

Strategy and Research Group (SRG)

# NEWCOMER STUDY REPORT



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Social Policy & Research Unit

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The provision by NCLS Research of National Church Life Survey datasets cited in this report.

## Interviewees for the Study

A key source of information for this study has been the leaders of churches which have above average levels of newcomers. The following people generously took part in interviews for this study:

- ❖ The Rev. Bruce Clarke (Rector), St Matthews Manly
- ❖ The Rev. Tim Clemens (Lead Pastor), Grace City Church, Waterloo
- ❖ The Rev. Tim Cocks (Rector), St Philip's Auburn
- ❖ The Rev. Ray Galea (Rector), MBM Multicultural Bible Ministry, Rooty Hill
- ❖ The Rev. Craig Hooper (Rector), Eagle Vale Anglican Church
- ❖ The Rev. Stuart Maze (Rector), Church@thepeak, Peakhurst Heights
- ❖ The Rev. Stephen Semenchuk (Rector), Dapto Anglican Church
- ❖ The Rev. Dominic Steele (Rector), Ms Jessica Brouwer (Mission Pastor) and Mr Silvanus Thiem (Membership Pastor), Village Church, Annandale
- ❖ The Rev. Brian Tung (Rector), St Georges Hurstville
- ❖ The Rev. Ed Vaughan (Rector), St Johns Darlinghurst.

The Rev. Stephen Semenchuk, one of the interviewees, passed away on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2019. His wise and thoughtful contributions to this study form part of his legacy to current and future generations of church leaders.

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# INTRODUCTION

Churches are to have an outward focus, showing the love of Christ to all and making known the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the wider community. It has been said that, “the Church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not members.”<sup>1</sup> One primary measure of the connection between church and community is the presence of those who have entered fresh into church life – known as ‘newcomers’ to church life.

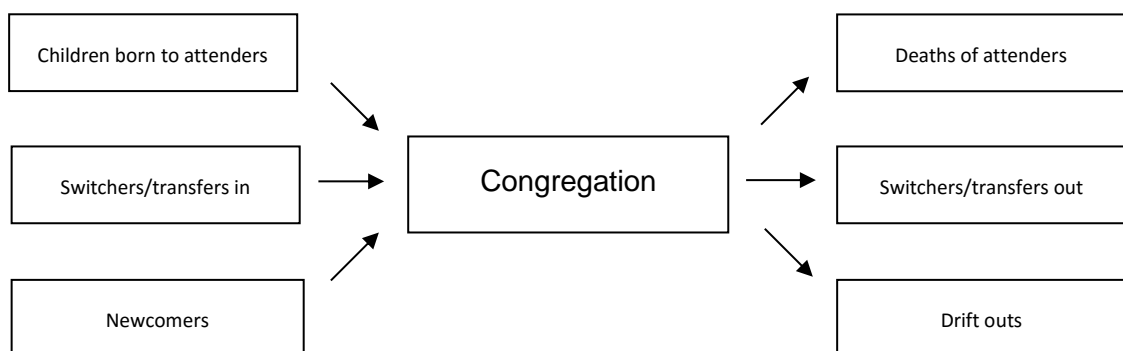
There are both theological and sociological imperatives for churches to take seriously the issue of newcomers to church life.

From a theological viewpoint, churches are to do more than simply maintain their place in society. They are to be mission-oriented, reaching out to those who do not know God. The Great Commission (Matthew 28: 19, 20) directs us to go into all the world to make disciples of all nations. Becoming a newcomer to church life is often accompanied by a process of Christian conversion and becoming a disciple.

From a sociological viewpoint, newcomers are an essential component of church attendance growth. Far from being static institutions, local congregations are constantly changing, with people leaving the congregation (‘outflow’) being replaced by new arrivals (‘inflow’). Church growth occurs where inflow exceeds outflow. This dynamic is depicted in Chart 1 below.

‘Newcomers’ from the wider community are one of the three main sources of inflow. Another source is children born to church attenders, who may then grow up within the life of the congregation. The final source is people arriving from other churches, either from churches of the same denomination (‘transfers’) or from churches of a different denomination or independent churches (‘switchers’). Unless churches are attracting newcomers from outside of church life, then they will eventually become a closed system, with local churches depending upon switchers and transfers from other churches to maintain or increase attendance levels. This closed system has been termed a ‘circulation of the saints’ in the literature. The danger of becoming a closed system is that, eventually, the churches overall will begin to decline in attendance.

**Chart 1: Congregational Inflow and Outflow**



<sup>1</sup> William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury 1942-44

Newcomers are thus important to the future of the churches. They are an indicator of the relevance of church beyond its own walls. For newcomers to become part of church life, often there has been some engagement between churches and the wider community. Rather than being simply a ‘circulation of the saints’, newcomers represent a true addition to the total number of attenders.

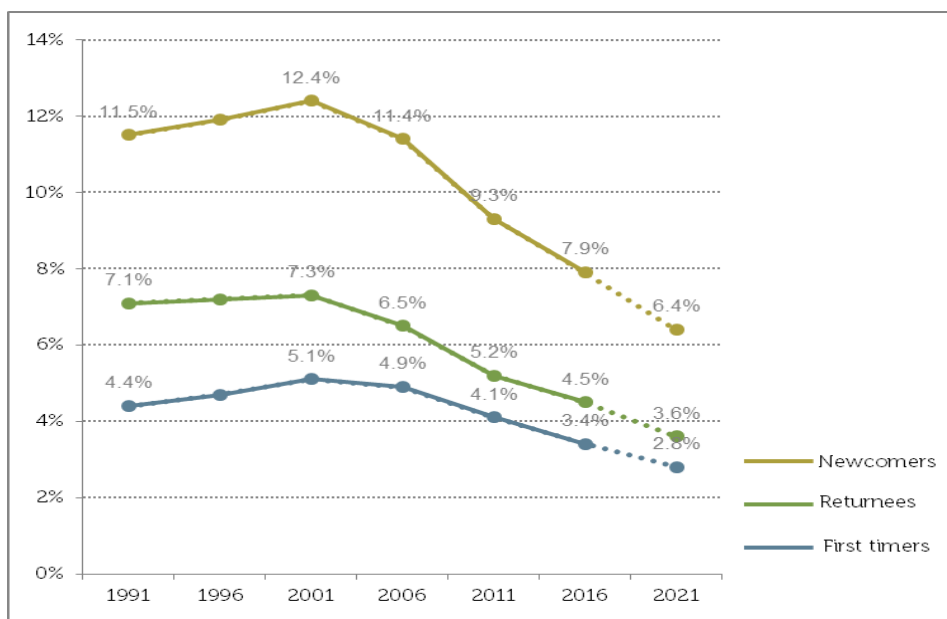
## Newcomers and the Diocesan Mission

The attraction and retention of newcomers forms a key goal of the Diocesan Mission. Adopted at the ordinary session of Synod held in October 2014, the Diocesan Mission set a goal to raise the level of newcomers to 12% of attenders by 2020. However, despite the priority given to newcomers, it is likely that the Diocese will fall well short of this goal by the notional conclusion of the Mission in 2020.

Chart 2 shows there has been a steady decline in the percentage of newcomers since 2001 (the yellow line), both in first-time newcomers (the blue line) and people returning to church life after an absence (the green line). Furthermore, it is projected that only 6% of attenders will be newcomers by 2021. This is a critical issue, as the failure to connect with new people, many of whom have yet to become Christians, will undermine future conversion and attendance growth, and accelerate the ageing of the attender profile.

**Chart 2: Newcomer Levels in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney, Projected to 2021**

(Source: NCLS 1991-2016)<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> Kaldor, P. (1991). 1991 NCLS Attender Sample Survey Dataset. NCLS Research: Sydney, Australia.  
 Kaldor, P. (1996). 1996 NCLS Attender Sample Survey Dataset. NCLS Research: Sydney, Australia.  
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## Study Description

The Strategy and Research Group (SRG) is committed to raising newcomer levels, in view of the decline in newcomer levels and the importance of newcomers to the life of churches in the Diocese. Consequently, at the meeting of 25<sup>th</sup> September 2018, the SRG requested Dr Bellamy to carry out research, for reporting to the April 2019 meeting of the SRG.

For the purposes of this study, a 'newcomer' is defined as a person aged 15 years or more who has joined their current church within the last 5 years and, before then, was not regularly attending a church. Newcomers can be further sub-divided into two groups:

- **First time newcomers**, who indicated that they have never been involved in a church before at any stage;
- **Returnees to church life**, who were once involved in a church but have not been attending for at least several years.

**A newcomer is a person aged 15 years or more who has joined their current church within the last 5 years and, before then, was not regularly attending a church.**

In a project proposal presented to the SRG, the current study was described as:

*"A mixed methods study with both quantitative aspects (identification of factors through the NCLS associated with higher levels of newcomers) and qualitative aspects (interviews with ministers from top newcomer churches)."*

The **quantitative** part of the study reports relevant findings from previous NCLS research into newcomers, particularly on factors associated with higher levels of newcomers in churches. These quantitative findings thus form the context within which the results of the qualitative study are located. It should be noted that the quantitative research which has previously been carried out by NCLS Research is based on all denominations in the NCLS database and is not limited to churches in the Diocese.

The **qualitative** part of the study involves reporting on the findings from interviews of ministers from top newcomer churches in the Diocese; a ranking of the top 25 newcomer churches in the Diocese was prepared based on 2016 NCLS results. Since the vast majority of churches in this list are small to medium sized, the SRG requested that a few large churches lying outside this listing also be invited to take part in the interviews. Such large churches would have much larger absolute numbers of newcomers than the smaller churches.

Ten interviews have been undertaken for this study. While this is a small number, it is important to recognise that the goal of the interviews has been to learn more about the *processes*, as well as better understanding key factors, that lie behind the attraction and inclusion of newcomers into Sydney Anglican church life. Such processes can be difficult to identify through quantitative research, which is able to prove an association but not necessarily a causal relationship between factors. The interviews are thus a 'deep dive' into the experience of churches which have been successful in attracting and retaining newcomers. The interviews have proven to be a rich source of information about the experience of these churches and complement and elaborate the findings of the broader quantitative research.

## Research Questions

The focus of the study is on seeking to identify and better understand both key factors and processes which underpin the successful inclusion of newcomers into Sydney Anglican churches.

The central Research Question underlying these interviews is: *What are the main factors or reasons which account for higher levels of newcomers at this church?*

Further Research Questions which were identified for examination in the study include:

1. To what extent are newcomers brought to church by other attenders and to what extent do they arrive through the presence/profile of the church in the community?
2. What is the role of different structures in church life in attracting and retaining newcomers (eg youth groups, Bible study groups, play groups)?
3. What are the key processes which lead to newcomers being attracted and retained (eg. welcoming and follow-up processes, training)?
4. What is the role of leadership, both clergy and laity, in creating an environment into which newcomers are attracted or brought by others?
5. Are there indicators of 'congregational confidence' and a commitment to vision in the life of the church, and how do these relate to newcomer levels?
6. Are there special ministries, activities or events which have attracted newcomers (eg. extensive visiting, rolling outreach events, a social service, help with immigration)?
7. Are there special connections to community which have facilitated a flow of newcomers (eg favourable demographics, a sector of the community to which the congregation has a ministry)?
8. What is the impact of church establishment and renewal in the attraction of newcomers (eg church planting)?
9. Are the factors in the attraction of first-time newcomers different to returnees?



