



2026 National Church Life Survey Proposal For Denominational Leaders

**Hear every voice.
Empower your churches.
Shape the future.**



2026ncls.org.au



General: info@ncls.org.au

For denominations: nclsliaison.org.au



61-2-9139 2525

An invitation



Dr Ruth Powell
Executive Director
NCLS Research

Christian churches are invited to partner in the 2026 National Church Life Survey (NCLS). It is the largest, longest running survey of church life in the world.

To Christian church leaders in denominational and regional roles,

You are warmly invited to take part in the 2026 National Church Life Survey, alongside 20+ denominations and movements. With collaboration across churches since 1991 it is now the largest, longest running survey of church life in the world.

The 2026 NCLS will offer a comprehensive snapshot of:

- The role of faith in individual lives
- The place of local churches within their communities
- The vitality of churches at both local and denominational levels.

The last NCLS was during COVID-19, which makes it important to check across diverse contexts about what is actually happening in church life.

We are also keen to partner with others to try innovative approaches for this project.

To run the 2026 NCLS, we rely on a close partnership with denominations and regions to coordinate the involvement of local churches. We know from experience that without denominational leadership, involvement and effectiveness of outcomes are limited.

For the sake of the whole Australian Church, we hope to hear as many diverse voices as possible. We invite you to join this collaborative venture of churches of all sizes, in all contexts and across faith traditions.

Dr Ruth Powell and the NCLS Research team
on behalf of the NCLS Research Board of Governors.
rpowell@ncls.org.au

2026 **National**
Church Life
Survey

LIFE TO THE FULL (JOHN 10:10)

At a glance

2026 National Church Life Survey

Hear every voice. Empower your churches. Shape the future.

Survey Snapshot

20+ denominations
Thousands of churches
Hundreds of thousands of voices
Every church gets its own results.

Why take part?

The 2026 NCLS is your opportunity to reflect, reset, and reimagine church life — backed by credible research and practical tools.

Partnering with 20+ movements

Anglican, Catholic, Baptist, Uniting, ACC, Hillsong, Salvation Army, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and many more.

For Leaders at Every Level

- **Local leaders:** Understand your congregation's needs
- **Regional leaders:** Support churches with data-driven decisions
- **Denominational leaders:** Shape strategy, training, and mission

Three Powerful Surveys

- **Church Life Survey:** Hear from every attender (15+), plus child surveys
- **Leader Survey:** Support leadership growth and wellbeing.
- **Local Church Audit:** Map your church's people, programs, and impact.

What You Get

- **Tailored insights** for every church
- **Strategic data** for denominational and regional leaders
- **Tools** to grow vitality, leadership, and community impact
- **Benchmarks** to track progress time

Customise Your Experience

Add your **own questions**
Use **translated** surveys
Include **children's** voices
Target **specific** churches or regions

Affordable & Flexible Pricing

- **Church Life Survey:** \$400+ \$2/survey
 - **Leader Survey:** \$180/church (unlimited)
 - **Local Church Audit:** \$180/church
- Discounts** for small churches, clusters, and bulk participation.

Next Steps

EOI Form is available online

1. Appoint your NCLS Regional Coordinator
2. Send your Expression of Interest by Dec 2025
3. Confirm your survey choices by March 2026

Contact us: nclsliaison@ncls.org.au (02) 9139 2525



About NCLS Research

NCLS Research is a world leader in research focused on connecting Christian churches, schools and agencies with their communities. Decades of rigorous and thoughtful work has examined wellbeing, spirituality, effective leadership and church health.

Our most well known five-yearly project is the National Church Life Survey, which has had millions of participants over 35 years.



➔ Our Vision

Thriving Christian communities understanding their role and mission within a changing society.

➔ Our Mission

To conduct credible research to:

- Support church life and health
- Invite the wider community to reflect upon their spiritual journey

Mission research with academic credibility and practical life-giving resources.

