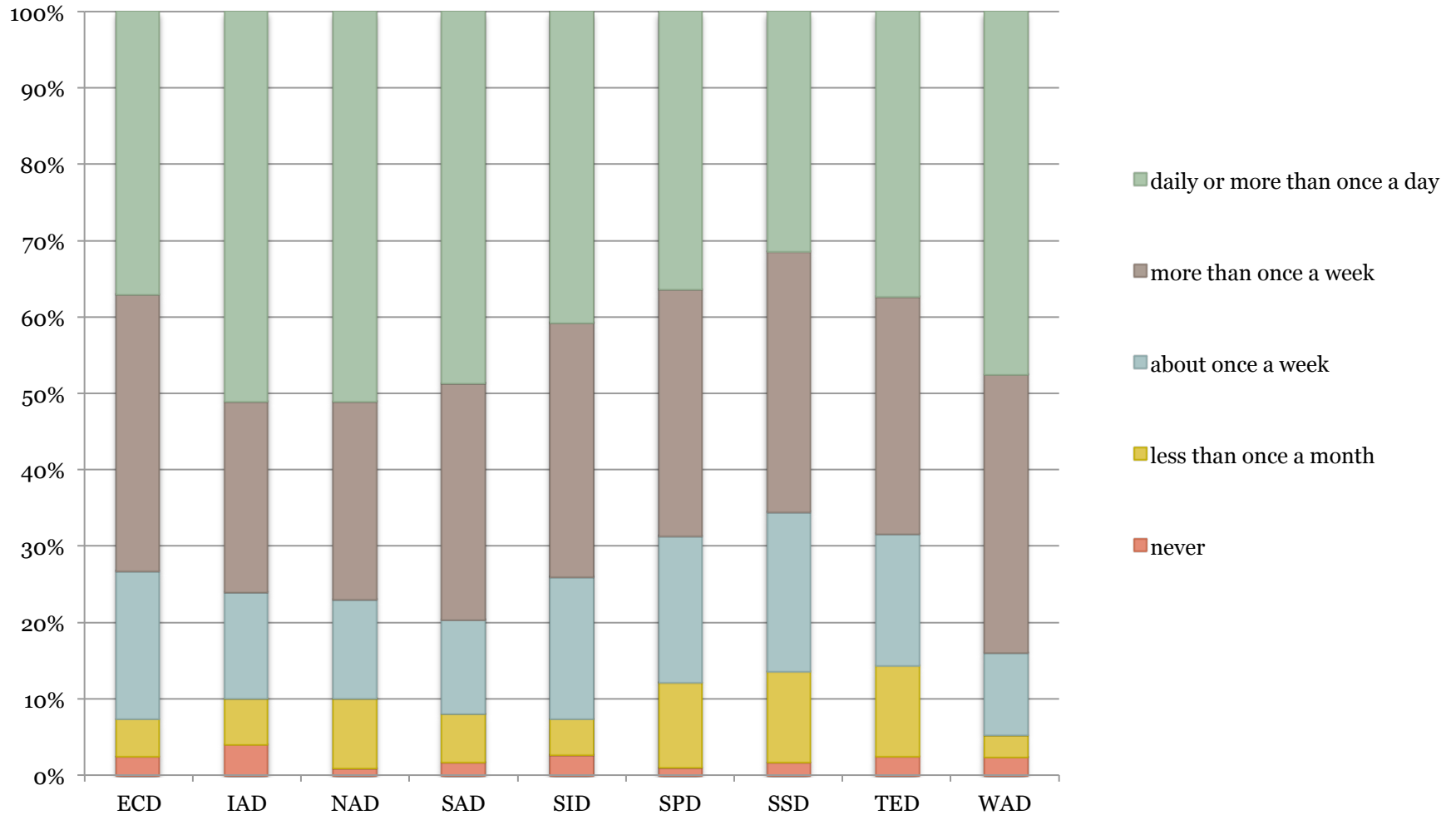
*The vast majority of the inactive and former members of the Adventist Church are not rejecting the message and mission of the Church, but are moving with strong dynamics in contemporary society away from established forms of religious activity; the fabric of most Adventist local churches is not sufficient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

