



Second Edition

Enriching Church Life Surveys for local churches

Ruth Powell | John Bellamy | Sam Sterland | Kathy Jacka | Miriam Pepper | Michael Brady





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Contact NCLS Research Locked Bag 2002 Strathfield NSW 2135 Phone: + 61 2 9701 4479 Email: info@ncls.org.au Web: www.ncls.org.au



Second Edition



Ruth Powell | John Bellamy | Sam Sterland | Kathy Jacka | Miriam Pepper | Michael Brady



If you care about churches, this book is for you. Local churches today are facing many challenges. Some are growing, drawing in many new attenders. Some have ministries that are well recognised in the wider community. Many are struggling with issues of static or decreasing attendance levels and how to make new connections with those outside of church life.

This book is for church leaders and attenders who wish to foster the health and vitality of their churches. It is for all churches, whether large or small, whether thriving or struggling. It looks at issues of ministry and mission, of connection within the church community and connection with the wider community. It is designed to help churches plan steps to enhance their future. The authors of this book are convinced that all churches can take such steps.

This book is for local churches. It aims to:

- show how local churches can use results from the National Church Life Survey (NCLS) to gain an understanding of the quality of their church life
- provide a richer understanding of nine core qualities of church life and the factors which influence them
- provide insights into the dynamics of church attendance growth.

This book also aims to:

• provide a snapshot of the health and vitality of the Australian church overall.

The research findings on church vitality discussed in this book will be shown to be applicable in both urban and rural contexts, in both large and small churches and in different Western countries. It is also true, however, that the steps needed to foster vitality may differ between these contexts. We will explore how a church's context may require different approaches to foster church health and vitality.

While this book is useful on its own, it is tailor-made for use with the National Church Life Survey statistical profile for local churches. The NCLS Church Life Profile presents the unique survey results for each church, for nine Core Qualities of church life and for three measures of attendance. It gives churches an opportunity to consider what it is that brings life to them and how their life and mission can be enhanced.

A Second Edition

Since the first edition of Enriching Church Life was produced in 2006, there has been much research completed as well as another National Church Life Survey in late 2011. At the time of writing, thousands of local churches are returning their completed surveys and will soon receive their updated Church Life Profiles from the 2011 NCLS.

In general, a second edition of a book is prepared by the same authors. This new edition comes from the same team, with a different mix of people. The current team is committed to the original mission and vision of NCLS Research as well as sharing what we have learned over the last twenty years. We acknowledge previous contributors on the next page.

Why did we feel it necessary to prepare a second edition? The purpose of the book is largely the same. We have retained the foundational work that was reported in Edition 1 that drew from earlier Australian National Church Life Surveys, as well as the international study of church health based on churches from Australia, UK, USA, and New Zealand.

There are some new features in this edition. We took the opportunity to:

- collate national Australian results about the Core Qualities in one place
- provide denominational differences
- note some trends over time using comparisons from previous National Church Life Surveys, Australian sample surveys and the National Census
- review the components of church growth and decline
- record a summary of results of new analysis on church health
- provide a demographic profile of the church and the wider community.

Another key difference between the two editions is that we have removed the 'Planning' section (previously Part 2 of the first edition). This important material has been incorporated into the Church Life Profile Workbook, as well as placed online at www.ncls.org.au/planning.

In writing this book, we have sought to provide sound research, forming a solid basis for churches who are thinking and acting upon issues of church vitality. Where possible, we have used the most recent datasets available at the time of writing, the 2006 NCLS, to provide a snapshot of Australian church life.

It is our intention that this book will inform those who wish to understand church vitality better, provide both hope and challenge, and enable churches to chart a suitable course of action for moving ahead.

The NCLS Research team.

THANK YOU

NCLS Research is supported by Anglicare Sydney, Uniting Mission & Education (Synod of NSW & the ACT), the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and the Australian Catholic University.

To the NCLS Research Board of Governors, thank you for your support and wisdom. Past Board members include Tina Rendell (chair), Peter Godwin, Peter Kell, Terry O'Mara, John Oldmeadow and John Coll. Current Board members include Glenn Davies, Bob Dixon, Susan King, Brian Lucas, Thomas Martin, Kath Merrifield, Grant Millard, Geoff Smith and Andrew Williams.

Our thanks go to staff, past and present, who have helped make this publication possible. Particularly we pay tribute to the original authors of the first edition of *Enriching Church Life:* John Bellamy, Bryan Cussen, Sam Sterland, Keith Castle, Ruth Powell and Peter Kaldor. John was lead author for the first edition, and his careful crafting of that book is still evident in this edition: large sections of text are untouched. John continues to work closely with us, and we thank him for his generous contribution to this edition. As inaugural Director, Peter's vision and intellectual contribution to the concepts described in this book have also left an enduring mark. Keith's courageous actions in his time as Director took the way we provided results and resources to a whole new level. Bryan's vital contribution to offering planning options for local churches has remained, albeit in a different format.

Thanks to Fraser Tustian, Chris Simpson, Peter Sillar and Dylan Bevis for their work on data reports, to Martin Dowson for statistical advice, and to Michael Pippett and Natalie Swann for initial analysis of the national demographics data.

Openbook Howden staff who have been involved in producing both editions include Chris Pfeiffer and Greg Hassold (coordination), John Pfitzner and Kristin Argall (editing), Mark Pearce, Sarah Lelliott and Nicholle Aitchison (layout and graphic design). Thank you for making both publications happen.

We also wish to acknowledge the contribution of overseas partners in the 2001 International Congregational Life Survey: in the United States, the Research Services office of the Presbyterian Church (USA); in England, Churches Information for Mission (CIM); in New Zealand, Church Life Survey-New Zealand (CLS-NZ). Some of the data collected in these countries and in Australia have been analysed in this book.

Finally we thank the hundreds of thousands of church attenders and leaders who took the time to complete the surveys, and through their collaboration and trust, made this all possible!

Ruth Powell, John Bellamy, Sam Sterland, Kathy Jacka, Miriam Pepper and Michael Brady, with the NCLS Research team (2012): Chandrika Chinnadurai, Ken Hodson, George Preetham Singh, Amelia Vaeafisi and Nicole Ward.

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Introducing the NCLS Church Life Profile

The *Church Life Profile* is an easy-to-read report outlining the unique statistics for each church that undertakes a Church Life Survey.

It is a starting point for churches who wish to reflect on and develop their vitality.



For Churches

We encourage you to refer to *Enriching Church Life* for guidance on how your church can use results from a Church Life Survey to gain an understanding of the quality of your church life.

Alongside this book, the Church Life Profile and Church Life Profile Workbook form an integrated set of resources on church vitality: The NCLS Church Life Pack.

Other planning resources are also available online at www.ncls.org.au/planning



PART 1 UNDERSTANDING CHURCH VITALITY

Introduction

Measuring Church Vitality

The Basis of the Vitality Measures

About the Surveys



INTRODUCTION

What Is Meant by the Vitality of Local Churches? Churches help people to respond to the Christian faith, worship God and explore the implications of faith in everyday life. Churches are communities of believers, where individuals find love and acceptance. They are places where people can be caught up in God's mission to the wider community and beyond. 'Church vitality' is ultimately about the quality of these various aspects of church life — the extent to which these aspects are well developed, well recognised and central to the life of churches.

The quality of these aspects of church life can and does vary. The frailty of humanity means that there will be blindspots where local churches need to improve what they do. There will always be room for churches to develop their vitality. It is into this context that this book seeks to make a contribution. Yet it is a key principle of this book that we should seek to identify the strengths of our churches, not simply focus on the weaknesses. The strengths of our churches are our best springboards for the future. Where there are weaknesses, they can best be addressed by extending what we do that works well.

The strengths of our churches are our best springboards for the future **The Source of Vitality:** You may recall times when your church involvement was life-giving. A spiritual awakening, a timely sermon, an experience of God's presence in the church community, a helping hand in time of need — such experiences are signs of life in a church.

A theme in the Gospel of St John is that Jesus is the source of life. He is the true vine without whom it is impossible to have real life. Jesus declared, "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10). Since Jesus is the source of this life, our expectation is that life would be seen in the churches. In fact, we should see life to the full! Many have found in the churches a life that the rest of the world cannot offer. The life that Jesus offers, which is found by faith, is present in churches week after week for anyone to see, as Christians love each other. In view of this ever-present source of life, every local church should be able to identify times of vitality in its history and in the present. What are the signs of life in your church?

Identifying Vitality in the Churches: The basis of this book is that it is possible to both identify and measure aspects of vitality within the life of churches. This provides an indication to church leaders of where strengths and weaknesses may lie in their churches: where there may be aspects to celebrate, aspects to remedy and aspects where deeper change is needed. The National Church Life Survey provides a way of measuring aspects of a local church's vitality. This is done by gaining insights into the attitudes,

experiences and behaviour of its people, gathered through a common survey form. This approach recognises and affirms that the life of a church can be seen in the stories of its people; the way in which they have been touched by God and by the activity of others in their lives.

Continuing research by the National Church Life Survey over many years has sought to identify and measure separate Core Qualities of a local church, based upon the survey responses of its people. This is not the only way that church vitality can be researched, but it has proven to be a most helpful way of doing so, providing a useful analysis tool for churches wishing to foster their vitality.

The resource that we have developed, called the Church Life Profile, identifies nine Core Qualities and three attendance measures that together build a picture of vitality in local churches.

What Can Research Tell Us? Many of us have picked up a book about a successful church, read its story and tried to understand what made that local church different. We might have wondered what it would be like to try the same things at our own church. The kind of research based on National Church Life Surveys is a search for a different kind of story than the story of one successful church.

It examines large numbers of churches instead of one and asks questions like: "What do the strong churches all have in common?" Research using large numbers of churches can describe what is going on in many different contexts. It can focus on the shared characteristics of healthy or growing churches.

A common theme of research into church life is that there is no one aspect that dictates the effectiveness of a local church's ministry and mission. Instead, the contribution of each aspect of church life, whether positive or negative, needs to be considered separately. Identifying distinct 'Core Qualities' of church life and how these interact is central to the approach used to measure church vitality through the National Church Life Survey.

An Overview of this Book: This book is divided into six parts.

- **Part One** focuses on understanding the idea of church vitality and the NCLS framework for measuring it. It outlines the surveys that underlie this work.
- Part Two works through each of the nine Core Qualities of church life, showing why its measurement is important for churches. We also demonstrate the extent to which each Core Quality is related to changes in the level and the proportion of newcomers.



- Part Three moves to attendance change or measuring 'quantities'. It starts by tracking historical changes over more than 100 years in religious affiliation and church attendance. It then focuses on the inflow and outflow of church attenders.
- In **Part Four**, we turn to a series of research questions that bring all the core qualities together. We look at fostering vitality in many different contexts, such as urban or rural settings, large and small churches.
- In **Part Five** we lift our focus beyond the church, offering a demographic profile of the wider Australian community as a reminder of the mission context that churches find themselves in.
- Part Six contains a brief conclusion and a series of appendices with additional information.

How to Use this Book: This book does not need to be read straight through, as it can also be used as a reference text. Much of it is designed to be taken in slices, either for reflection prior to action or to guide action. So we encourage you to dip in and out.

It is important to have a strong grasp of the nine Core Qualities that provide a framework for all the research findings within. The remainder of this first part will give you that understanding and equip you to effectively delve further into the research material. It will also provide foundational understanding of the material presented in your own Church Life Profile, which contains survey results for any church that has undertaken a Church Life Survey.

About the Cartoons: Since the first NCLS in 1991 we have used the wonderful cartoons of Chris Morgan (www.cxmedia.com). They add a quirky, humorous and very 'human' dimension to our work, giving us a chance to laugh at ourselves and see things a little differently.

We have included a few choices of cartoons in this book that have been taken from various NCLS publications, right back to 1992, and hope you enjoy them.

Introduction



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The National Church Life Survey provides a way of measuring aspects of a local church's vitality. This is done by gaining insights into the attitudes, experiences and behaviour of its people, gathered through a common survey form. This approach recognises and affirms that the life of a church can be seen in the stories of its people; the way in which they have been touched by God and by the activity of others in their lives.

Continuing research by the National Church Life Survey over many years has sought to identify and measure separate Core Qualities of a local church, based upon the survey responses of its people. This is not the only way that church vitality can be researched, but it has proven to be a most helpful way of doing so, providing a useful analysis tool for churches wishing to foster their vitality.

The resource that we have developed identifies **nine Core Qualities** and **three attendance measures** that together build a picture of vitality in local churches.



Nine Core Qualities of Church Life: The first three Core Qualities have to do with our faith in God and relationships within the church community. We have termed these the *Internal Core Qualities*, because they focus on the inner life of the community of faith. These Core Qualities are often seen as foundational to church life, providing both shape and energy to the other Core Qualities. The internal Core Qualities are:

- Alive and growing faith
- Vital and nurturing worship
- Strong and growing belonging.

While the first two Core Qualities focus on our response towards God, the third has to do with being part of a community of faith. Local churches should be communities where people experience friendship and share their lives, struggles, hopes and dreams.

The next three Core Qualities have to do with leadership and direction. We have termed these *Inspirational Core Qualities*, since they can be catalysts for change in churches. Together they reveal something of a church's openness to change. In order to move ahead, churches need:

- Clear and owned vision
- Inspiring and empowering leadership
- Imaginative and flexible innovation.

The final three Core Qualities focus on the interface between the local church and the wider community. These are about the outward focus of the churches in serving others, in sharing the faith and in assisting others in becoming part of the church. We have termed these the *Outward Core Qualities:*

- Practical and diverse service
- Willing and effective faith-sharing
- Intentional and welcoming inclusion.

Three Attendance Measures: There are also measures of attendance that point to a church's vitality. The ones we have highlighted here are:

- **Retained youth aged 15 to 19:** The proportion of attenders aged 15-19 years who have been attending their church for more than five years.
- Newcomers: The percentage of people who have joined their local church in the past 5 years and were previously not involved in any church.
- Attendance Change: Change in attendance or 'church growth' has been commonly used as an indicator of church vitality.

THE BASIS OF THE VITALITY MEASURES

Christians understand themselves to be called into a relationship with God, with others in the church and with the wider community. This "three-cornered" relationship underpins the thinking behind the measures of church vitality.

Our Relationship with God: The first and greatest command is to love God with all of our strength (Matthew 22:37). Church attenders seek to worship God and to be transformed through their relationship with God. Without this transformation or spiritual growth we are only "playing liturgical games or having charismatic caresses" (CEMPAC, 2004, 99). This dynamic aspect of the Christian faith is reflected in the **faith** and **worship** Core Qualities.

Relationships with Each Other: Faith in God also involves joining with others who are on the same journey of faith. The writer of the first letter of John sums this up by saying that "if we walk in the light...we have fellowship with one another" (1 John 1:5–7). Relationships between those in the light are to be characterised by love that is both truthful and practical (1 John 3:11–18). Relationships within the church, the degree of belonging that attenders feel, and frequency of attendance at church are covered by the **belonging** Core Quality.

The need for effective church leadership reflects a biblical pattern as well as a broader sociological reality. Leadership can provide both stability in a church and be a catalyst for change. How the leadership and their endeavours are viewed by church attenders is covered in the **leadership**, **vision** and **innovation** Core Qualities.

Relationships in the Wider Community: While the first command for the Christian is to love God, the second command is to love one's neighbour as oneself (Matthew 22:34–40). Our concern for our neighbour can include their physical and social needs (Matthew 25:31–46), the call to salvation and discipleship (Matthew 28:19,20) and justice and mercy (Matthew 5:6,7). We are to play our part in making present the kingdom of God. Practical ways in which church attenders do this are measured in the **service, faith-sharing** and **inclusion** Core Qualities.

Of the three attendance measures, **newcomers**, **young adult retention** and **attendance change**, the flow of newcomers is an important measure of how well a local church is connecting with the wider community. These are not people who have come from another local church but are fresh to church. Their presence is often the fruit of the outreach efforts of the church and its attenders.

Introduction

The issue of growth and decline in attendance is one that continues to be high on the agenda of many local churches. For some the need to engage this issue has to do with future survival. For others it is about pursuing the most effective approaches for outreach, so that they can connect more effectively with the wider community.

The question can be asked whether growing churches also have higher levels of vitality. This question is an important one that receives attention throughout Parts 2, 3 and 4 of this book. In short, the answer to the question is yes, there is a relationship between many aspects of church vitality and growth and decline in church attendance.



ABOUT THE SURVEYS

For most people, a first encounter with the National Church Life Survey involves taking part in the survey, conducted in a local church. Many church leaders have seen an NCLS Profile, which passes back to them the results of the survey for their church. Others have read the books, seen the newsletters or downloaded material from the NCLS website.

Behind these published resources is a research project designed to explore what makes churches vital and healthy. The research project has been very large, involving thousands of churches across four countries.

The broad base of the research overcomes a common problem with books about church growth: these books can be based on the experiences of only one church or a small number of churches. Isolated examples of large, rapidly growing, urban churches become the model for what is successful in church life. It is assumed that the lessons learned in such churches amount to a set of universal principles that can be readily applied in other churches, in other denominations and in other countries. By contrast, we believe that lessons are best learned from the broad mosaic of church life and are best applied with reference to the individual church context.

This analysis has proven to be more far-reaching than simply confirming church growth theories What Has This Research Led To? The Australian National Church Life Survey arose in part as a response to a flood of church growth books from the USA and England. The survey sought to gather large data sets from across the full spectrum of denominations, church sizes and locations. Analysis of this data has confirmed, for Australia at least, which church growth principles appear to be important, which are of minor importance and which are unimportant in the Australian context. Yet this analysis has proven to be more far-reaching than simply confirming church growth theories; a range of reliable measures of church vitality has been developed that are applicable across all kinds of churches. It is no longer necessary for churches to rely on changes in attendance level as the sole measure of their vitality.

Australia has proven to be a useful laboratory for research that can be replicated in other Western countries. It is a prosperous nation caught up in global changes, with a social diversity that is common to many Western nations. Like other nations, it has been greatly influenced by American culture since the Second World War. It shares a common religious heritage with both the United Kingdom and New Zealand. Like other Western countries, Australia has a Christian heritage, yet the churches need to keep adapting to a diverse and changing society. It is a country where denominations have a long history of working together, which is an important ingredient in achieving inter-denominational research.

Australian National Church Life Surveys: Normally research projects only collect data from a sample of the population that they are interested in. However, because Church Life Surveys aim to provide reflections of the attitudes and actions of all attenders in the results for each local church that takes part, every attender present is surveyed.

Table 1.1 shows the scope of each of the Church Life Surveys. Together, these surveys amount to what is arguably the largest study of church life in the world. At the time of writing, churches from 23 denominations were still returning hundreds of thousands of surveys from the 2011 NCLS.

Year of Survey	Attenders	Local Churches	Denominations
1991 *	310,000	6,500	19
1996 NCLS **	324,000	6,900	18
1996 CCLS **	101,000	281	1
2001	449,000	6,550	19
2006	400,600	5,200	22

Table 1.1: Australian National Church Life Surveys: 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006

* The 1991 NCLS covered Anglican and Protestant churches only.

** In 1996, Catholic Churches participated in the parallel Catholic Church Life Survey (CCLS).

Types of Surveys: Each church completed three main types of paper surveys:

- Attender Surveys: These surveys contained questions about adult attenders' characteristics and their views about their church. In 2001 and 2011, there was also a Child Attender Survey for younger attenders aged under 15 years.
- Operations Survey: This survey was completed by a congregational leader and was designed to collect factual information about each church's life and activities.
- *Leaders Survey:* These surveys were available for all leaders, clergy and lay. They contained questions about personal background, job role, attitudes and more.

Tests Over Time: The first NCLS in 1991 was planned as a 'one-off' project. However, the collaboration across Australian churches has now extended across two decades. This allows us to test for the robustness of research findings. It also means that we can track broad trends over time, and conduct new types of analyses looking at the effects of different actions on the local church experience.



	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011
Anglican Church of Australia	1	1	1	1	1
Apostolic Church of Australia	1	1	1	1	1
Australian Christian Churches (AOG)	\checkmark	1	1	1	1
Baptist Churches	1	1	1	1	1
Bethesda Ministries International	X	X	1	1	X
Catholic Church in Australia	X	√ ∗	1	1	1
Christian Brethren Assemblies	X	1	×	1	1
Christian and Missionary Alliance	1	X	1	1	1
C3 Church (was Christian City Church)	X	1	1	1	1
Christian Life Churches International	X	1	1	X	1
Christian Outreach Centre Australia	X	X	X	1	1
Christian Reformed Churches of Australia	1	1	1	1	1
CRC Churches International	1	1	1	1	1
Church of the Nazarene	1	1	1	1	1
Churches of Christ	1	1	1	1	1
Fellowship of Congregational Churches	1	1	1	1	1
Foursquare Church Australia	1	1	1	1	X
Grace Communion International	X	X	X	1	1
International Pentecostal Holiness Church (IPHC)	x	×	×	×	1
Lutheran Church of Australia	1	1	1	1	1
Presbyterian Church of Australia	1	1	1	1	1
Seventh-day Adventist Church	1	1	1	1	1
The Salvation Army	1	1	1	1	1
Uniting Church in Australia	1	1	1	1	1
Vineyard Churches Australia	1	1	1	1	1
Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australia	1	1	1	×	X
Westminster Presbyterian Church of Australia	1	×	×	×	×
Independent Churches	1	1	1	1	1

Table 1.2: Australian denominations that participated in National Church Life Surveys:1991, 1996, 2001, 2006 and 2011

* In 1996, Catholic churches participated in the parallel Catholic Church Life Survey (CCLS).

NB. Some denominations are missing from data tables (Apostolic, Brethren, Christian Missionary Alliance and Foursquare Church) because the sample of participating congregations are not sufficiently representative of the denomination.

Introduction

International Application of the Australian Model: Following two National Church Life Surveys in 1991 and 1996 in Australia, the NCLS Research team supported New Zealand churches as they conducted the Church Life Survey-New Zealand. The Australian methodology and resources were replicated for this project. New Zealand results confirmed the emerging ideas of the Australian team about how healthy churches work.

At the time of the 2001 NCLS, parallel projects were launched in the USA (USCLS), England (CLS-UK) and New Zealand (CLS-NZ), under the banner of the International Congregational Life Survey. These projects also used the Australian National Church Life Survey as the foundational model.

Since 2001, New Zealand has conducted a simplified variation of the CLS-NZ in 2007 and in 2011. Wave 2 of the USCLS was also conducted by the USA project team in 2008 and 2009. Wider application of the Australian-born National Church Life Survey model has also taken place in other nations.

Nation	Year of Survey	Attenders	Local Churches	Denominations
New Zealand (CLS-NZ)	1997	72,000	1,250	13
New Zealand (CLS-NZ)	2001	58,740	1,962	12
USA (USCLS)	2001	243,840	1,770	40
England (CLS-UK)	2001	107,220	1,960	15
Australia (NCLS)	2001	449,000	6,550	19

NB. Numbers have been rounded.

The Datasets Used in This Book: This book draws information from many of the rich datasets that now exist. For example, data from international surveys have been analysed for similarities and differences in the dynamics of church vitality in each country. It is clear that across the four nations surveyed there are many similarities, confirming that there are common insights to be learned about church vitality. Where there is no common dataset across the four countries, Australian data has been used.

This book also summarises results from the latest NCLS for which analysed data are available – the 2006 NCLS. As noted earlier, at time of writing this book, surveys from the 2011 NCLS are being processed. This collection of results provides a public record that will be a foundation for the future tracking of trends.



PART 2 NINE CORE QUALITIES OF CHURCH LIFE

About the NCLS Core Qualities of Church Life

Internal Core Qualities

Inspirational Core Qualities

Outward Core Qualities





NINE CORE QUALITIES OF CHURCH LIFE

What are the characteristics of a vital church? Often this question has been answered in terms of growth in the numbers of attenders. It is assumed that local churches growing numerically must be growing and developing in other ways as well. A notion has developed that growth in the numbers of attenders is the pre-eminent measure of the health of a church.

Going beyond Church Growth: Church vitality is about a broader set of issues than attendance. At the heart of any church are relationships with God, between church attenders and with the wider community. Attendance measures on their own do not tell us a lot about the quality of these relationships. The mission of a church to the wider community involves more than just attracting people to church. There are issues of becoming committed to the faith and of discipleship. There is the sharing of the faith beyond the walls of the church, which is reflected in evangelism/evangelisation, in addressing social justice and welfare issues, and in day-to-day living. Churches in areas of declining population may find it difficult to grow in numbers but may grow in vitality.

There has been much criticism over the years of the use of 'church growth' as the pre-eminent measure of church health, a criticism with which we agree. We have gone much further by providing a series of measures that enables a church to discern its vitality across nine broad areas as well as in the area of attendance.

Nine Core Qualities of Church Life

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

At the heart of any church are relationships with God, between church attenders and with the wider community It should not be assumed that we are defining and measuring every conceivable Core Quality of church life. The development of these Core Qualities and the measurement of them remains an unfinished task. The task of understanding church vitality is shaped by new research insights and by the changing nature of church life. It is a dynamic process with the possibility that new measures will be developed and added in the future.

Readers of previous NCLS publications will recall lists of Core Qualities organised in different ways. In our 2001 resources, there were twelve Core Qualities compared with nine now. This reorganisation has become necessary in the light of further research. It should be noted, however, that virtually all of the previous measures have been retained within the new scheme.

