A Review of the Environmental Context of the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania and some Implications for the Development of Ministry

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June 2014
# Table of Contents

**Executive Summary** 3

1. **Introduction** 5
   - The Comparative Roles of Theology and Sociological Description 5
   - Dimensions of the Uniting Church 5

2. **Demographic Change** 7
   - Changes in Religious Identity 7
   - Changes in Religious Practice 10
   - Changes through Immigration 12
   - The Impact of a Pluralistic Faith Environment 17

3. **Cultural Change** 19
   - Secularism or Individualism? 19
   - Reasons People Give For and Against Church Involvement 23
     - (a) Nurturing the subjective life of the individual 23
     - (b) Suspicion of traditions and institutional structures 28
     - (c) The nature of God 30

4. **Community Change** 32
   - Migration within Australia and Rural Decline 32
   - Changes in the Nature of Community Life: From Local to Global Communities 33
   - Professionalism in a Global Age 35

5. **Changes in Family Life** 36

6. **What Other Denominations are Doing** 38
   - Overseas Experts 38
   - Research Initiatives 38
   - Findings from Research into the Anglican Church in the United Kingdom (2014) 40
   - Research on Religion in the Cultural Context 43
   - Research Related to Education, Welfare and Health Organisations 43

7. **Inhibitors and Possibilities for the Uniting Church in the Present Environment** 45
   - Inhibitors of Growth in Church Vitality 45
   - Possibilities for Growth in Church Vitality 46

References 50
Executive Summary

This paper provides sociological description of the context in which the Uniting Church of Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, needs to make decisions about its future. It describes the social and cultural changes that are occurring and looks at the consequences for the Uniting Church. While its focus is on the congregational dimensions of the life of the Uniting Church, it also makes reference to the educational, welfare and health organisations associated with the Uniting Church.

In the 1947 Census, 22 per cent of the Australian population identified with the predecessors of the Uniting Church: the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches. Almost 90 per cent of the Australian population identified with a Christian denomination, mostly with the mainstream denominations. In the 2011 Census, the numbers of Australians identifying with Christian denominations has fallen to just over 60 per cent, and the proportion identifying with the Uniting and Presbyterian denominations is just 7.8 per cent. Estimates of actual numbers of Australian attending churches monthly or more suggest that there were substantial falls in attendances in most denominations between 1991 and 2009.

A major factor in the change has been immigration which has brought great religious plurality both among Christian denominations and in a substantial increase in people identifying with other religions including Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism. This means that the Uniting Church now operates within a much more religiously pluralistic environment. The second major factor in change has been cultural, particularly in the development of the sense that one is not born into a religion, but that religious involvement is an individual choice. As a result of this change in culture, it is estimated that the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania has lost the identification of around 65,000 people between 2001 and 2011.

For the Boomer and subsequent generations, the major personal evaluation of the costs and benefits of involvement in church practices revolves around questions of whether and what involvement contributes to the nurture and expression of one's personal subjectivity and that of one's family members. In general, churches which have focussed on maintaining the traditions of faith and on the service of humanity across the Western world have not been seen as contributing well to the nurture and expressions of personal subjectivity and have experienced a decline in the numbers of people involved in them. In addition, Australians have been suspicious of religious traditions and institutions. Denominations and local churches which have fostered the idea of a God who intervenes in the affairs of daily life have maintained much higher levels of involvement than those which have fostered the idea of a God who created the universe and has given us the rules and principles for living.

There has been some migration within Australia, both in and out of Victoria and Tasmania, but this has not had a big impact on the churches. There has been a decline in the population of many smaller towns and rural areas. This has had a significant impact on the capacity of small rural churches to survive in traditional forms.

With the increase in mobility and in electronic forms of communication, the focus of community, particularly in the cities, has moved from the local area to the wider region, for shopping, education, sport and many other aspects of life. Rather than community being developed in local areas, the mosaic of community experience is based largely on common interests (sometimes globally) and on common experiences. Younger people who have looked for a church have increasingly been attracted to large regional churches which offer high levels of professionalism in their services and a wide range of activities to cater for many interests. The changed nature of community means that
trust in organisations and their personnel is built not on a personal knowledge of the individuals involved or of their reputation, but is often based on trust in the systems which appoint, train and accredit. This has necessitated the development of systems of professionalism and accountability in many areas of life, including among the clergy.

Family life has also become a lot more diverse in its forms since the 1950s and 1960s. Of particular impact for the churches is that roles within the family have changed so that most married women are now involved in the paid work-force. While married women who were not in the work-force formed the core of many predecessors of the Uniting Church in the 1950s, there are now few married women looking for their social connections in the local community or available for voluntary work through the churches or other organisations.

The involvement of both partners in the workforce and the many and diverse ways people are involved in the community has increased the time pressure on Sundays. Many people see Sunday as a family day, but also a day in which it is necessary to do the week's shopping, attending sporting events, catch up with household chores and visit friends and relatives. Many people also have to work on Sundays. Nearly one-third of Australians say that that they do not attend a church because of time pressures of one kind or another.

In the attempt to deal with the cultural changes in the last few decades, many churches have turned to overseas experts who are seen to have some experience in giving vitality to churches. This appears to have been most successful when there has been long-term engagement between the expert, the Australian situation and the Australian denomination, rather than a short visit.

Many other churches have been engaged in some form of research, the most widespread of which has been the National Church Life Survey. This survey has provided feedback at national and denominational levels of strengths and weaknesses in churches and denominations. It has pointed to the importance of effective leadership, a clear sense of vision, engagement with younger people and the empowerment of lay people.

The Anglican Church in the United Kingdom has recently undertaken a large-scale review of its church life. Again, it has found that leadership that motivated, that created vision and which was innovative was a major factor in churches growing in vitality. It was also important for churches to have an intentional and clear sense of mission and purpose, a willingness to adapt, involvement of lay people, active engagement of children, teenagers, and people in the wider community, welcoming of visitors and commitment to nurturing new and existing Christians. It found fresh expressions were contributing some vitality to the church and that attendance in the large churches and cathedrals was growing mostly through occasional attenders and visitors who came to weekday services. It identified inhibiting factors to growth as a failure to retain younger generations, the amalgamation of congregations, burdensome buildings, inappropriate leadership and the lack of a willingness to change.

Among the major inhibitors of growth in the Uniting Church are a focus on the traditions and structures of the Church rather than on the spiritual nurture and wellbeing of people, the dependence on governance through councils, and the burden of inappropriate buildings. The major possibility for renewed vitality is through a focus of the whole church on the spiritual nurture and wellbeing of people, and through developing appropriate forms and patterns of leadership, both employed and voluntary, and through developing a range of 'light-weight' structures through which the wider population might be engaged in their search for meaning and in their recognition of the Mystery in human life and the universe.
1. Introduction

The Comparative Roles of Theology and Sociological Description

The purpose of this paper is to examine the environmental context of the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, from a sociological perspective and to look at how the Uniting Church currently relates to its social and cultural context. In so doing, some comparisons will be made with other religious groups and how they are responding to the changing context.

It should be noted that this paper provides a quick overview of major themes rather than an indepth study. It is designed to highlight some of the major changes in the context of the Uniting Church. It was limited by a time-frame of about a month that was given from the time of it being commissioned and by the fact that it draws almost entirely on secondary research. As a brief overview, much more could be said about every topic than is said here, and there are many nuances of change and situation which remain unexamined.

Sociological description should not determine the way forward. The vision for the Uniting Church should be rooted in its theology, in its understanding of its faith. Ultimately, the future of the Uniting Church should be its response in obedience to God. Whether that pathway is popular or not, the Church is called to be faithful.

On the other hand, that vision must be worked out in relation to the realities of the Church’s contemporary situation. It must take into account the sociological realities which help or hinder particular ways of achieving its vision. A vision that is developed without due attention to the situation is likely to remain irrelevant and unfulfilled. Hence, the suggestions made in this paper should be evaluated not only in terms of the social and cultural context of the church, and how that is changing, as well as in relation to the theological bases of the Uniting Church.

Dimensions of the Uniting Church

There are three broad sectors of the Uniting Church each with its own focus of activity:
- local churches, whose focus is worship;
- schools, whose focus is education; and
- welfare and health organisations, whose focus is care for those with special physical, psychological and material needs.

The life and mission of the church is lived out in all three sectors, and there is some overlap of activity in all three sectors. Churches are also engaged in education and care. Some worship occurs in schools, and they are involved in care. Welfare and health organisations are also involved in some worship and education. The churches initiated the schools, welfare and health organisations. However, the schools and welfare and health organisations are now funded very largely by the fees of those who use their services and government funding, and, to varying degrees, operate independently from the churches. They are staffed by professionals who mostly do not have a personal commitment to the Uniting Church although most are affirming of the values and ethos of the Uniting Church. They serve the wider community and not only those who identify with the Uniting Church. The Synod, Presbyteries and local churches have never included these organisations fully in their decision-making structures.

The Strategic Review has been initiated by the Synod, which is the gathering of the churches, and primarily concerns the future of the Church (and expressions of Mission, which are also embodied
in schools, health and welfare organisations). Thus, it is appropriate that some consideration of the schools and welfare and health organisations occur within this document.

Changes relevant to the Uniting Church have been summarised under several headings: demographic, cultural, community and family change. Another section summarises some of the ways that other denominations have addressed the changing context and some of the findings of other research.
2. Demographic Change

Changes in Religious Identity

In the 1947 Census, following World War II, 22.2 per cent of the Australian population identified with the predecessors to the Uniting Church: the Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregational churches. The only larger religious group were the Anglicans (39% of the population). Just a little smaller were the Catholics (20.9%). Together, 82 per cent of the Australian population identified with these mainstream denominations.

At that time, about 11 per cent of the population did not respond to the question on the Census about religion. Of the remaining 7 per cent of the population, most were Christians from the various smaller Protestant denominations, such as the Baptists, Churches of Christ, Lutherans, Salvation Army and Seventh-day Adventists. The largest group of people who belonged to another religion were Jews, who made up 0.4 per cent of the population.

In 2011, the Census presents a very different picture. Instead of making up almost 90 per cent of the population, those identifying with a Christian denomination made up just over 60 per cent of the population. The Anglicans have decreased in numbers from 39 to 17 per cent of the population and the Uniting Church was just 5 per cent with Presbyterians an additional 2.8 per cent. The Catholics, on the other hand, have become the largest Christian denomination with 25 per cent of the population identifying with them (Hughes, Fraser and Reid, 2012).

Recent changes in Victoria and Tasmania are illustrated in Tables 1a and 1b. They show the Uniting Church as declining faster than most other denominations. The Churches of Christ have declined more quickly in those tables, but the data is misleading. Many people in the Churches of Christ were instructed to write 'Christian' as their religion in the Census. This contributed to a substantial rise in the proportion of the population who were described in the Census as 'Christian not further defined'. There are also many people who attend churches associated with the Churches of Christ which describe themselves as community churches. Some of the attenders are not aware of the denominational affiliation of these community churches.
## Table 1a. Changes in Religious Identification among Australians Living in Victoria 2001-2011.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
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<td>15.3</td>
<td>661,450</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>647,781</td>
</tr>
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<td>Baptist</td>
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<td>1.4</td>
<td>68,225</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>76,930</td>
</tr>
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<td>Brethren</td>
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<td>0.1</td>
<td>4,914</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>4,567</td>
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<td>1,344,890</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>1,418,527</td>
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<td>15,097</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>13,675</td>
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<td>Eastern Orthodox</td>
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<td>223,483</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>230,649</td>
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<td>Jehovah’s Witnesses</td>
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<td>14,031</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>15,087</td>
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<td>Latter-day Saints</td>
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<td>9,920</td>
<td>0.2</td>
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<td>Lutheran</td>
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<td>Presbyterian &amp; Reformed</td>
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<td>3.4</td>
<td>140,099</td>
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<td>Salvation Army</td>
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<td>Seventh-day Adventist</td>
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<td>8,929</td>
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<td>Uniting Church</td>
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<td>267,378</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>245,724</td>
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<td>Other Christian</td>
<td>69,541</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>86,166</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>119,419</td>
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<td>Total Christian</td>
<td>2,974,836</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>2,951,469</td>
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<td>3,046,990</td>
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<td>Aboriginal</td>
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<td>238</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>443</td>
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<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>111,498</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>132,422</td>
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<td>168,435</td>
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<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>24,328</td>
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<td>42,251</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>83,008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>92,742</td>
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<td>109,281</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>152,709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judaism</td>
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<td>0.8</td>
<td>40,530</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>44,697</td>
</tr>
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<td>Other religious groups</td>
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<td>26,322</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>49,447</td>
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<td>Total Other religion</td>
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<td>351,044</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>498,739</td>
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<td>No religion</td>
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<td>17.3</td>
<td>1,000,007</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>1,275,456</td>
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<td>Other religious affiliation</td>
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<td>46,026</td>
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<td>Not stated</td>
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<td>9.9</td>
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<td>439,865</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>4,612,101</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>4,880,905</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>5,307,076</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1b. Changes in Religious Identification among Australians Living in Tasmania 2001-2011.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Group / Denomination</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>% change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>147,413</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>136,613</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>8,984</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>8,498</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brethren</td>
<td>2,162</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2,177</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>87,691</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>86,892</td>
<td>18.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Churches of Christ</td>
<td>1,478</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1,659</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Orthodox</td>
<td>2,158</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2,377</td>
<td>0.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jehovah's Witnesses</td>
<td>1,950</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>2,180</td>
<td>0.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latter-day Saints</td>
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<td>0.4</td>
<td>1,587</td>
<td>0.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lutheran</td>
<td>2,026</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>2,191</td>
<td>0.5</td>
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<td>Oriental Christians</td>
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<td>71</td>
<td>0.0</td>
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<td>Pentecostal</td>
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<td>4,737</td>
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<td>Presbyterian &amp; Reformed</td>
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<td>Salvation Army</td>
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<td>0.5</td>
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<td>Seventh-day Adventist</td>
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<td>1,041</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uniting Church</td>
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<td>26,846</td>
<td>5.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Christian</td>
<td>9,011</td>
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<td>10,064</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Total Christian</strong></td>
<td><strong>315,515</strong></td>
<td><strong>69.4</strong></td>
<td><strong>301,066</strong></td>
<td><strong>64.2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Aboriginal</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>2,017</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>2,565</td>
<td>0.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>801</td>
<td>0.2</td>
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<td>Islam</td>
<td>865</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1,051</td>
<td>0.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>0.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other religious groups</td>
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<td>0.3</td>
<td>1,694</td>
<td>0.4</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Other religion</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,940</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>6,377</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.4</strong></td>
</tr>
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<td>No religion</td>
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<td>Other religious affiliation</td>
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<td>0.7</td>
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<td>Not stated</td>
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<td>10.4</td>
<td>56,764</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total population</strong></td>
<td><strong>454,844</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>469,001</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Two major changes have occurred:
1. The range of religious groups has grown bringing greater diversity to Christians and to religion in general, which has occurred primarily through immigration;
2. The 'no religion' group has grown from 0.4 per cent of the population to 22.3 per cent, which has occurred primarily through changes in the Australian culture. This will be discussed in section 3.
Changes in Religious Practice

Changes in rates of church attendance are a little harder to measure than changes in religious identity. Most churches do not have reliable data about attendance. Often the data is a result of estimations of one person in the congregation reported to the headquarters, and this data is not highly reliable. In particular, it is very hard for such people to measure the numbers of people who come frequently but who are not there every week.

