

Lutheran Laity Movement
Faith in Action Survey
Department for Research and Evaluation
September 18, 2000

This is a report based on a two-part survey fielded by the Department for Research and Evaluation. Its purpose was to study the opinion of the Lutheran Laity Movement (LLM) network towards the *Faith in Action* magazine and LLM newsletter supplement. A sample of 431 magazine and newsletter recipients was taken from the groups of LLM members, *Faith in Action* subscribers, and both LLM and Division for Congregational Ministries (DCM) boards and staff. A sample was also taken from past *Faith in Action* magazine and LLM newsletter recipients that had chosen not to renew their subscription. There was a 45 percent response rate from the former sample and a 30 percent response rate from the latter.

Seventy-two percent of respondents were men and 25 percent were women. Respondents were also classified into three age groups:

- Under or equal to 44 years (8% of respondents)
- 45 years to 65 years (45% of respondents)
- Over 65 years (47% of respondents)¹

Findings²

A. Distribution

The *Faith in Action* magazine is distributed to the LLM network four times a year. Sixty-four percent of respondents remembered receiving the magazine four times, 11 percent remembered receiving it three times, 15 percent two times, and 4 percent said they remembered receiving it once.

Respondents were then asked to indicate how many times a year they would like to receive the *Faith in Action* resource. Most of the group indicated they would like to receive it quarterly (73%) versus semi-annually (20%) or monthly (5%).

The possibility of subscribing over the Internet was not considered a good alternative by this group. Less than one fourth of respondents said they would like to receive the magazine and newsletter through the Internet. The younger the age group, the more likely to support the use of the Internet (See Table 1).

¹These percentages do not consider respondents from the sample of past recipients who had not renewed their subscription. Questions such as *gender* and *age* were not part of this survey.

²The questionnaire and specific frequencies appear in Appendix I

Table 1

Would you subscribe to *Faith in Action* over the Internet?

Percentages indicate the number of respondents per age group that would consider subscribing to Faith in Action over the Internet

Age Group	Percent
Under or equal to 44 years	41.7%
45 years and over, up to 65 years	25.7%
Over 65 years	17.1%

B. Use

When asked what they typically do with the magazine, 30 percent indicated they typically read all or almost all the articles, another 28 percent read at least one article, 30 percent occasionally read an article, and 12 percent usually don't read the magazine.

Respondents were also asked what they typically do with the LLM newsletter supplement. Thirty-six percent always read the newsletter, 43 percent occasionally read it, and 14 percent of the group do not read the newsletter.

Respondents were then asked to indicate whether they shared the resource with other people. Fifty-three percent of respondents indicated they did not share the resources with other people. Forty-seven percent indicated they did share the resource with others: a pastor (9%), stewardship chair or committee member (25%), or some other person (22%).

Respondents were also asked to indicate if they had used the magazine's featured articles in a given group of settings. Forty-four percent of respondents said that they had not used any of the featured articles in any of the given settings (See Table 2). Other options, such as, use of *Faith in Action* for sermons and newsletters were noted.

Table 2

Have you personally used any of the featured articles in *Faith in Action* in any of the following settings? *Numbers indicate the group percentages that said they did use featured articles in the given setting*

Setting	Group
Private, personal devotions	20.2%
Public devotionals	11.9%
Sunday school classes	19.7%
Congregational committee activities	24.9%
Bible study	5.2%
Stewardship presentations to the congregations.	25.9%
Other	10.4%

C. Resource Evaluation

Respondents were asked to assess the *Faith in Action* magazine on a scale of one to five (1=Excellent and 5=Poor) in terms of the selection of articles, layout and format, readability, overall value, and whether it fulfilled a need. Responses were sub-categorized into: *Positive* (1 or 2 on the scale), *Neutral* (3 on the scale), or *Negative* (4 or 5 on the scale).

Every item was given a “positive” (1 or 2) rating by at least 50 percent of the respondents, with the exception of the item “fulfilling a need”, which was only given a positive rating by 45 percent of the respondents (See Figure 1). The older the age group, the more likely to be a positive response (See Table 3).

Figure 1

In general, how would you assess *Faith in Action* with regard to the following?

Numbers indicate the percent of respondents that assigned “positive” (1 or 2), “neutral” (3), or “negative”(4 or 5) rankings for each item.

