

InFo
Vol. 10. No. 2
October 2007
pp. 93 – 124

FEATURE

**Opinions on Family and Social Issues Associated
with Religious Practice in Southeast Asia¹**

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***Abstract:** This second part of the data analysis of a large sample of Seventh-day Adventist church members addresses opinions and practices relating to family and social issues. It identifies differences in opinion with age, gender, religious orientation and region of church membership. It challenges church professionals to acknowledge the level of polarization of opinion and to develop strategies that will maintain cohesiveness of belief yet accommodate perspectives within the social dynamics of developing SE Asian countries.*

Members of the Seventh-day Adventist church, while supposedly subscribing to the 28 fundamental beliefs of the church, tend to differ widely in their beliefs and practices. These differences may be regional, or related to differences such as age, gender, or socioeconomic status, but they are frequently hidden from view and not discussed openly. This study sought to clarify the positions of Adventist church members within Southeast Asia on some of these beliefs.

What are the opinions as expressed by this sample of church member respondents about specific issues of concern to Seventh-day Adventist administrators in Southeast Asia? This study sought opinions related to twelve specific issues: the writings of Ellen White, abortion, sexuality including

¹ This article is the second of a 3-part series documenting religious beliefs and practices, marital satisfaction and life events, and demographic data of 3379 members of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Southeast Asia. Countries participating included Myanmar, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Part I of this analysis, which contains an analysis of religious aspects of life and demographic data, was published in the *International Forum Journal* in April, 2006.

homosexuality, sex outside of marriage, sex education, divorce, and birth control (Table 1). Agreement with statements was indicated on a four point Likert-scale on which 1 represented strong disagreement and 4 strong agreement.

Table 1
Opinions on Key Social Issues

Statistics	N		Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Skew
	Valid	Missing					
1 Abortion is never an option for Christians.	3042	337	2.485	2	1	1.421	0.024
2 People with homosexual tendencies who do not engage in sexual practices with same-sex partners should be accepted into full church fellowship.	2980	399	2.774	3	4	1.215	-0.374
3 Sexual intercourse between two unmarried persons is not wrong if they really love one another.	3027	352	1.732	1	1	1.090	1.166
4 Divorced and remarried persons whose former spouse did not commit adultery should be disciplined by the church.	2912	467	2.883	3	4	1.225	-0.523
5 Husbands and wives should be encouraged to plan their families through birth control.	2990	389	3.307	4	4	1.001	-1.263
6 The sexual act in marriage was designed by God not only for procreation but also as an intimate experience which unites a married couple physically, emotionally, and spiritually.	2962	417	3.473	4	4	0.937	-1.681
7 Homosexual relations are not necessarily wrong if two consenting adults of the same sex enter into a lifetime commitment with each other.	2491	888	1.737	1	1	1.107	1.152

(table continues)

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Table 1 (continued)
Opinions on Key Social Issues

Statistics	N		Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Skew
	Valid	Missing					
8 Sexual education encourages promiscuity among youth.	2840	539	2.116	2	1	1.195	0.500
9 Remarriage after divorce should be allowed only for persons whose former spouses have committed adultery or have died.	2828	551	2.757	3	4	1.225	-0.349
10 It is wrong for a married person to have a sexual relationship with someone other than his/her married partner.	2885	494	2.872	4	4	1.364	-0.508
11 The writings of Ellen G. White are a sufficient guide for Adventists in their family relations today.	2913	466	3.546	4	4	0.880	-1.885
12 Abortion is wrong except in cases of rape, incest and when the mother's life is in danger.	2785	594	2.517	3	1	1.270	-0.047

Key: 1 = Strongly Disagree

4 = Strongly Agree

The Writings of Ellen White

In the history of the church the level of acceptance of the prophetic role of Ellen White in guiding the establishment of the church, its doctrines and the development of lifestyle practices has varied across time and countries. The church's official statement of Fundamental Beliefs (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (hereafter GC), 2008) indicates that the 18th of the 28 fundamental beliefs is that

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen. G. White. As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience

must be tested. (Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10)

The acceptance of White's writings in their practical application to parenting and maintenance of family relationships (see Table 2) is fairly strong. This was used as a vehicle for considering acceptance of these writings for application in the sampling time period.

Of the majority of the sample that responded to this item (86.2%), only 19.6% disagreed with the usefulness and sufficiency of the advice given by Ellen White's books for guiding family relationships. Close to three quarters of the item respondents strongly agreed with this concept. The mean for all respondents ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 0.88$) lies just within the value range for strong agreement.

Table 2
The writings of Ellen G. White are a sufficient guide for Adventists in their family relations today

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	193	5.7	6.6	6.6
	Disagree	187	5.5	6.4	13.0
	Agree	369	10.9	12.7	25.7
	Strongly agree	2164	64.0	74.3	100.0
	Total	2913	86.2	100.0	
Missing		466	13.8		
Total		3379	100.0		

Influence of Type of Religion

In an earlier analysis, three types of religion were defined and identified with the respondents. The ANOVA with Scheffé post hoc tests indicated a significant difference ($F(2, 1,269) = 45.857$, $p < 0.001$) in the respondents whose type of religion could be classified by dominance of one of the three types of religion. The religion orientation termed Identification characterized persons with an internalization of religion that includes integrated self-regulation. A person controlled by guilt or the expectations of others is described as having the religious orientation of Introjection. Literal interpretation of scripture as compared to principle deriving conception development classifies orientation as Literalistic. The introjection group showed agreement with the sufficiency of Ellen White's writings for guiding family relations, the mean ($M = 2.70$, see Table 3.) being in the lower range of the agreement category (2.50 – 3.50). This was significantly different to the other two groups. The literalism group mean

(M = 3.50) was on the lower border of the strong agreement category, while the identification group mean (M = 3.55) was in the lower range of the strongly agree class. Having a religion motivated by feelings of guilt and sensitivity toward meeting the behavioral criteria set by others appears to be associated with less strong affirmation of Ellen White's writings.