In general, we use 'attendance at least once a month' as the best indicator of frequent attendance. Most people do not get there every week, even if they intend to do so. Sickness, as well as special events and holidays, mean that 'weekly attendance' usually becomes 'three times a month' or so, over the period of a year.

The best indicators of monthly attendance are national surveys. However, most surveys are not sufficiently large to get reliable estimates of attendance of small denominations. Also, there is a tendency for people to indicate in such surveys how frequently they intend to attend, rather than the rate of actual attendance. Further, attendances are estimated by examining the percentage who attend a church assuming it is the denomination with which they identify. However, other evidence for surveys undertaken among young people suggest that many attend churches of other denominations than the denomination with which they identify. This is particularly true of people who attend Pentecostal churches and mega-churches associated with other denominations.

Table 2. Estimates of Church Attendance by Australians in 1991 and 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Estimated numbers attending monthly or more in 1991</th>
<th>Estimated numbers attending monthly or more in 2009</th>
<th>Change in numbers of attenders</th>
<th>Percentage change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>318,407</td>
<td>214,378</td>
<td>-104,029</td>
<td>-33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>131,593</td>
<td>170,178</td>
<td>38,585</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>2,118,688*</td>
<td>1,003,443</td>
<td>-1,115,245</td>
<td>-53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churches of Christ</td>
<td>55,475</td>
<td>18,932</td>
<td>-36,543</td>
<td>-66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutheran</td>
<td>76,761</td>
<td>75,756</td>
<td>-1,005</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal</td>
<td>177,908</td>
<td>148,914</td>
<td>-28,994</td>
<td>-16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian &amp; Reformed</td>
<td>64,123</td>
<td>105,655</td>
<td>41,532</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvation Army</td>
<td>36,874</td>
<td>27,189</td>
<td>-9,685</td>
<td>-26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh-day Adventist</td>
<td>44,328</td>
<td>40,919</td>
<td>-3,409</td>
<td>-8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniting Church</td>
<td>252,156</td>
<td>167,715</td>
<td>-84,441</td>
<td>-33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: 1991 estimates by NCLS from actual attendances (Kaldor et al., 1996). 2009 estimates by CRA from ISSP surveys 2006-2009 (Hughes et al., 2012). 2009 attendances of Churches of Christ are likely to be under-estimated due to many attenders not identifying their church as 'Churches of Christ'. 2009 Pentecostal attendances are also likely to be under-estimated as many people who identify with other denominations attend Pentecostal churches and it is possible that attendance at Pentecostal churches may be more than 200,000 people in 2009, meaning that they experienced a substantial rise in attendance rather than a fall. * Catholic estimates were based on ISSP survey for 1993.
The International Social Survey Program has asked about religious attendance in each of its surveys. In 1993, 24 per cent of the adult population said they attended church monthly or more often. In 2009, that figure was down to 16 per cent. In 2009, of those attending religious services, one per cent were attending services of religions other than Christianity. This meant that 15 per cent of the adult population were attending a Christian church monthly or more often. Attendance on any given week is generally about half monthly attendance. Thus, while we estimate the number of people frequently connected to Uniting churches to be close to 170,000, NCLS Research estimates that, on a particular Sunday, about 97,000 people attend a Uniting Church nationally and 24,000 in Victoria and Tasmania including children (R. Powell et al., 2014).

While different methods have been used for estimating attendances in 1991 and in 2009, and the figures are not highly reliable, they suggest that most denominations have seen significant declines, apart from the Baptists and the Presbyterians. In particular, the figures for attendance in the Churches of Christ are likely to be inaccurate. Apart from the Churches of Christ, the sharpest rate of decline has been in the Catholic Church, followed by the Uniting and Anglican denominations.

The current rate of decline in the Uniting Church is partly the result of the age of the congregation. In 2009, 57 per cent of attenders of the Uniting Church nationally were aged 60 years or older. It has the oldest attender profile of all denominations apart from the Anglicans (Hughes and Fraser, 2014, p.20). As few of the people attending Uniting churches are at the age of having children, it is almost inevitable that the Uniting Church will continue to decline rapidly. Modelling that takes account of births and deaths, but which does not take into account the immigrant factor, suggests that the Uniting Church in Australia will decrease to under 50,000 people by 2032. The proportion of people attending Uniting churches in Victoria and Tasmania is about 25 per cent of the national figure. Hence by 2032, it is expected that the attendance in Victoria and Tasmania will be about 12,000 adults.

*Figure 1.*
Immigration may well lead to increases in attendance over and above those predicted by the modelling. On the other hand, it is quite likely that the closure or merging of congregations will decrease attendances below what has been modelled. With numerous congregations below 25 people, it is possible that there will be a 'tipping point' which will see many congregations closed and a further substantial drop in the numbers attending a Uniting Church.

**Changes through Immigration**

Immigration has dramatically changed the demographics of the Australian population since 1947, and even more dramatically changed the religious profile of Australia. Today, approximately half of the Australian population were born overseas or one or both parents were born overseas. In other words, approximately half of the population are immigrants or children of immigrants.

Immediately following World War II, Australia welcomed hundreds of thousands of migrants from Europe, particularly from regions where the economy had been devastated by World War II. Among them were large numbers of people from Greece, adding greatly to the size of the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia. Eastern Orthodox immigrants also arrived from such places as Serbia, Romania, Ukraine and Macedonia. Immigrants from Italy, Poland and other parts of Eastern Europe and parts of northern Europe added significantly to the Catholic population in Australia. Immigrants from the United Kingdom added significantly to the Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches. There was also a significant number of Jewish immigrants, many of whom were survivors of the Holocaust (Bouma 1996, pp.18-22).

In the late 1960s, Turkish immigrants arrived in Australia in significant numbers. Many of them were Muslims. They were joined in the early 1970s by Lebanese Muslims fleeing the war in Lebanon. There were also immigrants from the various Catholic and Oriental Orthodox Christian
groups in Lebanon (Bouma 1996, p.19).

The war in Vietnam was a major factor in the arrival of many immigrants from Vietnam in the 1970s and 1980s. While some were Catholic, many of them were Buddhist. They added significantly to the Buddhist community in Australia. Other Buddhists arrived from Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Sri Lanka, Tibet, Malaysia, Korea and China (Bouma 1996, p.20).

Among the early Hindus to arrive in Australia were immigrants from Fiji, some because of the coup in 1987. However, since the 1980s, there have been increasing numbers of Hindus from India, welcomed because of their specialised skills in engineering, IT, medicine and other fields. In the period 2001 to 2011, immigrants from India were more numerous than immigrants from any other location. Approximately 25 per cent of immigrants from India are Christian, and these people have boosted attendances at churches of several denominations, including Catholic, Anglican and Uniting. Many others are Hindus and Sikhs and these two religions were the fastest growing religions in Australia in that decade.

In the 10 years from 2001 to 2011, 1.8 million migrants arrived in Australia and were present in Australia at the time of the 2011 Census. All religious groups experienced some growth from this huge influx of people. Many recent immigrants were associated with religions such as Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism. However, more Christians arrived as immigrants in the 10 years between 2001 and 2011 than people of other faiths: 767,000 compared with 514,000. There were also large numbers of immigrants who described themselves as having ‘no religion’ in the 2011 Census. The largest groups of immigrants were:

- 419,110 No religion
- 319,564 Catholics
- 161,175 Hindus
- 146,987 Muslims
- 144,009 Anglicans
- 136,051 Buddhists.

The influx of migrants has continued to add greatly to the multicultural and multifaith diversity of Australia. While the proportion of Christians continues to decline, the proportion of those associating with other religions continues to grow, mostly through immigration.

Migration has also had a continuing impact on the number and proportion of Christians in Australia. If it was not for the influx of Christian immigrants, the numbers of people identifying with Christian churches in Australia would have diminished by 380,000 people between 2001 and 2011. In other words, the numbers of people in the population identifying as Christian would have fallen 3 per cent points rather than rising by 3 per cent (Hughes 2012b, p.2).

According to the Census statistics, the Uniting Church in Australia has a smaller proportion of immigrants than most other churches. Just 13 per cent of those identifying with the Uniting Church are immigrants (compared with 30 per of the population) and another 13 per cent are second generation immigrations (compared with 19 per cent of the population).

On the other hand, the Uniting Church in Australia received a significant number of immigrants between 2001 and 2011: a total of 34,575. These immigrants had a significant impact on the rate of the decline of the Uniting Church nationally. Without them, the Uniting Church would have declined in number by 17.4 per cent between 2001 and 2011. They slowed the rate of decline to
14.6 per cent. The numbers of immigrants into the Uniting Church between 2001 and 2011 was a little less than the Baptists and Presbyterians, but more than the Lutherans, Eastern Orthodox and the Pentecostals. Of these immigrants who identified with the Uniting Church in the 2011 Census:
- 6,724 came from South Africa
- 4,252 from South Korea
- 3,488 from Oceania
- 3,000 from New Zealand
- 2,882 from UK and Ireland
- 2,365 from China
- 1,786 from United States and Canada (Hughes 2012b, pp.4-5).

Between 2001 and 2011, a total of 467,728 immigrants arrived from overseas and settled in Victoria, while a further 14,730 settled in Tasmania. Of these, in Victoria, 7,487 described themselves as Uniting Church in the 2011 Census. In Tasmania, 314 recent immigrants described themselves as such. Table 3 shows the birth-places of these immigrants. In Victoria, there were significant groups from various parts of South-East Asia (particularly Malaysia and Indonesia), South Korea, Southern and East Africa (such as South Africa), and China. These people contributed to a higher level of multiculturalism in the Uniting Church in Victoria.

Table 3. The Birthplace of Immigrants Arriving in Victoria and Tasmania between 2001 and 2011 Identifying Themselves as Uniting Church

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birthplaces</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>Tasmania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maritime South-East Asia</td>
<td>1,635</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan and the Koreas</td>
<td>1,072</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern and East Africa</td>
<td>1,025</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Asia (includes Mongolia)</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom and Ireland</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polynesia (excludes Hawaii)</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern America</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Asia</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Africa and the Middle East</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainland South-East Asia</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central and West Africa</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Europe</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Oceania</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other places</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>7,487</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: No reliance should be placed on small numbers under 10.
Most immigrants who identify with the Uniting Church come from countries where the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational traditions have existed for many years, often because of missionary work which occurred there in the 19th century.

Why does the Uniting Church have small numbers of immigrants compared with many other churches? It has certainly had policies that have sought to embrace immigrants. However, the fact is that the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational mission work was never as widespread as the Catholic or Anglican, and possibly less widespread than the Baptist. Many Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational missionaries worked in Africa from where comparatively few immigrants have come to Australia.

A second reason for the comparatively small number of immigrants in the Uniting Church is that many immigrants from Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational traditions have chosen to identify with more conservative denominations in Australia rather than with the Uniting Church. For example, 8,157 of the Koreans who arrived in Australia between 2001 and 2011 have identified with the Presbyterian Church compared with 4,252 who have identified with the Uniting Church. Some immigrants from Oceania have identified with one of the continuing Congregational denominations. Some of those from Methodist backgrounds have identified with the Wesleyan Methodists or the Church of the Nazarene.

In general, the nature of faith among immigrants is quite different from that among people of an Anglo-Celtic background. The differences are summarised in the following table.

**Table 4. Differences in the Nature of Faith among Immigrants and People of Anglo-Celtic Background**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Difference</th>
<th>Faith of Many Immigrants</th>
<th>Faith of Many People of Anglo-Celtic Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious identity</td>
<td>Rooted in being part of a community</td>
<td>A personal commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major form of expression</td>
<td>Community ritual</td>
<td>Personal experience and expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude to faith</td>
<td>Uncritical - seen as wrong to question religious traditions</td>
<td>Reflective - seen as important to question religious traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude to church</td>
<td>Expect hierarchical authority</td>
<td>Expect governance to be involving of the individual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Uniting Church encourages personal reflection and questioning and seeks to involve individuals in decisions about the church. Such attitudes are 'uncomfortable' for many immigrant communities where faith revolves around the actions and the authority of the community and where the questioning of faith is seen as inappropriate.

The more conservative denominations, such as the Presbyterians, tend to have stronger expectations of church leaders speaking authoritatively, and of religious traditions being regarded as immutable and unquestionable. Many immigrants have felt more comfortable in these traditions.

In some of the immigrant communities, the condemnation of homosexuality has been a significant marker of Christian orthodoxy. When the Uniting Church fails to make strong anti-homosexual
pronouncements, this is seen as a sign of the Uniting Church not being orthodox Christian. This issue has also been significant in relation to some indigenous Christian communities.

At one level, it might be argued that the local churches of the Uniting Church are well-placed to embrace the multiculturalism of the Australian population. The Uniting Church is willing to take seriously the diversity of cultures which make up contemporary Australian multiculturalism. It is respectful of people of other faiths and willing to engage in dialogue with them. It is present and active, more than most other religious groups, in interfaith forums. Yet, at the same time, these tolerant attitudes have been a barrier to many people from other cultures identifying with the Uniting Church. The engagement with the variety of faiths is a problem for many people whose faith has been formed in contexts in which they have been taught that the Christian faith is right and other faiths are wrong. Indeed, in some instances, the faith that immigrants bring to Australia has been sharpened by persecution for their stand for ‘the truth’.

While the numbers of immigrants identifying with the Uniting Church is small compared with most other denominations, immigrants are having a high impact on the Uniting Church partly because their levels of church involvement are high. Across all religions, immigrants tend to have double the level of involvement in religious activities compared with people born in Australia. According to the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2009), compared with the 14 per cent of Australian-born adults who attend worship monthly or more often:

- 29% of migrants who had been in Australia less than 20 years attended religious worship monthly or more, compared with
- 26% of migrants who had been in Australia between 20 and 30 years,
- 23% of migrants who had been in Australia between 30 and 50 years, and
- 19% of migrants who had been in Australia more than 50 years.

While it is possible that the attendance patterns of migrants who came to Australia 50 years were different from migrants who have come more recently, it is likely that involvement rates decline the longer migrants live in Australia. Religious organisations are very important as places where migrants find a community with which they can identify. For many migrants, the religious group also provides a place through which language and values are shared. However, over time, as migrants make more contacts in the wider Australian population, the importance of the religious organisation declines.

