

An Information Base for Strategic Planning

Beyond Vision 2000

- ***Church Demographics***
- ***Member Attitudes***
- ***Ministry Trends***
- ***Mission Context***



by Monte Sahlin & Paul Richardson

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Introduction

We were commissioned to put together for the officers and key planning groups of the Columbia Union Conference an information base that could serve as a useful reference in strategic planning and decision-making. We were asked for an array of information that would not only assess the needs and measure the opinions of church members, but also describe the context within which the Seventh-day Adventist Church works—institutional and demographic trends, and larger realities.

To fulfill that assignment we have brought together in this report four kinds of information from a wide range of sources.

1. Demographics of the Columbia Union membership
2. Attitudes and needs among the Columbia Union members
3. Trends in the ministries of the church in the Columbia Union
4. Demographics and needs of the general population in the 8-state territory assigned as the “mission field” of the Columbia Union, including a religious profile

Key points from each of these four categories are briefly described in the summary that follows immediately after this introduction. The full array of data is displayed in a set of about 60 presentation slides which make up the bulk of this report. Nearly 100 pages of raw data tables are also available in a companion volume.

A primary source for this information is a telephone survey conducted by the Center for Creative Ministry specifically for this project. A total of 296 telephone interviews were completed with a random sample of Columbia Union church members from April 19 through May 1. Each interview took 20 to 30 minutes, some as long as 45 minutes.¹ Demographic and school enrollment information was collected on all the individuals in each household—nearly a thousand records all together.

In addition an analysis of the demographics, location and number of Adventist households and Adventist churches for all 5,986 Zip Code areas in the eight states was completed by the Center for Global Urban Mission in collaboration with the Center for Creative Ministry. We include information a survey of the general public (a total of 1,511 telephone interviews) conducted by Center for Creative Ministry for the NAD in 1994. Data were also gathered from the NAD Office of Human Relations census of ethnicity in the Adventist Church conducted in 1995, the NAD Office of Information and Research annual surveys for 1989 through 1997, and the U.S. Census Current Population Surveys for 1990 through 1996. Detailed source notes are found in the companion volume.

¹In interpreting survey results it is important to keep in mind that all sample surveys are subject to sampling error; that is, the extent to which the results may differ from what would be obtained if the entire population had been interviewed. The allowance for sampling error in this survey is six percentage points (plus or minus) at the 95th percentile of reliability.

We wish to express appreciation for the professionalism and hard work that the Center for Creative Ministry team put into this study, as well as the cheerful cooperation of the Columbia Union Conference staff. Particularly important are the contributions made by Kandra Luke, administrative assistant, and Stephanie Sahlin, research associate.

It is our prayer that this information, together with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the vision and creativity of the Columbia Union officers and committees, will help to strengthen God's faithful people in this territory and build up Christ's church as it prepares for His coming!

Monte Sahlin & Paul Richardson
May 1998

Summary

Much of the information in this volume is well within expected ranges. Some of it points out important trends and realities. In this summary we will concisely describe these items and discuss their meaning for the Columbia Union and its congregations, ministries, conferences and institutions.

Church Demographics

Columbia Union membership is under-represented among the younger generations. For example, there are one-third the portion of young adults from the Baby Bust generation as is true for the general population in the eight-state territory. There is evidence of a significant drop-out factor among young adults who grew up in Adventist homes and have been baptized as teens. Young adult ministries, secular campus ministries, volunteerism and related kinds of programs for young adults do not appear to be strong in the Columbia Union. The church must find ways to attract and connect with new generations or it runs the risk of losing these men and women forever.

The Columbia Union membership is very diverse in its ethnicity. There are almost three times as many black members as the African American population in the eight-state region, and twice as many Hispanic members as in the general population. In fact, the Columbia Union no longer has any ethnic majority among its members. White, Anglo members now constitute a “majority minority” in the church. Such diversity can be a blessing, but it can also lead to problems of inter-group conflict, the “Balkanizing” of resources, and barriers to reaching the majority among the unreached population in the outside world. This reality calls for collaborative approaches and an organizational culture that both empowers each cultural group and maximizes joint effort toward common goals.

The church does not seem to provide a very attractive environment for single adults, which make up a growing segment of the American population. There are half as many singles in each adult generation among the Columbia Union member households as the proportion in the general population. Is this the result of a lack of success in outreach to singles, or because the dropout rate is higher among singles?

The Columbia Union membership has an exceptionally high level of education. There are three times as many adults with higher education as is true among the general population in the eight-state region. Clearly, Adventists believe in education!

Member Attitudes and Needs

Four out of five Columbia Union members say they are comfortable bringing work associates and neighbors to their local church. Yet, it appears that relatively few do so on any

given Sabbath. What more can be done to build on this valuable strength and incorporate it into an overall church growth strategy?

There is great diversity on the matter of taste in worship music. The vast majority prefer traditional hymns and gospel songs, but a third want contemporary Christian music. Can room be made for both tastes among the local churches? There is more unanimity on the kind of sermons members like. Despite the grumbling you may hear from some sectors, three out of four members want sermons on practical, Christian living. This is especially true among younger generations.

Adventists in the Columbia Union have higher levels of involvement, witnessing, attendance at training events, distribution of missionary literature than is true for the rest of the NAD. This is true for all measures of involvement, *except* volunteering for Adventist Community Services (ACS).

Asked to identify what they have actually observed to be the most productive means of winning new members into their local church, the largest number of members say it is “friendship evangelism.” This is true for all ethnic groups and generations. In fact, in the fastest-growing ethnic groups this response is even stronger than among the slower-growth ethnic groups. One in three members report that they were personally involved in the conversion of at least one new member during the last year! Why is there not more emphasis on this relational reality in evangelism? The evangelistic strategy and programs of the denomination need to be re-worked to capitalize more fully on this fact.

Three out of four Columbia Union members have had a relative or friend drop out of active membership in the Adventist Church. This is an area of major concern for members, and one they feel the denomination must give more attention to.

Two out of three local churches in the Columbia Union had no family life activities during the last year. Black and Hispanic churches are more than twice as likely to have family life activities as are white, Anglo congregations.

Four out of five (83%) of Columbia Union members want the Adventist Church to expand the humanitarian activities that it sponsors through ADRA and ACS. They want more done to meet the needs of the homeless, inner-city children and families in crisis here at home, as well as overseas.

Stewardship attitudes are more positive in the Columbia Union than across the NAD. Higher percentages express confidence in leadership (except for the GC) and approval of how church funds are being used. They are more likely to calculate their tithe on pre-tax earnings, and more likely to be “intentional givers” who commit themselves to give a percentage of their income above and beyond the tithe to church offerings. This means that it should be relatively less difficult to find the resources necessary to the mission and ministries of the church in this region.

Half the children (52%) in households with at least one active church member are attending an Adventist school. We found a surprising number of homes where one or more children are attending an Adventist school, and another child or more are attending elsewhere. We are also very surprised to find that among respondents who do not have their children in Adventist schools, two out of three say that their reasons are not on our list, which includes cost, distance, crowding, lack of needed course offerings, concerns about spirituality and academic quality, and refusal on the part of a non-member spouse. We suspect that a new generation of Adventist parents has a non-traditional set of attitudes toward Christian education, and these attitudes need to be explored and understood to insure the continued success of our educational institutions.

Ministry Trends

The growth rate in the Columbia Union has been lower than the rate for the entire NAD each year since 1993. The same was true for the average annual growth rates during the 1970s and the 1980s. Yet the number of baptisms and Professions of Faith are above the average for the nine unions in the NAD in most years (although not in 1996 and 1997). This may be related to evangelism and church growth programs which have not learned to take full advantage of the relational factor as mentioned with the data above about "friendship evangelism."

Local church ministries leaders appear to be well resourced. Among those who identified themselves as department heads or leaders of groups such as SS divisions, Pathfinder Clubs, or program committees in their local church, three-quarters or more know about the PlusLine 800 number help desk, have attended training in the last year, receive catalogs and own a copy of the relevant department handbook. It appears that the problem is not getting resources out to the field, but getting resources actually used—translated into functioning ministries that are actually touching the lives of people in meaningful ways at levels of activity appropriate to the need.

The Columbia Union *Visitor* is well-liked. Church members give it high positive ratings and very low negative ratings. One out of three report that they have purchased something or responded to an ad in the *Visitor* at some time. It continues to be a valuable medium for communication, and perhaps should be used more aggressively to address specific needs and goals on behalf of the church.

Context for Mission

At 39 million, the Columbia Union has the largest urban population of any of the unions in the NAD. Ten out of the 25 largest metropolitan areas in the United States are located in the Columbia Union territory. These constitute one of the largest clusters of unreached people groups on the globe and present a challenge that the Adventist Church has never really addressed seriously—reaching the large cities of the northeast.

At the same time, half the population of Appalachia—the largest and poorest rural region in the U.S.—is also located in the Columbia Union. Appalachia includes significant portions of Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, as well as West Virginia. Appalachia is also a largely untouched mission field. Recent research has documented that most of the Adventist baptisms in this area are among those who have migrated into Appalachia, not among the native-born.

Poverty is a significant problem throughout wide sectors of the Columbia Union. It is correlated to most other social concerns, and it is a key dynamic in both the large cities and Appalachia. There are 5.5 million people living in poverty in the eight-state region, of which 1.5 million are children. The Adventist Church is doing very little to address these needs, despite the historic counsel in Ellen White's writings and the contemporary need to establish visibility in unreached communities and a moral foundation from which to be more effective in preaching the gospel message.

Much of the Columbia Union is made up of unreached areas. Nearly half of the Zip Codes in these eight states have no Adventists living in them. Only 493 out of the 5,986 Zip Codes in the Columbia Union territory have an Adventist church planted in them. The 1,443 Zip Codes where there is no church, but two or more Adventist families would seem to be prime target areas for small group outreach, which has proved to be low-cost and highly effective in the field testing conducted by the Oregon Conference over the past several years.

Most of the Zip Codes where there are no Adventists resident fall into two kinds: (1) Communities made up of white, upper middle class, educated families in Delaware, District of Columbia, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Virginia; (2) Blue Collar, working class communities in Maryland, Ohio and West Virginia. Both of these are largely urban and represent people groups which the Adventist Church has not learned to evangelize effectively. It is likely that a significant investment in R&D will be necessary before proven strategies can be widely applied with success.

It should not be forgotten that there are more than a million people in the Columbia Union living in institutions—nursing homes, college and university dormitories, military quarters and correctional institutions. When a target group numbers one million, it is considered to be a “global mission target group” by the GC Office of Global Mission. Maybe these people should be accorded the same kind of serious attention in planning for mission in the Columbia Union. It will require specialized ministries to reach them.

Nearly half of the population in the eight-state territory (47%) is “unchurched”—does not belong to any religion. Another quarter are Catholics, and one in five are members of a mainstream Protestant church (Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, etc.). Only 6% are members of a conservative, Evangelical church, yet much of what is done in Adventist outreach and evangelism is based on tacit assumptions that the audience will come from a background like this 6%. There is a need to explore seriously how to reach the unchurched population.

A major problem facing the Adventist Church is that it is essentially unknown to the vast majority of Americans. Although data not available for the Columbia Union, it is likely that the problem is no better in this region. Our 1994 study of public awareness of the Adventist Church, conducted for the NAD, shows that no more than 17% of Americans know something about the Adventist Church and have a favorable attitude toward the church. Another 5% have inaccurate or unfavorable ideas about the church. More than three out of four (78%) either have never heard of the Adventist Church or know absolutely nothing about it. There has been a decline in public awareness over the past decade, and it is driven largely by a failure to connect with new generations.

Many still believe that the public relations problem facing the Adventist Church is to combat prejudice. In fact, the 1994 study found that only 1% of Americans see the Adventist Church as a "cult" or associate it with things such as David Koresh and the Waco events. In fact, this foundational problem for all evangelism and ministries is related to a complete lack of public identity instead of prejudice.

The graphs for Annual Household Income and Level of Education were revised slightly in October, 1998. Some graphs may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

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- Church Demographics
- Member Attitudes and Needs
- Ministry Trends
- Mission Context and Needs Outside the Church

Sources

Research conducted for the Columbia Union Conference by the Center for Creative Ministry

- 296 random telephone interviews with church members conducted April 19-May 1, 1998 by the Center for Creative Ministry
- NAD Office of Human Relations census of ethnicity in the Adventist Church, 1995
- 1994 survey of the general public by Center for Creative Ministry conducted for the NAD — 1,511 telephone interviews
- Analysis of Zip Code demographics and Adventist household data by Center for Global Urban Mission
- NAD Office of Information & Research annual surveys, 1989 through 1997
- U.S. Census, Current Population Surveys for 1990 through 1996

Church Demographics

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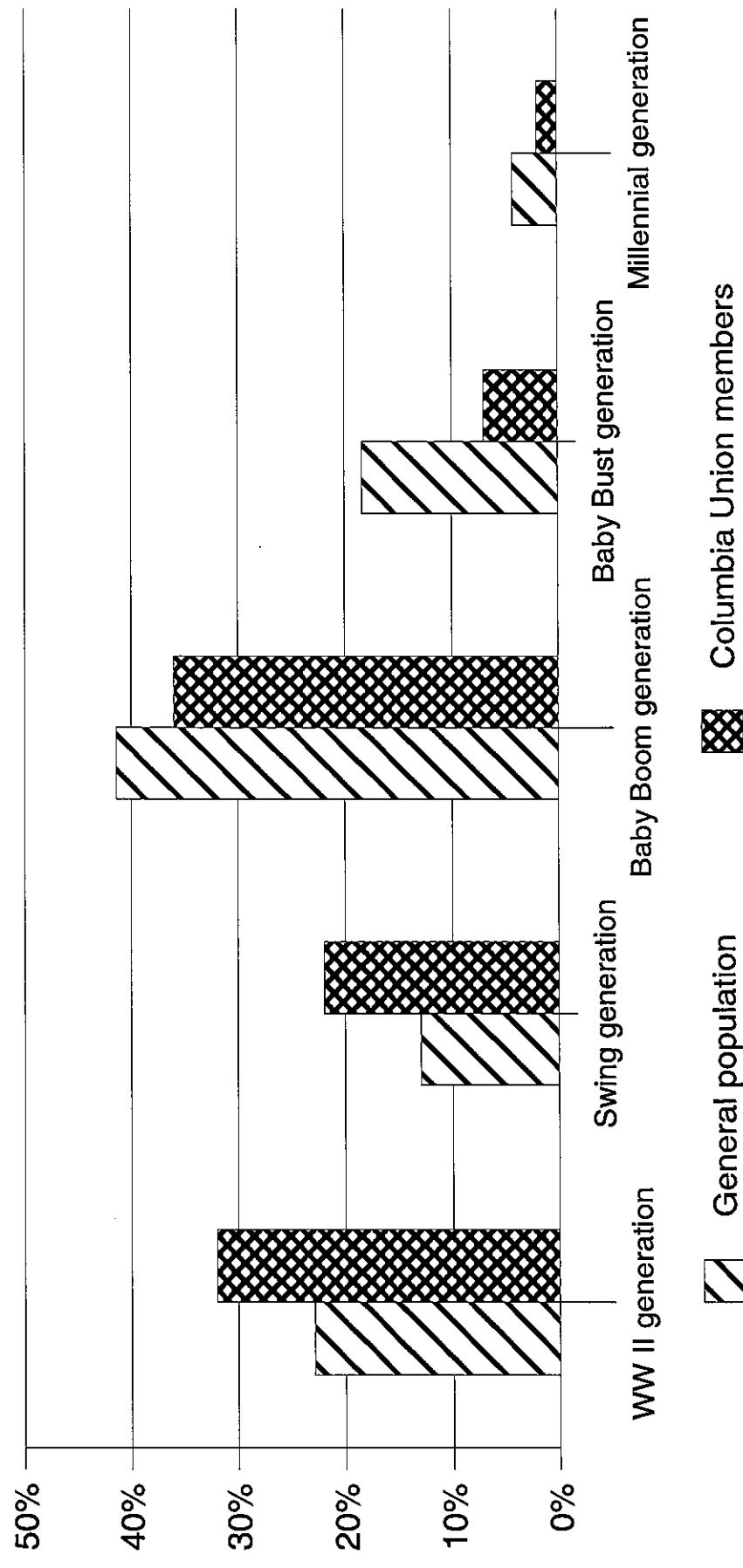
The generations

Current age dynamics in the United States

- World War II generation, born 1909-1932, now 66 through 90 years of age
- Swing generation, born 1933-1945, now 53 through 65 years of age
- Baby Boom generation, born 1946-1964, now 34 through 52 years of age
- Baby Bust generation (sometimes called Gen X), born 1976-1985, now 22 through 33 years of age
- Millennial generation, born 1977-1994, now 4 through 21 years of age

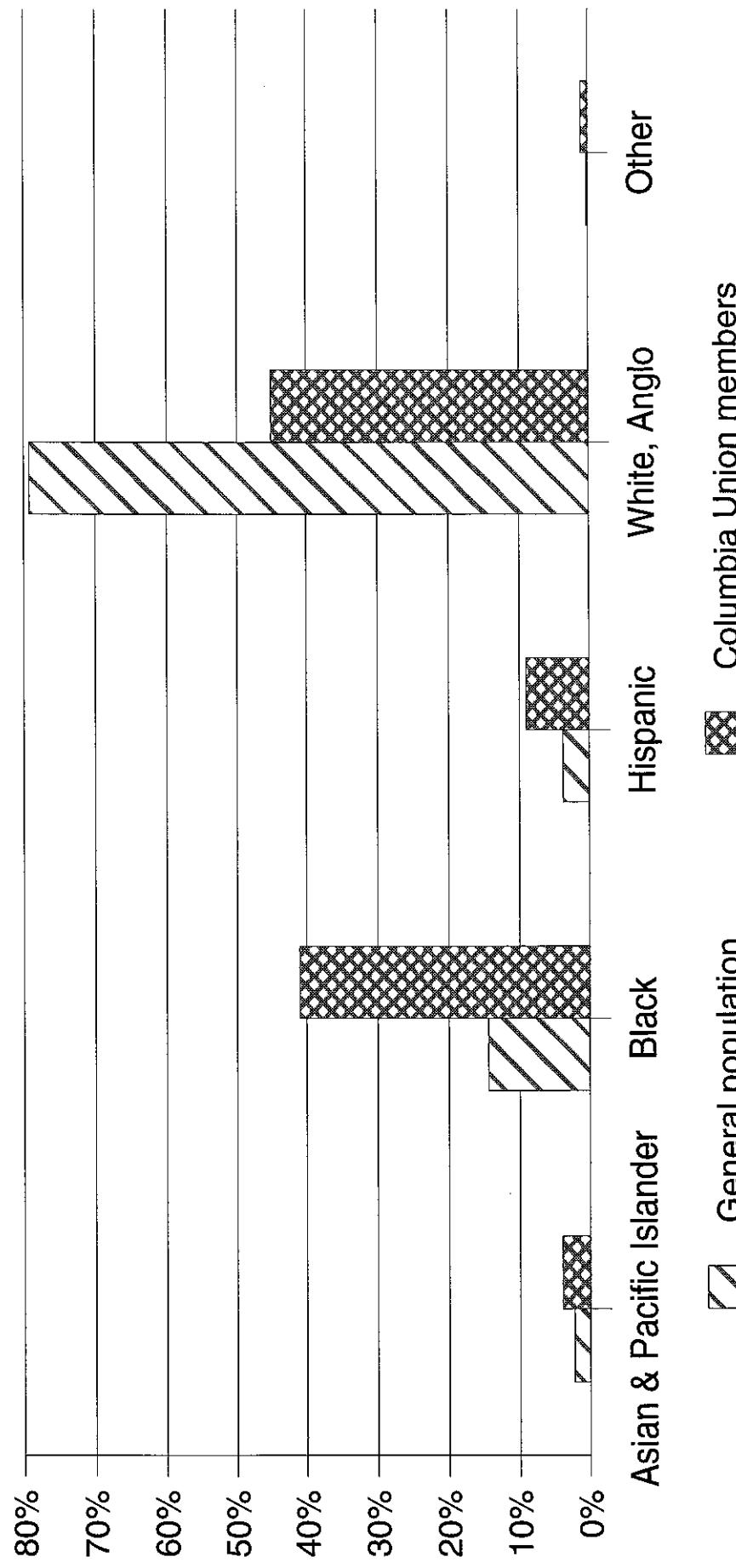
Age of heads of households by generation

