



# Local Churches in Australia

## Scanning the Landscape



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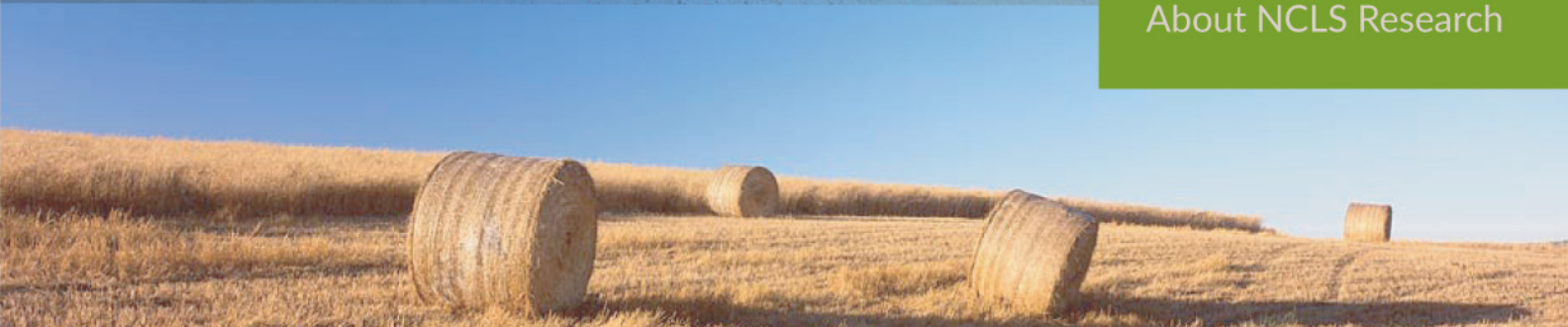
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About NCLS Research



## From the Editors

The NCLS Research team have been collecting information about Australian spirituality and local church life for more than 25 years.

This magazine is a sampler of our research. We show some key themes and the breadth of topics that we cover.

As we write, some local churches are still sending in their completed surveys for the 2016 National Church Life Survey. We expect to process a quarter of a million survey forms. So, a snapshot of the latest results from 2016 are not yet possible.



### Data sources

The research we present here is based on Government Censuses, surveys of the wider Australian community, and the National Church Life Survey attendee, leader and operations datasets from 2011 and earlier.

### Want more detail?

If you want to know more, all references are at the back.

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# Spirituality & Wellbeing of Australians

2016  
Australian  
Community  
Survey

## Australia is a moderately religious or spiritual nation

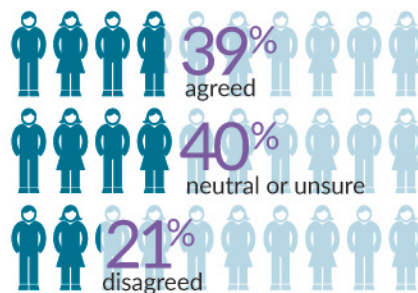
We can think about a person's religiousness or spirituality in various ways, such as:

1. Religious identity
2. Religious experiences
3. Private practices e.g. prayer, Bible reading, meditation or other devotional activities
4. Public practices e.g. attending church
5. Religious beliefs

### Religion – good for society?



Around four in ten Australians (39%) in late 2016 agreed that religion is good for Australian society and a similar proportion (40%) were neutral or unsure. Two in ten (21%) disagreed.



Source: 2016 Australian Community Survey run by NCLS Research. (n=1,258)

Results from Australian Government Censuses and representative sample surveys of all Australians indicate that Australia is a moderately religious or spiritual nation.

## 1. Religious Identity

### Six in ten Australians identified as Christian in the 2011 Census

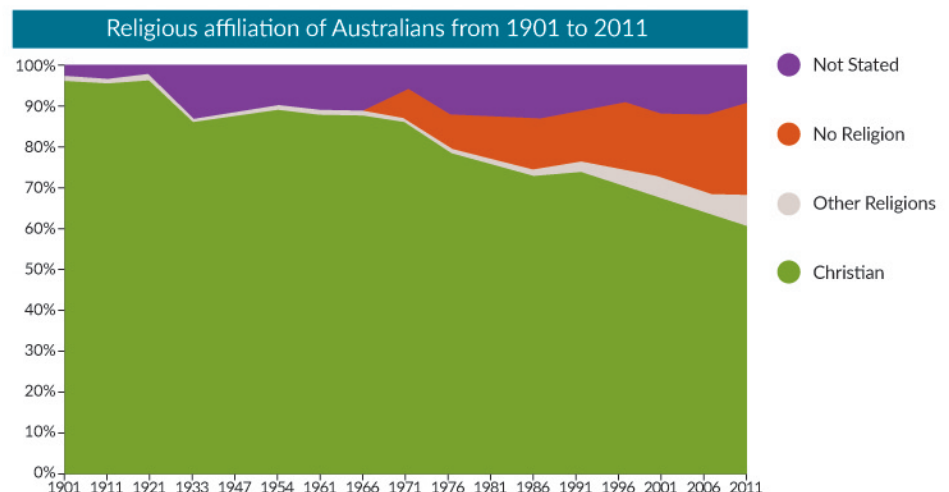
In each National Census run by the Australian Government since 1901 there has been the optional question 'What is your religion?'

In the 2011 Census, six in ten Australians affiliated with Christianity (61%). A further 7% identified with other religions. Some 22% said that they had 'no religion'.

In the past century, there has been a decline in the proportion of Australians identifying as Christian, although Catholic affiliation (25%) has been relatively stable over time, partly due to migration flows. There has been a small increase of other religions in recent decades.

Since it was first listed as a category in the 1971 Census, the proportion for 'no religion' has increased steadily. Younger people have been more likely to select this option.

In the 2016 Census, for the first time, 'no religion' was presented as the first option in the question about religion. In line with other western nations, it is expected that the 2016 Australian Census will reveal a further increase in 'no religion'.



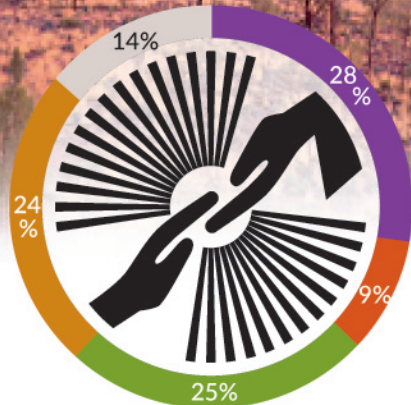
Source: National Census of Population and Housing, Australian Bureau of Statistics.

\* The question is optional, so there is always a proportion 'Not stated or inadequately described'. Chart prepared by NCLS Research.

## 2. Religious Experience

In late 2016, over a quarter of Australians reported having had a mystical or supernatural experience. A further third either knew someone who has had this type of experience or believed it could happen.

Q. Have you ever had a mystical or supernatural experience, either positive or negative, about which you have no doubts it was real?

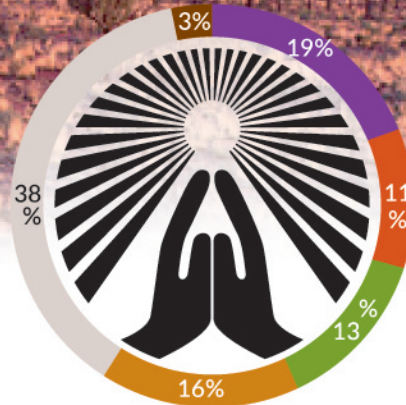


- Yes, I have
- No, but I know someone who has
- No, but I believe it could happen
- No, and I don't think such experiences occur
- Unsure

## 3. Private Religious or Spiritual Practices

Three in ten Australians said they pray or meditate at least once a week. Private religious or spiritual practices are a part of the week for a significant minority of Australians.

Q. How often do you pray or meditate?

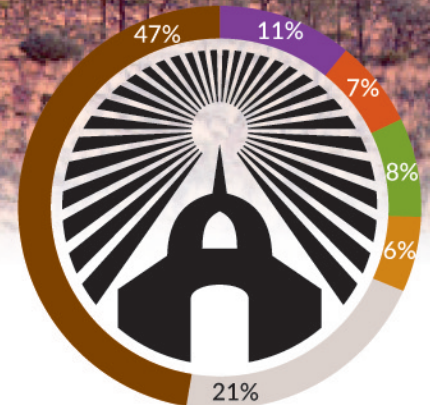


- Everyday, most days, or several times a day
- Once a week or a few times a week
- Occasionally
- Hardly ever
- Never
- Don't know

## 4. Public Religious Practice

Less than one in five Australians said they attended religious services at least monthly. Attendance rates have been declining for decades. In 2016 around 18% reported that they attended religious services at least monthly.

Q. Apart from special occasions (e.g. weddings, funerals), how often do you attend religious services?



- At least once a week
- At least monthly
- Several times a year
- Once a year
- Less frequently
- Never

Source: 2016 Australian Community Survey run by NCLS Research. (n=1,258)

## 5. Religious Beliefs

About six in 10 Australians said they believe in God or a higher power

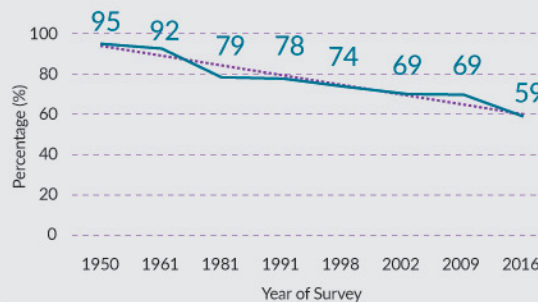
**Believers:** In 2016, 59% of Australians said they believed in a personal God (24%), or some sort of spirit or life force (35%).

