Data on youth retention, non-retention and connectedness to the Church

David Trim
Director of Archives, Statistics, and Research
Data from different sources

- Church statistics
- World survey of church members, 2012-13
- Studies of ex-members, 2012-13
- Survey of members of Japan Union Conference, 2012
- Survey of recent graduates of Adventist colleges in the United States, 2013
Since 1965, there have been 34,385,004 church members. Of those, 13,737,025 (or more) have chosen to leave the church.

Our net loss rate is 39.95%.

In effect, at least four members have slipped away for every ten who were in the church.
What percentage of that 40% are young people?

• We don’t know for certain because we don’t currently collect and report age data in statistical reports.

• That can be done with membership software and so that is another reason for membership software to be adopted and implemented very widely—better insights!

• But surveys reveal that young people make up a very large proportion of the 40%, though it varies around the world.
Total age distribution (2013 survey)

- 15 and under: 10.22%
- 16-25: 22.85%
- 26-40: 32.07%
- 41-60: 29.40%
- Over 60: 5.47%

[Pie chart showing the age distribution with the above percentages]
Age distribution by divisions (2013)
Demographics, World and North America

- The median age of a Seventh-day Adventist worldwide is 32
- In a 2008 study, the median age of a North American Seventh-day Adventist was 51
- In contrast the median age of the population in North America was 37
Demographics, Japan

- Japan is the oldest society in the world
- But the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s mortality rate has exceeded general mortality in Japan since 1973
- In other words, Japanese Adventists are older than Japanese society as a whole

(2013 survey)
Demographics in Japan


(2013 survey)
Age of Church Members, NAD

- Over 60, 43.28%
- 41-60, 38.26%
- 26-40, 13.91%
- 25 and under, 4.55%

(2013 world survey)
Age of Church Members, Japan Union

(2012 Japan Union survey)
Where are the young people?

• Young people are being born into the church and some being won into the church—so why are our demographics in some parts of the world so tilted towards older people?
• The young people have left!
• And not only in NAD, Japan Union, or other entities (e.g. in Europe) with aging memberships: of the 40% who are leaving around the world, the surveys of ex-members show that a large proportion are our youth
Where are the young people?

Global data

- Young adult: 62.55%
- Middle aged: 34.52%
- Child (never baptized): 1.27%
- Old age: 0.13%

(2012 survey of former members)
Why did they leave? (1)
2013 qualitative study of ex-members: “Most Important Reasons”

28% No big issue; I just drifted away
25% Lack of compassion for the hurting
19% Moral failure on my part
18% I did not fit in
14% Too much focus on minor issues
13% Conflict in the congregation
12% Moral failures of members
11% Moral failures of leaders
11% Pressure from family or friends
10% Race, ethnic or tribal issues
Why did they leave? (2)
2012 study of ex-members—results true across all age groups

What event triggered your decision to leave? (weighted)