Finding Out More about the Core Qualities: In this section of the book, we shall:

- outline in more detail each of the Core Qualities identified through the National Church Life Survey research
- outline the relationship between each of the Core Qualities and growth or decline in attendance and the presence of newcomers to church life.

Our aim is to make clear why the measurement of Core Qualities is important for churches. We shall show that by dealing with their Core Qualities, churches will also be addressing the issue of church growth and decline.

Each of the Core Quality areas in the Church Life Profile contains multiple measures. The measures provided reflect the kinds of issues that church leaders are concerned about and what have been the best measures so far discovered through our research. Different readers will consider some measures more important than others. The range of measures provided enables you to focus upon those issues that are of most concern to you and your church.





CORE QUALITY 1 Alive and Growing Faith

A growing, lively faith is at the heart of church vitality. A primary purpose of churches is to teach people about God, helping them to worship God by living out their faith in all aspects of their lives. The Apostle Paul captures this idea when he teaches that Christians are to offer themselves to God as "living sacrifices, which is your true spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1).

There are many elements that go together to make a lively, growing faith. A lively faith can encompass a growing understanding of doctrine, of trust and belief in God, of the experience of the presence of God or of putting faith into practice in everyday life. Much of this is difficult to measure in a short survey such as the NCLS! The following measures are included in the Church Life Profile within Core Quality 1:

- Importance of God: how important respondents believe God is to them
- *Faith commitment:* whether respondents have experienced a moment of faith commitment or whether their commitment grew gradually
- *Private devotional activity:* whether and how often respondents spend time in private devotions (prayer or Bible reading)
- *Growth in faith:* whether and to what extent attenders believe that their faith has grown in the past year.

Is Growth in Faith Related to Growth in Attendance? Our research has shown that the level of growth in faith within a congregation is related to changes in attendance level and the level of newcomers. As shown by the graph opposite, local churches where there are higher proportions of people who feel that they are growing in faith tend to be churches with higher levels of growth in attendance and higher levels of newcomers.

Our research has also shown that growth in attendance is often stronger among local churches with particular theological orientations. There are many different theological streams that flow through the Christian church. In all four countries that we studied, those churches with higher proportions of attenders with an evangelical or pentecostal theological orientation also tend to have higher levels of growth in attendance, including higher levels of newcomers and better retention of young adults. This phenomenon has been noted by other observers over the years. However, it should be noted that there are churches from *all* traditions that are successfully attracting newcomers, though not as commonly as across these particular traditions.

Vital churches are churches where people feel that their faith is growing

Nine Core Qualities of Church Life



When it comes to understanding church vitality and growth in attendance, theological orientation is only part of the story. We find that theological orientation makes a difference, but that many other factors contribute equally or more so to each of the Core Qualities of church life. This keeps in perspective the fact that no one group holds all the answers when it comes to church vitality.

It is quite possible for local churches that have strongly held beliefs and practices to be lacking in vitality. Schwarz (1996, 26–27) draws a distinction between lifeless orthodoxy and a passionate spirituality. Our research points in the same direction. Vital churches are churches where people feel that their faith is growing rather than simply holding a static set of beliefs.

Our research based on the 2006 NCLS confirms that Australian attenders feel that their faith is growing. A comparison over five years shows that more church attenders attribute their growth in faith to their local church, rather than other sources, than in previous years. (See Figure 2.2.)

Growth in Faith: When asked whether they believe they have grown in faith over the previous year, attenders respond positively, with 86% experiencing at least some growth. Nearly half (44%) believe they have experienced much growth from a variety of sources.



Faith Commitment: The journey of faith varies for attenders. Some 44% claim to have had faith all their life, while a further 14% say their commitment grew gradually. Just over a third of attenders (37%) describe a specific moment or series of moments of faith commitment. Of this group, 6% can identify a moment in the previous five years, 17% name a moment more than five years earlier, and 14% describe a series of moments of commitment.

Private Devotional Activity: Private practices of Christian faith include prayer, meditation or Bible reading alone. Seven out of ten (70%) of church attenders spend time in private devotions; 50% do so every day or most days. Previous NCLS research has found that among attenders in all denominations, it is the older generations who are more likely to conduct regular private devotions.

Importance of God: When asked how important God was to them, 53% of attenders say God is the most important reality in their life and a further 31% say God is more important than most things. Some 15% say

More church attenders attribute their growth in faith to their local church than in previous years God is fairly important, but many other things are more important. Less than 1% of attenders say that God does not matter at all.

What is Different Between Denominations? Some denominational variations exist within attenders' growth in faith. Overall, Catholics are more likely to have had faith all their life or formed a gradual faith, compared to Protestants who report having one or more specific moments of faith commitment. The practice of private devotional activities and importance of God is reported most frequently by attenders in Pentecostal churches.

	Growth in faith	Faith commitment		Private devotions	Importance of Goo	
	Much growth in faith	Had faith all life/gradual faith	One or more specific moments	At least a few times per week	More important than most things	The most important reality
Anglican	44%	59%	37%	71%	31%	51%
Australian Christian Churches (AOG)	69%	27%	70%	84%	18%	78%
Baptist	45%	33%	65%	76%	26%	67%
Catholic	39%	73%	21%	64%	34%	45%
C3 Church	67%	27%	71%	81%	20%	75%
Christian Outreach Centres	64%	30%	68%	82%	19%	77%
CRC Churches	59%	31%	66%	78%	20%	74%
Churches of Christ	46%	37%	60%	74%	28%	63%
Lutheran	40%	73%	24%	71%	32%	59%
Nazarene	55%	31%	65%	78%	22%	71%
Pentecostal (all)	67%	28%	69%	83%	18%	78%
Presbyterian	46%	52%	45%	76%	26%	64%
Salvation Army	56%	40%	56%	78%	27%	64%
Seventh-day Adventist	48%	50%	47%	83%	25%	70%
Uniting	38%	59%	37%	65%	36%	43%
Vineyard Churches	55%	26%	72%	77%	22%	72%
Total Anglican & Protestant	49%	47%	50%	74%	28%	61%
Catholic	39%	73%	21%	64%	34%	45%
All Attenders	44%	58%	37%	70%	31%	53%

Table 2.1: Denominational differences for indicators of growth in faith

Source: 2006 NCLS - Attender Survey



CORE QUALITY 2 Vital and Nurturing Worship

The writer of the Book of Hebrews exhorted the believers never to give up meeting together, as a source of encouragement in their faith in Christ (Hebrews 10:25). Since biblical times, Christians have regularly gathered together for worship, prayer, the sacraments and the teaching of the word.

The term "worship" can be used in different ways. Here it refers to congregational worship, such as church services and Mass. There is now a broad diversity of worship styles across the churches. In many local churches, traditional forms have given way to contemporary forms or to hybrid forms. Pentecostal meetings have set a new benchmark in what is considered to be "contemporary" in worship. Churches such as Australia's Hillsong have made their mark internationally in the writing of church songs and music.

Regardless of the form of worship, there are common elements of vitality that can be evaluated. The Church Life Profile provides measures of vitality found across all types of church service, including whether attenders always or usually experience:

- a sense of God's presence
- inspiration
- joy
- growth in understanding of God
- preaching that is helpful to everyday life.

On the negative side, attenders can also experience boredom during the services.

Is Worship Related to Growth in Attendance? The majority of attenders across denominations usually experience a sense of God's presence at church, as well as growth in their understanding of God. Most of these experiences of worship are related to changes in attendance levels.

Let's take a sense of inspiration as an example. The graph shows that local churches where higher percentages of attenders always feel inspired are also more likely to be growing churches. Similarly, churches where higher percentages of attenders always feel inspired are churches that are more likely to be attracting newcomers.

Our research shows that these qualities of worship act in a cumulative way. In all four countries that we have examined, more joy, awe and inspiration and less boredom all add up to higher levels of newcomers in church life. Each on its own has only a small impact, but together their effect is substantial.

More joy, awe and inspiration and less boredom all add up to higher levels of newcomers in church life Figure 2.3: Relationship between nurturing worship, newcomers and growth in attendance



What about Contemporary Worship? Of some importance, too, is the preference for contemporary worship over traditional forms in many churches. Newcomers to church life are usually more attracted to churches with contemporary worship. In a way this is not surprising, given that newcomers themselves are more likely to be younger people. But it does show that churches cannot overlook the impact of culture on their outreach to the wider community.

Churches that wish to connect better with younger people in their local communities should consider the issue of contemporary worship. While churches rightly question the place of popular culture in church life, when it comes to being attractive to potential joiners, churches that are more in tune with contemporary musical cultures tend to be more attractive.



When seeking to understand vitality related to congregational worship services in Australia, we consider a variety of factors including the style of worship services, attenders' experience in services, the helpfulness of preaching and the types of music most helpful to attenders' faith. While the nurturing of attenders' faith remains the central purpose, it is evident that there is an increasing diversity in how that purpose is achieved.

Some Australian Indicators

In the 2006 National Church Life Survey, one person from each local church provided information about the features of up to five church worship services associated with their congregation or parish (in the 2006 Operations Survey). These results represent nearly 20,000 worship services conducted across Australia; most are weekly, but some are less frequent.

In addition, church attenders were asked about their experience of congregational worship services, their view of the preaching and their musical preferences.



Overall Style of Church Worship Services: The style of worship services is relatively evenly spread across traditional and contemporary. In 2006 some 36% of Australian worship services were described as traditional (32%) or very traditional (4%). A similar proportion – 39% – of worship services were described as contemporary (28%) and very contemporary (11%). A further 25% of worship services were described as mixed.

Attenders' Overall Experiences in Congregational Worship Services:

Most Australian church attenders give a positive appraisal of their local church worship experience, with 75% reporting that they always or usually experience a sense of God's presence. Seven out of ten (71%) always or usually experience growth in understanding of God. Similar proportions experience joy (64%) or inspiration (60%), and 25% experience awe or mystery. Only 6% claim to always or usually experience boredom during worship services.

An integral part of any church is the passing on of knowledge of the faith. Largely achieved through sermons and homilies in the worship service, it is also facilitated through small groups, classes and courses.

Type of Sermons Preached: Table 2.2 shows that around half (52%) of all sermons preached in Australian worship services focus on and explain a passage of the Bible in detail. Another 41% are described as topical, using Bible passages for support. Only small proportions of services have recorded sermons provided on a CD or DVD (6%), largely topical (1%) or no sermon at all (0.3%).

	%
Sermons which focus on and explain a passage of the Bible in detail	52.0
Sermons which are topical, using Bible passages for support	41.1
No sermon is usually preached	0.3
Recorded sermons provided on a CD or DVD	6.0
Sermons which are topical, but make little or no reference to the Bible	0.6
Total	100

Attenders' Experience of Preaching: When asked how often they experience 'preaching very helpful to my life', 29% of church attenders said the preaching was always helpful and 44% said it was usually helpful.



Music in Church Worship Services: The styles of music used in Australian worship services are very diverse. Churches can also mix a variety of styles. Tables 2.3 and 2.4 give a profile of the musical styles and instruments most often used in worship.

Again we see proportions of music choice relatively evenly spread, similar to the style of worship services, with a third traditional, a third contemporary and a quarter mixed.

Attenders' Preferred Style of Music in Worship: Attenders were asked to assess 'which of the following styles of music do you feel would be most helpful to you in congregational worship? (Mark up to TWO).'

Table 2.5 shows the proportion of attenders who selected each option.

	%
Mainly traditional hymns, classical music, chorales, or sung responsorial psalms	30
Mainly contemplative chants (e.g. Taize, Iona) or music or songs from a variety of cultures	1
Mainly choruses	9
Mainly other contemporary music or songs	29
An equal mix of one or more of the above	24
No music or songs sung	7
Total	100

Source: 2006 NCLS - Operations Survey

Table 2.4: Type of musical accompaniment most often used in worship

	%
Mainly organ and/or piano	50
Mainly other non-electrified instruments (e.g. guitar, flute, woodwind)	6
Mainly electrified instruments (e.g. electric guitar) and/or drums	24
Mainly recorded music such as from a CD or DVD player	3
Mainly from a midi keyboard	8
No musical accompaniment	8
Total	100

Source: 2006 NCLS - Operations Survey
When it comes to preferred style of music, traditional hymns and praise music choruses are the main styles named as most helpful to attenders, ranking equally as strong and far above other styles of music. (See Table 2.5).

	%
Traditional hymns	54
Classical music or chorales	8
Sung responsorial psalms	10
Praise music/choruses	53
Contemporary hymns	26
Other contemporary music or songs	17
Music or songs from a variety of cultures	6
Contemplative chants (e.g. Taizé, Iona)	2
African-American gospel music	4
No music or songs	1
Don't know	3

Source: 2006 NCLS - Attender Survey.

N.B. Percentages will not add to 100% because respondants could choose more than one option

Music, Age and Denominational Differences: Previous research has shown that this is an issue strongly affected by age and denominational differences. Figure 2.5 shows that in 2006 older Anglican and Protestant attenders largely prefer 'traditional' music (defined as traditional hymns, classical music or chorales, and sung responsorial psalms), whereas younger attenders prefer 'contemporary' music (i.e. praise music/choruses, contemporary hymns, and other contemporary music or songs).

Among Anglican and Protestant attenders, the crossover of views occurs in the 60 to 69 year age group. In simple terms, this is effectively a divide between those born before and after World War Two.

In comparison, Figure 2.6 shows that while there is an increasing preference for traditional music with age among Catholic attenders, there is no age group that has a greater preference for contemporary music than for traditional music.

There is a greater preference for traditional music among older attenders as compared to younger attenders





What is Different Between Denominations? It is helpful to note that while inspiration in worship is a key indicator of vitality, different denominations have different areas of emphasis or strength. Typically, Salvation Army and Pentecostal attenders are more likely than attenders from other denominations

to report experiences of God's presence during worship. Whereas, growth in understanding of God is the aspect of worship most often expressed by many Protestant traditions. Seeking positive growth in faith through participation in nurturing worship services is central to the body of Christ, regardless of the particular form it takes.

			orship se ays/usua			eaching rch is	Style of music most helpful in congregational worship (Choose 2 from list)			
	Inspi- ration	Joy	Bore- dom	Awe or mys- tery	A sense of God's pres- ence	Growth in under- standing of God	Always helpful	Usually helpful	Choose one or more tradi- tional options	Choose one or more contem- porary options
Anglican	58%	62%	4%	22%	69%	72%	27%	49%	67%	67%
Australian Christian Churches (AOG)	86%	85%	4%	41%	86%	87%	53%	38%	17%	92%
Baptist	66%	67%	4%	24%	72%	74%	29%	51%	45%	87%
Catholic	52%	56%	8%	24%	76%	64%	24%	40%	78%	32%
C3 Church	85%	85%	3%	41%	86%	86%	51%	39%	10%	92%
Christian Outreach Centres	85%	84%	3%	40%	85%	85%	51%	37%	18%	93%
CRC Churches	74%	75%	5%	31%	79%	79%	35%	46%	27%	91%
Churches of Christ	66%	68%	5%	24%	72%	72%	26%	51%	43%	85%
Lutheran	66%	71%	4%	23%	79%	77%	33%	49%	60%	76%
Nazarene	74%	74%	5%	30%	78%	81%	44%	41%	60%	82%
Pentecostal (all)	85%	84%	3%	40%	85%	86%	51%	39%	17%	92%
Presbyterian	64%	65%	4%	24%	70%	80%	36%	47%	68%	75%
Salvation Army	72%	78%	6%	29%	81%	79%	36%	45%	60%	82%
Seventh-day Adventist	64%	68%	9%	19%	76%	74%	25%	48%	68%	73%
Uniting	55%	63%	4%	19%	68%	66%	23%	51%	71%	70%
Vineyard Churches	72%	70%	4%	34%	76%	72%	27%	51%	18%	92%
Total Anglican & Protestant	66%	70%	4%	26%	74%	75%	33%	47%	53%	79%
Catholic	52%	56%	8%	24%	76%	64%	24%	40%	78%	32%
All Attenders	60%	64%	6%	25%	75%	71%	29%	44%	63%	59%

Table 2.6: Denominational differences for indicators of vital and nurturing worship

Source: 2006 NCLS - Attender Survey.



CORE QUALITY 3 Strong and Growing Belonging

The New Testament likens the church to a body, where individuals have differing functions (1 Corinthians 12). This picture shows that church attendance means more than simply being present at church services; it is also about being part of a community of believers with various privileges and responsibilities.

Most church attenders across the four countries studied say that they have a strong sense of belonging to their local church. The feeling of belonging to a community of faith is essential for many people and should not be underestimated as a quality that enhances the life of a church.

This sense of belonging does vary across denominations. In Australia, Protestants are more likely than Catholics to have a strong sense of belonging to their local church. But for Catholics their sense of loyalty to their denomination is much higher than for Protestants. It seems that what binds attenders to their church and helps them feel part of a church community can be quite different across denominations.

Does Having a Sense of Belonging Matter? It might be thought that a sense of belonging is the simple by-product of attending church frequently. In other words, the more one goes to church the more one feels a sense of belonging. It is clear from our research that attending frequently is indeed associated with a sense of belonging. But there are many other factors too. Feeling that you belong is also strongly linked to:

- a sense of growth in faith
- commitment to the vision and direction of the local church
- positive experiences of worship services
- having leaders who are inspiring and empowering
- involvement in outreach activities.

In science, the colour produced by the "litmus test" reveals whether a liquid is alkaline or acidic. The sense of belonging that attenders have is an important litmus test for both satisfaction with and confidence in their church. As a measure of the quality of church life, it is tapping into aspects of community that are intangible and difficult to quantify. It contrasts with the more "hard-edged" measures of church life, such as the number of people attending church or the number of programs run.

Apart from the question about a sense of belonging to the congregation, the results of the following questions are also included in Core Quality 3:

• measures of participation, such as frequency of attendance at church and involvement in small groups

People are searching for fulfilling relationships and a sense of community

- results of conflict in the congregation
- sense of loyalty to the denomination.

Such measures are important for local churches in a society where people have become increasingly disconnected from their local community. The structure and order of a more traditional society has given way to one where people need to find their own place. Perhaps more than ever, people are searching for fulfilling relationships and a sense of community. Churches are able to meet not only religious needs but also a range of "felt needs", including that of a community in which to belong.

Is Sense of Belonging Related to Growth in Attendance? Local churches where people say that they have a strong sense of belonging to their church also tend to be churches that are growing in attendance. Our research shows this to be one of the most important aspects linked to changes in attendance level, the flow of newcomers and most of the other Core Qualities.



Nine Core Oualities

of Church Life

We now look at the belonging Core Quality measures in more detail.

Frequency of Attendance at Church: How frequently one attends church can be a reflection of how much they feel they belong. National polls of Australians reveal that 15% are frequent church attenders, that is, they attend church at least once per month. A National Church Life Survey is a snapshot of a week in church life. This means that people who attend less regularly are under-represented in this particular survey population. Among Australian NCLS participants, 66% claim to attend church usually every week and 15% attend more than weekly. Around 13% attend one, two or three times a month. The NCLS was also completed by 2% who attend less than once a month, 2% who hardly ever attend and 2% for whom it was their first time at the church.

Sense of Belonging to the Local Church: Whether attenders feel a sense of belonging to the local church is an important guide to the health of the church. Among all Australian attenders, nearly half (47%) said they have a strong sense of belonging which is growing. A further 26% have a stable sense of belonging, whereas 8% feel that this sense is perhaps not as strong as it was a year earlier. Figure 2.8 shows the full detail of the responses to the survey question about attenders' sense of belonging. Only 3% said 'Don't know' or 'Not applicable'.

Sense of Belonging to the Denomination: Institutional membership of volunteer organisations in general has declined over recent decades. Our research has shown that more attenders are switching between denominations, perhaps suggesting a decreasing loyalty to one particular denomination.

Here we ask people directly about their sense of belonging to their denomination. This taps into something different to belonging to a local faith community. It picks up on an underlying sense of identity.

When asked to respond to this statement 'I have a strong sense of belonging to the denomination of this church', 43% of attenders strongly agree and another 42% agree. Around one in ten (11%) are neutral/unsure and 4% disagree.

Most attenders have a strong sense of belonging to their local church, as well as to their denomination



Involvement in Small Groups in the Local Church: Small group involvement is an important feature of how Australian church attenders are involved in their local church. More than half (54%) of all attenders participate in one or more small groups. Thirty per cent of attenders said they were part of small prayer, discussion or Bible study groups at their local church. Some 32% also said they were in fellowships, clubs, social or other groups.

Results of Conflict in the Church: The presence of conflict is a negative measure of the strength of this Core Quality. When asked 'Over the last two years, what has been the main results of any conflict in this congregation?', 38% of attenders said there had been no real conflict that they were aware of and 22% said they did not know. One in five (21%) said there had been some, but it was easily resolvable. However, 8% of attenders were aware of significant conflict which affected relationships and 7% stated there had been significant conflict with people and/or leaders leaving the congregation. (Three per cent said 'none of the above'.)

Table 2.7. Description description	11.66	(f	and the second s
Table 2.7: Denominational	afferences f	for indicators of	of strong and	growing belonging

	Frequency of church attendance			h	Sense of belonging to local church			Belong- ing to denomi- nation Attendance at group activities			Awareness of conflict	
	Less than month- ly/ hardly ever/ first time	One to three times a month	Usu- ally every week	More than once a week	Strong & grow- ing	Stable	Weak- ening	Strongly agree or agree	Small study or prayer groups	Clubs or social groups	Some, but easily resolv- able	Sig- nifi- cant con- flict
Anglican	5%	17%	69%	10%	52%	29%	8%	83%	42%	39%	20%	14%
Australian Christian Churches (AOG)	3%	6%	45%	46%	73%	11%	6%	86%	64%	47%	21%	13%
Baptist	4%	10%	74%	13%	53%	23%	10%	73%	58%	40%	20%	15%
Catholic	8%	13%	65%	14%	38%	28%	8%	88%	12%	19%	21%	10%
C3 Church	4%	8%	54%	34%	68%	12%	8%	84%	55%	48%	19%	12%
Christian Outreach Centres	4%	8%	52%	35%	68%	12%	8%	84%	54%	46%	20%	12%
CRC Churches	4%	8%	66%	22%	66%	16%	8%	81%	55%	46%	23%	16%
Churches of Christ	4%	11%	72%	13%	53%	23%	10%	73%	53%	40%	21%	19%
Lutheran	4%	21%	73%	3%	45%	35%	10%	88%	37%	42%	23%	16%
Nazarene	3%	10%	63%	24%	62%	20%	9%	82%	49%	34%	20%	17%
Pentecostal (all)	3%	7%	49%	41%	71%	12%	7%	85%	60%	47%	21%	13%
Presbyterian	4%	11%	74%	12%	54%	26%	8%	79%	51%	39%	21%	13%
Salvation Army	4%	7%	65%	23%	62%	19%	8%	86%	45%	54%	21%	20%
Seventh-day Adventist	3%	9%	80%	7%	53%	24%	11%	87%	47%	42%	21%	21%
Uniting	3%	18%	74%	6%	49%	34%	9%	84%	33%	52%	23%	17%
Vineyard Churches	4%	13%	72%	11%	62%	18%	7%	76%	57%	39%	20%	16%
Total Anglican & Protestant	4%	13%	67%	16%	56%	24%	8%	82%	48%	44%	21%	16%
Catholic	8%	13%	65%	14%	38%	28%	8%	88%	12%	19%	21%	10%
All Attenders	6%	13%	66%	15%	47%	26%	8%	85%	30%	32%	21%	15%

Source: 2006 NCLS - Attender Survey

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What is Different Between Denominations? Figure 2.7 shows denominational differences for a range of measures related to this Core Quality. It shows a great variation between denominations with regard to how attenders participate in their church communities. Attenders in churches shaped by Pentecostal and evangelical faith traditions are more likely to be more frequent in their attendance at church and to be involved in small study or prayer groups.

Only around 8% of attenders on average across denominations experience a weakening sense of belonging to their church. However, churches who heed this information and seek to strengthen the sense of belonging of current attenders may help to prevent people from drifting away from church life in future.

When asked whether they had a strong sense of belonging to their denomination, more than eight out of ten attenders strongly agree (43%) or agree (42%) that they do.

The highest proportions of attenders who claim to have a sense of belonging to their denomination are found in the Catholic Church and Lutheran Church (each 88%) and Seventh-day Adventist (87%). This aligns to results about the much lower levels of switchers in these denominations (discussed later in Part Three).

However, against this pattern, we also note that Pentecostal attenders also have high levels of denominational belonging (85%), and yet they will be shown to have among the highest levels of switching between denominations. To explain these differences requires further work on how people define their sense of personal religious identity and connectedness. However, these findings do align with an increase in the proportion of Australians who affiliated with Pentecostal churches in the 2006 national Census. It provides further evidence of a shift in religious identity across the Australian religious landscape.



CORE QUALITY 4 Clear and Owned Vision

In view of Jesus' command to "go into the world and make disciples of all nations", there can be little argument that the vision of the church must include those beyond the church. The parable of the good Samaritan compels us to consider "Who is my neighbour?" and to expand our horizons beyond the people in our immediate circle.

Yet, when forced to choose, most church attenders value the internal ministries of their church more than its mission to those outside church. Our research across four countries has shown that most church attenders tend to be inward-looking, placing greater value on their church's teaching ministry, worship style or small-group experience than on reaching those beyond church life. Relatively few attenders highly value their church's caring for the wider community or outreach to non-churchgoers (Hughes and Bellamy, 2004, 16).

