

Spirituality, ageing, churches

Regenerating Places of Faith Conference 2019



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Outline

Background

- The ageing population
- Ageing as a problem?

The returnees project

- Quantitative (NCLS – data)
- Qualitative (UniSA – interviews)

So what?

Into the future...



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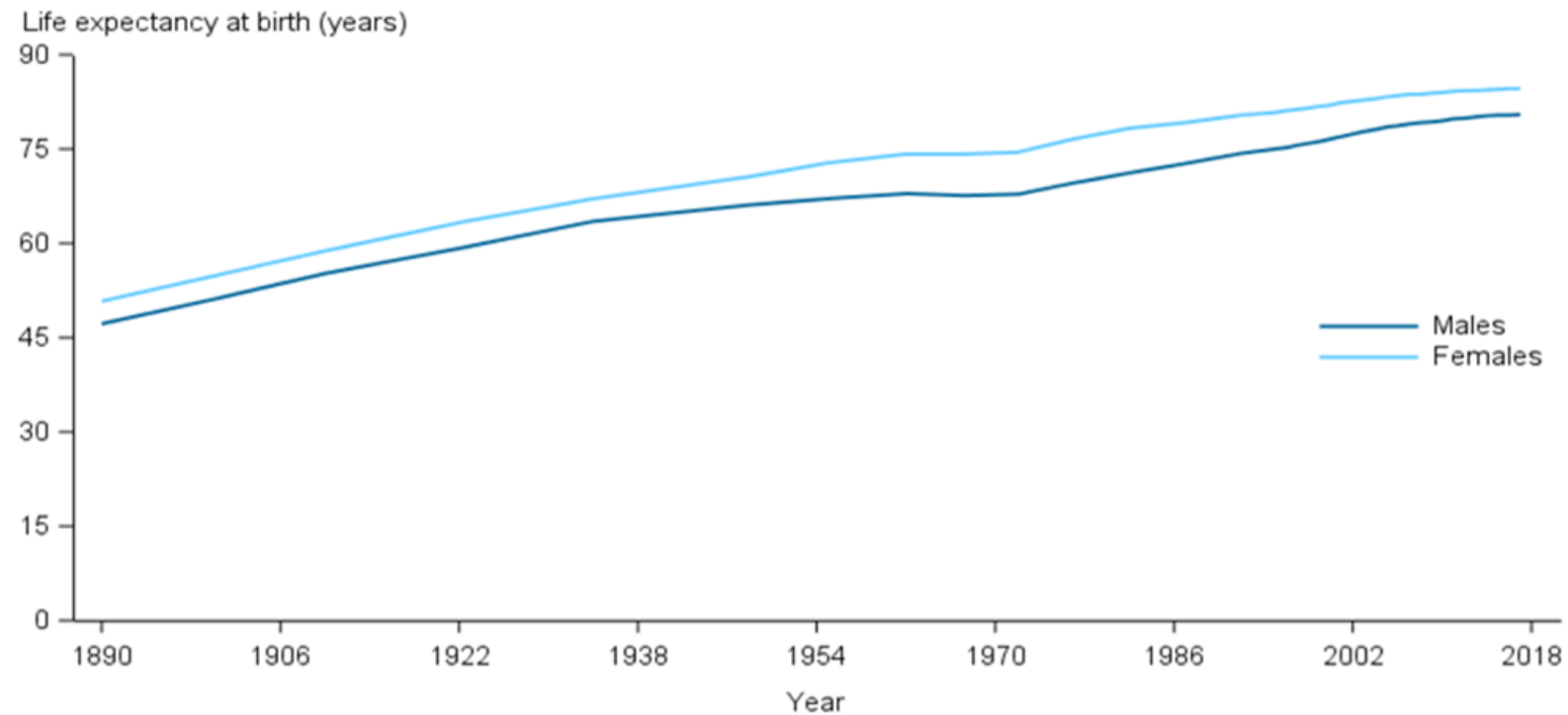
Background



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Australians are living longer...

Figure 6.1: Life expectancy (years) at birth by sex, 1881-1890 to 2015-2017



Sources: ABS 2014a; ABS 2014b; ABS 2015; ABS 2016; ABS 2017; ABS 2018a; (Table S6.1).

AIHW.....)



