

Consultants Report 1

***Survey of the People in the Pews
Mount Vernon Hill Church***

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Introduction

A survey of attenders at the Mount Vernon Hill Church was conducted in the fall of 2006 at the request of the pastor and elders. The purpose of the study is to evaluate various ministries and activities of the church as well as gather information for strategic planning. The standard Survey of the People in the Pews, developed by the Center for Creative Ministry, was used with some modifications relevant to the unique activities and character of this congregation. This instrument includes many items from national studies of congregational life in order to provide tested questions and comparative data. It was distributed to worship attenders on two consecutive Sabbaths and a total of 108 usable questionnaires were returned.

The most recent headcounts of attendance show an average attendance of 208, so the response rate was a little over 50 percent. This is a good response rate and indicates the reliability of the information contained in this report.

This report is based on a computer analysis of the 108 responses. All sample surveys are subject to sampling error. At the 95th percentile of reliability, an allowance of ten percentage points should be made in interpreting the results of this survey. (See the appendix for more precise information on sampling error.) Comparisons are made throughout this report with the U.S. Congregational Life Study (USCL) conducted in 2000 by a consortium of more than 40 denominations and faiths, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America.

Monte Sahlin, director of research for the Ohio Conference, developed the questionnaire and wrote the analysis for this study. Paul Richardson, executive director of the Center for Creative Ministry, managed the study with the assistance of Carmen Rusu and Norma Sahlin. The data processing was done by the Center and the graphics were prepared by staff at the Center, as well as the publication of the report.

Membership and Attendance

Both the membership and attendance at the Mount Vernon Hill Church are in decline, according to data obtained from the official records of the Ohio Conference. (See page 1 of the graphics.) The membership of the church was nearly 580 in 1984 and dropped to about 510 over the next two years, but then rebounded to nearly 590 in 1989. It remained at or above 580 through 1995, and then began a series of steps down to a low of 500 in 2003. It has rebounded a little since 2003 and by the January 1, 2007, stood at 508.

Attendance appears to be in more serious decline than membership. Sabbath attendance records are available going back five years. In the fourth quarter of 2003, attendance averaged 333. No report was filed for the fourth quarter of 2004, but by the final quarter of 2005 average attendance had dropped to 270. Again in 2006, no report was filed for the fourth quarter. During the first quarter of 2007, average attendance is down to 208. It should be kept in mind that first

quarter attendance in almost all churches is usually less than fourth quarter attendance, nonetheless these data are cause for serious consideration by the leadership of the congregation.

Demographic Profile of the Congregation

A little more than half of the people in the pews on Sabbath at the Mount Vernon Hill Church are women. (See page 2 in the graphics section.) Some 47 percent are men. This is not significantly different than the overall population in the U.S., and it is decidedly different than most Protestant congregations in America. The U.S. Congregational Life Survey (USCL) found that 61 percent of those who attend worship are women and only 39 percent are men. The much better balance among the attenders at the Hill Church is a sign of strength.

The Hill Church has many more people attending from the Millennial generation (13 through 30 years of age in 2007) than are present in the general population in Knox County, while it attracts significantly fewer than might be expected among those from the Baby Boom generation, 43 through 61 years of age in 2007. Some 47 percent of the respondents are in the Millennial generation as compared to only 20 percent of the general population. Another 12 percent are in Generation X—31 through 42 years of age in 2007—which is about the same as the general population. The USCL shows a pattern of larger portions of older people attending worship across America, but this is not reflected in the survey data at the Mount Vernon Hill Church. This is due to the fact that this congregation is the campus church for Mount Vernon Academy (MVA), a secondary school with students who are entirely in the current age frame of the Millennial generation. These young people play a key role in the life of the congregation and are vital to its future.

Annual Household Income

People from households with annual incomes of \$50,000 or more are more likely to attend Mount Vernon Hill Church, while those from households with a lower income are less likely to attend. (See page 3 of the graphics.) This is significantly influenced by the student body at MVA. The majority of attenders who are members in other churches (53 percent) are from the higher income households, while the majority of Hill Church members (56 percent) are from the lower income households. The fact that so many of the students come from higher income homes is undoubtedly related to the cost of education.

Level of Education

The educational profile of the Hill Church also reflects the many young people who are in the process of getting an education at MVA. There are more than twice as many church attenders who have not yet completed a secondary diploma as in the general population of Knox County and half as many who have only a secondary diploma. Among members of the Hill Church, 86 percent have a secondary diploma, while among the members of other churches who attend at the Hill Church, 85 percent do not. Despite this factor, the people in the pews at the Hill Church still include significantly more individuals with a college degree than in the general

population of Knox County. This difference is even more pronounced among the Hill Church members, 42 percent of whom have a college degree as compared to 22 percent of Knox County adults.

Marital Status

Due to the MVA students attending the Hill Church, the people in the pews include many more never married individuals than would normally be expected. (See page 4 of the graphics.) Among the members of the Hill Church, a more typical profile exists. More than two-thirds of the members (68 percent) are currently married, as compared to just half of the population of Knox County. The USCL found that 66 percent of church attenders are married as compared to 52 percent of Americans. At the same time 91 percent of the attenders who are members of other churches have never been married, and almost all of these are undoubtedly MVA students.

Even among the Hill Church members there are far fewer divorced individuals than in the general population of Knox County. This reflects the unfortunate fact that Americans tend to drop out of church when they get a divorce—a time when they most need the church—and divorced, single adults often report that they feel uncomfortable attending church where marriage tends to be the norm. The percentage of widows among the Hill Church members is about the same as in the general population.

Ethnic Background

Mount Vernon Hill Church has a predominantly White, non-Hispanic congregation, despite the fact that the majority of the MVA students are from ethnic minority backgrounds. A total of 53 percent of the attenders who are members of other churches are African American, Hispanic or multiethnic. And 90 percent of the Hill Church members are non-Hispanic Whites.

The congregation on Sabbath at the Hill Church is significantly more diverse than the general population in Knox County. (See page 5 of the graphics.) Even if the MVA students who are not Hill Church members were removed from the profile, the Hill Church still has a more diverse congregation than is true for the general population. This is generally true for Seventh-day Adventist churches across North America.

Citizenship at Birth

About eight percent of the people who attend the Hill Church are immigrants to the U.S., born without American citizenship. More than nine out of ten are native-born Americans. Hispanic respondents are more likely to be immigrants, as are those in their 30s, those with a college degree and those from middle-income households.

The Hill Church congregation is more likely than the general population in Knox County to include immigrants. (See page 6 of the graphics.) Even if only the Hill Church members among the respondents are considered, there are three times as many immigrants among the

membership as in the population of Knox County. Again, this is often true for Adventist churches in North America and around the world.

Church Membership

Nearly two-thirds of the respondents indicate that they are members of the Hill Church, while a third report that they are members of another Seventh-day Adventist Church. The remaining four percent are either unchurched individuals or members in another denomination.

The members are more likely to be over 30 years of age, of white ethnic background, from households with annual incomes under \$75,000, to attend the Hill Church regularly and to have a volunteer responsibility at the Hill Church. The respondents who are members of other Adventist congregations are more likely to be under 30 years of age, from ethnic minority groups, from high-income households, to attend less often and have no volunteer responsibility at the Hill Church.

Clearly many of the respondents who have their membership in another Adventist church are MVA students, but that does not account for everyone in this group. One in eight have college degrees and are over 30 years of age.

It should also be noted that there are at least two respondents who report that they are not members of any church and would like to join the Hill Church. Both are over 30 years of age, so these cannot be MVA students or local young people. Newcomers of this kind are crucial to the mission and future growth of the church. It is likely that there were more such individuals present who did not turn in a questionnaire.

Church Attendance

The majority of the respondents indicate that they attended at the Hill Church three or four out of the previous four Sabbaths. (See page 7 of the graphics.) Two in five say they were present only once or twice. Although there may be an individual exception, these two groups represent the regular attenders at Hill Church and the people who attend less often.

The regular attenders are more likely to be older people (over 60 years of age), from lower-middle income households (\$25,000 to \$49,999 per year), married or widowed, and from a white ethnic background. Those who attend less often are more likely to be younger people (under 40 years of age), from high-income households, never married, from an ethnic minority background, who have not yet completed a secondary diploma. Obviously the MVA students make up a large segment of those who attend less often, but they do not account for the entire group because a third are over 30 years of age.

The Hill Church may appear to have a much lower attendance pattern than is typical for Adventist churches across North America. If the MVA students were removed from the picture,

its attendance profile would be about the same as the average for North America. This still leaves a significant number of younger adults who attend less often and are not as involved in the church as are many of the older people who are regular attenders.

Impact on Participants

A number of questions were asked to try to measure the impact of the ministries of the Hill Church on the people who participate. The first such item simply asked, “To what extent does worship at the Hill Church help you with everyday living?” (See page 7 of the graphics.) One in four (23 percent) say, “A great extent.” Those over 60 years of age are more likely to give this response, as are those who attend every Sabbath, those from households with incomes under \$25,000 per year and those with only a secondary education.