Indeed, churches can become hindrances rather than assets in the processes of relating to the Australian culture, particularly for second and third generation immigrants. Some feel uncomfortable in those contexts which continue to assert traditional values of duty, obedience and respect for elders in ways which are contrary to the general Australian patterns. Many find the need to change from a non-English to an English language context, because, while they retain their homeland language for household affairs, they lose the ability to make sense of specialised religious language used in church services.

While migrants make up about just under 30 per cent of Australia’s adult population, they constitute more than 30 per cent of all people (32.5% according to the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes) attending religious organisations monthly or more often.

Ascertaining the number of overseas-born attenders in Uniting churches in Victoria and Tasmania is very difficult. However, we know the number of people who identify with the Uniting Church in Victoria who were born overseas and these are presented in the following table.
Table 5. People Identifying with the Uniting Church who Live in Victoria, by Age Group and Birthplace

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Born in Australia</th>
<th>Born overseas</th>
<th>Percent born overseas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 to 19</td>
<td>41,786</td>
<td>2,574</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 39</td>
<td>35,854</td>
<td>6,147</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 to 59</td>
<td>65,297</td>
<td>8,276</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 to 79</td>
<td>57,073</td>
<td>7,032</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 and over</td>
<td>20,292</td>
<td>2,019</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: No reliance should be placed on small numbers under 10.

Table 5 shows that there is certainly higher levels of overseas-born people identifying with the Uniting Church among younger age groups. It may be noted that the overseas-born in Tasmania represent a much smaller percentage of those who identify in all age groups.

However, the significant issue for ministry in the churches is not those who identify as much as those who attend. Many people who identify with the Uniting Church do not attend. The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2009) found that, among those who identified with the Uniting Church, 59 per cent of those born in Australia said they never attended a church, compared with just 18 per cent of those who were born overseas. In other words, those born overseas had a much higher rate of attendance than those born in Australia.

The difference is especially marked among people aged between 20 and 50 years of age. In this age group, there may be about 11,000 people born in Australia attending a Uniting Church monthly or more often in Victoria, and up to 10,000 born overseas attending a Uniting Church with that frequency, approaching half of all Uniting Church attenders in this age group.

If this pattern continues, it seems likely that by 2035, nearly half of all attenders in Uniting churches in Victoria may be immigrants and members of their families, many from non-English speaking backgrounds. This is likely to have a significant impact on the future nature of the Uniting Church. However, it must be noted that, while the source of the figures used in the above statistics is an excellent random sample of the Australian population, the sample size on which these calculations have been based is small and these calculations are not highly reliable.

In Tasmania, there are far fewer immigrants, and the impact of immigrants is much smaller.

It is noteworthy that Census of Uniting Church clergy undertaken by NCLS Research in 2013 found that 27 per cent of all clergy in Victoria/Tasmania were born overseas and 14 per cent were born in a non-English-speaking country: far higher than in any other State.

The Impact of a Pluralistic Faith Environment

The rise of religions other than Christianity changes the environment within which the Uniting Church operates. Because the schools, welfare and health organisations service all people irrespective of religion, the impact has not been highly significant, although some organisations have had to make allowances for special needs or provision for prayers among people of other
religions. But the rise of other religions has had much more significance for the churches. Since the beginning of European immigration, there have been Jews in Victoria and Tasmania. However, in 1971, the proportion of people of all other religions apart from Christianity in Australia was just 0.8 per cent. The vast majority of people had a Christian background, even if they were not active in churches. In 2011, however, 7.5 per cent of the Australian population nationally and, in greater Melbourne, 12 per cent identify with other religions. These other religions are continuing to grow, not just in numbers, but also in their significance in Australian society. A number of them are developing their own school systems, aged care systems, and training for leadership, as well as places of worship. Educational, welfare and health systems are having to make provision for people associated with them in terms of their religious rituals, dress, food and other special needs. Some of them are playing an active role in society in interfaith organisations. Many Local Government Councils in Melbourne have initiated interfaith networks to encourage mutual understanding of these traditions and to build social capital in ways which transcends the barriers of faith. Many public services and special events involve leaders from a variety of religious faiths.

The existence of people of other faiths within our midst challenges the mindset which has assumed that Christianity is the sole repository of religious truth. When these other religions were seen as existing only in 'under-developed' countries outside of Europe, it was much easier to regard them as 'misguided' expressions of the human search for meaning. When we find such beliefs among the people with whom we mix in our everyday lives, people with similar levels of education, with similar occupations, and participating in the same communities, the challenges to the sense of religious truth is heightened.

There are a variety of ways of regarding the pluralistic faith environment theologically. It is not the purpose of this paper to discuss these. However, from a sociological perspective, one can make some observations about the pluralistic religious environment.

There are some people who continue to see Christianity as correct and all other religions as wrong. Many of these people will regard people involved in other religions as 'mission fields', ready for conversion. Some hints of this attitude can be found in responses to the question about whether people respect other religions that was included in the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2009). In that survey, the following percentages of various denominations indicated that they did not respect other religions:

- 32% Presbyterians and Reformed;
- 30% Pentecostals
- 22% Anglicans
- 16% Catholics, and
- 13% Uniting.

The majority of people said that they did respect these other religions, including:

- 78% Uniting,
- 78% Baptists,
- 77% Catholics,
- 65% Lutherans,
- 64% Anglicans,
- 60% Presbyterians, and
- 39% Pentecostals.

Many of these people who respect other religions would see religions as pointing to similar moral
principles, such as the principle of compassion, although in different ways.

_The Basis of Union_ of the Uniting Church makes no direct reference to people of other faiths. However, in practice, through the recognition that we are all on a journey and we are continuing to explore faith, it opens the possibility of dialogue with people of other faiths. The Uniting Church does not regard faith as something laid down and immutable in a dogmatic form. The very sense of a Church that is continuing in the process of 'Uniting' opens the door to dialogue with other sectors of the Christian Church. That door can be easily pushed a little wider for dialogue with people of other religions.

In this way, the Uniting Church perhaps sits a little 'easier' than do some of the other Christian traditions with interfaith dialogue and with the pluralistic religious environment in which we now find ourselves. There is the possibility of the Uniting Church taking a lead in that dialogue, and, in practice, it has sometimes done that. However, this potential is not one which attracts a lot of people to worship in the Uniting Church. Why come to the Uniting Church in order to enter into dialogue? The dialogue can take place in many contexts.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are many people for whom the idea of multiple truths is uncomfortable, and even irrational. There are many for whom certainty in religious belief and in other areas of life is appealing. To some people, the fact that some denominations offer 'certainty' has been attractive.
3. Cultural Change

Secularism or Individualism?

While most major changes to the religious profile of Australians have come through migration, there is evidence in the profile of changes in Australian culture. The first and largest of these is a change to 'no religion'. The second of these is demonstrated in the rise of Pentecostalism. This section will examine the change in the population identifying themselves as 'no religion'.

It has been common for people to talk about a process of secularisation occurring in Australian society in which it is envisaged that people reject religious beliefs and rituals. It has been argued for more than a hundred years that this is a result of 'modernity', of scientific types of thinking replacing 'religious' types of thinking. Since Auguste Comte, a French sociologist who lived between 1798 and 1857, the demise of religion has been described as imminent.

The rising numbers of Australians who describe themselves as having 'no religion' appear to provide some support for a theory of secularisation. Between 2001 and 2011, the 'no religion' group in Victoria increased by almost 60 per cent to 1,275,000. The increase was more marked in Tasmania, which had an increase of 78 per cent to 140,000. The increases in both states more than accounts for all the 'missing' people who identified with Christian denominations in 2001, but failed to do so in 2011.

However, the picture is not quite as simple as it first appears. Firstly, part of the growth in Australia in 'no religion' is due to people who previously did not answer the question about religion becoming a little more definite about where they stood. After the 'natural growth' and the growth due to fewer people not answering the question about religion on the Census is taken into account, the 'no religion' category gained about 100,000 people in Victoria over the 10 years, a growth of 17.2 per cent above the population growth, rather than 60 per cent growth mentioned above.

Secondly, 'no religion' was boosted through immigration with 419,000 recent immigrants to Australia describing themselves as having 'no religion' in the 2011 Census, large numbers of them coming from China as well as New Zealand and England.

Thirdly, 'no religion' does not mean a rejection of all sense of transcendence as assumed in some theories of secularisation. The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2009) showed that approximately one-third of the people who say they have no religion (32%) describe themselves as spiritual but not religious, and half of them (54%) describe themselves as neither religious nor spiritual. Another 12 per cent of them say they cannot choose whether they are religious or spiritual or not.

Strictly speaking 'no religion' means that the person does not wish to identify with a particular religious group. To a significant extent, it is a rejection of religious institutions, rather than primarily a rejection of all religious or spiritual faith.

Internationally, among sociologists, the theory of secularisation is receiving little support. The number of people identifying with religion is on the rise, and the number of people who consider themselves as atheists is diminishing. A major reason for this change is the demise of atheistic communism and mass turning to religion in China and Russia. At the same time, the United States has maintained a high level of affirmation of religion.
In Australia, there has been a steady increase in people describing themselves as having ‘no religion’ since 1971. There is little evidence of such a trend before that time. This trend is best understood primarily as the result of a change in the nature of religion towards something that is more individualistic than communal, rather than as 'secularisation'. It is a rejection of religious institutions rather than a rejection of everything transcendent as implied by the word 'secularisation'.

However, another meaning of 'secularisation' is that the various dimensions of life are increasingly conducted without reference to religion or the transcendent. Over the centuries, particularly since the Renaissance, the history, geography and natural composition of the world has been described without reference to religion or religious authorities. In more recent centuries, the physical and psychological nature of human beings has also been more frequently described and examined without reference to God or the transcendent. Scientific disciplines have been developed on the basis of empirical evidence and have rarely if ever included reference to the divine. Hence, most work in education, welfare and health occurs in Australia by people who are trained in secular disciplines and who exercise their specialist skills without reference to religion. To a significant extent, it may be claimed that the activities of the Uniting Church educational, welfare and health agencies have become secular in nature and have been conducted by professionals with secular training. This does not mean, however, that all reference to religion has been removed. Religious values may still be significant in the foundation of these activities. There may also be continuing attention to the religious or spiritual dimension of life within these institutions through the provision of chapels and prayer rooms and through chaplaincy.

At the individual level, prior to the 1960s, most Australians grew up identifying with a religion. That religion was often recognised through church ceremonies soon after birth such as baptism. For many people, religious identity was seen as similar to, and often related to, their ethnic identity. If you were from a particular part of Germany you were Lutheran. If you were Scottish you were Presbyterian. If you were Irish, you were Catholic, and if you were English, you belonged to the Church of England, unless your family had made a specific decision to move to another denomination.

However, since the 1960s and 1970s, most Australians have grown up with a strong sense that they could choose their religion, or choose not to be associated with a religion at all. It was not something into which they were born, but a personal choice, similar to many other life-style choices. Religion became, then, a life-style choice rather than an (ethnically-related) heritage which was handed down the generations.

The change in the nature of religion came about partly because of changes in the ways children were raised. With the smaller families of the 1960s and 1970s (partly because of the availability of reliable contraceptives, and partly because children became an economic burden rather than an economic benefit) came a different way of raising children. Rather than parents expecting to make all the decisions for the family, parents sought to meet the interests of each individual child. Even from an early age, children would be asked what they would like to eat, what they wanted to play with, or watch on television. Thus, children began to see the world much more in terms of their personal choices rather than roles and duties given to them by their parents, or laid down for them by society by reason of their birth. This change occurred throughout the Western world and has been described as the great 'subjective turn' in Western culture (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005;

Note, however, that some scholars such as David Martin describe this change in the nature of religion and, indeed, the rise of the evangelicals and charismatics, as indicators of the secularisation as religion moves out of the public sphere and becomes increasingly a personal matter. See Martin 2005.
Since that time, the idea that one would automatically belong to the Uniting Church because one had been brought up in a family which had identified as such (or previously as a Methodist, Congregationalist, or Presbyterian) weakened among young people. They would make up their own minds. Among older people, there are still many people for whom the label 'Uniting Church' is one that has historical or family roots back to Methodism, Congregationalism or Presbyterianism. It does not mean that they are active in Uniting Church.

Without a sense of duty towards religious traditions related to their ethnic identity, many younger people choose not to be involved in a church, or choose only to be involved in a church on special occasions such as Christmas. They have not found other compelling reasons to be involved on a frequent basis. The reasons for or against involvement are explored later in this document.

However, one would expect that the 81 per cent of those who identify themselves as 'Uniting Church' who are not involved in a church will gradually drop the label 'Uniting Church' over time. Certainly, many of their children do not see any reason to retain identity with the Uniting Church and many describe themselves as having no religion. This means that the Uniting Church will appear much smaller in future censuses than it is now.

A large proportion of those attending Uniting churches belong to what is often referred to as the 'Builder Generation', born prior to 1946 and prior to these cultural changes. They grew up with a strong sense of duty towards the church that was rooted in their sense of identity. Among those born after World War II in families associated with the predecessors of the Uniting Church, known as the 'Boomer' generation, many have kept the Uniting Church identification but have ceased to attend a church. Among the subsequent generations, Generation X and Generation Y, many have dropped the identification. Thus, there are many younger people in Australian society who are now two generations away from active involvement in the Uniting Church. Their parents may identify but are not involved. In many cases, only their grandparents have retained their involvement.

It has been calculated that approximately 700,000 Australians ceased to identify as Christians between 2001 and 2011. This compares with about 120,000 who began to identify as Christian during that same period. Approximately 20 per cent or one in five of all people aged 15 to 24 in 2001, and aged 25 to 34 in 2011, appear to have changed their identification away from the Christian faith. Most of these people ticked the 'no religion' box in 2011 (Hughes 2013, pp.3-4). Among these, we have estimated that:

- 236,907 were Anglican,
- 172,863 were Catholic, and
- 155,730 were Uniting Church
- 39,432 were Presbyterian or Reformed, and
- around 10,000 or 11,000 each were Baptists, Churches of Christ, Lutherans and Pentecostals.