Columbia Union members compared to general population
in the eight-state area



Ethnicity

Columbia Union members compared to the general population
in the eight-state area



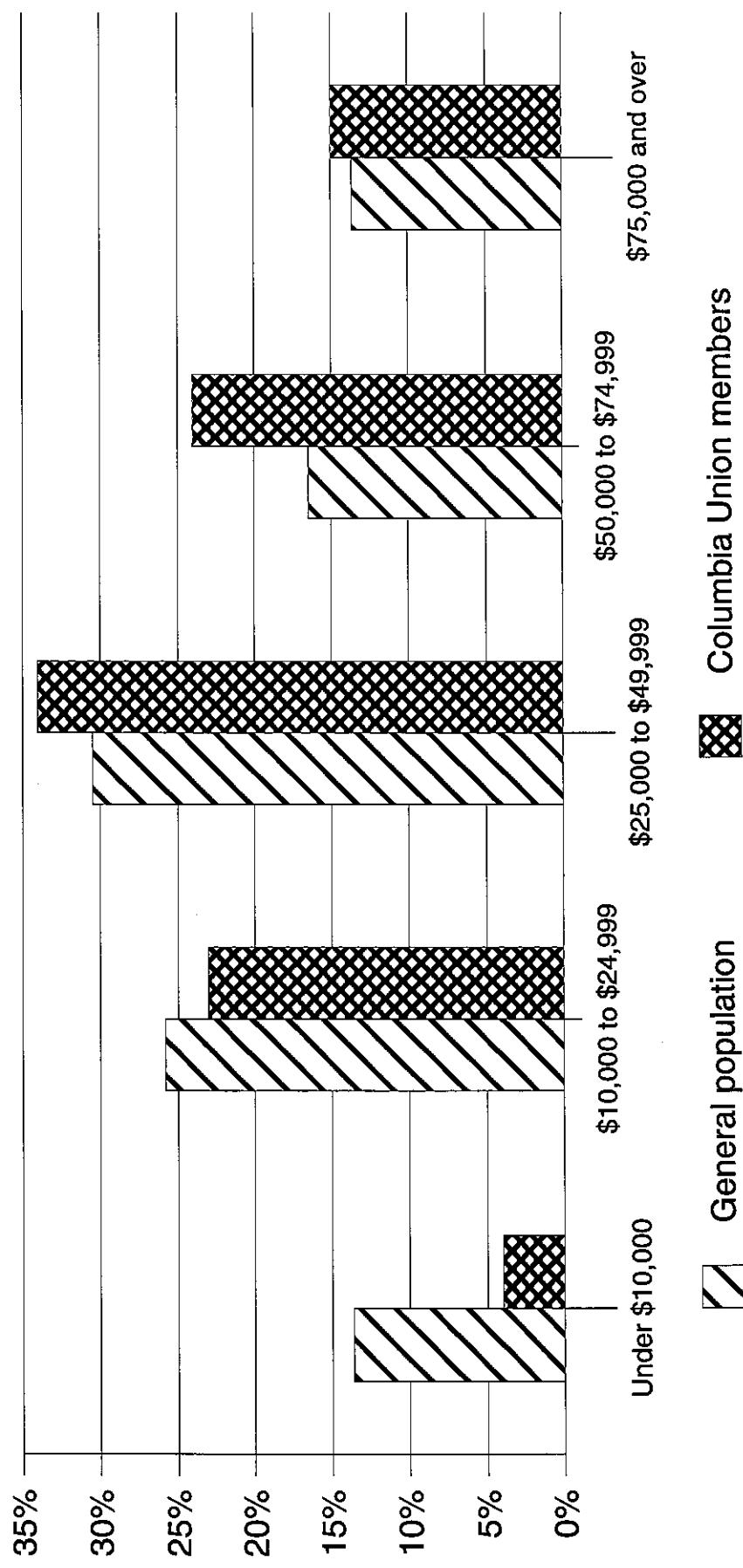
Immigrants

Columbia Union members compared to the general population

- 24% of Seventh-day Adventists in the Columbia Union Conference were not born in the U.S.
- 9% of the current population of the U.S. was born as a citizen of another nation

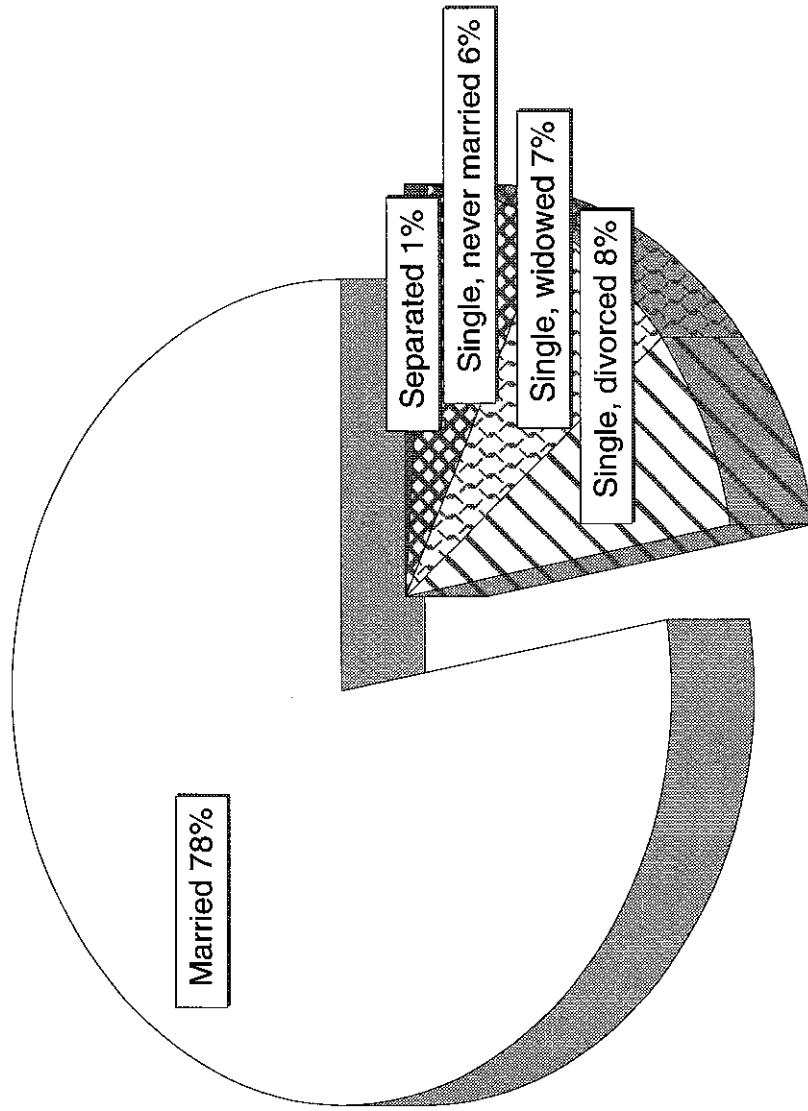
Annual household income

Columbia Union members compared with the general population
in the eight-state area



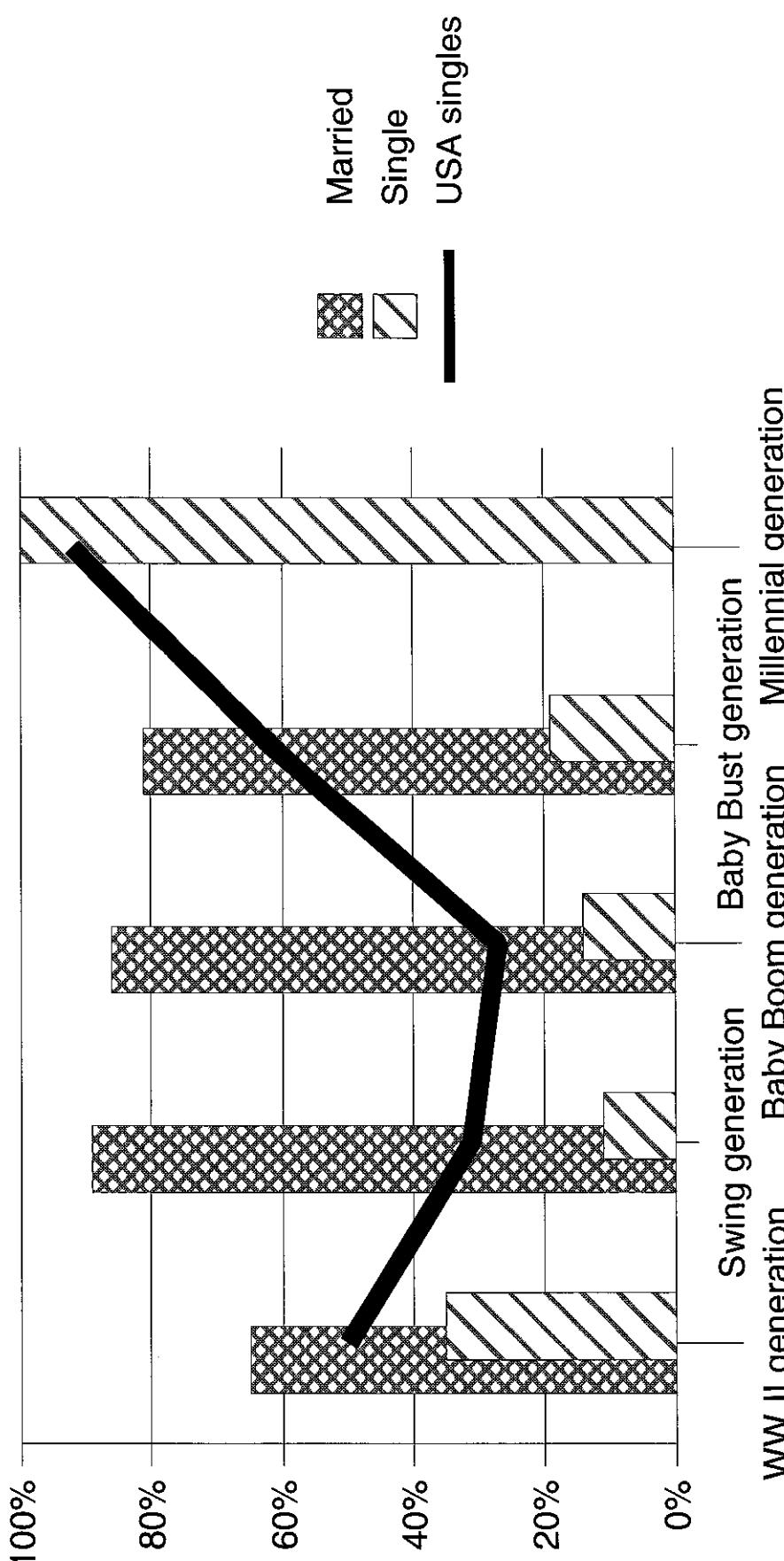
Marital status

Membership of the Columbia Union



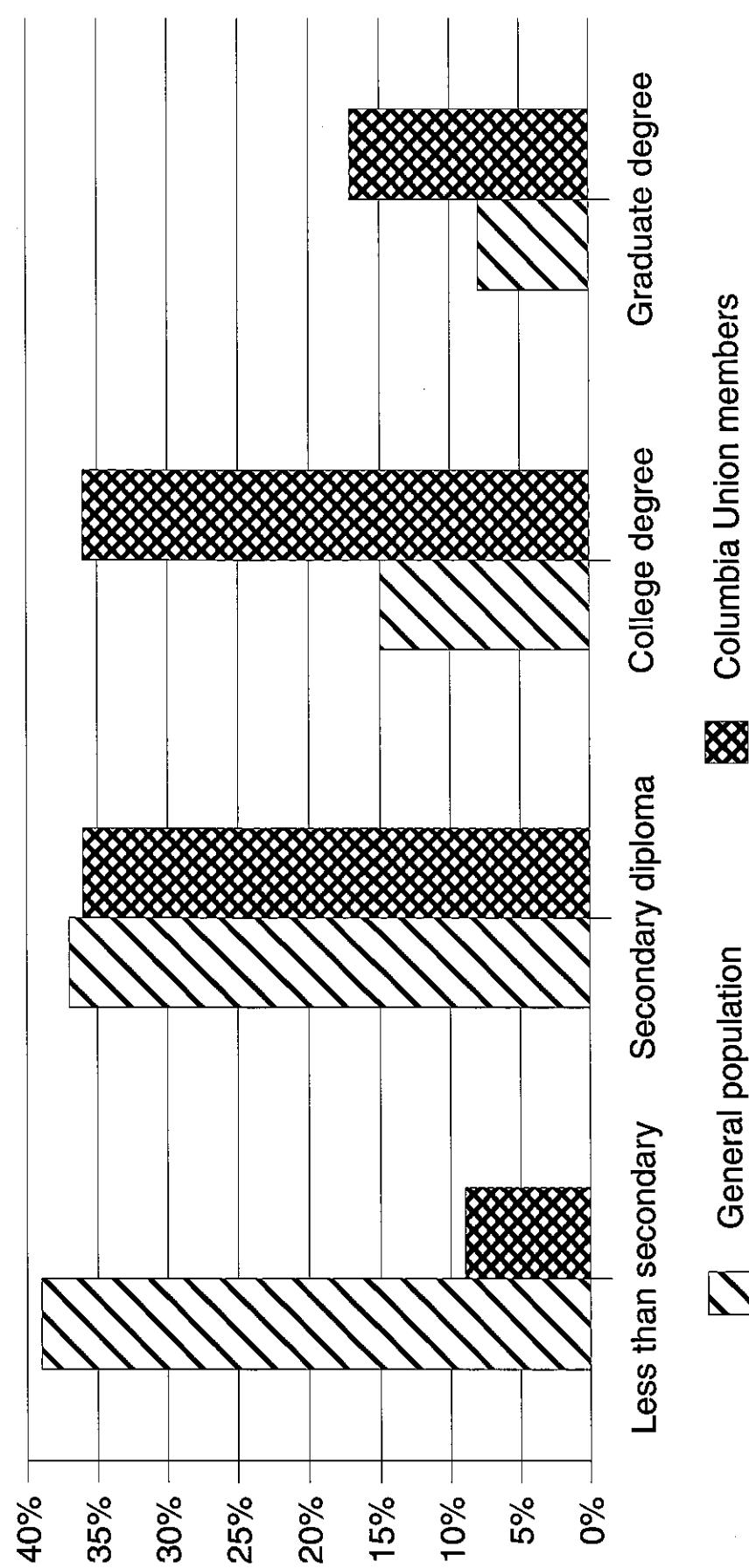
Marital status and age

Membership of the Columbia Union



Level of education

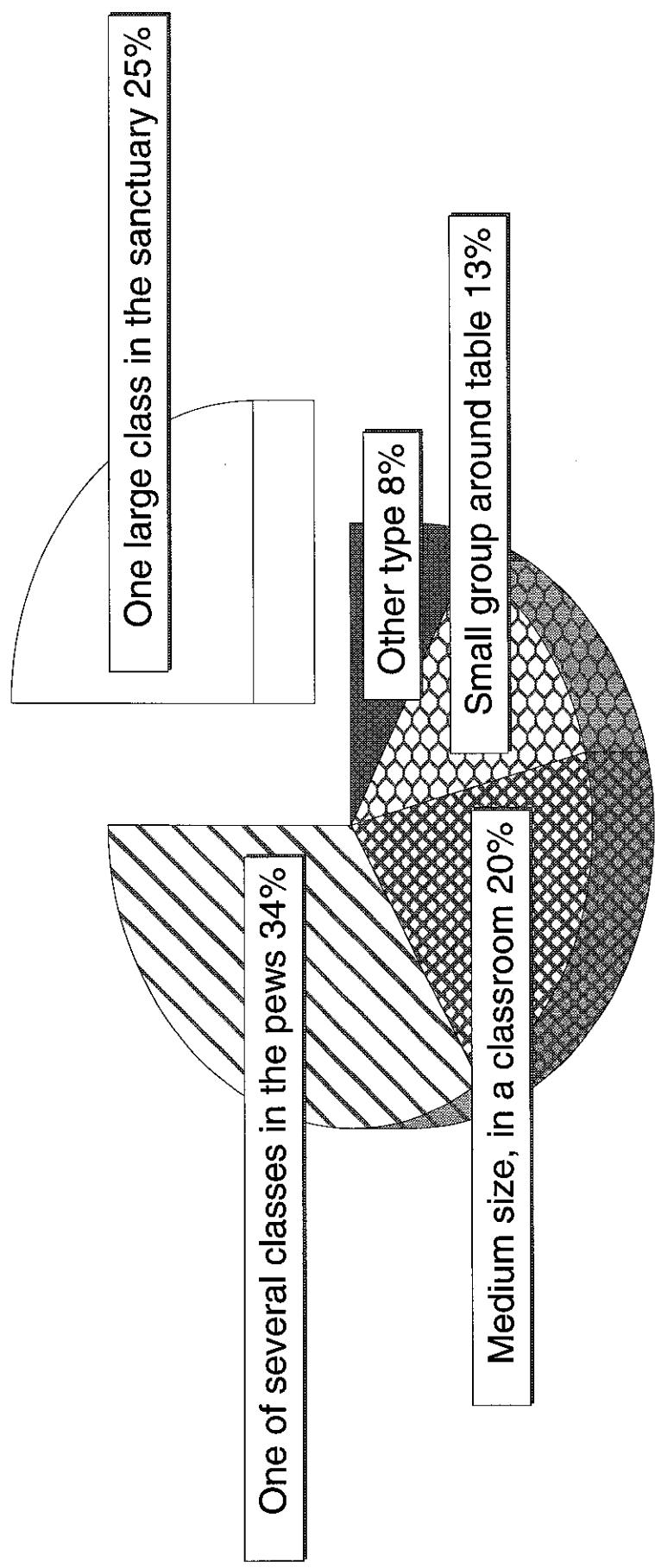
Membership of the Columbia Union compared to the adult population in the 8-state area



Member Attitudes and Needs

An Information Base for Strategic Planning

What kind of SS class do you belong to?