Two in five attenders (38 percent) say that worship at the Hill Church helps them only to “some extent” with everyday life. Respondents in their 30s, 40s and 50s are more likely to give this response, as are those from households with annual incomes of \$50,000 or more.

Another two in five respondents (39 percent) report that they are helped only to “a small extent” or “not at all” by their attendance at the Hill Church. Those from an ethnic minority background are more likely to give this response, and the same is true for those under 30 years of age, those who attend less often and those who are members of other Adventist churches.

Spiritual Growth in the Last Year

Half of the attenders at the Hill Church (51 percent) report “some growth” in their faith over the last year. (See page 8 of the graphics.) Those from upper-middle income households are more likely to give this response, as are adults over 40 years of age, those who are Hill Church members, and those with college degrees.

Two in five individuals (38 percent) say they have had “much growth” in their faith over the last year. Of these respondents, the largest segment is made up of the 19 percent who say that it was “mainly through my own private activities.” Another 12 percent say it was “mainly through other groups or congregations” and only seven percent say it was “mainly through the Hill Church and its activities.” Those from high-income households and those who have a graduate degree are more likely to report much growth from their own personal activities. Respondents who attend less often are more likely to report “much growth mainly through other groups or congregations,” as are those who come from ethnic minority backgrounds and those who have not completed a secondary diploma. Those from low-income households are more likely to report much growth in their faith during the last year and attribute their growth to the Hill Church, as are those over 60 years of age and those who attend regularly.

People attending the Hill Church are less likely to report much spiritual growth in the last year than are attenders at Adventist churches across the U.S. They are also less likely to attribute

this growth to the activities of the Hill Church. They are more likely to report only “some” growth or “no real growth.” This goes beyond the MVA students who may feel more at home in the Adventist church where they are members. There are many mid-life adults in the Hill Church who are not being challenged to greater spiritual development.

Volunteer Ministry Involvement

Nearly half of the people in the pews (48 percent) currently have a ministry assignment at the Hill Church. (See page 8 of the graphics.) Half do not. Those who attend more often are more likely to have a volunteer role, as are those who are members of the Hill Church. The same is true for respondents in their 30s, those over 60, those from a white ethnic background and those from middle-income households.

Among the half who do have a volunteer ministry role at the Hill Church, the largest number have not actually put in any hours in the previous month. (See page 9 of the graphics.) And nearly half of those who reported have a current ministry assignment did not answer the questions about how much time they put in. These are both indicators that the Hill Church may have slipped into a habit pattern present in many congregations in which members accept assignments from the nominating committee or leaders, but do not actually function.

Only two percent of the respondents report putting in ten hours or more in the previous month. The largest number of the active workers report only three to five hours in a month, about one hour a week. The consequence of this pattern is that the Hill Church is seriously understaffed to carry on adequate ministries. Because of the complexity of the Adventist community in Mount Vernon, it is possible that a significant number of respondents are volunteering time at the Community Service Center and other ministries, but did not think to include these in their response to this question. That would skew the results as compared to most Adventist congregations.

The majority of the people in the pews at the Hill Church (55 percent) indicate they have been asked personally during the last year to volunteer time in some ministry sponsored by the church. (See page 9 of the graphics.) Those who have a volunteer assignment are more likely to say they have been asked, as are those who attend regularly, those in their 30s, those over 60 years of age, those with a secondary diploma or a college degree, and those from middle and lower-middle income households.

Perhaps it is more important to identify who is not being asked to volunteer. Those who do not already have a volunteer assignment are less likely to have been asked, as are those who are from a black ethnic background, those who attend less often, those from the Baby Boom generation (now in their 40s and 50s), and those under 30 years of age.

Evaluation of Sermons

Half of the worship attenders say that the sermons at the Hill Church do “very well” in providing solid Bible content. (See page 10 of the graphics.) Just five percent disagree, with the rest giving an ambivalent response. Those from households with an annual income over \$75,000 are more likely to give a positive response, as are those with a graduate degree, those over 60 and those who have a volunteer role in the church.

A third of worship attenders indicate that the sermons at Hill Church do “very well” at encouraging spiritual growth, but one in six indicate that no encouragement is given. Half of the respondents (51 percent) are ambivalent. Respondents over 40 years of age are more likely to be positive, as are those with graduate degrees. Black and Hispanic respondents are more likely to be negative.

About one in four worship attenders (22 percent) report that the sermons at Hill Church do “very well” at encouraging the members to witness, while a larger number (30 percent) disagree. Nearly half (48 percent) are ambivalent. Those who are members of another Adventist church and those who come from high-income households are more likely to be negative. (Although age does not correlate, this is a profile related to the MVA students.) Those over 60 years of age are more likely to be positive, as are those with a graduate degree, those who attend every Sabbath and those who have a volunteer assignment.

One in five worship attenders feel that the sermons at Hill Church do “very well” in terms of relevance to everyday life and stimulating thought. Equal numbers were negative, leaving the majority ambivalent on both of these measures. Those over 60 years of age are more likely to be positive on both items, while those from high-income households and those with a graduate degree are more likely to be positive about relevance to everyday life and those from the Baby Boom generation are more likely to be positive about stimulating thought. Those with a college degree are more likely to be negative about stimulating thought, as are those in their 30s and those from a black ethnic background. Baby Boomers are more likely to be negative about relevance to everyday life.

More than two in five worship attenders (44 percent) say that social problems are never dealt with in the sermons at Hill Church, while only one in ten (11 percent) say the sermons do “very well” in dealing with social problems. Respondents in their 30s are more likely to say that social problems are not dealt with at all, as are those who are immigrants and those who are black or Hispanic. Respondents over 60 years of age and those with only a secondary education are more likely to say social problems are handled “very well.” This item constitutes a weak spot in the preaching at almost all Adventist churches in the U.S.

Music Preferences

Attendees were asked which type of music they prefer in worship. Eight different general types of music were listed along with “don’t know” and respondents were asked to indicate two choices.

Nearly everyone who attends the Hill Church (97 percent) prefers traditional hymns during worship along with other types of music. (See page 10 of the graphics.) Without exception, all demographic segments are about equally likely to express this preference.

Other than traditional hymns, no type of music is the preference of a majority of worshipers at the Hill Church. There is significant diversity regarding all other music. This makes the provision of a “blended” worship style necessary, yet problematic, unless a spirit of unselfish understanding and inclusiveness can be successfully fostered in the congregation.

Two out of five worship attendees (42 percent) also want to hear gospel music as part of the worship at the Hill Church. African Americans, those in their 30s, individuals with only a secondary education or less, and those who are members of another Adventist church are more likely to express this preference. No demographic segment evidenced a high negative toward gospel music.

A third of respondents (32 percent) prefer praise music or choruses in worship. Baby Boomers (in their 40s and 50s) are more likely to want this kind of music, as are respondents with a college degree. Again, no demographic segment gives evidence of a strong negative feeling toward this type of music in worship.

About one in four worshipers (24 percent) prefer contemporary Christian music. Those under 40 years of age are more likely to express this preference, as are those who have not completed a secondary diploma and those who are members of another Adventist church. This sounds very much like the profile of MVA students, but that does not account for about a third of those with this preference who are over 30 years of age.

Just eight percent of the people in the pews would like to hear classical music or chorales in worship. Those over 60 years of age are more likely to feel this way, as are those who attend every Sabbath.

Only five percent of the respondents selected “music or songs from a variety of cultures” as their preference. Black and Hispanic respondents are more likely to select this choice, as are Hill Church members in their 30s.

Two individuals would like to hear jazz in worship at the Hill Church, but no one selected Jesus Rock music. In terms of worship music all age groups and demographic segments in this congregation are relatively conservative, rejecting the most radical kinds of new religious music.

The preference for traditional hymns by those who attend the Hill Church is consistent with Adventists across the U.S. and the interfaith USCL survey. The percentages who prefer gospel music, praise music and contemporary Christian music are each a little less than the response among American Adventists across North America, but not largely so. Only the percentages selecting classical music and music from many cultures are significantly less.

Feelings about Worship

To explore in more depth the feelings of attenders about the worship experience, a series of eight items were used with the question, “How often do you experience the following during worship services at the Hill Church?” Each could be answered with one of four responses; always, usually, sometimes or rarely. (See page 11 of the graphics.) Similar research from Adventist churches across the U.S. and a large interfaith study have been published in *Adventist Congregations Today* (pages 7-9) and *Beyond the Ordinary: Ten Strengths of U.S. Congregations* (pages 28-30).

The majority of worshipers (55 percent) always or usually have a sense of God’s presence during the services at the Hill Church. Only 12 percent say they rarely do. Those over 60 years of age are more likely to feel a divine presence, as are those from high-income households and those who are members of another Adventist church. Those who attend every Sabbath are more likely to say they rarely sense God’s presence.

About half (48 percent) always or usually feel joy during worship at the Hill Church. Nearly one in five (18 percent) report that they rarely do so. Those over 60 years of age are more likely to feel joy, as are those with a graduate degree and those who are members of another Adventist church. Respondents who are black and those who attend less often are more likely to rarely feel joy.

