

## **NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION**

### **2004 CONGREGATIONS STUDY**

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In the autumn of 2004 a survey was sent to a sample of Seventh-day Adventist congregations in the North American Division. It was requested that the survey be administered to members attending on a given Sabbath. This is part of a regular, periodical collecting of information about practices of North American Adventists that assists church leaders in decision-making.

The Institute of Church Ministry at Andrews University, which was commissioned by the Office of Research and Information at the Division to conduct the study, received 1689 usable surveys. From these frequencies were calculated for each of the 61 variables. The complete printout of the frequencies and a copy of the survey are attached to this report. The written report will summarize the key features of the data. In the written report all figures have been rounded to the nearest whole percentage point. Therefore, the given figures may not always total exactly 100%.

### **The Demographics**

First, a look at the composition of the respondents may be helpful (Q. 55-61). As to gender, 57% are female - quite typical for Adventist congregations. The sample is composed of long-time Adventists: 61% have been members for over 20 years, and another 15% have been in the church from 11 to 20 years. Only about 4% have been members less than a year. Not only that, but 61% grew up with an Adventist parent. All this seems to indicate that our congregations are not bringing in many new members who have no Adventist background.

A majority (62%) of the respondents are Caucasian. The second highest group are

Blacks if we combine African Americans and West Indians (16%). Hispanics account for 11%. Since Whites do not comprise 62% of the members in the Division, the sample is somewhat biased in favor of Caucasians.

The sample is quite well-educated. About 72% have at least attended college with 27% going on to graduate and 19% earning a graduate degree. Only 4% have not gone beyond elementary school.

The data indicate an aging church. More than 60% are over 45 years of age with 22% being 65 or older. Only about 9% are under 25 years.

Finally, this sample is quite well off. Only about 21% have a yearly income below \$20,000, 21% receive between \$50,000 and \$74,000, and 24% have incomes in excess of \$75,000.

### **Witnessing**

Each time the Division is surveyed, questions are included about witnessing practices. This takes the place of individuals reporting missionary activities on Sabbath as they did in past generations. On this survey 11 practices were listed and respondents asked if they had participated in them during the past year (Q. 1-11). The “yes” responses seem to fall rather neatly into three groups. Well in first place with 36% participating is small-group or Home Bible Fellowship groups. Then seven practices cluster around 20%: phone contacts, evangelistic meetings, health seminars, Revelation Seminars, other Bible seminars, one-to-one Bible studies, and door-to-door contacts. Two practices involved around 10%: Daniel Seminars and family seminars. Teaching literacy or English was nearly off the list (3%).

Other witnessing opportunities revealed 19% attending a witnessing training program in the previous year (Q. 19), and 27% participating in a visiting ministry to former or inactive

members (Q. 20). Over 61% hold a church office or other position of service (Q. 18).

Asked: “About how many hours in an average month do you volunteer for church-related community-service programs?” (Q. 43) half of the respondents reported none. But about 30% claimed 1 to 5 hours, and an additional 11% volunteered 6 to 10 hours. Nearly 6% put in 20 or more hours.

It was also discovered that 27% gave out up to 5 pieces of witnessing literature in an average month, 7% between 6 to 10 pieces, and 9% distributed more than 11. However, 59% did not participate at all (Q. 44).

Respondents were asked: “How many people have you been wholly or partially responsible for bringing into the church in the last three years?” (Q. 21). About two thirds indicated that they were unaware of any. But 15% could think of one, and another 15% remembered two to five. Only 4% - 5% could identify more than five in the three-year period.

### **Devotional Practices**

A second perennial set of questions concerns devotional practices (Q. 12-17).

Respondents were asked how often they participated in five devotional activities. Leading the way was personal private prayer where 73% were involved daily and another 21% at least once a week.

Personal Bible study did not fare nearly as well with only 37% daily and 43% at least once a week. The study of the Sabbath school lesson was a bit lower: 28% daily and 41% at least weekly. Along that line, 71% attend Sabbath school classes each week, and another 9% get there at least monthly.

Ellen White’s writings are important to Seventh-day Adventists so how often are they being read by church members? Nearly 14% report that they read in them on a daily basis, and

another 29% at least once a week. But the other 57% read her rarely or never.

Studies have shown that family worship is a key to a solid Christian home and an important factor in retaining young people in the church. About 28% of the respondents have daily family worship, and another 33% conduct it on at least a weekly basis. The other 39% have family worship only occasionally or not at all.

