

★ Pointers ★

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All Melbourne Matters – Researching the Church in Melbourne

The Christian Research Association, together with the organisation 'Transforming Melbourne', has released a series of 32 reports on the churches and communities in greater Melbourne. The research utilised data from the 2006 National Church Life Survey (NCLS), additional supplementary surveys undertaken by Transforming Melbourne and the Christian Research Association, and the 2006 Australian Census of Population and Housing, along with special sections written by a variety of church leaders and other researchers. As part of the project two different types of reports were written:

- *a Citywide Report looking at the greater Melbourne area as a whole and,*
- *extended reports on each of the 31 local government areas.*

The results provide 'snapshots' of the church and community in every part of greater Melbourne, as well

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Charting the faith of Australians

The Christian Research Association was formed in 1985 to serve the churches of Australia. Its task is to provide up-to-date and reliable information about religious faith and church life in Australia. The following organisations are members of its board: the Anglican Dioceses of Brisbane and Melbourne, Baptist Union of Victoria, ACCESS ministries, Converge (International), Lutheran Church Australia, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Prahran Mission, Salvation Army (Southern Territory), Seventh-day Adventists, and the Uniting Church Synods of New South Wales and Victoria.

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as a comprehensive picture of Melbourne as a whole.

As part of the process the reports have been presented to denominational and church leaders. Transforming Melbourne is looking to gather people into networks within local government areas in order to reflect upon the results and to think and work strategically and collectively in ministry to the people of the city. It aims to engage the whole of the city for the future of the city.

Extensive analysis of the data and exhaustive research into Melbourne's churches has led to some expected and some unexpected findings.

Lack of young people in the churches....

According to data provided by the NCLS, churches in nearly all of the local government areas throughout Melbourne are struggling to attract the many young people (those aged 15 – 34) living within their communities.

That is, the proportion of young people attending churches is much lower than the proportion of young people within each of the areas.

One exception to this trend is in the City of Knox, situated in the outer east of Melbourne. The Census showed that in 2006 around 34.7 per cent of adults (aged 15 and over) in Knox were aged between 15 and 34. According to the NCLS, the proportion of adults in the same age group attending Knox churches was only slightly lower at around 34.4 per cent. Knox is the only local government area in Melbourne where the age profile of church attenders reflects the age profile of the community. However, with only 10 per cent of all young people of this age group in the Knox community attending church services, there is still much that the churches could be doing to attract them.

Table 1 shows seven local government areas which have high proportions of young people aged 15-34, and the estimated numbers of young people attending services of worship in those areas. The

table also shows the proportion of **all** young people in each area attending churches, and the proportion who stated they had 'No religion' on the 2006 Census.

In the City of Port Phillip, for example, a relatively well-to-do area in Melbourne's inner south bordering the CBD, 44 per cent of the adult population was aged between 15-34 (around 34,600 people). Yet only 400 of these young people (or 1.2%) are estimated to attend a church on a typical Sunday.

Also of note in all local government areas is the high proportion of young people who said they had 'no religion' in the 2006 Census. In all areas the proportion of young people responding this way was higher than that for the overall adult population, usually by around 5-6 per cent. Whether this means that increasing proportions of young people will describe themselves as having 'no religion' will only be revealed over time.

Table 1. Local Government Areas in Melbourne with high proportions of young people aged 15-34, and numbers attending churches in the area.

LGA Name	Population of young people aged 15-34	% of adult population aged 15-34	Estimated numbers of young people attending churches	% of young people attending churches	% of young people claiming 'No religion'
Melbourne (City)	51,636	58.4	1,923	3.7	25.5
Yarra (City)	29,391	47.1	718	2.4	35.8
Port Phillip (City)	34,582	44.1	402	1.2	28.7
Melton (Shire)	25,566	43.3	1,032	4.0	19.0
Maribyrnong (City)	21,683	41.0	721	3.3	23.5
Stonnington (City)	31,659	40.4	750	2.4	26.4
...
Knox (City)	40,039	34.7	3,989	10.0	29.2
Melbourne (Statistical Division)	1,052,543	36.1	56,158	5.3	24.6
Source: ABS Census of Population & Housing 2006 and NCLS 2006.					

....But doing well attracting older people

In contrast, the churches throughout Melbourne are engaging with older people fairly well. Between 1983 and 2005, there was significant growth in the numbers of older people attending churches. Examples of this growth can be seen in many of the NCLS surveyed churches. The southern-most part of greater Melbourne, the Mornington Peninsula Shire, has the highest proportion of older people aged 65 and over – around 23 per cent of the adult population. According to the NCLS, 55 per cent of attenders at churches in the Shire are 65 or older, and one-fifth of all in this age group attended church on a typical Sunday. (Forty per cent of churches in the Mornington Peninsula undertook the 2006 NCLS.)

But what of the next generation? As people reach retirement age they do not necessarily return to – or commence – attending church. If churches are to continue to attract older people, they will need to respond to the changes that the next generation brings.

A particular challenge which churches in many areas in Melbourne face is caring for older people in the community, while also connecting with younger people.

High proportions of well-educated people....

Most churches have high proportions of university graduates and post-graduates in comparison with the wider community. In the greater Melbourne area, one-fifth of all adults have university qualifications, but one-third of adults attending church on a typical Sunday have a university degree.

The local government area of the City of Melbourne is unique in its demographic profile. It has very high proportions of young people, many of whom are students attending university. It has high proportions of professional people, very low proportions of married people, and low proportions of families with children. The City of Melbourne has 79 churches including a number of city churches which do not primarily serve the local area population, but attract significant numbers of attenders from outside the immediate area. It has a well-educated population – around 36 per cent of adults in the area have a degree including 10 per cent who have post-graduate qualifications. The NCLS found that even higher proportions of church attenders in the area had these qualifications: around 60 per cent had a degree including 29 per cent who had post-graduate qualifications.

The large majority of churches across all parts of Melbourne appeal to the well-educated in society. The churches, though, are struggling to attract those with trade qualifications or those with no post-secondary education. Most church services require a high level of literacy, and many sermons and homilies revolve around ideas that appeal to the highly educated but mean little to others.

....And low proportions of unmarried people

In most areas throughout Melbourne there were stark contrasts between the proportions of unmarried people attending church and those within the wider community. In the greater Melbourne area in 2006, almost half of the adult population was married and 35 per cent were not married. A further 6 per cent were

widowed, and around 10 per cent were divorced or separated.