***EVIDENCE OF THIS CREPING SECULARIZATION  
CAN BE SEEN IN ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS***

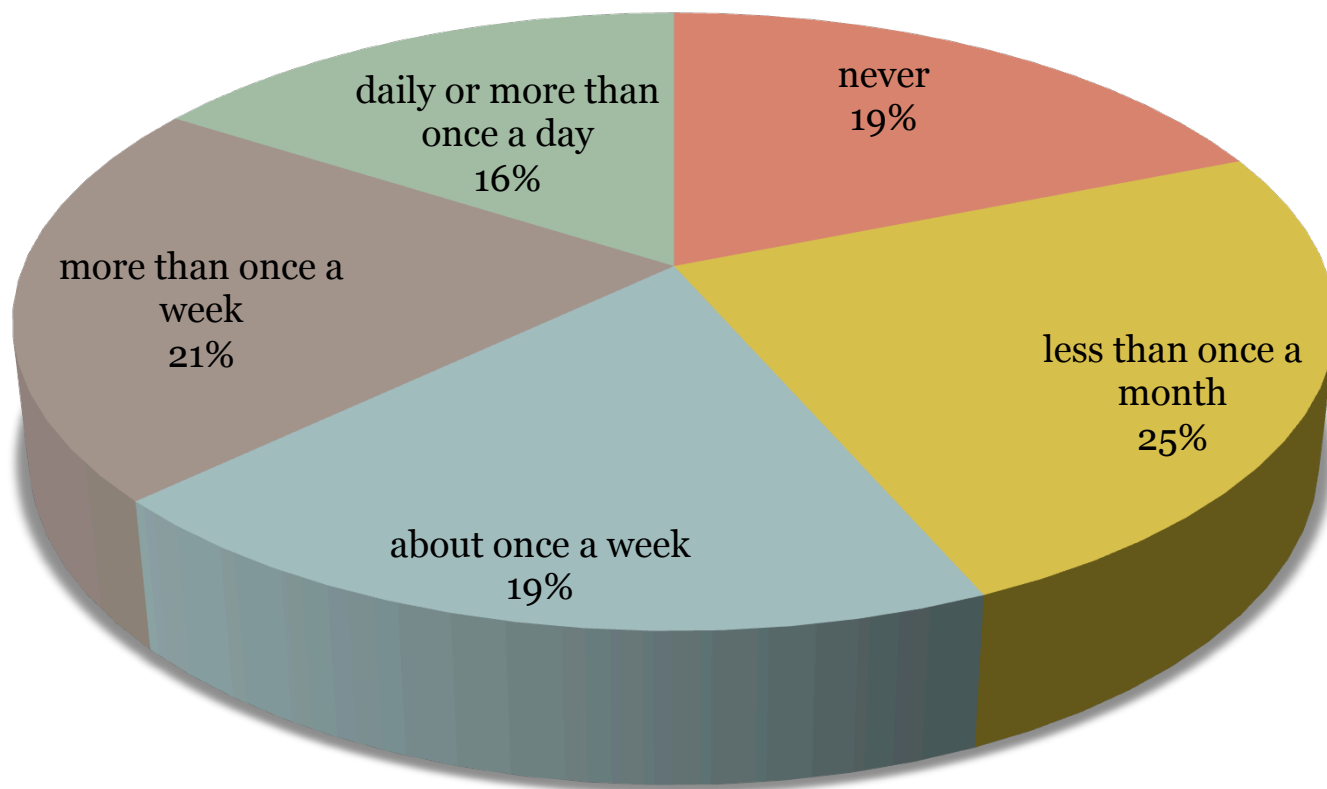
# 1. Episodic Bible-reading patterns



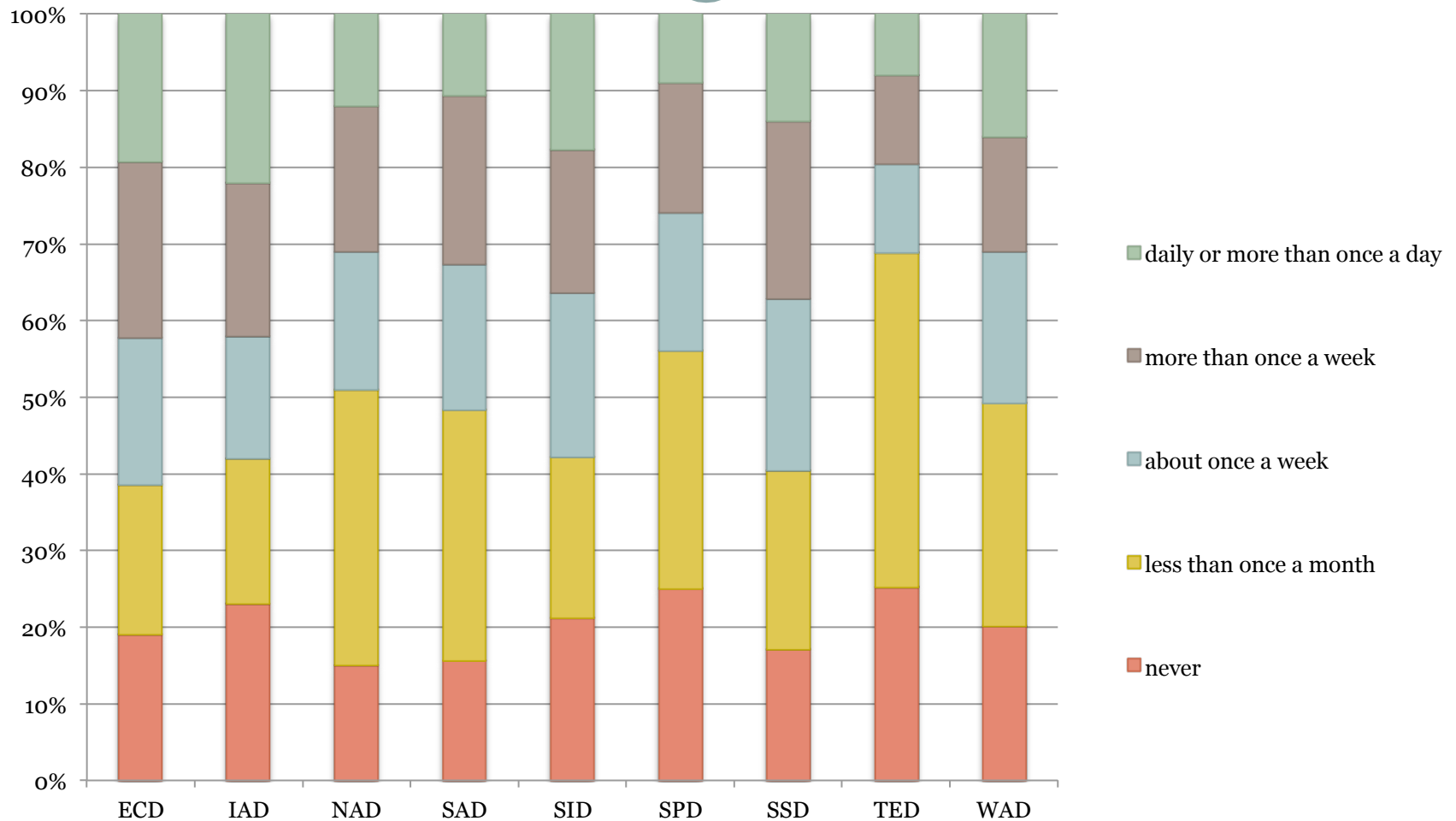
# 1. Episodic Bible-reading patterns



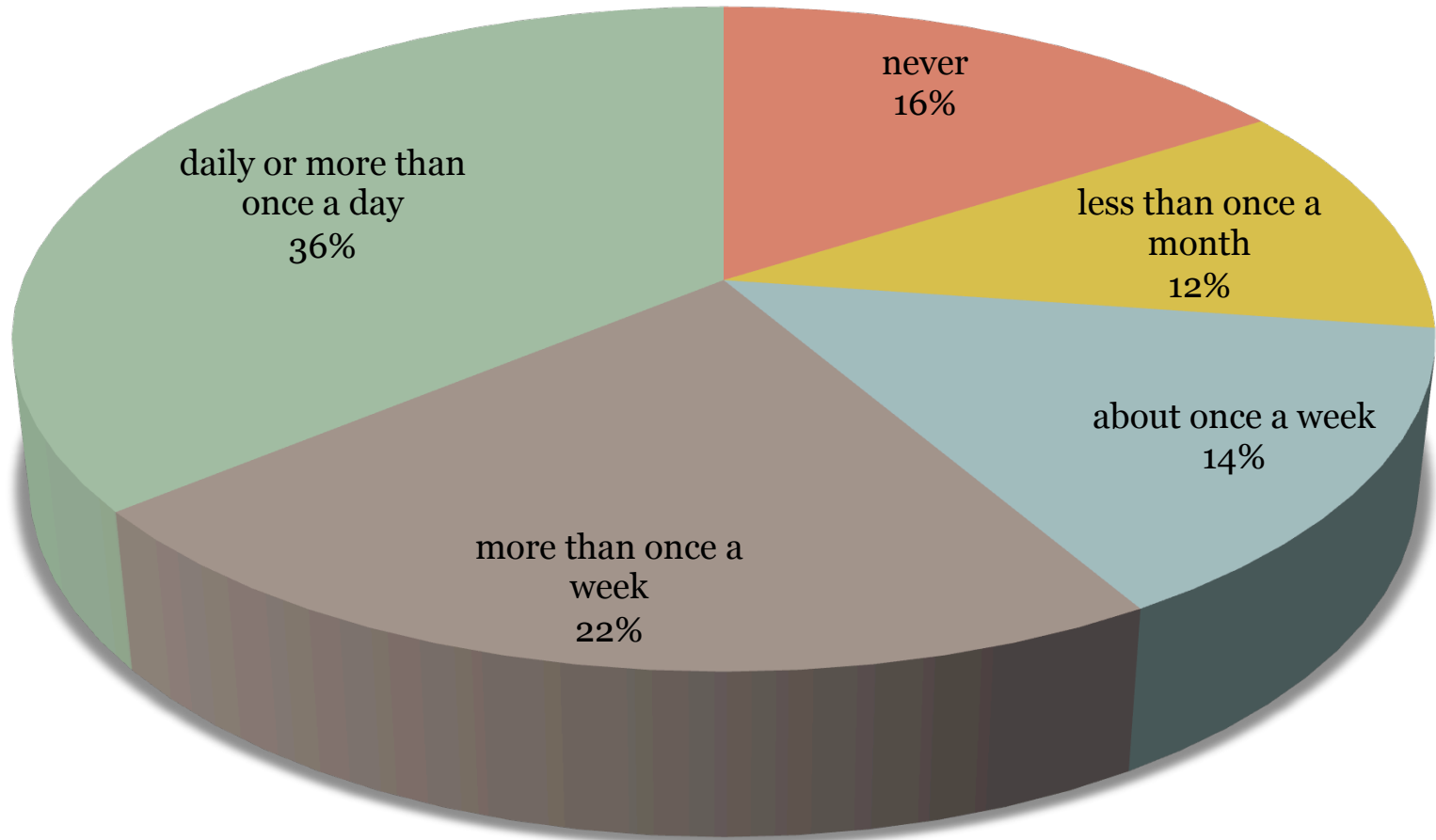
## 2. Very limited reading of Spirit of Prophecy



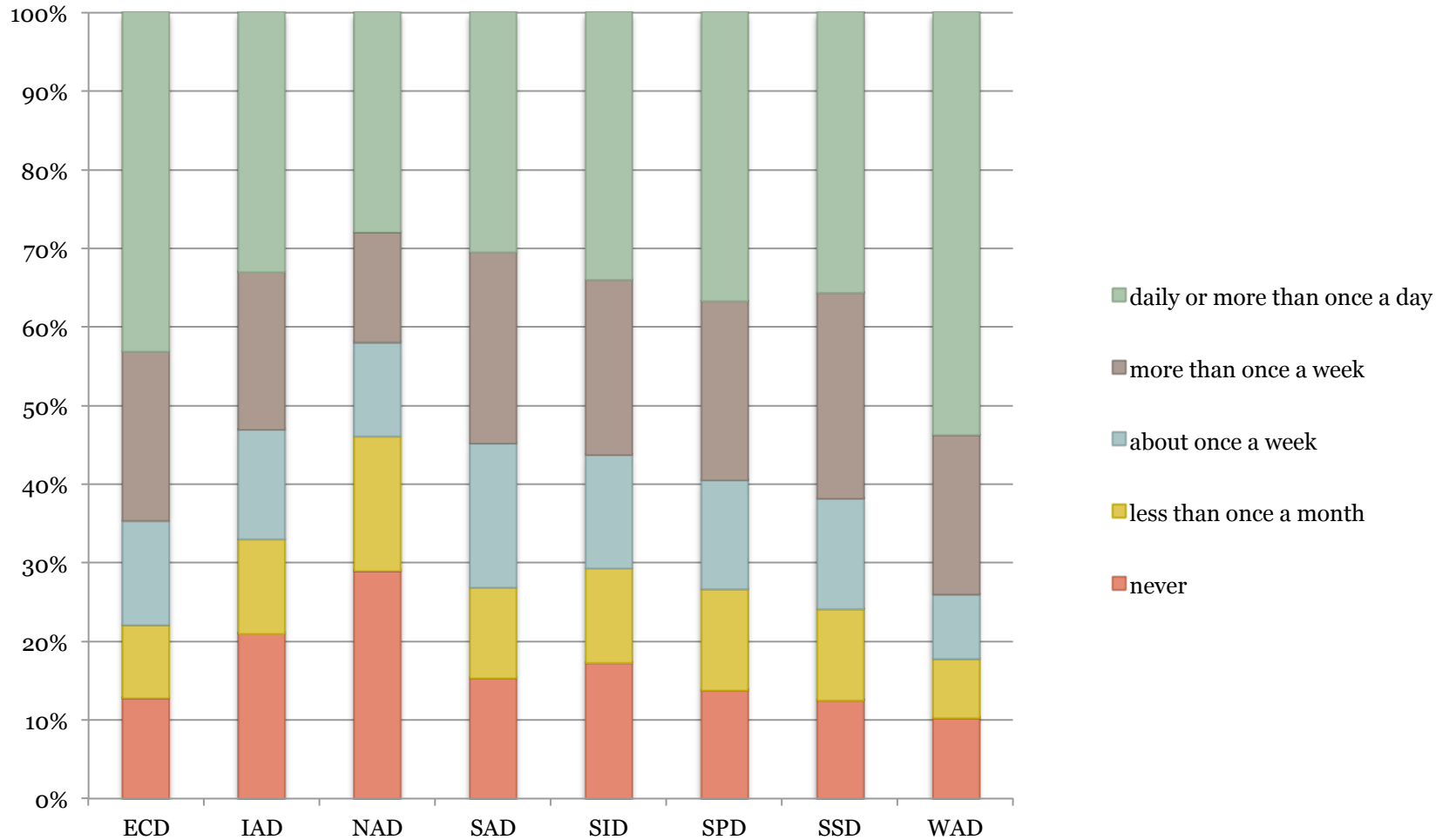
## 2. Very limited reading of Spirit of Prophecy