The details of this movement from the Uniting Church into 'no religion' is represented in the following tables. It can be assumed that most of those represented as 'missing' who would have been 75 years and older in 2011 (28,535 in Victoria and 3,195 in Tasmania) have died. However, most of those 'missing' who were aged 10 to 34 years of age in 2011 (42,667 in Victoria and 4,373 in Tasmania) are missing because they have dropped their identification with the Uniting Church and had identified themselves as having 'no religion'. There are also some others aged between 35 and 65 who are missing because they, also, had dropped their identification with the Uniting Church.
Table 6a. Numbers of Australians Identifying as Uniting Church 2001 and 2011 in Victoria, additional Christians who have arrived as Immigrants and ‘the Missing’ by Age Cohort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age in 2001</th>
<th>Numbers Identifying as Uniting Church in 2001</th>
<th>Age in 2011</th>
<th>Numbers Identifying as Uniting Church in 2011</th>
<th>Uniting Church Immigrants</th>
<th>Numbers ‘Missing’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 to 9 (born since 2001)</td>
<td>0 to 9 (born since 2001)</td>
<td>0 to 9 (born since 2001)</td>
<td>0 to 9 (born since 2001)</td>
<td>0 to 9 (born since 2001)</td>
<td>0 to 9 (born since 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 to 14</td>
<td>49,257</td>
<td>10 to 24</td>
<td>30,528</td>
<td>739*</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 to 24</td>
<td>32,166</td>
<td>25 to 34</td>
<td>19,170</td>
<td>1,768</td>
<td>-15,214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 34</td>
<td>29,543</td>
<td>35 to 44</td>
<td>27,945</td>
<td>1,471</td>
<td>-3,069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44</td>
<td>42,449</td>
<td>45 to 54</td>
<td>38,377</td>
<td>834</td>
<td>-4,906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54</td>
<td>44,719</td>
<td>55 to 64</td>
<td>39,690</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>-5,282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 to 64</td>
<td>35,303</td>
<td>65 to 74</td>
<td>30,381</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>-5,044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 to 74</td>
<td>29,319</td>
<td>75 to 84</td>
<td>22,760</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>-6,618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 and over</td>
<td>33,567</td>
<td>85 and over</td>
<td>11,660</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-21,917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>296,773</td>
<td>244,535</td>
<td>6,737</td>
<td>-89,503</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 2001 and 2011 Censuses of Population & Housing, Time Series Profile Cat. 2003.0. Data based on Place of Enumeration, overseas visitors excluded. *Immigrants under 10 are not counted in total immigrants when calculating ‘the missing’.

Table 6b. Numbers of Australians Identifying as Uniting Church 2001 and 2011 in Tasmania, additional Christians who have arrived as Immigrants and ‘the Missing’ by Age Cohort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age in 2001</th>
<th>Numbers Identifying as Uniting Church in 2001</th>
<th>Age in 2011</th>
<th>Numbers Identifying as Uniting Church in 2011</th>
<th>Uniting Church Immigrants</th>
<th>Numbers ‘Missing’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 to 9 (born since 2001)</td>
<td>0 to 9 (born since 2001)</td>
<td>0 to 9 (born since 2001)</td>
<td>0 to 9 (born since 2001)</td>
<td>0 to 9 (born since 2001)</td>
<td>0 to 9 (born since 2001)</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 to 14</td>
<td>4,410</td>
<td>10 to 24</td>
<td>2,141</td>
<td>28*</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 to 24</td>
<td>2,944</td>
<td>25 to 34</td>
<td>1,347</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>-1,666</td>
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<tr>
<td>25 to 34</td>
<td>2,796</td>
<td>35 to 44</td>
<td>2,441</td>
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<td>35 to 44</td>
<td>4,308</td>
<td>45 to 54</td>
<td>3,876</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>-465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54</td>
<td>5,121</td>
<td>55 to 64</td>
<td>4,679</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 to 64</td>
<td>4,169</td>
<td>65 to 74</td>
<td>3,566</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 to 74</td>
<td>3,302</td>
<td>75 to 84</td>
<td>2,390</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 and over</td>
<td>3,326</td>
<td>85 and over</td>
<td>1,043</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-2,283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30,376</td>
<td>23,289</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>-9,519</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 2001 and 2011 Censuses of Population & Housing, Time Series Profile Cat. 2003.0. Data based on Place of Enumeration, overseas visitors excluded. *Immigrants under 10 are not counted in total immigrants when calculating ‘the missing’.

The tables above show that approximately 100,000 people who identified with the Uniting Church in Tasmania and Victoria in 2001 Census did not so identify in 2011. This figure is calculated by adding the people who identified in 2001, those who were born between 2001 and 2011 and immigrants, and then subtracting the actual number identifying in 2011. Of these people, it is likely that around 35,000 did not identify because they had died. However, another 65,000 simply ceased to identify with the Uniting Church. In other words, right through that 10 year period, the Uniting
Church lost about 540 people per month.

All religious denominations which have been associated with a specific ethnic heritage have tended to decline, while others which emphasised the personal choice made by the individual in relation to religion have tended to grow, or at least not decline as rapidly. Thus, we have seen continuing decline since the 1970s in the Uniting, Anglican, Presbyterian and Lutheran Churches.

There has also been a decline among Anglo-Celtic people identifying with the Catholic Church, although this has been masked to a large extent by the huge immigration of Catholics from non-Western countries where the sense of ethnic tradition and family authority remains strong.

The people from Eastern Europe and the Middle East who are associated with the Orthodox Christian traditions have not experienced the same change in ways children are raised and have continued to have a stronger emphasis on maintaining traditions and religious identity. Thus, they have not been influenced as much by this change in society as those denominations from Western Europe.

On the other hand, we have seen growth in those denominations which have emphasised personal commitment to faith, as exemplified often in adult baptism, such as the Baptists, the Pentecostals, and the Seventh-day Adventists. The emphasis on making a personal decision is not the only factor in the decline or growth of denominations, but it is a significant one.

At the heart of this change, then, is the increased individualism of Western society. When people think about religious faith, most people of Anglo-Celtic background think of it as something which they must decide for themselves. In interviews about faith, young people have consistently said that they must own the faith for themselves. It is not something they believe they simply 'inherit' as their grandparents did. Many have decided there is no good reason for frequent church involvement.

**Reasons People Give For and Against Church Involvement**

In weighing up the pros and cons of any particular activity, people today look at the costs and the benefits. In other words, they bring consumer-type attitudes to their decision-making in many areas of life. This does not mean that the costs and benefits are evaluated only in economic terms or in terms of what brings pleasure and avoids pain. Costs and benefits may also be calculated in terms of what is seen as being of long-term benefit for the family, and even how best the individual may contribute to the lives of others. Various research projects have pointed to some of the reasons.

(a) Nurturing the subjective life of the individual

Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (2005), academics at Lancaster University in the United Kingdom, have analysed the nature of the cultural change in the Western world and have argued primarily on the basis of a major research project in the United Kingdom that churches that feed 'subjectivity' are more likely to be attractive to contemporary people than churches that focus on the traditions of faith. They echoed the description used by Charles Taylor in his book *The Ethics of Authenticity* of a 'massive subjective turn of modern culture' (Heelas and Woodhead, loc. 89) and described it in the following terms.

‘The turn’ is shorthand for a major cultural shift of which we all have some experience. It is a turn away from life lived in terms of external or ‘objective’ roles, duties and obligations, and a turn towards life lived by reference to one’s own subjective experiences (relational as much as individualistic) (Heelas and Woodhead, loc. 89).
Heelas and Woodhead describe the way of life before the cultural shift as ‘life-as’. It is life defined by one’s sense of role and identity. People lived, they say, to fulfil the ideas of being a dutiful spouse, a responsible parent, and a good leader, for example. They saw themselves as belonging to established orders of things including their family, community, class, nation and religion. The good life involved performing their duties as described by the communities and traditions of which they were part. The highest value, then, was ‘fulfilling one’s duty’.

Heelas and Woodhead themselves note that religion provides security and stability to family life through its emphasis on conformity to rules and roles. They suggest that religion sometimes ‘sanctifies hierarchies of leadership and control’ by identifying them as part of the divine order. In the 1950s, following World War II, this sort of security and stability was seen as highly desirable, and led to a flourishing of churches. But the mood changed in the 1960s and such security and stability became much less important to the Boomer generation (Heelas and Woodhead, loc. 1606).

Since the 1960s, people in Western culture have moved, Heelas and Woodhead argue, to ‘subjective life’ in which life is ‘lived in deep connection with the unique experiences of my self-in-relation’ (Heelas and Woodhead, loc. 94). In ‘subjective-life’, the authority is the inner self rather than external traditions or imposed roles. The good life is found through enriching experiences, being sensitive enough to find how one’s quality of life can be improved, to be the person ‘I truly am’. The highest value is personal authenticity, being true to oneself.

Heelas and Woodhead (loc.1188) note the preoccupation in current Western culture with cookery, nature, gardening, travel, self-help, and beauty. Books that fill our bookshops on these topics have, as a prime objective, enhancing the readers’ inner worlds. They argue that much of health care, fitness centres, spas, beauty salons, and even schools sell themselves as catering for those who want to feel good about themselves. Advertising slogans encourage people to ‘Be yourself only better’. Women are told to wear expensive make-up because they ‘deserve it’. They note that even hospices encourage the ‘terminally ill to enrich their lives’ as they ‘live with death’ (Heelas and Woodhead, loc. 1209).

While much of contemporary culture revolves around subjective wellbeing, Heelas and Woodhead suggest that a range of services encourage people to take this subjective wellbeing to a higher level. Amongst these practices are homeopathy, therapeutic massage, aromatherapy, yoga, reflexology and reiki. They suggest that the distinguishing characteristics of these activities is that they are ‘intensive’ and involve ‘face-to-face’ relationships (Heelas and Woodhead, loc. 1241).

The general argument of Heelas and Woodhead is that religion is associated with ‘life-as’ modes of living and is thus experiencing decline. On the other hand, spirituality is associated with ‘subjective-life’ and is consequently attracting more people. Spirituality is more in tune with current Western culture, with the exploration of the inner self, than religion, which is primarily about duties defined in terms of obedience to external authorities, such as church institutions, the Bible or God. Indeed, religion continues to be primarily about fulfilling ‘life-as’ roles well: about being a better mother, a more devoted follower of Jesus, a more obedient child (Heelas and Woodhead, loc. 1595). The spiritual practitioners do not demand commitment to particular doctrinal belief systems. The people who turn to them do not face the prospect of being ‘preached at or judged’ (Heelas and Woodhead, loc. 1275). Rather, clients are invited to explore what works for them, what fits with their personal experience. At the same time, ‘subjective life’ is not necessarily selfish in its orientation. It often includes an exploration of how the individual can contribute to the lives of other people or can help make the world a better place.

In more general terms, in contemporary Western societies, people search for the meaning and significance of life in many ways. The arts generally, including music, drama and film, are major
ways of exploring what life is about. So also is travel. These aspects of the exploration of human meaning have largely been ignored by the churches in recent times.

While Heelas and Woodhead argue that all churches see truth and goodness not in terms of the cultivation of the unique self but in terms of obedience to God, they actually relate to ‘subjective-life’ differently. They have developed a typology of churches reflecting these differences and they identify them as:

- churches of humanity
- churches of difference
- churches of experiential difference, and
- churches of experiential humanity.

The **churches of humanity** emphasise the worship of God through the service of humanity. Many of these churches, Heelas and Woodhead suggest, are mainline and liberal, both Protestant and Catholic. They are liberal in that they offer a level of freedom and tolerance and emphasise ethics over dogma and love over the law. However, Heelas and Woodhead (loc. 292) suggest that because of their strong emphasis on serving others, they are the least open to the exploration of the subjective self of all the church types. They pay little attention to the individual’s experiences, needs, desires and moods, directing attention to the service of others.

Indeed, according to Heelas and Woodhead, even personal faith is not often discussed in the churches of humanity. The repetition of set liturgies, responses and hymns, the use of the lectionary, they argue, encourages people to conform their subjectivities to the common life of the church and discourages people from thinking about their own lives.

Heelas and Woodhead argue that while there is some interest among members of the ‘churches of humanity’ in subjective-life forms, such as in mysticism, meditation and so on, these churches focus on life-as duties to others. There has been a humanising of faith, but not a subjectivising, and this is contributing to their rapid decline.

The **churches of difference**, Heelas and Woodhead (loc. 286) suggest, are churches which ‘stress the distance between God and humanity, creator and creation, and the necessary subordination of the latter to the former’. These are mostly the evangelical churches. Heelas and Woodhead argue that they actually give more attention to ‘subjective life’ in their focus on reconstructing it, on ‘being born again to new life’. These churches, they argue, appeal to those people whose lives are not working. They offer healing and peace, hope and security as they emphasise that people are loved by God and in the call to make free, personal decisions to give their lives to God. These congregations actually pay considerable attention to life’s problems and to enhancing memories, moods and feelings, for example, through the singing of choruses. They seek to make people feel better (Heelas and Woodhead, loc.313). On the other hand, these churches seek to do that by encouraging people to surrender their lives and their autonomy to God and, to that extent, reject some of the inner experiences a person may have.

The **experiential form of churches of difference**, Heelas and Woodhead (loc. 324) argue, is found in the charismatic churches. Here, the ‘Word’ is not just the external body of Scripture but the living reality of God in people’s lives. There is less emphasis on external conformity in the ‘experiential churches of difference’ than on the Holy Spirit becoming the inner core of subjective life and guiding and directing it from within. Thus, worship is less regulated and more personally subjective, although Heelas and Woodhead argue that only a narrow range of emotions are able to be expressed in worship, in particular, gratitude, joy, love and celebration. Heelas and Woodhead also note that only certain forms of subjective life are permitted. For example, homosexual feelings
are taught as being unacceptable. People are constantly reminded they must fix their eyes on Jesus. Heelas and Woodhead (loc 335) argue that churches which went furthest in ‘authorizing subjective-life’ were the **churches of experiential humanity** which include Unitarians and the Society of Friends. These churches, they suggested, encouraged individuals ‘to forge their own unique life paths’. They allowed people to disagree and to form their own opinions. They encouraged people to experiment with different types of spirituality, following their hearts. God is presented not as an external authority, but as the deepest, spiritual dimension of all life. Nevertheless, Heelas and Woodhead argue there remains in these churches a strong stress on the overriding duty of caring for others and for the whole planet.

Heelas and Woodhead argue that those churches which are best in attending to the subjective-life are likely to decline least, while those which give no attention to it, are likely to decline most. Hence, they see the ‘churches of humanity’ (most mainstream churches) declining most rapidly, ‘the churches of difference’ (the evangelical churches) declining less rapidly, and ‘the churches of experiential difference’ (the charismatic churches) declining less again.

According to their theory, the ‘churches of experiential humanity’ should be declining least, and, may in some circumstances be growing. In reviewing the evidence for their theory in the UK and USA, Heelas and Woodhead (loc. 894) note in general terms that some of the evangelical churches, the churches of difference, have declined while others have managed to keep pace with population growth. Heelas and Woodhead present evidence that many churches of experiential difference are growing. They cite evidence that they are increasingly ‘fitting around the subjective life of the unique individual’.

