



# Where are our Already Gone authors try to solve

Two-thirds.

That's the important figure at the heart of the 2009 book *Already Gone*; Why your kids will quit church and what you can do to stop it, co-authored by conservative Christian speaker Ken Ham and pollster Britt Beemer (with Todd Hillard).

*Already Gone* claims that of all the children sitting around you in the pews on Sunday, 60-plus percent of them will abandon their place on the benches within an alarmingly short amount of time. The book's findings are based on a survey the authors gave to 1000 formerly and currently church-going twenty-somethings. They were asked not only about their church-going habits (or lack thereof), but their beliefs (or lack thereof), as well as the reasons that those who are "already gone" dropped out of church in the first place.

The Canadian Lutheran sought out the opinions of three Lutherans on the book. Reader Judith Burns, parent and member of the ABC District Board of Directors, called *Already Gone* "one of the more challenging books I have read (in 2009)." Lori Schultz, a deacon and director of parish services in St. Catharines, Ontario, said that the book had some "startling conclusions" and "interesting inferences," while Pastor Terry Defoe of Mount Olive Lutheran Church in Regina seemed to take great interest in some of the points that Ham, et al., made with regard to the problem of youth dropping out of church, calling one particular passage a "helpful roadmap."

One of the main points Ham and company put forth in the book is the bitter irony that Sunday school itself is the reason that the kids are leaving the church, that current Sunday Schools are actually the cause of the children's eventual defection. Not only that, but the authors state that the children may have metaphorically left the church not in college, as common belief tends to dictate, but, rather, somewhere in the time between elementary and high school.

Pastor Defoe points out that "if we believe that we can

# young people?

## the exodus of youth from the church

by Jim Chliboyko

reach them in college, even in a Christian college, it turns out that that's far too late. Young people start leaving the church mentally long before they actually exit."

It doesn't end there. According to the research done for the book, Ham's team claims that former Sunday school students were more likely than people who never attended Sunday school to have doubts about the church's teachings--as well as the Bible itself--in spite of their years of Christian education.

But Sunday Schools are not alone responsible. Parents are also at fault, largely for foisting the entire responsibility for Christian education on that single hour before (or after) the Sunday service, while ignoring the other 160-some hours of the week. Says Schultz, "I once had a parent expressively 'remind' me that, as a church worker, it was my job to teach his children about God and give them Christian morals."

As for actual reasons why this chasm is forming, why the youth are calving off the berg of the church, the book says that there are several other factors at play, including what our youth see as their elders' and church leaders' general hypocrisy, as well as the dissonance that develops between what the church (specifically, the Bible) teaches about creation compared to what secular society believes.

Ham says that where most current Sunday schools go wrong is with the delivery of the lessons, on the storytelling itself, likening the current popular perception of Bible stories to fairy tales. He advocates God's Word is a true historical text.

Burns says, "This is where reading the book gets uncomfortable. Ken Ham suggests that because we tell Bible stories during Sunday school, the children learning them see them as equivalent to a fairy tale. Rather than giving an account of an historic event, we tend to have cartoon-like graphics and watered-down narratives of certain events. These "stories" are repeated on a two- or three-year cycle... Ken Ham argues that instead of teaching them the story of Noah and the ark, that we equip them to answer the questions that they are bound to face later in life about the (historical) reality of (the) worldwide Flood."

Adds Defoe, "Remember that the ground rules of science mean that science will not consider the supernatural, and therefore, what science can know about

this world and its origins, from a Christian point of view, will always be inadequate... For example, we can take issue with the fact that it leaves God out. We can take issue with the fact that it cannot explain how life began in the first place."

Defoe goes on to advocate not dismissing evolution, as Ham suggests, but studying the variety of views surrounding the competing theories of the development of life.

In further advocating his position, Ham says, "The Church and the Bible are no longer the places we go to learn historical science. The Church gave up that responsibility and relegated it to the world. We kept the spiritual things, the moral things and the relationships things. This

is what most preachers will preach about, but is it relevant? Do young people today make a connection if it isn't connected to physical reality? I don't think so."

As reader Schultz says, "Ham warns that when we allow such compartmentalisations, we begin to support the idea that Christianity is irrelevant."

