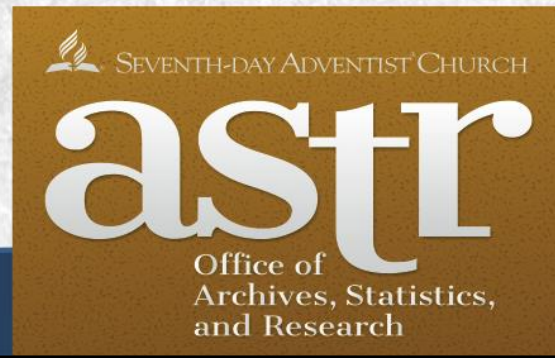


# Membership Audit: A Tool for Nurture and Retention

David Trim, Ph.D.

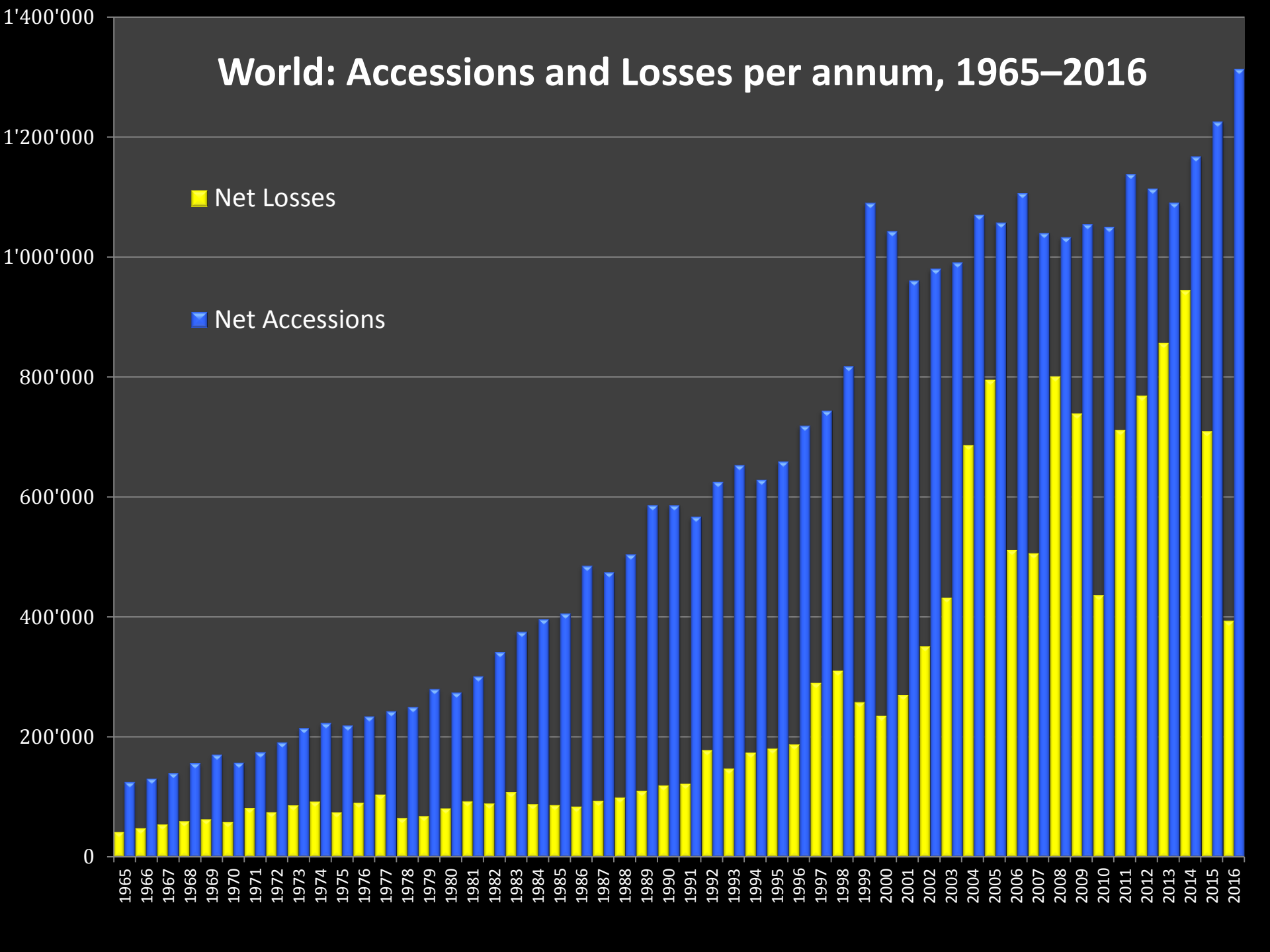
Director of Archives, Statistics, and Research  
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists



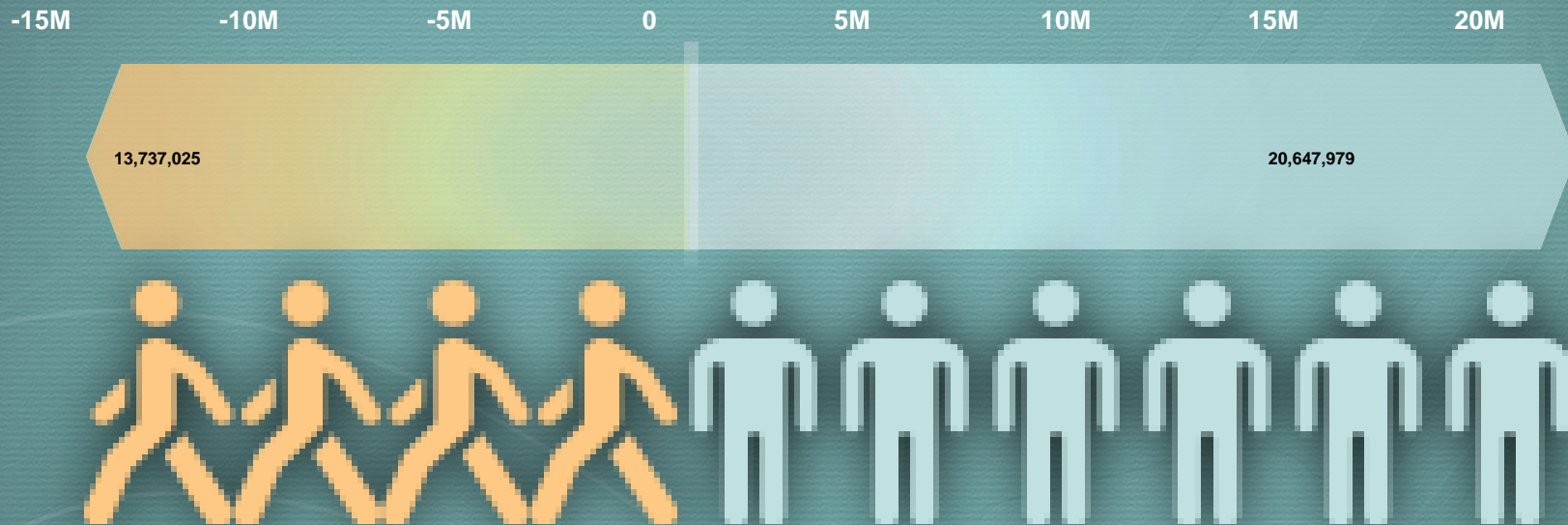
# World: Accessions and Losses per annum, 1965–2016

