

Public Awareness of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Parkersburg, West Virginia A Base-line Survey

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A survey of the general public in Parkersburg, West Virginia, was commissioned by the North American Division Office of Assessment & Strategic Planning, and implemented under contract by the Center for Creative Ministry, for Mountain View Conference and the Columbia Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Center has conducted similar studies nation-wide for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America (NAD) and in various locales for a number of other conferences and union conferences over the past two decades. It uses instruments developed by Gallup Polls International in 1970 and 1986.

A total of 241 random telephone interviews were completed during the summer and early fall of 2011. These were selected by random digit dialing so as to include unlisted and mobile telephones. At the 95th percentile of reliability the standard allowance for sampling error for a sample of this size is seven percentage points, plus or minus.

The purpose of this survey is to establish a baseline measurement of public perceptions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its mission and message at the beginning of a year-long media campaign in the Parkersburg television market. This survey will be replicated in the summer of 2012 to discover the impact the media campaign may have made on the community.

Name Recognition

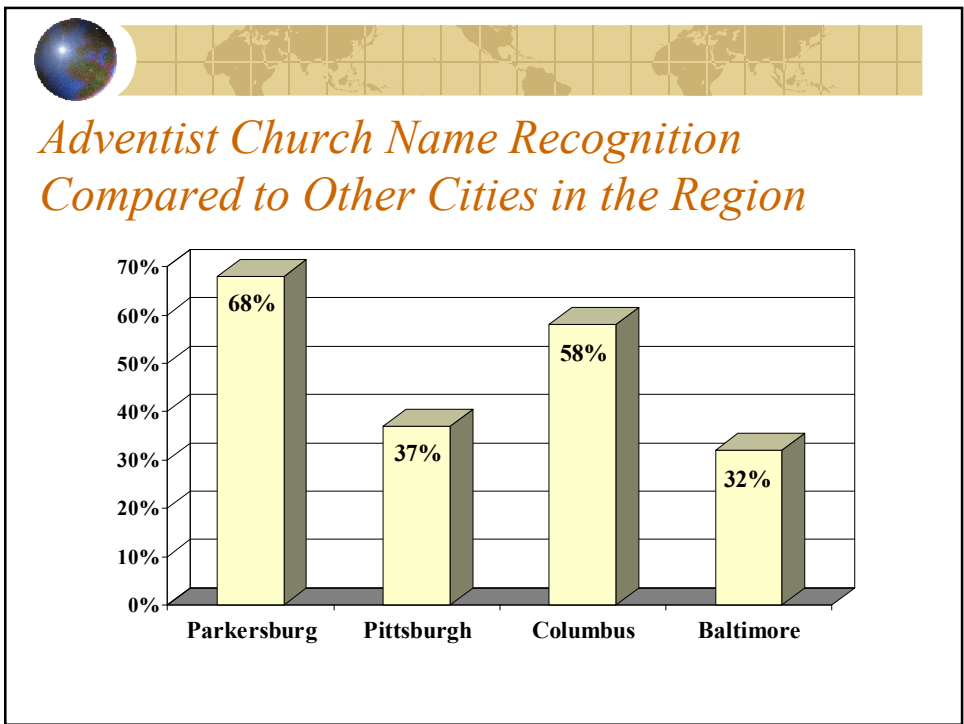
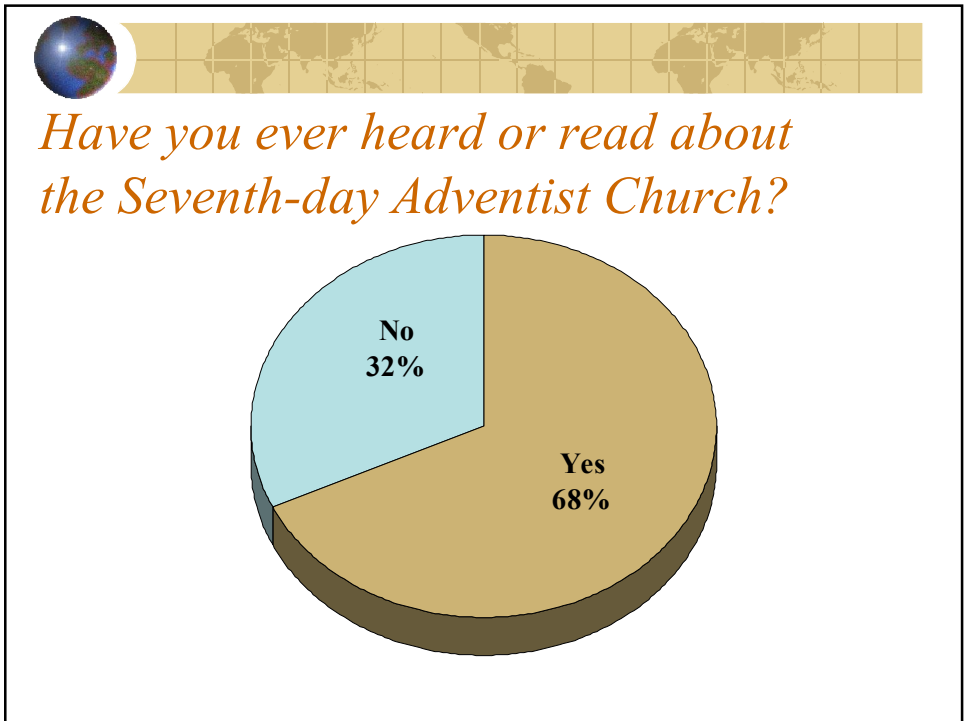
The first question asked in each interview was, "Have you ever heard or read about the Seventh-day Adventist Church?" More than two thirds of the residents interviewed said that they had. Older respondents, those over 45 years of age, were more likely to recognize the Adventist Church than were younger respondents under 45 years of age. Those employed in professional and managerial occupations were also more likely to indicate they had heard of or read about the Adventist Church.

