Dutch research to revitalize the SDA church
Large scale research among members and regular visitors in The Netherlands Union Conference

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What do you know about Adventist in The Netherlands?

**Energizer:**
Brain boost

**Intro exercise:**
We have been listening for a while now. But are your brains still fueled up? Let’s do this quick energizer to get your brain juices flowing again.

What do you know about the Adventist church in the Netherlands? After this presentation you’ll hopefully know a little more (as do the we, the Research Commission).

Source picture: http://healthbeginswithmom.com/is-my-child-eating-healthy/
Correct answer = A
Number of baptized Adventist in the Netherlands are:

A. 5457  
B. 6590  
C. 4579  
D. 5532  

Correct answer = A
Number of churches and churchplants in the Netherlands are:

A. 96  
B. 65  
C. 58  
D. 44  

Correct answer = C
Outline

- Introduction
- Methodology
- Some basic results
- Sabbath-keeping internalization and wellbeing
- Implications for revitalization
- Future actions
Our main goal of the whole research project in the Netherlands is as follows:

*To gain insight in the faith and (spiritual) well-being of local congregations, to give practical insights to the local church boards for policy making and to create a better an more (spiritual) purposeful church with meaning for members and visitors alike.*

Another effect will be to give the NUC the information on which they can make relevant and useful policy and to make sure that the NUC is subservient to the local congregations. As you can see creating information in a pure academic matter is and will never be our goal, because we want to be sure that our work is for creating a church in which members belong.

**Mission and strategy of the ‘Research committee of the Netherlands Union Conference of the Seventh-Day Adventist church’**

**Mission**

The committee tries to inform local and national policy of the SDA church in The Netherlands. It does this by conducting empirical socio-cultural (human sciences) research. Research will be conducted in support of the worldwide mission of the SDA church.

**Strategy**

To fulfill its mission, the committee will conduct the following activities:

- Conduct independent research and study initiatives based on relevancy for the church.
- Accepts request for and conducts research by local churches and/or the NUC which are in accordance with the committee’s mission.
- The committee exists of a core group of members from different backgrounds and academic disciplines and works with external subject matter experts if the committee does not possess the expertise required for a research or study.
- The committee tries to deliver one research or study every year if deemed necessary. If appropriate, then the committee will gather on a regular basis to discuss the progress and to improve the efficiency and to create an effective work environment.
- The committee evaluates its work and results once a year and sets its course for the next and following years.
- Evaluation will take into account its impact on the church and church policy.
- The committee strives to create support among church leaders and church members by promoting its activities.

The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to proclaim to all peoples the everlasting gospel in the context of the Three Angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6-12, leading them to accept Jesus as their personal Savior and to unite with His church, and nurturing them in preparation for His soon return.

Netherlands Union Conference.
The main purpose of my presentation is to show and share what is happening in the Netherlands with regards to research.
It is important to understand that we do not have any academic Adventist education within the Netherlands. Everything we do is based entirely on the effortless support of many volunteers within and outside the research committee.

However, we do abide to the highest academic standards. Some research we did in the past are:
2010: Large scale research among members and regular visitors in The Netherlands Union Conference
2011: “Not every believer is the same. Is profiling possible?” Why people turn their back at the Adventist church. A case study of the Netherlands.

NUC = Netherlands Union Conference
For your enjoyment a couple of pictures related to our research.

The president of the NUC also made a video statement which was disseminated throughout the church to create involvement (and thus a higher response) and to show that the NUC is in support of research. The following link shows his message (Dutch only)
https://youtu.be/RCZyhZOtClO
Here we will give you a short insight and information on our methodology. We used a number of different literature to strengthen our research and research questions and to give direction during our planning phase and for creating the questionnaire. You can find these references at the end of this presentation.

The 2010 questionnaire originally stated as a study into behaviors regarding tithing. This expanded into a more generic questionnaire into involvement with the local church, NUC and religious behavior and well-being among Adventist and (regular) visitors. Based on these results it was possible to create profiles of local churches. Jurriën and I explored this at our last conference.

