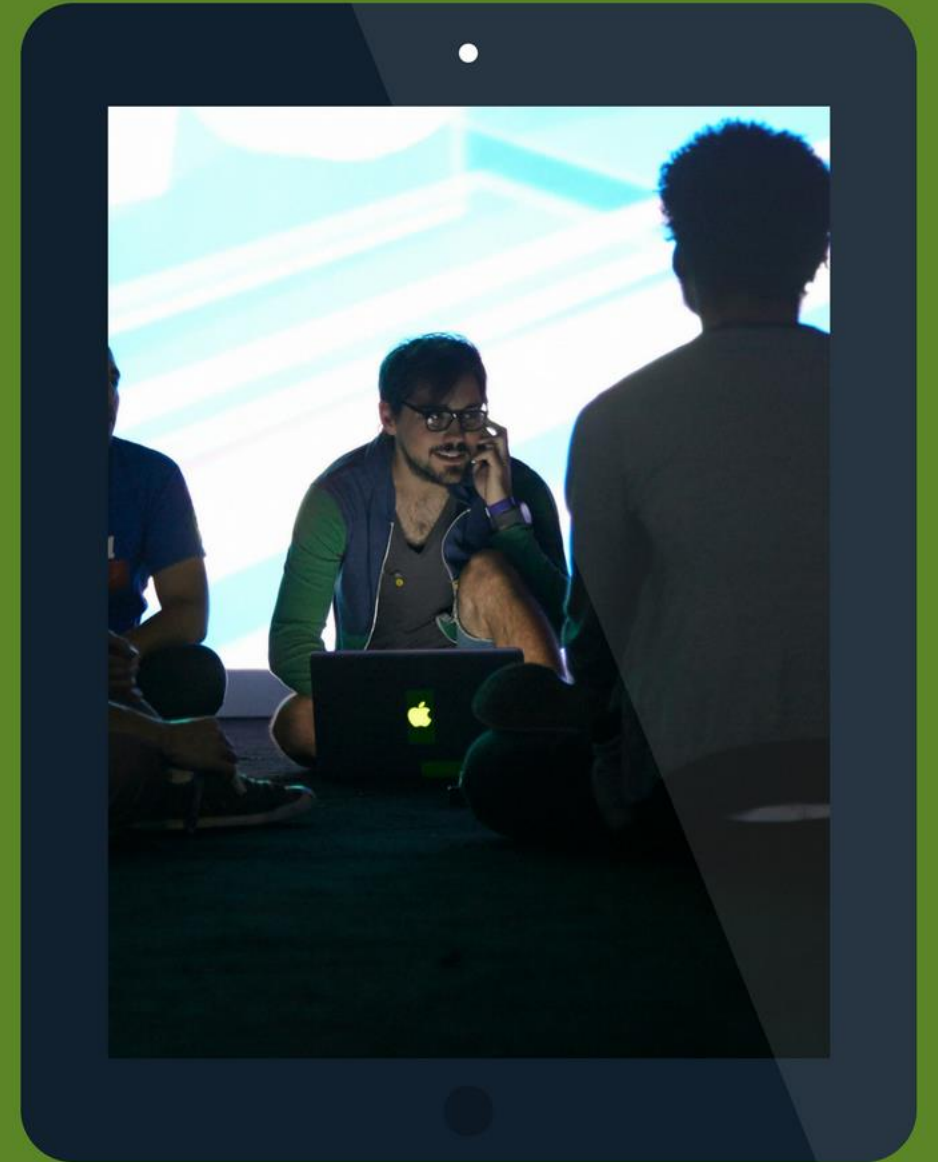


Retention of Lutheran Millennials

2017 LCMS Study of Young Adults

LCMS Research Services and
LCMS Youth Ministry



LCMS Youth Ministry - #lcmস্যaresearch

Welcome

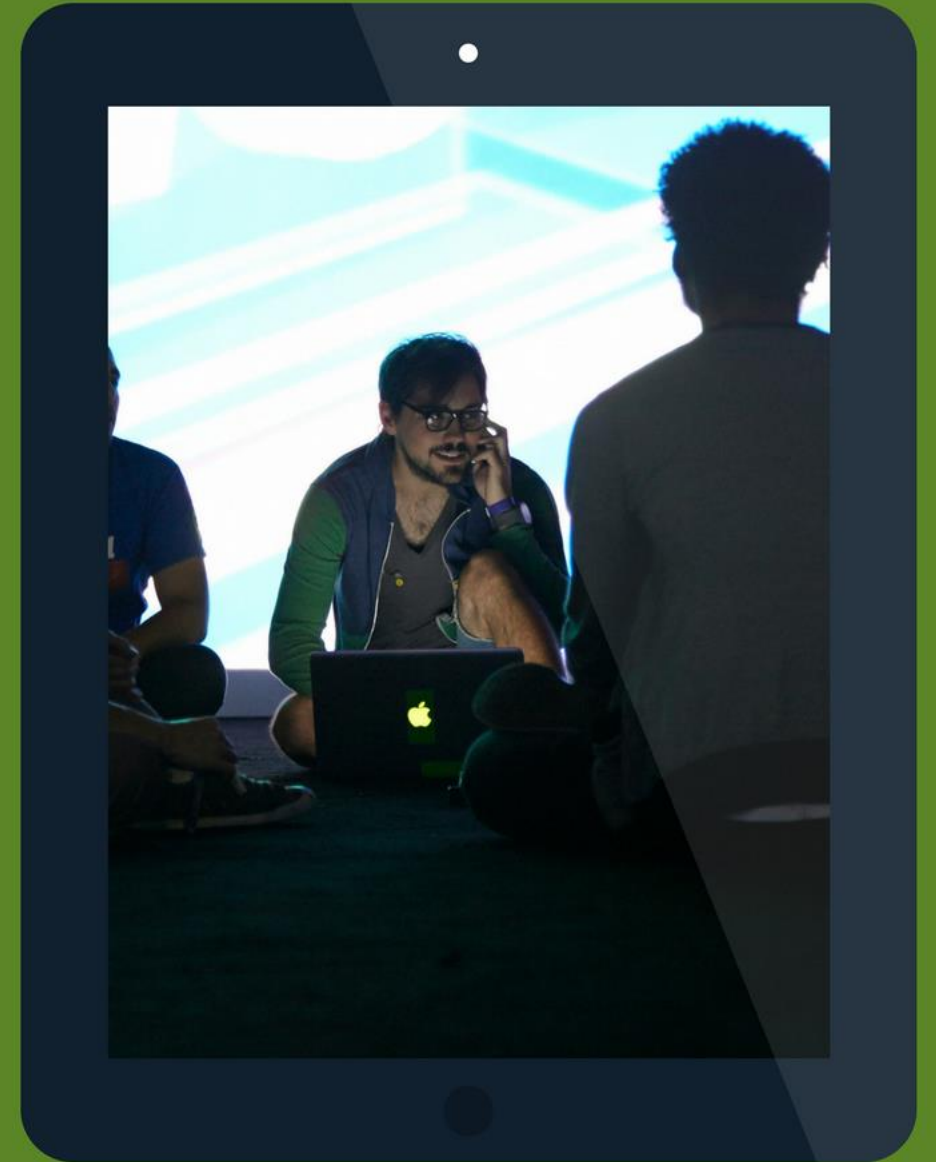
Joining you today:

