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# 2011 NCLS Research Collection

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Hancock

Revised edition, March 2016

This is a collection of publications that use data from the 2011 National Church Life Survey. They have been written by NCLS Research staff and associate researchers (including from the Pastoral Research Office of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, ANGLICARE Sydney, the Anglican Diocese of Sydney, and others). The collection includes research reports, fact sheets, academic papers, book chapters, workbooks and more across a wide range of research areas.

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# Who Goes to Church

## Who Goes to Church

Comparing church and community: A demographic profile

Giving Newcomers a Voice: What newcomers reveal about their experience of joining a church

NCLS Occasional Paper 19

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# Comparing Church and Community: A demographic profile

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Pepper and Nicole Hancock

May 2013

## Abstract

This paper uses data from the 2011 Australian population census and the 2011 National Church Life Survey to compare the general population with church attenders on a range of demographic measures. It also provides a break-down of key indicators by seven Christian denominations, namely Anglican, Baptist/Church of Christ, Catholic, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Uniting Church and other Protestant. Key findings indicate that the proportion of church attenders over 60 years of age is significantly higher than the proportion of that age group in the general population. Church attenders are more likely than the general population to be university educated and slightly more likely to be born in a non-English speaking country. Church attenders are more likely to be married or widowed, and less likely to be never married or separated/divorced than the population at large. The implications of these findings for churches are briefly discussed.

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## Acknowledgments

Production of this paper would not have been possible without the work of the other members of the NCLS Research team who, at the time of publication also included: Chandrika Chinnadurai, Martin Dowson, Ian Duncum, Kathy Kerr, Sam Sterland, and Amelia Vaeafisi.

## Citation

Mollitor, C., Powell, R., Pepper, M., Hancock, N., (2013) Comparing church and community: A demographic profile, NCLS Research Occasional Paper 19, Catalogue Number 2.13006, Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.

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## A demographic profile

Much has been written about Australia being a changing nation in a changing world, and the church has a long history of dealing with change—with varying degrees of success. In this paper, we look at some of the changing demographics of Australia and the changing demographics of churches in Australia. Our purpose is to shift the focus beyond the churches—to paint a picture of the reality of the wider community and encourage churches to engage with these wider issues. Demographics such as age, education, employment status, country of birth and marital status give insight into the people who form our communities. Trends and characteristics about Australian society offer information that can help churches to plan their structures, activity and mission to connect with and serve their surrounding communities. Likewise, understanding the demographics of churches themselves, and how these are changing, can help churches to plan for the future.

Using data from the 2011 National Church Life Survey (NCLS), the 2011 National Census and the most recent statistics available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), this paper compares the Australian churches with the broader Australian population on some key demographics and presents changes over time (Powell, 2011, Caldor 2006 & 2001; ABS 2011a, 2011b, 2006 & 2001). Differences between churches and the nation are highlighted and some implications for church ministry are noted (Bellamy et al., 2006).

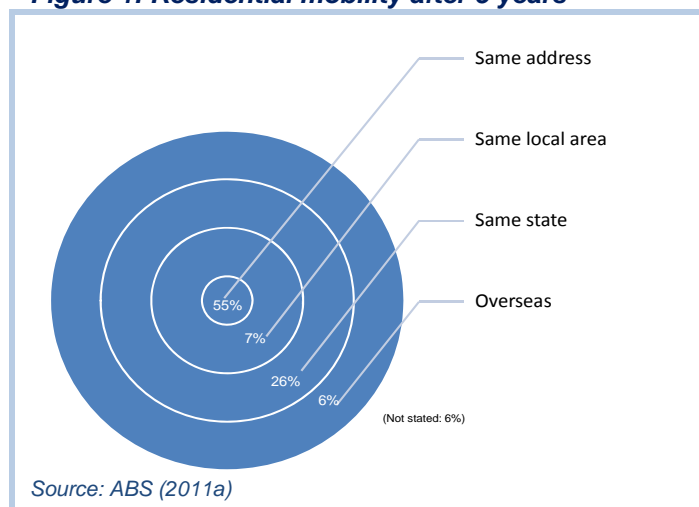
## 1. Population growth

In the 2011 National Census, the Australian Bureau of Statistics counted 21.5 million people in Australia. This marks a 7% increase from the 19.9 million people counted in 2006, which is even greater than the 5% population increase between 2001 and 2006.

These are broad brushstroke figures, and individual areas will differ markedly. For instance, some rural areas may even show a decline in population over this period of time, while some urban areas may show a sharp increase as people move from one area to another for reasons of employment and education. Some remote areas also may show an increase in temporary 'fly-in fly-out' population fluctuations as Australia's mining boom continues. Population increase from international immigration is also unevenly distributed.

Australians were slightly more settled in 2011 than they were in 2006. Figure 1 shows that in 2011, 45% of the population had moved in the previous five years. This compares with 49% in 2006. Fewer people arrived from overseas in the five years prior to 2011 (6%) than the same period prior to 2006 (8%) and fewer moved away from their local area (7% in 2011 and 11% in 2006).

**Figure 1: Residential mobility after 5 years**

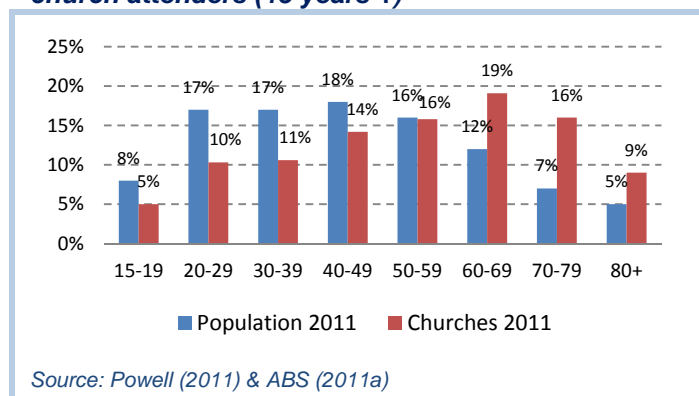


## 2. Age

**Australian Population:** Australia's population is ageing and life expectancy is increasing. The proportion of people aged 65 years and over jumped by 10% between 1901 and 2011 (from 4% to 14%). The median age has increased from just 23 years in 1901 to 37 years in 2011. The ABS predicts a continued rise in the median age (to between 39 years and 41 years by 2026). Although the elderly will make up an increasing proportion of the population, there will still be a numeric increase in the number of children and adults in their middle years.

**Church Attendees:** As a whole, Australian church attendees are older than the broader population, and in many churches ageing attendees are not being replaced by younger people. In 2011, the percentage of church attendees aged 20 to 39 was only 21%, compared with the national proportion of 28%. The proportion of church attendees over 60 years of age was 44% in 2011, yet, the national proportion of Australians aged 60 years and over was only 20% in 2011.

**Figure 2: Age structure of Australian population & church attendees (15 years +)**



The age profile of church attenders has been getting older over time. In 2001, 21% of attenders were aged 70 years and over. By 2011, 25% were in this older age bracket.

One unexpected development that disturbs the trend is that highest of proportion of attenders in their 20s was recorded in 2011 (10%) compared with earlier surveys (9% in 2006, 8% in 2001). While too early for much optimism, this certainly warrants further investigation.

**Table 1: Age profile of attenders: 2001 to 2011**

	2001	2006	2011
Age	Percentage		
15-19	6	6	5
20-29	8	9	10
30-39	12	10	11
40-49	18	16	14
50-59	18	17	16
60-69	17	19	19
70-79	15	16	16
80+	6	7	9

Source: Powell (2011), Castle (2006, 2001)

In the next twenty years, with the passing of the oldest generation of current church attenders, the Australian churchgoing population may shrink substantially in size. As well as coping with an ageing church, there is also the additional challenge of responding to distinctive generational differences in approaches to life and faith, among those within and beyond the churches. In the meantime, churches face the ministry question: how do churches both minister to ageing congregations as well as connect more effectively with younger people?

**Table 2: Age profile of attenders by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
Age	Percentage						
15-19	4	7	4	4	10	3	6
20-29	9	13	6	6	29	4	13
30-39	11	13	9	9	17	5	13
40-49	12	17	14	13	18	8	15
50-59	14	17	17	18	14	13	15
60-69	19	16	22	22	9	22	16
70-79	19	11	19	18	3	26	13
80+	13	6	9	11	1	19	9

Source: Powell (2011)

## 3. Gender

**Australian Population:** The Australian population is about equally made up of men and women; however, this varies greatly by age with more women living into later years. In 2011 51% of the population were female and 49% were male.

**Church Attenders:** The gender distribution in church attenders is less even than that of the Australian population with 60% of church attenders being female

and only 40% male. The increased life expectancy of women is reflected in these figures. A question for churches is how they can engage and retain younger males.

**Table 3: Gender profile of attenders by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
Gender	Percentage						
Female	61	56	61	58	56	63	58
Male	39	44	39	43	44	37	42

Source: Powell (2011)

## 4. Education

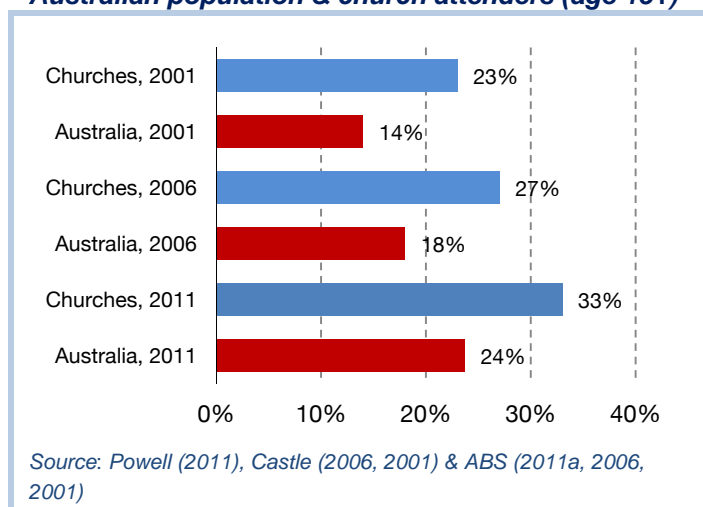
**Australian Population:** Australians are becoming more educated and the gender gap in education is narrowing. In 2011, 84% of 16-year-olds were attending school, compared with 48% in 1971. Moreover, the rate of growth in attendance at non-government schools has increased faster than national school enrolment. Each successive generation is more likely than the last to have completed school and to have a tertiary qualification, with Generations X and Y (those born between 1967 and 1986) being the most highly educated on record.

The proportion of the population aged over 20 years of age with a university degree almost doubled between 1991 and 2006, from 10% to 18% and rose further to 23.7% in 2011. In 2011, 19% of the population was enrolled for a qualification including higher education, school, TAFEs and other educational institutions (ABS, 2012). Since 2001 there has been a shift in the proportions of men and women aged 20-34 who obtain qualifications. In 2001, 47% of men and 45% of women aged 20-34 were obtaining qualifications compared with 52% of men and 60% of women in that age group in 2011.

**Church Attenders:** Church attenders are more likely to have a university education than the national population. The proportion of church attenders with a university degree rose from 27% to 33% between 2006 and 2011 (24% nationally). A further 25% of church attenders in 2011 had attained a trade certificate, diploma or associate diploma, while the remaining 42% had primary or secondary school as their highest qualification level. When the age profile of churches is taken into account, this disparity appears even more marked. Younger people are more highly educated than older people, and yet they are under-represented in churches.



**Figure 3: Levels of university education of Australian population & church attenders (age 15+)**



There is an issue here for Australia's churches concerning their connection with people of lower levels of formal education. What might this mean for a church? Increasingly well-educated ministry staff will need to be alert to the needs of potentially less educated attenders at their churches. They will also need to cater for changing expectations of teaching and learning situations from younger generations.

**Table 4: Highest education level achieved by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
Education Level	Percentage						
School	36	37	45	54	38	43	41
Trade cert/diploma/assoc diploma	23	27	22	22	33	26	27
Degree	42	37	32	24	29	31	32

Source: Powell (2011)

## 5. Employment

**Australian Population:** In 2011, 66% of Australians were in the labour force. The employment of women is plateauing with 59% in 2011 and 58% in 2006 being employed, (an increase since 1986 when 48% of women were in the labour force). In 2011 and 2006 some 70% of part-time workers were women.

Unemployment decreased from the 1990s down to 5% in 2006. It reached a low of 4% in February 2008 before rising back up to 6% in 2009 due to the impact of the Global Financial Crisis. In March 2013, the unemployment rate remained steady at 5.5% (ABS, 2013).

Some 17% of employed Australians work 49 hours or more a week. This has fluctuated over the past few decades. 49 hours or more is the most common

number of hours worked by men (24.3% of males, compared with only 8.8% of females), whereas 35-39 hours of work is most common for females (18.9%). Nevertheless, in 2011 36% of women did 15 hours or more of unpaid domestic work a week, compared with 11% of men. A question for churches is how might they tailor their ministries and processes of connecting in communities where men work substantially more paid hours per week than women? With men working a higher number of hours, how can the church contribute to a work-life balance?

**Church Attenders:** The older age profile of Australian church attenders is reflected in the higher proportion of retirees as compared with the Australian population, and consequently lower employment and unemployment rates. The percentage of employed church attenders was 51% in 2011 up from 50% in 2006, and the rate of unemployed attenders was 3% in 2011 (same in 2006).

There is a steady downwards trend in the percentage of church attenders who indicated full-time home duties/family responsibilities, from 15% in 2001 to 11% in 2006 to 9% in 2011. This may reflect the national trend of more women being employed part-time and older people remaining in the workforce longer.

As the proportion of retired churchgoers gradually shrinks through death and incapacity, what might be the implications for churches in terms of the volunteer hours that people can offer to church activities? Similarly, do churches assume that young parents have time to volunteer at church?

**Table 5: Employment status by church attenders (15 years +) by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
Employment	Percentage						
Full time	26	32	29	25	36	17	30
Part-time	15	18	13	15	24	11	16
Unemployed	2	3	3	2	5	2	4
Student	8	11	6	6	22	4	11
Home duties	10	10	9	9	8	10	10
Self-employed	7	7	7	12	9	6	8
Retired	39	24	37	37	8	54	29

Source: Powell (2011)

## 6. Country of birth

**Australian Population:** Australia is a country of many cultures. Around a third of Australia's population (30%) in 2011 was born overseas, up from 24% in 2006. Moreover, in 2011 46% of Australians had one or both parents born overseas, up from 44% in 2006.

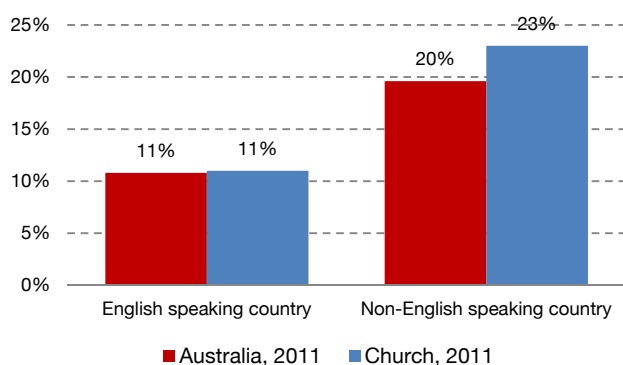
Immigration has long been a key source of population growth for Australia. However one of the biggest changes over the past three decades has been the

increase in the number of countries of origin. In 2011, the most common overseas countries of birth were the England, followed by New Zealand, China and India.

**Church Attenders:** When considering the country of birth of church attenders, it is important to note the limitations in the 2011 and 2006 National Church Life Survey results due to non-participation of some non-English-speaking churches. Therefore the following figures are conservative estimates of the presence of overseas-born attenders.

Some 34% of church attenders who completed the 2011 NCLS were born outside of Australia (compared with 28% in 2006), which is similar to the increased proportion for the broader Australian population (aged 15 and over). The results were also similar for the church and for the nation in terms of the proportions born in other English-speaking countries. Slightly higher proportions of church attenders are from non-English-speaking countries compared with the Australian population (23% vs. 20%).

**Figure 4: Country of birth of Australian population & church attenders (15 years +)**



Source: Powell (2011), ABS (2011a)

For Christians, churches play a significant role of stabilisation and support for first-generation migrants, providing a source of integration into Australian society and contacts from their homeland. However, the continuing challenge is retaining the second generation, where ethno-specific churches face the realities of operating within a different surrounding culture.

**Table 6: Country of birth of church attenders by denomination**

	Angli- can	Cath- olic	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
Born in Australia	74	63	56	80	66
Born in Other Eng Spkg Country	14	7	22	11	11
Born in Non-Eng-Spkg Country	13	30	23	9	23

Source: Powell (2011)

## 7. Marital status and family structure

**Australian Population:** Marriage rates have been decreasing in Australia since the early 1970s. In 1986, the crude marriage rate (the number of marriages registered per year per 1,000 people of the population) was 7.2. Over the last decade it has plateaued to between 5.3 and 5.5 (and was at 5.4 in 2011).

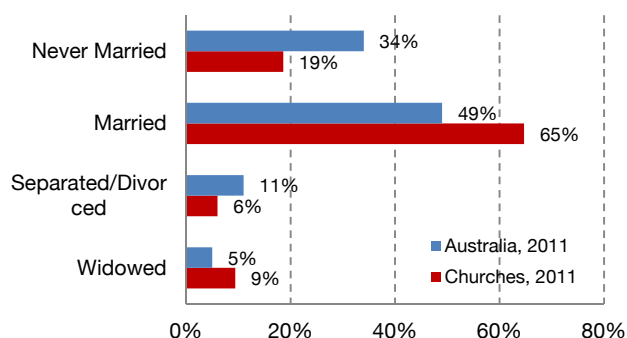
In 2011 49% of Australians were married (compared with 50% in 2006. The percentage of those in a de facto relationship had declined from 9% in 2006 to 7% in 2011 (including same sex couples).

Marriage is being postponed, with the median age of men entering their first marriage rising from 25.6 years in 1986, to 29.7 years in 2011. Similarly, the median age of women entering their first marriage rose from 23.5 years in 1986 to 28.0 years in 2011.

In 2011, 8% of people were divorced, 3% were separated and 6% were widowed.

**Church Attenders:** Of church attenders aged 15 or above in 2011 65% were married (compared with 66% in 2006) and 6% were separated or divorced (same as in 2006). The churches' older age profile contributes to the relatively high percentage of those who were widowed (9%). Finally, 1% of church attenders were in a de facto relationship (not shown on graph).

**Figure 5: Marital status of Australian population & church attenders (15 years +)**



Source: Powell (2011), ABS (2011a)

People who run church activities will need to be aware of non-traditional family structures, as marriages, de facto relationships and families form and reform with increasing flexibility. Welcoming people within diverse family structures into church life will be an increasingly significant social issue.

**Table 7: Marital status of church attenders (15 years +) by denomination**

	Anglican	Catholic	Pentecostal	Other Protestant	Total
Status	Percentage				
Never married	17	15	36	20	19
Married	64	67	54	64	65
De-facto	1	2	1	1	1
Separated or Divorced	6	6	7	7	6
Widowed	12	10	2	9	9

Source: Powell (2011)

## 8. Conclusion

Australia is a changing country. The churches are also changing, but not always in the same way or at the same rate as the nation. This can lead to differences between the church and the broader community. Some of these differences can lead to the church being disconnected from its wider community, but they can also provide the church with an opportunity to engage with society. How churches respond is a matter of ongoing discernment for church leaders and their communities of faith.

While the population of the nation may be ageing, that of the church is older still. Generally, members of the church community are likely to be better educated than the wider community and are less likely to be unemployed. They are less likely to be divorced, separated or living in a de facto relationship. They are more likely to have been born in a non-English-speaking country.

These are some of the demographic raw materials that make up the Australian church community and set it slightly apart from the wider society in which it is embedded. Churches can either ignore those differences or see them as particular strengths to draw upon in different ways as they engage with the world around them.



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## About NCLS Research

NCLS Research is a joint project of several denominational partners. Established in the early 1990s, it is a world leader in research focused on connecting churches and their communities. The most well-known project is the five-yearly National Church Life Survey.

## About the National Church Life Survey

The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a quantitative survey of 260,000-450,000 church attenders, 6,000-10,000 church leaders and 3,000-7,000 churches in more than 20 Australian denominations (Catholic, Anglican and Protestant denominations) every census year since 1991. The survey covers a wide range of areas of religious faith and practice and social concern. The NCLS includes three major survey types:

1. Attender Surveys (comprising a main survey variant and multiple small sample survey variants);
2. Several variants of a Leader Survey which is completed by local church leaders; and
3. An Operations Survey audit of local church activities.

Data are weighted to adjust for variations in participation levels across denominations and regions.

## Giving Newcomers a Voice: What newcomers reveal about their experience of joining a church

### **Abstract**

Through their own experiences, newcomers to church life can teach us about the process of discipleship. The National Church Life Survey gives a voice to thousands of people who have only started attending church in recent years. This chapter describes the demographic profile of newcomers and how they are spread across denominations. We learn about the significant people, activities and events that help them come to faith. We find out how and why they joined their church. Do they go church-shopping? What triggered their decision to attend? The basis for this study is the main 2011 National Church Life Survey results as well as a series of random sample polls of church attenders. By testing our assumptions against the evidence, we can evaluate our practices, and perhaps, make it easier for more newcomers to find their way into faith communities.

### **Citation**

Powell, R. (2015) Giving Newcomers a Voice: What newcomers reveal about their experience of joining a church, in *New Wineskins: Congregational Transformation in Australian Baptist Church Life*. Eds. Cronshaw, D. & Jackson, D. Sydney: Morling Press.

### **Availability**

Visit the publisher's website: <http://www.morlingcollege.com/shop/book/congregational-transformation-in-australian-baptist-church-life/>

# Church Health

## Church Health

### **Comprehensive overview**

Enriching Church Life (2nd ed.)

### **Trends in church health over time**

Trends in Protestant church vitality over twenty years (1991-2011)

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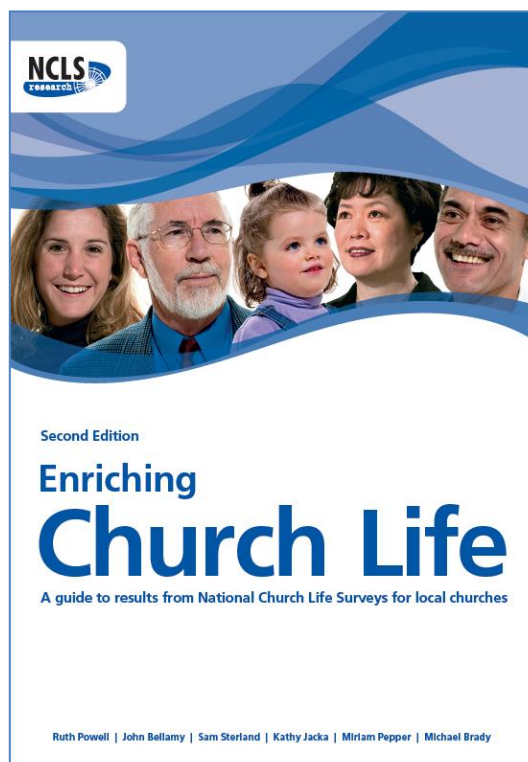
# Comprehensive overview

## Enriching church life: A guide to results from National Church Life Surveys for local churches (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)

Enriching Church Life is designed to help you understand and foster vitality in your church. It shows how the results of the National Church Life Survey can be the starting point for positive and enriching change in your church. This is a book for all local churches whether large or small, whether thriving or struggling. It is also for anyone who wants to understand what the research says about the dynamics of church life.

This second edition of Enriching Church Life outlines:

- Key research findings on fostering vitality and growth in churches, based on major surveys in four countries: Australia, England, New Zealand and USA
- Results from the 2006 National Church Life Survey in Australia, including denominational comparisons across each area of church vitality
- An overview over time of changes in religious affiliation and church attendance as well as a snapshot of the size of churches, and inflow and outflow patterns
- Research studies about fostering church vitality in different circumstances.



### Citation

Powell, R., Bellamy, J., Sterland, S., Jacka, K., Pepper, M., & Brady, M. (2012). *Enriching Church Life: A guide to results from National Church Life Surveys for local churches* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Sydney, NSW: Mirrabooka Press & NCLS Research.

### Availability

To order copies of Enriching Church Life (2nd ed.), go to: [www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=7168](http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=7168). You can also visit the NCLS website and find it under Research > Books.

# Trends in church health over time

NCLS Occasional Paper 23

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***Trends in Protestant  
church vitality over  
twenty years (1991-2011)***

Ruth Powell

September 2013

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## Acknowledgments

Production of this paper would not have been possible without the work of the other members of the NCLS Research team who, at the time of publication also included: Chandrika Chinnadurai, Martin Dowson, Ian Duncum, Nicole Hancock, Kathy Kerr, Claudia Mollidor, Miriam Pepper, Sam Sterland, Amelia Vaeafisi.

## Citation

Powell, R. (2013). Trends in Protestant church vitality over twenty years (1991-2011), NCLS Occasional Paper 23, Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press

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## 1 Introduction

The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a five-yearly event encompassing hundreds of thousands of participants in thousands of local churches.

Commencing in 1991, it has been repeated in 1996, 2001, 2006 and 2011 and gives us the opportunity to review broad trends in church life in more than twenty denominations over twenty years.

The underlying purpose of each NCLS has been to assist churches, at local, regional and national levels, to reflect on their health and vitality and to build on their strengths, in order to more effectively participate in God's mission.

The aim of this paper is to highlight some of the key trends between 1991 and 2011 revealed by these national surveys.

Part 2 outlines the changing context, while Part 3 profiles who goes to church. Part 4 reviews the health and vitality of Australian local churches over the past twenty years. Parts 3 and 4 are both limited to Anglican and Protestant churches because they have taken part in the NCLS across the whole twenty year period.<sup>1</sup>

## 2 The Australian context

The past few decades have been characterized by extraordinary, rapid social change. Much has been written about the changing context, particularly as it applies to Western nations. Broad paradigm shifts have been labeled by philosophers, social scientists and others. Theologians, including missiologists such as Bosch (1991) and Bevans and Schroeder (2004) have extended such thinking to the significant shifts in the way that churches think and act. In Australia, the work of Bouma (2006) and Hughes (2012) as well as our own NCLS Research team, has provided a sociological perspective drawing from quantitative data.

Kreider (1999) used the framework of 'belonging, believing and behaving' to track shifts in church and society. Here are a few summary indicators based on

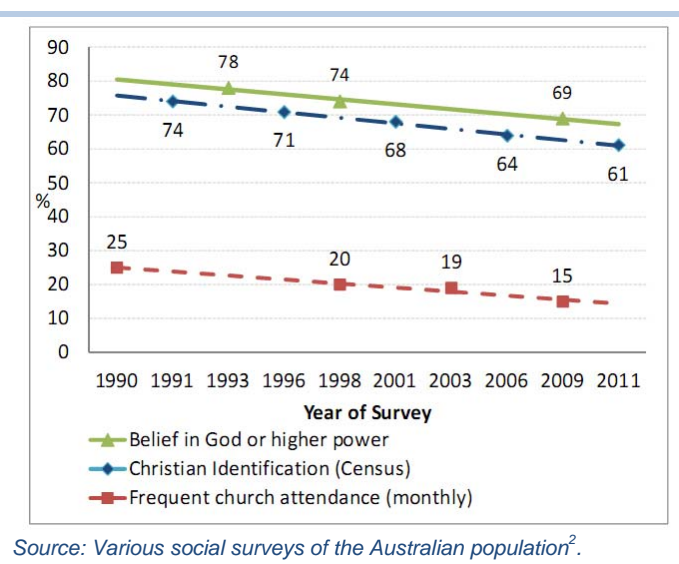
this framework to demonstrate the extent of change between 1991 and 2011.

- *Belonging*: the proportion of the Australian population who affiliate themselves with a Christian denomination/group in the National Census.
- *Believing*: the proportion of Australians who believe in God or a higher power.
- *Behaving*: the proportion of Australians who attend church at least monthly.

### 2.1 Belonging: religious identification

In 1901 when asked 'what is your religion' in the five-yearly National Census, some 96% of Australians claimed a Christian affiliation or identification. By 2011 this figure had declined to 61%. In the past two decades from 1991 to 2011, Figure 1 shows that there has been a decline in Christian identification from 74% to 61%.

**Figure 1: Religiosity of Australians: belonging, beliefs and behaviour**



Source: Various social surveys of the Australian population<sup>2</sup>.

### 2.2 Believing: belief in the existence of God or a higher power

Using various sample surveys of the Australian population, Figure 1 also shows that there has been a decline in 'belief in the existence of God or some kind of higher power' from around 78% in 1993 to 69% in 2009.

<sup>1</sup> The Catholic Church did not take part in the 1991 NCLS and some wording differences in questions means that a more limited scope would have to be applied to this paper. Analysis including Catholic trends will be done in other NCLS papers.

<sup>2</sup> Sources: 1993 National Social Science Survey, 1998 Australian Community Survey and 2009 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes, ABS National Census 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011

### 2.3 Behaving: the changing practice of church attendance

People can exhibit religious behaviours in a range of ways, including personal prayer, meditation and other devotional practises. Church attendance is the most commonly used measure of public religious practice, based on sample surveys of all Australians. While some denominations and regions have experienced numerical growth in church attendance, the overall trend for Australian church attendance since the 1950s has been decline.

Figure 1 shows that this longer term trend of overall decline in church attendance has continued in the two decades since 1991.

It is important to note that not all parts of the Church are in decline. In every faith tradition and in every context, there are growing churches or movements, such as Pentecostal churches. However, it is not enough to counter the overall net effect of decline.

How will new voices become part of the conversation about the nature of church and mission? For example, how are the voices the Pentecostals being heard? How will they shape future forms of engagement between church and community?

## 3 A demographic profile

Part 3 provides a brief summary of some of the demographic features of church attenders. While each characteristic deserves greater reflection, the purpose here is simply to understand more about whose voices we are hearing as they reflect on the vitality of their churches. As Catholic parishes only began to participate in the NCLS from 1996 onward, Parts 3 and 4 focus on Protestant<sup>3</sup> denominations in order to take full advantage of a twenty year time frame from 1991 to 2011.

The samples for these surveys are very large; each NCLS had hundreds of thousands of participants. This means that even small changes of one or two percentage points are statistically significant. So, this paper only highlights more substantial trends.

<sup>3</sup> The term 'Protestant' will be used in the text to refer to both Anglican and Protestant churches.

### 3.1 Gender

Some 59% of Protestant church attenders are women. This proportion has declined slightly over time from 62% in 1991. In general, the over-representation of women in church life continues a long term trend in Australia, and elsewhere, of the higher involvement of women in religious practice.

### 3.2 Education

Australia is becoming increasingly educated and the gender gap in education is narrowing. Each successive generation is more likely than the last to have completed school, and have a tertiary qualification. Generation X and Y are the most highly educated generations on record (Pippett, Powell & Sterland, 2010).

Protestant church attenders are even more highly educated than the national population. The proportion of Protestant church attenders whose highest completed educational qualification was a university degree increased from 23% in 2001 to 34% in 2011 (compared to 27% of all Australians in 2011).

### 3.3 Ethnicity

The national Census reveals that migration patterns are a very important part of the religious profile of Australia. The NCLS does not fully represent the multicultural diversity of Australian churches. Despite offering the survey in eight languages, non-English speaking individuals and mono-ethnic churches are under-represented in each NCLS.

Indigenous churches are also under-represented. However, the 2011 NCLS still found some 1% of attenders in churches were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin. Just under a third of current Protestant attenders in the 2011 NCLS were migrants, with 14% born in another country where English is the main language. Some 16% were born in a Non English-speaking country. This is consistent with 16% in 1996 and 2001 and 18% in 2006.<sup>4</sup> The Australian Church is enriched and strengthened by migrant participation. Some of the challenges include retaining the second generation, evaluating mono-cultural and multi-cultural approaches and issues of leadership and governance.

<sup>4</sup> The proportion of migrant attenders is higher in the Catholic Church.

### 3.4 Age

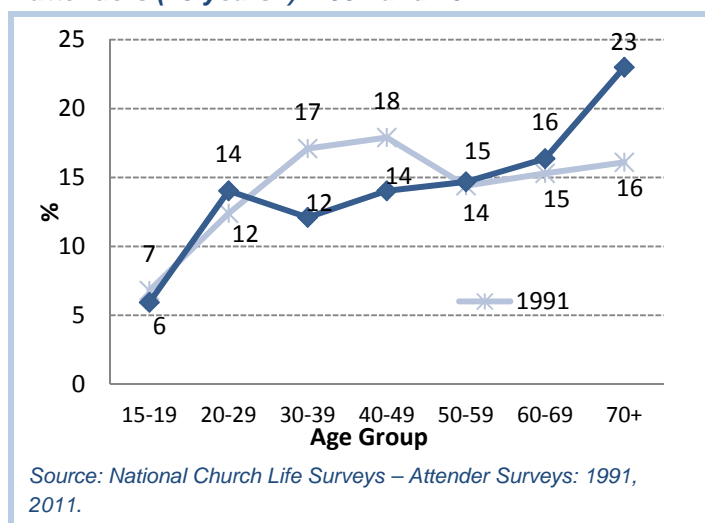
The population of Australia is aging. In the last century the age structure of Australia has changed dramatically, with fewer children under 15 years, and more people over 65 years old. In 1971 the mean age was 27.0 years. By 2009 it had increased to 37.9 years.

In the mid-1960s, there was little difference between the age profile of the church, compared to the wider community (Mol, 1971). Since then, a gap has emerged and widened over time. The result is that younger generations are increasingly under-represented in Australian churches.

Figure 2 displays the profile of Protestant adult church attenders (aged 15 years and over) from the 1991 NCLS and, twenty years later, in the 2011 NCLS. The ongoing repercussions of missing younger generations are obvious with the high proportions of attenders aged over 70 years (23% overall). As well as coping with an ageing church, there is also the additional challenge of responding to distinctive generational differences in approaches to life and faith, among those within and beyond the churches.<sup>5</sup>

One unexpected development that disturbs the trend is the higher proportion of attenders in their 20's in 2011 (14%) compared with 1991 (12%). While too early for much optimism, this certainly warrants further investigation.

**Figure 2: Age profile of Protestant adult church attenders (15 years+): 1991 and 2011**



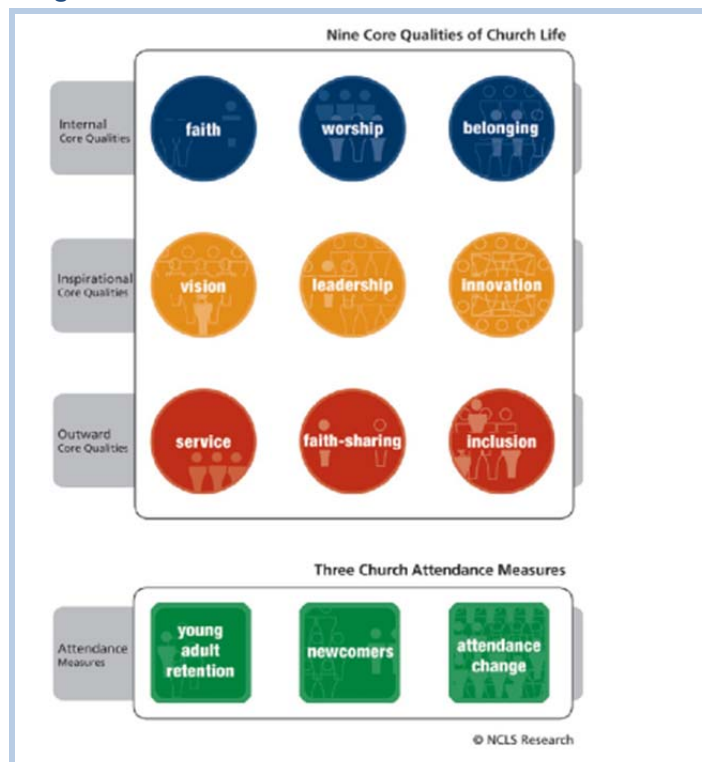
<sup>5</sup> Generational differences have been explored further in Powell & Jacka (2008).

## 4 Evaluating church health and vitality: nine Core Qualities of church life

Church Life Surveys provide a way of measuring aspects of a local church's vitality. NCLS Research has developed a framework of nine separate, but inter-related Core Qualities and three attendance measures that together build a picture of vitality in local churches. This section focuses on trends in church vitality over twenty years based on this framework.

The first three Internal Core Qualities have to do with our faith in God and relationships within the church community. The next three Core Qualities have to do with leadership and direction. The final three Core Qualities focus on the interface between the local church and the wider community.

**Figure 3: Nine Core Qualities of church life**



The nine Core Qualities are:

1. Alive and growing faith
2. Vital and nurturing worship
3. Strong and growing belonging
4. Clear and owned vision
5. Inspiring and empowering leadership
6. Imaginative and flexible innovation
7. Practical and diverse service
8. Willing and effective faith-sharing
9. Intentional and welcoming inclusion.

**Attendance Measures:** There are also three measures of attendance that point to a church's vitality. They are:  
**Young Adult Retention:** The proportion of attenders aged 15-19 years who have been attending their church for more than five years.

**Newcomers:** The percentage of people who have joined their local church in the past 5 years and were previously not involved in any church.

**Attendance Change:** Changes in attendance or church growth/decline.

#### 4.1 Core Quality 1: Alive and growing faith

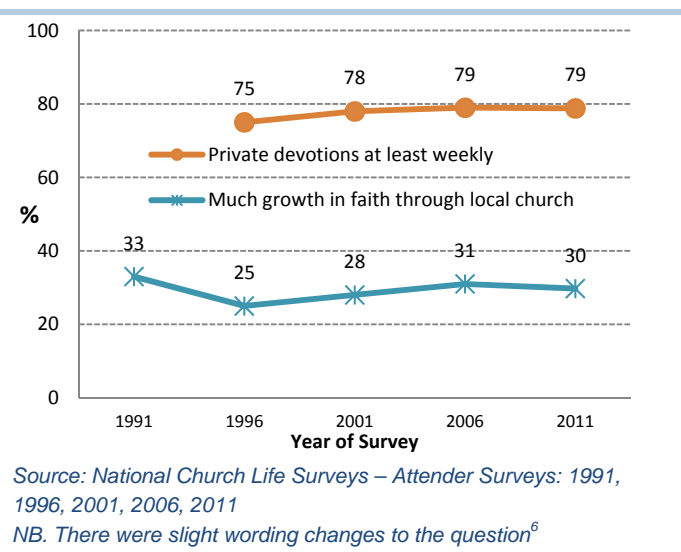
A growing, lively faith is at the heart of church vitality. Churches teach people about God, helping them to worship God by living out their faith in all aspects of their lives. A lively faith can encompass a growing understanding of doctrine, of trust and belief in God, of the experience of the presence of God or of putting faith into practice in everyday life (Powell et al, 2012). While such concepts are difficult to measure, two indicators are displayed in Figure 3. The first picks up the role of the local church in discipleship and the second measure explores the private practice of devotions.

Over the twenty year span from 1991 to 2011, the trends for the measures of 'alive and growing faith' among church attenders are relatively stable.

This consistent finding across time indicates the important role of the local church in nurturing faith journeys. Previous NCLS research has found that attenders of all ages report growth in faith. Further, higher proportions of attenders report 'much growth' due to their local church (30%), when compared with the activities of other groups (8%), or their own private activities (11%).

While the private practice of devotional life has also been stable over time, previous NCLS research has shown that these have differed across generations. This deserves further review.

**Figure 4: Measures of growth in faith in Protestant churches: 1991 to 2011**



#### 4.2 Core Quality 2: Vital and nurturing worship

The worship service generally has the highest profile of all church activities. The evidence suggests that it is the main missional interface between the local church and their community. The core quality titled 'Vital and nurturing worship' focuses on the attender's experience of the church worship services.

Going beyond issues of style, attenders are asked how often they experience certain characteristics during church services at their congregation. Here we focus on the proportion of attenders who always experience the following:

- a sense of God's presence in worship
- helpful preaching
- growth in understanding of God
- inspiration in worship

Figure 5 shows that the proportions of church attenders who claim to always experience these features of 'vital and nurturing worship' have increased from 2001 to 2011. The trends are both strong and positive.

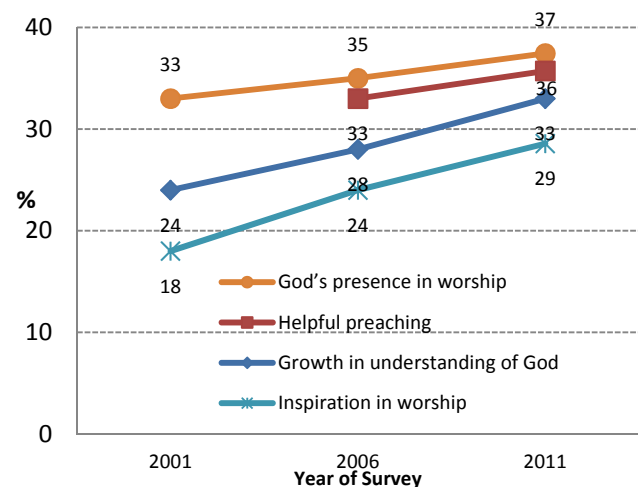
<sup>6</sup> Note question wording changes

91: "Over the last year, have you grown in your understanding of the Christian faith? Much growth, mainly through this church"

96, 01, 06, 11: "Over the last year, do you believe you have grown in your Christian faith? Much growth, mainly through this church"



**Figure 5: Measures of vital and nurturing worship in Protestant churches: 2001 to 2011**



Source: National Church Life Surveys – Attender Surveys: 2001, 2006, 2011

NB Comparable questions were not available from the 1991 NCLS or 1996 NCLS.

Churches may be justifiably gratified at this increasingly positive review of the worship experience.

It is quite likely that many churches have been investing in developing their worship services. Some will have invested in developing their musical repertoire. Others have drawn from both traditional and contemporary arts, using form and colour to engage and communicate. Some will have explored the riches of other traditions, perhaps adopting the rhythm of religious seasons, or meditative practices.

However, do we need to sound a cautionary note? Is it possible that we are only hearing those who remain, those who are comfortable and nurtured by what is offered? Have the people who wanted something different, who were not nurtured by the worship experience of their churches, given up? The battle lines around worship styles have previously been drawn along generational lines. We know that younger people are under-represented in church life. What is their experience?

Frost (2012) puts it this way, "...we are always perfectly designed to produce what we are currently producing!...There are too many instances of Christians worshipping sublimely every Sunday, but never making an impact beyond the congregation, never experiencing the powerful beauty of community, and never going deeper in discipleship." While Frost notes that he has

often been misunderstood as minimising the importance of worship in the Christian Church, he suggests that it has been allowed to become the organising function of the Church's life, and yet it has not been a catalyst that has effectively activated all the functions of Church.

The NCLS Research team can contribute to this discussion by continuing to research ways that churches conduct their worship services. This may offer insight to the way that different groups report their experience of the presence of God, as well as how this might act as a catalyst for how they experience and practice community, discipleship, witness and service.

### 4.3 Core Quality 3: Strong and growing belonging

The Core Quality of Belonging points to the function of the Church as a faith community, or fellowship. It is about the quality of relationships within a local church. In sociological terms, it is a measure of social capital. Putnam (2000) defines social capital as "those features of social organisation, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating co-ordinated actions." He, and other theorists, focus on the benefits of relational networks, as a resource for the wider community. Bonding social capital is about the strength of relationships within the group, whereas bridging social capital is about the extent and strength of relationships between the group and other groups (Leonard & Bellamy, 2012).

The NCLS core quality titled 'Strong and growing belonging' is a measure of bonding social capital. Attenders are asked to make a general assessment about whether they feel they belong to the local church. We also ask about their involvement in different types of small groups.

Figure 6 shows that the proportion of church attenders who describe their sense of belonging to the local church as 'strong and growing' was 56% in 2011, and that proportion has been relatively stable, particularly since around 1996. Involvement in social and other groups has also been quite stable over time, with 42% of attenders involved in 1991 compared to 41% in 2011.

There has been a significant increase in the proportion of attenders who participate in small prayer and/or study groups. Between 1991 and 2011 the proportion of Protestant attenders took part in this kind of small

group life increased from 42% to nearly half of all attenders (49%).

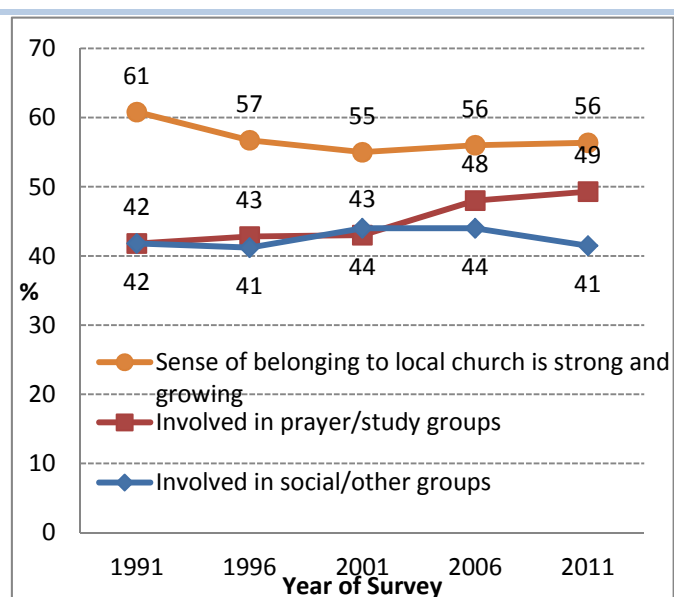
Using small groups to develop community as well as a tool for discipleship is affirmed by many. The format often encourages greater levels of personal intimacy, which facilitate greater bonding. It also offers another space for teaching and instruction in faith matters. Further, the role of small group leader is an opportunity for leadership development and could contribute to higher levels of involvement.

Whether or not churches have been promoting small prayer/study groups to a greater degree, this also highlights changes in individual preferences. Those who have chosen to remain connected with local churches may be more motivated to intentionally invest in the development of their own faith life.

Another cultural factor may be the predominance of individual-centred thinking and activity. If we apply this feature to faith exploration, it is perhaps not surprising that the intimate small group format is attractive to current attenders. It lends itself well to an emphasis on one's personal relationship with God, one that is certainly nurtured in many Protestant faith traditions.

In other research we have conducted, those born after WWII, who carry generational labels such as baby boomers, Generation X, Y and so on, are more likely to be participants in small prayer, discussion and Bible study groups, than older generations. This is partly a reflection of the traditions of the churches they attend, but it is also an example of the contemporary interface between gospel and culture.

**Figure 6: Measures of belonging in Protestant churches: 1991 to 2011**



Source: National Church Life Surveys – Attender Surveys: 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011.

#### 4.4 Core Quality 4: Clear and owned vision

The idea that it is important for groups to have a sense of direction, goals, or vision for the future, has gained profile among churches in recent decades. While the format varies widely, mission planning, or pastoral planning activities have become commonplace across many churches, as in other arenas, such as business, corporations, and community groups. Indeed, the resources provided by NCLS Research to local churches following a Church Life Survey are, at their heart, planning tools, designed to help churches to be proactive, and build on their strengths towards a desired future.

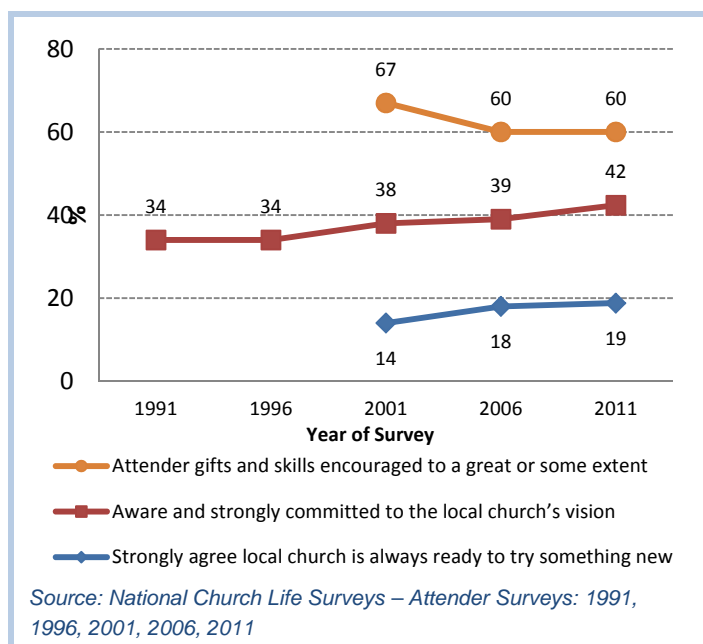
In some contexts, the leader conceives, casts and carries the vision with varying levels of consultation. However, having a clear vision, however well communicated, is only part of the dynamic. Another vital component is for that vision to be accepted and implemented. These two aspects are picked up in an NCLS question that asks if attenders are aware of a vision or directions for the future, and also their degree of commitment.

Previous research based on NCLS data has consistently found that having a clear and owned vision is important to overall church health and vitality. It is strongly related to other core qualities.

Of all the indicators of vitality discussed in this paper, this is the one with the greatest positive increase over the twenty years. The proportion of Protestant attenders who say they are aware and strongly committed to the vision or directions of their local church has increased from 34% in 1991 to 42% in 2011. (See Figure 7).

People in churches appear to be finding their footing in the changing tides. More churches appear to be attending to questions about their purpose in a given time and place and discovering a shared vision. This is evidence of a degree of intentionality about the work of the church in mission. Whether or not the hoped-for outcomes are forthcoming is yet to be seen.

**Figure 7: Measures of vision, leadership and innovation in Protestant churches: 1991 to 2011**



#### 4.5 Core Quality 5: Inspiring and empowering leadership

The core quality titled 'inspiring and empowering leadership' is not simply a measure of effective church leadership, or an evaluation of the clergy. It is about whether there is an equipping or empowering culture within the local church.

Attenders who perform a range of leadership or ministry roles at their local church has increased from 41% in 2001 to 44% in 2011.

Compared to ten years earlier, in 2011 Anglican and Protestant attenders were less likely to claim that their

gifts and skills are encouraged by the leadership in their local church. Changes in the question wording<sup>7</sup> require caution in displaying data from the earlier surveys in 1991 and 1996, however, those results also support the suggestion that there has been a decline in attender perceptions about the encouragement of people's gifts and skills.

Attenders were able to say if they felt their gifts and skills are encouraged 'to a great extent' or 'to some extent'. The pattern of decline from 2001 is the same for both responses. This result potentially points to an under-utilised resource in churches.

Figure 7 shows that the trend has been stable since 2006 (60%), and we only have measurements for three points in time, however this remains an important longer term trend to watch because it is one of the few indicators that has declined.

What is going on here? Has the Church become less encouraging? Or is this more about a change in attenders' perception of what is happening, rather than an actual change in practices? Of course, perceptions create their own version of reality, which is just as powerful as objectively measureable changes.

If we want to make the case that local church leaders have become less empowering of attenders than a decade ago, then we could suggest that leaders are responding to the challenges of contemporary ministry and mission by 'tightening the reins'. In a sense, this could be the shadow cast by the increased presence of a strong and clear vision for the future. Is there less room for a diversity of visions?

An alternative explanation is that the equipping behaviour of leaders within churches has not changed, but that attenders' expectations have, altering their perceptions. Do more attenders now expect their own contribution to be valued and sought after? This is another area for fruitful ongoing research.

<sup>7</sup> In 1991 and 1996, the wording of the NCLS question was "Does the leadership put a priority on encouraging people to find and use their gifts and skills here?" In 2001, 2006 and 2011, the wording was directed to the individual respondent, "Have this congregation's leaders encouraged you to find and use your gifts and skills here?"

#### 4.6 Core Quality 6: Imaginative and flexible innovation

Healthy churches are characterised by having a culture of being open to new possibilities. Having a degree of flexibility to allow innovation is associated with growth in numbers and with higher levels of newcomers who have not previously been part of church life (Powell et al, 2012).

This core quality, at its heart, is about the dominant missiological question of gospel and culture. As applied to churches it holds within it the tensions of change. On the one hand, there is the risk of discontinuity and disruption, while on the other, there is the opportunity of more effective witness and service.

Against a background of broad social and cultural shifts, labelled with terms such as post-modernity, and post-Christendom, there has been much innovative responsiveness 'on the ground' within churches as well as theological and missiological reflection<sup>8</sup>. Brighton (2012) argues that the Church's effectiveness hinges on its capacity for innovation, while noting Hans Kung's (1989, cited in Brighton, 2012) observation that "the Christian Church for much of its history has not welcomed innovation, often misidentifying it as heresy, because of its association with changing doctrine, ceremonies or structures'.

In 2011, when Protestant attenders were asked whether they agreed that their congregation was always ready to try something new, 19% *strongly* agreed and a further 50% agreed with statement. This is a trend upwards from 14% in 2001 who strongly agreed and 50% who agreed when the question was first asked in this format.

Attenders' assess their churches as more open to innovation than previously. Along with an increased clarity of vision about the future, this suggests churches are in increasingly good stead for engagement in effective mission. Yet, the move from potential to actual is challenging.

The NCLS Research team has been tracking examples of innovation over years and is mapping the presence of innovations such as church plants, new worship

services and pioneering expressions of worship and outreach (See NCLS Occasional Paper 14).

#### 4.7 Core Quality 7: Practical and diverse service

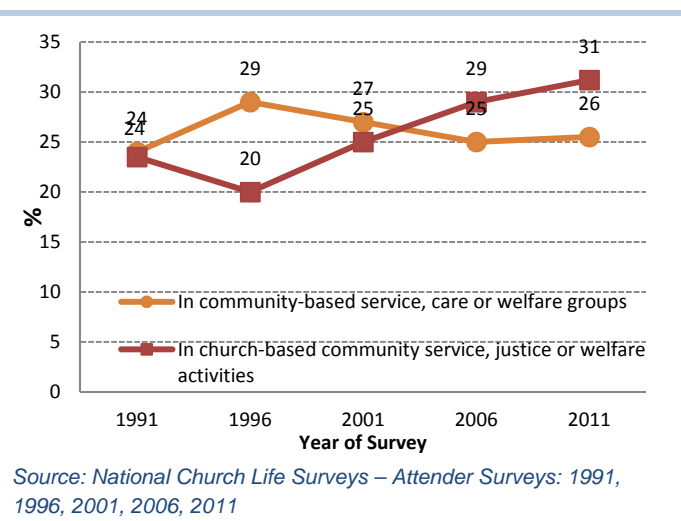
This quality of church life focuses on service, acts of care, welfare, social justice and action. It is a measure of how churches are living out their call to be the hands and feet of Christ; how they respond to the call to feed the hungry, visit the prisoner, care for the sick and so on (Matthew 25).

Many attenders serve others in informal actions of care and social action and this proportion is increasing. Some examples of how Protestant attenders have taken action include: 77% have donated money to charity; 51% visited someone in hospital; 44% helped someone through a crisis; 41% gave possessions to a needy person; 26% lent money outside their family; and 30% cared for someone who was very sick. Other than hospital visits, which has been stable, these percentages have all increased with each survey since 2001.

Attenders also reported their involvement in community-based service groups. Figure 8 shows that from 1991 to 2011, the proportion of Protestant attenders who participate in community groups of this kind has been relatively stable (~25%).

In contrast, Protestant attendee involvement in church-based service groups has increased substantially over the same period, from a low of 20% in 1996 to 31% in 2011.

**Figure 8: Measures of community service in Protestant churches: 1991 to 2011**



<sup>8</sup> Examples include Frost and Hirsch (2004), McLaren (2007), and Tickle (2012).



Australian society continues to benefit from the church which provides an extraordinary voluntary social welfare safety net (that is largely unheralded) made up of hundreds of thousands of individuals giving their time. That this remains true over time and has increased is something to celebrate.

The sharp rise in activities based within local churches, in contrast with the stable levels of involvement through wider community groups, deserves further reflection. Is this a sign of the Church in mission in new ways, perhaps trying to build new bridges to their communities? Are these signs of busyness in local churches always authentic expressions of living out faith in the whole of life? Or does the buzz of activity sometimes indicate a desperate casting around for new connections when old ones don't work? What difference will it make in the future if the hosting group for such activities is more likely to be the local church, rather than Christians being salt and yeast within existing community groups?

It must also be noted that the research conducted on this core quality over the years by the NCLS Research team has found that high levels of service within a church is the quality least associated to outcomes such as attracting newcomers, or numerical growth (Powell et al, 2012). If this is what churches hope to achieve as they build new bridges to their communities, then it will take more than simply doing it in the way that it has always been done before.

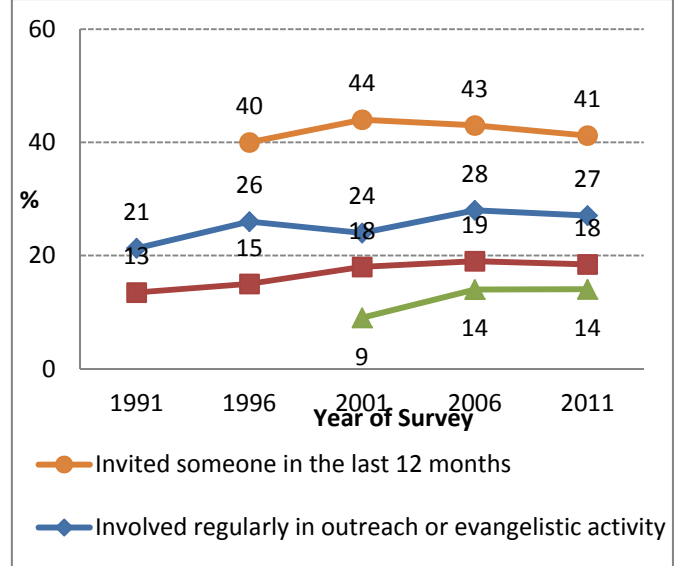
#### 4.8 Core Quality 8: Willing and effective faith-sharing

The core quality titled 'willing and effective faith-sharing' adds to the exploration of how churches and attenders focus outward. It is about how people speak of their faith to their friends and families. It includes formal involvement in the evangelistic activities of the church. In addition, it provides another specific evaluation of local church health by asking attenders if they invite others to their local church.

In Figure 9, it shows that in Protestant churches, the proportion of those who not only feel at ease, but look for opportunities to share faith has increased from 13% in 1991 to an average of 18% from 2001 to 2011. Further, 27% of attenders were regularly involved in

outreach or evangelistic activities in 2011, an increase from 21% in 1991.

**Figure 9: Measures of faith-sharing and inclusion in Protestant churches: 1991 to 2011**



Source: National Church Life Surveys – Attender Surveys: 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011

#### 4.9 Core Quality 9: Intentional and welcoming inclusion

The final core quality is called Inclusion. Is the focus of the church only the 'core' membership, or also on the so-called 'fringes' of faith communities? There are two aspects to inclusion. The first aspect is about integration of the new arrival. More than putting out the welcome sign, offering a beverage of random quality, and hoping for the best, this measure of inclusion is about the intentional attention given to hospitality and respectful engagement of the new person. The second aspect in this quality is about attending to the person drifting away from church life. A measure of this aspect is shown in Figure 9. When asked if they were likely to take personal responsibility to follow up someone they knew was drifting away, 14% of all attenders said they would do so. This is an increase from 9% in 2001.

#### 4.10 Newcomers to church life

NCLS Research provides other indicators which can be treated as outcome measures. Here we focus on newcomers to church life.

Newcomers are defined as the percentage of people who have joined their local church in the past 5 years and were previously not involved in any church. In

1991 8% of all Protestant attenders were newcomers. While the proportion shifted slightly (by only 1%) in the intervening years, by 2011, the proportion remained the same at 8%. The inflow of new arrivals has remained static in the past two decades, despite all the investment in the internal life of churches.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper has provided a summary of some trends in Australian Protestant church life in the twenty year period from 1991 to 2011. It showed in Part 2 that, while religion remains part of the Australian landscape, there is little doubt that the context for mission has changed dramatically.

The demographic profile of Protestant church attenders in Part 3 showed that some trends have continued over time, such as the over-representation of women, the highly educated and the aged. As well as facing the challenge of engaging missing groups, an important opportunity lies in developing the multicultural face of the Church, in a variety of ways.

Part 4 contained a review of the vitality of the Protestant churches over twenty years, using a small selection of indicators for each core quality.

One important feature of this twenty year review is that the trends are either stable or positive across most of the core qualities of church life.

The internal core qualities, related to growth in faith, worship and belonging, have been relatively stable or strengthened over time. Churches continue to provide a space and place for nurturing faith, and helping people to belong. Those attending church in 2011 are much more likely to report satisfaction with various aspects of worship, and to be in small prayer or study groups than in 1991.

One of the strongest positive trends is that attenders are much more aware of and committed to the vision for the future of their local church than twenty years ago. Supporting this trend is the greater levels of openness to innovation. These findings are held in tension with a decline in the perception of empowering leadership.

Over the past few decades, church attenders are more involved in acts of service, and churches are more likely to be the host of such services. Faith-sharing has

increased, but the personal invitations to church have declined.

Overall, we see a consolidation across Protestant church life. The reality of a changing context has largely been accepted. Attention has turned to sharpening clarity about the core practices related to mission, discipleship, service and worship. This increasingly positive view of the life and witness of churches should hearten those committed to strengthening the health of churches in Australia.

Twenty years is not a long time. The churches have not yet reached a new equilibrium to fit a new era. Perhaps it is not surprising that an institution under challenge starts by strengthening their internal life and clarifying their directions for the future.

Yet this review of the trends does bring with it a cautionary note. We have to ask why does the proportion of newcomers remain static? Why are fewer people inviting others to church than previously? What is the long-term impact of running services based in churches, rather than the community?

It is possible that ongoing numerical decline may have resulted in a more concentrated group of attenders who are most comfortable and nurtured by what is already offered. At the same time, current active participants are those who need to be motivated to invest in this period of transition –and many clearly are.

The facts are one thing. How one responds to these facts is often a matter of choice in interpretation. Does one take the optimist or the pessimist position? Perhaps the answer lies in holding these in creative tension, being honest and hopeful, realistic and courageous, focussing on the immediate issues and remembering the much longer story of the Church in mission across history.

*Ruth Powell*

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## **7 About NCLS Research**

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## **8 About the National Church Life Survey**

The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a quantitative survey of 260,000-450,000 church attenders, 6,000-10,000 church leaders and 3,000-7,000 churches in more than 20 Australian denominations (Catholic, Anglican and Protestant denominations) every census year since 1991. The survey covers a wide range of areas of religious faith and practice and social concern. The NCLS includes three major survey types:

1. Attender Surveys (comprising a main survey variant and multiple small sample survey variants);
2. Several variants of a Leader Survey which is completed by local church leaders; and
3. An Operations Survey audit of local church activities.

Data are weighted to adjust for variations in participation levels across denominations and regions.

# Churches with a vision

NCLS Occasional Paper 16

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# Churches with a Vision for the Future

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Ruth Powell, Nicole Hancock and Sam Sterland

June 2013

## Abstract

Having a vision for the future is an important barometer of church health, related to numerical growth and newcomer levels as well as many of the Core Qualities. However, it can be hard to help attenders capture and own a vision. This paper reviews a process for fostering a vision for ministry and mission. It also presents results based on more than 215 000 church attenders who took part in the 2011 National Church Life Survey.

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## Acknowledgments

Production of this paper would not have been possible without the work of the other members of the NCLS Research team who, at the time of publication also included: C. Chinnadurai, M. Dowson, I. Duncum, K. Kerr, C. Mollidor, and A. Vaeafisi.

## Citation

Powell, R., Hancock, N., and Sterland, S. (2013) Churches with a vision for the future, NCLS Research Occasional Paper 16, Catalogue Number 2.13003, Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press

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## 1 The importance of having a vision

Modern times call for leadership that can help churches embrace the changes necessary to move forward into a new era. When it comes to church vitality, research on thousands of Australian churches has found that one of the most important areas is the ability of churches to develop a clear vision or directions that attenders are strongly committed to.

The 2011 National Church Life Survey (2011 NCLS) is a survey of Australian church attenders conducted across more than 3100 local churches in 23 Christian denominations. More than 200 000 church attenders were asked whether they were both aware and committed to the vision, goals or directions of their local church for its ministry and mission.

There are very few churches where all attenders are strongly committed to the vision of their church. Indeed for most churches, less than a third of attenders feel this way. This shows that most church leaders share the challenge of helping their attenders to develop a compelling vision, to be committed to that vision and to maintain that commitment through to its fulfilment.

### 1.1 Vision is linked to numerical growth and newcomers

Previous NCLS research has found that a strong commitment to the vision, goals or directions of a church is associated with growth in attendance. In fact, it is more strongly related to growth than most other factors that have been tested. While there is no “magic bullet” when it comes to church growth, the research indicates this to be one of the most important areas for church leaders to consider.

That this has emerged from survey data reveals an important fact: the churches that grew were not those where the leadership simply produced a vision, but where attenders responded well to the vision and adopted it as their own. The vision has been communicated clearly and has been formed in a way that has led to ownership by church attenders.

Based on studies of churches across five year periods, knowing the levels of commitment to vision in a church is also one of the best clues for whether they will attract newcomers.

Churches with high levels of attenders strongly committed to the vision of their church also tend to be churches with high levels of newcomers. In addition, they are churches where high levels of young adults remain in church life. Without a compelling vision that people are committed to, growth is in jeopardy.

### 1.2 Vision is associated with other Core Qualities

NCLS Research has identified nine Core Qualities to measure a church's vitality. The work emphasises that:

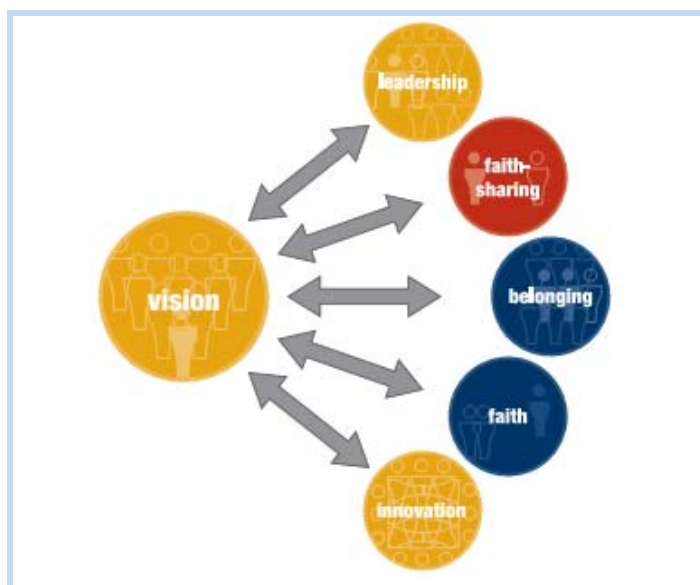
- each Core Quality is valuable in its own right
- these Core Qualities are related to numerical outcomes, such as church growth, newcomers, and retaining young adults
- changes in one Core Quality impact other Core Qualities

The four Core Qualities that have the strongest associations with other qualities are:

- faith-sharing
- empowering leadership
- clear and owned vision
- growth in faith. (Powell et al., 2012, 99).

The importance of churches having a clear and owned vision is highlighted by the fact that it is one of those qualities with the highest number of strong relationships with other Qualities.

**Figure 1: Vision and strongest associations with other Core Qualities**



Source: Powell et al., 2012, 99



Having a clear and owned vision occurs more often in churches that offer inspiring and empowering leadership. It occurs more in churches where attenders act by inviting others and sharing faith. This is potentially because it builds confidence in the church as a purposeful body with a mission to fulfil.

Such churches also typically have higher levels of belonging, perhaps because vision-building encourages a unifying process, or perhaps vision and belonging reinforce each other. Higher commitment to vision is also associated with a higher perception that the church is innovative, suggesting that the willingness to be flexible, or even take a risk, goes together with this Core Quality.

### 1.3 Attenders' awareness of a vision

In the 2011 NCLS attenders were asked: 'Does this congregation/parish have a clear vision, goals or direction for its ministry and mission?'

Figure 2 shows that some 70% of Australian attenders were aware of the vision that their local church has for the future.

On the other hand, 30% are not aware of a clear vision. Some 17% of attenders said that they were not aware of such a vision, goals or direction. A further 13% claimed there were ideas, but no clear vision, goals or direction.

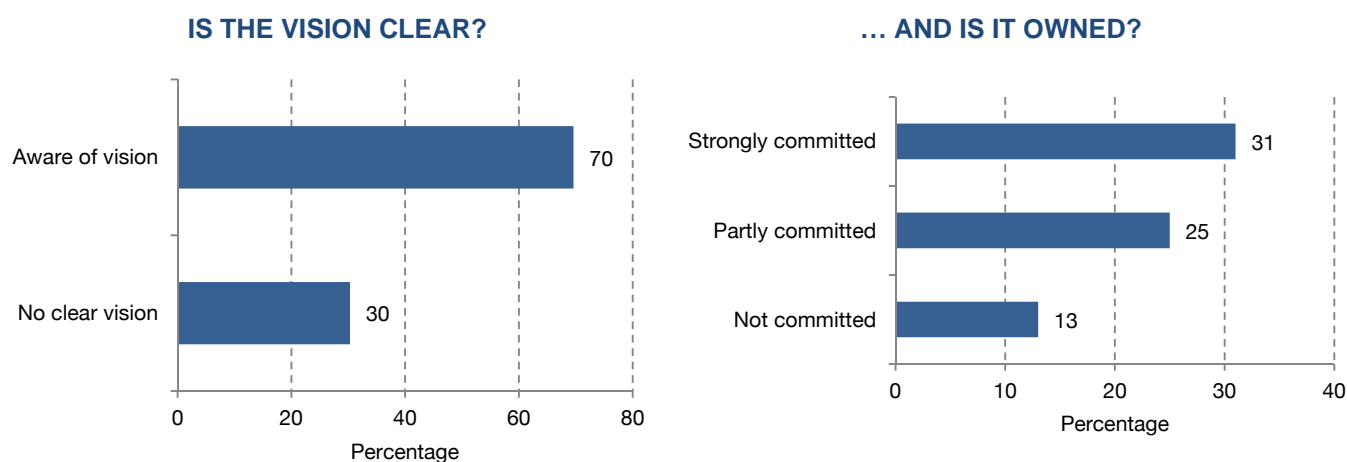
### 1.4 Attenders' commitment to the vision

In vital churches, the vision must not only be communicated clearly, but it must also be owned by attenders. Some 31% of Australian church attenders are strongly committed to the vision, goals or direction of their local church.

A further 25% are partly committed to the vision. Finally, there are 13%, who say they are aware of the vision, goals or direction, but they are not committed to them.

Discerning a vision for mission and ministry and motivating local church attenders to commit to it can be hard work, yet the impact is far-reaching. What can be done to motivate commitment?

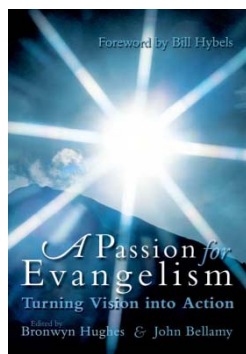
**Figure 2: Attenders' awareness and commitment to the vision**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Survey (n = 216,063)

## 2 Fostering a vision for the future

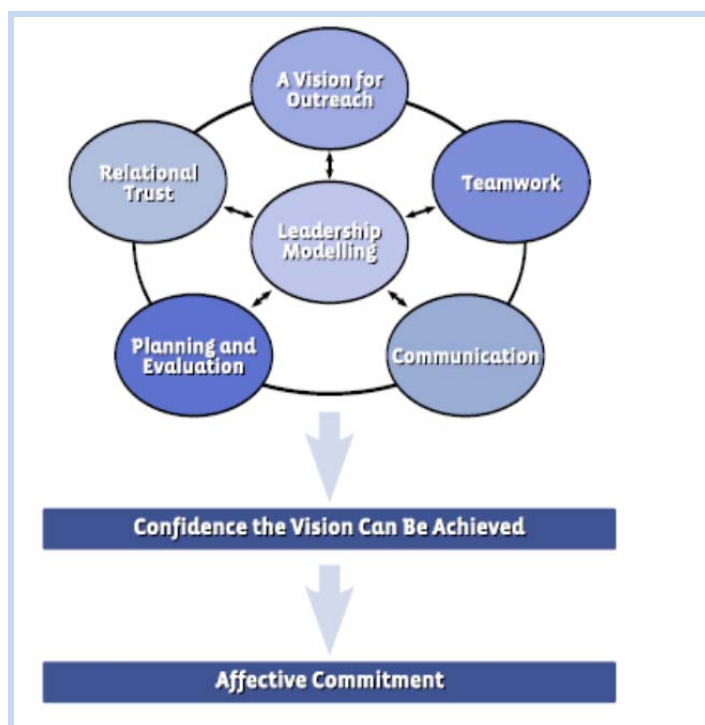
Figure 3 illustrates a process to motivate attenders to commit to a vision. There are important inter-related steps in the commitment process. These feed a sense of confidence, which translates to greater commitment to vision.



This framework was first presented in the book, *A Passion for Evangelism* (Hughes & Bellamy (Eds), 2004). Theory and research using NCLS data and a Congregational Commitment Study (CCS), was linked with the practical experiences of Australian church leaders.

These steps are presented here integrated with latest findings for Australian churches from the 2011 National Church Life Survey.

**Figure 3: A Process to Motivate Attenders**



Source: Hughes and Bellamy (Eds), 2004, 168

### 2.1 Pursuing a vision

In the 2011 NCLS, 74% of Australian attenders agreed or strongly agreed that leaders in their local church are strongly focused on directions for the future.

Following Jesus' commandment to 'go into all the world and make disciples of all nations', the vision for churches must include a vision for mission, focused on those beyond the church.

There is research-based evidence from previous National Church Life Surveys that a motivating vision is one that is focused outward, engaged with the needs of the community beyond the church.

Of all Australian church attenders, 74% agreed or strongly agreed that leaders in their local churches keep them strongly focused on connecting with people in the wider community. In contrast 4% of attenders disagreed or strongly disagreed that this community-centred focus was present.

### 2.2 It takes a team

A team culture is an important factor to help attenders commit to the vision. However, even if leaders agree on the value of team-based ministry it is often hard to put it into practice.

In the 2011 NCLS, around 38% of attenders said that their minister, pastor or priest takes the ideas of people into account to a great extent. A further 31% said ideas are taken into account to some extent.

When asked "Have this congregation's/parish's leaders encouraged you to find and use your gifts and skills here?", 21% said it has happened to a great extent, 29% to some extent and 21% to a small extent. Some 29% did not feel their gifts and skills have been encouraged or they did not know.

### 2.3 Communicating the vision

Most people need to know where they are going before they will commit to getting on board. Effective communication of the vision goes hand in hand with commitment to it.

As noted earlier, some 70% of Australian church attenders were aware of the vision that their local church has for the future, whereas 30% were not aware of such a vision (see Figure 2).

Preaching is another way that communicating a vision can take place. Previous NCLS research has identified that effective preaching, described as the ability to relate church teaching to attenders' daily lives, was strongly related to commitment to vision. Among Australian attenders, 75% said they always or usually experience preaching as very helpful to their lives.

## 2.4 Planning for action

The Congregational Commitment Study confirmed that committed churches not only have a challenging vision, but that there is a bias to action, with clearly defined goals and objectives that are regularly evaluated. The study found:

1. Leaders established clear goals.
2. Leaders inspired people to take action.
3. Leaders regularly evaluated progress toward achieving their vision.

(Hughes and Bellamy (Eds.), 2004, Ch 8)

In Australian churches, 63% of attenders agreed or strongly agreed that leaders inspire them to action. In contrast, 7% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The remainder were neutral or unsure.

An analysis of churches from the 2006 National Church Life Survey shows that there was a significant difference in levels of vision between churches that plan and churches that do not plan.

When a local representative was asked to select the best description of the level of planning at their local church, some 21% from all Australian churches in the 2011 NCLS described their church as having a formal long range plan with specific strategies to achieve goals. A further 24% claimed to have a formal medium-term plan (say one year), with specific strategies to achieve goals.

Another 39% said they have an informal plan reflecting the overall vision and direction of the church, but not specific strategies, whereas 12% claim to have limited

short-term plans (e.g. quarterly preaching plan). Finally, some 4% state that they had no overall plan.

Churches were asked if they had obtained assistance in developing plans for the congregation in the past five years. They were able to mark all that applied. The results are shown in Table 1.

## 2.5 The importance of trust








Building a culture of confident trust is critical to achieve committed churches. If people can't trust one another, or they can't trust the ability of their church to deliver on its vision, then commitment erodes. The findings of the CCS suggested three major issues that leaders need to address, if they want to create a church with high levels of commitment to vision:

1. Open and transparent communication
2. Confidence that conflict will be resolved
3. Pastoral care that can be trusted

Across all Australian churches, 75% of attenders agree or strongly agree that 'this congregation/parish has good and clear systems for how it operates.'

Furthermore, some 78% agree or strongly agree that local church leaders 'always communicate clearly and openly'.

Table 1: Motivating commitment to the vision

		All Aus 2011 %
<b>Pursuing a Vision</b>		
	Agree/strongly agree that leaders are strongly focused on directions for the future	74
	Agree/strongly agree that leaders keep attenders focused on connecting with the wider community	74
<b>It Takes a Team</b>		
	Ideas of people taken into account to a great extent	38
	Attenders' gifts and skills encouraged to a great extent	21
<b>Communicating the Vision</b>		
	Aware of the vision that their local church has for ministry and mission	70
	Always or usually experience preaching as very helpful to their lives	75
<b>Planning for Action</b>		
	Attenders agree or strongly agree that leaders inspire them to action	63
	<i>Planning processes *</i>	
	Have formal plans	44
	Informal or limited plans	51
	No overall plan	4
	<i>Assistance obtained for planning *</i>	
	Denominational leaders	40
	Denominational consultants or planners	30
	Other consultants	17
	Don't know/not applicable	27
<b>The Importance of Trust</b>		
	Attenders agree/strongly agree that the congregation/parish has good and clear systems for how it operates	75
	Attenders agree/strongly agree that the local church leaders always communicate clearly and openly	78
<b>Confidence that Vision can be Achieved</b>		
	Fully or partly confident vision can be achieved	72
<b>Commitment to the Vision</b>		
	Aware and strongly committed	31

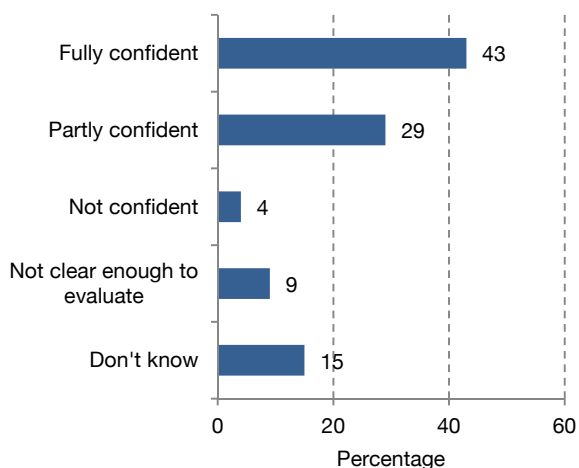
\*Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2520).

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Survey (n = 216,063)

## 2.6 Confidence that the vision can be achieved

By attending to each of the stages described in Figure 3, a church can build confidence among attenders. Confidence is linked to commitment. Figure 4 shows how confident Australian attenders are regarding the capacity of their churches to achieve the vision, goals or directions it has set itself.

**Figure 4: Confidence that vision, goals or directions can be achieved**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Survey (n = 216,063).

## 3 Summary

The framework of this paper is a process for fostering a vision for ministry and mission, based on research presented in Hughes and Bellamy (2004) *Passion for Evangelism*. Results from the 2011 NCLS provide a snapshot of how effectively Australian churches are applying this process.

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2. Several variants of a Leader Survey which is completed by local church leaders; and
3. An Operations Survey audit of local church activities.

Data are weighted to adjust for variations in participation levels across denominations and regions.



## Churches with a vision for the future: a profile of the Baptist Union of Victoria

### Abstract

Having a vision for the future is an important barometer of church health and vitality. Drawing from analysis of the Australian National Church Life Survey (NCLS) 2011 data of Victorian Baptists (8330 adult attenders across 79 churches) and a small set of follow-up interviews it is clear that while there are high levels of commitment to the idea of vision, at both a leadership and membership level, it can be hard to help attenders capture and own a vision. The data has demonstrated a strong association between churches with a clear vision for the future and numerical growth, a strong sense of belonging and innovation. Church leaders reinforce this, stating that a well-defined vision gives a clear sense of direction and facilitates decision-making and resource allocation. To be most effective a church's vision should be mission focused, engage the skills and gifts of the membership and be accessible to the whole group. A vision should be discerned in a context of trust, acceptance, humility and patience. The ongoing examination and evaluation of the outworkings of a church's vision enables churches to move forward with confidence and purpose. Finding the balance between innovation and realism, planning and action can be challenging but ultimately very powerful.

### Citation

Cronshaw, D., Powell, R., Hancock, N., Sterland, S., & Wilson, S. (2014). Churches with a vision for the future: A profile of the Baptist Union of Victoria. *Australian eJournal of Theology*, 21(1), 63-81.

### Availability

Visit the journal website: [www.aejt.com.au](http://www.aejt.com.au)

# Churches that inspire and empower

## Churches that inspire and empower: A case study survey of the Baptist Union of Victoria

### Abstract

Australian National Church Life Survey (NCLS) findings reveal that a key characteristic of vitality in church life is inspiring and empowering leadership. Drawing from analysis of NCLS 2011 survey data of Victorian Baptists, and a small set of followup interviews, this article discusses where Victorian Baptist churches and leaders are at their best in inspiring and empowering people: inspiring the involvement of the whole people of God in ministry and mission; encouraging and giving permission for innovation; inviting participation through identifying, utilising and supporting people's gifts; welcoming the contribution of different cultures and abilities; and fostering transformation in the direction of the Kingdom of God. There is room for improvement in all these areas, and especially for Victorian Baptists in encouraging the gifts and contributions of members who are younger and newer to church. But where leadership that inspires to action and empowers and mobilises people's gifts is present, churches are more likely to show health and vitality in a range of areas.

### Citation

Cronshaw, D., Powell, R., Powell, G., Hancock, N., & Wilson, S. (2014). Churches that inspire and empower: A case study survey of the Baptist Union of Victoria. *Australian eJournal of Theology*, 21(3), 212-233.

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# Innovation in church life

NCLS Occasional Paper 14

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# Mapping New Initiatives in Church Life

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Nicole Hancock, Ruth Powell and Miriam  
Pepper

May 2013

## Abstract

Using National Church Life Survey (NCLS) data from 2006 and 2011, this paper explores new initiatives that Australian Protestant churches have been implementing, and trends for different denominations and localities. Seven new initiative areas were considered: new churches, church plants, parent churches, multi-church planting, new worship services, highly experimental/pioneering forms of church and highly experimental/pioneering forms of outreach. Results show that new worship services were the most common new initiative pursued by Australian churches. Also of note was the large number of new churches that did not also identify as church plants. While this can partly be explained, it also points to a key issue in this field: terms such as 'church planting' do not mean the same thing among different churches and denominations.

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## Acknowledgments

Production of this paper would not have been possible without the work of the other members of the NCLS Research team who, at the time of publication also included: Chandrika Chinnadurai, Martin Dowson, Ian Duncum, Kathy Kerr, Claudia Mollidor, Sam Sterland and Amelia Vaeafisi.

## Citation

Hancock, N., Powell, R. & Pepper, M. (2013), Mapping New Initiatives in Church Life: NCLS Occasional Paper 14, Catalogue Number 2.13001, NCLS Research, Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.

## 1 Executive Summary

There are various new initiatives a church may implement in order to bring about innovative change. These initiatives vary from 'church planting' to starting new worship services, as well as experimenting with pioneering forms of church and outreach. Using National Church Life Survey (NCLS) Operations Survey data from 2006 and 2011, this paper explores which new initiatives Australian Protestant churches have been implementing, and whether trends emerge for different denominations and localities, such as rural, regional and urban contexts. Seven new initiative areas were considered: new churches, church plants, parent churches, multi-church planting, new worship services, highly experimental/pioneering forms of church and highly experimental/pioneering forms of outreach.

In 2011, 3.4% of churches that completed the National Church Life Survey were **new churches**, founded within the previous 5 years. More new churches had participated in the Survey in 2006, with 4.8% of churches founded between 2002 and 2006.

In 2011, 0.9% of Protestant churches identified themselves as **church plants** planted in the previous 5 years, down from 2.6% in 2006. One reason for many new churches not also identifying themselves as church plants is that new churches can be founded for a variety of reasons. Another reason could be differences in language use between churches, and variation between denominations in defining what constitutes a 'church plant'.

Slightly more churches in 2011 had planted another church in the previous 5 years than churches in 2006.

**Parent churches** made up 11.7% of Australian churches in 2011, and 10.9% in 2006. Almost one third of parent churches in 2011 had planted **multiple churches** between 2002 and 2011.

**New worship services** were the most popular new initiative among Australian churches. In 2011, 31.2% of churches had started at least one new service in the previous 5 years (2007-2011). Similar figures were found in the 2006 NCLS, with 34.7% of churches having started at least one service between 2002 and 2006.

More churches established **highly experimental/pioneering forms of outreach** than **highly experimental/pioneering forms of church** in both 2011 and 2006.

In terms of denominational trends, the Pentecostal grouping was the most active in each of the seven new initiative areas. It especially dominated the areas of church planting and multi-church planting. In 2011, 43.9% of Pentecostal churches had planted a church in the previous 5 years, and 18.3% had planted multiple churches in the previous 10 years. When it came to other initiatives, the Pentecostal grouping's activity was closer to that of other denominations, though often still higher. The Uniting Church, on the other hand, was the least active denomination in terms of church planting. Yet in the initiatives of highly experimental/pioneering forms of church and outreach, it yielded above average scores compared to other denominations.

Urban, regional and rural localities differed in some ways in their new initiatives. Urban and regional areas had a much higher rate of parent churches than rural areas. This is to be expected, as population decline in rural areas restricts opportunities to plant new churches. Urban churches were also more likely to establish highly experimental/pioneering forms of church than regional or rural churches. There were no significant differences between localities in their establishment of new services or highly experimental/pioneering forms of outreach in 2011.

Limitations of this paper must also be considered, such as the low participation of Pentecostal churches, and the different terms that participants use to describe and classify their new initiatives.

Further research in order to fill these gaps of representativeness should be undertaken. A qualitative study of how denominations use terminology to describe their new initiatives would be of value for future research, in continuing to map out new initiatives in Australian church life.

## 2 Introduction

In Australia, in the 1980s, 1990s and into the new millennium, local church leaders and attenders are seeking ways to help their churches be more vital. Many churches are trying new approaches to build community, provide nurturing worship services, act with justice and compassion, and witness to their experience of the gospel.

These initiatives are being taken against a background of significant change in society, where Australians are increasingly disengaged from church life. They are accompanied by extensive theological and philosophical debates about the implications of broad paradigm shifts and what appropriate responses should be.

Beyond the words, what is the current level of action in local churches regarding new initiatives in Australian church life? Has it increased or declined? Are some types of initiatives, such as church plants, preferred over others? Where are we up to at the moment?

The five-yearly National Church Life Surveys, conducted across the full range of Christian faith traditions, provides one source of information to address these kinds of questions.

For example, in 2011, 65% of church attenders who completed the National Church Life Survey supported innovative change being made to their church service, and 66% agreed that their church leaders were always ready to try something new.

This paper provides a first look at the areas of church life in which this openness to innovation is being channelled.

### 2.1 About the National Church Life Survey and this study

The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) database offers a way of gaining an understanding of new initiatives in church life. NCLS data has been obtained from church attenders from over 3100 local Australian churches in 23 Christian denominations, and across 5 survey waves: 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, and 2011.

