

A Proposal for a Presentation to the Adventist Human-Subject Researchers Association Conference at Andrews University, May 16-20, 2018 on the subject:

“Adventist Millennials: Measuring Emerging Adults Connection to Church”

Presenters

Douglas Jacobs, D.Min.
Professor, School of Religion, Southern Adventist University
Lead Researcher, Adventist Connection Study
jacobs@southern.edu
mobile: 423-580-6554

Chelsy Tyler
Research Assistant, Adventist Connection Study
ccalumpiano@southern.edu
mobile: 682-401-5775

Presentation Summary

Numerous research studies have demonstrated an exodus of emerging adults from churches throughout Christian denominations. As the United States becomes an increasingly post-Christian society, studying a Christian community whose identity has largely drawn from a minority position could provide helpful insight into maintaining relevance as Christianity moves into minority status. This paper examines how recent emerging adult graduates of Seventh-day Adventist universities connect with or disconnect from both the denomination as a whole and with local churches in the context of identity, community, orthodoxy, and orthopraxy. Through a two-phased mixed methodology approach, researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with self-selected focus groups of recent college graduates, developed an inductively generated survey instrument, and then electronically distributed the survey via email to recent Adventist college graduates. The results suggested ten themes that require further discussion. Particularly notable is the influence personal religiosity has on the sample's acceptance of Adventist teachings and faith practice, as well as the negative impact participants' media usage and transitory lifestyles have on their connection to local churches. Overall, the majority of the sample identified as connected to the Adventist Church, and even many who appear to have disconnected from the Adventist Church remain engaged in a variety of nontraditional ways.

Due to the exploratory nature of the research and the voluntary response sample, extrapolation of the results to a wider population may be limited. However, the findings offer valuable insights and understanding into possible reasons for high attrition rates of young adults from the Adventist Church and provide an important foundation for further research both within the Adventist church and in the wider Christian community. Twelve of the created scales concerning Identity, Community, Orthodoxy, and Orthopraxy had a Cronbach's alpha between 0.814 and 0.942. The three remaining scales (all

related to Community) had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.610, 0.768, and 0.776 respectively. This shows that overall the scales had very good internal consistency and accurately measured the variables of interest. Hence, the research instrument created for this study is of value and can be used in future studies as well as serve as a guide to researchers who may want to build on this work.

Key Words: Seventh-day Adventist, millennials, emerging adulthood, higher education, personal religiosity

Abstract for Program

How do graduates of Adventist universities connect with or disconnect from the church in the context of identity, community, orthodoxy, and orthopraxy? Findings include the influence personal religiosity has on acceptance of Adventist teachings and faith practice, and the negative impact media usage and transitory lifestyles have on connection to local churches.

References

- Arnett, Jeffrey J. and Jennifer L. Tanner. 2006. *Emerging adults in America: Coming of age in the 21st century*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Barna Group. 2013. *Seventh-Day Adventist Church young adult study*. Ventura: Barna Group.
<http://www.youngadultlife.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Barna-SDA-Millennials-Report-final.pdf>. Accessed 14 October 2016.
- Barna Group. 2009. "How faith varies by church size." Ventura: Barna Group. <https://www.barna.com/research/how-faith-varies-by-church-size/>. Accessed May 2013.
- Brown, Megan. 2016. Relationships matter: The impact of relationships upon emerging adult retention. *Christian Education Journal* 13(1): 7-27.
- Brown, Megan. 2014. The impact of adolescent experiences on emerging adult church-based retention. *The Journal of Youth Ministry*. 13(1): 5-16.
- Center for Creative Ministry. 2010. Southern Adventist University Student Spiritual Life Survey.
- Center for Creative Ministry. 2006. *INNOVATION* Newsletter 12(19). [Electronic newsletter].
- Cross, Tim. 2011. Toward an integrated youth ministry: A case study of the application of principles from Ephesians among teens and their families for the Friday evening youth ministry programming of the Collegedale Church of Seventh-day Adventists. Doctoral thesis, Andrews University.
- Doherty, Jacqueline. 2013. "On the rise." *Barron's*, April 29.
<http://www.barrons.com/articles/SB50001424052748703889404578440972842742076>. Accessed 31 October 2016.

