

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Chapter IV will be divided into four parts. In the first part, general findings from the survey will be presented. In the second, the findings from rural churches and from urban churches will be compared. In the third, the findings from smaller (<99) and larger churches (>100) will be compared. In the second and third parts only those findings reflecting the most variability will be reported. The fourth part of this chapter will cover the opinions of thirty pastors from the interviews conducted to gain more information about research questions five, six, nine, and ten. Each part is summarized in a conclusion. A comprehensive summary concludes the chapter.

Overview of Research

This study sought information to develop a profile of the Costa Rican evangelical pastor in the areas of their lives and ministry environments. Data were collected to determine:

1. What is the background profile of the pastor?

Research questions one to four dealt with this problem.

2. What are the parameters of the pastor's ministry environment?

Research questions five dealt with this problem.

3. What is the profile of the churches where the pastors are serving?

Research questions six to eight dealt with this problem.

4. What is the relationship between the church and the general populace?

Research questions nine to twelve dealt with this problem.

Introduction

Between November 1997 and March 1998, 1,580 questionnaires were distributed to the ten largest Evangelical church associations and in meetings of the Evangelical Alliance of Costa Rica (FAEC). Of these, 431 (27.7%) completed questionnaires were returned. Based on the estimate of 2,300 Evangelical churches from Chapter I, this study sampled 18.7% of the churches in Costa Rica.

The ten church associations targeted for the study came from the *1986 Directorio de Iglesias, Organizaciones y Ministerios del Movimiento Protestante: Costa Rica*. Table 4.1 presents these denominations (and others) with their respective number of churches in 1986 and 1997, as well as the number of questionnaires collected and the percentage of churches represented according to the 1997 total number of churches. The final column represents the percent of questionnaires that each denomination contributed to the overall study.

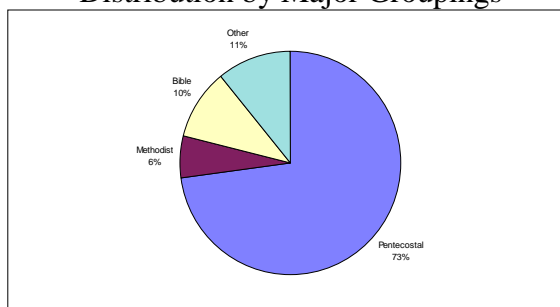
Table 4.1
Denominational Participation

Code	Denomination	1986 No. of churches	1997 No. of churches	Questionnaire s Received f.	Churches Represented %	Survey Total %
IDEC	Full Gospel Church	502	280	117	42	27.0
ACAD	Assembly of God	295	350	44	13	10.0
IDCUADRN	Foursquare Church	105	77	24	31	5.6
AIBC	Bible Church	77	116	44	38	10.0
AISP	Pentecostal Holiness	76	78	20	26	4.6
AECA	Central America Mission Church	64	70	6	9	1.4
AIEMCR	Methodist	61	70	26	37	6.0
AIDPCR	Pentecostal Church of God	45	120	24	20	5.6
ACIENA	National Evangelical Church	43	50	19	38	4.4
AICC	Christian Church	36	20	4	20	1.0
AICPCR	Christian Pentecostal Movement (MMM)	36	120	20	17	4.6
AINAZ	Nazarene Church	30	33	3	9	0.7
AIMCR	Mennonite	16	18	3	17	0.7
	Other			80		18.4
	Totals			431		100.0

Part 1 - General Background

Of the 431 questionnaires collected, the majority (73%) were from Pentecostal churches, forty-four (10%) were from Bible churches, twenty-six (6%) from Methodist churches, and forty-six (11%) from some other church family. These data indicate that pastors from a Pentecostal church background participated heavily in this study (c.f. Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1
Denominational Participation Distribution
Distribution by Major Groupings



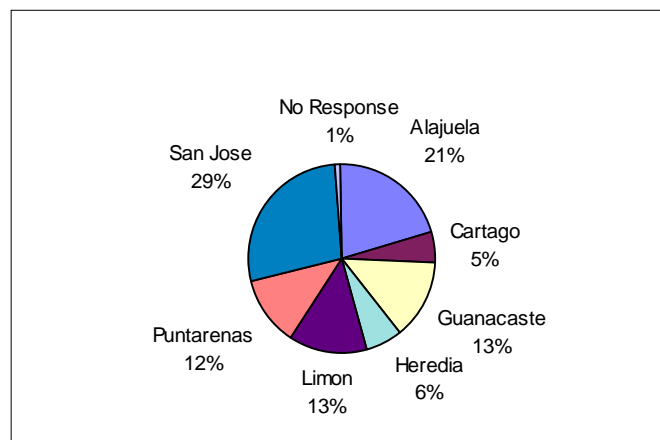
Of the seven provinces of Costa Rica the province of San Jose displays the greatest participation in the study, representing 29% of the returned questionnaires. This is the province where the Greater Metropolitan Area is located. Other than the province of San Jose, all other provinces are rural. The province with the second highest number of participants is Alajuela (21% of responses). The province with the least representation was Cartago with twenty-two (22) returned questionnaires (5% of responses). Geographical distribution of the pastors participating in the study is presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2
Denominational Participation by Province
(n = 431)

Province	urveys	Survey Total %
Alajuela	90	21
Cartago	22	5
Guanacaste	57	13
Heredia	27	6
Limon	58	13
Puntarenas	51	12
San Jose	121	29
No Answer	5	1
Totals	431	100%

In graph form the information presented in Table 4.2 shows the proportion of participation in this study by the province (cf. Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2
Survey Distribution by Province