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Life expectancy changes

Table 6.1: Life expectancy (expected age at death in years) at different ages by sex, 1881–1890, 1960–1962 and 2015–2017

Age (years)	Males 1881–1890	Males 1960–1962	Males 2015–2017	Females 1881–1890	Females 1960–1962	Females 2015–2017
0 (birth)	47.2	67.9	80.5	50.8	74.2	84.6
1	54.3	69.5	80.8	57.4	75.5	84.9
15	59.5	70.1	80.9	62.5	76.0	85.0
25	62.1	70.8	81.2	64.7	76.3	85.1
45	68.0	72.4	82.2	70.6	77.4	85.7
65	76.1	77.5	84.7	77.3	80.7	87.3
85	88.9	89.1	91.3	88.9	89.8	92.3
95	97.2	97.3	98.1	97.3	97.6	98.3

Survive to 1 –
extra 25/30
years now

Survive to 45 –
extra 25/30
years now

Not much
change in 150
years ...If you
made it this far

Sources: ABS 2014a; ABS 2018a.

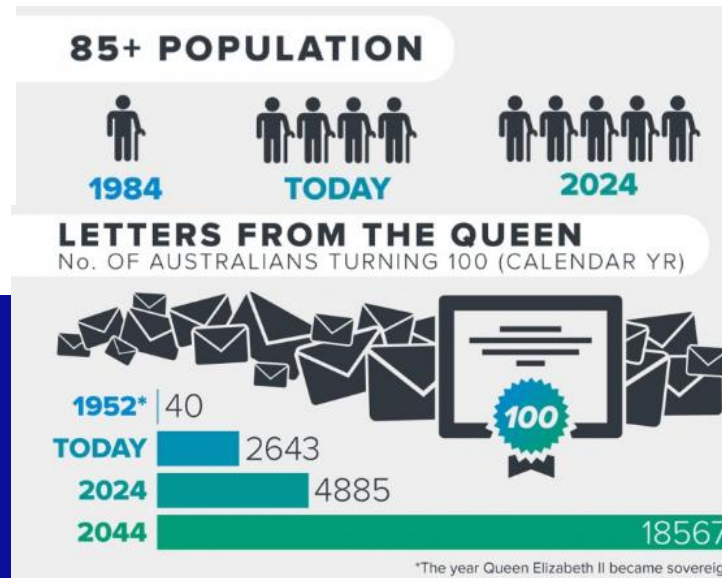


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www.aihw.gov.au/reports/life-expectancy-death/deaths-in-australia/contents/life-expectancy

In summary

- Reduced child mortality (19th > Mid 20th Century)
- Extended ageing (mid 20th Century to now)
- = More people living to be old
- More people living to be old old eg centegenarians



MORE third and fourth age people

First Act	Formation, childhood, adolescence, dependency, growing to adulthood (age 1-25)	
Second Act	Development, independence, career planning & progression, partnering, bringing up family, saving for later	
Third Act	Transformation, second chance, new career after retirement. Time, space, opportunity for growth & development	← Ages 60-79
Fourth Act	Paring down, old age, facing increasing frailty, loss of acuity of senses, health or mind and facing the inevitable end of life	← Ages 80+ OR last 5-10 yrs of life

My thanks to Susanne Cook-Greuter, Liz Norris & Marie Lord for suggested wording on the above. Dr. Edward Kelly.

http://www.thethirdact.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/WHAT-IS-THE-THIRD-ACT_.pdf



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However...



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Challenges of an ageing population

Rebecca de Boer, Social Policy Section

Long-term calls for structural reform of aged care may need to be heeded as the population ages.

Population projections for Australia suggest that there will be four million people aged 65 and over in the next ten years. Support and care for these people is currently either provided through the residential aged care sector or by community based services.

