

The background of the image is a solid purple color. Overlaid on this background are numerous white, thin, wavy lines that form a pattern resembling topographic contour lines or a stylized wood grain. These lines flow across the entire frame, creating a sense of movement and depth. In the bottom right corner, the word "TABOR" is written in a bold, white, sans-serif typeface. The letter 'O' is replaced by a white circular icon containing a stylized mountain peak or a similar geometric shape.

**TABOR**





# **The State of Discipleship in South Australia REPORT**

**Primary Researcher - Stuart Devenish PhD**

**May 2018**

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## Appendix A MCCRINDLE REPORT

## Appendix B Annotated Bibliography

### **Abstract**

This research was undertaken by Dr Stuart Devenish (Director of Postgraduate Studies, School of MTC, Tabor), in March-August 2017. Its purpose was to (1) describe and assess the discipleship practices currently being utilized by 18 Christian congregations in South Australia; (2) provide a written report identifying the effectiveness (or otherwise) of discipleship in those settings, including measures for gauging how congregations define and practice discipleship; (3) critically evaluate the effectiveness of disciple-making programs in those churches; & (4) make recommendations – on the basis of findings generated from the research and stated in a formal Report – with a view to increasing the awareness and effectiveness of discipleship in participating churches, in order to assist ministry leaders and congregations to implement best-practice patterns of discipleship in the South Australian context. It is also hoped that insights obtained from those research carried out in South Australia, will also be of use to ministry leaders in other States and Territories in Australia. The Research Report was written up in April-May 2018.

### **A Word of Thanks:**

A piece of research such as this requires the cooperation and participation of a large number of people. I particularly want to thank the Pastors, Life Group members, and Online Cohort volunteers – who took the time and trouble to participate in this research.

It is my hope and prayer that you will find something challenging, inspiring and interesting in what you read here. May you continue to live as disciples of Jesus Christ, all your blessed lives.

Stuart Devenish, Tabor.

## 1. Commissioning Agency

The agency that commissioned this research was the Centre for Church Health, situated in Tabor's School of Ministry Theology & Culture [MTC], under the direction of Dr Aaron Chalmers. Dr Chalmers acts jointly as the Head of School MTC, and the Director for the Centre for Church Health. The Discipleship Research Project was designed as a major research project that marshals the resources of Tabor and its Centre for Church Health, in order to address an observed lack in discipleship practice and effectiveness in Christian congregations in South Australia.

## 2. Primary Researcher

The primary researcher for the Project is Dr Stuart Devenish, who serves as the Director of Postgraduate Studies, School of MTC. Stuart has extensive experience in qualitative research as follows.

**1. PhD Research.** Stuart's PhD dissertation entitled 'The Mind of Christ?: A Phenomenological Explication of Personal Transformation and Cosmic Revision in Christian Converts in Western Australia' (Edith Cowan University, 2001), made use of a phenomenological methodology in order to interpret transcripts from co-respondents in answer to the primary research question, "What is the primary experience of acquiring new religious knowing in the context of conversion; and what account may be given of the processes of change in the believer's perceptions of God, self and world following Christian conversion?" His experience in carrying out research was important for implementing this present research project.

**2. Youth Spirituality Report.** In 2010, Stuart acted as primary researcher in a significant research project in youth spirituality entitled, 'Discovery Pathway/Youth Spirituality Report', commissioned by The Salvation Army, Australia Eastern Territory. At the time, Stuart was Senior Lecturer in missiology and spirituality at Booth College, The Salvation Army, Sydney. The Report records the findings from extensive interviews and surveys undertaken among 150 young people between the ages of 17 and 25. As with the current research project, McCrindle Research – one of Australia's most prominent research agencies with expertise in demographic, cultural and sociological research – was commissioned to interpret key aspects of the data and to contribute to the findings from that research.

**3. Director of Postgraduate Studies at Tabor.** As Director of a Postgraduate Research Program in the School of Ministry, Theology and Culture at Tabor, Stuart oversees the learning and research experiences of the 30 +/- students who are enrolled in programs that require them to either prepare for research or actively engage in research at Masters or Doctoral levels. To that end, he teaches research design, methods, writing and ministry application to students. He is an experienced supervisor of research. He oversees other supervisors on Tabor's Register of Supervisors in the task of supervision of their allocated students, and acts as both examiner of internal and external theses, as well as overseeing examinations of students who produce theses in the postgraduate department which he directs.

### 3. Research Partner: McCrindle Research

McCrindle Research has a team of highly qualified and respected researchers.<sup>1</sup> McCrindle Research is a nationally recognised research agency, working with big name brands, large organisations and senior leaders – including Federal and State governments – in order to assist them to understand the social, economic and political environments in which they operate their business and services, by providing evidence based on of current statistics and best practice research in order to uncover emerging trends.

McCrindle Research was commissioned to develop and manage the online portal /access relating to a third cohort of survey respondents for this research. From data gathered from the online survey, the McCrindle team prepared a report entitled 'Insights into the Effectiveness of Congregational Discipleship: September 2017'. That Report represents an Appendix to this Research Report on the State of Discipleship in South Australia. Members of the McCrindle team who contributed to this Report were Sophie Renton and Annie Phillips.

### 4. Budget Allocation

A budget of \$10,000 was allocated by the Centre for Church Health over the 2 years 2017-2018. From that \$10,000, the expenditure breakdown was:

McCrindle Research fee	= \$ 6,000
Book Purchases	= \$ 2,000
Recording Equipment	= \$ 500
Travel and Ancillary Items	= \$ 1,500
TOTAL	\$10,000

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1. <http://www.mccrindle.com.au/>

## **5. Why the Research was Commissioned**

As a researcher across multiple disciplines of (a) pastoral ministry in practice; (b) a missiology of Western culture; & (c) Christian spirituality... Stuart has observed a noticeable decline in the size of Christian congregations, a decrease in the confidence of Christian speaking in the marketplace (including the media), and an erosion of religious vitality in individuals, groups and congregations. This is not a new observation. The National Church Life Survey has been tracking this kind of decline since its inception in the late 1980s.

What was needed was a clear diagnosis of the root-cause of decline, and applied research that paid specific attention to the question of discipleship in local churches, and its presence (or otherwise), and effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) in congregational settings. Why was it that churches were not growing, and in many cases losing numbers on an annual basis? Why are there so many people who have left our churches, and why can't we keep our children and young people in the faith? What steps are churches taking to make disciples – indirect obedience to Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28 – and what factors contribute to and act as blockages in Christians' desire to become and remain disciples of Jesus in the complexities and pressures of their 21st-century lives? These are the key questions which generated the initial impulse to undertake this research.

## **6. Significant Recent Comparable Studies**

At the present time, a significant amount of attention is being given to the topic of discipleship by Christian thinkers and practitioners around the globe. It is as if the Spirit is saying to the Churches that discipleship is a theme of fundamental import in the present moment.

As can be observed from the Bibliography provided as an Appendix to this Report, much of this attention to the question of discipleship is generated in the form of topical studies in the fields of biblical, theological, sociological, pastoral and spiritual formation studies. There is almost an overwhelming excess of literature in this area, requiring the reader to segregate the literature into its component parts for ease of access. But there are many fewer studies in the area of discipleship which have gone to the trouble of interviewing



people "on the ground" and finding out what is happening in real-life situations. Applied research in the field of discipleship is lacking. That is why this research has adopted an evidence-based approach, in order to obtain actual, "real world" measures of discipleship from the lived-experiences of Ministry leaders, Life Group members and worshipping Christians as a snapshot of discipleship in South Australia in 2017-18.

What follows is a description of 4 comparable studies to this study ... which provide touchstones and points of comparison for this research undertaken in South Australia.

**6.1 Barna Research, 'The State of Discipleship':<sup>2</sup>** This research was commissioned by the Navigators in the USA, and conducted by the Barna Research Group. It sought to define, measure and assess the state of Christian discipleship in the US. In order to do that, it employed a 4-phase strategy, in the form of (1) interviewing 36 leaders of Protestant and Catholic seminaries and Bible Colleges in December 2014-January 2015. (2) It undertook in-depth interviews with leaders of 30 congregations and 7 parachurch ministry groups, around the theme of discipleship, using open-ended survey questions in an online platform, in February 2015. (3) 2000 people who self-identified as Christians participated in an online and telephone survey conducted in March-April 2015, around the topic of discipleship. (4) A final phase of telephone interviews and online surveys of 833 Protestant senior pastors and congregational leaders was carried out in April-May 2015, whose ministries were associated in some way with both discipleship and spiritual growth. Those activities netted 615 interviews with senior pastors and an additional 218 interviews with church leaders whose focus was on Christian discipleship. The subsequent 140+ page Report offers a comprehensive analysis of the state of discipleship in the USA. It tracks a distracted culture (including Christians), who – in a consumer age – are preoccupied with 'self', and who by and large are not intentional about the way they live out their discipleship. There were 4 key findings from that research. First, there is general recognition in the Churches amongst pastors and leaders that churches as a whole are not doing a good job of making disciples, but they don't know what to do about it. Second, the study reveals that there is disagreement about what discipleship *is* and how best to define it – particularly in a culture which is preoccupied with personal freedoms and among a population who are intent on determining their own destinies. Third, many Christians expressed a desire to grow spiritually, but were overrun by busyness and apathy and a lack of guidance from their pastoral and spiritual leaders around how to grow into Christ, or any identifiable pathways or mechanisms that produce growth in one's discipleship ... or how that is transferred to a congregational setting. And finally, difficulties were experienced in locating suitable measurements of vitality, growth

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2. Shireen Hattingh, Lindsay Morton, and et al. "A Qualitative Analysis of Discipleship in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church: Responses to Global and Regional Survey." *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 12, no. 1/12, 2016: 156–70, 2015.

and maturation in discipleship which are likely to assist ministerial leaders in congregational settings to improve and increase spiritual vitality and discipleship in their emerging leaders and wider congregations.

## **6.2 Qualitative Research on Discipleship in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church:<sup>3</sup>**

In 2016, a research project was undertaken by six authors at Avondale College of Higher Education, in Cooranbong NSW. That research was commissioned by the South Pacific Division of the Seventh Day Adventist [SDA] Church in 2014. It is a direct response to the SDA Church's making discipleship a global mission priority in early the 2000s. As stated in the title, this is a regional survey of the effectiveness of discipleship in the SDA churches in Australia and the Pacific-region. As SDA author Russell Burrell states in the report:

We (the SDA) do a very good job of getting people onto the membership rolls and retaining them. However, discipleship... is deeper than agreeing to 28 cognitive truths and then sitting in a pew for the rest of one's life. [Discipleship] is a radical commitment to the whole life of the radical Jesus. Jesus' definition of disciple must form the basis for any discipleship plan your church develops.<sup>4</sup>

The research was implemented via telephone interviews, using 4 basic interview questions, with 40 participants, each interview taking 10-15 minutes in duration. The interviews took place over December 2014-February 2015, predominantly in Australia. Interview transcripts were processed through NVIVO software, in order to generate findings. The 4 primary research questions were: (1) Are you aware that your ministry leaders make use of a working definition of an SDA disciple of Jesus?; (2) how do you measure discipleship in your ministry context?; (3) are there currently discipleship resources available to you – and if so, which ones/do you have resources to develop/use?; (4) do you have any other comments you would like to add about discipleship in your ministry context?<sup>5</sup> Primary categories employed by the SDA International Office in terms of (1) church health; (2) counter-productive discipleship actions; (3) disciple's actions; & (4) effective communication ... were introduced into the interpretive schema.

There were 4 primary findings from the research. (1) First, measurement has been via hard statistics such as baptisms, entry into church membership, tithes and offerings, and other such *outward* measures – but no adequate measurement has been found to measure spiritual growth which is an *inward* reality pertaining to spiritual vitality. (2)

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3. Hattingh, Morton, et al., “A Qualitative Analysis of Discipleship in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church: Responses to Global and Regional Survey.”

4. Hattingh et al, Qualitative Analysis of Discipleship in the SDA Church, 2.

5. The format of the questions were simplified in each case by the writer of this Report for ease of understanding.

Second, Bible reading and evangelism were identified as primary contributors to how people become disciples and then grow as disciples in terms in their faith (via Bible reading), and their leading others into a dynamic faith (via evangelism). Wherever these two elements were not present, the practice of discipleship fell into wholesale decline. (3) Third, the importance of leaders linking their own personal discipleship to their church employment and ministry role. The fundamental reality is that ministry which is transformative and life-changing does more than require pastors to be good employees. Discipleship by its very essence is life-on-life, and transformation transitions from one life to the other. Pastors must be disciples of Christ themselves ... before they are ministers to others. And finally (4) discipleship – while it can sometimes be a personal practice – is effectively a corporate practice. When it slips into the background in the minds of ministry leaders and becomes mere programs, budgets and the like – discipleship tends to fade into the background. Unless ministry leaders make discipleship a matter of ultimate priority in their ministry churches, discipleship is an accidental practice rather than an intentional one.

**6.3 Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry:**<sup>6</sup> This study offers a careful analysis of several different denominations in the US,<sup>7</sup> by the authors – each of whom have responsibility for Schools of Ministry in their different denominations. Their task was to discover what contributes to exemplary youth work in congregational settings, and how those effective 'elements' activated/re-activated discipleship in congregations. The research question for the study asked, "Do congregations with high percentages of committed Christian youth exist? If so, what is going on in congregations that might be contributing to vital faith in those young people?" The study sought to identify behaviours, attitudes, beliefs, programs, processes and policies that contributed to exemplary youth work. As a whole, the Study sought to (1) identify congregations with significant numbers of young people with a vital faith; (2) describe the ministries of those congregations which youth leaders and young people identified as faithful and effective; & (3) discover what accounts for those congregations' effective approaches to ministry with young people of vital Christian faith.

The Study undertook a mixture of qualitative and quantitative analyses, each of which sought to survey youth, parents, adult youth workers and lead pastors as well as youth pastors working in youth ministry, to identify from the survey data what produced effective youth ministry outcomes. Overall, the key finding from the Study was that it is the culture of the whole church that is most influential in nurturing youth in a vital Christian faith. The congregation needs to activate all of its faith assets in terms of the family, the school, the congregation, the relationships within each of those, as well as

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6. Roland Martinson, Wes Black, and John Roberto. *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry: Leading Congregations Toward Exemplary Youth Ministry*. St Paul, MN: EYM Publishing, 2010.

7. Assemblies of God, Evangelical Covenant, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, Presbyterian Church, Roman Catholic, Southern Baptist, and United Methodist Church.

the moral and intellectual intent of congregational leadership, in order to generate the 7 key findings that contribute to exemplary youth ministry. They are: (1) seeking spiritual growth – where young people pursue spiritual growth through conversation, study, reading the Bible, prayer, small groups and retreats. (2) Possessing a vital faith – where youth are keenly aware of God being present and active in their own lives, the lives of others, and the life of the world. (3) Practising faith in community – where youth practice their faith in Jesus Christ, privately and publicly, through participation in the congregation's worship, ministries and leadership. (4) Making the Christian faith a 'Way of Life' – where youth actively recognise God's call and integrate their beliefs into the conversation, decisions and actions in their daily lives. (5) Living a life of service – where youth are involved in activities that care for others, reaching out to others in need, and addressing injustice. (6) Exercising moral responsibility – where youth live with integrity, utilising the Christian faith in making moral decisions. And (7) possessing a positive spirit – where youth reflect loving and hopeful attitudes towards others and to life in general.

**6.4 Transformational Discipleship Assessment:**<sup>8</sup> Transformation Discipleship Assessment (TDA) is an extensive, research-grounded discipleship program based in the US, whose primary aim is to enable individuals and entire congregations to self-assess their current spiritual status according to eight (8) different areas of discipleship. In 2011, LifeWay conducted research on discipleship by (1) interviewing recognised 'experts' in the field of discipleship; (2) surveying 1000 pastors (Protestant church leaders), through telephone surveys; and (3) 2900+ church attenders in Protestant churches across the US. The results of these surveys were analysed using the Spiritual Formation Inventory (SFI), an online instrument developed on the basis of extensive research gathered by surveying 2500 church attenders in 2006. The results of the SFI were published in a book entitled *The Shape of Faith to Come* by Brad Waggoner.<sup>9</sup> The instrument represents a "gap analysis" of the faith of 2500 Christians, who self-identified as Christian disciples, against a series of criteria organised into 7 'domains'. Those domains are: (1) Knowledge, truth or 'learning quotient'. (2) 'Obedience quotient', where the disciple chooses to obey God and to deny themselves. (3) 'Service quotient', where the disciple chooses to serve God and others as their life-vocation. (4) 'Evangelism quotient', where the disciple sees themselves as an ambassador of Christ. (5) 'Faith quotient', where the disciple exercises faith in God, even in times of challenge and risky situations. (6) The sixth domain is the 'worship quotient', where worship is seen as the real driver of a Christian disciple's inner and outer life. And (7) 'Relational quotient', where relationships become a central feature of the disciple's life and habit for living. The research asked 2500 Christian disciples from major denominations across the US, a series of questions relating to the Bible, the nature of salvation, the person and work

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8. The originator of the TDA program LifeWay Research, is based in Nashville, Tennessee. <https://www.lifeway.com/>

9. Brad J. Waggoner. *The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and the Future of Discipleship*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2008.

of Jesus, some of the key doctrines of Christianity such as the Trinity, and so on. Respondents were offered a simple Likert Scale which asked them to either strongly agree (at one end of the spectrum); or to strongly disagree (at the other end of the spectrum) with the questions posed. Respondents' replies were assessed against (a) an ideal response; (b) the average response; and (c) their overall score for each domain. These were graphed in order to generate outcomes/results for each person in each domain. Findings from the research indicates that discipleship is most transformational when leadership pays specific attention to it, and when learner-disciples in their faith-communities are provided with a set of tools which encourage them to grow, and resource them in their discipleship and increase in spiritual vitality.

## 7. The Need for Evidence-Based Research on Discipleship

There are many books, journal articles and resources relating to Christian discipleship available today. Many of these are generated by Christian leaders who have formed the opinion (correctly in my view) – that discipleship as a priority and as a practice represents the beating heart of authentic and classical Christianity. However, only a very small number of studies are undertaken as evidence-based research which is able to validate and verify any claims they make with regard to the practice of Christian discipleship is an applied ministry practice.

The priority of this present research has been to undertake applied research, so we can get beyond the level of what *ought* to take place on the basis of biblically-grounded Christian teaching vis-à-vis Christian discipleship ... in order to see what is actually taking place, and to measure any movement towards growth or decline in spiritual vitality in the life of the individual disciple, or within the congregational setting. Only when we have such verifiable findings are church leaders and denominational representatives, able to adjust their ministry strategies in order to move towards increased positive outcomes with regard to discipleship and congregational settings.

## 8. Objectives of the Research

The objectives which were identified as the basis for the research are:

- **Outcome #1:** describe those discipleship programs currently being employed in 18 congregations in South Australia

- **Outcome #2:** develop a definition of growth in religious vitality, identifying measures for gauging the effectiveness of discipleship programs in local churches
- **Outcome #3:** critically evaluate the discipleship programs in participating churches, with particular reference to their effectiveness in (i) making disciples; & (ii) facilitating the spiritual growth/formation of Christian disciples under their care
- **Outcome #4:** make recommendations for best-practice discipleship programs in congregational settings in 21st century Australia/South Australia.

These objectives were felt to be of great importance, because there is a tendency for ministry leaders (professional clergy such as ministers and pastors, as well as lay-leaders such as elders, deacons and departmental overseers) – to become preoccupied with the weekly running of their churches, programs, worship services, offering the sacraments, and critical pastoral care interventions (weddings, funerals, providing social services to those in need, pastoral visitation and the like. Although important ... these can quickly overshadow the practice of discipleship which is thought to be the "first priority" in the life of a Christian congregation.

## 9. Design of the Research

The design of the research was intended to answer the research question for the overall research. That question was broken up into 4 component-parts:

- (a) What approaches, processes and programs are local churches using with regard to making disciples?
- (b) How effective are those approaches, processes and programs to actually making disciples?
- (c) What measures of religious vitality and spiritual formation are being applied, and how effective are they in measuring and promoting the formation of disciples in congregational settings? &
- (d) How can these approaches, processes and programs be improved upon in order to increase the impact and effectiveness of the discipleship activities of communities of faith?

In order to operationalize the research, the following elements were chosen.

**A. Social Science-type Surveys:** because the purpose of the research was to find out what was happening "on the ground", we needed to speak with persons who were (a) seeking to make disciples, and (b) seeking to live and grow as disciples. This required us to interview people in those locations where they learned and practiced their faith. For the most part, pastors and ministry-leaders were interviewed either in church offices and/or in localities adjacent to their places of ministry. When it came to Life Groups – life-group members were interviewed either in local homes where they

would normally meet for their usual mid-week Bible study meetings, or in their local church building.

**B. Interviewing Leaders, Life Group Members & an online Cohort:** because we wanted to 'capture' information from a broad spectrum of respondents ... it became necessary to target three groups of participants: (i) congregational leaders; (ii) life group participants; & (iii) and an online cohort.<sup>10</sup> The total number of participants was ca. 440 people.

**C. Overlapping Research Questions:** because we wanted to address the specific perspectives belonging to the needs and interests of each of the three 'audiences' for the research, we designed 3 separate sets of questions. Each separate set represented the perspectives of each discrete group, but allowed for a central set of questions which overlapped and provided a 'core' for the research as a whole. In this way, we believed we could harness the perspectives of church leaders, life group members, and the online cohort – in a way which offered the possibility of generating a central set of findings. We believe these findings are applicable to this group of people, but are also likely to be generalizable to address discipleship in the wider Australian Church.

**D. Interpretation via Ethnographic Research:** Interpretation of the extensive interview transcripts (140 pages), was by means of ethnographic research such as that promoted and demonstrated by Dr Christian Scharen in several of his recent books. The selection of relevant themes, and exploration of those using a form of "thick" description has been the primary concern. Thematic analysis akin to general ethnography was the means by which key findings and recommendations from the research were generated.<sup>11</sup>

## 10. Ethics Approval:

Application for ethics approval was made to the Tabor Ethics Committee in February 2017. Permission to proceed with the research was conveyed by Dr Francis Ben, Chair of the Tabor Ethics Committee, in a letter dated April 10, 2017. The HREC Reference Number for this research is TAHREC-1117-004.

## 11. Recruitment of Partner Churches

Partner Churches for the research were approached using 3 different kinds of approach; (1) a general email circular; (2) via a telephone call to church leaders; & (3) direct personal approaches from myself as the Primary Researcher for the project. Subsequently, Letters of Agreement were sent and signed by church leaders on behalf of themselves and their congregations, and a schedule of visits were made with regard to dates, times and places

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10. A small proportion of the online cohort also took part in the leaders interviews and life group interviews.

11. Two in particular are: Pete Ward (Ed.) *Explorations in Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2012; and Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen (Eds.). *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics*. London: Bloomsbury, 2011.

for the three groups of (1) congregational leader; (2) life group members; & (3) the URL for the online portal provided by McCrindle Research.

## **12. Partner Churches in the Research [Listed]**

As a result of that recruitment campaign, the following congregations – through their pastoral leaders – responded positively to the research and signed a Letter of Agreement to act as participants in the research.

1. The Source Church, Christian Revival Crusade, Stirling
2. Blackwood Church of Christ, Happy Valley
3. Clovercrest Baptist, Modbury North
4. Coromandel Uniting Church, Coromandel Valley
5. Holy Methodist Chinese Church, Ovingham
6. Burnside Family Church, Burnside
7. Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Paravista
8. Trinity Baptist Church, Colonel Light Gardens
9. Grange Baptist Church, Grange
10. The Salvation Army, Murray Bridge Corps
11. Austral Asian Chinese Church, Adelaide CBD
12. Hope Arabic Church, Richmond
13. Noarlunga Church of Christ, Noarlunga
14. Edwardstown Baptist Church, Edwardstown
15. Noarlunga Salvation Army Corps, Noarlunga
16. Aldgate Baptist Church, Aldgate
17. Richmond Baptist Church, Richmond,
18. The Ark Lutheran Church, Salisbury.

Once they had committed themselves to participating in the research, none of the churches withdrew, and all have continued to express positive interest in the findings from the research. One of the commitments made to Participating Churches, was that the full findings from the Discipleship Research Report would be made available to them as soon as it was completed. It is likely a 'launch' of that report will be made public in the second half of 2018, and all participating churches will be invited to be a part of that launch event.

## **13. Processing the LEADERS TRANSCRIPTS:**

### **13.1 Questions for LEADERS: [number of leaders interviewed was 70]**

1. What words or language do you most commonly used when referring to disciples and discipleship?
2. Does any documentation exist (such as vision and mission statements) that refers to and/or gives priority to discipleship?
3. What programs do you currently have in place that you would define as being focused on making disciples?



4. What have been your goals as a church in deepening the spiritual formation of your own congregation, and making disciples from outside your faith-community?
5. What measures of success have you been using, and how satisfactory/unsatisfactory is that?
6. What have been the effects of your attempts to do discipleship over the past two years – positive or negative?
7. What resources have you been using in terms of books, journals, programs, CDs, videos – and with what effect?
8. What have been the responses of your people: excited-positive-indifferent-negative-reactionary?
9. In what way would your church be different if you had a cohort of excited new disciples in your midst?
10. What needs to change in your programs in ministry-resourcing in order to make discipleship a priority?

### 13.2 Analysis of Leaders' Responses:

#### QUESTION #1

What words or language do you most commonly use when referring to disciples and discipleship?

- Many ministry leaders don't use *the language of discipleship* because they are worried about offending non-Christians; whereas for others ... it's a matter of effective communication; discipleship is not a commonplace word. Instead, we talk about being fans or supporters of a football team. We should be talking about "barracking" for Jesus.
- Pastors genuinely attempt to convey *the qualities implied by discipleship*; these are allegiance, basic life orientation, Christ-like character, a life-priority which values Jesus more than other relationships and values; living God's story together; not having all the answers, but being willing to 'risk' our lives for the sake of Christ who is our most beloved Lord and friend.
- Ethnic churches seem to retain *a reserved "place" in their cultures for following any person who is a model of faith*, on the basis that they possesses a holy life, godly wisdom, or a convincing life. But in majority White or Anglo churches, this reserved "place" or space is not so clearly observable. This means that culturally, ethnic churches and believers expect to follow Jesus... Whereas Anglo churches and believers have to work hard to prioritise discipleship.
- *Mentoring is a term used by 7 of the 18 congregations* (40%). In those cases, mentoring relates to a process of faith-formation where the character of the mentor shapes the life values and life-direction of the mentoree towards Christ. This is not so much about a skill-set, but an orientation of life to commit oneself wholly and totally to Christ.
- Maturity, sanctification and *growth towards one's potential as a faith-filled person*, where Christ-like character, self-control, goodness, gentleness, kindness and the like – are exhibited through the life of the believing soul. Categories of "integration" and elevation are either stated outright, or hinted at.
- *Importance of the Bible in shaping the life of the disciple/discipling congregation.* Preaching and teaching are our primary focus for equipping, coaching, and shaping the life-commitments of adherents to become disciples. But in addition to Biblical teaching, the idea of leaders modelling faith through their lives is also important.
- *The end of the word discipleship is 'ship'* – indicating that we are in this ship of faith together. The metaphor is about communal responsibility to nurture one

another, and care for one another's' needs. The old adage that it takes a whole village to raise a child applies here. It takes a whole congregation to raise a disciple or saint.

- ***The idea of a disciple is one who has a form of spiritual "fitness"***, who comes to the task proactively, in a life-long process of committed application through a deliberate process. Discipleship isn't passive, it is active, intentional, something prioritised by both leaders and the congregation alike.

