

BEYOND BELIEFS²

early baptism

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Early Baptism

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Summary

There has been a strong emphasis in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America to baptize young people prior to reaching high school as it is believed this practice may be associated with membership retention within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, it is unknown how these young people, upon reaching early adulthood, feel about their early baptism and if they have a comprehensive knowledge of the 28 Beliefs of Adventism.

The Beyond Beliefs 1 (Cohort 1) and *Beyond Beliefs 2* (Cohorts 2-6) studies, identified that there may be an unforeseen consequence of early baptism, in that young adults possess a limited knowledge of the official 28 Beliefs of Adventism and factors other than personal conviction contribute to their decision to be baptized prior to age 14. A number of participants expressed negative feelings relating to the practice of early baptism and 65.16% of those baptized prior to age 14 expressed that if they could do it again, they would have waited until they were older to be baptized. Paternalism and the potential implementation of an alternative practice for children, tweens, and early teens, other than baptism, are discussed in this report.

The *Beyond Beliefs* study is an ongoing study and is in the process of going global. Data from millennial young adults from other world regions of the Seventh-day Adventist church will help identify if this is just a North-American phenomenon or if it is a larger issue.

The Beyond Beliefs study

Beyond Beliefs 1 and *Beyond Beliefs 2* collected data from eight cohorts at Andrews University over several semesters to investigate how Millennial young adults really feel about each and every one of the 28 Beliefs of Adventism. This report uses the data of the first 6 cohorts which was available at the time of writing. Until now it has only been anecdotally assumed that a Millennial young adult (age 18 - 32) who identifies as a Seventh-day Adventist and is baptized or attends an Adventist educational institution, has a comprehensive knowledge of the 28 Beliefs of Adventism and endorses them fully.

As a part of this study, participants were asked to write a 150+ word response to each of the 28 Beliefs of Adventism including *Belief 15 - Baptism*. Participants were asked to describe what they liked/disliked about the belief, if they felt it was important/unimportant, and if they felt it was relevant/irrelevant. Participants were sourced from the General Education class RELT225 Doctrines of Adventist Faith. Over 930 written responses were collected from the Spring 2013 cohort (*Beyond Beliefs 1*) from a sample of 37 participants belonging to the North American Division. In *Beyond Beliefs 2*, responses from an additional 142 participants (Cohorts 2, 5, 7, 8) were collected. The *Beyond Beliefs* study is a transparent study, thus, the 4,000+ responses of all 179 participants will be available in a two volume publication, *Beyond Beliefs 1 – Respond* (their responses to *Fundamental 15 – Baptism* is already available as a sample chapter on www.Beyond-Beliefs.com/reports).

The participants used in this report submitted each response after reading the belief statement and commentary as outlined in the publication *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* but prior to undertaking a class related to the associated belief. This was to minimize peer and teacher influence. Participants also completed two demographic inventories which collected demographic and religious attitudinal data in two separate surveys, one taken at the beginning of the study and one at the conclusion. Nearly 700 participants took part in the survey process – about a third of the undergraduate population at Andrews University. The demographic inventories included questions asking what age they were when they were baptized (if baptized); why they decided to be baptized; the meaning of baptism; if they could do it again would they still have been baptized; if they were not baptized what reason best described why; questions relating to whether they would have waited to be baptized until

they were older if they were baptized before age 18; their attitudes toward rebaptism; and self-reported knowledge of the 28 Beliefs.

The focus of this report relates to findings on Baptism from the *Beyond Beliefs* qualitative and quantitative data from *Beyond Beliefs 1* and *Beyond Beliefs 2* (Cohorts 1-6). More information about the *Beyond Beliefs* study, comprehensive commentary, and findings relating to all 28 Beliefs from the Spring 2013 cohort (*Beyond Beliefs 1*) can be found in the 452 page publication, *Beyond Beliefs – Full Report, Cohort 1* which is available through www.amazon.com, Logos, and www.Beyond-Beliefs.com.

Baptism results

Most participants in the Spring 2013 cohort of the *Beyond Beliefs* study expressed in their written responses that they liked *Belief 15 – Baptism*, and nearly all (90%) were baptized members. However, more than a third (36%) of the participants specifically expressed some reservations and concerns regarding how baptism is being practiced within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America. One participant suggested, “I have seen people be treated differently in a negative way because they aren’t baptized and they are looked down upon by other members of the church.” The sentiment of the remaining participants focused predominantly on the practice of baptizing people at an early age (prior to young adulthood). Given the most prominent theme identified in the *Beyond Beliefs* participant responses regarding *Belief 15 – Baptism*, was “baptismal candidates must be able to understand this decision and its importance” (44%), this sentiment is not surprising.

Some participant comments relating to this issue were as follows:

“I personally wished that I would have waited to be baptized until I was about the age that I currently am. I feel like so many kids are shoved into the baptismal pools at churches because their parents want them to be ‘saved’ or because it is ‘time.’”

“I took a class from my pastor about baptism and he explained to me why I was getting baptized, but honestly, I don’t think I was ready.”

“I got baptized when I was 13 years old and I realize now that I was too young. I didn’t really understand life (not that I completely understand life) but at 13 years old there isn’t much I understood about life. If I could rewind and get baptized again, I would do it in late high school or even in college.”