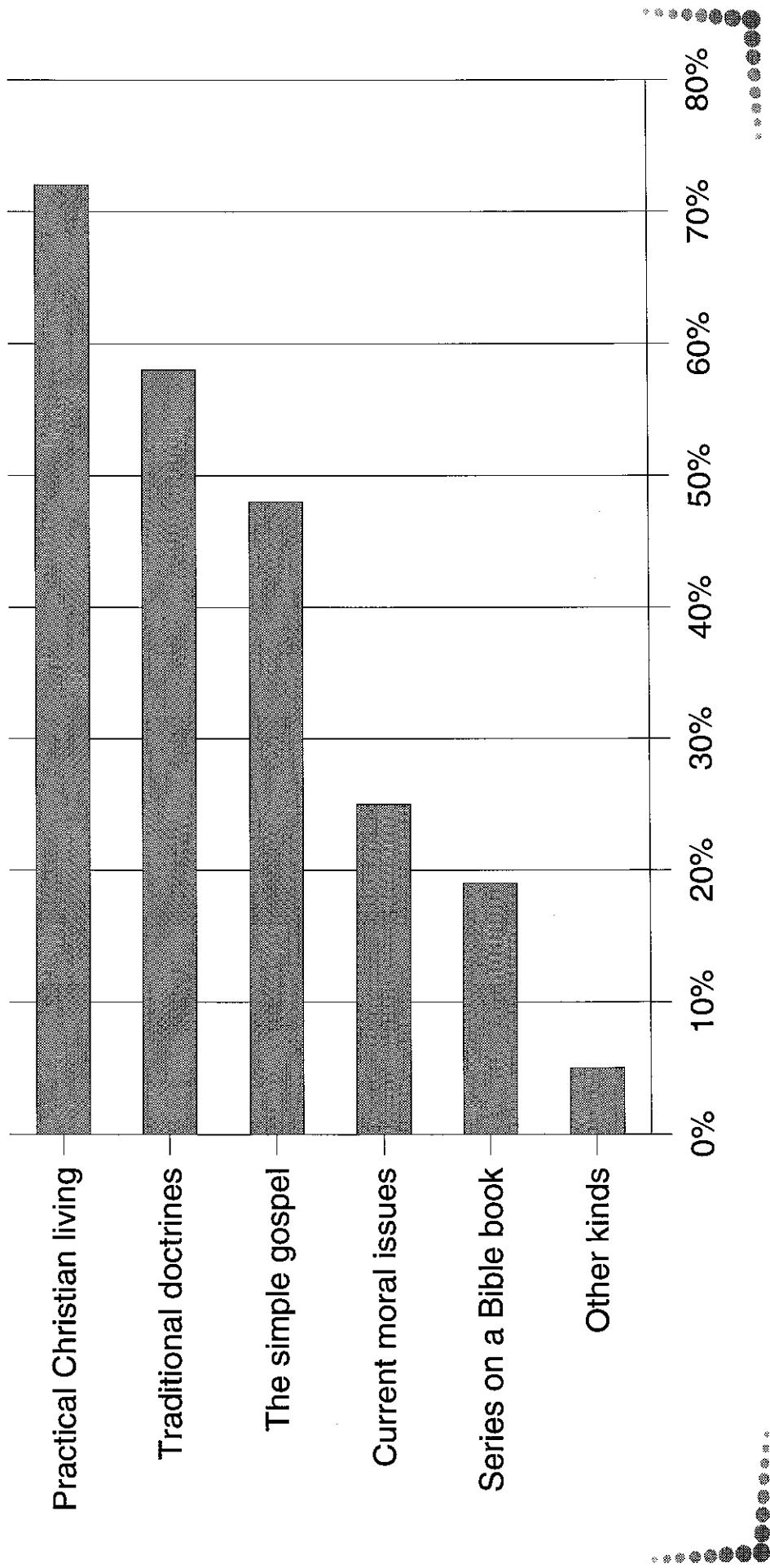


Sabbath worship

Four out of five members (83%) have found a local, Adventist church where they would feel comfortable bringing their work colleagues or neighbors to visit on most Sabbaths.

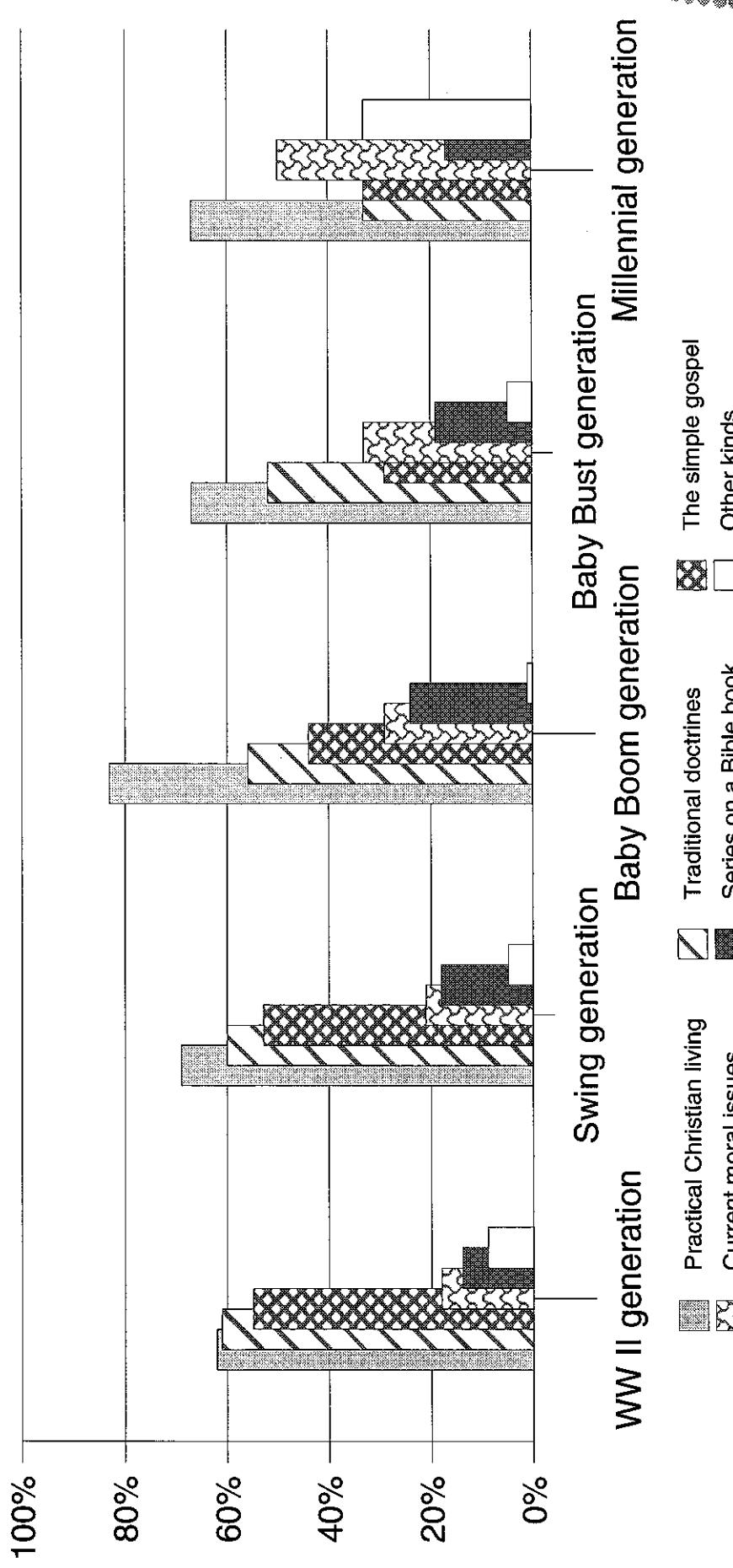
What kind of sermons would you prefer to hear on Sabbath at church?

Columbia Union members . . . allowed to select more than one



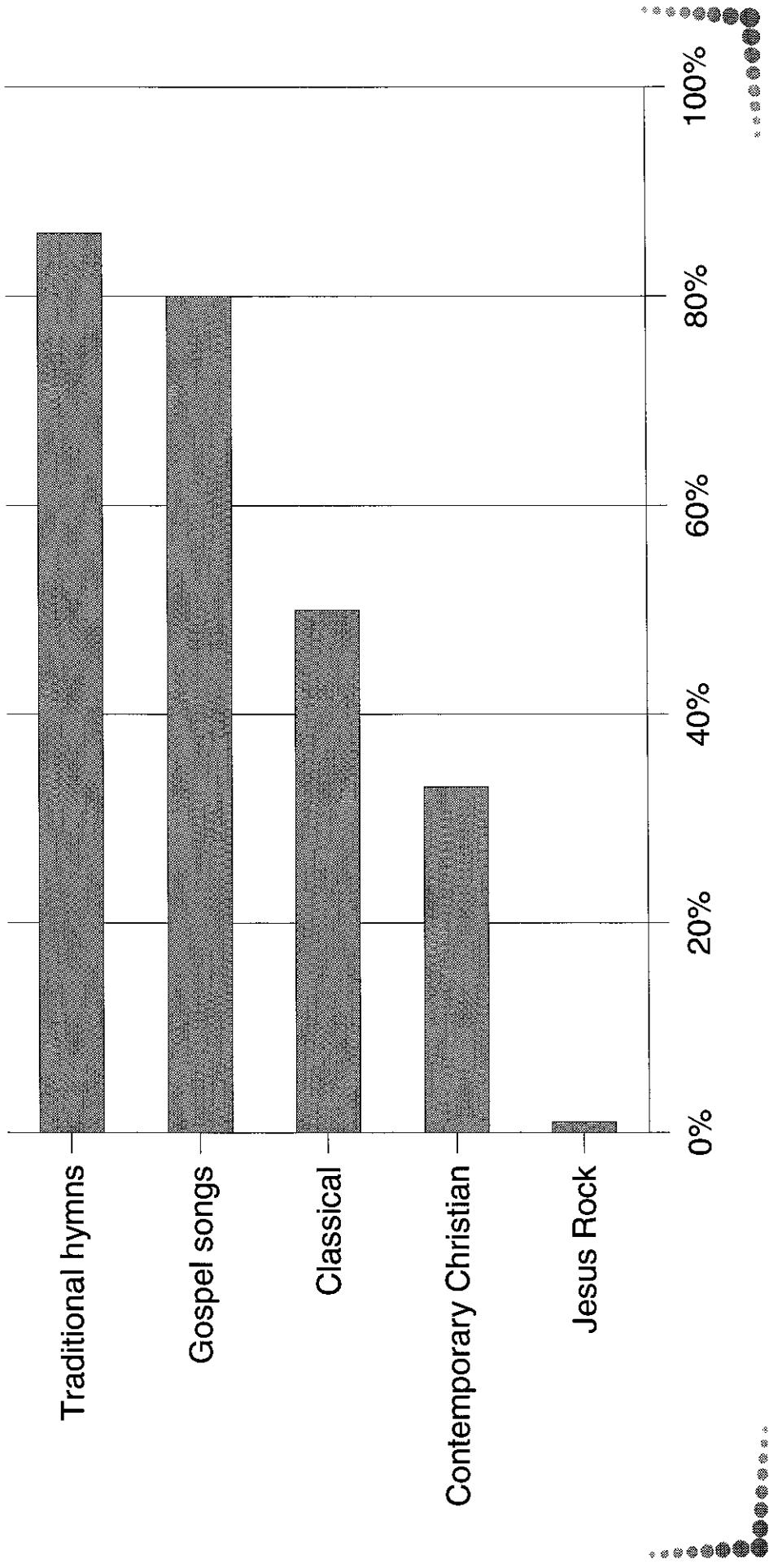
Sermon preferences

Comparisons by generation

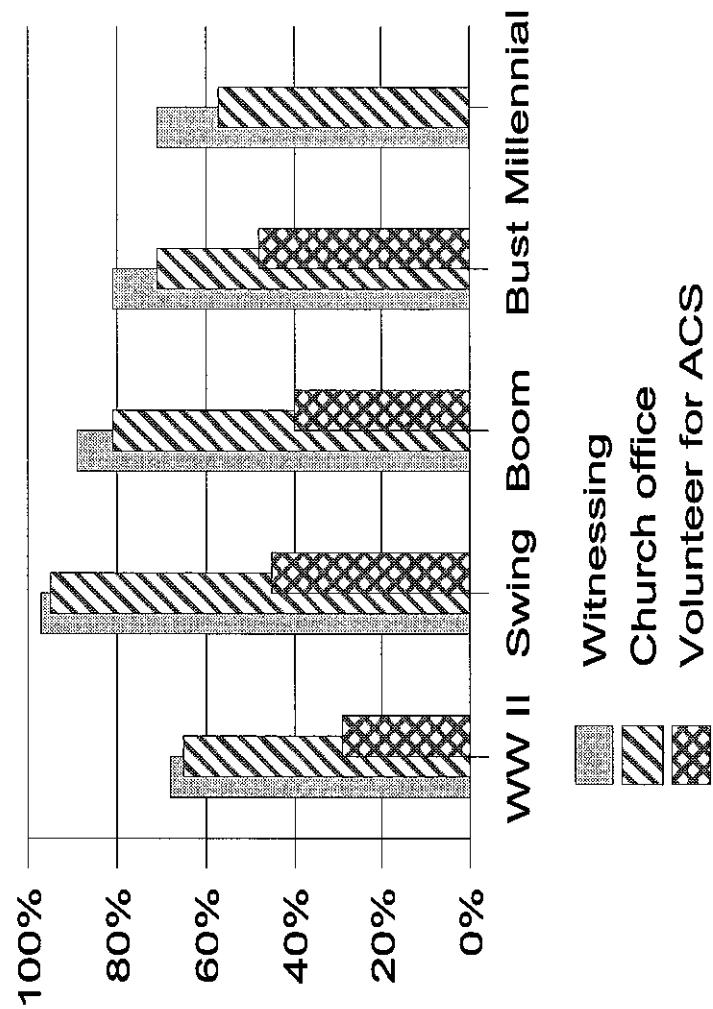


What kind of music would you prefer to hear on Sabbath at church?

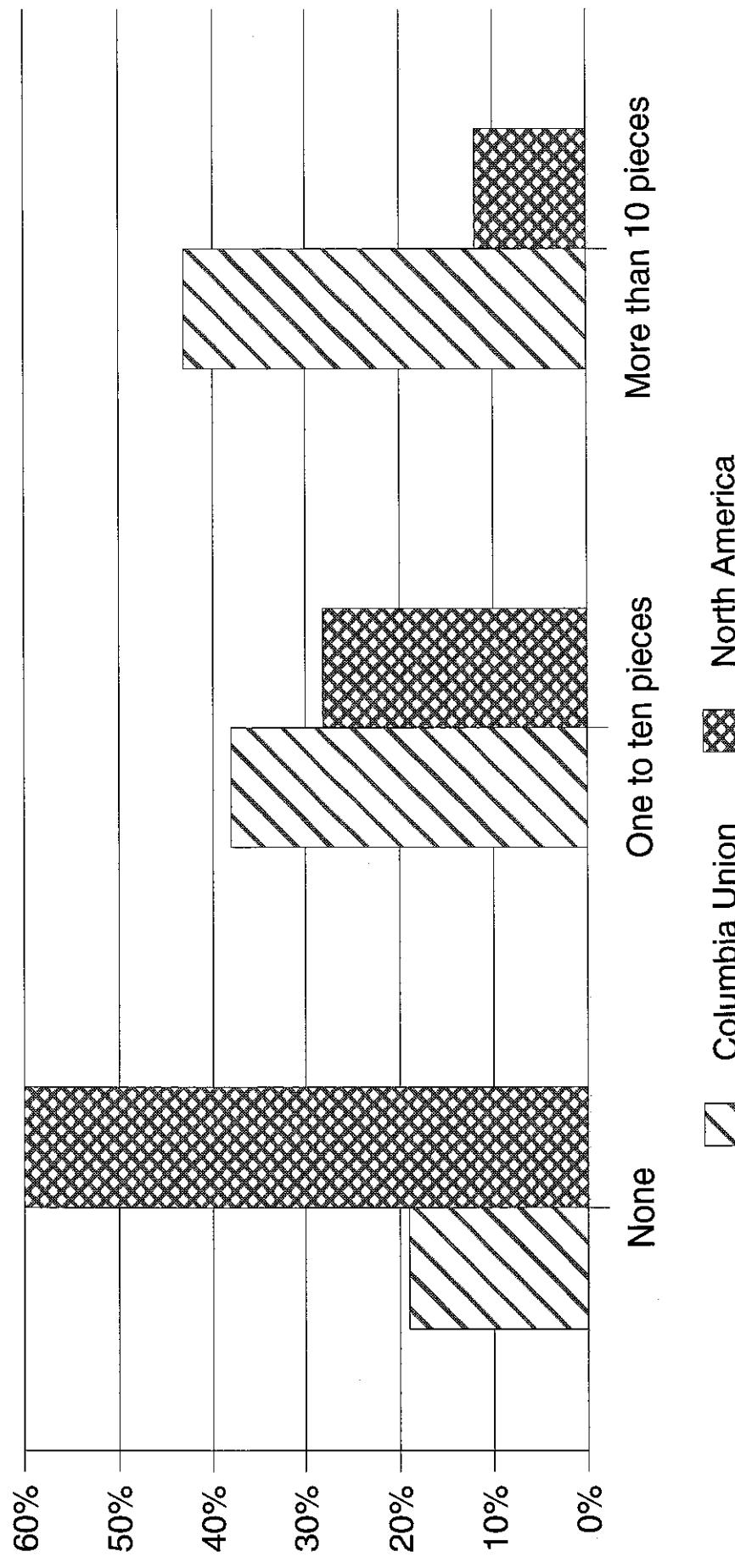
Columbia Union members . . . allowed to select more than one



- 83% involved in witnessing
- 78% hold a church office
- 37% volunteer for Adventist Community Services

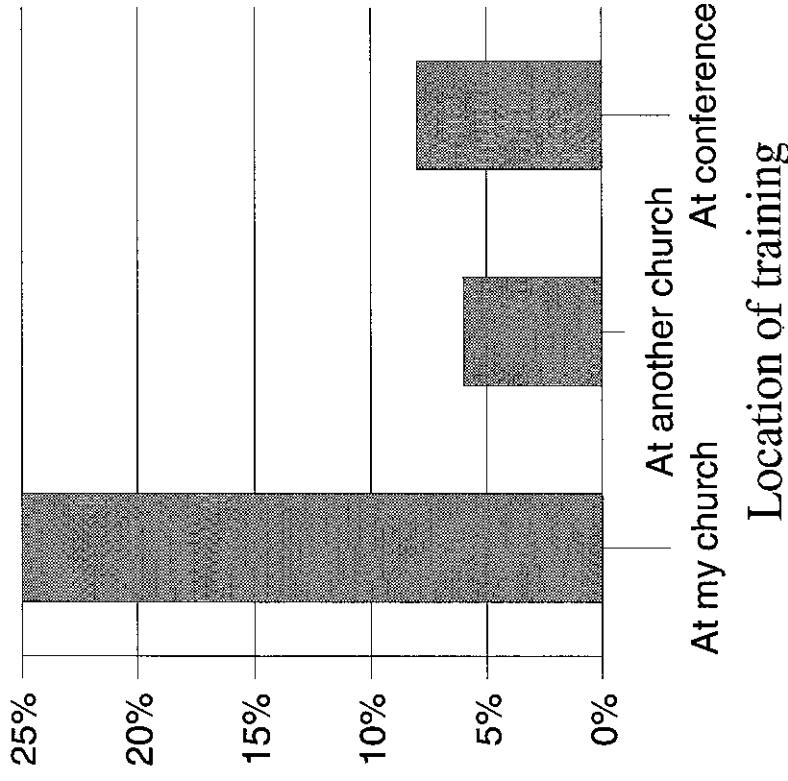


Literature given to non-members in the last month . . .



