

Uniting Church Assembly Triennial Statistics



Preliminary Report

April 2000

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It has been the practice of Uniting Church Synods to co-operate for the triennial collection of statistics for the Assembly. This report represents information gathered between November 1999 to April 2000 from Uniting Church congregations across Australia.

It is only possible to produce a preliminary report for the July 2000 Assembly. This time period for data collection had some unique difficulties relating to ongoing changes in congregational structures. Not all congregations have finalised their new structural arrangements and relationships with other congregations. All Synods are still in the process of preparing updated records.

This has made impossible the task of determining how many congregations currently exist in the Uniting Church and how this has changed since 1996 within the time constraints prior to the Assembly. The task of following up recalcitrant respondents has also not been straightforward.

This preliminary report is based on the 1399 responses received by end of April, 2000. This is only a rough guide as to the number of congregations who are represented, as some responses cover more than one congregation.

The process of preparing up-to-date listings of Uniting Church congregations in each Synod, linking this information to the statistical returns and reconciling this with the 1996 Triennial Statistics will continue during 2000.

Method of Collection

The Assembly General Secretary and Synod Secretaries commissioned NCLS Research to assist in this project.

The Synods were responsible for preparing a full up-to-date list of all congregations, distributing survey forms to congregations, and follow up of outstanding respondents.

NCLS Research was responsible for printing the initial survey forms, processing and data entry of forms, data preparation and analysis, and preparation of final reports.

Response Rate

Table 1 lists the number of responses received from each Synod by the end of April, 2000. As noted earlier, this is only a rough guide as to the number of congregations that are covered by the figures.

Once the total number of Uniting Church congregations is determined and final responses received the response rate per Synod can be calculated.

Table 1: Preliminary Response Rates

	Number of responses
Overall	1399
NSW	338
Victoria	363
Queensland	183
South Australia	295
Western Australia	129
Tasmania	74
Northern Synod	17

Accounting for congregations that did not respond

A more reliable picture will be obtained if congregations not returning information can be accounted for. This can be done by adjusting data from each Synod on the basis of the percentage of attenders in the Synod represented by the congregations returning data. While by no means perfect, this process will provide a more accurate and representative picture than simply looking at the raw data.

At this stage, there is no full attempt to account for congregations that have not responded. However, a preliminary adjustment can be made based on two assumptions: first, that the responses received represent congregations and second, that the number of Uniting Church has not changed dramatically since 1996 when there were around 2800. Based on these assumptions (which need to be confirmed), it may be that around half of all congregations have returned information. Therefore, a simple preliminary weighting is to double the raw figures. These preliminary weighted figures are shown in the following tables.

Worship attendance and membership statistics

Table 2 provides the best estimate of overall attendance at worship services in each Synod. Congregations were also asked how many worship services they had per week. The table shows both the raw figures and the figures resulting from the initial weighting.

Table 2: Worship Attendance

	Numbers Attending Worship (Raw figures)	Numbers Attending Worship (Initial Weighting)	Number of worship services per week (Raw figures)	Number of worship services per week (Initial Weighting)
Overall	79 694	159388	37850	75701
NSW	22672	45344	7450	14900
Victoria	18673	37346	11387	22774
Queensland	13057	26114	4916	9832
South Australia	16292	32584	7498	14997
Western Australia	5261	10522	5742	11485

Tasmania	2605	5210	556	1113
Northern Synod	1134	2268	299	598

Table 3 includes information about membership, using the same categories that have been provided in previous Triennial Statistics returns. In Table 3 the raw figures have been doubled.

The categories were defined as follows:

- *Confirmed members:* A person who has personally professed the Christian faith, has been baptised and confirmed and has thus accepted the responsibilities of full membership in the Uniting Church, and is listed on the congregation's roll of members.
- *Baptised members:* a person who has been baptised into the Christian faith, is currently associated with a congregation of the Uniting Church but not yet confirmed, and is listed on the congregation's roll of baptised members.
- *Members in association:* a person who is a confirmed member (or equivalent) of a Christian church other than the Uniting Church, who is participating at present in the life of a congregation of the Uniting Church, and is listed on the congregation's roll of members in association
- *Adherents:* a person who is participating in the life of a congregation of the Uniting Church, but who has not been baptised, and is listed on the congregation's roll of adherents.