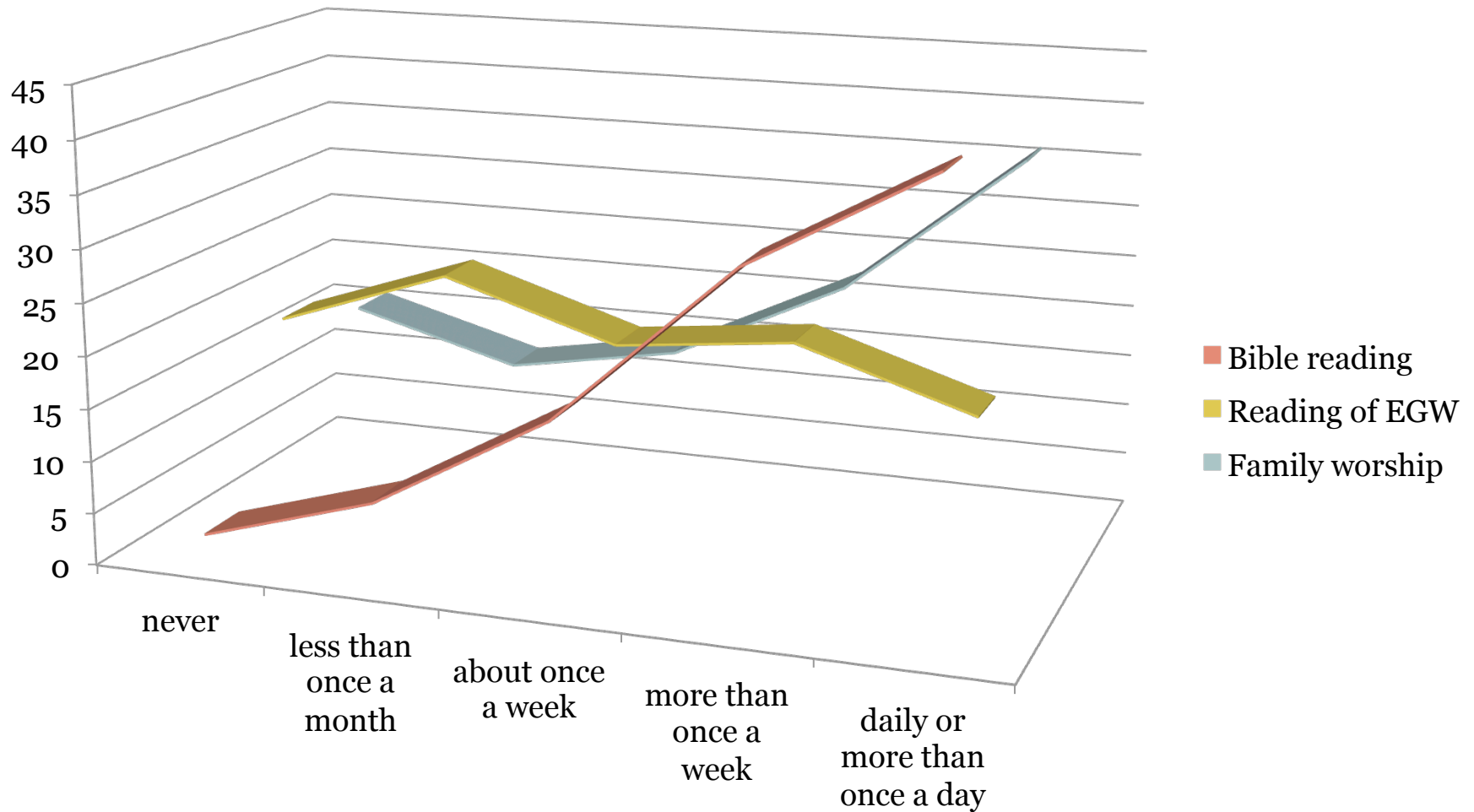
### 3. Decline in family worship



### 3. Decline in family worship

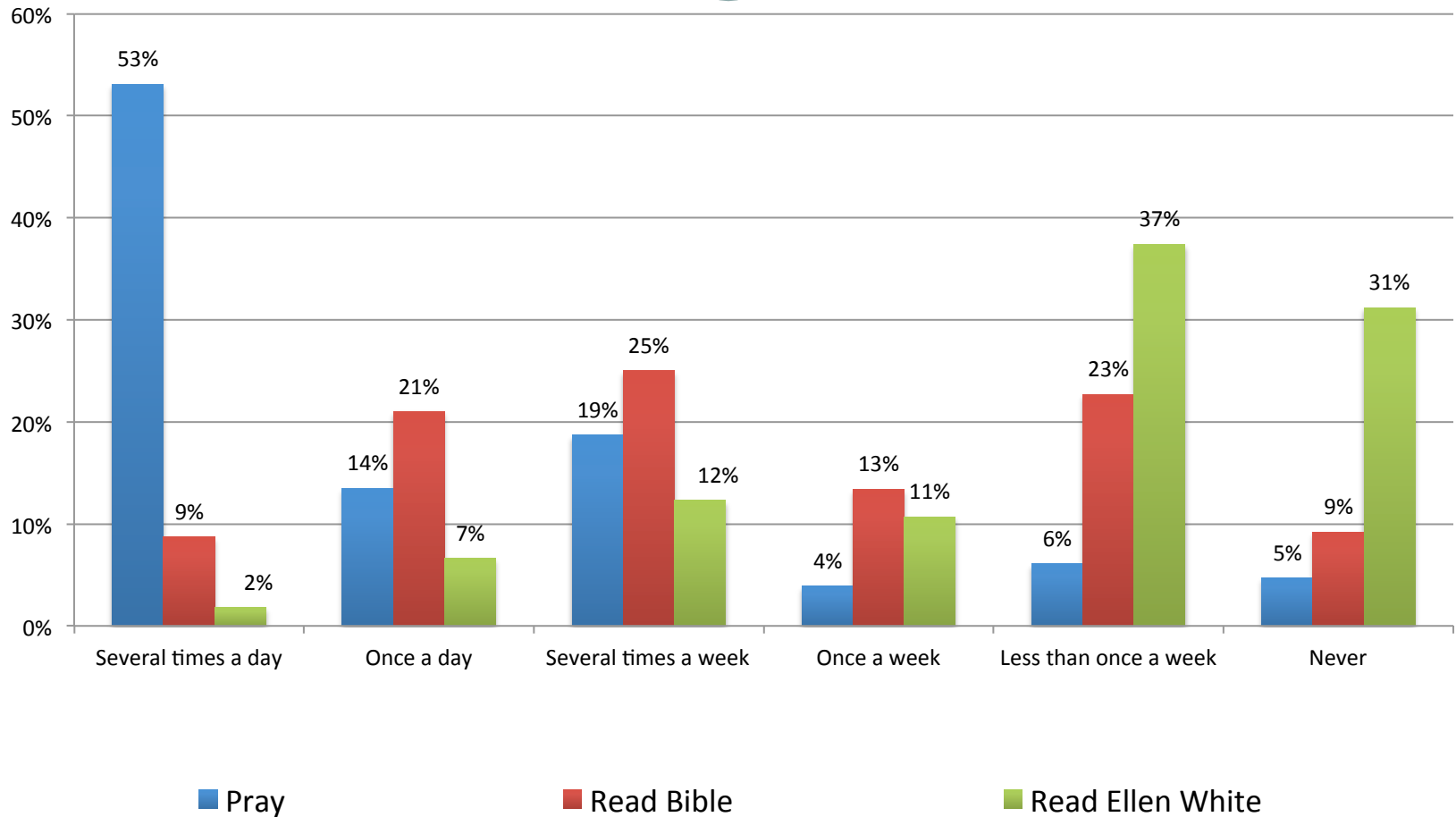


# Comparison of three