Nearly as many (46 percent) always or usually experience inspiration, while one in six (15 percent) say they rarely do so. Those over 60 years of age are more likely to be inspired, as are those with graduate degrees, those who are immigrants and those who are members of another Adventist church. Respondents from the lowest-income households are more likely to say they rarely feel inspired.

More than a third of the worshipers (36 percent) always or usually have “a sense of fulfilling my obligation” when they attend worship at the Hill Church. A quarter (24 percent) rarely have such feelings. Those over 60 years of age and those in their 30s are more likely to feel that they are fulfilling an obligation, are those who attend every Sabbath, those who have a volunteer assignment, those who report their ethnic background as Hispanic, those from lower-middle income households, those with only a secondary education, and those who are members of another Adventist church. Only those from the lowest-income households are more likely to rarely feel a sense of obligation at worship.

Nearly a third of the people in the pews (29 percent) rarely or only sometimes experience spontaneity. Only 17 percent say they always or often do. Respondents over 60 years of age and those who attend every Sabbath are more likely to say they often experience spontaneity, while those in their 30s, 40s and 50s, those with college degrees and those who are immigrants are more likely to rarely experience it.

More than a third of worship attenders at the Hill Church (37 percent) rarely or only sometimes have a feeling of awe or mystery, while 17 percent indicate they always or usually do. Respondents from high-income households and those with graduate degrees are more likely to say they often experience a sense of awe or mystery, while those in their 30s, those who are Hispanic and those who attend less often are more likely to say they rarely do so.

Only a quarter of worshipers (23 percent) rarely experience boredom during worship at the Hill Church, while fully 42 percent say they are always or often bored. It is the MVA students who make up a large share of those who are always or often bored. Respondents under 30, those who are members of another Adventist church, those who attend less often, those who are black, those who are immigrants, those who are from high-income households and those who have not completed a secondary diploma are all more likely to be bored. Those over 40 years of age, those who attend regularly, and those with higher education are more likely to be rarely bored.

Two in five attenders rarely feel frustration with the worship services at the Hill Church, while a quarter are always or often frustrated. Respondents who have only a secondary diploma rarely experience frustration and the same is true for those who attend regularly.

Clearly, the Hill Church congregation has higher negative feelings and lower positive feelings about the worship experience than is typical for Adventist congregations across America. Attenders are more likely to say they always or usually experience boredom and frustration. They are less likely to feel God's presence, inspiration, joy, spontaneity, awe or even that they are fulfilling a sense of obligation on the Sabbath.

Feelings about worship at the Hill Church do not even compare favorably with the interfaith sample. Just 48 percent of Hill Church worshipers always or usually experience joy as compared to 79 percent of all faiths, and 46 percent of Hill Church worshipers are inspired as compared to 78 percent of all religions. Only 17 percent of Hill Church worshipers always or usually experience awe or mystery as compared to 25 percent of all religious communities.

Evaluation of Worship

Attenders at the Hill Church were asked to evaluate various aspects of the worship service on a five-point scale from excellent to poor. The percentages reported here are based on the number of respondents who selected a five or four, which are described as an "excellent" evaluation; the number of respondents who selected a three, which are described as neutral or

ambivalent; and the number of respondents who selected a one or two, which are described as an evaluation as “poor.” (See page 12 of the graphics.)

A majority of worship attenders (56 percent) evaluate the order of service at the Hill Church as excellent, while 17 percent indicate that this aspect of worship is poor. Those with graduate degrees and those who attend every Sabbath are more likely to rate the order of service as excellent, and those in their 30s, 40s and 50s are more likely to rate it as poor.

Half the people in the pews (51 percent) say the food and fellowship at the Hill Church is excellent. Only 14 percent say it is poor. Both the eldest age group—those over 60—and the youngest age group—those under 30—are more likely to say the food and fellowship are excellent. Those in their 30s are more likely to say it is poor, as are African Americans and Hispanics in the congregation.

Half the congregation (49 percent) indicate that the children’s story is excellent. Only one in six (13 percent) indicate it is poor. Respondents with a graduate degree are more likely to be positive, as are those from upper-middle income households, those who attend every Sabbath, those who have a volunteer assignment in the church, and those who are over 60 years of age. African Americans are more likely to be negative about the children’s story.

Just two in five respondents give excellent ratings to the warmth of the congregation (41 percent), the sermons (40 percent) and the songs we sing (39 percent). In each case, one in four respondents rate as poor these same elements of worship. Respondents over 60 years of age and those from low-income households are more likely to think the warmth of the people and the sermons are excellent. Respondents over 40 are more likely to think the songs we sing are excellent, as are those with graduate degrees, those who attend every Sabbath and those who have a ministry assignment. Black and Hispanic respondents are more likely to rate the songs we sing as poor, as are those in their 30s. Black and Hispanic respondents are also more likely to rate the sermons as poor, while those from high-income households are more likely to rate the warmth of the people as poor, as are those who have no volunteer role in the church.

About a third of the attenders at the Hill Church evaluate the visual aids used during worship (30 percent) and the music (32 percent) as poor. Only 28 percent in each case rate them as excellent. People with households with annual incomes over \$50,000 are more likely to be critical of both worship elements, while those with a college degree are more likely to be negative about the visual aids and those who attend regularly and those who are African Americans are more likely to be negative about the music. Those who attend less often are more likely to be positive about both items, as are those with graduate degrees and those under 30 years of age. Baby Boomers are more positive about the music, while immigrants and those who are members of another Adventist church are more positive about the visual aids.

In the opinion of the people in the pews, the worst aspect of the worship service at the Hill Church is the relative low attendance. Half the congregation (49 percent) think the number typically in attendance is poor, while only one in six (17 percent) see it as excellent. The seating

capacity of the sanctuary is considerably larger than the average worship attendance. Respondents in their 30s, 40s and 50s are more likely to be critical of attendance, as are those who are Hispanic and white, those with a secondary education and those with a college degree, those who attend regularly, those who have a volunteer role in the church, those who are Hill Church members, and those from middle-income households. This is a broad swath of the total congregation. Respondents under 30 years of age, those who have not completed a secondary diploma, those with membership in another Adventist church, and those who attend less often are more likely to rate the attendance as excellent. Most of this segment are very likely the MVA students who have no knowledge of the typical attendance at the Hill Church in past decades and may, in some cases, be used to home churches that are much smaller.

Perceptions of Hill Church

In order to get a more specific idea of their perceptions of the fellowship and ministry at the Hill Church, five statements were included in the questionnaire and respondents were asked to indicate how well each statement describes the congregation on a five-point scale, from “very well” to “not at all.” (See page 12 of the graphics.)

Church programs are well organized agree 40 percent of worship attenders, while 23 percent disagree and the rest are not sure. Those over 60 years of age are more likely to agree, as are those who are immigrants. Those in their 30s are more likely to disagree.

Only one in four (23 percent) agree that church ***activities strengthen personal relationships*** among the congregation, while a much larger number (43 percent) disagree and a third are not sure. Those in their 30s are more likely to disagree, as are blacks and Hispanics and those from households with annual incomes over \$75,000. Those over 60 years of age and those from low-income households are more likely to take a positive view.

Only one in five agree that ***new people are easily assimilated*** into the Hill Church, while 44 percent disagree and another third (36 percent) are not sure. Those in their 30s, 40s and 50s are more likely to disagree, as are Hispanics and those from households with annual incomes of \$50,000 or more. Those over 60 years of age are more likely to agree.

Only one in five agree that the ***members are excited about the future*** of the Hill Church, while half the congregation disagrees and nearly a third (30 percent) are not sure. Those in their 30s, 40s and 50s are more likely to disagree, as are those from upper-middle income households, those with college degrees, those who have a volunteer assignment and those who are Hispanic.

Less than one in five (18 percent) agree that the Hill Church ***has a clear sense of mission*** and purpose, while nearly half (47 percent) disagree and the rest are not sure. Those in their 30s are more likely to disagree, as are those from households with incomes of \$75,000 or more. Those under 30 and those who are members of another Adventist church are more likely to agree.

Sense of Belonging

Nearly two-thirds of the people who attend (62 percent) say they have a strong sense of belonging to the Hill Church. (See page 13 of the graphics.) The largest portion of these are split in two somewhat opposite views: 25 percent say that their sense of belong is not only strong, but growing, and another 25 percent indicate that although their sense of belonging is strong, it is “not as strong as in the past.” Another 12 percent say it is strong and about the same as last year.

A strong and growing bond is more likely among those over 60 years of age, those in their 30s, Hispanics, immigrants, and those with a graduate degree. A strong, but less so bond is more likely among Baby Boomers in their 40s and 50s and those with a college degree. An about-the-same bond is more likely among Baby Boomers and those who have never finished a college degree.

About a third of the people in the pews (37 percent) indicate that their sense of belonging to the Hill Church is not strong. Again, two equal portions take polar views on this: 13 percent say their bond is not strong, “but I am new here.” And another 13 percent say their bond is not strong, “but I am happy as I am.” A smaller number (11 percent) report that they do not have a strong sense of belonging to the Hill Church, “but I wish I did.”