- Dudley, Roger. 2000. *Why our teenagers leave the church: Personal stories from a 10-year study*. Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association.
- Dudley, Roger. 1996. Social attachment to the Seventh-Day Adventist Church among young adults. *Review of Religious Research* 38(1): 38-50.
- Dudley, Roger. 1995. Grace, relevancy, and confidence in the future: Why Adventist young adults commit to the church. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 14(3): 215-227.
- European Valugensis. 1999. [Qualitative survey instrument].
- Fry, Richard. 2016. "Millennials overtake baby boomers as America's largest generation." Pew Research Center. Last modified April 25. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/04/25/millennials-overtake-baby-boomers/>.
- General Conference (of Seventh-day Adventists). 2014. "Responding to changing cultural attitudes regarding homosexual and other alternative sexual practices." Last modified April 8. <https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/guidelines/article/go/0/responding-to-changing-cultural-attitudes-regarding-homosexual-and-other-alternative-sexual-practice/>.
- Gillespie, V. Bailey, Michael Donahue, Ed Boyatt, and Barry Gane. 2004. *Ten years later: A study of two generations*. Riverside: Hancock Center Publication.
- Hill, Jonathan. 2011. Faith and understanding: Specifying the impact of higher education on religious belief. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 50(3): 533-551.
- Howden, Lindsay and Julie Meyer. 2011. Age and sex composition: 2010. *2010 Census Briefs*. U.S. Census Bureau. <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-03.pdf>. Accessed 31 October 2016.
- Jenkin, Clint and A. Allan Martin. 2014. Engaging Adventist millennials: A church embracing relationships. *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 8(1): 96-104.
- Kimball, Cynthia, Chris Boyatzis, Kaye Cook, Kathleen Leonard, and Kelly Planagan. 2013. Attachment to God: A qualitative exploration of emerging adults' spiritual relationships with God. *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 41(3): 175-188.
- Kinnaman, David and Aly Hawkins. 2011. *You lost me: Why young Christians are leaving church—and rethinking faith*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

- Lizardy-Hajbi, Kristina. 2016. *Engaging young adults*. Hartford: Hartford Institute for Religion Research.
<http://www.faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/default/files/Engaging-Young-Adults-Report.pdf>. Accessed 27 October 2016.
- Martin, A. Allan. 2008. Burst the bystander effect: Making a discipling difference with young adults. *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 3(1): 46-53.
- Miller, Munday, and Hill. 2013. Faith in the age of Facebook: Exploring the links between religion and social network site membership and use. *Sociology of Religion* 74(2): 227-253.
- Ministerial Association (of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists). 2005. *Seventh-day Adventists believe*, 2nd ed. Silver Spring: Pacific Press Publishing Association.
- Petts, Richard. 2009. Trajectories of religious participation from adolescence to young adulthood. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48(3): 552-571.
- Pew Research Center. 2010. *Religion among the millennials: Less religiously active than older Americans but fairly traditional in other ways*. Washington, D.C.: Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.
- Pew Research Center. 2015. "America's changing religious landscape." Last modified May 12.
<http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.
- Powell, Kara, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin. 2016. *Growing young: Six essential strategies to help young people discover and love your church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.
- Rainer, Thom and Sam Rainer. 2008. *Essential church? Reclaiming a generation of dropouts*. Nashville: B&H Books.
- Regnerus, Mark and Jeremy Uecker. 2006. Finding faith, losing faith: The prevalence and context of religious transformations during adolescence. *Review of Religious Research* 47(3): 217-237.
- Sahlin, Monte and Paul Richardson. 2008. *Seventh-day Adventists in North America: A demographic profile*. North American Division secretariat demographic survey. Milton Freewater: Center for Creative Ministry.
- Sbanotto, Elisabeth Nesbit and Craig Blomberg. 2016. *Effective generational ministry: Biblical and practical insights for transforming church communities*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- Secretariat (of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists). 2010. *Seventh-day Adventist church manual*, 18th edition. Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association.
- Seventh-day Adventist Church. 2018. "Who are Seventh-day Adventists?" <http://press.adventist.org/en/#history>.
- Sigvartsen Leanne, Jan Sigvartsen, and Paul Petersen. 2014. *Beyond beliefs 1: What millennial young adults really think of*

the 28 beliefs of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. Berrien Springs: Andrews University Department of Religion and Biblical Languages. <http://www.beyond-beliefs.com/resources/Beyond%20Beliefs%20Report%20-%20Abridged%20Version%20for%20Yola%20-%20June%2010%2C%202016.pdf>. Accessed 21 October 2016.

Smith, Christian and Melina Denton. 2005. *Soul searching: The religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Smith, Christian and Patricia Snell. 2009. *Souls in transition: The religious and spiritual lives of emerging adults*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Stein, Joel. 2013. "The me me me generation." *Time*, May 20.

Stone, Arthur, Christine Bachrach, Jared Jobe, Howard Kurtzman, and Virginia Cain. 2000. *The science of self-report: Implications for research and practice*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Strauss, William and Neil Howe. 2000. *Millennials rising: The next great generation*. New York: Vintage Original.

Uecker, Jeremy, Mark Regnerus, and Margaret Vaaler. 2007. Losing my religion: The social sources of religious decline in early adulthood. *Social Forces* 85(4):1667-92.

United States Census Bureau. 2015. "Millennials outnumber baby boomers and are far more diverse, Census Bureau reports." Last modified June 25. <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2015/cb15-113.html>.

Vaidyanathan, Brandon. 2011. Religious resources or differential returns? Early religious socialization and declining attendance in emerging adulthood. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 50(2): 366-387.

Wuthnow, Robert. 2007. *After the baby boomers: How twenty- and thirty-somethings are shaping the future of American religion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Zuckerman, Phil. 2012. *Faith no more: Why people reject religion*. New York: Oxford University Press.