

## Church attender's views about other religions

### Living in multi-religious Australia

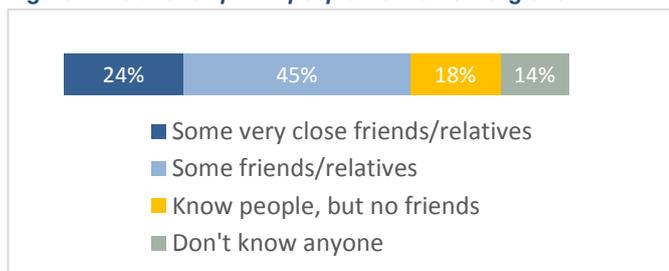
Slightly more than half the Australian population professes to be Christian, and with exception to those living in remote areas, it is unlikely that one has never met someone of a different or no religion. Whilst many see diversity as richness, for others it is a source of uncertainty or fear. So, what are church attenders' views about people of other religions?

### Overall findings

In the 2016 National Church Life Survey, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant attenders were asked a series of questions on their relationship to, and views on people of other faiths.

In response to the question **“Which of the following described your relationship with people from religions other than Christianity (e.g. Muslims, Buddhists)?”**, a large majority of attenders (86%) knew someone who prescribed to a religion other than Christianity, more than two-thirds had friends or relatives, and nearly a quarter had close friends or relatives who were non-Christians (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Relationship with people from other religions



Source: 2016 NCLS Attender Sample Survey G (n=1,302).

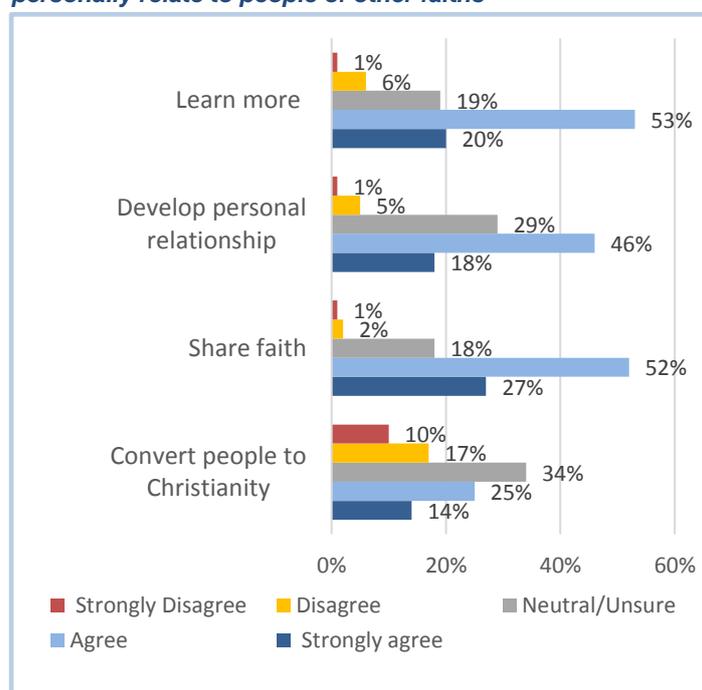
Attenders were also asked the extent to which they agreed/disagreed with the following statements:

**I should...**

- **learn more about people from other religions**
- **develop personal relationships with people from other religions**
- **share my faith with people from other religions**
- **convert people from other religions to Christianity**

Most attenders believed that they should personally learn more about people from other religions, develop relationships with the latter and share their own faith with them. More than half the attenders however, were either neutral or disagreed that they should convert people of other faiths to Christianity (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Views on how attenders believe they should personally relate to people of other faiths



Source: 2016 NCLS Attender Sample Survey G (n=1,261-1,278)

### Demographic differences in views

Differences in attitudes were evident when comparing various demographic groups of attenders.

The 15-29-year-old cohort had the strongest belief that personal action was necessary. While the majority across all age groups agreed that they should learn more about people from other faiths, the largest proportion (80%) was found with the 15-29-year-olds. The youngest cohort were also most likely to agree that they should share their faith, and twice as likely (58%) as 70+ year-olds (28%) to agree that they should convert people of other faiths to Christianity. The 30-49-year-old cohort were also quite likely to agree that they

should take personal action and most likely to develop personal relationships with people of other faiths (72%).

**Table 2: Views of attenders by demographics\***

	Learn more	Develop personal relationships	Share faith	Convert people to Christianity
<b>Percentage</b>				
<b>By age</b>				
15-29yrs	80	69	89	58
30-49yrs	76	72	84	47
50-69yrs	75	65	77	38
70+yrs	66	53	73	28
<b>Gender</b>				
Female	75	66	82	38
Male	71	60	74	41
<b>Education</b>				
School	63	60	76	38
Trade cert/diploma	73	75	82	38
Degree	83	64	79	39

\*Percentages depict the proportion of attenders who either agreed or strongly agreed to four statements

Source: 2016 NCLS Attender Sample Survey G (n=1,261-1,278)

Apart from women being more likely to agree that they should share their faith (82% compared to 74% of men), there was little difference in views between the genders.

Degree holders were most likely to agree that they should learn more about people of other religions (83%), whilst those with a highest level of education being a trade certificate/diploma or associate certificate/diploma holders were most likely to agree that they should develop personal relationships (75%) and share faith with people of other religions (82%).

### Church life

Differences in views were also evident between attenders of denominations and other church/faith related aspects. Pentecostal and other Protestants were most likely to believe that personal action was necessary and were close to three times as likely (61%) as Catholics (22%) to agree that they should convert people of other religions to Christianity.

Close to half (49%) of those for whom God was an important part of their life believed that they should convert people of other faiths to Christianity, compared

to attenders for whom God was only fairly or not at all important.

**Table 3: Views of attenders by denomination and other church/faith related factors**

	Learn more	Develop personal relationship	Share faith	Convert people to Christianity
<b>Percentage</b>				
<b>Denomination</b>				
Catholic	69	58	68	22
Mainstream Protestant	76	66	81	46
Pentecostal	76	70	96	61
Other Protestant	78	77	93	61
<b>Leadership Role</b>				
No	68	57	73	34
Yes	82	75	87	46
<b>Importance of God</b>				
Fairly/not important	71	58	53	11
Almost most important	75	65	74	33
Most important	73	65	87	49

Source: 2016 NCLS Attender Sample Survey G (n=1,261-1,278)

Attenders in a ministry or leadership role at their local church were more likely (82%) to agree that they should learn more about people from other religions compared to those who did not have a role (68%).

### Summary

Attitudes of attenders towards people of other religions vary between group to group but remain positive overall. Most agree that they should personally learn more about people of other religions, develop personal relationships and share their faith with the latter. Differences in what attenders believe they should personally do however, can be seen between age groups and denominations.

### Data sources

Powell, R., Pepper, M., Hancock, N., & Sterland, S. (2016) [computer file] 2016 NCLS Attender Sample Survey G. Sydney: NCLS Research.

### Citation

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