But, the reviewers did find wisdom in the authors' findings.

Says Burns, "Initially, there might be some resistance on our part as members of Lutheran Church-Canada to think that our Sunday school program might fall into the category of needing a reformation, but upon reading the book, I have to conclude that on the basis of Ham's analysis, the criticisms are valid even for us."

Pastor Defoe adds, "Our young people want to know whether the Bible relates to the real world they live in every day. To our young people, it appears that schools teach "facts" while the church teaches "opinions."

### Review excerpt

Not once does Ken Ham suggest that being able to answer tough questions is a method of evangelism. Rather, he encourages us to give our young people a solid footing so children will know that even though we walk by faith, we do not have to discard intelligence to continue in the faith of our fathers.

Judith Burns



## Review excerpt

Our young people want to know whether the Bible relates to the real world they live in every day. To our young people, it appears that schools teach “facts” while the church teaches “opinions.” ... Confirmation programs in our churches are a tremendous resource—but these programs need new life. By the time confirmation rolls around, our young people already have strong opinions about the church and faith and the relationship between religion and science.

*Rev. Terry Defoe*

I believe that the confirmation programs in our churches are a tremendous resource—but these programs need new life.”

This is where the role of Sunday school as apologetics class comes in. The simple definition of the field of Christian apologetics is the defence of one’s faith. Ham and his team are particularly focused on the aspect of apologetics that focus on the Bible’s accuracy.

Burns says that, “Basically, Ken Ham is proposing that our Sunday schools become an arena for an apologetic for our faith. This is obviously easier said than done. It would take a total re-education of parents, youth leaders and Sunday school teachers. They would become the teachers of apologetics, rather than teachers of Bible stories.”

Defoe, too, mentions the apologetics angle. “Churches need to help Sunday school teachers to answer

the sceptical questions of young people and teach apologetics... It’s one thing to tell students what to believe, it’s another thing to teach and communicate that in a convincing and gripping way.”

There are other possible reasons for adjustment, as well.

“We need to remember that the main sources

of influence on our young people are their friends, their music and the media,” says Defoe. “We need to work diligently with these realities, not against them.”

However, the reviewers didn’t agree with everything that the authors brought up.

Schultz says that she differs from Ham in the alarmist tone he raises: “However, I am compelled to disagree with Ham on his following comment: ‘American Christianity could be on the edge of obsolescence in less than two generations.’ Given our state in original sin, following Christ could never become obsolete!”

Another one of the book’s issues is that Ham attempts to cover all the bases for all denominations by referring to them merely as Bible-focused. Schultz, for one, says, “It is important to note that, of the 1000 young adults interviewed, only 136 were Lutheran (and it is unclear from which synod they hail.) Many Lutheran readers might want to know more about how and who they classified as ‘Bible-believing congregations and Bible-preaching pastors.’”

## Review excerpt

We have abdicated instruction regarding the history of the universe (e.g., the study of geology, biology, astronomy, anthropology) to the secular world and chosen to focus solely on doctrine, “concentrating on the spiritual and moral aspects of Christianity.” Many of the “facts” being taught in conventional education contradict the truth of the Scriptures. Ham warns that when we allow such compartmentalizations, we begin to support the idea that Christianity is irrelevant. He notes a Church-wide shift in focus, where man’s ideas are used to interpret the Bible, rather than using Scripture to evaluate man’s ideas. Perhaps we need to evaluate what we do to help children, youth and young adults refute these claims.

*Deacon Lori Schultz*

Ultimately, though, the readers seemed to take something away from the read. Defoe writes, “Blaming is not helpful. Taking shared responsibility for finding solutions is. Ham calls for ‘a new reformation’ in the church—in other words, a reformation in the way we deal with our young people and their questions.”

Burns concludes by saying, “Even though this book may require a great deal of soul searching on our parts, it may well be one of the most important books we read on the subject of youth in our churches.”

Read the entire reviews at [www.canluthextra.ca](http://www.canluthextra.ca) where you can also comment what you read.

The book *Already Gone: Why Your Kids Will Quit Church and What You Can Do to Stop It* by Ken Ham, Britt Beemer, and Todd Hillard is available from most online booksellers and [www.answersingenesis.org](http://www.answersingenesis.org).

