



Recently released reports from the researchers at the National Church Life Survey reveal some interesting information on Australians views about faith and church life. Here are summaries of two of the reports.

You can see more information about these and other reports and the work of the National Church Life Survey at <http://www.ncls.org.au/news/enewsletter>

Religious, spiritual, neither or both? Four groups of Australians

Results from the 2018 Australian Community Survey by NCLS Research:

Australians were asked: “To what extent do you see yourself as a religious person?” and “To what extent do you see yourself as a spiritual person?”

“Religiousness” and “spirituality” are terms that have different but overlapping meanings in popular language. Both concepts are concerned in some way with the sacred or the transcendent.

“Religious” tends to refer to adherence to a particular religion, including its practices, beliefs and communities of expression, whereas “spiritual” refers more to an appreciation of the sacred as well as personalised beliefs and practices.

Results reveal that Australians fall into four groups:

- Religious and spiritual (practising religious and spiritual) (26%)
- Moderately religious and spiritual (non-practising religious and spiritual) (26%)
- Spiritual but not religious (13%)
- Neither religious nor spiritual (35%).

Australians' views on the role of churches

In the 2018 Australian Community Survey, NCLS Research asked a sample of Australians to freely choose from a list of fourteen possible roles that churches should fulfil in society. The responses can be grouped into three levels. Overall, the normative view appears to be that the churches have a role in fostering cohesive communities and a good society, but that this role should be an embedded influence rather than taking an up-front role.

When asked their view on the role of Christian churches in society, three roles were chosen by a majority of Australians as suitable for churches to fulfil in society: conduct weddings, funerals, baptisms, etc (56%) encourage good morals (also 56%) and support the poor (54%). Other roles received less support.

Sacred rites, morals and poverty: top roles selected by Australians

Only three roles were chosen by a majority of Australians as suitable for churches to fulfil in society. These roles are:

- Conduct weddings, funerals, baptisms, etc (56%)
- Encourage good morals (also 56%) and
- Support the poor (54%).

This evaluation of the primary roles churches should fulfil in society was consistent with earlier results from the 2016 ACS, when the same three roles were selected by the majority (59%-60%).

Worship and social activities received moderate support

The second group of roles was supported by around four in ten Australians. They are:

- Provide opportunities for worship (43%)
- Give meaning and direction to life (42%)
- Provide chaplains for hospitals and other institutions (40%)
- Provide social services (e.g. aged care) (38%)
- Allow community groups to use church buildings (37%)
- Challenge injustice in society (35%) and
- Run social activities (35%).

Upfront roles not as well supported

However, roles that evoked an up-front place of the churches in public life were not well supported by Australians. Options presented included:

- Leadership at public events such as Anzac Day (16%)
- Convert people to the faith (12%) and
- Public comment on political issues (10%).

Only two in ten (21%) thought that churches should provide schools. Some 18% of Australians claimed that the churches should have no role in society.

The overall results reveal that in terms of the role of Christian churches in particular, most Australians preferred that churches have an embedded role, investing in fostering cohesive communities and a good society.

With thanks to NCLS Research.

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