



2021 National
Church Life
Survey

FOCUSED ON THE
future

Faith-sharing and Baptist Churches: views of Baptist church attenders

A report on questions included in the 2021 National Church Life Survey for Australian Baptist Ministries

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NCLS Denominational Commissioned Headline Report No. 2022.BA1.07

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Faith-sharing and Baptist Churches: views of Baptist church attenders

A report on questions included in the 2021 National Church
Life Survey for Australian Baptist Ministries.

R. Powell, C. Gan & S. Sterland | February 2023



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- **Suitability of local church for non-Christian/ enquirer**
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- **Australian responses to invitation**



About National Church Life Surveys

Every five years

Largest, longest
running survey of
church life in the
world.

20+
denominations
and movements

Thousands of local
churches and local
church leaders

Hundreds of
thousands of
attenders

Every local church
gets their own
results & planning
resources



Around 8000 Baptist attenders in NSW & ACT completed surveys in late 2021 and 2022

About the 2021 National Church Life Survey

The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a major survey of churches and church attenders carried out every five years in Australia since 1991.

Each NCLS involves hundreds of thousands of church attenders across more than 20 denominations and movements, including Catholic, Anglican and all the major Protestant denominations in Australia.

Survey Types

Both hard copy and online survey forms were available.

The “NCLS Attender Survey” was completed by church attenders aged 15 years and older, usually during or after a service of worship.

The “NCLS Census Survey” about the activities and operations of the local church was completed by a single leader/administrator in each church.

Ethics

The 2021 NCLS received Human Research Ethics Approval from Charles Sturt University (Ref: H21355).

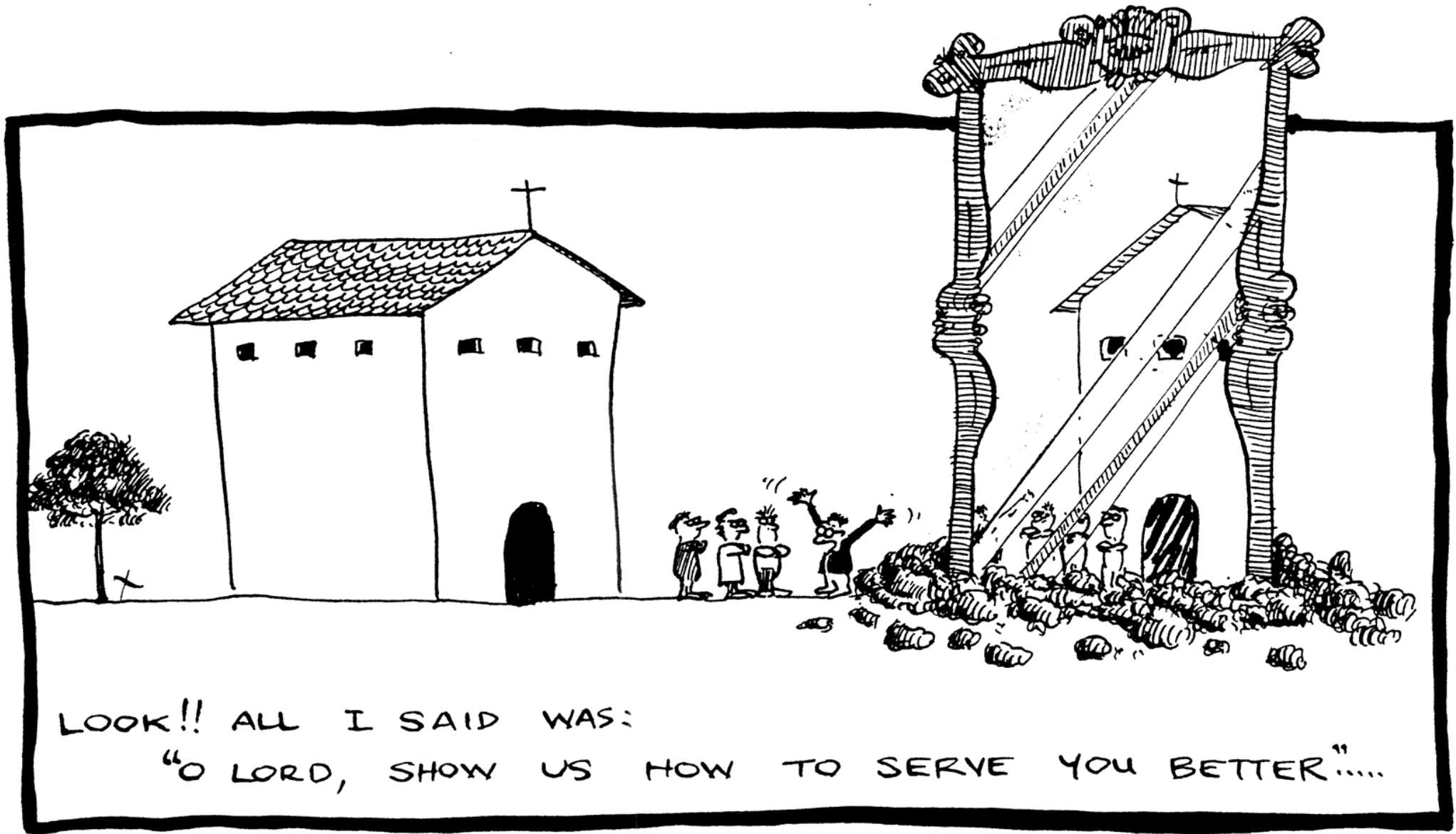
Method

The main attender survey is known as “NCLS Attender Survey A” and is available in a number of languages. Attender Survey A was completed by 85% respondents in each denomination in 2021. The variant of Attender Survey A (ABA) completed by attenders of Baptist Churches around Australia included several questions commissioned by the Australian Baptist Ministries. They were distributed across Baptist churches around Australia and was completed by 7,387 church attenders.

The remaining attenders receive one of a range of Attender Sample Survey forms, which include a core component from Attender Survey A, and additional questions unique to the sample variant. These small surveys (between 20 and 30 in each wave) progress a wide range of research agendas beyond church health and are included at random in the bundle of survey forms ordered by the church.

Error Rates

The maximum margin of error on a simple random sample of 1,406 at a 95% level of confidence is 2.6%. That is, assuming a simple random sample, there is a 95% chance that a sample result falls within $\pm 2.6\%$ of the result for the Australian churchgoing population.



LOOK!! ALL I SAID WAS:

"O LORD, SHOW US HOW TO SERVE YOU BETTER"....

Jesus calls his people to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19, 20).

The Acts of the Apostles shows that, for the early church, fulfilling this mission involved a readiness to proclaim the Good News about Jesus in anticipation of the conversion of people to the faith and their inclusion in the fellowship of believers.

Faith-sharing: a core quality of healthy churches



Church health/vitality: NCLS Research model

UNDERSTAND
THE BIG
picture

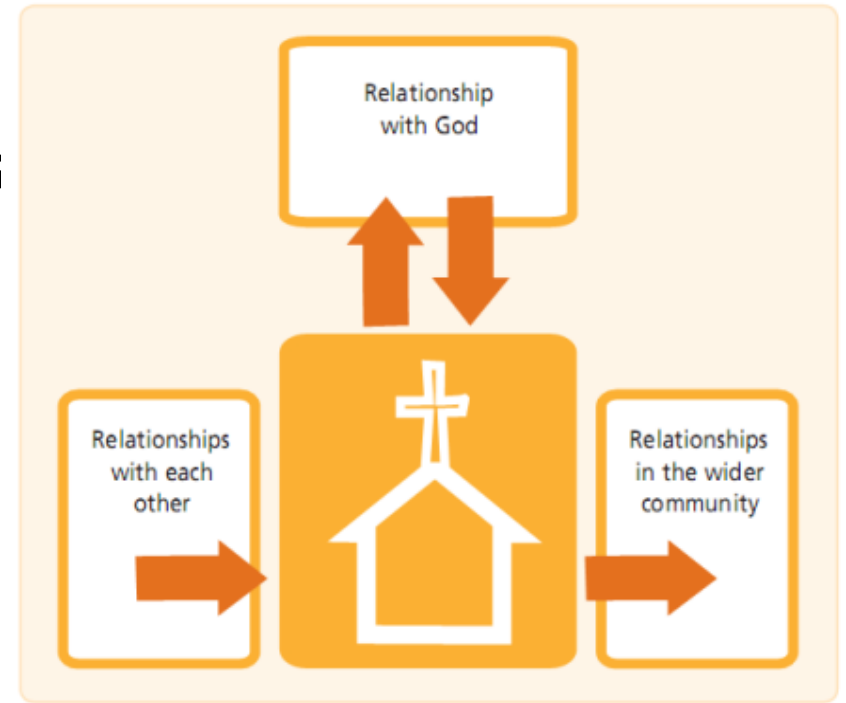
Goal-focused: What a church seeks to achieve

Healthy churches **help people in their relationships**

- with God
- with each other
- with the wider community

Healthy churches are “sustainable” in terms of **attendance**, inclusion of **young people & newcomers**.

Healthy churches also have **vital leadership**
directions for the future



Attendance
Measures

young
adult
retention

newcomers

attendance
change

Church health: NCLS Core Qualities model

UNDERSTAND
THE BIG
picture

NCLS Research describes nine Core Qualities and three attendance measures which are central to the life of a vital and healthy church.

They are:

- based on years of research in Australian and international churches
- all central to the life of a church
- all interrelated yet also separately understood

The Internal Core Qualities



Faith



Worship



Belonging

Inner life

The Outward Core Qualities



Service



Faith-Sharing



Inclusion

How churches focus beyond themselves

The Inspirational Core Qualities



Vision



Innovation



Leadership Culture

Relate to leadership and direction

Attendance Measures



Young adult retention



Newcomers



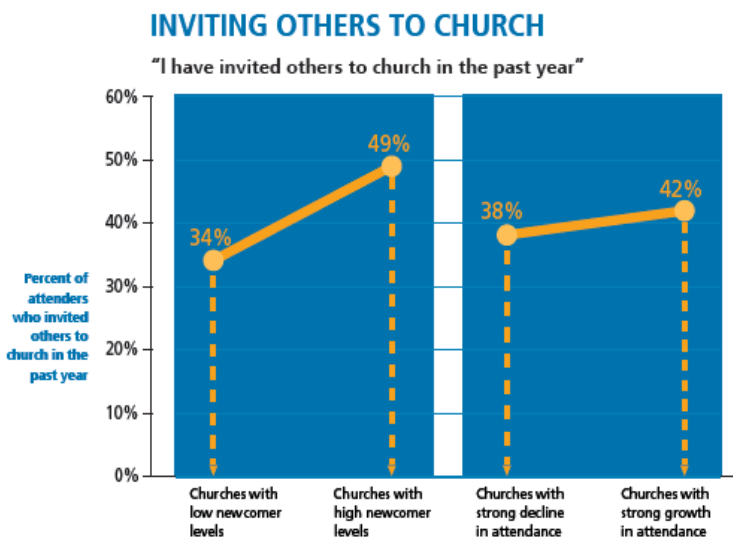
Attendance change

Research findings about faith-sharing

Finding 1: Inviting others to church is positively linked with church growth and attracting newcomers.

Finding 2: An inter-related quality. When a church is strong in this quality, it is associated with being strong in many other qualities.

Figure 2.23: Relationship between inviting others to church, newcomers and growth in attendance



When more attenders invite others to church, churches tend to grow
Source: 2016 NCLS Local Churches - aggregated weighted data (Newcomers n=2,366; Growth/Decline n=2,078).



