LIFTING THE LID ON THE NZ CHURCH

A new survey shows the Adventist Church in New Zealand is healthy.

The initial results of the 1997 New Zealand Church Life Survey have just been released. Some 72,000 attenders from 1250 congregations in 13 denominations responded to the survey in the last week of May 1997.

Despite a number of Adventist churches not maximising this opportunity, the sample, approximately one in five attenders, generally represented the demographics of the church throughout New Zealand.

The results include print-outs for individual congregations. The print-outs contain 17 graphs or tables outlining attenders' background, issues of worship and involvement, and attitudes to matters of faith.

Other available resources include an additional 12 pages of data print-outs focusing on key aspects of vitality and characteristics of congregations who usually exhibit them.

Also included is *Lifting the Lid on the New Zealand Church*, an initial overview of the survey's key results.

The Adventist results

The following points are of special interest to Adventists:

- While New Zealand churches are greying (41 per cent of attenders over the age of 60 and 31 per cent already retired), Adventist attenders' age demographics generally resemble the national census (only 20 per cent over the age of 60).
- Some 32 per cent of attenders in Adventist churches are aged between 20 and 40.
- Adventists are among those who are more likely to say their sense of belonging (63 per cent) and their faith (49 per cent) is growing.
- Music and worship styles throughout New Zealand churches are diverse. Half of all attenders prefer contemporary Christian hymns, songs or choruses, while only 45 per cent prefer traditional hymns.

Not surprisingly, this trend is age related, with only 14 per cent of the 15-19 age group appreciating traditional hymns, while 77 per cent of the 70+ age group prefer hymns.

Among Adventists, 52 per cent prefer contemporary hymns, songs and choruses, with only 40 per cent preferring traditional hymns.

- Adventists have the most attenders reporting they always have a deep sense of God's closeness in worship services (30 per cent).
- Adventists are among those who are most likely to say they spend time in daily devotions and prayer every day or most days (58 per cent).
- Almost a quarter of all Adventist attenders seek opportunities to share their faith (23 per cent). This is more than twice the national Christian average (10 per cent).
- Adventists have the highest involvement in all types of congregational mission activities (55 per cent), but among the lowest (30 per cent) involvement in community-based welfare and social action groups.
- Adventists have the highest denominational loyalty (72 per cent), with attenders stating the church provides a significant framework for their faith.

Among other New Zealand Christians, denominational loyalties are not paramount. Two in every five people who change congregations also change denominations.

- Although midweek attendance at church by Adventists is minimal (10 per cent), Adventists are more likely to be involved in small prayer groups (41 per cent).
- While most Christians, including Adventists, are seeking new directions, one-quarter of Adventists (24 per cent) say their congregation must faithfully maintain past directions.

The bigger picture

Many of these results give us, as Adventists, good reason to thank the Lord for the faithfulness of His people. While comparisons with other Christians or even specific churches are interesting, our eyes need to be fixed on the example of Jesus.

We all need to continue to grow daily in our relationship with Him, so that He can use us in His ministry to our community.

May the insights gained from this survey help us make informed decisions that will enhance our mission and ministry through the church into the wider community.—*Dr Stephen Currow (a member of the oversight committee for the New Zealand Church Life Survey. He is now a lecturer in church ministry at Avondale College, NSW)*



Longburn College church.

A summary

A summary of the 1997 New Zealand Church Life Survey results shows Adventists:

- are younger than other Christians
- prefer more contemporary music and worship styles
- spend more time in daily devotion and prayer
- have the highest involvement in mission activities, but the lowest involvement in community-based welfare and social action groups
- are more than twice as likely to share their faith
- have the highest denominational loyalty
- get involved in small groups