The 2015 questionnaire was based as a second study with longitudinal effects in mind. Also we expanded on a couple of subjects based on a number of different literature and well know scales such as Post-Critical Belief Scale. Based on our last AHSRA meeting we also included questions regarding Sabbath Keeping, based on the research from Karl Bailey.

Our research outline focused on a number of themes such as Sabbath experience, the local congregation and on existential life questions. We did not depart our researched with a ‘solid’ or narrow research question. This was also ‘easier’ for us from a practical standpoint, hence remember we are not ‘professional’ researchers. We based the questionnaire also on our own experiences, observations and contacts among the church to ‘know’ what issues could or should be relevant to be included.
We created 2 versions of the questionnaire. A paper and online version in 4 languages. Dutch, English, Portuguese and Papiamento. The online version was only available in Dutch and English. The online version was also compatible with use for tablets and smartphones.

October 3rd was chosen as a national research day. The idea was that after the church service people would stay in church to fill out the questionnaire. Before that day all local elders and secretaries where contacted, by mail and phone to increase the involvement and create a high number of respondents. A video message from the NUC president was also available. This was used to create support among churchgoers and to show the backing from the NUC. The online version was available till the end of December.

Aforementioned method of data gathering has its advantages (such as creating a sense of solidarity) and disadvantages (only capturing people who happens to be in church that day). However seeing the results of this method in 2010 we were confident to reproduce this and expand on (e.g. more languages and an online version).
When looking at the numbers of respondents the following remarks are important: Out of 1173 returned questionnaires (digital and paper) only approximately 1068 are relevant. That is, the number of questionnaires which are filled out (almost) completely. Which means that, except for missing values on some of the questions for a number of reasons (e.g. question to difficult or plainly forgotten), the complete questionnaire was filled out. The decision was made not to include the total, because of non-complete questionnaire which might have distorted the outcomes. However the ‘raw’ values of these questionnaires where processed and are still available for future analyses.

N=1173 (2015)
N=1571 (2010)

The high number of responses are encouraging. The data quantity (number of respondents and the high coherency of the questionnaire) is important for the quantitative and statistical accountability. Also the open questions where filled out very meticulously. On a great number of questionnaires a lot of remarks where written down along the questions. These where also transcribed for future reference. The fact that we had a high involvement is something to take into serious consideration. A remark that can be made is that in general the number of people filling out questionnaires are in general more involved of have a higher tendency to be more involved then those who do not fill out or participate.

Interesting to see is that we had a myriad of people who participated such as members, visitors, ex-members who returned into the church. The first analyses show us that we have a broad image of how the Adventist church looks like.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Digital version</th>
<th>Paper version</th>
<th>Total received</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>249</td>
<td>924</td>
<td>1173</td>
<td>5457</td>
<td>21.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Useful (approx.)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>1068</em></td>
<td>5457</td>
<td>19.57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Again high number of responses
- N=1173 (2010) Number of reasons why lower
- High involvement
- Data quantity & quality is high
- Members, visitors, ex-members etc.
Our analyses is currently in progress. As mentioned before this will take time for a number of reasons.
The first step was making sure we would process all the paper versions digitally. This was a long and painstaking process, using a number of volunteers and making sure the data entry would take place in the same way (e.g. the way on how to use which spelling for cities or countries).

After the data-entry the first steps to ‘clean’ the complete results took place, using STATA software for analyses. Based on all results the average outcome per question was generated. Among this, also a basic profile or benchmark was created, which may be seen as the average Dutch Adventist. The latter does not have by definition the same outcomes as the average outcome per question. The next step was that all questions where corrected for items such as age, gender, number of respondents per congregation etc. This means that the outcome on a question is purely, about that question without the influences of certain items as aforementioned. Nevertheless when furthers analyses takes place, this could be taken into consideration, because it might account for certain outcomes.

We are now currently at looking ‘purely’ at the outcomes. What do the numbers tell us, what are the outliers, what similarities doe we see? When using this method, we are hoping to find more and better topics which might need to be addressed for analyses first and for presentation to the NUC, instead of focusing on a predetermined research question. Out of this method of analyses a top ‘5 list’ of themes can be distilled.