There are now many commentators in the West who are warning that the churches cannot simply focus on their internal functions but need to be proactive about mission. They argue that new forms of church are needed to complement churches that have more in common with a previous era of Christendom than with the modern era (Mead, 1991; Bandy, 2001; Jackson, 2002; Frost and Hirsch, 2003).

Most church leaders face the immense challenge of helping attenders to be committed to a compelling vision

The Power of an Inspiring Vision: Modern times call for leadership that can help churches embrace the changes necessary to move forward into a new era. When it comes to church vitality, it is not surprising that one of the most important areas identified in our research is the ability of churches to develop a clear vision or directions that attenders are strongly committed to.

The Church Life Profile shows the extent to which attenders:

- are committed to their church's vision, goals or directions
- perceive that leaders are focused on future directions
- believe that the vision, goals or directions are achievable.

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

Is Commitment to Vision Related to Growth in Attendance? Our research has found that a strong commitment to the vision, goals or directions of the church is associated with growth in attendance. In fact, it is more strongly related to growth than most other factors that we have tested. While there



is no "magic bullet" when it comes to church growth, our research indicates this to be one of the most important areas for church leaders to consider. That this has emerged from survey data reveals an important fact: the churches that grew were not those where the leadership simply produced a vision, but where attenders responded well to the vision and adopted it as their own. The vision has been communicated clearly and has been formed in a way that has led to ownership by the church attenders.

The graph shows what this relationship is like. Churches with high levels of attenders strongly committed to the vision of their church also tend to be churches with high levels of newcomers and high levels of growth in attendance. In addition, they are churches where high levels of young adults remain in church life. Without a compelling vision that people are committed to, growth is in jeopardy. While awareness of and commitment to a church's vision is one measure of this Core Quality, it is also helpful to explore attenders' confidence that it can be achieved and attenders' perceptions that leaders are focused on future directions.

Commitment to the Church's Vision, Goals or Directions: Seven out of ten (70%) church attenders say that they are aware of the vision, goals or directions of their local church. Fourteen per cent say 'there are ideas, but no clear vision' and a further 17% say that they are not aware of any vision.

It has already been noted that commitment to any vision is the key. Over half of all attenders are committed to their church's vision for the future; this is made up of 29% who are strongly committed and another 26% partly committed.

Confidence that Vision, Goals or Directions are Achievable: Three quarters (74%) of all attenders are confident that their local church can achieve the vision, goals or directions it has set for itself; 44% are fully confident they can be achieved and 30% are partly confident. Only 4% say 'I am not confident we can achieve them'. A further 9% say 'They are not clear enough to me to be able to evaluate this', while 13% do not know.

Perception that Leaders are Focused on Future Directions: As part of the 2006 NCLS, attenders were asked if they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about their leaders. One of these statements was "Leaders here are strongly focused on directions for the future."

Again, three quarters of all attenders support this statement (75%). Some 26% strongly agree and 49% agree that their leaders are focused on the future. Most of the remaining group of attenders are neutral or unsure (22%) with only 2.5% who disagree and 0.5% who strongly disagree.



Figure 2.10: Attenders' awareness & commitment to vision, goals or directions

Around three

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are confident

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attenders

vision or

			ommitment ision		church ca vision/goa	nce that n achieve ls/direction s set	Leader strongly focused on future directions		
	Yes, strongly committed	Yes, partly committed	Yes, but not committed	Unaware of any clear vision	Fully confident	Partly confident	Stronly agree	Agree	
Anglican	33%	29%	11%	27%	37%	38%	25%	53%	
Australian Christian Churches (AOG)	60%	23%	8%	8%	77%	14%	57%	36%	
Baptist	38%	31%	10%	20%	48%	32%	31%	51%	
Catholic	17%	23%	21%	39%	40%	26%	18%	49%	
C3 Church	59%	26%	8%	7%	78%	14%	62%	32%	
Christian Outreach Centres	56%	25%	10%	9%	74%	16%	52%	40%	
CRC Churches	49%	26%	9%	16%	62%	23%	41%	46%	
Churches of Christ	39%	30%	11%	20%	48%	32%	32%	51%	
Lutheran	26%	28%	11%	35%	32%	40%	14%	54%	
Nazarene	39%	23%	11%	27%	47%	31%	31%	48%	
Pentecostal (all)	59%	24%	9%	9%	76%	15%	55%	37%	
Presbyterian	36%	27%	11%	27%	41%	34%	23%	53%	
Salvation Army	40%	25%	10%	26%	48%	31%	34%	47%	
Seventh-day Adventist	34%	25%	9%	32%	43%	32%	23%	52%	
Uniting	31%	28%	10%	31%	34%	40%	20%	55%	
Vineyard Churches	45%	30%	7%	18%	54%	28%	31%	50%	
Total Anglican & Protestant	39%	28%	10%	23%	47%	32%	31%	49%	
Catholic	17%	23%	21%	39%	40%	26%	18%	49%	
All Attenders	29 %	26%	15%	30%	44%	29%	26%	49%	

Table 2.8: Denominational differences for indicators of clear and owned vision

Source: 2006 NCLS - Attender Survey

What is Different Between Denominations? We have already noted the importance of this Quality for attracting newcomers and attendance growth overall. Here we see quite significant denominational differences. Where higher proportions of attenders are unaware of any clear vision, or are not fully confident about capacity, churches may struggle to achieve it, and miss an opportunity to tap into the people willing to work for that vision. However, also encouraging to note is that most denominations have over 60% of attenders committed, either strongly or in part, to their church's vision.



CORE QUALITY 5 Inspiring and Empowering Leadership

Leadership is critical to church life. It is important for problem solving, for promoting visionary goals, encouraging individuals to work together and responding to new opportunities. It is important for resolving conflicts, and for maintaining standards of behaviour and best practice in church life. It is a primary catalyst for change and for churches to move forward. In the Bible, the Acts of the Apostles shows that these aspects of leadership were also found among leaders in the early church.

Inspiring Leadership: Many people have been inspired by others who have changed the course of events, have lived godly lives and have been willing to stand up for what is right. Such people may not have had the status of "leader" but nonetheless exercised leadership. How much more, then, do church leaders have the opportunity to provide inspiration for attenders, not just through what they say but also through what they do.

Our research had previously contrasted three leadership styles: strongly directive leadership, leadership that inspires people to action and leadership that allows other people to start most things. Of the three approaches, leadership that inspires people to take action is most associated with other aspects of church vitality (Kaldor *et al.*, 2002, 82). Across all four countries that we studied, it is also clear that inspirational leadership is the one that is most associated with growth in attendance.

Church attenders reveal through the survey the extent to which their leaders inspire them to action. The Church Life Profile is a very useful mirror for leaders at this point, because it gives an insight into the thoughts of those they lead. Do they see the leadership as inspiring them to action?

Empowering Leadership: Our research has highlighted that leaders need to not only inspire others but also equip them and involve them in the tasks of the church. Even where there are leaders who have a strong sense of vision and are highly motivated, a vision cannot be achieved by the leadership alone; what is required is a team of people willing to work towards a common goal.

The extent to which leaders are serious about empowering attenders can be seen in the way that attenders have responded to questions in the National Church Life Survey, for example, whether they use their gifts and skills for the good of the church. The question reflects the biblical idea of the church as a body made up of different parts, each with different functions (1 Corinthians 12). The Church Life Profile can indicate how well this is actually happening in each church, from the viewpoint of church attenders.

A lack of willingness to allow and trust lay participation can also be indicative of communication problems within a congregation or parish. While church

Leadership is a primary catalyst for change and for churches to move forward



leaders may provide church attenders with plenty of information, true communication will involve deeper interaction, emotional engagement and participatory decision-making (Lucas, 2004, 416).

Is Empowering Leadership Related to Growth in Attendance? Discerning the gifts and skills of attenders and matching people with tasks is difficult to do well. Often the immediate need to get a role filled can drive selection. Yet our research across the four countries suggests this is an issue worth engaging. Across all four countries, leadership that encourages attenders to use their gifts and skills is also most associated with growth in attendance. Churches with high levels of newcomers are much more likely to have leadership that values people's gifts and skills than churches with few or no newcomers.

Important elements to measure include attenders' experience of being empowered, the inclusion of their ideas, as well as the church leaders' example and behaviour.

Attenders' Experience of Being Empowered: Around three quarters of attenders feel their gifts and skills are encouraged by their leaders: 22% feel this happens to a great extent. Figure 2.12 shows further details.



Another measure of empowering leadership is the extent to which attenders believe their ideas are taken into account. Some 44% say the ideas of the people are taken into account to a great extent. A further group says it happens to some extent (27%) or a small extent (4.9%). Only 1.4% say it does not happen. A fifth of attenders (21%) do not know.

Leadership Strengths and Style: Attenders were invited to respond to a series of statements about leaders at their church. Table 2.9 shows the percentage who agree or strongly agree that leaders model these characteristics.

Table 2.9: Attenders' views of leadership strengths & style

Agree or strongly agree that leaders here	%
Inspire us to action	62
Are good at bringing people together to make things happen	72
Focus on wider community	73
Set an inspiring example of the Christian life	83
Communicate clearly and openly	77
Help us build on our strengths	75

Good and Clear Systems: Another aspect of how people can feel empowered is when they feel they can have confidence that organisational systems are

Three quarters of attenders feel that leaders encourage their gifts and skills and take their ideas into account in place. Three quarters of attenders either strongly agree (21%) or agree (54%) that 'this congregation has good and clear systems for how it works'. Only 4% disagree and 22% are neutral or unsure.

Table 2.10: Denominational	differences	for indicators	of inspiring	and empowering
leadership				

		& skills raged		Take ideas Attenders agree has nto account that leaders & sys							
	Yes, to a great extent	Yes, to some extent	A great extent	Some extent	Inspire us to action	Focus on wider com- munity	Set an inspiring example of the Christian life	Commu- nicate clearly and openly	Help us build on our strengths	Agree	
Anglican	23%	33%	49%	29%	67%	74%	87%	82%	76%	75%	
Australian Christian Churches (AOG)	43%	29%	48%	29%	87%	90%	93%	87%	88%	86%	
Baptist	23%	34%	48%	29%	71%	80%	87%	80%	77%	75%	
Catholic	15%	27%	38%	25%	51%	65%	76%	73%	70%	71%	
C3 Church	38%	30%	42%	30%	88%	88%	93%	87%	88%	87%	
Christian Outreach Centres	41%	28%	49%	28%	84%	87%	91%	85%	87%	84%	
CRC Churches	35%	33%	48%	31%	80%	84%	91%	84%	83%	79%	
Churches of Christ	26%	33%	45%	29%	70%	82%	86%	79%	78%	76%	
Lutheran	17%	36%	49%	30%	56%	63%	80%	73%	70%	72%	
Nazarene	32%	33%	57%	26%	74%	80%	93%	84%	80%	78%	
Pentecostal (all)	42%	29%	48%	29%	86%	89%	92%	86%	88%	85%	
Presbyterian	23%	33%	44%	32%	65%	69%	86%	78%	74%	76%	
Salvation Army	28%	32%	48%	30%	74%	80%	89%	79%	81%	76%	
Seventh-day Adventist	25%	34%	48%	28%	59%	70%	80%	71%	71%	72%	
Uniting	24%	35%	51%	28%	64%	76%	85%	80%	78%	75%	
Vineyard Churches	33%	33%	49%	30%	79%	85%	89%	84%	80%	73%	
Total Anglican & Protestant	27%	33%	48%	29%	70%	78%	87%	81%	79%	77%	
Catholic	15%	27%	38%	25%	51%	65%	76%	73%	70%	71%	
All Attenders	22%	30%	44%	27%	62%	73%	83%	77%	75%	75%	

Source: 2006 NCLS - Attender Survey.

The presence of a culture of encouraging attender gifts and skills does vary across denominations. A more collaborative leadership style is evident in Nazarene churches as well as Uniting churches, with high proportions reporting that their leaders take their ideas into account.

The modelling action of leaders is widely evaluated in a positive light across denominations.



CORE QUALITY 6 Imaginative and Flexible Innovation

Jesus used the analogy that new wine should not be poured into old wineskins, because the skins will burst and both the wine and the skins will be ruined. Instead, new wine should be poured into fresh wineskins (Mark 2:22). The same analogy can be used in relation to churches today. Many commentators see the need for fresh wineskins in church life to hold the new wine of a younger generation of church attenders. Fresh wineskins are also needed to reach those who have little or no experience of church life.

Leaders new to a local church can face this question: How can change be brought about to help this church become more vital? Such leaders may encounter opposition to changes for which a case has been clearly made. It may take a long process of negotiation or even conflict to bring about even small changes.

One of the Core Qualities identified in our research is that churches need to be open and willing to try new things. There are too many churches that are losing touch with those beyond church life or with a new generation of church attenders. It is clear from our research that openness to change and a spirit of innovation are part of what is needed to reverse these trends.

Churches need to be open and willing to try new things Many churches are trying new approaches. Large 'mega-churches' have developed, bringing a range of new worship styles, group life and mission activities. Some churches have commenced different types of services with a view to reaching diverse groups in the population. Others have started satellite churches in suburbs or towns far from the parent church, or have adopted a 'multi-campus' model.

Church planting ventures range from individual initiatives to full teams. Some are provided with quite significant denominational support in terms of training, property and finance, while others have to grow a base of support.

Another example of innovation in church life is the emergence of new forms of church alongside more conventional forms, particularly in Western countries. In some cases, it is a reorientation of emphasis or focus on mission. Some of the terms that recur in the explosion of literature written in the past decade include 'misson-shaped church', 'fresh expressions', 'emerging church', 'missional church' and so on (e.g. Frost and Hirst, Kimball, McLaren, etc.). Some examples of new forms of church include alternative worshipping communities, café churches, cell churches, church plants, network-focused churches, school-based churches, seeker churches and youth congregations.

Is Openness to Change Related to Growth in Attendance? Figure 2.13 shows the relationship between a willingness to try something new and growth in attendance. Churches with strong growth are more likely to be churches



where there is a strong recognition that they are ready to try something new. Rather than seeing change as something to be feared, such churches are willing to embrace it.

Similarly, churches with high levels of newcomers also tend to be churches ready to try something new. The greater level of newcomers may reflect the impact of innovative programs being pursued by such churches.

Regarding emerging churches, research in Australia has found that church plants established as part of the growth programs of denominations or by other local churches tend to have higher levels of newcomers to church life than other churches. They are also more effective in comparison to other more conventional outreach or evangelism programs (Bellamy and Castle, 2003).

In general, our research reveals a growing openness to such innovations in church life over time. Attitudes to change and encouragement of change are significant parts of this shift in openness.

Local Church Openness to New Initiatives: In the 2001 and 2006 NCLS, all participating attenders were asked to agree or disagree with the following statement: 'This congregation is always ready to try something new.'

The overall trends show a positive shift in attitude. For example, the proportion of attenders who strongly agree increased from 13% in 2001 to 17% in 2006. This shift is evident across denominations between 2001 and 2006.



The level of openness to innovation in church life has increased

Leaders' Encouragement of Innovation and Creative Thinking: When asked if "Leaders here encourage innovation and creative thinking", 18% of attenders strongly agree and a further 48% agree. Some 28% are neutral or unsure and 6% disagree or strongly disagree.

Attitude to Changes to Worship Style: To further explore attender attitudes to change, a scenario was posed: "If others who worship here wanted a different style of worship, what do you think the church should do?" Table 2.11 shows the responses.

Table 2.11: Attenders' attitude to changes in worship style

	%
Change this service to include other styles as well	26
Offer another service with a different worship style	22
Offer the one service with the style that the majority want	13
Continue with the way we currently worship	23
Not sure	16
Total	100

Source: 2006 NCLS - Attender Survey

Table 2.12: D	Denominational	differences	for	indicators	of	imaginative	and	flexible
innovation								

	Church is willing Leaders to try something encourage new innovation			rage	Attitude to change in worship style					
	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree	Change to include other styles	Offer another service	One service with majority style	Continue as now	Not sure	
Anglican	12%	49%	17%	52%	21%	31%	14%	20%	14%	
Australian Christian Churches (AOG)	37%	46%	42%	43%	20%	16%	12%	31%	22%	
Baptist	14%	51%	20%	53%	31%	19%	15%	17%	18%	
Catholic	17%	46%	13%	43%	7%	15%	18%	47%	13%	
C3 Church	36%	46%	44%	42%	15%	18%	11%	36%	20%	
Christian Outreach Centres	33%	48%	37%	47%	19%	20%	12%	30%	19%	
CRC Churches	22%	51%	28%	52%	26%	18%	12%	22%	21%	
Churches of Christ	17%	52%	21%	53%	30%	20%	14%	18%	17%	
Lutheran	11%	50%	11%	51%	26%	30%	10%	23%	11%	
Nazarene	25%	42%	24%	51%	33%	16%	17%	21%	13%	
Pentecostal (all)	35%	47%	40%	45%	20%	17%	12%	30%	21%	
Presbyterian	11%	47%	13%	50%	23%	19%	16%	25%	17%	
Salvation Army	19%	47%	27%	50%	31%	16%	12%	26%	15%	
Seventh-day Adventist	10%	44%	14%	54%	32%	14%	12%	27%	15%	
Uniting	14%	53%	16%	56%	31%	22%	16%	19%	11%	
Vineyard Churches	25%	50%	31%	48%	29%	11%	12%	26%	22%	
Total Anglican & Protestant	18%	49%	22%	51%	26%	22%	14%	23%	16%	
Catholic	17%	46%	13%	43%	7%	15%	18%	47%	13%	
All Attenders	17%	48%	18%	48%	26%	22%	14%	23%	16%	

Source: 2006 NCLS - Attender Survey.

Being open to new possibilities in church life seems to be crucial to the future of the church finding its place in a changing society. Particularly as younger generations become leaders, openness to change may bring a whole new dimension to the form and nature of church life.



CORE QUALITY 7 Practical and Diverse Service

Jesus calls us to love our neighbour and help others in practical ways (Luke 10:25–37) and to be "salt and light" in our communities (Matthew 5:13–16). The church throughout the ages has responded to this call with acts of service and justice that reflect God's heart for the world.

Living It Out in Diverse Ways: In view of the fact that service and helping others are central to the mission of the church, several measures of attender activity in this area are provided in the Church Life Profile. Attenders were asked whether they are involved in:

- the community service, social justice or welfare activities of their church
- community service, social action or welfare groups beyond the church
- helping others in informal ways, such as donating to charity, caring for the sick and helping people with drug or alcohol problems.

There are other ways too in which church attenders can be "salt and light" in the wider community. Identifying with the poor and marginalised, being a prophetic voice speaking out against greed and injustice, offering friendship to the lonely, and remaining faithful in the face of opposition are all ways in which churches and church attenders can and do respond to the call of Christ. Of necessity, the Church Life Profile covers only some of the many important ways in which churches have an impact in this area.

Denominations, parishes and congregations have also made significant institutional contributions in this area. In various countries, church organisations are major providers of welfare, educational and medical facilities and services. Along with the activities of local churches and individual attenders, these contribute to the "social capital" of society, as distinct from its economic capital.

Is Helping Others in Informal Ways Related to Growth in Attendance? Previous NCLS research found definite links between churches having an outward focus beyond the congregation and growth in attendance.

Minor links have also been found between attender involvement in wider community care and growth in attendance (Kaldor *et al.*, 1997, 108–117).

However, there appears to be little link between changes in attendance and the level of informal helping among church attenders. Churches where attenders more often help others in informal ways — such as caring for sick people, donating to charity, helping those with drug or alcohol problems, and so on — are only a little more likely to be attractive to newcomers.



Ongoing NCLS research has found that older church attenders were usually more active than others in community welfare organisations or were involved in such activities through their church. However, it is churches composed mostly of older church attenders which often struggle with issues of church decline or are failing to connect with the younger generations.

Sometimes there is confusion between what churches should be doing to be effective and what they should be doing to be faithful. In this respect, the involvement of attenders in service has more to do with being faithful to Christ's call than with directly drawing people into the life of the church. It should not be assumed that all Core Qualities must lead to growth in attendance. There will be key aspects of church life that have their own importance irrespective of their impact on growth. This appears to be one such area.



We now describe some ways that churches in Australia serve the wider community. As well as revealing some of the informal ways that people help others, we see how attenders are involved in community service, social justice or welfare activities both within and beyond their church.

Informal Acts of Service by Individuals: Figure 2.16 shows the 2006 results for Australian church attenders when asked "In the past 12 months, have you done any of the following? (Mark all that apply)":

- Lent money to someone outside your family
- Cared for someone who was very sick
- Helped someone through a personal crisis (not sickness)
- Visited someone in hospital
- Given some of your possessions to someone in need
- Tried to stop someone abusing alcohol or drugs
- Donated money to a charitable organisation
- Contacted a parliamentarian or councillor on a public issue



In Australia, 54% of attenders helped others in three or more ways from this list in the twelve months prior to completing the survey. In general across all churches, younger attenders are more likely to engage in individual informal acts of service. Older attenders however are more likely to be involved in the formal corporate activities, whether church-based or community-based.

About volunteers: Church attenders are more likely to be volunteers in local community groups (43%) than the wider Australian population (32%).

Across all denominations, volunteering within the congregation has a strong positive relationship with volunteering in the community.

Rather than being only church-focused, church volunteers are outward-looking and active in their community.

Source: NCLS Research/University of Western Sydney joint study on volunteering (2001)

Involvement in Wider Community Groups: Church attenders can make connections with people who are not involved in church life by participating in wider community groups.

Attenders were asked if they were involved in any community service, social action or other kinds of groups not connected to this congregation. They were able to select all that applied. Some 22% of Australian adult attenders were involved in community service, care or welfare groups in 2006, while 6% were in social action, justice or lobby groups (e.g. environmental, human rights, local issues).





Around 17% were in sports, recreation or hobby groups, 10% were in school or youth groups (e.g. P&C, Scouts) and 9% reported being in another kind of group (e.g. arts, cultural, political). In Australia, 52% of attenders said they were not involved with such groups.

Involvement in Church-based Service Groups: Church attenders also get involved in acts of service when their churches run programs of this kind. In 2006 22% of adult attenders say they were involved in 'Community service, social justice or welfare activities of this congregation', compared to 19% in 2001.

Apart from often being older, those who are involved in church-based service and care groups tend to be more involved in church life (e.g. regular and long-term church goers, with a ministry role), more often informally helping others, and more ready to share their faith.

	15-29 Yrs %	30-44 Yrs %	45-64 Yrs %	65+ Yrs %
Informal ways of helping others (in	last year)			
Lent money outside family	52	32	25	11
Cared for someone who was sick	24	26	32	25
Helped someone through a crisis	52	49	47	28
Visited someone in hospital	45	49	55	54
Gave possessions to a needy person	36	47	43	30
Helped stop alchol/drug abuse	26	16	16	8
Donated to charity	64	78	81	76
Contacted MP/council about an issue	7	13	16	14
<i>3 or more of the above</i>	58	59	60	45
Involvement in church-based service	activities			
Attenders involved regularly in community service, social justice or welfare activities connected to this congregation	16	17	23	29
Formal ways of helping others (in la	st year)			
Comm. service, care/welfare groups	11	13	23	31
Social action, justice or lobby groups	5	4	6	6
Sport, recreation or hobby groups	24	21	16	14
School or youth groups (e.g. P&C, scouts)	20	17	9	3
Another kind of group	8	7	10	11

Table 2.13: Generational differences related to formal acts of service in Australia in 2006

Types of Service Activities Run by Churches: The vast majority of all churches (92%) in Australia provided community service activities of some form in 2006. Some 78% of all Australian churches report that these activities occur monthly or more often and 14% take place occasionally. This is an extraordinary gift to the well-being of Australian society, creating opportunities for community and care.

Table 2.14 ranks the service activities of all Australian churches from the most common to the least common. It shows that emergency relief/material assistance (e.g. food, clothes for the needy) is the most common form of service activity churches are performing, with 80% giving this form of aid at least occasionally.

Visiting as a form of service is also very common (76%), as is offering some form of counselling (56%). Churches are clearly involved in a diverse range of practical services in their communities.

Table 2.14: Types of service activities run by local churches at least occasionally, across Australia in 2006 (ranked in order from most common to least common)

	%
Emergency relief or material assistance (e.g. food, clothes, for needy)	80
Other visiting (e.g. prisons, hospitals, fringe attenders)	76
Counselling services (e.g. marriage counselling, parenting programs, social work)	56
Other welfare/community service/social action activities not mentioned elsewhere	44
Political or social justice activities (e.g. human rights)	26
Aged care services (e.g. Meals on wheels, home help)	25
Community development or local resident action groups	22
Children or youth support (e.g. youth training schemes, literacy programs, unemployment programs)	21
Care for the disabled (e.g. skills training, respite care, home care)	18
Migrant support activities (e.g. ESL, refugee support, interpreting service)	17
Activities for unemployed people (e.g. job seeking preparation, skills training, volunteers scheme	14
Other accommodations (e.g. homeless hostels, crisis accommodation, student accommodation)	13
Animal welfare or environmental activities (e.g. Landcare)	9
Accommodation for the aged or infirm (e.g. nursing homes, aged units)	6
Source: 2006 NCLS - Operations Survey	

Some 92% of all churches in Australia provide community service activities

	Attender involvement in					
	Attender involvement in					
	Community-based service activities	Church-based service activities	Informal helping - at least 3 actions in the past 12 months			
Anglican	32%	26%	56%			
Australian Christian Churches (AOG)	20%	32%	67%			
Baptist	22%	24%	58%			
Catholic	22%	15%	48%			
C3 Church	15%	19%	65%			
Christian Outreach Centres	20%	23%	66%			
CRC Churches	22%	26%	63%			
Churches of Christ	23%	26%	59%			
Lutheran	29%	28%	51%			
Nazarene	20%	21%	56%			
Pentecostal (all)	20%	28%	66%			
Presbyterian	25%	22%	53%			
Salvation Army	28%	33%	57%			
Seventh-day Adventist	26%	31%	59%			
Uniting	40%	38%	55%			
Vineyard Churches	23%	29%	66%			
Total Anglican & Protestant	28%	29%	58%			
Catholic	22%	15%	48%			
All Attenders	25%	22%	54%			

Table 2.15: Denominational differences for indicators of practical and diverse service

Source: 2006 NCLS - Attender Survey

What is Different Between Denominations? Serving others in either community-based or church-based service activities shows some variation between denominations.