“What I don’t like about this concept is how it is pushed for in the Adventist church while people have no clue about it. I feel as though people do this just because of the pressure from parents or others, especially at a young age and then wonder why they left the church or why Adventism really did not attract them.”

Reasons given for getting baptized

In the *Beyond Beliefs 1* cohort (Spring 2013) the researchers identified two baptismal age group clusters. There seemed to be a peak at ages 11-13 and again, to a lesser extent, from ages 16-18. The majority of participants were baptized before age 14, prior to entering high school. There are a number of reasons participants gave for why they decided to be baptized. For comparison and to look more closely at the two identified age group clusters, the researchers divided participants of the *Beyond Beliefs* study into these two groups – those who were baptized at age 14 or older, and those who were baptized at age 13 or younger. The following results were ranked in order of importance based on the participant responses:

Why did you decide to get baptized (13 years or younger)

Why decided to get baptized		Ranked in order of importance – 1 being the most important								Did not select this option
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
1	You felt personally convicted	56.62%	5.85%	3.08%	1.54%	1.54%	1.23%	0%	0%	30.15%
2	Your parents encouraged you	29.85%	18.15%	5.23%	3.38%	1.54%	0%	0.31%	0%	41.54%
3	Your friends were getting baptized	24.62%	6.46%	4.62%	2.77%	2.77%	0%	0.62%	0%	58.15%
4	Your pastor encouraged you	14.77%	5.54%	9.54%	4.31%	1.54%	0%	0.62%	0%	63.69%
5	You felt pressured by friends, family or pastor	9.23%	3.38%	1.54%	0.62%	0.62%	3.08%	1.23%	0%	80.31%
6	Extended family encouraged you	7.08%	2.77%	4.00%	4.92%	1.23%	0.92%	0.31%	0.62%	78.15%
7	For the attention and gifts	2.77%	1.23%	1.85%	0.92%	0.31%	0%	0.31%	4.00%	88.62%
8	You felt pressured by church members	1.85%	0.62%	2.46%	0.62%	0.31%	0.92%	2.46%	1.23%	89.54%

Why did you decide to get baptized (14 years or older)

Why decided to get baptized		Ranked in order of importance – 1 being the most important								Did not select this option
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
1	You felt personally convicted	74.19%	2.15%	4.83%	1.61%	0%	0%	0%	0%	17.20%
2	Your parents encouraged you	21.50%	13.98%	3.23%	2.15%	0.54%	0%	0.54%	0%	58.06%
3	Your pastor encouraged you	12.90%	8.06%	8.60%	2.69%	3.76%	0%	0%	0%	63.98%
4	Your friends were getting baptized	9.68%	6.99%	4.30%	2.69%	1.08%	2.15%	2.15%	0%	70.97%
4	You felt pressured by friends, family or pastor	9.68%	2.69%	1.08%	2.15%	2.15%	3.23%	0.54%	0.54%	77.96%
6	Extended family encouraged you	5.38%	1.61%	3.76%	4.30%	3.23%	1.61%	0%	0%	80.11%
7	You felt pressured by church members	2.69%	0%	0.54%	1.08%	0%	2.69%	5.91%	0%	87.10%
8	For the attention and gifts	0.54%	0%	0%	0.54%	1.08%	0.54%	0.54%	8.60%	88.17%

In both age groups, personal conviction was the number one factor for baptism which ranked highest, 56.62% in the pre-14 age group, and 74.19% in the age 14 and older group. One of the most prominent differences in these two tables is the disparity between personal conviction with regard to a baptism decision. For those who were aged 13 or younger, 30.15% of the participants did not even select the option of personal conviction as a reason given for why they decided to be baptized, presumably because personal conviction was not a factor. Instead they made their decisions based on encouragement from parents (61.22%) and their friends were getting baptized (51.02%). However, 34.69% felt pressured by friends, family, or their Pastor (34.69%):

If personal conviction was not a factor (13 years or younger):		%
1	Your parents encouraged you	61.22%
2	Your friends were getting baptized	51.02%
3	You felt pressured by friends, family or Pastor	34.69%
4	Your Pastor encouraged you	30.61%
5	Extended family encouraged you	15.31%
6	For the attention and gifts	10.20%
7	You felt pressured by church members	9.18%

A second important difference in these two tables is the influence of friends. Those who were baptized at age 13 or younger, 24.62% mentioned the primary reason for their decision for getting baptized was their friends were getting baptized. Conversely, only 9.68% listed friends as the primary reason among those who got baptized at age 14 or older. Interestingly, 70.97% of participants in this group did not even select this option. The influence parents have on the decision to be baptized seems to decrease somewhat as their children grow older. For those aged 13 or younger, 58.46% mentioned encouragement from parents, while those aged 14 and older, 41.94% mentioned their encouragement as a factor, a change of 16.52%. Parents are still one of the most important influencers of Millennial young adults, ranking second after personal conviction in both age groups. This is salient as it emphasizes the importance of parental spiritual influence, as identified in the *Beyond Beliefs* report *Peer Ministry Part 1*, available to download for free at www.Beyond-Beliefs.com/reports. Church programming for young people focuses on removing them from their parents and providing separate programming led by specialist youth ministers. Given this finding, and the findings outlined in the *Peer*

Ministry Part 1 report,¹ this may not be the best practice. Programming that keeps families together may prove to be more efficacious. Encouragement from the church pastor seems to remain consistently around 35%.