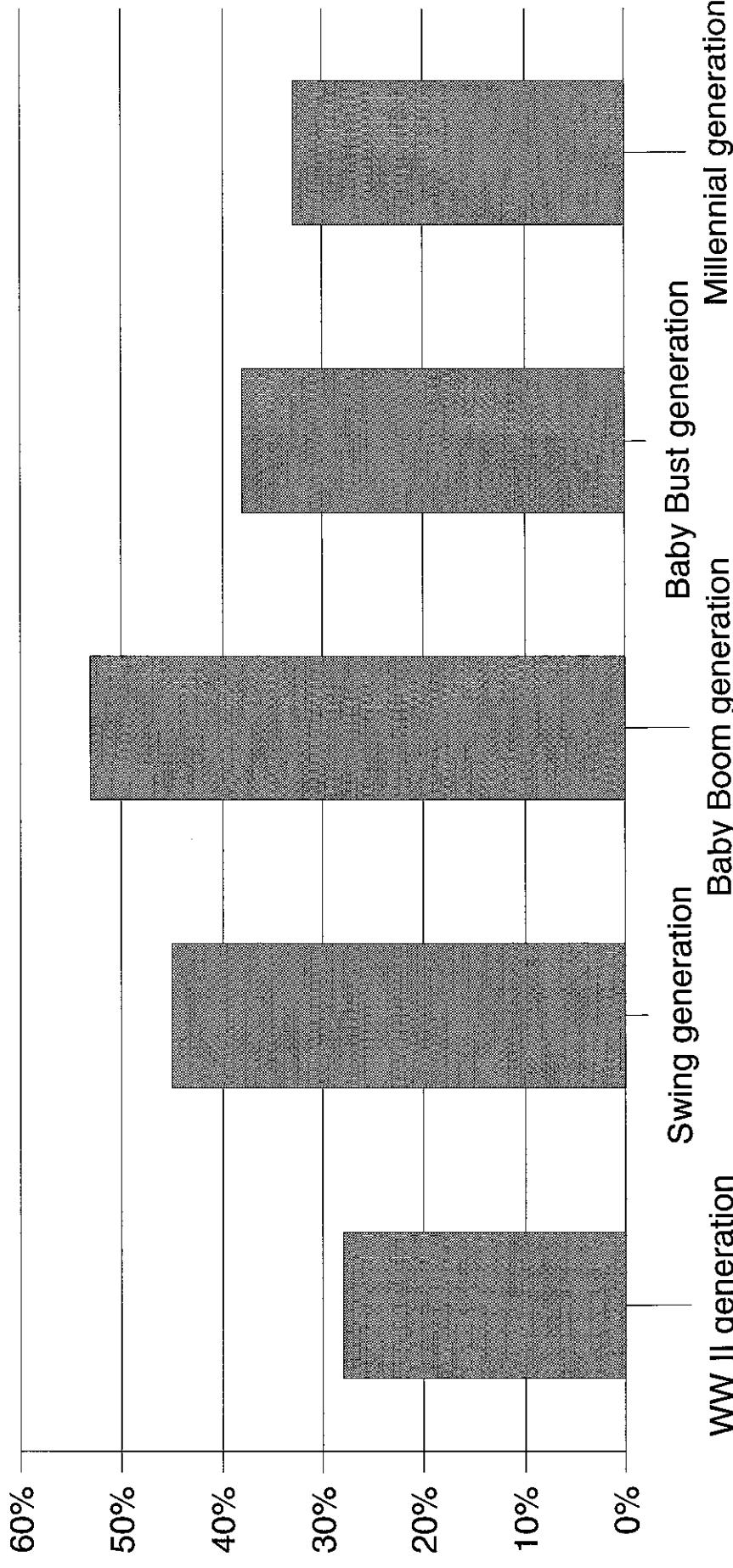
Attended witnessing or church ministries training in the last year

- 42% in Columbia Union
- 21% across North America

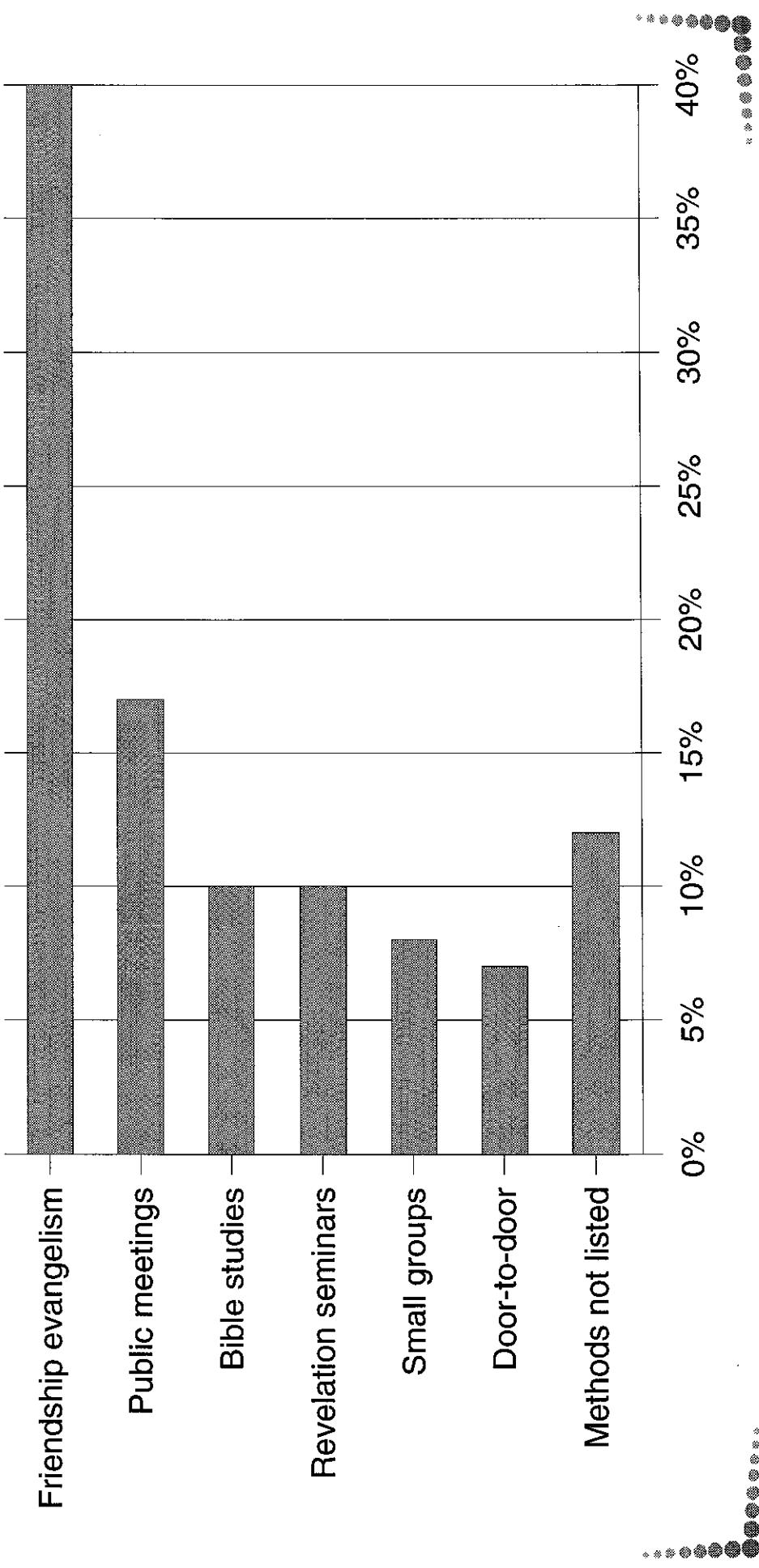


Attended witnessing or church ministries training in the last year

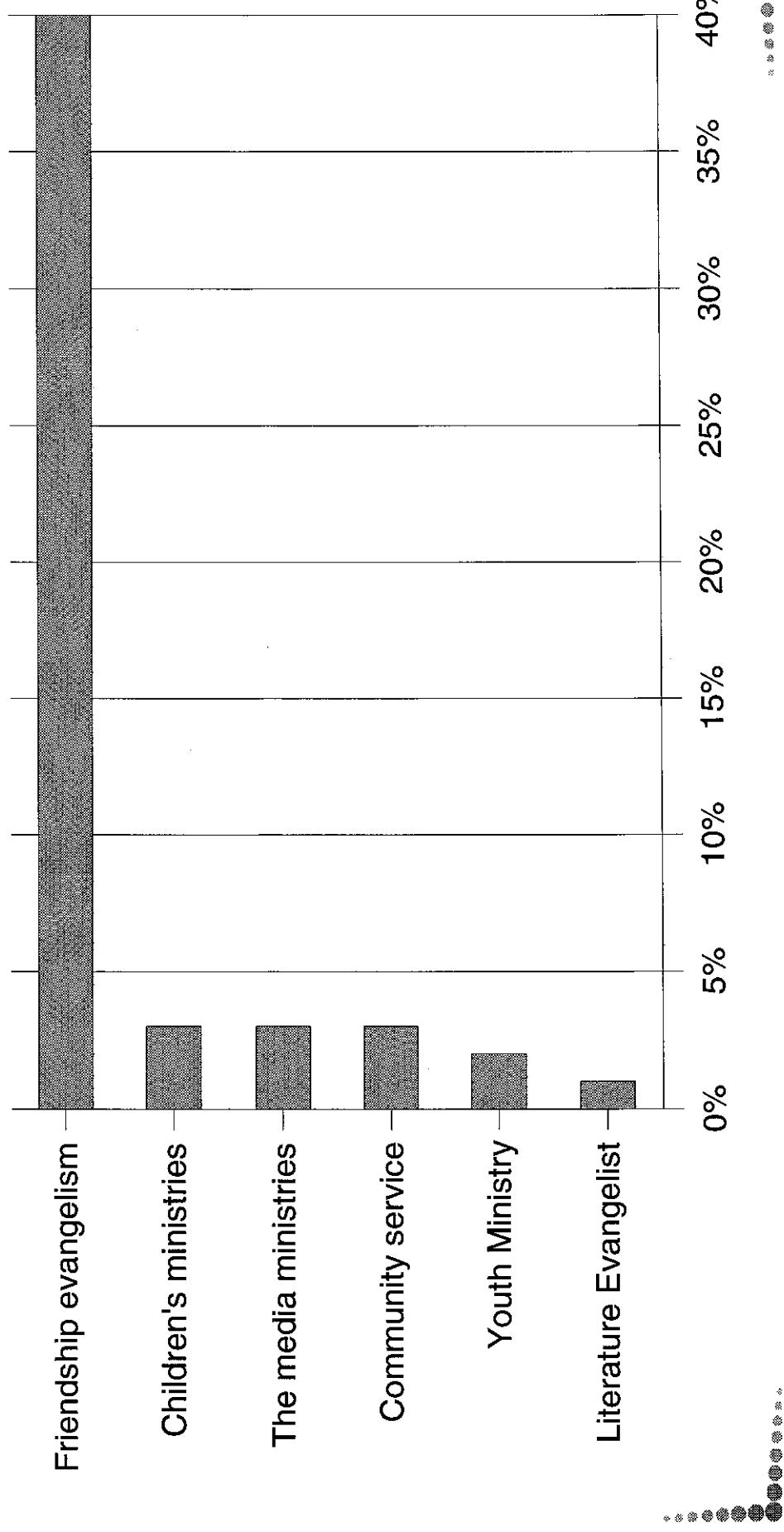
Comparing the generations . . .



What have you observed to be the most effective method for bringing new members into your local church?

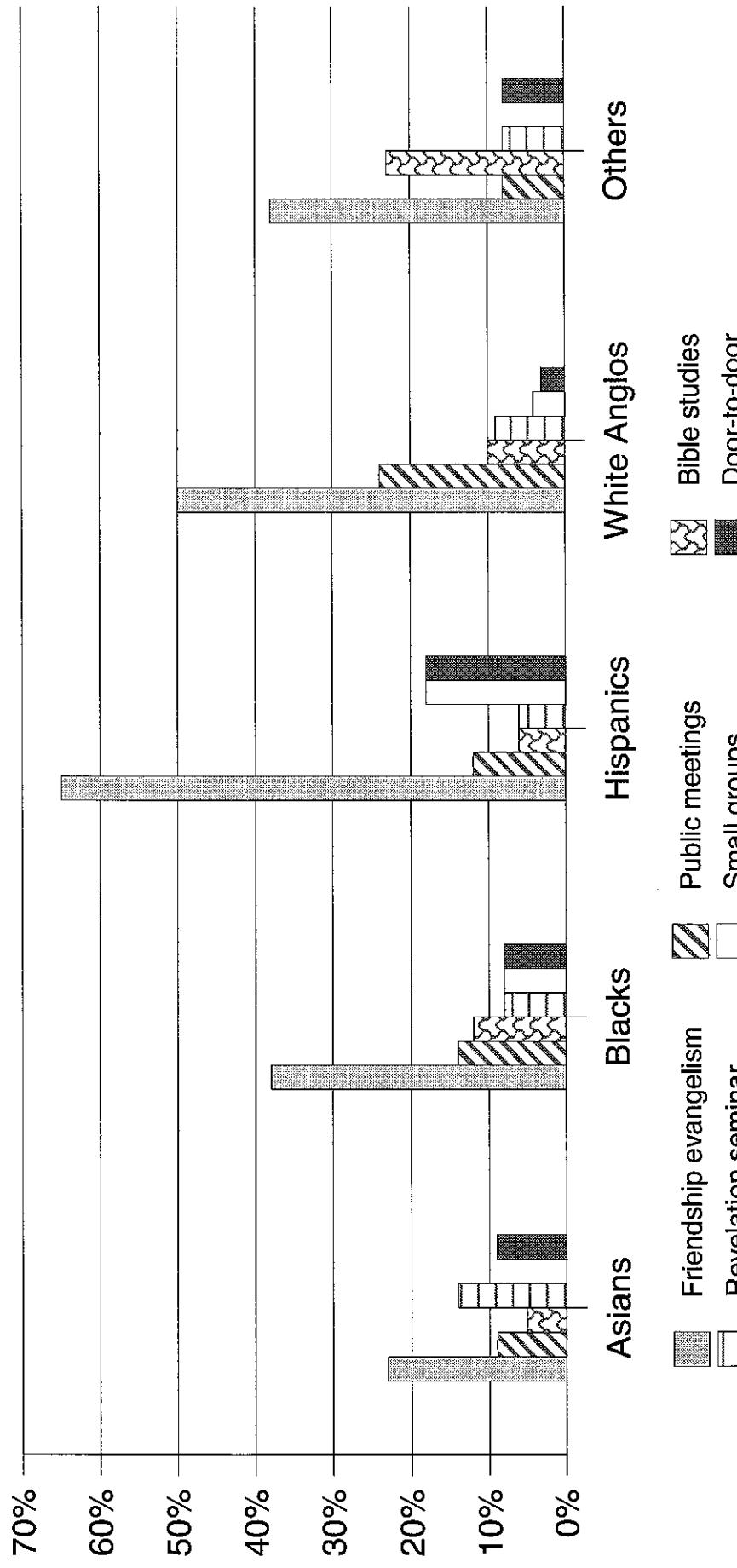


What have you observed to be the most effective method for bringing new members into your local church?



Most effective methods of soul-winning

Compared by ethnic group

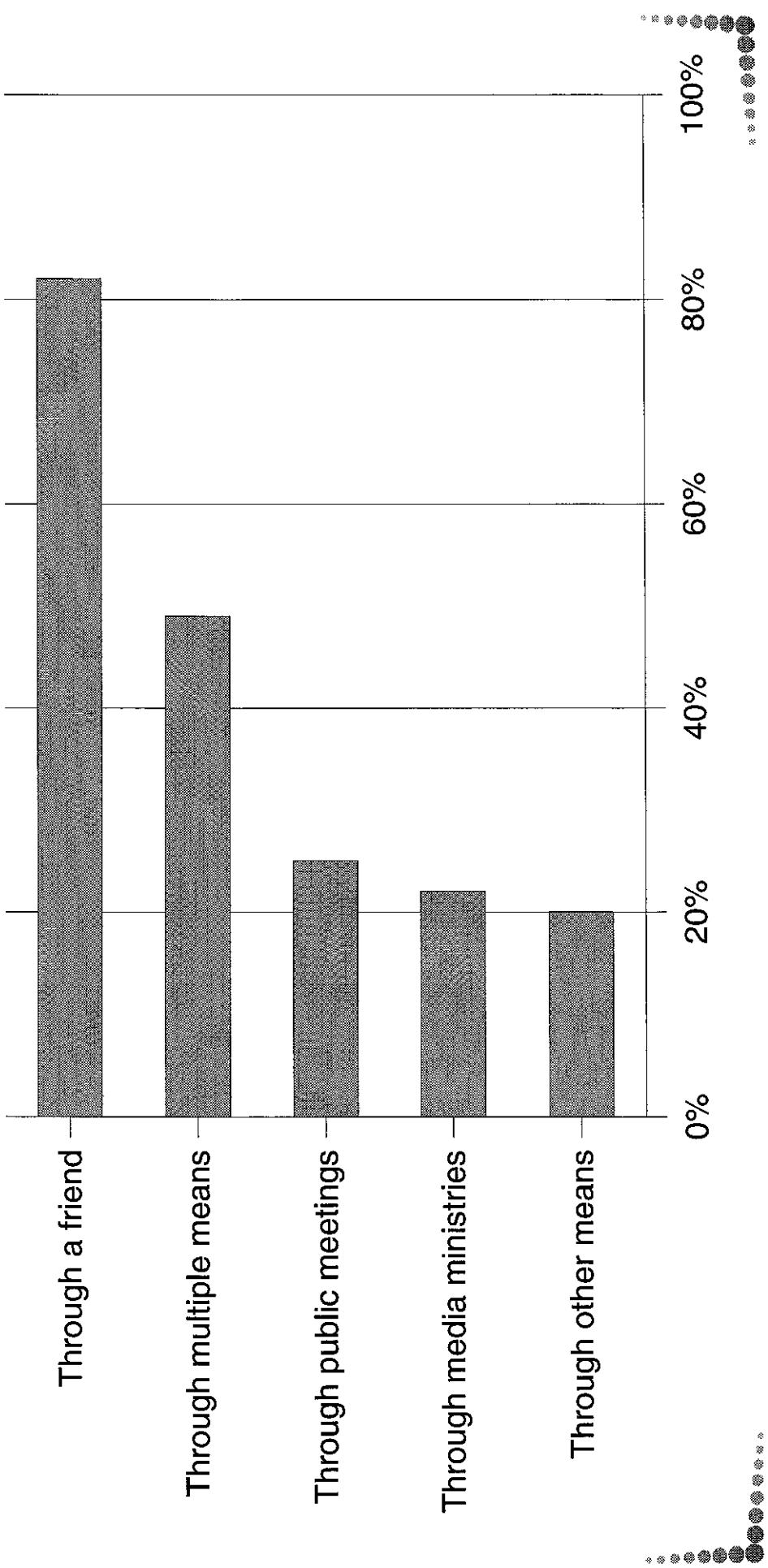


Participation in soul-winning

Members in the Columbia Union

- 65% know someone personally who joined the church during the last year
- 30% were personally involved in the conversion process (1 year)
- Across North America, 33% of Adventist members say they were personally involved in bringing in a new member during the last 3 years

How did the new member become aware of the Adventist Church?