The “I am new here” response is more likely among respondents under 30 years of age, those who have not yet completed a secondary diploma and those who report their ethnicity as African American. Many of these are probably MVA students. Those who are happy with a weak sense of belonging are more likely among the very same profile, as well as those from households with incomes over \$75,000 a year. Those who wish for a strong sense of belonging at the Hill Church are more likely among the Baby Boom generation.

The Hill Church has a significantly greater percentage of people who say that they do not have a strong sense of belonging than do most Adventist churches across the U.S. It also has a significantly smaller percentage of people who report that they have a strong sense of belonging. In both cases the percentages are also below the USCL interfaith sample. These are all indicators of a significant need that must be addressed by the Hill Church leadership.

Involvement in Making Decisions

The majority of attenders (59 percent) report that they have been given the opportunity to be involved in the making of important decisions at the Hill Church. (See page 13 of the graphics.) The largest number of these respondents also indicate that they only occasionally (27 percent) or almost never (18 percent) get involved. This means that only about one in six of the people who participate in New Community Fellowship (14 percent) regularly participate in important decisions. Those who are over 60 years of age are more likely to be among this 14 percent who usually get involved in decision-making, as are those who attend regularly, those who have a volunteer role in the church, those from lower-middle income households and those

who have not completed a college degree. Those who feel that they are given the opportunity, but generally or always choose not to get involved are more likely to include those 30 to 60 years of age, those from households with annual income over \$50,000 and those who attend less often.

More than two out of five attenders (42 percent) say that they have not been given the opportunity to get involved in making important decisions for Hill Church. Most of these respondents (29 percent of the whole sample) also indicate “that is fine.” They have no negative feelings about being left out. Just 13 percent of Hill Church worshipers say they feel excluded from the decision-making process and are not happy about it. Those who are under 30 years of age are more likely to say they are left out of important decisions. The same is true for those who report their ethnic background as black or Hispanic, those who are immigrants, those who have not completed a secondary diploma, those who attend less often, those who do not have a volunteer role at the Hill Church and those who are members of other Adventist churches. Only a handful of Hill Church members say they are excluded from being involved in important decisions at the church and are unhappy about it.

Compared to Adventist churches across the U.S., Hill Church has significantly more people in the pews who feel left out of decision-making and significantly more who are unhappy about it. It has about half the number as the average congregation who feel included in decision-making and do participate “often.” This is significantly different than in congregations of other denominations in which a much larger percentage of worshipers feel they could get involved in major decisions, according to the findings of the USCL survey. But, it appears that most of those who say they are excluded from decision-making are Mount Vernon Academy students who are not members of the Hill Church.

Overall Evaluation of Hill Church

Worship attenders were asked to evaluate ten aspects of Hill Church on a five-point scale from “poor” to “excellent.” Four of these can be considered strengths of Hill Church because the majority or nearly a majority of respondents rated these items with a 4 or 5 on the scale. (See page 14 of the graphics.) Six items were rated a 1, 2 or 3 on the scale by a majority of the respondents and represent the weaknesses of Hill Church.

The highest rating was given to the ***parking*** at Hill Church. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) rated it as excellent, while ten percent evaluate it as poor. Those over 30 years of age are more likely to rate the parking excellent, as are those who attend every Sabbath, those from households with incomes over \$75,000 a year, those with college and graduate degrees and those who are members of Hill Church.

The majority of those who attend Hill Church (55 percent) say that ***the pastor’s leadership*** is excellent, while one in four (26 percent) rate it as poor. Those over 62 years of age and those under 30 years of age are more likely to evaluate the pastor’s leadership as excellent, while those in their 30s are more likely to rate it as poor. Those from the highest-income

households and those who do not have a volunteer role at Hill Church are also more likely to give the pastor's leadership an excellent rating.

A majority of worshipers (51 percent) rate *community service* activities sponsored by Hill Church as excellent. Less than one in five (18 percent) say that community service is poor. Those who have a volunteer assignment at Hill Church are more likely to rate community service as excellent and the same is true for those who attend every Sabbath, those who are members of Hill Church, those over 60 years of age, those from low-income households and those with little education.

The *worship services* each Sabbath are rated as excellent by two in five worshipers, while one in four (26 percent) say they are poor. Those over 42 years of age are more likely to rate the worship services as excellent. The same is true for those from low-income households.

Less than a third of attenders (32 percent) rate the *help provided to individuals* in need at Hill Church as excellent. Nearly a quarter (22 percent) rate this aspect of the church as poor, with the largest number ambivalent on this item. Those under 42 years of age are more likely to give a positive response. No demographic segment is more likely than another to be negative.

About a third of respondents (32 percent) rate the *church board* at Hill Church as excellent and almost as many (28 percent) evaluate it as poor. The remaining third are ambivalent. Those over 60 years of age are more likely to evaluate the church board as excellent, as are those from lower-middle income households. Those 30 to 62 years of age are more likely to evaluate the church board negatively as are those from higher-income households and those with college degrees.

Only one in four people in the pews at Hill Church (24 percent) say the *evangelism* activities of the congregation are excellent. Nearly twice as many (44 percent) say it is poor. Those under 30 years of age are more likely to give the positive response, while those 30 to 62 years of age are more likely to be negative, as are those from middle-income households.

Just one in five respondents (21 percent) report that the *children's ministries* at Hill Church are excellent. More than a third (35 percent) indicate that they are poor. Those over 62 years of age and those under 30 are more likely to say children's ministries are excellent, while those in their 30s are more likely to say they are poor.

Another 21 percent indicate that *small group ministries* at Hill Church are excellent, while nearly twice as many (39 percent) indicate they are poor. People in their 30s and those from lower-middle income homes are more likely to rate small groups as poor, while those who attend regularly are more likely to give small groups a positive rating.

Less than one in five worshipers at Hill Church (18 percent) feel that the *youth group* is excellent. Nearly three times as many (45 percent) say the youth group is poor. This is the item with the worst evaluation of any of the ten and it is ironic that this is a congregation with a

relatively large numbers of young people attending. Those 30 to 62 years of age are more likely to be negative about youth ministries as are those from middle-income and upper-middle households. Those over 62 years of age and those who attend every Sabbath are more likely to be positive.

Values at Hill Church

In order to ascertain the values of the congregation as they relate to church activities, worship attenders were given a list of ten items and asked, “Which of the following aspects of Hill Church do you personally most value?” They could select up to three items from the list.

Less than one in three of the respondents answered this question, almost all of them members of the Hill Church. The high number of non-responses indicates that many of the people who attend Hill Church do not have strongly-developed positive motivations for doing so. Most of the teenage non-members did not respond to this question, probably because they attend at the request of the Mount Vernon Academy administration rather than for reasons of personal motivation and to some degree because it is characteristic of a stage in life where individuals are only beginning to define themselves and their values. The lower response to this questions is further evidence of the ambivalence many attenders feel toward the Hill Church. The data below and displayed on pages 15 and 16 of the graphics is based only on the few respondents who answered this question.

Community service—The only item selected by a majority of respondents—in fact, an overwhelming majority—was community service. All demographic segments were equally strong on this value. This indicates that Hill Church needs to do more to strengthen its involvement in serving the local community and the Knox County region. Community service programing is essential to building a strong congregation as well as supporting the mission of Christ in the world.

My friends at Hill Church—Two out of five of those who responded to this question (39 percent) selected “my friends at Hill Church” as something they value most about the congregation. The numbers involved in this response are too small for demographic analysis.

Practical care for one another—A third of the respondents (32 percent) selected “the practical things we do to care for one another.” This would include the typical church activities of visiting the ill in the hospital, sending cards, bringing food to the home, expressing condolences to the bereaved, etc. Again, the numbers involved in this response are too small for reliable demographic analysis.

Social activities—One in four respondents to this question (26 percent) picked church social activities as something they value. Again, the numbers involved in this response are too small for reliable demographic analysis.

Praying for one another—Nearly one in four respondents (23 percent) also selected prayer for other church members as an element of Hill Church that they value. Again, the numbers involved in this response are too small for reliable demographic analysis.

Very small numbers of people actually selected the other values included in this question. It appears that the people in this congregation value the evangelistic and pastoral ministry of Hill Church much less than they do the social aspects. For example, “reaching the unchurched” was selected by only four individuals.

What Hill Church Values Most

Worship attenders at Hill Church are nearly seven times as likely to personally value community service than are the people attending Adventist congregations across America. Hill Church worshipers are twice as likely to value caring for one another in the congregation as are most Adventist worshipers in the U.S. The gap is almost the same in terms of the value placed on church social activities and praying for one another. These are marked differences that profile the ways Hill Church is different from the typical Adventist church.

What Hill Church Values Least

The people who attend Hill Church are significantly less likely than most Adventist churches to value small group ministries, preaching and reaching the unchurched. (See page 16 of the graphics.) This may be surprising in view of the traditional Seventh-day Adventist reputation of the congregation. Adventists have a long history of dedication to evangelism and outreach. Yet, it seems that the people in the pews at the Hill Church place greater value on other things. Many people may be more concerned about their own personal preferences and comfort than the sacrifices necessary to carry out the mission of Christ in the world.

