



Thursday, February 24, 2011

A survey of churches for churches

Churches that use the 2011 National Church Life Survey to take time to reflect and review will reap the benefits of access to detailed information about themselves and their communities – valuable information all in one place.

The National Church Life Survey is a tool that has helped local churches of many types and denominations do this for over 20 years.

NCLS research and resources help churches assess qualities of vital church life, including faith, worship, belonging, vision, leadership, innovation, service, faith-sharing and inclusion.

The 2011 National Church Life Survey – for which each denomination will be allocated a survey month from September to November – will provide churches with evidence-based insight to equip them for ministry and mission.

Feedback from the survey

- identifies signs of hope in churches;
- provides practical processes to build on strengths and grow vision;
- highlights the passions and hopes of your attenders;
- shows what attenders value about the church and how they think it's going;
- sustains and promotes wellbeing in leaders.

Survey results help churches to identify and understand changes in attendance, young adult retention and newcomers.

It produces a profile of a church and its strengths. The Church Life Pack of supporting material helps build church vitality, nurture growth in faith, vision and outreach.

Carole Gan, from the Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay, said NCLS statistics helped parishes make informed decisions. Information from the 2006 survey helped identify nine core strengths and parishes could see areas they might need to build on.

She said some parish leaders might be surprised to discover what their members actually thought. And churches could compare the services they offered with what was available and needed in the community.

The Rev. Dr Steen Olsen, Mission Director with the Lutheran Church of Australia, SA/NT District, said, "Often our 'gut feelings' about what is happening in our congregations and in the lives of our people prove to be flawed.

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“NCLS gives us objective data to shape our prayers and on which we build our plans. The community connections materials are invaluable in helping our congregations engage with their neighbourhoods. We are looking forward to using the results of the 2011 National Church Life Survey in the work of the kingdom of God.”

The 2011 National Church Life Survey will have optional extras, including one that allows local churches to find out more about the spiritual beliefs, needs and hopes of people who don't regularly attend.

National Census data and the NCLS surveys are used to profile a local community, its people and social changes. The Community Connections Pack helps churches connect with their local area.

Uniting Church Rural Chaplain Julie Greig said, “To have all the information in one place, categorised and graphed, and not spend hours digging it out from ABS data is a huge benefit.”

Gary Koo, a minister at St Paul's Anglican Church, Carlingford, Sydney, said NCLS data had helped staff determine what type of ministries and church plants to develop.

They could see the percentage of people in a certain ethnic group, age groups, languages spoken, socio-economic status and how a local area had changed over time.

The 2011 survey will have the most practical and grounded focus on community yet, with online surveys for young people and local church contacts such as people at playgroups.

Uniquely Australian, this cooperative project of churches seeks to gain insight and understanding into the changing face of church and spirituality; to equip churches to connect better with their communities; and to invite the wider community to reflect upon its spirituality and the church's place within it.

Churches who take part in the 2011 National Church Life Survey will be able to

- hear all the voices in a season of listening, including those who don't always get heard: clergy, lay leaders, adult attenders, youth and children;
- take stock of their health and vitality;
- assess nine core qualities and three attendance measures;
- identify and build on their strengths;
- contribute to the largest collection of data on church life in the world;
- shape the story of the church in the wider community.

For more information, visit <http://www.2011ncls.org.au/> or contact Director Ruth Powell on 02 8267 4394.