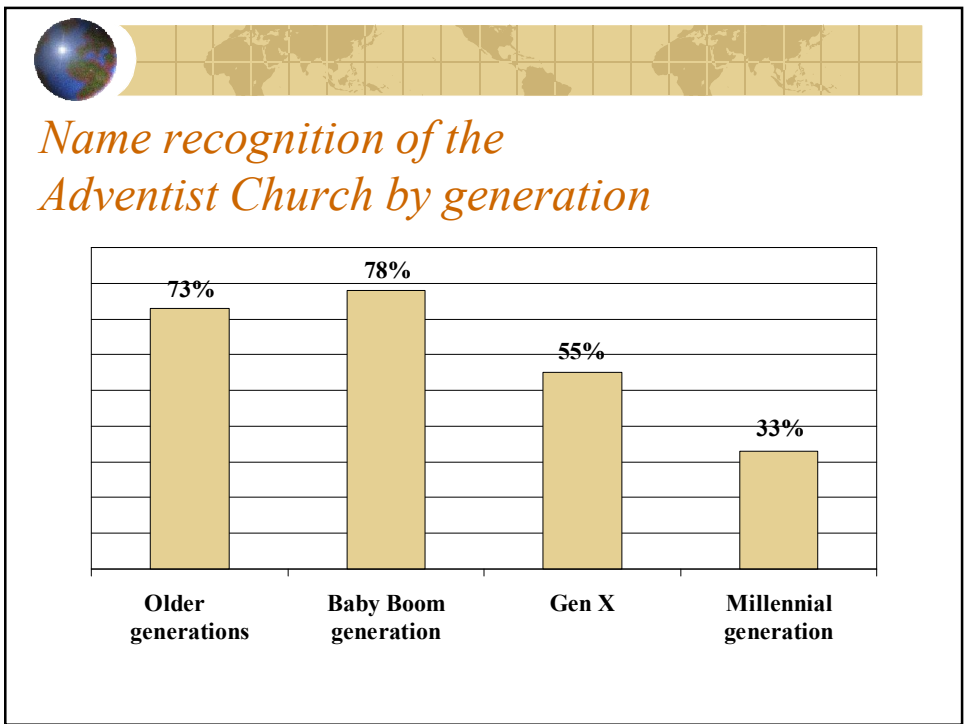
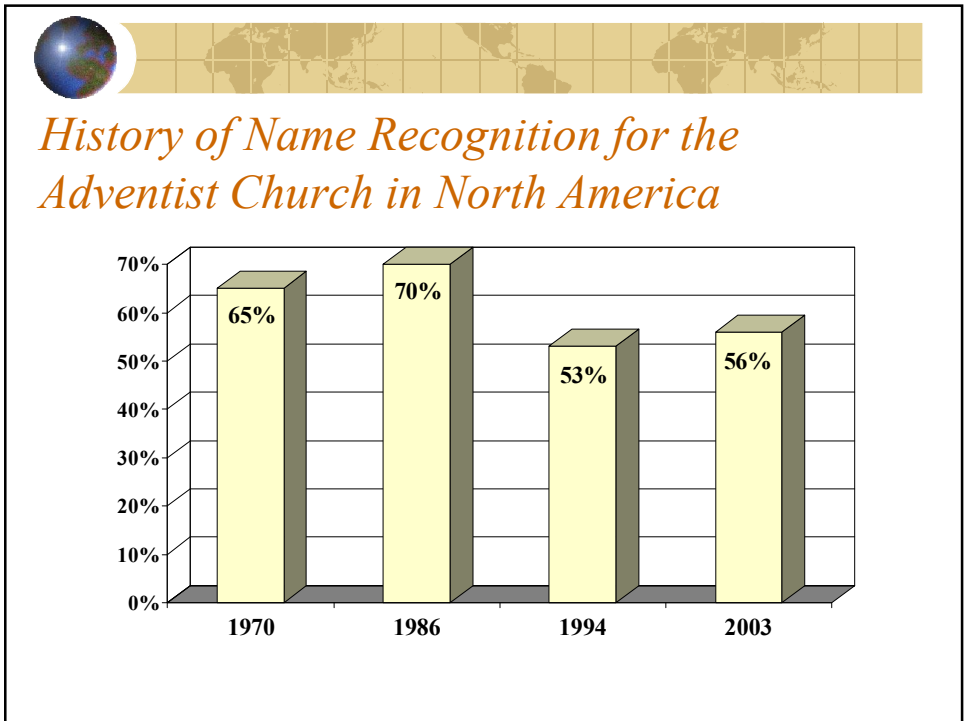
Overall, there was a significantly higher level of name recognition in Parkersburg than was found in similar surveys in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Columbus, Ohio, two metropolitan areas relatively near Parkersburg. It is higher than the level of name recognition found in several surveys on the east coast in Baltimore, Philadelphia and Newark.

