

STRENGTH FOR TODAY, BRIGHT HOPE FOR TOMORROW*

a statistical survey of the PCU since union (1977 — 2019)

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From Chisholm's 20th century hymn 'Great is thy faithfulness'

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40 years on ...

There's a song written in 1872 for Harrow School (UK)¹ that begins:

*Forty years on, when afar and asunder
Parted are those who are singing today,
When you look back, and forgetfully wonder
What you were like in your work and your play ...*

It is specifically about life at school, and is meant to give today's students an idea of what it will be like in forty years when they return to their old school or reflect on their student days, and to also to remind old boys about their school life.

So also, this can be today's catch-cry for the Presbyterian Church of Victoria encouraging us to assess whether we are building on true foundations and being true to our core values.

40 years on is a perfect time to search our hearts and asked some questions:

- How has it worked out, forty years later?
- How true are we to our foundations we re-asserted by not joining the uniting movement?
- Is today an opportunity to start afresh and to ask ourselves whether we're still true to what we know to be core foundations and values of the church of Jesus Christ?

¹ This has been adapted by many schools around the world, including our own Scotch College, Melbourne.

Chapter one – the starting point: earliest records of the PCV (Continuing)

There are various indicators we use to gain a picture of the PCV which are explored at length in chapter two. However, in the earliest years post-union, the meticulous record keeping which is now known to be a valued attribute of the church wavered. This is an indicator of the uncertainty of the times and the changing nature of the landscape as congregations emerged and leadership of the denomination settled.

At the time of union, there are only two reliable sources: voting returns and the original rolls of Assembly. From these we have a glimpse of PCV's numerical strength at the moment of union in 1977.

a) Voting Returns: YES, NO or NO, YES?

Voting returns were critical to establishing congregational allegiance and claiming congregational property. Two questions² were asked of every member of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, prior to union:

- i) Do you desire this congregation to become a congregation of the church which may result from the proposed union?
- ii) Should the required majority vote for union be obtained in Presbyteries, State General Assemblies and the General Assembly of Australia do you desire to remain in membership of any Presbyterian Church of Australia continuing to function on the present basis?

Though four permutations are possible for completed returns:

- the typical uniting response to these questions would be to vote: **'YES, NO'**;
- the typical continuing response would be: **'NO, YES'**³.

The indicator was used to determine that if at least *one third* of the membership of a congregation voted 'NO, YES' then that congregation would remain a PCA (Continuing) church. Anything less than this would see the congregation change names and become part of the Uniting Church in Australia.

The powers in office were hoping for a resounding 'YES, NO' result. However, as in the case of even the simplest referendum ballot paper, voters can be confused as to which way they *should* vote in order to achieve a particular outcome. In fact, when pro-union leaders counted the returns, they were naturally disappointed as there were not as many clear 'YES, NO' responses as expected.

² Presbyterian Church of Australia, *Minutes of Proceedings of the 34th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia* (Melbourne: Brown, Prior, Anderson, 1973), 107.

³ Although, in his 2004 book *The Crisis of '77*, Bob Thomas explains why he, a convinced continuing Presbyterian, voted: **YES, YES** and persuaded others to do so – see p. 18,19. But the key was to answer **YES** to the 2nd question.

The leadership so objected to the result that they pressed the case that, as the second question was confusing to many, another vote was in order. They managed to secure approval for a further period of congregational 'education' and to establish a process setting up a second vote.

Rev Hamish Christie-Johnston, minister at East Kew Presbyterian-Methodist Church⁴ and key pro-unionist, reflected 30 years later: 'These two questions actually proved quite problematic for a considerable number of people, with many congregations across Australia complaining that they had not voted the way they intended when the results were announced. There was a sufficient groundswell of disquiet for the General Assembly of Australia to call for a further program of education and a second vote.'⁵

Following this second (1973) vote, 159 individual Victorian congregations voted to continue out of 649, a percentage of 24%. This was a weak vote for continuing Presbyterians compared with NSW 54% and QLD 46%, bringing the national average to 36%. This proved surprising to the initiators of the union concept, as they were hoping for an incontestable triumph for the idea of union, not to be much bothered by protests or remnant's rights of claim.

Even the result of 159 out of 649 congregations might sound satisfactory for us, but many of these were small rural congregations about to merge or fold. There are several similar instances, but take just one example, in the Presbytery of Bendigo, a small congregation of Bridgewater, 13 members voted: 7 for union and 6 for continuing. The result: awarded to the continuing church. This is hardly a position of strength or stability going forward, even if some of the 7 who voted for union later changed their mind and remained, such a small congregation faces many challenges to its long-term viability.

So, although there were 159 congregations whose property would be awarded to the Presbyterian Church (Continuing), in reality there were far fewer worshipping congregations than this. Ward estimates that in Victoria the Presbyterian Church was reduced to just 15% of its pre-union membership.⁶

b) Rolls of Assembly

Another useful data source is the roll recorded at each General Assembly. The 1976 General Assembly records show that the PCV (Continuing) had 50 ministers in self-sustaining charges, 10 home missionaries and 15 vacant charges – though even this is not the complete picture of 1976 Presbyterianism in Victoria.

⁴ The author played football for East Kew Combined (i.e. the name reflecting the joint Presbyterian-Methodist congregation of East Kew) in the early 70s when suburban church football leagues were fairly robust. Twice a season, we dutifully attended church parades with Rev Christie-Johnston addressing us. But all that was prior to my understanding of grace or reformed convictions, or any knowledge of the liberal ecumenism of my 'minister of the day'.

⁵ Hamish Christie-Johnston, 'A Presbyterian Experience of Church Union', *Proceedings of the Uniting Church Historical Society, Synod of Victoria & Tasmania*, 14.2 (2007), 28.

⁶ Rowland Ward, *The Bush Still Burns* (Brunswick: Globe Press, 1989), 462.

There is very little recorded information for 1977, other than the following:

The PCV (Continuing) Roll of Assembly 1977⁷

self-sustaining charges – filled	45
vacant charges (hopeful of being self-sustaining)	22
total charges	67
ministers in charges	45
ministers working in non-charge duties (mission field, chaplaincy, committee officers, theological education)	3
total ministers	48
retired ministers	22

To put these figures into perspective, they can be compared with the undivided (pre-union) PCV. These are the figures tabled at the final PCV General Assembly prior to the UCA inauguration – an Assembly held, 14 June 1977 (just 8 days prior to the UCA), that include all ministers and churches that were part of the Camberwell (break-away) Assembly as well.⁸

The (undivided) Roll of Assembly 1977

ministers in self-sustaining charges	210
vacant charges (hopeful of being self-sustaining)	50
total charges	260
home missionaries (working in home mission stations)	9

The proportion of employed ministers continuing as Presbyterian (i.e. not joining the UCA) was 21% (45/210). The proportion of self-sustaining Presbyterian charges was 25% (67/260).

