

**THE TABOR COLLEGE CLASS OF 1967
55 YEARS LATER**

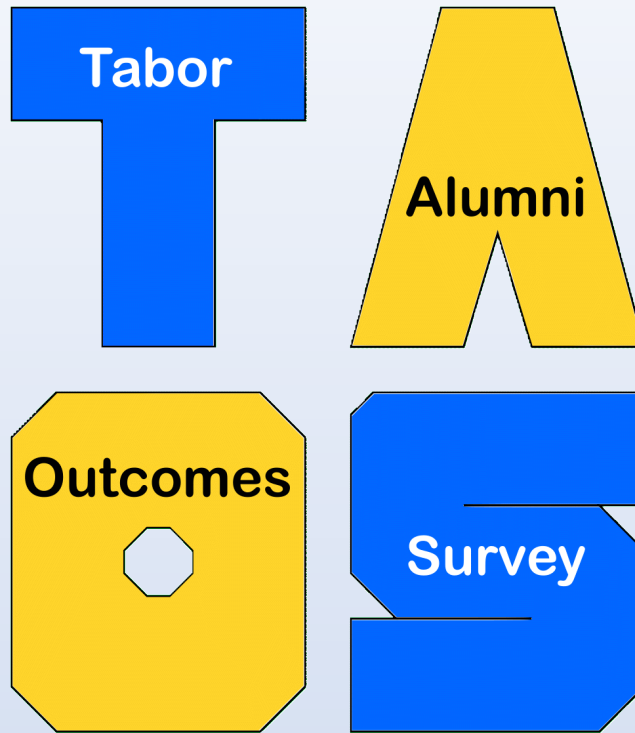
August 2022

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Survey conducted December 2021

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Table of Contents

Appreciation.....	v
Highlights	vii
Preface	ix
1. The Backgrounds from Which We Came	1
2. Our Families of Origin	4
3. The Tabor Experience	6
4. How We Changed at Tabor	11
5. Establishing Ourselves	15
6. The Places We Lived and to Which We Traveled	17
7. Professional Lives and Careers	20
8. Relationship to Tabor College.....	23
9. Religious Perspectives and Engagement with the Church	26
10. Political Perspectives and Engagement in Politics.....	33
11. Engagement with the World.....	37
12. How We See the World Today.....	41
13. Looking Back on Our Lives	45
14. Final Words	47
Appendix I: Research Methodology.....	50
Appendix II: About the Authors	52
Appendix III: Further Information and Documents	52
Endnotes	53

Appreciation

Many people helped bring this study to fruition. First, we want to express our appreciation to several people at Tabor College for their help with this project. President David Janzen reviewed the prospectus and encouraged us to undertake the study. Executive Vice President of Academics and Compliance, Frank Johnson, wrote a letter of introduction and support to the Class of '67. Vice President of Philanthropy, Ron Braun, and Rod Hamm, Director of Alumni Relations, helped us track down classmates and cross-check email addresses. Jim Paulus, Assistant professor of Psychology and Chair of the Tabor Institutional Review Board, facilitated the review and approval of the research methodology and questionnaire by that group. Thank you all so much!

We also want to thank several faculty colleagues from other universities who reviewed the survey instrument and suggested changes that improved it: Duane Stoltzfus (Communications; Goshen College), Lindsey Ibanez (Sociology; Washburn University), Doug Penner (Former President; Bethel College, KS), Mike Yoder (Sociology; Northwestern College, IA), and Norm Ewert (Economics; Wheaton College, IL). Their comments and suggestions helped us sharpen the questions and refine the instrument.

We asked several people who graduated from Tabor just before or after we did to complete the questionnaire as a pre-test and share their comments, suggestions, and observations with us. Based on the suggestions from those who took the pre-test, we made a number of modifications. We promised them anonymity and so we can't thank them by name here, but we're grateful for their help!

Wayne Steffen polished the report and made it more coherent and readable. Thanks, Wayne! The four of us, however, are responsible for any errors in the data, analysis, or presentation.

This project would not have been possible without the understanding, love, and support of Anita, Ginger, Ruth, and Priscilla! Zoom calls frequently ran late. Lunches were delayed. Other projects and outings were placed on hold because we were so involved with this study. Thank for your patience and understanding, as well as for those occasional—and needed—reminders that our combined male perspective might have missed something!

Highlights

- Most of our class came from farms and small towns. Now a significant number of us live in medium-to-large cities or suburbs.
- Over half of us came from families where neither parent finished college, nearly a quarter from families where neither parent finished high school.
- Nearly a third of us lived outside the U.S. or Canada for at least a year.
- We were once overwhelmingly Mennonite Brethren (MB); though there are far fewer now, most of us remain evangelical.
- We still attend church regularly at over twice the rate of the larger society. We have been active in leadership roles over the years and tend to adhere to traditional gender roles in church.
- For most of us, the Tabor experience was good, but few of us sent our own children to Tabor or encouraged others to attend.
- Nearly all of us found our careers to be meaningful and are happy with how our lives have gone.
- Both politically and theologically, we are still predominantly conservative to middle-of-the-road. Many of us, however, have become somewhat more liberal.
- Today, our theology and politics align very closely; those who are conservative (or liberal) in one, tend to be the same in the other. That alignment has grown significantly stronger since coming out of college.
- Sharp political differences have emerged which separate us, and these show up vividly in the issues we identify as the most significant challenges facing the nation.
- We're civic citizens—We vote at a very high level, are engaged with our communities, are generous with our money, and give our time to volunteer with local organizations.

Preface

This report is based on a research project that grew out of conversations among the four of us who graduated from Tabor College in 1967. We all worked in Africa, went to graduate school, and then spent most of our careers in higher education, where conducting research and publishing the findings became part of our professional lives. Over the decades, we talked with each other and exchanged emails. We reflected on our Tabor experience and noted the ways through which it influenced the trajectory of our lives and professions. We also wondered how our classmates viewed their college experience 50+ years later and how attending Tabor affected their lives and careers. We decided to ask them.

We discussed at length who should be considered a “classmate.” We ended up with a list that included all who graduated with us in 1967, those who began with us but graduated from Tabor a year earlier or later than we did, and those who spent at least two years as “one of us.” We ended up with 50 respondents out of the 74 living classmates from 1967. As members of this class, the four of us also completed the questionnaire. See Appendix I for more details about the methodology used in the study.

Every research project has certain limitations. So does ours. However, a response rate of 68% is very high for social science research. There are things we’d do differently next time but we’re confident that the data generally represent the Class of ’67.

We want to express our deep thanks to all of you who completed your questionnaires. We hope you will find the results as interesting as we did! We also hope that what we learned will be helpful to Tabor College and others interested in Christian higher education.

TAOS is an independent research project by the authors. It was not commissioned, funded, or sponsored by any other entity.

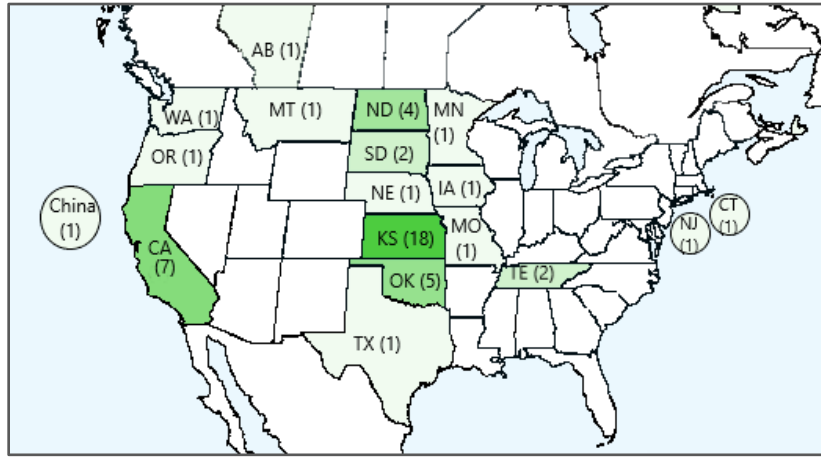
Merrill, Dale, Dave, and Ken

1. The Backgrounds from Which We Came

The state, province, or country where we were born

We begin our review of the data by examining the background characteristics of our class. Figure 1-1 shows the states or countries in which those who responded to the survey were born:

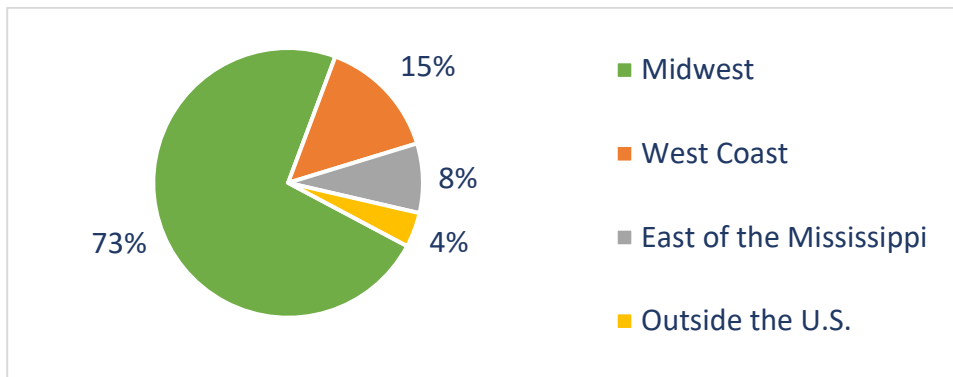
Figure 1-1 The places where members of the Class of '67 were born.



Thirty-five percent of us came from Kansas, where Tabor College is located.

Figure 1-2 shows that three-quarters came from the Midwest (defined here as the region between the Mississippi River and the Rockies). Only 4% were born outside the United States.

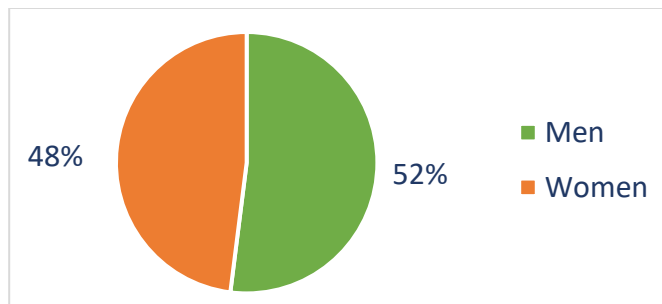
Figure 1-2 The regions from which we came.



Gender

There was nearly an even split between the number of men and women in our class as Figure 1-3 shows:

Figure 1-3 The composition of our class by gender.

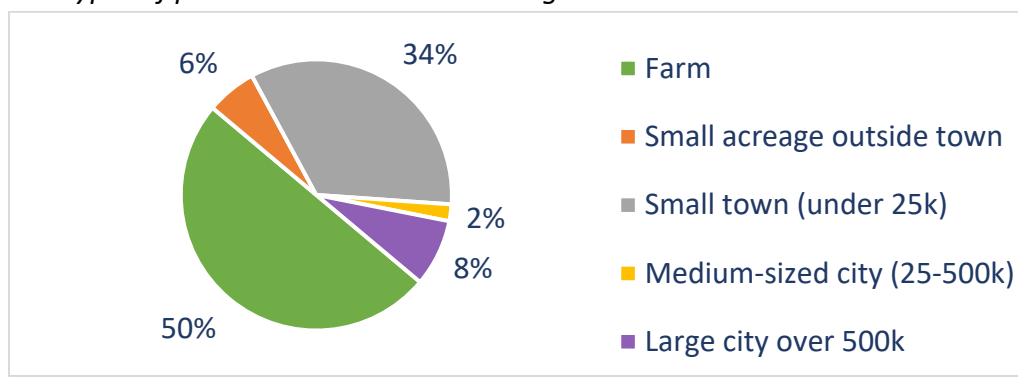


Of the 50 respondents in our survey, 26 were men and 24 were women. That apparent 52%-48% balance contrasts with the fact that nationally, 50 years ago, 58% of college students in the U.S. were men. But the percentages among our respondents are distorted by a startling reality that affected our pool of available respondents: over the past half century 26 of our classmates have died—22 of them men, and four women. A count of pictures in Tabor *Bluejay* yearbooks showed that our freshman class had 61 men and 48 women (56% male). Our senior class had 37 men and 31 women (55%). Both of those figures are closer to the national average at the time.

Where we lived at age 16

We asked respondents where they lived at age 16. Figure 1-4 reflects the small, rural communities from which we came:

Figure 1-4 The types of places in which we lived at age 16.

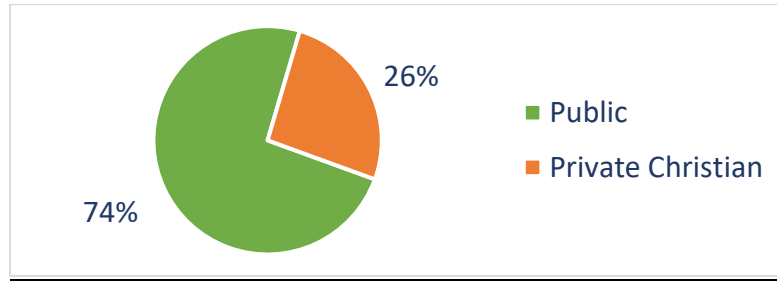


Half of us grew up on farms, several on small acreages, and another third in small towns. Only a few came from medium or large cities.

The high schools from which we graduated

We wanted to know whether our classmates attended Christian high schools, graduated from public schools, or were home-schooled. Figure 1-5 shows what we learned:

Figure 1-5 The type of high schools from which we graduated.

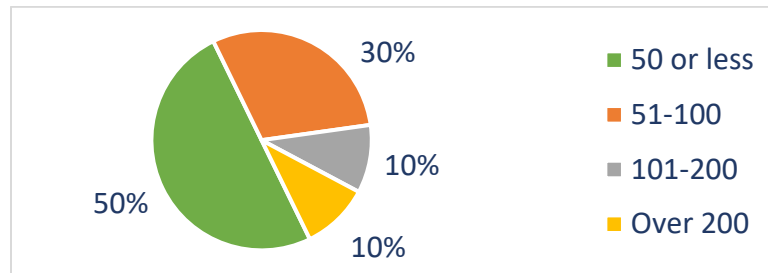


Three-quarters attended public high schools, but a significant proportion graduated from private Christian academies. None reported being home schooled.

The size of our high school graduating classes

Most of us came from very small high schools as the following graphic shows:

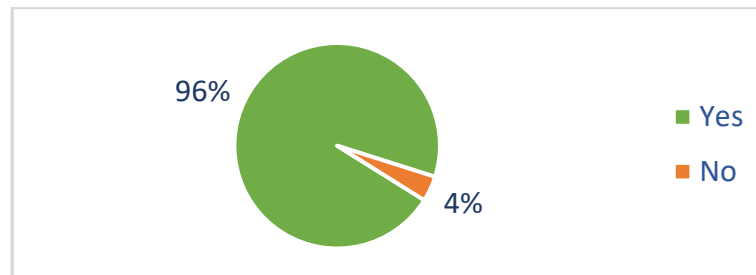
Figure 1-6 The number of students in our high school graduating classes.



Only 20% of us were part of graduating classes larger than 100 students. This reflects the small towns and rural communities from which we came.

From high school to college

Figure 1-7 The percentage of us going straight from high school to college.



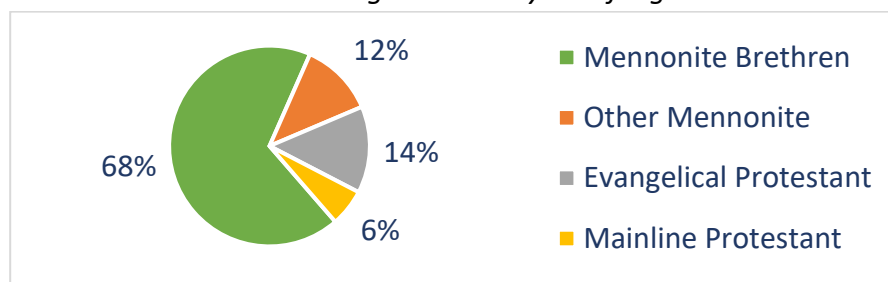
With nearly all of us going directly from high school to college, we were clearly young and had little life experience. Going to Tabor was our first step toward becoming independent adults.

Denominational affiliation in high school

Tabor College was the U.S. Mennonite Brethren Church's only four-year college as we were completing high school. (Fresno Pacific University, Tabor's sister school, started its four-year program in 1963 and was accredited as a four-year college in 1965, a year after Tabor.)

Figure 1-8 shows that two-thirds of us grew up in Mennonite Brethren (MB) congregations, increasing the likelihood that we would enroll at Tabor:

Figure 1-8 The churches we attended during our senior year of high school.



No one reported coming from the other options that we provided: *PENTECOSTAL, CATHOLIC, NOT PART OF A CHURCH...* or *OTHER RELIGIONS*. The majority of us came from Mennonite backgrounds, but we will see later that our denominational affiliations changed over the years.

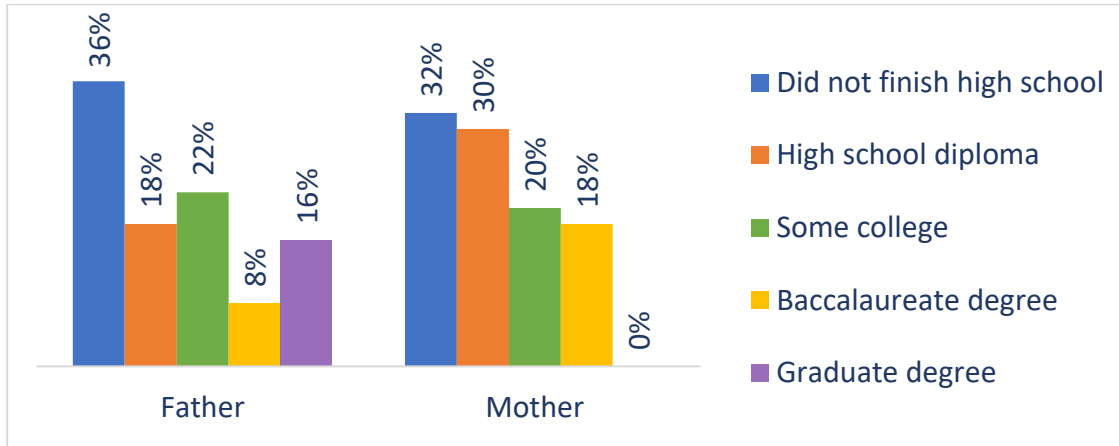
2. Our Families of Origin

We asked several questions about the families in which we were raised. We were interested in the educational levels of our parents as well as how well off we perceived our families to be as we grew up.