The NCLS Operations Survey is an audit of staffing, programs and activities completed by a representative of the local church. This paper draws upon the 2006

and 2011 Operations Surveys for information on new initiatives. The reason we chose not to extend further back to 2001, 1996 and 1991 Operations Surveys is that this earlier data had issues preventing it from merging successfully with more recent data. Results are thus based on 5072 Protestant churches – 4284 of which completed the 2006 Operations Survey, and 2262 of which completed the 2011 Operations Survey. As you can see, a fair number of churches (1474) took part in both survey waves. Despite this overlap, it is important to understand that these two survey waves do not represent longitudinal data: a mostly different cohort of churches participated in the 2006 and 2011 Operations Surveys. Rather, we have used the 2006 and 2011 data to create two cross-sectional studies of new initiatives in church life, in two time periods. Providing two snapshots of how churches pursue new initiatives strengthens the results outlined in this paper.

The data used in this paper has been weighted to adjust for variations in participation levels across denominations. Church data was weighted so that it reflects denominations' actual proportions in the Australian church. This was done by comparing the participation level of a particular denomination with its actual size estimate. For example, the NCLS Operations Survey had a low participation rate among Pentecostal churches, so Pentecostal figures were weighted up to be as representative as possible of their denomination. Denominational regions were also weighted, meaning that data at the diocese/synod level was weighted proportionally as well. Weighting helps ensure that NCLS results are as representative of the wider Australian church as possible. It is what allows this paper to refer to 'x% of Australian churches' rather than just 'x% of participating churches'.

### 2.2 Defining New Initiatives in Church Life

The first challenge of studying new initiatives in church life is that different groups use different terms, or the same terms to mean different things. There is great variation between churches in defining new initiatives, particularly church planting. With denominations using different language and terminology regarding their initiatives, what one church may classify as a 'church plant', another may not. Thus this paper has adopted an expansive definition of new initiatives in church life, comprising seven parts:

### Section 3: New Churches

Churches that have been founded within 5 years of the Operations Survey they complete (e.g. founded 2002-2006 or 2007-2011) are defined as *new churches*. They are also loosely defined as *church plants* – loosely because church planting is only one of several possible reasons for a new church being founded.

### Section 4: Church Plants

Churches that identify themselves as a church plant established within 5 years of the Operations Survey they complete are defined as *church plants*. This provides a more conservative estimate of church plants than Section 3.

### Section 5: Parent churches

Churches that have helped plant another church within 5 years of the Operations Survey they complete are defined as *parent churches*.

### Section 6: Multi-church planting

Churches who helped establish more than one church plant between 2002 and 2011 are defined as *multi-church planters*, a subset of parent churches.

### Section 7: New worship services

This section covers churches that have started at least one new worship service in the 5 years prior to the Operations Survey they complete.

### Section 8: Experimental/Pioneering forms of church

This section covers churches that have established what they consider to be highly experimental/pioneering forms of church in the 5 years prior to the Operations Survey they complete.

### Section 9: Experimental/Pioneering forms of outreach

This section covers churches that have established what they consider to be highly experimental/pioneering forms of outreach to the community in the 5 years prior to the Operations Survey they complete.

Such a multifaceted approach is necessary when language and definition can vary between different denominations and churches. This is why this paper could not settle on one functional definition of a church plant, but rather looks both at Sections 3 and 4. Different amounts of churches would be expected to identify as church plants depending on their definition of a church plant. Similarly, Sections 8 and 9 also have

limitations of language, as what could be considered 'highly experimental' by one denomination may not be for other denominations or churches.

## **2.3 Limitations of this Study**

This paper has been limited to Protestant churches, excluding Catholic data. This is because the Catholic versions of the 2006 and 2011 NCLS Operations Surveys used different wording in its questions that were not equivalent in meaning to the Protestant versions. For example, rather than using the term 'church planting', the Catholic 2011 NCLS Operations Survey asks about the 'new parish, established in the last 5 years'. Furthermore, the Catholic NCLS Operations Survey does not have questions relating to Sections 8 and 9 (pioneering forms). For these reasons, this paper deals solely with Protestant data, leaving an investigation of new initiatives in Catholic Church life as a future research possibility.

Another limitation of this paper is the representativeness of some of the data used, particularly Pentecostal data. Although Pentecostal data was weighted up to be as representative as possible, the low participation count of Pentecostal churches in the NCLS Operations Survey does affect its representativeness. Further, the denominations that fall under the Pentecostal umbrella – including C3 Churches, Apostolic, Australian Christian Churches (AOC), CRC Churches, Christian Life Churches, Four Square Gospel, Christian Outreach Centres, Bethesda, International Pentecostal Holiness Church, and others – are not represented equally. Caution should therefore be applied in interpreting Pentecostal figures. This paper was also unable to provide state breakdowns of results, with low participation from the Northern Territory and Tasmania in particular. While corrections were made through weighting, breaking the data down into categories with such small numbers would not have maintained the integrity or representativeness of state figures.

Having outlined the major limitations of this paper, it should be clear that its aim is not to provide authoritative, exact figures at a national, denominational or locality level. Rather, it is merely a first step, a 'mapping exercise' of the broad landmarks of new initiatives in church life. Yet it is still of value, in giving insight into the various ways Australian churches are

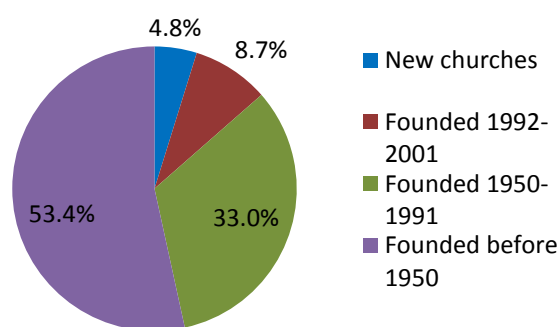
choosing to pursue innovative change. At minimum, this study can act as a basis for future work.

### 3 New Churches

*New churches* are defined as those churches that were founded within 5 years prior to the NCLS Operations Survey they completed; participating churches in 2006 that had been founded from 2002-2006 were considered 'new', as were participating churches in 2011 that had been founded from 2007-2011.

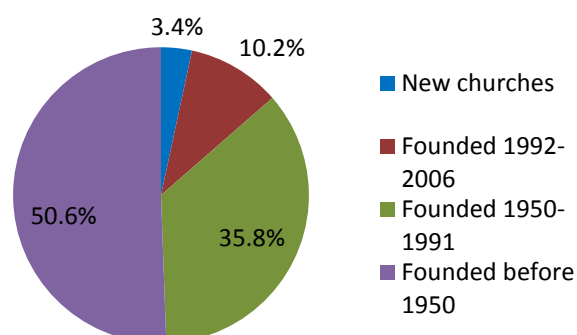
If we take a snapshot of all Protestant churches in 2006, the proportion that can be defined as 'new churches' was 4.8% (see Figure 1). In comparison, 3.4% of all Protestant churches in 2011 were new churches (see Figure 2). More new churches were founded between 2002 and 2006 than between 2007 and 2011.

**Figure 1: Percentage of new churches in 2006**



Source: 2006 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 3888).

**Figure 2: Percentage of new churches in 2011**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2137).

### 3.1 New Churches by Denomination

Table 1 shows the proportion of new churches each denomination had in both 2006 and 2011. The Pentecostal denomination had the highest percentage of new churches founded between 2002 and 2006 (13.5%), and 'Other Protestant' churches had the highest percentage of churches founded between 2007 and 2011 (6.8%). Although more new churches existed in 2006 than 2011 overall, this pattern did not apply to all denominations: both the Anglican Church and 'Other Protestant' grouping had higher proportions of new churches in 2011 than 2006.

**Table 1: New churches in 2006 and 2011 by denomination.**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Luther- an	Pente- costal	Uniting	Other Protest- ant	Overall
Category	Percentage						
New churches 2011	3.2	2.3	0.5	4.4	2.0	6.8	3.4
New churches 2006	2.6	4.6	1.6	13.5	3.5	3.1	4.8

Source: 2006 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 3631) and 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 1820).<sup>1 2</sup>

### 3.2 New Churches by Locality

As shown in Figure 3, all localities (rural, regional and urban) had more new churches in 2006 than 2011. The largest disparity was found between 2006 and 2011 regional churches, with 5.3% of churches in regional areas qualifying as new churches in 2006, and 1.6% in 2011. In 2006, churches in urban and regional areas had the highest proportion of new churches, with 5.8% of churches in urban areas and 5.3% in regional areas. However, it is to be expected that rural churches would have a lower proportion (3.4%), considering the decline of rural populations. In 2011, regional churches had the lowest proportion of new churches (1.6%), rather than

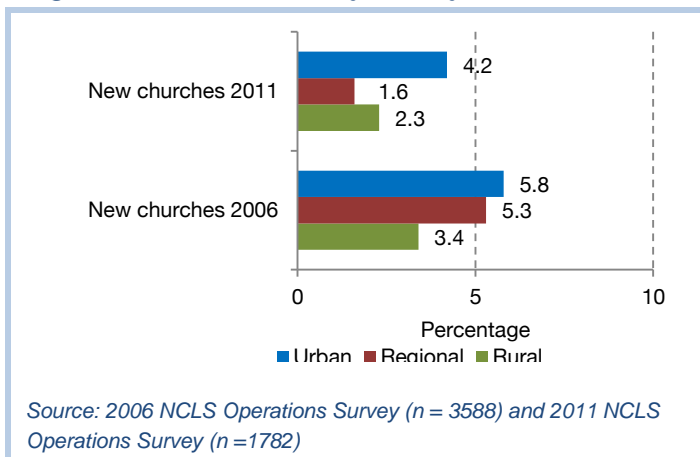
<sup>1</sup> 'Other Protestant' may include churches from any of the following denominations: Adventist, Brethren, CMA, Congregational, Grace Communion, Nazarene, Presbyterian, Reformed, Salvation Army, Vineyard and other independent churches. All subsequent uses of 'Other Protestant' hold to this definition.

<sup>2</sup> 'Pentecostal' may include churches from any of the following denominations: C3 Churches, Apostolic, Australian Christian Churches (AOC), CRC Churches, Christian Life Churches, Four Square Gospel, Christian Outreach Centres, Bethesda, International Pentecostal Holiness Church, and other Pentecostal groups. All subsequent uses of 'Pentecostal' hold to this definition.



rural churches. Urban churches had the highest proportion with 4.2% new churches, again to be expected considering urban population growth. Although this pattern of new churches differs from 2006, it appears that the rate of new churches being founded is lower across all localities in 2011 than in 2006.

**Figure 3: New churches by locality: 2006 and 2011.**



#### New Churches Summary:

- 4.8% of Protestant churches in 2006 were new churches, and 3.4% of Protestant churches in 2011.
- Pentecostal and 'Other Protestant' denominations had the highest levels of new churches.
- Urban areas had the most new churches in both 2006 and 2011.

## 4 Church Plants

Section 4 now focuses on those churches that identified themselves as 'church plants' in the 2006 or 2011 NCLS Operations Surveys. In 2011, 0.9% of Protestant churches identified themselves as a church plant, compared to 2.6% of Protestant churches in 2006. In both NCLS Operations Surveys, church representatives were asked whether their church had been established as a church plant in the past 5 years, meaning from 2002-2006 if answering the 2006 Survey, or 2007-2011 if answering the 2011 Survey. Thus these figures only represent recent church plants.

### 4.1 Church Plants in 2006

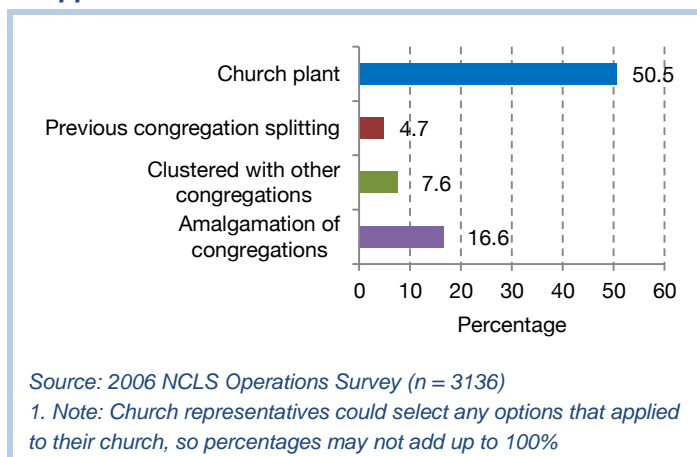
It is interesting to observe how the two definitions of a church plant in Sections 3 and 4 differ. The estimate given from Section 4 (churches who identified themselves as a church plant) was expected to be more conservative than the estimate from Section 3 (churches founded within the previous 5 years). This is

indeed the case for 2006 data, with 4.8% of churches being founded within the previous 5 years, but only 2.6% identifying as a church plant.

This makes sense when considering the various reasons a church may be founded other than church planting (see Figure 4). For example, a church could be formed from an amalgamation or 'clustering' of congregations, or from the split of a previous congregation. Of those churches in 2006 that were new churches, 17% had been formed from an amalgamation of congregations, 5% from a congregation splitting, and 8% had been clustered with other congregations, sharing resources and leaders. About half (51%) of *new churches* in 2006 also identified themselves as *church plants*.

This can be partially explained by the various other reasons a new church can come into existence, as outlined above. Yet those alternative reasons (amalgamating, clustering and splitting) only account for 30% of new churches. It is likely that some participating new churches were founded in ways not outlined by the NCLS Operations Survey. But even so, the gap between new churches and church plants could also partially be due to language and definitional differences. One church grouping or denomination's definition of 'church plant' may be much more conservative or specific than another's. It is for this reason that seven types of new initiatives are explored by this paper, as it should not be assumed that there is a consensus across the Australian church on terms like 'church plant'.

**Figure 4: Things new churches identify as having happened to them between 2002 and 2006.**





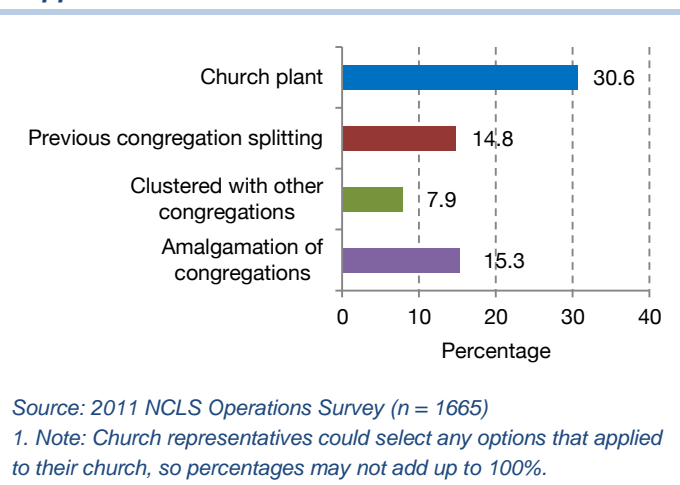
## 4.2 Church Plants in 2011

In 2011, 0.9% of churches identified themselves as church plants established in the previous 5 years (2007-2011). This compares to a total of 3.4% of churches that had been founded in that 5 years period, again supporting our expectation that self-identified church plants would give a more conservative estimate than new churches. Only 31% of new churches in 2011 also identified themselves as church plants. This proportion is considerably lower than 51% of new churches in 2006. This could be due to church planting being more active from 2002-2006 than from 2007-2011, which our data supports – 2.6% of churches in 2006 self-identified as church plants compared to 0.9% of churches in 2011. The change could also be due to statistical artifacts, such as the fact that 2006 and 2011 data represent different cohorts of churches, and that 2006 data had a larger sample size than 2011 data (n = 3888 and n = 2137).

Like 2006 data, this large discrepancy between church plants and new churches can be partially explained by churches being founded for reasons other than church planting. Of the new churches in 2011, 15% were formed from an amalgamation of congregations, 15% were the result of a previous congregation splitting, and 8% had been clustered with other congregations, sharing leaders and resources (see Figure 5). However, these alternative reasons for founding a church account for 38% of new churches, still leaving 31% of new churches unaccounted for. This again strengthens the possibility of different definitions across the Australian church of what constitutes a church plant.

As the number of participating church plants was not large enough in either 2006 or 2011, differences between denominations or localities could not be appropriately investigated.

**Figure 5: Things new churches identify as having happened to them between 2007 and 2011.**



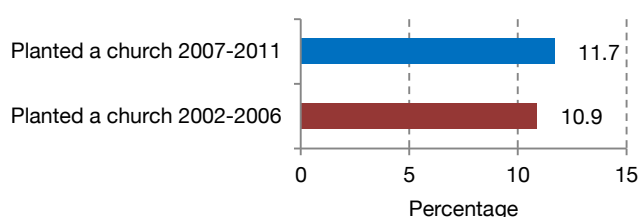
### Church Plants Summary:

- In 2011, 0.9% of Protestant churches identified themselves as a church plant, and 2.6% of Protestant churches in 2006.
- Only 31% of new churches in 2011 also identified themselves as church plants.
- This was partially due to churches being founded for other reasons – amalgamation or clustering of congregations, or a previous congregation splitting. It also points to language differences between churches as to what constitutes a 'church plant'.

## 5 Parent Churches

In this next section, the focus shifts onto 'parent churches' – churches that have planted other churches. 11.7% of Protestant churches in 2011 had helped plant another church in the previous 5 years. In 2006, 10.9% of Protestant churches had helped plant another church in the previous 5 years (see Figure 6). As with the definition for church plants, parent churches are limited to the 5 years prior to the NCLS Operations Survey they complete. This means that for a church in 2006 to be considered a parent church it must have planted a church between 2002 and 2006, and for a church in 2011 to be considered a parent church it must have planted between 2007 and 2011. Like church plants, the category of parent church relies on self-report, specifically church representatives indicating that they had planted a church within the previous 5 years.

**Figure 6: Parent churches in 2006 and 2011.**



Source: 2006 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 3888) and 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2137).

### 5.1 Parent Churches by Denomination: 2006

The Pentecostal denomination had the highest proportion of parent churches in the 2006 NCLS (see Table 2). Among Pentecostal churches, 35.7% had planted a church between 2002 and 2006. The 'Other Protestant' grouping had the second highest proportion, with 11.3% of its churches qualifying as parent churches. The Uniting Church had the lowest proportion of parent churches, with 2.2% reporting to have planted a church between 2002 and 2006.

### 5.2 Parent Churches by Denomination: 2011

In 2011, Pentecostal churches again had by far the highest proportion of parent churches, with 43.9% of its churches having planted a church between 2007 and 2011. Also standing out was the 'Other Protestant' grouping of churches, with 14.5% of its churches qualifying as parent churches. Anglican and Baptist/Churches of Christ had similar percentages, while the Uniting and Lutheran Churches had the lowest proportion of churches that described themselves as parent churches.

**Table 2: Parent churches by denomination: 2006 and 2011.**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Luther- an	Pente- costal	Uniting	Other Prot- estant	Overall
<b>Category</b>	<b>Percentage</b>						
Planted a church 2007-2011	6.5	5.1	1.7	43.9	1.5	14.5	11.7
Planted a church 2002-2006	5.7	8.1	3.7	35.7	2.2	11.3	10.9

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2036) and 2006 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 3566).

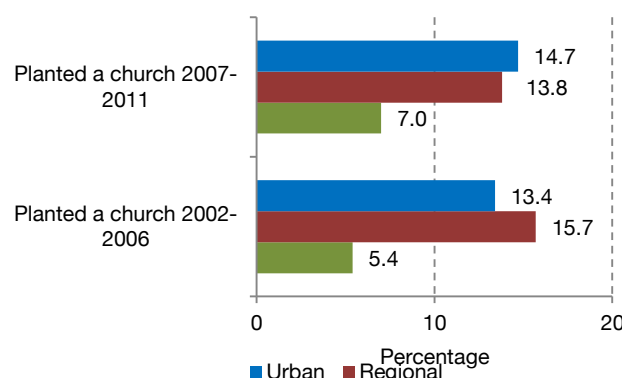
### 5.3 Parent Churches by Locality: 2006

When we consider where parent churches are located, in the 2006 NCLS regional areas had the highest percentage of parent churches (15.7%), compared to 13.4% in urban areas and 5.4% in rural areas (see Figure 7). Of course the opportunities to plant new churches in rural areas, particularly in areas of population decline, are fewer than in urban and regional areas of growth.

### 5.4 Parent Churches by Locality: 2011

In the 2011 NCLS, the patterns changed with 14.7% of urban churches claiming to have planted another church between 2007 and 2011, closely followed by 13.8% of regional churches. With 7.0% of rural churches qualifying as parent churches, the disparity between rural and urban/regional localities was less pronounced in 2011 than in 2006.

**Figure 7: Parent churches by locality: 2006 and 2011.**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 1986) and 2006 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 3524).

### Parent Churches Summary:

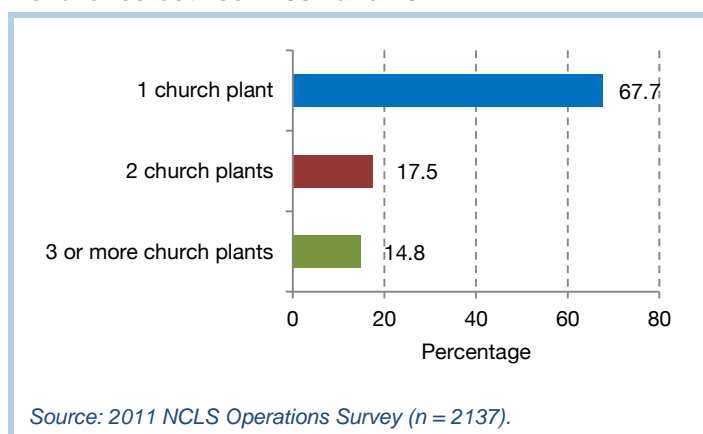
- 11.7% of churches in 2011 had planted another church in the previous 5 years, compared to 10.9% of churches in 2006.
- The Pentecostal grouping had by far the highest proportion of parent churches in 2006 and 2011.
- Parent churches were more common in urban and regional areas than rural areas.

## 6 Multi-Church Planting in a 10 Year Period

Some churches take an active stance in terms of planting other churches. Section 6 now looks at a subset of parent churches: those churches that planted more than one church in the 10 year period between 2002 and 2011. Of those churches that planted a church between 2002 and 2011, 32.3% planted more than one church. This 'multi-church planting' phenomenon was measured by the 2011 NCLS Operations Survey through a question that asked church representatives to name any churches they had planted in the last 10 years (from 2002 to 2011), giving space for three church plants to be named. As only three spaces were provided for naming church plants, those churches who named three plants will be described as having planted '3 or more' churches, as it is possible they had planted more churches but did not have the space to name them.

Results showed that 13.6% of Protestant churches named at least one church they had planted between 2002 and 2011. Of these parent churches, two thirds (67.7%) planted one church in that 10 year period, 17.5% planted 2 churches, and 14.8% planted 3 or more churches (see Figure 8). Thus about a third of parent churches between 2002 and 2011 planted multiple churches.

**Figure 8: Number of churches planted by parent churches between 2002 and 2011.**



### 6.1 Multi-Church Planting by Denomination

Do the same denominations that had high rates of parent churches also feature prominently as multi-church planters? Table 3 shows the number and percentage of churches who planted multiple churches between 2002 and 2011, by denomination. Just as the

Pentecostal denomination had by far the highest proportion of parent churches (see Section 5), it also dominates the multi-church planting scene: 7.1% of its participating churches planted 2 churches between 2002 and 2011, and 11.2% planted 3 or more churches. The 'Other Protestant' grouping is the next highest contributor to multi-church planting, as 5% of its churches planted 2 churches in this 10 year period. The differences between denominations in terms of parent churches are further exaggerated when looking at multi-church planting – a niche that seems to belong particularly to the Pentecostal grouping.

**Table 3: Multi-church planters by denomination: 2002-2011**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Luther- an	Pente- costal	Uniting	Other Protest- ant	Overall
Category	Percentage						
Planted 2 churches	1.1	1.0	0.0	7.1	0.4	5.0	2.4
Planted 3+ churches	0.6	0.2	0.0	11.2	0.0	0.7	2.0

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2137).

### 6.2 Multi-Church Planting and Ongoing Operation

When church representatives were asked to name any churches they had planted in the last 10 years, they were also asked whether these plants were still operating or not, as of late 2011. Three text boxes were supplied for this information on church plants. Table 4 shows the results for up to three identified church plants. There is no way of telling if this information is recorded in the order that the plants occurred. That is, it would be incorrect to come to the conclusion, simply based on this question, that a second plant is more likely to succeed than the first.

**Table 4: Operation status of churches planted 2002-2011, as listed by parents.**

	Still operating	No longer operating
Category	Percentage	
First church listed	87.8	12.2
Second church listed	97.9	2.1
Third church listed	94.1	5.9

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2137).

This is the only current source of available information about the sustainability of church plants and is a

reminder of the high degree of challenge and cost related to this kind of undertaking.

Future work on those church plants that have closed may involve looking in previous NCLS survey waves to find church plants and following them up. In the current context, have expectations changed around how long a church plant should last? This will lead to other questions about churches that close. What comes to the fore as key reasons? How often is it seen as a 'failure', or is it sometimes seen as right for a season?

Multi-Church Planting Summary:

- Of those churches that planted a church between 2002 and 2011, 32.3% planted more than one church.
- The Pentecostal grouping dominated the multi-church planting scene, with 18.3% of its churches planting multiple churches between 2002 and 2011.

## 7 New Worship Services

Section 7 now turns to another new initiative in church life: starting new worship services within the congregation. Again, we face the challenge of differing terms. In some traditions, a new worship service will be counted as a new congregation. In others, it is simply an extension of the parent church.

In 2011, 31.2% of all Protestant churches had started at least one new worship service in the previous 5 years (2007-2011). Similar figures were found in the 2006 NCLS, showing 34.7% of churches had started at least one new worship service between 2002 and 2006.

Results were obtained from a question in which church representatives were asked to name up to 5 of their services, and then indicate whether or not these services had been started in the last 5 years. In this way, a *new service* is defined as one started in 2007-2011 for 2011 churches, and 2002-2006 for 2006 churches. Not surprisingly, new services were found to be more common than church plants (Section 4) and parent churches (Section 5), given that they generally require fewer resources, planning and restructuring than planting a whole new congregation.

### 7.1 New Worship Services by Denomination: 2006

In the 2006 NCLS, all denominations were active in terms of starting new worship services, with at least 25.4% of churches in each denomination starting a new service between 2002 and 2006 (see Table 5). Once again the Pentecostal grouping emerged with the highest proportion of new services. More than half (53%) of its churches started new services between 2002 and 2006. The Anglican Church had the next highest proportion (36.7%). Some 28% of The Uniting Churches started new worship services in the previous five year period.

### 7.2 New Worship Services by Denomination: 2011

Based on the 2011 NCLS, starting new worship services in the period from 2007 to 2011 was spread more evenly across denominations compared to church planting (see Sections 4 and 5). The Anglican Church had the highest proportion in starting new services (36.1%), followed by the Pentecostal churches (32.5%).

**Table 5: New worship services by denomination: 2006 and 2011.**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Luther- an	Pente- costal	Uniting	Other Protest- ant	Overall
Category	Percentage						
Started new service 2007-2011	36.1	29.5	27.2	32.5	28.1	27.8	31.2
Started new service 2002-2006	36.7	32.3	33.7	53.0	28.0	25.4	34.7

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2109) and 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 3670).

### 7.3 New Worship Services by Locality: 2006

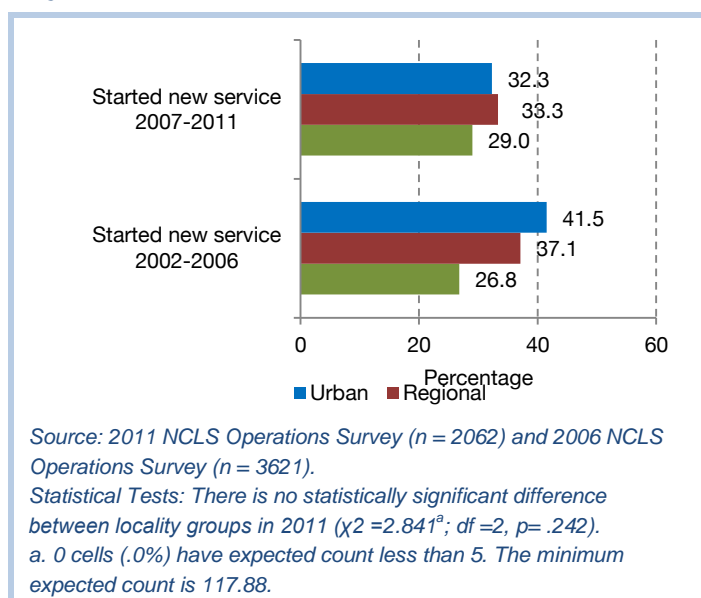
Churches in urban areas had the highest proportion of new worship services in 2006, with 41.5% of urban churches starting a new service between 2002 and 2006 (see Figure 9). This was followed by regional churches (37.1%) and rural churches (26.8%). It should be acknowledged that new worship services can be started for a variety of reasons: not only the pursuit of innovative change, but also attendance growth, may lead to this new initiative. If new services were being started because of demands from growth in the congregation, this fits with the pattern of results from 2006.



## 7.4 New Worship Services by Locality: 2011

The pattern of new services across localities in 2011 differs from the pattern observed for 2006. Here, the proportion of churches that started new services between 2007 and 2011 was similar for urban, rural and regional churches. Differences between localities in their proportion of new services were not statistically significant. In again considering the reasons behind starting new worship services, this pattern in 2011 does not match the theory that new worship services are dictated only by population growth and decline. Rather, this 2011 data may represent a more uniform pursuit of innovative change, in the form of new services, across localities.

**Figure 9: New worship service by locality: 2006 and 2011.**



### New Worship Services Summary:

- 31.2% of churches in 2011 and 34.7% of churches in 2006 had started a new worship service within the previous 5 years.
- All denominations were active in establishing new services. The Pentecostal grouping had the highest percentage in 2006, and the Anglican Church had the highest percentage in 2011.
- Urban churches had the highest proportion of new services in 2006. In 2011, differences between localities in their proportion of new services were not statistically significant.

## 8 Experimental/Pioneering Forms of Church

This next section explores another type of new initiative in church life: the formation of what respondents considered to be highly experimental or pioneering forms of church. In 2011, 12.1% of churches reported that they had established 'highly experimental or pioneering forms of church' in the previous 5 years (from 2007 to 2011). This compares to 21.9% of churches in 2006. The results from the 2006 NCLS Operations Survey were further divided into whether the experimental/pioneering form of church was still in operation or had ceased. It was found that 15.8% of churches had an experimental/pioneering form of church still in operation, and 6.1% had established one that had ceased.

Although this appears to represent a large drop in experimental/pioneering forms of church, much of this difference between 2006 and 2011 may be accounted for by differences in question design. In the 2006 NCLS Operations Survey, this issue was its own self-contained question. In the 2011 NCLS Operations Survey, it was one option out of a possible 10 to be ticked. This formatting difference may mean it was easier for church representatives to skip over the option in 2011 than a whole question in 2006. The 2006 Survey also gave examples of experimental/pioneering forms of church in its question – "(eg. cafe church, pub church)" – while the 2011 Survey did not. Thus church representatives in 2006 may have felt more inclined to say they had established experimental/pioneering forms of church than 2011 participants, who would have had more uncertainty about what qualified as a 'highly experimental' or 'pioneering' form of church. Furthermore, the 2006 NCLS Operations Survey gave the added option of indicating whether an experimental/pioneering form of church was still in operation or had ceased, and whether the church hadn't established one but was intending to very soon. All of these design differences suggest that the two figures obtained – 12.1% in 2011 and 21.9% in 2006 – are not from equivalent questions and so should not be compared. As a result, Section 8 will evaluate experimental/pioneering forms of church in 2006 and 2011, but will refrain from comparison between surveys.

### 8.1 Experimental/Pioneering Forms of Church by Denomination: 2006

Around a third of Pentecostal churches (32.3%) claimed to have established experimental/pioneering forms of church between 2002 and 2006 (see Table 6). This was closely followed by Baptist/Churches of Christ (30.1%) and then the Uniting Church, (21.1%).

### 8.2 Experimental/Pioneering Forms of Church by Denomination: 2011

In the 2011 NCLS, the denomination with the highest proportion of experimental/pioneering churches was The Uniting Church (14.9%). The Baptist/Churches of Christ grouping had the second highest proportion (14.4%).

Pentecostal churches had the second lowest proportion of experimental/pioneering churches. This shift in pattern highlights how, with so many different avenues for pursuing innovative change in churches, denominations may favour different types of new initiatives in church life.

**Table 6: Experimental or pioneering churches by denomination: 2006 and 2011.**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Luther- an	Pente- costal	Uniting	Other Prot- estant	Overall
<b>Category</b>	<b>Percentage</b>						
Pioneering churches 2007-2011	11.7	14.4	3.3	10.2	14.9	11.7	12.1
Pioneering churches 2002-2006	18.2	30.1	16.4	32.3	21.1	14.5	21.9

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2036) and 2006 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 3627).

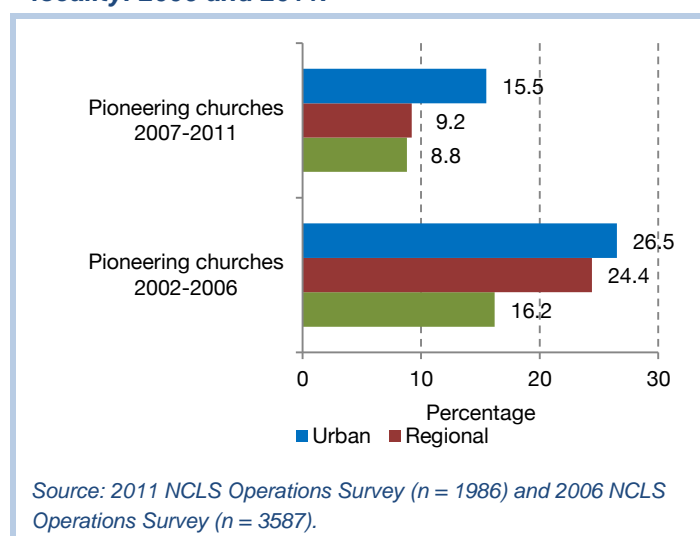
### 8.3 Experimental/Pioneering Forms of Church by Locality: 2006

Churches that had established experimental or pioneering forms of church between 2002 and 2006 were more common in urban and regional areas than in rural areas (see Figure 10). Urban areas had the highest proportion of experimental /pioneering churches within the previous 5 years (26.5%) followed by churches in regional areas (24.4%). Rural churches had the lowest rate of experimental /pioneering churches (16.2%).

### 8.4 Experimental/Pioneering Forms of Church by Locality: 2011

In the 2011 NCLS, urban churches again had the highest proportion of experimental /pioneering churches, with 15.5% having established an experimental /pioneering form of church between 2007 and 2011. Regional and rural churches yielded similar proportions, with 9.2% and 8.8% establishing experimental /pioneering forms of church respectively.

**Figure 10: Experimental or pioneering churches by locality: 2006 and 2011.**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 1986) and 2006 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 3587).

### Experimental/Pioneering Forms of Church Summary:

- The Pentecostal grouping had the highest proportion of pioneering churches in 2006. Yet in 2011, they yielded the second lowest proportion. The Uniting Church had the highest, followed by Baptist/Churches of Christ.
- Urban churches had the highest proportion of pioneering churches in both 2006 and 2011.

## 9 Experimental/Pioneering Forms of Outreach

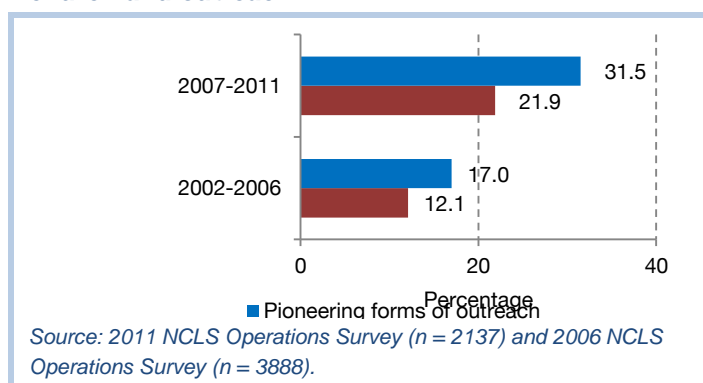
Section 9 now casts the net wider to also include highly experimental or pioneering forms of outreach to the wider community. In 2011, 17.0% of churches reported that they had established what they considered to be experimental/pioneering forms of outreach. In 2006, 31.5% of churches indicated they had established experimental/pioneering forms of outreach – of which 85% were still in operation. The same differences in question design that affected experimental/pioneering forms of church also apply to the question of



experimental/pioneering forms of outreach in the 2011 and 2006 NCLS Operations Surveys. Therefore, the 2011 and 2006 results in this part will not be compared, as they were not obtained from equivalent questions.

One point of comparison that can be made, however, is between experimental/pioneering forms of church (Section 8) and experimental/pioneering forms of outreach. As illustrated in Figure 11, more churches established forms of outreach than forms of church in both 2011 and 2006. As with other sections of this paper, the category '2007-2011' represents forms of church and outreach established in the 5 years prior to the 2011 NCLS Operations Survey, and '2002-2006' represents the same for the 2006 NCLS Operations Survey.

**Figure 11: Experimental or pioneering forms of church and outreach.**



### 9.1 Experimental/Pioneering Forms of Outreach by Denomination: 2006

As seen in Table 7, the Pentecostal grouping had the highest proportion of churches (52.5%) that established experimental/pioneering outreach between 2002 and 2006. This was followed by the Baptist/Churches of Christ grouping (41.9%).

### 9.2 Experimental/Pioneering Forms of Outreach by Denomination: 2011

Noting again that the change in question wording means that the two time periods are not directly comparable, Table 7 shows that Pentecostal churches had the highest proportion of churches who had established experimental/pioneering forms of outreach (24.7%). Baptist/Churches of Christ and the Uniting Church also yielded above average rates of experimental/pioneering outreach.

**Table 7: Experimental or pioneering outreach by denomination: 2006 and 2011.**

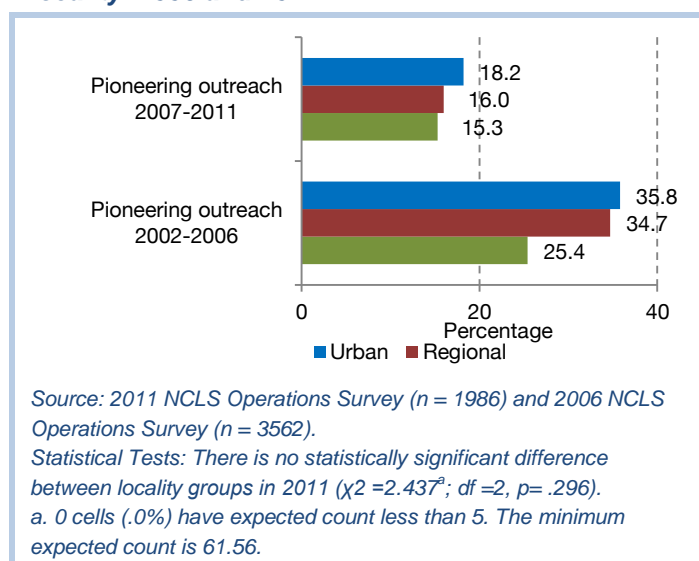
	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Luther- an	Pente- costal	Uniting	Other Protest- ant	Overall
Category	Percentage						
Pioneering outreach 2007-2011	13.6	20.6	7.9	24.7	18.1	14.6	17.0
Pioneering outreach 2002-2006	21.3	41.9	21.7	52.5	28.3	27.6	31.5

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2036) and 2006 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 3602).

### 9.3 Experimental/Pioneering Forms of Outreach by Locality: 2006 and 2011

As shown in Figure 12, churches in urban areas (35.8%) and regional areas (34.7%) were more likely to have established experimental/pioneering forms of outreach between 2002 and 2006 than churches in rural areas (25.4%). In the 2011 NCLS there was no statistically significant difference in proportion of experimental/pioneering outreach between localities.

**Figure 12: Experimental or pioneering outreach by locality: 2006 and 2011.**



Experimental/Pioneering forms of Outreach Summary:

- More churches established pioneering forms of outreach than pioneering forms of church in both 2011 and 2006
- The Pentecostal grouping was the most active in terms of pioneering forms of outreach.
- Rural areas had the lowest proportion of pioneering outreach in 2006. In 2011, there was no statistically significant difference between localities.

## 10 Conclusion

This paper has outlined a range of findings about new initiatives of Australian Protestant churches which arose from analysis of the 2006 and 2011 NCLS Operations Surveys.

Performance in the seven areas of new initiatives in church life frequently varied according to the survey year, denomination and locality of churches. Overall, new churches were found to be more common than church plants, with 3.4% of 2011 churches classified as new churches, and only 0.9% identifying themselves as church plants. Parent churches accounted for 11.7% of 2011 Pentecostal churches and 10.9% of 2006 Pentecostal churches. It was found that the area of 'multi-church planting' was dominated by the Pentecostal churches; they were in fact a highly active denomination in all seven areas. Establishing new worship services was the most popular new initiative pursued by churches, with about a third of Australian Protestant churches in both survey waves starting at least one new service in the previous 5 years. In both 2006 and 2011, more churches established highly experimental/pioneering forms of outreach than highly experimental/pioneering forms of church.

The key findings of this paper have highlighted two main issues relevant to understanding new initiatives in church life:

- The importance of considering a range of new initiatives in order to assess a church's/denomination's activity
- The lack of consensus among churches/denominations in language use, which has the potential to confound research in this area

It is clear from this paper that Australian churches have been pursuing a range of new initiatives in church life. Although starting new services was the most popular, churches also engaged in church planting, multi-church planting, and experimental/pioneering forms of church or outreach. If only one of these initiatives were studied, it would give a misleading view of innovation in churches. This illustrates the importance in looking at the full range of new initiatives, in order to more accurately gauge a church's or denomination's activity.

Variation in how churches or denominations describe their new initiatives is a conceptual problem this study

and others like it face. There is no reason to assume that different denominations use the same language to describe their initiatives. This study found a high percentage of new churches that don't also identify as church plants. While this gap can be partially accounted for by churches being founded for reasons other than church planting, a gap still remained. This suggested that what constitutes a 'church plant' may not be universally agreed upon among churches. If one denomination were to have a narrower definition of 'church plant' than another, this would hinder comparative study, and leave any operational definitions arrived at by the researcher profoundly flawed. Thus a deeper look into the differences in language and terminology between denominations is an important area for future research.

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Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Operations Survey OP. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

## 12 About NCLS Research

NCLS Research is a joint project of several denominational partners. Established in the early 1990s, it is a world leader in research focused on connecting churches and their communities. The most well-known project is the five-yearly National Church Life Survey.

## 13 About the National Church Life Survey

The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a quantitative survey of 260,000-450,000 church attenders, 6,000-10,000 church leaders and 3,000-7,000 churches in more than 20 Australian denominations (Catholic, Anglican and Protestant denominations) every census year since 1991. The survey covers a wide range of areas of religious faith and practice and social concern. The NCLS includes three major survey types:

1. Attender Surveys (comprising a main survey variant and multiple small sample survey variants);
2. Several variants of a Leader Survey which is completed by local church leaders; and
3. An Operations Survey audit of local church activities.

Data are weighted to adjust for variations in participation levels across denominations and regions.

NCLS Occasional Paper 25

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# A comparison of the vitality of new and old churches

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Powell

December 2014

## Abstract

With new churches being established across the country each year, church planting appears to be alive and well in Australia. This paper uses 2011 and 2006 NCLS data to explore whether these newer churches or ‘church plants’ differ from older churches in terms of health and vitality. Churches in four age categories (0-5 years old, 6-10 years old, 11-20 years old, and over 20 years old) were compared across NCLS Research’s nine core qualities of church vitality, as well as in their newcomer levels. It was found that newer churches were significantly more innovative than older churches – churches founded in the last 10 years had more attenders who thought their church was always ready to try new things than churches 11-20 years old, who in turn had more attenders thinking this than churches over 20 years old. Newer churches also attracted more newcomers (people new to church life) than older churches – churches up to 10 years old had a higher proportion of newcomers than churches 11-20 years old, who in turn had more newcomers than churches over 20 years old. While it is clear that churches face different challenges depending on their stage of life, an important finding was that churches of all ages were able to foster growth in the faith of their attenders.

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## Citation

Hancock, N., Pepper, M. & Powell, R. (2014) A comparison of the vitality of new and old churches, Occasional Paper 25. Sydney: NCLS Research. © NCLS Research, 2014.

## 1 Introduction

Christianity in Australia is experiencing decline, as Australians are becoming increasingly disengaged from church life. In recent census years, the proportion of people reporting a Christian affiliation has dropped, while those who hold no religious affiliation are on the rise<sup>1</sup>. This has translated into falling church attendance rates, with 15% of Australians in 2009 self-reporting that they attended church at least monthly, down from 25% in 1990<sup>2</sup>.

Yet against this backdrop of overall decline, church planting remains an active phenomenon in the Australian church. New churches are being established across the country in an attempt to evangelise the unchurched, revitalise existing churches and mobilise resources for the kingdom of God. In 2011, 12% of Australian churches had been involved in establishing a new church within the previous 5 years, and almost a third of these churches had planted multiple churches within the previous 10 years<sup>3</sup>.

A key question in understanding this activity is whether or not church plants (which we define for the purposes of this paper as simply young churches) differ from older churches, and in what ways. Are church plants more vital than established churches? Do they have different strengths and weaknesses? And might a better understanding of such points of departure enable churches, both young and old, to learn from each other?

This paper compares church plants with older, established churches in several key areas of church health and vitality. First, churches are categorised into one of four groups according to their age. Second, our indicators for measuring church health and vitality are outlined. Next, two possible confounding variables – the faith tradition and locality of a church – are taken into account for the statistical analyses. Results for church vitality core qualities and newcomer levels are then presented for the four age groups of local churches, with possible explanations given for the differences observed between groups.

This research is of use for denominational officials and missiologists, as well as local church leaders and church planters, as they seek to identify areas for growth in their church's own unique circumstances and stage of life.

## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Data and the grouping of churches by age

Churches that filled out an NCLS Operations Survey in 2011 or 2006 were used for this research (n = 2402; see section 7 for a more detailed description of the NCLS). Data was unweighted, and the unit of analysis was the local church (congregation or parish). Using their answer to the question "When was this congregation first founded?", churches were categorised into one of four age groups: churches 0-5 years old (n = 234; 9.7%), churches 6-10 years old (n = 164; 6.8%), churches 11-20 years old (n = 340; 14.2%), and churches more than 20 years old (n = 1,664; 69.3%).

For the purpose of this paper, we used the category of churches 0-5 years old to define a "church plant". Rather than simply comparing this age group with the well-demarcated 20 plus year old churches, we also included two intermediate age groups in order to address more questions of interest. For example, maybe it is the 6-10 year old churches that are the most vital, as they are relatively young while also past the unstable infancy most church plants experience. Or perhaps there exists a critical cut-off point, where churches past a certain age experience more or less vitality.

There are certain limitations to our categorization that should be kept in mind. First, the age range we used to define a church plant (0-5 years old) is fairly arbitrary and open to interpretation – after all, all churches at some point in their history have existed as "church plants". Secondly, defining church plants by when they were founded does not take into account that some churches are founded through processes not typically considered as "planting"; churches can be formed from an amalgamation or clustering of congregations, or from the split of a previous congregation. Moreover, it is clear that practitioners do not see the terms "new church" and "church plant" as synonymous – only 31% of new churches in 2011 also identified themselves as church

<sup>1</sup> Powell et al (2012, pp.68-69).

<sup>2</sup> Powell et al (2012, p.71).

<sup>3</sup> Hancock, Powell & Pepper (2013).



plants<sup>4</sup>. We have chosen our definition of church plants in order to avoid confusion over language and terminology, and this should be kept in mind when interpreting results.

## 2.2 Operationalisation of church vitality

The NCLS framework of church health or vitality comprises nine “core qualities”, which are grouped into three main areas. Three Internal Core Qualities focus on the inner life of the community of faith, three Inspirational Core Qualities focus on the vigour of a church and the catalysts that inspire a church to move forward, and three Outward Core Qualities focus on the outward looking life of the church. For the purposes of the present paper, each core quality is operationalised by means of a headline indicator. Indicator scores are determined for each church by calculating the percentage of church attenders at that church who chose a particular response option for the indicator question in the NCLS Attender Survey. The nine core qualities are listed in Table 1, together with the survey question/response option(s) which are used as headline indicators.

**Table 1: Core qualities and core quality indicators**

Core quality	Core quality headline indicator
<b>Alive and growing Faith</b>	I have experienced much growth in faith at my church
<b>Vital and nurturing Worship</b>	I always/usually experience inspiration during the service here
<b>Strong and growing sense of Belonging</b>	I have a strong and growing sense of belonging here
<b>Clear and owned Vision</b>	I am strongly committed to the vision, goals and direction here
<b>Inspiring and empowering Leadership</b>	Our leaders encourage us to a great extent to use our gifts here
<b>Openness to imaginative and flexible Innovation</b>	I strongly agree our church is always ready to try new things
<b>Practical and diverse Service</b>	I have helped others informally in at least three of a number of listed ways
<b>Willing and effective Faith-sharing</b>	I invited someone to church here in the last year
<b>Intentional and welcoming Inclusion</b>	Certain I would follow up someone drifting away from church

<sup>4</sup> Hancock, Powell & Pepper (2013).

In addition to the core qualities, NCLS Research also uses three attendance measures as indicators of church health:

- Newcomers – the percentage of the congregation who are newcomers to church in the last five years.
- Attendance change – percentage change in the size of the congregation over the last five years.
- Young adult retention – the extent to which the children of the faith community remain regular attenders when they grow into young adulthood.

For the purposes of the present paper, analyses were conducted for newcomers, but not for attendance change or young adult retention<sup>5</sup>.

## 2.3 Controls: Faith tradition and locality

Previous research has shown that churches from Pentecostal or Evangelical traditions score higher on vitality measures than other churches<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, it is also Pentecostal and Evangelical churches that are the most likely to participate in church planting<sup>7</sup>. Thus a finding that church plants are more vital than older churches could simply be because they are more likely to be Pentecostal or Evangelical. Pentecostal faith tradition was operationalised as the percentage of the congregation who identified as Pentecostal, and Evangelical faith tradition the percentage who identified as Evangelical.

The locality of churches (urban/regional/rural) is another possible confounding variable. While studies haven’t shown that rural churches are less vital than urban churches, it is the case that they have a different dynamic – rural churches are smaller, have older attenders, and are more likely to face financial hardship than other churches<sup>8</sup>. It is also the case that churches are more likely to be planted in urban or regional locations<sup>9</sup>.

For these reasons, the faith traditions and localities of churches were taken into account for all analyses. Two-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with age group

<sup>5</sup> Both of these variables rely on data comparisons 5 years apart, but our key group of interest – church plants – have existed for less than 5 years.

<sup>6</sup> Powell et al (2012, pp.112-113).

<sup>7</sup> Hancock, Powell & Pepper (2013).

<sup>8</sup> Powell et al (2012, pp.114-121).

<sup>9</sup> Hancock, Powell & Pepper (2013).

and locality as the factors and faith tradition as the covariate was conducted on each vitality measure. If there was no significant interaction between age group and locality, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with age group as the factor was also conducted.

### 3 Results

Our presentation of results draws on Kaldor et al's (1997) rating classification for the importance of results. Findings were classified as "critical", "very important", "important", "of some importance" or "marginal", depending on how much variance in the dependent variable was explained<sup>10</sup>. Figure 1 shows the average Core Quality scores and newcomer levels of the four different age groups of churches. All results reported in the following sections have controlled for faith tradition.

#### 3.1 Comparison of vitality by church age

**3.1.1 Alive and growing faith:** Churches over 20 years old had less attenders who had experienced much growth in faith through their church than churches that were 6-10 years old or 11-20 years old; however, these differences were marginal. Church plants (0-5 years old) were not significantly different in their Faith scores from any other age group.

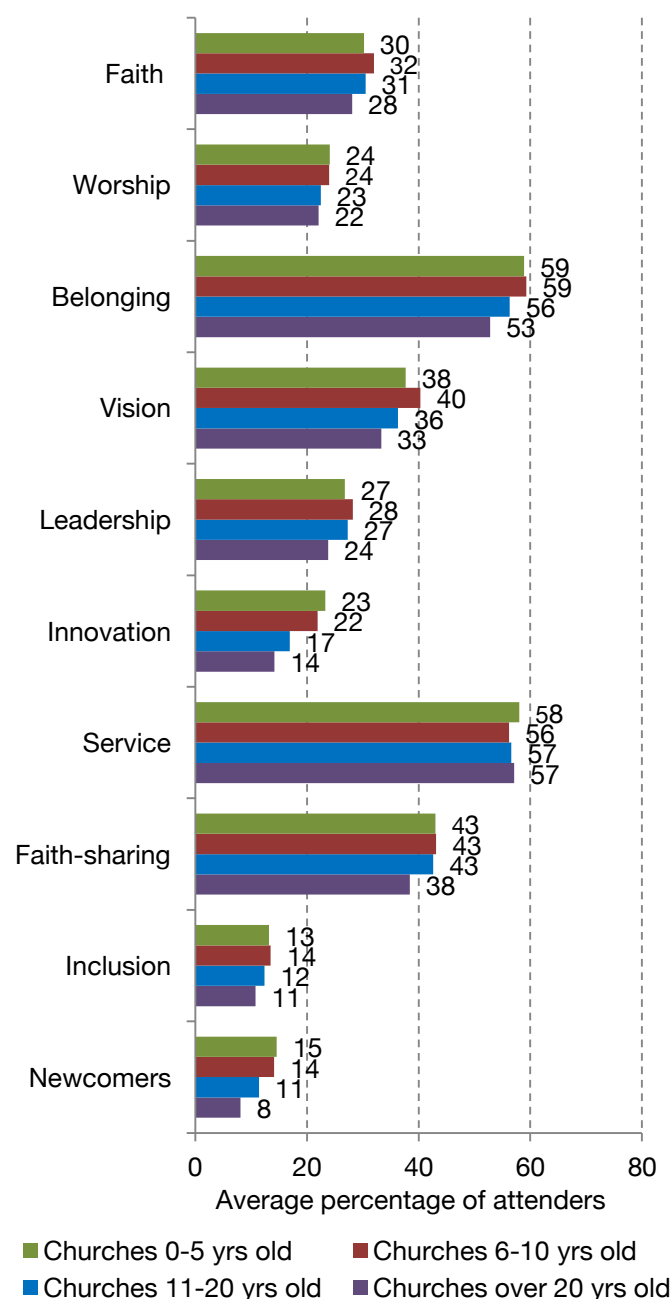
This demonstrates that older and younger churches alike have the ability to foster an alive and growing faith in their attenders, which is at the heart of a church's vitality.

**3.1.2 Vital and nurturing worship:** Churches of different age groups didn't differ in how many of their attenders usually or always experienced inspiration during services. This shows that the quality of worship provided by a church isn't dependent on its age – whether it is a freshly planted or a long-established church does not affect its ability to inspire its members.

**3.1.3 Strong and growing sense of belonging:** Churches more than 20 years old had less attenders with a strong and growing sense of belonging than the three younger groups of churches. This difference was found to be of some importance (although it was less pronounced among churches in regional areas).

This is perhaps surprising, as older churches are more likely to have members who have shared fellowship with each other for longer and so have a more tight-knit community. On the other hand, it might be these established relationships that make it harder for new attenders to feel that they belong. Another factor could be the wording of the survey question, where longer-term attenders may find it harder to describe their sense of belonging as "growing".

**Figure 1: Core quality indicators for age groups**



Source: 2011 and 2006 NCLS Operations Survey dataset (n=2,402 churches).

Note: Faith tradition (Pentecostal, evangelical) is controlled.

<sup>10</sup> Kaldor et al (1997, p.15). Criteria: "critical" (>10%), "very important" (5-10%), "important" (3-5%), "some importance" (1-3%), and "marginal" (0.5-1%).

**3.1.4 Clear and owned vision:** Churches up to 10 years old had more attenders committed to their vision than churches 11-20 years old, who in turn had more committed attenders than churches over 20 years old. These differences were found to be of some importance, and were not as strong for churches in regional areas.

A possible explanation for this finding is that newer churches often have a clearer, more tangible vision – e.g. “we want to grow to X amount of people or Y number of services” – than older, more established churches. This makes it easier for attenders to be both aware of the church’s vision and to get behind it.

**3.1.5 Inspiring and empowering leadership:** Churches over 20 years old had less attenders who thought their leaders encouraged them to a great extent to use their gifts than younger churches. This difference was found to be of some importance.

It makes some sense that younger churches would have leaders that encourage more attenders to use their gifts and skills, given their unique situation. Church plants are often in greater need for attenders to step up and fill ministry roles and have their gifts be put to use – more than in older churches where opportunities to serve are often less apparent. Part of the reason may also lie with the leaders themselves – a study by Williams (2012) found that church planters tend to have the personality traits of showing initiative and inspiring others.

**3.1.6 Openness to imaginative and flexible innovation:** Churches up to 10 years old had more attenders who thought their church was always ready to try new things than churches 11-20 years old, who in turn had more attenders thinking this than churches over 20 years old. These differences in innovation were found to be very important.

The idea that newer churches are more innovative than older churches is fairly intuitive. While older churches can find themselves tied down by traditions and established practice, new churches have the freedom to try new things as they don’t face the same amount of institutional resistance. Leadership style may also help explain this finding, as it is possible that church plants or new churches tend to attract more innovative leaders who are “always ready to try new things”.

**3.1.7 Practical and diverse service:** Churches of different age groups did not differ from each other in the amount of informal helping their attenders participated in. This shows that people who attend younger churches are no more or less likely to be active in their faith than attenders of older churches.

**3.1.8 Willing and effective faith-sharing:** Churches over 20 years old had less attenders who had invited someone to church in the last year than younger churches. This difference in faith-sharing was found to be of some importance. It may reflect a more insular focus in older churches, or perhaps less events or activities being held for new people to be invited to.

**3.1.9 Intentional and welcoming inclusion:** Churches over 20 years old had less attenders who were certain they would follow up someone drifting away from church life than younger churches. However, this difference was marginal.

## 3.2 Comparison of newcomers by church age

Churches up to 10 years old had a higher proportion of newcomers than churches 11-20 years old, who in turn had more newcomers than churches over 20 years old. These differences in newcomer levels were found to be very important, and were most pronounced among rural churches.

It should be remembered that newcomers in this context does not mean people new to the particular church in the last 5 years (otherwise all attenders of a church plant could be considered newcomers) but rather, people who are new to church life – having either never attended a church before, or not done so for a long time. Thus it appears as though newer churches are better at attracting the unchurched to their services than older churches. There may be several reasons for this. Church plants are forced to be more outward-focused simply to get off the ground, and so often have a greater sensitivity towards the needs of the non-believer<sup>11</sup>. They have often been formed with outreach or new connections specifically in mind, which then become an integral part of that church’s vision and identity. Furthermore, the greater ability of plants to be innovative allows for more effective evangelism into the wider community, and could make them more attractive to people who hold negative images of ‘traditional’

<sup>11</sup> Keller (2002).

church. The fact that newer churches tend to be more vital in certain areas than older churches (e.g. belonging, faith-sharing) might also help to both attract and retain newcomers to church life.

### 3.3 Summary of findings

Table 2 displays the results of statistical tests for all core qualities and the newcomers measure, as well as the relative importance of those findings.

**Table 2: Comparing churches of different ages**

Measure	Finding				
Faith	6-10 yrs 11-20 yrs	HIGHER THAN	> 20 yrs		
Worship	NO DIFFERENCES				
Belonging	0-5 yrs 6-10 yrs 11-20 yrs	HIGHER THAN	> 20 yrs		
Vision	0-5 yrs 6-10 yrs	HIGHER THAN	11-20 yrs	HIGHER THAN	> 20 yrs
Leadership	0-5 yrs 6-10 yrs 11-20 yrs	HIGHER THAN	> 20 yrs		
Innovation	0-5 yrs 6-10 yrs	HIGHER THAN	11-20 yrs	HIGHER THAN	> 20 yrs
Service	NO DIFFERENCES				
Faith-sharing	0-5 yrs 6-10 yrs 11-20 yrs	HIGHER THAN	> 20 yrs		
Inclusion	0-5 yrs 6-10 yrs 11-20 yrs	HIGHER THAN	> 20 yrs		
Newcomers	0-5 yrs 6-10 yrs	HIGHER THAN	11-20 yrs	HIGHER THAN	> 20 yrs

Shading indicates the importance of the finding. Dark blue = "very important", medium blue = "of some importance", light blue = "marginal".

## 4 Conclusion

While the vitality of churches of different ages varied to some degree, it was in the areas of innovation and newcomer levels that newer churches exceeded older churches the most. Churches founded in the last 10 years were more likely to be judged by their attenders as 'always ready to try new things', and had a higher proportion of newcomers to church life. To a lesser

extent, younger churches also had more attenders with a strong sense of belonging, who were committed to the church's vision and had invited someone to church, as well as leaders who encouraged attenders' gifts and skills.

The similarities between churches of different ages were also noteworthy. Our results showed that both new and old churches produced growth in the faith of their attenders at similar levels. Therefore while newer churches may outperform older churches in some areas, in a key area of discipleship the age of a church seems to matter very little. Churches of different ages were also similar in the Core Qualities of worship, service and inclusion.

The wide-ranging similarities between churches 0-5 years old and churches 6-10 years old were particularly unexpected. Churches up to 5 years old did not differ significantly from churches 6-10 years old in any of the 9 core quality measures, or in their proportions of newcomers. Instead, numerous differences were found between churches younger and older than 10 years. This calls into question our definition of 'church plant' as a church 0-5 years old, suggesting it should be extended to include the first decade of a church's life.

It should be stressed that this paper's findings should not be taken as evidence of younger churches being more 'successful' in general than older churches. A major restriction of the present study is that not all churches participate in the NCLS, so there are no doubt other church plants for which data was not available. The fact that a lot of plants probably close down in their early stages, before participation is possible, may have also compromised the representativeness of our data. Nevertheless, this paper has provided some initial, limited evidence that younger churches may be more vital than older churches in several key areas of church life.

It is clear that new and old churches face their own sets of challenges unique to their circumstances and stage of life, and that no particular age guarantees the health of a church. While churches cannot control how old they are, assessing their own strengths and areas for growth can help churches to address the limitations placed on them by their age.

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## 6 Acknowledgments

Production of this paper would not have been possible without the work of the other members of the NCLS Research team: Chandrika Chinnadurai, Kathy Kerr, James Schroder, Sam Sterland and Amelia Vaeafisi.

## 7 About NCLS Research

NCLS Research is a joint project of several denominational partners. Established in the early 1990s, it is a world leader in research focused on connecting churches and their communities. The most well-known project is the five-yearly National Church Life Survey.

## 8 About the National Church Life Survey

The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a quantitative survey of 260,000-450,000 church attenders, 6,000-10,000 church leaders and 3,000-7,000 churches in more than 20 Australian denominations (Catholic, Anglican and Protestant denominations) every census year since 1991. The survey covers a wide range of areas of religious faith and practice and social concern. The NCLS includes three major survey types:

1. Attender Surveys (comprising a main survey variant and multiple small sample survey variants);
2. Several variants of a Leader Survey which is completed by local church leaders; and
3. An Operations Survey audit of local church activities.

Data used in this paper are not weighted to adjust for variations in participation levels across denominations and regions.

# Willing and effective faith-sharing



## Churches who share their faith: A case study survey of the Baptist Union of Victoria

### **Abstract**

Australian National Church Life Survey (NCLS) findings reveal that a key characteristic of vitality in church life is willing and effective faith-sharing. Drawing from analysis of NCLS 2011 survey data of Victorian Baptists, and a small set of follow-up interviews, this article discusses where Victorian Baptist churches are at their best in faith-sharing practices among attenders – readiness to share faith, inviting people to church and faith-sharing in families; and faith-sharing programs and activities as churches – in local church activities, evangelism training and processes for inclusion. These results are presented alongside results for participating churches of all faith traditions. There is room for improvement in all these areas, and especially for Victorian Baptists in empowering families to share faith, fostering an invitational culture and providing evangelism training. But where faith-sharing, willingness to invite and processes for inclusion are present, churches are more likely to show health and vitality in a range of areas.

### **Citation**

Cronshaw, D., Powell, R., Hancock, N., Sterland, S., & Wilson, S. (2015). Churches who share their faith: A case study survey of the Baptist Union of Victoria. *Australian eJournal of Theology*.

### **Availability**

Visit the journal website: [www.aejt.com.au](http://www.aejt.com.au)

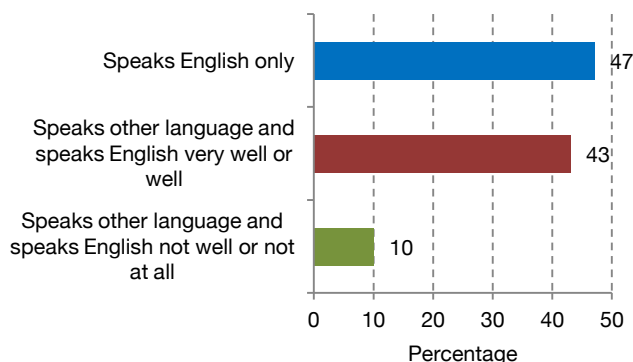
# Multicultural Church

## Local Church Engagement with Non-English Speaking Churches

### Introduction

Australia's population is becoming increasingly multilingual, with more than half (53%) of those born overseas and migrating to Australia able to speak a language other than English (LOTE). Only one tenth of migrants identified their ability to speak English as 'not well or not at all' (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Proficiency in spoken English by migrants to Australia**



Source: ABS (2011), table B11.

Churches can potentially offer a sense of belonging and friendships for migrants who may be feeling voiceless or struggling with their ability to communicate. Churches can also provide migrants with practical and pastoral support in settling into a new country, and opportunities to explore or strengthen faith in Christ. This Fact Sheet focuses on that ministry potential by exploring the engagement of churches with congregations from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB).

### Local Church Relationships with NESB Congregations

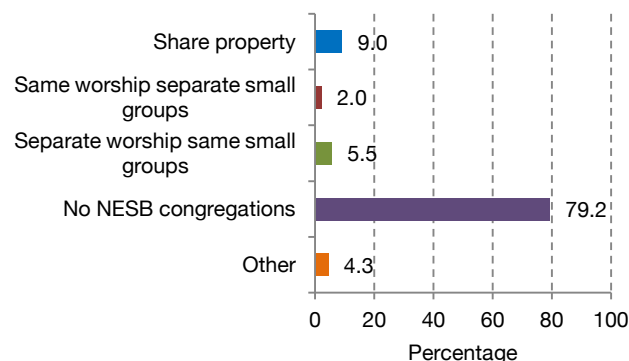
In the 2011 National Church Life Survey, church leaders were asked:

**Are there any non-English speaking congregations meeting for worship here? If so, which of the following would best describe your relationship? (Mark ONE only)**

- ☐ We share the same property, but have no shared ministry
- ☐ We share the same church worship service, but have separate language small groups or other activities
- ☐ We have separate language church services, but share small groups or other activities
- ☐ No non-English speaking congregations meet for worship here
- ☐ Other

Figure 2 shows the type of relationships that participating local churches have with NESB congregations.

**Figure 2: Local church engagement with NESB churches**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n=2,216)

While the majority of local churches do not have a relationship with a NESB congregation, over one fifth (21%) of participating churches do have such a relationship. Most commonly, this centres around sharing property (9%), but this is nearly matched by sharing ministry, whether through small groups (6%), or worship (2%).

Some churches may think language is a barrier to a greater level of shared ministry between themselves and a NESB congregation. However, with 90% of migrants able to speak English 'very well or well,' such barriers lie more in other areas. In every cross cultural situation, there are potential challenges that arise from communication and cultural differences, preferences and understandings. These could include: ethnic prejudices between groups, control of resources (e.g. property), and lack of willingness to share ministries and leadership.

### Multicultural Ministry Mostly in Urban Settings

Across Australia, those from non-English speaking backgrounds tend to be located in urban centres. This pattern impacts church life, meaning that local church engagement with NESB congregations, or multicultural ministry generally, is much more likely to be relevant for churches in urban settings. This helps explain why 50% of participating churches responded: [ministry toward migrants] "is not a priority in our area."

Churches in regional and rural areas are more likely to say that multicultural ministry is not a priority. In smaller rural towns or areas (less than 2000 in population), this can be around twice as likely as for those in city suburbs.

### Denominational NESB Ministry

**Table 1: Relationships with NESB congregations by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
	Percentage						
Share property	5	16	5	8	1	16	12
Share worship service	1	2	3	2	1	1	5
Share small groups	7	8	9	2	4	4	3
No NESB congregations	85	70	77	86	80	78	77
Other	2	4	6	2	14	2	3

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n=2, 216)

Denominational differences are shown in Table 1. Baptist/Churches of Christ and Uniting churches had significant engagement with non-English speaking background congregations.

Care should be taken in seeking to quantify the numbers of NESB churches from this data. This data only includes responses from churches participating in 2011 NCLS, rather than all Australian churches.

Although the 2011 NCLS was available in eight languages, a lower participation of NESB churches gives less information from their perspective about the relationship between NESB congregations with other congregations. In addition, the survey question only asks about NESB congregations that share property, services or small groups, and not about congregations that are independent or have no relationship with another congregation.

### Conclusion

It is encouraging that churches are engaging with and responding to the multicultural context of their community through forming relationships with non-English speaking background congregations. However, opportunities remain for many of the 79% of churches who have no association with a non-English speaking background congregation to engage in some way, particularly since only 10% of migrants to Australia identified their proficiency in speaking English as 'not well or not at all.' For the churches who do have a relationship with a NESB congregation, the main connecting point is a shared use of property (9%), rather than any form of shared ministry, whether services (2%) or small groups (6%).

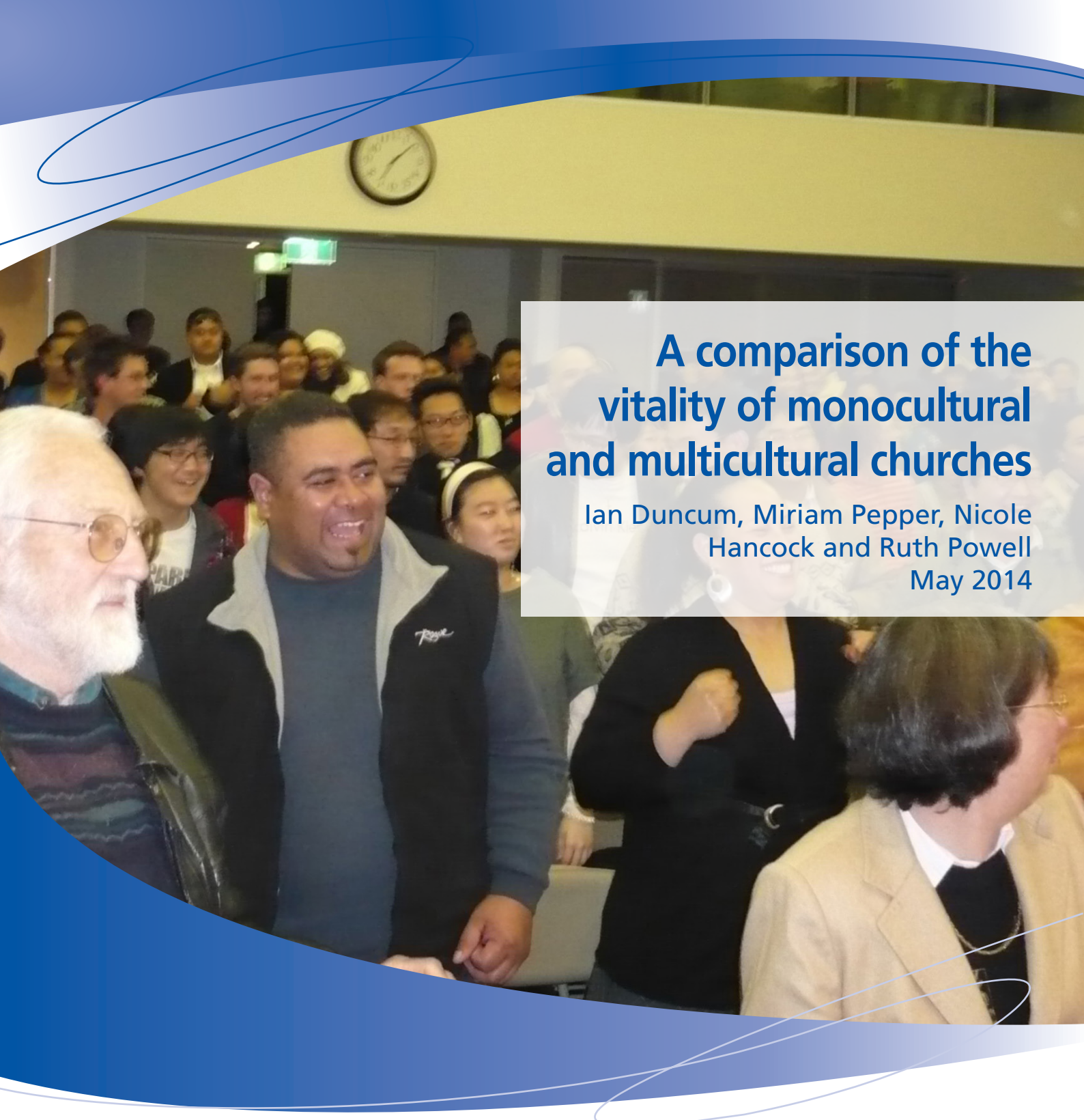
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### Citation

Duncum, I., Hancock, N & Powell, R. (2014) Local Church Engagement with Non-English Speaking Churches, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 14009. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.



# A comparison of the vitality of monocultural and multicultural churches

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NCLS Occasional Paper 24



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## Abstract

In recent years there has been debate around what is the best shape of churches in a context of migration and multiculturalism. This paper explores this question from the perspective of the health and vitality of local churches (congregations and parishes) in Australia. Three cultural models of church defined in terms of the country of birth/language background of attenders – mono-cultural Anglo, mono-cultural non-Anglo and multicultural models – are compared and contrasted across NCLS Research's nine core qualities of church vitality and several church attendance measures. In the 2011 NCLS, monocultural non-Anglo churches performed particularly strongly in the core quality areas of worship, faith sharing and inclusion. These churches also had higher levels of newcomers to church life and greater numbers of attenders' children aged over 15 who were still attending their parents' church. However, due to low participation of non-Anglo churches in the NCLS, these results should be considered preliminary and may or may not hold across the breadth of such churches in Australia. Monocultural Anglo churches excelled in the core quality of service, but lagged multicultural churches in several other areas. The way forward for all churches is to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of their cultural model, and to discern where God is leading them in the next stage of their journey of engaging with and in their particular cultural context.

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## Acknowledgments

Production of this paper would not have been possible without the work of the other members of the NCLS Research team: Chandrika Chinnadurai, Claudia Mollidor, Sam Sterland, Amelia Vaeafisi.

## Citation

Duncum, I., Pepper, M., Hancock, N. & Powell, R. (2014) A comparison of the vitality of monocultural and multicultural churches, Occasional Paper 24. Sydney: NCLS Research. © NCLS Research, 2014



## 1 Introduction

Migration, and the involvement by Australian churches in ministry to migrants, is a significant factor in the shaping of both Australian society and the Australian churches. Many Australians have been directly impacted by the migrant experience. Some 5.3 million people, or 25% of Australia's population in 2011, indicated that they were born overseas<sup>1</sup>, and 1.8 million people have arrived in Australia 2001-2011, indicating high levels of recent migration<sup>2</sup>. 43% of all Australians in 2011 indicated that they had at least one parent born overseas.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, there is an increasing diversity of source countries of emigration. The top countries of birth in 2011 for Australia's overseas-born population were: United Kingdom (21%), New Zealand (9%), China (6%), India (6%), and Italy (4%).<sup>4</sup> Australia's population is also becoming increasingly multilingual, with more than half (53%) of those born overseas and migrating to Australia able to speak a language other than English (LOTE).<sup>5</sup> Only one tenth of migrants identified their ability to speak English as 'not well or not at all'<sup>6</sup>.

While debate has swirled around various aspects of migration in the wider Australian society over recent decades, churches in Australia have seen and embraced migration as an opportunity for both hospitality and evangelism. Churches can potentially offer a sense of belonging and friendships for migrants who may be feeling displaced or struggling with their ability to communicate; an opportunity to explore or strengthen faith in Christ; and practical and pastoral support in settling into a new country and local community. Over a third (35%) of Australian churches in 2011 said they were involved in migrant ministry, with 15% heavily involved, and 20% taking first steps in ministry to migrants<sup>7</sup>. This is a large increase on the 2006 NCLS (24%)<sup>8</sup>, and an encouraging sign that churches are engaging with an increasingly multicultural Australia and taking up the opportunities afforded by Australia being one of the most multicultural nations in

the world<sup>9</sup>. Churches have engaged with and responded to the multicultural context of their community in a range of ways, including ministry to migrants in the church and the community, supporting/partnering with mono-cultural churches from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, and partnering with migrants in international/multi-cultural churches. Over one fifth (21%) of churches in 2011 reported having a relationship with a non-English speaking congregation, through either sharing property (9%), sharing small groups (6%) or worship services (2%), or through some other way (4%).<sup>10</sup>

In recent years there has been debate, both within theological circles as well as among scholars of church growth, around the best shape of churches in a context of migration and multiculturalism. This paper explores the health and vitality of Australian churches (congregations and parishes), by comparing and contrasting different cultural models of church, and exploring the strengths and areas for growth of each model. First, different ways of categorizing churches in terms of their orientation toward and practice of ministry in a CALD diverse context are presented. Next, a three-fold categorization of churches in terms of the country of birth of their attenders – monocultural Anglo, monocultural non-Anglo and multicultural churches – is chosen for the analysis of church vitality. Results for church vitality core qualities, newcomer levels and young adult retention are then presented for the three types of local churches and the strengths and weaknesses of each model are discussed.

This research is of use for denominational officials, missiologists and theological educators, as well as pastors and local church leaders as they seek to grapple toward missional connections into increasingly CALD communities.

## 2 Cultural models of church

In this section, several frameworks for understanding churches in relation to cultural diversity are presented. But first, some definitions are in order. *Culture* is "the more or less integrated systems of ideas, feelings, and values and their associated patterns of behavior and products shared by a group of people who organize and

<sup>1</sup> ABS (2011), Table B09.

<sup>2</sup> ABS (2011). Tables B10a and B10b. These figures are for 1/1/2001 to 9/8/2011.

<sup>3</sup> ABS (2011), Table B08.

<sup>4</sup> ABS (2011). Tables B10a and B10b; ABS (2012).

<sup>5</sup> ABS (2011). Table B11.

<sup>6</sup> ABS (2011), Table B11.

<sup>7</sup> Duncum, Hancock, Pepper & Powell (2014).

<sup>8</sup> Due to a wording change from 'ethnic ministry' in 2006 to 'migrant ministry' in 2011, results may not be entirely comparable.

<sup>9</sup> Miranti, Nepal & McNamara (2010, p. 3).

<sup>10</sup> Duncum, Hancock & Powell (2014).

regulate what they think, feel and do"<sup>11</sup>. When a person moves from one culture to another they are termed a *migrant*<sup>12</sup>. *Multicultural* refers to the juxtaposition of a number of distinct cultures. *Homogeneous* or *monocultural* refers to the limitation of a particular group to one particular culture<sup>13</sup>. There are many different ways in which culture varies. In this paper, we are concerned with broad cultural distinctions in terms of different countries of birth/language groups/ancestries.

Drawing on the models of multicultural church described by Geoffrey Blackburn, Manuel Ortiz and Jeannie Mok, Yang<sup>14</sup> has specified four groupings that are a particularly helpful starting point for an Australian context, namely:

- Monocultural model,
- Friendship model,
- Partnership model, and
- Integrated model.

## 2.1 Monocultural model

A monocultural congregation is homogeneous in language, ethnicity and culture. Blackburn uses the term 'mono-ethnic' and Mok uses 'ethnic' as the label for such a church<sup>15</sup>. Such a church provides migrants with a connecting point with those from their source country and worship according to their own customs and (usually) in their own language<sup>16</sup>.

## 2.2 Friendship model

The Friendship model refers to a congregation that has some kind of cross-cultural relationship with another congregation. The host congregation provides migrant cultural groups with facilities, primarily for Sunday worship, either free or for rent. Each church retains its autonomy and its own leadership, and the relationship between congregations tends towards being more formal and transactional than interactive. Potentially, the relationship can develop toward a greater sense of mutual partnership and shared ministry.

## 2.3 Partnership model

The Partnership model reflects a mutuality between various cultural groups, and a sharing of ministry and

mission. This value of diversity within unity is expressed structurally, but not necessarily in the same way in each context. So because this model often entails multiple congregations, often with different language in each, Blackburn labels this type the bilingual church and Mok multicongregational<sup>17</sup>. The Partnership model can be a context for the second generation of a non-English speaking church to attend English speaking youth groups and services, which may not be available to them otherwise.

## 2.4 Integrated model

The Integrated model is made up of diverse cultural groups including those of Anglo-Celtic culture in Australia, with services in English. The value of willingness to integrate with other cultures implies the openness to setting aside one's own cultural preferences for the sake of Christian community, ministry and mission. So churches in this model not only have people of various cultural backgrounds but also seek to ensure that such cultures have equal voices and are able to influence the life, leadership and ministry of the church. On one level, this model is more challenging as it involves cross-cultural communication and inevitable misunderstandings. However, the richness of fellowship forged in such a context, along with the witness to the wider multicultural community in Australia of a diverse and intentionally culturally inclusive church can be compelling.

However, it is clear that any of these and other attempts to classify churches collide with the complexity of actual churches that often do not fit neatly into such categories. Rather, in this discussion of models, it appears that there are three interwoven strands, as shown in Figure 1, that influence each other, without determining each other.

<sup>11</sup> Hiebert (1985, p.30).

<sup>12</sup> Calvert (2006, p.1).

<sup>13</sup> Naylor (2006, p. 6).

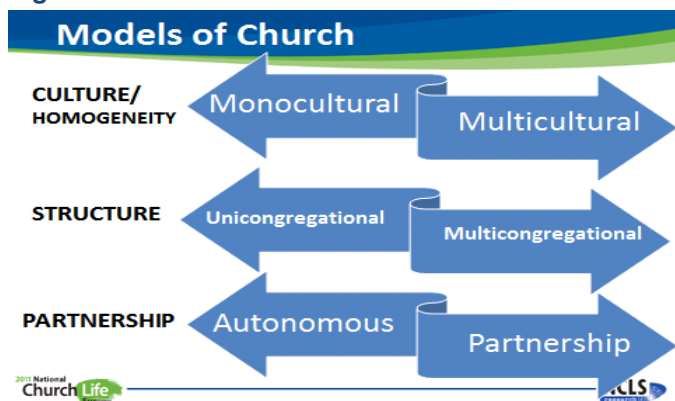
<sup>14</sup> Yang (2012, pp.19-30).

<sup>15</sup> Blackburn (1991), Mok (2004).

<sup>16</sup> Yang (2012, pp.23-24).

<sup>17</sup> Blackburn (1991), Mok (2004).

Figure 1: Cultural models of church



One strand is where a church sits on the continuum from monoculturality to multiculturality, and this is the main focus of this paper. According to sociologists, a congregation can be considered multicultural when 20% or more of its members are different in terms of their cultural background than the dominant cultural group<sup>18</sup>. Organizational researchers identify 20% as the critical point at which the minority group's presence is significant enough to make a difference<sup>19</sup>. Therefore, a church is monocultural when more than 80% of attenders have one cultural background. The second thread is how the church is structured, from unicongregational to other patterns such as Mok's "multicongregational." The third strand is the way in which these churches relate to other churches, from autonomous, through contractual (e.g. "renting"<sup>20</sup>), to forms of partnership and shared ministry (such as services or small groups). These relationships are influenced, but not determined by, where churches are on the monocultural to multicultural continuum, and by language.

Taking the influence of the interrelationships of these three strands into account, monocultural churches will tend to be unicongregational and autonomous, because culture, structure, and partnership synchronise with each other. Similarly, churches that are "multicongregational" will more likely be found toward the multicultural end of the spectrum, as will churches that have some form of relationship such as sharing services or small groups. But understanding that culture, structure, and partnership may also be

independent of each other means it is possible to have a multicultural, unicongregational, autonomous church.

This is not an exhaustive survey of the literature on church models, and many churches defy neat categories. Indeed, Mark Naylor envisions a limitless number of models as churches range along a continuum "adapted from Sheffield's "multicultural matrix" that moves from exclusive (monocultural) through tolerant and accepting (multiethnic) to inclusive (multicultural)." However, Sheffield's model considers a local church to be closer to the ideal as it moves towards the inclusive end of the matrix<sup>21</sup>. From a biblical perspective, and writing in a North American context, Mark DeYmaz argues strongly for multicultural models: "For as it is today, segregated by race and class distinctions, the local church remains a far cry from that which Christ envisioned (John 17:20-23), Luke described (Acts 11:19-26; 13:1), and Paul prescribed in the book of Ephesians. Only by returning to the principles and practices of first-century churches (like those at Antioch and Ephesus, for example) can local churches in the twenty-first century hope to express a credible witness of God's love for all people"<sup>22</sup>. This may reflect DeYmaz's US context where over 90% of churches are mono-ethnic<sup>23</sup>.

However, Sheffield's and DeYmaz's viewpoints about the superiority of multicultural churches are not universally shared. Not all authors see a neat relationship between the scriptures and practice when it comes to the variety of cultural models of the church. For example, Catherine and Justo Gonzalez write that "Pentecost is not simply the reversal of Babel"<sup>24</sup>, and Volf's nuanced approach centres on the values that Pentecost brings; neither destroying diversity, nor forcing uniformity, but "advancing toward the harmony of cultural diversity"<sup>25</sup>. Yang examines "the necessity for movement between the [cultural] models. That is, a church that represents a particular model needs to be aware of where it needs to move to next, in order to remain vital and viable. It cannot be presumed that any one model is an end point in itself"<sup>26</sup>. Similarly, Naylor advocates for a variety of approaches in keeping with

<sup>18</sup> Emerson & Kim (2003), Emerson & Woo (2006).

<sup>19</sup> Emerson & Kim (2003), Kanter (1977), Pettigrew (1975).

<sup>20</sup> Ortiz (1996, p.66).

<sup>21</sup> Sheffield (2005, p.92).

<sup>22</sup> DeYmaz (2011, p 9).

<sup>23</sup> Gray (undated).

<sup>24</sup> González & González (1993, p.22).

<sup>25</sup> Volf (1993, p.228).

<sup>26</sup> Yang (2012, p.30).

the diversity and unity of the body of Christ, with local congregations dynamically adjusting to their changing context as they seek to impact their broader communities<sup>27</sup>.

The depth and breadth contained in Volf's words "toward the harmony of cultural diversity" surely explodes out of the mere confines of one or two models of church to being a 24/7 lifestyle where these values are lived out individually, and then expressed in a variety of ways both within the life of a church, and then as the church interacts with its surrounding community. Rather than advocating for a particular model of church, this paper maintains that different approaches have validity and seeks to provide information about the health of different approaches along the monoculturality/multiculturality continuum using a variety of indicators of church vitality.

