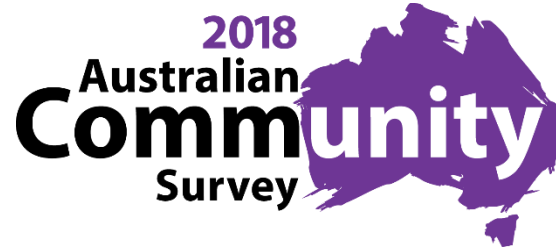


# Religion and Spirituality in Australia: results from the 2018 Australian Community Survey



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# About NCLS Research

For 25+ years, NCLS Research has used empirical research to inform resources for churches to nurture life and health in their congregations, leaders and local community.

We work in partnership with 20+ denominations in Australia.

## Resources for your church from NCLS Research

### Connecting with Your Community

**What do the Census figures tell you about your local area?**

Use a *Community Connections Pack* to understand the people in your local area and find ways to connect in ministry and mission.



### Church Health and Vitality

**What do the experiences, hopes and opinions of your church attenders reveal?**

Use a *Church Life Survey* to get a picture of the health of your church with practical ways to move forward, whatever your circumstances.



### Effective and Sustainable Leadership

**How effective and sustainable are the leadership practices at your church?**

Use the NCLS *Lead With Your Strengths* resources and our sustainable leadership material to build effective leadership and thrive in ministry.





# A focus on religion and spirituality. An 'average' week?

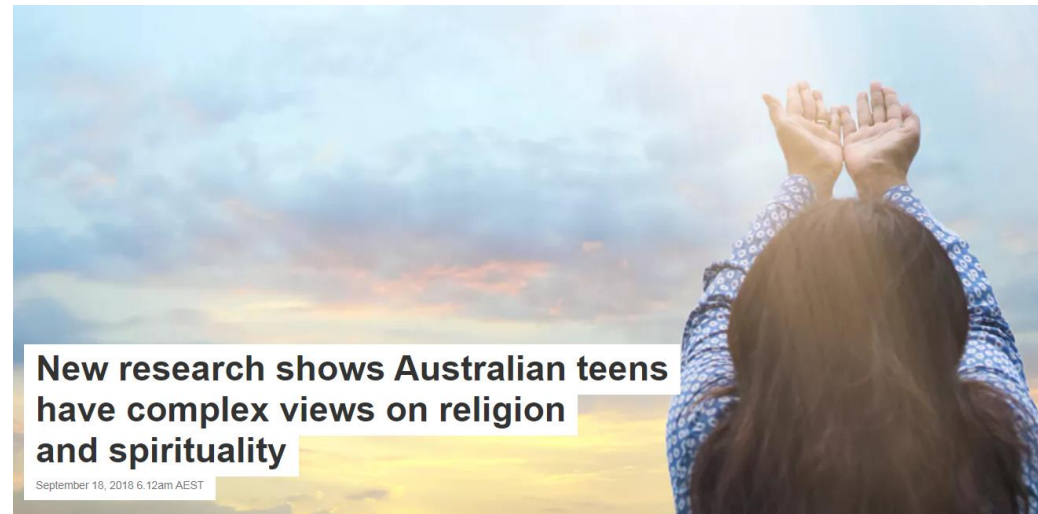
Hayden's baptism

18 Sep – Catholic Leader/ABC



Teenage Spirituality research: six types

18 Sep - ABC

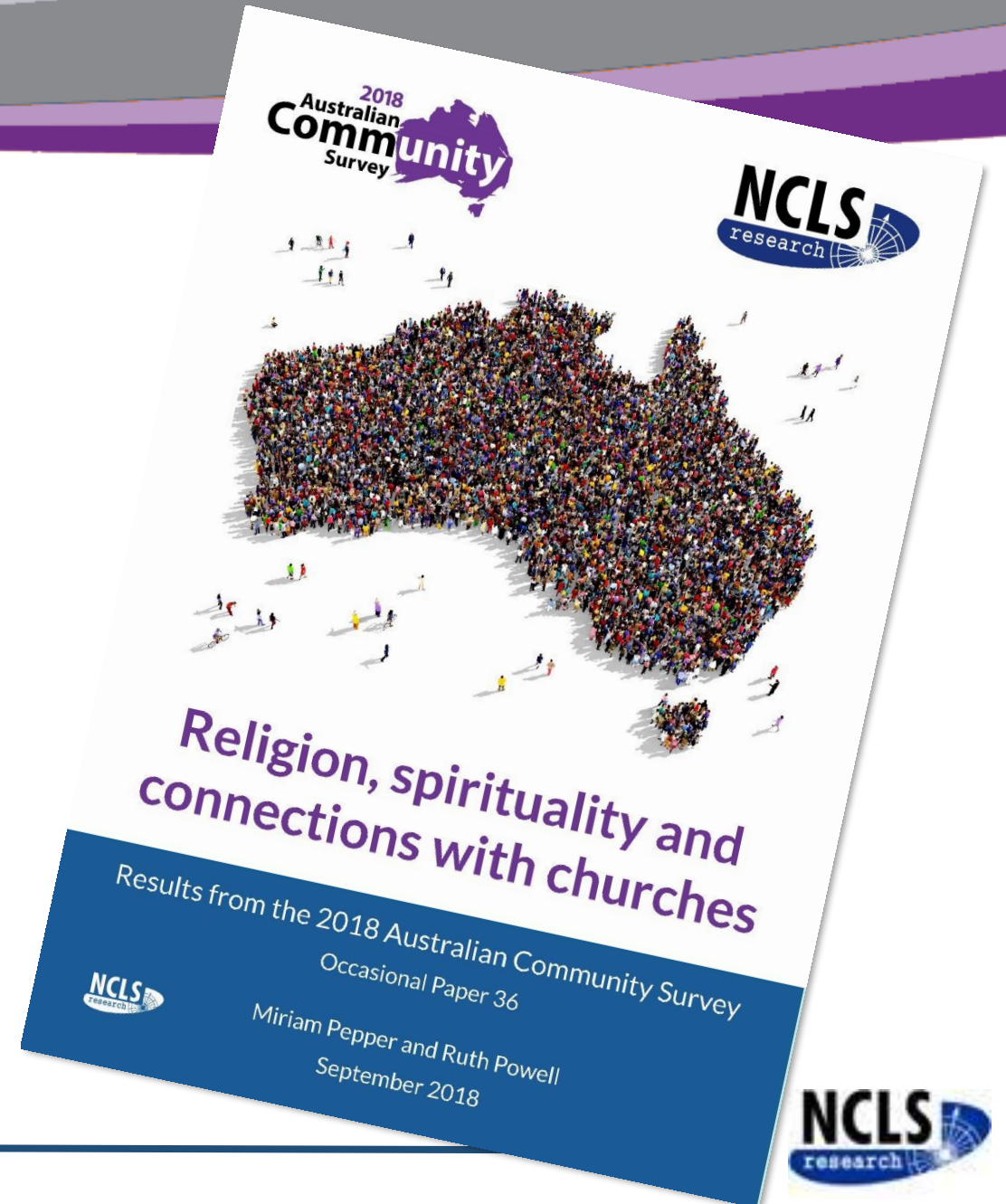


Why Western Christianity has a death wish

18 Sep - SMH



1. Attitudes to religion in society
2. A religious and spiritual profile of Australians
3. Connections with Christian churches.