devotional practices

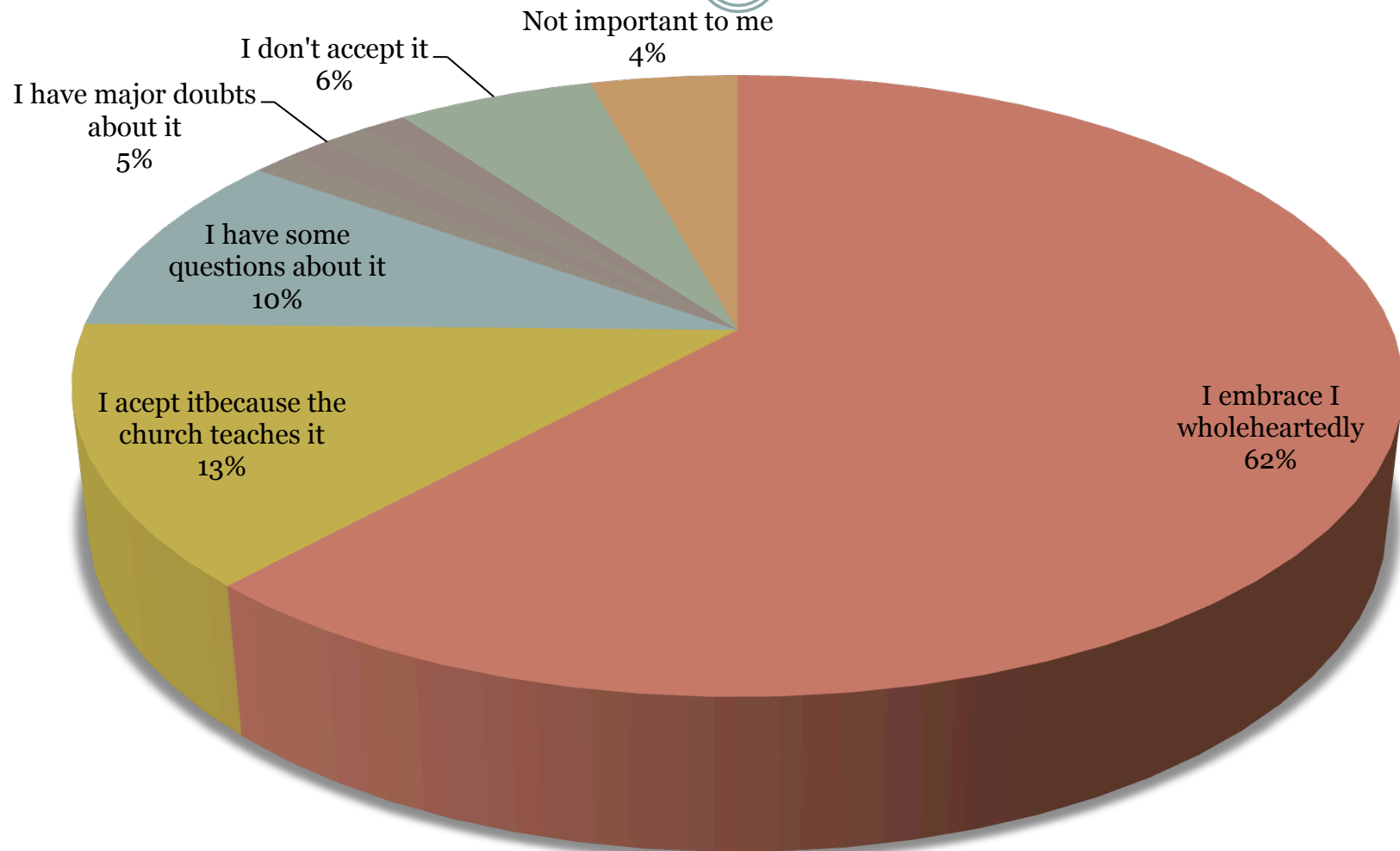




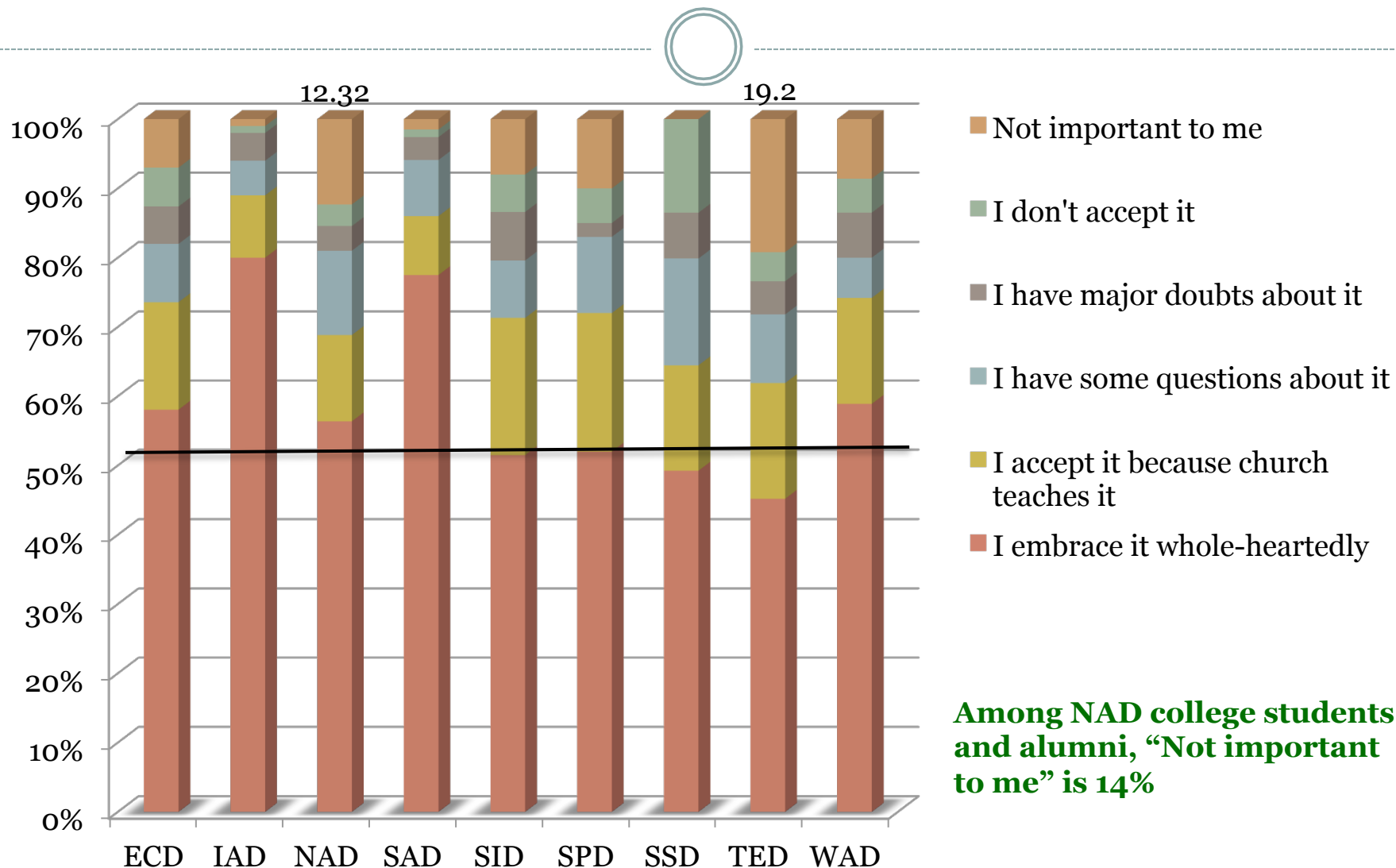
# Devotional practices among current and recent college/university students



