

# RESEARCH BULLETIN

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## *The Nehemiah Project's Impact on Seminary Students*

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## **Introduction**

In August 2006, the Center for Missional Research (CMR) for the North American Mission Board (NAMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), commissioned a survey of recent graduates from the six SBC seminaries plus the Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary. It was determined to survey Southern Baptist masters level graduates who received their degrees between the years of 1998 and 2004 in order to discover the effectiveness of seminary training in specific areas of practical ministry.

Richie Stanley, Research Director of NAMB and Dr. Reggie Ogea, Associate Professor of Leadership and Pastoral Ministry at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS), assisted Dr. Ed Stetzer, NAMB's Missiologist and Senior Director of CMR, in developing a New Millennium Minister's Online Survey. With the assistance of the NAMB Nehemiah professors from each SBC seminary, the Alumni Departments from the seminaries were asked to submit their contact lists of graduates. Once the lists were obtained from the seminaries, Dr. Ogea enlisted NOBTS seminary students to assist in verifying the data through Internet address searches. A letter was mailed to each graduate, inviting them to participate in the online survey and providing a personal access code. Following a two week-waiting period, additional NOBTS students were enlisted to make follow-up phone calls to the graduates, encouraging them to complete the online survey.

## **Response Rates**

A total of 2,230 online surveys were recorded, a response rate of 30 percent of the 7,551 graduates identified from 1998 to 2004. Many of the targeted respondents never had a chance to respond due to invalid addresses provided by the seminary alumni offices. An effective response rate, which will be considerably higher than 30 percent, will be calculated later.