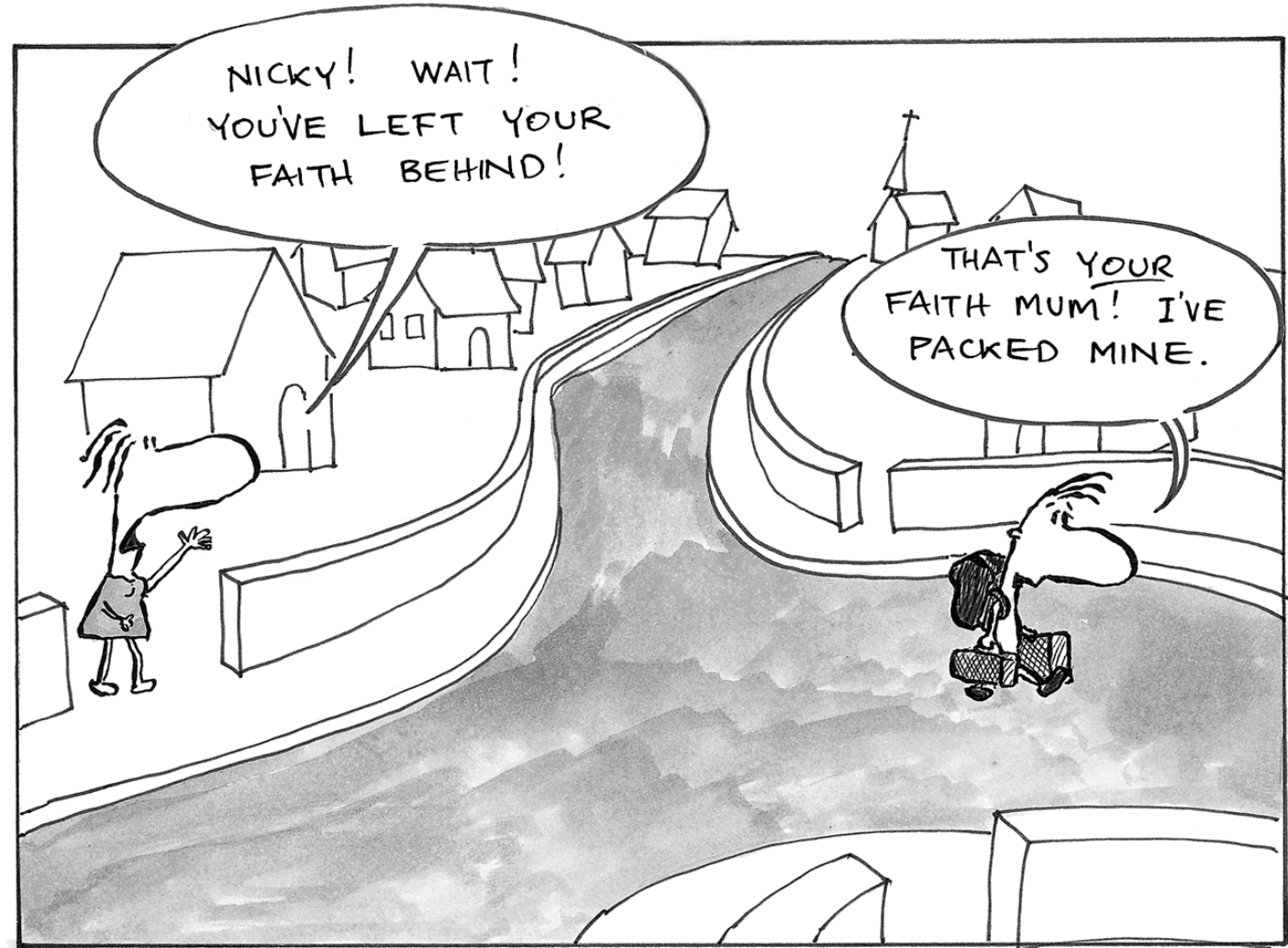
Faith sharing

How Baptist attenders approach sharing their faith



Baptist attenders strongly engage faith in their households

89% talk about matters of faith with other members of their household (8% live alone)



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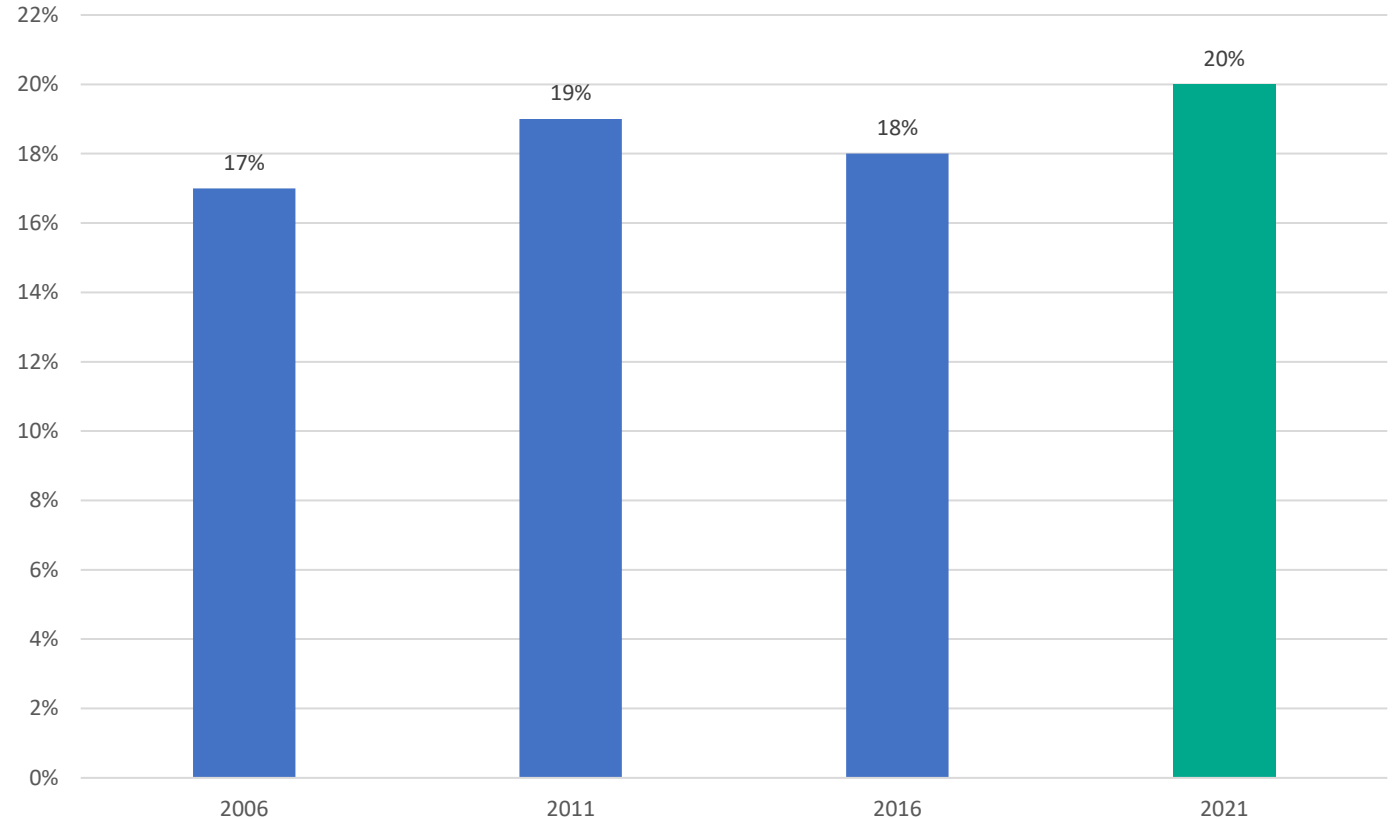
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Two in ten Baptists are active evangelists

20% feel at ease talking about faith with others and look for opportunities to do so.

This is slightly higher than in previous years

Feel at ease talking about faith with others and look for opportunities to do so: 2006 to 2021



Source: National Church Life Surveys. Baptist NSW & ACT: 2006 to 2021



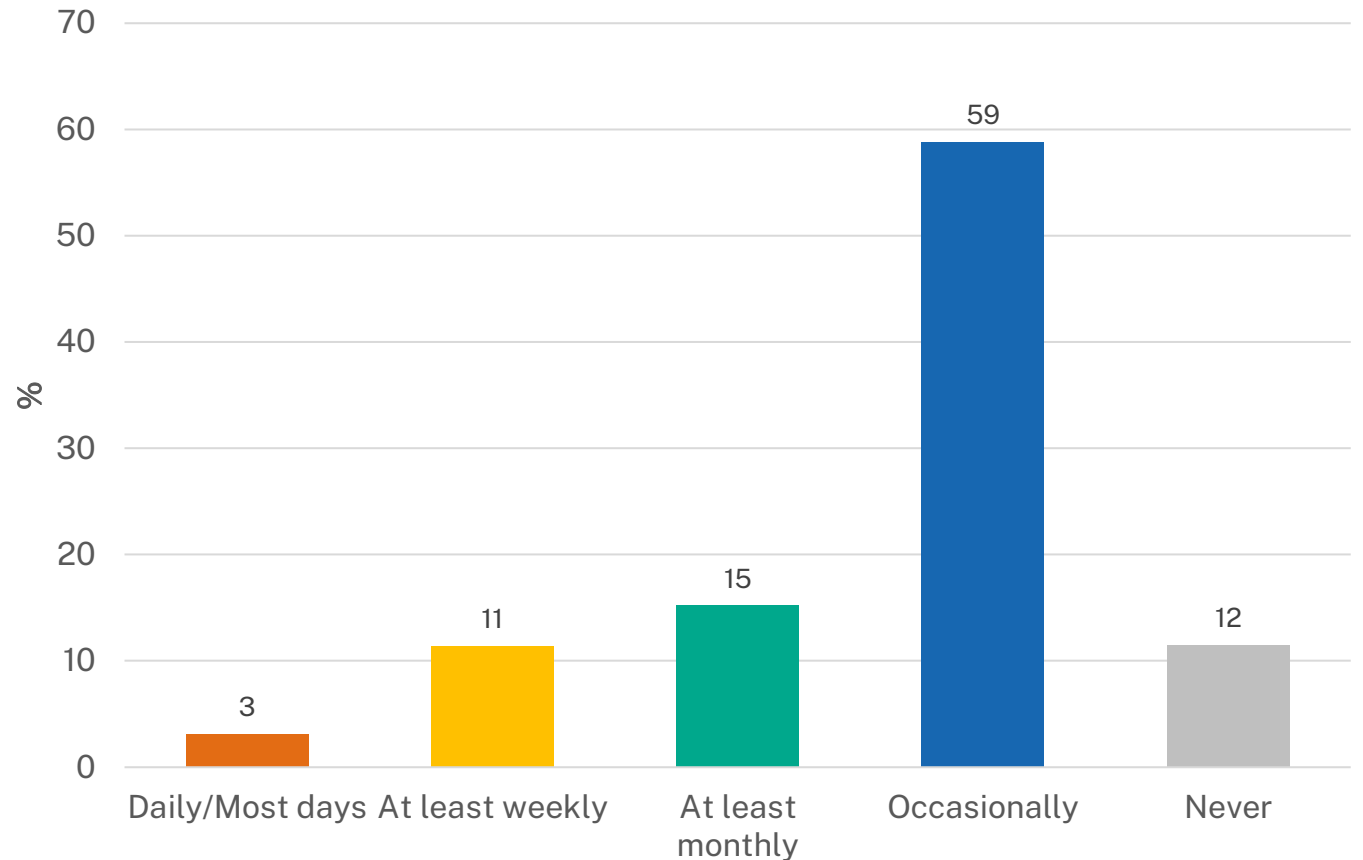
THIS HAPPENED EVERY TIME MARGARET
LEFT HER FAITH AT HOME!

