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# **An Information Base for Strategic Planning**



## **Chesapeake Conference**

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*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 Chesapeake 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 Chesapeake Conference membership
2. Attitudes and needs among the Chesapeake Conference members
3. Trends in the ministries of the Chesapeake Conference
4. Demographics and needs of the general population in the territory assigned as the “mission field” of the Chesapeake Conference, 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 45 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 150 telephone interviews were completed with a random sample of Chesapeake Conference church members from August 16 through September 10. Each interview took 20 to 30 minutes, some as long as 45 minutes.<sup>1</sup> Demographic and school enrollment information was collected on all the individuals in each household—nearly 500 records all together.

In addition an analysis of the demographics, location and number of Adventist households and Adventist churches for all 522 Zip Code areas in the states of Maryland and Delaware was completed by the Center for Global Urban Mission in collaboration with the Center for Creative Ministry. We also include information from 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.

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<sup>1</sup>In 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 eight percentage points (plus or minus) at the 95<sup>th</sup> 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 Chesapeake Conference staff. Particularly important are the contributions made by Kandra Luke, Center for Creative Ministry 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 Chesapeake Conference officers, staff, pastors 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

October 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 Chesapeake Conference and its congregations, schools, departments and ministries.

### Church Demographics

Chesapeake Conference membership is under-represented among young adults. There is one quarter the portion of members from the Baby Bust generation as there is in the general population in Maryland and Delaware. 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 Chesapeake Conference. 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 Chesapeake Conference membership is very diverse in its ethnicity. One in five members are black despite the fact that the Allegheny East Conference shares the territory of the Chesapeake Conference precisely to conduct a ministry among the black population. There are twice as many Hispanic, Asian and Other members as in the general population. One in four members are immigrants, born outside the United States. White, Anglo members still make up the majority of the Chesapeake Conference, but they constitute less than two-thirds of the total. This reality calls for sensitivity to the unique needs of each ethnic group and multicultural training for professional and volunteer leaders.

The Chesapeake Conference membership is largely middle class. There are less than half the portion of church members from low-income households as in the general population in Maryland and Delaware, while the percentage among the highest-income households is the same as in the general population. Why are there so few poor people joining the Adventist Church in the Chesapeake Conference? Historically, Adventist evangelism has had an excellent response among the poor.

The Chesapeake Conference membership has an exceptionally high level of education. There are more than twice as many adults with higher education among the members as is true in the adult population of Maryland and Delaware. Clearly, Adventists believe in education!

### Member Attitudes and Needs

Only six percent of the respondents in the interviews conducted for this study report that they attended one Sabbath or less out of the previous four. Only 12 percent say they do not attend Sabbath School. It is very probable that the actual portion of church members who do not attend

regularly is much higher, and that the data reported here have a skew toward the active members of Chesapeake Conference congregations.

Four out of five Chesapeake Conference members (83%) 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 in preferences of 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, two out of three members want sermons on simple, gospel topics and practical, Christian living. Smaller numbers prefer to hear the traditional doctrines of the church preached. Older generations prefer basic gospel messages, while younger generations most like sermons on practical, Christian living.

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." Almost as many say it is public evangelism or Revelation Seminars. Bible studies and small group outreach are seen to be less effective in the Chesapeake Conference than elsewhere in the Columbia Union, while community service and youth and children's ministries are seen to be more effective means of winning new members.

One in three members (35%) 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 Chesapeake Conference need to be re-worked to capitalize more fully on this fact.

Nearly four out of five Chesapeake Conference members (78%) 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 conference must give more attention to.

Stewardship attitudes are more positive in the Chesapeake Conference than throughout the Columbia Union and across North America. Higher percentages express confidence in leadership and approval of how church funds are being used. Although they are more likely to be "reactive givers" that need regular appeals and stimulus to encourage giving and less likely to be "intentional givers" who commit themselves to give a percentage of their income above and beyond the tithe to church offerings, they are more likely to calculate their tithe on pre-tax earnings. These facts, together with the higher than average income of church members, means that it should be relatively less difficult to find the resources necessary to the mission and ministries of the church in this conference.

Nearly half the member households with school-age children (46%) have at least one child attending an Adventist school. About 42 percent of those who do not have their children in church school say that it is because their family finances cannot afford the cost. Less than one in five (17%) say that it is because the nearest Adventist school is too far away, and smaller portions indicate that it is because of the low academic quality of church school or that the particular course of study their child needs is not available.

It is significant that among respondents who do not have their children in Adventist schools, the largest portion (44%) say that their reasons are not on our list, which includes items gleaned from similar studies over the past three decades. 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 schools.

## **Ministry Trends**

The growth rate in the Chesapeake Conference has been greater than the rate for the Columbia Union and for the entire NAD each year since 1993, except in 1997. The same was true for the average annual growth rates during the 1970's and the 1980's. At the same time Chesapeake Conference has been less involved in church planting than seems to be true for most conferences throughout the Columbia Union and across North America.

## **Context for Mission**

The Chesapeake Conference has an urban mission. Nine out of ten of the residents in its missionary territory live in metropolitan areas. Three of the 25 largest metropolitan areas in the United States are at least partially in Chesapeake territory. This includes the Baltimore metropolitan area with a population of 2.4 million, about two-thirds of a million people in portions of the Philadelphia metro area, and about a half million of the people in the northern suburbs of Washington.

Poverty is a significant problem in many communities in the Chesapeake territory. It is correlated to most other human needs, and it is a key dynamic in the large cities. There are 400,000 people living in poverty in Maryland and Delaware, of which 150,000 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 Chesapeake Conference's "mission field" is made up of unreached neighborhoods. Only 68 of the 460 Zip Code areas in Maryland have an Adventist Church located there. Although only 38% of the general population lives in these 68 neighborhoods, the majority of Adventist members live in these areas. In Delaware only 10 of the 62 Zip Code areas have an Adventist Church, and even though only 31% of the population lives in these areas, most of the Adventist members in Delaware live in these areas.

Most of the unreached neighborhoods in Delaware are made up of white, upper middle class, educated families. In Maryland they largely Blue Collar, working class communities. 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 about 150,000 people in the Chesapeake Conference living in institutions—nursing homes, college and university dormitories, military quarters and correctional institutions. These people cannot be reached through the same means used to evangelize the general population. It requires specialized ministries to reach them.

The majority of the population in both Maryland and Delaware is “unchurched”—does not belong to any religion. One in five are members of a mainstream Protestant church (Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, etc.), and another one-sixth are Catholics. Only five or six percent 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 of this kind. 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 Maryland and Delaware alone, it is likely that the problem is no better in the Chesapeake Conference. 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.



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# **An Information Base for Strategic Planning**

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Chesapeake Conference

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# **An Informative Base for Strategic Planning**

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Chesapeake Conference

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

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Research conducted for the Chesapeake Conference by  
the Center for Creative Ministry

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- 150 random telephone interviews with church members conducted August 16-Sept 10, 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
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# **Church Demographics**

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# The generations

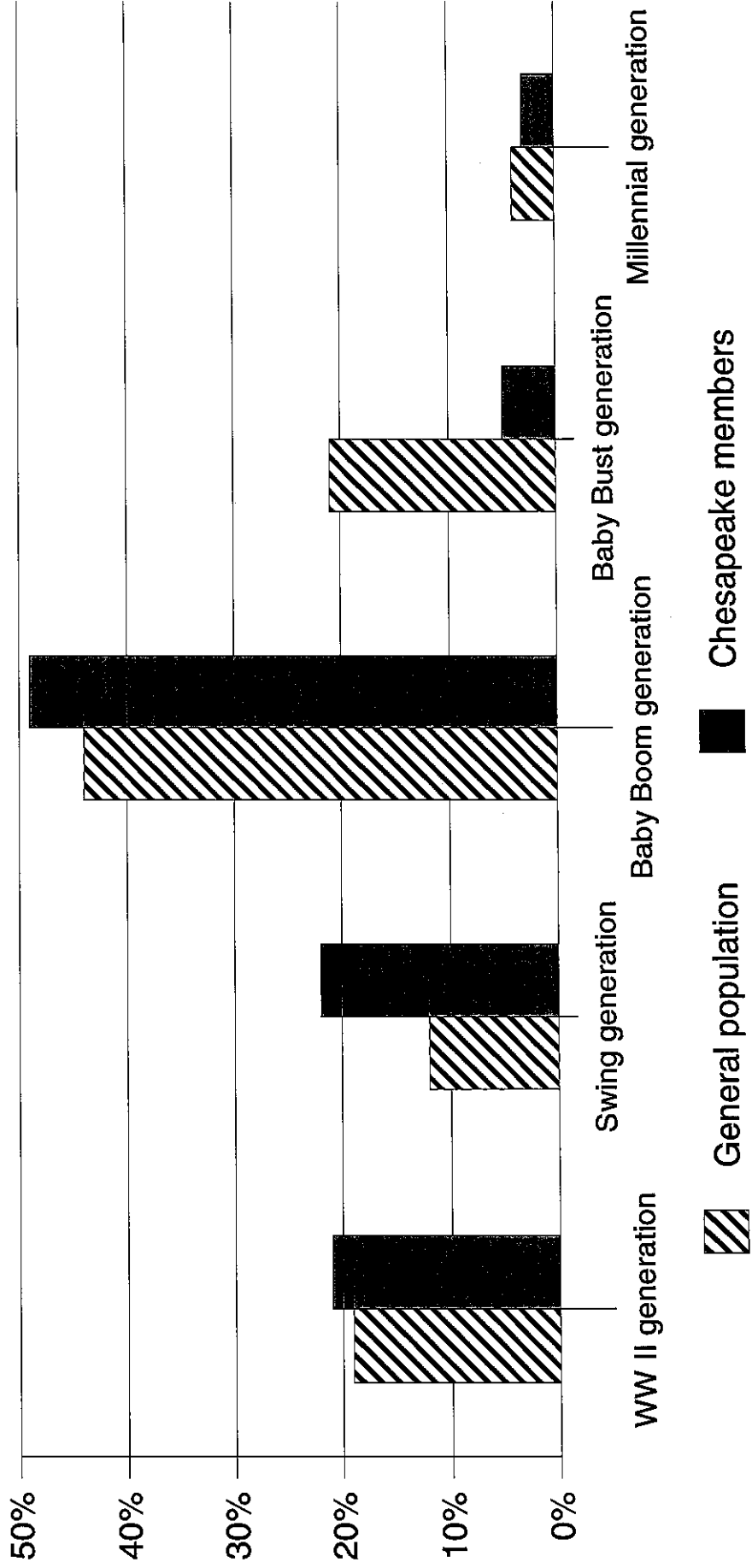
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Current age dynamics in the United States

- 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 1965-1976, now 22 through 33 years of age
- Millennial generation, born 1977-1994, now 4 through 21 years of age