The Productivity Commission (PC) has commenced an inquiry to investigate the options for reforming the aged care system to meet the challenges facing the coming decades.

https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BriefingBook43p/ageingpopulation



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AGEING POPULATION WILL NEED MORE MEDICAL SUPPORT



23 Apr 2018

Supporting our ageing population

Home > The Hon Dan Tehan MP > Supporting our ageing population

Wednesday 31 October 2018
Joint Media Release

The Hon Dan Tehan MP

Minister for Education

The Hon Ken Wyatt MP [ARCHIVED]

Minister for Indigenous Health
Minister for Aged Care

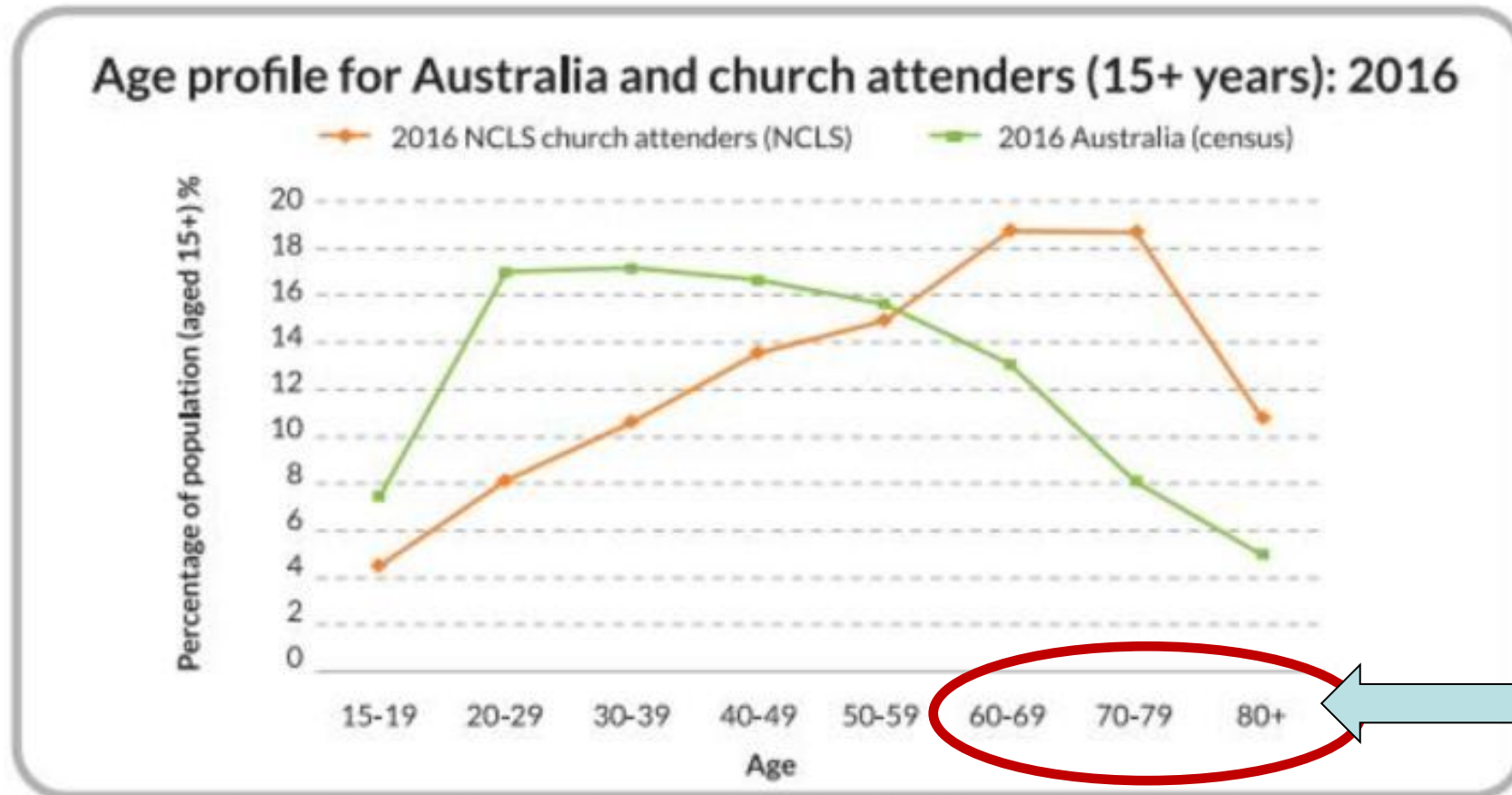
the challenges of an ageing population
Centre of Excellence funded

[Supporting our ageing population](#)



<https://ama.com.au/media/ageing-population-will-need-more-medical-support>

The ageing church problem? (NCLS & ABS)



Third and Fourth ages

Sources: 2016 NCLS Attender Survey (n= 186,117). 2016 Census of Population & Housing, Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Our (pilot) study



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The impetus...

