

SOCIAL SHIFTS

SPIRITUAL TRENDS

4 DECADES OF CHANGE

Christianity in Australia Today



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RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This report was commissioned by Christian Venues Association to analyse trends regarding Christianity in Australia today, and to identify generational changes, faith influencers and the role of Christian camps and conferences in the spiritual lives of Australians.

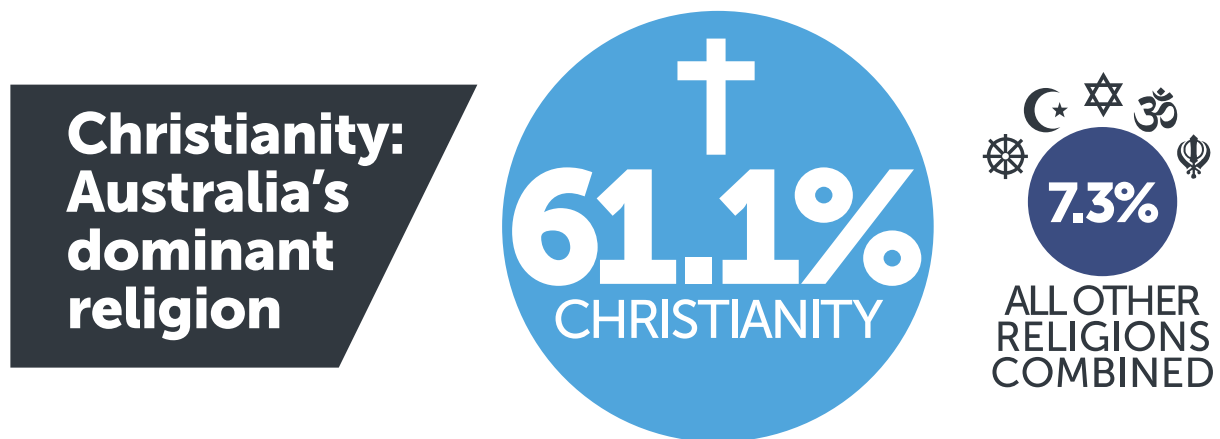
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This report is based on Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data, other ABS data sets, McCrindle Research figures and survey questions commissioned by Christian Venues Association in the 2011 National Church Life Survey (NCLS).

SOCIAL CHANGE, SPIRITUAL TRENDS:

The Church in Australia

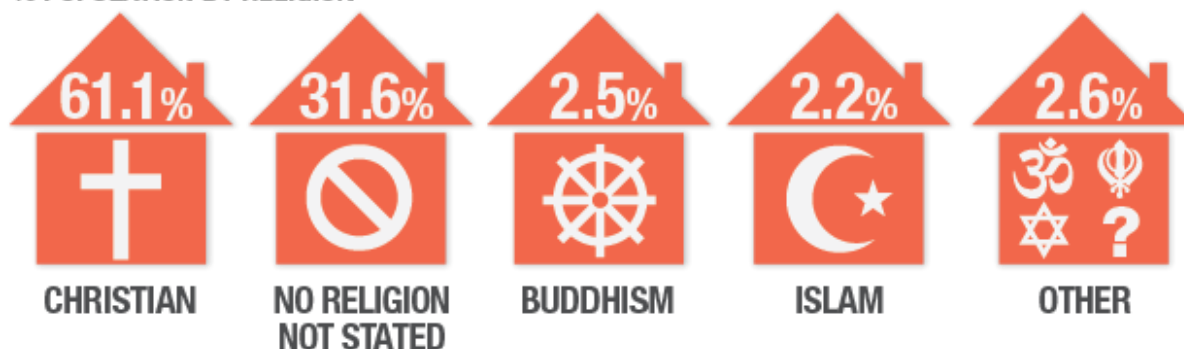
Amidst the massive change drivers of demographic growth, increased cultural diversity, transitioning household structures and shifting societal values is the church, which has historically been a cornerstone to the social fabric and community engagement in our nation. Christianity continues to be the dominant religion in Australia, however the trend line shows a gradual decrease of those stating that they are Christian. When asked in the 2011 National Census what their religion was, 3 in 5 Australians (61.1%) identified as Christian, however this has gradually declined from 96% in 1911. During the past decade this has declined from 68% to 61%.



Contrastingly, there has been an increase in those reporting an affiliation to non-Christian religions or stating they are not religious. The number of people reporting 'no religion' has increased strongly over the last decade from 15% to 22% of the population. This is even more evident amongst younger people, with 28% of the 15-34s stating that they had no religious affiliation. Almost 1 in 3 Australians (31.6%) identify as either "not religious" or chose to not state their religion, and 7.3% of Australians identify with a religion other than Christianity. Younger people make up a high proportion of those reporting no religion (around half who did so being less than 30 years old).

In a segmented society which is increasingly stratified by age and generation, the church still stands in our community as a community of diversity where different generations, cultures and genders congregate, connect and contribute.

% POPULATION BY RELIGION

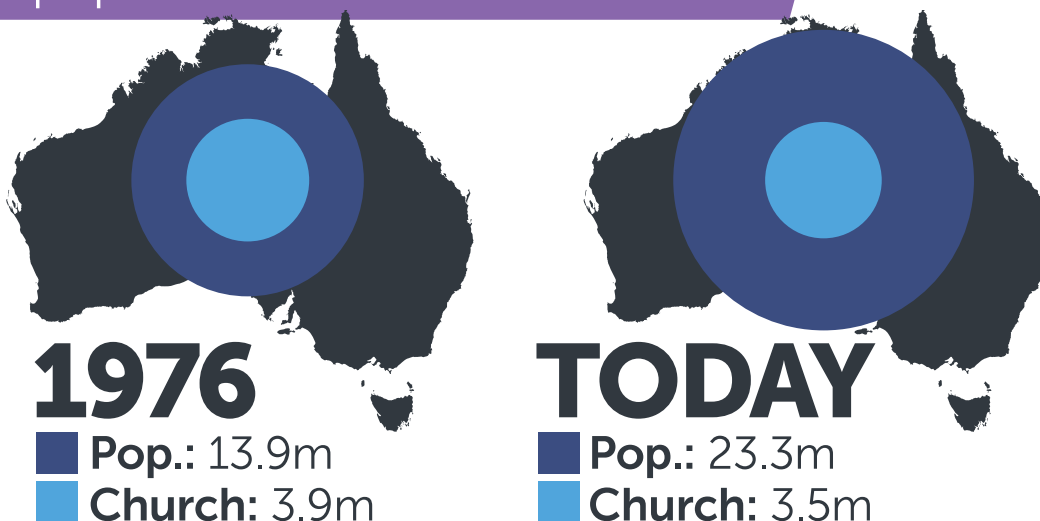


High Affinity, Less Activity

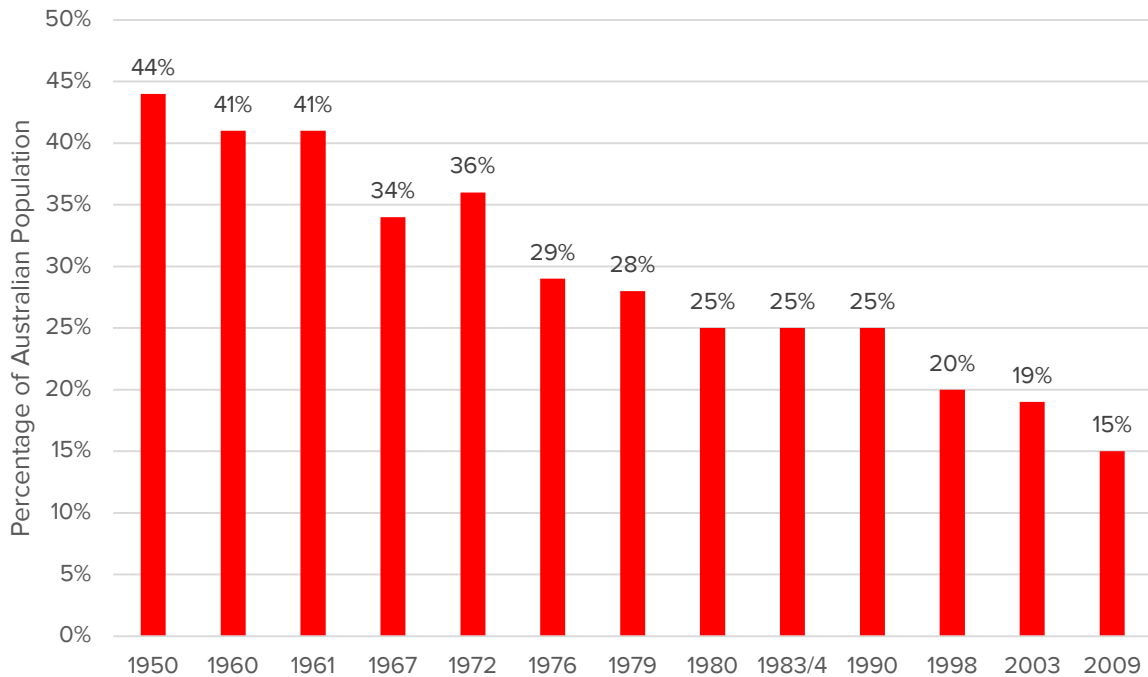
To provide further context about Christianity in our nation, Australia has more churches (13,000) than schools (9,500), and more Australians regularly attend church (3.5 million) than the total populations of South Australia, Northern Territory, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory combined. However in 1976, when Australia's population was 13.9 million, there were 3.9 million regular church attenders. In 1960, 2 in 5 Australians (41%) attended church at least once per month, in 1990 this had declined to 1 in 4 (25%), and today it is approximately 1 in 7 (15%). These trends suggest that whilst Australians still associate with Christianity, there is an engagement deficit when it comes to church attendance and actively practicing their faith.