➔ Our Values

CREDIBLE

- We seek to provide trustworthy and authoritative research
- We want other researchers to have access to high quality data sources

VITAL

- We seek to nurture life and health
- We aim to identify and build on strengths

UNIFYING

- We serve the diversity of churches
- We facilitate mutual learning & sharing ideas between churches
- We encourage churches to work together in mission and ministry

PROPHETIC

- We provide a critical analysis and interpretation of church and community trends
- We encourage informed reflection, evaluation, and decisions for mission
- We aim to be a catalyst for creative mission in a changing context

History of National Church Life Surveys

TIMING

- Every five years, alongside National Census
- Previous waves of NCLS: 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016 and 2021/22

1991 to 2026

**The largest
longest running
survey of church life
in the world**

PARTICIPANTS

- 20+ denominations and movements
- Thousands of local churches
- Thousands of local church leaders (ordained and lay)
- Hundreds of thousands of attenders
- Adults (+15 plus)
- Children (8 - 14 years)

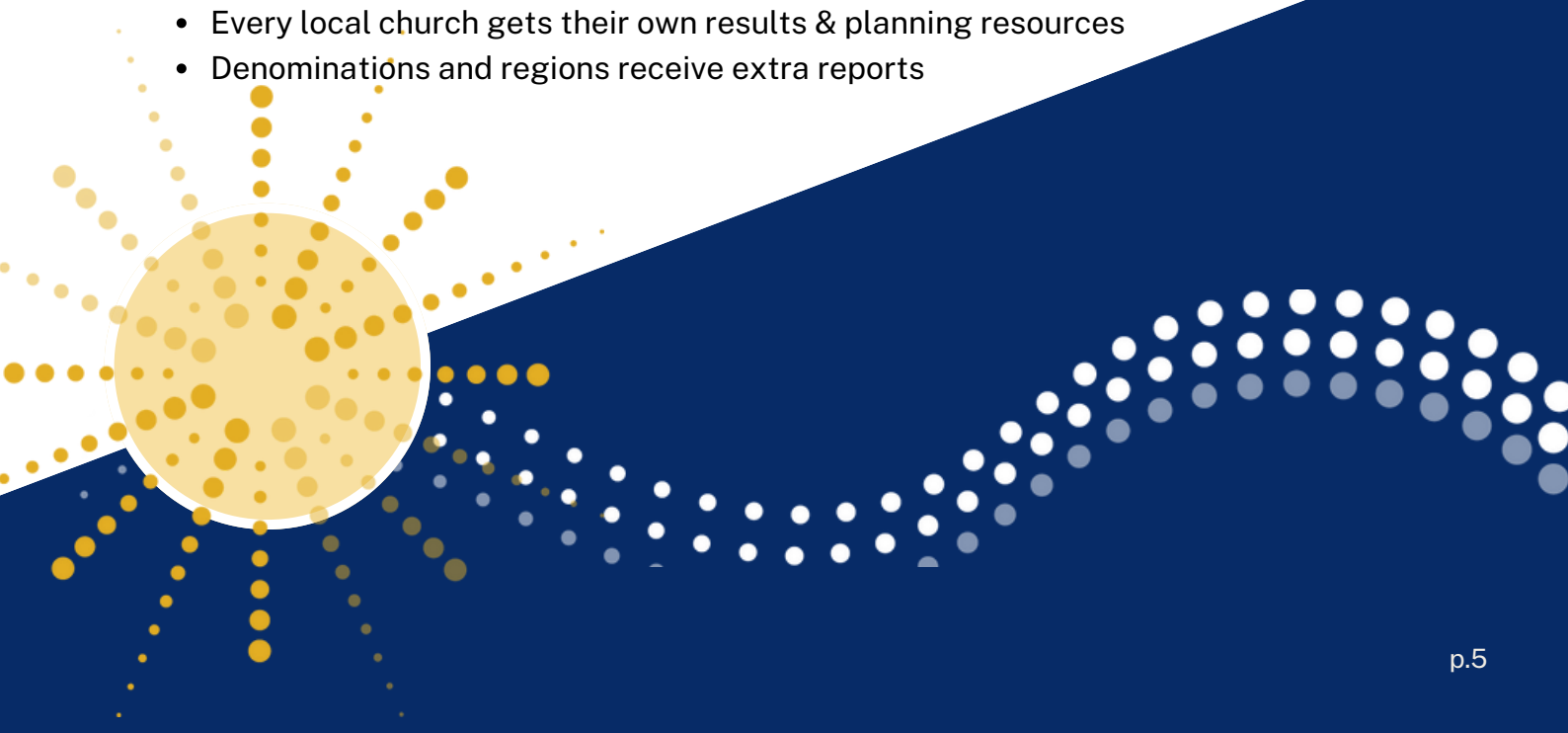
METHOD

- Paper and online survey options
- Multiple languages
- An omnibus of different types of surveys
- Customised with own questions



OUTPUTS

- Every local church gets their own results & planning resources
- Denominations and regions receive extra reports



Who is involved?

➔ Participating groups

Participating groups in past National Church Life Surveys have included:

- Acts 2 Alliance (A2A)
- Anglican Church of Australia
- Australian Christian Churches (ACC)
incl. Hillsong Church
- Baptist Churches
- C3 Church
- Catholic Church in Australia
- CityLife Church
- Christian & Missionary Alliance
- Christian Reformed Churches
- Churches of Christ
- Congregational Churches
- CRC Churches International
- Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC)
- International Pentecostal Holiness Church (IPHC)
- International Network of Churches
- Lutheran Church of Australia
- Presbyterian Church of Australia
- Seventh-day Adventist Church
- The Salvation Army
- Uniting Church in Australia
- Vineyard Churches in Australia
- Independent Churches

plus more...

