

SUMMARY REPORT

# Faith Sharing, Discipleship and Evangelism



**NCLS**  
research 

# Faith Sharing, Discipleship and Evangelism Summary Report

*“At Alpha we aim to help Australians explore the Christian faith. Research into churchgoers sharing their faith is central to this goal.”*



**Ben Higgins**  
National Director,  
Alpha Australia



*“It is our hope that these research findings equip you with inspiration and insight into faith sharing in our country.”*



**Dr Ruth Powell**  
Director, NCLS Research  
ncls.org.au



Alpha Australia approached NCLS Research to undertake research to provide insights into faith sharing, discipleship and evangelistic activities in local Christian churches around Australia.

This report uses the findings from the 2021 NCLS to understand the faith sharing practices of church attenders, church leaders' views of evangelism and activities that local churches undertake to promote a culture of discipleship and evangelism.

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This report describes how churchgoers, leaders and local churches create a culture of evangelism and faith sharing, and reach out to their community.

# Aim

To explore faith sharing, discipleship and evangelistic activities in local churches in Australia.

*And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'* (Matthew 28: 18 to 20)

# Who took part

This summary report is based on results from the 2021/22 National Church Life Survey.



In **20+** Christian denominations across  
**Australia**

\*Senior or sole ministers/pastors/priests in local churches and lay people serving as the principal leader where there is no minister/pastor/priest.

Denominational groups used in this report:

1. Catholic
2. Mainstream Protestant (Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Uniting Church)
3. Pentecostal (Australian Christian Churches, C3 Church, International Network of Churches, Christian Revival Crusade)
4. Other Protestant (Baptist, Churches of Christ, Christian Reformed, Salvation Army, Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches)

Data are weighted to reflect different levels of participation across denominations and regions.

# Key findings



## CHURCH ATTENDERS

**72%** of attenders were prepared to invite friends and relatives who don't attend to a church service.



**Three in four** attenders (74%) said they feel mostly or fully at ease talking about their faith.



**31%** had done so over the previous 12 months.



**38%** directly helped non-churchgoers explore questions about faith over the previous 12 months.



## LOCAL CHURCHES



Around **9 in 10** local churches ran discipleship activities apart from worship services.



**78%** ran regular small Bible study, discussion or prayer groups.



**Seven** in 10 churches ran evangelistic or outreach activities.



**47%** of local churches ran small short-term groups or courses (e.g. Alpha, Advent, Lent groups).



## LOCAL CHURCH LEADERS

**76%** of senior leaders affirmed that "leaders at our church see evangelism as highly important".



About a **quarter** of leaders felt they had a particular gifting in evangelism, and **four in ten** felt very well equipped in mission and outreach.

**28%** of senior leaders indicated that all or most leaders are involved in evangelism,

... some **22%** indicated that their church has ... leaders that specialise in evangelism,

and **18%** said that particular gifted attenders do most of the evangelism.



# Faith sharing approaches of church attenders

Most church attenders are involved in evangelism in a personal, informal capacity.

The majority are mostly or fully at ease to talk about their faith and most are willing to invite people to their church.

However, there are other aspects of church life that attenders value more than active and intentional evangelism and a relatively small number regularly participate in evangelistic activities at their church.

The most confident, active evangelists and those who value evangelism most highly tend to be Pentecostals, attenders in a leadership/ministry role, and attenders who switch denominations.