Population growing, church attendance shrinking

Total population & church attendance



Monthly Church Attendance 1950-2009



A trendline of declining adherence

Religious change: 1976 - today



Christianity

↓ 22%



Church attendance

↓ 48%



No religion

↑ 269%

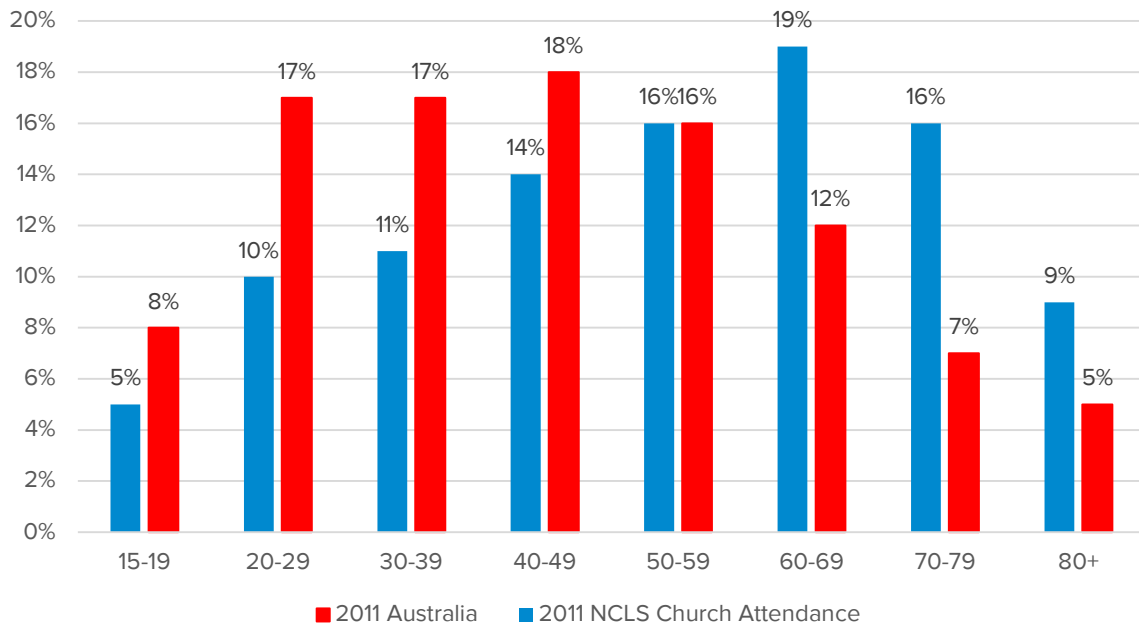
Older Generations Strongly Represented in the Church

Church attendance analysis shows a clear demographic trend; there is an underrepresentation of younger Australians attending church. While the 70 plus age group

The over 60s make up 24% of the national population but 44% of the church population.

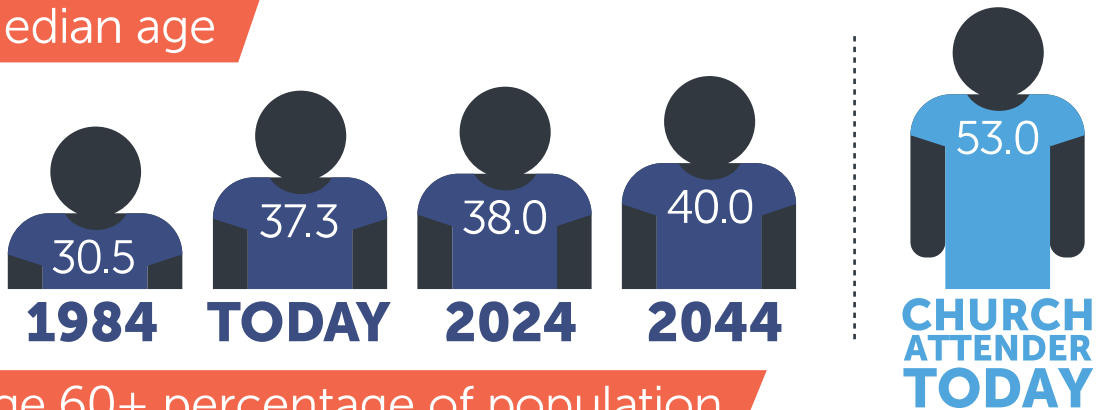
are strongly represented in church (comprising 12% of the population but 25% of all church attendees), the age groups under 50 are underrepresented. This divide is increasingly evident with each younger generation. For example, the 20-39 year olds make up 34% of the population but just 21% of church attenders.

Australian Population and Church Attenders (aged 15+)

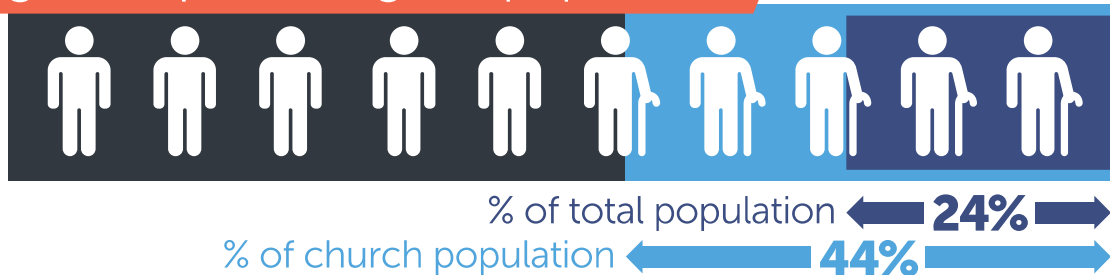


Ageing population & an ageing church

Median age



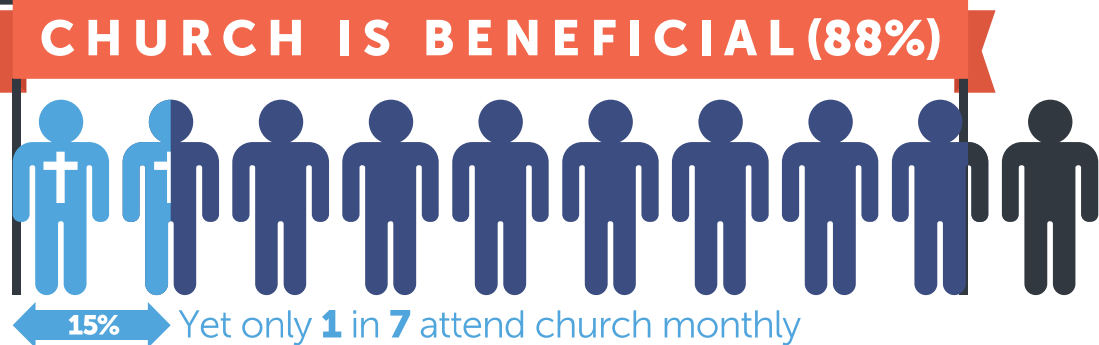
Age 60+ percentage of population



Church Beneficial to the Community

Whilst church attendance is in decline, Australians still see the value of church in our communities. The church is well regarded for its education, health and welfare legacy in forging this nation and its ongoing community building to this day. In a study conducted by McCrindle Research, 91% of Australians stated that the church is beneficial for the community, and over half (56%) stated it is beneficial to them as an individual. When non-regular church attenders were asked this same question, close to 9 in 10 (88%) still believe churches are beneficial for their community, and 43% state that churches are beneficial for them personally, even though they do not attend regularly. This socio-solo deficit highlights that Australians see the value of churches in their community but have reservations about the relevance of church to their own life.

Most Australians say the church is beneficial for their community



The centripetal force of change relentlessly pushes organisations to the margins of relevance in ever changing times. However, by being responsive to social trends and innovative in style, many churches have been able to communicate timeless truth in an engaging way.

Christianity and Relevance

While the complexity of life and the busyness of modern households have no doubt impacted on church attendance numbers, this is not seen as the primary obstacle, with just 15% of Australians stating that they are “too busy to attend”. And nor is it an issue of belief, with just 14% putting their non-attendance down to doubts about Jesus and the Bible. Australians consistently attributed their reasons for non-attendance to the relevance of the church, the application of its teaching in their lives and the style of services. The key objections were that it was “outdated” and “irrelevant” and they would more likely attend church if it was “modern”, “relevant” and “transparent”. It must be understood that while Australians have strong views of the church, most have had little adult experience of church services. Church

leaders need to understand that Australians have not rejected the church but rather their perceptions of it. It is their imaginings of a church service that has been found wanting rather than the modern day reality. Perceptions are powerful, influence behaviour and ought not to be dismissed. Therefore the remedy to the relevance question is one of communication, interaction and invitation.



The statistics highlight Australia's engagement with Christianity; whilst there was only a slight decline over the last five years of Australians who identify as Christians in the Census (64% in 2006 to 61.1% in 2011), there is a significant engagement challenge for the church at large, particularly evident in reaching the emerging generations who are significantly underrepresented in the church.

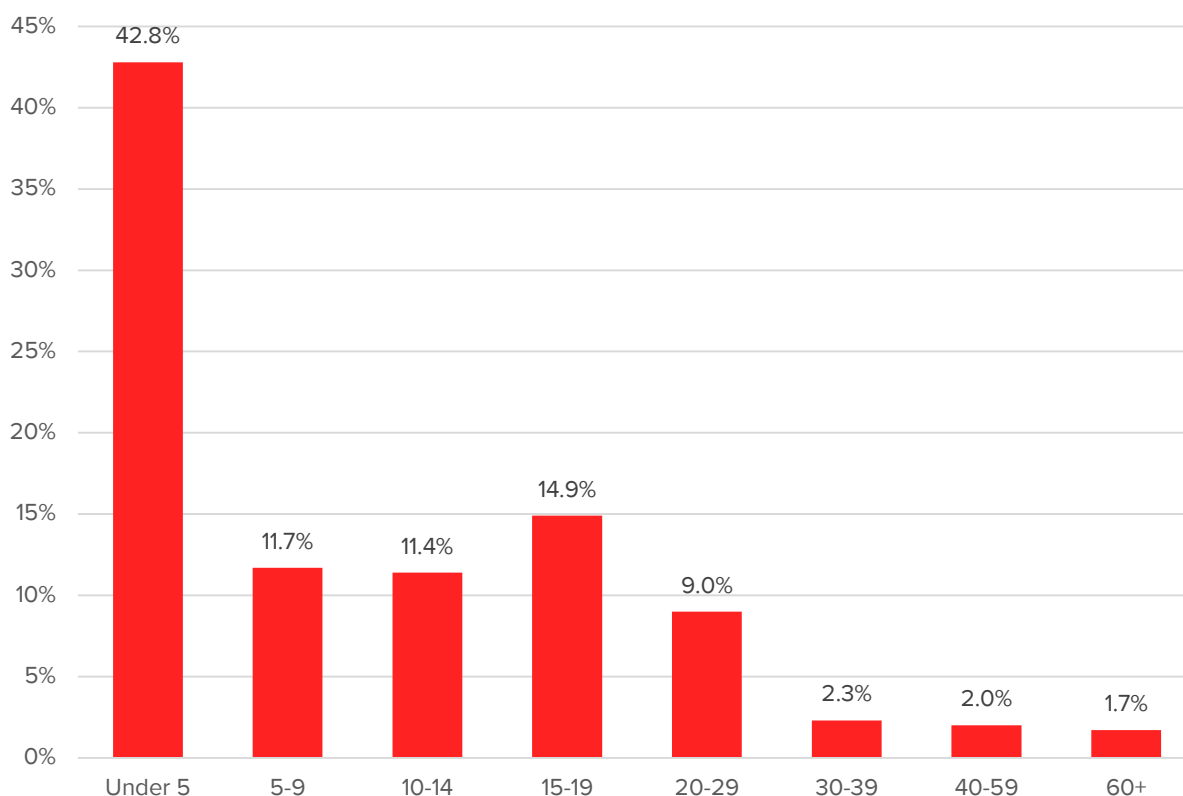
The results from the 2011 National Church Life Survey which surveyed over 270,000 church attenders provide some fascinating insights into the current situation of the Australian church and the practices and priorities of attenders.

FAITH DECISIONS IN AUSTRALIA

4 in 5 Faith Decisions Before Age of 20

In order to better understand Christianity in Australia and the role of the church and other ministries, it is important to look at when and how people make the decision to become a Christian.

"If you can identify a particular age, how old were you when you first became a Christian?"

