



**Youth Ministry & Resource Material Study
of the
African American Church**

Conducted for The
AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY
in May-June 1996

Survey Design and Tabulation by
Bruno and RIDGEWAY Associates, Inc.

Research Conducted and Analysis by
New Developing Markets
American Bible Society
Charles H. Smith, Asst. Director

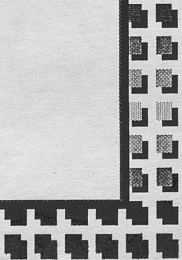
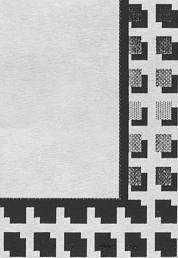




TABLE OF CONTENTS

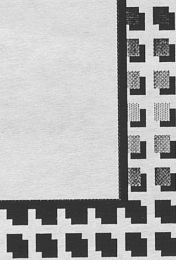
■ The Purpose.....	1
■ The Methods.....	2
■ The Sample Size.....	2
■ The Scope of Research.....	2
■ Findings.....	3
– Resource Material Topic Interest.....	3
– Current and Planned Ministries.....	3
– Institutional Resource Tools and Program Interest.....	4
– Bible Translation Preferences -- Bible Access to Youth.....	4
– Marketing Implications: Product, Price, Place, Promotion...	5
■ Summary Analysis.....	7





APPENDICES

■ Table 1: Thematic Topic Interest.....	8
■ Table 2: Group with Greatest Needs Now.....	7
■ Table 3: Interest in Resources for the Urban Challenge.....	10
■ Table 4: Bible Translations Being Used.....	11
■ Table 5: Mediums Currently Used.....	12
■ Table 6: Unit Price of Bibles, Music Cassettes, CD-ROM.....	13
■ Table 7: Where Products are Purchased.....	14
■ Table 8: Churches: Location.....	15
■ Table 9: Respondents' Church Affiliation.....	16
■ Table 10: Weekly Worship Attendance.....	17
■ Table 11: Congregational Age Span Profile/Respondents' Age & Sex	18





The Purpose

- To explore the market potential for developing Bible and Scripture resource materials and tools for use among pre-teens, teenage youth and young adults in African American churches.
- To research church leaderships' assessment of the needs/wants of this large segment of their congregation. Youth views of this segment were expressed in an independent qualitative research project recently completed.
- To obtain information on current Bible translation usage and attitudes towards using the CEV for their youth membership.
- To identify additional consumer Bible support needs, purchasing patterns, institutional demographics and attitudes toward resource mediums. This information is needed so that ABS can build products in response to the customer and at the same time build an effective business and marketing plan.



The Methods

This was a self-administered questionnaire conducted at a professional church leadership conference in May and June 1996. Interviewing was conducted using a six-page questionnaire.

The Sample Size

A total of 1203 completed and usable surveys were returned. An additional six hundred surveys taken at the National Baptist Congress of Christian Education are not reflected in the enclosed data. However, after a cursory review, the answers further reflect the findings of this group. It should be noted that 79% of the respondents were Baptist with less representation from Methodist and Pentecostals as national memberships may suggest. However, due to response pattern consistencies, it is doubtful that the results are skewed to any appreciable degree.

The Scope of the Research

ABSs' New Developing Marketing Team conducted a survey with 1203 church leaders attending the Hampton Ministers' Conference and Hampton Christian Education Leadership Institute in May and June 1996. This professional self-improvement gathering represents a cross-denominational group of Black Church leaders who intentionally seek to improve their ministries. The results of the findings provide clear parameters to guide ABS in the development of products and services, comprehensive communication and sales plans in order to maximize distribution and sales. Respondents' attitudes were affirmative toward youth product content; and clear as to the resources needed for effective ministry, information on who makes purchasing decisions and Bible translation preference, attitudes toward audio, video, CD-ROM and other print products, place and methods of purchasing, and average unit price of purchase.

ABS New Developing Markets



Findings

Resource Material Topic Interest

The same needs/wants findings expressed in an independent youth study were presented to the respondents for their judgment/assessment in the context of their own local ministry needs. 80% or more of the sample said their church would be “very interested” in themes such as *Gaining and Giving Respect, Family Conflict, Dealing with Peer Pressures, Spirituality and Understanding the Meaning of the Church, Coping with Drugs, Alcohol, Permissive Sex, and AIDS*. 67% to 79% were very interested in the remaining topics as being relevant in their ministries (see Table 1).

