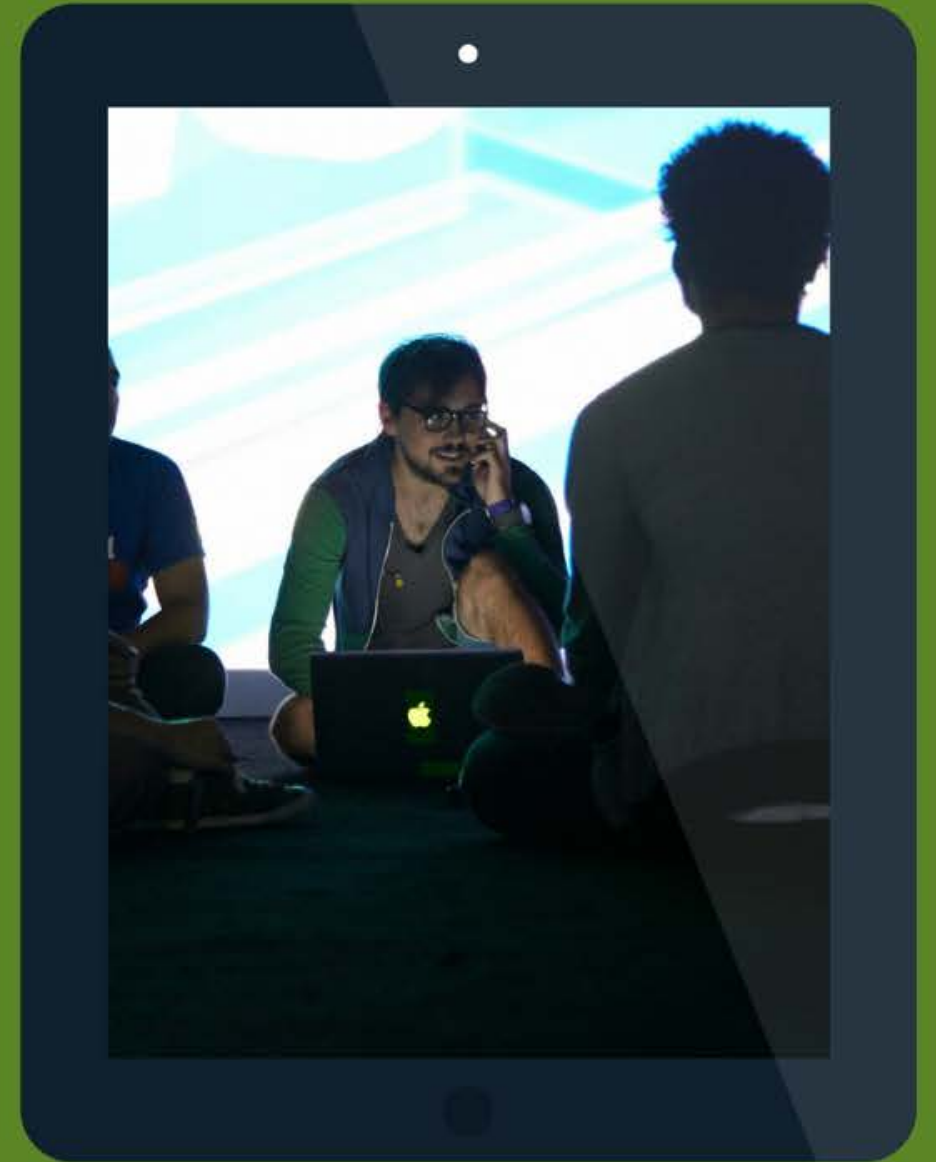


# Retention of Lutheran Millennials

2017 LCMS Study of Young Adults

LCMS Research Services and  
LCMS Youth Ministry



LCMS Youth Ministry - #lcmস্যaresearch

# Welcome

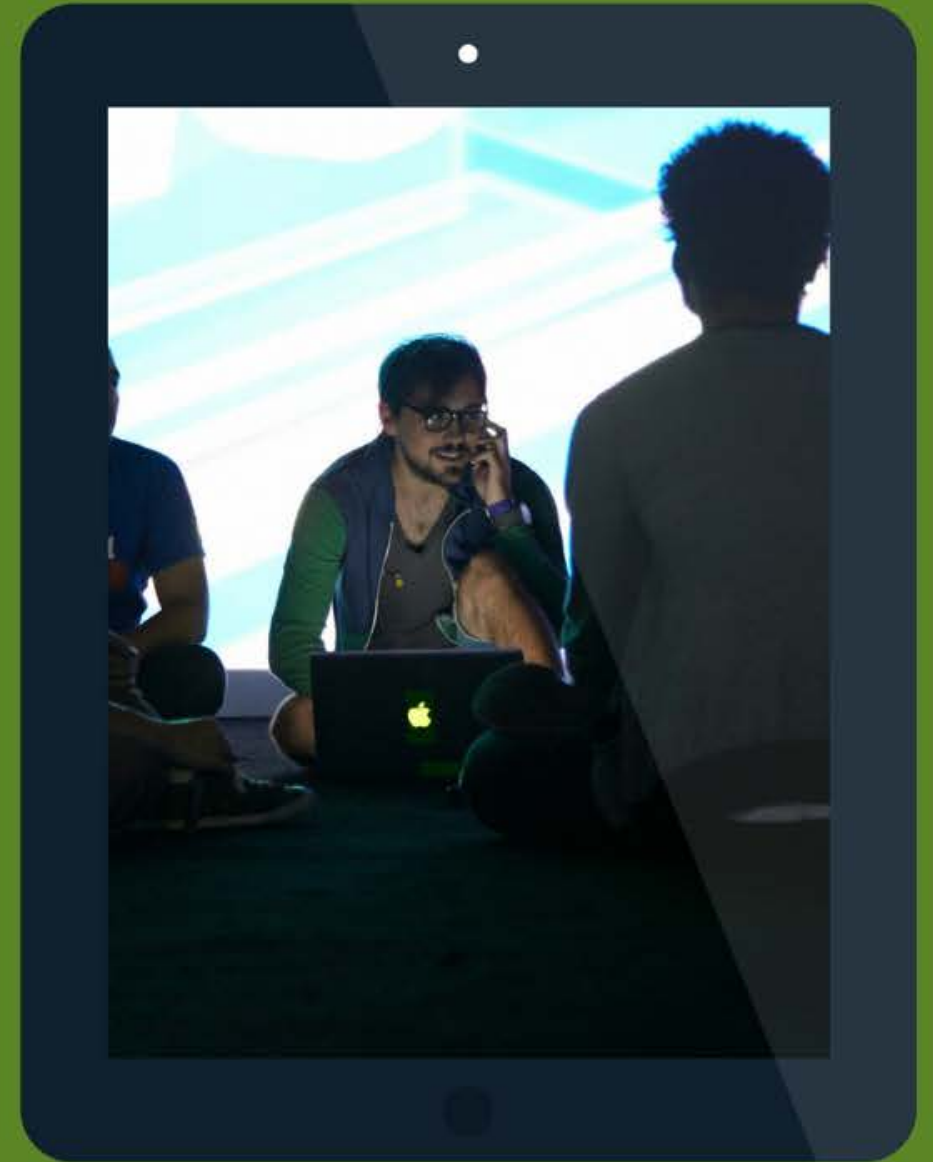
Joining you today:

**Mr. Ryan Curnutt, LCMS Senior  
Research Analyst**

**Rev. Mark Kiessling, Director for LCMS  
Youth Ministry**

**DCE Julianna Shults, Program Manager  
Lutheran Young Adult Corps**

**Meredith Whitefield, Communications  
Specialist**

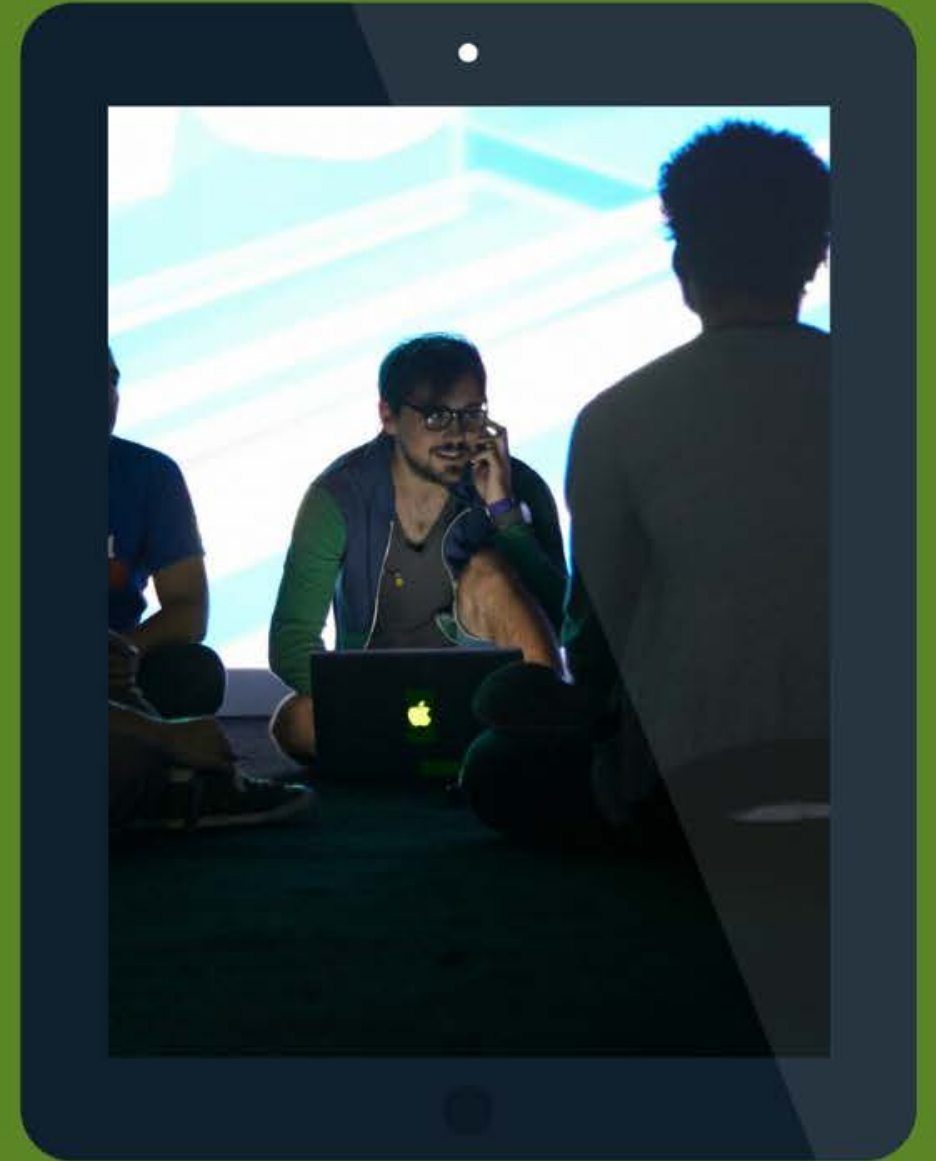


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# Webinar Tip

- Use the “**Chat**” (left-hand side of screen) to post questions.
- Questions will be answered:
  - Throughout presentation via chat
  - By presenters during the Q&A time



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# Background: About this Study

- LCMS Youth Ministry partnered with LCMS Research to conduct an unprecedented study of young adult retention.
- The study consisted of two phases
  - LCMS Confirmation Survey – Spring 2017
  - LCMS Young Adults Survey –Summer 2017

## **Primary Researcher**

Ryan Curnutt – Senior Research Analyst – LCMS Research Services

## **Research Team**

Rev. Mark Kiessling – Director Youth Ministry, LCMS Office of National Mission

Julianna, Shults, DCE – Program Manager – LCMS Youth Ministry

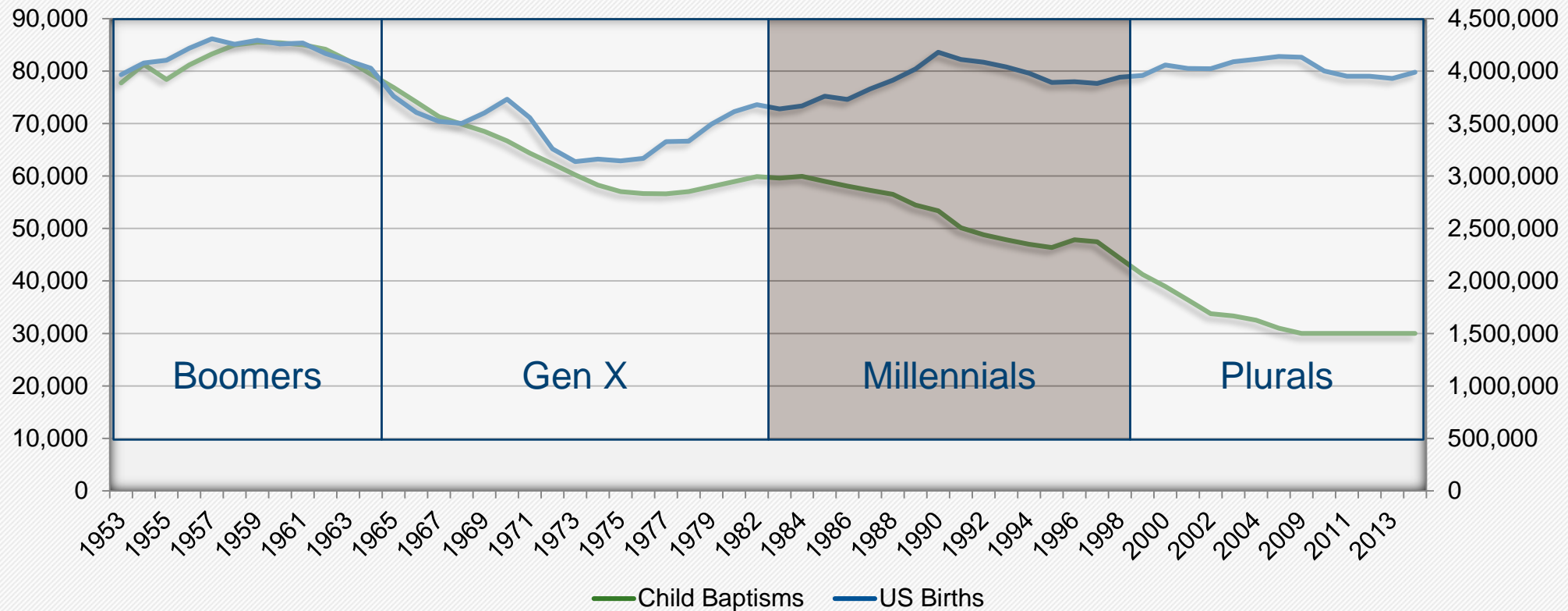
Kevin Borchers, DCE, Ph.D. – Associate Professor of Christian Education, Concordia University, Chicago

