



Leaving the Church

*Why some Seventh-day Adventist
members
leave the church, and why some come
back*

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Thanks & Acknowledgements

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Survey Background

- ▶ In 2011, Seventh-day Adventist church leaders, concerned about evidence that some of its members were leaving the church, decided to conduct a world-wide study of the factors that may be involved. Under the leadership of the General Conference Nurture and Retention Committee, the hope was to identify areas on which to focus the church's nurture initiatives. A detailed survey was developed by the Nurture and Retention Committee (Adults) and Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASTR) with the purpose of it being administered to members who were no longer attending worship services ("left"), along with a companion (and parallel) survey to be administered to members who had previously left the church for a period of time, but had "returned" to active church membership.

Survey Details



- ▶ Years conducted: 2012
- ▶ Number of surveys: 2
- ▶ Respondents:

First survey: Members who no longer attended worship services (“left”)

Second survey: Members who had previously left the church for a period of time, but began attending church again, or returned to active church membership (“returned”)

Survey Content



- ▶ Basic demographic information
- ▶ Attendance of SDA/Non-SDA schools
- ▶ Five most important causes for initially becoming SDA
- ▶ Reason for leaving SDA church
- ▶ Length of time as practicing members and regular church attendance
- ▶ 20 possible reasons that triggered decision to leave SDA church
- ▶ Free-form section on why people decide to leave SDA church
- ▶ Length since last attended SDA church
- ▶ If returned, length of absence from SDA church

Survey Content



- ▶ Possible connection between Adventist education and decision to leave the church
- ▶ Frequency of involvement in community service and other spiritual activities
- ▶ Opinions of organized religion
- ▶ Exploration of personal beliefs, including authority of Scripture, gift of prophecy manifested in Ellen White, etc.
- ▶ Degree to which belief in God continued after leaving
- ▶ Nature of current ties to Adventism
- ▶ How they felt about the church when they left
- ▶ Rate of openness to reconnect with SDA church
- ▶ If attending SDA church again, reason for reconnection

Survey Procedure



- ▶ Chair of Nurture and Retention Committee briefed Division leaders on purpose of survey
- ▶ Divisions invited to translate survey and arrange for distribution and collection (this responsibility usually given to Division Secretariat or Ministerial Association)
- ▶ Divisions assign constituent Unions to survey five individuals in both categories (i.e., “left” and “remained”)
- ▶ Divisions to submit surveys to GC ASTR for compiling and analysis

Survey Accomplishments



- ▶ **415** usable surveys received from former members who left Seventh-day Adventist Church
- ▶ **370** usable surveys from those previously separated from Seventh-day Adventist Church but subsequently reconnected
- ▶ Results provide insights into background, behavior, and thoughts of **785** members around the world who left the church at one point in their life, providing evidence why this occurred



Survey Results

FREQUENCY OF ENGAGEMENT IN SPIRITUAL
ACTIVITIES PRIOR TO DEPARTURE FROM CHURCH

[SEE HANDOUT SHEET]



Survey Results

WHY DO PEOPLE DECIDE TO LEAVE THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH?

