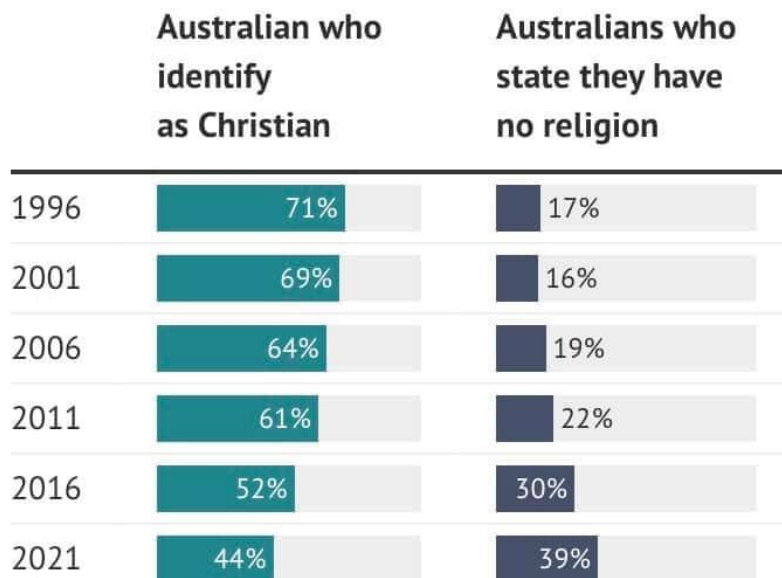


# Growing in number – it’s not about working harder, it’s all about relationships

By [Karen Mitchell Lambert](#) 27 June 2022

## Religious belief in Australia



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

This week the Australian Bureau of Statistics released the latest data from the census around religious belief in Australia. The numbers are very interesting. In 25 years the amount of people in Australia who would call themselves Christian has almost halved and those who state they have no religion has more than doubled.

There are 2 ways we can look at this. Either as incredibly depressing and we should just all go home and call it quits or an incredible opportunity.

The Uniting Church in NSW ACT has decided that it is time to grow. We think that the Good News is actually good news for everyone, not just those who go to Church and that our Uniting Church is a pretty good place to live that out.. Big claims.

Growing in number, meaning the number of people who are part of our Church, is often seen as quite a crass conversation. As a Church we have at times been timid about the idea of expecting more people to come to our church. We hope and pray they will, but we want to be supportive and respectful. We are more focused on living a Christian life and sharing the generous love of God with people, without telling them that it is the generous love of God they are experiencing here, not just me being a nice person to you.

Where does this even come from? Last century, (I cant believe I am using those words having been born last century) when as a world we moved from modernity with all it’s certainty, to

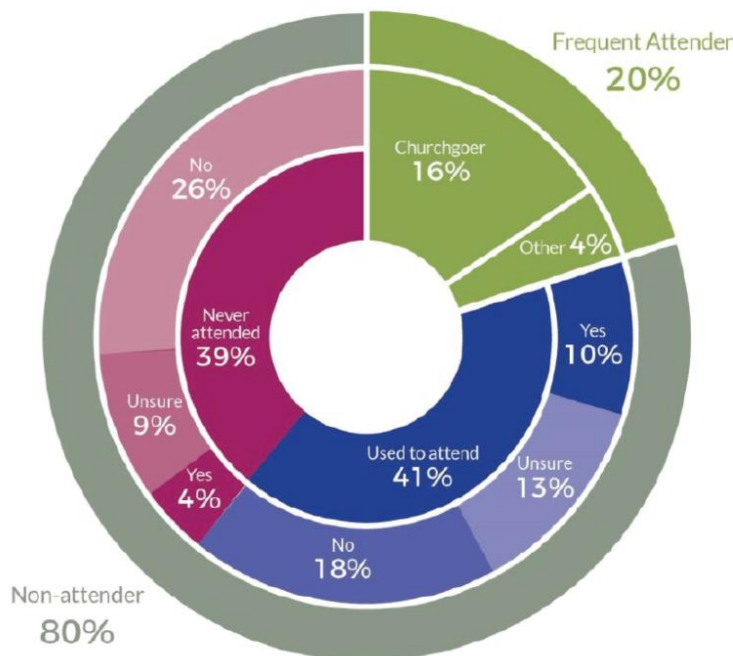
post modernity, faith was moved into the private sphere of life. Our songs became individualistic, faith was all about Jesus and me.