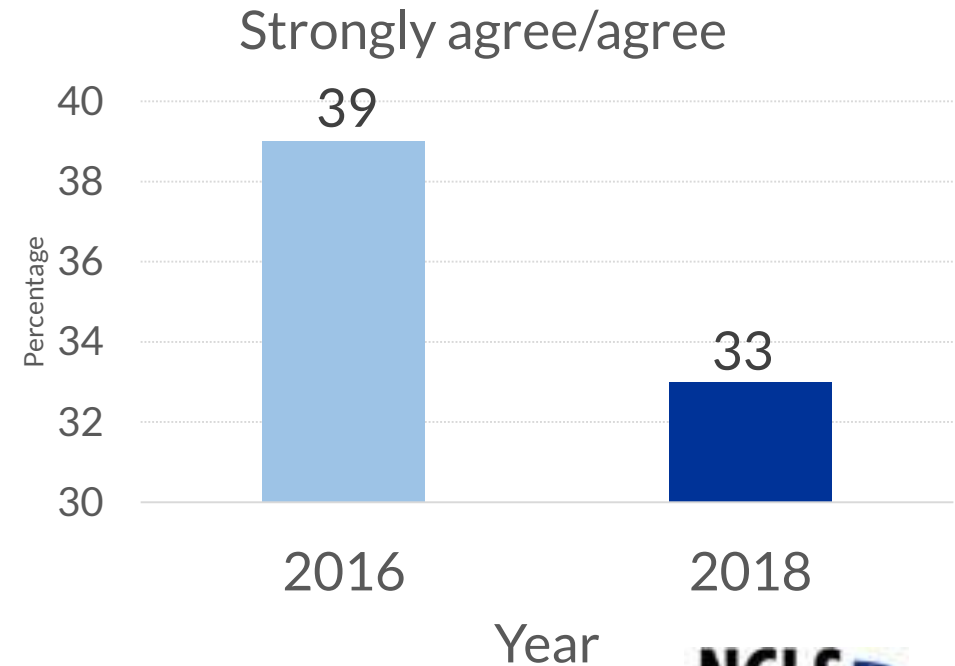
# 1. Attitudes to religion

# Is religion 'good for society'?



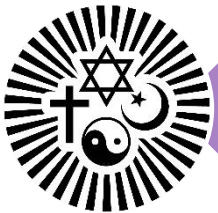
About three in ten Australians agree that religion is good for Australian society. Four in ten are neutral or unsure.

A decline in those who agree since 2016



## 2. A Religious and Spiritual Profile of Australians

A profile of a person's religiousness or spirituality has multiple dimensions.



Religious  
affiliation



Public religious practice



Private religious practice



Mystical experiences

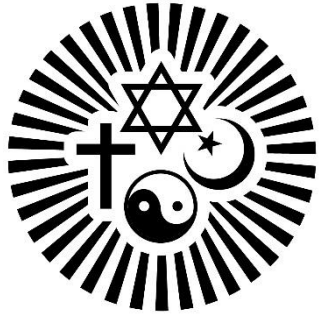


Belief in God

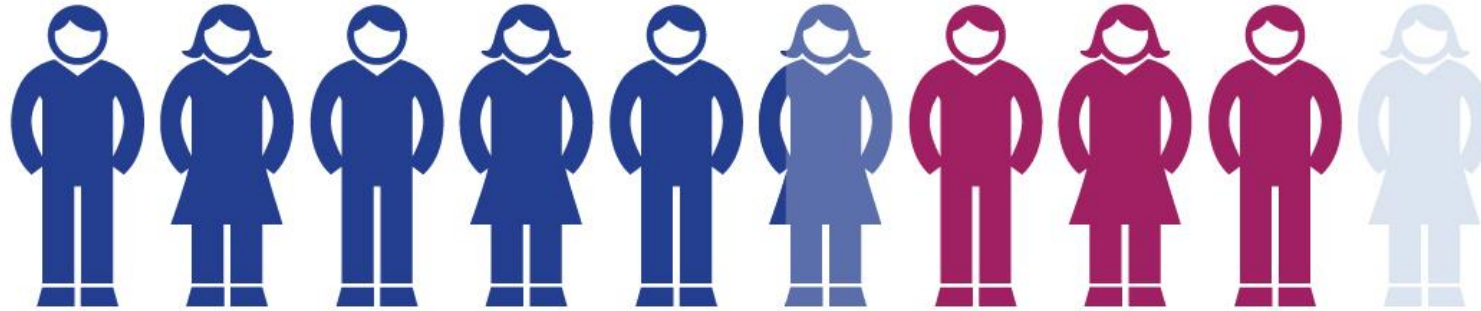


Importance of faith or  
spirituality in life





## Religious affiliation



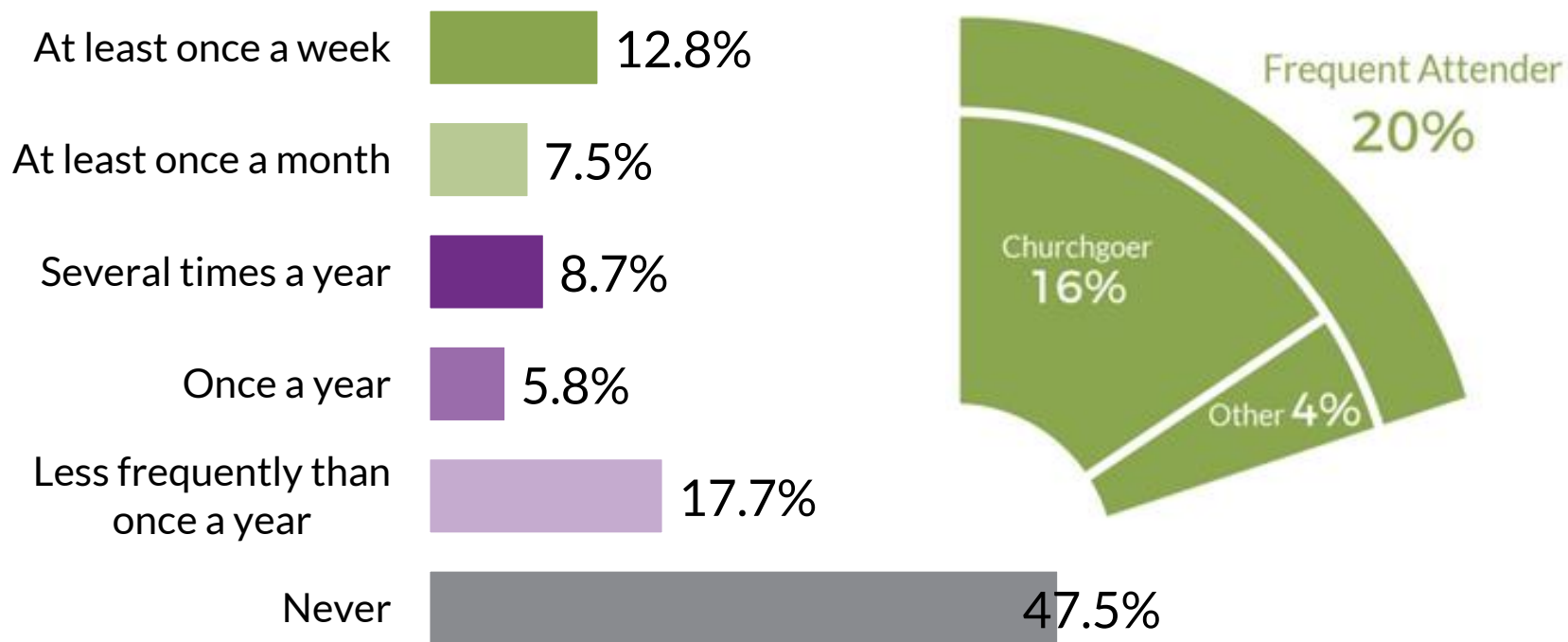
The religious affiliation of Australians is  
52% Christianity; 8% another religion;  
30% none (10% not stated).



## Public religious practice

Figure: Self-reported frequency of religious service attendance

One in five (20%)  
Australians are  
frequent attenders  
at religious services  
at least monthly.