Dave Rueter, DCE, Ph.D. – Associate Professor of Christian Education, Concordia University, Irvine

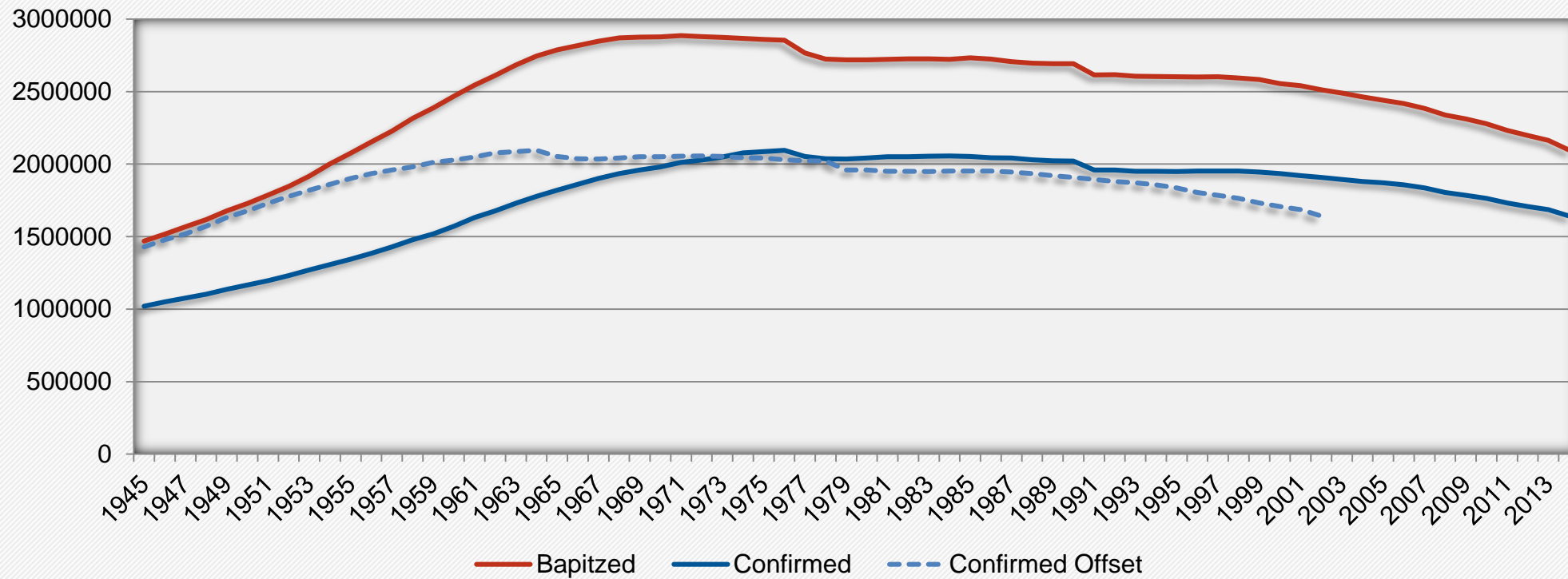
## **Cover Photos:**

Picture courtesy of LCMS Communication

# Millennials were Never Here in Large Numbers



# Low Retention of Baptized Babies to Confirmation Started with the 1950's Baby Boom



# Background: Retention Must be Addressed

- The Synod's rate of retaining children into adulthood (1-in-3) has not changed in the past three generations of adults
- Low retention of Baby Boomers into adulthood, led to lower rates of babies being born in the Synod (hence, fewer infant baptisms)
- Already beginning with low numbers, poor retention of Millennials has made them the smallest segment of Synod's confirmed membership.
- As Millennials now start families of their own, the cycle could potentially continue as a smaller proportion of their children are born in the church.
- Retention rates are not likely to change on their own, therefore, for the sake of Millennials and the generations to come, retention must be addressed.

# Disclaimer

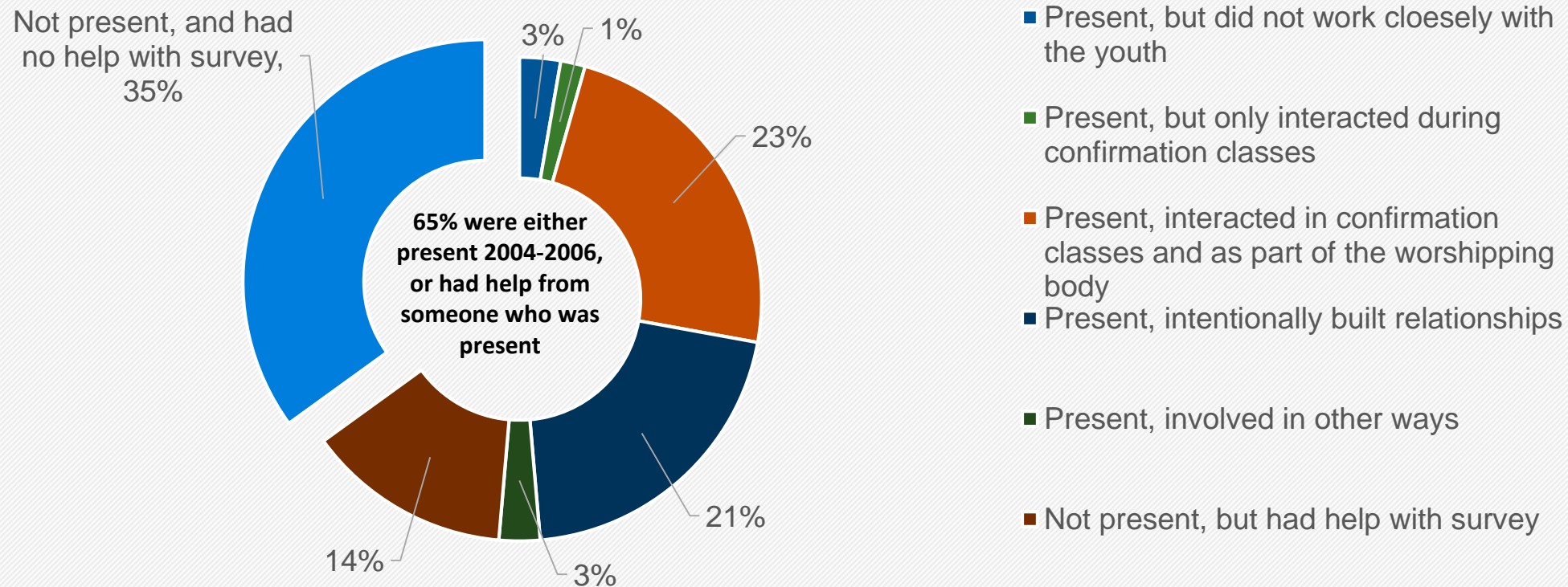
*It is well-known that many in our culture, especially young people, hold views that are opposed to the Bible and the church. This study seeks to help the church learn more about these differences. This is not in any way to suggest the church is considering changing its stance or turning away from sound Biblical teaching. Rather, this study is an exercise in careful listening so that church leaders and ministers are equipped to defend doctrine while compassionately engaging the whole spectrum of view points found throughout this diverse generation.*