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# Listening to a younger voice

by Quinn Moerike

In the summer of 2009, Lutheran Church–Canada invited young people online to participate in a survey to help those who serve the church in leadership positions understand their attitudes toward their church. People who had attended youth gatherings and those who were members of LCC’s Facebook page received the invitation and were asked to share the link with others.

Not all who responded were ‘young adults.’ Of the 352 respondents, 49.4 percent were under the age of 35 and 60 percent female. Edmonton seminary student Quinn Moerike provided November’s Planning Conference with an overview of the survey, taking into account both the statistical information and numerous comments.

**T**he main thing we know is that these answers reflect those of people with Internet access who have been made aware of or been connected in some fashion to the web-presence of Lutheran Church–Canada which, though it is a good start, we must concede is a small presence much in line with our small synod.

A few over-arching themes are evident: most attend services weekly; most identify themselves as “Lutheran Christians;” most think that their faith is important in their daily life; most think that “hearing God’s Word” is the most important part of the Divine Service; most have some contact with people their own age at their church; most are very highly educated in comparison with the national average; most are either students or work full time; and we had a good mix of over/under 35 and male/female.

Something interesting to note is that the average respondent is highly educated. This stood out right away, as the numbers for the respondents are very high. The national average is “some 33 percent of women...held a university degree compared to 25 percent of men in 2006.” That is far less than the almost 57 percent this survey boasts for university graduates, with another 25 percent of respondents with some university or college.

The younger the respondent, the less important their faith became for them in day-to-day life and the more suspicious and wary of the Church they became. The above-35 crowd was almost universally happy with their present congregation, with some exceptions.

Also, the younger the respondent, the more angry they seemed to be with the congregation they had interacted with, and were often bewildered by the complexities of church life, doctrine, and even worship forms. Many felt ostracised by the Church as a whole, and felt they didn’t matter/were not being heard.

Some suggested courses of action were, of course, worship style changes, but also most interestingly, a fairly consistent call for youth/young adult Bible studies with people their own age and a means to be involved in the life of the congregation, like on boards or committees.

The younger a respondent, the more important unity in the externals seemed, even if people disagreed on points of doctrine, that disagreement was seen as un-Christian and unloving.

The older a respondent, the more likely they were militant in their beliefs, with worship forms being the main topic of consideration. Those asking for historic Liturgy tended towards the middle of the spectrum, with the very young and the over-35 crowd most in favour of “contemporary worship” forms. I should note here that though almost no one said that entertainment was their priority for the Divine Service, many complained about boring and irrelevant preaching and worship forms.

There is an immediately obvious and vast theological illiteracy, starting with the over-35 crowd who are theologically ignorant and militant, while the younger are illiterate and suspicious of all of this fighting over issues that, frankly, baffle them.

Fortunately, there was a large minority of theologically thoughtful respondents (from all sides of the issues), but the gap between them and the rest was so profound that one wonders if they would ever understand each other. It is likely they would perceive the other as not even speaking the same language when it came to matters of the faith.

Sadly, there is vast division in the respondents, with multiple condemnations from all sides of the issues for the other sides, usually in the form of thinly veiled insults questioning the faith or faithfulness of the “other” Christians. The vast differences in practice (perhaps theology) confuse and scare the people growing up in the Church as they do not understand why there is so much difference and anger or infighting over what they usually perceive to be external and unimportant issues.

Finally, two groups are at most risk for leaving the church and feeling left out: young adults and young parents. Both feel there is nothing for them; young parents feel they cannot be part of the worshipping community as they have to care for their children and feel like they are looked down upon if their children make noise or are not perfectly behaved during the Divine Service, which makes them reticent to come at all. The young adults perceive they are not valued and “left out” when the focus of a congregation is on the seniors and the youth, with nothing left for them.

Overall, two major factors are at play. One, our biblically illiterate and secular culture. And two, relationships between youth and adults which play the most determinative factor regarding their loyalty to, enjoyment of, and willingness to participate in congregational life. There is little we can do about the first trend, but we can address the second with Christian love, patience, care and even things as simple as courtesy and manners. And that is valuable information indeed.