

Support for People in Developing Countries by Australian Churches

The Australian churches' support of people/ministries overseas

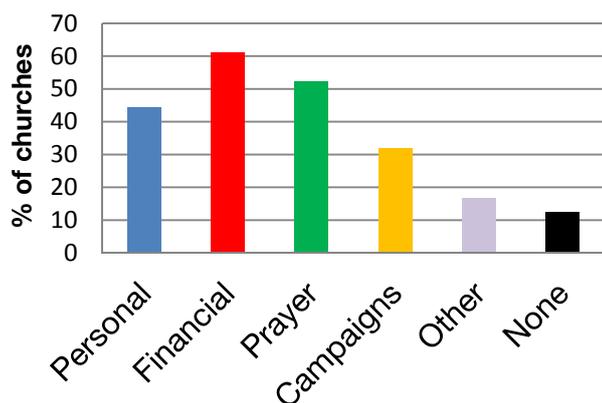
This fact sheet examines the support of Australian churches for people in developing countries, through various means. There is a long tradition of churches supporting the work of 'service' and 'proclamation' in the local community, elsewhere in the country or overseas. Focusing on support in developing countries, what are the levels for different kinds of support, and how much does such support really amount to? Are there large differences between denominational groups?

Churches that support people/ministries in developing countries

The following question was asked in the 2011 National Church Life Survey *Operations Survey*¹.

"Over the past 12 months, has this local church had a specific commitment to people in developing countries?"²

Figure 1: Support for people in developing countries



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Surveys (n=2,429 churches).

¹ This is a one-per-church survey used as an audit of objective information such as activities each church runs or supports.

² 'Yes, a personal relationship with individuals/groups'; 'Yes, a regular financial commitment'; 'Yes a regular prayer commitment'; 'Yes, through campaigns which tackle poverty or injustice'; 'Yes, another kind of link'; 'No links of this kind'. Churches could mark all options.

Figure 1 shows that financial support is the most common (61% of all churches indicated they had a regular form of financial support). The second highest form was 'Prayer' (52% of churches) followed by 'Personal' (44%). Approximately one third of churches (32%) indicated they have regular support for poverty and injustice campaigns. Such campaigns would include Micah Challenge, TEAR, Act for Peace, or denominationally affiliated groups such as Baptist World Aid, Caritas, Catholic Mission, and Uniting World. Twelve percent of churches indicated having no supportive link of any kind.

Denominational group differences

The results have also been divided into major denominational groups, and shown below in table 1.

Table 1: Support for people in developing countries, by denominational groups

	Personal	Financial	Prayer	Campaigns	Other	None
Total	44	61	52	32	17	12
	% of churches					
Anglican	38	57	53	18	14	18
Baptist	65	84	78	46	18	4
Catholic	22	39	24	43	12	20
Churches of Christ	58	86	78	31	12	3
Lutheran	27	42	40	33	14	20
Pentecostal ³	75	94	81	35	23	0
Presbyterian	42	58	60	16	10	16
Salvation Army	21	64	35	40	24	5
Seventh-day Adventist	47	59	41	24	37	7
Uniting	39	48	39	41	15	14
Other Protestant ⁴	62	71	59	26	20	9

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Surveys (n=2,429 churches).

³ 'Pentecostal' includes Australian Christian Churches, Apostolic, C3 Church, CRC International, and International Network of Churches.

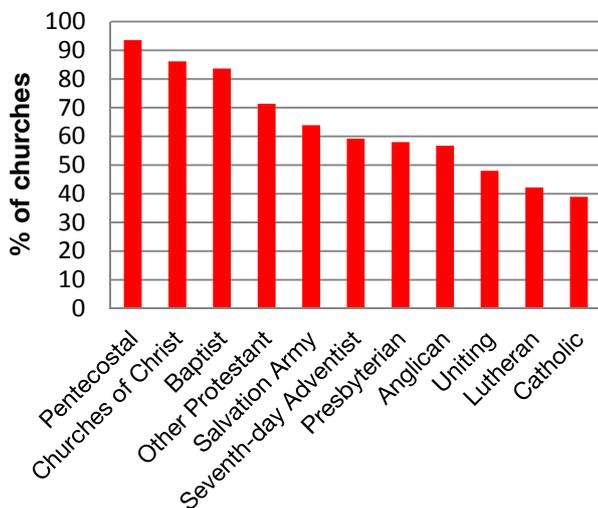
⁴ 'Other Protestant' included churches from Christian Reformed, Congregational, Vineyard, Missionary Alliance, Nazarene, and independent churches.

While support is widespread across all denominations, there are considerable denominational differences evident in table 1. For the first 3 categories (Personal, Financial, Prayer) where support is most common, the Pentecostal churches hold the top position in each, with Baptist, Other Protestant, and Churches of Christ largely interchanging for positions 2, 3 and 4. The degrees of support for poverty and injustice campaigns follows a very different pattern, with strongest supporters being the Baptist, Catholic, Uniting and Salvation Army movements. This perhaps reflects strong and successful denominational agencies for these movements.

The real financial contribution?

Examining these results can reveal something about both the internal culture of each denominational group, and the real contribution. This is because there is a vast difference in the size of these movements. To illustrate this, figure 2 below graphs the financial support figures (as a percentage) from table 1.

Figure 2: Percent of local churches giving financial support for people in developing countries - by denominational groups

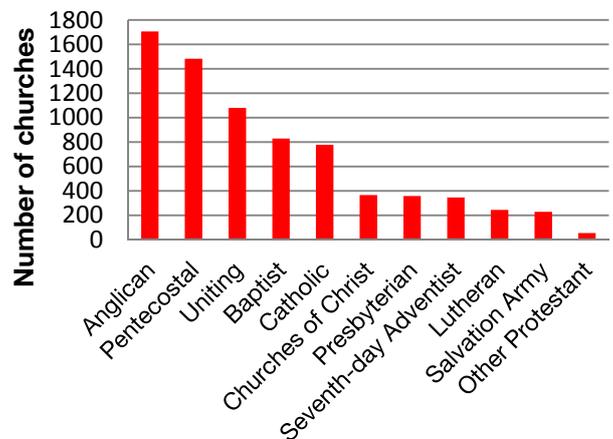


Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Surveys (n=2,429 churches).

Figure 2 shows important information about the different internal cultures of support that exist in the denominational groups. A further step is to take into account the different sizes of these groups. If the actual number of churches who give financial support were shown in each movement, the order of largest to smallest is quite different, as figure 3 shows.

Comparing figures 2 and 3, some of the groups that have less churches proportionally giving support are nevertheless large movements, and therefore make up a large portion of the total churches in Australia providing support (e.g. Anglican, Uniting, Catholic). Some of the 'high percentage groups' correspond to high numbers of churches if they are of sufficient size as movements (e.g. Pentecostal, Baptist), but not if they are smaller groups (e.g. Churches of Christ).

Figure 3: Numbers of local churches* giving financial support for people in developing countries - by denominational groups



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Surveys (n=2,429 churches). Results are weighted by denomination and region to estimate national totals. *Catholic results in this graph show the number of parishes rather than local churches because of the method of surveying used.

These results provide a glimpse, perhaps the first ever for Australia, into how support for developing countries is distributed among the Australian churches. If it were possible to take into account other factors such as the variation of large churches or institutional differences the picture might change somewhat. Specific information about the dollar-value of churches' support would give the most detailed picture of all.

Data sources

Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Operations Survey. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Citation

Sterland, S. (2014) Support for People in Developing Countries by Australian Churches, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 14026. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.