When it comes to being involved in *community-based services*, attenders in Uniting and Anglican churches have higher rates of involvement, along with Lutheran and Salvation Army attenders.

In *church-based services*, we see higher levels of involvement from Uniting, Salvation Army, Australian Christian Churches and Seventh-day Adventist attenders.

Around half of church attenders overall helped others in at least 3 informal ways over the past twelve months.

CORE QUALITY 8 Willing and Effective Faith-sharing

Jesus calls his people to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19, 20). The Acts of the Apostles shows that, for the early church, fulfilling this mission involved a readiness to proclaim the Good News about Jesus in anticipation of the conversion of people to the faith and their inclusion in the fellowship of believers.

Today there are different emphases across the denominations in regard to this mission. Among Catholics, evangelisation has been seen more as a responsibility of the clergy and religious brothers and sisters than of the laity. Among Protestants, particularly Evangelicals and Pentecostals, the mission responsibility of rank-and-file attenders has been emphasised. There has been debate over the relative importance of evangelism and the helping ministries of the churches, sometimes resulting in one area gaining ascendancy over the other.

NCLS research has found that church attenders are involved in outreach to varying degrees. For some, this involves an active engagement, taking part in the outreach activities of their church or initiating discussion at home, work or on social occasions. For others it is more about being prepared to discuss their faith if the opportunity happens to arise or in how they live their lives before others.

The Church Life Profile contains several measures of the involvement of church attenders in outreach. These include:

- involvement in the evangelistic or outreach activities of their church
- readiness to share the faith with others
- whether outreach is a highly valued part of their church involvement

Why We Need to Invite Others: Religious sociologists view the inviting of outsiders to activities by friends and relatives as the most common way in which people join religious groups (McGuire, 1987, 70).

NCLS research has also found that inviting others to church appears to be the key way in which newcomers arrive at church. Among newcomers to Australian churches, some 38% were prompted to attend through the invitation of their spouse, a family member or a friend. Among newcomers, this was the most common catalyst for joining a church, and it is a much higher percentage than that for other church attenders (15%).

Inviting others to church, then, is part of the process by which many join the life of the church for the first time or after an absence of years.

Among newcomers, a personal invitation was the most common catalyst for joining a church

INVITING OTHERS TO CHURCH "I have invited others to church in the past year" 50% 49% 40% 30% Percent of attenders who invited others to church in 20% the past year Churches with Churches with Churches with Churches with low newcomer high newcomer strong decline in strong growth in attendance levels levels attendance When more attenders invite others to church, churches tend to grow Source: ICLS 4 nations data

Is Faith-sharing Related to Growth in Attendance? Our research shows that outreach activity, particularly attenders inviting others to church, is an activity that is closely associated with growth in attendance and the flow of newcomers into church life. It is clear from the graph that churches that have high percentages of attenders inviting people to church also tend to be growing churches or churches where high percentages of newcomers are found.

The research underlines that this is an area where good intentions matter a lot less than actions. Few churches resolve to do less outreach, but frequently this is what happens by default. Churches need to sow in a multiplicity of ways in order to reap even a moderate harvest among those who are currently beyond the life of the church (Hughes and Bellamy, 2004, 115–119).

Figure 2.18: Relationship between inviting others to church, newcomers and growth in attendance

Faith-sharing by Attenders: In Australia, 16% of church attenders feel at ease talking about their faith and look for opportunities to do so. Around half (51%) mostly feel at ease, and talk about faith if it comes up. Another 19% find it hard to talk about their faith, and 13% believe that their life and actions are sufficient. Attenders who feel at ease talking about their faith are, amongst other factors: highly involved in church life, experiencing personal growth in faith, helping people in practical ways and younger. Older attenders are more likely than young attenders to prefer not to talk about their faith, believing their life example is sufficient, while for the younger group the barrier is more often finding it difficult to talk about their faith in ordinary language.

Faith-sharing in Families: The results of various studies suggest that the influence of parents is the most powerful predictor from a person's childhood of their current religious involvement (Bellamy et al., 2002, p.27). In Australia 44% frequently discuss matters of faith at home. Of this group, 14% discuss faith in formal ways, through family or household devotions. Some 6% of church attenders in Australia note that they do not talk about their Christian beliefs with other members of their household.

Previous research has confirmed that for the majority of Anglican and Protestant attenders, first contact with the Christian faith is provided by their parents or family. These familial ties are the most significant in bringing attenders to faith (Kaldor, Dixon and Powell, 1999b, p.60). In the Catholic Church importance is placed on the role of parents educating their children in the faith (Kaldor et al., 1999b, p66). Churches that support parents in this role are more likely to retain youth.



Familial ties are a significant factor for people coming to faith **Inviting People to Church:** The most common way in which people join religious groups is because friends and relatives invite them. In the 2006 NCLS, church attenders were asked 'Would you be prepared to invite to a church service here any of your friends and relatives who do not currently attend a church?'. In Australia, 73% of church attenders were open to inviting someone, with 37% having invited someone in the last 12 months and another 36% being willing to invite someone but had not. In contrast, 14% of church attenders probably or definitely would not invite someone. A further 13% said they did not know if they would be prepared to invite someone.



Reasons for Not Inviting Others: The most common reason church attenders gave for not inviting others was 'Those I could invite may not be interested', selected by 18% of respondents. Table 2.16 lists the other reasons given by attenders.

The most common reason church attenders gave for not inviting others was 'Those I could invite may not be interested' Table 2.16: Reasons given by all Australian church attenders in 2006 for not inviting others

What most discourages you from inviting people to this congregation/parish? (mark up to 2)	%
I do not see the need to do so	10
I don't know many people from outside church	10
My friends & contacts live too far away	9
Lack of confidence in talking about my faith	10
Fear of rejection/damaging relationships	7
They may not like the style of worship	9
They may not be made to feel welcome	3
They may not be interested	18
Other	6
Don't know	9

Local Church Evangelistic Activities: Churches that took part in the 2006 NCLS were also asked to complete an Operations Survey outlining programs and activities. The following question was included: 'In the past 12 months, did this congregation/parish conduct any of the following outreach or evangelistic activities?'. Results are shown in the table below.

The proportion of congregations/parishes who conducted the following outreach or evangelistic activities occasionally, monthly or more often in the past <u>12 months</u>	%
Evangelistic church services or events (e.g. guest services, crusades)	59
Evangelistic Bible studies (e.g. Christianity Explained, Alpha)	50
Street/shopping centre evangelism, door-knocking, drop-in centres	34
Other visiting (e.g. prisons, hospitals, fringe attenders)	69
Mission teams to Australia or overseas	26
Other evangelistic or outreach activities not mentioned above	47
Churches indicated at least one of the above	89





Attender Involvement in Local Church Evangelistic or Outreach Activities: In the 2006 NCLS, attenders were asked about their involvement in any activities of their local church which reach out to the wider community. In Australia, 18% of attenders were involved regularly in outreach or evangelistic activities in 2006 compared to 14% in 2001.

Churches Offering Training: The 2006 NCLS Operations Survey asked: 'Has this congregation offered significant training for lay people in the following leadership or ministry roles in the past 2 years?'

'Outreach/evangelism role' was one of 12 options (any of which could be marked). Results for Australia and selected denominations providing such training in an outreach/evangelism role, can be seen in Table 2.18.

Australian Attenders	%
Anglican	13
Baptist	24
Catholic	11
Churches of Christ	21
Lutheran	12
Pentecostal	28
Presbyterian	25
Salvation Army	15
Uniting	5
All churches	17

Table 2.18: Percentage of local churches in 2006 providing training in outreach/evangelism in the previous 2 years (by denomination)

Table 2.19: Denominational differences for indicators of willing and effective	
faith-sharing	

	Faith-sharing				Faith- sharing in family			Local church activities	
	Life & actions are sufficient	I find it hard to talk about	At ease & do so if it comes up	Look for opportu- nities to do so	Yes, frequently in formal and informal ways	Yes, in the past 12 months	Yes, but not in the past 12 months	Involved in evangelistic outreach	
Anglican	14%	21%	50%	14%	44%	40%	41%	24%	
Australian Christian Churches (AOG)	3%	15%	50%	31%	67%	63%	28%	41%	
Baptist	5%	27%	51%	17%	59%	41%	42%	29%	
Catholic	18%	16%	51%	13%	32%	28%	33%	7%	
C3 Church	4%	15%	54%	27%	67%	62%	28%	32%	
Christian Outreach Centres	4%	15%	52%	28%	69%	58%	31%	40%	
CRC Churches	4%	19%	53%	24%	62%	50%	35%	33%	
Churches of Christ	7%	25%	51%	17%	56%	42%	40%	28%	
Lutheran	8%	25%	53%	13%	47%	34%	44%	16%	
Nazarene	7%	17%	52%	24%	55%	45%	40%	31%	
Pentecostal (all)	3%	15%	51%	30%	67%	61%	30%	39%	
Presbyterian	10%	25%	48%	16%	52%	38%	43%	31%	
Salvation Army	8%	21%	49%	21%	50%	48%	37%	32%	
Seventh-day Adventist	6%	19%	50%	23%	61%	40%	41%	30%	
Uniting	18%	24%	48%	10%	37%	34%	43%	20%	
Vineyard Churches	3%	21%	54%	21%	69%	45%	42%	28%	
Total Anglican & Protestant	10%	22%	50%	18%	52%	43%	39%	28%	
Catholic	18%	16%	51%	13%	32%	28%	33%	7%	
All Attenders	13%	19%	51%	16%	44%	37%	36%	18%	

Source: 2006 NCLS - Attender Survey

Across all denominations around half of church attenders are at ease to share their faith and do so if it comes up.

When it comes to inviting others to church, some 61% of Pentecostal church attenders were active in inviting others to church, versus an average of 37% in all attenders.



CORE QUALITY 9 Intentional and Welcoming Inclusion

Inclusion has to do with the successful integration of people into church life. Such inclusion is intentional: the seeking out of new people or people who may be on the margins and including them in what is happening. It is also welcoming: seeking out people no matter what their background and maintaining diversity in church life.

The early church in Jerusalem is an example of a church that practised inclusion. People had become Christians from a diversity of ethnic backgrounds, yet it was said of them that "they were like a family to each other" (Acts 2:42).

Fitting into Church: In regard to fitting into church life, some newcomers find it easier than others. Some come equipped with previous experiences of church life, while others have had no such experience. Some already have a Christian world view while others are still wrestling with basic beliefs. Our research among newcomers shows that, in Australia and England at least, newcomers were much less likely than other church attenders to have attended church or Sunday school as a child or to have had church-attending parents. They were also less likely to hold orthodox Christian beliefs or to see God as most important.

Some churches have formal procedures to help newcomers become fully integrated into church life. Many churches have welcoming programs and study groups where they can learn about central beliefs and the way the church operates. The Catholic Church has rites of Christian initiation (RCIA) to assist newcomers to become part of the church. Our research shows that churches that provide such programs have significantly more success than others in turning visitors into regular attenders.

The Church Life Profile contains a measure of how well church attenders believe their church carries out such work among new arrivals, or indeed of what attenders themselves are prepared to do.

Drifting out of Church: At the other end of the spectrum are those who are on the way out of church life. The catalysts for leaving church life can range from a loss of faith through to life-stage changes such as leaving home, moving house and sickness or infirmity. Research in the USA, England and Australia suggests that leaving church is more often due to life-stage transitions than some crisis of faith or loss of confidence in the church (Bellamy et al., 2002, pp. 101-2).

Mission is often thought of only in terms of reaching out to those beyond the life of the churches. Yet retaining people within the life of the church should also be of great concern. There is evidence in Australia that upwards of

Retaining current attenders needs to be firmly on the church's agenda along with outreach
Nine Core Qualities of Church Life



Figure 2.21: Relationship between follow up of others, newcomers and growth in attendance.

10% of church attenders will leave church life every five years, a little more than the proportion that comes into the church as newcomers (Sterland et al., 2006). Retention needs to be firmly on the church's agenda along with outreach.

The Church Life Profile shows the proportion of church attenders who see it as their responsibility to follow up someone they know is drifting away from church life.

Is Inclusion Related to Growth in Attendance? Our research in Australia shows that churches which provide welcoming programs are more successful than others in drawing people into church life. We have also found a relationship – although it is weak – between attenders' involvement in follow-up and change in attendance levels at churches. The graph shows that relatively few people in a church would certainly follow up someone who was drifting. This was the case in both strongly declining and strongly growing churches.

Individual Follow-up of Those Drifting Away: A survey question that attenders were asked to evaluate the culture of inclusion in a church was: 'If you knew someone was drifting away from church involvement, how likely is it that you would take the time to talk with them about it?' Just over half of all attenders (56%) believe they would personally follow up someone. A third are non committal and one in ten (11%) say it is unlikely.



Churches that provide ways to intentionally include new people have more success retaining them

Local Church-planned Procedures to Follow-up New People: Churches that provide ways to intentionally include new people have significantly more success in retaining them. A profile of types of planned procedures that Australian churches used in 2001 and 2006 is shown in Table 2.20.

 Table 2.20: Percentage of local churches with planned procedures designed to help integrate new people
 NCLS
 NCLS

 2006 %
 2001 %

	2006 %	2001 %
Follow-up visits by clergy or other people from church	67	67
People extend hospitality & invite them for meals	50	45
Group/program for new Christians/members	20	18
Invite to join a small group, fellowship or similar	57	52
Invite to take up a task in the life of the church	43	35
Other	3	4
At least one of the above	86	84
Source: 2001 NCLS and 2006 NCLS - Operations Surveys		

Attender Participation in Welcoming and Follow-up of New Arrivals:

Attenders were also asked about their involvement in a system for welcoming and/or follow-up of new arrivals to church (e.g. a system for visitation, greeters). Some 17% are formally part of a welcoming system, while 58% say that while there is one, they are not a formal part of it. Seven per cent say that there is no system, but they deliberately seek out new arrivals to make them feel welcome. Eighteen per cent say there is no system, or none that they are aware of.

Ease of Making Friends: Three quarters of all attenders agree that they have found it easy to make friends within the local church (28% strongly agree; 47% agree). Of course, those who have not found it easy may no longer be attending.

	Pers	onal follov	w-up	Welcoming system				
	Certain	Very likely	Likely	Yes, and formally part of it	Yes, but not formally part of it	No, but deliberately seeking out	No system/ none that I'm aware of	
Anglican	10%	21%	29%	19%	61%	10%	10%	
Australian Christian Churches (AOG)	27%	30%	26%	29%	64%	3%	4%	
Baptist	12%	25%	33%	15%	71%	6%	8%	
Catholic	8%	12%	23%	10%	53%	5%	32%	
C3 Church	25%	30%	28%	24%	71%	2%	3%	
Christian Outreach Centres	24%	29%	26%	26%	66%	4%	4%	
CRC Churches	18%	28%	30%	21%	63%	8%	8%	
Churches of Christ	12%	24%	31%	16%	68%	7%	9%	
Lutheran	7%	17%	31%	18%	59%	11%	12%	
Nazarene	22%	25%	26%	25%	49%	18%	8%	
Pentecostal (all)	26%	30%	26%	27%	65%	4%	4%	
Presbyterian	12%	24%	30%	19%	58%	12%	10%	
Salvation Army	17%	26%	29%	20%	63%	9%	8%	
Seventh-day Adventist	17%	26%	29%	22%	55%	11%	12%	
Uniting	7%	19%	29%	23%	60%	10%	7%	
Vineyard Churches	15%	29%	31%	15%	62%	12%	11%	
Total Anglican & Protestant	14%	24%	29%	21%	63%	8%	8%	
Catholic	8%	12%	23%	10%	53%	5%	32%	
All Attenders	11%	19%	26%	17%	59%	7%	18%	

Table 2.21: Denominational differences for indicators of intentional and welcoming inclusion

Source: 2006 NCLS - Attender Survey





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PART 3 THE DYNAMICS OF ATTENDANCE CHANGE

Religious Affiliation

Church Attendance

Size of Churches

Life Cycle of Churches

Three Key Attendance Measures

Inflow and Outflow

Church Attender Background

- » Switchers
- » Transfers
- » Newcomers
- » Visitors

Young Adult Retention

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION



The Evidence about Church Growth and Decline: Falling church attendance is a common issue of concern across denominations in Western countries. Studies continue to be undertaken and committees appointed to tackle what is seen as an endemic problem. There have been signs of denial and despair among church leaders over this issue.

So what are the trends in Australia? What is the evidence? This section starts with an overview of what we know about church growth and decline. We review different sources of information, as each provides a different perspective on the issue. We look at trends related to:

- religious affiliation
- patterns in church attenders' self-reported attendance
- size of local churches, based on estimates of attendance at weekly church services.

Following this overview, we will turn to the dynamics of attendance change. In simple terms, churches grow when inflow exceeds outflow. We describe the NCLS Inflow Outflow model for churches and introduce the three ways that attenders flow in and out of churches. By examining the different church backgrounds of current attenders, such as newcomers, switchers and transfers, as well as engaging the issue of retaining young adults, we learn more about new arrivals into churches.

Religious Affiliation in Australia: Questions in a national census are generally not a measure of church attendance or religious commitment, but rather a simple measure of religious identification or affiliation.

Every five years, the voluntary question 'What is your religion?' has been asked in one form or another in Australia's National Census of Population and Housing. Figure 3.1 shows that the Australian national religious profile has changed significantly over the last century.

Since the Census introduced the option 'no religion' into the religion question in 1971, the proportion of those who claim no religious affiliation has increased in almost every census between 1971 (6.7%) to 2006 (18.7%). As the religion question is voluntary, there is always a proportion who do not answer it (11.9% in 2006).

Figure 3.2 shows that by 2006, the most recent census with data available, 63.9% of Australians affiliated themselves with Christianity. Of the 5.6% of Australians who identified with a non-Christian religion, 2.1% affiliated with Buddhism while 1.7% nominated Islam. A further 0.7% affiliated with Hinduism and 0.4% chose Judaism.

The Dynamics of Attendance Change





Religious Affiliation by Denomination: If we compare the trends for different denominations in Australia, we find a more complex story. At the time of the most recent Census for which data is available (2006), the Catholic population numbered 5,126,884, easily the largest religious group in Australia, accounting for 25.8% of the nation's population.

Figure 3.3 shows that a higher proportion of Australians now identify as Catholic compared to the beginning of the century (22.7% in 1901 and 25.8% in 2006). The religious composition of immigrants coming to Australia is an important factor shaping the Catholic population. In 2006 more than two fifths (44%) of Catholics were either born overseas or were second-generation Australians.

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION



Figure 3.3. shows that the proportion of Australians who identify as Anglicans has more than halved across the century (39.7% in 1901 to 18.7% in 2006). In addition, the overall trend is one of decline for all other Christian denominations considered together, although it should be noted that there are significant differences among them. For example, there has been decline in religious affiliation to Anglican, Uniting, Presbyterian/Reformed, and Churches of Christ denominations. Whereas other denominations, such as Baptist and Pentecostal churches, had an increase in affiliation in the last 20 years. Further detail is found in Table 3.1.



	1986		19	96	20	06
	' 000	%	'000	%	'000	%
Anglican	3 723.4	23.9	3 903.3	22.0	3 718.3	18.7
Baptist	196.8	1.3	295.2	1.7	316.7	1.6
Catholic	4 064.4	26.1	4 799.0	27.0	5 126.9	25.8
Churches of Christ	88.5	0.6	75.0	0.4	54.8	0.3
Lutheran	208.3	1.3	250.0	1.4	251.1	1.3
Eastern Orthodox	427.4	2.7	497.3	2.8	544.3	2.7
Pentecostal	107.0	0.7	174.6	1.0	219.6	1.1
Presbyterian & Reformed Churches	560.0	3.6	675.5	3.8	596.7	3.0
Salvation Army	77.8	0.5	74.1	0.4	64.2	0.3
Seventh-Day Adventist	48.0	0.3	52.7	0.3	55.3	0.3
Uniting Church	1 182.3	7.6	1 334.9	7.5	1 135.4	5.7
Other Christian	596	3.8	322.7	1.8	468.6	2.4
Christian Total	11 381.9	73.0	12 582.9	70.9	12 685.9	63.9

NB. Religious affiliation is coded to the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups, Second Edition. Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics data, Census of Population and Housing 1986, 1996 and 2006.

CHURCH ATTENDANCE

The Dynamics of Attendance Change

Australian Church Attendance: Church affiliation is not the same as church attendance. In general, more people identify with a particular denomination than regularly attend its churches. In this section, we review trends about church attendance patterns in Australia.

Churches keep records of various measures such as weddings, funerals, communicants, baptisms and formal membership. These types of counts are often not comparable across denominations. However, from time to time various churches will develop detailed estimates or even conduct a 'head count' of who attends church worship services, and this can provide a basis for comparison when available.

Another method for estimating church attendance is to use sample surveys of populations. From time to time sample groups of people in nationally representative surveys, are asked about their church attendance practice and patterns. While more detailed and, arguably, precise counts of church attendance come directly from churches themselves, sample surveys are a source of information over a longer time frame in Australia, so we use them here.

Frequent Church Attendance: We define 'frequent church attendance' as attending church worship services at least once per month. Figure 3.4 shows that in 2009, 15% of Australians were frequent church attenders. While these figures are based on sample surveys, which church head counts suggest may be an over-estimate of the actual number of church attenders, based on the total population at that time, this equates to 3.28 million people.

Figure 3.4 also shows that the overall trend for frequent church attendance patterns among Australians from 1950 to 2009 has been in decline. In particular, mainstream denominations such as Anglican, Catholic and Uniting have been in steady decline. While some denominations and regions have grown, it has not been enough to offset overall numerical decline.





The Church-Attending Population by Denomination: Having determined that the church-attending population has declined overall, how is this group divided up between denominations? Put colloquially, even if 'the pie' has shrunk, what portion of the pie can each denomination claim? Figure 3.5, based on sample surveys conducted between 1960 and 2009, shows the church-attending population of Australia divided into denominations. Catholics have made up between 40% to 50% of all church attenders throughout that period. The proportion of Australians who report that they attend church and identify with Methodist/ Presbyterian/Uniting Churches has also been relatively stable over the decades (17% in the most recent survey at time of publication).

In contrast, those who claim to attend and also identify as Anglican has declined significantly as a proportion of all church attenders (from 26% in 1960 to 10% in 2009). This decline is contrasted with the increase in attendance at other Christian churches, which has increased from 13% in 1960 to 23% in 2009.



A 'Head Count': In seeking more precise attendance figures, the Pastoral Research Office of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has begun conducting a national head count of Mass attenders every five years, and their most recent report on 2006 data states:

An average of 708,618 people attended Mass, or a Sunday Assembly in the Absence of a Priest, each weekend during May 2006, when the most recent National Attendance Count was conducted. About 8.2 per cent of these attended Mass celebrated in a language other than English... The total attendance figure represents 13.8 per cent of Australia's 2006 Catholic population of 5,126,884 (Dixon *et al.*, 2008.).

Anglican and Protestant denominations do not have the same systematic national head count approach. However, NCLS Research conducts a long-term project seeking estimates of weekly church attendance for each denominations, and, where possible, regions within denominations. This data is being collected and revised at time of publication.

Growing Churches: While church attendance may be declining overall, it is not the case that all denominations are declining. There are evangelical and pentecostal denominations that are growing, some spectacularly so. Furthermore, there are many pockets of growth within declining denominations.

It is our belief that the issue of church decline can be addressed by developing vital and healthy churches. The evidence from the National Church Life Survey study of churches in four Western nations, and especially the detailed investigation of Australian churches, has demonstrated that there is an association between most of the Core Qualities of church life and changes in attendance level. Growth in each Core Quality is often matched by rising levels in church attendance.

A Note about the Life Cycle of Churches: Before we move on, we add this brief note about the idea of a life cycle. In the early years, the inflow of people into a new church often exceeds the outflow, and the church enters a period of steady growth in attendance. Eventually, growth may give way to stability, and attendance begins to plateau. If this happens, church leaders should recognise that the trends in inflow and outflow have been turning around and may well continue to do so. Unless there is intervention, the outflow of people will start to exceed inflow, resulting in declining attendance. This may mean eventual closure of the church. Such a cycle of growth, plateau and decline would typically be measured in decades rather than years.

Alternatively, if there is successful intervention, the result could be quite different. The trends that led from growth to plateau could be halted, and followed by growth. This is no small challenge for most churches however, in that they must be willing to evaluate and confront such trends.

The issue of church decline can be addressed by developing vital and healthy churches

SIZE OF CHURCHES

Size of Churches: Average Weekly Attendance: In each NCLS, church leaders were asked to provide an estimate of the average weekly attendance at church services. Estimates have been calculated for many non-participating churches using a range of sources at the time of the 2006 NCLS.