***Discipleship is for everyone... Not just for professional clergy or the super-spiritual laity.*** Reference was made to "degrees" of Christian-ness or discipleship. While we recognise they can be degrees of sanctification, they cannot be degrees of saved-ness. The discipleship process is an ongoing work-in-progress, a life-changing experience that requires the full cooperation of the individual disciple, as well as the community of faith to create a culture of expectancy around discipleship.

- ***The cost and rewards of discipleship:*** it is important for pastors and those teaching/modelling what it means to be a disciple to talk about the "cost" of discipleship. Bonhoeffer and others made much of this – and certainly Jesus did in his teaching ministry. At a time when discipleship comes at significant "cost" in terms of exclusion from mainstream cultural activities – we must talk about the cost of discipleship, but also about its joys, and what it means to be a fulfilled, joyful, contented and thoroughly happy believer. This is important because outsiders have no ability to see us as anything other than "screwed up", unhappy and maniacal in our counter-cultural activities and life-orientations.

## QUESTION #2

Is there any documentation (such as vision and mission statements) that refer to and/or gives priority to discipleship?

- ***All Churches reported having prepared literature and making it available to their adherents and external communities***, via (1) websites; (2) Facebook pages; (3) vision and mission statements; & (4) some kind of 'guiding principles' statement.

- Often that documentation makes reference to ***doctrinal distinctives***, core-beliefs of the Church or the denomination to which they belong, and sometimes particular emphases of that leadership/faith-community. What is apparent is that a 'gap' exists in the literature vis-à-vis (i) core beliefs & (ii) their outworking in the life-experience and life-values of confessing Christian believers.

- ***Ca. 50% of churches reported that discipleship is a HIGH priority for them***, ca. 30% of churches reported that discipleship is a priority, and ca. 20% reported that it represents a part of their ministry programming.

- The word '***disciple***' and '***discipleship***' appears in ***ca. 30% of websites, Facebook pages, vision and mission statements***, and any 'guiding principles' statements. One Church's leadership said they don't use the word 'disciple' because it is old-fashioned and outmoded – BUT they are absolutely committed to being disciples and producing disciples as one of their core values.

- In other words, it is ***not so much the definition of disciples/discipleship they want to convey... but WHAT it means to be a disciple***; WHAT being a disciple looks like; & HOW discipleship works itself out in the lives of a committed follower of Jesus Christ, and the faith-community to which they belong.

- One Church's leadership made the insightful statement that **"We haven't lost the practice of discipleship... But we have lost the meaning of it"**. Another Church's leadership said that because discipleship is more caught than taught – the spiritual life is intuitive, and transmitted through relationships. We (and 3 other Churches' leaders said the same) hold to relational discipleship in terms of modelling, building a culture of discipleship, and teaching towards discipleship outcomes as a primary value.
- One Church's leadership reported that one of their central values as the **intergenerational transmission of a high-commitment form of discipleship** from older generations to younger generations, and that their programming, staffing and budgeting reflects that priority.
- One church's leadership reported they made **membership material** available to their adherents, for the purpose of entering the congregation and becoming joiners of the faith-community. But that they did not have any form of literature, documentation or course-material that helped new Christians to grow in their faith as a disciple of Jesus. There was an admission that they expected authentic faith to happen by osmosis, without any invitation, training or expectation being placed upon new or existing people to become authentic followers of Jesus. They needed to do something about that, and fast.
- **Statements about discipleship contained in the literatures of the specific Churches** are: (1) our goal is to produce Christ-following disciples who seek to obey the Great Commandment and the Great commission; (2) we place importance on children, youth and young adults' discipleship; and (3) Our church exists to worship God and glorify him by equipping, mobilising and resulting God's people for his mission through discipleship.
- There is the danger of the **"wallpaper effect"** – where material is offered to church members overtly, frequently and forcefully ...but over time it fades into the background and loses its priority and importance. One congregation reported: "Yes, we have all those documents, but we never refer to it".

### QUESTION #3

What programs do you currently have in place that you would define as being focused on making disciples?

- Church leaders generally expressed a good understanding of **the limits of programs vis-a-vis discipleship**. They said (in various ways), that programs are only the conduit or vehicle or delivery system for making disciples – nothing more and nothing less. For example, one church leadership reported: "We are wary of programs. We discovered in recent years that we were over-programmed, and our people became weary in well-doing. We had to de-program our church so our people were free to organically impact their worlds and community."
- Having said that however, **a long list of programs were mentioned**; i.e., mid-week Bible study groups (by various names), Sunday schools, youth groups, Alpha, Valiant Man, Kids Hope, Grumpy's Men's Shed, Discipleship Classes (the two Chinese Churches specifically required people to formally study through a Discipleship Training Framework Course – to good effect), a 'Just Getting Started' Booklet for New Believers; Kingdom Kids, one Lutheran Church Pastor said he intentionally made use of the *catechism* in his preaching and teaching, and although the difficulties in transmitting it into modern day language – he "wasn't going to shy away" from the

demand for discipleship from his people; Christianity Explained, Discipleship Explained, Soldiership Explained (Salvation Army); whole-of-church denominationally-required programs; Jesus in Every Story; Bible Study Fellowship; know your Bible; etc. [Stuart quotation from Thomas Campus along with citation – if you want to be holy, you need a program]; Craft Groups; Music Groups; Girls' Brigade; Boys' Brigade; Scouts and brownies, Segala, Café Life, Mainly Music, Thrift Shop etc.

- 8 of the 18 Churches (40%), **reported that they used mentoring as an intentional process for implementing discipleship** in their congregations. The best representations of mentoring programs are when leaders champion mentoring; when it is adopted as a whole-of-congregation priority; when leaders themselves are involved in receiving and giving mentoring; when department leaders follow through on mentoring and implement some of the required changes; and when mentoring is focused not so much on establishing church goals, but on embedding Jesus' discipleship-teaching into the lives of disciples themselves; often that form of application apply to how to be a better husband or wife, mother or father, Christian the workplace or whatever; the focal point needs to be practical outcomes. Mentoring has had a profound effect on at least 4 of those churches who have made it the centre-piece of their ministry and discipleship activities.

- There were **3 instances of younger women who were discipled by other women**. Each were now in leadership and two of whom were now young mums – who had been specifically mentored/discipled by older women [in the past] who met with them on a regular basis for a prescribed period of time (12-18 months+), and who studied Scripture with them, prayed with them, and mentored them in what it means to live the Christian life as a happy, holy and winsome person. Each of these 3 younger women reported that the influence of their older mentors (invariably from 5+ years ago)... Had left an indelible impact on their lives. As a result, they themselves were seeking to mimic that same kind of activity, but were finding it difficult to do so because of their responsibilities to mother younger children and carry out employment duties.

- Leaders understood that **"discipleship is not just ticking a box... it's about a journey of life-long commitment to Jesus Christ"**. Program activities were the "birthing room" on the journey of faith into and towards Christ which is never-ending. People need to work out their salvation in terms of serving others in the faith community and beyond – and new Christians need to have support mechanisms, instruction opportunities, and planned growth options as they grow in their faith in Christ.

- One church's leadership said **"We don't do programs – we do rhythms. Those rhythms are deeply connected with discipleship"**. As a disciple you are buying into a journey of life. We don't want to fill people's lives with things to do. Instead, we want to use rhythms and pathways to further and better and establish them as disciples of Jesus Christ". This appears to be well-recognised across the board, even if ministry-leaders tend to default to applying programs in order to articulate the principles and faith-value which form the centrepiece of discipleship.

- **Church camps and overseas mission trips**: approximately 33% (6 Churches) of Church leaders reported that church camps formed a very significant part of their discipleship strategy. When young people and adults "get away" from the demands of life and can spend time together, they seem to be particularly open to hearing the voice of God. Church camps are of vital importance, and most Christians can remember a time when God spoke to them on camp. It also applies to overseas mission trips, when (particularly young people) are placed into a high-intensity learning and service

environment and they are forced to go "beyond their limits"; they learn something about depending upon God. One leader said he believed a 2-3 week mission trip produced the same kind of spiritual growth that 2-3 years of regular church attendance produced. This kind of intensification is often reported in situations of liminality, producing a kind of enforced, high-velocity spiritual growth.

#### QUESTION #4

What have been your goals as a Church with regard to (1) the spiritual growth of your people; & (2) the making of new disciples outside your existing faith community?

- **100% of the 18 churches – strongly want their people to grow spiritually.** The guiding factor seems to be that disciples (not programs) make disciples. Spiritual life and vitality is transmitted relationally from one person to the other.
- 5 of the 18 churches (28%) indicated that their **goal was to create a culture of discipleship in their congregation**, where there were enough people modelling the faith, resources spiritual growth and opportunity to 'perform' the discipleship – that people will choose to want to grow spiritually, and to move towards a mature spiritual disciples.
- But as the old adage goes... ***You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink.*** Simply having resources available doesn't mean that people will choose discipleship which is costly, counter-cultural, and has a high-price attached to it. One pastor of a large church stated, "I don't think we have a culture of discipleship. We might think we do but we don't. We are resource rich but program heavy, and 'light on' when it comes to knowing how to activate people in a discipleship journeys". The statement seems to be representative of a number of churches find themselves vis-à-vis discipleship.
- **Creating a healthy congregation – relationally, spiritually, and in terms of a ministry.** The discipleship journey can be represented as (1) training; (2) being sent out; (3) being fed as disciples "on the road"; (4) restoration after failure; & (5) fruitfulness and ministry (adjusted for simplicity). Another Church's leaders said that all discipleship is intended (by Jesus) to be worked out "on the road". To equip disciples for that kind of practical, journeyed outworking – that Church intentionally causes people to adopt the journey mentality, where they read the Bible together, with a pray together, where they serve together, and where they live-out the implications of the gospel together organically. If we take Jesus' calling of the 12, and his training of the 12 as-they-journeyed on the road, represents one or more elements of what it means to be a healthy congregation.
- That same Church leader reported their **primary discipleship agenda is through Life Groups**, where a 3-fold culture is worked out in terms of Life-Growth-Action in community; where the Us-We-Me; and the Up-In-Out aspects of discipleship work best.<sup>12</sup> Backing up from this, another Church leader stated that there church's goal was to model discipleship as a leadership group, on the basis that – as a smaller congregation – the best resource they have is not books, programs and the like... But the "living

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12. Mike Breen. *Building a Discipling Culture: How to Release a Missional Movement by Discipling People Like Jesus Did*. Pawleys Island, SC: 3DM, 2014.

document" of an engaged and engaging leadership group who were able to "bear in their body" (like St Paul), the life and death of Jesus.

- One of the Chinese church leaders said he wanted to **"kindle a fire in the lives of others... A wildfire of discipleship"**. He planned for this to happen through training of leaders of disciples, to enable them to reach other people in their (mostly ethnic) networks, as well as reaching their Australian friends at university, in the food/hospitality industries, and of course at church.

- **Prayer is the engine room of discipleship.** 4 of the 18 churches specifically mention prayer in terms of activating an awakening their congregations to a greater awareness of the importance of discipleship, and to "act out" their faith in their everyday lives, despite it being a costly choice. There is significant sacrifice involved in choosing to be a disciple – primarily because people are so busy these days, prioritising discipleship, church, nurturing their children in the faith, and supporting mission activities locally, nationally and internationally – requires significant sacrifice.

- Another Church leader admitted that **"the church has replaced discipleship with programs"** – in that people are expected to attend programs and participate in community activities, when sometimes all they wanted to do was to sit quietly and talk to Jesus and to listen to him in return. Often we don't prioritise that kind of space for being, listening, and learning. Church leaders need to slow it down, and take it deeper to make this discipleship thing work.

- **Another Church leader described discipleship as "swallowing a big pill"**. By that he meant that the 21st century Western consumer needs to forego all the options offered available through the marketplace and the media, and to wrap their lives around this 'other' alternative way of living, and being. It is not simply a head-thing, but a whole-of-life thing. I liked the "following the big pill" idea because it makes discipleship what it truly is – something visceral, totally embodied, and whole of life.

- **3 other Church leaders focused on different aspects of discipleship.** The first (most importantly, a female Pastor), spoke about the importance of discipling women through Bible study, mentoring and encouragement, so that they can become all they can be. That particular congregation has an extensive network of life groups for women, offering them a sense of belonging, and nurturing them in body, mind and spirit. There are many women in our communities who are really struggling, and who need additional support in terms of crisis care and accommodation, assistance with their parenting/mothering, and in their marriage relationships. The second (a male youth pastor), spoke about the importance of discipling youth and young people. A male associate pastor) spoke about the importance of discipling children and families.

## QUESTION #5

What measures have you been using to assess religious vitality in your people/congregation?

- Pastors and **ministry-leaders apply a variety of "measures" of growth when it comes to assessing spiritual and religious vitality in their congregations.** For the most part, they are external measures in terms of attendance, giving/tithing, participation in scheduled activities, numbers of people on rosters, sometimes it is Bible knowledge, and other times the number and quality of new emerging leaders to take on leadership responsibilities. But these "outward" measures are somewhat informal and church leaders are the first to admit the inadequacy of these structural measures to adequately gauge growth and vitality in the spiritual life which are "inward" realities. At present

the best measures of spiritual temperature are the number of conversions, baptisms, and those who want to "step up" into positions of senior ministry that come at significant cost to the individual. But it is clear that even these are inadequate measures to gauge growth in discipleship commitment.

- In 15 of 18 interviews with Church Leaders (85%), ***the need to develop improved measures of inward religious and spiritual vitality for use by ministry Leaders in congregational settings***, was discussed. Difficulties in measuring spiritual maturity require an alternative set of KPIs. At very least, such **elements** as: spiritual hunger, passionate worship, quality of their prayer life, teachability, spiritual temperature, persistence, willingness to serve, Christ-like character, other-centred not self-centred, willingness to testify to their faith, engagement in evangelism and "passing something onto others", a certain power or realism about their life, receptivity to revelation from Scripture and the Spirit, a measurable love for other people (which one Youth Pastor called a 'love-ometer', the use of the spiritual gifts and disciplines, allegiance to Christ, a clear-cut Christian identity, etc.
- ***We ought to be able to measure growth toward spiritual maturity***, because the monastics have been doing this for 1500 years. Yet our Western 'need' to measure things objectively can sometimes kill the very thing we are trying to measure. The passing on of the spiritual life and its nurture in individuals in congregational settings represents the "meat and potatoes" of Christian ministry. We are disappointed that we appear to have lost the art of soul-nurture (one of the Church's lost things, cf. Luke 15), and haven't been able to – as a matter of course – ensure our people are growing towards increased maturity in the spiritual life.
- ***As pastors, we are the ones who know our people best***. We see them on a daily/weekly basis and find a way to "test" the interior weather occurring within them. One church leader stated, "They can't be accountable to a standard they don't know". That means we need to move our people from passive participation to active engagement, and to the willing performance of their faith, similar to the Wesleyan Class System in days gone by. The building of a discipleship "culture" where there is an expectation for people to grow and to intentionally participate in Life Groups and other forms of growth-producing ministry activities, is essential.
- One Ministry Leader said of discipleship that ***"We are good at talking about it, but we are not good at living it out"***. In many ways that applies to our Ministry Leaders with regard to knowing where their people are located in terms of increasing or decreasing spiritual life, so they can respond with a kind of spiritual "therapy" to improve and increase the temperature.
- Clearly ***there needs to be a change in "corporate practice"***, if churches are to incorporate spiritual well-being, resilience and movement towards maturity, by assigning to it a budget, database capacity, staffing allocation, and intentional and a systematic approach to encouraging their people towards spiritual growth. Reference to a previous Church's priority of life-growth-action; and the importance of honesty in numbers. In some mission contexts, it is clear that numbers of conversions are over-inflated. We don't want to arrive at a place where we are either dishonest in reporting spiritual growth, or inaccurate in miss-measuring the spiritual growth of either ourselves, our people or our congregations.

**QUESTION #6**

What have been the effects of your attempts to do discipleship over the past 2 years – positive or negative?

- The discovery that asking more from our people puts them under significant pressure. *The pace of life for younger families with children, and busy executives with key responsibilities at work and at home – appears to be negatively impacting peoples' ability to give more time and focus to their faith.* In particular, this applies to lay leaders, many of whom are very busy at work, very busy at home, and very busy at church. Yet because of their faith in Christ and their commitment to serving in the church – many really do want to give more financially and in time. We are finding that people always have more capacity to give, and the higher their passion for Christ and to serve him, the higher their commitment to give time and money and energy to their faith.
- *The limitations of preaching.* Several church leaders pointed out that preaching from the front of the Church can only produce limited outcomes. "We expect too much from a single sermon and not enough from a whole year of preaching. Building a culture of discipleship is what really matters". Another church leader said that people don't stay because of the preaching – they stay connected in their faith-community because of the quality of relationships around about them. Preaching sets the tone for that, and the community extends the arms of love to create the culture of inclusion, growth and discipleship. Another church that prioritizes discipleship said that it is the task of the pastors and Elders to set the benchmark for "spiritual expectation" – they themselves need to be growing while they are in office. "What we have to pass on is lively faith, not how to run a ministry".
- *Some have seen positive results from increased attempts to do discipleship.* Genuine excitement around the church, increased spiritual temperature, more testimonies. "What people want to see is real people up front, not double-distilled, holier-than-thou shams". When they see the real deal they can see that spiritual growth is a genuine option for them, which is enjoyable, positive and achievable. One church leader said, "The majority of the Church has been enthusiastic, and this has been expressed through increased participation in Life-groups".
- One of the *Chinese churches said they were having difficulties locating enough mentors to lead discipleship-groups.* In particular, the younger generation (English-speaking) hasn't really warmed to attempts to increase discipleship in the church. One youth pastor said, "the generation we are facing now is different from previous generations. They have a consumer mentality, and think the whole world exists for them. But Christianity is about giving away your life, and requires something very different. This makes great demands on people. Making disciples and being disciples is not so easy!"

**QUESTION #7**

What resources have you been using (books, journals, programs, CDs, videos etc.,) and to what effect?

- Church leaders gave *a variety of responses.* One church leader was quite resistant to the idea of any one resource, and replied nothing specific, because of (1) the danger of developing a placebo mentality (i.e., the book or program or resource is



THE solution); and (2) what is really needed is a culture of disciple making, and books, programs and resources contribute to but do not create such a culture.

- Whereas other church leaders named *a wide variety of resources*: the most significant of which are: (1) BSF/Bible Study Fellowship; (2) Alpha; (3) Francis Chan's BASIC series; (4) various denominationally sponsored programs; (4) Michael Breen's Building a Discipling Culture book; (5) the 3DM program; (6) Various NT Write Books; (7) Christian Schwartz' Natural Church Development; (8) Marriage Enrichment; (9) Bill Hybel's Walk Across the Room; (10) Annual Conferences; (11) Retreat Program; (12) Richard Foster's Celebration of Discipline; (13) Cary. Niewhof's Lasting Impact; (14) Steve Addison's Pioneering Additional Movements; (14) Tim Keller's Centre Church material; (15) denominational instructional material, specifically the United Methodist Church of Australia's Discipleship Program Redbook-Green Book-Purple Book at different levels; (16) a bookclub; (17) prayer meals; (18) Mid-week Life Groups; (19) the Bible Study Groups; (20) Karl Faase DVDs i.e., 'Jesus the Game-Changer'; (21) Andy Stanley Material; (22) Neil Anderson's Bondage Breaker series; (23) studies for new believers by Noel Dhu [Lutheran, South Australian]; (24) KYB/Know Your Bible; (25) Dale Stevenson from Crossway Baptist, Discovery Bible Resource; (26) Jason Hoett study material, (26) Christianity Explored-Christianity Explained; (27) Nick Hawkes' Basics of Christianity series; (28) SOAP Journaling (Scripture-Observation-Application-Prayer); (29) Serendipity Bible Study Series; (30) AWANA Children's Ministry; (31) Scouts & Boys Brigade; (32) John Bevier material; (33) School of Christ study materials [online]; (34) Rob Bell Material; (35) Divorce Care; (36) the SHAPE series; (37) Purpose Driven Life; (38) 40 Days of Discipleship; (39) Gordon McDonald's Ordering Your Private World; (40) gender-specific activities, and such as the annual Hillsong Colours Conference for Women; (41) Ed Stetzer's Comeback Church ... etc.

- Church Leaders are very aware that *people are "drinking from lots of wells"* – i.e., blogs, You-tubes and podcast sermons. This is thought to be a good thing, but there are instances where some people are "buying into" forms of teaching which may not contribute to healthy spiritual outcomes.

## QUESTION #8

What has been the response of your people: excited-positive-indifferent-negative-reactionary?

- Church leaders were very honest about this.* They reported a range of responses from their people. Focusing mostly on optimism and positive response to the invitation to grow in their discipleship journey... where that journey was modelled and highlighted by leaders, and where resources were provided in order to grow.

- BUT there were three specific *instances of strong push-back from church members*; (2 of which involved pastors visiting peoples' homes and asking appropriate questions with regard to the state of peoples' souls; & 1 involved a pastor leading a Life Group), where there was clear "resistance" from people who were regular attenders at church and who would self-identify as having a strong faith. In one instance, the Pastor was asked to leave the house, and in the other 2 instances, there was a clear resistance to having ministry Leaders moving into spaces which were thought to be one's own private domain, and therefore "out of bounds" to professional/appointed ministry leaders.

- One *church located in quite a wealthy area expressed significant disappointment and frustration* that (1) their own church was not more intensely committed; & (2) their wider host-community didn't seem to want what they were offering. They said they felt sidelined and believe that God has more for both the church and the community than either currently recognises. They thought that living in a wealthy area distracted their people from undertaking the spiritual journey, and growing in their lives as disciples of Christ/becoming disciples of Christ. Some distress about this negative state of affairs was expressed.
- One church reported that they had recently been able to make a new ministry-appointment, and in doing so have increased their sense of enthusiasm and optimism, and replaced the old toxicity and resistance. Another congregation had chosen 5 key focal points as the Core Values for the church. They were seeking to re-establish mission, ministry and discipleship as the basis for their church's culture and identity. They were *seeking to put Christ at the centre of their congregation, and inter-generational discipleship and growth-in-faith* were at the centre of that.
- There was a great deal of awareness that some sections of the community *wanted to retain the "Sunday face"*, and the company and convenience that church attendance and Christian faith meant for them – without necessarily exerting themselves in terms of faith and costly discipleship. But this kind of non-discipleship Christianity has always been with us, and pew-warmers who knew about Jesus but didn't necessarily love him will always be there. But the challenge is to "go with the goers" and to inform, resource and work with those who are spiritually hungry and want to grow, serve, minister and extend themselves in the name of Christ.
- One older Chinese pastor who had ministered outside Australia where conflict was a part of the Christian life – observed that *the spiritual "atmosphere" in Adelaide/Australia is at a very low level*. Most people had not known violence or persecution. When he talks about the cost of discipleship with his people here – they don't like it. They don't want to give time, and say they are too busy. The most difficult part about doing discipleship in Australia is not teaching the content of discipleship, but finding a way to challenge and to "at the heart on fire" in order to be more willing to live for Jesus at a high-level.
- Another church leader indicated that he was spending a lot of time with people on the "margins" of the church, new Christians and people who had recently re-committed themselves to faith. That meant *lots of energy was being poured into receptive people*, but perhaps people in the mainstream of church membership were being left to their own devices? Perhaps more effort and energy needs to go into supporting them in their spiritual journeys. What would need to change in thinking and behaviour for that to happen?

## QUESTION #9

In what way would your church be different if you had a cohort of excited you disciples in your midst?

- Approximately *50% of leaders indicated their church had a small number of converts in the past 1-2 years*, as a result of their ministries. Generally-speaking, 2-3 converts, and 2-3 re-commitments, often resulting in a small but consistent flow of baptisms. But these did not necessarily result in overall congregational growth, because of deaths, people moving to other churches, or elsewhere for work. Usually, ministry-

leaders or others appointed to the task, spent one-on-one time with new converts, to disciple them. The emphasis was on building relationships, and the transmission of faith, commitment and knowledge was the priority, rather than signing them up to a program of one sort or another.

- One church leader said that ***having a new cohort of disciples in the church would change everything***. They had seen it before. The temperature of the whole church would lift, and the sense of excitement would be palpable. It would help the whole church to re-discover their basic call to discipleship, and to remember things that they may have lost in the meantime.
- Another church leader said he would be ***careful not to "box" the new disciples into a program, or to "train" the new Christians in the old ways and traditions of that particular congregation***. They would want to grow people in all-age groups, with an emphasis on prayer and Bible learning. Each group should have a personality of its own, and leaders would need to "shape" the curriculum for each group's learning process as the need arose. "It's a journey and we would want to work with them. That would be very exciting".
- Another ***church leader defined himself as a "church environmentalist"***. What he meant by that was that his role as a pastor was to create the right culture in a congregational setting, in order to leave enough space and opportunity for people to grow in their faith in Christ. He didn't want to create a compensatory 'system' – where people fell into discipleship as a reaction to something else. He wanted people in the congregation to become "champions" of discipleship, by living the adventure together, and telling stories about what was happening in their lives. The mid-week Life Groups were one of the real "engine rooms" of discipleship where people could share with others their journey with Christ. When that reached a crescendo – that would overflow into mission in the church, the community, their schools and universities, homes and work-places.

## QUESTION #10

What has to change in your approach and programming in order to re-make discipleship a priority?

- Often by the time we got to this final question in the Leadership interviews – we had run out of time and energy. But ***the general consensus was that discipleship needs to move from an afterthought, to the main-game***.
- In about half the interviews – ***I asked the question as a rhetorical question***, inviting the Church Leaders to consider what that might mean for their own leadership and their own church congregation going forward. In one instance, there was a lively discussion about this. In a subsequent conversation with that Senior Pastor – he reported that they had ongoing conversations about this and they had made this question the topic of one of their subsequent Leaders Meetings.
- Several church leaders clearly stated that the ***change has to be more organic and attitudinal, than structural and program-related***. In other words, pastors and church leaders need to be disciples themselves, and to 'model' means to be a disciple for others. "People have got to see the real thing... We've got to be real in our faith, not phony Christians. They got to see the real Jesus in us".

- One female Pastor stated, "As pastors it's our job to disciple the leaders of the church, and their job to disciple the people in the church and beyond. We could do this better. *We need to do less of the non-discipleship things (i.e., practical ministry and the like), in order to give us time and energy to focus on doing discipleship*". Another Pastor's realisation that "A pastor's time needs to change to invest more in discipleship and people-work; and less on administration and pastoral care at the lower levels. We need to change our focus and energy". He finished by stating this also needs to have a budget commitment to ensure there is adequate support for discipleship as a whole.
- It seems fitting to *give one of the Pastors the "last word"*, by offering an extensive direct quotation from the interview transcripts:

Our addiction to buildings and programs is a key part of the problem of us becoming blind to mission and discipleship. Jesus kept on the move, and his disciples learned from him as they were moving and engaging in the journey of life. This was being "walked" into their brains and tongues and hearts as they moved. ... [I think] connectivity is important here. Disciples and making disciples requires high levels of connectivity. We need to live and breathe it in order for it to remain at the top of our priority list. The challenge for us [as Pastoral Leaders] is to find the time to do this. We HAVE to live and breathe faith and discipleship with our people every day. If we are not focused on disciples and making disciples then the decisions we make are more for convenience rather than for the inconvenient task of making disciples. That includes the allocation of a budget. What you spend your money on clearly demonstrates your priorities. It's all about discipleship".

### Conclusion to Church Leaders' Responses:

That marks the close of interview responses of congregational leaders. A summary discussion will be provided later in the Report.

