

# UPDATE

## UPDATE - 2002

- Thinking about the Church
  - Factors influencing leaving
  - Youth Ministry and the church
- John Hancock Center for Youth and Family Ministry-La Sierra University and the North American Division Office of Education*

Number 6 — *Valuegenesis*<sup>2</sup> information you can use

June, 2002

## What youth think about the church

*Valuegenesis* research focuses on three specific areas of importance in the lives of children and youth in the church: the family setting, the schools' importance, and the church impact in growing a rich and dynamic faith experience.

We promised in **UPDATE 6** that we would provide information about congregational life. In the data sets, we have interesting and helpful insights into the spiritual life of youth in the church, the feelings they have towards their church, the insight they provide about church ministry, and information about the climate in the church, for example.

In our earlier research we discovered that one key element in building loyalty and commitment to the church related to the ability of the local congregation to find ways of foster the Christlikeness that models acceptance of everyone, love to all, and significant caring for others. These qualities describe an "ideal" church, one that all of us would love to join.

The climate issues in churches proved to be very significant in making change in the attitudes of young people towards their church. Let's take a closer look at *Valuegenesis*<sup>2</sup> information about the church. With this in mind, *Valuegenesis* asked the youth to think about the local church that they attend and indicate how true of that church were each of seven statements. A five-point response format ranged from "not at all true" to "very true."

The list below shows the combined percentages of those who answered either 'quite true" or "very true." The percentages are contrasted with the *Valuegenesis*<sup>1</sup> study in 1990.

Warmth, Acceptance, Thinking — CLIMATES	VG <sup>2</sup>	VG <sup>1</sup>
It is friendly	67%	61%
It is warm	51%	44%
Strangers feel welcome	55%	49%
It accepts people who are different	63%	60%
I learn a lot at church	43%	34%
It encourages me to ask questions	35%	28%

(Based on questions 87-89, 91-94 of the *Valuegenesis*<sup>2</sup> survey)

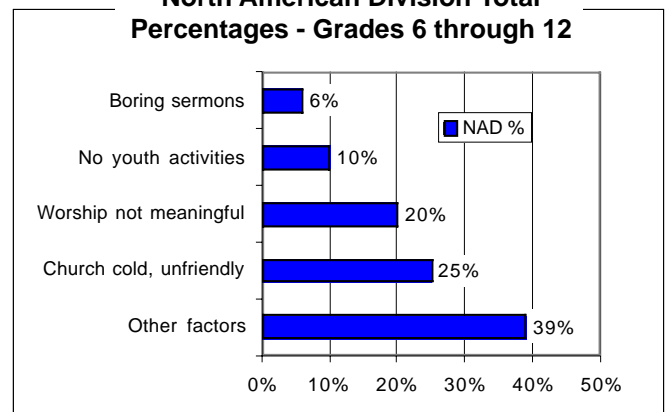
NOTE: Go to [www.lasierra.edu/centers/hcyfm](http://www.lasierra.edu/centers/hcyfm) for downloads of previous *Valuegenesis* UPDATES.

The Thinking Church Climate Scale is strongly correlated with the Warm Church Climate Scale and is an even more important predictor of values and commitment. While the percentage of young people who felt their congregations were warm and friendly and feel that they learn a lot in church has improved over the period of these two studies, we cannot be content with only 40 per cent of our youth feeling their church is a place where they can think and grow and is open to new ideas and encourages questions. Perhaps this area should be addressed by congregations who wish to have a more positive impact on the young of their congregations.

## Why would you leave the church?

Early on in our research about the relationship young people have with the church we discovered that relationships and climate issues are very crucial to a happy, growing and positive relationship with the church itself. When asked about the conditions that would have to exist if they considered leaving the local Seventh-day Adventist church to worship in another congregation of another faith, the answers were revealing.

North American Division Total  
Percentages - Grades 6 through 12

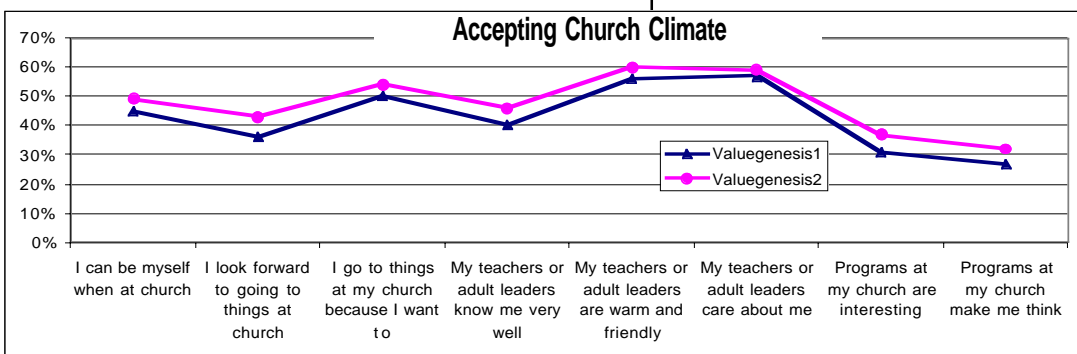


None of the "other factors" totaled above 3% each. Thus, issues that relate to relevance, meaningfulness and church climate ranked significant in determining youth's interest in staying in church. Perhaps these factors are crucial in the 48% of teens that, according to Roger Dudley's latest research, choose to drop out of church.<sup>1</sup>