Although parents and ministers are influential people to Millennial young adults with relation to baptism, given the qualitative responses submitted by participants, the adage “with great power, comes great responsibility” is applicable. Most particularly when the most prominent theme expressed by Cohort 1 participants for *Belief 15 – Baptism* was, “baptismal candidates must understand the meaning of this decision and its importance.” Parents and ministers are cautioned to not use their influence to prematurely baptize young people. From the qualitative responses from *Beyond Beliefs 2*, it seems that those who were baptized before age 14 who did not regret their early baptism, often contextualized that their baptism was a very personal event. They were the only one baptized at the beach, lake, or a special place to them and there was a celebration following. They were often baptized by a significant person like a relative and their friends, family, and church community were in attendance. It was an event not too dissimilar to a wedding and reception. It may be advisable to discontinue the practice of mass baptism and encourage all young people who wish to get baptized to plan their baptism to make it meaningful and memorable – just as they would a wedding. This does not have to be an extravagant costly event, but rather, emphasizes the individual and adequately celebrates the decision they have made in the presence of the most important people in their lives. This may minimize the issue of peer pressure where a crowd is baptized, rather than individuals.

It would seem a large number of young adults in this sample wished they had not been baptized so early. Early baptism was even described by one participant response as though others “don’t care for the individual’s relationship and walk with Christ.” One of the reasons the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not practice infant baptism is due to their belief that a person has the right to make an informed choice about their faith, endorsement of the 28 Beliefs of Adventism, and membership within the church organization.

¹ Participants reported in *Beyond Beliefs 2* that parents, especially their mother, was the most spiritually influential person both when they were growing up (mother 80.60% and father 60.34%) and as a young adult (mother 46.40% and father 35.80%). Only 6.4% of young adult participants identified youth ministers as spiritually influential.

Reasons given for not getting baptized

Of those who were not baptized (less than 10% of the sample) but were from a Seventh-day Adventist background, there were 53 participants who selected reasons for why they had not chosen to be baptized:

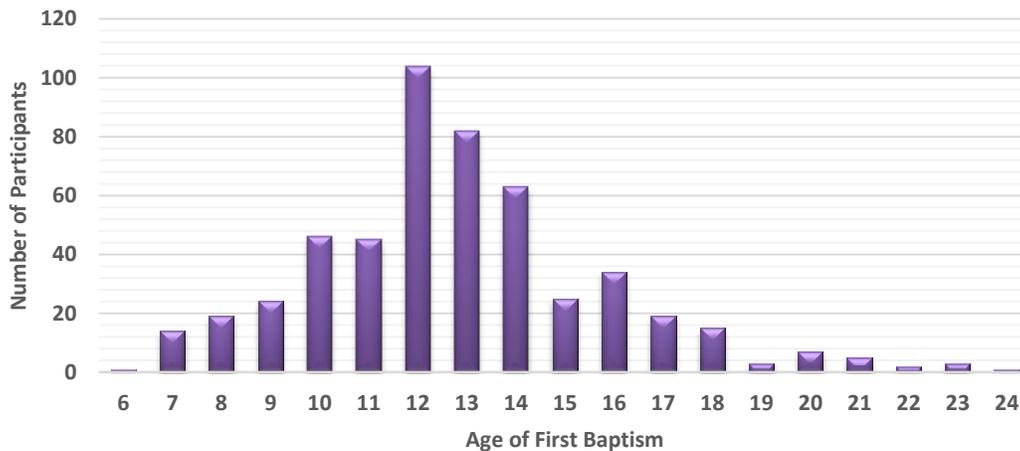
Why you decided not to get baptized		%
1	You didn't feel convicted	56.60%
2	Other	33.96%
3	You were not interested in Adventism	22.64%
	You disagreed with some Adventist beliefs	22.64%
5	You were never given the opportunity	15.09%
6	Extended family encouraged you not to	5.66%
	You didn't like some people at church	5.66%
8	Your parents encouraged you not to	1.89%
	Your friends encouraged you not to	1.89%

Like the participants who had made the decision to get baptized, personal conviction was the most cited option for not making that decision. It is also revealing that 15.09% were never given the opportunity.

Age of first baptism

In the *Beyond Beliefs 1* and *Beyond Beliefs 2* cohorts, there were 579 participants who provided input relating to baptism. Of this group 90.33% were baptized with the mean age being 12.84 and the range being 6 years of age to 24 years of age for a first baptism.

Age of First Baptism

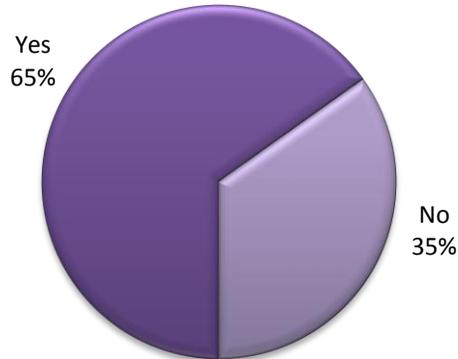


It may be easy to conclude from the chart above that baptism propensity declines after age 12 as less and less young people are baptized as they age. That conclusion, though, erroneously assumes an infinite number of baptismal candidates. One should keep in mind that if significant numbers of young people in a church organization are baptized early (in this case 65.43% of this sample were baptized before or at age 13) the pool of potential baptismal candidates remaining within a church population is also shrinking, which may provide a more reasonable explanation of lower baptism numbers at older ages.