## 14. Processing LIFE GROUP Responses:

14.1 Questions for LIFE GROUP Members: [the number of life group members interviewed was 150]

1. What is the primary reason you meet together as a mid-week group?
2. To what extent does being a disciple, or growing as a disciple feature in your meetings?
3. What language do you use as a group (or as a church both parenthesis when you speak about discipleship and being a disciple?
4. Have you personally grown as a disciple in the past 12 months – measure perhaps in terms of commitment, knowledge, compassion, or some other measure?
5. What steps have you taken personally to grow as a disciple in the past 12 months?
6. As you understand it – does your church/do your church leaders expect you to grow spiritually?
7. What contributes most to your growth as a disciple of Jesus Christ?
8. On a scale of 1-10, give yourself a score as a disciple, and say why.
9. How have you attempted to assist others to grow as disciples and in their followership after Christ?
10. What is the difference between being a Christian who attends church on a Sunday, and a disciple who follows Jesus every day of the week?

## 14.2 Analysis of Life Group Responses:

### QUESTION #1

What is the primary reason you meet together as a mid-week group?

- ***Mid-week life groups a very different to Sunday Worship at Church.*** Sunday worship is too large to have meaningful relationships, to question the content of the sermon, or to meaningfully discuss what is being taught. The benefits of Sunday-worship were generally accepted and valued – but life group members wanted to understand the teaching and its implications at a deeper level than Sunday allowed for. ***They wanted to be more honest, more caring, and more able to question and to undertake a kind of "discovery-related" learning which was whole-of life.***
- ***Mid-week life groups are where many attenders feel "at home".*** They can worship together, and share the journey-of-life at a very deep level, in the context of supportive and nurturing friendships, pray for the church, for themselves and their families, as well as the wider world. Different groups have different focal points; one was learning, another was worship, another was mutual support, another was honesty, another was the opportunity to question their faith, and another was the deep need to be understood by others. But effectively, the genius of the life group experience was to be able to do faith together. The phrase "doing life together" was used by 5 life groups as a way of describing that they were a small community of like-minded friends who cared deeply for each other, and who were prepared to support each other through thick and thin with prayer, love, healing and words of affirmation and acceptance.
- ***A great variety of different kinds of people.*** In one younger life group, there were people from Evangelical, Pentecostal/charismatic, Catholic and Eastern Orthodox backgrounds fellow-shiping together. They enjoyed the range of theological perspectives, but were very open and supportive of each other in a way where they could "build each other up in our faith". In the Arabic speaking church, there were people present from Lebanon, Egypt, Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East – speaking a variety different languages; i.e., English, Persian and Arabic. Despite the ethnic and linguistic differences, there was a great deal of cohesion expressed in the form of their shared faith, and their love of Christ and their acceptance of one another. In one of the 2 Chinese churches, international students from around the world gathered into the Youth Fellowship, and – despite their differences of country, language and culture – were able to support each other in the new experience of living in Australia, undertaking by students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and working out how to be disciples of Jesus in this context.
- ***Cultural mix and the use of heart language.*** Particularly for those who are away from their "home" culture – there is a strong need to gather with other people like themselves for mutual understanding and support. One person from the Arabic-speaking Church said:

"We are busy but we take time to come together. I need this meeting. It doesn't matter what we study, but I like to meet with other Christians. I love

Jesus and I love this community, and they love me. It's better for me to express my feeling with my own language group, in my mother tongue. I am more free to pray and communicate, mostly in Arabic. This is a very close culture... We are a big family and we are very far from home, so we are all homesick. But here in this group we don't feel alone. Here, there is less stress and depression and anxiety. We have each other, we have food, we have faith, we have language, we have culture."

- Discipleship in the Small Group. On first "look" – life groups can tend to look like nothing more than friendship groups. But on second look – ***it is clear that for most people, there is an intentional quest to go deeper in their faith.*** One participant said, "I like getting to know people, and I also like to learn through the process of exchange how to live as a disciple. ***I want to understand; I want to know what all this means in the context of 2017*** ... Through the more intimate relationships with people, through prayer, through study together." Through significant amounts of "intimacy and vulnerability", people can discover what it means to be a disciple by means of each other's different but nonetheless shared life journeys. And it is clear that they do in fact "disciple one another". They do that with a great deal of support and mutual encouragement. Social reinforcement appears to be an important element of discipleship at a time when Christianity is in decline and/or in a marginalised state. People seem to take the instruction from the letter of St Jude seriously, when he wrote "But you, beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith" (Jude 1:20). And clearly this is an injunction for members of faith-communities, rather than individuals to attend to this important task separately. Mutuality appears to be key.

## QUESTION #2

To what extent does discipleship or being a disciple or growing as a disciple feature in your meetings?

- Not consciously. Ca. 70% of life groups do not consciously use the language of discipleship. For them, ***discipleship is a bi-product of their Bible study, community-life together, communal prayer life, and attempts to "work out" their salvation*** (Philippians 2:12-13) together. Several groups were somewhat reactive, saying "We don't use the word discipleship at all"; "It is old-fashioned and out-moded"; "We are concerned to communicate the Christian faith to non-Christians... That's why we don't use it".
- And yet for other groups – despite not having discipleship as their primary focus, there is a very short distance between reading the Bible, and struggling to find a way to work it out to their lives in the everyday world. One leader said, ***"I feel like our focus is on discipleship, but I wouldn't say we require it. And yet discipleship is our foremost activity.*** While the language of discipleship is not used, nevertheless discipleship is our unspoken goal". Another member said discipleship is front and centre in our group. "We are doing it without necessarily talking about – we put a lot of emphasis on active witness". In other words, in taking Jesus' teaching seriously and in putting Christianity to work (individually and corporately) ... Discipleship happens. Although many groups are concerned for the P of pastoral care; and others are concerned for the E of evangelism – nevertheless sooner or later the D of discipleship

comes into play. One group member said, "Something big is going on, and we need to understand how we fit into it".

- ***Discipleship as a two-tiered understanding.*** Some 5 life groups (25%) either understood directly, or seemed to imply that discipleship is for new converts and beginner-level Christians. "I think of discipleship as initial training of people who have just come to know Christ. But for those of us who have been Christians for a long time we would use a different term than discipleship". In summing up the conversation in one of the Groups, I said I had observed different levels of understandings about discipleship. On the one hand they might either be a new Christian who needed a specific kind of "baby food" to grow them into maturity. Or perhaps they might be a spiritual hero, who was an extraordinary Christian or disciple. ***One life group member stated, "I tend to think of a disciple as someone who is out there heroically evangelising and making disciples".*** So it is clear that some people have a two-tiered structure of discipleship in place. Whereas in Jesus' mind, discipleship is a non-negotiable call he places on everyone's life, to "Follow me".

- On several occasions, ***group-members broke discipleship up into its component parts***, which was a very helpful way of thinking. (1) Jesus making discipleship the centre of his earthly ministry; (2) The 12 themselves in the Gospels and the book of Acts; (3) The concept of discipleship, along with the biblical teaching, its language and applications; (4) Its applications in ordinary life, Such as the need for testimony and evangelism, care for other persons in Christ's name, the way we treat other people (especially fellow-Christians), and our care for the earth and our environment.

### QUESTION #3

What language do you use as a group when you speak of discipleship?

- 40% of life groups (***7 groups***) ***were reticent to use the language of disciple/discipleship, although that is what they continually implied.*** Instead, they tended to use words like believers, Christian, someone on a faith-journey, drawing near to Jesus, born again, brother-sister, whereas someone who is a nearly Christian might be called a "friend", someone in the fellowship of the Church, the Christian Family, someone who had been baptised, someone who submits to Jesus' Lordship.
- Group members seemed to be ***more comfortable talking about what it means to be a disciple in its outworking in practice***, through acts of kindness, generosity, service, mission, evangelism and shaping others (as much through socialisation as through specific teaching and oral instruction) – what it means to be a follower or disciple of Jesus.
- One group leader reported,  
 "When I have lead life groups of young people in another city/country, I felt like I had to keep re-stating the primary purpose (i.e., discipleship); but that doesn't need to happen here. We are unique to the extent that we all have significant previous experience. We want this to be authentic, organic, not to be forced. ***[Our life group] definitely has discipleship as its intent.*** If someone were ***a fly on the wall*** and listened to the language and phrases we use – especially our prayers, the way we speak to each other, our dependence on Jesus, and the use of Scripture – ***they would not hear the word disciple***

***much, but they would see and hear very clearly what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. [We are] ... well-equipped to live for Christ in the 21st century".***

- When Christians do use the language of discipleship, they appear to be using ***language that distinguishes them from non-Christians, and a kind of in-group and out-group distinction.*** The Christian disciple is someone who attempts to live their lives in accordance with the teachings of the Bible, and in obedience to Jesus' call to "Come, follow me". Although this is done imperfectly, nevertheless, the intent and the overall direction of their lives is towards Christ, and clearly "before the face of God". They are aware they are being watched by the Divine eye. And this has applications for such things as moral living, love for their neighbour, care for the poor and downcast and a deep concern to be "good citizens" in their families and workplaces. Whereas the unbeliever lives in disobedience to God, and stands outside the will and purpose of God in Christ. And therefore such people – although living under the providential grace of God – choose not to participate in it. They are not so much objects of wrath, as blinded by their worldly desires and unaware of the eternal life which can be theirs in Christ.
- Our identity as Christians/disciples. ***Peppered throughout the language of disciples and discipleship, is the language of identity.*** It is clear that quite a few group members felt some kind of tension around the fact that as Christians we are obviously different from the general population around us, and it is our faith in Christ and our attempts to work that out to our everyday lives in terms of love for our neighbour and a deep desire to bring healing and wholeness to families, communities and to the wider world. But they don't want that identity to create such a "distance of difference" that they cannot communicate their faith with their neighbours, friends and family-members, in the form of testimony, evangelism, and a desire (very deeply held), to make a positive difference to the lives of other people in Christ's name. This question of identity as disciples, but not wanting it to "get in the way", appears to form a creative tension for most group members.

#### QUESTION #4

Have you grown as a disciple in the past 12 months, measured as commitment, knowledge, compassion or some other measure?

- ***Almost everyone in the 18 groups (a total of 150 people), said they had grown as a disciple in the last 12 months.*** There were one or two exceptions – but after discussion, they came around to admitting they had grown in ways they had not expected. What I was particularly interested in was to see HOW they have grown. Descriptions which exemplified the HOW?: "I prefer the word developed over grown. I have no hesitation to say YES! We do discipleship in this group. I have grown in compassion, tolerance, commitment to Christ, and real development in my faith".
- Other life group members refer to growing in wisdom, an intensity of passion towards Christ, to living an inspiring life, and to compassion for others ... especially others in need. Others said the confession of sins, the determination to keep on walking with God, to love being challenged, reading books, daily Bible reading, increase in prayer life, the use of a spiritual Journal (only 3-4 references to journaling). Others said being filled with the Spirit, maturing and developing, and



increasing in Christ-like character, justice, mercy and truthfulness, and ability to communicate their faith in words to others, as well as living it out as a form of lived exemplification of Christian discipleship. ***Others said a kind of "realisation" in 3D form, lived discipleship is a form of "proxy" for words about discipleship.***

- ***The linkage between the inner life and our outward actions.*** Sooner or later, disciples of Jesus will begin to look like, sound like and talk like him. They have a new allegiance, and a new way of looking at the world. "Many of us in this group have become more open and authentic about our faith. ***I can't say why exactly, but I'm feeling more confident about my faith,*** with more boldness and willingness to speak out. I used to worry about what I could and could not say at work about my faith, but now I seem not to care. I simply talk about my faith everywhere I go".
- ***Discipleship is the agenda of our church...*** There is increasing intensity around discipleship in our life group. This group is ***a place to "rest my head"*** (someone who is in part-time ministry); "I feel I can trust everything and everyone here. This is a real haven. It is a real safe place for me and for others to grow".
- An older group member. ***"Yes I have grown in the last three months since my wife died.*** I was her carer. I didn't know how I was going to manage, but God is there for me all the time, helping me. It is hard to measure whether I have grown and how much.... It's more about ***how my faith journey has been.... There are spurts and stalls, ebbs and flows"***.
- A younger group member who is a meat inspector in an abattoir. "Yes I have grown. [I have realised that] ***there is more to attending church than just being on the music team. There are lots of other arms to Christian ministry, such as talking with people outside the church.*** This been a lot of personal growth (for me), through leadership, church administration, evangelism, a better understanding of how the church connects with the community, my Bible reading at 4:30 AM in the morning before I go to work, my leading of a life group, and my sharing of what I believe to be the gospel with my colleagues at work – even if they think I'm nuts".
- A young Chinese university student who was about to be baptised. ***"Yes, I have grown as a disciple of Jesus now. I'm more mature, and happier than I was.*** I used to be angry with God for giving me this challenge (to be a proper disciple), but now I know he will do me no harm, because he wants me to grow and to be mature".
- A middle-aged lady from the Arabic speaking church reported, ***"I'm growing deeper and growing stronger in my faith. It has really been helpful for me to read the Bible in my own language (Persian).*** I have now been healed in my heart in so many ways. The Lord has worked strongly. God's Word is so effective to reach into my soul. When I read God's Word I ask the Holy Spirit to guide me. It's important to read the Bible, because you come to know God's thoughts through his Word."
- Mostly when asked HOW they have grown as disciples of Jesus, ***people responded that they had taken responsibility for feeding themselves spiritually,*** for reading the Bible for themselves, being more consistent in their prayer lives, and talking about their faith with family members, people at work, at church and elsewhere. There is a dependence upon the Holy Spirit, which they haven't seen before, and which was now reflected in an increasingly Christ-like character, and there growing "difference" from selfish, consumer-oriented, and sometimes immoral people around about them.

- One way in which people had grown was to ***separate themselves from social media – quite intentionally*** – in order to deepen their prayer lives and to not just talk about faith but actually put it into practice. ***"Yes, I'm growing. Less talky talky and more do-y do-y"***.

## QUESTION #5

What steps have you taken personally to grow as a disciple in the past 12 months?

- Most people (***an estimated 85%***) ***in life groups reported they had taken steps toward spiritual growth*** in the form of: increased attention to Bible reading on their own and with others; increased commitment to prayer; spending time with a spiritual director; attending a semi-regular spiritual retreat; intentionally choosing vocations where they can talk about their faith at work; putting their faith into action; started seeing a counsellor to sort some of my 'issues' out; stepping out in faith and trust in God in key issues in my life; have begun leading a Bible study or Alpha group; *Lectio Divina* spiritual contemplation and meditation group with friends; attending BSF/Bible Study Fellowship (an estimated 30% + of women in the Life Groups attended BSF either regularly or at some time in the past); active attempts to evangelise my family and friends; being more self-reflective about where I am in my Christian faith.
- One lay leader reported: ***"I lead a Bible study group on Wednesdays. I find that what I'm studying helps me to learn and grow deeper. I really enjoy it.*** I put in at least a day of preparation, and this leads me and others closer to Christ.... The more you dig into Scripture ... the closer you become to Christ. It is so pleasing. I just love it. Without that I'd be pretty shallow. I also lead 2 services in nursing homes. That way I stay motivated. I find it energizing and very enjoyable. I have certainly grown in my faith, and others alongside me too".
- One Group member who have grown up as a Roman Catholic, went on an Emmaus Walk some years ago but really struggled. She nearly walked away. At first she thought she was really rebellious against God. But that God spoke to her, showing her two concepts. The first was that ***what you read in the Bible really was God's Word to her. And the second was that God loved her as she is – that she is enough. That God's loves for her – with her imperfections and all – and now she is growing spiritually into Christ likeness.*** This is remarkable to her. She now has a spiritual director, and is actively involved in a wide variety of ministries in her local Protestant church.
- A summary of other ***steps people are taking to grow spiritually:*** writing a spiritual Journal in an attempt to hear God's voice to me; being willing to be accountable to church leaders with regard to my spiritual growth; meeting with others on a regular basis for the purpose of their/my spiritual growth; a willingness to confess sins to God and to others; an increasing level of honesty with myself; a willingness to see my spiritual life as a "journey of obedience" – and learning the lesson (again) that I need to be gentle on myself and to receive Christ's forgiveness; running a parents' night for other parents who get "burned out" caring for their children, and who need to be "fired up" in their faith; Taking a "timeout" from social media; listening to podcast sermons instead.

## QUESTION #6

As you understand it, does your Church/church leaders expect you to grow spiritually?

- ***There is a desire and an intent to grow spiritually, but we find it difficult to know how to grow.*** Group members couldn't think of a deliberate statement regarding spiritual growth from their church's leadership. There seemed to be a lot of general encouragement to ***belong to a life group – on the assumption that would automatically produce spiritual growth.*** But how that would produce spiritual growth is not stated.
- Church leaders seem to place significant expectations on people to grow spiritually, and there were programs and resources either pointed to or made available for this purpose. But ***clear statements about what a disciple is and what spiritual growth looks like/effective measures, were not forthcoming from leaders.***
- ***We can observe spiritual growth and formation in others, but we find it difficult to see it in ourselves.*** Life group members felt that most church leaders want to see that people grow in the faith, but even they themselves often don't define what they mean by spiritual growth or don't have the skill-set to talk to peoples' souls/deepest inner life motivations.
- ***Yes, our church leaders want us to grow, but what is missing is any kind of steps to ensure that we do grow as disciples.*** As a result, our spiritual growth is not as effective as they want it to be. There is something missing. Sometimes pastors seem quite happy when we go on a roster to serve in some ministry in the church. But that in itself does not constitute spiritual growth.
- One life group member stated, ***"Our pastors love us. They are sharing the spiritual journey with us,*** and encourage us to step out in our comfort zones in order to walk by faith. They challenge us with uncomfortable topics and invite us to grow." Another group member stated: "They constantly connect with us, they are interested in me in my life and my faith. We value our leaders a lot". Another group member said "Yes, from the sermons and conversations they give us, they are calling us to live a deeper faith. This is not just the surface thing. It is based on knowledge and conviction".
- Another response was: ***"Yes! Our church's leadership expects us to grow. They are very intentional about equipping people for ministry.*** I've not seen it elsewhere. Every time I engage with our Senior Pastor – his intention for me is to grow. ***I receive intentional support from the leadership for me to grow as a discipler"***.
- "Yes – our church leadership DOES expect us to grow. Our church is special. Our life groups provide us with an opportunity to journey together, doing life together. ***There is good accountability which is not heavy or demanding. It is very genuine.*** The first time I came to this church it was like I could rest and put on my slippers – with no Catholic guilt. They didn't tell you what to do or how to act. One of the best programs is Christianity Explained – that's like ***a 'springboard of WOW!'*** I've known the Lord for 30 years, and I can tell you this is very exciting".
- "Yes – our leaders expect us to grow. We meet regularly outside of our usual church meetings to read the Bible and pray together. ***If you're a Christian, Jesus wants you to grow closer to God by your example of love. As Christians we***

**SHOULD be growing.** There's lots of people in our church you are interested in spiritual nature in the church and beyond".

- One of the dangers experienced by life group members is that when ministry leaders place low levels of expectation on them, they tend (by default) to create a culture of low performance among their people.

## QUESTION #7

What contributes most to your growth as a disciple?

- **Mentoring Programs.** *8 of the 18 Churches (40%) have implemented a mentoring program specifically for the purposes of facilitating discipleship in their congregations.* Acting as a mentor is a way of connecting senior Christians with junior/novice Christians. It enables one-on-one relationships to develop which are targeted towards growing the faith of the younger Christian, through prayer, Bible study, modelling of the faith by the older/more mature Christian, and under the sanction of the leadership of the church. Sometimes the mentors who carry out the discipling process are either pastors and/or church elders who have undergone some kind of training about how to deepen the faith of those for whose souls they have been given pastoral oversight. [NOTE: mentoring was reported as a strong contributor to discipleship by both pastors/Ministry leaders and Life Group members, and therefore represents a strong contributor to discipleship in the churches of South Australia].
- **Direct revelations and answers to prayer.** Examples are being rescued from depression and anxiety. "At one time I was lost, I tried to know Jesus in my own way. I thought he was never going to help me. But at one particular meeting a miracle happened. Things began to happen at home in my family, in my soul and in my life. It's a miracle! I now have a completely different relationship with God. He is the teacher and I'm the learner. I now understand his message, his Word. I want to trust him 100%. I don't preach in the church, but I do preach to my husband. Another Christian reported that God "send his angel" to guide me, through the postcard of a friend, which arrived at exactly the right time. God gave his guidance through that answer to prayer.
- **Life Group Participation.** Almost everyone participating in a life group reported that they had grown spiritually as a direct result of participating in the Group. In particular, the faith-stance to God of people in the group who were going through tough times, and who were depending on God in faithfulness and prayer for the deliverance – was a significant provocation to an increase in their own faith.
- **Belonging to a Community.** Not just the Life Group – but also in a circle of Christian friends, belonging to a Christian congregation, having people we can go to (including mentors and older Christians), who can pray with us and encourage us.
- **Suffering and "being in a hard place".** One man who had just spoken about the death of his wife stated: "The great thing about being a Christian is that despite being in tough times, we can find our way through to a very deep level of peace, knowing that we have been forgiven and made whole. We have a fresh start made available to us through our faith in Christ. Yes that is the Christian message. We can be forgiven, and we always have access to hope". Tremendous growth comes as a result of trials and sufferings. At the time it is unwelcome, but suffering is a great teacher; "suffering develops our muscles". In times of trauma, grief and loss – we

reach out to God and he does something for us we cannot do for ourselves. We are thrown back into total dependence upon him. And we see him respond to us by answering prayer, and meeting us right where we are.

- ***Facing your own mortality is an accelerant to faith.*** Coming to an understanding that God is eternal and we are mortal, yet able to participate in his eternal life – is a wonderful thing.
- ***Mission, evangelism and serving needy people.*** "We have to be serving people. We can't just tell them about God, we have to be meeting them at that point of need. Through their suffering we can reach them, and that speaks volumes to them".
- ***Other Aspects:*** worship and being in the presence of God; being challenged by Christian friends who we know truly love us; the kind of wisdom that only God could show us; the grace and goodness of God to us – especially when we sin and fall short. "God's constant confirmation that I am loved, and that I'm to love others. He constantly tells me he loves me. Meeting and recognising Jesus in others, who are not always people of faith. When I was working, I prayed every day that Christ would show himself through me to others". A prison chaplain said that he found his clients very inspiring (despite the fact that very few of them were Christians), and he often grew spiritually as a result of working with them. Another person said good teaching was really important for spiritual growth. Another person mentioned the life-experiences of other people. For example: the story of Tim Winton's father who was very sick. A Christian man came into the house to care for his father who was not at first a believer. Tim saw the outworking of faith in practice. It was not an intellectual exercise. It was ***love in action.***

## QUESTION #8

On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the highest), give yourself a score as a disciple.

- This question generated ***a wide variety of responses; from stunned silence, to absolute hilarity, to perplexity.*** This is understandable, because no one had been asked this question before, and being invited to give themselves a score as a disciple was completely unanticipated, and unprecedented. But the question also provoked some serious soul-searching.
- One international student said that she has gone through some hard times recently, and felt that God has left her. But she has decided to take him at his word, that he will never leave her nor forsake her. "I'm going to take that as a statement of faith. ***I'm going to talk to You anyway, and live for You and be here anyway.*** These hard times will not scare me away. I'm going to step forward anyway".
- One young man who is an intellectual-type, gave himself a low score of #1. Why? Because he was raised in a Greek Orthodox heritage, and has clearly in his mind the type of an ideal Saint who strives to live for Christ at great cost to themselves. He cited ***St Seraphim saying, "What he displayed in his life is what I would consider to be an 8-9.*** It's just total humility, total service, and lots of amazing things. I simply can't compare myself to him".
- A young woman stated – on the other hand – that since she had been crucified with Christ, and Christ was living in her, the Holy Spirit was living within her and as a result she was living a kind of supercharged life, because she was dependent on

Christ, and therefore *on a scale of 1-10, maybe I'm a 10!* Maybe we are all a 10! Thereafter the talk went in the direction of the Eastern Orthodox concept of the *theosis* which focuses on the redeemed human person who is on the other side of the cross, restored, reconciled and made beautiful, whole, fulsome, rich, and lovely – everything that a human ought to be. But **BECAUSE of what Christ has done for us.**

- One young woman in one of the Chinese churches said she thought she was a 5. Given the fact that the Bible says we are given three score years and ten to live (i.e., 70 years), and since she was 35 years old (halfway) – she supposed she had 35 years to continue growing in Christ, and *ought (by the end of her life), have achieved the magical number of #10.* [Laughter].
- One group member said *"Irrespective of my failings, God sees me as a 10;* whereas I see myself as a 2. And that's fine. It's the relationship within that matters. There is still a lot of learning, a long way to go". This observation that God is likely to score us-ourselves, draws attention to the fact that we need to find a way to "workout" and to 'realise' the faith we hold within ourselves, projecting it out into our everyday actions, in the way we treat ourselves and others and the world around about us.
- Another group member said, *"I always aim to put God at the centre of my world. My aim is to put him first. I bring him into all aspects of my life.* God doesn't want us to be the people tomorrow that we are today. Growth is the necessary principle of the Christian life. We ought to be getting stronger, it is difficult to measure because we are always changing, we ought to be one faith-level one day and another faith-level the next".
- Another group member (an international student) said, "I was born into a Christian family, but I didn't have a very good relationship with God for the past couple of years. But now *I have discovered he is always there for me, in the hard times. I score myself as a 7*".

## QUESTION #9

How have you attempted to assist others to grow in their faith and discipleship?

- Serving in various ministries in the church, especially the worship ministry, Bible study groups, life groups. *Breaking the cultural mould that says we have to always look after ourselves – by serving others instead. Giving away our lives as Jesus said we should.*
- Offering others the kind of time, respect and capital listening they need to empower them. "The hardest lesson in life is learning how easy it is". We just have to *draw on the power of the Holy Spirit who is flowing through us.* In the ordinariness of life, God is doing extraordinary things through us. This means we have to be courageous enough to work with what God is doing in and through us.
- *Hospitality, being open to people who are "searching for something".* "This has happened to me 7 times in the past year. I always get a thrill out of that." One example of that was a young couple who invited another couple to dinner – not knowing that they were facing a terrible crisis in their lives and one of the partners was contemplating suicide. "That is very encouraging to us to be able to help people. *Caring, sharing, praying, encouraging.* Talking about discipleship at a deeper level than ordinary everyday life. I want to encourage those who have not been attending church recently. I want them to grow closer to Jesus".

- ***Sharing faith with other people in order to encourage them to either become Christians, or grow in the faith to become more Christ-like.*** Two examples. (1) a grandparent who went overseas to visit family and grandchildren. Stayed for some time. Their daughter had grown away from Christ, and their grandchildren didn't know about Jesus. But after some months of living with them and praying together at bed-time each evening. Faith has now been refreshed in the family. Now that the grandparents have left to go home ... the family continue praying together on going to bed in the evenings and the children want to pray together". (2) One young married man had gone back to TAFE College to up-skill in his profession. While there he met an Afghani Muslim who was confident, unashamed and highly skilled at communicating his faith. Whereas this young Christian man didn't have anywhere near the same level of competence, or ability or even the words to express the deepest things he felt about God in Christ. He said ***he felt "ashamed" about who he was, and his capacity (incapacity) to talk about his faith.*** That really provoked him to get better at talking about his faith so that others can better understand the deep things he believed to be true about life and death, Jesus and salvation.
- One female international student was aware that another young woman was really struggling. ***"I was sensitive to her need. I had some depression and anxiety before, but God's Word has healed me. God heals the broken-hearted. I shared my testimony with her"***. In another instance, she wrote a series of encouraging texts and postcards with Bible verses to another young woman. Her hope and prayer was that she would come to faith in Christ, and entrust herself to Christ who cares for the broken-hearted.

### QUESTION #10

What is the difference between being a Christian who attends church, and a disciple who follows Jesus?