From an academic point of doing research this might not be a ‘pure’ method of doing research as taught, yet from a practical point of view, this method has its advantages. Especially if you are looking form where we are coming from and how we conducted (are conducting) our research.
Some basic data about our respondents

- The following slides show some basic data about our respondents
- Our analyses is currently in progress
- All data and numbers presented here are still tentative
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Currently we are still in the process of data-analyses. We looked into Sabbath-keeping internalization. Can we also find a correlation between this and the other questions regarding wellbeing? And if so, what does that mean? When we are looking at the national results (purely on how the questions were answered) we see no specific outcomes. The outcomes are too generic, but when we look at individual congregation we might find interesting results.

We already looked into this on a very basic level. When we look at a congregation (but up to ± 3 years ago a church plant) in the centre of Holland we noticed the following. Respondents of this congregations scored lower an the Sabbath-keeping internalization questions, with the exception on the question “I enjoy doing ‘good’ on the Sabbath”, were they scored higher. An explanation of this can be that this particular congregation focuses on families and does not have a traditional Sabbath (e.g. Sabbathschool, traditional vespers and divine service) and has a broad basis in community service, often on the Sabbath afternoon.
Some basic data on Sabbath-keeping internalization and wellbeing

- The following slides show some basic data on Sabbath-keeping internalization and wellbeing
- Our analyses is currently in progress
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Implications for revitalization and faith-internalization

- Implications for policy making on national level

- More important: implications for local congregations
- Creating ‘profiles’ per congregation

- ‘Well-being’ of local churches irt faith-internalization
  - Spiritual growth
  - Revitalization
  - Social bonding
The following steps which we need to make are:

1. **Presenting the results to the NUC.** What are the most urgent topics from the questionnaire on which the NUC needs to take action. They are the ones which are making the policy (not the researchers, although we might hint at certain directions to take, based on the outcomes of the study).

2. **Communication** using different outlets to keep in touch with the local churches and to show them that the research in which they participated will have real life effects.

3. **Road show,** or in other words we can create profiles for each congregation. For the local church boards this might be interesting. However not every congregation can participate in the ‘road show’, because to say something meaningful we need a minimum number of respondent per congregation based on their size.

4. **Comparing** with our earlier results (2010). Which trends, shifts and changes do we see? Also in 2015 two national studies were presented with regard to religion and faith. One form the protestant church in the Netherlands (focusing on the protestant church (PKN)) and a longitudinal study by the Vrije Universiteit (Free University Amsterdam) and the Radboud University Nijmegen. The latter study started in 1966 and is being repeated every ten years. Interesting to see if national trends and changes are also occurring in the Adventchurch.
Beyond our research......

- What about replicating our study in a broader scope?
- Already interests from Belgium and Germany

- Cross-cultural analysis (Hofstede?)
- Are there differences. Yes..., but where, when and how?

- What are/ could the implications be in a broader Adventists view?

Who is willing to take up this challenge?
References (1/2)

- Brochure, Summer 2015 (Volume 6-9), Berrien Springs, MI, USA: Andrews University, Office of Research and Creative Scholarship.
References (2/2)

- Kerk op weg naar 2025 (Church on the road to 2025). A national research conducted in 2015 by the PKN (Protestant churches in The Netherlands).

Used scales for background information

- Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS)
- Post-Critical Belief Scale
- Oxford Happiness Questionnaire
- Satisfaction With Life Scale
- Purpose in Life test
About the research committee

Mission

- The Research committee of the Netherlands Union Conference of the Seventh-Day Adventist church tries to inform local and national policy of the SDA church in The Netherlands. It does this by conducting empirical socio-cultural (human sciences) research. Research will be conducted in support of the worldwide mission of the SDA church.¹

- ¹) The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to proclaim to all peoples the everlasting gospel in the context of the Three Angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6-12, leading them to accept Jesus as their personal Savior and to unite with His church, and nurturing them in preparation for His soon return.
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