

## Justice – A Christian Role in Society

### Working for change

The notion of a just society, where all have adequate access to resources, opportunity and a say in decisions that affect their lives, is not only a basic tenet of modern Western democracies, but a notion that few Christians would disagree that the Gospels call for. The question of how Christians should engage in this work, is one which has long been debated and elicits a much wider variety of responses.

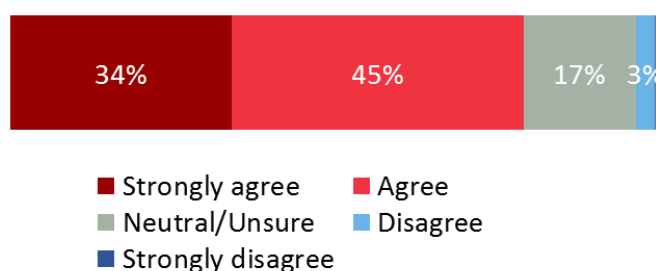
In 2016, the National Church Life Survey asked a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant attenders the following question:

**“Do you agree or disagree: ‘Christians should work to change the structures of society in order to create a more just society?’”**

### Overall findings

A large majority of attenders (80%) agreed with the statement (see Figure 1), including 34% who strongly agreed. A small number (17%) were neutral or unsure, with only 3% disagreeing. The views of the attenders suggest that there is underlying support within the Christian community for active attempts to work for change that establishes a more just society.

**Figure 1: Christians should work to create a more just society - overview**



Source: 2016 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P (n=1,261).

### Demographic differences in view

Whilst most church attenders agreed that Christians should work to change structures, views differed to some extent by demographics (shown in Table 1).

**Table 1: Just society by demographics**

	SA*	A	N	DA	SA
<b>Percentage</b>					
<b>Gender</b>					
Female	33	44	20	3	0
Male	37	46	14	3	0
<b>Age (years)</b>					
15-29	27	36	31	6	0
30-49	36	43	19	2	0
50-69	37	44	15	3	0
70+	34	52	12	2	0
<b>Education</b>					
School	27	48	24	1	0
Trade cert/diploma	37	47	13	3	0
Degree	39	41	15	5	0
<b>Country of birth</b>					
Australia	34	45	18	3	0
Other English-spkg	30	40	23	6	0
Non-English-spkg	36	49	12	3	0

\* SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral/Unsure, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

Source: 2016 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P (n=1,241-1,252)

Men were a little more likely than women to agree or strongly agree that Christians should work to change the structures of society to make it more just (83% and 77% respectively). Stronger differences can be seen between age groups where 86% of 70+ year-olds agreed or strongly agreed that Christians should work towards a more just society, whereas this was only seen with 63% of those aged 15-29 years old. Some 31% of this latter group were neutral or unsure.

When it came to country of birth, attenders born in non-English speaking countries were the most likely group to agree/strongly agree (85%) and the least likely to be neutral/unsure (12%). In comparison, 70% of attenders born in other English-speaking countries other than Australia agreed/strongly agreed and 23% were unsure.

Some 75% of those whose highest level of education was school, 85% of those with a trade qualification and 80% of degree holders either agreed or strongly agreed that Christians should work towards a more just society. Some 24% of school leavers were neutral/unsure, compared with 13% of attenders with a trade education and 15% of those with a degree.

## Church life

The overall support for Christians working for a more just society differed between denominations and other faith-related variables such as the importance of God in attenders' lives as well as attenders' faith-related activities (see Table 2).

Most attenders across the various denominations agreed that Christians should work to change the structures of society in order to create a more just society. Pentecostals had the highest percentage of attenders strongly agreeing (47%), however there was wider overall support from the Mainstream and Other Protestant cohorts (79% and 83%, compared to 73% of Pentecostals).

**Table 2: Just society by denomination, importance of God and private devotion**

	SA*	A	N	DA	SA
	Percentage				
<b>Denomination</b>					
Catholic	33	48	16	3	0
Mainstream	28	51	18	3	0
Pentecostal	47	26	22	5	0
Other Protestant	35	49	15	1	1
<b>Importance of God</b>					
Fairly/not important	20	51	27	3	0
Almost most	30	49	17	3	0
Most important	41	42	13	3	0
<b>Private Devotion</b>					
Hardly ever/never	21	44	33	3	0
Occasionally	24	52	22	2	0
Once/few times a week	35	42	17	5	0
Everyday/most days	40	45	13	2	0

\* SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral/Unsure, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

Source: 2016 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P (n=1,227-1,261).

About seven in 10 (71%) of those for whom God had little or no importance believed Christians have the responsibility to work to change the structures of society, whilst 84% of those for whom God was the most important reality believed this to be so.

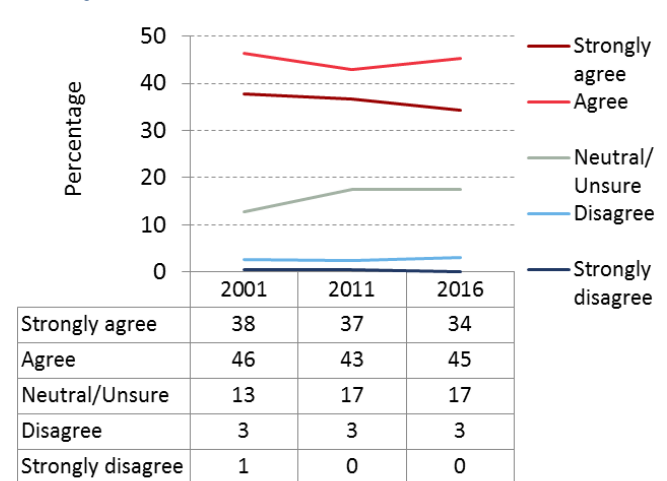
Differences in view were also evident between various groups depending on their faith-based activities. Some 65% of those who did not or hardly engaged in private devotion (e.g. prayer, meditation, Bible reading alone) agreed or strongly agreed in contrast to 85% of those who undertook private devotion most days or every day.

## Previous surveys

A sample of church attenders was also asked if they agreed that Christians should work to change the

structures of society in order to create a more just society in the 2011 and 2001 National Church Life Surveys. As can be seen in Figure 2 below, there is little difference between the results of the three surveys.

**Figure 2: Christians should work to create a more just society, 2001, 2011 and 2016**



Source: 2001 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N (n=2,139), 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,430), and 2016 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P (n=1,261).

## Summary

Whilst the majority of attenders agreed that Christians should work to change the structure of society to create a more just society, some differences in views across the different age groups and levels of education were evident. Differences were also evident from the attender's denomination, importance of God and the level of private devotion undertaken.

## Data sources

Castle, K., (2001) [computer file], 2001 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N. Sydney: NCLS Research.

Powell, R., (2014) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2. Sydney: NCLS Research.

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

## Citation

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