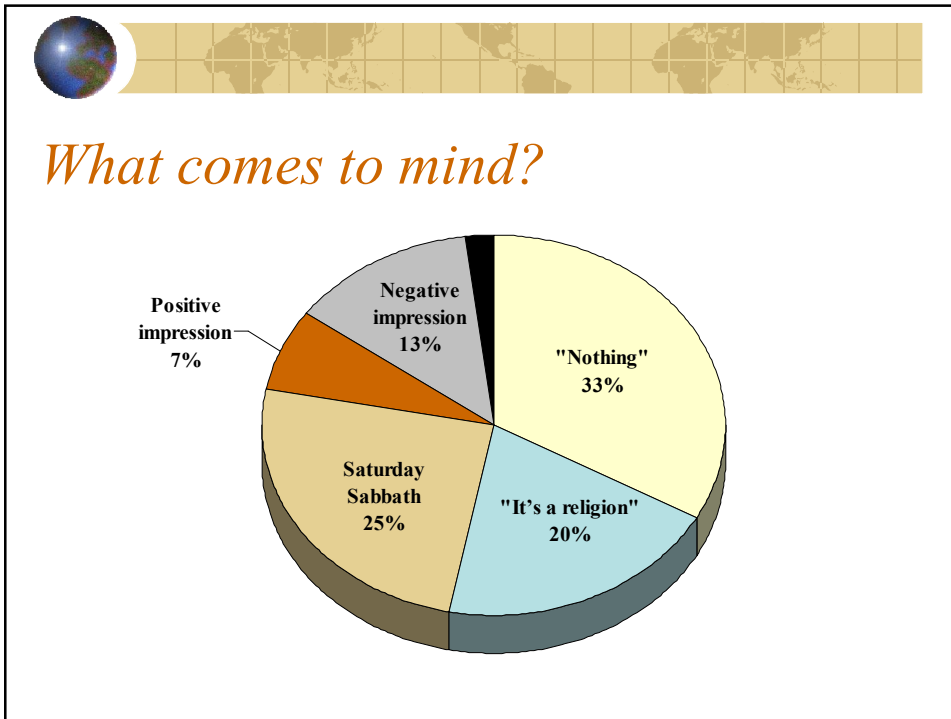
The level of name recognition in Parkersburg is also significantly higher than that found in the most recent national survey in 2004. It is comparable to the levels of name recognition found in the 1970 and 1986 national surveys.