### 3 Methodology

#### 3.1 Cultural types of churches

In this paper, we use the monocultural/multicultural dimension in terms of country of birth to examine the relationship between culture and church vitality. We specify three categories of churches, namely monocultural Anglo churches (churches where the large majority of attenders are from an English-speaking country), monocultural non-Anglo churches (churches where the large majority of attenders are from a particular non-English speaking country), and multicultural churches (attenders from a mix of countries). Our unit of analysis is the local church (congregation or parish).

The dominant culture of monocultural non-Anglo churches was firstly identified through their church name, and secondly through identifying which of these churches had at least 60% of their attenders who were born in a particular non English-speaking country, or set of countries. Assessing 60% by birthplace was thought to be a conservative figure in approximating 80% of a cultural group in a church as recommended by Emerson and colleagues<sup>28</sup>. There were 44 monocultural non-Anglo churches in the dataset. Monocultural Anglo churches (n = 2,147) were those churches in which at least 80% of attenders were born

in an English-speaking country. The remaining churches were classified as multicultural (n = 623), and thus comprised at least two cultural groups.

There are certain limitations to this categorisation. It does not distinguish language (i.e. some monocultural non-Anglo churches use English while some use another language). Language of service could be an intervening/mediating variable. Neither does it distinguish leadership structure (i.e. some monocultural churches are autonomous and unicongregational, while others are part of a multicongregational church with shared leadership).

Moreover, our dataset is skewed because individuals and churches with low English skills are underrepresented in the NCLS. Some language groups lacked access to a survey form in their language (either because their church did not purchase forms or it was not available in their language). The results of the analyses for monocultural non-Anglo churches should therefore be considered preliminary.

#### 3.2 Operationalisation of church vitality

The NCLS framework of church health or vitality comprises nine "core qualities", which are grouped into three main areas. Three Internal Core Qualities focus on the inner life of the community of faith, three Inspirational Core Qualities focus on the vigour of a church and the catalysts that inspire a church to move forward, and three Outward Core Qualities focus on the outward looking life of the church. For the purposes of the present paper, each core quality is operationalised by means of a headline indicator. Indicator scores are determined for each church by calculating the percentage of church attenders at that church who chose a particular response option for the indicator question in the NCLS Attender Survey. The nine core qualities are listed in Table 1, together with the survey question/response option(s) which are used as headline indicators. In order to explore differences in church types in more detail, secondary indicators of two of the core qualities (faith sharing and service) are also examined, as listed in Table 1.

In addition to the core qualities, NCLS Research also uses three attendance measures as indicators of church health:

- Newcomers – the percentage of the congregation who are newcomers to church in the last five years.

<sup>27</sup> Naylor (2006, pp.1,6).

<sup>28</sup> Emerson & Kim (2003), Emerson & Woo (2006).



- Young adult retention – the extent to which the children of the faith community remain regular attenders when they grow into young adulthood. Young adult retention is the percentage of the congregation who are 15-19 years old and who have been attending for more than five years.
- Attendance change – percentage change in the size of the congregation over the last five years.

**Table 1: Core qualities and core quality indicators**

Core quality	Core quality headline indicator
<b>Alive and growing Faith</b>	I have experienced much growth in faith at my church
<b>Vital and nurturing Worship</b>	I always/usually experience inspiration during the service here
<b>Strong and growing sense of Belonging</b>	I have a strong & growing sense of belonging here
<b>Clear and owned Vision</b>	I am strongly committed to the vision, goals & direction here
<b>Inspiring and empowering Leadership</b>	Our leaders encourage us to a great extent to use our gifts here
<b>Openness to imaginative and flexible Innovation</b>	I strongly agree our church is always ready to try new things
<b>Practical and diverse Service</b>	I have helped others informally in at least three of a number of listed ways  (Secondary indicator: I regularly take part in community service, social justice or welfare activities of this church)
<b>Willing and effective Faith-sharing</b>	I invited someone to church here in the last year  (Secondary indicator: I regularly take part in evangelistic or outreach activities of this church)  (Secondary indicator: I feel at ease talking about my faith and look for opportunities to do so)
<b>Intentional and welcoming Inclusion</b>	Certain I would follow up someone drifting away from church

For the purposes of the present paper, analyses are conducted for young adult retention and newcomers, but not for attendance change<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Only churches that participated in the National Church Life Survey in both 2006 and 2011 have a measure of attendance change. Attendance change was therefore not examined, in order to avoid reducing the number of churches in the analysis.

To shed more light on young adult retention, results are also presented for the proportion of attenders' adult children (aged 15+) living at home who themselves also attend a church. This measure is separated into the portion attending the church of their parent(s), and the proportion attending another church.

It should be noted that, because the unit of analysis is the local church (congregation or parish), in some cases the local church comprises more than one service of worship. The analysis may therefore mask differences in the CALD composition and vitality between different worship service gatherings that constitute the one congregation. This is a limitation of the analysis.

## 4 Comparison of vitality by cultural type

### 4.1 Core quality indicators by cultural type

A comparison between monocultural Anglo churches, monocultural non-Anglo churches and multicultural churches is shown in Figure 2. It reveals the following:

Monocultural non-Anglo churches performed better than monocultural Anglo churches across all core qualities, except for service where Anglo churches performed better on informal helping and no differently on participation in community service/justice/welfare activities and vision.

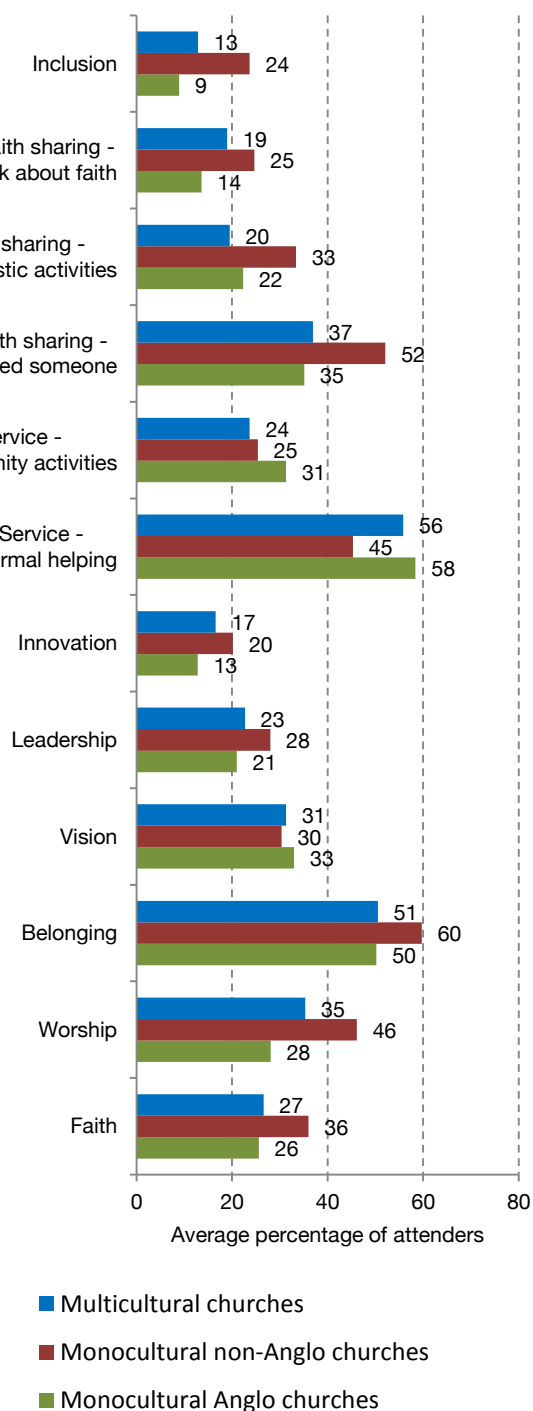
Monocultural non-Anglo churches differed from multicultural churches across all core qualities except for vision, innovation and the secondary indicator for service (participation in community service/justice/welfare activities). Where the cultural types differed, the monocultural non-Anglo churches performed better than multicultural churches, except for informal helping and participation in the church's outreach/evangelistic activities.

Monocultural Anglo churches and multicultural churches differed on most of the core qualities – worship, leadership, innovation, service, faith sharing and inclusion. Multicultural churches performed better in most of these areas, except for service and participating in the evangelistic/outreach activities of their church where Anglo churches performed better. The two cultural types did not differ on faith, belonging or vision.

The differences in vitality indicators were statistically the strongest for inclusion, faith sharing, service and

worship. The differences for belonging and leadership were only marginal, and the differences for faith and innovation were moderate.

**Figure 2: Core quality indicators for cultural types**



Source: 2011 NCLS Aggregated Attender Survey dataset (n=2,814 churches).

These results indicate that monocultural non-Anglo churches are particularly strong on worship (46% of

attenders always experienced inspiration in worship, compared with 28% of attenders at Anglo churches and 35% of attenders at multicultural churches), faith-sharing (e.g. 52% of attenders had invited someone to church in the last year, compared with 35% and 37% of attenders at Anglo and multicultural churches respectively) and inclusion (24% of attenders said they would certainly follow up a drifter from church, compared with 9% and 13% of attenders at Anglo and multicultural churches respectively). Monocultural Anglo churches are particularly strong on service (31% of attenders took part regularly in the service activities of their church, compared with 25% of attenders at non-Anglo churches and 24% of attenders at multicultural churches).

Previous research by NCLS has shown that the vitality indicators tend to be higher for churches with an evangelical or charismatic orientation<sup>30</sup>. These factors may account for some of the differences seen in vitality between the three cultural types. Might the relative strength of monocultural non-Anglo churches simply be due to them being of a stronger evangelical persuasion than the other types of churches, rather than them being non-Anglo churches as such? In the 2011 NCLS dataset, typically almost half of the attenders at non-Anglo churches identified with evangelical/reformed approaches to faith, compared with around a quarter of attenders at churches of the other two cultural types.

It is also feasible that the location of a church (e.g. whether it is in a city, a regional centre, or a rural area) may have an impact on its health. Might some of the differences between the cultural types be due to a greater tendency for monocultural Anglo churches to be in rural areas (40% of Anglo churches, compared with 17% of non-Anglo churches and 11% of multicultural churches)?

Unfortunately, there were too few non-Anglo churches outside of the city to test for the effect of location on the health of this cultural type. However, it was possible to take into account the theological tradition of the church. Controlling for theological tradition (the proportion of attenders in the church who identified with evangelical/reformed or charismatic/pentecostal approaches to faith) resulted in the difference between the non-Anglo churches and the two other cultural types

<sup>30</sup> Powell et al (2012).



on the belonging indicator becoming no longer significant, as well as the difference between non-Anglo and multicultural churches on leadership. The difference between multicultural and mono-cultural Anglo churches on inviting people to church also became insignificant. Interestingly, when theological tradition was taken into account, non-Anglo churches were marginally lower on vision than Anglo churches. That is, for churches with similar proportions of attenders identifying as evangelical/reformed and charismatic/Pentecostal, monocultural non-Anglo churches had slightly lower scores on vision. For the rest of the core qualities, taking the theological tradition of the church into account did not greatly affect the results for the differences between the cultural types.

There were sufficient numbers of monocultural Anglo churches and multicultural churches to test for the effect of location on the results for these two cultural types. In the case of the leadership core quality indicator, the greater strength of multicultural churches was only observed in rural areas – not in regional or urban churches. The greater strength of monocultural Anglo churches on informal helping was only found in regional and urban areas – churches in rural areas had similar levels of informal helping reported, regardless of whether the church was monocultural or multicultural. The relationship between church cultural type and church health did not differ in between localities for any other core quality indicators.

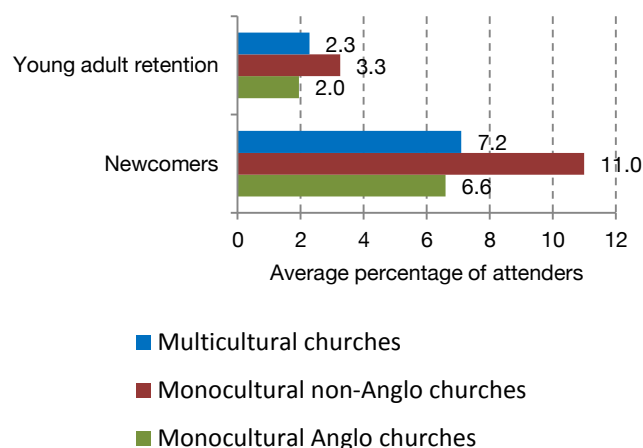
#### 4.2 Attendance by cultural type

The average percentages of the congregation who were newcomers to church life in the preceding 5 years, and who were aged 15-19 years (young adult retention), are given in Figure 3 for the two cultural types. Figure 4 shows the average percentages of the children of the attenders of a congregation (aged 15+ years and living at home) who attended church.

As shown in Figure 3, some 11% of monocultural non-Anglo attenders were not attending any church five years earlier. While migration may buoy this figure, it is possible that the relatively high prevalence of faith-sharing activities by these churches and by individual attenders are having an impact on the levels of newcomers. If this is the case, it may follow that if multicultural and monocultural Anglo churches made similar efforts, their churches might expect to boost their levels of newcomers (7% newcomers for both types of

churches). These results held when the theological tradition of the church and the locality (urban, regional, rural context) were taken into account.

**Figure 3: Newcomers and young adult retention for cultural types**



Source: 2011 NCLS Aggregated Attender Survey dataset (n=2,814 churches).

DeYmaz captures the perceptions of many when it comes to discussing first, second, and third generation issues in monocultural non-Anglo churches:

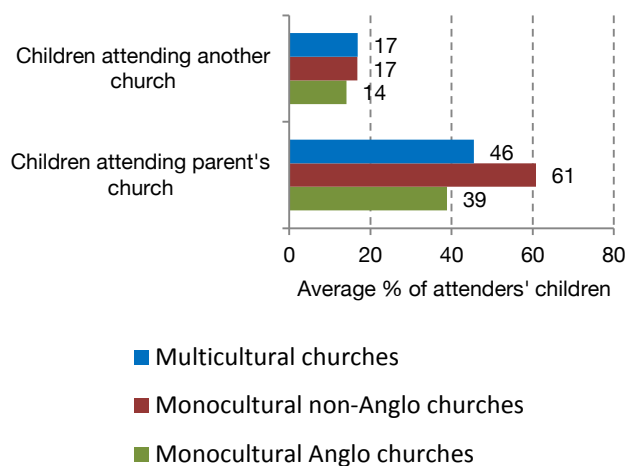
"...it has been my experience in discussing this very thing with ethnic pastors that virtually all agree (despite what they and their congregants might otherwise desire): 1.0s will have "two feet in" the ethnic-specific church; 2.0s will likely have "one foot in and one foot out;" and third generation offspring will in most cases have "two feet out"<sup>31</sup>.

While the average young adult retention figure is numerically higher for monocultural non-Anglo churches (3.3% of the congregation) than for the two other cultural types (2.0% and 2.3% for monocultural Anglo and multicultural churches respectively), the difference is not statistically significant. This is due to the higher variability in young adult retention among non-Anglo churches (approximately double the variance of Anglo churches, and triple the variance of multicultural churches). Instead of being clustered closely around the average, some monocultural non-Anglo churches are performing well in their retention of young adults,

<sup>31</sup> DeYmaz (2010).

while others are doing less well. These results held when theological tradition was taken into account.

**Figure 4: Attenders' children aged 15+ and living at home who are attending church**



Source: 2011 NCLS Aggregated Attender Survey dataset (n=2,814 churches).

Another measure of the effectiveness of transmission of the faith to the next generation is the proportion of attenders' children who are themselves attending church. Of attenders' children who are aged 15 years and over and are still living at home, an average 61% of them attended the church of their parent(s) in the case of non-Anglo churches (see Figure 4). This compares favourably with means of 39% and 46% for Anglo and multicultural churches respectively (although the difference between non-Anglo churches and multicultural churches was not statistically significant when the theological tradition of the church was taken into account). Non-Anglo churches performed no better but also no worse than the other cultural types in terms of the proportion of attenders' children who attended a different church than the church of their parent(s). The higher proportion of children attending church does not align with the outward drift DeYmaz writes of above, however it may indicate that there are cultural factors at play in these results such as a stronger impetus to meet parental expectations, or different ages when children break away from parental control in different cultures. Only 20% of those 15 years and over and still living at home were not attending any church in the case of monocultural non-Anglo churches, compared with 46% for Anglo churches and 37% for multicultural churches.

Multicultural churches performed a little better than Anglo churches on all three young adult retention/attendance measures, and these results remained statistically significant when theological tradition was taken into account. This pattern of results did not vary by locality (urban, regional or rural context).

## 5 Conclusion

Literature in the area of churches and multiculturalism records much debate over whether multicultural or monocultural models of church are preferred in a CALD context. NCLS research into vitality of three cultural types of churches affirms strengths and weaknesses in each approach, while recognizing that further research into monocultural non-Anglo churches would be beneficial, due to low participation of these churches in the NCLS.

No particular cultural type of church is a guarantee of health; as churches of all types pursue their ministries there will be individual churches that are more vital and those that are less vital. Nevertheless, although the theological approach of churches typically explained more of the variation in the vitality measures than the cultural type, cultural type was still an important factor in explaining church health for some vitality indicators.

Our initial research indicates some strengths of monocultural non-Anglo churches, particularly in the core quality areas of worship, faith sharing and inclusion. Non-Anglo churches are especially good at following up drifters and leading inspiring worship, and attenders at such churches are enthusiastic about talking about their faith. Non-Anglo churches also perform better than the other two cultural types in attracting newcomers to church. However the generally weaker connections with the surrounding community through service action is an issue that need to be addressed either within the monocultural model, or as it navigates transition to a different model. Non-Anglo churches also appear to perform better than the other cultural types in terms of children living at home aged 15+ who attend the church of their parents. However it is unclear how far into adulthood this pattern extends – it may be that children break away from parental expectations or control later in non-Anglo communities and that the results for retention of young adults converge across the cultural types as children grow older. Further research is needed to examine whether or not this is the case.

Monocultural Anglo churches excel in the core quality of service, but lag the multicultural model in several areas. DeYmaz and others interpret the biblical narrative as affirming multicultural churches, but the challenges of planting or transitioning to this model are significant. One question that arises is whether on church health grounds, monocultural Anglo churches should be encouraged towards greater cultural diversity. Taken by themselves, the results from the 2011 NCLS may be seen to provide only a qualified “yes” in response to this question. Multicultural churches are outperforming monocultural Anglo churches in four of the nine core quality areas (worship, leadership, innovation and inclusion), and in their retention of young adults. The situation for faith-sharing is mixed, with Anglo churches performing better than multicultural churches on participation in outreach/evangelistic activities, but worse on talking about faith. Only in the case of worship, looking for opportunities to talk about faith, service and inclusion does cultural type appear to play an important (as compared with minor) role in explaining the variation in church health among monocultural Anglo and multicultural churches.

Overall, the findings for the vitality of the three cultural types accord with both Yang’s and Naylor’s validation of all models and observation around effectiveness:

“Each of the four models will be affirmed as valid as long as they are relevant to their context and making an impact within their setting for the glory of God. At the same time many churches are seeking transition (or should be seeking transition) to another place along the [cultural] continuum and all churches need to constantly evaluate their current model in light of their changing context”<sup>32</sup>.

The way forward for all churches lies in values and attitudes that are marked by welcoming, integrating, and reaching out. These characteristics can be expressed within any model, whether monocultural, friendship, partnership, or integrated. A recognition of the strengths and areas for growth of each model, along with a church’s demographic context, and discernment of where God is taking the church on the next stage of its unfolding journey, will be important resources for

pastors, church leaders, and for all who equip pastors and churches to realise their full potential.

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<sup>32</sup> Naylor (2006, pp.1,6).

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## **7 About NCLS Research**

NCLS Research is a joint project of several denominational partners. Established in the early 1990s, it is a world leader in research focused on connecting churches and their communities. The most well-known project is the five-yearly National Church Life Survey.

## **8 About the National Church Life Survey**

The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a quantitative survey of 260,000-450,000 church attenders, 6,000-10,000 church leaders and 3,000-7,000 churches in more than 20 Australian denominations (Catholic, Anglican and Protestant denominations) every census year since 1991. The survey covers a wide range of areas of religious faith and practice and social concern. The NCLS includes three major survey types:

1. Attender Surveys (comprising a main survey variant and multiple small sample survey variants);
2. Several variants of a Leader Survey which is completed by local church leaders; and
3. An Operations Survey audit of local church activities.

Data used in this paper are not weighted to adjust for variations in participation levels across denominations and regions.

# Leadership

## Leadership

### **Profiling those who lead**

Psychological type profile of Protestant church leaders in Australia: Are clergymen and clergywomen different?

### **Sustainable leadership**

Thriving, surviving and burnout in church leaders

Spirituality and burnout amongst church leaders: Findings from the 2011 Australian National Church Life Survey

Workaholism and burnout in Australian church workers

Hours worked by Australian Church Workers

Spirituality and work engagement among church leaders

Spiritual foundations: Personal foundation 1

Clarity of purpose: Personal foundation 2

Sense of self: Personal foundation 3

Integration: Personal foundation 4

Supportive relationships: Personal foundation 5

Balance and boundaries: Personal foundation 6



# Profiling those who lead

## Psychological type profile of Protestant church leaders in Australia: Are clergymen and clergywomen different?

### **Abstract**

A sample of 120 clergywomen and 436 clergymen from Protestant demonstrations in Australia participated in the 2011 National Church Life Survey completing form LS2 that included the Francis Psychological Type Scales (FPTS), an operationalization of psychological type theory. The type profiles of the clergymen and clergywomen are compared, and demonstrate only one difference, clergywomen are significantly more likely to report a feeling preference than the clergymen but the difference is not strong at  $p < .05$ . The type profiles of the clergy are compared to the Australian population norms. The implications of these findings for the ministry and mission of the Protestant church in Australia are discussed.

### **Citation**

Robbins, M., & Powell, R. (2015). Psychological type profile of Protestant church leaders in Australia: Are clergymen and clergywomen different? *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 18(7):576-585, DOI: 10.1080/13674676.2014.963997

### **Availability**

Visit the journal website: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13674676.2014.963997>

# Sustainable leadership

## Thriving, Surviving and Burnout in Church Leaders

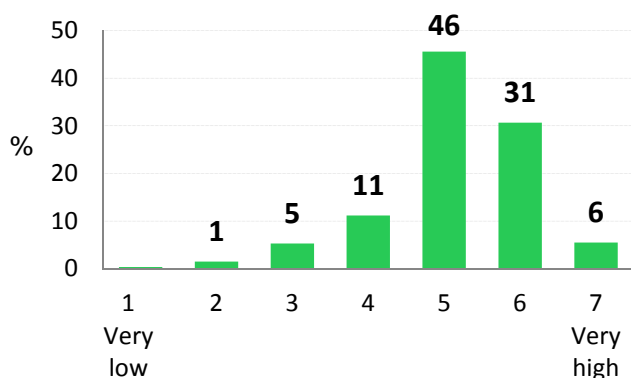
### The Highs and Lows of Church Ministry

Those in Christian ministry can experience high levels of personal satisfaction in their work, and a great sense of effectiveness. It can be intensely rewarding, with a sense that their ministry is making a positive difference. In the 2011 National Church Life Survey Leader Survey the responses of over 2,000 senior church leaders showed that a vast majority rated their overall effectiveness highly.

Responses are shown in figure 1 to the following question, for senior church leaders in Australian churches:

*"How would you rate your overall effectiveness in your present role here over the last few months?"*

**Figure 1: Personal rating of effectiveness**

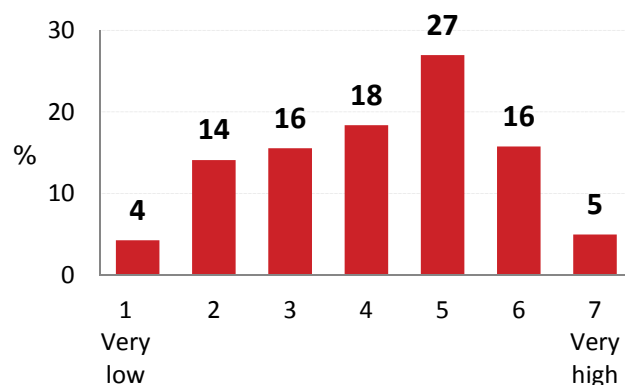


Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=2,272, weighted).

At the same time, church ministry can have significant challenges. Unlike in many vocations, a church leader's role and the expectations of those around them are often not clearly defined, they may have little or no control over the desired outcomes as expressed by those who employ them, and their personal life is continually under scrutiny as a model to others. Some of the challenges are met with a positive response, galvanising a leader to action, while others are a negative source of stress that the leader must deal with to continue effectively in ministry. Figure 2 shows the responses of senior leaders to the question:

*"How stressed do you feel in your present role here over the last few months?"*

**Figure 2: Personal rating of stress**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=2,270, weighted).

Levels of stress are more evenly spread, but with the majority indicating levels up the higher end of this subjective scale. Rather than 'feeling stressed' or 'feeling effective', many church leaders are experiencing a high level of effectiveness and high stress *at the same time*.

### Defining Thriving and Burnout

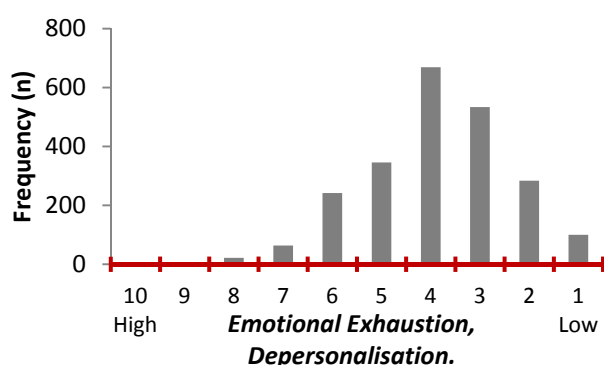
Stress can sometimes be constructive because of the response it elicits - people can rise to a challenge. However *chronic stress*, will eventually take a toll, and lead one towards burnout. The balance of the positives and negatives of ministry, combined with the personal vulnerabilities and strengths of the leader will determine

whether they are thriving, merely surviving, or burning out. While the causes and pathways towards or away from burnout are complex, there is widespread agreement that burnout itself is a



combination of 'emotional exhaustion' with typical distancing and coping behaviours (often referred to as 'depersonalisation'), and a low sense of personal achievement and work satisfaction. NCLS Research helped develop a pair of scales to examine these negative and positive phenomena in church leaders. The 'Scale for Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry' (SEEM) is eleven questions related to emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation. The results for senior ministers across Australia are shown below in Figure 3, with low exhaustion to the right.

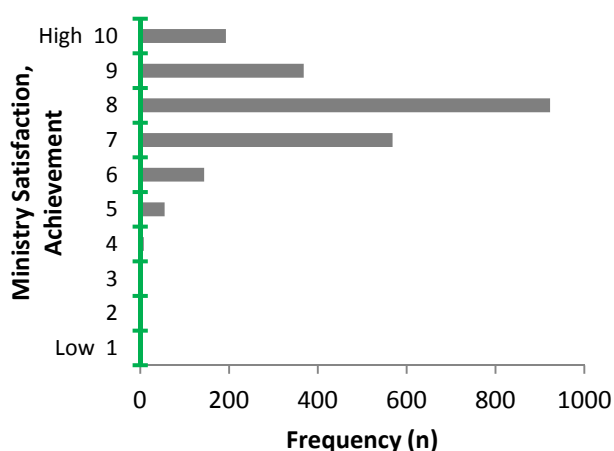
**Figure 3: Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalisation (from SEEM Scale)**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=2,266, unweighted).

The 'Satisfaction in Ministry Scale' (SIMS) is eleven questions related to personal achievement and satisfaction in the role. Figure 4 shows the results for senior ministers in Australia on this scale, with high satisfaction towards the top.

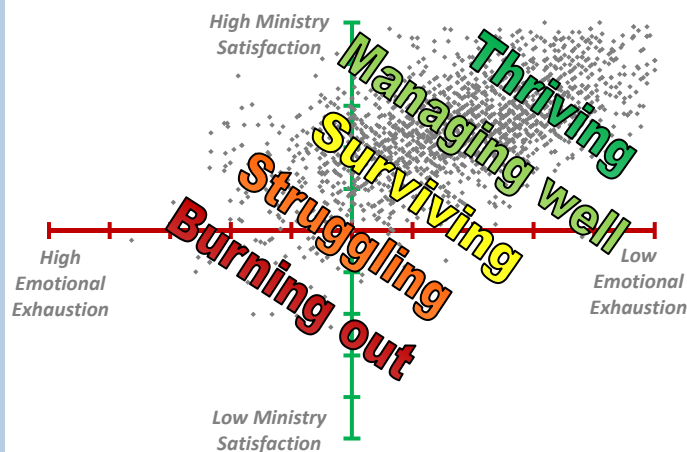
**Figure 4: Ministry Satisfaction and Achievement (from SIMS scale)**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=2,266, unweighted).

To be *high on emotional exhaustion and low on satisfaction/achievement* is to be in danger of burnout. The converse (low exhaustion, high satisfaction/achievement) is to be *thriving* in the role. Figure 5 below shows both scales combined and where these outcomes are located.

**Figure 5: Exhaustion/Depersonalisation combined with Satisfaction/Achievement**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=2,266, unweighted).

Examining where one is on the spectrum from burnout to thriving is an issue for all in church leadership - not just senior ministers. Most leaders in Australian churches are in the range of 'Managing well' to 'Thriving'. However, a large number are below this, with some in danger or in the process of burning out.

### Moving beyond surviving to thriving

Denominational leaders ought to consider what the positions of all their church leaders might be, what the main sources of stress and encouragement are, and whether systemic or training issues could be playing a role in the vulnerability or strength of ministers in their movement. The NCLS Personal Foundations of Sustainable Leadership offer a framework for personal development and resilience of those in church leadership.

### Data sources

Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Leader Survey. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

### Citation

Sterland, S. (2014) Thriving, Surviving and Burnout in Church Leaders, Factsheet 1.14001. Sydney: NCLS Research.

## Spirituality and burnout amongst church leaders: Findings from the 2011 Australian National Church Life Survey

### Abstract

Burnout is a serious problem for many church leaders because of its relationship with job dissatisfaction, turnover intentions, poorer physical and mental health, and relationship difficulties. Previous research amongst clergy has considered work-related and personal antecedents of burnout. Key work-related antecedents include the opened nature of church ministry, characterized by extensive interpersonal interaction, heavy workload and low personal support. Key personal antecedents include age, gender, marital status and level of education. However, very little work has investigated spiritual antecedents of burnout amongst church leaders, despite the spiritual motivation of clergy, the spiritual nature of church work, and the spiritual outcomes of church ministry. This chapter considers two core spiritual resources of clergy as potential protective mechanisms against burnout. The first is an internal orientation to church ministry as a positive response to the secularization of modern society. Under conditions of secularization church leaders are less able to receive legitimation through their position in society or from the support of their congregation. Having an internal, rather than an external, orientation to ministry involves a sense of autonomy, satisfaction with spiritual practices, and a sense of competence in ministry skills. Internal orientation to ministry, then, is hypothesized to be negatively associated with clergy burnout because it compensates for stressful work-related consequences of secularisation. The second spiritual resource is a secure attachment relationship with God. Security of attachment to God provides a relatively stable and positive cognitive-affective foundation for healthy religious coping, spiritual practices and engagement with the world. Data from the 2011 National Church Life Survey (Australia), collected from local church leaders, were used to test the hypotheses that having a secure attachment to God, and an internal orientation to ministry, would both be associated with lower burnout and higher satisfaction in ministry, and that orientation to ministry would mediate the relationship between attachment to God and burnout. The hypotheses were tested using Structural Equation Modelling and were confirmed. Theoretical implications of these findings are discussed, as well as directions for future research and applications to the formation and resourcing of church leaders.

### Citation

Miner Bridges, M., Sterland, S., Dowson, M., & Powell, R. (2013). Spirituality and burnout amongst church leaders: Findings from the 2011 Australian National Church Life Survey. In B.R. Doolittle (Ed.), *Psychology of burnout: New Research* (pp.157-178). Hauppauge, New York: Nova Science Publishers.

### Availability

Visit the publisher's website: [www.novapublishers.com](http://www.novapublishers.com)



## Workaholism and burnout in Australian church workers

### Abstract

Workaholism considered as work addiction and its relationship to burnout is examined in a sample of ministers and other workers in Australian churches. This group has received little attention in workaholism studies though their work context contains factors which could cause them to have greater risks and not to place limits on their work. Results showed that overwork and poor boundaries are the norm, but suggested an incidence of workaholism towards the lower end of the spectrum with professions in the health, social work and education sectors. Current questions on working excessively may not be adequate to assess these sectors. Working excessively was not related to the negative aspects of burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation) and was positively related to the positive aspects (personal achievement and satisfaction with ministry), suggesting that, for church workers, working excessively is not in itself a threat to their well-being. Working compulsively, the other component of workaholism, was associated with higher emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation, and lower personal achievement and satisfaction with ministry. Therefore it is the working compulsively component of workaholism that appears to lead to outcomes of lower well-being in church workers. Feeling guilty when not working and pushing oneself to work hard even when it's not enjoyable are compulsive work dynamics that could risk burnout by ignoring the warning signs of fatigue when they appear.

### Citation

Sterland, S. (2015). Workaholism and Burnout in Australian Church Workers. *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, (Vol 26, pp. 250-265). Brill. DOI: 10.1163/9789004299436\_017.

### Availability

Visit the publisher's website: <http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/books/b9789004299436s017>

## Hours Worked by Australian Church Workers

### Introduction

This Fact Sheet looks at issues related to the number of hours worked by workers in Australian churches. Such workers may be senior ministers, assistant ministers, youth and children's workers or others with a specialised ministry focus, as well as those who work in an administration role.

Many church workers work beyond their expected number of hours in the role outlined for them. This may represent an area of concern for church leaders, particularly if such practices are unsustainable and staff do not stay in their role as a result. There may be numerous pressures on church workers to work beyond their expected hours, such as being one of relatively few staff in an organisation where many non-staff give their time voluntarily, and there being more tasks than time available in allotted hours. Boundary issues may also play a role; where workers are involved in multiple aspects of church life they may work beyond their normal role description because of their staff status.

The 2011 National Church Life Survey included the following two questions in the Leader Survey (available to be filled out by any staff and volunteers who contribute significantly to the life of the church).

*Approximately how many hours in a typical week do you spend in congregational/parish ministry?*

*How many hours a week are you expected to/employed to spend in congregational/parish ministry?*

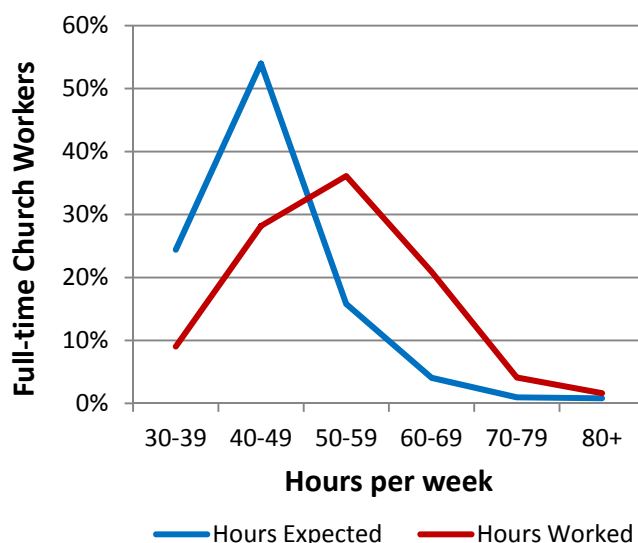
 

### Full-time workers

Of those who responded to the survey, church workers who indicated they were expected to/employed to spend over 30 hours in ministry were examined, to capture all those who were close to 'full-time' in their ministry. Figure 1 shows the percentage of this group by how many hours they are expected to/employed to

work, as well as how many hours they estimate they do actually work.

**Figure 1: Hours expected and worked by full-time church workers**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey, full-time church workers (Expected hours >30 per week, n=2,090, unweighted).

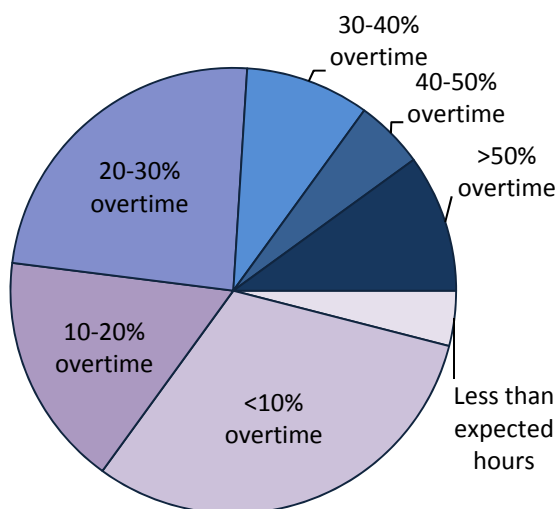
The above figure shows that in general, church workers work more hours than they are expected. For example in the 50-59 hours per week category, there are more than twice as many workers (36%) who work these hours than are expected to (16%), and in the 60-69 hours a week category there are more than 5 times (21% compared to 4%).

Two things are striking about these results: first, there are a considerable number of workers who believe they are expected to work over 50 hours a week (22% in this sample, which includes 4% over 60 hours and 2% over 70 hours). It may be that workers have reached this conclusion based on the number of different tasks they undertake and what they understand to be required, perhaps in lieu of a clear job description. Second, it is striking that so many workers work more hours than they believe they are expected to.

## Overtime is the norm

The percentage of extra hours worked for each worker can be calculated by dividing the number of hours actually worked by the number of expected hours. This shows that the phenomenon of working extra hours of overtime is not just restricted to a small number of church workers. As Figure 2 shows, only a small percentage of full-time workers (4%) work less than their expected hours, by their own estimation. The norm is to work about 19% more hours than expected<sup>1</sup>.

**Figure 2: Amount of overtime by full-time church workers**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey, full-time church workers (Expected hours >30 per week, n=2,090, unweighted).

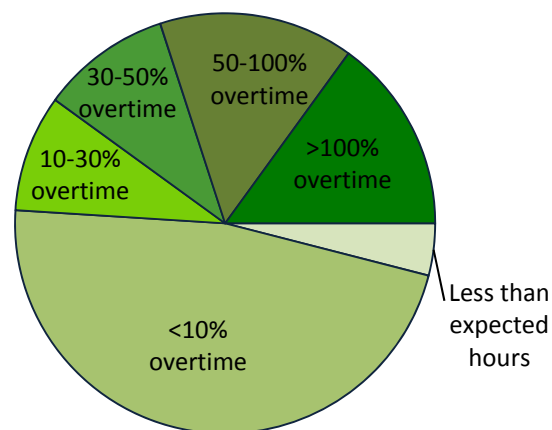
At the high end, 1 in 10 full-time church workers work more than 50% beyond their expected hours, and overall about a quarter work more than 30% beyond.

## Part-time workers

The distribution for part-time church workers shows that some are even more prone to working hours beyond their expected amount than full-time workers are. Church workers who indicated they were expected to work more than 2 hours and less than 16 hours a week were selected as a comparison to full-time workers. From this group, 3 in 10 worked more than 50% beyond their expected hours (three times the rate of full-time

workers) and 15% of them worked more than double their expected hours.

**Figure 3: Amount of overtime by part-time church workers**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey, part-time church workers (Expected hours 2-16 per week, n=1,435, unweighted).

Some church workers who are working well-beyond their expected hours may be in an unsustainable position and consider leaving. While many work extra hours because they consider the work important and experience greater satisfaction in ministry when putting in the extra time, where there is not sufficient recognition of this effort, churches risk losing their most dedicated workers. Becoming disillusioned is a strong theme among those who experience burnout, while workers who are appreciated and rewarded are more likely to thrive in ministry. This is an area where church leadership can make a difference to their workers' welfare.



## Data sources

Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Leader Survey. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

## Citation

Sterland, S. (2015) Hours worked by Australian Church Workers, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 15003. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.

<sup>1</sup> Both the mean (average) and the median (50<sup>th</sup> percentile) for full-time church workers were 19%.

## Spirituality and work engagement among church leaders

### Abstract

Much research attention has been given to the mental health problems of church leaders, but relatively few studies have investigated positive indicators of clergy mental health at work, such as work engagement. This paper examines spiritual resources and job resources as key antecedents of work engagement. In contrast, job demands were examined as a moderator of the relationship between resources and work engagement. Hypotheses were framed within the motivational process of the Job Demands-Resources model, and tested using data from 1230 church leaders who completed the 2011 National Church Life Survey in Australia. Results of structural equation modelling analyses supported hypothesised positive relationships between resources and work engagement but, contrary to expectations, job demands did not amplify the positive relationship between spiritual resources and work engagement. Findings are discussed in the light of recent empirical studies of church leaders and the conservation of resources theory.

### Citation

Miner, B., Bickerton, G., Dowson, M. & Sterland, S. (2015). Spirituality and work engagement among church leaders. *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 18(1):57-71, DOI: 10.1080/13674676.2014.1003168.

### Availability

Visit the publisher's website: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13674676.2014.1003168>



## Spiritual Foundations

### Personal Foundation 1 of Sustainable Leadership

#### Introduction

This fact sheet examines the importance of a Christian leader's spiritual foundations and the relationship with sustainable leadership. Leader Survey results from the 2011 National Church Life Survey (senior leaders) show that those with strong spiritual foundations are more likely to be thriving in ministry rather than burning out. NCLS Research has conducted extensive research into sustainable leadership - avoiding burnout and moving from surviving to thriving in ministry.



Most church leaders face many challenges in ministry and also experience many encouragements. Numerous factors need to be taken into account to understand why some leaders struggle while

others manage well. Some factors may be difficult or even impossible to change. Spiritual Foundations is one area where change can occur - where a leader can examine their own identity, priorities, practices, and relationships to consider what could be different and how positive results could flow.

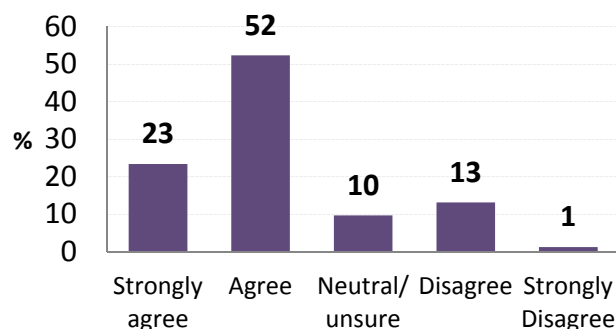
#### What are spiritual foundations?

Your spiritual foundations remind you of your identity and dependence on God and your place in the world. Active ongoing spiritual formation and a deepening relationship with God is a necessary resource upon which Christian leaders draw. NCLS Research has identified several questions that give a consistent picture of the priority that leaders give to their own spiritual formation and the impact they feel it has had upon them. In addition, these questions have been demonstrated to correlate positively with a sense of satisfaction and achievement in ministry, and negatively

with emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation - the main features of burnout. Figures 1 and 2 show the responses of almost two thousand senior church leaders to two of these key questions.

*"Most days I spend time alone in private devotional activities (prayer, Bible reading) "*

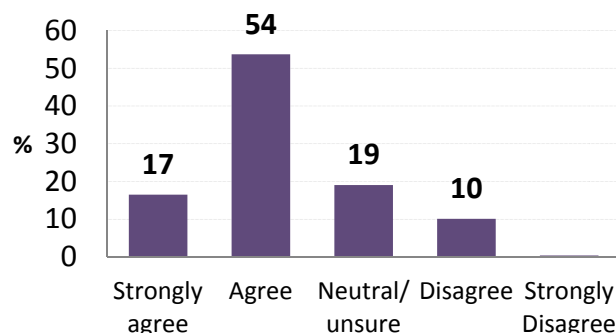
**Figure 1: Regular private devotions**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=1,869, weighted).

*"The quality of my spiritual practice has improved over my time in ministry "*

**Figure 2: Spiritual practice improved over time**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=1,872, weighted).

The results show that most senior leaders express a positive opinion about their own private devotional life.



Such leaders are more likely to be thriving in their ministry - less emotionally exhausted and more satisfied with their work and having a sense of achievement in it.

## Factors that help or hinder spiritual foundations

A number of questions used for this foundation are negatively worded, so that agreement signals a sense of struggle or dissatisfaction in this area. These questions were:

*"During **busy times** my personal time with God is often the first thing to go"*

*"Most of my personal time with God is **preparing sermons** or other material for church"*

*"I am frustrated with the **lack of effect** my private spiritual practices have in the rest of my life"*

The percentage of leaders who agreed or strongly agreed with these questions is shown below in table 1.

**Table 1: Leaders agreeing they struggle to maintain spiritual foundations**

	'Busy times'	'Preparing sermons'	'Lack of effect'
<b>All Leaders</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>11</b>
	%	%	%
Senior Ministers	41	41	11
Assistant Ministers	45	34	10
Lay Leaders	46	16	11
<b>Risk Factors</b>			
Work over 50hrs a week	44	41	10
Feel highly stressed in role	49	42	14
No theological training	47	20	13
In ministry 3-6 years	51	44	13
<b>Positive Factors</b>			
Meets with ministry team for support	40	34	9
Meets with supervisor or mentor	38	32	8
Participated in retreats, spiritual formation	39	34	8

Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey (n=2,119, unweighted).

\*Respondents not working 'full-time' (>30 hrs per week) are excluded.

Well over a third of leaders agreed with the first two questions above, while over ten percent agreed that they are frustrated with the lack of effect their spiritual practices have in their own life. Church leaders in this position may well have weaker spiritual foundations,

and this could affect their ability to perform their role well, and to survive well in their ministry.

In addition, table 1 shows that high working hours, feeling stressed in the role, and having no theological training are potentially factors that heighten the risk somewhat. Those that had been 'in the accredited ministry' 3-6 years in particular showed a peak in these questions, suggesting a group to give special attention and support to.

There were also a number of factors identified that appear to be positive, in that such leaders indicate lower levels of struggling and frustration. Those who belong to a ministry team that meets together for support had lower levels on these questions. Those who met regularly with a pastoral or professional supervisor or mentor and those who participated in retreats or spiritual formation groups were also lower on agreeing with these struggle-oriented questions.

## Spiritual foundations and thriving

The spiritual foundations of a church leader are an important part of thriving in the role, whether a full-time senior minister of a team or a part-time lay position. The spiritual foundations of leaders no doubt involves concepts that are rich and complex. The questions covered in this paper, while not capturing that full complexity, indicate Australian ministers having a varied experience spiritually. While most are feeling positive, there is a group expressing struggle, and there are factors that give some insights into factors positively or negatively related to a church leader's spiritual walk.

NCLS Research has found this foundation to be positively related to thriving in ministry: associated with lower emotional exhaustion and typical distancing and coping behaviours that go with it (often referred to as 'depersonalisation'), and with higher satisfaction in ministry and sense of achievement. Spiritual foundations are important not only in long-term survival but in fulfilling the role effectively and with joy.

## Data sources

Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Leader Survey. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

## Citation

Sterland, S. (2014) Spiritual Foundations: Personal Foundation 1, Factsheet 1.14002. Sydney: NCLS Research,.





## Clarity of Purpose

# Personal Foundation 2 of Sustainable Leadership

### Introduction

This fact sheet examines the importance of a 'clarity of purpose' for the Christian leader and the relationship with sustainable leadership. Leader Survey results from the National Church Life Survey in 2011 and earlier years show that those with a strong clarity of purpose are more likely to be thriving in ministry rather than burning out.

NCLS Research has conducted extensive research into sustainable leadership - avoiding burnout and moving from surviving to thriving in ministry. Most church

leaders face many challenges in ministry and also experience many encouragements. Numerous factors need to be taken into account to understand why some leaders struggle while others manage

well. Some factors may be difficult or even impossible to change. Clarity of purpose is one area where change can occur - where a leader can examine their own identity, priorities, practices, and relationships to consider what could be different and how positive results could flow.

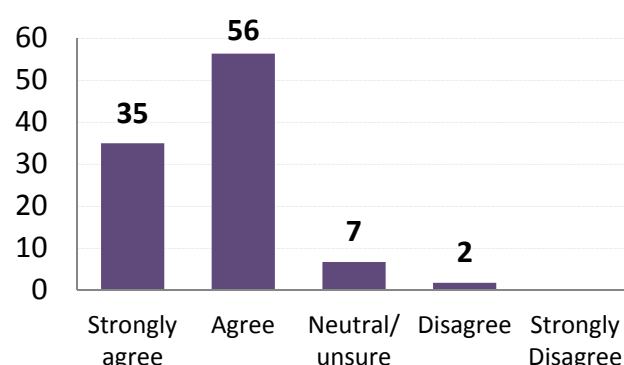
### What is clarity of purpose?

A personal sense of purpose, or calling in ministry is an important foundation that most leaders share. It can act as a reference point, an internal compass to help stay on course and persevere. As such, it is associated with lower burnout in church leaders. NCLS Research have identified several questions that relate to a leader's personal sense of purpose and call, and these questions correlate positively with a sense of satisfaction and achievement in ministry, and negatively with emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation - the main features of burnout. Figures 1 and 2 show the

responses of almost two thousand senior church leaders to two of these key questions.

*" My life has a strong sense of purpose "*

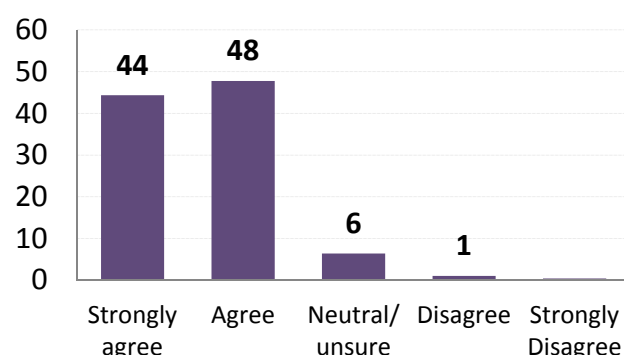
**Figure 1: Life has a strong sense of purpose**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders ( n=1,875, weighted).

*" I have a strong calling on my life "*

**Figure 2: Strong calling on life**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=1,871, weighted).

The results show that almost all senior leaders (over 90%) express a strong sense of call and purpose for their life. Such leaders are more likely to be thriving in their ministry - less emotionally exhausted and more satisfied with their work and having a sense of achievement in it.

It's clear that having a strong sense of purpose and call is the norm for most senior ministers, and this is also true for assistant ministers. Lay leaders however (whether a principal leader of a church or team members) do not have quite as strong levels. Table 1 shows using the following questions that lay leaders do not tend to be as strong in this area.

" I know what the **purpose** is for my life "

" I am very **intentional** about how I live out what matters to me "

**Table 1: Comparison of leaders for Clarity of Purpose**

	'Purpose'	'Intentional'
<b>All Leaders</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>76</b>
	%	%
Senior Ministers	91	76
Assistant Ministers	90	77
Lay Leaders	81	73

Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey ( n=2,119, unweighted).

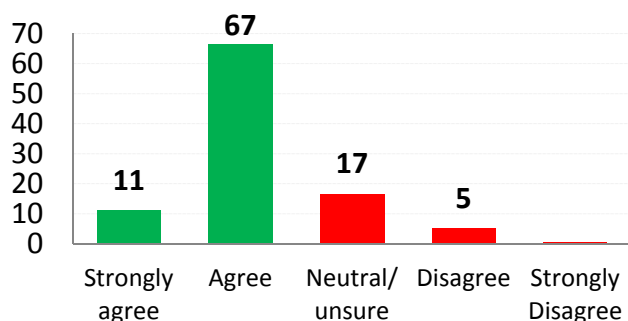
\*Respondents not working 'full-time' (>30 hrs per week) are excluded.

Similarly it was found that leaders with no theological training were significantly lower in agreeing with these questions. It should be borne in mind therefore that such leaders may be more vulnerable in testing times or less likely to stay in leadership.

## The importance of Clarity of Purpose

Whilst being strong in this area is common for leaders, its importance is illustrated by the differences in those who do not have this quality as strongly.

**Figure 3: Intentional about living out what matters**

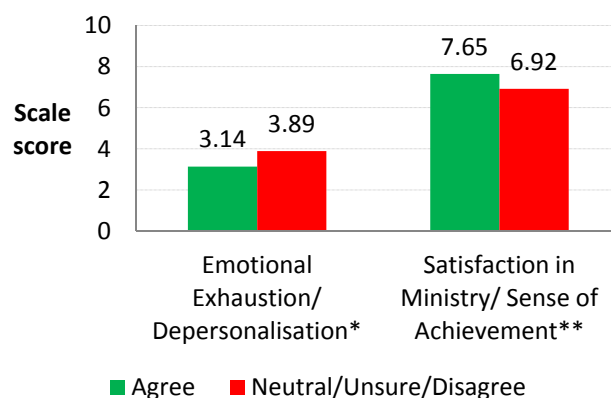


Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=1,866, weighted).

The question "I am very intentional about how I live out what matters to me" has a similar pattern to the earlier

questions as shown in figure 3, where those who agree are shown in green and those who are neutral, unsure, or disagree are shown in red. Figure 4 shows that the green group are significantly higher in a positive outcome (Satisfaction in Ministry and Sense of Achievement), and significantly lower in a negative outcome (Emotional Exhaustion/Depersonalisation).

**Figure 4: Intentional living - significant differences in positive and negative outcomes**



\*Scale for Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry (SEEM). Groups are significantly different (p < .001)

\*\*Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (SIMS). Groups are significantly different (p < .001)

Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=1,866, unweighted).

The same differences are evident when the other questions from this personal foundation are profiled in the same way. In other words, having a strong clarity of purpose is associated with thriving in ministry. This means having a higher satisfaction and sense of achievement in the role, and also being lower in emotional exhaustion and its typical distancing and coping behaviour (depersonalisation). Church leaders generally have a high clarity purpose, which NCLS believes functions as a resilience factor in the face of the challenges and demands of ministry. Where this quality is threatened, leaders may well be more vulnerable to burnout and less likely to thrive.

## Data sources

Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Leader Survey. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

## Citation

Sterland, S. (2014) : Clarity of Purpose: Personal Foundation 2, Factsheet 1.14003. Sydney: NCLS Research.



## Sense of Self

# Personal Foundation 3 of Sustainable Leadership

### Introduction

This fact sheet examines the importance of a Christian leader's 'sense of self' and the relationship with sustainable leadership. This is the third of six Personal Foundations of Sustainable Leadership outlined by NCLS Research. The first 3 can be grouped under the heading 'Who we are' - qualities that are close to our very identity. Results from the 2011 National Church Life Survey (NCLS) for church leaders who completed the Leader Survey show that those with a strong sense of self are more likely to be thriving in ministry rather than burning out.

NCLS Research has conducted extensive research into sustainable leadership - avoiding burnout and moving from surviving to thriving in ministry. Most church

leaders face many challenges in ministry and also experience many encouragements. Numerous factors need to be taken into account to understand why some leaders struggle while others manage



well. Some factors may be difficult or even impossible to change. The Personal Foundations are areas where change can occur - where a leader can examine their own identity, priorities, practices, and relationships and consider what could be different and how positive results could flow.

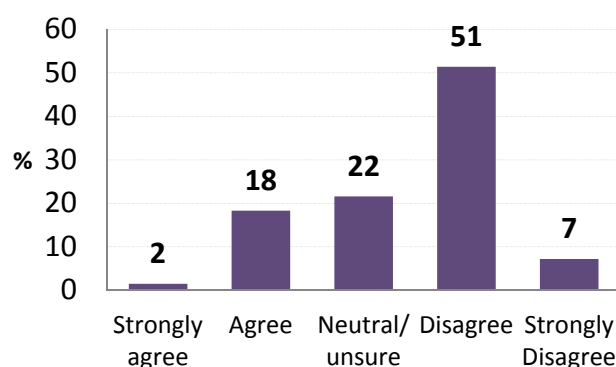
### What is a sense of self?

A strong sense of self means maintaining a sense of identity separate from the influences of ministry work and relationships. It is having the personal autonomy to not be overly dependent on the affirmation of others or the authority of the position. It is not about 'not caring' or being arrogant, but being separate enough from

ministry in one's identity. This can be subtle to identify, and is a question of degree, as a level of personal investment in one's ministry is natural and right. Figures 1 and 2 show the responses of almost two thousand senior church leaders to two key questions in this area.

*"Without encouragement from others I find it really hard to keep going"*

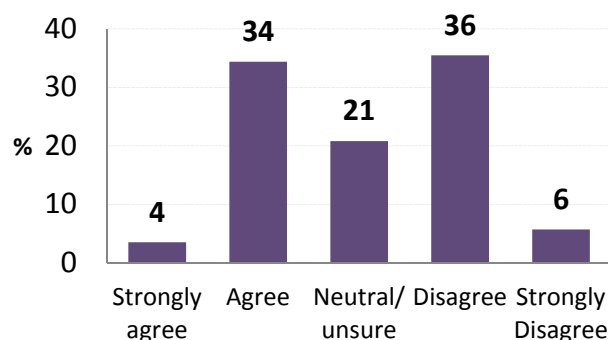
**Figure 1: Find it hard to keep going without encouragement**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=1,866, weighted).

*"If people criticise the church I tend to take it personally"*

**Figure 2: Take criticism of the church personally**

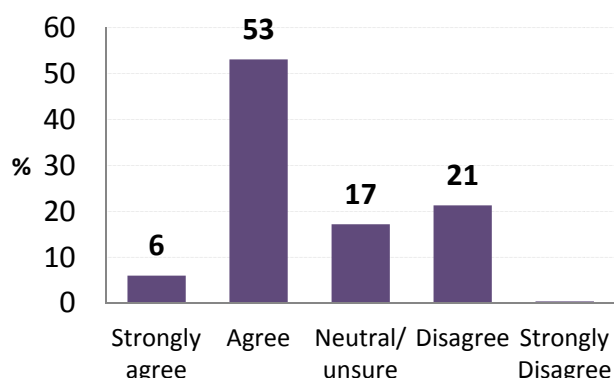


Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=1,868, weighted).

Most senior leaders affirm that they can keep going without encouragement from others (Fig. 1), but a very even picture is evident in those who say they take criticism of the church personally, and those who say they do not (Fig. 2). That ministers are personally invested in their churches is evidenced in Figure 3, which show the majority agreed with the statement:

*"If I know there's unrest at church I don't feel much peace personally either"*

**Figure 3: Don't feel peaceful if there's unrest at church**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=1,869, weighted).

The results highlight the subtle nature of a sense of self. A high level of personal identification with church is natural, yet NCLS have found that over-identification correlates with emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation - the main features of burnout, and has an inverse relationship with satisfaction and a sense of achievement in ministry.

### Factors related to sense of self

This may be the personal foundation where change is the most difficult, perhaps because over-identification with ministry is an unconscious process for many, and therefore difficult to reverse. If one feels a sense of responsibility or burden for the success of the church, it's understandable that a 'need' for it to flourish, and to receive encouragement to that effect, is easily taken on. NCLS Research has found that those who are more prone to over-identification are:

- solo ministers
- senior ministers
- those who work long hours

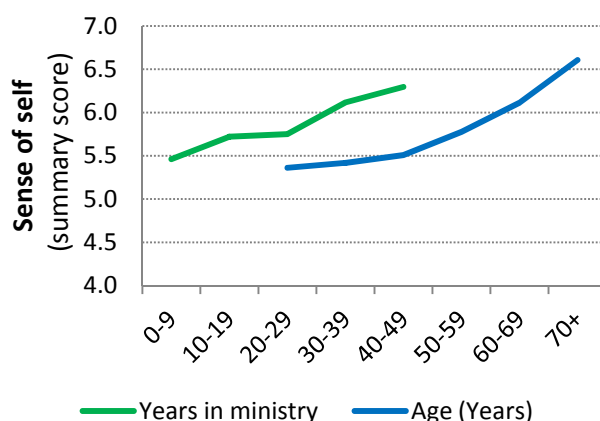
Leaders in these categories have a higher risk of over-identification, perhaps because of a higher sense of responsibility they feel.

Leaders who tend to have a stronger sense of self are:

- lay leaders
- those who are less stressed in their role
- those who feel supported by their team
- those who are older or have more experience

This last point is striking when observed graphically (see Fig. 4). A summary score for Sense of Self was

**Figure 4: Sense of Self across age and experience**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey respondents working >30 hrs per week (n=2,109 unweighted).

calculated by combining 5 similar questions on the topic (including the 3 shown in this paper). Ministers with more years of experience tend to have a higher sense of self score, as do older ministers. This suggests not only that change is possible, but probable as a leader matures both in age and experience.

### Sense of self and thriving

A strong sense of self can mean a healthy personal investment in church life without over-identifying church success with personal success as a leader. It means having a buffer zone in one's identity, so that when challenging times come the leader is not as vulnerable to burnout. Because this is caught up with identity so strongly, over-identifying can be an unconscious and potentially entrenched action. Change may require deep self examination - one's history, personality and leadership experiences may all play a part.

### Data sources

Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Leader Survey. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

### Citation

Sterland, S. (2014) Sense of Self: Personal Foundation 3, Factsheet 1.14004. Sydney: NCLS Research.



## Integration

# Personal Foundation 4 of Sustainable Leadership

### Introduction

This fact sheet looks at the issue of personal 'integration' in the life of the Christian leader and its relationship with sustainable leadership. This is the fourth of six Personal Foundations of Sustainable Leadership outlined by NCLS Research. The second 3 can be grouped under the heading 'How we live' - qualities that reflect our current situation as well as our priorities and choices within it. Leader Survey results from the 2011 National Church Life Survey (senior leaders) show that those strong in this area are more likely to be thriving in ministry rather than burning out. NCLS Research has conducted extensive research into sustainable leadership - avoiding burnout and moving from surviving to thriving in ministry. Most church

leaders face many challenges in ministry and also experience many encouragements. Numerous factors need to be taken into account to understand why some leaders struggle while others manage



well. Some factors may be difficult or even impossible to change. Integration is one area where change can occur - where a leader can examine their own identity, priorities, practices, and relationships and consider what could be different and how positive results could flow.

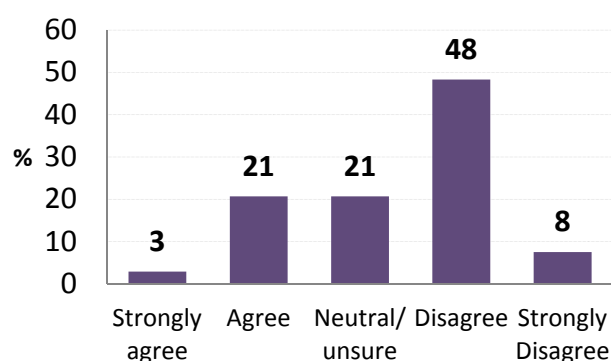
### What is integration?

Literature on work engagement and burnout has identified 'person-job fit' as a key area to consider. In the context of church ministry, leaders need to consider their own giftings, passions and experience and how they can most effectively serve in a role. Key questions

related to this area from the NCLS Leaders Survey are shown below.

*" There is a marked gap between my aspirations and what I actually do "*

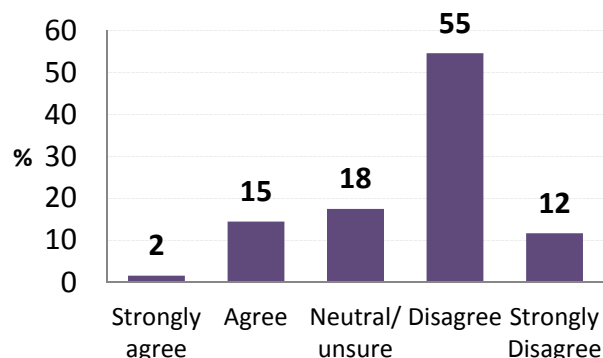
**Figure 1: Gap between aspirations and actions**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=1,863, weighted).

*" Much of my life seems to be spent on things that do not reflect what really matters to me "*

**Figure 2: Much of life spent on things that do not reflect what really matters**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=1,871, weighted).

Furthermore, church leaders would rarely have a dispassionate skill-oriented view towards their ministry. Rather, having a good sense of fit between aspirations



and role is often a question of personal authenticity or integrity. It means one feels they can live out their role, and be a genuine model to others. The term 'integration' is intended to reflect this. The results above show that while most senior church leaders express a reasonable fit between their aspirations, priorities and what they actually spend time on, there is a significant number who agree with these negatively worded questions.

### Areas of mismatch in ministry

Leaders completing the 2011 NCLS Leader Survey were presented with a list of roles and asked to indicate which 'should be' their main roles, and which they 'actually carry out'. They were restricted to choosing 3 from the list both times. Table 1 shows the percentage of senior leaders who indicated each role, in descending order by what they believe they 'should be' doing.

**Table 1: Leaders preferred and actual roles**

Main roles of ministry	Indicated they 'Should be' doing this %	Indicated they 'Actually' do this %
Teaching about the Christian faith	66	73
Training people for ministry and mission	60	42
Conducting worship/ administering sacraments	55	74
Developing a vision and goals for the future	51	42
Visiting, counselling, helping people	40	57
Offering prayer, being a spiritual role model	31	38
Converting others to the faith	27	22
Involvement in wider community groups or social issues	21	19
Administering the work of the church	17	55
Other	3	4
Don't know	1	0

*Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=1,807, weighted). Leaders could choose 3 roles from list.*

The table indicates several important issues: what senior church leaders in Australia generally believe they should be doing, are doing, and which are the areas of greatest discrepancy. The fact that so few leaders

indicated 'other' and 'don't know' suggests the list was sufficiently comprehensive for almost all leaders to choose options they identified with. Two thirds of senior leaders (66%) indicate that teaching is one of the top 3 roles they should be performing. A larger number (73%) indicate this is one of the top roles they actually do, so some leaders hold it as an area of some mismatch. Other areas where a considerable number of leaders indicate they are doing roles that should not be a priority are: 'Administering the work of the church' (by far the largest discrepancy), conducting worship/ administering sacraments, and visiting and counselling/ helping people. On the other hand, roles where leaders are doing less than they believe they should be: training people for ministry/mission, developing a vision, and converting others to the faith.

### Integration, thriving and burnout

While table 1 reveals general areas of mismatch, it's important to remember that integration is an individual phenomenon. A leader who believes their strengths are in counselling and they should be performing this role will be encouraged that they actually are, while one who feels forced into this as a role they should not be doing is less likely to be thriving.

*Overall 16% of senior leaders did not indicate any matches between their preferred and actual roles.* This represents a risk group, who in their current position would likely be feeling very low levels of integration between who they are and their ministry. As such, they are more likely to be feeling lower levels of satisfaction in their role and personal achievement. They may also be feeling more emotionally exhausted and find it more difficult to engage with people and aspects of their ministry.

NCLS Research has found that leaders with a higher sense of integration between their aspirations and their actual role are more likely to be thriving. While one cannot usually determine their own job description, it highlights the value of a good personal fit, and may well make one more resilient in times of challenge.

### Data sources

Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Leader Survey. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

### Citation

Sterland, S. (2014) Integration: Personal Foundation 4, Factsheet 1.14005. Sydney: NCLS Research.





# Supportive Relationships

## Personal Foundation 5 of Sustainable Leadership

### Introduction

This fact sheet examines the importance of a Christian leader's maintaining supportive relationships in their own life. Results from the 2011 National Church Life Survey (NCLS) for church leaders who completed the Leader Survey show that those with strong supportive relationships are more likely to be thriving in ministry and not burning out.

NCLS Research has conducted extensive research into sustainable leadership - avoiding burnout and moving from surviving to thriving in ministry. Most church

leaders face many challenges in ministry and also experience many encouragements. Numerous factors need to be taken into account to understand why some leaders struggle while others manage

well. Some factors may be difficult or even impossible to change. Supportive relationships is one area where change can occur - where a leader can examine their own identity, priorities, practices, and relationships to consider what could be different and how positive results could flow.

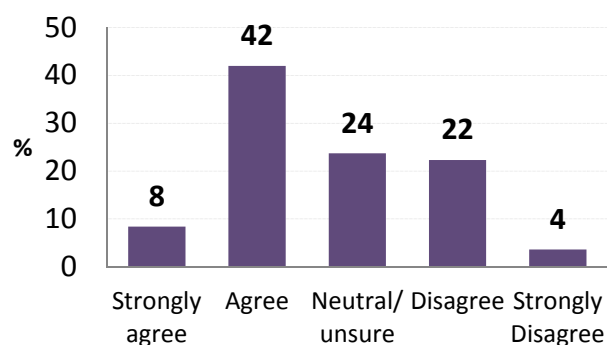
### Supportive relationships matter

Being able to make and keep friends can be a challenge for some in ministry roles. The support received from close friends and family can make a critical difference in how well demanding times in ministry are handled. Supportive relationships within the church are also important. When church leaders feel loved and supported by those within the church they are less likely to be burning out and more likely to be thriving. Personal well-being is enhanced through relationships with people who care, can provide support, can be honest truth-tellers and reference

points for both work and wider issues. Figures 1 and 2 show the responses of almost two thousand senior church leaders to two questions about their relationships.

*"I have a strong and growing circle of close friends from whom I get a great deal of support"*

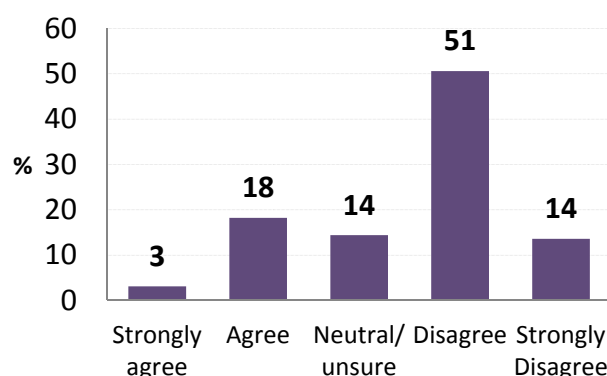
**Figure 1: Strong circle of close friends who give support**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=1,875, weighted).

*"I find it hard to make and keep close friends"*

**Figure 2: Hard to make and keep close friends**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=1,872, weighted).

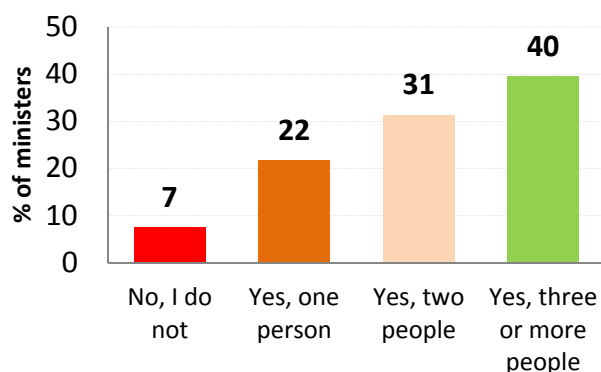
Half of senior ministers agree they have a strong and growing circle of friends, as shown in Figure 1, while

about one quarter (24%) are unsure and the remaining quarter disagree (26%). About one in five (21%) agree they find it hard to make and keep close friends. This raises the question: are the ministers without an adequate base of friends in a sustainable position, while they offer pastoral care and support to those in their churches?

Another question that appeared in the leader survey is identifying the proportion of ministers that may be in a relationally isolated position:

*"Among your family, colleagues and contacts, do you have someone with whom you are able to be completely honest, who encourages and supports you and is really concerned for you in your daily life and work?"*

**Figure 3: Number of people who support with complete honesty, encouragement, concern**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=1,875, weighted).

These results show that among senior leaders in Australian churches, 7% indicate they do not have even one person with whom they can be completely honest and be supported and encouraged by. Another 22% indicate they have one such person. This highlights the isolated plight of over a quarter of those in senior ministry. There are no doubt many assistant clergy and lay leaders in a similar position.<sup>1</sup>

### Where do leaders find support?

Church leaders may sometimes have a support network provided by a caring church, but often it is up to them to find their own sources of support and encouragement. Leaders in the 2011 NCLS were asked:

<sup>1</sup> Most of the results produced in national fact sheets using leader data focuses on senior leaders. This is because weighting can be applied based on the estimated number of senior leaders (1 per church) and a representative national picture can be presented.

*"Who are the people most helpful and supportive to you in your leadership role?"*

**Table 1: Most helpful and supportive in role**

	%
Spouse	71%
Ministry colleague	71%
Person in congregation	51%
Friend	45%
Counsellor/spiritual director	28%
Denom leader or consultant	25%
Sibling	15%
Parent	14%
Other relative	11%
Other	5%
Church consultant apart from denom	5%

Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey D Senior Leaders (n=473, weighted).

Note: respondents could choose up to 4 options.

As table 1 shows, the most common sources of personal support in their leadership role were their spouse or a colleague in ministry, chosen by 71% of senior leaders as one of their 4 choices for this question. Just over half of leaders (51%) indicated there was a person in their congregation while less than half (45%) indicated a friend. About a quarter indicated a professional support person such as a counsellor/spiritual director (28%) or a denominational leader (25%). While it's encouraging that so many indicated major support in their role by a ministry colleague, outside support from a professional is an area where more help could be made available.

While church leaders can seek out supportive relationships, it is not an area where they can be sure they will always find them. Churches would do well to support this need, both internally being supportive and providing the means for other external support.

### Data sources

Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Leader Survey. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

### Citation

Sterland, S. (2014) Supportive Relationships: Personal Foundation 5, Factsheet 1.14006. Sydney: NCLS Research,.



## Balance and Boundaries

### Personal Foundation 6 of Sustainable Leadership

#### Introduction

This fact sheet examines the importance of a Christian leader's work/life balance and boundaries and the relationship with sustainable leadership. Results from the 2011 National Church Life Survey (NCLS) for church leaders who completed the Leader Survey show that those with good balance and boundaries are more likely to be thriving in ministry rather than burning out. NCLS Research has conducted extensive research into sustainable leadership - avoiding burnout and moving from surviving to thriving in ministry. Most church

leaders face many challenges in ministry and also experience many encouragements. Numerous factors need to be taken into account to understand why some leaders struggle while others manage

well. Some factors may be difficult or even impossible to change. Balance and Boundaries is one area where change can occur - where a leader can examine their own identity, priorities, practices, and relationships to consider what could be different and how positive results could flow.

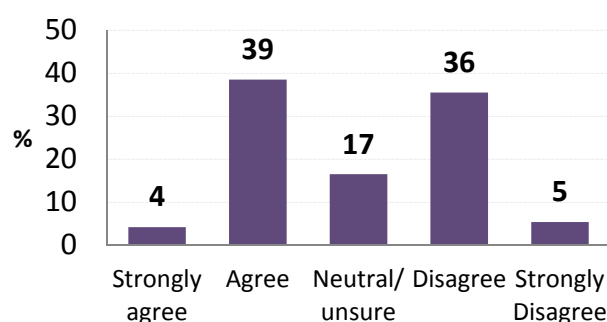
#### What are balance and boundaries?

Constant and unbroken engagement in ministry can stop a church leader's energy levels returning to a natural and healthy equilibrium. It's possible for leaders not to recognise when this is happening, or to feel powerless to do something about it. Being sometimes caught amidst competing demands and limited resources only emphasises the need for a leader to establish clear and appropriate boundaries between work time and other time. A balanced life with clear boundaries allows leaders to be realistic in knowing

what they do and what they don't do. Not doing this may, in the longer term, mean the leader cannot sustain their energy levels in ministry, becoming overwhelmed, and unable to cope. Results for almost two thousand senior church leaders to two key questions in this area are shown below.

*"I find it hard to keep my work life separate from other areas of life such as my home life"*

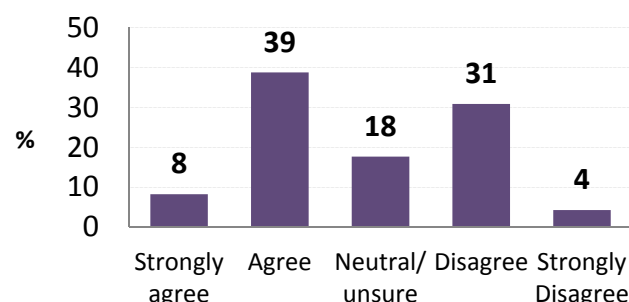
**Figure 1: Hard to keep work separate from other areas of life**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=1,870, weighted).

*"I often find I have a lack of time for recreation, relaxation or other activities"*

**Figure 2: Lack time for recreation/relaxation activities**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=1,868, weighted).

There are more senior ministers who agree they find it hard to keep work separate from other areas of life, than those who disagree (Figure 1). Almost half (48%) agree that they have a lack of time for activities that would bring balance to their work life (Figure 2). Clearly maintaining good work/life balance and boundaries is a challenge for many church leaders.

A positively worded question "I manage to keep good boundaries between work and the rest of my life" showed a similar breakdown with 50% of senior leaders agreeing and 50% either disagreeing or indicating they were neutral or unsure. This issue is certainly not just a problem for senior church leaders, with lay leaders even less likely to agree. Those who have been in ministry less than 3 years or with no theological training, or working over 50 hours a week are all more likely to indicate problems with maintaining their boundaries and work-life balance.

On the positive side, those who are participating in retreats or meeting with a professional or pastoral supervisor or mentor are more likely to agree they are maintaining good work-life boundaries. There are many other activities that those in church leadership (both lay and ordained) participate in and find helpful. Figure 3 below shows the results for senior church leaders to the question:

*"How helpful have each of the following been to you in reducing stress levels or enhancing your wellbeing?"*

The most strongly endorsed activity was 'Going on recreational leave', with 75% of senior ministers describing it as 'very helpful' and another 18% as 'of some help'. Also highly rated was 'Spending quality time with your family' (68%), 'Spending time alone in reflection, prayer' (58%) and 'Doing physical exercise

or sport' (57%). Each of these were at least 'of some help' to over 90% of senior leaders. Simple things such as 'Doing hobbies or non-ministry activities' and 'Learning to say no' were also very helpful to over 40% of leaders, while 'Participating in retreats, spiritual formation' and 'Listening to music and going to cultural events' were not selected by as many leaders, perhaps because they represent short term single events. As stated earlier, those who participated in retreats were more likely to indicate good boundaries, and this includes even those who described those retreats as 'not very helpful'.

### An important area for leaders to follow up

The nature of church leadership is naturally going to produce challenges in terms of maintaining work-life balance and boundaries. Living in close proximity to the workplace and having unusual and necessarily flexible working hours are practical issues many vocations do not need to contend with. Being part of a community where all (or most) others are volunteers also creates boundary dynamics that others often remain unaware of. Add to these the nature of the work as ministering to important needs, whether personal crises, teaching and administering sacraments, or equipping others for service, and it can be difficult for leaders to know when to say 'no' to rest and recharge.

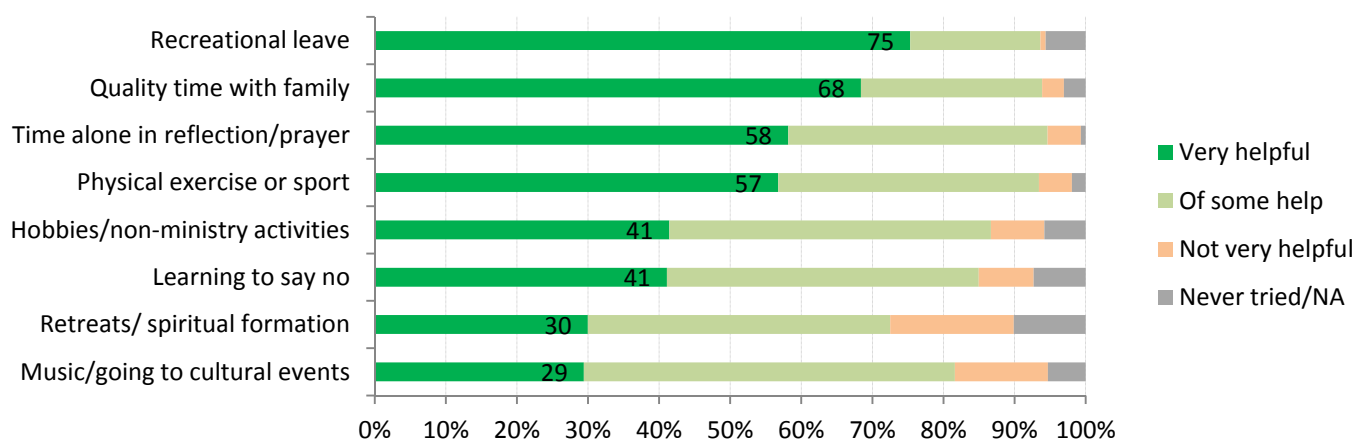
### Data sources

Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Leader Survey. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

### Citation

Sterland, S. (2014) Balance and Boundaries: Personal Foundation 6, Factsheet 1.14007. Sydney: NCLS Research.

**Figure 3: Helpful activities for work/life balance and boundaries**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey D Senior Leaders(n=479, weighted).

# Churches in the Public Sphere

## Churches in the Public Sphere

2011 NCLS local church activities report: Contributions to the community

The impact of congregations on Australian society

Church involvement in migrant ministry

Support for people in developing countries by Australian churches

Support for overseas workers by Australian Protestant churches

Environmental activities in local churches

Senior local church leaders' environmental views and actions

'Ecological engagement' in An informed faith: The Uniting Church at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century

Involvement by churches in public policy

Public issues and priorities for churches

The changing face of the Catholic community in Australia: Challenges for Catholic social service organisations





# 2011 NCLS Local Church Activities Report: Contributions to the community

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February 2015

## NCLS Occasional Paper 26



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## Abstract

This report describes activities of local churches in Australia, by using data from the 2011 National Church Life Survey (NCLS). The NCLS is a rich and extensive source of data about thousands of local churches in 23 Catholic, Anglican and Protestant denominations. This report synthesises a wide range of measures of the services that local churches provide and of the ways that they collectively engage with their local communities. First, the report documents the prevalence of various types of activities, including social services, as well as social, recreational, and educational activities. The focus then turns to ministries offered for specific people groups, including children and youth, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, migrants, people in developing countries and people with disabilities. Finally, there are results about local church activities that intersect with the wider community in other ways, such as environmental activities, sharing property with community groups, involvement in community events and the church's role in local community wellbeing.

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## Acknowledgments

Production of this paper would not have been possible without the work of the other members of the NCLS Research team who, at the time of publication also included: Chandrika Chinnadurai, Chris Ehler, Kathy Kerr, James Schroder, and Amelia Vaeafisi.

## Citation

Powell, R., Pepper, M., Sterland, S., and Hancock, N. (2015). 2011 NCLS Local Church Activities Report: contributions to the community. NCLS Occasional Paper 26. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Definitions

- A “local church” is defined as a gathered faith community in a single location.
- The total number of local Catholic, Anglican and Protestant churches in Australia was estimated as 12,400 in 2011.
- The 2011 NCLS datasets contained 3100 local churches from 23 denominations, which is 25% of the estimated total number of local churches.

**Table 1: Summary of activities run by local churches**

Activities run by local churches	% of Local Churches	Estimated No. of Churches
<b>Social Service and Social/Recreation Activities</b>		
Provision of social services to the wider community	95	11780
Provision of emergency relief/material assistance (e. g. food, clothes for the needy)	84	10416
Provision of social, recreational or leisure activities for the community	67	8308
<b>Ministries for Children and Youth</b>		
Creche	36	4461
Playgroups run by the congregation	37	4566
Pre-schools run by the congregation	4	508
Sunday School	63	7839
Kids club	19	2363
Youth groups	48	5946
Other youth activities/clubs not counted above (eg CEBS, Girls Brigade)	10	1220
<b>Ministries with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people</b>		
Some involvement with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people	19	2356
Emergency services that primarily serve Aboriginal people	12	1488
<b>Migrant Ministry</b>		
Involved in migrant ministry	35	4340
Migrant ministry not a priority in their area	51	6324
<b>Support for People in Developing Countries</b>		
Regular financial support	61	7564
Regular prayer commitment	52	6448
Personal relationships with individuals/groups	44	5456
Support for campaigns that tackle poverty or injustice	32	3968
<b>Support for People with Disabilities</b>		
Have major physical facilities e. g. ramps, disabled toilets & reserved parking	75	9300
Have minor physical facilities	56	6944
<b>Environmental Initiatives</b>		
Engagement in animal welfare or environmental activities	10	1240
Use recycling services	64	7936
Purchasing of environmentally friendly consumables (eg recycled paper, cleaning products)	33	4092
<b>Shared use of Property</b>		
Allow church property to be used by groups in the wider community	86	10664
Allow church property to be used at least weekly	53	6572
<b>Congregational Involvement in Community Organisations and Events</b>		
Involved in some way: leaders, congregations or individual attenders	95	11780
Provides leadership or organises community events	19	2356
Congregations collectively take part or support community organisations/events	36	4464

Activities run by local churches ( <i>continued</i> )	% of Local Churches	Estimated No. of Churches
<b>Role in Local Community Wellbeing</b>		
Have played a positive role in response to problems that have occurred in the local area	42	5208
Have had an influence in some way when there are crises in the local community	84	10416

\*Based on the estimate of 12,400 local churches in Australia.

## PART A: INTRODUCTION

### 1 Introduction

Local churches are a significant collective expression of religion in Australia. They are places of worship and are defined by their alignment with religious beliefs and teachings. Because they are embedded in the social fabric of local neighbourhoods, they are also assets to the wider community. Local churches are networks of people which nurture values and practices that contribute to the well-being of their members and the communities they serve, providing both emotional and material support. As organisations, local churches ascribe to the value of helping others, and can play an important role in meeting social and welfare needs through the provision of social services.

The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a longitudinal study of Christian churches. The NCLS has taken place every five years since 1991; the sixth wave will be conducted in 2016. This rich dataset represents an extraordinary collaboration between Christian denominations and is unparalleled in the world in terms of its length and breadth.

### 2 Social Capital as a Conceptual Framework

Social capital theory provides a useful conceptual framework to evaluate the contribution of local churches to Australian society. It offers a way to conceptualise the relationships between individuals, congregations and the wider community. Putnam defines social capital as “those features of social organisation, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating co-ordinated actions.” (Putnam, 1993, p. 167).

Social capital is often characterised as being of two principal types: bonding and bridging (Woolcock and Narayan 2000). Bonding social capital is about the strength of relationships within the group, whereas bridging social capital is about the extent and strength of relationships between the group and other groups (Leonard & Bellamy, 2013). A third type of social capital is so-called “linking capital” which focuses on vertical norms of respect and networks of trusting relationships between people interacting across power or authority gradients in society.

In Halpern’s (2005) attempted synthesis of many threads of social capital research, he proposed a framework which is a matrix of components of social capital - networks, norms and sanctions - and the three types of social capital; bonding, bridging and linking relationships. This three-by-three matrix is then further expanded with three scales – micro, meso and macro. Local churches fit the meso level.

Local religious congregations have been recognised to be both creators and repositories of social capital. For example, Putnam has observed that faith communities are the single most important repository of social capital in America. He and others have identified the links between religiosity and increased volunteering, giving and civic engagement (Putnam 2002; Putnam and Campbell 2010).

There have been a number of applications of social capital theory to Australian congregational life. Dixon (2010) framed the NCLS core qualities of church vitality as religious social goods and linked them to social capital theory in the context of Catholic parishes. Leonard and Bellamy published a series of papers applying social capital constructs to volunteering behaviour in particular (e. g. Leonard & Bellamy, 2006; Leonard & Bellamy, 2010; Leonard & Bellamy, 2013). In both cases NCLS data played a central role.

The main focus of this report is on bridging social capital in Christian churches – the relationships between groups. In particular, it presents data that indicates the degree to which church attenders interact with other groups in the wider community. Through bridging, attenders create relational ties, cross demographic divides such as class or ethnicity, construct bridges across network holes (where there has been little or no connection), and/or access resources such as information, knowledge, and finance from sources external to an organization or community (Bellamy & Leonard, 2014).