Ministry Realities

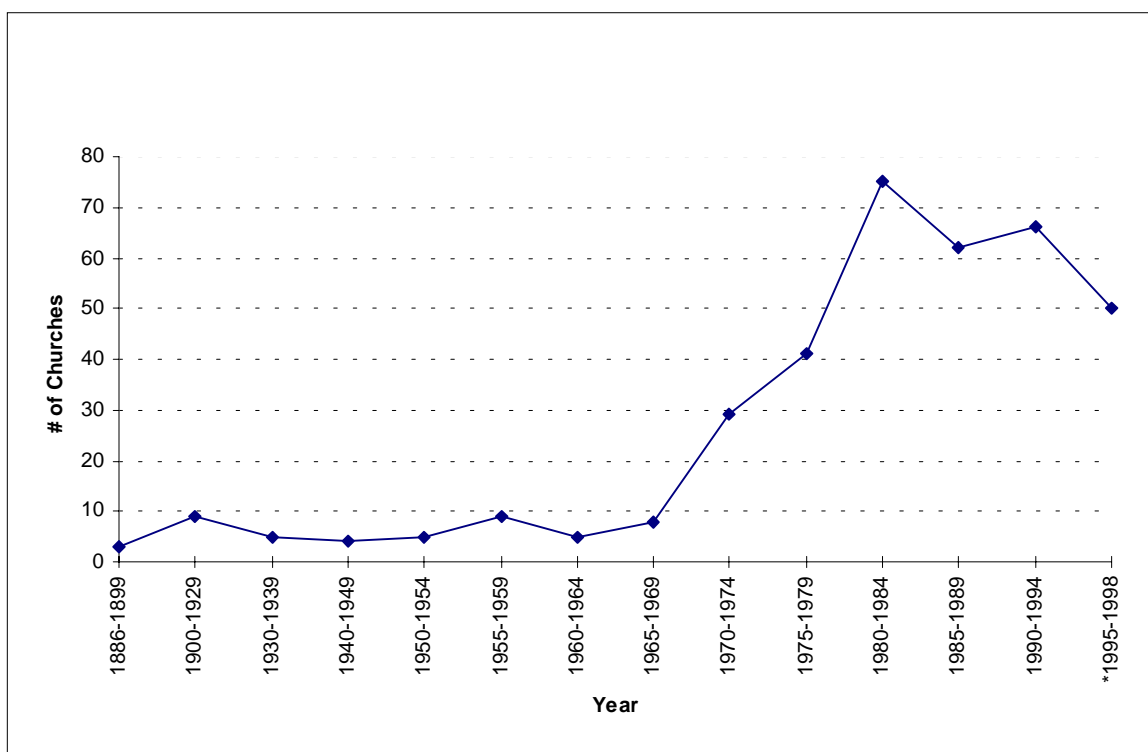
To develop a comprehensive view of which ministry realities the pastors faced in their work it is important to understand the churches and communities the pastors work in (RQ 6 -12). Questions for the survey instrument were formulated around two areas: (1) a profile of the churches and (2) the relationship between the general population and the church. Research questions six through eight (RQ 6 - 8) dealt with the first area and research questions nine through twelve (RQ 9 - 12) dealt with the second.

To develop a profile of the churches, questions were asked about the location, age, denomination, attendance, programs, and ministry areas of the church. Ministry areas surveyed were evangelistic strategy, a discipleship program, and the missionary vision of the church. In this part, data related to developing a church profile will be presented first and then information about ministry areas.

The churches in the survey ranged from 1 to 107 years in age with a mean age of 19 years. The oldest church in the study was the Central American Mission church founded in 1891.

Evangelical churches in Costa Rica experienced tremendous growth in a period beginning in 1970 and ending about 1984. Before 1970 there was about five point three (5.3) of the churches in this group of 361 churches were planted annually. The number of churches planted annually began to rise in 1970 to a peak of seventy-five-point-eight (75.8) churches from this group planted in 1984. From 1985 to 1998 the number of churches started has declined to 65.2 in 1998 . These data indicate that the number of new churches planted since 1984 continues to be significantly higher than that before 1970, though the number has subsided by about ten churches per year since its peak in the years 1980 to 1984 (see Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3
Years when Churches were Established
(n = 361)

