

---

# **ARE WE GROWING YET?**

## Non-denominational Churches of Christ in Australia – Summary of 2006 survey results

**Southern Pacific Christian Research**

*in association with*

**Klesis Institute**

### Contents

A.	What's New in the Latest Survey?	2
B.	The Big Picture: Churches, Members and Attendees Australia-wide	2
C.	State by State Round-up	4
D.	About the Surveys	6

August 2007

# What's new in the Latest Survey?

## The 2006 Survey Results are in!

- The Survey was conducted in early 2007 and provides us with information on members, attendance and baptisms of churches as of October 2006. Final parts of the data were received in June 2007.
- This summary report provides some of the highlights of the survey findings.

## The Survey Highlights

- This year's Survey saw three churches from the former Boston Movement\ICOC included.
- There was a slight growth in members and attendees since the last survey in 2001.
- Membership and average attendance Australia-wide peaked in 1988 and hit a low point in 1994. Since that time there has been some growth in numbers and attendance.
- Since 1984 the number of members has increased by 5.9% (although the number of attendees has dropped by 2.7%).

# The Big Picture: Churches, Members and Attendees Australia-wide

## The Basic Facts

- Seventy-five churches were included in the survey (Table 1).
- The total estimated number of members of these churches was 2,040.
- The average Sunday attendance was 2,433.
- The average size of churches was 27 members, with 32 attending Sunday assemblies.

## Are We Growing? - The Picture Over 22 Years

- Yes, there has been some growth.
- The number of churches has grown from 65 to 75 over the period (15.4%) (Table 2).
- The number of members has grown from 1,926 in 1984 to 2,040 in 2006 (5.9%).
- Sunday average attendance has decreased from 2,502 to 2,433 (-2.7%).
- However, the 3 new (former ICOC) congregations included in the survey this year added 267 members and 305 attendees.

## Trends – Glass Half Full or Half Empty?

- A quick look at Figure 1 tells the story. The number of members has not changed significantly over the last 22 years.
- The peak in the number of members and number of attendees occurred in 1988 (18 years ago). The peak for the number of churches occurred in 1992-94.
- The prediction of some analysts in the 1980's that the churches would disappear in the first decades of the new century was wrong.
- However, the question for churches is: "what needs to happen for significant growth to take place in the next two decades?"

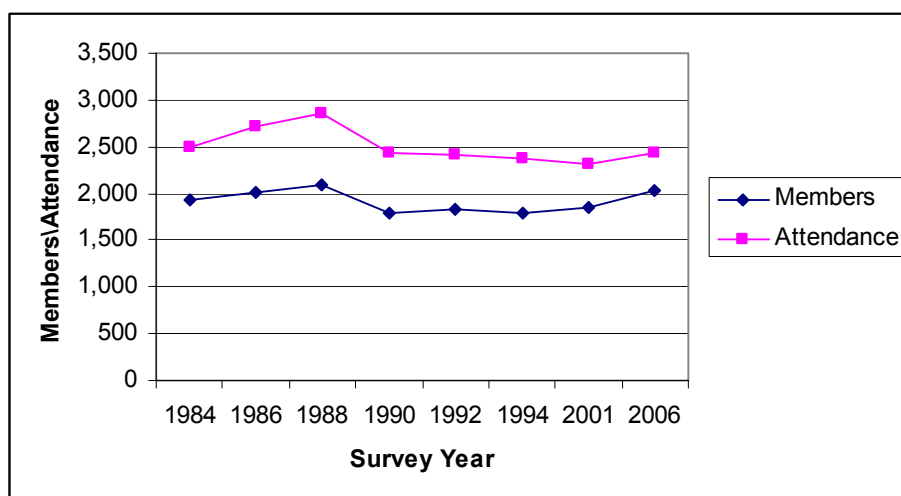
**Table 1. Churches of Christ in Australia 1984-2001**  
– Churches, Members and Attendees

	Year							
	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	2001	2006
<b>Churches</b>	65	72	74	76	80	80	78	75
<b>Members</b>	1,926	2,017	2,091	1,781	1,838	1,799	1,842	2,040
<b>Attendance</b>	2,502	2,719	2,862	2,439	2,419	2,373	2,308	2,433
<b>Av. Membership</b>	29.63	28.01	28.26	23.43	22.98	22.49	23.62	27.20
<b>Av. Attendance</b>	38.49	37.76	38.68	32.09	30.24	29.66	29.59	32.44