**Agnostic:** Nearly one in five (19%) said 'I don't really know what to think'.

**Atheistic:** One in five (21%) Australians said 'I don't really think there is any sort of spirit, God or life force'.

### Levels of belief in God or higher power have declined

Australians' belief in God, spirit or life force



Source: Various social surveys, including 2016 Australian Community Survey run by NCLS Research. (n=1,258)

Q. Which best describes your beliefs about God?



### Religion generally has a positive link to wellbeing

Australia is a nation with high levels of recorded subjective wellbeing.



Source: Capic et al (2016) Australian Unity Wellbeing Index Survey 33.0, p.20.

Subjective wellbeing—people's positive experience of their life—is one aspect of mental health. On a scale from 0 to 100, the average Australian in 2016 rated their level of life satisfaction as 77. Most published studies across the world have found a positive relationship between being religious and subjective wellbeing.

NCLS researchers looked at relationships between religiousness and life satisfaction for church attenders and leaders. We confirmed the positive link between higher religiousness and higher life satisfaction.

Some highlights of the research are:

- > Part of the reason why church attenders with high religiousness have higher life satisfaction appears to be because they are more likely to volunteer.

- > Not all aspects of religion relate positively to wellbeing. Religious leaders with a stronger 'questing' religious approach (seeing their faith as a journey that involves questioning and doubting) report lower levels of life satisfaction.

# Mapping the Local Church Landscape

With the long-term co-operation of most Australian Christian denominations, NCLS Research is uniquely positioned to provide an overview of the Australian churches. Here we outline current estimates of the number and size of churches. We also estimate church attendance and how this varies by denomination.

We can only ever give estimates as the task of tracking the changes is never-ending. We also know that some groups of churches are under-represented in these figures, such as indigenous churches, mono-ethnic churches from non-English speaking backgrounds, and other independent churches that are not part of the 22+ denominations that have participated in National Church Life Surveys.

We use four denominational groupings for mapping.

1. Catholic Church
2. Mainstream Protestant
3. Pentecostal
4. Other Protestant

## Catholic Church

### Mainstream Protestant:

Anglican Church  
Lutheran Church  
Presbyterian Church  
Uniting Church

### Pentecostal:

Acts 2 Alliance  
Australian Christian Churches  
Apostolic Church  
Bethesda Ministries International  
C3 Church  
CRC Churches International  
Four Square Gospel  
International Network of Churches

### Other Protestant:

Baptist Church  
Churches of Christ  
Christian & Missionary Alliance  
Congregational Church  
Church of the Nazarene  
Christian Reformed Churches  
Salvation Army  
Seventh-day Adventist  
Vineyard Churches Australia  
Wesleyan Methodist



## Around 12,400 church locations form a national network

In 2011 the estimated number of church locations was around 12,400.

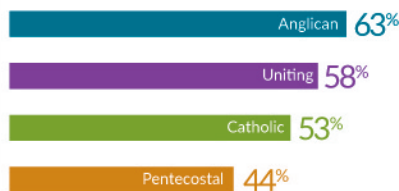
Between 1991 and 2011 there was a net decrease of at least 1,000 churches. In many instances, a church presence remains in an area, but different

locations have merged. The net decline in church locations is made up of a decrease in the very large number of mainstream Protestant church locations partly offset by an increase in the number of Pentecostal and other Protestant locations.



Source: NCLS Research Churches Database. NB. This chart shows the trend from 1991 to 2011. Fewer than 12,400 locations are shown in this chart because only parish counts (not Mass centres) are used for the Catholic Church, as Mass centre counts are not available back to 1991.

### Church locations outside major cities in select denominations



Source: NCLS Research Churches Database.

## A strong presence outside the cities

Australian churches have a strong presence outside the major cities—with 53% of church locations in 2011 in regional, rural and remote areas.

The mainstream Protestant churches have a particularly strong presence in regional and rural areas.



Churches (ACC/AOG) (115), Baptist (119) and Reformed (141) have some of the largest average attendances of the Protestant denominations.

Anglican (55), Presbyterian (50), and Uniting (51) have some of the smallest average attendances, reflecting the presence of these denominations in many small rural towns.

## A nation of small churches

The average (mean) size of churches in Australia is 121 people attending in a typical week.

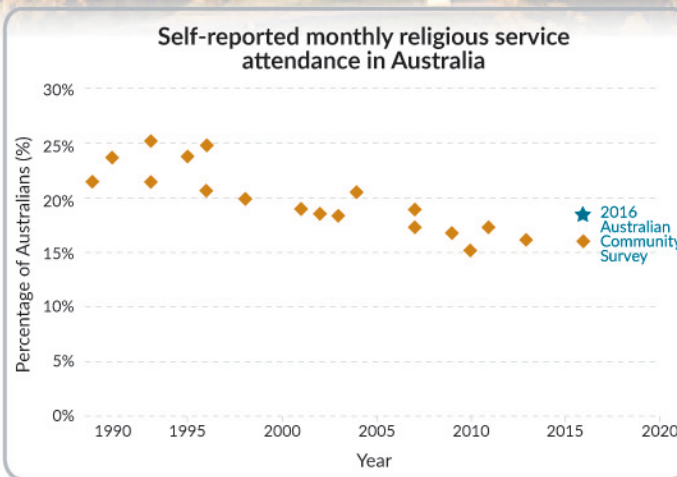
However, the average church size of different denominational affiliations shows a wide diversity.

The average size of Catholic parishes is around 360 people. According to the 2011 NCLS, Australian Christian



## Decline in frequent religious service attendance continues, but is slowing

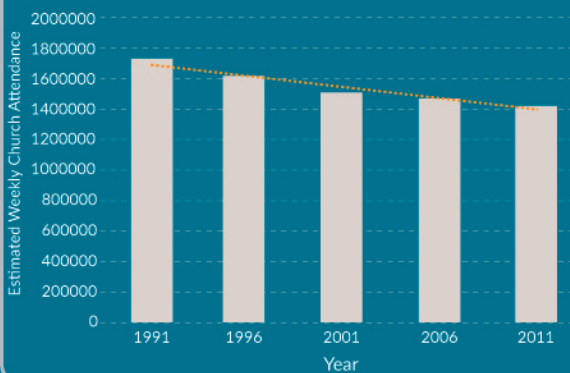
Decreasing levels of self-reported attendance at religious services have been tracked through sample surveys of the Australian population over several generations. The decline has continued since 1990, but at a slowing rate.



A 'frequent attender' attends religious services at least once per month

Source: International Social Survey Programme (1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996); Australian Community Survey (1998, 2016); 2002 Wellbeing and Security Survey; Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2003, 2007, 2009, 2011); Australian Election Study (1990, 1993, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2004, 2007, 2010, 2013, 2016).

## Weekly church attendance estimates: 1991 to 2011



Source: NCLS Research Attendance Estimates Database: 1991 to 2011.

## Weekly numbers at Christian church services were less than 1.5 million in 2011

Based on estimates collected through National Church Life Surveys (as reported by church leaders and administrators), 6% of Australians attended church every week in 2011. This is a decline from 10% of the population in 1991.

In 2011 the estimated weekly church attendance was 1,432,000. This figure is 87% of the estimated 1991 figure. That is, based on current best estimates, overall church attendance declined by around 13% over 20 years.

It is important to note that self-reported attendance rates obtained from sample surveys tend to be inflated compared to head counts and estimates from church leaders and administrators.

## Weekly attendance estimates by denominational group: 1991 to 2011



Source: NCLS Research Attendance Estimates Database: 1991 to 2011

## Denominations vary in attendance change: 1991 to 2011

The overall picture of declining church attendance is made up of different denominational patterns.

Catholic church attendance declined in the period from 1991 to 2011.

Protestant churches show little change in weekly attendance over the 20 years. This net result masks the decline in mainstream churches offset by significant growth in Pentecostals - who doubled in size over the 20 year period.

# Who Goes to Church

People who go to church are older than the wider Australian population, more likely to be female and more likely to have a university degree.

The results from the 2011 National Church Life Survey provide demographic features of church attenders. Comparisons with 2011 ABS Census data illustrate some gaps to the wider community.

## Age profile of attenders continues to get older



Churches face the ministry question: how to minister to ageing congregations as well as connect more effectively with younger people?

The proportion of church attenders over 60 years of age (43%) is much higher than the proportion of people aged over 60 in the general population (24%). The age profile of church attenders has been getting older. In 2001, 21% of attenders were aged 70 years and over. By 2011 this grew to 25%.

Australia's population is also ageing and life expectancy is increasing. The median age has increased from 23 years in 1901 to 37 years in 2011. It is predicted to rise to between 39 years and 41 years by 2026.

A quarter of Australians are aged 15 to 29 years. Some denominations more than others are reaching younger people. Pentecostal churches have the highest proportion of younger attenders, with 39% aged between 15 and 29 years. Baptist churches, along with Churches of Christ, have 20% of their attenders aged 15-29.

Other denominations have higher proportions of older attenders—including Uniting (67% of attenders aged 60 or older), Lutheran and Anglican churches, (51%) and Catholic (50%).

N.B. Figures are calculated on the population aged 15 years and over.

