

ConnectionsLife

NCLS
research

NCLS Research Newsletter Issue 6 May 2005

New
Survey

Welcome to the NCLS Research Newsletter.

- **New survey.** We are thrilled to announce that the National Church Life Survey 2006 has been confirmed
- **New research.** Meet the NCLS team and find out about the many research projects they have been working on both within and beyond churches
- **New initiatives.** Doing more than conducting surveys for the churches, NCLS Research launches Church Search, an internet service to help people find churches. We also commence a project seeking new initiatives and fresh expressions of church.

A letter from NCLS Director



As we move toward NCLS 2006, I find myself often thinking about the thousands of churches across Australia involved in mission in so many ways. Some large, some small. Each with your own story. I think about how we as a team can best assist you in the ministry of those places.

Faster and easier to use

Our goal is to return the survey results in a much shorter time frame. Church leaders are busy people, and we aim to make our material more accessible. We hope that initiatives will flow directly from taking part in the survey.

Supporting churches in context

We continue to believe that churches within context are best at understanding the issues you confront. However we are keen to help you develop visions for ministry that flow out of the natural energy of churches where you are located.

New initiatives

NCLS Research doesn't want to just repeat itself. As we launch Church Search, we hope that you find it a useful service. I also find cause for hope in new initiatives occurring in rural and urban locations, new and old churches. I look forward to what we can contribute through our new project seeking fresh expressions of church (see back page).

An invitation to take part

Finally, I want to encourage churches to participate the National Church Life Survey 2006, as there is no more cost effective way for a church to evaluate ministry that hears the voice of the attenders.

Over the coming months we will seek to let church leadership know some of the initiatives that we have for 2006. The whole team is very excited in what we believe will be the best survey ever.

Keith Castle
Director, NCLS Research

National Church Life Survey 2006 is happening

During the second half of 2006, church attenders across Australia will once again take part in the National Church Life Survey (NCLS). It is a symbol of churches co-operating to strive for a vital future.

Some 20 denominations have collaborated in past National Church Life Surveys in 1991, 1996 and 2001. It is expected that around 850 000 attenders in around 10 000 congregations will be invited to take part in the 2006 survey covering attitudes, beliefs and practices.

The survey model, pioneered by the Australian NCLS team, has been replicated in New Zealand, England, and the USA. The project is unprecedented in its size and scope.

Your church is invited to participate in NCLS 2006!

NCLS 2006: Integrated planning



If you think of the National Church Life Survey as a mirror to glance at every five years, then we invite you to think again. NCLS 2006 will be offered to churches as part of an integrated and ongoing planning resource.

Churches in control

Healthy churches have a clear and owned vision for the future. "We hope that NCLS 2006 will be used as a stimulus for intentional planning" says Bryan Cussen, who works with others in the NCLS team to develop planning resources.

"We want churches to know that they will be in control of their whole planning cycle". Churches can fit their NCLS 2006 results into their ongoing plans or start a new process. They can update their results at any time that suits them.

"We are currently developing a planning process to be offered to churches as part of NCLS 2006 resources," says Bryan. "It will need to be useable by an individual, such as the local leader, by the congregational leadership team, or by the whole congregation."

NCLS offers ongoing support

Other kinds of support will also be available to help congregations make the most of the results from NCLS2006. Such support will include website tips and articles, an easy-read book about the process, access to consultants - and more. "We hope that any support we offer will be in close co-operation with staff of the various denominations" says Bryan.

Sponsors to back NCLS 2006

The current major sponsors of NCLS Research have agreed to support the National Church Life Survey (NCLS) in 2006.

"This is the only tool of its kind where every church attender and leader is given a voice".

Tina Rendell, Executive Director of the Uniting Church Board of Mission (NSW)

"The tools and services offered can help churches reflect and plan for the future. They are available to assist churches plan for mission whenever they are required."

Peter Kell, Executive Director of ANGLICARE (Diocese of Sydney)

"The NCLS has given us a 'reality check' for our hunches. We have been provided a reliable, authoritative map of a changing landscape over time".

Rev Brian Lucas, General Secretary of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.