Frequency of sharing faith in a secular space in the last year

Three in ten Baptists frequently shared faith in secular spaces with someone they knew

29% have frequently (at least monthly) shared their faith
Six in ten had 'occasionally' shared their faith (59%)
One in ten 'never' shared their faith in this way (12%).

In the last year, how often have you mentioned or shared your faith with someone you know through a secular workplace, club, school etc?



Source: National Church Life Survey 2021, survey ABA (n=7203)

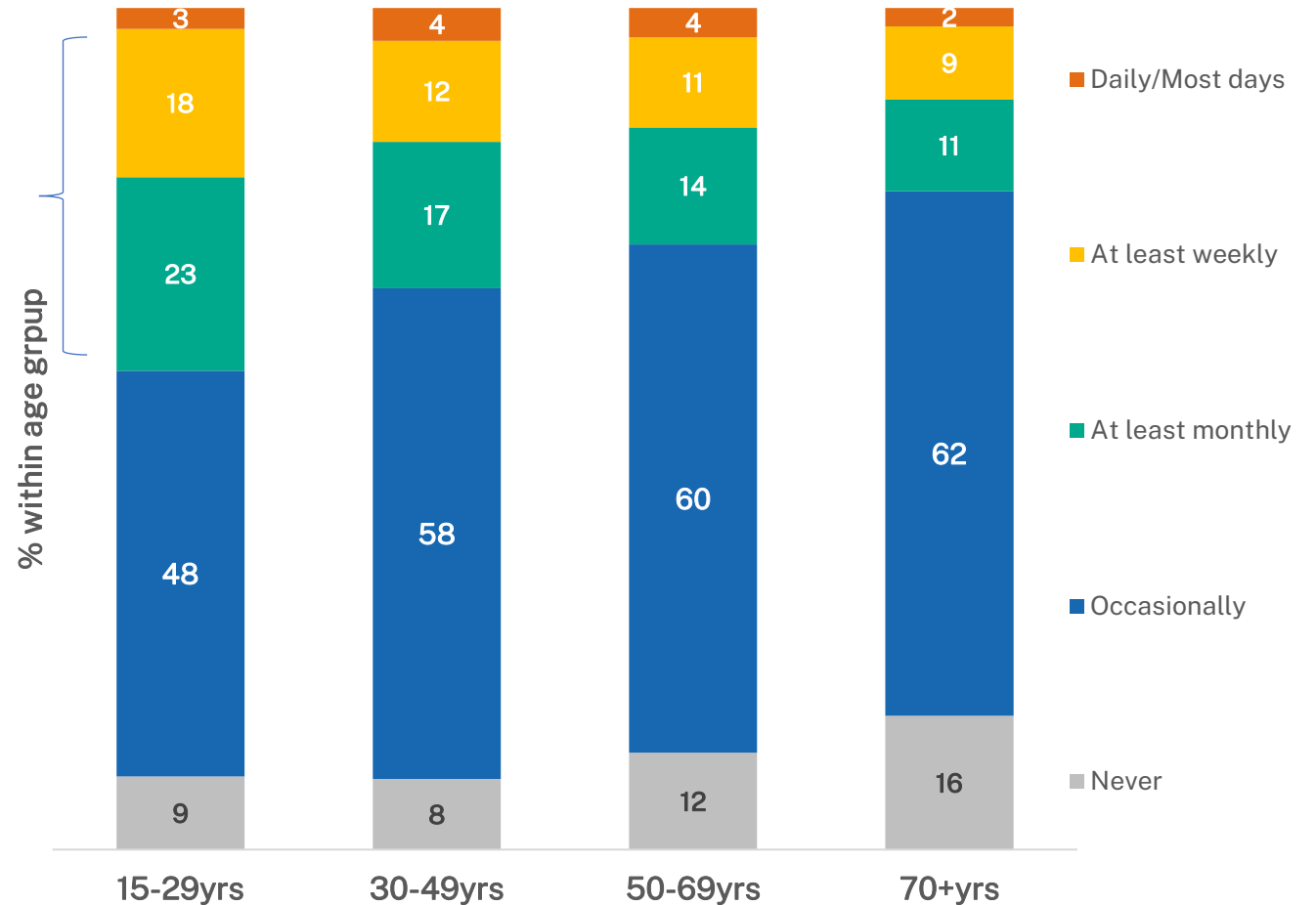
Frequency of sharing faith by age

Younger Baptist attenders are *more* likely to share faith frequently than older attenders

41% of attenders aged 15-29 year shared their faith 'at least weekly or monthly'.

This decreases with increasing age to 20% of attenders aged 70+ years

Shared your faith with someone you know by Age



Source: National Church Life Survey 2021, survey ABA (n=7203)

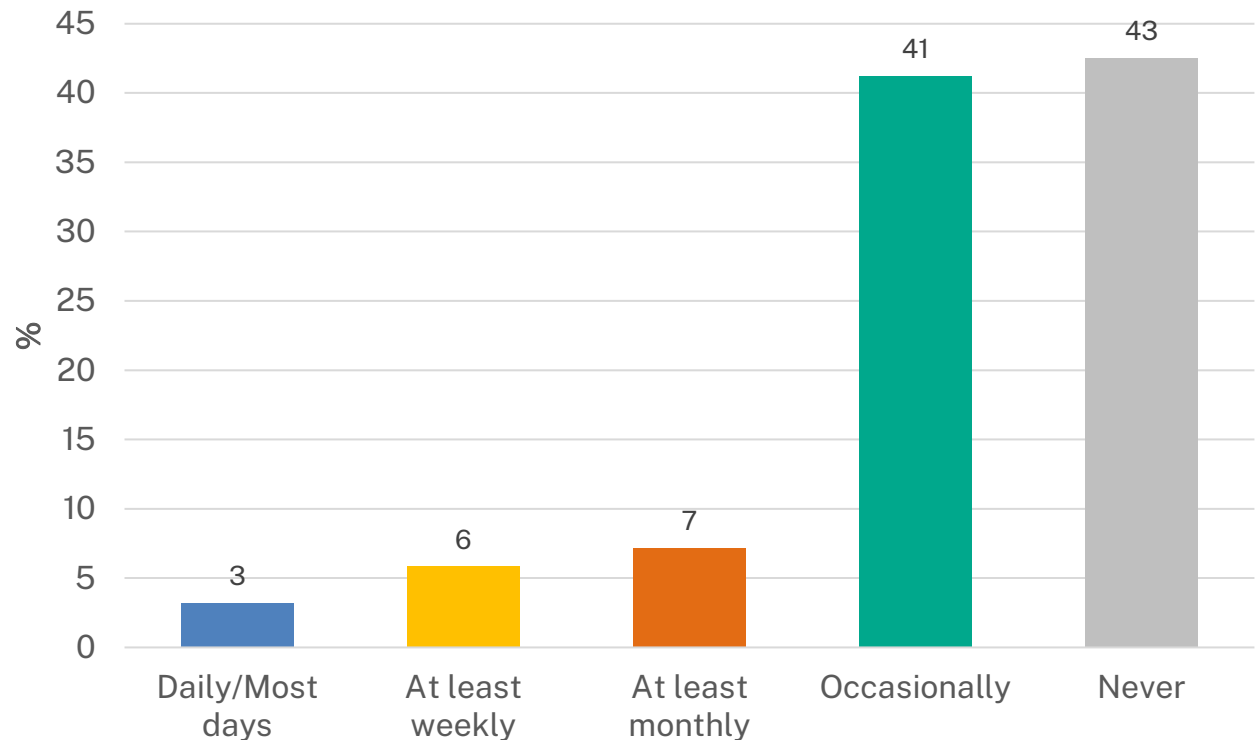
Sharing Christian content on social media

Sharing Christian content on social media/web in order to share faith with others is not common

43% of Baptist attenders reported they had 'never' shared Christian content on social media/web with others in the last year to share their faith

41% 'occasionally' shared Christian content on social media/web to share their faith

In the last year, how often have you shared Christian content on social media/web in order to share your faith with others?



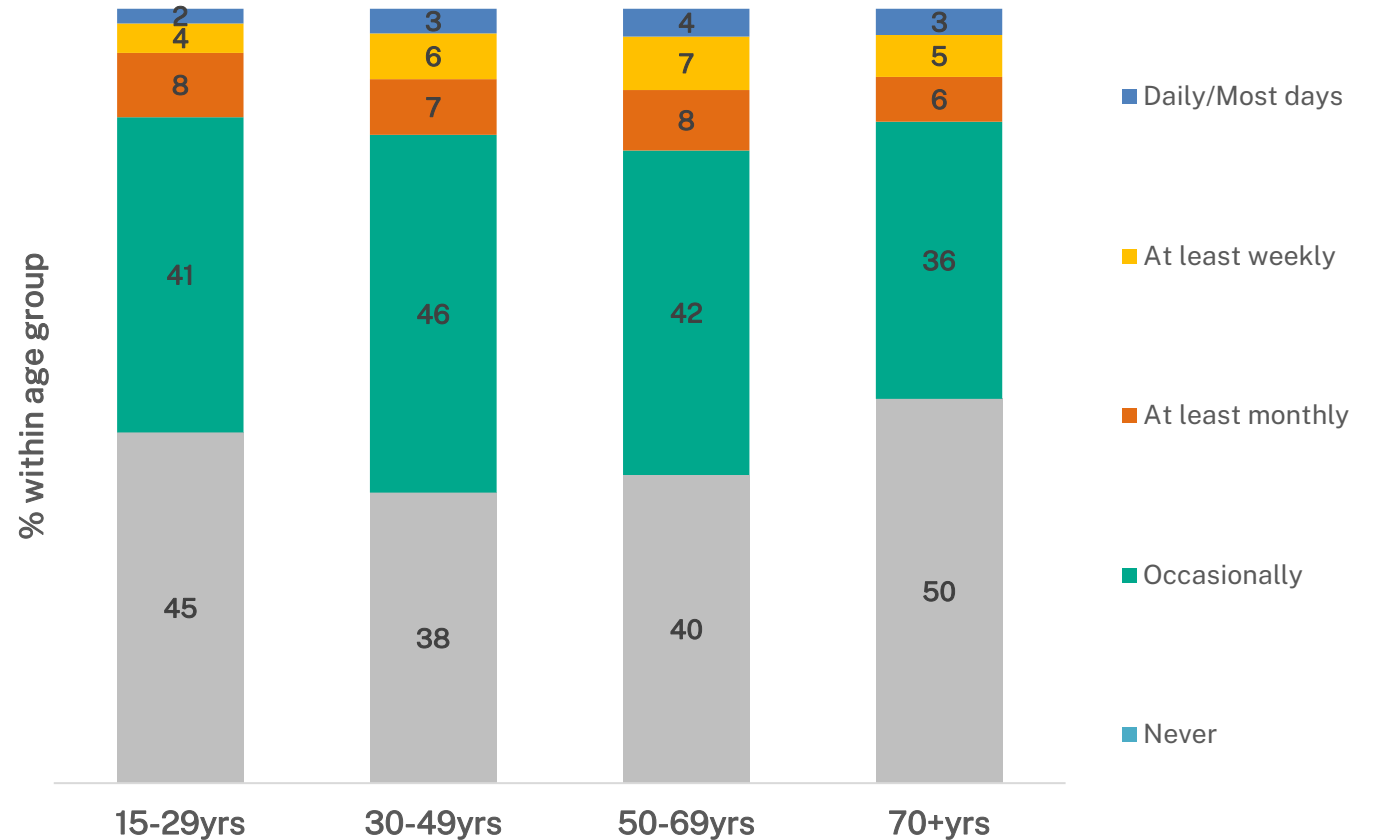
Source: National Church Life Survey 2021, survey ABA (n=7203)

Sharing Christian content on social media

Shared Christian content on social media by Age

The frequency of sharing Christian content on social media/web to share faith in the last year differed slightly by age

The proportion of attenders reporting they had 'never shared' Christian content on social media/web to share their faith, was highest in attenders aged 70+ years (50%) and lowest in attenders aged 30-49 years (38%).