- In at least half the life group meetings, we didn't get to discuss this question, because discussing the previous 9 questions took up all the time. I chose to include this question because I thought it helped people to look at discipleship from another point of view.
- A young International student stated: ***"An ordinary Christian is someone who believes in God and just goes to church. But a disciple of someone who really follows Jesus and does what he wants them to do. We ought ALL to be disciples"***.
  - ***"It's too hard to be a disciple... It's easier just to be a Christian instead"***.
- "One of the leaders asked me to serve in the Youth Group and I said yes. I wanted to experience how to walk with Jesus and grow in his way. ***Jesus doesn't take a university class approach... He takes an apprenticeship approach which is based on a relationship. When you follow him in your everyday life, he teaches you and you learn, and he shows you how to put it into practice; serving-learning-relating-growing.*** Now I'm also on the worship team".

**Conclusion to Life Group Responses:**

That concludes the responses of life group members. An analysis of themes emerging from both leaders and life group member's responses will be provided at the end of the Report.



## 15. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY of Online Survey

### 15.1 McCrindle Research:

McCrindle Research were commissioned to develop the online component of the research relating to a third cohort of survey respondents in the form of online respondents to the Discipleship Research Project. 220 people responded to the online survey, providing the research with a solid foundation on which to base its findings.

From the data gathered from the online survey, the McCrindle team prepared a report entitled 'Insights into the Effectiveness of Congregational Discipleship: September 2017'. That Report represents an Addendum to this Report on The State of Discipleship in South Australia.

### 15.2 Survey Questions for Online Cohort:<sup>13</sup>

[the number of people who participated in the online surveys was 220].

In addition to standard demographic information such as age, gender, denominational affiliation, and length of association with the congregation they presently attend ... online participants were also invited to answer a number of value-based and open-ended questions. In those instances where online respondents were invited to select one or more available options, the means of recording their responses was often by means of a Likert Scale.

Q 1	From your own understanding, what is a disciple?
Q 2	Which of the following terms do you use when talking about discipleship – refer to all that apply: Christ-like; spiritual growth; spiritual maturity; journey, spiritual transformation, sanctification, followership; obedience, other (please specify); or none of the above.
Q 3	Please take 3 terms from these indicators and rank them in order of importance for your life as a disciple. Eight indicators were given relating to discipleship; 1) biblical knowledge; 2) Christ -like character; 3) traditional moral; 4) servant-heartedness; 5) passionate commitment; 6) effective in evangelism; 7) care for the poor and oppressed; & 8) the use of one spiritual gifts.
Q 4	Please rank the following items in the order of importance (1 = most important; 4 least important) ... when putting discipleship into practice.

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13. These questions were developed in cooperation with the team from McCrindle Research in Sydney. McCrindle Research generated a 34 page Report from responses gathered in the Online research. Please see Appendix 1 for details of that report).

	1) believing certain things; 2) what we do through our actions; 3) the things we say to others; & 4) the character we reflect towards others.
Q 5	Do you always think of yourself as a disciple of Jesus?
Q 6	Do you tell others that you are a disciple or follower of Jesus?
Q 7	Do you attempt to put your faith into practice in the following social networks? 1) family; 2) close friends; 3) friends; 4) work colleagues?
Q 8	How important are the following items in helping you stay close to Jesus and keep fresh in your faith? 1) serving at church; 2) serving in your community/workplace; 3) evangelism; 4) discipling others; 5) attending church; 6) attending Bible studies; 7) fasting; 8) praying/studying the Bible with others; 9) attending conferences; 10) reading the Bible/praying on your own; & 11) developing your spiritual gifts?
Q 9	Is discipleship a priority in your life? Yes/No.
Q 10	Which of the following items does your church offer you as a disciple? 1) Bible study; 2) mentoring with an older Christian; 3) one-on-one catch up; 4) church attendance/participation; 5) church camp; 6) attending church training days; 7) special one-off events with guest speakers; 8) participation in ministry; 9) serving at church; 10) leadership development courses; 11) mission trip; 12) alpha groups; 12) other [please specify]; or 13) none of the above.
Q 11	How effective are these programs at encouraging people to grow as disciples of Christ? 1) Bible study; 2) mentoring with an older Christian; 3) one-on-one catch up; 4) church attendance/participation; 5) church camp; 6) attending church training days; 7) special one-off events with guest speakers; 8) participation in ministry; 9) serving at church; 10) leadership development courses; 11) mission trips; 12) alpha groups; 12) other [please specify]; or 13) none of the above. (Likert scale)
Q 12	Please indicate how effective the following items are in terms of your own personal growth as a disciple of Christ? 1) books and other resources; 2) close friends and family members; 3) events such as conferences, camps and guest speakers; 4) Bible study groups; 5) one-on-one mentoring/catchups; 6) serving our church; 7) church attendance; 8) training days at church; 9) leadership development courses; 10) other. (Likert scale).
Q 13	How influential have the following factors been in your decision to attend church? 1) your social connections; 2) your spiritual growth; 3) biblical teaching; 4) your worship experience; 5) encouraged in my face; 6) a sense of community; 7) commitment to volunteering; 8) desire to see people come to know Jesus; 9) opportunity to contribute to the faith-formation of children. (Likert scale).
Q 14	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your approach to Church? 1) I see church as an opportunity to serve others; 2) I see church as a place to get my spiritual fulfilment each week; 3) I see church as a place to be part of a community of faith; 4) I see church as a place where I can meet with God.
Q 15	Are you involved with mission activities run by an organisation other than your local church? Yes/no?

Q 16	Are you currently advocating for justice on behalf of others? If so, which groups and why?
Q 17	How could your church better support you on your journey as a disciple of Jesus?
Q 18	If you have any other feedback on discipleship through your local church – please comment in the box below.

### 15.3 Executive Summary of Online Survey:

What follows in this section is a highly compressed 'executive' summary of the extensive McCrindle Report from the qualitative and quantitative research. That report entitled 'Insights into the Effectiveness of Congregational Discipleship, September 2017' is attached to this Report in the form of an in-depth 35 page Report. See Appendix XYZ.

#### Who Took Part in the Online Survey?

Survey participants were 38% male and 62% female.

The ages of participants were as follows:

- 18-22 -year-olds: 5%
- 23-37-year-olds: 18%
- 38-52-year-olds: 20%
- 53-71-year-olds 44% (majority)
- 72+ year-olds: 13%.

By denomination, online respondents had the following affiliations:

- Baptist: 52% (majority)
- Lutheran: 4%:
- Uniting Church: 10%
- Churches of Christ: 7%
- Salvation Army: 5%
- CRC: 4%
- Other: 10%

In terms of frequency of church attendance, online respondents reported the following:

- every week: 93%
- at least once a month: 7%
- on special occasions 0%.

#### Defining Discipleship:

There are many different interpretations of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. The commonly held belief, however, is that a disciple is someone who believes in and follows Jesus. The most frequently used term by 4 in 5 church members (81%) when talking about discipleship is 'Christ-like'.

It is believed that the effect of discipleship should be reflected in an individual's life. Top three expressions of being a disciple of Christ are: (1) faith is evident in lifestyle (89%); (2) obedience to Christ (88%); & (3) spiritual growth and development (84%).

**Discipleship in Practice:**

For two thirds of church members (67%), discipleship is a very high priority in their life. This is reflected in their openness to telling others about their faith, with 4 in 5 church members (80%) being open to telling others they are a disciple of Jesus. Of these members, however, just 1 in 4 (26%) actively tell others, whilst more than half (54%) wait until asked to tell others. There is a belief that discipleship should be shown through character and actions. Ca. half of respondents (48%) ranked character reflected to others as the most important factor when practising discipleship.

Faith is most likely to be lived out amongst family (82%, definitely) and close friends (74%, definitely). There is a shift when it comes to work colleagues, however, with almost 1 in 5 (20%) church members not really trying to put their faith into action among their work colleagues.

For keeping their faith fresh, church members identify reading the Bible and praying on their own (96%), attending church (96%), and using & developing their spiritual gifts (93%) as most important (very/somewhat).

**Developing Disciples:**

Church members believe applying their faith in their own lives is essential when making disciples of other people. The top three most important (extremely/very) considerations when discipling others are: (1) modelling their faith through their lives (100%); (2) acting as spiritual guides to others who are beginning the journey of faith (76%); & (3) talking about their faith in their everyday conversations (66%).

**The Effectiveness of Discipleship:**

The greatest influences (extremely/very) on an individual's growth as a disciple are: (1) Bible study (78%); (2) close friends and family members (77%); & (3) church attendance (70%).

Involvement in church life is considered as the most effective discipleship pathway. Many (71%) of those whose church offered opportunities for them to serve found this to be an effective (extremely/very) in growing disciples of Christ. Similarly, where involvement in ministry is an option at their church, 71% see this as an effective (extremely/very) pathway for growing disciples of Christ.

Key areas where churches could better support their members on their journey as a disciple of Christ include:

- Providing more structured mentoring programs which connect older congregation members with younger members
- Increase the training and support of Bible study leaders, as well as the frequency of Bible studies
- Work on creating a sense of community within the church, being open and inclusive to new people, while reaching out to the wider community.

**Effective Discipleship on Mission and Justice Initiatives:**

Just over 1/3 of church members (36%) are involved in mission activities run by organisations other than their church.

**Conclusion to McCrindle Research regarding Online Cohort Responses:**

That concludes the summary of the online cohort responses to the research questions.

**16. Analysis of Key Themes Emerging from the Research**

As we bring this Report to its conclusion, it is time to offer a thematic analysis of the major themes which emerged from the research. Here, I want to introduce 7 themes for each of the contributing cohorts, i.e., (1) from the perspective of church Leaders; (2) from the perspective of life group participants; & (3) from the perspective of the online respondents, whose input has been processed by McCrindle Research.

**16.1 Themes Emerging from the Church Leaders Responses.**

**THEME #1: The Disconnect between Ministry Practice and Discipleship.** It is clear that while something in the order of one third to one half of ministry leaders and churches *do* give priority to the concept of discipleship, nevertheless there is a clear disconnect between the focus of many Ministry leaders on a daily and weekly basis ...and the practice of discipleship. Many pastors are spending their time on oiling the machinery of the church as an institution. Rosters, running meetings, balance sheets, resolving conflict and ensuring the smooth-running of the organisation where they are addressing the majority of their time. This prioritisation of the church as "system" means that the deeper systemic issues of discipleship, the spiritual "tone" of the congregation, building into relationships with key people in the congregation, mentoring leaders and other mentors – needs to be put to one side. But if anything has been learned from this Research Report process, it is that discipleship takes time. And if it is to take time, that it must be a priority, and a priority for ALL in the leadership team – not just the Pastor or pastoral team. This is because pastors feel obligated to perform to the expectations of their key accountability group in the congregation, whether that be church members, or the Parish Council or some other reference group. This means spending extended amounts of time on either creating a discipleship culture in the congregation, or building into the lives of disciples who are growing in their faith in Christ – needs to be a priority for everyone, not just the ministry leader him/herself.

**THEME #2: Using the Language of Discipleship.** There is considerable variation in the kind of language used about discipleship, and the depth of conviction around

whether or not that language should be retained or adjusted to new forms. Almost universally, ministry leaders value discipleship, and understand it to be a first-order priority of Christian ministry. But not everyone was comfortable or accomplished in conveying this through preaching, Bible studies, and other forms of up-front ministry. Discipleship or being a disciple of Jesus Christ, is the direct response to the call of the gospel of Jesus to "Follow me". As such, discipleship is the engine-room of all Christian ministry, so we need to find a language for it which is able to convey its substance in clear, compelling and convincing ways. But the preference for oblique and secondary language for discipleship and the inner spiritual life of the disciple – is an indicator of either our unwillingness or inability to define what we mean by discipleship, or a loss of confidence in the gospel. If we cannot state the essential features of this primary calling of followers of Jesus, we are not likely to make many convinced disciples – especially at a time a particular challenge such as ours. Second, a broad range of definitions of discipleship and what a disciple is has come to light both in the literature pertaining to discipleship, but also in the course of this research. One needs to understand the basic distinction between a mere church attender (or a traditional, cultural Christian), and a convinced, convictional and confessing disciple who "risks" all in order to follow Christ.

**THEME #3: The Need for an Effective Measure of Spiritual Vitality for Use in Churches.** As is discussed extensively in the response transcripts by pastors and ministry leaders – it is clear that the business-oriented measures of the institutional life of the church in the form of static 'measures such as numbers of attendees, weekly giving, the number of programs, births and deaths, numbers of baptisms, and participation in various ministry rosters (i.e., worship team, prayer meeting, youth group leadership and so on), are very unsatisfactory external measures of what needs to be clearly understood as something which is first and foremost an inward reality. Discipleship is a response to the felt presence of God in Christ, and to the invitation to "Follow me", which represents a fundamental inward orientation and life-and-death allegiance. To that end, a new instrument which has the capacity to measure Inward realities of commitment, vitality and passion need to be developed. Such measures do exist in the psychological literature, but are overly complex and difficult to use. We cannot wait any longer for someone else to develop such a measure – there is need for us as pastoral leaders and the "shepherds" of Christ's flock, to find ways to measure the touchstones of a vital spiritual life, to gauge such things as heart temperature, desire, hunger for God, passion, maturity, dynamic worship, the willingness to Give one's life away, and to act in ways which are deeply countercultural to our non-Christian environment. This will include some kind of resilience and willingness/ability to resist Empire which invites us to make other choices, against rather than "for" Christ.

**THEME #4: Building an Effective Disciple-making Culture.** If we are to believe James KA Smith's writings, 21st-century post-Christian culture is a conversionist and disciple-making culture. Western consumer culture is a dynamic and ever-changing thing, characterised as a contested space between competing goods and values. People are converting all the time, from one consumer brand to the other, from one -ism to the other, and more recently from one sexual orientation to the other. The cultural Left

has found a way to employ its marketing arm (the media), and youth culture more broadly, so as to both convert and *disciple* Western youth (many of whom were once members of local churches, and many of whom are the children of confessing Christians), into forms of living which are not honouring to God. Why then do we as the Church, the community of Christ's disciples and followers, find it so difficult to participate in the contested space of culture, and to seek to both convert and make disciples of everyone we encounter? This has been the trademark activity of the Christian 'movement' from the beginning. Somehow or another – perhaps in the time of Christendom when we acclimatized to the fact that everyone was a Christian – we seem to have lost both the awareness and the skill-set of talking-up the gospel and the claims of Christ so as to make "converts" and to grow those converts into highly committed and loyal disciples. But as we all know, Christendom has died, and we find ourselves today in a post-Christendom age. We need to build an effective disciple-making culture in our churches, such that they are communities where high-levels of commitment at both asked and given. And this is not to egotistical leaders or particular denominational priorities (after all, the post-Christendom age is also a post-denominational age). The priority being spoken of as a commitment to Christ, first and foremost.

**THEME #5: Discipleship is Not a Program it is a Priority and a Communal**

**Practice.** Ministry leaders are very clear that discipleship is open to all sorts of misinterpretations. One of those is that discipleship is an individual thing, where the individual uses his or her choice to "choose" for Christ. But that ignores the larger reality that discipleship is a communal practice, and – as previously stated – it takes an entire church to raise a disciple and/or saint. Another frequent misunderstanding is that discipleship can be taught or programmed into existence. If there is a discipleship class, then one ought to expect that there is disciples being made. But there are complexities here. Clearly, programs are helpful conveyor belts or delivery systems for spiritual formation and growth and discipleship/commitment. As Thomas A'Kempis observed, "Progress means a program".<sup>14</sup> But that program of activities must be something which is a priority not only for ministry leaders, but also for the congregation as a faith-community. Ultimately, discipleship needs to be a recognised, commended and supported activity by everyone in the church. One of the most useful "programs" employed by 8 of the 18 congregations (40%), is mentoring. In this case, it is mentoring for the purpose not of growing leaders (the usual understanding of mentoring), but of growing disciples. Although it IS somewhat programmatic – nevertheless the intentional, systematic, leader-endorsed and congregation-wide practice of mentoring-for-discipleship, represents one of the great success stories among the churches of South Australia.

**THEME #6: The Greater the Cultural Marginalization the Greater the need for Discipleship.** Pastors and ministry-leaders are – whether they like it or not – spiritual abbots of faith-communities. They are caretakers of the souls of others. And when

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14. Thomas A'Kempis. *The Imitation of Christ*. London: Burns and Oates. 1959, 45.

those "others" are tempted to give into the siren songs of 21st-century consumer culture, and are increasingly being marginalised (read "pushed" to the edges) by a culture that does not welcome either an interventionist God, or a Christianity which is seen as an outmoded life-form and belief system from another age ... then ministry leaders need to do something about it. Our people live in Babylon, they are staring into the eyes of the snake. What they need is a greater sense of identity and a clearer sense of their reason-for-being in the world. Part of our task as ministry leaders is to deepen our peoples' capacity to "resist" what is on offer from the world, and to identify with clarity and purpose what is the Christ calls us to be, and to do. The greater the cultural marginalisation therefore, the greater the need for ministry leaders to – with care and intentional purpose – disciple that people properly. Preaching and teaching from such text as the Gospels and Peter's Epistles are likely to engender a deeper sense of the value and worthiness of being a Christian in a post-Christian age, and to remind people that although some suffering and persecution are likely to be involved, nevertheless following Christ almost always means the cross, suffering and exclusion. But it is there in those uncomfortable places, that Christ comes through for us, and that we discover most powerfully the presence of Christ working in and through his People.

**THEME #7: Discipleship Offered as a Supported Pathway.** One of the options for spiritual formation and growth in faith vitality which arose out of the interviews, was the possibility that people desiring to grow in their faith-journeys as Disciples of Christ, could be offered a series of steppingstones towards a clearly identified goal. In the same way that Life Coaches lay before people a series of steppingstones towards financial independence, physical fitness, or achieving some other life goal – there is the same potential for Ministry Leaders (as spiritual directors), to lay out before those wishing to grow in their discipleship-journeys, a pathway to increased spiritual vitality. One way of doing this is to invite (a) the disciple themselves (b) a small team of Elder, life group leader and respected friend; & (c) and a member of the Pastoral team – to come to an agreement on an annual plan for growing and deepening the spiritual life of the person concerned. Elements such as timeframe, activity, prayer, service, reading, agreed outcomes in terms of KPIs, could be put in place, and a spiritual director (if your congregation has them in place), could check on progress from time to time. At the end of the year, that teammates to assess the growth of the individual and what needs to happen the following year. There are dangers of course, because power and control issues could come into play, and this kind of activity is only likely to work if it is a widespread practice throughout the congregation. In the early years of the Christian faith, these kinds of steps played an important part in the catechism or process of admission and induction into the Christian faith. With care and wise oversight – there is no reason why it can't happen again in today's churches.

## 16.2 Themes Emerging from Interviews with Life Group Participants.

**THEME #1: The Language of Discipleship.** Live Group members repeatedly said they would rather "act out" what discipleship was, than try to define it. While it IS possible to define it, they would rather enact discipleship than talk about it. One of the



striking phrases used was "Less talky talky and more do-y do-y". And yet there was also the repeated refrain that they were hungry for more information about discipleship, and that their leaders hadn't told them with any sense of clarity or consistency – what a disciple was. For that reason, I offered (on three or four occasions) a brief summary of the biblical language of discipleship, in the hope that it would cement the concept of discipleship in their minds.

(1) **Mathetes**: the Greek for disciple as follow-up, or learner. In other words, someone who is enrolled in Jesus' school. (2) **Mimeomai**: the root of this Greek word is to mimic or to copy. Hence one definition of discipleship is to "copy a life". (3) **Akolutheow**: this Greek word (from which we derive the word acolyte), mean someone who follows. (4) **Misseo**: this Greek word means someone who is sent, who is tasked with a particular role or who act on behalf of another. From which we obtain the word for 'mission'. (5) **Paroikoi**: This Greek word is used on 6 occasions (mostly by Peter in his Epistles), meaning resident alien, stranger or someone who is citizenship is from somewhere else. These biblical terms need to be allowed to give "shape" and cogency to the role, calling and function of discipleship for us as 21st-century disciples. And (6) **Manthanw**: the Greek word referring to one who is a learner, a student enrolled in Jesus's school ... A school from which one never graduates.

## **THEME #2: Growing as Disciples in the Comforting Setting of a Life Group**

**Community.** There were times in the research when I felt that Life Groups were little more than friendship groups. But it didn't take long to "break through" that misconception, to a deeper insight. Namely that a very deep bond of life-faith-learning-accountability-mutuality was formed in Life Groups. People seem to really need this. Especially people like the Arabic-speaking Christians, who said they really "need" to be in a setting with like-minded people, to speak their own heart-language, and to draw succour and sustenance from other people who are like them. But that was also the case for everyday Australians. They said things like "I feel like I can put on my slippers here"; "I can rest my head here"; "I feel I have come home" here. It was through the regular pattern of Bible reading, prayer, sharing life together, accountability, watching others "live out" their faith – especially in the hard times – that Life Group members taught each other how to be disciples. One of the repeated refrains was "I want to know how to be a better Christian in my life". And "I see in the lives of my fellow Life Group members what it means to be a disciple in the joys, struggles, sorrows and victories of life". It is almost as if we need a reference group to socially 'validate' our beliefs and life-orientation. If the group says it is okay – that IS okay. This is particularly important in today's godless culture, where it is difficult to live as a Christian. Our lives are counter-cultural, and our actions are clearly "out of step" with the actions and value-systems of others. It is difficult to be a Christian in the 21st-century post-Christian context. There is a deeply-felt need to connect with other Christians, to affirm our own faith-stance, and to support us in holding our

"alternative" view to what I have called elsewhere the "authorised version of right-mindedness".<sup>15</sup>

**THEME #3: Discipleship is Not a Two-Tiered Structure.** Quite a few people in Life Groups believed (falsely), that discipleship is a two-tiered practice. 25% of the Groups had people who said they believed the disciple is a young Christian, who needs to be taught how to follow Christ. They thought special teaching and the language of "discipleship" referred to the stage of life-growth of a novice believer. This represents the first stage or tier of discipleship. The second stage or tier of discipleship were the "heroes" of the faith, who were "out there heroically evangelising and making other disciples". This form of discipleship represented a higher level of the spiritual life, and a later stage in the spiritual journey. But as one Group members said, I don't think it's about those who are out there risking everything, like a missionary or a pastor or someone who generously gives lots of money to a great cause. No. We are all the same. One person is no more spiritual than the other. We are all called to discipleship, to follow after Christ. We are all in Jesus' school. Jesus calls EVERYONE to be his disciple – the young and the old, the new Christian and the lifelong believer. Other thoughts on this matter were: "An ordinary Christian is someone who believes in God and just goes to church. But a disciple is someone who really follows Jesus and does what he wants them to do. We ought ALL to be disciples". "It's too hard to be a disciple ... It's easier just to be a Christian instead".

**THEME #4: It's Not so Easy to Talk about My Faith, but I Try.** One of the most compelling stories told by a member of a life group, was of a young man in his mid-30s (married with children), who went back to TAFE to acquire further skills for his work. While there, he encountered an Afghani Muslim and got to know him. Over lunch one day, the Muslim asked the young man what he believed. He really struggled to put his faith into words, and felt that he had "failed" in his attempt. As a result he felt "ashamed". Whereas the Muslim man gave a confident and compelling account of his faith with clarity and conviction. One of the outcomes of the transition into a post-Christian world, where there are many other competing ideologies and well-religions, is the need for us to train our people not simply in evangelism, but in identifying WHAT Christians believe; HOW they are different from everyone else; WHY that is so; WHO they are as Christians; and the like. Otherwise we will find ourselves as Christians not being able to compete in what is now a highly competitive cultural 'space'. On the other hand, there were many people who participated in the research, who said things like, "I used to worry about what I could and could not say at work. But these days I don't worry anymore. I just talk about my faith". Others said, "I talk about my faith all the time". And still others said, "An important part of my growth as a disciple has been my willingness to talk about my faith with others". The "others" referred to were family members, work colleagues, and neighbours. Because a

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15. Stuart Devenish. *Seeing & Believing: The Eye of Faith in a Visual Culture*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012.

significant number of people who contributed in Life Groups said they had grown as a disciple in the past 12 months (an estimated 95%), this increase in the desire and capacity/confidence to talk about their faith is very noticeable.

**THEME #5: Christian Parents Struggling with Loss of Faith in Their Children.**

One of the repeated refrains throughout the interviews in Life Groups, was of highly committed Christian parents struggling with loss of faith in their children. In one instance, an elder who had been in low-ministry all his life in the church, had 4 children. Today only one of those 4 continues to profess faith in Christ. Another migrant couple had come to Australia 20+ years ago, in the hope and expectation that they could live as Christians in Australia, without having to be in fear of their Egyptian (Islamic) religion. But on arriving in Australia, the 3 children were given an excellent education, and while receiving an education, had imbibed the secularised values of their Aussie friends and neighbours. Today, none of the three children profess faith in Christ, leaving the parents deeply distressed about the state of affairs. Their father wept as he told me the story in the interview-situation. In another setting, grandparents went to visit their daughter and grandchildren who were living overseas. Their daughter no longer saw herself as a person of faith, and had not passed on Christian faith to her own children. The grandparents prayed with the grandchildren each evening, and told them bedtime stories from the Bible. At the end of their lengthy stay, the children expected to pray together, and missed the Bible-stories from the grandparents. After arriving home, the children continue to pray together, and to ask their parents and grandparents to tell them Bible stories. Faith has been re-kindled in that family. One mother of an adult son said you have to be intentional about going on in your faith. It doesn't just happen automatically. "My son used to be a Christian and go to church every week. But now he doesn't. He is negative and not positive. Finding Jesus is like someone turning on a light switch. But my son is in the dark". Keeping our children in the faith represents one of the great challenges faced by Christian parents and grandparents. Reaching and keeping our own children/grandchildren in the Christian faith, represents a matter of urgent priority, since they are our "first" mission responsibility.

**THEME #6: As a Christian I'm Different from Other People.** Although the category of 'difference' was represented in transcripts from interviews with pastors and ministry leaders – the categories of identity, difference and cultural distance from the average population, appears most strongly in interview transcripts from Life Group participants. Quite a few group members felt some kind of tension between who they were as Christians, and the kind of world they needed to live in, and the kind of godless culture which hosts them. One worker in an aggressively non-Christian setting said "I think I'm nuts" (of his workmates). But that didn't deter him. He simply ratcheted up his actions and words (with a good sense of humour), to meet the challenge. People didn't want the sense of "difference" between Christians and non-Christians to get in the way of their witness. The challenge of "difference" represented a creative challenge, which invited them to bear witness/testimony to the value of being a Christian in the world, even if non-Christians were predisposed to see Christianity as an old and out-moded belief system, which was no longer relevant in today's world. People realise the importance not simply to "tell" their un-believing

friends and neighbours the good news of the gospel of salvation; but the need to "show" them through the quality of their lives. "We can't just tell them, we have to show it to them with our lives". The need to be happy, holy, worldly saints who were the messenger-message-and working model of the kingdom of God was recognised by many.

**THEME #7: God is Present in Our Brokenness and Suffering.** What I noticed in interviews with Life-group members was the sheer number of people who are coping with significant life-issues. Sickness, grief, relationship breakdown and financial difficulties were commonplace. And yet the consensus was that suffering is the place where our faith in Christ grows most strongly. "Suffering develops our faith-muscles". "Meeting our mortality is an accelerant to growth in faith". The felt-presence of God – even in times of struggle and suffering – was the testimony of most if not all. But it is in those dark places of the life of Christ becomes real, and his constant affirmation that "I am loved, and I'm called to love others" comes into play. One young International student said that there were many times when God felt absent from her life, but she decided that she was going to talk to him anyway; she was going to live for him anyway; and she was going to be a disciple – no matter what. And often it was through suffering that committed disciples were able to connect with the pain of others. In one particular instance, a young couple invited a non-Christian couple over for dinner – completely unaware that they were going through some deep waters, and that one of the second couple were considering suicide. They were able to care and ministered to that couple, and to prevent further suffering. I'm not sure that story has resulted in a conversion to Christ – but the fact that there was deep-care offered, and a life saved, is precious in itself.