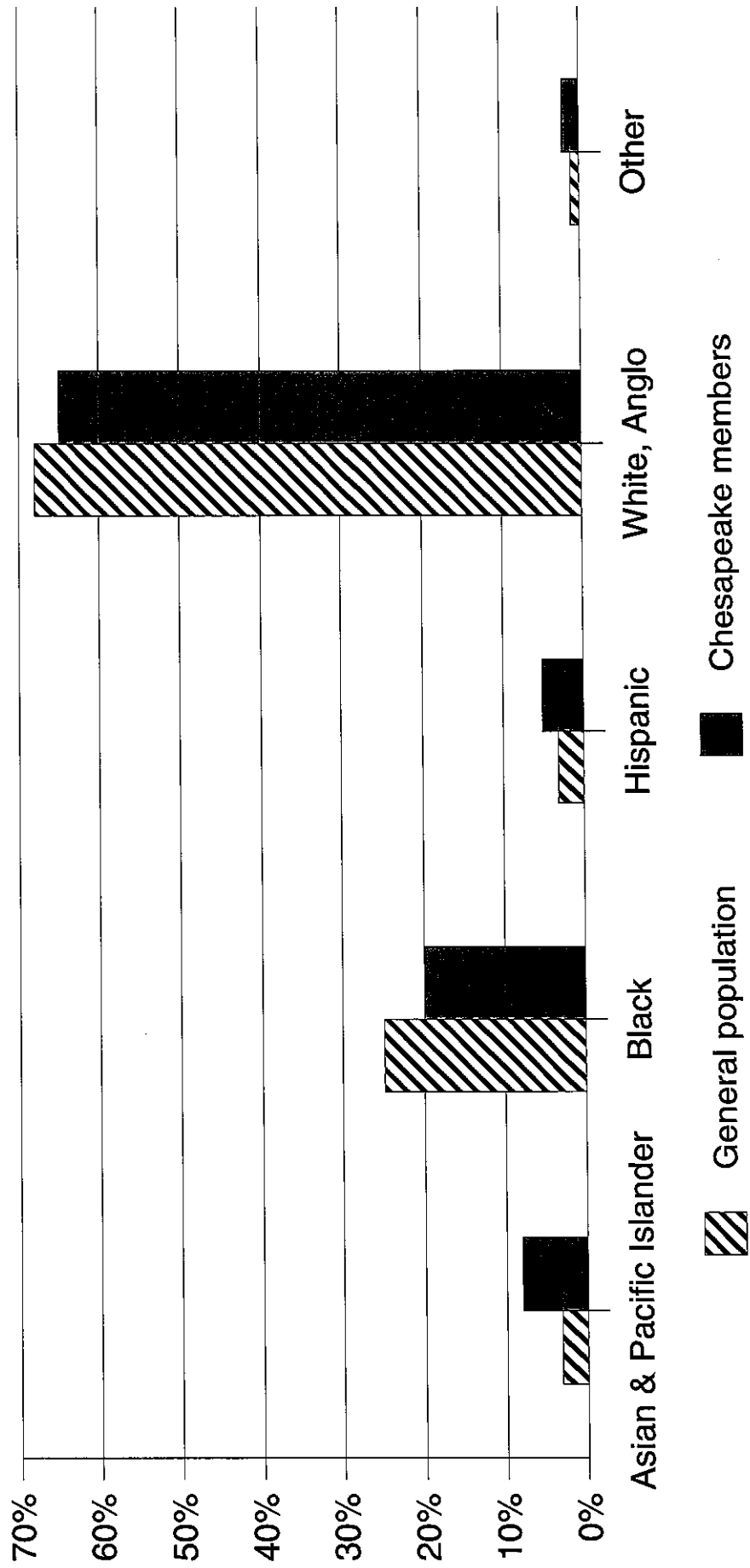
# Age of adults by generation

Chesapeake members compared to general population  
in Maryland and Delaware



# Ethnicity

Chesapeake members compared to the general population in Maryland and Delaware



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# **Immigrants**

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Chesapeake members compared to the general population

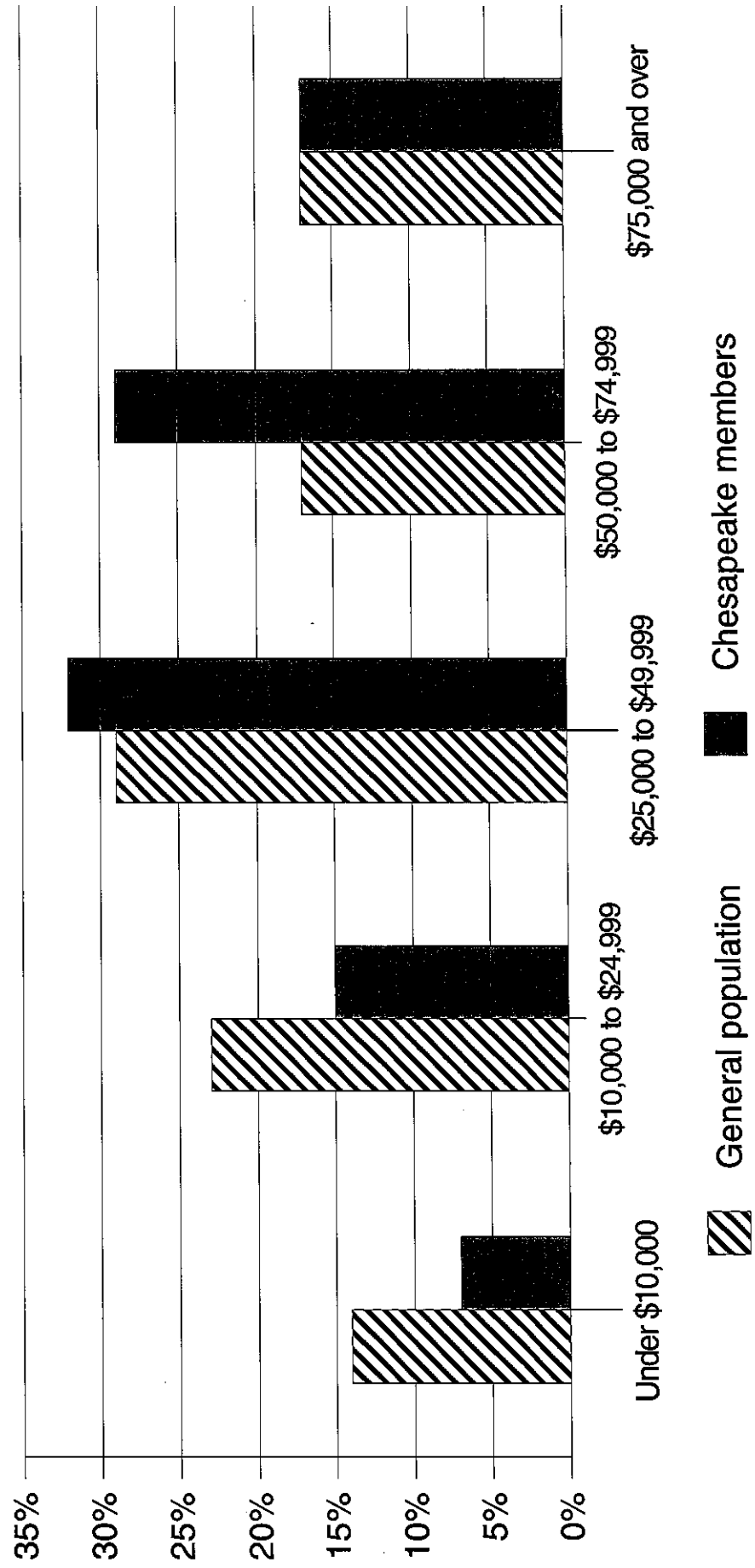
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- 24% of Adventists in the Chesapeake Conference were not born in the U.S.
  - 9% of the current population of the U.S. was born as a citizen of another nation
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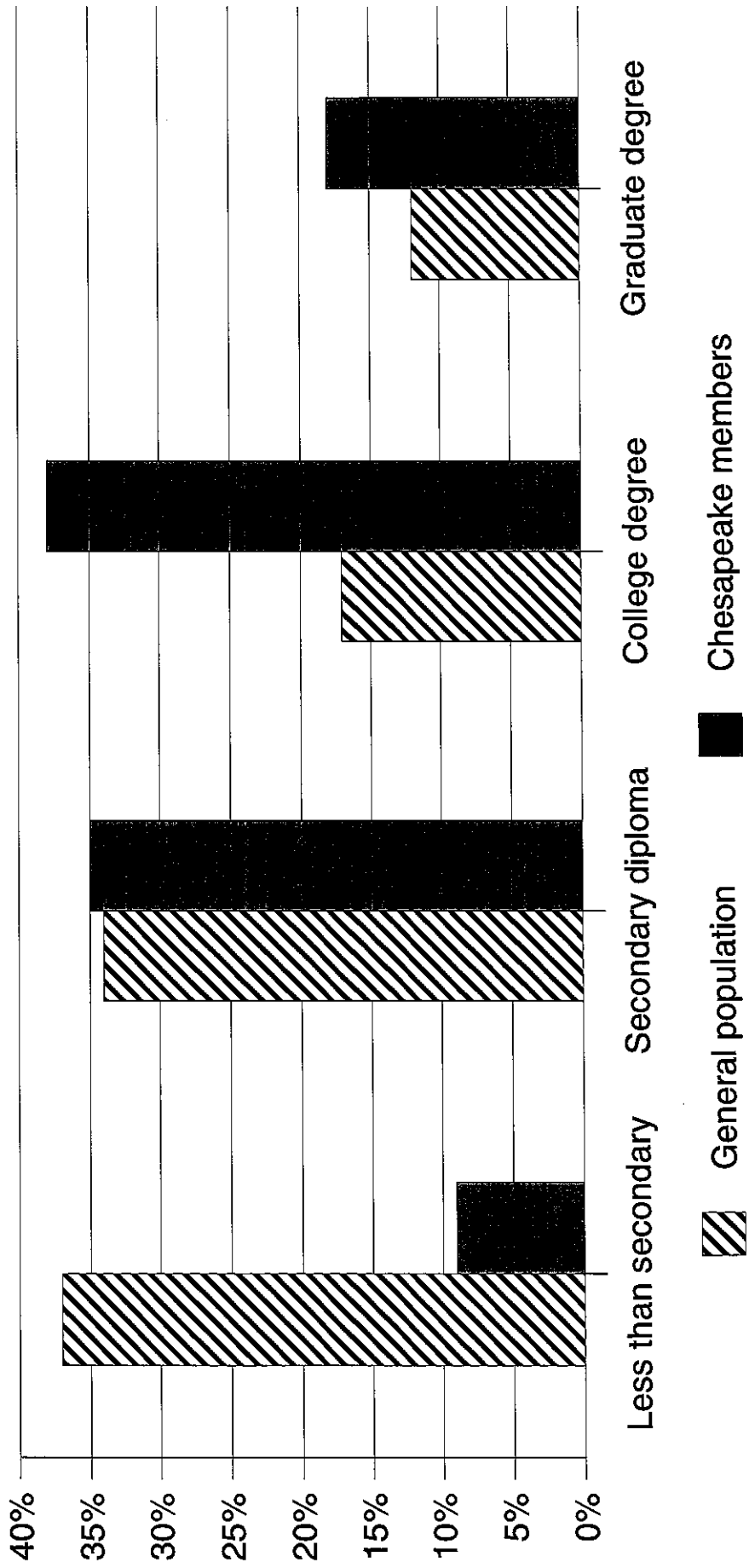
# Annual household income

Chesapeake members compared with the general population in the mid-Atlantic region