The churches growing most rapidly should be the churches of experiential humanity, the Quakers and the Unitarians. Heelas and Woodhead (loc. 953) cite some evidence for growth in the USA and Britain, but note that these groups remain a very small part of church activity. Heelas and Woodhead note that there has been an explosion of participation in small groups with a religious or spiritual focus in the USA. They suggest that this may be where the nurture of subjective life may be occurring rather than in the churches.

The theory of Heelas and Woodhead would appear to explain some aspects of the Australian situation: the rapid decline of the mainstream churches, the lower levels of decline and, in some places, the maintenance of the Evangelical churches, and the growth of the charismatic and Pentecostal churches. The weakest part of their theory is their expectation of growth among churches of experiential humanity. There is little evidence of their growth in Australia.

The mainstream Uniting, Anglican and Catholic denominations are declining most rapidly. However, within these denominations are some evangelical and charismatic churches which are declining much less rapidly. The evangelical Anglican Diocese of Sydney, for example, is holding its own in terms of church attendance, while other parts of the Anglican Church in Australia are in rapid decline. Attendance at charismatic churches, particularly the Pentecostal churches, is continuing to grow in Australia as a whole, as are the Baptists and the Brethren, although only at the rate of population growth. A complicating factor in Australia is migrant flow that has been previously discussed.

Two groups of people remain particularly strong in many mainstream churches. One group is of older people who have long connections with the churches. In part, their involvement is maintained because the sense of community nurtures them. Some may not even enjoy the services much, but they appreciate the sense of community and the relationships they have in these churches. Many are
older people who have a continuing sense of duty in regards to church attendance, which was
established well before the ‘massive subjective turn’ in Western culture.

Another large group in mainstream churches are recent migrants. Most of these people come from
cultures which have not experienced the turn to ‘subjective-life’ experienced in Western cultures.
For these migrants, life is dominated by a strong, often collective, sense of duty, where the self is
seen in terms of roles and identities in relation to their ethnicity, their religion, their gender, their
local community and their role within the family. Many of these people continue to live in a ‘life-as’
way, often into the second generation. However, over generations, these people also begin to move
into ‘subjective-life’ ways of thinking about life, and the sense of duty fades. Incidentally, one of the
reasons foreign-born clergy often find it difficult to fit into Western churches is because of their
assumptions of ‘life-as’.

However, many younger people with an Anglo-Celtic background prefer to use the terminology of
'spirituality' rather than 'religion'. Indeed, in the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2009), more
Australian adults described themselves as 'spiritual' than described themselves as 'religious', and a
total of 23 per cent of the adult population described themselves as 'spiritual but not religious'. The
change in language reflects the cultural change that Heelas and Woodhead have described: the
change from religious faith which is a community involvement and in which people participate as
part of the duty in fulfilling their identity to a spirituality which is a personal attitude and in which
people look for ways of nurturing it as part of fulfilling their 'subjective life'.

While the theory of Heelas and Woodhead has some weaknesses and is not as complete an account
of the dynamics of people's involvement in church life as they imagine, it does contain some
important pointers. Uniting churches are, in their terms, churches of humanity. Focussed on the
traditions of the church, the liturgy, and social justice, few Uniting churches excel in addressing the
'subjective self'. In most Uniting churches, clergy are loyal to the liturgy and faithful in the
exposition of Scripture, but are poor in addressing the subjective needs and interests of people.

This has been reflected in the results from the National Church Life surveys over several decades.
Evaluation of the quality of preaching in the Uniting churches tends to be particularly low. This is
not because the Uniting Church clergy are not good preachers. Rather, they are simply not meeting
the needs or engaging relevantly with the subjective lives of the attenders. According to the NCLS
(1991), just 27 per cent of Uniting Church attenders find a formal liturgy 'helpful' (and another 36%
say it is of some help) (Kaldor and Powell, 1995, p.31). Yet, most Uniting churches continue to
have a formal liturgy. It is an issue on which younger and older church attenders had quite different
views. People 80 years and over certainly prefer a formal liturgy, but many younger people do not
find such a liturgy helpful.

Many people who have some commitment to a church, when moving to a new area, will try out
several churches and see which suits them best. People may well attend the activities that they enjoy
in more than one church and these churches may be of different denominations. The sense of loyalty
to a particular denomination in this consumeristic age is not high on the agenda of most people.
They will go to a church which has the music they like, sermons which engage them, churches that
are warm and friendly, where they feel welcome and which have activities for the family, rather
than going to a church of the denomination in which they were raised. Few people are looking for a
church which is loyal to the traditions of faith when they search for a church.

Uniting churches operate in an environment in which they are often compared with churches of
other denominations. People go to where they find the activities that are of interest to them. Indeed,
it has become increasingly common for people to attend activities in several churches which may well be of different denominations: a choir in one, a Bible study in another, and a social justice activity in a third, for example.

(b) Suspicion of traditions and institutional structures
One major factor in the ‘turn of culture’ in the 1960s and 1970s in northern Europe and the ‘Anglo' world was a rejection of tradition for tradition’s sake. Tradition had so often been the basis on which the 'life-as' approach and its associated duties had been defended. Tradition was seen as the force which had bound married women to home-duties and which had not allowed them to find fulfilment through occupations in the wider community. Tradition was seen as the force which protected the social classes and kept one class 'down-stairs' while another class enjoyed life 'up-stairs'. Tradition was also seen as the basis of the rules which prohibited pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex and homosexuality.

So great was the reaction to tradition in the 1960s and 1970s, that the subsequent period has been labelled the post-traditional age by social commentators such as Anthony Giddens (1991). Indeed, some people have preferred the label 'post-traditional' to 'post-modern', as the former term picks up the very evident rejection of 'tradition' which occurred at that time, while it is not clear that 'modernity' has been superseded. The rejection of tradition allowed people to make decisions on the basis of their consequences, rather than on the basis of what had been done before. Many people failed to see pre-marital sexuality as having dire consequences, especially as new reliable methods of contraception had become available. Hence, that tradition was no longer seen by most Australians having any validity. Today, just 14 per cent of adult Australians believe that sexual relations before marriage are always or mostly wrong.

Incidentally, this does not mean that Australians are simply becoming more 'liberal' in their sexual attitudes. It is interesting to note that while there has been increasing acceptance of sexual relations prior to marriage, there is decreasing acceptance of sexual relations with someone other than one's spouse. In 1993, about half of all Australians felt that extra-marital sex was always wrong. In 2009, 65 per cent said it was always wrong. (Hughes and Fraser 2014, p.88-89). The point is that most Australians evaluate what is right and wrong on what they see as the consequences of the actions for those involved, rather than based on the traditions of society or religion.

The churches have generally been seen as institutions dedicated to keeping 'the traditions'. Over the decades they have been widely criticised for their attitudes to 'traditional' views about the place of women in society and in the home, and for their failure to allow women to have roles of leadership. They have also been criticised for their rules about sexuality and other moral matters. Behind the criticism is the idea that the churches require people to be blindly obedient to their religious traditions rather than think about the consequences of actions. In a study of the spirituality of 'non-churched' people in the United Kingdom, Kate Hunt sums up the attitudes in this way:

Religious people are often considered narrow-minded; allegedly they only believe what they are taught to believe. In a society where children are encouraged to question from an early age, the idea of believing in a rigid set of doctrines is seen as immature .... There is a strong value judgement being made here: religious people do not think deeply about life, but are spoon-fed on an old-fashioned diet of dogma (Hunt 2003, p.162).

Uniting Church people might well respond that they do question and they do think deeply about life, rather than simply accept traditional dogmas. However, many people in the contemporary Western world, lump all religious groups together and fail to distinguish between them.
In a similar way, the accusations of child-abuse by church-related personnel, and the ways that this has been covered up, has caused great damage to the churches as a whole. In a study that examined the causes of the decline in belief in God in Australia, one of the major factors was found to be the decline in confidence in the churches and religious organisations (Hughes 2012a). This has been affirmed also in a recent study by Olive Tree Media (2011) in which three 'blockers' to belief were seen as child abuse, hypocrisy, and judging others. However, the usual cause for lack of confidence in institutions is that they are more concerned about protecting themselves than concerned to serve their clients and the society. An additional issue for many Australians is that the churches have covered up the abuse because they saw it as more important to protect themselves than to help the victims.

Other accusations are also made about the churches in terms of them using devious methods to 'get converts' or to 'fill the pews'. As people see the churches taking greater interest in their own structures and finances than in the people they are trying to serve, so their levels of confidence drops. Just 22 per cent of the population say they have complete or much confidence in the churches. Forty-seven per cent of Australian adults have little or no confidence in the churches (Hughes and Fraser, p.116). The level of confidence in the churches is much lower than that in most service sectors of society such as the educational, health and police sectors, but a little higher than in most industries, banks and the federal parliament.

The Uniting Church should be less subject to some of these criticisms than some other denominations. It has been more welcoming than most of women in positions of leadership. It has been reflective, rather than simply accepting 'tradition' for its own sake. It has had less exposure than some other denominations to accusations of sexual abuse or attempts to cover up such abuse. However, the people who have made these accusations generally have not moved from one denomination to another, but have found in these criticisms reason to reject church involvement, and sometimes the Christian faith, altogether.

Many children who have grown up in the Uniting Church and its predecessors continue to hold the values of the Uniting Church, including the commitment to social justice and to the wellbeing of people on the margins of society. However, they do not see the Uniting Church as the only, or even the best, way of expressing their concerns. Again, they look for forms of expression with light institutional weight, where their time and energy is not consumed by maintaining old buildings, extensive organisational structures, and worship which is experienced as largely irrelevant to contemporary life. The Uniting Church's commitment to social justice is much admired in the wider community, but it brings few into worship. It probably has a greater impact in attracting employees to the welfare agencies and schools.

While there has been widespread suspicion of religious institutions, this has not spread to all other institutions. There remains a high level of confidence in the educational, health and charitable institutions in Australian society. These institutions have not been seen as simply continuing traditions from the past, but have been seen as adapting to people's needs and to advances in the understanding of the professions of education, health care and social welfare. They are also largely seen as not predominantly existing to protect their own structures and finances, but as being there for the sake of the service they offer to others.

There has been significant criticism of the education, health and welfare organisations from within the Uniting Church. At the heart of these criticisms is the fact that, as they have become reliant on funding by government and fees from clients, they have failed to maintain the values of the Uniting
Church. It has not been possible for educational organisations and aged care facilities, for example, to serve all parts of society equally because of their reliance on fees. It has been argued that the reliance on government funding in welfare has meant that some welfare organisations have failed to criticise government welfare policies (Wallace and Bottomley 2012). The extent to which these criticisms are valid, and the means of addressing these issues through broadening the bases of funding or developing other expressions of education and care which are not so dependent on fees from clients is beyond the scope of this discussion paper. Nevertheless, it may be noted that it may be appropriate for the Uniting Church to create structures in which discussion of such concerns and how the values of the Uniting Church might best be expressed through all parts of the Church.

There has been much discussion of the fact that the churches now exist in a ‘post-Christendom’ era (Mead 1991). Certainly, the authority of the churches in Western societies has reduced over recent decades. Fewer people assume that the churches are part of social leadership. It has been noted that it is often assumed that religious faith should only be a personal matter and has no place in the public square. While it is also true that the churches may have less authority in society, part of this has to do with a general suspicion of traditional institutions. It is also true that the basic assumptions of the Christian faith of the existence of God and Jesus being the Son of God are no longer shared widely in society, which means mission can no longer be simply persuading people of the value of church involvement.

On the other hand, the extent of the movement that has occurred in which the churches have become assumed to be marginal to society has probably been exaggerated. While more than 80 per cent of Australians identified with a Christian denomination until the early 1970s, the levels of involvement in churches have generally been closer to 30 per cent and frequently less. With the Church Act of 1836 in New South Wales, the link between church and State was weakened with the monopolistic role of the Anglican Church being removed. The 'secular education' discussions of the 1870s demonstrated that 'Christendom' could not be assumed in Australia (Maddox 2014). Nevertheless, the churches have continued to have a voice in Australian politics as an advocate for certain causes. The Lord's Prayer is still said at the start of Parliament. The majority of Australians (57%) continue to assert that the Christian faith is important in providing a foundation for values (Hughes 2011a, p.16), particularly the values of compassion and care.

(c) The nature of God
Another reason for not attending church among the children and grandchildren of many people associated with the Uniting Church has to do with the way that God is understood. In the 1950s, the mainstream denominations, and particularly the predecessors of the Uniting Church, thought of God primarily as a creator who continued to sustain the order of the universe, and who came in Jesus to teach us how to live (and, secondarily, to forgive sin). God, as creator, was revered. The liturgical service was, in itself, a statement of God's order, and a reminder that God maintained that order, even amidst the apparent chaos of life.

In the 1960s, the sense of the order of life faded, along with the sense of social order and hierarchy and the duties associated with one's place in that order. Rather than a place of order, the world was seen as a maze to be personally negotiated, an arena in which each individual must make their own path. The idea of God as the God of order no longer had much appeal (Hughes 1994).

Some people began to see God much more as a friend who accompanied the individual in the maze of life. God was personal. One could turn to God for help in that maze. God was seen as constantly intervening in life. This was the focus of faith of the Pentecostal denominations and of the charismatic sectors of other parts of the church. In the church service, that personal connection with
God was reinforced. Those churches which have emphasised this sense of a personal God involved in the activities of everyday life have had continued high levels of involvement (Hughes 1994).

To other people, God shows us how to live, but God is not seen as intervening in the activities of everyday life. Indeed, for some, God has become more of a distant and mysterious 'higher power' than a 'person' involved in daily life. Many of these people have not seen it necessary to continue in frequent worship. It is enough to keep in one's mind the basic values and principles that God has laid down for daily life, in particular the values of compassion and care. Those values can be learnt as a child through school or through children's activities, but one does not need to attend a church weekly to maintain them.

In the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2009), the following affirmed God is concerned with human beings:

- 79% raised as Pentecostals;
- 67% raised as Baptists;
- 42% raised as Orthodox;
- 39% raised as Lutherans;
- 39% raised as Catholics;
- 34% raised as Uniting; and
- 24% raised as Anglicans.

Of those who strongly affirm that 'God concerns himself with human beings', 54 per cent attended a church monthly or more often, compared with just 2 per cent of those who disagreed with the statement.

In the Uniting Church, God is seen much more as creator and teacher than as intervening in the activities of daily life. But many of those who believe in that God do not see frequent worship or church involvement as necessary.

At the same time, there are many people particularly in the Uniting Church who have not given up all church involvement but who wrestle with the interpretation of the Christian story in the context of current knowledge of the universe. The Christian story (and all the Biblical texts) were written in the context of a view of the universe which was both 'earth-centred' in that all heavenly bodies were assumed to move around the earth, and 'human-centred' in that human beings were seen as having a unique place in God's creation. Re-telling the Christian story and identifying its meaning is challenged significantly by the fact that science has revealed that the universe is much more vast and complex in both time and space than was conceived of in early Christian times. To many educated and reflective people in contemporary Western society, the scientific view of the world does pose a challenge to some conceptions of God.