### 16.3 Themes Emerging from the Online Cohort Responses [in the McCrindle Report].

#### **Preface to the Online Cohort Responses:**

There appears to have been a small number of pastors and church leaders (group 1), and life group members (group 2), who also participated in the online survey. Because of the anonymous nature of the online survey, we are not able to identify the extent of the overlap, apart from estimating that of the 220 people who participated in the online survey, possibly 30 (?) [or ca.15% of the overall number] Pastors and life group members also participated in the online survey.

**THEME #1: Who Responded to the Online Survey?** The majority of respondents to the online survey were Baptist by affiliation (52%); and were in the 53-71 age-range. They were regular church attenders (with 93% attending church and weekly basis, and most had been attending their current church for a lengthy period of time (10-40+ years). As a group, these were a highly committed group of people who appear to have a vested interest in traditional church attendance as a form of faith-formation. The kind of church they had in mind was a traditional form of church, with worship, the sacraments, Bible reading, personal and corporate prayer, service, giving and a commitment to mission and evangelism, social justice, and mercy ministries.

These were the preferred platforms for faith formation, discipleship and the expression of Christian testimony preferred by the majority of respondents to this online survey.

**THEME #2: Who is Not Represented in the Online Sample?** What we don't hear in these online research surveys is the voice of younger people. That doesn't mean that younger people who profess faith in Christ don't think discipleship is important. What it probably does mean is that they were busying themselves elsewhere, in a range of activities which may well have appealed to the younger generations. If the older generations prefer traditional forms of church – younger generations possibly prefer other activities, such as drinking coffee with friends, socialising in local café's, reading the Bible together in "third" spaces, participating in music, creative and other forms of Christian witness beyond traditional church attendance. That cannot be said for certain, because as we know from reading the Bible, arguments "from silence" aren't always effective. But it is clear that for whatever reason, younger people did not participate in this online survey in large numbers. That is a surprise because given their status as "digital natives", we might expect them to have warmed to participation in the online platform.

**THEME #3: What is a Disciple of Jesus?** 232 people responded to the question, "From your understanding, what is a disciple of Jesus?" A wide range of responses were given, but the most significant responses were: (1) a follower of Jesus; (2) a person who has accepted Jesus as the Lord and Saviour; (3) one who follows Jesus in every aspect of their life, giving in the priority; (4) a student/learner who consciously commit themselves to learn from Jesus' teaching, and to make disciples of other; (5) someone who seeks to become like Jesus; (6) someone who has a personal relationship with Jesus, who has a hunger to know who he is; & (7) someone who is a witness to Jesus Christ.

**THEME #4: Reflecting Discipleship in Both Words and Actions.** One of the pastors in the interviews with ministry leader said, "We are good at talking about discipleship, but we are not good at living it out". Another person who was in attender of their life group, said something different: they said, "If we're not going to live it out ... There is absolutely no good just talking about it". This sentiment appears to be repeated in the online survey cohort, where very high numbers of people (99%) believed the need to model the faith through our lives; 76% said we need to act as spiritual guide to others who are beginning and the Christian faith; and 63% said we need to talk about faith in our everyday conversations with others. The implication here is that what matters most is our willingness and ability to "live out" our faith in our everyday lives, and "talking about our faith" comes in as a poor second. Of course the ideal thing is to do both, with our words interpreting our deeds, and our deeds interpreting our words. In fact 89% of respondents said that faith needs to be evident in our lifestyle.

**THEME #5: The Role of Church Attendance in Discipleship Formation.** Contributors to the online survey expressed strong confidence that Bible study (78%) and church attendance (70%) make significant contributions to the formation of

disciples and their faith and ongoing growth. Involvement in ministry in church contexts (62%) and one-on-one catch-ups with other church members (51%) and meeting with a mentor (46%) played lesser roles in the formation of disciples in their view. A different survey question related to this topic asked respondents what contributed most to their understanding of discipleship? The most significant responses were: (1) church attendance (98%); serving at church (95%); involvement in some form of ministry (81%); special one-off events with guest speakers (67%); being mentored by a more mature Christian (52%) involvement with mission activities (50%) etc. However I refer the reader back to then #1 'Responded to the Online Survey?' relevant to this Section, drawing your attention to the fact that many of the respondents to the online survey were older more traditional believers, with a vested interest in the current form of church/church attendance. Because of the extent of the decline of the church in past decades, and that includes a significant and measurable drop in church attendance – it is clear that church is not working for everyone, and if we are to be effective in growing disciples into the future, we will have to look outside the current traditional structures in order to be more effective in forming disciples into maturity for a great admission and impact in our still-secularising Australian cultural context.

**THEME #6: Are You a Disciple ... Really?** In the Research, the definition of a disciple was given as follows: "A disciple is a person who has heard Jesus' call to "Follow me", and who submits themselves in a voluntary, personal relationship to imitate Jesus' life, to communicate his gospel to others and to share in the life and work of the Master". In response to that definition, almost all respondents (98%) see themselves as a disciple of Jesus. 52% said this is always true; 33% of respondents said this is true most of the time, and 13% of respondents said this is true only sometimes. More than 90% indicated that discipleship is a core value in their lives, with 67% saying a very high priority; 29% saying somewhat of a priority, and 4% saying not really a priority. When it comes to telling others about their identity as a disciple of Jesus; 26% say yes, they actively tell others; 54%, say they tell others they are a disciple when they are asked, and 17% really tell others they are a disciple of Jesus.

**THEME #7: How Could Your Church Better Support You on Your Journey as a Disciple of Christ?** /Respondents feel their church supports them well in their journey as a disciple of Christ. However a number of areas for improvement were identified as follows. (1) Church leaders could provide more structured mentoring programs which connect older congregation members with younger members. (2) Increased training and supported Bible study leaders, as well as the frequency of Bible studies available to members. & (3) work on an increased sense of community within the church, being open and inclusive to new people, while reaching out to the wider community. In addition, respondents gave the following feedback; (a) provide a pathway for spiritual growth and a system of accountability; (b) provide more specific guidance regarding 'how' to grow as a disciple; (c) targeted ministry towards men's, women's and youth to increase their spiritual growth.

## 17. Recommendations from the Research

What follows is a number of discursive comments which form some key threads that contribute to the Recommendations for Action from the Research in the Churches in South Australia going forward.

"We (the SDA) do a very good job of getting people onto the membership rolls and retaining them. However, discipleship... Is deeper than agreeing to 28 cognitive truths and then sitting in the pews for the rest of one's life. [Discipleship] is a radical commitment to the whole of life of the radical Jesus. Jesus' definition of discipleship must form the basis for any discipleship plan your church develops".<sup>16</sup>

"I don't think we have a culture of discipleship [in our church]. We might think we do but we don't. We are resource rich but program heavy, and "light on" when it comes to knowing how to activate people in their discipleship journeys". (Statement by the pastor of a large church).

"An ordinary Christian is someone who believes in God and just goes to church. But a disciple is someone who really follows Jesus and does what he wants them to do. We ought ALL to be disciples." (A young international student).

"It's too hard to be a disciple ... It's easier just to be a Christian instead". (A young international student).

"Discipleship is the determined, intentional decision to follow Christ with my life and all that I am, so that his life is mirrored in mine. That way, others can see through my living, my words and my actions, that I am for Christ. It is a lifelong followership after him. As Eugene Peterson said, 'It is a "long obedience in the same direction."' (Definition of discipleship provided by Stuart Devenish in response to a request from my Life Group for such a definition).

"If you make disciples, you will always get the church. But if you try to build the church, you will rarely get disciples." (Mike Breen, discipleship specialist).<sup>17</sup>

"We need to go beyond shallow, everyday Christianity, to the nub of what it really means to follow Christ as a costly, radical, life-and-death disciple. In the future, there is going to have to be a greater connection between ministry practice and the craft of discipleship, if we are to make any disciples who are resilient, and able to resist the onset of both secular culture and the self-centred spiritualisms of post-modernity" (Statement by Stuart Devenish to a discipleship class, February 2018).

"I want to kindle a fire in the lives of others. A wildfire of discipleship". (Statement by a senior Chinese pastor).

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16. Hattingh et al, Qualitative Analysis of Discipleship in the SDA Church, 2; cited on page 9 of this Report.

17. From an online article by Mike Breen, entitled 'Why the Missional Movement Will Fail', at <http://www.vergenetwork.org/2011/09/14/mike-breen-why-the-missional-movement-will-fail/>

**RECOMMENDATION #1: Re-Knit the Connection between Lordship and Discipleship.**

A strong and vital commitment to discipleship (personal and congregational), is the logical outcome of the Christological confession that "Jesus Christ is Lord". Not to prioritise discipleship as the predominant activity of the Christian church is to renege on this most fundamental commitment of the Christian faith, and to force a destructive wedge between doctrinal confession and daily devotion.

**RECOMMENDATION #2: Rediscover Christianity's Capacity to Convert, Disciple and Transform its People.**

As the scholar James K.A. Smith has been telling us for the past two decades, 21st-century secular Western culture is not benign; it is a conversionist and formational/discipling culture. It wants to convert all of its citizens into committed consumers (of both products and lifestyles) – including Christians and our children. Christians have a 2000-year-long history of knowing how to convert and disciple people into the faith. It is time we rediscovered that skill set, and put it into practice.

**RECOMMENDATION #3: Establish a Strong Culture of Discipleship in Our Congregations/Worshipping Communities.**

Ministry leaders (pastors, elders, departmental 'heads' and life group leaders), need to develop strategies for strengthening a "culture of discipleship" in their congregations based on careful teaching, intentional modelling, and an expectation that people will deepen their commitment to Christ and their understanding of their faith.

**RECOMMENDATION #4: Make Multi-Generational Discipleship a Priority in Our Churches.**

Given the extent of the marginalisation of the Christian faith in contemporary Australian culture, and the pressure on our younger generation to conform through social media, movies and the like – if we do not prioritise multi-generational discipleship (especially of our children and Millennials), there will be no Christianity to speak of when the son of man returns (Luke 18:8).



**RECOMMENDATION #5: Increase Our Commitment to Innovate in the Area of Discipleship.**

Jesus made discipleship the centrepiece of his earthly ministry. Our task in the 21st century is to do the same – despite the challenges we face. Churches and ministry leaders need to be innovative in order to find patterns of ministry which attract the participation of committed Christians, in order to grow in their faith. Discipleship pathways and/or fresh ideas around teaching and modelling the faith are now an urgent priority for the Australian Church.

**RECOMMENDATION #6: Strengthen Christian Identity among Believers.**

We can strengthen identity of Christians in our churches by identifying 'differences' between ourselves in contemporary culture, rather than highlighting points of 'similarity'. The historian of the early church Alan Krieger said that conversion in the early church was a matter of an encounter with God that transformed people's *believing*, *behaving* and *belonging*. Correct doctrine is important, and moral behaviour likewise – but many Christians have a 'weak' religious identity which threatens their resilience in the face of multiple challenges... most of which are cultural.

**RECOMMENDATION #7: Be Sure to Resource People in their Desire to Grow as Disciples.**

Many of the participants in this research indicated their strong desire to grow as Christian disciples. But they didn't know how to. Churches need to adequately resource the growth of disciples in their congregations. Resourcing possibilities are: an adequate budget allocation; an annual preaching series on discipleship; perhaps the employment of a Pastor for Discipleship; incorporating discipleship material for study and life groups; ensuring pastors give enough time and attention to making and growing disciples and the congregations. This will include assisting Christians in their homes, workplaces and schools/colleges, to know how to talk about their faith. This is not just a matter of evangelism... it is a matter of giving our people the confidence to speak about their faith in a confident and convincing manner.

**RECOMMENDATION #8: Developing a Simple Tool for Measuring Spiritual Growth/Regression in Congregational Settings.**

As stated earlier in this report, churches tend to measure static things such as attendance, offerings and whether leadership rosters are filled – or not. But what is needed is a measurement instrument that can measure spiritual and religious vitality (or otherwise), in church members/disciples. Elements such as spiritual hunger, patient worship, quality of prayer life, teach ability, spiritual temperature, persistence/resilience, willingness to serve, Christ-like character etc., are central to this process. The instrument should involve both individual disciples and the ministry networking which they are nestled, in order to accurately and safely measure spiritual vitality.

**RECOMMENDATION #9: Offer Opportunities for On-the-Road, in-Service Learning as Disciples.**

When Jesus disciplined the twelve, the training he provided was not in a safe environment. It was an in-service form of training, which was often risky, and would be taken in our day to be premature. Paul also took this approach in his training and equipping of elders in each of the mission communities he established. Community service, mission trips, social action and justice activities provide ideal opportunities for Christian leaders to train novice disciples in order to pass on deeply held convictions of faith that call for courageous implementation.

**RECOMMENDATION #10: Denominational Leaders Cooperate to Run a State-Wide Conference on Discipleship in South Australia.**

It was the missionary bishop Lesslie Newbigin who stated that, "Unity is a missional imperative". The kind of activity proposed here is that Church leaders (and their training Colleges), work together to consult each other around discipleship. In the past 2 years, Catholics, Anglicans and other denominations in South Australia have made discipleship a priority. What have we learned? What works and what doesn't? How can we cooperate rather than compete – in order to honour Christ and grow disciples as we were commanded (Matthew 28:20).

## **Appendix A**

### **MCCRINDLE REPORT**

Insights into the Effectiveness of Congregational Discipleship



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# Tabor College

Insights into the effectiveness of  
congregational discipleship

September 2017



**Tabor** Adelaide

**mccrindle**

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# Research objectives

In September 2016, Tabor College commissioned McCrindle to conduct research into the effectiveness of congregational discipleship in South Australia. The objectives of this research are to:

- Gain insight into congregation members' perceptions of discipleship
- Understand the current discipleship practises and programs applied in churches
- Evaluate the effectiveness of discipleship programs available in churches
- Outline potential improvements to the discipleship process

# Research methodology

The *Insights into the effectiveness of congregational discipleship* report is the collation of data gained through a quantitative survey of 221 church members across 18 South Australian churches. The survey was deployed through Tabor College to a list of church leaders who then distributed the link to their congregations. The survey was in field from 7<sup>th</sup> May to 21<sup>st</sup> August 2017.

*When interpreting the results, please take into account the small sample size, particularly where segmentation is provided.*

## Terminology and segmentation throughout this report

Respondents to this survey are called *church members* or *respondents* throughout the report.

Length of attendance at <u>current</u> church Q. How long ago did you commence attending your current church regularly?		
Segment name	Option/s chosen	% of Church Members
Recent movers/0-5 years	0-5 years ago	30%
6-20 years	6-10 years ago, 11-20 years ago	32%
21+ years	21-30 years ago, 31-40 years ago, 41-50 years ago, 51-60 years ago, 61-70 years ago, 71+ years ago	38%

Length of church attendance in general Q. For how long have you been attending a church regularly?		
Segment name	Option/s chosen	% of Church Members
20 years or less (0-20 years)	0-5, 6-10, 11-20 years	23%
21-50 years	21-30, 31-40, 41-50 years	41%
51+ years	51-60, 61-70, 71+ years	36%

# Executive Summary

## Church attendance

Church members typically attend church to be encouraged in their faith (88% extremely/very influential), to receive Biblical teaching (86% extremely/very influential) and for their own spiritual development (85% extremely/very influential).

Church is seen as a place where members can meet with God (71% strongly agree), and be a part of a community (63% strongly agree).

## Defining discipleship

There are many different interpretations of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. The commonly held belief, however, is that a disciple is someone who believes in and follows Jesus. The most frequently used term by four in five church members (81%) when talking about discipleship is 'Christ-like'.

It is believed that the effects of discipleship should be reflected in an individual's life. The top three expressions of being a disciple of Christ are:

1. Faith is evident in lifestyle (89%)
2. Obedience to Christ (88%)
3. Spiritual growth and development (84%)

## Discipleship in practice

Two thirds of church members (67%) see discipleship as a very high priority in their life. This is reflected in their openness to telling others, with four in five church members (80%) being open to telling others they are a disciple of Jesus. Of these members, however, just one in four (26%) actively tell others, whilst more

than half (54%) wait until asked to tell others. There is a belief that discipleship should be shown through character and actions. Half of respondents (48%) ranked the character we reflect to others as the most important factor when practicing discipleship.

Faith is most likely to be lived out amongst family (82%, definitely) and close friends (74%, definitely). There is a shift when it comes to work colleagues, however, with almost one in five (19%) church members not really trying to put their faith in action amongst their work colleagues.

For keeping their faith fresh, church members identify reading the Bible and praying on their own (96%), attending church (96%), and using and developing their spiritual gifts (93%) as most important (very/somewhat).

## Developing disciples

Church members believe applying their faith in their own lives is essential when making disciples of other people. The top three most important (extremely/very) considerations when discipling others are:

1. Modelling their faith through their lives (100%)
2. Acting as spiritual guides to others who are beginning the journey of faith (76%)
3. Talking about their faith in their everyday conversations (66%)



## Effectiveness of discipleship

The greatest influences (extremely/very) on an individual's growth as a disciple are:

1. Bible study (78%)
2. Close friends and family members (77%)
3. Church attendance (70%)

Involvement in church life is considered the most effective discipleship pathway. Many (71%) of those whose church offered opportunities for them to serve found this to be effective (extremely/very) in growing disciples of Christ. Similarly, where involvement in ministry is an option at their church, 71% see this as an effective (extremely/very) pathway for growing disciples of Christ.

Key areas where churches could better support their members on their journey as a disciple of Christ include:

- Providing more structured mentoring programs which connect older congregation members with younger members
- Increase the training and support of Bible study leaders, as well as the frequency of Bible studies
- Work on creating a sense of community within the church, being open and inclusive to new people, whilst reaching out to the wider community.

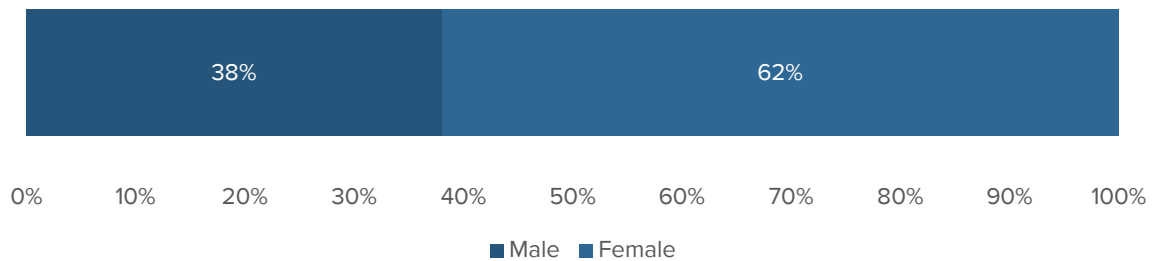
## Effects of discipleship on mission and justice initiatives

Just over a third of church members (36%) are involved in mission activities run by organisations other than their church

# Demographics

## Gender

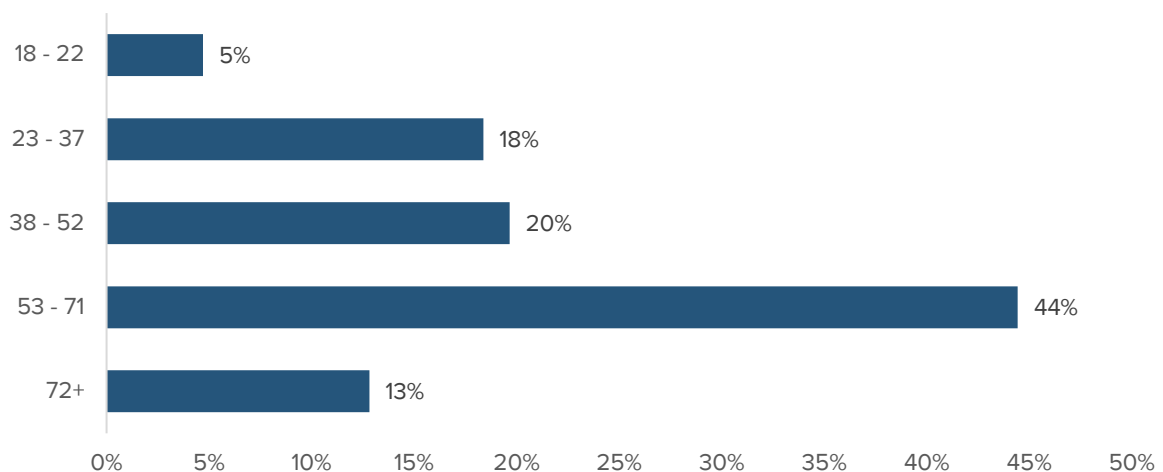
Q. Are you male or female?  
(n=234)



Church members who responded to the survey included slightly more females than males.

## Age

Q. What age will you be in 2017?  
(n=234)

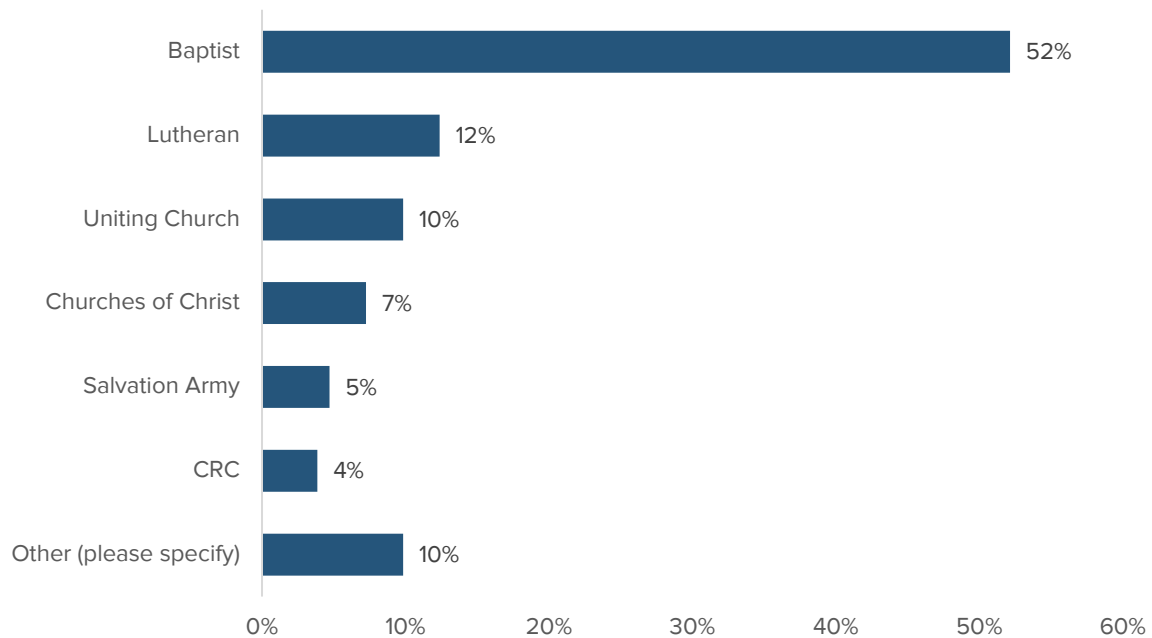


Almost one in four respondents (23%) were aged between 18-37 and one in five (20%) were 38-52. The largest proportion of respondents (44%) were aged 53-71, and one in eight (13%) were 72 years or older.

**Denomination**

Q. Which of the following best describes the denomination of your church?

(n=234)



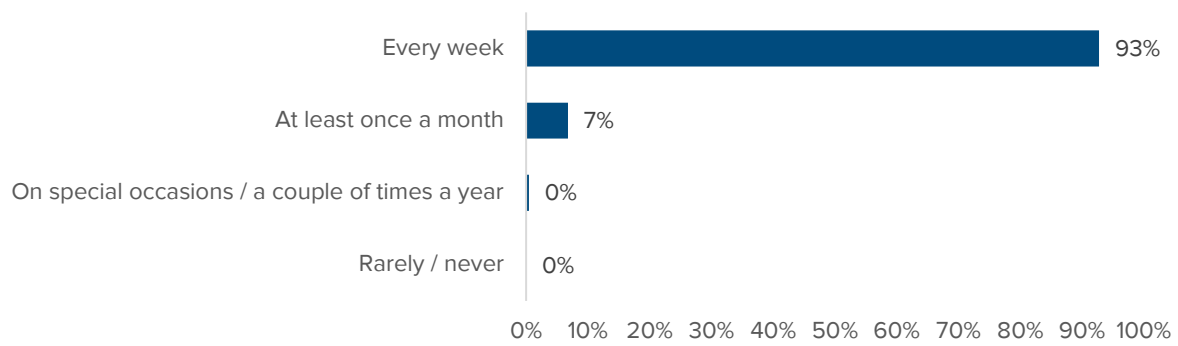
The largest proportion of respondents were Baptists (52%), followed by Lutheran (12%). Those who selected other (10%) indicated their church denomination as Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, Pentecostal, Independent and non-denominational.

# Church attendance

Church members are most likely to attend church every week.

More than nine in ten respondents (93%) attend church or participate in a religious service every week. Just 7% attend at least once a month.

Q. How regularly do you attend church or participate in a religious service?  
(n=222)

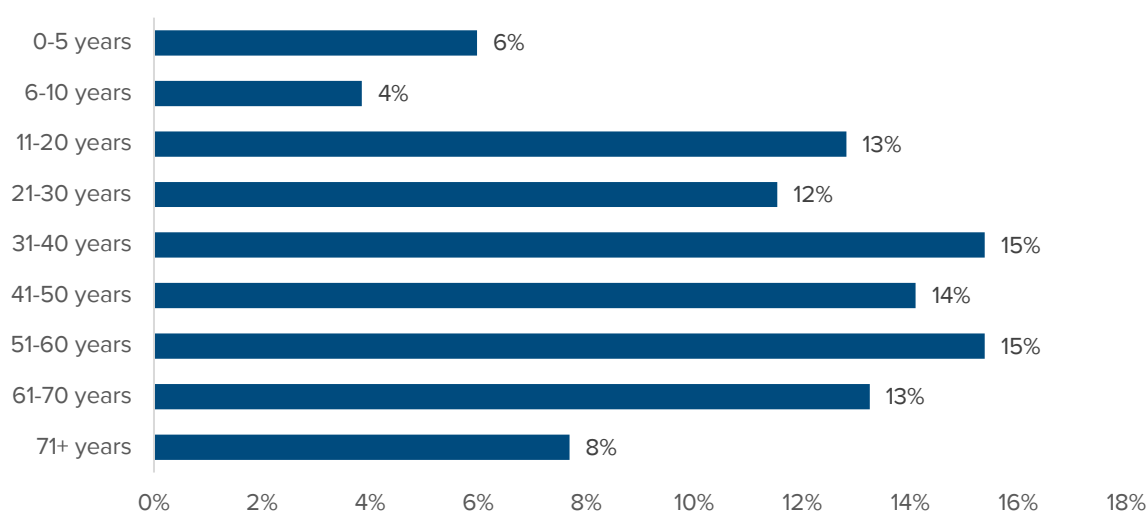


## Church members are committed to regularly attending church.

Just over a third of church members (36%) have been attending a church regularly for more than 50 years. Two in five (41%) have been

attending between 21 to 50 years, whilst a further one in five (23%) have been attending church regularly for 20 years or less.