## 4. Uncertainty about the Sanctuary Doctrine and the Investigative Judgment

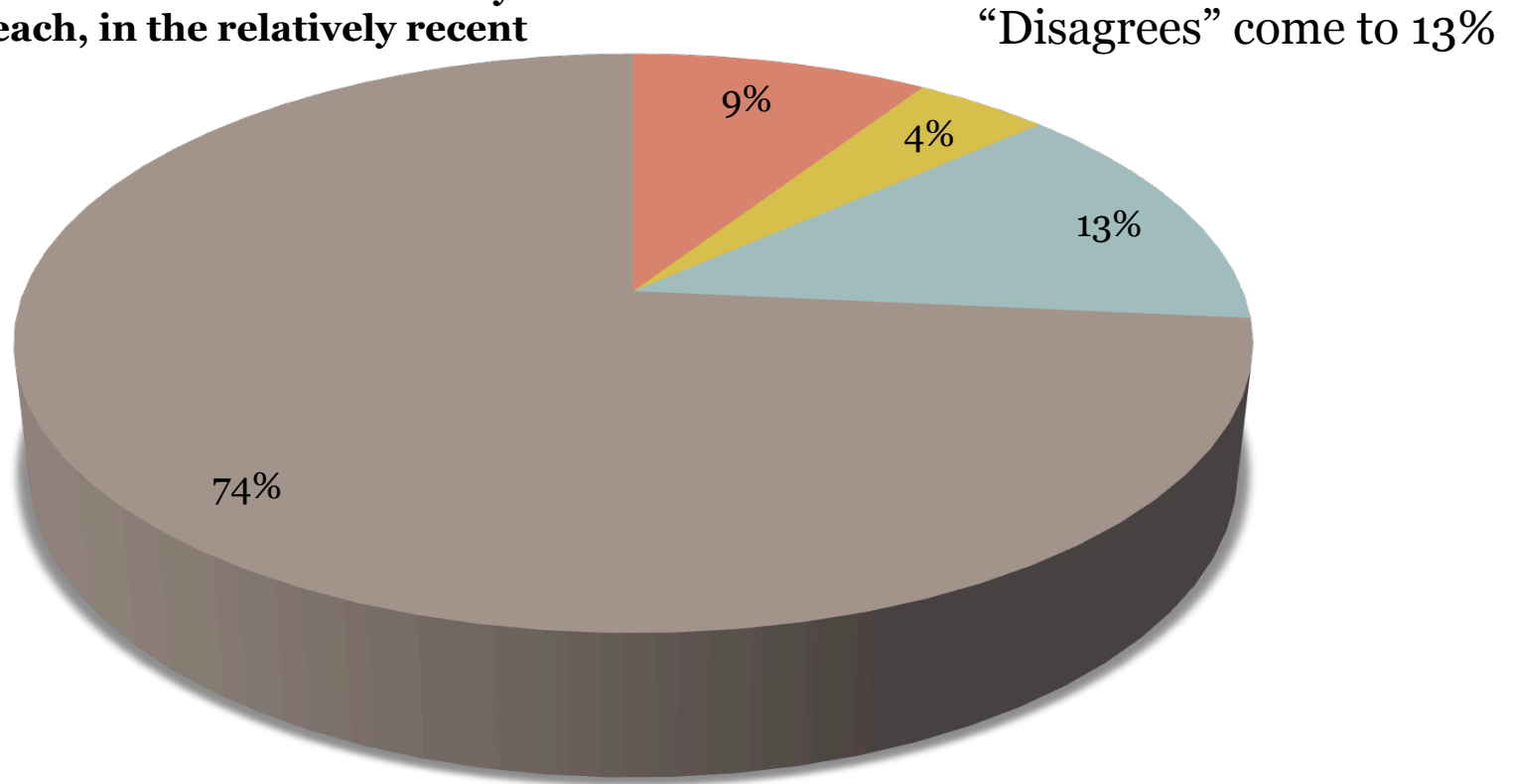


## 4. Uncertainty about the Sanctuary Doctrine and the Investigative Judgment



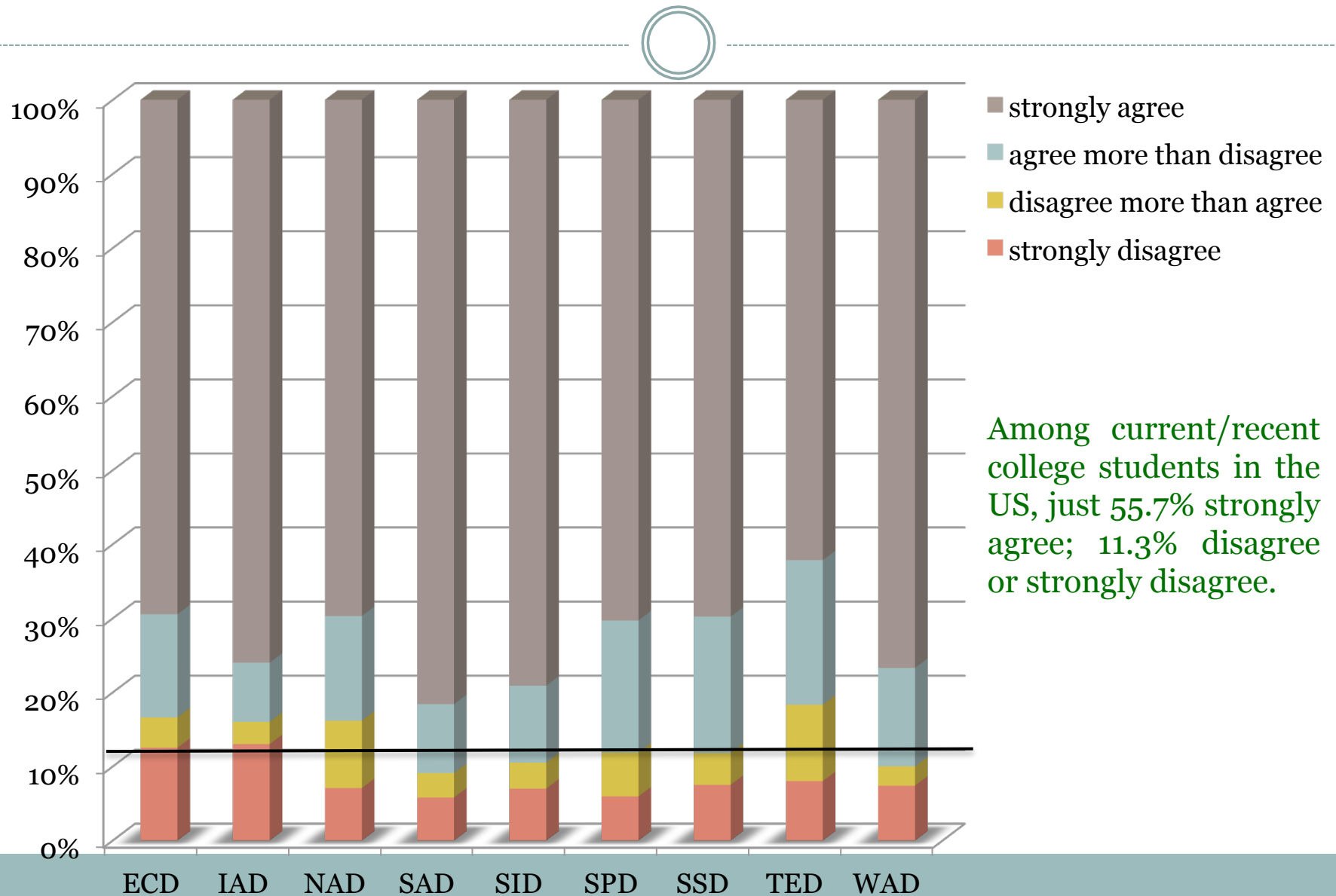
## 5. Growing uncertainty about a recent and literal creation week as described in Genesis 1–2