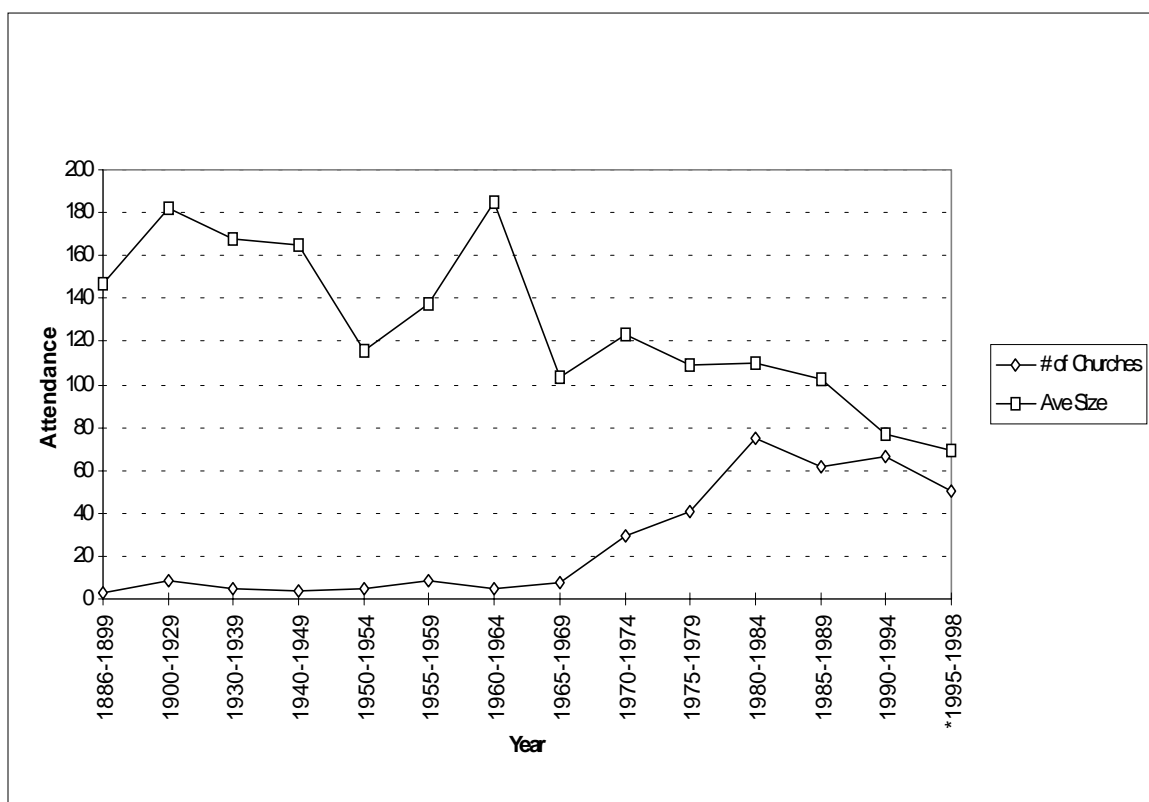


* figure is factored for five-year equivalency

Average Sunday attendance for all Costa Rican evangelical churches was calculated to be 99 people. Of those attending, 28% were men, 40% were women, and 32% were children. An average of twenty people (20% of Sunday attendance) work with the pastor in a leadership capacity (i.e. elders, Sunday school teachers, ministry leaders) in the programs of the church. Women would seem to play a proportionately more important role than men in the life of the Costa Rican evangelical church and hence, in the work of the pastors. That 20% of the people are involved, with the pastor, in the leadership of the church is encouraging and demonstrates a high level of shared responsibilities in the growth of the church.

To determine how the age of the churches related to the current size of the congregation, the research data on the year the church began were compared with the attendance figures provided by the respondents. It was found that the year of founding is negatively correlated to attendance, i.e. that younger churches are more likely to be smaller than older churches. The average attendance in churches planted in or prior to 1964 is 157 people. Churches planted between 1965 through 1989 are currently averaging 109 people attending and people attending newly planted churches (1990 through 1998) have an average attendance of 73 people. These data show a definite tendency that older, established churches tend to have higher average attendance and that newer churches tend to have lower attendance (see Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4
Number of Churches vs. Average Size
(n = 361)



*figure is factored for five-year equivalency

In order to construct a good profile of the Costa Rican evangelical church the basic statistics of location, age and attendance, information is also needed regarding the programs and activities go on in the church

When asked if their church had an evangelistic plan, 349 (80.9%) of the pastors responded affirmatively. The other 82 (9.1%) said no or did not reply. The most frequently used words to describe their evangelistic plan were “personal evangelism” (f.= 65), house-to-house visitation (f.= 57), evangelistic campaigns (f.= 37), open air services (f.= 33), and family groups (f.= 18). The only formal North American evangelistic plan referred to was *Evangelism Explosion*, mentioned by four pastors.

Closely related to evangelism is the need to disciple the people in the church. The

question of a discipleship plan for the churches was dealt with in the survey instrument with a open-response item. Three hundred twenty-three (n = 323) pastors responded to this item. Most (f. = 95 or 29.4%) answered that they have some type of discipleship class or cell group. While not many specified where the classes are held, there were several (f.= 17) that indicated that discipleship was going on in the homes of the families. Rarely (f.= 4) were institutions mentioned as forming part of the discipleship plan of a church. More often (f.= 25 or 7.7%) specific programs of discipleship were mentioned with *SEAN* accounting for 23 of the 25 program responses. Some pastors (f.= 8 or 2.5%) said that programs were “in progress,” while 44 pastors (13.6%) admitted they had no discipleship program.

Missionary involvement by the church is an important area to determine how much the church has an outward vision toward the world and is not just oriented toward its own communities or nation. While the definition used to formulate the questions about mission involvement in the questionnaire revolved around sending a missionary outside of the country for one year or more, it was important to collect data from the pastors themselves as to what their definition of “missions” was. For this reason an open-response item asking for the pastors to describe their missionary vision was necessary.

Many pastors (f.= 330 or 76.6%) responded when asked to explain their missionary vision. Many of the responses were too vague to be classified into any meaningful categories. Some pastors simply replied “yes,” others wrote “we help missionaries,” and still others wrote phrases like “to reach the world for Christ.” While these phrases show an enthusiasm for missions they could not be used to construct any meaningful data about the mission worldview of Costa Rican evangelical pastors. In

looking over the other responses, two kinds of responses were received. One group of respondents employed phrases to *describe* their missionary vision, while the second group identified *where* their missionary vision is focused. In the first group there were 96 responses (29.0%). In the second group there were 83 responses (25.1%).

By far the most common phrase used to describe the pastor's missionary vision was in the area of supporting missionaries through financial giving. This accounted for 38 responses (11.5%). The next most common phrase came from those pastors who admitted to having no missionary vision (f.= 20 or 6.1%). Other pastors had a vision to engage in missionary training in their churches (f.= 19 or 5.7%), and another 2.1% (f.= 7) said their missionary vision was to send people to plant churches. Less than one percent (0.9%) mentioned that they were targeting their leaders for missionary training.

In the second group, the majority of the pastors (14.2%) mentioned that their missionary vision was focused on reaching Costa Rica. A substantial 8.5% said that their missionary vision was outside of Costa Rica, on the nations of the world. Two point four percent (2.4%) of the answers indicated that there was both a national and international perspective to their missionary vision.