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

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

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

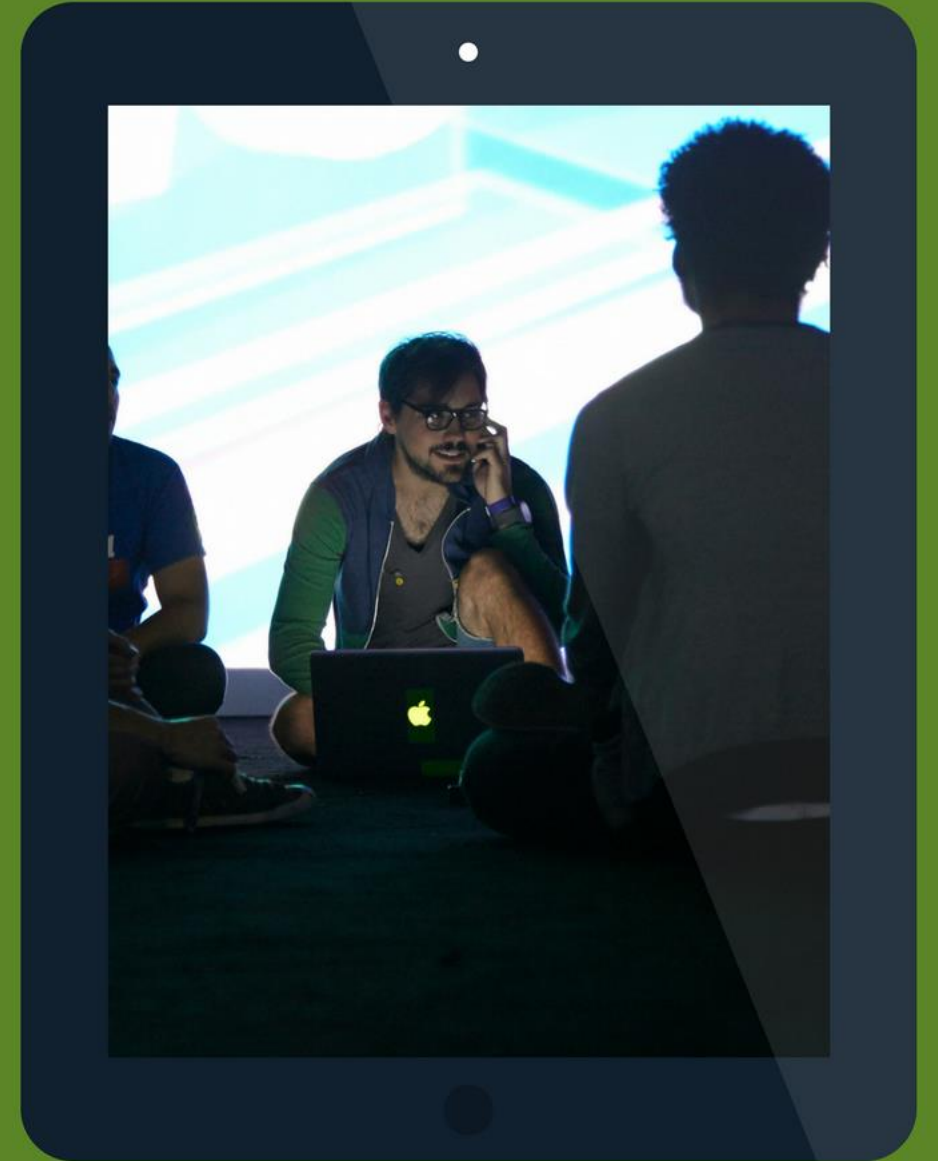
**Meredith Whitefield,
Communications Specialist**



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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

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Cover Photos:

Picture courtesy of LCMS Communication

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.

2017 Survey of Young Adults

The Main Question Behind the Survey

*We want to hear from young adults who grew up LCMS. Who are they? Where are they now? Are they still in the LCMS? What do they believe about the God, the Bible and the church? What do they believe about the world and social issues? **If they left the LCMS, why did they leave the church...and what was different for those who did not leave?***

Who took the Survey?

- 2,046 Young Adult Responses (2,086 from all ages)
- Average Age: 24 years old (when limited to 18-35 year-olds)
- Nearly twice as many women as men (F:66% M:34%)
- Most (72%) were confirmed in the LCMS in 8th grade
 - 88% were confirmed between 6th-9th grade
 - 105 (5%) respondents were never confirmed in the LCMS
 - 60 (3%) were confirmed after High School
 - Of those confirmed, 70% say the process was multiple years, with another 17% saying it was a full year.

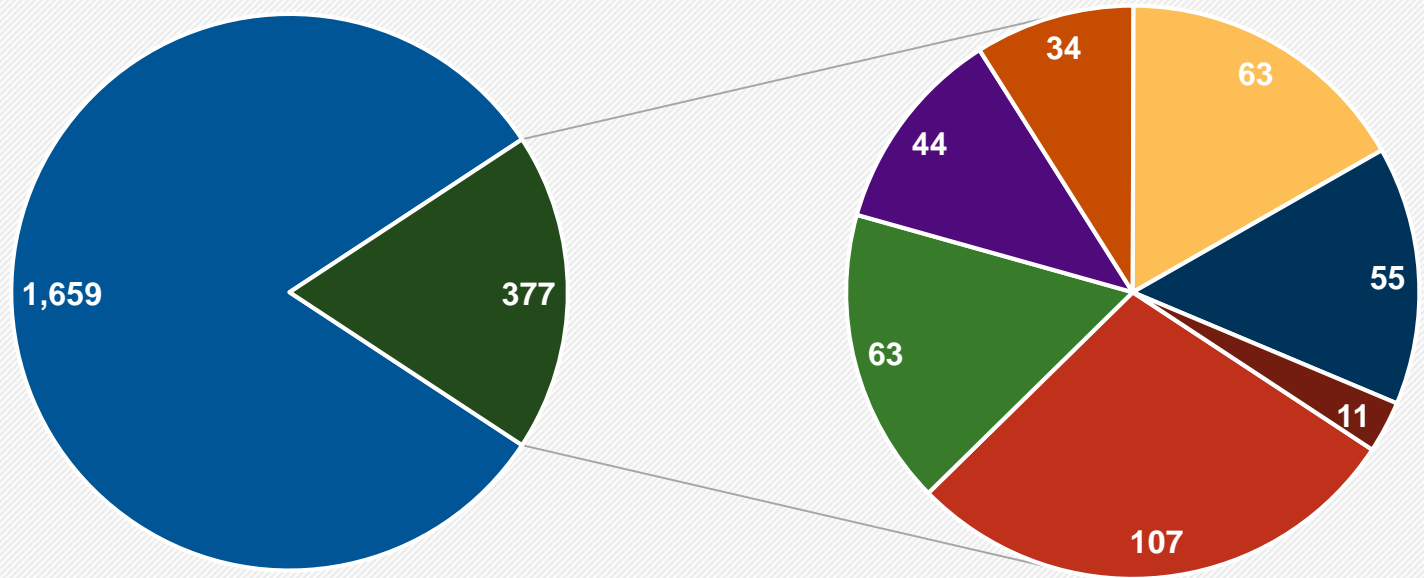
Individuals Confirmed in the LCMS Classified in Six Categories Based on Current Affiliation

- **LCMS – (1,576)**
 - **Active LCMS** (1,393) – those who worship at an LCMS church at least once a month
 - **Nominal LCMS** (186) – those who do not attend worship monthly, but still consider themselves LCMS Lutherans
- **Not LCMS Today – (355)**
 - **Evangelical Protestant** (163) – those attending evangelical protestant denominations (WELS, SBC, PCA, etc.), or a non-denominational church
 - **Mainline Protestant** (63) – those in mainline denominations (ELCA, PCUSA, UMC, etc.)
 - **Non-Protestant Christian** (11) – those who are now Catholic or Orthodox
 - **Unaffiliated** (92) – those who identified themselves as atheists, agnostics, spiritual but not religious (SBNR) with not church activity, or belonging to a different faith
 - **Unclassifiable** (26) – these people indicated they were “Spiritual but not religious”, but reported active church attendance and did not fit statistically with other groups.