However, the NCLS found that 64 per cent of all adult church attenders were married, 20 per cent had never married, 9 per cent were widowed, and around 6 per cent were separated or divorced.

This contrast is even more pronounced in the outer growth areas of Melbourne which have high proportions of married people and families. In the City of Melton, on the western fringe of the greater Melbourne area, just over half of the adult population was married. A further 32 per cent of adults had never married. However, in the Melton churches, around two-thirds of attenders were married, and only 15 per cent of attenders had never married.

Typically, churches across Melbourne are attracting people whose focus of life is their family and who have opted for a married relationship. Churches are struggling to attract those who have never married and those in de facto relationships. Previous research has suggested that many in these latter groups feel uncomfortable in churches, aware of a mismatch between their own values and lifestyle and those of others attending church.

The uneven spread of churches across Melbourne

The Transforming Melbourne project showed that the provision of Christian churches is quite uneven across the city. In particular, there are low levels of provision in Whittlesea, Wyndham, Hume and Melton, all local government areas on the fringes of greater Melbourne. The northern and western regions are generally less well served than the south and east of the city.

As an example, for every 3,757 people living in the Whittlesea area (situated in Melbourne’s outer north-east), there is one church. In contrast, in the City of Boroondara (an affluent area in Melbourne’s inner-east), there is one church for 1,530 people.

The map of local government areas in Melbourne below highlights five areas that the Victorian Government has earmarked for future growth.

The balloons on the map show the estimated projected growth of the areas between 2006 and 2031.

The balloons also show the current number of people per church in each area.

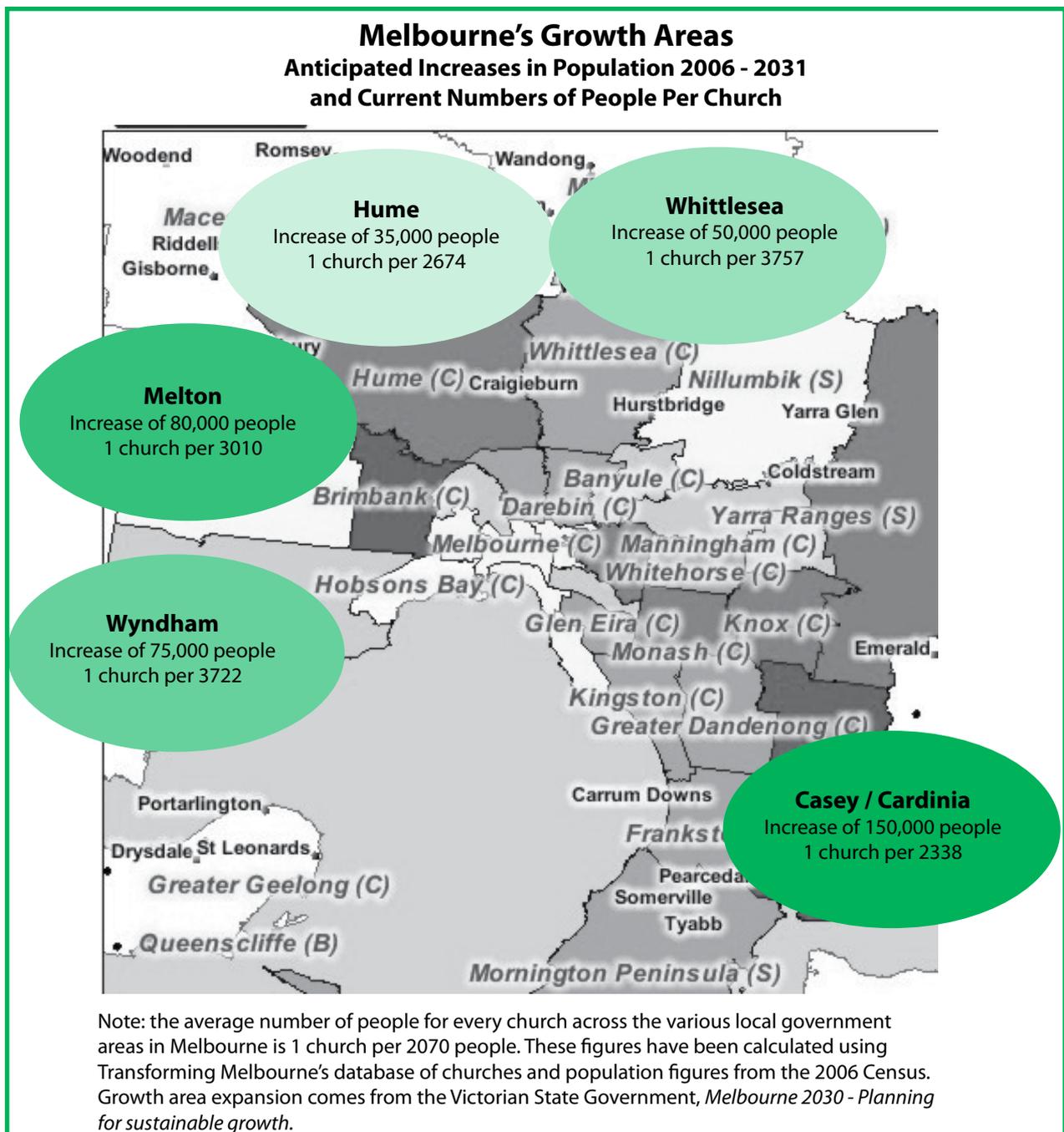
In 2006, for example, the City of Wyndham had a population of around 112,000 and 30 churches. Thus, there was one church per 3,722 people in the Wyndham community. It is estimated that in 20 to 25 years time the population will reach 187,000. If no further resources are allocated to the area, that is, if no churches are built or started, by 2031 each church will serve around 6,200 people. Research in the USA suggests that the more churches there are,

the greater the overall religious vitality.

Denominational and church leaders need to be asking questions now about resourcing the churches for the future.

Ethic ministries

The language being spoken at home is often a clearer indicator of ethnic groups living in an area than country of birth. Some local government areas in Melbourne have relatively high proportions of immigrants, yet a much smaller proportion speaking non-English



languages. In the City of Frankston, an area located to Melbourne's south, just over one-fifth of the population was born overseas, yet only around 8 per cent speak a language other than English at home.

Table 2 shows seven areas in Melbourne with the highest proportion of people speaking a language other than English at home, and the percentage of the population in each area born overseas. The table also shows the proportion of churches in the area involved with ethnic ministry and the extent of their involvement.