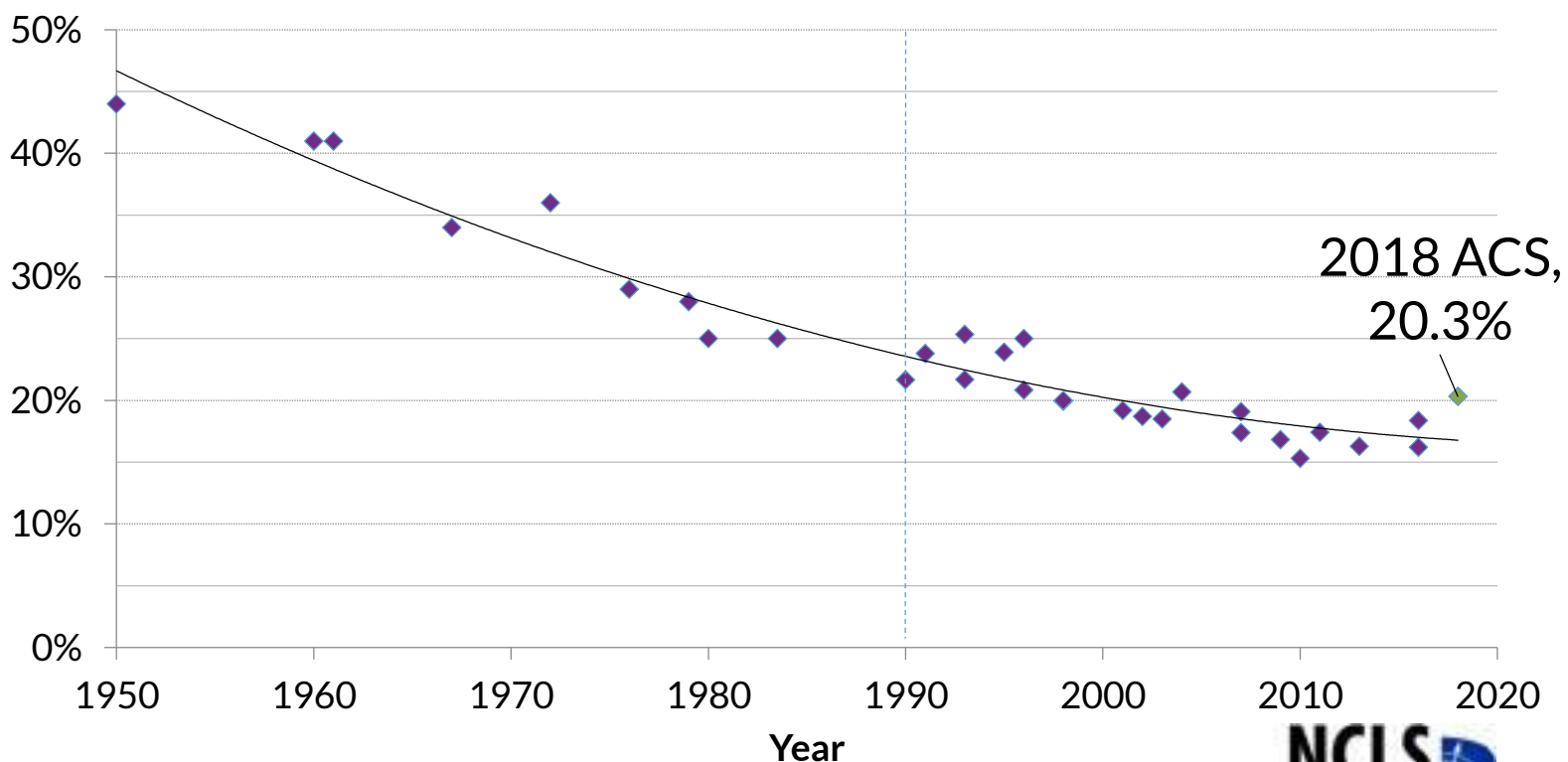




# Public religious practice: attendance over time

After a steep decline after the 50's, in recent years the decline in attendance has slowed.

Figure: Self-reported monthly religious service attendance since 1950

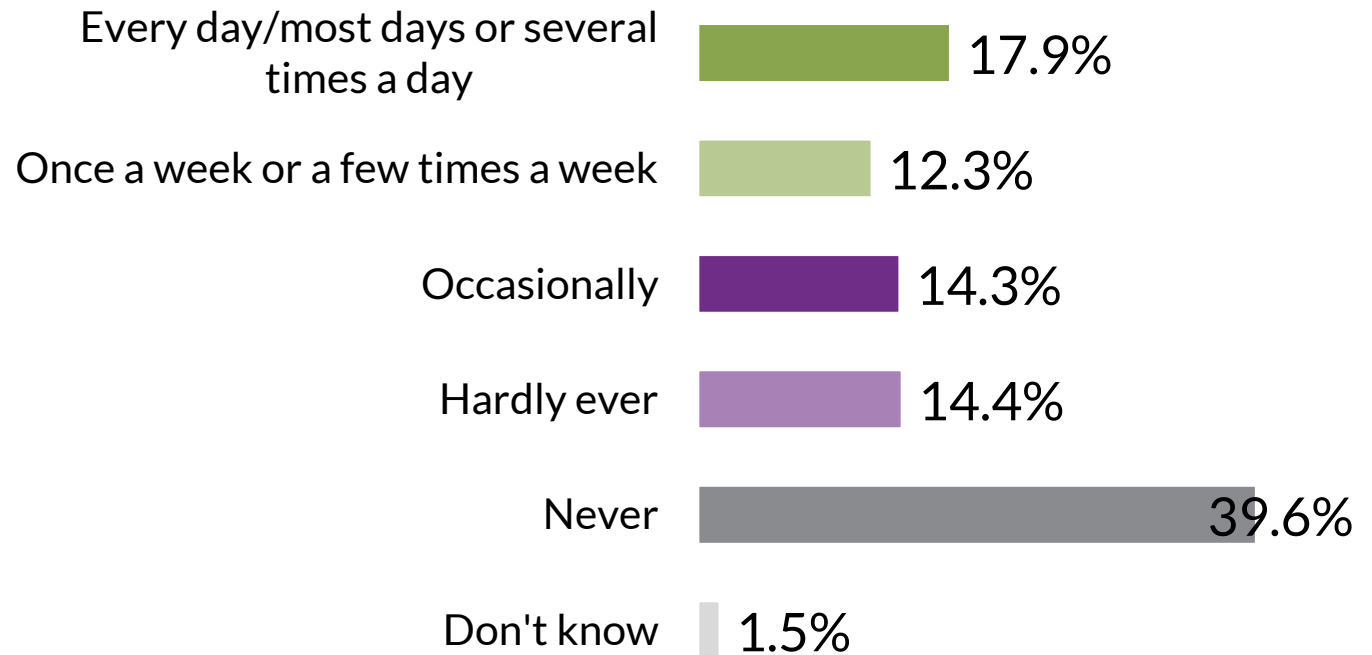




# Private religious practice: pray and meditate

Three in ten (30%)  
Australians said they  
pray or meditate at  
least once a week.

Figure: Self-reported frequency of prayer or meditation





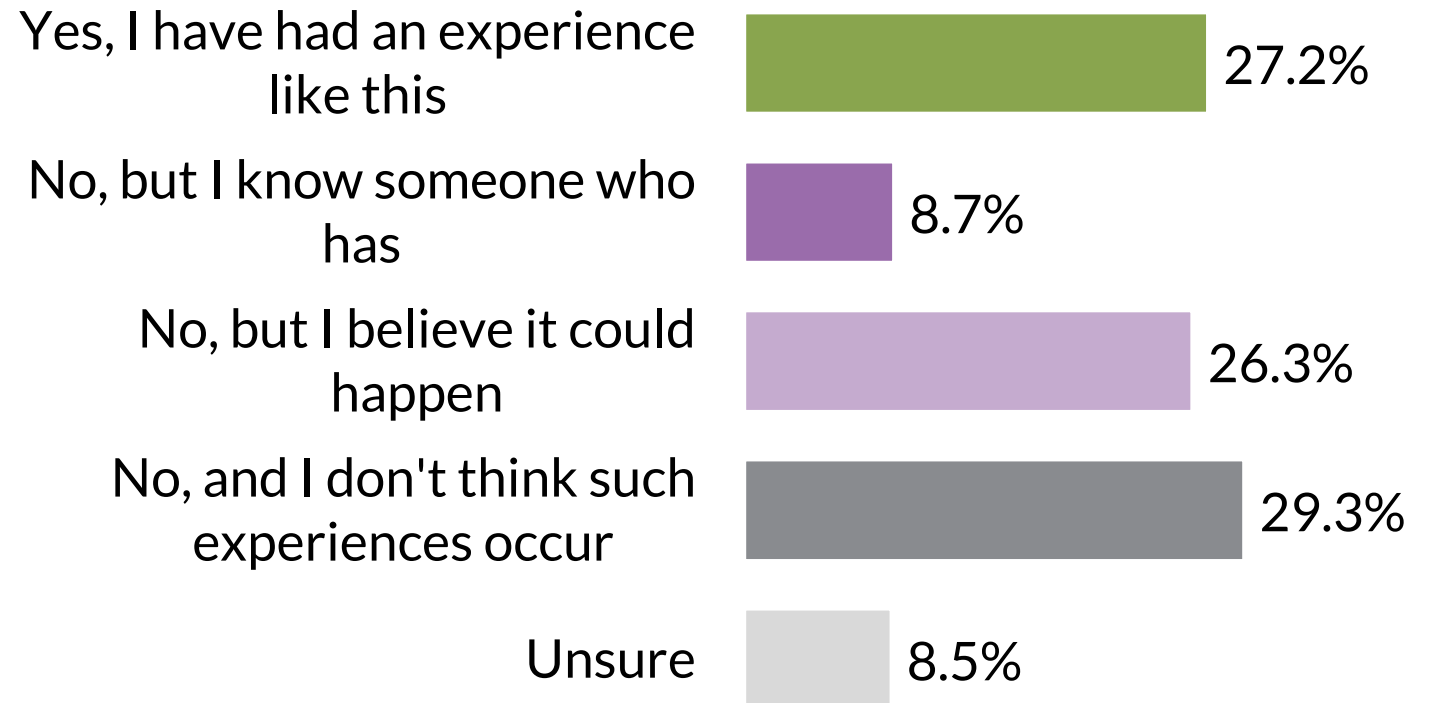


## Mystical experiences

Over a quarter (27%) of Australians have had a mystical or supernatural experience.