■ Net Losses

■ Net Accessions



# MEMBERS WHO LEAVE



- Members who left
- Members who stayed

Since 1965, there have been **34,385,004** church members.  
Of those, **13,737,025** (or more) have chosen to leave the church.

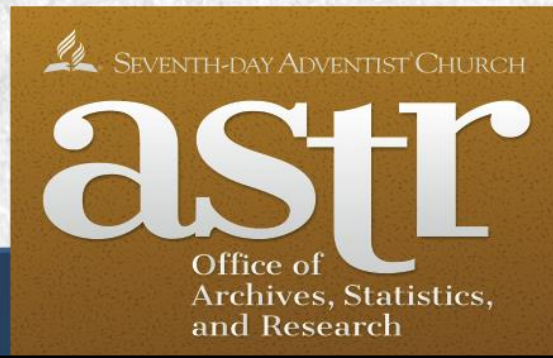
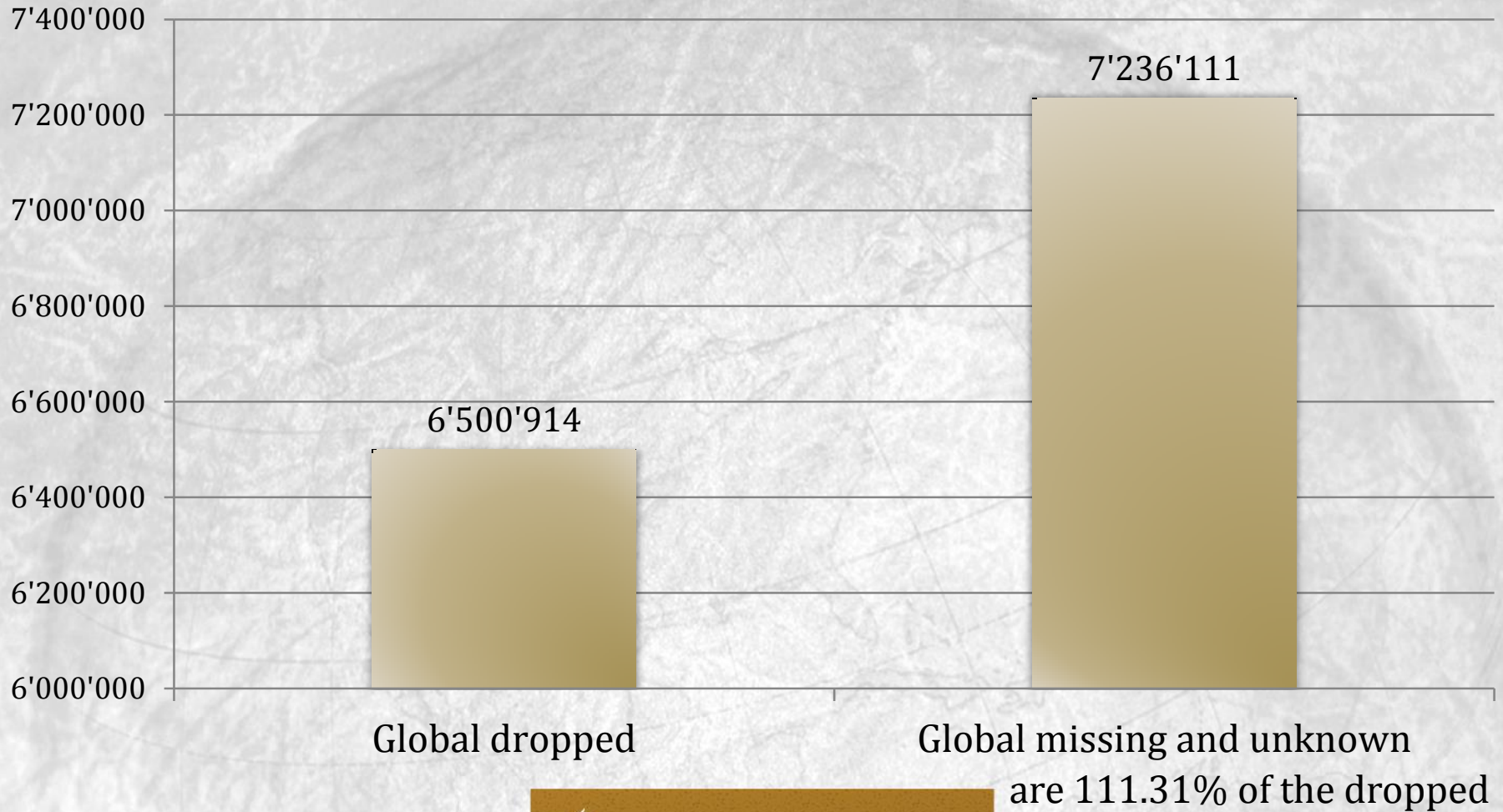
**Our net loss rate is 39.95%**

In effect, at least four members have slipped away for every ten who were in the church.