Three hundred eighty-three (n = 383) or 88.9% of the pastors answered the question in the survey instrument asking if their church had participated in sending a missionary to another country for more than one year. Interestingly, 81.7% of the pastors responded that their churches had helped send a missionary. It should be noted that there was no specification as to when the missionary had been sent (i.e. within the last year, five years, or ten years).

Perhaps more revealing regarding the actual state of missions in Costa Rica is the

next item which asked for the number of missionaries the respondents' church is currently supporting outside of Costa Rica. In contrast to the 383 pastors answering the item about helping to send missionaries only 109 (25.3%) pastors responded to the item regarding the number of their missionaries currently outside of Costa Rica. Table 4.3 shows the number of missionaries being supported.

Table 4.3
Missionaries Currently being Supported
(n = 109)

No. of Missionaries being supported by churches	Responses (f.)	Responses %
0	57	52.3
1	12	11.0
2	6	5.5
3	5	4.6
4	5	4.6
5	1	0.9
6	2	1.8
7	17	15.6
8+	4	3.6
Total	109	100.0

In response to these items, 47.7% of the pastors responding indicated their church is currently involved in supporting one or more missionaries outside of the country. If we compare the number of responses to the total database (f.= 431), however, the percentage drops to 12.1%.

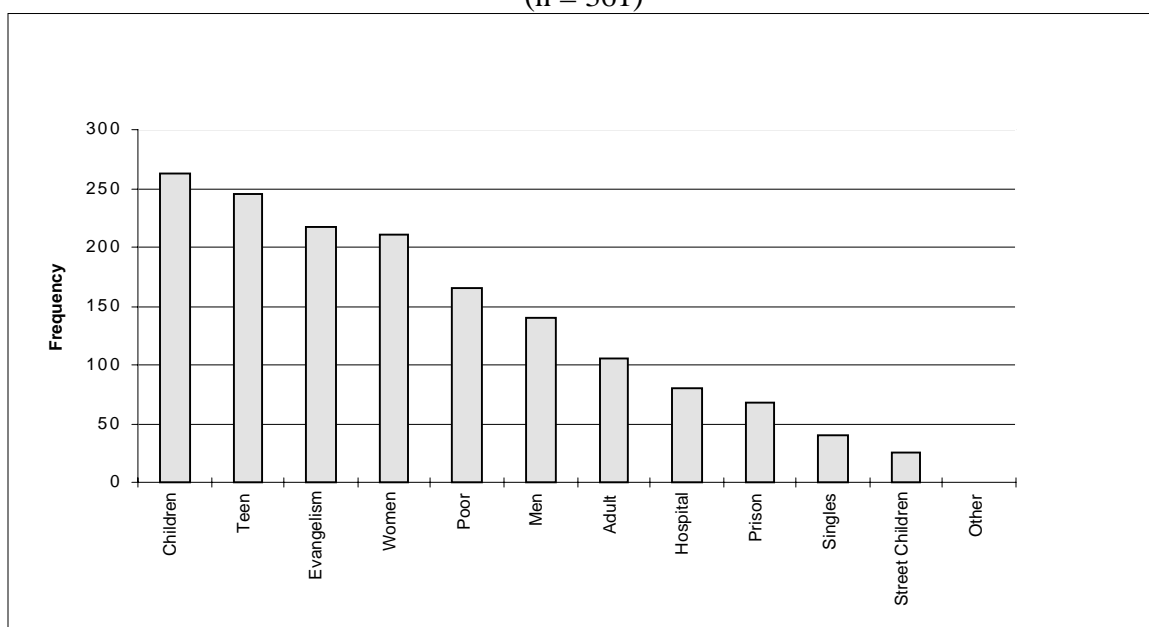
Progress in the area of missionary awareness and the missionary responsibility of the Costa Rican evangelical pastor is strong. The fact that most missionary vision is focused on Costa Rica should not be too surprising in light of the tremendous church growth that has occurred since 1970. It would be hoped that this church growth could be

translated into a broader international missionary vision among the pastors as well.

Other ministry programs commonly reported by the pastors are directed toward children (f.= 263), youth (f.= 246), evangelism (f.= 218), and women (f.= 211). Ministries to the poor (f.= 165), men (f.= 140), and adults (f.= 105) also were common. Programs that were less frequently mentioned included hospital visitation (f.= 80), prison ministries (f.= 68), ministries for singles (f.= 40), and street children (f.= 25).

It would seem from these data that the pastor's first priority for church programs are centered on meeting the needs of people within the church. While the research indicates that ministry to children, youth, and women are strong there seems to be a lack of programs that minister to the needs of men. Also, except for the an emphasis on evangelism, there seems to be a deficiency of programs to meet the needs of special groups such as prisoners, singles, and street children (see Figure 4.5).

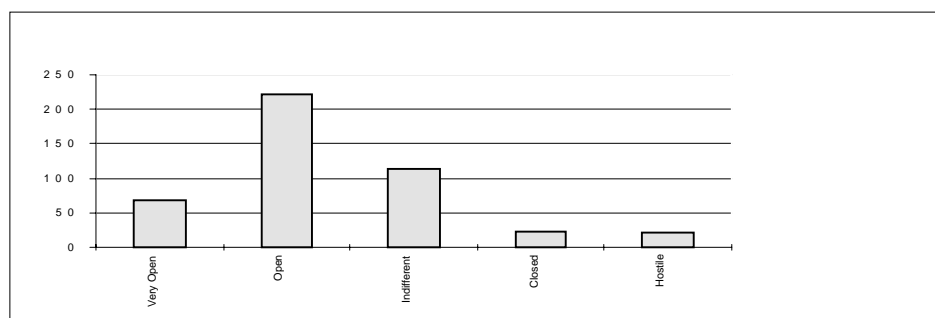
Figure 4.5
Ministries in Churches
(n = 361)



This study also sought information about the relationship of the church with the

general population (RQ 9). When pastors were asked to describe the attitude of people living in their area to the gospel, most said that the communities were “very open” to “open” (64.9%). Few said that their communities were “closed” or “hostile” (9.8%). Some (25.3%) said their communities were “indifferent.”