## Quick Facts about Church Attenders

### Age



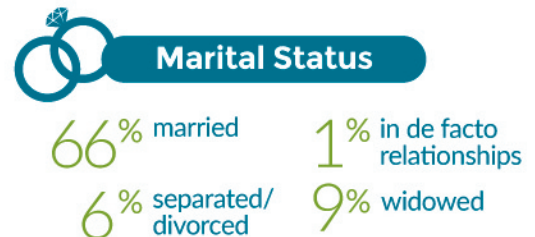
### Gender



### Education



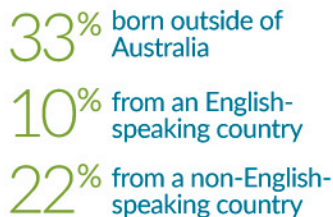
### Marital Status



### Employment



### Country of Birth



### Female

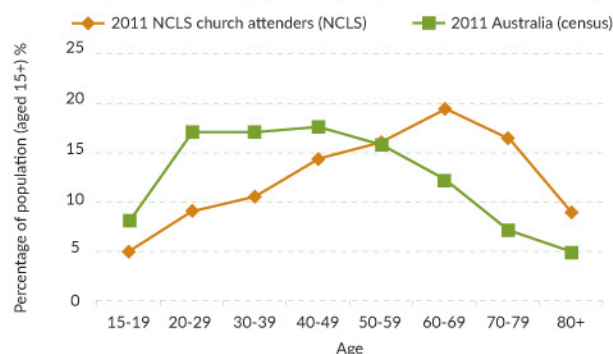


### Aged over 60 years



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Survey (n=227,063), 2011 National Census of Population and Housing, Australian Bureau of Statistics.

## Age profile for Australia and church attenders (15+ years): 2011



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Survey (n=227,063), 2011 National Census of Population and Housing, Australian Bureau of Statistics.



## Church attenders are more highly educated than the general Australian population



33% church attenders

19% all Australians

Church attenders are more likely than the general population to be university educated. The proportion of church attenders with a university degree rose from 27% to 33% between 2006 and 2011 (19% of the general population in 2011).

A further 25% of church attenders in 2011 had attained a trade certificate, diploma or associate diploma, while the remaining 42% had primary or secondary school as their highest qualification level. Anglican attenders are the most highly educated.

	School %	TC/D/AD* %	Degree %
Overall	42	25	33
Anglican	36	23	42
Baptist/Churches of Christ	37	26	37
Catholic	45	22	32
Lutheran	54	22	24
Pentecostal	40	31	29
Uniting	43	26	31
Other Protestant	41	27	32

\* Trade certificate/diploma/associate diploma

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Survey (n=227,063).

## Inflow into churches: Three in ten attenders new to current church in previous 5 years



Three in 10 attenders (30%) in 2011 joined their current church in the previous five years.

Some 15% transferred from a church in the same denomination and 9% switched denominations.

Between 1996 and 2011, newcomers without a church background remained static at 6%.

Newcomers were most likely to seek out the church in early to mid adulthood (in their 20s to 40s).

### The top two reasons newcomers gave for starting to attend church were:

1. They thought something was missing in their life (24%)
2. They moved to a new area (10%)

### Newcomers tend not to go 'church shopping'.

In the 12 months prior to their current church, 67% of newcomers didn't visit or attend any other church, 19% visited/attended one, and 6% visited/attended two or more other churches.

### Newcomers are found in all denominations.

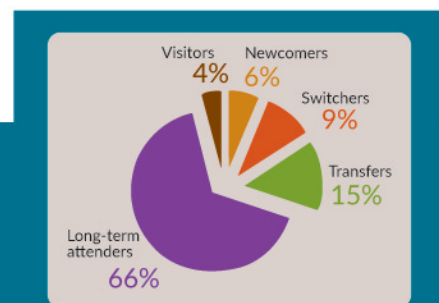
Newcomers were a higher proportion of all attenders in Salvation Army (11%), Pentecostal (10%), Churches of Christ (9%), Vineyard (8%) and Anglican churches (8%) than in other denominations.

## Attenders describe faith identity

Attenders were asked 'Do you identify with any of the following approaches to matters of faith?' They were able to choose up to two options from 11 listed.

The most common faith identity chosen by Australian church attenders was 'Catholic/Anglo-Catholic'. The second most common choice was 'I do not identify with such descriptions'. The labels 'Progressive' and 'Liberal' were adopted by very few attenders.

Younger attenders were least likely to identify with such labels.



### Defining church background:

**Visitors:** People who do not normally attend the church where they filled out the survey.

**New arrivals:** Attenders who have joined the church where they filled out the survey in the last five years and are either:

- Transfers:** Previously attended a church of the same denomination
- Switchers:** Previously attended a church of a different denomination
- Newcomers:** Were not previously attending anywhere else

**Long-term attenders:** Those who have attended the church for more than five years.

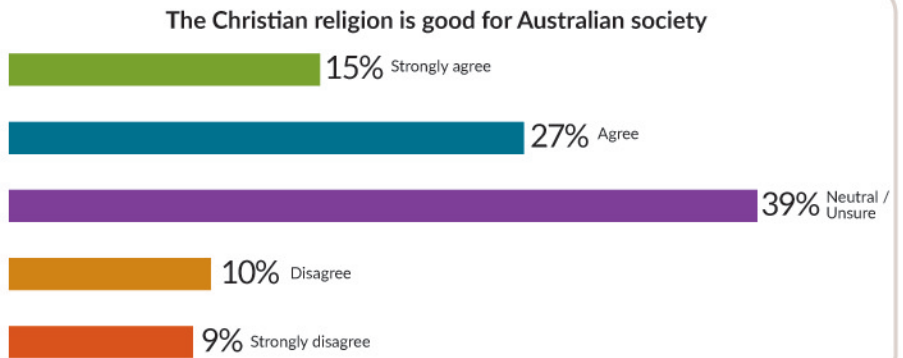
# Church & Community Connections

## Australians have mixed views on whether Christianity is good for Australian society

Around four in 10 Australians agreed or strongly agreed that the Christian religion is good for Australian society.

This is matched by around four in 10 who were neutral or unsure.

Around two in 10 disagreed that the Christian religion is good for Australian society.

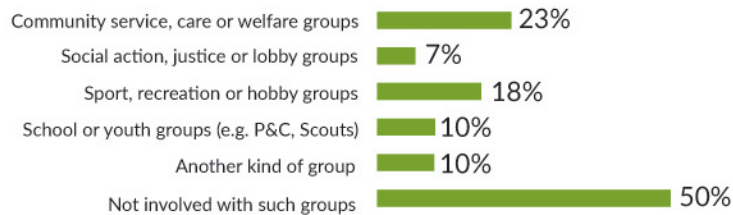


Source: 2016 Australian Community Survey (n=1,258).

## Churchgoers make a strong contribution to the community

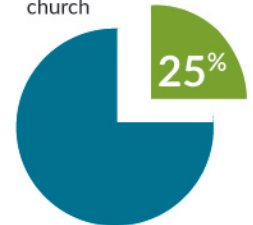


### Churchgoer involvement in community groups not connected to the church



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Survey (n=227,063).

25% of church attenders take part in community service activities run by their church



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Survey (n=227,063).

## Local churches serve their communities in diverse ways

Types of services run by local churches at least occasionally	% of local churches
Emergency relief or material assistance (e.g. food, clothes for needy)	84
Visiting (e.g. prisons, hospitals, fringe attenders)	82
Counselling services (e.g. marriage counselling, parenting programs, social work)	60
Other welfare/community service/social action activities not mentioned elsewhere	52
Political or social justice activities (e.g. human rights)	35
Community development or local resident action groups	24
Aged care services (e.g. Meals on Wheels, home help)	23
Care for the disabled (e.g. skills training, respite care, home care)	21
Migrant support activities (e.g. English as a second language, refugee support, interpreting service)	21
Children or youth support (e.g. youth training schemes, literacy programs, unemployed programs)	20
Activities for unemployed people (e.g. job seeking preparation, skills training, volunteers scheme)	13
Other accommodation (e.g. homeless hostels, crisis accommodation, student accommodation)	13
Animal welfare or environmental activities (e.g. Landcare)	10
Accommodation for the aged or infirm (e.g. nursing homes, aged units)	6

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n=2,520 churches).



## Churchgoers support advocacy on public policy issues

Church attenders support engagement with public policy issues through advocacy or lobbying of governments. According to the 2011 NCLS, some 75% believed that Christians should be involved in advocacy, and 63% supported advocacy from the churches.

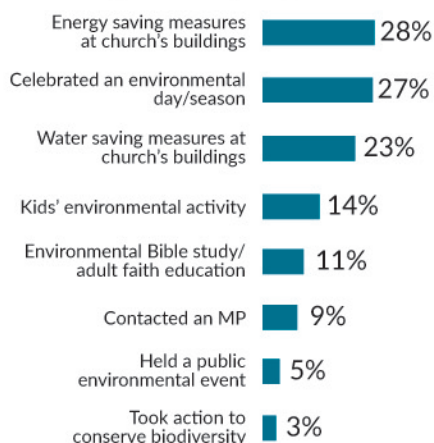
While there remains obvious and often strong disagreement across the diversity of the churches over prioritisation of issues and particular policy stances, there is nevertheless widespread support for the validity of Christian faith, individuals and institutions to proactively shape society.

When asked to choose up to four issues from a list of 14 on which their denomination should be most active, the most popular issues concerned marriage/family and poverty.

Same-sex marriage has been an issue of significant debate in recent years. When asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with same-sex marriage, almost three-quarters of attenders in 2011 disagreed (73%), and only 13% agreed. Attenders were more accepting of civil unions, with 34% in support.