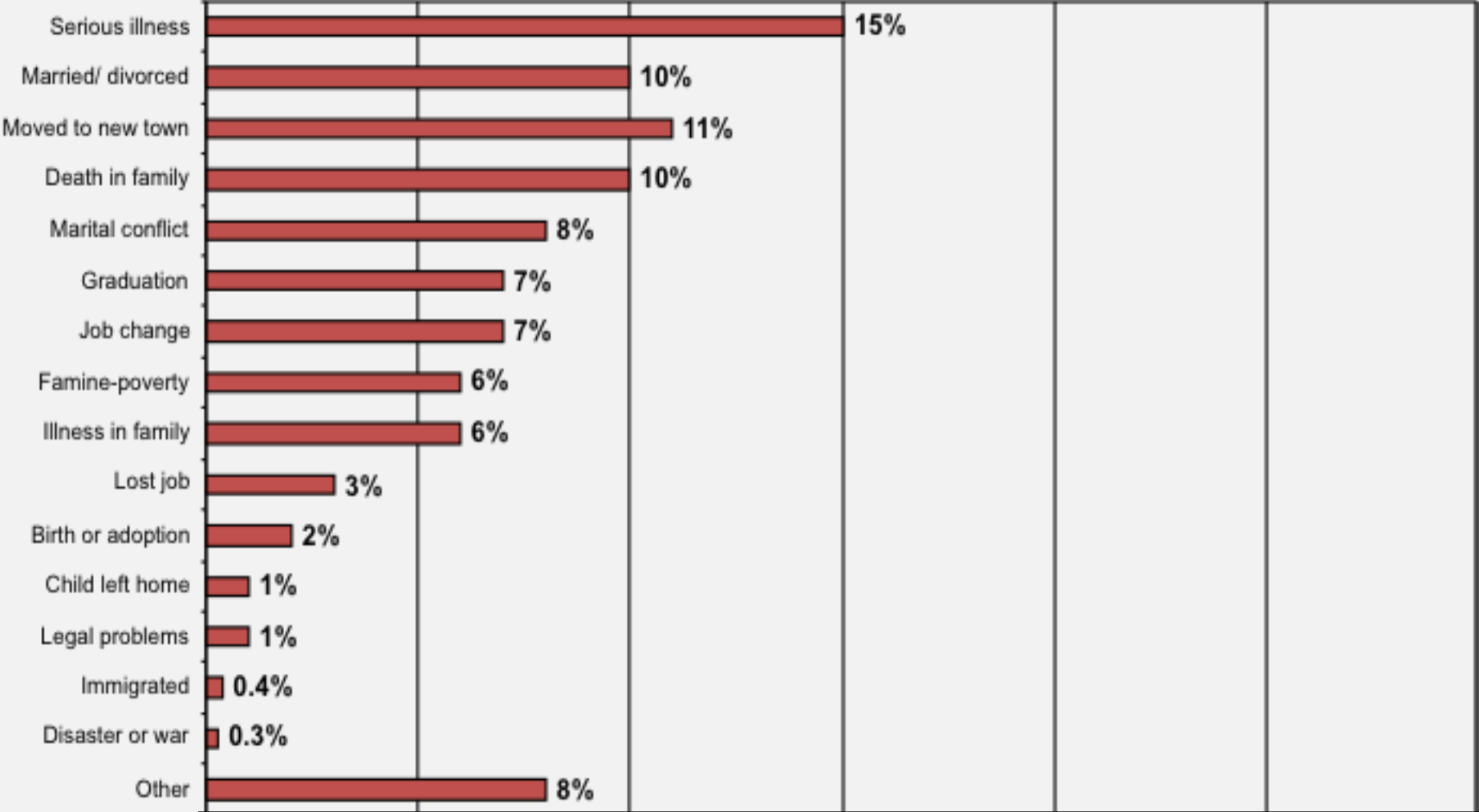
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# Global lost: dropped vs. missing, 1965–2016