A further (35%) knew someone who had, or believed that such experiences could happen.

Figure: Mystical or supernatural experiences





# Religious/spiritual beliefs

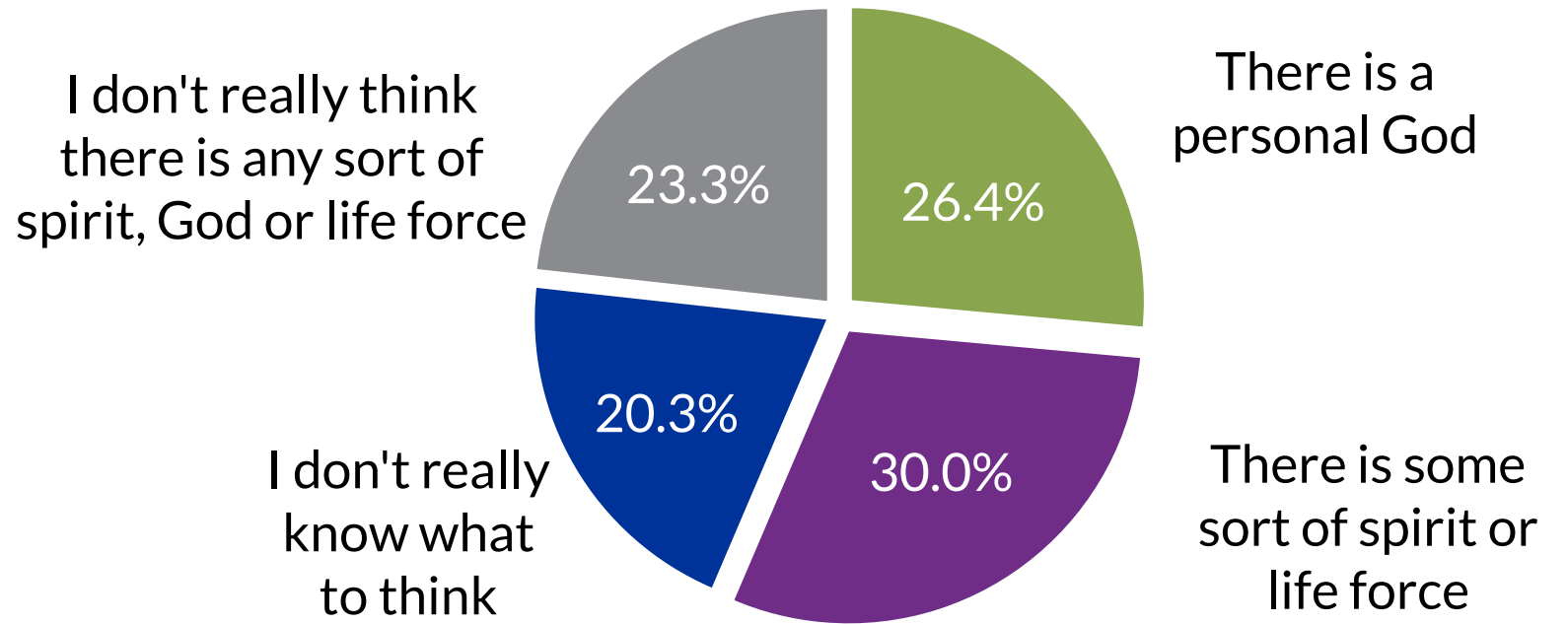
*'Which of these statements comes closest to your belief about God?'*

56% Believers

20% Agnostic

23% Atheist

Figure 5: Belief in God





## Importance of faith or spirituality in life

More than four in 10 (44%) say that faith or spirituality was important or very important in shaping their decisions.

Figure: Importance of faith or spirituality in shaping life's decisions





20% attend services frequently



30% pray or meditate



27% had mystical experiences



56% belief in God/higher power



Importance of faith or spirituality in life

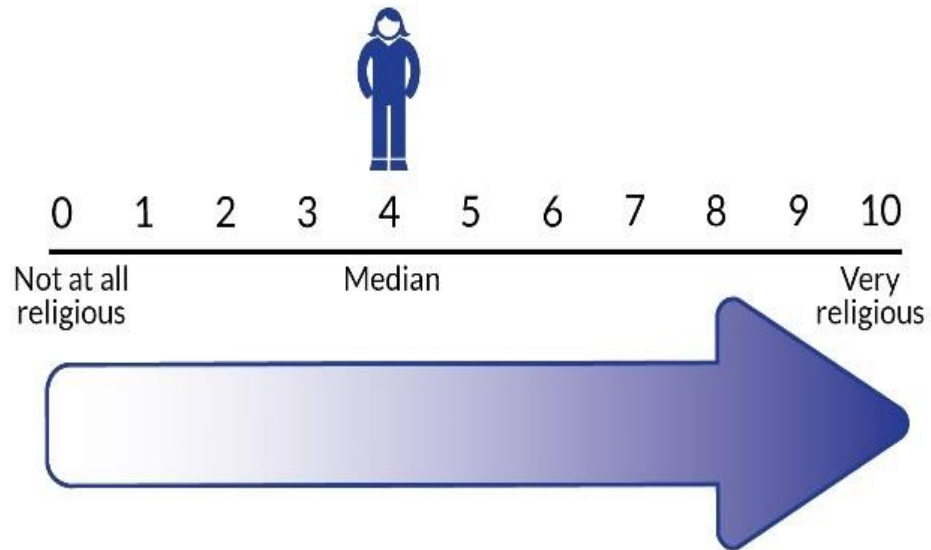




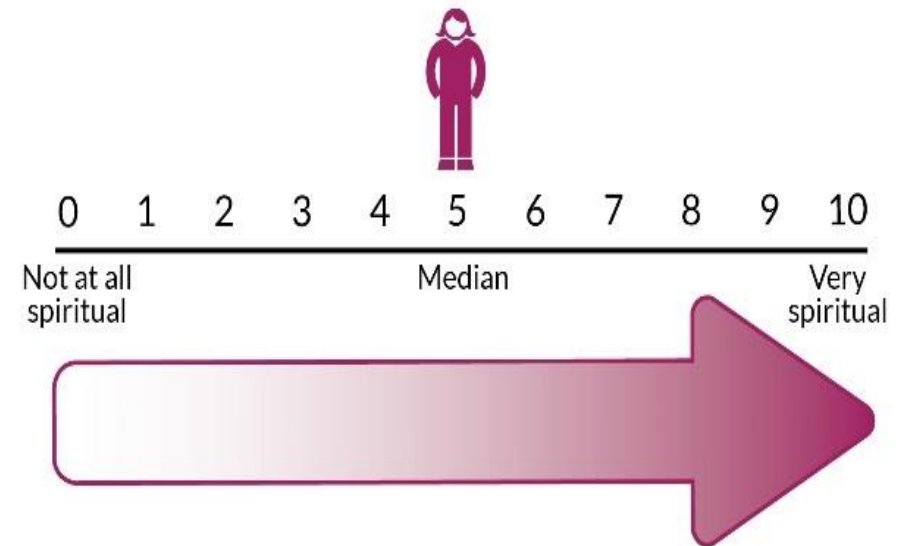
# Religious? Spiritual? Both? Neither?

On scales from 0 to 10, Australians were asked...

To what extent do you see yourself as a religious person?