## Priority given to evangelism



*'Encouraging people to share faith or invite others' should be given priority in next 12 months (out of 13 options)*

**14%** of all attenders (ranked 10 of 13 options)

Highest priority found in:

- Protestant attenders with a leadership role **22%**
- Protestants **19%**
- 15-29 year olds **19%**
- Attenders who switched denominations in last five years to current church **19%**

## Value given to evangelism



*'Reaching those who don't attend church' is most valued aspect of church (top 3 out of 13 options)*

**11%** of all attenders (ranked 12 of 13 options)

Highest values found in:

- Pentecostals **18%**
- "Other Protestants" **16%**
- Protestant attenders with a leadership role **16%**
- Attenders who switched denominations in last five years to current church **19%**

## Participation in evangelistic activities of church

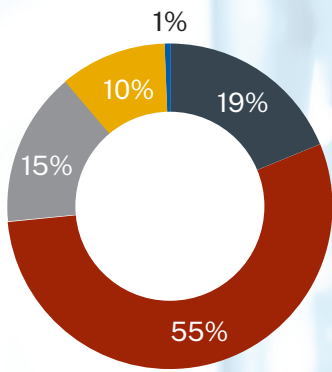


**13%** of all attenders

Highest participation found in:

- Attenders with a leadership role (Protestant) **25%**
- and (Catholic) **19%**
- "Other Protestants" **19%**

# Readiness to talk with others about faith



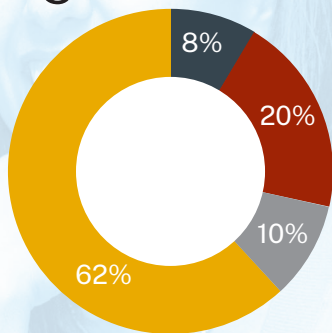
Q. Which of the following best describes your readiness to talk to others about your faith?

- At ease, look for opportunities
- Don't like to, actions sufficient
- Mostly at ease, do if comes up
- N/A - No faith
- Find it hard

Attendees most enthusiastic in talking about faith:

- Pentecostals
- Born overseas in non-English speaking country
- Attendees who switched denominations in last five years to current church

# Helping non-churchgoers explore questions of faith



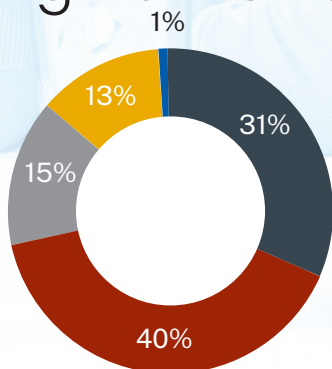
Q. In the last 12 months, have you been directly involved in helping any non-churchgoers explore questions about faith?

- Several people
- One person
- Few people
- None

Attendees most likely to help explore faith:

- Pentecostals
- Aged 15-19
- Attendees who switched denominations in last five years to current church