Perceptions of the Adventist Church

The 68 percent of the respondents who indicated that they had heard of the Adventist Church were immediately asked an open-ended follow-up question. "What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the name Seventh-day Adventist Church?" The







interviewers took careful notes, transcribing the specific responses of the people they interviewed.

A third of the respondents said that nothing came to mind. Those employed in Blue Collar occupations were more likely to give this response. These are very likely individuals with less education.

Another 20 percent of the respondents said simply, “It is a religion” or “It is a church.” This is another way for the respondents to admit that nothing substantive is connected with the name Seventh-day Adventist in their minds because the question identified it as a church. Adults 33 to 45 years of age from Generation X were more likely to give this response.

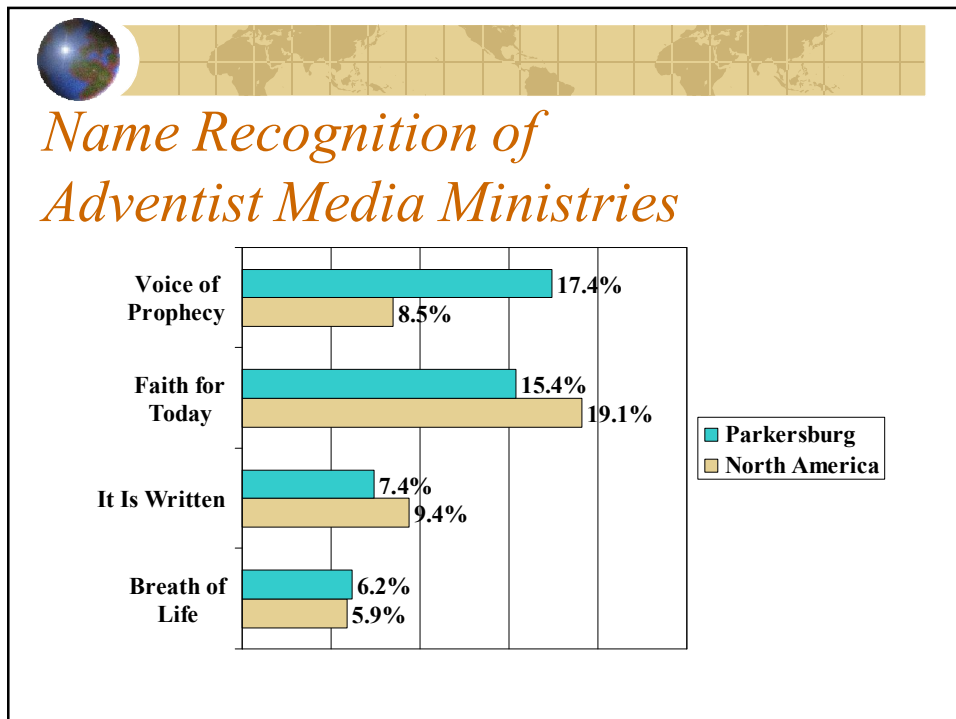
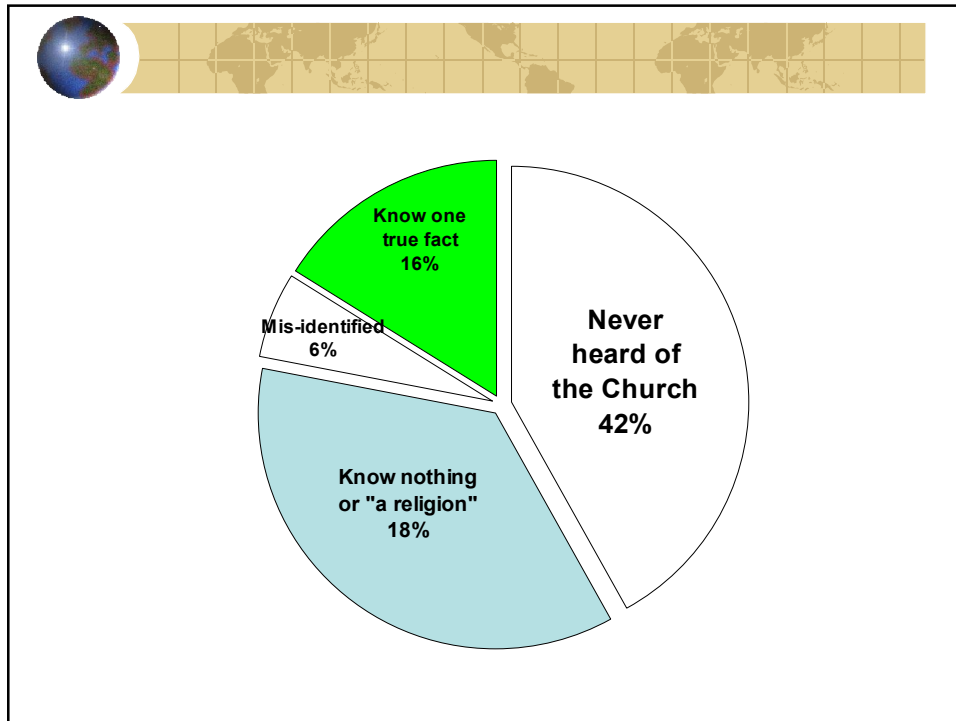
One in four of the respondents to this question mentioned Saturday Sabbath or going to church on Saturday. All demographic segments were equally likely to give this response. This is the single characteristic of the Adventist Church which was most widely known among the public in Parkersburg.