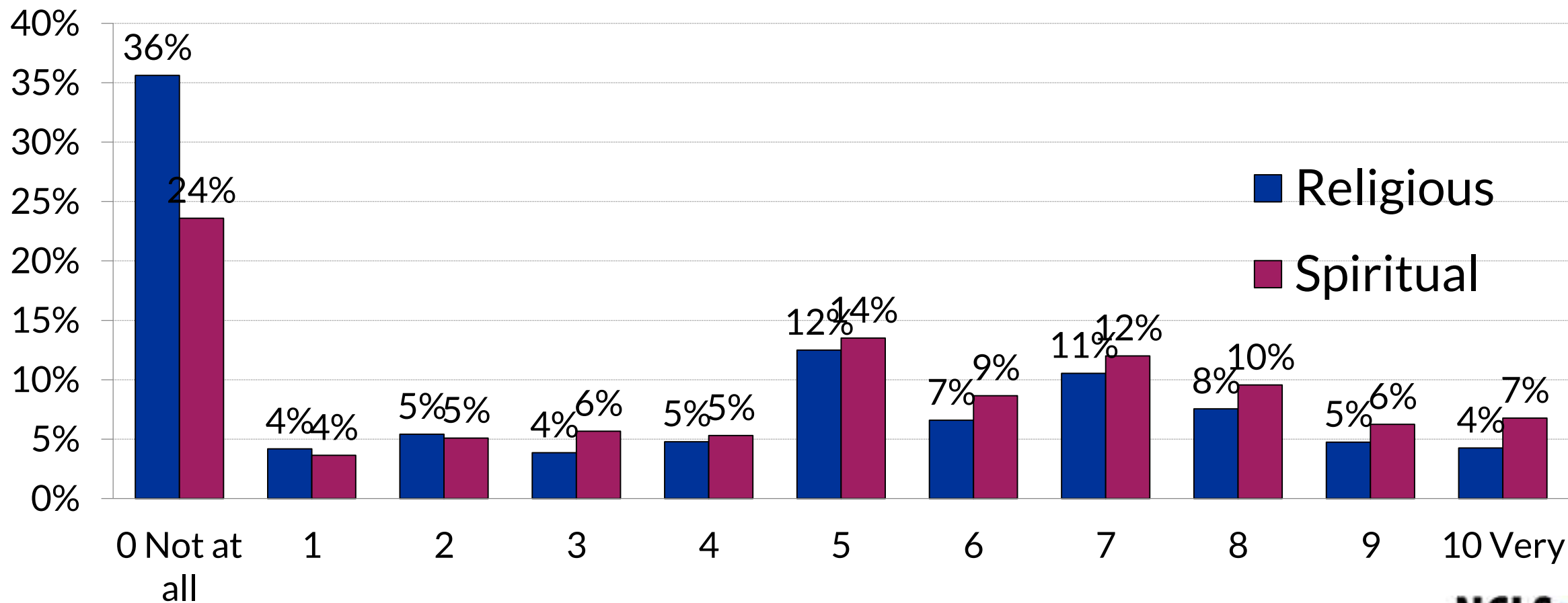


To what extent do you see yourself as a spiritual person?



Source: 2018 ACS run by NCLS Research (n=1,200).

Figure: Religious and spiritual self-perceptions

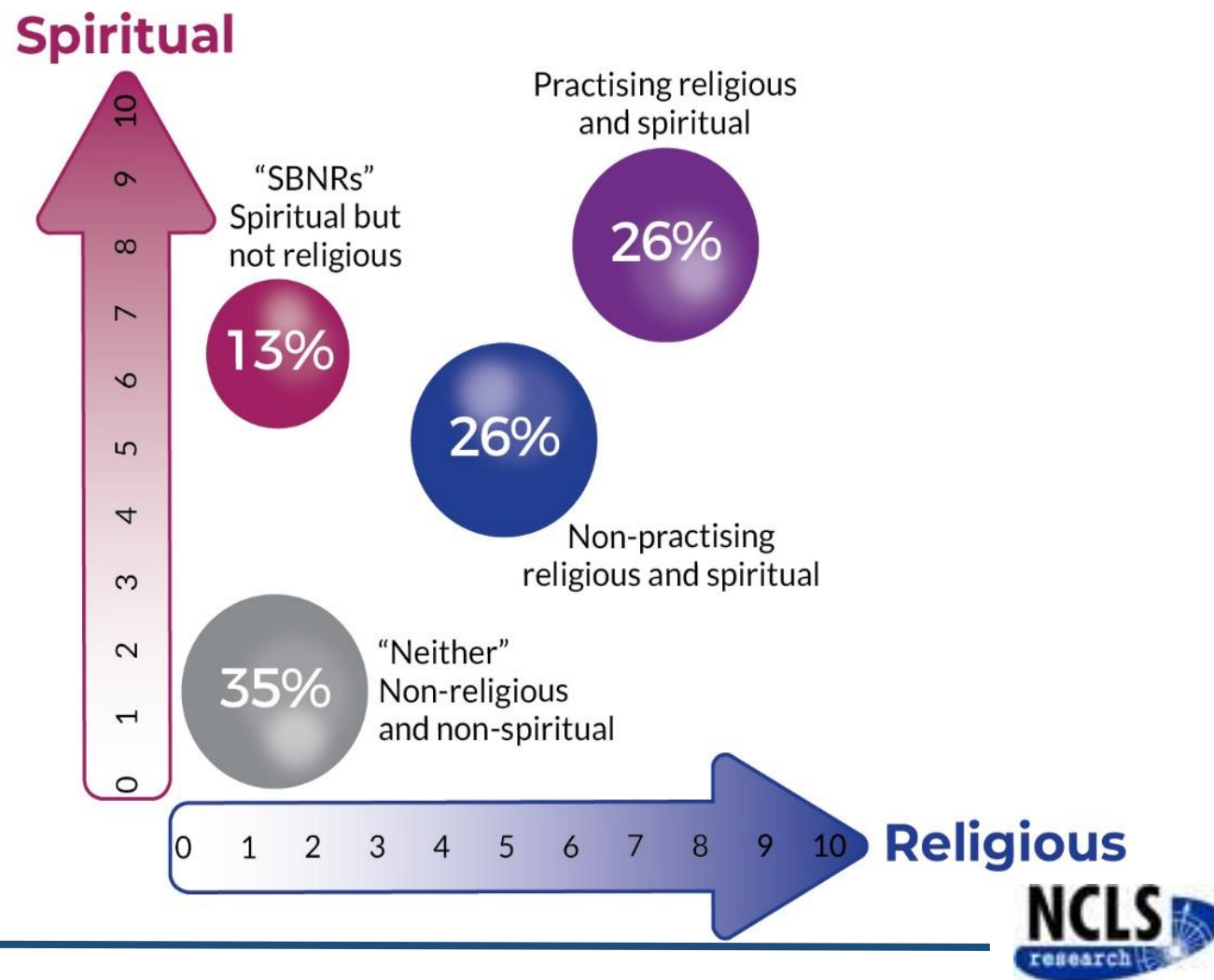


Source: 2018 ACS run by NCLS Research (n=1,200).

An empirical analysis found four clusters which indicate four general approaches to religion and spirituality.

- Practising (26%)
- Non-practising (26%)
- 'SBNR' (13%)
- Neither (35%)

Figure: Religious and spiritual self-perceptions: four clusters



# 3. Connections with Christian churches



## Role churches should fulfil

### Group 1: Majority agree (54% to 56%)

- Conduct weddings, funerals, baptisms etc
- Encourage good morals and
- Support the poor.

### Group 2: Around four in 10 say:

- Provide opportunities for worship
- Give meaning and direction to life
- Provide chaplains
- Provide social services (e.g. aged care)
- Allow community to use church buildings
- Challenge injustice in society and
- Run social activities.