**The above counts only include young adults (18-35 years old) who were at one time confirmed in the LCMS.*

We Heard From 377 Young Adults Who Do Not Self-Identify as LCMS Lutheran

...and the 1,659 includes 194 young adults who consider themselves LCMS Lutheran but are not attending worship



- LCMS Lutherans
- ELCA Lutheran
- Atheist/Agnostic/Other faith
- Non-Denominational
- Other Lutheran
- Catholic/Orthodox
- Believe but not going to church
- Other Protestant

How to Survey Those Who Left the Church?

- Social Networking

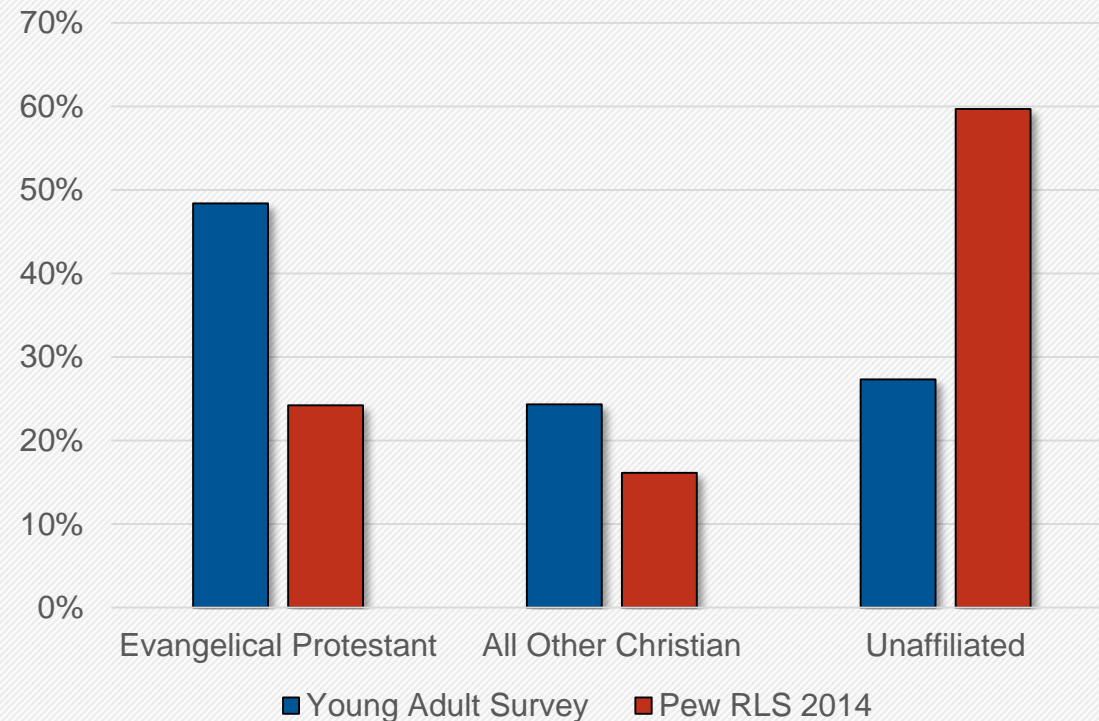
- Social media
- Relatives still in the church
- Friends from school or confirmation class

Essentially no difference!

How Did you Hear About the Survey?	All Respondents	Non-LCMS or Inactive
Invited by a pastor or teacher:	6%	6%
Saw the post on social media:	59%	55%
Invited by a family member:	14%	15%
Invited by a friend:	19%	22%
Other (most 'other' responses were combination of social media and a friend)	3%	2%

Limitations Because of the Sampling Method

- The Pew Religious Landscape Survey (RLS) 2014 has a large enough sample to inform us about the distribution of Young Adults who left the LCMS.
- Our sample was somewhat biased in that it drew fewer from “unaffiliated” and more from evangelical denominations.
- This means the survey data should not be used to measure how many LCMS Lutherans are now atheists or non-denominational, etc. (the Pew data is more appropriate for that)
- However, our data is reliable to inform us about the opinions and preferences of the Young Adults in those groups.



These were Quality Responses of Substance

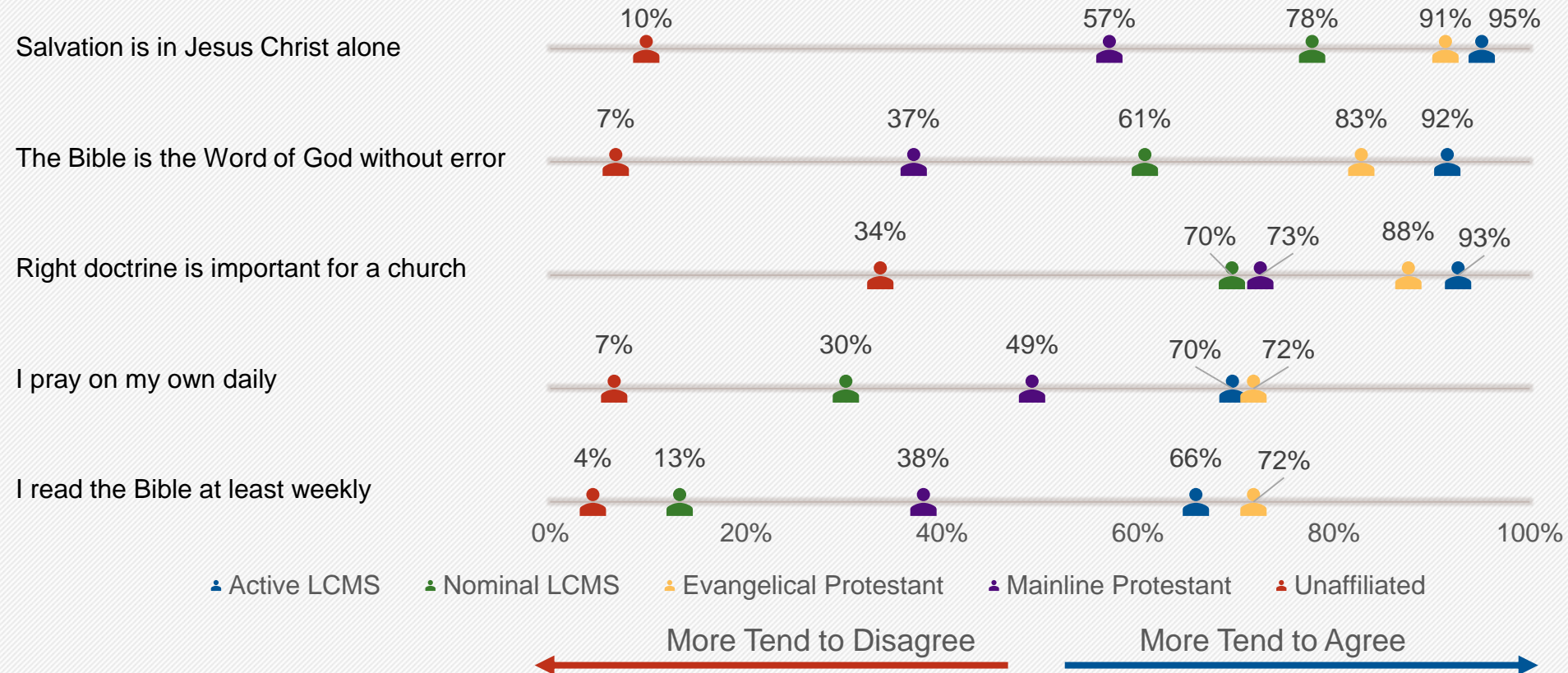
The 377 non-LCMS respondents and 44 of the “nominal LCMS Lutherans” provided over 55,000 words in open-ended questions about their spiritual journey and their thoughts on the LCMS.