At the time, the community could be very aggressively anti Christianity, which meant sharing your faith with another was one of the scariest things. You could be yelled at or at least aggressively questioned. If you didn't have the answers, and the magic formula didn't work for you, the only response left was silence, and praying that they would notice there is something different about you because of the way that you loved others. I remember saying alot at the time "not all Christians are like that!"

It is hard at times to realise how much the world has changed since then, or to realise that it was a very long time ago now. The world is now a very different space. It might surprise you to know that a significant number of people think that the church is a very secret elite club that you need a special invitation to, and that mostly they have no idea about what happens inside those buildings or that it could be valuable to them. When they do turn up what happens does seem quite strange and doesn't make alot of sense, particularly if leaders don't take the time to explain what is going on during a service. As I talk with friends a significant number of people my age (around 40 – 50) who consider themselves Christian and love the Uniting Church, have left and are going nowhere. They long for a community to belong to, the experience of consumerist worship experiences leaves them disappointed and unfed.

## Would you go to church if invited?

Openness to accept an invitation to church  
by attendance history



Australians' openness to accept an invitation to church from close family or friend,  
by history of attending religious services.

Source: 2018 Australian Community Survey, by NCLS Research (n=1,200).

NCLS did some research around Australian Spirituality and discovered that Australians are more open to be invited to go to Church than we would have expected, even people who have never been to Church are open to the invitation.

So is it enough to just invite people to church and they will come? There could be a small chance that this could be the case, but people are more likely to come to a meal or a musical event. Smick flyers are great but nowhere near as powerful as an invitation from a friend. But the real question is what are we inviting them to come along to? If it is just another form of worship experience to consume we will not win that battle against other churches and often Netflix provides much more fulfilling opportunities.

The true gift that is the Church is not its buildings or its Sunday morning worship, it is the community. The gathered people of God, encouraging, inspiring, challenging each other in engaging and living a Jesus shaped life.

I don't know about you, but I think the Uniting Church is awesome and I think that the life Jesus calls us to live is well worth it. It gives my life meaning and purpose and gives me a reason to get out of bed and the community gives me a bunch of people to try and do that living with.

There are a lot of people in our world that don't know what a Jesus life is about, or how it can make a difference to them. Reality is; if you are not telling people that you do what you do because of the love of God and the calling of Jesus, they just think you are a really nice person.

If you are not inviting people to Church or anything associated with your Church, even if they are really curious, or really like the Uniting Church, they are unlikely to come. If what happens at your Church isn't something you would invite someone to, then why not have a chat to your congregation about what you would invite them to. There are so many creative options available to us now, that wasn't there before. If you don't have enough resources to do those creative things why not talk to other Uniting Churches to see if you can partner together to make new things happen.

Whether we like it or not, part of being a follower of Jesus is about taking others with us on that journey.. The last thing that Jesus said to his disciples, is go throughout the whole world and make disciples. As blessed recipients of this we too are held accountable to this call. I remember when I first became a Christian on nearly every notice board there were the Church missionaries ( I hate this word, but go with me) that the congregation prayed for and financially supported. The role of a good missionary was to find ways to share the gospel in a culturally appropriate way. Maybe it is time we got serious about sponsoring Australian missionaries for the Uniting Church!

I believe we can grow in number and that the Uniting Church has something uniquely special to offer the world and our communities, maybe it is time to take that light out from under the bushel and share it with others.

Remember you can keep in touch with PULSE by [signing up for our monthly newsletter](#), or for further information contact our team via [email](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), or [TikTok](#).

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