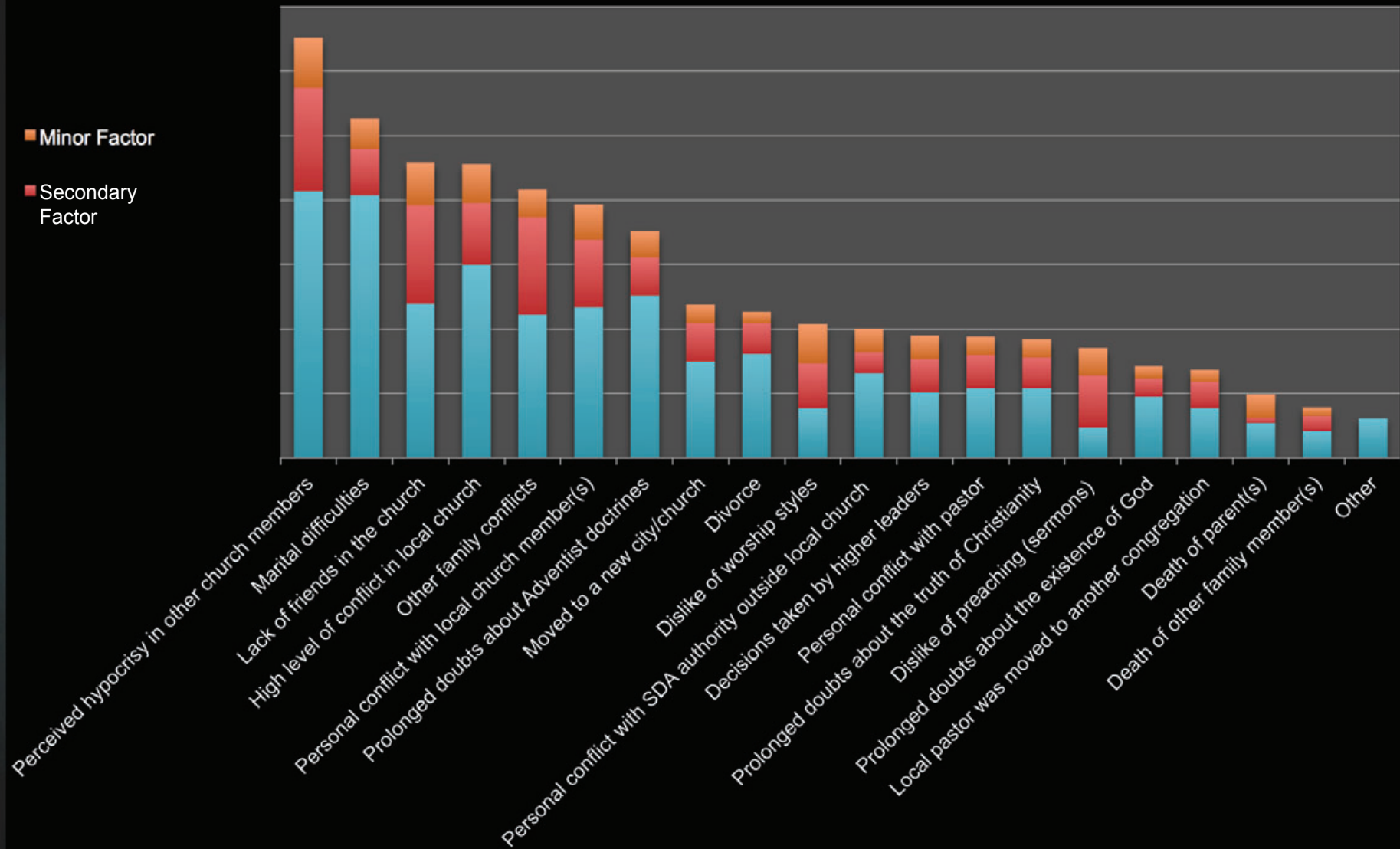
[SEE HANDOUT SHEET]



Survey Results

CONFLICT IS A RE-OCCURRING THEME

Table 12: What event triggered your decision to leave? (Listed in weighted rank order –Members who left)