**Table 2. Churches of Christ in Australia 1984-2001**  
– Percentage Growth in Churches, Members and Attendees

	1984-1990		1990-2001		2001-2006		1984-2006	
	%	%/PA	%	%/PA	%	%/PA	%	%/PA
<b>Churches</b>	16.92	2.82	2.63	0.24	-3.85	-0.77	15.38	0.70
<b>Members</b>	-7.53	-1.25	3.43	0.31	10.75	2.15	5.92	0.27
<b>Attendance</b>	-2.52	-0.42	-5.37	-0.49	5.42	1.08	-2.76	-0.13
<b>Av. Membership</b>	-20.91	-3.49	0.81	0.07	15.18	3.04	-8.20	-0.37
<b>Av. Attendance</b>	-16.63	-2.77	-7.80	-0.71	9.63	1.93	-15.72	-0.71

**Figure 1. Churches of Christ in Australia 1984-2006 – Members and Attendees**



Source: Australian Church Surveys Database (2007)

# State by State Round-up

## Australian Capital Territory

- The number of churches has grown from 1 in 1984 to 2 in 2006 (Table 3).
- The number of members has grown from 25 to 90 and average weekly attendance from 35 to 93 (Tables 4 and 5).

## New South Wales

- The number of churches has grown from 17 to 20, with the peak number of churches reached in 1986, 1988 and 1994.
- The number of members has grown from 574 to 707 and average weekly attendance from 755 to 840.
- However, members reached a peak of 761 in 1988, along with an attendance of 1,100. Members and attendees dropped sharply after that with the movement of our largest congregation into the Boston Movement\ICOC.
- The participation of two relatively large congregations from the old Boston Movement\ICOC has boosted the number of members and average attendance.

## Northern Territory

- The Northern Territory, including the cities of Darwin and Alice Springs has the smallest membership and attendance.

## Queensland

- Churches in Queensland increased from 18 to 24.
- Members increased from 425 to 552 and attendees from 667 to 693.
- Members reached a peak in 1992, dropping slightly in 1994 and then increasing again in 2001 and 2006. Attendees peaked in 1988 then dropped in the following years.

**Table 3: Churches of Christ in Australia 1984-2006: Number of Churches by State**

State	Year							
	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	2001	2006
ACT	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
NSW	17	22	22	19	21	22	20	20
NT	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	2
Queensland	18	17	19	22	22	23	24	24
SA	4	5	7	7	7	6	5	5
Tasmania	4	5	5	7	7	7	11	8
Victoria	11	11	12	12	12	10	11	7
WA	10	11	8	8	8	9	6	7
Total Australia	65	72	74	76	80	80	78	75

Source: Australian Church Surveys Database (2007)

## South Australia

- Churches in South Australia increased from 4 to 5, with a peak of 7 churches in the period 1988 to 1992.
- Members dropped from 155 in 1984 to 94 in 2006 and attendees from 173 to 98.

## Tasmania

- Churches in Tasmania increased from 4 to 8 with a peak of 11 in 2001
- Members increased from 101 to 123 and attendees from 127 to 170.
- Members and attendees have decreased over the last 5 years.

**Table 4: Churches of Christ in Australia 1984-2006 – Members by State**

State/Territory	Year							
	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	2001	2006
ACT	25	25	37	35	50	40	77	90
NSW	574	613	761	517	515	512	529	707
NT	0	0	0	0	9	6	0	4
Queensland	425	511	525	539	546	520	548	552
SA	155	151	128	116	139	137	113	94
Tasmania	101	124	133	122	108	120	139	123
Victoria	144	156	175	207	220	215	205	222
WA	502	437	332	245	251	249	231	248
Total Australia	1,926	2,017	2,091	1,781	1,838	1,799	1,842	2,040

Source: Australian Church Surveys Database (2007)

**Table 5: Churches of Christ in Australia 1984-2006 – Attendees by State**

State/Territory	Year							
	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	2001	2006
ACT	35	35	50	55	80	65	94	93
NSW	755	890	1,100	732	715	679	638	840
NT	0	0	0	0	18	6	0	7
Queensland	667	730	783	752	738	703	694	693
SA	173	211	184	148	177	165	130	98
Tasmania	127	146	160	159	125	173	212	170
Victoria	232	234	252	296	284	271	253	269
WA	513	473	333	297	282	311	287	263
Total Australia	2,502	2,719	2,862	2,439	2,419	2,373	2,308	2,433

Source: Australian Church Surveys Database (2007)

## Victoria

- Churches in Victoria decreased from 11 to 7.
- Members, however, increased from 144 to 222 and attendees from 232 to 269.