# Life Events in the Year Leading Up to Decision to Stop Attending



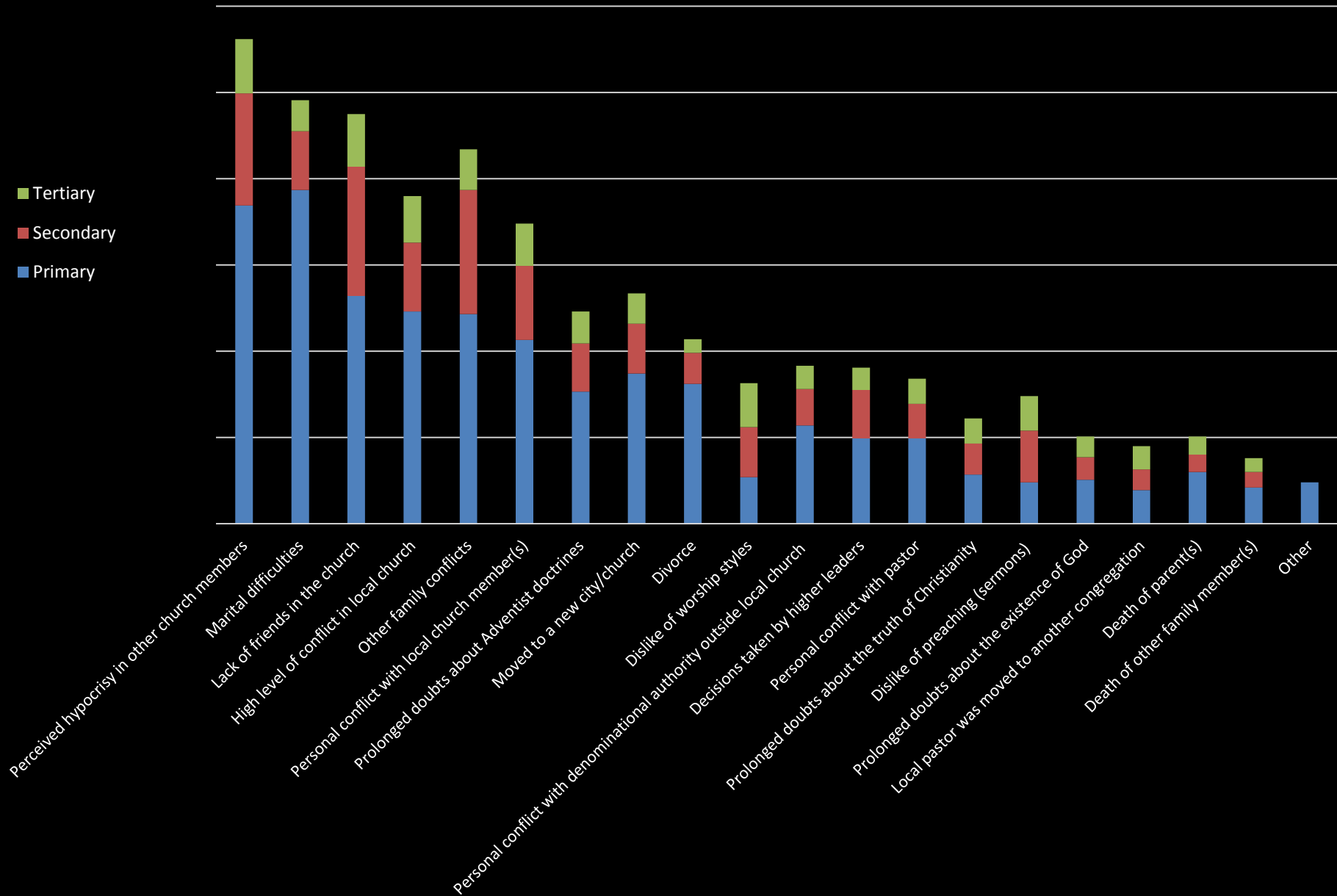
# Most Important Reasons Why Decided to Stop Attending