## PART B: METHOD AND DATA

### 3 About the Data for this Report

#### *In summary:*

- A “local church” is defined as a gathered faith community in a single location.
- The total number of local churches in Catholic, Anglican and Protestant denominations in Australia was estimated as 12,400 in 2011.
- The 2011 NCLS datasets contained 3100 local churches from 23 denominations, which is 25% of the estimated total number of local churches.

#### 3.1 Local churches in Australia and in the National Church Life Survey

This report is based on data collected through the NCLS, which is perhaps the largest database on church life in the world. These five-yearly national surveys have been the result of collaboration across more than 20 Anglican, Protestant and Catholic denominations. Each survey wave has collected responses from hundreds of thousands of individual church attenders in thousands of local churches.

In 2011, 3,103 local churches from 23 denominations took part, which represents 25% of the estimated number of 12,400 local churches in Australia. This figure does not include Orthodox churches (who have participated in the NCLS to date) and independent and house churches, about whom NCLS Research does not hold a reliable database.

Different denominations organize their church structures in a variety of ways. As well as single congregations in a location, some have a geographically-based parish structure, others have multi-congregation churches in the same or different locations. The language also varies and can mean different things in different contexts: church, congregation, parish, cluster, multi-site, multi-campus, worship service and so on.

For the sake of clarity, NCLS researchers distinguish between congregations or faith communities in different locations. These are referred to as “local churches”. That is 3,103 locations participated in the 2011 NCLS. All percentages in this report are calculated on the basis of local churches as locations.

If these local churches are considered in terms of how they are clustered together, this equates to 2,492 entities (parishes/multi-congregation churches/single congregation churches).

#### 3.2 Denominations in the National Church Life Survey

Table 2 shows the participation of denominations across all the waves of the NCLS. The Catholic Church did not take part in the 1991 NCLS and participated in a parallel Catholic Church Life Survey in 1996.

#### 3.3 NCLS Survey Instruments

The NCLS is a church-based survey completed by attenders and leaders in individual congregations and parishes. There is a variety of survey instruments used in each local church. The information in this report is based on the “2011 NCLS Operations Survey”.

A single representative from each participating local church was invited to complete an Operations Survey form outlining the activities and operations of the church. The Operations Survey included a listing of types of social service, social, recreational and educational activities, activities for children and youth, and estimates of the numbers attending these



different activities. It also included information about congregational character and history, church worship services, staffing and lay leadership, planning processes and decision-making, property, finances and relations with other groups.

Other surveys which were part of the NCLS – namely “Attender Surveys” and Leader Surveys” – are not used in this report. Hard copy Attender Surveys were intended for all participants aged 15 years and over. As well as core Attender Survey items completed by all respondents, a series of polls (Attender Sample Surveys) were conducted on random samples of attenders across the nation. Leader Survey forms were also made available in paper and online formats for interested lay leaders and clergy in the local church.

**Table 2: Denominations that participated in National Church Life Surveys: 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006 & 2011**

	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011
Anglican Church of Australia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Apostolic Church of Australia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Australian Christian Churches (AOG)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Baptist Churches	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bethesda Ministries International	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
Catholic Church in Australia	✗	✓*	✓	✓	✓
Christian Brethren Assemblies	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓
Christian and Missionary Alliance	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
C3 Church (was Christian City Church)	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Christian Life Churches International	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
Christian Outreach Centre Australia	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
Christian Reformed Churches of Australia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CRC Churches International	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Church of the Nazarene	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Churches of Christ	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fellowship of Congregational Churches	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Foursquare Church Australia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Grace Communion International	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
International Pentecostal Holiness Church (IPHC)	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Lutheran Church of Australia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Presbyterian Church of Australia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Seventh-day Adventist Church	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Salvation Army	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Uniting Church in Australia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vineyard Churches Australia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australia	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Westminster Presbyterian Church of Australia	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Independent Churches	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

\* Note 1: In 1996, Catholic churches participated in the parallel Catholic Church Life Survey (CCLS).

Note 2: Some denominations are missing from data tables (Apostolic, Brethren, Christian Missionary Alliance and Foursquare Church) because the sample of participating congregations was not sufficiently representative of the denomination.

Note 3: Christian Life Churches International has now changed to Acts 2 Alliance (A2A)

Note 4: Christian Outreach Centre Australia has now changed to International Network of Churches (INC)

## PART C: RESULTS

This section of the report outlines the results collected through the NCLS about the impact of local churches on Australian society. The results focus on the activities of congregations, rather than individuals. The report documents the prevalence of various types of activities run by local churches:

Social service activities run by local churches

Social, recreational, and educational activities run by local churches

The focus then turns to ministries offered by congregations for specific people groups. These groups include ministries or services for:

- Children and youth
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people
- Migrants
- People in developing countries
- People with disabilities

The final sets of results deal with local church activities that intersect with the wider community in other ways:

- Environmental activities
- Sharing property with community groups
- Involvement in community events
- Role in the wellbeing of the local community

The results are weighted to adjust for variations in local participation levels across denominations and regions, in order to present the best possible estimates.

## 4 Social Service Activities Run by Churches

*In summary:*

- *Ninety five percent of churches provided social services to the wider community in 2011.*
- *Emergency relief/material assistance (e. g. food, clothes for the needy) was the most common form of service activity (84% gave this form of aid at least occasionally).*

The impact of local churches in Australian society can be assessed from the perspective of the types of social service activities they offer to the wider Australian community. NCLS results show a very high level of investment in the wellbeing of Australian society by local churches acting as organisations to provide services.

The vast majority (95%) of local churches in Australia provided community service activities of some form in 2011 (see Table 3). The responses indicate that these activities occurred “monthly or more often” in 81% of churches and “occasionally” in 14% of churches.

**Table 3: Churches performing community service activities: 2011 vs 2006**

Churches that indicated performing <u>any of the community services</u> indicated in the 2011 NCLS	All NCLS in 2011	All NCLS in 2006
	%	%
Monthly or more often	81	78
Occasionally	14	14
Never	5	8

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2520), 2006 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 4212).

Churches are involved in a diverse range of practical services in their communities (see Table 4 for a ranking of service activities). Emergency relief/material assistance (e. g. food, clothes for the needy) was the most common form of service activity in 2011, with 84% giving this form of aid at least occasionally. Visiting as a form of service was also very common (82%), as was offering some form of counselling (60%).

**Table 4: Types of service activities run by local churches at least occasionally, across Australia in 2011**

	%
<b>Emergency relief or material assistance</b> (eg food, clothes for needy)	84
<b>Visiting</b> (eg prisons, hospitals, fringe attenders)	82
<b>Counselling services</b> (eg marriage counselling, parenting programs, social work)	60
<b>Other welfare/community service/social action activities not mentioned elsewhere</b>	52
<b>Political or social justice activities</b> (eg human rights)	35
<b>Community development or local resident action groups</b>	24
<b>Aged care services</b> (eg Meals on wheels, home help)	23
<b>Care for the disabled</b> (eg skills training, respite care, home care)	21
<b>Migrant support activities</b> (eg English as a second language, refugee support, interpreting service)	21
<b>Children or youth support</b> (eg youth training schemes, literacy programs, unemployed programs)	20
<b>Activities for unemployed people</b> (eg job seeking preparation, skills training, volunteers scheme)	13
<b>Other accommodation</b> (eg homeless hostels, crisis accommodation, student accommodation)	13
<b>Animal welfare or environmental activities</b> (eg Landcare)	10
<b>Accommodation for the aged or infirm</b> (eg nursing homes, aged units)	6

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2520).

In the following section, the various services offered by local churches have been loosely grouped as follows:

- **Programs related to physical care for the vulnerable** (eg aged care, disabled care, accommodation, material assistance, etc)
- **Services that equip or empower people** (eg counselling, children and youth support, migrant support, activities for the unemployed, etc)
- **Other activities related to service or justice** (eg political and social justice activities, community development, environmental and other activities)

Table 5 shows the levels of local church involvement in service or social action activities related to the physical care of the vulnerable. As noted, across the nation, the most common service offered by local churches was emergency relief or material assistance (84%) followed by visiting people in prisons and hospitals, and fringe attenders (82%). These activities have been longstanding examples of roles held by churches and pastors/ministers.

With regard to services that empower and equip others, across Australia, more than half of all churches offered counselling services (60%). Less common services were those targeted at empowering and equipping a specific group of people, such as children and young people, migrants or the unemployed (see Table 6).

Other activities related to service or justice are grouped in Table 7. Around a third of Australian churches ran activities with a political or social justice focus and about a quarter with a focus on community development. Activities related to animal welfare or environmental actions were pursued by 11% of Australian churches in 2011.

Between 2006 and 2011 there was an increase in the percentage of churches who offered any of the types of activities shown in Tables 5, 6 and 7.

The percentage of Australian churches that offered physical care activities at least occasionally increased from 90% in 2006 to 93% in 2011. An example of this increase is seen in the 6% rise in churches involved in visiting ministries. The proportion of churches that serve people with disabilities also rose (from 18% to 21%) in the five year period.

Australian churches' involvement in physical care activities has remained relatively stable between 2006 and 2011, showing a level of continuity. Aged care services are one of the few physical care service activities where there were lower levels of local church involvement in 2011 when compared to 2006 (23% down from 25%). This is despite the ageing profile of attenders. This may be partly due to the changes in government requirements for such services.

Congregational involvement in political or social justice activities (eg human rights) is an area that has seen a significant rise between 2006 and 2011 (from 26% to 35%).

**Table 5: Physical care activities taking place in Australian churches**

<i>In the past 12 months, did this congregation/parish conduct any of the following social service or social action activities?</i>		All NCLS in 2011	All NCLS in 2006
		%	%
<b>Accommodation for the aged or infirm (eg nursing homes, aged units)</b>			
	Monthly or more often	4	4
	Occasionally	2	2
	Never	94	94
<b>Other accommodation (eg homeless hostels, student accommodation)</b>			
	Monthly or more often	4	5
	Occasionally	10	8
	Never	87	87
<b>Aged care services (eg Meals on wheels, home help)</b>			
	Monthly or more often	12	15
	Occasionally	11	10
	Never	77	75
<b>Visiting (eg prisons, hospitals, fringe attenders)</b>			
	Monthly or more often	62	56
	Occasionally	20	20
	Never	18	25
<b>Care for the disabled (eg skills training, respite care, home care)</b>			
	Monthly or more often	9	9
	Occasionally	12	9
	Never	79	82
<b>Emergency relief or material assistance (eg food, clothes for the needy)</b>			
	Monthly or more often	46	48
	Occasionally	38	32
	Never	16	20

In the past 12 months, did this congregation/parish conduct any of the following social service or social action activities? (continued)		All NCLS in 2011	All NCLS in 2006
		%	%
<b>Churches indicated at least one of the above</b>			
	Monthly or more often	75	72
	Occasionally	18	18
	Never	7	11

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2520), 2006 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 4212).

**Table 6: Empowering and equipping activities taking place in Australian churches**

In the past 12 months, did this congregation/parish conduct any of the following social service or social action activities?		All NCLS in 2011	All NCLS in 2006
		%	%
<b>Counselling services (e. g. marriage counselling, parenting programs, social work)</b>			
	Monthly or more often	24	33
	Occasionally	36	24
	Never	40	43
<b>Children/youth support (e. g. youth training, literacy, unemployed programs)</b>			
	Monthly or more often	11	12
	Occasionally	9	9
	Never	80	79
<b>Migrant support activities (e. g. ESL, refugee support, interpreting service)</b>			
	Monthly or more often	12	11
	Occasionally	9	6
	Never	79	83
<b>Activities for unemployed people (e. g. job seeking, skills training)</b>			
	Monthly or more often	6	7
	Occasionally	8	7
	Never	87	86
<b>Churches indicated at least one of the above</b>			
	Monthly or more often	36	41
	Occasionally	31	22
	Never	34	36

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2520), 2006 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 4212).

**Table 7: Other activities related to service or justice by Australian churches**

In the past 12 months, did this congregation/parish conduct any of the following social service or social action activities?		All NCLS in 2011	All NCLS in 2006
		%	%
<b>Political or social justice activities (eg human rights)</b>			
	Monthly or more often	9	8
	Occasionally	25	18
	Never	65	74
<b>Community development or local resident action groups</b>			
	Monthly or more often	6	8
	Occasionally	18	15
	Never	76	78
<b>Animal welfare or environmental activities (eg Landcare)</b>			
	Monthly or more often	2	2
	Occasionally	9	7
	Never	90	91
<b>Other welfare/ community service/ social action activities not mentioned elsewhere</b>			
	Monthly or more often	24	25
	Occasionally	28	19
	Never	48	57

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2520), 2006 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 4212).

## 5 Social, Recreational and Educational Activities Run by Churches

### *In summary:*

- *Some two thirds of local churches offered some form of social, recreation or leisure activities in 2011.*

As a broader expression of witness and service to the community, local churches also conduct a wide diversity of social, recreational, or educational activities.

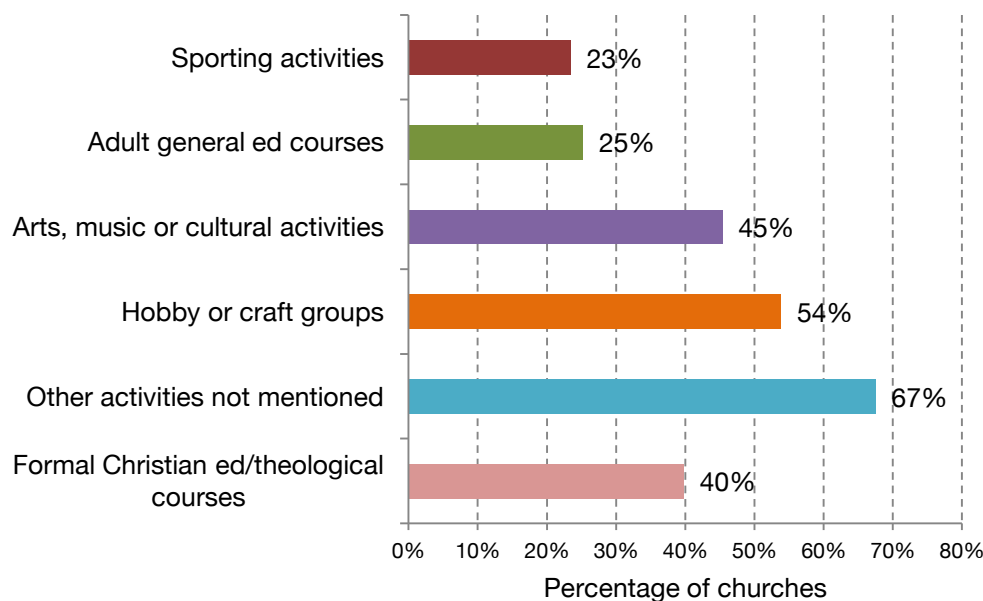
In the 2011 NCLS Operations Survey, the following question focussed on activities conducted in the past 12 months. Results are shown in Figure 1.

*In the past 12 months, how often has this congregation conducted any of the following social, recreational, or educational activities? (Please mark a response on EVERY line)*

- Sporting activities (e. g. church sporting teams)*
- Adult general education courses*
- Arts, music or cultural activities*
- Hobby or craft groups*
- Other social, recreation or leisure activities not mentioned above*
- Formal Christian education/theological courses (not preaching or Bible study groups)*



**Figure 1: Social and recreational activities conducted by Australian churches**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 1777).

The most common social, recreational, or educational activities offered by local churches in the 12 months prior to the 2011 NCLS were to do with nurturing creativity. Around half have conducted hobby or craft groups (54%) or arts, music or cultural activities (45%) in the past 12 months.

Beyond preaching and Bible studies, the provision of educational activities also has a strong presence. Four in ten churches offered formal Christian education/theological courses (40%). Around a quarter conducted adult general education courses (25%).

Finally, sporting activities, such as church sporting teams, were conducted in the preceding 12 months by around a quarter of all local churches (23%).

## 6 Services for Children and Youth

### *In summary:*

- *The most common services for children and youth offered by congregations were Sunday School (63%) and youth groups (48%).*
- *Only 4% to 6% of congregations were involved in providing pre-schools, primary or secondary schools.*

### 6.1 Creche, Sunday Schools, Youth Groups and More

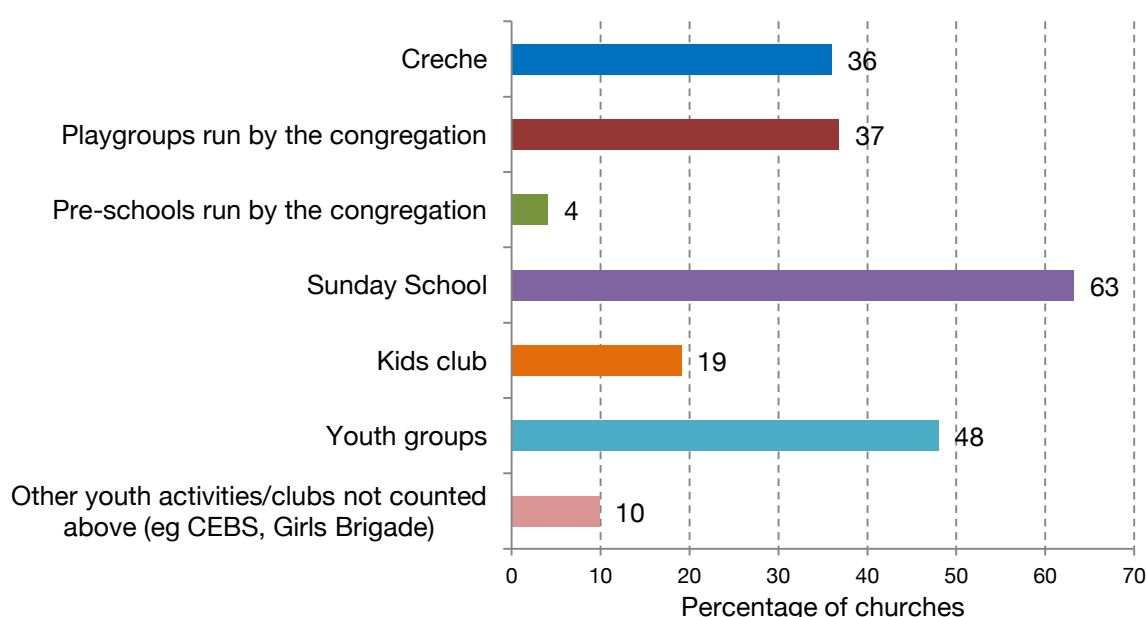
Australia has had Sunday Schools for over 200 years. St Johns Church, Parramatta in Sydney, has the oldest continuously running Sunday School in Australia. First started in 1813 in the home of the Hassall family in Parramatta, it was formalised in 1815 with the support of Governor Macquarie. In 2011, Sunday Schools were the most common activity offered by churches for children, with six out of ten congregations (63%) running them.

Youth groups were the next most common activity, offered by nearly half of all churches (48%). They were largely aimed at those in high school years, and occurred at various times during the week or less frequently than weekly.

Some 36% of churches also provided a crèche, which was likely to run concurrently with church worship services and cater to very young children.

Playgroups appear to be relatively widespread with 37% of churches offering them in 2011. This activity for young children and their carers was more likely to be run during the week. Kids Clubs, catering for primary school aged children, were also often held during the week. Around one in five local churches (19%) offered Kids Clubs. Around 10% of churches held other types of youth activities/clubs not listed, such as CEBS (Anglican Boys Society), Girls Brigade and others.

**Figure 2: Services for children and youth conducted by Australian churches**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2409).

## 6.2 Schools provided by local churches

To invest in running a school is a major commitment by a church. A very small percentage of local churches (4%) run pre-schools (see Figure 2). Churches were also able to specify whether they provided or ran primary and secondary schools, either alone or with other local churches. Among the local churches who took part in the 2011 NCLS, 6% provided an infants/primary school (K-6) and 4% provided a secondary school.

It should be noted that in some denominations, such as the Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church, there is a strong relationship between local parishes and parish schools. While the parish school is integral to parish life and ministry, these schools are not represented in the figures provided here as they are not solely the responsibility of the local faith community, with institutions such as Catholic Education Offices in each diocese playing a key role.

## 7 Ministries that Serve Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander People

### *In summary:*

- *Around one in five churches had some involvement with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, with 16% doing direct work with them.*
- *The most common type of ministry offered by churches that primarily serves Aboriginal people was emergency services (12%).*

Churches were invited to describe the congregation's current position with regard to ministry with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. Around one in five churches claimed to either be heavily involved (2%) or have some involvement (19%). A further 5% were taking first steps. While they had no current ministry, one in ten churches reported they would be open to it in the next two years. Four in ten churches indicated that there was limited/no opportunity in their area for this type of ministry. A further 23% stated that there was no current opportunity and it was unlikely in the next two years. (See Table 8).

**Table 8: Local churches who do direct work with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people**

	Percent
<b>We are heavily involved</b>	2
<b>We have some involvement</b>	19
<b>We are taking first steps</b>	5
<b>No current ministry, but we would be open to it within the next 2 years</b>	10
<b>No current ministry, and it is unlikely in the next 2 years</b>	23
<b>There is limited/no opportunity in our area for this type of Ministry</b>	40

*Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Surveys (n=2,177 churches).*

**Table 9: Type of ministries offered by local churches that primarily serve Aboriginal people**

Type of Ministry	Percent
<b>Church worship services</b>	3.6
<b>Care for a particular age group (eg children, youth, aged care)</b>	1.9
<b>Counselling services</b>	2.6
<b>Emergency relief</b>	12.2
<b>Activities for the unemployed</b>	0.3
<b>Political or social justice action</b>	0.9
<b>Accommodation</b>	0.7
<b>Outreach or evangelistic services, events or Bible studies</b>	1.8
<b>Drop in centre</b>	1.0
<b>Mission teams to other parts of Australia</b>	4.2
<b>Visiting (e. g. prisons, hospitals etc. )</b>	4.4
<b>Social or recreational activities</b>	3.1
<b>General education</b>	2.5
<b>Christian education</b>	3.1
<b>Other activities not mentioned above</b>	7.0
<b>We are not involved in such ministries</b>	76.8

*Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Surveys (n=2,017 churches).*

The most common type of ministry offered by churches that primarily serves Aboriginal people was emergency services (12%). There were a range of other ministries that around 3-4% of churches offered, including church worship services, counselling services, mission teams, visiting (e. g. prisons, hospitals etc), social or recreational activities, general education and Christian education. A further 7% claimed to offer other ministries not mentioned in the NCLS listing (see Table 9).

## 8 Church Involvement in Migrant Ministry

### *In summary:*

- **Over a third (35%) of Australian churches were involved in migrant ministry, while more than half said it is not a priority in their area.**

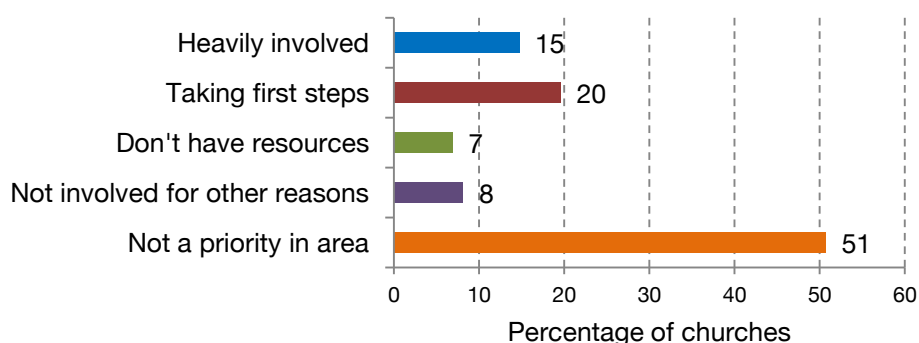
Migrants have increasingly become a key component of Australia's population. In 2010, some 29% of Australia's population was born overseas. Of these people, more than a quarter had arrived in Australia after 2000, indicating high levels of recent migration<sup>1</sup>. Many Australians have been directly impacted by the migrant experience in their own families. Almost half of Australia's population was either born overseas or had a migrant parent, according to the 2011 Census of Population and Housing.<sup>2</sup>

Churches can potentially offer connection and a sense of belonging for migrants who may be feeling displaced, as well as practical and pastoral support in settling into a new country and local community.

How involved are local Australian churches in intentional ministry towards migrants? In the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a representative from each participating church was asked: "To what extent is this congregation involved in ministry towards migrants?"

As shown in Figure 3, over a third (35%) of Australian churches said they were involved in migrant ministry, with 15% heavily involved, and 20% taking first steps. Seven percent of churches reported having insufficient resources to be involved in migrant ministry, and 8% were not involved for other reasons. More than half of all churches (51%) claimed ministry towards migrants was not a priority in their area.

**Figure 3: Local church involvement in ministry towards migrants**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n=2,347).

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/6250.0~Nov+2010~Main+Features~Overview?OpenDocument>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/immigration-update/australian-migration-trends-2011-12-glance.pdf>

Churches in rural areas (75%) were much more likely than urban (34%) and regional churches (44%) to say that multicultural ministry is not a priority in their area. This makes sense, as most migrants live in urban areas.<sup>3</sup> The likelihood of churches being involved in migrant ministry was highest in urban areas (49%), followed by regional areas (37%). Only 14% of rural churches indicated they were involved in this form of ministry.

There has been a large increase in the proportion of local churches who claim to be involved in migrant ministry, from 17% of local churches in the 2001 NCLS to 24% in 2006, and 35% in 2011. However, results may not be entirely comparable due to a wording change from “ethnic ministry” in 2001 and 2006 to “migrant ministry” in 2011. (Duncum, Hancock, Pepper, & Powell, 2014).

## 9 Support for People in Developing Countries

### *In summary:*

- *Regular financial support is the most common form of support that churches offer to people in developing countries (61%).*

There is a long tradition of churches supporting the work of service and proclamation in other countries. The 2011 NCLS Operations Survey asked specifically about commitment to people in developing countries.

*Over the past 12 months, has this congregation had a specific commitment to people in developing countries? (Mark ALL that apply)*

*Yes, personal relationships with individuals/groups*

*Yes, a regular financial commitment*

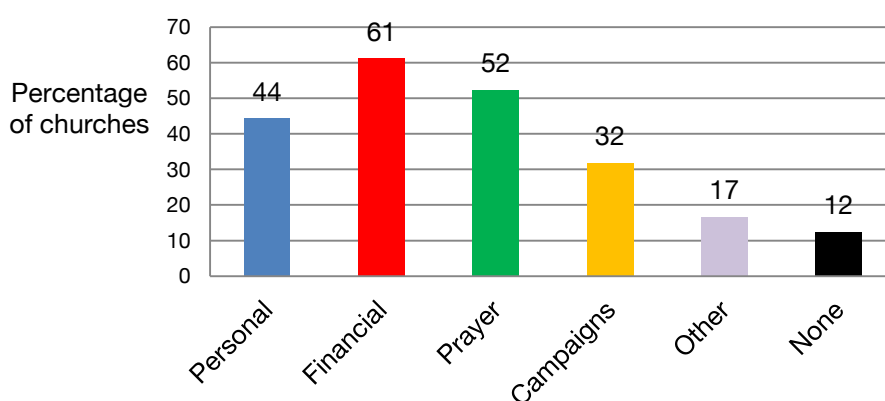
*Yes, a regular prayer commitment*

*Yes, through campaigns which tackle poverty or injustice*

*Yes, another kind of link*

*No links of this kind*

**Figure 4: Support for people in developing countries**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Surveys (n=2,429 churches).

Figure 4 shows that regular financial support was the most common form of support offered by churches (61%). The second highest form of support was a regular prayer commitment (52%) followed by personal relationships with individuals/groups (44%). Approximately one third of churches (32%) indicated they had regular support for poverty and injustice campaigns. Such campaigns would include Micah Challenge, TEAR, Act for Peace, or denominationally

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=2293>

affiliated groups such as Baptist World Aid, Caritas, Catholic Mission, and Uniting World. Twelve percent of churches indicated that they had no supportive link of any kind. (Sterland, 2014).

## 10 Inclusion of People with Disabilities

### *In summary*

- *Most churches (75%) had major physical facilities for people with disabilities, such as ramps, disabled toilets and reserved parking, in place.*

Some 18% of churches had a written, public statement expressing a commitment to welcoming and including people and families living with a disability. Of this group, 8% had a statement specific to their church and 10% had a statement as part of their denomination. A further 26% had a sentiment of inclusion in their written statements, but nothing specific for disability. In addition, 13% of churches provided specific education on disability inclusion to their church staff and volunteers, either locally (5%) or by training offered elsewhere, such as denominational training (9%).

Churches were asked the following question about the provisions they made for the needs of people with a disability and were able to mark all that applied.

*What provisions does your church have for the needs of people with a disability? (Mark ALL that apply)*

*Major physical facilities (eg ramps/lift, disabled toilet, reserved parking)*

*Minor physical facilities (eg hearing/induction loop, wheelchair space convenient for services, large print alternatives to written materials)*

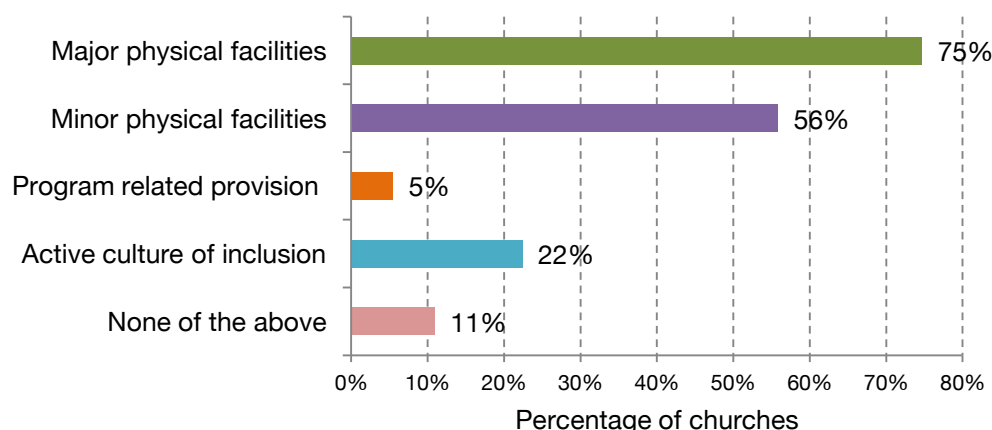
*Program related provision (eg intellectual impairment adapted Bible studies, social support, education to congregation)*

*Active culture of inclusion (eg in teaching and practice of the church, adapting curriculum for children, special needs catered for)*

*None of the above*

Figure 5 shows that most churches (75%) have major physical facilities, such as ramps, disabled toilets and reserved parking, in place. More than half (56%) also have minor physical facilities. Some 5% have program-related provisions and 22% have an active culture of inclusion. Around one in ten (11%) do not have any provisions for the needs of people with a disability. (Powell, Sterland, Pepper & Hancock, 2012).

**Figure 5: Churches' provisions for the needs of people with disabilities.**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Surveys (n=2,342 churches).



## 11 Environmental Activities

### *In summary:*

- *There has been increased engagement in animal welfare or environmental activities from 2% of local Catholic and Protestant churches in 2001 to 10% in 2011.*
- *Almost two thirds of congregations indicated that they recycled, and a third of churches indicated that they purchased environmentally friendly consumables.*

Within church circles there has been increased attention over recent decades to environmental concerns. There is evidence of a widening sphere of concern about Christian environmental responsibility among global Christian leaders and church denominations, as well as Christian international aid and development organisations. Ecological theology is now a rapidly growing sub-discipline. There has also been ecumenical collaboration seeking to raise environmental awareness, appreciation, commitment and activity among the churches. However, knowledge among church leaders and environmental advocates about the relative uptake of activities, and who is doing what and where, is mostly patchy and anecdotal. The 2011 National Church Life Survey (NCLS) sought to address this gap and to paint a picture of local church-based environmental activity in Australia (Pepper & Powell, 2013).

### 11.1 About the NCLS and the environmental activity questions

In the 2001, 2006 and 2011 Operations Survey audits of local church activity, the survey informant was asked to indicate whether the congregation/parish had engaged in any animal welfare or environmental activities over the past 12 months (and in the 2006 and 2011 surveys, the frequencies of such activities).

In 2006 and 2011, the informant was also asked whether the congregation/parish had undertaken an environmental audit of church buildings in the preceding five years.

The 2011 Operations Survey also included a battery of some 20 items about environmental activities, including in the areas of worship, operations of church buildings, and community projects and events. The question wording is shown in Table 10, with alternate Catholic wordings italicised and in square brackets, and with short labels that are subsequently used in charts and data tables also given.

**Table 10: 2011 Operations Survey questions about specific environmental activities**

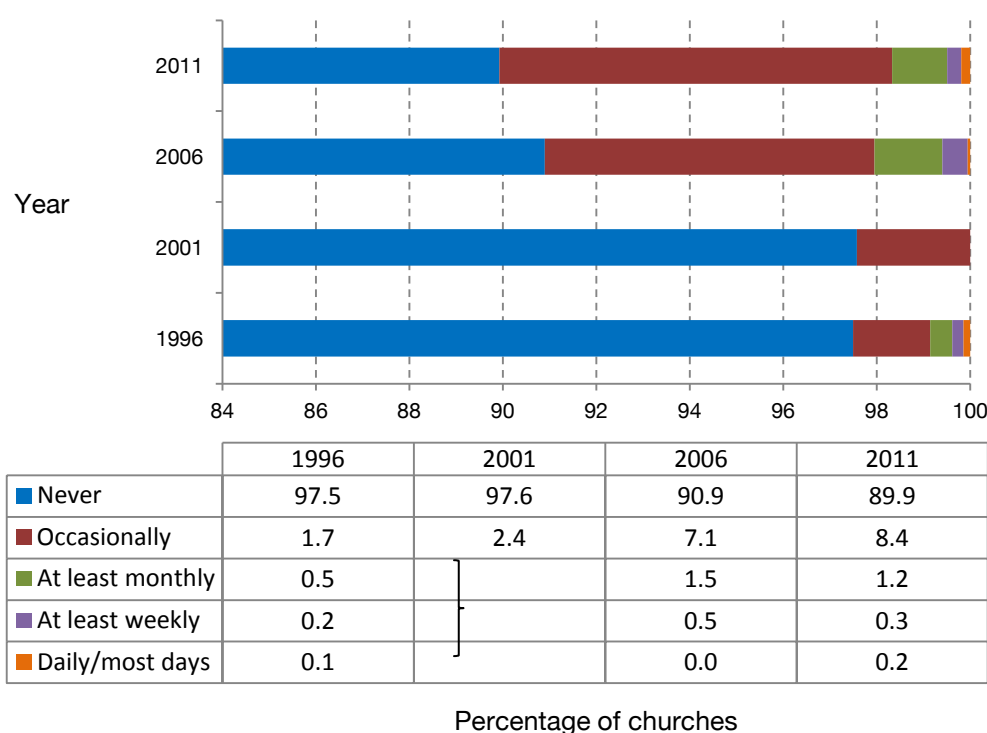
Question wording	Short label
<b>In the past 5 years, has this congregation [<i>parish</i>] undertaken any of the following activities? (Mark ALL that apply)</b>	
Celebrated a day or season with an environmental theme (eg Season of Creation, Environment Sunday)	Day/season
Run a Bible study [ <i>an adult faith education session</i> ] on an environmental theme	Bible study
Run a children's activity on an environmental theme	Kids' activity
Hosted and/or run a community garden	Cmty garden
Taken action to conserve biodiversity (eg hosted a native garden, raised funds for endangered species)	Biodiversity
Held a public event on an environmental theme	Public event
Worked on an environmental activity/project in the local community (eg Clean Up Australia Day, Landcare project)	Local project
Collaborated with an environmental group (eg local bushcare group, national environmental organisation)	Collaborated
Contacted an elected government member about an environmental issue	Contacted MP
None of the above	None, actions
<b>Have any of the following been done at the church's buildings in the past 5 years? (Mark ALL that apply)</b>	
An environmental audit	Enviro audit
Implementation of water saving measures	Water saving
Installation of rainwater tanks or water recycling	Water tank
Implementation of energy saving measures	Energy saving
Switch to government accredited GreenPower	GreenPower
Installation of solar panels or solar hot water heating	Solar panels
None of the above	None, bldgs

Question wording ( <i>continued</i> )	Short label
<b>Do any of the following usually happen at this congregation [parish]? (Mark ALL that apply)</b>	
Inclusion of environmental concerns in worship (eg through hymns/songs, prayers, sermons/homilies [homilies])	Env worship
Purchasing of environmentally friendly consumables (eg recycled paper for the office, cleaning products)	Consumables
Use of Council recycling services	Recycling
Sourcing of food that is more environmentally friendly for meals at church (eg local produce, less meat)	Enviro food
Composting of food wastes from meals at church	Composting
Provision of information to attenders to help them to be more environmentally friendly in daily life	Information
None of the above	None, usual

## 11.2 Changes in environmental activity: 1996 to 2011

As shown in Figure 6, the results for engagement in animal welfare or environmental activities suggest an increased engagement between 1996 and 2011 from 2% of local Protestant churches in 1996 (and of Catholic and Protestant churches in 2001) to 10% of churches in 2011 having engaged in any activities.

**Figure 6: Frequency of environmental/animal welfare activities in churches**



*Note: 1996 data is for Protestant churches only. Data for 2001 onwards includes Protestant and Catholic churches. The question format differed in 2001 compared with the other years (churches were only able to indicate whether they did or didn't do the activity, not the frequency).*

*Source: NCLS Operations Surveys 1996 (n=10,255), 2001 (n=6,148), 2006 (n=5,897) and 2011 (n=2,270).*

The results also indicate a small increase for environmental audits of church buildings, from 13% of local churches indicating that they had done so in the previous five years in 2006, to 16% in 2011.

## 11.3 Specific environmental activities conducted in churches

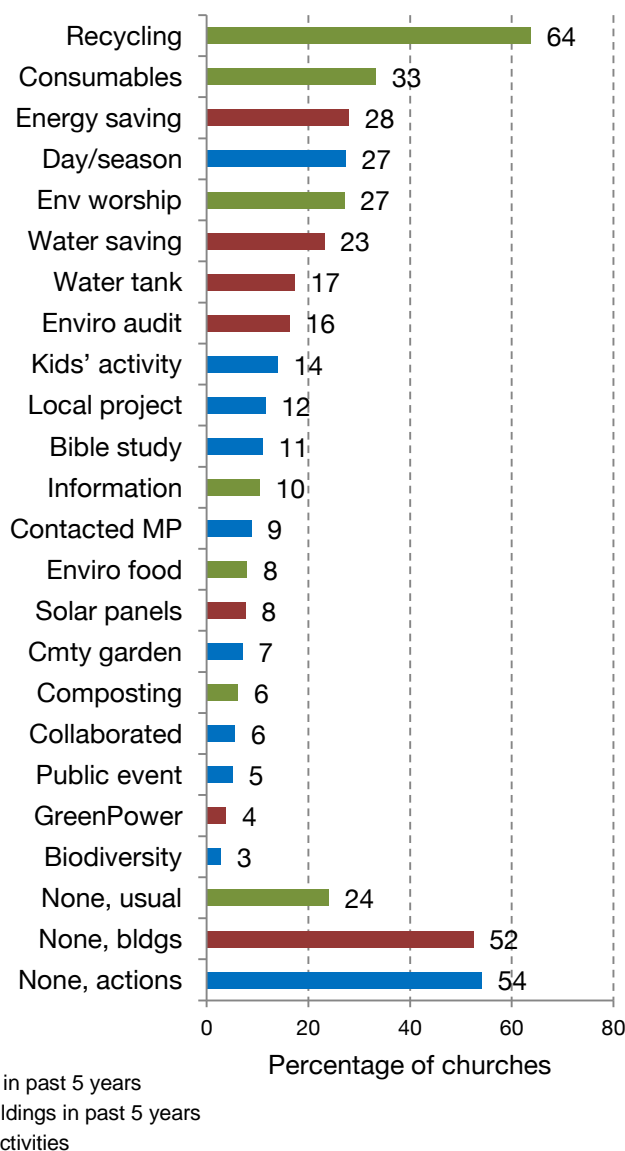
Figure 7 shows the percentage of local churches that indicated that they had undertaken the various environmental activities that were included in the 2011 Operations Survey, ranked from most common to least common.

The majority of congregations (almost two thirds) indicated that they recycled, which is reflective of the widespread nature of recycling services across Australia. A third of churches indicated that they purchased environmentally friendly consumables. Next most popular were the implementation of energy savings measures at church buildings, celebration of a day or a season with an environmental theme, inclusion of environmental concerns in worship, and implementation of water saving measures at church buildings, with approximately a quarter of churches indicating that they had done these.

In apparent contrast to the relatively high degree of inclusion of environmental awareness in worship, Bible studies/adult faith education sessions and children's activities on an environmental theme were much less common, with less than 15% of congregations/parishes having undertaken these activities.

The least popular activities were taking action to conserve biodiversity, switching to GreenPower, and holding a public event on an environmental theme, with 5% or fewer of churches having done each of these.

**Figure 7: Types of environmental activities in churches**



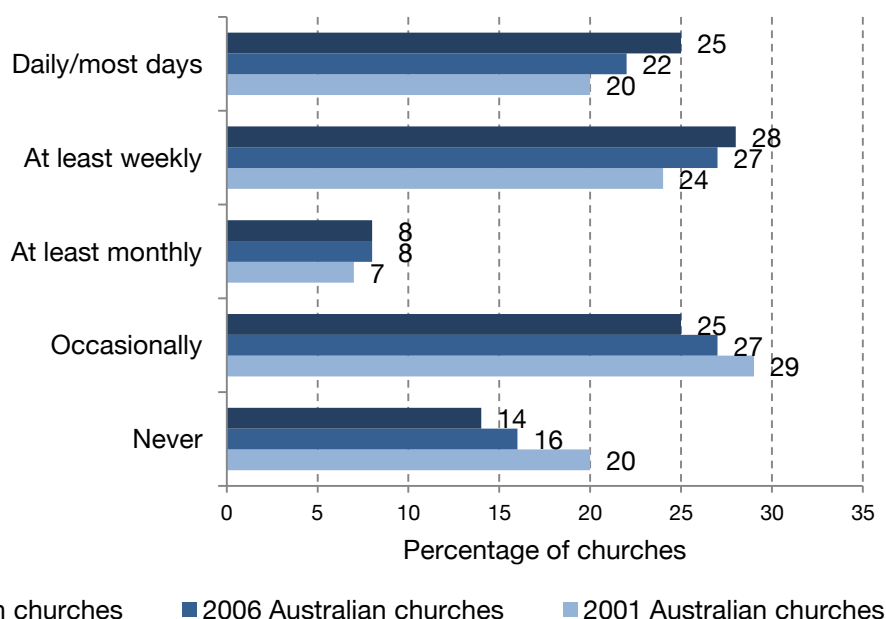
Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n=2,284 to 2,331).

## 12 Sharing Property with Community Groups

- Some 86% of churches allowed their property to be used by groups in the wider community, with more than half being used at least weekly.

The majority of churches allow their property to be used by groups in the wider community. This may be an act of service as well as a valuable source of connection. Figure 8 shows an increased sharing of church property since 2001. In 2011, a quarter of churches were used by community groups on a daily basis or most days (25%). A further 28% of churches were used at least on a weekly basis. Some 8% of buildings were used at least monthly, and a quarter (25%) were used by community groups occasionally.

**Figure 8: Sharing church property with community groups**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2520), 2006 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 4212), 2001 Operations Survey (n = 6148).

## 13 Involvement in Community Events

### *In summary:*

- Nearly all churches were involved in community events, such as community fairs, with more than half providing leadership/organising them, or giving congregational support to them.

Nearly all churches get involved in local events such as fairs, taking the opportunity to be a presence in the midst of events of the community. Churches described their involvement in response to the following question.

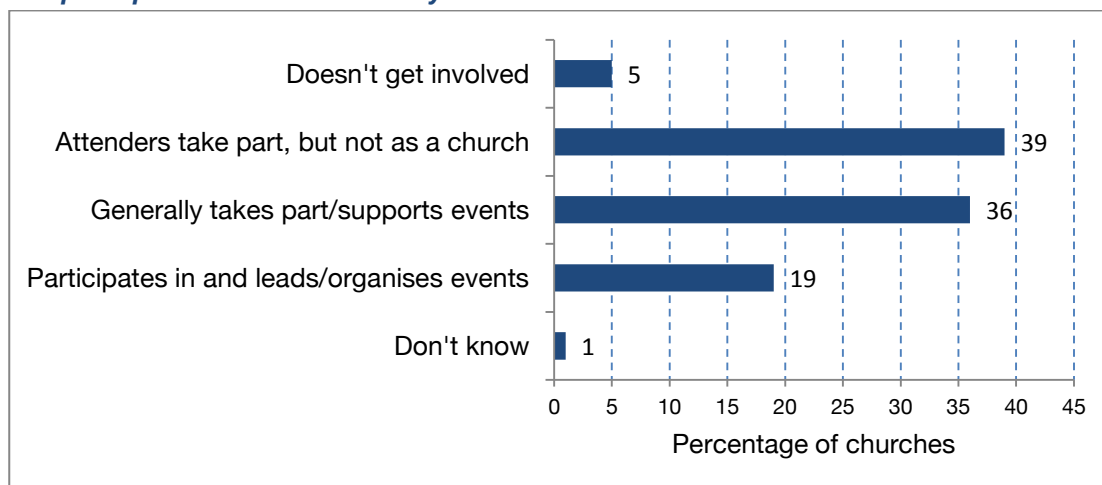
*Which of these statements best describes this congregation's involvement in community organisations and events (e. g. community fairs, marches, beautification programs, Carols by Candlelight)?*

- This congregation does not get involved in other community organisation/events*
- Attendees take part, but not as an activity of this church*
- This congregation generally takes part or supports such organisations/events*
- This congregation participates in and leads/organises events*
- Don't know*

Figure 9 outlines churches' involvement in community organisations and events, showing that 95% were involved in some way.

One in five local churches (19%) provided leadership or organised community organisations and events. A further 36% generally took part in or supported such organisations/events. A similar proportion distinguished between involvement as a congregation and individual involvement: 39% stated that "Attendees take part, but not as an activity of this church".

**Figure 9: Church participation in wider community events**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2520).

## 14 Role in the Local Community Wellbeing

### *In summary:*

- *Four out of ten churches (42%) felt that they had played a positive role in response to problems that have occurred in the local area.*
- *The majority of churches (84%) claimed to have an influence in some way when there are crises in the local community,*

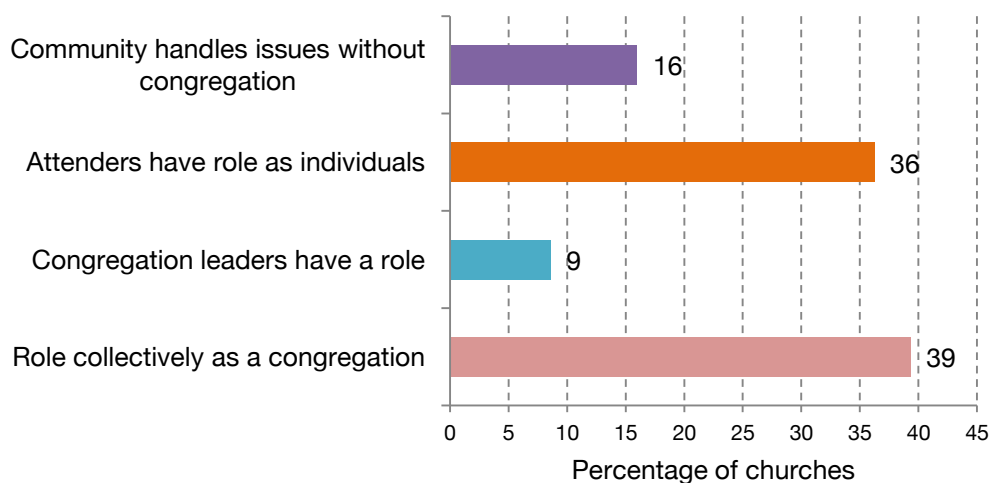
When problems or crises occur in local communities, the local churches can be an asset to address concerns and invest in local community wellbeing.

**Responding to community problems:** Local churches were asked: "Over the past five years, do you think that this congregation has played a positive role in response to problems that have occurred in the local area (e. g. decline in community services, crime, conflict)?" Four out of ten churches (42%) reported they had played a positive role in enhancing community wellbeing, with 18% definite that they had and 24% who said it was probable. A further 36% were neutral or unsure and 22% reported that they had probably or definitely not played this kind of role.<sup>4</sup>

**Crises in the community:** When asked "In crises in the local community, does this congregation see itself as having a significant role?" the majority of churches (84%) claimed to have an influence in some way. Around four in ten (39%) churches claimed to have a role collectively as a congregation. A further 9% reported that leaders of the congregation had a role. Some 36% of churches indicated that attendees had a role as individuals, but not through their connection with the church and 16% indicated that the community handles the issues without the congregation. (See Figure 10).

<sup>4</sup> Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2354).

*Figure 10: The perceived significant role of local churches in crises in their local communities*



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2175).

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### **About NCLS Research**

*NCLS Research is a joint project of several denominational partners. Established in the early 1990s, it is a world leader in research focused on connecting churches and their communities. The most well-known project is the five-yearly National Church Life Survey. The NCLS Board of Governors comprises representatives from primary sponsors: Uniting Mission and Education, NSW/ACT Synod, Anglicare Diocese of Sydney, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and Australian Catholic University.*

## Appendix 1: Church Participation Rates in the 2011 NCLS

Information in this Appendix was first published in Pepper, M. , Sterland, S, and Powell, R. (2015), *Methodological overview of the study of wellbeing through the National Church Life Survey. Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, (in press).

NCLS Research holds the most comprehensive database of Christian churches in Australia, drawing on information from regional church institutions (e. g. state bodies, dioceses, synods from different denominations) as well as more than two decades of work with NCLS datasets. A comparison of this database with the list of churches that participated in the NCLS can give an indication of the participation rates of congregations/parishes by denomination, locality (urban, regional, remote) and state.

A random sample of Catholic parishes was selected for participation in the 2011 NCLS (with other parishes able to participate on a voluntary basis). For all other churches, participation was opt-in – although some regional church bodies offered to pay for the participation of any/all of the congregations/parishes in their region to boost uptake.

The participation rates of congregations/parishes from Catholic, Anglican and most of the Protestant denominations have generally been good, although this has varied in different rounds of the NCLS. Church participation rates varied by denomination, and within each denomination by region (e. g. states, dioceses, synods).

The participation rate was highest for Vineyard Fellowship churches (73% took part), with the next best participation occurring among Lutheran churches. Participation was poor for Presbyterian churches and Christian Reformed churches. It is also the case that mono-cultural non-Anglo congregations and indigenous congregations are under-represented. Church participation by state was highest in South Australia (38% of churches) and lowest in the Northern Territory (10% of churches). Participation by remote churches was low at only 17%, compared with 22% of churches in regional areas and 29% of urban churches (in capital cities). (See Table A1).

While it is not possible to determine whether there is any systemic self-selection bias, in relation to self-selection by churches, it is conceivable that there may be some biases in relation to church health, given that evaluating their church's health is the reason that churches participate. For example, vibrant churches may well be more likely to participate than those that are in decline. On the other hand, some churches that know they are in trouble may be motivated to participate to help equip themselves with tools for planning for the future. Small churches are likely to be under-represented due to the cost of participation and to the fact that Church Life Profiles are only provided for churches with at least ten respondents. However, in the denominations where regional bodies offer to pay for congregational participation these biases may be offset to an extent.

With limitations notwithstanding, the NCLS datasets are unparalleled in terms of their breadth of national and denominational coverage.

**Table A1: Respondent numbers and response rates for 2011 Operations Survey.**

Survey type	Respondent n	Response rate	Response rate definition
Operations	2,225	89%	Total number of churches which returned a survey form divided by the number of participating churches (parishes/multi-congregation churches/single congregation churches)

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey datafile.

Note: 3,103 locations participated in the 2011 NCLS (2,492 parishes/multi-congregation churches/single congregation churches).

**Table A2: Church participation rates for denominations, states and localities in 2011.**

Variable	% of churches participating
<b>Denominational grouping<sup>1</sup></b>	
Catholic	23
Mainstream Protestant	31
Pentecostal	6
Other Protestant	25
<b>Selected individual denominations</b>	
Anglican	34
Apostolic	11
Australian Christian Churches (AOG)	2
Baptist	35
Christian City Church	45
Christian Missionary Alliance	16
Christian Outreach Centres	4
Christian Reformed	10
Churches of Christ	17
Christian Revival Crusade	18
Catholic	23
Lutheran	54
Presbyterian	10
Salvation Army	31
Seventh-day Adventist	16
Uniting	27
Vineyard	73
<b>State</b>	
NSW/ACT	29
NT	10
Qld	16
SA	38
Tas	25
Vic	19
WA	29
<b>Locality<sup>2</sup></b>	
Urban	30
Regional	22
Remote	17

Source: 2011 NCLS Aggregated Attender datafile, NCLS Admin database.

1 "Mainstream Protestant" includes Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Uniting churches; "Pentecostal" includes Australian Christian Churches, Apostolic, Bethesda, Christian City Church, Christian Revival Crusade, Christian Life Churches, Four Square Gospel, Christian Outreach Centres and International Pentecostal Holiness Church churches; and "Other Protestant" includes Baptist, Brethren, Churches of Christ, Christian Missionary Alliance, Christian Reformed, Congregational, Grace Communion, Nazarene, Salvation Army, Seventh-day Adventist, Vineyard Fellowship and Wesleyan Methodist churches.

2 Locality is derived from Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013) remoteness area classification of postcodes. "Urban" refers to major cities of Australia, "regional" refers to inner and outer regional areas, and "remote" refers to remote and very remote areas. The locality is assigned based on the remoteness area which has the greatest proportion for each postcode.

### Augmented Datasets

Additional Church Life Survey projects were conducted in 2013 and 2014 with a sample of Australian Christian Churches (Assemblies of God) and of Salvation Army Eastern Territory corps. While figures in this report only include 2011 NCLS results, we hope to revise this report based on the augmented dataset.

NCLS Research Report

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# The impact of congregations on Australian society

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Ruth Powell, Miriam Pepper & Sam Sterland  
February 2015

## Abstract

The purpose of this report is to address the impact of religion on Australian society at the level of local religious groups. The National Church Life Survey provides a rich and extensive source of data about thousands of local Christian congregations in 23 Catholic, Anglican and Protestant denominations. Using a social capital conceptual framework, this report synthesises a wide range of measures, particularly focussing on bridging (between group) actions, such as volunteering or civic engagement. These existing measures are based on the collective actions of church attenders, or the services that congregations provide. The report also outlines some options for filling some of the gaps that the National Church Life does not cover, including some Christian groups as well as non-Christian religious groups.

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## Acknowledgments

Production of this paper would not have been possible without the work of the other members of the NCLS Research team who, at the time of publication also included: Chandrika Chinnadurai, Chris Ehler, Nicole Hancock, Kathy Kerr, James Schroder, and Amelia Vaeafisi.

## Citation

Powell, R. , Pepper, M, and Sterland, S, (2015) The impact of congregations on Australian society: NCLS Research Report. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research, Australian Catholic University.  
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## PART A: INTRODUCTION

### 1 Introduction

How might we map the economic and social impacts of religion in Australia? One key component of this exercise is to assess the impact at the level of local religious groups – or religious congregations.

Congregations are a significant collective expression of religion in Australia. They are defined by their alignment with religious beliefs and teachings and offer places of worship. Yet, because they are embedded in the social fabric of local neighbourhoods, they are also assets to the wider community. Congregations are networks of people that nurture values and practices that contribute to the well-being of their members and the communities they serve, providing both emotional and material support. As organisations, they ascribe to the value of helping others, and can play an important role in meeting social and welfare needs, through the provision of social services.

This report has two aims; to review what we already know about the scope of activities of religious congregations and to propose methods to fill gaps in this knowledge. The first main aim is to describe what we currently know about ways that Christian churches in Australia impact on the wider community. The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a longitudinal study of Christian congregations that commenced in 1991 and, 25 years on, will have a sixth wave in 2016. This rich dataset represents an extraordinary collaboration between Christian denominations over time and is unparalleled in the world in terms of its length and breadth.

The collation of data in this report in a relatively short time period is only possible because of the long-term investment of denominations and congregations in the National Church Life Survey. Some sections of this report have previously been published in different formats, such as in Fact Sheets, Occasional Papers as well as academic journal articles. Other sections have required analysis of the raw datasets. This review of existing data and research aims to provide measures which may be the basis of further work. Sample metrics can be assessed for their suitability for further research and analysis.

The second aim of this report is to address the question of what else we need to do with regard to understanding the impact of local religious groups. By showing what we already know, this will allow gaps to be identified. For example, while the NCLS covers Catholic, Anglican and Protestant faith traditions through the participation of 23 denominations, it does not hold any information about some Christian faith traditions, such as Orthodox churches. In addition, it has not extended to include other non-Christian religious communities. These are important gaps to be addressed in order to fully address the goal of mapping the economic and social impact of religion at the congregational level.

## 2 Key Findings

### About definitions

- A 'local church' is defined as a gathered faith community in a single location.
- The total number of local churches in Catholic, Anglican and Protestant churches in Australia was estimated as 12,400 in 2011.
- The 2011 NCLS datasets contained 3100 local churches, covering an estimated 25% of all local Christian congregations in Australia from 23 Catholic, Anglican and Protestant denominations.
- An estimated 15% of Australians are 'frequent church attenders' i. e. attend church at least once per month. Based on the population of Australia at the time of the survey, this equates to 3. 28 million people.

### A profile of church attenders

- Church attenders are older than the wider Australian population (44% aged over 60 years vs 20% overall), more likely to be female (60% vs 51% overall) and more likely to have a university degree (33% vs 24% overall).
- The most common occupation for attenders is in the people-focussed professions (33%), followed by administrative, clerical, or sales workers (21%).
- Estimated family income is normally distributed across church-goers, with the most common income brackets being between \$40 000 and \$80 000 per year (28%).

### Church attenders' shared beliefs, values and vision

- Shared beliefs: More than nine out of ten attenders accept a Trinitarian view of God
- Shared values: eight out of ten attenders agreed that Christians should a) work to create a more just society, and b) had a responsibility to be active about environmental issues.
- Shared organisational vision: seven out of ten attenders are aware of a clear vision, goals or direction for their local church's ministry and mission and nearly six out of ten (56%) are either strongly or partly committed to it.

**Table 1: Summary of the collective action of church attenders: measures of bonding and bridging**

Collective action of church attenders
<b>Measures of Bonding</b>
75% of church attenders describe their sense of belonging to the local church as either 'strong and growing' or 'strong and stable'
Around a third (32%) of all attenders participate in small prayer and/or study groups.
<b>Measures of Bridging (or Civic Engagement)</b>
Church attenders are more likely to volunteer in local community groups (48%) than the wider Australian population (38%).
Each month, more than half (52%) of all church attenders give some hours to community service.
Half of all church attenders are involved in community service, social action or other kinds of groups not connected to their congregation.
A quarter of all church attenders are involved in church-based community service or social action groups.

Source: 2011 National Church Life Attender Survey A and Sample Survey G

**Table 2: Summary of Bridging Activities by Local Church**

Activities run by local churches	% of Local Churches	Estimated No. of Churches*
<i>*Based on the estimate of 12,400 Christian congregations in Australia</i>	%	n
<b>Social Service and Social/Recreation Activities</b>		
Provision of social services to the wider community	95	11780
Provision of emergency relief/material assistance (e. g. food, clothes for the needy)	84	10416
Provision of social, recreation or leisure activities for the community	67	8308
<b>Ministries for Children and Youth</b>		
Creche	36	4461
Playgroups run by the congregation	37	4566
Pre-schools run by the congregation	4	508
Sunday School	63	7839
Kids club	19	2363
Youth groups	48	5946
Other youth activities/clubs not counted above (eg CEBS, Girls Brigade)	10	1220
<b>Ministries with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people</b>		
Some involvement with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people	19	2356
Emergency services are the most common type of ministry that primarily serves Aboriginal people	12	1488
<b>Migrant Ministry</b>		
Involved in migrant ministry	35	4340
Migrant ministry not a priority in their area	51	6324
<b>Support for People in Developing Countries</b>		
Regular financial support	61	7564
Regular prayer commitment	52	6448
Personal relationships with individuals/groups (44%)	44	5456
Regular support for poverty and injustice campaigns	32	3968
<b>Support for People with Disabilities</b>		
Have major physical facilities e. g. ramps, disabled toilets & reserved parking	75	9300
Have minor physical facilities	56	6944
<b>Environmental Initiatives</b>		
Engagement in animal welfare or environmental activities	10	1240
Use recycling services	64	7936
Purchasing of environmentally friendly consumables (eg recycled paper, cleaning products)	33	4092
<b>Shared use of Property</b>		
Allow church property to be used by groups in the wider community	86	10664
Allow church property to be used at least weekly	53	6572
<b>Congregational Involvement in Community Organisations and Events</b>		
Involved in some way: leaders, congregations or individual attenders	95	11780
Provides leadership or organise community organisations and events	19	2356
Congregations collectively take part or support community organisations/events	36	4464
<b>Role in the Local Community Wellbeing</b>		
Have played a positive role in response to problems that have occurred in the local area	42	5208
Have had an influence in some way when there are crises in the local community	84	10416

### 3 Social capital as a conceptual framework

Social capital theory provides a useful conceptual framework for evaluating the impact of congregations on Australian society. It offers a way to conceptualise the relationships between individuals, congregations and the wider community. Putnam defines social capital as “those features of social organisation, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating co-ordinated actions.” (1993, p. 167). Noting the overall goal of this project is to map the economic and social impact of religion, the link between social capital and the idea of improving ‘the efficiency of society’ is worth highlighting.

While social capital has, to some degree, been victim to ‘conceptual creep’ and subject to vigorous debate about definitions, Putnam and other social capital theorists focus on the benefits of relational networks as a resource for the wider community. Any activities that increase social networks, and therefore grow and strengthen relationships, should increase social capital. Based on this assumption, researchers assess the level of participation in activities and organizations as good indicators, because dynamics both within and between groups generate social capital.

Social capital is often characterised as being of two principal types, bonding and bridging (Woolcock and Narayan 2000). Bonding social capital is about the strength of relationships within the group, whereas bridging social capital is about the extent and strength of relationships between the group and other groups (Leonard & Bellamy, 2013).

Putnam defines bonding social capital as that type of social capital which is inward looking and tends to ‘reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups’. It refers to trusting and co-operative relations between members of a network who are similar in terms of social identity (e. g. race/ethnicity). Bonding social capital is associated with dense networks, thick trust, and shared norms.

In contrast, bridging social capital is defined as outward looking, encompassing people ‘across diverse social cleavages’ (Putnam 2000:22). It is theorised to be associated with large, loose networks with horizontal weak ties across difference, and thin trust (Leonard and Onyx 2003).

A third type of social capital has been added in order to fill a perceived gap in terms of recognising vertical power differentials in social relations. So-called ‘linking capital’ is defined as ‘norms of respect and networks of trusting relationships between people who are interacting across explicit, formal, or institutionalized power or authority gradients in society.’ (Szreter and Woolcock, in Kawachi, Kim, Coutts & Subramanian, 2004).

In Halpern’s (2005) attempted synthesis of many threads of social capital research, he proposed a framework which is a matrix of components of social capital - networks, norms and sanctions - and the three types of social capital; bonding, bridging and linking relationships. This three-by-three matrix is then further expanded with three levels of analysis – micro, meso and macro. Religious congregations fit the meso level.

There have been many attempts to measure social capital and make links to an economic framework. For example, the World Bank (2004) invested in the development of a social capital survey instrument in their attempt to refine and “improve our understanding of local social contexts, and thus our collective capacity to respond more effectively to the interests and aspirations of the poor”. In one iteration, the components of the survey covered six dimensions: Groups and Networks, Trust and Solidarity, Collective Action and Cooperation, Information and Communication, Social Cohesion and Inclusion, Empowerment and Political Action. The first two dimensions cover measures of group and network membership (“structural”) and subjective perceptions of trust and norms (“cognitive”). The next two addressed the main ways in which social capital operates and the final pair dealt with major areas of application or outcomes.

In broad terms, there are two approaches to using social capital in policy evaluation and development. The first approach is the monetary valuation of social capital stocks, which consists of producing estimates of the value of social capital assets. However, the fact that social capital is based largely on relationships makes it difficult to value in this way. A second approach consists of choosing relevant, independent and comparable social capital measures based on

existing survey questions. While there is a lack of widely accepted measures of social capital at a national or international level, largely caused by the wide range of approaches used to define social capital, efforts are still being made to come up with a coherent set of measures that may have international comparisons. For example, in a recent framework proposed by the UK Office of National Statistics (2014), they select measures based on four different aspects of social capital: Personal Relationships, Social Network Support, Civic Engagement, Trust and Cooperative Norms.

Local religious congregations have been recognised to be both creators and repositories of social capital. For example, Putnam has observed that faith communities are the single most important repository of social capital in America. He and others have identified the links between religiosity and increased volunteering, giving and civic engagement (Putnam 2002; Putnam and Campbell 2010).

There have been a number of applications of social capital theory to Australian congregational life. Dixon (2010) framed the NCLS core qualities of church vitality as religious social goods and linked them to social capital theory in the context of Catholic parishes. Leonard and Bellamy have published a series of papers exploring social capital constructs to volunteering behaviour in particular (e. g. Leonard & Bellamy, 2006; Leonard & Bellamy, 2010; Leonard & Bellamy, 2013). In both cases NCLS Research data played a central role.

The main focus of this report is on bridging social capital in Christian congregations – the relationships between groups. In particular, it will present data that will indicate the degree to which church attenders interact with other groups in the wider community. Through bridging, they create relational ties, cross demographic divides such as class or ethnicity, construct bridges across network holes (where there has been little or no connection), or access resources such as information, knowledge, and finance from sources external to an organization or community (Bellamy and Leonard, 2014).

The approach to measurement in this report is to draw on existing survey questions to determine what we know about the impact of religious congregations. So, while some indicative measures of other areas of social capital are included, the majority of what is mapped in this report are measures of civic engagement. It should also be noted that the measures outlined in this report are not an exhaustive list of what is included in National Church Life Survey instruments. However, what follows is a synthesis of information that has not previously been presented in such an extensive manner.

## PART B: METHOD AND DATA

### 4 About the data for this report

#### *In summary:*

- *A 'local church' is defined as a gathered faith community in a single location.*
- *The total number of local churches in Catholic, Anglican and Protestant churches in Australia was estimated as 12,400 in 2011.*
- *The 2011 NCLS datasets contained 3100 local churches, covering an estimated 25% of all local Christian congregations in Australia from 23 Catholic, Anglican and Protestant denominations.*
- *An estimated 15% of Australians are 'frequent church attenders' i. e. attend church at least once per month. Based on the population of Australia at the time of the survey, this equates to 3. 28 million people.*



#### 4.1 Local churches in Australia and in the National Church Life Survey

This report is based on data collected through Australian National Church Life Surveys (NCLS), perhaps the largest database on church life in the world. These five-yearly national surveys have been the result of collaboration across more than 20 Anglican, Protestant and Catholic denominations. Each survey wave has collected responses from hundreds of thousands of individual church attenders in thousands of local churches.

In 2011, 3,103 local churches from 23 denominations took part, which represents 25% of the estimated number of 12,400 local churches in Australia. This figure does not include Orthodox churches (who have participated in the NCLS to date) and independent and house churches, about whom NCLS Research does not hold a reliable database.

Different denominations organize their church structures in a variety of ways. As well as single congregations in a location, some have a geographically-based parish structure, others have multi-congregation churches in the same or different locations. The language also varies and can mean different things in different contexts: church, congregation, parish; cluster, multi-site; multi-campus, worship service and so on.

For the sake of clarity, NCLS researchers distinguish between congregations or faith communities in different locations. These are referred to as 'local churches'. That is 3,103 locations participated in the 2011 NCLS. All percentages in this report are calculated on the basis of local churches as locations.

If these local churches are considered in terms of how they are clustered together, this equates to 2,492 entities (parishes/multi-congregation churches/single congregation churches).

#### 4.1 Church attenders in Australia and in the National Church Life Survey

**Frequent Church Attendance:** We define 'frequent church attendance' as attending church worship services at least once per month. The 2009 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes found that 15% of Australians were frequent church attenders. These figures are based on sample surveys, which some church head count studies suggest may be an over-estimate of the actual number of church attenders. However, they remain the most reliable figures currently available. Based on the total population of Australia at that time, this percentage equated to 3.28 million people.

**NCLS Church Attenders:** During a National Church Life Survey all church attenders aged 15 years or over present at spiritual nurture activities during the survey period, such as church worship services, are invited to complete an Attender Survey. The 2011 NCLS Attenders Surveys were completed by nearly 260,000 church attenders. The attender sample used for this report is 216,063 attenders. The 2006 NCLS Attenders Surveys ( $n = 300,338$ ) has also been referenced in this report. In both survey waves, the data has been weighted by denominational estimates to improve representativeness. (See Pepper, Sterland and Powell, 2015, for more information about weighting).

#### 4.2 Denominations in the National Church Life Survey

More than 20 Catholic, Anglican and Protestant denominations have taken part in each of the National Church Life Surveys. The Catholic Church did not take part in the 1991 NCLS and participated in a parallel Catholic Church Life Survey in 1996. In 2011, some 23 denominations were represented. Table 3 shows the participation of denominations across all the waves of the NCLS.

**Table 3: Denominations that participated in National Church Life Surveys: 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006 & 2011**

	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011
Anglican Church of Australia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Apostolic Church of Australia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Australian Christian Churches (AOG)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Baptist Churches	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bethesda Ministries International	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
Catholic Church in Australia	✗	✓*	✓	✓	✓
Christian Brethren Assemblies	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓
Christian and Missionary Alliance	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
C3 Church (was Christian City Church)	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Christian Life Churches International	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
Christian Outreach Centre Australia	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
Christian Reformed Churches of Australia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CRC Churches International	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Church of the Nazarene	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Churches of Christ	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fellowship of Congregational Churches	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Foursquare Church Australia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Grace Communion International	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
International Pentecostal Holiness Church (IPHC)	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Lutheran Church of Australia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Presbyterian Church of Australia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Seventh-day Adventist Church	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Salvation Army	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Uniting Church in Australia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vineyard Churches Australia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australia	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Westminster Presbyterian Church of Australia	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Independent Churches	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

\* Note 1: In 1996, Catholic churches participated in the parallel Catholic Church Life Survey (CCLS).

Note 2: Some denominations are missing from data tables (Apostolic, Brethren, Christian Missionary Alliance and Foursquare Church) because the sample of participating congregations was not sufficiently representative of the denomination.

Note 3: Christian Life Churches International has now changed to Acts 2 Alliance (A2A)

Note 4: Christian Outreach Centre Australia has now changed to International Network of Churches (INC)

### 4.3 NCLS survey instruments

The NCLS is a church-based survey completed by attenders and leaders in individual congregations and parishes. There is a variety of survey instruments used in each local church.

**Operations Survey:** A single representative from each participating local church was invited to complete an “Operations Survey” form outlining the activities and operations of the church. This is the main dataset that is used for this report. The Operations Survey included a listing of types of social service, social, recreational and educational activities, activities for children and youth, and estimates of the numbers attending these different activities. It also

included information about congregational character and history, church worship services, staffing and lay leadership, planning processes and decision-making, property, finances and relations with other groups.

**Attender Surveys:** The main survey is a hard copy “Attender Survey” form for all participants aged 15 years and over. As well as core Attender Survey items completed by all respondents, a series of polls (Attender Sample Surveys) were conducted on random samples of attenders across the nation. As an enhancement to the Operations Survey data, this report will contain some results from attenders, particularly about their acts of service to the wider community.

**Leader Surveys:** “Leader Survey” forms were also made available in paper and online formats for interested lay leaders and clergy in the congregation/parish. However, these data will not be used in this report.

#### 4.4 Participation rates and representativeness of all churches

NCLS Research holds the most comprehensive database of Christian churches in Australia, drawing on information from regional church institutions (e. g. state bodies, dioceses, synods from different denominations) as well as more than two decades of work with NCLS datasets. A comparison of this database with the list of churches that participated in the NCLS can give an indication of the participation rates of congregations/parishes by denomination, locality (urban, regional, remote) and state.

A random sample of Catholic parishes was selected for participation in the 2011 NCLS (with other parishes able to participate on a voluntary basis). For all other churches, participation was opt-in – although some regional church bodies offered to pay for the participation of any/all of the congregations/parishes in their region to boost uptake.

The participation rates of congregations/parishes from Catholic, Anglican and most of the Protestant denominations have generally been good, although this has varied in different rounds of the NCLS. Church participation rates varied by denomination, and within each denomination by region (e. g. states, dioceses, synods). The procedures for estimating participation, weighting data and proportions of participating churches in each denomination, state and locality (urban, regional and remote location) are shown in Appendix 1.

The participation rate was highest for Vineyard Fellowship churches (73% took part), with the next best participation occurring among Lutheran churches. Participation was poor for Presbyterian churches and Christian Reformed churches. It is also the case that mono-cultural non-Anglo congregations and indigenous congregations are under-represented. Church participation by state was highest in South Australia (38% of churches) and lowest in the Northern Territory (10% of churches). Participation by remote churches was low at only 17%, compared with 22% of churches in regional areas and 29% of urban churches (in capital cities).

An issue that has bearing on the reliability of both the population estimates and small sample survey data concerns self-selection bias. This occurs on two levels. Firstly, self-selection by churches regarding participation in the NCLS in the first place, and secondly, self-selection by individuals within the participating churches. It is not possible to determine whether there are any systemic self- biases in either case. Of course, the important question is whether self-selection biases survey results in relation to a specific research question and whether or not findings are likely to be skewed.

In relation to self-selection by churches, it is conceivable that there may be some biases in relation to church health, given that evaluating their church’s health is the reason that churches participate. For example, vibrant churches may well be more likely to participate than those that are in decline. On the other hand, some churches that know they are in trouble may be motivated to participate to help equip themselves with tools for planning for the future. Small churches are likely to be under-represented due to the cost of participation and to the fact that Church Life Profiles are only provided for churches with at least ten respondents. However, in the denominations where regional bodies offer to pay for congregational participation these biases may be offset to an extent.

There is no evidence of any self-selection biases at the level of individuals. The content of the surveys and distribution method is unlikely to have triggered any self-selection. Individual church attenders were randomly selected to receive the small Attender Sample surveys. Those who had trouble completing survey forms (e. g. people with various disabilities, including reading and/or writing difficulties) are likely to be under-represented.

With limitations notwithstanding, the NCLS datasets are unparalleled in terms of their breadth of national and denominational coverage.

**Table 4: Respondent numbers and response rates in 2011 for NCLS survey types.**

Survey type	Respondent n	Response rate	Response rate definition
Operations	2,225	89%	Total number of churches which returned a survey form divided by the number of participating churches (parishes/multi-congregation churches/single congregation churches)
Attender	258,000	62%	Total survey forms returned divided by total forms ordered (with only churches that returned at least one form included in the calculation)

Source: 2011 NCLS Core Attender datafile, 2011 NCLS Operations Survey datafile.

Note: 3,103 locations participated in the 2011 NCLS (2,492 parishes/multi-congregation churches/single congregation churches).

#### 4.5 Augmented datasets

While Pentecostals were under-represented in the 2011 NCLS, a later Church Life Survey project conducted with a national sample of Australian Christian Churches (Assemblies of God) during 2013 to 2014 has allowed augmentation of the datasets, providing a useful redressing of this potential source of bias. The 2011 NCLS datasets have also been augmented with the addition of data from a 2014 Church Life Survey of a representative sample of Salvation Army Eastern Territory corps.

While figures in this report only include the 2011 NCLS results, it may be possible to revise this report based on the augmented dataset, which would also include the 2013 Australian Christian Churches sample data and the 2014 Salvation Army Eastern Territory sample.

## PART C: RESULTS

This section of the report outlines the results collected through National Church Life Surveys about the impact of Christian congregations on Australian society. Some of these results have been published in previous reports. Some have been extracted from the raw datasets.

The first set of results briefly outlines the demographic profile of church attenders: their age, gender and education. In addition, indicators of occupation and income are included. As well as adding to the general description of the church attending population, these particular variables point to the capacity of local congregations to be social institutions where linking social capital can be built. That is, congregations are locations where trusting relationships can be built between people at different gradients of social power and authority.

While it is not an extensive analysis, the next set of results provides some sample indicators of the norms and sanctions, which are a component of social capital.

- Shared religious beliefs
- Shared vision
- Shared values e. g. Moral duty and Just society

The third set of results focus on the impact of individuals on their wider community through collective action. To what degree are individual church attenders engaged in service to the wider community, beyond their congregational involvement? Indicators include:

- Levels of church attender involvement in social services
- Number of voluntary hours invested by individual attenders in wider community organisations

The remaining results focus on the activities of congregations, rather than individuals. The types of activities run by local churches are documented:

- Social service activities run by local churches
- Social, recreational, and educational activities run by local churches

The focus then turns to ministries offered by congregations for specific people groups. These groups include ministries or services for:

- Children and youth
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people
- Migrants
- People in developing countries
- People with disabilities

The final sets of results deal with local church activities that intersect with the wider community in other ways:

- Environmental activities
- Sharing property with community groups
- Involvement in community events
- Role in the local community wellbeing

## 5 A demographic profile of church attenders

### *In summary:*

- *Church attenders are older than the wider Australian population, more likely to be female and more likely to have a university degree.*
- *The most common occupation for attenders is 'Professional working mainly with people (eg teacher, lawyer, social worker, nurse)'*
- *Estimated family income is normally distributed across church-goers, with the most common income brackets being between \$40 000 and \$80 000 per year (28%)*

All participants (n = 258 000) in the National Church Life Survey were asked a series of core demographic questions (Mollitor, Powell, Pepper, Hancock, 2013). Results for age, gender and education are summarised below.

**Age:** As a whole, church attenders are older than the broader Australian population. In 2011, the percentage of church attenders aged 20 to 39 was only 21%, compared with the national proportion of 28%. The proportion of church attenders over 60 years of age was 44% in 2011, compared to only 20% across all Australians.

**Gender:** While it varies with age, the Australian population has a balanced gender profile with 51% female and 49% male. In contrast, the gender distribution among church attenders is less balanced with 60% of church attenders being female.

**Education:** Church attenders are more likely to have a university education than the national Australian population. Some 33% had a university degree in 2011 compared to 24% of all Australians at the same time.

**Occupation and income:** Additional demographic questions were directed to a small random representative sample of attenders, including questions about occupation and income, which 1143 people responded to. These variables are not only useful for describing the population of church attenders, but they give some indication of the potential for linking social capital within congregations. That is, local churches are a venue for people to meet and build relationships with people from a wide diversity of occupational backgrounds and wealth. Lawyers rub shoulders with manual workers. Engineers build contacts with farmers.

Table 5 shows the occupation profile of church attenders. Those who were not currently in an occupation were asked to answer for their last occupation. Those with more than one job, answered for their main job. It shows that the most common occupation for church attenders is in the people-focussed professions (33%), followed by administrative, clerical, or sales workers (21%).

Figure 1 shows the estimated family income per year in a randomly selected sample of attenders across all denominations. It shows a normal distribution with the largest proportion of attenders reporting that they have a family income of between \$40 000 and \$80 000 per year.

This national snapshot does not capture the degree of diversity within local congregations. This would require further work, modelling differences within congregations. However, it does point to the potential of strengthening linking social capital.

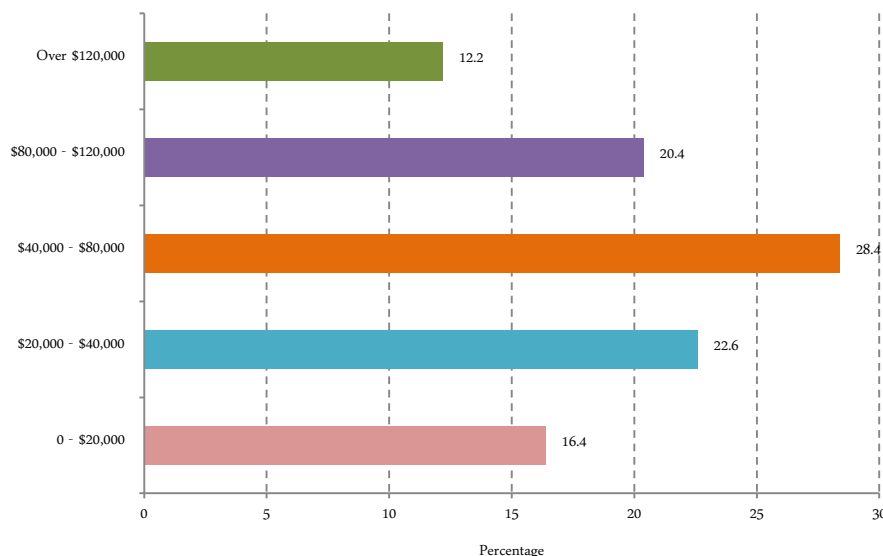


**Table 5: Occupation of Australian church attenders**

	%
Professional working mainly with people (eg teacher, lawyer, social worker, nurse)	33.3
Professional working primarily in technological fields (eg engineer, surveyor, accountant)	10.2
Employer or small business owner	6.5
Administrative, clerical, or sales worker	20.6
Skilled trades or craft worker (e. g. carpenter, hairdresser)	4.5
Semi-skilled or manual worker (e. g. machinist, waiter, cleaner, labourer)	6.3
Farmer or farm manager	2.6
Some other occupation	15.9

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Survey Q (n = 1143). NB: Those who were not currently in an occupation were asked to answer for their last occupation. Those with more than one job, answered for their main job.

**Figure 1: Estimated family income of church attenders**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Survey Q (n = 1143).

## 6 Shared norms and values

### *In summary:*

- **Shared beliefs:** More than nine out of ten attenders accept a Trinitarian view of God
- **Shared values:** eight out of ten attenders agreed that Christians should a) work to create a more just society, and b) had a responsibility to be active about environmental issues.
- **Shared organisational vision:** seven out of ten attenders are aware of a clear vision, goals or direction for their local church's ministry and mission and nearly six out of ten (56%) are either strongly or partly committed to it.

Some of the key elements of the concept of social capitals are norms, reciprocity, trust, shared values. Social capital theorists argue that when these are shared, society's efficiency is improved because actions are co-ordinated. While it is

not the main focus of this paper, a few indicative variables are included here to demonstrate that local Australian churches exhibit the hallmarks of effective generators and repositories of social capital. A brief snapshot of the following features in congregational life follows:

- Shared core beliefs
- Shared values
- Shared organisational vision

### 6.1 Shared core religious beliefs about God

There is a strong foundation of shared beliefs about the nature of God in the church-going population. For example, a random sample of 1362 church attender across denominations<sup>1</sup> were asked a standard poll question about which statement best summarised their belief about God. Some 92% selected the statement “There is one God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit” and 7% chose an alternate description of God. Only 0. 2% stated that “God does not exist” and 0. 6% of attender did not know. When provided with a series of statements to represent various concepts of God, 98% of all attenders agreed that God is forgiving, loving, and merciful.

### 6.2 Shared values

Two indicators of values have been selected to demonstrate shared values. To what degree is there a spread of views among attenders about whether Christians:

- should work to change the structures of society in order to create a more just society
- have a responsibility to be active about environmental issues.

**Working for change in the structures of society:** The notion of a just society, where all have adequate access to resources, opportunity and a say in decisions that affect their lives, is a basic tenet of modern Western democracies. Christianity has long played a role in debates over what shape justice should take in the prevailing circumstances. Churches, Christians, and church-based NGOs have been involved in debate and active attempts to redress social and environmental issues.

In 2011 the National Church Life Survey asked a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant attenders the following question: “*Do you agree or disagree: ‘Christians should work to change the structures of society in order to create a more just society’?*” A large majority of attenders (80%) were in agreement with the idea that Christians should work to create a more just society, including 37% who were in strong agreement. A small number (17%) were neutral or unsure, with only 3% in disagreement. The views of these attenders suggest that there is underlying support within the Christian community for active attempts to work for change that establishes a more just society. While the goal of social change is debated among churches and their members – with different groups at times holding opposing views in relation to a justice issue – it is clear that the current tenor of attenders’ views is one of activism rather than withdrawal from social and political engagement (Powell, Pepper & Bevis, 2014).

**Christian environmental responsibility:** Environmental destruction, resource depletion, and the increasingly adverse effects of a changing climate have focussed the attention of publics across the globe in recent decades. The future of the Murray-Darling Basin, drought, flood, fire, food production, the oceans and water security are all part of a heightened Australian debate around our relationship to the environment and our use of our natural resources. Many of Australia’s churches are expressing their sense of environmental responsibility through words and actions. For example, some denominations have environment commissions and networks, and the National Council of Churches has commenced a new “Eco Mission” project. Growing numbers of congregations are also becoming more engaged in appreciation of and care for Creation in terms of their worship, mission, service and the operation of their buildings (Pepper, Bevis, Hancock, Powell, & Sterland, 2014).

<sup>1</sup> 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey J.

In the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant attenders were asked their views about the moral requirement for action on the environment as follows: *“Do you believe that Christians have a responsibility to be active about environmental issues?”* Overall, 81% of church attenders in 2011 believed they had responsibility to be active about environmental issues, including 33% who indicated that they themselves were personally active. Some 13% were unsure and a small minority (6%) said that being active about environmental issues was not a Christian responsibility.

### 6.1 Shared organisational vision

One of the dimensions of social capital, sometimes referred to as a cognitive dimension is the subjective perception of trust and norms. One relevant measure in the NCLS is a question that assess whether there is a clear and owned vision for the congregation. Attenders were asked *“Does this congregation/parish have a clear vision, goals or direction for its ministry and mission.”* Across participating congregations in Australia, 69% of attenders claim to be aware of the congregation’s clear vision, goals or direction for its ministry and mission and 56% are at least partly committed to this vision. Previous research based on NCLS data has consistently found that having a clear and owned vision is important to overall church health and vitality. It is strongly related to other core qualities (Powell, Bellamy, Sterland, Jacka, Pepper, & Brady 2012).

## 7 Congregational bonding

*In summary:*

- ***75% of church attenders describe their sense of belonging to the local church as either ‘strong and growing’ or ‘strong and stable’***
- ***Around a third (32%) of all attenders participate in small prayer and/or study groups.***

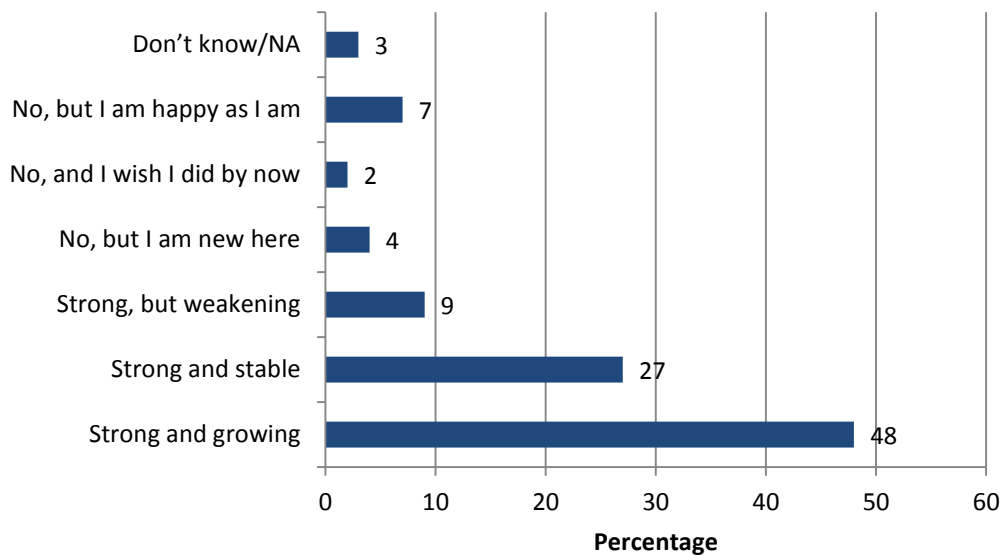
The NCLS core quality titled ‘Strong and growing belonging’ is a measure of bonding social capital – which is about the strength of relationships within the group. While this is not the main focus of this paper, as a key component of social capital, some sample indicators are included here. Other available indicators in the NCLS cover aspects such as levels of trust, effective communication, close friends, conflict and more (see 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey D). Pursuing this line of enquiry may be the subject of further research.