Source: National Church Life Survey 2021, survey ABA (n=7203)



C.S.L.
CHURCH
AS A
SECOND
LANGUAGE

“SIN” IS THE
OPPOSITE TO “RIGHTEOUSNESS.”
WE ARE TO SHUN SIN AND
PUT ON THE GARMENT OF
RIGHTEOUSNESS.....
LET ME START AGAIN,

Faith sharing

When most likely to share faith

.....



When most likely to share faith

The majority (56%) were most likely to share their faith in a relaxed space with people they know (e.g. sports, meal, men's shed etc)

- 31% were comfortable to share their faith in most situations
- 6-7% indicated they would struggle to share their faith

When are you most likely to share your faith? (Select ALL that apply)

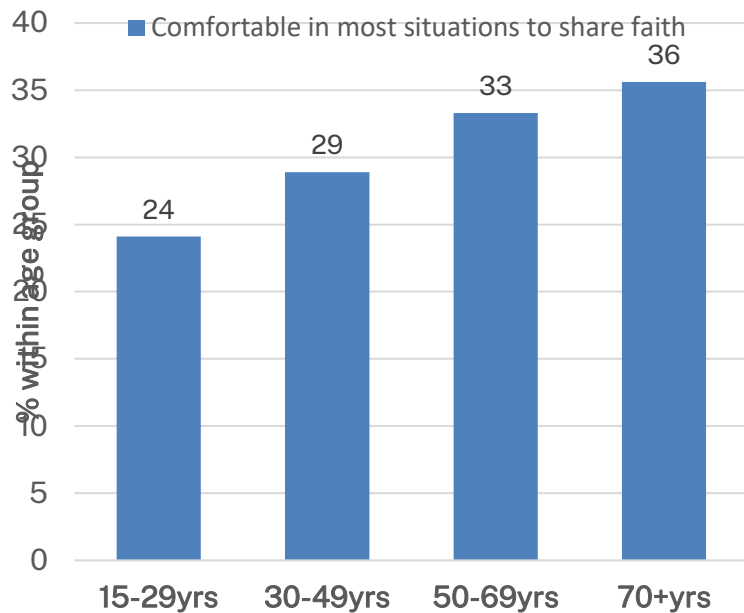


Source: National Church Life Survey 2021, survey ABA (n=7203)

When most likely to share faith

Situations when most likely to share faith differ by age.

As age increases, attenders are more likely to be comfortable to share faith in most situations.

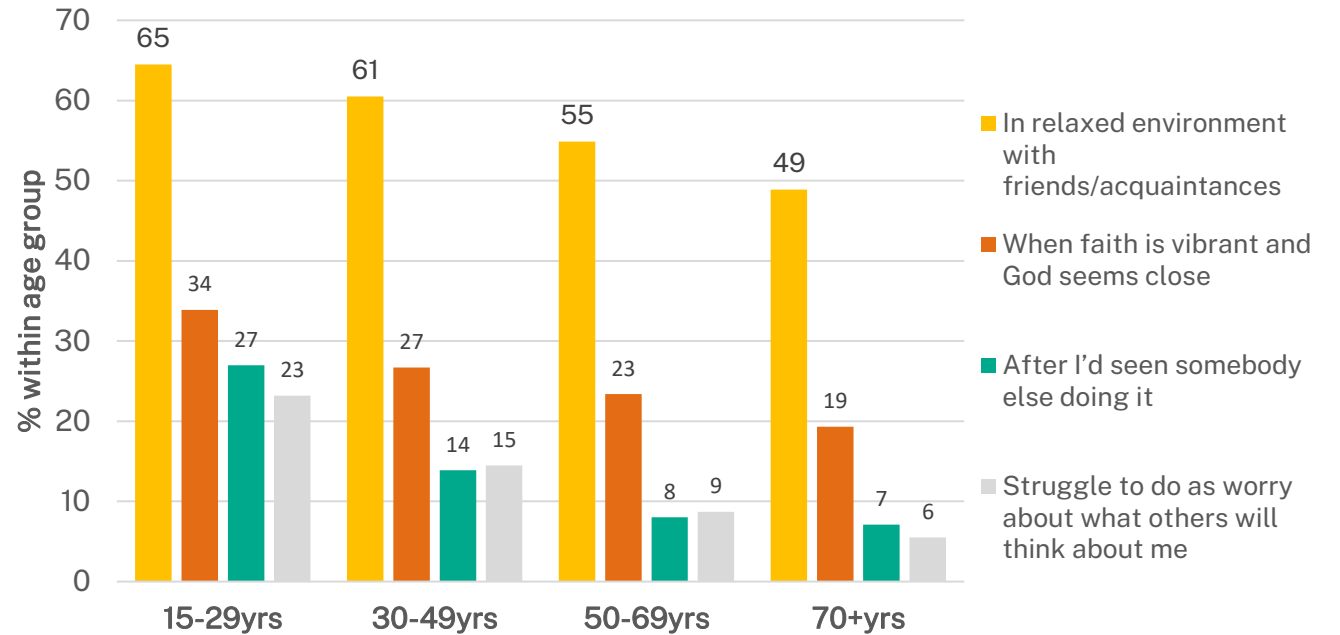


When most likely to share faith by Age (key findings)

Younger attenders are more likely to share faith:

- In a relaxed environment with friends/acquaintances
- When faith is vibrant and God seems close
- After seeing somebody else do it

Younger attenders are also more likely to struggle to share their faith due to worry about what others may think.



Source: National Church Life Survey 2021, survey ABA (n=7203)

Faith sharing

Evaluation - equipped to share faith



Equipped to share faith

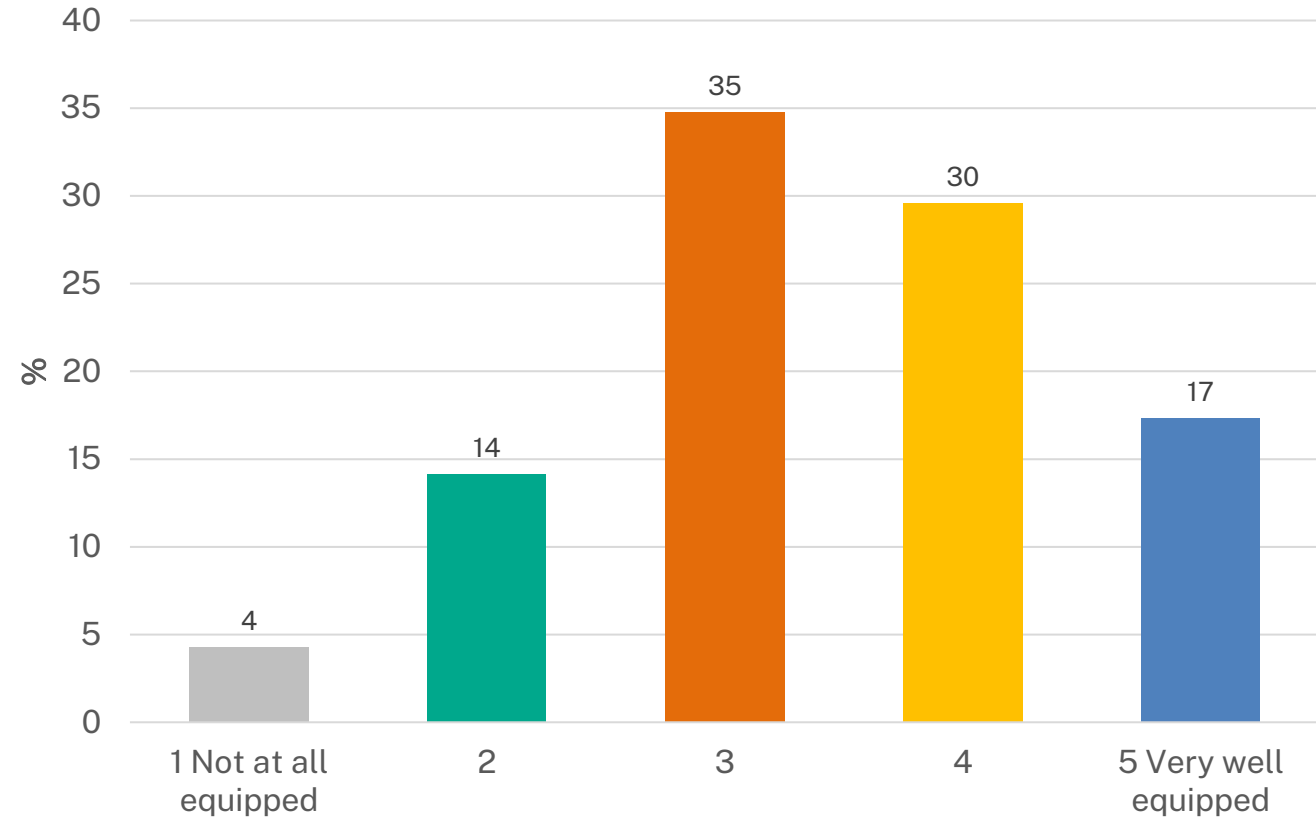
47%

of attenders felt well equipped to share their faith (rating 4 or 5)