This snapshot of the size of local churches is based on the estimated size of 10,049 local chuches. Not every church in Australia is represented here. Some large churches, as well as many small churches, are missing from these estimates. However, while it may be incomplete, at this point it is the best profile that exists of the size of Australian churches. Our crosschecks of 2006 data with earlier data collected in 2001 and 1996 confirm the consistency of the profile that emerges here.

It is quite clear in Figure 3.6 that Australia is a nation of small churches. More than half of all churches (53%) have less than 50 people attending weekly church services. Almost a third of all churches have less than 25 people.

At the other end of the spectrum, we find 2.5% of churches who estimate they have over 500 in weekly church services. In 2006, some 66 churches were estimated to have more than 1,000 people in weekly church worship services. In 1996, the largest estimate of church size provided to NCLS was 2,600 people (This 1996 count did not include Catholic parishes). In 2006, the largest church on record was 16,400 people.



Australia is a nation of small churches

INFLOW & OUTFLOW

Why Do Churches Grow?: Growth in church attendance has been seen by some as the measure of church health. Where there is growth, it is assumed that good things must be happening. Where there is decline, it is assumed that the church must be unhealthy in some way.

In the Bible, the church grew as people turned to Christ. When Peter preached to the crowd at Jerusalem, it was recorded that some 3000 people were added to the church on that day (Acts 2:41). The Acts of the Apostles records many instances where people were added to the number of believers, whether through one-to-one conversation (Acts 8:26–40), through whole households becoming Christian (Acts 16:29–34) or through the ministry of new churches (Acts 16:4,5).

Yet, today, church attendance growth on its own is a flawed indicator of church health. Research in Western countries has shown that much of what passes as "church growth" is actually people moving between churches, not the inclusion of new believers as in the New Testament. In Australia it has been estimated that only a fifth of new people at church are people fresh from the wider community moving into church life (Bellamy and Kaldor, 2002, 31). It is quite possible for churches to be misled about the true nature of their connection with the wider community through paying too much attention to their overall growth in attendance.

If change in attendance is to be a more useful measure to churches, it is necessary to break it up into its constituent parts. Then churches can see whether their growth is made up mostly of people moving in from other churches, whether they are attracting newcomers from the wider community or whether they are retaining the young adults brought up within the church. That way churches can understand whether their growth is a reflection of effectiveness in mission or whether it is being driven by other factors.

Churches Grow When Inflow exceeds Outflow: Why do some churches grow while others decline? Put simply: *Churches grow when the inflow of new attenders exceeds the outflow of people leaving the church.* The inflow and outflow of attenders are composed of a few different streams. The strength of these streams determines whether inflow exceeds outflow or vice versa; growth or decline is the net result of these streams added together. If we want to understand better how change in attendance levels occurs, we need to measure these separate streams.

Measuring these streams enables a church to see the main source of its inflow as well as the main destination of its outflow. Such a picture helps a church to understand its change in attendance much more clearly and to identify reasons for growth or decline. The sources of church growth in one church can be completely different from the sources in another church. Similarly, the reasons for decline can vary markedly. The movement of people between churches does not constitute overall church 'growth'



NCLS Research has developed a model that differentiates between these streams for all church attenders who are 15 years and over. We use the terms 'adult congregation' and 'adult attenders' to refer to the part of the local church aged 15 and over. The *Church Life Profile* that churches participating in the Survey receive contains the church's Inflow/Outflow report:

Inflow is comprised of:

- Switchers/transfers in: people arriving from churches of other denominations (switchers) or from churches of the same denomination (transfers) in the past five years
- Retained youth aged 15 to 19 years: Young attenders aged 15 to 19 who were attending this church five years ago
- Newcomers: Attenders who were not attending any church five years ago.

Outflow is comprised of:

- Switchers/transfers out: people leaving for other churches
- Deaths: People who have ceased attending in the last five years because of death or infirmity.
- Drift outs: people drifting out of, or who have left church life.

Attendance Inflow and Outflow Chart



Put simply, churches grow when the inflow of new attenders exceeds the outflow of people leaving the church

CHURCH ATTENDER BACKGROUND

History of Attendance: In this section, attenders' history of attendance is discussed in relation to their current local church. Those who have been attending their current congregation/parish for less than five years are divided into the following groups:

- Switchers: people who were previously attending a local church of a different denomination
- Transfers: people who were previously attending another local church of the same denomination
- Newcomers: people who were not previously attending church anywhere
- Visitors: people who said they were visiting the local church during the week of the survey.

Across Australia in an average week in 2006, 5% of all attenders at church are visitors, 6% newcomers, 8% switchers and 18% transfers. The remaining 65% are long-term attenders. Figure 3.7 shows that these proportions have not changed much from the previous NCLS in 1996 and 2001. Figure 3.8 shows that new arrivals to church – switchers, transfers and newcomers – have a significantly younger age profile compared to long-term attenders.





Switchers, transfers and newcomers have a significantly younger age profile than long term attenders



About Switchers: Switchers are the group of church attenders who have arrived in the previous five years from churches in other denominations.

Across Australia, around 8% of attenders have switched from another denomination in the previous five years. This compares to 7% in 1996, which is relatively stable. However, this average hides the fact that switching is largely a Protestant phenomenon. Some 15% of Anglican and Protestant attenders were switchers compared to only 1% of Catholic attenders.

Denominational switchers tend to be younger than adult attenders as a whole, with an average age of 42 years (vs 53 years overall).

Why do they switch? Previous research found that switching often occurs around the time that people move house (Kaldor et al., 1999). This is linked to the younger age profile: young adults are at a life stage when many changes are made, such as leaving home, commencing tertiary study, establishing a career and marriage. Such changes often entail changing both residence and congregation. However, moving house is only one part of the picture. Switching can occur because of attenders' unhappiness with their previous congregation's teaching, leadership or style of worship.

Switchers are more committed and involved: When asked what they value about their current church, the aspects switchers most commonly chose were sermons, preaching or Bible teaching (49% vs 35% overall) and a contemporary style of worship or music (32% vs 21% overall), which once

again may be linked to a younger age profile. They are more likely than other attenders to be involved in small prayer, discussion or Bible study groups (50% vs 30% overall).

Despite being relatively new arrivals, many switchers show a readiness to use their gifts and skills to contribute to church life. Some 37% of switchers think that encouraging attenders to discover/use their gifts is one of the top three things to which their church should give more attention. They are also more likely than other attenders to be strongly committed to the leader's vision for the growth of the congregation (39% vs 29% overall), look for opportunities to share their faith (23% vs 16% overall) and have invited someone to church in the last 12 months (49% vs 37% overall). In short, they tend to want to be more involved, are more energetic and more committed to the church's missional activities.

	1996	2006
	%	%
Anglican	7	9
Australian Christian Churches	27	26
Baptist	19	20
Catholic Church	1	1
C3 Church	43	34
Christian Outreach Centres	N/A	30
CRC Churches	29	27
Churches of Christ	22	25
Lutheran	3	4
Nazarene	23	25
Pentecostal (all)	31	31
Presbyterian	14	19
Reformed	6	15
Salvation Army	10	12
Seventh-day Adventist	3	4
Uniting	8	8
Vineyard Fellowship	69	43
Total Anglican	14	15
& Protestant Catholic	1	1
	-	·
All Attenders	7	8

Table 3.3: Switchers by denomination in 1996 & 2006

Source: 1996 & 2006 NCLS - Attender Surveys



Pentecostal churches attract high levels of switchers **Denominational Differences in Switching:** As noted earlier, switching mainly impacts on Anglican and Protestant churches. Only 1% of Catholic attenders have come from another denomination. Vineyard, Pentecostal, Nazarene, Churches of Christ, Baptist and Presbyterian churches attract the highest number of attenders switching to their church from another denomination. Around a third of Pentecostal attenders, a quarter of Churches of Christ attenders and a fifth of Baptist attenders were attending a different denomination five years earlier (see Table 3.3).

Tracking Pentecostal Switching: If nearly a third of Pentecostal attenders were in a different denomination five years earlier, where did they come from? Figure 3.9 shows the switching tracks of this group into Pentecostal churches. It should be noted that switchers include people who have switched from one Pentecostal denomination to another (48.3%), as well as those who have switched between the Pentecostal sector and non-Pentecostal denominations.



The Dynamics of Attendance Change

About Transfers: Transfers are the group of church attenders who have arrived in the previous five years from churches in the same denomination. The level of church attenders who transferred from a church of the same denomination over the previous five years decreased from 18% in 1996 and 2001 to 16% in 2006.

In terms of the Core Qualities, in many ways the profile for transfers is very similar to long term attenders, although they are less likely to be involved in church-based service or evangelistic activities. Compared to 18% of all attenders, 15% of transfers are 'involved regularly in outreach or evangelistic activity'.

From the list provided of what they valued in their church, transfers ranked two aspects above others. Sharing in Holy Communion/the Eucharist/ Lord's Supper is the aspect of church life most valued by 42% of transfers (vs 41% overall), followed by the sermons, preaching or Bible teaching (40% vs 35% overall).

When asked what should receive attention in the next 12 months at their church, transfers are most likely to choose building a strong sense of community within the congregation (31% vs 33% overall) and encouraging individuals to discover/use their gifts at their local church (30% vs 29% overall). The priorities identified by transfers align with those of all attenders combined.

Two denominations stand out as having higher than average levels of transfers: the Catholic Church (19%) and Seventh-day Adventists (21%). This aligns with their lower level of switchers.

Switchers, transfers and links to denominational loyalty: What is the link between denominational loyalty and moving between churches? We might expect that switchers are more likely to be prevalent in denominations with lower levels of loyalty, whereas transfers might tend to be in denominations with higher levels.

In Part 2, we outlined the attenders' sense of belonging to their denomination. It is true that Catholic and Adventist attenders have among the highest levels of belonging to their denominations (88% and 87%). When a Catholic or Adventist attender changes churches, it appears they tend to limit their options.

However, the differences between many denominations in terms of level of belonging is not that great, with many denominations having more than 80% of attenders who claim a sense of denominational belonging (see Table 2.7). Furthermore, we need to point out again the surprisingly high proportion of Pentecostal attenders in this category (85%). Yet, they also have the highest level of switchers. This dynamic needs further investigation to understand how Pentecostals view their denominations and movements, and the Pentecostal movement as a whole.

Transfers value the Eucharist and want to belong



Newcomers to Church Life: We define 'newcomers' as those who have attended their present congregation for less than five years and previously were not regularly attending church. There are those who have no previous background of church involvement and those who are returnees to church life after an absence of several years.

The presence of newcomers reflects the effectiveness of churches in connecting with those beyond church life. NCLS identifies the levels of these newcomers in the life of each participating congregation. They are found in congregations of all sizes and across all denominations.

Level of Newcomers Static: The level of newcomers to Australian churches has remained fairly static: 5% in 1996, and 6% in 2001 and 2006. One-third of that 6% (2%) have never regularly attended, and two-thirds (4%) have returned after a long absence. These proportions also remain unchanged between 2001 and 2006.

Newcomers Have a Different Demographic Profile: Compared to other attenders, newcomers are younger, with 49% less than 40 years old (25% overall). They are less likely than other new arrivals (switchers and transfers) to be in their first marriage and more likely to be never married, remarried, in a defacto relationship, separated or divorced. They are less likely to be university educated (26% vs 33% of switchers and 38% of transfers).

Newcomers Positively Rank the Inner Core Qualities: When assessing church life, newcomers scored the inner Core Qualities of Faith, Worship and Belonging as three out of their four top qualities. This perhaps reflects that churches are effective at helping them develop their faith practices and, as such, are being positively rated in those areas. Newcomers are also more likely than other attenders to describe their church as open to new initiatives.

When asked what they think the church should give more attention to, newcomers are most likely to say that they hope attenders will be encouraged to discover/use their gifts and skills at the local church. Similarly, they hope a sense of belonging within the church will be strengthened (both 32%). Newcomers most value elements of church life that help them grow in the knowledge and practice of their faith, that is, sermons and preaching (34%), contemporary worship or music (27%) and the sharing of Holy Communion (24%).

Denominational Differences: In the 2006 NCLS, those denominations with the highest proportions of newcomers were C3 Church (17%), Australian Christian Churches (AOG) and Christian Outreach Centres (each 14%), Salvation Army (12%), CRC and Vineyard Churches (each 11%), Anglican, Churches of Christ and the Church of the Nazarene (each 9%) (see Table 3.4).

Newcomers most hope to use their gifts and skills at church and to belong **Visitors:** Visitors are people who said they were visiting the church/parish during the week of the survey. In most denominations between 2% and 4% of attenders on any given Sunday are visitors. Catholic parishes are exceptional, with twice the percentage of visitors as Anglican and Protestant congregations (7%).

As previously noted by NCLS researchers, "The principal reason for this is that, while most Catholic attenders regard it as very important that they go to Mass each Sunday, for many urban Catholics where they go is of less importance or even unimportant. Therefore, when factors such as children's sporting commitments, family social engagements and travel disrupt their normal Sunday arrangements, Catholics will often choose to go to Mass at a different parish from their usual one." (Kaldor, *et al.*, 1999b, p.27.)

	Visitors	Newcomers	Switchers	Transfers	Long-term attenders	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Anglican	3	9	9	15	65	100
Australian Christian Churches	2	14	26	14	44	100
Baptist	2	8	20	14	56	100
Catholic Church	7	3	1	19	71	100
C3 Church	3	17	34	5	41	100
Christian Outreach Centres	3	14	30	8	46	100
CRC Churches	2	11	27	6	55	100
Churches of Christ	3	9	25	7	56	100
Lutheran	2	4	4	14	75	100
Nazarene	2	9	25	8	55	100
Pentecostal (all)	3	13	31	9	44	100
Presbyterian	3	7	19	11	60	100
Reformed	2	4	15	11	68	100
Salvation Army	4	12	12	13	59	100
Seventh-day Adventist	3	6	4	21	66	100
Uniting	2	7	8	10	74	100
Vineyard Churches	3	11	43	10	33	100
Total Anglican & Protestant	2	9	15	13	61	100
Catholic	7	3	1	19	71	100
All Attenders	5	6	8	16	65	100

Table 3.4: Church background of attenders

Source: 2006 NCLS - Attender Surveys



YOUTH & YOUNG ADULT RETENTION

Youth Attendance: The NCLS data offers three separate snapshots of a church's youth attendance.

- Youth in the church: The first snapshot shows what proportion of the adult congregation is made up of people aged 15 to 19.
- Retained youth aged 15 to 19: The second snapshot shows what proportion of the adult congregation is aged 15 to 19 now and was attending this church five years ago. That is, five years ago they were children in this church (aged 10 to 14) and are still attending this same church. NCLS calls this measure 'Retaining youth aged 15 to 19'. This is included in the Inflow Outflow model for churches.
- Attenders' children: The third snapshot shows what proportion of attenders' children aged 15+ still living at home are still attending this church.

Each snapshot overlaps with the others and shows a different aspect of youth attendance in a church. Taken together, these three snapshots will give a more complete picture.

Youth in the Church: When we consider the age profile of adult church attenders, the proportion of attenders aged 15 to 19 in Australian congregations rounds out to 6%. Young people are under-represented in churches, with three quarters of adult attenders being 40+ years of age.

Retained Youth Aged 15 to 19: 'Retained youth aged 15 to 19 years' measures the number of youth (aged 15 to 19) who are currently attending and were attending this church five years earlier (when they were aged 10 to 14 years). That is, this is an estimate of children who have been retained once they reach an age where they are probably able to make their own choice about whether they attend church.

In terms of the Inflow Outflow model, those who have arrived via this pathway as a percentage of all attenders was 3% in 2006. It was also 3% in 2001. A further 2% of attenders aged 15 to 19 had attended this church for less than 5 years in 2001 and also in 2006.

Nearly 60% of attenders' children aged 15+ attend church regularly **Attenders' Children:** The churches' retention of children brought up by church-attending parents is significant to the future of all denominations. The reality of recent times is that churches lose many of their child attenders during their teenage years.

Table 3.5 shows the church involvement of attenders' children who are still living at home (of any age). In 2006, 86% of attenders' children living at home aged under 15 regularly attended the church of their parents. For those aged 15 and over this figure falls to 46% - almost half.

However, Table 3.5 also shows a small growth in the attendance rates for attenders' children who live with their parents between 2001 and 2006—both for those under 15 and for those 15 years and over.

We can also take a broader view beyond the local church to evaluate whether attenders' children go to church anywhere. Table 3.5 show that nearly 60% of attenders' children aged 15+ who live with their parents are attending church regularly. Most of them are at the church of their parents (46%) and some at another church (13%).

	All NCLS 2001	All NCLS 2006
Aged 0-14		
Still attend this church	82%	86%
Attend elsewhere	7%	7%
Do not attend any church	10%	8%
Aged 15 and over		
Still attend this church	45%	46%
Attend elsewhere	11%	13%
Do not attend any church	42%	40%

Table 3.5: Attendance patterns for children still living with parents in 2001 and 2006

Source: 2001 & 2006 NCLS Attender Surveys



Satisfaction With What is Offered for Young People at Church: In 2006, just over half of adult attenders were satisfied with what their church was offering for children (56%), which was up slightly on the 53% who were satisfied in 2001. However, there was a lesser percentage satisfied with what their church was offering youth (42%) and young adults (35%). Nevertheless, as Figure 3.10 shows, their levels of satisfaction had risen since 2001, perhaps suggesting that churches have given some attention to improving their youth and young adults ministry activities.

Satisfaction Rates Remain Static Among Youth and Young Adults: In 2006, when the youth themselves were asked if they were satisfied with the activities their church was offering them, 61% of 15 to 18-year-olds responded that they were satisfied. Among young adults aged 19 to 25 this figure was less, with 54% saying they were satisfied with what their church was offering their age group.

Given that five years earlier the figures were almost the same (62% and 54% respectively in 2001), there would appear to have been little change here.



Satisfaction levels amongst young people remain steady over the past five years

The Dynamics of Attendance Change

	Attenders aged 15-19	Retained young adults*	Attenders' children 0-14 this church#	Attenders' children 0-14 another church#	Attenders' children 15+ this church#	Attenders' children 15+ another church#
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Anglican	5	2	88	5	40	16
Australian Christian Churches	12	4	93	4	65	11
Baptist	8	4	92	4	55	17
Catholic	4	3	80	10	42	12
C3 Church	12	4	91	3	58	13
Christian Outreach Centres	8	3	91	4	61	11
CRC Churches	9	5	90	3	59	10
Churches of Christ	8	3	91	5	54	14
Lutheran	5	3	92	5	58	10
Nazarene	5	2	94	4	45	21
Pentecostal (all)	11	4	92	4	63	11
Presbyterian	6	3	91	5	53	17
Salvation Army	6	3	89	5	48	14
Seventh-day Adventist	6	4	93	4	62	12
Uniting	3	2	87	5	38	15
Vineyard Churches	8	3	92	3	50	19
Total Anglican & Protestant	7	3	90	5	51	14
Catholic	4	3	80	10	42	12
All Attenders	6	3	86	7	46	13

Table 3.6: Denominational comparison: young adult retention

Source: 2006 NCLS – Attender Survey * Calculated as a proportion of the total church population

Calculations based on attenders' children who live with their parents



THREE KEY ATTENDANCE MEASURES

In Part Three of this book we have reviewed what we currently know about the state of church growth and decline in Australia. We have also introduced the Inflow and Outflow model and explored its components. We conclude this Part by returning to the *Church Life Profiles* that churches participating in the National Church Life Survey receive.

In the Church Life Profile, there are three key attendance measures:

- **Retained youth aged 15 to 19:** the percentage of attenders who are aged 15 to 19 years and who have been attending the church for at least five years is calculated from the responses of attenders.
- Newcomers: the percentage of attenders in this church who are new to church life in the last five years or have returned during the past five years after an absence of several years is also calculated from the responses of attenders.
- Attendance change: average attendances in the church for the five years prior to the survey and for the survey year are provided by church leaders.



The Dynamics of Attendance Change

Retaining Young Adults in Church Life: The retention of children in the church, many of whom have church attending parents, is significant to the future of all denominations. People expect that the children of attenders will be the core of tomorrow's church. Yet, in reality, churches lose many children during the teenage years. For some churches, such as those in rural areas, there may be little that can be done about this situation because of the impact of the regional context on church life and the drift of young adults to the cities.

It is important to provide children with a positive environment in which to learn about the Christian faith. Many churches provide Sunday schools, children's liturgies and youth groups. Some denominations, such as the Catholic Church, provide an entire school system linked to local parishes.

The quality of children's ministry provided by local churches is an issue for church-attending parents. There is evidence that parents are prepared to change churches for the sake of their children. Children themselves will vote with their feet as they get older. Some will move to churches that better suit their needs, while others will leave church life altogether. Mission is often thought of as reaching out to people not yet involved in the church. It can also be thought of as successfully discipling those who are already in the care of churches. In the case of children, this involves understanding how children come to faith, designing church activities to nurture that faith and assisting parents in their role.

The *Church Life Profile* shows the proportion of attenders aged 15 to 19 years who have been attending their church for more than five years. This measure gives a good idea of how successfully a church is retaining children brought up within church life as they move into young adulthood. It provides a basis for discussion and planning about how best to engage and involve them.

Newcomers: This measure represents the fruit of the outreach of churches into the community and the inclusion of new people into church life. Yet much of the growth in attendance is not made up of newcomers but simply of people moving between churches. Rather than successfully reaching the wider community, many growing churches are instead engaged unwittingly in a game of religious musical pews!

Drawing new people into a community of faith is important for reasons other than making congregations larger. It can be hard for the Christian faith to be fostered outside a supportive Christian community. Across the four nations in our study, newcomers are more likely than other attenders to have made some kind of faith commitment in the last five years but are less likely than others to hold orthodox Christian beliefs or to see God as important in their lives (Sterland, *et al.*, 2004). retained youth aged 15 to 19







Change in Attendance: Whether a church is growing or declining in attendance can be an important indicator of its vitality. The size of a congregation often reflects the volunteer and financial resources available to it, which in turn affects its ability to sustain staffing and ministry programs. A situation of growth may point to the church being able to plan to increase its ministry or mission into the future. A situation of decline can challenge the church to plan how long it can sustain current activities and how it might tailor them to future needs.

CONCLUSION

Overall, Christian affiliation and church attendance in Australia and most other Western countries has been declining slowly over the last half century. The reasons for this are many and varied, and need to be explained within the broader context of Western society as well as the practice of churches.

Australia continues to be a nation of small churches, serving a population spread across a vast continent.

Behind these trends lie the dynamics of attendance change. To simply count heads as a measure of church health is a flawed and limited understanding of church growth or decline. Churches grow when inflow exceeds outflow. The NCLS Inflow and Outflow model shows the three ways in and out of a church. People can flow into a church from other churches. At any given time, about 8% of attenders are people who have switched to a church of another denomination within the last 5 years and 15% are transfers from churches of the same denomination. Another source of inflow are the 6% of newcomers, that is, people who five years ago were not attending church at all.

This dynamic nature is important for the life of the church. While transfers can bring other expressions of the same denomination to a church, newcomers and switchers often bring an energy and commitment that can help revitalise an established church. The other source of renewed energy for a church can come from its young people, and the data challenges churches to focus on retaining their young people as they reach their mid- to late-teens.

It is one thing to name the challenges facing churches with regards to the importance of drawing in newcomers, switchers and in retaining its young people, but it is quite another to point a way forward. Our next Part, 'Fostering Vitality' seeks to do just that.

FOSTERING CHURCH VITALITY

Applying Research to Foster Church Vitality

Associations between Core Qualities

Core Qualities Act Together on Church Health

The Link between Core Qualities and Newcomers

The Link between Core Qualities and Retaining Young Adults

The Influence of Theological Tradition

The Influence of Social Context: A Profile of Rural Churches

The Influence of Congregational Size: Comparing Small, Medium and Large Churches



APPLYING RESEARCH TO CHURCH VITALITY

Learning from the Experience of Thousands of Churches

How can our church be more healthy, vital and grow? These are questions that committed and concerned church leaders ask. The collaboration of thousands of churches over many years in National Church Life Surveys makes new kinds of research possible. The NCLS is able to draw from the wisdom and experience of these thousands of churches in extraordinarily diverse circumstances. This allows us tell a story that is different to simply reporting the story of one successful church.

NCLS Research has identified nine Core Qualities to measure a church's vitality. In the previous parts of this book we introduced each of these Core Qualities and showed that:

- each Core Quality is valuable in its own right
- strong Core Qualities are related to outcomes, such church growth, newcomers or retaining youth.

Each Core Quality is Valuable in its Own Right: Each Quality describes an important part of church life. We suggest that most church leaders would agree that an increase in any of the Core Qualities would be a desirable outcome. Does my church help people grow in their faith? Does it foster a strong sense of community? Even if a church community feels that it knows itself well, these simple indicators touch on issues that are not often directly addressed in the regular flow of church life. The comparison with the wider group of churches in Australia gives a broader context for self-reflection.



Strong Core Qualities are Related to Outcomes: We have also demonstrated that church vitality is related to changes in attendance (church growth), the flow of newcomers without a church background into church life, and the retention of young people.



In Part Four, we give a brief overview of research findings that bring all the Core Qualities together. We focus on how to foster church vitality. By examining large numbers of churches, we can ask questions like 'What do healthy or growing churches have in common?' We can describe what is going on in many different contexts, such as urban or rural settings, large and small churches. We hope that these findings will help individual churches, giving them greater confidence in decisions they make with regard to the future.