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

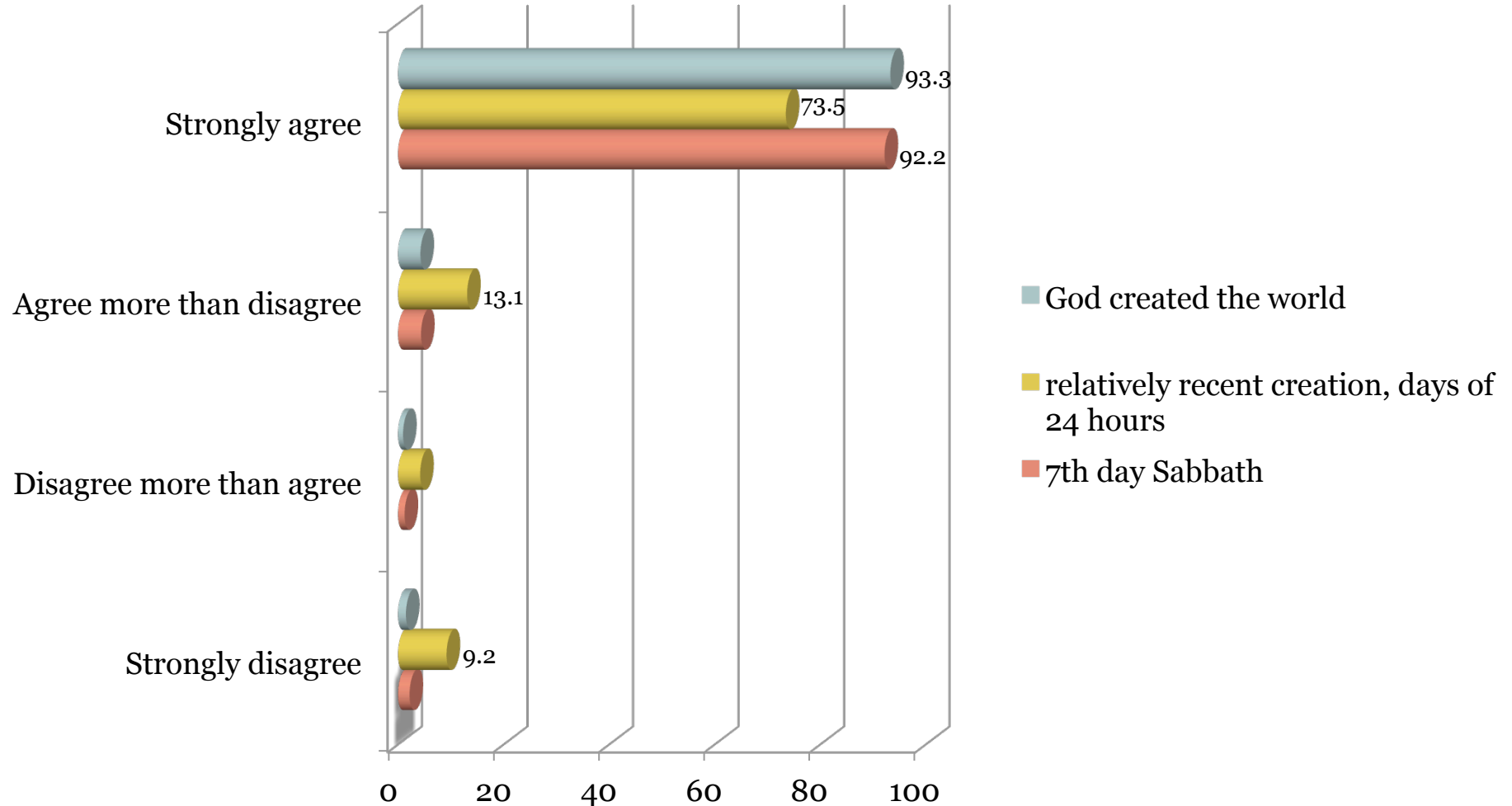


Strongly disagree   Disagree more than agree   Agree more than disagree   Strongly agree

## 5. Growing uncertainty about a recent and literal creation week as described in Genesis 1–2



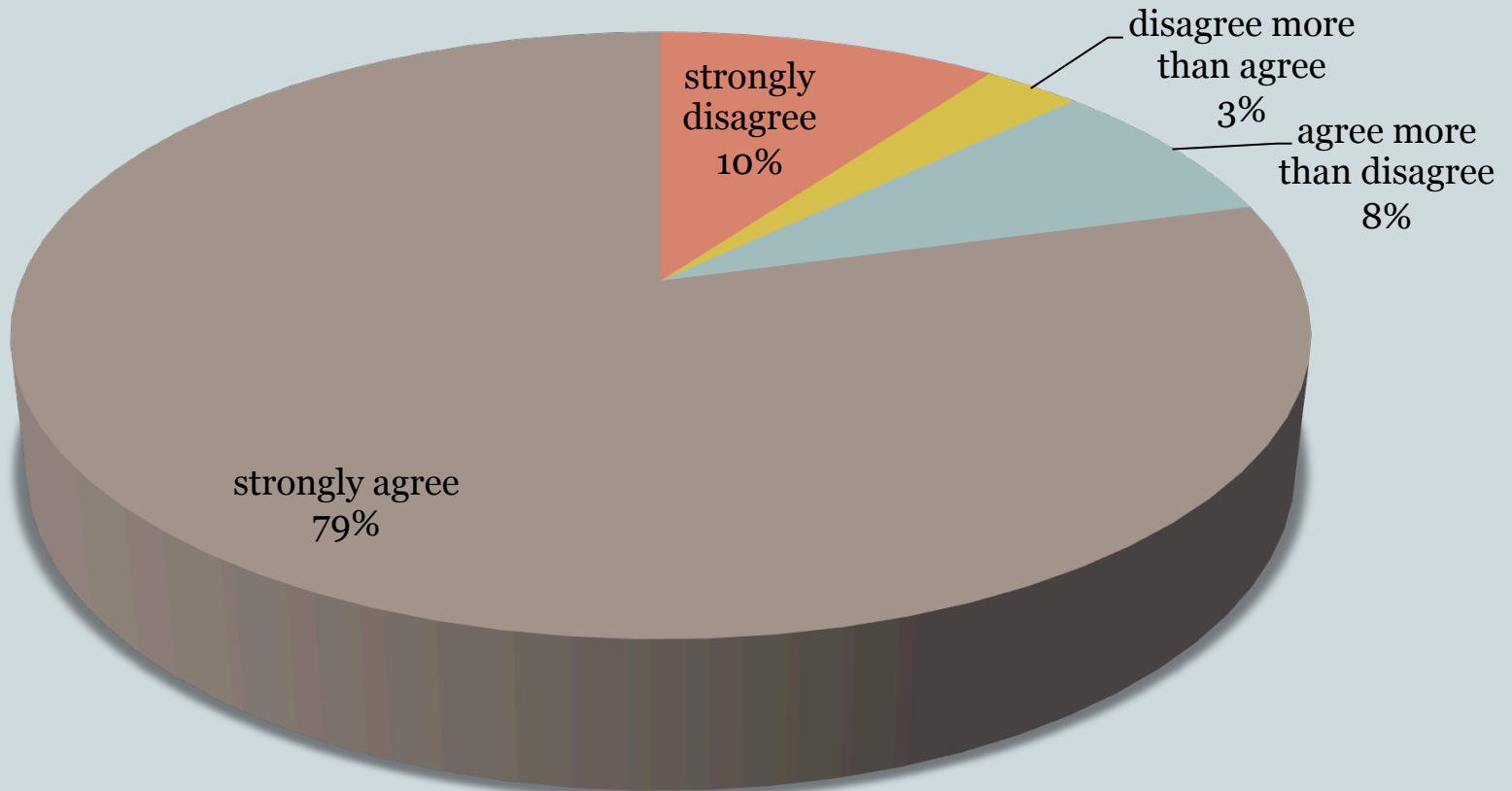
# Comparing beliefs in a literal Genesis-described Creation, God as creator, and the 7<sup>th</sup>-day Sabbath



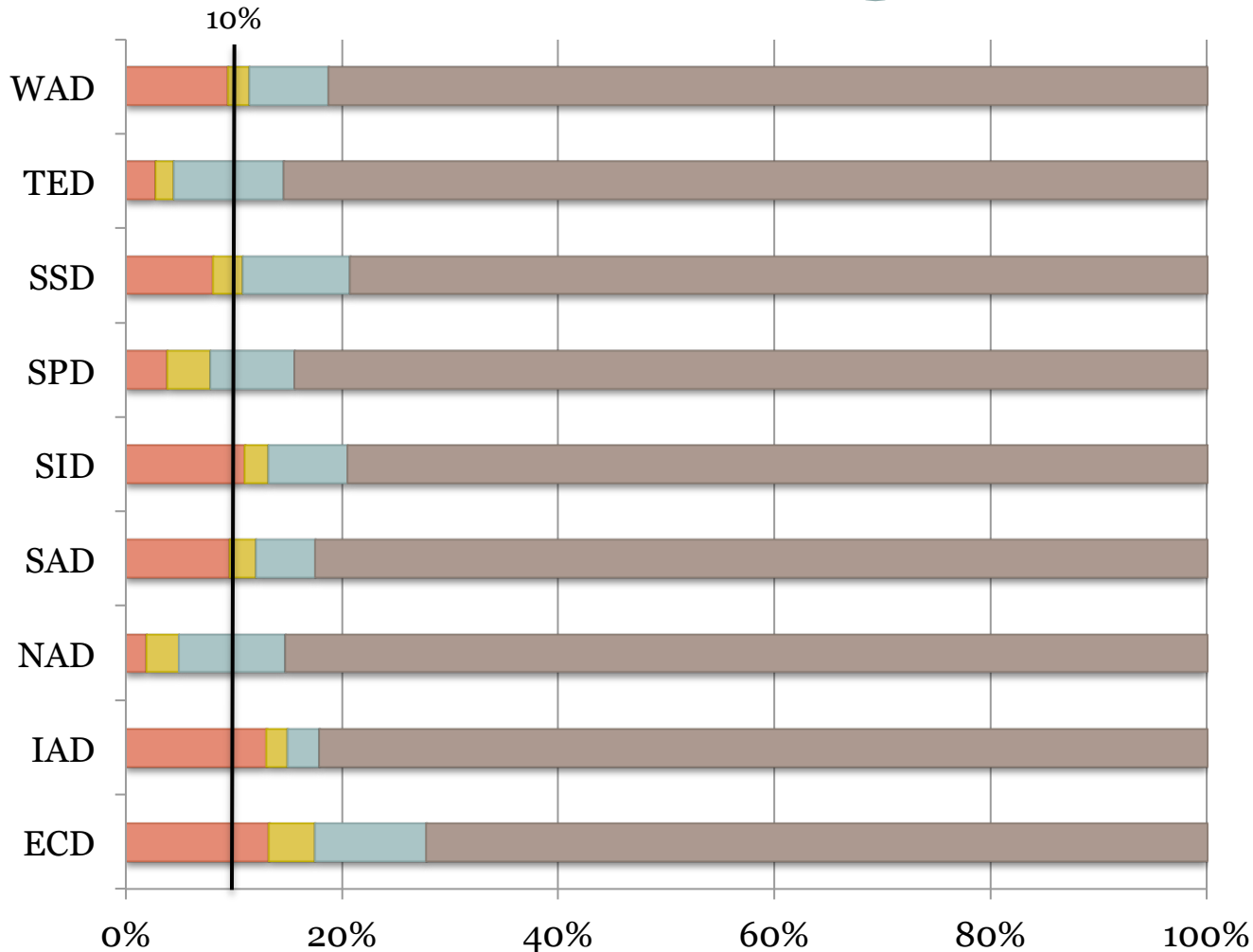
## 6. Uncertainty about the State of the Dead