## Caretakers of the environment

Selected environmental activities at local churches (previous 5 years)



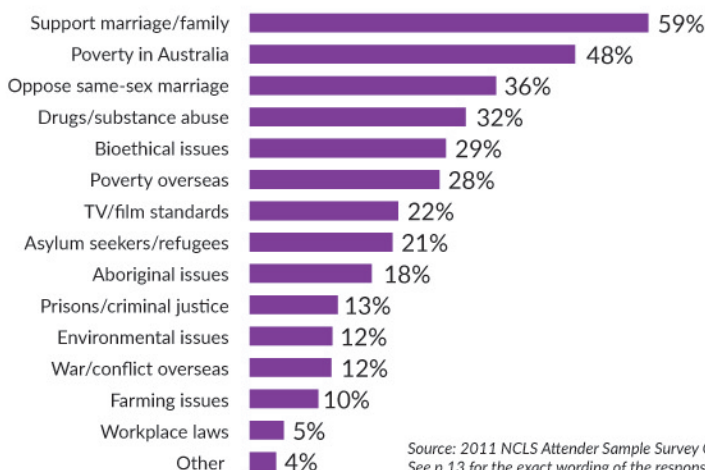
Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n=2,284 to 2,331 churches).

Churches are becoming more engaged in appreciation of and care for Creation in terms of their worship, mission, service and the operation of their buildings. Engagement differs strongly by denomination.

In 2011, environmental activity was particularly high in the Uniting Church, followed by Catholic and Anglican churches. The Pentecostal churches were the least active.

## Three quarters of attenders support Christian advocacy on public policy issues

### Attenders' priorities for church advocacy



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O (n=1,301). See p.13 for the exact wording of the response options.

## Human-caused climate change a minority view

In late 2011, 82% of attenders thought that climate change was occurring, and they were split about whether or not this was natural (38%) or a largely human-induced phenomenon (44%). This distribution of views was similar to that for the Australian population at large.

## Environment a moral responsibility but low priority

Some 81% of church attenders in 2011 believed there is a moral obligation for Christians to be active about environmental issues, including 33% who were themselves personally active. But only 12% of attenders prioritised the environment as a public policy issue with which their denomination should engage.

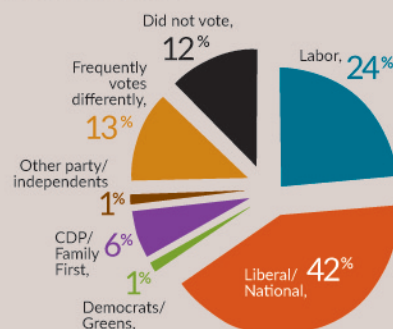
## Attender and leader voting patterns

Australian church attenders heavily favour the Liberal/National Coalition in their voting patterns.

Attenders in 2011 were less likely to vote Labor or Greens in the Federal Lower House over the previous decade than the general public (comparing NCLS results on self-reported voting tendencies with actual voting patterns from elections).

The voting pattern for local church leaders as a whole appears to be similar to the pattern for church attenders. However attender-leader comparisons within denominations are a different story. The 2011 NCLS indicated a much stronger inclination towards the Coalition among Pentecostal leaders as compared to Pentecostal attenders, and the reverse was true of the Uniting Church, where leaders voted strongly for progressive political parties. Anglican leaders were also more likely than Anglican attenders to vote Labor.

### "What have been your voting patterns\* over the last 10 years in lower house Federal elections?"



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Surveys N, O and R (n=3,665). \*Attenders aged 15 years plus

# Healthy Churches

## A 'healthy church'. What does that mean?

Why do we assess church health?

Church health is one way to assess how well churches are participating in God's mission in the world, and what churches can do to strengthen their capacity for action.

There are many different ways that people look for signs of health in a church.

Some focus on the size of a church or they look for churches that are growing in numbers.

Others focus on other signs of health such as an active prayer life, strong small groups and so on.

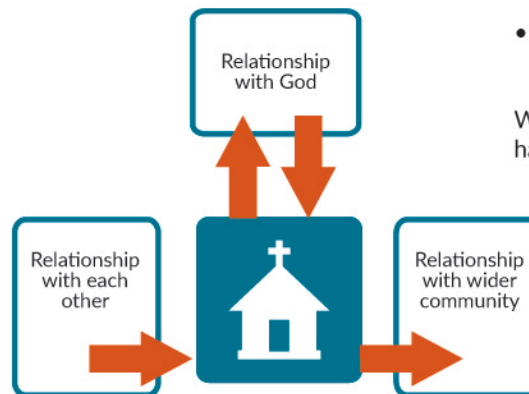
Over the past 25 years, NCLS researchers have looked for signs of health and vitality that are both quantities (such as size and growth) and qualities of health and vitality.

NCLS researchers evaluate churches as healthy when they help attenders to:

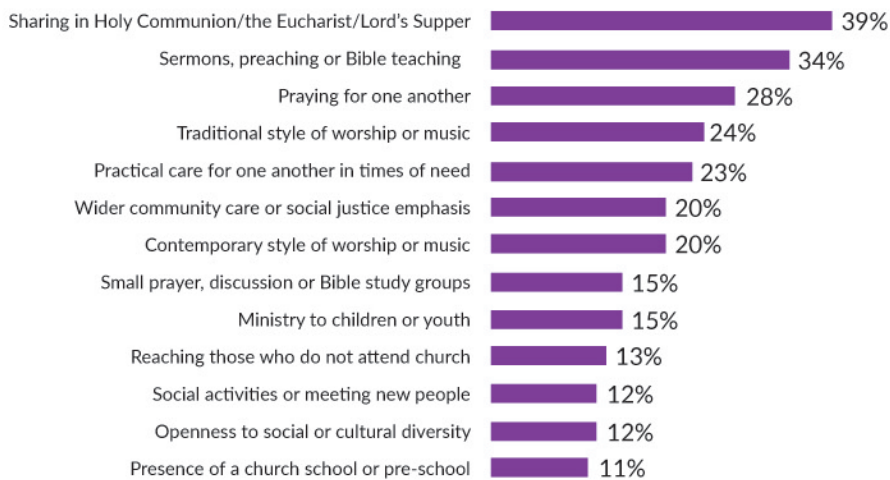
- Build relationship with **God**
- Build relationship with **each other**
- Build relationship with the **wider community**

We also look for signs that the church has:

- An **inflow** of new people for sustainability
- A culture of collective confidence, giving them **capacity for action**.



## What attenders most value about their local church



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Survey (n=227,063).

In the 2011 NCLS church attenders selected up to three aspects of church life they personally most valued, perhaps to be preserved or strengthened.

Attenders most commonly selected:

1. Sharing in Holy Communion
2. Sermons, preaching or Bible teaching
3. Praying for one another
4. Traditional style of worship or music
5. Practical care for one another in times of need



## Churches help attenders build relationships

### Clues for church vitality

Christians understand themselves to be called into a relationship with God, with others in the church and with the wider community.

In simple terms, these sets of relationships are the goals for local churches. They are clues to church health or vitality.

#### Relationship with God



#### Relationship with each other



#### Relationship with the wider community



#### Commitment to the church's vision



#### Openness to innovation



#### An equipping leadership



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Survey (n=227,063).



#### Relationship with God

Helping people to explore matters of faith, develop religious knowledge, and strengthen religious practices and beliefs is part of church life.

In 2011, 45% of church-goers said they had experienced much growth in faith in the previous 12 months.

Around 48% spent time in private devotional activity on most days. Some 65% said they always or usually experienced 'growth in understanding of God' during worship services.



#### Relationship with each other

A goal for all churches is to help participants to develop and maintain relationships with each other.

In vital faith communities, people feel that they belong. In 2011, 84% of church attenders had a strong sense of belonging to their local church and 76% agreed that they found it easy to make friends within their local church.

Three in 10 (31%) were involved in small groups.



#### Relationship with wider community

In vital faith communities, people seek to make an impact through deeds and/or words in the wider community.

**Actions:** 50% of church attenders in 2011 were part of wider community groups and 23% were part of community service, justice or welfare activities not connected to their local church.

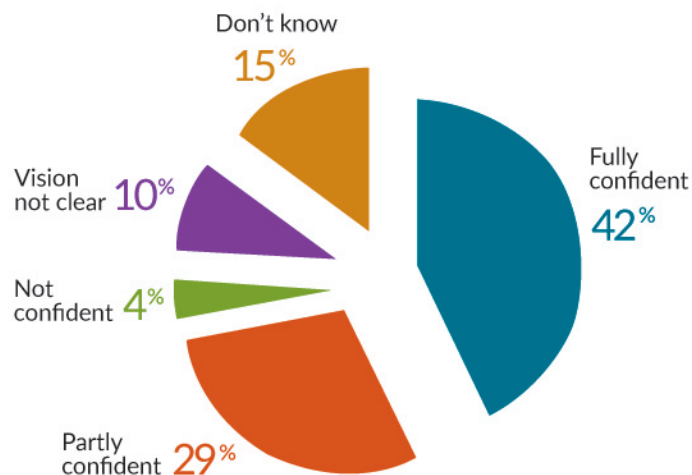
**Words:** 69% felt at ease talking about their faith with others and 72% were willing to invite friends and relatives to a church service at their local church.

### Vision, innovation and leadership culture: clues to a capacity for action

When a local church community exhibits a readiness to act, other signs of health are often present. The importance of a culture of 'collective confidence' has been a consistent finding in NCLS research on healthy churches over many years.

Clues as to whether a local church is positioned well to move into the future can be found in their commitment to their church's vision, openness to new possibilities and the presence of an inspiring, equipping and mobilising leadership culture.

