

Notes on the Report

*This is an example of a **Standard Local Area Report** produced by the Christian Research Association for congregations. You may order such a report for your local area and your denomination.*

This report is different from previous reports in that it contains fewer tables of data and more explanation. The aim is to provide an account of the local community which can be used by a Church council to think about the ministry of the congregation and which does not require the Council to do a lot of statistics itself.

*Reports are produced as required for specific areas. It is easiest to define the area in terms of one or several **postcodes**, as the information about age and religion is only available for postcodes. However, other information can be put together for any area - local government areas and areas defined by road boundaries. Most reports are also designed for specific denominations and contain information unique to that denomination in that area.*

An Area Report for Congregational Life and Mission: Australia

In reviewing the life and mission of congregations, it is important to look both internally at the congregations and externally at the communities. This report provides a context for looking at the congregation by examining

- the numbers of people in the community and the extent to which these are changing,
- the religious identity of those who live in the community, particularly proportion who identify with your denomination,
- their age, and the age of those who identify with your denomination,
- the mobility of people in the area
- birthplace and language,
- and their socio-economic profile.

A second section of the report looks at some areas of mission for which indicators are provided in the Census data:

- families, and numbers of lone parents
- elderly people and especially those living alone
- immigrants
- indigenous people.

In June 2003, the ABS will be releasing more information on people's occupation and employment. More details of these areas will be available from the Christian Research Association after that time.

If the church is interested in more details on any of the information provided here, such as exactly in what part parts of the community the elderly live, further information can be provided such as coloured maps showing the location of concentrations of particular groups of people in the community.

A. Congregational Life

1. The size of the congregation.

The size of the congregation depends partly on the size of the community in which it is placed and the numbers of people identifying with your denomination.

In Australia as a whole, there were:

- 18 769 249 individuals, of whom 15 038 339 were 15 years of age and over, and 7 072 202 households at the time of the 2001 Census.

Within Australia, 12 764 342 people identified with the Christian denominations in 2001 Census. This amounts to 68% of the population. However, not everyone who identifies with a denomination attends worship. Using National trends as

All local reports include a full table of the religious groups in the area - the percentage of people identifying with them, comparable percentages for the relevant larger area (such as the city or the rural part of the State) and comparable percentages for each of the religious groups in the area for 1996. This provides detailed information about how groups have grown or declined. This table would usually go here. It has not been included in this version because such a table was published in Pointers Vol.12, no.3 (Sept 2002)



a guide, we would expect that the average number of people attending churches in Australia on a typical Sunday would be 2 million, including children.

According to the 2001 Census, the major religious groups in Australia were: Catholic, Anglican, Uniting, Presbyterian and Reformed and Orthodox. 4.9% of the population identified with other religions. 15.5% said they had no religion and 9.8% did not answer the question. It cannot be assumed that people in these two groups have no interest in religion. Other surveys have shown that many of these people are interested in spirituality but do not want to identify with a particular religious group.

Religious Group	Percentage in your area in 2001	Percentage in your area in 1996	Percentage in your State or capital city in 2001

2. Growth or Decline

Another factor to consider in terms of the size and trends within your congregation is whether the population is growing or declining. There are many areas where the population is declining not because the numbers of households are declining but because the numbers of people living in a household are declining.

In 1996, there were 17 752 829 people living in Australia.
 In 2001, there were 18 769 249 people. This represents an increase of 5.7 % .

However, during that five year period the numbers of people identifying with Christian Churches increased from 12 582 423 to 12 764 342 an increase of 1.4%.

The extent of mobility within a community can have an impact on growth or decline of a church congregation. Within Australia:

- 39.7% of all homes are fully owned
- 26.5% are in the process of being purchased
- 26.3% are households are renting.

The proportion owning their homes and purchasing them often indicates the stability of the community. The proportion of Australians renting has decreased over the past 5 years, from 27.3% of the population to 26.3%.

3. Various Sectors of the Community

Age

Within the local community, there are many opportunities for children’s and youth activities, as well as ministry around university students. In 2001, the Census indicated that there were

- 277 845 children in pre-school,
- 1 771 411 children in primary school,
- 1 267 103 students in secondary school,
- 493 924 students in a TAFE college, and
- 722 125 students in University.

*A congregation may ask whether it has appropriate forms of ministry in place for the various sectors of the community:
 - various age groups
 - ethnic groups, and
 - socio-economic groups.*

This table contains a lot of very valuable information. For every congregation, one of the challenges is to cater appropriately for the various groups of people in the area.