Baptized too early?

Those who were baptized at age 13 or younger, were asked in the *Beyond Beliefs* survey that if they could do it again, would they have waited until they were older to be baptized. The results were as follows.

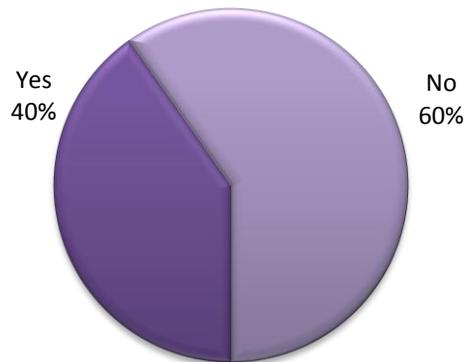
**Waited until older?
(Age 13 or younger)**



It would seem a large number of young adults who were baptized prior to high school felt they were baptized too early. The ramifications of this are yet to be determined, however, in the quest to “suffer the little children to come unto me” the Seventh-day Adventist church may have created a generation that wished they had waited for baptism. It should still be noted though, that 34.84% did not regret their early baptism. The qualitative responses in the *Beyond Beliefs* study suggest an individual baptism, that was both meaningful and memorable, was associated with a lack of regret. Future research may uncover other factors.

Those who were baptized at age 14 or older were also asked the same question in the *Beyond Beliefs* survey. The results were as follows:

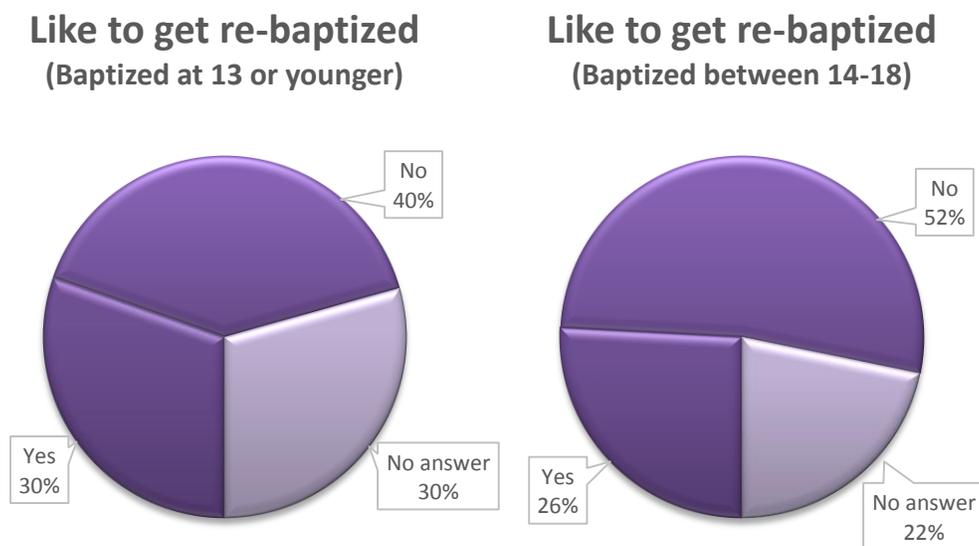
**Waited until older?
(Age 14 or older)**



It seems it is a reversal, where the majority of young people did not feel they were too young to be baptized (59.72%). The ramifications of this are still yet to be determined and this will be explored further within the context of other *Beyond Beliefs 2* data.

Re-baptism

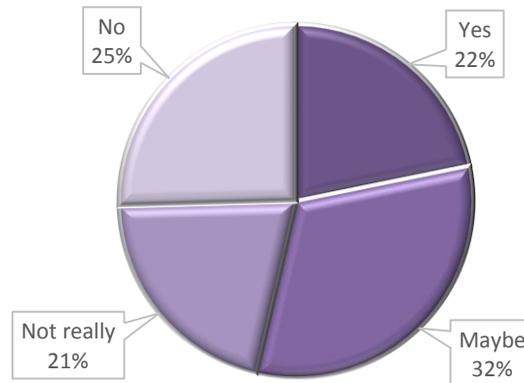
There were 26 participants in the survey who identified as having been re-baptized but there were 132 participants (27.27% of all of those who identified as being baptized) who stated they would like to be re-baptized. With regard to re-baptism, those who were aged 13 or less were slightly more likely to desire re-baptism than those aged 14-18, as the chart below demonstrates. It would seem, however, the difference is not all that great. Interestingly, a desire for re-baptism if one was baptized after age 18 was not identified in this sample. This could be due to the demographic factors, like smaller numbers who are in fact baptized after age 18 (only 19 participants) and given the range of ages in this sample (18-32 years of age), a baptism after age 18 may not have been that long ago.