Some Research Questions about Church Vitality

The information collected from churches who took part in each National Church Life Survey provides researchers with one of the richest databases in the world to use in studies of church health and vitality. Over the years, the NCLS team, as well as associate researchers, have conducted studies looking at a wide range of research questions. This research work continues using all five National Church Life Surveys. In Part Four, we summarise some of the findings from this research.

About the Measures: Attenders and leaders in churches who take part in each NCLS provide answers to a range of survey questions. Responses from attenders are used to create scores for all questions designed to measure the nine Core Qualities. Churches also provide measures of attendance outcomes, such as change in attendance levels, the proportion of newcomers and the retention of young adults. There are also a range of other measures of church life for thousands of churches. A full list of survey questions for each Core Quality is shown in Appendix 2.

Such research is important because it can give churches greater confidence in decisions they make



We have used a range of statistical approaches to look for patterns that may tell us what characterises vital or growing churches. Here are eight types of research questions that we have been able to address in different studies.

How Core Qualities Are Related

Research question 1: How are the Core Qualities related? How do Core Qualities interact with each other? Can we identify those most strongly associated with each other? Understanding how Core Qualities are related will help us understand how they can be fostered.

Research question 2: Are the Core Qualities part of a broader concept of church health? We test whether the nine Qualities act together, pointing to a single underlying factor which we can call 'church health'.

Linking Core Qualities and Outcomes

Research question 3: Which Core Qualities are linked to attracting newcomers?

Research question 4: Which Core Qualities are linked to retaining young adults?

These two research questions are both about sources of inflow into church life. What can we learn from churches that have higher levels of newcomers from outside the church or have effectively retained their young adults?

Other Influences on Church Health

Research question 5: What influence does theological tradition have? Do Core Qualities have a significant effect on attracting newcomers and retaining young adults once theological tradition is taken into account?

Research question 6: What influence does social context have? Do the Core Qualities have an effect on attracting newcomers and retaining young adults once social context is taken into account? We begin by examining the influence of the demographic context on the attraction of newcomers and retention of young adults. Then, as well as describing some of the differences between rural and urban churches, we look at whether the Core Qualities apply equally in rural areas and urban areas.

Research question 7: What influence does congregational size have? Do the core qualities still have an effect on attracting newcomers and retaining young adults once congregational size is taken into account?

The datasets used for these studies come from different waves of the NCLS, as available. Where possible, we have used the 4-country data from 2001. Some studies are Australian-only. Others are based on Australian Anglican and Protestant churches, with additional notes made if relevant separate Catholic studies exist. Future work will continue to refine and update these kinds of studies to test the findings for specific denominations and at different times.

ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN CORE QUALITIES



Research Question 1: How are the Core Qualities Related?

We address the first major research question looking for associations between Core Qualities. We consider each of the nine Qualities grouped under three dimensions; Internal Core Qualities, Inspirational Core Qualities and Outward Core Qualities



Understanding how Core Qualities are related, and affect each other, will help us understand how they can be fostered. When we measure the degree of association between two Core Qualities, what we are doing is testing the degree to which one Core Quality has an influence on, and is influenced by, another Core Quality.

If you are evaluating where a church is up to, and planning for the future, then deciding to focus on one or two Core Qualities does not necessarily mean that you neglect all of the others. If there is a strong association, then if you only choose to focus on growing one Core Quality, it is likely that you will still have an impact on other Core Qualities.

All Core Qualities are Highly Interrelated: The first thing that our research shows is that the Core Qualities are highly interrelated. In other words, churches that have high levels of one Core Quality often have high levels of other Core Qualities. Table 4.1 is what is called a latent variable correlation matrix. We applied more sophisticated methods (Structural Equation Modelling) than previously used on the dataset of Australian Anglican and Protestant churches. It uses sets of survey questions to measure each underlying Core Quality and

Our research shows that the Core Qualities are highly interrelated



looks for the strength of all relationships. The stars show that there is an association between virtually every Core Quality when all the measures are clustered together in this way. Three stars show the strongest relationships. (See Appendix 3.) This is an important finding, because it suggests that if churches work on one Core Quality, it will have flow-on effects to other Core Qualities.

_	Faith	Worship	Belonging	Vision	Leadership	Innovation	Service	Faith- sharing	Inclusion
Faith		**	**	***	**	*	*	***	**
Worship	**		***	**	***	**	-	***	**
Belonging	**	***		***	***	**	*	***	**
Vision	***	**	***		***	***	*	***	*
Leadership	**	***	***	***		***	*	***	**
Innovation	*	**	**	***	***		*	**	**
Service	*	-	*	*	*	*		**	*
Faith- sharing	***	***	***	***	***	**	**		***
Inclusion	**	**	**	*	**	**	*	***	

 Table 4.1: The strength of relationship between all Core Qualities

KEY: * = small ** = medium *** = large

Source: NCLS - Attender Surveys

Some Core Qualities stand out as key 'attractors' of other Qualities **Some Core Qualities Stand Out as Key 'Attractors' of Others:** You will find that some aspects of church life appear time and again in our research findings. The 'three-star' items in Table 4.1 show which Core Qualities are highly related to other Core Qualities. If you focus on these, then the others will be more likely to be impacted at the same time:

- faith-sharing
- empowering leadership
- clear and owned vision
- growth in faith.

All Core Qualities are, to some extent, fostered by other Core Qualities. It is also true that Core Qualities are fostered by aspects beyond the Core Quality measures examined here. Take, for instance, inspiring leadership. The current vitality of a congregation has an effect on whether a leader is able to inspire others to action. However, whether their leadership is seen as inspirational is also a function of the personality and gifts of the leader as well as their own passions and beliefs, ministry formation and previous leadership experience — aspects that are not measured as part of the *Church Life Profile*. Leaders bring a lot of personal resources to their role that will influence their ministry.

About the 'Strongest Association' diagrams

This section includes diagrams for each Core Quality, showing where the strongest relationships with other Core Qualities exist. As previously mentioned, Core Qualities are highly interrelated. Here, we only show the Core Qualities with the strongest relationships. (See Figure 4.1 for example, which shows the two Core Qualities strongly related to the alive and growing faith Quality.) These have reached a certain threshold based on statistical tests, shown in Table 4.1 as three stars. (See Appendix 3 for more detail.) They are also ranked in order of strength, starting at the top right. (So, in the case of Figure 4.1, alive and growing faith is most strongly related to faith-sharing, followed by vision).



The Relationship of the Internal Core Qualities to Other Qualities

The Internal Core Qualities focus on the inner life of the community of faith. These Core Qualities, shown in blue, are:

- an alive and growing faith
- vital and nurturing worship
- strong and growing belonging.

These are often seen as foundational to church life. In fact, for many people these qualities are the first things that spring to mind when asked what a church is for: growing disciples in their faith, gathering together for growth and corporate expressions of our faith, and to be a community of Christ together.

What is Associated with Alive and Growing Faith? When we consider a lively faith, we see that other Core Qualities all have a significant association with this important quality in churches.

In particular, the faith and faithsharing Qualities have a very strong relationship. This relationship is no doubt two-way. When church attenders feel they are growing in



their faith, they are spurred on to share that with others in their lives, and many who share their faith find this a spiritually enriching experience.

Diagrams show strongest relationships for each Quality, ranked in order of strength

Fostering Church Vitality There is also a strong relationship between attenders' personal faith journey and whether the church has a clear vision that people own for themselves. It would be a mistake to think that having a lively faith is a process that is divorced from being well-integrated into a community of faith.



 $\cap \cap$

What is Associated with Vital and Nurturing Worship? Nurturing worship gatherings are most strongly associated with empowering leadership, faith-sharing and belonging. When attenders experience worship as vital and nurturing, this is linked to an experience of the church as empowering and equipping. In addition, such churches are places where individuals are speaking of faith to others and inviting them to participate in the worship gathering and life of the church. This quality is also strongly tied to strong and growing belonging.

It should be noted that there was no statistically significant relationship between individuals' experience of worship and their likelihood to be involved in acts of social justice or service, such as giving money, visiting people in hospital and so on.



What is Associated with Strong and Growing Belonging? When empowering leaders acknowledge and encourage the gifts and skills of attenders, it is strongly associated with strong and growing belonging in a church. Belonging is also strongly related to being aware and committed to the vision for the future. A danger in some churches is if 'belonging' borders on an exclusive or insular culture. However, these results suggest that in general this is not the case; rather than high belonging being associated with exclusivity, such churches are higher in inviting others and sharing faith, and also in involving groups

of people in outreach activities of various kind. Figure 4.3 shows that the fourth quality that has a strong association with belonging is vital and nurturing worship, which is an important forum for the experience of community.
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The Relationship of the Inspirational Core Qualities to Other Qualities

The Inspirational Core Qualities relate to leadership and direction. While they may not be immediately obvious, these qualities are the major catalysts for churches to move forward. They point to the leadership culture within a church. As well have having many strong relationships with the other internal and outward focussed Qualities, these are a hallmark of growing churches. These Core Qualities, shown in orange, are:

- Clear and owned vision
- Inspiring and empowering leadership
- Imaginative and flexible innovation.

What is Associated with Clear and **Owned Vision?** Having a clear and owned vision occurs more often in a church that empowers people. It occurs more in churches where attenders act by inviting others and sharing faith, probably because it builds confidence in the church as a purposeful body with a mission to fulfil. Such churches also typically have higher levels of belonging, perhaps because visionbuilding encourages a unifying process, or perhaps vision and belonging reinforce each other. Higher commitment to vision is also associated with a higher perception that the church is innovative, suggesting that the willingness to be flexible, or even take a risk, goes together with this Core Quality. The importance of this Core Quality





is highlighted by the fact that it has one of the highest number of strong relationships with other Qualities.

Encouraging the vision of the church is discussed in depth in a joint publication between NCLS Research, Bible Society and Willow Creek, *A Passion for Evangelism: Turning Vision into Action* (Hughes and Bellamy, 2004).



 $\cap \cap$

What is Associated with Inspiring and Empowering Leadership? Again we see the link between empowered leaders and knowing what a church stands for. A culture of empowering leadership has a very strong relationship with having high commitment to a clear and owned vision. Both qualities speak of ownership of the church's agenda; a community of faith where church attenders are empowered to jointly take part in the mission of the church. Instead of 'conscripting workers', the church has willing volunteers.

In churches where more attenders feel empowered, it is also likely more will feel a strong sense of belonging, and to affirm a vital and nurturing worship experience. This is perhaps partly because

of the greater sense of participation and contribution to church life in this way. Such churches also tend to be stronger in terms of attenders' perception that the church would try new things. We also see a link to an outward focus, where high empowering churches also tend to be higher in faith-sharing and inviting of others.



Discovering and growing in your leadership and ministry gifts is an ongoing journey, as is fostering this culture within a church. *Lead With Your Strengths* (Kaldor *et al.*, 2009) is a distillation of our most recent research into leadership. None of us have the full range of leadership strengths. We need each other's gifts and a commitment to work together to fulfil our mission.

In a separate study of 231 Australian Catholic parishes (Dixon 2010), this Core Quality had an exceptionally strong relationship to parish involvement in urban parishes.

Even if people felt only a little encouraged to use their gifts and skills, it made a difference to their response to every one of the other eight Core Qualities. The more encouragement they felt they had received, the more likely they were to have selected each of the Core Quality responses. It is probable that part of this result was due to people with a highly positive view of the parish and who were already involved reporting that their efforts were affirmed retrospectively, but it

also indicates that creating an environment of encouragement is one of the most effective things that any parish can do to increase Core Quality scores and promote parish involvement. (Dixon, 2010, p.11.)

What is Associated with Flexible and Imaginative Innovation? Since the publication in 1988, of Peter and Sue Kaldor's Where the River Flows, NCLS Research has sought to identify and explore innovation in Australian churches. In more recent times NCLS has followed up with the NOVUS



magazine, and continues to follow new developments in church life. From our analysis of NCLS data, a few things stand out about churches that are seen by their attenders as being flexible and open to change:

First, leadership style is closely wedded to a perception that the church is flexible. Where the leader listens to the ideas of attenders, where gifts and skills are recognised, where leaders are seen as inspiring and where one of the main roles of the leader is seen as developing vision, there is a strong tendency for attenders to perceive the church as being innovative or open to new possibilities.

Second, perceiving a church to be highly flexible does not equate to it being shifting and unpredictable. One of the strongest predictors of innovation is that the church has a clear vision.

While all three of the inspirational Core Qualities are strongly related to leadership issues, the Innovation Core Quality has its strongest associations to the other two inspirational Core



Qualities. It may be that, when present, its effect on the overall leadership culture is where it is most felt.

NCLS Research continues to work on projects that look at new initiatives in church life in Australia.



The Relationship of the Outward Core Qualities to Other Qualities

The Outward Core Qualities describe how churches focus beyond themselves by reaching out to others in ways that proclaim and live out the gospel. The Qualities that have an outward focus require making an effort that extends beyond running worship services and caring for the current attenders of the church. Some churches may be tempted to set these Qualities aside 'until we are a bit stronger' and 'have built up our foundations more'.

However, given that disconnection from the wider community is a major issue for much of the church, putting

these Qualities on hold, or hoping that the days will return when 'people will come to us', is not only quite risky, but also naive. Those churches that are engaging in outwardly focused activities are connecting with people who will probably never come to a church of their own accord.

These Core Qualities, shown in red, are:

- Practical and diverse service
- Willing and effective faith-sharing
- Intentional and welcoming inclusion.



What is Associated with Practical Acts of Service? As Table 4.1 showed, there are positive relationships between service and the other Qualities, with the exception of worship. Service, done well, is an enhancement to wider church life. While the strength of these relationships may not be as great as for other Qualities, they do exist. This finding counters the view that participation in acts of service detracts from other areas of church life.

The strongest relationship with service is the Core Quality of faith-sharing. It is of medium strength. These two aspects go together in many churches rather than compete; deed and word, showing faith through acts of compassion and speaking of faith to others. Churches can be all too aware of the resources needed to continue a community service program or similar practical activity, perhaps one that has been running for many years, and they may question whether it is worth it. It is probably true that many service activities are not evaluated often enough, and that some, while demonstrating the kingdom of God to those in the community, may not have the same connection with the rest of church life that they were envisaged to have, or originally did. The relationship between service and the other Core Qualities that emerges in our analysis is probably weaker for this reason. However, encouraging church attenders to serve others outside of church life is an effective conduit for sharing their faith, as well as a way of living out the vision of the church.

What is Associated with Willing and Effective Faith-Sharing? Faith-sharing includes a range of indicators, both personal (such as readiness to share faith and invite others to church) and corporate (involvement in church outreach activities). There is clearly a stronger 'culture of sharing and inviting' within some theological streams, though in all traditions an emphasis on reaching out is valued.

A strong culture of inviting and faithsharing in a church is more likely to be found in churches where attenders feel that they are growing in their faith, and with a strong sense of community. Faithsharing also goes together with having more church attenders who 'own' the vision of the church, who are empowered in the exercising of their gifts and know they are making a valued contribution. Further,



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it goes with an affirmation that worship is nurturing and enriching and intentional inclusion of those on the fringes—both new arrivals and potential drift outs. If inviting and faith-sharing is to be strong, people need to believe their church is a good place to bring their friends. It is not determined only by personal commitment to faith, but also by confidence in church.



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What is Associated with Intentional and Welcoming Inclusion? Welcoming people well and incorporating them into the life of church is a crucial process, as almost all newcomers enter church life gradually and tentatively over a period of time, perhaps even years. Yet this outward Core Quality probably receives less attention than the others. Despite the effort required for effective

outreach and getting new people to connect with church, it is surprising how little is done in many churches to help them integrate well. As mentioned earlier, relatively few people in a church would follow up someone who was drifting away from church.

This is an area that most churches would do well to examine, as the number drifting out of church may exceed the number being integrated. The Core Quality most strongly associated with a high level of inclusion in churches is faith-sharing. These are complementary Qualities, focused on both the 'front door and back door' of a church. The same culture that encourages inviting also reinforces inclusion. Healthy churches will welcome the new arrival and help them become integrated. In addition, they are aware and intentional about the follow up and care for those who may be drifting away.



Each week, Leanne's chair came that little bit closer



Research Question 2: Are the Core Qualities Part of a Broader Concept of Church Health?

Over the years of studying church health, NCLS researchers have developed this model of vitality that includes nine Core Qualities and three attendance measures (or 'quantities'). So far we have introduced each Quality and demonstrated the strength of relationships between them. We have also shown how survey questions that tap the individual qualities relate to attendance measures. However, at the heart of our work, we aim to address the concept of 'church health' or 'church vitality'.

In this research study, we wanted to test how our model of vitality stood up to scrutiny and whether we could demonstrate that there is an underlying unifying concept. We used a method called Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Factor analysis starts with a large number of variables or measures and confirms whether there are underlying clusters or factors. Our main analyses were based on Australian Anglican and Protestant churches.

In one series of analyses, we tested our theory that each set of measures for each Core Quality could be described as a single 'factor' that represented this Quality. For each Core Quality, we created a series of 'indicators' or measures based on the answers to relevant survey questions. For instance, there are different survey questions which measure the Faith-Sharing Core Quality, including attenders' readiness to share their faith, attenders inviting others to church, and the involvement of attenders in mission activities.

Effectively, we ran a numerical test to confirm our theoretical ideas. For the Qualities where we tested a collection of measures, results confirmed that these did cluster together as a single identifiable factor as expected. NCLS researchers will continue applying these kinds of tests with different datasets amd measures over time.

In another analysis, we proposed that all nine Qualities would be statistically related to a single underlying concept (or latent variable) —which we call 'church health'. In this test, we chose one indicator for each Core Quality. CFA is a powerful multivariate analysis technique that tests the interaction between every Core Quality in a single analysis. Results of this CFA provided a statistical confirmation of our theory that all the different Core Qualities could be associated with a single underlying concept, called church health. Figure 4.11 is a simplified diagram of the resulting model.



Results also hold when Catholic Parishes are Included: NCLS Research strives to serve Australian churches as a whole. This first CFA study was only based on Anglican and Protestant churches. Extra CFAs confirmed that these results hold when Catholic parishes are included in the test. In the dataset used for the present study, the Catholic survey did not include an indicator of Inclusion, the ninth Core Quality. Therefore, Catholic responses could not be included in the test of the complete NCLS model of vitality with nine Core Qualities. However, subsequent tests based only on the first eight Qualities found that the Protestant-only model and the Protestant-Catholic model were virtually identical. So, we believe that the model of church health applies when Catholic parishes are included alongside Protestant churches.

Individual analyses for different denominations may be the subject of future studies.

THE LINK BETWEEN CORE QUALITIES AND NEWCOMERS

Research Question 3: What Attracts Newcomers?

As shown earlier in this book, changes in the level of church attendance are the result of the interaction between separate inflow and outflow streams. Here we look at two inflow streams:

- the flow of newcomers into church life
- the retention of young adults.

What should churches do to attract more people from the wider community into church life? Numerous books have been written on the subject of church growth and they often prescribe what churches need to do to grow.

What does the NCLS research reveal about this issue? Churches grow overall for many reasons. One important contribution that we have made is to separate the concept of

newcomers out from numerical growth. We identify newcomers without a church background, or who are returning after many years of absence as an important source of inflow.

Part of the issue involves working out what activities would have a positive impact on inflow — and what the priorities should be. Sometimes it has been concluded that it is simply a matter of getting the style of congregational worship right. However, in our research this does not emerge as the area of greatest priority.

In fact, it is immediately apparent from our research that there is no 'magic bullet' when it comes to attracting newcomers. All Core Qualities have some contribution to make. This has been observed in previous NCLS publications, such as *Build My Church* (Kaldor *et al.*, 1999).

When it comes to attracting newcomers, all Core Qualities have some contribution to make





In order of importance, the following emerge as key priorities for attracting newcomers across the four countries that we studied — Australia, UK, USA and New Zealand.

- 1. Promote a Strong Sense of Belonging among Attenders: One thing that stands out is that newcomers are attracted to churches where attenders have a strong sense of belonging. It has been observed by social commentators that people are searching for a community to belong to. It appears that whatever enhances the quality of community among church attenders will also help in attracting newcomers.
- 2. Encourage Attenders to Invite Others to Church: Of all the measures to do with faith-sharing, this one is the most important in relation to the flow of newcomers into churches in three of the four countries, the exception being England. Previous NCLS research among Australian Protestants found that two-thirds of newcomers first joined their church through someone inviting them. A 'culture of inviting' needs to be developed among church attenders.
- 3. Be an Empowering Leader: In churches that are attracting newcomers, attenders are more likely to feel that leaders put a high priority on encouraging them to use their gifts and skills. Why might this make a difference? It makes sense that people who feel empowered are more likely to have greater confidence in their church and therefore be more confident about inviting others along. It also reflects that a church where many feel confident to do the work of ministry will have a greater reach than a church where outreach is left up to a few. This may also reflect a strong church life, where people feel they can participate and contribute and their involvement is seen as valuable.
- 4. Discover a Sense of Vision and Direction: Newcomers are more often found in churches where there is vision and a sense of direction. Churches that are drifting or where there is not the same sense of direction do not tend to hold on to newcomers. This result may be a reflection of newcomers themselves being attracted to churches that know where they are heading. It could also be that attenders in such churches are more committed to inviting and caring for newcomers, as part of their commitment to an outwardly focused vision for their church.
- 5. Nurture Growth in Faith and Movement towards Commitment: Churches where people are growing in faith are more attractive to newcomers. Also, churches where attenders are encouraged to make a commitment of faith tend to keep newcomers. This is irrespective of the theological orientation of churches.

- 6. Aim for Joyful, Inspiring Services: Across the four countries, an experience of joy in worship, a sense of being inspired by the worship and low levels of boredom or frustration were ranked among the top aspects of congregational worship associated with higher levels of newcomers. This was especially so in the US. Another significant aspect, particularly in the US and Australia, was a high level of spontaneity in the service.
- 7. Introduce Contemporary Worship: In comparison with long term church attenders, a greater proportion of newcomers is aged 15 to 39 years. Given the strong preference for contemporary worship among many young attenders, it is no surprise that newcomers are attracted to churches where there is a preference for contemporary styles of worship. This was an even more highly ranked aspect among Australian churches than other countries.
- 8. Encourage Informal Acts of Helping: Churches where there are higher proportions of attenders engaged in helping others also have higher levels of newcomers. Why would this be so? One explanation is that these churches have better links with the wider community and thus more contacts with people outside of church life. It is also possible that people who have received practical care may be more open to attend the church of the person offering that care.
- **9.** Look After the Young: Churches that attract newcomers tend to have younger age profiles. As noted elsewhere, newcomers tend to be younger themselves. This would appear to be a case of 'like attracting like'.
- 10. Focus on People beyond Church Life: Church attenders value a wide variety of aspects of their church involvement. However, relatively few place great value on their church's emphasis on reaching out to those beyond church life. Those churches that consciously focus on reaching newcomers more often achieve it than those who do not have such a focus.
- **11.** Be Willing to Try New Things: In addition to the above list, research among Australian Protestants highlights that a willingness to try new things can be another important factor in attracting newcomers.

The Long-term Impact of Core Qualities on Newcomers: Do the activities of a church at one point in time make any difference to its future? This question moves us beyond looking at correlations between Core Qualities to looking at causation. In one preliminary study to test for longitudinal effects we tested two Core Qualities — Vision and Leadership — to see if they were linked with the level of newcomers over time. We used data from churches who had taken part in two National Church Life Surveys five years apart.

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For both Core Qualities, the results were positive. We found that a church's commitment to vision or empowering leadership in 'Time 1' (2001 NCLS) had a positive relationship to the church's level of newcomers in 'Time 2' (2006 NCLS). Thus, the presence of a clear and owned vision not only had a positive impact on the level of newcomers in a church at a given point in time, but also five years later. This same pattern occurred when we measured the level of newcomers and the presence of empowering and inspiring leadership in a church.

When we consider the many factors in a church's life that may change in a five-year period, to be able to find any statistical relationship at all between two characteristics such as these is encouraging. While it is important to avoid a simplistic interpretation of these results, they do provide another piece of evidence about the importance of Core Qualities.

The conclusion we can draw is that these Core Qualities are associated with newcomer levels measured five years later, even when you take into account the relationship that previously existed between the Quality and newcomers. These findings suggest two things. First, having a clear and owned vision and empowering leadership is associated with having more newcomers now. Second, building on these Qualities could be sowing the seeds for a healthy church years into the future.



Research Question 4: What Can Be Done To Retain Young Adults?

Another dimension of inflow into adult congregations is the successful retention of children brought up in church life. What does the research tell us about the characteristics of churches that are retaining young adults, aged 15 years or more, who are still living at home and whose parents attend church?

The research findings here are based on Australian churches only. Relatively few of the Core Quality measures tell us much about retaining young adults in church life. This is partly due to the fact that youth often have separate structures within church life, such as youth groups and young adults groups. The qualities of these groups may have a greater bearing on young adult retention than the qualities of the wider congregation. Nevertheless, the research has identified the following aspects of church life which do have a bearing on retaining young adults:

- 1. Theological Orientation: A pentecostal, evangelical or charismatic theological orientation is positively associated with keeping young adults in church life.
- 2. Church Programs Oriented to Youth: Factors associated with high levels of young adult retention are general satisfaction among church attenders with the quality of the youth program and a preference for contemporary over traditional worship styles.
- 3. Larger Church Size: Previous research among Australian Protestants has highlighted that younger people are more attracted to larger congregations, particularly among the mainstream denominations (Kaldor et al., 1994, 305).
- 4. Discussing Faith at Home: Churches where more attenders reported that faith was discussed frequently at home also tended to have better retention of young adults. This result highlights the key role of parents in the development of faith among their children.

