

# GROWING OLDER: AN ADVENTIST REALITY?

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **ADHERENCE TO CHRISTIANITY IS DECLINING, ESPECIALLY IN THE WESTERN WORLD.**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is not immune to this trend, with membership and baptisms plateauing in Western countries, and up to 70% of Adventists leaving the Church by their late 20s. Across denominations, the 18-30 age bracket has become known as a “black hole” in church attendance.

### **ONE MAJOR FACTOR CONTRIBUTING TO THIS DECLINE IS A PARALLEL DECLINE IN THE PRACTICE OF “FAITH TRANSFER”.**

Faith Transfer—the practice of passing down one’s religious beliefs and worldview to their children—has become difficult and even controversial, especially in Western, individualistic societies.

This study focuses on Millennials (1981 - 1996; ages 28 - 43) to assess unique generational perspectives and practices that may be contributing to a decline in faith transfer.

### **TWO MAJOR CHALLENGES ARE CONTRIBUTING TO A DECLINE IN FAITH TRANSFER AND CHURCH ATTENDANCE: UNHEALTHY CHURCHES, AND POSTMODERNISM.**

This study gleaned data from two sources:

- 1. External studies, statistics and expert opinions about the current state of Churches in the Western world.**
- 2. A survey of 424 Adventist Millennials conducted by Jeff Parker, Youth Director for the Seventh-day Adventist Church.**

Together, these revealed that overall, Adventist Churches are unprepared to handle many of the attitudes and experiences of Millennials. Specifically, there are two major challenges that the Church must address:

- 1. Church environments are unhealthy and unattractive to Millennials**

External data shows that the two non-negotiable tenets of healthy churches that retain young people are: intergenerational relationships, and a focus on teens and parents.

Survey data also revealed that a sense of belonging and being supported were the biggest factors in determining whether a young person has a positive or negative experience of church.

### **2. Church environments are not receptive to postmodern, post-Christian thinking**

Postmodernism’s inherent plurality and distrust of totalitarian systems highlights the need for a nuanced, inclusive and diverse conversation about the nature of reality and faith, especially in Christian churches.

Many survey respondents highlighted the urgent need for more relevance and genuine connection in church, and that this may require rethinking tradition or bridging gaps between age groups.

### **WHILE THE CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT IS CHALLENGING FOR THE CHURCH TO NAVIGATE, THERE ARE PRACTICAL STEPS THAT CAN HELP TO INCREASE CHURCH HEALTH AND MEMBERSHIP RETENTION.**

These include:

- 1. Giving young people “the keys”—that is, autonomy, freedom and legitimacy in church leadership roles.**
- 2. Cultivating intergenerational relationships and a strong sense of community in local churches.**
- 3. Create dedicated spaces, programs and resources for younger age groups.**

By addressing these issues, and others highlighted throughout this report, the Church can become a safe space where Millennials feel comfortable raising their children and passing on their faith.