# NCLS ANALYSIS –What It Tells Us

The study of newcomers to church life has been a focus for NCLS Research since the first survey in 1991. Apart from specific studies on newcomers, this work has often been carried out as part of broader research into church vitality, of which the level of newcomers within churches is one aspect. Numerous books, journal articles and papers have been produced over the years outlining research findings about newcomers, including *Shaping a Future: Characteristics of vital congregations* (1997)<sup>3</sup> and *Build My Church: Trends and possibilities for Australian churches* (1999)<sup>4</sup>.

## Current Newcomer Research: Causal Modelling

The most recent work carried out by NCLS Research in 2018 has focussed on better understanding how factors in church life act to attract and retain newcomers.<sup>5</sup> This research involved a sophisticated longitudinal study of over 1000 congregations, drawing upon Australian Anglican and Protestant data collected in three survey waves: 2001, 2006 and 2011.

The study examined the relationship between collective confidence in churches and attracting newcomers to church. '**Collective confidence**' concerns attender satisfaction with the church and its leadership. Three selected indicators of collective confidence were used in the study: **growth in faith through the church, leadership that inspires people to action, and church services that are inspiring**. Different models were tested for describing the possible relationship between collective confidence and newcomer levels, using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

The study best supported a model where collective confidence and newcomer levels mutually reinforce each other. This has implications for local churches in that working to enhance collective confidence is likely to lead to higher levels of newcomers, confirming there is much that local churches can do to increase newcomer levels. At the same time, the study showed that an increasing level of newcomers also leads to higher levels of collective confidence in the congregation; that the presence of more newcomers leads attenders to feel more positive about their church and to act accordingly. In this way, the relationship between collective confidence and newcomer levels is a reciprocal one, creating an ongoing cycle. By the same token, a decline in confidence and in newcomers reinforcing each other is also supported.

## Identification of Factors Associated with High Newcomer Levels

Earlier NCLS research focussed upon identifying individual factors in church life which were most associated with higher levels of newcomers. These studies, which involved multiple regression techniques, were less sophisticated than the SEM and longitudinal study described above but nevertheless were useful in identifying single factors that most predicted the level of newcomers. It is for this reason that we now turn to these earlier studies.

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<sup>3</sup> Kaldor, P, Bellamy J, Powell, R, Hughes, B and Castle K (1997) *Shaping a Future: Characteristics of vital congregations*, Adelaide: Openbook Publishers.

<sup>4</sup> Kaldor, P, Bellamy, J, Powell, R, Castle, K and Hughes, B (1997) *Build My Church: Trends and possibilities for Australian churches*, Adelaide: Openbook Publishers.

<sup>5</sup> Sterland, S., Powell, R., Hancock, N., Pepper, M., Dowson, M. (2018) "Newcomers and Collective Confidence in Protestant Churches: a Longitudinal Study from 2001 to 2011", *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, 29, 231-252.

The first studies carried out by NCLS Research were mostly limited to Australian Anglican and Protestant churches. However, the International Church Life Survey (2001) of which the Australian NCLS was a part, enabled comparative research to be carried out across four countries – USA, England, Australia and New Zealand – as well as the inclusion of samples of Catholic churches from these countries wherever possible.

Table 1 below shows statistical results from a series of multiple regressions carried out for Australian churches as part of the ICLS. In short, the table shows the variance in newcomer levels explained by each of the listed variables, after accounting for the impact of the congregation’s theological orientation. The *variance* is a measure of the proportion to which a statistical model accounts for variation (dispersion) of a given data set – in this instance the percentage of newcomers in churches. Overall, the data explained 36% of the variance in newcomer levels. This is a relatively large proportion given the existence of other factors which lie outside the data collection and may affect newcomer levels (ie. national factors, denominational factors, local community factors), apart from the effect of any measurement error present in the data itself.

In considering the results shown in Table 1, it needs to be remembered that these were the *top* factors detected. There were many other variables which were tested but not shown here, either because there was no significant relationship with the level of newcomers or the effect size was smaller than what is shown here (ie less than 4% of the variance).

**Table 1: Top Factors Explaining Variance in the Proportion of Newcomers in Congregations (Source: 2001 Australian NCLS)<sup>6</sup>**

Variable		Variance explained (%)
	<b>Congregational theological orientation (fitted before other variables below)</b>	<b>12</b>
	<b>Congregational characteristics:</b>	<b>24*</b>
1	Attendees invite others to church	12
2	Growing sense of belonging among attendees	11
3	Leaders encourage attendees to find and use gifts/skills	7
4	Much growth in faith through this congregation (other attendees)**	6
5	Congregation is moving in new directions	6
6	A clear vision to which attendees are committed	6
7	Experience of decisive faith commitment (other attendees)**	5
8	Attendees more likely separated, divorced, remarried, widowed**	5
9	A preference for contemporary over traditional church services	4
10	Experience of spontaneity in church services	4
11	Experience of inspiration in church services	4
12	Informal helping of others by church attendees	4
	<b>Total variance explained</b>	<b>36</b>

\* Variance explained after accounting for the impact of attendees’ theological orientation

\*\* Variance based on the remainder of each congregation after excluding newcomers

<sup>6</sup> Sterland, S, Bellamy, J, Escott P, & Castle K (2006) "Attracting and integrating newcomers into church life: research in four countries", *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 27(1): 39-52.

Table 1 shows that the **theological orientation of the congregation** is related to newcomer levels, accounting for some 12% of the variance. Theological orientation of the congregation is represented by the percentage of attenders identifying with a particular orientation from a list provided in the survey. Attenders could self-identify with a specific orientation (eg 'Anglo-Catholic', 'Evangelical', 'Reformed') or could indicate that they didn't identify with any such orientations. The theological orientation of each congregation would often reflect one or two predominant orientations found among the attenders. Analysis showed that the theological orientations which were most associated with newcomers included Evangelical and Pentecostal.

However, Table 1 also shows that the range of other characteristics of the congregation's life had even more power in explaining newcomer levels than theological orientation. The proportion of attenders **inviting people to church** and the proportion who had a **strong, growing sense of belonging** to their church (each explaining 12% and 11% of the variance respectively) were the most predictive of these congregational characteristics. The importance of attenders inviting others to church as a first step in newcomers joining the church and coming to faith, is supported in the sociological literature. The importance of attenders' sense of belonging would reflect the community aspect of church life; that being part of a church is usually more than just about attending church but also involves becoming part of a community of believers.

It is common for newcomers to report high levels of **growth in faith**, which may reflect their spiritual journey as a new believer. However, it should be noted that newcomers were also more likely to be found in congregations where there were high levels of growth in faith among the *other attenders* as well (6% of the variance). Similarly, newcomers were more often found where there were higher levels of **decisive faith commitments and conversion experiences** among the other attenders (5% of the variance). This suggests the importance of congregational environments conducive to fostering faith and commitment among newcomers, not just how newcomers themselves are responding to these issues.

The proportion of attenders **committed to a clear vision for the growth of the church** and a sense among attenders that the **church is moving in new directions** each predicted 6% of the variance in newcomer levels. These aspects not only serve to inspire and motivate attenders but may also be attractive to potential newcomers. Particular qualities of church services which were associated with higher newcomer levels should also be noted: **contemporary rather than traditional** (4% of variance), **spontaneity** (4% of the variance) and **inspirational** (4% of the variance).

Interestingly, the study found a relationship between newcomer levels and the levels of other attenders **who were beyond their first marriage**: ie, separated, divorced, remarried or widowed (5% of the variance). It was noted in the study that it is more likely that newcomers may be separated or divorced than other attenders, suggesting that this result may be a case of 'like attracting like'.<sup>7</sup>

As mentioned in the Introduction, these results help to inform the findings of the qualitative part of the study and will be referred to where necessary in the remainder of this report.

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<sup>7</sup> Sterland, S, Escott P, Castle K (2004) *Attracting and Integrating Newcomers – An analysis across four countries*, NCLS: Sydney, p 19.

# The INTERVIEW STUDY

The qualitative part of the study involved interviewing ministers from churches with high levels of newcomers. The interviews each took 2 to 2.5 hours and were conducted at the church or a nearby location. A signed consent form was obtained prior to conducting the interview and interviewees received an information sheet about the study in advance of the interview. A common interview schedule was followed, which contained questions designed to address the Research questions.

Each interview began with the following open-ended question, which also reflects the overarching research question for the study:

*What do you believe have been the main factors or reasons which account for these higher levels of newcomers at your church?*

In this way, interviewees were able to share what they believed were the primary reasons, without their answers being influenced by more targeted questions about particular factors. Interviews then generally proceeded in a semi-structured way but ensuring that the list of research questions were touched upon at some point.

Analysis of the interviews has sought to find common themes across interviews as well as to identify unique contributions from interviewees. Unlike a quantitative study, the qualitative approach can build a picture and reach conclusions from many differing contributions and perspectives.

## Introducing the Churches and Interviewees

The churches in the interview study were drawn from two pools:

- A list of the top 25 churches by percentage of newcomers, according to 2016 NCLS results. Village Church, Darlinghurst, Church@thepeak, Hurstville, Grace City Church, Auburn and Eagle Vale were drawn from this list.
- Churches with more than 500 attenders and with above average levels of newcomers. Dapto, MBM Rooty Hill, Manly and Hurstville were in this category. The rationale for inclusion of these churches was to ensure that churches with large absolute numbers of newcomers, as opposed to percentages, were included in the study.

St Georges Hurstville was the only church to appear in both categories. However, it was noted that the church's 2016 NCLS statistics in this report appear to cover the Mandarin-speaking congregation only; the English and Cantonese speaking congregations have separate NCLS statistics not included here.

The list of churches in the study, and their newcomer and attendance levels are shown in Table 2.

Churches for the study were drawn from all Diocesan regions and from a range of urban environments, including inner city, middle ring, and outer locations in Sydney, and from outside Sydney. Some churches with large Non-English-Speaking Background congregations were selected, including Hurstville, Auburn and MBM.