About one in eight respondents (13 percent) mentioned some negative impression of the Adventist Church. About half this cluster said that the Adventist Church is a “cult” in their opinion or misidentified it in some way with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS, or Mormons) or Jehovah’s Witnesses. Almost as many referred to what in their view are deceptive or overly aggressive outreach techniques used by the Adventist Church, such as going door to door to visit people who have not invited them and with whom they are not acquainted. It should be kept in mind that some of the impressions about outreach methods may actually be related to interactions with denominations other than the Adventist Church since it is clear that there is a degree of confusion in correctly identifying the denomination. A small number (two percent) complained that Adventists, in their view, are narrow-minded, “different” than other Christians or “too strict” in their religion.

Just seven percent of the respondents shared a positive impression of the Adventist Church with the interviewers. This includes those who named a friend or relative who they appreciate and know as an Adventist, references to Adventist health principles and programs, and general statements such as “they are good people” or “it is a religion that is OK” or “Bible-based.”

Lack of Knowledge is Greater than Prejudice

In Parkersburg, as is true in much of North America, the major problem with public awareness of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is that most people do not know much about it. This is a much larger problem than prejudice or negative opinions.



Nearly four out of five residents (78 percent of the total sample) either say they have never heard of the Seventh-day Adventist Church or indicate they do not know anything specific about it. These people have no impressions one way or another. The Adventist message is a blank slate for them.

Name Recognition of Media Ministries

Interviewers asked the respondents if they had ever heard of four of the radio and television ministries produced on behalf of the Adventist Church. The largest number (17.4 percent) said they had heard of the Voice of Prophecy radio program. Seniors 65 years of age and older were more likely to know about the Voice of Prophecy, as were ethnic minorities.

One in six of the respondents (15.4 percent) indicated that they know of the Lifestyle Magazine television program produced by Faith for Today. Those in Generation X, 33 through 45 years of age, were more likely to give this response as were Blue Collar workers.

Only 7.4 percent of the residents in Parkersburg have seen or heard about the It Is Written television ministry. Middle-aged Baby Boomers and ethnic minorities are more likely to know about this television program.