# Inviting non-attenders to church



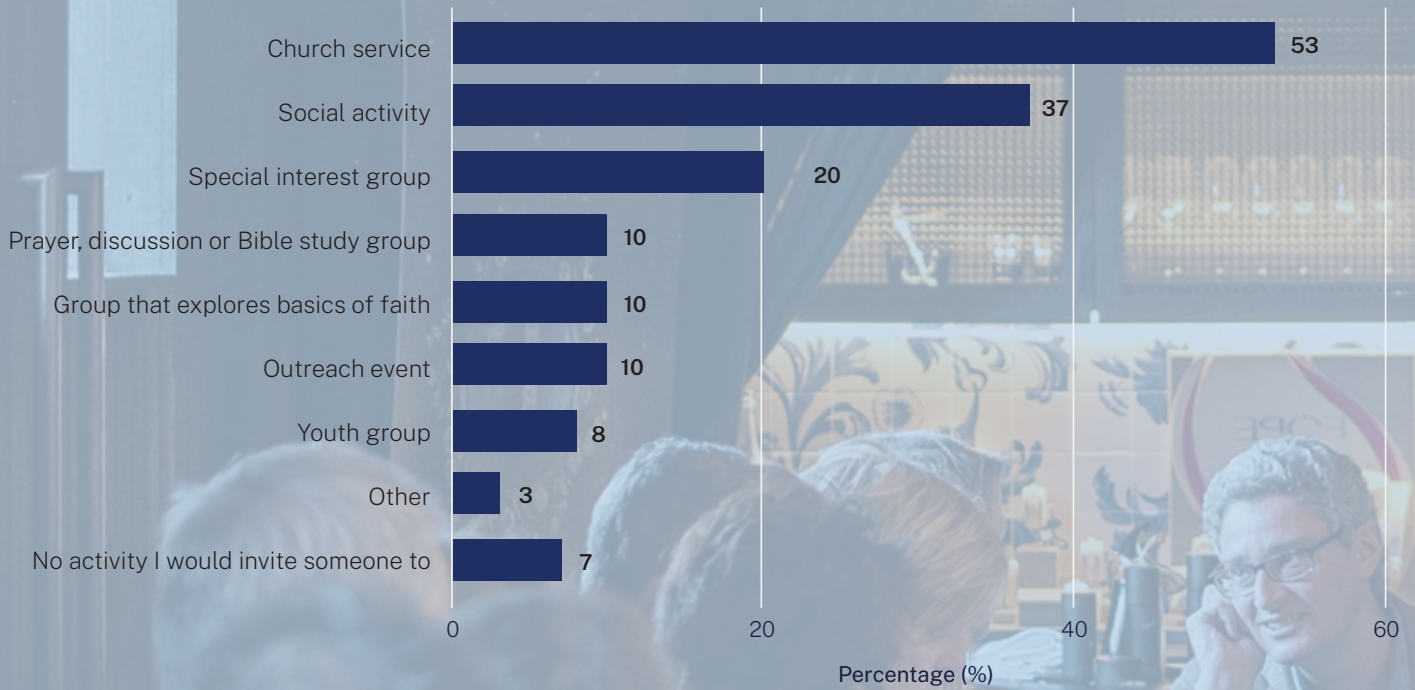
Q. Would you be prepared to invite to a church service here any of your friends and relatives who do not currently attend a church?

- Yes and have
- Probably not
- Yes but haven't
- Definitely not
- Don't know

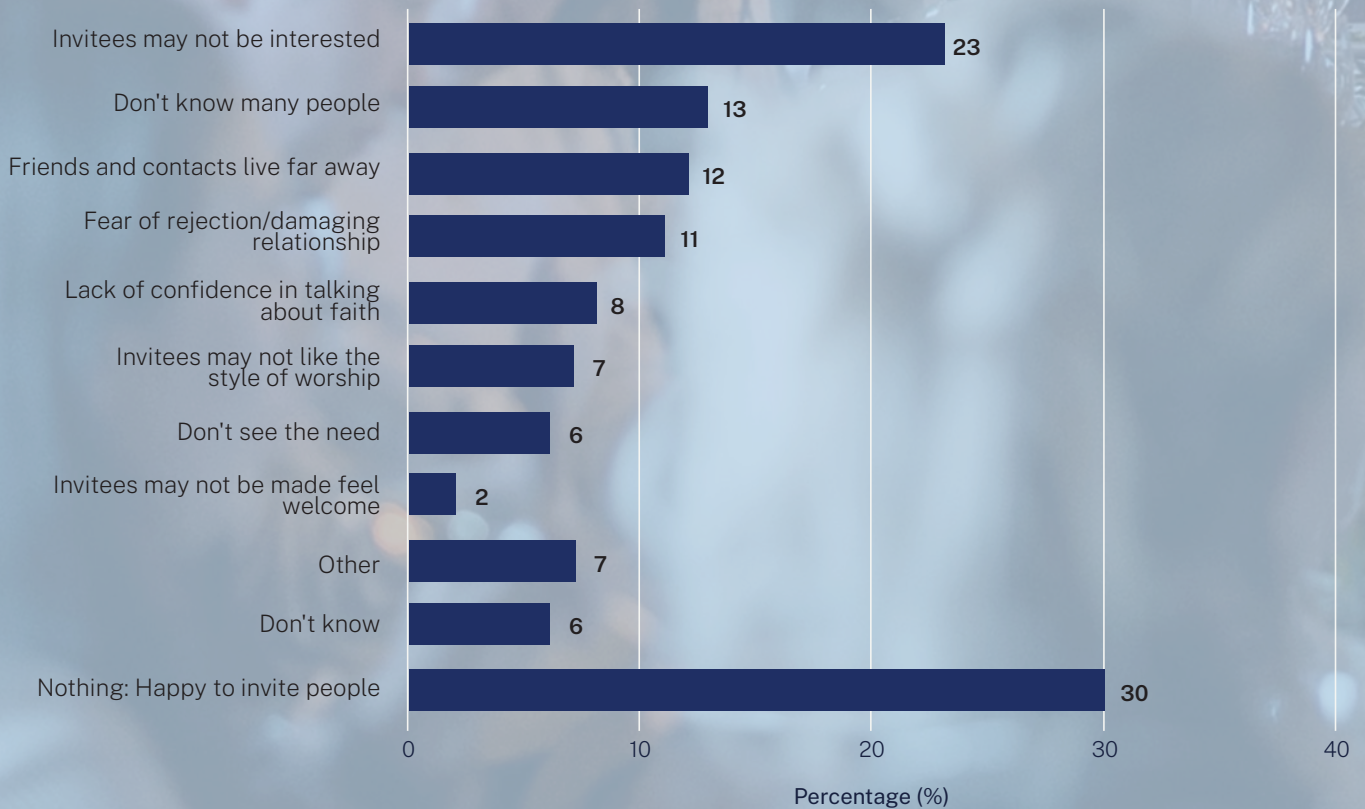
Attendees most avid in inviting others:

- Pentecostals
- Attendees who switched denominations in last five years to current church
- Protestant attendees in ministry/ leadership roles

# Activities attenders feel comfortable inviting people to:



# Factors that discourage attenders from inviting others:



Source: 2021 NCLS Attender Survey.

For more detailed results

This report summarises findings from three reports:

- Sharing faith: approaches by church attenders
- Discipleship & evangelism activities in local churches
  - Leaders' views on evangelism

These 3 detailed reports are available courtesy of Alpha Australia and NCLS Research



And Jesus came and said to them,  
'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.  
Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them  
in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.  
And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'  
(Matthew 28: 18 to 20)

# Discipleship & evangelism activities in local churches



Most churches intentionally and actively engage in evangelising activities.

This includes a visible Christian witness and/or strengthening relationships with the local community. It also includes acting to attract or welcome new people or develop discipleship of current and new members.

Most local churches run activities and programs that help attenders develop, deepen and grow their faith with three quarters running regular small groups and almost half running small short-term groups or courses (e.g. Alpha, Advent, Lent groups).

## Church approaches to discipleship and evangelism

Senior local church leaders assessed their church as follows:

**Welcoming** 80%

Church intentionally acts to attract or welcome new people



**Witness** 63%

Church intentionally acts to have a visible Christian witness in their community



**Discipleship** 77%

Church works to develop the discipleship of current and new members



**Community** 70%

Church intentionally strengthens relationships with people in the local community and beyond



# Discipleship activities in local churches

Churches running any discipleship activities (other than worship services)

91% 

(including small groups, women's ministries, men's ministries, various activities for children, youth and youth adults)

## Churches running small groups

In the past 12 months, did this church run ...

Small Bible study, discussion or prayer groups (regular groups only)?

78% 

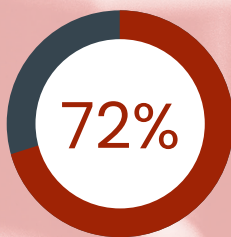
Small short-term groups or courses (e.g. Alpha, Advent, Lent groups)?

47% 

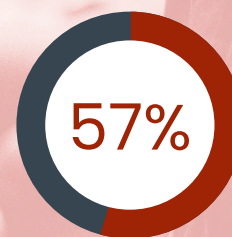
Catholic parishes were nearly twice as likely to run short-term groups or courses (79%) compared to Protestant churches (43%).