# Level of education

Chesapeake members compared to the adult population in Maryland and Delaware



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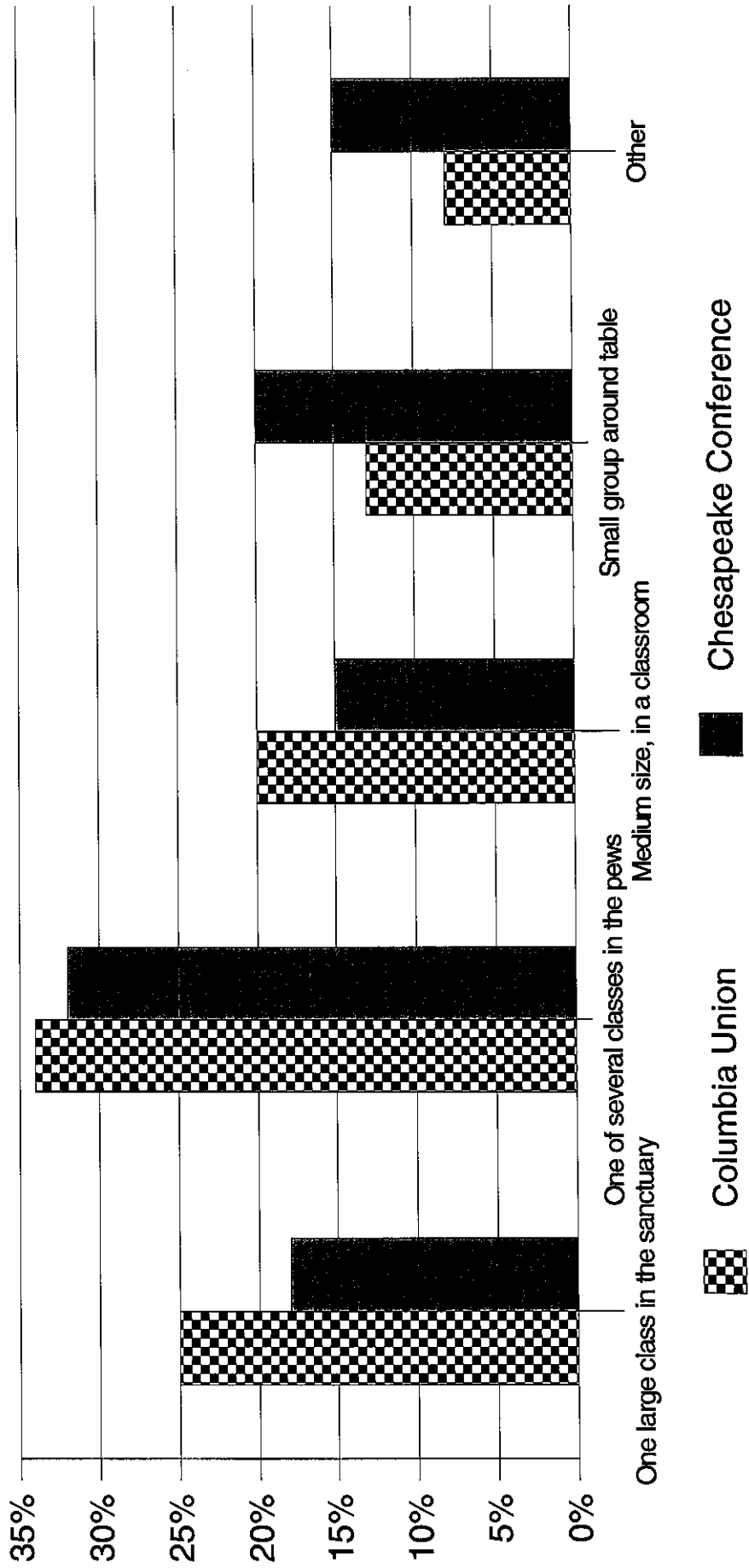
# **Member Attitudes and Needs**

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# What kind of Sabbath School class do you belong to?

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## **Sabbath worship**

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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.

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# **Sabbath attendance**

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Survey respondents

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12% do not attend Sabbath School

6% have attended worship only once or not all  
during the last four Sabbaths

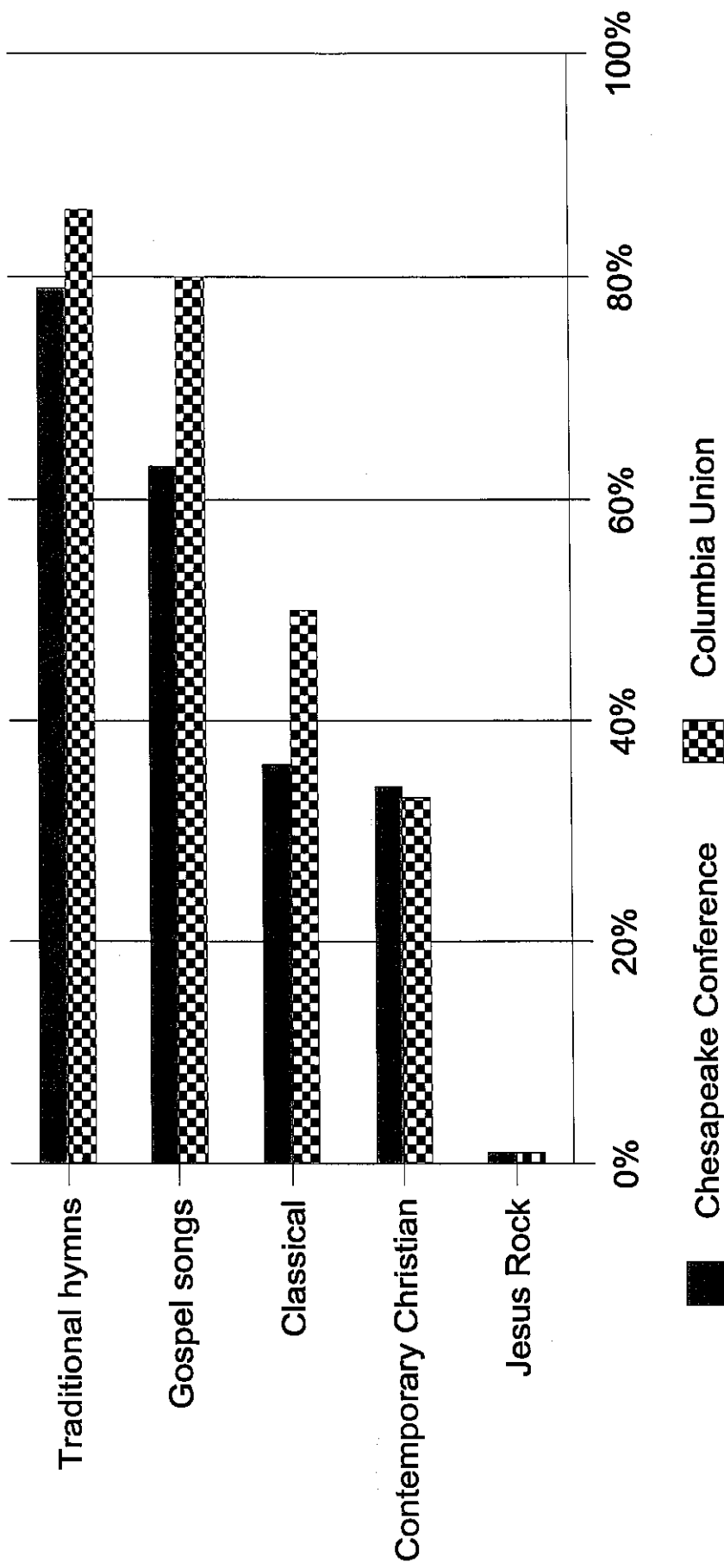
8% have attended worship only twice during  
the last four Sabbaths

16% have attended three times out of the last  
four Sabbaths

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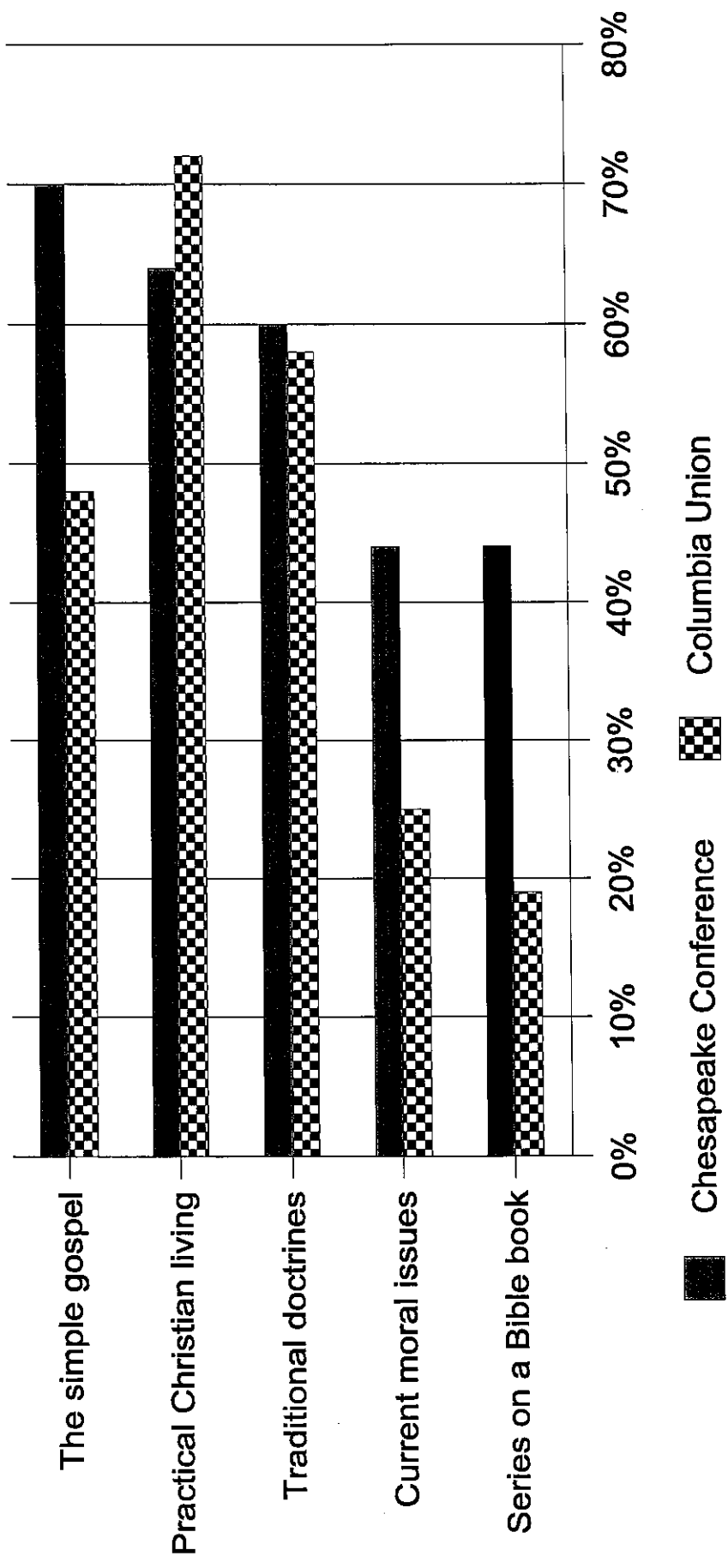
# What kind of music would you prefer to hear on Sabbath at church?

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



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

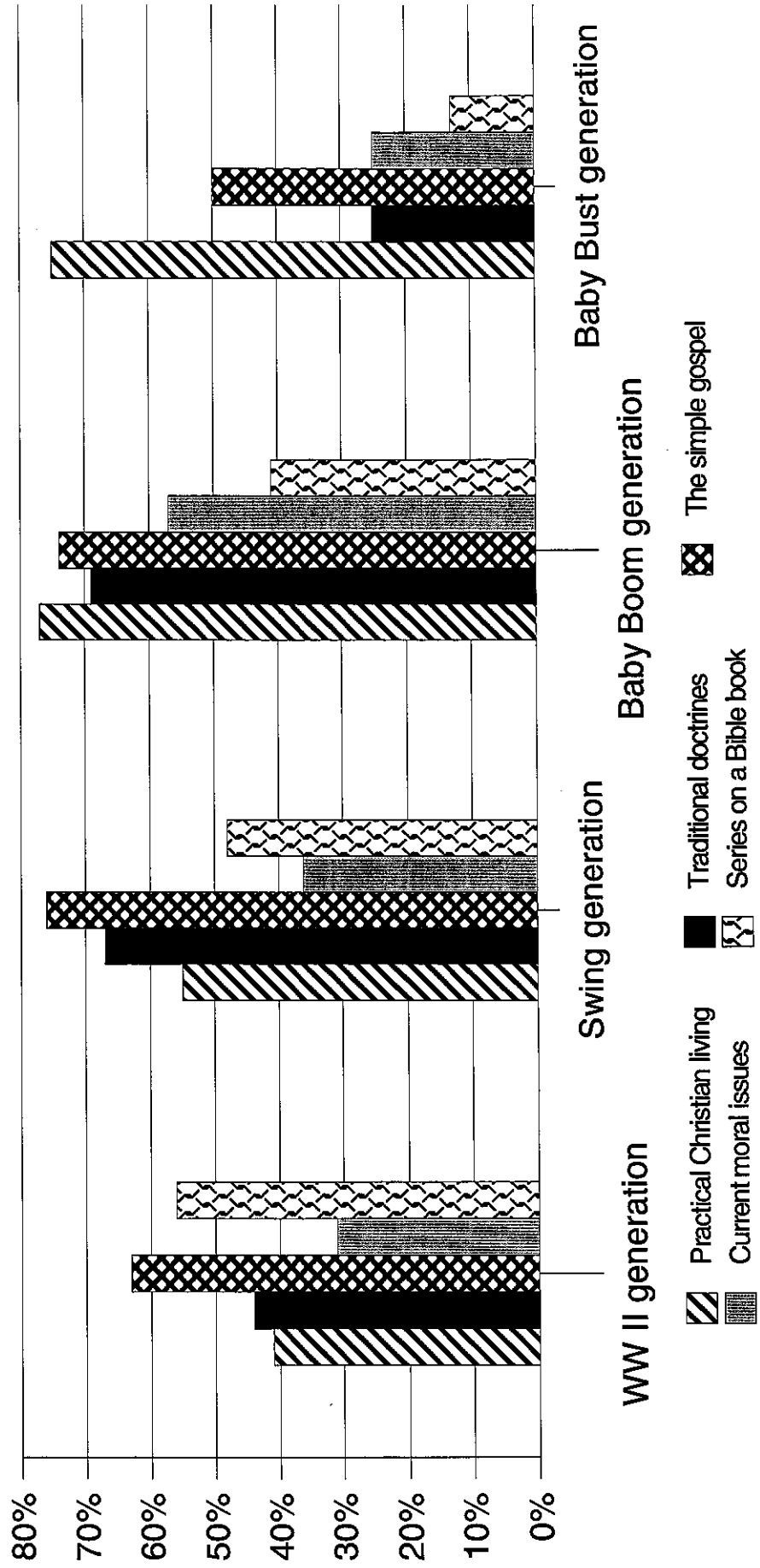
Chesapeake members compared to Columbia Union  
... allowed to select more than one





