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VIEWS OF FUTURE PASTORAL MINISTRY CAREERS AMONG SDA ADOLESCENTS

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Background and Methods

This report offers findings from a data gathering endeavor that occurred from August 14 to 16, 2019 at the Pathfinder Camporee in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. The purpose of this preliminary report is to offer research sponsors the opportunity to have input into next steps for the research endeavor.

Researchers engaged 29 adolescents between the ages of 9 and 17 in either individual interviews or focus groups to gather information about their future career aspirations with a special inquiry about pastoral ministry.

Three areas of the North American Division were represented in the data gathering effort: the West Coast of the US, the Lake Union area of the US, and Canada. The table below summarizes the type of data collection, the geographical region from which participants originated, and the number of participants per focus group/interview.

Table 1. Study Participants

Type of Interaction	Region of the NAD	Age or Age Group	Number of Participants
Focus Group	West Coast	15-17	2
Focus Group	West Coast	12-14	8
Focus Group	West Coast	12-14	4
Focus Group	West Coast	9-11	4
Focus Group	West Coast	9-11	3
Focus Group	Lake Union	12-14	6
Interview	Canada	11	1
Interview	Canada	15	1

The research questions for this inquiry include:

1. What are the primary careers that SDA adolescents are considering today?
 - a. What are the motivators for choosing those careers?
2. What are the career interests of elementary, middle school, and high school students in relation to a future in pastoral ministry?
 - a. What factors attract adolescents to ministry work, and what factors deter adolescents from considering careers in ministry?
3. What potential motivators exist to encourage more adolescents to consider a ministerial career?

Findings

RQ # 1. What are the primary careers that SDA adolescents are considering today? And, what are the motivators for those choices?

The table below summarizes the raw data regarding the areas of career interest for our study participants.

Table 2. Career Interest and Motivators

Interest Area	#	Reason for Choice	#
Uncategorized/Do not know	8	Enjoy doing it	9
Entertainment	5	Helping people	6
Technology	4	To Serve/Inspire	6
Law Enforcement/Legal	4	Good at it	4
Military	4	Sharing gospel	3
Clergy	3	Interaction with others	3
Education	3	Parents	1
Science	1	Do not know	1

RQ # 2 What are the career interests of elementary, middle school, and high school students in relation to a future in pastoral ministry? What factors attract adolescents to ministry work, and what factors deter adolescents from considering careers in ministry?

There were no significant differences in elementary, middle school, and high school students' responses in terms of their desires to enter pastoral ministry. As can be seen in Table 2, only three participants were considering a career in pastoral ministry, and those participants ranged across these groupings.

The majority of participants viewed having a career in pastoral ministry negatively, as something that they would not wish for themselves. Table 3 reports those perceptions.

Table 3. Overall Perception of Pastoral Ministry

Perception	#
Positive	9
Negative	13
Neutral	4

Research Question 2 also explores the perceptions that adolescents have about what a pastor's life involves and their daily tasks. Table 4 shows the perceptions of the participants about those skills and tasks.

Table 4. Pastoral Life and Daily Tasks

What does pastoral life involve?	#	What are the daily tasks of pastors?	#
Leadership	9	Learning	7
Preaching/Teaching	7	Outreach/Visiting	5
Helping others	6	Preaching	5
Inconveniences	5	Counseling members	5
Learning	5	Do not know	5
Connection with God	4	Praying	5
Connection with others	4	Teaching/Proselytizing	3
Being busy	4	Nothing extra	3
Do Not Know/Other	4	Baptisms	3
Public speaking	3	Writing sermons	3
Sharing/Proselytizing	3	Reading the Bible	3
Modeling behaviors	2	Youth outreach	3
Popularity	2	Community work	2
Traveling/Visiting	2	Other	2
Conflict resolution	2	Church business	2
		Marriages	1

Additionally, research question 2 investigates the positive and negative aspects of pastoral ministry, as viewed through the adolescent lens. Table 5 recaps the factors that participants noted would attract or deter them from considering careers in pastoral ministry.

Table 5. Perceptions of Positive and Negative Aspects of Pastoral Ministry

Positive Aspects	#	Negative Aspects	#
Teaching/Preaching	5	Dealing with people	11
Knowing people	4	Hard work	7
Activities performed	4	Public perceptions of pastors	6
Helping others	1	Stressful	5
Connection with God	1	Hard on family	4
		Public speaking	4
		Lot to know/understand	3

RQ # 3 What potential motivators exist to encourage more adolescents to consider a ministerial career?

Participants offered very few responses to the focus group questions intended to answer this question. The bulleted list below offers a sampling of answers about what might help them make a decision to consider pastoral ministry as a career choice.

- Work through youth pastors and have them reach out to the youth of the church
- Continue Pathfinder events
- Be more connected with the kids in the church to encourage them to become pastors
- Foster closeness between the kids as a way to influence each other
- Reach out to know kids better/ask them what they want
- Provide more information about pastoral ministry. Help kids know what pastors do
- Offer classes that pastors teach (i.e., public speaking, literature evangelism)
- Teach kids how to preach and get the kids involved
- Tell schools about the need to get kids interested in pastoral ministry

Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this research endeavor is to develop a better understanding of adolescents' views of pastoral ministry as a career choice. With this initial data gathering experience we have learned several things about adolescents' thinking about pastoral ministry.

First, it appears that very few adolescents are currently considering a career as a pastor. However, the majority of our participants did not know what they wanted to do for a future career. The top considerations included vague ideas such as something in the entertainment field, technology, law enforcement, law or the military.

Second, our participants knew very little about the work a pastor is tasked to do. Unprompted, they could not state typical tasks in which pastors engaged beyond preaching on Sabbath. One pastor's child, when asked what pastors do replied, "Nothing. My dad sits around at home all week. He picks us up from school and works on his sermon."

Third, there seems to be little variation across age groups and geographical locations in terms of either adolescents' knowledge of pastoral ministry or their aspirations to become pastors. The 16- and 17-year-olds appeared a bit more sophisticated in their replies to focus group questions, however, qualitatively and quantitatively were not much different. Although we had limited interaction with adolescents outside the west coast, the group from the Lake Union and the interviewees from Canada sounded very similar in their answers to interview questions.

Forth, there appears to be an overall negative perception of being a pastor; however, this perception does not come from negative interactions with pastors. We did not sense that the participants disliked or held biases against pastors, rather the adolescents held negative

perceptions of pastoral life as a career. One fear that participants voiced was pastors not having enough money to provide for their families. One participant asked, “Do pastors even get paid, or do they have other jobs during the week?” Thus, the perception exists that pastoral life is one of sacrifice that they may not want to make.

Because these findings show early data saturation, the research team recommends that NAD Ministerial leadership reflect on these preliminary findings to either **refine the study’s assumptions, goals, and methods, or to move forward with plans to intervene based on the current results.** For example, one of the early study assumptions was that elementary, middle school, and high school students would have different views of pastoral ministry as a career. In our preliminary investigation, this has not been the case. If we want to investigate this assumption further, we might narrow that focus to younger adolescents (age 10 -12) versus older adolescents (16 – 17). That would allow for a greater distinction between age groups for a clearer comparison.

An example of moving forward with an intervention plan might be to set a goal of increasing the knowledge of pastoral ministry as a career among SDA young people through a strategic educational campaign. A pretest/posttest design study could be implemented as a pilot in two to three areas of the NAD territory with the results informing next steps.

Overall, the data gathering endeavor at the Pathfinder camporee yielded important preliminary findings about adolescents’ views of pastoral ministry as a career choice. There is enough evidence to suggest adolescents do not have a clear picture of what pastors do, especially day-to-day.