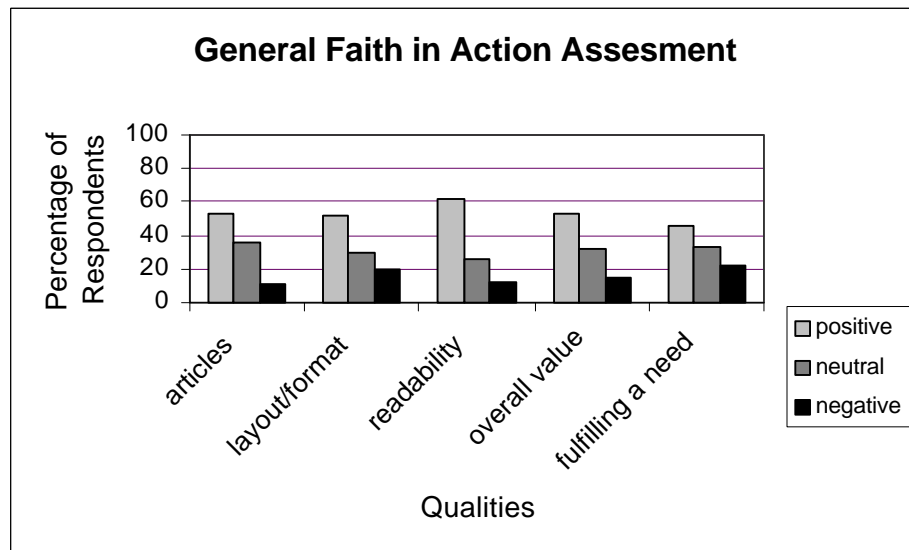


Table 3

In general, how would you assess *Faith in Action* with regard to...?

Percentages indicate the number of respondents per age group that assessed *Faith in Action*'s qualities with a “positive” rating.

Age Group	Articles	Layout/ Format	Readability	Overall Value	Fulfilling a need
Under or equal to 44 years	46.2%	38.5%	46.2%	38.5%	30.8%
45 years and over, up to 65 years	47.2%	35.6%	50.7%	47.9%	39.2%
Over 65 years	61.0%	69.3%	75.0%	60.5%	53.2%

A similar style was used to evaluate *Faith in Action's* articles in terms of whether they are motivating, relevant, informed, practical, insightful, or useful. The scale of one to five (1=Very and 5=Not at all) was also used and answers were coded into *positive* (1 or 2), *neutral* (3), or *negative* (4 or 5).

All items received a “positive” response by at least 50 percent of the respondents, with the exception of the item “motivating” which was given a positive response by 45 percent of the respondents (See Figure 2). The older the age group, the more likely to be a positive response (See Table 4).

Figure 2

Think back to the featured articles in *Faith in Action*...In general, were the articles...? Numbers indicate the amount of respondents that assigned “positive” (1 or 2), “neutral”(3), or “negative”(4 or 5) rankings for each item.

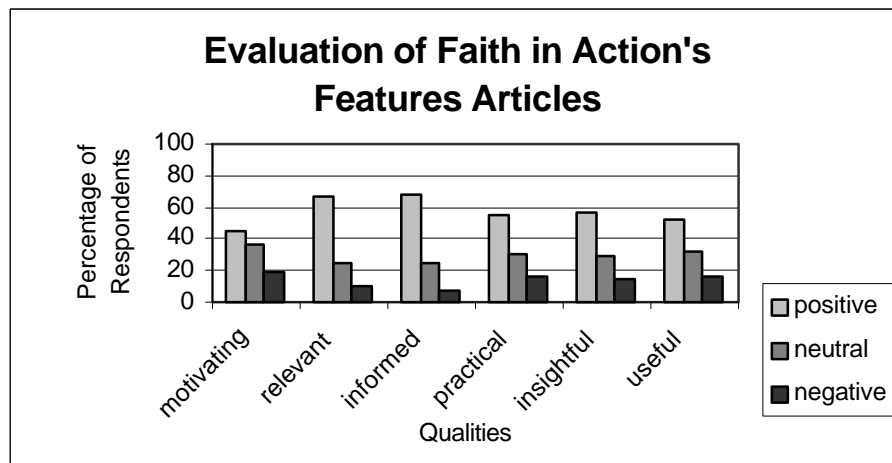


Table 4

Think back to the featured articles in *Faith in Action*...In general, were the articles ...? Percentages indicate the percent of respondents in each age group that assessed *Faith in Action's* articles with a “positive” rating.