Consistent with Findings in Other Research

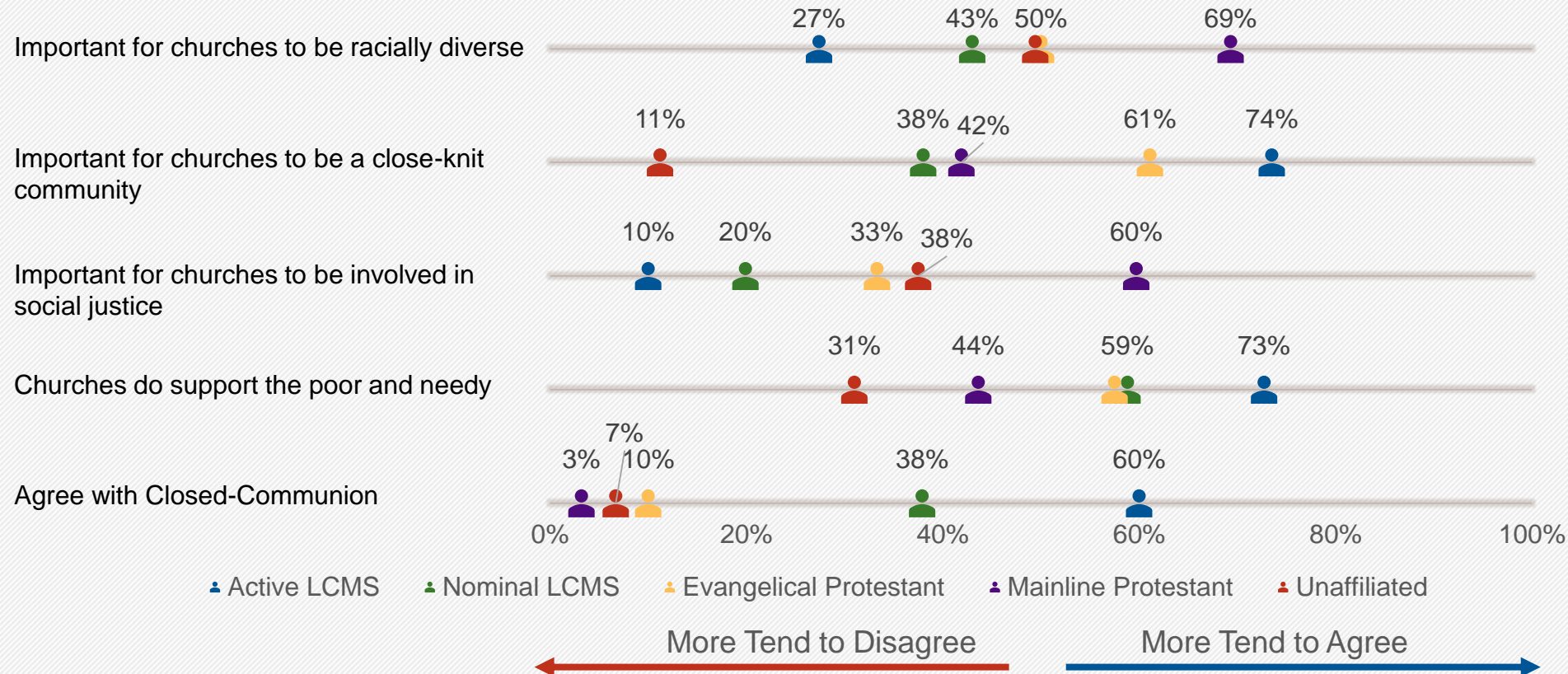
- Barna Group
 - “unChristian”, “Churchless”, “You Lost Me”, David Kinnaman
- Fuller Youth Institute
 - “Growing Young”, Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Giffin
- Lifeway Research
 - “The Millennials” by Thom Rainer and Jess Rainer
 - Additional Research by Rob Phillips
- Notre Dame - Youth and Religion (NSYR), Christian Smith
 - “Lost in Transition”, “Souls in Transition”
- Pew Research Center
 - Religious Landscape Survey (2014)
- We reached consistent results despite major differences in our approach:
 - We asked these questions in different ways and came to the same conclusion.
 - We specifically targeted those who were raised and confirmed as LCMS Lutherans, and came to the same conclusions found among the general population.
- This has two important implications:
 - Findings from other research are demonstrated to be sound
 - Conclusions of other research are relevant and applicable to Lutheran contexts

Young Adult Survey Results

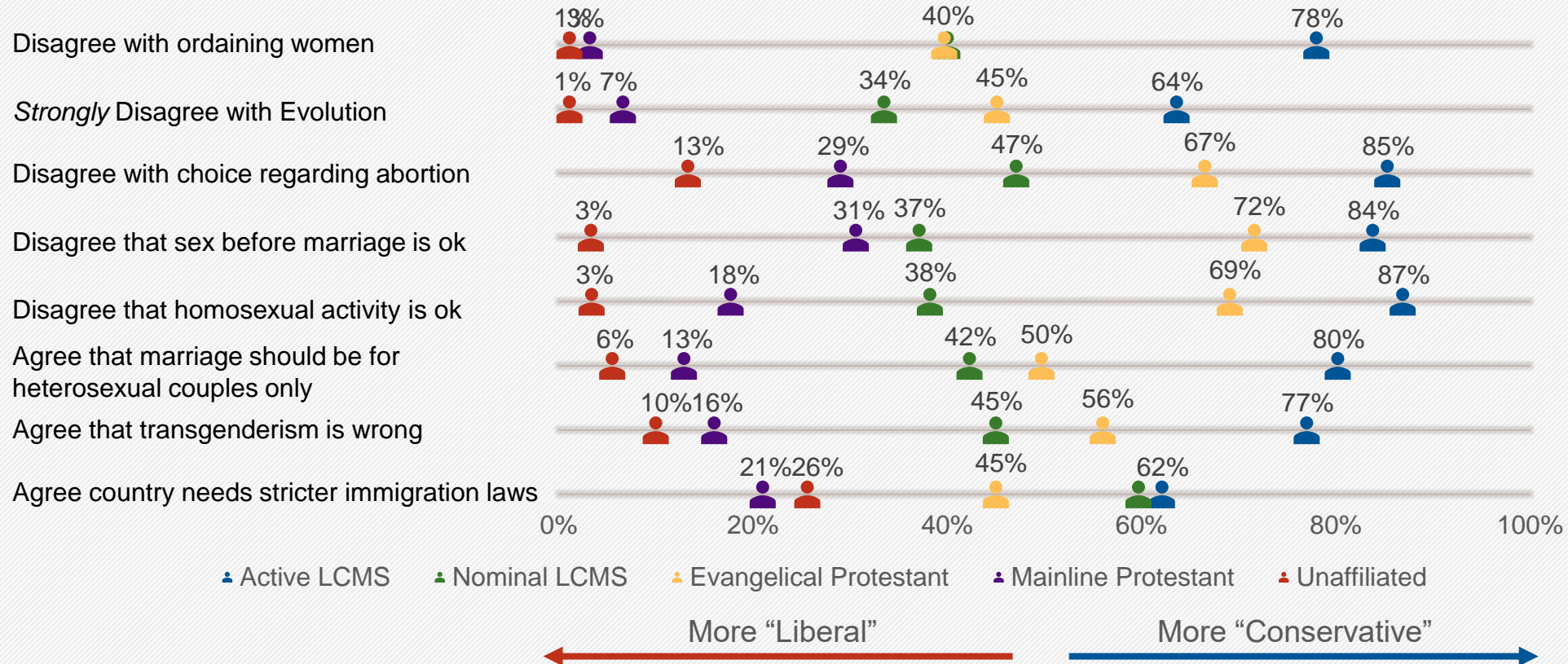
Comparing Active LCMS of Views and Practices of the Faith with Others