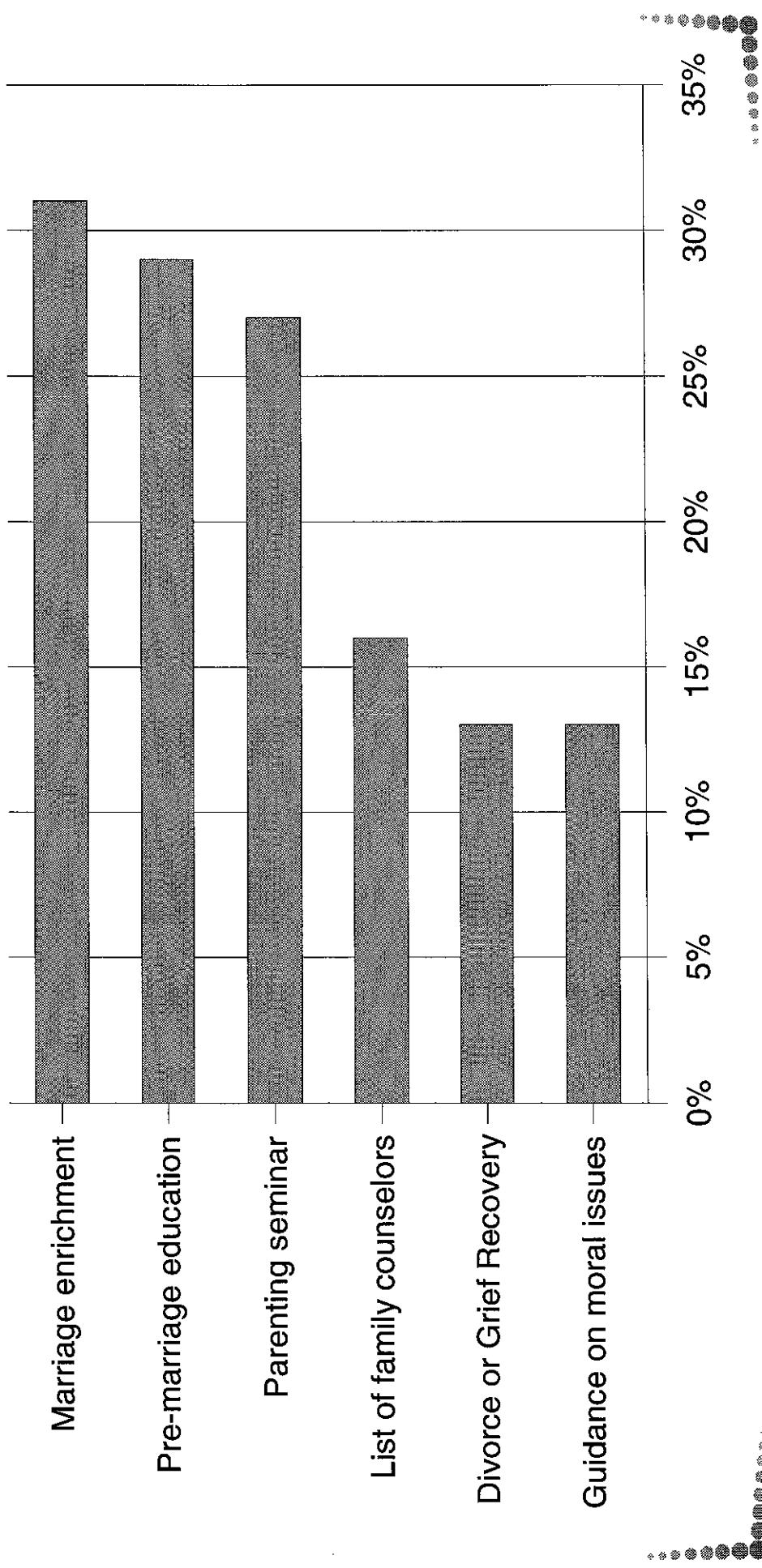


Inactive and former members

A widespread concern among Columbia Union members

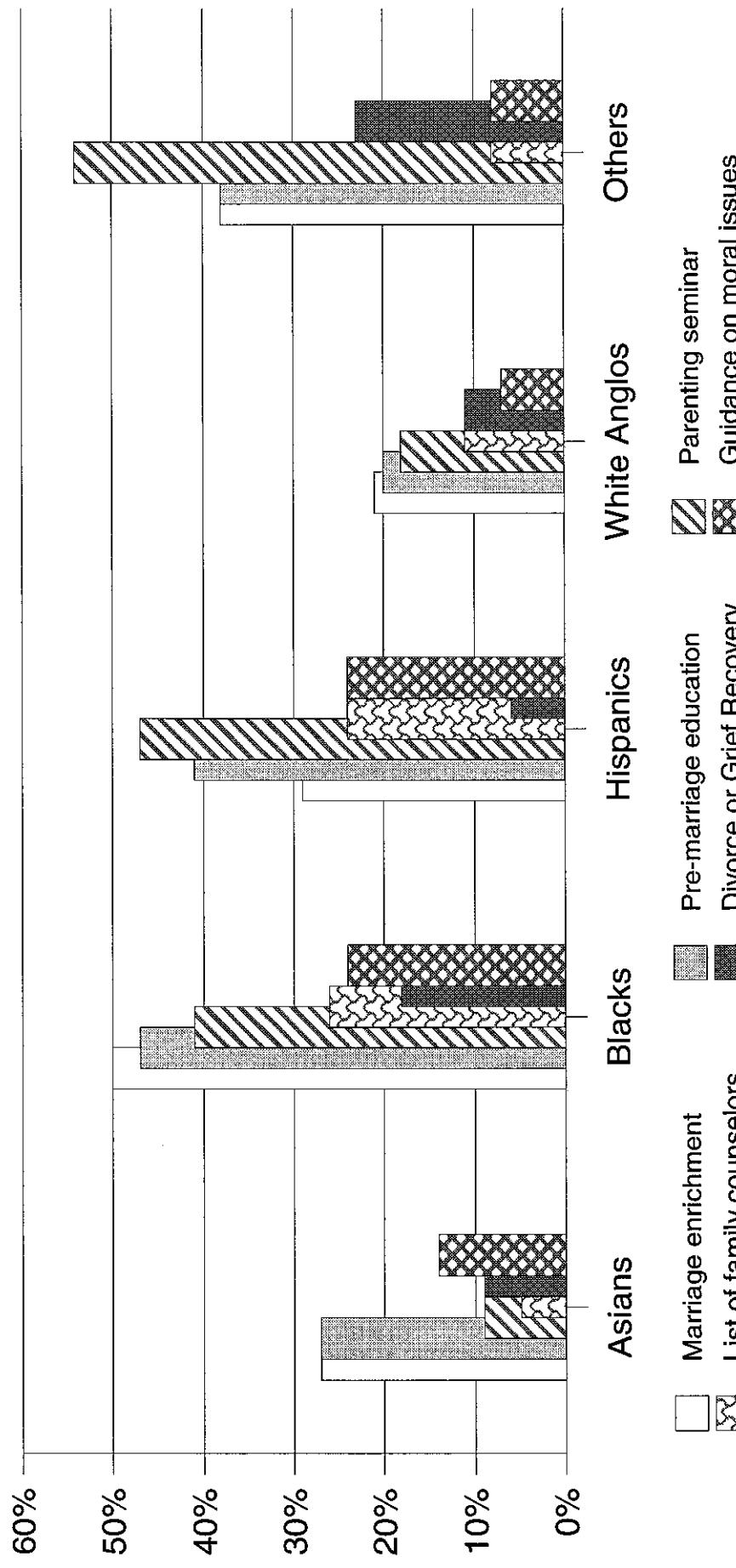
- 72% say they have a relative or friend who used to be an active member of the Adventist Church, but has since dropped out
- The longer a respondent has been a church member, the more likely they are to report that they have a loved one who has dropped out

Family life activities conducted in your church in the last year



Family life activities in the last year

Comparing major ethnic groups



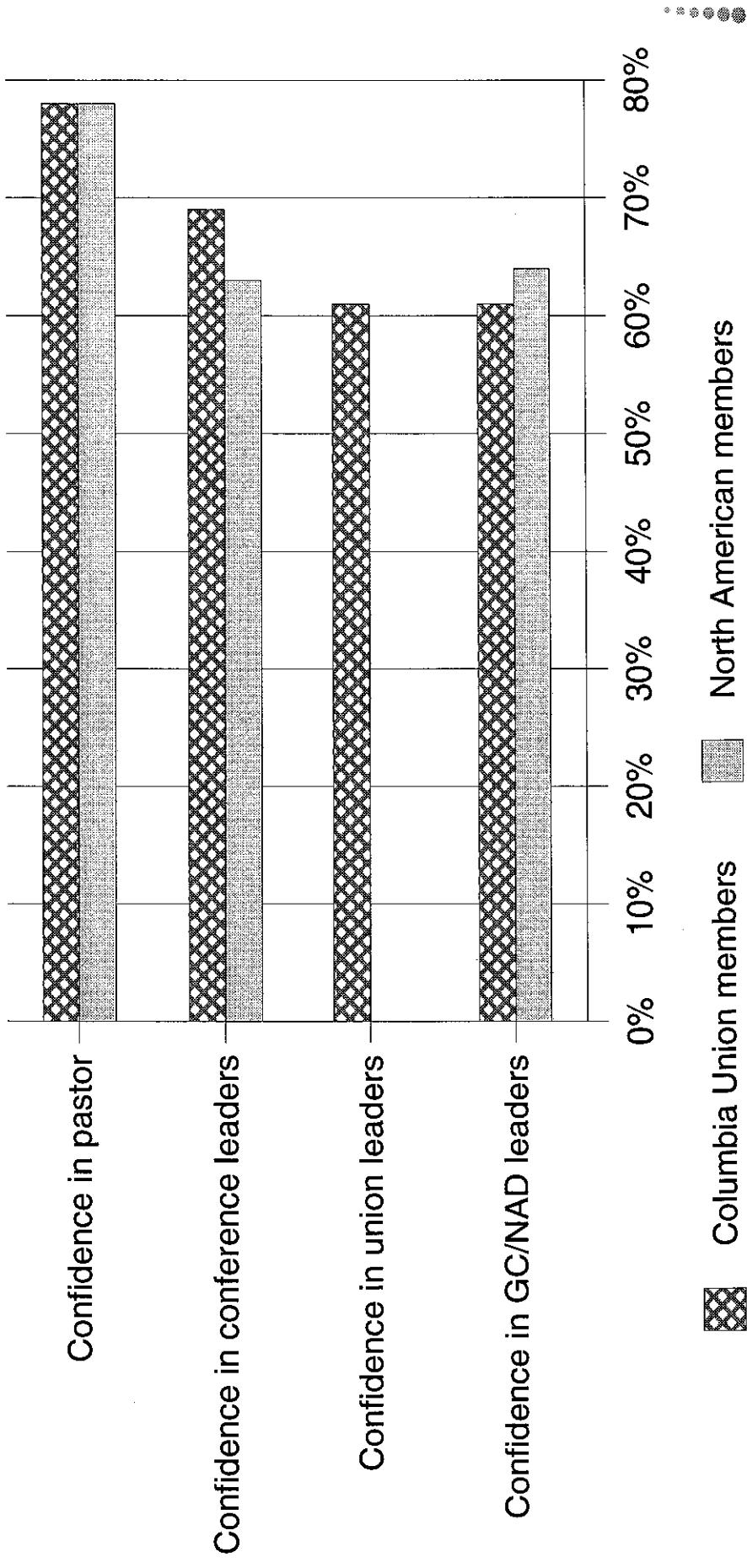
Humanitarian activities

Members in the Columbia Union

- 83% want the Adventist Church to do more to meet the needs of the homeless, inner-city children and families in crisis
- All generational, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic categories are equally strong in this view
- The only segment where it drops significantly; 63% of new members baptized in last 5 years