Table 3

Descriptives for Religious Orientation and the writings of Ellen White are a sufficient guide for Adventists in their family relations today

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Identification	651	3.55	.857	.034
Introjection	119	2.70	1.246	.114
Literal	502	3.50	.870	.039
Total	1272	3.45	.937	.026

A second ANOVA with Scheffé post hoc tests based on five types of religion (formed by combinations of religion type) indicated significant differences ($F(4, 2,332) = 45.805, p < 0.001$) between both the Low Identification, Introjection and Literalism (LILjLL, M = 3.18) and High Introjection and Low Literalism (HIjLL, M = 3.34) groups that agree with the statement; and the high identification groups of High Identification and Low Literalism (HILL, M = 3.74), High Identification and High Literalism (HIHL, M = 3.71) showing strong agreement, with $p < 0.001$ for each difference. The High Introjection High Literalism group (HIHLi, M = 3.57) also showed strong agreement and was also significantly different ($p < 0.05$) from the Low Identification, Introjection and Literalism (LILjLLi, M = 3.18) group. Only two groups are distinguished by the homogeneous group table, however (Table 4). This analysis also indicates the reduced affirmation with introjection but also includes the opinion of the group with low identification with religion, low guilt and low perceptions of literalism which are least supportive of agreement with use of Ellen White writings in family guidance.

Influence of Regional Differences

Consideration of the regional differences in the acceptance of Ellen White's written advice for family guidance shows agreement with this use by all groups since means are all greater than 3.00 (2.5 – 3.5 Agree). ANOVA indicates significant differences ($F(5, 2,907) = 9.276, p < 0.001$) between the Myanmar (M = 3.73, $p < 0.001$) and Philippines CPUC Ilongo (M = 3.67) showing strong agreement as compared to all the other groups which show agreement by lower means that are in the agree range (Table 5).

Table 4
The writings of Ellen White are a sufficient guide for Adventists
in their family relations today

	Groups of religion	N	Subset for alpha = .05	
			1	2
Scheffé(a,b)	Low identification, introjection & literalism	582	3.18	
	High interjection & low literalism	328	3.34	
	High interjection & high literalism	168		3.57
	High identification & high literalism	291		3.71
	High identification & low literalism	968		3.74
	Sig.			.209

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 329.189.

b The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used.
Type I error levels are not guaranteed.

Table 5
Religious Orientation and the Writings of Ellen G. White are a Sufficient Guide
for Adventists in their Family Relations Today

	Group	N	Subset for alpha = .05		
			1	2	3
Scheffé(a,b)	Philippines SPUC 1	464	3.42		
	Philippines CPUC Cebuano	277	3.43		
	Indonesian EIUC	567	3.47		
	Philippines SPUC 2	692	3.55	3.55	
	Philippines CPUC Ilongo	555		3.67	
	Myanmar	358		3.73	
	Sig.			.348	.118

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 442.180

b The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I
error levels are not guaranteed.

No gender or age related effects were found for acceptance of E G White's writings for use in family and parental guidance.

Opinions on Abortion

Christians respect the concept of the right to life of every human being, however, groups have expressed differences in the application of this principle to the embryo or unborn fetus. Concerns related to the practice of abortion find expression in different codes of behavior for Christians. Respondents in this study express a diversity of opinion (see Table 6). A slim majority of those answering the item disagree that abortion is never an option for Christians, however, 43.9% strongly agree with this perception.

Influences of Age and Gender

While no age effect was found a gender effect ($F(1, 2,515) = 7.101$, $p < 0.001$) is present with mean male scores falling marginally in the agree category ($M = 2.59$) and females in the disagree range ($M = 2.44$). This may suggest the female claim to personal decisions about their own bodies, but may also reflect a clearer understanding of the church's position statements.

Table 6
Frequencies for: Abortion is never an option for Christians

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	1356	40.1	44.6	44.6
	disagree	191	5.7	6.3	50.9
	agree	159	4.7	5.2	56.1
	strongly agree	1336	39.5	43.9	100.0
	Total	3042	90.0	100.0	
Missing		337	10.0		
Total		3379	100.0		

The Seventh-day Adventist Church offers the following information on its website (GC, 2008, "abortion" section)

Adventists do not condone abortions for birth control, gender selection or convenience. And we do not believe those with a religious or ethical objection to abortions should have to participate in them.

But when a woman faces exceptional circumstances of serious moral or medical dilemmas, **she has the final decision whether to terminate the pregnancy or not**. Attitudes of condemnation are inappropriate.

The church does not serve as a conscience for individuals, but it does provide moral guidance. It:

1. Supports women who choose to complete crisis pregnancies
2. Creates a safe climate for ongoing discussion of the moral questions associated with abortion
3. Provides sex education
4. Emphasizes responsibility for family planning
5. Encourages fathers to participate responsibly in the parenting of their children
6. Assists in alleviating the social, economic and psychological factors that add to abortion.

Adventists encourage people to make decisions about prenatal human life in the context of healthy family relationships. (The full General Conference statement on abortion is available at http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/guidelines/main_guide1.html)

Influence of Regional Differences

The seeming confusion within the church membership may arise from the impact of regional religious cultural influence. An ANOVA with Scheffé post hoc tests of the means for the regions indicates that there are significant differences ($F(5, 3,036) = 22.546, p < 0.001$) in the means (see Tables 7-8). The church members of Myanmar are the most conservative and express agreement with this claim that abortion is not an option for a Christian ($M = 2.89$), though this is not different to the position of the members from the south Philippines SPUC 1 ($M = 2.71$) and SPUC 2 (2.60). These three previous groups are different to the CPUC Ilongo ($M = 2.07$), CPUC Cebuano ($M = 2.18$) groups who disagree, and the Indonesian EIUC ($M = 2.48$) group that approaches the more conservative attitudes of Myanmar and south Philippines.

Anecdotal and other evidence suggests Myanmar's societal views are strongly influenced by Buddhism and traditional social attitudes that are conservative and protective of any life, embryonic or fetal. Although abortion is against the law, repetitive illegal abortion is frequently used as a birth control measure, contributing significantly to mortality in women (Ba-Thike, 1997; Lao Htaw, 2004). The Philippine cultures by comparison are strongly influenced by the conservative views on abortion held by the Catholic population (85%) and this is supported by government regulation (Juarez, Cabigon, Singh, & Hussain, 2005). This perspective is clearly modified in some regions, however,

particularly as evidenced in the responses from the members in the central Philippines.