My friend A – who after 50 years of non-engagement in churches has become a regular and vital part of my little church's community...

Chatting to people around churches – there are other Anitas...

NCLS contact (should have done this sooner)

- “1. Around 6% of all people in church in Australia in any given week are newcomers to church life.
2. Around 8% of *that* group are over 70 years of age.
3. Given at least 1.5 million people attend church in a given week, that's a lot of people.” (email communication 29/11/18)



The Returnees Project

Partnership – University of South Australia (UniSA) and National Church Life Survey (NCLS)

- UniSA – Qualitative (cobbled together Professional devt funds)
- NCLS – Quantitative

Project reference group – Anglican, Uniting, Catholic representation (looking for other “aged churches” connections)

South Australia focus:

- Ageing profile - second highest median population age at 40 (national average = 37)
- Qualitative research team is based at UniSA
- Research unfunded (NCLS partic issue)

Qualitative

Purpose – *to explore the reasons and experiences given by older people for re-engaging with faith communities (Christian churches) after many years absence.*

- c25 Participants - mix of Christian denominations (Anglican, Uniting, Catholic to begin) metropolitan and rural, mixed sizes of churches (less than 50, 50-100, 100+)
- Recruiting via church networks (pew sheet notices & word of mouth)
- **Criteria**
 - beginning/returning to church less than 5 years ago;
 - regular engagement ie at least monthly since then,
 - non-attendance for 10+ years prior to this time
 - aged 60+.



Interview questions:

- Why they (older people) left (or did not engage with) churches when younger.
- Why they have returned (spiritual, community or ?? drivers)
- What keeps them engaged when they return
- What is different now (compared to when they left/did not engage)
- What could churches do to attract more people like them?



Quantitative (NCLS data)

Purpose – *to investigate the characteristics of older church-attending returnees and the characteristics of their congregations across denominations who took part in the 2016 National Church Life Survey.*

1. How do **older returnees** differ from **other older churchgoers** in terms of **demographics** (eg marital status, education, ethnicity?).
2. **Other differing qualities** between older returnees and older church-goers (current church involvement, faith journey, attitudes to worship, leadership, involvement in non-church groups?).
3. Do certain **denominations** have more **success** in attracting older returnees?
4. Are there **other features** of churches more successful in attracting older returnees (urban? size? highly community-involved?).
5. Do **older returnees** differ from **younger returnees** across a range of characteristics?

Status...



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National Church Life Survey data

National Church Life Survey – an opportunity for an quantitative study of older returnees.

- 240,000 church attenders took part
- More than 3,100 local churches
- Around 20 denominations (Catholic, mainstream Protestant, evangelical/other Protestant, Pentecostal).



What is an 'older returnee'?

Older = church attenders aged over 60 years

Returnee = a person who indicated they had returned to church life in last ten years after not attending church for several years.



First results: older vs younger returnees

RQ1: Do older returnees differ from younger returnees across a range of characteristics?

- Older Returnees = Aged over 60 and have returned to church life in last 10 years.
- Younger Returnees = Aged 50 and under and have returned to church in last 10 years.

	Older	Younger
Female	✓	
Separated, divorced, or widowed	✓	
Children at church		✓
Growing in faith	✓	✓
Practice private devotions	✓	

First results: older vs younger returnees

	Older	Younger
Have a role or want to be more involved		✓
Sense of belonging	✓	✓
Involved in social groups	✓	✓
Involved in small faith/fellowship groups		✓
<i>Re worship:</i> Positive about experiencing inspiration, growth in understanding, challenged to action, preaching		✓
<i>Re leadership and vision:</i> view as innovative, committed to the vision of the church; confident about the church		✓
Priority is promoting belonging, including new people.	✓	

Yes – Older (60+) returnees do differ from young returnees

Qualitative

- Quantitative data informed the choice of age 60+
- RA employed – Rev Margaret Holt – great skills and networks
- Response from clergy and other key people has been very positive (recognise a need for this project & able to respond to the findings)

Qualitative data to date:

- 5 interviews; all female; Anglicans and Catholic (more men?)
- 4 returned to the same church tradition of their childhood...
- All attended as children with parents or grandparents, left the church as young adults
- Most had 'issues' with the church as young people eg women's role in church, *but* left more because they moved away from home, married, started working and **they just stopped going**
- Some had their children baptised
- 3 returned to church after death of spouse or significant person...
- Reasons for returning and remaining - spiritual comfort, social and community engagement, desire for the Eucharist

So what....