Apart from ethnic background and language, the major divisions between people in terms of their preferences in worship and ways they express faith, have to do with age group.

Based on the percentage of people identifying with a particular denomination in the 1996 Census who actually attend (here, based on the Australian Community Survey), an estimate of expected attendance for a particular denomination in a particular area, and thus for a particular congregation, can be made.

Note that our estimate is similar to the 1.8 million adult attenders estimated by the National Church Life Survey for 1996.

Note that these estimates simply apply national patterns to the local area. They do not take into account all relevant factors, but do provide some basis for comparing a congregation to an estimate of its potential, given the local demographics.

Compared then with 1996,

- the proportion of children aged under 15 has dropped slightly,
- as has the proportion of young people aged between 15 and 24,
- There are also smaller proportions in the 25 to 34 age group.
- However, the proportion of people in the 45 to 64 age group is up, reflecting the aging of the 'Baby Boomer' bubble - born after World War II.
- There is also a higher proportion of people aged 75 and over.

Age Group	Numbers in 2001	Percent of Population in 2001	Percent of Population in 1996	Numbers Identifying with a Christian Denomination	Numbers Expected to Attend Services Weekly
0 to 14	3 912 475	20.8	21.6	2 440 521	317 268
15 to 24	2 566 346	13.7	14.5	1 590 538	176 550
25 to 34	2 723 188	14.5	16.0	1 694 617	176 240
35 to 44	2 868 288	15.3	15.5	1 916 617	277 913
45 to 54	2 568 332	13.7	12.6	1 810 054	311 329
55 to 64	1 759 742	9.4	8.4	1 369 082	288 876
65 to 74	1 280 170	6.8	7.1	1 042 048	234 461
75 plus	1 090 708	5.8	5.0	900 940	280 192
Total	18 769 249	100	100	12 764 441	2 062 829

There are people in Australia who identify with the Christian Churches but rarely, if ever, attend a service of worship. Based on the percentage of people identifying who said they would attend a church weekly or more often for various age groups in the Australian Community Survey (1998), an estimate may be given of the numbers of people expected to attend. Overall, the numbers identifying with the Christian churches translate into weekly attendances of just over 2 million people (including children), or 1.75 million adults. According to the Australian Community Survey, the total number of people attending once a month or more would be expected to be about 60% greater than that number: more than 3.2 million including children or 2.6 million aged 15 years or more.

Is this an area in which there are sufficient numbers of children to make initiatives in children's ministry worthwhile? The Census indicates there are 3 912 475 children under the age of 15 in the area. Of these, according to the Census,

- 1 112 699 (28.4%) were identified with the Catholic denomination
- 631 831 (16.2%) were identified with Anglican denomination
- 218 384 (5.6%) were identified with the Uniting Church
- 94 396 (2.4%) were identified with Orthodox denominations
- 63 300 (1.6%) with Presbyterian and Reformed denominations
- 63 170 (1.6%) with the Baptist denomination
- 51 070 (1.3%) with the Pentecostals
- 45 079 (1.2%) with the Lutherans

Most people like to worship in their first language: the language of the heart.

However, second generation immigrants, while continuing to use their ethnic language in the home may not always understand fully the technical religious language. But neither do they feel comfortable in churches which reflect the culture and ethos of other ethnic groups.

Throughout local area reports, comparisons with the appropriate State capital city or area of the state outside the capital city will be included. (Such comparisons were not relevant in a report for the totality of Australia.)

Different socio-economic groups express themselves differently and appreciate different forms of worship. While less research has been undertaken in this area, it does seem that different forms of ministry are needed among people from different socio-economic backgrounds.

Income is a poor measure of the relevant socio-economic factors. Some better measures will be available from June 2003, when more data is released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

- 14 271 (0.4%) with the Salvation Army
- 10 996 (0.3%) with the Seventh-day Adventists
- 10 713 (0.3%) with the Churches of Christ
- 265 063 (6.8%) were identified with other religions
- 124 612 (3.2%) were identified with other Christian denominations
- 737 701 (18.9%) were identified as having no religion, and
- in 468 981 (12.0%) cases, the question was not answered.

Ethnicity

The religion with which people identify with is often related to their country of birth. In Australia as a whole, 72.6% of people were born in Australia. This is less than the proportion in 1996 when it was 73.9%, which was, in turn, lower than in 1991 when it was 75.5%.