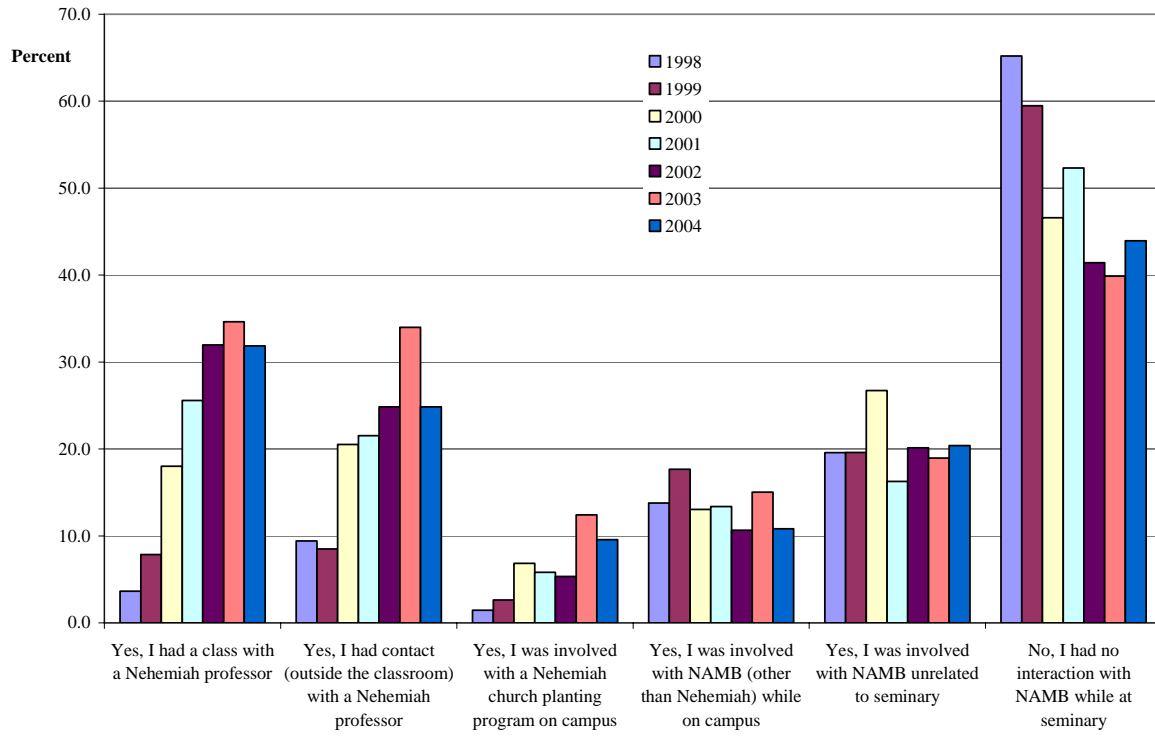
## **Results**

### *Contact with NAMB while at seminary*

Graduates were asked a multiple answer question regarding their contact with NAMB while at seminary. They were allowed to choose more than one answer. Overall, 51 percent recorded no contact with NAMB while at seminary, 21 percent had a class with a Nehemiah professor, 20 percent verified contact with a Nehemiah professor outside the classroom, 19 percent indicated involvement with NAMB unrelated to seminary, 15 percent affirmed contact with NAMB other than a Nehemiah professor while on campus, and 6 percent confirmed involvement with a Nehemiah church planting program on campus. The sample may have been influenced by the positive response from those with some kind of NAMB contact.

Although 51 percent of responders recorded no contact with NAMB while at seminary in the years 1998 to 2004, the percentage actually decreased from a high of 65 percent in 1998 to 44 percent in 2004. Involvement with Nehemiah professors has increased each year since the initiation of the Nehemiah Project. The year of highest seminarian involvement and interaction with Nehemiah professors occurred in 2003. Results for this question are summarized in the following figure.

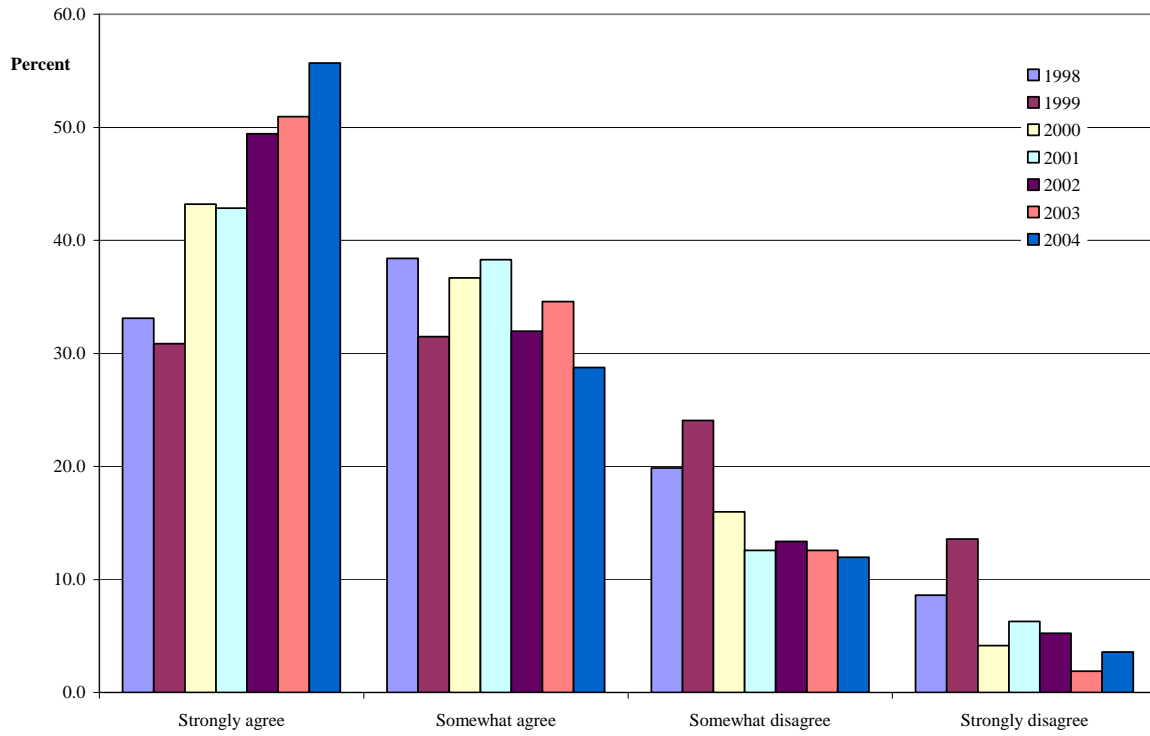
**New millennium ministers' answers to  
"Did you have contact with NAMB while at seminary?" 1998 to 2004**