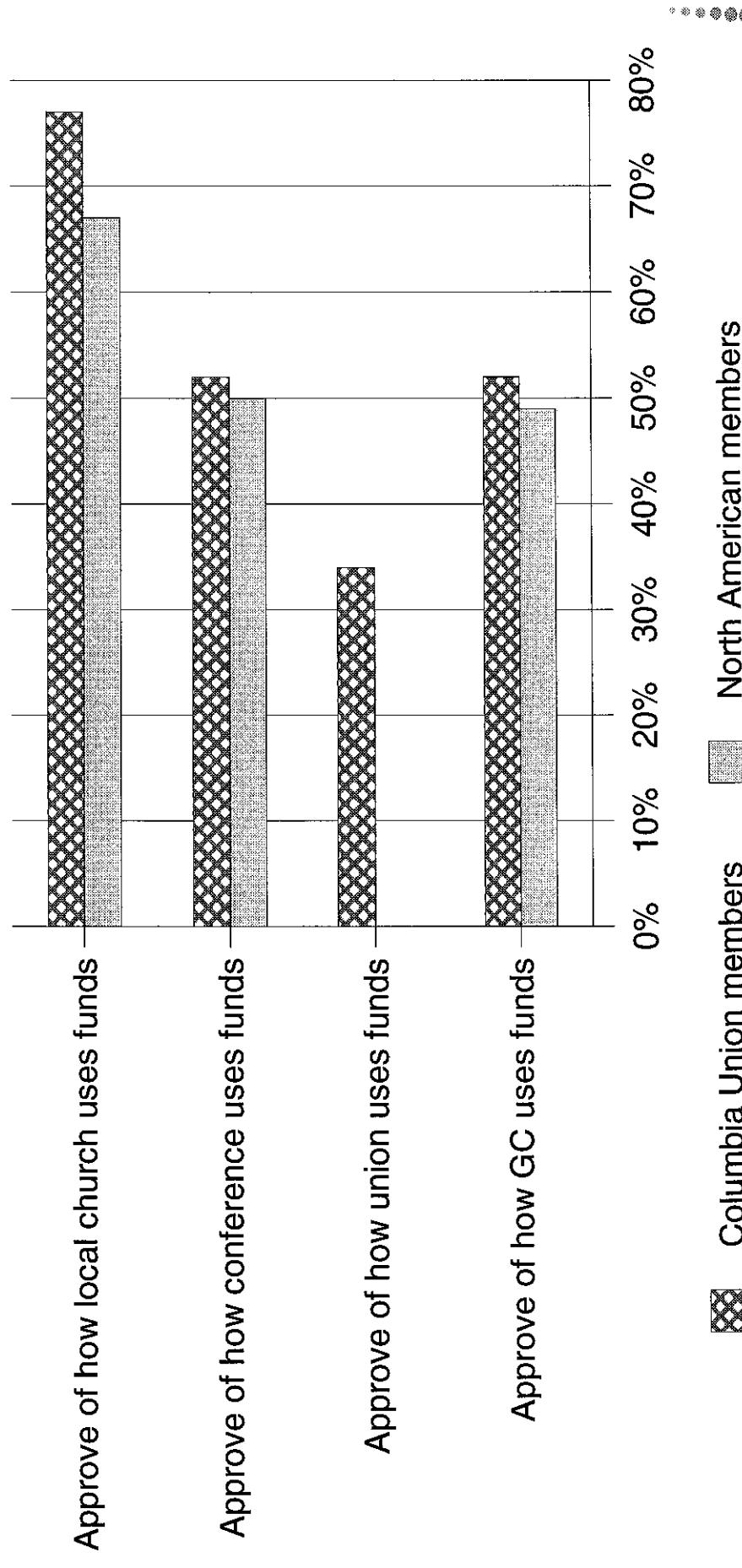
Confidence in church leadership

Attitudes of Columbia Union members



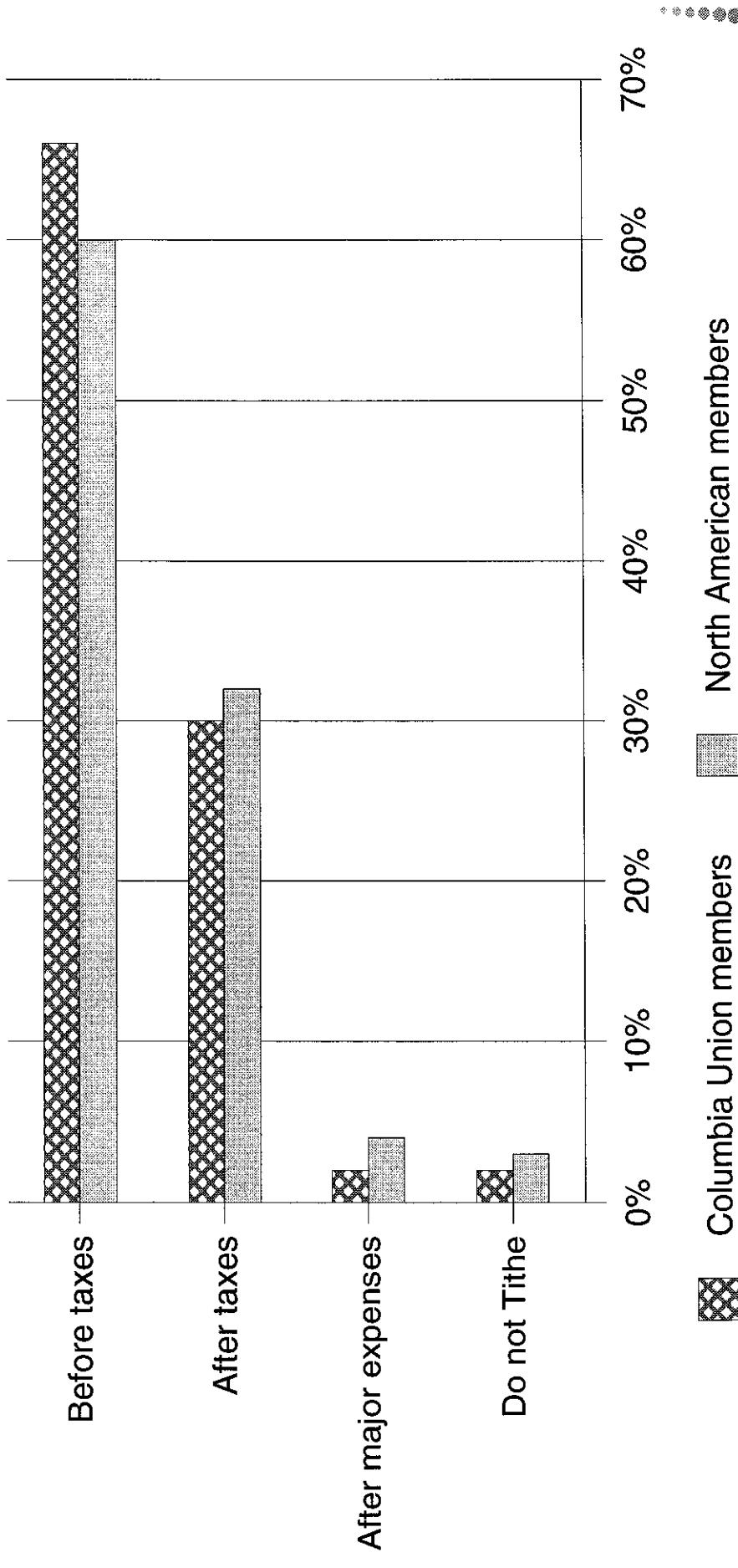
Approval of how funds are used

Attitudes of Columbia Union members



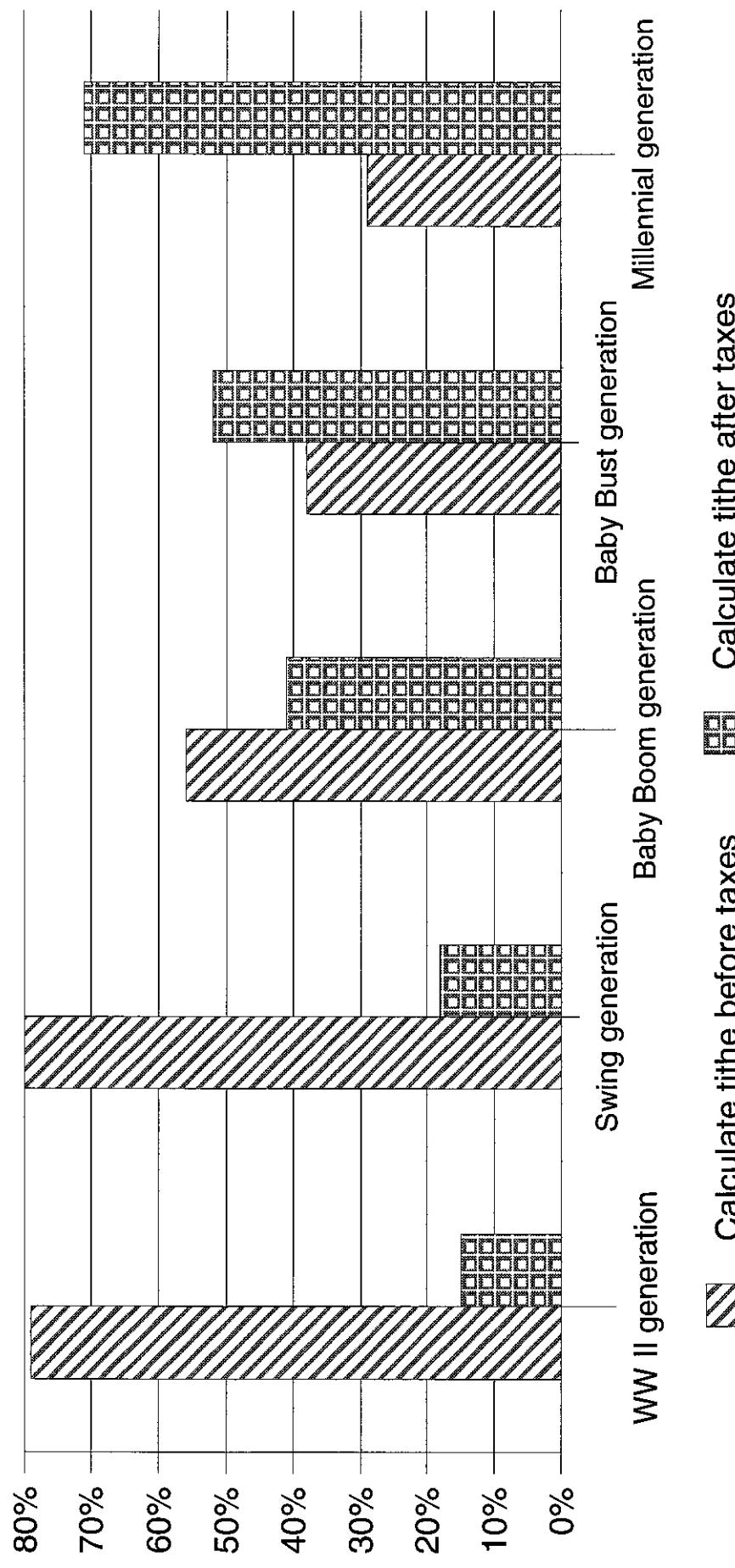
How members figure their Tithe

Columbia Union members compared to NAD members



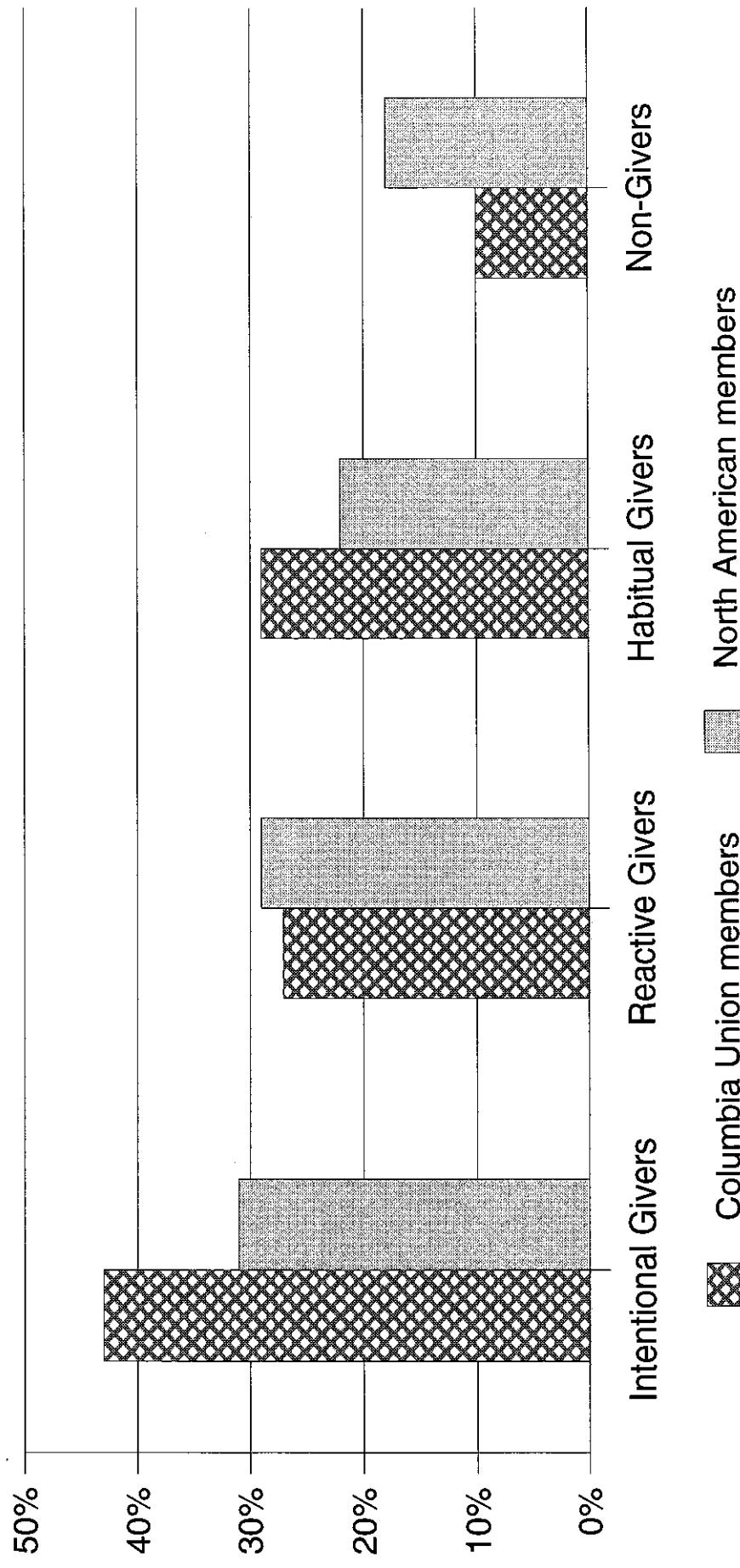
How members figure their Tithe

A generational shift may be underway



Giving styles of members

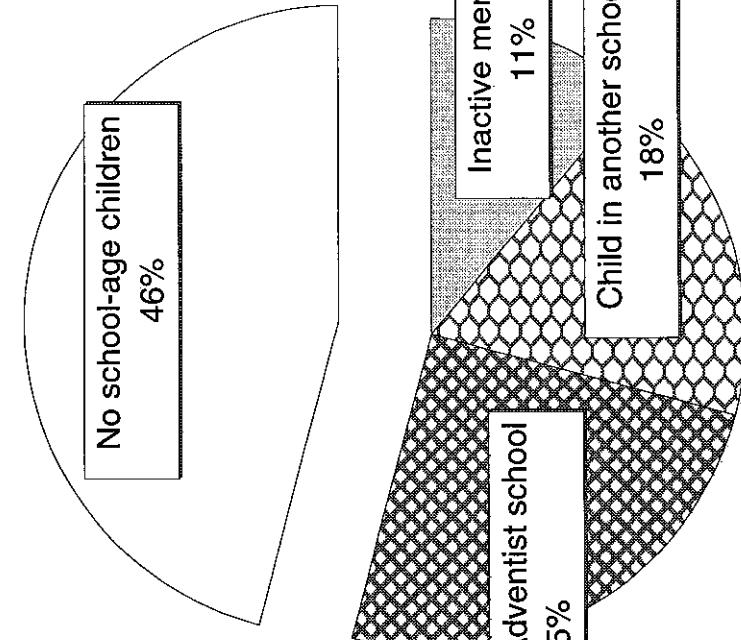
Comparing Columbia Union members to NAD members



Christian Education

Participation by member households in the Columbia Union

- 52% of children in active member homes are in Adventist schools
- Inactive members are not likely to have children in Adventist school(s)
- Average of 1.5 children enrolled in Adventist school(s) in each participating household



Why children of church members are not in Adventist schools

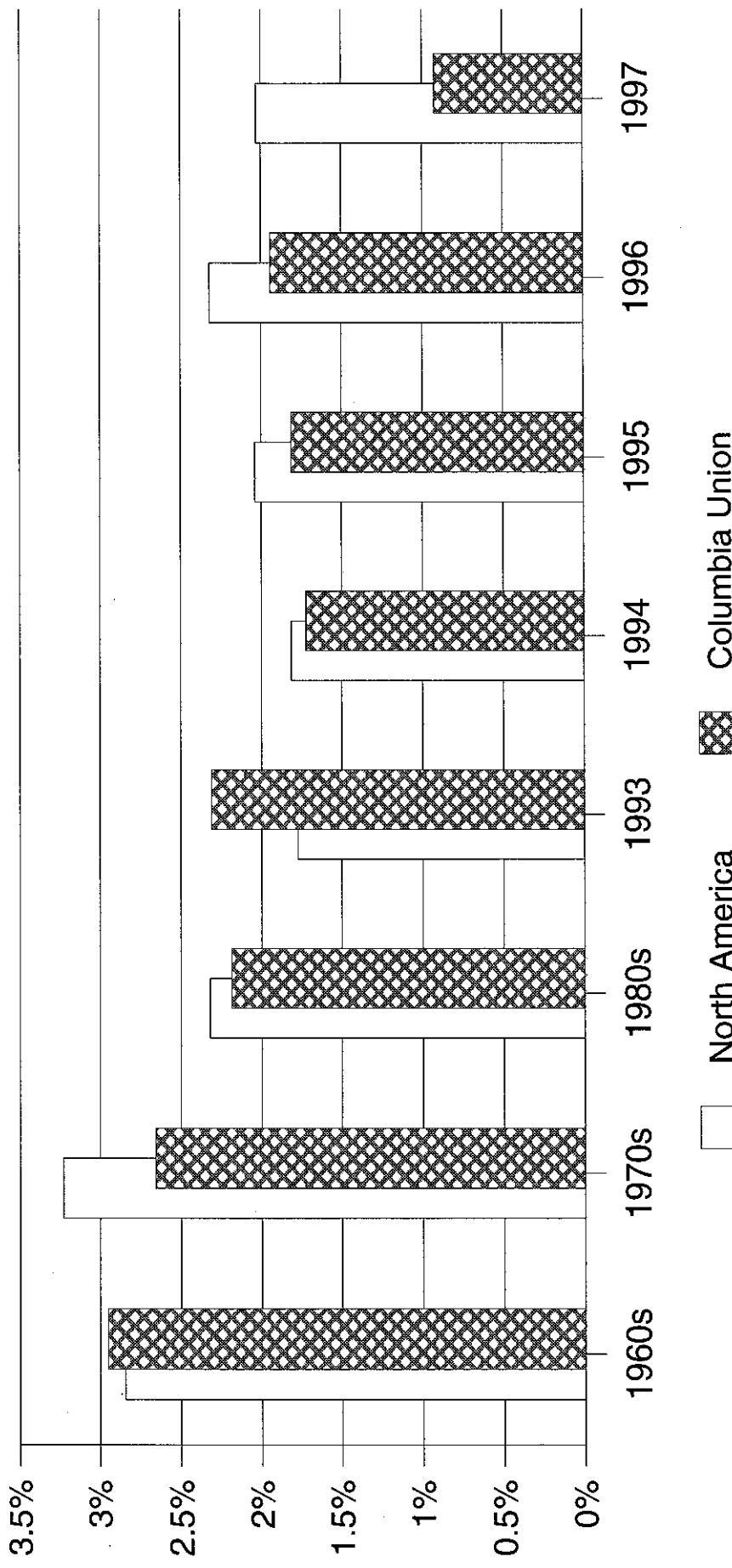
- 15% because of the cost and family finances
- 7% because of distance
- 6% because specific course is not available
- 3% because Adventist school is too crowded
- 3% because of poor academic quality
- 2% because of poor spiritual life at the school
- 1% because my spouse will not allow it
- 63% because of reasons not on the list

Ministry Trends

An Information Base for Strategic Planning

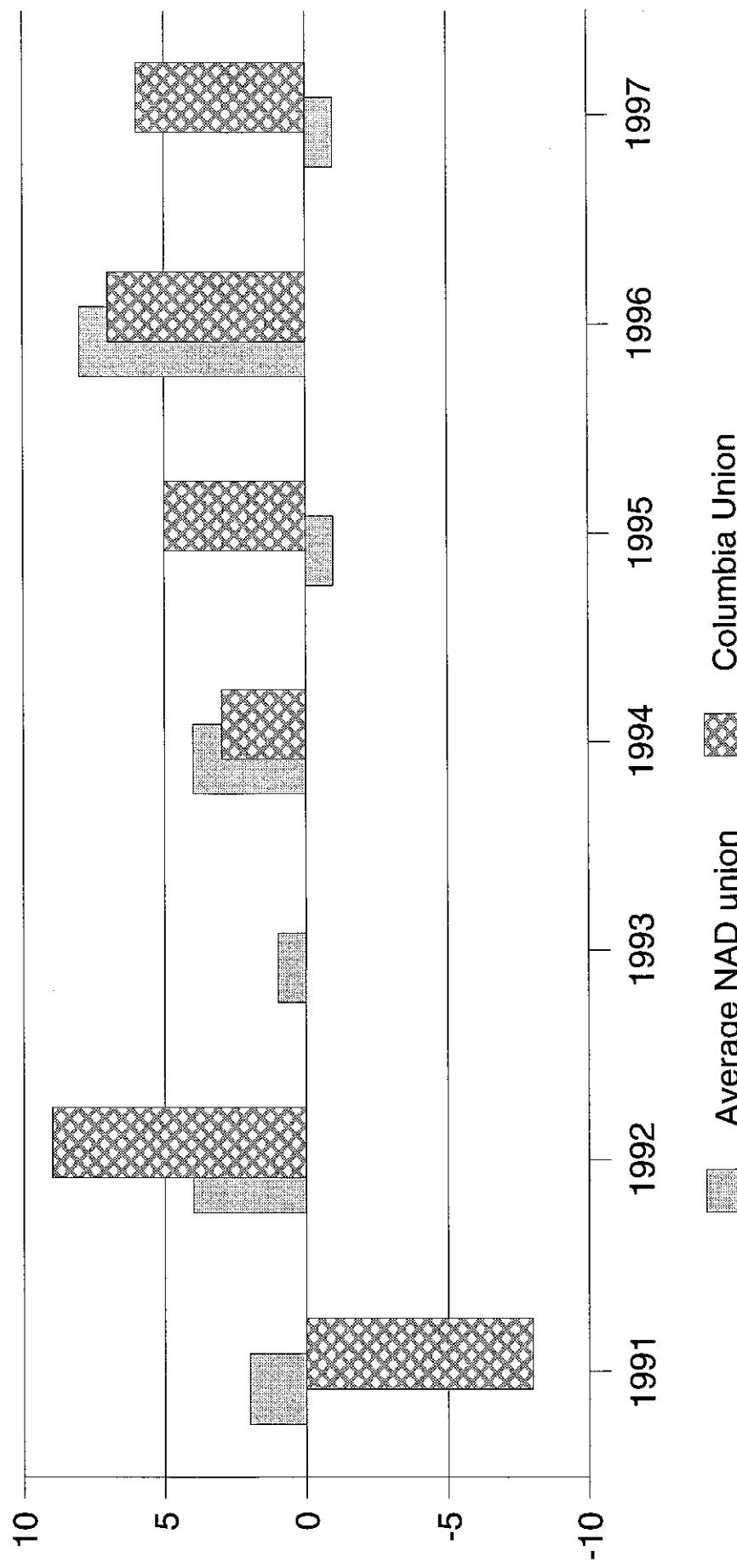
Church Growth

Annual Growth Rate for the Columbia Union



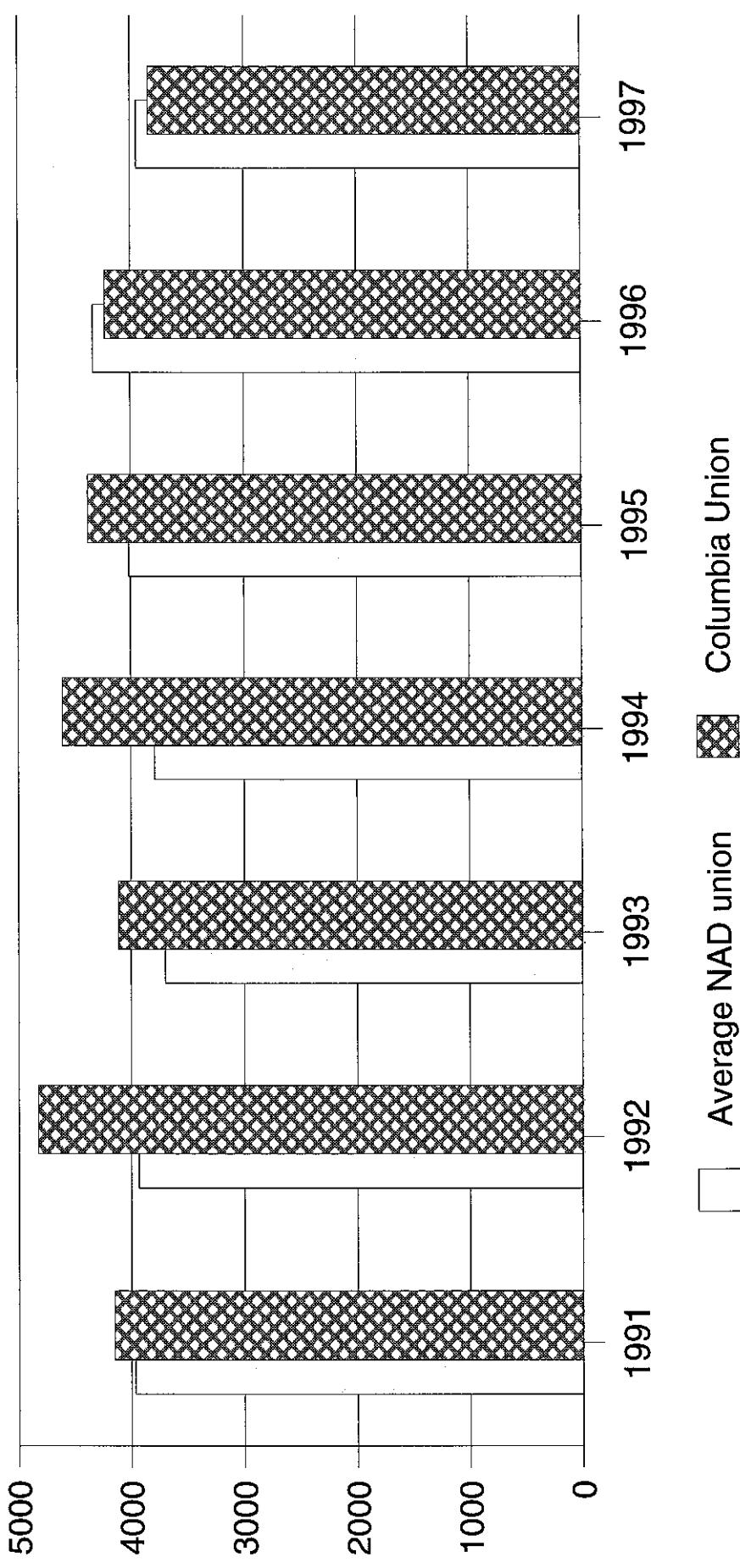
Church Planting

Annual Growth in Number of Local Churches



Evangelism

Baptisms and Professions of Faith



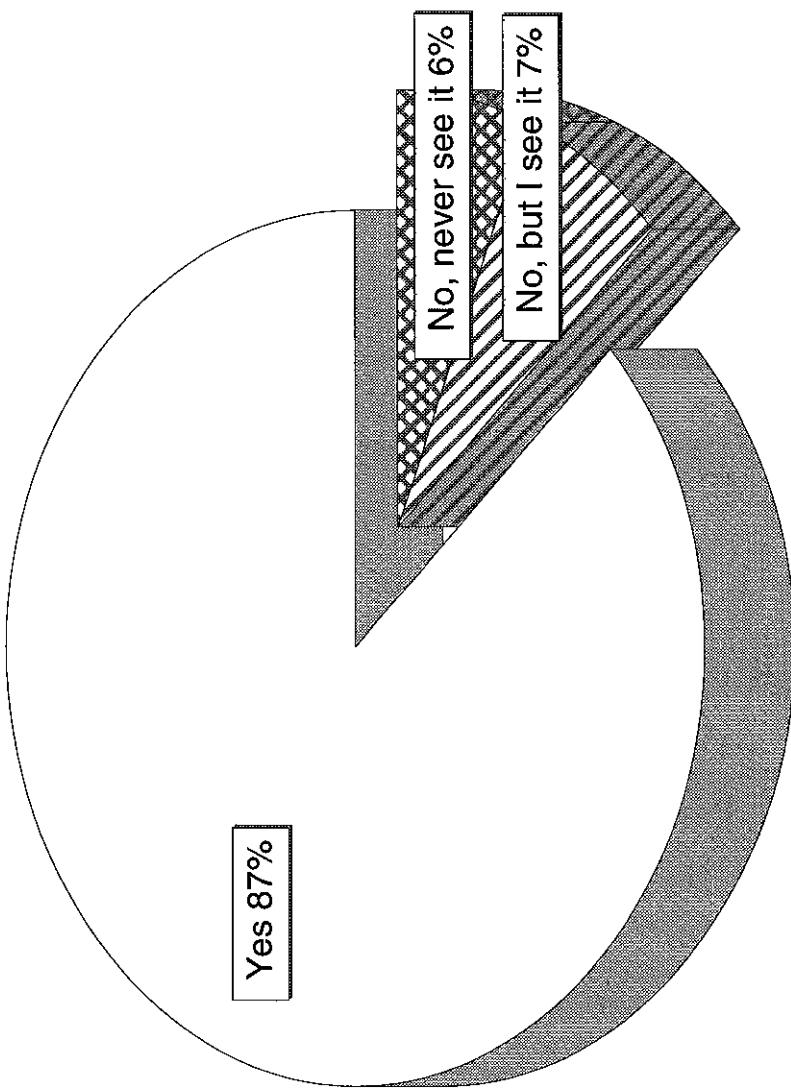
Local church ministries leaders

Respondents in Columbia Union who head a department or lead a group in their local church such as a SS division, Pathfinder Club, family life committee, etc. . . .