Comparison of Opinions about the Church



Comparison of Views on Social Issues



Frequently Mentioned Reasons for Leaving the LCMS (regardless of affiliation)

Feel the LCMS excludes people or is unwelcoming	160
Personally felt judged in the LCMS	56
The LCMS is “closed-minded”	40
Disagree with the LCMS stance on social issues	144
Issues related to homosexuality or gender	56
Ordination of women	38
Churches had too few young adults or no support for young adults	75
Prefer contemporary worship (mostly from evangelicals)	53
LCMS has gotten too involved in politics	40
People in the LCMS are “inauthentic”	37

Out of 359 Commenters

(that is 95% of the sample of those who left the LCMS)

Comments can be counted in multiple categories, if applicable.

“ When I was 9 my pastor at the time told me I could talk to him about difficult issues and he wouldn't tell my parents. I never took him up on it, but I needed to hear that in my life. I figured if God put people like that on Earth, he must be here for me and love me. I never doubted that again. ”

23 year old *transgendered* LCMS Lutheran

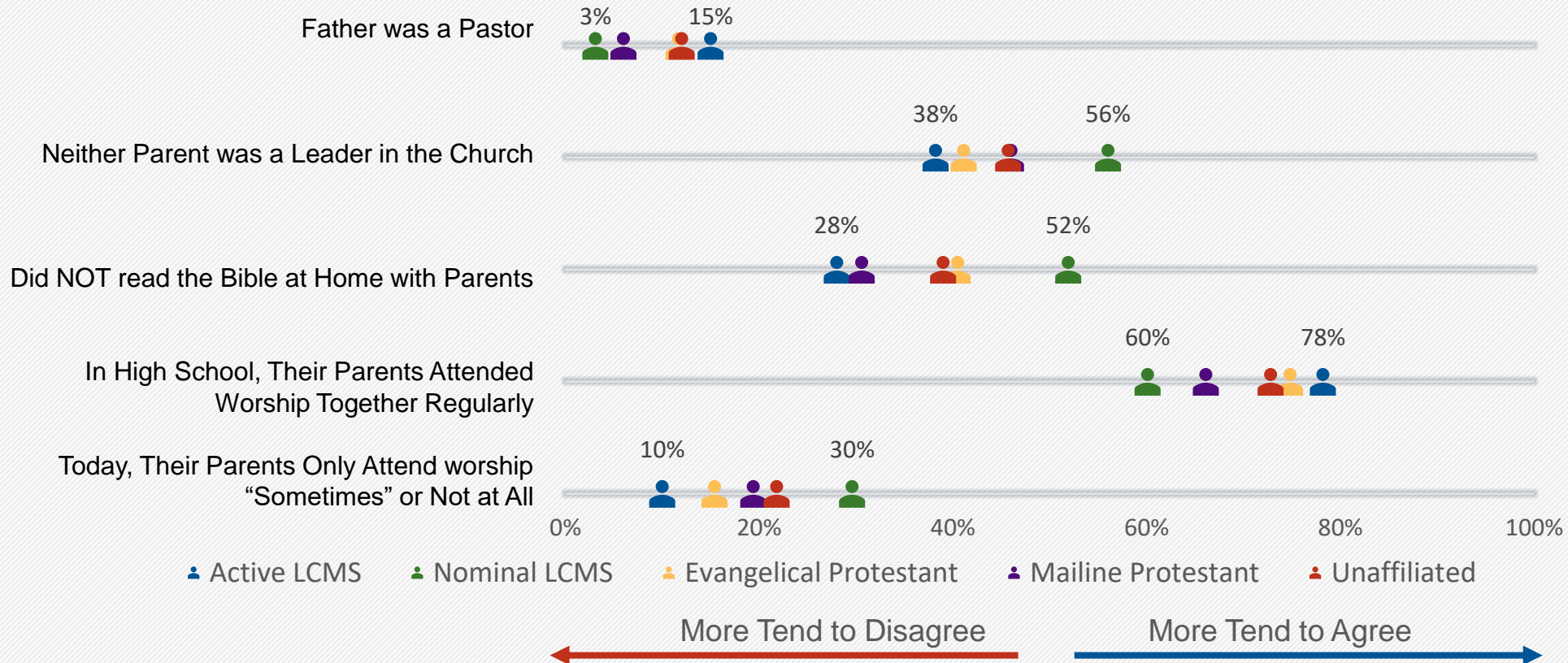
This person indicated a very poor relationship with their parents, especially with mother
But strongly agreed that their pastor cared for them
They cited their home church pastor was the number one positive role model.