Table 3: Membership Statistics

	Confirmed Members	Baptised Members	Members in association	Adherents
Overall	175570	69586	12368	55334
NSW	47006	18708	3976	13108
Victoria	53384	20164	2794	14340
Queensland	24280	12606	1386	8636
South Australia	32934	10690	2328	13344
Western Australia	10940	4934	842	3238
Tasmania	5846	2134	544	1818
Northern Synod	1180	350	498	850

It should be noted that the rate of missing data was much lower for the 'Confirmed Member' category, compared to the other three categories.

Changes in the last 12 months

Change in overall attendance

It is not possible to calculate the change in overall attendance between 1996 and 2000 until final lists of current congregations are available.

Patterns of joining and leaving

Congregations were asked to record how many people had joined or left their congregation through a range of avenues in the past 12 months. People were to be included in a single, most appropriate category. Table 4 gives the detail for each avenue. In Table 4 the raw figures have been doubled.

Table 4: Changes in the past 12 months

In the past 12 months how many people have <i>joined</i> your congregation through:						
	Conversion to the Christian faith	Transfer from another UCA congregation	Transfer from another denomination	Confirmation as a young person or adult	Baptism as young person or adult	Baptism as children
Overall	1906	6526	3268	2784	1338	9842
NSW	716	1748	1248	766	340	3624
Victoria	176	1806	646	868	286	2096
Queensland	358	1030	422	510	318	1808
South Australia	474	1242	486	472	260	1448
Western Australia	104	436	288	128	90	502
Tasmania	52	196	102	30	14	270
Northern Synod	26	68	76	10	30	94
In the past 12 months how many people have <i>left</i> your congregation through:						
	Transfer to another UCA congregation	Transfer to another denomination	Dropping out	Resignation	Death	Removal from rolls by Church Council
Overall	4816	2300	3702	416	5006	2654
NSW	1336	698	1170	72	1356	484
Victoria	1400	348	824	118	1740	1244
Queensland	622	394	654	74	552	172
South Australia	956	482	624	96	830	394
Western Australia	268	158	248	56	316	282
Tasmania	158	54	164	0	202	78
Northern Synod	76	166	18	0	10	0

It should be noted for some of these fields around half of the returned forms did not include any information. Around 20% of forms did not include information for *any* of these categories. This may mean that many congregations did not experience any change, however it is more likely that they found it difficult to complete this information.

Other information about inflow and outflow

Another source of information about changes in the Uniting Church can be found in the NCLS Research publication *Build My Church* (1999). Although it covers an earlier period

(1991-1996), it may be useful to include. Using earlier data from the 1996 Survey, NCLS Research has prepared a method of summarising inflow and outflow between 1991 and 1996 in terms of three avenues:

- *Biological issues:* The children of church attenders becoming involved as young adults are a major stream into the life of the churches. The passing of older attenders will affect negatively the size of the churches.
- *Denominational switching:* Attenders switching between denominations will affect each denominational positively or negatively.
- *The front and back doors:* Newcomers without a background in active church participation becoming involved in the life of the churches is a critical avenue into church life. An equally critical avenue in the opposite direction are attenders drifting out of church involvement altogether.

The overall results are shown in Table 5 and show that for each avenue, levels of outflow has been greater than inflow.

Table 5: Inflow and Outflow between 1991 and 1996 (NCLS data).

Category	Inflow and Outflow	%
Biological Issues	IN: New 15 to 19 year olds	4
	OUT: Deaths	11
Denominational switching	IN: Switchers in	8
	OUT: Switchers out	10
The front and back doors	IN: Newcomers	5
	OUT: Drifted Out	11

The age profile of the Uniting Church is a key factor in the patterns of inflow and outflow. Using data from the 1996 NCLS, Table 6 shows the age profile of each Synod (except the Northern Synod).

Table 6: Age Profile (1996 NCLS data)

	15-19 years	20-29 years	30-39 years	40-49 years	50-59 years	60-69 years	70+ years
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Overall	4	6	10	14	17	20	29
NSW	4	7	11	14	16	20	28
Victoria	3	4	8	13	17	22	34
Queensland	4	7	12	15	17	19	25
South Australia	3	5	10	16	17	19	30
Western Australia	3	4	9	15	18	20	30
Tasmania	2	5	9	14	17	20	33

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