Age Group	<i>motivating</i>	<i>relevant</i>	<i>informed</i>	<i>practical</i>	<i>insightful</i>	<i>useful</i>
Under or equal to 44 years	23.1%	38.5%	46.2%	46.2%	30.8%	23.1%
45 years and over, up to 65 years	40.6%	67.2%	67.2%	58.2%	56.7%	57.4%
Over 65 years	53.7%	70.6%	74.6%	52.2%	61.5%	53.6%

D. Readers' Suggestions and Comments

Respondents were given the option of writing down any comments or suggestions they had for the *Faith in Action* magazine. Some respondents feel the magazine is a valuable resource to them. They look forward to receiving it, use it in their personal life and in different church circles. Some respondents used this section to comment on aspects of the magazine that they don't like and some even suggested discontinuing its publication. Other respondents took the opportunity to give suggestions on how to improve the different aspects of the magazine. Among others, respondents discussed issues, such as, format, layout, font, article topics, and article length (Appendix II).

The survey also asked respondents to indicate topics that would be of interest to them, if the content of *Faith in Action* were to be expanded. Respondents were given a list of topics to choose from including an "other" option where they could mention different topics from those included in the original list of options. For example, one suggestion in the "other" option is the topic "How to evaluate congregational potential?". The following is a list in rank order according to respondents' topic preferences, "1" being the most preferred topic and "8" being the less preferred topic (Appendix II):

1. Theology of Stewardship
2. Leadership Development
3. Life Management Skills
4. Stewardship for Youth
5. Fund-raising
6. Devotions
7. Stewardship of Creation / Environment
8. New Books / Publications

Conclusion and Recommendations

Question #6 of the survey asked respondents to evaluate *Faith in Action* in terms of different aspects. Among the aspects to be considered was whether the magazine "fulfilled a need". As noted earlier a large percent of the group indicated that *Faith in Action* is not "fulfilling a need". It is very unusual for a large percentage of respondents in a dedicated mailing list to indicate that a resource is not "fulfilling a need" or to question its "usefulness"

It seems *Faith in Action* has to decide whether it will focus its energy towards maintaining the number of currently *happy* subscribers, improve the opinion of currently *unhappy* subscribers, and/or whether it wants to attract *new* subscribers.

The option of maintaining its currently *happy* subscribers implies that the magazine staff should continue to do exactly what they are doing. Yet, if the intention is to improve the

opinion of currently *unhappy* subscribers or increase the number of subscribers, *Faith in Action* should answer the following questions:

1. *Why do we publish this magazine?*

Revisiting the magazine's purpose should help bring light into the needs that brought about the magazine's publication.

2. *Who is our target audience? What are our target audience's needs?*

Targeting the magazine's audience, in turn, will help *Faith in Action* compare the needs that initially brought about the resource to the one's of its current target audience.

3. *What is our plan?*

When considering a plan of action, survey responses gave light into certain issues and questions that are of importance (Appendix II):

- *There is a relationship between age and a positive response towards the resource. What stewardship needs do people 45 to 65 have? What stewardship needs do people younger than 45 have?*
- *How do we make Faith in Action more motivating, relevant, informing, practical and insightful in the eyes of the age groups 65 and under?*
- *How do we make Faith in Action's format/layout and articles more attractive to these younger generations?*
- *How do we make this magazine more accessible and practical so that subscribers are motivated to share the resource with other people in whatever their settings may be?*

This plan should lead into the evaluation of potential changes or modifications under the framework of the magazine's purpose. When considering these changes or modifications, *Faith in Action* should acknowledge the fact that some subscribers feel very comfortable with the resource as it is. Any changes made might threaten these subscribers' loyalty towards the magazine.

The challenge is, therefore, to think of some creative compromises between the views and needs of currently happy subscribers and to evolve into a resource that tends to include the suggestions and needs of subscribers that aren't too happy or don't know about the resource.

"I've also found that change presents opportunities - times to reflect and evaluate the past"

Joyce Cain, Executive Director for the Lutheran Laity Movement for Stewardship