Table 7
Descriptives by Region for: Abortion is never an option for Christians

	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Myanmar	366	2.89	1.36	.071	2.75	3.03
Philippines SPUC 1	489	2.71	1.36	.062	2.59	2.83
Philippines SPUC 2	699	2.60	1.40	.053	2.49	2.70
Indonesian EIUC	608	2.48	1.46	.059	2.36	2.59
Philippines CPUC Cebuano	299	2.18	1.38	.080	2.03	2.34
Philippines CPUC Ilongo	580	2.07	1.39	.058	1.96	2.18
Total	3041	2.48	1.42	.026	2.43	2.54

Table 8
Grouping by Region for Abortion is never an option for Christians

Group	N	Subset for alpha = .05			
		1	2	3	4
Scheffé (a,b) Philippines CPUC Ilongo	581	2.07			
Philippines CPUC Cebuano	299	2.18	2.18		
Indonesian EIUC	608		2.48	2.48	
Philippines SPUC 2	699			2.60	2.60
Philippines SPUC 1	489			2.71	2.71
Myanmar	366				2.89
Sig.		.910	.070	.256	.070

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 464.460.

b The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed.

Influence of Religious Orientation

Religious orientation has an effect on opinions about abortion ($F(2, 1,329) = 13.636, p < 0.001$) the Literalists showing agreement ($M = 2.68$) the identification group disagreement ($M = 2.26, p < .05$). The introjectionists are not different to either group but are overall intermediate in response in the disagree range ($M = 2.46$). These are the expected responses for the religious orientations. The identification group has an integrated set of values and self control, while the literalists can use scripture with limited interpretation, to in this case, condemn abortion. The guilt driven orientation of introjectionists seems to lean towards protection of those who need to fulfill the expectations of others.

An additional item attempted to develop understanding of the abortion issue. It asked respondents to indicate whether abortion could be accepted as legitimate in special circumstances such as when a female is subject to criminal behavior such as rape or incest or alternatively, if the mother's life was in danger (see Table 9). A similar polarization of belief was apparent, confirming the previously expressed beliefs within a slightly smaller sample of respondents. More respondents appeared to be comfortable responding to the global statement ($n = 3042$) rather than this accommodation of belief to specific circumstances ($n = 2785$). Agreement with the proposition of wrongness for abortion except within these limited exceptions was indicated by 52.3%, a percentage increase of 2.4% above those considering abortion always wrong.

Table 9
Abortion is wrong except in cases of rape, incest
and when the mother's life is in danger

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	957	28.3	34.4	34.4
	disagree	371	11.0	13.3	47.7
	agree	516	15.3	18.5	66.2
	strongly agree	941	27.8	33.8	100.0
	Total	2785	82.4	100.0	
Missing		594	17.6		
Total		3379	100.0		

It would seem that the remaining respondents (47.7%) indicate disagreement and have other reasons for accepting abortion in the lives of Christians which might include use for birth control, especially when this is

coupled with poverty. In the Philippines, research (Juarez, Cabigon, Singh & Hussain, 2005) suggests low sexual activity amongst single women (9% for ages 15 -24) yet

According to estimates for the four major regions, Manila has the highest proportion of pregnancies ending in abortion (one in three), compared with about one in five in the rest of Luzon and about one in eight in Visayas and Mindanao. . . . One of every two married women did not want a child soon or wanted no more children, but were not using a contraceptive method. (¶20, 26)

Rates of use of unreliable traditional methods (withdrawal and periodic abstinence) contribute to the abortion rate, according to these researchers. In addition “family . . . planning service providers incorrectly informed clients that the duration of the protective period from breastfeeding (i.e., lactational amenorrhea) is longer than it actually is” (¶29). As a consequence, “the approximately one in two married women of reproductive age who have an unmet need for effective contraception need improved contraceptive services” (¶34).

This need for contraception is a humanitarian need consistent within the circumstances of the poor in developing countries of the SE Asia region. The church department of health needs to meet this challenge by improving the knowledge of religious concepts of morality associated with its stated position on abortion, but also the physiological knowledge to enable effective use of both traditional and modern contraceptives and a willingness to consider facilitating the supply of suitable contraceptives. Church members’ attitudes about birth control are discussed later in this analysis.

There was no gender difference on this item. Regional differences (see Table 10) examined by ANOVA of the means and Scheffé post hoc tests follow the same pattern as the global abortion item, except that the SPUC 2 group moves into the *disagree* category ($M = 2.48$) while the Indonesian EIUC moves into the *agree* category ($M = 2.56$). The difficulty presented by a survey technique is highlighted here in that an explanation for this change in attitudes cannot be given with any certainty. The SPUC 2 group may consider that abortion is still wrong even in this situation and choose to express disagreement. Others in this category may be persisting in a view that abortion is not wrong in other circumstances also and express disagreement.

Table 10
 Descriptives for: Abortion is wrong except in cases of rape, incest
 and when the mother's life is in danger

	N	Mean		SD	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Myanmar	325	2.81	Agree	1.22	0.068	2.68	2.94
Indonesian EIUC	553	2.56	Agree	1.27	0.054	2.45	2.66
Philippines SPUC 1	450	2.56	Agree	1.23	0.058	2.45	2.67
Philippines SPUC 2	660	2.48	Disagree	1.27	0.049	2.39	2.58
Philippines CPUC Cebuano	268	2.44	Disagree	1.28	0.078	2.29	2.59
Philippines CPUC Ilongo	529	2.34	Disagree	1.30	0.056	2.23	2.46
Total	2785	2.52	Agree	1.27	0.024	2.47	2.57

Opinions on Birth control

Only about one in five church members disagree with the idea that both husbands and wives should be encouraged to plan their families through birth control methods (see Table 11).

Influence of Age and Gender on Birth Control Opinions

There was no statistically significant gender difference; both sexes shared a similar opinion ($M_{\text{males}} = 3.30$, $M_{\text{females}} = 3.37$). The level of agreement was significantly different for different age ranges ($F(9, 2,2565) = 2.846$, $p < 0.01$), however this is not confirmed in Scheffé post hoc tests, which are conservative. The trend, however is evident (Figure 1). The strength of agreement increases from teenage years and peaks in the child bearing age ranges from 19 years to 40 years.