Our parent's levels of formal education

Since the educational level of parents is generally seen as one factor influencing the education aspirations of their children, we included this in our study. The distribution is portrayed in Figure 2-1.

Figure 2-1 Our parents' education levels.



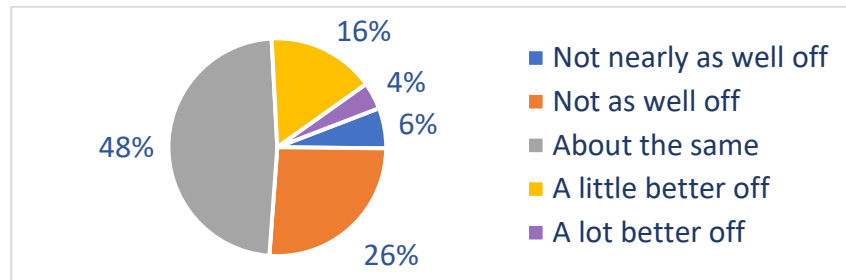
Around a third of both mothers and fathers did not finish high school. However, there is a wider distribution of educational levels among fathers than mothers. Eighteen percent of our mothers earned a baccalaureate degree, but none of them obtained graduate degrees. A quarter of our fathers received *at least* a baccalaureate degree, and more than half of those fathers went on to earn a graduate degree.

Further investigation showed that nearly a quarter of us came from homes where *neither* parent had finished high school. For 64% of us, *neither* parent finished college.

Perception of our families' financial well-being

A family's financial well-being often influences the educational opportunities of the children. It would be difficult for anyone to objectively evaluate the actual economic situation of their family five decades later. We did, however, ask people how they *perceived* their families' financial well-being compared to other families in their community as they were growing up. The results are shown in Figure 2-2.

Figure 2-2 How well-off we perceived our families to be compared to other families.



Most of us came from farms or small towns that tend to be economically more homogeneous than large urban centers. It's not surprising that we generally saw our families in the same economic situation as others in our communities. Forty-eight percent said their families' financial situation was "about the same" as others while only 10% felt their families were a little or a lot better off

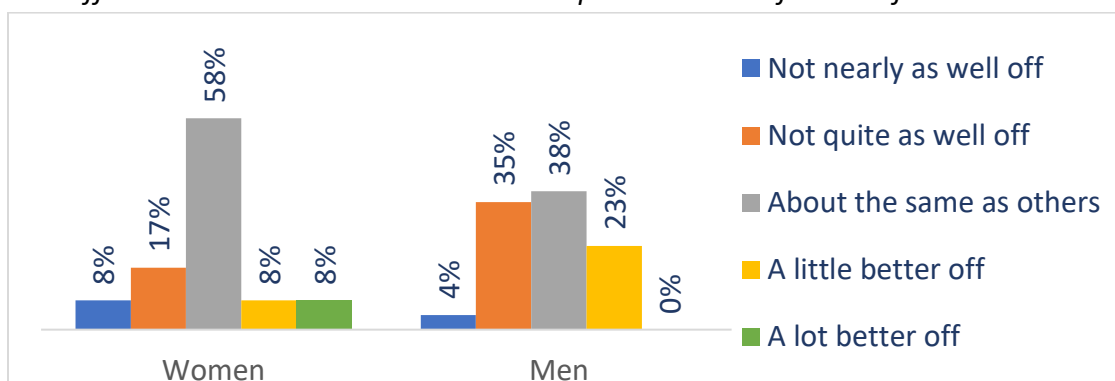
than others in their communities. More than a quarter, however, felt their families were worse off financially than others around them.

The data show that classmates didn't have to feel better off than others in their community in order to go to college. Further analysis showed that the perception of wealth had no effect on educational achievement.

Gender and our perceptions of financial well-being

When we compared the perceptions of men and women about their families' financial well-being as they were growing up, we found some minor differences as shown in Figure 2-3.

Figure 2-3 Differences in how the men and women perceived their families' financial well-being.



The majority of women felt their families were financially the same as others in their communities. Only 38% of the men perceived their families' situations as comparable to others, while 39% felt theirs were less well off than others.

3. The Tabor Experience

We noted earlier that nearly all of us went directly from high school to college. We also wanted to know the reasons for that decision, why we chose Tabor, and how we experienced Tabor.

Why we went to college

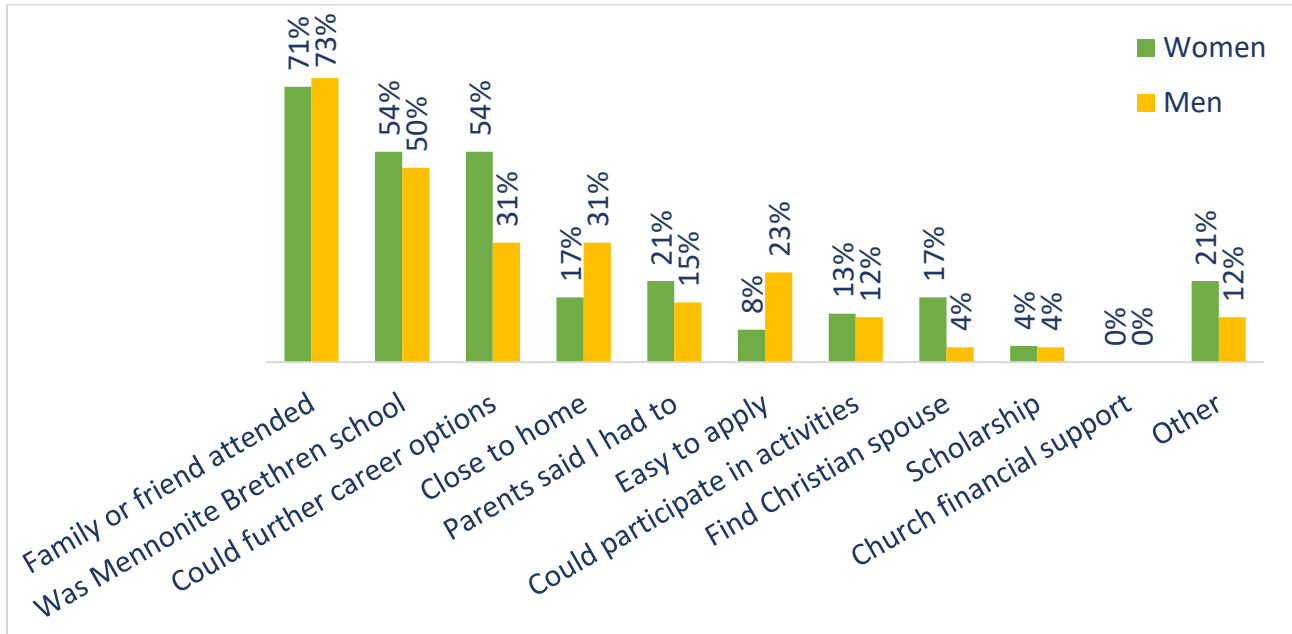
We asked our classmates to explain, in their own words, the reasons for deciding to go to college. The common theme running through their responses was that their families had encouraged higher education and created the assumption that college was the natural, next step after high school. Some of the comments included: *"My parents expected me to go to college."* *"All my friends my age were going to college, and my family supported it."* *"It was the normal thing to do."* This is particularly significant because more than half of our parents never attended college themselves.

Many saw going to college as *"the key to a good paying job."* College would open up career options or provide a gateway to a particular career. Some saw it as *"a way to escape the farm"* or *"to stay out of military service."*

Why we chose Tabor

We wanted to know why our classmates chose to attend Tabor, so based on our experience in higher education, we identified ten possible reasons for choosing a college. People do things for multiple reasons, so we asked our classmates to select the *three top* reasons for having selected Tabor as their undergraduate institution. In the following chart we compared how men and women responded to this question:

Figure 3-1 Our reasons for choosing Tabor. (Each respondent could select up to three.)



Having a family member or knowing someone who attended was the most significant factor in choosing Tabor. The college’s affiliation with the MB denomination was the second most important reason. (Tabor College was the U.S. MB Church’s only four-year college as we were completing high school in 1963.) The belief that they could further their career options was also important. The latter, however, was more important to the women than the men. Proximity to home and ease of applying were more important to the men than the women.

When given the opportunity to elaborate on their college choices, several mentioned having grandparents in Kansas or having previously lived near Hillsboro so they were familiar with the area. That helped direct them to Tabor. A number noted that there was never really a question about where they would enroll. They (and usually their parents) had always assumed they would attend Tabor.

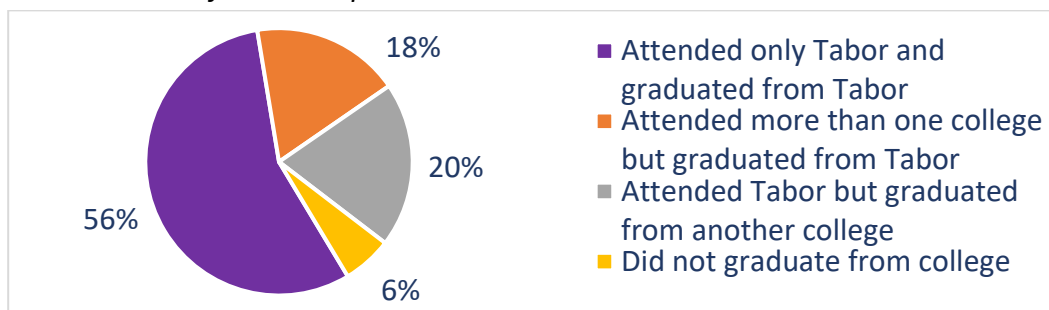
As we will see later, a third of our classmates did meet their spouses at Tabor. This includes all the women who indicated that finding a Christian spouse was important.

Several classmates transferred to Tabor during our junior year after a Christian college in Minnesota that they had been attending closed. Tabor made it easy for them to enroll.

The length of time we spent at Tabor

We noted earlier that many in our class spent four years at Tabor and then graduated. Some attended more than one college but graduated from Tabor. Others attended Tabor but graduated elsewhere. Figure 3-2 shows how much time the Class of '67 spent at Tabor.

Figure 3-2 The amount of time we spent at Tabor.

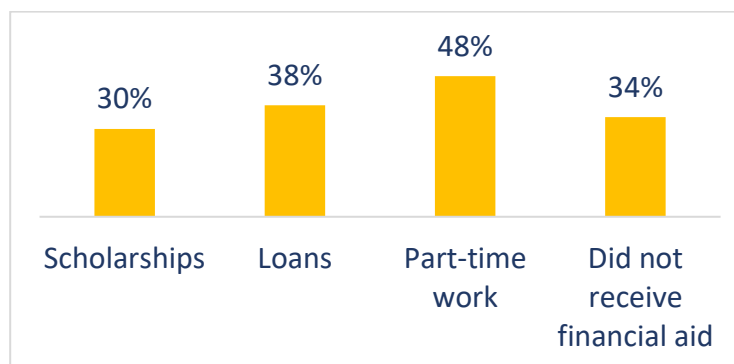


Three-quarters of the survey respondents ended up graduating from Tabor, though some had previously attended other colleges. Twenty percent attended Tabor but transferred out and graduated elsewhere. Several completed three years of Tabor and then transferred to professional schools such as dentistry and optometry where they completed their baccalaureate programs concurrently.

Financial aid

Paying for college today has become a very significant issue for students and their families. College was a lot less expensive when we were students. One-third of our class reported that they did not have scholarships or loans, and were not working part-time during college, as shown in the following graphic:

Figure 3-3 Types of financial aid that we received.



Based on the personal budget records of one of our classmates, we estimate that when the Class of '67 were freshmen, Tabor's tuition for one year cost less than \$1,000. By 2021 Tabor's annual tuition and fees had risen to \$32,100. Based on an online calculator,¹ the increase in tuition

between 1963 and today is three and one-half times the rate of inflation. This increase is consistent with other higher education institutions and not unique to Tabor.

In the mid-60s, some students earned enough on summer harvest crews or other jobs to pay for their entire tuition, room, board, and fees. That would be virtually impossible today. The National Defense Student Loan (NDSL) program was signed into law in 1958 but expanded significantly in the early 60s. This made government loans more plentiful.

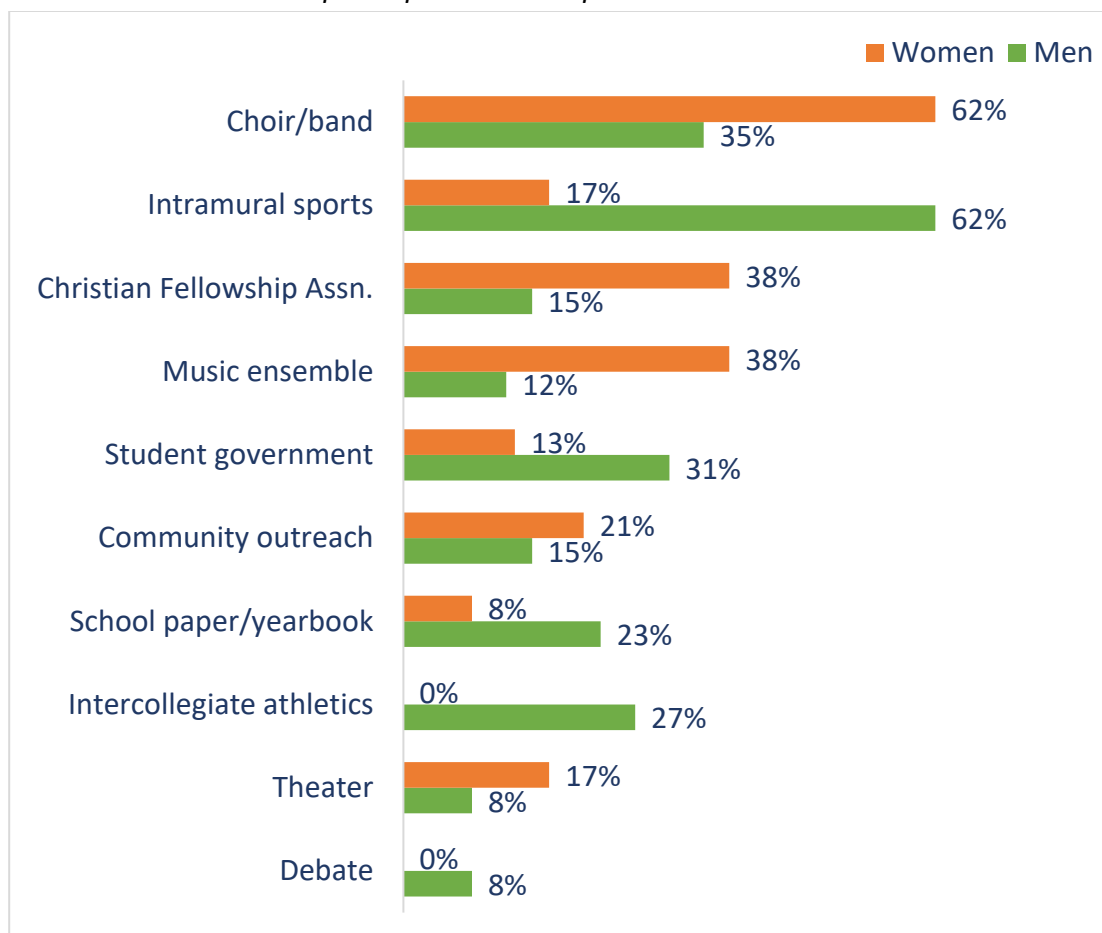
Our data show how many of our classmates took loans through Tabor but not how many families took out private loans to send their students to college. Loans to families would not necessarily have been obvious to students. Many of us came from farms that relied on annual operating loans or lines of credit. Parents may have taken out operating loans that were also used to cover college costs without students knowing this had happened.

Though college has become much more expensive since we were students at Tabor, federal and state financial aid have become more available. According to the latest data from the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2020-2021 every Tabor student received an institutional grant or scholarship. Seventy-three percent took out federal loans.

Participation in campus activities

Based on our own experience and the suggestions of others who reviewed the survey instrument, we identified a list of those extracurricular activities being offered while we were students. We asked respondents to note all of those in which they participated at Tabor. The following figure shows the percentage of men and women involved in each activity:

Figure 3-4 Men's and women's participation in campus activities.

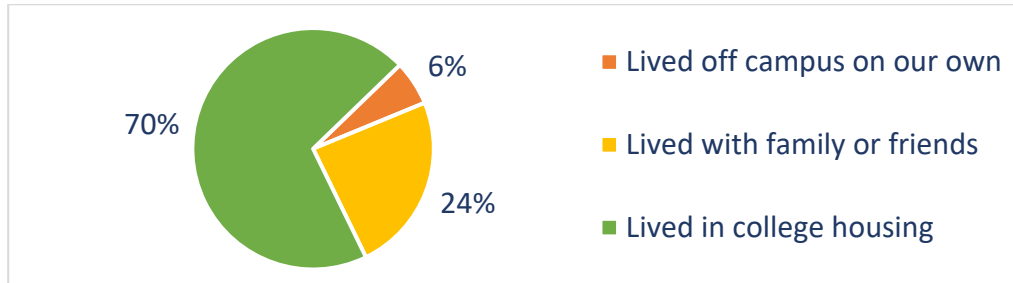


Music, intramural athletics, and Christian Fellowship Association (CFA) were cited most frequently. A higher percentage of women than men participated in choir/band, CFA, music ensemble, and theater. More men participated in intramural sports, student government, the student newspaper and yearbook, debate, and intercollegiate athletics. There were no intercollegiate sports for women in small Kansas colleges prior to Title IX, passed in 1972.

Where we lived during our senior year

Tabor was then, and still is, primarily a residential campus. The distribution for our senior year is shown in Figure 3-5.

Figure 3-5 The type of housing in which we lived during our senior year of college.



Most lived in campus housing while a quarter lived at home, with family, or friends in the community. Several (generally married couples) lived off campus on their own.

4. How We Changed at Tabor

People go to college expecting to learn, grow, and change. We asked everyone to comment on how they had changed at Tabor and the factors involved in that process.

How Tabor changed us

The word used most frequently to describe how the Tabor experience changed us was "broadening." One said, "[It] broadened my view, introducing me to people and ideas that I had not considered before." Another responded, "I discovered that there was not just a single correct answer to every question." A classmate spoke to the broadening theme, saying "It excited and challenged me to learn that there were so many interesting things to investigate and consider and that asking questions was a good thing."