Many churches in the highly multicultural areas share property and other resources with ethnic communities. Other churches have combined worship services or other relationships with ethnic groups.

Yet, in these areas, many churches do not see ethnic ministry as a high priority, even though the Census results indicate that they have high proportions of residents speaking languages other than English.

It must be noted that only a small proportion of churches in each of the areas participated in the NCLS (between 6 per cent and 30 percent), so the picture in table 2 of church involvement may not represent all the churches in the area.

New ways of evangelism and outreach needed

Most churches throughout Melbourne are relatively ineffective in attracting people into the life of the church and bringing people to faith. Much effort is being put into evangelism and outreach activities. Many churches run evangelistic services, events or Bible studies. Many are involved with drop-in centres, street evangelism or sending mission teams to other parts of Australia or overseas.

However, according to the NCLS, on a typical weekend in Melbourne, between six and seven per cent of church attenders are newcomers returning after a long absence, or newcomers who had never attended church regularly during the previous five years.

As an example, if a church has 150 people attending its worship service on a typical Sunday, on average ten of those people would have started attending within the last five years. This means that, each year, approximately two people had come to faith (or come back to faith) and had started attending church on a frequent basis.

Overall, we estimate that the churches in Melbourne are experiencing a net loss of about 4,500 attenders a year: the equivalent of one medium-sized congregation every two weeks.

The work of the Christian churches in Melbourne immeasurable

Aside from providing worship services, programs and activities for their attenders, the churches and their agencies play a significant role for many others in greater Melbourne. Part of this can be measured in terms of the number of social and welfare services they provide, or in terms of the number of people who use their services.

Table 2. Local Government Areas with high proportions of people speaking non-English languages at home, per cent born overseas and the involvement of churches in ethnic ministry.

LGA Name	Per cent of population speaking a language other than English at home	Per cent of population born overseas	Number of churches in LGA	Per cent of churches involved in ethnic ministry			Number of churches surveyed in NCLS
				Heavily involved	First steps	No resources, not involved or not a priority	
Greater Dandenong (City)	55.2	51.5	93	50.0	8.3	41.7	12
Brimbank (City)	53.7	43.3	65	20.0	50.0	30.0	11
Whittlesea (City)	43.0	32.7	33	16.7	50.0	33.4	6
Maribyrnong (City)	42.8	38.8	49	0.0	100.0	0.0	3
Moreland (City)	39.5	32.3	66	42.1	31.6	26.3	19
Darebin (City)	39.0	32.0	61	35.3	35.3	29.4	18
Monash (City)	38.6	39.7	88	40.9	22.7	36.3	23
Melbourne (Statistical Division)	26.3	28.9	1,721	14.6	21.5	63.8	511

Source: ABS Census of Population & Housing 2006 and NCLS 2006.

The churches are also involved with education through running schools and providing chaplaincy services. They are also involved in many other diverse settings: ethnic communities, prisons, hospitals, workplaces, media and sport.

For example, churches in the City of Maroondah, in Melbourne's outer east, provide a diversity of social services and social action activities to people in their area. Ninety-four per cent of Maroondah churches have visitation programs, 88 per cent provide emergency relief or assistance, and 82 per cent provide counselling services. Considerable numbers of churches are actively involved with the disadvantaged and marginalised in the community, providing services to the aged, homeless, unemployed and disabled. The City of Maroondah is just one example of what the Christian churches are doing right across Melbourne.

There is also much more that happens 'under the radar'. Christians of all denominations call on their neighbours and volunteer for charitable organisations. Strengthened by the moral imperatives of the Christian faith, people treat each other with empathy and compassion. Indeed, when one asks people what is the importance of the Christian faith, more than half the population says that it is important because it encourages care and compassion. That sort of influence, however, is beyond measurement.

The future of the church in Melbourne

The *All Melbourne Matters* research project has revealed significant disparities between Melbourne's population and the profile of church attenders. Many questions have arisen about the



A Christian celebration on the steps of the Victorian State parliament.

future of Christian churches. How can churches better relate to the communities of which they are a part? How can the churches in Melbourne engage with those not attending their programs and services? What must these churches do if they are to be relevant to the next generation?

If attendance and traditional involvement in church life is the measure, then it could be said that the churches in Melbourne are failing to remain relevant in a rapidly changing and diverse society. If other measures of impact are used – connectivity, services provided, moral influence of the Christian faith – it could equally be said that the church is having significant success right throughout Melbourne. While the churches are doing well in offering care, are they transforming people's lives, giving hope to those without hope, purpose to those without direction, and freedom to those who are bound by the addictions offered by contemporary society?

The churches are facing many challenges throughout greater Melbourne. Not all of these challenges are the same in

each area. In the City of Greater Dandenong, there is the challenge of ministering to 15 different large and numerous small immigrant groups. In the Cities of Casey, Melton and Wyndham, there is the challenge of resourcing rapidly growing populations. Churches in the Melbourne local government area are faced with the challenge of ministering to more than 16,000 highly mobile university students.

These challenges also bring significant opportunities for churches to make an impact on their communities. Some churches in Melbourne are taking up those opportunities and trying new initiatives. Others are floundering, wondering how to connect with a population which is not represented by those sitting in its pews.

The churches in Melbourne will look very different in twenty years time. Unless there is a major change in the direction of society or within the churches, the number of attenders will be two-thirds what it is today, while Melbourne's population will have grown considerably. Currently around 8.4 per cent of the population attend church on a typical weekend in Melbourne. By

2026, only five per cent of the population will attend on a typical Sunday.

If the churches across Melbourne are to be more effective in their role as transformers of society, then renewal is needed both at denominational level and local church level. As local churches are transformed internally, and as they in turn connect and engage more effectively with the wider community, they will play a more vital role in society and have a greater influence on Melbourne as a whole.

Stephen Reid

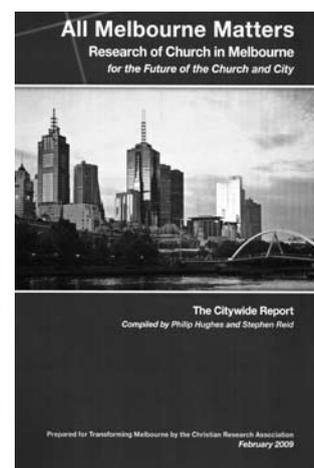
The Reports

The Citywide Report

The report for greater Melbourne provides a comprehensive picture of its population and the nature and activities of its 1720 churches. Many people have contributed to the report, which shows the variety and quality of congregational life and its many activities in education, health and social welfare. It covers house churches through to the regional churches. The great diversity of Melbourne's population is described and future trends are plotted. The report was written as a basis for strategic thinking about mission and ministry, and it puts a number of challenges clearly before the churches. Containing more than 100 A4 pages, it is available from the Christian Research Association for \$75 including postage.