**Table 2: Churches in the Newcomer Study – Region, Attendance and Newcomer Statistics (Source: 2016 NCLS)**

Church	Region	Attendance Band (2016 NCLS)	Newcomer Percent (2016 NCLS)
Village Church, Annandale	South Sydney	100-200	18.9%
St Johns Darlinghurst	South Sydney	0-100	18.8%
St Georges Hurstville	Georges River	500+	17.4%*
Church@thepeak, Peakhurst Heights	Georges River	0-100	17.1%
Grace City Church, Waterloo	South Sydney	100-200	16.2%
St Philip's Auburn	Western	100-200	15.6%
Eagle Vale Anglican	Wollongong	100-200	13.2%
Dapto Anglican	Wollongong	500+	11.6%
MBM, Rooty Hill	Western	500+	11.0%
St Matthews Manly	Northern	500+	10.4%
<b>DIOCESAN AVERAGE</b>			<b>7.9%</b>

\* Note: Newcomer statistic for Mandarin-speaking congregation only

Ten interviews with church leaders have been undertaken for this study. This represents less than 4% of churches in the Diocese that took part in the 2016 NCLS. However, around 9%, or 1 in 11 newcomers in the Diocese were found in these 10 churches in the 2016 NCLS.

The list of interviewees and their position in the church is shown in Table 3. At the request of the rector, the interview at Village Church involved three staff, in order to gain a more complete picture of newcomer involvement at the church.

**Table 3: Churches in the Newcomer Study – Interviewees**

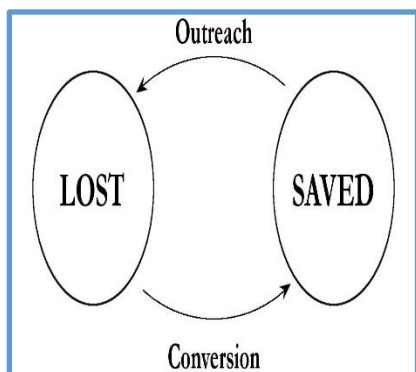
Church	Interviewee	Position	Date of interview
Village Church, Annandale	Rev Dominic Steele	Rector	21.11.2018
Village Church, Annandale	Ms Jessica Brouwer	Mission Pastor	21.11.2018
Village Church, Annandale	Mr Silvanus Thiem	Membership Pastor	21.11.2018
St Johns Darlinghurst	Rev Ed Vaughan	Rector	22.1.2019
Church@thepeak, Peakhurst Hgths	Rev Stuart Maze	Rector	29.11.2018
St Georges Hurstville	Rev Brian Tung	Rector	29.11.2018
Grace City Church, Waterloo	Rev Tim Clemens	Lead Pastor	14.2.2019
St Philip's Auburn	Rev Tim Cocks	Rector	23.1.2019
Eagle Vale Anglican	Rev Craig Hooper	Rector	30.1.2019
Dapto Anglican	Rev Stephen Semenchuk	Rector	27.11.2018
MBM, Rooty Hill	Rev Ray Galea	Rector	22.2.2019
St Matthews Manly	Rev Bruce Clarke	Rector	23.1.2019

## Findings from the Interviews

Findings from the interviews have been organised under twelve themes or 'factors' which were identified in the interviews as contributing to the attraction and/or the retention of newcomers. These factors, which are dealt with in turn, are:

1. A Passion for Outreach
2. A Strong Profile in the Community
3. A Pathway into Church
4. Activities that Meet Wider Community Needs
5. People Inviting People
6. Church Services for Both Christians and Non-Christians
7. Welcoming and Welcomers
8. Designated Mission Staff
9. Systems for Keeping Track
10. A Pathway to Maturity
11. Good Implementation
12. Impact of the Diocese

# FACTOR 1: A Passion for Outreach



It is common these days for parishes to have a Mission Statement. Usually such mission statements include a reference to reaching out to the community, to evangelism or to bringing people to know Christ. Examples include:

- ❖ *Making believers out of unbelievers;*
- ❖ *To preach God's word, to teach God's people, and to reach the world with God's love;*
- ❖ *To share God's love through meaningful worship, study, caring relationships, service and outreach.*

But how deep do such statements really run in the life of a church? One of the most notable characteristics of the churches in this study was how statements of intent around mission and outreach had been turned into an ever-present reality. Mission and outreach were not merely aspirational in these churches, but high levels of newcomers appeared to be the fruit of what, in many cases, were ongoing mission strategies implemented over many years.

## a. A Passion for Reaching the Lost which Shapes the Life of the Church

The interviews revealed that the leaders of the churches in this study are passionate individuals when it comes to making the Gospel known to people in their community. It would be easy to conclude that the leader's passion is the main reason behind the success of their churches in attracting newcomers. However, the study highlights that the key is not simply about having a passion for the lost — important though this is as a driver — but how this passion is being translated into the life of the churches.

A key feature of most churches in this study is that **outreach shapes the purpose of the groups and activities in the church**. Far from being an occasional event or an extension to the church's usual activities, outreach is seen as a central, ongoing process in the life of the church, influencing how various parish and church activities are carried out, and informing how these activities interact together and complement each other.

Outreach shapes the purpose of the groups and activities in the church

A common feature among the churches in the study is identifying the contribution that groups and activities make to individuals becoming Christians and where exactly these groups and activities sit on the faith pathway along which a newcomer would travel. For instance, some groups/activities have a contacting role as a gateway into church life; others have a role in newcomers exploring and coming to faith; while others are about helping newcomers to grow in faith and belonging. The interviewees demonstrated a clear understanding of the contribution each group/activity can make to the process of outreach, conversion and faith maturity among newcomers in their church.

The identification of a clearly defined pathway for newcomers into church life is an important unifying idea for many of the factors described in this report. It is fair to say that a clear pathway or 'pipeline' into church, supported and resourced by the church, is one of the outstanding features of most churches in this study. While church is first and foremost the gathering of

believers, a key feature of the churches in the study is that they look beyond the needs of current believers to see how to make church as accessible and effective for those who are the future believers, and to devote significant resources to making this happen.

The importance of a defined pathway into the life of the church is discussed in more detail under Factor 3.

#### b. The Leaders Understand the Community They Are Seeking to Reach

Leaders in the study not only have an outreach focus which shapes their churches but also a keen interest in the community or target group they are trying to reach. The leaders often displayed a great depth of understanding about the local community. It is difficult to convey the extent of such knowledge in a report such as this. However, some examples from the interviews include:

- ❖ **An awareness of the main demographic groups living in the parish and the impact of the housing market on these groups.** For instance, in the suburb of Waterloo where Grace City Church is located, high density living means there are large numbers of people living all around the church, mostly in the 20-49 year age group, and there is a high turnover of residents. In Manly and in Darlinghurst there is a need for families to move further away as their children grow, though perhaps to remain connected to the church despite the distance.
- ❖ **The influence of the built environment and local geography on living patterns among the population.** For instance, in Manly: the very high numbers of apartments that are conducive to 'downsizers' and divorcees; the high numbers of young professionals who are only a ferry ride away from the City and don't need cars; and the wide variety of people 'living the dream' of the beach and harbour lifestyle.
- ❖ **The influence of the heritage of an area.** For example, in Dapto, the previous influence of the Port Kembla steelworks means that the suburb, "still works to the beat of the old steelworks and still votes Labor" (Stephen Semenchuk).
- ❖ **How the built environment impacts on the way the local community interacts with the church.** For example, at Village Church in Annandale the church leadership is aware of the level of passing pedestrian and vehicular traffic due to its village location, which in turn shapes the church's signage, banner displays in windows and activities in the church's street-facing rooms.
- ❖ **How different groups in the community regard the Christian faith.** For example, in Auburn, the country of origin of the many Muslims in the area affects not only the way they regard their own faith but how they regard other religions such as Christianity. Many more Muslims would be regarded as moderate or nominal in this community than would be considered 'hard line'.

The effect of a deepening understanding of the wider community and its dominant or multiple cultures enables the leader to consider how this might shape the church's outreach and what might need to change in the life of the church to make this happen effectively.



## FACTOR 2: A Strong Profile in the Community



It closely follows that a developed understanding of the wider community means that church leaders in the study also have an appreciation of the importance of the church having a strong profile within the community.

A common observation among the interviewees is the relationship between the church's profile and the volume of 'walk-in' visitors to church, some of whom will become newcomers to church life.

In some cases, the church is already blessed with strong locational advantages which lead to high numbers of walk-ins. For instance, St Matthews Manly is located in the heart of the Corso, which is the main pedestrian mall and shopping strip running between the harbour and the ocean. Bruce Clarke, rector of St Matthews, noted that the church does not take particular steps to attract visitors since "ten million people walk past the front door every year." Similarly, St Johns Darlinghurst is located between busy Victoria St and Darlinghurst Rd; this unique location results in high numbers of pedestrians passing through the church grounds every week.

For St Georges Hurstville, the number of visitors (about 400 per year) across Mandarin, Cantonese and Next Generation (young adult) congregations is partly due to the church being located on a large site near the main shopping centre but also reflects the church's natural connections with the expatriate and local Chinese communities. The church experiences a high turnover, with some members returning to China or moving elsewhere; these members are often replaced by unchurched newcomers. In this instance, the church does little to build its profile; while the church has an attractive website there has not been much investment in marketing, advertising or signage.

However, most churches in the study did not have exceptional locational advantages or community connections, requiring them to pay attention to building the church's profile. A wide variety of profile-raising initiatives were noted during the interviews, including:

- ❖ Informative signage and banners on-site
- ❖ Brochures and leaflet drops in the community
- ❖ On-site church activities with a community focus (eg. ESL)
- ❖ Co-location of the church with other facilities (eg. café, child care centre)
- ❖ Usage of the church property by community groups (eg. use for school concerts)
- ❖ Marketing and paid advertising
- ❖ A presence in the virtual world (eg. an easy-to-use church website; maximising search engine optimisation)
- ❖ Being active in the virtual world (eg. in Facebook groups, having a Facebook page designed for outsiders, blog posts)
- ❖ Partnering with other local organisations (eg. on community projects)
- ❖ Participation in major community events (eg. festivals)
- ❖ Becoming a focus for community action.

It was noted that most of the churches in the study had attractive, outsider-oriented websites, which can add to the church's profile. Facebook pages can also contribute. Dominic Steele has observed that most visitors would look at Village Church on-line before they come in person.

The point was made that churches need to invest time and resources into raising their profile, particularly at the commencement of ministry:

“When I first came here (to Annandale), I had to work out how to let people know we exist. For me it was like how a blacksmith used to stand out the front of their shop. In the same way you have to rattle the shingle in ministry” (Dominic Steele).

“If a new church was a start-up company, it would have a sizeable marketing budget” (Tim Clemens).

There is a distinction between profile-raising and evangelistic activities, although the two are connected. For three years, Grace City Church at Waterloo held *Carols in the Park* at Christmas, growing from 400 attendees in the first year to over 1500 attendees in the third year. In 2019, they instead held a *Movies in the Park* event. These were major awareness-raising events with sponsors, banners and flyers, designed to make a ‘splash’ for the church. The events in turn created a platform for advertising a sermon-series from January onwards each year, which were challenging around Gospel issues (eg. “The Problem with God”). The awareness-raising not only helped people to know the church existed but also in making church attractive: “If you build a name for the church in the community, then that very small percentage of Australians who think of going back to church - they will be walking into our church” (Tim Clemens).

