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National church survey tracks staffing trends, guides mission and training strategies

The National Church Life Survey found that between 2001 and 2006 there was a decrease in the proportion of senior ministers and an increase in the proportion of lay staff at local churches across the nation.

How that trend continues will be recorded in the forthcoming 2011 NCLS survey.

The implications are significant for church leaders as they consider issues of leadership and strategies for mission.

Lay people lead music and teaching ministries, including community outreach and evangelism. They provide support and assistance to members of local congregations in need. They also lead Sunday school and Bible study classes. Others serve as youth pastors and music ministers.

Many volunteer to deal with budgets and legal matters. Others see their ministry as managing their church's website.

In addition to noting a decrease in senior ministers and ordained ministers and an increase in lay staffing, NCLS found between 2001 and 2006 there were increases in the proportion of church staff who were accountants or business managers, children's workers and music coordinators (see table below).

When comparing the 2006 church staff profile to 2001, there were lower proportions of full-time staff, men and those aged 40 to 59 years. Churches, instead, were employing a greater percentage of both younger (less than 40 years) and older (60+) staff.

NCLS is encouraging churches to take part in the 2011 survey to record important trends across the whole church and create an invaluable resource.

A profile of staffing in local churches developed from NCLS statistics will help church mission strategists determine:

- What kind of work lay leaders are doing at the grassroots level of the church;
- How best to meet the expectations of congregations wanting full-time service for part-time pay;
- What kind of training lay leaders require;

more ...

- If all types of ministry are honoured and affirmed, so people are free to serve in the area of their particular giftedness;
- If churches need to develop a more inclusive paradigm of ministry that encourages greater collaboration between clergy and laity;
- If clergy, facing increasing ministry and institutional challenges, are allowing gifted lay leaders to work collaboratively to lighten their load.

TABLE 3: A Profile of Staffing	In 2006	In 2001
	%	%
Senior Minister	30	36
Associate Minister	13	12
Administrator/Office Support	12	12
Accountant or Business Manager	5	4
Children's Worker	7	6
Youth Worker/Youth Minister	6	6
Counsellor/Social Worker	2	2
Worship/Music Coordinator	8	7
Ethnic or Cross-Cultural Worker	1	1
School Religious Education Co-ordinator	2	2
Outreach Co-ordinator/Evangelist	1	1
Other	12	11
	100	100
Paid	68	67
Full-Time	41	44
Ordained	40	44
Lay	60	56
Male	54	58
Female	46	42
15-39	28	26
40-59	50	55
60+	22	19

SOURCE: 2006 & 2001 NCLS OPERATIONS SURVEY(S)

The National Church Life Survey is a five-yearly cooperative venture across all churches. Around 400,000 attenders in 7,000 churches in 22 Christian denominations have taken part in previous National Church Life Surveys in 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006.

The NCLS Research team conducting the 2011 survey is an ecumenical body that aims to provide evidence-based results to help churches connect with the wider community.

With deadlines closing soon, local churches are encouraged to register now at www.2011ncls.org.au.

For more information, contact Dr Ruth Powell, NCLS Research Director, 9701 4479.