# Sermon preferences

## Comparisons by generation



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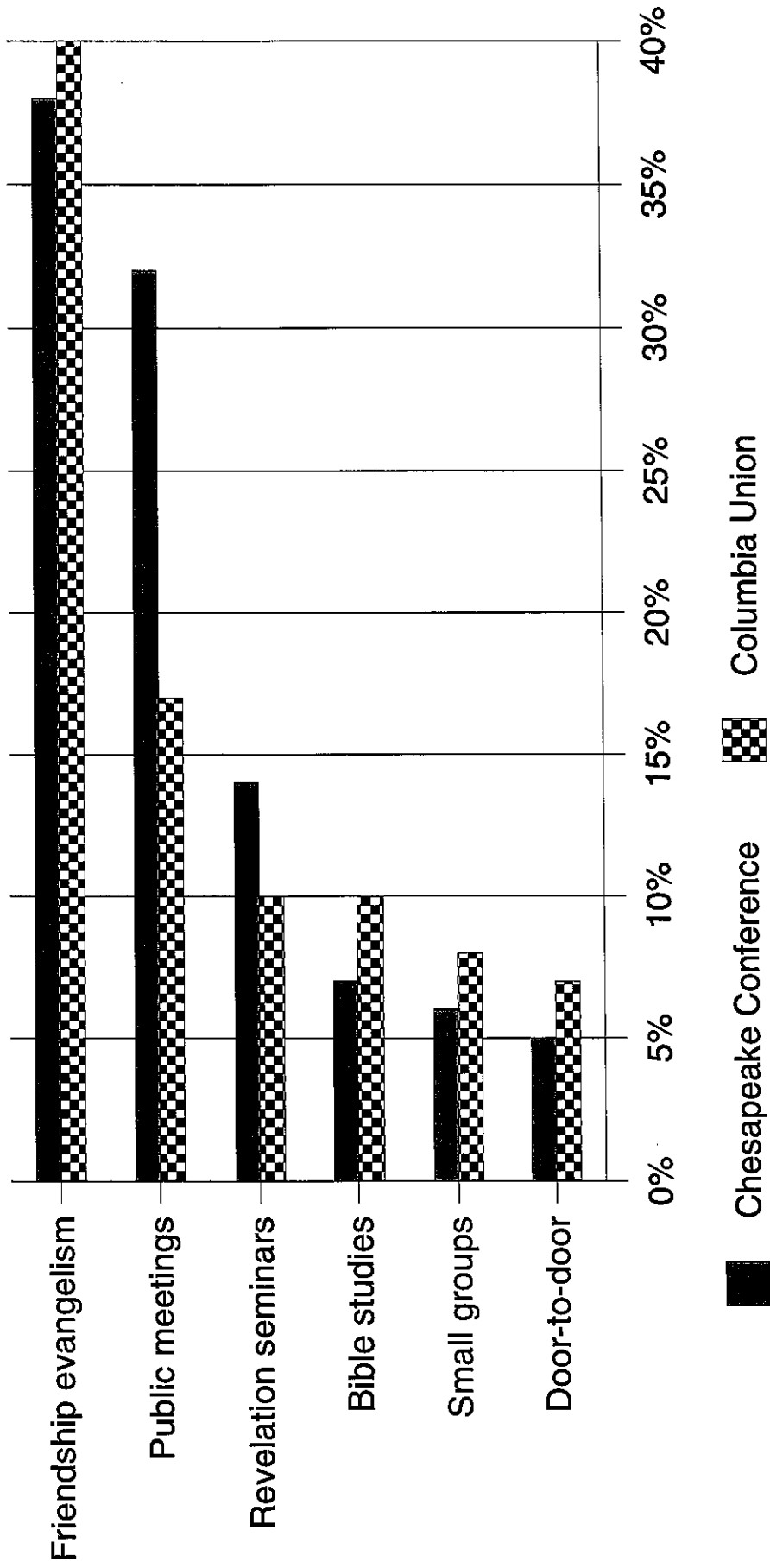
# **Involvement**

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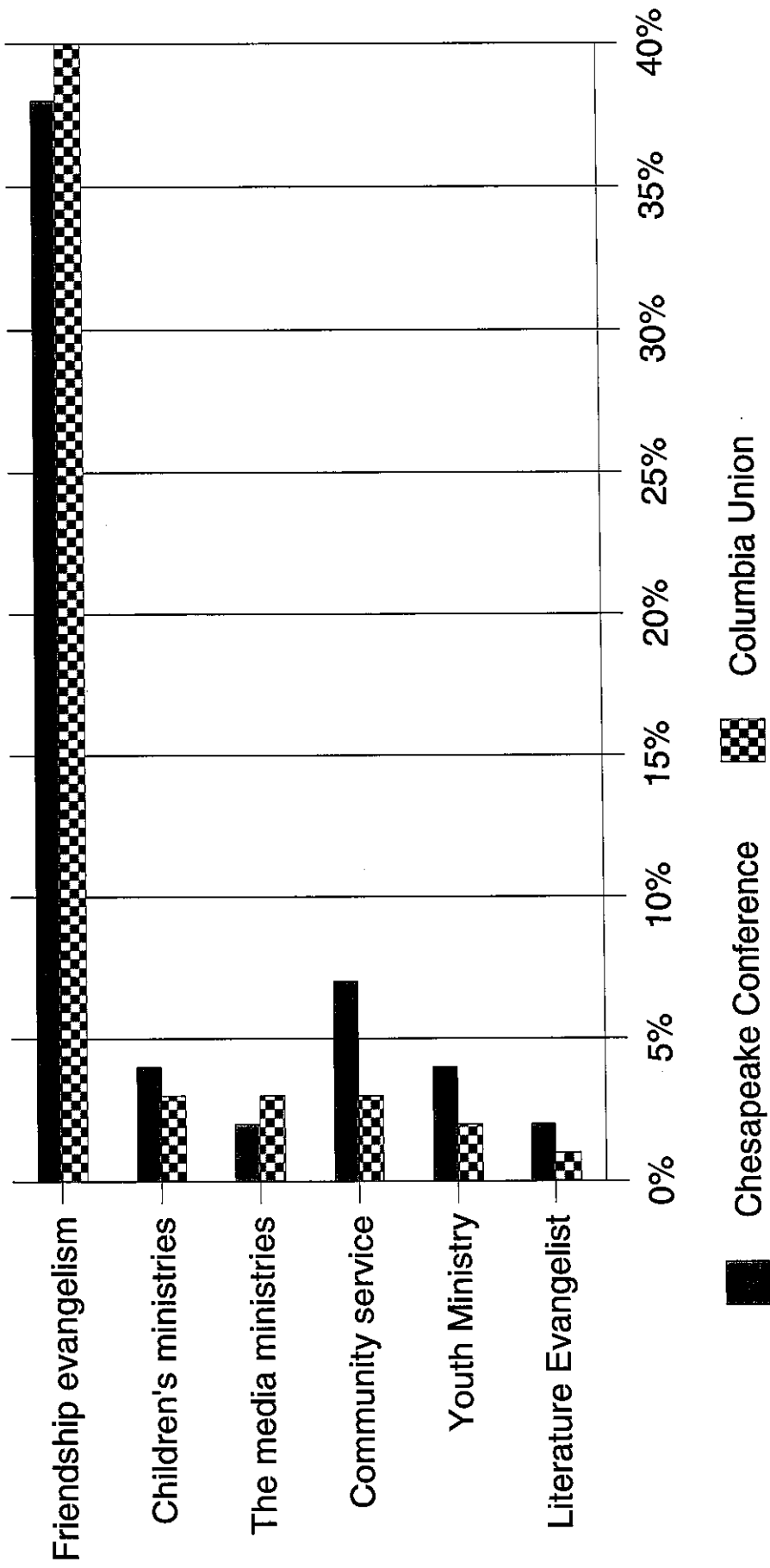
Chesapeake Conference members

- 
- **87% involved in witnessing**
  - **71% hold a church office**
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# 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?



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# **Participation in soul-winning**

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Members in the Chesapeake Conference

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- 68% know someone personally who joined the church during the last year
  - 35% were personally involved in the conversion process
  - Across North America, 33% of Adventist members say they were personally involved in a conversion during the last 3 years
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# **The Dropout Problem**

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A major concern on the part of Chesapeake members

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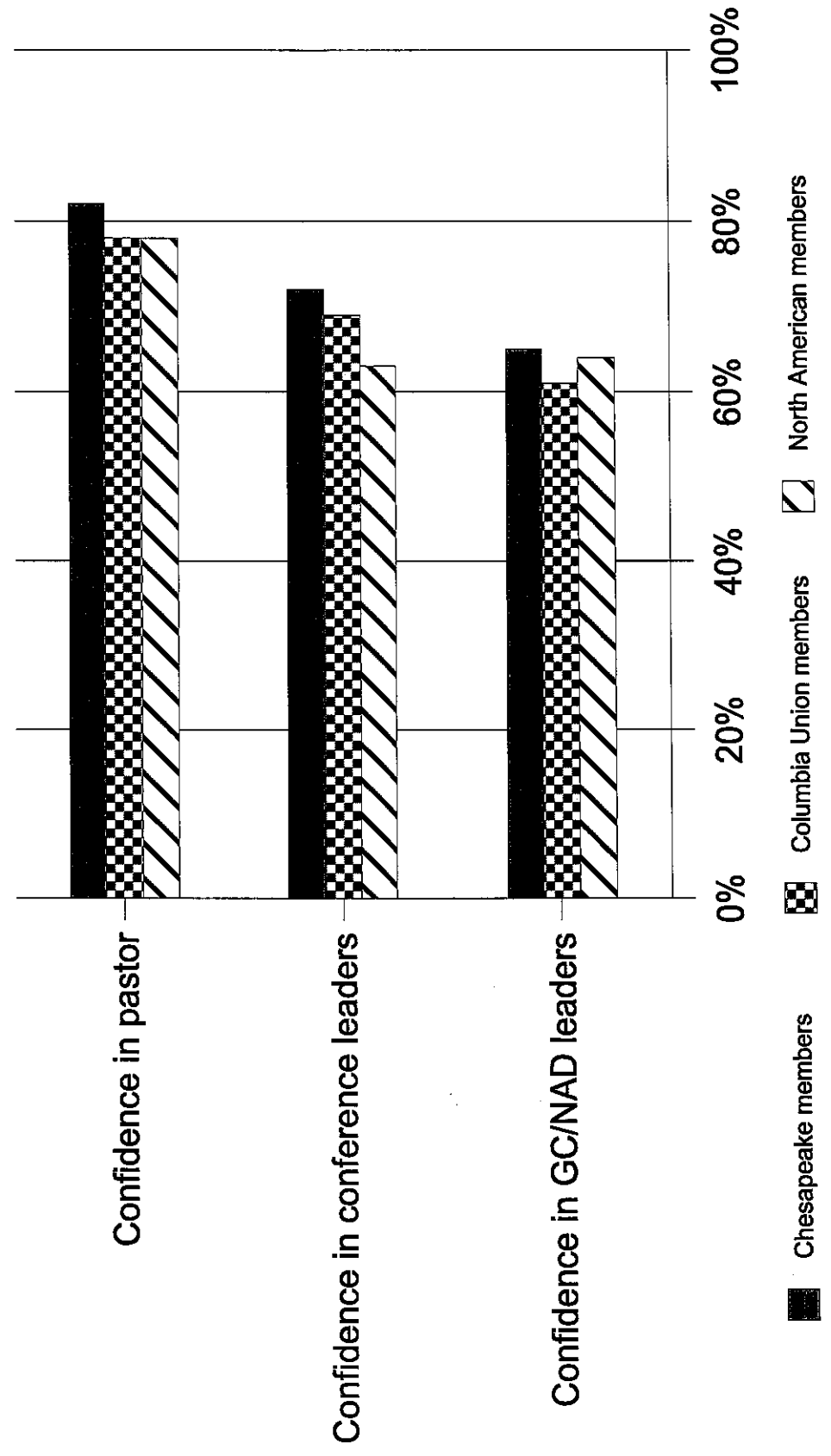
Nearly four out of five members (78%) have a loved one who used to be an active church member and has since dropped out