The Effect of Parents on Young Adults

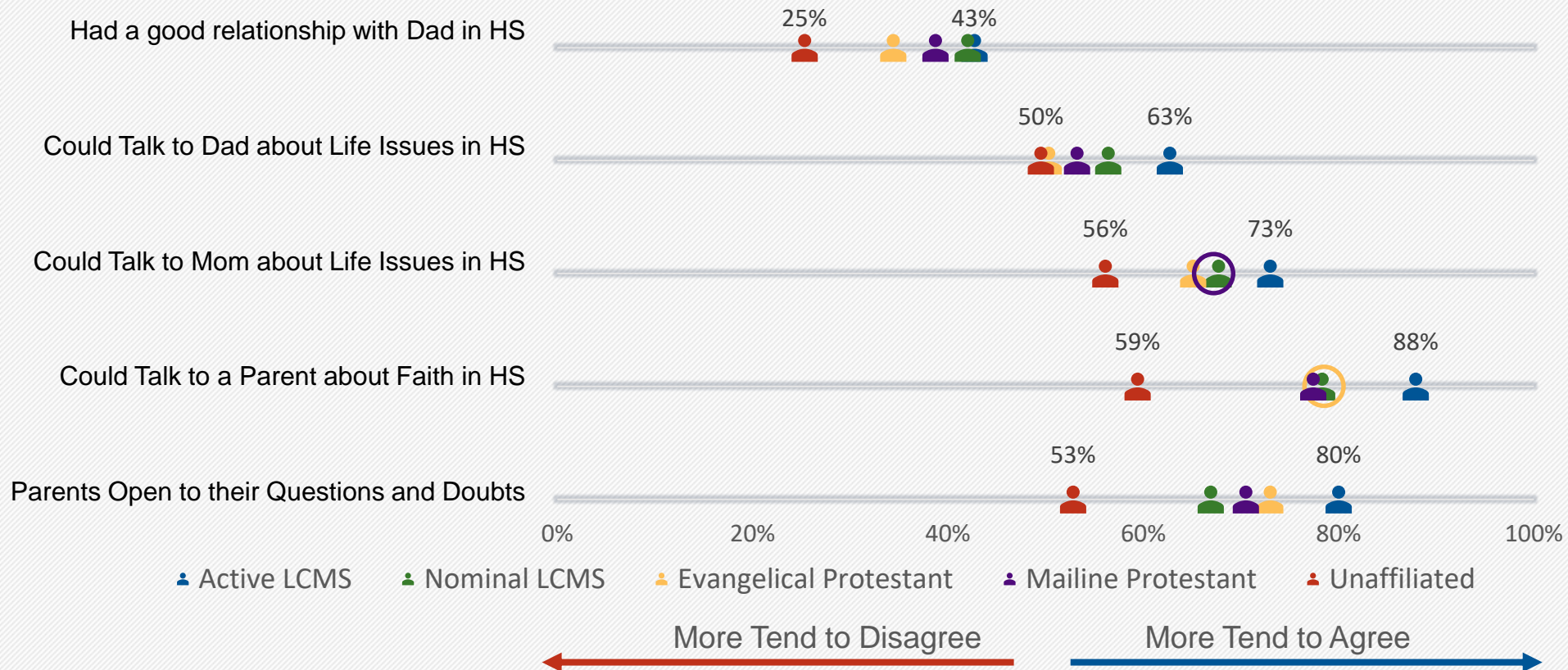
Young Adults Cite their Parents as Major Influences

- Nearly 1-in-3 young adults listed a parent as one of the most influential people in their lives
 - While that influence was usually positive, those who left the LCMS were more than twice as likely to say a parent had a negative influence (13% vs 5%)
- Parents ranked in the Top 10 of major components of accounts of their “pivotal moments”
 - Parents were specifically mentioned as a crucial part of the pivotal moment narratives 46 times (roughly 4% of comments regardless of current affiliation)

Impact of Parents' Involvement with Church and Faith Practices – Especially Strong with Nominals



Impact of Their Relationship with Parents During High School – Especially with the Unaffiliated





Parental Factors Contributing to Active Adherence

Today's Active LCMS Young Adults...

- Were the most likely to see a high level of faith practiced by their parents
 - Frequent Bible reading at home
 - Prayed with parents at home
 - Regular church attendance of both parents together (continuing even today)
 - At least one parent having a service or leadership role in the church
- Were the most likely to have a good relationship with parents in High School
 - Felt they related well in general, specifically with dad
 - Felt they could talk to both parents about life issues
 - Felt they could talk openly with at least one parent about faith
 - Felt safe bringing up their questions and doubts to their parents

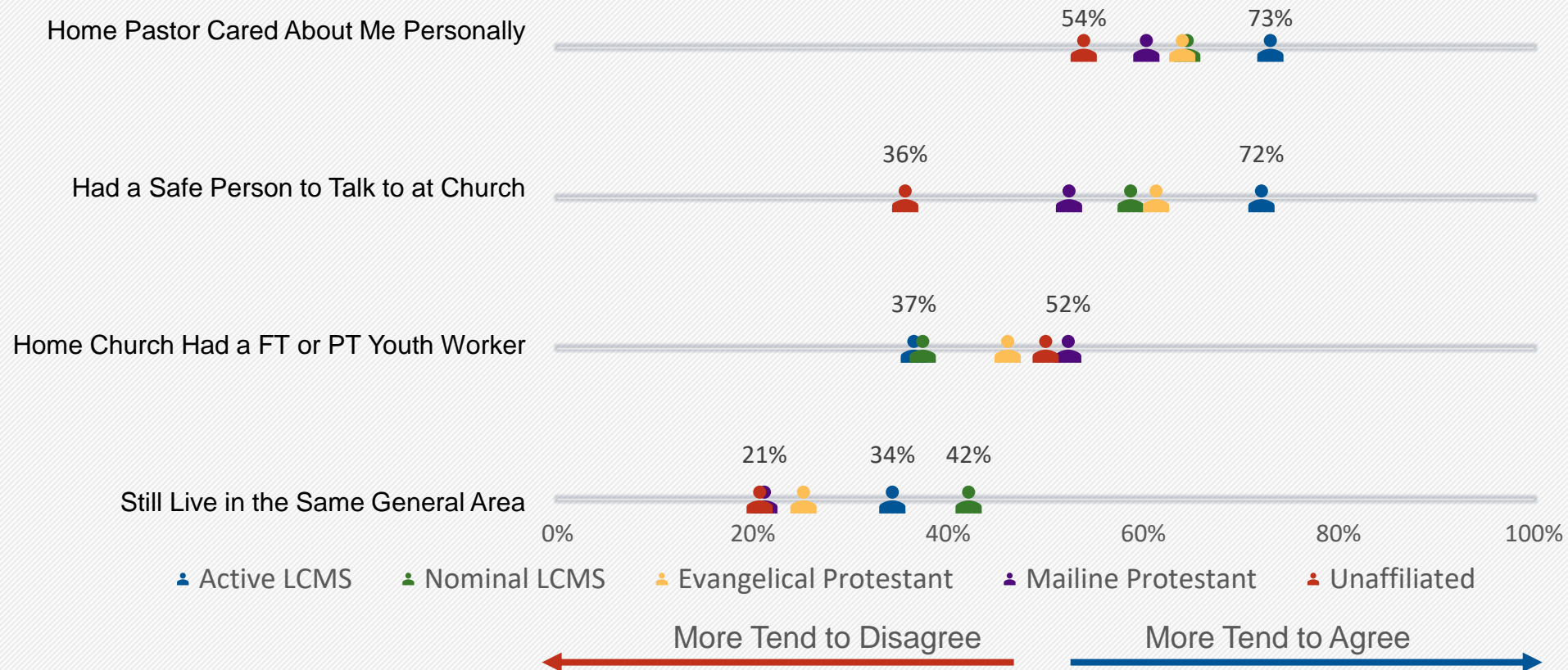
The effect is most pronounced when combined. Over two-thirds of Active LCMS claimed 5 or more of these were true, whereas nearly half all other respondents claimed only 4 or fewer were true for them.

