

# Support for Overseas Workers by Australian Protestant Churches

## Support of overseas workers through agencies and directly

This fact sheet examines Australian Protestant<sup>1</sup> churches' support for workers in other countries, either through a mission agency or directly. There is a long tradition of churches supporting work overseas, whether missions of evangelism and ministry training, works of practical service and empowerment, or endeavours comprised of both. Historically, support that does not go through an agency has been relatively low, but is believed by many to have been rising for some time. This could have important implications for mission agencies, churches, and workers themselves.

## Numbers of workers supported by churches

The following question was asked in the 2011 National Church Life Survey *Operations Survey*<sup>2</sup>.

*How many overseas workers does this church support through:*

*A mission agency?*

*Directly (not through a mission agency)?*

The results in this fact sheet come from the responses of 2,587 Protestant churches from 20 different denominations (including independent churches). Responses from Catholic churches that participated in the 2011 NCLS showed clearly that support for missions is not organised primarily at a local level, but at an institutional one for this denomination. Therefore, because the data was being collected at a local level, results in this fact sheet do not include missions support by the Catholic Church in Australia<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> In this paper 'Protestant' is being used as a broad term for all Australian churches that are not from the Catholic and Orthodox denominations.

<sup>2</sup> This is a one-per-church survey used as an audit of objective information such as activities each church runs or supports.

<sup>3</sup> Some other denominations may be partially affected by this local/institutional complication, but no others have been excluded.

## Average amounts of support

Table 1 below shows the average number of overseas workers supported by Protestant churches overall, and by churches of different denominational groups.

**Table 1: Average number of overseas workers that churches are contributing support to**

	Agency	Direct	Combined
<b>All Protestant</b>	<b>1.18</b>	<b>0.47</b>	<b>1.65</b>
Anglican	1.35	0.20	1.55
Baptist	3.15	0.62	3.77
Churches of Christ	1.64	0.67	2.31
Lutheran	0.24	0.10	0.34
Pentecostal <sup>4</sup>	1.05	1.40	2.44
Presbyterian	1.86	0.33	2.19
Salvation Army <sup>5</sup>	0.09	0.05	0.14
Seventh-day Adventist	1.30	0.15	1.45
Uniting	0.17	0.18	0.34
Other Protestant <sup>6</sup>	3.33	1.89	5.22

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Surveys (n=2,587 churches).

The results from table 1 show that the typical Protestant church in Australia contributes support to 1.65 overseas workers. In other words, if 100 typical Protestant churches were selected at random, there would be about 165 overseas workers being contributed to (made up of 118 being supported via a mission agency, and 47 receiving support directly from the church).

Several important points emerge from this. First of all, by dividing up the two sources of support, these figures

<sup>4</sup> 'Pentecostal' includes Australian Christian Churches, Apostolic, C3 Church, CRC International, and International Network of Churches.

<sup>5</sup> Southern Territory only (approximately half of Australian Salvation Army Corps).

<sup>6</sup> 'Other Protestant' includes churches from Christian Reformed, Congregational, Vineyard, Missionary Alliance, Nazarene, and independent churches.

suggest that 28% of support for overseas workers from Protestant churches is currently not going through any mission agency. This raises significant questions. If mission agencies follow a set of 'best practices' that involve protections for workers and programs, are workers and programs not being supported via an agency more vulnerable in any way? Are churches

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involved in direct support also more vulnerable to potential problems that can occur? Are churches 'going around' mission agencies because of a

failure to connect well with them or because of a perceived lack of options (such as believing they have needs that agencies will not be able to meet)?

Secondly, there are clearly considerable differences in culture between the different denominations when it comes to support of overseas workers (see figure 2, below). There are movements where 20% or less of overseas worker support may be going direct (Anglican, Baptist, Presbyterian, Seventh-day Adventist), which presumably reflects a successful connection with one or more agencies, and confidence that churches have in these groups. At the other end of the spectrum, there are movements (particularly in the Pentecostal churches) where more than half of all support appears to not be going via any agency.