Looking back after more than a half-century, the limited horizons we brought from our mostly rural, small-town childhoods clearly were expanded at college. For example, one said, "Classmates and others allowed me to see a broader slice of life and perspectives than I had growing up in a small rural community." Another noted that college "Started opening my eyes to a bigger world. It was my first step towards moving into my own independent life. It also protected me from getting lost on a large university." In a comparable note, still another suggested that Tabor "gave me protection because it was small enough for me to adjust to life and not get lost in the system of life."

Getting acquainted with a wider range of people was another important part of that "broadening" experience. As one classmate put it: "I made friends from so many different places and I began feeling part of the world community." Another spoke about living in the residence halls: "Dorm living and being involved with people on a bigger level than my limited exposure of my early days, really stretched me socially and intellectually." A comment that reflected what many expressed was, "I developed life-long friendships through the college although we have become very diversified politically." Speaking of life-long friends, several emphasized having met their spouses at Tabor!

Maturing in Christian faith was another common theme running through what people wrote. As one put it: "*[I] began to think for myself instead of just parroting my parents' beliefs.*" Another noted that the Tabor experience "*Gave me a deeper understanding of the faith that I had brought from home and Sunday School and helped shape my own faith.*" A classmate said: "*[At Tabor] I learned about Christian service and living a life of humility and service to others.*"

Some indicated that Tabor prepared them for specific professions or changed or sharpened their career focus. The clearest and most common theme running through our classmates' comments was that Tabor opened their minds and broadened their worldviews.

The impact of professors and staff on our lives

Given the importance of teaching and mentoring at Tabor, we asked everyone to identify the person (a professor, staff member, or coach) who influenced them or was particularly helpful. We followed up by asking what it was about that person which made the difference in the student's life.

Respondents listed more than 20 different faculty members or coaches who had been particularly significant in their lives. Sol Loewen (biology), Delbert Wiens (philosophy), Clarence Hiebert (Bible and theology), and Clarence Harms (biology) appeared most frequently. Others named by more than one student were Bill Johnson (chemistry), Roy Just (sociology and the college president), David Karber (business), Emil Thiessen (business), Paul Wohlgemuth (choral director), Leonard J Franz (history), Steve Kimery (coach), Malinda Penner Nickel (English), Vernon Wiebe (dean of students), and Marvin Kroeker (history).

A classmate wrote: "*Delbert Wiens challenged me to think, to apply my faith, and taught me the principles of good writing.*" Another wrote: "*Dr. Paul Wohlgemuth's character and Christian testimony through music and example of serving in the church influenced me.*" Someone said: "*Dr. Sol Loewen believed in me and promoted me to leadership beyond what I thought I could do.*" Another said: "*Clarence Hiebert provided a broadened spiritual world view and encouraged me to consider overseas service in Congo.*" Another noted: "*Dr. [Bill] Johnson [whose] enthusiasm and love of chemistry and teaching put a smiley face on the cover of the chemistry texts I would see during the rest of my education.*" A classmate said: "*Ken Kornelsen gave me confidence in myself by telling me I could succeed in college... [He] believed in me when I didn't believe in myself.*"

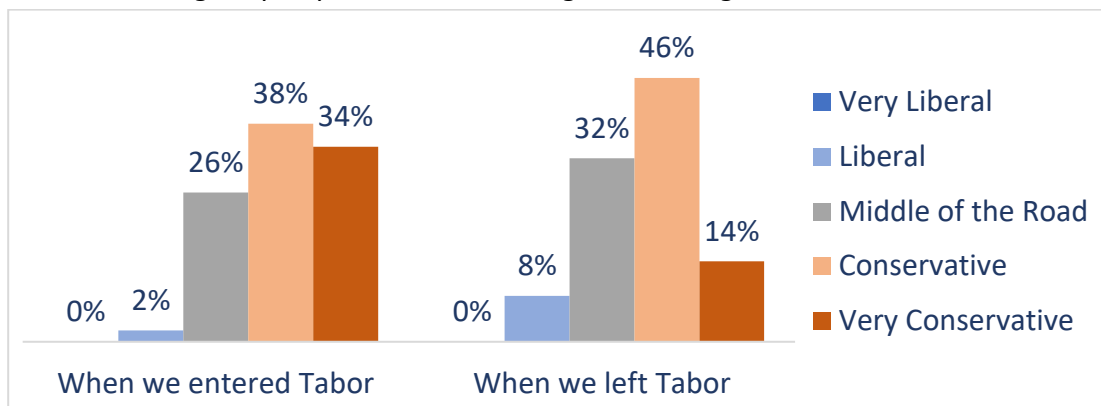
Only ten classmates did not identify someone as having been particularly helpful to them or influential in their lives.

People's comments revealed how highly they valued those who took a personal interest in them or reflected personal qualities they subsequently tried to model. It was not necessarily the exceptional teaching in the classroom that made these professors special. It's significant that 80% of the respondents could point to a professor (or professors) who had a specific impact on their lives. This personal connection was a very important part of our class' collective experience and suggests that this may have been Tabor's strongest comparative advantage over larger and better-resourced institutions.

How our theological perspectives changed during college

We asked the Class of '67 about their theological perspectives at three different points in time: when they arrived at Tabor, when they left Tabor, and today. We gave them a five-point scale that went from *VERY CONSERVATIVE* to *VERY LIBERAL*. Figure 4-1 shows how we changed during college.

Figure 4-1 Our theological perspectives on entering and leaving Tabor.



Nearly three-quarters of the class described themselves theologically as having been either *CONSERVATIVE* or *VERY CONSERVATIVE* when they arrived at Tabor. Two percent described themselves as *LIBERAL* when they arrived at college. None described themselves as *VERY LIBERAL*. The proportion of the respondents considering themselves *CONSERVATIVE* or *VERY CONSERVATIVE* dropped to 60% by the time we left Tabor. The *MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD* group grew as did the percentage of those who saw themselves as *LIBERAL* when they left Tabor. Again, none described themselves as *VERY LIBERAL* at that point.

About 40% of our classmates, using different words, said their theological beliefs had not changed or had changed very little during their time at Tabor. For those whose theological perspectives had shifted during college, we gave the opportunity to explain how this happened, and why.

Among the majority who reported that their theological perspectives had changed during college, some expressed it as a deepening faith and moving beyond the “thou-shalt-nots” of their youth. One described [Going] “... from legalism to understanding true Christianity.” Another: “My commitment to Christ was reinforced and deepened.” One put it this way: “I became less legalistic and more desiring to live my life by loving Jesus and wanting to serve Him.” The same theme came out in another comment: “I moved from a legalistic do’s-and-don’ts to an understanding of Christianity established in the work of Christ.”

The “broadening” theme continued in several other comments: “[I] became more aware of different perspectives which made me more open to other points of view.” Others expanded on that: “[I] realized that Christians come in all shapes and sizes.” One said: “I no longer believed that only Mennonite Brethren would populate heaven.” The “broadening” theme came through in another statement: “I began to understand that the Bible was more than a plug-and-play set of instructions.”

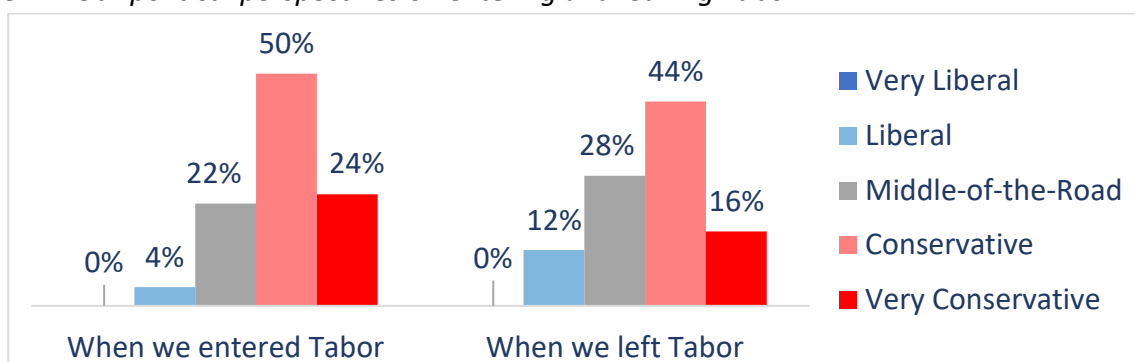
When asked what prompted these changes, a number of classmates identified Clarence Hiebert's influence. For example: *"Exposure to new ideas, significantly through Clarence Hiebert's World Religions class, which showed that the majority of the world was not consigned to hell."* Others mentioned the influence of Orlando Wiebe, Clarence Harms, and Delbert Wiens in reshaping their theological perspectives. A number also noted how discussions with friends and other students helped shape their new understandings.

A later section will show how our theological views have changed since college.

How our political perspectives changed during college

Not only did our theological orientations shift, but so did the political perspectives of some of our classmates. Again, we used a five-point scale from *VERY LIBERAL* to *VERY CONSERVATIVE*. Our changes in political perspectives while in college (Figure 4-2) were less significant than our shifts in theological perspectives.

Figure 4-2 Our political perspectives on entering and leaving Tabor.



Three-fourths of our class considered themselves politically *CONSERVATIVE* or *VERY CONSERVATIVE* at the start of our undergraduate careers. When we left Tabor, the percentage dropped to 60%. Later in this report, we'll see that it subsequently dropped further to 50%. Nobody reported being *VERY LIBERAL* either when they started college or when they left Tabor. The percentage of the class who considered themselves *LIBERAL* increased from 4% when they started college to 12% when they left Tabor.

The data show that our classmates' political views changed far less than their theological views. We found that 70% indicated that their political perspectives did not change at Tabor. They retained the conservative political orientations that were formed while growing up in their home communities. We asked those whose political perspectives had changed during their time at Tabor, what caused those changes? Many said they had little political interest or awareness during college, as typified by the following response: *"I do not think I changed politically during college—quite frankly I didn't think much about it then. I always thought I would hold the same views as my father."* Another said, *"I don't recall that political discussion was that much a part of my experience although I was aware of what was happening in the world."*

Of those who acknowledged that their political perspectives had changed, most indicated they had become slightly more liberal. The reason? Most in this group reported a growing concern about the Vietnam War. None, however, hinted at any involvement in anti-war activism. A few mentioned President Kennedy as an inspirational figure. One person identified history and political science courses as having demonstrated that *"progressive political, social, and economic programs could make a necessary positive impact."* An individual whose views had not changed admitted that *"I became friends with people who had differing political views and became less clear that I had the only acceptable perspective."* Another classmate said, *"Actually my perspectives changed causing me to become more conservative."*

Clearly, for the Class of '67, Tabor College was not a politically charged place.

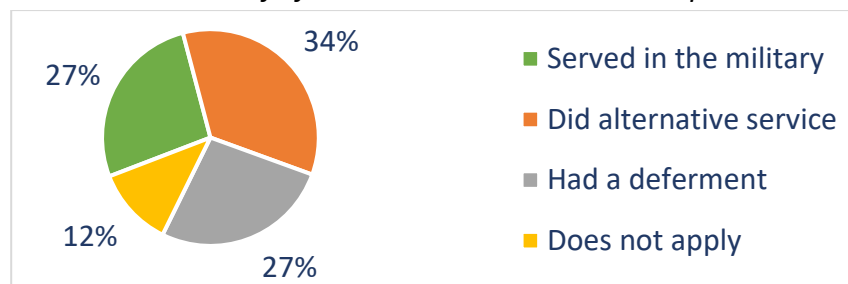
5. Establishing Ourselves

Life following departure from Tabor presented us with a new set of circumstances. Many fulfilled their Selective Service obligations, went to graduate school, started families, or began careers. Many of us lived in multiple states, some lived abroad, and most traveled outside the country.

Military/alternative service

We came of age during the Vietnam War and military conscription. Consequently, the men who were U.S. citizens, and therefore subject to the draft, faced a choice on how to respond. While some received deferments (educational, medical, etc.), the others had to choose between alternative service or the military. Those choices are summarized in Figure 5-1:

Figure 5-1 How the men in our class fulfilled their Selective Service requirements.

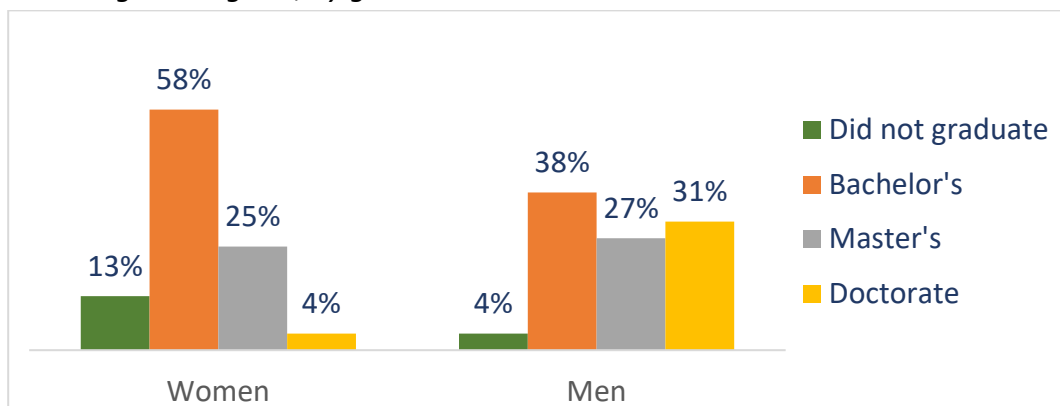


A third performed alternative service as conscientious objectors. We will see later that many of the latter served overseas in Africa with the Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services (now called Multiply) or the Mennonite Central Committee. This was largely attributable to the active encouragement of Tabor faculty.

Highest degrees we earned

We wanted to know the extent to which our class went on to earn other degrees after graduating from college and looked at the data by gender in Figure 5-2. We collapsed academic (Ph.D.) and professional doctorates (JD, DMIN, EdD, DDS, and OD) into a single category of doctorates.

Figure 5-2 Our highest degrees, by gender.

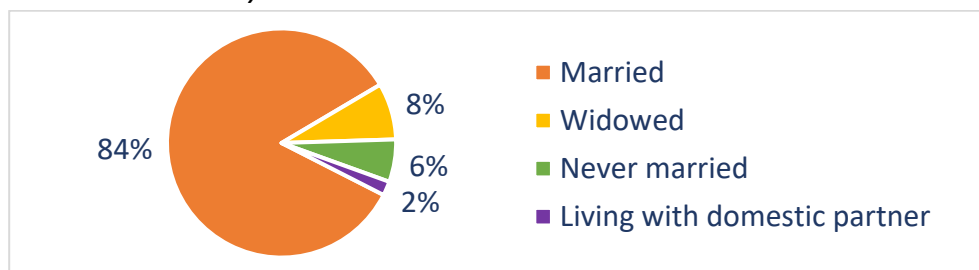


Forty-four percent of our class went on to professional or graduate school. Similar percentages of men and women received master's degrees as their highest degree. However, an additional 31% of men received a doctorate degree, in comparison to 4% of women.

Marital and family status

We asked respondents about their current marital status. (We did not ask about divorce or remarriage.) Overwhelmingly we are married today (see Figure 5-3).

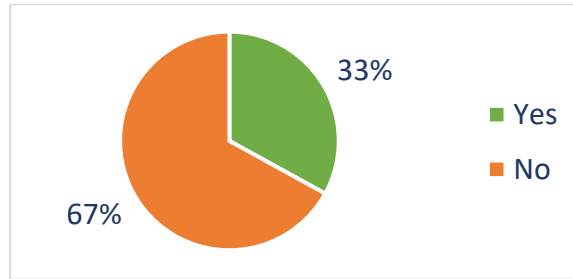
Figure 5-3 Marital status today.



Some met their spouses at Tabor

How many of our classmates met their spouses at Tabor? A college like Tabor would have been considered a particularly good place for young Mennonites to find a life partner. Of those who married, one-third of us did.

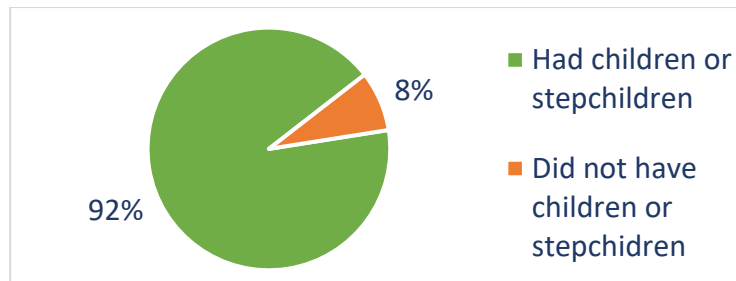
Figure 5-4 Meeting a spouse at Tabor.



Most of us had children

Most of us (Figure 5-5) had children or stepchildren.

Figure 5-5 Percentage of the class with children or stepchildren.



Although many of us were parents, we will see later that few of our children went to Tabor.

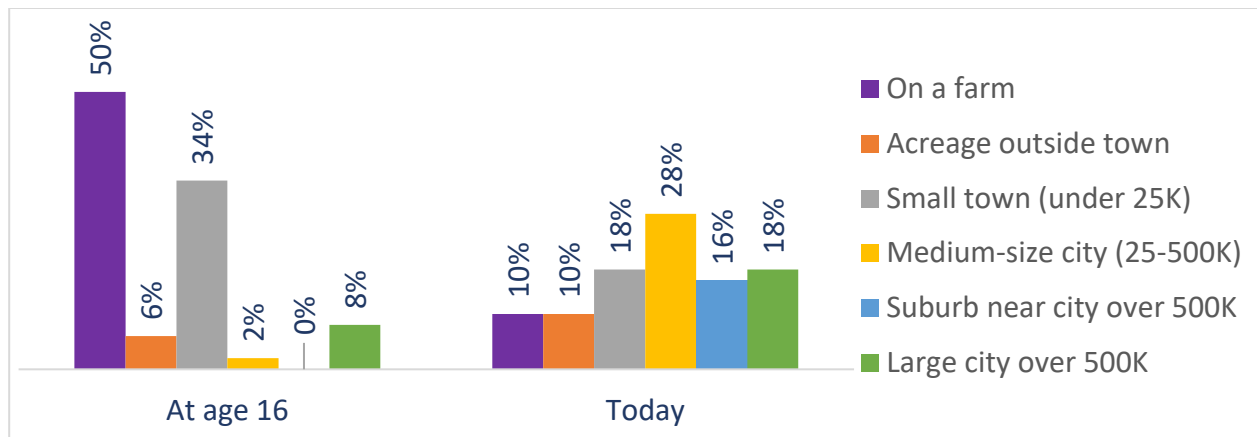
6. The Places We Lived and to Which We Traveled

Americans have generally become more mobile in recent decades so we asked our classmates about where they had lived and traveled.