The second survey asked participants a similar question, but this time they were given two additional options (“maybe” and “not really”) to give a little more nuance to their answer. The *Beyond Beliefs* researchers wanted to identify if the opportunity for re-baptism was not a difficult process (someone

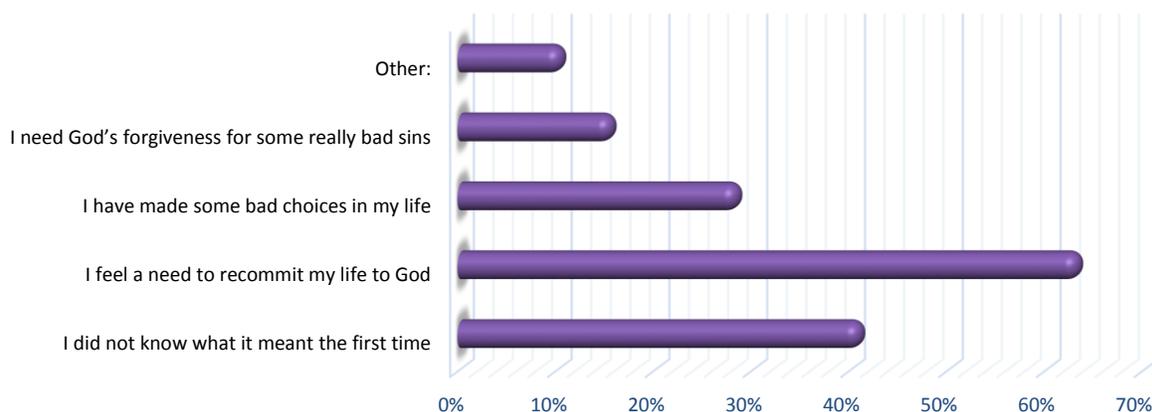
asked them, rather than pursuing it themselves), would more take up this hypothetical offer. The following chart shows the result from the 468 participants who answered this second question:

If someone asked if you wanted to be baptized/rebaptised, would you be interested?



More than half of the participants (54%) were in the “maybe” and “yes” range, which is a rather high number, given more than 90% of the participants were already baptized and were from a Seventh-day Adventist background. The *Beyond Beliefs* survey also asked Millennial young adults, if they had ever contemplated rebaptism, to contextualize why they wanted to be re-baptized. They could pick several options, including providing their own reason. There were 350 participants who answered this question.

If you have ever contemplated rebaptism, why do you want to be re-baptized?



There were 41.14% who stated they did not know what baptism meant the first time they were baptized. Again, this reinforces the notion that baptism of children and very young people may be questionable at best, socially irresponsible at worst. The most common reason for wanting to be re-baptized, however, was participants felt need to recommit their life to God (63.43%). This may indicate that the full meaning of the Lord’s Supper has not been properly presented, as the ordinance also serves as a quarterly recommitment service.

What is baptism?

The *Beyond Beliefs* study survey also asked the participants “Baptism is?” They were able to select every option that applied to them, and space was also provided for participants to add options of their own. Thus, when an option was not selected, it was salient. There were 471 participants who answered this question.

Baptism is:		%
1	A symbolic act that shows that I would like to follow Jesus and have accepted him as my savior	81.3%
2	Like a marriage—it is a symbolic act of publically showing my intention to live the rest of my life in a relationship with God	76.2%
3	A chance for a new start	53.1%
4	Showing others that I have accepted the 28 Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church	32.5%
5	An act that washes away your sins	31.2%
6	Necessary for salvation	13.8%
7	Necessary for going to heaven	7.6%
8	Other	1.7%

By far the most popular option was, baptism is “a symbolic act that shows that I would like to follow Jesus and have accepted him as my savior” (81.3%), followed by baptism is “like a marriage – it is a symbolic act of publically showing my intention to live the rest of my life in a relationship with God” (76.2%) – which supports that a baptism that is individualized and celebrated like a wedding/marriage may be a viable means of reducing regret for early baptism. A little more than half of the participants