There are also important qualifications to note in these findings. The question in the NCLS survey referred to *overseas workers*. Some denominations have strong programs of support for workers elsewhere in Australia, and support of this kind is not covered in these results. Also, the question refers to *people* ('workers') rather than programs, and some denominations more often focus churches on supporting whole programs rather than individuals. This could result in average figures in table 1 that do not reflect the overall support for overseas work as well. Having said that, if church attenders find it easier to see support of a person as a useful concrete contribution their church can make, such a focus could lead to churches not using their denomination's agencies, or indeed any agency, and shifting towards more direct support<sup>7</sup>. This could be one of numerous factors contributing to differences of support between the denominational groups.

**Data sources**

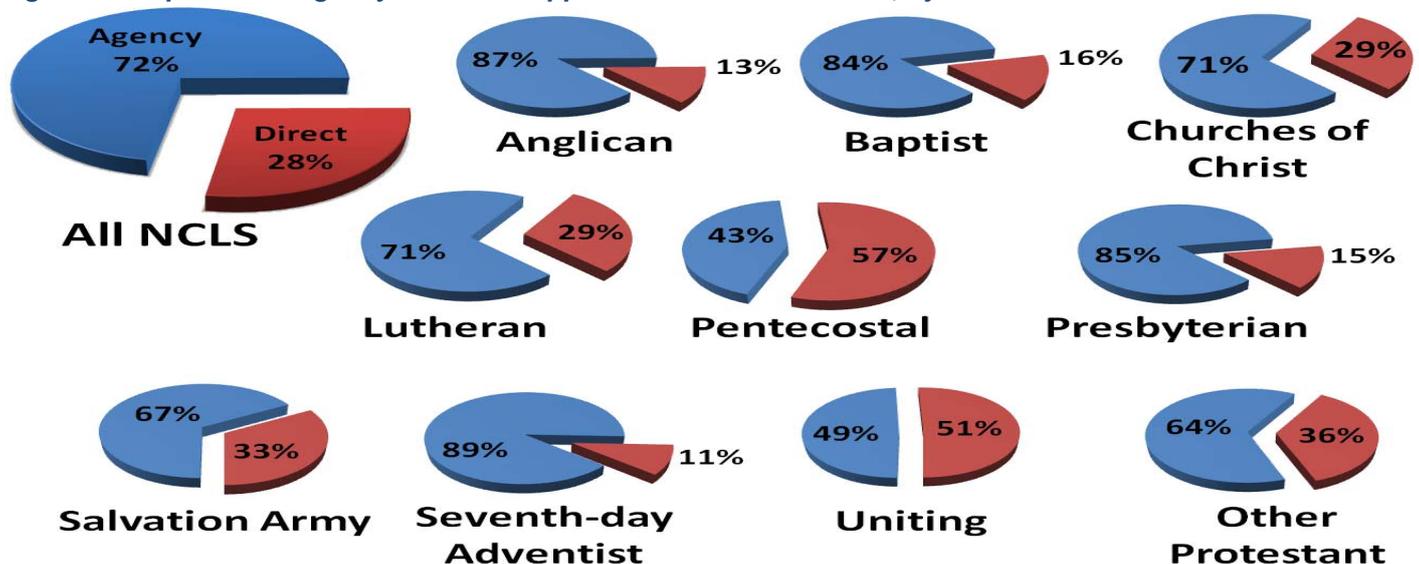
Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Operations Survey. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

**Citation**

Sterland, S. (2014) Support for Overseas Workers by Australian Protestant Churches, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 14027. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.

<sup>7</sup> It should also be borne in mind that the amount of support for each worker is not indicated in the question, nor how many churches jointly support a worker. Therefore it is not possible to arrive at a total number of workers using this question.

**Figure 2: Proportion of agency vs direct support for overseas workers, by denomination**



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Surveys (n=2,587 churches).