

**Title:** Church Membership Survey 2017 in Inter-European Division - an overview of family religious values and beliefs

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**ABSTRACT:** The proposed research study is a part of 2017 Church Member Global Survey that provides relevant data on EUD members regarding their faith and convictions, spiritual life related behaviors and habits, in-group and out-group attitudes that translate into community oriented and mission oriented behaviors and initiatives.

The research has been carried out on a representative sample of the EUD members from 10 out of its 11 Unions consisting of over 3800 participants. The research results are part of the preliminary report describing the main trends in EUD regarding membership, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors directly related to the SDA families.

**SUMMARY**

*Literature review and previous European Studies*

A comparison between European and other world regions on religious matters is a difficult endeavor considering historical and sociological factors, as well as the extreme variety of denominations and practices. Anthropological, ethnographical and even historical studies are more common but empirical research has been quite American-centric, encouraged by the conventional wisdom that the United States is an outlier of religiosity in the developed world, and, more pragmatically, by the availability of survey data. (Brenner, 2016).

An analysis of the situation of religious practices and affiliations across Europe has been marked by the large trend of secularization. Some studies suggest that the process is not a homogenous one as religious decline is mainly occurring in Catholic European countries and has effectively ceased among post-1945 birth cohorts in six Northwestern European societies where secularization began early. Considering factors as migration, different fertility rates and historical changes, it is possible that, despite the grim prognostics, Western Europe or, at least, some parts of it, may be more religious at the end of the 21st century than at its beginning. (Kaufmann, 2012; Requena & Stanek, 2013).

The problem of religious education in Europe is highly politicized and debated, especially in some countries where the secularization process is not fully established or the ethnic religious issues are particularly prominent. (Smyth, Lyons & Darmody, 2013) As a general policy, European Parliamentary Assembly invited member states 'to avoid any conflict between state-promoted education about religion and the religious faith of families, in order to respect the free decision of families in this very sensitive matter'. (Pepin, 2009)

**Valuegenesis Europe** has been one of the largest research projects on a European SDA population of young people. Since it has not been included in the previous wave of research inside the SDA community, there is little data to compare to or to rely on for reference. The Valuegenesis Europe study has been carried out on an online convenience sample which, while large, has not been representative because of access and response control issues, but

its results could have provided a basis for ulterior projects. Unfortunately, data on this study is not accessible.

**EUD Family Research** has been one other European study carried out during 2013-2015, on a representative 2062 sample of adult SDA members from all EUD Unions except the Austrian one. It used 2009 Adventist Family Survey translated and adapted for European population and focused on the following themes: family history, decision-making, parenting and education, sources of conflict, attitudes in the family: jealousy, fidelity, acceptance and patience etc., family-church relationship. The research results have revealed a high level of satisfaction within the marriage (67.19% are happy and very happy) that reflects in the high frequency of positive behaviors and attitudes like: spouse is understanding with partner (81.35%), spouse is loyal to marriage (89.71%), spouse is willing to work through problems (88.33%), spouse is warm and affectionate (84.66%). One of the main issues of concern, as reflected in the research results is connected to children's education. Less than 50% of the participants view a college education as necessary for their children. Yet, most parents who have expressed their opinion (1761= 67.7% of the sample) favor Adventist schools. Only 19.42% consider public schools to be a better academic option. Family worship and Sabbath activities represent another area of concern. Except for church attendance (96.07%), preparation (73.85%) and wearing Sabbath clothes (72.26%), the other activities, especially those involving volunteering for the ones in need, community service and activities planned especially for children are infrequent.

### *Research Objectives*

The research study has aimed to identify the tendencies and progress of the church members in the main faith and community-related behaviors and attitudes of the European SDA members.

Its objectives included:

1. To explore the faith-related beliefs of the SDA members of EUD (corresponding to Reach up with God portion of Reach the World 2015-2020);
2. To analyze the attitudes towards the church in general and the local communities (corresponding to Reach in with God portion of Reach the World 2015-2020);
3. To explore the mission and evangelism related attitudes and behaviors of EUD members (corresponding to Reach out with God portion of Reach the World 2015-2020);
4. To investigate the habits and lifestyle choices of the SDA members of EUD that are relevant for their religious and spiritual life;
5. To identify common trends and differences among the culturally different areas of EUD regarding members' beliefs, attitudes and behaviors.

### *Sampling and data gathering*

The research has followed a quantitative approach: operator assisted survey based on the translated and culturally adapted version of 2017 Church Member Survey.

The selection of the participants in the sample has been based on a sequential / cluster procedure that includes random selection of local churches (clusters) on three tiers (small, medium, large). From each local church, the survey operators have randomly selected a previously assigned number of participants according to instructions regarding time, place and selection procedure.

The 3800+ participants have used hard copies of the survey, which they handed out to the data gathering operators. A team of database operators has then created the database using either Survey Monkey platform or SPSS directly.

### *Research Results*

The preliminary data analysis has provided a description of family religious habits and beliefs as well as several comparisons with previous studies on EUD membership family life.

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