Figure 4.6
Community Openness
(n = 410)

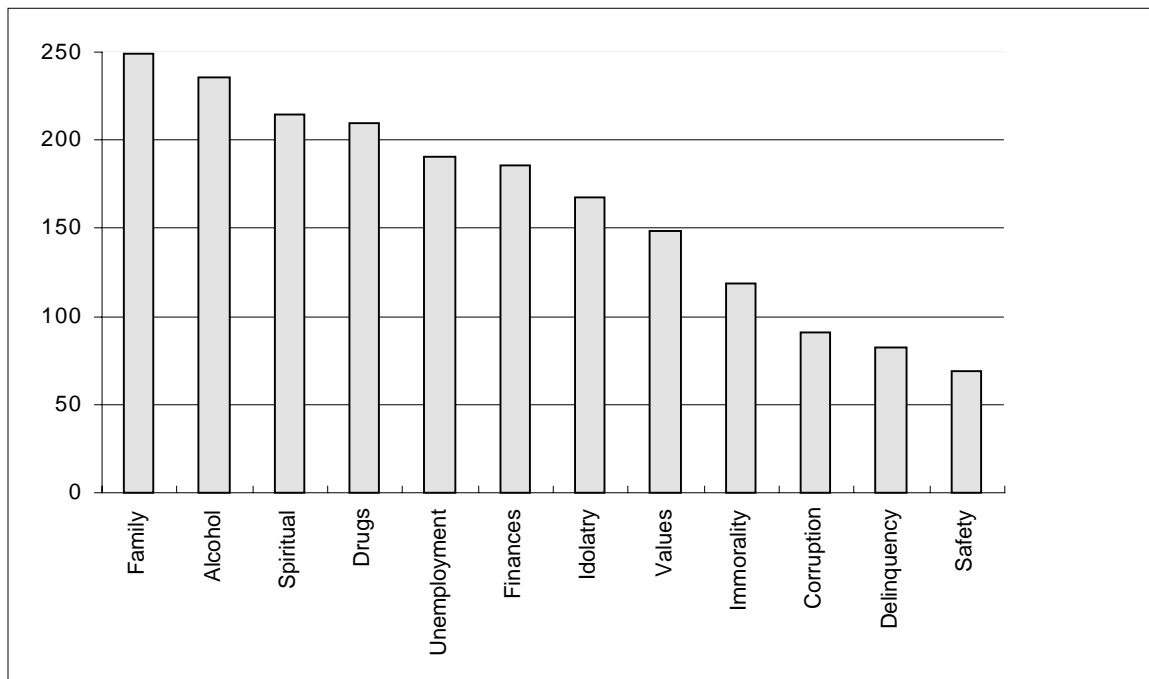


Important to the development of a profile of pastors is their perception that they understand the problems of the community. Data gathered in the research indicated that 72.2 % (f.= 293) of pastors feel they know the community’s problems, only 7.4% (f.= 30) said they do not, and 20.4% (f.= 83) said they only knew a little bit.

Pastoral responses indicated that the principal problems in their communities were related to the family (f.= 249). Family problems would be situations that arise from relationship issues within the family itself such as spousal abuse and child abuse. Alcohol-related problems were second (f.= 236) while the communities’ spiritual needs were third (f.= 215). Drugs (f.= 210) was the fourth most frequently perceived problem followed by unemployment (f.= 191). Among the lesser community problems, according to the pastors, were corruption (f.= 91), delinquency (f.= 82) and public safety (f.= 69).

Figure 4.7

Community Problems
(n = 424)

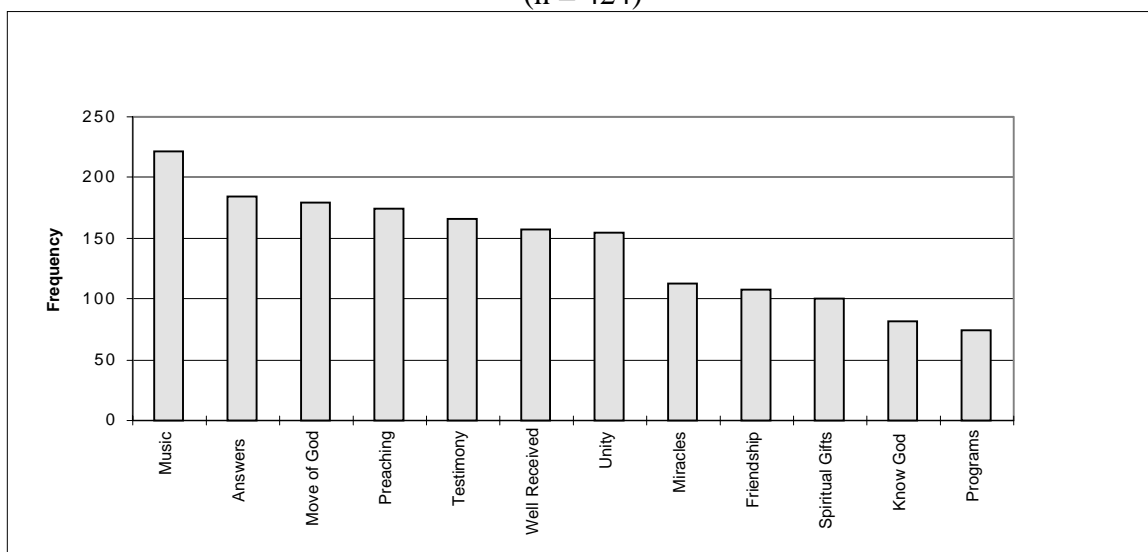


The majority of pastors (84.5%) reported that they had some contact with their community, but 15.5% admitted that they had none. Answers given in an open-ended item, indicate that most contact with the community comes through evangelistic events, i.e. open-air services and campaigns (f.= 81). Nevertheless, helping with local schools (f.= 41) and engaging in social projects (f.= 38) also were mentioned. Several (f.= 8), reported having members of their congregations participate on community committees. Most of the pastors (72%) felt that they knew what problems affected their communities, but a significant 28% felt they knew nothing or very little in this regard. While most pastors are in touch with their communities through evangelistic events, there seems to be more that they could do in order to become involved in the other facets of the life of their communities.