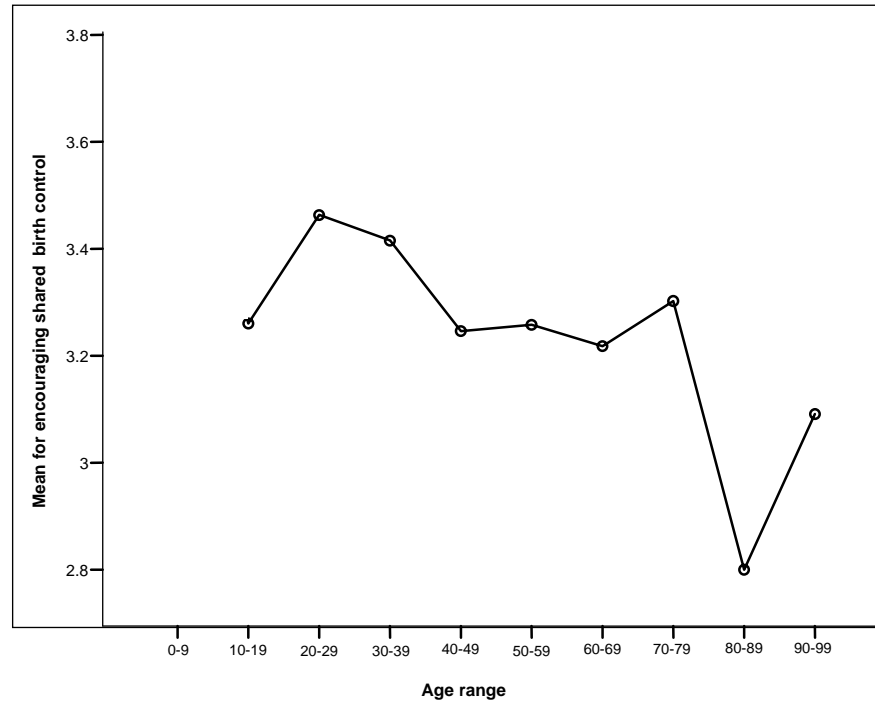


Figure 1. Age variation in agreement for encouraging shared planning for birth control.

Regional Influences on Birth Control Opinions

All regional groups express strong agreement with this encouragement of family planning, though statistically significant differences ($F(5, 2,984) = 4.70$, $p < 0.001$) exist between the lowest mean, for Myanmar ($M = 3.12$), and the highest, for CPUC Ilongo ($M = 3.39$, $p < 0.05$), and Philippine SPUC 2 ($M = 3.38$, $p < 0.01$). The most conservative view is again demonstrated by Myanmar members and one needs to determine whether this is related to a morality issue or is an educational exposure factor.

Influence of Religious Orientation on Birth Control

There is agreement about the need for birth control by all groups formed by type of religion, with the strongest agreement being espoused by the identification group ($M = 3.40$, $p < 0.001$) which with the literalism group ($M = 3.30$, $p < 0.001$) are significantly different ($F(2, 1,311) = 13.304$, $p < 0.001$) from the introjection group ($M = 2.91$).

Table 11
Husbands and wives should be encouraged to plan their families
through birth control

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	310	9.2	10.4	10.4
	disagree	250	7.4	8.4	18.7
	agree	643	19.0	21.5	40.2
	strongly agree	1787	52.9	59.8	100.0
	Total	2990	88.5	100.0	
Missing		389	11.5		
Total		3379	100.0		

Opinions Related to Sexuality

In today's global secular society there is a strong emphasis on sexuality in all media, newspapers, magazines, literature, film, television, other performing arts, the internet and society. This fascination with sex is demonstrated in fashion, conversation and behavior. Sexuality is acknowledged by the church as God-designed at creation, but it is recognized as now perverted by evil expressed in humankind (General Conference, 2008). The purpose of sexuality has been identified by the church as both procreative and unifying within the marriage relationship.

God intends that couples may have ongoing sexual communion apart from procreation (1 Cor 7:3-5), a communion that forges strong bonds and protects a marriage partner from an inappropriate relationship with someone other than his or her spouse (Prov 5:15-20; Song of Sol 8:6, 7). In God's design, sexual intimacy is not only for the purpose of conception. Scripture does not prohibit married couples from enjoying the delights of conjugal relations while taking measures to prevent pregnancy. (General Conference, 2008, "sexuality" section ¶6)

Sexuality

A questionnaire item sought clarification on the opinions held relating to God the Creator's conception of sexuality. While 12.3% of the sample chose not to answer the question (see Table 12), close to one quarter (23%) of the actual respondents disagreed that God designed the sexual act in marriage for procreation and relationship unification, with 8.4% disagreeing strongly. By comparison, 70% strongly agreed with the statement.

An influence of age was suggested by ANOVA ($F(9, 2543) = 1.614, p < 0.05$); however post hoc tests did not differentiate the age ranges. However for most age ranges the means indicate agreement and are close to the strong agreement range boundary. The 19 to 30 and 69 to 80 groups indicated strong agreement. No gender effect was detected.

Table 12

The sexual act in marriage was designed by God not only for procreation but also as an intimate experience which unites a married couple physically, emotionally, and spiritually

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	249	7.4	8.4	8.4
	disagree	184	5.4	6.2	14.6
	agree	447	13.2	15.1	29.7
	strongly agree	2082	61.6	70.3	100.0
	Total	2962	87.7	100.0	
Missing		417	12.3		
Total		3379	100.0		

All regional groups also indicated agreement, though Myanmar ($M = 3.13$) and Philippines SPUC 1 ($M = 3.25$) were only in agreement, being significantly different to all others that were in strong agreement ($M = 3.55$ to 3.60).

The influence of type of religion espoused differentiated significantly ($F(2, 1,297) = 35.470, p < 0.001$) between agreement by the introjection grouping (guilt and other's opinion sensitive, $M = 2.82$) and the similarly strongly agreeing identification (internalizing, $M = 3.53$) and literal ($M = 3.55$) groups.