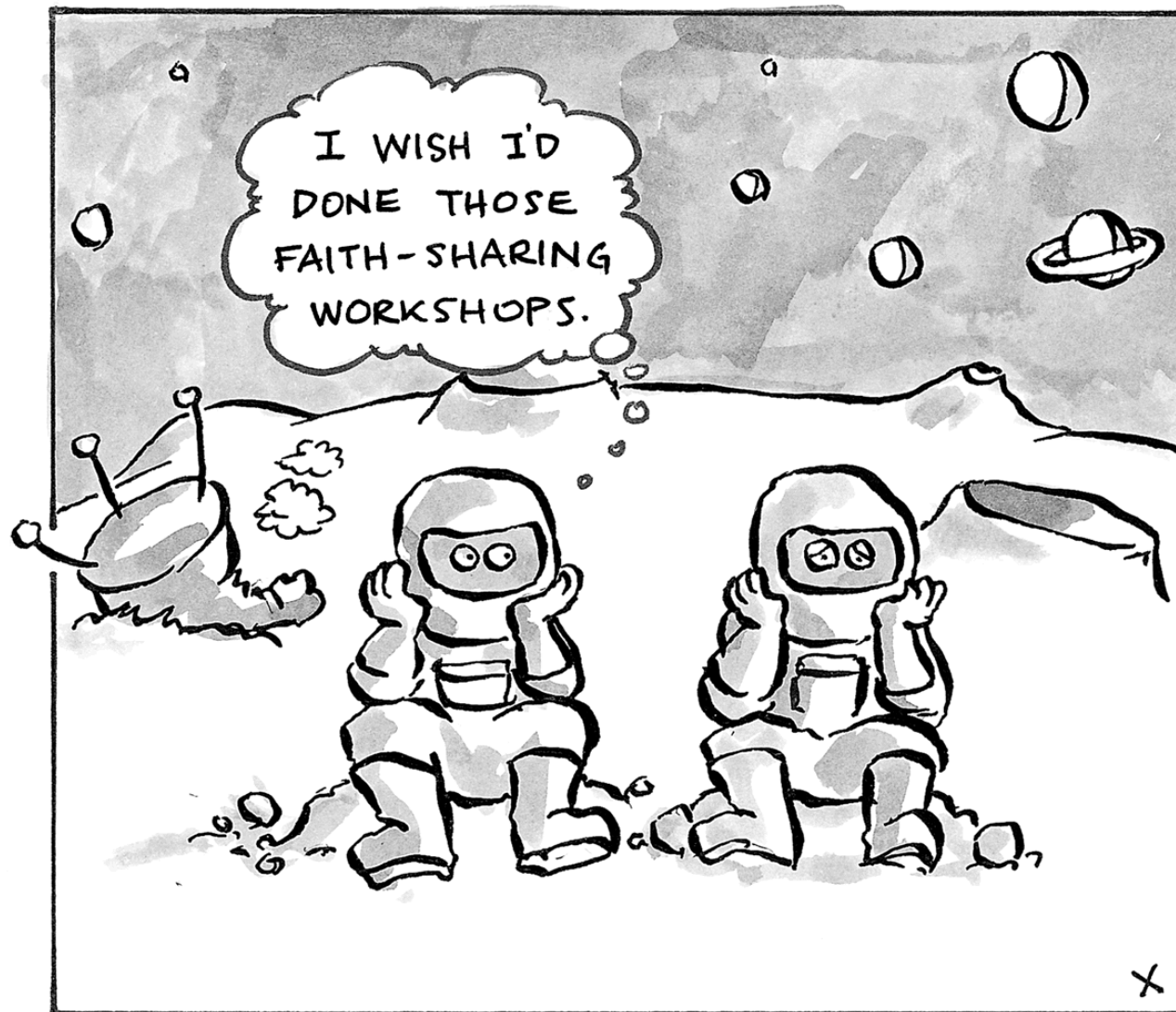
35% felt moderately well equipped (rating 3)

The perception of feeling equipped to share faith was similar across age groups.

How well equipped do you feel to share your faith?



Source: National Church Life Survey 2021, survey ABA (n=7203)



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Faith sharing

Suitability of local church for non-Christian/ enquirer



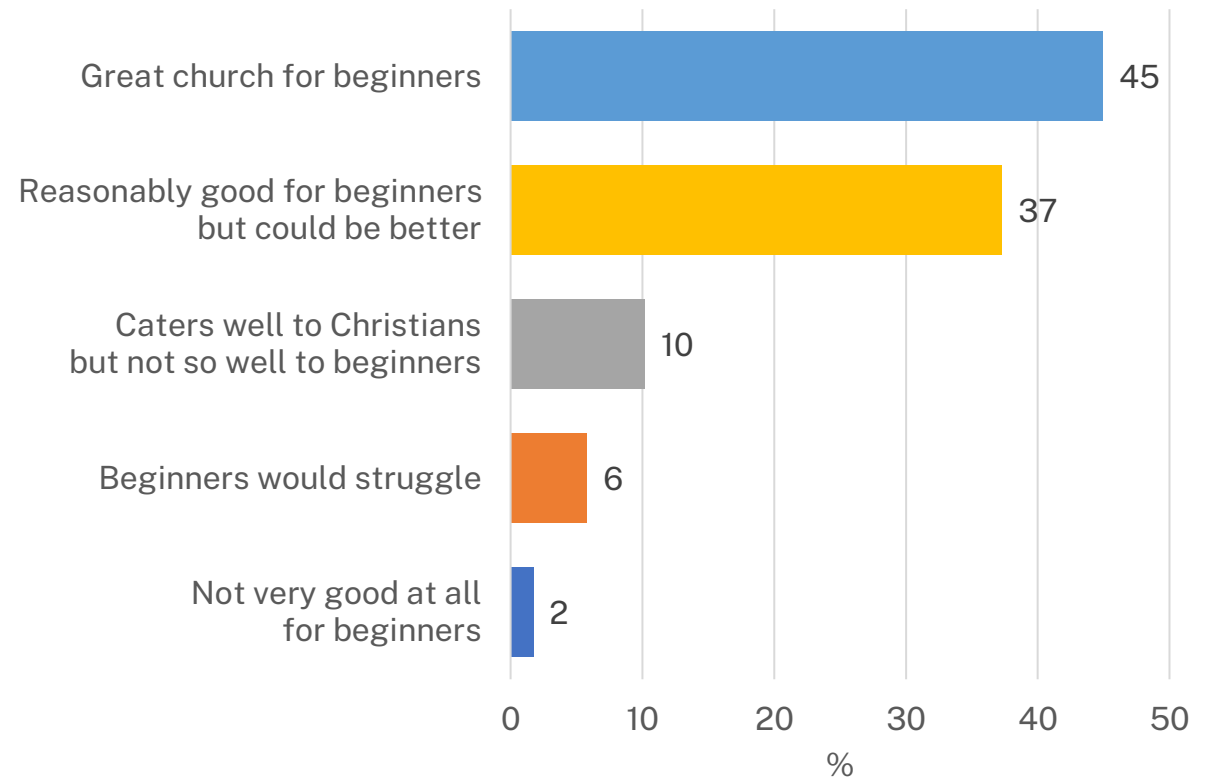
Suitability of local church for beginners

45%

of attenders feel that their church is great for beginners

A further 37% feel that it is reasonably good, but it could be better.

To what extent do you feel that this church is a good one to invite a (non-Christian or enquiring) friend to?



Source: 2021 NCLS Attender Survey ABA (n=7,387).

Suitability of local church for beginners

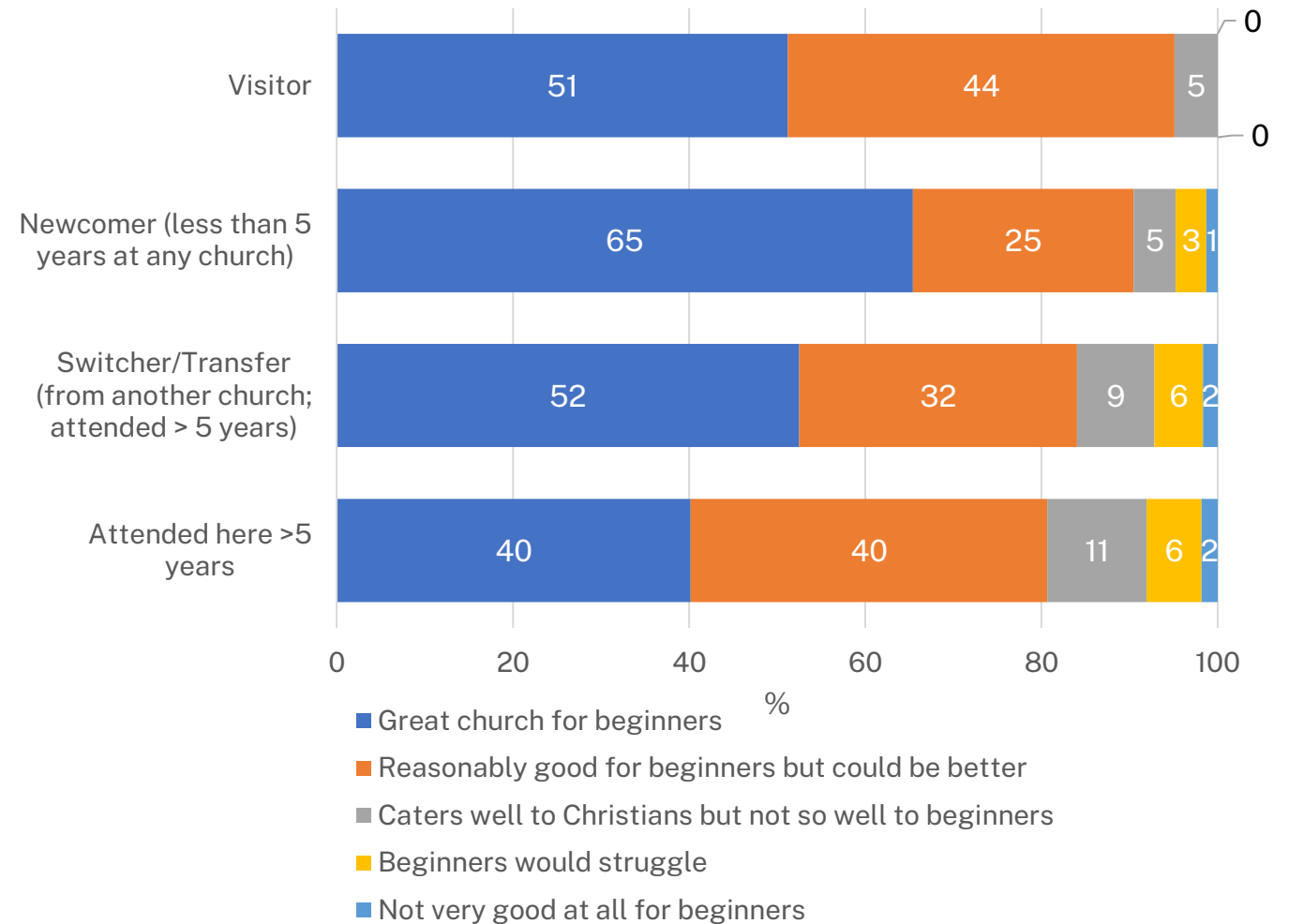
To what extent do you feel that this church is a good one to invite a (non-Christian or enquiring) friend to?

65%

of newcomers felt that the church was great for beginners

whilst only 40% of those who were attenders for more 5 years felt the same.

Some 44% of visitors felt that the local church was reasonably good for beginners but could be better.



Source: 2021 NCLS Attender Survey ABA (n=7,387).

