

## Churches' role in peacemaking

Many churches worldwide have a long history of opposing wars, conflicts and violence, and the role often played by churches in promoting peace continues today. For countries in the midst of war, this may be seen through local churches working to broker peace between hostile communities or bring humanitarian relief to civilians, or through prominent church figures taking a public stand against the conflict at hand. For countries more removed from armed conflict, such as Australia, the peacemaking role of churches can often take on a different form.

A number of church bodies or Christian organisations in Australia are dedicated to promoting peace throughout the world, such as the National Council of Churches in Australia's 'Act for Peace', Pax Christi Australia and UnitingJustice. Their work includes informing the public of world conflicts and events, lobbying the government to support peacemaking efforts or bodies (such as the United Nations), and providing humanitarian aid to war-torn areas overseas.

What do Australian church attenders think about the role their churches should play in peacemaking? In late 2011 as a part of the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders were asked the following question:

**Do you agree or disagree: 'The churches should more actively promote non-violent alternatives to armed conflict'?**

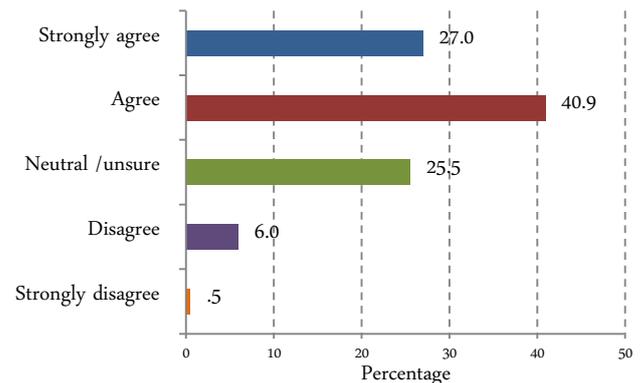
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral /unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

### Overall results

As shown in Figure 1, most attenders agreed or strongly agreed that churches should more actively promote non-violent alternatives to armed conflict (68%). Only 7% disagreed or strongly disagreed, while about one in four attenders (26%) remained neutral or unsure. This group of attenders may include those who

were unaware of churches' current peacemaking efforts, and so had difficulty answering the question.

**Figure 1: Views on church role in peacemaking**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,379).

### Demographics

Statistically significant differences in how this question was answered were found for attenders of different ages. As seen in Table 1, younger attenders were more likely to be neutral or unsure about whether churches should more actively promote peacemaking, with 31% of 15-29 year olds and 29% of 30-49 year olds selecting this option. Respondents aged 70 and over were the most likely to disagree with churches promoting peace more actively. Yet for every age group, those who disagreed or strongly disagreed were a minority, ranging from 4 to 11%.

**Table 1: Views on church role in peacemaking by age**

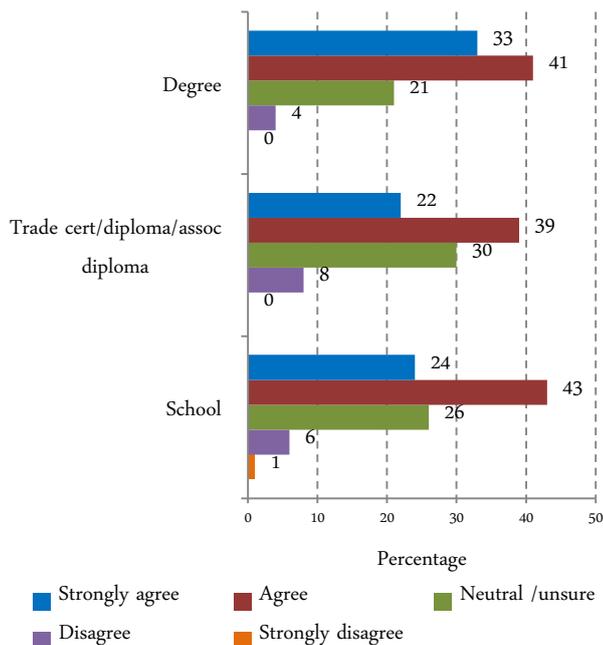
	15-29 yrs	30-49 yrs	50-69 yrs	70+ yrs
	Percentage			
<b>Strongly agree</b>	21	24	31	28
<b>Agree</b>	43	43	39	40
<b>Neutral/unsure</b>	31	29	23	22
<b>Disagree</b>	4	4	6	10
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	1	0	0	1

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey Nv2 (n=1,371).

Attenders' views also differed significantly according to their level of education. Those with a university degree indicated the highest level of agreement that churches

should more actively promote non-violent alternatives, with almost three quarters (74%) who agreed (see Figure 2). This compares with 61% of attenders with a trade certificate or diploma and 67% of attenders with schooling only. Levels of neutrality or uncertainty were highest among attenders with a trade certificate or diploma (30%).

**Figure 2: Views on church role in peacemaking by education**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,363).

In terms of gender, similar proportions of men and women were in favour of increased peacemaking action by churches. However, men were a little more likely to disagree or strongly disagree with the question (9% vs. 5% of women), and women were more likely to be neutral or unsure (27% vs. 23% of men).

Attenders did not differ significantly in their views according to how often they attended church or their level of private devotional activity.

### Denominational differences

All denominations were much more likely to agree that churches should more actively promote non-violent alternatives to armed conflict than disagree (see Table 2). Catholic (71%), Uniting (70%) and Anglican (69%) attenders were the most likely to be in favour of increased action. Disagreement was low across all

denominational groups, but was lowest among Pentecostal, Catholic and Uniting Church attenders. Attenders from Pentecostal churches were the most likely group to be neutral or unsure about this issue (31%). Given the earlier finding that young attenders were more likely to select 'neutral/unsure', this result may be due to the higher proportion of young people found in Pentecostal churches.

**Table 2: Views on church role in peacemaking by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist / Church -es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
	Percentage						
Strongly agree	32	25	29	22	23	28	21
Agree	37	37	43	37	42	41	39
Neutral/unsure	22	27	24	28	31	25	29
Disagree	8	9	5	6	4	5	10
Strongly disagree	1	1	0	5	0	0	0

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,379).

### Summary

The majority of Australian church attenders held the view that churches should more actively promote non-violent alternatives to armed conflict. This view was particularly prevalent among attenders with a university degree, or who attended Catholic, Uniting or Anglican churches. Younger attenders and women were more likely to be neutral or unsure about this issue, while older attenders and men were a little more likely to disagree. Yet across all demographic and denominational groups, a clear majority of attenders were in favour of churches increasing their role as peacemakers.

### Data sources

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

### Citation

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