A Catholic Study of Young Adult Attendance Rates: In a study of 231 Catholic parishes, one of the research questions was about young adult attendance rates (Dixon, 2010). The conclusion was:

Parishes where attenders feel they have grown in their faith, have high levels of participation in informal acts of service, and are prepared to follow up people drifting away from church are likely to have higher young adult attendance rates than other parishes. The effect will be even greater if they provide a Sunday evening Mass and are located in an area where a high proportion of the Catholic population was born in non-English speaking countries (p.8).



THE INFLUENCE OF THEOLOGICAL TRADITION

Research Question 5: What Is the Influence of Theological Tradition on Church Health?

Even a brief discussion on what contributes to church vitality would not be complete without some treatment of two influences which represent major schools of thought in the literature: theological tradition and social context.

A great deal has been said over the years about the importance of theological tradition and emphasis in determining whether churches will thrive or struggle. Some stories of growth in the 1950s and 1960s were attributed to mainline churches becoming more liberal and aligning more with secular society, making church more accessible to the masses. In the 1970s, a contrasting picture was painted by Dean Kelley, who argued that conservative and evangelical churches would thrive rather than die out because their clear-cut message stands in contrast to the void of meaning that people have increasingly felt as society changes. The advent of the 1980s saw 'rational choice theory' applied to church attendance, adopting the principles of economic market-theory. Debate has continued on the true effect of society's secularisation on church life. A fuller discussion of these issues can be found in *Shaping a Future* (Kaldor *et al.*, 1997, pp. 205–221).

What most commentators in these debates have agreed on is that theological traditions make a difference to church vitality. However, little objective data is available on which to base any conclusions. Indeed, some would say that much of the literature making assertions about church health and growth, as well as religious phenomena in society, is based far more on theory alone than on actual evidence.



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The data available from successive National Church Life Surveys has been a rare opportunity to contribute to this field, with a wide variety of objective measures based on responses from every available church attender, rather than a select group or a single leader. Surveys have included questions about both church life experiences and personal opinions/values, including questions of faith identity and theological tradition.

Theological tradition does indeed play a role in the outcomes of church vitality. There are clear indicators of this in repeated analyses, with churches influenced by evangelical and pentecostal traditions having something of a 'head start' on other groups. However the Core Qualities play a role in church vitality over and above such influences; they are relevant to churches of all persuasions. Theological traditions do indeed play a role in church vitality, yet churches can benefit from the influences of Core Qualities regardless of their background, denomination or tradition.

The Core Qualities play a role in church vitality over and above the impact of theological tradition





Research Question 6: What Is the Influence of Social Context?

Another influence precious to many theoreticians is social context. Just as some would say 'theological tradition is all that matters in determining whether a church will thrive or not', others would contend that local social context is the factor that really matters in church vitality. It has been established that, when it comes to church attendance levels, there certainly are 'Bible belts' in Australia, but is this the whole story?

What impact does the local community have? Churches have been and largely remain local institutions, and they are vulnerable to changes occurring in the local community. Small Protestant churches are most vulnerable to such changes. Similarly, Catholic communities designed for a single ethnic grouping are also vulnerable.

There are many examples of churches that were primarily Anglo-Celtic in composition becoming disconnected as their surrounding communities came to be dominated by new migrant groups. There are also many examples of churches that have become disconnected from a younger generation of residents in the wider community. As the church community has aged relative to the local community, disconnection has occurred, and the church has then entered into a period of decline.

The situation in rural areas has a different set of dynamics but produces similar results. Younger people in rural areas often leave for the cities for education or work, leaving behind churches with few, if any, young attenders. Rural populations can shrink with the closure of local industries, resulting in church decline. In some outback parts of Australia, local populations are constantly turning over, resulting in churches with few long-term attenders. Other rural communities are becoming dormitory areas for larger regional centres.

A Study of the Local Demographic Context for Protestant Churches

Our own research on the impact of the local community context has been limited to Australian Anglican and Protestant churches. Readily accessible census data in Australia has provided a detailed picture of local communities, enabling us to closely assess the impact of the local demographic context on two outcomes: church attendance and levels of newcomers.

Our research shows that the local demographic context does indeed help us to understand some of the variation in the growth and decline of churches, including the level of newcomers in a church. It is clearly an important influence.

Figure 4.13: Relationship of local context factors and the Core Qualities of churches with newcomer levels Image: Context Factor Image: Context Factor

However, our research also shows that the quality of church life is an even greater influence than the demographics of local communities (Kaldor *et al.*, 1997, 199). Therefore, it is possible for many churches to break out of the cycle of growth and decline. While some churches will inevitably close, there is also much scope for churches to reverse the trends of decline or to start completely new ministries, with good prospects for success. Although it can be a powerful influence, the local community context need not dictate church growth and decline.

Although it can be a powerful influence, local context need not dictate church growth and decline





Fostering Church Vitality

A PROFILE OF RURAL CHURCHES



A Study of the Local Demographic Context for Catholic Parishes: Attendance and New Arrivals

A separate study using NCLS data and demographic information about the local context was conducted on 231 Catholic parishes (Dixon, 2010).

Catholic Mass Attendance: The study found that the size of the local Catholic population is a strong predictor of attendances at Mass.

One of the most important findings in this study is that the way parishes function is affected by local contextual factors such as location itself, and the percentage of Catholics born in non-English speaking countries or with university degrees. However, while local context has a strong influence on a parish, it does not determine how it operates. Context is neither an advantage or a disadvantage; it is a fact (Dixon, 2010, p.12).

New Arrivals: With regard to attracting new arrivals (defined as newcomers and switchers), while local context factors, such as the surrounding Catholic population, matter, the internal life of the parish is also significant. When Core Qualities such as growth in faith and acts of service are stronger, then there are more new arrivals in Catholic parishes.

The differences between the Protestant and Catholic studies could partly be explained by the different methods used. For example, in the Catholic study, only a single measure of each Core Quality was used. Results may have differed if different measures had been considered.

Overall, there is no question that some churches are placed in a more challenging local environment than others. However, churches in all contexts benefit from the development of the Core Qualities.



Do the Core Qualities Apply Equally in Rural Areas as in Urban Areas?

The question of whether there are differences between urban and rural parts of Australia seems self-evident. Of course there are differences. It is also reasonable to assume that expressions of church life vary in these different social contexts. So, before we explore whether the Core Qualities apply equally in rural and urban areas, we provide a general overview of churches in different contexts.

Churches were grouped into three types of locations:

- Rural: areas with a population of less than 20 000.
- Regional City: regional cities with a population of 20 000 or more.
- Capital City: suburbs or centre of capital cities.

We then highlight some of the unique features of churches in rural contexts.

A Profile of Rural Churches

In the 2006 NCLS, 42% of churches were in rural settings. This may be an underestimation of the total proportion of rural churches, as it is possible that churches which chose not to take part in the 2006 NCLS were more likely to be small and in rural settings.

Most of the rural churches who did take part in the NCLS were in small- to medium-sized towns. They can be further divided into 18% in a rural area (less than 200 people); 34% in small rural towns (200 to 2,000 people), 33% in rural service centre (2,000 to 10,000) and 15% in rural cities (10,000 to 20,000). More than half of all rural churches in the 2006 NCLS were Anglican or Uniting churches. (See Figure 4.14.)





	Rural	Regional	City
	%	%	%
Does the leader or team of leaders have responsibility for:			
Just this congregation	35	62	71
Two congregations	24	18	18
Three or more congregations	41	20	11
Church finances			
Increasing financial base	15	36	31
Essentially stable financial base	46	48	52
Declining financial base	25	12	12
Viability is potentially threatened	14	5	5
Inter-church collaboration			
Church services	71	66	51
Special celebrations	74	62	50
Welfare/community service activities	42	43	37
Evangelistic activities	35	44	33
Educational activities	31	31	28
Take part in special events in the wider community			
Always/mostly	26	14	11
Sometimes	51	56	48
Hardly ever/never	17	27	35

Table 4.2: Characteristics of churches in rural, regional and city settings

Source: 2006 NCLS - Operations Survey

Some Unique Characteristics of Rural Churches

Rural Church Attenders Have a Different Demographic Profile: Compared to urban churches, rural church attenders are older, with an average adult age of 55 years (vs 50 years), and more likely to be retired (35% vs 27%). Attenders are slightly more likely to be female (62% vs 59%). They are less likely to have university degrees (20% vs 34%) or to be born overseas in English-speaking or non-English-speaking countries (18% vs 36%).

Rural Churches Are Much Smaller: Over 60% of rural churches have regular congregations of up to 50 people. Figure 4.15 shows how very different this is to regional and city churches. This feature of rural churches obviously must affect the way that these churches function from day to day.

Leaders Are More Likely to Be Working across Multiple Congregations: In only one-third of rural churches (35%), the leader or team of leaders have responsibility for just one congregation. This compares to 62% in regional settings and 71% in capital-city churches. In Anglican and Uniting churches, a parish or parish-style structure is generally used, where leaders tend to work across multiple congregations. These denominations are the most common churches in rural settings. However, there still remains a significant difference between how leaders work in rural and urban settings more broadly.

More Rural Churches Face Financial Challenges: Some 25% of rural churches have a declining financial base. A further 14% feel that their viability is threatened by finances.

Rural Churches Are More Likely to Take Part in Special Events in the Wider Community: Some 26% of rural churches always/mostly take part in special events in the wider community.

Rural Churches Are More Likely to Collaborate with Other Churches for Church Services and Celebrations: More than 70% of rural churches collaborate for church services and special celebrations at least yearly. However, rural churches do not stand out as most likely to collaborate with other churches on welfare/community service activities, evangelistic activities, or educational activities. With regard to these types of activities, it is regional churches who are more likely than others to collaborate in these ways with other churches.

A Study Comparing Core Qualities in Rural Churches to All Churches

Do the Core Qualities apply equally in rural areas as in urban areas? Since different contexts introduce different dynamics for churches, it seems plausible that the Core Qualities for churches may differ between urban and rural contexts.

One study we conducted compared the Core Quality summary scores for rural churches with the scores for all Australian churches. We found that, in terms of measures of health and vitality, there is little difference between the responses of rural attenders and the national average. That is, attenders in rural churches do not stand out as different when it comes to levels of growth in faith, belonging, commitment to vision, involvement in outward-focused activities and so on. Furthermore, the inflow of newcomers is similar for rural churches compared to the national average. This analysis of the 2006 NCLS, which found a lack of difference for rural churches on matters of vitality, confirmed what has been found in earlier NCLS studies.



A Study of Newcomers in Anglican and Protestant Churches in Urban and Rural Areas

In another study we focused on the flow of newcomers. We divided Anglican and Protestant churches surveyed in Australia into urban and rural. We then analysed the two groups separately to see whether the same Core Qualities emerged as being important in relation to the flow of newcomers into church life.

 All the Core Qualities Are Relevant: Our research reveals that the list of nine Core Qualities is just as relevant in rural areas as in urban areas. Churches attracting newcomers in each of these contexts exhibit the same kinds of qualities.

The need for vision and direction and the need for inspiring and empowering leadership is equally important across urban and rural churches. Worship services with preaching that is helpful for daily living and where boredom is minimised are important in both contexts. A strong sense of belonging, a willingness to invite people to church, and growth in faith are important priorities in both contexts and are more strongly featured among growing churches.

- 2. Some Core Qualities Are More Important: While all Core Qualities are relevant, a few appear to be more important in one setting compared with the other.
 - Innovation and Worship: The willingness of churches to try new things appears to be a more prominent feature of churches attracting newcomers in urban areas than in rural areas. In addition, a preference for traditional music among churches does not appear to be as much of a barrier to church growth in rural areas as it is in urban areas.
 - Belonging and Faith-sharing: Having attenders who invite others to church is the main characteristic of churches that are attracting newcomers in urban areas. While this is also very important in a rural setting, a sense of belonging and a sense of growth in faith are the most important characteristics of such churches in rural areas. Individuals inviting people to church appears to matter a little more in urban churches, whereas in rural churches the communal aspects of church life are more important.
 - **Theological Orientation:** In relation to attracting newcomers, the theological orientation of church attenders appears to matter less in a rural setting than it does in an urban setting.

The list of nine Core Qualities is just as relevant in rural areas as in urban areas

Fostering Church Vitality

In summary, there is a range of Core Qualities associated with the flow of newcomers, not just a few. The best strategies for growth in both urban and rural areas will ultimately foster Core Qualities across the range. The emphases adopted in urban and rural areas could differ to some degree. For example, it is important not to ignore issues of belonging and growth in faith in rural areas. Whereas in urban areas, issues to do with faith-sharing, particularly inviting to church, are important to focus on for growth.

A Study of Newcomers in Catholic Parishes in Urban and Rural Areas

Dixon's (2010) study of 231 Catholic parishes is not directly comparable to the Protestant study due to the use of a different method and measures, however, it highlights the impact of contextual factors. He found significant differences between urban and rural parishes with regard to attracting new arrivals (defined as newcomers and switchers). In this study, for parishes in major cities, the Core Qualities that are positively associated with new arrivals are growth in faith and acts of service. For parishes outside major cities, the Qualities that are positively associated with attracting new arrivals are growth in faith and faith-sharing or, specifically, inviting people to church.

Sunday evening Mass: One other key difference between urban and rural parishes was the role of the Sunday evening Mass. In urban parishes, there is a moderate to strong positive relationship between the provision of a Sunday evening Mass and a range of outcomes including attendance (size), percent attendance change (numerical growth), young adult attendance rates and the level of newcomers/switchers in the parish.

Urban parishes with a Sunday evening Mass were more successful than other urban parishes in attracting newcomers and switchers. Compared with general attenders, these newcomers and switchers were much younger on average. It appears that one reason for higher numbers of newcomers and switchers attending Mass in these parishes is that they are invited by young adult attenders in those parishes.

In urban parishes, there was also a moderate to strong positive relationship between the provision of a Sunday evening Mass and a range of other outcomes, including attendance (size), percent attendance change (numerical growth) and young adult attendance rates .

On the other hand, in rural areas, having a Sunday evening Mass is not significantly related to any of the outcomes measured in the study. One reason for this finding is that Sunday evening Masses are not as common in rural areas. The smaller population means there is less demand and there are fewer young adults. (Dixon, 2010).



Research Question 7: Does Congregational Size Matter to Core Qualities?

Many books on church growth and vitality are based on the experience of large, usually urban, congregations. Are some Core Qualities more relevant in larger congregations than in medium or small ones?

To address this question, we divided Anglican and Protestant churches in Australia into three groups: small (up to 50 attenders), medium (51–200) and large (over 200). We then analysed each group separately to see whether the same Core Qualities emerged as being important in relation to the flow of newcomers into church life.

Catholic parishes mostly fit into the largest size category, but vitality was not found to differ much by size among Catholic parishes. For this reason they were excluded from this analysis.

What the Research Shows

 All Core Qualities Are Relevant across Size: The research shows that the list of Core Qualities is relevant across all categories of church size in relation to attracting newcomers. Small churches that attract more newcomers exhibit the same kinds of qualities as large churches that attract more newcomers.

The relative priority of the Core Qualities also remains similar across different-sized churches. One example of this is the proportion of attenders who invite others to church. This is the most important factor in the Australian context and remains so irrespective of the size of the church. Churches of all sizes should encourage their attenders to invite people to church.

Our research also shows that the Core Quality measures help us to best understand the reasons for growth in the largest churches. For example, inviting others was more strongly associated with the flow of newcomers in large churches than it was in either medium-sized or small churches. This pattern is more or less repeated across all the Core Qualities.

- 2. Some Core Qualities Are More Important: Three Core Qualities, in particular, became more important with the increasing size of the church. The larger the church, the more important each of these becomes in relation to newcomers:
 - Innovation: There is a greater level of agreement among attenders at large high-newcomer churches that their church is willing to try new things.

The current list of Core Qualities is relevant across all categories of church size

- Faith-sharing: Attenders at large high-newcomer churches are more likely to value reaching out to unchurched people as part of their church experience.
- Worship: Attenders at large high-newcomer churches are more likely to always have a sense that they are growing in their understanding of God through the worship services.

Among small churches, commitment to a clear vision was more important in relation to attracting newcomers than it was in either medium or large churches. While the need for a unifying, compelling vision is often thought of as essential to large churches, it is important for smaller churches as well.

In summary, while all Core Qualities are important, the emphasis adopted in large churches may need to differ from that in smaller churches. Cultivating innovation, growth in understanding of God and involvement in outreach become more of a priority in larger churches. In smaller churches, the issue of vision and direction should be addressed.

In Conclusion

In Part Four, we have looked at a series of research questions and presented the results of some statistical analyses based on the data available through National Church Life Surveys. We have found that:

- All nine Core Qualities do act together on church health.
- There are clear associations between Core Qualities: the strongest associations with other qualities exist for faith-sharing, vision and empowering leadership.
- Churches can prioritise their focus to attract newcomers and/or young adults.
- There are things you can do now that will have an impact in the future.
- Theological tradition does matter, but the Core Qualities have an impact above and beyond this factor.
- Social context does matter, but churches in all contexts benefit from the development of the Core Qualities.
- In terms of measures of health and vitality, there is little difference between the responses of rural attenders and the national average. That is, rural attenders do not stand out as different when it comes to levels of newcomers, growth in faith, belonging, commitment to vision, involvement in outward-focused activities and so on.
- While all Core Qualities are important in churches of different sizes, the emphasis adopted in large churches may need to differ from that in smaller churches.



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PART 5 COMPARING CHURCH AND COMMUNITY: A Demographic Profile

Population Growth

Age

Education

Employment

Country of Birth

Marital Status

A DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE



Changing Nation, Changing Churches: Much has been written about Australia being a changing nation in a changing world, and the church has a long history of dealing with change—sometimes well and sometimes not so well. In the final Part of this book, we look at some of the changing demographics of Australia and the changing demographics of the church in Australia. Our purpose is to shift the focus beyond the churches—to paint a picture of the reality of the wider community and encourage churches to engage with these wider issues.

Demographics such as age, education, employment status, country of birth and marital status give insight into the people who form our communities. Trends and characteristics about Australian society offer information that can help churches to plan their structures, activity and mission to connect with and serve their surrounding communities. Likewise, understanding the demographics of churches themselves, and how these are changing, can better help churches to plan for the future.

Using data from the 2006 NCLS, the 2006 National Census and the most recent statistics available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), this chapter compares the Australian churches with the broader Australian population on some key demographics and presents changes over time. Differences between churches and the nation are highlighted and some implications for church planning and ministry are noted.



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POPULATION GROWTH

National Demographics: What is Changing in Our Churches

Population Growth: In the 2006 National Census, the Australian Bureau of Statistics counted 19.9 million people in Australia, marking a 4.7% increase since 2001. Five years later, by mid-2011, the population had further grown to 22.6 million people, which marked a larger 13.6% increase in population over that five-year period.

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

Australians are also on the move. In 2006, half the population had moved house in the previous five years. Three in ten residents had newly arrived in their community from outside the local area in the last five years (ABS, 2006a).



AGE

Australian Population: Australia's population is ageing and life expectancy is increasing. The proportion of people aged 65 years and over jumped from 4% in 1901 to 13% in 2006. The median age which was just 22.5 years in 1901 was 36.7 years in 2006. The Australian Bureau of Statistics predicts a continued rise in the median age (39.5 years by 2026). The elderly will make up an increasing proportion of the population, but there will still be a numeric increase in the number of children and adults in their middle years.

Church Attenders: As a whole, Australian church attenders are older than the broader population, and in many churches ageing attenders are not being replaced by younger people.

- In 2006, the percentage of church attenders aged 20 to 39 was only 20% (down from 23% in 1996), compared to the national proportion of 34%.
- Those aged 60 years and over made up 42% of the churches (up from 34% in 1996), yet only 23% nationally.



The Australian churchgoing population is much older than the Australian population as a whole

National Demographics: What is Changing in Our Churches

In the next twenty years, with the passing of the oldest generation of current church attenders, the Australian churchgoing population may shrink substantially in size. One implication is that it may regain a younger age profile similar to the general community. In the meantime, churches face the ministry question: how do churches both minister to ageing congregations as well as connect more effectively with younger people?

	15-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Anglican	5	9	9	12	16	20	19	10
Australian Christian Churches (AOG)	12	24	18	20	14	7	3	1
Baptist	8	14	15	19	17	14	9	4
Catholic	4	5	9	16	18	21	18	7
C3 Church	12	22	22	23	13	5	2	1
Christian Outreach Centres	8	17	20	22	17	11	4	1
CRC Churches	9	15	16	22	19	12	6	2
Churches of Christ	8	15	15	18	17	13	9	5
Lutheran	5	8	11	16	20	18	15	7
Nazarene	5	13	15	13	18	16	13	6
Pentecostal (all)	11	22	18	21	15	8	3	1
Presbyterian	6	11	12	14	16	15	16	10
Salvation Army	6	11	12	13	17	20	16	7
Seventh-day Adventist	6	13	12	18	18	16	11	5
Uniting	3	5	6	11	15	22	24	15
Vineyard Churches	8	16	24	23	17	8	3	1
Total Anglican & Protestant	7	12	12	16	16	16	14	7
Catholic	4	5	9	16	18	21	18	7
All Attenders	6	9	10	16	17	19	16	7

Table 5.1: Age profile of	of attenders by	denomination
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Source: 2006 NCLS - Attenders Survey

EDUCATION

Australian Population: Australians are becoming more educated and the gender gap in education is narrowing. In 2006, 84% of 16-year-olds were attending school, compared to 48% in 1971. Moreover, the rate of growth in attendance at non-government schools has increased faster than national school enrolment. Each successive generation is more likely than the last to have completed school and to have a tertiary qualification, with Generations X and Y (those born between 1967 and 1986) being the most highly educated on record.

The proportion of the population aged over 20 years of age with a university degree almost doubled between 1991 and 2006, from 10% to 19%. In 2006, a quarter of the Australian population was attending an educational institution, and most men and women aged 20 to 39 years of age were obtaining non-school qualifications (57% of men and 56% of women).

Church Attenders: Church attenders are more likely to have a university education than the national population. The proportion of church attenders with a university degree rose from 23% to 27% between 2001 and 2006 (18% nationally).

A further 23% of church attenders in 2006 had attained a trade certificate, diploma or associate diploma, while the remaining 50% had primary or secondary school as their highest qualification level. When the age profile of churches is taken into account, this disparity appears even more marked. Younger people are more highly educated than older people, and yet they are under-represented in churches.

In general, Australia's churches are not connecting with people with less formal education



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

	Primary or secondary school only	Trade certificate, diploma or associate diploma	Bachelor or postgraduate degree
	%	%	%
Anglican	45	23	32
Australian Christian Churches (AOG)	48	29	23
Baptist	41	27	32
Catholic	52	21	27
C3 Church	41	29	29
Christian Outreach Centres	54	29	17
CRC Churches	55	26	18
Churches of Christ	45	26	29
Lutheran	56	21	23
Nazarene	51	29	20
Pentecostal (all)	49	29	22
Presbyterian	44	24	32
Salvation Army	63	23	14
Seventh-day Adventist	49	27	24
Uniting	50	24	26
Vineyard Churches	36	26	37
Total Anglican & Protestant	48	25	27
Catholic	52	21	27
All Attenders	50	23	27

Table 5.2: Highest education level achieved by denomination

Source: 2006 NCLS - Attender Survey

EMPLOYMENT

Australian Population: In 2006, 64.6% of Australians were employed. This increased from 61.9% in 1996, almost exculsively due to increasing numbers of women entering the labour force. In 2006, nearly six in ten women (58%) were employed, compared with 48% in 1986. Some 70% of part-time workers were women. Many employees were remaining in the workforce longer; labour force participation for the 55 to 64 age group increased between 1996 and 2006 for men (61% to 68%) and especially for women (31% to 48%).

Unemployment decreased from the 1990s down to 5.2% in 2006. It reached a low of 4.1% in February 2008 before rising back up to 5.8% in 2009 due to the impact of the Global Financial Crisis. Over the six months to early 2012, unemployment settled back to 5.2%.

Australians are also working longer hours, with 19% of employed people working 49 hours or more a week in 2006, up from 15% in 1986. The majority of these people are men (77%), particularly fathers with young children. On the other hand, when combining paid employment and nonpaid work in the home, young mothers were working up to 70 hours a week (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2007).

A question for churches is how might they tailor their ministries and processes of connecting in communities where people are increasingly busy? With parents working a higher number of hours, does church contribute to quality family time?

Australians are working longer hours and for more years of their lives

Church Attenders: The older age profile of Australian church attenders is reflected in the higher proportion of retirees as compared to the Australian population, and consequently lower employment and unemployment rates. The percentage of employed church attenders was 48% in 2006, and the rate of unemployed attenders was 3%.