Current and Planned Church Ministries

Respondents provide insights as the status of functioning ministries in their churches. 75% of the respondents reported having youth ministries from age 13 - 19, and 74% had children’s ministries from ages 6 - 12. However, their greatest ministry needs were for young men and single parents (see Table 2). In the ministries stated, larger churches are more likely to have these ministries than smaller churches.



Institutional Resource, Tools and Program Interest

70% or more of the respondents were “very interested” in training, seminars, clear understanding of Bible concepts, learning more about product mediums in addition to traditional print. 58% were “very interested” in an urban outreach challenge (*see Table 3*).

Bible Translation Preferences - Youth Access to Bibles

King James Version is the primary translation being used by 73% of the respondents. The NIV (21%) and TEV (20%) tie for second place. However, when TEV is factored into the equation at 3%, the tie is apparent. About three in ten are aware of the CEV with suburban churches being the most knowledgeable. CEV is used in 5% of the churches - no real difference among the sub-groups. 30% of the sample are familiar with the CEV. Of those familiar, most (59%) say they would use it for their youth ministry. Smaller churches are more apt to stick with the KJV while larger use more translation at the same time. Although 57% stated Bibles were provided for youth from 6 - 12 and 75% stated Bibles were provided for teenagers, it is not clear as to whether their understanding means these segments have access to Pew Bibles or separate Bibles for their usage.

Leadership's primary reason for not providing Bibles for youth was lack of financial resources. This problem was apparent among rural and urban churches.



Marketing Implications

Product

Printed materials (77%) and VCRs (61%) are the most widely used and acceptable products for teaching. The best market mediums for ABS are in the video and music cassette categories (*see Table 5*).

Price

Printed materials are used by about eight in ten churches. The average price paid is \$19. 21% of the respondents use Bibles on cassette tapes and average \$38. 38% report using music cassette tapes with an average price of \$14 and 9% report using CD-ROM with an average price of \$40. The larger church response would indicate money plays an significant role as to medium usage. Unit prices paid by respondents fit with the current competitive market (*see Table 6*).

Place

Materials are purchased from a variety of sources: Christian bookstores (68%), Direct mail (32%), Denominational publishing houses (26%) and 17% purchase from conventions (*see Table 7*).



Promotion

The foundation for promotion strategy formation will be built on ABSs' current African American customer base (estimated at 5% of sales) and the traditional black church denominations with special leaning towards Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal and Independents. This base has participated in these studies. Relationships have been established nationally with the church communions. Each anticipate using either generic products or opting for special imprint adaptation. Each expressed an interest in providing ABS opportunities to roll-out new products designed to meet their congregants' needs. Relational marketing will be the key to promotion.

The pastor is the primary decisionmaker as to what translation is used by the church, followed by the key church education person.

Respondents' rationale for recommending the CEV is *its readability and ease at understanding for youth* (Benefit). The primary reason churches do not provide Bibles is a financial one (ABS Mission).

The following tables provide 'parameters' for promotional efforts: population concentration/geography (*Table 8*), Church Affiliation (*Table 9*), Weekly Worship Attendance (*Table 10*), Age Segmentation/Sex Representation of the Congregation (*Table 11*).



Summary Analysis

This study provides 'parameters' to develop well-defined product concepts prior to development. The target audience will participate in validating product requirements and affirmation of its 'core benefit' potential.

This study also provides a sound basis for effective segmentation. The homogeneity of the sample respondents was astounding. Therefore the segment should be large enough to offer a tailored marketing program. The market is measurable, substantial, accessible and differentiable to establish different marketing mix elements and programs. This market is actionable where effective programs can be formulated to serve sub-segments.

Additional studies are recommended to further sub-divide the market; gain deeper insights into consumer motivations, attitudes and behavior. The average age of respondents was 49 (51% women and 49% men). Men provide 80% pastoral leadership and hold key decision authority. However, trends are apparently changing in the Black pulpit. 51% of all African American seminary students are female. Further study is needed to forecast how these changes will affect our ability to serve this population.