Premarital sex

Opinions about the morality of premarital sexual intercourse were in general alignment with the teachings of Christian churches. A minority (23%) supported the view that "real love" justified sexuality before marriage (see Table 13). There was no age-related difference in means but there was a significant difference in the strength of disagreement with this statement when expressed by different genders ($F(1, 2,550) = 7.331, p < 0.01$) though both were within the category of "disagree" (males $M = 1.73$; females $M = 1.63$) females being in stronger disagreement.

Type of religion practiced indicated a significant difference ($F(2, 1,327) = 27.275, p < 0.001$) with similar levels of disagreement for those strongly

identifying with their religion ($M = 1.64$) or alternatively being highly literal in interpretation of scripture ($M = 1.63$) as compared to the lower level of disagreement indicated by the mean of the introjection (guilt and reputation motivated) category ($M = 2.33$). Perhaps this reflects some empathy by introjectionists for this type of temptation and assumes a potential for resolution in the future.

Table 13
Sexual intercourse between two unmarried persons is not wrong
if they really love one another

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	1907	56.4	63.0	63.0
	disagree	429	12.7	14.2	77.2
	agree	286	8.5	9.4	86.6
	strongly agree	405	12.0	13.4	100.0
	Total	3027	89.6	100.0	
Missing	9	352	10.4		
Total		3379	100.0		

Does country of origin or regional influence in the Philippines affect opinions expressed about premarital sex? ANOVA with Scheffé post hoc tests indicates two significantly different ($F(5, 3,021) = 7.771, p < 0.001$) categories of the regional groups within the disagree range. Indonesians EIUC ($M = 1.58$) and Philippines CPUC Ilongo were most in disagreement as compared to SPUC 2 ($M = 1.83$) and Myanmar ($M = 1.89$), who also expressed disagreement. The Philippines CPUC Cebuano group ($M = 1.75$) and the Philippines SPUC 1 ($M = 1.82$) were intermediate in opinion but not significantly different to either group. It seems this opinion has become a clearly and widely accepted belief across the regions studied. Sexual intercourse between two unmarried persons is considered wrong even if they really love one another. This is in harmony with the literal interpretation of the Bible and a widely accepted biblical principle.

Sex education

One questionnaire item examined perceptions of the effect of sex education on youth and how these opinions varied (see Table 14). A minority of church members (36.7%) indicated that they considered that sex education increases promiscuity among the youth of the church. This is contradictory to current educational claims.

Table 14
Sexual education encourages promiscuity among youth

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	1298	38.4	45.7	45.7
	disagree	500	14.8	17.6	63.3
	agree	457	13.5	16.1	79.4
	strongly agree	585	17.3	20.6	100.0
	Total	2840	84.0	100.0	
Missing		539	16.0		
Total		3379	100.0		

The following research response to the effect of sex education has been offered.

Does sex education cause promiscuity? That is the fear of opponents of sex education programs. They argue that discussion of sex will arouse young people's curiosity, reduce their reticence about sexual matters, and encourage sexual activity.

The evidence says otherwise, however. According to a review commissioned by the World Health Organization, there is no support for the contention that sex education encourages sexual experimentation or increased activity (p. 181). After analyzing more than 1,000 reports on sex education programs worldwide, the authors concluded that sex education courses did not lead to earlier sexual intercourse, and in some cases they delayed it. (Population Reports, 1995, ¶ 2,3)

A *USA Today* release in Washington stated that a report by Douglas Kirby for the non-partisan National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy on sex education program research indicated

Programs that focus exclusively on abstinence have not been shown to affect teenager sexual behavior, although they are eligible for tens of millions of dollars in federal grants, according to a study released by a non-partisan group that seeks to reduce teen pregnancies.

“At present there does not exist any strong evidence that any abstinence program delays the initiation of sex, hastens the return to abstinence or reduces the number of sexual partners” among teenagers, the study concluded.

The study found that while abstinence-only efforts appear to have little positive impact, more comprehensive sex education programs were

having “positive outcomes” including teenagers “delaying the initiation of sex, reducing the frequency of sex, reducing the number of sexual partners and increasing condom or contraceptive use.”

“Two-thirds of the 48 comprehensive programs that supported both abstinence and the use of condoms and contraceptives for sexually active teens had positive behavior effect,” said the report (par. 1-6).

Opinions among respondents were differentiated by gender ($F(1, 2,370) = 10.149, p < 0.01$) but with little practical application since for males ($M = 2.20$) disagreement was only marginally less than females ($M = 2.04$). No differences for age range groups were present in the sample—all expressed disagreement that sex education increased promiscuity. All types of religion indicated disagreement and were similarly differentiated ($F(1, 1,271) = 4.198, p < 0.05$) to results for the previous items on sexuality. Both the identification ($M = 2.00$) and the literalism ($M = 2.08$) types were in greater disagreement with the assertion than the introjection type ($M = 2.33$) respondents.

The agreement that sex education increased promiscuity expressed by the Myanmar national group ($M = 2.57, p < 0.001$) was significantly different ($F(5, 2,834) = 15.477, p < 0.001$) to the disagreement expressed by all other groups. The Indonesian EIUC group was in the least disagreement ($M = 2.18$) but not different to the remaining groups ($M_{\text{Philippines CPUC Ilongo}} = 2.10, M_{\text{Philippines SPUC 1}} = 2.09, M_{\text{Philippines CPUC Cebuano}} = 2.07$) except the Philippines SPUC 2 ($M = 1.88$).

Extramarital sexual relationships

An alarming 37.6% of the respondents (see Tables 15-16) indicated that they do not consider that “it is wrong for a married person to have a sexual relationship with someone other than his/her marriage partner,” an attitude in direct conflict with official church statements (General Conference, 1987, 1990, 1998, 1995). While there were no differences in mean across age ranges, however an interesting, but small, significantly different gender bias ($F(1, 2,419) = 10.324, p < 0.05$) is evident in the responses, in which males ($M = 2.99$) are slightly stronger than females ($M = 2.81$) in their agreement that extramarital sexual relationships are wrong.