### Group 3 : Up-front roles not well supported

- 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 10 (21%) thought that churches should provide schools

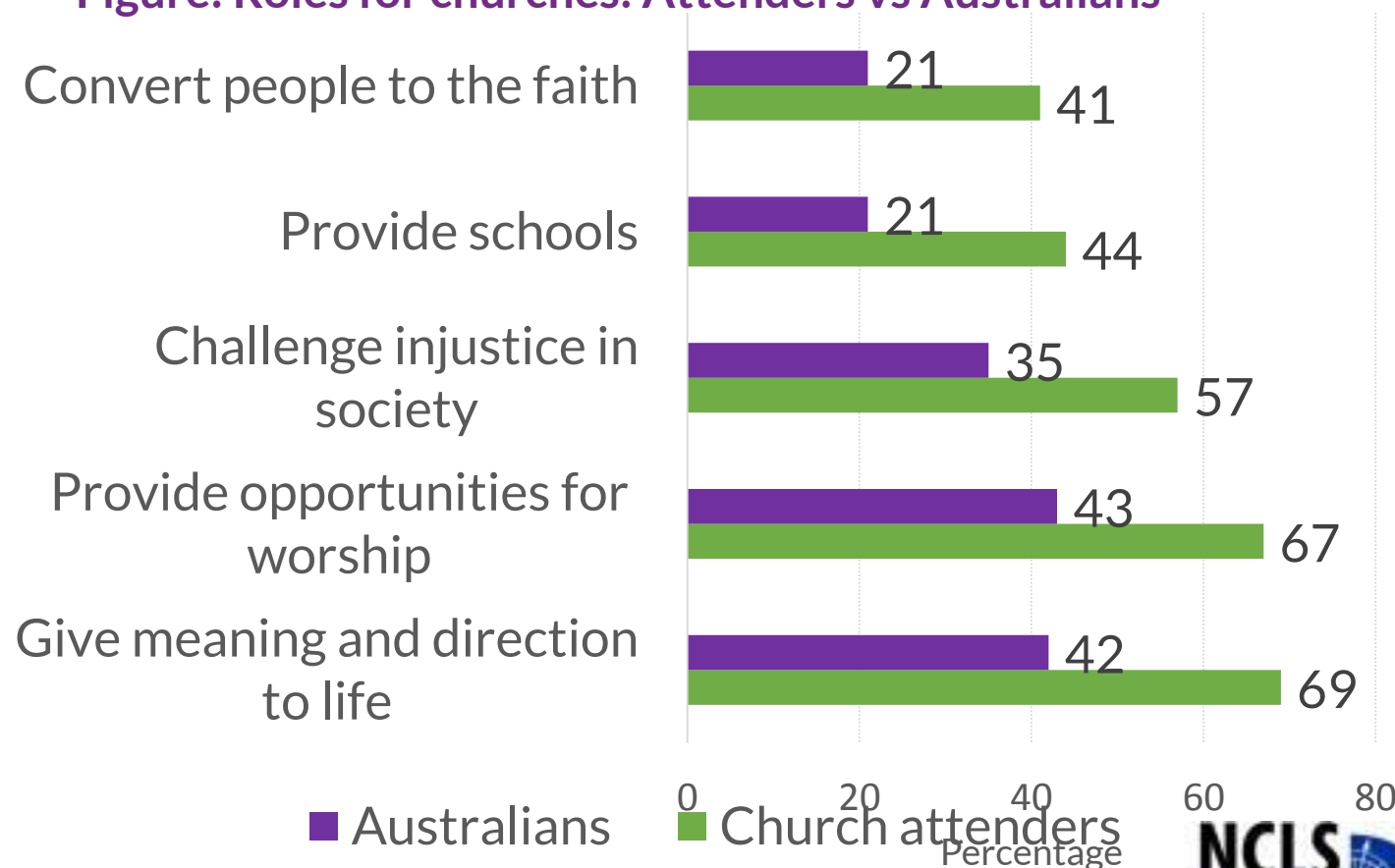
Some 18% claimed that churches should have no role in society.

# Roles for churches: Attenders vs all Australians

Significantly higher proportions of church attenders affirmed all roles listed.

The five roles for churches where there was the greatest difference between church attenders and all Australians are shown in the chart.

Figure: Roles for churches: Attenders vs Australians

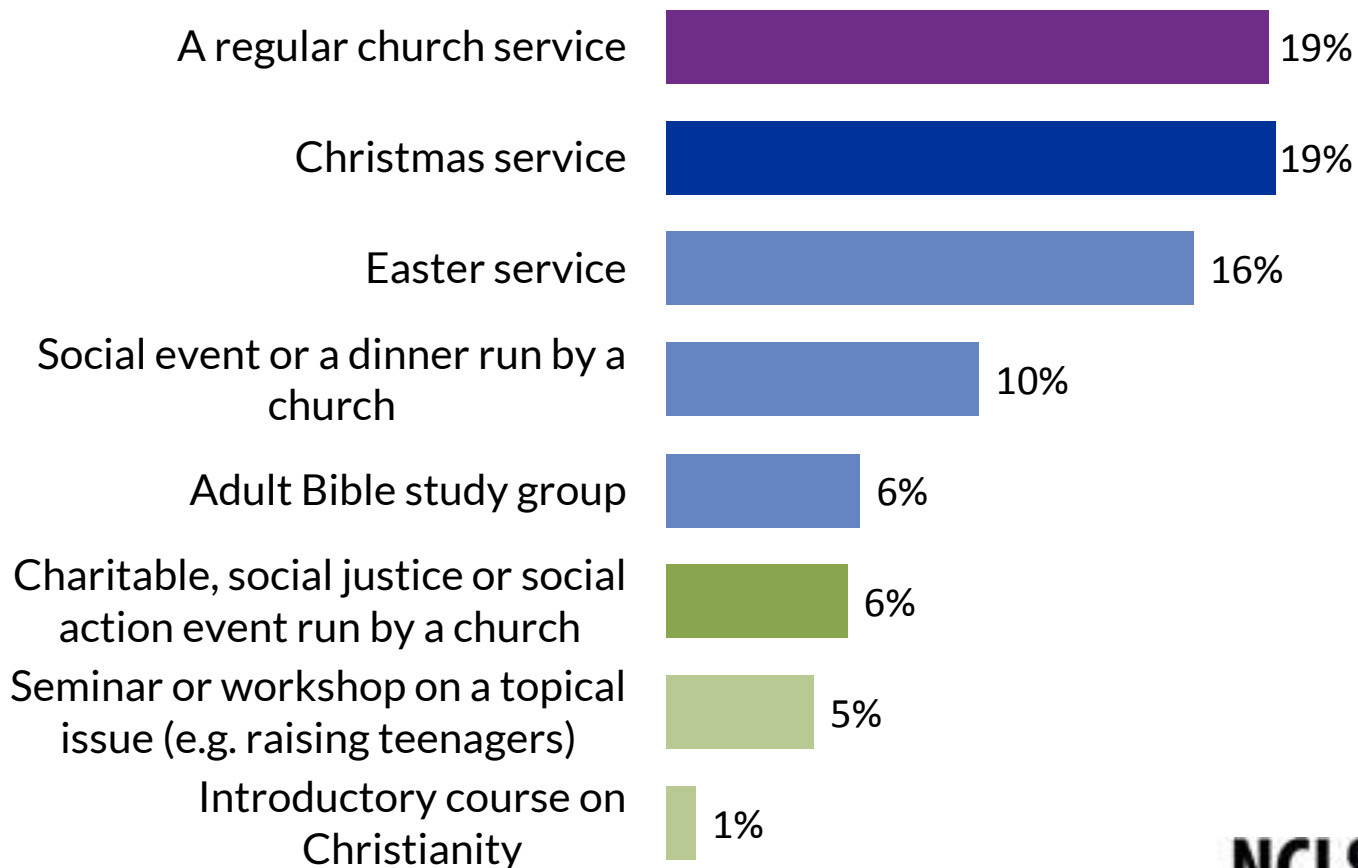


# Contact via church activities

Figure: Attendance at Christian events in preceding 12 months

A third of Australians have been at a church event in the past 12 months.

Attendance at regular services, at Christmas and Easter were most common, and important points of contact for infrequent attenders.