# About the Confirmation Survey

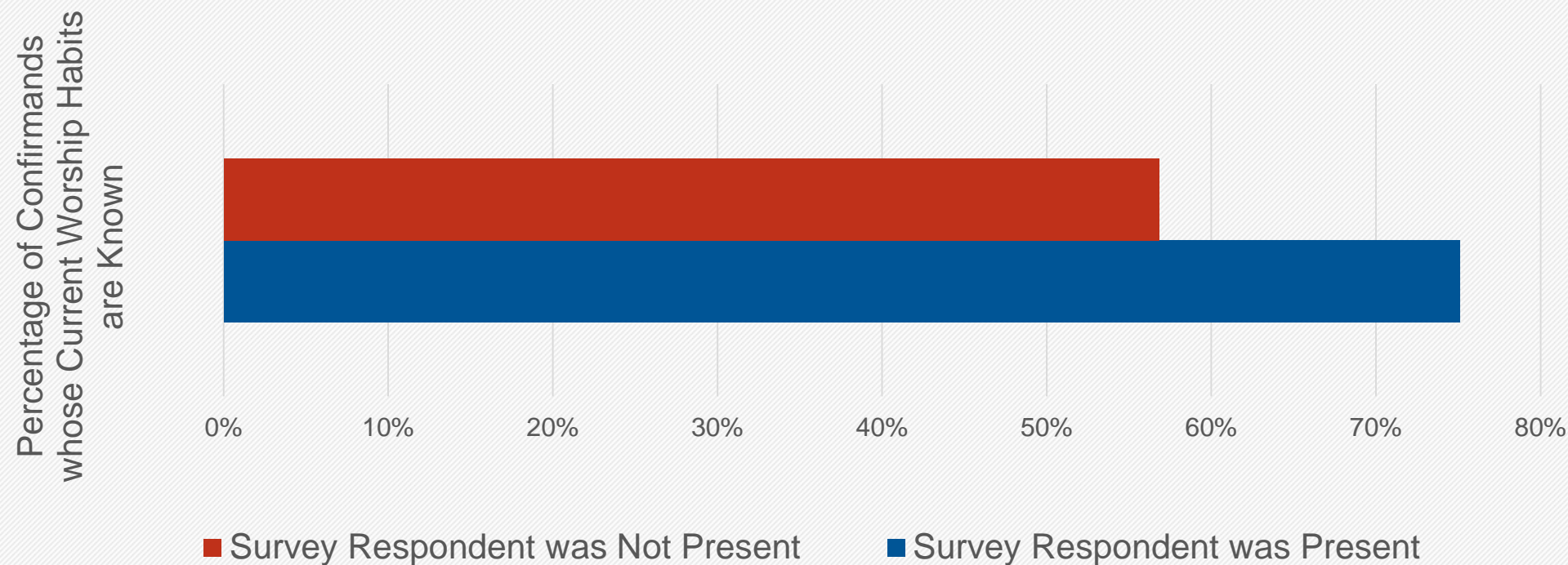
- 184 congregations provided responses
  - 10% of the 1,800 selected
  - Margin of error +/- 6%
- Respondents were typically the pastor (86%)
- Reviewed confirmation records from 2004-2006
  - Assuming the standard confirmation age of 12-14, these young people would now be 23-27 years old
  - Nearly a quarter (23%) did not have useable records from those years.
- Since many pastors were not at the same congregation a decade ago, respondents were encouraged to recruit help from staff or parents who might know more about these young people.

# 2/3 of Respondents were either at the Congregation in 2004 – 2006 or Sought Help from Someone

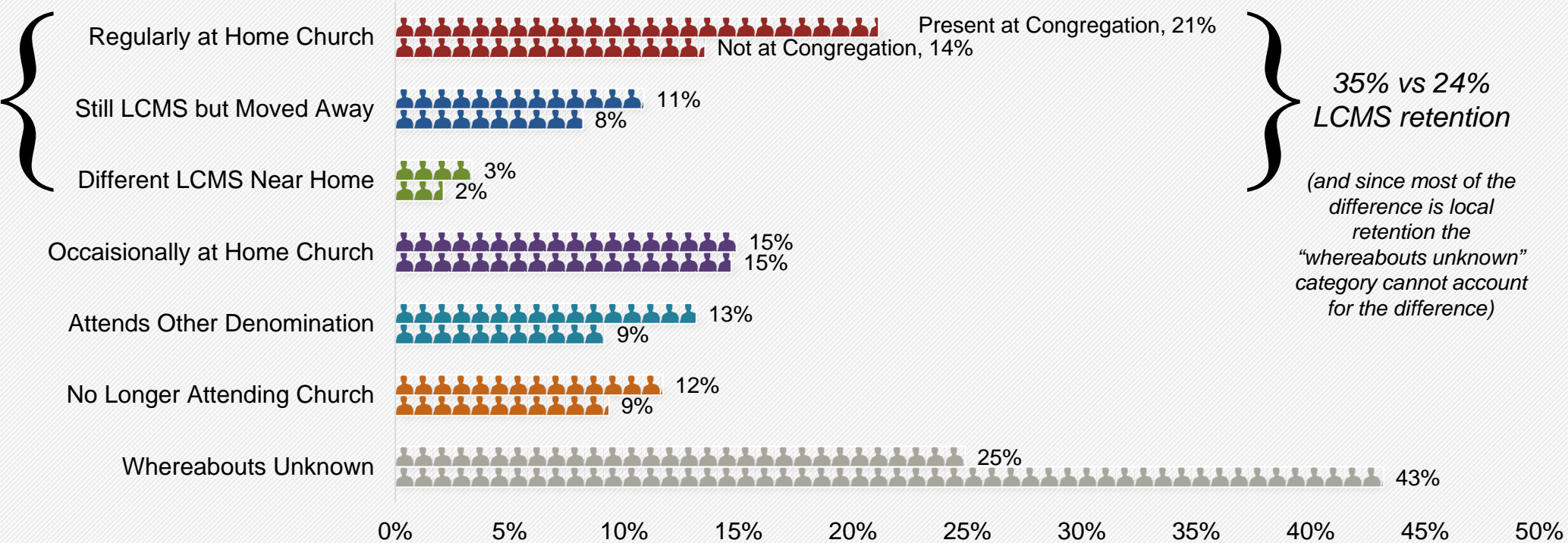


\* All of the respondents who were not at the congregation in 2004-2006 were pastors, except for 7 who were DCEs.