Where we lived at age 16 and today

We noted earlier that more than two-thirds of us came from farms and small rural communities. Figure 6-1 shows that after college, many of us moved to urban centers.

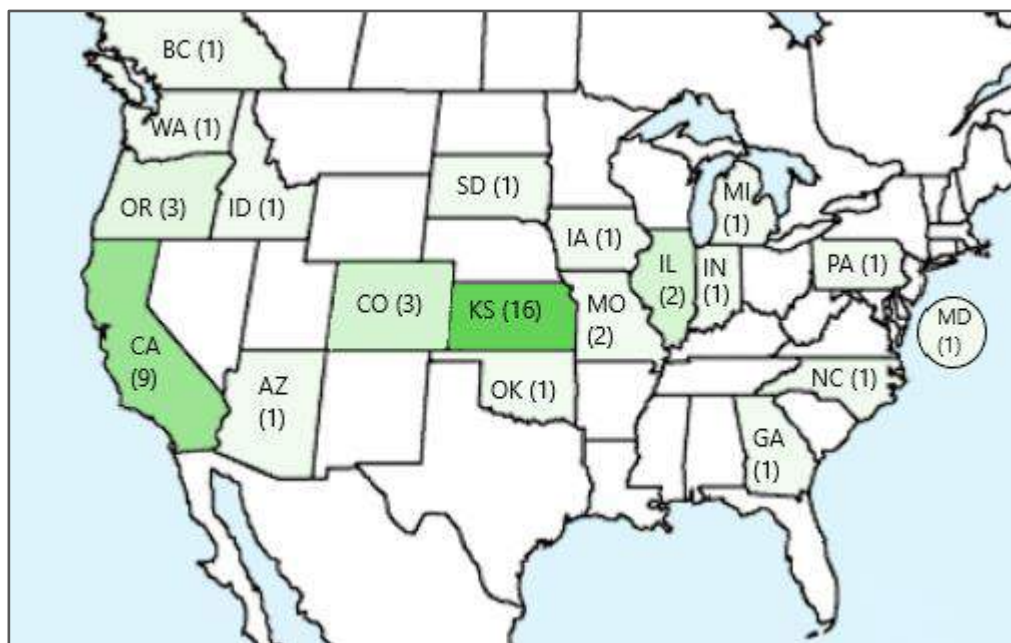
Figure 6-1 Type of place where we lived at age 16 and where we live today.



Today, 62% of us live in cities with populations over 25,000. Just over one-third still live on farms or in small rural communities like the ones from which we came. A third of us live in large cities or suburbs.

We also broke it down by state (Figure 6-2). As before college, Kansas remains home to more of our classmates today than any other state, with California a distant second.

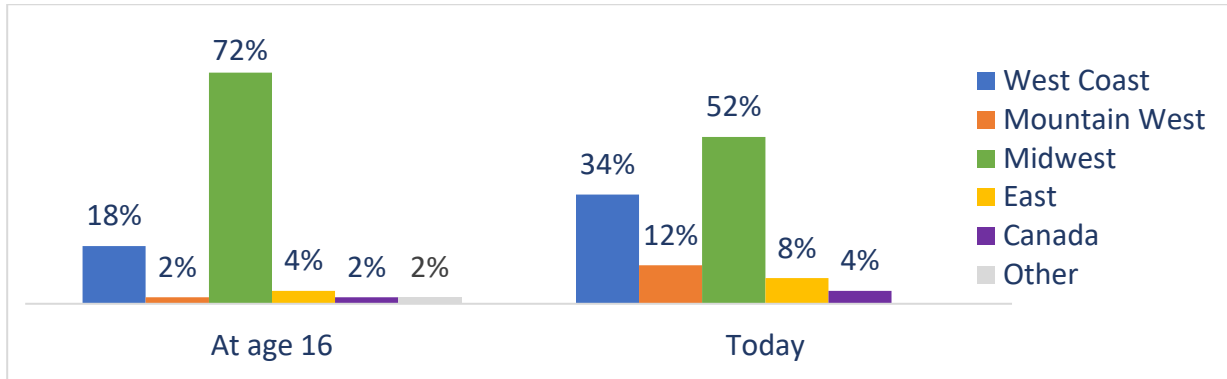
Figure 6-2 The states and province where we live today.



Some moved to other regions

Our class has been mobile. As Figure 6-3 shows, the distribution of the regions in which we live changed markedly after age 16.

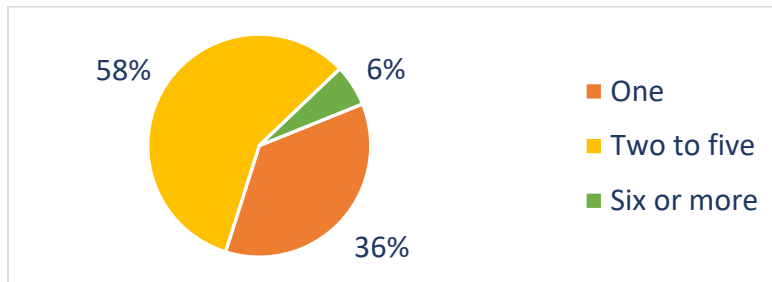
Figure 6-3 Regions where we live now compared to age 16.



At age 16, nearly three-fourths of us were living in the Midwest (between the Rockies and the Mississippi), a figure that dropped to around half at the time of the survey. The percentage of our classmates on the West Coast nearly doubled (increased from 18% to 34%) between high school and today.

The majority of us (Figure 6-4) lived in multiple states and provinces over the course of our adult lives.

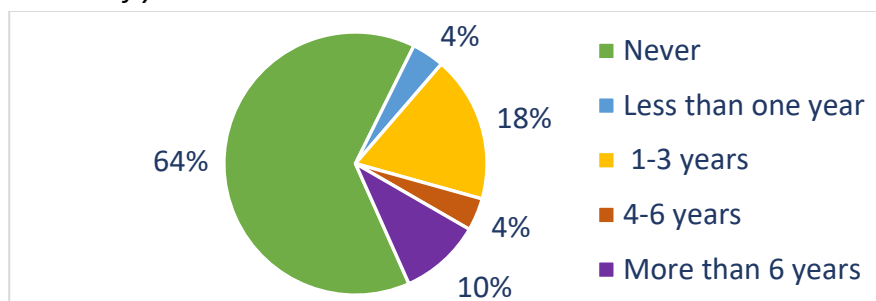
Figure 6-4 Number of different states or provinces in which we lived.



Some lived abroad

About a third of our class (see Figure 6-5) lived outside the U.S. or Canada at some point in their lives.

Figure 6-5 The number of years lived outside the U.S. and Canada.



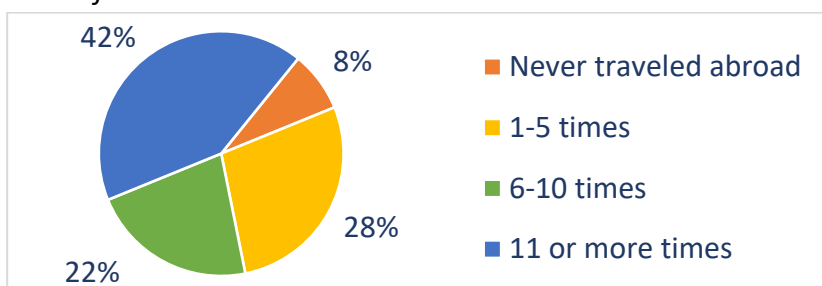
A number in our class fulfilled their military or alternative service abroad, which helps account for the number who lived internationally. Anecdotally, we know that those who lived overseas for more than six years were serving with the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) or other NGOs.

Although Mexico is located in North America and contiguous to the U.S., we included it as living or traveling abroad since it would have been an intercultural experience. We did not consider Canada as being abroad since the two countries share a common language, culture, a permeable border, and often ties of kinship.

Many travel abroad

Because we were interested in our classmates' intercultural experiences, we asked them about their travels outside the U.S. and Canada. We found (Figure 6-6) that many of us had done so.

Figure 6-6 The number of times we traveled outside the U.S. and Canada.



Again, this means that many of our classmates had multiple opportunities to experience other countries and cultures, though our data don't show how many of these trips involved cruises or vacations in the Caribbean.

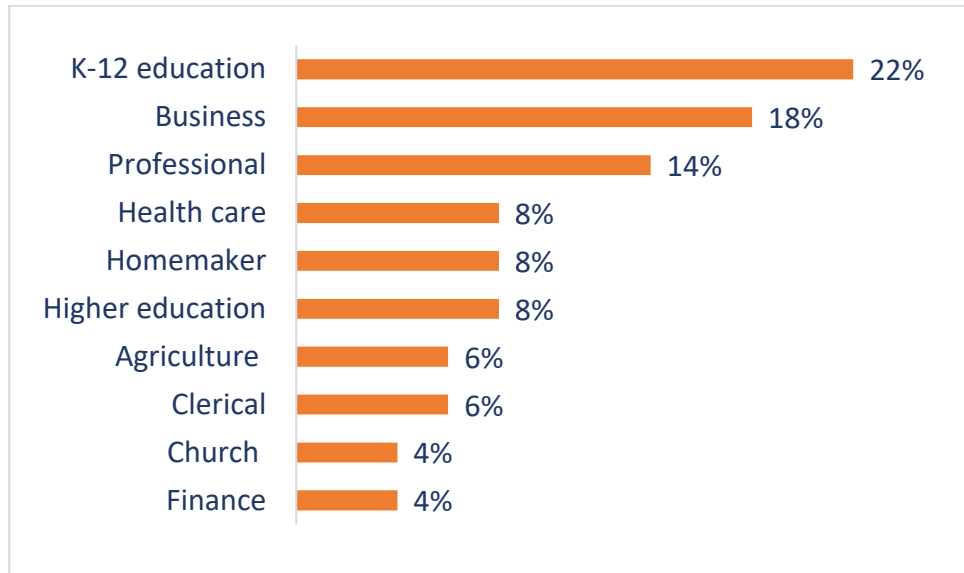
7. Professional Lives and Careers

We were interested in our classmates' professional lives and careers after Tabor, so we asked them what they did. We also asked them how they felt about their lives' work.

Primary occupation

Rather than try to create an exhaustive list of potential careers in which our classmates had been involved, we asked an open-ended question about their primary occupations. We then clustered their responses into the occupational categories presented in Figure 7-1:

Figure 7-1 Our primary occupations.

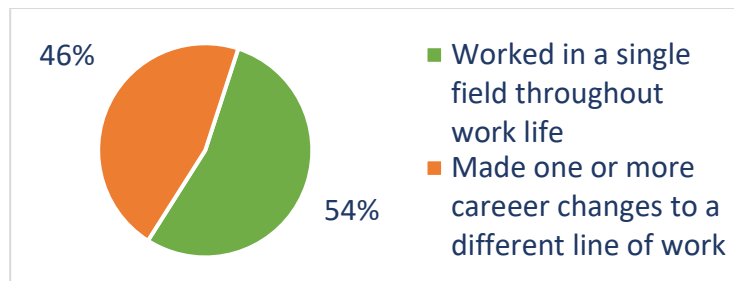


Education was the largest occupational field. Together, K-12 education and higher education employed nearly a third of our classmates. Business and the professions were the next largest groups. Under *business*, we included small business owners (photography studio, quilt shop, print shop, travel agent, business products) and business managers. *Professional* included accounting, journalism, fishery scientist, library science, and human resources. *Medical* included medical research, nursing, dentistry, and optometry. *Finance* included banking and financial services. The respondents in the *church* category were pastors.

Multiple career changes

We were interested in the extent to which people remained in the same field throughout their careers or switched occupations at some point. Figure 7-2 shows what we learned:

Figure 7-2 Working in a single field versus changing to a different line of work?

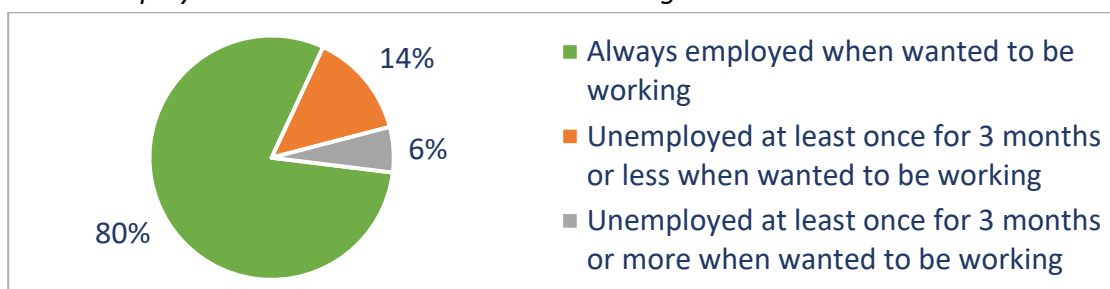


Slightly more than half of the respondents indicated that they had spent their entire careers in a single field while the others reported making one or more career changes. To be clear, we specifically asked about *career* changes rather than *job* changes since most people hold multiple positions over time, often with increasing levels of responsibility.

Periods of unemployment

Because we have lived through periods of heightened unemployment during our adult lives, we asked about the extent to which our classmates were employed when they wanted to be working. The level of unemployment in our class (Figure 7-3) over the 50-year period was remarkably low.

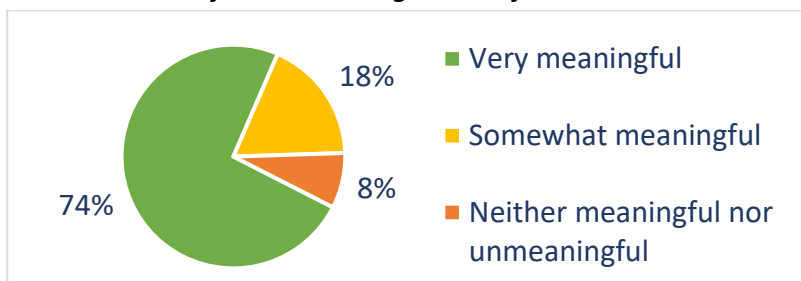
Figure 7-3 Unemployment when we wanted to be working.



Meaning in our work

We then asked our classmates to reflect on how they now see their lives and careers. Specifically, we asked them to indicate how meaningful they found their work using a five-point scale ranging from *LACKED MEANING* to *VERY MEANINGFUL*.

Figure 7-4 The extent to which we found meaning in our life's work.



Ninety-two percent of our class see their life's work as *VERY MEANINGFUL* or *SOMEWHAT MEANINGFUL*. No one suggested they saw their life's work as having *LACKED MEANING*. Clearly, those in the Class of '67 feel good about their life's work and careers.

When given the opportunity to elaborate further, our classmates spoke almost in unison about what they meant by "meaningful." However, no one defined meaningful as "importance." Nor did anyone mention accomplishments, fame, or fortune. Was that because no one climbed high up the corporate ladders or achieved enormous wealth? Or because our parents, churches, home communities, and college education infused us with a different definition of meaningfulness?

"Making a difference in the lives of others"—whether students, customers, clients, co-workers—was a common phrase people used to describe what made their work meaningful. Several variations of the theme included: *"I enjoyed working with people and finding ways to make their lives more enjoyable and meaningful."* Or *"Teaching children to read [and] write, I think was a very positive experience for me."* Or *"People should see God through you."* Or *"I believe what I did made a difference to my students and to the organizations in which I served."*

Several took satisfaction and inspiration from meeting challenges. One said, *"It was challenging, served our customers often in social and emotional ways...it fed my creative gifts."* Another said that *"What I did from day to day was intellectually challenging and satisfying."* One noted satisfaction in that *"I was always learning and continually facing new challenges."*

Those who rated their work more neutrally—neither meaningful nor unmeaningful—described it in more guarded terms: *"My occupation as a teacher was not particularly meaningful. It was the way I earned a living. I was a good teacher, but not a gifted teacher. It turned out well. I have no regrets."* Others said, "Sometimes [my occupation] seems so vain, but it fulfilled a purpose for my community." One called it *"...a job. Brought in income and benefits."* Similarly, there was a comment that *"[it] provided for my family, and set my stage for retirement."*

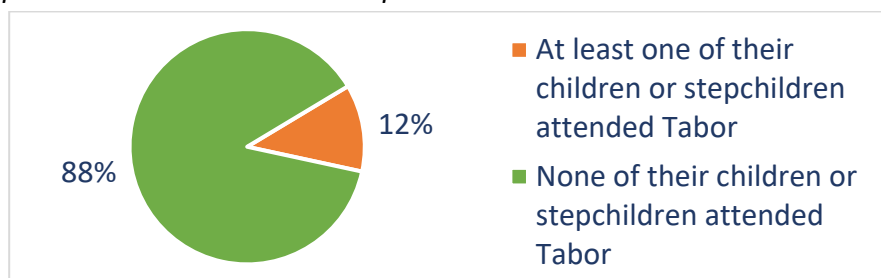
8. Relationship to Tabor College

As Tabor graduates, we wanted to know how closely, and in what ways, our classmates had stayed connected with the college. Did they send their children to Tabor? Did they attend Tabor events? Donate money? How do they feel about their Tabor experience five decades later?

Our children at Tabor

Although 92% of us had children, few of them (Figure 8-1) followed us to Tabor.

Figure 8-1 The percent whose children or stepchildren attended Tabor.

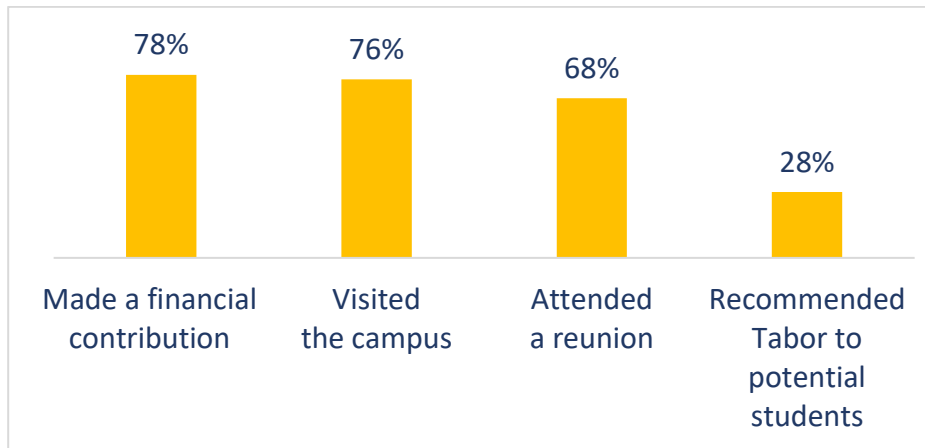


It would be interesting to explore why so many who attended Tabor had a good experience and graduated there, but their children went to other colleges.