In the 2011 NCLS attenders are asked to make a general assessment about whether they feel they belong to the local church. They were also asked about their involvement in different types of small groups.

Figure 2 shows that the proportion of church attenders who describe their sense of belonging to the local church as either ‘strong and growing’ or ‘strong and stable’ was a combined 75% in 2011.

Around a third (32%) of all attenders participate in small prayer and/or study groups. (Among Protestant attenders, participation is as high as 49%.) A similar proportion of all attenders (32%) participate regularly in fellowships, clubs or other social groups.

**Figure 2: Bonding social capital: Church attenders sense of belonging to their church**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Survey (n = 216,063)

All remaining results in this report focus on the bridging activities of religious congregations measured in terms of the collective action of individuals (such as volunteering levels) and as services offered by congregations.

## 8 Volunteer Acts by Church Attenders

*In summary:*

- **Church attenders are more likely to volunteer in local community groups (48%) than the wider Australian population (38%).**
- **Each month, more than half (52%) of all church attenders give some hours to community service.**
- **Half of all church attenders are involved in community service, social action or other kinds of groups not connected to their congregation.**
- **A quarter of all church attenders are involved in church-based community service or social action groups.**

Local churches are volunteer organisations. While there are paid staff at most churches, many roles are carried out by volunteers and are necessary for the successful operation of congregations. In the 2011 NCLS, it was found that around 44% of church attenders have a voluntary role of some kind within the congregation; these roles can include preaching, leading worship services, music, running groups for children, youth, or adults, committee/task force membership, and administrative and business roles. However, this kind of volunteering within the congregation is not the subject of this report. 'In house' volunteering needs to be distinguished from volunteering in the wider community, which is a more direct measure of the impact on wider society.

It has been estimated that 38% of the Australian adult population are volunteers (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Volunteering Australia (2012) recently found that the most common type of volunteering in Australia was related to sport and recreational activities, particularly in rural areas, and those aged 35-44 or 65-74 were more likely than any other age group to volunteer.

In comparison, some 48% of church attenders volunteers in community service and social action. This figure is based on a composite volunteering measure formed from two of the National Church Life Survey questions. Church attenders indicated whether they took part in a range of activities such as community service, welfare activities, social action,

justice or lobby groups. They also indicated whether these volunteer activities were connected to their congregation, or whether they were community-based activities.

These results from the 2011 NCLS confirm previous studies that demonstrated that religion (identity and attendance) has a positive relationship with volunteering (Lyons and Nivison-Smith 2006). Rather than being only church-focused, results confirm that church volunteers are outward-looking, and active in their community. As noted earlier, research on the NCLS datasets has found that across all denominations there is a positive correlation between hours spent on volunteering within congregations and hours volunteering beyond congregations (Leonard and Bellamy 2006; 2010).

### 8.1 Number of voluntary hours in community service

In the 2011 NCLS, a random sample of 1412 church attenders<sup>2</sup> were asked the following question about their community service: *“How many hours during the last month have you given voluntary time apart from your congregation’s programs to help people in need or to make your community a better place to live?”*

Each month, more than half of all church attenders give some hours to community service (52%). Of this group, 6% volunteer for more than 11 hours each month; 10% volunteer for 6 to 10 hours; 16% for three to five hours and 20% for one to two hours per month.

### 8.2 Levels of service by church attenders via community groups

There are four domains of volunteering activity that account for the majority of volunteering activity outside of local churches and also within Australia’s church-run charities and schools. People volunteer for recreation and sporting organizations, community and welfare organizations, education and training organizations and for social action, social justice or lobby activities.

The largest domain of volunteering activity in Australia is for recreation and sporting organizations accounting for 37% of volunteers. Volunteering for community and welfare organizations (22%) and education and training organizations (18%) are the next largest domains, apart from volunteering for religious organizations such as churches (22%). Volunteering for social action, social justice or lobby activities are among the smaller categories of volunteering (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010).

In the 2011 NCLS, individual church attenders were asked if they were involved in any community service, social action or other kinds of groups *not connected* to their congregation. They were able to select all that applied from a list.

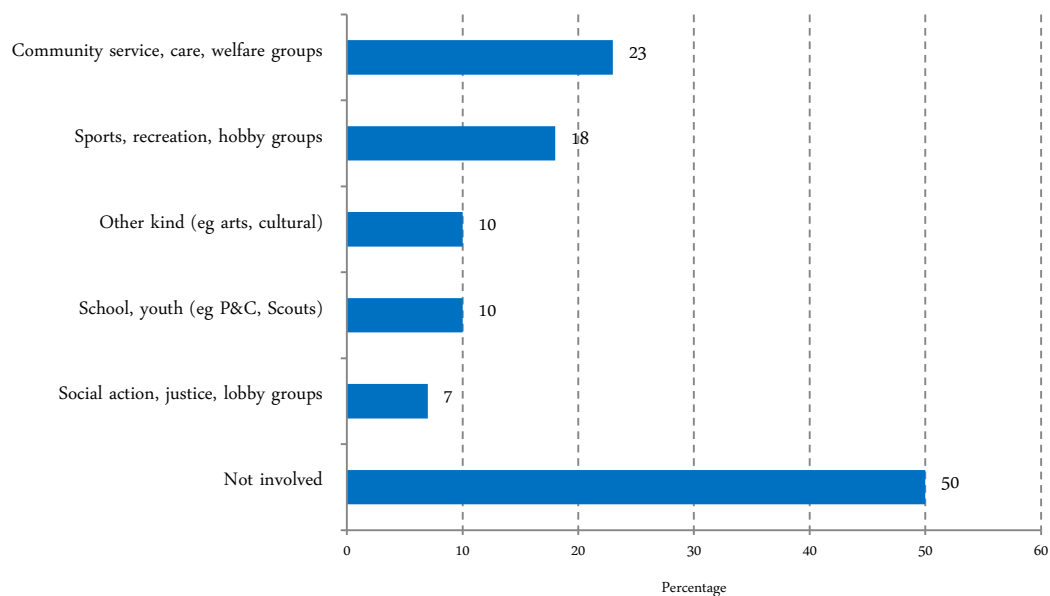
In contrast to all Australians where the most common volunteering related to sport and recreational activities, church attendee volunteers are most likely to be assisting with community care and welfare. Figure 1 shows that 23% of Australian adult attenders were involved in community service, care or welfare groups. Around 18% were in sports, recreation or hobby groups, and 10% reported being in another kind of group (e. g. arts, cultural, political). One in ten (10%) were in school or youth groups (eg P & C, Scouts), while 7% were in social action, justice or lobby groups (e. g. environmental, human rights, local issues).

In 2011, 50% of Australian attenders said they were not involved with such groups. This compares to 52% of attenders in 2006.

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<sup>2</sup> 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey G

**Figure 3: Attender involvement in groups of the wider community**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Survey (n = 216,063)

### 8.3 Levels of service by church attenders through church-based service groups

Church attenders also get involved in social service activity when their churches host programs, groups and activities. Across Australian churches 25% were regularly involved in church-based community service or social action groups. This has increased from 22% in the 2006 NCLS.

Similar to all Australians, older generations tend to be considerably more involved in service related groups both in the wider community and those run by the church. In fact across the Australian churches as a whole, the proportion of church attenders over 65 involved in community service and social action groups based in the community is more than double the proportion of church attenders under 30 who are involved. Some 13% of attenders 15-29 years old were involved in community based service, care or welfare groups in 2011, compared to 32% of attenders 65 and over.

## 9 Social Service Activities Run by Churches

### *In summary:*

- *Ninety five percent of churches provide social services to the wider community.*
- *Emergency relief/material assistance (e. g. food, clothes for the needy) is the most common form of service activity churches are performing, (84% give this form of aid at least occasionally).*

The impact of local congregations in Australian society can be assessed from the perspective of the types of social service activities they offer to the wider Australian community. NCLS results show a very high level of investment in the wellbeing of Australian society by local churches acting as organisations to provide services.

The vast majority of all churches (95%) in Australia provided community service activities of some form in 2011 (see Table 6). Some 81% of all Australian churches reported that these activities occurred monthly or more often and 14% took place occasionally.



**Table 6: Percent of churches performing community service activities: 2011 vs 2006**

<b>Churches that indicated performing any of the community services indicated in the 2011 NCLS</b>	<b>All NCLS in 2011</b>	<b>All NCLS in 2006</b>
	%	%
Monthly or more often	81	78
Occasionally	14	14
Never	5	8

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2520), 2006 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 4212).

Churches are involved in a diverse range of practical services in their communities (see Table 7 for a ranking of service activities). Emergency relief/material assistance (e. g. food, clothes for the needy) is the most common form of service activity churches are performing, with 84% giving this form of aid at least occasionally. Visiting as a form of service is also very common (82%), as is offering some form of counselling (60%).

**Table 7: Types of service activities run by local churches at least occasionally, across Australia in 2011**

	%
<b>Emergency relief or material assistance</b> (eg food, clothes for needy)	84
<b>Visiting</b> (eg prisons, hospitals, fringe attenders)	82
<b>Counselling services</b> (eg marriage counselling, parenting programs, social work)	60
<b>Other welfare/community service/social action activities not mentioned elsewhere</b>	52
<b>Political or social justice activities</b> (eg human rights)	35
<b>Community development or local resident action groups</b>	24
<b>Aged care services</b> (eg Meals on wheels, home help)	23
<b>Care for the disabled</b> (eg skills training, respite care, home care)	21
<b>Migrant support activities</b> (eg English as a second language, refugee support, interpreting service)	21
<b>Children or youth support</b> (eg youth training schemes, literacy programs, unemployed programs)	20
<b>Activities for unemployed people</b> (eg job seeking preparation, skills training, volunteers scheme)	13
<b>Other accommodation</b> (eg homeless hostels, crisis accommodation, student accommodation)	13
<b>Animal welfare or environmental activities</b> (eg Landcare)	10
<b>Accommodation for the aged or infirm</b> (eg nursing homes, aged units)	6

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2520).

In the following section, the various services offered by local churches have been loosely grouped as follows:

- **Programs related to physical care to the vulnerable** (eg aged care, disabled care, accommodation, material assistance, etc)
- **Services that equip or empower people** (eg counselling, children and youth support, migrant support, activities for the unemployed, etc)

- **Other activities related to service or justice** (eg political and social justice activities, community development, environmental and other activities)

Table 8 shows the levels of local church involvement in service or social action activities related to the physical care of the vulnerable. As noted, across the nation, the most common service offered by local churches is emergency relief or material assistance (84%) followed by visiting people (82%) in prisons, hospitals, and fringe attenders. These activities have been longstanding examples of roles held by churches and pastors/ministers.

With regard to services that empower and equip others, across Australia, more than half of all churches offer counselling services (60%). Less common services are those targeted at empowering and equipping a specific group of people, such as children and young people, migrants or the unemployed (see Table 9).

Other activities related to service or justice are grouped in Table 10. Around a third of Australian churches run activities with a political or social justice focus and about a quarter with a focus on community development. Activities related to animal welfare or environmental actions are pursued by 11% of Australian churches.

Between 2006 and 2011 there was an increase in the percentage of churches who offered any of the types of activities shown in Tables 8, 9 and 10.

The percentage of Australian churches that offered physical care activities at least occasionally increased from 90% in 2006 to 93% in 2011. An example of this increase is seen in the 6% rise in churches involved in visiting ministries. The proportion of churches that serve people with disabilities also rose (from 18% to 21%) in the five year period.

Australian churches' involvement in physical care activities has remained relatively stable between 2006 and 2011, showing a level of continuity. Aged care services are one of the few physical care service activities where there were lower levels of local church involvement in 2011 when compared to 2006 (23% down from 25%). This is despite the ageing profile of attenders. This may be partly due to the changes in government requirements for such services.

Congregational involvement in political or social justice activities (eg human rights) is an area that has seen a significant rise between 2006 and 2011 (from 26% to 35%).

**Table 8: Physical care activities taking place in Australian churches**

<i>In the past 12 months, did this congregation/parish conduct any of the following social service or social action activities?</i>		All NCLS in 2011	All NCLS in 2006
		%	%
<b>Accommodation for the aged or infirm (eg nursing homes, aged units)</b>			
	Monthly or more often	4	4
	Occasionally	2	2
	Never	94	94
<b>Other accommodation (eg homeless hostels, student accommodation)</b>			
	Monthly or more often	4	5
	Occasionally	10	8
	Never	87	87
<b>Aged care services (eg Meals on wheels, home help)</b>			
	Monthly or more often	12	15
	Occasionally	11	10
	Never	77	75
<b>Visiting (eg prisons, hospitals, fringe attenders)</b>			
	Monthly or more often	62	56
	Occasionally	20	20

	Never	18	25
<b>Care for the disabled (eg skills training, respite care, home care)</b>			
	Monthly or more often	9	9
	Occasionally	12	9
	Never	79	82
<b>Emergency relief or material assistance (eg food, clothes for the needy)</b>			
	Monthly or more often	46	48
	Occasionally	38	32
	Never	16	20
<b>Churches indicated at least one of the above</b>			
	Monthly or more often	75	72
	Occasionally	18	18
	Never	7	11

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2520), 2006 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 4212).

**Table 9: Empowering and equipping activities taking place in Australian churches**

<i>In the past 12 months, did this congregation/parish conduct any of the following social service or social action activities?</i>		All NCLS in 2011	All NCLS in 2006
		%	%
<b>Counselling services (e. g. marriage counselling, parenting programs, social work)</b>			
	Monthly or more often	24	33
	Occasionally	36	24
	Never	40	43
<b>Children/youth support (e. g. youth training, literacy, unemployed programs)</b>			
	Monthly or more often	11	12
	Occasionally	9	9
	Never	80	79
<b>Migrant support activities (e. g. ESL, refugee support, interpreting service)</b>			
	Monthly or more often	12	11
	Occasionally	9	6
	Never	79	83
<b>Activities for unemployed people (e. g. job seeking, skills training)</b>			
	Monthly or more often	6	7
	Occasionally	8	7
	Never	87	86
<b>Churches indicated at least one of the above</b>			
	Monthly or more often	36	41
	Occasionally	31	22
	Never	34	36

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2520), 2006 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 4212).

**Table 10: Other activities related to service or justice by congregations**

In the past 12 months, did this congregation/parish conduct any of the following social service or social action activities?		All NCLS in 2011 %	All NCLS in 2006 %
<b>Political or social justice activities (eg human rights)</b>			
	Monthly or more often	9	8
	Occasionally	25	18
	Never	65	74
<b>Community development or local resident action groups</b>			
	Monthly or more often	6	8
	Occasionally	18	15
	Never	76	78
<b>Animal welfare or environmental activities (eg Landcare)</b>			
	Monthly or more often	2	2
	Occasionally	9	7
	Never	90	91
<b>Other welfare/ community service/ social action activities not mentioned elsewhere</b>			
	Monthly or more often	24	25
	Occasionally	28	19
	Never	48	57

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2520), 2006 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 4212).

## 10 Social, Recreational and Educational Activities Run by Churches

### *In summary:*

- *Some two thirds of congregations offer some form of social, recreation or leisure activities.*

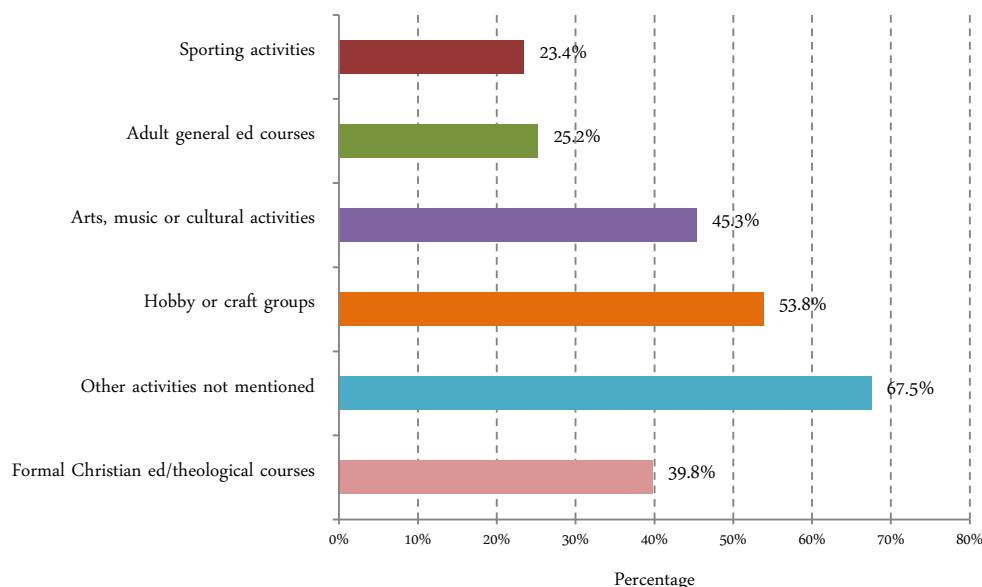
As a broader expression of witness and service to the community, congregations also conduct a wide diversity of social, recreational, or educational activities.

In the 2011 NCLS Operations Survey, the following question focussed on activities conducted in the past 12 months. Results are shown in Figure 4.

*In the past 12 months, how often has this congregation conducted any of the following social, recreational, or educational activities? (Please mark a response on EVERY line)*

- Sporting activities (e. g. church sporting teams)*
- Adult general education courses*
- Arts, music or cultural activities*
- Hobby or craft groups*
- Other social, recreation or leisure activities not mentioned above*
- Formal Christian education/theological courses (not preaching or Bible study groups)*

**Figure 4: Social and recreational activities conducted by congregations**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 1777).

The most common social, recreational, or educational activities offered by congregations in the 12 months prior to the 2011 NCLS were to do with nurturing creativity. Around half have conducted hobby or craft groups (54%) or arts, music or cultural activities (45%) in the past 12 months.

Beyond preaching and Bible studies, the provision of educational activities also has a strong presence. Four in ten congregations have offered formal Christian education/theological courses (40%). Around a quarter have conducted adult general education courses (25%).

Finally, sporting activities, such as church sporting teams, have been conducted in the past 12 months by around a quarter of all congregations (23%).

## 11 Services for Children and Youth

### *In summary:*

- *The most common services for children and youth offered by congregations are Sunday School (63%) and youth groups (48%).*
- *Only 4% to 6% of congregations are involved in providing pre-schools, primary or secondary schools.*

### 11.1 Creche, Sunday schools, youth groups and more.

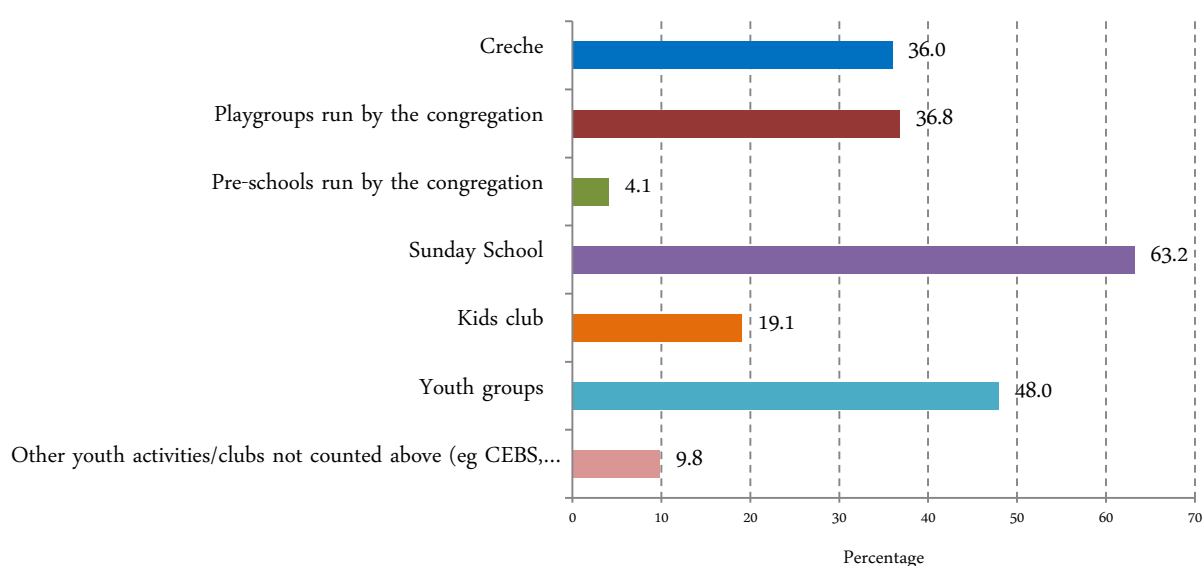
Australia has had Sunday Schools for over 200 years. First started in 1813 in the home of the Hassall family in Parramatta, Sydney, it was formalised in 1815 with the support of Governor Macquarie. St Johns Church, Parramatta, now has the status of having the oldest continuously running Sunday School in Australia. In 2011, Sunday Schools were the most common activity offered by churches for children, with six out of ten congregations (63%) running them.

Youth groups are the next most common activity, offered by nearly half of all churches (48%). They are largely aimed at those in high school years, and can occur at various times during the week or less frequently.

Some 36% of churches also provide a crèche, which is likely to run concurrently with church worship services and cater to very young children.

Playgroups appear to be relatively widespread with 37% of churches offering them. This is as an activity for young children and their carers that is more likely to be run during the week. Kids Clubs tend cater for primary school aged children, and are also often held during the week. Around one in five local churches (19%) offer Kids Clubs. Around 10% of churches claim to hold other types of youth activities/clubs not listed, such as CEBS (Anglican Boys Society), Girls Brigade and others.

**Figure 5: Services for children and youth conducted by congregations**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2409).

## 11.2 Schools provided by local churches

To invest in running a school is a major commitment by a congregation. A very small percentage of congregations (4%) run pre-schools (see Figure 5). Congregations were also able to specify whether they provided or ran primary and secondary schools, either alone or with other congregations. Among the local churches who took part in the 2011 NCLS, 5.6% provided an infants/primary school (K-6) and 3.5% provided a secondary school.

It should be noted that in some denominations, such as the Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church, there is a strong relationship between local parishes and parish schools. While the parish school is integral to parish life and ministry, these schools are not represented in the figures provided here as they are not solely the responsibility of the local faith community, with institutions such as Catholic Education Offices in each diocese playing a key role.



## 12 Ministries that Serve Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander People

### *In summary:*

- *Around one in five churches have some involvement with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, with 16% doing direct work with them.*
- *The most common type of ministry offered by churches that primarily serves Aboriginal people is emergency services (12%).*

Churches were invited to describe the congregation's current position with regard to ministry with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. Around one in five churches claim to either be heavily involved (1.7%) or have some involvement (19.1%). A further 5% are taking first steps. While they have no current ministry, one in ten churches report they would be open to it in the next two years. Four in ten churches reported that there was limited/no opportunity in their area for this type of ministry. A further 23% stated that there was no current opportunity and it was unlikely in the next 2 years. (See Table 11).

**Table 11: Percent of local churches who do direct work with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people**

	Percent
We are heavily involved	1.7
We have some involvement	19.1
We are taking first steps	5.0
No current ministry, but we would be open to it within the next 2 years	10.4
No current ministry, and it is unlikely in the next 2 years	23.4
There is limited/no opportunity in our area for this type of Ministry	40.3

*Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Surveys (n=2,177 churches).*

The most common type of ministry offered by churches that primarily serves Aboriginal people is emergency services (12%). There are a range of other ministries that around three to four percent of churches offer, including church worship services, counselling services, mission teams, visiting (e. g. prisons, hospitals etc), social or recreational activities, general education and Christian education. A further 7% claim to offer other ministries not mentioned in the NCLS listing (see Table 12).

**Table 12: Type of ministries offered by local churches that primarily serve Aboriginal people**

Type of Ministry	Percent
Church worship services	3.6
Care for a particular age group (eg children, youth, aged care)	1.9
Counselling services	2.6
Emergency relief	12.2
Activities for the unemployed	0.3
Political or social justice action	0.9
Accommodation	0.7
Outreach or evangelistic services, events or Bible studies	1.8
Drop in centre	1.0
Mission teams to other parts of Australia	4.2
Visiting (e. g. prisons, hospitals etc. )	4.4
Social or recreational activities	3.1
General education	2.5

Christian education	3.1
Other activities not mentioned above	7.0
We are not involved in such ministries	76.8

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Surveys (n=2,017 churches).

### 13 Church Involvement in Migrant Ministry

#### *In summary:*

- **Over a third (35%) of Australian churches are involved in migrant ministry, while more than half say it is not a priority in their area.**

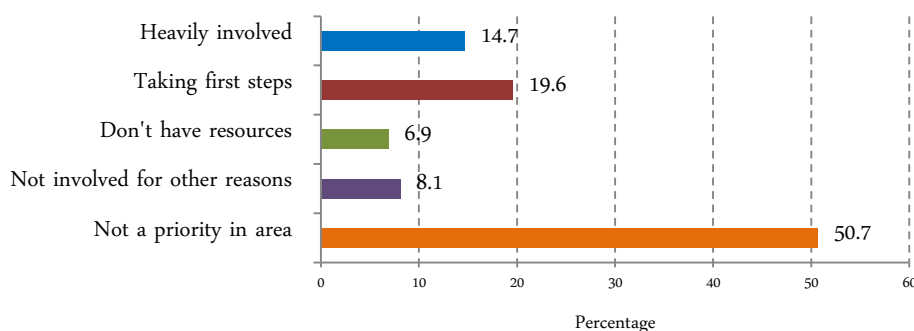
Migrants have increasingly become a key component of Australia's population. In 2010, some 29% of Australia's population were born overseas. Of these, more than a quarter have arrived in Australia after 2000, indicating high levels of recent migration<sup>3</sup>. Many Australians have been directly impacted by the migrant experience in their own families. Almost half of Australia's population were either born overseas or have a migrant parent, according to the 2011 Census of Population and Housing.<sup>4</sup>

Churches can potentially offer connection and a sense of belonging for migrants who may be feeling displaced, as well as practical and pastoral support in settling into a new country and local community.

How involved are local Australian churches in intentional ministry towards migrants? In the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a representative from each participating church was asked: *"To what extent is this congregation involved in ministry towards migrants?"*

As shown in Figure 6, over a third (35%) of Australian churches said they were involved in migrant ministry, with 15% heavily involved, and 20% taking first steps. Seven percent of churches reported having insufficient resources to be involved in migrant ministry, and 8% were not involved for other reasons. More than half of all churches (51%) claimed ministry towards migrants was not a priority in their area.

**Figure 6: Local church involvement in ministry towards migrants**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n=2,347).

Churches in rural areas (75%) were much more likely than urban (34%) and regional churches (44%) to say that multicultural ministry is not a priority in their area. This makes sense, as most migrants live in urban areas.<sup>5</sup> Likelihood

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/6250.0~Nov+2010~Main+Features~Overview?OpenDocument>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/immigration-update/australian-migration-trends-2011-12-glance.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=2293>

of churches being involved in migrant ministry was highest in urban areas (49%), followed by regional areas (37%). Only 14% of rural churches indicated they were involved in this form of ministry.

There has been a large increase in the proportion of local churches who claim to be involved in migrant ministry, from 17% of local churches in the 2001 NCLS to 24% in 2006, and 35% in 2011. However, results may not be entirely comparable due to a wording change from 'ethnic ministry' in 2001 and 2006 to 'migrant ministry' in 2011. (Duncum, Hancock, Pepper, & Powell, 2014).

## 14 Support for People in Developing Countries

### *In summary:*

- **Regular financial support is the most common form of support that churches offer to people in developing countries (61%).**

There is a long tradition of churches supporting the work of service and proclamation in other countries. The 2011 NCLS Operations Survey asked specifically about congregational commitment to people in developing countries.

*Over the past 12 months, has this congregation had a specific commitment to people in developing countries? (Mark ALL that apply)*

*Yes, personal relationships with individuals/groups*

*Yes, a regular financial commitment*

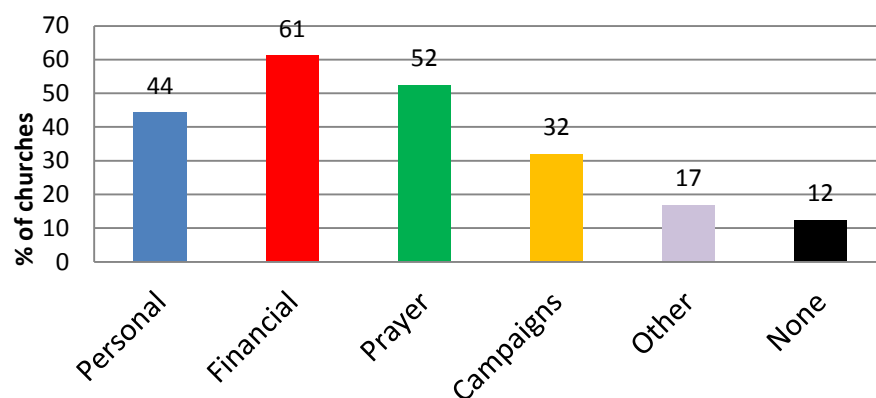
*Yes, a regular prayer commitment*

*Yes, through campaigns which tackle poverty or injustice*

*Yes, another kind of link*

*No links of this kind*

**Figure 7: Support for people in developing countries**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Surveys (n=2,429 churches).

Figure 7 shows that regular financial support is the most common form of support that churches offer (61%). The second highest form of support was a regular prayer commitment (52%) followed by personal relationships with individuals/groups (44%). Approximately one third of churches (32%) indicated they have regular support for poverty and injustice campaigns. Such campaigns would include Micah Challenge, TEAR, Act for Peace, or denominationally affiliated groups such as Baptist World Aid, Caritas, Catholic Mission, and Uniting World. Twelve percent of churches indicated that they had no supportive link of any kind. (Sterland, 2014).

## 15 Inclusion of People with Disabilities

### *In summary*

- **Most churches (75%) have major physical facilities for people with disabilities, such as ramps, disabled toilets and reserved parking, in place.**

Some 18% of churches have a written, public statement expressing a commitment to welcoming and including people and families living with a disability. Of this group, 8% have a statement specific to their church and 10% have a statement as part of their denomination. A further 26% have a sentiment of inclusion in their written statements, but nothing specific for disability. In addition, 13% of churches provide specific education on disability inclusion to their church staff and volunteers, either locally (5%) or by training offered elsewhere, such as denominational training (9%).

Churches were asked the following question about the provisions they made for the needs of people with a disability and were able to mark all that applied.

*What provisions does your church have for the needs of people with a disability? (Mark ALL that apply)*

*Major physical facilities (eg ramps/lift, disabled toilet, reserved parking)*

*Minor physical facilities (eg hearing/induction loop, wheelchair space convenient for services, large print alternatives to written materials)*

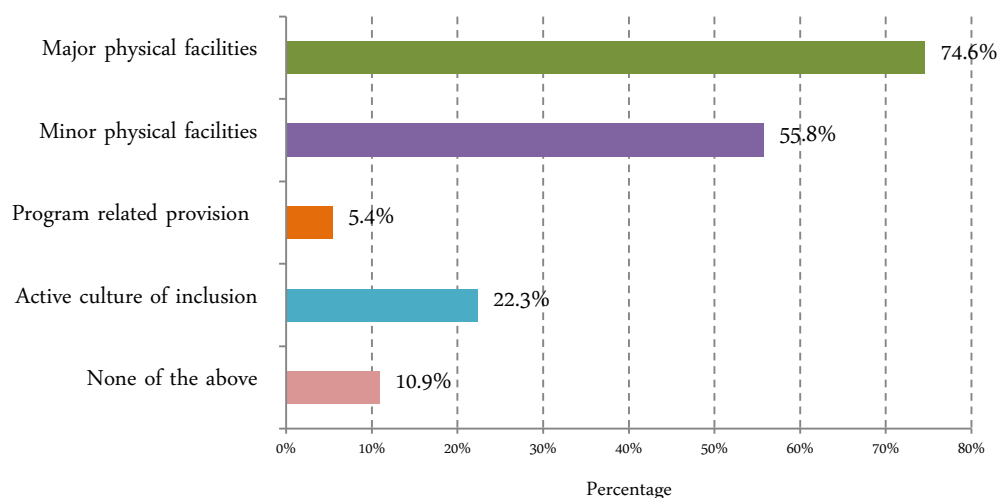
*Program related provision (eg intellectual impairment adapted Bible studies, social support, education to congregation)*

*Active culture of inclusion (eg in teaching and practice of the church, adapting curriculum for children, special needs catered for)*

*None of the above*

Figure 8 shows that most churches (75%) have major physical facilities, such as ramps, disabled toilets and reserved parking, in place. More than half (56%) also have minor physical facilities. Some 5% have program-related provisions and 22% have an active culture of inclusion. Around one in ten (11%) do not have any provisions for the needs of people with a disability. (Powell, Sterland, Pepper & Hancock, 2012).

**Figure 8: Churches' provisions for the needs of people with disabilities.**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Surveys (n=2,342 churches).

## 16 Environmental Activities

### *In summary:*

- *There has been increased engagement in animal welfare or environmental activities from 2% of local Catholic and Protestant churches in 2001 to 10% in 2011.*
- *Almost two thirds of congregations indicated that they recycled, and a third of churches indicated that they purchased environmentally friendly consumables.*

Within church circles there has been increased attention over recent decades to environmental concerns. There is evidence of a widening sphere of concern about Christian environmental responsibility from global Christian leaders, church denominations, as well as Christian international aid and development organisations. Ecological theology is now a rapidly growing sub-discipline. There has also been ecumenical collaboration seeking to raise environmental awareness, appreciation, commitment and activity among the churches. However, knowledge among leaders and environmental advocates in the Churches about the relative uptake of activities, and who is doing what and where, is mostly patchy and anecdotal. The 2011 National Church Life Survey (NCLS) sought to address this gap and to paint a picture of local church-based environmental activity in Australia (Pepper & Powell, 2013).

### 16.1 About the NCLS and the environmental activity questions

In the 2001, 2006 and 2011 Operations Survey audits of local church activity, the survey informant was asked to indicate whether the congregation/parish had engaged in any animal welfare or environmental activities over the past 12 months (and in the 2006 and 2011 surveys, the frequencies of such activities).

In 2006 and 2011, the informant was also asked whether the congregation/parish had undertaken an environmental audit of church buildings in the preceding five years.

The 2011 Operations Survey also included a battery of some 20 items about environmental activities, including in the areas of worship, operations of church buildings, and community projects and events. The question wording is shown in Table 13, with alternate Catholic wordings italicised and in square brackets, and with short labels that are subsequently used in charts and data tables also given.

**Table 13: 2011 Operations Survey questions about specific environmental activities**

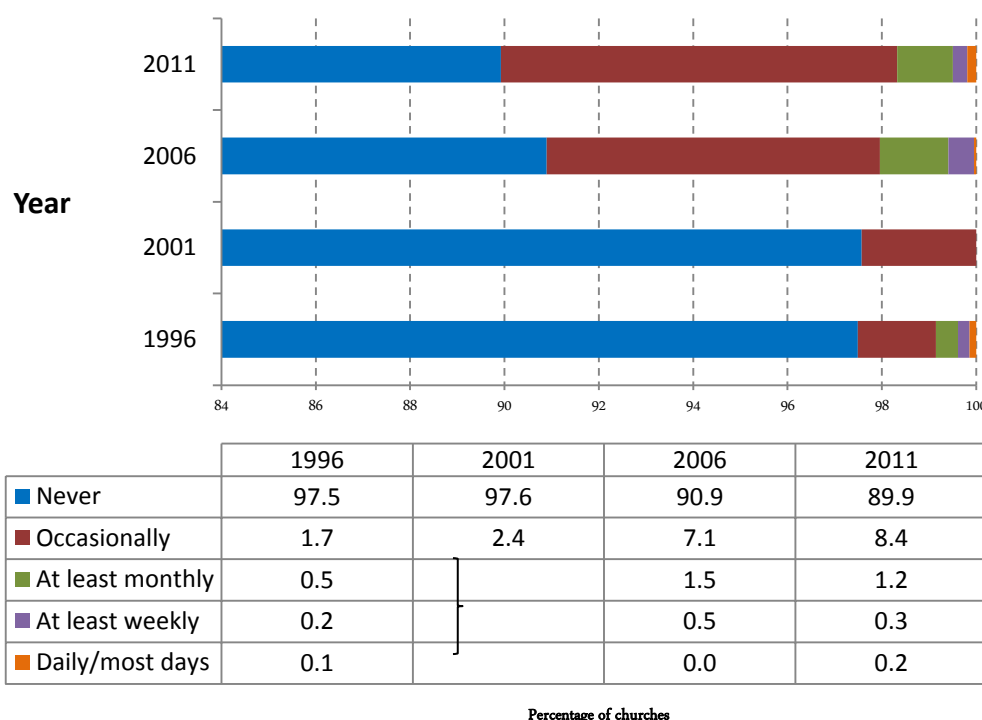
Question wording	Short label
<b>In the past 5 years, has this congregation [<i>parish</i>] undertaken any of the following activities? (Mark ALL that apply)</b>	
Celebrated a day or season with an environmental theme (eg Season of Creation, Environment Sunday)	Day/season
Run a Bible study [ <i>an adult faith education session</i> ] on an environmental theme	Bible study
Run a children's activity on an environmental theme	Kids' activity
Hosted and/or run a community garden	Cmty garden
Taken action to conserve biodiversity (eg hosted a native garden, raised funds for endangered species)	Biodiversity
Held a public event on an environmental theme	Public event
Worked on an environmental activity/project in the local community (eg Clean Up Australia Day, Landcare project)	Local project
Collaborated with an environmental group (eg local bushcare group, national environmental organisation)	Collaborated
Contacted an elected government member about an environmental issue	Contacted MP
None of the above	None, actions
<b>Have any of the following been done at the church's buildings in the past 5 years? (Mark ALL that apply)</b>	
An environmental audit	Enviro audit
Implementation of water saving measures	Water saving
Installation of rainwater tanks or water recycling	Water tank
Implementation of energy saving measures	Energy saving
Switch to government accredited GreenPower	GreenPower
Installation of solar panels or solar hot water heating	Solar panels

None of the above	None, bldgs
<b>Do any of the following usually happen at this congregation [parish]? (Mark ALL that apply)</b>	
Inclusion of environmental concerns in worship (eg through hymns/songs, prayers, sermons/homilies [homilies])	Env worship
Purchasing of environmentally friendly consumables (eg recycled paper for the office, cleaning products)	Consumables
Use of Council recycling services	Recycling
Sourcing of food that is more environmentally friendly for meals at church (eg local produce, less meat)	Enviro food
Composting of food wastes from meals at church	Composting
Provision of information to attenders to help them to be more environmentally friendly in daily life	Information
None of the above	None, usual

## 16.2 Changes in environmental activity: 1996 to 2011

As shown in Figure 9, the results for engagement in animal welfare or environmental activities suggest an increased engagement between 1996 and 2011 from 2% of local Protestant churches in 1996 (and of Catholic and Protestant churches in 2001) to 10% of churches in 2011 having engaged in any activities.

**Figure 9: Frequency of environmental/animal welfare activities in churches**



*Note: 1996 data is for Protestant churches only. Data for 2001 onwards includes Protestant and Catholic churches. The question format differed in 2001 compared with the other years (churches were only able to indicate whether they did or didn't do the activity, not the frequency).*

*Source: NCLS Operations Surveys 1996 (n=10,255), 2001 (n=6,148), 2006 (n=5,897) and 2011 (n=2,270).*

The results also indicate a small increase for environmental audits of church buildings, from 13% of local churches indicating that they had done so in the previous five years in 2006, to 16% in 2011.

## 16.3 Specific environmental activities conducted in churches

Figure 10 shows the percentage of local churches that indicated that they had undertaken the various environmental activities that were included in the 2011 Operations Survey, ranked from most common to least common.

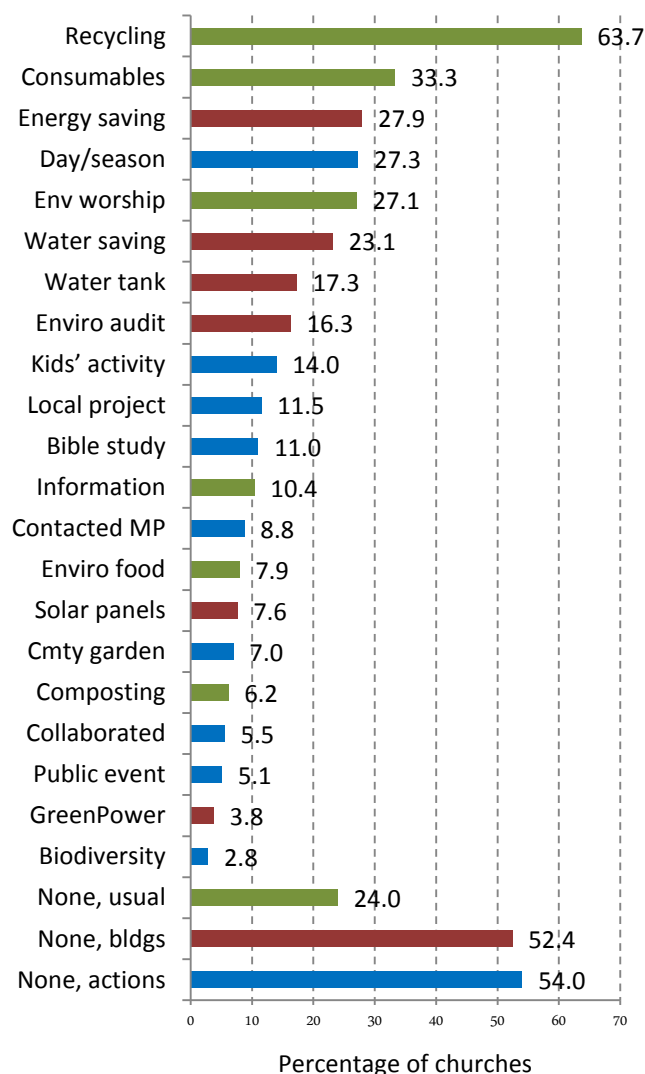


The majority of congregations (almost two thirds) indicated that they recycled, which is reflective of the widespread nature of recycling services across Australia. A third of churches indicated that they purchased environmentally friendly consumables. Next most popular were the implementation of energy savings measures at church buildings, celebration of a day or a season with an environmental theme, inclusion of environmental concerns in worship, and implementation of water saving measures at church buildings, with approximately a quarter of churches indicating that they had done these.

In apparent contrast to the relatively high degree of inclusion of environmental awareness in worship, Bible studies/adult faith education sessions and children's activities on an environmental theme were much less common, with less than 15% of congregations/parishes having undertaken these activities.

The least popular activities were taking action to conserve biodiversity, switching to GreenPower, and holding a public event on an environmental theme, with 5% or fewer of churches having done each of these.

**Figure 10: Types of environmental activities in churches**



■ Environmental actions in past 5 years  
■ Changes to church buildings in past 5 years  
■ Usual environmental activities

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n=2,284 to 2,331).

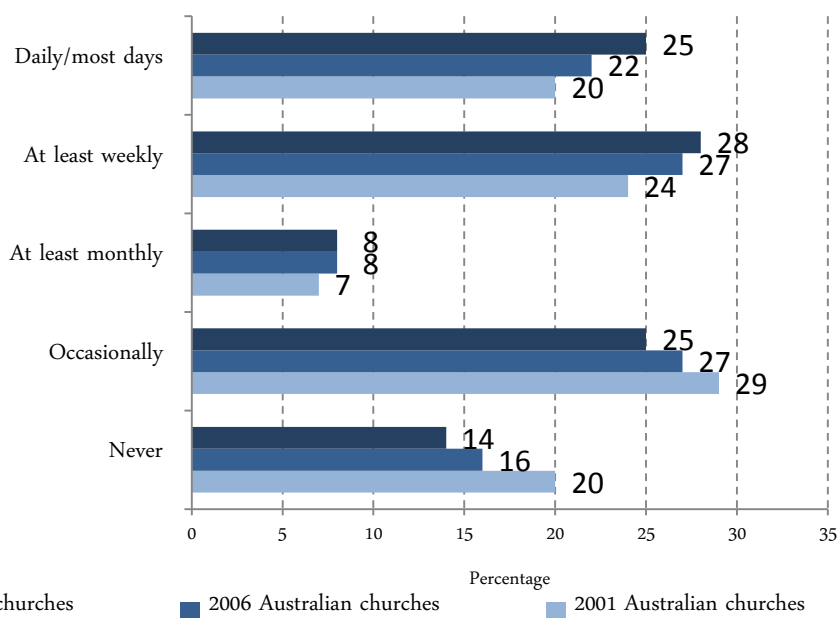
## 17 Sharing Property with Community Groups

- Some 86% of churches allow their property to be used by groups in the wider community, with more than half being used at least weekly.

The majority of churches allow their property to be used by groups in the wider community. This may be an act of service as well as a valuable source of connection. Figure 3 shows that the proportion of trends since 2001 for sharing church property. A quarter of churches are used by community groups on a daily basis or most days (25%). A further 28% of churches are used at least on a weekly basis. Some 8% of buildings are used at least monthly, and a quarter (25%) are used by community groups occasionally.

By showing comparisons with results from the 2001 NCLS and the 2006 NCLS, Figure 11 also shows that the use of church buildings has been increasing over the previous ten years.

**Figure 11: Sharing church property with community groups**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2520), 2006 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 4212), 2001 Operations Survey (n = 6148).

## 18 Involvement in Community Events

### *In summary:*

- Nearly all churches are involved in community events, such as community fairs, with more than half providing leadership/organising them, or giving congregational support to them.

Nearly all churches get involved in local events such as fairs, taking the opportunity to be a presence in the midst of events of the community. Churches described their involvement in response to the following question.

*Which of these statements best describes this congregation's involvement in community organisations and events (e. g. community fairs, marches, beautification programs, Carols by Candlelight)?*

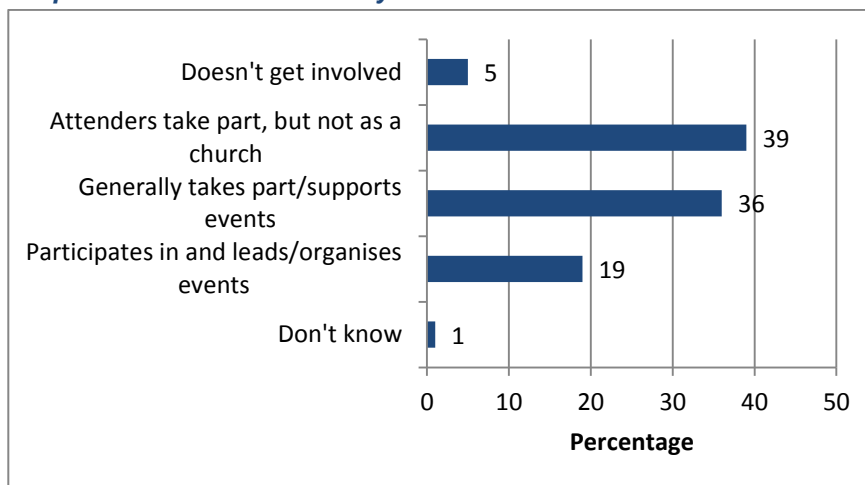
- This congregation does not get involved in other community organisation/events
- Attendees take part, but not as an activity of this church

- *This congregation generally takes part or supports such organisations/events*
- *This congregation participates in and leads/organises events*
- *Don't know*

Figure 12 outlines churches' involvement in community organisations and events, showing that 95% are involved in some way.

One in five congregations (19%) provides leadership or organise community organisations and events. A further 36% of congregations generally takes part or supports such organisations/events. A similar proportion distinguish between involvement as a congregation and individual involvement: 39% state that "Attendees take part, but not as an activity of this church".

**Figure 12: Church participation in wider community events**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2520).

## 19 Role in the Local Community Wellbeing

### *In summary:*

- *Four out of ten churches (42%) report they have played a positive role in response to problems that have occurred in the local area.*
- *The majority of churches (84%) claimed to have an influence in some way when there are crises in the local community,*

When problems or crises occur in local communities, the local churches can be an asset to address concerns and invest in local community wellbeing.

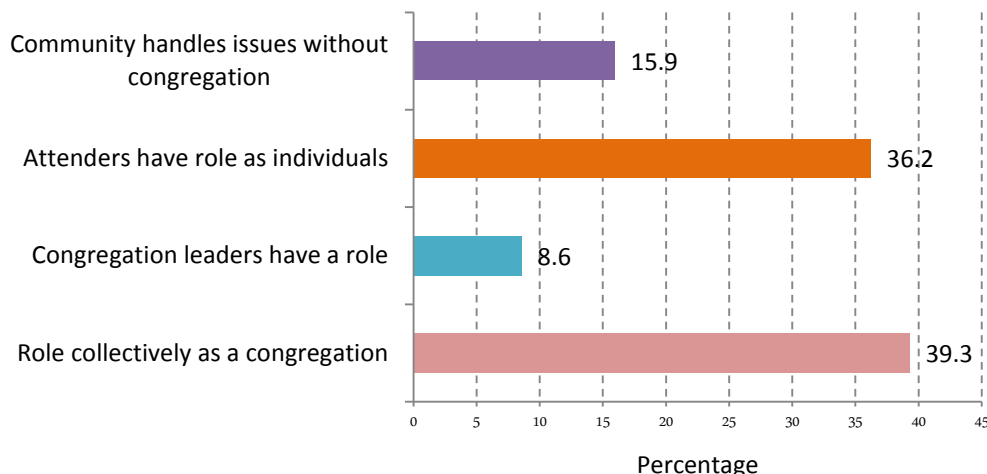
**Responding to community problems:** Local churches were asked: "Over the past five years, do you think that this congregation has played a positive role in response to problems that have occurred in the local area (e. g. decline in community services, crime, conflict)?" Four out of ten churches (42%) report they have played a positive role in enhancing community wellbeing, with 18% definite that they have and 24% who say it is probable. A further 36% are neutral or unsure and 22% report they have probably or definitely not played this kind of role.<sup>6</sup>

**Crises in the community:** When asked "In crises in the local community, does this congregation see itself as having a significant role?" the majority of churches (84%) claimed to have an influence in some way. Around four in ten (39%)

<sup>6</sup> Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2354).

churches claimed to have a role collectively as a congregation. A further 9% reported that leaders of the congregation have a role. Some 36% of churches state that attenders have a role as individuals, but not through their connection with the church and 16% state that the community handles the issues without the congregation. (See Figure 13).

**Figure 13: The perceived significant role of local churches in crises in their local communities**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n = 2175).

## PART D: PROPOSALS TO ADDRESS GAPS

### 20 Identifying gaps in knowledge about religious congregations

The National Church Life Survey covers thousands of congregations in 23 denominations. It is an unparalleled rich source of data about the landscape of Australian religious congregations. This report has provided a broad range of measures of the activities of individual attenders, often acting collectively, and the provision of specific services.

However, there are some limitations to the results presented in this report. Some examples follow.

**Under-represented regions and denominations:** The under-representation of Pentecostals in the 2011 has been addressed through the 2013-14 Church Life Survey conducted by a large stratified sample of ACC congregations (Assemblies of God). In addition, the Salvation Army Eastern Territory, who had not effectively taken part in 2011, also ran a special Church Life Survey on a sample of corps. However, the primary 2011 NCLS datasets have not yet been augmented with this additional information about congregational activities.

**Missing denominations:** There are some Christian faith traditions that the NCLS has never covered. For example, the various Orthodox churches are not represented.

**Missing types of congregations:** In addition, we are aware that certain groups are under-represented, including churches with people from non-English speaking backgrounds, and indigenous churches.

**Missing religions:** The policy of the NCLS Board of Governors, to date, has been that the invitation to participate in the five-yearly national joint project is for Christian Trinitarian denominations. This means that non-Trinitarian groups and also other religious groups, such as Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist local religious communities have not been covered in this report.

One of the significant challenges of this project is to define what is meant by a 'local religious community'. Some are geographically based, others are networks. Some gather on a regular basis, others gather at key events, such as festivals. Some activities are locally hosted and controlled, others are collaborations with other religious groups, agencies or denominational partners. For the purposes of this project, we propose to identify religious congregations as entities with a dominant religious identity, who are able to be associated with a specific location. If the congregation identifies an activity or service as part of what they provide, then, even if other entities are also involved in the provision of such services, the activity will be counted as part of the impact of local religious congregations.

Based on the assumption that the goal is to move quickly to the next phase of the whole project on the economic and social impact of congregations, there is a primary option proposed to address these gaps. In addition, there are a series of other options for consideration. These options could also be used in combination.

- Option 1: 2015 National Congregations Survey: a fast result, with limitations
- Option 2: 2016-2017 National Congregations Survey: slower results, but higher quality
- Option 3: 2015 Faith Community Life Survey pilot: learning from attenders from other religious communities
- Option 4: NCLS Research Panel of Christian church attenders

#### 20.1 Option 1: 2015 National Congregations Survey: a fast result, with limitations

##### **Background/context:**

The project to evaluate the economic and social impact of congregations has been under development for some years now. We expect that some project participants may be motivated to move quickly to further data collection and analysis. This first proposal is for a project that, with the co-operation of existing partners, can be completed during 2015. It will aim to map the types of activities that religious congregations are involved in.

NCLS Research can simply manage the data collection phase and pass on a copy of the dataset for others to analyse and write a report. Alternatively, NCLS Research can manage the whole project from design through to report writing and presentation of results. Those with expertise in providing an economic analysis of the results can work with either the raw data or the report.

The strength of this proposal is that it will produce a fast result, and it will extend and update existing knowledge. The limitations are that it will not have the benefit of the time required to establish credibility and trust throughout different religious groups. Its success will partly rely on project partners' capacity to deliver viable mailing lists at the beginning. The return rate will not be as high as if there were time for a series of reminders. It will not be a full census of all congregations. It will not collect information from individual attenders.

**Aim of Project:** To conduct a National Congregations Survey in the first half of 2015.

##### **Methodology:**

##### **Phase 2: Mailing Databases:**

1. *For Christian churches.* NCLS Research and the project steering committee will write a joint letter to heads of all Christian churches describing the project and asking for permission to use the church contact details already held by NCLS Research for the purposes of this project. A set timeline will be given for responses in order to stay on a short schedule. The final mailing will only contain church groupings where permission has been given.
2. *For other religious groups:* The project steering committee will use existing contacts to obtain appropriate contact lists of religious congregations. A set timeline will be given for responses in order to stay on a short schedule.

### ***Phase 2: Question design***

We propose a short 2 to 4 page survey. A first selection of questions will be drafted based on questions used in the 2011 NCLS Operations Survey, 2012 NCLS Church Census and other similar projects run by the NCLS Research team (e. g. 2013 Uniting Church Census and 2013 ACC Census). Further questions will be added to cover other aspects of the social capital conceptual framework.

In terms of process, NCLS Research will bring a draft to a project working group for discussion. Final decision-making regarding questions will be with NCLS researchers.

### ***Phase 3: Survey design and layout***

Congregations will be given the option of completing a paper version or online version of the census forms.

*Paper survey:* NCLS Research will use our specialised scanning software (Teleform) to create a master paper survey and prepare it for printing.

*Online survey:* NCLS will use our in house online survey systems. Each congregation will be given an ID so that leaders or administrators can access the online survey to complete.

*Cover letter:* NCLS will provide a draft cover letter that will be adapted and finalised by the project steering committee.

*Envelope:* NCLS can provide existing envelopes at no cost, or a special envelope may be printed.

*Internal Reply Paid Envelope:* NCLS will provide a Reply Paid envelope for completed forms to be returned to NCLS for scanning.

### ***Phase 4: Collection and processing***

*Distribution:* A Survey Kit will be mailed to all congregations on the lists. It will contain a cover letter, a 2-4 page survey, and a reply paid envelope. We will use a mail merge so that each letter and survey are linked to a local congregation. We will use our mailhouse to print and mail survey forms.

Congregations will be asked to complete and return forms during the month of May. This is the most 'normal' month of the year across the nation, with the fewest public holidays, school holidays, or seasonal activities (e. g. Easter, Christmas, Ramadan, annual conferences etc).

*Follow up:* NCLS Research will produce a list of congregations who had not returned forms and send a follow up letter by mail in July, directing people to the online survey. The collection phase will close at the end of July. Where possible, any missing data will be estimated using the estimation methodology developed by NCLS Research.

### ***Phase 5: Analysis and report writing***

NCLS Research can simply manage the data collection phase and pass on a copy of the dataset for others to analyse and write a report. Alternatively, NCLS Research can manage the whole project from design through to report writing and presentation of results. Those with expertise in providing an economic analysis of the results can work with either the raw data or the report.



### Project timeline and milestones

This timeline aims to complete the project by the end of September 2015.

'NCLS' = NCLS Research. 'SC' = Project Steering Committee

Description	Who	By
NCLS Research and project steering committee to write to Christian denominations seeking permission to use NCLS church lists for this project	NCLS/SC	Mid March
Project partners to provide church mailing lists for other groups		Mid March
NCLS to update database using current church listing	NCLS	Mid April
<b>Phase 2: Question Design</b>		
Create draft of survey form	NCLS	28 March
Review and edit	SC	11 April
Sign off on question design	SC	11 April
<b>Phase 3: Survey design and layout</b>		
Complete layout of census form and send to mailhouse	NCLS	18 April
Mailhouse to send out	Mailhouse	25 April
<b>Phase 4: Collection and Processing</b>		
Main Survey period	Congregations	May
Send first reminder letter (NCLS to create db and draft letter)	Mailhouse	1 July
Conclude collection	NCLS	End July
<b>Phase 5: Analysis and Report Writing</b>		
First draft report produced	NCLS or ?	End Aug
Feedback provided	SC	15 Sep
Final report produced	NCLS or ?	End Sep
Final dataset/s handed over to ACC	NCLS	End Sep

## 20.2 Option 2: 2016-2017 National Congregations Survey: slower results, but higher quality

This option also aims to collect information about the activities of religious congregations. In general terms, it would take the same approach as the 2015 National Congregations Survey, however with the benefit of a longer lead time, the result will be of higher quality.

Some of the differences between the first and second option are:

- More time to approach different religious groups and build relationship, credibility and trust
- More time to get high quality lists of local congregations
- More time to improve conceptualisation of measures and deal with differences between religious groups
- Opportunity to integrate project with the 2016 National Church Life Survey and leverage financial and relational benefits of this integration
- Results not available till 2017

## 20.3 Option 3: 2015 Faith Community Life Survey pilot: a stratified sample of non-Christian faith communities

This option is a pilot project to apply the NCLS Church Life Survey tool within other faith communities. It would not only collect information about congregational activities, but also from individual attenders about their own participation.

Given the smaller proportion of Australians who identify with non-Christian religions, it will be difficult to find sufficient numbers of respondents who are actively involved. One idea is to use a national panel and target non-Christian respondents until a statistically viable sample is achieved. This is likely to be quite costly.

This option is to use the NCLS Church Life Survey tool within other faith communities, as outlined below. It is most easily applied in faith communities that gather in congregations. It is also framed in a way most suitable for the monotheistic religions (Abrahamic faiths).

It is expected that within the time and cost limitations of the current project, this would only be a preliminary investigation or treated as a pilot for potential future work. However, a small pilot project in a limited number of congregations may still be worthwhile as it will test to a degree whether certain behaviours of Christian and non-Christian attenders are similar or different (eg volunteering levels, financial giving etc). It will also point the way for future research work.

Assumptions:

- For attenders of faith communities/congregations that are not covered in a National Church Life Survey
- The existing NCLS Church Life Survey (Attender A form) would be used with minimal changes.
- Project group provides representatives from participating religious groups to work with NCLS on modifying questions.
- Administered using NCLS methodology: paper surveys distributed through the local leadership of local faith communities/congregations.
- Sufficient numbers of local faith communities would need to be identified by project partners and agree to take part.
- A database with names and contacts of participating congregations/faith communities is provided to NCLS.
- Results are not aggregated - attender datafiles are provided as output.
- Each participating congregation will receive a report of their own results (frequency charts only) .

#### 20.4 Option 4: NCLS Research Panel of Christian church attenders

A final option that is immediately available is the use of the NCLS Research Panel of Christian church attenders. This would enable the project steering committee to design questions specifically related to project goals.

- Up to 3000 respondents available
- Online survey of Christian church attenders from across denominations
- New questions can be designed to address the project goals
- Target = 1,000 respondents.
- Quota sampling based on age, sex and denomination type.
- Existing NCLS questions will be provided as a reference point for survey design
- Includes feedback on design of questions, set up of online survey, management of invitations and reminders, and data extraction.
- Output: dataset in SPSS or other agreed format

Ruth Powell, Miriam Pepper and Sam Sterland

February 2015

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### **About NCLS Research**

*NCLS Research is a joint project of several denominational partners. Established in the early 1990s, it is a world leader in research focused on connecting churches and their communities. The most well-known project is the five-yearly National Church Life Survey. The NCLS Board of Governors comprises representatives from primary sponsors: Uniting Mission and Education, NSW/ACT Synod, Anglicare Diocese of Sydney, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and Australian Catholic University.*

## 23 Appendix 1: Church participation rates for denominations, states and localities in 2011.

Information in this Appendix was first published in Pepper, M. , Sterland, S, and Powell, R. (2015), Methodological overview of the study of wellbeing through the National Church Life Survey. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, (in press).

NCLS Research holds the most comprehensive database of churches in Australia, drawing on information from regional church institutions (state bodies, dioceses, synods etc from different denominations) and over two decades of work with NCLS datasets. A comparison of this database with the churches that participated in the NCLS can give an indication of the participation rates of congregations/parishes by denomination, locality (urban, regional, remote) and state. NCLS Research also produces Australia's most reliable demographic estimates of the national churchgoing population. These estimates are obtained by calculating frequencies on weighted attender data, where the weight applied to the information provided by each respondent is the inverse of the estimated attender participation rate for that respondent's region or denomination. The participation rate is the number of NCLS participants from that region/denomination divided by the estimated attendance for that region.

Bellamy and Castle (2004) dedicated considerable time to producing comprehensive attendance estimates for each congregation/parish in 2001. A less detailed methodology was applied for 2011, with estimates obtained from the following sources: 1) estimates of attendance provided by congregations/parishes in the 2011 Operations Survey, 2) estimates provided by regional church contacts, 3) estimates provided by congregations/parishes and regional church contacts as part of the 2006 NCLS, and 4) where necessary, extrapolations from the comprehensive 2001 estimates. These estimates were then aggregated at the regional/denominational level. In the case of the Catholic Church, a single estimate for national attendance was provided by the National Count of Mass Attendance.

Regional weights were used for each of the Anglican, Baptist, Churches of Christ and Uniting Church denominations, with the regions all contiguous with state (New South Wales, Victoria etc) with the exception of the Anglican dioceses. A single weight was applied to Pentecostal church attenders, as low participation by Pentecostal churches in the 2011 NCLS did not justify the calculation of unique weights for the different movements. A single denominational weight was used for the Catholic Church, and only respondents from pre-determined sample parishes were included in the analysis. Denominational weights were also applied for each of the following small Protestant denominations: Christian Missionary Alliance, Christian Reformed, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Salvation Army, Seventh-day Adventist and Vineyard denominations. A weight of zero was used for denominations for which participation was very low, nil or unknown, namely Bethesda, Brethren, Christian Life Centres, Congregational, Four Square Gospel, Grace Communion, International Pentecostal Holiness Churches, Nazarene, Wesleyan Methodist and independent and house churches. Inasmuch as the demographics of church attenders vary by region or denomination, a comparison of weighted and unweighted attender survey datasets can thus give an indication of the representativeness of samples on various demographic measures.

**Table A1: Church participation rates for denominations, states and localities in 2011.**

Variable	% of churches participating
<b>Denominational grouping<sup>1</sup></b>	
Catholic	23
Mainstream Protestant	31
Pentecostal	6
Other Protestant	25
<b>Selected individual denominations</b>	
Anglican	34
Apostolic	11
Australian Christian Churches (AOC)	2
Baptist	35
Christian City Church	45

Christian Missionary Alliance	16
Christian Outreach Centres	4
Christian Reformed	10
Churches of Christ	17
Christian Revival Crusade	18
Catholic	23
Lutheran	54
Presbyterian	10
Salvation Army	31
Seventh-day Adventist	16
Uniting	27
Vineyard	73
<b>State</b>	
NSW/ACT	29
NT	10
Qld	16
SA	38
Tas	25
Vic	19
WA	29
<b>Locality<sup>2</sup></b>	
Urban	30
Regional	22
Remote	17

Source: 2011 NCLS Aggregated Attender datafile, NCLS Admin database.

1 "Mainstream Protestant" includes Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Uniting churches; "Pentecostal" includes Australian Christian Churches, Apostolic, Bethesda, Christian City Church, Christian Revival Crusade, Christian Life Churches, Four Square Gospel, Christian Outreach Centres and International Pentecostal Holiness Church churches; and "Other Protestant" includes Baptist, Brethren, Churches of Christ, Christian Missionary Alliance, Christian Reformed, Congregational, Grace Communion, Nazarene, Salvation Army, Seventh-day Adventist, Vineyard Fellowship and Wesleyan Methodist churches.

2 Locality is derived from Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013) remoteness area classification of postcodes. "Urban" refers to major cities of Australia, "regional" refers to inner and outer regional areas, and "remote" refers to remote and very remote areas. The locality is assigned based on the remoteness area which has the greatest proportion for each postcode.

## 24 Appendix 2: Demographic estimates (percentages) for church attenders in 2011.

*Table A2: Demographic estimates (percentages) for church attenders in 2011.*

Variable	Australian churchgoing population estimate
<b>Age</b>	
15-29	15
30-49	25
50-69	35
70+	25
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	60
Male	40
<b>Country of birth</b>	
Australia	66
Other English-speaking	11
Non English-speaking	23
<b>Educational attainment</b>	
School	42
Trade certificate/diploma	25
University degree	33
<b>State</b>	
NSW/ACT	41
NT	0.5



Qld	15
SA	8
Tas	2
Vic	22
WA	11
<b>Locality</b>	
Urban	70
Regional	29
Remote	1
<b>Denomination<sup>1</sup></b>	
Anglican	12
Baptist/Churches of Christ	10
Catholic	47
Lutheran	2
Pentecostal	13
Uniting	8
Other Protestant	7

Source: 2011 NCLS Core Attender datafile, 2011 NCLS Small Sample Survey L datafile.

<sup>1</sup> "Pentecostal" may include Australian Christian Churches, Apostolic, Christian City Church, Christian Revival Crusade, Christian Life Churches, Christian Outreach Centres and International Pentecostal Holiness Church churches. "Other Protestant" may include Brethren, Christian Missionary Alliance, Christian Reformed, Congregational, Grace Communion, Nazarene, Salvation Army and Seventh-day Adventist churches

As expected due to uneven denominational participation rates, Pentecostal church attenders were strongly under-represented in small sample surveys and Anglicans and Lutherans were over-represented (19% and 4% respectively), as shown in table 3. The gender, age, educational, country of birth, state and locality profiles of small sample survey L did not differ greatly from the churchgoing population as a whole. There was a slight over-representation of attenders living in New South Wales and Queensland with attenders from Victoria and Western Australia slightly under-represented. Weighting the survey L data using denominational and regional weights (as described above) brings the denominational and state breakdowns into line with the churchgoing population as a whole.

## Church involvement in migrant ministry

Migrants have increasingly become a key component of Australia's population. In 2010, some 29% of Australia's population were born overseas. Of these, more than a quarter have arrived in Australia after 2000, indicating high levels of recent migration<sup>1</sup>. Many Australians have been directly impacted by the migrant experience in their own families. Almost half of Australia's population were either born overseas or have a migrant parent, according to the 2011 Census of Population and Housing.<sup>2</sup>

Churches can potentially offer connection and a sense of belonging for migrants who may be feeling displaced, as well as practical and pastoral support in settling into a new country and local community.

How involved are local Australian churches in intentional ministry towards migrants? In the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a representative from each participating church was asked:

### *To what extent is this congregation involved in ministry towards migrants?*

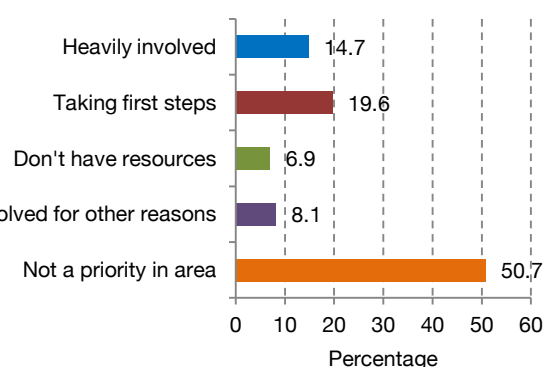
- ☐ Heavily involved
- ☐ We are taking first steps
- ☐ We would like to be involved but do not have the resources
- ☐ We are not involved for other reasons
- ☐ It is not a priority in our area

### Overall results

As shown in Figure 1, over a third (35%) of Australian churches said they were involved in migrant ministry, with 15% heavily involved, and 20% taking first steps. Seven percent of churches reported having insufficient resources to be involved in migrant ministry, and 8% were not involved for other reasons. More than half of

all churches (51%) claimed ministry towards migrants was not a priority in their area.

**Figure 1: Local church involvement in ministry towards migrants**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n=2,347).

### Year founded

Newer churches tended to be more likely to be heavily involved in migrant ministry, with 20% of those founded in 2001-2011 and 22% founded in the 1990's, compared to 14% of older churches (see Table 1). Churches founded before 1950 were the least likely to be involved in migrant ministry (32% compared to 40% of younger churches). Similar proportions of churches indicated they didn't have the resources or weren't involved for some other reason. Churches founded in the 1960's and 1980's were least likely to claim migrant ministry wasn't a priority in their area.

**Table 1: Migrant ministry by year church founded**

	2000-2011	1990-1999	1980-1989	1970-1979	1960-1969	1950-1959	Before 1950
	Percentage						
Heavily involved	20	22	17	16	13	14	13
First steps	20	17	27	22	27	23	19
Don't have resources	9	3	7	6	12	4	8
Other reasons	6	7	8	9	9	9	8
Not a priority	46	51	41	47	39	50	53

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n=2,000)

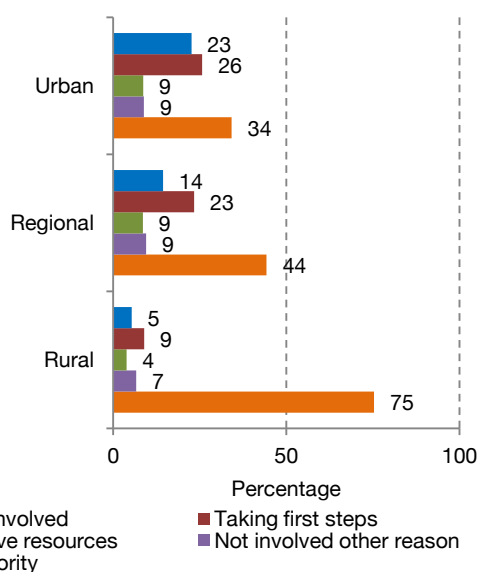
<sup>1</sup> <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/6250.0~Nov+2010~Main+Features~Overview?OpenDocument>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/immigration-update/australian-migration-trends-2011-12-glance.pdf>

## Locality

Churches in rural areas (75%) were much more likely than urban (34%) and regional churches (44%) to say that multicultural ministry is not a priority in their area (see Figure 2). This makes sense, as most migrants live in urban areas.<sup>3</sup> Likelihood of churches being involved in migrant ministry was highest in urban areas (49%), followed by regional areas (37%). Only 14% of rural churches indicated they were involved in this form of ministry.

**Figure 2: Migrant ministry by church locality**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n=2,199).

## Denominational Differences

As shown in Table 2, Anglican and Lutheran churches had the lowest involvement in migrant ministry (26% and 23% respectively), although this may partly be related to the stronger rural presence of these denominations. Pentecostal churches had the highest level of involvement, with almost half (48%) either heavily involved or taking first steps. Lutheran churches were most likely to indicate that ministry to migrants was not a priority in their area (65%).

**Table 2: Migrant ministry by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
	Percentage						
Heavily involved	12	16	14	9	21	13	16
First steps	14	25	17	14	27	19	23
Don't have resources	7	8	7	4	7	5	9
Other reasons	8	8	10	7	6	9	9
Not a priority	59	43	52	65	39	54	43

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n=2,347)

## Time change

There has been a large increase in the proportion of local churches who claim to be involved in migrant ministry, from 17% of local churches in the 2001 NCLS to 24% in 2006, and 35% in 2011. However, results may not be entirely comparable due to a wording change from 'ethnic ministry' in 2001 and 2006 to 'migrant ministry' in 2011.

## Summary

More than a third of Australian churches report being involved in ministry towards migrants, be it heavily involved or just taking first steps. About half of all churches claimed migrant ministry was not a priority in their area. Younger churches and urban churches were most likely to be involved in migrant ministry. Results also differed by denomination, and over time.

## Data sources

Castle, K., (2001) [computer file], 2001 NCLS Operations Survey. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Castle, K., (2006) [computer file], 2006 NCLS Operations Survey. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Operations Survey. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

## Citation

Duncum, I., Hancock, N., Pepper, M. & Powell, R. (2014) Church involvement in migrant ministry, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 14008. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=2293>

# Support for People in Developing Countries by Australian Churches

## The Australian churches' support of people/ministries overseas

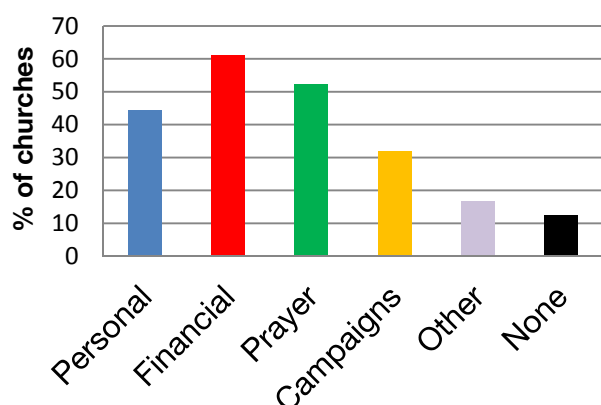
This fact sheet examines the support of Australian churches for people in developing countries, through various means. There is a long tradition of churches supporting the work of 'service' and 'proclamation' in the local community, elsewhere in the country or overseas. Focusing on support in developing countries, what are the levels for different kinds of support, and how much does such support really amount to? Are there large differences between denominational groups?

## Churches that support people/ministries in developing countries

The following question was asked in the 2011 National Church Life Survey Operations Survey<sup>1</sup>.

"Over the past 12 months, has this local church had a specific commitment to people in developing countries?"<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 1: Support for people in developing countries**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Surveys (n=2,429 churches).

<sup>1</sup> This is a one-per-church survey used as an audit of objective information such as activities each church runs or supports.

<sup>2</sup> 'Yes, a personal relationship with individuals/groups'; 'Yes, a regular financial commitment'; 'Yes a regular prayer commitment'; 'Yes, through campaigns which tackle poverty or injustice'; 'Yes, another kind of link'; 'No links of this kind'. Churches could mark all options.

Figure 1 shows that financial support is the most common (61% of all churches indicated they had a regular form of financial support). The second highest form was 'Prayer' (52% of churches) followed by 'Personal' (44%). Approximately one third of churches (32%) indicated they have regular support for poverty and injustice campaigns. Such campaigns would include Micah Challenge, TEAR, Act for Peace, or denominationally affiliated groups such as Baptist World Aid, Caritas, Catholic Mission, and Uniting World. Twelve percent of churches indicated having no supportive link of any kind.

## Denominational group differences

The results have also been divided into major denominational groups, and shown below in table 1.

**Table 1: Support for people in developing countries, by denominational groups**

	Personal	Financial	Prayer	Campaigns	Other	None
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>% of churches</b>						
Anglican	38	57	53	18	14	18
Baptist	65	84	78	46	18	4
Catholic	22	39	24	43	12	20
Churches of Christ	58	86	78	31	12	3
Lutheran	27	42	40	33	14	20
Pentecostal <sup>3</sup>	75	94	81	35	23	0
Presbyterian	42	58	60	16	10	16
Salvation Army	21	64	35	40	24	5
Seventh-day Adventist	47	59	41	24	37	7
Uniting	39	48	39	41	15	14
Other Protestant <sup>4</sup>	62	71	59	26	20	9

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Surveys (n=2,429 churches).

<sup>3</sup> 'Pentecostal' includes Australian Christian Churches, Apostolic, C3 Church, CRC International, and International Network of Churches.

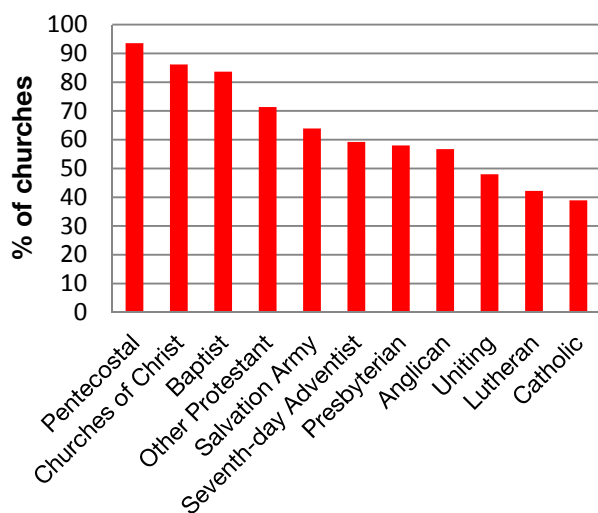
<sup>4</sup> 'Other Protestant' included churches from Christian Reformed, Congregational, Vineyard, Missionary Alliance, Nazarene, and independent churches.

While support is widespread across all denominations, there are considerable denominational differences evident in table 1. For the first 3 categories (Personal, Financial, Prayer) where support is most common, the Pentecostal churches hold the top position in each, with Baptist, Other Protestant, and Churches of Christ largely interchanging for positions 2, 3 and 4. The degrees of support for poverty and injustice campaigns follows a very different pattern, with strongest supporters being the Baptist, Catholic, Uniting and Salvation Army movements. This perhaps reflects strong and successful denominational agencies for these movements.

### The real financial contribution?

Examining these results can reveal something about both the internal culture of each denominational group, and the real contribution. This is because there is a vast difference in the size of these movements. To illustrate this, figure 2 below graphs the financial support figures (as a percentage) from table 1.

**Figure 2: Percent of local churches giving financial support for people in developing countries - by denominational groups**

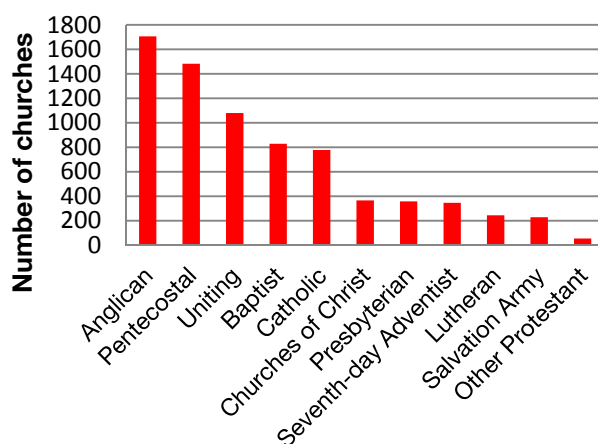


Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Surveys (n=2,429 churches).

Figure 2 shows important information about the different internal cultures of support that exist in the denominational groups. A further step is to take into account the different sizes of these groups. If the actual number of churches who give financial support were shown in each movement, the order of largest to smallest is quite different, as figure 3 shows.

Comparing figures 2 and 3, some of the groups that have less churches proportionally giving support are nevertheless large movements, and therefore make up a large portion of the total churches in Australia providing support (e.g. Anglican, Uniting, Catholic). Some of the 'high percentage groups' correspond to high numbers of churches if they are of sufficient size as movements (e.g. Pentecostal, Baptist), but not if they are smaller groups (e.g. Churches of Christ).

**Figure 3: Numbers of local churches\* giving financial support for people in developing countries - by denominational groups**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Surveys (n=2,429 churches). Results are weighted by denomination and region to estimate national totals. \*Catholic results in this graph show the number of parishes rather than local churches because of the method of surveying used.

These results provide a glimpse, perhaps the first ever for Australia, into how support for developing countries is distributed among the Australian churches. If it were possible to take into account other factors such as the variation of large churches or institutional differences the picture might change somewhat. Specific information about the dollar-value of churches' support would give the most detailed picture of all.

### Data sources

Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Operations Survey. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

### Citation

Sterland, S. (2014) Support for People in Developing Countries by Australian Churches, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 14026. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.



# Support for Overseas Workers by Australian Protestant Churches

## Support of overseas workers through agencies and directly

This fact sheet examines Australian Protestant<sup>1</sup> churches' support for workers in other countries, either through a mission agency or directly. There is a long tradition of churches supporting work overseas, whether missions of evangelism and ministry training, works of practical service and empowerment, or endeavours comprised of both. Historically, support that does not go through an agency has been relatively low, but is believed by many to have been rising for some time. This could have important implications for mission agencies, churches, and workers themselves.

## Numbers of workers supported by churches

The following question was asked in the 2011 National Church Life Survey *Operations Survey*<sup>2</sup>.

*How many overseas workers does this church support through:*

*A mission agency?*

*Directly (not through a mission agency)?*

The results in this fact sheet come from the responses of 2,587 Protestant churches from 20 different denominations (including independent churches). Responses from Catholic churches that participated in the 2011 NCLS showed clearly that support for missions is not organised primarily at a local level, but at an institutional one for this denomination. Therefore, because the data was being collected at a local level, results in this fact sheet do not include missions support by the Catholic Church in Australia<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> In this paper 'Protestant' is being used as a broad term for all Australian churches that are not from the Catholic and Orthodox denominations.

<sup>2</sup> This is a one-per-church survey used as an audit of objective information such as activities each church runs or supports.

<sup>3</sup> Some other denominations may be partially affected by this local/institutional complication, but no others have been excluded.

## Average amounts of support

Table 1 below shows the average number of overseas workers supported by Protestant churches overall, and by churches of different denominational groups.

**Table 1: Average number of overseas workers that churches are contributing support to**

	Agency	Direct	Combined
<b>All Protestant</b>	<b>1.18</b>	<b>0.47</b>	<b>1.65</b>
Anglican	1.35	0.20	1.55
Baptist	3.15	0.62	3.77
Churches of Christ	1.64	0.67	2.31
Lutheran	0.24	0.10	0.34
Pentecostal <sup>4</sup>	1.05	1.40	2.44
Presbyterian	1.86	0.33	2.19
Salvation Army <sup>5</sup>	0.09	0.05	0.14
Seventh-day Adventist	1.30	0.15	1.45
Uniting	0.17	0.18	0.34
Other Protestant <sup>6</sup>	3.33	1.89	5.22

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Surveys (n=2,587 churches).

The results from table 1 show that the typical Protestant church in Australia contributes support to 1.65 overseas workers. In other words, if 100 typical Protestant churches were selected at random, there would be about 165 overseas workers being contributed to (made up of 118 being supported via a mission agency, and 47 receiving support directly from the church).

Several important points emerge from this. First of all, by dividing up the two sources of support, these figures

<sup>4</sup> 'Pentecostal' includes Australian Christian Churches, Apostolic, C3 Church, CRC International, and International Network of Churches.

<sup>5</sup> Southern Territory only (approximately half of Australian Salvation Army Corps).

<sup>6</sup> 'Other Protestant' includes churches from Christian Reformed, Congregational, Vineyard, Missionary Alliance, Nazarene, and independent churches.



suggest that 28% of support for overseas workers from Protestant churches is currently not going through any mission agency. This raises significant questions. If mission agencies follow a set of 'best practices' that involve protections for workers and programs, are workers and programs not being supported via an agency more vulnerable in any way? Are churches

**"These figures suggest that 28% of support for overseas workers from Protestant churches is currently not going through any mission agency"**

involved in direct support also more vulnerable to potential problems that can occur? Are churches 'going around' mission agencies because of a

failure to connect well with them or because of a perceived lack of options (such as believing they have needs that agencies will not be able to meet)?

Secondly, there are clearly considerable differences in culture between the different denominations when it comes to support of overseas workers (see figure 2, below). There are movements where 20% or less of overseas worker support may be going direct (Anglican, Baptist, Presbyterian, Seventh-day Adventist), which presumably reflects a successful connection with one or more agencies, and confidence that churches have in these groups. At the other end of the spectrum, there are movements (particularly in the Pentecostal churches) where more than half of all support appears to not be going via any agency.

There are also important qualifications to note in these findings. The question in the NCLS survey referred to overseas workers. Some denominations have strong programs of support for workers elsewhere in Australia, and support of this kind is not covered in these results. Also, the question refers to *people* ('workers') rather than programs, and some denominations more often focus churches on supporting whole programs rather than individuals. This could result in average figures in table 1 that do not reflect the overall support for overseas work as well. Having said that, if church attenders find it easier to see support of a person as a useful concrete contribution their church can make, such a focus could lead to churches not using their denomination's agencies, or indeed any agency, and shifting towards more direct support<sup>7</sup>. This could be one of numerous factors contributing to differences of support between the denominational groups.

### Data sources

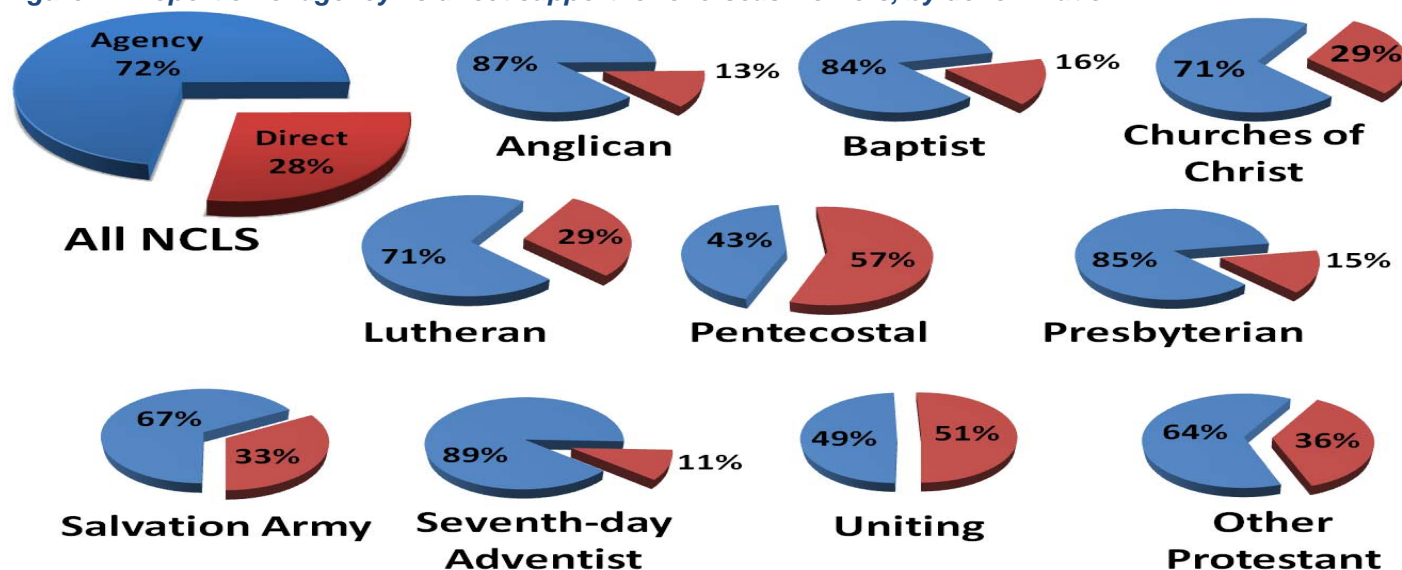
Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Operations Survey. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

### Citation

Sterland, S. (2014) Support for Overseas Workers by Australian Protestant Churches, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 14027. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.