This information will help church leaders to know what things need to be emphasized in their work for the members - both in witnessing and in the devotional life.

### **Stewardship**

While the above two areas are always included on the Division survey, each time the survey is given other areas on a rotating basis are selected. For this year two additional topics were financial stewardship and factors influencing the members decision to join the church.

Over 73% claim to have returned at least 10% of their income as tithe (Q. 22). Another 14% contribute between 5% and 10%, 8% give less than 5%, while 5% do not tithe at all.

Members were asked if they ever give their tithe to an entity other than the local church and were presented with seven possibilities (Q. 23-29). Large majorities (66%-90%) never do, but lesser percentages do occasionally. The organizations most likely to be supported occasionally are Adventist radio and television ministries (19%), another local church (15%), and overseas organizations (14%). In addition, 24% occasionally support other unnamed organizations with tithe money. Only about 2% to 3% of respondents regularly send all of their tithe to another organization than the local church, but up to 6% regularly do with a part of it.

When we consider offerings beyond the tithe (Q. 30), 44% contribute less than 5% of their income, 41% approach a double tithe with 5% to 10%, 4% go as high as 15% in offerings,

and 3% even give more than 15%. On the other hand, 8% do not contribute at all.

In distributing these offerings in addition to the tithe, a little more than half regularly support the needs of their local congregations, and another third do so occasionally. However, respondents regularly contribute to other entities in varying percentages (Q. 31-41).

The cause with the most regular support other than the local congregation is Sabbath school missions with 46%. Nothing else comes close. But every cause draws some regular support. In descending order they are: Christian education - 27%, world budget - 23%, local conference projects - 20%, Adventist radio and television - 12%, global mission and ADRA - tied at 11%, independent Adventist ministries - 10%, non-Adventist charitable causes - 8%, and Adventist World Radio - 7%.

Only 13% never support their local congregations, and 17% never give Sabbath school offerings. But other causes are never supported by percentages ranging from 28% to 58%. Complete information is given in the frequency tables.

The Personal Giving Plan encourages members to set aside a certain percentage of their income regularly to be divided among the various needs. It replaces “impulsive” giving or giving what one happens to have in the wallet or purse at the time of the appeal. Asked if they participate in this plan (Q. 42) 37% said yes, 37% said no, and the rest didn’t know.

### **Why They Joined**

The second topic of special interest included in the 2004 survey was a question asking the relative strength of nine factors in influencing them to join the Adventist church (Q. 45-53). To make the relationships easier to grasp, we have combined the percentages of those who reported “quite a bit of influence” and “very great influence” and arranged them in descending order.

Complete data are given in the frequency tables.

Brought up in an Adventist home	59%
A friend or relative	58%
Read books, journals, other literature	49%
Public evangelism meetings	36%
Bible studies in the home	34%
Visits by a pastor	20%
Television or radio programs	20%
Bible correspondence course	19%
Material on the internet	7%

In addition, question 54 was a blank line that said “other.” A total of 22% checked this as having either quite a bit of influence or very great influence. Respondents were invited to indicate what this “other” was on the blank line. While not all did this, a number did, and we present these comments below.

The most frequent comments had to do with Christian education:

Christian Education  
Christian Education  
Church school  
Church school  
School  
SDA education  
School system - SDA  
Church school teacher  
Attendance at an Adventist boarding academy  
Attended an SDA college  
Atlantic Union College - as a convert - Bible classes (Baptismal)  
Children went to church school  
Worship in my home - church school education from grade 1 to grad. school

Other comments focused accepting people encountered:

Warmth and friendship of members (Auburn, Washington)  
Head elder visited and brought videos.  
Visits by head elder  
My spouse  
My future wife (now my wife)  
Premarital counseling given by Adventist pastor  
Rejoined after children were born

A few had to do with personal study:

Reading the Bible, conviction of truth by the Holy Spirit  
Personal studies  
Specific study of the Bible  
Outside Bible Study (BSF)

Finally, there was a miscellaneous category:

*The Great Controversy*  
Sabbath-meeting church  
The health message  
Adventist vegetarian life style  
Challenge from non-SDA Christians  
Mormon missionaries

Obviously, some of these reasons could have been placed in one or more of the categories given in items 45 to 53. The most important new item is Adventist Christian education.

The findings from this important survey should be studied by church leaders and planners; first, so that leadership will have a clear picture of the present status of North American Adventist membership, and second, to provide directions for future programs and materials that will advance the mission goals of the North American Division.