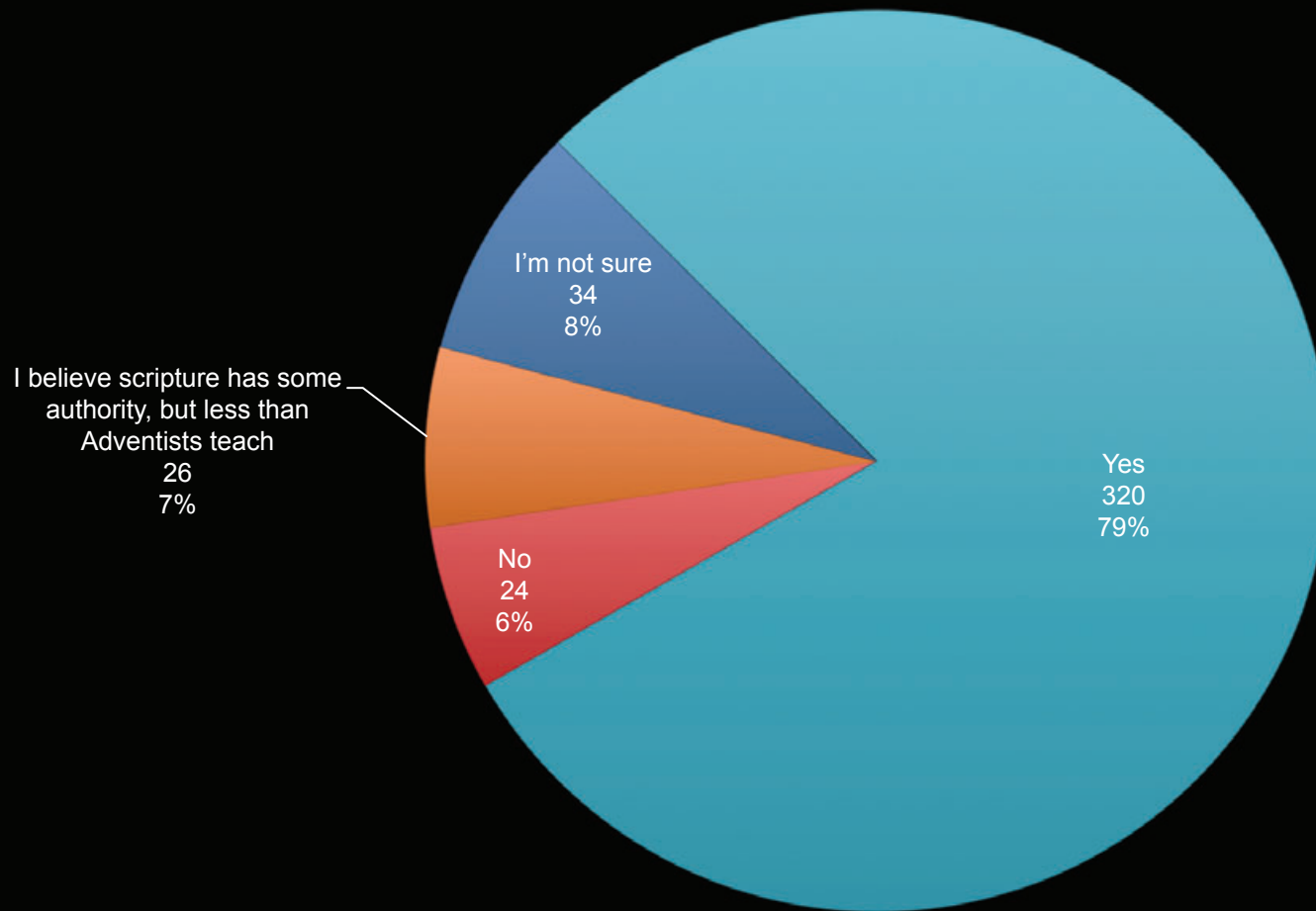




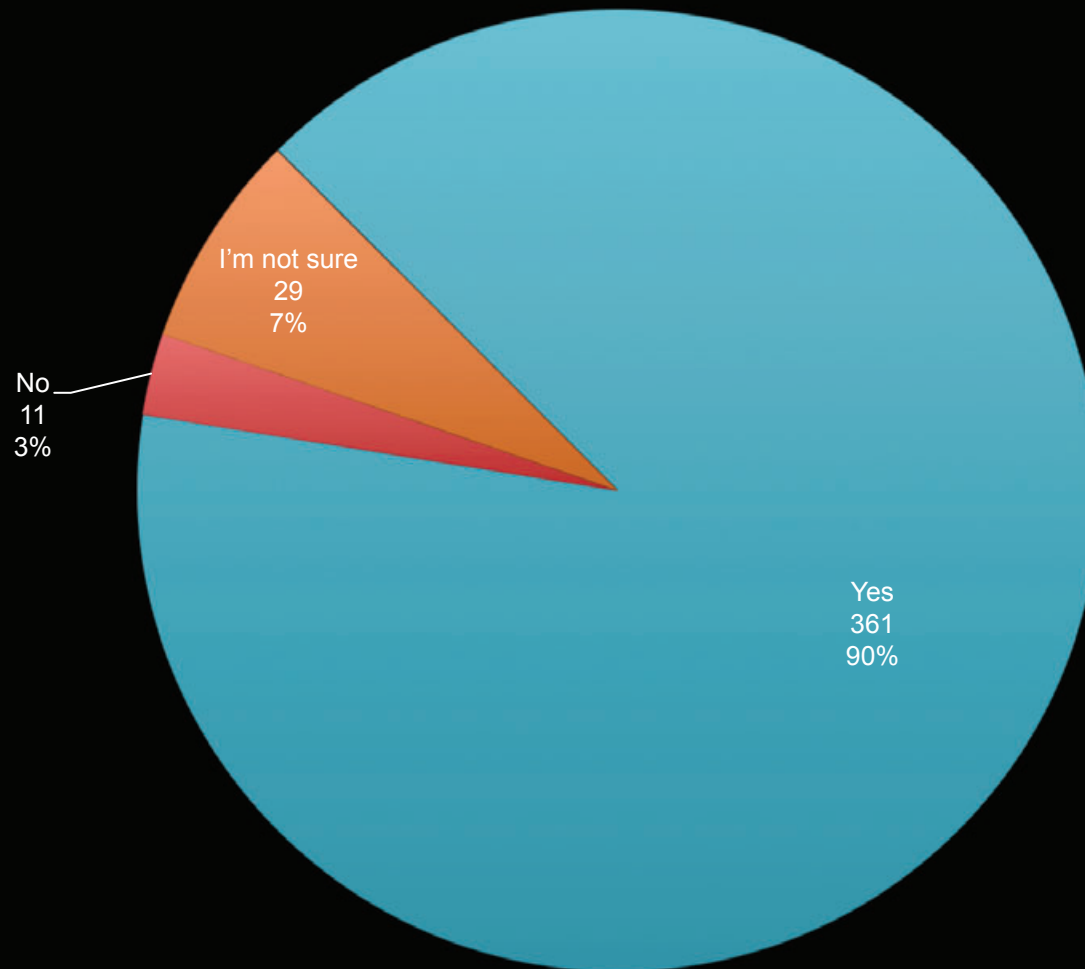
Take Home Point Number 1

THE BIBLE STILL RETAINS AUTHORITY &
SIGNIFICANCE

Table 22: Do you still believe in the authority of Scripture, as taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church? -- Former Members