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

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

National Demographics: What is Changing in Our Churches

	Employed full time	Employed part time	Unemployed	Student	Home duties	Self-employed	Retired	Other
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Anglican	23	13	2	8	12	8	38	2
Australian Christian Churches (AOG)	37	20	4	18	10	10	8	3
Baptist	33	18	3	11	12	8	21	2
Catholic	27	12	3	6	11	8	34	2
C3 Church	42	20	4	16	10	14	5	2
Christian Outreach Centres	34	18	4	10	15	14	11	4
CRC Churches	30	20	5	11	14	11	14	4
Churches of Christ	32	18	3	12	12	9	21	2
Lutheran	28	15	2	7	11	13	29	1
Nazarene	31	13	3	9	13	8	28	5
Pentecostal (all)	36	20	4	16	11	11	9	3
Presbyterian	26	13	3	9	14	8	32	2
Salvation Army	25	13	5	9	11	5	34	4
Seventh-day Adventist	32	14	3	10	11	11	24	2
Uniting	18	11	2	4	13	8	47	2
Vineyard Churches	36	22	5	13	13	13	8	3
Total Anglican & Protestant	28	15	3	10	12	9	29	2
Catholic	27	12	3	6	11	8	34	2
All Attenders	27	14	3	8	11	8	31	2

Table 5.3: Employment status of church attenders (15 years+) by denomination

Source: 2006 NCLS – Attender Survey NB. Percentages will not add to 100% as respondents could select more than one option.

COUNTRY OF BIRTH

Australian Population: Australia is a country of many cultures. Over a quarter (27%) of Australia's population in 2010 was born overseas. In 2006, 24% of Australians were born overseas and 44% had at least one parent born overseas.

Immigration has long been a key source of population growth for Australia. However one of the biggest changes over the past three decades has been the increase in the number of countries of origin. In the 2006 National Census, more than 200 ancestries were separately identified. The most common overseas countries of birth were the United Kingdom, followed by New Zealand, China and Italy.

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

Some 28% of church attenders who completed the 2006 NCLS were born outside of Australia, which matches the proportion for the broader Australian population (aged 15 and over). The results were also similar for the church and for the nation in terms of the proportions born in other English-speaking countries and in non-English-speaking countries.

Retaining secondgeneration immigrants is a continuing challenge for churches


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

	Born in Australia	Born in other English-speaking country	Born in non- English-speaking country		
	%	%	%		
Anglican	77	14	9		
Australian Christian Churches (AOG)	69	14	16		
Baptist	77	12	11		
Catholic	67	8	26		
C3 Church	72	16	12		
Christian Outreach Centres	79	12	9		
CRC Churches	78	11	11		
Churches of Christ	76	11	13		
Lutheran	88	4	8		
Nazarene	64	17	20		
Pentecostal (all)	72	14	14		
Presbyterian	76	10	14		
Salvation Army	82	12	6		
Seventh-day Adventist	72	12	16		
Uniting	81	10	8		
Vineyard Churches	75	16	9		
Total Anglican & Protestant	77	12	11		
Catholic	67	8	26		
All Attenders	72	10	18		

Source: 2006 NCLS - Attender Survey



MARITAL STATUS AND FAMILY STRUCTURE

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

In 2006, for the first time, the proportion of Australians aged 15+ who were married dropped below 50% (49.6% compared to 51.4% in 2001), and the percentage of those in a de facto relationship had grown to 8.8%.

Young couples without children, in a registered marriage, decreased from 75% in 1986 to 44% in 2006. Meanwhile, 33% of all children in 2006 were born to parents not in a registered marriage (up from 3% to 4% in the 1960s).

Marriage is being postponed, with the median age of men entering their first marriage rising from 25.6 years in 1986, to 29.6 years in 2006. Similarly, the median age of women entering their first marriage rose from 23.5 years in 1986 to 27.6 years in 2006.

There is an overall decline in the proportion of Australians living with a partner. In 2006, 8% of people were divorced, 3% were separated and 6% were widowed.

Church Attenders: Of church attenders aged 15 or above in 2006, 66% were married and 6% were separated or divorced. The churches' older age profile contributes to the relatively high percentage of those who were widowed (10%). Finally, 1% of church attenders were in a de facto relationship.

Australia's churches have relatively high proportions of married people and widowers



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

	Never married	In first marriage	Remarried after divorce	Remarried after widowed	In a de facto relationship	Separated but not divorced	Divorced and not remarried	Widowed
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Anglican	16	56	6	2	1	1	5	13
Australian Christian Churches (AOG)	34	47	7	1	1	2	6	3
Baptist	21	60	6	1	1	1	4	5
Catholic	16	63	4	1	1	2	4	10
C3 Church	34	48	7	1	1	2	7	2
Christian Outreach Centres	22	51	9	1	1	3	8	4
CRC Churches	23	53	8	1	1	2	6	4
Churches of Christ	22	58	6	1	1	2	5	6
Lutheran	15	64	5	2	1	1	4	9
Nazarene	18	58	7	1	1	2	5	9
Pentecostal (all)	31	49	7	1	1	2	6	3
Presbyterian	19	60	4	2	0	1	3	10
Salvation Army	20	49	8	3	1	2	7	10
Seventh-day Adventist	17	56	9	2	1	1	6	6
Uniting	11	60	5	2	1	1	4	16
Vineyard Churches	23	59	7	1	1	2	7	2
Total Anglican & Protestant	20	56	6	2	1	2	5	9
Catholic	16	63	4	1	1	2	4	10
All Attenders	18	59	5	2	1	2	4	10

Source: 2006 NCLS - Attender Survey



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

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

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



AFTER FINALLY CONVINCING HIS NEIGHBOUR TO COME TO CHURCH, STEVE STARTED QUESTIONING HIS PLAN.

PART 6 _____ CONCLUSION & APPENDICES

Appendix 1: NCLS Research and Church Planning

Appendix 2: List of Survey Questions

Appendix 3: Statistical analyses about church vitality

References

The NCLS Team

CONCLUSION

This book is about church health and vitality. It is built on the foundation of solid research based on a partnership between churches in different nations that has spanned twenty years. As well as providing a summary snapshot of research findings, it has been written as a resource for local churches. It has been written with a desire to offer practical and purposeful assistance to local churches to help them understand and build on their strengths for the sake of God's mission.

In Part One, we introduced the concept of church vitality and outlined our framework for understanding it. In simple terms, Christians understand themselves to be called into a relationship with God, with others in the church and with people in the wider community. Healthy churches are gatherings that show signs of vitality in each of these three sets of relationships.

NCLS Research has used surveys as a tool to listen to the views and experiences of individual church attenders. Their answers give us a way to measure the effectiveness of the local church. Everyone who is present at the church takes part in a Church Life Survey, not just a subset of key leaders or particular groupings. This means that everyone has a voice, from the long-term committed leader to the new arrival who is tentatively feeling their way. This provides a nuanced picture for that local church of the quality of its life. With the addition of other information provided by the leaders of local churches, we also know about churches as organisations, or as integrated systems. We can see the interplay of how one part of church life affects another.

In 2011, it was twenty years since the first National Church Life Survey. The level of the participation in this venture by thousands of churches in Australia, as well as other nations, is extraordinarily inspiring. It speaks to the fact that this is indeed an era of change. The motivation has been there from churches to listen, reflect and learn from their own people and from each other.

By investing in multiple National Church Life Surveys, Australian churches have created a resource that is now available for ongoing studies of the features of effective church life. We suspect that we now have the largest database of church life in the world!

Part Two outlines the nine Core Qualities and three Attendance Measures used to evaluate church vitality in a church. We believe that underlying the idea of church health there are themes that consistently recur. People from different faith traditions or expressions of church may use different terms or language to describe these themes. They may organise and group these concepts in slightly different ways, perhaps resulting in some variation of a list of characteristics. However, we assert that there are more similarities than differences in the underlying features of church vitality, even when the surface-level expression of these features varies.

In the first edition of *Enriching Church Life* we outlined the nine Core Qualities that are indicators of church vitality. As researchers, the temptation is there to continue to refine and improve the modelling. However, for the sake of all those who have become familiar with this framework and have used it in their planning, in this edition, we deliberately avoided 'tweaking' the model. The results of the four country study have been repeated, showing that each of the Core Qualities has a positive relationship with growth in church attendance overall, as well as attracting newcomers to church life.

We have taken advantage of this second edition to synthesise some of the findings we have made over the past few years that are relevant to each of the Core Quality areas. Further, while they largely stand without comment, we hope that it is useful to have put the denominational tables into the public domain for the use of others.

In Part Three, the focus turned to Attendance Measures - the numbers about church growth and decline. The overview of historical changes in Australia shows ongoing decline to date. The most recent data on church attendance suggests that 15% of Australians claim to be frequent (at least monthly) church attenders. Alongside this broad trend, we see that the balance of denominations has also undergone some changes. While the Catholic Church continues to hold its position as having around half of all church attenders, there has been significant change in the balance among Protestant churches. Australia continues to be a nation of small churches.

Part Three also repeats a message that NCLS Research has consistently conveyed to the churches over the years. That is, to simply count heads as a measure of church health is a flawed and limited understanding of church growth or decline. Instead we have explained the NCLS Inflow and Outflow model which shows that there are three separate streams into and out of church life. Churches grow when inflow exceeds outflow. This dynamic is important for the life of the church.

In Part Four, we focussed on fostering church vitality. We shared the findings of a number of research studies. More than just being interesting, we have focussed on those findings that we believe are practical and purposeful as well. For churches who want some guidance as to their next steps, there is the reminder that all the Core Qualities are strongly interrelated. If you want to start with the Qualities that are most strongly associated to other qualities,



then work to develop the Qualities of willing and effective faith-sharing, clear and owned vision and empowering and inspiring leadership. What you do now, may well have an impact over time.

Given the great diversity of churches across the nation, it may be encouraging to hear that while theological tradition and social context do matter when measuring the outcomes for churches, the Core Qualities remain important and can have an impact.

In Part Five, the focus goes beyond the church, offering a demographic profile of the wider Australian community as well as the churches. Much has been written about Australia being a changing nation in a changing world. The Church has a long history of dealing with change—sometimes well and sometimes not so well. Demographic challenges, including the ageing profile of attenders in particular, remain a stark reminder of the challenges that face churches.

It is important that we do not forget to attend to the voices of those beyond the churches, those who are, to some degree, disconnected or disengaged. This is why NCLS Research also conducts research into the views of the wider community as well (e.g. Why People Don't Go to Church, 2002). To do so would mean that we are at risk of forgetting the mission heartbeat of Christ's church. This is why we seek to build healthy churches.



OChris Morgan 1994 comedia.com



NCLS Research encourages leaders of churches that have taken part in the National Church Life Survey to use their results as a basis for church planning.

To this end NCLS Research has developed planning resources that church leaders will find easy to use whether it be for a complete whole of church planning process, or a single review and planning session with a ministry team or small church group.

The cornerstone of this suite of resources is the Church Life Profile Workbook that is part of every Church Life Pack. Additional copies of the Workbook can be ordered from Mirrabooka Press (www.mirrabookapress.com.au). See also www.ncls.org.au/planning



The first half of the Workbook provides simple planning and discussion processes for each page of data of the Church Life Profile enabling churches to more effectively engage their results and develop strategies for moving forward. It also contains templates to assist people who wish to prepare a report based on their church's results.

The second half of the Workbook briefly outlines our approach to planning. As well as being a means to growing church vitality, planning is ultimately about stewardship — the way that churches set directions to make the best use of the resources that God has made available to them.

Stepping deeper into planning we move from the 'instant' planning/discussion processes outlined so far in the Workbook to introduce and outline three more complex planning options, each requiring greater commitment from the church than the one before. These options are:

- A Short Planning Session for using the NCLS Profile as a basis for celebrating the strengths of the church and developing ways to build on those strengths.
- A Reflection-Action Planning Process designed for churches that wish to move directly from their NCLS Profile to action steps. Such churches may not yet be ready for a full planning process, while others may already have a vision for the future.

• A Comprehensive Planning Process designed to help churches to develop a communal vision for the future and the detailed action steps to turn that vision into a reality. This process will involve several meetings and can provide churches with an exciting and well-grounded sense of direction.

These three processes are further fleshed out and detailed online at www.ncls.org.au/planning.

Further NCLS online planning resources include:

- Understanding Church Vitality
- Hints for running NCLS Workshops
- Frequently asked questions about NCLS results
- NCLS PowerPoint presentations for facilitators
- NCLS video clips for workshops
- Consultants Directory
- Links to other planning processes

All NCLS planning resources are based on helping churches to build upon their strengths to become more effectively what they are becoming rather than to focus on what they are not. The touchstone of our approach to planning remains Jesus' declaration: *"I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly"* (John 10:10)

APPENDIX 2 LIST OF SURVEY QUESTIONS



Core Quality 1: Alive and growing faith

Growth in faith Moment of faith commitment Private devotional activity Importance of God in your life

Core Quality 2: Vital and nurturing worship

Preaching helpful to life Inspiration (at church services) Joy (at church services) Boredom (at church services) Awe or mystery (at church services) Sense of God's presence (at church services) Growth in understanding of God (at church services) Challenge to action (at church services) – NCLS 2006 ONLY Strengthened spiritually (at church services) – NCLS 2006 ONLY Preferred styles of music at church

Core Quality 3: Strong and growing belonging

Sense of belonging to the congregation Frequency of church service attendance Attendance at group activities Ease of making friends at church – NCLS 2006 ONLY Sense of belonging to the denomination – NCLS 2006 ONLY Results of conflict

Core Quality 4: Clear and owned vision

Commitment to vision, goals and directions of the church Confidence vision can be achieved – NCLS 2006 ONLY Leaders focused on future directions – NCLS 2006 ONLY

Core Quality 5: Inspiring and empowering leadership Leaders encourage attenders to use gifts and skills Leaders takes ideas of attenders into account Leaders inspire to action Leaders communicate clearly – NCLS 2006 ONLY Leaders focus on the wider community – NCLS2006 ONLY Congregation has clear systems – NCLS2006 ONLY

Leaders are good at bringing people together – NCLS 2006 ONLY Leaders set an inspiring example – NCLS 2006 ONLY Leaders help congregation build on its strengths – NCLS 2006 ONLY

Core Quality 6: Imaginative and flexible innovation Openness to change of worship style – NCLS2006 ONLY Willingness of congregation to try new things Leaders encourage innovation – NCLS2006 ONLY



Core Quality 7: Practical and diverse service

Involvement in church-based service activities Involvement in community-based service activities – SOME ITEMS NCLS2006 ONLY Informal ways of helping others Aspects of church most valued – wider community care

Core Quality 8: Willing and effective faith-sharing

Involvement in evangelistic or outreach activities Readiness to share faith with others Inviting others to church Aspects of church most valued – outreach Discussing matters of faith at home

Core Quality 9: Intentional and welcoming inclusion Welcoming new arrivals – NCLS2006 ONLY Follow-up of people drifting away from church

Attendance Measures

Length of attendance (in years) – FOR DERIVING NEWCOMERS Church attendance history – FOR DERIVING NEWCOMERS Age of children Place of residence of children Church attendance of children Previous church attendance (one year ago)

Other Questions in the Survey

Year of birth Sex Highest educational gualification Marital status Spouse who completed a survey form **Employment status** Country of birth (self) Country of birth (parents) Denomination of previous church attended Theological orientation Length of journey to church (in minutes) Satisfaction with activities for children Satisfaction with activities for youth Satisfaction with activities for young adults Roles at church Aspects of church most valued – all other aspects Financial giving Aspects of church to get more attention – NCLS 2006 ONLY

About Statistical Methods Used in This Book

In addition to frequencies and cross-tabulations, we have used a range of statistical approaches to look for patterns that tell us what characterises vital or growing churches.

- Statistical association: Using the techniques of correlation and multiple regression, we can see which things tend to occur together in churches and which things don't seem to be associated at all.
- Longitudinal study: Since the survey has been repeated, we can look at what was happening in churches before they grew or declined, or before newcomers were attracted to the church. This analysis strengthens the case for saying that particular Core Qualities caused growth rather than simply being symptoms of growth.
- Factor analysis: When we see the same patterns in church life again and again, we ask, "Do these things go together because there is some underlying factor binding them together?"
- Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) has been conducted using LISREL software. SEM combines factor analysis and multiple regression into a single analysis to give even more powerful results.

One advantage of using SEM is that it allows a confirmatory factor analysis. LISREL allows analysis of underlying themes driven more by theory than by data. The exact nature of the factors is stipulated by the researcher, such as the number of factors and the independent variables that contribute to each of these factors. An exploratory factor analysis might be performed first in order to investigate from the data itself what sort of factors might be present, as was the case in the earlier NCLS analyses. A confirmatory factor analysis then tests the exact factor structure the researcher postulates.

Another advantage of using SEM is that it is a more concise analysis. It estimates the error for each term in the model, whereas in exploratory factor analysis all error is grouped together across all variables. By partialling error out of the structural model, SEM can often arrive at more powerful coefficients. In other words, by having a process that estimates error separately to the other relationships, the true story can be told more clearly, as more noise has been removed. This advantage applies not only to confirmatory factor analysis, but to all models.

SEM is also a more rigorous analysis. It does not simply estimate parameters (to try to tell the story of relationships), but also employs a battery of 'fit indices' to indicate the likelihood that the model is a true 'fit' of the data



presented. Using accepted thresholds on various fit indices, a model might be accepted, rejected, or modified and retested.

Finally, underlying themes are examined in more detail. Beyond a confirmatory factor analysis, more complex models can be examined including the relationships between latent variables. Not only are the observed variables investigated, and their relationships to latent variables postulated; but the relationships between the underlying variables are also tested. In this way, the true story of 'what is really going on underneath' is being tested. In other words SEM allows us to investigate *processes*.

NCLS researchers have conducted a range of initial analyses using SEM, which appear to have positive outcomes. Models will continue to be tested using new variables and new datasets as they become available.

About Research Studies in Part Four: Fostering Church Vitality

One research goal we had was to test the strength of association between all Core Qualities. For one research study, our analysis was based on Australian Anglican and Protestant churches (n = 4991). For each Core Quality, we identified potential variables that could act as indicators or measures of the Quality. For instance, there are different survey questions which measure the faith-sharing Core Quality, including attenders' readiness to share their faith, attenders inviting others to church, and the involvement of attenders in mission activities. In this study, some Qualities had multiple measures, while others only had one. Some measures had to be excluded in order to achieve a good model fit. Table A.1 lists the variables used in this particular analysis.

We also wanted to test our theory that the indicators would 'load' successfully onto each of the nine factors, or Core Qualities. We used SEM to run a Confirmatory Factor Analysis using LISREL software. The results confirmed that the collection of measures we tested for each Core Quality did cluster together as a single identifiable factor as expected. Figure A.1 shows the full SEM model generated for this analysis.



CQ1a	Have devotional activities at least a few times per week
CQ1b	God is said to be the 'most important' thing in life
CQ2a	Always experience a sense of inspiration in worship services
CQ2b	Always experience a sense of god's presence in worship services
CQ2c	Always experience a sense of joy in worship services
CQ2d	Always experience a growth in understanding of God in worship services
CQ3	Have a strong growing sense of belonging to this church
CQ4	Aware and strongly committed to vision
CQ5a	Feel that own gifts and skills are encouraged to a great extent
CQ5b	Agree that leader inspires people to action
CQ5c	Agree that leader takes ideas into account to a great extent
CQ6	Strongly agree that the congregation is always ready to try something new
CQ7	Involved in informal acts of helping others (care/justice)
CQ8a	Involved in evangelism activities at church
CQ8b	Look for opportunities to share faith
CQ8c	Values reaching non-churched people
CQ8d	Have invited others to church in the last year
CQ9	Feel certain that they would follow up people drifting out of church life

Table A.1: List of variables used in Confirmatory Factor Analysis shown in Figure A.1



Figure A.1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Nine Core Qualities

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Source: NCLS - Attender Surveys

Goodness of Fit Statistics:Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI) = .95; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .96

SEM has become a quantitative technique of choice for researchers across a range of disciplines, including disciplines in the social sciences. However, the issue of how well a given SEM model represents the data under consideration, known as model 'fit' and measured by various 'fit' indices, is by no means agreed. Specifically, there widespread disparity of opinion with respect to which fit indices to report, and which values of various indices represent 'good fit'. In recent years, the applicability of fit indices has come under scrutiny, with serious shortcomings associated with the specification of stringent threshold values for various indices increasingly recognised within the field (Kenny and McCoach, 2003; Marsh et al, 2004).

One key indicator of model fit is the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). The RMSEA indicates how well a model, with unknown but optimally chosen parameter estimates, would fit the population covariance matrix (Byrne, 1998). Recommendations concerning RMSEA cut-off points have varied considerably over the past 20 years, with recent values indicating 'good fit' being specified at approximately .06 (Hu and Bentler, 1999; Steiger, 2007). Thus, our current model is not an ideal fit in terms of the RMSEA. However, in the context of very good CFI and NNFI values (> .95), and recognising the limitations concerning the specification of stringent threshold values referred to above, the current model may be accepted as an adequate representation of the data under consideration. We expect to repeat these analyses with different sets of variables from various datasets over time and continue to refine this work.

Another outcome from this SEM analysis was that we could learn more about the strength of association between a given Core Quality and each of the other Core Qualities.

Table A.2 shows what is known as the latent variable correlation matrix which takes into account all the measures for all the Core Qualities that are included in the model. It reveals that the Core Qualities are highly interrelated.

In terms of the interpreting the magnitude of these effects, Cohen (1988) is widely cited. He suggests that a correlation of 0.5 is large, 0.3 is moderate, and 0.1 is small. Anything less than 0.1 is insubstantial. We have used this as a guide for translating these correlation coefficients into the star rating used in Part Four.



	Faith	Worship	Belonging	Vision	Leadership	Innovation	Service	Faith- sharing	Inclusion
Faith	1								
Worship	0.4	1							
Belonging	0.44	0.55	1						
Vision	0.53	0.44	0.58	1					
Leadership	0.43	0.63	0.69	0.75	1				
Innovation	0.22	0.42	0.41	0.51	0.63	1			
Service	0.23	-0.02	0.19	0.25	0.25	0.2	1		
Faith- sharing	0.84	0.55	0.58	0.63	0.63	0.49	0.32	1	
Inclusion	0.36	0.44	0.31	0.29	0.34	0.3	0.11	0.54	1

Table A.2: The strength of relationship between all Core Qualities

In another set of analyses, we proposed that all nine Qualities would be statistically related to a single underlying concept (or latent variable) — which we call 'church health'. In this test, we chose one indicator for each core Quality. Having run a series of analyses with different variables on different samples, every indication is that is it possible to identify a single underlying concept, called church health. Further modelling will be conducted on future datasets.



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Ruth Powell is the Director of NCLS Research and has played the lead role in the overall co-ordination, development and writing of this book. She has also been responsible for revision of material from the first edition. Ruth has been part of the NCLS Research team since 1991, involved in all five National Church Life Survey waves. She is an Associate Professor at the Australian Catholic University.

John Bellamy is a former NCLS Research team member, and was the lead author for the first edition of Enriching Church Life, which has shaped this book. He has also reviewed and contributed to this second edition. His current role is as Senior Research Officer in the Social Policy & Research Unit of Anglicare Sydney.

Sam Sterland is a researcher with NCLS Research and has played a major role in the statistical research for this book. He has been involved in analysis of the 2001 and 2006 National Church Life Surveys and the design of the 2011 National Church Life Survey. He was a key contributor to much of the underlying analyses described in Part Four.

Kathy Jacka is a former NCLS staff member who is now a consultant to NCLS in the area of resource development and is part of the NCLS resource development team. She has made a contribution to the development of this book with a particular focus on Parts Three and Five.

Miriam Pepper is a researcher with NCLS Research who has also been involved in the data development of NCLS resources. She has provided editorial feedback, assisted with data analysis and was part of developing Part Five.

Michael Brady is a member of the communications and resource development teams with a major focus on communicating with the churches who are involved in the National Church Life Survey as well as contributing to the design of NCLS resources.

Amelia Vaeafisi is office manager and provides administrative support to the NCLS Research endeavours.

Nicole Ward was heavily involved in all aspects of the 2011 NCLS logistic team and continues with the NCLS team in the role of research assistant.

Ken Hodson has been the logistics manager for the 2011 National Church Life Survey project. He has been responsible for organising the dispatch and receipt of surveys to thousands of churches, as well as the distribution of the Church Life Packs to all participating churches.



George Preetham Singh managed the logistics team that received all the 2011 surveys back from participating churches and entered all their information into the NCLS database.

Fraser Tustian runs a consultancy that provides IT services and support for NCLS Research (contact: fraser@fallingrocks.com.au).

Chandrika Chinnadurai is part of the NCLS IT team and has been responsible for developing further online capabilities for the NCLS projects. Other former team members who have been heavily involved in the IT part of the work are Chris Simpson, Dylan Bevis and Pete Sillar.

In addition to John Bellamy, **Keith Castle, Peter Kaldor** and **Bryan Cussen** are former NCLS team members who played a major role in the development, coordination and writing of the first edition of this book in 2006. The current edition is built in part upon their work.

Phone: +61 2 9701 4479

Web:

Email: info@ncls.org.au

Mail:

Locked Bag 2002 Strathfield NSW 2135 Australia www.ncls.org.au www.2011ncls.org.au www.leadwithyourstrengths.net.au www.churchsearch.org.au



Chris Morgan 1994

Enriching Church Life is designed to help you understand and foster vitality in your church. It shows how the results of the National Church Life Survey can be the starting point for positive and enriching change in your church.

This is a book for all local churches whether large or small, whether thriving or struggling. It is also for anyone who wants to understand what the research says about the dynamics of church life.

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NCLS Research

Locked Bag 2002 Strathfield NSW 2135 Phone: + 61 2 9701 4479 Email: info@ncls.org.au Web: www.ncls.org.au