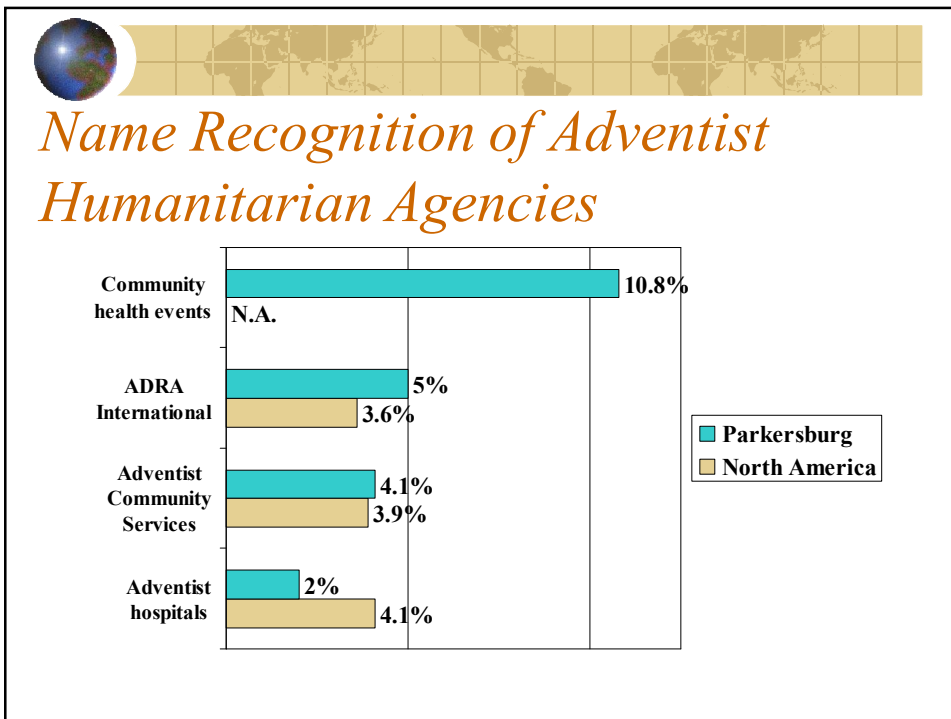
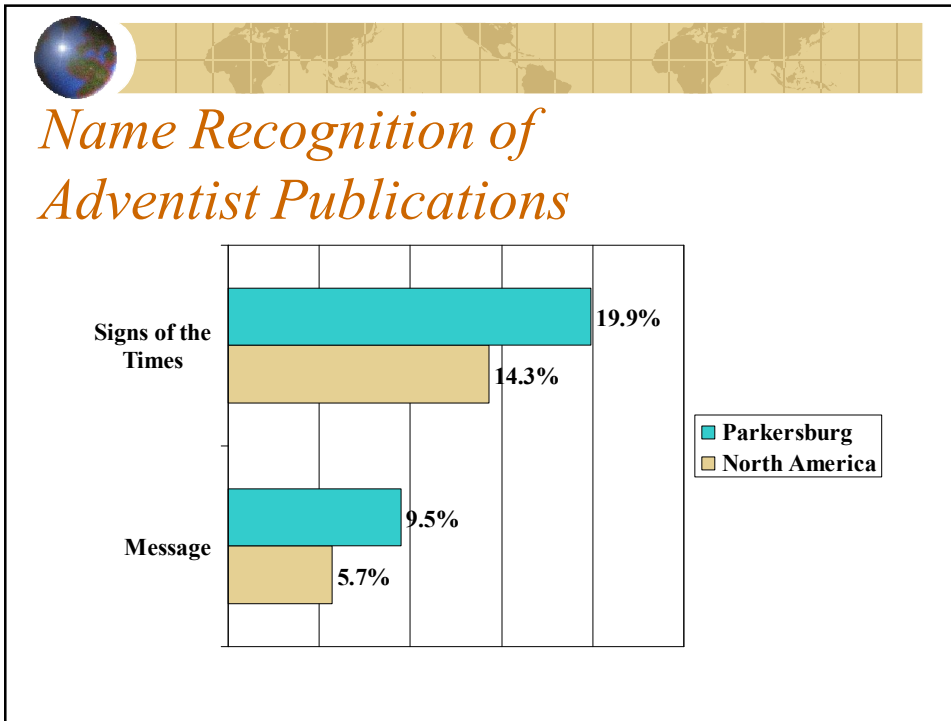
Just 6.2 percent of the respondents knew about the Breath of Life television program. Again, those in Generation X and with Blue Collar occupations were more likely to recognize this ministry. It also correlated with ethnic minorities, but the numbers involved are too small to be reliable.