The research also sought to determine how the evangelical church is perceived by its members and outsiders. In the survey instrument three items sought to derive an answer to this query. One dealt with the reasons pastors felt people were attracted to the evangelical church, another with what kept people away, and a third about the reasons evangelicals leave.

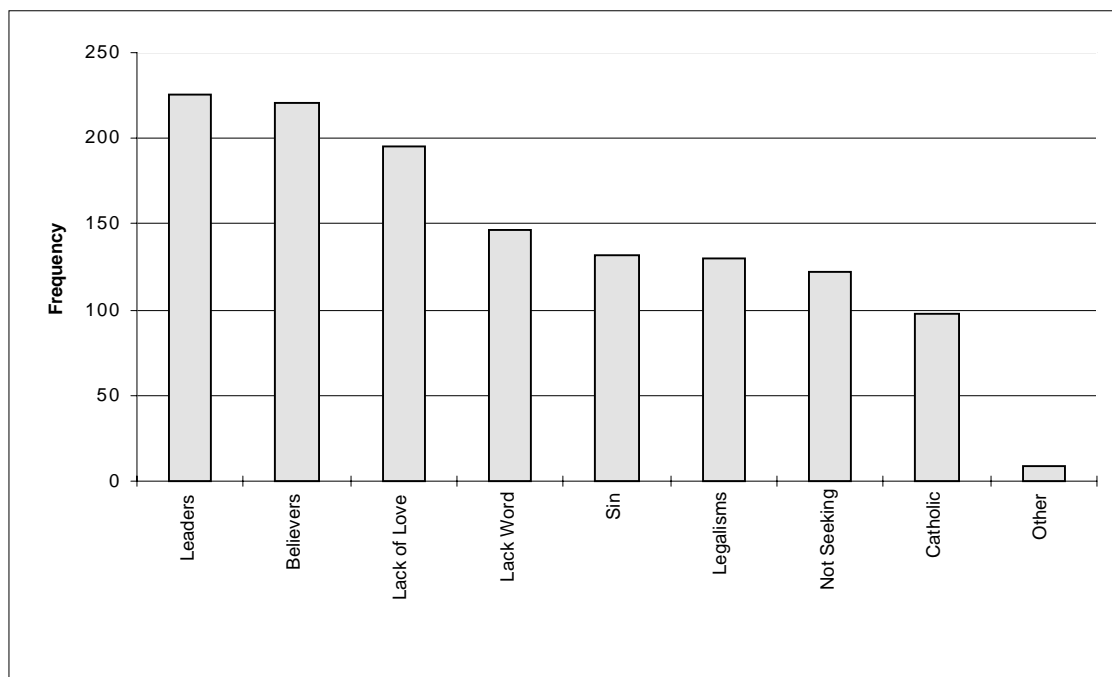
The pastors felt that the three top things that attracted people to the evangelical churches were the music (f.= 222), that the church offered something to the people who were seeking answers to life's problems (f.= 184) and "a move of God" (f.= 180). (According to one pastor a move of God is when the visitor feels that he or she has been transported into the presence of God through the music and message, and has been emotionally touched). The three least-frequently marked reasons for people being attracted to Evangelical churches were the presence of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (f.= 100), the opportunity to know more about God (f.= 82) and the programs that the church offered (f.= 74) (cf. Figure 4.8).

Figure 4.8
What Attracts
(n = 424)



Interestingly, when asked to identify factors that kept people away from evangelical churches, pastors were quick to mark the bad example of leaders (pastors and others) (f.= 226) and the bad examples of believers (f.= 221) as the most important factors. A third reason they cited was a lack of love and attention (f.= 195). Among the least marked responses were legalisms (f.= 130), their perception that the people were not seeking God (f.= 122), and that the people were too committed to the Catholic church (f.= 98). Clearly, pastors have a clear understanding of their position in the church as role models, as well as a need that there be adequate love and attention to their flocks, if they are to attract more people into their churches. At the same time, they do not feel that legalisms, nor the commitment to the Roman Catholic church on the part of the general population as threats to their being able to attract new people (see Figure 4.9).