The Local Government Area Reports

The local government area reports present a picture of church life and activities in each of Melbourne's local government areas. This is placed alongside the picture of the population in each local government area. The report draws out the implications for mission. Each church will need its own local government area report as it reflects on its mission to the area. This is an invaluable resource around which churches in a locality might gather to reflect on how, together, they can have an impact on their local government area. Local government reports vary in length between 24 and 40 pages and are available from the Christian Research Association for \$35 each including postage or \$660 for the full set.



AT A GLANCE: Melbourne Snapshots of the 2006 Australian Census & 2006 NCLS

	▲ Highest		▼ Lowest		Greater Melbourne
	LGA name	% or N	LGA name	% or N	
2006 Population	Casey	212,790	Cardinia	56,143	3,563,166
Percentage population growth (1996-2006)	Melton	100.3%	Greater Dandenong	-0.3%	14.5%
Population aged 65 or over	Mornington Peninsula	18.8%	Melton	5.6%	12.6%
Population aged 15-34	Melbourne	55.0%	Bayside	20.7%	29.3%
Identification with a Christian denomination	Whittlesea	68.7%	Melbourne	36.6%	58.4%
"No religion"	Yarra Ranges	30.5%	Brimbank	9.3%	19.8%
Percentage of population born overseas	Greater Dandenong	51.5%	Nillumbik	14.2%	28.9%
Percentage speaking non-English language	Greater Dandenong	55.2%	Mornington Peninsula	4.5%	26.3%
Number of churches in area	Boroondara	99	Cardinia	21	1,721
Number persons per church (2006 population)	Whittlesea	3,757	Melbourne	1,079	2,070
Percentage "Newcomers" to church in 5 years	Maribyrnong	13.0%	Banyule	3.0%	6.6%
Percentage of young people (aged 15-34) in area attending churches	Knox	10.0%	Port Phillip	1.2%	5.3%

Source: ABS Census of Population & Housing 2006, National Church Life Survey 2006 and Transforming Melbourne Church Listing Feb. 2009.

De facto Relationships

One of the most significant changes over recent years in the structures of families has been the increase in de facto relationships (where two people live together as a couple and are not married), and the public acceptance, or at least tolerance of these relationships. While the majority of partnered people are married, it is rare to find a family today in Australia in which one of the adult children is not in, or has not been in, a de facto relationship. The Census data confirms the prevalence of people 'living together', particularly among young people. The exceptions are usually where the bride and groom are committed members of conservative denominations, such as Pentecostal churches which have a younger age profile and a stronger proscription on sexual relationships before marriage.

The status of de facto relationships

The writer Emily Maguire encapsulates the viewpoint of many contemporary younger Australians in her recent reflection on contemporary feminism and women:

And of course marriage isn't necessary even if you have met someone with whom you want to live and love forever. It's perfectly possible to have a happy, committed, loving relationship without any kind of ceremony or signature. (pp.96-97)

While surveys confirm this general acceptance of de facto relationships, an institutional sign of their acceptance was the change of name of the pre-eminent marriage organisation in Australia in 1994 to 'Relationships Australia', which incidentally celebrated sixty years of service in 2008, having been founded as a marriage advice agency in 1948.

The organisation was called Marriage Guidance, but in 1994, the organisation underwent a name change to Relationships Australia - a name considered more reflective of the broader range of services provided by the organisation. Today, RA is the largest secular organisation in Australia providing professional services to support relationships. (Relationships Australia, Media release, January 2008)

One of the main professional bodies for marriage educators

also changed its name a year later. MAREAA (Marriage and Relationship Educators' Association of Australia) was formerly the Marriage Educators Association of Australia (MEAA). It was formed to meet the professional needs of marriage, and now marriage and relationship, educators throughout Australia.

Notably, the Catholic Professional Association has retained the term 'marriage education'.

The 24th British Social Attitudes survey by the National Centre for Social Research (running since 1983) report in 2007 says "marriage - once the bedrock institution of British society - is seen by two thirds of people as virtually indistinguishable from cohabitation".

A newspaper article in the United Kingdom summarised that:

Government support for gay couples and single parents, the rise in cohabitation and an official failure to support traditional marriage are said to have resulted in previously unconventional lifestyles becoming widely accepted. ('Married couples are no longer the social norm', Sarah Womack, Social Affairs Correspondent, accessed 23/01/2008 telegraph.co.uk)

While de facto relationships are accepted socially, there are still differences which cause people to ponder or question. Many people in long-term de facto relationships still marry and this is an interesting area worthy of more

study by itself: why?

Sharon Aris, the author, of *Being Married: Your Guide to a Happy Marriage*, wrote:

... I never thought about marriage much until I turned 30. I wasn't so much anti-marriage, I just didn't really consider it. I had other things to do - travel, career, party. But, about seven years ago, after being with my partner Ron for a number of years, living together stopped being enough. It wasn't that we weren't committed - we were buying a house, we'd supported each other through two degrees and two careers - but, somehow, I wanted more. I felt inexplicably jealous as we went to the weddings of friends. I started joking about an engagement ring. This went on for two years. Finally, I issued an ultimatum: Ron had until the end of the year to decide if this was permanent. The deadline passed, I pondered my next move. Then on Valentine's Day in 2000 he proposed. I got my diamond. (*Sunday Telegraph Magazine*, September 25, 2005, p. 19)

A younger person, interestingly, reflects a more cynical view of de facto relationships in an article initially circulated on the Internet. Year 12 student, Amanda Fairweather, reflected on marriage in 'All my friends are still getting married', published in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (December 31, 2004, p. 13) which received considerable interest at the time.

It's boomers who've gone bust, not wedding vows that are old hat.

Those deeply committed to a faith seem to stay in relationships and desire marriage earlier in life. In contrast, the more liberally minded are more likely to have shorter relationships ... The problem is that social commentators, usually embittered by their own bad relationships or at least their observations of them, try to tell my generation that marriage is bad, or at least superfluous. The men and women we look up to tell us it is a good idea to move in with someone without committing to marriage; to feel the air, but not to get tied down.