Some people continue the intellectual struggle through such venues as the Progressive Christian Movement. Others, particularly those with little prior commitment to the traditions of faith, have ceased trying to make sense of 'God'. There is some evidence that scientific views of the world have discouraged some Australians from belief in God (Hughes 2012a).

Yet, others find that these intellectual struggles disturbing or even threatening to their devotional attachment to their faith. They find them anathema to the call to a simple personal relationship with God. The struggles with the interpretation of the Christian tradition continue to be divisive in the Uniting Church and has made it difficult for the Uniting Church to find expressions of faith on which there is common agreement.
4. Community Change

Migration within Australia and Rural Decline

Another factor in the changing context of the Uniting Church is migration within Australia. The Census provides information about where people were living five years prior to the Census. While we do not know the changes of migration in and out of Victoria and Tasmania between 2001 and 2006, information is available about movements between 2006 and 2011. Table 7 shows in those five years the movements among those identifying as Uniting Church. A total of 6,109 of those who identified themselves as Uniting Church and living in Victoria in 2011 were living outside of Victoria in 2006. A total of 1,141 of those who identified themselves as Uniting Church and living in Tasmania in 2011 were living outside of Tasmania in 2006. Of those who described themselves as Uniting Church in 2011 in other parts of Australia, 6,259 said they were living in Victoria in 2006. In Tasmania, 1,058 had moved out of the state to another during the same period. To a large extent, the movements in and out of Victoria or Tasmania to other parts of Australia balance each other. The net change between 2006 and 2011 in Victoria was a reduction of just 150 Uniting Church people, while in Tasmania it was a nett increase of around 83 people. Over the ten years between 2001 and 2011, the difference may well be at least double that. However, it is not a large figure in determining the overall change in the number of Uniting Church identifiers in Victoria and Tasmania.

Table 7. Internal Migration (within Australia) of those who identify as Uniting Church, In and Out of Victoria and Tasmania 2006 – 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location (from or to)</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>Tasmania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Migrated In</td>
<td>Migrated Out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>2,151</td>
<td>1,742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>1,695</td>
<td>2,096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>873</td>
<td>925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6,109</td>
<td>6,259</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of Victoria and Tasmania 2006 – 2011


While these changes show that, across Victoria and Tasmania, the impact of internal migration has been slight, the impact in particular rural areas is significant. Many traditional farming areas in Victoria and Tasmania, where the Uniting Church has been strong, have seen significant decline in population.

If one takes the North West area of Victoria, for example, including Horsham and Mildura, the total population fell between 2001 and 2011 by 0.6 per cent. The numbers identifying with the Uniting Church fell by 25 per cent. However, the trend has been for the population to grow in the larger centres, and to decline in the small towns and rural areas. Hence, over that period of time, both Horsham and Mildura grew in population. Indeed, the proportion of the population of North West
Victoria living in those two cities grew from 45 per cent to 48 per cent of the population.

This means, however, that many other smaller centres declined. For example, the population of the Nhill region declined by 8.5 per cent in those 10 years. This goes some way in explaining the 25 per cent decline in the numbers of people identifying with the Uniting Church in that area between 2001 and 2011. That story of a declining population compounding the declining numbers in the Uniting Church would be repeated in many rural farming communities around Australia.

Apart from the large regional centres which have increased in population, there has also been an increase in the population in some rural areas which serve holiday makers and the retired. Many rural towns which are relatively close to Melbourne, such as Castlemaine, have grown because of increased numbers of people moving there and commuting to Melbourne for work.

Changes in the Nature of Community Life: from Local to Global Communities

Another major change in the context of the Uniting Church has been in the nature of community life. Until the 1970s, most people lived predominantly in local communities, within the area in which they could walk. They did their shopping in that area. They played sport in that area. Children went to schools in the local community. People found many of their leisure activities in that area.

Until the 1970s, it made sense to build a church in each local community, within walking distance of each other. Hence, scores of Presbyterian and Methodist churches were built across the suburbs of Melbourne. Many churches were built in the various suburbs of the larger cities such as Ballarat, Bendigo, and even smaller cities such as Wangaratta.

The first regional shopping centre in Melbourne was Chadstone and it was opened in 1960. It signalled the movement away from local suburban shopping. Its growth was possible because increasing numbers of people had a car. Indeed, as women entered the workforce, increasingly families had two or more cars. Individual access to a motor vehicle gave people the chance to draw from resources further afield. They could participate in sporting activities which were not offered in the local area. They could enjoy leisure and social activities outside their local area (Hughes et al., 2007).

One result of this increased ability to travel was that people had greater choice in the activities in which they became involved. Travel opened up choice not only in terms of sporting, leisure and shopping activities, but also in terms of schools and employment opportunities. It also made it possible for people to choose a church that was further afield. As 'consumer attitudes' developed in relation to churches, people looked increasingly for larger churches that could offer a greater range of high quality facilities and activities for themselves and for the members of their families.

As the Pentecostal movement grew, they built churches to serve large regions. Indeed, a number of Pentecostal denominations argued that there should be just one church for the whole city. These churches tended to be larger than the typical Protestant local suburban church. But because they were larger, they could offer a wider range of activities, and sometimes higher quality activities for the people who attended. For example, a number of them employed professional musicians, youth leaders, counsellors, and other personnel who became part of the church team.

There has been an increasing tendency for younger people, in particular, to attend these larger
churches. In 2008, it was calculated that there were about 25 Protestant churches in Melbourne which had more than 500 people attending on a particular Sunday. Nine or 10 of these churches had attendances of 1000 or more per week. In a survey of these larger churches, 22 of them indicated that, collectively, they had:

- 29,500 weekly attenders,
- 370 equivalent full-time staff,
- 224 pastors and
- 1,732 cell groups or small groups of various types (Hughes and Reid 2009, p.41).

It was calculated at that time that about 20 per cent of all people attending a Protestant church in Melbourne attended one of the larger regional churches. Thus, 20 per cent of Protestant attenders were attending less than 2 per cent of Melbourne's Protestant churches.

Some of the other denominations have developed large churches including the Anglicans, Baptists, Churches of Christ and the Salvation Army. However, there are no Uniting churches of this size. It is not entirely clear why no large Uniting churches have emerged in Victoria and Tasmania, particularly given the merging of so many churches prior to and following Union. It is possible that the structures of the Uniting Church and the emphasis on ministers as facilitators rather than as leaders has been an inhibiting factor. Many of the large churches have grown around leaders with strong personalities and sense of vision. The Uniting Church has discouraged this style of leadership, emphasising the importance of working with Councils.

Increased opportunities for travel were complemented by increased connection with other people using electronic means, such as the telephone. Through the telephone, people could keep in touch with those who lived at some distance from them. Electronic communications have developed exponentially since 1980 with the availability and increasing power of mobile phones and with the internet and social media which have added visual dimensions to communication.

With sophisticated electronic connections through the internet, a number of electronic churches have been established. While these attract some people, for a significant number, they are experienced as complementary to, rather than alternatives to, face-to-face church communities (Hutchings 2010).

However, the immediate facilities for contact via Facebook and mobile phone has meant that many people only make decisions as to what they will do and where they will connect with their friends at the last minute. The idea of having regular commitments to meet with others is less common. Indeed, people will make up their minds as to whether they will go to church on a particular week or not often at the last minute. They are also more likely to 'visit' other places. Thus, in the United Kingdom, it has been found that attendances at cathedrals and large churches has grown significantly in the past decade, mostly from people who attend occasionally and from visitors, and many at weekday services (Church of England 2014, p.19).

Hence, it has become increasingly important that churches use electronic media to keep in touch with those people who have some association with them. Newsletters need to be emailed. Facebook pages and websites need to be kept up-to-date with the details of activities and times of services.

If someone is looking for a church, they may be invited by a friend to a particular church. However, frequently, they will look up the internet to look at the details of the church and what activities are on offer, just as they will look up the details of restaurants or other service providers.
Professionalism in a Global Age

In the small rural town, or in the local city suburb in years gone by, one often knew a variety of people who lived in the local area. One knew, by reputation if not personally, local doctors, teachers at the school and clergy at the churches. One of the other consequences of living in larger communities is that frequently one does not know personally, nor by reputation, the people who provide services and lead activities in the community. Within these wider communities, as Anthony Giddens (1990) has pointed, much of our trust in people is rooted in the trust of the systems which appoint people, train people, and maintain their accountability. If people do not know the teachers in the local school, their trust will be largely based on the education system and on the reputation of the school system.

Franchises and chain stores have done well in this context because they are able to establish the reputation of a brand, rather than depending on the reputation of a local operator.

There is a certain 'brand' identity of churches, although the brand of Uniting churches is relatively weak in that local Uniting churches vary greatly. There has also been an increased need for professional systems to be developed through which clergy are held accountable to the system. This has also become necessary because of the abuse in which some clergy have been involved and the need to reassure the public that such problems are appropriately managed by the denominational structures and by the civil authorities.

At the same time, the churches which are expanding most rapidly are mostly churches which are built around charismatic individuals who provide strong, innovative and individual leadership. In fact, today, most identity and sense of belonging, particularly among younger people, is probably with local churches and their leaders rather than with denominations.

The 'brand' identity of schools, welfare and health organisations of the Uniting Church has also not been well-established. While these organisations are accountable for their professional standards through government regulation, there has been a tendency for each organisation to develop its own particular character and ethos and to express its connection with the Uniting Church in its own way. This has certainly occurred in relation to Uniting Church schools. While welfare organisations have been seen as dimensions of UnitingCare, the various organisations and missions also have retained their own independent identities.
5. Changes in Family Life

There have been significant changes in family life since the 1970s. With the rejection of tradition in the 1970s, there was widespread questioning of the relevance of the marriage. Many people moved into de facto relationships rather than registering their marriage. Marriage has not disappeared, however, although the majority of Australians now live together before they get married. Marriage has become the public commitment which takes that 'living together' to a new level. When asked in a survey in 2005 whether marriage was an outdated institution, just 18 per cent of adult Australians agreed and 82 per cent disagreed (Hughes and Fraser 2014, p.97).

With changes in the law in 1975, a legal divorce became much easier to obtain. Consequently, many Australians now have more than one marriage in their life-time and there are many blended families with children from different relationships.

In the adult population (aged 18 years or over), the Census in 2011 found that:
- 51% were in a registered marriage,
- 3% were separated from their partners but not divorced,
- 9% were divorced,
- 6% were widowed, and
- 31% had never married.

It also found that 9 per cent of the adult population were in a de facto relationship (and could also be in a registered marriage, separated, divorced, widowed or had never married) (Hughes and Fraser 2014, p.35). It is noteworthy that people in a de facto relationship are much less likely to attend a church than other people. Also there is evidence that people often leave church when they experience separation in their marriage, and many never return. Those who are most likely to be in church are those who fulfil or have fulfilled the ideal of Christian marriage: either being in their first married relationship or being widowed.

Roles within the family have also changed. In 2009, Australians were asked whether they agreed with the statement: 'The husband earns the money, the wife's job is the family'. Just 16 per cent of adult Australians affirmed that division of roles. However, there remained a significant difference in relation to age. Thus, 22 per cent of people aged 50 and older affirmed that division, compared with just 8 per cent of those aged under 30 (Hughes and Fraser 2014, p.96). The survey found that church attenders were twice as likely to affirm the division of roles than non-church attenders (27 per cent to 13 per cent). The fact is that most married women are involved in the work-force although most spend some time away from employment when their children are young.

The changes in family, and in particular, the entry of married women into the work-force, has had a significant impact on the education, health and welfare organisations of the Uniting Church. It has had some impact on the nature of services that have been requested. Increasingly, for example, schools are required to take responsibility for multiple dimensions of the development of children and young people, apart from cognitive development. The family services offered by welfare organisations have become increasingly complex in order to cope with the complexity of family life in contemporary society. It has also meant there are fewer volunteers available to assist in these organisations and that the time and energy that volunteers are able to offer is more constrained.

Changes in the patterns of family life have had a great impact on church involvement. When married women were home during the day in the 1950s, many of them found their social life
through the local churches. They also found ways of making contributions to the wider society through their involvement in the churches and in their welfare and charitable activities. Indeed, many Uniting churches have members who first became part of that local community in the 1950s.

Subsequent generations of married women have been involved in the workforce and have found much of their social life there. They have not looked for social activities in the local communities. The demands of work has meant that there has been less time for church. Sunday is often seen as a time for family rather than for church. Although Sunday is also a day for sport, shopping and many other activities which cannot be fitted into the rest of the week.

At the same time, the issue of time is ultimately an issue of priorities. When asked about the reasons for not attending a church in a large survey of Australian adults in 1998,

- 15% said 'not enough time because of work', but
- 21% said 'too many other commitments' and
- 31% said 'prefer to do other things', with
- 34% saying 'no need to go to church' (Bellamy et al., 2002, p.14).

Certainly, then, time and competition with other activities is a factor, but part of the problem is that church involvement is not high on the list of priorities for many people.

Again, competition for time affects all churches, not just the Uniting Church. However, it is likely that fewer people raised in the Uniting Church than people raised in some other denominations have been convinced that church involvement should be a priority. As previously noted, how the priorities are seen depends partly on how faith, and in particular God, are seen in relation to human life. Most of those who have continued to attend a church are those who have seen church attendance as vital to a continuing relationship with a God who is seen as active in human lives. On the other hand, people who have seen God as more distant, perhaps as giving values to live by, but who does not intervene in the events of daily life, have not seen church involvement as having a high priority.
6. What Other Denominations are Doing

All denominations, perhaps with the exception of the Oriental Orthodox denominations which have been growing rapidly through migration, have found it hard to grow their churches in the current environment. Several have taken a variety of steps to examine and address the situation. The following are some notes about the processes they have used.

**Overseas Experts**

One of the steps that many denominations have taken is to look for overseas 'experts': people who have had record of building church life in other contexts. Many such people have been found in the USA, where attitudes to the church are very different, and where it has been much easier to build churches. Nevertheless, it has been felt that much can be learnt from significant leaders.

The Uniting Church has invited a number of people to Australia to provide expert advice such as Kennon Callahan, Diana Butler Bass, and Darrell Guder.

The Salvation Army (Southern Territory), for example, invited Paul Borden, a Baptist leader, to Australia. Paul Borden has developed patterns of 'accountability' in denominational leaders such that there is an expectation that they will produce productive change in churches. He has also developed processes for conducting congregational consultations that will focus them on change. He believes that the most important factor in church growth is the identification and training of leaders who are then held accountable for the growth. One of his books is called *Hit the Bullseye*.