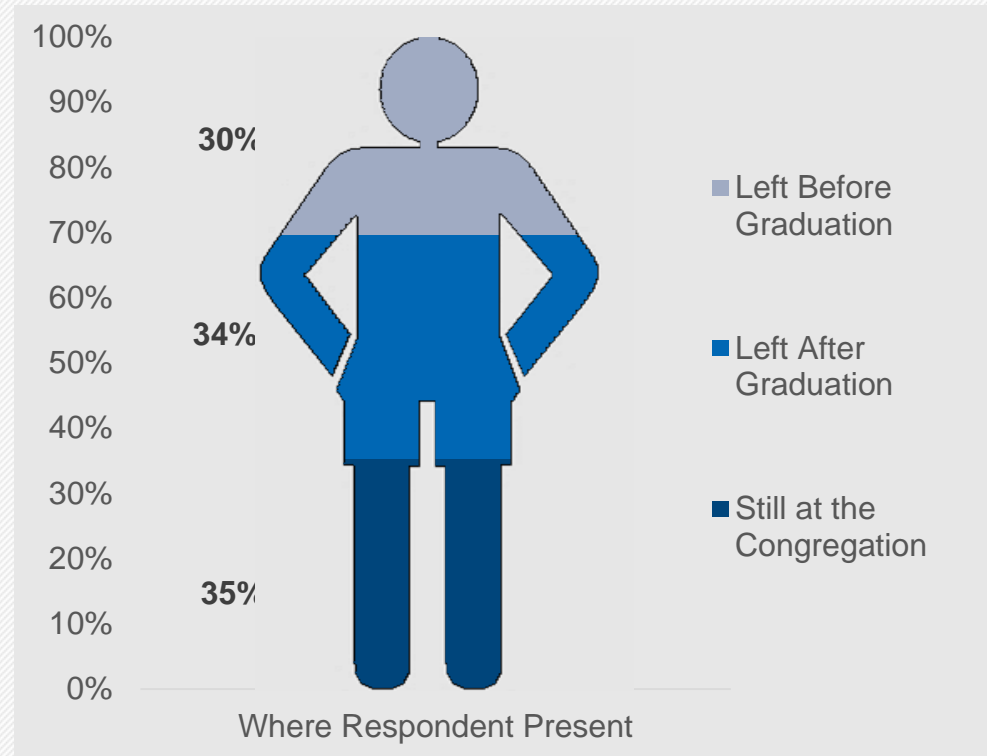
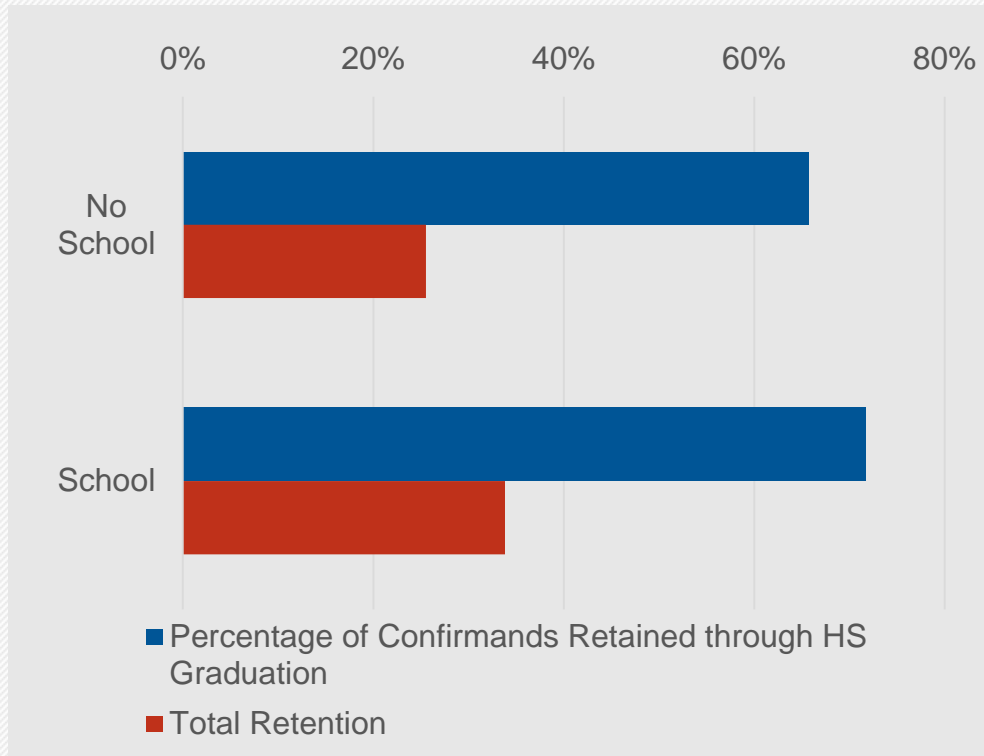
# Pastors Not at the Congregation in 2004-2006 were Less Likely to Know the Confirmands Today



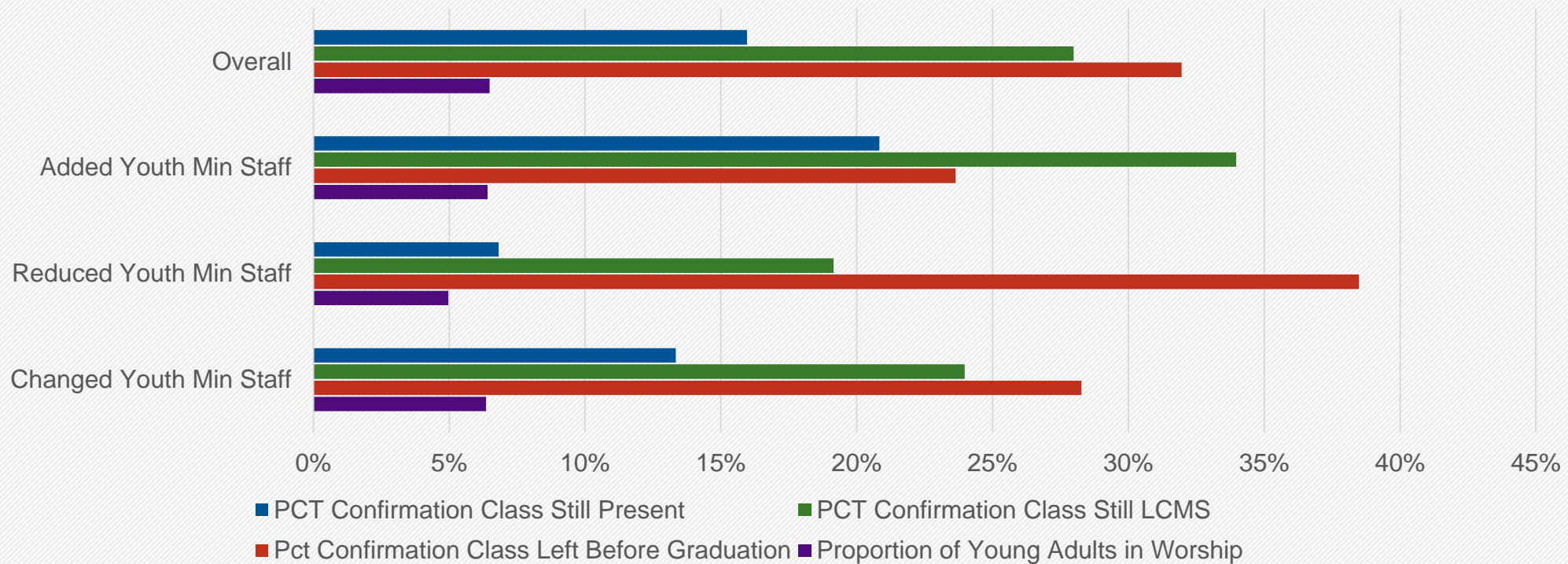
# Retention Rates Better in Congregations where the Pastor in 2004-2006 is Still Present