- 28% No big issue; I just drifted away
- 25% Lack of compassion for the hurting
- 19% Moral failure on my part
- 18% I did not fit in
- 14% Too much focus on minor issues
- 13% Conflict in the congregation
- 12% Moral failures of members
- 11% Moral failures of leaders
- 11% Pressure from family or friends
- 10% Race, ethnic or tribal issues

# Most Important Reasons Why Decided to Stop Attending

- 8% Few members of my age group
- 7% Legalistic attitudes
- 6% Pastor was dictatorial
- 6% Church did not do much to help the poor
- 5% I did not believe some doctrines
- 5% Unrealistic demands on members
- 4% Low standards
- 3% The worship was not very spiritual
- 3% Too much asking for money
- 2% Church voted to drop me from membership
- 1% Apostate ideas were promoted

# What event triggered your decision to leave?

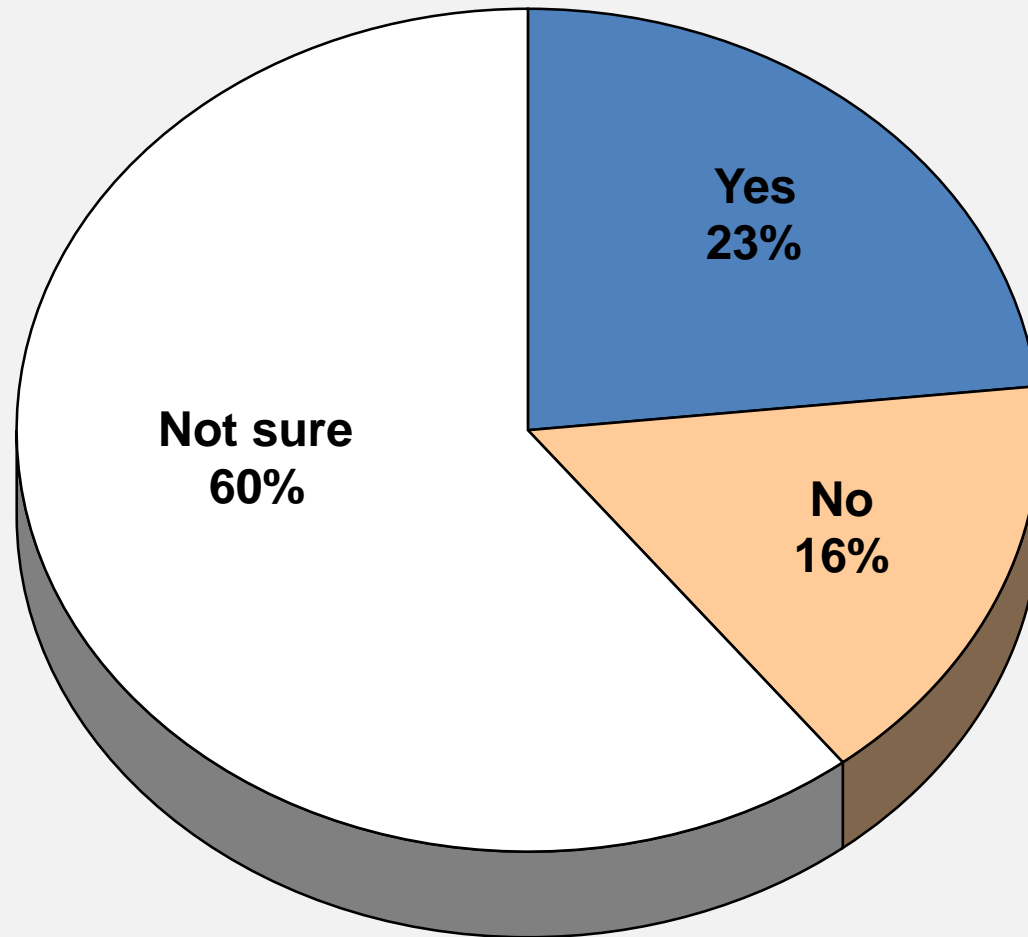




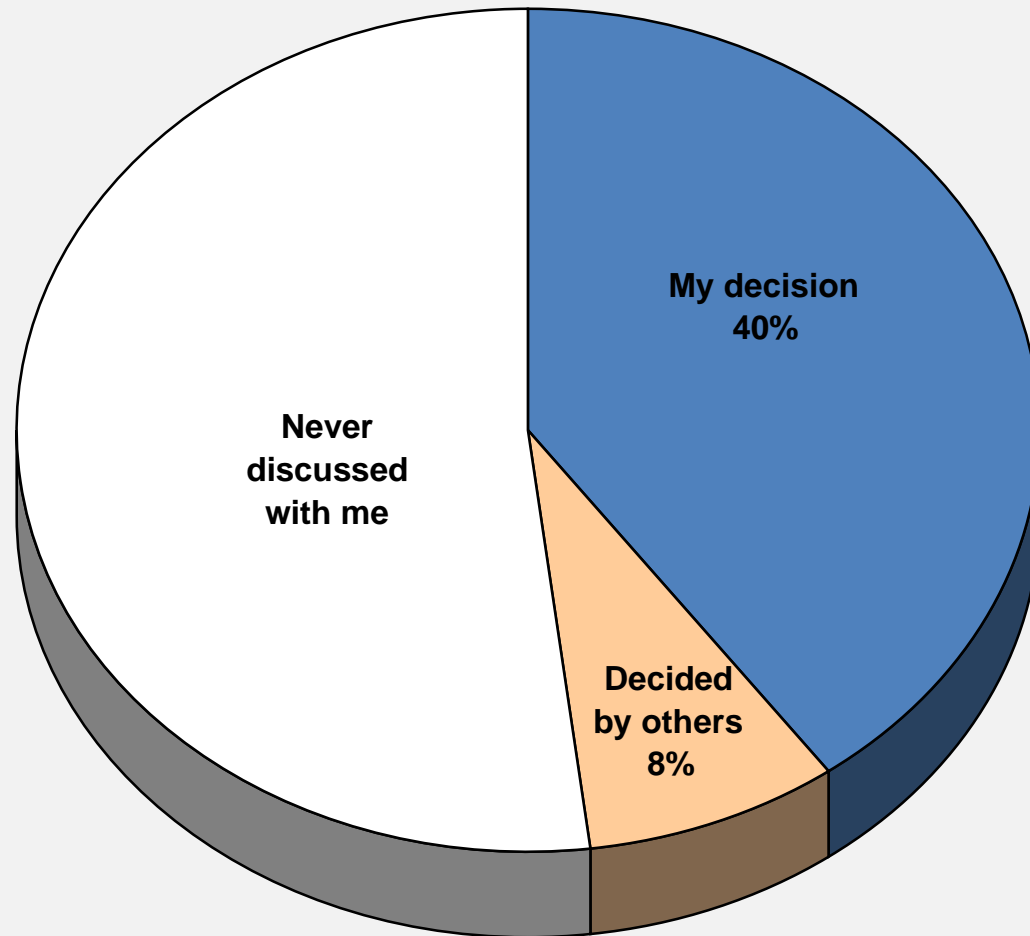
# What Happened When They Stopped Attending Church

- 40% No one contacted me
- 19% A church member came to visit me
- 17% A local elder came to visit me
- 15% A local church member contacted me by phone
- 10% An Adventist relative made contact
- 9% The pastor came to visit me
- 6% The pastor contacted me by phone or Email
- 3% An Adventist, not a local member contacted me
- 2% I received a letter in the mail
- 0.3% Printed material was mailed to me

# Is your name still on the membership list?



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



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

In light of these statistics, which show pastors engage very little with members who stop attending church, it is not surprising to find that 53% of global pastors say they never received training in nurturing and retaining members in their first degrees; the same proportion (53%) say that they also received no training in these areas in postgraduate study.

 SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

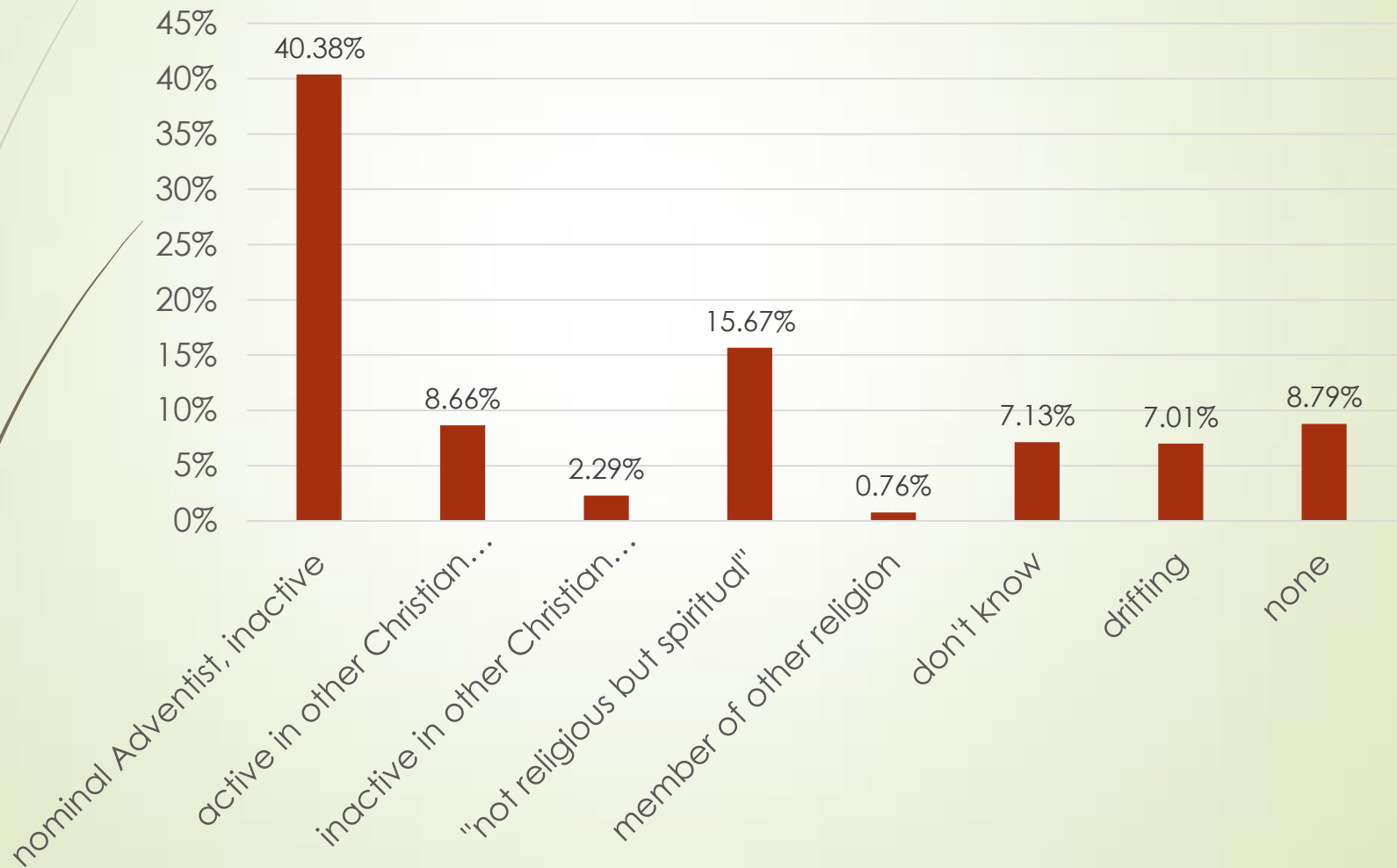
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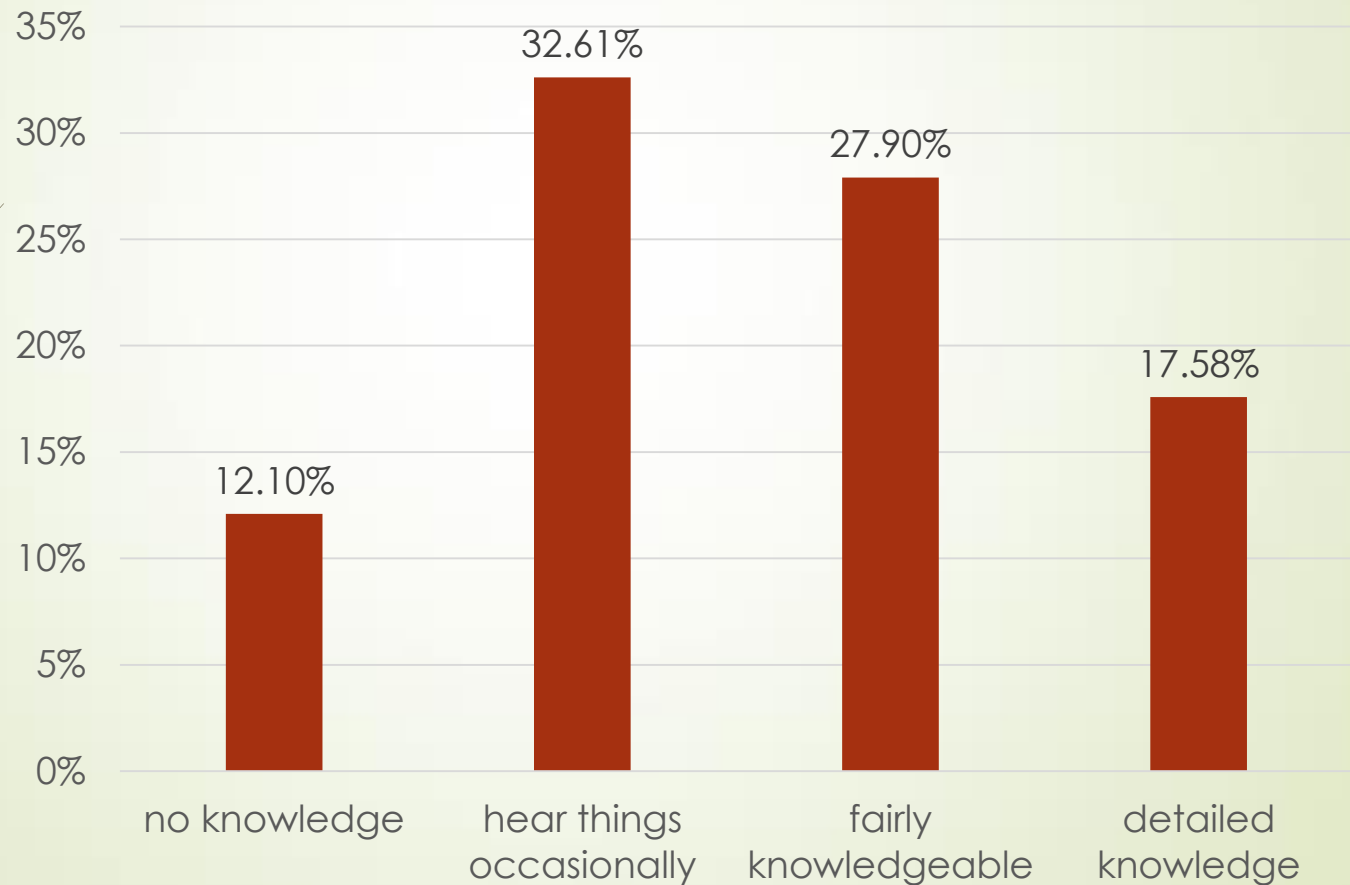
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH  
SECRETARIAT