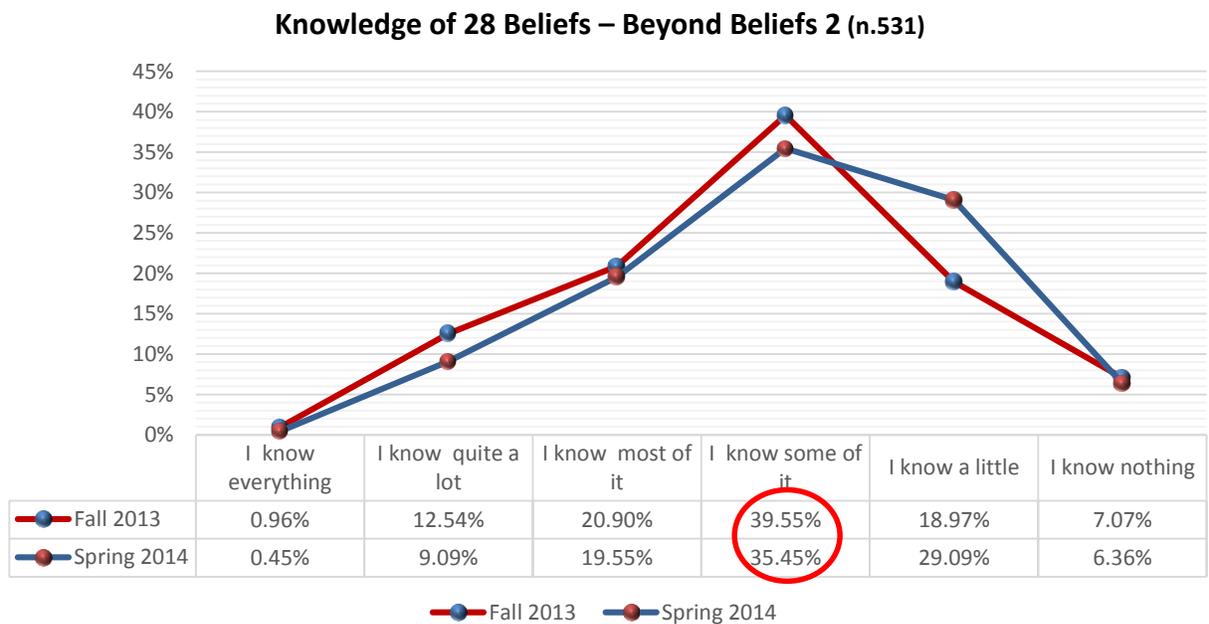
viewed baptism as a chance for a new start (53.1%), an intentionally broad option to gauge if it is necessary to undertake further study in this area. When contemplating rebaptism 28.57% stated that they had made some bad choices in their lives. Another 15.71% stated they needed forgiveness for some really bad sins. One has to ask, what type of sins or lifestyle did such young people need a new start from? Does it really require baptism for forgiveness of such sins, and if so, would this result in multiple rebaptisms? Or is this “new start” merely a cliché? Given 53.1% selected this response, more research into this issue may be warranted.

It seems Millennial young adults have received the message strong and clear that baptism is a symbolic act showing that – I love Jesus and would like to have a relationship with him. However, only 32.5% of the participants recognized that the act of baptism is “showing others that I have accepted the 28 Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.” Or to state it differently, it seems 67.5% of the participants did not see any relation between the beliefs of the church and the baptism ordinance. This is interesting since both the traditional and the alternative vow given by the baptismal candidate when baptized in a Seventh-day Adventist Church clearly states that a candidate “accepts the teachings of the Bible as expressed in the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and pledge by God’s grace to live your [their] life in harmony with these teachings.”² According to this data, there seems to be a disconnect between the beliefs of the Church and the act of baptism, perhaps due to early baptism which may emphasize Jesus at the expense of the beliefs of the church, in an effort to simplify and make it more understandable for the children, tweens, and teens. It is almost as though ministers do not trust the value of 28 Beliefs even though *Beyond Beliefs 1* was able to determine that Millennials were not opposed to the beliefs and endorsed them - particularly when they were associated with some personal benefit. What Millennials opposed with relation to the 28 Beliefs was that they were not followed, or they were used to abuse or judge others.

²For the baptismal vows, see Secretariat, General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 17th edition* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2005), 32-34.

Knowledge of the 28 Beliefs of Adventism

It may be suggested that it is efficacious to baptize children, tweens, and teens, even though they may not be personally convicted or have an adequate understanding of the 28 Beliefs of Adventism, contending that they can always learn these things later in “post baptism nurture.” This attitude may be perceived as paternalistic and is highly problematic as the relatively low self-reported knowledge of the 28 Beliefs of Adventism, from *Beyond Beliefs 2*, indicates that this type of nurture has either not taken place, or has been largely ineffective. The following graph shows the knowledge level of the participants at the beginning of the Fall 2013 and Spring 2014 semesters, 65.59% (Cohorts 2-4) and 70.90% (Cohorts 5-6) of the participants self-reported in the “I know some of it,” “I know a little,” and “I know nothing” range.



After baptism, there may be little benefit or motivation for a busy church pastor to conduct this type of nurture as they have already received a statistical reward for baptizing a new member, and must spread his/her limited time among a number of members in their church. The child may not have any incentive either, as they have already been baptized and may not possess the maturity to perceive the need for further study. *Beyond Beliefs 1* identified that even at a university level very few young adults signed up for classes like RELT225 Doctrines of Adventist Faith in order to learn more about the 28

Beliefs of Adventism. The demographic inventory showed that the majority took the class simply because they needed a Religion General Education class (56%) that fit their schedule (21%).

“Post baptism nurture” contradicts the predominant theme expressed by young adults in relation to *Belief 15 – Baptism*, which is “baptismal candidates must understand the meaning of this decision and its importance.” Also, if “post baptism nurture” is the current strategy of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, some may wonder why not practice infant baptism? Making a mature and informed choice resonated with young adults, and early baptism may contradict this and cause suspicion that numbers or paternalism is the motivating factor, rather than personal conviction and what is best for an individual’s long term spiritual experience. (Paternalism is when an individual or authority figure/group/organization, male or female, makes decisions for what is best for another group – often without consultation with this group. It is problematic because authority figures making these decisions will often not experience any negative consequences of their decisions, should they prove erroneous.) Thus, it may also be timely to investigate the issue of paternalism within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, focusing on its actual efficacy, ethical considerations, and the potential negative ramifications it may have, particularly with regard to the retention of young adults.