Name Recognition of Outreach Periodicals

Interviewers asked about two periodicals published by the Adventist Church to reach non-members. One in five respondents indicated that they had seen the *Signs of the Times* magazine. Ethnic minorities, adults in Generation X (age 33 through 45) and those employed in White Collar occupations were more likely to give this response.

Nearly one in ten respondents said that they had seen or heard about *Message* magazine. Ethnic minorities were more likely to give this response, as were young adults under 33 years of age.

In general, print media may have a wider reach in Parkersburg than broadcast media. It is impossible to know to what extent the higher overall name recognition for outreach periodicals is due simply to a longer period of circulation than the number of years that the radio and television programs have been present in this market.



Name Recognition of Humanitarian Agencies

More than one in ten respondents told interviewers that they had heard of community health promotion activities sponsored by the Adventist Church such as the Five-day Plan to Stop Smoking, the Breathe Free program and other health classes. Blue Collar workers and ethnic minorities were more likely to be aware of these programs.

Five percent of the respondents said that they had heard of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) International. A slightly smaller number recognized the name of the domestic agency, Adventist Community Services (ACS). In both cases, these were distributed relatively equally among all demographic segments, making it impossible to identify specific segments of the population that had greater name recognition for these agencies.

Very few of the residents in Parkersburg have ever encountered a hospital sponsored by the Adventist Church. This should not be surprising since there have never been an Adventist health care institution in this area or in any of the cities in the region.

Personal Contact with Adventists

Nearly one in eight Parkersburg residents knows a member of the Adventist Church through their occupation, as a neighbor or some other acquaintance in the community. Ethnic minorities and those employed in professional or managerial occupations are more likely to give this response.