Building a profile takes time. St Johns Darlinghurst has a reputation built over many years for being active on social justice issues. While many visitors to the church are overseas visitors with a church involvement in their home country, other visitors are local; they may come to St Johns as part of their spiritual quest or because they know somebody at church, but many are attracted by the church's social justice involvement. Recently, some 200 people attended a meeting at the church about the appropriateness of the date for Australia Day, many of whom were not involved in the church.

Churches need to invest time and resources into raising their profile.

## FACTOR 3: A Pathway into Church

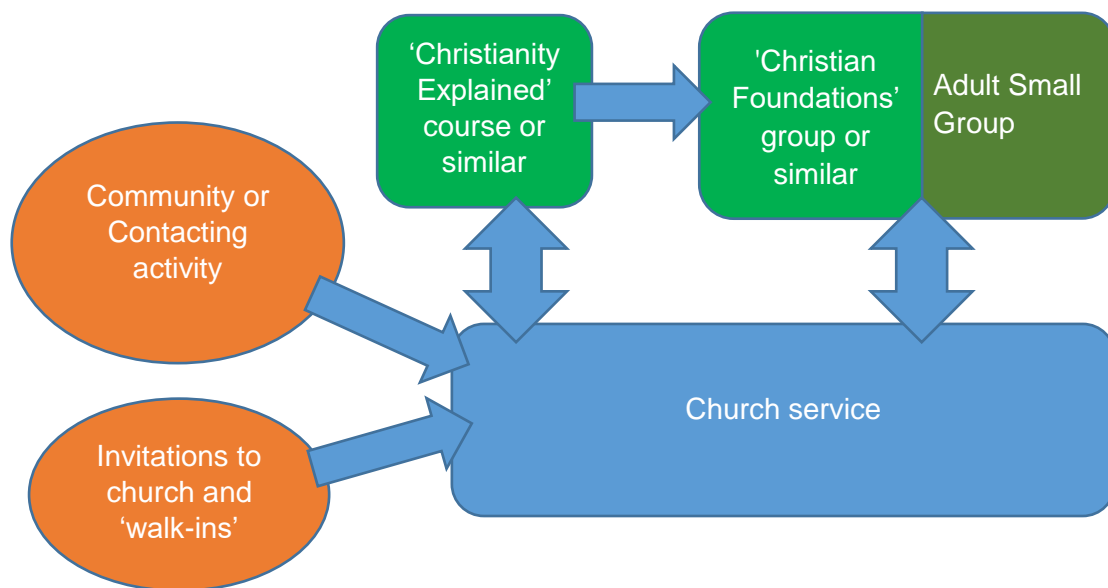


An important distinguishing feature of most churches in this study was the presence of a defined pathway for newcomers into church life. There was an awareness among interviewees of how church and community activities link together to provide a pathway which people can follow, from outside of church life right through to eventually joining an adult small group. This was not something seen as being left to chance but rather a process to be planned and followed.

Chart 3 below provides a simple schematic of this pathway from the interviews. Some of the key characteristics of this pathway are:

- ❖ It is purpose-built. “We have tried to be intentional about building a pathway to bring people from outside to inside” (Tim Clemens).
- ❖ It does not end with a warm welcome and a follow-up visit. Rather, it extends through to the point where people are part of the church community, have come to know Christ and are growing in maturity.
- ❖ It is well supported and resourced by the leadership.
- ❖ Those involved in making it happen seek to discern the best next step for each individual moving along the pathway. “The key is to work out how to connect people to the next step in the process” (Jessica Brouwer).
- ❖ It is a framework which unifies and gives a common missional purpose to a range of church activities. In the end, “A lack of newcomers is a pathway problem. There is a need to think systematically and to prioritise” (Brian Tung).

**Chart 3: Simplified Pathway into Church for Newcomers**



## a. Entry Points and Contacting Activities

Chart 3 shows that common entry points into church life for newcomers are either being invited by a friend or family member, or as a 'walk-in'. Another entry point is the church's community activities, which are examined in more detail under Factor 4 later in this report. While established to meet a community need or based around a common interest, these activities are also a point of first contact for many people outside church life. Participants at these activities may then respond to an invitation or advertising to come to a spiritual activity, usually a church service but possibly a group (eg. youth group).

Jessica Brouwer, Village Church's Mission Pastor, noted that the church's weekly playgroup acts like a kind of 'funnel', since it has been common for participants of the playgroup to then attend a church service. In any given parish, there may be many such pathways or 'funnels' into church which vary by age and stage.

An important distinguishing feature of most churches in this study was the presence of a defined pathway for newcomers into church life.

Stephen Semenchuk provided an example of an age/stage pathway for youth at Dapto Anglican. Youth from the church run breakfast clubs and lunchtime groups in the two local high schools. Many young people have made the transition from these groups into the church youth group, which meets on a Friday night. In addition, 'Street Crew', which is a mobile ministry, informally meets youth on the streets around Dapto on a Thursday night. Since there is not much for youth to do at night, Street Crew provides food, games, friendship, and help if needed. Youth contacted by Street Crew may then attend the church

youth group. Among newcomers to the youth group, conversion often takes place when the youth group goes away on camps. Further along the pathway, youth group participants attend the Youth Service on Sunday afternoon, which is run by the youth themselves.

Stephen noted that, as society becomes less Christian, we need to build 'platforms' for the Gospel so that people will want to hear it; such platforms include community activities, events and groups, perhaps conducted in partnership with other organisations. At one time, such platforms would have been viewed as pre-evangelistic, but are now part of evangelism because "people are starting further back and with a lot more negative attitude towards us."

## b. Connecting and Assessing which Pathway Is Best

Newcomers to church life may already be Christians or may be still searching for faith. A common theme among interviewees was the need to assess where people are up to and encourage them down the pathway that would be most helpful to them. This is apart from any 'triage' which may be needed when people arrive with problems or issues apart from spiritual ones. At Auburn, the courses that they run are often 'messy' due to the many pressures people are under, such as adapting to a new culture, visa issues, and trauma among asylum seekers.

Tim Clemens noted that, "When people first come, we ask, 'Is this person church-ed or are they unchurch-ed or dechurch-ed?'" At Grace City Church, people who are already Christians are encouraged into an 'On-Board Membership' course which happens once per month. From there, the person is encouraged towards a small group and/or a ministry team involvement. For people who are not Christians, they would be encouraged into an 'Explore' course running

for 6 weeks. From there the person may go into an 'Explore Group', looking at Mark's Gospel over an 8-week period.

Ray Galea, rector of MBM at Rooty Hill, emphasised the need to keep such processes simple, not just for those giving direction but most importantly for the newcomer themselves. At MBM, new arrivals are encouraged to go to the 'I'm New' flag where first time arrivals gather to meet staff and welcomers. To keep it simple, newcomers are encouraged to complete a Getting Connected card and to consider attending a Belonging Course (3 weeks) and/or a *Christianity Explained* course (4 weeks).

### c. An Introductory Course to Christianity

Another common feature among the churches in this study is the presence of an introductory course to the Christian faith, as part of this pathway. This course is often *Christianity Explained* but may be *Introducing God*. Often, these courses are run every quarter or more frequently, depending upon the size of the church. Jessica Brouwer mentioned that Village Church ran seven *Introducing God* courses in 2017, four of which became Bible study groups in their own right. By the end, some 40% of participants had become Christians.

Other leaders in the study also reported people regularly becoming Christians through these courses. For example, at St Georges Hurstville's Mandarin congregation, there are large numbers of visitors. A team identifies and looks after visitors and newcomers, inviting them to lunch at the church and introducing them to others in the congregation. Gospel classes are held after lunch and up to a fifth of newcomers are willing to go. Brian Tung's observation was that "almost all of these newcomers end up baptised."

### d. A 'Christian Foundations' group

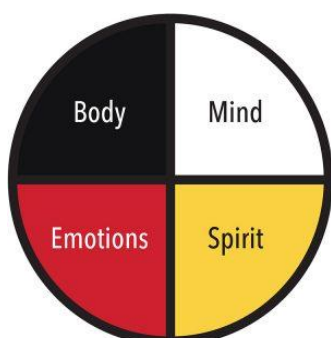
Some of the churches in the study take the view that newcomers involved in the *Christianity Explained* course should then be encouraged to join an adult small group, as the next step along the pathway. Other churches have taken a different approach, believing there is a need for an intervening group structure for such newcomers, which explores the foundations of faith and practice.

There were churches in the study that provided 'Christian foundations' courses or groups for newcomers. These may be short term; however, Tim Clemens observed that, at Grace City Church, it is not uncommon for a person to go around twice through the 'Explore Group', which is then significant in their coming to faith. Other churches provide even longer courses for newcomers outside the adult small group program. At one of the largest churches in the study, MBM, Ray Galea advised that the leaders try to delay new Christians joining adult Bible study groups; instead new Christians go into a year-long 'Firm Foundations' course.

### e. The Youth Group

The church Youth Group is an important pathway – perhaps *the* most important pathway in some churches – for newcomers entering church life. It has been noted in previous NCLS research that newcomers are typically younger than church attenders generally and that more than 70% of Sydney Anglican church attenders become Christians prior to the age of 20 years. Eventually these young people need to make the transition into the adult congregation. For instance, at St Matthews Manly, about 90 young people attend the youth group, around a third of whom are newcomers, having not come from church families (Bruce Clarke).

## FACTOR 4: Activities that Meet Wider Community Needs



All churches in the study run community activities or facilities, irrespective of whether the congregations are small or large, well-resourced or with few resources. These activities do not have a primary purpose as spiritual nurture activities and many of the participants do not attend church. Instead these activities are generally accessible to anyone from the community and are designed to meet community needs. Rather than being inward-facing activities for church attenders, these are outward-facing to the community.

Table 4 lists community facilities and activities for each church in the study, as mentioned in the interviews. There are some astonishing examples in this list of what can only be described as ‘first rate’ local activities or facilities and are an expression of Christian love for others. There is evidence here of a strong commitment by churches to assisting their local communities, leading to churches becoming significant local institutions right at the heart of community social networks.