➔ NCLS Regional Coordinators

Regional Coordinators are nominated by their denomination or region (synod, state etc.) to liaise with NCLS Research throughout the survey project.

In most cases this person oversees the organisation of the survey in their region and is the main point of contact for their churches.

A list of Regional Coordinators will be on the 2026 NCLS website for local churches to make contact with.

We will provide Coordinators with survey project information and promotional material for use with local churches.

➔ Agencies

Other agencies may also commission questions to go to a randomly selected sample of church attenders across denominations and the nation.

Outcomes

This national collaboration offers research-based evidence and processes to resource:

- ✓ Local church leaders
- ✓ Local churches.
- ✓ Regional leaders
(e.g. states, dioceses, synods, presbyteries)
- ✓ Denominational leaders

➔ Resources for local churches and leaders

The 2026 NCLS offers insight to:

- local church leaders about their people's hopes, concerns and commitment
- local churches about their spiritual and pastoral strengths.

➔ Resources for denominational leaders

Denomination/movement leaders get:

- Help for strategic and pastoral roles
- Evidence for their decisions.

Results can offer insight and support for:

- consultancies,
- new staff placements,
- funding applications,
- strategic reviews,
- local church strategic resourcing,
- ongoing training and
- pastoral support.

➔ Research-based insights

The 2026 NCLS will create a new dataset for use by researchers to analyse trends and patterns in church life.

How to maximise denominational benefits

When denominations sponsor churches, you will **unlock extra reports** with high level denominational results.

Minimum threshold:

To unlock high level reports you need a minimum number of churches in order to meet a reliable threshold.

How it works

1. Order surveys.

- Orders for surveys can be placed by local churches or denominational staff.
- Churches will need enough surveys to cover regular attenders.
- Available in either paper or online format.

2. NCLS Research distributes a Survey Kit

The Survey Kit will have instructions. Surveys will be paper forms or online.