Boys grow inured to this and eventually see cohabitation as merely the next step in a relationship. So what on earth could possibly induce a man to propose to a woman when there is free sex and the housework gets done without any commitment in return? A guy has it so good in this situation: all the entitlements of marriage, safe in the knowledge that if something better comes along he doesn't have to lose half his stuff to make the exchange....

In short, we seek what is best offered in marriage and in a nuclear family. The desire for this is so high among females, and, at least initially among males, that we might actually have the chance of achieving it – if forty-somethings can stop telling twenty-somethings how to live their lives.

De facto relationships – a rose by any other name?

How do people in de facto relationships perceive their relationship? Is a de facto relationship a quasi-marriage? Unlike marriage, there is usually no formal initiation of a de facto relationship.

Couples therapist Alessandra Adamski has written:

There's nothing wrong or

inferior about living together. But it's less clear cut. The point about marriage is that both sign the same contract. (Marcus, p. 22)

Laura Marcus notes that:

Living together often takes place informally. ... Couples just drift into it in a way you can't with marriage, which is, after all, a rite of passage. So living together is frequently the result of a creeping process (Marcus, 'To tie the knot or not', *The Sunday Telegraph Sunday Magazine*, September 1, 2002 p.21)

There is a 'common law' view that there are no differences between a de facto relationship and a marriage, and certainly the law has been moving in this direction. While the new Federal laws introduced in March 2009 have reconciled some differences in the areas of benefits and responsibilities regarding property and spousal maintenance, there are still legal and practical differences, and differences between some States.

The most obvious is that a de facto relationship easily can end. If it is mutually agreeable or simply due to lack of interest, one can just 'move on' without any of

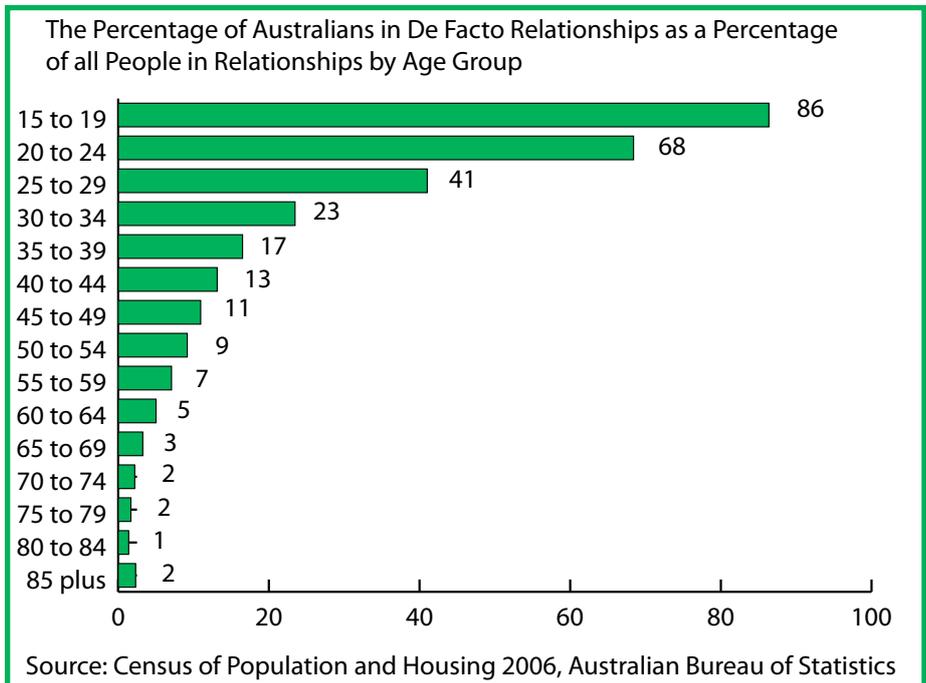
the major issues that arise with 'divorce'. I have seen this happen frequently among my peers, who are often in what one terms nowadays 'serial monogamous' relationships, so aptly highlighted in the recent Julie Delphy film: *2 Days in Paris*.

One can also still be legally married to one partner and in a de facto relationship. To marry again, you need to formally divorce your first partner.

Why do people seek de facto relationships? Who is cohabiting?

Of people marrying in 2006, 76.1 per cent indicated they had cohabited prior to registering their marriage. This compares with 64.7 per cent in 1997, and an estimated 16 per cent in 1975.

Age is also a factor. In 2006, only 2 per cent of Australian young people 15 to 19 were living in a relationship, but of those who were, 85 per cent were in a de facto relationship as shown in the figure below. Among those in their early twenties, 21 per cent are in a relationship and 68 per cent of this group are in de facto relationships. By the time young



people are in their late twenties, just over half of them (52%) were living in a relationship, and of them, 41 per cent were in a de facto relationship.

The 2006 census confirmed the continuing increase in the number of people aged 15 years and over in de facto relationships. In ten years (from 1996) the percentage of de facto partners rose 50 per cent from 10 per cent to now represent 15 per cent of all adults in, what the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) terms, 'socially married' category, either a registered marriage or a de facto relationship. The ABS also notes that some of the increase could be due to people more readily indicating their status. (ABS, *Marriages 2006*)

Helen Glezer found that those cohabiting in 1996 tended to have the following features:

- an English-speaking background
- were not religious
- came from family backgrounds where parents had divorced, and
- had experienced difficulties in finding secure employment in the last five years (particularly for those who have never married). (Glezer, p.7)

Dr Shail Jain in her contribution to *Australian Social Trends 2007* 'Lifetime Marriage and Divorce Trends' notes the increasing amount of time that people spend divorced, pointing to one factor as being the fact that many divorcees enter into de facto relationships rather than registered remarriages. There is also evidence that those who have been divorced are more likely to enter de facto relationships than widowed people who re-marry. (See 'Marriages, divorces and de facto relationships' in *Yearbook Australia, 2008*)

Further research needs to be undertaken in these areas to compare past studies with present situations, particularly as the status of de facto relationships has changed.

Are de facto relationships trial marriages?

Belinda Hewitt has undertaken significant research in the area of de facto relationships and cohabitation in particular.

