

National Church Life Survey

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Millions worldwide invited to take part in church life surveys

NCLS 2001: focussing on resources to assist congregations

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Some 2.3 million church attenders across four countries are being invited to have their say about church life. During April and May 2001, 17 300 congregations in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, England, and the USA will take time to complete a written survey covering attitudes, beliefs and practices.

The 2001 survey provides a unique moment to take a 'snapshot' of the churches at the start of the new millennium. Common questions have been designed across the four nations to assist church leaders and congregations to reflect on church life, gain insights and plan future directions. Other questions will focus on the needs of particular groups. Working together makes it possible to achieve far more than each country could on its own.

"This project is unprecedented in its size and scope," said Rev Dr Dean Drayton, chair of the international steering committee. "For the first time we will be able to compare four countries in detail, and be wiser in how we read and apply what comes from overseas sources."

The 2001 National Church Life Survey (NCLS) will be the third for Australian Protestant denominations. However, a new development is that a cross-section of Catholic parishes will also be represented in the NCLS. Overall, some 850 000 survey forms will be distributed to 10 000 congregations in 18 denominations across Australia.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the Christian Research Association has joined with NCLS Research in 1996 and again in 2001 to provide a mirror to the churches.

The first church life survey of its kind in these countries, the project will be coordinated by Churches Information for Mission (CIM) in England and the Presbyterian Church (USA).

"The survey teams are motivated by a shared desire to help congregations in their mission", commented Dr Peter Kaldor, coordinator of the international dimension of the project. "This allows us to move beyond our differences and find constructive ways forward".

The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a major collaborative project that seeks to assist in equipping the churches for mission. In Australia, it is a partnership between the Uniting Church Board of Mission, ANGLICARE (NSW), and the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

For more information or to arrange an interview contact: Dr Ruth Powell,
Communications Manager NCLS Research,

info@ncls.org.au

Ph: (02) 8267 4394

Fax: (02) 9267 7316

<http://www.ncls.org.au/>

www.ncls.org.au

NCLS 2001: focussing on resources to assist congregations

Australian congregations and parishes across 18 denominations are being given the opportunity to reflect on their life and mission, leadership and connection with the community through the National Church Life Survey (NCLS).

The NCLS is a huge co-operative venture which will chart the views of church attenders at the turn of the millennium. In Australia alone, some 850 000 survey forms will be distributed to 10 000 congregations during May 2001.

This year the survey will also include congregations in the United States, England and New Zealand. Globally, some 2.3 million survey forms will be distributed to 17 300 congregations across these four countries. The primary objective of this whole project is to help congregations be more effective in mission.

"While we will be able to provide 'snapshots for the family album' to every congregation early in 2002, we hope to serve and equip congregations in an ongoing way", said Dr Ruth Powell, NCLS researcher and author. "The team is working hard to develop tools to help people reflect on the vitality of their congregations, to discern priorities and to plan effectively".

NCLS Research is gathering a diversity of resources from which congregational leaders can draw to help them in key areas such as: inviting newcomers to church; empowering lay leaders; building Christian community; discovering a vision for mission; looking after the young and encouraging growth in faith.

Resources of the future need not necessarily be 'one size fits all'. While hard copy resources will continue to be available, NCLS Research will bring together the ideas and experience of practitioners from across denominations in a variety of forms. "We will be offering a range of resources from which people can choose and customise to suit their needs", commented Dr Powell.

The internet has opened up new possibilities. For internet users, the NCLS website (<http://www.ncls.org.au/>) will aim to provide answers to many of the questions congregations may be interested in. It offers immediate access to information and resources, whether your congregation is in a city, town, rural or remote setting.

The NCLS website (<http://www.ncls.org.au/>) will also allow secure online access to each congregation's information. "The website for 2001 will provide new data, and more specific resources for a range of different congregations who want to learn from the experience of others. What a database for information and help." said Rev Dr Dean Drayton, chair of the NCLS Steering Committee.

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