One further observation is needed of the analysis of PCV's starting position. The PCV (Continuing) 1977 was led by an aging ministerial workforce. Consider:

- a) of the 45 in self-sustaining charges in 1977, 30 years later:
 - 39 of them had died
 - 2 remained in ministry
 - 2 had left the ministry
 - 2 were retired ministers;

⁷ Presbyterian Church of Victoria, *Minutes of Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria* (Melbourne: Brown, Prior, Anderson, 1977), 37.

⁸ Presbyterian Church of Victoria, *Minutes of Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria* (Melbourne: Brown, Prior, Anderson, 1977), 37.

- b) as well as the 45 ministers who remained in the PCV, the church also inherited 25 retired ministers, all of whom have since died;
- c) as well as the 45 ministers (in self-sustaining charges), the church had 3 ministers working on a mission field or in chaplaincy or teaching at the Theological College.

Compare this with the end point of this study (2018):

The PCV Roll of Assembly 2018

		Growth since 1977
self-sustaining charges – filled*	85	
vacant charges (hopeful of being self-sustaining)	20	
total charges	105	56%
ministers in charges	85	
ministers working in non-charge duties (MDO, ADF, PTC, Clerk)	11	
total ministers	96	100%
retired ministers	40	

* in this scheme, a charge with an assistant, associate or collegial position is counted as 2

Chapter two – 'no reserve, no retreat and no regrets'

A church re-born

Despite the challenges of the voting process and the resultant small numbers, 23 June 1977 marked the day of 'no turning back' for a re-focused and refreshed church - the Presbyterian Church of Australia. It should be remembered that the PCA didn't start when we joined the church in the 80s, 90s or the 00s. We have a long history, and almost all of us joined it since the 1970s and the vote. Listen for a moment to the 'fathers' of our church – that is, the church reborn nearly 45 years ago.

Although this study explores the progress of our Victorian church, we need first to record and remember what occurred in the Australian (PCA) General Assembly. The PCA is our federal body which exists to make principle decisions in key areas for its constituent state churches. So, when the General Assembly of the PCA votes to enter into a new union church it's doing so on behalf of each of the six state General Assemblies.

10am, 23 June 1977, the PCA (Continuing) General Assembly opened with the words of Psalm 118: 'This is the day which the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it', followed by the singing of Psalm 124 (tune OLD 124th):

*'Now Israel may say, and that truly,
if that the Lord had not our cause maintain'd;
if that the Lord had not our right sustain'd,
when cruel men against us furiously
rose up in wrath to make of us their prey;
Then certainly they had devour'd us all ...
But bless'd be God, who doth us safely keep ...'*

Neil MacLeod spoke like an Old Testament prophet, declaring that the Assyrian captivity was over, and that light was dawning in the power of the Spirit. His firm belief was that 'A smaller church fast-anchored on the Word of God will prove a far greater blessing to herself and to this land than a larger church uncertain of her foundations.'

As the continuing Church's first national Moderator-General, **Rev Ken Gardner**, in his opening address to the General Assembly, pronounced with vigour: 'There has never been any virtue in majorities. The elect of God has always been a remnant.' 'We can now see reformed doctrine of the Westminster Confession of Faith revived, and an eldership that's more than a status symbol'. Finally, Gardner cited the dying words of William Borden⁹, a man heading to China as a missionary when he died in 1913 before reaching his destination: 'No reserve, no retreat and no regrets.'

Three years prior

We note that **Rev Ken Gardner**, at the pivotal moment in the 1974 church union debate three years earlier, laid down a protest, declaring that the PCA continues to exist – despite a vote for union. His protest for recognition of the PCA to continue was based on three solid commitments:

⁹ Bill Borden's extraordinary and short life has inspired many – from his evangelistic endeavours at Yale University to his desire to evangelise the Muslim Kansu people of China. He died at age 25, in 1913.

- a) unchanged belief that the Scriptures (Old and New Testaments) is the Word of God and the only rule of faith and practice;
- b) ongoing allegiance to the Westminster Confession of Faith as the way in which we understand the Scriptures;
- c) understanding that best practice polity holds to the office of elder as central to local church governance.

Within the tense atmosphere of that meeting, recorded divisions amongst nearly 400 voters, it's no surprise that Gardner's protest was turned down 272:83¹⁰. Specifically, his Claim of Right for separate existence within the undivided assembly was denied on the grounds that 'the Continuing PCA does not yet exist'.

Having declared:

- approval of The Basis of Union (note, with only a 61% vote);
- agreement to 'Enter into Union' (63%);
- denial of Gardner's protest (76%);

the Assembly then proceeded with an extended set of procedural decisions to effect the union just agreed to (71%).

A pivotal moment

Immediately following the procedural agreements: there was a transformative and most memorable moment. Rev Neil Macleod stood up, tabled his DISSENT AND PROTEST, declaring that what has just been agreed to was 'unacceptable, and in conscience we cannot enter into this union' and ... after a dramatic and solemn pause ... walked out, to reconvene the General Assembly of the PCA across the road, declaring:

*'... and I invite all those who adhere to this PROTEST, since there is not room in this place for two assemblies, to follow me to another place, namely 46 Russell Street (Amethyst Hall), where we, the continuing General Assembly of Australia, shall resume the sittings of this house.'*¹¹

Neil Macleod and church procurator Maxwell Bradshaw led the walk-out. What a charged moment in our history. What drama – we should make a documentary of this and create a reenactment: our own little cameo version of the 1843 Disruption in the Church of Scotland.

The official minutes of the meeting record: 'and some 20 members followed.' **Rev Bob Thomas**, who was there, disputes this. He says: 'by my estimate the official Blue Book minute suffers from either poor proof-reading, bad eyesight or dishonesty – there were more like 120 who followed Macleod and walked out.'¹² One member spoken to recently (one who decided to vote against the Basis of Union but to stay in the Assembly) thought the number was 40.