Opinions across regions are significantly different ($F(5, 2,879) = 35.586, p < 0.001$). The regional groups form four categories. In the first category is the Philippines CPUC Ilongo that overall ($M = 2.34$) are in disagreement with this statement condemning extramarital sexual relationships. The Ilongo group was significantly different from the Philippines CPUC Cebuano ($2.69, p < 0.05$), the Indonesian EIUC ($M = 2.87, p < 0.001$), and Philippines SPUC 2 ($M = 2.97, p < 0.001$) groups all of which show lower range agreement with this statement. The Philippines SPUC 1 group ($M = 3.01, p < 0.001$) also showing agreement, is

statistically different to the disagreeing CPUC Ilongo ($p < 0.001$), and as well the most conservative in opinion the Myanmar national group ($M = 3.47$, $p < 0.001$). However the Philippines SPUC 1 group is not different to the Indonesian or Philippines SPUC 2 or Philippines CPUC Cebuano groups (yet the homogeneous groups table does show a difference with this last group). Myanmar members are significantly different to all other groups and express the strongest agreement ($M = 3.47$), close to the strongly agree lower boundary.

Table 15

It is wrong for a married person to have a sexual relationship with someone other than his/her marriage partner

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	902	26.7	31.3	31.3
	disagree	184	5.4	6.4	37.6
	agree	181	5.4	6.3	43.9
	strongly agree	1618	47.9	56.1	100.0
	Total	2885	85.4	100.0	
Missing		494	14.6		
Total		3379	100.0		

Table 16

It is wrong for a married person to have a sexual relationship with someone other than his/her marriage partner (post-hoc tests)

	Group	N	Subset for alpha = .05			
			1	2	3	4
Scheffé(a,b)	Philippines CPUC Ilongo	553	2.34			
	Philippines CPUC Cebuano	262		2.69		
	Indonesian EIUC	572		2.87	2.87	
	Philippines SPUC 2	686		2.97	2.97	
	Philippines SPUC 1	458			3.01	
	Myanmar	354				3.47
	Sig.			1.000	.071	.768

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 433.546.

b The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed.

Homosexuality

There has been increased attention and discussion of same-sex relationships in society resulting in legislation for recognition and rights for same-sex unions (Wikipedia, n.d.). This has led to a need to be aware of the opinions of membership considering the social climate and the official statements of the church (General Conference, 1999b, 2004). Has the increasing social acceptance of homosexuality in society been reflected in opinions within the church to membership and homosexual practice? Two items in this section of the questionnaire sought respondent's opinions. The first was related to the morality of consenting lifetime same-sex relationships and the second related to church membership for non-practicing homosexuals.

About three quarters (76.4%) of the membership surveyed (see Table 17) indicated that they did not agree with the suggestion that such consensual longterm relationships were not morally wrong. Perhaps surprisingly, 14% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement. It was some six years after the data in this study was collected, that CBS News Polls (2004) reported that 28% of Americans favored allowing same-sex marriages and up to 57% favored some form of legal recognition. An insight into this response is derived from the events that have occurred in the respondents' lives, in some cases before joining the church. In another part of this survey of church members in the SE Asia region, respondents reported on homosexual practice. A total of 18.3% indicated personal involvement in homosexual activities at some time in their life, 8.5% in the last year and 4.1% in the last three years (see Table 18). This helps to understand why about half of the 23.6% have indicated agreement with it "not necessarily [being] wrong if two consenting adults of the same sex enter into a lifetime commitment with each other."

Table 17
Frequencies for personal involvement in homosexual activities

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes, during the last year	225	6.7	8.5	8.5
	yes, during the last three years	108	3.2	4.1	12.6
	yes, at an earlier time in my life	149	4.4	5.7	18.3
	no, not at all	2155	63.8	81.7	100.0
	Total	2637	78.0	100.0	
Missing		742	22.0		
Total		3379	100.0		

This incidence of practice within the church membership may well explain some of the reasons for this response, but what are the reasons for the agreement of the rest? Perhaps it reflects a perception of the church's need to show acceptance and forgiveness and to be responsive to all forms of sin (General Conference, 1999b), further to avoid condoning homophobic attitudes or responses within the church and its organization principles as clearly stated in more recent official statements (General Conference, 2004).

We hold that all people, no matter what their sexual orientation, are children of God. We do not condone singling out any group for scorn and derision, let alone abuse. However, it is very clear that God's Word does not countenance a homosexual lifestyle; neither has the Christian Church throughout her 2000 year history. Seventh-day Adventists believe that the biblical teaching is still valid today, because it is anchored in the very nature of humanity and God's plan at creation for marriage. ¶5

Legal protection from sexual discrimination is an issue the church membership needs to understand fully.

No gender or age effects were found. Though all regional groups disagreed with the statement legitimizing lifelong consensual same-sex relations, there were significant differences ($F(2, 1107) = 25.063, p < 0.001$). The CPUC Cebuano express strongest disagreement ($M = 1.36$) but were not different to the Indonesians ($M = 1.43$) or the CPUC Ilongo ($M = 1.63$). Different to the two lowest score groups was the Philippine SPUC 2 and SPUC 1 groups ($M = 1.74$ and 1.80 respectively) which in turn were different to the Myanmar group with its least disagreement but significant difference to all groups ($M = 2.21, p < 0.001$). In this case the Myanmar membership was least conservative in their opinion. Those with an introjection religious orientation overall indicated different ($F(2, 1107) = 25.063, p < 0.001$) and less disagreement ($M = 2.33, p < 0.001$) with consensual lifelong homosexuality than the alternate category of higher disagreement including the identification and literalist groups ($M = 1.57$ and $M = 1.59$).

Protection from discrimination is addressed in the second item that proposed conditional membership for non-practicing homosexuals. A majority 60.9% agree with this proposition with 40.8% expressing strong agreement (see Table 18). This is consistent with redemptive acceptance of all sinners who demonstrate confession and repentance pursuing reformation of their life.

Table 18
 People with homosexual tendencies who do not engage in sexual practices with same-sex partners should be accepted into full church fellowship

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	722	21.4	24.2	24.2
	disagree	444	13.1	14.9	39.1
	agree	598	17.7	20.1	59.2
	strongly agree	1216	36.0	40.8	100.0
	Total	2980	88.2	100.0	
Missing		399	11.8		
Total		3379	100.0		

While there are no gender effects for the first item related to homosexuality, this second item indicates a significant difference ($F(1, 2,457) = 7.148, p < 0.01$) for which males ($M = 2.89$) as a group express a stronger agreement than females ($M = 2.79$) for acceptance into membership, though there is little practical difference. Type of religion has no significant difference as all groups agree on this redemptive attitude across all church membership.