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Third and fourth ages/acts of ageing

First Act	Formation, childhood, adolescence, dependency, growing to adulthood (age 1-25)	
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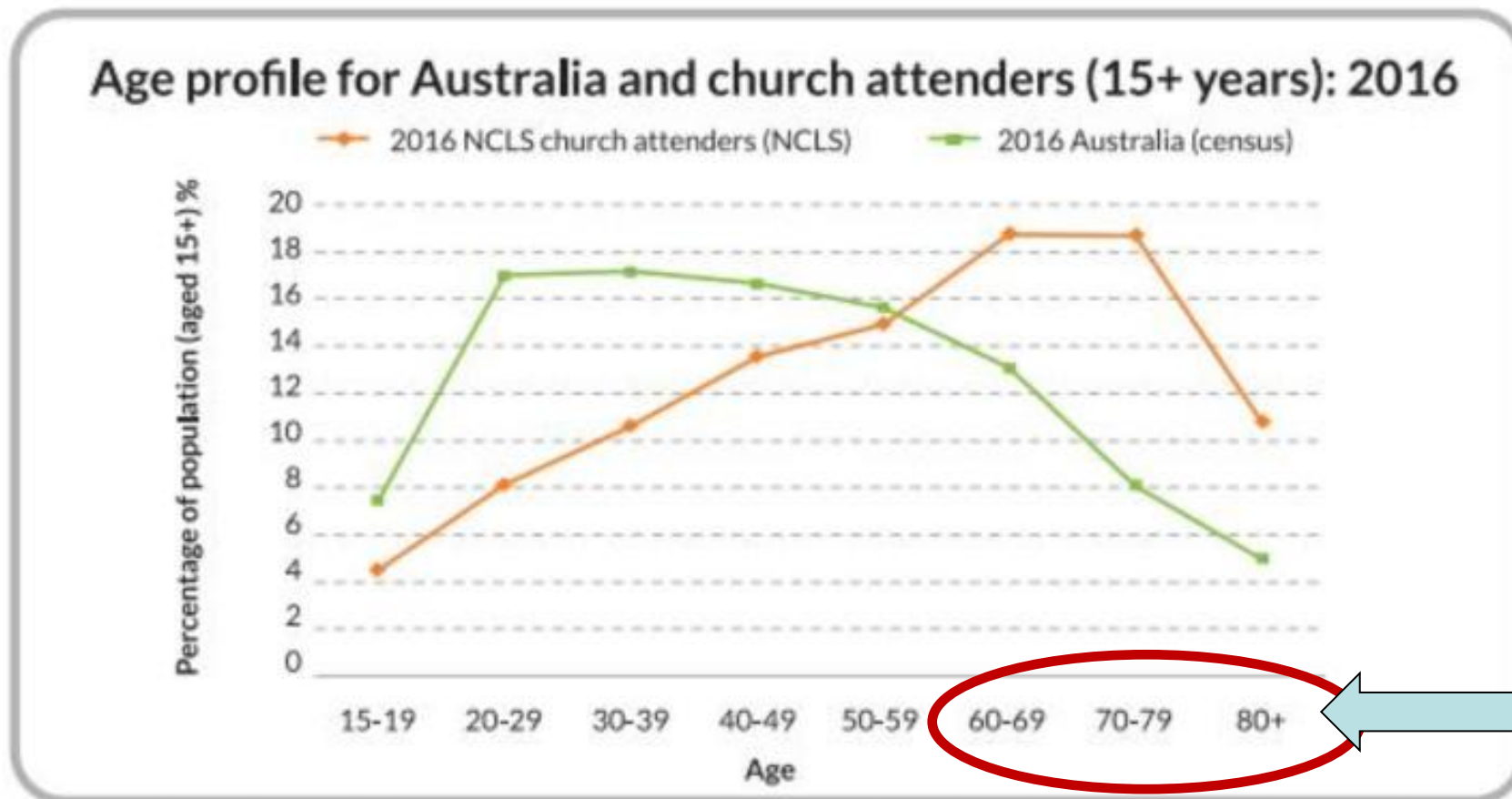
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The ageing church problem opportunity? (NCLS & ABS)



Third and Fourth ages

Sources: 2016 NCLS Attender Survey (n= 186,117). 2016 Census of Population & Housing, Australian Bureau of Statistics.