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



# 6. Uncertainty about the State of the Dead



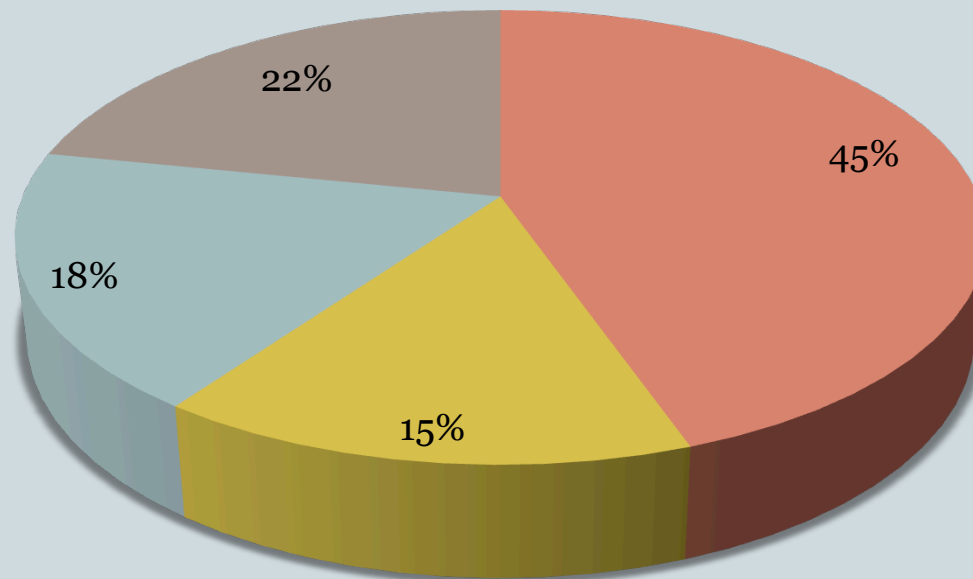
- strongly disagree
- disagree more than agree
- agree more than disagree
- strongly agree