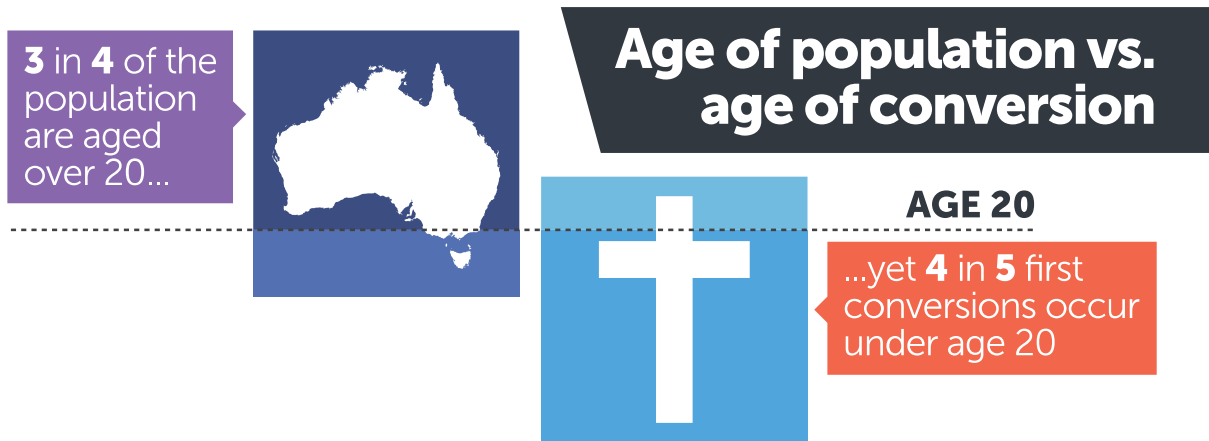


4 in 5 church attenders first made the decision to become a Christian before the age of 20.

9 in 10 church attenders first made the decision before the age of 30.

A significant finding that the NCLS data shows is that the decision to first become a Christian is most likely to occur whilst young, with **81% of decisions being made before the age of 20**. A further 9% make the decision to become a Christian as a young adult when aged in their 20s, which means **that 9 in 10 current**

Australian church attenders made the decision to be a Christian before they were 30. Just 1 in 17 church attenders (6%) made the decision aged 30 or older. Under 1 in 20 church attenders, 4.2% cannot remember when they first made the decision.



A significant proportion of those who make the decision to become a Christian before the age of 20 actually do so before they are 5 years old (42.8%). Many of these are likely to have grown up in a Christian family and have been identified as “Faith Inheritors”. Almost a quarter, 23.1% of church attenders made the decision to first become a Christian when aged 5-14 years of age, segmented as “Tween Converters”. Also making up approximately a quarter of church attenders (23.9%) are those who made the decision to become a Christian when aged between 15-29 years of age, identified as “Young Deciders”. Those who made the decision when aged over 30 make up 6% of the church population and have been labelled as “Adult Responders”.

Faith Inheritors (First became a Christian aged under 5)



Faith Inheritors are those who first made the decision to become a Christian aged under 5, and make up 42.8% of church attenders.

Some characteristics of Faith Inheritors include:

- Make up over 2 in 5 church goers
 - This segment is decreasing – for the current Gen Y and Gen Zeds aged between 15-29 years old, just 31.8% made the decision to become a Christian before the age of 5.
 - Make up 54.8% of church attenders born in a non-English speaking country.
- While Faith Inheritors comprise 2 in 5 church goers, they comprise 3 in 5 (61.9%) of Australians who attend church less than monthly and 3 in 5 (59.3%) of those who hardly ever or never have a personal devotional practice and 3 in 4 (75%) of those who do not see God as most important in their life.
 - They're less likely to have a leadership role (35.2%) than their representation in the church (42.8%).
 - Faith Inheritors make up almost three quarters of Catholic congregations (72.6%), about a quarter of Mainstream Protestant congregations (24.2%), 15.3% of Other Protestant congregations and just 9.4% of Pentecostal congregations.

Tween Converters (First became a Christian when aged 5-14)



Almost a quarter (23.1%) of church attenders made the decision to first become a Christian between the ages of 5 and 14, and this segment has been identified as “Tween Converters”.

Some characteristics of the Tween Converters include:

- Tween Converters are less likely to be in the “hardly ever / never” devotional practice category (12.1%).
- Make up over a quarter of those who have a ministry or leadership role (26.8%).
- Make up almost a third of Mainstream Protestant congregations (30.9%), almost a third (30.7%) of Other Protestant congregations, just over a quarter of Pentecostal congregations (26.3%) and 15% of Catholic congregations.

Young Deciders (First became a Christian aged 15-29)



Young Deciders make up almost a quarter of the church population (23.9%), and first made the decision to become a Christian when aged between 15 and 29.

Some characteristics of the Young Deciders include:

- Make up 41.2% of the current Gen Y and Z attenders aged between 15-19.
- While more male church goers made their first time decision aged 10-14 than females, more females in the 15-19 age group made their first decision.
- Make up 32.8% of church attenders who were born in an English speaking country other than Australia, and just 22.3% of those born in a non-English speaking country and 23.3% of those born in Australia.
- Make up 26.2% of those who attend church weekly or more and just 4.4% of those who attend less than monthly.
- Make up 25.6% of those who have devotional practice daily or most days, 29.5% of those who have one once or a few times a week and just 14.8% of those who hardly or never have a devotional practice.
- Make up 30.4% of those who say God is 'most important' in their lives.
- Make up 30.1% of those who have a ministry or leadership role.
- Make up 62% of Pentecostal congregations, 40.1% of Other Protestant congregations, 28.7% of Mainstream Protestant congregations and just 4.1% of Catholic congregations.

Adult Responders (First became a Christian when aged 30+)



Adult Responders are those who first make the decision to become a Christian when aged over 30 and make up just 6% of the church population.

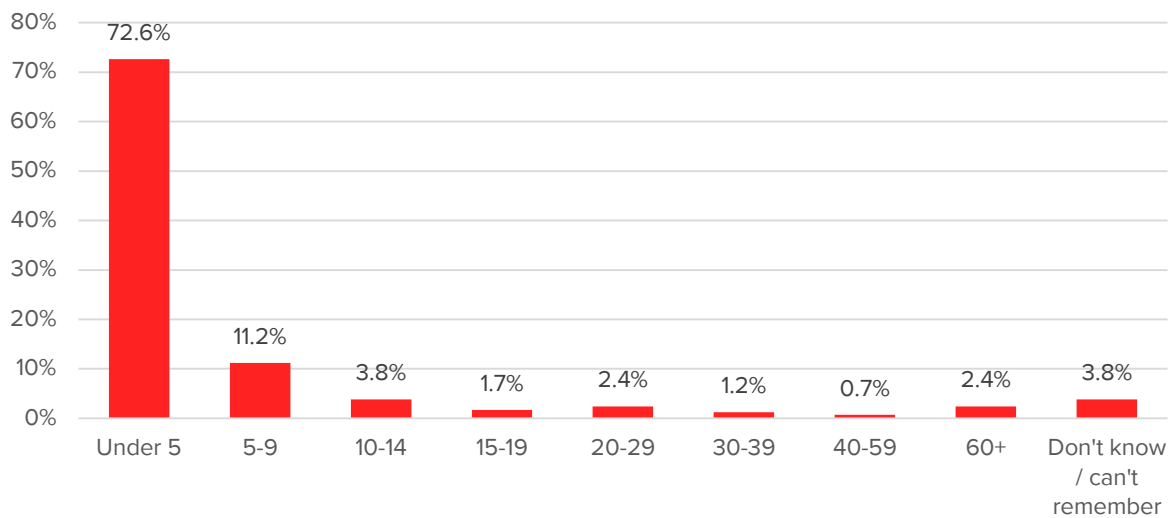
Characteristics of Adult Responders include:

- Make up 7% of male church attenders, 5.2% of female church attenders
- Make up 7.6% of attenders born in a non-English speaking country and 5.5% of those born in Australia.
- They make up 6% of those who have a devotional practice daily or most days and 5.6% of those who hardly ever / never do.
- They make up 4.1% of those who have a leadership/ ministry role.
- Adult Responders make up 9.5% of Other Protestant congregations, 9.4% of Mainstream Protestant congregations, 4.3% of Catholic congregations and 1.8% of Pentecostal congregations.

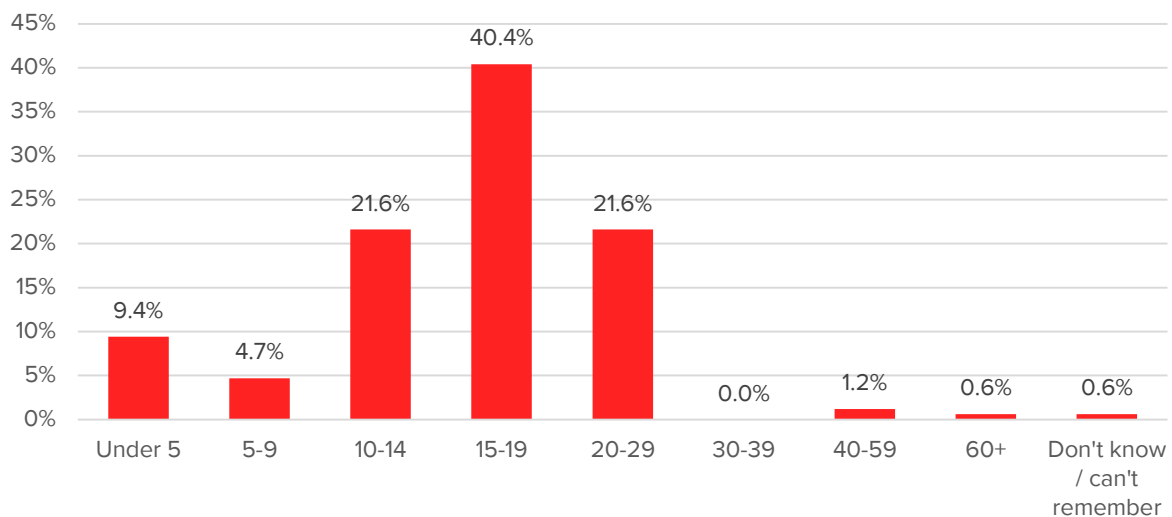
Faith Decisions and Denominations

An analysis of age at first conversion data identifies some interesting insights around denominational affiliation, church attendance patterns, devotional practices and ministry involvement. For example, whilst Catholics are strongly represented by Faith Inheritors (72.6% of Catholic church attenders are Faith Inheritors), Young Deciders are strongly represented in Pentecostal churches (62% of Pentecostal churches are made up of Young Deciders). Protestant churches have a strong representation of Tween Converters, making up 31% of Protestant churches.