The longer a person has been a member of the Adventist Church, the more likely they are to report a loved one who has dropped out

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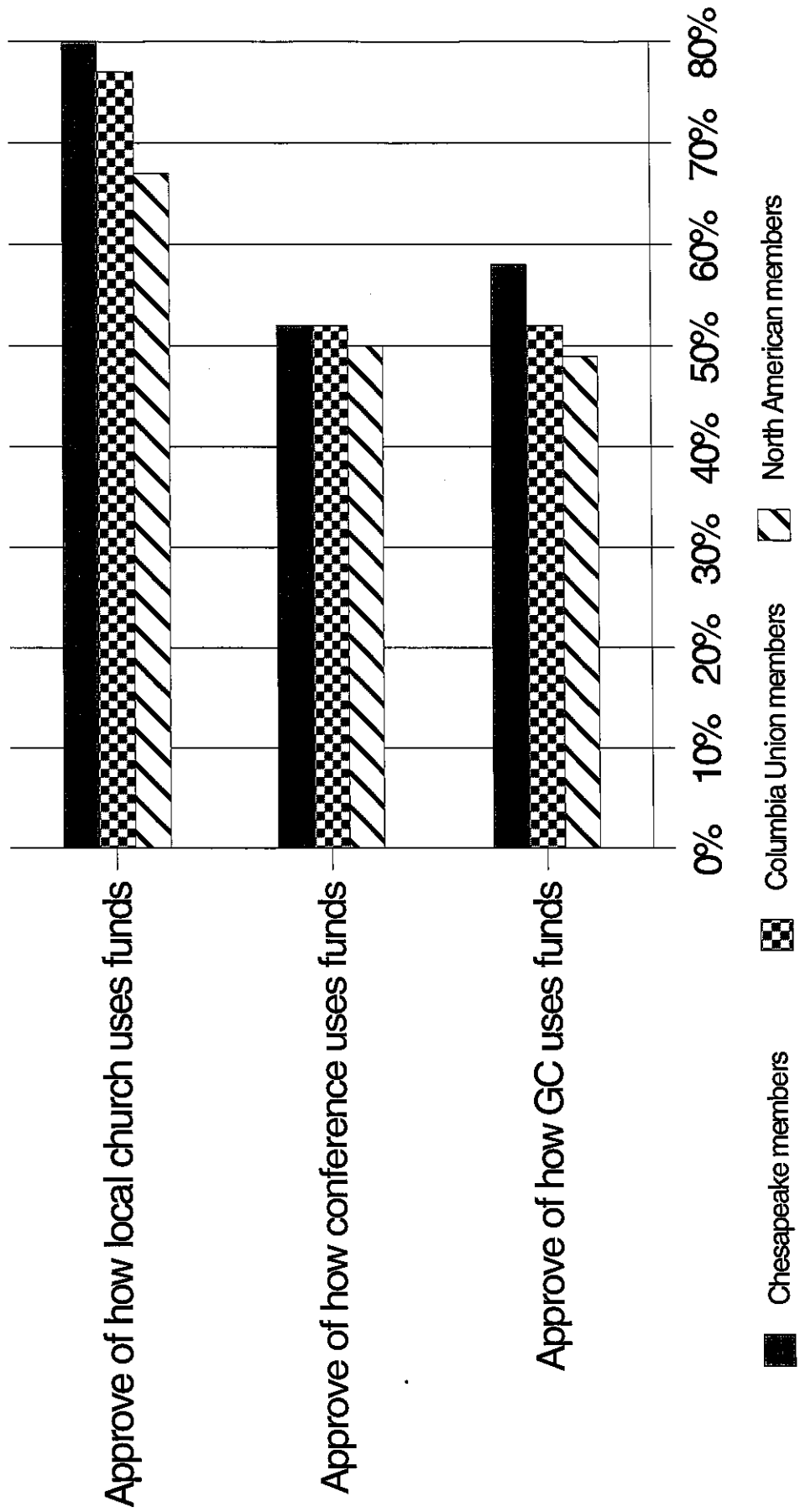
# Confidence in church leadership

## Attitudes of Chesapeake members



# Approval of how funds are used

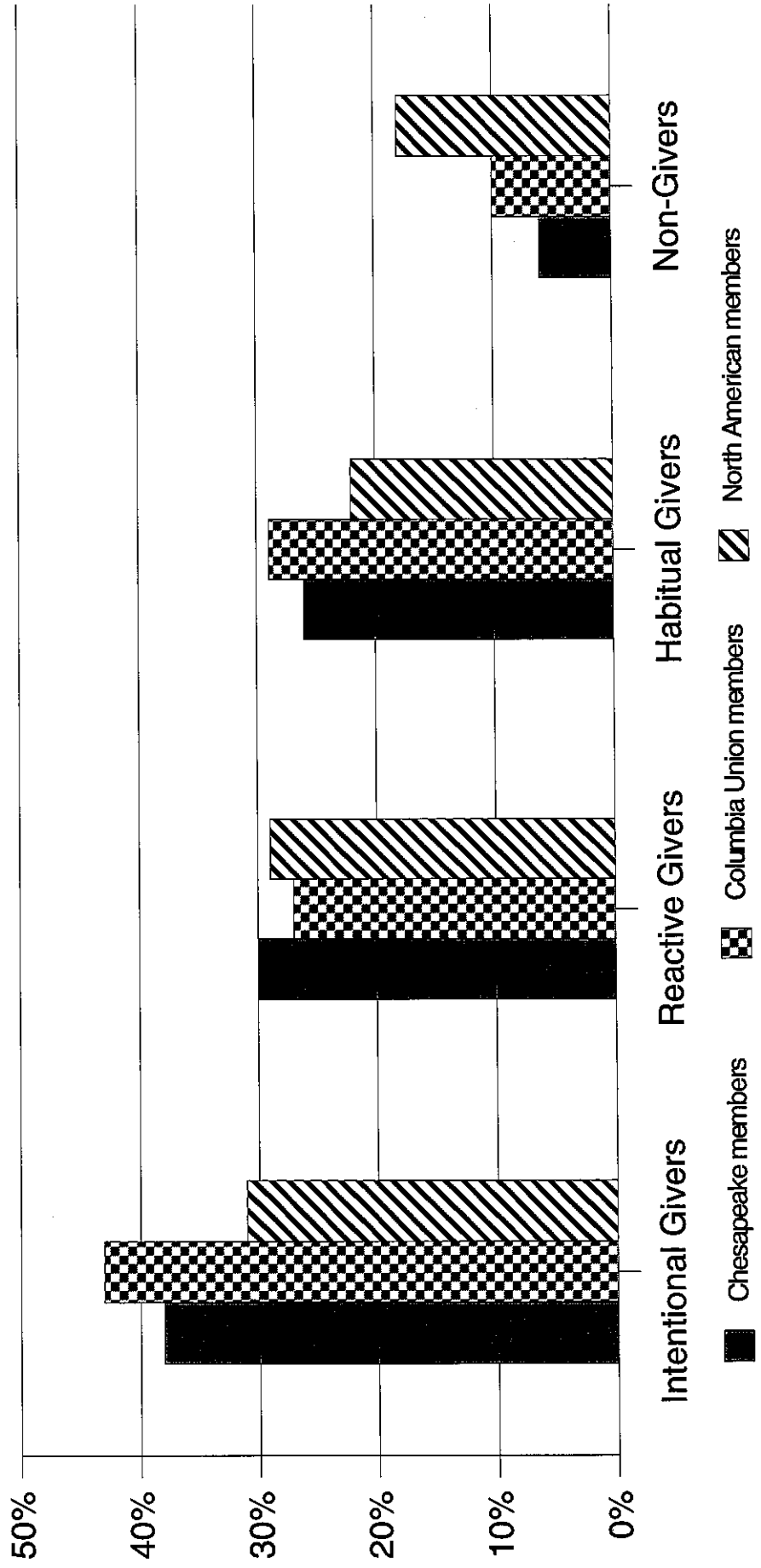
## Attitudes of Chesapeake Conference members





# Giving styles of members

Comparing Chesapeake members to  
Columbia Union members and NAD members

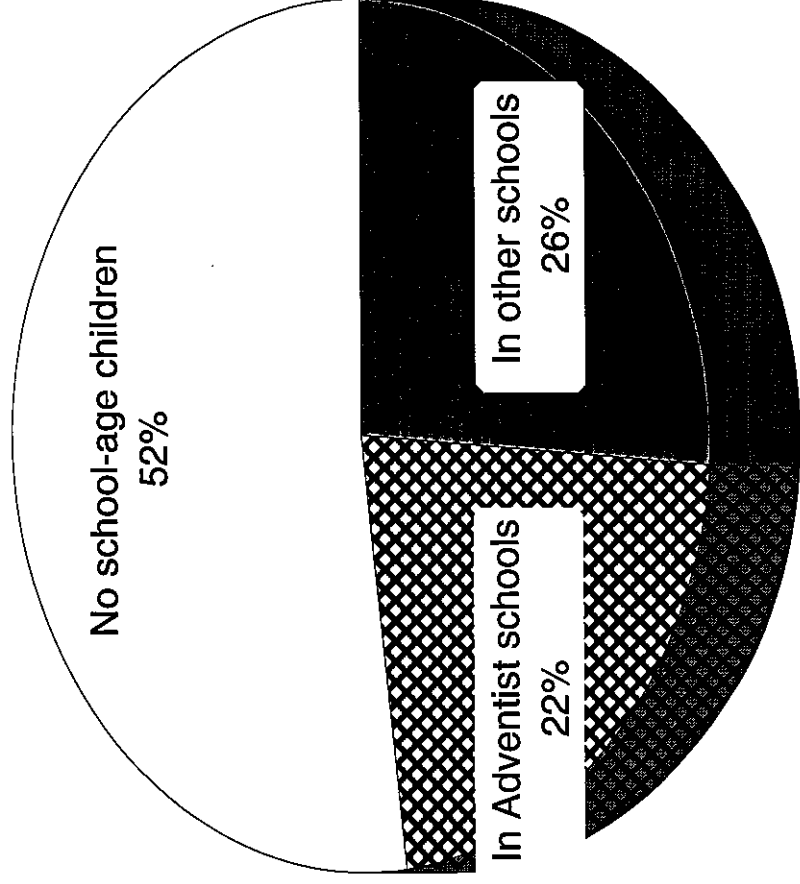


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# Christian Education

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Church families with at least one child in school