- 88% say they know about the PlusLine 800-number help desk
- 83% report they have attended department training in the last year
- 79% get resource catalogs in the mail
- 75% have a copy of the department handbook

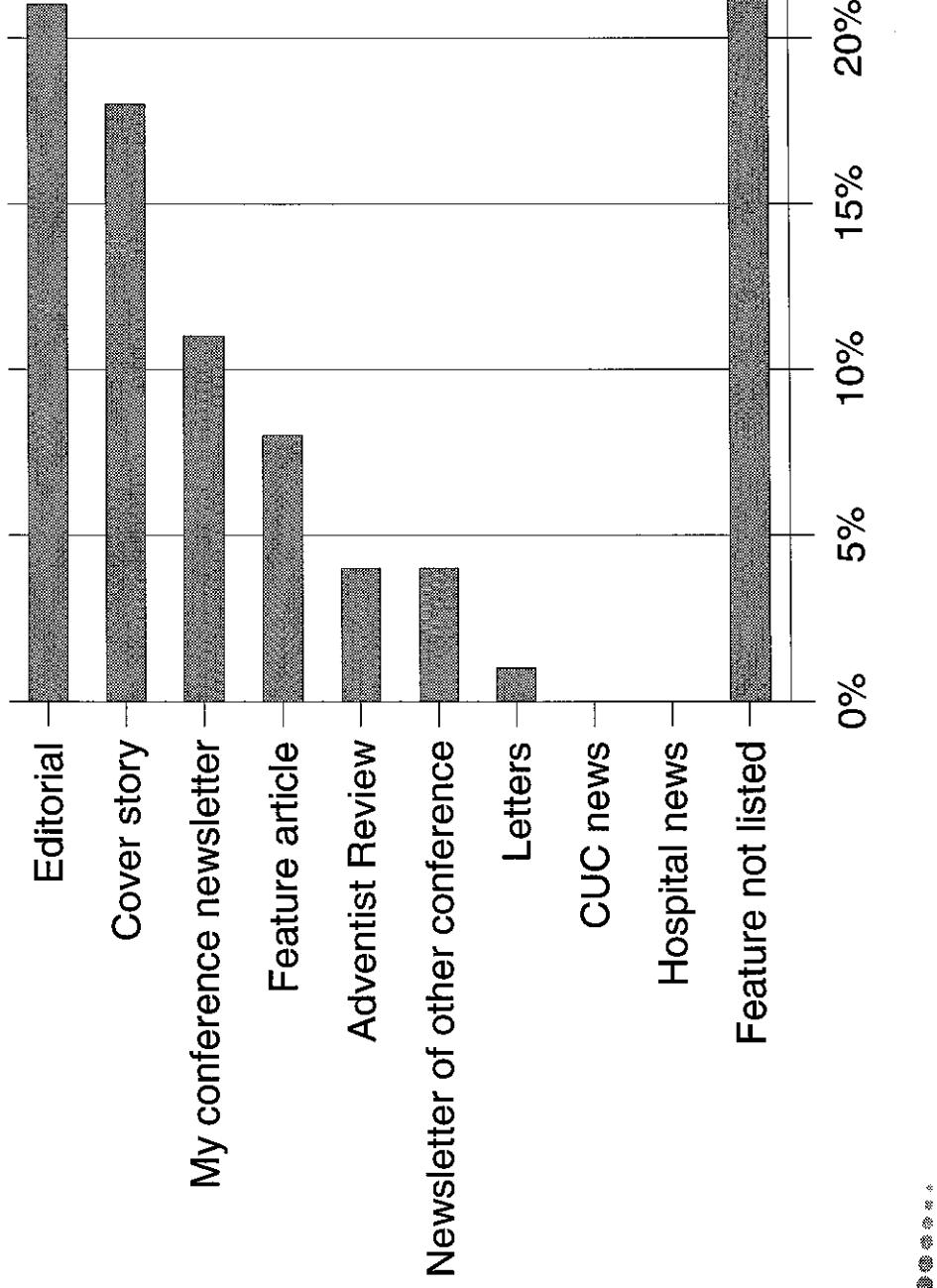
The Visitor

Does it come to your home regularly?



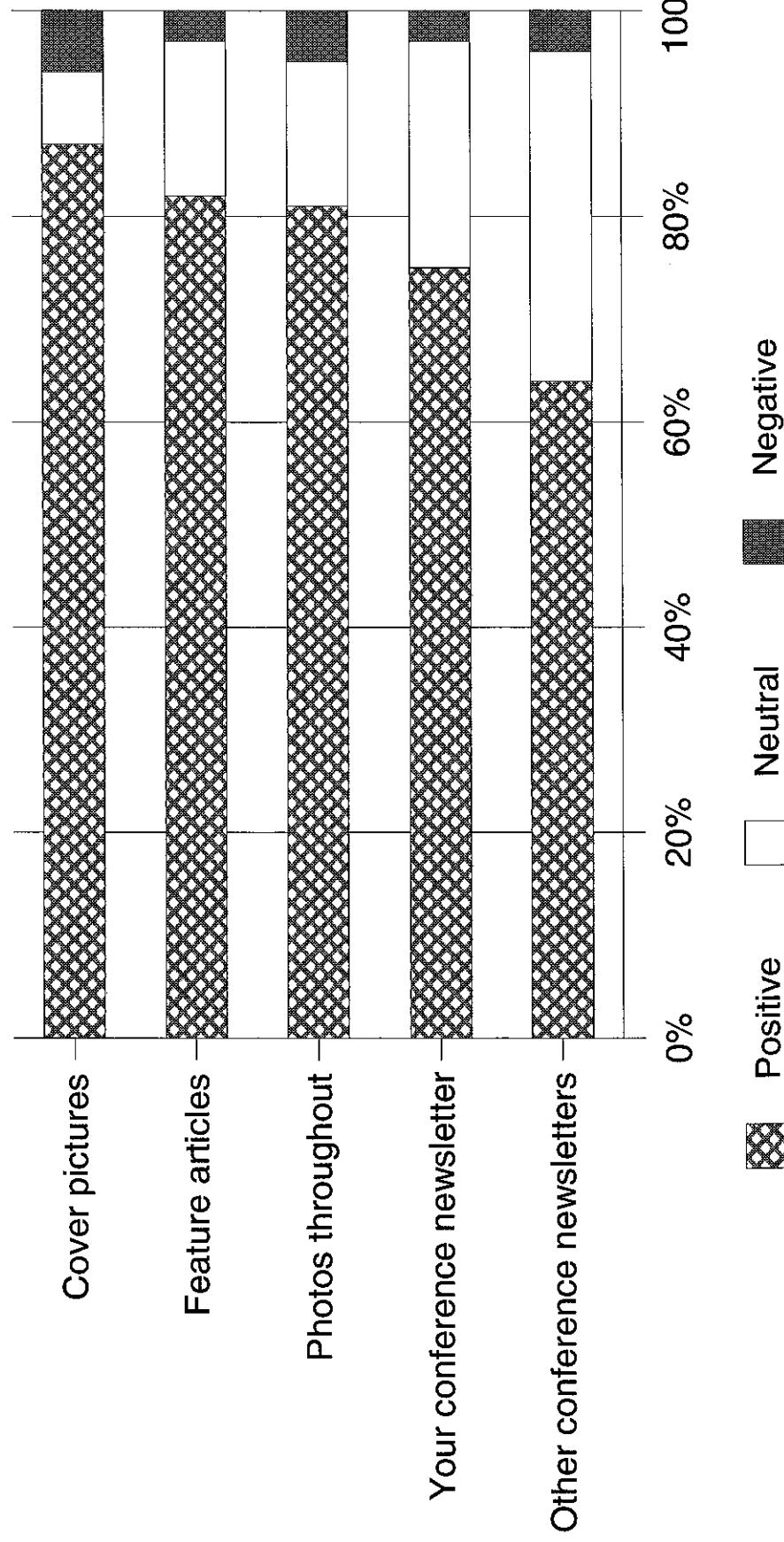
The Visitor

What do you read first when it comes?



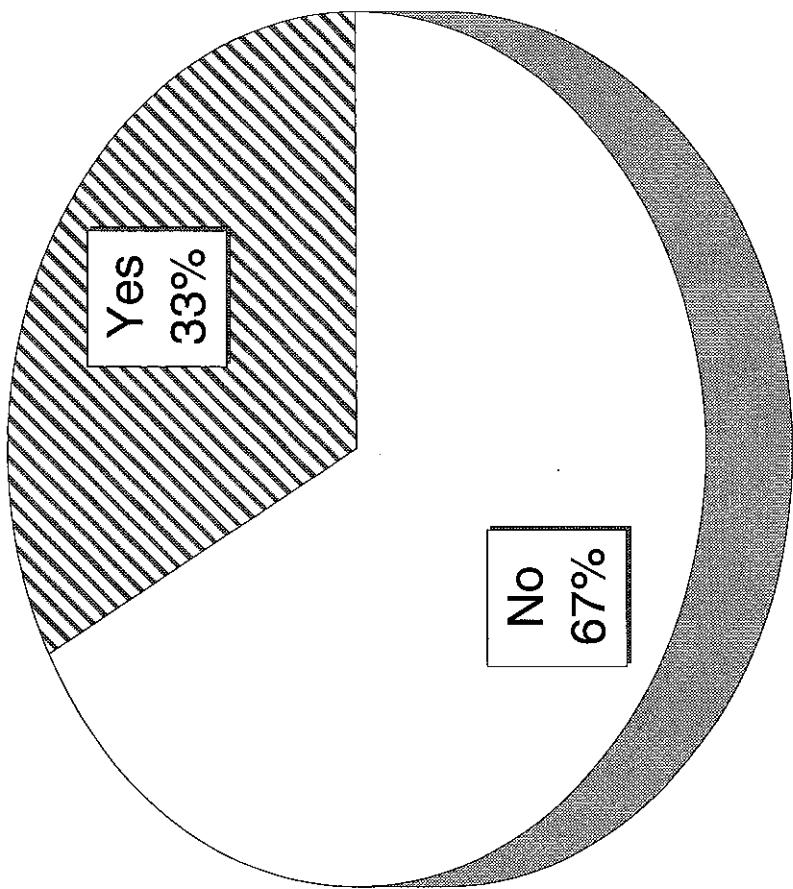
The Visitor

Evaluation of specific elements



The Visitor

Have you ever purchased something or responded to an ad?



Context for Mission

An Information Base for Strategic Planning

An Urban Mission

- At 39 million, the Columbia Union has the largest population living in metropolitan areas of any of the union conferences in the NAD
- The others:
 - Pacific Union — 37 million
 - Southern Union — 34 million
 - Atlantic Union — 28 million
 - Lake Union — 25 million
 - Southwestern Union — 22 million
 - Mid-America Union — 14 million
 - North Pacific Union — 7 million

Major Metropolitan Areas

10 of the 25 largest are in the Columbia Union

- 5 in the Bo-Wash Megalopolis
 - Philadelphia-Wilmington—5.9 million
 - Washington—4.3 million
 - Baltimore—2.4 million
 - NJ Suburbs of NYC—2.3 million
 - Newark—1.9 million
- 1 in the newest major metro area in the U.S.
 - Norfolk-Va. Beach-Newport News —1.5 million

Major Metropolitan Areas

10 of the 25 largest are in the Columbia Union

- 2 in the Rust Belt
 - Cleveland-Akron—2.9 million
 - Pittsburgh—2.4 million
- 2 in the Midwest
 - Cincinnati—1.8 million
 - Columbus—1.4 million

Appalachia

A major rural region

- Half of the population of Appalachia is in the Columbia Union
 - In West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Virginia
- It is America's poorest rural region
- It also represents an unreached people group for the Adventist Church

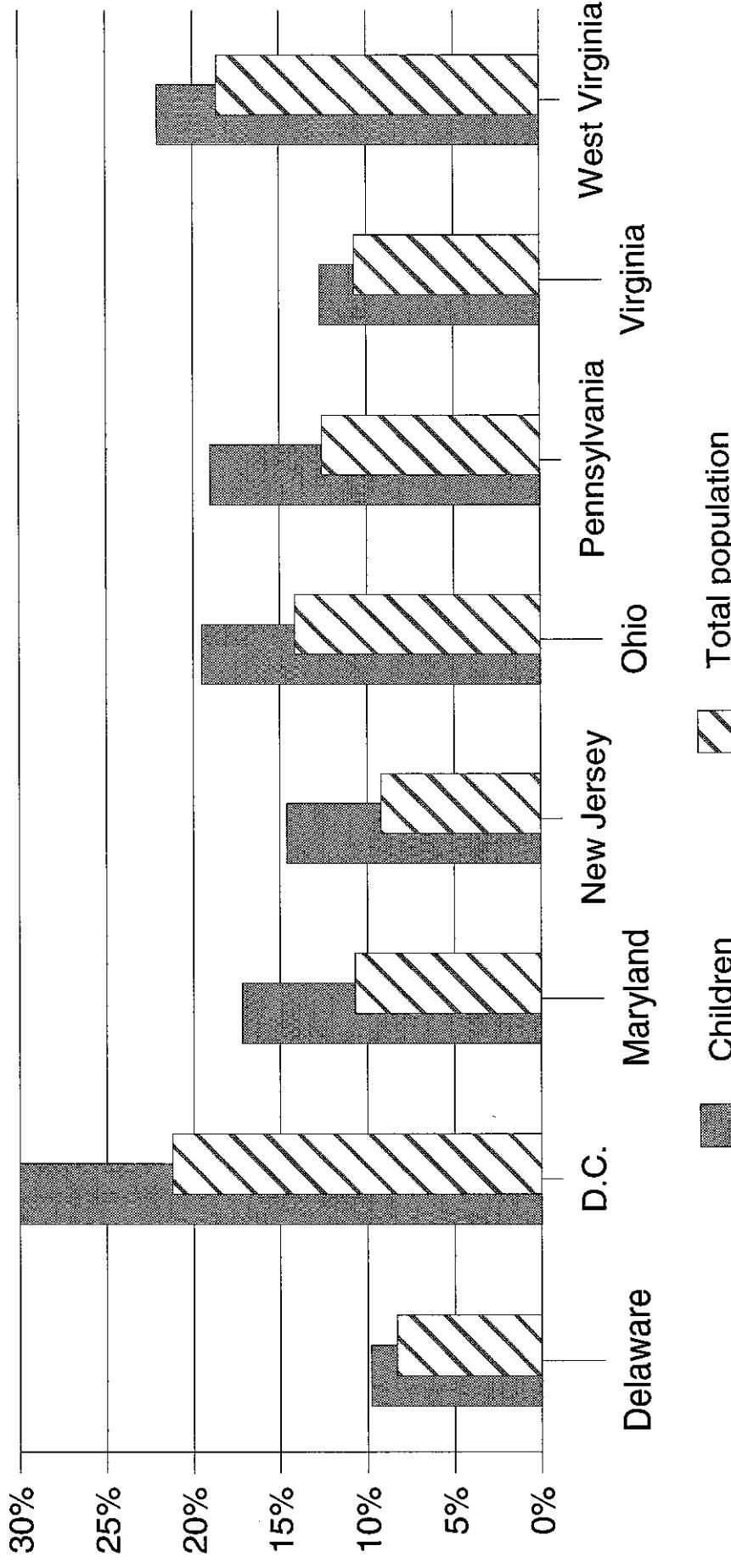
Poverty

In the eight-state territory of the Columbia Union

- Poverty correlates with most other human needs and social concerns--malnutrition, disease, addictions, crime, lack of education, unemployment, domestic violence
- 5.5 million people in the Columbia Union territory live in poverty
 - 1.5 million children are among this group, about one in five of the children in the 8 states

Poverty

The poverty rate for the total population and for children



Neighborhoods

Reached and unreached Zip Codes in the Columbia Union

- 493 out of 5,986 have an Adventist church
- 1,443 with no church, but 2 or more Adventist families
- 1,296 with no church and only 1 Adventist family
- 2,754 with no church and no members

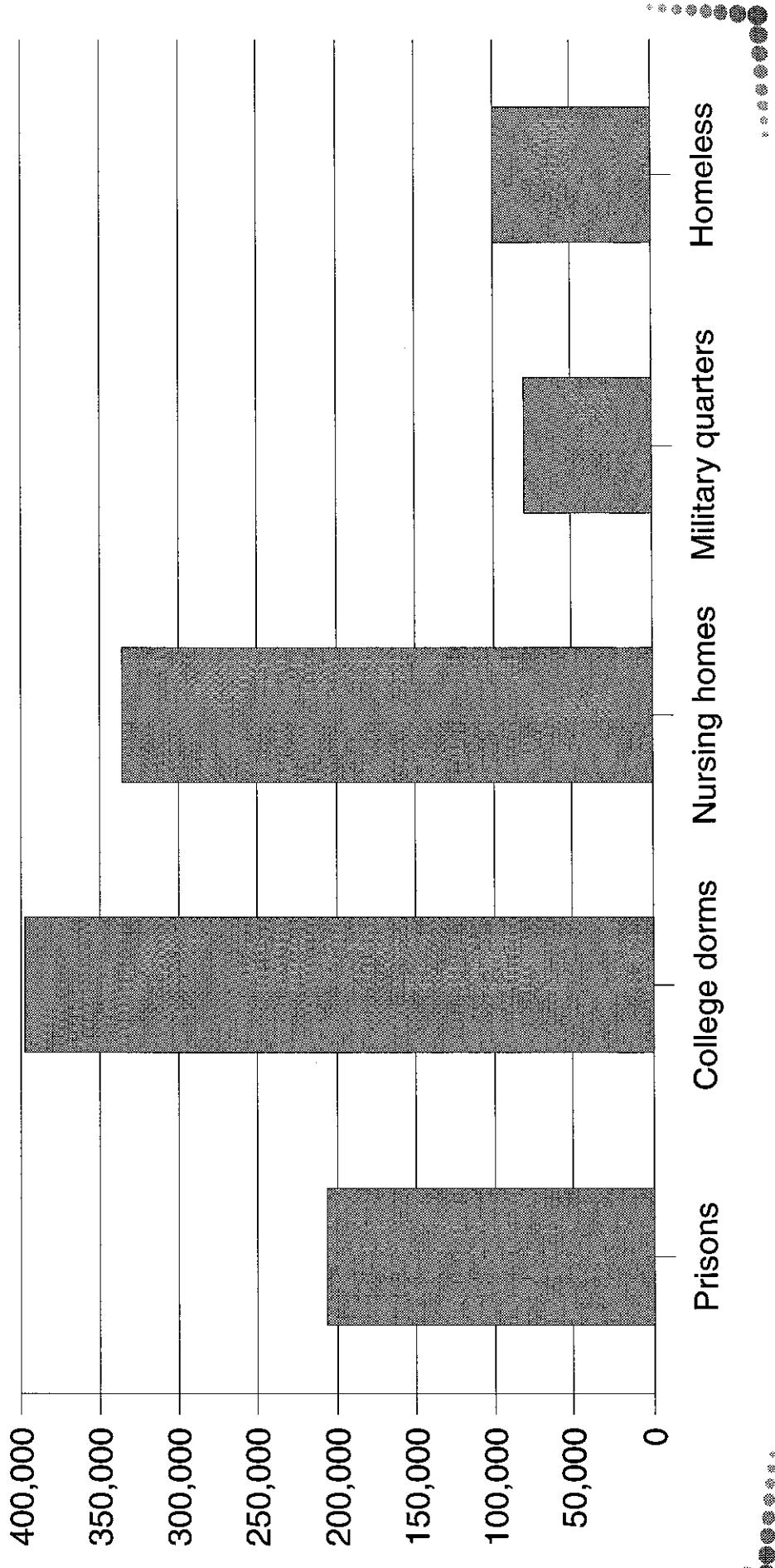
Neighborhoods

Comparison of demographics of reached & unreached Zip Codes

- Unreached neighborhoods are more likely to be younger, middle class and upper middle class, educated families in Delaware, DC, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Virginia
- Unreached neighborhoods are more likely to be Blue Collar communities with somewhat lower levels of education and income, but single-family, owner-occupied homes in Maryland, Ohio and West Virginia