The survey will guide ABS in geographic roll-out strategies and product needs intelligence and provide a solid basis for an Urban Heritage program.

Thematic Topics Interest

TABLE 1

TOTAL ANSWERING: 994

	<i>Very Interested</i>	<i>Somewhat Interested</i>	<i>Not Too Interested</i>
Lonliness	(67%)	(26%)	(6%)
Relationships	(76%)	(21%)	(2%)
Respect	(81%)	(17%)	(2%)
Family Conflict	(83%)	(16%)	(2%)
Dysfunctional Homes	(69%)	(25%)	(6%)
Role Models	(69%)	(26%)	(6%)
Abuse, Violence	(75%)	(21%)	(4%)
Drugs, AIDS	(88%)	(11%)	(1%)
Peer Pressure	(84%)	(15%)	(2%)
Spiritual	(89%)	(10%)	(1%)
Urban Challenge (Social)	(58%)	(33%)	(9%)

Group with Greatest Needs Now

TOTAL ANSWERING: 935

Youth: Ages 6-12	33%
Youth: Ages 13-19	45%
Young Adults	37%
Young Men	40%
Young Women	30%
Single Parents	44%
Parents	27%
Youth Outreach	34%

Youth Ministry & Resource Material Survey - May/June 1996

Interest in Resources for the Urban Challenge

TABLE 3

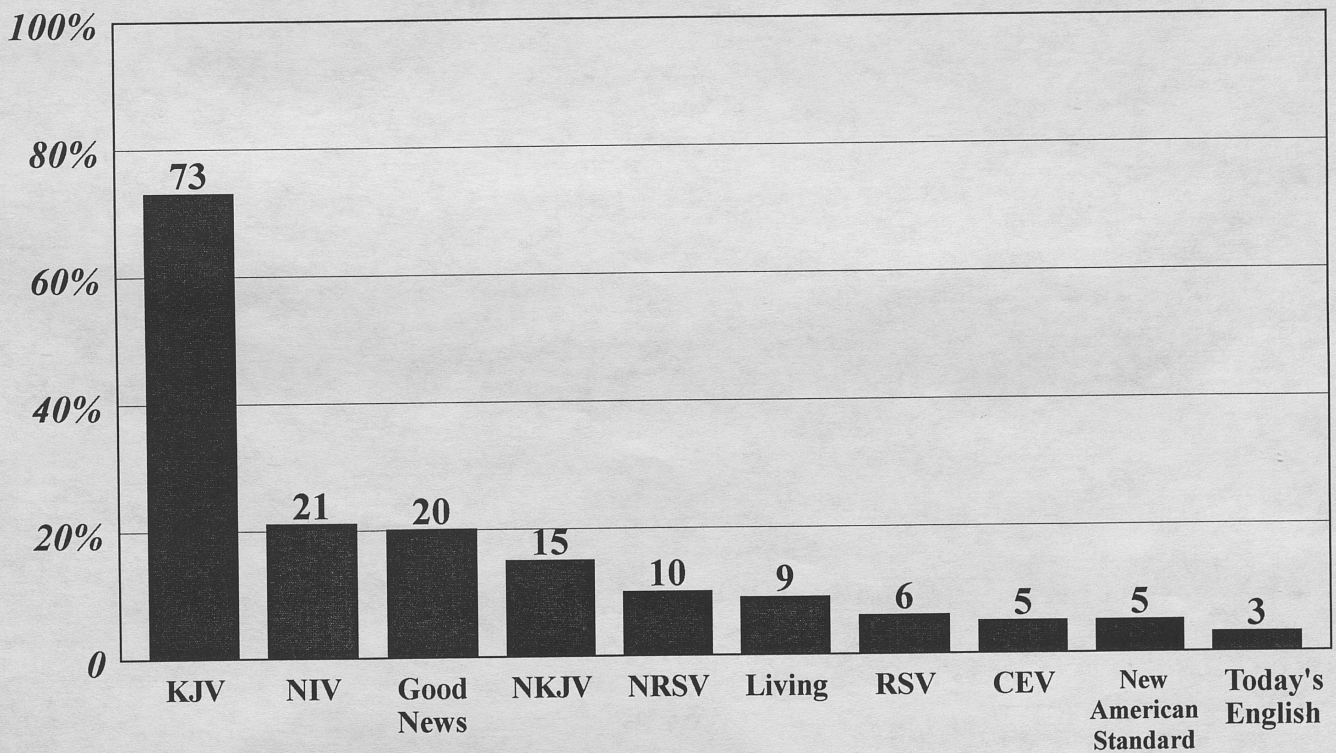
TOTAL ANSWERING: 856

	LOCATION			REGION			
	Urban	Suburban	Rural	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Very Interested	66%	49%	33%	62%	43%	57%	61%
Somewhat Interested	29%	42%	44%	31%	48%	34%	33%
Not Too Interested	5%	9%	23%	8%	9%	9%	6%