# Congregations with Schools Retain More Through Graduation (though most losses occur afterwards).



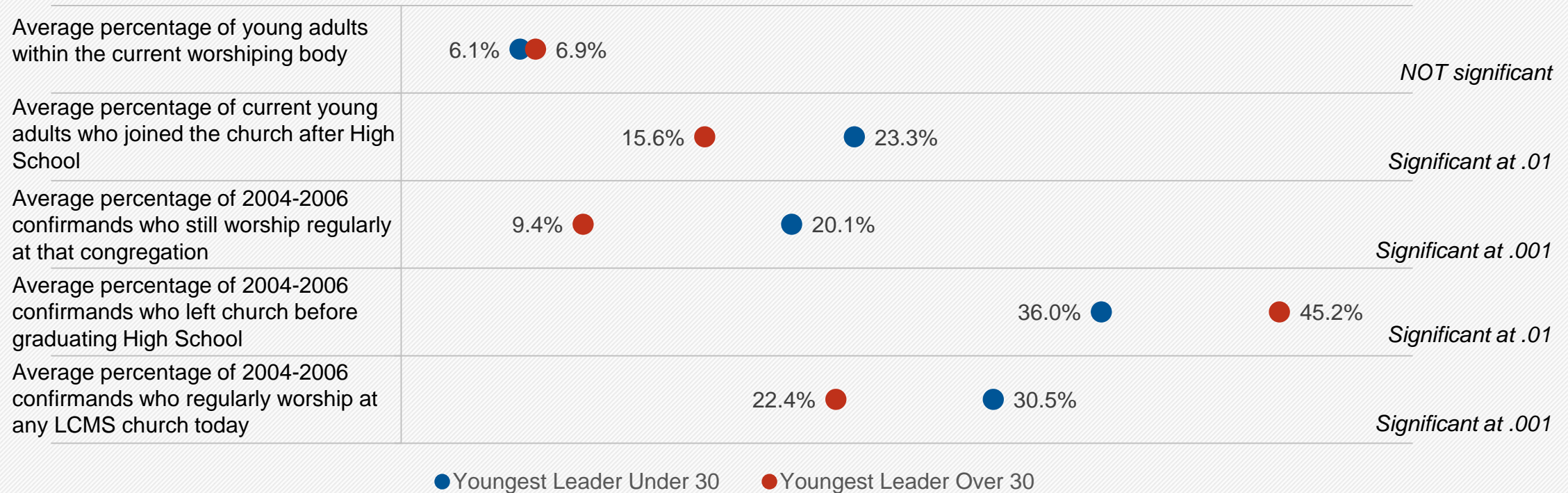
# Adding Youth Ministry Staff Helps Retention, while Reducing Staff can be Detrimental



*This effect is controlled for size of congregation and number of young adults present. Those factors are not influencing the effect. The question asked if there had been any of these changes in the past 15 years. While these correlations are significant, they did not show up in regression analysis.*



# Clear Link Between Having Young Church Leaders and Retaining/Attracting Young Adults



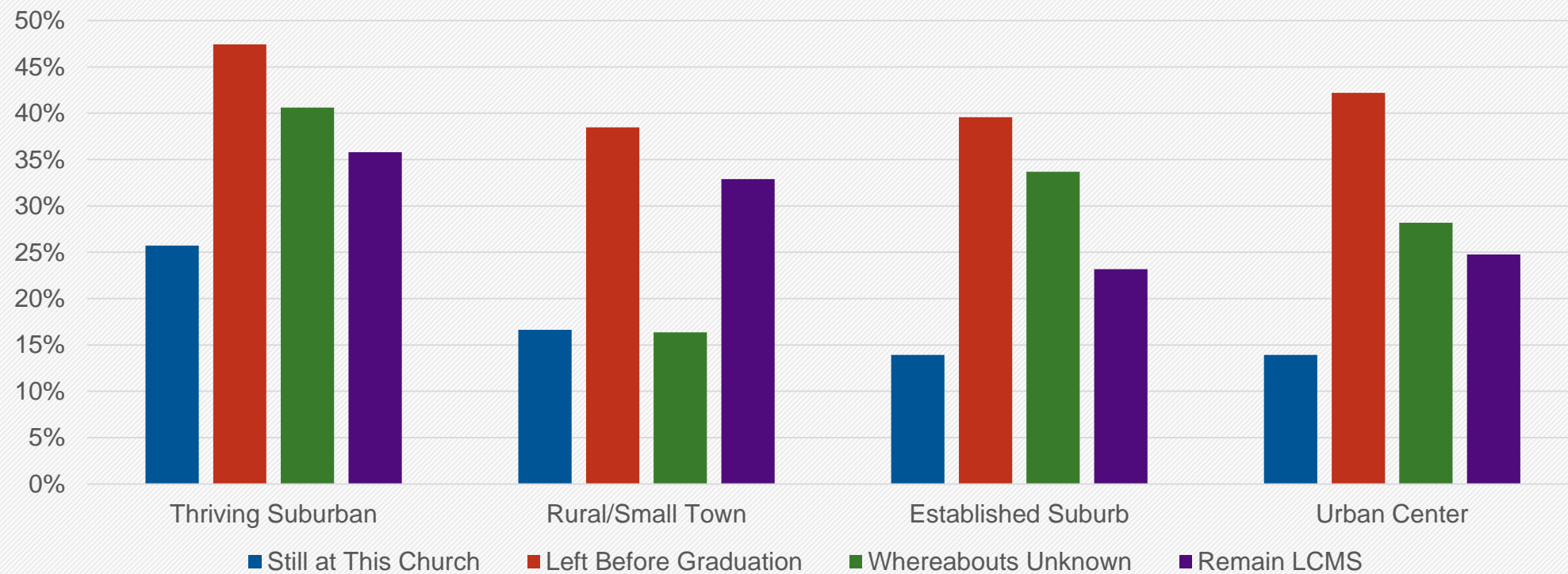
*This effect is controlled for size of the congregation, so that is not influencing the correlation. Also, the percentage of young adults in the current worshiping body is statistically not a significant factor, so it is not influencing the other elements as well.*

“None of the church leaders asked me to help serve in the church at all. No one asked me to teach Sunday school when I had just gotten out of college studying to be a DCE.  
  
...[the church] is dying because no one wants to ask for help with ministry from someone my age, 28.”