¹⁰ Presbyterian Church of Australia, *Minutes of Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia* (Melbourne: Brown, Prior, Anderson, 1974), 25.

¹¹ Presbyterian Church of Australia, *Minutes of Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia* (Melbourne: Brown, Prior, Anderson, 1974), 37,38.

¹² Bob Thomas, *The Crisis of '77* (Melbourne: PTC Media, 2004), 23.

Neil Macleod, like Ken Gardner, wanted to see the union proposal as the golden opportunity to restore biblical and gospel orientated version of the church and to rid itself of liberalism once-for-all. But Macleod saw value in immediate separation and setting up the work of the church and its committees, so that on union launch day – the PCA (Continuing) was already functioning.¹³

To complete the story, in case we think there were two continuing PCA churches. Not so. On union launch-day, 24 July 1977, Gardner's protest group (who'd remained until the last possible moment), including Monsen, Clark and Russell, joined harmoniously with Macleod's walk-out group, including Boyall, Pearsons, Campbell, Bradshaw and Loftus. The so-called 'Collins Street Assembly' and the 'Camberwell Assembly' were reunited with the minimum of fuss.

How has it worked out, forty years later? How true are we to these foundations? Is today an opportunity to start afresh and to ask ourselves whether we're still true to what's most important? Let's be clear – just because the MacLeod/Gardner generation made their protest and led the way in the 1970s doesn't make them necessarily right. But we think it's important that we look back at this 1977 foundation ... and ask the questions.

¹³ Presbyterian Church of Australia, *Unconfirmed Minutes of Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia (cont.)* (Cheltenham, 1974), 2.

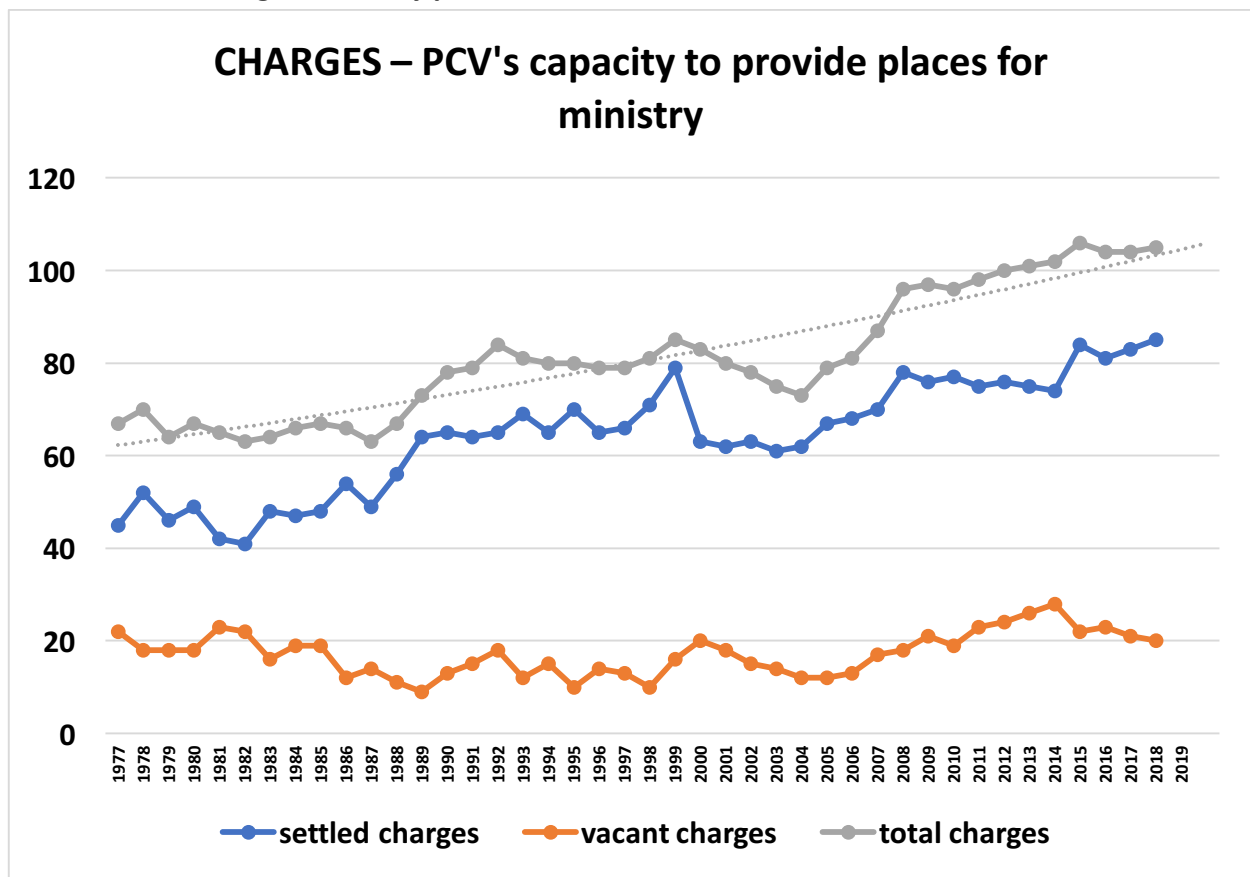
Chapter three – four decades of a church's life

The Presbyterian Church is known for its care in recording history and archiving its records. One of its core commitments is recognition of God's past mercies and so, reflecting this deep-seated gratitude, the PCV displays an administrative reliability in keeping records of decisions and events.

We rely on the records of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria where there are a number of possible records, including the official Annual Statistics of churches, recording such things as number of congregations, members, elders, children etc. From the PCV annual statistical returns, ten key indicators have been identified, as follows:

1. Number of charges in the PCV; i.e. those places where the PCV provides a ministry position – whether settled or vacant.
2. Number of full-time workers engaged by congregations as ministers of home missionaries.
3. Number of communicants, adherents and average total attendance at Sunday worship.
4. Age of attendees at morning worship services.
5. City vs. Country attendance comparison.
6. Number of 'professions of faith' made for the year and baptisms: infant and adult.
7. Number of Sunday School children enrolled in the PCV.
8. Attendance at church youth groups (PFA/Presbyterian Youth (PYV)/other).
9. Attendance at (weekly) adult small-group ministries.
10. Number of elders serving in the PCV.