### *Church Planting Focus*

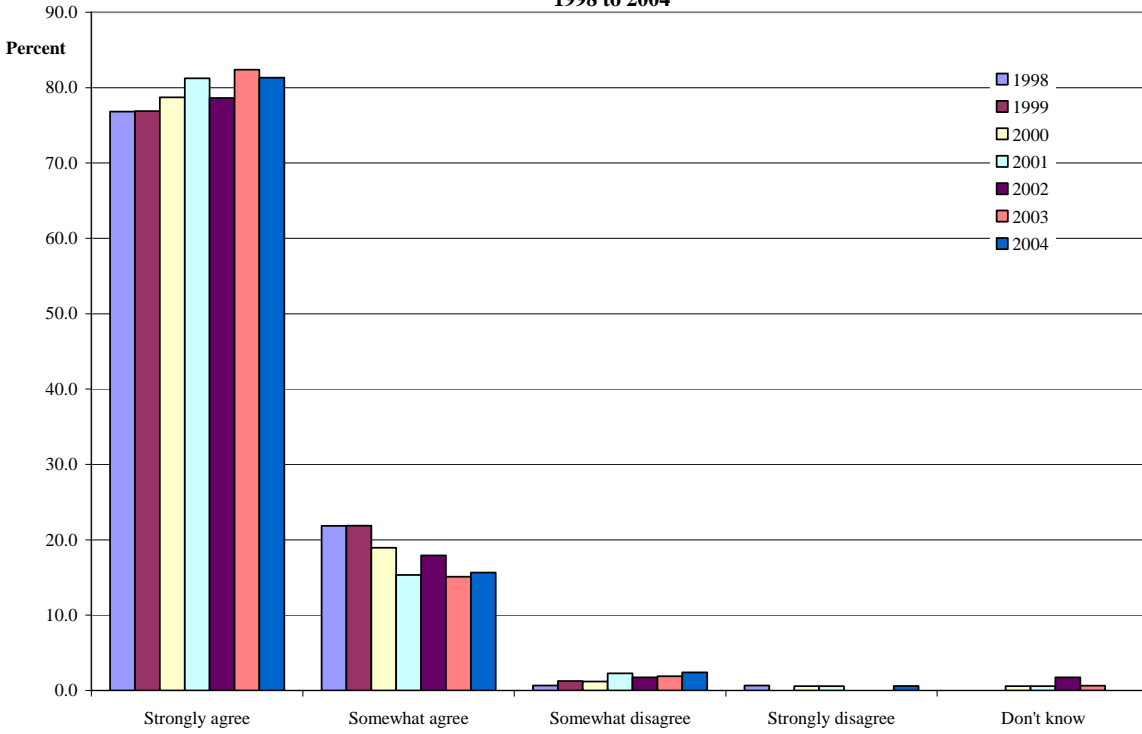
Several questions in the New Millennium Minister's Survey dealt with church planting issues. Because of the church planting focus in the SBC in general and NAMB in particular, graduates were asked their level of agreement with "I heard frequently about church planting while at seminary." Forty-seven percent responded "strongly agree" and 33 percent responded "somewhat agree" for an 80 percent agreement response rate. An additional insight from the survey affirmed a sharp increase in the "strongly agree" category from 1998 to 2004 (33% to 56%), and a moderate decrease in the "somewhat agree" category for the same time period (38% to 29%). Also, the number of responders who report not hearing about church planting while in seminary decreased sharply from 1998 to 2004. The obvious conclusion drawn from the research is the development of a culture change among recent SBC seminary graduates in their exposure to church planting. It seems very likely that this culture shift is at least partially attributable to the growth of NAMB's Nehemiah presence on the seminary campuses.

**New millennium ministers' agreement with  
"I heard frequently about church planting while at seminary," 1998 to 2004**



When asked about their convictions concerning churches being involved directly in sponsoring missions and new church plants, 79 percent of the millennium ministers strongly agreed and 18 percent somewhat agreed. A minimal change in these percentages occurred between the years of 1998 and 2004, indicating a consistently strong belief among SBC seminary graduates that churches should be actively engaged in sponsoring missions and new church plants. That strong belief apparently existed prior to 1998 and continues to remain strong among 21<sup>st</sup> century seminary graduates. The slight changes over time, indicated in the following figure, may be attributable to the Nehemiah process.