## **Western Australia**

- Churches in Western Australia decreased from 10 to 7.
- Members decreased from 502 to 248 and attendees from 513 to 263.

## **About the Surveys**

### **When did the Surveys start?**

- The first survey took place in 1984 and was conducted by Stephen Randall of the Canberra Church of Christ to support an application for a government land grant.

### **How many Surveys have there been?**

- This is the eighth survey covering a 22-year period (1984 – 2006).
- Previous surveys took place in 1984, 1986, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1994 and 2001.

### **Who conducts the Surveys?**

- Stephen Randall has for many years conducted the surveys.
- He has spent countless hours over the years contacting churches, distributing the surveys by post or email, following them up and collating the statistics ready for analysis.
- The latest survey was conducted by Alan Rowley from Klesis Institute in Melbourne. Klesis is a Melbourne-based organisation established, owned and operated by members of the non-denominational Churches of Christ.
- Klesis Institute provides biblically grounded Christian resources to assist individuals and churches respond to God's call in the modern context. Stephen Randall and Alan Rowley are members of the Klesis Advisory Board.

### **How are the results analysed and reported?**

- Through the years the survey results have been reported on by Stephen Randall and Peter Gray in publications such as *Happenings* and the *Christian Chronicle*.
- Analysis of the surveys over time has been undertaken by Peter Gray of Southern Pacific Christian Research and a series of research papers were produced in 2003.
- Survey results have been entered into a research database (*Australian Church Surveys Database*) to help us understand past growth trends and actions needed for future growth.

### **What questions are asked in the Survey?**

- Three simple questions are asked of churches: the number of members; their average Sunday attendance; and the number of baptisms over the previous 12 months.
- The questions are answered with reference to the month of October of the survey year.

## **What is the coverage of the Survey?**

- Churches of Christ have a history in Australia that goes back to 1848.
- Pioneers from Scotland and New Zealand established the first congregations in South Australia. They were part of the growing 'Restoration Movement' which thrived in Britain and the United States.
- The heirs to that movement are represented today by four main groups: the Australian Churches of Christ Conference; the independent Christian Churches\Churches of Christ; the International Churches of Christ (formerly Boston Movement); and the non-denominational Churches of Christ.

## **Who participates in the Survey?**

- The survey participants are drawn from the Directory of Non-denominational Churches of Christ. Mike Roberts from the Canberra Church of Christ has for several decades produced and updated this directory.
- Up until 1988 churches from the Boston Movement\ICOC background took part in the survey. After that time they declined to participate. However, in 2006, three congregations from the Boston Movement\ICOC background were included in the survey.
- From time to time a church may decline to participate in the Survey for doctrinal or other reasons. This year one church declined to participate as they felt that it infringed on their congregational autonomy.
- Altogether data relating to 75 congregations were included in the survey out of a possible total of 76 congregations.

## **A word of caution concerning statistics ... and a word of thanks**

- Just a word of caution concerning the interpretation of the statistics: they can show 'what happened' in terms of the growth or decline of the number of members and the average attendance.
- However, they don't tell us 'why' the numbers increased or decreased. This can only be ascertained through research into the history of the churches in a particular State.
- *A word of thanks is due to Stephen Randall and Mike Roberts of the Canberra Church of Christ. Their selfless service has made it possible to track the growth of non-denominational Churches of Christ in Australia over more than two decades.*

## **For more information, contact:**

- Peter Gray, 12 Morris Avenue, Thornleigh, NSW 2120
- Alan Rowley, 17 Hortense Street, Glen Iris, Victoria 3146;  
Email: rowleys77@bigpond.com
- Klesis Institute, PO Box 700, Glen Waverley, Victoria 3150;  
Email: info@klesisinstitute.com