42% are confident that their local church can achieve the vision, goals or directions it has set.



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Survey (n=227,063).

# Australia's First Peoples Church

## Indigenous church attenders and churches under-represented in National Church Life Surveys

In the 2011 NCLS, all church attenders were asked: "Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) origin?" Some 0.9% of church attenders and 0.6% of senior local church clergy indicated "Yes". In comparison, some 3% of the Australian population identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander in the 2011 Census.

Indigenous participants in the 2011 NCLS were almost entirely in non-Indigenous congregations.

Half of all Indigenous participants in the NCLS were in congregations with only one or two other Indigenous people.



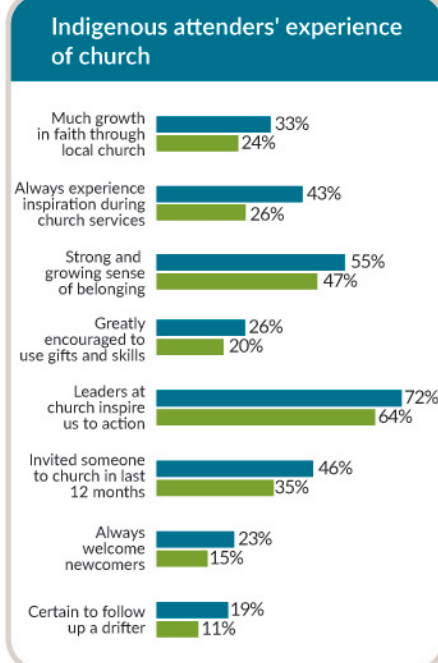
- Total no. of churches in 2011 NCLS
- No. of churches in 2011 NCLS with Indigenous attenders
- No. of churches with 1-2 Indigenous attenders
- No. of churches with >20% Indigenous attenders
- No. of churches with >50% Indigenous attenders

Source: 2011 NCLS Aggregated Attender Survey (n=3,224 church locations).

## Indigenous attenders report positive experiences of church

Compared with non-Indigenous attenders Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander attenders in 2011 were more likely to report:

- much growth in faith through their local church
- experiencing inspiration in church services
- strong and growing sense of belonging to their church
- being encouraged in their gifts and skills at church
- being inspired to action by church leaders
- having invited somebody to church
- welcoming newcomers to church
- talking with someone drifting away from church

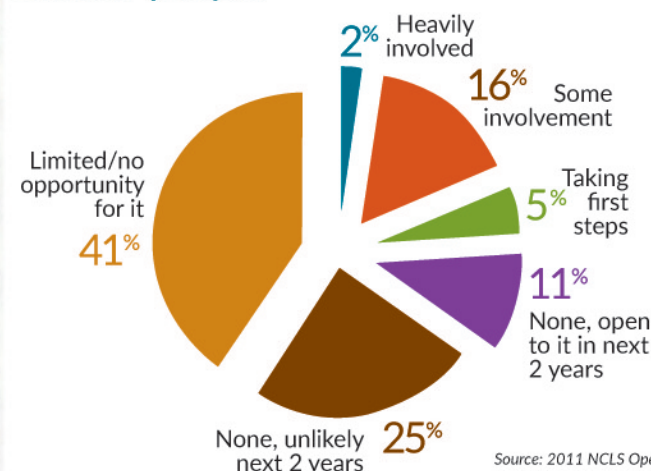


- Indigenous attenders
- Non-Indigenous attenders

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Survey (n=211,472).

These differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous attenders were particularly prominent in Catholic parishes.

## Churches' ministry with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

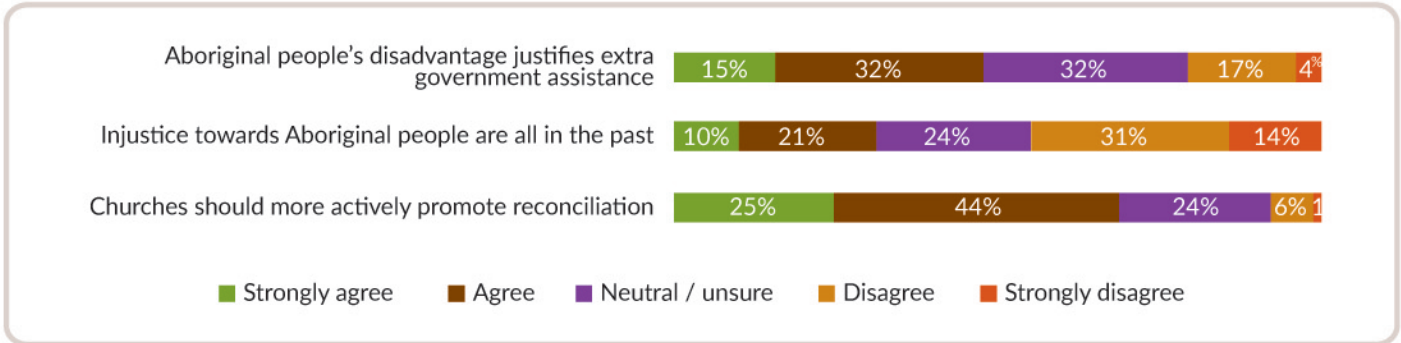


A minority of churches who participated in the 2011 NCLS reported ministries with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (23%). A further one in 10 were open to developing such ministries.

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n=2,354 churches).

## Church attender views on Aboriginal issues

Strong support exists among church attenders for churches to more actively promote reconciliation with Aboriginal people. Some seven in 10 attenders agreed with this proposition in 2011. Almost half of attenders believed that Aboriginal people's disadvantages justifies extra government assistance. Further, while three in ten agreed that injustices towards Aboriginal people are all in the past, nearly half (45%) disagreed with this statement. A quarter to a third of attenders expressed neutrality or uncertainty in response to these statements.

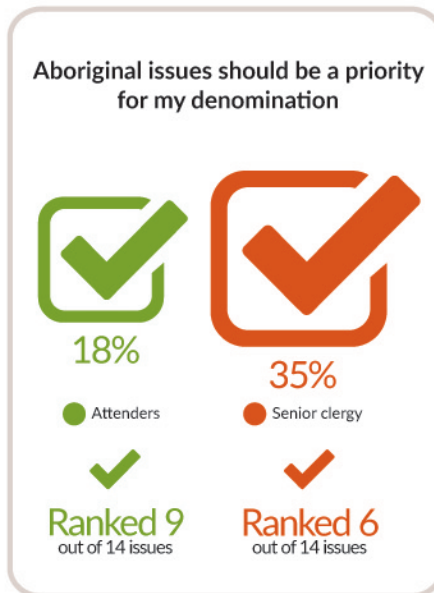


Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,381 to 1,407).

## Aboriginal issues a moderate priority

When asked to choose which four out of a list of 14 issues their church denomination should be most active on, attenders tended not to prioritise Aboriginal issues (18% chose this option). In contrast, senior local church clergy were significantly more likely to prioritise Aboriginal issues, with more than a third (35%) doing so in 2011.

- Aboriginal issues
- Asylum seekers/refugees
- Bioethical issues (e.g. abortion, euthanasia, cloning)
- Drugs/substance abuse
- Environmental issues
- Farming issues
- Opposition to same-sex 'marriage'
- Poverty and disadvantage in Australia
- Poverty overseas
- Prisons and the criminal justice system
- Standards in TV, film and literature
- Support for marriage and the family
- War and conflict overseas
- Workplace conditions and laws
- Another issue not listed here
- The church should not be involved in public policy



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O (n=1,301), 2011 NCLS Leader Survey A (n=469).

## Future research 2016 National Church Life Survey

The 2016 NCLS included a more extensive research agenda on Indigenous issues. Future research using data from the 2016 NCLS will include:

- Personal contact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Attitudes to Indigenous issues
- Attitudes to church engagement with Indigenous issues
- Actions concerning Indigenous issues
- Local church/parish ministries and relationships with Indigenous people
- Local church clergy frequency of preaching on justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

### The Wisdom Project

NCLS Research is also planning a five-year qualitative study to give voice to Aboriginal Christian leaders from a variety of church traditions. Leaders will be invited in individual and group interviews to share their stories of Aboriginal Christian leadership, including becoming a leader, learning and growing as a leader, and dealings with the institutional churches.



# Cultural Diversity & Church



## Australia: A multicultural, cohesive nation

Australia is one of the most multicultural countries in the world, with around 28% of people born overseas (in 2014). The diverse ethnic background of citizens also contributes to a rich religious diversity.

Australia is a relatively cohesive society, in comparison with other western nations. Community surveys since 2007 show a consistent pattern of:

- Positive identification with Australia;
- Agreement that there is economic opportunity and reward for hard work;
- Satisfaction with financial circumstances;
- Strong levels of support for multiculturalism.

Source: Mapping Social Cohesion Reports (2007 to 2016).

Top 10 countries of birth of Australians

Country of birth	% of Australian population	Median age
United Kingdom	5.2	54.4
New Zealand	2.6	39.7
China	1.9	35.5
India	1.7	33.2
Philippines	1.0	39.5
Vietnam	1.0	44.5
Italy	0.9	68.8
South Africa	0.8	40.9
Malaysia	0.7	38.6
Germany	0.5	62.9

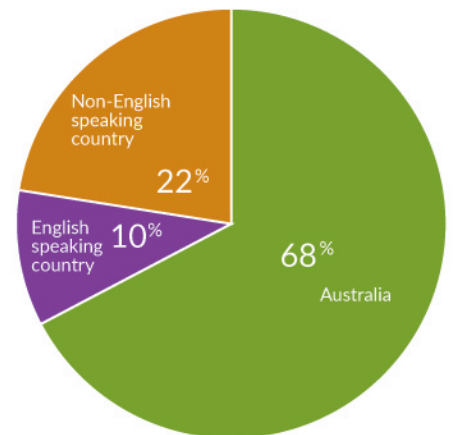
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

## An Australian church for all nations

NCLS Attender Survey forms are available in multiple languages. In 2016, these were: English, Arabic, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Tongan, Dinka (South Sudan), Italian, Chin (Burmese) and Karen (Burmese).

