

Churches with a Faith Sharing Culture

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What are the characteristics of churches that have a culture of faith sharing? This fact sheet provides a quick snapshot of some keys National Church Life Survey have identified in churches effectively 'going and making disciples of all nations' (Matthew 28:19, 20).

Inviting Culture

Churches with a strong 'culture of inviting' share these factors:

- **Local church mission activities are present**
Creating an outward focus, contexts for faith sharing and a culture of evangelism amongst attenders is increased through activities such as evangelistic church services,

events, or Bible studies, door-knocking, outdoor evangelism, or drop-in centres. Those involved are more likely to have invited someone to church in the past year and to be at ease sharing their faith (*Mission under the Microscope* p.48).

- **Attenders feel empowered and mobilised**
Where attenders feel that their own gifts are recognised and that their contribution is valued, higher levels of sharing faith and inviting to church are likely to exist (see *Enriching Church Life*, p.48). Churches also have higher levels of sharing and inviting when training specifically for outreach and evangelism is provided.

- **Churches are inclusive and enriching:**
Creating an inclusive, welcoming environment for newcomers ensures those reached have a positive first experience on arrival, and a warm and consistent welcome as they are integrated over time. This integration can be facilitated by visits, hospitality, programs and groups, an enriching sense of community and nurturing worship. In churches with strong inclusion, attenders are more likely to share their faith and invite others (*Enriching Church Life*, p.51).

Table 1: Evangelistic Activities taking place in Australian Churches

In the past 12 months, did this congregation/parish conduct any of the following outreach or evangelistic activities?

	All NCLS in 2006 %
Evangelistic church services or events (eg guest services, crusades)	
Monthly or more often	14
Occasionally	45
Never	41
Evangelistic Bible studies (eg Christianity Explained, Alpha)	
Monthly or more often	18
Occasionally	32
Never	50
Street/shopping centre evangelism, door-knocking, or drop-in centres	
Monthly or more often	13
Occasionally	21
Never	66
Other visiting (eg prisons, hospitals, fringe attenders)	
Monthly or more often	40
Occasionally	29
Never	31
Mission teams to Australia or overseas	
Monthly or more often	2
Occasionally	24
Never	73
Other evangelistic or outreach activities not mentioned above	
Monthly or more often	16
Occasionally	31
Never	53
Churches indicated at least one of the above	
Monthly or more often	57
Occasionally	32
Never	11

Source: NCLS Operations Survey. Based on Operations Surveys responses from the following number of locations:

4,400

Local Evangelistic Activities

Across Australia 14% of churches in 2006 indicated they put on 'Evangelistic church services or events' monthly or more often, and another 45% indicated they had done so occasionally over the previous year. The strongest denominations in this regard were the Pentecostals, with Christian City Churches the highest, indicating 46% monthly or more often and 54% occasionally.

The denomination with the highest percentage of churches practicing at least one form of

outreach was the Salvation Army, with 79% of churches indicating at least one of the outreach strategies listed was practised monthly or more often. While this denomination's proportion of churches conducting evangelistic services and Bible studies was about average, such a high figure was due to the high proportion of churches conducting programs related to street evangelism, drop-in centres, or visiting.

Attendees and Evangelism

Attendees were asked about their involvement in any activities of their congregation which reach out to the wider community. In Australia 18% of attendees were involved regularly in such outreach or evangelistic activities in 2006 compared to 14% in 2001, (see Figure 1).

Levels of involvement by denomination are highest among Pentecostals (37%), and Baptists (29%), and lowest among Lutherans (16%) and Catholics (7%). Previous research has suggested that family education as well as an emphasis on the Catholic school system contributes to Catholic parishes having fewer formal evangelistic programs than their Protestant counterparts (*Taking Stock*, p.66).

Inclusion: an important part of the process

One factor that will naturally affect people's willingness to invite is whether they think their friends will be treated well. Churches with higher levels of sense of belonging have higher inviting levels (*Enriching Church Life*, p.48); the closeness of the group no doubt helps confidence in the church as a place where friends will be welcomed. **A culture of inclusion is as important as a culture of inviting if new people are to stay**, and eventually consider themselves belonging to the church. Churches that provide

Table 2: Percentage of local churches with planned procedures designed to help integrate new people. All NCLS in 2006 %

Follow-up visits by clergy or other people from church	67
People extend hospitality and invite them for meals	50
Group or program for new Christians or new members	20
Invitation to join a small group, fellowship or similar	57
Invitation to take up a task in the life of the church	43
Other	3
At least one of the above	86

Source: NCLS Operations Survey. Based on Operations Surveys responses from the following number of locations: 4,400

Table 3: Percentage of local churches providing training in outreach/evangelism in the previous 2 years (by denomination).

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

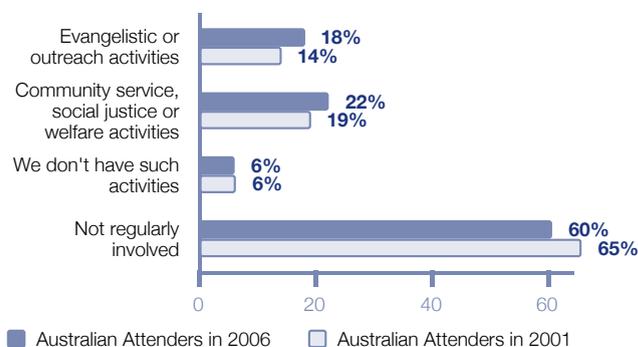
Source: NCLS 2006 Operations Survey, based on responses from 4,400 congregations in Australia.

ways to intentionally include new people have significantly more success in retaining them (*Enriching Church Life*, p.28).

Creating a culture of evangelism and an outward focus as a church is enriched through local church mission activities being present, mobilising attendees to share their faith and creating an inclusive and enriching environment where newcomers are well integrated. Programs and training also have an important place, not only with direct evangelistic value, but because of the confidence in church that they create among in church attendees.

Figure 1: Church attendee involvement in congregational outreach activities

I regularly take part in activities of this congregation:



Source: 2006 NCLS Attendees Survey, based on 300,388 responses in 2006 and 367,531 responses in 2001.

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References

This fact sheet is based on *Occasional Paper 13: Faith-sharing activities by Australian Churches*. For references and further information on data sources, view at www.ncls.org.au in the Research section.