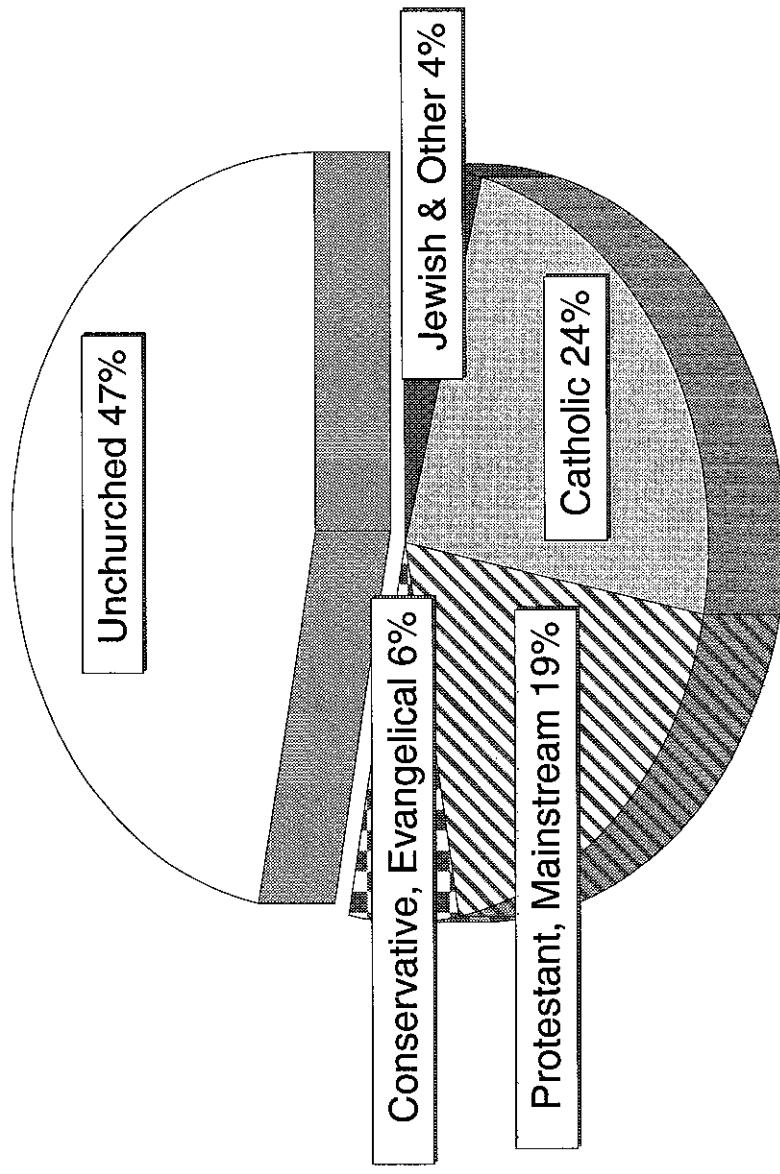
People in Institutions

Special ministries are needed to reach these people groups



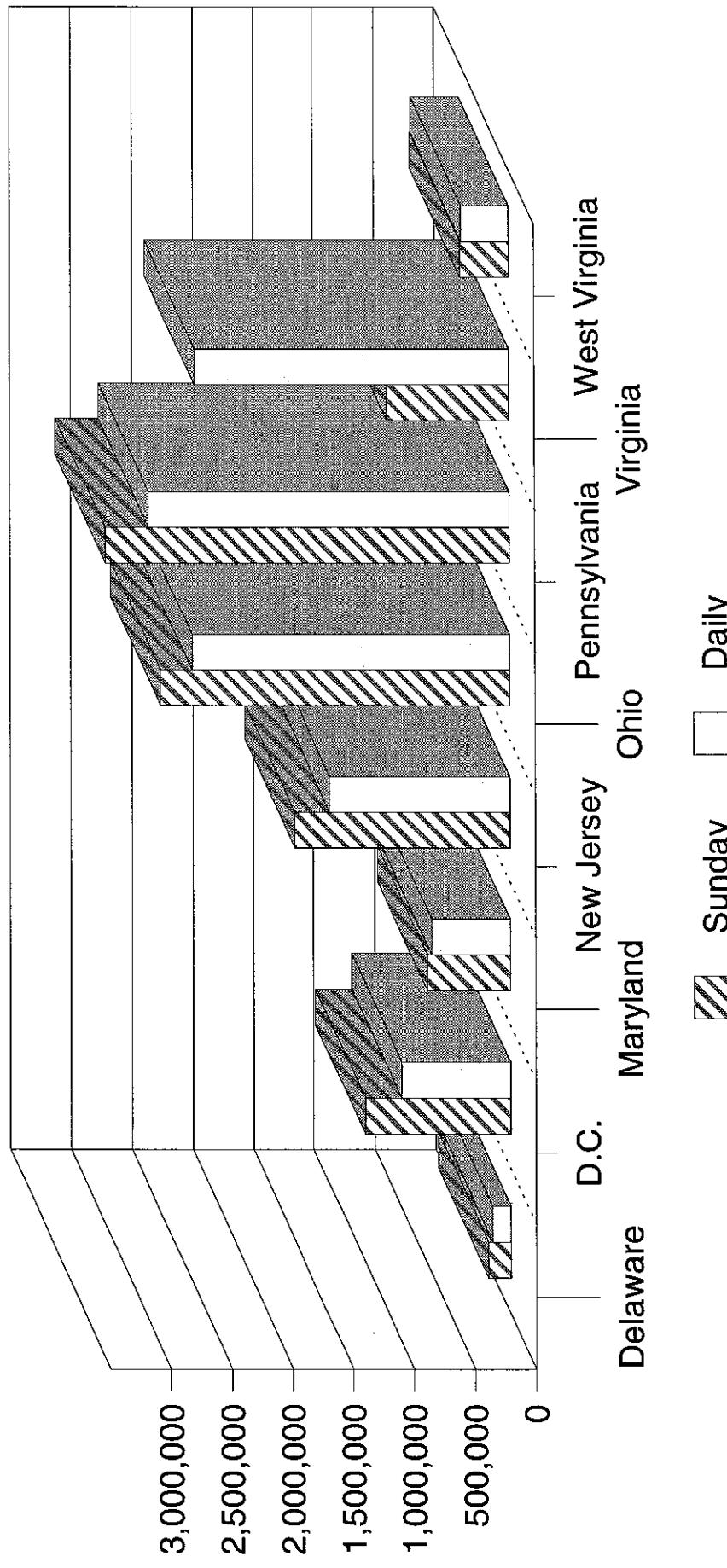
Religious Profile

The eight-state territory of the Columbia Union



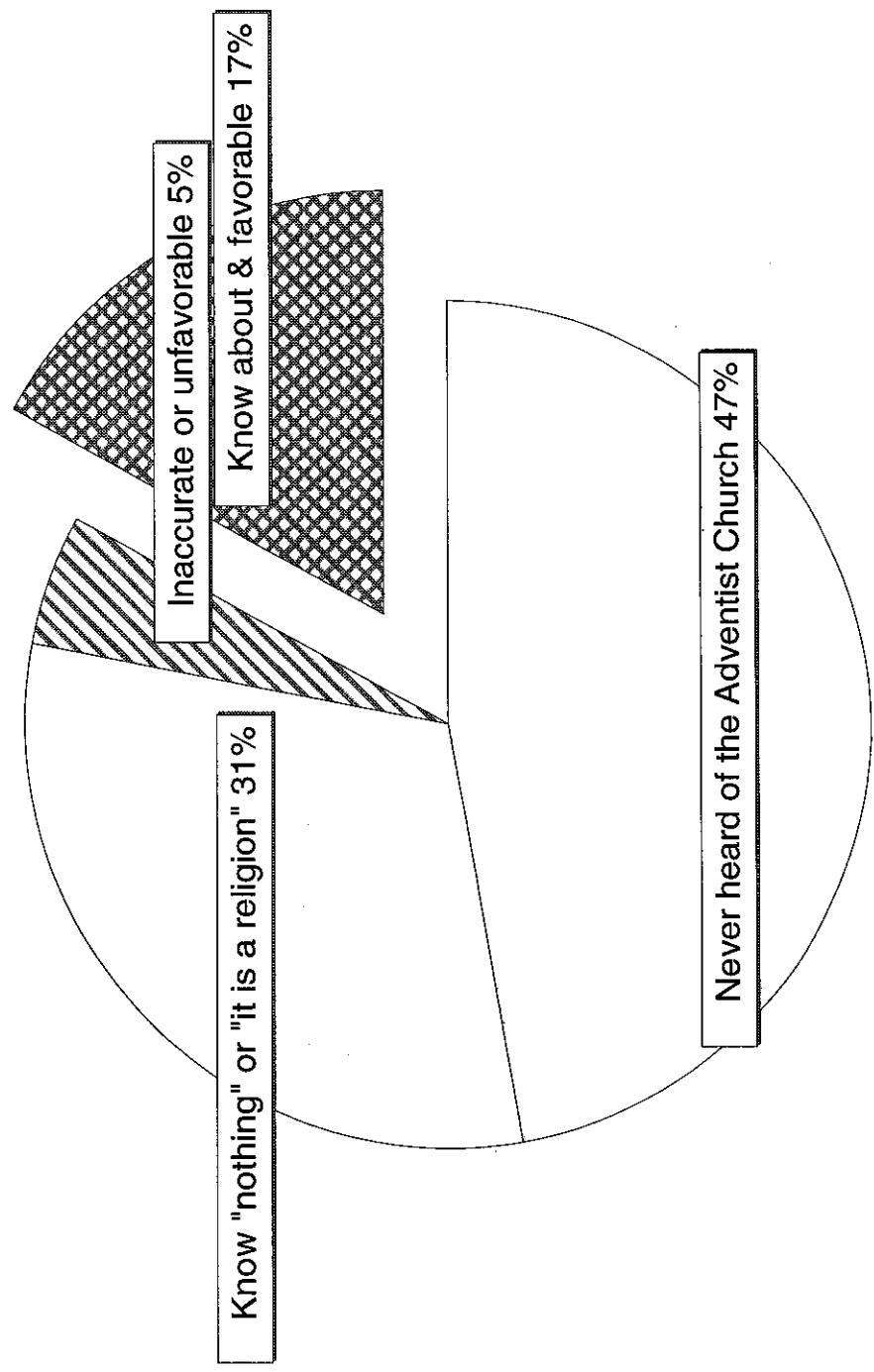
The Media

Circulation of daily newspapers in the eight-state territory



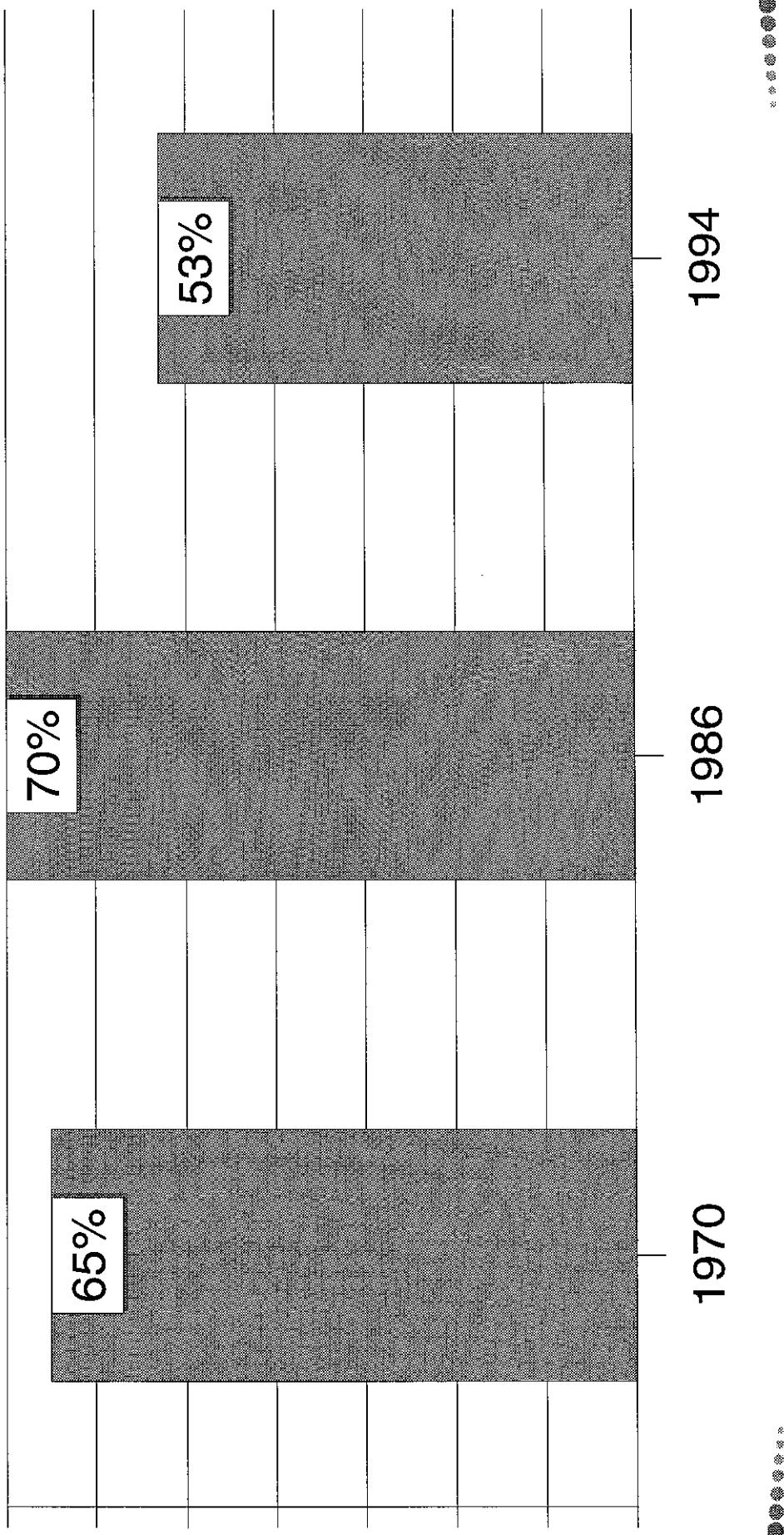
Public Awareness

Of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its ministries,
institutions and agencies . . . throughout North America



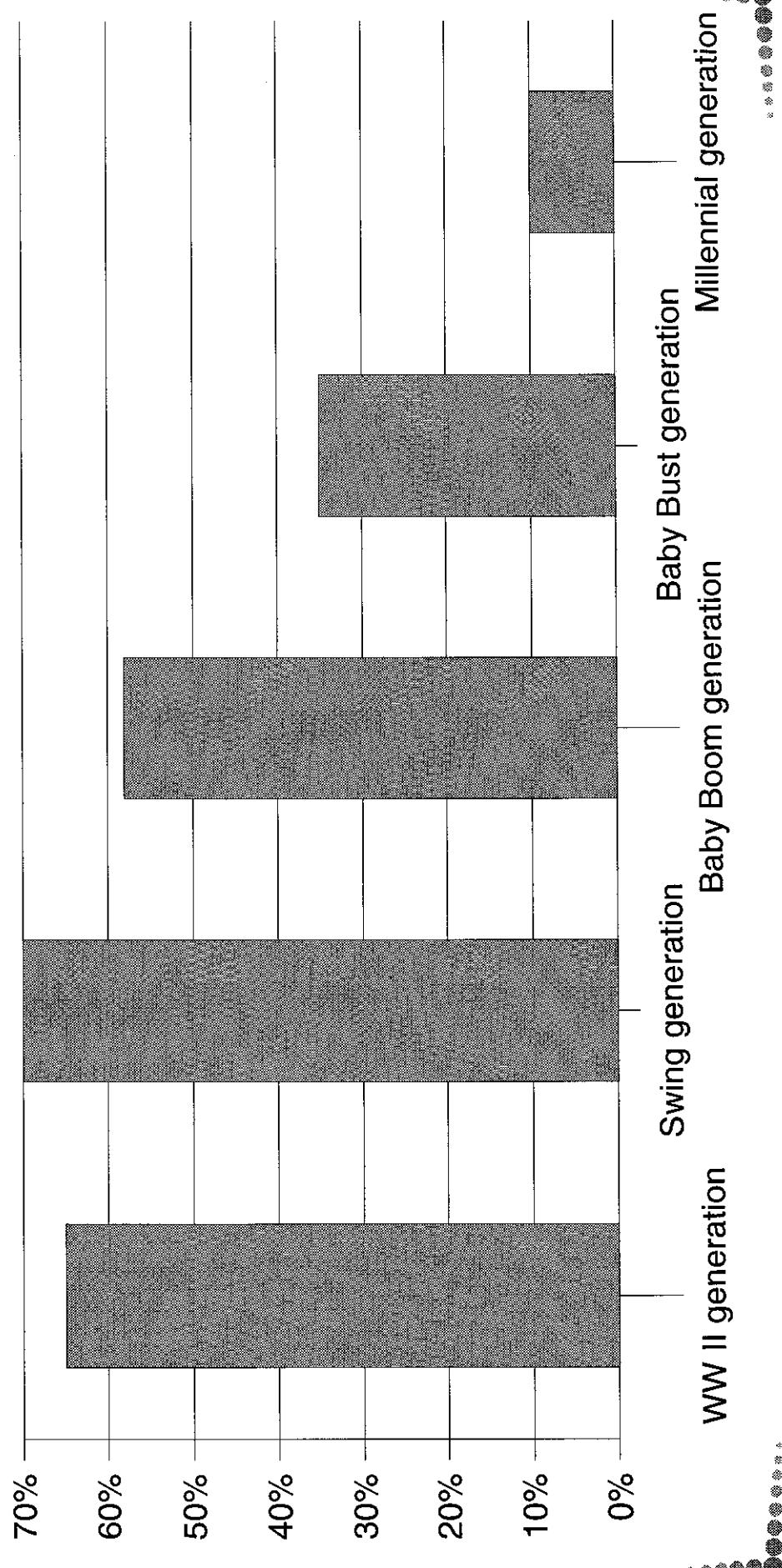
Public Awareness

Percentage of Americans who have heard of
the Seventh-day Adventist Church



Public Awareness

Percent of Americans who have heard of the Adventist Church
by generations



Public Awareness

Americans who call the Adventist Church a “cult” or identify it with the David Koresh events in Waco