3. All churches choose their 'Survey Month' - August to October 2026.

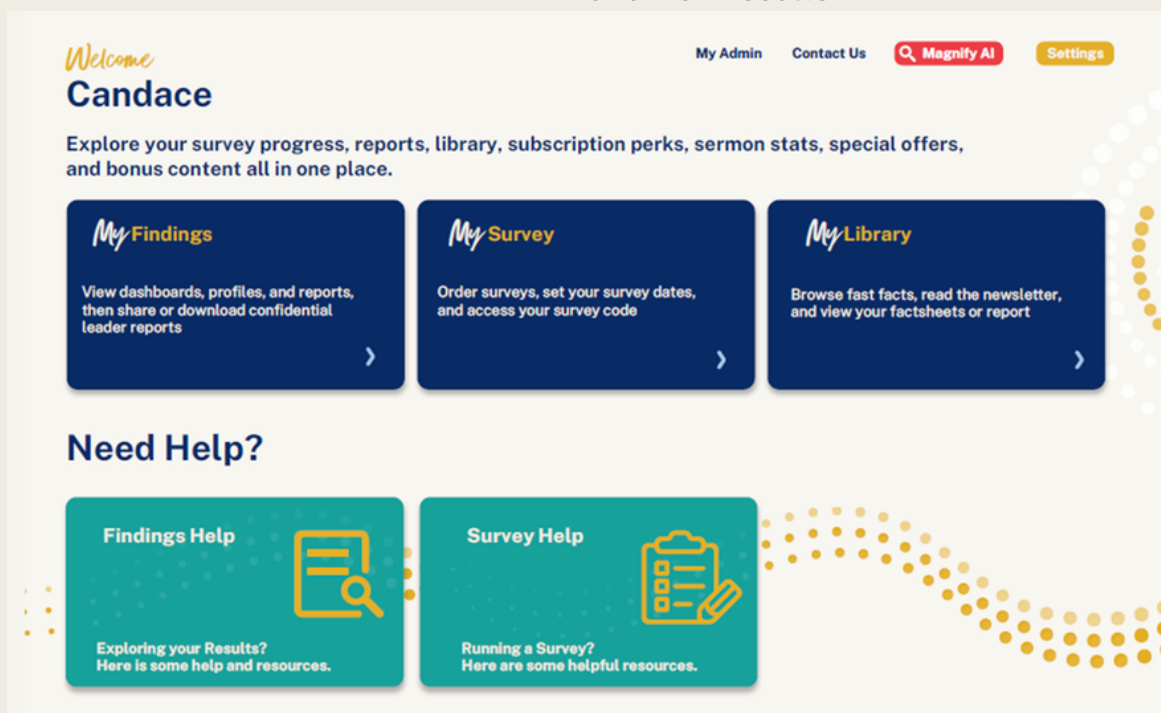
- Each church can choose their preferred 'Survey Month' from August to October 2026.
- The best approach is to choose one week in the month when most attenders will take 15 minutes to complete the survey either before or during a worship service.
- Ask attenders to complete the survey together at the same time.
- During the Survey Month, encourage other regular attenders to complete the survey.

4. Churches return completed surveys

5. NCLS Research releases results

➡ My NCLS Admin

The online NCLS portal called 'My NCLS Admin' will enable all survey coordinators to track progress, get helpful resources and view results.



The Approach: Three separate integrated surveys

The National Church Life Survey uses three types of surveys to build a comprehensive profile of the life of the whole church: the people, the leaders, the assets and activities and an evaluation of health and vitality.

1

Church Life Survey

For all attenders to reflect on their experience of local church vitality

2

Leader Survey

For leaders to reflect on leadership development, personal wellbeing and their perspective on church health.

3

Local Church Audit

To map activities, resources and people in local churches

Sponsoring all three surveys will give you the most comprehensive profile of the life of the whole church.

Your Decision

Will your denomination or region choose to sponsor one, two or three surveys?

Church Life Survey

Aim: For all attenders to reflect on their experience of local church life and vitality

➔ Who does it

Adults: The Attender Survey gives each attender aged 15 years and over a voice to evaluate and reflect on their experience of church life.

Children: The Child Attender Survey is an optional survey that enables churches to hear the views of children aged 8 to 14 years.

➔ Paper or online

Surveys for attenders will be available in paper and/or online formats. Each church will have their own online Survey Code. We intend to provide some paper surveys as a backup to all churches.