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# **Why children of church members are not in Adventist schools**

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- 42% because of the cost and family finances
  - 17% because of distance
  - 8% because specific course is not available
  - 8% because of poor academic quality
  - 44% because of reasons not on the list
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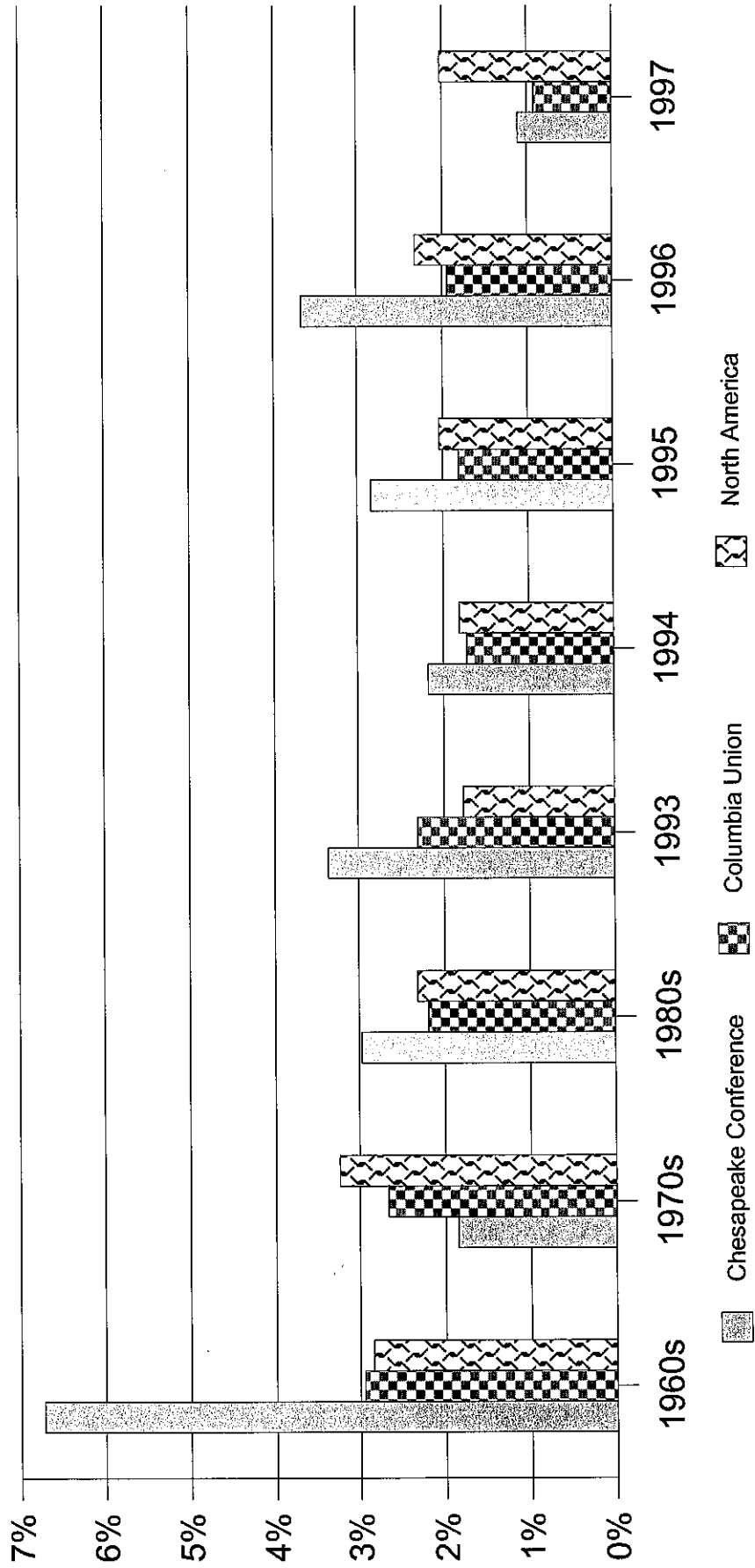
# Ministry Trends

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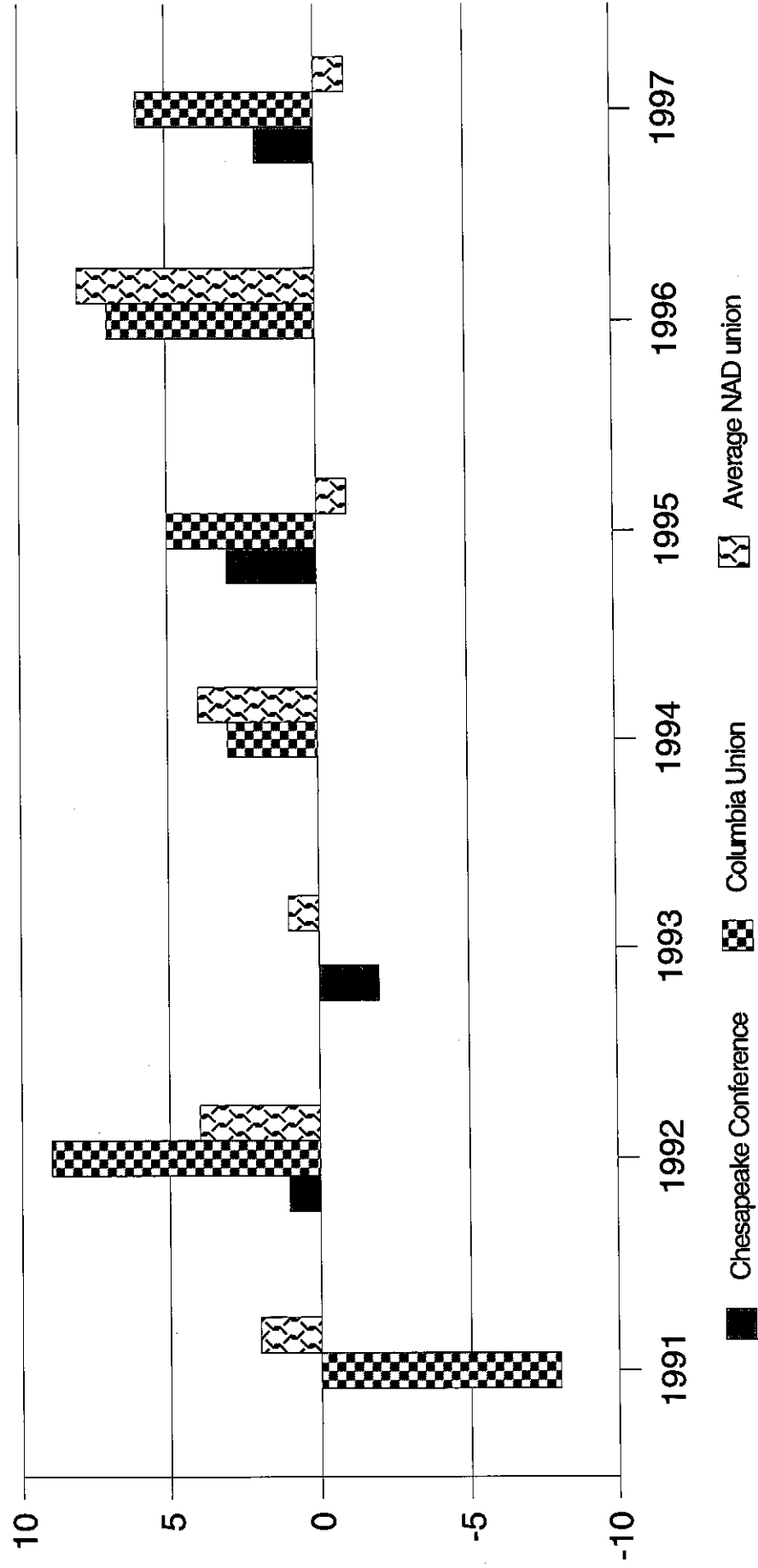
# Church Growth

Annual Growth Rate for the Chesapeake Conference  
compared to the Columbia Union and NAD



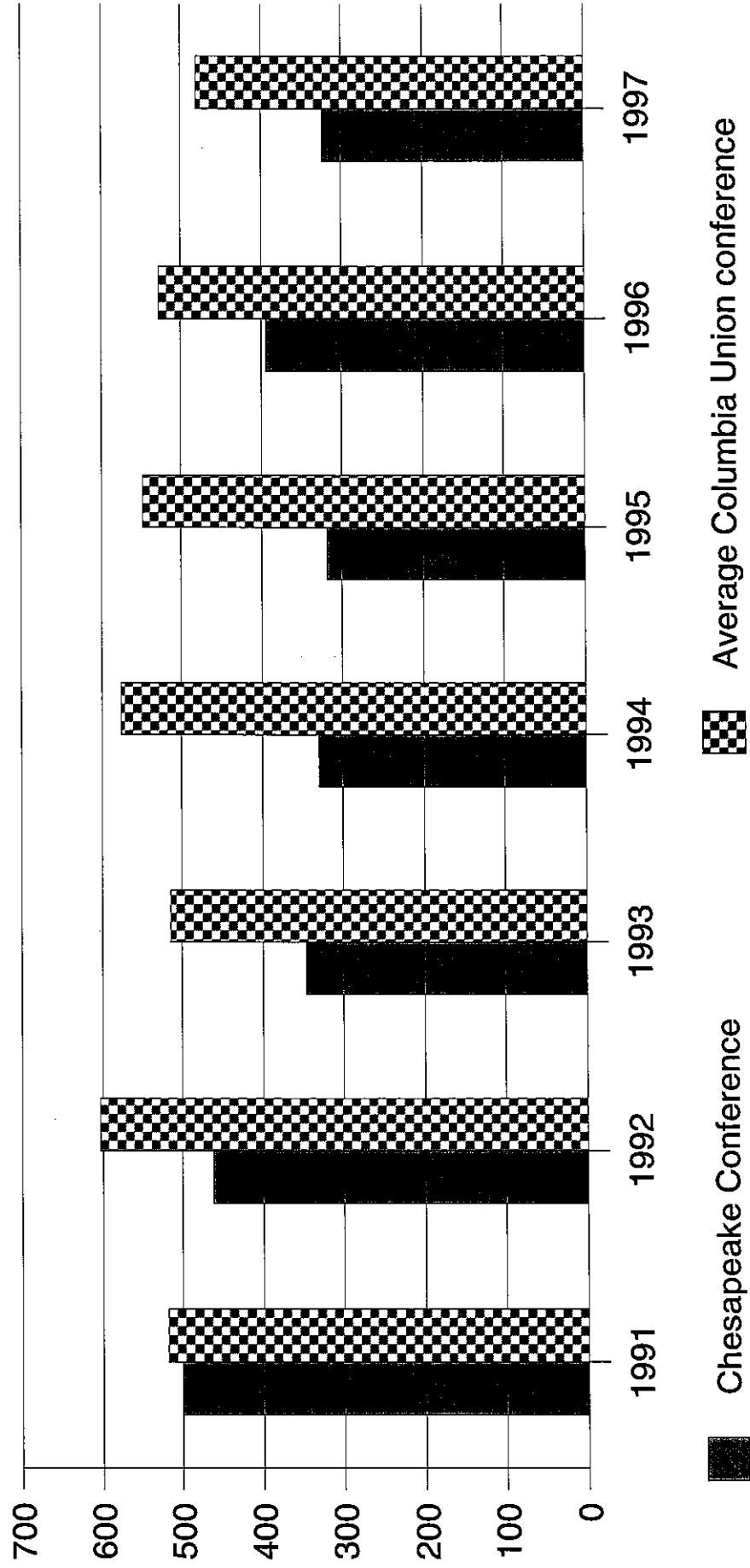
# Church Planting

## Annual Growth in Number of Congregations



# Evangelism

## Baptisms and Professions of Faith



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# **Context for Mission**

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## **An Urban Mission**

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- 90 percent of the population in the Chesapeake territory live in metropolitan areas
- 3 of the 25 largest are in Chesapeake territory
  - ▶ Baltimore—2.4 million
  - ▶ Edge of Washington metro area—half million
  - ▶ Edge of Philadelphia metro area—two-thirds million