Bible Translations Being Used

TABLE 4

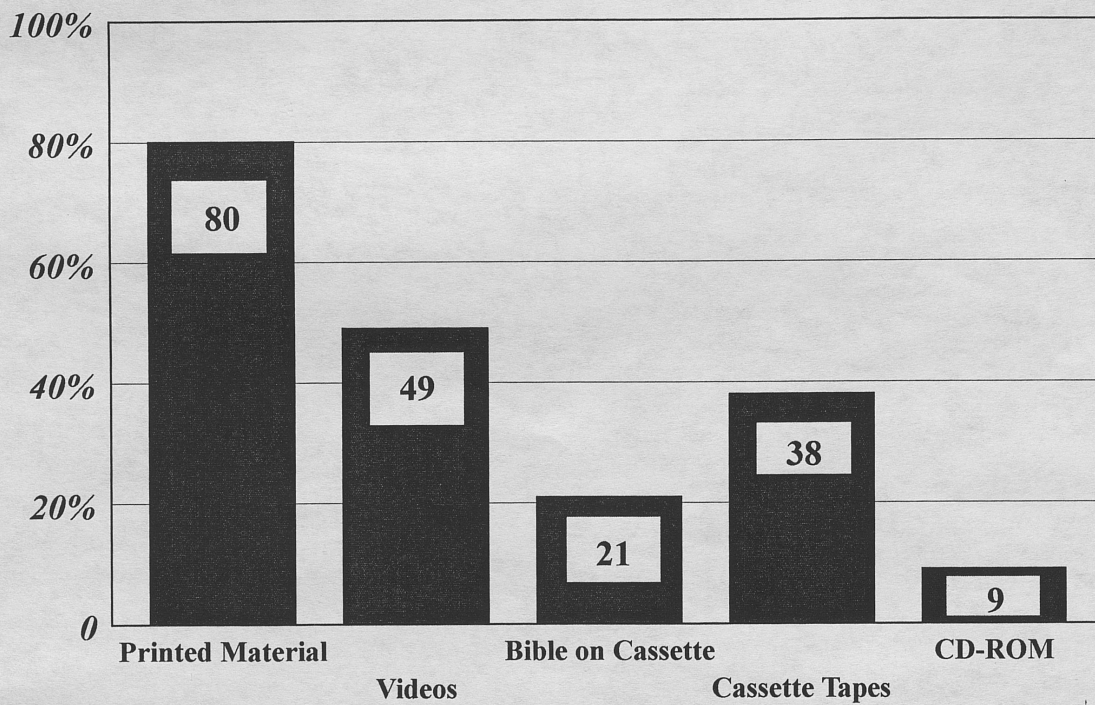
TOTAL ANSWERING: 1203



Mediums Currently Used

TABLE 5

TOTAL ANSWERING: 1203



Unit Price

TABLE 6

Bibles on Cassette Tapes

TOTAL ANSWERING: 51

Under \$10	27%
\$10 - \$20	20%
Over \$20	53%

Music Cassette Tapes

TOTAL ANSWERING: 124

Under \$5	13%
\$5 - \$10	56%
Over \$10	31%

Multi-Media/CD-ROM

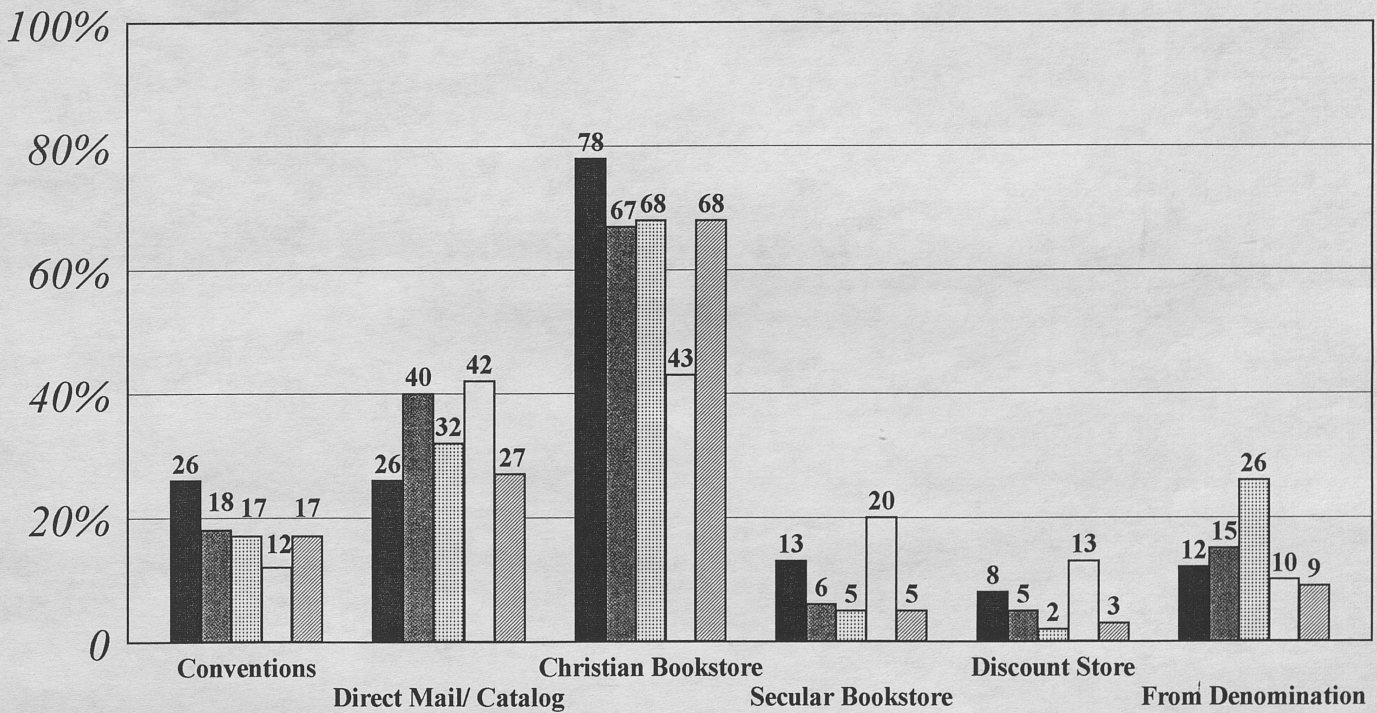
TOTAL ANSWERING: 24

Under \$20	38%
Over \$20	63%

Where Products are Purchased

TABLE 7

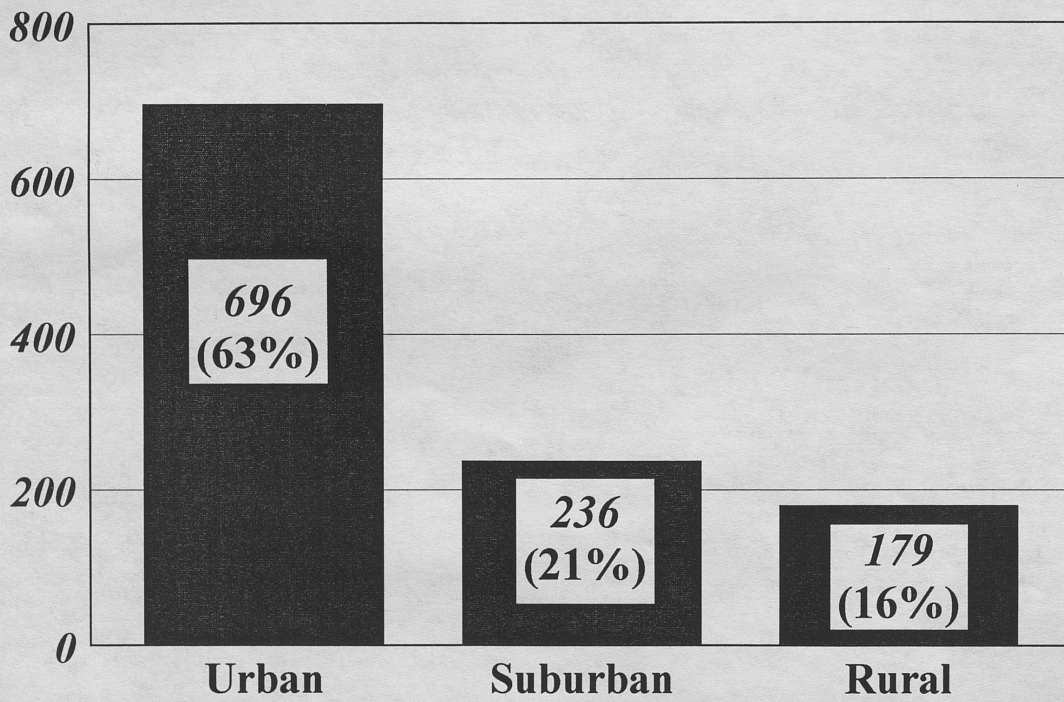
Music Cassette Tapes (124)
 Video Tapes (474)
 Printed Materials (844)
 CD-ROMs (24)
 Bibles on Cassette (204)



Churches: Location

TABLE 8

TOTAL ANSWERING: 1203



Respondents' Church Affiliation

TOTAL ANSWERING: 1203

Baptist	79%
Methodist	7%
Pentacostal	7%
Other Protestants	6%
Catholic	1%

Weekly Worship Attendance

TABLE 10

TOTAL ANSWERING: 1203

1 to 50	15%
51 to 150	30%
151 to 350	27%
350 +	28%

Average worship attendance exceeds the national average for churches.

Congregational Age Span

TABLE 11

TOTAL ANSWERING: 1203

	0-24%	25-49%	50-74%	75-100%
Under 30	39%	49%	10%	2%
30 - 49	18%	55%	25%	2%
50 - Over	30%	41%	27%	3%

Respondents Median Age: 49
Sex: 51% Female and 49% Male

QUALITATIVE MARKET RESEARCH