The *Beyond Beliefs* study also asked Millennial young adult participants who had taught them the 28 Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They were welcome to select as many options as applied to them, and they were also able to provide their own option. The top four options were, Bible class at school (K-12), in baptismal classes, my parents taught me, and my pastor taught me. However, 23.9% of the participants indicated that nobody taught them the 28 Fundamentals and that is why they didn’t know them very well.

There were 33.1% who learned them at school. This is why the *Beyond Beliefs* team has released, free of charge, the PowerPoints and curriculum of RELT225 Doctrines of Adventist Faith as a resource to teachers and ministers (see www.Beyond-Beliefs.com/teach). This class was able to produce a phenomenal shift in the self-reported knowledge level of participants in the *Beyond Beliefs* study. This self-reported shift was also reported by external reports, unrelated to the Beyond Beliefs study. See *Peer Ministry Part 1* (www.beyond-beliefs.com/reports) for more details of the efficacy of RELT225 Doctrines of Adventist Faith.

Who taught you the 28 Fundamentals?		%
1	Bible class at school (K-12)	33.1%
2	In baptismal classes	31.3%
3	My parents taught me	30.7%
4	My pastor taught me	27.2%
5	Sabbath School	24.1%
6	Nobody—that's why I don't know them very well	23.9%
7	Pathfinders	20.0%
8	I taught myself	15.1%
9	Youth services	11.5%
10	Youth camp or programs	11.2%
11	Evangelistic campaigns	11.0%
12	Other	7.2%
13	Campus Chapel programs	6.5%
14	My grandparents taught me	5.9%

Conclusion

It may be appropriate for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to perhaps consider introducing a different symbolic practice for children or tweens other than baptism, one that would allow them to feel included, make a public declaration of their commitment to God/Jesus, while still respecting that they may not be at an age where they fully understand the ramifications and rationale of the 28 Beliefs of Adventism.

It must be noted that Jesus was not baptized until age 30 (Luke 3:1-22), at the beginning of his ministry (this should not be confused with the regular practice of Mikvah performed multiple times during a Jewish person's life). He was however, presented at the temple as an infant by his parents (Luke 2:22-40), a practice that is mirrored in the Seventh-day Adventist Church through baby dedications. We can also assume that at age 12 he participated in a bar mitzvah (an event alluded to in the Gospels when Jesus impressed the religious leaders in the Temple, Luke 2:41-52), which is when a Jewish child makes a personal commitment to adhere to God's laws and does so publically. Thus, a symbolic practice for Seventh-day Adventist children or tweens, other than baptism, may mirror Christ's life while reserving baptism for an age when they can make a mature decision regarding their faith and their endorsement

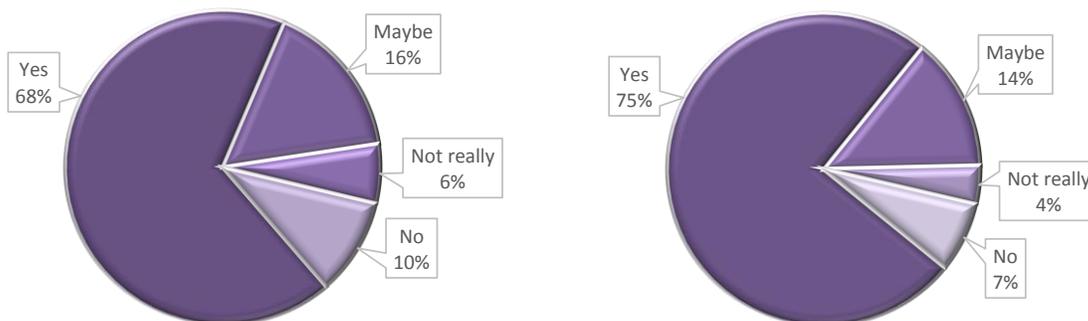
of the 28 Beliefs of Adventism. Alternatively, the suggestion of an individual baptism that is planned to be a meaningful and memorable event – much like a wedding may be advisable.

While some may ask, “When will a young person, or any church member for that matter, be able to understand the 28 Beliefs of Adventism?” Conversely, if written in clear language with examples and a focus on an application in everyday life, one could also ask, “Why wouldn’t a literate adult understand them?” If literate adult church members of any age are unable to understand the 28 Beliefs of Adventism, this would suggest that, in their current form, they are unintelligible and may require revision. Such revision may also have the added benefit of making them more understandable to children, tweens, and teens, with personal conviction perhaps becoming a more prominent part of their decision to be baptized.

Given the issue of paternalism discussed above, if an additional symbolic practice other than baptism is introduced for younger Seventh-day Adventists, it is done in consultation with a number of children, tweens and teens from a diverse range of ethnic, family, and social backgrounds so as to identify a practice that is meaningful to them and their spiritual walk - not necessarily what their parents or church leaders believe should be meaningful to them.

The *Beyond Beliefs* survey also asked participants if they could do it again, would they still have chosen to be baptized. The results for *Beyond Beliefs 2* are represented in the chart below. Again, they have been divided into two groups, 13 and younger (pre high school) and 14 to 18 (high school):

If you could have done it all again, would you have gotten baptized? (13 years or younger) **If you could have done it all again, would you have gotten baptized? (14-18 years old)**



This outcome is interesting as it would seem the majority would choose again to be baptized or would at least consider it. Thus, early baptism may not be as necessary as once thought.