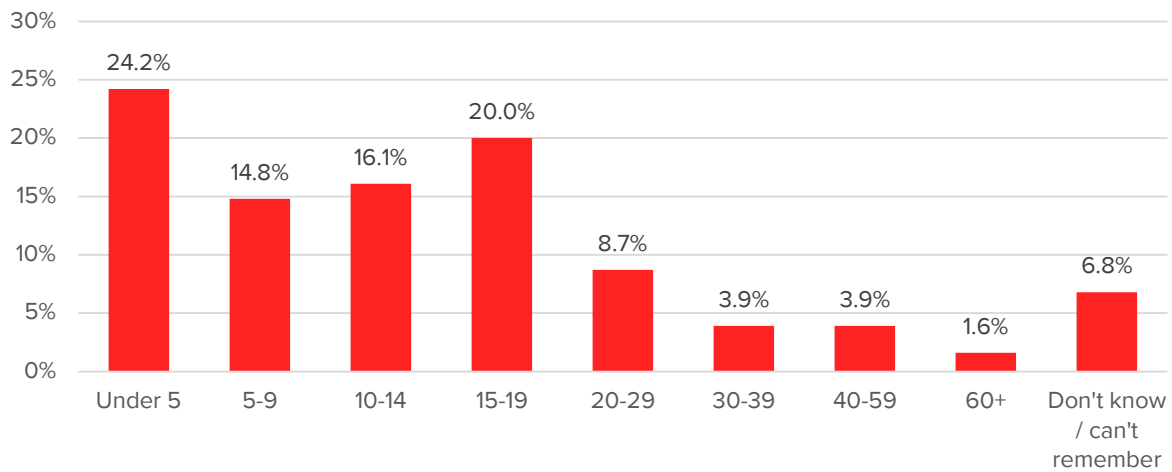
Age when first became a Christian for Catholic



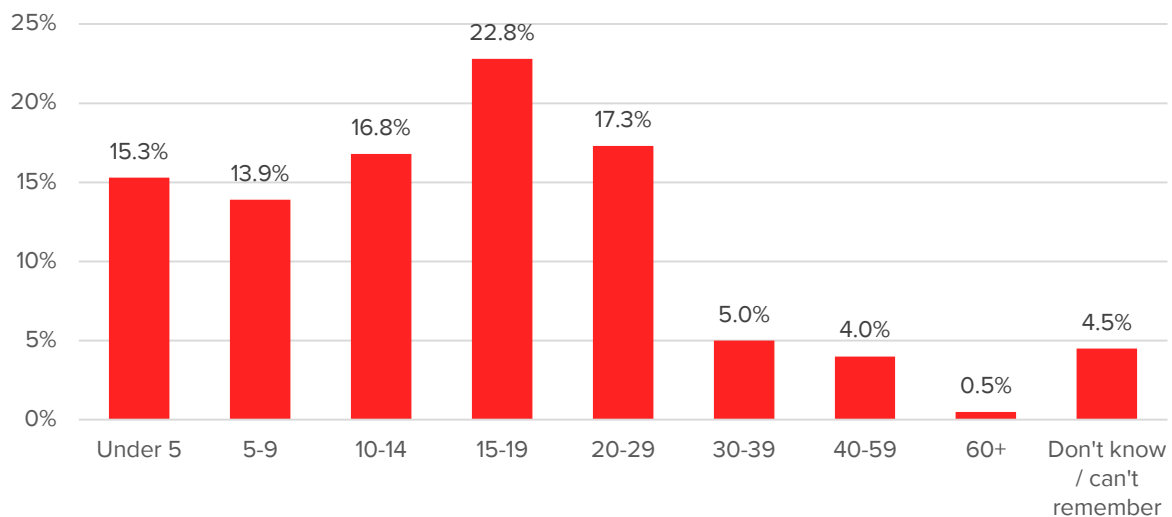
Age when first became a Christian for Pentecostal



Age when first became a Christian for Mainstream Protestant



Age when first became a Christian for Other Protestant



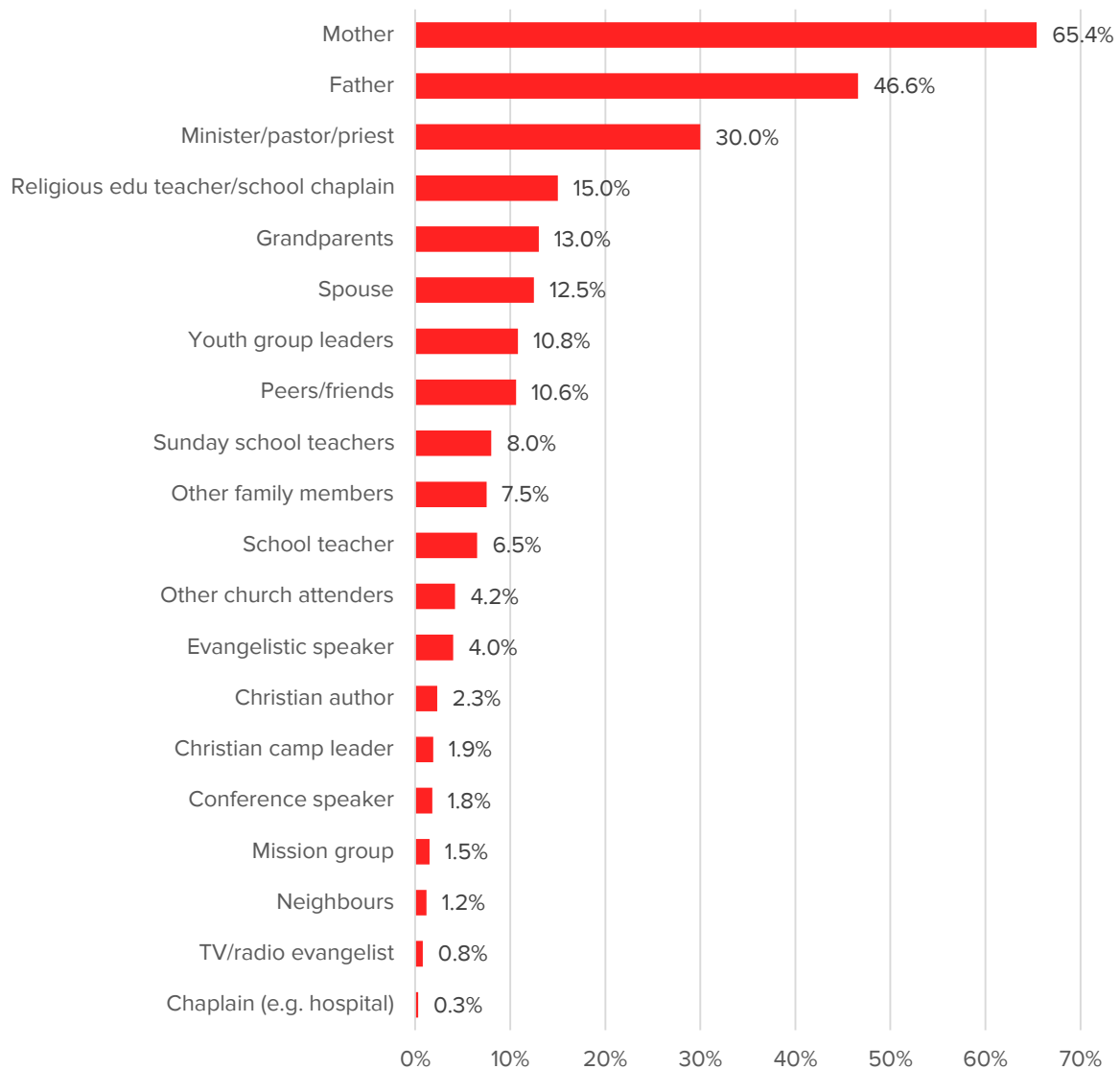
Faith Inheritors Declining

Whilst 2 in 5 church attenders (42.8%) are Faith Inheritors, having made the decision before the age of 5, this significantly decreases with the current Generation Y and Zeds, with under 1 in 3 (31.8%) making the decision before the age of 5. This is likely to have been affected by the decrease in church attendance by Australians over the past few decades, which has impacted the transference of faith to the next generation who were less likely to have been brought up attending church. Whilst Gen Y and Zeds are more likely to be a Young Decider, making the decision when aged 15-29, this generation is significantly underrepresented in the church. Whilst the 15-29 year olds make up 29% of Australia's population, they make up just 14% of the Church population.

Parents are influential in shaping faith

The role of parents in shaping one's faith is hugely significant, and therefore the trend of declining church attendance has had a noticeable impact on the younger generations who have been less likely to grow up being taken to church. When church attenders were asked who were the most significant people in showing them what faith was about, the overwhelming response was their mother (65.4%) followed by their father (46.6%).

"Who were the most significant people to show you what faith was about?"



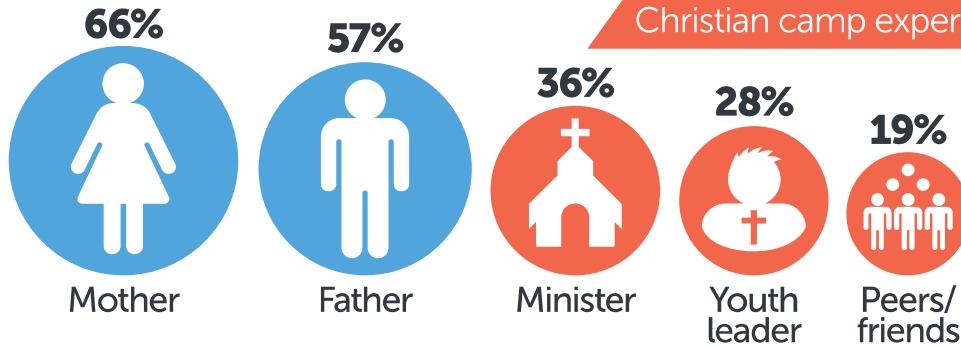
FAITH SHAPERS

From Ministers to Peers

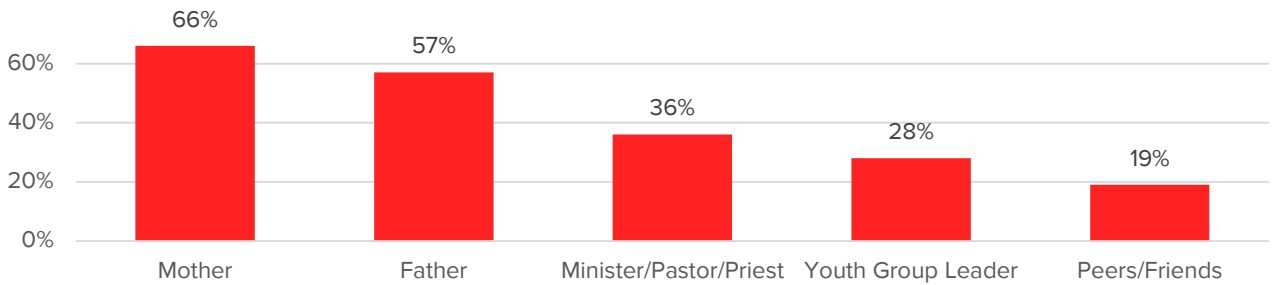
Parents clearly play an important role in the spiritual life of their children, but outside the family home, the next most significant influencer on one's faith understanding was church ministers, pastors or priests (significant for 30% of church attenders), followed by a religious education teacher or school chaplain (significant for 15%). The role of the religious education teacher or school chaplain had a slightly higher impact for females than males (17% compared with 13%). This shows the importance of such outreach ministries in our school communities, particularly in light of the data which shows almost 2 in 5 church attenders (38%) make the decision to become a Christian during the school years. Grandparents had a significant impact for 13%, spouses for 12.5% (however, spouses had a significant impact on 17% of males compared with 9% of females). Youth group leaders were significant for 10.8% of all church attenders, however this increases to 28% for current Gen Y and Zeds aged 15-29. While peers were seen as significantly influential for 1 in 10 church attenders (10.9%), this increases to almost 1 in 5 (19%) of current Gen Y and Zeds aged 15-29. This is likely to be influenced by the current stage of life where peer influence is significant, and also may have increased due to the social media networks which the emerging generations are frequent users of and heavily influenced by. The more engaged that someone was in regularly attending church and with their personal devotional practices, the more significant the role of church leaders, ministers and youth leaders was seen to be. Similarly, for those with a ministry or leadership role, the role of the church minister or youth leader was more likely to be significant.