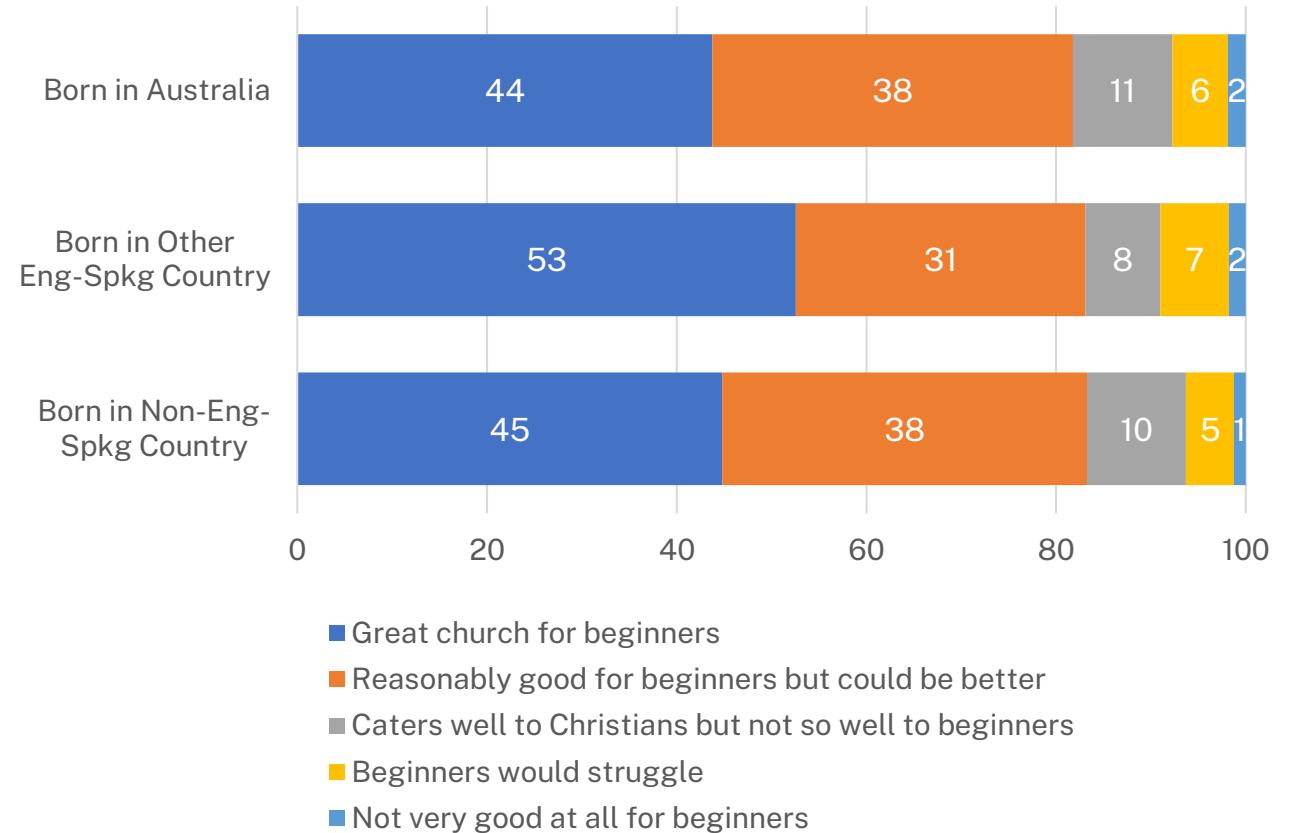
Suitability of local church for beginners

To what extent do you feel that this church is a good one to invite a (non-Christian or enquiring) friend to?

53%

of attenders born in English-speaking countries outside Australia feel that their local church was great for beginners

whilst 44% of those born in Australia and 45% from non-English speaking countries felt the same.



Source: 2021 NCLS Attender Survey ABA (n=7,387).

Faith sharing

Involvement in evangelistic activities of local church





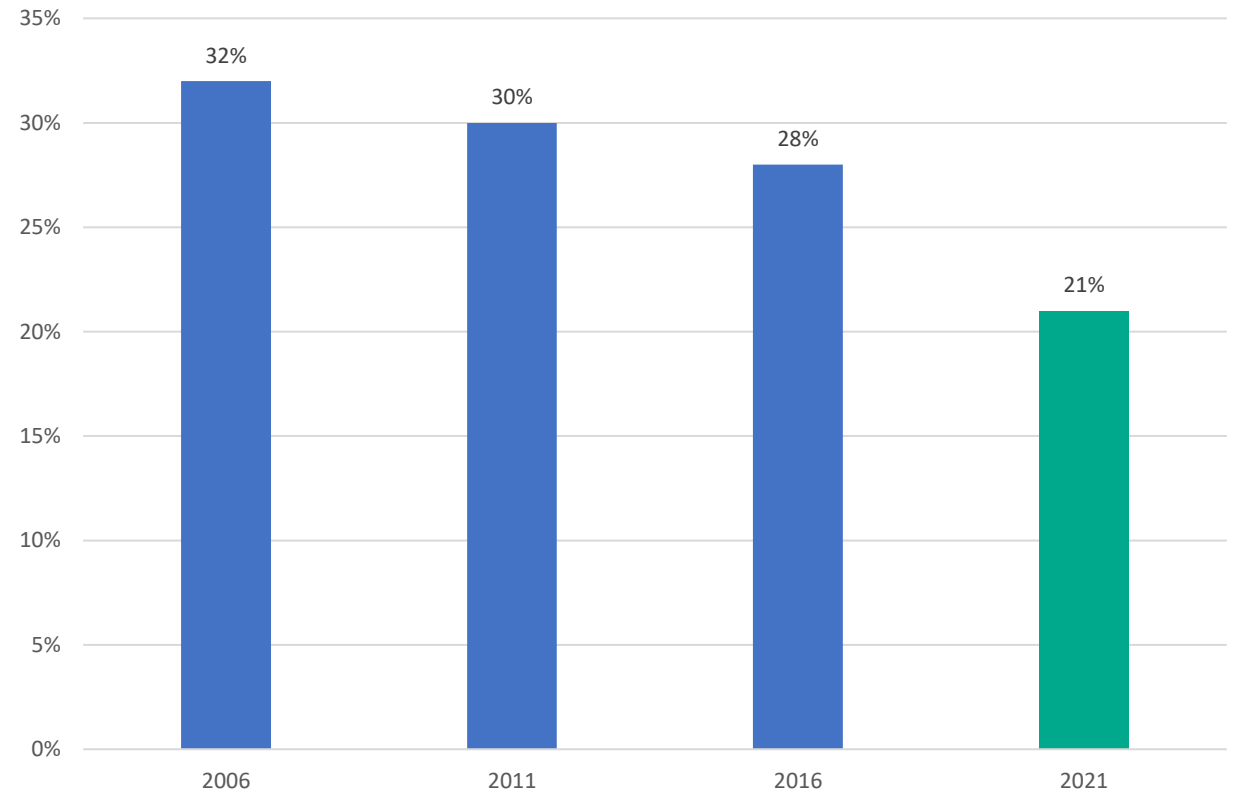
Involvement in evangelistic activities at local churches

Two in 10

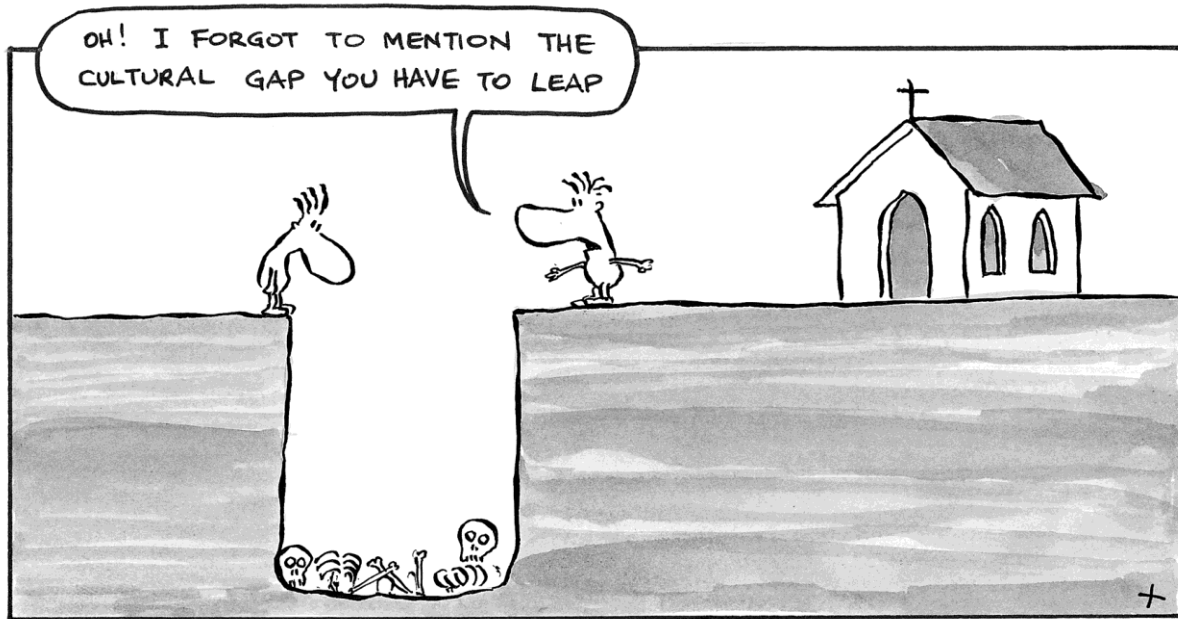
Baptist attenders were involved in evangelistic activities at their local churches in 2021/2

The proportion of Baptist attenders involved in local church evangelistic activities has **declined** over time