Goals for Hill Church

Respondents were provided with a list of twelve possible goal statements and asked, “Which ... do you consider to be the ***three*** most important goals for Hill Church?” Less than a quarter of the respondents answered this question. This is further evidence of the ambivalence that many of the people in the congregation feel about this church. For one reason or another most of them do not seem to have thought much about the plans and goals of the church. The data reported here and displayed on page 16 of the graphics section probably say more about the core leadership of Hill Church than the people in the pews.

Only one of the twelve goals received the support of the majority of respondents. Nearly nine out of ten (88 percent) of those who answered this question selected, “To deepen prayer life” as one of the three most important goals for Hill Church. Those who attend every Sabbath were more likely to say this, as were the younger respondents and those from lower-income

households. Clearly, the goals of Hill Church must include a foundational focus on prayer life and spirituality.

Half of these respondents indicated that the goals of Hill Church must include increasing knowledge of the Bible. Those under 30 years of age were even more likely to choose this goal.

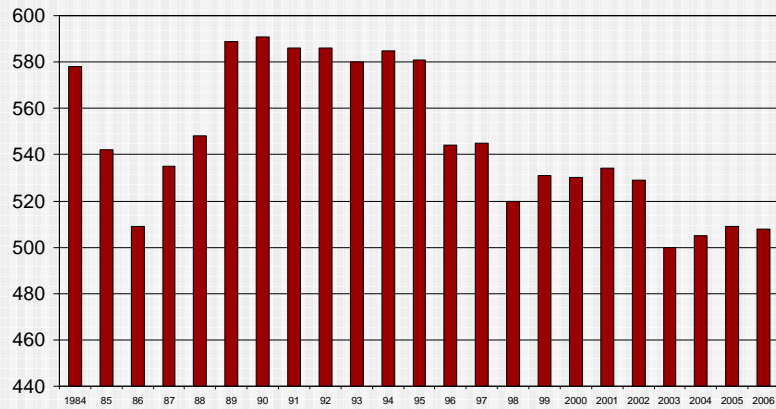
Nearly half of those who did respond to this question (48 percent) said that one of the goals of Hill Church must be simply “to worship God.” Those over 62 years of age were more likely to pick this goal.

A quarter of those who answered this question said that one of the most important goals for Hill Church is “to encourage the spiritual growth of individuals,” and an equal number selected “working for church growth.” The numbers involved are too small to provide reliable demographic analysis, yet this response does indicate that there is a small segment of the congregation willing to work for a missional impact on the community and the world as well as take care of the needs of the members of the congregation.

Very small numbers indicated support for the other possible goals. In contrast to the goals related to individual spirituality, most of the goals that are not supported by more than a handful of Hill Church members are those that relate to service and ministry—getting more people involved, equipping members for ministry, understanding community needs, increasing unity in diversity and increasing giving. Just one person said that a goal of the Hill Church should be “transforming the community.”

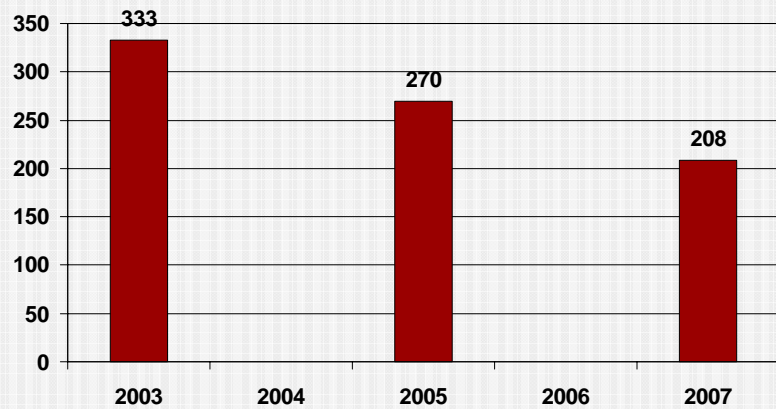
The values expressed here reflect the not just the situation at the Hill Church, but the major religious trends of our times. Despite the fact that many of the people in this congregation who see themselves as conservative and traditional Adventists, the “postmodern” mind set with its focus on personal spirituality and low interest in collective action toward larger, missional goals is clearly present. It is possible that these attitudes reflect a level of resentment that the Adventist institutional structure has not been able to achieve more for the individual believer. Perhaps many of the people in the pews at the Hill Church have withdrawn into their own individual concerns and goals because they are deeply disappointed, maybe even in despair, about what the institutional structure can deliver. This disappointment would provide a significant tension pulling against the traditional views of Adventists and might explain the underlying ambivalence that is hinted at in much of the data presented in this report.

Membership



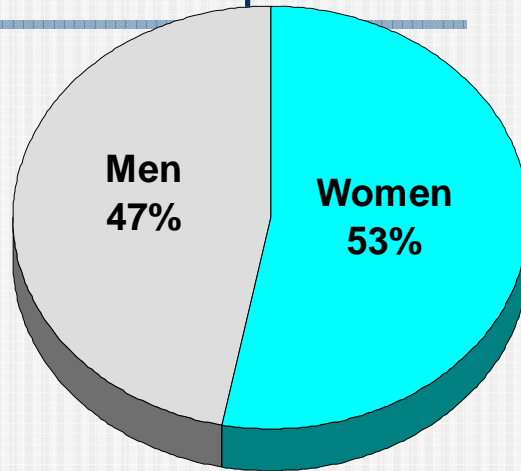
Source: Ohio Conf database

Sabbath Attendance

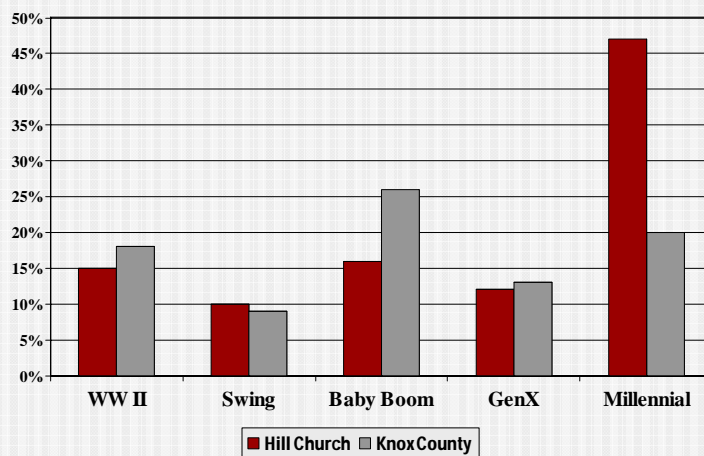


No report in 2004 or 2006.