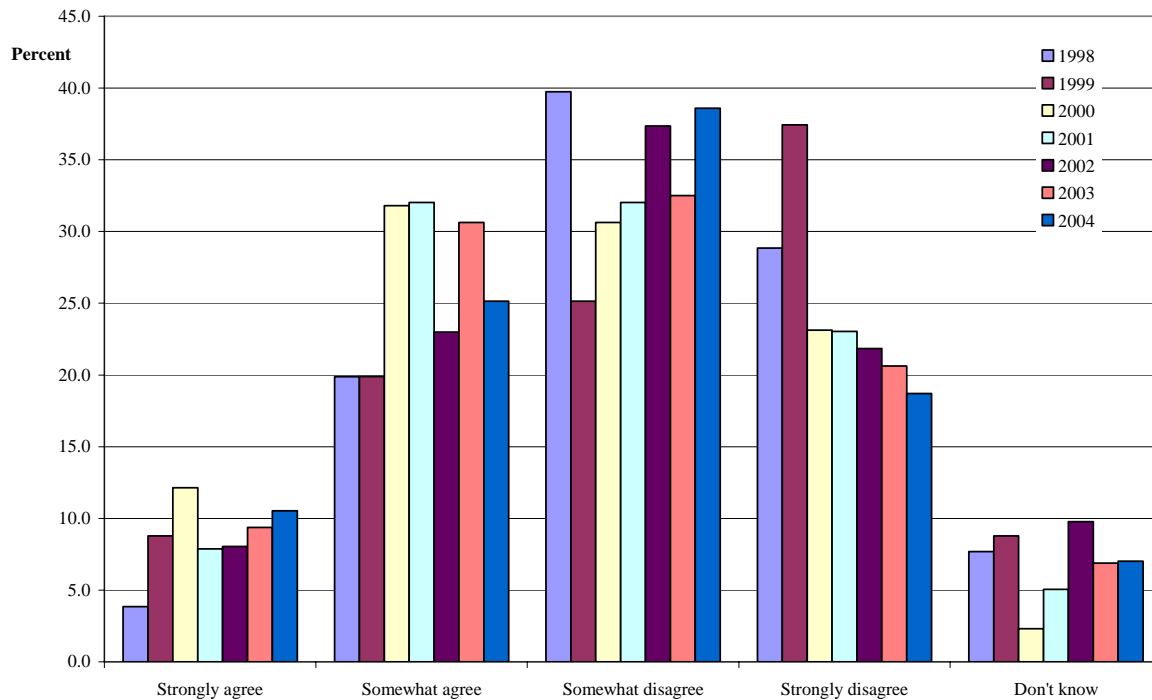
**New millennium ministers' agreement with  
"I believe that churches should be involved directly in sponsoring missions and new church plants,"  
1998 to 2004**



On the issue of seminary preparation for sponsoring churches, 56 percent of graduates indicated a lack of preparation in this area. The question is whether or not the seminaries should be assigned this task, or if this is the task of local association, state conventions, and NAMB. The results in this area would appear to indicate a need for more dialogue and instruction regarding the role and responsibility of sponsoring churches. Perhaps local associations, state conventions, and NAMB should intentionally partner with the seminaries in a strategy to equip seminary graduates in the roles and responsibilities of sponsoring churches, especially in the fields of Pastoral Ministry, Christian Education, and Missions.

Two of NAMB's goals in placing Nehemiah professors at each SBC seminary were to increase both awareness and preparedness for church planting among graduates. The next figure shows that new ministers added to the SBC pool feel more prepared since Nehemiah was started.

**New millennium ministers' agreement that they were adequately prepared for sponsoring new churches, 1998 to 2004**



*Conclusions*

The New Millennium Minister’s Survey promises a wealth of insights into ministry preparedness and attitudes of recent seminary graduates. This initial look has examined the effect of NAMB’s Nehemiah project, and found several key findings. A new minister completing a masters degree at an SBC seminary in 2004 likely differs from a 1998 graduate in the following ways.

- ◆ The 2004 graduate is more likely to feel prepared to sponsor a new church.
- ◆ The 2004 graduate is slightly more likely to believe that churches should be directly involved in sponsoring missions and new church plants.
- ◆ The 2004 graduate is much more likely to have heard frequently about church planting during his or her time at seminary.
- ◆ The 2004 graduate is more likely to have taken a course or had other contact with a Nehemiah professor.
- ◆ The 2004 graduate is much less likely to have had no contact with NAMB while in seminary.

NAMB’s Nehemiah project has heightened awareness and preparedness of church planting among SBC seminary graduates, and has also impacted the culture of the campuses as well.