

“They don’t preach that anymore!”

Sermons less commonly
preached by Adventist pastors

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

You may be surprised at what topics have not been covered in sermons in the last 12 months in some Seventh-day Adventist churches. We certainly were! Of course, it is not possible to preach on every topic in any given year. Pastors need to be selective. However, responses to the Global Adventist Pastors' Survey (GAPS) reveal that—alongside the regular appearance of expected topics—there were some surprising absences.

What were these absences, and how can the church meet the challenge of ensuring adequate coverage of key topics?

Most preached/least preached

In addition to asking how many topics participants had preached on in the previous year, the GAPS also asked pastors how frequently they preached on specific topics. Table 1 lists the topics preached on most frequently.¹

Many of the topics preached most frequently are important markers of Seventh-day Adventist identity. The Second Coming, the Sabbath, the three angels' messages, and the great controversy feature among the top 13 most preached topics.

Table 2 lists the topics preached less frequently. It is noteworthy that, for each of the topics listed

Table 1: Sermon topics preached most frequently in the last 12 months

PREACHING TOPIC	(% OF PARTICIPANTS)				
Number of times preached →	0	1–2	3–4	≥ 5	n=
The experience of salvation through Jesus	0.65%	11%	23%	66%	7065
The Second Coming	1.6%	16%	27%	55%	7012
The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus	1.1%	20%	33%	46%	7051
Stewardship	5.7%	23%	27%	43%	6961
An Old Testament passage other than the book of Daniel	2.2%	23%	34%	40%	7034
The Sabbath	4.6%	25%	30%	40%	7023
The miracles or parables of Jesus	3.5%	27%	32%	37%	7037
The Bible (e.g., inspiration, authority, etc.)	4.5%	29%	29%	37%	7048
The three angels' messages	6.9%	26%	31%	35%	7019
The Holy Spirit	4.9%	32%	30%	33%	7025
Paul's letters	5.5%	30%	32%	31%	7006
The prophecies of Daniel and/or Revelation	6.5%	30%	32%	31%	7022
The great controversy	6.0%	31%	33%	30%	6997

Table 2: Sermon topics preached less frequently in the last 12 months

PREACHING TOPIC	(% OF PARTICIPANTS)				
	0	1–2	3–4	≥ 5	n=
Number of times preached →					
The state of the dead	8.3%	32%	30%	29%	6997
Applying biblical principles to challenging cultural norms such as lying, cheating, and promiscuity	9.4%	34%	29%	27%	6964
Christian marriage	12%	33%	29%	25%	6955
Lifestyle standards	8.6%	35%	31%	24%	6970
The remnant	12%	34%	29%	24%	6962
Creation	9.5%	38%	28%	23%	6967
The Trinity	13%	39%	28%	19%	6992
The sanctuary and 1844	16%	39%	27%	18%	7014
The gift of prophecy	14%	39%	27%	18%	6987
The holistic Adventist health message	16%	42%	25%	16%	6977
Topics addressing local cultural beliefs and practices	19%	41%	24%	15%	6979
Adventist education	25%	42%	19%	12%	6961

here, these topics are not only preached less frequently but also have higher percentages of pastors who report that they have not preached on those topics in the last 12 months at all. The percentage of pastors not preaching on these topics ranges from 8 percent to 25 percent.

What should be made of these findings? Some results can be attributed to practical considerations. After all, depending on the nature of the pastoral assignment, a typical Adventist pastor in a local church preaches from 10 to 48 sermons on different topics in a year; some, besides preaching in a local church, hold evangelistic meetings. Given the number of topics available, no pastor, even pastors who preach more often than the typical pastor does, can preach on every topic that they would like.

Furthermore, though 25 percent of pastors reported that they had not preached on education in the last 12 months, perhaps the conference education director or the chaplain of a conference school preached on it, and the pastor did not see the need to repeat the topic. Similarly, there may be regular visiting speakers who address topics such as the gift of prophecy; so, again, the pastor sees no reason to repeat it that year.

Nevertheless, table 1 surprisingly indicates that 4.6 percent of Adventist preachers had not preached on the Sabbath in the last 12 months; 6.9 percent had not preached on the three angels' messages; 6 percent had not preached on the great controversy. And, according to table 2, another 8.3 percent had not preached on the state of the dead.

Such topics are central to the Adventist identity. Without regular preaching on these doctrines, there is a real danger of forgetting why we are Seventh-day Adventists. Furthermore, when anti-Trinitarian views are unsettling many, why was the doctrine of the Trinity not preached by 13 percent of pastors? Again, it might not be possible to cover every topic, every year, but one would expect these to be staple topics preached by Adventist ministers.

What is happening in your division?