**Table 23: Do you still believe there are benefits to Bible study?
-- Former Members**

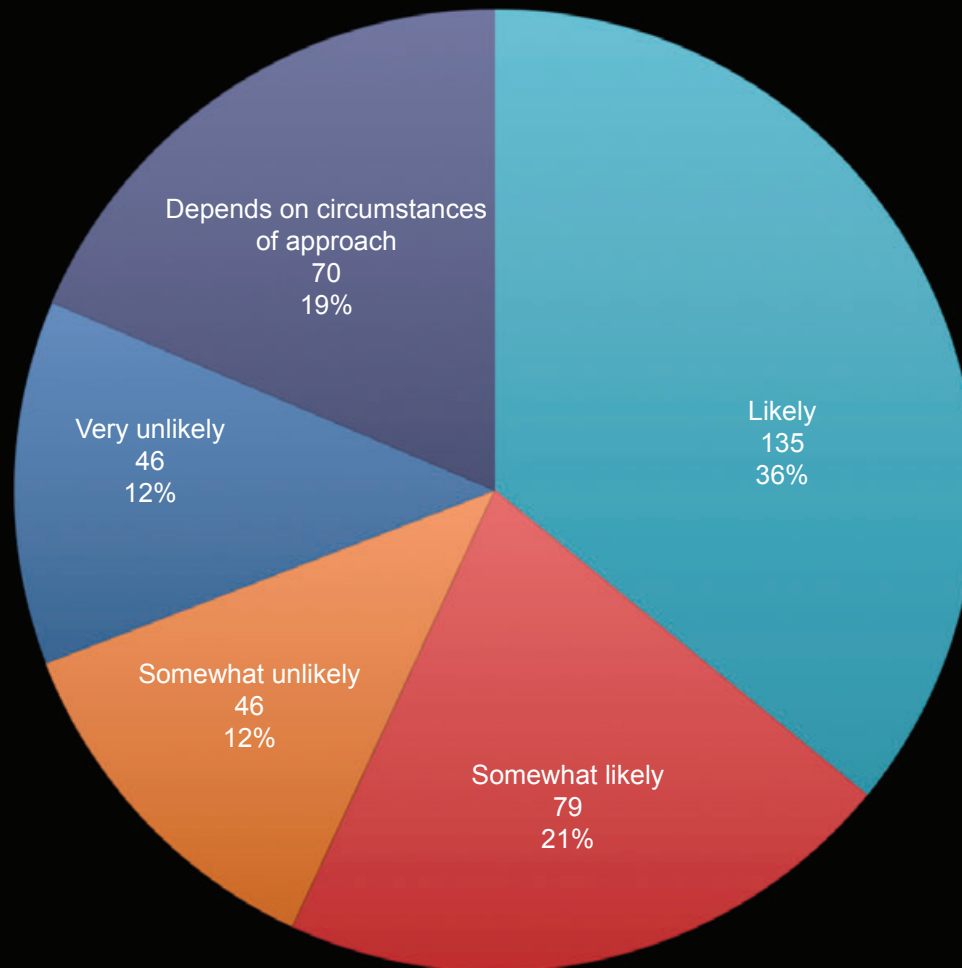




Take Home Point Number 2

WITH THE APPROPRIATE APPROACH **76%** OF FORMER MEMBERS ARE 'OPEN' TO RECONNECTING WITH THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

Table 35: How would you rate your openness to reconnect with the Seventh-day Adventist Church? -- Former Members



Conclusions



- ▶ Respondents who returned to the church appear to have left the church at a younger age and to have fewer children.
- ▶ The five most important ways by which respondents came to be Seventh-day Adventists are being raised an Adventist by parent(s), the influence of other relatives, the influence of friends, evangelistic campaign, and personal Bible study.
- ▶ The top six reasons for leaving are perceived hypocrisy in other members, marital difficulties, lack of friends in the church, other family conflicts, high level of conflict in the local church, and personal conflict with local church member(s).

Conclusions



- ▶ Participation in church-related activities does not appear to be an indicator of whether a person who leaves the church will return.
- ▶ Those who leave and still consider themselves to be nominal Adventist are more likely to return to the church.
- ▶ Those who leave but still remain in touch with Adventism, particularly through family and friends who make continued visitations to encourage reconnecting are more likely to return to the church.
- ▶ More analysis of the survey results remains to be done, specifically the open-ended questions and especially Q VII.2 in 'returned' survey.

Recommendations

- ▶ Comprehensive, widespread, practical and effective training in **conflict resolution** and **reconciliation** be implemented throughout the Seventh-day Adventist Church
- ▶ **Mentoring discipleship** be incorporated into the DNA of the Seventh-day Adventist Church
- ▶ Initiate: '**Operation Reconnect**'



Questions? Comments?