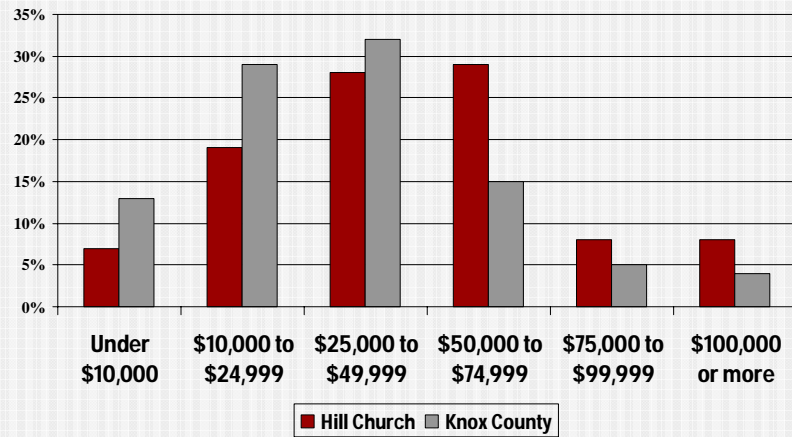
Gender of respondents



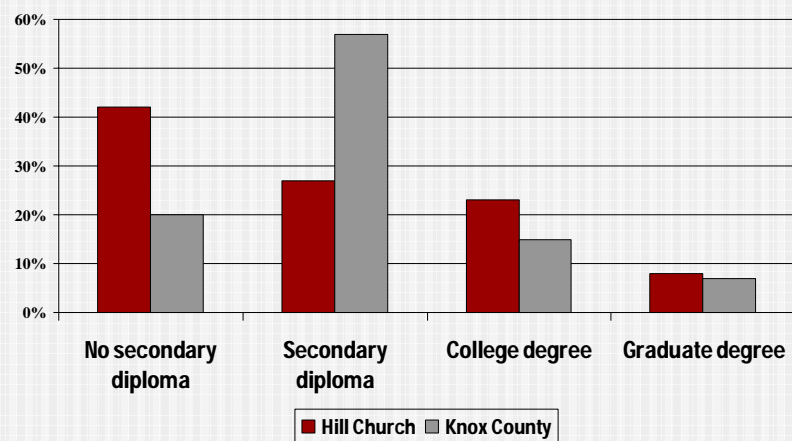
Age groups by generation



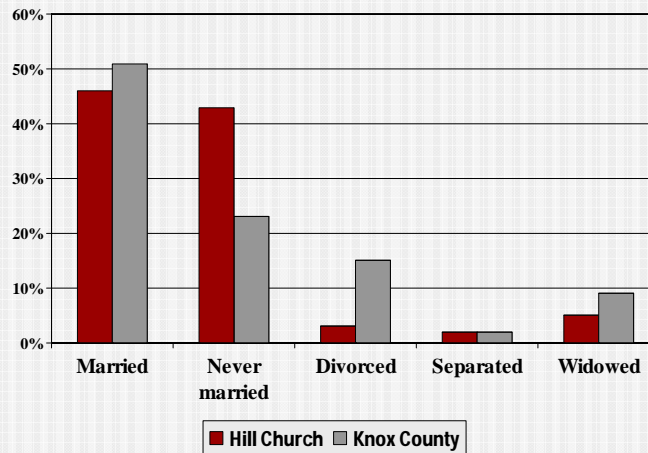
Annual household income



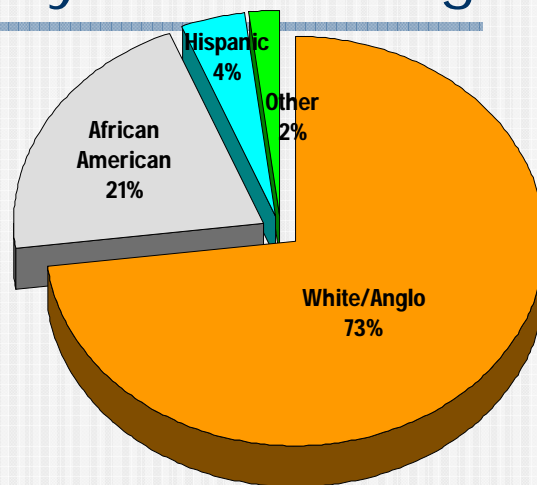
Level of education



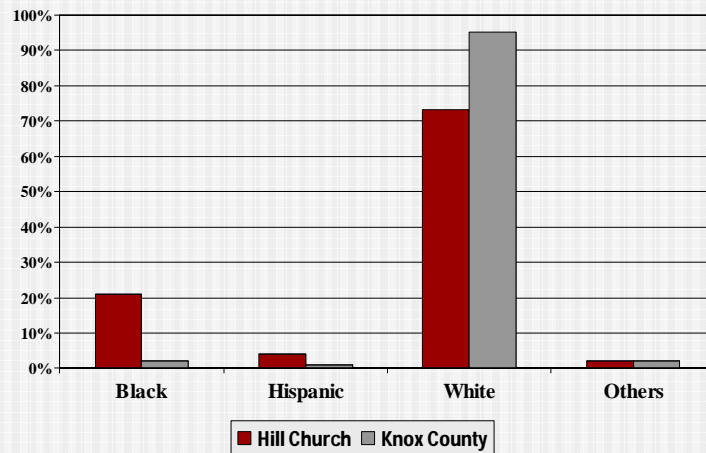
Marital status



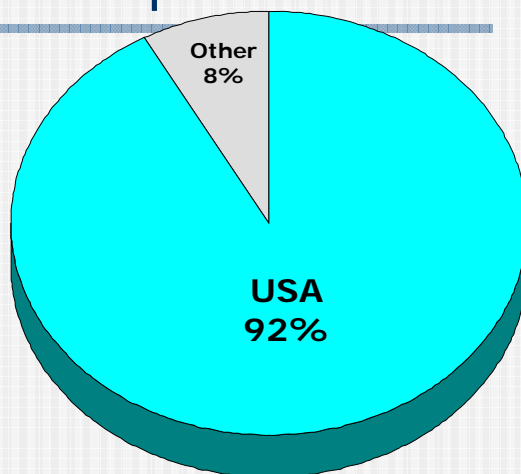
Primary ethnic background



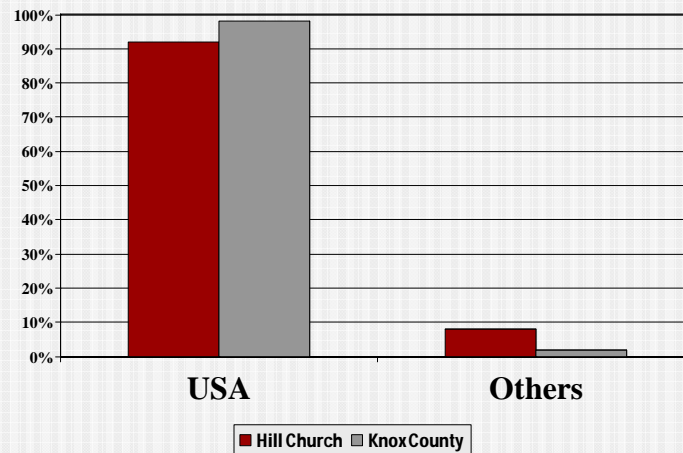
Comparative ethnic profile



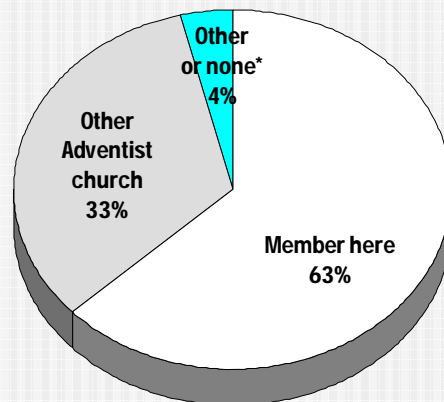
Citizenship at birth



Citizenship at birth

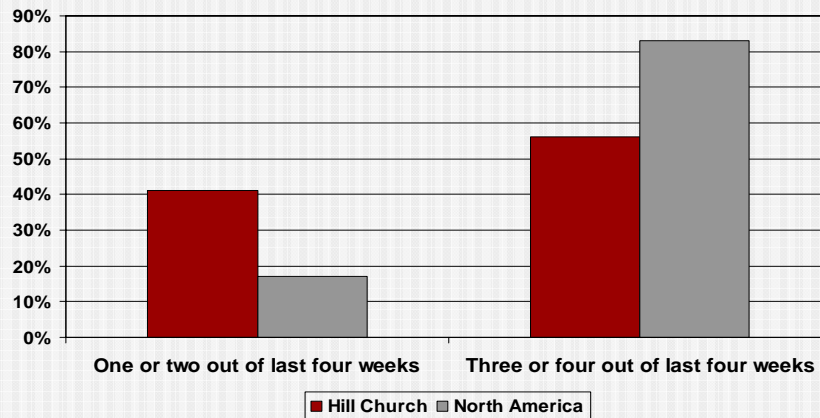


Church membership

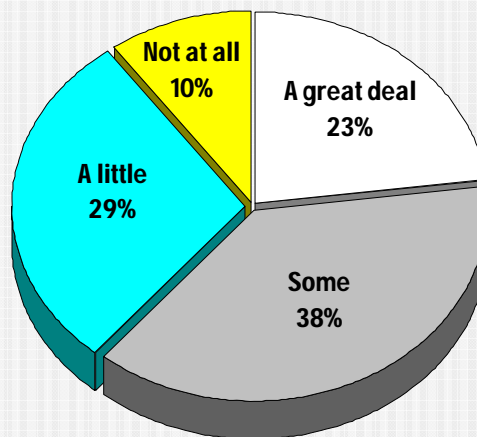


*3% none; 1% other denomination

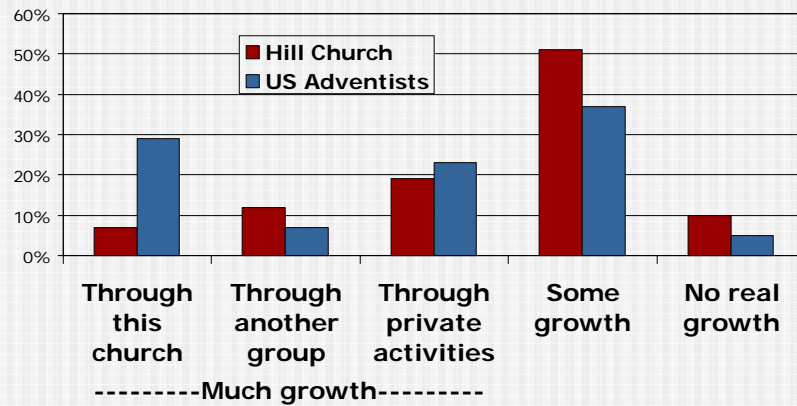
Attendance



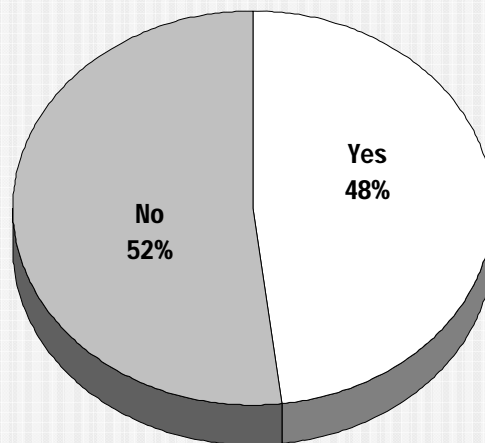
How much does the Hill Church help you with everyday life?