An aged church...continuers AND returnees

Returnees unnoticed to now

But, still enough of them to show in NCLS data

The BIG question?

What might happen if we actively “pursued”, responded, “targeted” these third agers...?

UK Anglican responses...

Ageing as a time of spiritual renewal, growth & progression

Churches as resource in combating the “loneliness crisis”

Anna Chaplaincy

Offering spiritual care in later life

Let's help you find out about the Anna Chaplaincy way of supporting older people emotionally and spiritually.

We have practical knowledge of developing Anna Chaplaincy in towns and villages across the UK.

Whether you're an individual called to this ministry, or a church leader wanting to develop it in your community, we can help you.

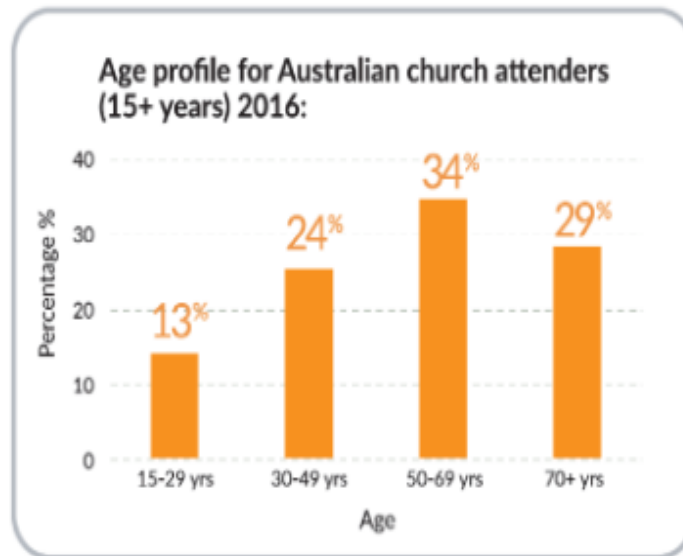
Anna Chaplains are named after the widow, Anna, who appears with Simeon in Luke's gospel; both are good role models of faithful older people. Anna Chaplains are there for people of strong, little or no faith at all.

Our vision is to see an Anna Chaplain in every small - to medium-sized town and village in the country, and for the Anna Chaplain name to become synonymous with spiritual care for older people.



Asking different questions...

Are some churches – a special space for older people?



Age profile of Australian church attenders.
Source: 2016 NCLS Attender Survey (n=189,751).
NCLS Research www.ncls.org.au

Where are the young people?

If you walk into some churches they look hipper than a TV soap: tweets, hipsters, espressos and play zones. These churches have retained their youth and young adults and thus, closely match the age of the general population.

Pentecostal churches have the highest proportion of young attenders, with 24% aged between 15 and 29 (while Australian churches on average have 13% of their attenders aged 15-29).

In fact, Pentecostal churches are the only denomination who match the broader Australian population age profile for younger people (24% of Australian population are aged 15-29**). **Comparing persons aged 15+. *See '[Age profile](#)' article for more community comparisons.

Baptist churches have 18% and 'other Protestant' churches (including Baptist, Churches of Christ, Christian Reformed, Salvation Army, CityLife Church) have 17% of their attenders aged 15-29 in 2016.

Where do people complain: “where are the young ones?”

Historical societies?

Classic car clubs?



Port

&...Churches...