Our relationship to Tabor after college

We also asked about the ways in which they have interacted with Tabor since graduation. We provided several options (Figure 8-2).

Figure 8-2 Our interaction with Tabor since graduation.



Our classmates are arguably better connected with each other than are those in other classes. For example, the class organized a 50-year reunion and followed it with a two-day retreat in Hesston that brought together more than 35 people. In conjunction with the *Golden Graduate* celebration at Tabor, the Class of '67 raised \$30,000, which was a record class gift.

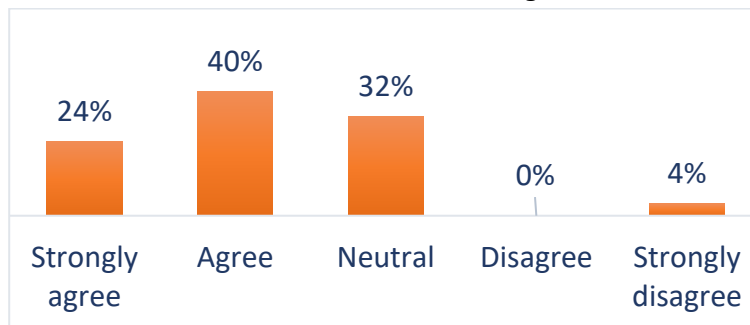
Although not part of the questionnaire, we are unaware of any of our classmates serving on the Tabor faculty or the Board of Trustees.

While many contributed financially to the college, our data show that only a quarter of the class had recommended Tabor to a potential student.

Reflections on the Tabor experience

In a 2021 *Anabaptist World* editorial, someone wrote, “My education at [another Mennonite college] was vital in laying a foundation for my life. Professionally and personally, the ripple effects of my experiences in college are too many to count...I would do it again.” Using a five-point scale from *STRONGLY AGREE* to *STRONGLY DISAGREE*, we asked our classmates about the extent they would agree with that statement if it referred to Tabor College. Figure 8-3 summarizes their responses:

Figure 8-3 “My education at Tabor was vital... I would do it again.”



Nearly two-thirds agreed or strongly agreed with that statement. Tabor had played a vital role in establishing the foundation for the Class of '67, and if we had to make that decision over, we'd do it again. About one-third gave a neutral response—neither particularly positive nor negative. Four percent strongly disagreed with that statement. We asked everyone to share the rationale behind their choice.

The responses, perhaps influenced by how the question was framed, clearly said that Tabor provided “a strong foundation,” “a good groundwork,” or “a start for who I was to become.” A number indicated that Tabor provided a transition from their small-town home communities. One noted, “Given the limited exposure to the world I received prior to college, Tabor was an appropriate next step for me.” Another said, “Tabor was a place for me to understand the narrow scope of the MB world; before that I thought that was all there was...the main benefit was it helped me to ask questions.” Someone else described faith formation during college as “not changing, but growing stronger,” and acknowledged “exploring the elements of my Christian faith in a way that led to further growth and understanding later.”

“Life-long friendships” and meeting a spouse were mentioned by more than a few as lasting benefits from their years at Tabor.

Some hinted that their academic training at Tabor was good, but not great. Others praised the academic preparation for their careers. Several responses mirrored the comment of one who “found a field of study/work that was the first step toward a satisfying career.” Similarly, some echoed their response to an earlier question about a professor who made a life-changing difference by pointing them in the direction of a career they had not previously considered. Others reported gaining confidence in themselves, something they had previously lacked.

Those who were neutral about Tabor—neither agreeing or not with the statement—said or implied that they had been shaped more by their previous experience and relationships (e.g., “parents and grandparents”) or after (“situations and experiences after college life”). Some acknowledged that they had been too immature during their college years to receive the full benefit of what college had to offer.

Looking back, another noted that “While I had a great experience, I doubt I would pay today’s tuition [to attend Tabor].”

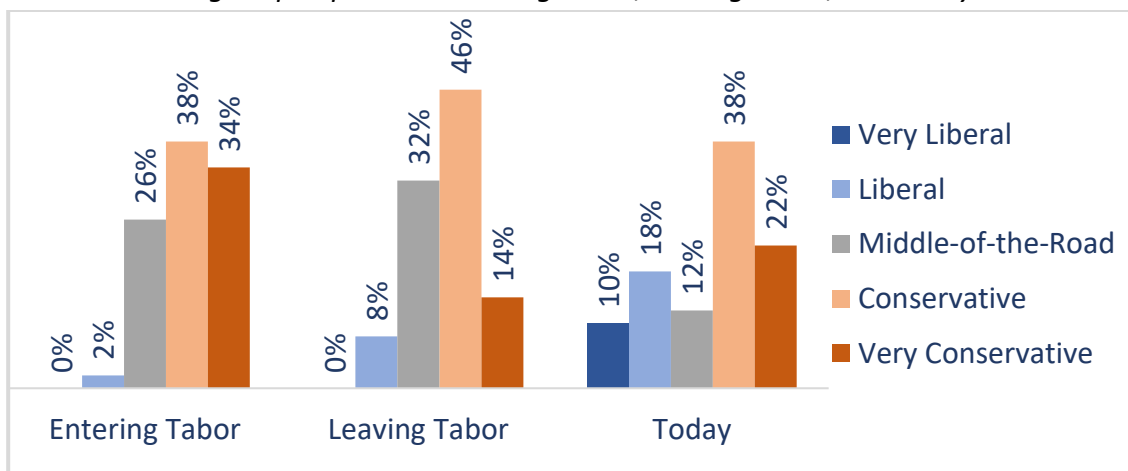
9. Religious Perspectives and Engagement with the Church

We asked our classmates about their theological beliefs—and how these had changed over the decades. We also asked them about their participation in religious activities.

Changes in our theological perspectives over the course of our lives

Our data show that we moved toward the two ends of the theological spectrum. Some became more liberal while others became more conservative. We were definitely conservative when we arrived at Tabor, but by the time we left, we were less so. We generally are even less conservative today as we can see in Figure 9-1.

Figure 9-1 Our theological perspectives entering Tabor, leaving Tabor, and today.



The relative size of the *CONSERVATIVE/VERY CONSERVATIVE* group is the same as it was when we left Tabor, but today, more of those describe themselves as *VERY CONSERVATIVE*. Over the same period, the *LIBERAL/VERY LIBERAL* group grew to more than a quarter of the class. Since we left Tabor, we have moved theologically from the center toward the two ends of the spectrum, with some becoming more liberal and the conservatives becoming more conservative.

Given the opportunity to comment on how their theological perspectives changed since their college years, classmates who identified themselves as liberals were more inclined to explain what shaped them. One went so far as to say, “Christianity/spirituality have been completely left behind,

because of the way human beings call themselves Christians, but don't live the way they say they believe." Others who retain their faith but see it differently than they once did, spoke of taking the Bible *"seriously, but not literally,"* or understanding it to be *"metaphorical and not literal."*

Of those whose views became more liberal, most attributed the change to relationships with *"people from other religions or faiths"* or *"a diverse community of friends and neighbors."* One said that *"my children have stretched my thinking."* More than a few pointed to international experience, and specifically to teaching and service assignments under MB and MCC programs; one described their service as having *"tremendously expanded my perspective on who and what Jesus was sent to 'save.'"* Another questioned *"the idea that Christianity is for all. The essence of humanity is kindness, goodness, respect, and is something that can be found in Buddhists and Muslims, too."*

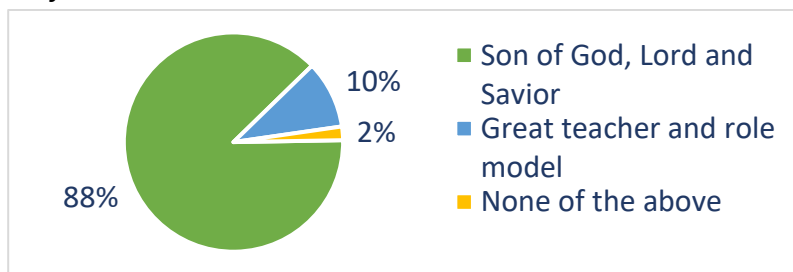
Those who described themselves as theologically conservative were less inclined to offer explanatory comments. Two expressed a similar belief that their Savior or God's Word *"remains the same yesterday, today, and forever."* One said that *"as I have matured as a Christian, I have become more conservative and biblically founded."* Others described spiritual changes that didn't alter fundamental beliefs, but reported having matured, grown in knowledge of Christ, and *"moved from legalism to grace."* One elaborated by saying *"I am more compassionate and accepting to diverse thinking and opinions, while not abandoning my core beliefs and values. I am not confrontational now and more accept[ing] of questioning than I was when I was a senior at Tabor."*

How we view Jesus

We used two questions to learn more about the underlying assumptions people make about Jesus and the Bible.

A fundamental difference between Christianity and other religions is how they view Jesus. We gave the respondents several statements that reflect different views and asked them to identify the one that most closely aligns with their beliefs. See Figure 9-2:

Figure 9-2 Our views of Jesus.



Most of the Class of '67 continue to reflect a very evangelical Christian view of Jesus and his ministry—seeing him as *SON OF GOD, LORD, AND SAVIOR*. We gave respondents another option: that Jesus was *SIMPLY A PROPHET AND TEACHER LIKE OTHERS OF HIS TIME, THOUGH BETTER KNOWN*. None selected it. A national survey in 2020 by LifeWay Research, on the other hand, found that 51% of the people

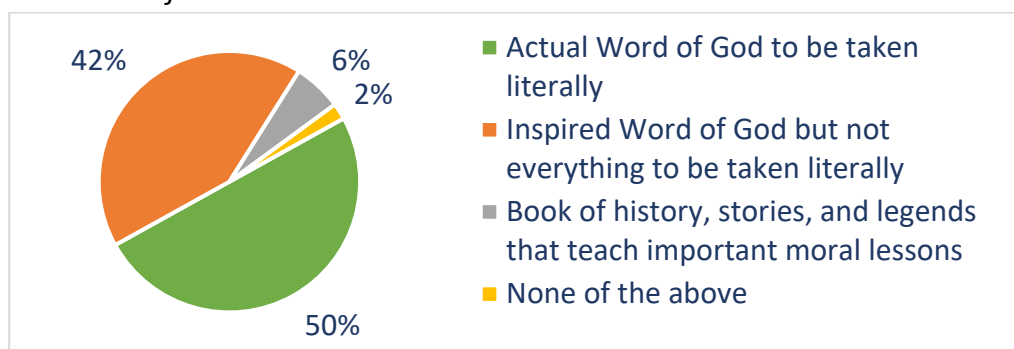
agreed (or strongly agreed) with the statement saying that Jesus was a great teacher, but not God. Thirty-six percent disagreed while 12% said they were not sure.²

A 2022 Gallup poll found that the number of people in the U.S. who believe in God has now dropped to 81%.³ As the LifeWay Research study found, however, they just don't believe that Jesus is Lord. The Class of '67 does.

How we view the Bible

We followed up with a question about people's views of the Bible. We asked them to choose a statement from several options that best described how they see the Bible today. The responses shown in Figure 9-3 reflect a conservative view of the Bible.

Figure 9-3 Our views of the Bible.



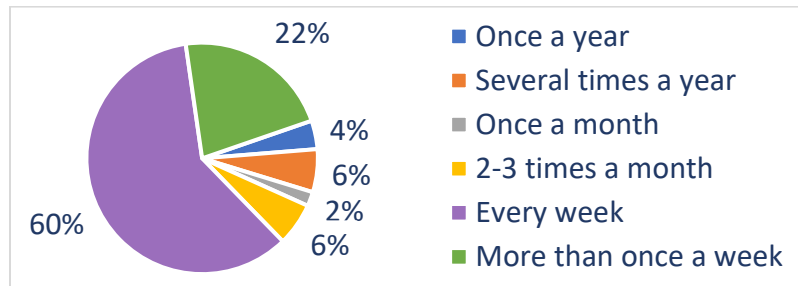
The respondents generally held a conservative view of the Bible but reflected the divisions among many Christians. Half see the Bible as the *ACTUAL WORD OF GOD TO BE TAKEN LITERALLY*, word for word. Forty-two percent believe it is the *INSPIRED WORD OF GOD, BUT NOT EVERYTHING TO BE TAKEN LITERALLY*. A few see it as a *BOOK OF HISTORY, STORIES, AND LEGENDS THAT TEACH IMPORTANT MORAL LESSONS*. As a point of comparison, a recent poll of U.S. adults found that 20% see the Bible as the “*actual word of God*.”⁴ Forty-nine percent believe it is the “*Inspired word of God*” but not necessary the “*actual word of God*,” while 29% consider the Bible to be “*an ancient book of fables*.”

The data show that people's political orientations are reflected in how they view the Bible. Eighty percent of those in the politically conservative or very conservative group indicated they see the Bible as *THE ACTUAL WORD OF GOD TO BE TAKEN LITERALLY*. Twenty percent of them see the Bible as the *INSPIRED WORD OF GOD BUT NOT EVERYTHING IS TO BE TAKEN LITERALLY*. Seventy-five percent of those whose politics place them in the *MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD, LIBERAL, OR VERY LIBERAL* groups see the Bible as the *INSPIRED WORD OF GOD BUT NOT EVERYTHING IS TO BE TAKEN LITERALLY*. Five percent of the politically liberal and middle-of-the-road referred to the Bible as the *ACTUAL WORLD OF GOD TO BE TAKEN LITERALLY*, word for word. Twenty percent of this group called the Bible a book of history, stories, and legends that teach important moral lessons.

Church attendance prior to the pandemic

Church attendance might be considered one objective indicator of religious commitment, so we asked how often they attended religious services. Because this survey was conducted during the pandemic when many churches were meeting online only, we asked respondents how often they attended religious services *prior* to the pandemic. Figure 9-4 shows the results:

Figure 9-4 Attendance at religious services before the pandemic.



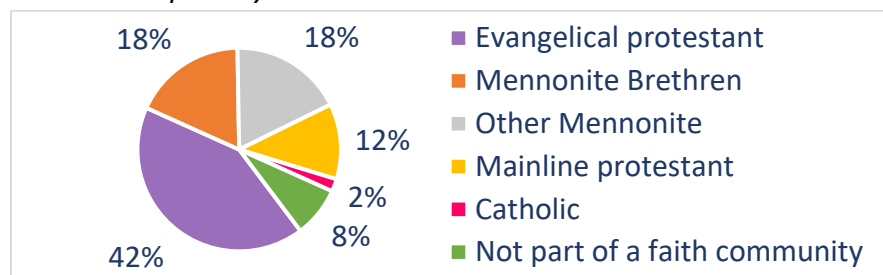
A total of 88% indicated that they attended church services at least two-three times per month. Only 10% said they attended less than once per month. Although *DID NOT ATTEND RELIGIOUS SERVICES* was given as an option, no one selected it.

According to research by the Pew Research Center, 24% of all Americans attend religious services at least once a week but for adults 65 and over, that increases to 48%. Sixty-three percent of evangelicals attend weekly.⁵ Clearly, the Class of '67 has continued to participate in religious services at over twice the rate of the rest of the U.S. population or their age cohorts.

Where we worship today

All respondents reported being part of local churches when they finished high school, so we wanted to know if this had changed over the years. Figure 9-5 indicates the types of churches of which they were part at the time of this survey.

Figure 9-5 Where we worship today.



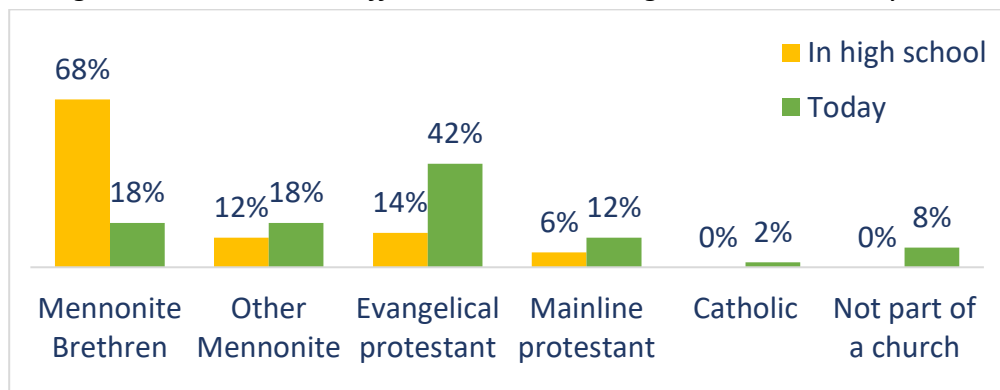
Though we were overwhelmingly Mennonite when we came to Tabor, only 36% report worshipping with Mennonite congregations today. Forty-two percent now say they are part of Evangelical Protestant congregations.

The fact that 92% of the Class of '67 remain part of local congregations today is quite remarkable.

How our denominational affiliations changed over time

The following graphic shows how the denominational affiliations of the Class of '67 changed between 1963, when most of us were finishing high school, and today:

Figure 9-6 Change in denominational affiliations between high school and today.

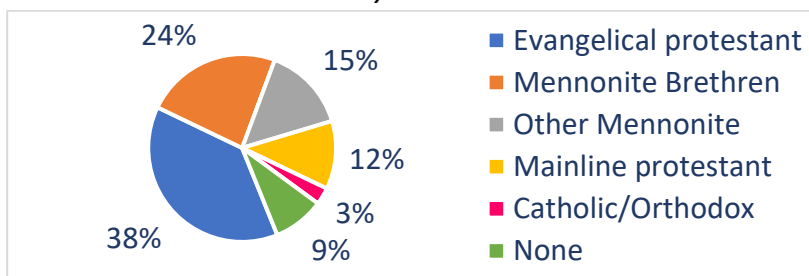


Eighty percent of us were part of Mennonite churches when we started college. Today, that number has dropped to 36%, evenly split between *MENNONITE BRETHREN* and *OTHER MENNONITE*. The number of those who now call themselves *EVANGELICAL PROTESTANT* has tripled since 1963. The percentage of those who now consider themselves *MAINLINE PROTESTANTS* has doubled since we started college.

Where the Mennonite Brethren went

Finding significant movement of MBs to other denominations, we wondered where they went. The distribution is shown in Figure 9-7.