## 7. Skepticism about imminence of 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent

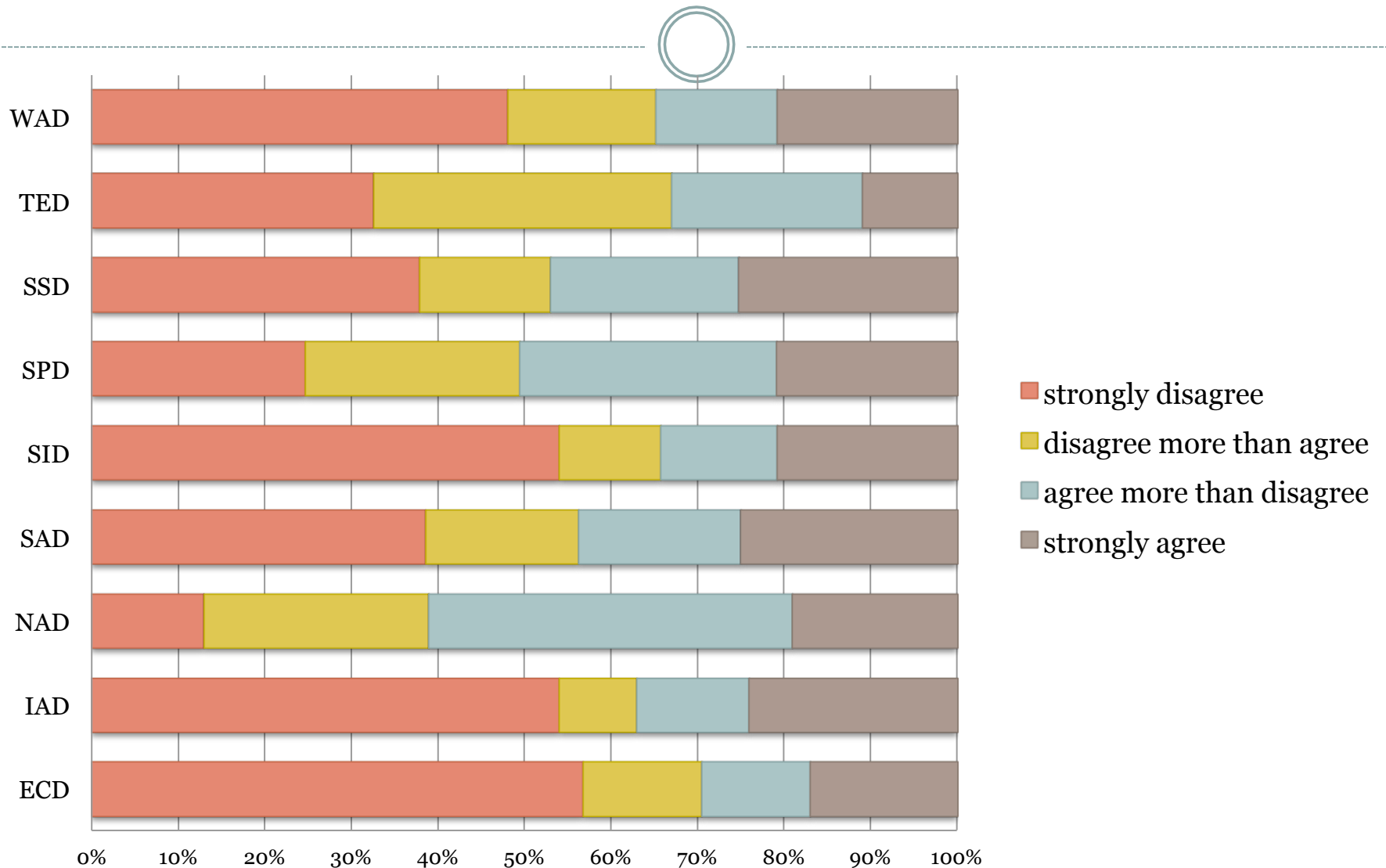


Question statement: *I expect the world to end within the next twenty years*

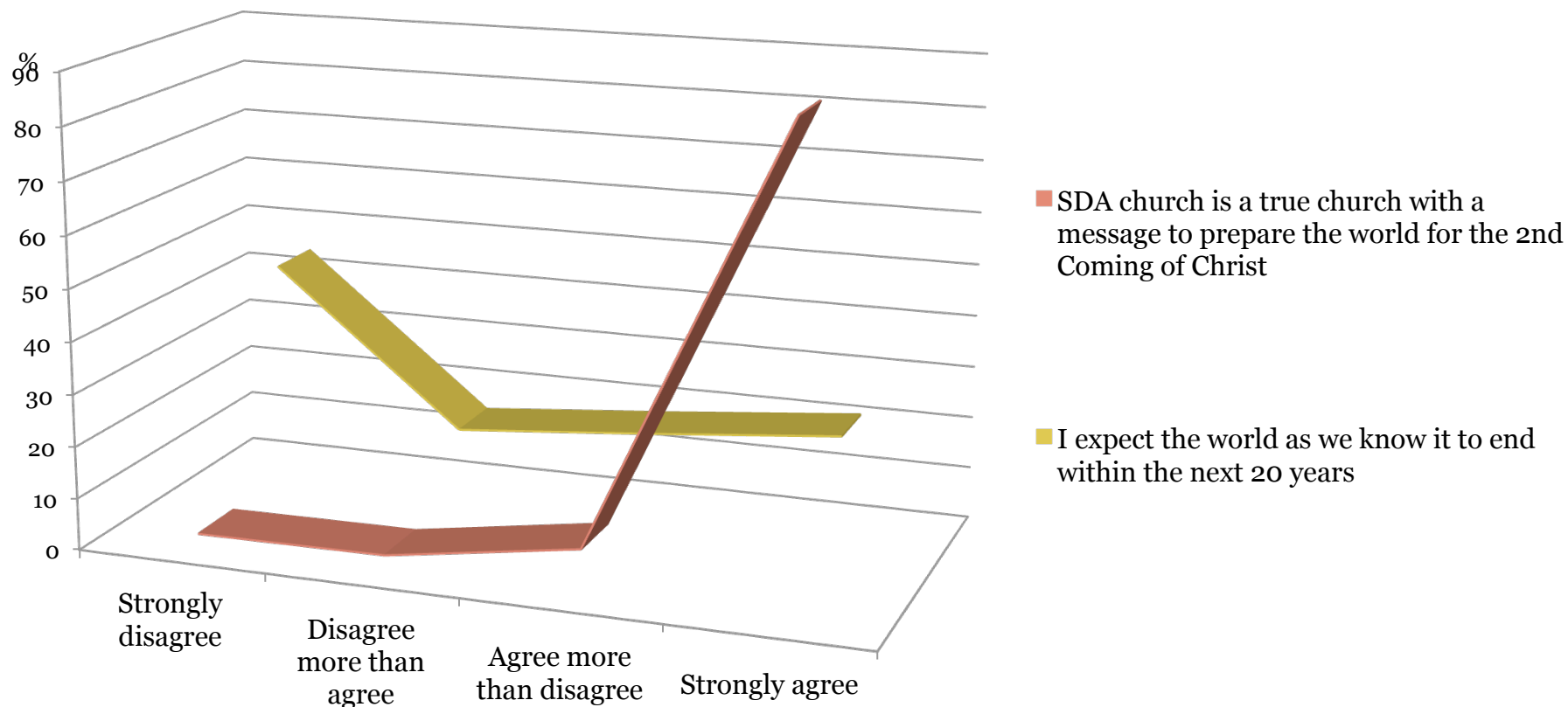


strongly disagree   disagree more than agree   agree more than disagree   strongly agree

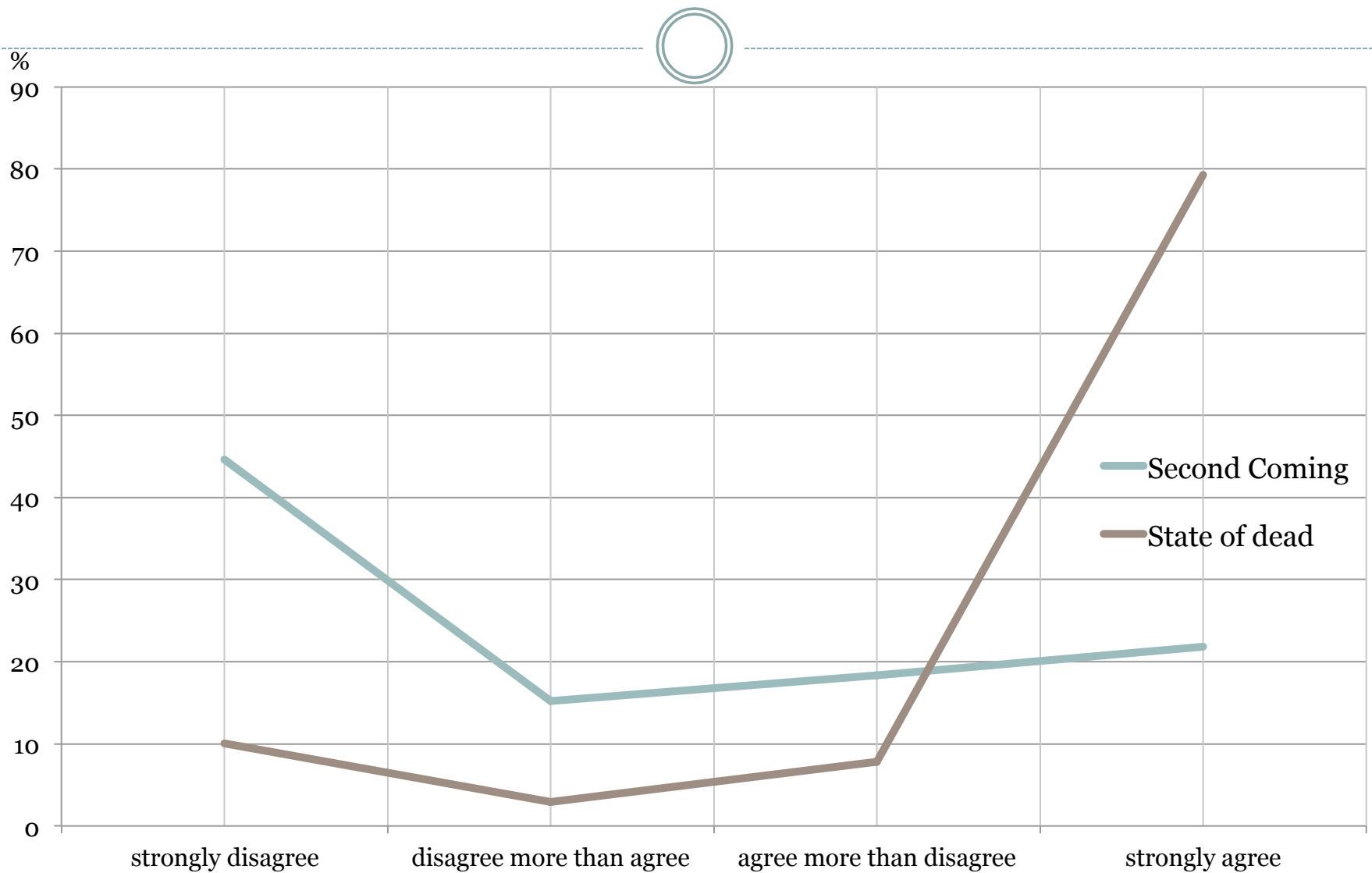
# 7. Skepticism about imminence of 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent



# 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”.



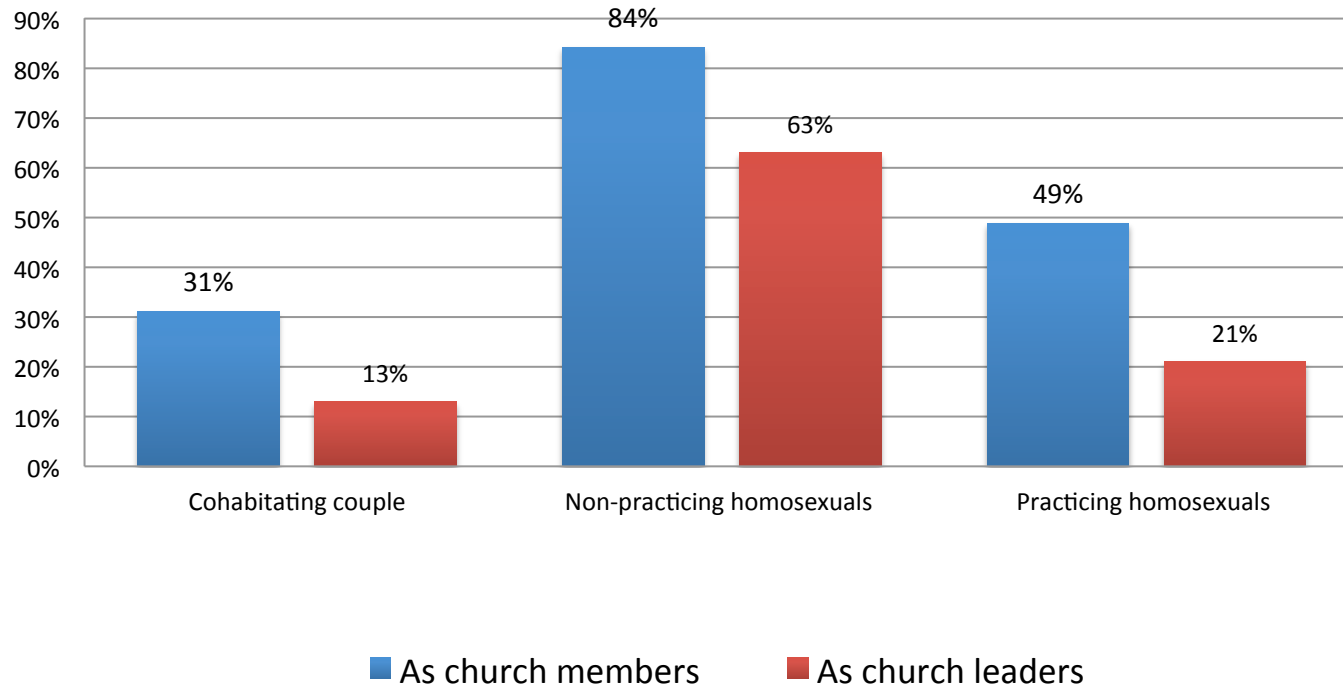
## Comparison between Second Coming within 20 years and Adventist doctrine of the State of Dead



## 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.