# Evangelistic activities in local churches

Any evangelistic or outreach activities

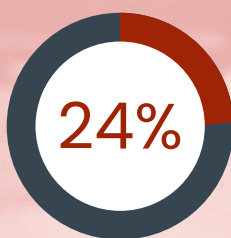


Community event  
e.g. fair, open day, Christmas carols, shared meal, musical event



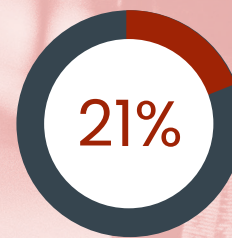
Evangelistic church services or events

e.g. guest speaker services, outreach services



Evangelistic courses

e.g. Christianity Explained, Alpha





## Leaders' views of evangelism

The state of evangelism is positive in Australia with three in four senior leaders seeing evangelism as highly important.


Evangelism is a work that is shared. While almost all churches/parishes have leaders and/or attenders involved in evangelism, who is involved varies. Beyond formal evangelism, most senior leaders hold the view that attenders evangelise as part of their daily lives.

About a quarter of senior leaders felt they had a particular gifting in evangelism, while almost all felt equipped in mission and outreach, at least to a basic level.

Senior leaders were confident in the possibility of growth in their church, which provides a strong foundation for evangelism.

## Importance of evangelism

76% of senior leaders said "Leaders here see evangelism as highly important"

32% strongly agree 

44% agree 

Senior leaders at Pentecostal (87%) and Other (non-Mainstream) Protestant churches (83%) were more likely to agree or strongly agree that leaders at their local church/parish see evangelism as highly important, compared to Catholic (75%) and Mainstream Protestant (66%) senior leaders.

## Meaning of mission

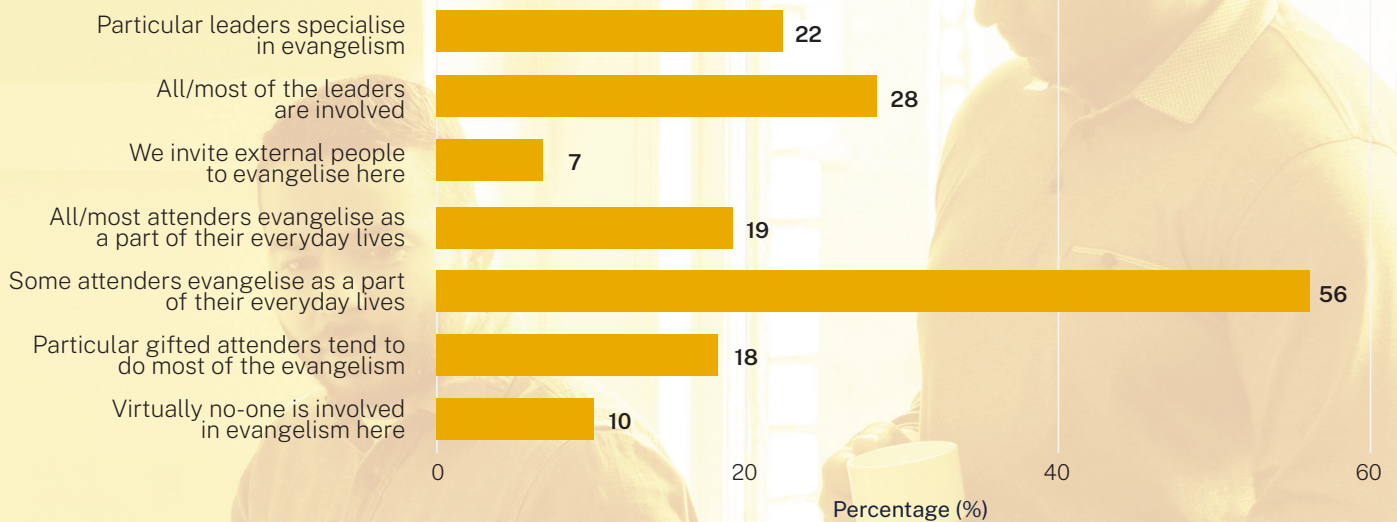
The dominant understandings of "mission" among senior leaders were

- "being a witness to Jesus Christ through my actions" and
- "proclaiming the Word of God".