## Reflections on my church . . .

We asked teens to think about their experience with the religious educational programming and experience in their local church. This would include Sabbath School, Bible studies, youth groups, camping, projects, choir, retreats, Adventist Youth and other such programs. For each of these statements, "Tell how true it is for you." The five-point response format ranged from "not at all true" to "very true." In the chart that follows, the percentages represent the combined responses of those who answered "true" or "very true." Again, the results of *Valuegenesis<sup>1</sup>* are contrasted with the new *Valuegenesis<sup>2</sup>*

The first three statements above comprise the Accepting Church Climate Scale. It measures how "wel-



come and at home" the youth feel in their churches. Almost half (49%) attended functions with desire or enthusiasm or felt accepted as they were. "Somewhat true" was the most used response. While this was better than the (44%) of *Valuegenesis<sup>1</sup>* with a rather weak endorsement of "somewhat true," we can simply do much better making youth feel at home in their churches!

Adventists continue to be below the 77% of mainline Protestant youth and the 82% of Southern Baptists who felt at home in their churches.

## Perceptions of Adult Leaders and Teachers in Local Churches. . .

In this latter scale, composed of the fourth, fifth, and sixth statements in the above list, it seeks to measure the extent to which youth perceive that their teachers and leaders in their church religious education programs are personally interested in them and were warm, friendly, and caring. In *Valuegenesis<sup>1</sup>* only about half of the youth (average 51%) perceived them this way. In *Valuegenesis<sup>2</sup>* research, 55% saw them positively. And again, as in our first study, there was a steady decline from 70% in grade six to 56% in grade twelve.

And as the book *Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance* points out, "We don't compare very well here with other denominations either. While 57% (VG<sup>2</sup>=59%) of the Ad-

ventist teenagers felt that "My teachers or adult leaders care about me," 79% of the mainline youth and 82% of the Southern Baptist so indicated."<sup>2</sup> We have some local work to do here!

## Perceptions, Perceptions, Perceptions...

We know that there has over the past ten years been an increase of churches that have placed an emphasis on youth ministry. We asked a number of questions in the *Valuegenesis<sup>2</sup>* survey about youth ministry and the local church. They centered around three foci. How "regular" is your youth ministry at your local congregation? Do you find them personally meaningful? And Do youth and young adults regularly take leading roles in the worship services at your church? These questions, along with identifying whether or

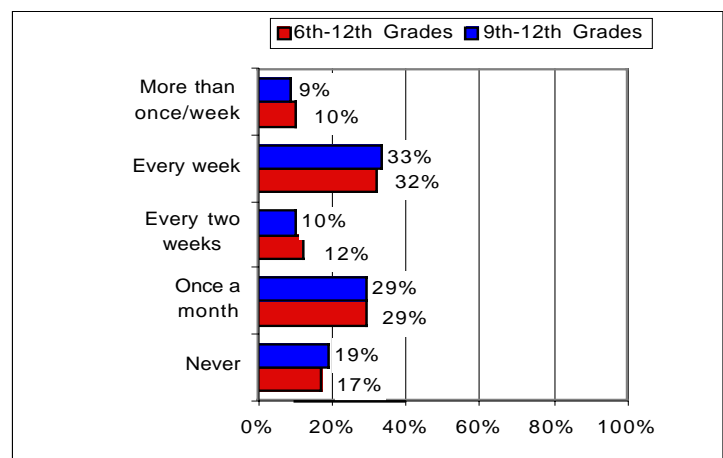
not their local church even had a youth pastor or someone designated for them to seek ministry from gave us a significant look at the impact of ministry in the local setting.

When we asked if there was a youth pastor in their church, they responded with 60% (YES) and 40% (NO).

These numbers did not appreciably change from grades six through twelve There is a perception that someone cares for them in almost 2/3rds of the youth.

When we asked how well this "pastor" was known, we found out that only 11% knew "him or her very well," while 26% said "quite well" and 18% "not well at all."

Question 276 asks, "Is there a regular youth ministry program in your church?" Here are the responses below. As you can see, we are in real need of improvement.



### For more information

<sup>1</sup>See Roger Dudley's latest book, *Why Teenagers Leave the Church* (Review and Herald Publishing, 2000).

<sup>2</sup>For complete information, we still have a few of the original study entitled, *Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance* by Roger Dudley with V. Bailey Gillespie. Email the Hancock Center for prices and availability at cwebster@lasierra.edu.