Big
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<https://i0.wp.com/portadelaic>



St Albans Largs Bay SA

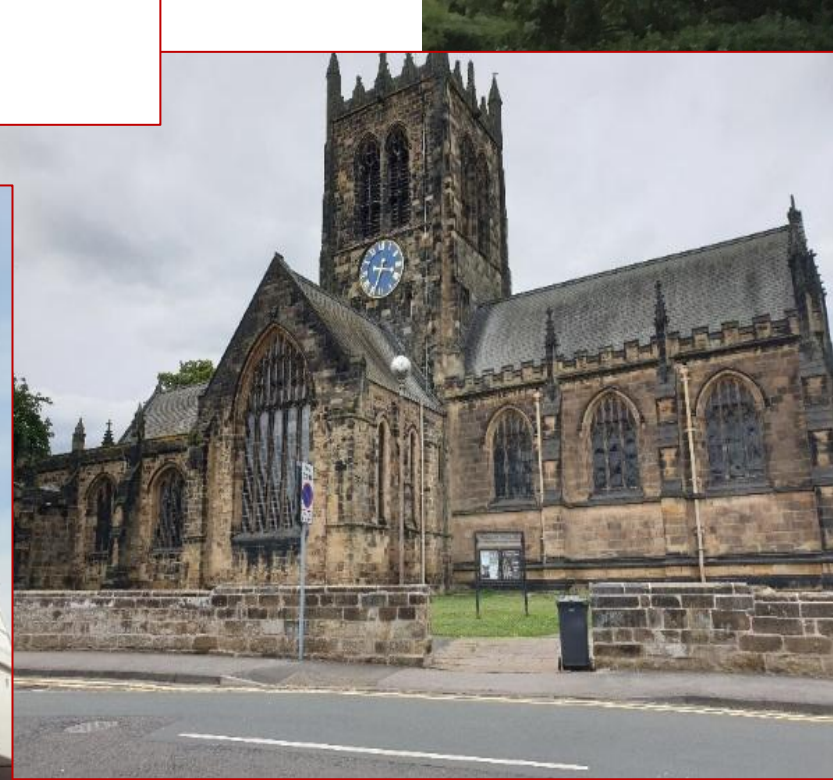


Photo – Janette Young – North Allerton



[_images/cache_10972060.jpg?t=1531850449](#)



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Churches may be a third age *special* resource

- *Thinking beyond* just “aged visiting”
- Recognising *we offer opportunities* for cross-generational engagement (collectively eg cross denominations?)
- Recognising ageing as a *unique* era of spiritual growth and learning
- Recognising that older people support older people very actively (*internal auditing/reflecting*)
- Recognising *ageism*? (Our own – the youth focus; and older people’s ageism to ageing)







Churches – a resource as we (all) age...?

Helen Reddy (1941) 77
Mick Jagger (1943) 75

Bill Gates (1955) 63

Julia Gillard (1961) 57
Barack Obama (1961)
Elon Musk (1971) 48

30 somethings –
not quite ruling our
lives yet!

Talking a different language				
Formative experiences	Maturists (pre-1945) Wartime rationing Rock'n'roll Nuclear families Defined gender roles - particularly for women 	Baby boomers (1945-1960) Cold War 'Swinging Sixties' Moon landings Youth culture Woodstock Family-orientated 	Generation X (1961-1980) Fall of Berlin Wall Reagan/Gorbachev/ Thatcherism Live Aid Early mobile technology Divorce rate rises 	Generation Y (1981-1995) 9/11 terrorists attacks Social media Invasion of Iraq Reality TV Google Earth 

<http://www.mas.org.uk/uploads/artlib/talking-about-my-generation-exploring-the-benefits-engagement-challenge.pdf>

Where and what next?



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Research is ongoing:

- Interviews – need more interviewees from other denominations; more men
- Data analysis – more funds – applying for grants plus some donations received

Future post pilot research

- Larger survey? Include question in NCLS next time?
- Active exploring and responding to findings – workshop in early 2020?

Acknowledgements

Funds:

- **Professor Ian Olver**
- **Catholic Archdiocese (Adelaide)**
- **Australian Research Theology Foundation Inc (ARTF Inc)**

- **The project reference group**
- **Our interviewees to date**
- **My returnee friends who inadvertently sparked this exploration!**

Partners:

- **National Church Life Survey (NCLS)
– A/Prof Ruth Powell & Sam Sterland**
- **My UniSA colleagues – Dr Caroline Adams and Rev Margaret Holt**

- **School of Health Sciences, University of South Australia**





The Zimmers "My Generation" - YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqfFrCUrEbY>



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