The institution of marriage has undergone major changes in Australia since World War II. Arguably the two main changes are increasing rates of cohabitation before marriage and marriage breakdown. It has been argued that these two processes are interrelated. Sociological theorists of modernity argue that the increasing rates of cohabitation observed in most developed Western nations are in response to the perceived risk of divorce. When marriage is no longer guaranteed for life cohabitation offers the opportunity for a 'trial marriage' where a couple can see how they get along together before they marry and hence minimise the risk of divorce. Conversely, not living together before marriage is viewed as a risky prospect. There is however, very little empirical support for the expectation that cohabitation reduces the risk of marriage breakdown (Hewitt, p.2).

Hewitt reviews the factors that contribute to the risk of breakdown in relationships. She argues that the rates of breakdown in marriage are higher when the couple has cohabited prior to marriage than among couples who have not cohabited. The reason for this is not cohabitation itself, but the values and beliefs that underlie it. Those who cohabit have lower levels of cohabit have lower levels of commitment to marriage and more readily accept divorce.

Hence, those who cohabit are more likely to experience divorce.

This research points to the importance of values and attitudes towards marriage. Those who have high levels of commitment to marriage are less likely to experience the breakdown of their relationships. Not cohabiting prior to marriage reflects values and beliefs that reduce the risk of marriage breakdown. (http://eprints.qut.edu.au/archive/00006134/01/Hewitt_FIN.pdf)

Conclusion

Contemporary de facto relationships are an important area for further research. How religious groups and church involvement relates to de facto relationships is also of interest. Theologians and Christian researchers are well placed to do further work in this area, and to also help their churches to engage with and reflect more adequately on what is happening in contemporary Australian society.

Peter Bentley

Statistics: Australian Bureau of Statistics: Marriages Divorces and De Facto Relationships 2002 and 2006: <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/C0771D0225B882D2CA2570DE0006B864?opendocument>

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Marriage Within and Outside the Religious Group

Most people look for life partners who share their values and their approach to life. For many people, this means looking for people who have similar religious or spiritual values. Nevertheless, the numbers of people who marry people of the same religious group varies greatly in Australia: from 36 per cent among those who identify with nature religions to 94 per cent of those who identify with Islam.

Apart from personal preference, three major factors affect the extent to which people marry people of their own religious group.

Pattenden, Rosalie, 'For better or for

1. The extent to which religious groups and the wider society encourage people to marry within the religious group. In some religious groups, this is a simple matter of community approval. People within the group comment positively if someone finds a partner within the group. At the other end of the spectrum are those religious groups which have rules about whom its members can and cannot marry. Some groups expel those who do not meet the rules.

Table 1. Rates of marriage and de facto relationships occurring within religious groups, the rates of growth and decline in the religious group and the proportions of the group under 15 years of age

Religious Group	Total number of marriages	Rate of Marriage within the Religious Group	Partnerships within the religious group in de facto relationships	Rate of growth or decline of the religious group 2001 to 2006	Proportion of all relationships which are de facto	Under 15 year olds as a proportion of all those identifying
Islam	127,392	93.9	51.0	20.9	3.4	29.9
Brethren	10,533	92.8	38.7	25.2	1.8	25.4
Coptic Orthodox	9,004	92.6	20.2	11.2	1.0	21.2
Assyrian Apostolic	3,377	92.5	50.0	15.2	0.8	20.2
Druse	1,289	92.5	33.3	19.5	1.4	24.6
Hinduism	68,881	90.9	41.7	55.1	3.0	19.2
Sikhism	11,416	90.2	40.5	51.9	2.7	20.6
Pentecostals	87,969	89.9	45.0	12.9	3.6	24.2
Christadelphians	4,940	88.5	11.4	2.2	2.1	20.5
Jehovah's Witnesses	38,253	85.2	23.2	-0.2	1.9	17.8
Baha'i	5,254	84.5	19.6	11.8	3.6	19.7
Latter-day Saints	17,409	82.7	12.2	6.6	7.8	28.1
Judaism	38,483	82.7	40.9	5.8	8.5	17.0
Reformed	6,204	82.2	14.0	-15.9	3.4	5.4
Eastern Orthodox	252,027	82.1	27.5	2.8	4.8	17.9
Seventh-day Adventist	22,251	78.4	24.3	2.6	7.6	19.7
Buddhism	154,216	78.4	47.5	17.0	11.2	16.6
Churches of Christ	25,436	73.8	23.1	-10.6	4.7	16.5
Baptist	133,099	69.1	18.6	2.4	7.3	19.3
No Religion	1,039,980	69.1	67.9	27.6	27.1	24.6
Catholic	1,900,083	63.4	40.1	2.5	12.9	21.1
Anglican	1,529,339	59.8	44.1	-4.2	13.5	15.2
Community of Christ	549	57.6	0.0	-8.3	6.0	10.2
Uniting Church	493,402	56.1	24.8	-9.1	9.5	14.9
Lutheran	95,470	54.6	16.7	0.3	13.0	17.1
Salvation Army	25,130	53.7	11.0	-10.1	10.9	16.4
Presbyterian	269,042	40.5	17.9	-8.5	10.7	9.4
Spiritualism	2,892	40.0	31.4	6.1	27.3	8.2
Nature Religions	6,221	36.0	29.8	21.7	42.8	10.4

Source: ABS 2006, National Population and Housing Census.

2. *The extent to which people feel bound by the expectations and rules of the religious group.* People whose affiliation with a religious group is nominal may feel little pressure from the religious group to abide by its expectations and its rules. If they are not involved in the activities of a religious group, then expulsion from those activities will mean little to them.

3. *The availability of people to be marriage partners within one's religious group.* If a religious group is very large, then the availability of suitable partners within the religious group should be greater. In Thailand, where 95 per cent of the population are Buddhists, it is hard to marry outside the Buddhist community. simply because there are so few potential partners. The rates of marriage within the group are thus high, even though there are few explicit rules or instructions. Nevertheless, many small religious communities have high rates of marriage within the group. People do find suitable partners in quite small groups.

Table 1 shows the rates of marriage within the religious group. Where the relationship is de facto, the rate of partnering within the group is much lower than in registered marriages. Indeed, the fact that the relationship is 'de facto' may reflect the fact that the people in these relationships realise that they will not be approved by the religious group. Hence, in some cases, a de facto relationship may be the only possible form of relationship. The other factor is that having decided on a partner of another religious group, in some cases, the couple have already put themselves outside the expectations of the religious group. Thus, they experience little pressure from the religious group to make this a registered marriage.