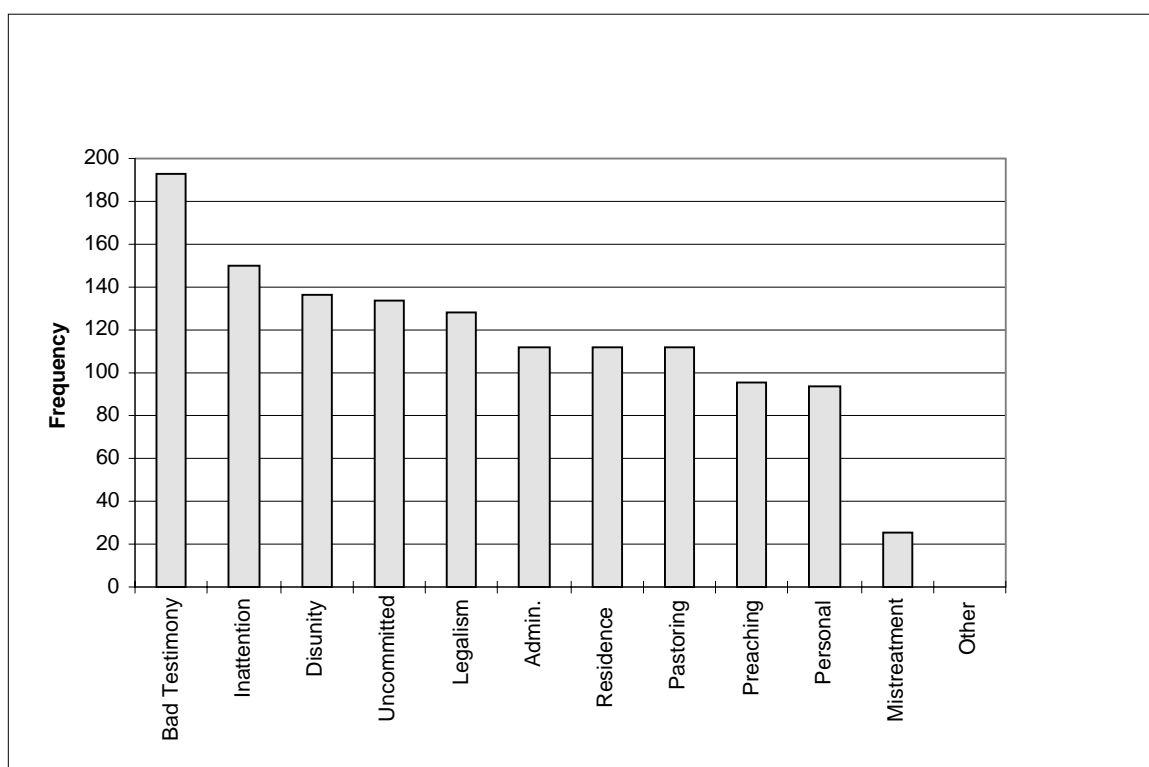
Figure 4.9
What Repels Unbelievers
(n = 418)



When asked to respond as to why they felt that evangelicals were leaving the

evangelical church, pastors cited the bad testimony of the believers as the principal cause (f.= 193), a lack of attention/discipleship (f.= 150), and lack of unity (f.= 136), as the other two reasons. On the other hand, such choices as lack of pastoring (f.= 112), and bad administration of the church finances (f.= 112) were lower on the list. The options with the fewest responses were “poor teaching” (f.= 95), “bad personal conduct” (f.= 94), and “mistreatment or disrespect for the person” (f.= 25). While placing most of the blame for people leaving churches on the bad testimony of believers, the pastors also recognized that a lack of discipling also plays an important role in church desertion.

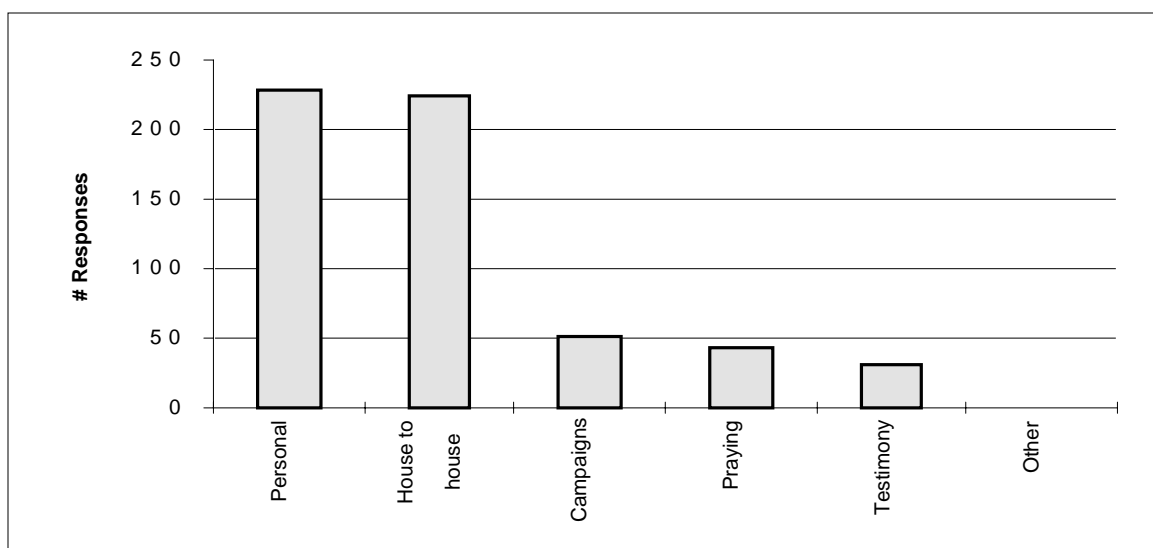
Figure 4.10
Why Evangelicals Leave
(n = 420)



Information on what pastors felt was the most effective method of evangelism was one of the areas of query presented in the survey (RQ 12). By far, person-to-person

evangelism (f.= 229) and house-to-house evangelism (f.= 225) were seen as the best ways to reach people with the gospel. Campaigns (f.= 51), praying for people (f.= 43), and preaching in the streets (f.= 31) were seen as the least effective. In the open responses, it was clear that evangelism carried out in an intimate person-to-person (i.e. friendship evangelism) context was by far the most effective way that pastors felt people were being evangelized. This is congruent with responses regarding what kind of evangelistic plans the churches preferred; the two phrases written in most often were “personal evangelism” and “visitation.” Interestingly, campaigns and testifying in the streets were ranked as the least effective methods to evangelize. Nevertheless, respondents reported that cooperation between churches for such events is widely practiced by the churches.