<sup>7</sup> It should also be borne in mind that the amount of support for each worker is not indicated in the question, nor how many churches jointly support a worker. Therefore it is not possible to arrive at a total number of workers using this question.

**Figure 2: Proportion of agency vs direct support for overseas workers, by denomination**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Surveys (n=2,587 churches).

NCLS Occasional Paper 20

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# Environmental activity in local churches

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Miriam Pepper and Ruth Powell  
August 2013

## Abstract

Within church circles, there has been increased attention over recent decades to environmental concerns. However, knowledge about the relative uptake of activities in local churches in Australia, and who is doing what and where, is mostly patchy and anecdotal. Results from approximately 2,400 local churches that participated in the 2011 National Church Life Survey address this gap. The results indicate modest increases in environmental engagement among churches over the last 15 years. With the exception of recycling (two thirds of churches) and the purchase of environmentally friendly consumables (one third of churches), the most common activities in 2011 were implementation of energy and water saving measures at church buildings, the usual inclusion of environmental concerns in worship, and the celebration of a day or a season with an environmental theme in the previous five years, with approximately a quarter of local churches having done these activities. Biodiversity conservation activities and switching to GreenPower were the least common, with less than a twentieth of churches. Engagement varied markedly across denominations and was particularly high in the Uniting Church, followed by Catholic and Anglican churches. The Pentecostal churches were the least active. Activity was particularly high in the centres of capital cities and lowest in rural areas.

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## Acknowledgments

Production of this paper would not have been possible without the work of the other members of the NCLS Research team, who at timing of writing included: C. Chinnadurai, M. Dowson, I. Duncum, N. Hancock, K. Kerr, C. Mollidor, S. Sterland, and A. Vaeafisi.

## Citation

Pepper, M. & Powell, R. (2013) Environmental activities in local churches, NCLS Research Occasional Paper 20. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.

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## 1 Introduction

Within church circles there has been increased attention over recent decades to environmental concerns. Global Christian leaders, notably the Ecumenical Patriarch, the last two Roman Catholic Popes and the previous Archbishop of Canterbury, spoke publicly about Christian environmental responsibility, exhorting Christians to take action as well as claiming a Christian contribution in the broader public sphere.<sup>1</sup> The World Council of Churches has a longstanding Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (now Justice, Diakonia and Responsibility for Creation) program.<sup>2</sup> Ecological theology is now a rapidly growing sub-discipline.

Particularly among the larger church denominations in Australia (namely, the Catholic, Anglican and Uniting Churches), there is evidence of a widening sphere of social concern which has expanded from matters such as social justice and peacemaking to also include the environment as well as the relationships between environmental degradation and human flourishing.<sup>3</sup> These denominations and the National Council of Churches have each produced environmental statements, which call upon their adherents to care for the Earth.<sup>4</sup> Given the implications of climate change for the global poor, some Christian international aid and development organisations are now also actively engaged in raising awareness about climate change among the churches and in public policy related advocacy.

There has also been ecumenical collaboration seeking to raise environmental awareness, appreciation, commitment and activity among the churches. The National Council of Churches Eco Mission project, established in 2011, is one such example.<sup>5</sup> The state-based ecumenical councils have also collaborated on

environmental matters (e.g. the “Sustainable September” project in Western Australia).<sup>6</sup> The Season of Creation is an ecumenical project that has been running since 2004, which encourages churches to celebrate a Season of Creation every September/October and produces supporting worship materials<sup>7</sup>. Congregations and parishes in Australia, and now internationally, take part.

In addition to creation-sensitive worship, practical environmental activity is now occurring in congregations and parishes, such as energy audits, installation of water tanks and community gardening. Such activity is often supported by (and/or may prompt the development of) denominational and ecumenical resources for taking practical action.

However, knowledge among leaders and environmental advocates in the Churches about the relative uptake of activities, and who is doing what and where, is mostly patchy and anecdotal. The 2011 National Church Life Survey (NCLS) sought to address this gap and to paint a picture of local church-based environmental activity in Australia.

## 2 About the NCLS and the environmental activity questions

In the 2001, 2006 and 2011 Operations Survey audits of local church activity, the survey informant was asked to indicate whether the congregation/parish had engaged in any animal welfare or environmental activities over the past 12 months (and in the 2006 and 2011 surveys, the frequencies of such activities).

In 2006 and 2011, the informant was also asked whether the congregation/parish had undertaken an environmental audit of church buildings in the preceding five years.

The 2011 Operations Survey also included a battery of some 20 items about environmental activities, including in the areas of worship, operations of church buildings, and community projects and events. The question wording is shown in Table 1, with alternate Catholic

<sup>1</sup> See for example, Chrysavgis (undated); Benedictus PP. XVI (2010), Ioannes Paulus PP. II (1990), Williams (2004).

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/justice-diakonia-and-responsibility-for-creation>, accessed 9 April 2013.

<sup>3</sup> This has been well documented by Douglas (2007).

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Anglican Church of Australia General Synod (2007), Australian Catholic Social Justice Council (2002), National Council of Churches in Australia (2001), The Climate Institute (2006), Uniting Church in Australia Assembly (1991).

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ncca.org.au/departments/eco-mission>, accessed 9 April 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Information about Sustainable September is available at <http://www.churcheswa.com.au/ccwa/caring-for-our-planet/>, accessed 9 April 2013.

<sup>7</sup> [www.seasonofcreation.com](http://www.seasonofcreation.com), accessed 9 April 2013.

wordings italicised and in square brackets, and with short labels that are subsequently used in charts and data tables also given.

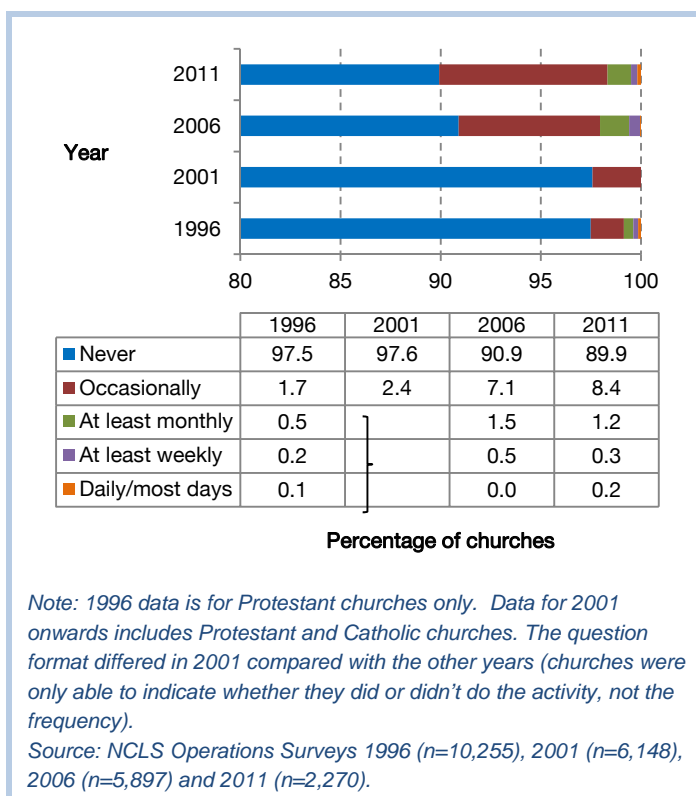
**Table 1: 2011 Operations Survey questions about specific environmental activities**

Question wording	Short label
<b>In the past 5 years, has this congregation [parish] undertaken any of the following activities? (Mark ALL that apply)</b>	
Celebrated a day or season with an environmental theme (eg Season of Creation, Environment Sunday)	Day/season
Run a Bible study [an adult faith education session] on an environmental theme	Bible study
Run a children's activity on an environmental theme	Kids' activity
Hosted and/or run a community garden	Cmty garden
Taken action to conserve biodiversity (eg hosted a native garden, raised funds for endangered species)	Biodiversity
Held a public event on an environmental theme	Public event
Worked on an environmental activity/project in the local community (eg Clean Up Australia Day, Landcare project)	Local project
Collaborated with an environmental group (eg local bushcare group, national environmental organisation)	Collaborated
Contacted an elected government member about an environmental issue	Contacted MP
None of the above	None, actions
<b>Have any of the following been done at the church's buildings in the past 5 years? (Mark ALL that apply)</b>	
An environmental audit	Enviro audit
Implementation of water saving measures	Water saving
Installation of rainwater tanks or water recycling	Water tank
Implementation of energy saving measures	Energy saving
Switch to government accredited GreenPower	GreenPower
Installation of solar panels or solar hot water heating	Solar panels
None of the above	None, bldgs
<b>Do any of the following usually happen at this congregation [parish]? (Mark ALL that apply)</b>	
Inclusion of environmental concerns in worship (eg through hymns/songs, prayers, sermons/homilies [homilies])	Env worship
Purchasing of environmentally friendly consumables (eg recycled paper for the office, cleaning products)	Consumables
Use of Council recycling services	Recycling
Sourcing of food that is more environmentally friendly for meals at church (eg local produce, less meat)	Enviro food
Composting of food wastes from meals at church	Composting
Provision of information to attenders to help them to be more environmentally friendly in daily life	Information
None of the above	None, usual

### 3 How has environmental activity changed over the last ten years?

As shown in Figure 1, the results for engagement in animal welfare or environmental activities suggest an increased engagement between 1996 and 2011 from 2% of local Protestant churches in 1996 (and of Catholic and Protestant churches in 2001) to 10% of churches in 2011 having engaged in any activities.

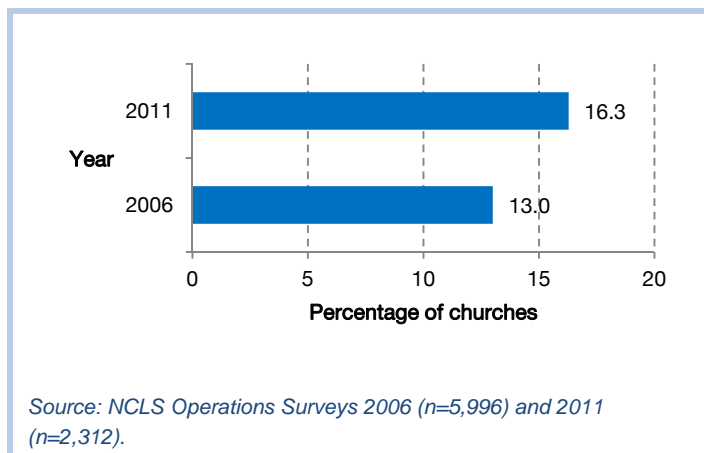
**Figure 1: Frequency of environmental/animal welfare activities in churches**



The results also indicate a small increase for environmental audits of church buildings, from 13% of local churches indicating that they had done so in the previous five years in 2006, to 16% in 2011, as shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2: Environmental audits conducted in churches**



#### 4 What specific environmental activities are being conducted in churches?

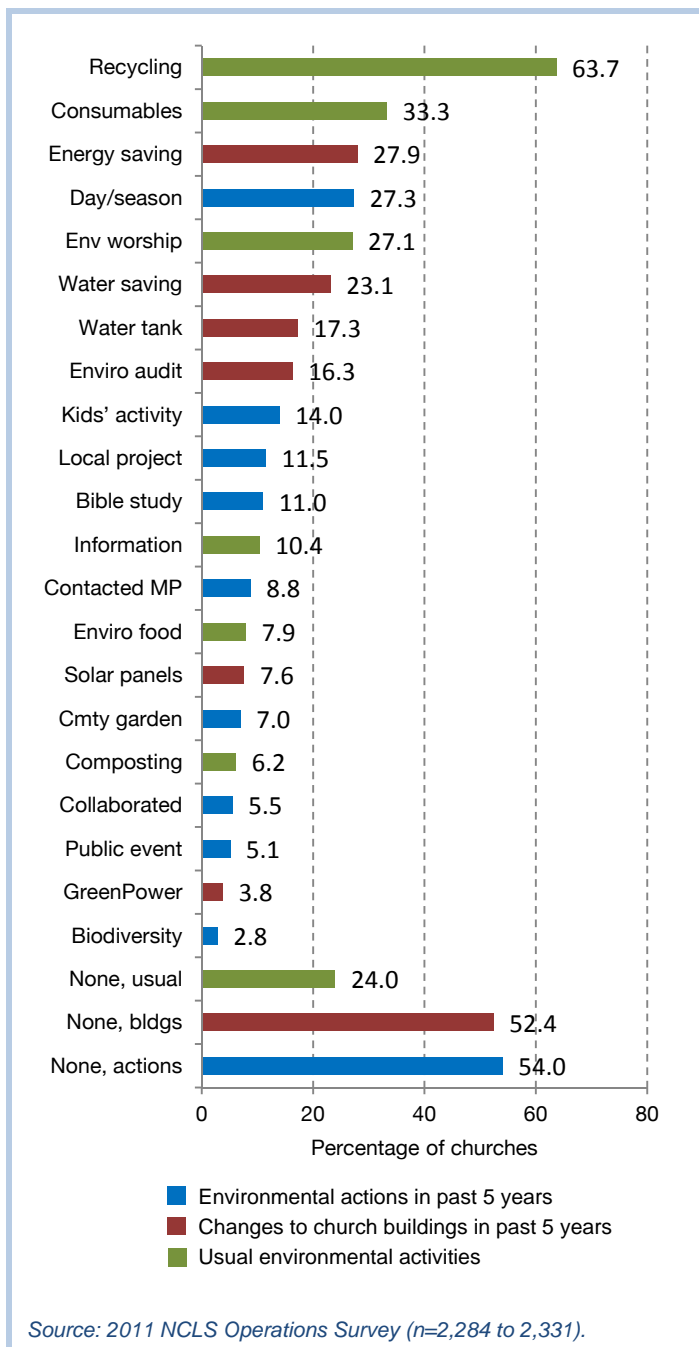
Figure 3 shows the percentage of local churches that indicated that they had undertaken the various environmental activities that were included in the 2011 Operations Survey, ranked from most common to least common.

The majority of congregations (almost two thirds) indicated that they recycled, which is reflective of the widespread nature of recycling services across Australia. A third of churches indicated that they purchased environmentally friendly consumables. Next most popular were the implementation of energy savings measures at church buildings, celebration of a day or a season with an environmental theme, inclusion of environmental concerns in worship, and implementation of water saving measures at church buildings, with approximately a quarter of churches indicating that they had done these.

In apparent contrast to the relatively high degree of inclusion of environmental awareness in worship, Bible studies/adult faith education sessions and children's activities on an environmental theme were much less common, with less than 15% of congregations/parishes having undertaken these activities.

The least popular activities were taking action to conserve biodiversity, switching to GreenPower, and holding a public event on an environmental theme, with 5% or fewer of churches having done each of these.

**Figure 3: Types of environmental activities in churches**





## 5 How do environmental activities differ by denomination?

Churches are grouped into the following denominational groupings for comparison: Anglican, Baptist/Churches of Christ, Catholic, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Uniting Church, and Other Protestant<sup>8</sup>.

When the number of environmental activities (of a possible total of 21) reportedly undertaken by a congregation/parish was added up, it was found that the median number of activities undertaken in the Uniting Church was 4, in Catholic and Anglican churches it was 3, in Pentecostal churches it was 1, and in the remaining churches it was 2.

Breakdowns by denomination for individual activities (listed in Table 2), indicate that, statistically, all activities differ significantly by denomination. The most popular activities showed a particularly strong variation across denominations. In the case of recycling, over 75% of Catholic parishes recycled, yet less than 40% of Pentecostal churches recycled. More than a third of Anglican and Uniting churches had implemented energy saving measures, yet equal to or less than 20% of the Lutheran churches, Pentecostal churches and churches in the Other Protestant category did so.

Strong variation is apparent once again for the integration of environmental matters in worship. Almost half of Uniting churches had celebrated a day or season with an environmental theme, but fewer than 5% of Pentecostal churches had done so, with a similar pattern for whether or not churches usually included environmental concerns in worship.

When denominations were ranked on each activity (so the denomination with the highest percentage of churches that have undertaken the particular activity is ranked as 1), the Uniting Church had the highest average rank across all activities, followed by Catholic and Anglican Churches, then Baptist/Churches of Christ

churches, Other Protestants, Lutherans, and Pentecostals. However, Lutheran churches ranked well (compared to their uptake of other activities) on celebrating a day/season with an environmental theme (which may reflect the adoption of the Season of Creation, which, although ecumenical, was originally developed and championed by a Lutheran, Norman Habel. Pentecostal churches ranked relatively highly on contacting a government representative about an environmental issue, second to the Uniting Church. Churches in the Other Protestant category were most likely of all churches to indicate that they sourced environmentally friendly food for meals at church.

**Table 2: Church environmental activity by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
Activity	Percentage of churches						
Day/season	38	10	29	30	4	47	16
Bible study	14	9	13	8	1	16	10
Kids' activity	20	8	13	7	2	18	16
Comt garden	10	6	11	3	3	8	4
Biodiversity	3	0	5	0	0	6	2
Public event	7	3	5	1	3	8	2
Local project	10	12	13	6	9	15	13
Collaborated	5	4	9	2	0	12	2
Contacted MP	7	4	9	2	11	17	6
None, actions	(46)	(66)	(52)	(60)	(76)	(34)	(62)
Enviro audit	28	8	12	6	5	26	6
Water saving	27	20	31	19	10	29	20
Water tank	19	16	29	18	3	23	12
Energy saving	41	22	28	15	12	35	20
GreenPower	5	3	5	1	0	6	3
Solar panels	11	5	10	6	1	8	8
None, bldgs.	(40)	(59)	(45)	(60)	(82)	(37)	(65)
Env worship	37	7	36	30	0	49	16
Consumables	40	31	39	19	32	38	19
Recycling	73	64	77	50	37	64	68
Enviro food	6	8	7	5	1	10	17
Composting	6	6	6	6	1	9	8
Information	12	7	17	1	3	18	6
None, usual	(18)	(25)	(12)	(36)	(50)	(19)	(20)

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n=2,284 to 2,331).

## 6 How do environmental activities differ by locality?

Survey informants were asked to choose the locality of their church from among the following options:

- Rural area (less than 200 people)
- Small rural town (200 to 2000 people)
- Rural service centre (2,000 to 10,000)

<sup>8</sup> 'Pentecostal' may include respondents from any of the following denominations: C3 Churches, Apostolic, Australian Christian Churches (AOC), CRC Churches, Christian Life Churches, Four Square Gospel, Christian Outreach Centres, Bethesda, International Pentecostal Holiness Church, and other Pentecostal groups. 'Other Protestant' may include respondents from any of the following denominations: Adventist, Brethren, CMA, Congregational, Grace Communion, Nazarene, Presbyterian, Salvation Army, Vineyard and other independent churches.

- Large rural centre (10,000 to 20,000)
- Regional centre (more than 20,000 people)
- Centre of a State or Territory capital city
- Suburbs of a State or Territory capital city

Churches are now grouped into these localities for comparison, with the results displayed in Table 3.

When the number of activities (of a possible total of 21) reportedly undertaken by a local church was added up, it was found that the median number of activities undertaken in the centre of a capital city was 4, in the suburbs of a capital city and large rural centres it was 3, and in regional centres, rural service centres and small rural towns) it was 2. In rural areas (less than 200 people) it was 1.

**Table 3: Church environmental activity by location**

	Rural area	Small rural town	Rural service centre	Large rural centre	Regional centre	Centre capital city	Suburb capital city
Activity	Percentage of churches						
Day/season	25	25	30	22	24	50	27
Bible study	2	9	6	4	9	36	13
Kids' activity	6	5	13	10	14	33	15
Comt garden	2	7	3	7	8	27	6
Biodiversity*	2	1	4	3	3	3	3
Public event	2	1	6	3	6	8	6
Local project*	6	8	12	14	12	6	13
Collaborated*	2	4	4	5	6	4	6
Contacted MP	4	5	7	17	9	5	9
None, actions	(66)	(57)	(55)	(58)	(55)	(37)	(52)
Enviro audit	7	8	11	20	15	39	18
Water saving	15	14	17	17	22	36	27
Water tank	21	15	11	13	16	28	19
Energy saving	14	24	29	28	26	46	28
GreenPower	1	1	6	3	3	4	4
Solar panels*	1	6	11	7	6	8	7
None, bldgs.	(62)	(58)	(54)	(50)	(55)	(38)	(52)
Env worship	21	25	29	29	20	43	28
Consumables	8	15	27	39	35	65	38
Recycling	20	50	53	71	62	77	72
Enviro food*	10	4	7	10	8	10	8
Composting*	3	6	8	6	6	4	5
Information*	4	7	11	11	10	5	12
None, usual	(55)	(37)	(31)	(14)	(25)	(11)	(18)

\*Indicates that the differences between locations are not statistically significant.

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n=2,146 to 2,188).

The take-up of most individual activities (14 of 21) also differed by church location. Recycling varied particularly strongly by location; a smaller proportion of local churches recycled in rural areas than in regional

and city areas, which may be reflective of the lack of recycling services in the former. It may be surprising that fewer than four fifths of local churches in capital cities recycled, when it is highly likely that all city councils have recycling services. The explanation may be that churches in some areas may be required to pay for recycling services (like businesses do), rather than having them provided free of charge as residents do. In terms of the implementation of energy saving measures, urban churches (churches in the centre of a capital city) had the highest proportion of churches that had implemented these, and rural churches the lowest. Urban churches again scored the highest for celebrating an environmental day/season and usually including environmental concerns in worship, with considerably less variation among the churches in other locations.

When localities were ranked on each activity (so the locality with the highest percentage of churches that have undertaken the particular activity is ranked as 1), urban and suburban areas of capital cities tended to report the highest levels of activities, followed by regional centres and rural service centres, and finally rural towns and rural areas.

Half of urban churches had celebrated a day or season with an environmental theme, and almost half had implemented energy saving measures at church buildings. Approximately a third of urban churches had undertaken each of the following: run a Bible study/faith discussion group on an environmental theme, run an environmental children's activity, conducted an environmental audit, implemented water saving measures. A quarter or more of urban churches had: hosted/run a community garden, installed rainwater tanks or water recycling.

Churches in large rural service centres ranked relatively highly (compared to their ranking on other activities) on contacting a government member about an environmental issue. In fact, they ranked higher on this activity than all other localities. Churches in rural service centres ranked relatively highly on switching to GreenPower, churches in small rural towns ranked relatively highly on hosted and/or run a community garden, and churches in rural areas ranked relatively highly on the installation of rainwater tanks.

## 7 Discussion

Results from 1996 to 2011 indicate a small increase environmental activity in churches over time.

The majority of congregations/parishes (just under two-thirds) recycle, which is reflective of the widespread nature of recycling services across Australia.

Some activities related to the operations of buildings and property – the implementation of energy and water savings measures – were relatively popular, with approximately a quarter of churches indicating that they had done these in the preceding five years. Implementation of these measures may be motivated by cost savings as much as by environmental concern, particularly given increases in electricity prices.

Approximately a quarter of congregations/parishes indicated that they usually included environmental concerns in worship, and that they had celebrated a day or a season with an environmental theme in the previous five years. However, the use of Bible studies/faith discussion groups and children's activities on an environmental theme were much less popular. There are a variety of small group and children's resources available, so the lower figures may reflect factors other than a lack of materials. Not all churches have small groups or children's activities, and for those that do, more effort may need to be invested in organising such programs or activities as compared with other activities e.g. once-off services on an environmental theme, or the regular inclusion in worship of environmentally sensitive songs or prayers.

The least popular activities were taking action to conserve biodiversity, switching to GreenPower, and holding a public event on an environmental theme. In the case of public events, the low take up may in part reflect the effort required to organise such initiatives. Financial costs may limit the uptake of GreenPower, although it is usually possible to switch to a proportion of GreenPower at no extra cost. In the case of biodiversity conservation, efforts such as planting indigenous plants in the church garden, or taking up a collection for a threatened species may not take considerable effort. Their lack of popularity suggests that biodiversity conservation is not of particular interest or concern to most churches.

Environmental activity was particularly high in the Uniting Church, followed by Catholic and Anglican churches. The Pentecostal churches were the least active. This denominational pattern of activity matches the pattern of institutional environmental engagement by denominational structures, which is greater in the Catholic and mainstream Protestant denominations. The Uniting Church particularly has been a leader in such institutional engagement, with its environmental policies preceding anything similar in the Catholic and Anglican denominations by some 20 years<sup>9</sup>. The Uniting Church is also prominent in public policy environmental advocacy (particularly in relation to climate change), and has played a strong role in ecumenical environmental initiatives, such as through the state and national councils of churches.

It is also notable that the Anglican, Catholic and Uniting Churches have all explicitly named environmental matters as an aspect of mission. The fifth mark of mission of the Anglican Communion is "to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth"<sup>10</sup>, Pope John Paul II spoke of the need to "encourage and support the 'ecological conversion'"<sup>11</sup>, and the Uniting Church's founding document states that "the Church's call is to serve... that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation."<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, churches which belong to denominations with stronger or more centralised institutional structures may receive stronger encouragement, resourcing and support to take environmental action, in comparison with denominations such as the Baptists, Churches of Christ and Pentecostal movements in which local churches are more autonomous.

That many Pentecostal churches don't own their own buildings may help to explain the low levels of environmental actions concerning buildings. But the consistently low levels of Pentecostal activity across the spectrum of environmental activities included in the 2011 NCLS suggests that there are other factors at

<sup>9</sup> Douglas (2007, p. 221), although Douglas's research and that of Pepper and John (forthcoming) indicates that the implementation of environmental policies in the Uniting Church has been patchy.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/mission/fivemarks.cfm>, accessed 9 April 2013.

<sup>11</sup> John Paul II (2001).

<sup>12</sup> Uniting Church in Australia (1992).

play. Other research examining Pentecostal responses to sustainability issues argues that in Pentecostal churches there is a focus on individual spirituality to the neglect of social concerns, conservative eschatology (end times theology), and that prosperity theology may work against environmentalism (Sheppard, 2006). However, the research also suggested that there are elements that may motivate Pentecostals to engage with environmental problems, such as sensitivity to the seriousness of evil in the world and to the escalation of global crises.

Environmental activity was particularly high in the capital cities and lowest in rural areas. However, environmental activity is not just a city phenomenon. Churches in large rural centres were the most likely (compared with churches from other localities) to have contacted a government member about an environmental issue, and churches in rural service centres were most likely to have switched to GreenPower. The particularly high figure for contacting government members could be due, for example, to the high levels of concern about issues such as the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and the encroachment of mining onto farming land.

In summary, the results indicate modest increases in environmental engagement among churches. Engagement varies markedly across types of activity, denominations, and locality. There is clearly scope for increased engagement, and for inspiration and support from advocates within churches and denominational structures and beyond to facilitate this to happen, if indeed “the church has a genuine mission to love and care for God’s creation as a vital expression of its faith.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.ncca.org.au/departments/eco-mission>, accessed 9 April 2013.

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## **9 About NCLS Research**

NCLS Research is a joint project of several denominational partners. Established in the early 1990s, it is a world leader in research focused on connecting churches and their communities. The most well-known project is the five-yearly National Church Life Survey.

## **10 About the National Church Life Survey**

The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a quantitative survey of 260,000-450,000 church attenders, 6,000-10,000 church leaders and 3,000-7,000 churches in more than 20 Australian denominations (Catholic, Anglican and Protestant denominations) every census year since 1991. The survey covers a wide range of areas of religious faith and practice and social concern. The NCLS includes three major survey types:

1. Attender Surveys (comprising a main survey variant and multiple small sample survey variants);
2. Several variants of a Leader Survey which is completed by local church leaders; and
3. An Operations Survey audit of local church activities.

Data are weighted to adjust for variations in participation levels across denominations and regions.



NCLS Occasional Paper 21

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# Senior local church leaders' environmental views and actions

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Miriam Pepper and Ruth Powell  
July 2013

## Abstract

As well as being of interest in and of themselves, the environmental views and actions of local church leaders are important because they have the potential to influence the communal lives of congregations and parishes and the lives of individual church attenders. The 2011 National Church Life Survey asked approximately 500 senior church leaders about their environmental views (concerning a diversity of ecotheological positions) and about their environmental actions. Overall, almost two thirds of leaders endorsed the view that caring for the Earth should be an essential part of the mission of the Church, however, there were strong differences between denominations. Dominion theology, stewardship, the presence of God in nature, non-human Creation praising God, and the importance of Earth care for human wellbeing were all endorsed by a majority of leaders. However, leaders were ambivalent about whether the most important reason for Earth-care was human flourishing (anthropocentrism). When it came to their environmental actions, roughly a third of senior leaders often or sometimes preached about environmental issues, and a quarter did so occasionally, although there was a marked difference by denomination, with leaders from evangelical Protestant and Pentecostal churches least likely to preach on this topic.

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## Acknowledgments

Production of this paper would not have been possible without the work of the other members of the NCLS Research team, who at timing of writing included: C. Chinnadurai, M. Dowson, I. Duncum, N. Hancock, K. Kerr, C. Mollidor, S. Sterland, and A. Vaeafisi.

## Citation

Pepper, M. & Powell, R. (2013) Senior local church leaders' environmental views and actions, NCLS Research Occasional Paper 21, Catalogue Number 2.13008, Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press  
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## 1 Introduction

Environmental concerns are gaining increased attention within Australian churches (see Pepper and Powell, 2013). As well as being of interest in and of themselves, the environmental views and actions of local church leaders (ministers, pastors and priests in placement at a particular local church) are important because they have the potential to influence the communal lives of congregations and parishes and the lives of individual church attenders. Church leaders may play a role in helping Christians to make sense of the growing ecological crisis and to relate it to their faith and practice. They may also provide inspiration and support for local churches to take collective environmental action.

In late 2011 as a part of the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a sample of approximately 500 senior church leaders<sup>1</sup> from Catholic, Anglican and Protestant churches were asked a series of questions about their environmental views and actions.

## 2 Ecotheological views

There are a diversity of ecotheologies<sup>2</sup> that are present within Christian reflection and praxis. For example, Kearns (2004) lays out three different types of ecotheology that connect variously with evangelical, mainstream Protestant, liberal Protestant, Catholic and liberal Catholic church traditions.

In the 2011 NCLS, church leaders were asked about their ecotheological views, that is, they were asked about their understandings of the relationships between humanity, the Earth and God.

Leaders were requested to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a set of seven propositions/statements as follows (with short labels used in subsequent tables given in brackets).

One statement concerned a classic "dominion" theology, which is predicated on the Genesis 1 creation narrative, in which humans receive a God-given mandate to exercise dominion over the Earth:

<sup>1</sup> Senior leaders indicated that they were either "The minister, pastor or priest of this congregation/parish", "The senior minister/pastor/priest of a ministry team here", "An interim minister, pastor or priest here" or "A layperson serving as the principal leader here".

<sup>2</sup> "Ecotheology" is a shorthand term for ecological theology.

*Humankind was created to rule over the rest of nature*  
(Human rule over nature)

A second question concerned a "stewardship" mentality, where humans have a responsibility to manage the Earth for the good of all (human and non-human):

*Humanity's role in caring for the earth is to manage it so that everything thrives* (Humanity manage the earth)

Another item was the notion of the immanence of God in nature (or pan[en]theism):

*God is present in nature* (God present in nature)

Another item drew on the language of some of the Psalms, which present other-than-human Creation as singing for joy, clapping its hands, and/or praising God:  
*The non-human creation has its own way of praising God* (Creation praises God)

Two statements were about environmental sensitivity on the basis of the importance of environmental integrity for human flourishing. One named this sensitivity, and another tapped an *anthropocentric* sensitivity, where the environmental impacts on humans are not only recognised but are the most important motivator for concern:

*We need to care for the earth for the sake of human beings* (Earth care for humans)

*The most important reason to look after the environment is to ensure that human beings can flourish* (Earth care anthropocentric)

Finally, one statement concerned the role of the Church in relation to the Earth, and specifically, whether this could be understood as mission<sup>3</sup>:

*Caring for the earth should be an essential part of the mission of the Church* (Earth care mission)

Senior leaders' responses are shown in Table 1.

There was majority support for all but one of the theological statements, with roughly two thirds to three quarters of leaders in agreement. The exception was anthropocentric environmental concern; senior leaders were fairly evenly split over whether or not the most

<sup>3</sup> This understanding of the church's environmental responsibility is being articulated by the National Council of Churches Eco Mission project. <http://www.ncca.org.au/departments/eco-mission>

important reason to look after the environment is the well-being of human beings.

**Table 1: Church leaders' ecotheological views**

	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Ecotheological statement	Percentage		
Human rule over nature	13	10	77
Humanity manage the earth	6	16	78
God present in nature	17	11	72
Creation praises God	13	23	64
Earth care for humans	10	15	76
Earth care anthropocentric	35	25	39
Earth care mission	16	17	68

Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Version A (n=539 to 543).

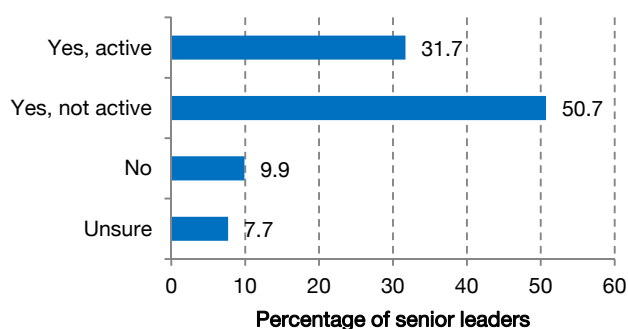
When the correlations between these different theological statements were examined, it was found that there was moderate negative relationship between endorsing dominion theology and endorsing the view that caring for the Earth should be an essential part of the mission of the Church. There was a moderate positive correlation between endorsing the latter statement and endorsing the stewardship position, and between environmental concern on the basis of impacts on humans and anthropocentric environmental concern. Otherwise, the relationships between the seven different ecotheological views were weak.

Senior church leaders were also asked:

**Do you believe that Christians have a responsibility to be active about environmental issues?**

- ☐ Yes, and I am already active
- ☐ Yes, but I am currently not active
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

**Figure 1: Church leader views about Christian environmental responsibility**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Versions A,B, C and D (n=540).

As shown in Figure 1, over 80% of leaders felt that that Christians have a responsibility to be environmentally active, and almost a third were personally active.

### 3 Environmental actions

The church leaders were also asked several questions about their environmental activities, as follows:

*Over the past five years, have you undertaken any of the following actions? (Mark ALL that apply)*

- ☐ Been a member of an environmental group or movement
- ☐ Collaborated with an environmental group (e.g. local bushcare group, national environmental organisation) in your capacity as a church leader
- ☐ Collaborated with other clergy or church leaders from outside your congregation(s) concerning environmental matters
- ☐ None of these actions

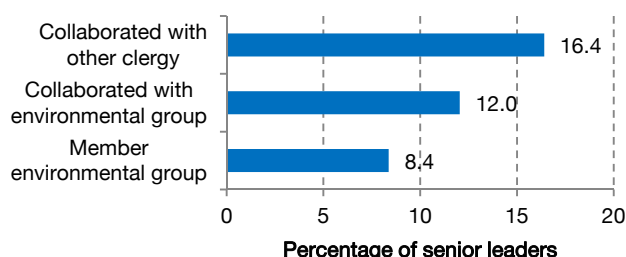
*How often would you touch on the topic of the environment/caring for the earth in your preaching over the course of a year?*

- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

Membership of an environmental group/movement was low, at 8%. Slightly more, 12%, had collaborated with an environmental group and 16% had collaborated with other clergy on environmental matters (see Figure 2). Almost three quarters (73%) of leaders indicated that they hadn't undertaken any of these three activities.

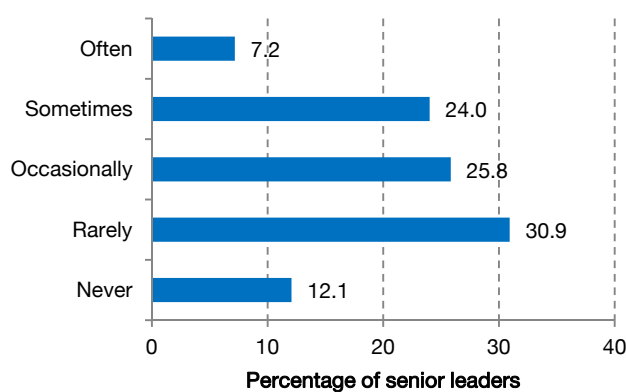
As shown in Figure 3, almost a third (31%) of senior leaders indicated that they often or sometimes preached about environmental issues, a quarter (26%) did so occasionally, and 43% did so rarely or never.

**Figure 2: Church leader environmental activity**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Version A (n=534).

**Figure 3: Frequency of preaching about environment**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Version A (n=497).

## 4 Denominational differences

Church leaders' views and actions related to the environment and Earth care varied strongly by denomination, as the results in Table 2 indicate.<sup>4</sup> Senior leaders from the Uniting Church consistently reported strong pro-environmental views and actions. And, with the exception of several of the environmental actions (membership of an environmental group, collaboration with an environmental group, and collaboration with other clergy) Pentecostals tended to be the denominational grouping with the weakest pro-environmental stance. For example, 39% of Pentecostal leaders agreed that Earth care should be

an essential part of the mission of the church, compared with 92% of Uniting Church leaders. Some 61% of Uniting Church leaders indicated that they preached sometimes or often about the environment/caring for the earth, whereas 79% of Pentecostals rarely or never did so. However, Pentecostal leaders were more affirming than some other denominations of the presence of God in nature (72%, versus 63% of Anglicans and 62% of Baptist/Churches of Christ attenders). This finding could reflect the emphasis within Pentecostalism on the immanence of the Holy Spirit, which may be understood to be present in nature.

Almost half 46% of Anglican senior leaders believed that being active about environmental issues is a Christian responsibility, and were themselves active, which approached the proportion (54%) of Uniting Church leaders who indicated likewise. Catholic leaders tended to be fairly pro-environmental in their stances. However, in terms of specific environmental activities, while a quarter (24%) of Catholic leaders had collaborated with other clergy on environmental matters in the preceding five years, Catholics leaders were unlikely to have collaborated with environmental groups and none of the survey participants were members of environmental groups.

In their responses, Catholic leaders seemed to be both highly valuing of the human person and highly valuing of the rest of creation, but with the human person clearly taking precedence. Compared with leaders from other denominations, Catholics tended to agree relatively strongly that God is present in nature (90%) and that Earth care is an essential part of the mission of the Church (83%), but also to be relatively likely to think that the most important reason for earth care is to ensure that humans can flourish (55%).

The responses also show the prevalence of dominion views across the denominations, with the exception of the Uniting Church, where less than half (41%) of leaders agreed that humankind was created to rule over the rest of nature. In contrast, the proportions agreeing in other denominations ranged from two thirds to over 90%.

<sup>4</sup> 'Pentecostal' may include respondents from any of the following denominations: C3 Churches, Apostolic, Australian Christian Churches (AOC), CRC Churches, Christian Life Churches, Four Square Gospel, Christian Outreach Centres, Bethesda, International Pentecostal Holiness Church, and other Pentecostal groups. 'Other Protestant' may include respondents from any of the following denominations: Adventist, Brethren, CMA, Congregational, Grace Communion, Nazarene, Presbyterian, Salvation Army, Vineyard and other independent churches.



**Table 2: Church leader views and actions by denomination and faith identity**

	Denomination							Faith Identity				Total
	Anglican	Baptist/ Churches of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Uniting	Other Prot- estant	Catholic /Anglo- Catholic	Evang- elical/ Reform	Mod/ Liberal/ Progress	Charis/ Pente- costal	
Statement (% agree)	Percentage of senior leaders											
Human rule over nature	67	94	73	83	93	42	90	55	81	44	87	77
Humanity manage the earth	79	80	77	77	62	92	79	79	77	84	71	78
God present in nature	63	62	90	68	72	84	67	88	64	77	75	72
Creation praises God	59	59	67	75	41	79	76	77	68	76	50	64
Earth care for humans	67	73	93	82	72	71	81	80	74	63	79	76
Earth care anthropocentric	32	30	55	37	52	24	48	41	35	23	39	39
Earth care mission	73	57	83	58	39	92	67	87	64	85	57	68
Christian enviro responsibility												
Yes, active	46	25	31	37	7	54	26	47	33	48	25	32
Yes, not active	41	56	55	51	59	42	54	46	51	39	55	51
No	9	12	3	0	24	2	9	0	10	3	12	10
Unsure	4	8	10	12	10	2	11	6	6	10	8	8
Member group	10	4	0	15	11	22	1	8	5	16	4	8
Collaborated group	16	13	7	6	7	24	6	12	10	25	14	12
Collaborated clergy	18	15	24	13	11	28	7	24	12	24	18	16
None of the above	69	80	69	70	82	47	90	68	80	62	74	73
Preaching frequency												
Often	6	0	13	5	0	28	0	14	11	11	9	7
Sometimes	32	18	30	27	7	34	26	46	25	28	25	24
Occasionally	35	25	39	35	14	24	24	26	32	39	21	26
Rarely	27	43	9	30	38	14	44	11	28	15	39	31
Never	1	14	9	3	41	1	6	3	5	8	6	12

Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Version A (n=461 to 543).

## 5 Faith identity differences

Another way to examine the relationship between Christian tradition and environmental views and actions is to look at the differences in views and actions by "faith identity". Leaders were asked to indicate up to two approaches to matters of faith with which they most identified from a list of 11 possibilities (including an option "I do not identify with such descriptions). The following were grouped to form four faith identities: Catholic/Anglo-Catholic, Evangelical or Reformed, Moderate or Liberal or Progressive, and Charismatic or Pentecostal. The results are presented in Table 2.

The results are similar to those obtained for denomination. Interestingly, holding a Catholic/Anglo-Catholic faith identity tended to result in a decreased tendency both to hold anthropocentric environmental views and to agree with dominion theology compared with simply belonging to the Catholic Church (41% versus 55% for agreement with anthropocentrism, and 55% versus 73% for dominion). This faith identity also heightened both being active about environmental issues (47% versus 31%) and preaching about the environment (60% versus 43% often or sometimes).

As was the case for the Pentecostal denomination, leaders who identified as charismatic or Pentecostal in terms of their faith identity tended to be less pro-environmental in their views and less environmentally active than other leaders. However, this tendency for faith identity was weaker than was the case for denomination (e.g. 57% charismatic/Pentecostal versus 39% Pentecostal denomination in agreement that Earth care is an essential part of the mission of the Church, 25% versus 7% active on environmental issues, and 34% versus 7% often or sometimes preaching about the environment).

Leaders who identified as moderate, liberal or progressive tended to hold relatively strong pro-environmental views and to be relatively strong in terms of environmental action.

## 6 Demographic differences in views and actions

There was some relationship between age and environmental views and actions, with the younger leaders less pro-environmental in their stances. The



strongest differences observed between age groups were as follows. Some 56% of leaders under 50 years of age agreed that caring for the Earth should be an essential part of the mission of the Church, compared with 75% of leaders aged 50 and over. Some 85% of leaders under 50 endorsed dominion theology, in comparison with 71% of 50 to 69 year olds, and 78% of 70+ year olds. And 72% of leaders under 50 years old believed that it is a Christian responsibility to be active about environmental issues, compared with 90% of older leaders.

A small minority (17%) of leaders under 50 often or sometimes preached about environmental matters, compared with 41% of 50+ year olds. Leaders aged 50-69 were the most likely (compared with younger and older leaders) to have undertaken other environmental actions. These results may well reflect a combination of the younger age profile of Pentecostal and evangelical Protestant leaders, as well as elderly leaders having less energy to undertake more involved environmental actions.

Differences and reported views and actions between men (who comprised 81% of senior church leaders) and women (19% of leaders) were few. The strongest difference was that women were more likely than men to hold pan[en]theistic views, with 92% of women in agreement that God is present in nature compared with 68% of men.

## 7 Comparisons of leaders and attenders

Most of the questions that were asked of church leaders were also asked of a subsample of church attenders who participated in the 2011 NCLS. Comparisons between leaders and attenders are given in Table 3.

Regarding ecotheological views, the main differences between leaders and attenders are that leaders were considerably less anthropocentric in their responses (39% of leaders holding anthropocentric views, compared with 64% of attenders), less likely to affirm the immanence of God in nature (72% versus 95%), and more likely to hold to dominion theology (77% versus 58%). However, these differences did not always hold across denominations. There was no difference in agreement regarding anthropocentrism for Pentecostals (52% of leaders and attenders) and the difference for Other Protestants was relatively small (48% versus 56%). Catholic leaders and attenders

were both very strongly in agreement about the immanence of God in nature (90% versus 95%). Anglican leaders and attenders were equally in agreement regarding dominion (67% versus 66%), and Uniting Church leaders were actually somewhat less in agreement with dominion than were attenders (42% versus 50%).

**Table 3: Church leader views and actions by denomination**

	Senior leaders	Church attenders
Statement (% agree)	Percentage	
Human rule over nature	77	58
Humanity manage the earth	78	87
God present in nature	72	95
Creation praises God	64	53
Earth care for humans	76	83
Earth care anthropocentric	39	64
Christian enviro responsibility		
Yes, active	32	32
Yes, not active	51	48
No	10	7
Unsure	8	13
Member environmental group	8	5

Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Version A (n = 534 to 543), and 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P (n = 1270 to 1310).

Views about Christian environmental responsibility were similar for leaders and attenders (e.g. 32% of both leaders and attenders believed that being active about environmental issues was a Christian responsibility and were themselves personally active), as was membership of environmental groups or movements (8% of leaders versus 5% of attenders).

## 8 Discussion

The results for church leaders' ecotheological views are interesting. Overall, almost two thirds of leaders endorsed the view that caring for the Earth is an essential part of the mission of the Church, however, there were strong differences between denominations, with Uniting Church most in agreement, followed by Anglicans, and then Catholics. It is notable that these three denominations have all explicitly named environmental matters as an aspect of mission. The fifth mark of mission of the Anglican Communion is "to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth"<sup>5</sup>, Pope John Paul II (2001) spoke of the need to "encourage and support the

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/mission/fivemarks.cfm>, accessed 9 April 2013.

'ecological conversion"', and the Uniting Church's founding document states that "the Church's call is to serve... that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation" (Uniting Church in Australia, 1992, §3).

Dominion theology, stewardship, the presence of God in nature, non-human Creation praising God, and the importance of Earth care for human wellbeing were all endorsed by a majority of leaders. However, leaders were ambivalent about whether or not the most important reason for Earth care was human flourishing (anthropocentrism). Again, the denominational differences in dominion theology were marked, with the vast majority of leaders from the evangelical Protestant denominations concurring with this theology, contrasted most strongly with the large minority of Uniting Church leaders who were of the same view.

There was a tendency for leaders who were more supportive of dominion theology to be less in favour of Earth care being an essential part of the mission of the Church. In contrast, the other ecotheological views tended to be positively related (though typically weakly) or unrelated to supporting Earth care. This suggests that, although there may be versions of dominion theology that are more ecologically amenable than others, dominion theology as currently understood by Australia's church leaders may be problematic for fostering greater environmental engagement in churches. In contrast, anthropocentrism is not necessarily a bar to environmental engagement, but neither is it necessarily a support for it (there was no relationship between holding anthropocentric views and supporting Earth care).

Pepper and John (forthcoming) have commented that, in official statements of the Australian denominations, stewardship and/or dominion theologies have tended to be prevalent.<sup>6</sup> The exception has been the Uniting Church, where a broader range of ecotheologies have been articulated, including a "web of life" theology that emphasises humanity's ecological connections to the rest of life on Earth through a series of dynamic relationships, as opposed to the hierarchy implicit in dominion approaches. However, several Australian Catholic religious orders have also articulated "web of

<sup>6</sup> For example, in the Climate Institute's (2006) "Common Belief" collection of statements from different denominations about climate change.

life" theologies and theologies that take seriously an evolutionary understanding of life<sup>7</sup>, and Australian academic theologians from a range of denominations have also pushed the envelope of ecotheological understanding.<sup>8</sup>

Catholic leaders or those who identified as Catholic or Anglo-Catholic were the most likely to likely to agree that God is present in nature, which accords with the sacramentality of the Catholic/Anglo-Catholic tradition.

The denominational differences in ecotheological views were greater for senior church leaders than they were for church attenders. This comes as no surprise, given that leaders would be expected to be more strongly formed in their own tradition than church attenders. Indeed, most senior leaders had undergone formal ministry training, and it would be expected that for most leaders this training would have been with their present (or another closely related) denomination.

In terms of church leaders' environmental actions, the results suggest a reasonable degree of environmental engagement. However, a breakdown of the results by denomination shows that, once again, the averages mask a high variation between denominations, ranging from relatively strong engagement within the Uniting Church through to much weaker engagement among Pentecostals. This denominational differentiation was also observed for local church activity itself, in the 2011 NCLS Operations Survey audit of local churches.

Overall, the results suggest that the view articulated by the National Council of Churches in its "Eco-Mission mandate" that "the church has a genuine mission to love and care for God's creation as a vital expression of its faith"<sup>9</sup> is reflected unevenly in the attitudes and actions of Australia's local church leaders, and that there is considerable scope for increased engagement in this regard.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Earthsong, which is a collaboration between six Catholic religious orders. <http://earthsong.org.au/>

<sup>8</sup> These include the Lutheran scholar Norm Habel (e.g. Habel, 2012), the Catholic theologian Denis Edwards (e.g. Edwards, 2012), and Uniting Church process theologian Jason John (John, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.ncca.org.au/departments/eco-mission>, accessed 18 June 2013.

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## 10 About NCLS Research

NCLS Research is a joint project of several denominational partners. Established in the early 1990s, it is a world leader in research focused on connecting churches and their communities. The most well-known project is the five-yearly National Church Life Survey.

## 11 About the National Church Life Survey

The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a quantitative survey of 260,000-450,000 church attenders, 6,000-10,000 church leaders and 3,000-7,000 churches in more than 20 Australian denominations (Catholic, Anglican and Protestant denominations) every census year since 1991. The survey covers a wide range of areas of religious faith and practice and social concern. The NCLS includes three major survey types:

1. Attender Surveys (comprising a main survey variant and multiple small sample survey variants);
2. Several variants of a Leader Survey which is completed by local church leaders; and
3. An Operations Survey audit of local church activities.

Data are weighted to adjust for variations in participation levels across denominations and regions.

## **'Ecological engagement', in *An Informed Faith: The Uniting Church at the Beginning of the 21st Century***

### ***Abstract***

This chapter explores Uniting Church engagement on matters of our relationship with other-than-human Creation in the new millennium. We have drawn upon a wide diversity of sources – previous scholarship into Uniting Church ecological engagement, interviews with some fifteen to twenty present and former staff and ecological advocates from across the church, analysis of a variety of documents, quantitative surveys of ecological views and actions, and our own experience as practitioners and advocates. We structure the chapter as follows. First, we provide a brief presentation of ecological reflection and praxis in the Uniting Church in its first two decades, and at the same time start to introduce several categories of ecotheological thought. Next, we examine the ecotheological tendencies within the church, followed by activity in theological colleges. We then conduct an organisational analysis of how the Assembly and Synod councils and agencies have engaged with ecological matters, followed by an examination of congregational activity. Finally, we discuss key trends across the new millennium and offer some thoughts for the future.

### ***Citation***

Pepper, M., & John, J. (2014). Ecological engagement. In William Emilsen (Ed.), *An informed faith: The Uniting Church at the beginning of the 21st Century* (pp. 189-213). Melbourne, Vic: Mosaic Press.

### ***Availability***

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# Involvement by churches in public policy

## Churches and public issues

Christianity has a long history of social and political engagement. While various ecclesial and theological traditions have at times been in conflict with public sentiment, and at other times in quiet agreement with it, in recent decades there has been well-publicised engagement with mainstream politics and matters of public importance by many churches and Christian leaders. A minority have continued to take an approach that avoids all explicit public engagement. The past decade has seen churches and individual Christians engage in public debates over issues as broad as global poverty and the climate, and as intimate as human reproduction and marriage. What were the views of attenders on the validity of advocacy and public comment by churches and Christians in the 2011 National Church Life Survey?

In late 2011, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant attenders was asked:

### ***In your opinion, should Christians be involved in public policy issues in the following ways?***

*Advocacy or lobbying of governments*

*Public comment*

Attenders were then asked these same questions in relation to whether churches should be involved.

## Overall findings

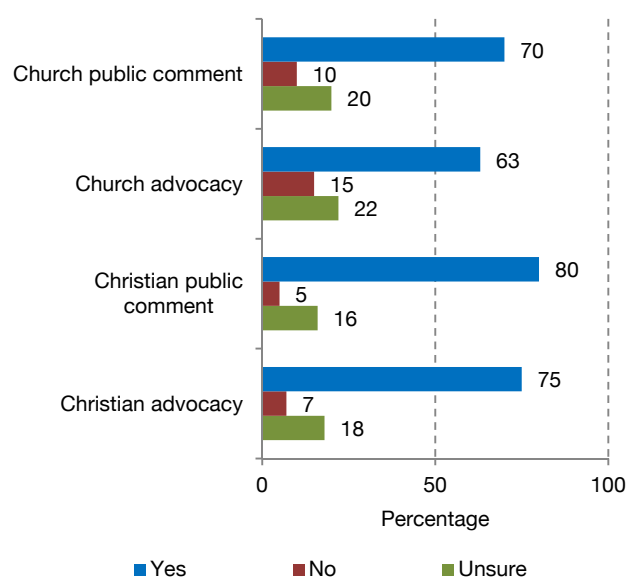
The 2011 National Church Life Survey shows there was strong support from church attenders for both advocacy and public comment with 80% support for Christian public comment and 75% support for Christian advocacy.

By comparison, support for church institutional engagement in advocacy fell to 63%, and 70% for public comment.

Though these are still strong majorities, the fact that support for these forms of public engagement is lower for churches as institutions than for individuals perhaps reflects a conservatism in the minds of some attenders

who may wish to allow for the freedom of conscience of other Christians to speak their mind or advocate for political and social change, while being less certain that churches as a whole should engage in such activity.

**Figure 1: Christian and church involvement in advocacy and public comment**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O (n=1,409).

## Demographics

Across both domains of public comment and advocacy, for both churches and Christians, youth aged 15-19 were consistently much more likely than other attenders to be uncertain in their views, with the "unsure" response ranging from 51% to 66% of youth, compared with 13 to 19% of attenders 20 years and older. These results were mirrored by smaller proportions of youths agreeing with Christian and church activity in advocacy and public comment.

Women were also more likely than men to be uncertain, although the gap between them (in the order of 10%) was much smaller than was the case for age groups. This pattern was also repeated for education, with those whose highest level of formal education was secondary schooling more unsure than other people.



**Table 1: Breakdown by age, gender and education**

	Age		Gender		Education	
	15- 19 years	20+ years	Women	Men	School education	Higher education
	Percentage					
<b>Christian advocacy</b>						
Yes	34	78	72	79	67	82
No	6	7	6	8	6	7
Unsure	60	15	21	12	27	11
<b>Christian comment</b>						
Yes	47	82	77	82	72	85
No	3	5	4	5	3	5
Unsure	51	13	18	12	25	10
<b>Church advocacy</b>						
Yes	25	66	60	69	55	69
No	9	15	13	16	13	15
Unsure	66	19	27	15	32	15
<b>Church comment</b>						
Yes	34	73	67	75	62	75
No	6	11	9	11	10	11
Unsure	61	17	24	14	28	15

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O (n=1,286).

## Denominational differences

Anglican and Baptist/Churches of Christ had the largest proportion of attenders who agreed with Christian advocacy (85%/86%) and Christian public comment (88%/87%) as well as church comment (both 76%). In terms of church (rather than attender) activity, Anglicans, Baptist/Church of Christ and Uniting Church attenders demonstrated the strongest levels of agreement (~71% agreeing with church advocacy, and ~77% agreeing with public comment).

**Table 2: Breakdown by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
	Percentage						
<b>Christian advocacy</b>							
Yes	85	86	72	73	74	71	74
No	5	2	10	6	5	8	5
Unsure	10	12	19	21	21	22	21
<b>Christian comment</b>							
Yes	88	87	76	76	79	81	77
No	4	1	7	6	2	4	4
Unsure	8	12	17	18	20	15	19
<b>Church advocacy</b>							
Yes	71	71	59	60	63	72	61
No	9	9	20	15	10	11	11
Unsure	19	21	21	25	27	17	28
<b>Church comment</b>							
Yes	76	76	69	68	65	78	61
No	7	7	14	10	3	7	15
Unsure	17	17	17	22	32	15	24

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O (n=1,280).

Newcomers to church life in the last five years were least likely to think that Christians and churches should

be active with regard to advocacy and comment, and the group most likely to be unsure.

**Table 3: Breakdown by attender type**

	Visitor	Newcomer	Switcher	Transfer	Attended > 5 years
	Percentage				
<b>Christian advocacy</b>					
Yes	82	58	82	76	76
No	0	8	2	9	8
Unsure	18	34	16	15	16
<b>Christian comment</b>					
Yes	81	67	81	85	80
No	1	5	5	6	5
Unsure	19	28	14	9	15
<b>Church advocacy</b>					
Yes	80	55	68	65	63
No	10	13	9	19	15
Unsure	10	32	22	16	22
<b>Church comment</b>					
Yes	82	62	67	71	71
No	7	11	7	15	10
Unsure	11	27	25	14	19

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O (n=1,236).

## Summary

Attenders appear to be strongly supportive of both engagement in public comment and the more targeted and long-term activity of advocating for political policy change. While there remains obvious and often strong disagreement over prioritization and the conclusions drawn about many issues of public debate among attenders, there is nevertheless strong support for the validity of Christian faith, and the individuals and institutions that represent that faith, to proactively shape the society in which attenders live their lives. The 2011 National Church Life Survey shows attenders are committed to speaking out.

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## Citation

Pepper, M., Bevis, S., Powell, R., & Hancock, N. (2013) Involvement by churches in public policy, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 13003. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.

**Acknowledgments:** With thanks to other members of the NCLS Research team: C. Chinnadurai, M. Dowson, I. Duncum, K. Kerr, C. Mollitor, S. Sterland, & A. Vaeafisi.

**About NCLS:** The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a quantitative survey of 260,000-450,000 church attenders, 6,000-10,000 church leaders and 3,000-7,000 churches in more than 20 Australian denominations every census year since 1991.



## Public issues and priorities for churches

### Churches and public issues

The 2011 National Church Life Survey (NCLS) revealed that almost all church attenders thought that churches and Christians should be involved in advocacy and comment in relation to public policy issues.<sup>1</sup> So what are the priority public issues that they believe their own denominations should focus on?

A sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant attenders were asked the following question as part of the 2011 NCLS:

***On which of the following public issues do you think your church denomination should be most active (Mark up to FOUR options)***

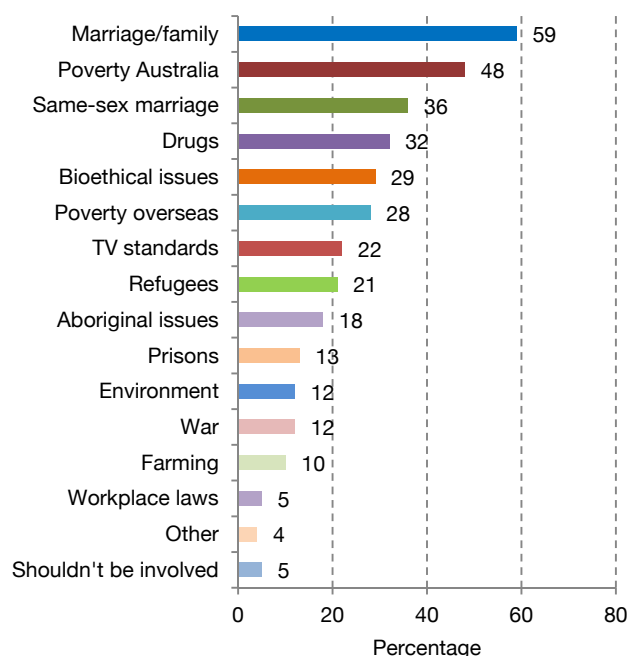
- ☐ *Aboriginal issues*
- ☐ *Asylum seekers/refugees*
- ☐ *Bioethical issues (e.g. abortion, euthanasia, cloning)*
- ☐ *Drugs/substance abuse*
- ☐ *Environmental issues*
- ☐ *Farming issues*
- ☐ *Opposition to same-sex 'marriage'*
- ☐ *Poverty and disadvantage in Australia*
- ☐ *Poverty overseas*
- ☐ *Prisons and the criminal justice system*
- ☐ *Standards in TV, film and literature*
- ☐ *Support for marriage and the family*
- ☐ *War and conflict overseas*
- ☐ *Workplace conditions and laws*
- ☐ *Another issue not listed here*
- ☐ *The church should not be involved in public policy issues*

### Overall responses

Church attenders were most likely to select marriage and the family (59%) as a public issue on which they wanted their church denomination to be most active. Poverty in Australia (48%) was the second most popular choice as a priority for action by their denominations. The least popular issue was workplace laws and conditions (selected by 5% of attenders).

<sup>1</sup> Pepper, M., Bevis, S., Powell, R., & Hancock, N. (2013) Involvement by churches in public policy: NCLS Fact Sheet 13002. NCLS Research, Australian Catholic University, Sydney.

**Figure 1: Public issues and priorities for churches**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O (n=1,301).

### Demographic differences

The priorities of 8 of the 14 named issues differed significantly between age groups. Popularity increased with age for aboriginal issues, farming issues, and standards in TV/film/literature. Poverty overseas was a higher priority among 15 to 29 year olds than among other age groups, but the reverse was true in the case of poverty in Australia. Support for marriage/families and bioethical issues were least popular among the 70+ age group (compared to other age groups) and 50-69 year olds were the age group least likely to choose drugs/substance abuse.

Views about priority issues differed little by gender. However, the priority of several issues increased with educational attainment, namely environmental issues, asylum seekers/refugees, poverty overseas and standards in TV/film/literature. The reverse was true for drugs/substance abuse, same-sex marriage, and farming issues.

**Table 1: Public issue priorities by age and education**

Issue	Age				Education		
	15-29	30-49	50-69	70+	School	Trade cert	Degree
	Percentage				I		
Aboriginal issues	8	14	21	23	19	16	18
Bioethical issues	28	34	30	23	28	26	33
Drugs	34	39	28	21	36	31	30
Environment	9	11	13	11	8	11	16
Farming	5	6	13	13	12	11	7
Marriage/family	60	65	57	54	55	64	60
Poverty Australia	39	49	52	49	46	50	50
Poverty overseas	40	26	25	27	24	28	32
Prisons	13	13	14	11	13	12	13
Refugees	18	19	23	24	16	20	28
Same-sex marriage	33	34	35	41	42	38	26
TV standards	13	14	22	35	24	28	16
War	10	13	11	14	10	12	14
Workplace laws	4	6	6	6	5	5	6
Other issue	8	4	5	2	5	3	4
Shouldn't be active	2	5	5	5	4	2	7

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O (n=1,282).

## Denominational differences

Denominations did not differ significantly in views about whether or not the church should be involved in public policy issues as a whole. However, attenders in different denominations gave differing weight to the prioritization of public issues. There were significant differences by denomination for all named public policy issues except for poverty in Australia, prisons, and workplace conditions.

**Table 2: Public issue priorities by denomination**

Issue	Anglican	Baptist/Churches of Christ	Catholic	Lutheran	Pentecostal	Uniting	Other Protestant
	Percentage						
Aboriginal issues	18	15	20	16	10	33	12
Bioethical issues	21	28	32	42	32	13	28
Drugs	27	30	31	22	40	31	43
Environment	12	11	12	6	6	22	10
Farming	8	6	11	24	6	17	7
Marriage/family	63	70	56	65	66	46	55
Poverty Australia	56	43	48	46	47	55	39
Poverty overseas	42	34	24	20	29	22	25
Prisons	12	13	13	6	11	16	17
Refugees	25	18	22	14	11	35	24
Same-sex marriage	29	45	35	38	44	25	35
TV standards	31	30	19	24	15	19	34
War	14	5	14	6	6	16	12
Workplace laws	4	4	7	6	5	8	0
Other issue	5	3	5	5	5	1	6
Shouldn't be active	3	4	6	1	3	7	5

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O (n=1,301).

When the issues were ranked in terms of importance within each of the denominations (with a higher rank indicating higher importance), the ranking pattern for

the Uniting Church differed the most from the ranking across all attenders. Refugees, aboriginal issues, environmental issues and farming issues exhibited much higher rankings for Uniting Church attenders than for all attenders (and bioethical issues and opposition to same sex marriage displayed much lower rankings in the Uniting Church). Farming issues also exhibited a much higher ranking for Lutherans than for church attenders as a whole.

## Differences by attendance rate

There were some differences observed in views by frequency of attendance. Increasing church attendance was related to a greater popularity of bioethical issues (15% of people attending less than monthly, 24% of people attending at least monthly, and 30% of people attending weekly or more often) and opposition to same-sex marriage (10%, 24% and 38% for the three attendance levels respectively).

## Summary

The vast majority of Australian church attenders were of the view that their denomination should be involved in public policy issues. When it came to which sets of issues denominations should be active on, with the exception of poverty in Australia, the most popular issues tended to be socially conservative ones (such as marriage and the family and same-sex marriage). In contrast, the least popular issues were those that have tended to be the domain of progressive social voices – such as workplace laws, war and the environment.

## References

Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O, NCLS Research, Sydney.

## Citation

Pepper, M., Bevis, S., Powell, R. & Hancock, N. (2013) Public issues and priorities for churches, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 13004. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press

**Acknowledgments:** With thanks to other members of the NCLS Research team: C. Chinnadurai, M. Dowson, I. Duncum, K. Kerr, C. Mollitor, S. Sterland, & A. Vaeafisi.

**About NCLS:** The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a quantitative survey of 260,000-450,000 church attenders, 6,000-10,000 church leaders and 3,000-7,000 churches in more than 20 Australian denominations every census year since 1991.

## The changing face of the Catholic community in Australia: Challenges for Catholic social service organisations

### ***Citation***

Dixon, R. (2014). The changing face of the Catholic community in Australia: Challenges for Catholic social service organisations. In McMullen, G., & Warhurst, J. (Eds.), *Listening, learning and leading: The impact of Catholic identity and mission*. Ballarat, Vic: Connor Court.

### ***Availability***

Visit the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Pastoral Research Office website: [www.pro.catholic.org.au](http://www.pro.catholic.org.au)

# Social and Political Views

## **Social and Political Views**

### **Family and sexuality**

- Attitudes to euthanasia
- Attitudes to sex before marriage
- Attitudes to extra-marital sex
- Attitudes to same-sex marriage and civil unions
- Attitudes to same-sex adoption
- Attitudes to abortion

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- Church attenders and environmental responsibility
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- Attenders' sense of moral duty to act on climate change
- How Ecotheological Beliefs Vary Among Australian Churchgoers and Consequences for Environmental Attitudes and Behaviors
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**Other social and political views**

Problems facing Australia: Attender attitudes

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Aboriginal issues – Attenders' views

Church attenders' views of immigrants

Church attenders' views on defence spending

Churches' role in peacemaking

What do mass attenders believe? Contemporary cultural change and the acceptance of key Catholic beliefs and moral teachings by Australian mass attenders

Mixed results for orthodoxy: The impact of contemporary cultural change on the acceptance of key Catholic beliefs and moral teachings by Australian mass attenders

# Family and sexuality



## Attitudes to euthanasia

### Opposition and support

Euthanasia, though illegal in Australia, is a hotly contested issue which religious groups have frequently weighed in on. Conservative churches have voiced their opposition to decriminalising euthanasia, claiming the right to give and take life belongs to God alone. Other Christian groups, such as Christians Supporting Choice for Voluntary Euthanasia, support euthanasia as providing compassionate, dignified death for the terminally ill. The Australian population largely supports voluntary euthanasia, with 85% in favour of it.<sup>1</sup> How does this compare to the opinions of church attenders?

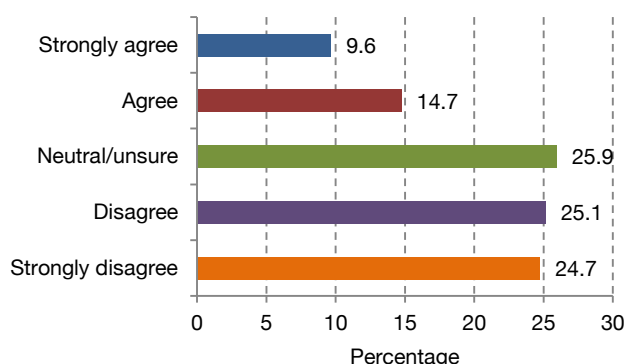
In late 2011 as a part of the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders were asked the following question:

**Do you agree or disagree: 'People suffering from a terminal illness should be able to ask a doctor to end their life'?**

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral /unsure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

### Overall results

**Figure 1: Attitudes to euthanasia**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,381).

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/latest-news/per-cent-support-voluntary-euthanasia-poll/story-fn3dxiwe-1225791455181>

About half of church attenders either disagreed (25%) or strongly disagreed (25%) that people suffering from a terminal illness should be able to ask a doctor to end their life (see Figure 1). Only 24% of church attenders showed support for euthanasia. This shows a great departure from national trends. More than a quarter of attenders indicated they were unsure about this issue, highlighting the complex moral implications of euthanasia.

### Demographics

Overall, age groups didn't differ significantly in their attitudes to euthanasia. The idea that older church attenders may be more sympathetic towards euthanasia, due to them being more susceptible to terminal illness, wasn't supported. One age-related finding of note, however, was the high proportion of 15-29 year olds who indicated they were 'neutral/unsure' (40% compared to 24% of other age groups). There were also no differences by level of education.

Women were more likely to oppose euthanasia than men, with 55% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing compared to 44% of men. For men, 12% strongly agreed that those with a terminal illness should be able to ask a doctor to end their life, and 16% agreed. For women, 8% strongly agreed and 14% agreed. Men were more likely than women to be 'neutral/unsure' (29% versus 24%).

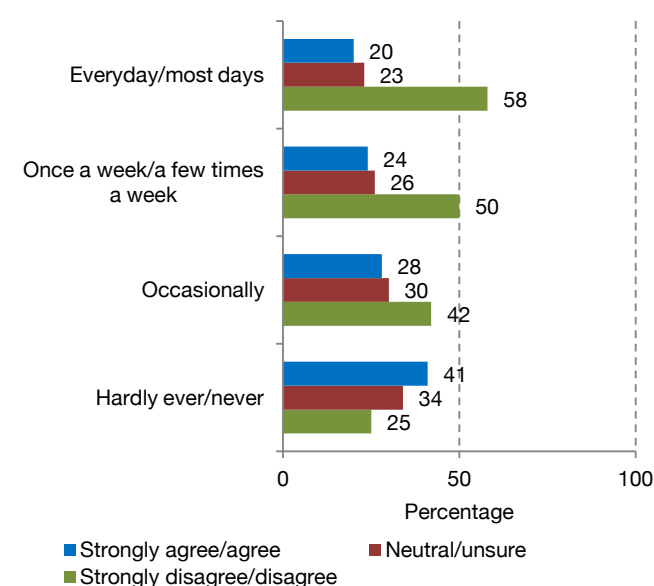
### Religious practice

Church attenders' attitudes towards euthanasia varied according to church attendance history. Newcomers to church life in the last five years were most likely to support euthanasia (39% in agreement versus 23% of other attenders), and church visitors were most likely to oppose it (59% versus 49% of other attenders). For long-term attenders (more than 5 years), 25% agreed or strongly agreed that the terminally ill should be able to ask a doctor to end their life, and 48% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

The more frequently a church attender attended church, the more likely it was that they opposed euthanasia. Of

those who attended services weekly or more often, 54% disagreed or strongly disagreed with euthanasia. This compares to 27% of those who attended less than weekly. Frequency of private devotions was also related to opposition to euthanasia (see Figure 2). The more frequently an attender spent time in private devotion, the more likely they were to disagree or strongly disagree with the terminally ill asking a doctor to end their life (58% of those who practiced devotions everyday or most days, versus 25% of attenders who never or hardly ever spent time in private devotions).

**Figure 2: Attitudes to euthanasia by devotional practice**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,359)

## Denominational differences

Attendees from every denomination were more likely to oppose euthanasia than support it, except for Uniting Church attendees (see Table 1). They had 42% of attendees either agreeing or strongly agreeing that the terminally ill should be able to ask a doctor to end their life, and only 28% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. The Baptist/Churches of Christ grouping had the

**Table 1: Attitudes to euthanasia by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
	Percentage						
Agree	25	15	28	23	14	42	14
Neutral/unsure	36	22	22	25	33	29	24
Disagree	39	63	50	52	53	28	62

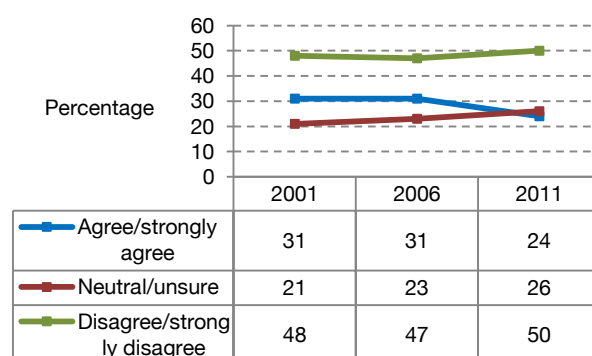
Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,381)

highest proportion of attendees opposing euthanasia, with 63% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

## Change over time

The proportion of church attendees who are in favour of euthanasia has declined over time, from 31% in 2001 to 24% in 2011. Church attendees in 2011 were also more likely to select 'neutral/unsure' than attendees 5 or 10 years ago. Similar proportions of attendees opposed euthanasia in each of the three time waves.

**Figure 3: Attitudes to euthanasia, 2001-2011**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,381), 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey J (n=2,409), 2001 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N (n=2168).

## Summary

Church attendees are more likely to oppose euthanasia or remain unsure about the issue than they are to support it. This differs from the views of the Australian population. Attendees' attitudes towards euthanasia vary as a function of their gender, attendance history, frequency of religious practice, and denomination.

## Data sources

Castle, K., (2001) [computer file], 2001 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Castle, K., (2006) [computer file], 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey J. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Powell, R., (2014) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

## Citation

Hancock, N., Pepper, M. & Powell, R. (2014) Attitudes to euthanasia, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 14011. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.

## Attitudes to sex before marriage

### A point of difference

Australian society is increasingly accepting sex before marriage as the norm. As one indication of this, cohabitation with a partner before marriage has become more common in the past 20 years, from 45% of married couples in 1990 having lived together first, to 71% in 2000 and 79% in 2010<sup>1</sup>. This represents a point of difference between the teaching of many churches and what is acceptable in wider society. What do Australian church attenders, immersed in this broader context, think about sex before marriage?

In late 2011 as a part of the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders were asked the following question:

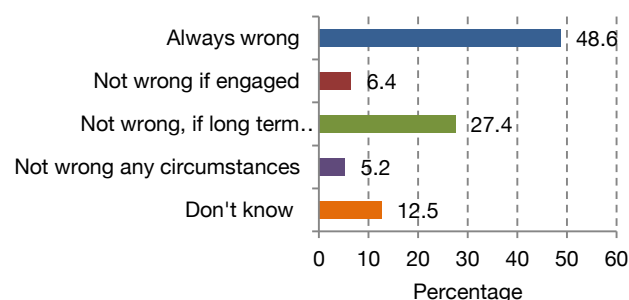
#### **Do you think it is wrong if a man and a woman have sexual relations before marriage?**

- ☐ Always wrong
- ☐ Not wrong if they are engaged
- ☐ Not wrong, if they are committed to a long term relationship
- ☐ Not wrong in any circumstances
- ☐ Don't know

### Overall results

As shown in Figure 1, almost half of all church attenders (49%) in 2011 thought that sex before marriage is always wrong. Some 6% thought it isn't wrong if engaged, a further 27% thought it isn't wrong if committed to a long-term relationship, and 5% thought that there are no circumstances in which it is wrong. Some 13% did not know. There is a large gap between the views of church attenders and broader community views about pre-marital sex. In 2009, 9% of Australians thought that sex before marriage was always wrong, and 5% that it was almost always wrong.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 1: Attitudes to sex before marriage**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,357).

### Demographics

Apart from the very youngest and oldest age groups, the proportion of attenders who thought premarital sex is always wrong seemed to decline with age (Table 1). The 20-29 year old grouping (58%) and the 30-39 year old grouping (57%) were the most likely to think this. Fifteen to 19 year olds were the age group most likely to think that sex before marriage wasn't wrong in any circumstances (14% versus 5% of the other ages).

**Table 1: Sex before marriage by age**

	15-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+
	Percentage							
Always wrong	53	58	57	50	45	43	40	57
Not wrong if engaged	3	0	3	8	8	8	8	5
Not wrong if long term relationship	8	33	27	25	27	36	29	22
Not wrong any circumstances	14	4	5	6	6	5	2	4
Don't know	22	5	7	10	14	7	21	13

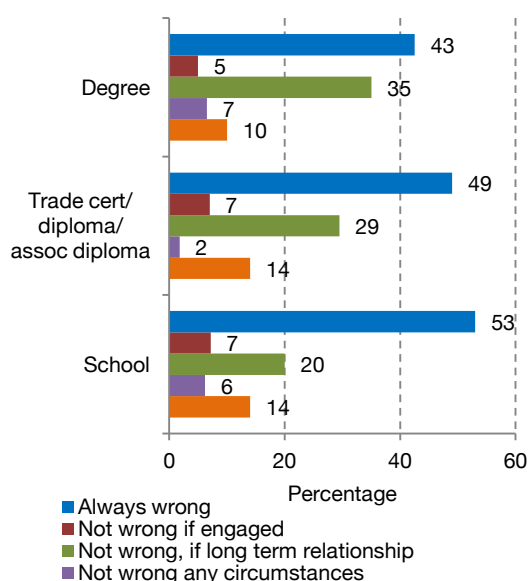
Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,345).

Men and women answered this question quite similarly, with little difference in their responses. Attenders whose highest education was school were most likely to think premarital sex is always wrong (53% compared to 49% of those with a trade certificate/diploma, and 43% of those with a degree). Those with a degree were most likely to take the more liberal stance that premarital sex isn't wrong if committed to a long-term relationship (35% thought so).

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features30March+Quarter+2012>

<sup>2</sup> Evans, A. The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes, 2009. [Computer file]. Canberra: Australian Data Archive, The Australian National University, 2010. <http://www.ada.edu.au/social-science/01189-release1jun2011>

**Figure 2: Sex before marriage by education**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,337).

## Frequency of religious practice

Frequency of church attendance was associated with more conservative views about pre-marital sex. Over half (54%) of people who attended church at least weekly thought that pre-marital sex was always wrong, compared with 23% of less frequent attenders. A similar pattern was observed for devotional practice. As frequency of private devotions increased from hardly ever/never to everyday/most days, being always against pre-marital sex increased from 24% to 59%

Newcomers to church life in the last five years were also highly distinct in their views. Over a fifth (22%) of newcomers thought that pre-marital sex was always wrong, versus almost half (46%) of attenders who had been at their church for at least five years.

## Denominational differences

**Table 2: Sex before marriage by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
	Percentage						
Always wrong	45	69	34	39	85	32	70
Not wrong if engaged	5	2	9	10	5	7	2
Not wrong if long term relationship	25	14	36	34	5	41	18
Not wrong any circumstances	4	3	8	6	0	6	2
Don't know	21	12	13	11	5	14	8

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,357)

“Always wrong” was the most common response from all denominations, except for Catholics and Uniting Church attenders, who were more likely to think it isn’t wrong if committed to a long-term relationship. Anglicans were the most unsure denomination (21%).

## Change over time

The views of church attenders regarding premarital sex have remained relatively stable over time. The proportion who think it is always wrong was slightly lower in 2011 (49%) than in 2001 (52%). The proportion of people who don’t know what to think has increased, from 9% in 2001 to 13% in 2011. However in 1991, 75% of Protestant church attenders disagreed with sex outside of marriage<sup>3</sup>, compared with 63% of Protestants in 2001 and 61% in 2011 who think sex before marriage is always wrong. This may indicate that just as cohabitation before marriage increased rapidly in Australia between 1990 and 2000 and less sharply since 2000, views among church attenders regarding pre-marital sex have followed a parallel trajectory.

## Summary

While about half of church attenders thought sex before marriage is always wrong, more than a quarter thought it isn’t wrong if the couple are committed to a long-term relationship. This more liberal stance is more common among the higher educated, in some denominations and among people who attend church and practise devotions less frequently. Views on sex before marriage have remained relatively stable over time.

## Data sources

Castle, K., (2001) [computer file], 2001 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Castle, K., (2006) [computer file], 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey J. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Powell, R., (2014) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

## Citation

Hancock, N., Pepper, M. & Powell, R. (2014) Attitudes to sex before marriage, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 14013. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.

<sup>3</sup> No data are available for Catholics in 2001. The question wording in 1991 was also slightly different.



## Attitudes to extra-marital sex

Extra-marital sex has historically been considered a serious offense in many cultures. In some countries adultery is illegal today, with punishments ranging from fines to the death penalty. In Australia, although extra-marital sex is not a legal matter, it is still an important moral issue. What do Australian church attenders think about extra-marital sex?

In late 2011 as a part of the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders were asked the following question, after having first been asked whether they thought it is wrong if a man and a woman have sexual relations before marriage:

**And what about a married person having sexual relations with someone other than his or her husband or wife?**

- ☐ Always wrong
- ☐ Almost always wrong
- ☐ Sometimes wrong
- ☐ Not wrong
- ☐ Don't know

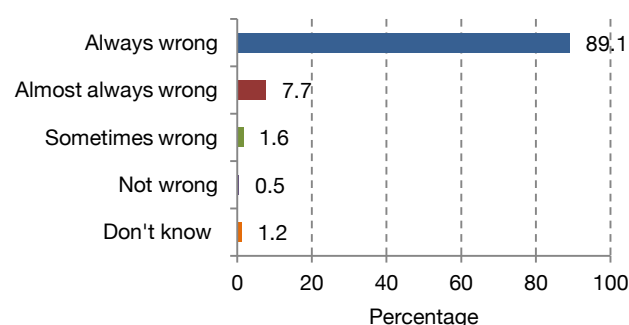
### Overall results

As shown in Figure 1, an overwhelming majority (89%) of Australian church attenders thought extra-marital sex is always wrong. A further 8% thought it is almost always wrong, suggesting they may condone it in some circumstances. The proportions who thought extra-marital sex was sometimes wrong, not wrong, and who didn't know, were negligible. The latter also indicates the assurance with which most attenders form an opinion on this issue.

Church attenders' views about the issue differ significantly from those of the broader Australian community. Some 63% of Australians thought in 2009 that extra-marital sex was always wrong, and 27% that it was almost always wrong.<sup>1</sup> However, the gap

between attenders and the broader community was not as great as was the case for views about pre-marital sex.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 1: Attitudes to extra-marital sex**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,233).

### Age, gender and education

Although the vast majority of every age group thought that extra-marital sex is always wrong, some differences can be observed. The 20-29 year old group had the highest proportion of attenders thinking extra-marital sex is always wrong (97%). The 60-69 year old group had the lowest proportion holding this view (84%), and the highest thinking it is almost always wrong (12%).

**Table 1: Attitudes to extra-marital sex by age**

	15-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+
	Percentage							
Always wrong	88	97	90	94	88	84	88	88
Almost always wrong	8	3	8	5	9	12	7	7
Sometimes wrong	2	0	0	1	1	3	3	1
Not wrong	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Don't know	3	0	2	1	1	0	2	2

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,233).

Differences in views between men and women were slight. Women were a little more likely than men to think extra-marital sex is always wrong (91% of women vs.

<sup>1</sup> Evans, A. The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes, 2009. [Computer file]. Canberra: Australian Data Archive, The Australian National University, 2010. <http://www.ada.edu.au/social-science/01189-release1jun2011>.

<sup>2</sup> Hancock, N., Pepper, M. & Powell, R. (2013) Attitudes to sex before marriage, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 19. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.

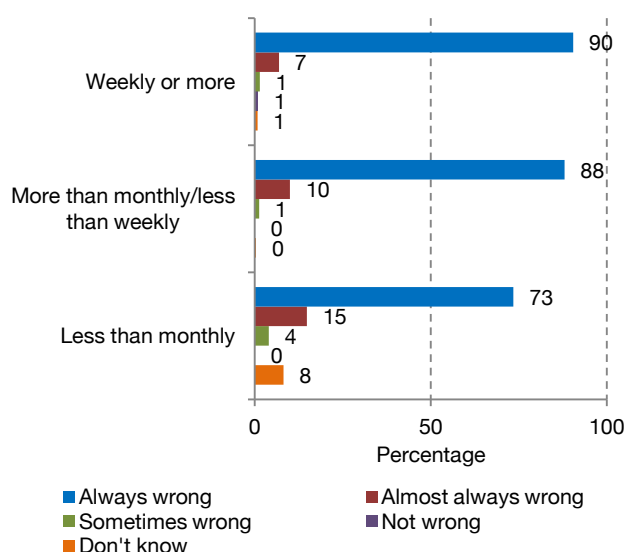
87% of men). In contrast, men were more likely than women to think it is almost always wrong (11% vs. 6%).

Again differences by education level were small. Those attenders whose highest education was school were more likely than those with a trade certificate/diploma or degree to think extra-marital sex is always wrong, with 92% thinking so. These attenders were also less likely than those higher educated to think extra-marital sex is almost always wrong (4% compared to 10%).

## Religious practice

Those who attended church less than monthly were less likely than other church attenders to think extra-marital sex is always wrong, and more likely to think it is almost always wrong (see Figure 2). Similarly, as the frequency of church attenders' private devotions increase, so does their likelihood of thinking extra-marital sex is always wrong (79% of those who hardly ever/never have private devotions thought it was wrong, verses 94% of those who have devotions everyday/most days).

**Figure 2: Extra-marital sex by church attendance**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,219).

Interestingly, there was little difference between the views of people with different church attendance histories. Church attenders who were visitors or who were newcomers to church life in the last five years were just as strongly against extra-marital sex as long-term attenders.

## Denominational differences

Uniting Church attenders were least likely out of the denominations to think extra-marital sex is always wrong (80%), and most likely to think it is almost always wrong (16%). In contrast, Pentecostal attenders had the highest proportion thinking it is always wrong (98%).

**Table 2: Extra-marital sex by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
Percentage							
Always wrong	90	97	84	91	98	80	95
Almost always wrong	7	1	11	4	2	16	3
Sometimes wrong	2	1	2	0	0	4	1
Not wrong	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
Don't know	1	1	2	4	0	1	1

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,233)

## Change over time

Attenders' views on extra-marital sex have remained remarkably stable over time. In 2001, 89% of attenders thought it was always wrong, 7% almost always, 2% sometimes wrong, and 2% didn't know. Zero percent selected 'not wrong'. These results are almost identical to those sourced in 2011, ten years later.