It should be noted that the Census information provides a picture of people's religious identity at the time of the Census. In some cases, when people marry someone of a different religious group, they change their identity. In a study of Christian-Muslim marriages in Australia, Ata (2003, p. 70) estimated that in about 19 per cent of marriages, one partner in the marriage 'converted' to the religious group of the other. Marriages in which such conversions have occurred are not reflected in Table 1. Another option, which Ata (p.72) suggests may happen in up to 30 per cent of cases, is that the couple find a third religious group which they both rate highly, rather than continuing their identification with either of the original groups. Again, such cases are not reflected in the Census statistics.

There is one group for whom the rates of marriage within the group in de facto partnerships and in registered marriages was little different: 'no religion'. In this group, there is no pressure to marry within the group except the preference for finding someone with similar values and attitudes.

In general, in those groups which have a high rate of marriage within the religious group, few people enter into de facto relationships. Both the rate of marrying within the religious group and the proportion of the group entering

a de facto relationship are related to the strength of the internal pressures to conformity within the group. Most religious groups which exert more pressure over their members to conform have higher rates of marriage within the group and lower numbers who enter into de facto relationships. There was a strong negative correlation between the rate of marriage within the religious group and the number of de facto relationships as a proportion of all relationships into which members of the group had entered of -.76.

The rate of marriage within the religious group has consequences for the on-going life of the group. While many factors impact growth, especially rates of migration, those groups which had a high rate of marriage within the religious group also had a stronger rate of growth in numbers identifying with that group between 2001 and 2006 in the Census. The correlation between the rate of marriage within the group and the rate of growth was .42.

This works in several ways. If both parents have a commitment to the same religious group, then it is more likely that the children of those parents will share that commitment. If the parents are divided in their religious loyalties, then the children are less likely to be committed to either, or perhaps any, group. There was a strong correlation of .66 between the rate

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of marriage within the religious group and the proportion of the group aged under 15 years.

A high rate of marriage within the group also contributes to keeping the religious group pure and distinct. Groups which offer a distinctive way of life tend to attract converts. Those groups which merge readily with the wider society do not attract as many converts.

Church Attenders

When we look at church attenders among Christian groups, we find that those groups with a high rate of marriage within the denomination have higher proportions of young people attending services of worship (Table 2). The correlation is .69. Again, both the rate of marriage within the denomination and the high proportions of young people attending services probably reflect the pressures to conform within the group.

Contrary to the general pattern, Catholics have a relatively high rate of marriage with other Catholics but a low proportion of young people in their churches. This is partly because Catholics are a large portion of the population. There is a 25 per cent chance of anyone in Australia finding a Catholic partner. In comparison, there is only a 0.3 per cent chance in the wider society of finding a partner in the Churches of Christ. Hence, if there were no pressures for a Catholic to marry another Catholic, and no predisposing factors, one in four of all Catholics would marry another Catholic. However, it is likely that schools are a significant factor in the maintenance of the Catholic rate of marriage within the denomination. A large proportion of Catholic young people attend Catholic schools, even if they do not attend church and, no doubt, some find their partners in the networks established there.

While a high rate of marriage within the religious group may be beneficial for the maintenance of the religious community, marriage outside the religious group may be beneficial for the wider society. Marriages outside of one's religious group can actually contribute to understanding and tolerance. Those people who marry people of different religious backgrounds often find themselves at the forefront of religious dialogue. That dialogue occurs in their homes as they work through differences in values and perspectives on life and how they will act together as partners. The dialogue can be difficult, and there are often considerable differences and tensions which have to be resolved (Ata 2003, ch.5).

Costs and Benefits

People who enter into marriage outside their religious group may face criticism and prejudice from family members and members of their religious communities. Yet, such marriages can help to bring people with different backgrounds, values and approaches to life together among their families and their circles of friends. In so doing, they assist in breaking down religious stereotypes. They show that differences in values and approaches to life can be reconciled. They can contribute to mutual respect among people of different religious groups (Ata 2003, ch.8).

While marrying within the religious group may be good for that group, marrying outside the religious group may actually have some benefits for the wider society. The conclusions of a study of people marrying within or outside their ethnic and religious groups remain valid:

Mixed marriage has brought mixed results to Australia. At

Table 2. Proportion of Adult Attenders on a Typical Sunday Aged 15 to 29 and Proportion of All Marriages Occurring within the Religious Group

Denomination	15 to 29 Year Olds as a Proportion of All Adult Attenders	Proportion of all Marriages Within the Religious Group
Pentecostal	33	89.9
Churches of Christ	23	73.8
Baptist	22	69.1
Seventh-day Adventist	19	78.4
Salvation Army	17	53.7
Presbyterian	17	40.5
Anglican	14	44.1
Lutheran	13	54.6
Catholic	9	63.4
Uniting Church	8	56.1

Sources: NCLS 2006 as quoted Powell and Jacka, 2008, and ABS, 2006 National Census.

the level of the population as a whole it has resulted in economic, religious and social integration mid-way between in-marriages within birthplace groups and the patterns of the general Australian population. At the personal level it has both enriched and complicated family life (Penny and Khoo, p.211).

Philip Hughes

Reference:

Abe Ata (2003) *Christian-Muslim Inter-marriage in Australia: Identity, social cohesion or cultural fragmentation*, David Lovell Publishing, Melbourne.

Janet Penny and Siew-Ean Khoo (1996) *Inter-marriage: A study of migration and integration*, Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.

Ruth Powell and Kathy Jacka (2008) 'Moving Beyond Forty Years of Missing Generations', *Pointers*, vol.18, no.1, March. pp.13-15.

The Census data was commissioned by the Christian Research Association from the 2006 Population and Housing Census, Australian Bureau of Statistics.

What Social Factors Contribute to Divorce?

Mariah Evans and Jonathan Kelley have just published a paper on the social factors which contribute to or protect against parental divorce, that is, divorce of parents of children. The paper is based on the analysis of 27,386 cases in the International Social Science Program surveys between 1984 and 2002. The paper was published this year in the *International Journal of the Sociology of the Family*.

Divorce was relatively uncommon prior to the 1970s. Around 10 per cent of marriages ended in divorce. However, as divorce became easier the rates of divorce soared in the 1970s to around 40 per cent of marriages. Since then there has been a drift higher, perhaps close to 50 per cent of marriages. However, some research has suggested that the divorce rate has plateaued in Australia. It is similar to that in many other Western countries, but less than the divorce rate in the United States.

The rate of divorce among couples who have children is less than among those who do not. However, the number of children does not have much impact. Having a larger family does not make it less likely that a couple will divorce.