Top 5 most influential in faith shaping (15-29 yr olds)

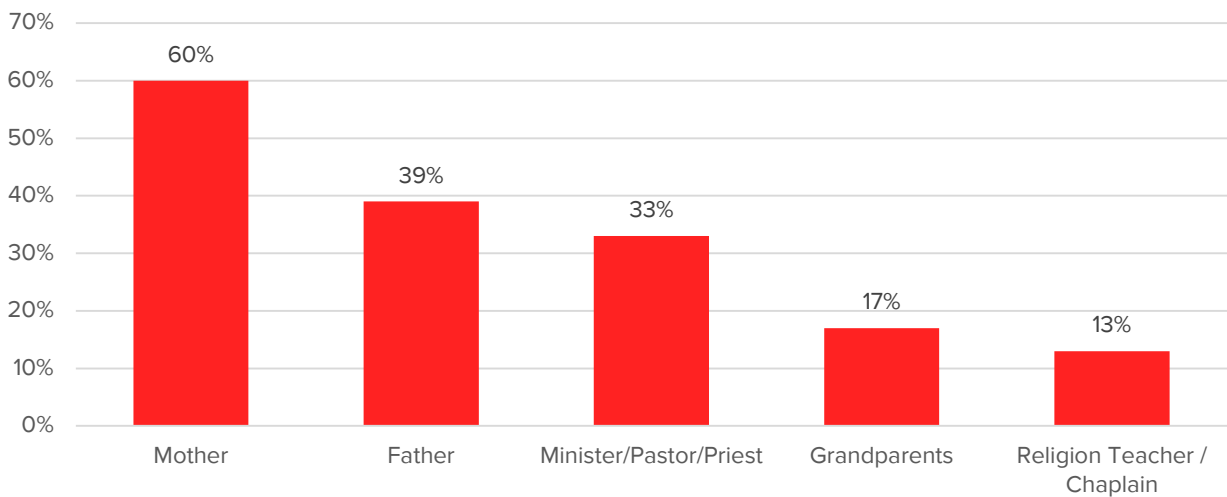
After parents, the top 3 influencers are instrumental in the Christian camp experience



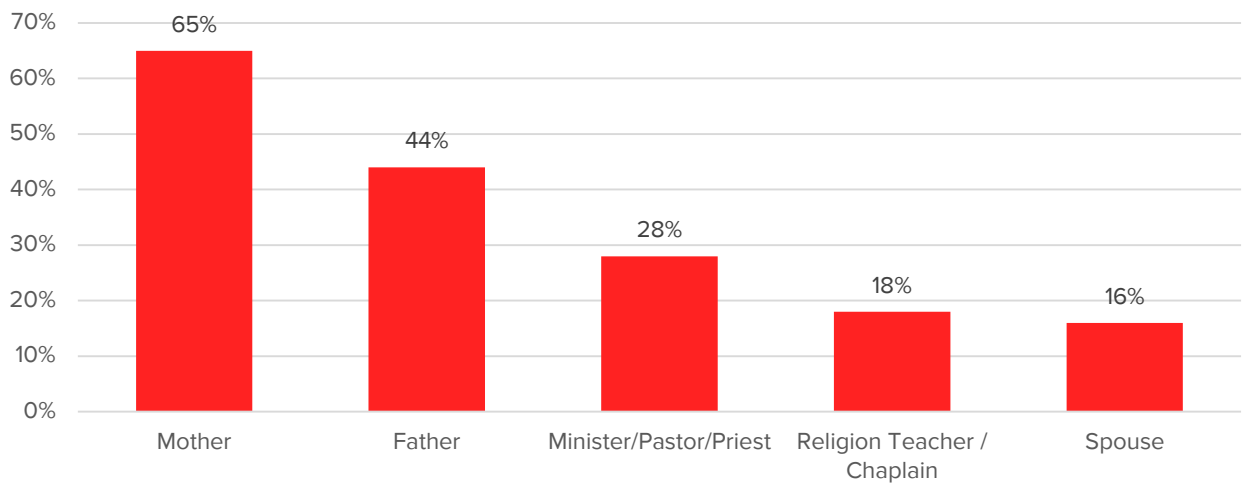
Top 5 significant people to faith for 15-29 year olds



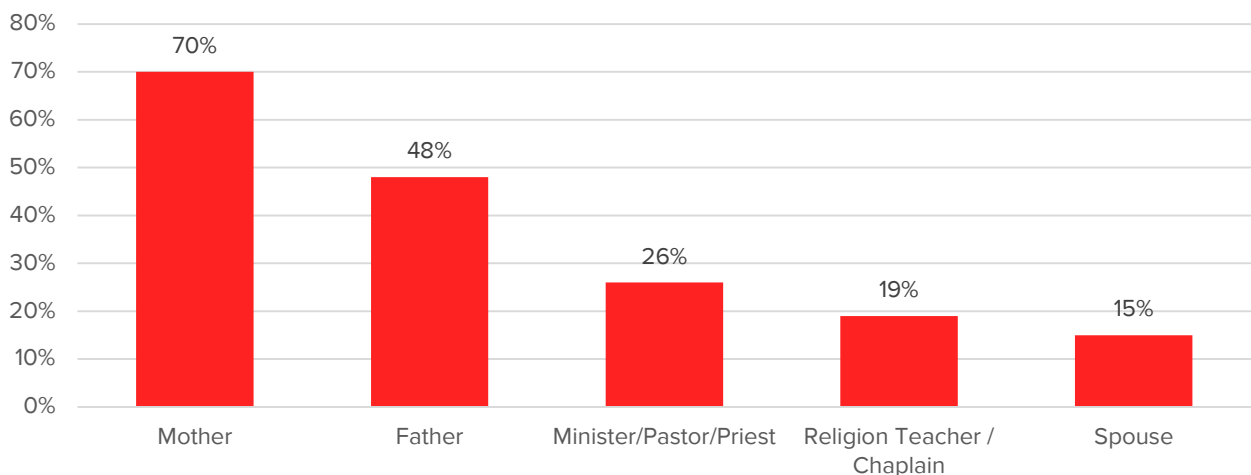
Top 5 significant people to faith for 30-49 year olds



Top 5 significant people to faith for 50-69 year olds



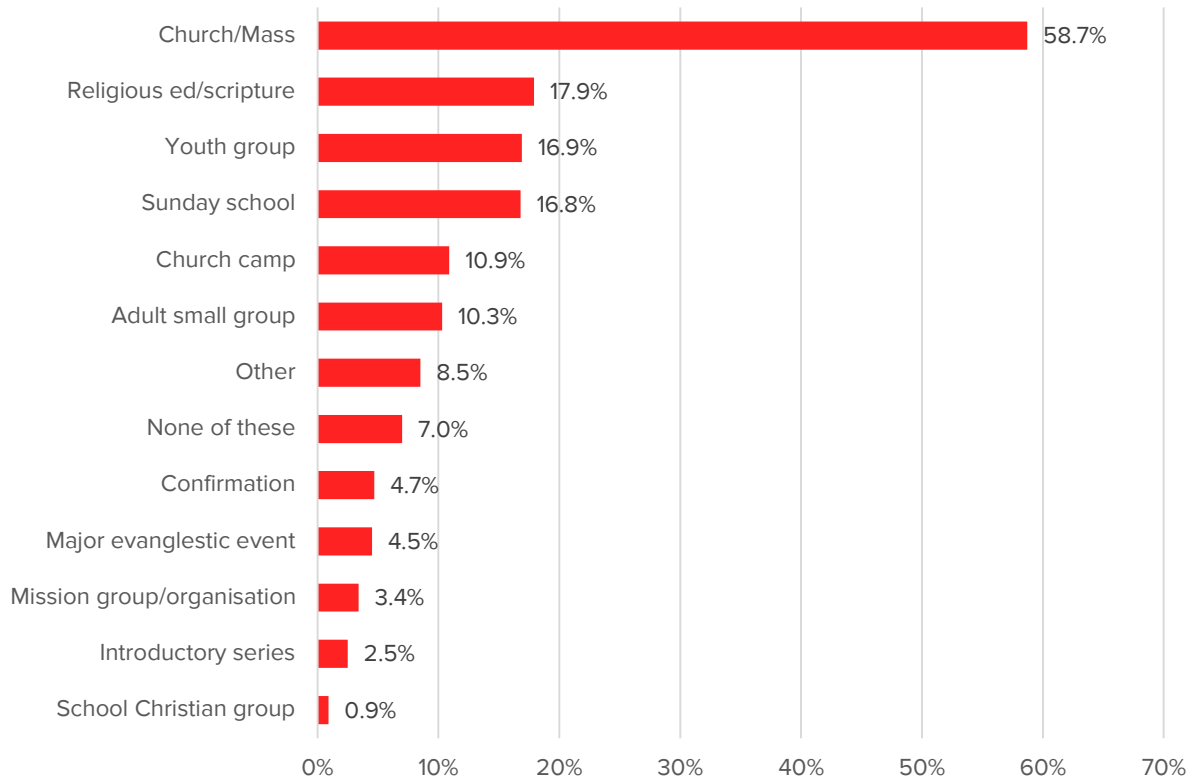
Top 5 significant people to faith for 70+ year olds



Christian Activities that Influence the Faith Decision:

When understanding the anatomy of a faith decision, not only are there age brackets where the decision is more likely and people who have significant influence, there are also significant activities that people are engaged with that affect the decision. For almost 3 in 5 church attenders (58.7%), church or mass were significant in helping them come to faith. This was followed by Religious Education / Scripture (17.9%) and Youth Group (16.9%), Sunday school (16.8%) and church camps (10.9%).