The Impact of the Home Church

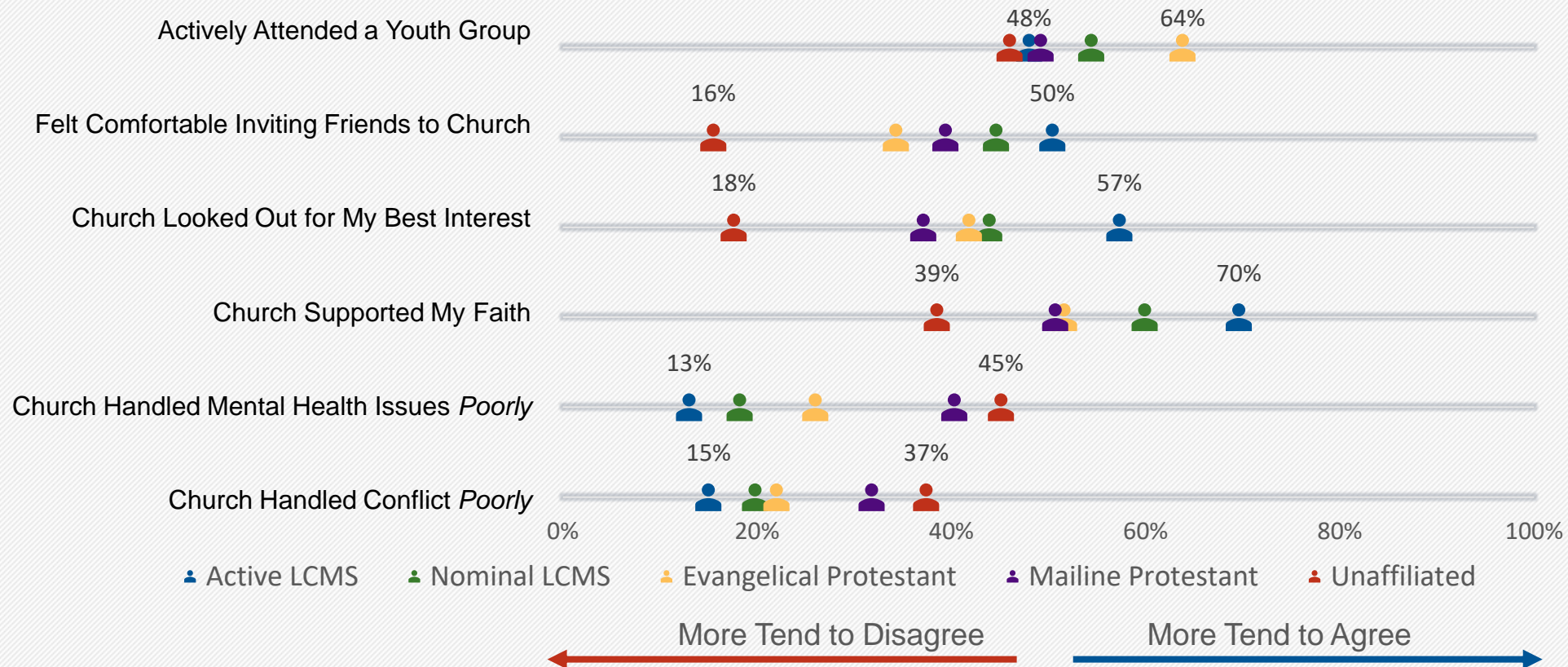
Other Adults, Especially Those Associated with the Home Church, are Also Highly Influential

- Who Young People Cited as the Influential People in their Lives
 - Parents 29%
 - Home church pastor 13%
 - Other family members 12%
 - Teacher 12%
 - Other pastor 11%
 - Youth Minister 10%
- However, not all of these were positive influences
 - More than 1 in every 5 times a pastor was mentioned, the young person cited him as a negative influence (especially from those who left the LCMS).
 - By comparison, among teachers and family members, less than 5% were negative.

Relationships within the Home Church Matter



Impact of the Home Church



“ I went through a difficult time in college and Christianity could not give me comfort or answers, only further judgment.

[The LCMS] was not welcoming to me. I faced too much judgment. I have a mental illness and it was judgmental to me. I was raped and mostly just blamed for it. I am lesbian and am not welcome there. I ask a lot of questions and am interested in philosophy and other religions and that was taboo. I am a feminist and that was frowned upon.

”

22 year old female
Agnostic

Sometimes it all comes down to one bad experience or series of experiences. Young People have expectations that the church will keep them safe and comfort them in need. When a church fails at that young people are devastated.

So Much Depends Upon Relationships

- One of the largest effects on adherence shows up in the question of whether they felt there was a “safe person” to talk to at church
 - Even though those who are still LCMS Lutherans (active or nominal) had the lowest reporting of having a dedicated Youth Worker, they were the most likely to report that their pastor cared about them and that there was a safe person to talk to at church.
 - Nearly 1 in every 10 of the “pivotal moments” comments from those who left mentioned an experience where their questions, concerns or doubts were ignored or dismissed.
- There is a definite correlation with moving away from one’s home town and leaving the LCMS
 - This may be even more dramatic than the data suggestions when we consider the number of rostered church workers in the sample who likely moved away because of calls.
- Other significant factors from the home church that influence retention are more relational than institutional in nature
 - Active LCMS feel the church supported their growth and looked out for their best
 - Active LCMS were much more likely to feel comfortable inviting friends to church
 - Active LCMS did not see much of a problem in the way their home church handled conflict and mental health issues

“

my freshman year of high school...I was seriously sexually abused by a young man... [My] youth group spread rumors about me and no adults listened to me or noticed the change in me. I felt abandoned and unwanted. This lead to be being assaulted multiple times in the next two years because of the isolation and lack of trust in authority. ...I still feel stressed when I go into the church I grew up in.

”

28 year old female
Currently considers herself non-denominational

When major issues are not taken seriously, young people stop looking to the church for help and go elsewhere.

'Relational' and 'Authentic' are Not Just Buzz Words

- Young People Are Looking for *Real* Relationships
 - They want to feel cared for on a personal, individual level
 - They want to be able to ask deep questions or raise concerns without being ignored or dismissed
 - They need to have open discussions about complicated issues where there can be room for dissent without being judged (especially in politics)
 - They need to feel safe enough to confide major issues such as abuse, mental illnesses and doubts
 - If they move away, they need support from their home church in finding any connective community like the one they are leaving
 - They want people to acknowledge the world is a broken and hard place, that there are not always easy answers, but within that broken world that there are people who care about them personally no matter what happens

“ I didn't feel safe asking questions and having doubts about my faith/the denomination. I felt like when I brought up issues, I was answered with condescension. ...I felt like there was a fear whenever I brought up other ideas. Since no LCMS friends wanted to talk about the things that mattered to me, I slowly found new friends to talk with and connect with. ”

29 year old female
Agnostic

When doubts and questions are not heard, young people have to look for answers and support outside the church

“ I still feel at home in a church pew - I enjoy the music, the fellowship, and the community, probably more so now that I live in a big city. And, honestly, my busy schedule isn't an excuse to not go to church - I have the time on Sunday mornings. I'd think about coming back if I got a sense that they would welcome skeptics to church and not dismiss my skepticism out of hand. ”

24 year old male
Spiritual but not religious

When doubts and questions are not heard, young people have to look for answers and support outside the church