Q. For how long have you been attending a church regularly?  
(n=234)



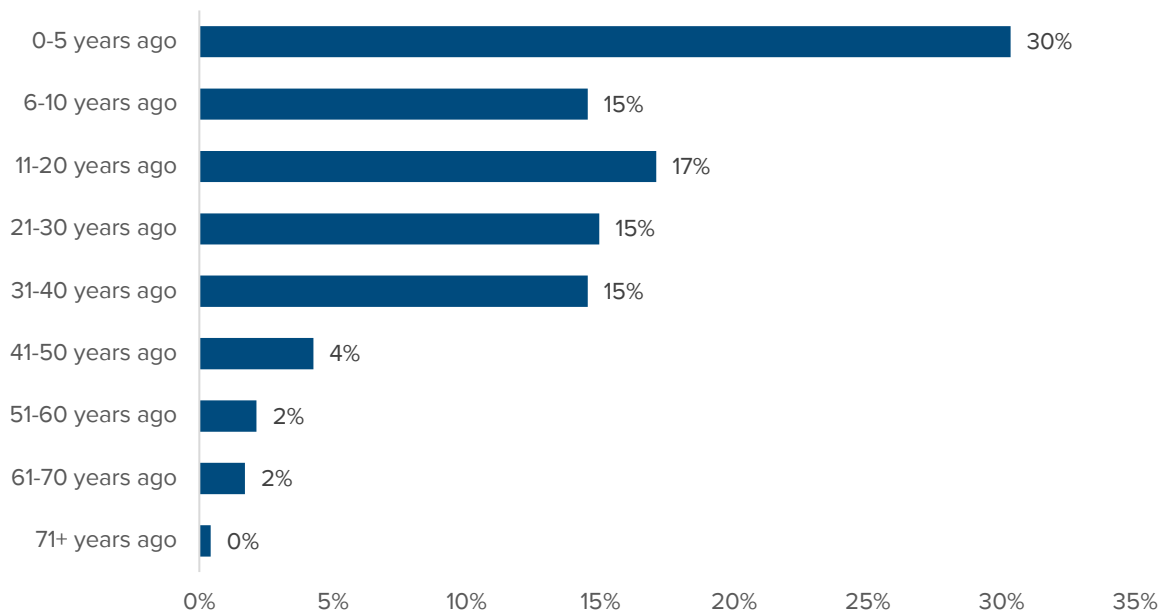
## Three in ten church members have attended their current church for less than five years.

Church members, although committed to attending church regularly do not always attend the same church. Three in ten church members (30%) have been regularly attending their current church for five years or less. Conversely, 70% have attended their current

church for six years or more. Almost a third (32%), have been committed to regularly attending their current church for six to twenty years. Similarly, almost two in five (38%) began regularly attending their current church more than 20 years ago.

### Q. How long ago did you commence attending your current church regularly?

(n=234)



## The main reason to attend church is to be encouraged in faith.

The top three most influential (extremely/very) reasons church members attend church are:

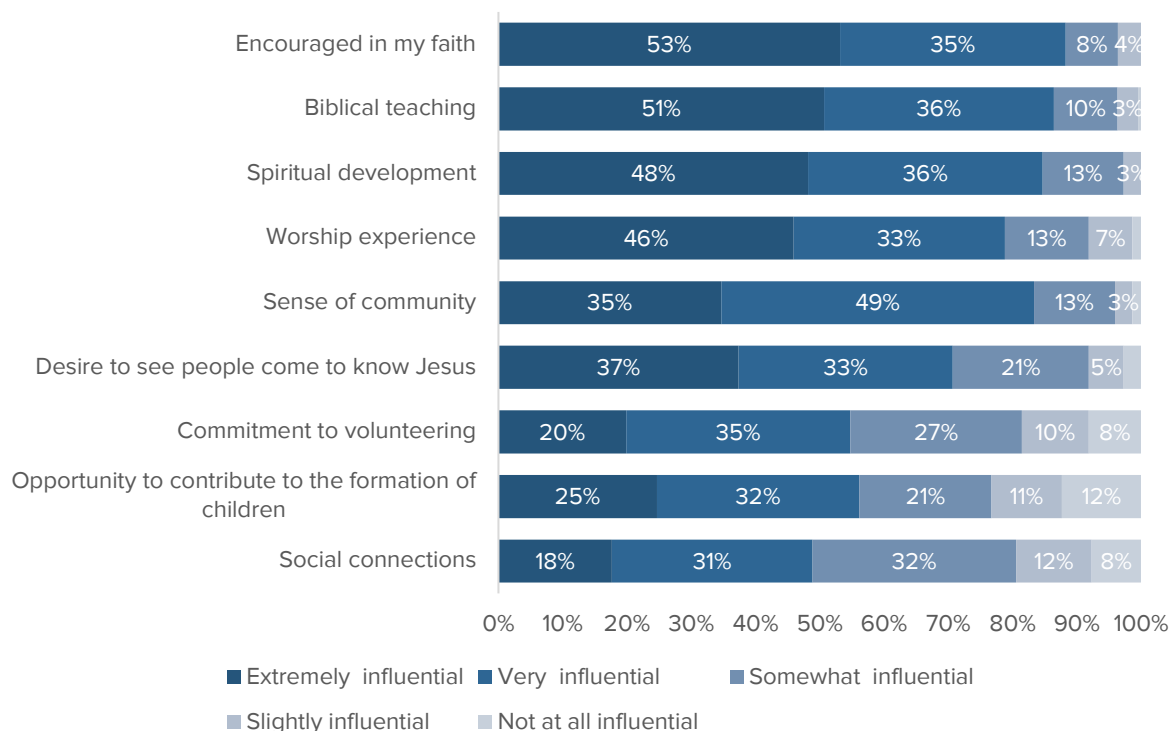
1. To be encouraged in their faith (88%)
2. Biblical teaching (86%)
3. Spiritual development (85%)

The desire for a sense of community (83%) is also influential. Social connections (49%) are the least influential factor.

### Gender

Females are more likely than males to indicate a number of factors as extremely influential on their decision to attend church. The factors yielding the greatest difference between females and males include the worship experience (57% cf. 29%, extremely), being encouraged in their faith (61% cf. 40%, extremely) and Biblical teaching (58% cf. 39%, extremely).

Q. Please indicate the level of influence each of the following factors have on your decision to attend church?  
(n=222)



Please indicate the level of influence each of the following factors have on your decision to attend church? (Extremely influential)		
	Males	Females
Encouraged in my faith	40%	61%
Biblical teaching	39%	58%
Spiritual development	38%	54%
Desire to see people come to know Jesus	32%	41%
Worship experience	29%	57%
Sense of community	27%	39%
Opportunity to contribute to the formation of children	22%	26%
Commitment to volunteering	18%	21%
Social connections	14%	20%



## Church is seen as a place to meet with God.

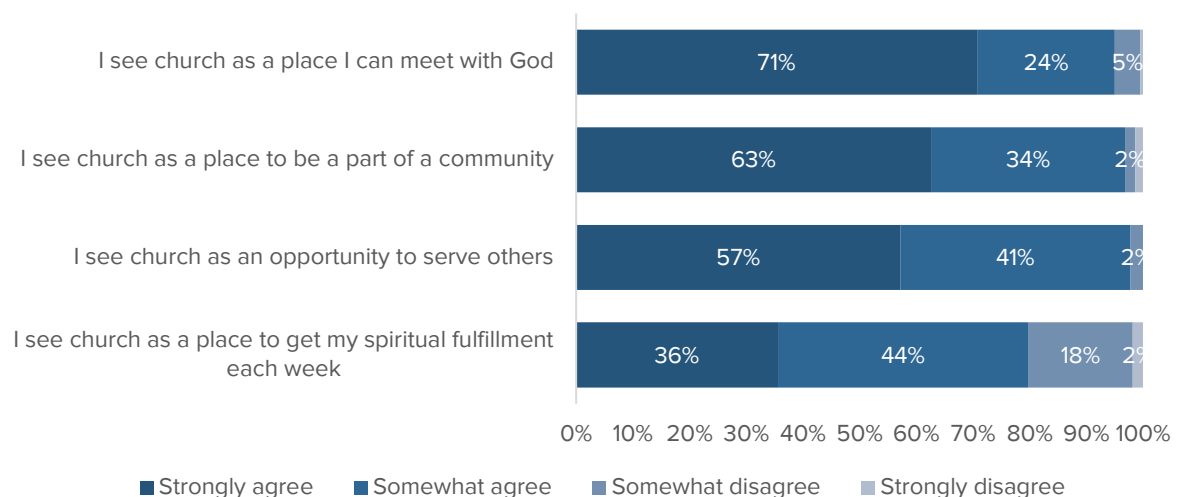
Church members are most likely to strongly see church as a place where they can meet with God (71%), followed by a place where they can be a part of a community (63%).

The opportunity to serve others, whilst still strong, is of less importance to church members (57%). Just over a third (36%) see church as a place to get their spiritual fulfilment each week.

### Length of church attendance in general

Church members who have been attending church for 20 years or less are more likely to indicate they strongly agree that church is a place to get their spiritual fulfilment each week (50% 20 years or less cf. 25% 21-50 years, 37% 51+ years).

Q. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your approach to church?  
(n=222)



# Defining discipleship

A disciple is one who believes in and follows Jesus.

Q. From your understanding what is a disciple of Jesus?

A variety of responses were given by church members, which ranged in emphasis from the Lordship of Jesus through to the application of His teaching in the lives of his followers. The majority of church members describe a disciple as someone who believes in Jesus and follows his teaching, with an emphasis on living this out and becoming more like Christ. Less frequent

responses included the themes of serving others and leading others to Jesus.

*A full list of responses has been outlined in a separate document titled "Discipleship effectiveness Report 2017 Appendix 1" in the worksheet labelled 'What is a disciple of Jesus'.*

## Evidence of faith in lifestyle is the most important expression of being a disciple of Christ.

Respondents identified the top three most important expressions of being a disciple of Christ as *evidence of faith in lifestyle* (89%), *obedience to Christ* (88%) and *spiritual growth and development* (84%). Seven in ten respondents (70%) believe that *regular prayer times* are also an important expression of being a disciple of Christ.

To a lesser degree, respondents see *Biblical understanding* (41%), *sacrificial giving to others* (41%), *regular church attendance* (37%) and

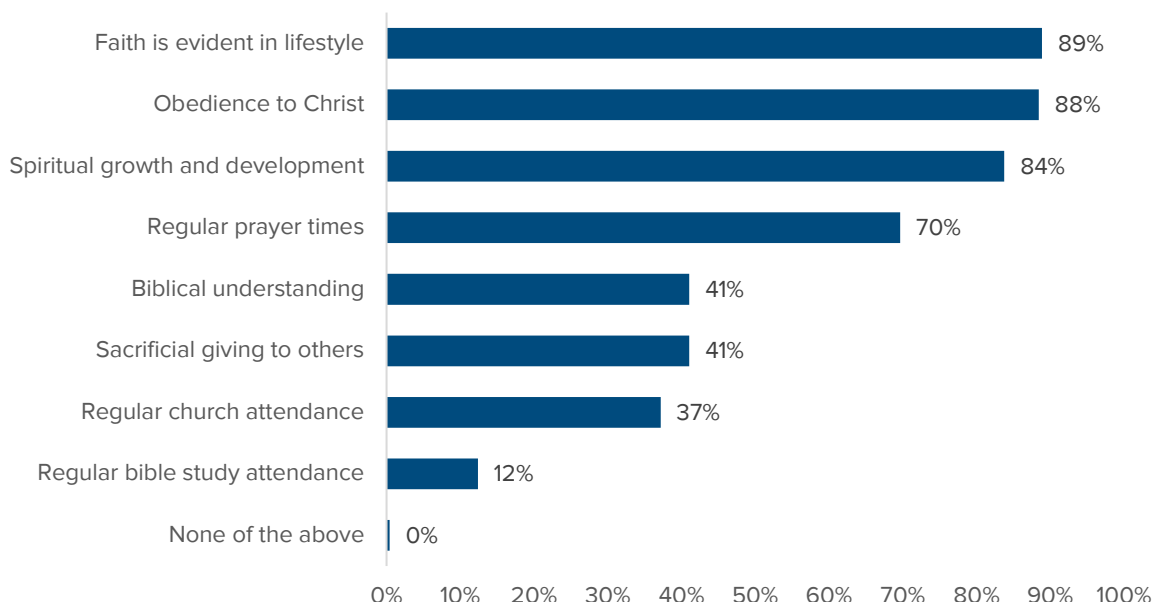
*regular Bible study attendance* (12%) as important expressions of being a disciple of Christ.

### Length of attendance at current church

Recent church movers (0-5 years) are more likely to identify Biblical understanding (48%) as an important expression of discipleship than long term attenders (35% 6-20 years, 40% 20+ years).

Q. Please indicate from the following list what you would most identify as being important expressions of being a disciple of Christ.

Please select up to 5 statements. (n=234)



## Four in five use the term Christ-like when talking about discipleship.

The most commonly used term when talking about discipleship is Christ-like (81%). Seven in ten respondents identify with spiritual growth (70%) and obedience (69%), whilst three in five (62%) use the term journey when talking about discipleship.

The least commonly used terms are followership (31%) and sanctification (26%). For those that indicated 'other' a variety of

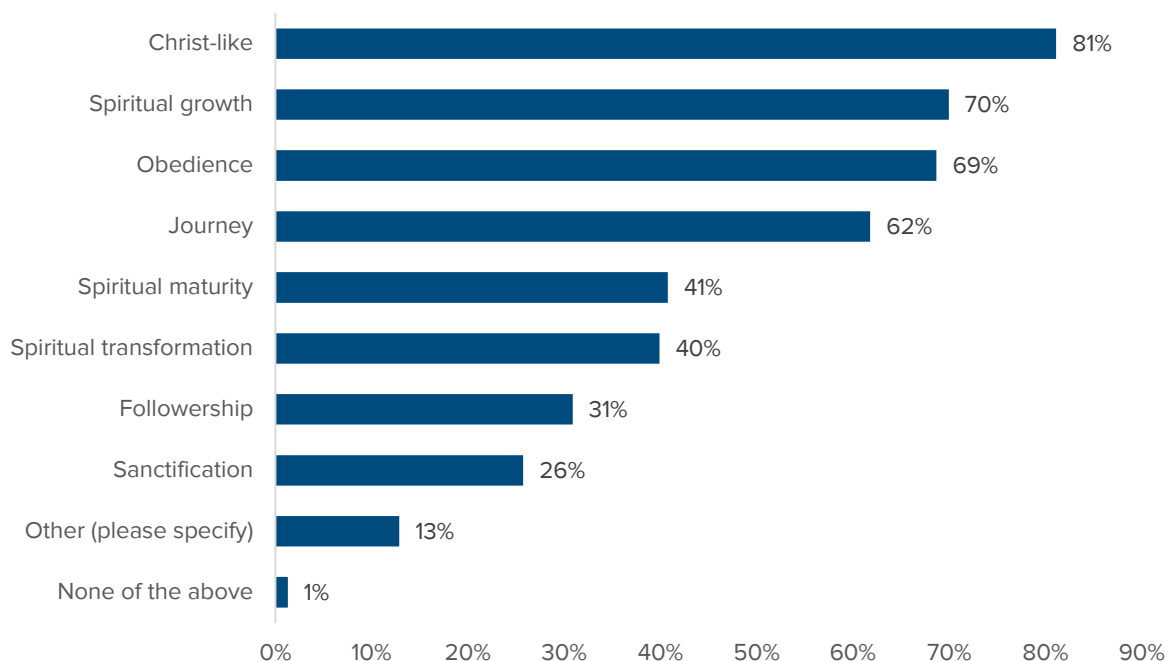
responses were given, the most frequently specified term, however, is a 'relationship'.

### Gender

Females are slightly more likely than males to use the term Christ-like when talking about discipleship (85% cf. 74%).

### Q. Which of the following terms do you use when talking about discipleship?

*Please select all that apply. (n=233)*

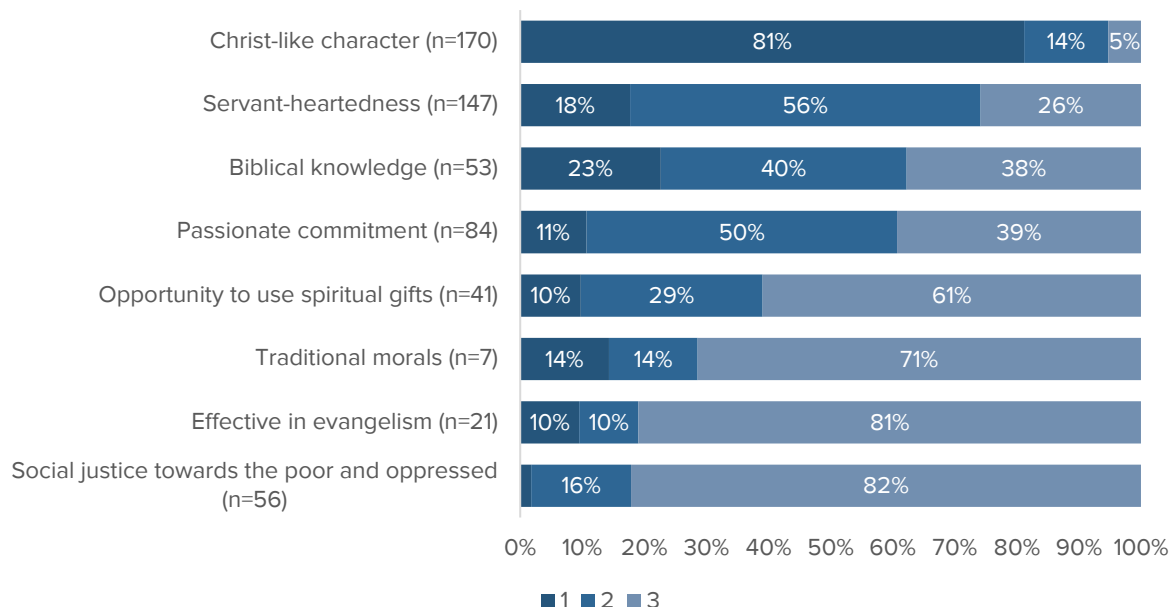


## Disciples are those with Christ-like character.

Christ-like character is the term respondents most identify with being a disciple. Of those who identified it as a key characteristic, four in five (81%) ranked it as most important. Biblical knowledge is the next characteristic most

frequently ranked as number one (23%, n=53). When first and second rankings are combined, however, servant-heartedness (74%) is the second most frequent term church members identify with being a disciple.

Q. Please select three terms from the following list that you most identify with being a disciple. Please rank them from 1 - most identify with being a disciple, 2 - second most identify with being a disciple, 3 - third most identify with being a disciple



# Discipleship in practice

More than half of church members see themselves as a disciple of Jesus all the time.

Almost all respondents (98%, who say 'yes') see themselves as a disciple of Jesus. There is variation, however, as to the extent that they believe this. More than half (52%) think of themselves as a disciple of Jesus always. One third (33%) most of the time, and just over one in ten (13%) think of themselves as a disciple of Jesus sometimes.

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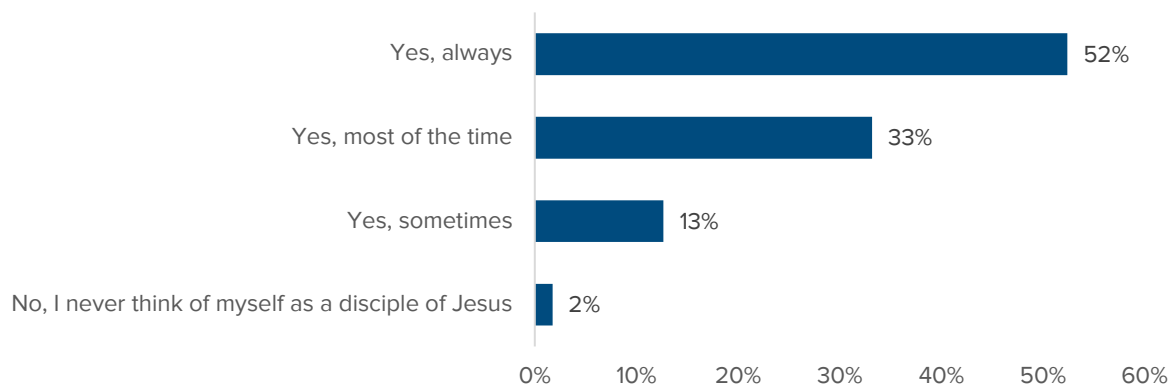
## Length of attendance at current church

Church members who have been at their current church for 6-20 years are the most likely to always think of themselves as a disciple of Jesus (66% cf. 47% recent movers (0-5 years) and 45% of those at their current church for 21+ years).

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Q. Do you think of yourself as a disciple of Jesus?

(n=229)



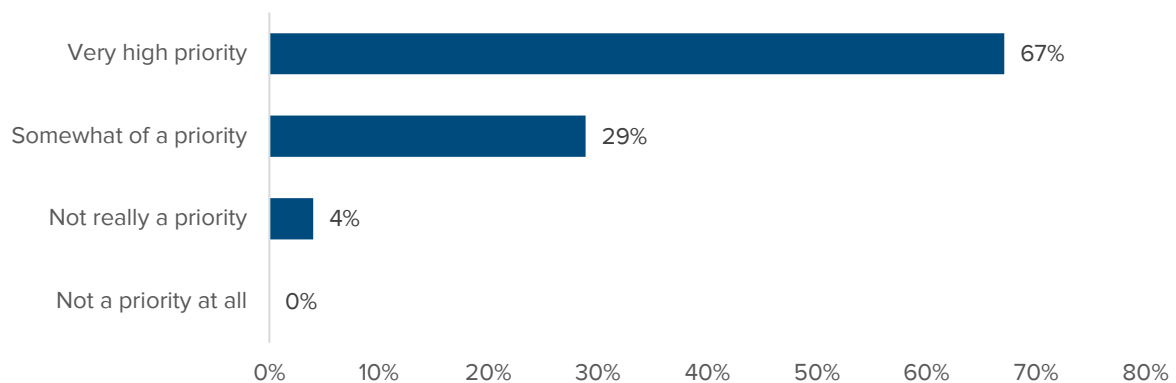
## More than nine in ten see discipleship as a priority in their life.

The following question was prefaced with this definition of discipleship: “*A disciple is a person who has heard Jesus' call to "Follow me", and who submits themselves in a voluntary, personal relationship to imitate Jesus' life, to communicate his gospel to others, and to share in the life and work of the Master.*”

Two in three respondents (67%) consider discipleship as a very high priority in their life. Almost three in ten (29%) see discipleship as somewhat of a priority and just 4% do not really see discipleship as a priority.

Q. In thinking about this definition, to what extent do you see discipleship as being a priority in your life?

(n=225)



## One in four actively tell others they are a disciple of Jesus.

Four in five (80%) respondents are open to telling others that they are a follower of Jesus. Just over one in four (26%) actively tell others that they are a disciple of Jesus whereas more than half (54%) are open to telling others, but wait until asked rather than initially volunteering the information.

One in six (17%) will rarely tell others that they are a disciple of Jesus.

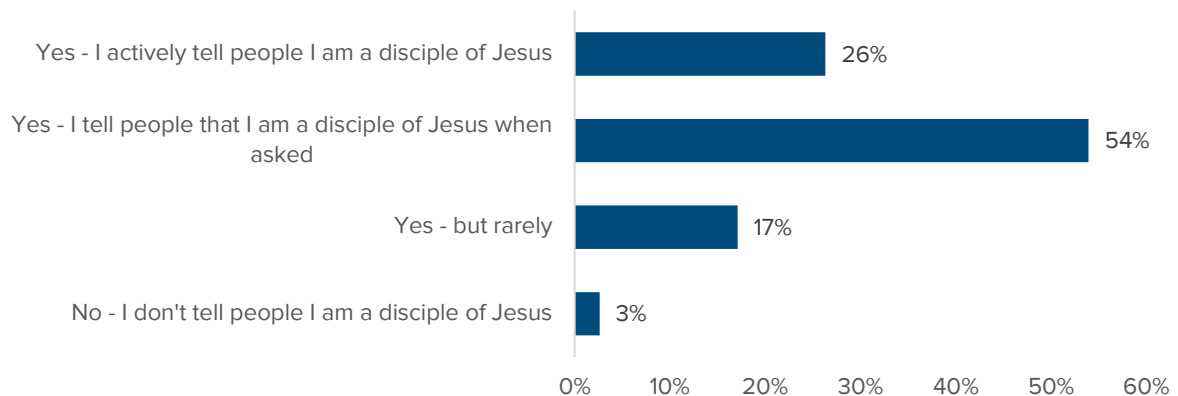
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### Gender

Females are more likely to tell people they are a disciple of Jesus when asked (58% cf. 48% men) whereas one in four males will rarely tell people they are a disciple of Jesus (26% cf. 12%).

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Q. Do you tell other people that you are a disciple/follower of Jesus?  
(n=228)





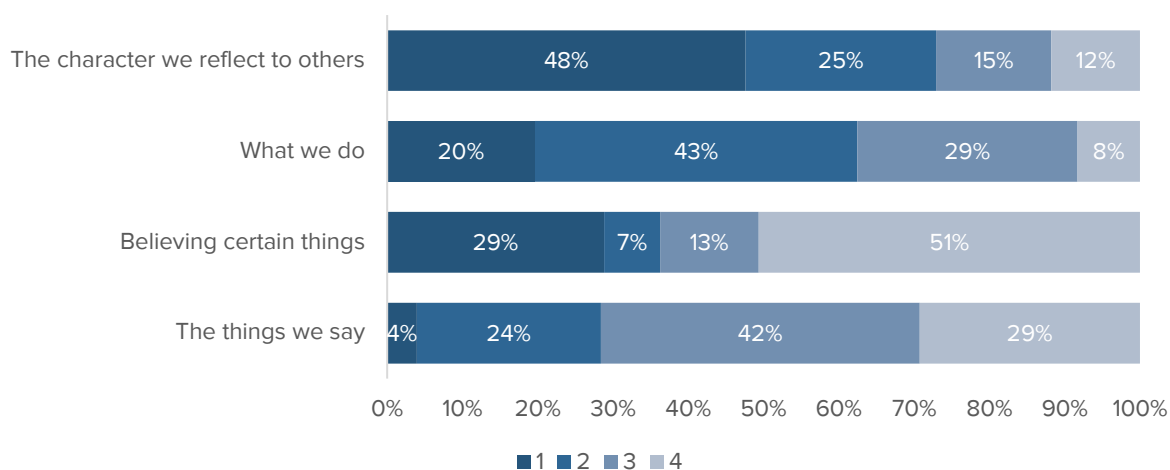
## Discipleship should be reflected in character and actions.

The outworking of faith through character and actions is of greatest importance to church members when putting discipleship into practice. Almost half (48%) ranked the *character we reflect to others* as most important. Almost three in ten (29%) ranked

*believing certain things* as most important, this is more than those who indicated *what we do* (20%). When rankings one and two are combined, however, *what we do* is seen to be of greater importance than *believing certain things* (62% cf. 36%).

Q. Please rank the following in the order of what you think is most important (1) to least important (4) when putting discipleship into practice.

(n=229)



## Faith is most likely lived out amongst family and close friends.

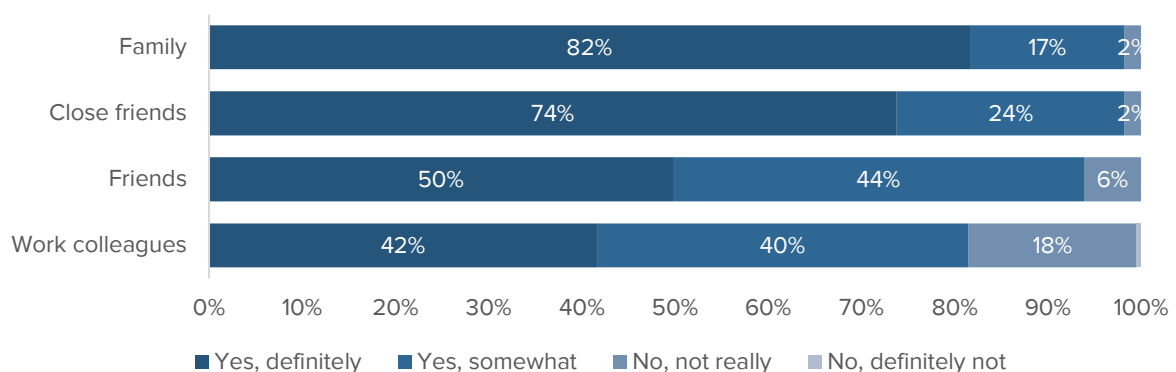
Church members are most likely to attempt to put their faith into practice with family and close friends. Four in five (82% yes, definitely) attempt to put their faith into practice with family, whilst almost one in four (74%, yes definitely) do so with close friends.