Involved in evangelistic or outreach activities at local church: 2006 to 2021

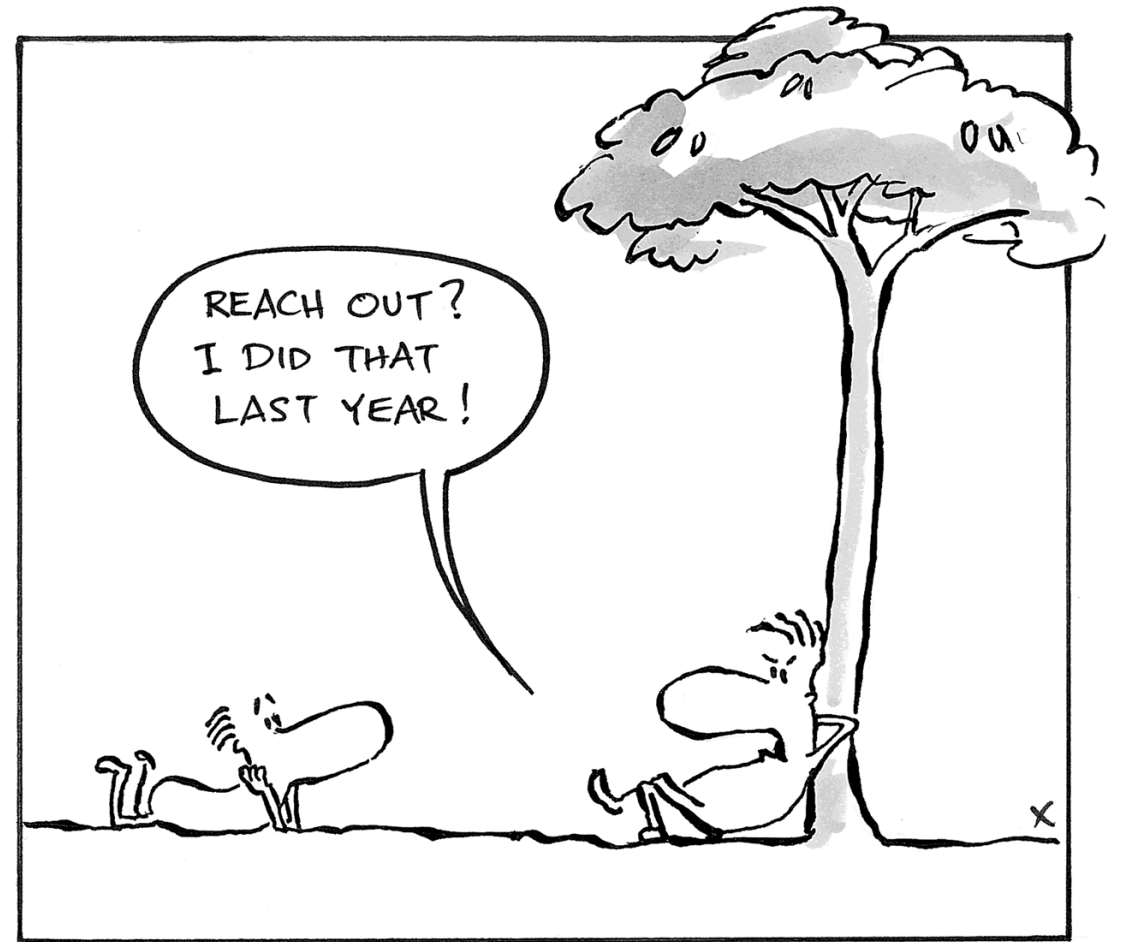


Source: National Church Life Surveys. Baptist NSW & ACT: 2006 to 2021



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Faith sharing

Baptist attenders inviting others to church



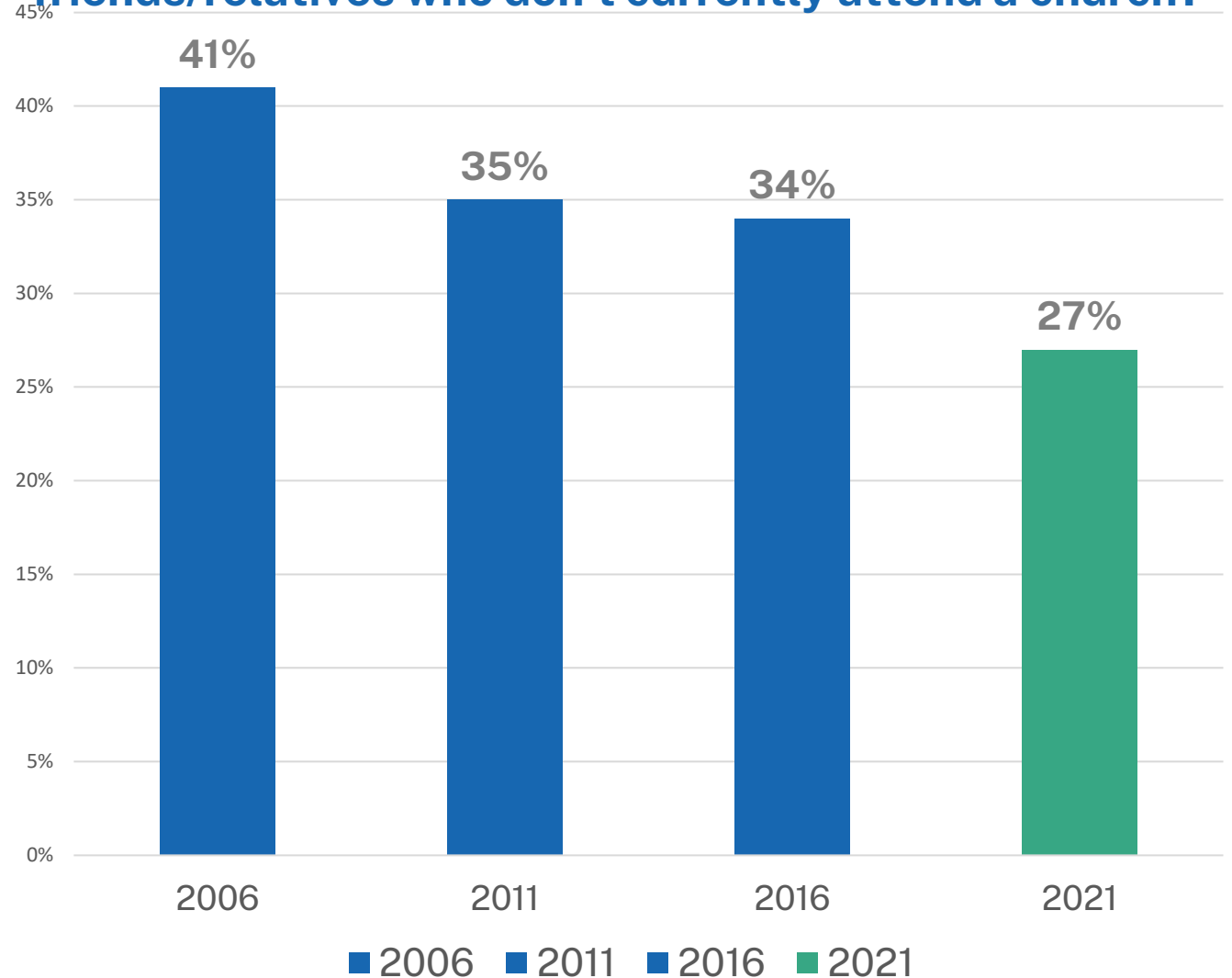
Approaches to sharing faith

27%

Were willing and invited friends or family who don't currently attend church to a church service in the last 12 months.

2021/22 results are lower than in previous years

How willing are you to invite to a church service here any friends/relatives who don't currently attend a church?



Source: National Church Life Surveys. Baptist NSW & ACT: 2006 to 2021

Approaches to sharing faith: 2006 to 2021

Confidence to invite has eroded.

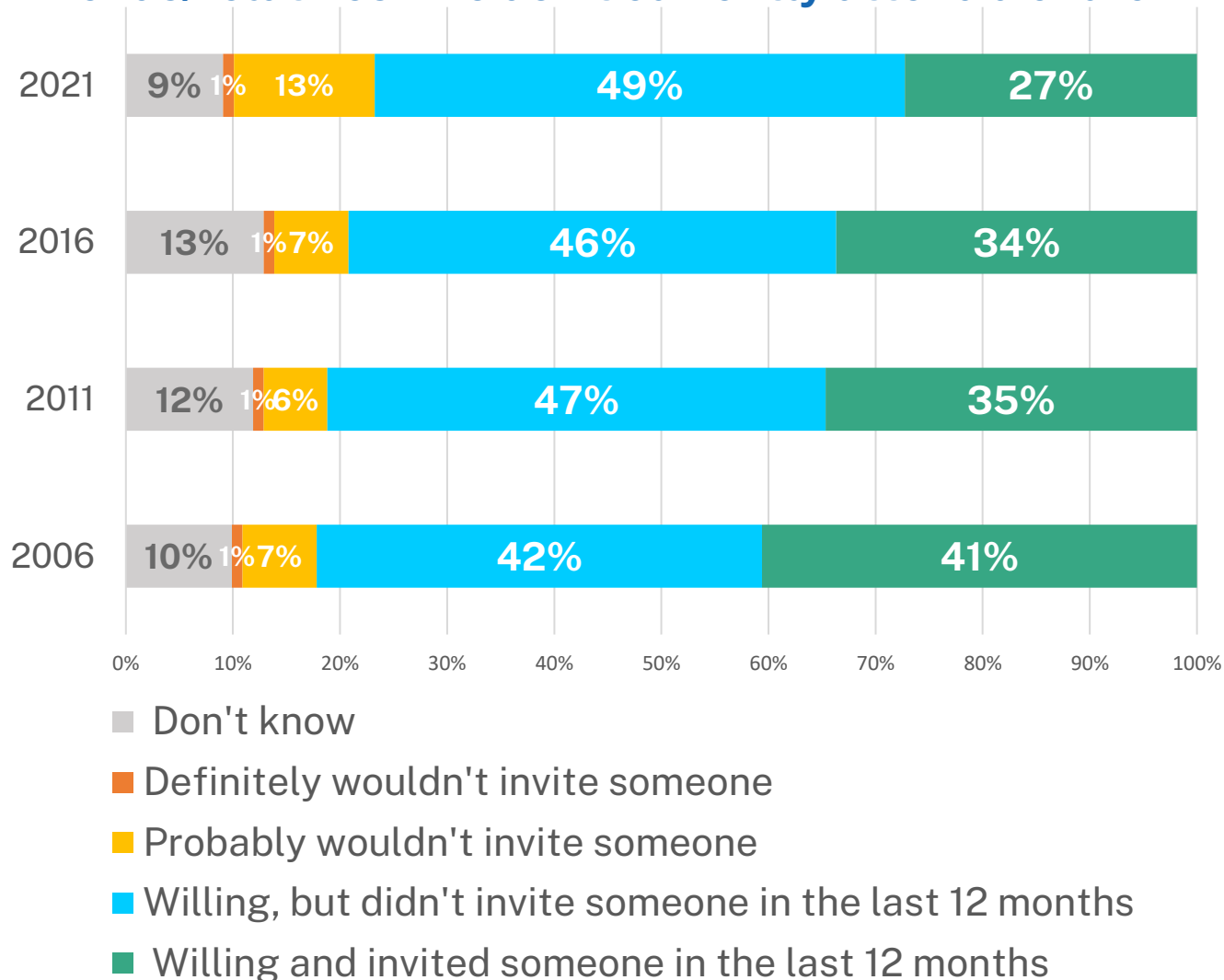
In 2021/22

27% were willing and invited someone.

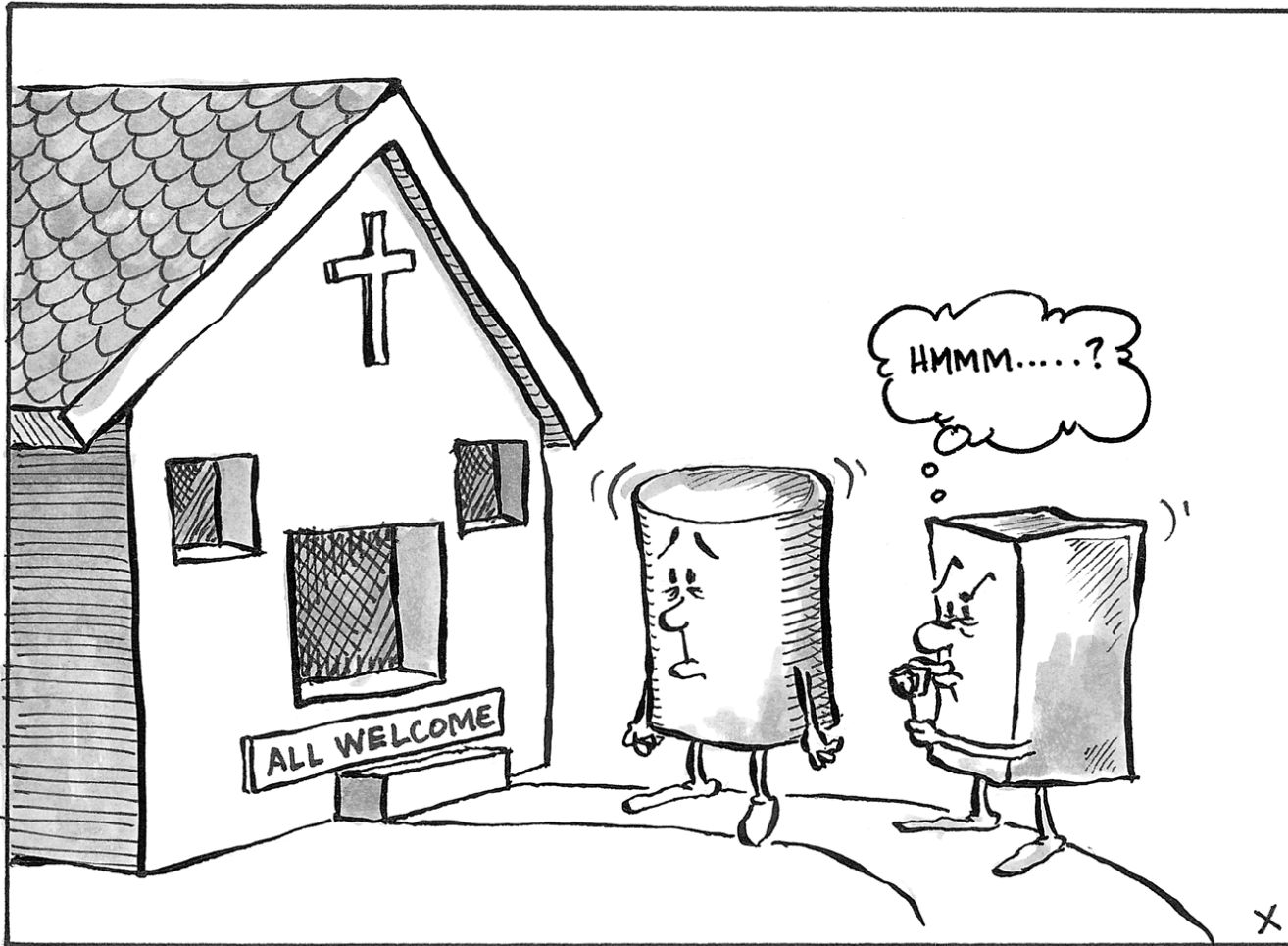
49% were willing but didn't invite someone.