# Religious Affiliation After Stopped Attending Church

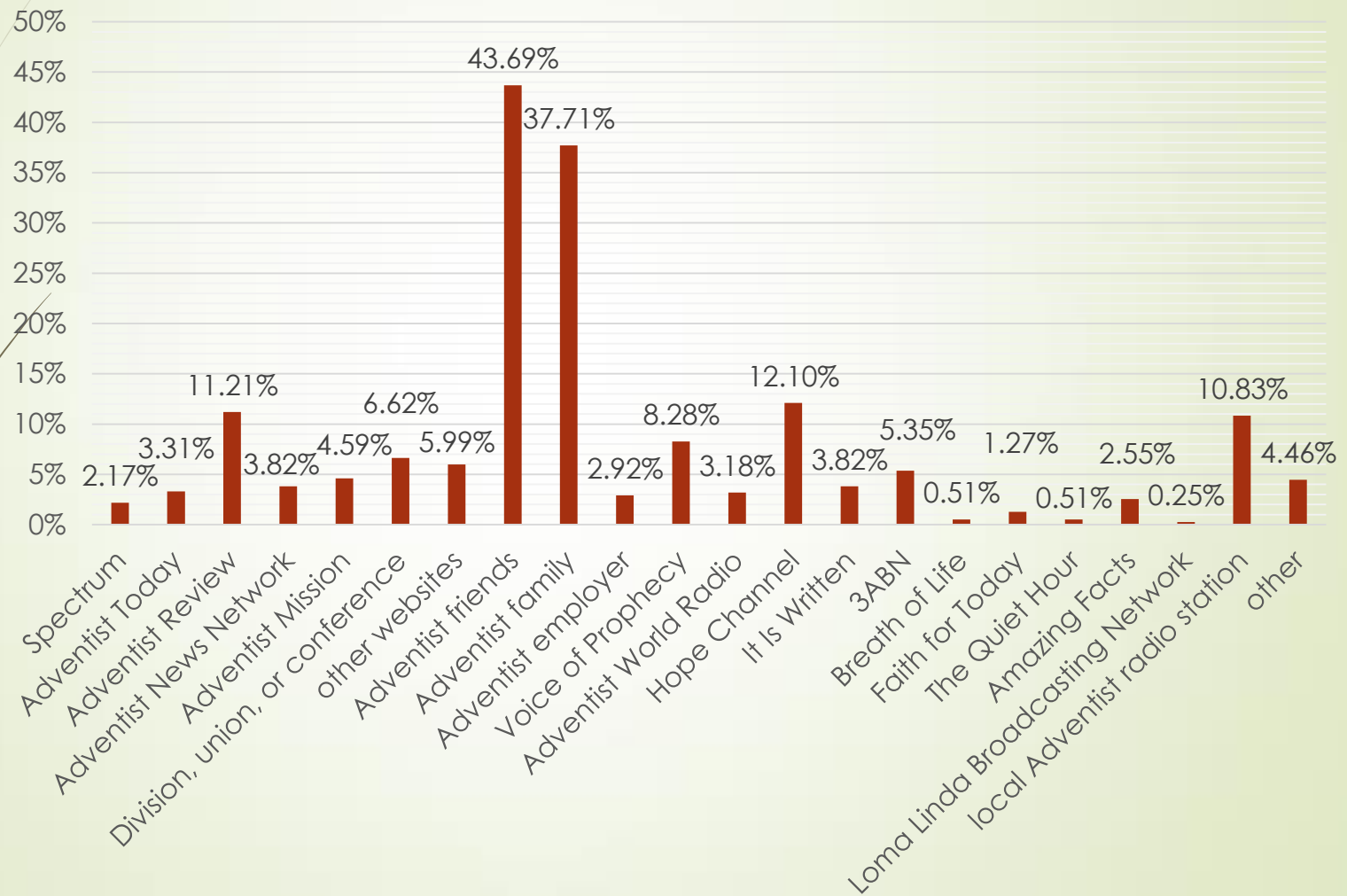




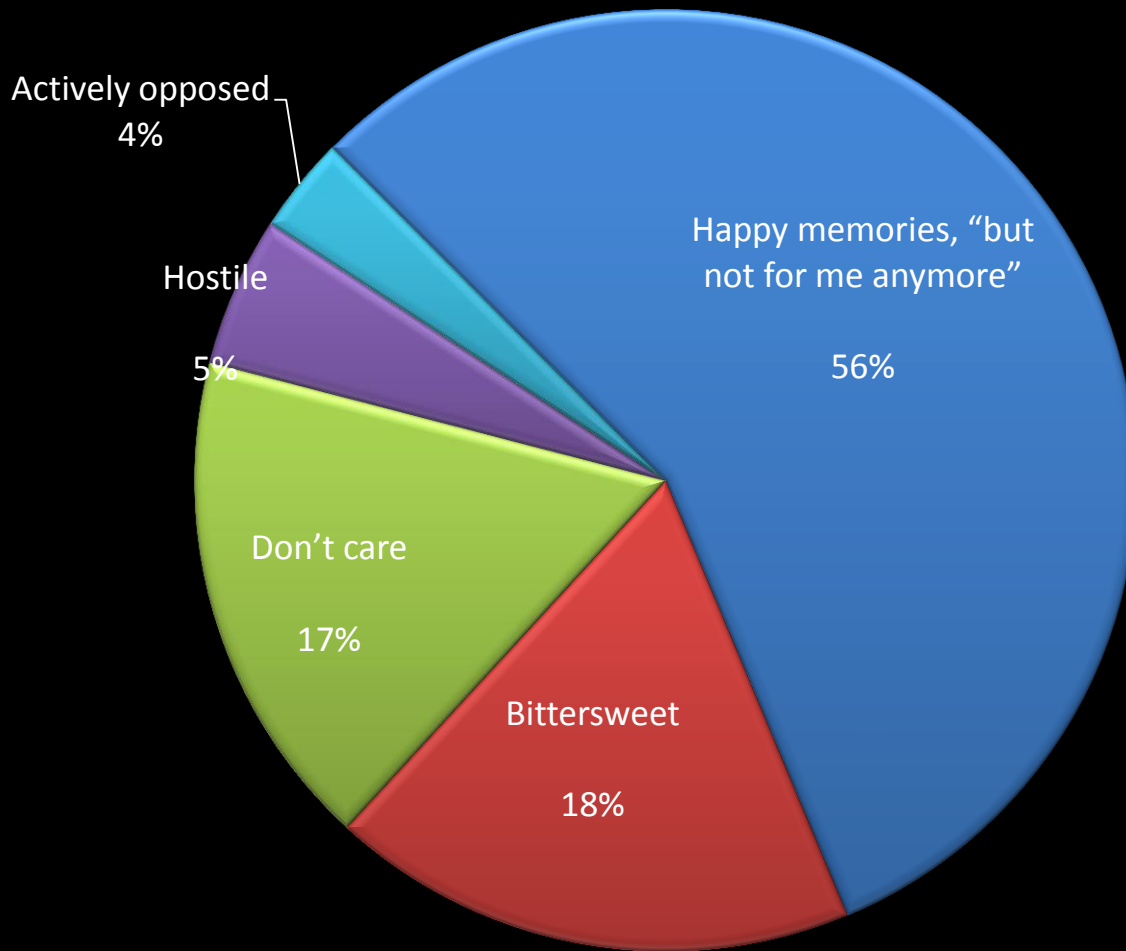
# Awareness of Developments in Adventism