However, non-English-speaking language groups are under-represented in the NCLS.

Nevertheless, in the 2011 NCLS a third of Australian church attenders were born outside of Australia. One in ten (10%) were born in another English-speaking country and 22% were from a non-English-speaking country (vs 20% of all Australians).

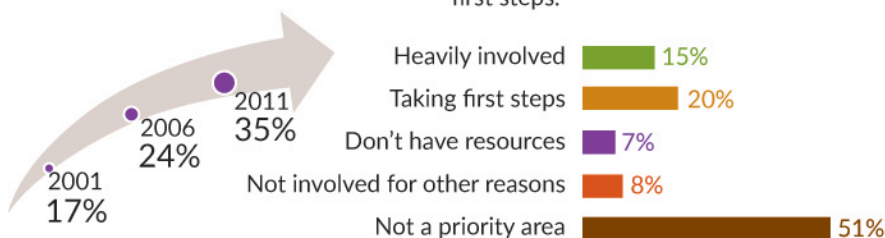


Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Survey dataset (n=227,063).

## Churches reach across language divide with migrant ministries

Over a third of churches are involved in migrant ministry and this has increased significantly since 2001.

Of the third of churches (35%) who reported that they were involved in migrant ministry in 2011, 15% were heavily involved and 20% were taking first steps.



Source: 2001, 2006 and 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n=2,347 churches).

\* Results may not be entirely comparable due to a wording change from 'ethnic ministry' in 2001 and 2006 to 'migrant ministry' in 2011.

More than half of all churches claimed ministry towards migrants was not a priority in their area.

Some 21% said they were involved in migrant support activities (e.g. English as a second language, refugee support).

## Relationships with churches from non-English speaking backgrounds

A fifth (21%) of churches in 2011 reported in their Operations Survey that they had a relationship with a non-English speaking congregation. Most commonly, this centred around sharing property (9%), but this was nearly matched by sharing ministry, whether through small groups (6%) or worship (2%).

## Church attenders hold positive attitudes about migration

Australian church attenders hold positive attitudes towards migrants. A large majority (73%) in 2011 agreed that Australian society is improved by immigrants.

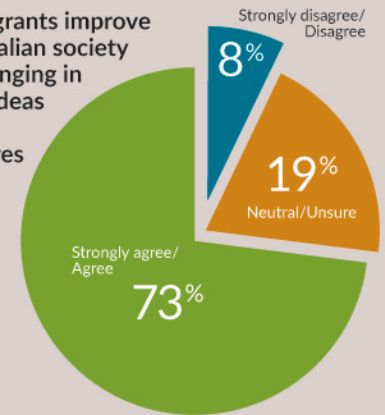
Preferences for approaches to migrant integration differed somewhat between attenders from different church contexts. Some 39% of people from multicultural congregations felt that immigrants

should adapt to Australian culture compared to 47% of those from monocultural Anglo congregations.

Similar proportions from both cultural contexts (approximately four in 10) felt that Australia should evolve to develop a common culture.

Finally, 20% of participants from multicultural congregations thought that immigrants should retain their own culture so that Australia will be diverse, compared to 14% of participants from monocultural congregations.

Immigrants improve Australian society by bringing in new ideas and cultures



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,346).

## Cultural context and church vitality

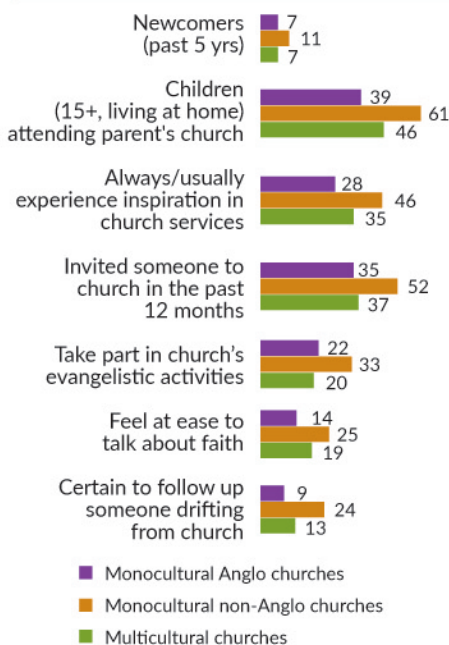
NCLS researchers defined three cultural models of church in terms of the country of birth/language background of attenders: 1) monocultural Anglo, 2) monocultural non-Anglo and 3) multicultural models. These three models were compared across the NCLS indicators of church vitality.

In the 2011 NCLS, monocultural non-Anglo churches performed particularly strongly in areas of worship, faith sharing and inclusion.

These churches also had higher levels of newcomers to church life and greater numbers of attenders' children aged 15+ who were still attending their parents' church and living at home.

Monocultural Anglo churches excelled in service to the community, but lagged multicultural churches in several other areas.

### Percentage % of attenders



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

## Migrant integration: an Asian case study

Around a third of Asian migrants to Australia self-identify as Christians, and many join churches where they meet fellow migrants and other Australians. Churches might thus be places that can foster the integration of Asian migrants into Australian society.

NCLS researchers examined the prevalence of bonding and bridging capital among Protestant attenders in the 2011 NCLS. Bonding refers to the relationships between people within the same social group, whereas bridging refers to relationships between people from different social groups.

First generation Asian migrants in Anglo congregations had lower bonding but higher bridging compared with those in multicultural or Asian congregations.

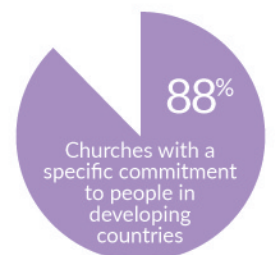
The results suggest that Asian migrants in Anglo churches may be less tightly bound to their congregation, but more likely to bridge beyond it, than are Asian migrants in other church settings.

## Strong support for people in developing countries

There is a long tradition of churches supporting the work of 'service' and 'proclamation' overseas.

Focusing on support in developing countries, some 88% of churches reported in their 2011 Operations Survey that their local church had a specific commitment to people in developing countries. Regular financial support was the most common (61% of all churches). The second highest form was a regular prayer commitment (52%) followed by personal relationships with individuals/groups (44%).

Approximately one third of churches (32%) indicated they had regular support for poverty and injustice campaigns.

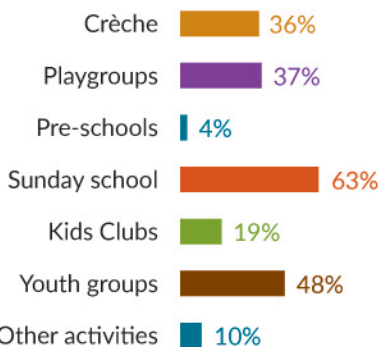


Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n=2,429 churches).



# Generations & Church

## Services for children and youth run by Australian churches



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n=2,409 churches).

## Sunday schools run at six in 10 churches

Australia has had Sunday schools for over 200 years. St Johns Church, Parramatta in Sydney, has the oldest continuously running Sunday school in Australia, first started in 1813. In 2011, Sunday schools were run by six out of 10 churches (63%).

Youth groups were offered by nearly half



of all churches (48%). They were largely aimed at those in high school years, and occurred at various times during the week or less frequently than weekly.

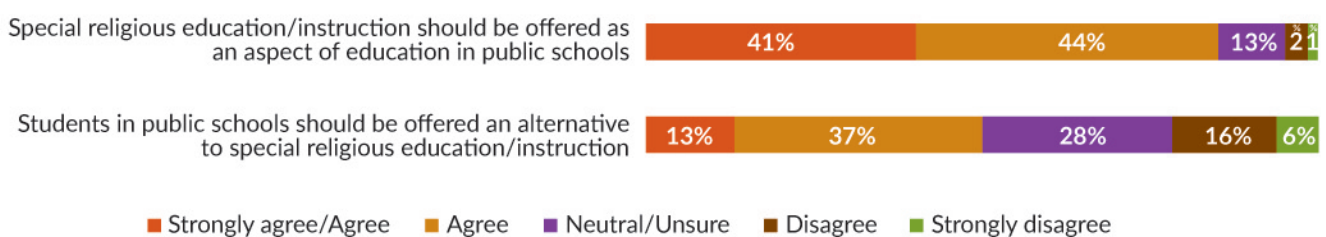
Some 36% of churches also provided a crèche, which was likely to run concurrently with church worship services.

Playgroups were relatively widespread, offered by 37% of churches.



## Strong support for religious education in schools

At the time of the 2011 NCLS, there was strong public debate about special religious education/instruction in schools and alternatives to it. More than eight in 10 attenders agreed that special religious education should be offered in public schools, and half felt that an alternative should be offered. Attenders were also asked their views about schools for children of a particular religion. Some 69% felt that any religious group should be able to have its own schools, while 9% felt that no religious group should, and 22% felt that some religious groups but not others should have their own schools.



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey R v2 (n=1,342 to 1,353).

