

UPDATE

UPDATE - 2002

- School Versus Church
- Attitudes and Change

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Love my school, Love my church

Valuegenesis research contrasts attitudes of teens towards church and their school. These contrasts provide for us a close look at the general feelings youth have towards these two venues, which have such an impact on their time and values. While we have looked at the impact of the home, this **UPDATE** looks at four unique scales developed especially for *Valuegenesis²* research. They provide a sliding scale of attitudes toward both the school and the local congregation. From it we can learn just how these young people feel about their religious training and what they might like to change.

Let's look at the church first

The *Valuegenesis²* project contains a rich scale that explores the "types" of religious attitudes these students have, first, regarding their local church experience. The scale was designed to explore a range of feelings. Two words were contrasted with a choice to place a score somewhere in between the two options. When looked at together, we get a sliding scale of the feelings of our students in Adventist schools regarding their church. This is what we discovered.

	(-)	Neutral	(+)	
Dull	64%	22%	14%	Exciting
Cold	45%	25%	30%	Warm
Disorganized	38%	24%	38%	Organized
Rigid	62%	20%	18%	Flexible
Not growing	48%	22%	29%	Growing
Rude	40%	22%	38%	Kind
Dark	38%	25%	36%	Bright
Exclusive	53%	20%	28%	Inclusive
Unfair	46%	23%	32%	Fair
Closed	39%	21%	39%	Open

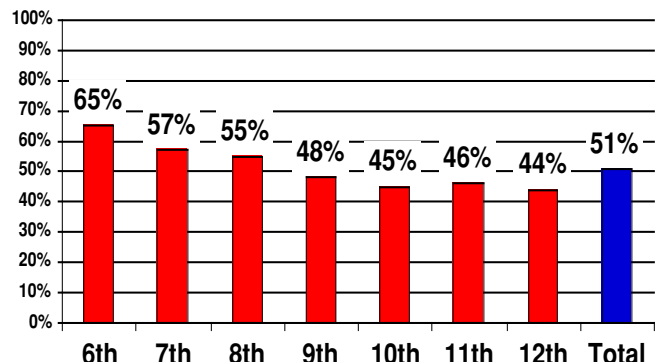
22.4% of the young people in grades 9-12 are neutral to this scale. In essence, they feel the church is neither dull nor exciting, for example. But when you look at the extremes of the scale above, you notice something interesting which could be helpful to local congregations as they plan their worship and ministry to teens.

You notice that 64% say their church is more dull than exciting, while 62% see it as rigid and not flexible. There

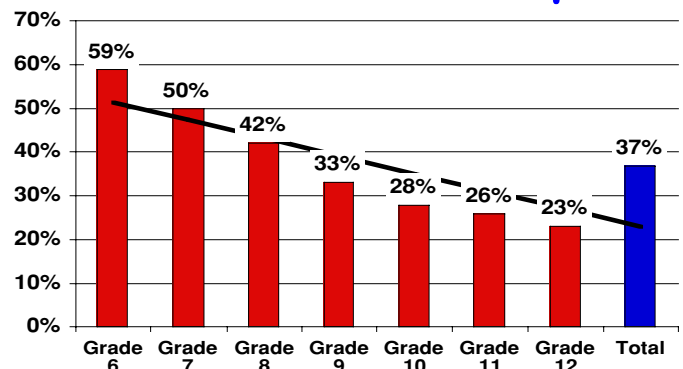
seems to be a balance between those that see the church as more disorganized than organized, dark or bright, closed or open. And in contrast to these more neutral opinions, some 48% of high school students in Adventist schools see their local congregation as not growing rather than growing, and more cold than warm.

These statistics conform to the information on church climate you will remember when we shared it in an earlier **UPDATE**. After ten years there has been an increase of the sense of warmth from 44% to 51% from *Valuegenesis¹* and *Valuegenesis²* totals. And, when comparing Adventist teens to other churches taking the same survey we still have a ways to go since Baptists have a 76% and mainline Protestants have 63% of their youth positive about their feelings towards warmth in their churches. When asked if the worship services are relevant and stretch the youth in worship, we again see a decline.