**Table 4: Churches in the Newcomer Study – Activities Serving the Wider Community**  
(Source: Interviews with church leaders)

Church	Activities Serving the Wider Community
Dapto Anglican	Café, Play Patch (playgroup), Pre-School, After-school program, Breakfast Club, Street Crew (Youth support), Rise (Special needs), Just Moved (New residents program), DAC Care (Pastoral visiting), Coffee morning, Craft group (retirees), Art Show, Op Shop
St Johns Darlinghurst	Rough Edges drop-in centre (for homeless or marginalised community), Story-telling nights, Aged Care facility (with HammondCare), Sleepout (fundraiser), School educational program, Legal pro-bono work for Rough Edges
Eagle Vale Anglican	Playgroup, ESL, Self Defence classes, Knitting group, ‘Sorted’ Men’s group, Anglicare Mobile Community Pantry (MCP), Anglicare Community Chaplaincy, doorknocking
Village Church, Annandale	Playgroup, Art Exhibition, English Conversation Group, Divorce Care, Gingerbread and wreath making, music nights, family movie nights, kids’ holiday clubs
MBM, Rooty Hill	Playgroup, ESL, Holiday club, Kids Club, Parenting and Marriage courses, Counselling, allowing schools to run concerts
St Matthews Manly	Playgroups, ESL, Soup Kitchen, Music (eg Manly Jazz Festival), Ballet School, Christian Surfers
St Georges Hurstville	Playgroup, ESL, Chinese Cancer Survivors & Carers
St Philip’s Auburn	ESL, BBQs, Doorknocking
Church@thepeak, Peakhurst Heights	Cycling group, Music playgroup, Anglicare Toys ‘n Tucker
Grace City Church, Waterloo	‘Movies in the Park’, Café before and after church (in nearby ‘Freedom Hub’ café)

For newcomers to church life, these activities or facilities may be the first step along the pathway into church life, eventually leading to Christian commitment and an active church involvement. For some community activities, being an entry-point may be a by-product of the activity rather than part of its central purpose. However, other community activities are conceived as primarily being profile-raising for the church or as being an integral part of the pathway for newcomers into church life. Consequently, where the activity is not contributing effectively to these purposes, the church leadership may decide to cease the activity.

The interviews uncovered many points of engagement with the community, which cannot be described in detail here. Instead, this section concentrates on just a few of the churches: Dapto, Darlinghurst, and Village Church, with a view to showing how their community facilities and activities are related to the flow of newcomers to church. This is examined under the following headings:

- ❖ Facilities;
- ❖ Activities; and
- ❖ Partnerships.

#### a. Facilities

Modern church design has moved away from the single-purpose worship centre towards multi-function buildings that have a range of purposes apart from public worship. Both Dapto Anglican and St Johns Darlinghurst operate community facilities on a continual basis, with complementary social services or groups also available. What is a large investment in helping people to thrive can also enhance the flow of newcomers into church life.

The Dapto Anglican church is an example of a contemporary church building that is not just 'multi-functional'. The building has a large worship space, offices and an adjoining pre-school facility. A café was also added as part of the building's design. However, the café is not simply an annex to the worship space; rather it forms part of the main entrance to the building. To enter the worship space, visitors pass through the large foyer of the building that encloses the cafe; this design means that, upon first entry, visitors to church encounter something with which they are familiar. Most importantly, the café environment is conducive to informal discussions before and after church, as well as during the week, which again enhances the unchurched visitor's experience of church.

The café operates commercially 4 days per week. Among many visitors to the café, the local Council holds a post-natal group at a nearby location and group members are drawn to the church's café afterwards. A mid-week Café Church is also held which is designed for women from unchurched or de-churched backgrounds, who may be unable to attend Sunday church services because their partner has no interest in attending. The Café Church has enjoyed some success; "Two weeks ago we did confirmations for five of the women," Stephen said.

St Johns Darlinghurst has a drop-in centre for homeless people, the marginalised and socially-isolated people. Called 'Rough Edges' it is open 5 nights a week, with 50 to 100 attendees per night. Attendees may have issues with mental health, addiction or be survivors of abuse. There are complementary services which Rough Edges is able to provide including legal services, social work and referrals for public housing. There is a Thursday night church service (called 'Streetwise'); however, the nature of the community is such that regulars may disappear for long periods of time before returning. Rough Edges has been operating for 23 years and is run by staff from the church and by volunteers from the community. With its long

history and multi-faceted connections to the community, Ed Vaughan views Rough Edges “as the heart of this church.”

In terms of newcomers to church, there is some crossover from Rough Edges into the 6pm church service; the Assistant Minister at the congregation is also the chaplain to Rough Edges. However, relatively few of the congregation volunteer at Rough Edges, though the congregation itself is welcoming of new people who come to church. Often, other people are attracted to the church because of its community involvement and social justice stance rather than as a result of direct contact through Rough Edges.

## b. Activities

All churches in the study run outward-facing activities designed to meet community needs. As shown in Table 4, playgroups were mentioned by several interviewees as an activity which their church provides. But how does a playgroup act as an entry-point into church life, wherever this occurs? According to interviewees, some features of a playgroup are conducive to it being an entry point, including:

- ❖ Church and non-church people mixing together socially;
- ❖ Non-church people being able to get to know church leaders;
- ❖ Advertising of other church or community activities;
- ❖ Church people inviting non-church people to activities, including church services.

At Village Church’s playgroup, church services and other activities are advertised, which makes it easier for church attenders in the group to issue invitations to other members. These invitations are not just for church services but also to *Introducing God*, as well as other community activities of the church. Invitations are issued to events such as Anglicare’s Toys ‘n Tucker community food drive, kids holiday programs, adult BBQs, annual Art Exhibition, Easter and Christmas events and even Anglican school scripture for their children down-the-track. Rather than being a group in isolation, the playgroup is part of a broader network of church-hosted activities and events in which playgroup members participate; for instance, the playgroup kids learn a song each year to perform at the church’s Christmas event (Jessica Brouwer).

It was also noted that as children grow up, parents will be following their kids around, taking them to activities and picking them up. “If the kid comes and the kid’s loved and loves coming here, the parents will want to know what you are doing and are much more positively disposed towards you and your message. And you get a chance to speak to them and minister to them and have coffee with them. Eventually they end up in a *Christianity Explored* group, finding out what the kids are learning...It’s one of the key pathways” (Stephen Semenchuk).

At Dapto Anglican, the approach has been to provide community activities or groups at every age and stage, which may then become entry points into church life. Table 4 shows that Dapto Anglican provides community activities for pre-schoolers, school-aged children, youth, young mothers, and retirees. The leaders work to turn these groups and activities into effective entry points. Once a person has come to an activity it is important to then be thinking about the next step for that person: “They come along to something, we keep putting on the next thing for them, once they have come to the next thing, someone will get to know them and will then start inviting them to *Christianity Explored* groups” (Stephen Semenchuk).



### c. Partnerships

A third form of community engagement involves partnerships between the church and other organisations, with a view to providing a service to the community. A partnership model means that both the church and other organisations are contributing resources to making a community service happen; these resources may be provided in a complementary way rather than in equal proportions of staff, funds or land. For instance, the pre-school at Dapto Anglican is separately incorporated; it is housed on the church site with its own qualified staff. Church representatives show prospective pre-school parents around the facilities on the site. This is the start of the building of relationships. The church runs four church services per year at which children perform and parents attend. Parents or their children may then be invited to other church activities, such as to the church's 'Connect' groups for children.

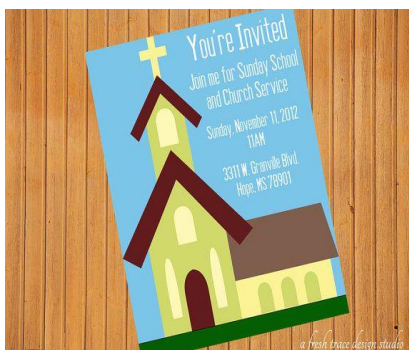
At St John's Darlinghurst, Rough Edges would not exist to the level that it does without the involvement of the wider community. The church partners with other community groups to raise funds for the work of Rough Edges, apart from the huge volunteer commitment by people from the community in running it. This could not happen without the church taking an inclusive approach to the community, which is the heartland for the gay community in Sydney. Rather than being moral guardians, the church has sought to "have an open hand and to offer blessing," presenting an "apologetic of love" to the people they encounter (Ed Vaughan).

#### A Different Way?

Community activities acting as entry points into church life fit neatly into what has been termed the 'Attractional Model' of mission. But what about community activities that are not seen as entry points into church but as embryonic spiritual communities in their own right? At Eagle Vale Anglican, this is the missional direction now being followed. As Craig Hooper explained, much of the local community finds it too hard to bridge the cultural divide when invited to a regular church service. Instead, Craig sees the community activities that the church runs as the place where people should also find the Gospel, not as a stepping stone into church services.

The church runs several community activities, including self-defence and English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) classes. Each activity is followed by an optional Bible reading group run by the church's evangelist or community chaplain. With the playgroup, the Bible time is within the regular program and is run by lay leaders and the community chaplain. Craig has found that many of the participants elect to be involved in the Bible times. These are not seen as stepping stones to existing Sunday gatherings, although some people do come on Sundays; instead the expectation is that the Bible reading group will eventually become its own spiritual community - the church - for these people, as they continue to gather around the word of God.

## FACTOR 5: People Inviting People



Newcomers arrive at churches for different reasons. So far, we have seen that some churches in the study experience higher volumes of ‘walk-ins’ than other churches. We have also seen that community activities can be avenues through which people become involved in church. We now turn to another important catalyst for newcomers coming to church: being invited by family or friends.

As discussed earlier, previous NCLS research found that people new to church have often been invited to come; in fact, the proportion of church attenders inviting people is one of the most important single predictors of newcomers at church. Consistent with this statistical association, 2016 NCLS statistics for churches in this study showed that 8 of the 10 churches had above-average levels of inviting. Some of these churches had very high levels of inviting: Grace City Church led the way with nearly two-thirds of attenders (62.7%) having invited another person to church in the past 12 months. Very high levels of inviting were also evident at Village Church (54.3%), Auburn (53.6%), MBM Rooty Hill (52.9%), Church@thepeak (50%) and Dapto (48.8%).

**Table 5: Churches in the Newcomer Study – Proportion of Attenders Who Invited Others to Church (Source: 2016 NCLS)**

Church	Attenders who invited someone to church in the past year (%)
Grace City Church, Waterloo	62.7%
Village Church, Annandale	54.3%
St Philip's Auburn	53.6%
MBM, Rooty Hill	52.9%
Church@thepeak, Peakhurst Hgts	50.0%
Dapto Anglican	48.8%
Eagle Vale Anglican	43.4%
St Matthews Manly	41.8%
St Johns Darlinghurst	34.4%
St Georges Hurstville	33.6%
<b>DIOCESE</b>	<b>39.3%</b>

The Diocesan Mission has as a goal to see the proportion of attenders inviting others to church lifted from a 2011 average of 40% to an average of 45% by 2020. Not only did most of these churches have above-average levels of inviting, but 6 out of 10 of these churches already had levels of inviting above the 2020 Diocesan goal.

Among interviewees, there was general agreement that attenders inviting others has played an important role in explaining newcomer levels at their churches. For some of the churches, particularly those with no natural advantages in either location or community connections, invitation was viewed as critical to newcomers being present. As Stuart Maze noted about Church@thepeak, “Most newcomers are here through personal invitation.” Similarly, Tim Cocks observed that, “Inviting is key at our church at Auburn. We get next to no ‘walk-ins’.”