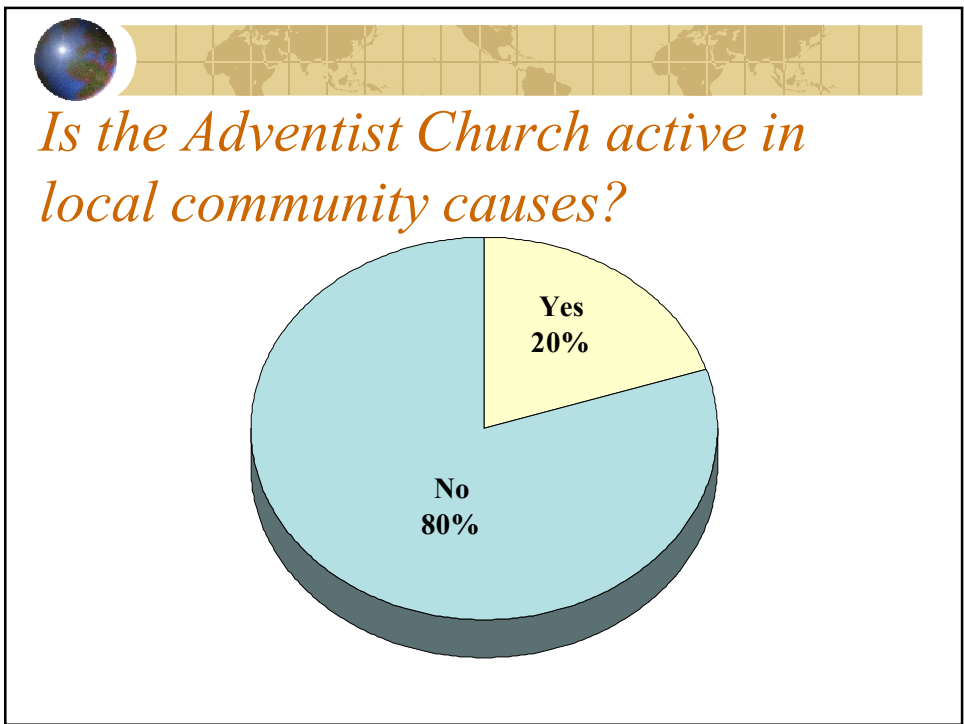
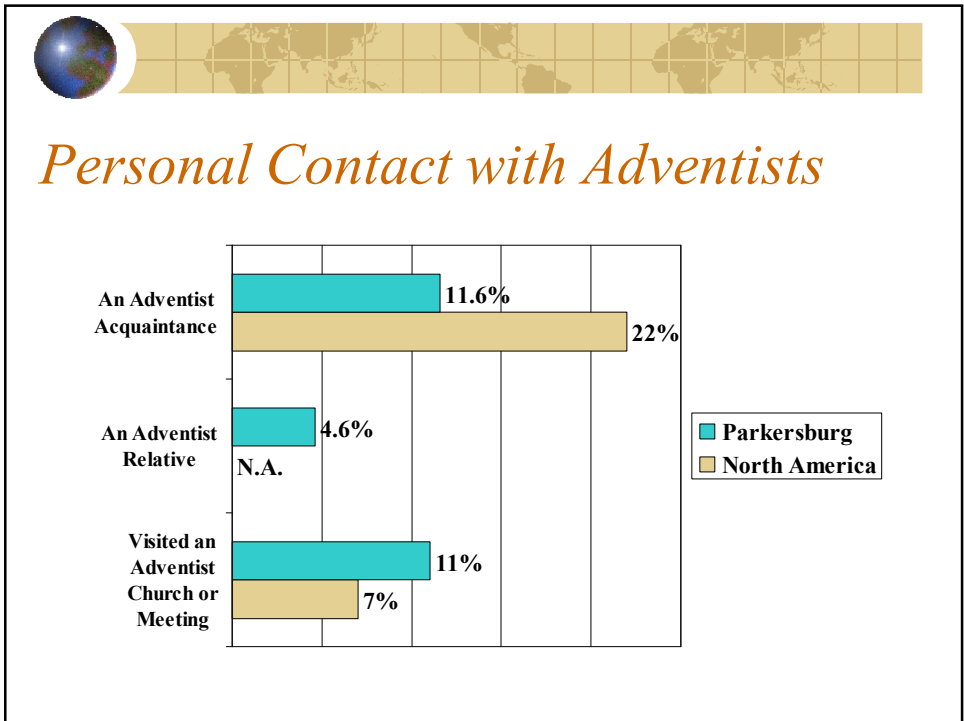
Less than five percent say that they have a relative who is a member of the Adventist Church. These respondents are spread across all demographic segments.

Community Involvement by the Adventist Church

One in five Parkersburg residents told interviewers that they see the Adventist Church as active in local community causes and meeting needs in the community. Those employed in professional and managerial occupations are more likely to have this impression as are young adults under 33 years of age.

Overall, the community involvement and personal relationships of Adventists are associated with positive feelings and good impressions among the residents of Parkersburg. A media campaign will do the most for the public awareness of the Church if it builds on this personal foundation, highlighting personalities and community projects associated with the Adventist Church.

A disembodied approach or one that focuses on institutional advertising will likely do little to improve public knowledge of the Adventist faith or improve attitudes toward the



Adventist religion. Residents need to anchor their impressions of the Adventist message and mission in personalities and projects that they can relate to.

Demographics of the Survey Sample

The Parkersburg residents who were interviewed in this survey were more representative of older generations and less representative of the young adults in the community. The data showing that younger people are less likely to recognize the name of Seventh-day Adventist combined with this age skew may account for the overall higher level of name recognition in Parkersburg. If a similar survey or focus group research were limited to young adults, it is likely that a much lower level of name recognition would be found.

These facts create a strategic decision point for the media campaign. If the media is focused more on older residents, it may get a greater increase in overall name recognition in the second survey at the end of the year. If the media focuses more on young adults, it may result in a smaller overall impact at the end of the year, but it could do more to change the very small percentage of people in this age group who have ever heard of the Adventist Church.

In terms of gender and ethnicity the sample in this survey is quite similar to the census data for the Parkersburg metropolitan area. This is another indication of the reliability of the data from this survey, but it provides little guidance in terms of targeting the media campaign.

The occupation profile of the respondents is also similar to the available census data for Parkersburg. Unfortunately, these data are more than ten years old, from the 2000 Census. The occupation data from the 2010 Census has not yet been released for the Parkersburg metropolitan area.

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