The Churches of Christ developed a renewal process called *Future Directions*. In this process, a Canadian Church consultant, Alan Roxburgh, had a major role. He helped move many congregational leaders and ministers from a 'maintenance' mindset to missional engagement. The process began in 2003-4. Roxburgh argued that this was a time of 'discontinuous change' and some radical changes were necessary. The church had to find different ways of operating. He sought to move leaders from adapting to the situation to being innovative in relation to it. He argued for experimentation and engagement with the community beyond the walls of the church. The history of this movement is fully described in the thesis by Gerald Rose (2013).

Part of the success of Alan Roxburgh was that he did not visit just for a short time, but worked with the denomination over a period of years in the renewal process. Further, that process was complemented by a range of other initiatives such as the development of Forge by Alan Hirsh.

**Research Initiatives**

Other denominations have done research as a basis for new initiatives. The Anglicans, for example, have reflected among themselves on what needs to be done. Several dioceses have seen the Fresh Expressions movement as providing some hope for the future. In more general terms, they have looked for new styles of leadership, the development of passion, connection with the community, and new freedom in worship (Hale and Curnow 2009). The General Synod published a resource book: *Building the Mission-Shaped Church in Australia*.

The Lutherans felt that they needed to go back to their members to determine their priorities in a situation in which finances were falling. They engaged the Christian Research Association to conduct a major survey across all their churches seeking to find what the members felt should be the priorities of the church.
The Catholics have a number of research projects through the Pastoral Research Office. For example, one major project focussed on Catholics who have stopped attending Mass (Dixon et al., 2007). It identified as the major reasons for ceasing to go to church the feeling that the church was irrelevant to life and provided little stimulation. There were also widespread concerns about the misuse of power and authority in the church and concerns about particular local clergy. The Pastoral Research Office is currently involved in a project called Building Stronger Parishes. This project has involved identifying parishes where good things are happening, and identifying some of the factors that have contributed to that growth.

Many denominations have turned to NCLS Research surveys for feedback about the quality of church life. NCLS Research has argued, from the basis of the findings in its surveys, that there are nine core factors in church vitality: the quality of faith development, worship and sense of belonging, along with having a vision, appropriate leadership and innovation, and ensuring there is service, faith-sharing and inclusion (Bellamy et al., 2006).

NCLS surveys have provided feedback at both denominational and local church levels on the attitudes and characteristics of church attenders. The hope was that, by identifying weaknesses and strengths of denominations at both levels, strategic initiatives might be developed to strengthen the life of the churches. This has happened in some local churches and in some denominations. However, many of the churches and denominations have accepted the survey results simply as 'bad news' or as 'confirming what they already knew' rather than taking the opportunity to think seriously about responding to the weaknesses identified in the information. Between 1991 and 2006, the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania participated in these surveys, but there was little use of the results at a denominational level, and many local churches failed to make much use of the information that was provided to them.

Some churches, particularly in The Salvation Army and the Seventh-day Adventists have made use of the Natural Church Development surveys as developed by Christian Schwarz (1996). These surveys have been given regularly to a core group within the church and the Natural Church Development organisation has provided reports to local churches on these surveys. The methodology used in these surveys is much less sound than that of the NCLS Research surveys. The surveys only tap into the opinions of people who are in the core of church life, and thus ignore the feelings of younger people and older people and others on the fringe of the churches. The surveys are also less balanced theologically than the NCLS Research surveys, and reflect an evangelical and devotional theology. Nevertheless, some churches have found these surveys and the reports on them to be catalysts for thinking about addressing weaknesses in the life of the church.

Both the NCLS Research and the Natural Church Development look at the current practices in church life and the factors which contribute to its vitality. They are both bound by current church models of life and practices. Neither has the capacity to address the paradigmatic change that is needed in these times.

In terms of a systematic research project looking at the vitality and growth, one of the most comprehensive is that which has been undertaken by the Church of England in the United Kingdom. It has examined all the churches and has identified a range of factors that are contributing to growth in the churches. A series of reports have been released and are available on the internet at http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk. The following section summarises some findings. It may be noted that the finding that major contributors to vitality of church life include leadership, the intentional development of vision and ways of operationalising this vision, on welcoming people, maintaining the involvement of young people, and the empowering of lay people to be active
participants in the mission of the church, are similar to findings from the NCLS Research reports.

**Findings from Research on the Anglican Churches in the United Kingdom (2014)**

The summary report begins by noting that there are several dimensions to growth including the following:

1. the holiness, transformation and commitment of members and churches (growth in depth);
2. the number of disciples of Jesus Christ (growth in numbers);
3. the fruit of social righteousness and a transformed society (growth in the outworking of discipleship).

However, while growth in depth and in the outworking of discipleship is mentioned, the major focus is on numerical growth.

Overall, the research identified that there had been a national decline of 9 per cent in average weekly attendances in congregations of the Church of England over the decade from 2000 to 2010 (Church of England, p.7). In particular, it noted the challenge of retaining children in involvement in the churches. It noted that nearly half of all the Anglican churches had fewer than five children under the age of 16 (Church of England, p.8). However, it also noted that there were many findings to encourage and celebrate. In the decade to 2010, 18 per cent of churches grew, 55 per cent were stable, and 27 per cent declined (Church of England, p.14).

**Factors Contributing to Growth**

The report emphasised that there was no single recipe for growth. Rather, there were a number of ingredients which were linked to growth.

1. **Context.** Growth was harder to achieve in areas where the population was static or in decline. Rural village churches were more likely to be facing decline. However, growth was more likely to occur in areas with younger, urban, ethnic minority attenders (Church of England, p.10).

2. **Leadership.** Leadership is an important factor. The leadership qualities which stood out as significant in relation to growth were: motivating, envisioning and innovating. Those leaders with those qualities were significantly more likely to have growing churches.

Other important elements of leadership were:

- having the ability to engage with outsiders and newcomers;
- being intentional about worship style and tradition;
- having a vision for growth and doing new things to make it happen;
- prioritising growth;
- being good at developing a vision and goals;
- abilities in training people for ministry and mission (Church of England, p.11).

3. **A clear mission and purpose.** Of those parishes who reported a clear sense of mission and purpose, 64 per cent had growth and 25 per cent had declined. Of those that reported they did not have a clear sense of mission and purpose, 26 per cent had grown and 52 per cent had declined (Church of England, p.11).

4. **Self-reflection.** The researchers reported that the particular style of a church was less important than the fact that it had considered and embraced a particular style: that the church was self-reflective and willing to learn (Church of England, p.11).
5. Willingness to change and adapt. Growing churches had a mentality of 'giving it a go'. They were willing to try new initiatives and experiments (Church of England, p.11). One sign of that willingness to try new things noted in the research was that churches which used Facebook and other social media were more likely to be growing than those that did not (Church of England, p.13).

6. Assigned roles for lay people. The quality of lay leadership is important. The research found that in churches which reported there was a rotation among people in volunteer leadership roles there was much more likely to be growth than in those churches which said that the same people tended to serve in the same roles (Church of England, p.12).

7. Active engagement of children and teenagers. Three-quarters of the churches that offered retreats, conferences or camps for young people reported growth, compared with half of the churches which did not offer such activities. In general, churches with programs for children and teenagers were more likely to be growing (Church of England, p.12).

8. Active engagement of people in the wider community. Some community programs such as providing debt counselling and aid work were related to growth in churches. Other community activities did not relate to numerical growth even though they may be linked to growth in social transformation (Church of England, p.12).

9. Visitors welcomed and followed up. The most direct route to growth, the researchers noted, was members inviting and welcoming family, friends and acquaintances into the church (Church of England, p.13).

10. Commitment to nurturing new and existing Christians. Those churches offering specific discipleship courses or specifically preparing members for Christian witness in their lives were more likely to be growing than those that did little or relied on the Sunday services for their educational ministry (Church of England, p.13).

11. Vision for growth. Growth, said the researchers, 'is not mechanical but results from a deep reflection and commitment, a desire to experiment and a desire for renewal' (Church of England, p.13).

**Fresh Expressions**
The research looked at 477 fresh expressions of the church in 10 dioceses. These were quite varied and included Messy Church, and church based around drop-in centres or in cafes or bars. Many of these fresh expressions were focussed on children. However, they were:
- missional - with the intention of serving people outside traditional forms of church;
- contextual - listening to people and entering their culture;
- educational - making discipleship a priority; and
- ecclesial - aspiring to be the church in itself and not just a bridge to 'real church' (Church of England, p.16).
The majority (52%) were run by lay people.

It found that of the fresh expressions examined:
- 66% were growing;
- 25% had grown but were now shrinking;
- 9% had fluctuated in attendance and
• 10% had ceased to operate. Overall, it was calculated that they had added about 21,000 people into the life of the church, the equivalent of about one new medium-sized diocese.

Church Plants
A number of churches had developed teams of people to plant new churches. In most cases, a larger church provided some financial and other resources with the expectation that the new church would become self-supporting within three to five years. The research identified several models of church planting. However, it noted that such planting activities commonly involved entrepreneurial and innovative approaches. It was important that they were relational and incarnational, welcoming, and involved families. Most plants focussed on local people, volunteering, attempting to be a healing presence, and used small groups in the growth.

Cathedrals
Overall weekly attendance in 42 cathedrals across Britain grew by 35 per cent between 2002 and 2012. In particular, there was a doubling of the numbers of week-day attenders. It was suggested by the cathedral deans that growth was associated with the quality of worship, music, preaching, the hospitable and friendly atmosphere, exploring new patterns of service, spiritual openness and emphasis on families and young people (Church of England, pp.21-22). It is notable that in a study of the attenders of four cathedrals, just half of the worshippers were regular in their involvement. It would appear that increasing numbers of people were dropping in occasionally.

Attenders said the three major factors in their attendance were, in order, the opportunity for peace and contemplation, the worship and music, and the friendly atmosphere (Church of England, p.22).

A number of other ‘greater churches’ which sought to offer a cathedral style of ministry were identified. These churches generally had a strong public and civic role. Again, the factors of initiating new services and congregations, increasing civic profile, improving welcoming and hospitality, developing educational programs, cultivating mission intentionality and promoting inclusion and diversity in worship, membership and outreach were all reported as seen as significant factors in growth (Church of England, p.24).

Factors in the Decline of Churches
1. Failure to retain younger generations. The major reason why churches are declining is because churches are not keeping young people in their teens and into young adulthood. Half of all churches had less than five children under the age of 16 years. The most effective growth among young people involved building community. Those factors which were associated with church growth were:
   • worship services designed for children
   • youth programs
   • camps and retreats
   • a church school (Church of England, p.26).

2. Amalgamation of congregations. Amalgamated churches where there was one leader for several churches were unlikely to grow. Churches were most likely to grow where there is a single church under one leader. Team ministries were less likely to grow than when a church had its own single leader. In 2011, 71 per cent of the Church of England parishes were in multi-parish teams or benefices, compared with just 17 per cent in 1960. Running amalgamations, leaders become increasingly focussed on administration and buildings and sustaining Sunday worship (Church of England, p.27).
3. **Burdensome buildings.** In approximately half of all the churches, the maintenance of buildings was seen to be a significant burden (Church of England, p.30).

4. **Stagnation.** The report stated that doing things in the church by default rather than by choice leads to decline (Church of England, p.30).

5. **Inappropriate leadership.** It was found that where leaders were reported as having the characteristics of empathising, persisting and managing, there was less growth. The researchers suggest that while these are not negative qualities, they are not associated with being flexible and motivating people to move in new directions, characteristics associated with growth (Church of England, p.30).

6. **Unwillingness in congregations to change.** The report noted that changes are often uncomfortable. Where churches were unwilling to change, for example, in how a building is used, or changes in lay leadership, or the timing and type of worship, there was a great tendency to decline (Church of England, p.31).

**Factors Not Associated with Growth or Decline**
The research did not find any significant relationship to growth or decline in the theological tradition of churches, nor in the gender, ethnicity or marital status of the leader (Church of England, p.31).

**Research on Religion in the Cultural Context**
It should be noted that almost all the research undertaken by the churches has looked at contemporary challenges in terms of what the churches can do better in terms of leadership, structures and programs. Little of this research has been directed to understanding the church in its contemporary context. That sort of research has occurred mostly in the universities. One of the major contributors to consideration of the church in society has been Gary Bouma of Monash University (1992; 2006). Bouma argues that there is a continuing interest in religion / spirituality in Australia and that secular humanism has not solved the human problems of providing meaning. The expression of religion / spirituality in Australia is taking diverse forms, and the mainstream denominations are not tapping well into contemporary expressions of it.

There is continuing debate about secularisation, individualisation and consumerisation in relation to religion overseas (see, for example, Bruce 1999, Lyon 2000, Miller 2004, and Wuthnow 1998). However, much of these debates has not been related significantly to church life in Australia.

A major study was undertaken on the culture and attitudes to religious faith of young people by researchers from the Australian Catholic University, Monash University and the Christian Research Association between 2002 and 2006. The study found that young people's lives revolved around fun, family and friends and that religious faith was seen as peripheral by many young people. Yet, it was also concluded that young people are not opposed to spirituality and there are points at which a dialogue about the spiritual dimensions of life can begin in the ways in which they value relationships, music and the natural world (Hughes 2007).

**Research Related to Educational, Welfare and Health Organisations**
Research on how educational, welfare and health organisations operate in their particular specialist fields is beyond the scope of this discussion paper. It should be noted that a number of
denominations have considered how their churches and these organisations should be relating to each other.

The integration of the welfare and congregational dimensions of The Salvation Army has been a matter of concern for a long time. In 2002, The Salvation Army commissioned the Christian Research Association to examine the success of attempts at integration at various locations. The Christian Research Association found that, in a few places, a high level of integration had been achieved with significant results for both welfare and congregational dimensions of the churches' life. This had occurred particularly where there had been joint ministry and business long-term vision and planning. For example, in a corps in Adelaide, a podiatrist, an unemployment agency and a congregation had been co-located. Through the development of a friendship club to which older people who came for podiatry were invited, many older people were invited into the fellowship of the congregation. A co-located café became the interface between the church and the unemployment agency for younger people. Young people went from the unemployment agency to the computers in the café to look for work. They were welcomed and assisted in the café by volunteers from the church. Some of them became involved in the life of the church (Hughes and Bond 2004).

The Catholic Church has given great attention to training its senior management in health and welfare in Catholic theology and values, particularly since the late 1990s when the management of many of its agencies was handed over by religious orders to lay professionals. Its training programs have focussed on how Catholic theology and values are expressed within the health and welfare dimensions of the churches' life. The Christian Research Association has been involved in the assessment of one such program which has been conducted by the Australian Catholic University. Operating as an executive and leadership training program, the Christian Research Association found that most participants in the program had found it most worthwhile. Whether they were personally committed to the Catholic Church or not, it had helped them to implement the Catholic theology and values in their professional occupations and develop the Catholic ethos in their organisations.