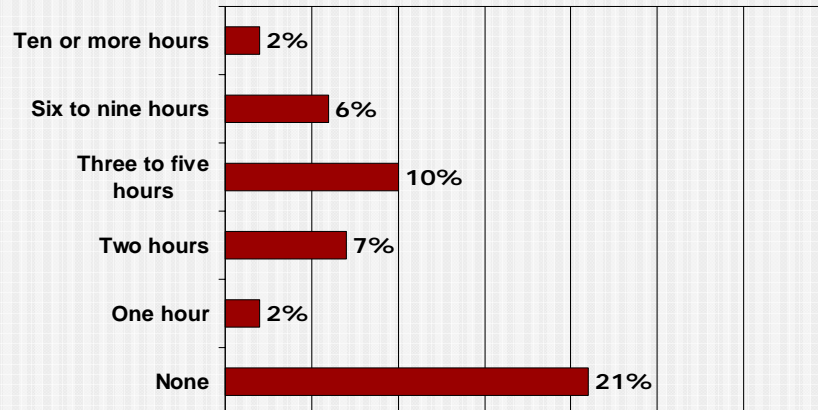
How much have you grown in your faith in the last year?



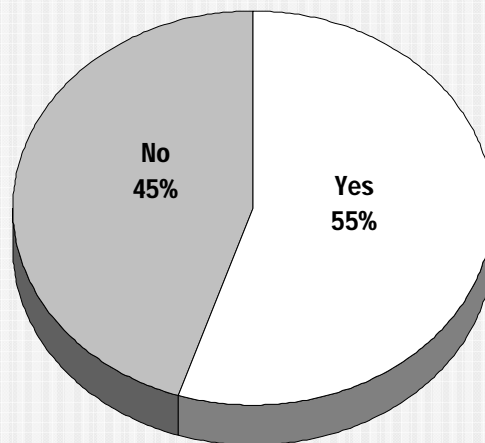
Currently have a ministry role



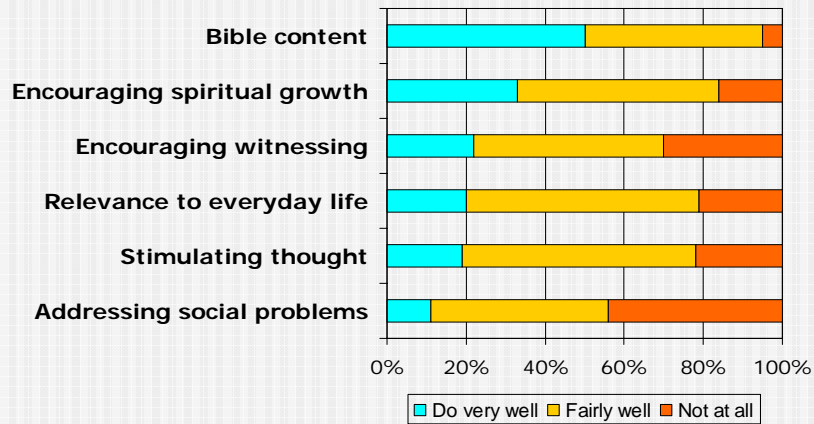
Volunteers: Hours per month



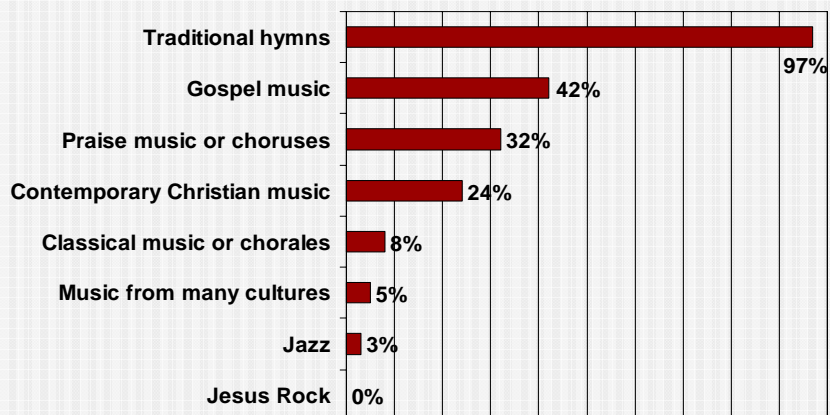
Has anyone asked you personally to volunteer time in the last year?