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# Poverty

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- Poverty correlates with most other human needs and social concerns--malnutrition, disease, addictions, crime, lack of education, unemployment, domestic violence
  - 400,000 people in the Chesapeake territory live in poverty
  - 150,000 children are among this group, about one in eight children
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# Neighborhoods

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Reached and unreached Zip Codes in Maryland

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- 68 out of 460 have an Adventist church
  - 38% of the population lives in these Zip Codes
  - The majority of Adventist members live in the 68 neighborhoods with churches
  - More than three million people live in a neighborhood with no Adventist presence
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# Neighborhoods

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Reached and unreached Zip Codes in Delaware

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- 10 out of 62 have an Adventist church
  - 31% of the population lives in these Zip Codes
  - The majority of Adventist members live in the 10 neighborhoods with churches
  - Half a million people live in neighborhoods where there is no Adventist presence
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# Neighborhoods

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Comparison of demographics of reached and  
unreached Zip Codes

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The unreached neighborhoods are most likely  
to be Blue Collar communities with somewhat  
lower levels of education and income, and  
single-family, owner-occupied homes

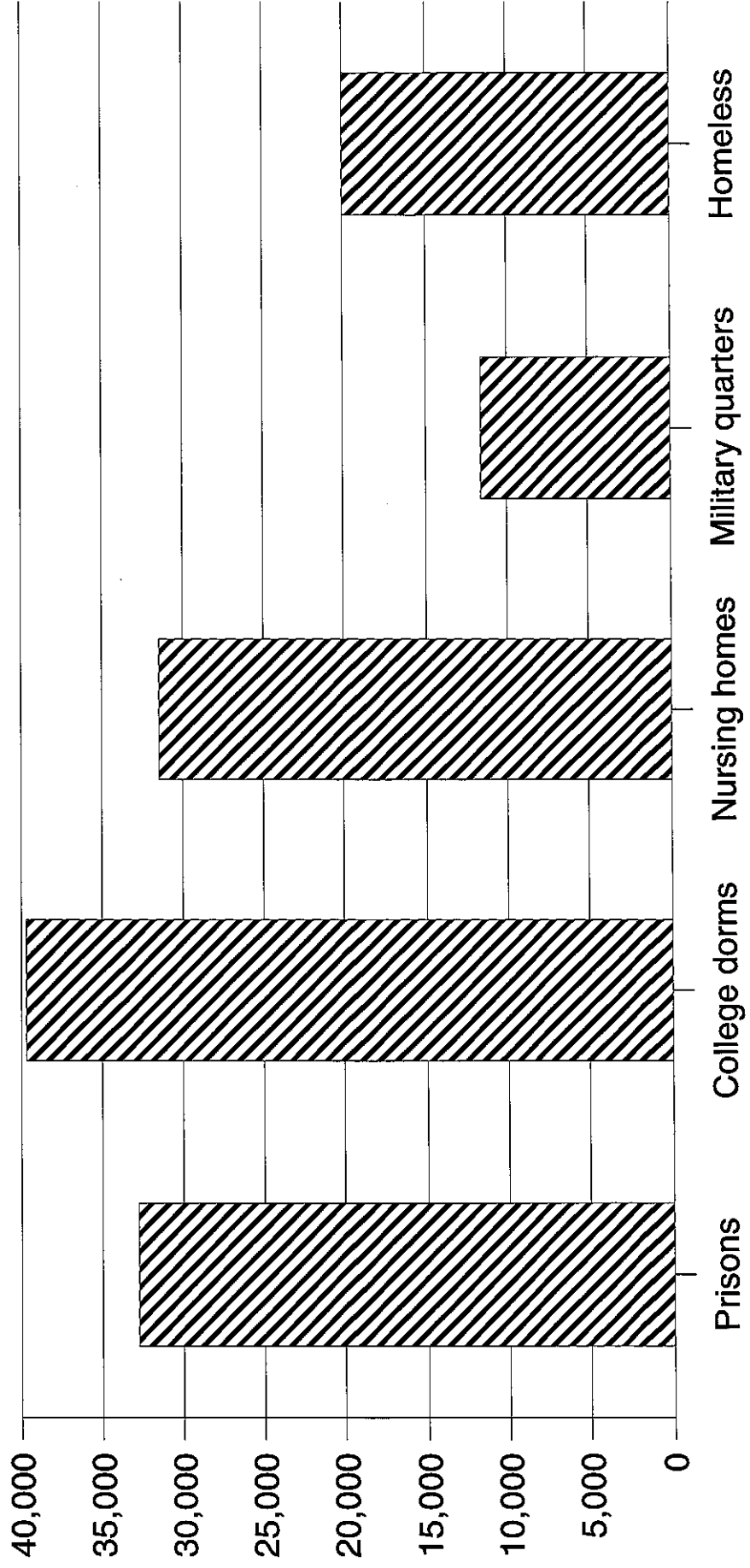
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# People in Institutions

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Special ministries are needed to reach these people groups

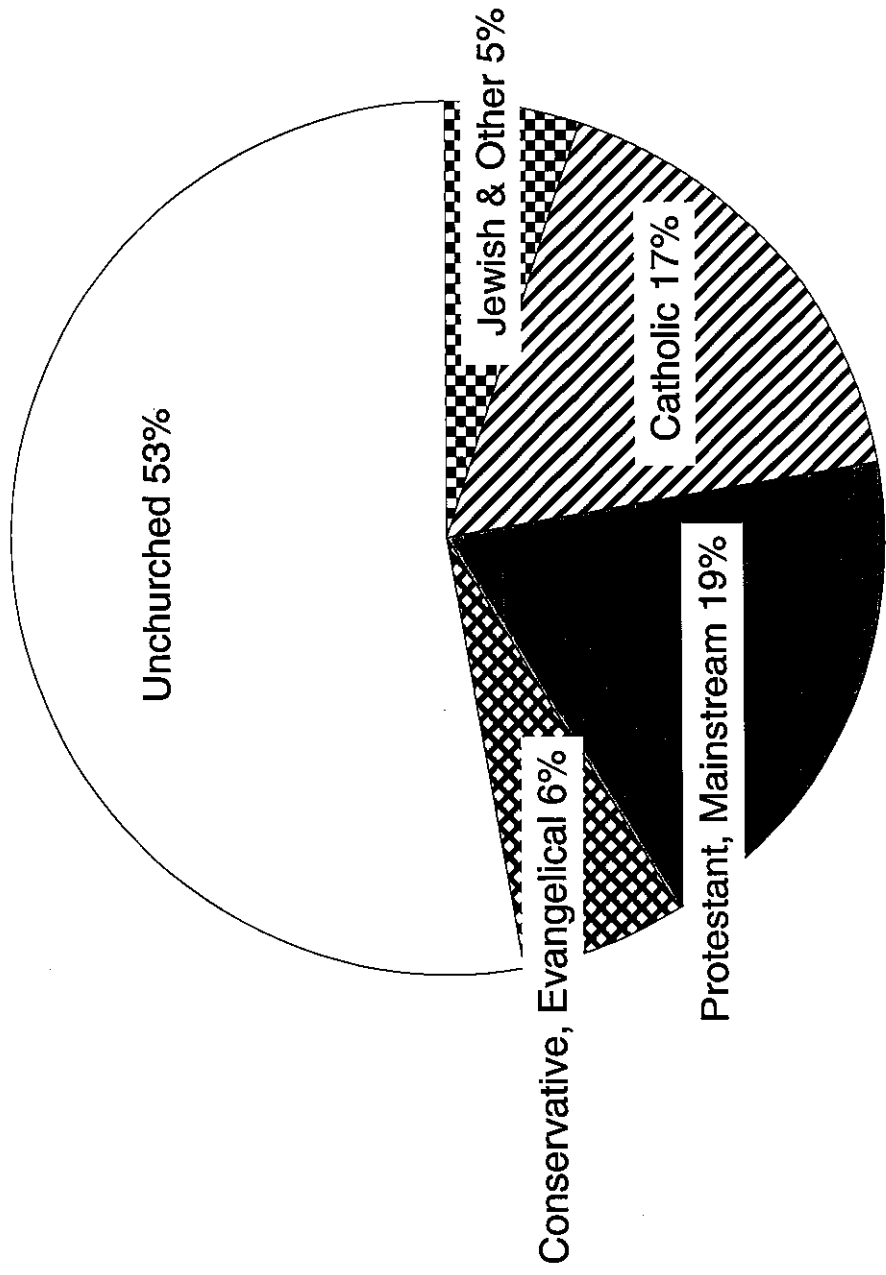


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# Religious Profile

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The residents of the state of Maryland

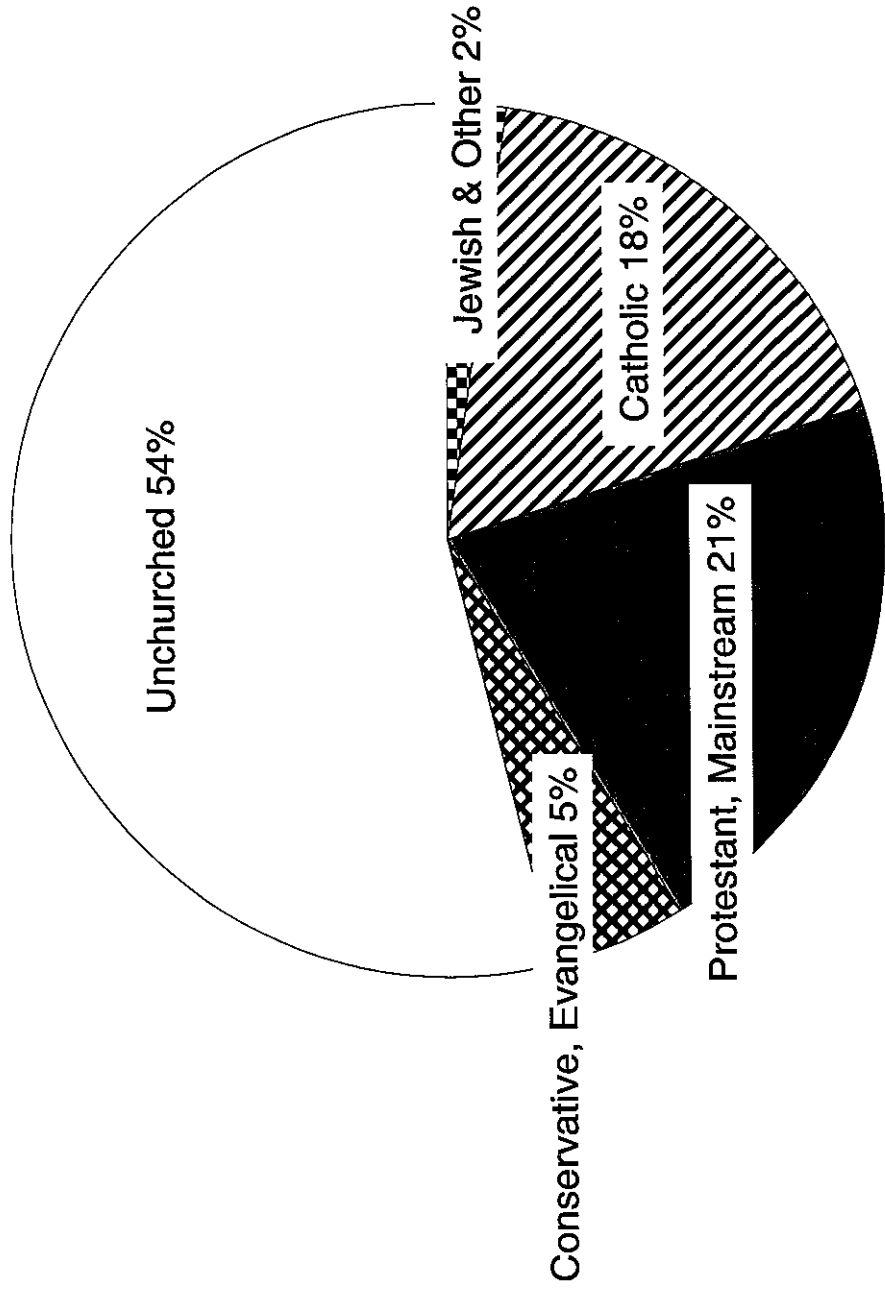


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# Religious Profile

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Residents of the state of Delaware