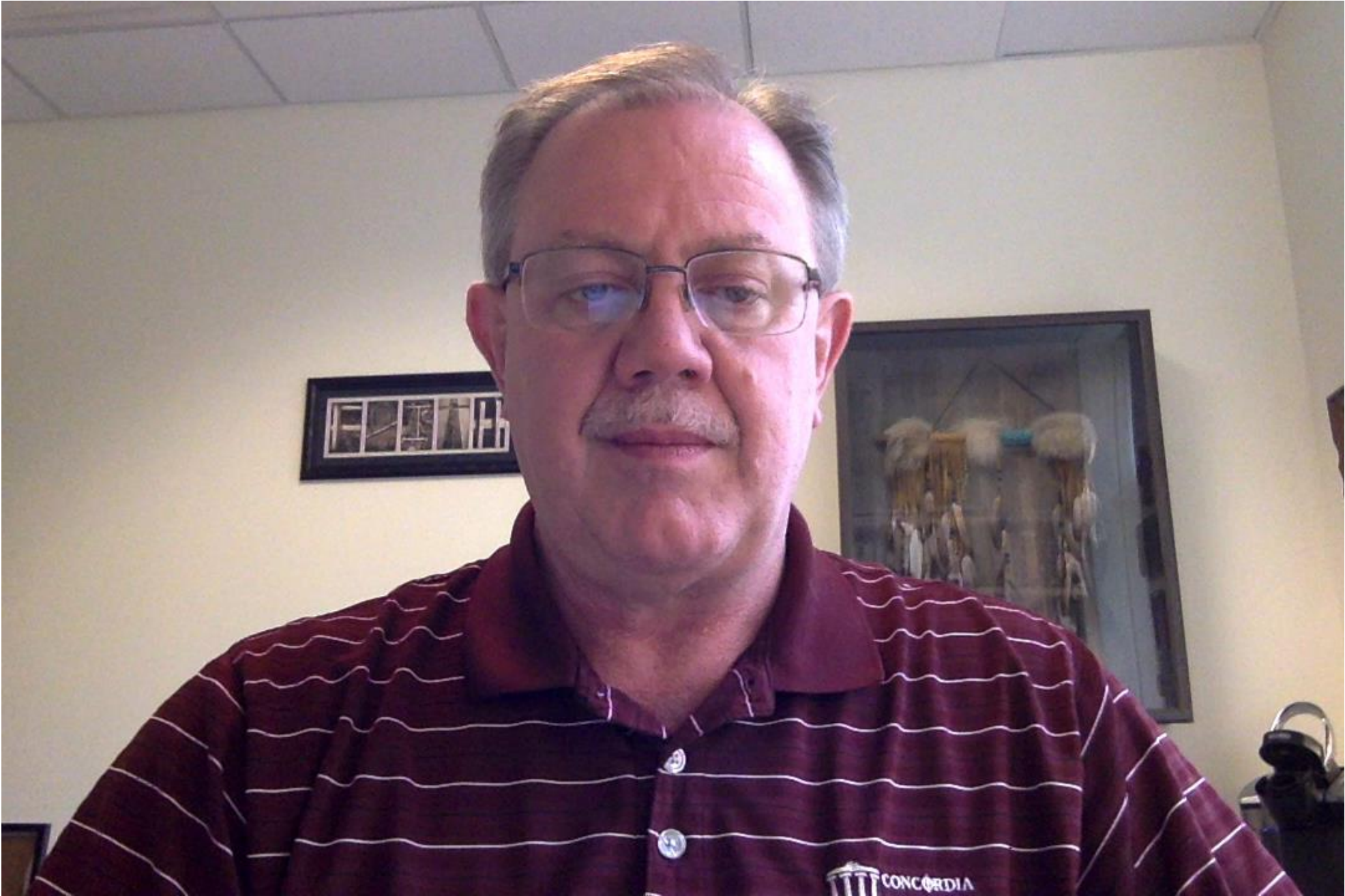
“ I do not like many of the attitudes of the people who attend... To be completely honest, my husband is Mexican. He doesn't even feel comfortable walking into most Lutheran churches due to the kind of people mentioned above. I don't blame him, either. Seeing how they have felt about him has really made me feel that they are accepting...to a point.

Perhaps if there was a small community meeting with other diverse young adults, or open minded people, where you could meet on Sunday evening, or weekday evenings. ...I like the idea of a community but I don't like the strict/conservative environment that often comes along with LCMS

23 year old female
Currently considers herself religious but unaffiliated with any church

”

Many do not feel welcome because of what their own perceptions (which may or may not be valid).



LCMS Research Services
& LCMS Youth Ministry

Home Church Factors Contributing to Active Adherence

- Personal Relationships
 - Feeling cared for personally strongly correlates with long term retention while feeling dismissed or ignored strongly correlates with leaving
 - While there is so much talk about mistrust of the institution in this generation, so much of their opinion about the “institution” is based on relationships with key people
- Young People Sense the Overall Environment in the Church
 - How are conflicts, controversies and struggles handled? – young people watch and observe
 - What about the political atmosphere of the church?
 - Is the church welcoming and open to diversity?
 - Or does it allow certain strong opinions to create an environment that feels toxic?

One Final Observation about Home Churches

- Young Adults who hold conservative views today, were much more likely than others to feel that their home church *did not* prepare them well to defend their faith
 - Felt unprepared = 34% conservative
 - Felt prepared = 19% conservative
 - This likely has to do with expectations – those whose views matched the views of their church *expected* to get more help from their congregation than they actually did.

Final thoughts for Home Churches

- Empathize with young people and challenges in today's cultural
 - Grow in understanding of young people's cultural context related to economics, relationships, educational opportunities, and moral foundations.
 - If you don't know, or are unsure, ask young people about the challenges they face and **LISTEN**.
 - Be slow to blame them for the culture they daily have to navigate.
- Although nothing new, walk alongside young people as they “carry their cross” as a disciple of Christ.
 - Empathize with the difficulties of making a public witness of Christ while living in many and complex contexts.
 - Understand the struggles of living a moral and faithful life in a cultural that often provides little support for the Christian faith.

Questions?

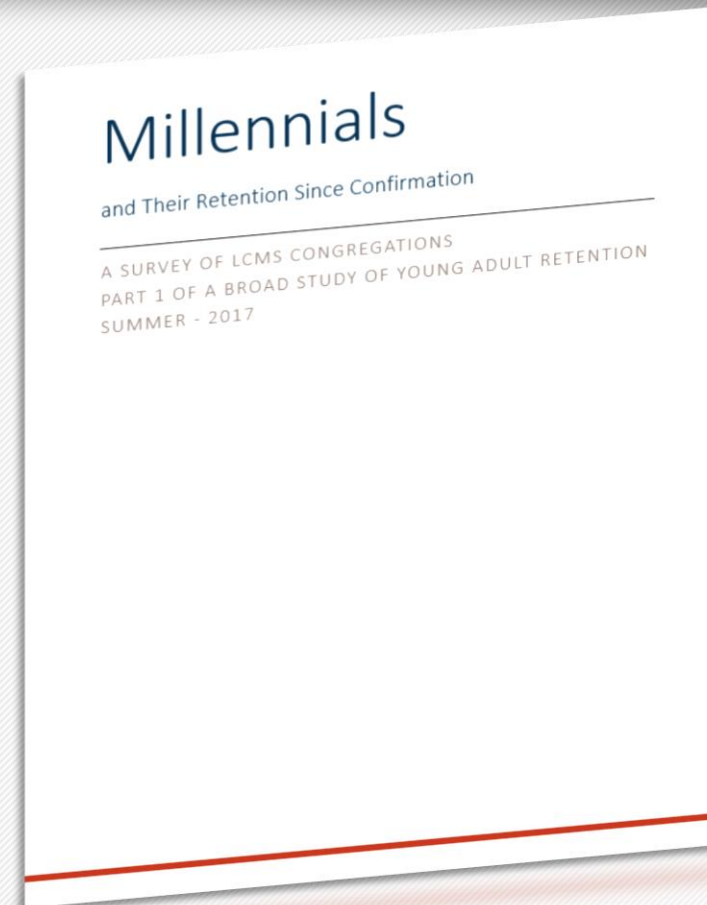
More Details Available in the Complete Congregational Report and Executive Summary

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

For more information on the Millennial study, find the “Executive Summary” of the 2017 Millennial Research.

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!

Join us for the second webinar on this survey of 2000+ young adults about themselves, the church, and their faith.

Join us for a webinar on May 16th at 11am CT which will focus on: **the impact of caring for youth through transitions, crisis, and into young adulthood.**