**AFRICAN-
AND
HISPANIC-
AMERICAN
YOUTH**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



the AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY

conducted by

CHARLES H. SMITH, NEW DEVELOPING MARKETS

assisted by

MARJORIE G. ADAMS, PH.D., ADAM-BERRYMAN CONSULTANTS, INC.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Parents, families, educators, clergy, and religious institutions are increasingly unable to provide moral guidance to at-risk young people because they lack an understanding of the language that youth speak, the symbols with which they identify, and the media that provide them with meaningful and sustaining messages.

Purpose of the Study

ABS designed a research project to gain insight into the attitudes and prevailing feelings that at-risk youth have about their environment to: identify appropriate messages that speak to their needs; identify effective communication strategies for delivering God's Word as authentic, relevant, and intimate; determine the formats, media, and channels are appropriate for reaching that audience; and recommend follow-up steps for a holistic outreach plan for Heritage communities.

How the Study was Conducted

Over a 16-month period, ABS conducted primary and secondary research, field studies, and some 42 focus groups in community, social, and penal institutions in 23 major cities nationwide catering to youth. All subjects reside in urban or inner-city neighborhoods often characterized by low income and a high incidence of single-parent homes, public housing, and crime.

Summary

Young people overwhelmingly cited meaningful relationships as their primary need.

For many inner-city youth, the disparity between the world of possibilities outside their environment and their own circumstances resulted in a sense of hopelessness and behavior reflecting the same. In contrast, their peers who espouse a "faith belief system" are less susceptible to pessimism and negative behavior.

Youth are not anti-religion or anti-God, but they do discriminate between Christian values and the behavior of some churchgoers.

Youth practitioners set the context for young people's attitudes and actions, and cited the dearth of practical educational and religious materials that speak to their needs.

In addition to this market research, "think tank sessions" were conducted with Hispanic urban practitioners and African American theologians. Two of the sessions reinforced the research findings. A third went even further, indicting the Church as an institution whose hermeneutics have not evolved with the times.