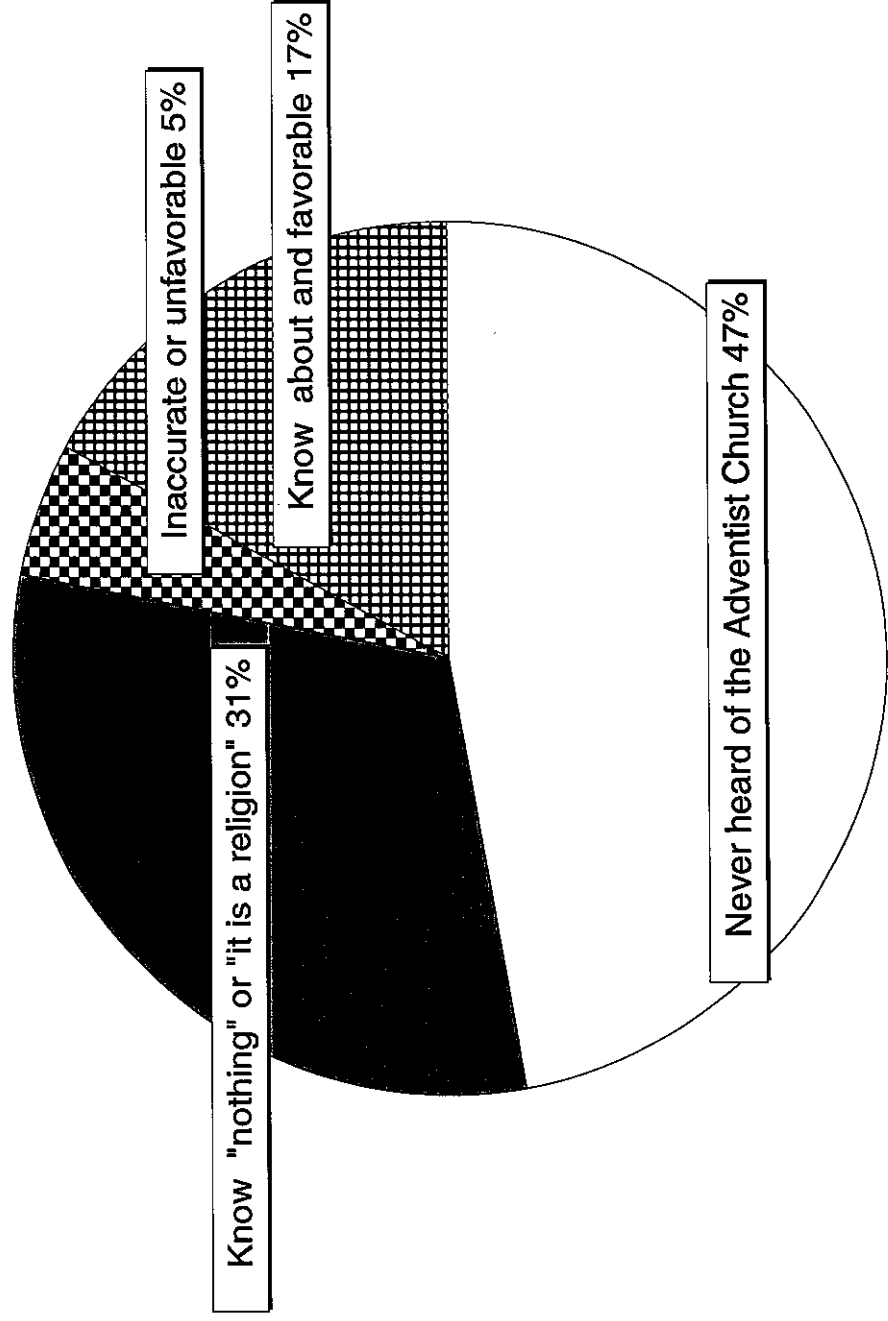


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# Public Awareness

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of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its ministries,  
institutions and agencies in the U.S.A.

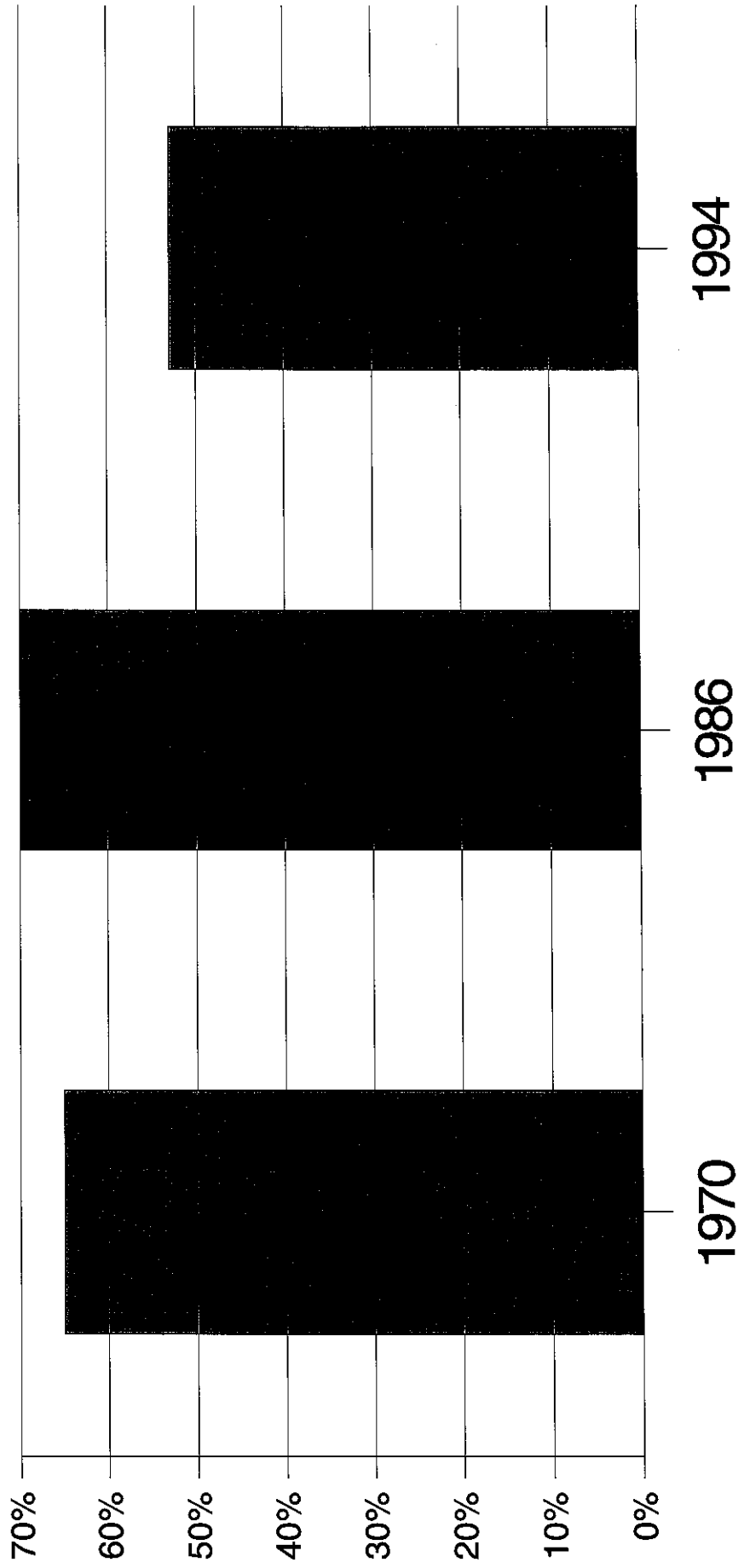


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# Public Awareness

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

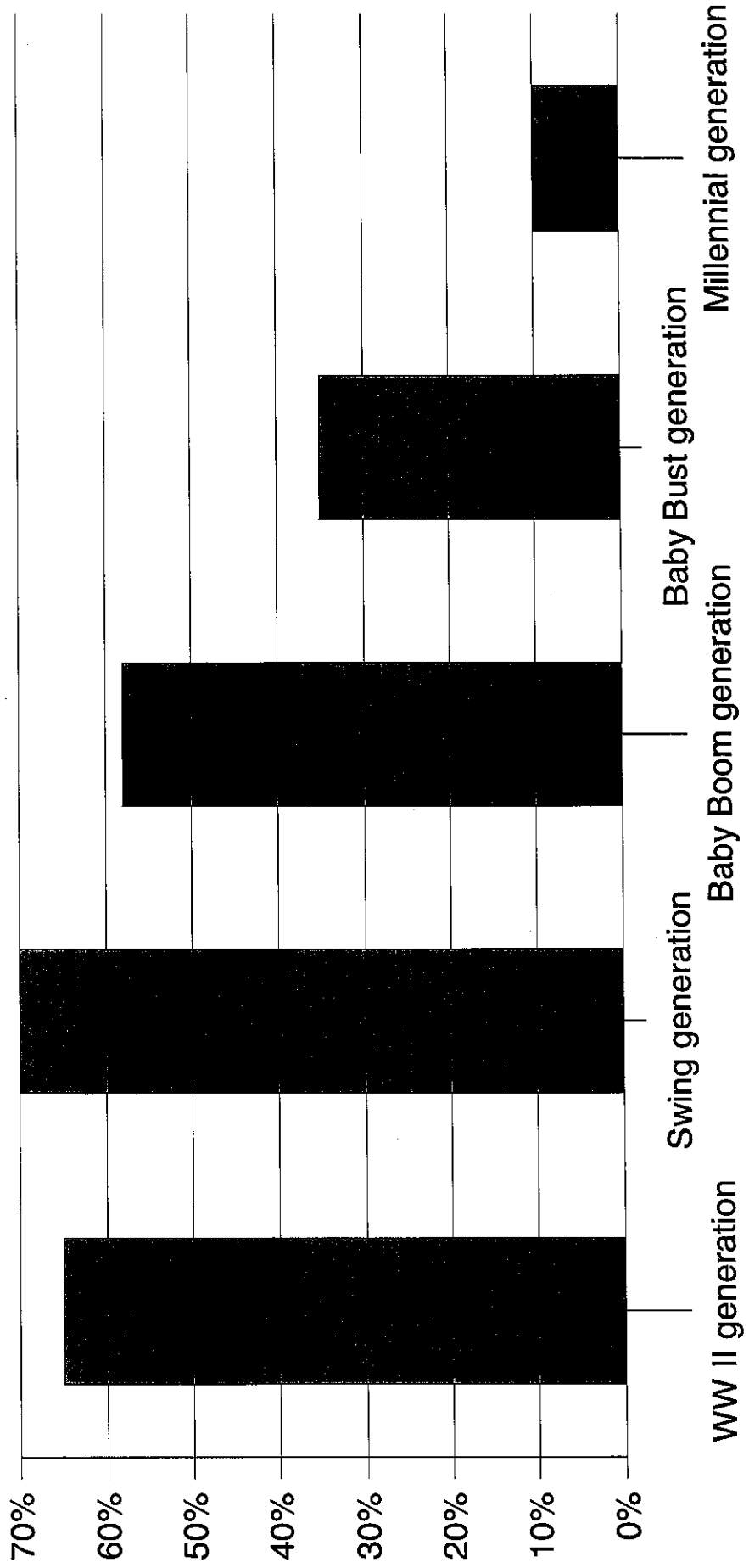


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# Public Awareness

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



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# Public Awareness

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