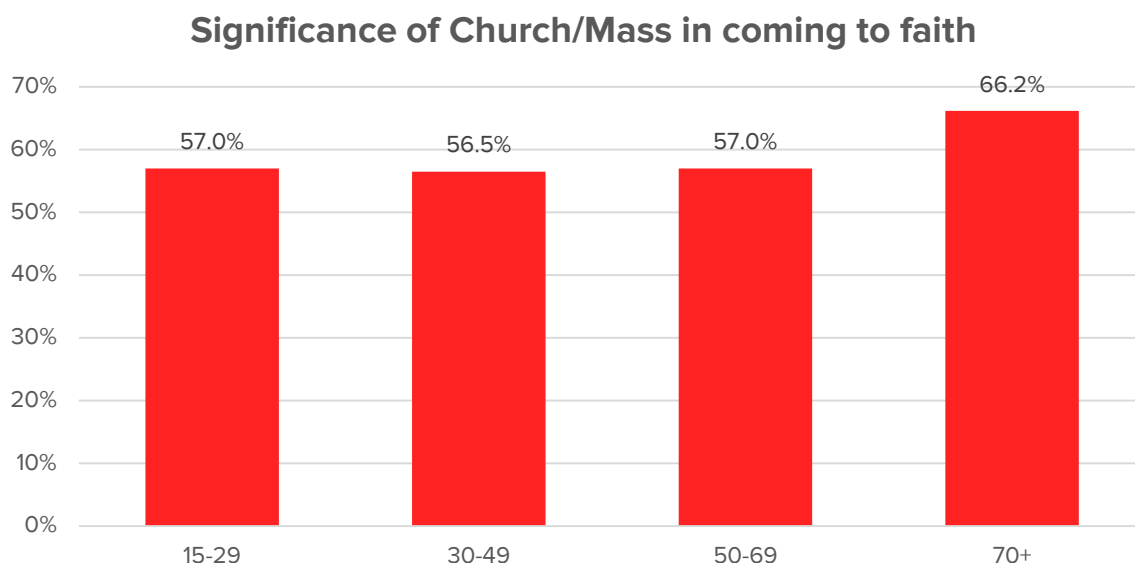
"Which of the following activities, if any, would you say were most significant in helping you come to faith?"



Most influential activities in helping people come to faith:

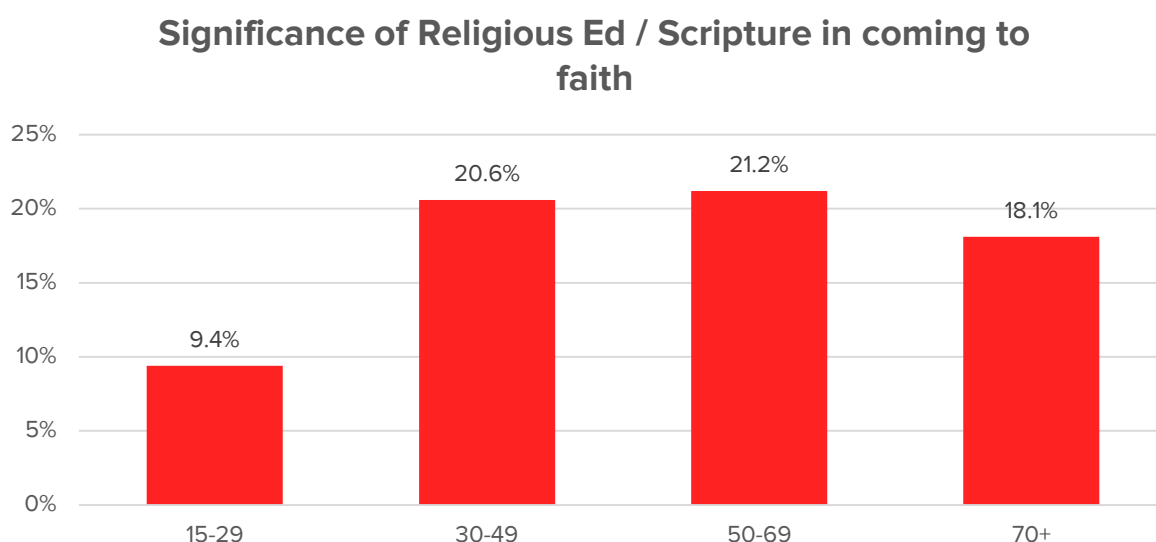
1. Church (58.7%)
2. Religious Education / Scripture (17.9%)
3. Youth Group (16.9%)
4. Sunday School (16.8%)
5. Church camp (10.9%).

Church or Mass Services



The local church cannot be underestimated in its role and effect in helping people come to faith. The frequency and regularity of the services, as well as the community that it establishes positions the local church as the key doorway for people finding faith in our nation. Almost 3 in 5 (58.7%) of today's church attenders were significantly helped by the local church in coming to faith. For South Australians, the church service had a significant impact for 65.5% of people in coming to faith, whereas it was influential for just 24.3% of Tasmanians.

Religious Education / Scripture



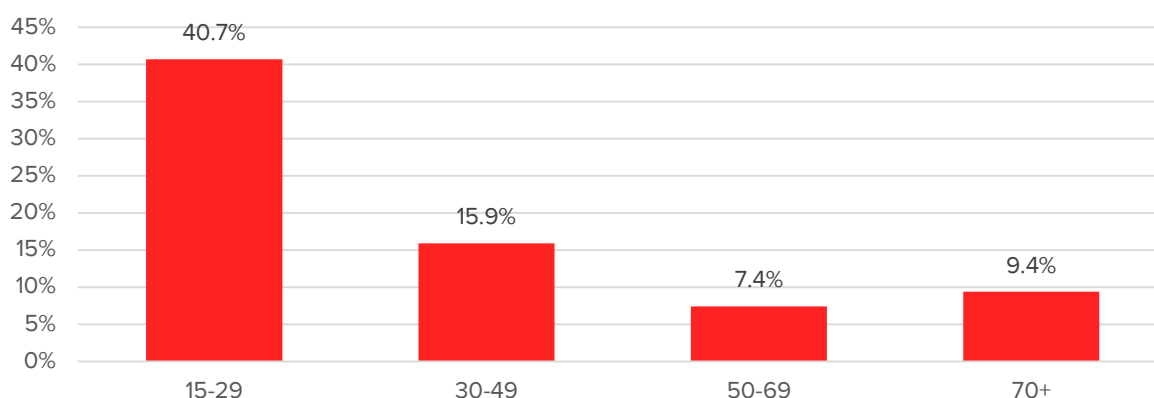
The place and importance of religious education and scripture classes in Australian schools is highlighted in this report. Not only were religious education teachers or school chaplains influential for 15% of people coming to faith, the activity of attending religious education or scripture was significant for close to 2 in 5 (18%) respondents. Religious education has had an

even more significant impact on those now in the older generations (for example, it was influential for 21.2% of those aged 50-69), whereas it has been influential for just under 1 in 10 (9.4%) of the current Gen Y and Zeds aged 15-29. This is likely to be affected by the decline in the number of schools offering religious education in their timetables, and the option students are given to choose to attend these classes.

Religious education has had a greater impact in certain states and territories, with it being influential for over 1 in 5 in Western Australia (21.4%) and Queensland (21.7%), yet for just 13.6% in South Australia.

Youth Groups

Significance of Youth Group in coming to faith



As over a quarter of church attenders make their first faith decision in the key youth years (aged 10-19), youth groups play an essential role in the formation of faith and the continuation and growth of Christianity in Australia.

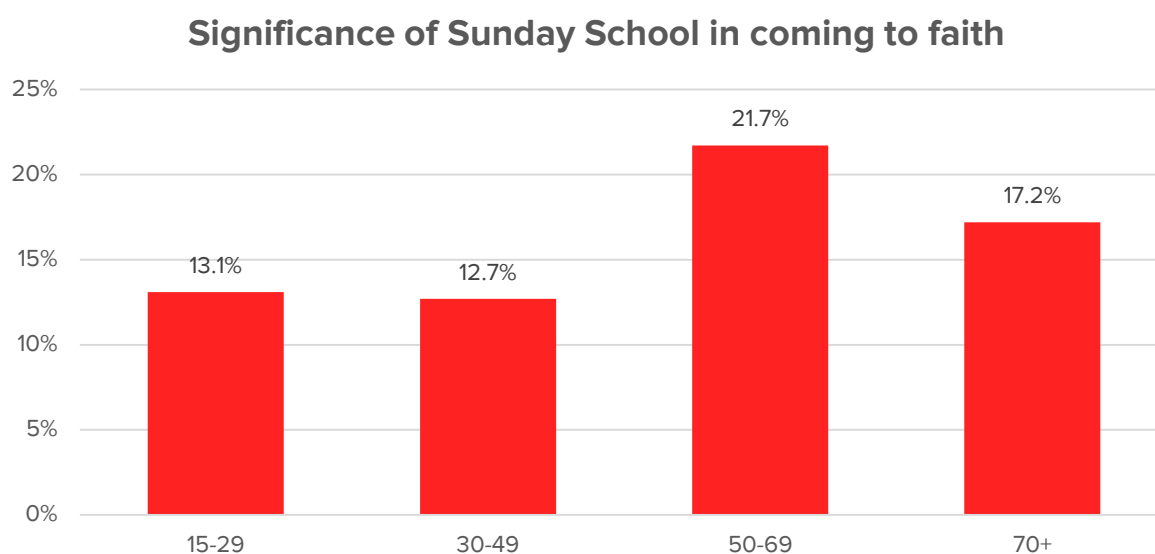
Youth Groups were recognised as the third most influential activity in helping people come to faith, having a significant impact for 16.9% of church attenders. The role of youth groups were even more pronounced amongst the current Gen Y and Zeds, aged 15-29, with 40.7% of this age group saying youth groups were influential in their faith decision. Youth groups were seen as slightly more influential for females (18.1%) than males (15.2%).

Youth groups were particularly significant in South Australia, with 31.1% of South Australian church attenders stating this was a significant activity in their faith decision, whereas it was only significant for 10.9% of Queensland church attenders.

For those in a Pentecostal church, over 2 in 5 (42.9%) attributed a significant part of their faith decision to being involved in a youth group. This was the case for 23.3% of people in Other Protestant congregations, 19.2% in Mainstream Protestant denominations and just 5.7% of those in Catholic congregations. These research findings give an indication of the different emphasis placed on the activity of youth groups among different denominations in Australia.

Those who had been significantly influenced by a youth group were also more likely to have a regular devotional practice in their personal lives, with 29.5% of those who have a devotional practice once or a few times a week being influenced by a youth group. Furthermore, those in a leadership or ministry role were more indicative that youth groups were a significant activity in helping them coming to faith than their non-leadership and ministry counterparts. Over 1 in 4 (26%) leadership-or-ministry-position-holders indicated youth groups to be a significant activity in them coming to faith, compared to 1 in 10 (10%) of those who did not hold a similar position.

Sunday School



Sunday school was a significant activity for 16.8% of church attenders in coming to faith. It was even more likely to be significant for those currently aged 50-69, with over 1 in 5 (21.7%) of this age group stating that Sunday school was significant. However, this has declined somewhat over the generations, with just 12.7% of those aged 30-49 and 13.1% of those aged 15-29 stating it was a significantly influential activity for them in coming to faith. This may partially be related to the decline in church attendance in Australia over the past decades, resulting in fewer families taking their children to church.

Sunday school was more likely to be significant for church attenders born in an English speaking country, with it being influential for 18.2% of those born in Australia, 24% of those born in an English speaking country other than Australia, but just 9.5% of those born in a non-English speaking country.

Sunday school was a significant activity in people coming to faith for almost 1 in 4 (23.1%) of Victorians, yet just over 1 in 10 (10.9%) Queenslanders. Of those who attend church weekly or more, 17% had been influenced significantly by Sunday school in coming to faith. However, for those who attend church less than monthly, just 6.5% of this cohort were made up of those

who had been significantly influenced by Sunday school. This data suggests that for those who have been influenced by Sunday school at an early age are more likely to have developed regular church attendance patterns.