When you ring NCLS you will usually speak with Rachel Barr as the first point of contact. She is responsible for much of the day-to-day administration and liaison for the NCLS team.

Rachel says, "It's exciting to be working with a team who are committed to serving the Australian church in all its forms. I look forward to answering any queries or directing you to appropriate resources as you include NCLS in your thinking about ministry."



New Research

NCLS Research conducts research in five areas: who goes to church, healthy churches, leadership, spirituality and wider community.



Dr Peter Kaldor was director of NCLS Research for many years. Now his projects include primary research in the areas of spirituality and leadership.

Spirituality Research

"I am excited about our work on spirituality because it shows us both the extent of searching among Australians today and the important contribution that spirituality makes to our lives and communities" comments Peter.

The majority of Australians have a spiritual dimension to their lives. "Our research suggests that those who are engaging their spiritual sides are more likely to have a strong sense of purpose in their lives, to be growing more as people, to be more optimistic, with higher self esteem, and have greater satisfaction with their relationships".

"Significantly, they are also more likely to be showing concern for others in daily life, giving to charities and putting time into voluntary community organisations. They are also more likely to value justice and concern for the environment. They are less likely to place a high value on leading an exciting life or on success and material possessions," Peter adds. "There is an important story to tell here, and we are continuing to work on it".

(See Order Form for the Occasional Paper on spirituality)

Leadership Research

One of the major strands for NCLS 2006 is to provide specific resources to leaders. Peter Kaldor says, "All our past research suggests that a core quality of effective congregations is leadership that assists attenders to grow a vision for their future and empowers them to make use of their gifts and skills within the congregation."

It is intended that following the 2006 NCLS there will be an evaluation resource for leaders. It will help them assess the effectiveness of their leadership, based on extensive international research.

Leaders will also be given feedback as to the sustainability of their ministry. The resource will include profiles of survey results, a book on leadership issues, workshops and resources for taking issues further.



Sam Sterland is committed to producing better resources for local churches. His research on congregational vitality, personal ministry experience, plus working with churches since NCLS 2001, is informing and shaping the new products and resources.

Better resources and faster

"We have come up with a plan that we believe is going to be fantastic for anyone who participates in NCLS 2006" says Sam. Part of the plan is faster return of results.

"We know from the experience of the churches who have completed Update Surveys, that participating in NCLS 2006 can result in groundbreaking leadership meetings, powerful in-house workshops, and potentially launch a new season of purpose-driven planning."

Compare your results then and now

Sam works with survey data showing changes over time. A new feature in the 2006 Profiles is that churches will be able to compare with their previous survey results. "Seeing the benefit to the churches who have already seen their story in the changing results, we want to share that with churches who participate in 2006" said Sam.

Home-grown research with international credibility

NCLS resources are based on local knowledge of the Australian church and analysis performed by experienced researchers. Sam has conducted research on the International Church Life Survey database (Australia, England, USA and New Zealand), with encouraging feedback from academics.

He notes "Having done international research we can say that each country is different but similar. Australian research is best for Australian churches."

"Looking at what makes a healthy church has been an excellent experience and one I pursue with a passion, having been in ministry myself."

Youth Groups Busy Turning Teens to God

This article is based on the 'Social Influence Upon Faith Development' report, one of the Occasional Papers produced by NCLS researchers. See below to review and order other current reports.

It was the day Jodie might have turned his back on church youth groups. Aged 13, the young Anglican went interstate for a year, taking fond memories of 'Teens Group' gatherings in the Sydney suburb of St Ives.

Turning up for a church-run teens program in a new city, Jodie tried to picture what he'd find inside. "I assumed that every single youth group you went to would have a bit where there'd be a talk from the Bible and the youth would be encouraged to pray for their friends, the world and each other."

Not so, he regrets. "All this group did was just run around and play games." Jodie never returned to that youth group.

Inspired to Inspire

Sadly, for kids genuinely interested in being open to God, such a disappointment might have meant the end of church involvement. But not Jodie. Rather than turning from God and church-run activities, it helped form his views on what a good youth ministry should be.