## Parents' approach an important influence on child attendance

A research study using the 2011 NCLS Child Survey (surveys completed by children aged 8 to 14 years) assessed peer and parental influence on children's frequency of church attendance, attitude toward church and attitude toward Christianity.

The results indicate the power of parental example on frequency of church attendance. Not surprisingly, young churchgoers attend frequently when both parents attend as well.

Parental influence works differently on shaping attitudes toward church. Young churchgoers who have the opportunity to talk about God with their parents and who do not feel that their parents make them go to church hold the most positive attitudes. Young churchgoers respond to parental encouragement better than to parental pressure.

Although peers' influence within the church does not make much contribution to how often children attend church, it does contribute to shaping positive attitudes toward church.



## Children at church with positive feelings about religion are also happy with their lives.

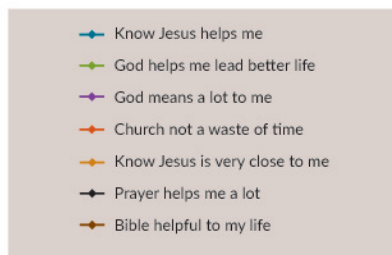
The connection between religious affect (positive emotional meaning of religion to an individual) and happiness has been demonstrated in various research studies of adults and older teenagers conducted overseas.

For the first time, a study examined the relationship between religious affect and happiness among younger children. The study used 2011 NCLS Child Survey data (8 to 14 year olds).

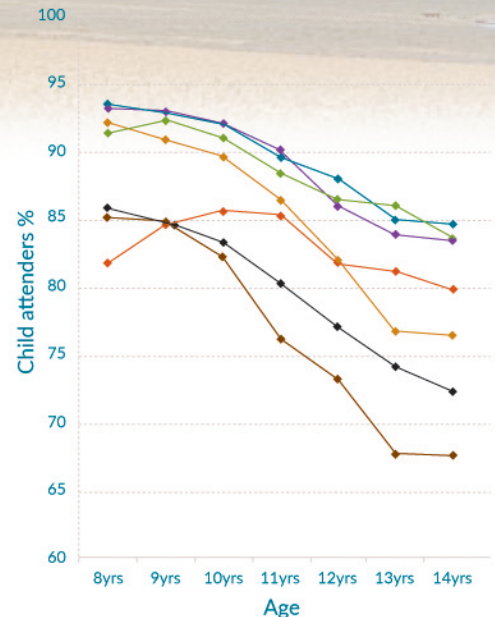
Children were invited to respond to seven items: I know that Jesus helps me; I think going to church is a waste of my time; God helps me to lead a better life; God means a lot to me; Prayer helps me a lot; I know that Jesus is very close to me; I think the Bible is helpful to my life.

## Positive views decline as children hit teen years

Between seven and nine out of 10 children aged 8 to 14 years who participated in the 2011 NCLS had positive views about Christianity and church. However, there was a decline with age.



Source: 2011 NCLS Child Attender Survey for 8 to 14 year olds (n=9,863). NB. The Child Attender Survey is an opt-in survey and is not necessarily representative of churchgoing children in Australia.



The children were also asked if they agreed that they were happy with school, themselves, their family and where they live.

As expected, there was a moderate positive relationship between feeling positive about religion and happiness.

## A generational drift away from church

In 2011, some 5% of church attenders aged 15 and over were teenagers. Teenagers were most common in Pentecostal churches, making up 10% of attenders.

Of attenders' children aged 14 or under 91% attended church. Some 85% attended their parents' church and 8% attended another church.

Considering the children of church attenders (aged 15 and over), 38% attended church: 16% attended their parents' church and 23% attended elsewhere.

These results indicate a large generational drift away from the churches.

## Satisfaction with youth and young adults ministries lower than with those for children

Church attenders were asked in the 2011 NCLS about their satisfaction with activities that their church offered for young people.

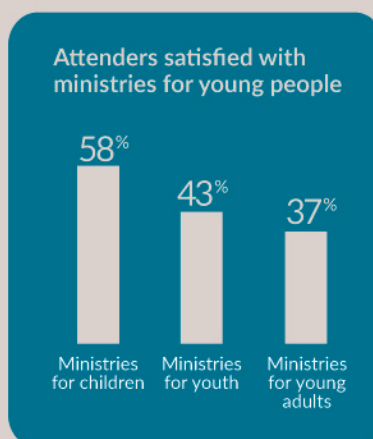
Whereas a majority of attenders were satisfied with what was offered for children, satisfaction with what was offered for youth (aged 12 to 18 years) declined to less than half, and decreased further in relation to ministries for young adults (aged 19 to 25) with less than four in 10 attenders satisfied.

Around six in 10 young attenders (aged 15 to 25 years) were satisfied with what was offered for their age group.

Of course, as a church-based survey, the

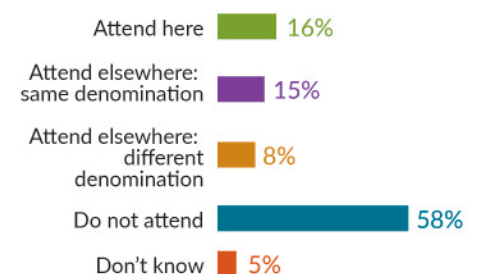
NCLS is only able to hear the views of young people who are present at church. Those who have drifted away are not able to have a voice in the survey.

These results suggest that, overall, there are opportunities to improve ministries for young people.



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Survey (n=227,063).

## Church attendance of attenders' children (aged 15+)

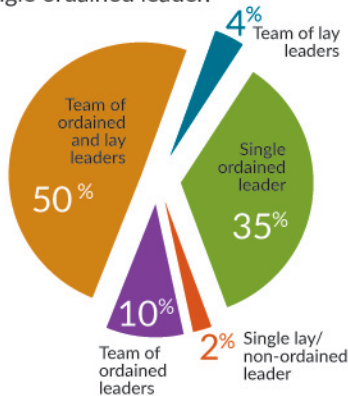


Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Survey (n=227,063). All child attendance options could be selected, so percentages may not add to 100%.

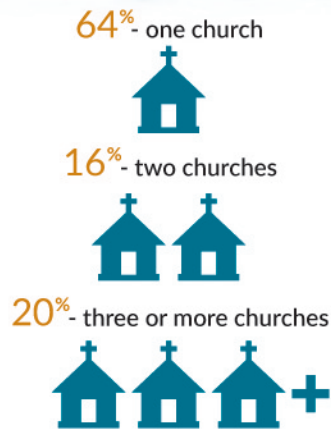
# Leadership in Local Churches

## Local church leadership structures

Half of local churches (50%) reported that they had a team of ordained and lay leaders, and just over a third (35%) had a single ordained leader.



## How many churches\* are leaders responsible for?



\* 'Church' = single local congregation for Protestant and parish for Catholic.

## Staffing in local churches: fewer clergy, more other staff

'Staff' = a person working one or more days per week at a local church

In 2011 around 30% of all staff in local Protestant churches were senior ministers/pastors/priests. In Catholic parishes 18% of staff were Parish Priest/Priest Administrators and 10% were Assistant Priests.

In Protestant churches, the proportion of senior clergy in the staff team decreased from 35% of staff in 2006 and 41% in 2001. There was a slight increase

in other types of staffing, such as administrators, accountants and children's workers. The proportions of Protestant church staff who were lay people (60%), women (46%), and over 60 years old (24%) also increased between 2001 and 2011. Part-time leaders also became more common, with 61% of staff members holding a part-time position in 2011.

The Catholic staff profile has been more stable over time.

Table: Profile of staffing in churches (as percentage of all staff)

Protestant churches	%	Catholic parishes	%
Senior Minister/Pastor/Priest	30	Parish Priest/Priest Administrator	18
Associate Minister/Pastor/Priest	15	Non-ordained Pastoral Administrator	5
Administrator/Office Support	15	Assistant Priest	10
Accountant/Business Manager	6	Deacon	3
Children's Worker	7	Pastoral Associate (employed)	10
Youth Worker/Minister	7	Parish Secretary/Office Support	17
Counsellor/Social Worker	2	Accountant or Business Manager	8
Worship/Music Coordinator	8	Children's Sacrament Coordinator/RE Coordinator (parish, not school)	10
Ethnic or Cross-cultural Worker	1	Youth Minister/Youth Worker	4
School Religious Education Coordinator	2	Counsellor/Social Worker	1
Outreach Coordinator/Evangelist	1	Liturgy/Music Coordinator	10
Other	6	Ethnic or Cross-cultural Worker	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	Other	2
		<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n=2,117 churches, detailing 7,731 staff)

## About senior clergy

'Senior clergy' = ministers, pastors or priests who are the primary or senior leader of a congregation/parish, or who have equal standing in the ministry team

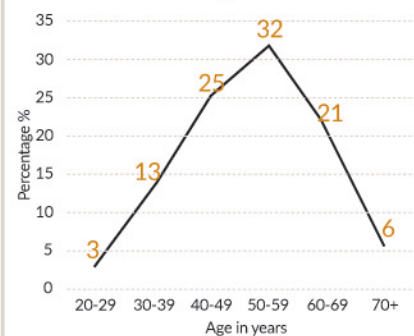
### Average years in...

- Current congregation/parish 6
- Ordained/accredited ministry 18

### Gender



### Age



### Country of birth

13% born in a non-English-speaking country



### Education

77% university qualified  
11% currently studying



Highest theological qualification	%
No formal qualification	2
Ongoing training on the job	7
A lay preacher's or other relevant certificate	1
Bible college qualification	8
Diploma in theology/ministry	15
Degree in theology/ministry	36
Postgraduate diploma or degree	27
Doctorate	4

### Occupation

Other occupation apart from ministry

None	45
Home/family duties	34
Other job	29
Also studying	11



Source: 2011 NCLS Leaders Survey, senior clergy (n=1,906).