➔ Who gets results

- ✓ Denominations.
- ✓ Regions (Dioceses, Synods, States)
- ✓ Local churches.

➔ Translations

Surveys will be translated to key languages.

Previous examples include:

- Arabic
- Chinese
- Korean
- Vietnamese
- Tongan
- Chin (Burmese)
- Karen (Burmese)
- Dinka (South Sudanese).

➔ How much?

\$400 per local church plus \$2 per survey form ordered (adult surveys in any language and child surveys)

Attenders reflect on qualities of church vitality:

- attenders' evaluation of private devotions,
- importance of God,
- growth in faith,
- nurturing worship,
- belonging,
- evangelism,
- service, advocacy,
- leadership roles,
- involvement of children and more.

9 Core Qualities of Church Vitality

The Internal Core Qualities



Faith



Worship



Belonging

The Outward Core Qualities



Service



Faith-Sharing



Inclusion

The Inspirational Core Qualities



Vision



Innovation



Leadership Culture

Outputs from the Church Life Survey

➡ For local churches

Participating churches get online access to their **Church Life Profile**, a 28 to 36 page report of their unique survey results.

They can also access **supportive resources** online. In 2021, this included a Workbook, Enriching Church Life ebook and more.

Plus links to:

- denominational support and/or
- consultant networks



➡ For denominational leaders

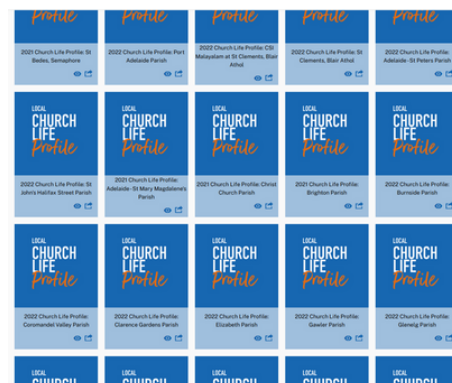
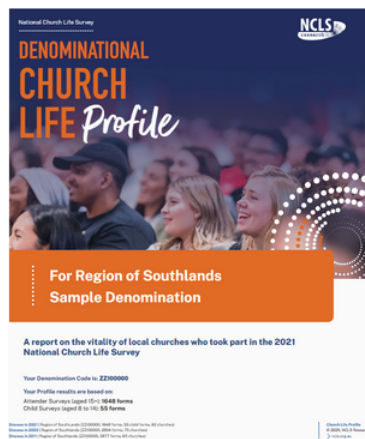
Denominational results:

Denominational and regional leaders get access to a series of reports.

E.g. Denominational & Regional Church Life Profiles

Access to local results:

Where permission is granted, regional leaders can have access to local church results using the online *My NCLS Admin* portal.



Assumptions include:

Participation has been sponsored or subsidised by the denomination
A minimum threshold for participation has been achieved

Leader Surveys

Aim: For leaders to reflect on leadership development and personal wellbeing

➔ Who does it

Anyone in ministry or pastoral leadership within a local church

- A. Senior leader (at minimum)
- B. Ministry/pastoral leaders who contribute significant time or who help set directions: staff & non-staff.

➔ Who gets results

✓ Denominational and regional leaders get a series of reports on leader wellbeing and effectiveness.

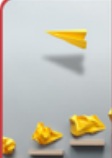
✓ Local church leadership also gets results

➔ How much?

- \$180 per church (for unlimited Leader Surveys).

➔ Customise

Add your own denominational questions to the Leader Survey.
\$800 per question

	Ministry Positions and Context
	Demographics of Local Church Leaders
	Leader Wellbeing: Effectiveness and Stress
	Leader Resilience: Personal Foundations
	Church Vitality and Leadership
	Leadership Development and Training
	Leadership Roles: Practices and Preferences
	Leaders and Innovation

Outputs from the Leader Survey

➡ For individual leaders in local churches

Example: Leaders may log in to access their personal dashboards which will show their own evaluation of personal wellbeing and resilience measures compared with wider benchmarks.