Figure 9-7 Where those raised MB attend today.

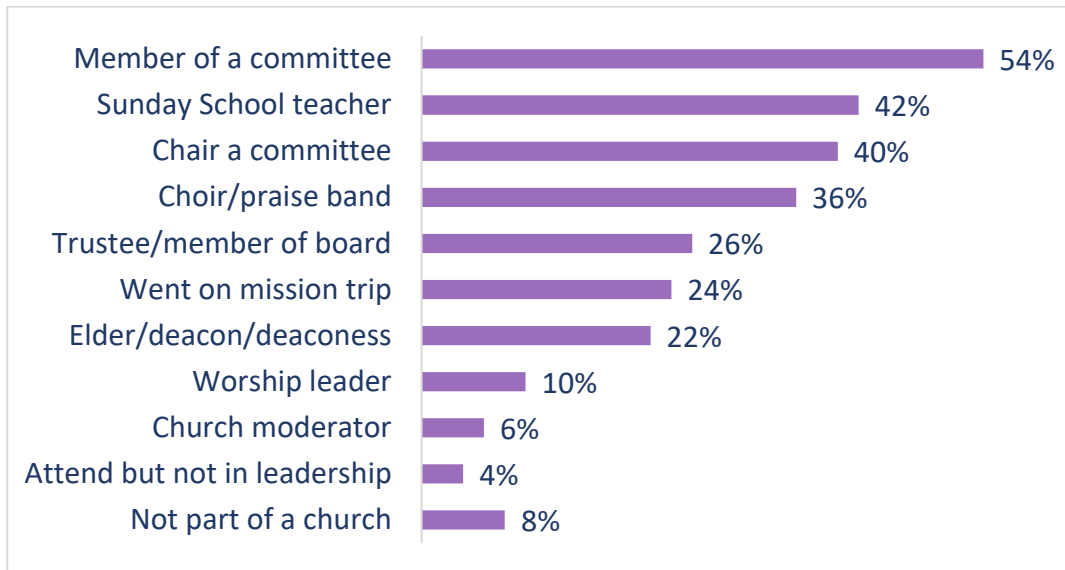


This graph shows where our classmates who identified themselves as MBs at the start of college ended up. The destination for MBs was mostly *EVANGELICAL PROTESTANT*. It might be argued that today there is little distinction between *MENNONITE BRETHREN* and *EVANGELICAL PROTESTANT*.

Involvement in local congregations

For those who continued to be part of local congregations, we asked how they had been involved in their churches. Specifically, we created a list of leadership roles and volunteer opportunities in church and asked everyone to identify the ways in which they had served their congregations over the past 15 years. We compiled the results into Figure 9-8:

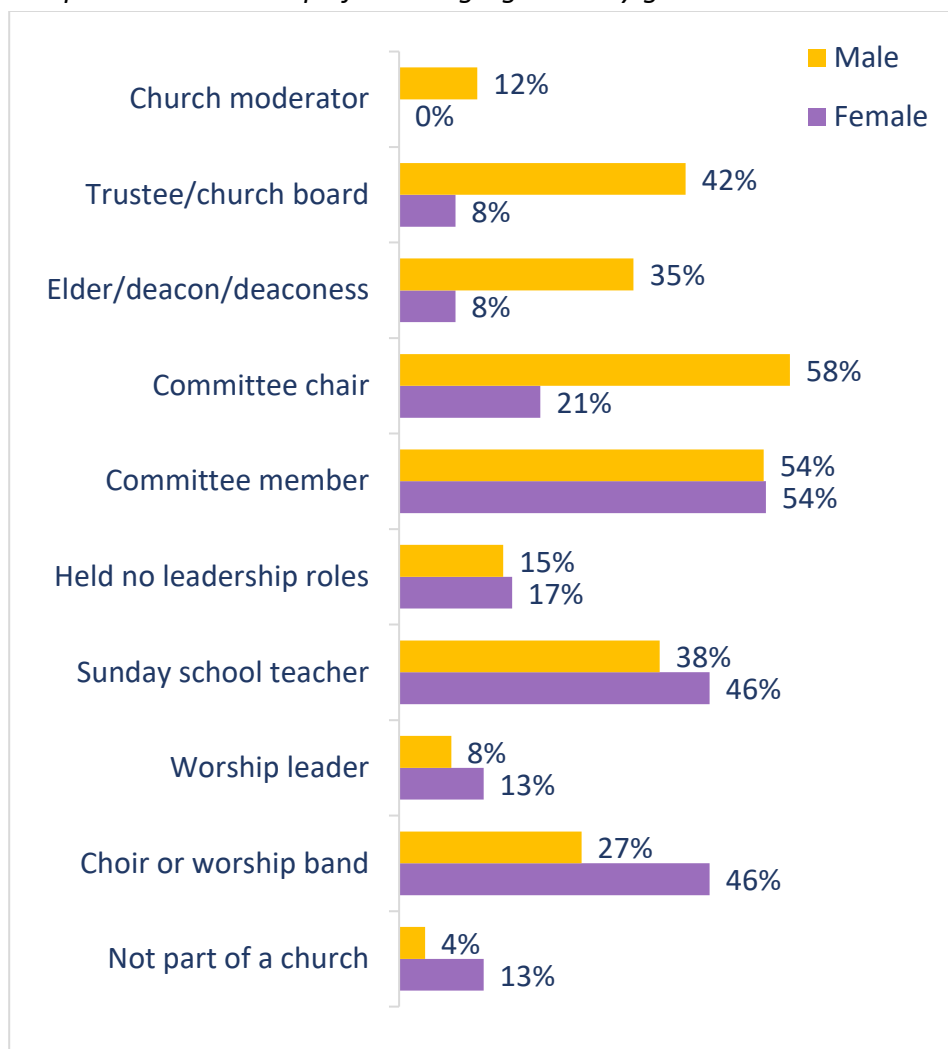
Figure 9-8 Participation in the leadership of our congregations.



Clearly, the church has continued to be central in the lives of most in our class. Having attended a Christian college and having remained active in local congregations, it’s not surprising that they also assumed institutional leadership roles.

When we broke down leadership roles and voluntary service by gender (Figure 9-9), an additional story emerged. Men and women hold dramatically different roles in their congregations.

Figure 9-9 Participation in leadership of our congregations by gender.



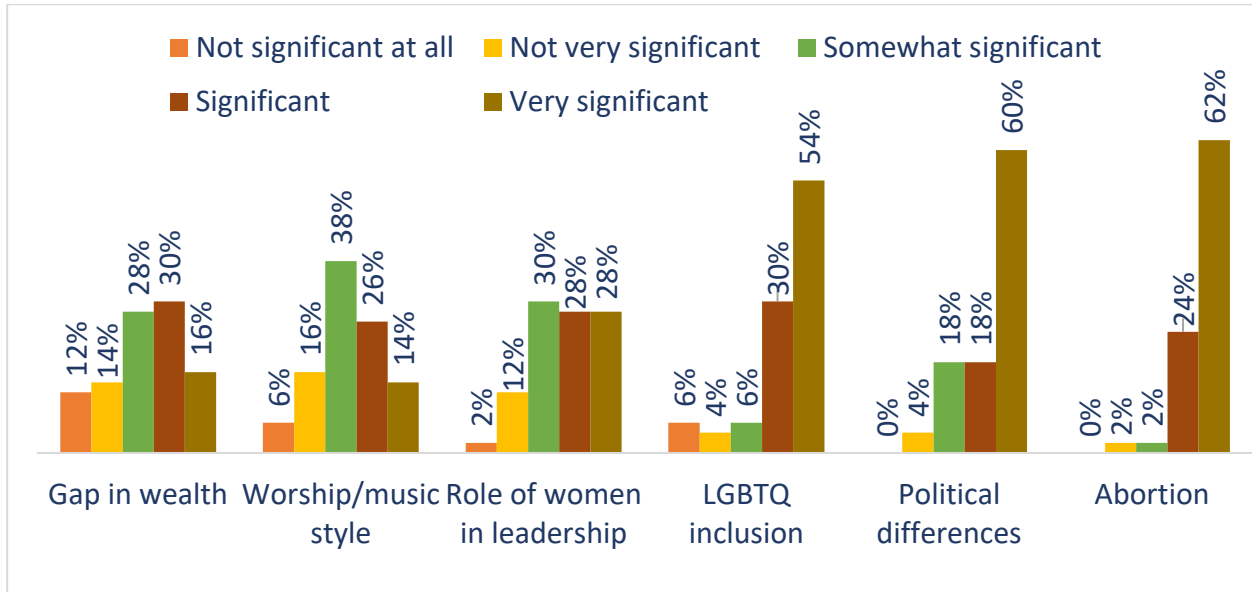
Women and men were equally likely to have served on committees, but men were more likely to have chaired them. Only men had been moderator, and few women served as a trustee or elder/deacon.

The data show that the men in our class have held more leadership roles in our churches than the women. Likely this is because so many in our class are now part of evangelical congregations where leadership is assumed to be the purview of men. It certainly reflects the traditional gender roles in the MB churches of our youth.

The issues we see that are straining the faith community today

There are many issues straining the church today. We created a list of issues from our observations and asked respondents to identify how significant those issues are using a five-point scale from *NOT SIGNIFICANT* to *VERY SIGNIFICANT*. The question focused on what they saw as the issues straining the church, *writ large*, not the importance or how they personally felt about those issues.

Figure 9-10 The most significant issues straining the faith community today.



The hot-button issues are clear: abortion, political differences, and the inclusion of LGBTQ congregants in church. (Note that these results pre-date the June 2022 Supreme Court decision on abortion.) The role of women in leadership causes less strain than these three but is more important than differences in worship/music styles and gaps in personal wealth.

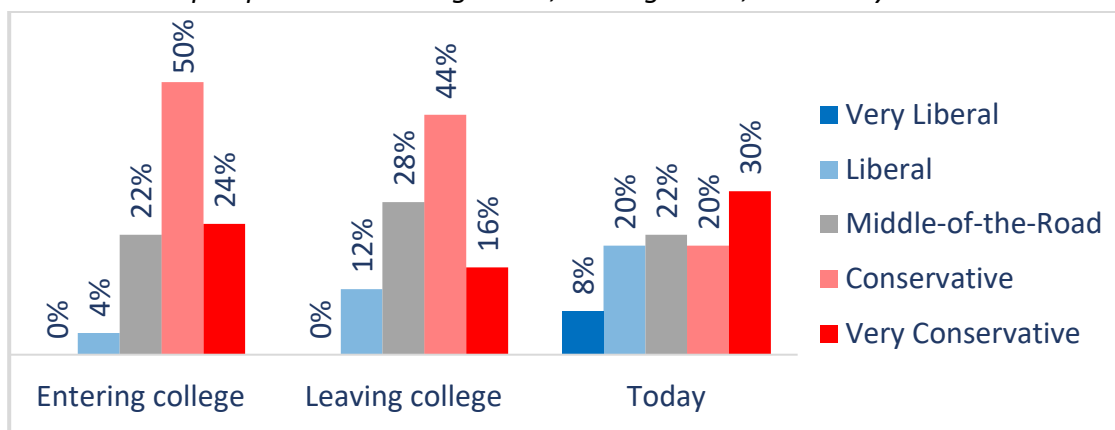
10. Political Perspectives and Engagement in Politics

With politics emerging as a significant issue in society, we asked our respondents about their political perspectives and their involvement in the political process.

How our political perspectives changed over the course of our lives

As we did with theological perspectives, we asked our classmates about political perspectives: when we arrived at Tabor, when we left Tabor, and today. The following graphic shows what we heard:

Figure 10-1 Political perspectives entering Tabor, leaving Tabor, and today.

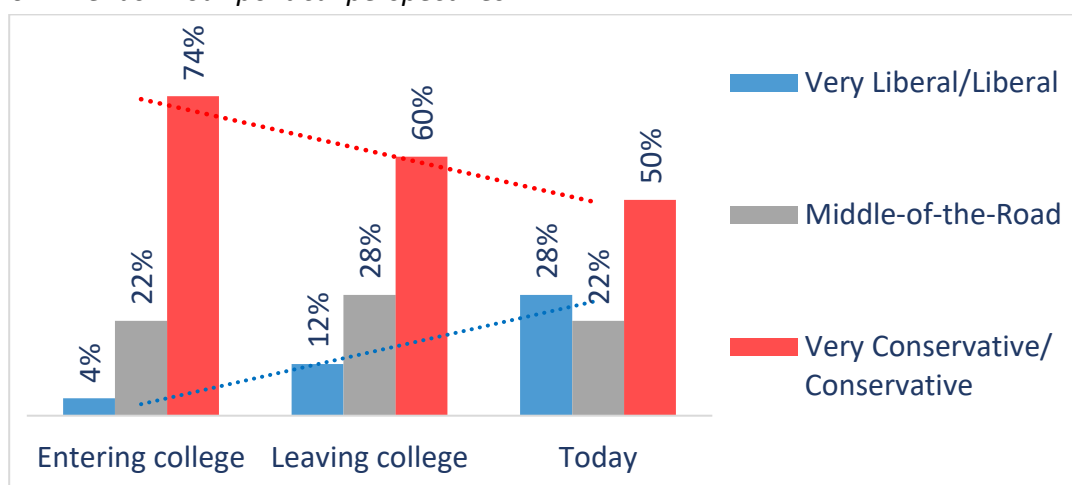


Entering college, very few considered themselves politically *LIBERAL*; none said they were *VERY LIBERAL*. However, by the time we left college, those calling themselves *LIBERAL* had tripled. The percentage of those who considered themselves *CONSERVATIVE* decreased during college as did the *VERY CONSERVATIVE* group.

The greater change—in both directions—took place *after* college. The number who now call themselves liberal has more than doubled. On the other side of the political spectrum, there was also a significant shift, from *CONSERVATIVE* to *VERY CONSERVATIVE*.

In order to visualize the trends, we reduced the political spectrum from five points to three—collapsing *VERY LIBERAL*/*LIBERAL* into one group and *VERY CONSERVATIVE*/*CONSERVATIVE* into another in Figure 10-2.

Figure 10-2 Trends in our political perspectives.



This revealed a gradual, but significant, evolution in our class's political profile. The combined Liberal category tripled from before college to after college. It subsequently more than doubled to the present. The combined Conservative group dropped during our college years, and since that time, it has decreased further to today.

Based on this graphic, it's clear that our class has realigned itself into a new distribution across the political spectrum.

With more to learn in these data, we will be exploring this further.

We found something very interesting when we asked people to comment on the change in their political perspectives. Those identifying themselves as *LIBERAL* or *MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD* were more inclined to discuss their change and the reasons for it, than those on the conservative side of the spectrum. Those who had become more liberal attributed their new perspectives to a greater awareness of poverty, injustice, and the inequitable distribution of wealth. They identified reading, discussion, small-group studies, and *"more exposure to the world"* as sources of that awareness. As with the theological-perspective question, some referred to *"working overseas"* and to *"exposure to varied social, economic, and cultural conditions during travel"* as particularly formative.

Several characterized their liberal tendencies as *"Trying to be a Jesus follower in the real world,"* or similarly: *"I have become more liberal and more socially minded. I believe that Jesus was this kind of person who cared for the whole person."*

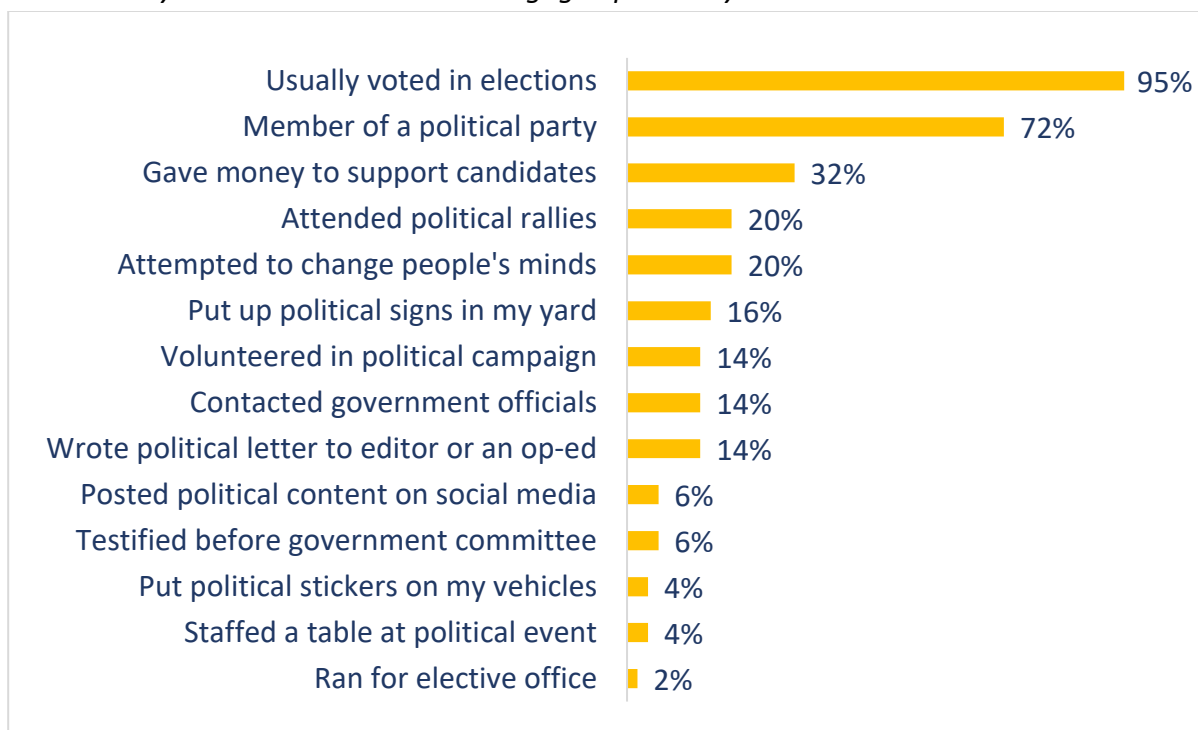
Two, who now position themselves as *MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD*, asserted, in the words of one, *"Donald Trump soured me on conservative [political] positions."*

The predominant theme among those identifying themselves as politically conservative was that the nation had drifted away from them. Another phrased the same idea another way: *"Still conservative. Somebody's moved the middle."* And another: *"As I see the world around me getting more and more liberal, with all the hatred and anger, I have moved to be more conservative."* One asserted that *"I became more conservative as I got older and the world got more liberal."* Another lamented *"watching the US drift from a constitutional republic toward being a welfare state."*

Political engagement

We not only asked people about their political beliefs—where they stood on a continuum from left to right—but we also about their political involvement. We provided a list of political actions and asked everyone to indicate the ones in which they had participated. The compilation is shown in Figure 10-3.