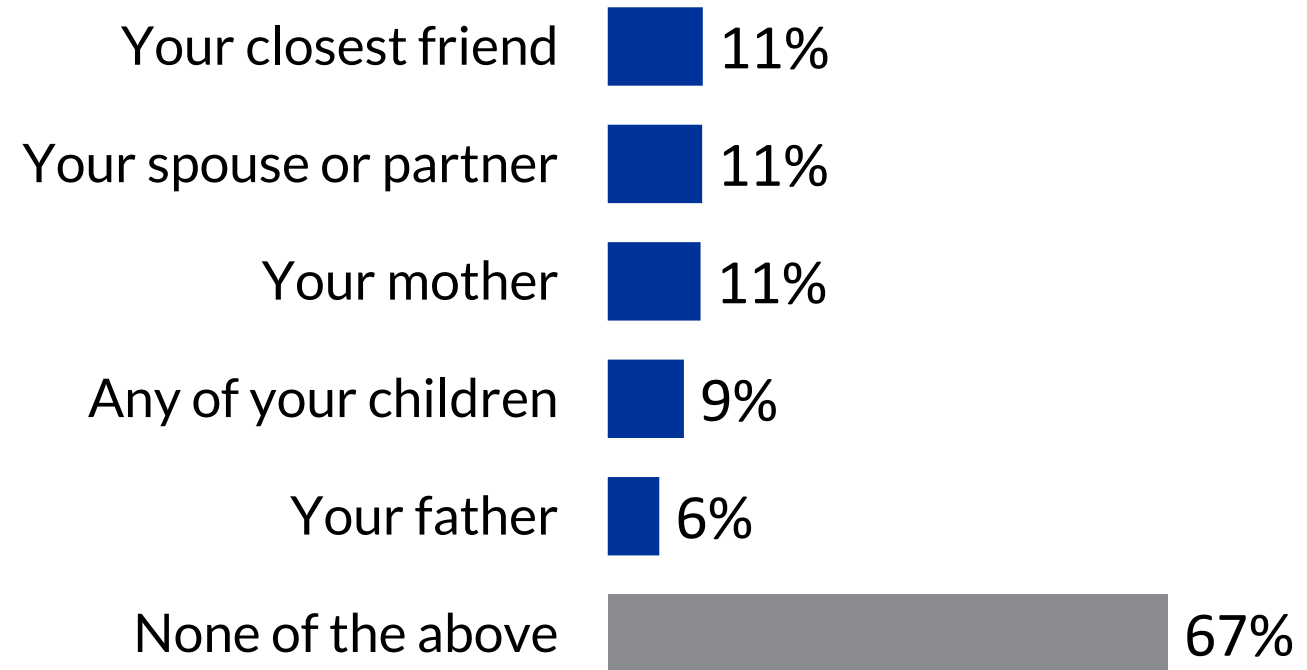


## Social relationships and church

Social relationships have a vital role in determining whether a person will attend church.

Two thirds of Australians do *not* have any close friends or family who attend church.

Figure: Close others who attend a Christian church regularly



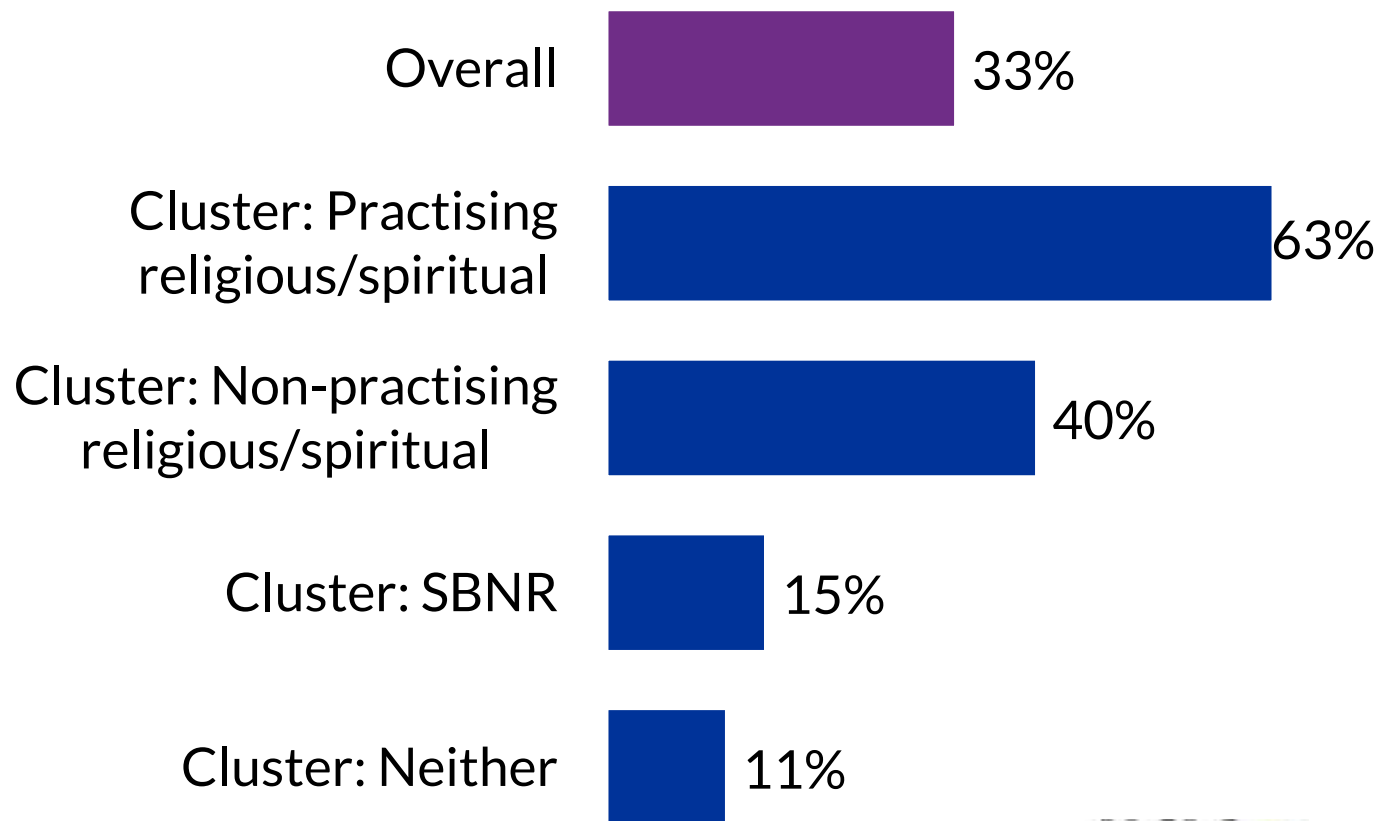


# Who is in relationship?

It varies...

E.g. 40% of the non-practising group had one of the people listed regularly attending church (most commonly their mother).

Figure: Any close others attend a Christian church regularly by segment



# Openness to accepting an invitation to church

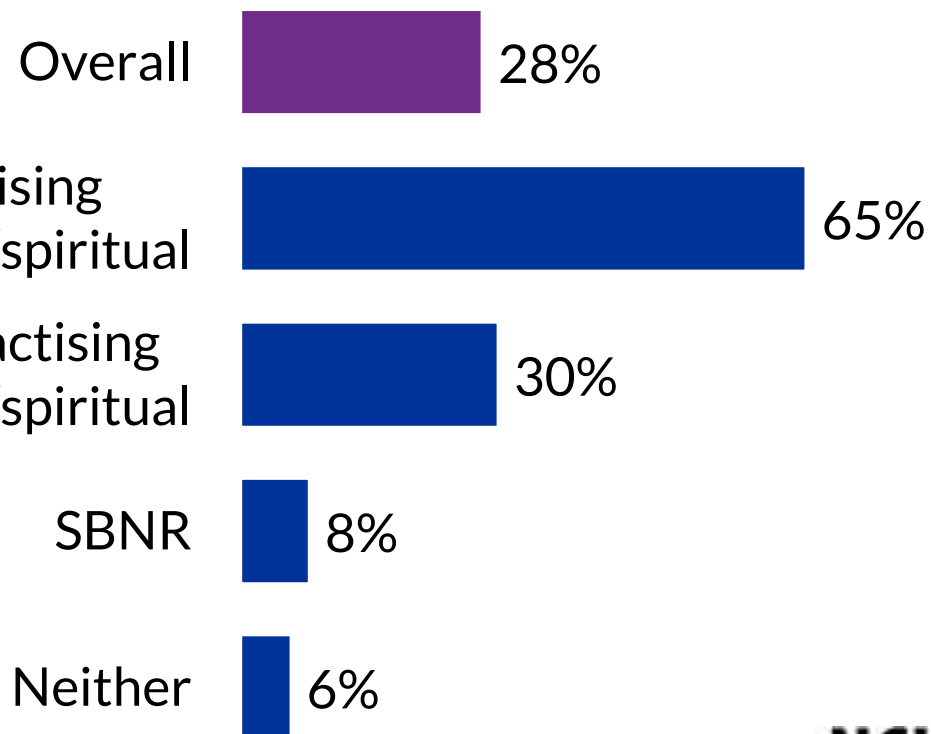
Would Australians go to a regular church service if invited by close family and friends?