1. Number of charges: ministry positions, settled or vacant



This graph is designed to display the overall number of PCV charges that are (or could expect to be) supporting a minister in his work of the gospel. In recent years a few charges have grown sufficiently to include a ministerial assistantship or associate position. Where this additional position is full-time (or near to full-time), that charge counts as two 'settled charges'.

Error factors:

- Some charges that are labelled as 'vacant' are included more in hope rather than realistically, and in all likelihood, will never be able to provide the costs of ministry and will need to be heavily subsidised by the Ministry Development Committee (MDC).

Overall (42 years):

- 56% growth in the number of places supporting ministry within the Presbyterian Church of Victoria.

Note we are counting charges, not individual congregations, and we are calculating from a realistic base figure – allowing for the dust to settle after the awarding of 159 congregations to the PCV on 1974. Many of these did not see the light of a new day post-1977 (as explained on p. 3), and many smaller congregations were linked with others to form a charge (formerly referred to as a parish).

1A. New congregations formed (post-union era):

Whenever a new church is established, or a church dissolved, the matter is reported to the General Assembly of the PCV, so it is possible to construct a list of church formations over 42 years. It is to be understood that not all of these church plants have survived. Some of them were 'planted' on the basis of rather flimsy research and overly optimistic expectations.¹⁴

The congregations **in bold** are the ones that continue to this day, while all the others have been dissolved. Some never actually commenced as worshipping congregations but rather folded before that stage, while still just a group meeting in a private home for Bible study. Yet for all intents and purposes these places were considered as 'church plants'.

- 1979 **Blackburn** (from Surrey Hills)
- 1981 **Yarrawonga**
- 1982 Maryborough, **Dandenong**
- 1983 Templestowe (1st version), **Wodonga**
- 1984 **Leongatha**, Echuca, Warracknabeal
- 1985 **Castlemaine**, **Broadmeadows** (Hume), Tallangatta
- 1986 **Ararat**, **Myrtleford**, **Kerang**, **Kyabram**, Maffra, **Belgrave Heights**, **Mildura**
- 1987 **Korean** (St Kilda, then Camberwell)
- 1988 **Indonesian** (Flemington), **Chinese** (Malvern), **Melton**, Corryong, Knox (Rowville)
- 1989 **Samoan** (Heidelberg, Fawkner, now Coolaroo), Ouyen, Molesworth, Bayside (Sandringham), Blackburn moved to present property
- 1990 Rutherglen, **Ballarat West** (Grace), Creswick, **Chinese** (Burwood)
- 1991 **Croydon Hills** (Croydon) (from Ringwood-Heathmont), Spanish/Portuguese (Pascoe Vale), **Japanese** (Canterbury), Menzies Creek
- 1992 Waverley (from Knox), **Arabic** (Sth Yarra),
- 1993 Craigieburn (part of Hume), Lakes Entrance, **Bundoora** (from Eltham)
- 1994 Merbein
- 1996 East Bentleigh, Berwick, Apollo Bay
- 2002 **Templestowe** (2nd version)
- 2003 **Deaf Congregation**, Port Melbourne
- 2004 **Brimbank** (from Melton), North Warrnambool, **Samoan** (Cranbourne)

¹⁴ For example, using the anecdotal observation: 'Well, we know that a few former Presbyterians live here'. Lapsed Presbyterians never provided a sure basis for a revived congregation.

- 2007 Officer (land purchase only)
- 2011 **Valley** (meeting at PVCC)
- 2012 **Point Cook** (starts meeting in RAAF chapel), Bundoora move to PCV property
- 2013 **Thornbury** (Darebin), **Sth East Bendigo** (Reforming)
- 2014 **Warragul**
- 2015 Doreen land purchased for Valley
- 2017 **Bellarine**
- 2018 **Officer** (New Life), **Bannockburn** (replant), also Reforming (SE Bendigo) purchase property
- 2021 **Donnybrook**¹⁵
- 2022 **Knox (Wantirna South)**¹⁶

Summary:

- 48 congregations ‘planted’ over the period 1982 – 2004
- 30 of these in an eight-year period 1986 – 1993
- 8 planted over the last ten years

Overall (42 years):

- almost all the church plants were established in the 1980s and early 1990s, and approximately only half have survived

During the same time the Home Mission Committee (now: MDC) adopted some specific goals in relation to church extension (planting new churches). Arising out of the 1986 General Assembly the church adopted the HMC’s bold initiative of setting expectations in ‘church development’ for the five-year period 1988-1993.

Reporting to the Assembly on progress of this five-year plan in 1990 the committee said:

*Quite a number of the suggested developments – made either by the Committee or by individual Presbyteries have become a reality or are in the process of being realized. Since 1986 it is estimated that 19 new congregations (and ethnic fellowships with unofficial links with the PCV) have been formed. Several more new churches are projected to commence in the 1990-91 period.*¹⁷

¹⁵ This is planned and anticipated to commence in January 2021.

¹⁶ This is planned for 2022.