Figure 10-3 Ways in which we have been engaged politically.

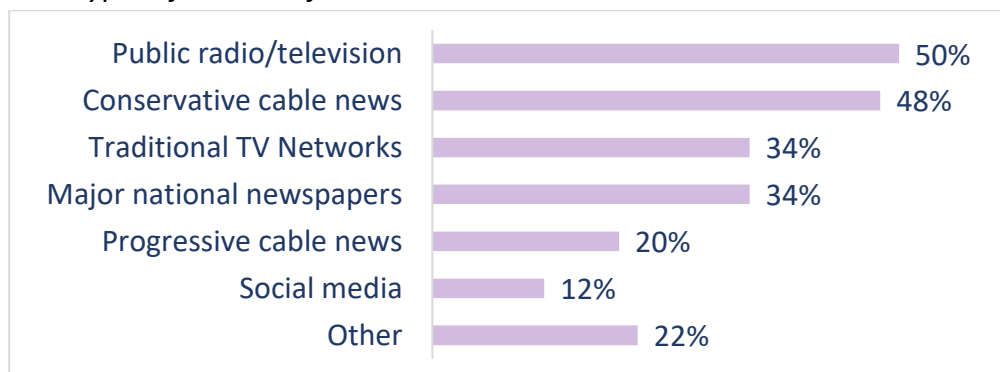


Although only one person among our respondents ever ran for elective office, we know that two of our classmates, now deceased, had served in their respective state legislatures.

Impressively, 95% usually voted, far exceeding the national average. By comparison, in the 2020 U.S. election which had the highest voter turnout in the 21st century, 67% of the eligible voters actually voted; even among adults 65-74 and adults 75 and older, the number was only 71%.⁶

Sources of national and international news

We know that people get their news about the nation and the world from different sources. News sources tend to have a perspective, so we asked our classmates to identify their three most trusted sources for national and international news. The following graphic shows what we learned:

Figure 10-4 The types of sources of national and international news that we trust.

Like the country at large, our classmates have widely varied preferences for the news sources they trust. Given the chance to identify three different types of sources, no single type was favored by more than half of the respondents. Two distinctly different types of sources—public radio and television, and conservative cable news—were each trusted by about half of the respondents. Traditional TV networks and major national newspapers each were mentioned by about one in three; progressive cable news by one in five; and social media by one in eight. Significantly, although we did list not Christian radio as an option, 22% of the class wrote it in as one of their three most trusted sources of news.

11. Engagement with the World

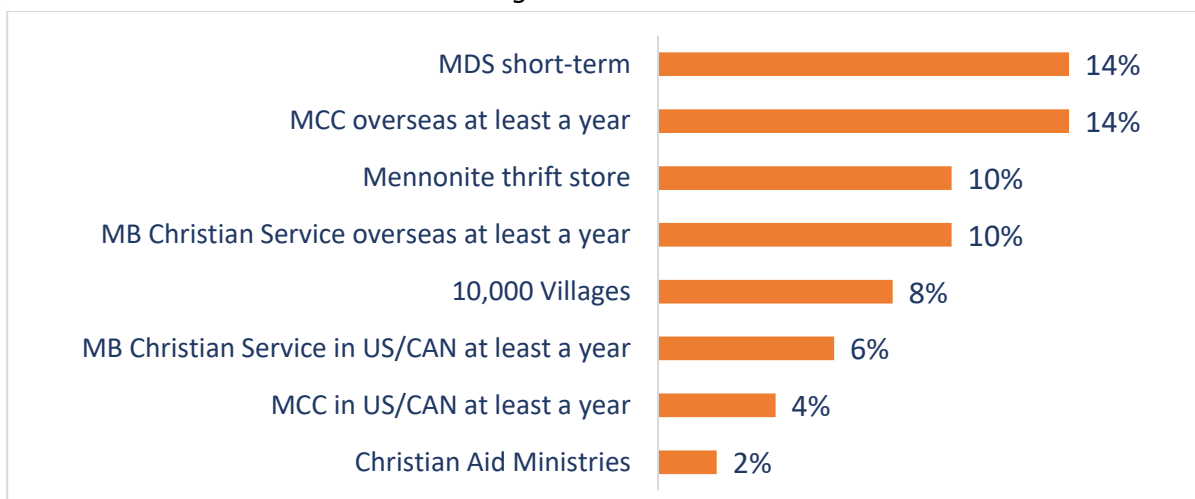
We wanted to learn more about our classmates' engagement with civil society, the network of voluntary/non-governmental organizations that are formed to address problems in their communities and the world. We asked people to identify the types of voluntary organizations in which they were involved. Since they had already responded to questions about their participation in their local congregations, we asked about their participation in non-church organizations as well.

Service with Mennonite institutions

As we noted earlier, 80% of our class had Mennonite roots, so we asked how many of them had served with one of the Mennonite service organizations. We presented a range of service opportunities from those lasting a few days to a few years. Tabor actively encouraged MB Christian Service overseas.

Thirty-eight percent of our class volunteered short-term with at least one Mennonite social service organization. Figure 11-1 shows the percentages that served in each of the following organizations:

Figure 11-1 Our service with Mennonite organizations.

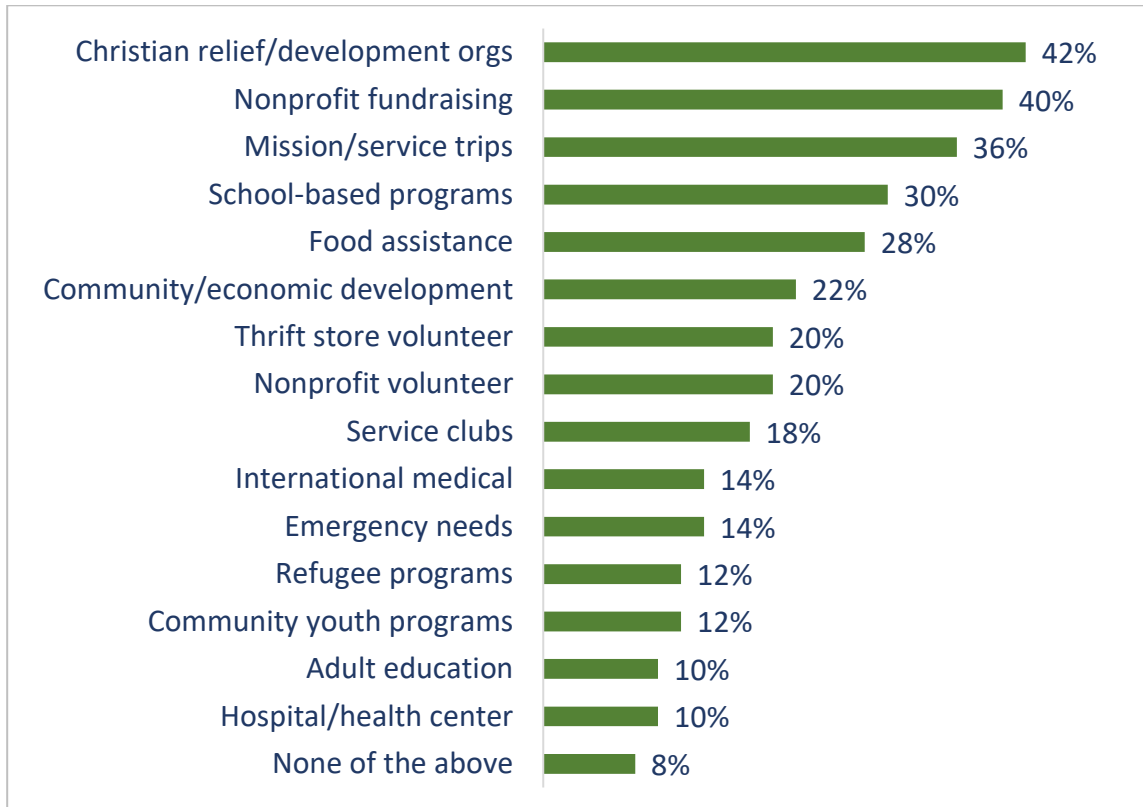


Twenty-four percent of our class served at least a year with the Mennonite Central Committee and/or the Mennonite Brethren Christian Service Program. Both MCC and MB Christian Service assignments fulfilled the selective service requirements for men. Twenty-four percent of our classmates volunteered with at least one short-term Mennonite organization.

Volunteerism with non-church organizations

We were also interested in the extent to which our class was involved in voluntarism outside their local congregations and outside Mennonite service organizations. We listed the types of organizations with which people typically volunteer and asked everyone to identify all the ones in which they had been involved. Figure 11-2 shows what we found:

Figure 11-2 Our volunteer participation in different types of organizations outside our local congregation.



Ninety-two percent volunteered with at least one of these types of organizations. Most identified multiple organizations. Christian organizations involved in relief and development were identified most often. We know anecdotally that people in our study have volunteered with the Samaritan’s Purse “Shoe Box” program, MCC relief sales, World Vision program activities, etc. The question about mission/service trips specifically excluded mission trips sponsored by people’s own churches. Thirty percent volunteered with school programs and a similar number in food assistance programs such as Head Start and local food banks.

While our classmates held leadership roles in their churches, they were also serving with community and other nonprofit organizations. They are actively engaged in of civil society.

Where we give our money

Donating money is another element of voluntarism, so we asked everyone to indicate which types of organizations they support financially. See Figure 11-3:

Figure 11-3 Organizations through which we do our charitable giving.



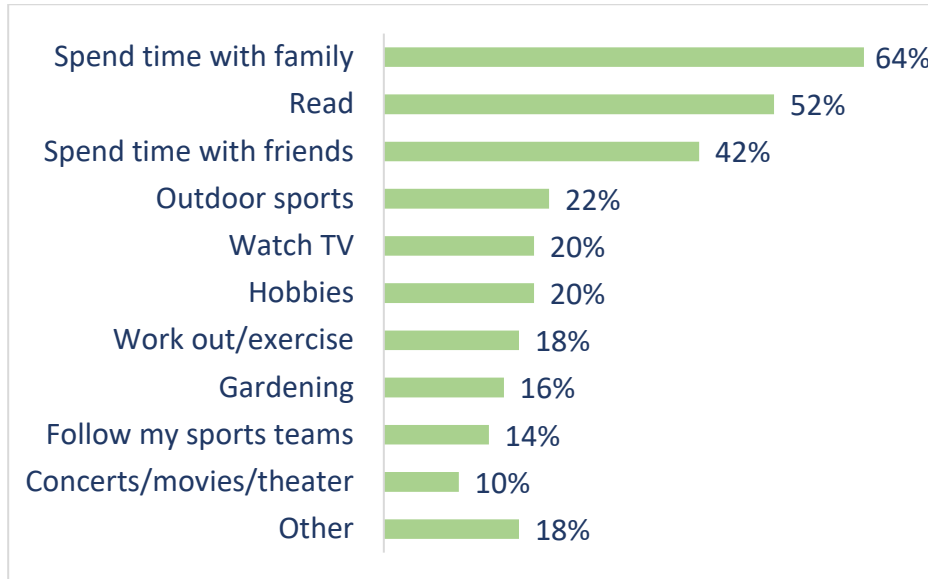
Most of our classmates give to their churches/faith communities. Just under half support other religious nonprofit organizations, social service organizations, and educational institutions. Social justice organizations, advocacy groups, and political groups are much lower priorities.

Our class is quite charitable when compared to the rest of the American population. They not only support their churches but also other nonprofit organizations and groups addressing the needs of society. A Gallup Poll in 2020 found that 73% of Americans donated to charity during the previous year, although that is a drop of 6% since 2009.⁷

How we spend our free time

We identified a list of leisure time activities in which people like us are typically involved and then asked everyone to select the three they value the most. Figure 11-4 shows the results:

Figure 11-4 The top ways in which we spend our free time.



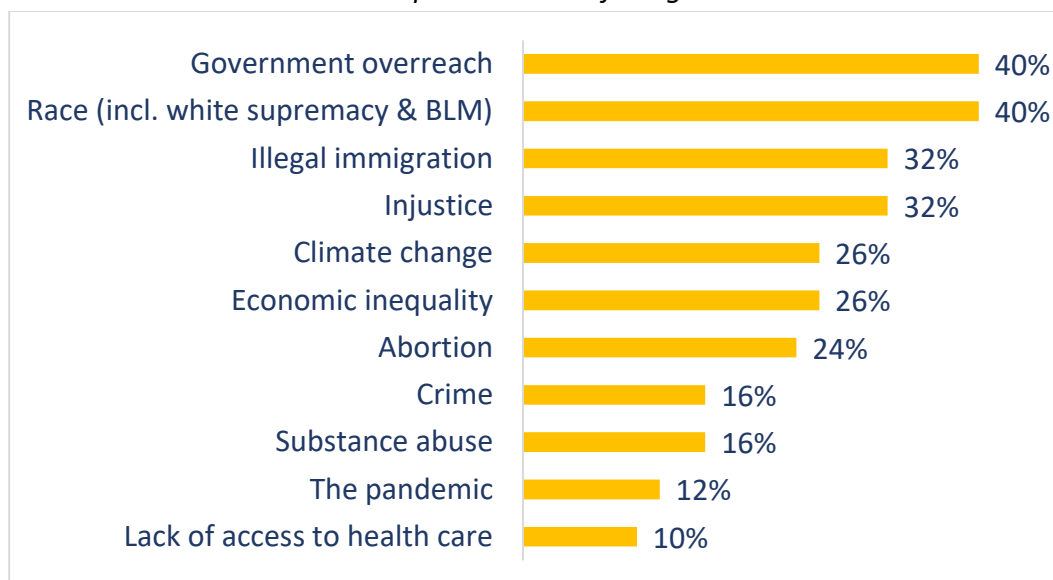
We enjoy spending our leisure time with family, reading, and friends. We are social creatures. Two of the three clearly favored leisure-time activities involved spending time with family and friends. Beyond that, we enjoy a wide range of equally ranked individual activities.

12. How We See the World Today

The issues facing our nation

We identified a list of issues facing the nation today. Then we asked everyone to select the three issues they felt were the most important. As a point of reference, all but one of those responding to our survey currently live in the United States. The following figure shows what our classmates see as their top three issues:

Figure 12-1 What we see as the most important issues facing our nation.



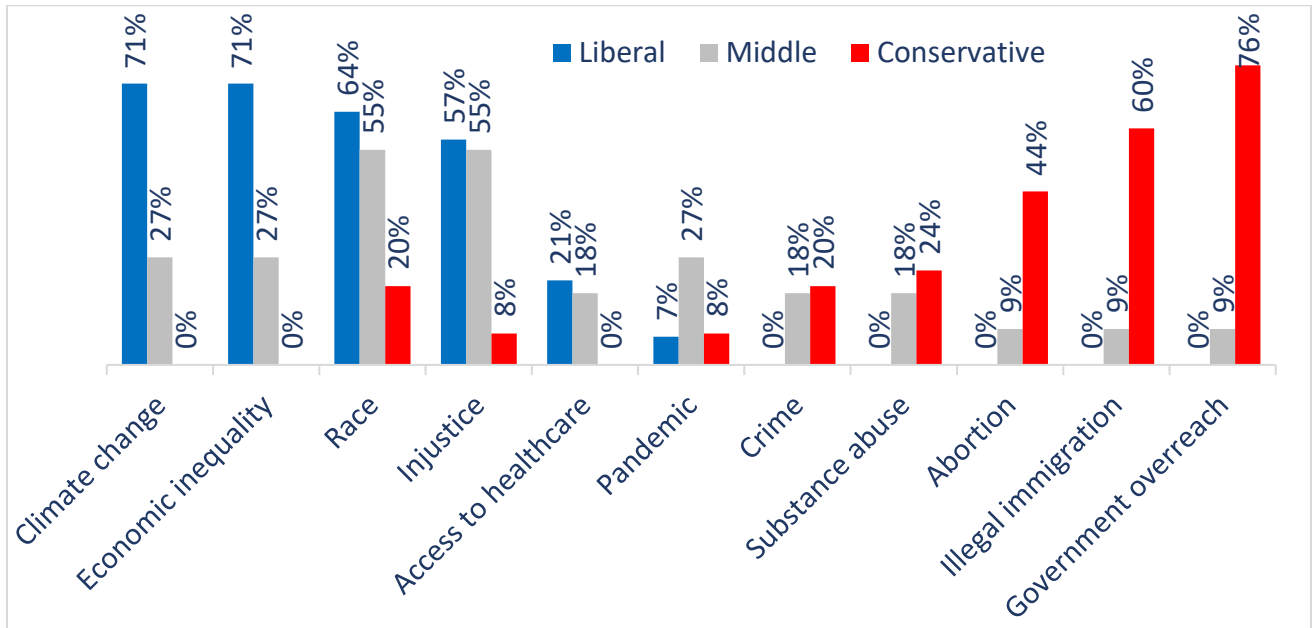
GOVERNMENT OVERREACH and *RACE* were two of those issues considered most significant. One third identified *ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION* and *INJUSTICE* as critical issues.

We gave *OTHER* as an option and invited comment. Five of the eight comments addressed spiritual issues: “*spiritual ignorance*,” “*postmodern acceptance of no absolutes for truth*,” “*the church being ineffective*,” and “*failure in the spiritual life of believers*.”

Political differences and the issues facing the nation

We wondered if political differences accounted for what people identified as the most critical issues facing the nation. We again used the three-level, political scale we had created earlier (Liberal, Middle-of-the-road, and Conservative). Figure 12-2 clearly shows that political views matter when it comes to identifying what people see as the most important issues facing the nation.

Figure 12-2 Our political perspectives and the most important issues facing the nation. (Each respondent could select up to three.)



Political conservatives (the red bars) identified *GOVERNMENT OVERREACH*, *ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION*, and *ABORTION* as the most important issues facing the nation. None of the liberals did. (It is important to note that this survey carried out well before the 2022 Supreme Court decision placed abortion front and center in national discussions. Were this survey to be conducted later in 2022, the responses would probably be quite different.)

Liberals (the blue bars) identified *CLIMATE CHANGE*, *ECONOMIC INEQUALITY*, *RACE*, and *INJUSTICE* as primary issues. Only a few conservatives included *RACE* or *INJUSTICE* as a top concern.