*Source: 2021 NCLS Leader Survey.*

# Evangelism as a shared work

Senior leaders report both leaders and attenders are involved in evangelism



## Senior leaders gifting and equipping

- About a quarter (26%) of leaders felt they had a particular gifting in evangelism,
- A fifth (20%) had been trained in outreach/evangelism in the previous two years, and
- Four in ten (41%) felt very well equipped in mission and outreach (a further 47% felt equipped to a basic level).

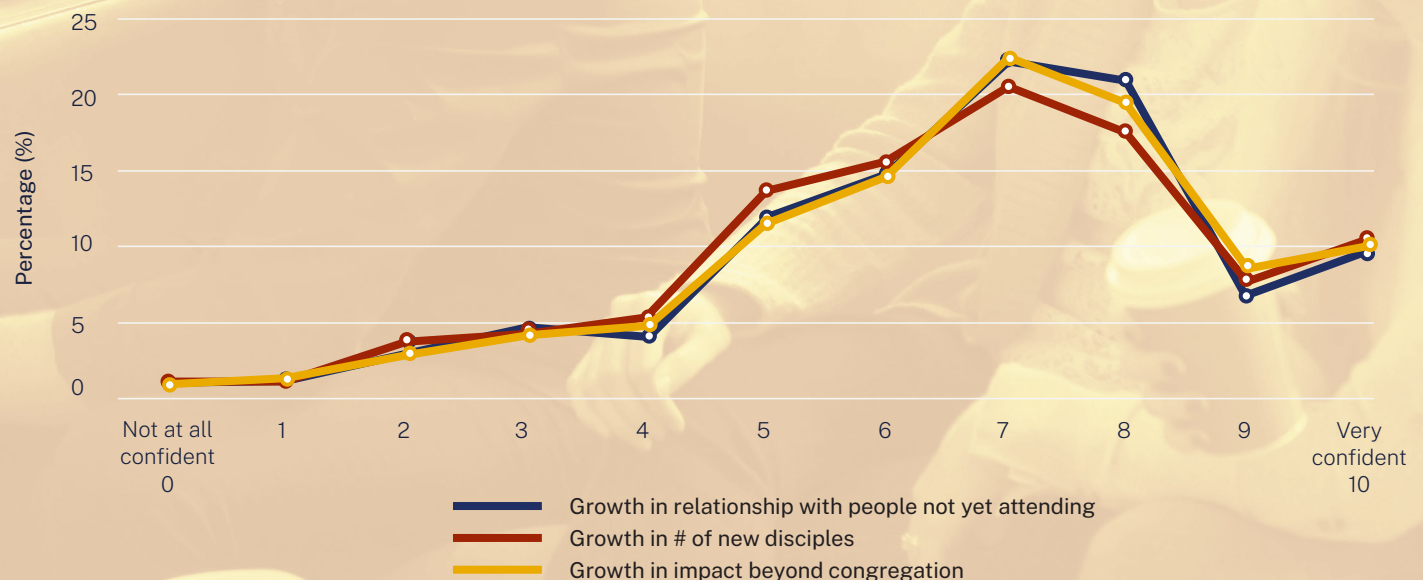
## Confidence in growth

Mean confidence rating between 6 and 7 was given by senior leaders for growth in:

- relationship with people not attending church
- number of new disciples
- impact beyond the congregation

Pentecostal leaders were especially confident.

Senior leader confidence about growth in the next 5 years



Source: 2021 NCLS Leader Survey.

# Faith sharing, discipleship and evangelism

## SUMMARY REPORT

This report uses the findings from the 2021 NCLS to understand the faith sharing approaches of church attenders, activities that local churches undertake to promote a culture of discipleship and evangelism, and church leaders' views of evangelism.

*Want more?*



3 detailed reports are available:

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