14% probably or definitely wouldn't invite someone to church

How willing are you to invite to a church service here any friends/relatives who don't currently attend a church?



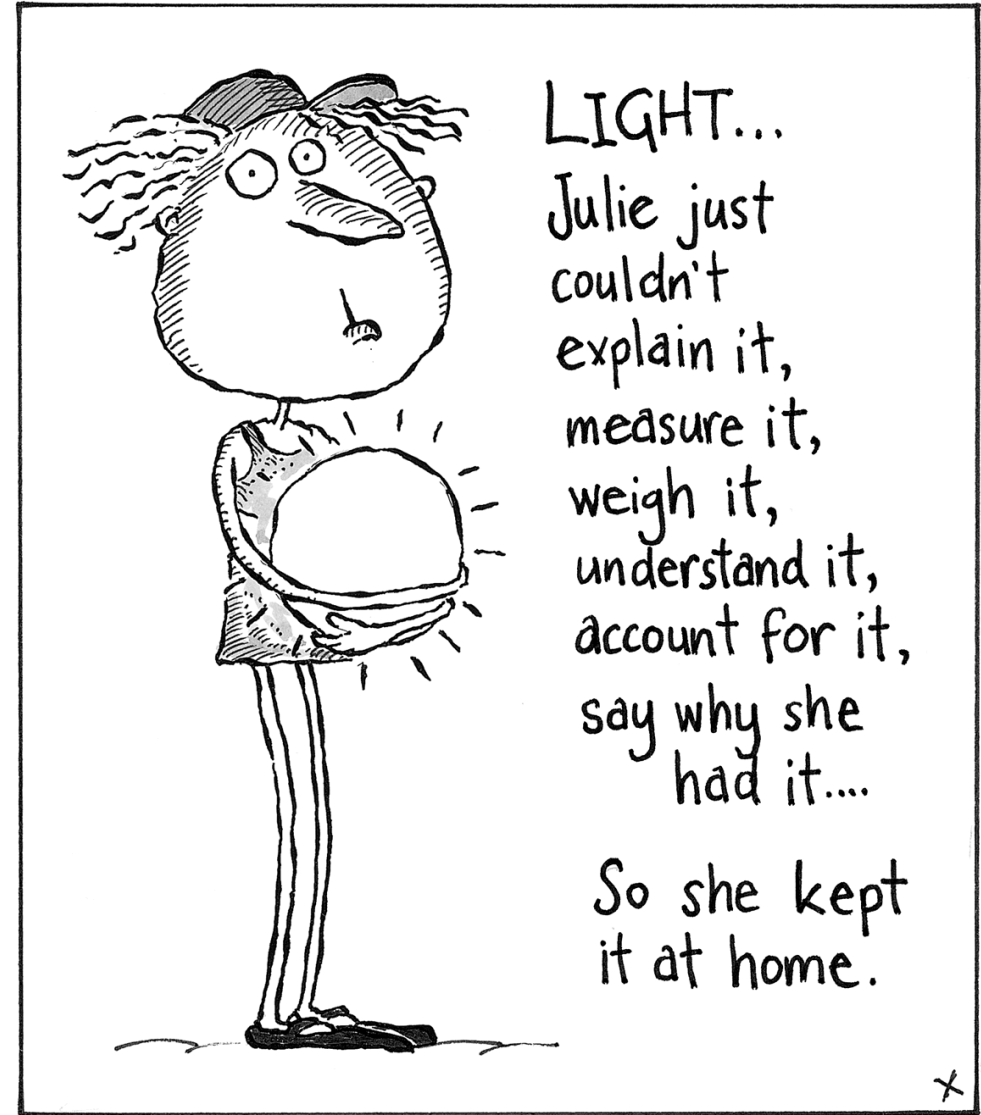
Source: National Church Life Surveys. Baptist NSW & ACT: 2006 to 2021



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AFTER FINALLY CONVINCING HIS NEIGHBOUR TO COME TO CHURCH , STEVE STARTED QUESTIONING HIS PLAN.



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From the 2021 Australian Community Survey

Hearing from all Australians...

Three in ten
Australians are likely to go
to church if invited by
close friends and family

Source: 2021 Australian Community Survey run by NCLS Research (n = 1,286)

Apart from such special occasions as weddings, funerals, etc., would you go to a Christian church service if invited by close friends or family?

31% said 'yes/probably'
16% were not sure
27% said 'no/probably not'

NB: 26% did not choose a response to the scenario. They noted they did not have friends or family who attend.

Factors that help with accepting invitation?

What would help someone accept an invitation to church?

Relationship:

If I felt that it was important to my friend or family member that I accept

Hospitable:

If I could be confident that I would be made to feel welcome

Service:

If the church was doing good work in the community (e.g. supporting vulnerable people)

Convenient:

If the church was convenient for me to get to

Inclusive:

If the church was inclusive of people of all sexualities and genders

Timely:

If the church service was short and wouldn't take much of my time

Social:

If I had an opportunity to informally talk with other people at the church when I visited

Clear:

If my friend/family member explained to me what happens at a church service

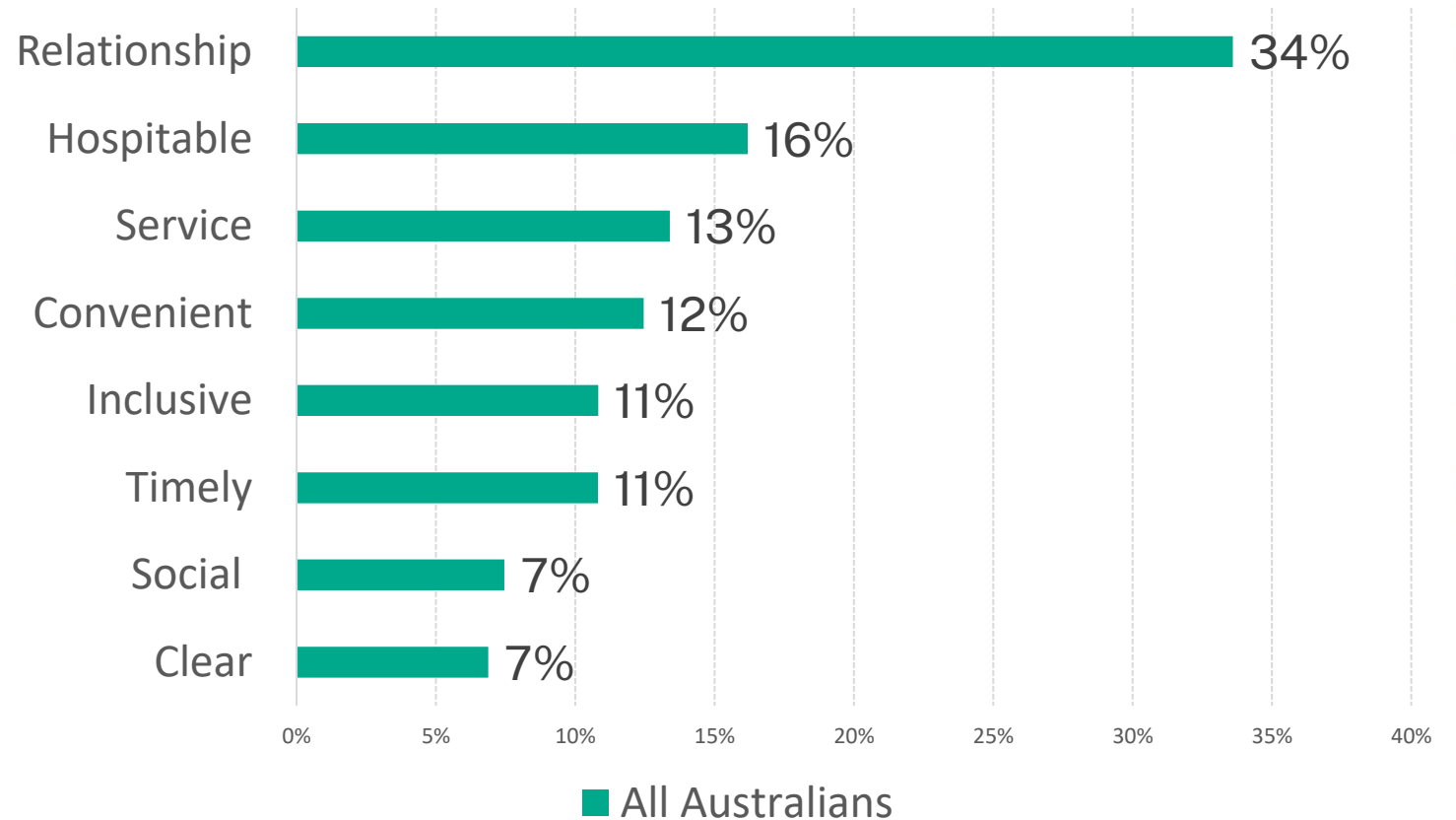
Factors that help with accepting invitation?

Relationship matters much more than anything else.

“If I felt that it was important to my friend or family member that I accept”

What would increase the likelihood of accepting an invitation to a church service? (Mark ALL that apply)

All Australians



Source: 2021 Australian Community Survey run by NCLS Research (n = 1,286)

KEY UNDERSTANDINGS

- **Baptist attenders strongly engage faith in their households**
 - **Two in ten are active evangelists – looking for opportunities to share faith.**
 - **Three in ten share faith frequently in secular environments (at least monthly).**
 - **Sharing Christian content on social media/web in order to share faith with others is not common**
 - **56% were most likely to share their faith in a relaxed space with people they know**
 - **Just under half felt well equipped to share their faith**
-

KEY UNDERSTANDINGS

- **45% of Baptist attenders feel that their church is great for beginners. A further 37% feel that it is reasonably good, but it could be better.**
 - **Fewer Baptist attenders are involved in church evangelistic activities than before**
 - **The confidence to invite others to church has been eroded**
 - **However, we learn from Australians that three in 10 are likely to accept an invitation.**
 - **Relationships are vital.**
-

Citation:

Powell, R., Gan, C. & Sterland, S. (2022). Faith-sharing and Baptist Churches: views of Baptist church attenders. NCLS Commissioned Report 2022.BA1.07. Sydney: NCLS Research.

Data Sources

Powell, R., Sterland, S., Gan, C., & Hourihan, F. (2021). 2021 NCLS Attender Sample Survey ABA. [Data file]. Sydney: NCLS Research.

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