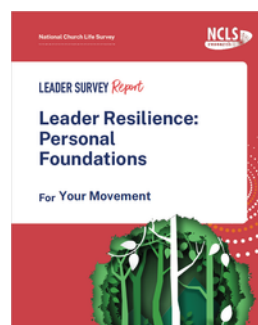
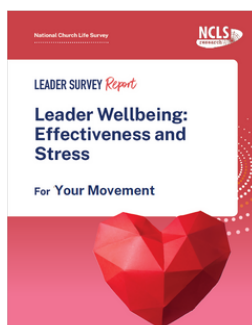
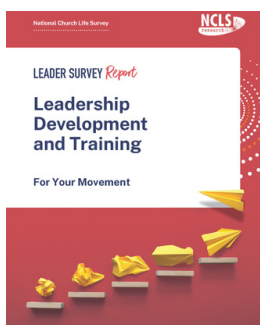
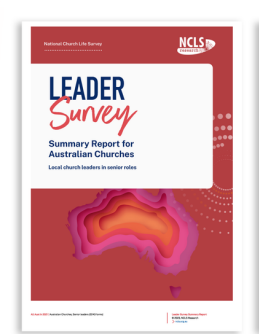
Personal results are confidential.



➡ For denominational leaders

Denominational and regional leaders get access to a series of reports.
e.g.

- **Leadership Map:** age, gender, education, ethnicity, staffing, roles etc.
- **Church Health Check:** Leaders' views about the health of their churches
- **Effective Leadership:** Effective governance, healthy teams, leadership development.
- **Wellbeing of Leaders:** thriving, burnout and resilience.



Assumptions include:
Participation has been sponsored or subsidised by the denomination
A minimum threshold for participation has been achieved

Local Church Audit

Aim: To map activities, resources and people in local churches

➔ Who does it

- One person from each local church.
- Paper and online surveys

➔ Who gets results

- Denominational and regional leaders get access to findings

➔ How much?

- \$180 per church

➔ Customise

- Add your own denominational questions to the Local Church Audit
- \$800 each



Outputs from the Local Church Audit

➔ Church Pulse Check



The goal: To estimate church attendance and faith commitments in 2026. This work will extend earlier estimates.



A short Church Pulse Check will also be conducted with a sample of churches in 2027 and 2028.

➔ National Impact Audit

The goal: To quantify the dollar value of the social contribution that local churches and attenders provide to the Australian community.

NB. We are currently developing a partnership with NAYBA, who will also collect information from agencies and non-Christian religious groups.

➔ For denominational leaders

Denominational and regional leaders get access to a series of reports or dashboards. e.g Topics include:

- **Map of local churches:** Size, number of churches and type of churches (e.g. rural/urban, multicultural or monocultural)
- **Attendance estimates:** How many people go to church?
- **Organisation and leadership structures:** Number of staff? Worship services? Sunday schools? Youth groups? Discipleship groups? Governance and compliance?
- **Interaction with community:** How do local churches relate to their surrounding communities, to social issues and global needs? What do they offer in terms of social services and advocacy activities, educational activities, community partnerships and more?

Assumptions include:

*Participation has been sponsored or subsidised by the denomination
A minimum threshold for participation has been achieved*

Investment

➔ Custom surveys

Denominations may add questions into surveys for your own local churches, attenders and leaders.

➔ Church Life Surveys

For all attenders to reflect on their experience of local church vitality

**\$400 church fee
+ \$2 per survey**

Outputs

- Local Church Life Profiles
- Regional and Denominational Church Life Profiles
- Online access to local results (with permissions)

Your own questions: \$2000 per qn

➔ Leader Surveys

For leaders to reflect on leadership development & personal wellbeing

***Unlimited leader surveys per church.**

\$180 per church*

Outputs

- Personal dashboards for individual leaders in local churches with benchmarks
- A series of report options for denominational leaders (when threshold for participation is met)

Your own questions: \$800 per qn

➔ Local Church Audit

To map activities, resources and people in local churches

\$180 per church

Outputs

- A series of report options for denominational leaders (when threshold for participation is met)

Your own questions: \$800 per qn

Discounts & payment models



Discounts and subsidies

The 2026 NCLS may attract wider sponsorship, to help keep costs to a minimum for participating churches. There are also some options to manage your investment.