The study looked a wide range of factors. Were those couples with high levels of education or income more or less likely to divorce? Did divorce occur more among people in lower socio-economic situations?

The study found that, even when all the social factors had been taken into account, most of the variation between those who divorced and those who did not could not be explained. Evans and Kelley note that no study has been able to explain much of the variation. They put it down to a high level of 'random variation'. Whether couples divorce or not depends partly on such factors as personality and circumstances which were beyond the scope of this sociological study. Many of the other factors which Evans and Kelley studied had no impact. Education levels made no difference. Neither did income levels. They did not find any indication that people higher or lower on the socio-economic scales were more or less likely to divorce. Whether one is a professional or a labourer makes no difference.

However, the study found three factors which did have a significant impact. The first factor which had the greatest impact was whether the wife was employed. In families where the mother worked full-time throughout her life there was a much greater likelihood of divorce. However, they noted that this factor had decreased in importance over time. Evans and Kelley note that for parents having children in 1925, the divorce risk for a mother who was a full-time homemaker was just 2 per



cent, compared with a risk of 18 per cent in the (rare) family where the mother worked full-time.

For families having children in 1970, however, the divorce risk for a full-time homemaker increased to 5 per cent, but for the working mother, fell from 18 per cent to 13 per cent. In other words, there is still a higher frequency of divorce among mothers who work full-time, but the difference is not as great as it used to be. Evans and Kelley suggest that, as full-time work for mothers has become the norm, there have been some adjustments in family life and to couples' expectations of each other.

Evans and Kelley do not discuss the reasons why women's work has an impact. Other discussions have suggested that one significant factor is economic independence. To put it in other words, economic dependence makes it much harder for one person to leave another. The mother who is a full-time homemaker is often economically dependent on her husband and would therefore find it much more difficult to leave her husband.

There was a small difference between people living in urban and rural areas. The city dwellers were a little more likely to divorce. However, Evans and Kelley concluded that the differences have to do with the availability and participation of the mother to work outside the home (or presumably the farm). When workforce participation was taken into account, the differences between urban and rural dwellers became statistically insignificant.

The second largest factor which related to the rate of divorce was church attendance. The more frequently the couple attended church, the lower was the risk of divorce. Evans and Kelley found

that the impact of this factor had not changed over time. Typical parents who attended church weekly had a 3 per cent risk of divorce compared with a 9 per cent risk for those who never attended. In other words, regular church goers are only a third as likely to divorce as those who never attend.

Evans and Kelley found that whether people were Catholic or Protestant made no difference to the rate of divorce. They concluded that denominational differences had no impact, and probably theology or belief systems were not important. What was important was the social activity of attending church. However, Evans and Kelley note that the impact of church attendance may be over-estimated in their study if people who divorced stopped attending church. Anecdotal evidence and the evidence from the National Church Life Survey of low proportions of separated people attending church suggests that people who separate often do cease to attend church. Hence, it is likely that Evans and Kelley's finding over-estimate the impact of church attendance.

The third factor Evans and Kelley identified was that divorce risks were significantly lower among families of Mediterranean ethnicity. This was not a matter of immigrant families holding together. Immigrant families from northern Europe and from Asia had higher divorce rates than those from southern Europe. Rather, Evans and Kelley suggest that immigrants from southern Europe were more likely to have come from traditional family-oriented cultures. Life revolved around the family. Often the family operated as one economic unit. However, Evans and Kelley suggest that it is possible that this factor may

gradually weaken with successive generations in the Australian environment.

Evans and Kelley conclude with several hypotheses. They suggest that the reality behind these statistics is about social integration, both within the family and with the wider community. They suggest that family members who play games together, who rely on each other, and who work at home rather than outside, have less risk of divorce. Similarly, those families which attend church together, or are active together in other areas of society, perhaps in voluntary work or in sporting organisations, have less risk of divorce. Thirdly, those families which readily adapt to each other's situation, to workplace schedules, to the need for some socialisation with workplace colleagues, and who do not complain when housework is not done because of the demands of work, have less risk of divorce.

They suggest that employers may contribute to lowering the risk of divorce by encouraging flexibility in relation to work. By allowing more part-time work, more working from home, adopting flexitime, and giving generous maternity (and, one might add, paternity) leave, employers can help lower the risk, and ultimately the incidence, of divorce.

Philip Hughes

Reference:

M.D.R. Evans and Jonathan Kelley, 'Traditional Lifestyles Protect against Parental Divorce: Effects of Religion, Ethnicity, Rurality and Mother's Employment in Australia in the 20th Century', *International Journal of Sociology of the Family*, Spring 2009. This paper is available on the internet on the Social Science Research Network at: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1328744>

Transforming the Quality of Relationships

In the various studies reviewed in this edition of *Pointers*, we have seen how religious groups discourage de facto relationships and divorce and how they encourage people to marry within the religious group. We have noted that some religious groups exercise greater influence on their members than do other groups.

Do religious groups simply make it more difficult for couples to live in de facto relationships or to divorce? Or do religious groups encourage values, attitudes and behaviour which lead to stronger and more fulfilling relationships in which there is no desire for divorce.

Surely, the fundamental objective has to do with the quality of relationships rather than their structures. We want a society in which couples find great and lasting fulfilment in their relationship with each other and do not desire divorce.

The graph below shows that those people who attend church monthly or more often rate the qualities of their relationships higher than do those who identify themselves as Christian but never attend, and those who describe themselves as having no religion. The practice of church attendance was found to be significantly related to higher levels of intimacy and sense of security in relationship. However, the differences between the three groups in the reported treatment by their spouses and agreement on roles was not statistically significant.

There is a continuum along which religious communities lie as they seek to transform people. On one end of the continuum are those religious groups which have highly defined rules and demand high levels of conformity to those rules. Members who do not keep the rules are excluded from the group in order that the group maintains its 'purity' and offers people a real alternative to the ways of living available in the wider society.

Because such groups offer clear alternative ways of life, they are often more successful in winning converts who are looking for something radically different.

At the other end of the continuum are those religious communities which uphold ideals but which recognise that many people do not attain those ideals. Thus, rather than calling for obedience to rules, such groups encourage aspiration to ideals. In recognising that many people fail in attaining these, they are inclusive in their acceptance.

Rules about the structures of relationship may be helpful in maintaining relationships. However, encouragement to a deepening of the qualities of relationships will have the greatest impact in transforming the lives of individuals and the wider society.

Philip Hughes