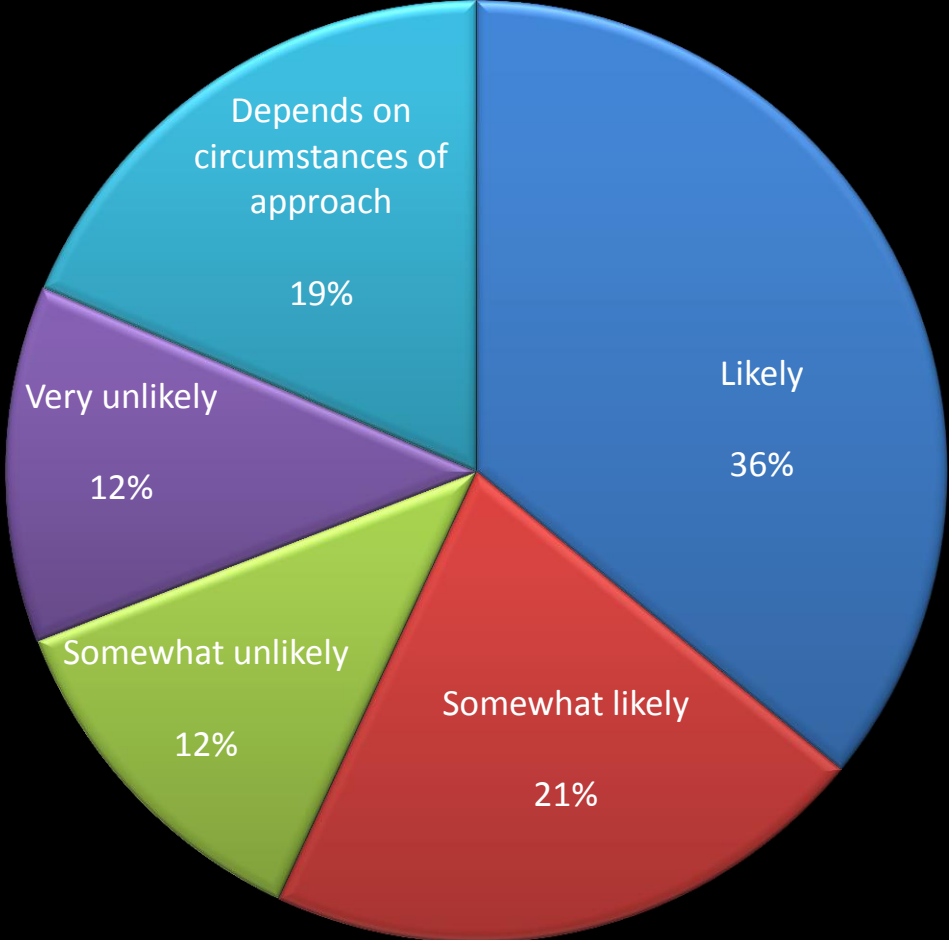
# Sources of Information



# How do you presently feel about Adventism? (Former Members)



# How would you rate your openness to reconnect? (Former Members)



# The Lessons of Scripture

1

1 Chron. 21: 1–2, 7

“Now Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel. So David said ... to the leaders of the people, ‘Go number Israel from Beersheba to Dan, and bring the number to me ... And God was displeased with this thing; therefore He struck Israel.’”



# Lessons from the Spirit of Prophecy

*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 747:

“It was **pride and ambition** that prompted this action of the king. The numbering of the people would show the contrast between the weakness of the kingdom when David ascended the throne and its strength and prosperity under his rule.”

## The Lessons of Scripture

Have we sometimes counted our church members not out of pastoral concern, but out of pride?

Have we looked to our own strength, rather than to God's?

*But membership audit should be redemptive*

# The Lessons of Scripture

Luke 15:4-6

“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he



## The Lessons of Scripture

calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'

“I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

# Lessons from the Spirit of Prophecy

“The shepherd who discovers that one of his sheep is missing, does not look ... on the flock that is safely housed, and say, “I have ninety and nine, and it will cost me too much trouble to go in search of the straying one. Let him come back and I will open the door ... and let him in.” No; **no sooner does the sheep go astray** than the shepherd is filled with grief



# Lessons from the Spirit of Prophecy

and anxiety. He counts and recounts the flock. When he is sure that **one sheep is lost, he slumbers not.** He leaves the ninety and nine ... and goes in search of the straying sheep. The darker ... the night, and the more perilous the way, the greater is the shepherd's anxiety, and the more earnest his search. **He makes every effort to find that one lost sheep."**

*Christ's Object Lessons, p. 187*

# The Lessons of Scripture

God's desired retention rate?

100%!

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

**Are we unwilling to follow our Lord and Saviour's example?**

# The Lessons of Scripture

## 2 Corinthians 13:11

Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.



# The Lessons of Scripture

James 5: 19–20

My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death, and cover over a multitude of sins.

# Final lesson: the Good Shepherd

“In the parable the shepherd goes out to search for one sheep—the very least that can be numbered. So if there had been but one lost soul, Christ would have died for that one.”

Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 187



**What should we do?**

**Recommendations**



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# What next?

- **Attendance should be monitored so pastors, elders and members can know who is at risk**
- Some see this as controversial; but physicians use temperature, pulse, and blood pressure to measure health
- So in measuring congregational health, we need to know membership, tithe *and* attendance
- And only by monitoring who attends can we act preemptively, to stop members slipping away



# What next?

- **Membership audits need to be carried out**
- *Not* to get rid of members or “purify” the flock—that is not the methodology of the Good Shepherd
- *Rather* we seek to identify and register those who, in their own minds, have *already left*
- In approaching members who have not been seen for many years, ask not: “Do you want your name taken off the books?”

# What next?

- Make contact with former members of your local church—offer an apology for anything you or other church members may have done to offend and tell them they are always welcome
- Even if the pastor or church isn't at fault!
- Tell them: “We want you to come back. What can we do to help you?”
- And when former (or current!) members who have not attended church for a while *do* come, *welcome* them, like the father of the prodigal son

# First global Summit on Nurture, Retention, and Discipling

All the presentations given at the 2013 World Summit on Nurture, Retention, and Discipling are available:

[http://www.adventistresearch.org/nurture\\_home](http://www.adventistresearch.org/nurture_home)  
(along with audio recordings of the discussion sessions that followed each presentation)



# Other Resources

[http://www.adventistresearch.org/research\\_reports](http://www.adventistresearch.org/research_reports):  
Under “Retention Studies”:

Full reports on the two studies of former and inactive members that are summarised in this presentation

[http://www.adventistresearch.org/astr\\_presentations](http://www.adventistresearch.org/astr_presentations)

Copies of David Trim’s reports to Annual Council in 2014 & 2015, which draw out key findings and statistics



# Other Resources

[http://southern.libguides.com/c.php?g=490463&p=3853417:](http://southern.libguides.com/c.php?g=490463&p=3853417)

A report on American graduates of Adventist universities & their sense of connectedness to the Seventh-day Adventist Church

<http://www.adventistresearch.org/sites/default/files/files/Revised%20Adventist%20Youth-Connected%20and%20Disconnected%20Oct%202013.pdf>

A presentation by Galina Stele which brings together data, from several studies, on young Adventists around the world and factors affecting their retention