There are significant differences ($F(5, 2,964) = 16.968, p < 0.001$) by nation and regional group in restoration of non-practicing homosexuals to church membership (see Table 19). The Myanmar membership is in disagreement with this proposition ($M = 2.29, p < 0.001$) and significantly different from all other national or regional groups. At the opposite end of the spectrum of opinions are the Philippines CPUC Ilongo ($M = 3.02$) the group showing the strongest agreement and this group is significantly different from the Philippines SPUC 1 ($M = 2.71, p < 0.01$); however, both of these are not different to the three remaining intermediate groups the Indonesian EIUC ($M = 2.76$), Philippines SPUC 2 ($M = 2.77$), Philippines CPUC Cebuano ($M = 2.98$), all expressing agreement.

An explanation of this difference must be a culturally related factor with respect to the society or alternatively the church traditions of the national group. Myanmar has laws against male homosexuality with penalties of up to 10 years' imprisonment (Wikipedia, n.d.). Lesbianism may not be prohibited (Rau, 2006). A researcher writing cross-gender behavior in Myanmar (formerly Burma) reports that

Males with cross-gender behavior are referred to as acaults. Although Myanmar is a profoundly Buddhist society, the people still have strong animistic beliefs with an elaborate system of 37 nats (spirit gods). One

of these nats is a female named Mangedon who may take possession of males and impart femininity on them. The cross-gender status of the acaults is sanctioned by their spiritual marriage to Mangedon. The acaults, while not envied, are respected for their roles as shamans and seers.

Most of the society in Myanmar is described as tolerant of homosexuality except the Muslim and Christian communities, which are relatively small in numbership (Martin, 2002). Identifying with Christianity and the Christian tradition in this country may demand a more stringent perception of maintaining church standards in relation to this area of behavior, helping to explain these results.

Table 19

People with homosexual tendencies who do not engage in sexual practices with same-sex partners should be accepted into full church fellowship

Group	N	Subset for alpha = .050		
		1	2	3
Scheffé(a,b) Myanmar	320	2.29		
Philippines SPUC 1	487		2.71	
Indonesian EIUC	606		2.76	2.76
Philippines SPUC 2	705		2.77	2.77
Philippines CPUC Cebuano	285		2.98	2.98
Philippines CPUC Ilongo	577			3.02
Sig.		1.000	.058	.082

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 444.811.

b The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed.

Opinions about Divorce

Divorce is a recurring conundrum for the church and is open to literalist and varied interpretive conceptions. Since there is marriage break down within the marriages of the church membership how should the church treat separated persons? The church manual (General Conference, 2005, p. 204) details circumstances beyond the limited conditions of this first item. It only addresses the issue of remarriage after divorce indicating it is possible only for those whose spouse has died or alternatively committed adultery.

A majority (60%, see Table 20) agreed with the statement. This probably reflects the less liberal views officially upheld at this earlier time (1998) that avoided controversy by not acknowledging some practices of local churches and national groups. Some locations accepted that the ultimate irretrievable breakdown of marriage occurred through the breaking of marriage vows in a variety of ways. That 40% within the membership studied disagree indicates the awareness of situations where these broader perspectives are considered appropriately applied. There are no mean differences for gender, age, regional or religion type group differences thus confirming an overall expression of general consensus, uniformly distributed over these groupings. This is unique amongst the opinions studied.

Table 20

Remarriage after divorce should be allowed only for persons whose former spouses have committed adultery or have died

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	708	21.0	25.0	25.0
	disagree	422	12.5	14.9	40.0
	agree	546	16.2	19.3	59.3
	strongly agree	1152	34.1	40.7	100.0
	Total	2828	83.7	100.0	
Missing		551	16.3		
Total		3379	100.0		

There is agreement amongst about 64% of the membership that “Divorced and remarried persons whose former spouse did not commit adultery should be disciplined by the church,” with 47% expressing strong agreement. There are 29% at the opposite extreme however indicating strong disagreement. When an attempt is made to identify significant differences by group no gender ($M_{\text{males}} = 2.93$, $M_{\text{female}} = 2.92$), age, regional or national group, or uncombined religious orientation effect is apparent. There are significant differences however between the five combinations of religious orientations studied (see Tables 21-22). The first category includes only one group those with Low Identification, Introjection, and Literalism (LILjLi) having the lowest mean indicating lowest level of agreement ($M = 2.66$). This is different to a second group with higher agreement with the item claim, including the groups High Identification and Low Literalism (HILLi, $M = 2.98$, $p < 0.001$), High Identification & High literalism (HIHLi, $M = 3.00$, $p < 0.01$), and High Introjection and High Literalism (HIjHLi, $M = 3.03$, $p < 0.01$). The High Introjection and Low

Literalism group has an intermediate overall mean not different from either of the other categories ($M = 2.83$). Low levels on all religious orientations and the combination of high introjection (guilt) with low literalism in biblical interpretation appear to reduce the level of agreement with more conservative views. This is consistent with expectations and contrasts strongly with the most conservative opinions of the high introjection (guilt and concern for fulfilling expectations) high literalism of scriptural admonition combination of two religious orientations. In this sense, level of literalism in interpretation of scripture is driving respondents to the different extremes of opinion in this area.

Table 21

Divorced and remarried persons whose former spouse did not commit adultery should be disciplined by the church

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	666	19.7	22.9	22.9
	disagree	377	11.2	12.9	35.8
	agree	501	14.8	17.2	53.0
	strongly agree	1368	40.5	47.0	100.0
	Total	2912	86.2	100.0	
Missing		467	13.8		
Total		3379	100.0		

Information supporting the development of personal interpretations of scripture is fundamental to establishing the different interpretation of scriptural principles related to remarriage after divorce. Has the 'missionary' sharing and high adoption of a particular literalistic form of biblical study favored this widely shared willingness to discipline members establishing new marital relationships after experiencing destructive ones? Has the church changed in some cultural environments where singleness and divorce are economically viable and remarriage accepted culturally while in other countries this practice may have a cultural stigma? Consideration of a shared Asian viewpoint might help gain an understanding of these strongly held but polarizing opinions.