28 year old female  
Currently considers herself a non-denominational Christian

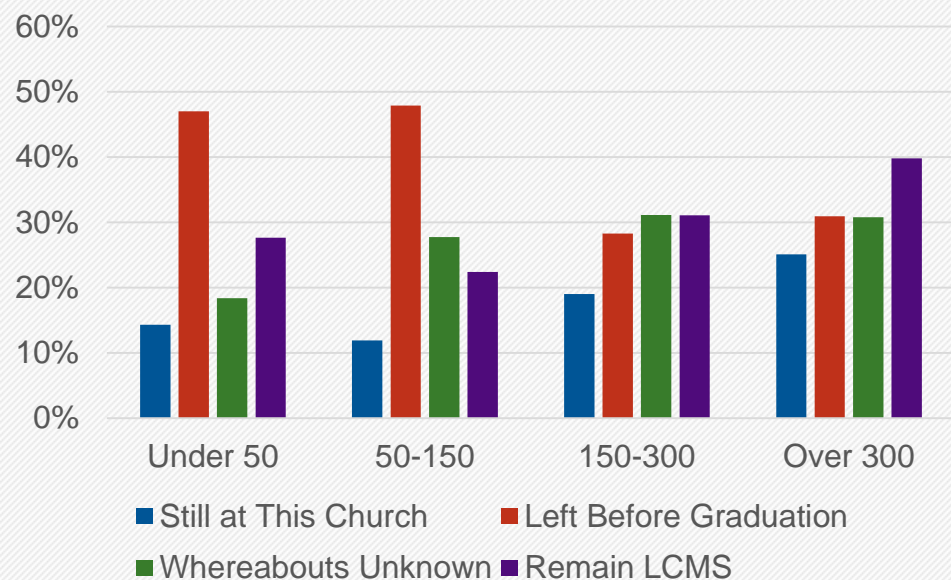
Young Adults need to feel that they can get plugged in.  
They need to be given roles and responsibilities.

# Thriving Suburbs Retained More Over Time but Rural and Small Town Churches Stay Better Connected

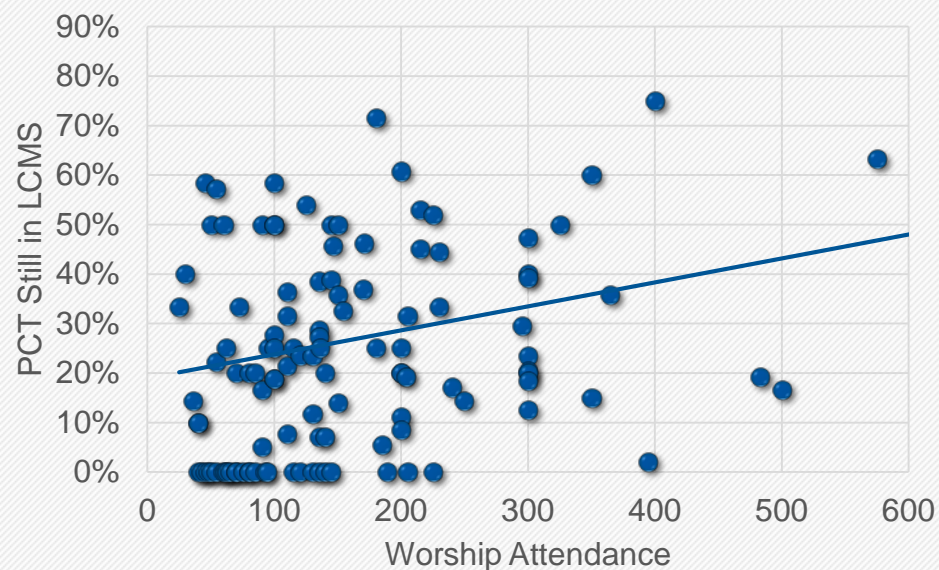


# Congregation Size Makes a Difference, Even with Those who Leave Their Home Church

## LARGE CONGREGATIONS LOST FEWER PEOPLE PRIOR TO GRADUATION AND RETAINED MORE OVERALL



## YOUNG PEOPLE FROM LARGE CONGREGATIONS ARE MORE LIKELY TO REMAIN IN THE LCMS



# Four Predictors of High LCMS Retention

- Having a large number of young adults who joined after high school
  - This is an interesting link, because it links young adult behavior at the congregations at different times (confirmed teens who remain in the Synod and young adults that were attracted to that congregation after high school).
  - In other words, congregations that produced lasting Lutherans, also did well in attracting other young adults
- Having a reduced number of confirmands who leave before graduation
  - This may seem somewhat tautological, but it is important to point out – churches that lose more young people prior to graduation also see more young people leave into adulthood
- Being a larger congregation
  - Based on average weekly attendance, large congregations are more likely to produce young people that remain LCMS regardless of whether they stay in their home congregation
- Having younger adult leaders (specifically, younger than 32 years old)
  - This may be the most important of all the above factors, especially as can be acted upon. Putting young adults in leadership roles is something tangible that congregations can do to improve retention.

# Other Variables with No Direct Impact on Retaining/Attracting Young Adults

- Age of senior pastor – despite the importance of having young leaders, there appears to be no difference based on the age of the senior/sole pastor. Additionally, in only 14 of the congregations surveyed was the senior/sole pastor of the congregation the youngest leader, and only two of those was he under age 32.
- Changes to confirmation process or youth ministry, other than staff changes. Most congregations made one or more changes to ministry or programs related to youth, but these changes had no measurable impact on retention.
- Presence of local colleges – there is slight positive impact on attracting new young adults (it is debatable whether it is statistically significant), but if even so, the effect is not as much as might be expected.



“ I go to [a major public university]. There are a ton of churches here, and one LCMS Lutheran Church. I spent my first semester going there...There were maybe 20 people in the congregation and not one said hi to me the entire time I was there. The pastor never learned my name, even though I would shake his hand and talk to him before and after church every week. I went to 2 college group events and maybe 5 people showed up (including the pastor). The church makes me feel very uncomfortable.”

20 Year Old Female  
Currently attending a Methodist church

Multiple comments from frustrated Young Adults that churches in college towns are not making an effort to reach students

“

My home church is in a college town, but to my knowledge, there is minimal if any college outreach. ...there are few if any people close to my age.