Some topics, such as the experience of salvation through Jesus, are consistently preached in all parts of the worldwide church, as seen in figure 1.

Given the global nature of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, various topics are given more

Figure 1: Frequency of preaching on the “Experience of Salvation”

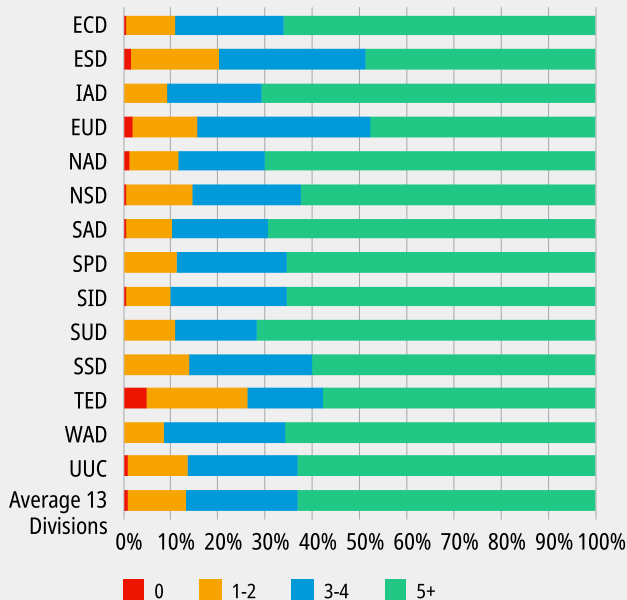
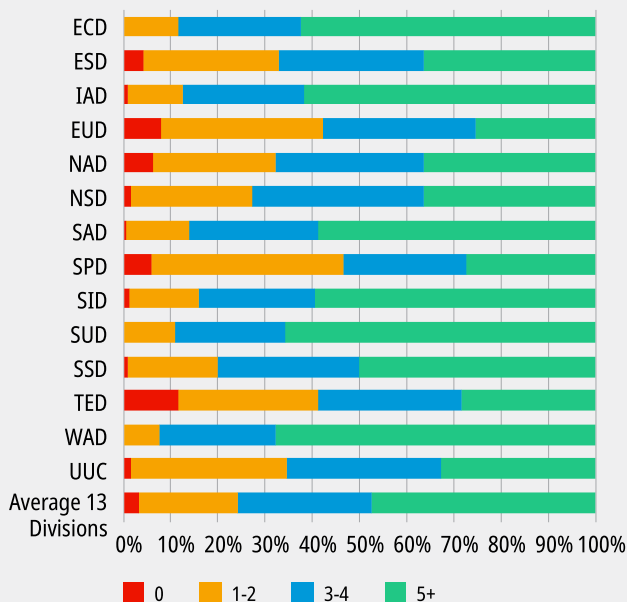
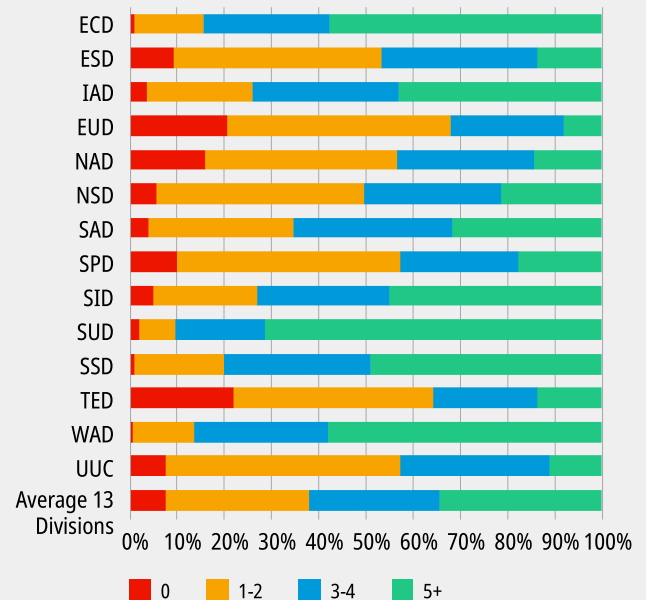


Figure 2: Frequency of preaching on “The Second Coming”



prominence in some divisions of the Adventist Church than in others. Curiously enough, though, the second coming of Jesus is preached more often in some parts of the church than in others, as seen in figure 2.

Figure 3: Frequency of preaching on “The Sabbath”



Notable variation exists in the number of times the Sabbath is the sermon topic among the divisions, as seen in figure 3.