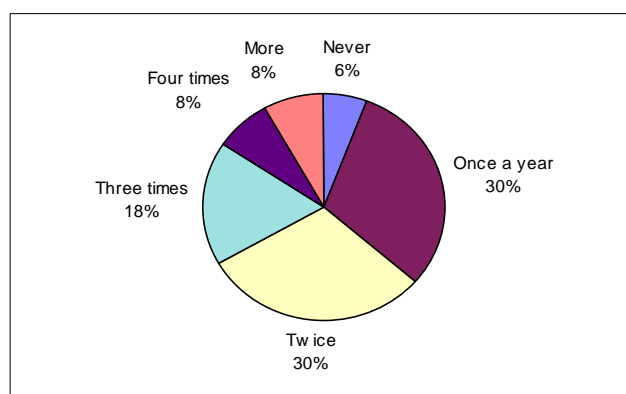
Table 4.11
Evangelistic Methods
(n = 404)



Evangelical churches are very active in terms of the frequency of their evangelistic events to reach their communities. A majority of churches (63.8%) hold two or more

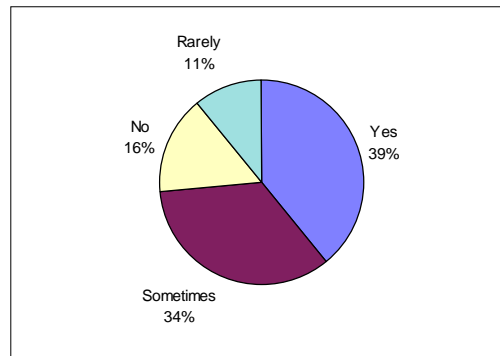
evangelistic events a year. Three or more annual events are common (33.3%) while some churches (15.5%) have four or more events a year. A few churches even have weekly and monthly events, but this is rare. Only 5.7% of the pastors indicated that they have no evangelistic events. Clearly the Costa Rican evangelical churches are aggressive in proclaiming the Gospel to their communities (see Figure 4:12).

Figure 4.12
Frequency of Evangelistic Events
(n = 389)



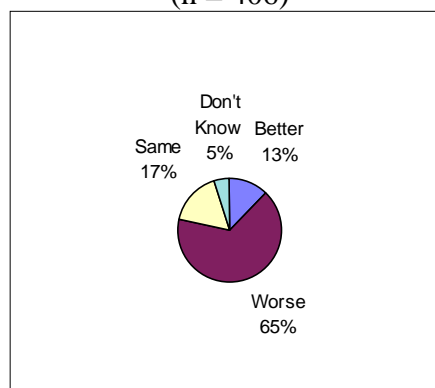
Not only are the churches aggressive, the survey showed that many times churches cooperate together in evangelistic events. Forty-one point three percent (41.3%) of the pastors marked “yes” on the response choices to indicate their interest in cooperating with other churches while 34% marked “at times.” “Rarely” was marked 10.6% while “no or never” was mentioned by only by 14.1% of the pastors. Grouped into categories we see that 75.3% of the pastors will, at times, cooperate with other churches in evangelistic events while only 24.7% of pastors rarely or never will. This demonstrates that there is a high degree of unity, cooperation, and trust among the pastors.

Figure 4.13
Willingness to Cooperate in Evangelism
(n = 401)



The pastor's perception of the moral and ethical condition of the country drew a good number of responses. Four hundred eight (408) (95%) of the 431 pastors returned responses to this item. Most pastors (66%) felt that Costa Rica was worse off now than in the past. Only 17% thought that the country was "the same" and even fewer (12.5%) thought the country was better now than in the past. Clearly the pastors feel that there has been a loss of morals and values in Costa Rica which may be part of the reason for their aggressive work in evangelism.

Figure 4.14
Moral Status of the Country
(n = 406)



A profile of the Costa Rican evangelical churches based on the information presented in an earlier chapter and reflected in the findings of this study reveals the following characteristics:

- There are an estimated 2,300 churches.
- The average church is 19 years old.
- The number of evangelical churches increases by 2.7% per annum.
- 73% of the churches are Pentecostal.
- The average church has a Sunday attendance of 99 people, consisting of about 28 men, 40 women, and 32 children.
- 20% of a congregation is involved in the leadership of the church.
- Currently, 65.2 churches are being planted per year.
- 90.1% of the churches have an evangelistic plan but only 29% have a discipleship plan.
- The missionary vision of the church is mostly focused on church planting efforts in Costa Rica.
- 81.7% of the churches have helped to send a missionary for more than one year outside of the country sometime in the past, but only 12.3% are currently supporting any missionary.
- Evangelism is the most common ministry found in the church.
- Other church programs are principally for children, teens, and women.
- There are few ministries for street children and single adults.

Regarding the churches' relationship to their communities it has been discovered that:

- 64.9% of the pastors described their communities as “very open” to “open.”
- The worst community problems are seen as those related to the family, alcohol, and spiritual issues.

- Music and the search for answers to personal problems are perceived to be the two main reasons people are attracted to the evangelical churches.
- Church programs, a desire to know God and the gifts of Holy Spirit are the three least compelling reasons why people are attracted to the evangelical churches.
- The bad example of leaders and the bad example of believers are recognized as the two reasons why people stay away from evangelical churches.
- Most people who quit attending evangelical churches are perceived to do so because of the testimony of believers and because of a lack of discipling.
- Person-to-person and house-to-house visitation are recognized as the two most effective evangelism methods used to draw new people into the churches.
- Most churches (63.8%) have two or more evangelistic events a year.
- 75.3% of the pastors reported that their churches are open to cooperating with one another in evangelism events.
- Most pastors (66%) feel that Costa Rica is in worse moral condition now than in the past.

This information helps to construct a profile of the churches, the communities where they are located, and the characteristics of the relationship between the churches and their communities giving us a clearer picture of the ministry realities within which Costa Rican evangelical pastors minister. The following data will help us to construct a profile of the pastor as a person.