## Summary

The vast majority of Australian church attenders think extra-marital sex is always wrong, and a small proportion think it is almost always wrong. These views vary somewhat by denomination, frequency of church attendance and devotional practice, and only slightly by age and education.

## Data sources

Castle, K., (2001) [computer file], 2001 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Castle, K., (2006) [computer file], 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey J. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Powell, R., (2014) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

## Citation

Hancock, N., Pepper, M. & Powell, R. (2014) Attitudes to extra-marital sex, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 14014. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.



## Attitudes to same-sex marriage and civil unions

### A nation divided

The legal recognition of same-sex relationships has been on Australia's political agenda for several years. Australian federal law has been amended numerous times to afford same-sex couples the same rights as heterosexual couples in areas such as taxation, employment and health. Yet a national civil union or marriage scheme has not been made to include same-sex couples. By state law, gay couples can join in civil partnerships or registered relationships in Tasmania, Victoria, ACT, NSW and Queensland. The Marriage Equality (Same Sex) Act 2013 was recently passed in the ACT, the first Australian state to legalise same-sex marriage, however the Act was repealed after the High Court ruled it was invalid.

More than half of the Australian public in 2011 (57%) were found to be in support of same-sex marriage<sup>1</sup>. How does this compare to the attitudes of church attenders? In late 2011 as a part of the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders were asked the following question:

### *Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?*

*Same-sex couples should be able to marry*

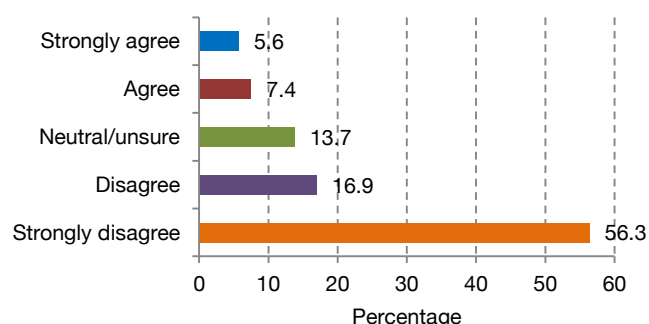
*Same-sex couples should be able to register their relationships as civil unions*

### Overall results

As shown in Figure 1, the majority of Australian church attenders disagreed or strongly disagreed with same-sex marriage (73%), and only a small proportion agreed or strongly agreed (13%). It appears that much less support for same-sex marriage can be found in churches than among the Australian public. Attenders were more accepting of civil unions, with 12% strongly

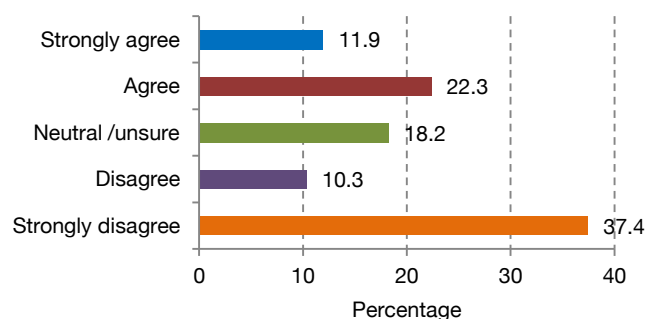
agreeing and 22% agreeing they should be legalised (see Figure 2). However, a large proportion still opposed this alternative to marriage – 10% disagreed and 37% strongly disagreed. A further 18% were unsure as to whether they supported civil unions or not.

**Figure 1: Attitudes to same-sex marriage**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,232).

**Figure 2: Attitudes to same-sex civil unions**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,225).

### Demographics

The majority of every age group (split into 15-19 year olds and subsequent decades) disagreed with same-sex marriage, although this was only just the case for 15 to 19 year olds (56% disagreement). This age group also had the highest amount of attenders who were neutral/unsure about this issue (27%, the next closest being 40-49 year olds with 16%). Views about civil unions differed little between age groups.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.starobserver.com.au/news/greens-seize-on-marriage-poll/47780>

Men and women differed somewhat in their views about same-sex marriage. Men were more likely to disagree or strongly disagree (77%) than women (70%), with women more unsure (16%) than men (11%) about the issue. Men and women did not differ significantly in their views about civil unions.

Attendees with a university education were more likely than attendees with less education to agree with same-sex marriage (see Table 2). Those with a trade certificate or diploma were the most likely to disagree (81%). Attendees with a degree were more than twice as likely as attendees with only schooling to agree with same-sex civil unions (47% compared to 23%).

**Table 2: Attitudes to same-sex marriage and civil unions by education**

	Education		
	School	Trade cert/ diploma	Degree
<b>Same-sex marriage</b>	<b>Percentage</b>		
Agree/Strongly agree	11	10	18
Neutral/unsure	15	9	16
Disagree/Strongly disagree	74	81	67
<b>Civil unions</b>			
Agree/Strongly agree	23	33	47
Neutral/unsure	20	17	18
Disagree/Strongly disagree	57	50	35

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,213 to 1,216)

## Religious practice

Newcomers to church life within the last 5 years were more likely than other attendees to agree with same-sex marriage (24% vs. 12%) and civil unions (44% vs. 34%).

The more frequently churchgoers attended church, the more likely it was that they disagreed with same-sex marriage and civil unions. Seventy six percent of those who attended weekly disagreed with same-sex marriage, compared to 59% of those who attended less frequently. Regarding civil unions, 51% of those who attended weekly or more often disagreed, compared to 28% of those who attended less frequently.

## Denominational differences

Attendees from all denominations were more likely to disagree with same-sex marriage than agree, however views nonetheless differed strongly between denominations. 'Other Protestant' attendees were the most against same-sex marriage, with 91% disagreeing

or strongly disagreeing. The Uniting Church had the greatest proportion of attendees in favour of same-sex marriage, with over a quarter (26%) agreeing or strongly agreeing with it.

Attendees from every denomination except the Anglican and Uniting Churches were more likely to disagree with civil unions than agree with them. Forty two percent of Anglicans and 53% of Uniting attendees were in favour of civil unions. Pentecostal attendees were the most conservative on this issue, with 72% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Anglican attendees were the most likely of any denomination to be neutral or unsure.

**Table 3: Attitudes to same-sex marriage and civil unions by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
<b>Same-sex marriage</b>	<b>Percentage</b>						
Agree/Strongly agree	13	9	16	13	5	26	3
Neutral/unsure	11	6	19	12	7	18	6
Disagree/Strongly disagree	76	85	64	75	88	56	91
<b>Civil unions</b>							
Agree/Strongly agree	42	25	39	22	17	53	26
Neutral/unsure	29	16	19	18	11	12	19
Disagree/Strongly disagree	29	59	42	61	72	35	56

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,225 to 1,232)

## Summary

Church attendees appear to disagree with same-sex marriage much more than the Australian public. While more accepting of same-sex civil unions, strong opposition to this alternative to marriage was also present in the results. Younger attendees, the highly educated, newcomers and infrequent attendees were the most likely to support same-sex marriage and civil unions. Results varied particularly strongly as a function of denomination, with evangelical Protestants most opposed.

## Data sources

Powell, R., (2014) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2. Sydney, Aus: NCLS Research.

## Citation

Hancock, N., Pepper, M. & Powell, R. (2014) Attitudes to same-sex marriage and civil unions, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 14015. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.

## Attitudes to same-sex adoption

### Changes in legislation

In recent years, same-sex adoption has become legal in the ACT, Western Australia, New South Wales, and most recently, Tasmania. Although same-sex couples in other states can't adopt, they can foster children, and single gay men or women can adopt. How do Australian church attenders view these developments in same-sex adoption? Do they support or oppose such legislation?

In late 2011 as a part of the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders were asked the following question:

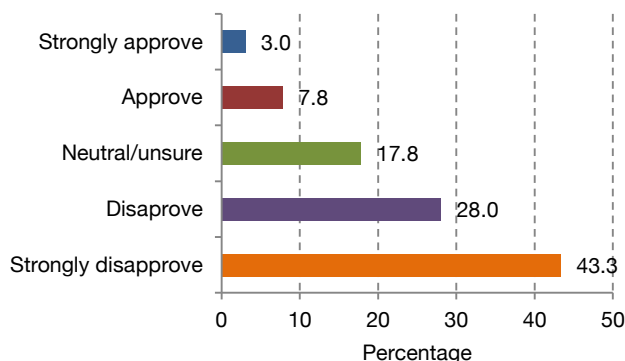
#### **Do you approve or disapprove of allowing same-sex couples to adopt?**

- ☐ Strongly approve
- ☐ Approve
- ☐ Neutral/unsure
- ☐ Disapprove
- ☐ Strongly disapprove

### Overall results

As shown in Figure 1, a small minority of church attenders strongly approved (3%) or approved (8%) of same-sex adoption. Strong disapproval of same-sex adoption was voiced by 43% of attenders, and a further 28% disapproved, leaving 18% of attenders neutral or unsure about this issue.

**Figure 1: Attitudes to same-sex adoption**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,375).

A national poll conducted in 2013 found that two thirds of Australians either strongly agreed or agreed somewhat that same sex couples should have the same rights to adopt children as heterosexual couples do. This stands in strong contrast to the over two thirds of church attenders who disapproved of same sex adoption in 2011 (although it is possible that views may have shifted somewhat among church attenders in the last two years).

### Age, gender and education

Approval of same-sex adoption was less common among church attenders the older they were. The 15-19 year old grouping had by far the highest approval rate, with over a fifth (21%) approving or strongly approving of same-sex adoption. This contrasts with those 80 and older, where only 4% approved. Those 80 and above were also the least likely to be unsure regarding this issue, and most likely to disapprove (84%, versus 57% of 15-19 year olds).

**Table 1: Attitudes to same-sex adoption by age**

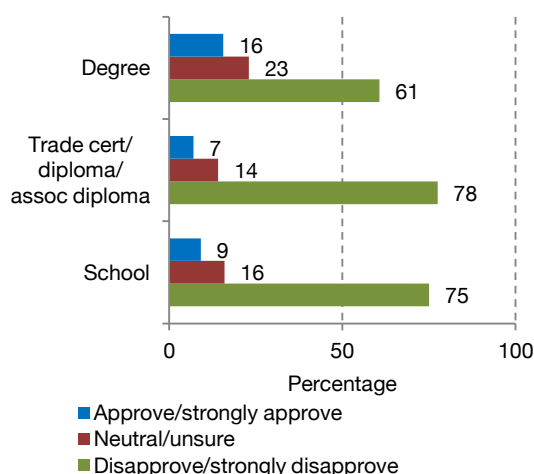
	15-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+
	Percentage							
Approve	21	18	13	12	10	11	6	4
Neutral/unsure	22	18	19	21	16	18	19	12
Disapprove	57	64	68	67	74	72	75	84

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,361).

Note: Strongly approve is added to approve, likewise for disapprove.

Views about same-sex adoption differed little between men and women. However, church attenders differed significantly in their views on same-sex adoption depending on their level of education (see Figure 2). Those whose highest level of education was school or a trade certificate/diploma were more likely to disapprove or strongly disapprove of same-sex adoption than those who were university educated. For those with a degree, 61% disapproved, compared to 78% of those with a trade certificate/diploma and 75% of those with schooling only. Church attenders with a degree were also more likely to be neutral/unsure about this issue (23%) than those with a trade certificate/diploma (14%) and those with schooling only (16%).

**Figure 2: Same-sex adoption by education**

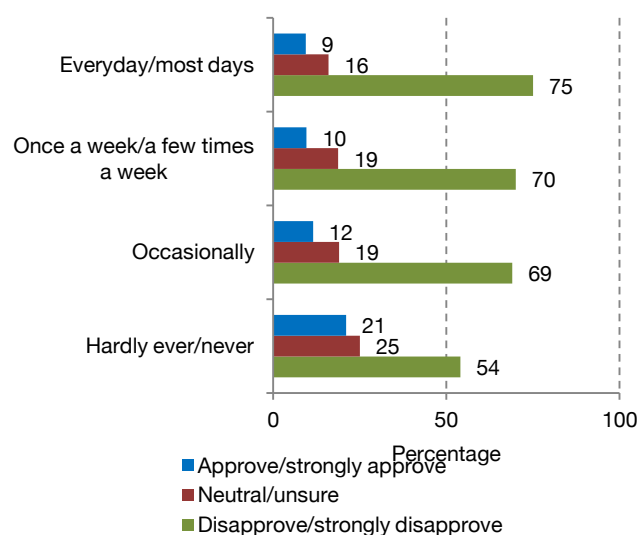


Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,352).

## Religious practice

Do the views of church attenders on same-sex adoption differ depending on how active they are in the church and their faith? Some 74% of weekly (or more frequent) attenders disapproved/strongly disapproved of same-sex adoption. This compares to 56% of those who attended church less than weekly. Church attenders who went to church at least monthly but less often than weekly were particularly uncertain in their views (29% neutral or unsure, versus 16% of more frequent attenders and 14% of infrequent attenders).

**Figure 3: Same-sex adoption by devotional practice**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,353).

Views on same-sex adoption also differ significantly depending on attenders' frequency of private devotions (see Figure 3). Those who 'hardly ever/never' did

private devotions had a 21% approval rate of same-sex adoption. This is higher than those who did them occasionally (12%), once or a few times a week (10%), and everyday/most days (9%).

Attenders who were new to church in the last five years were much more approving of same-sex adoption than longer term attenders (27% vs. 11%). Some 54% of newcomers and 71% of longer term attenders disapproved of same-sex adoption.

## Denominational differences

Uniting Church attenders were the most likely to approve of same-sex adoption, with 19% approving or strongly approving (see Table 2). 'Other Protestant' (85%), Pentecostal (84%) and Baptist/Churches of Christ (82%) attenders were the most likely to disapprove/strongly disapprove. Some 23% of Catholic attenders were neutral/unsure about the issue.

**Table 2: Same-sex adoption by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
	Percentage						
<b>Approve</b>	14	4	14	11	3	19	5
<b>Neutral/unsure</b>	14	14	23	13	13	19	10
<b>Disapprove</b>	72	82	64	76	84	62	85

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,375)

Note: Strongly approve is added to approve, likewise for disapprove.

## Summary

The vast majority of church attenders disapprove or strongly disapprove of same-sex adoption. Those who approve or strongly approve in the 2011 NCLS were most likely to be young people, university educated, and less active in their faith – but support for same sex adoption was still a minority position among these groups. Views also differed between denominations, with disapproval lower among Uniting and Catholic attenders than among the other denominations.

## Data sources

Powell, R., (2014) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

## Citation

Hancock, N., Pepper, M. & Powell, R. (2014) Attitudes to same-sex adoption, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 14012. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.



## Attitudes to Abortion

### Various positions

As a complex matter of medical and sexual ethics, abortion has produced various opinions and positions within Australian churches. Some denominations and groups take a strict stance against it, advocating for the rights of the unborn. Others have conceded that abortion is 'the least problematic solution' in some circumstances.<sup>1</sup> Still other denominations and churches choose to have no official position.

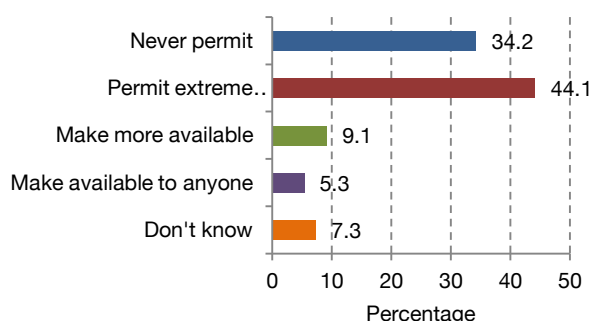
Aside from official teachings, what do church attenders actually think about the issue of abortion? In late 2011 as a part of the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders were asked the following question:

#### **Which statement is closest to your attitude to abortion?**

- ☐ Abortion should never be permitted
- ☐ Abortion should be permitted only in extreme circumstances (eg rape, risk to the mother)
- ☐ Abortion should be available in a wider range of situations
- ☐ Abortion should be available to any woman who desires one
- ☐ Don't know

### Overall results

**Figure 1: Attitudes to abortion**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,354).

As shown in Figure 1, church attenders were most likely to think abortion should only be permitted in extreme circumstances, with 44% thinking so. Those who thought abortion should never be permitted made up a smaller proportion (34%). This suggests that church attenders are more prone to view abortion as a complex moral issue with shades of grey, not just as black and white. A minority of attenders thought abortion should be made available in a wider range of situations (9%) or to any woman (5%), and 7% indicated they did not know.

### Age, gender and education

Interestingly, 15-29 year olds were the only age group more likely to think abortion should never be permitted (40%) than that it should be permitted in extreme circumstances (36%), as shown in Table 1. Almost half of people over 50 thought that abortion should be permitted in extreme circumstances.

**Table 1: Attitudes to abortion by age**

	15-29 yrs	30-49 yrs	50-69 yrs	70+ yrs
	Percentage			
Never permit	40	35	35	28
Permit extreme circumstances	36	42	46	48
Make more available	6	9	9	10
Make available to anyone	5	6	6	5
Don't know	12	8	4	9

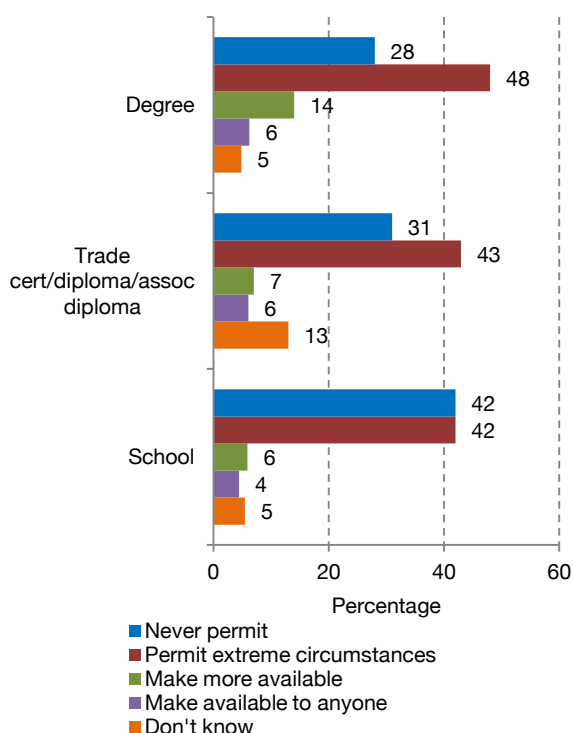
Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,338).

Women were more likely than men to think abortion should never be permitted, with 38% compared to 29% thinking so. Similar proportions of men and women thought abortion should be permitted in extreme circumstances, should be made more available and should be made available to any woman. More men (10%) than women (5%) were unsure about this issue.

As shown in Figure 2, 28% of church attenders with a university education thought abortion should never be permitted, compared to 31% of those with a trade certificate and 42% of those with only schooling.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/anglicans-call-for-new-stance-on-abortion/2007/12/14/1197568264984.html>

**Figure 2: Attitudes to abortion by education**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,332).

## Religious practice

Views about abortion varied by frequency of attending church and frequency of religious practice. A large majority (83%) of weekly (or more often) attenders thought that abortion should never be permitted or only permitted in extreme circumstances, versus 56% of less frequent attenders. Some 84% of attenders who practiced private devotions daily or most days held these views, compared with 60% who rarely or never did so.

Newcomers to church life in the last five years were less strongly opposed to abortion than longer term attenders. Some 20% of newcomers thought that abortion should never be permitted and 40% that it should only be permitted in extreme circumstances. In contrast, of longer term attenders, 32% and 46% respectively held these views.

## Denominational differences

Denominations varied greatly in terms of people thinking abortion should never be permitted, from 8% of Uniting attenders to 50% of Pentecostals. Every denomination (other than Pentecostals) was more likely to think abortion should be permitted in extreme circumstances than never permitted, and minorities

(although sizeable for the Uniting Church) thought abortion should be made more available.

**Table 2: Attitudes to abortion by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
	Percentage						
Never permit	11	36	40	19	50	8	35
Permit extreme circumstances	50	48	41	63	40	46	46
Make more available	15	6	8	11	4	22	7
Make available to anyone	7	5	5	5	1	14	5
Don't know	17	6	6	2	5	10	8

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,354)

## Change over time

Attitudes towards abortion remained relatively stable over the previous 10 years. Those who thought abortion should be permitted in extreme circumstances decreased slightly between 2001 and 2011 (from 49% to 44%), and those who were unsure about this issue almost doubled over the same period (4% to 7%).

## Summary

Church attenders are likely to think abortion should only be permitted in extreme circumstances (e.g. rape, risk to the mother), or not permitted at all. A minority think abortion should be made more widely available. These results have remained relatively stable over time. Views vary particularly strongly by denomination, but also as a function of age, gender and education.

## Data sources

Castle, K., (2001) [computer file], 2001 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Castle, K., (2006) [computer file], 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey J. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Powell, R., (2014) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

## Citation

Hancock, N., Pepper, M. & Powell, R. (2014) Attitudes to abortion, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 14010. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.



# Environmental views

## Church attenders and environmental responsibility

### Christian environmental responsibility

Environmental destruction, resource depletion, and the increasingly adverse effects of a changing climate have focussed the attention of publics across the globe in recent decades. The future of the Murray-Darling Basin, drought, flood, fire, food production, the oceans and water security are all part of a heightened Australian debate around our relationship to the environment and our use of our natural resources.

Many of Australia's churches are expressing their sense of environmental responsibility through words and actions. For example, some denominations have environment commissions and networks<sup>1</sup>, and the National Council of Churches has commenced a new "Eco Mission" project. Growing numbers of congregations are also becoming more engaged in appreciation of and care for Creation in terms of their worship, mission, service and the operation of their buildings.<sup>2</sup>

In the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant attenders were asked their views about the moral requirement for action on the environment as follows:

#### ***Do you believe that Christians have a responsibility to be active about environmental issues?***

- ☐ Yes, and I am already active
- ☐ Yes, but I am currently not active
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

### A strong sense of responsibility

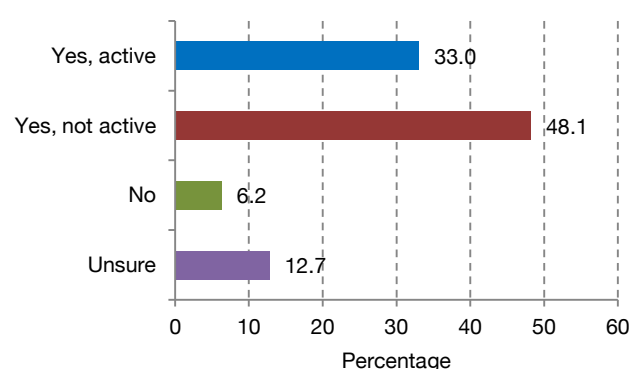
Overall, 81% of attenders in 2011 believed there is a moral obligation to be active about environmental

<sup>1</sup> E.g. Catholic Earthcare <http://www.catholicearthcare.org.au/>, Environment Working Group of the Anglican Church in Australia <http://www.environment.perth.anglican.org/>, Uniting Justice <http://www.unitingjustice.org.au/environment>

<sup>2</sup> A collection of stories of churches from a range of denominations who are caring for Creation are contained in the "Greening the Church" booklet, available from <http://greenchurch.victas.uca.org.au/what-are-churches-doing/leaf-eco-awards/award-winning-churches/>, accessed 14/3/13.

issues, including 33% who indicated that they themselves were personally active, as shown in Figure 1. Some 13% were unsure and a small minority (6%) said that being active about environmental issues was not a Christian responsibility.

**Figure 1: Church attenders' sense of Christian environmental responsibility**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P v2 (N=1,362).

### Demographic differences in views

An analysis of the responses of different age groups (shown in Table 1) indicates increased personal environmental activity with age, with 21% of attenders aged under 30, 29% of 30-49 year olds, 36% of 50-69 year olds and 40% of those aged 70+ convinced of Christian environmental responsibility and personally active. There were no significant differences among respondents with different levels of formal education, and gender differences were minor.

**Table 1: Environmental responsibility by age**

	15-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+
	Percentage							
Yes, already active	18	23	30	29	38	34	41	37
Yes, not active	64	49	50	48	41	51	49	41
No	7	7	7	9	7	7	3	5
Unsure	12	21	13	14	14	8	7	17

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P v2 (N=1,341).

### Church life

Over 80% of attenders in most denominational groupings thought that it was a Christian responsibility

to be environmentally active, as shown in Table 2. The exceptions were Baptist/Churches of Christ (73%) and Pentecostals (75%). A particularly high proportion of people reported being active in the Lutheran (44%), Uniting (41%) churches, compared with 32% of attenders in other denominations. Pentecostals were the group most uncertain in their views (18% unsure).

**Table 2: Environmental responsibility by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
	Percentage						
Yes, already active	31	24	33	44	39	41	26
Yes, not active	52	49	51	39	36	44	55
No	5	10	6	5	6	3	5
Unsure	12	17	10	13	18	11	14

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P v2 (N=1,362)

Interestingly, there was a difference in views by church attender background (see Table 3). Visitors to church were the most likely to agree that Christians have a responsibility to be active about environmental issues and to be personally active (39%), compared with 32% of regular church attenders.

**Table 3: Environmental responsibility by attender background**

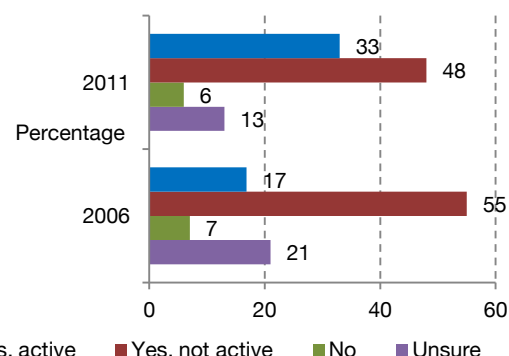
	Visitors	New- comers	Switchers	Transfers	Long-term attenders
	Percentage				
Yes, already active	39	33	28	31	33
Yes, not active	44	54	53	58	46
No	2	2	8	5	7
Unsure	15	11	11	7	14

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P v2 (N=1,319)

## Change over time

The 2006 NCLS also asked attenders about Christian environmental responsibility. The results indicate a strong shift over five years towards personal engagement with environmental issues and suggest an Australian church community that is moving from awareness to action, as shown in Figure 2. This shift was also evident across each of the seven denominational groupings. In 2006, 72% of attenders agreed that Christians had an environmental responsibility (compared with 81% in 2011), and only 17% were personally active (33% in 2011). There was a decrease in uncertainty, with 21% of attenders unsure in their views in 2006 (13% in 2011).

**Figure 2: Church attenders' sense of Christian environmental responsibility in 2006 and 2011**



Source: 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey H (N=3074), 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P v2 (N=1,362).

## Summary

The survey question wording does not allow an interpretation of the ways in which people were engaging with environmental issues (for example, church attenders may advocate for divergent outcomes in relation to water management in the Murray-Darling Basin, or simply recycle household goods). Nevertheless, the results suggest a high degree of environmental concern, with a large majority of Australian church attenders in 2011 thinking that it was a Christian environmental responsibility to be active about environmental issues. While only a third were themselves personally active, this proportion had almost doubled over five years, indicating a growing connection not only between environmental awareness and faith but a personal ownership of moral responsibility. While some denominations were more engaged than others, this trend towards increased responsibility seems to have occurred across the board.

## Data sources

Castle, K., (2006) [computer file], 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey H, NCLS Research, Sydney.

Powell, R., (2014) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P v2, NCLS Research, Sydney.

## Citation

Pepper, M., Bevis, S., Hancock, N., Powell, R. & Sterland, S. (2014) Church attenders and environmental responsibility, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 14018. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.

NCLS Occasional Paper 22

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# Environmental activities of Australian church attenders

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Miriam Pepper and Ruth Powell  
July 2013

## Abstract

Environmentally aware action is a part of life in Australia. The 2011 National Church Life Survey paints a picture of the environmental actions of church attenders by drawing on the results of a small sample survey of approximately 1,300 attenders. Household/consumer environmental activities, such as purchasing environmentally friendly products and reducing water and energy consumption, were being undertaken by a majority of attenders in 2011, especially older people. Civic environmental actions, such as participating in an environmental event or contacting a member of Parliament about an environmental issue were much less common. Denominational differences in environmental actions of church attenders were few.

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## Acknowledgments

Production of this paper would not have been possible without the work of the other members of the NCLS Research team who, at timing of writing, included: C. Chinnadurai, M. Dowson, I. Duncum, N. Hancock, K. Kerr, C. Mollidor, S. Sterland, and A. Vaeafisi.

## Citation

Pepper, M. & Powell, R. (2013) Environmental activities of Australian church attenders, NCLS Research Occasional Paper 22, Catalogue Number 2.13009, Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.

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## 1 Introduction

Environmentally aware action is a part of life in Australia. Many communities live with water restrictions, environmentally-labelled products such as detergents and washing powders are available on supermarket shelves, and around 2.5 million Australians live in homes with solar photovoltaic panels on their rooves<sup>1</sup>.

As well as large member-based organisations such as the Australian Conservation Foundation, there are numerous small community environmental organisations including Landcare, Bushcare, permaculture and climate action groups which represent an important part of civic participation.

Environmental protest is also a part of Australia's recent history, with campaigns in past decades such as green bans in large cities, the Franklin-Gordon River campaign and the anti-nuclear movement having achieved significant support across the Australian populace. Protests against the escalation of fossil fuel mining are gaining pace in various parts of the country.

There are two broad types of environmental actions:

- Consumer behaviours (those undertaken in the household sphere, e.g. reducing energy consumption); and
- Civic behaviours (those undertaken in the public sphere, e.g. signing a petition or participating in an environmental group).

These two types may be similarly motivated by environmental concern, however they are conceptually distinct. In survey studies of individuals' environmental actions, consumer behaviours tend to cluster together on the one hand, whereas civic behaviours tend to cluster together on the other.<sup>2</sup> Both types of action are important. Choices about consumer behaviour can express one's values in everyday life and can contribute to ecological sustainability. Civic behaviours can help to bringing about broader structural changes that shape – and restrict – the possibilities for action, including action in the private sphere.

Some of Australia's denominations, and ecumenical networks such as the National Council of Churches have spoken out about the importance of caring for the Earth and have called upon Christians to do so in their daily living.<sup>3</sup> So what kinds of environmental actions are being undertaken by church attenders? Which are more common and which are less so?

## 2 About the NCLS and the environmental activity questions

In late 2011 as a part of the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a subsample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders aged 15 and over who participated in the survey were asked the following question about their environmental actions. (Short labels that are used in subsequent charts and tables are given in square brackets).

Attendees were firstly asked about their environmental activity generally:

***Do you believe that Christians have a responsibility to be active about environmental issues?***

- ☐ Yes, and I am already active
- ☐ Yes, but I am currently not active
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Attendees were then asked about six consumer behaviours:

***Have you taken any of the following actions to reduce your impact on the environment? (Mark ALL that apply)***

- ☐ Most of my cleaning products are environmentally friendly [Cleaning products]
- ☐ I have switched to products that are more environmentally friendly [Enviro products]
- ☐ I have reduced the amount of water I use around the house and in the garden [Reduced water use]
- ☐ I have reduced the amount of gas and/or electricity I use around the house [Reduced energy use]
- ☐ I recycle my household waste [Recycling]
- ☐ I switch lights off around the house whenever possible [Switch off lights]

<sup>1</sup> <http://minister.innovation.gov.au/gregcombet/MediaReleases/Pages/Renewableenergytargetsupportsonemillionsolarrooftops.aspx>, accessed 30 April 2013.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Klineberg et al. (1998), Gardner and Stern (2002).

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Anglican Church of Australia General Synod (2007), Australian Catholic Social Justice Council (2002), National Council of Churches in Australia (2001), The Climate Institute (2006), Uniting Church in Australia Assembly (1991).



Attenders were then asked about six civic behaviours:

**In the last five years, have you undertaken any of the following actions? (Mark ALL that apply)**

- ☐ *Been a member of an environmental group or movement* [Member enviro group]
- ☐ *Taken part in a protest or demonstration to protect the environment* [Participated protest]
- ☐ *Contacted an elected government member about an environmental issue* [Contacted MP]
- ☐ *Taken part in an environmental event (eg Earth Hour)* [Participated event]
- ☐ *Taken part in a conservation activity (eg Landcare, bush regeneration)* [Conservation activity]
- ☐ *Voted in a government election on the basis of an environmental issue* [Voted enviro issue]

Finally, a second subsample of attenders was asked two questions related to involvement in environmental groups. Specifically:

- *Have you participated in conservation, environment or animal rights groups in the past two years?*<sup>4</sup>
- *In the past two years, have you done unpaid work in conservation, environment or animal rights groups?*

### 3 Overall results

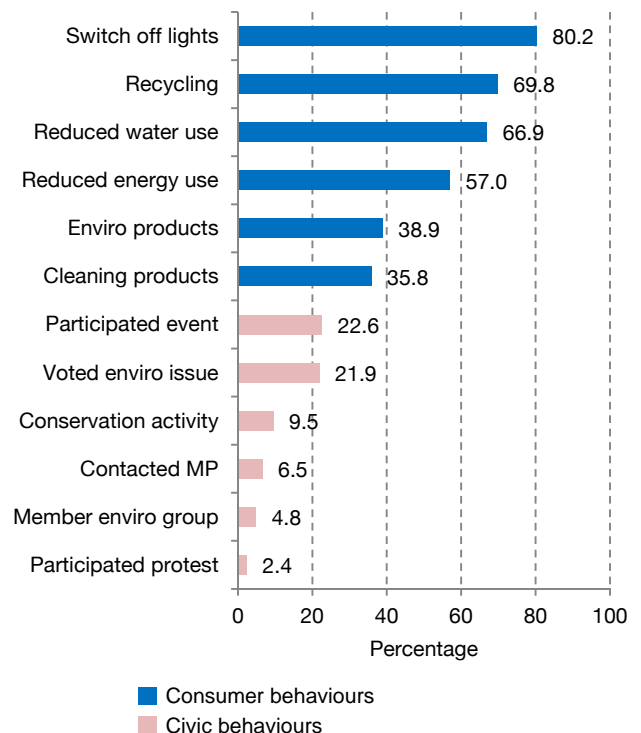
When asked about Christian environmental responsibility and whether or not they were personally active, 32% of attenders indicated that they believed that Christians did have such a responsibility and that they were themselves active about environmental issues in general. A further 48% considered this a Christian responsibility, but were not themselves personally active.

Four of the six consumer behaviours were undertaken by a majority of church attenders and the remaining two by over a third of attenders. Engagement ranged from 80% switching off lights wherever possible to 36% of attenders using environmentally friendly cleaning products (see Figure 1). When the consumer

behaviours were tallied, the median number was four (out of a possible total of six.)

In contrast, the civic behaviours were far less common. While over a fifth of respondents had taken part in an environmental event such as Earth Hour or voted in an election on the basis of an environmental issue (23% and 22% of attenders respectively), the other civic activities were selected by less than a tenth of attenders, with only 2% of church attenders indicating that they had taken part in a protest or demonstration to protect the environment. The median number of civic behaviours undertaken by attenders was zero – that is, most attenders did not undertake any of the civic environmental actions.

**Figure 1: Church attenders' environmental activities**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P (n=1,298).

When asked about their involvement in conservation, environment and animal rights groups in the previous two years, 4% of attenders indicated that they had participated in such groups and 2% that they had done unpaid work.

<sup>4</sup> The question clarified that 'participation in' meant attending activities or events, not just paying membership dues or donating money.

## 4 Demographic differences in activities

Self-reported general activity about environmental issues increased with age, from 21% of attenders aged 15-29 to 39% of 70+ year olds.

In general, the percentage of attenders undertaking environmentally friendly consumer behaviours tended to increase with age, as shown in Table 1. There was a statistically significant difference by age group for environmentally friendly cleaning products, environmentally friendly products generally, reduced water usage, and reduced energy usage. The median numbers of consumer activities for the age groups were as follows: three activities for 15-29 and 30-49 year olds, and four activities for 50-69 and 70+ year olds. The youngest attenders (in the 15-19 age group) had undertaken a median of two activities, which might be explained by youth having less responsibility for tasks such as purchasing consumables for their household.

**Table 1: Church attender's environmental actions by age**

	15-29	30-49	50-69	70+	Total
	Percentage				
Active about enviro issues	21	29	33	39	32
Consumer behaviours					
Cleaning products	28	34	35	44	36
Enviro products	30	36	46	39	39
Reduced water use	51	63	72	75	67
Reduced energy use	45	56	59	64	57
Recycling	66	67	73	70	70
Switch off lights	78	80	80	83	80
Civic behaviours					
Member enviro group	5	7	4	4	5
Participated protest	4	1	3	1	2
Contacted MP	2	5	9	8	7
Participated event	32	27	20	15	23
Conservation activity	8	8	12	8	10
Voted enviro issue	12	20	24	28	22
Environmental groups					
Participated	8	3	5	2	4
Volunteered	2	2	2	1	2

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Surveys G (n=1,175, 1,191) and P (n=1,278).

In contrast, there was no clear picture for the relationship between age and the civic behaviours. Contacting a politician and voting on the basis of an environmental issue tended to increase with age. In contrast, taking part in an environmental event decreased as age increased. There were no statistically significant differences between age groups

for membership of environmental groups, participation in protests, or participation in conservation activities. The median number of civic behaviours undertaken in the 15-29, 30-49, 50-69 and 70+ age groups was zero. However, when age groups were broken down further, the median number of activities was one activity for 15-19 year olds, 40-49 year olds, and 50-59 year olds.

The young (15-29 years) and middle aged (50-69 years) were the most active attenders in terms of their participation in conservation, environment or animal rights groups (8% and 5% respectively, compared with 2% of the remaining attenders).

A greater proportion of women reported undertaking pro-environmental consumer behaviours than men as shown in Table 2. The median number of consumer behaviours undertaken by women was four, compared with three for men. However the gender differences for civic behaviours were inconsistent. Environmental events were the only activity for which women reported statistically significantly higher levels of participation than men (27% versus 16%).

**Table 2: Church attenders' environmental actions by gender**

	Female	Male	Total
Consumer behaviours	Percentage		
Cleaning products	38	32	36
Enviro products	43	33	39
Reduced water use	70	62	67
Reduced energy use	62	51	57
Recycling	72	66	70
Switch off lights	84	76	80
Civic behaviours	Percentage		
Member enviro group	4	6	5
Participated protest	3	2	2
Contacted MP	7	6	7
Participated event	27	16	23
Conservation activity	10	10	10
Voted enviro issue	21	24	22

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P (n=1,277).

When it came to energy-related consumer behaviours, higher levels of formal education appear to be conducive to reducing electricity and gas consumption in the home and to switching off lights (see Table 3). The median number of consumer behaviours undertaken was three for people for whom school was their highest level of formal education, and four for other attenders. People with a university degree were more likely than other attenders to be a member of an

environmental group (8% versus 3%), and to have participated in an environmental event (30% versus 19%).

The picture for country of origin (see Table 4) was that attenders who were born in non-English speaking countries were less likely than other attenders to report engaging in the pro-environmental consumer behaviours (except for using environmentally-friendly cleaning products, where the difference was not significant). The median number of consumer behaviours undertaken by attenders born in non-English speaking countries was three, compared with four for other attenders. The same pattern was not evident for civic behaviours. In fact, people born in non-English speaking countries reported the highest participation in environmental events (29% versus 22% of Australian-born attenders and 15% of attenders born in other English-speaking countries).

**Table 3: Church attenders' environmental actions by education**

	School	Trade cert /diploma	Degree	Total
<b>Consumer behaviours</b>	<b>Percentage</b>			
Cleaning products	35	38	36	36
Enviro products	38	38	41	39
Reduced water use	67	66	69	67
Reduced energy use	53	56	64	57
Recycling	69	70	71	70
Switch off lights	79	76	86	80
<b>Civic behaviours</b>				
Member enviro group	3	3	8	5
Participated protest	2	2	3	2
Contacted MP	6	5	9	7
Participated event	18	20	30	23
Conservation activity	7	10	12	10
Voted enviro issue	23	19	22	22

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P (n=1,285).

There were no significant differences by gender, education or country of origin for participation or volunteering for conservation groups or for general activity about environmental issues.

## 5 Denominational differences in activities

Attenders are grouped into the following denominational groupings for comparison: Anglican, Baptist/Churches

of Christ, Catholic, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Uniting Church, and Other Protestant<sup>5</sup>.

**Table 4: Church attenders' environmental actions by country of origin**

	Australia	English speaking	Non-English speaking	Total
<b>Consumer behaviours</b>	<b>Percentage</b>			
Cleaning products	37	37	32	36
Enviro products	41	45	30	39
Reduced water use	70	66	57	67
Reduced energy use	60	59	46	57
Recycling	72	76	60	70
Switch off lights	84	85	66	80
<b>Civic behaviours</b>				
Member enviro group	4	2	8	5
Participated protest	2	2	3	2
Contacted MP	7	6	5	7
Participated event	22	15	29	23
Conservation activity	11	8	6	10
Voted enviro issue	21	19	25	22

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P (n=1,281).

Denominational differences in attenders' environmental behaviours were few. The only statistically significant differences present were for switching to environmentally friendly products, saving water in the house and garden, and contacting an elected government member about an environmental issue, with comparisons shown in Table 5.

**Table 5: Church attenders' environmental actions by denomination**

	Angli-can	Baptist/Church-es of Christ	Cath-olic	Luth-eran	Pente-costal	Unit-ing	Other Prot-estant
<b>Behaviours</b>	<b>Percentage</b>						
Enviro products	47	34	41	46	29	45	31
Reduced water use	76	65	66	74	56	80	66
Contacted MP	10	3	6	13	4	12	7

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P (n=1,298).

Another way to examine the relationship between Christian tradition and environmental actions is to look at the differences in views and actions by "faith identity".

<sup>5</sup> 'Pentecostal' may include respondents from any of the following denominations: C3 Churches, Apostolic, Australian Christian Churches (AOC), CRC Churches, Christian Life Churches, Four Square Gospel, Christian Outreach Centres, Bethesda, International Pentecostal Holiness Church, and other Pentecostal groups. 'Other Protestant' may include respondents from any of the following denominations: Adventist, Brethren, CMA, Congregational, Grace Communion, Nazarene, Presbyterian, Salvation Army, Vineyard and other independent churches.

Attenders were asked to indicate up to two approaches to matters of faith with which they most identified from a list of 11 possibilities (including an option “I do not identify with such descriptions”). The following were grouped to form five faith identities: Catholic/Anglo-Catholic, Evangelical or Reformed, Moderate or Liberal or Progressive, Charismatic or Pentecostal, and Traditionalist.

Few major differences were found in uptake of environmental activities between attenders identifying with different faith identities. The exception was voting on the basis of an environmental issue, where 40% of attenders identifying as Moderate or Liberal or Progressive indicated that they had done so, compared with 21% of other attenders. The median number of consumer behaviours undertaken was four for each of the faith identities. The median number of civic behaviours was zero for Evangelical or Reformed, Charismatic or Pentecostal and Traditionalist faith identities, and one for Catholic/Anglo-Catholic and Liberal or Moderate or Progressive identities.

Volunteering (doing unpaid work) for conservation organisations did not differ significantly across denominations, but participation did. The proportions of attenders who indicated that they had participated in such groups in the previous two years were as follows: Baptist/Churches of Christ attenders (11%), Anglican and Uniting Church attenders (6%), Other Protestants (5%), Catholics (3%), Pentecostals (2%) and Lutherans (0%). Attenders who identified as Evangelical or Reformed or as Liberal or Moderate or Progressive were also more likely than other attenders to participate in conservation groups (8%), whereas people who identified as Charismatic or Pentecostal were the least likely (less than 1%).

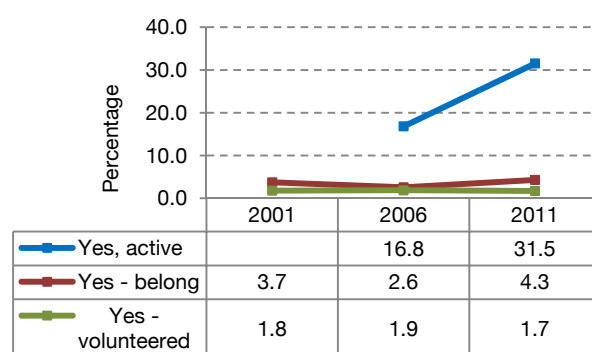
## 6 Changes in environmental activity over time

The question about Christian responsibility to take action on environmental issues was included in the 2006 NCLS, enabling an examination of how environmental activity has changed over time. Participation in and volunteering for conservation,

environment groups and animal welfare groups was included in both 2001 and 2006.<sup>6</sup>

The proportions of attenders who indicated that they were active in response to each of these questions are shown in Figure 2. The results indicate that self-reported activity in relation to environmental issues nearly doubled between 2006 (17%) and 2011 (32%). In contrast, membership and volunteering with conservation, environment or animal welfare groups remained stable and low over the ten years to 2011, under 5% for membership and under 2% for volunteering.

**Figure 2: Church attenders' environmental actions 2001, 2006 and 2011**



Source: 2001 NCLS Attender Sample Survey I (n=1,931, 2,046), 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey H (n=2,145, 2,272, 2,274), 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Surveys G (n=1190, 1203) and P (n=1,298).

## 7 Comparisons with the Australian population

A survey undertaken in 2011 by the CSIRO included many of the same questions about environmental activity that were included in the 2011 NCLS. A comparison between the two samples is shown in Figure 3. Church attenders' use of environmentally friendly cleaning products (and environmentally friendly products in general) was markedly lower than that reported by the general adult population (36% versus 64% for cleaning products, and 39% versus 71% for environmentally friendly products). However, attenders reported energy and water saving behaviours at a similar rate to Australians more generally, and were

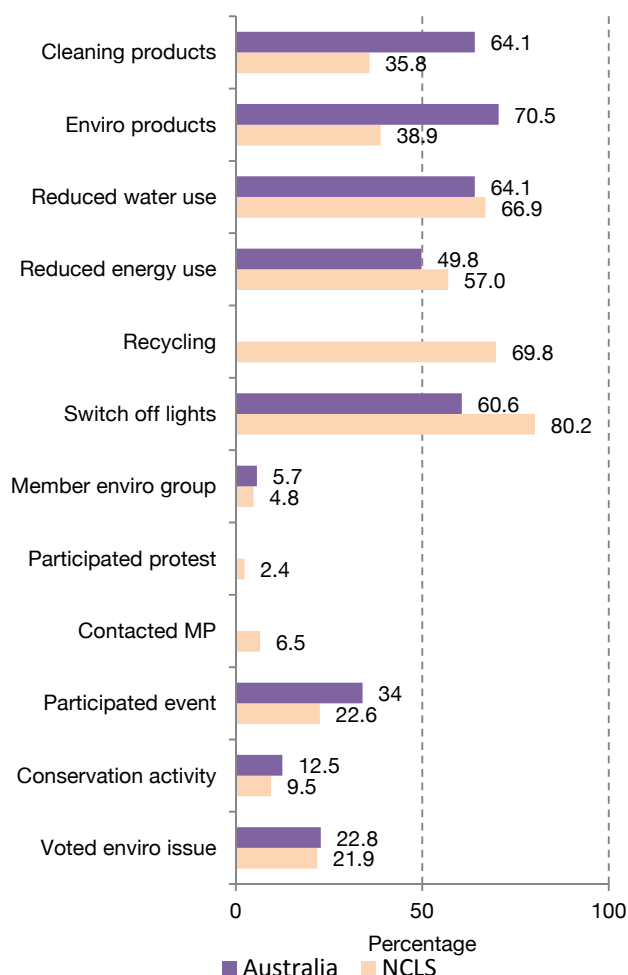
<sup>6</sup> In 2001 and 2006, instead of “participation in the last two years”, the question about participation asked about “belonging to” such organisations with no timeframe specified. Similarly, in 2001 and 2006 the question wording for volunteering was “doing unpaid work” with no timeframe specified.



more likely to switch off their lights (80% of attenders compared with 61% of Australians). The incidence of civic activities was similar among the Australian population and attenders (slightly lower among attenders).

Results from the 2010 Australian General Social Survey also indicate that in 2010, 6% of adult Australians (aged 18+) had participated in environmental or animal welfare groups in the last 12 months, and that 2% had done unpaid volunteer work (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010). These figures are slightly higher to those found in 2011 NCLS (4% and 2% respectively).

**Figure 3: Environmental activities – comparison between church attenders and Australian population**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Surveys P (n=1,298), CSIRO Second Annual Survey of Australian Attitudes to Climate Change (n=5030).

Note: The CSIRO survey did not include recycling, contacting an MP or participating in a protest.

## 8 Summary and discussion

Most of the consumer behaviours included in the survey were undertaken by a majority of attenders. In contrast, there was a much lower uptake of civic environmental activities. Church attenders are not unique in this regard – among the Australian community more broadly, civic environmental actions tend to be less frequent than the consumer actions that were included in the survey.

The incidence of the majority of activities among churchgoers was lower than among the general populace, although the differences were often small. However, it seems that a greater proportion of church attenders reported undertaking energy and water saving behaviours to reduce their impact on the environment than did the Australian population. This result may reflect a greater tendency for frugality among church attenders (e.g. Pepper et al., 2010, Watson et al., 2004), but can only be speculated on at this stage.

In contrast to NCLS findings for significant differences by denomination in environmental activities in local churches (Pepper and Powell, 2013a), and in the attitudes of senior local church leaders (Pepper and Powell, 2013b), denominational differences in attenders' environmental actions were few. This result suggests that activities in churches may not be resulting in church attenders taking similar actions in their personal lives. Where there were denominational differences in attender activity, uptake tended to be lower among Pentecostal and evangelical Protestant attenders, and higher among Catholics and mainstream Protestants. The exception was participation in a conservation, environment or animal rights group, where Baptist/Churches of Christ attenders actually reported the highest level of participation. Voting in an election on the basis of environmental issue occurred among Moderate/Liberal/Progressive attenders at double the rate of remaining attenders.

Consumer behaviours tended to be consistently related to demographics among church attenders. Older people, women and attenders born in Australia or other English-speaking countries reported enhanced levels of pro-environmental consumer behaviours. In contrast, demographic differences in civic environmental behaviours were fewer.

It is also important, however, to note that consumer behaviours undertaken with a pro-environmental intention are not necessarily environmentally significant. That is, signalling that one undertakes certain actions in order to protect the environment does not necessarily mean that these personal actions make a notable difference to an individual or household's ecological footprint. For example, research has found that income (rather than environmental concern) is one of the primary predictors of actual household energy use (e.g. Gatersleben et al., 2002, Abrahamse, 2007).<sup>7</sup> A household on a high income may attempt to save energy, but may well still be using more energy than a poorer household. It is therefore important to consider demographic differences in consumer behaviour with care, particularly where these may suggest a greater or lesser environmentalism on the basis of ethnicity or social class and result in an inappropriate moralistic discourse.

Overall, it is a hopeful sign that some 80% of church attenders consider being active on environmental issues to be a Christian responsibility. There is clearly much greater scope for Australian Christians to become environmentally engaged.

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<sup>7</sup> E.g. Gatersleben et al. (2002), Abrahamse (2007).



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## **10 About NCLS Research**

NCLS Research is a joint project of several denominational partners. Established in the early 1990s, it is a world leader in research focused on connecting churches and their communities. The most well-known project is the five-yearly National Church Life Survey.

## **11 About the National Church Life Survey**

The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a quantitative survey of 260,000-450,000 church attenders, 6,000-10,000 church leaders and 3,000-7,000 churches in more than 20 Australian denominations (Catholic, Anglican and Protestant denominations) every census year since 1991. The survey covers a wide range of areas of religious faith and practice and social concern. The NCLS includes three major survey types:

1. Attender Surveys (comprising a main survey variant and multiple small sample survey variants);
2. Several variants of a Leader Survey which is completed by local church leaders; and
3. An Operations Survey audit of local church activities.

Data are weighted to adjust for variations in participation levels across denominations and regions.

## Church attenders' climate change attitudes

### Climate change in the public discourse

Discussion and debate about climate change has been a feature of mainstream public discourse in Australia since the mid 2000s, discourse which has become highly politicised in the last several years.<sup>1</sup>

Some of Australia's church denominations, congregations/parishes, church aid and development agencies, and ecumenical networks have spoken publicly about climate change and its implications for humans and God's larger Creation, and have urged the churches and the broader society to mitigate climate change and its effects on the most vulnerable.<sup>2</sup> Some congregations, parishes and individual Christians have also engaged with these issues.<sup>3</sup>

In 2011, the National Church Life Survey asked a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant attenders the following question:

**Which of the following statements best describes your thoughts about climate change?**

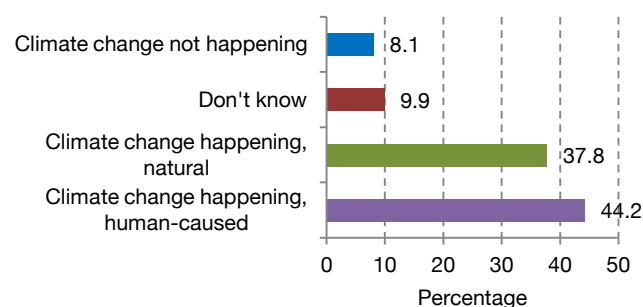
- ☐ I don't think that climate change is happening
- ☐ I have no idea whether climate change is happening or not
- ☐ I think that climate change is happening, but it's just a natural fluctuation in Earth's temperatures
- ☐ I think that climate change is happening, and I think that humans are largely causing it

### A diversity of views

Attenders largely agreed that climate change was occurring, with 82% endorsing the proposition. This figure constituted 38% who thought that the causes of

climate change were natural and not human-caused, and 44% who thought that climate change was human-caused (see Figure 1). A tenth (10%) of attenders indicated that they had no idea whether climate change was happening or not, and 8% did not think that it was happening. Comparison with a survey of the broader Australian populace conducted at a similar time indicated that attenders held similar views to the public at large.<sup>4</sup> However, these views are discrepant from climate scientists, almost the entirety of whom are convinced of the existence of human-induced climate change.<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 1: Climate change attitudes of church attenders**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P v2 (n=1,286).

### Demographic differences in attitudes

An analysis of the attitudes of different age groups (shown in Table 1) indicates that as age of churchgoers increased, there was an increased tendency to think that climate change was a natural occurrence and a decreased tendency to think that it was human-caused. The 20-29 year old age group was the main exception

<sup>1</sup> For an overview, see Leonard, R. & Leviston, Z. (2012) Changes in trust in environmental organisations and the implications for their legitimising strategies, *Third Sector Review*, (2):121-144.

<sup>2</sup> For a collection of statements about climate change from the main Christian denominations, see "Common belief: Australia's faith communities on climate change," available <http://www.climateinstitute.org.au/articles/publications/common-belief.html>, accessed 14/4/13.

<sup>3</sup> A collection of stories of churches from a range of denominations who are taking action on climate change and caring for Creation are contained in the "Greening the Church" booklet, available from <http://greenchurch.victas.uca.org.au/what-are-churches-doing/five-leaf-eco-awards/award-winning-churches/>, accessed 14/3/13.

<sup>4</sup> A representative sample of the Australian population was asked about their views towards climate change in July and August 2011. The question wording was identical to that used in the NCLS. 42.8% accepted anthropogenic climate change, 45.3% thought that climate change was a natural fluctuation, 7.4% did not think climate change was happening, and 4.5% had no idea. Leviston, Z. & Walker, I. (2011) *Second Annual Survey of Australian Attitudes to Climate Change: Interim Report*. Social & Behavioural Sciences Research Group, CSIRO. Available <http://www.csiro.au/en/Outcomes/Climate/Adapting/Climate-change-attitudes-online-survey.aspx>, accessed 12/3/13.

<sup>5</sup> An examination of the views of scientists, drawing on a number of sources including polling of scientists, is available at <http://www.skepticalscience.com/global-warming-scientific-consensus-intermediate.htm>, accessed 14/3/13.

to this trend, however. This age group was much less likely than attenders in their 30s, 40s and 50s to think that climate change was human-caused (38% of 20-29 year olds held this view, versus 53% of 30-59 year olds).

**Table 1: Climate change attitudes by age**

	15-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+
	Percentage							
Not happening	6	11	6	7	5	11	8	11
No idea	9	15	13	14	7	8	7	10
Natural fluctuation	32	36	23	26	39	44	45	50
Human-caused	53	38	59	52	49	37	39	29

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P v2 (n=1,268).

There was also a significant gender difference (see Table 2), with women more likely than men to think that climate change was human caused (49% versus 38%), less likely to think it was occurring but a natural phenomenon (34% versus 42%), less likely to think that climate change is not happening (6% versus 12%), and more uncertain in their views (12% of women had no idea, versus 7% of men). Church attenders with a university education were more likely than other attenders to think that climate change was caused by humans (56% versus 38%) and less likely to hold other views, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Climate change attitudes by gender and education**

	Education			Gender	
	School	Trade cert /diploma	Degree	Female	Male
	Percentage				
Not happening	9	10	6	6	12
No idea	11	11	7	12	7
Natural fluctuation	41	42	31	34	42
Human-caused	39	37	56	49	38

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P v2 (n=1,270 to 1,272)

## Church life

Attitudes towards climate change also differed across denominations and are illustrated in Table 3. The strongest differences were observed in relation to thinking that climate change is human-caused. Lutherans were the least likely to think so (38%), and Other Protestants (consisting of a range of small evangelical churches) were most likely (54%), followed by Anglicans (50%). Pentecostals were the most likely denominational group to think that climate change was not happening (12% of Pentecostals versus 8% of other attenders).

**Table 3: Climate change attitudes by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
	Percentage						
Not happening	5	9	8	9	12	4	9
No idea	8	13	10	10	9	7	11
Natural fluctuation	37	39	39	43	34	44	26
Human-caused	50	40	42	38	45	45	54

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P v2 (n=1,286)

There were also some differences in views by frequency of private devotional practice. Church attenders who indicated that they undertook private devotional activity every day or most days were the least likely attenders to accept human-caused climate change (39% of the most devout attenders, versus 46% of people who practiced private devotion once or a few times a week, and 50% of those who did so occasionally, hardly ever or never).

## Summary

Although a large majority of Australian church attenders thought in late 2011 that climate change was occurring, they were split about whether or not this was a natural or largely human-induced phenomenon, as is the case for the Australian populace in general. While leadership in many denominations has indicated an acceptance of the position of the vast majority of scientific opinion that climate change is largely human-caused, there is a considerable gap to the views of attenders. The results indicate a need for considerable engagement with people in the pews about climate change, its causes and imperatives for mitigation.

## Data sources

Powell, R., (2014) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P v2, NCLS Research, Sydney.

## Citation

Pepper, M., Hancock, N., Powell, R. & Sterland, S. (2014) Church attenders' climate change attitudes, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 14020. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.

## Attendees' sense of moral duty to act on climate change

### Moral duty as a driver for action

Some of Australia's church denominations, congregations/parishes, church aid and development agencies, and ecumenical networks have spoken publicly about climate change and its implications for humans and God's larger Creation, and have urged the churches and the broader society to mitigate climate change and its effects on the most vulnerable.<sup>1</sup>

The extent to which church attendees feel a sense of responsibility to act on climate change can give an indication of the degree to which the work of institutions connects with the people in the pews. Moreover, such sense of obligation has been found to be an important indicator of whether or not people undertaking positive steps to address climate change – including household actions such as saving energy and civic actions such as contacting a member of parliament.<sup>2</sup>

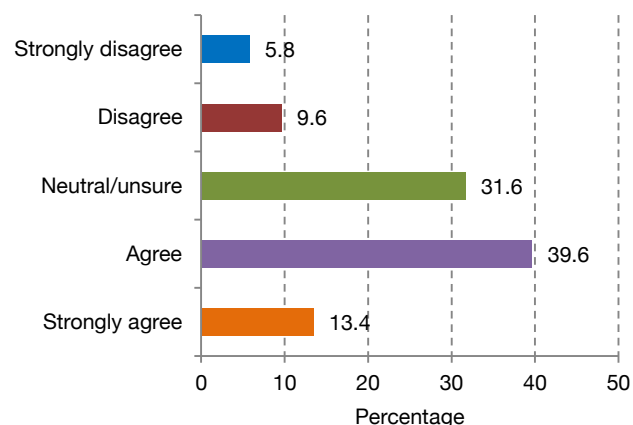
In the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant attendees were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statement:

*I feel a moral duty to do something about climate change.*

### Overall results

As shown in Figure 1, just over half (53%) of attendees felt a sense of moral responsibility to do something about climate change, almost a third (32%) were unsure. A minority (15%) disagreed.

**Figure 1: Attendees' sense of moral duty to act on climate change**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P v2 (N=1,331).

### Demographics

Attendees' sense of moral obligation differed between age groups. As shown in Table 1, attendees in the 20-29 years and 80+ age brackets were less likely than other attendees to feel a sense of moral duty (34% of 20-29 year olds, 40% of 80+ year olds, and 57% of other attendees), and more likely to be unsure in their views (46% of 20-29 year olds, 42% of 80+ year olds, and 29% of other attendees).

**Table 1: Sense of climate change moral duty by age**

	15-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+
Sense of obligation	Percentage							
Disagree	21	20	12	13	17	16	13	18
Neutral/unsure	28	46	30	28	29	29	27	42
Agree	50	34	58	59	54	55	59	40

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P v2 (N=1,313).

Women were more likely than men to feel morally obliged to act, although the difference was small (54% versus 51%). Education also had an effect on views – people who had completed a university degree reported a stronger sense of obligation than attendees with lower levels of formal education (61% versus 50% in agreement).

<sup>1</sup> For example, for a collection of statements about climate change from the main Christian denominations, see "Common belief: Australia's faith communities on climate change," available <http://www.climateinstitute.org.au/articles/publications/common-belief.html>, accessed 14/4/13.

<sup>2</sup> Leviston, Z. and Walker, I. "Second Annual Survey of Australian Attitudes to Climate Change: Interim Report." CSIRO, Perth, 2011, p.21. Online: <http://www.csiro.au/en/Outcomes/Climate/Adapting/Climate-change-attitudes-online-survey.aspx>, accessed 26 April 2013.



## Denominational differences

Attenders' sense of moral duty to do something about climate change varied by denomination. Catholics, Uniting Church people and especially Anglicans were more convicted, and Pentecostals, Baptists/Churches of Christ attenders, Other Protestants and Lutherans were less convicted. Almost two thirds (63%) of Anglicans reported a sense of moral duty, compared with only 43% of Pentecostals. However, the proportion of attenders who disagreed did not vary so greatly between denominations. The highest degree of uncertainty was among Pentecostals (37%).

## Citation

Bevis, S., Hancock, N., Pepper, M., Powell, R. & Sterland, S. (2014) Attenders' sense of moral duty to act on climate change, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 14021. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.

**Table 2: Sense of climate change moral duty by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church -es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
<b>Sense of obligation</b>	<b>Percentage</b>						
Disagree	11	19	14	21	20	13	17
Neutral/unsure	26	34	31	30	37	31	34
Agree	63	47	56	49	43	56	49

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P v2 (N=1,331).

Climate change obligation varied by church attendance background. Almost three quarters (72%) of newcomers to church life in the previous five years (with no recent church attendance history prior to that) reported a sense of moral duty, compared with 50% of all other church attenders who had been attending church for at least five years. There were no significant differences in views by frequency of church attendance or by frequency of devotional practice.

## Summary

Just over half of Australian church attenders in late 2011 reported a sense of moral duty to do something about climate change. Views varied somewhat by denomination, with the greatest conviction among Anglicans and the least conviction (and highest uncertainty) among Pentecostals. A large majority of newcomers to church life reported a sense of moral duty.

## Data sources

Powell, R., (2014) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P v2, NCLS Research, Sydney.



## How Ecotheological Beliefs Vary Among Australian Churchgoers and Consequences for Environmental Attitudes and Behaviors

### **Abstract**

Worldviews play an important part in shaping and driving people's more specific environmental attitudes and behaviors. In a religious context, attention to eco(theo)logical worldviews, defined as foundational beliefs about the relationships between God, the Earth and humanity, helps researchers and environmental practitioners alike to better understand the religious frameworks which may foster or impede environmental action. This study draws on data from the 2011 Australian National Church Life Survey to examine churchgoers' beliefs about the presence of God in nature and human dominion over the environment. Australian churchgoers strongly affirmed the presence of God in the natural world, but were less affirming of dominion theology. Dominion varied between church traditions, but beliefs about the presence of God did not. The beliefs predicted a range of measures of environmental attitudes and behaviors. The results regarding dominion are consistent with findings from other countries, and the research extends previous limited work on the sanctification of nature to a concept of the presence of God in the natural world.

### **Citation**

Pepper, M. and Leonard, R. (2015) How ecotheological beliefs vary among Australian churchgoers and consequences for environmental attitudes and behaviors, *Review of Religious Research*, DOI 10.1007/s13644-015-0234-1.

### **Availability**

Visit the journal website: <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13644-015-0234-1>

## Climate change attitudes and energy descent actions of Australian churchgoers: The effects of religious persuasions and social capital

### *Abstract*

This quantitative study of the climate change attitudes and energy descent actions of Australian Christian churchgoers presents data from a series of national surveys plus investigates one survey in greater depth to identify the effect of diverse religious persuasions and social capital in the prediction of 'consumer' energy descent actions and 'civic' actions. Comparisons are made across time, 2006 to 2011, and with a survey of the Australian population. Churchgoers were similar to, or slightly more pro-environment than, the Australian population in their attitudes and actions. Social capital was a stronger predictor of action, particularly civic actions, than environmental attitudes or religious persuasions. The norm of Christian responsibility for the environment was also a strong predictor of action. Because church leaders were trusted sources of information about climate change, they have an important role in fostering positive changes in attitudes and actions.

### *Citation*

Leonard, R. J., & Pepper, M. D. (2015). Les attitudes face aux changements climatiques et les actions pour la décroissance énergétique des chrétiens pratiquants: les effets des persuasions religieuses et du capital social. *Social Compass* 62(3):326-343. doi: 10.1177/0037768615587812.

### *Availability*

Visit the journal website: <http://scp.sagepub.com/content/62/3/326.abstract>

Pre-review version in English available via Research Gate:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282135844\\_Climate\\_change\\_attitudes\\_and\\_energy\\_descent\\_behaviors\\_of\\_Australian\\_churchgoers\\_The\\_effects\\_of\\_religious\\_persuasions\\_and\\_social\\_capital](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282135844_Climate_change_attitudes_and_energy_descent_behaviors_of_Australian_churchgoers_The_effects_of_religious_persuasions_and_social_capital)

# Global poverty and justice

# Campaigning for global justice: attender attitudes

## Influencing a changing world

Our world is increasingly connected. Technology, communications, and travel have brought about heightened awareness of how others live around the globe. Church attenders are part of this cultural shift. Awareness of inequality, and of popular responses to poverty such as charity giving and mass advocacy campaigns, has grown significantly since the late 1990s.<sup>1</sup>

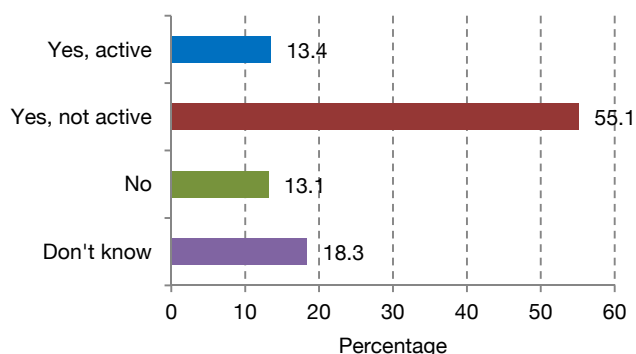
What are church attenders' views concerning support for, and participation in, these responses to poverty? Should the church campaign for global justice?

## The question and overall response

In late 2011 as a part of the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders were asked the following question:

*"Do you believe it is a Christian responsibility to take part in mass campaigns designed to address issues of global poverty or injustice (e.g. Make Poverty History, Micah Challenge)?"*

**Figure 1: Church attender views about campaigning for global justice**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N (n=1,306).

<sup>1</sup> Significant majorities of publics in all developed countries support development assistance for poor countries. See Council on Foreign Relations, Chapter 7: World Opinion on Economic Development and Humanitarian Aid, *Public Opinion on Global Issues*, January 26, 2012. [www.cfr.org/public\\_opinion](http://www.cfr.org/public_opinion)

When asked this question in 2011, a large majority (69%) thought that Christians have a responsibility to take part in mass campaigns to address global poverty or injustice. This represents a significant commitment to forms of political engagement that attempt to bring about social change. However, the survey reveals that only 13% have been actively engaged in a recent campaign. A minority remained unconvinced (13%), with 18% undecided. It would appear that the challenge for churches and Christian NGOs is to enable those who support campaigning to take action or to remain active.

## Pentecostals and young activists

Pentecostal churches are mobilizing the largest proportion of those who are active on this issue with 20% of their attenders recently active. Youth and young adults are the most likely to be active in campaigning generally, with a quarter of people under 30 actively engaged. The Pentecostal churches, who have a large young adult demographic, appear to be effectively channeling the commitment of this age group.

The Baptists and Churches of Christ have the second most active memberships, and the largest combined group (76%, slightly larger than the Pentecostals) who are affirmative and/or active on this issue. Some 70% of Anglican attenders are affirmative of Christian action for global justice, but they have the smallest proportion (9%) who have been active in a recent campaign. Is action on global poverty acceptable as part of Christian faith for these Anglicans, but not a priority? The relatively low level of activity among Anglicans may also be due in part to the older age profile of Anglicans.

**Table 1: Views about campaigning by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
Campaigning view	Percentage						
Yes, active	9	18	11	15	20	16	11
Yes, not active	61	58	55	54	55	51	51
No	14	9	13	14	17	16	12
Don't know	16	16	22	16	8	18	27

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N (n=1,306).

## A question of time and age?

Youth and young adults (inclusive of those 30-39 years of age) appear to be part of a new activist generation. The survey results emphasize that younger generations are currently the most likely to take some form of action. Perhaps this is the result of a mix of their good social media skills, and the fewer time constraints that enable engagement in forms of direct campaigning and lobbying. Of those who were actively involved in a recent campaign, 25% of 15-19 year olds and 24% of 20-29 year olds were in this category. Perhaps schools and youth groups have also been a fertile ground for church attenders to become involved in mass campaigning? Responding to global injustice may also be part of the rapid build up of social media and the online accessibility of world news.

Gen X and Baby Boomers, in turn, are the most likely to be theoretically supportive of the responsibility of Christians to engage in global campaigns, with 63% of 40-49 year olds and 62% of 50-59 year olds in favour of campaigning. However, they are underrepresented in recent campaign activity. Could this be because they were busy juggling family, work commitments, and maintaining life balance issues? Or were the current mechanisms of campaigning difficult or off-putting for these church attenders to engage in or utilize?

**Table 2: Views about campaigning by age**

	15-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+
<b>Campaigning view</b>	<b>Percentage</b>							
Yes, active	25	24	17	12	12	12	10	9
Yes, not active	49	53	57	63	62	55	45	50
No	4	7	11	9	11	15	23	16
Don't know	22	17	15	17	15	18	23	25

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N (n=1,299).

## Does locality make a difference?

**Table 3: Views about campaigning by locality**

	Rural	Regional	Urban	Total
Yes, active	8	9	17	14
Yes, not active	58	60	55	57
No	14	13	11	12
Don't know	20	19	16	17

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N (n=1,013).

Attendees living in urban areas were more likely than attendees living in regional and rural areas to be actively involved in campaigning (17% versus 8%). This difference may well be a reflection of the age profile of different localities – urban areas have the highest proportion of attendees under 40 years old, the age group who are the most active campaigners.

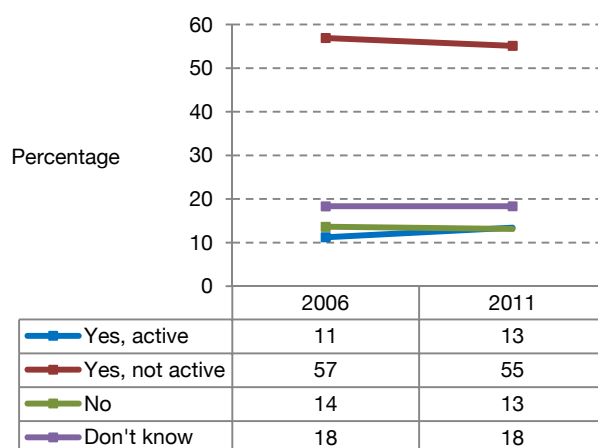
## Previous surveys

A sample of church attendees was also asked about their views regarding mass campaigning in the 2006 National Church Life Survey. There is little difference between the 2006 and 2011 results. Whether the small increase in the proportion of active attendees becomes a trend would need to be tested over time.

## Summary

Overall, there is strong agreement that Christians should take part in mass campaigns for global justice, although actual involvement is a minority activity. Young adults are the most actively engaged, and denominational and locality differences in involvement may be a reflection of this demographic.

**Figure 2: Church attender views about campaigning for global justice, 2006 and 2011**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N (n=1,306), and 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey J (n=2271).

NB. The wording changed slightly between 2006 and 2011, with no mention of Micah Challenge in the 2006 question.

## References

Castle, K., (2006) [computer file], 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey J, NCLS Research, Sydney.  
Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N, NCLS Research, Sydney.

## Citation

Bevis, S., Hancock, N., Pepper, M., Powell, R. & Sterland, S. (2013) Campaigning for global justice: attender attitudes, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 13001. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press

**Acknowledgments:** With thanks to other members of the NCLS Research team: C. Chinnadurai, M. Dowson, I. Duncum, K. Kerr, C. Mollitor, S. Sterland, A. Vaeafisi.

**About NCLS:** The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a quantitative survey of 260,000-450,000 church attendees, 6,000-10,000 church leaders and 3,000-7,000 churches in more than 20 Australian denominations every census year since 1991.

## Overseas poverty and justice: attender attitudes

### Poverty and its complexities

Overcoming the absolute poverty faced by many of the globe's poorest people is regarded as an issue of moral importance by increasing numbers of Australians. The roots of poverty, and our relationship to its causes and solutions, are often complex. In the 1991 National Church Life Survey 90% of attenders thought there was a responsibility to share in meeting the needs of people in developing countries. In recent decades Christian NGOs, and churches themselves, have played an increasing role in both delivering aid and in advocating with governments to increase the size and effectiveness of national responses to poverty and injustice.

In late 2011, the National Church Life Survey asked a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders about their views on the Australian Government's involvement in a range of issues that are regarded as relevant to the question of ending global poverty:

***In your opinion, does the Federal Government do too much, too little, or about the right amount in each of the following areas?***

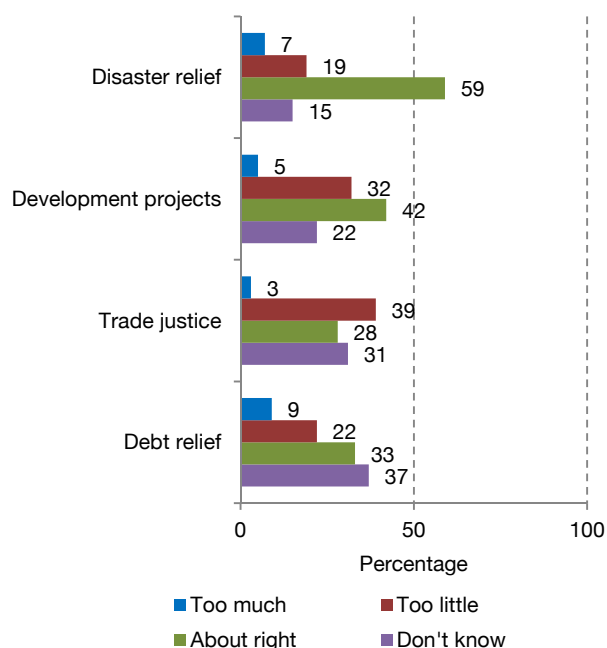
- ☐ Provision of overseas emergency aid/disaster relief
- ☐ Funding of projects for development in poor countries
- ☐ Establishment of/advocacy for just trade arrangements with poor countries so producers get a fair return for their product
- ☐ Provision of debt relief to heavily indebted countries

### Overall responses

Only a small minority of church attenders believe the Federal Government's response to international poverty has been too much (less than 10%). The government's provision of overseas emergency aid/disaster relief was deemed about right by 59% of attenders, with 19% claiming it was too little. The government's funding of development projects was deemed to be about right by 42% of attenders, but a sizeable minority (32%) believed the government was doing too little. The issue of just trade arrangements with poor countries had the largest group of attenders (39%) who believed that too little is currently being done (only 28% felt it was about

right). Some 33% of attenders believed the provision of debt relief to heavily indebted countries was about right and 22% felt it was too little.

**Figure 1: Attender attitudes to Federal Government action on overseas poverty and justice**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N (n=1,427).

Support for action declines as the issues become more complex or are less well known in the community. For example, 37% attenders responded 'don't know' when posed with the issue of debt relief for heavily indebted countries. Church leadership was strong in this area in the late 1990s (with Jubilee Australia), but it now appears to require new work to educate Australian attenders. In contrast, Micah Challenge has been very active in the churches in the new millennium, with a stronger focus on aid than on trade justice or debt relief.

### Demographics

Attenders aged under 30 years were the most likely compared to other age groups to indicate that there was too little emergency aid/disaster relief and too little government funding of development projects. This



represents a high level of awareness and concern of Generation Y with the subject of international aid and development, and may be reflective of Micah Challenge's strong engagement with young people. Older attenders were the most likely to think that government delivery of disaster relief and development funding was about right. The differences between age groups regarding debt relief and trade justice were not as marked.

Men were more concerned than women that too little was being done to fund development and emergency relief. A higher level of formal education was associated with a greater likelihood of thinking that the government was doing too little in each of the four areas (emergency relief, development projects, debt relief and trade justice), and a lower likelihood that the government was doing too much.

**Table 1: Overseas poverty and justice by age, gender, education**

	Age				Gender		Education		
	15-29	30-49	50-69	70+	Female	Male	School	Trade cert	Degree
<b>Disaster relief</b>	Percentage								
Too much	1	6	8	10	7	7	11	7	3
Too little	31	22	16	13	15	24	14	20	24
About right	48	55	63	64	62	55	59	59	60
Don't know	19	16	13	13	16	14	16	14	13
<b>Development projects</b>									
Too much	2	4	5	7	4	5	8	5	1
Too little	43	36	29	26	30	36	27	34	37
About right	26	37	45	51	42	41	47	41	37
Don't know	28	23	21	16	24	18	19	20	25
<b>Trade justice</b>									
Too much	2	3	2	2	1	4	4	3	1
Too little	37	42	40	36	39	41	30	40	49
About right	24	25	26	36	26	30	32	29	23
Don't know	37	30	32	25	34	25	34	28	27
<b>Debt relief</b>									
Too much	3	7	11	11	7	11	11	10	4
Too little	22	25	20	19	21	23	15	22	28
About right	29	32	33	34	29	37	35	34	30
About right	46	36	36	36	43	29	39	33	38

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N (n=1,275).

## Church life

Pentecostals and Baptist/Churches of Christ and "Other Protestant" attenders were the most likely to think that too little is being spent on emergency aid and overseas development projects. Again, this may be reflective of Micah Challenge's strong engagement with evangelical churches. In contrast, Anglicans attenders were the most likely to think that the government was doing too

little with regard to trade justice. Differences between denominations were not significant for debt relief.

**Table 2: Overseas poverty and justice by denomination**

	Anglican	Baptist/Churches of Christ	Catholic	Lutheran	Pentecostal	Uniting	Other Protestant
<b>Disaster relief</b>	Percentage						
Too much	7	6	10	7	0	7	6
Too little	18	24	16	14	24	16	26
About right	65	50	61	68	56	64	51
Don't know	10	20	13	11	21	13	16
<b>Development projects</b>							
Too much	3	3	7	2	3	2	4
Too little	30	38	29	27	40	31	35
About right	40	33	46	52	34	47	36
Don't know	27	25	18	19	23	20	25
<b>Trade justice</b>							
Too much	2	1	2	1	3	4	4
Too little	50	43	34	44	47	39	30
About right	24	21	32	23	20	25	32
Don't know	24	34	31	31	30	31	34
<b>Debt relief</b>							
Too much	7	5	11	5	8	11	5
Too little	21	25	20	22	25	20	24
About right	29	25	36	35	26	37	35
Don't know	43	45	34	38	42	32	36

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N (n=1,301).

Higher levels of devotional practice and church attendance were generally associated with a greater likelihood of thinking that the government was doing too little about overseas poverty and justice.

## References

Kaldor, P., Powell, R., Bellamy, J., Castle, K., Correy, M., & Moore, S. (1995) Views From The Pews: Australian Church Attenders Speak Out: National Church Life Survey. Openbook Publishers, Adelaide.  
Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N, NCLS Research, Sydney.

## Citation

Pepper, M., Bevis, S., Powell, R., & Hancock, N. (2013) Overseas poverty and justice: attender attitudes. NCLS Research Fact Sheet 13005. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press

**Acknowledgments:** With thanks to other members of the NCLS Research team: C. Chinnadurai, M. Dowson, I. Duncum, K. Kerr, C. Mollitor, S. Sterland, A. Vaeafisi.

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## Refugee Intake – Church Attenders' Views

### Troubled waters

The question of refugee intake has become a polarizing issue in Australian society. The often tragic life stories of the individuals and families who seek asylum and claim refugee status in Australia have become a complex part of Australia's own national story as Australians seek to define themselves in an increasingly uncertain world.

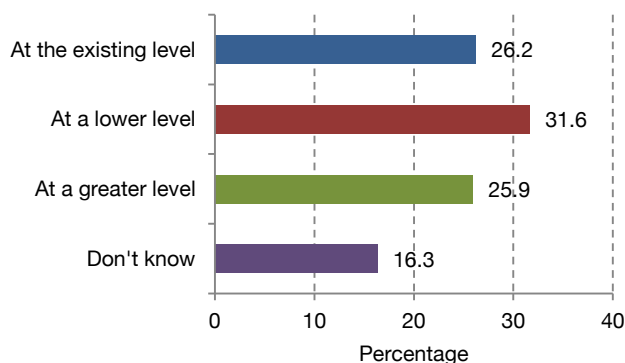
The 2011 National Church Life Survey was a chance to hear the views of church goers on attitudes towards refugee intake in Australia. The 2011 NCLS survey must be read in the light of the fraught historical time of late 2011. The survey took place in the last quarter of 2011, soon after the High Court of Australia rejected the Federal Government's "Malaysian Solution" on August 31 2011, and in the midst of an increase in the number of "irregular maritime arrivals". The month of November 2011 saw a record 902 asylum seekers and crew arrive by boat in Australian waters.

A sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders were asked:

*Do you believe that Australia should accept refugees:*

- ☐ At the existing level
- ☐ At a lower level
- ☐ At a greater level
- ☐ Don't know

**Figure 1: Australia should accept refugees**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,410).

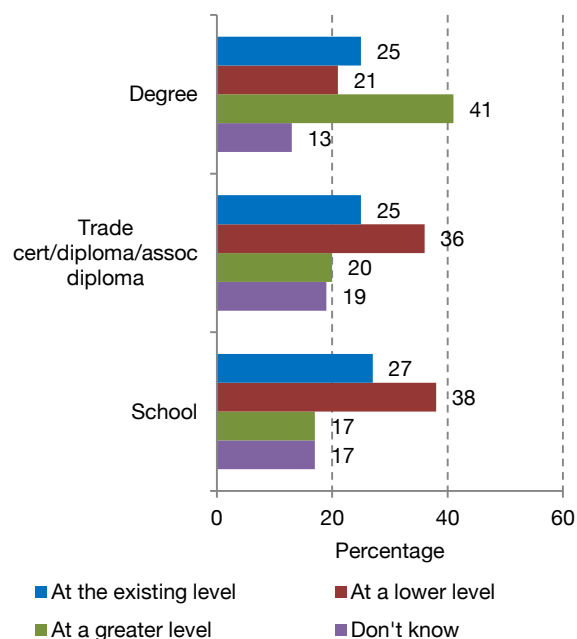
### Overall Response

Those who believed the intake should be at a lower level made up 32% of responses (see Figure 1). The proportion of attenders who believed intake should be at the existing level (26%) was the same as that who thought it should be at a greater level (26%). A minority of 16% were unsure.

### Education

The level of education of church attenders appears to be a significant determinant of attitude to the level of refugee intake in Australia (as shown in Figure 2). Those who have a tertiary degree were far more likely to believe the intake should be increased (41%) as compared with those with lower levels of formal educational attainment (17% school and 20% trade/diploma). Conversely, those without a tertiary degree were significantly more likely to believe the intake should be at a lower level, with 38% of school educated attenders choosing this option.

**Figure 2: Accepting refugees by education**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,393).

## Age and gender

Although the survey painted a divided picture on church goers' overall responses to the intake of people seeking refugee status, there were some clear tendencies in attitude when age was taken into account (see Table 1). Those aged 20-29 were the largest group of those unsure of how to respond to the situation, with 36% answering "Don't know". The most likely to nominate "At a lower level" were those aged 70+.

**Table 1: Accepting refugees by age**

	15-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+
	Percentage							
At the existing level	27	18	31	25	27	23	28	33
At a lower level	16	23	31	26	31	34	41	41
At a greater level	38	23	20	30	27	30	20	14
Don't know	19	36	17	19	14	13	11	12

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,400).

Some 33% of women believed intake should be at a lower level compared with 28% of men.

## Church life

The most notable difference in views by denomination was that Anglicans were most in favour of increasing intake (37% of Anglicans, contrasted with less than 26% for other denominational groupings).

**Table 2: Accepting refugees by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
	Percentage						
At the existing level	26	27	26	31	30	27	22
At a lower level	28	31	33	40	25	37	32
At a greater level	37	24	25	21	23	24	22
Don't know	9	19	16	9	22	12	23

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,410)

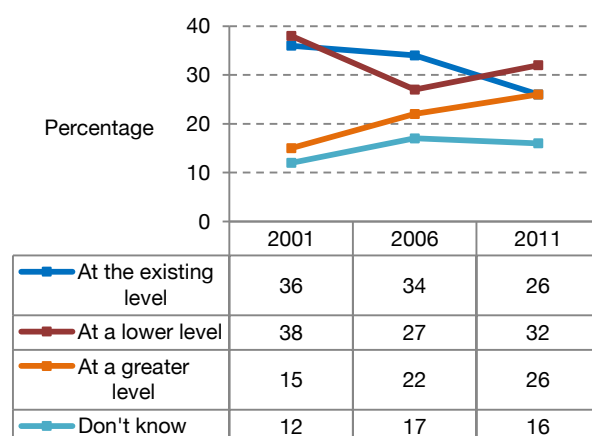
Visitors to churches were the largest group of church goers favouring an increase (40%, compared with 25% of other attenders). Of those who nominated a reduction in intake, newcomers (those who were new to their congregation in the last five years) had the largest percentage (41%, compared with 20% of visitors and 31% of other attenders) holding this view.

## Change over time

This survey question on refugee acceptance was also asked in 2006 and 2001, allowing for a look at trends over time (see Figure 3). Satisfaction with the existing level of refugee acceptance seems to have declined

over time, with 36% of attenders selecting "at the existing level" in 2001 compared with 26% in 2011. Those thinking Australia should accept refugees at a greater level has increased over time, from 15% in 2001 to 22% in 2006, to 26% in 2011.

**Figure 3: Accepting refugees, 2001-2011**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N (n=1,410), 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey J (n=2,356), 2001 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=2,198).