## A 20 year study of effective and sustainable leadership

NCLS Research has studied leadership over 20 years, among thousands of church leaders in denominations across Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and the USA.

Our research affirms that creating a culture of empowering leadership, where attenders can contribute their gifts and skills, is key to effective church leadership.

Sustainability in ministry is also a vital area that contributes to effective leadership as well as to the wellbeing of leaders themselves.

## Signs of an equipping local church leadership culture



**42%** Australian church attenders with a leadership or ministry role

Australian church attenders agreed that:



**70%** Leaders here encourage me to find and use my gifts and skills here



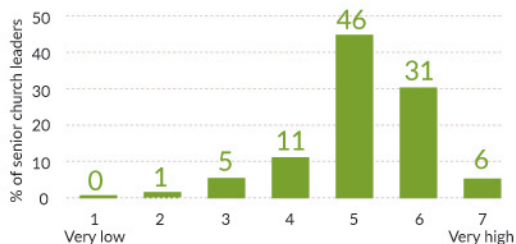
**68%** Leaders take into account ideas of people here



**62%** Leaders here inspire me to action

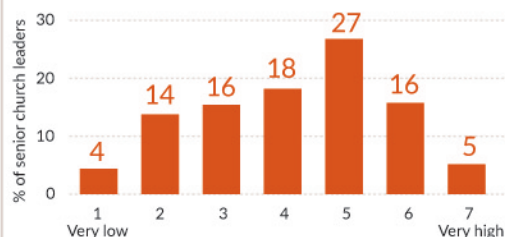
Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Survey (n= 227,063).

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



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

### How stressed do you feel in your present role here over the past few months?



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



## Most local church leaders are thriving

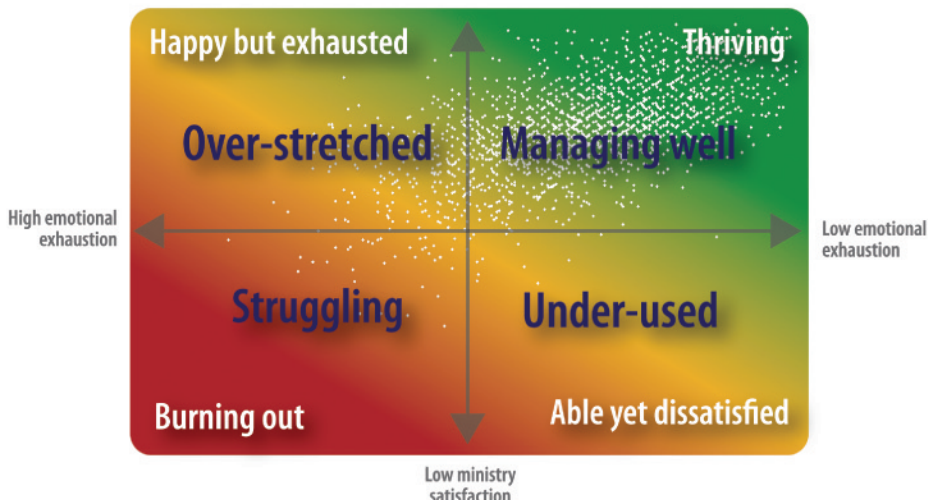
Australian local church leaders completed scales of survey questions measuring their ministry satisfaction and emotional exhaustion.

This Sustainability Map shows a distribution of over 2000 senior church leaders. Most ministers are in the 'thriving' domain. There are many however in the 'happy but exhausted' domain, a small number are 'able yet dissatisfied', and a concerning number are struggling and at risk of 'burning out'.

Of course, this map only shows local church leaders who have not left ministry.

Each dot on the Sustainability Map represents one senior local church minister/pastor/priest.

High ministry satisfaction



Source: Scatterplot of Ministry Satisfaction Scale by Emotional Exhaustion Scale (unadjusted), Senior ministers, 2011 NCLS Leader Survey (n=2,266).

NCLS Research aims to help churches to build:

- Vitality and health in mission and ministry
- Effectiveness and sustainability in leadership
- Stronger connections with local communities



## About National Church Life Surveys

- Largest, longest-running survey of its kind in the world: 25 years—1991 to 2016
- Nationwide ecumenical venture
- The largest nationwide survey after the ABS National Census
- Twenty five years old: first took place in 1991
- Happens every five years at the same time as the National Census
- Around 3,000 local churches and 260,000+ individuals from 23 denominations took part in 2011.
- Around 6,000 leaders took part in 2011.
- In eight languages in 2011: English, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Tongan, Italian, Arabic and Dinka (Sudanese).

## About NCLS Research

NCLS Research was established in the early 1990s in collaboration with multiple church mission agencies as a means of enabling churches to connect with the wider community. Its mission is to use credible research in order to assist church communities to identify their role and place in society. Research focuses on issues such as Australian spirituality, church health, effective and sustainable leadership, and the connections between church and community.

NCLS Research also conducts research in a range of areas, often in partnership with other researchers and institutions. In addition to conducting commissioned research for denominations and other groups, research programs include:

1. Leadership and organisational effectiveness in Australian local churches and denominations.
2. Mapping the intersection between church and community.
3. Psychology of religion and positive psychology in church life.
4. Who goes to church and tracking trends in church life over time.
5. Cultures and generations.

## National Church Life Surveys

The National Church Life Survey is a research project that began in 1991 and has continued to date with the latest survey in 2016. It is an outstanding example of co-operation across denominations and traditions.

NCLS survey forms are provided for adult church attenders (aged 15+) and child church attenders (aged 8 to 14), and local church leaders.

At the conclusion of each National Church Life Survey, the NCLS Research team provides results to each of the thousands of local churches about their own church vitality, to local church leaders about patterns of sustainable leadership and to denominational leaders about the state of church life in their sphere of influence.

National results are weighted to adjust for variations in survey participation levels across denominations and regions.



NCLS Research is supported by four main sponsoring agencies:

- Anglicare (Sydney),
- Uniting Church (NSW & the ACT),
- Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and
- Australian Catholic University.

Work is also supported by partnerships, other sponsors and networks of local, regional and national church representatives.



NCLS Research has conducted a number of surveys of the wider Australian community over the years, often in partnership with others.

The most recent Australian Community Survey (ACS) was an online survey conducted by NCLS Research in early December 2016, with a sample drawn from a large online research panel.

Quotas were set for age, gender and geographic location.

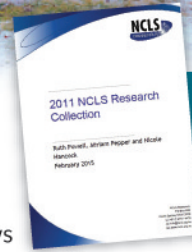
Results are weighted to reflect the demographic profile of the Australian population aged 18+ on age, gender and education.

The final dataset was 1,258 Australians that are statistically representative of the whole Australian population.

Error guide: The maximum margin of error on a random sample of 1,258 at a 95% level of confidence is 2.8%. That is, assuming a simple random sample, there is a 95% chance that a sample result falls within 2.8% either side of the true result for the Australian population.

For those who wish to follow up more detail, this list of references presents all published sources that were drawn upon to produce this magazine. A collection of all published results from the 2011 NCLS is also available as a free download.

# References



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2011 NCLS Research Collection

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## Partners represent a rich diversity

Since 1991, NCLS Research has been built on a strong history of partnership between denominations. Thousands of churches across 20 plus denominations represent a social, theological, cultural and geographic diversity of Australian churches. The collaboration of such a large variety of participants is testimony to the vision and leadership of church leaders.

## 23+ Participating Churches

Churches from these denominations took part in the 2011 NCLS and are represented in the results inside.

Anglican  
Apostolic  
Australian Christian Churches  
Baptist  
Brethren  
Catholic  
Christian & Missionary Alliance  
C3 Churches  
COC Australia  
Congregational  
CRC Churches International  
Christian Reformed Churches  
Church of the Nazarene  
Churches of Christ  
Foursquare Gospel  
Grace Communion  
Independent churches  
IPHC  
Lutheran  
Presbyterian  
Salvation Army  
Seventh-day Adventist  
Uniting Church  
Vineyard Churches



The Australian National Church Life Survey is an extraordinary joint endeavour across hundreds of thousands of church attenders and leaders. It is the foundation for over 25 years of high-quality research on a diversity of topics, including church health, the structure, leadership and governance of churches, personal well-being, religious faith and practice, attitudes and behaviours related to issues of social and political importance, civic contributions of individuals and churches and more.

This magazine is a sampler of some of the research from the 2011 NCLS (over 100 publications to date) plus views from all Australians about spirituality.



### Some highlights include:

#### Spirituality & Wellbeing in the Australian community and churches:

A majority of Australians have had a mystical experience, know someone who has, or believe it can happen

#### Mapping the Local Church Landscape:

Australian churches have a strong presence outside the major cities

#### Who Goes to Church:

There are strong demographic differences between church attenders and the wider community

#### Church & Community

**Connections:** A majority of church attenders support advocacy from the churches on public policy issues

**Healthy Churches:** Two thirds of attenders agree their local church is always ready to try something new

#### Australia's First Peoples & Church:

Indigenous attenders report positive experiences of church

#### Cultural Diversity & Church:

Churches help migrants to build bridges into Australian society

#### Generations & Church:

Children at church with positive feelings about Christianity are also happy with their lives

#### Leadership in Local

**Churches:** Most local church leaders are managing well or thriving