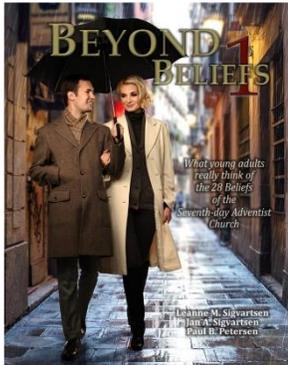
More study regarding baptism and young people that investigates factors other than its correlation with retention may be timely. The focus of future researchers, given the findings of this study and the issue of paternalism, should always be the spiritual wellbeing of a young person; respect for their personal walk with God both now and in the future; and their right to make an informed decision regarding baptism and membership within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

BEYOND BELIEFS REPORTS

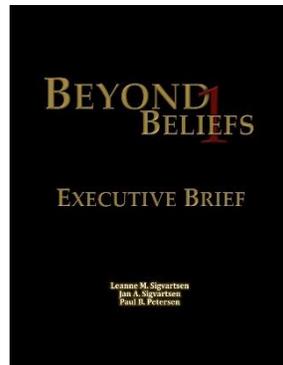
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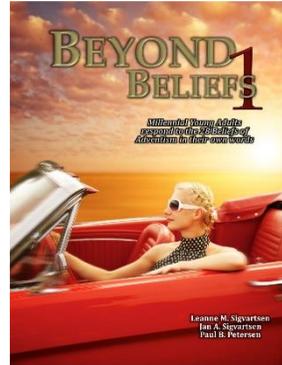
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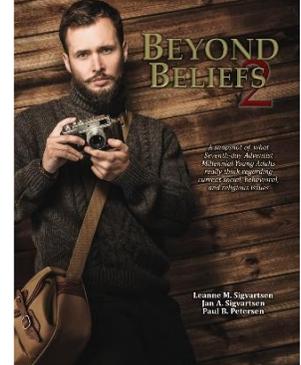
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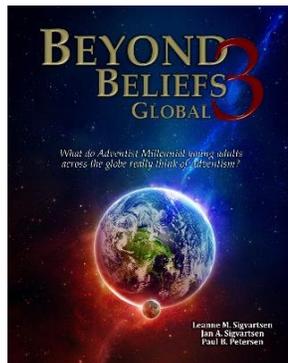
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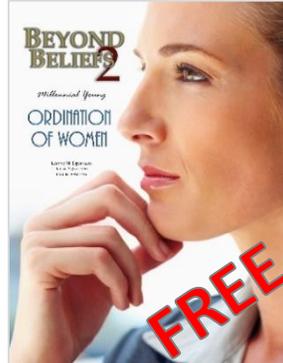
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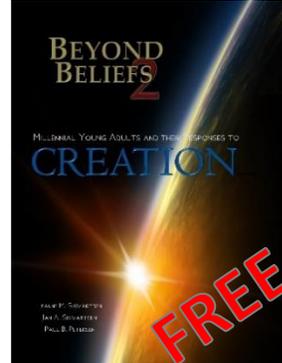
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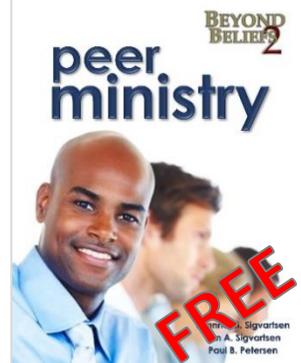
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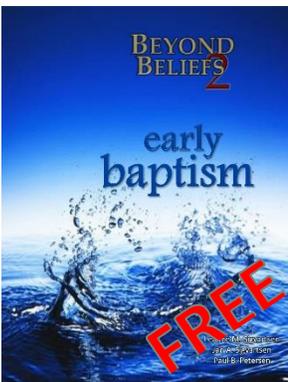
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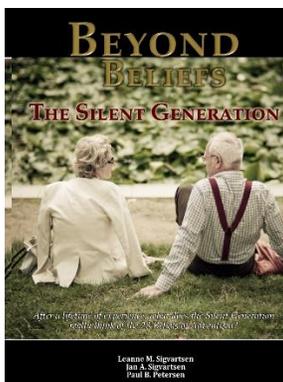
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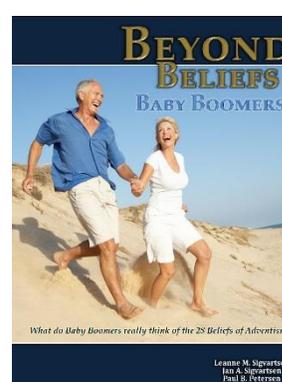
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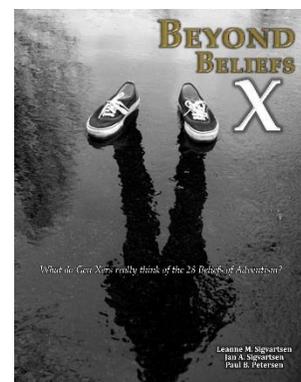
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