## Summary

In summary, the survey reveals a complex and mixed response of attenders to the issue of refugee intake. It points not only to the church in Australia wrestling with the issue, but also to the social complexity that church leadership must contend with in shaping a coherent response to this pressing ethical matter.

## Data sources

Castle, K., (2001) [computer file], 2001 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Castle, K., (2006) [computer file], 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey J. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

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## Citation

Powell, R., Pepper, M., Bevis, S. (2014) Refugee intake – Church attenders' views, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 14017. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.

# Other social and political views

## Problems facing Australia: attender attitudes

### Prioritising issues

The Australian nation is generally prosperous, well endowed with many natural resources, and has a stable system of government. Nevertheless, complex problems, endemic poverty for certain sectors of society, environmental issues, and the possibility of risks and failures accompany even the best of our way of life.

In the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders were surveyed on their views of problems facing Australia. The survey question was as follows:

***Below is a list of problems that face Australia today. Please indicate how important each problem is.***

- ☐ The economy
- ☐ Health care
- ☐ Education
- ☐ The environment
- ☐ Crime
- ☐ Water management
- ☐ Cost of living
- ☐ Immigration
- ☐ Poverty
- ☐ Better government
- ☐ Honesty & social responsibility in business
- ☐ Australia's ability to provide for its food needs<sup>1</sup>
- ☐ Gambling
- ☐ Youth suicide
- ☐ Alcohol and substance abuse

Respondents indicated the level of importance on a scale from one to five, where 1 was "not important", 3 was "fairly important", and 5 was "very important". In order to assist with the presentation of results, charts and tables in this Fact Sheet display the average (mean) scores on these scales. A higher score indicates a higher level of importance.

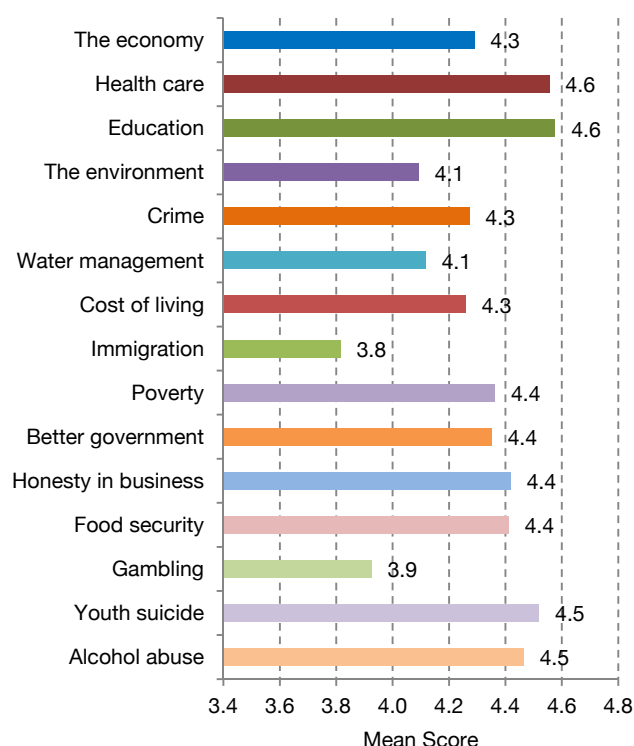
### Overall findings

The top two most important issues identified by church attenders were education and health care, with almost 9 out of 10 people giving them a rating of at least 4 out of five for importance.

The survey responses present a picture of attenders who are particularly concerned about quality of life and the future of the young. It is noteworthy that education and health care are centerpieces of government responsibility, policy and budgeting.

When framed as problems, the two issues least likely to be identified as important to church attenders were immigration (mean score of 3.8) and gambling (mean score of 3.9).

**Figure 1: Problems facing Australia**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O (n=1,409).

<sup>1</sup> The term "food security" is used as shorthand for this problem throughout the Fact Sheet.



## Differences by demographics

The age of church attenders made a difference to views for all questions. People aged 50+ consistently rated the issues as more important than younger people. People under 30 years old gave the weakest importance ratings, except for poverty where the 30 to 49 year olds gave the weakest rating. Women also attributed higher importance ratings to almost all issues (honesty in business and gambling were the exceptions). There were some differences by attenders' levels of educational attainment, but only across a minority of issues.

**Table 1: Problems facing Australia by age & gender**

Problem	Age				Gender	
	15-29	30-49	50-69	70+	Female	Male
	Mean score					
The economy	3.9	4.3	4.4	4.4	4.4	4.2
Health care	4.2	4.4	4.7	4.6	4.7	4.3
Education	4.3	4.6	4.7	4.6	4.7	4.4
The environment	3.8	4.0	4.3	4.2	4.2	3.9
Crime	4.0	4.1	4.4	4.4	4.4	4.1
Water management	3.7	3.9	4.3	4.3	4.2	4.0
Cost of living	4.0	4.3	4.4	4.3	4.4	4.1
Immigration	3.5	3.7	4.0	3.9	4.0	3.6
Poverty	4.3	4.2	4.5	4.4	4.5	4.1
Better government	4.1	4.3	4.4	4.5	4.4	4.2
Honesty in business	4.1	4.3	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.3
Food security	4.0	4.2	4.6	4.6	4.5	4.2
Gambling	3.6	3.7	4.2	4.0	4.0	3.8
Youth suicide	4.4	4.4	4.6	4.6	4.6	4.4
Alcohol abuse	4.2	4.3	4.6	4.6	4.6	4.3

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O (n=1,284).

## Differences by denomination

The level of importance attributed to the issues varied by denomination across all questions except for gambling and alcohol abuse, where differences were not statistically significant.

**Table 2: Problems facing Australia by denomination**

Problem	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
	Mean score						
The economy	4.0	4.1	4.4	4.2	4.4	4.3	4.2
Health care	4.3	4.4	4.7	4.6	4.5	4.6	4.3
Education	4.3	4.4	4.7	4.6	4.4	4.7	4.5
The environment	4.0	3.9	4.2	4.2	3.8	4.3	3.8
Crime	3.9	4.2	4.4	4.3	4.2	4.2	4.2
Water management	4.0	4.0	4.2	4.3	3.9	4.3	4.0
Cost of living	3.8	4.1	4.4	4.3	4.4	4.2	4.0
Immigration	3.6	3.9	4.0	3.7	3.6	3.9	3.6
Poverty	4.1	4.3	4.5	4.4	4.3	4.4	4.2
Better government	4.0	4.3	4.5	4.4	4.4	4.3	4.2
Honesty in business	4.2	4.4	4.5	4.5	4.4	4.5	4.3
Food security	4.4	4.3	4.5	4.5	4.3	4.4	4.3
Gambling	3.8	4.0	3.9	3.9	4.1	4.1	3.7
Youth suicide	4.4	4.5	4.5	4.4	4.7	4.5	4.3
Alcohol abuse	4.3	4.4	4.5	4.3	4.6	4.5	4.3

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O (n=1,293).

Compared with church attenders from other denominations, Anglicans tended to attribute the least importance to the issues, and Catholics tended to attribute the greatest importance. When the issues were ranked in terms of importance within each of the denominations (with a higher rank indicating higher importance), the ranking pattern for Anglicans and Pentecostals differed the most from the ranking across all attenders. Food security, water management and the environment exhibited much higher rankings for Anglicans than for all attenders (and education, health care and cost of living displayed much lower rankings for Anglicans). The economy and cost of living exhibited much higher rankings (and education and food security much lower rankings) for Pentecostals than for attenders as a whole.

## Summary

Church attenders were presented with a list of problems that face Australia and they indicated how important they felt each problem was. The issues rated with the highest levels of importance were education and health care. Issues with the lowest average ratings as problems facing Australia were immigration and gambling. Older attenders (aged 50+) tended to rate issues as more important than younger attenders. There were also differences in the views of attenders of different denominations.

## References

Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O, NCLS Research, Sydney.

## Citation

Bevis, S., Pepper, M., Powell, R., & Hancock, N. (2013) Problems facing Australia: attender attitudes. NCLS Research Fact Sheet 13002. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press

**Acknowledgments:** With thanks to other members of the NCLS Research team: C. Chinnadurai, M. Dowson, I. Duncum, K. Kerr, C. Mollitor, S. Sterland, A. Vaeafisi.

**About NCLS:** The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a quantitative survey of 260,000-450,000 church attenders, 6,000-10,000 church leaders and 3,000-7,000 churches in more than 20 Australian denominations every census year since 1991.



## Justice – A Christian Role in Society

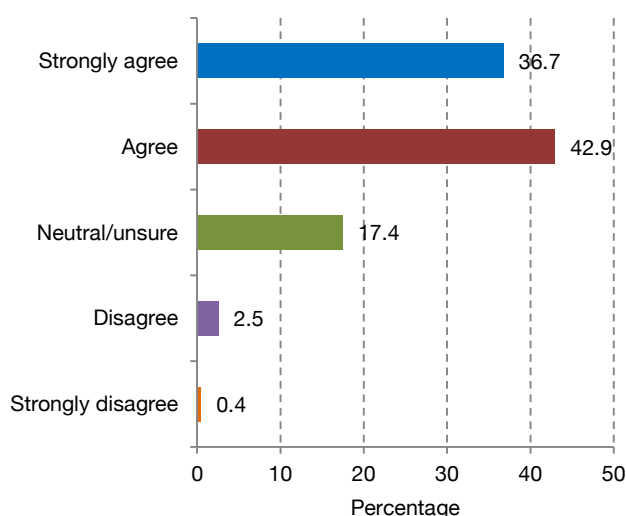
### Working for change

The notion of a just society, where all have adequate access to resources, opportunity and a say in decisions that affect their lives, is a basic tenet of modern Western democracies. Christianity has long played a role in debates over what shape justice should take in the prevailing circumstances. Today, we are aware that social structures are not only somewhat fluid and changeable, but can also have effects that are sometimes unjust. The status quo is not necessarily eternal or inevitably good. Churches, Christians, and church-based NGOs have been involved in debate and active attempts to redress social and environmental issues. What are attenders' views on this issue?

In 2011 the National Church Life Survey asked a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant attenders the following question:

*"Do you agree or disagree: 'Christians should work to change the structures of society in order to create a more just society'?"*

**Figure 1: Christians should work to create a more just society - overview**



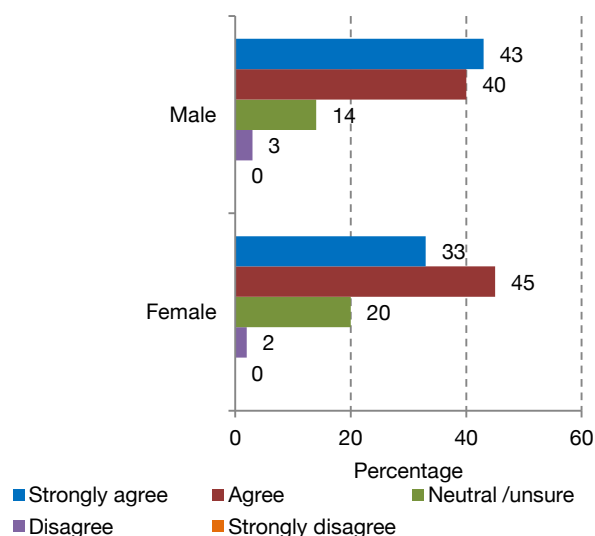
Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,430).

### Overall findings

A large majority of attenders (80%) were in agreement with the idea that Christians should work to create a more just society (see Figure 1), including 37% who were in strong agreement. A small number (17%) were neutral or unsure, with only 3% in disagreement. The views of these attenders suggest that there is underlying support within the Christian community for active attempts to work for change that establishes a more just society. While the goal of social change is debated among churches and their members – with different groups at times holding opposing views in relation to a justice issue – it is clear that the current tenor of attenders' views is one of activism rather than withdrawal from social and political engagement.

### Age, gender and education

**Figure 2: Christians should work to create a more just society – by gender**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,397).

As shown in Figure 2, similar proportions of males and females either agreed or strongly agreed that Christians should work towards a more just society (83% and 78% respectively). Agreement increased with the age of attenders (see Table 1), the greatest discrepancy being between the 15-29 year olds (71%) and those over 70

years of age (83%). Those attenders with a university education were the most likely to either agree or strongly agree, and the least likely to be neutral/unsure.

**Table 1: Just society by age and education**

	Age				Education		
	15-29	30-49	50-69	70+	School	Trade cert	Degree
	Percentage						
Strongly agree	35	40	36	35	34	36	40
Agree	36	40	45	48	41	43	45
Neutral/unsure	26	18	16	14	21	19	12
Disagree	3	2	3	2	3	1	2
Strongly disagree	1	1	0	0	1	0	0

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,410 to 1,420)

## Denominational differences

Within the overall support for Christians working for a more just society there are differences between denominations (see Table 2). The proportion of attenders who disagreed or strongly disagreed remained relatively constant across denominations. In contrast, those who agreed or strongly agreed ranged from the Lutherans' 77% up to Baptist/Churches of Christ with 84%. Lutheran attenders had the highest rate of people selecting 'neutral/unsure', contributing to their lower proportion of agreeing attenders. For Pentecostal attenders, 49% strongly agreed that Christians should be working towards a more just society; a greater proportion than any other denomination.

**Table 2: Just society by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
	Percentage						
Strongly agree	30	37	35	31	49	37	37
Agree	52	47	43	46	31	46	42
Neutral/unsure	15	13	19	22	19	15	18
Disagree	3	2	3	1	2	2	3
Strongly disagree	1	0	1	0	0	0	0

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,430).

## Other demographic patterns

Those attenders who have been attending their church for 5 years or longer had the highest level of agreement (82%) out of the different backgrounds of attenders. Newcomers to church life had the lowest agreement, with 67% of newcomers agreeing or strongly agreeing that Christians should work towards a more just society. Newcomers were also the most likely to be neutral/unsure.

The proportion of attenders who agreed or strongly agreed rose with their level of attendance. Of those attending weekly or more, 81% were in agreement, compared to 60% of those who attended less than monthly.

Not only frequency of attendance, but frequency of private devotions, had an impact on attenders' level of agreement. Those who had devotions everyday/most days had 83% agreement, those who had them once/a few times a week had 79% agreement, those who had them occasionally had 78% agreement, and those who hardly ever had devotions had 66% agreement. The rate by which attenders were neutral/unsure also decreased as the frequency of devotions increased.

## Summary

When faced with perceived social injustices, the majority of attenders in the 2011 survey were in agreement with Christians working to change the structure of society to create a more just society. The level of agreement among attenders varied as a function of certain demographic variables such as age, education and denomination.

## Data sources

Powell, R., (2014) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

## Citation

Powell, R., Pepper, M., & Bevis, S. (2014) Justice – a Christian role in society, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 14023. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.

# Voting patterns of church attenders

## Elections in Australia

Reporting on voter intentions for federal elections is a staple of Australian media news cycles and a constant source of interest to governments, businesses and civil society alike. Australian Federal Government elections are held to elect parliaments for three-year terms for the House of Representatives and in a ten-year period Australian voters could be required to vote on four separate occasions. Is there a clear voting pattern for Australian church attenders in federal elections? Results from the 2011 National Church Life Survey reveal church attender voting patterns across denominations.

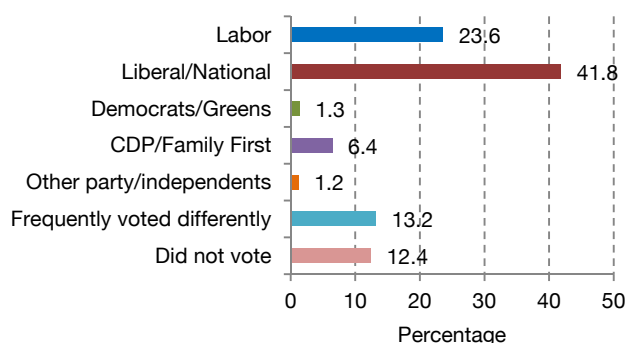
In late 2011, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders was asked:

***What have been your voting patterns over the last 10 years in lower house Federal elections?***

## Overall findings

The overall voting patterns of attenders in 2011 were as follows: Labor 23.6%, Liberal/National 41.8%, Democrats or Greens 1.3%, Christian Democratic Party and Family First 6.4%, and Other party or Independents 1.2%<sup>1</sup>. Of the remainder, 13.2% frequently vote differently and 12.4% did not vote at all.

**Figure 1: Church attender voting pattern**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Surveys N, O and R (n=3,665).

<sup>1</sup> "Generally One Nation" and "Some other party or independents" were listed separately in the survey question. However, due to small numbers, the results are presented together here.

The 2011 survey reveals that no party held a majority of attender support in the last 10 years, although attender voter patterns heavily favoured the Liberal/National Coalition. Attenders were less likely to vote Labor or Greens than the general public when compared with voter patterns from elections held in the same ten-year period.<sup>2</sup>

## Denominational differences in voting

The 2011 survey also confirms that denominational differences in attender voter patterns do exist.

**Table 1: Church attender voting by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
Party	Percentage						
Labor	19	17	31	15	12	25	17
Liberal/National	46	44	39	63	36	47	48
Democrats/Greens	2	1	1	1	1	3	0
CDP/Family First	5	13	2	4	17	4	8
Other party/ independents	1	1	2	1	1	1	1
Frequently voted differently	18	11	13	9	10	15	12
Did not vote	7	14	11	6	22	6	14

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Surveys N, O and R (n=3,665).

Catholic attenders (31%) are the largest group to have voted Labor. However, even Catholics are more likely to have voted Liberal/National with 39% indicating that they have generally voted for the Coalition. Lutherans (63%) are the most likely to generally vote Liberal/National, Anglicans (18%) the most likely to frequently vote differently, and Pentecostals (17%) and Baptist and Churches of Christ (13%) the most likely to generally vote Christian Dem Party or Family First. Catholics (2%) are the least likely to generally vote Christian Dem Party or Family First.

<sup>2</sup> The Liberal/National vote has averaged 44% over the last four elections, the Labor vote 39%, and the Christian Democrats/Family First 2%. Considering only those church attenders who voted, and distributing the swinging vote proportionately among the parties, the equivalent figures for church attenders are 56% Liberal/National, 32% Labor and 9% Christian Democrats/Family First. The results for each election are available at <http://results.aec.gov.au>

Across denominations long-term attenders were also more likely than other church attenders to vote Liberal/National, with 47% of those who have attended a church for five or more years generally voting for the Coalition.

## Demographic differences in voting

Gender played little role in shaping attender voter patterns in the 2011 survey.

The educational status of attenders does appear to have some bearing on voter patterns with 45% of those who listed their highest educational attainment as secondary school generally voting Liberal/National, compared to 40% of attenders with a greater level of formal education.

There also appears to be a strong correlation between age and the increased likelihood that attenders generally vote Liberal/National.

**Table 2: Church attender voting by age**

	15-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+
<b>Party</b>	<b>Percentage</b>							
Labor	6	16	18	25	29	27	28	21
Liberal/National	8	28	32	38	39	47	56	71
Democrats/Greens	0	2	1	1	2	1	1	1
CDP/Family First	2	10	13	7	9	5	3	1
Other party/independents	0	3	2	1	2	1	1	0
Frequently voted differently	1	18	15	15	14	16	11	6
Did not vote	82	24	20	13	5	3	1	0

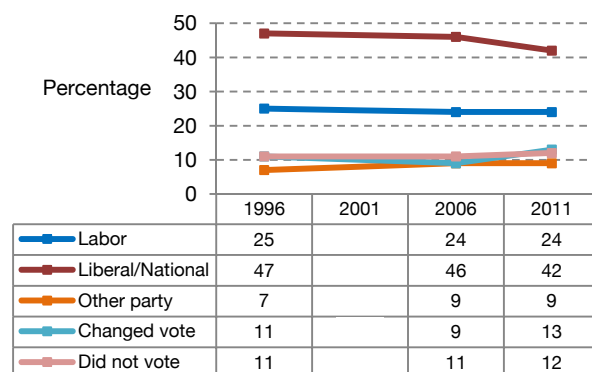
Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Surveys N, O and R (n=3,635).

Of those aged 80 plus 71% generally voted Liberal/National, while 56% of 70-79 year olds and 47% of those aged 60-69 also voted Liberal/National. Age thus appears to be a strong indicator of attender voting patterns for the Coalition. One modest contrast to this trend is that the age group with the strongest Labor vote was 50-59 year olds (29%). While older attenders were most likely to generally vote Liberal/National, those most likely to vote for the Christian Dem Party or Family First were those aged 20-29 (10%) and those aged 30-39 (13%). It appears that a segment of younger attenders are casting their vote with minority parties that express their values rather than with the larger Liberal/National or Labor parties.

## Previous surveys

Comparisons with 1996 and 2006 survey data reveal no major changes in attender voting patterns over the last 15 years. No comparative data is available for 2001.

**Figure 2: Church attender voting 1996-2011**



Source: 1996 NCLS Attender Sample Survey I, 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey J, 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Surveys N, O and R.

## Summary

While the patterns differ somewhat by denomination and demographic factors, Australian church attenders are predominantly conservative in their voting preferences, a trend which has changed little over 15 years.

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 Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey R, NCLS Research, Sydney.

## Citation

Bevis, S., Pepper, M., Powell, R. & Hancock, N. (2013) Voting patterns of church attenders, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 13007. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.

**Acknowledgments:** With thanks to other members of the NCLS Research team: C. Chinnadurai, M. Dowson, I. Duncum, K. Kerr, C. Mollitor, S. Sterland, A. Vaeafisi.

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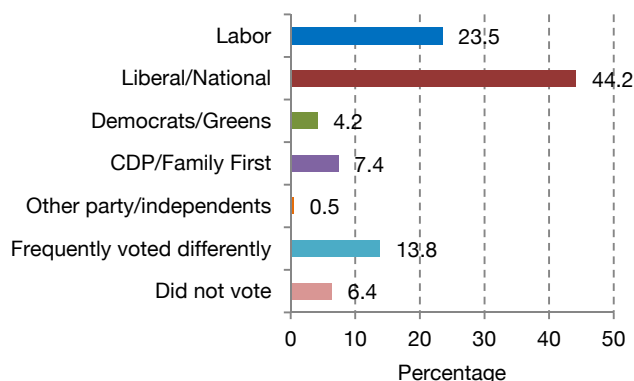
## Voting patterns of local church leaders

### Overall responses

In late 2011 as a part of the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a sample of approximately 2,000 local church leaders in senior positions<sup>1</sup> from Catholic, Anglican and Protestant churches were asked the following question:

**What have been your voting patterns over the last 10 years in lower house Federal elections?**

**Figure 1: Local church leader voting pattern**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Versions A,B, C and D (n=2,034).

Liberal/National was the most popular voting choice, with 44% of local church leaders in senior positions having voted this way. Almost a quarter (24%) voted Labor, and 14% indicated that they had frequently voted differently<sup>2</sup>.

### Demographic differences in voting

There was a strong difference in voting patterns by age. The vote among the oldest (70+ years) and youngest (15-29 years) age groups was strongly Liberal/National, with almost two thirds of local leaders in these age groups (64% for 70+, and 62% for 20-29) having voted for the coalition. In contrast, the middle age groups (50-

59 and 60-69 years) reported the strongest Labor vote, at 27% and 29% of respondents respectively.

**Table 1: Local church leader voting by age**

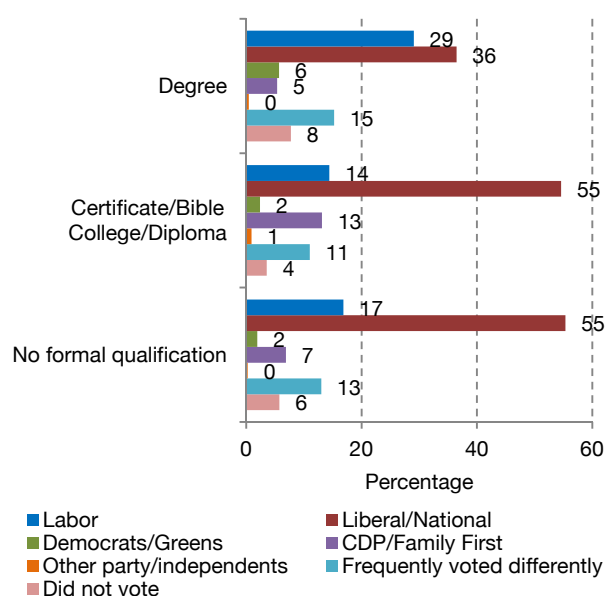
	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+	Over-all
Labor	9	10	23	27	29	20	23
Liberal/National	62	42	39	43	45	64	44
Democrats/Greens	0	7	3	5	4	0	4
CDP/Family First	10	9	11	7	4	3	7
Other party/independents	1	2	0	0	0	1	1
Frequently voted differently	18	15	14	12	16	11	14
Did not vote	0	15	10	5	3	1	6

Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Versions A,B, C and D (N=2,027).

Local church leaders who were women were less likely to vote for the Coalition than men (36% versus 46%), and a greater proportion of women than men voted Labor or for the minor parties.

In terms of level of theological education, local senior leaders who had at least a bachelor degree in theology/ministry (58% of all local senior leaders) were much more likely than other to vote Labor and much less likely to vote Liberal/National.

**Figure 2: Local church leader voting by theological education**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Versions A,B, C and D (n=1,988).

<sup>1</sup> Local senior church leaders indicated that they were either "The minister, pastor or priest of this congregation/parish", "The senior minister/pastor/priest of a ministry team here", "An interim minister, pastor or priest here" or "A layperson serving as the principal leader here".

<sup>2</sup> "Generally One Nation" and "Some other party or independents" were listed separately in the survey question. However, due to small numbers, the results are presented together here.

## Denominational differences in voting

The voting pattern of local church leaders varied greatly between denominations. The strongest contrast is present between Pentecostal and Uniting Church leaders. The Liberal/National vote was extremely strong among Pentecostal leaders, at 74%. The next most popular choice was the CDP or Family First, with 15% of leaders having made this choice. Pentecostals were least likely among all leaders to change their vote, with only 3% of senior leaders indicating that they had done this. No Pentecostals in this dataset had consistently voted for the Democrats or the Greens.

In contrast, among Uniting Church leaders, 40% voted for the Labor Party (more than tenfold the Labor vote among Pentecostals) and the Liberal/National vote was less than a third of what it was among Pentecostals, at 21%. Almost a fifth (18%) of Uniting Church senior leaders had consistently voted for the Greens or the Democrats, much more than leaders from other denominations.

The Labor vote among Catholic and Anglican leaders approached that observed in the Uniting Church leadership, and the Catholics and Anglicans also displayed the greatest proportion of respondents who had frequently changed their vote (18% and 19% respectively).

**Table 2: Church leader voting by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
Party	Percentage						
Labor	36	13	38	15	4	40	15
Liberal/National	35	52	31	59	74	21	47
Democrats/Greens	2	3	1	0	0	18	2
CDP/Family First	4	14	1	5	15	1	8
Other party/ independents	1	0	1	0	0	1	1
Frequently voted differently	19	14	18	16	3	14	16
Did not vote	4	4	10	5	5	5	11

Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Versions A,B, C and D (n=2,034).

## How do leaders compare with attenders?

The voting pattern for church leaders as a whole was similar to the voting pattern for church attenders as a whole (see Table 3). The main difference was a higher portion of attenders who did not vote (12% of attenders versus 6% of leaders). However, an examination of leaders versus attenders within denominations shows a different story.

Leaders and attenders are highly distinct in both the Pentecostal and the Uniting churches. There is a much stronger inclination towards the Liberal and National parties among Pentecostal leaders (74%) as compared to Pentecostal attenders (36%), and the reverse is true of the Uniting Church (21% of leaders versus 47% of attenders). The proportion of Labor voters among Uniting Church attenders was a quarter (compared to 40% of leaders), and very few attenders from this denomination voted Democrat or Green (3% versus 18% of leaders). There was also a markedly stronger preference for Labor and weaker preference for Liberal/National among Anglican leaders (36% Labor and 35% Liberal/National) as compared to Anglican attenders (19% Labor and 46% Liberal/National).

**Table 3: Voting patterns of church leaders and attenders**

	Leaders	Attenders
Party	Percentage	
Labor	23.5	23.6
Liberal/National	44.2	41.8
Democrats/Greens	4.2	1.3
CDP/Family First	7.4	6.4
Other party/independents	0.5	1.2
Frequently voted differently	13.8	13.2
Did not vote	6.4	12.4

Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Versions A,B, C and D, 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Surveys N, O and R.

## References

- Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Leader Survey A, NCLS Research, Sydney.  
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## Citation

Pepper, M., Powell, R. & Hancock, N. (2013) Voting patterns of local church leaders, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 13008. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press

**Acknowledgments:** With thanks to other members of the NCLS Research team: C. Chinnadurai, M. Dowson, I. Duncum, K. Kerr, C. Mollitor, S. Sterland, A. Vaeafisi.

**About NCLS:** The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a quantitative survey of 260,000-450,000 church attenders, 6,000-10,000 church leaders and 3,000-7,000 churches in more than 20 Australian denominations every census year since 1991.



# Taxes versus government spending: attender attitudes

## Funding the future

Federal budgets are important moral documents. They are fought over, analysed and dissected by politicians and commentators alike. For many other Australians, a quick glance at “what’s in it for me?” may be all the attention these documents receive. Nevertheless, how Government policy is funded and how the appropriate balance between taxation and spending is arrived at remain potent questions. In 2011 the National Church Life Survey was able to test church attenders’ views on this contentious issue. In late 2011, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant attenders was asked:

***If the government had a choice between reducing personal income taxes or increasing social spending on services like health and education which do you think it should do?***

- ☐ Strongly favour reducing taxes
- ☐ Mildly favour reducing taxes
- ☐ Depends
- ☐ Mildly favour increasing social spending
- ☐ Strongly favour increasing social spending
- ☐ Can't choose

## Overall responses

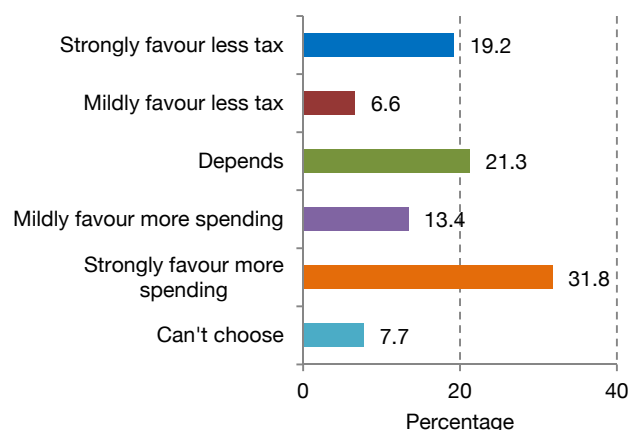
A total of 45% of attenders favoured further government spending rather than reducing personal taxes. The largest group of responses to the question was those who strongly favoured further spending (32%). The next largest group (21%) were those who responded ‘depends’. Those favouring less tax amounted to 26% of attenders. A small group (8%) could not choose. The survey reveals a strong base for social spending on services like health and education and a significant group of people willing to be persuaded by the merits of the case.

## Gender and education

Women were more decisive and held stronger opinions about this issue than men. Over a third of women (36%) strongly favoured further spending, compared with 27% of men. A fifth (20%) of women and 17% of men

strongly favoured less tax. A quarter (25%) of men responded ‘depends’, compared with 19% of women.

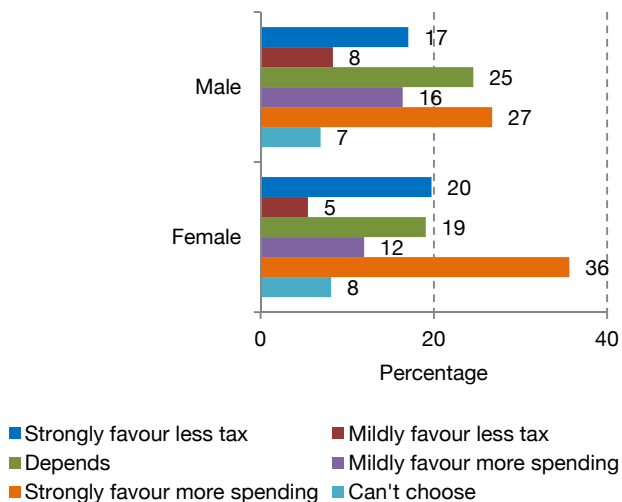
**Figure 1: Reducing taxes versus increasing government social spending**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N (n=1,427).

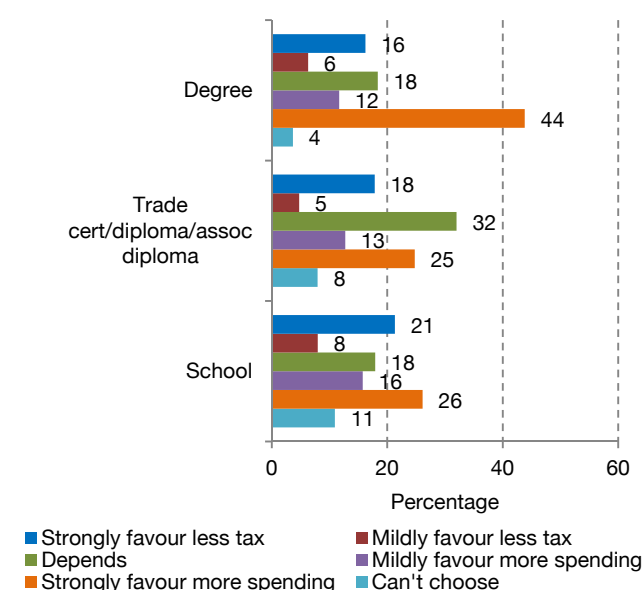
In terms of education, church attenders with a degree were more likely than those without to strongly favour increasing social spending (44% versus 26%). Those with a trade certificate or diploma were the most likely (32%) to respond ‘depends’, compared with 18% of people whose highest level of formal education was school or a tertiary degree.

**Figure 2: Taxes versus social spending by gender**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N (n=1,313).

**Figure 3: Taxes versus social spending by education**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N (n=1,322).

## Denominational differences

Strong denominational differences are apparent. Anglicans had the largest proportion of attenders who strongly favoured further spending (49%). While Catholic and Pentecostal attenders were still more likely to support increased spending than decreased tax, they had the lowest proportions who chose this option (28% and 27% respectively). Attenders from Catholic parishes (24%) and Pentecostal churches (22%) were most likely to be strongly in favour of less tax.

**Table 1: Taxes versus social spending by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
Category	Percentage						
Strongly favour less tax	11	10	24	10	22	16	19
Mildly favour less tax	5	9	7	5	6	7	8
Depends	20	21	22	26	22	18	17
Mildly favour more spending	13	15	11	16	16	18	15
Strongly favour more spending	49	32	28	35	27	35	30
Can't choose	4	12	8	9	6	7	11

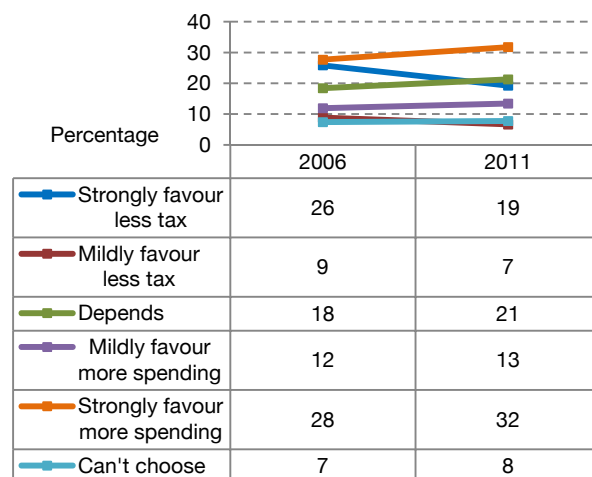
Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N (n=1,340).

Differences can also be noted based on church attendance background, with 50% of those who have attended for five or more years in favour of further social spending on services.

## Change over time

A comparison with results from the 2006 NCLS suggest that views have shifted away from favouring less tax (35% of attenders in 2006, versus 26% in 2011).

**Figure 4: Taxes versus social spending over time**



Source: 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey J (n=2,653), 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N (n=1,340).

## Summary

When faced with a choice concerning sharing of the pie of government finances and expenditure, church attenders are more likely to prioritize social spending than personal tax cuts. The issue is not clear-cut, there is room for debate and a significant body of attenders is unconvinced about the merits of either case.

## References

Castle, K., (2006) [computer file], 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey J, NCLS Research, Sydney.  
Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N, NCLS Research, Sydney.

## Citation

Bevis, S., Pepper, M., Powell, R., & Hancock, N. (2013) Taxes versus government spending: attender attitudes. NCLS Research Fact Sheet 13006. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press

**Acknowledgments:** With thanks to other members of the NCLS Research team: C. Chinnadurai, M. Dowson, I. Duncum, K. Kerr, C. Mollitor, S. Sterland, A. Vaeafisi.

**About NCLS:** The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a quantitative survey of 260,000-450,000 church attenders, 6,000-10,000 church leaders and 3,000-7,000 churches in more than 20 Australian denominations every census year since 1991.

# An Australian republic? Attenders' attitudes

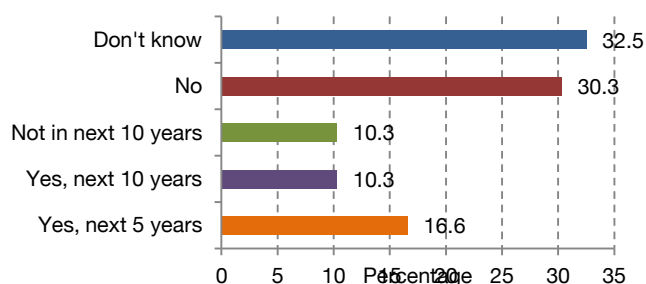
## General attitudes towards an Australian Republic

Indications are that public support for Australia becoming a republic has declined. In 1999, the year of the unsuccessful referendum<sup>1</sup> on Australia becoming a republic, support for a republic among the general population was at 51%<sup>2</sup>. By 2011, support had fallen to 41%<sup>3</sup>, a decline of 10% in 12 years.

## What do attenders think?

When asked in the 2011 NCLS: "Should Australia become a republic?", 27% of all church attenders thought that Australia should become a republic within the next 10 years, with 17% wanting a republic within five years (see Figure 1). Some 10% thought Australia should become a republic but not in the next 10 years. Support for a republic among church attenders was therefore approximately 4% lower than among the general population. Thirty percent of all church attenders did not think that Australia should become a republic, and 33% did not know either way.

**Figure 1: Church attenders' views on a republic**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,426).

<sup>1</sup> The question asked in the 1999 referendum was "To alter the Constitution to establish the Commonwealth of Australia as a republic with the Queen and the Governor-General being replaced by a President appointed by a two-thirds majority of the members of the Commonwealth Parliament"  
[http://www.aec.gov.au/elections/referendums/1999/Referendum\\_Reports\\_Statistics/1999.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/elections/referendums/1999/Referendum_Reports_Statistics/1999.htm), accessed 8 November 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Newpoll: *Becoming a Republic*  
<http://resources.news.com.au/files/2011/04/24/1226044/215274-aus-news-file-newpoll-110425.pdf>, accessed 9 November 2012. The question wording was "Are you in favour of or against Australia becoming a republic? If in favour, is that strongly in favour or partly in favour? If against, is that strongly against or partly against?"

<sup>3</sup> ibid

## How does age affect the view?

As shown in Table 1, the biggest supporters of an Australian republic were the older generations (people aged 50 and over). The lowest level of support was found among those in the age range 20-29 (11% supported a republic in the next 10 years), with slightly higher support from those in the 15-19 age range (19%). As well as being more supportive of a republic than younger attenders, older attenders were also more opposed. The explanation for this is that older people were much firmer in their views than younger people, with a decline in the 'don't know' response from almost 60% of attenders under 30 years of age to less than 20% of those aged 70+. The issue of an Australian republic is just not "on the radar" for many young church attenders.

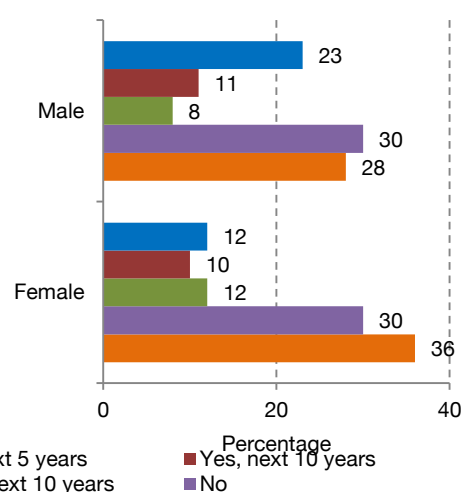
**Table 1: Views on Australian republic by age**

	15-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+
	Percentage							
Yes, next 5 yrs	7	6	16	19	21	15	19	20
Yes, next 10 yrs	12	5	5	9	10	14	12	7
Not in next 10 yrs	3	5	7	6	12	12	16	15
No	20	23	27	24	30	35	37	41
Don't know	58	59	45	42	28	23	16	17

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,414).

## What about gender?

**Figure 2: Church attenders' views on a republic**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,390).

Among church attenders, considerably more men (34%) than women (22%) supported Australia becoming a republic in the next 10 years (see Figure 2). Of the men supporting an Australian republic, the majority (23%) wanted a republic by 2016. This tendency for church attending men to favour a republic more so than women, is consistent with the general population where 49% of men and 34% of women were found to be in favour of an Australian republic in 2011.

### Do attitudes differ by denomination?

Reviewing denominational results, the biggest supporters of an Australian republic within 10 years are attenders from Catholic (30%) and Uniting (28%) churches (see Table 2). The lowest support was among Lutheran attenders (20%), 'Other Protestants' (22%) and Baptist/Churches of Christ attenders (22%). Pentecostal attenders were the most likely to select 'don't know'.

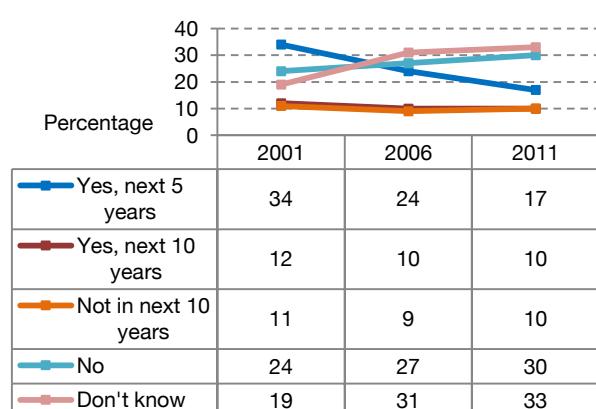
**Table 2: Views on Australian republic by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
	Percentage						
Yes, next 5 years	12	15	20	11	13	13	13
Yes, next 10 years	12	7	10	9	11	15	9
Not in next 10 years	15	10	10	10	6	16	8
No	43	29	26	41	27	30	42
Don't know	19	39	34	29	43	25	28

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,426).

### Change over time

**Figure 3: Church attenders' views on a republic, 2001-2011**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,426), 2006 Attender Sample Survey J (n=2,469), 2001 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N (n=2,231)

As shown in Figure 3, the proportion of church attenders in favour of an Australian republic in the next

five years steadily declined between 2001 (34%) and 2011 (17%). In contrast, the proportion of church attenders not in favour rose from 24% in 2001 to 30% in 2011. This mirrors the trend observed among the general population. There was also a sizeable increase in the proportion of attenders indicating they don't know (19% in 2001, 31% in 2006, and then 33% in 2011).

### Summary

In 2011, opinions were mixed as to whether Australia should become a republic. Attitudes varied as a function of age, gender, and denomination. The support for a republic decreased among attenders between 2001 and 2011.

### Data sources

Castle, K., (2001) [computer file], 2001 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Castle, K., (2006) [computer file], 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey J. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Powell, R., (2014) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

### Citation

Powell, R., Pepper, M. & Hancock, N. (2014) An Australian republic? Attenders' attitudes, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 14022. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.



## Aboriginal Issues - Attenders' Views

### Reconciling Australia?

According to the 2006 Census, Aboriginal Australians make up 2.5% of the population. Aboriginal Australians are the nation's 'first peoples', yet they continue to lag behind the majority of non-Indigenous Australians on many social, health and economic indicators<sup>1</sup>. Views on how to improve this situation, and how to empower Aboriginal Australians, have altered over time. Governments have increasingly taken up the mantle of attempting to effect change through actions such as the 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Response, the symbolism of the 'Sorry' apology, embracing the Closing the Gap campaign, and the current Stronger Futures legislation. What are the views of church attenders to this vital issue in Australian life? In late 2011 as a part of the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders were asked the following question:

*How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the situation of Aboriginal people in Australia?*

1. *The churches should more actively promote the process of reconciliation with Aboriginal people*
2. *Injustices towards Aboriginal people are now all in the past*
3. *Aboriginal people's level of disadvantage justifies extra government assistance*

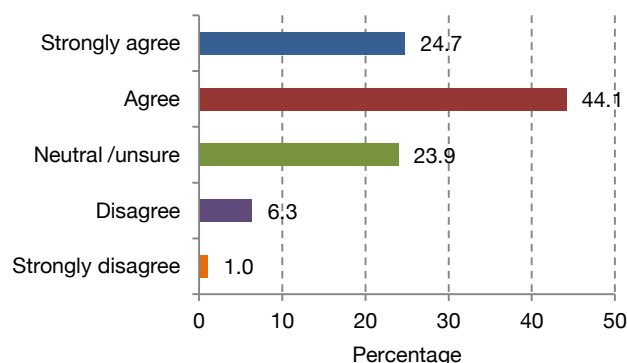
### Overall findings

Strong support exists for churches to promote reconciliation with 7/10 attenders (69%) believing this should be part of church life. Only 7% disagreed with this statement (see Figure 1).

Almost half (48%) of attenders believed the government should do more to assist disadvantaged Aboriginal people, 32% were unsure, and 21% disagreed.

<sup>1</sup> Face The Facts: Some Questions And Answers About Indigenous Peoples, Migrants And Refugees And Asylum Seekers, Australian Human Rights Commission, 2012

**Figure 1: Churches should promote reconciliation**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,407).

Almost half (45%) of attenders disagreed with the idea that injustices towards Aboriginal people are now all in the past, while 31% agreed and 24% were unsure.

Taken together, these results indicate that there is a proportion of people who are supportive of reconciliation but who do not think that injustices still exist (29% of people who were supportive of reconciliation) or who do not think that extra government assistance is required (13% of people who were supportive of reconciliation). Believing that injustice remains usually meant support for extra government assistance (64% of those who believed that injustice remained agreed that extra assistance was required).

### Demographics

There were some minor differences between age groups in terms of views about reconciliation, with attenders aged 80+ most supportive of the churches promoting reconciliation (86% in agreement with the proposition, compared with 67% of younger attenders). Women were also somewhat more likely to support this than men (71% of women versus 64% of men). There was a consistent difference in views across all three survey questions with respect to education (see Table 1). In comparison to attenders with less formal education, people with a tertiary degree were more supportive of the churches promoting reconciliation

(73% versus 66%) and of extra government assistance (61% versus 41%). Tertiary educated churchgoers were also less likely than others to agree that aboriginal injustices were all in the past (21% versus 36%).

**Table 1: Attenders' views on Aboriginal issues by education**

	Education		
	School	Trade cert/ diploma	Degree
<b>Should promote reconciliation</b>			
Agree	67	66	73
Neutral/unsure	26	26	21
Disagree	7	8	7
<b>Injustices are in the past</b>			
Agree	38	32	21
Neutral/unsure	26	28	19
Disagree	37	40	60
<b>Extra assistance justified</b>			
Agree	41	41	61
Neutral/unsure	35	37	24
Disagree	24	23	15

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (N=1,360 to 1,387)

## Church life

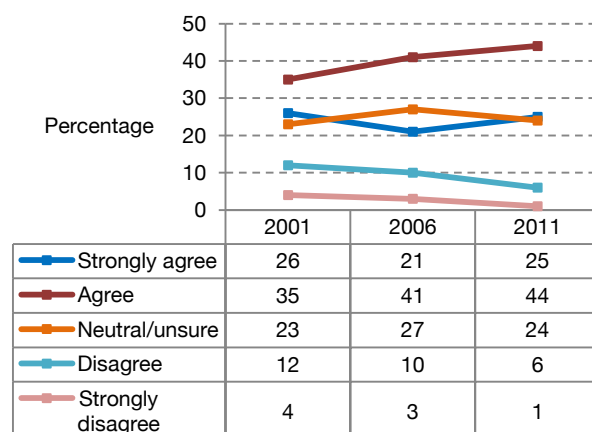
Views about Aboriginal issues did not vary greatly by denomination. However, there was a difference in views about reconciliation by frequency of devotional practice, with people who hardly ever or never spent time in private devotional activity less likely than other attenders to agree that churches should promote reconciliation (49% versus 70%).

## Change over time

The survey question on whether '*The churches should more actively promote the process of reconciliation with Aboriginal people*' was also asked in 2006 and 2001, allowing for a look at trends over time (see Figure 2).

Interestingly, the proportion of attenders who strongly agreed with this statement was highest in 2001, with 26% of attenders strongly agreeing that the churches should actively promote reconciliation with Aboriginal people. However, combining those who agree or strongly agree shows an increase over time – 69% of attenders either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement in 2011, compared to 62% in 2006 and 61% in 2001. Similarly, the rate of disagreement with churches promoting reconciliation has decreased over time (from 16% in 2001, to 13% in 2006 and to 7% in 2011).

**Figure 2: Churches should promote reconciliation, 2001-2011**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,407), 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey J (n=2382), 2001 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N (n=2183).

## Summary

Strong support exists for churches to promote reconciliation with Aboriginal people. Almost half of attenders believed the government should do more to assist disadvantaged Aboriginal people, and that injustices against Aboriginal people are not all in the past.

## Data sources

Castle, K., (2001) [computer file], 2001 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Castle, K., (2006) [computer file], 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey J. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Powell, R., (2014) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

## Citation

Powell, R., Pepper, M., & Bevis, S. (2014) Aboriginal issues – Attenders' views, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 14019. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.



## Church attenders' views of immigrants

### Strengthening Australia

Migration, the largest component of Australia's population growth, is caught up in the identity of the nation. It strengthens Australia's workforce, economy, and humanitarian obligations. Almost half of Australia's population were either born overseas or have a migrant parent, according to the 2011 Census of Population and Housing. Furthermore, almost two thirds of Australians think that migration from a diverse range of countries makes Australia stronger<sup>1</sup>.

How do church attenders view immigrants and their impact on Australian society? In late 2011 as a part of the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders were asked the following questions:

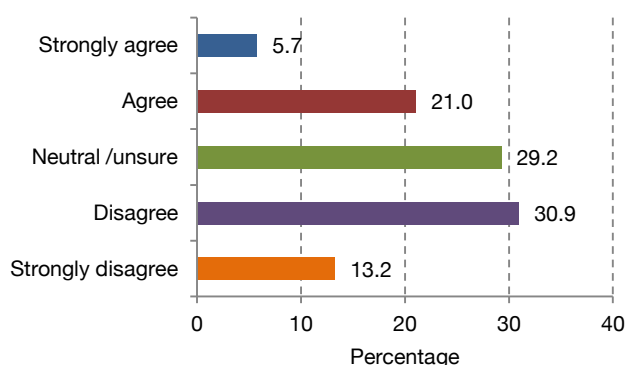
***How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (Mark one on EACH line)***

*Immigrants increase crime rates*

*Immigrants improve Australian society by bringing in new ideas and cultures*

### Overall results

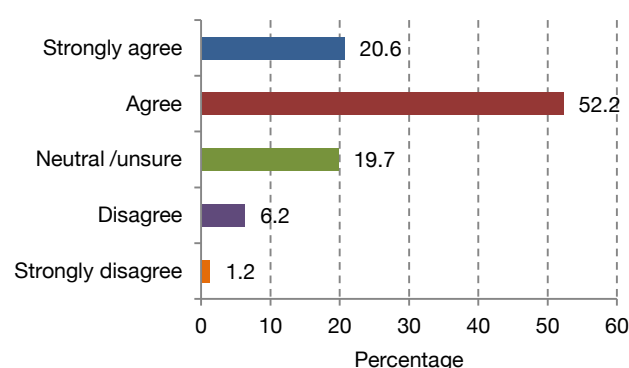
**Figure 1: Immigrants increase crime rates**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,389).

As shown in Figure 1, more church attenders disagreed than agreed with the statement that immigrants increase crime rates (44% vs. 27%). A large proportion of attenders indicated they were 'neutral/unsure' about the statement, perhaps because the question had an objective quality despite also measuring an attitude, and these attenders did not know the answer.

**Figure 2: Immigrants improve Australian society**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,408).

The vast majority (73%) of church attenders agreed or strongly agreed that immigrants improve Australian society (see Figure 2). This suggests that the underlying attitude towards immigrants among most church attenders is a positive one. Although the proportion of attenders who were neutral/unsure was again large, those who disagreed (6%) or strongly disagreed (1%) were in the clear minority.

### Demographics

The likelihood of attenders agreeing that immigrants increase crime rates seems to increase with age, with 17% of 15-29 year olds agreeing or strongly agreeing, compared with 40% of those 70 years or older. Different age groups did not differ significantly on whether they thought immigrants improve Australian society. This suggests that some older attenders hold negative and positive attitudes towards migrants simultaneously.

Attenders' attitudes towards immigrants did not differ significantly by gender; males and females were similar in their responses to the statements above.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/immigration-update/australian-migration-trends-2011-12-glance.pdf>

Those attenders with a university education were much less likely to agree that immigrants increase crime rates, with 13% agreeing compared with 34% (on average) of those with a lower education (see Table 1). They were also more likely to agree that immigrants improve Australian society, with 85% thinking so compared with 73% of those with a trade certificate and 63% with school as their highest education.

**Table 1: Attitudes towards immigrants by education**

	Education		
	School	Trade cert/ diploma	Degree
<b>Increase crime rates</b>			
	Percentage		
Agree/Strongly agree	36	31	13
Neutral/unsure	31	33	25
Disagree/Strongly disagree	34	36	63
<b>Improve Australian society</b>			
Agree/Strongly agree	63	73	85
Neutral/unsure	25	21	12
Disagree/Strongly disagree	12	7	2

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,372 to 1,388)

Out of the different types of attenders, visitors were the most likely to agree (83%) and least likely to disagree (3%) that immigrants improve Australian society. Newcomers to church life in the past 5 years had the lowest proportion of agreement (66%), and were the most ambivalent (28% who were neutral/unsure). For long-term attenders (more than 5 years at their church), 72% agreed and 8% disagreed that immigrants improve Australian society. There were no significant differences between attender types in how they answered the question on immigrants and crime.

**Table 2: Immigrants improve society by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
Percentage							
Strongly agree	25	9	23	15	26	14	14
Agree	49	52	55	51	49	48	52
Neutral/unsure	19	28	16	22	20	30	23
Disagree	5	9	6	12	2	8	11
Strongly disagree	2	2	1	0	3	0	0

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,408)

Catholic attenders were the most likely to agree or strongly agree that immigrants improve society (78%), not surprisingly given the large proportion of Catholics in Australia who are immigrants. Baptist/Churches of Christ (61%) and the Uniting Church (62%) were the least likely to agree or strongly agree. Denominations

did not differ significantly in their opinions on whether immigrants increase crime rates.

## Summary

With migrants to Australia making up a key element of Australian life, how other citizens and immigrants themselves view and accept (other) immigrants is of great importance. While a vast majority of church goers agree that Australian society is improved by the new ideas and cultures that immigrants bring, a majority also either agree that immigrants increase crime rates, or don't know whether they do or not.

## Data sources

Powell, R., (2014) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

## Citation

Powell, R., Pepper, M., Hancock, N. (2014) Church attenders' views of immigrants, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 14016. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.

## Church attenders' views on defence spending

Each year a portion of the Australian federal budget is allocated to defence, with the aims of ensuring national security and protecting shared interests with Australia's allies. In 2011/2012, when the National Church Life Survey (NCLS) was conducted, defence spending was estimated at \$26.3 billion.<sup>1</sup> In terms of public opinion, it has been claimed in recent years that "support for more defence spending has dropped to its lowest level since the end of the Cold War"<sup>2</sup>, as fewer Australians perceive a security threat to the country. Although Australian Electoral Study results support this claim (with the percent of Australians in favour of higher spending in decline since 2001), it is still a position held by many. In 2010, 45% of Australians surveyed thought the government should spend more on defence, compared to 10% who thought it should spend less and 45% who thought spending was about right<sup>3</sup>.

What do Australian church attenders think in relation to defence spending? In late 2011 as a part of the 2011 NCLS, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders were asked the following question:

**Do you think that the government should spend more or less on defence?**

- ☐ Spend much more
- ☐ Spend some more
- ☐ About right at present
- ☐ Spend less
- ☐ Spend a lot less

### Overall results

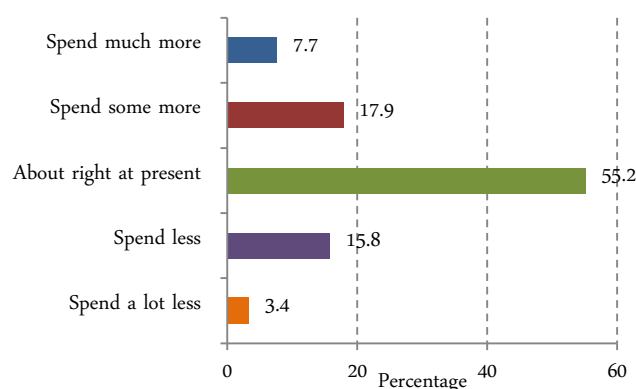
As shown in Figure 1, more than half (55%) of the attenders who answered this question thought that government spending on defence was "about right at present". It is possible that this option was also chosen by attenders who felt they didn't have enough

knowledge on the issues to make an informed selection.

Of the attenders who weren't content with the current level of defence spending, the majority wanted spending to increase. Over a quarter (26%) of all attenders thought the government should be spending more, with 18% selecting "some more" and 8% "much more". In contrast, almost one in five attenders (19%) thought less or much less should be spent on defence.

Comparing these results with those from the 2010 Australian Electoral Study mentioned earlier, church attenders as a whole were less likely to advocate increased spending on defence than the wider Australian population (26% vs. 45%). Correspondingly, higher proportions of attenders thought the government should spend less (19% vs. 10%), and that spending was about right at present (55% vs. 45%).

**Figure 1: Attender views on government defence spending**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,383).

### Demographics

Attenders were found to differ somewhat in their views on defence spending depending on their age (see Table 1). The oldest attenders were most likely to advocate increased spending, with 32% of 70 plus year olds thinking the government should spend more. Attenders aged between 30 and 49 were the most likely age group to select "about right at present" (with about six out of 10 choosing this option), and were the least likely age group to support increased spending.

1 Parliament of Australia, Department of Parliamentary Services, Budget Review 2012-2013, Research Paper no. 9, 2011-2012.  
 2 Australian Strategic Policy Institute (2008) Special Report on *Public Opinion in Australia towards Defence, Security and Terrorism*, Issue 16  
 3 McAllister, I., & Cameron, S. (2014) *Trends in Australian Political Opinion: Results from the Australian Electoral Study, 1987-2013*, ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences.

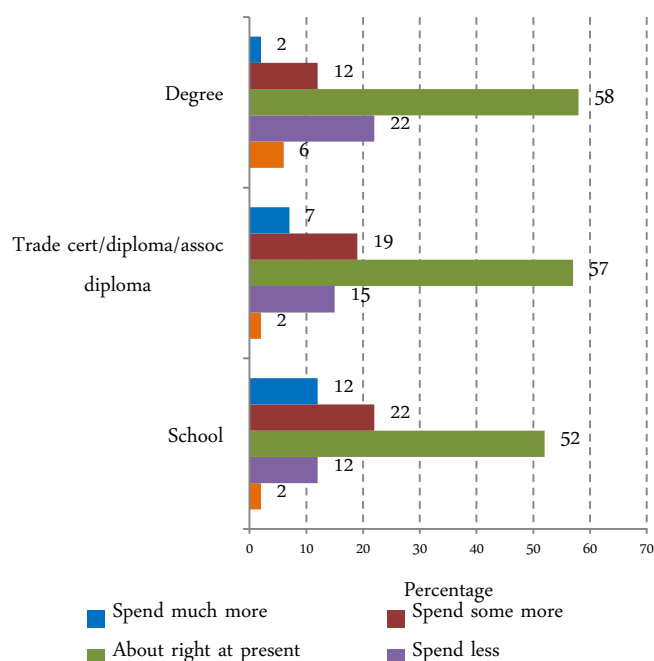
**Table 1: Views on defence spending by age**

	15-29 yrs	30-49 yrs	50-69 yrs	70+ yrs
	Percentage			
<b>Much more</b>	6	6	7	12
<b>Some more</b>	19	13	19	20
<b>About right</b>	58	61	53	49
<b>Less</b>	14	19	15	16
<b>A lot less</b>	2	2	5	3

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,376).

As shown in Figure 2, attenders with no post-school qualifications were more likely to support increased defence spending (34%) than those with either a trade certificate, diploma or associate diploma (26%) or a university degree (14%). Attenders with a degree were the most likely to think the government should be spending less on defence (28% compared to 15% of other attenders).

**Figure 2: Views on defence spending by education**



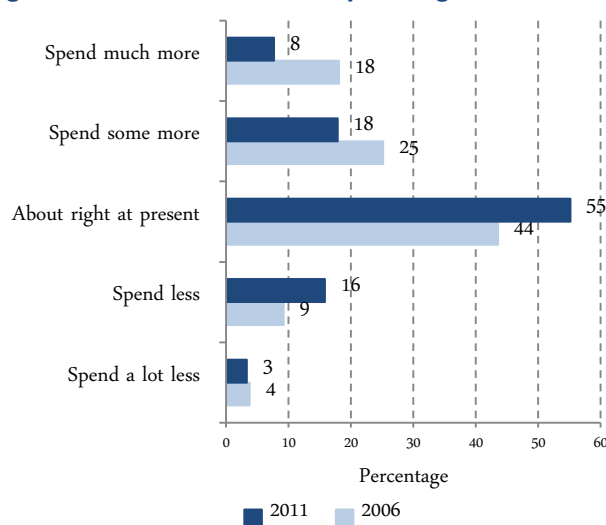
Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,366).

No significant differences in attitude were found based on attenders' gender, frequency of attendance, frequency of private devotions, or denomination.

## Change over time

Attenders in 2011 were significantly less likely to think the government should spend more on defence than attenders who were asked the same question in the 2006 NCLS (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Views on defence spending 2006 vs 2011**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,383), 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey J (n=2,283).

## Summary

The majority of Australian church attenders thought the government's spending on defence was about right at present. The remaining attenders were more likely to advocate increased rather than decreased spending on defence, although the proportion in favour of more spending had decreased between 2006 and 2011. These findings varied according to attenders' age and education. Compared to the wider community, Australian church attenders were less likely to support increased government spending.

## Data sources

Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Castle, K., (2006) [computer file], 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey J. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

## Citation

Pepper, M. Hancock, N., & Powell, R. (2015) Church attenders' views on defence spending, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 15001. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.

## Churches' role in peacemaking

Many churches worldwide have a long history of opposing wars, conflicts and violence, and the role often played by churches in promoting peace continues today. For countries in the midst of war, this may be seen through local churches working to broker peace between hostile communities or bring humanitarian relief to civilians, or through prominent church figures taking a public stand against the conflict at hand. For countries more removed from armed conflict, such as Australia, the peacemaking role of churches can often take on a different form.

A number of church bodies or Christian organisations in Australia are dedicated to promoting peace throughout the world, such as the National Council of Churches in Australia's 'Act for Peace', Pax Christi Australia and UnitingJustice. Their work includes informing the public of world conflicts and events, lobbying the government to support peacemaking efforts or bodies (such as the United Nations), and providing humanitarian aid to war-torn areas overseas.

What do Australian church attenders think about the role their churches should play in peacemaking? In late 2011 as a part of the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders were asked the following question:

**Do you agree or disagree: 'The churches should more actively promote non-violent alternatives to armed conflict'?**

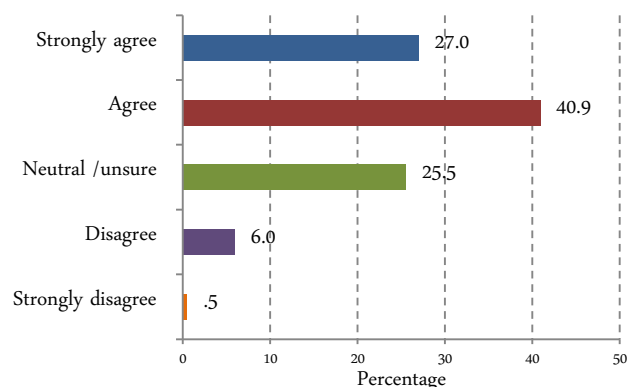
- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral /unsure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

### Overall results

As shown in Figure 1, most attenders agreed or strongly agreed that churches should more actively promote non-violent alternatives to armed conflict (68%). Only 7% disagreed or strongly disagreed, while about one in four attenders (26%) remained neutral or unsure. This group of attenders may include those who

were unaware of churches' current peacemaking efforts, and so had difficulty answering the question.

**Figure 1: Views on church role in peacemaking**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,379).

### Demographics

Statistically significant differences in how this question was answered were found for attenders of different ages. As seen in Table 1, younger attenders were more likely to be neutral or unsure about whether churches should more actively promote peacemaking, with 31% of 15-29 year olds and 29% of 30-49 year olds selecting this option. Respondents aged 70 and over were the most likely to disagree with churches promoting peace more actively. Yet for every age group, those who disagreed or strongly disagreed were a minority, ranging from 4 to 11%.

**Table 1: Views on church role in peacemaking by age**

	15-29 yrs	30-49 yrs	50-69 yrs	70+ yrs
	Percentage			
Strongly agree	21	24	31	28
Agree	43	43	39	40
Neutral/unsure	31	29	23	22
Disagree	4	4	6	10
Strongly disagree	1	0	0	1

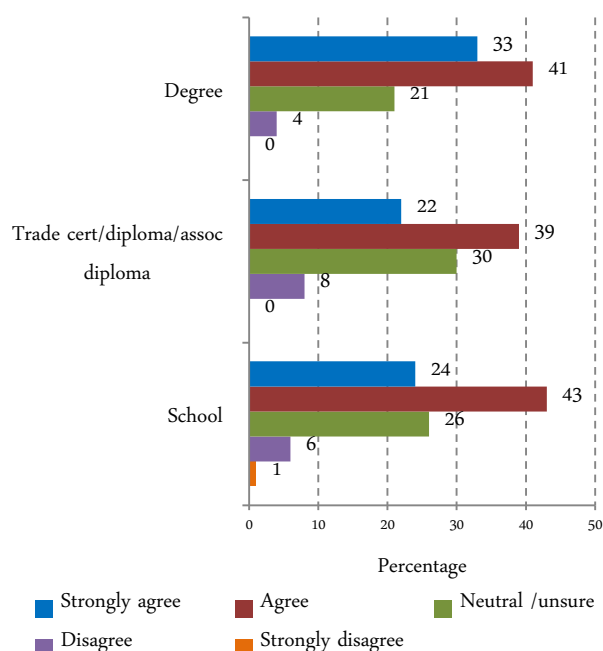
Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey Nv2 (n=1,371).

Attenders' views also differed significantly according to their level of education. Those with a university degree indicated the highest level of agreement that churches



should more actively promote non-violent alternatives, with almost three quarters (74%) who agreed (see Figure 2). This compares with 61% of attenders with a trade certificate or diploma and 67% of attenders with schooling only. Levels of neutrality or uncertainty were highest among attenders with a trade certificate or diploma (30%).

**Figure 2: Views on church role in peacemaking by education**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,363).

In terms of gender, similar proportions of men and women were in favour of increased peacemaking action by churches. However, men were a little more likely to disagree or strongly disagree with the question (9% vs. 5% of women), and women were more likely to be neutral or unsure (27% vs. 23% of men).

Attenders did not differ significantly in their views according to how often they attended church or their level of private devotional activity.

## Denominational differences

All denominations were much more likely to agree that churches should more actively promote non-violent alternatives to armed conflict than disagree (see Table 2). Catholic (71%), Uniting (70%) and Anglican (69%) attenders were the most likely to be in favour of increased action. Disagreement was low across all

denominational groups, but was lowest among Pentecostal, Catholic and Uniting Church attenders. Attenders from Pentecostal churches were the most likely group to be neutral or unsure about this issue (31%). Given the earlier finding that young attenders were more likely to select 'neutral/unsure', this result may be due to the higher proportion of young people found in Pentecostal churches.

**Table 2: Views on church role in peacemaking by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist / Church -es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
	Percentage						
Strongly agree	32	25	29	22	23	28	21
Agree	37	37	43	37	42	41	39
Neutral/unsure	22	27	24	28	31	25	29
Disagree	8	9	5	6	4	5	10
Strongly disagree	1	1	0	5	0	0	0

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,379).

## Summary

The majority of Australian church attenders held the view that churches should more actively promote non-violent alternatives to armed conflict. This view was particularly prevalent among attenders with a university degree, or who attended Catholic, Uniting or Anglican churches. Younger attenders and women were more likely to be neutral or unsure about this issue, while older attenders and men were a little more likely to disagree. Yet across all demographic and denominational groups, a clear majority of attenders were in favour of churches increasing their role as peacemakers.

## Data sources

Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

## Citation

Hancock, N., Pepper, M. & Powell, R. (2014) Churches' role in peacemaking, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 15002. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.



## **What do Mass attenders believe? Contemporary cultural change and the acceptance of key catholic beliefs and moral teachings by Australian Mass attenders**

### ***Abstract***

Have the cultural changes of the last fifty years or so influenced the way that Australia's most active Catholics think about key Catholic beliefs and moral teachings? In this article, I will search for evidence of such an influence by examining responses from Mass attenders to selected questions in the 2011 National Church Life Survey. I will note especially the extent to which respondents' demographic characteristics are related to the way they answered those questions, and I will also examine how responses to those questions have varied over successive surveys, at five-yearly intervals, from 1996 to 2011.

### ***Citation***

Dixon, R. (2013). What do mass attenders believe? Contemporary cultural change and the acceptance of key Catholic beliefs and moral teachings by Australian mass attenders. *Australasian Catholic Record*, 90(4), 439-458.

### ***Availability***

Visit the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Pastoral Research Office website: [www.pro.catholic.org.au](http://www.pro.catholic.org.au)

## Mixed results for orthodoxy: the impact of contemporary cultural change on the acceptance of key Catholic beliefs and moral teachings by Australian Mass attenders

### Abstract

What has been the effect, if any, of the cultural changes of the last fifty years or so on the beliefs and moral attitudes of Catholic church attenders in Australia? This question arose for me when I read Gerald Rose's (2013) fine study of how Churches of Christ ministers in Australia have adapted to cultural change in the way they lead their congregations. Have the same changes influences the way that the most active Catholics think about key Catholic beliefs and moral attitudes? In order to examine that question, I will look at responses from Mass-attending Catholics to selected items in the 2011 National Church Life Survey, noting especially the extent to which respondents' demographic characteristics are related to the way they answer these questions and seeking other explanatory variables as well. I will also examine the extent to which the responses to these items have varied over successive surveys, at five-year intervals, from 1996 to 2011.

### Citation

Dixon, R. (2013). Mixed results for orthodoxy: The impact of contemporary cultural change on the acceptance of key Catholic beliefs and moral teachings by Australian mass attenders. In Giordan, G., & Swatos, W. (Eds.), *Testing pluralism: Globalizing belief, localizing gods* (pp. 11-37). Leiden: Brill.

### Availability

Visit the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Pastoral Research Office website: [www.pro.catholic.org.au](http://www.pro.catholic.org.au)

# Spirituality and Wellbeing

## Spirituality and Wellbeing

The churches and well-being: Perspectives from the Australian National Church Life Survey

Methodological overview of the study of wellbeing through the National Church Life Survey

Subjective wellbeing, religious involvement and psychological type among Australian churchgoers

Subjective well-being and psychological type among Australian clergy

Volunteering, religiosity and well-being: Interrelationships among Australian churchgoers

Interacting religious orientations and personal well-being among Australian Church leaders

Religion, culture, motivation, and achievement

## The churches and well-being: Perspectives from the Australian National Church Life Survey

### Abstract

Australia is a nation with high levels of recorded well-being. This paper introduces a collection of papers which are concerned with the intersections between well-being and religion in an Australian context. The research is conducted on a religious population, namely Christian church attenders and local church leaders (both clergy and lay) in congregations in the Australian National Church Life Surveys (NCLS), perhaps the largest database on church life in the world. The NCLS covers more than 20 Protestant and Catholic denominations. Each survey wave has collected responses from hundreds of thousands of individual church attenders in thousands of local churches. To frame the research, we define subjective well-being as an aspect of mental health and establish the positive relationship that has been found with religion. Some features of the Australian cultural context are also provided as background. The paper then offers a brief synopsis of articles in the collection. They include a methodological overview, and studies of links between volunteering, psychological type, religious orientation and well-being, as well as work engagement among clergy.

### Citation

Powell, R., & Robbins., M. (2015). The churches and well-being: Perspectives from the Australian National Church Life Survey. *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 18(1):1-7, DOI: 10.1080/13674676.2015.1011370.

### Availability

Visit the journal website: <http://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/9cCChYrWm4igJ7KWkK8i/full>

## Methodological overview of the study of wellbeing through the National Church Life Survey

### Abstract

All papers in this special edition of *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* utilise data sets from the 2011 round of the Australian National Church Life Survey (NCLS). This paper presents a methodological overview of the NCLS, including data collection methods, survey instruments and demographic descriptions of church attender and leader data sets. The data sets have good national coverage and denominational diversity, although Pentecostals are under-represented. The data sets may be further affected by self-selection by participating churches; however, the content of the surveys is unlikely to have triggered self-selection biases at the level of individuals. The paper also provides details concerning the measurement of quality of life in the present collection, concentrating on the Personal Well-being Index (PWI) which is featured in four of the five empirical papers. Mean PWI scores for churchgoers and leaders were similar to the Australian populace at large, although there was greater variability among churchgoers. The domain of spirituality/religion makes a significant contribution to well-being in these Australian Christian sub-populations.

### Citation

Pepper, M., Sterland, S., & Powell, R. (2015). Methodological overview of the study of wellbeing through the National Church Life Survey. *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 18(1):8-19, DOI: 10.1080/13674676.2015.1009717.

### Availability

Visit the journal website: <http://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/QBPVWBDzykYbb4fciCuh/full>

## Subjective wellbeing, religious involvement and psychological type among Australian churchgoers

### Abstract

Personality and religiosity have consistently been found to be related to subjective well-being. However, the relative impact of these factors has not been clear. This quantitative study of 1855 church attenders from 20 denominations in the 2011 Australian National Church Life Survey found that their psychological type profile confirmed patterns found in other church-going populations, with high proportions of introverts, sensing types, feeling types, and judging types. Results also showed that positive relationships were found between extraversion and well-being, but not for the predominant psychological types (sensing and judging). Religiousness and well-being were also positively related; however, denominational affiliation made no difference. In terms of the relative contribution of psychological type and religiosity to well-being, the results confirmed that both made a similar unique and significant contribution. It was concluded that both factors should be taken into account.

### Citation

Powell, R., & Pepper, M. (2015). Subjective wellbeing, religious involvement and psychological type among Australian churchgoers. *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 18(1):33-46, DOI: 10.1080/13674676.2014.1003170.

### Availability

Visit the journal website: <http://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/w9KNi5WyWTfGP3ZAXaVz/full>



## Subjective wellbeing and psychological type among Australian clergy

### Abstract

A sample of 677 ordained clergy in Australia participated in the 2011 National Church Life Survey completing the Leaders Survey 2 questionnaire that included the Francis Psychological Type Scales (FPTS), an operationalisation of psychological type theory and the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI), an operationalisation of subjective well-being. The data demonstrate good reliability for the FPTS and the PWI among this sample. The ordained clergy in Australia report a preference for introversion (56%), sensing (59%), feeling (54%), and judging (81%). Exploration of the relationship between psychological type and well-being demonstrates that extraverts and judging types are significantly more likely to record higher levels of well-being. The implications of these findings are discussed.

### Citation

Robbins, M., & Hancock, N. (2015). Subjective wellbeing and psychological type among Australian clergy. *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 18(1):47-56, DOI: 10.1080/13674676.2014.1003171.

### Availability

Visit the journal website: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13674676.2014.1003171#abstract>

## Volunteering, religiosity and well-being: Interrelationships among Australian churchgoers

### Abstract

Existing research has mostly found positive, but sometimes inconclusive and contradictory, results about the relationships between volunteering and well-being, as well as between church attendance and volunteering. This paper aims to clarify how volunteering and religious beliefs and practices are related to well-being among Christian churchgoers. Utilising data from the 2011 Australian National Church Life Survey (NCLS), volunteering was found to partially mediate the positive relationship between religiosity and well-being (life satisfaction), but only for some denominational groupings. Part of the reason why church attenders with high religiosity have higher well-being is because they are more likely to volunteer. The implications of these findings are discussed within the context of economic, managerial, public health and religious parameters.

### Citation

Mollitor, C., Hancock, N., & Pepper, M. (2015). Volunteering, religiosity and well-being: Interrelationships among Australian churchgoers. *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 18(1):20-32, DOI: 10.1080/13674676.2014.1003169.

### Availability

Visit the journal website: <http://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/Kv9KcBifH9St9ZPeZfXv/full>

## Interacting religious orientations and personal well-being among Australian Church leaders

### Abstract

This study examines the relationship between religious orientation and personal well-being (PWB) among 1289 Australian church leaders. The study is of interest because although religion and religiousness in general have been found to be positive contributors to important variables (such as well-being and satisfaction with life), particular orientations towards religion, and their interaction, may moderate the positive effects of religion on these variables. In light of this observation, the paper examined the Quest and Intrinsic religious orientations in relation to PWB, with the aim of clarifying the interactive effect of these two orientations. Specifically, the study hypothesised that there would be a negative relationship between questing and satisfaction with life, but that this negative relationship would be moderated by Intrinsic religious orientation. Using Structural Equation Modelling to test this hypothesis with a large data set and robust measures, results of the study indicated that intrinsic orientation did indeed moderate a negative relationship between questing and satisfaction with life (from  $-.44$  to  $-.34$ ). However, the negative relationship between questing and PWB remained statistically significant suggesting that Intrinsic Orientation may not be a strong moderator of the negative effects of questing. The study makes a substantial empirical, and nuanced theoretical, contribution to the literature concerning the effects of religious orientations.

### Citation

Dowson, M. & Miner, M. (2015). Interacting religious orientations and personal well-being among Australian Church leaders. *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 18(1):72-84 DOI: 10.1080/13674676.2014.1003167.

### Availability

Visit the journal website: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13674676.2014.1003167>

## Religion, Culture, Motivation, and Achievement

### Abstract

Our chief hypothesis is that religion can provide additional meaning to, and hence additional motivation for, achievement and achievement strivings. However, this “meaning” effect is dependent upon the salience of religion in any given setting, context or culture. Thus, in settings, contexts or cultures (such as those strongly influenced by secularization) where religion has become marginalized, the positive effect of religion on academic motivation and achievement would be expected to be reduced or perhaps even reversed. Our second set of analyses demonstrated how this situation can be the case, whilst also indicating that different hypotheses may account more-or-less successfully for relationships between religiosity and educational attainment across cultural groups.

### Citation

Dowson, M., & Miner, M. (2013). Religion, culture, motivation, and achievement. In Liem, G., & Bernardo, A. (Eds.), *Advancing Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Educational Psychology: A Festschrift for Dennis M. McInerney* (pp. 87-106). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

### Availability

Visit the publisher's website: [www.infoagepub.com](http://www.infoagepub.com)

# Resources for Local Churches

## Resources for Local Churches

Church Life Pack

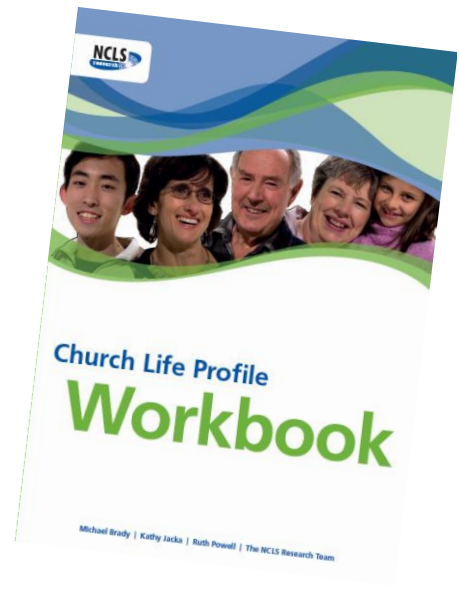
Community Connections Pack for churches

## Church Life Pack

A Church Life Survey (CLS) is a practical tool that helps your church to assess the core qualities of church life and the impact of changes over time. It can be conducted at any time that suits your church.

A Church Life Pack contains:

- Church Life Profile - A unique 28 page full colour report based on your survey responses. Your profile will help you assess the qualities of your church's life.
- 'Enriching Church Life' book - for church leaders and attenders who want to enhance the vitality of the ministries they offer.
- Workbook - Includes worksheets and notes to help guide you through the process.



### Citation

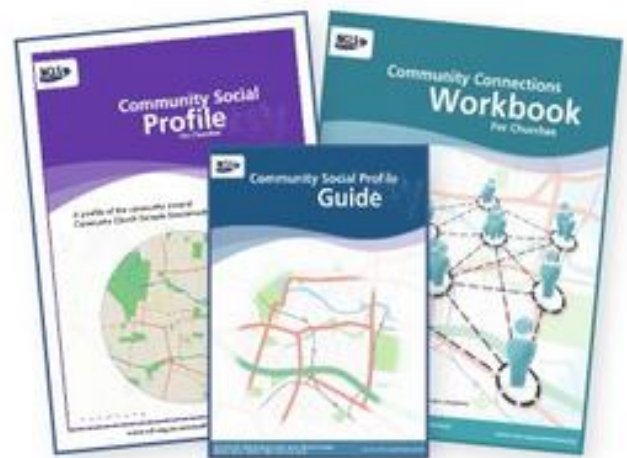
Brady, M., Jacka, K., & Powell, R. (2012). *Church Life Profile Workbook*. Adelaide, SA: Mirrabooka Press.

### Availability

Visit the NCLS website for more details: [www.ncls.org.au](http://www.ncls.org.au)

## Community Connections Pack for churches

The Community Connections Pack has been specially prepared for churches. It contains a social profile of your community based on national Census information. It is uniquely designed to include the people living in the local community around your church building. You can nominate an address to customise it to any area you wish.



### Citation

Brady, M., Kerr, K., & Powell, R. (2014). *Community Connections Workbook*. Adelaide, SA: Mirrabooka Press.

### Availability

Visit the NCLS website for more details: [www.ncls.org.au](http://www.ncls.org.au)



# Commissioned Reports

## Commissioned reports

Anderson, P., Moffitt, A., Mollenhauer, J., McDonald, K., & Lin, S. (2013). Different Faces Changing Faces. Connecting with the Cultures in the Sydney Diocese. Commissioned report for the Anglican Diocese of Sydney.

Bellamy, J., & Brackenbury, S. (2013). ANGLICARE Marketing Issues: Data from the 2011 National Church Life Survey. Commissioned report for Anglicare Sydney.

Bellamy, J., & Moffitt, A. (2012). NCLS 2011 Initial Findings. Anglican Diocese of Sydney. Commissioned report for the Anglican Diocese of Sydney.

Bellamy, J. (2013). Changes in Staffing Structures of Churches in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney. Commissioned report for the Anglican Diocese of Sydney.

Bellamy, J. (2013). Diocesan Mission Indicators Anglican Diocese of Sydney. Commissioned report for the Anglican Diocese of Sydney.

Bellamy, J., Brackenbury, S., Bodiam, T., & Kemp, B. (2013). ANGLICARE Parish Partnerships: Data from the 2011 National Church Life Survey. Commissioned report for Anglicare Sydney.

Bellamy, J., Iohara, S., Bodiam, T., & Kemp, B. (2013). Becoming a Christian: A report from the 2011 National Church Life Survey for the Anglican Diocese of Sydney. Commissioned report for the Anglican Diocese of Sydney.

Bellamy, J., Kemp, B., & Beilharz, T. (2013). Correlations between Church Vitality and Selected Demographics in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney: A report from the 2011 National Church Life Survey. Commissioned report for the Anglican Diocese of Sydney.

Hancock, N., & Pepper, M. (2015) Baptist children: Findings from the 2011 NCLS Children's Survey. NCLS Commissioned Report. Sydney: NCLS Research.

Kemp, B., & Bellamy, J. (2013). Correlates of Youth Group Size and Growth in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney: National Church Life Survey (NCLS) data. Commissioned report for the Anglican Diocese of Sydney.

Kemp, B., & Bellamy, J. (2013). Inner West Mission Area: NCLS and Census Profiles. Commissioned report for the Anglican Diocese of Sydney.

Kemp, B., & Bellamy, J. (2013). Changes in Church Staff Numbers and Church Attendance Growth (updated with 2011 NCLS data). Commissioned report for the Anglican Diocese of Sydney.

Moffitt, A., & Bellamy, J. (2012). Contemporary Approaches to Evangelism in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney. Commissioned report for the Anglican Diocese of Sydney.

Mollenhauer, J., & Bellamy, J. (2012). Diocesan Mission and Future Directions: Data from 2011 National Church Life Survey. Commissioned report for the Anglican Diocese of Sydney.

Pepper, M., Sterland, S. & Powell, R. (2015). Relationships between church size and church vitality for Baptist churches, NCLS Commissioned Report. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research, Australian Catholic University.

- Reid, S., & Dixon, R. (2013). Ecumenism and interfaith relations: What do Australian Mass attenders think? A report to the Australian Catholic Council for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations on questions included in the 2011 National Church Life Survey.
- Reid, S., & Dixon, R. (2013). Family planning: Practices of Australian Mass attenders. A report to Natural Fertility Australia on questions included in the 2011 National Church Life Survey.
- Reid, S., & Dixon, R. (2013). Mass attenders' responses to the clergy sexual abuse crisis. A report to the National Committee for Professional Standards on questions included in the 2011 National Church Life Survey.
- Reid, S., & Dixon, R. (2013). Public policy and voting: Attitudes & practices of Australian Mass attenders. A report to the ACBC Public Policy Director on questions included in the 2011 National Church Life Survey.
- Reid, S., & Dixon, R. (2013). Selected migrant and refugee issues: What do Australian Mass attenders think? A report to the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office on questions included in the 2011 National Church Life Survey.
- Reid, S., & Dixon, R. (2013). Selected moral issues: What do Australian Mass attenders think? A report to the Catholic Moral Theology Association on questions included in the 2011 National Church Life Survey.
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- Reid, S., & Dixon, R. (2013). The work of Caritas: Awareness and impressions of Australian Mass attenders. A report to Caritas on questions included in the 2011 National Church Life Survey.
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- Reid, S., Dixon, R., & McEvedy, S. (2013). Mass attenders' views of parish pastoral councils: A report to the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life questions included in the 2011 National Church Life Survey.
- Reid, S., Dixon, R., & McEvedy, S. (2013). World Youth Day: Participation by Australian Mass attenders. A report to the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life (Youth) on questions included in the 2011 National Church Life Survey.
- SPRU (2013). EEMuG Profiles for various parishes. Commissioned report for the Anglican Diocese of Sydney.
- Sterland, S., & Bellamy, J. (2012). National Church Life Survey 2011. Initial Results for Anglican Diocese of Sydney. Commissioned report for the Anglican Diocese of Sydney.