”

23 Year Old Female  
Currently attending a Christian Missionary Alliance church

Multiple comments from frustrated Young Adults that churches in college towns are not making an effort to reach students

# Conclusions

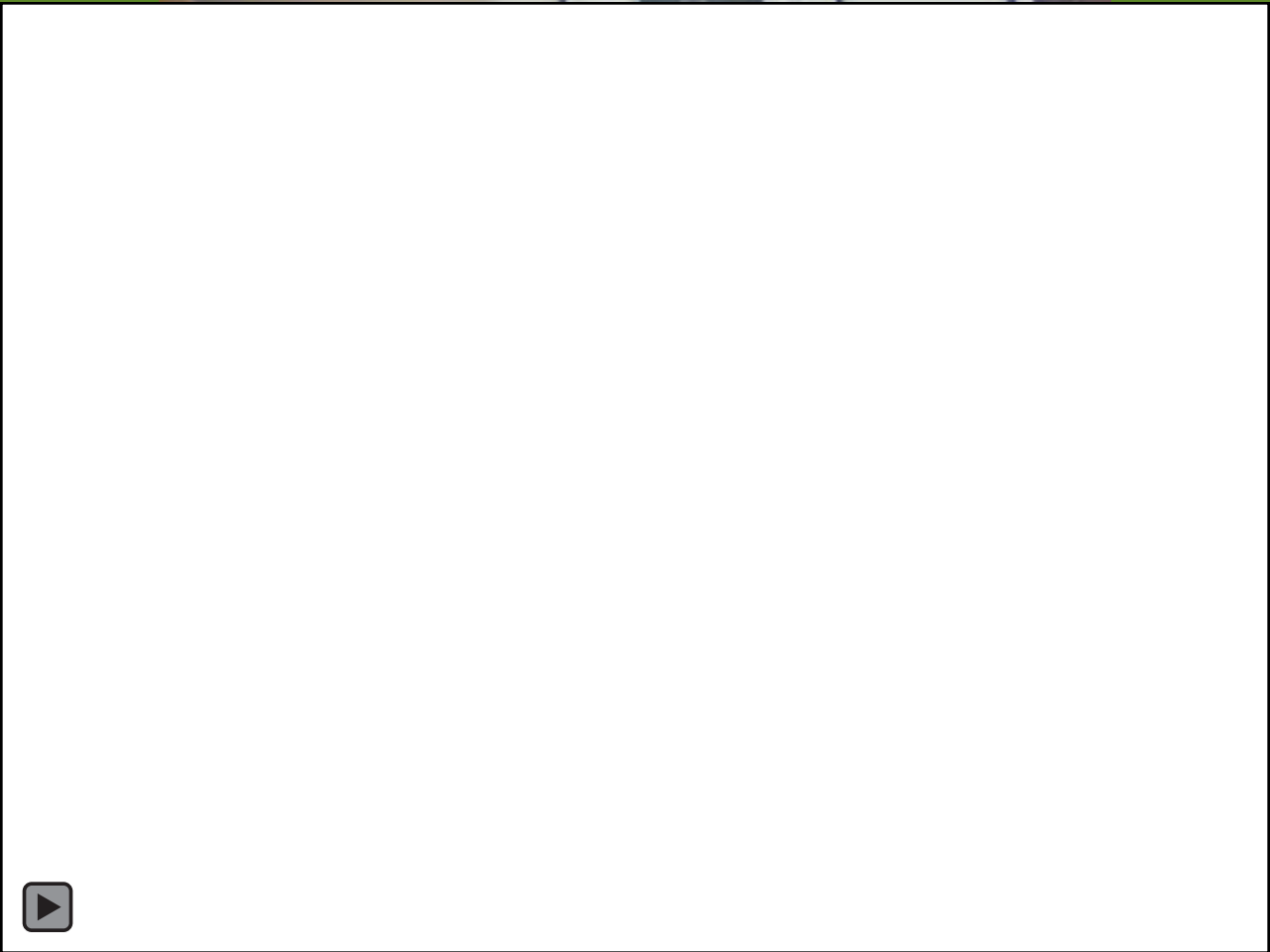
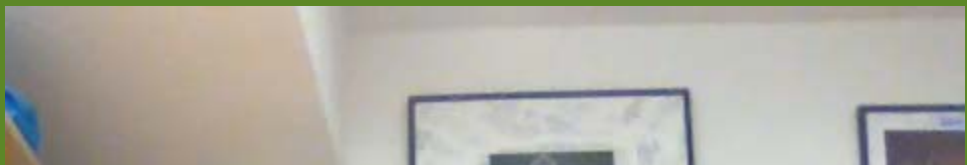
- Confirmed LCMS Millennials: 1/3 LCMS retained; 1/3 Left; 1/3 Unknown
  - At least 11% of those who left are worshipping in another Christian denomination.
  - Most who left their home church did so after they graduated from high school.
- Every size and community has different benefits and struggles.
  - Rural communities demonstrate more connectedness
  - Suburban churches were better at retaining young adults within the LCMS.
- Staff and leadership make a difference
- A profile of a typical congregational with Higher Retention
  - Large congregation in a new suburban community
  - Operates or is associated with a school which helps retention until graduation
  - Has added ministry staff with responsibilities for young people in the past decade
  - Has had a consistent pastor for over a decade
  - Has incorporated young people into leadership roles in the church
  - Continues to attract young adults



# Unintentional Neglect









# Adding staff and staff longevity

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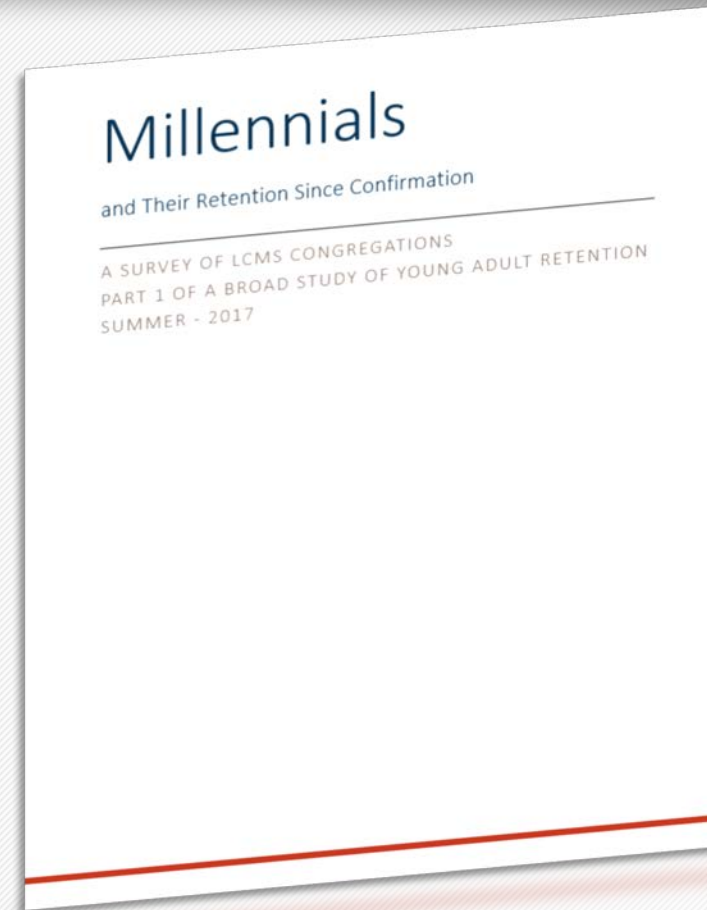
— — — — —  
Encourage and mentor young leaders.

# More Details Available in the Complete Report

For more information on the findings of the 2017 Confirmation Survey, refer to the report “Millennials and their Retention Since Confirmation”.

Follow the DropBox link on the Facebook page.

Also included on the Dropbox is this PowerPoint and a discussion guide.



# Hear from the young adults themselves!

Come hear the second part of this survey where we asked 2000+ young adults to share about themselves, the church, and their faith.

Join us for webinars on  
April 19 and  
May 16th at 11am.