Table 22
Divorced and remarried persons whose former spouse did not commit adultery should be disciplined by the church (post-hoc tests)

	Groups of religion	N	Subset for alpha = .05	
			1	2
Scheffé(a,b)	Low identification, introjection & literalism	590	2.66	
	High interjection & low literalism	331	2.83	2.83
	High identification & low literalism	956		2.98
	High identification & high literalism	282		3.00
	High interjection & high literalism	174		3.03
	Sig.			.560

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 332.109.

b The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed.

A comment on Asian American marriages (National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, 2005) suggests that within a number of Asian cultures there is discouragement of the expression of strong emotions, a high valuing of harmony and strong conflict avoidance. Further a marriage is a union of two families and separation would represent failure for both families consequently even abusive relationships are tolerated. Assimilation of American culture particularly individualism appears to be reducing these cultural perspectives and outcomes. It may be that this shared pervasive Asian perspective of marriage is uniformly being reflected in combination with literalistic interpretations of biblical principles shared so as to guide Adventist lifestyle. This may offer an explanation for the overall agreement with conservative attitudes to divorce and remarriage reported. Additional qualitative research is needed to gain more useful understanding of these expressed opinions.

Discussion

Church members opinions in the SE Asian region do indicate important differences. For the purposes of this discussion opinions can be divided into those topics with little polarization and small agreement/disagreement of 20% or less, significant polarization with moderate agreement/disagreement of between

21% to 30% and lastly highly polarized opinions with more than 30% agreement/disagreement.

Low polarization is displayed for acceptance of the writings of Ellen White as guidance for family relationship building today (20% disagree); and spouses being encouraged to share planning for birth control and family size (20% disagree). Agreement for the latter peaks in the late teens early twenties and is little different till the age of forty. This coincides with the child-bearing ages. No gender or religious orientation effect is observed, however, the Myanmar membership is least in agreement and the Philippine CPUC Ilongos are in highest in agreement. Cultural differences probably account for these differences and the gap would be reduced only by open discussion in a broad, significant group and with individuals in pre-marital and family counseling activities.

No age or gender effects relate to the writings of Ellen White. Identification and literalism are identified with higher acceptance and introjection with lower acceptance. Changing the remaining opinion gap may be best addressed by resolving the self conception of self-guilt and striving to fulfill the expectations of others by refocusing on the importance of spiritual relationship building so as to internalize and integrate religious perspectives. This may lead to the acceptance of resources to support family development from a relationship perspective rather than a condemnation or guilt establishing or guilt maintenance perspective.

Moderately polarized opinions are offered by the sample for premarital sex between those in real love being wrong (23% disagree); belief that God created sex for both unity in marriage and procreation (23% disagree); and the unacceptability of consensual long term same-sex relationships (23.6% disagree).

The most polarized opinions are related to: divorce and remarriage when the first spouse has not committed adultery requires church discipline (36% disagree); sex education causing increased promiscuity (37% agree); extramarital sex is wrong (37% disagree); restoring membership in the church to non-practicing homosexuals (39% are against); remarriage is only possible after adultery by the spouse or their death (40% disagree); abortion is only acceptable as a result of rape, incest or threat to the mother's life (47.7% disagree); abortion is never an option for Christians (50.9% disagree).

This data gathering and analysis indicates that there are statistically significant differences within the church membership and while these may not be of practical significance in the case of some opinions, they have the potential to be divisive in others. Resolution of polarized opinions is aided by first identifying the potential sources of the difference. This analysis has considered

difference is associated with age, gender, religious orientation or region of membership. Other analyses are possible including time since baptism, parents, education in Adventist schools and other variables which may be pursued in additional analyses in the future,

Statistically significant differences associated with age have no practical significance for addressing the differences in opinions observed. Gender effects are usually small and within the same level of opinion. Females indicate stronger disagreement that sex education increases promiscuity, disagree more strongly with premarital sex being acceptable, but show lower agreement that extramarital sex is wrong. The largest effect is demonstrated in relation to abortion “never being an option for Christians.” Females disagree with this proposition when males indicate agreement. This probably relates to the identification of women with the various issues that could be “owned” in their future as well as their cognitive claim to self-determination. The church may well need to do more to establish greater understanding by men of the issues as women face them. Since the gap in opinion is small resolution should be possible.

Religious orientation effects are apparent. In the Asian climate the religious orientations of identification and literalism are consistently associated with what might be termed the more ‘conservative views.’ Across religious orientations the level of agreement is usually in the same range with introjection at the more moderate level.

Regional effects can lead to specific programs being directed to specific locations to clarify understandings and accommodate opinions. This is needed where extremes may not reflect the representative shared view of the church or alternatively if differing opinion may threaten future unity. The membership of the church in Myanmar appears to consistently demonstrate conservative but sometimes extreme views. This is true for abortion “is never an option for a Christian” persisting even if the pregnancy is due to rape, incest or is damaging to the mother. This community is least convinced that God created sexuality for unity in the marriage relationship as well as procreation. Sex education is seen to increase promiscuity when all other regions disagree. It is the group most strongly identifying extramarital sex as wrong, The CPUC Ilongo seem to disagree and this could identify a community that needs support in understanding how this undermines a marriage and family relationships. This same group which may have the youngest membership in terms of years in the church seems to be liberal in other areas such as acceptance of non-practicing homosexuals into church membership, yet clearly identifies homosexuality as wrong. It is unusual to observe one aberration to this pattern of Myanmar opinions. In this context Myanmar membership shows the least disagreement with accepting as not wrong consensual lifelong same sex partners. This is the

most liberal regional position. This variation in view point is likely culturally influenced as discussed earlier.

The previous discussion has offered some examples of how analysis of the differences observed may lead to strategy developments for gap resolution. Earlier studies (Strahan & Craig, 1995) have informed other regions and consultations with leaders responding to those outcomes may be of benefit. The further development of these and other ideas is the challenge this data and its analysis directs to professionals guiding church development, matching specific situations and localities. May it assist the contextualization of efforts made to accomplish the mission of the church.

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