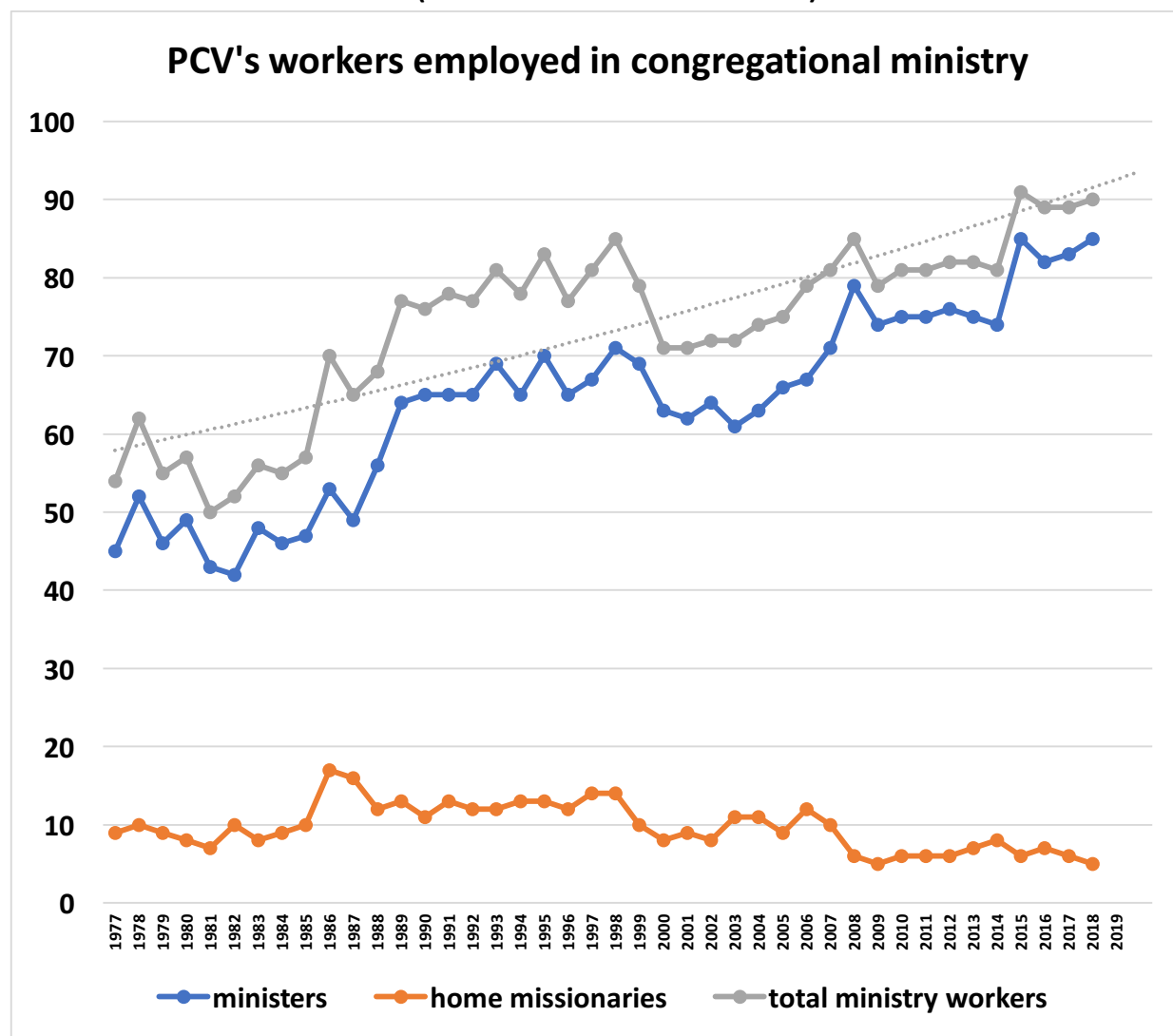
¹⁷ Presbyterian Church of Victoria, *Minutes of Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria* (Melbourne: Brown, Prior, Anderson, 1990), 114.

In fact, the figures quoted: '19 new congregations' and 'unofficial links with the PCV', cannot be fully substantiated and several of these congregations soon folded. However, putting aside the fact that the report was overly optimistic and hopeful, it nevertheless reflects the mood of the day. There was an accepted plan for specific church development and an expectation that it would happen.

It is important to compare this 1986 – 1993 period of visionary and bold planning with what appears in the 2002 General Assembly report: a far less radical goal was adopted for the five-year period 2003-07 – **one** new work in conjunction with a 'mother church'.¹⁸ The target, and expectation, dropped from near **thirty** to **one** by the year 2002 – the PCV's expectation of growth lowered by 95%.

¹⁸ Presbyterian Church of Victoria, *Minutes of Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria* (Melbourne: Brown, Prior, Anderson, 2002), 186.

2. Number of full-time workers (ministers + home missionaries):



This graph is designed to display the **overall number of PCV gospel workers** working in local churches as either ministers or home missionaries.

Error factors:

- It's hard to consistently identify all gospel workers who are working within the charge when some are working on a less than full-time basis.

Overall (42 years):

- 67% growth in the number of congregational gospel workers within the Presbyterian Church of Victoria.

The home missionary is an unordained pastor – employed usually to minister in a church not strong enough to be classified a self-sustaining charge and unable to pay the full costs of ministry. But there has always been a degree of flexibility about this position, or, a lack of

precision, and this has given rise to ambiguity as to how the role of home missionary is understood.

The home missionary in the PCV has suffered from this ambiguity – often feeling diminished by the attitude of the rest of the church, yet fulfilling a proper and strategic role in the life of the PCV. For the purpose of this analysis, they are counted as ministry workers.

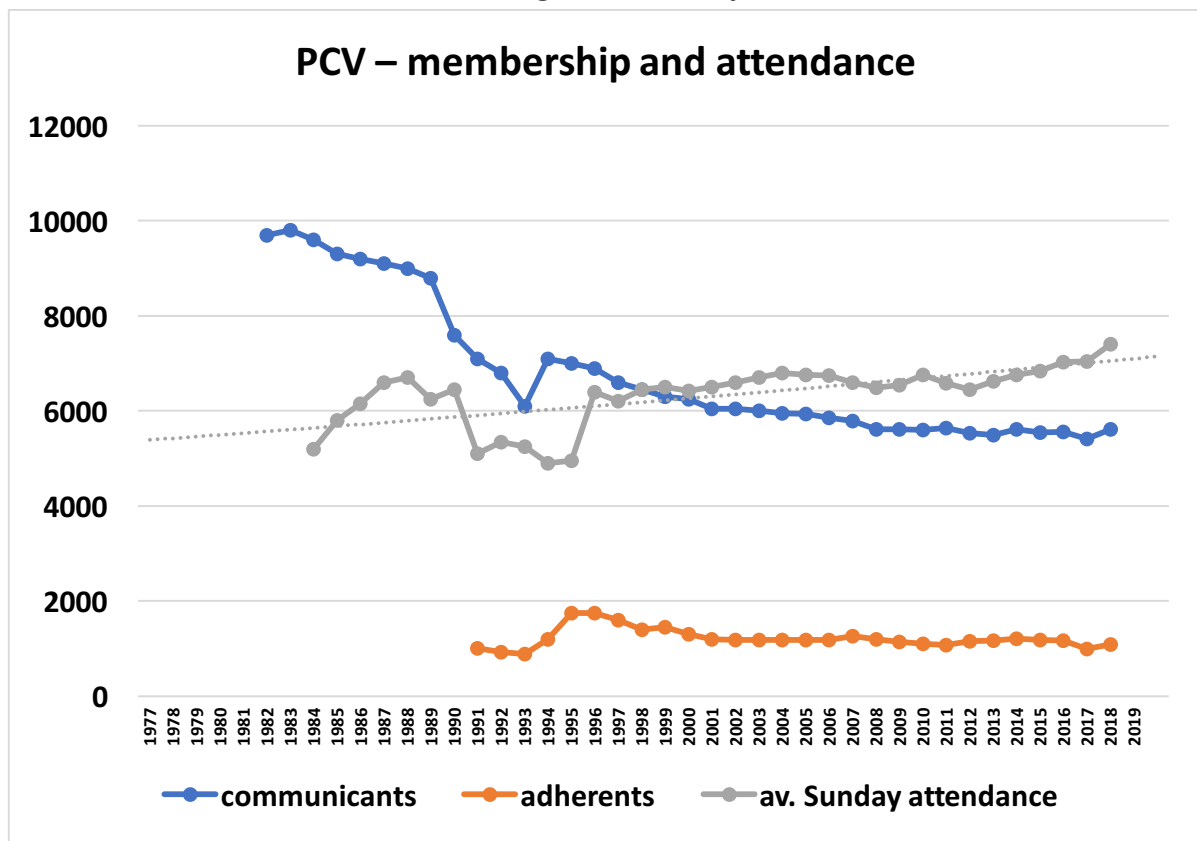
Further, it is important not to discount the strength and strategic place of other ordained ministers not employed in a charge setting. For example, there are currently another 11 ordained ministers:

- 2 are chaplains in the Defence Force,
- 1 is employed by an Assembly committee,
- 4 are staff at the Theological College,
- 2 are chaplains in church schools,
- 1 is Assembly Clerk.

Whichever way these figures are examined, the results are impressive:

- a rise from 54 to 90 full-time charge workers – an increase of 67% over 42 years;
- a rise from 57 to 101 full-time ministry workers (but not necessarily in the charge context) – an increase of 77% over 42 years.

3. Communicants, adherents and average total Sunday attendance:



This graph is designed to display the **overall number of PCV people** found on membership rolls and in actual attendance of our churches. Note the changing relationship between membership and attendance since the mid-1980s.

Error factors:

- we don't have information from the early days post-union;
- 1991, 1992 and 1994, 1995 figures are unreliable due to a significant number of charges not responding to the statistical returns;
- those responsible for filling out census figures often guess at numbers of people at church.

Overall (35 years):

- over the entire period of record keeping, the PCV has lost approximately 4,000 of its members (which is a 41% loss of the optimum figure of 1983);
- from 1998 – 2018 (the last 20 years), the average Sunday attendance at PCV churches has grown by 14%;
- from 2012 – 2018 (the last 6 years), the average Sunday attendance at PCV churches has grown by 11% (compare this with the Australian population growth rate over the same six years of 10%).

There are several possible explanations for the 41% overall loss:

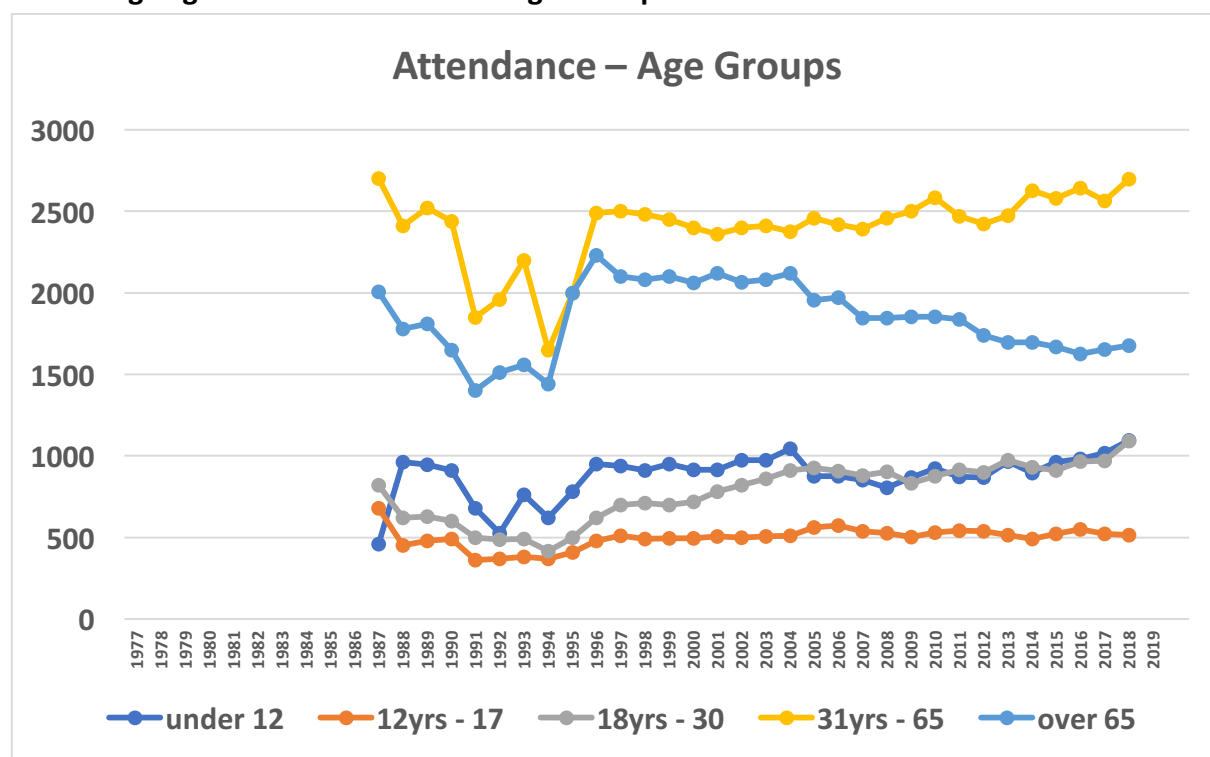
- a) In one sense, this is an 'acceptable' loss and one not unexpected given the makeup of the continuing congregational rolls of 1977 and the reformed stance of the Theological College and the commitment to the Westminster Confession of Faith of all its newly trained ministers and newly inducted elders. If it is true (as suggested by commentators such as Bob Thomas¹⁹) that a percentage of members voted to continue for reasons other than theological commitment, then there will inevitably be fallout when the leadership strongly adheres to and applies this commitment in congregational life.
- b) The church post-union placed a higher value on entrance into church membership than previously. In the 1950s and 1960s there were PCV churches in which membership could be secured on a gentlemen's handshake, with a 'nod or a wink', rather than on the basis of communicant's class preparing for profession of faith. Anecdotal evidence suggests this was especially so if you were a Freemason, a Rotarian, or a renowned good-living citizen. Requirements for church membership became more meaningful and therefore numbers declined.
- c) Today, in society generally, there is less value placed on formal membership, and this trend applies to anything. It is more and more acceptable to support a cause by simply attending whenever you feel like it, as seen in Hugh McKay's discussion on the 'options' generation.²⁰ Again, this trend, if translated into church life, means less membership numbers.