- ➔ **1. Small churches fee**
\$300 flat rate for churches of less than 30 regular attenders.
- ➔ **2. Small churches clusters**
Small churches who partner in 'survey clusters' will attract a single admin fee and get a single cluster Profile of results. Surveys occur in each location. Suitable for clusters of small rural, cooperative, or house churches.
- ➔ **3. Bulk discount**
High levels of local church participation (e.g. more than 80%) will attract an overall denominational discount.
- ➔ **4. Pay over multiple years**
You may make payments over more than one financial year.

Payment models

There are a number of models for how regions or denominations manage survey costs.

- ➔ **1. Full subsidy**
Denomination pays for all costs on behalf of their local churches.
- ➔ **2. Part subsidy**
Denomination covers part of the costs (e.g. admin fee per church or for a selected group of churches).
- ➔ **3. Local churches pay**
Denomination collects payment from local churches.

In general, NCLS Research invoices the NCLS Regional Co-ordinator as the key contact point.

Each region may choose to pass on some or all of the costs to the local church. Regions will be invited to pay a 30% deposit based on ballpark quotes during FY26.

Payments can be made over a number of financial years.

Project Timeline



By end 2025

Provide an EOI

- Denominations and Regions provide an initial 'Expression of interest'
- Note interest in extra questions
- Likely approach to partnership



By Mar 2026

Confirm denominational plans

- Denominations and Regions confirm involvement
- Confirm interest in own commissioned questions



Jan - Jul 2026

Place survey orders

- Update church lists (new churches, closures, changed contact details)
- Co-design own survey questions
- Promote to churches
- Place survey orders



Aug to Oct 2026

Churches complete surveys

- **August:** Local Church Audit completed by one representative per church
- **August to Oct:** Churches complete Church Life Survey and Leader Surveys



Nov 2026 to Mar 2027

Results released

- Local Church Audit reports released
- Local churches receive own results
- Denominations and regions receive results

Commendations

Rev. Mark Wilson

National Ministries Director
Australian Baptist Ministries
Baptist Union of Australia Inc.



The National Church Life Survey gives us a clear and honest picture of church life across Australia. It helps us listen to the voices of our congregations, understand where we are growing, and discern where we are being called to change. The insights it offers are essential for shaping a healthy and mission-focused future for the church.

Fr Brian Lucas

National Director – Australia
Catholic Mission



The National Church Life Survey is a unique dataset which gives important insights into the faith experience and attitudes of church attenders in Australia. It provides information on trends within the social context across decades. It is an important tool for church communities to use in their planning. For church leaders it provides insight into particular features relevant to their congregation.

Rev Dr Cameron Eccleston

Mission Specialist
Uniting Church in Australia



The National Church Life Survey provides a unique opportunity for both ministers and denominational leaders to not only get a snapshot of how well their congregations are flourishing, but also to examine trends over decades of data collection. Each National Church Life Survey is a must have tool for anyone serious about church life and vitality.

Susan King

Head of Advocacy and Research
Anglicare



The NCLS highlights not just trends in growth, activity, and leadership but the key elements driving a thriving church community. As a researcher I have observed the rigour and excellence of this applied research which enables churches to identify levers for growth, change and outreach into their communities. It is an invaluable tool for future mission planning.

Peter Mayrick

Executive Director
Partners in Ministry



Leaders who care about discipleship need a regular measure of the spiritual lives and behaviours of the people in the church. I believe the Church Life Survey is a gift to the church leader and provides leaders with a cost effective, simple yet deep measure of church health.

2026 National Church Life Survey

Next Steps

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