1 in 5 of those in a ministry role (20.1%) had been significantly influenced by Sunday School in making their faith decision.

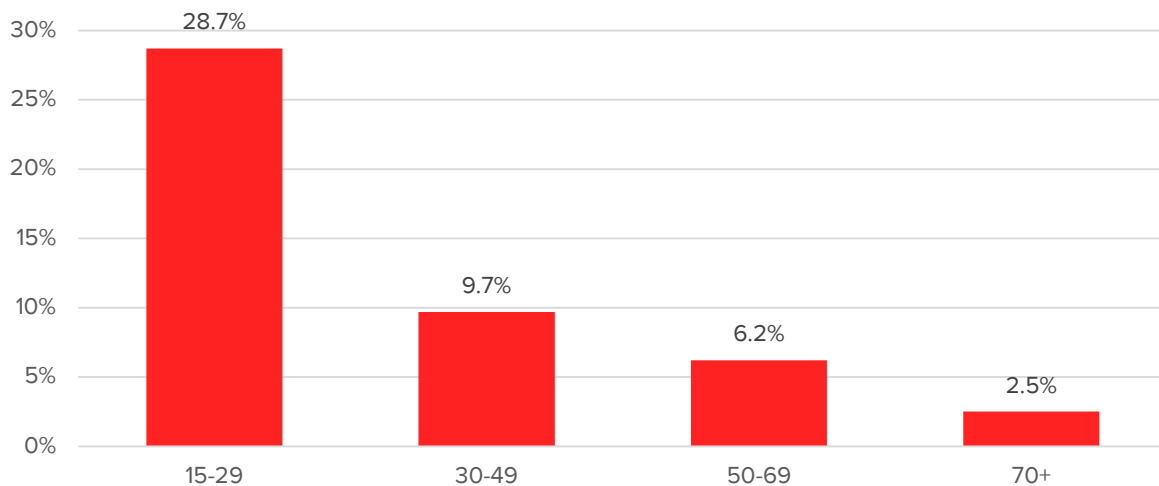
Sunday School was significant for almost a third (31.9%) of Mainstream Protestant attenders, over 1 in 5 (22.2%) of other Protestant attenders, 16.6% of Pentecostal attenders and just 6% of Catholic attenders.

Church Camp

Some of my most satisfying teaching experiences have been as a Bible teacher at Christian camps. Why? The camp setting offers an opportunity for daily study in a way not typically experienced in the local church.

Wayne McCown, Broad President, Lighthouse Christian Camps

Significance of Church Camps in coming to faith



For over 1 in 10 church attenders (10.9%), church camps were significant in helping them come to faith. The importance of camps has increased through the generations, with camps being a significant activity in one's faith decision for just 2.5% of those aged 70+, 6.2% of 50-69 year olds, 9.7% of 30-49 year olds and a notable increase to 28.7% for the current 15-29 year olds. While the role of Religious Education and Scripture teaching as well as Sunday school have declined significantly for this age group (likely to be due to the decline in the number of schools offering religious education and decline in families attending church), the role of camps in young people's faith decision has escalated. In a post-Christian, missional context

that Australia is now in, the need to actively engage young people in helping them come to faith is pertinent for the future of the church in the nation. The research shows that church camps are playing a vital role in the engagement of the emerging generations in coming to faith.



The thing I love about camps is that kids remember it for the rest of their lives, so what a good place to do ministry.

Camp Leader, Youthworks

Church camps were slightly more impacting for females in coming to faith (12% compared to 9.6% of males). Whilst camps were important for just 5.4% of faith decisions in Western Australia, they were significant for over 1 in 4 decisions in Tasmania (28%). Of the regular church attenders (weekly or more), 13.7% of them were significantly influenced by a Christian camp in making their faith decision, whereas for those who attend church less than monthly, just 1.2% had been significantly influenced by church camps, showing a high level of commitment to church attendance if they had been influenced by attending a church camp. Similarly, those who had a regular devotional practice were likely to have been significantly influenced by a church camp when making their first faith decision (12.8% of those who have a devotional practice every day, and 15.1% of those who have one once or a few times a week). These camp converters were also more likely to see God as “most important” in their life (14.6%), and more likely to be in a ministry or leadership role (14.3%).

One third of church attenders in a Pentecostal church (32.8%) have been significantly influenced by a church camp in making their initial faith decision. This was also the case for 14.4% of other Protestant church attenders, 11.1% of Mainstream Protestant attenders and just 3.2% of Catholic church attenders.

At a Christian camp in Colorado, a woman Bible teacher gave an illustration that changed my life.

Tim Keller, Apologist, Author, Speaker and Pastor

THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN CAMPS IN AUSTRALIA

As the data shows, 9 in 10 church attenders made the decision to become a Christian before the age of 30. Therefore, this age bracket ought to be given a focused priority by churches for evangelism. As this report has highlighted, there are a number of factors that influence a person's faith decision, from people who have a significant role in shaping one's faith to activities that people become involved with. However the data also shows that there are some significant trend lines changing in our society around faith conversion, which are particularly evident amongst the emerging generations.

For example, whilst Scripture and Religious Education have been significant for approximately 1 in 5 faith decisions in the past, for the current Gen Y's, this decreases to less than 1 in 10. This is likely to be not so much a reflection on the quality of the teaching being offered then and now, but rather that there are fewer Scripture classes being offered in Australian schools. The social fabric of our communities is also changing, for example, church attendance, along with Sunday school used to be part of the normal community infrastructure, whereas now approximately just 15% of Australians regularly attend church. Traditional factors of evangelism are not as evident in our society today. Connected to this shift is the role of influential people in shaping one's faith. As fewer people are regularly attending church, there has also been a decline in the number of people that are being impacted by the clergy, minister, pastor and the religious education teacher in forming their faith decision. There has been a shift from these title based influencers to the peer group influencers.

Whilst traditional ways of people engaging with Christianity in our community is declining, the role of other activities, such as youth groups and camps, seem to be having an increased prominence and impact in faith decisions for these younger generations. For example, whilst under 10% of those aged 50 and above attribute a youth group to their faith decision, 15.9% of Gen X's aged 30-49 do, as well as 2 in 5 (40.7%) Gen Y's (15-29 year olds). When asked about the importance of a camp to their Christian conversion, 9% of over 70s strongly agreed that it was very important compared to 10% aged 50-69, 11% aged 30-49 and almost twice this for 15-29 year olds at 21%.

Camp attendance also has an impact on the age at which someone is converted with a strong correlation in the data between young people coming to faith and their attendance at Christian camps. Of those who came to faith at 40 or older, 34.2% said that camp was important in their journey to faith. For those who came to faith aged 20-39, importance of camp was acknowledged by 39.4%, while those who came to faith at 10-19 years, the importance of camp was acknowledged by 44.9%.

The fastest growing denomination in our nation is Pentecostalism, and interestingly, the most influential activities for church attenders in this denomination when coming to faith after the Sunday church services was youth groups (42.9%) and church camps (32.8%). Many

mainstream churches can learn from the growth drivers of the fastest growing churches, many of which denominationally are in the Pentecostal movement, and many of which culturally are ethnic churches. This research shows that Christian camps are a significant factor in the growth of each of these church segments. When asked to respond to the statement that “A Christian camp, conference or spiritual retreat was very important to my first faith commitment or Christian conversion”, 35% agreed with 13% strongly agreeing. For Pentecostals, twice as many “strongly agreed” (32%) compared to Mainstream Protestants (16%). Similarly, those born in a non-English speaking country were far more likely to agree that the attendance at a camp was important to their conversion (68%) compared to 41% of Australian born church goers.

In terms of faith, I always remember believing. I do remember at the age of 17 at a Christian camp, having a strong, numinous experience of God, of transcendence, of, “I am not here by accident, I’m not just a biological freak in a cosmic zoo. There’s a purpose to my life”, and it was quite an overwhelming experience of awe. I remember actually physically trembling.

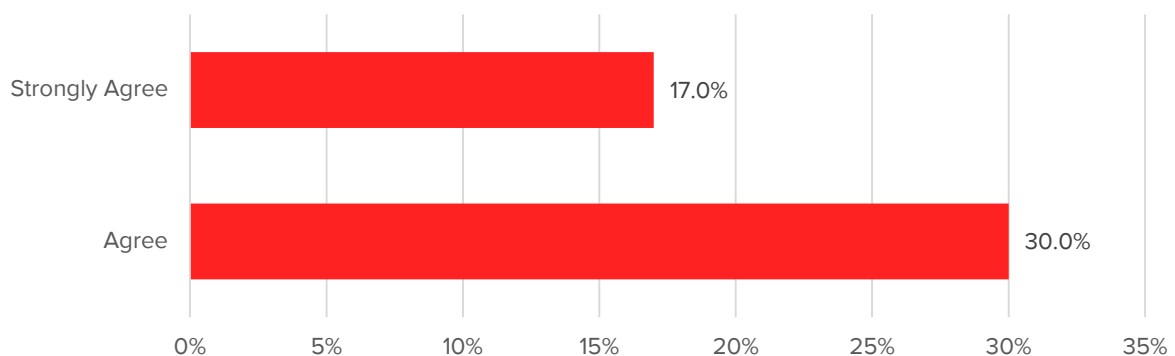
Tim Costello, CEO, World Vision Australia

First faith commitment / conversion

Of those who have attended a camp, conference or spiritual retreat it was *very important* to the first faith commitment / conversion for...

47%
That's nearly half!

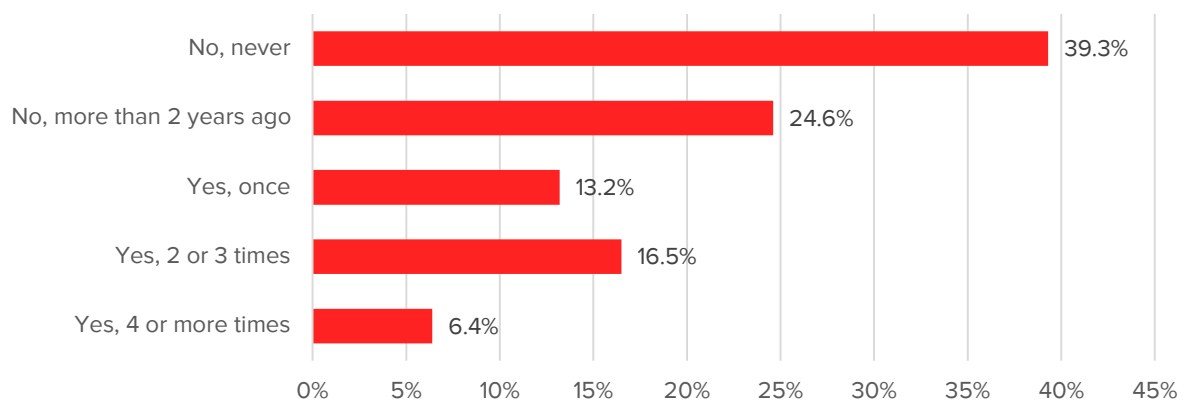
"A Christian camp, conference, or spiritual retreat was very important to my first faith commitment or Christian conversion." (Of those who have attended a Christian camp).