Throughout the period of 41% loss in communicant membership, there has been an inverse trend in attendance at worship. To some this might seem counter-intuitive, but attendances have increased over the same period of time.

¹⁹ Thomas, *The Crisis of '77*, 39, 40. Thomas identifies five groupings within the PCA (continuing) at the time of church union, and even makes estimates proportions: reformed evangelicals (20%), conservative evangelicals (20%), (Scottish) traditionalists (30%), theological moderates (20%) and hard-core liberals (10%).

²⁰ Hugh Mackay, *Generations: Baby Boomers, Their Parents and Their Children* (Sydney: Macmillan, 1997), ch 4.

4. Average age of attendees at morning worship:



This graph is designed to display the overall number of attendees in PCV charges **comparing age brackets** since the mid-1980s.

Error factors:

- only from 1996 is the data returned by the presbyteries much more reliable;
- those responsible for filling out census figures often guess at numbers of people and their age groups at church.

Overall (the last 20 years):

- whichever way we look at the numbers, the profile of the PCV is that it's getting younger, while the average age of the Australian population is rising;
- the over-65 representation in our congregations has fallen 19% over the last two decades²¹;
- the 31-65 representation in our congregations has risen 8% over the last two decades;
- the young adult (18-30) representation in our congregations has risen 50% over the last two decades;
- teenage (12-17) representation in our congregations has risen just 5% over the last two decades.

²¹ The ABS provides statistics that show the Australian population is aging and that the representation of over-65s has risen to 15% of the total population.

Average age of a Presbyterian worshipper?

While recognising the unreliability of statistical returns from congregations, and the element of guess work in completing forms, nevertheless an effort has been made to track the 'average age' of PCV worshippers in attendance on the average Sunday.

The method used is to assign a percentage to the midpoint of each age range, and then average them all, i.e.:

- under 12, take the mid-point age to be 6;
- 12 – 17, mid-point age of 14;
- 18 – 30, mid-point age of 23;
- 31 – 65, mid-point age of 48;
- over 65, mid-point age of 78.

The closing years of the 1990s, i.e. 1998 and 1999, the average age of Presbyterian worshippers was 46 years.

By 2008, 2009, it was 44 years.

By 2017, 2018, it was 42 years.

The actual age number is almost meaningless, but given the same (flawed) method is use for each decade, the trend downwards is of interest.

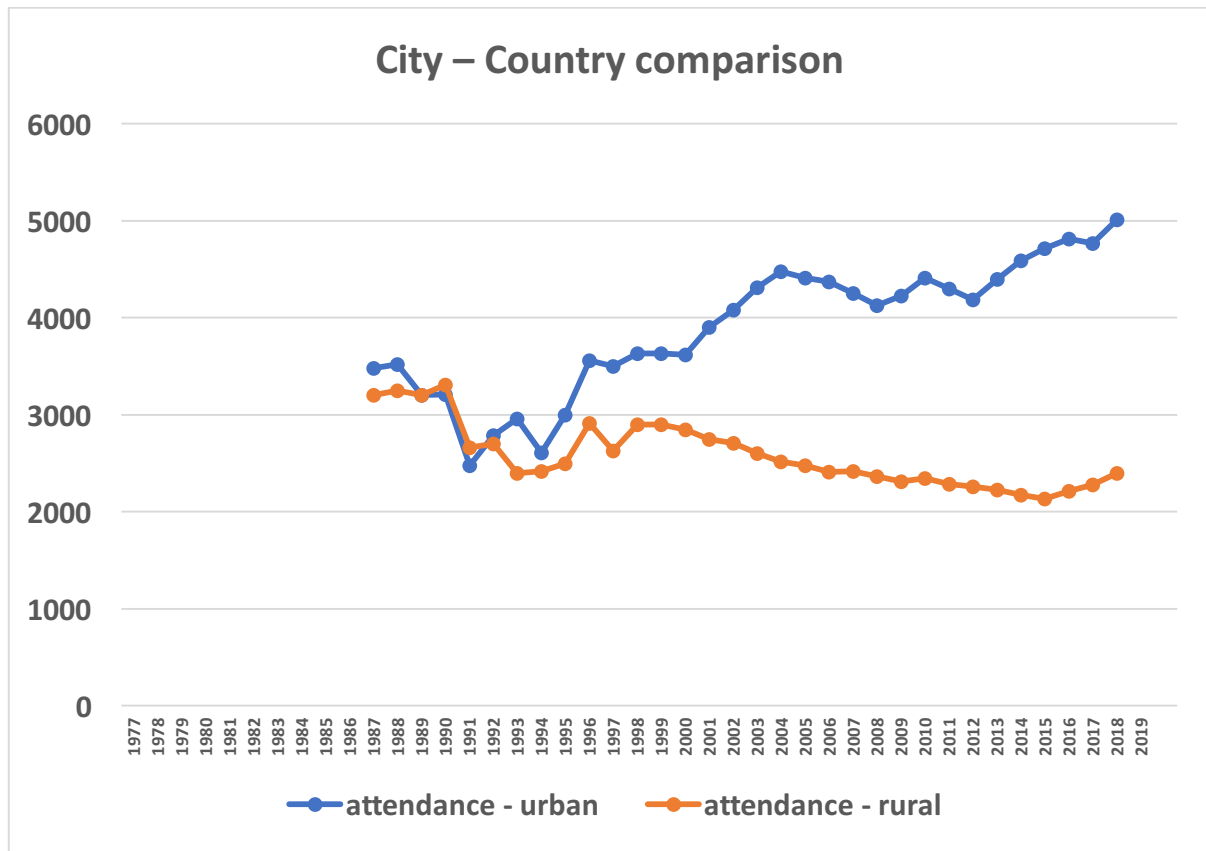
Age bracket representation

One final analysis is to ask whether the age bracket spread in PCV churches correlates with that of the general population of Australia, or whether it's skewed to the older age bracket being over represented. It's not surprising to see that the answer is the latter, but not by as much as may be expected or predicted by our nay-sayers.