Current ABS products were evaluated by youth and practitioners, eliciting constructive recommendations regarding style, content, channels for distribution, and accessibility.

Recommendations made to ABS include having the research population to test prototype materials and retrofit existing ABS materials, such as the CEV and Multimedia Translation Projects, for segments of the target audience.

This research is presented as a tool for ABS in its efforts to produce and distribute need-specific products with appropriate messages for the at-risk youth market segment.

Background/Objectives

African and Hispanic American youth represent the largest block of growth populations in the U.S., yet they are underrepresented in ABS programs. In order to design products and programs that meet their needs and identify distribution channels, ABS began to collect and evaluate pertinent information in 1994.

For the purposes of this research, the youth population was segmented by age, ethnicity, neighborhood, and geography to test the common assumption that there is a homogeneous youth culture and whether the dominant culture's linear, syllogistic style of communication is effective with audiences whose traditions are oral and visual.

Demographics

The subgroups are:

- African American boys ages 9 through 12
- African American teenage mothers with children living at home
- Hispanic/African American youth ages 13 through 19
- Counselors, pastors, school principals, and others who work directly with young people

The religious background of the participants was either Catholic or Protestant. Although those who were Protestant mostly belonged to mainline or evangelical churches, some of them were not connected with any denomination. Moreover, it was apparent that non-mainline churches were more effective at ministering to at-risk youth outside the confines of their local church community.

Methodology

Focus groups were conducted in a wide variety of venues where young people are found — community groups, youth centers, restaurants, detention centers, and prisons.

The formats were free-flowing, with sessions lasting from 90 to 120 minutes.

The research is divided into four parts.

The first part captures, in young people's own words, how they see the world. The second phase deals with the context of the world in which young people live as heard through the voices of youth practitioners. The third phase covers reactions to ABS products, young people's preferences regarding media, channels of communication and distribution, and communication strategies. The fourth part contains recommendations to ABS in its development of relevant materials for this at-risk youth population.

PART I: YOUTHS' VIEWS

Ten Dominant Concerns

The young people were asked a battery of open-ended questions aimed at encouraging them to express their innermost concerns. In order of priority, the ten predominant concerns were:

1. Meaningful Relationships

The young people are frustrated by feelings of loneliness, disconnection, and isolation. Meaningful relationships among family and friends seem difficult to attain.

"Seeing my parents get divorced made me feel lonely."—DALLAS, TX

2. Coping with Stress and Abuse Leading to Violence and Death

Many of the respondents have experienced the senseless death of a friend, family member, or member of their community.

"I think that the most difficult thing for me is just living in a world where other people are dying and I know that if I just do one thing wrong, I will end up like them."—SAN FRANCISCO, CA

3. Identity Crisis Resulting in Loneliness and Emptiness.

How to cope with identity crises, loneliness, and lack of self-esteem.

4. Desperation for Respect.

How to gain respect, retain it, and give it.

5. Family Conflict.

How to deal with conflicts in family traditions, values without guilt, and retribution.

"Arguing a lot with your parents—especially with my mom—makes me feel lonely"—PASADENA, CA

Mothers and friends topped the list of dominating influences in youths' lives. The majority of those who stated that their mothers know them best are involved in some type of church activity. Those who say their friends know them best tend to allow them to influence their decisions and did not identify with the religious community.

6. Dysfunctional Homes in Environmental Context.

How to cope with coming from a dysfunctional home and crime-infested neighborhood.

7. Role Models That Care for the Long Haul.

Someone who takes enough time to teach, love, show how to love, and to be there for the long haul.

8. Coping Power Over Drugs, Alcohol, Permissive Sex and AIDS.

How to cope with the lure of drugs, permissive sex, fear of AIDS, and the surrounding environment.

9. Dealing With Peer Pressure.

How to negotiate the pressures from peers, remain loyal to chosen values, and still be accepted by the group. Many youth have practically no family system, so the peer group becomes an alternative.