For other churches, particularly those with a strong community profile, the flow of newcomers was dependent upon a combination of walk-ins, community activities and invitation. However, even among churches with a strong community profile, invitation is still key. As Tim Clemens observed about Grace City Church: “We get lots of walk-ins, but usually these people are church-ed or de-church-ed. Almost all unchurched people arrive because they were invited by a church friend. While lots of our members may invite someone at some stage, about 15% of our members are the key inviters, constantly inviting friends.”

## How Inviting Is Encouraged

While it is clear that inviting has an important role to play in newcomers arriving at church, how can inviting be encouraged among attenders? Three avenues are explored here.

**Congregational Confidence:** Interviewees tended to agree that congregational confidence is important in encouraging inviting behaviour. Attenders should feel they can trust both the leaders and the rest of the congregation to do the right thing when they invite their friends or family to church. Bruce Clarke summarised it up as follows: “If people don’t feel confident in what is happening up the front, they won’t bring friends. This is a huge issue.” He also observed that, “Outsiders pick up on whether attenders actually like their own church.”

For Tim Clemens, building congregational confidence has both positive and negative elements to it. On the one hand, he sees he has a role in building momentum: “People like to be on a train that’s going somewhere. People want to be part of something that is bigger than themselves.” On the one hand, he also sees a role in fighting ‘Gospel fatigue’ which can demotivate attenders when they don’t see others being converted.

**Relationships beyond Church:** The breadth and strength of attenders’ existing relationships beyond church was seen as a key source of newcomers and critical to inviting behaviour. Speaking of his church at Manly, Bruce Clarke observed that, “800 people at church represent an enormous web of influence in the community.” Dominic Steele observed that there may be fewer people through the door but there will be more ‘stickiness’ where there are pre-existing relationships between current attenders and new arrivals at church.

Stuart Maze finds that people tend to ‘belong before they believe’, an observation echoed by other interviewees. Thus, attenders’ relationships with others is a starting place for believing: “Typically there has been a relationship and a coming to church first.”

**Training in Outreach:** Interviewees were asked about the role of outreach training in encouraging inviting to church. There wasn’t a widespread endorsement of training from interviewees, but some acknowledged that it had been valuable in their situation. This depended upon the type of training. For instance, Craig Hooper mentioned that “Simple Gospel Tools” training had been very helpful in learning to communicate the Gospel in story form. Stuart Maze has tended to focus on personal evangelism rather than events-based evangelism with his congregation. However, he recognised that “while we may have good intentions to share our faith, at times we have struggled to know how to do it.” More recently he has worked hard to help equip them and to overcome their fears.

For others, outreach was more caught than taught. At Grace City Church, it has become part of the culture; “Matt (the evangelism pastor) is always asking ‘Who are you inviting?’” (Tim Clemens).

## FACTOR 6: Church Services for both Christians and Non-Christians



There was general agreement among the interviewees that what happens on Sunday is central to the attraction and retention of newcomers. However, what this might look like in practice differed a lot between the interviewees. Some of the more common features mentioned are outlined below.

**Contemporary:** Most churches in the study have contemporary styles of music and worship, including the use of modern hymns. NCLS Research has previously found that a key predictor of newcomer levels across Anglican and

Protestant churches was the adoption of contemporary worship over more traditional forms. This is not surprising given the over-representation of young people among newcomers. But it is a finding that does underline the importance of having service styles which are congruent with the wider culture. As Dominic Steele succinctly put it, “Church has to feel like their contemporary world”.

However, in multi-cultural or single-ethnic churches in the study, it is more accurate to say that the style of service needs to resonate with the cultures of the audience. In these congregations, other aspects of church were perhaps more important than being contemporary, such as the use of simple English free of jargon, warmth, and ethnic diversity among those who lead the service. At St Georges Hurstville, which ministers to a largely Chinese congregation, it’s about elements that work for that culture, such as having a regular preacher and ministry offerings to family members all happening on Sunday.

Another aspect was making sure to include both Christians and non-Christians in the service.

**Quality:** A theme which emerged in the interviews was the importance of doing church services well. Ray Galea commented that churches need to do four things well: preaching, music, children & youth, and connections. On the same topic, Bruce Clarke commented that, “The bigger your church gets, the more important the quality of both the preaching and the music become,” impacting the capacity of the church to reach out to the community.

The Diocese has high standards when it comes to faithfulness to the Biblical text in the preaching. For Tim Clemens, it’s not just the content of the sermon that is important but how the hearers will experience it. Doing church well means preparing the delivery of the message, not just its content, by striving to meet high production values. Other interviewees commented that the sermon needs to not only minister to the mind but also to the emotions and should address application.

**Speaking to both Christians and non-Christians:** Another aspect was making sure to include both Christians and non-Christians in the service. This is particularly important when it comes to newcomers, many of whom will still be exploring the faith or are not yet at a point of being committed to Christ. Ray Galea set out a range of qualities needed in good preaching:

faithfulness to the biblical text, personal conviction, clarity of speaking, and 'speaking to head, heart and hands'. He tries to put himself in the shoes of unbelievers and to answer the questions that they might ask of the text. Until recently, Church@thepeak had regular Q&A's after the sermon; Stuart Maze noted that newcomers particularly found these beneficial in coming to grips with the faith.

Jessica Brouwer noted that the way language is used in church at Village Church "always acknowledges that non-Christians are here." Dominic Steele added that people on the platform introducing themselves is a simple way of including visitors (eg. "Hi. My name is Stuart and I'm going to read from the Bible").

**Authenticity:** The need for authenticity came out in different ways in the interviews. At Eagle Vale and Darlinghurst, it's about providing opportunities in the service for people to pray with others; this sends the message that "it's okay to admit you are struggling" (Craig Hooper). At MBM Rooty Hill, the interviews conducted in the church service don't set out to avoid a person's struggles (Ray Galea). As the senior minister, it's also about being open about your own sin and weakness, to demonstrate that "no one has it completely together" (Dominic Steele).

**Young People:** How children and teenagers are provided for while the church service is underway is another area thought by interviewees to make a difference to attracting and retaining newcomers. At Dapto, it's not only about the quality of the program, but finishing the children's program after the service to enable parents – some of whom are newcomers – to engage undistracted in adult conversation. At Church@thepeak, it's also about creating an informal atmosphere in which children and parents feel comfortable to move about.

## FACTOR 7: Welcoming and Welcomers



The term 'warmth' was often used by interviewees to describe a key quality that churches wishing to attract and retain newcomers need to display. This ranges from the warmth of the people up the front, to the warmth of conversation with attenders, to the warmth of the welcome that newcomers receive.

One of the key priorities for churches is to "have an open and welcoming orientation" (Stephen Semenchuk). Congregations need to be outward looking, wanting newcomers to come, being willing to try new things in the church service for the outsider, and, when they do visit, trying not to overwhelm them.

At St Matthews Manly, dinner at the pub and then returning for church occurs regularly as a way of including visitors and newcomers socially. There are also special Newcomer Nights. However, Bruce Clarke's view is that, while these activities have been successful, the speed of delivery is becoming more important among younger age groups, who may otherwise quickly lose interest and move on.

For multi-cultural congregations in the study, meals are an important part of including new people. People from other cultures often bond over food. In fact, food nights, lunches, and morning teas are part of the life of the churches in this study. Part of the logic behind cafés connected to the church, such as those at Dapto and Waterloo, is to provide the incentive for people to stay and enjoy conversations rather than rushing off as soon as church is over.

It was common among the churches in the study to have designated welcomers or welcoming teams of lay people, who may be on hand before, during and after church services. The members of these teams would receive training in welcoming and follow-up, though in some churches this was more 'on-the-job'. Training was not only so that they will be sensitive towards visitors, but also to ensure they will faithfully implement the pathway into church life described earlier under Factor 3.

In the Attractional Model of mission, the welcoming team is a main point of engagement between congregations and unchurched visitors; therefore, it is critical that they carry out this role effectively. Previous research by NCLS Research has shown that, compared with denominational switchers, newcomers to church life don't tend to 'shop around' for the right church.<sup>8</sup> If welcoming is mishandled, it is less likely that they might try again elsewhere.

Consequently, most of the churches in the study had clear processes for the welcoming and follow-up of new arrivals, for which a designated staff-person is usually responsible (Factor 8) and supported by church management software (Factor 9). Some interviewees outlined their follow-up processes in detail, such as the process reflected in the Village Church's Pathway Progression Sheet in the Appendix; a simplified outline of such a process is shown below which was provided by Stuart Maze for Church@thepeak, which can be seen in the processes followed by other churches.

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<sup>8</sup> Kaldor, P, Bellamy, J, and Moore, S (1995) *Mission under the Microscope. Keys to effective and sustainable mission*, Adelaide: Openbook Publishers, pp 109-110.

## Simplified Follow-up Process (Church@thepeak)

### Newcomer first visit

1. Obtain contact details
2. Guest email sent
3. Welcome letter from Stuart
4. Follow-up again in 4 weeks

### Newcomer second visit

5. Guest email sent
6. Pastoral visit arranged
7. Hospitality invitation (by a lay person)

### Regular attenders

- Weekly emails
- Invitation to growth group
- Hospitality invitation
- Pastoral meeting to discuss serving
- Newcomer lunch

The above process is supported by Elvanto church management software. Stuart marks the church roll from memory on the Monday and adds newcomer names then.

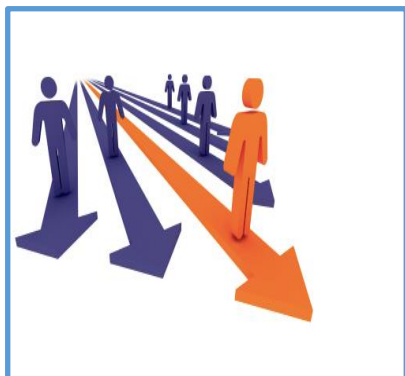
How successful are these churches in making newcomers feel at home? It is possible to gain some idea of this by looking at the way newcomers at these churches answered the 'belonging' question in the 2016 NCLS. Participants in the survey were asked whether they have a sense of belonging to their congregation, to which they could choose to respond that they have a strong, growing sense of belonging. Table 6 below shows the proportion of newcomers within each of the churches in the study who responded that they have a strong, growing sense of belonging, compared with the average for newcomers across the Diocese.

Very high levels of newcomers at Grace City Church (82%), Eagle Vale (80%) and Hurstville (78%) indicated a strong, growing sense of belonging, compared with 58.6% among newcomers generally in the Diocese. Newcomers at most churches in the study had above average levels of belonging, suggesting that newcomers at these churches were more likely to feel 'at home' in their church than is typically the case among newcomers elsewhere. This is an important finding, as it suggests these churches are not only successful in attracting newcomers in the first place, but in providing the right conditions for them to be stay as well.