"It feels warm"



"It stretches me in worship"



Now let's look at the school

In the Valuegenesis2 research data set we have another scale, similar to the one designed for churches. This time, however, it targets school attitudes. It is interesting to see how teens (grades 9-12) see their schools now that we understand how they view their local congregations. The chart below identifies their choices.

	(-)	Neutral	(+)	
Dull	53%	23%	24%	Exciting
Cold	47%	25%	28%	Warm
Disorganized	50%	23%	27%	Organized
Rigid	58%	22%	20%	Flexible
Not growing	55%	21%	24%	Growing
Rude	50%	24%	26%	Kind
Dark	45%	25%	30%	Bright
Exclusive	56%	20%	24%	Inclusive
Unfair	60%	22%	18%	Fair
Closed	48%	22%	29%	Open

As we compare the percentages on the church chart with those of this school report, there are some significant differences. For example:

- The church is seen as more dull than the school
- The church is perceived as more disorganized
- The church is slightly more rigid than the school
- The church is seen as more open than the school
- The school is understood as significantly more unfair than the church
- The school is more closed than the church
- Both the school and the church are more exclusive than inclusive

Another way to summarize these scales would be to say the following:

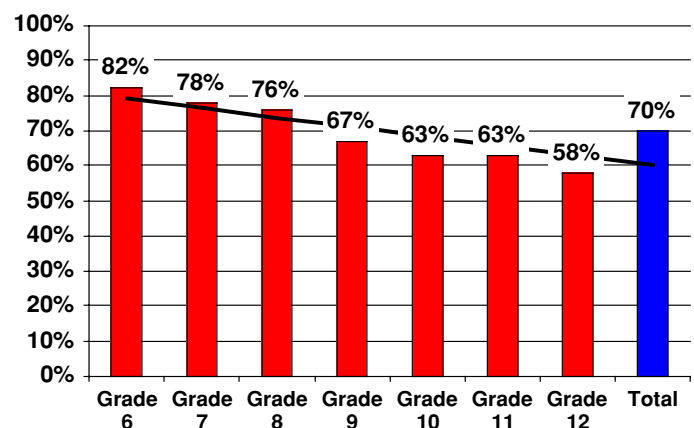
- The church is significantly seen as more dull and rigid than the schools
- The church is seen as only slightly more exciting, warm, organized, growing, kind, bright, inclusive, fair and open than the schools
- The schools are seen as significantly more disorganized, not growing, rude, dark, unfair and closed than are the churches.
- The schools are seen as only slightly less dull and rigid than are the churches.

On the whole, the report for both churches and schools is quite critical and negative. But this attitude should be balanced by more positive aspects of both the church and the school. For example:

- The church service is seen as a powerful influence for mature Christian faith by the youth in the study
- The youth see a high percentage of ministry being given to them by the local congregation and by the Adventist school. Some 67% say they have youth pastors available to them. We know this can't possibly be true since there are so few youth pastors in the Adventist ministry system. Youth are seeing others in their local

environments as providing clear ministry for them it seems. About 2/3rds of high school students share that the church provides fellowship in their Christian walk.

"It provides fellowship"



The importance of Adventism

There is no question that students, when given a chance to critique their school and church, often frame negative opinions. It is simply easier, and youth, who are establishing their own identity and ideology, often take opportunities like this survey to voice their opinions about change in a clear way. Nevertheless, there are some strong feelings about what the church and school might do to make the environment a more positive one for faith growth.

Churches can target youth and young adults in their worship service—both by involving them in worship and preaching, teaching, and ministering specifically for them and their needs.

Schools can continue to involve students in decision making. We have learned that involvement of any kind has a positive influence on their attitudes.

Both venues—schools and churches—can make the warmth climate issues a priority. Local church leaders can try to change the perception of a cold, unfriendly, and uncaring church by being accepting, warm, and inclusive. Yet, in spite of some of these criticisms, youth still claim satisfaction with their church. 69% are satisfied or very satisfied while only 11% claim dissatisfaction.

Retention in the Church

Q. 110. How satisfied are you with your current church (SDA)

• Very dissatisfied	5%
• Dissatisfied	6%
• Neither	21%
• Satisfied	40%
• Very satisfied	29%

For more information

• If you are not on our e-mail list to receive regular **UPDATES** of the Valuegenesis research, e-mail: bgillesp@lasierra.edu