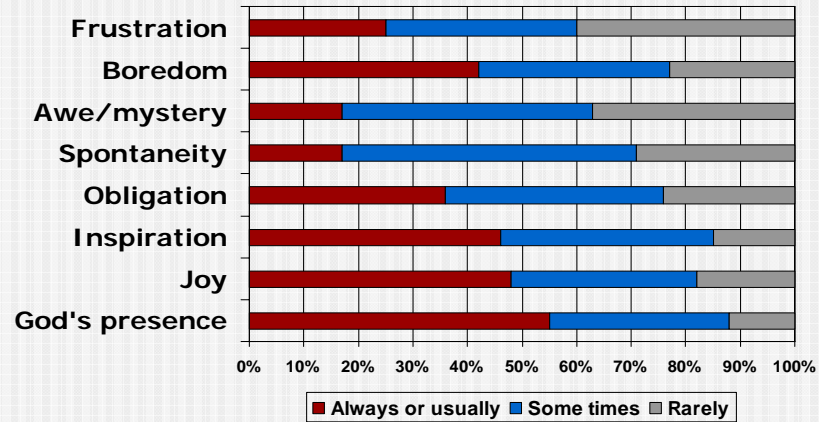
Evaluation of sermons



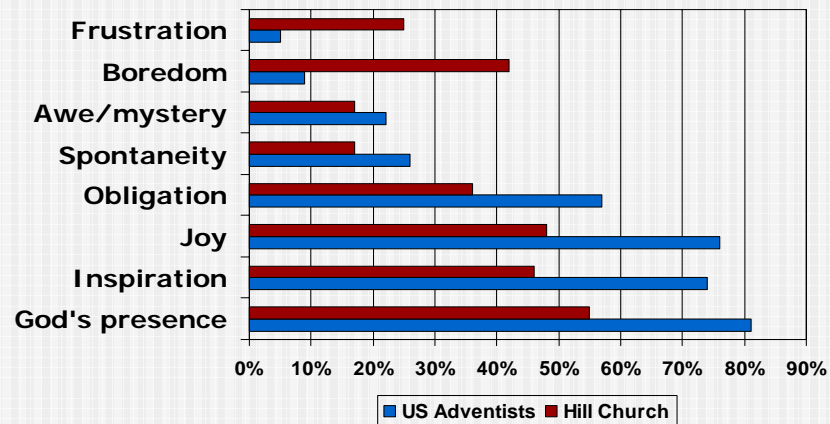
Music preferences



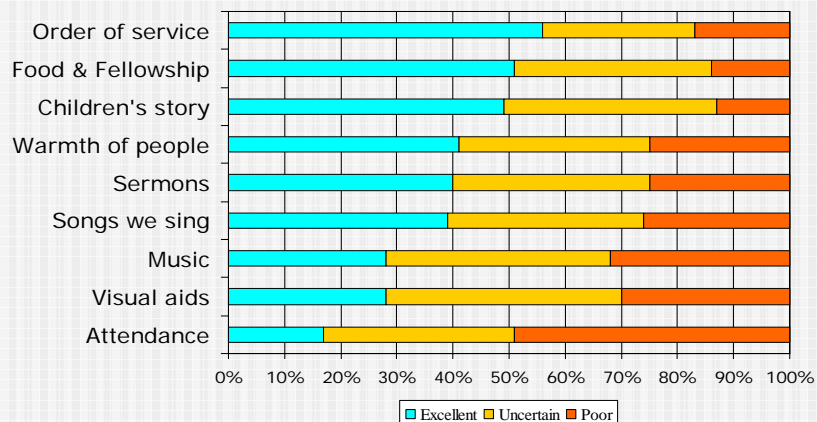
Feelings about worship



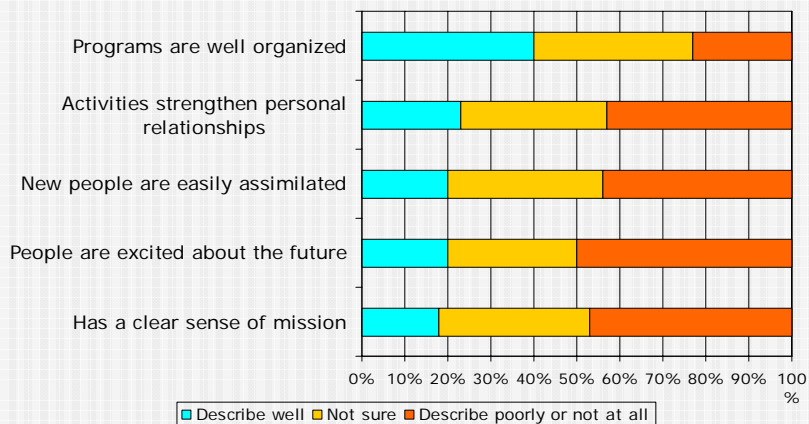
Feelings about worship



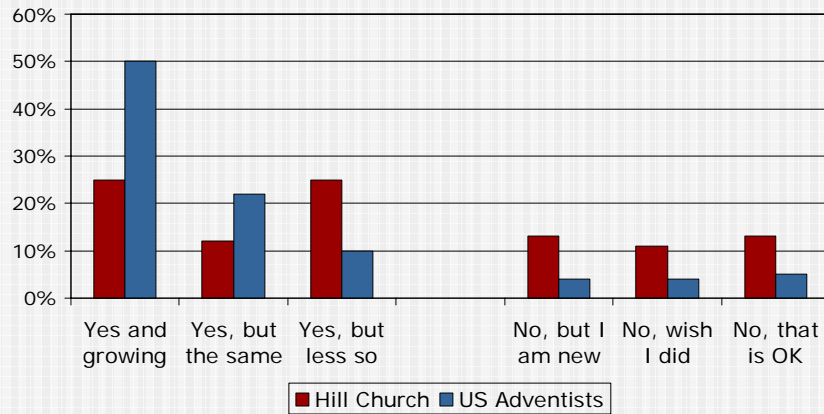
Evaluation of worship



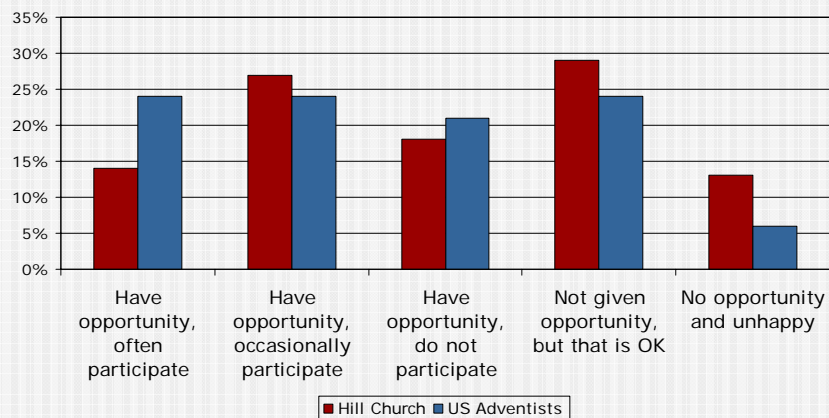
Perceptions of Mount Vernon Hill Church



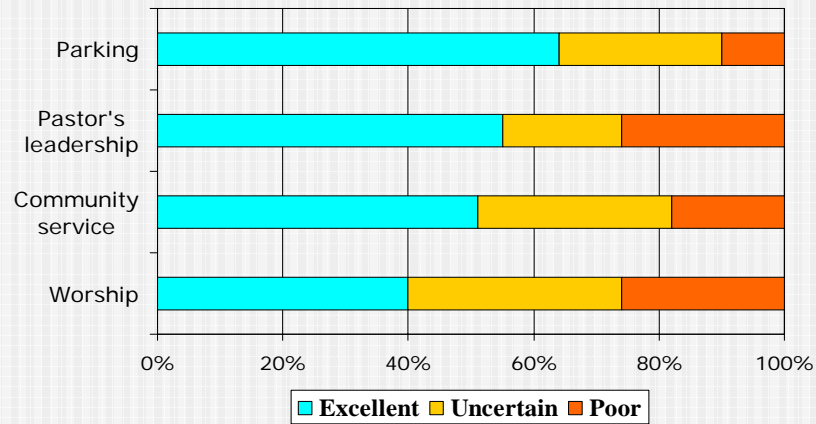
Strong sense of belonging to the congregation



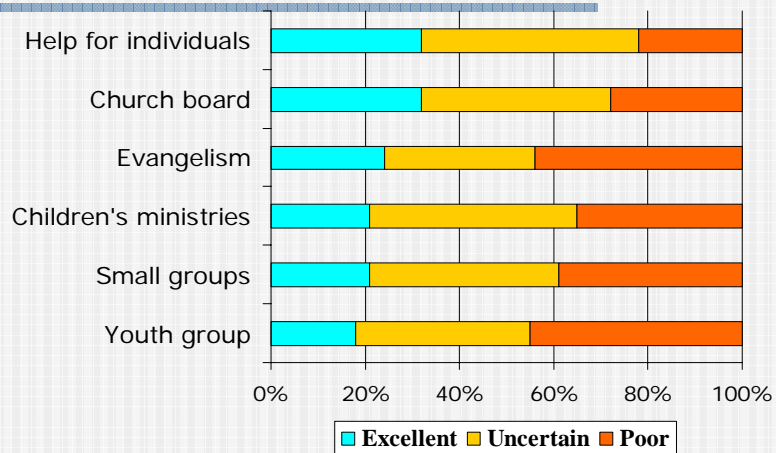
Involvement in making important decisions



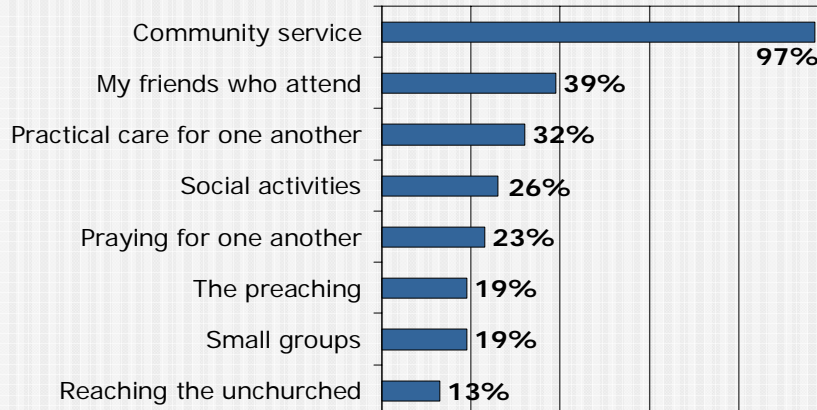
Strengths of the Hill Church



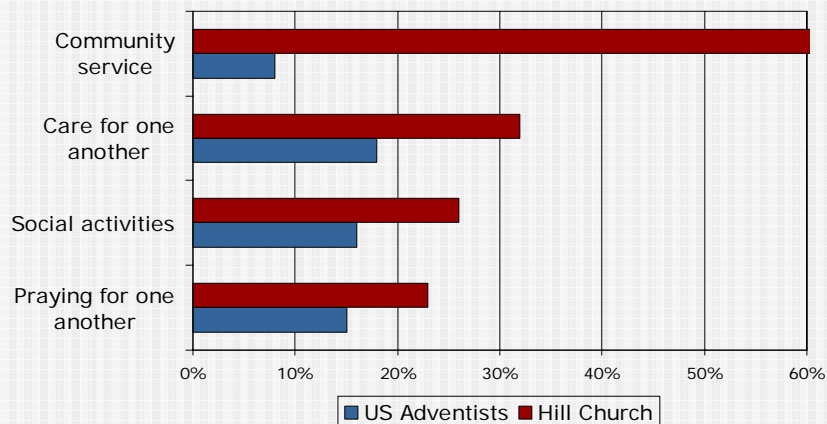
Weaknesses of Hill Church



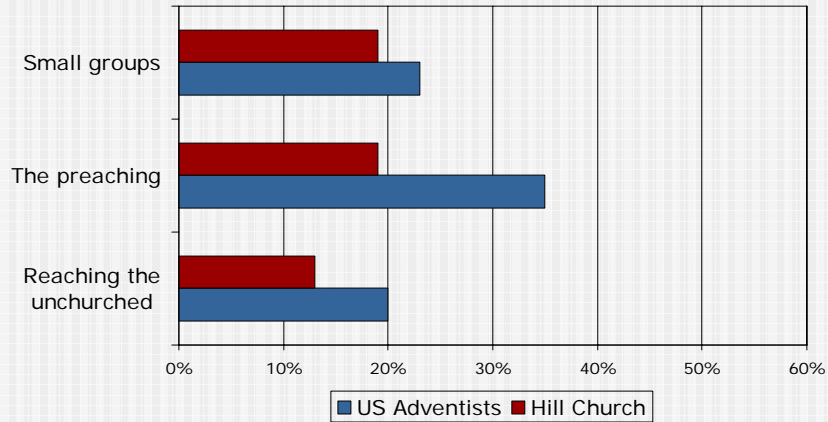
What do you personally value most about Hill Church?



What is valued more at Hill Church than by US Adventists?



What is valued less at Hill Church than by US Adventists?



Most important goals for Mount Vernon Hill Church