Now, as a 34 year-old Youth Ministry Trainer and Adviser with Anglican Youthworks in Sydney, Jodie McNeill is putting that memory to good use—making sure modern youth groups turn kids to God while balancing the spiritual message with an attractive, nurturing environment.

"Youth leaders today aren't just thinking, 'Well, how do we give our kids a good night out once a month?'"

Report Agrees

The 'Social Influence Upon Faith Development' report—produced by NCLS, and sponsored by the Bible Society—has found youth groups are now a rising force in pointing people to God.



"Church youth groups are now almost as important as church services in bringing 15-29 year olds to faith," report co-author John Bellamy explains. "Youth groups have had a much greater impact among younger attenders, confirming their importance in any overall strategy to minister to children."

When researchers asked church-goers aged 15-29 years what had influenced them most in their faith, some 38 percent ticked the box next to 'youth groups'—second only to main church services (42%).

Appealing, Accepting

Melbourne's Assemblies of God-based Youth Alive Victoria Director David Molyneux confirms the importance of such ministry to the development of meaningful faith.

"A good youth ministry would be one that isn't just looking after Christian teenagers," David stresses. "It meets for corporate worship besides the Sunday service; it breaks up into small groups and meets in homes. Another arm might have a couple of sporting teams. It might have a high school outreach, then there might be a dance team."

Put together, a good and effective youth ministry provides a sense of "acceptance," David explains.

The NCLS authors agree, pointing to the "more appealing" approaches that make youth groups comparatively attractive over traditional forms of activities for children and youth. "Youth groups are often run by youth themselves, bringing with it flexibility in and control over form and program," the report suggests, adding such ministries may now be "better than activities based on a more educational model, such as Sunday schools, confirmation classes or school Scripture."

By Paul Gallagher

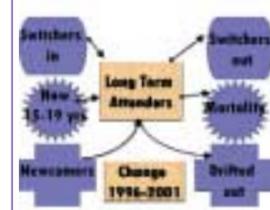
Getting the Mix Right

A budding youth leader herself, Melbourne's 20-year-old **Bodene Downie** (Youth Alive) sees youth groups as the ideal place to make a spiritual impact over activity-based programs. "We're told in the Bible to make disciples of other people so what better place to start than the youth?" she told NCLS.

Christa Meyer, 16, says her Wonga Park Christian Reformed Church youth group in Melbourne gives an opportunity to socialise with other Christians while getting a chance to discuss their faith in an easy-going setting. She thinks the ideal youth group should always give that mix of both "challenging devotions and fun, social activities."

Inflow and Outflow

Inflow and outflow has been mapped for major denominations that took part in both the 1996 and 2001 NCLS.



Working part time, **Sheridan Reilly** is Operations Manager with the NCLS. Responsible for the logistics of the 2001 Survey, she will assist the new Project Manager Rod Smith, for NCLS 2006. "We are already planning how to process around half a million survey forms and deliver results back to churches quickly."

Dr John Bellamy is a primary researcher with the NCLS team. The main priority for John at the moment is work on congregational vitality in preparation for the 2006 NCLS. He says, "I am very keen to produce a publication that is easy to read, with an engaging and accessible format"

Children and Youth Project
John is also exploring results of the 10 to 14 year Attender Survey that some denominations opted to do. He notes "We are all aware that this is an age when people begin to leave church life. The Children and Youth Project is important because it gives a voice to 10 to 14 year olds. This is something that has not been done before." He is currently working on a report for denominations that took part.

Faith Development Research
Other research outlines what were significant activities and who were significant people in the development of faith among Anglican and Protestant attenders. "We learnt that most attenders became Christians before they were 20 years old. The kinds of activities and people varied significantly depending upon when they became Christian. If it was before 10 years of age, then Sunday School and parents are by far the most important influences. For those who become Christians between the ages of 10 and 20, parents are important, but other church structures, such as youth groups, are important. After the age of 20, then church ministers, adult small groups and other church workers are more important," says John. (See Order Form for the Occasional Paper on faith development)

In between major projects, John answers data queries, provides data for denominational groups, and completes commissioned research.