Respondents are least likely to attempt to put their faith into practice amongst work colleagues (19% no, not really/ definitely not).

### Length of church attendance in general

Long-time church attenders (51+ years) are the most likely to attempt to put their faith in action in all of the following social networks: family, close friends, friends and work colleagues.

Q. Do you attempt to put your faith into practice in your following social networks?  
(n=229)



Do you attempt to put your faith into practice in your following social networks (Yes, definitely)			
	0-20 years church attendance	21-50 years church attendance	51+ years church attendance
Family	54%	83%	92%
Close friends	62%	73%	82%
Friends	38%	48%	60%
Work colleagues	30%	43%	47%

## The key to keeping faith fresh is praying and reading the Bible.

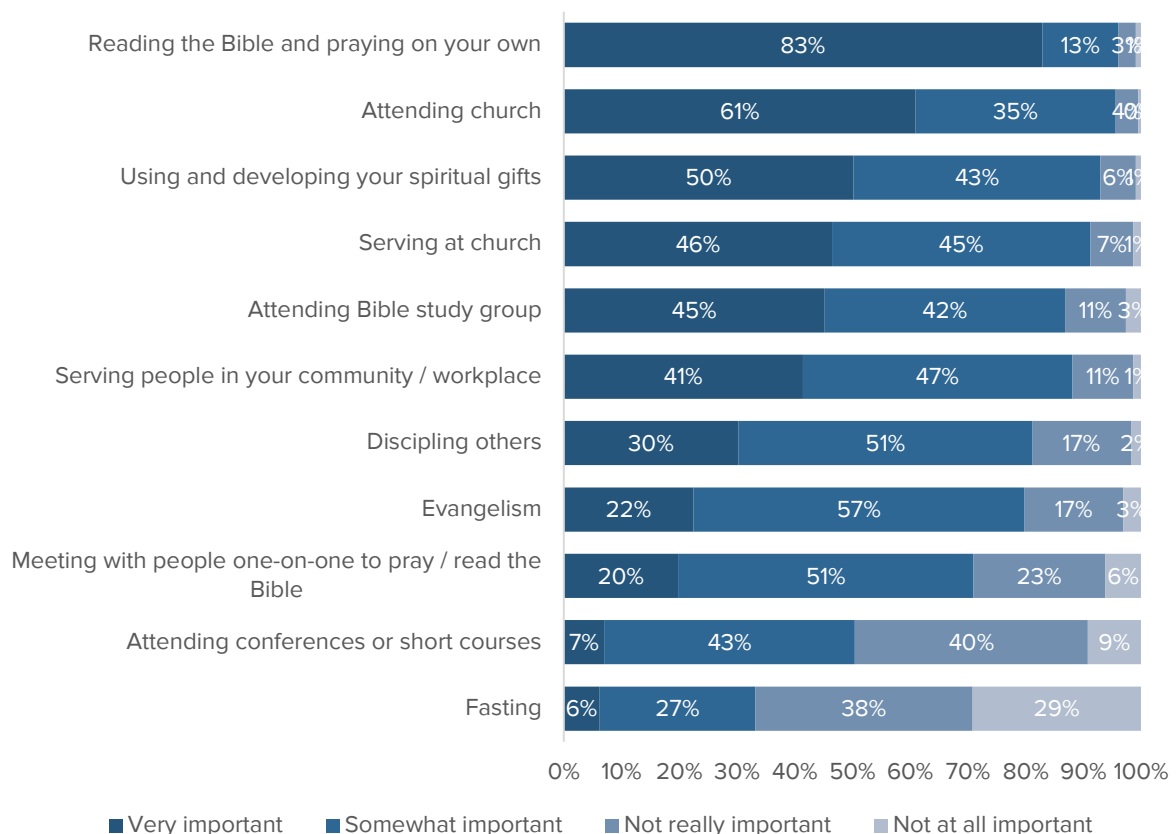
The most important (very/somewhat) factors in helping respondents stay close to Jesus and keep fresh in their faith are:

1. Reading the Bible and praying on their own (96%)
2. Attending church (96%)
3. Using and developing their spiritual gifts (93%)

Serving others is considered important (very/somewhat) to keeping faith fresh by more than four in five respondents. This is through serving at church (91%) or serving people in their community (88%).

Attending Bible study (87%) and discipling others (81%), whilst still important, are slightly lower on the priority list for church members.

### Q. How important are the following in helping you stay close to Jesus and keep your faith fresh? (n=228)



### Length of church attendance in general

Church members who have been regularly attending church for 20 years or less are *more* likely to indicate that serving at church, attending Bible Study group and serving people in their community/workplace helps them to stay fresh in their faith.

How important are the following in helping you stay close to Jesus and keep your faith fresh? (Very important)			
	0-20 years regular church attendance (n=53)	21-50 years regular church attendance (n=92)	51+ years regular church attendance (n=83)
Reading the Bible and praying on your own	81%	84%	83%
Attending church	62%	61%	60%
Serving at church	66%	40%	41%
Using and developing your spiritual gifts	54%	51%	47%
Attending Bible study group	53%	39%	47%
Serving people in your community/workplace	55%	35%	40%
Discipling others	28%	30%	31%
Evangelism	21%	20%	27%
Meeting with people one-on-one to pray/read the Bible	15%	23%	19%
Attending conferences or short courses	11%	8%	4%
Fasting	9%	5%	5%

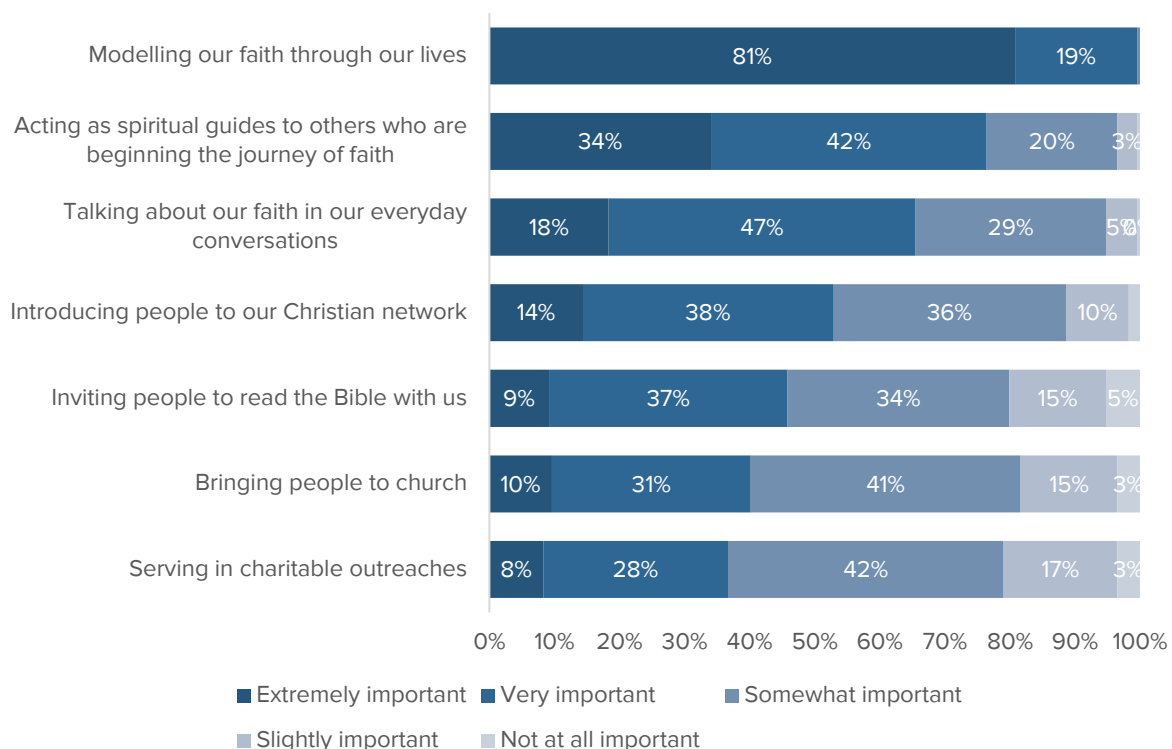
# Developing disciples

Modelling faith in action is of greatest importance when making disciples of other people.

The concept of faith in action is the most important factor when discipling others. All respondents (100%) consider modelling their faith through their lives as extremely or very important.

More than three quarters of respondents (76%) view acting as spiritual guides to others who are beginning their faith journey as important (extremely/very). A further two in three (66%) believe talking about their faith in everyday conversations is important when making disciples of other people.

Q. How important do you believe the following are when making disciples of other people?  
(n=229)



## Gender

Males are slightly more likely than females to believe inviting people to read the Bible with them is important (extremely/very) when making disciples of other people (51% cf. 43%). Females, however, value introducing people to their Christian network (56% cf. 48%).

## Length of church attendance in general

Church members who have regularly attended church for less than 20 years are more likely to see introducing people to their Christian network as important (extremely/very) when making disciples (66% cf. 48% 21-50 years, 50% 51+ years). Those who have attended church for more than 50 years, however, place great importance (extremely/very) on talking about their faith in everyday conversations (71% cf. 60% less than 20 years, 63% 21-50 years).

How important do you believe the following are when making disciples of other people? (Extremely/Very important)			
	0-20 years regular church attendance	21-50 years regular church attendance	51+ years regular church attendance
Modelling our faith through our lives	100%	100%	99%
Acting as spiritual guides to others who are beginning the journey of faith	79%	76%	75%
Introducing people to our Christian network	66%	48%	50%
Talking about our faith in our everyday conversations	60%	63%	71%
Inviting people to read the Bible with us	47%	49%	42%
Bringing people to church	49%	39%	36%
Serving in charitable outreaches	42%	37%	33%

# Effectiveness of discipleship

Bible studies are the most influential factor on an individual's personal growth as a disciple of Christ.

The questions in this section were prefaced with this definition of discipleship: *"A disciple is a person who has heard Jesus' call to 'Follow me', and who submits themselves in a voluntary, personal relationship to imitate Jesus' life, to communicate his gospel to others, and to share in the life and work of the Master."*

The most influential (extremely/very) factors on church members' personal growth as a disciple of Christ are:

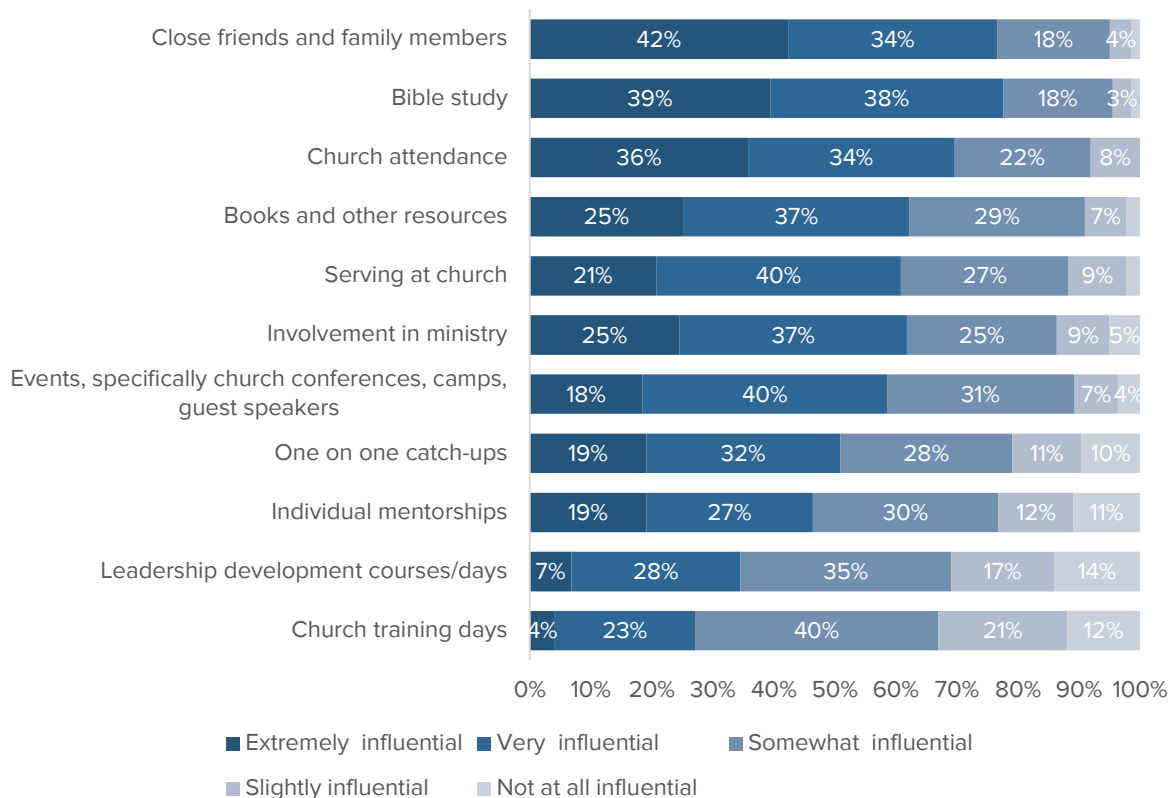
1. Bible study (78%)
2. Close friends and family members (77%)
3. Church attendance (70%)

Involvement in ministry (62%) and serving (61%) whilst frequently offered pathways of discipleship are seen as slightly less influential on an individual's personal growth as a disciple of Christ.

One in two church members see one on one catch-ups (51%) and individual mentorships (46%) as extremely or very influential on their personal growth as a disciple of Christ.

Q. Please indicate the level of influence each of the following factors have had on your personal growth as a disciple of Christ?

(n=223)



### Length of church attendance in general

Church members who have regularly attended church for 21-50 years place a greater emphasis on the importance (extremely/very) of individual mentorship (55% cf. 45% 20 years or less, 38% 51+ years) and one on one catch ups (56% cf. 55% less than 20 years, 43% 51+ years) than those who have attended church for shorter or longer periods of time.

In a similar way, involvement in ministry is of more importance (extremely/very) to those attending church for 21-50 years than others (69% cf. 57% 20 years or less, 57% 51+ years).



## Attending and serving at church are the most frequently offered discipleship pathways.

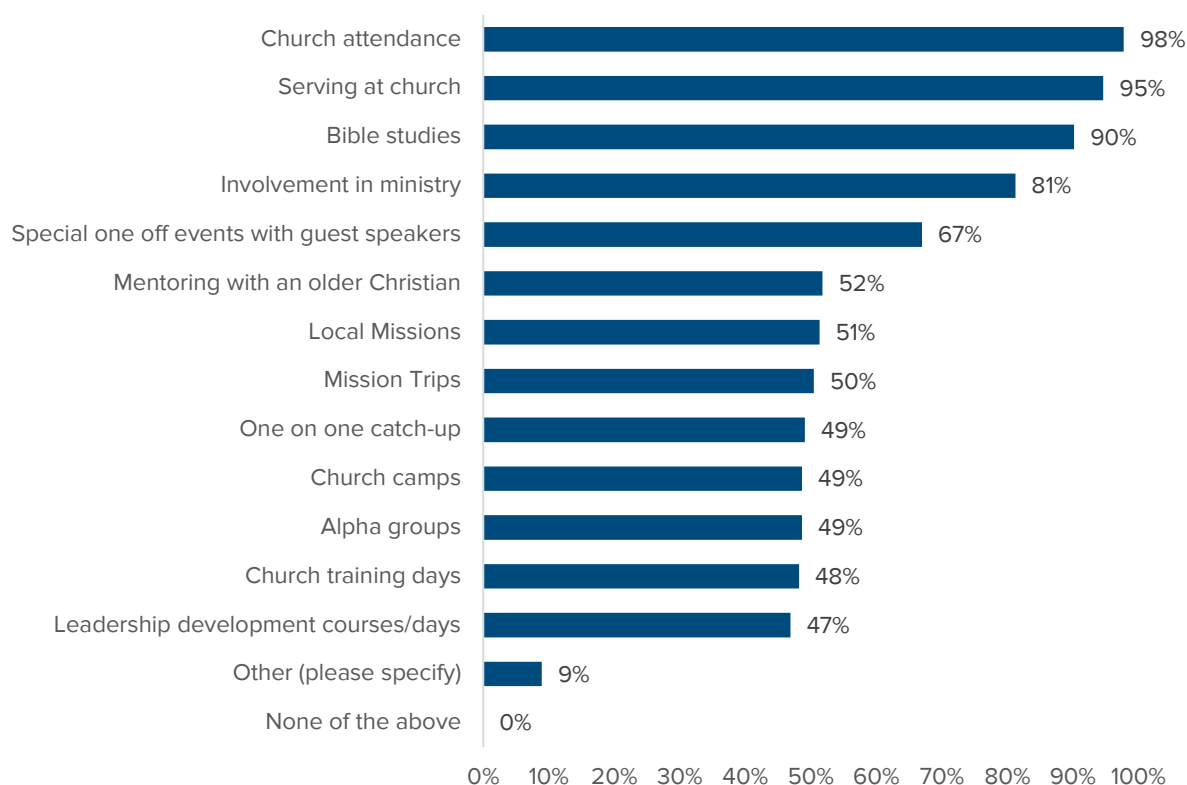
The most frequently offered pathways churches offer as part of discipleship are church attendance (98%), serving at church (95%), Bible studies (90%) and involvement in ministry (81%).

The least offered pathways by churches are leadership development courses/days (47%), and church training days (48%).

Mentoring with older Christians (52%) and one on one catch-ups (49%) come in sixth and eighth place respectively.

### Q. Which of the following does your church offer/encourage as part of discipleship?

*Please select all that apply. (n=224)*



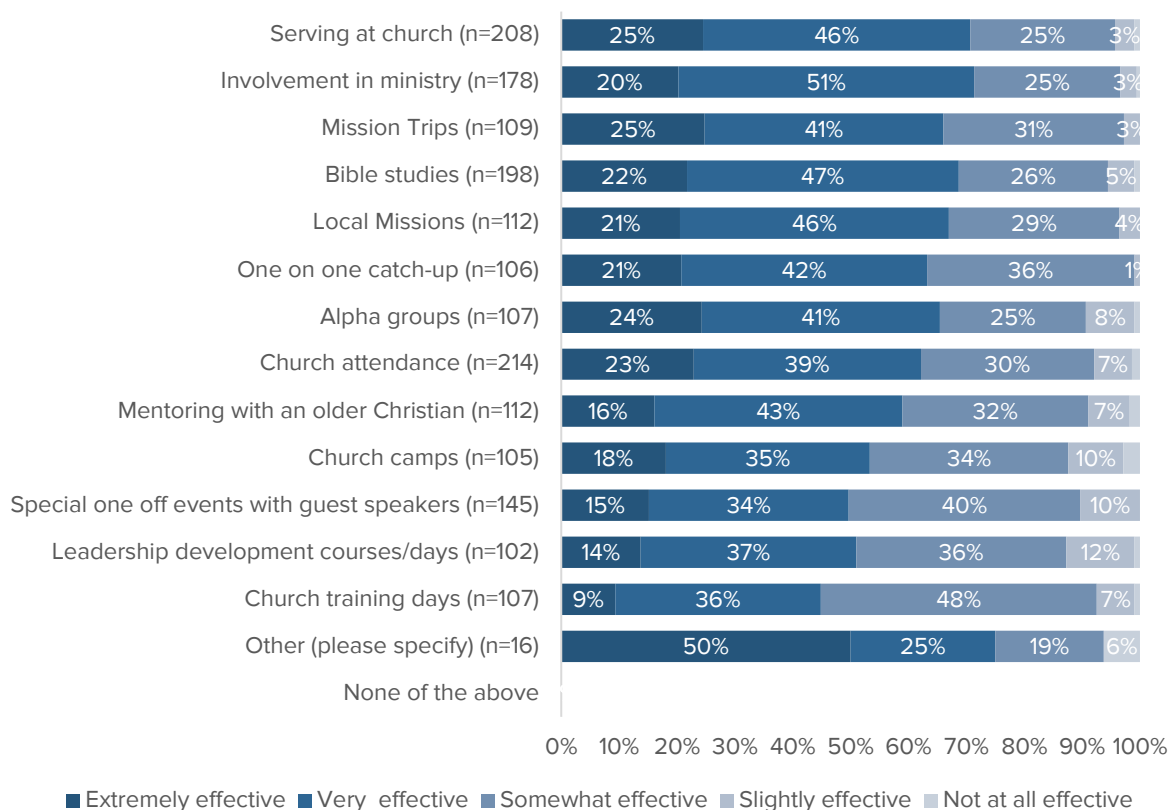
## The most effective discipleship pathway is involvement in church life.

*The programs below were only shown to respondents if they had first selected that their church offered the pathway (pg. 29).*

Church members see serving at church as the most effective pathway to growing a disciple of Christ. Of those who previously indicated serving at church was offered at their church, 71% saw it as effective (extremely/very) in growing disciples of Christ. Similarly, 71% see involvement in ministry as effective, followed by Bible studies (69%) and local missions (67%).

Interestingly, whilst special one-off events with guest speakers is in the top five most frequently offered pathways, it is only seen to be effective (extremely/very) by one in two (50%) members of churches where it is offered.

### Q. How effective are each of these programs your church offers/encourages at growing disciples of Christ?



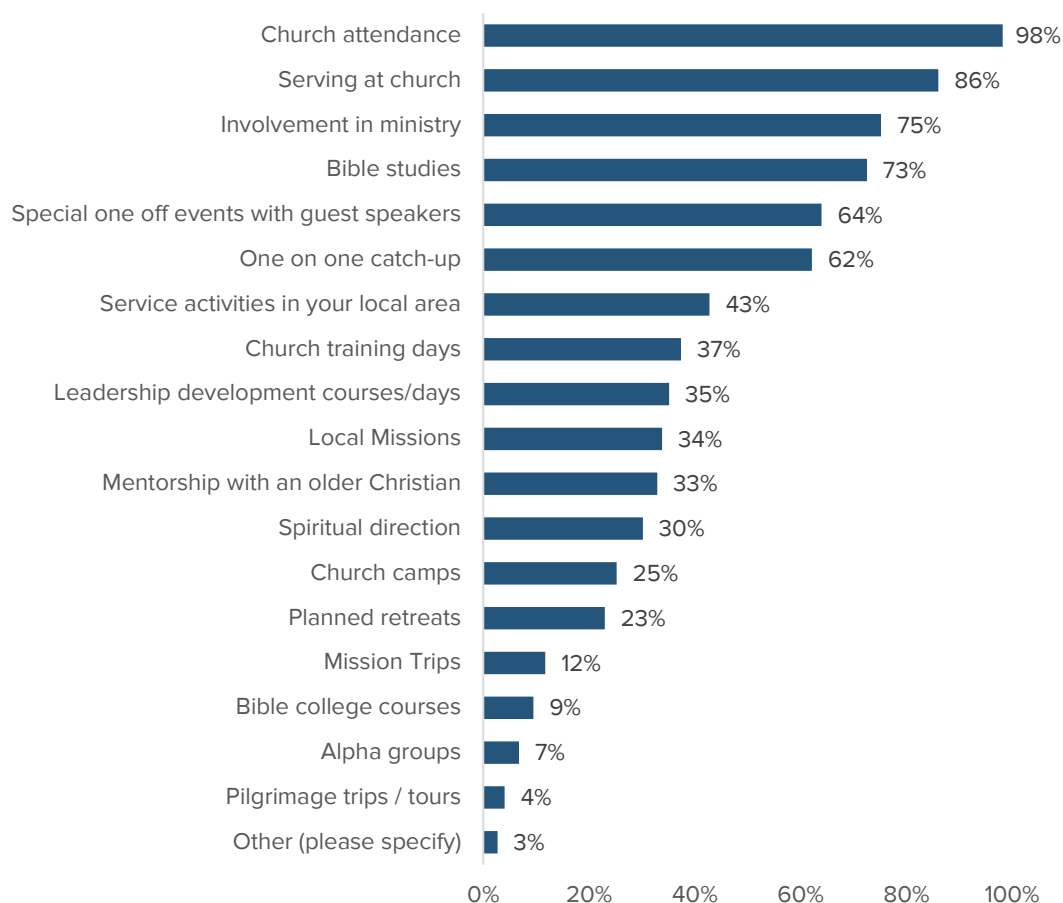
## More than four in five church members have served at church in the last year.

In the last year, church members are most likely to have been involved with attending church (98%), serving at church (86%), involvement in ministry (75%) and Bible studies (73%).

They are least likely to have been involved with pilgrimage tours (4%), Alpha groups (7%), Bible college courses (9%) and mission trips (12%).

### Q. Have been involved with the following in the last 12 months?

*Those that indicated 'yes' (n=222)*



## Church members want to be involved in serving at church and attending Bible studies.

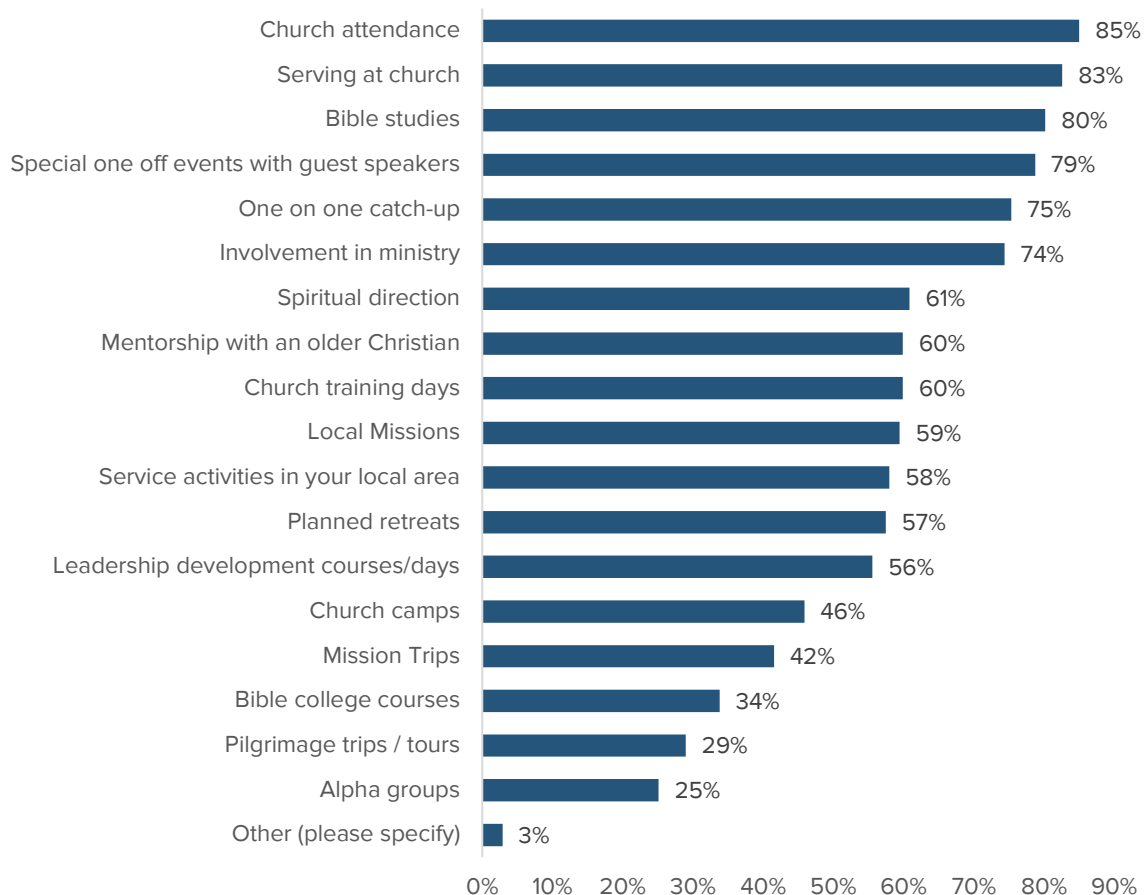
Church attendance (85%), serving at church (83%), and Bible studies (80%) continue to be the areas that church members are most likely to want to be involved in in the future.