"The gang is always going to back you up, or that's what they say. . . . They say they'll always be with you and give you whatever you need. . . ."—EL PASO, TX

10. Spirituality and Church Understanding

The young people were asked about the impact of the church in their lives and community. The most common descriptions of it were as a safe haven and a teacher of positive values. The youth voiced concern that church members and ministers set bad examples by demonstrating behavior contrary to Christian ethics and standards. They said that church programs do not reach them.

"I really don't think about the Bible when I make decisions, but I see the consequences wrong decisions and I agree that there ought to be consequences."—LEXINGTON, KY

Impressions on the Bible

Those familiar with the Bible said that it is the basis for establishing morals and principles for living. They also indicated that:

- the consequences of sin presented in the Bible cause them to try to uphold its moral standards
- the most respected book was Revelations
- the most misunderstood part of Scripture is Genesis (Why did Adam and Eve's disobedience make me a sinner?)

**PART II: PROFESSIONAL
PRACTITIONERS' PERSPECTIVES
ON YOUTH**

Through 21 focus interviews conducted with hands-on youth workers, counselors, clergy, social workers, youth ministers, a clear picture of youths' environment emerged. Respondents were engaged in programs that covered pre-teen, teenage, young adults, and com-

munity programs targeting the family unit.

Practitioners revealed that youth are, in the words of a Dallas, Texas, respondent, surrounded by "a frenzy of defeat attitude" emanating from home, school, and community environments in which guidance is negative or nonexistent.

A Miami, Florida respondent implicated young people's steady diet of violence as a major influence in their behavior: "There's violence in the household, violence over the TV set, and violence right outside the front door in the neighborhood."

Respondents took the established church to task for being out of touch with urban youth, for allowing tradition, rituals, and material trappings to supersede substantive ministry.

Think Tanks Reinforce and Challenge ABS

Hispanic community To help evaluate the research and to develop recommendations, two think tanks were convened in the Hispanic community with urban youth practitioners .

African American community A think tank was conducted at Virginia Union University's Graduate School of Theology comprising its dean and a half-dozen senior faculty.

The group concluded that the hierarchical nature of the church has alienated young people, who are not anti-God nor anti-religious, but, rather, anti-Church. It examined a Black preaching style that evolved from one that shared Good News and helped people foster change, to one that is often superficial and emotionally rousing for older adults. It reported the need for a new hermeneutic rooted in the historical Black preaching tradition.

It concluded that youth need to hear Biblical stories translatable into their specific vernacular that give them hope and that speaks to their specific challenges, and a church that is relational, redemptive, and loving.

Furthermore, the group challenged ABS to approach the Heritage communities in the true spirit of ministry: by cultivating relationships for the higher good, rather than for the promise of quantitative returns.

PART III: YOUTHS' CRITIQUE OF ABS PRODUCTS

In general, youths responded very positively to ABS products. Among the concerns and recommendations they expressed are:

- Portions are not readily available
- Materials need more illustrations
- Contrasting images of correct and incorrect behavior would be helpful
- Visuals are important because of their immediacy
- There is a need for materials that are relevant to youths' troubled environment.

There is a need for methods and/or scholastic exercises that encourage them to apply Biblical messages.

The CEV gained high points for its readability over other Bible translations. However, overall, the opinion that ABS does not have adequate tools to meet the needs of inner-city youth and families was reinforced constantly. Value-based Scripture resources emphasizing character development were recommended as a deterrent to the violence that plagues inner-city life. It was further suggested that this is another market niche that ABS can fill.

PART IV: RECOMMENDATIONS

ABS, armed with the results of this research, is in a unique position to address the needs and concerns of at-risk youth populations in the nation's urban centers. The

following recommendations can guide future research and product development:

1. Design prototype materials for the at-risk populations and test-market them to determine/confirm their validity.

2. Lead volunteers to explore new frontiers in community-based ministries to youth that include after-school, grandparents' and intergenerational programs.

3. Take immediate steps to gather infor-

mation from denominational/parachurch institutions that serve urban youth in order to further determine their needs and seek partnerships.

4. Explore how the Multimedia Translation products can be adapted to meet some needs of targeted audiences in the study.

5. Share research findings for partnership projects with denominational peers.

CONTACT:

REV. CHARLES H. SMITH
NEW DEVELOPING MARKETS
AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY
1865 BROADWAY
NEW YORK, NY 10023
1-800-296-0598
(212) 408-1362