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Please post to me

- 2001 Church Attendance Estimates. Estimates of size and patterns of growth/decline from the 2001 NCLS
- Insecurity in Australia. Describes levels of insecurity in Australian society and the relationship to wellbeing.
- Social Influences upon Faith Development. Looks at issues relating to faith development
- Spirituality and Wellbeing in Australia. To what extent is spirituality related to higher levels of wellbeing?
- Inflow and Outflow Between Denominations. Tracking the three pathways of attenders in and out of denominations

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Sydney South, 1235

Valuable Partners

NCLS appreciates the support of partners. CBMI has partnered with NCLS to bring you this newsletter.

We commend their work to you and encourage you to review their enclosed material.

All articles and papers in this newsletter can be found on the NCLS website. See 'Top Links' in the top right corner at www.ncls.org.au



Phil Harding works on web development for NCLS Research. The internet will be used extensively to share information and resources for NCLS 2006.

NCLS Seeks New Initiatives

If you are part of a fresh expression of Church, or know of one, please contact Ruth Powell via the NCLS website, PO Box A2178 Sydney South 1235 or rpowell@ncls.org.au

Your Privacy: You receive this newsletter because at the time of the National Church Life Survey you requested more information on the survey jacket, or you have been identified as the representative of a local participating congregation or denomination/region. You may unsubscribe using the contact details below

Introducing a new service from NCLS Research!

The NCLS team are very pleased to announce the launch of a new free and easy to use internet service, Church Search - www.churchsearch.org.au

"NCLS Research is in the unique position of having perhaps the best list of Australian churches that exists. We are the caretakers of a list of over 10 000 churches in 20 denominations. By providing this service, we hope that it will help more people find their way into churches" said Dr Ruth Powell, project manager.

Useful for seekers and people on the move

Church Search will be useful for people looking for a church for the first time, in a new place, or while on holidays. "Church leaders may also use the service to help people move - making recommendations or introducing people to a new church family," Ruth added.

Church Search is one Phil Harding's current major projects. "Church Search is exciting because it allows people to get a snapshot of churches in their area in a way that might encourage them to try one out" he says. "Other church directories I have seen are pretty limited in the information they provide. We are trying to let the personality of each church come through".

Phil hopes that Church Search will contribute to a sense of a unified presence for Australian churches. "They will be presented alongside each other, and yet their diversity is preserved. This is a chance for non church-goers to find out about all the good things that their local churches are doing such as youth programs and community services."

Basic information is now available online. In the next few months, all listed churches will be asked for permission to show even more detailed information, such as the style of worship services and more.

www.churchsearch.org.au



A Comprehensive Guide to Australian Churches

Church SEARCH is an internet service that will help you find a church in your local area.

Whether you want to start attending, have recently moved, or are interested in local churches, Church Search can be your guide.

- Free and easy to use
- Search by name, location and denomination
- Find churches with Sunday School, youth group and small groups
- Find out about the mission and service activities of local churches

For Churches Church Search provides a free and easy way to be visible online. Information about your church can be updated at any time through our web site.

Try it out today!

www.churchsearch.org.au

NCLS seeks new initiatives

New project maps fresh expressions of church



When Triple J, the ABC youth radio station, uses 'emerging church' as their Buzzword of the Week, it is time for church researchers to get to work. "We are seeking all new ventures and hope that they make themselves known to us," says **Dr Ruth Powell**, NCLS researcher.

Talk of fresh expressions of church or the 'emerging church' has become more prevalent over the last decade. "It is a priority for NCLS to attend to fresh expressions of church. In this new project we hope to create an exploratory map, share stories of experiments and new life, as well as, perhaps, providing



a point of contact that encourages mutual support," said Ruth.

A 'new venture' is defined as any Christian initiative (such as worship service, gathering, mission activity, network etc) that commenced since 1991 ie currently less than 15 years old. "In this initial stage, we plan to throw the net as wide as possible," said Ruth.

"We are also interested in ventures that no longer exist, as they will help provide clues about sustainability", added Ruth.

The exploratory phase of the project commences in April 2005. It will continue alongside the 2006 National Church Life Survey, however the team will also need to use a range of different methods to gather both data and stories for this project.

In the future, the project will aim to explore questions of health and vitality. What is required for a new initiative to be effective and sustainable?