**Table 6: Churches in the Newcomer Study – Proportion of Newcomers Who Feel a Strong Sense of Belonging to their Congregation (Source: 2016 NCLS)**

Church	Newcomers completing question in 2016 NCLS (no.)	Newcomers with a strong, growing sense of belonging (%)
Grace City Church, Waterloo	11	82%
Eagle Vale Anglican	10	80%
St Georges Hurstville	18	78%
MBM, Rooty Hill	61	71%
Church@thepeak, Peakhurst Hgts	6	67%
Dapto Anglican	32	63%
St Matthews Manly	47	62%
St Philip's Auburn	16	56%
Village Church, Annandale	20	55%
St Johns Darlinghurst	11	55%
<b>DIOCESE (Newcomers Only)</b>	<b>2640</b>	<b>58.6%</b>

## FACTOR 8: Designated Mission Staff



The interviews highlighted that it is not enough to have a clear pathway for newcomers into church life. It is vital that, along its length, this pathway be properly resourced and supported by staff if it is to be sustained. Brian Tung summed it up by saying, “Church ministry has to be resourced across a whole pathway, not just evangelism. It will fail if there is under-investment in follow-up and nurture.”

The staff resources required to support this pathway may be over and above the staff and lay leadership needed to run each of the groups and activities of the church; it is about ensuring that the pathway which links these groups and activities together receives the attention needed. Consequently, nearly all churches in the study had designated staff, apart from the rector, whose roles are to support the various aspects of the newcomer pathway into church life.

The role of maintaining the pathway into church life may be carried out within a traditional staffing structure, such as by an assistant minister or the leader of a single congregation. There were examples of churches in the study where assistant ministers were responsible for evangelism, welcoming and follow-up. These roles may also provide everything from preaching to pastoral care to organising the worship. However, this means there is a risk that outreach and mission becomes just one among a number of competing priorities for these staff.

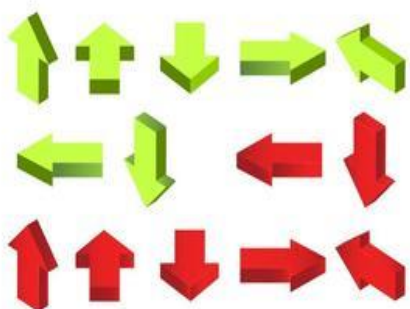
Some churches in the study have taken the step of appointing staff whose primary role is to support mission within the church. For instance, at Village Church, there is a Mission Pastor whose primary role is to disciple and equip members for evangelism, whilst ensuring that the activities of the church result in people becoming Christians. The church also employs a Membership Pastor whose role includes equipping members to ensure that newcomers are welcomed, connected and integrated into church life. These roles, under the oversight and leadership of the rector, provide proper coverage of the pathway into church life.

Other churches have staff whose role is to be an evangelist operating beyond the church. For example, at Eagle Vale Anglican church, a main staff role is the evangelist, who conducts training in personal evangelism and runs some of the community activities and the optional Bible times connected to these activities. The church has been further blessed by the provision of an Anglicare community chaplain. “We need to reallocate resources away from church members, or get more resources somehow, which are focussed on bringing the gospel to non-believers” (Craig Hooper).

Consideration is also needed to the selection and equipping of lay leaders. How this is done varies from church to church. For instance, at MBM, people are appointed to team leadership roles and then a team is chosen. People who have joined MBM are made aware of the need to serve as part of their discipleship and eventually join a team. Both leaders and team members are given clear role descriptions. The team leaders receive coaching, so that strengthening and equipping of the team can cascade from the coach to team leader to team members (Ray Galea).



## FACTOR 9: Systems for Keeping Track



The welcoming and follow-up processes described earlier under Factor 7 can come under pressure or breakdown whenever attendances spike or as the church grows. As a result, churches have moved from hardcopy records and spreadsheets towards fit-for-purpose, church management software such as Elvanto, UCare and Jethro.

The use of church management software is common in the Diocese. In the 2016 NCLS, two-thirds of Sydney Anglican churches (67%) indicated that they used

church management software. There is also a high level of usage among the churches in this study, with 8 out of 10 using fit-for-purpose software, particularly Elvanto.

For the churches in the study, the use of this software is not simply to keep track of attendance generally nor for the creation of rosters. A key purpose is to track visitors and newcomers, so that these people don't 'fall through the cracks' and be neglected or overlooked, a situation which can easily occur in large or rapidly growing churches.

As Dominic Steele explained, it would be impossible at Village Church to keep track of new people without such systems; there were 450 new names at Village Church in 2018 alone. Details collected upon entry are subsequently used to connect a person to the right staff and the right groups. The system enables invitations to be directed to the 'Introducing God' (evangelism) or 'Village Life' (belonging) courses and assists staff to know pastorally what each person's 'next step' toward faith or belonging is and make appropriate plans to help this happen. It is also used to know who to follow up, when to follow up, and triage for different programs (including Divorce Care). "As we have developed these systems we have become much better at tracking and pastorally caring for people" (Dominic Steele). A sample extract from Village Church's Current Pathway Progression Sheet is shown in the Appendix.

Similarly, Tim Clemens believes that systems such as Elvanto are essential once the church grows beyond being small. At Grace City Church, there were 750 visitors in 2018 and 54 new people who have come three or more times in the first three months of 2019. The software enables a systematic approach towards such new arrivals, without which people can be overlooked or not directed to the most helpful group. Attendances can be recorded along the pathway into church life discussed under Factor 3, to ensure a consistent level of pastoral oversight. Stephen Semenchuk made an observation about the usefulness of such databases, which was echoed by other interviewees: "Less people fall through the cracks and it helps us to close the backdoor."

"The database helps us to close the backdoor."

The use of such software also helps leaders to monitor the life of the church, on an annual or even on a 'real-time' basis. Such monitoring can enable churches to evaluate their programs and detect any changes which may be driven by external factors, not just internal ones. As Ray Galea observed for MBM Rooty Hill, "We monitor our data so we are not relying on

anecdotes. When there are less newcomers than at the same time last year, we can investigate based on the metrics.”

There appeared to be differences in how extensively such software is being used among the churches in the study. Some churches appeared to sit lightly with the use of such software. Without diminishing its value, Stephen Semenchuk observed, “The database is a tool; we definitely don’t depend on it.” Bruce Clarke explained that, at Manly, there are just three main collection points for information: a ‘Connect’ card to be completed at church services; registration for children participating in family ministries (a ‘must have’ for child safety); and at newcomer welcoming events. However, at other churches, attendance is also recorded in the database for all kinds of church activities and groups. Staff assessments of where people are up to spiritually and pastorally may also be added to the record. One church mentioned the additional use of Facebook to map relationships.

While church attenders may be actively involved in checking in whenever they attend and would generally be aware of data collection by their churches, it was less clear whether they were aware of its extent. This is not to suggest there have been any privacy breaches nor that anyone would be surprised such information can be assembled in the Digital Age. As one interviewee said, he would never record or write anything that he wouldn’t be happy to show to the person concerned. While this is a good rule to follow, nevertheless the range of information being collected may create a reputational risk for churches. Given the widespread use of church management software and the variable degrees of usage, the Diocese may wish to look into the need for Guidelines around its usage.

## FACTOR 10: A Pathway to Maturity



Joining a church is often accompanied by the process of coming to faith, perhaps for the first time. When discussing the pathway for newcomers into church, interviewees would often make a distinction between the pathway for newcomers who are already Christians and the pathway for those who have yet to come to faith.

Those who have not yet become a Christian would be encouraged into a *Christianity Explained* group or similar; from there they might join a 'Christian Foundations' group designed for those who are new to the faith, or perhaps join a regular small group. Those who are already Christians may be encouraged into the Christian Foundations group or to join a small group, depending upon which would be most helpful to them.

### a. Staying on the Pathway

Becoming part of a group as well as attending church was seen by interviewees as essential for newcomers. Negatively, there was a common view that newcomers are unlikely to remain in church life if they do not join a group of some kind. In large congregations, it is difficult to become connected and to build friendships with other attenders unless the newcomer is involved in a smaller group. With a church of 1000 attenders on a Sunday, Ray Galea commented that, "Not joining a small group is a decision to leave."

Positively, joining a small group or a suitable course can provide the context for newcomers to build friendships and receive support, but also as a way of growing in their faith in Christ. Small groups can allow churches to "connect people to Jesus in the context of loving relationships" (Ray Galea). It also means that newcomers will see others who are modelling the faith; it is interesting that previous NCLS research found that newcomers are more often to be found in churches where high proportions of attenders have *themselves* made commitments to Christ and are growing much in their faith (See Table 1).

The importance of newcomers being among people who are themselves growing in faith underlines that another key to attracting and retaining newcomers is for leaders to have a primary focus on church *health*, not on church growth (Ed Vaughan).

So what has it been like for newcomers at the churches in the study, as they have progressed along the pathway towards faith and Christian maturity? Table 7 shows that newcomers at most churches in the study had above-average levels of growth in faith, while the remainder were close to the Diocesan average. Very high levels of newcomers at St Johns Darlington (83%) and Grace City Church (82%) indicated they had grown much in faith compared with an average of 59.6% among newcomers generally in the Diocese.

**Table 7: Churches in the Newcomer Study – Proportion of Newcomers Who Grew Much in their Faith in the Past Year (Source: 2016 NCLS)**

<b>Church</b>	<b>Newcomers completing question in 2016 NCLS (no.)</b>	<b>Newcomers reporting much growth in faith in 2016 NCLS (%)</b>
St Johns Darlinghurst	12	83%
Grace City Church, Waterloo	11	82%
St Philip's Auburn	16	75%
MBM, Rooty Hill	59	73%
St Georges Hurstville	17	71%
Village Church, Annandale	20	70%
Eagle Vale Anglican	11	64%
Dapto Anglican	32	63%
St Matthews Manly	47	58%
Church@thepeak, Peakhurst Hgts	7	57%
<b>DIOCESE (Newcomers Only)</b>	<b>2602</b>	<b>59.6%</b>

#### b. Conversion, Baptism, Celebration

Stephen Semenchuk noted that there are now more appeals to become a Christian at Dapto Anglican church than in previous years. Attenders respond to the message by raising their hand and receive a 'Yes' pack and pray with another attender after the service.

Some interviewees mentioned that, once people had come to faith, they were given the opportunity to be baptised, confirmed or to give their testimony publicly. This provides a moment where newcomers who have come to faith or become recommitted to faith can 'nail their colours to the mast.' It is also a moment which the congregation can celebrate together.

## FACTOR 11: Good Implementation



Many of the factors identified here would come as no surprise to readers. Some readers may be mentally ticking off each factor for their church and yet still be faced with the dilemma: 'Why aren't there more newcomers at my church?'

An observation about the churches in this study is that attracting newcomers is not just about whether such factors are present but how well these factors are resourced, how well these fit together, and how the system is evolving to meet new challenges. What is important is the way the

various elements have been brought together – or implemented – to create a dynamic whole.