Salvation and conversion

Ellen G. White urged preachers to “let the science of salvation be the burden of every sermon.”² In another place, she wrote, “Jesus is the living center of everything. Put Christ into every sermon.”³

The frequency with which this counsel was being followed was intended to be tested by the following item in the GAPS: Participants were asked to respond to the statement: “I try to include something on salvation and conversion in every sermon I preach [Q27].” In the survey, 76 percent of respondents strongly agreed, and a further 17 percent agreed more than disagreed (a total of 93 percent of respondents).

That 93 percent of Adventist pastors included in every sermon something on salvation and conversion is something to rejoice about. But does this mean that there is no longer any room for sermons on doctrine? Hardly. The church has flourished on the strength of theologically rich, Christ-centered sermons in which the full teachings of the church are presented in a meaningful and contextualized manner. If, for example, the focus on the Second Coming is lost, the church risks losing its sense of urgency in mission. If

Adventists lose the Sabbath, they risk losing their ability to rest in Christ, not just on Sabbath but every day of the week. Every teaching is linked, and every teaching builds on the truth of who Jesus is and what He has accomplished for us.

How the great truths of the church are taught will vary around the world. A preacher knows the teachings of the church but, at the same time, should also preach the Word—with the power to transform hearts and lead people to Christ—toward the culture where the pastor is located.

For example, the Sabbath message was so important to Jesus that He risked confrontation with the religious leaders of His day over how it should be observed (Matt. 12:1–14; John 5:1–18; 9:13–41). It is also central to the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, the Sabbath is preached differently in different countries. For Western society, the Sabbath may be presented in terms of ceasing work, breaking stress cycles, and rejecting consumerism for a day so as to join with family and friends in worship. In other parts of the world, it might be more about ceasing from heavy physical labor to find peace from toil and also for rejoicing in the salvation and grace of Christ, who supplies all our needs. It is the same doctrine but contextualized to the needs of people living in very different cultures and situations.

Practical suggestion

Clearly, one good way to be intentional in leading your church(es) is to make a sermon plan for each of your congregations. In fact, successful pastors have good sermonic plans. A good sermonic plan can be developed relatively quickly, and the doctrines can be presented by more than just the lead pastor. Elders, visiting speakers, and youth can also speak on the various predetermined themes, thereby ensuring a healthy spiritual diet for your church.

A plan can be created on paper, using a spreadsheet (such as Google Sheets or Microsoft Excel) or, where the internet is available, using ChatGPT, Meta.ai, Grok, Google Gemini, or your favorite AI program. (To get started, see the suggested prompt in the box.) Once you have a response from an AI program, you can use that as a resource to help you plan.

The key is to feed a balanced diet to your church over the course of a year. Your church leaders will love the planning, and it will broaden the depth of teaching.

ChatGPT/Meta.ai/Grok Prompt: I am a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, and I want you to create a sermon plan for the year based on the 28 fundamental beliefs. The sermonic plan must take into account special days, such as welcome back to school, Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day, Adventurer Day, Youth Day, Pathfinder Day, Creation Sabbath, World Day of Prayer, Heritage Day, and visitor days. For November to December, can you give me a mini-series on the magnificent Jesus, leading to a celebration of His life in early December, then counting down to Christmas and His glorious birth? There should also be a special mini-series that counts down to Easter focusing in on the glory of Jesus' sacrifice and glorious resurrection. Please tabulate results with the following columns: Date of Sabbath (2025), Series Title, Fundamental Belief or Theme, Creative Title, Key Verses, Special Day Focus.

Balance and depth

The data from the GAPS should make us all think about how to plan what we preach. A sermon plan is critical for doctrinal consistency and church growth. Balance and depth are the keys for all ages, adults and youth alike, in the church. The best sermons are not only culturally relevant but also theologically sound. They touch on our key doctrines. They find the answer to the felt needs of a congregation and do so by seeing its solution in the ministry of the Spirit and in the power of the Cross being applied in the lives of believers.



- 1 In the Global Adventist Pastors' Survey, the topics were presented in an order that largely follows the order they are found in the 28 *Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*. They were presented to the participants as follows: a. The experience of salvation through Jesus; b. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; c. The trinity; d. The Holy Spirit; e. The miracles or parables of Jesus; f. The Bible (e.g. inspiration, authority, etc.); g. The Sabbath; h. The state of the dead; i. Paul's letters; j. An Old Testament passage other than the book of Daniel; k. The prophecies of Daniel and/or Revelation; l. The sanctuary and 1844; m. The great controversy; n. The three angels' messages; o. The Second Coming; p. Creation; q. The remnant; r. The gift of prophecy; s. Topics addressing local cultural beliefs and practices; t. Adventist education; u. The wholistic Adventist health message; v. Stewardship; w. Christian marriage; x. Lifestyle standards; y. Applying biblical principles to challenging cultural norms such as lying, cheating, and promiscuity.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1915), 160.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 158.

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