Those in the political center (the gray bars) aligned themselves more closely with the liberals than the conservatives, identifying *RACE* and *INJUSTICE* as significant issues followed by *CLIMATE CHANGE*, *INEQUALITY*, and *THE PANDEMIC*.

We found no significant differences between the views of men and women.

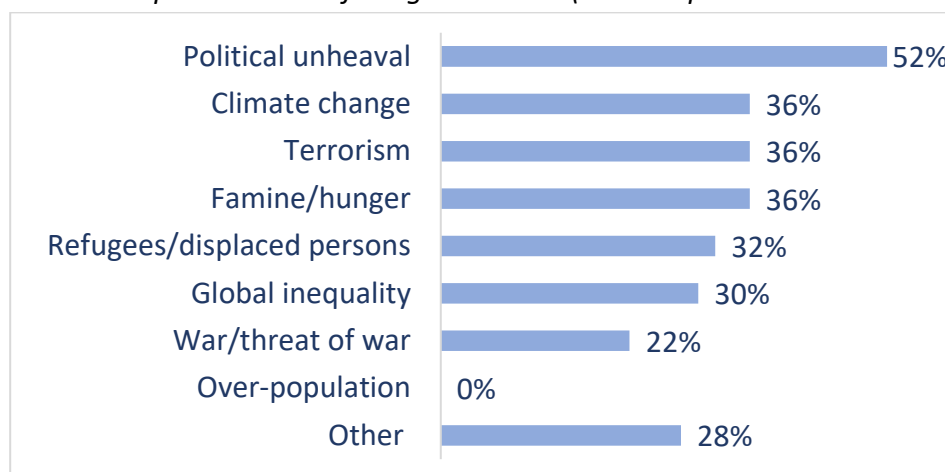
The most important finding here is that we have two groups who almost completely disagree with each other about the critical issues facing the nation. Liberals and moderates largely agreed on their top issues. As a group, conservatives largely agreed among themselves on a separate set of issues, with essentially no overlap with the rest of the class. The only overlap was on *RACE* but it's not clear from the data if they were concerned about it for the same reasons.

This fundamental difference on how we define the nation's most pressing problems clearly mirrors what we are seeing in our nation today.

World issues

We asked everyone to look at a set of issues facing the world today and to identify the three they considered the most important. (We note that the survey was taken before the Russian build-up and attack on Ukraine.) Figure 12-3 shows what we heard:

Figure 12-3 The most important issues facing our world. (Each respondent could select up to three.)



More than half identified *POLITICAL UPHEAVAL* as one of the top three issues facing the world. Interestingly, no one identified *OVER-POPULATION*, a major concern in the 1970s, as a top concern today.

Most of the remaining options were selected by between 22% and 36% of the class. We found little difference between how men and women saw these issues. People's differing political views were reflected in what they identified as the most significant world issues, but the differences were not as dramatic as we found when we asked about national issues.

While the majority of our class did identify three national and world issues, there was one notable exception. Most of those who identified themselves as *VERY CONSERVATIVE* used only half of their selections.

We included an *OTHER* category and gave people an opportunity to propose something not on the list. One theme arose repeatedly: Ten of the 14 comments identified the major problems facing the world in spiritual terms such as, "world without Jesus," "fear of God," "exposure to the Word of God," "lack of God awareness," and "removal of Christianity from daily life."

Comparison of our theological and political perspectives today

Given the differences in our classmates' theological views and differences in their political views, we looked at how the two aligned on a scale from *VERY CONSERVATIVE* to *VERY LIBERAL*. Table 12-1 compares the two:

Table 12-1 The relationship between our theological and political perspectives.

		Political Perspectives		
		Liberal	Middle-of-the-Road	Conservative
Theological Perspectives	Conservative	2%	10%	48%
	Middle-of-the-Road		10%	2%
	Liberal	26%	2%	

Twenty-six percent of the class consider themselves *LIBERAL* or *VERY LIBERAL* in *both* politics and theology. Ten percent identify themselves as *MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD* in *both* politics and theology. Forty-eight percent are *CONSERVATIVE* or *VERY CONSERVATIVE* in *both* politics and theology. This means that when we define ourselves on a spectrum from liberal to conservative, for 84%, our politics and theology essentially overlay. Only 16% of the class hold political and theological views that don't closely align.

We performed additional statistical analyses on the strength of the relationship between theological and political perspectives. We found that the correlation between the two became stronger over time—from starting college, to completing college, to now. Our political views and theological views align more closely over time, and the number of outliers decreases. We will be exploring this further in future studies.

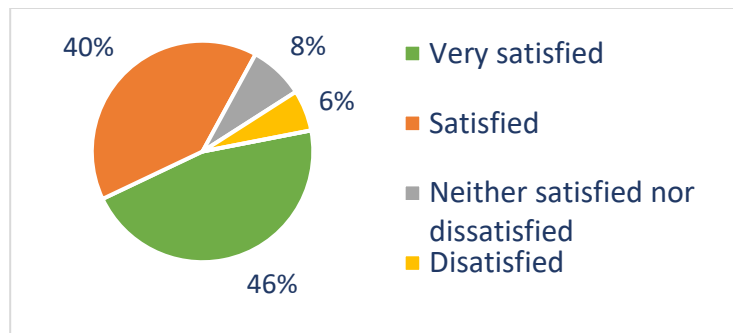
13. Looking Back on Our Lives

Life has its ups and downs, challenges and rewards. We also wanted to know how people feel about their lives when they look back. Social scientists sometimes frame this in terms of satisfaction and happiness. *Satisfaction* is what people feel when they look back at the trajectory of their lives. *Happiness* refers to how things are going these days.

Satisfaction

Figure 13-1 shows what we learned when we asked our classmates about how satisfied they are with their lives.

Figure 13-1 Satisfaction with life.

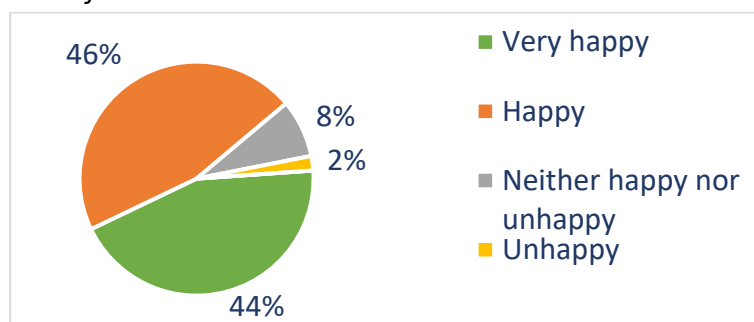


Eighty-six percent said that they were *SATISFIED* or *VERY SATISFIED* with their lives.

Happiness

We asked our respondents to reflect further. With everything taken together, we asked “how happy are you these days?”

Figure 13-2 Happiness in life.



Ninety percent said they were *HAPPY* or *VERY HAPPY* these days; only one person selected *UNHAPPY*.

It is interesting to compare these reports of overall happiness and satisfaction with Figure 7-4 that measured people's assessment of the meaningfulness of their careers. In all three cases the combination of classmates who found their careers *MEANINGFUL/VERY MEANINGFUL* and their assessments of their lives overall *SATISFIED/VERY SATISFIED* and *HAPPY/VERY HAPPY* were in the 85-92% range.

A Gallup poll in early 2022 found that Americans felt very satisfied with their lives in spite of however they felt about things in the US. Ninety-two percent of those who attend church services regularly are satisfied with their lives, compared to 82% of those who attend services less than monthly.⁸ Our classmates match up well with those church-goers.

When we asked these two questions, the results were nearly identical. Almost everyone was satisfied with the way their lives had gone overall and characterized themselves as happy at present.

In an earlier question we asked for people's assessment of the meaningfulness of their careers. The results there, as reported in Figure 7-4, were strikingly similar. In all three cases the combination of classmates who found their careers meaningful/very meaningful and their assessments of their lives overall satisfied/very satisfied and currently happy/very happy were in the 85-92% range.

Clearly, these highly positive results should not be taken as an indication that all was smooth sailing and free of crises for our classmates. It would take another research project to understand how to account for such uniformly favorable self-assessments. In any event, it appears that for most, life has been good.

14. Final Words

Sixty years ago, those of us who became the Tabor Class of '67 were anticipating our senior year of high school during which we would complete our college applications and decide where to enroll. This document reports the results of a survey of those of us who chose Tabor. It examined the backgrounds from which we came and summarized our personal reflections about our lives at three points in time over the past 60 years: when we arrived at Tabor, when we graduated (or left) Tabor, and today.

We mostly came from highly religious, rural communities; only one in this study came from outside North America. All but a few lived on farms or small towns and attended small high schools. Many came from families where neither parent had graduated from high school. We were raised in Mennonite Brethren (MB) churches and reflected the conservative theological and political perspectives of these congregations.

We chose Tabor primarily because of the influence of those around us. Tabor was an MB college, and we knew people who had attended there. Our families and home communities believed education was important and encouraged us to enroll in college. Though some of our parents had little formal education, this was not a barrier to our own educational achievement. Nor was coming from small high schools or families with limited financial means.

Participants in our study referred to Tabor as a broadening experience. It opened our minds and introduced us to new ideas, perspectives, and people that extended far beyond the small communities in which we were raised. Some indicated that Tabor prepared them for specific professions or shaped their career choices in specific ways.

This was due not only to the classes we took and the extracurricular activities in which we were involved, but also to the professors who taught and mentored us. Most of us can identify a specific professor who had a lasting influence on our lives. Comments emphasized an appreciation of faculty who took a deep personal interest in individual students or modeled admirable qualities.

Though Tabor was generally a broadening experience for us, the changes in our theological and political perspectives during college were relatively modest. Given our starting points, most changes tended to make us slightly less conservative, or slightly more liberal.

In addition to what we learned at Tabor and the changes in our values and worldviews, we also formed lasting friendships. Around a third of us met our spouses in college.

When we asked classmates to reflect on their decision to attend Tabor, most indicated they "would do it again," but very few of our children followed us to Tabor.

Most of the men in our class faced the draft upon graduation. One-quarter entered the military, while over a third opted for alternative service as conscientious objectors.

Nearly half of our classmates went to professional or graduate school. In striking contrast with our parents' generation, equal numbers of men and women earned master's degrees as their highest degree. However, many more men than women obtained a doctoral degree.

Our lives and careers differed substantially from those of our parents. Ninety percent of us came from rural communities—farms and small towns—but many now live in medium-to-large cities or suburbs. Most of our families came from agricultural backgrounds, but we entered a wide range of careers. Remarkably few of us were ever unemployed when we wanted to be working. Nearly all of us reported finding meaning in our work.

We came from similar backgrounds and shared a common college experience that helped to define our early theological and political views. However, after college, our lives, locations, and careers took us in new directions. Some became more liberal while others remained generally conservative or subsequently became more conservative. Not surprisingly, the study found a correlation between our theological and political views before college, after college, and today: People who are conservative or liberal in one tend to be conservative or liberal in the other. However, today that correlation is much stronger as though the theological and the political now define each other.

We have remained remarkably engaged with the organized church, regardless of our theological perspectives. We attend church at over twice the rate of the general population. Though no longer mostly MB, we are still predominantly evangelical in our affiliations. We are active in our local congregations, volunteer in church programs, contribute financially, and take on leadership roles. Men and women are equally involved in church activities, but the men tend to hold the primary leadership roles.

We are involved in our communities and politically engaged. We vote at a much higher rate than the national average and serve as volunteers in community organizations. The differences in our political orientations, however, profoundly affect what we identify as the most important issues facing the nation. The issues identified by those with generally liberal orientations are not even on the list for those who consider themselves conservatives. The opposite is also true.

We may be as polarized politically as the rest of our nation, but these differences have not gotten in the way of our relationships. In many ways, the responses to various questions in the survey revealed the high value that our class has placed on relationships. Members of our class have stayed in touch with each other over the decades through emails and reunions. We followed our 50-year reunion with a two-day retreat that was filled with cordial conversation, stories, and

fellowship. It ended in a time of worship and remembrance of our classmates who have passed on. It is gratifying to report that tendency, and to be able to credit that warm collegiality for making this study possible and successful.

Appendix I: Research Methodology

Introduction

This research project grew out of conversations among the four of us who graduated from Tabor College in 1967, worked in Africa, went to graduate school, and then spent most of our careers in higher education. Over the decades, we talked with each other and exchanged emails. We reflected on our Tabor experience and noted the ways through which it influenced the trajectory of our lives and professions. We also wondered how our classmates viewed their college experience and how it impacted their lives and careers.

We decided to ask them.

We drafted a concept paper that laid out the study and shared it with Tabor President David Janzen and Executive Vice President of Academics and Compliance Frank Johnson. They were enthusiastic and encouraged us to move forward with this study. Dr. Johnson wrote a letter of support and gave permission to process the survey through Tabor College's *Institutional Review Board*. We greatly appreciate Tabor's support.

Our classmates have stayed in touch with each other to a remarkable degree. This has been facilitated by class reunions, occasional emails, and two retreats—one ten years after graduation and the other immediately after our 50-year reunion. They helped us stay in touch and facilitated our study. We are deeply grateful to all who participated!

The Research Questions

There is a national debate over the nature, purpose, and impact of a college education. Is it worth the time and money? Do graduates value their college experience, years after graduation? This led us to wonder how our classmates' lives and careers had unfolded. How did the Tabor experience shape them? Did their values, beliefs, and commitments change over time? To what extent—and in what ways—were our classmates involved in their churches, communities, and society itself? How did their values influence their choices and priorities? These discussions focused our study on the following questions:

- How do our classmates perceive their college experience five decades after graduation?
- How did that experience help inform or shape their lives and careers?
- To what extent (and in what ways) did they become involved in their churches, communities, and society itself?
- What are their values, beliefs, and priorities today?
- How did our classmates' values, beliefs, and priorities play out in their lives and experience?

The Research Methodology

Our questionnaire included background data (gender, marital status, military/alternative service, where they were raised, the types of high schools they attended, etc.). Other questions focused on our classmates' values, commitments, and levels of engagement with the church, community organizations, and society itself. We asked our classmates to reflect on how their theological and political perspectives may have changed over time. Some of the specific questions came from earlier research and the rest from our personal experience and interests.

We used *Survey Monkey* to distribute the questionnaire, track responses, and summarize the data. We asked several friends—social scientists—to critique the proposed instrument and suggest changes. We incorporated their input and then pretested it with a group of Tabor graduates from our era who were not in our class. Their responses led to other changes.

After collecting the data, we used descriptive statistics to summarize the initial findings that are included here. However, we are continuing with more in-depth analyses that will look more deeply into trends and assess the relationships between multiple variables.

The Study Population

Our first major decision was determining who should be considered part of our class. This was not straightforward. Do we include only those who graduated in May 1967? What about those who left after our freshmen year? What about those who transferred to Tabor later? What about those who spent a couple years at Tabor and graduated from another college? We decided to include everyone who graduated in the May 1967 commencement, regardless of how long they had been at Tabor. Graduation *per se*, we decided, was not essential to what constituted our cohort's shared experience. We included those who started with us but graduated a year early or a year later.

We ultimately defined the Class of '67 as those who graduated in May, 1967, as well as those who spent two or more overlapping years as part of our cohort. This meant including several who received their diplomas in a different year, from another school, or who never graduated at all.

We started with email lists from our class reunions to contact people. The Tabor College Alumni Office shared its lists. Our yearbooks helped us identify others who were with us for a time between 1963 and 1967 but were not on our lists. We also did web searches and used several "people finder" websites to track down some of our classmates.

This process yielded 148 names. We found that 26 of our classmates were deceased. We eliminated another 40 people who were part of the 1967 cohort for only one year and did not graduate with us. This reduced the list to 82 eligible names. We were unable to find active email accounts for seven people. This left us with 75 to whom we sent the questionnaire. We subsequently learned that one person on our list had passed away several months earlier.

Of the 74 living members of the Tabor Class of '67 to whom we sent the questionnaire, 50 completed them. That's a 68% rate of return, high by any standard for social science research.

The Implications and Limitations

Colleges and universities in the United States are as diverse as their students, so we need to be modest about our conclusions. We cannot generalize to all Tabor alumni or graduates of other institutions. This survey of the Tabor College Class of '67 is an exploratory study, a first step. We hope that our findings spark meaningful conversations within Tabor and the Mennonite Brethren Church (the college's founding denomination) but also encourage other scholars to continue this line of inquiry. We have, in fact, received expressions of interest from scholars at several other institutions who want to draw on our work for their own research.

Appendix II: About the Authors

Merrill Ewert (merrill.ewert@gmail.com) earned an MA in cultural anthropology and a PhD in adult education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He worked in international development and taught at the University of Maryland, Wheaton College (IL), and Cornell University, and then served as President of Fresno Pacific University.

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Thanks in part to encouragement from professors at Tabor, all four of us spent two or more years in Africa shortly after graduation. Three of us served in the Democratic Republic of Congo under Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services and/or Mennonite Central Committee: Dale as a secondary school teacher, Merrill in rural development, and David as an international community school teacher. Ken was a secondary school teacher in Botswana with MCC.

Appendix III: Further Information and Documents

For digital copies of this report or the questionnaire, or to view this document formatted for handheld devices, go to <http://taos67.net/>.

Endnotes

¹ <https://usInflationCalculator.com>, accessed June, 2022.

² *The State of American Theology Study*, LifeWay Research (commissioned by Ligonier Ministries), 2020, <http://research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Ligonier-State-of-Theology-2020-White-Paper.pdf>, accessed July 18, 2022.

³ *Belief in God in the U.S. Dips to 81%, a New Low*. Jeffrey M. Jones, Gallup. June 22, 2022, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/393737/belief-god-dips-new-low.aspx>, accessed July 18, 2022.

⁴ *Fewer in U.S. Now See Bible as the Literal Word of God*. Frank Newport. Gallup. July 6, 2022, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/394262/fewer-bible-literal-word-god.aspx>, accessed July 16, 2022.

⁵ *Religious Landscape Study: Attendance at Religious Services*. Pew Research Center, 2022. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/attendance-at-religious-services/among/age-distribution/65/>, accessed July 16, 2022.

⁶ *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2020*. United States Census Bureau, April 2021. <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-585.html>, accessed July 16, 2022.

⁷ *Percentage of Americans Donating to Charity at New Low*. Jeffrey M. Jones, Gallup. May 14, 2020. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/310880/percentage-americans-donating-charity-new-low.aspx?version=print>.

⁸ *Religion and Wellbeing in the U.S.: Update*. Frank Newport, Gallup. February 4, 2022, <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/389510/religion-wellbeing-update.aspx>, accessed July 16, 2022.