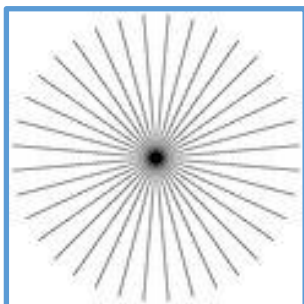
As an outsider to these churches, I found myself impressed by what had been achieved and the missional thinking that lay behind it. Sometimes the interviewees gave the impression that it had been relatively straightforward, which can happen in the telling of a story after the event. But there was also evidence of prayer and faith exercised, of visions cast and followed, of hard work by people striving together, of funds expended, of some aspects found wanting and the need to make changes, and constant attention towards newcomers and their journey of faith. Yet despite the unique pressures of each situation, the continuing desire for excellence was also on display.

One indication of the quality of implementation is where the church's achievements have been recognised by others. In the case of Dapto Anglican, the contemporary church design won a prestigious Blakett Prize for Regional Architecture in 2012, awarded by the Australian Institute of Architects NSW.

Village Church has become recognised as a church resourcing many others. The *Introducing God* course, which was developed at the church, has been used by 2,500 Australian churches over the years. Informative sessions on church life and mission are regularly disseminated through podcasts on [www.thepastorsheart.net](http://www.thepastorsheart.net). Dominic Steele leads a Facebook group "Mission Thinking in Sydney and the Illawarra" where potentially some 700 church leaders share mission ideas.

There was also a desire to become even better at implementation, such as in measuring outcomes and evidence-based decision-making from a business context (Brian Tung). There was interest in better implementation and evaluation techniques, such as setting clear targets for outcomes, working with data to figure out what to do and being intentional about achieving outcomes. If what is being done doesn't achieve what it is intended to achieve, then something must change, even if this means cancelling a program (Silvanus Thiem).

## FACTOR 12: Impact of the Diocese



In 1624, the English clergyman and poet John Donne wrote, “No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main.” Similarly, it could be argued that no parish is independent of the others and affects or is affected by the activities of the whole. In the same vein, what impact, if any, does the Diocese itself have on the ability of parishes to attract and retain newcomers?

Interviewees agreed that the Diocese has a role to play when it comes to newcomers and can have an impact on newcomer levels. Some of the ways that the Diocese can have an impact on newcomers are outlined here.

### a. Prayer Gatherings

When it comes to newcomers, it was suggested that the No.1 priority for the Diocese is prayer. The Diocese could hold regular prayer meetings for the city and for the lost, in recognition that it is God who gives the growth.

### b. Promoting Best Practice

None of the interviewees was advocating a Connect09 style-of-approach with the Diocese directing or funding an evangelistic campaign. Instead, some advocated the promotion of principles which parishes should follow to better attract and retain newcomers, most of which have been discussed in this report. For instance, the Diocese could assist by promoting:

- The need for a clear vision among the parishes;
- High production values around the Sunday church experience;
- A systematic way of thinking about the pathway by which people move from being unchurched to conversion to growth in faith to service (Tim Clemens, Grace City Church);

and:

- Getting Sunday right (Preaching, music, children & youth, connections);
- Clear pathways and structures, properly staffed;
- Senior leaders must have a heart for the lost;
- Culture of celebration over people being saved (Ray Galea, MBM).

### c. Changing Mission Directions

It can be argued that the Diocese is approaching a crisis point because of the declining numbers of newcomers. As has already been referred to in this report, Craig Hooper (Eagle Vale Anglican) believes that we are too locked into existing Sunday church gatherings as the endpoint of evangelistic endeavours, and it is time to try other ways to bring the gospel to people and then build them up in Christ. “We need to look at further ways to be ‘all things to all people, so that by all possible means we might save some’ (1 Corinthians 9:22).”

A suggestion was also made about the need to focus more on Sydney’s migrant youth in the Diocesan Mission. While planting new churches in Greenfields areas is good, there is an

equally large harvest in the Brownfields areas of Western and SW Sydney; the growth in the children of migrants in these areas is projected to continue well into the future.

#### d. The Public Space

The suggestion was made that public stances taken by Diocesan senior leaders can have an impact on levels of visitors and newcomers. Two of the interviewees believed that Diocesan activity during the Same-Sex Marriage debate affected the attitude of local people towards the church, was a source of tension within the congregation or led to people thinking about leaving the church. Even though they themselves held conservative views, they felt the activity of the Diocese in the public square was not helpful locally and damaged the Church's reputation corporately.

# CONCLUSION

Over 15 years ago, I was the primary author of a book called *Why People Don't Go to Church*.<sup>9</sup> The main data source for the book was a large national community survey which, among other things, sought to explore respondents' recent encounters with churches. People were asked whether they would go to church if invited by someone they knew; how likely it was that they would ever become a more frequent churchgoer; and what kind of things in their background would predict a willingness to go to church. Only small proportions of these people indicated that they might go to church if invited or increase their involvement.<sup>10</sup>

They were then asked whether they had sought to become involved in a church. Some 12% of these people – around 1 in 8 – indicated that they had tried to do so in the previous 5 years. While this was an encouraging number, it was discouraging to learn that only 1 in 3 of these people said they had been followed up by the church they had visited, either receiving a letter or phone call, or a visit from the minister or another attender. While almost a quarter (24%) chose not to become involved in the church because they didn't agree with the teachings, beliefs or morality, the majority had not become involved for any one of a range of deficit-based reasons, including loss of interest, the worship being too traditional, being asked to do too many things, people not taking an interest in them, the church not meeting their or their family's needs, or not finding people similar to themselves.<sup>11</sup>

Since then, many Sydney Anglican churches have become more systematic about how to deal with the hundreds of people who visit every year. A couple of interviewees mentioned Tim Sims who, among other things, has encouraged church leaders to consider the nature of their communities and to address the issue of welcoming and follow-up of new arrivals. This has been followed in more recent times by the Centre for Ministry Development (CMD) working one-on-one and in workshops with rectors, ministry staff and lay teams around such issues. CMD and Tim Sims have developed a diagnostic tool which covers various areas of effective ministry, including welcoming and integration of new arrivals.

The current study provides examples of churches that are effective in attracting and retaining newcomers to church life. The picture that emerges from these interviews is very different to the one which emerged from *Why People Don't Go to Church*, where many visitors were not followed-up by Australian churches and some outsiders were neglected by or became frustrated with the church. If nothing else, the interviews in the current study show that it is possible to plug these gaps in a systematic way.

Yet the challenge remains of how to arrest the current slide in newcomer arrivals, and to connect more effectively with local communities and new generations of Australians. Churches in this study show that it is possible to work effectively to meet this challenge.

## Research Questions Addressed

In terms of the original research questions outlined at the beginning of this report, the study has shed light on all but the final question. It became clear very quickly that it would be difficult

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<sup>9</sup> Bellamy, J, Black, A, Castle, K, Hughes, P and Kaldor, P, (2002) *Why People Don't Go to Church*, Adelaide: Openbook.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, pp 87-92.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, pp 93-96.



for interviewees to distinguish between the two sub-categories of newcomers – first-timers and returnees. So, the research question around these two groups could not be pursued.

Brief summaries are provided below of answers to research questions, but readers need to engage with the full report to gain a fuller picture.

1. **To what extent are newcomers brought to church by other attenders and to what extent do they arrive through the presence/profile of the church in the community?**

There is evidence that both inviting and the wider profile of the church are important. Churches in good locations and with natural community ties enjoy more ‘walk-ins’ arising from these advantages; other churches are reliant almost entirely on invitation and contacts garnered through community activities. However, inviting seems to be important even where there is a strong profile; the presence of a pre-existing relationship with church attenders makes it more likely that unchurched people will go to church.

2. **What is the role of different structures in church life in attracting and retaining newcomers (eg. youth groups, Bible study groups, play groups)?**

All these structures can play a role. The key appears to be working out what that role should be, as part of an integrated pathway for newcomers into church life. The role may vary depending on whether the activity is a contact or entry point, is an introductory group to faith or to the church or is a group in which a person can mature in faith.

3. **What are the key processes which lead to newcomers being attracted and retained (eg. welcoming and follow-up processes)?**

Newcomers are attracted and retained through contacting, inviting, welcoming, follow-up, pastoral care, relationship-building, conversion and growth in faith. These can form steps along a pathway which newcomers travel from first contact with a church through to conversion and maturing in faith.

4. **What is the role of leadership, both clergy and laity, in creating an environment into which newcomers are attracted or brought by others?**

Leaders, both staff and lay people, play a critical role in ensuring the pathways into church life are well resourced and supported. Lay people running community activities, welcoming activities and study groups need to understand where their group or activity fits on the pathway and what they need to do to assist newcomers take the next step. Staff often have oversight of the pathway and the progression of individuals along it, thinking about the best next step and encouraging newcomers to meet the right people or group.

5. **Are there indicators of ‘congregational confidence’ and a commitment to vision in the life of the church, and how do these relate to newcomer levels?**

The ‘collective confidence’ of a congregation has to do with attenders’ satisfaction with the church and its leadership. Recent NCLS research provides the clearest indication yet that enhancing the collective confidence of the congregation can lead to increased newcomer levels. The relationship between newcomer levels and collective confidence has been found to be reciprocal, in that congregational confidence also grows with

increasing levels of newcomers. It can also operate in a negative way in that declining confidence can lead to declining newcomer levels.

6. Are there special ministries, activities or events which have attracted newcomers (eg. extensive visiting, rolling outreach events, a social service, help with immigration)?

Community activities or facilities which meet community needs and are readily accessible to those beyond church life, were often cited as providing entry points into church life for newcomers. There was a wide variety of such activities/facilities uncovered through the study, which may be an intentional part of the pathway into church life for newcomers. Some activities may be run mainly as profile-raising activities, but other activities are part of the churches' longer-term and deeper commitment to helping their local community and being part of local networks and partnerships.

7. Are there special connections to community which have facilitated a flow of newcomers (eg favourable demographics, a sector of the community to which the congregation has a ministry)?

There were some congregations in the study ministering to non-English speaking background people which had natural connections to local ethnic communities or had intentionally built such connections. The cultural awareness of these churches has been critical in making the churches more welcoming and comfortable for newcomers from these communities.

8. What is the impact of church establishment and renewal in the attraction of newcomers (eg church planting)?

The previous Church Planting study generally showed above-average levels of newcomers across different types of church plants.<sup>12</sup> The previous study was based on all church plants established in the Diocese between 2002-14. The current study further uncovered how particular church plants have engaged successfully with newcomers (eg. Grace City Church, Waterloo); this could form the basis for further analysis of church plants in the 2016 NCLS dataset. The current study also suggests that how a church goes about the building of new facilities, such as at Dapto Anglican, can enhance the church's ability to reach newcomers in the future.

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<sup>12</sup> Bellamy, J, Kemp, B, and Compton, B (2015) *Study into Effective Church Planting in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney*, Report prepared on behalf of the Archbishop's Strategic Research Group, Parramatta: Anglicare.