With an ageing population and an ageing church going profile, the underrepresented groups are young people, and they are far more likely to attend a camp. Typically in research when looking at the likelihood to have experienced a product, service or event, logically the older someone is, the more likely they are to have had an incidence on any measure. Interestingly with camp attendance, younger generations are more likely to have attended a camp than the older generations.

Not only is Australia's population more diverse than ever before, with population growth being driven significantly by net overseas migration (60%) compared to natural increase (40%), one of the fastest growing segments of the church in Australia are attendees who were born in non-English speaking countries. Both the attendees and the number of church plants among non-English speaking people is experiencing significant growth. Those born in non-English speaking countries are significantly more likely to have attended a church camp at least annually over the last 2 years (30.6%) than Australians born in English speaking countries (13.7%) and those born in Australia (22.1%).

"Have you attended a Christian camp, conference or spiritual retreat in the last 2 years?"



Correlation between Church Attendance and Camp Attendance

Of church attendees who filled in the National Church Life Survey, respondents were categorised as those who attend church less than monthly, more than monthly but less than weekly and at least once per week. The weekly church attenders were the most likely to have also attended church camps in their life (two thirds of them, 66.6%), while of the semi-regulars 53.5% had attended a camp. However, of the less than monthlies, only a third (37.5%) had ever attended a Christian camp.

Of those who have a ministry role, 82% had attended a Christian camp compared to just 47% who have no ministry role.

Correlation between Spiritual Practice and Camp Attendance

Similarly, we found a strong correlation between regular devotional practice and previous church camp attendance. The majority of those who had a daily or most days devotion had also attended church camps (65.8%). Of those who only occasionally had a devotion 51.6% had attended a camp, and of those who had never or hardly ever had a personal devotion, 28.6%.

Correlation between Importance of God and Camp Attendance

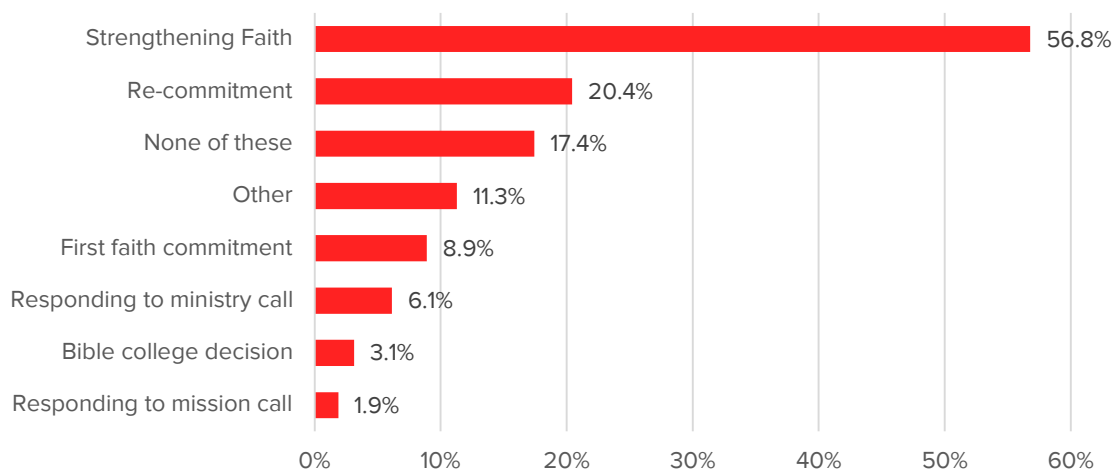
There was also a strong correlation between the importance of God in one's life and previous Christian camp attendance. Of those who said that God is "most important" in their life, 70.1% had attended a camp. Of those who said God was "almost the most important", 60.1% had attended camps, of those who said God was "fairly important" in their life, 30.2% had attended a church camp and of those that said that God was "not at all the most important", 22.6% had attended a church camp.

Camp attendance results in...



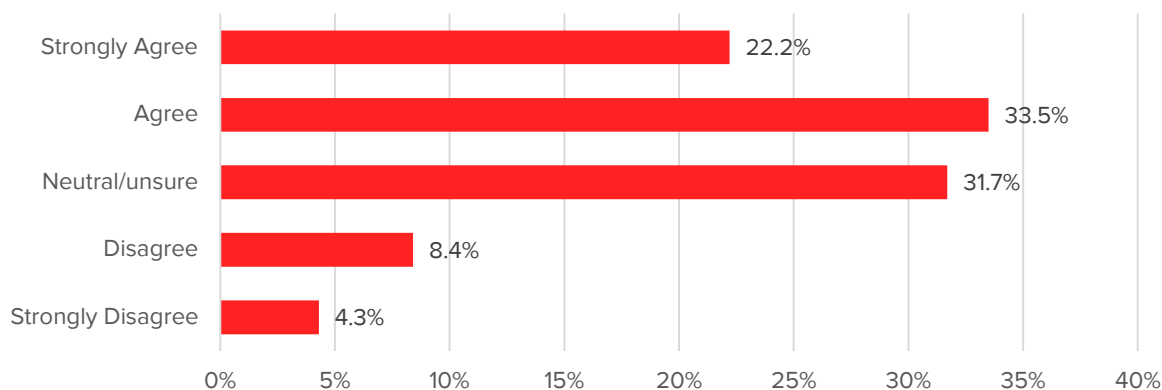
Of all respondents, the majority (60.7%) had attended a camp at some point in their life with 36.1% having attended at least once in the last two years. However Pentecostals were far more likely than this average to have attended a Christian camp in the last two years (91.3%) compared to Mainstream Protestants (32.1%).

"In which ways has attending a Christian camp, conference or spiritual retreat been important in your life?"



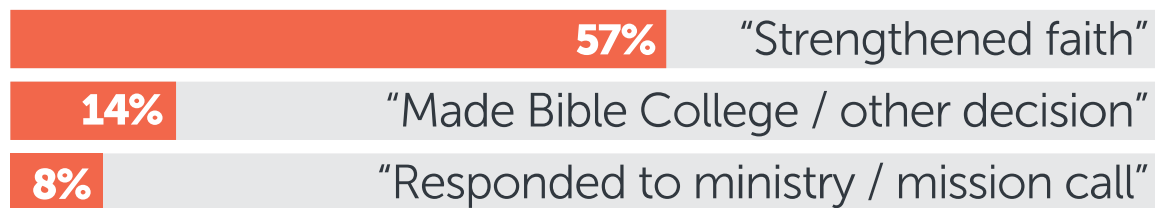
While 2 in 5 church goers (39.4%) have either not attended a Christian camp or not been impacted by it, most have had some significant spiritual impacts from their attendance. The biggest impact has been the strengthening of faith (56.8%), followed by a recommitment (20.4%) or a first commitment (8.9%). 8% responded to a ministry or missions call and 3.1% made a decision to attend Bible College. Today's young people are far more likely to have made a first faith decision (18%) compared to 30-49s (11%), 50-69s (4.4%) and 70+ (3.2%), but as with the overall findings, strengthening of faith was the biggest impact of camp attendance experienced by today's young people (75.9%) compared to 60.8% for those aged 30-49, 50.2% for those aged 50-69 and 43.8% for those aged 70+. The data consistently shows that camp attendance has strong and broad impacts on someone's faith decision as well as their ongoing spiritual walk.

"Christian camps, conferences or spiritual retreats have been very important to strengthening or nurturing my Christian faith."



For the majority of church attendees (55.7%), attendance at a Christian camp has been very important to the strengthening or nurturing of their Christian faith. It was even higher for those of a non-English speaking background (65.4%) and young people aged 10-19 (74.3%). The value of Christian camp attendance is further shown by the frequency of attendance by church goers. Frequent church camp attendees (who have been 4 or more times in the last 2 years) are the most likely to agree on the importance of camp in strengthening their faith (91.8%), compared to those who have not attended a Christian camp for at least 2 years (52.8%).

Impact of Christian camps



In 1892 two students from Cambridge University came up with a novel idea. They wanted to organise a boy's camp. They wrote: "Our plan is as follows: to collect together as many as possible in tents, to provide for them all the sports and amusements dear to the heart of boys, and while in the midst of these enjoyments, to influence them more by example than by words." They did just as they planned and it is reported that, "on the last night some of the most unlikely ones, who had come to camp as a joke, told how they found Christ that week".

Scripture Union Australia

For more information on planning your next camp visit
christianvenues.org.au

SOCIAL SHIFTS SPIRITUAL TRENDS 4 DECADES OF CHANGE

Christianity: Australia's largest religion

61.1% CHRISTIANITY

7.3% ALL OTHER RELIGIONS COMBINED

But a trendline of declining adherence
Religious change: 1976 - today

Christianity ↓ **22%**
Church attendance ↓ **48%**
No religion ↑ **269%**

Population growing, church attendance shrinking
Total population & church attendance

1976
Pop.: 13.9m
Church: 3.9m

TODAY
Pop.: 23.3m
Church: 3.5m

Ageing population & an ageing church
Median age

1984: 30.5
TODAY: 37.3
2024: 38.0
2044: 40.0

53.0 YRS OLD AVERAGE CHURCH ATTENDER

Age 60+ (percentage of population)

% of total population: **24%**
% of church population: **44%**

As Australia shifts from sacred to secular

1998 The last year that religious > civil Marriage celebrants

TODAY: 70% of all weddings conducted by civil celebrants

Even though most Australians say the church is beneficial for their community

CHURCH IS BENEFICIAL (88%)

15% Yet only 1 in 7 attend church monthly

Age of population vs. age of conversion

3 in 4 of the population are aged over 20...

AGE 20
...yet 4 in 5 first conversions occur under age 20

THE IMPACT OF CHRISTIAN CAMPS

Top 5 activities in coming to faith
% most significant in helping come to faith

Church: **59%**
Religious ed/Scripture: **18%**
Youth group: **17%**
Sunday school: **17%**
Church camp: **11%**

5th camps Ahead of...

Confirmation Evangelistic event
School Christian group Small group
Church outreach Introductory series
Mission group

15-29 year olds
This figure rises to **3** in **10** for 15-29 year olds. Church camps are the **3rd** most significant for this generation (ahead of Sunday school & small groups)

3rd camps

Top 5 most influential in faith shaping (15-29 yr olds)
After parents, the top 3 influencers are all instrumental in the Christian camp experience

Mother: **66%**
Father: **57%**
Minister: **36%**
Youth leader: **28%**
Peers/friends: **19%**

First faith commitment / conversion
Of those who have attended a camp, conference or spiritual retreat it was **very important** to the first faith commitment / conversion for...

47%
That's nearly half!

Camp attendance results in...

2x ↑ Church attendance **weekly**
2x ↑ Devotional practice **daily**
3x ↑ Importance of God in life **most important**
2x ↑ Leadership **ministry role**

Impact of Christian camps

57% "Strengthened faith"
14% "Made Bible College / other decision"
8% "Responded to ministry / mission call"

YET... 2 in 3 church goers have not attended a camp in the last 2 years!

Source: ABS, NCLS, McCrindle

For the full report or more information on planning your next camp visit christianvenues.org.au

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