The language used at home is often helpful in identifying ethnic groups in the area. There will be many people born in Australia who continue to use a language other than English at home. The major language groups spoken in Australia are:

- 80% speak English
- 2.1% speak a Chinese language
- 1.9% speak Italian
- 1.4% speak Greek
- 1.1% speak Arabic (including Lebanese)
- 0.9% speak Vietnamese.

Socio-economic groups

Another factor to take into account when looking at the spread of ministry are the various socio-economic groups within the area. Different approaches in ministry are needed among people of different socio-economic groups. A church which serves the highly educated, for example, will not necessarily do well among those with lower levels of education. Those with high levels of education may look for ways of being involved in discussion groups and in leadership, while those with lower levels may look for forms of ministry which are not so cognitively oriented. The differences are not quite so important among the older members of the congregation among whom the extent of formal education may represent opportunity rather than orientation.

One indicator of socio-economic level is individual weekly income. In Australia:

- 39.7 % of people aged 15 years or more have an income of less than \$300 per week (being the pension level or less). Some of these are young people who are students. Others are elderly pensioners. However, there are a lot of other people who receive government pensions, are supported by other family members, or are living off savings. Further details relating to family incomes will be released later by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. In 1996, 47.6% of individuals had an income of less than \$300 per week.
- 30.4 % have a moderate income of between \$300 and \$700 per week, (compared with 31.9% in 1996)
- 22.3 % have a high income of greater than \$700 per week (compared with 14.2% in 1996)

There are many social needs and mission opportunities in Australia. The Census points to just a few of these as outlined in this section of the report.

Local area reports will provide some indication of what appear to be the major social challenges in the local area as far as these may be identified from Census information.

Order your local report from the Christian Research Association.

Email your request to:
localreport@cra.org.au,
stating
** your area*
(preferably in a
postcode or group of
postcodes)
** your denomination.*
Please do not forget
to include:

- *name,*
- *organisation,*
- *address,*
- *contact phone*
number.

The cost of reports (which includes a royalty paid by the CRA to the Australian Bureau of Statistics) is:
\$66 for Associate Members;
\$88 for non-members.

■ 7.6% did not state their income (compared with 6.2% in 1996).

Overall, Australia is wealthier than it was in 1996, particularly when it is taken into account that a higher proportion than average own their own homes.

B. Areas of Ministry

This section of the report looks at particular groups with which the churches may be able to develop appropriate and supportive forms of ministry. The following information will provide some indications of the areas of social need within the local community.

1.Families

There are 2 054 243 families in Australia which include children who are under 15 years of age. Of these 439 697 families are lone-parent families: 21.4 per cent of all families, up from 19.4 per cent of all families which include children under the age of 15 in 1996. Altogether, including parents of families in which all children are 15 years or older, there are 762 632 lone parents in Australia, compared with 672 874 in 1996.

2.Elderly People

5.8% of all the people who live in the area are over the age of 75. Particularly vulnerable are those elderly people who live alone. Many cope as long as they are healthy. But life can get very difficult for them unless there are sources of physical and social support. Altogether, 348 307 people (37.6%) are 75 years of age and over and live alone. This compares with 32.2% of people 75 years and over living alone in 1996.

3.Immigrants

There are 4 105 444 people born overseas who are currently living in Australia. Most of these arrived 15 or more years ago, but 531 294 have arrived since 1996.

Of these recent arrivals 209 899 (39.5%) speak English as their only language. Some others are fluent in English, but 77 350 do not speak English well. In other words, 14.6 per cent of recent immigrants who have settled in Australia recently do not speak English well. Altogether, 425 399 (10.4% of all immigrants) living in Australia do not speak English well or do not speak it at all.

4.Indigenous People

There are 410 003 people in the area who are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island origin. This compares with 352 970 who so identified themselves in the 1996 Census.

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All figures for the local area, and comparative figures for Melbourne, apart from estimates of numbers in congregations, have been taken directly from, or derived from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Cdata 2001*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2002. Figures for religious affiliation among specific age groups have been derived from customized table **cra_01.xls** provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Congregational estimates have been derived using information from the Australian Community Survey, 1998. All interpretation and recommendations about ministry are the work of the Christian Research Association. Copyright in ABS data resides with the Commonwealth of Australia. Used here with permission.