28% say 'yes'

24% are unsure

48% say 'no'

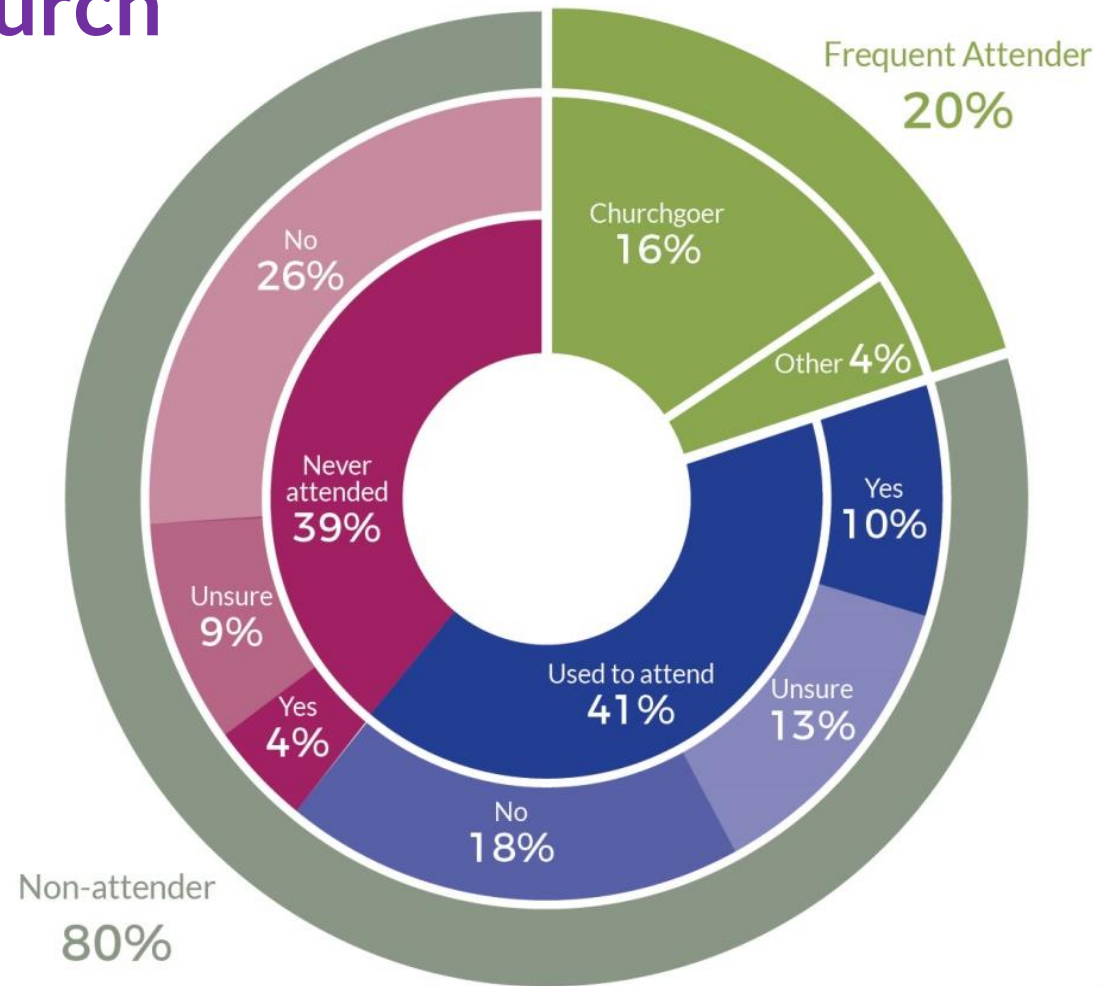
Figure: Would accept an invitation to church by segment



## Accepting invitations to church

14% of non-attenders would accept an invitation to church from close friends or family. A further 22% were unsure.

People who used to attend are more likely be open.



# Why accept or decline an invitation to church?

944 of 1,200 people (79%) gave additional written information about their choice.

A qualitative content analysis was conducted on the open text responses, where they were coded into themes which covered:

- their attitudes towards churches and Christianity,
- their own religious identity and/or practices,
- social relationships,
- issues of practical barriers to attendance, and
- curiosity or openness to new experiences.

# Why accept? Relationships, curiosity and connection

The most commonly given reasons were:

1. To support or affirm their friend or family member, for example:

*“I would attend because it is important to the person who invited you, otherwise they wouldn’t have invited you.”*

2. Curious about attending, or open to trying something new or different:

*“I would accept as I like to be open minded.”*

3. Appreciated the idea of connecting with other people at church:

*“It’s a nice social experience if you go to church and mingle with and get to know other people.”*



# Why decline? Negative, no interest, non-religious

The most salient reasons were:

1. Negative attitudes or feelings towards churches and/or Christianity:

*“Out-dated and the reputation of the church has been tarnished for a long time due to paedophilia by the clergy.”*

2. Attending a service did not interest them or was a waste of time:

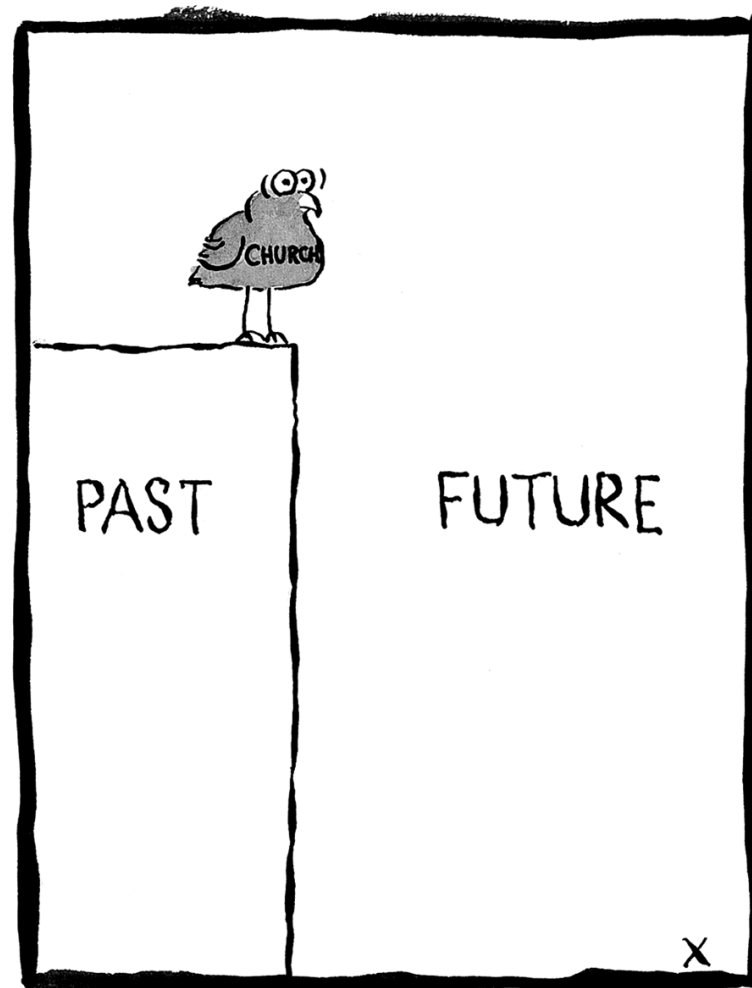
*“I have no real interest in attending religious services”; “...Could use my time better elsewhere.”*

3. Not religious or spiritual identity or practices

*“I do not believe in any religious figure, and nor do I participate in anything that has to do with religion.”*

## In summary...

- Overall, Australians are moderately religious.
- While religiousness and spirituality have eroded over time, religious practices, beliefs and experiences continue to be present.
- While religion and religious institutions, such as Christian churches, face higher levels of distrust and disinterest than previously, they are still understood to have roles in society
- Most people preferred Christian churches to have an embedded role, investing in fostering cohesive communities and a good society.
- A person's religious identity and disposition, along with significant relationships, provide the most effective points of connection for churches, with Christmas, Easter and special occasions presenting strong opportunities.



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