Whilst three in five (64%) church members are currently involved in special one-off events with

guest speakers, four in five (79%) would like to be involved in the future. Similarly, the proportion of respondents who would like to be involved in one-on-one catch-ups in the future (75%) is greater than those who are currently involved (62%).

### Q. Would you like to be involved with the following in future?

*Those that indicated 'yes' (n=207)*



## Q. How could your church better support you on your journey as a disciple of Christ?

A large number of church members feel their church supports its members well on the journey as a disciple of Christ. Areas of improvement identified by those who felt their church could provide better support have been categorised into the following themes:

- Provide more structured mentoring programs which connect older congregation members with younger members
- Increase training and support of Bible study leaders, as well as the frequency of Bible studies
- Work on a sense of community within the church, being open and inclusive to new people, whilst reaching out to the wider community.

*A full list of responses has been outlined in a separate document titled "Discipleship effectiveness Report 2017 Appendix 1" in the worksheet labelled 'Church support'.*

## Q. If you have any other feedback on discipleship in your church please comment in the box below?

A wide range of comments were provided, overall, however, there is a sense that more emphasis should be placed on discipleship and mentorship within the church. A focus on spiritual growth and not just numerical growth.

*A full list of responses has been outlined in a separate document titled "Discipleship effectiveness Report 2017 Appendix 1" in the worksheet labelled 'Feedback on discipleship'.*

# Effects of discipleship on mission and justice initiatives

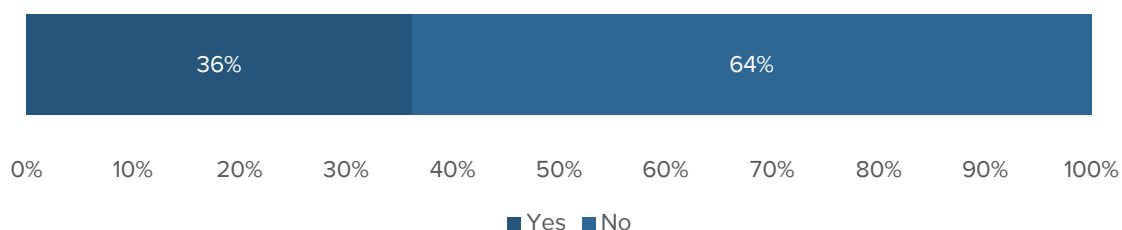
Just one third of church members are involved with mission activities outside of their church.

One in three church members (36%) are involved with mission activities run by organisations other than their church.

The key mission activities that church members are involved in outside of their church are

overseas aid, development and child sponsorship programs. A number of church members are also involved in local initiatives including school, prayer and chaplaincy ministry.

Q. Are you involved with mission activities run by an organisation other than your church?  
(n=221)



Q. Are you currently actively advocating for justice on behalf of any groups? If so, what does this look like for you?

The top three areas where church members are actively advocating for justice are through child sponsorships (61 church members), purchasing ethical products (24 church members), and assisting refugees (14 church members). There are a range of other organisations and groups which church members advocate on behalf of.

*A full list of responses has been outlined in a separate document titled "Discipleship effectiveness Report 2017 Appendix 1" in the worksheet labelled 'Advocating for justice'.*

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## For further information

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## **Appendix B**

### **Annotated Bibliography of Books on Christian Discipleship**



## **Annotated Bibliography of Christian Discipleship**

**Resource:** a resource for Church Leaders and Congregations who participated in Tabor's 'Measuring the Effectiveness of Discipleship in Congregational Settings' in South Australia research project in May-August 2017. The bibliography forms a part of Tabor's research project in discipleship in South Australia.

**Purpose:** the purpose of this annotated bibliography is to provide a ready-reference list of resources for people interested in discovering what resources are available for being in making disciples in Congregational settings.

**Categories:** for reasons of convenience, these are broken up into the categories of biblical, theological, pastoral, local church, missiological, historical, and research. That way readers can scan across the categories to select resources in their fields of interest.

**How to Use this Bibliography:** for people who are not familiar with annotated bibliographies; the *annotation* element simply describes some of the features of the book or journal article, such as author, title, subtitle, publishing details, purpose of writing, central argument, and any features/resources which are thought to contribute to discipleship. I suggest that readers scan each entry, and locate ideas and resources that will be of use to you in your context.

### **Biblical:**

### **Pastoral.**

**Athol Gill.** *Life on the Road: the gospel basis for a messianic lifestyle.*

Homebush West, NSW: Lancer, 1989.

Paperback, 290 pages. At the time of writing, Gill was Professor of New Testament at Whitley Baptist College in Melbourne. Gill had a deep concern for practical Christianity in action. The purpose of the volume is to explore key gospel texts. The eight chapters address key themes such as the call to discipleship, the cost of living on the road, the need to travel light, friends you encounter on the journey, the tasks of discipleship, streams in the desert and so forth. The overriding focal point is the person of Jesus and his transformative call to discipleship. Gill's expositions include ... being confronted by the person of Jesus, the blindness of the disciples, his understanding of the culture of first century Palestine and his practical of the lessons of discipleship to 20<sup>th</sup>-century/21<sup>st</sup> century Australia. These make the volume an accessible, inspiring and credible text on the topic of discipleship. Readers who thumb its pages will have no difficulty in finding fascinating and relevant resources for applied discipleship in the Australian (and other) contexts. Highly recommended. Out of print.

### **Theological.**

**Timothy E. O'Connell. *Making Disciples: a Handbook of Christian Moral Formation.***

New York: Crossroad Herder Book, 1998.

Paperback, 180 pages. Purchase price is a new paperback is AUD \$18. At the time of writing, the author was Prof of Christian Ethics in the Institute of Pastoral Studies at Loyola University of Chicago. Thus he is a Roman Catholic intellectual who is writing for Roman Catholic audience. But the tone of the book is practical, and ecumenical. Those Protestant readers have much to learn from this resource. The subtitle refers to Christian moral formation, implying that the author's definition of discipleship is one who lives according to the teachings of Jesus, and who is committed to voluntarily conforming their lives to write-living, as might be found in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. O'Connell's definition of a disciple is one who lives in a relationship with God through faith in Christ; whose understanding of life as one which is lived in a loving commitment to Christ as the first priority; which is carried out in the fidelity of the communion of the faith-community (pp. 142-3). The book is particularly strong on providing the reader with models of understanding which underlie the moral and spiritual formation of the disciple, which is the fundamental priority of ongoing discipleship in the life of the church. As such, particular concerns for the author are the identity of the disciple, the values people live by, and virtue ethics offered by Alistair Macintyre and other Christian ethicists. The book offers a good base-line on which to establish a disciple-making practice in your church, and has resources in it which could easily be used for preaching. Readability score = 6.5/10; significance score = 6/10.

### **Missiological.**

**Jonathan Ingleby. *Storm Signals: contemporary essays on mission and discipleship.***

Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2016.

Paperback, 120 pages. Purchase price as a new paperback AUD \$43. Ingleby was a missionary in India for much of his life, and on returning to the UK, became Head of Mission Studies at Redcliffe College in the UK from 1990 until his retirement. Undertaken primarily from a missiological perspective – the author adopts a well-informed theological, political, social and cultural analysis of mission developments around the globe. The volume takes the form of a monograph, containing 7 essays which provide a theoretical basis for understanding mission in the global context. Examples of essay topics include, How goes the battle?; adversarial attitudes; modern myths and movements – another look at mission in the light of globalisation and post-modernism, hybridity, and new mission organisations. Aware of the West's tendency to retain colonialism as its preferred way of thinking and functioning, the volume presents a deep challenge to culturally-generated and un-biblical approaches to mission in overseas cross-cultural contexts. Thus the primary locus for mission lies beyond the borders of the sending Church, with no particular reference to mission "at home". The strength of the work is the author's theoretical analysis of globalisation, post-modernism and the need for a clearly understood and well-implemented contextualisation of the gospel. The author's theoretical acuity makes this book a particularly useful addition to missiological literature.

However its concern for discipleship represents a sub-theme, and ministry leaders seeking useful practical insights for understanding and applying discipleship in their “home” context will be disappointed.

### **Spirituality.**

**David Augsburger.** *Dissident Discipleship: a spirituality of self-surrender, love of God, and love of neighbour.* Grand Rapids, MI: Brozos Press, 2006.

Paperback, 230 pages. The author was at the time of writing Prof of Pastoral Care and Counseling at Fuller Theological Seminary. His theological predilection is for Anabaptist theology, which is largely subversive of authoritative, institutional religious practices, and seeks to empower confessing Christian communities who seek to be authentic witnesses to Christ in their mission and ministry.. The book is broken into eight chapters, some of whose headings are radical attachment, tenacious serenity, habitual humility and resolute nonviolence, concrete service and authentic witness. The book itself has the appearance of being a workbook on the topic of discipleship for 21<sup>st</sup>-century Western readers, with its theological readings of Scripture, its applied practice of discipleship from a counter-point perspective, and its deeply practical concern for “applied Christianity”. One can variously understand that it is undertaken within an overlapping spirituality and pastoral care paradigm. Augsburger appears to be especially eager to enable his readers to think outside the traditional teaching concerning discipleship, received in local churches across the US and indeed the Western world. In its place, he seeks to resource new patterns of thinking about discipleship and application of discipleship “in practice” in the readers of his lives and their faith-communities. This is a highly readable text which comes highly recommended. Purchase price as a new paperback is AUD \$25.

**Bill Hull.** *The Complete Book of Discipleship: on being and making followers of Christ.*

Colorado Springs, CO. NavPress, 2006.

Paperback, 325 pages. Purchase price as a new paperback AUD \$35. Locating textbooks that incorporate careful biblical teaching, in a theology to guide but not to overwhelm, and that resource disciple making in the local church – is a tricky business. They are few and far between. However, Hull’s *The Complete Book of Discipleship* is just such a book. It offers the reader just the right balance of theory and practice, Bible and theology, pastoral insight and experiential wisdom. It is clear that the author is not only sold out to the idea of evangelism and discipleship, but that he is a practitioner of the “art” of disciple making, as well as someone who thinks very deeply about his topic. Hull has written extensively on discipleship, including co-authored works with Dallas Willard and Scot McKnight (among others). He is deeply critical of the Western non-discipleship model of Christianity, and offers ideas, resources, practices, measures of effectiveness, and approaches to discipleship that intended to enable ministry leaders and local congregations to turn their discipleship deficits into discipleship plusses. If you want practical, can do, achievable and measurable resources for disciple-making in your local church – this is it. I really liked the balance Hull manages to achieve between discipleship, mentoring, spiritual formation and invitation to spiritual maturity that

is attractive, achievable and non-coercive. I can't wait to open the covers of some of Hull's more recent books.

**Peter Block, Walter Brueggemann & John McKnight. *An Other Kingdom: departing the consumer culture*.** Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2016.

Paperback, 100 pages, purchase price as a new paperback AUD \$10. This book is about re-framing the way we look at the world, and our role in it. Effectively it is a critique of Western consumer society from the perspective of the Christian gospel. Consumer society contains all manner of myths, false assumptions and culturally-entrenched messages. Mostly it is about believing (wrongly) that more stuff equals greater happiness and the more you play by the "rules" of the media and *haute culture*, the more pleasure you are likely to enjoy. But everyone knows the party stops sometime, and after the binge drinking and the high-living comes the hangover and the Visa card bills. This book is the result of extensive conversations between the authors and their re-imaginings of what real human life – with Christ at the centre – could actually be. The beauty of this brief little piece is that it can be consumed in two1+ hour settings, and that both informed and lay-readers will "get" the message that there is a better way of living and being controlled by the market and the media. And that better way of living means a personal choice to follow Jesus in re-making the world by subverting the status quo and living by the principles of neighbourliness, justice, equity and hospitality. If we are going to live as Jesus' disciples, we are going to have to have the courage of our convictions by putting our beliefs into practice. This great little book is all about how the big ideas contained in Jesus' teaching, can be put into practice in our world, by us, here, now.

**Francis Chan. *Multiply: disciples making disciples*.** Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2012.

Paperback, 325 pages, purchase price as a new book is AUD \$10. Chan is a pastor of established congregations and leader of disciple-making movements through church planting in San Francisco, as well as via a global multiplication network. The beauty of this book is that it offers both a strategy and a content for disciple-making. The strategy is around teaching what you learn, and sharing life – not just information (page 10). The content is effectively the content of Christian belief, as it is appropriated by new believers. There are 5 parts to the book, addressing topics such as living as a disciple-maker, living as the church, how to study the Bible, and understanding the New Testament. Each of these parts is broken into subsequent parts which summarise basics for new believers; i.e., what is a disciple?, who is the Holy Spirit?, living in the Kingdom, and awaiting the new heavens and the new earth. This is an "entry level" work vis-a-vis discipleship, but that is its genius. No highbrow social theories, theological formulations or models for making disciples. Just an assumption that the people engaged in the process of becoming disciples know little if anything of the Christian content of Christian belief. In that sense, it is Christianity 101. And that may also be the source of its downfall, because there are no references to worship styles, the sacraments, any kind of teachings on moral issues, codependency or addiction. Not those anyone book can do all of that. And I think that is the key to understanding this book. It has a part of the answer, but not all. Most pastors of local

churches who want to commence a discipleship program in their church will want to have a look at Multiply, but are likely to want to add other materials as a resource for that program.

**Gordon T. Smith. *Called to Be Saints: an invitation to Christian maturity*.**

Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014.

Paperback, 250 pages, purchase price as a new book is AUD \$18. Whereas other books make their focus the sole concern of making disciples – *Called to Be Saints* has a broader concern related primarily to the task of spiritual formation, with a view to delivering them into spiritual maturity. The concerns of the book are “big ticket” items that every disciple and every disciple maker ought to pay attention to, such as union with Christ, leading people towards wisdom, vocational holiness, social justice and holiness, and the ordering of the affections. For anyone concerned with ensuring that disciples (at whatever level of their maturity, whether neophyte believers or advanced in their knowledge and character maturity) – continued to grow towards Christ likeness, from “one degree of glory to another” (2 Corinthians 3:18). One of the great problems of Western Christianity is that disciples become “stuck” in their spiritual development, so much so that Dallas Willard was heard to ask the question, “Why so many immature in our churches?” Smith’s work is one of the few really thoughtful pieces of writing on Christian spiritual maturity, and how to grow believers from being spiritually sick to being spiritual doctors (to use Augustine’s helpful metaphor). At the time of writing, Smith was Professor of Systematic and Spiritual Theology at Ambrose University College and Seminary in Calgary, Alberta. As such, he had a particular responsibility and interest in Christian higher education. Not everybody in the local church will need the kind of complexity Smith brings to his task, but at no point does it become so technical that his writing is out of reach. Instead, he brings an acute knowledge of the classical Christian faith-tradition to bear, so that disciple makers have at their fingertips the kinds of tools they need to create steps towards new knowledge, new allegiance, and new worship of Christ the King. This book is highly recommended.

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *The Cost of Discipleship*. London: SCM Press, reprinted 1964.**

Paperback, 270 pages, purchase price is a new book AUD \$10. It is hard to avoid superlatives when it comes to Bonhoeffer’s *The Cost of Discipleship*. We could say that he “wrote the book” on the subject. Bonhoeffer’s life, ministry and untimely death in the Flossenbürg concentration camp in 1945, just 2 weeks before liberation, demand that we take note of his teaching on the topic. In many ways, the best of his teachings are contained in this seminal work that tackles discipleship head-on. Key elements of Bonhoeffer’s thought on discipleship are as follows. He says, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die” (p. 79); the focal point of his teachings were taken from Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). In them Jesus’ call to “Come, follow me” come with great immediacy and power; his teachings on “cheap grace” and “costly grace” remind us – in our comfortable consumer Christianity – that “Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner” (p. 35) and does nothing more than baptise our willfulness and undisciplined characters. Yet, there is a great costliness to grace –first by Jesus on the cross, then by the disciples, then by faithful saints in subsequent history, and then by us. Although grace is free, it demands that we live heroic lives. If nothing else, Jesus calls us to a new kind of life where everything is put on the line. As Dallas Willard put it, “Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to

earning”; and the freedom of the believer who is both a child of this world and who suffers as a result of their testimony – and yet is the child of God who is the source of their life in Christ. There is so much in *The Cost of Discipleship* that it comes as not simply recommended reading, but as a *must have* resource in your discipleship toolbox.

**Michael Frost. *Exiles: Living Missionally In A Post-Christian Culture*.**

Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006.

Paperback, 330 pages, purchase price as a new book AUD \$15. Michael Frost has been around so long now it is easy for us to ignore the central place he has claimed in showing Christians how to live in the post-Christian age. This book positions itself at the nexus between Christian discipleship, Western culture, and effective Christian witness. In *Exiles*, Frost’s training as an English teacher and his ability to craft words to convey a powerful message, is on show. 13 chapters are knit together, the key themes of which are Jesus the exile, following Jesus into exile, being exiled from a hyper-real world, the kind of esprit de corps experienced by disciples under pressure, exiles at the table, restless at injustice, and comforting the oppressed. Typical of his in-your-face razzle-dazzle style, Frost carries us beyond the personal salvation message which is so central to Christian discipleship, to explorations in the media, to social justice, in political, economic, business and ecological concerns. Frost shows us what others only tell us – that the gospel is political, and to think otherwise is to ignore key components of Jesus’ teachings. It is not important that Christians attempt to re-claim the “golden age” of Christendom in the 1960s and 70s, because that in itself is a fool’s errand and not central to our core business as witnesses to Jesus. But it is important that continued to act as “salt and light” in the world, and that means faith has implications, we need to use our vote to make a difference, and that Christianity is a social renewal movement – based on the life and teachings of Jesus – such that if ever there was a time for us to “stand up and be counted”, it is now. This book is highly recommended.

**James K.A. Smith. *You Are What You Love: the Spiritual Power of Habit*.**

Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2016.

Hardback, 200 pages, purchase price is AUD \$25. This is a book which Pastors and church leaders asked for, and as such, is a “must-read” for anyone committed to understanding what it means to be a disciple and the disciple-making process in Western contexts in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century. It is a compilation and signification of Smith’s two earlier books; namely *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker academic, 2009); & *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013). Both books are part of Smith’s ‘Cultural Liturgies Series’ – with a third volume yet to be written/published. The beauty of Smith’s writing is that he is a philosopher who is writing on theological and ministerial themes. The purpose of both *Desiring* and *Imagining* is to help readers to understand some of the critical theory which forms the basis for a useful hermeneutic of culture which is needful for Christian Ministry practitioners. Anyone who is serious about trying to understand contemporary society and culture and its idols, needs to read Smith. To return to the composite volume *You Are What You Love* – there is simply so much in this book that it cannot be adequately summarized. But if I were to risk a



description of its key themes; I would propose (1) humans are not rational beings, they are desiring beings; (2) so for those who want to make disciples, less propositional teaching and more shaping of what we love will be a priority; (3) it was Augustine who said that we can only know something/someone if we truly love them, which – from a discipleship point of view – means that we need to be strategic about attempting to “form” peoples’ lives/desires; (4) Christians are often more shaped by the consumer culture than the faith they profess; (5) liturgy (“the work of the people”) is central to worship, and has not only creeds but a series of ritual actions as its composite parts; (6) these actions shape us from the outside in, and are somewhat determinative of our values, characters and actions; (7) consumer culture represents a kind of liturgy – one which we as Christians don’t always understand; (8) as Christian leaders, we have to get smarter about ensuring that our people encounter God in Christ through sacred time, sacred story, sacred place and sacred action.

Readability score = 7/10; significance score = 9/10.

**Gary Black Jr. *The Theology of Dallas Willard: Discovering Proto-Evangelical Faith.***

Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013.

Paperback, 240 pages, purchase price in AUD \$35. One of the things most lacking in Evangelical thinking has been a properly thought-out theology of discipleship. Thankfully Dallas Willard has come to the party and written a number of wonderful books to “help us out”. An example of when ideas helpful writings are *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (1988); *The Divine Conspiracy* (1998); *Renovation of the Heart* (2002), *Hearing God* (2012), *The Great Omission* (2013) and more. But what we haven’t had to hand – until now – as a scholarly integration of Willard’s theology of discipleship. Thankfully, Gary Black has now given us such a peace. While it is very demanding reading and I would imagine the average church-going Christian would really struggle to get their heads around this – for the average Pastor and ministry-leader who has had some theological training, this book is a veritable goldmine of material. One of the great things about Dallas Willard is that he brought tremendous intellectual acumen to the discipleship Tabor, and what we get here is a serious, fully-fledged “theology” – but not one which is dealing with intangibles. Instead, if you can wait your way through some of the technical language, what you get here is a weighty (but mostly accessible) romp through Willard’s thinking about discipleship as follows: (1) the importance of God speaking through Scripture; (2) the experiential nature of discipleship which exemplifies Willard’s Wesleyan prioritising of the “felt presence of God”; (3) high levels of suspicion towards the critical apparatus in biblical scholarship; (4) the priority of the restored and redeemed soul, over the sinful, wretched creature of Romans 7; (5) the importance of the body to the spiritual life; (6) Willard opposed American Evangelicalism’s two-willing embrace of what he called “the gospel of sin management”, which the Christ deal with sins, while avoiding any responsibility on the part of the sinner. Overall, a very important read, for those with the tools to harvest its insights. Readability score = 4.5/10; significance score = 10/10.

**Robert E. Webber. *The Divine Embrace: Recovering the Passionate Spiritual Life*.** Grand Rapids, MA: Baker Books, 2006.

Paperback, 270 pages, purchase price is AUD ca. \$30. Prior to his death, Webber was the William R and Geraldine B Myers Prof of Ministry at Northern Seminary in Illinois. He is the author of the Ancient Future Series of books (a series of approximately 7 books addressing Time, Evangelism, Faith etc.) Webber's grasp of the Christian spiritual tradition is extensive, impressive and practical. But as a pastor and a teacher, Webber is not interested in knowledge for knowledge's sake – he wants to “pass it on” to his students and readers. And this is what makes Webber's work particularly attractive. As a Pastor and church leader, if you don't have at least one of Webber's books in your library, you need to remedy that situation by making a purchase at your earliest convenience. *The Divine Embrace* is a kind of tour de force of the Christian spiritual life which contains within it biblical, historical, biographical, theological, liturgical and other resources which are incredibly helpful. He is not only backward-looking, but also forward-looking, as someone who is critically aware of the emerging missional church, and trends in contemporary culture. He is grounded in the Evangelical faith, and has a kind of “nack” for reading the play in terms of where the Spirit is taking the church in the new mission and ministry context. Although this particular work refers to spirituality, with only a passing glance at discipleship per se – I would argue that almost the entire volume speaks to the “leading-edge” of what it means to both be a disciple and to make disciples in Western contexts in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century. This makes *The Divine Embrace* irresistible reading for anyone who wants to go beyond passing fads and practical how-to manuals, to spend time immersing themselves in material which is foundational and therefore unchanging. Readability score = 6.5/10; significance score = 9/10.

**Dann Spader. *4 Chair Discipling: Growing a Movement of Disciple-Makers*.** Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014.

Hardback, 150 pages, purchase price is AUD \$15. There comes a time when one has enough of theoretical disciple-making books, and all you want is a box of tools and concepts which help you get your discipleship-feet on the ground. This is that book. The 4 chairs that spade it talks about are a series of “sorting boxes” that arose out of spade's own frustration with a lack of tools for making disciples. So he innovated, and it is own thing. Chair 1 is those who are lost and far away from God. Evangelism as early-career discipleship is what is in view here. Chair 2 is the believer who has come to faith in Christ, and the set of discipling tools and processes which spade has discovered actually “work” when it comes to helping believers to grow as disciples. Chair 3 is the worker – those men and women who act as spiritual guides who offer modelling, teaching and mentoring in churches, schools, colleges, homes and community-settings. And Chair 4 is the disciple-maker's ministry is not so much to run the church or Christian relief and charitable organisations – but instead their primary focus is to “make disciples”. The great thing about the book is its practical nature. Resources, tools, barriers, blockages, encouragement and some practical open quote how to's” are provided by the author. This resource would be a really useful addition to any disciple-making library. Readability score = 8.5/10; significance score = 8.5/10.

**David Platt. *Follow Me: a Call to Die, a Call to Live*.** Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013.

Paperback, 230 pages. Purchase price in AUD is \$15. David Platt is the lead pastor of The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama, USA. He has authored a number of best-selling books including *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* (2010), and someone who – according to the Blurb and the kinds of connections – has attracted the ear and the respect of the movers and shakers in the discipleship world. For example, Francis Chan has written the introduction. Francis is a church planter based in Singapore. One of the real strengths of this book is the biblical foundations, which – when put together with Platt’s own life and ministry experience – are woven together into a very powerful “case” for making disciples. If you want a good “perspective” on making disciples, and some of the real issues related to making disciples in 21<sup>st</sup>-century culture, then Platt has some good things to say. There are some very helpful insights, practical “on the ground” stories and “how to move forward”-type ideas which are very helpful. You could call this book a practical manual for making disciples, either in your network-circle or in your church. It is not a classic by any means, but people with a disciple-making bent should be aware of it, and what it has to offer. Readability score = 8/10; significance score = 4/10.

**Jim Putnam & Bobby Harrington. *Disciple-Shift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples*.** Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan: 2013.

Paperback, 230 pages. Purchase price in AUD is \$15. Now here is a book you need to swallow whole. Both Putnam and Harrington have been around a long time in the discipleship-scene, and the fact that they use Dr Robert E. Coleman who was the founder of the Masterplan of Evangelism from the 1960s, says a great deal about the pedigree of their thought, practice and advice vis-à-vis disciple-making. The reader is easily able to identify the 5 steps (or “shifts” as they become), and for each step there is offered a range of helpful and practical resources for making the “shift” to disciple-making. At the end of the book there is a scorecard for success, which is a really helpful approach to this difficult area, where many churches have got themselves “stuck” in a kind of non-discipleship living. Put them in Harrington give some useful advice with graphs, models and clear explanations as to how to move forward. In my view, the book does deliver by providing five steps that help your church to make disciples who make disciples. As such, this is a practical “how-to” manual which takes the idea of disciple-making, and makes every possible attempt to “activate” the process of making disciples in the local church. In my view, pastors and Ministry leaders who are serious about disciple-making should have within reach a copy of this book. A valuable resource and deed. Readability score = 8/10; significance score = 8/10.

**Bobby Harrington & Josh Patrick. *The Disciple-Maker's Handbook: 7 Elements of a Discipleship Lifestyle*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017.**

Paperback, large format, 185 pages. Purchase price in AUD is \$15. If I were to reach for a top-10 pick of best-books to help me think about making disciples today, I would pick this one. Jam-packed with common sense, biblical resources, theological reflection which is practical and available for immediate use – the book just works at every level. Part of its appeal as it is clear structure and the fact that there are sample boxes and clear headings right throughout the large format pages, makes it really useful. I particularly like some of the appendices at the rear of the volume. There are some really good material there. My only gripe is that I would like to have seen more of the excellent material one can find there. If you want to work with your leadership, or with your disciple-making team, or perhaps Life Group leaders – this would make a really good study book. Based in the discipleship.org Resource material – there is a lot to be said about this. Practical and informative, this is usable stuff. Examples are (1) you need to plan; (2) you need tools; (3) you need a role model; (4) you need to be discerning; (5) intentionality is the key to modification and reaching people. This is just a taster. This book really does it for me. Readability score = 9/10; significance score = 9/10.