There is also continuing attention within the Catholic Church to the integration of its schools and churches. The Christian Research Association is currently doing a research project on the collaboration between schools and parishes in the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney in the faith development of young people. The Catholic Education Office in the Archdiocese has appointed Youth Ministry Coordinators in secondary schools who have, as a focus of their role, the collaboration with parishes in the faith development of the students.
Inhibitors and Possibilities for the Uniting Church in the Present Environment

What, then, are the implications of current research on church life and culture in the Western world for the Uniting Church in Australia? This brief review has highlighted that changes that have come through the flows of immigration in Australia and the decline in local community life as people have become more mobile and as electronic communications have enhanced people's capacity to communicate with each other on a global basis. However, the major change has been the cultural change, sometimes referred to as the development of post-modernity, in which traditions have been critiqued and individuals have focussed on what benefits them and those close to them. The following are proposed as potential inhibitors and possibilities for growth in church vitality.

Inhibitors of Growth in Church Vitality

1. Focus on the church structures and traditions rather than on spiritual nurture and wellbeing of people. Heelas and Woodhead found in the United Kingdom that those churches which are most focussed on the maintenance of traditions are least likely to grow in numbers or engage people. People look for churches through which they and their families will find nurture and sustenance for what Heelas and Woodhead refer to as 'the subjective life'. It is likely that that finding is also relevant to Australian churches.

Uniting churches are responding to the pastoral and personal needs and interests of their members poorly and, in particular, have failed to understand the needs and interests of their younger members. Many churches have maintained the importance of having worship for all ages together, for example, which has then occurred in patterns which have tended to serve the interests and desires of the majority who are older people. There has been a focus on ecumenism, interpreted largely as organisational unity, but while this may be well justified theologically, it has not met the spiritual needs and interests of most members. The training of clergy has focussed on learning the history, the Biblical roots and the theological ruminations of the church, rather than focussed on understanding the spirituality, needs and interests of contemporary church members or people in the wider society.

In some parts of the Uniting Church, the focus has been on trying to reinterpret the traditions and beliefs of the Christian faith for our contemporary context. While this has been a valid preoccupation of some of the more intellectual people in the Uniting Church, it has not always addressed the spiritual nurture and wellbeing of many church attenders and members of the community who look for direction and encouragement in facing the practical realities of the coming week. The problem is not one of 'evangelical' or 'progressive' theology, but rather how theology is employed in supporting the lives of people. It is noteworthy that the research in the Church of England in the United Kingdom found no correlation between theology and church growth.

The focus on the maintenance of a particular structure of church as involving a building dedicated for worship and an employed professional clergy person in leadership has often caused churches to amalgamate in the attempt to maintain that sort of structure. However, such amalgamations usually lead to decline, as the research on the Church of England has found. They lead to a diminution of the sense of identity with a particular group. They also 'prop up' patterns of church life which have become irrelevant to most people. Contemporary faith communities need to be able to flourish today in a wide variety of forms – from discussion or meditation groups that meet in a home to the gathering of people for a city-wide festival.

2. Leadership through councils. There is clear evidence that Australians have become suspicious of the value of maintaining many voluntary institutions and have looked for 'light-weight'
institutional forms. The leadership of the denomination, the presbyteries and the local churches has been placed in the hands of numerous councils. In the formation of the Uniting Church this may well have contributed to ownership of the evolving identity. However, it has meant that 'weight' of the institutional structures has been very heavy. These councils have absorbed enormous amounts of time and energy and have probably sapped the church's energy in terms of achieving outcomes both in relation to church vitality, social justice and other forms of mission. Leadership through councils has also meant that it has been hard to maintain accountability for the mission of the church.

There are now comparatively few people available for these councils, but they remain highly time-consuming and unaccountable. They take the time and energy of many clergy and channel them away from their responsibilities in local churches. They take the time and energy of many lay people away from more productive activities in the life and mission of the church.

While some councils will continue to have a role particularly in overseeing aspects of the church's life, it is critical for church vitality that individual leaders are given responsibility for various tasks within the mission of the church and are held to account for the conduct of those tasks and the outcomes. This is particularly true in relation to employed staff. Employed staff need to have clear job descriptions and expectations in regards to outcomes and need to be held accountable for carrying out their specific tasks and responsibilities. This change is needed at all levels of the Uniting Church. It means that there needs to be clear expectations and job descriptions for paid employees in churches who should be held accountable to the councils of the church for the achievement of reasonable and agreed outcomes.

This means that local church clergy must be freed to give leadership and to motivate and empower others through their leadership rather than seeing themselves primarily as facilitators. However, new patterns of ministry must be evolved to cater for the needs of increasing numbers of small congregations. One such pattern is through 'resource ministry' patterns whereby the focus of clergy is in resourcing and supporting lay leadership and providing expert pastoral care for challenging personal situations, similar to that that has been developed in some rural situations (Hughes and Kunciunas 2008). Nevertheless, 'resource ministers' should also be expected and empowered to initiate new groups and activities, rather than simply facilitate lay leadership.

3. Inappropriate Buildings. Many church buildings are now inappropriate for the forms of community and worship that appeal to most people in the Australian community. Many convey a hierarchical theology and the ‘awesomeness’ of God that was appropriate in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. They were appropriate for the static, clergy dominated expressions of dogma, when values and the heritage could be encapsulated in stained-glass windows and 'unworthy' parishioners were content to sit on uncomfortable wooden pews. However, they are inappropriate to express the sense of a gathered group of people sharing their lives, passions and values with each other in the twenty-first century who learn through participation rather than simply listening to a lecture, who communicate with each through moving imagery rather than reflecting on static stained-glass, and who experience their sense of community through high quality coffee (and decaffeinated substitutes). These people express their faith and nurture each other in a great variety of ways rather than simply through hour-long services of music, prayers, sermon and Eucharist. They do it through meditation, counselling sessions, being out in and reflecting on nature, pilgrimage, discussion of films and books, eating together, making banners, artistic works, drama, professional development sessions, discussion groups, and even games. Hence, the spaces which are needed to help people nurture their own spirituality and that of others need to be flexible, comfortable, of varying sizes and furnishings, with a capacity for using electronic forms of communication (such as LCD screens) as well as face-to-face communication.

Many church buildings have become burdensome remnants of the past which are extremely expensive to maintain as well as being inappropriate for the growth of the church of the future, even
though they are sometimes seen by the wider community as significant parts of the past architectural heritage. It will be important to find ways of releasing church communities from those burdens and developing new buildings that are suitable for the diverse ways in which people will explore faith in the future.

**Possibilities for Growth in Church Vitality**

Most denominations in Australia are finding growth difficult, although only in some denominations is decline occurring, and it is occurring at very different rates in the different denominations. Factors contributing to growth include the following.

1. **Immigration.** Churches which are welcoming many immigrants are growing much faster than churches which are welcoming few new immigrants. Many of these immigrants become incorporated into their own congregations which speak their own language. However, it becomes necessary to develop English-language alternatives for the children of immigrants and to develop ways in which they can transfer into the English-language environment. The Uniting Church in Melbourne is likely to continue to grow through immigration from countries such as China, Korea, and India. However, it will need to be sensitive to the different understanding of faith of many immigrants. This may mean allowing immigrant congregations more independence in expressing their faith and values in their own ways.

2. **Regional Churches.** Large regional churches (including, in England, cathedrals) are growing in many places. They are attractive to people because of the high quality of the preaching and music in worship and because of the wide range of activities, including small groups, they offer for people of all age groups and with various interests. Many of them have large teams of staff often with distinctive professional qualifications such as in music, in children's and family work and in counselling, who conduct many of the activities and ensure their high quality. Many of them are growing largely through increasing numbers of people who come occasionally or who are visitors.

These churches need to make extensive use of electronic means of communication including websites and Facebook pages with people associated with them.

The Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania currently has very few if any churches of more than 500 people meeting on a typical Sunday. However, there may be the possibility of developing some within the Uniting Church if innovative leadership is given opportunity and if churches focus more on meeting the needs of people than on maintaining church traditions. The development of regional churches needs to be considered strategically and initiatives taken at a regional level. It cannot be accomplished simply by merging several congregations any more than one can build a regional shopping centre simply by amalgamating a number of small suburban shops.

3. **Focus on Nurturing the Subjective Life of Individuals.**

The Uniting Church in Australia in Victoria and Tasmania will find new life and vitality as it re-focusses on serving the broad population in their wellbeing and, particularly, their spirituality. It will find new life and vitality as it listens carefully to people and engages them in dialogue, as it seeks to journey with people. It will need to change its structures and reallocate its resources so that it can engage people in their search for a meaningful life.

If it is to engage the large number of Australians who do not wish to identify with a particular religious group and especially the large number who describe themselves as 'spiritual but not religious', then it must engage them in forms which are very 'light-weight' institutionally, such as
through a home discussion group or through forms of chaplaincy rather than expecting these people to take up membership in a highly institutionalised professionally-led church congregation.

There are a number of synergies between the people in the Australian community who describe themselves as 'spiritual but not religious' and the traditions out of which the Uniting Church has emerged (Geels 2009). It will be necessary to build on these synergies. Among them are:

1. The world is not best viewed only in material terms, but includes a spiritual dimension. At the heart of human life lies the mystery of love. At the heart of the universe lies the mystery of being. These mysteries are not reducible to the findings of empirical science, but continue to affect how we live life and see the universe.
2. A respect for the natural world as an expression of the mystery of life and the universe, which is also found in some parts of the Scripture and in many parts of the historical tradition of the Church.
3. A focus on personal experience rather than dogma as a source of truth, which fits especially with the early Methodist heritage of the Uniting Church, but which also has parallels with the mystical traditions of Christianity.
4. Personally-owned sense of the meaning of life rather than the inheritance of a community identity, which has parallels with those traditions of the church that have emphasised personal commitment of faith.

One component of the 'spiritual but not religious' movement in Australia and in other Western countries (Butler Bass 2012) today is that it is a protest against religious traditions which have become highly professionalised, hierarchical and institutionally heavy. Many aspects of this protest parallel the Protestant protest of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries against the hierarchical clericalism and institutionalism of the Church. The Uniting Church might recognise that some aspects of these protests are relevant again today.

How might the Uniting Church seek to engage the wider population in its search for meaning and spiritual wellbeing? One possibility is to explore how churches can work with schools, welfare and health organisations to engage with the wider public, bringing the capacity for community-building and spiritual nurture to all parts of the population. Churches, schools, welfare and health organisations will need to enter into respectful dialogue in order for this to occur. All dimensions of the Uniting Church need to use electronic forms of communication much more extensively to engage with that population that no longer exists in local communities but finds community in a mosaic of ways through common interests and experiences.

Opportunities for training both for people who will be in paid employment and those who will act in volunteer capacities for serving the population spirituality and in their search for meaning and wellbeing should be offered. There must be a much greater focus on understanding people and contemporary society, rather than focussing almost exclusively on understanding the roots and traditions of the Church. It is expected that, in the future, most activities for the nurture of the spirit will be offered in 'user-pays' contexts. Future employees of churches will not be able to depend on the faithful donations of people to support all their activities. Some will be employed in administrative roles organising different community activities. Many may act as 'tutors' in meditation, as counsellors or chaplains, and as community educators.

Within this context, it is appropriate to integrate more the work of the schools, welfare and health organisations with the churches. This means welcoming the organisations into the decision-making and engaging in meaningful dialogue about how the spiritual and communal dimensions of life can be enhanced through them as through the churches, and where churches and other organisations can
work together for the sake of the holistic provision of services to the wider population. It may also mean opening up appropriate professional development opportunities through which leaders and other employees in these organisations may be encouraged to reflect on what it means to be part of the Uniting Church (Hughes 2010, pp.145-6).

As the Uniting Church engages the population in its search for meaning, some will point to the risk that the Uniting Church will lose touch with the essence of its faith, its own story of the divine and of Jesus. Theologically, it must be noted that it was a similar risk that preoccupied the Pharisees and the teachers of the law in the time of Jesus. Jesus responded by reminding them that what God requires is that we love God and our neighbours and that our human traditions can often become hindrances to those primary requirements.

At the same time, it will be important that through the churches' internal structures that it ensures that the essence of the faith of the Uniting Church is not lost, but is applied in new and vital ways as the Church seeks to engage with people in their diverse journeys. This needs to occur through the education, not only of those who would be leaders in the church and congregational activities, but leaders in all aspects of the churches' life, including schools, welfare and health organisations. However, in educating its leaders, its focus must be on the application of the essence of faith to various expressions of the churches' life.

There are a range of models through which the renewed engagement with the population can occur. Among them will be the following.

- Regional churches which offer a wide range of events and activities through which the spiritual may be nurtured.
- Community Living Centres as have been initiated by many local churches.
- Through drama and artistic groups and activities and task groups focussed on particular social justice and social welfare concerns and interests.
- Festivals of faith that might be offered, perhaps in conjunction with other Christian denominations, throughout a city.
- Chaplaincy and the formation of small groups and other activities in schools, welfare and health organisations.
- Integrated projects offering a wide variety of events and activities through which the spiritual may be nurtured between congregations, schools and welfare organisations.

Fresh expressions of faith will emerge as a culture of innovation is encouraged in all parts of the church, and where innovative leaders are given permission to experiment in an accountable way, but without having to get the approval of a council for every step along the path.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that a large proportion of Uniting Church people are elderly. They do not have the energy or the capacity for innovative activity. They need the pastoral care of the church. There is no need to destroy their communities in order to build fresh expressions, although there may be times when the facilities they are using may provide the basis for fresh expressions. There may also be occasions when it is more appropriate for existing congregations to worship in small chapels and homes rather than trying to maintain expensive, burdensome buildings. And it may be that better use is made of lay preachers and other lay leaders in conducting traditional forms of worship and providing pastoral care in these congregations, rather than using all the clergy in the support of existing congregations. The new forms of Christian community must be built alongside the old.

The new models of nurturing the spirit are not likely to lead to more people into traditional church
services on a Sunday morning. But that is not the aim. The mission of the church lies in engagement with people of all ages, all ethnic and religious backgrounds, taking them seriously as people, and seeking with them to experience and to express love for God and for neighbour, and such experiences and expressions can take many forms. As the Uniting Church seeks to be faithful to its calling, it must seek to nurture the spirit of the people of Australia wherever and whenever it has the opportunity, and to do so in communal and incarnational ways. While there must be experimentation, there must also be carefully planned forms of evaluation and accountability. Theologically, it is inconceivable that there is a diminishing of God's activity among human beings, even among those who no longer believe in God. Rather, the challenge is finding how we can better work with God, especially in the lives of people in Victoria and Tasmania.
References


**Data Sources:**
Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data has mostly been accessed through Table Builder. The Christian Research Association is responsible for the construction of tables and the interpretation of the data.