Consider the PCV 2018 spread, compared with that of the general population:

age groups	PCV churches (%)	Australian population (%)
under 12	15	15
12 - 17	7	6
18 - 30	15	18
31 – 65	38	46
over 65	23	14

5. City attendance compared with country attendance:



This graph is designed to display the overall number of attendees in PCV charges **comparing city vs country** since the mid-1980s.

Error factors:

- Geelong Presbytery is counted as rural, which is not entirely accurate;
- Flinders and Maroondah presbyteries are considered urban, which also is not entirely accurate.

Overall (30 years):

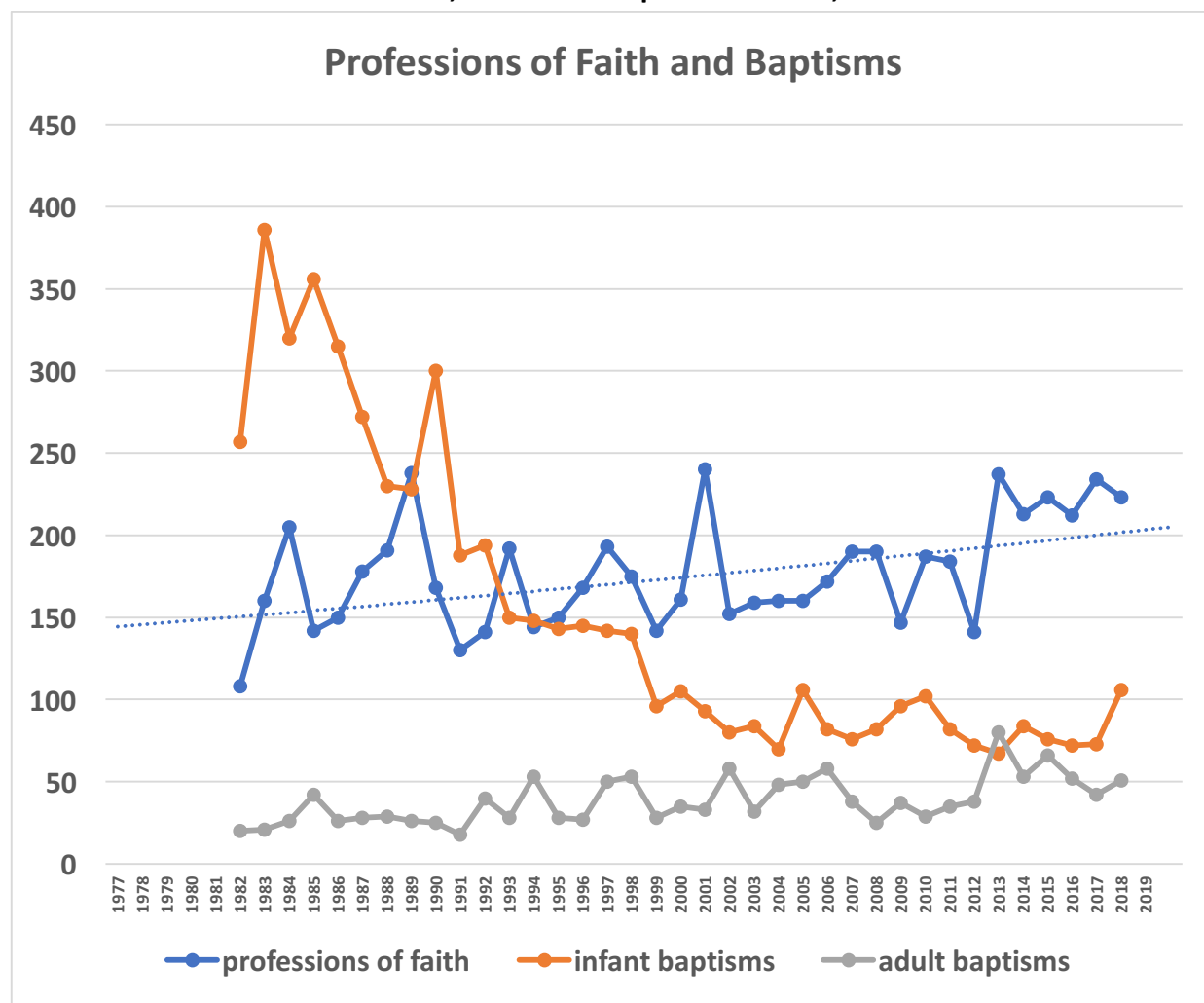
- a significant gap between the two (67% city of Melbourne, 33% non-metropolitan), but less than that of the general population (77% : 23%);
- a widening gap over the decades reflecting the historic Presbyterian position of rural strength.

Sociological factors explain this trend, but more so when the roots of the PCV are considered. There was a time when the strength of the PCV was its rural membership. Particularly this was so in colonial Victorian days when the total number of attendees was stronger in the rural districts than in the city.

In Victoria, high concentrations of Presbyterians live in the Western District, west of Geelong and out beyond the border with South Australia. Scottish migrants arrived to farm Australia and took up residence near good pastures where they could transfer their skills from the Scottish highlands. It is that situation which is still faintly reflected in the earliest figures of the church post-union.

The other obvious contributing factor is the general decline in the number of sustainable farms and the lack of employment available on them, even for the immediate family of the land owners. Machinery has taken over many farm jobs and frequent droughts have robbed farms of productivity. It is an observable fact that many young people who move to the city for post-secondary education and employment, never come back home.

6. Number of Professions of Faith, number of baptisms – infant, adult:



This graph is designed to display the overall number of people becoming members of the PCV by making professions of faith, and then, the number of baptisms.

This and the earlier indicator (no. 3 Membership, Attendees) need to be understood for their difference. The two measurements are as different as, in physics, a chart of velocity is from acceleration. Where a flat line acceleration chart means speed is increasing, so a flat-line profession of faith means church membership is increasing:

- Indicator 3 (membership and attendances) is recording the same people each time and therefore one would expect increase, or else (given the death rate in Presbyterian circles each year) the church is going backwards;
- Indicator 6 is recording new people each year, and in one year the data is measuring people who have never been recorded previously; so a plateau effect is not a negative indicator, and a rising graph indicates 'acceleration'.

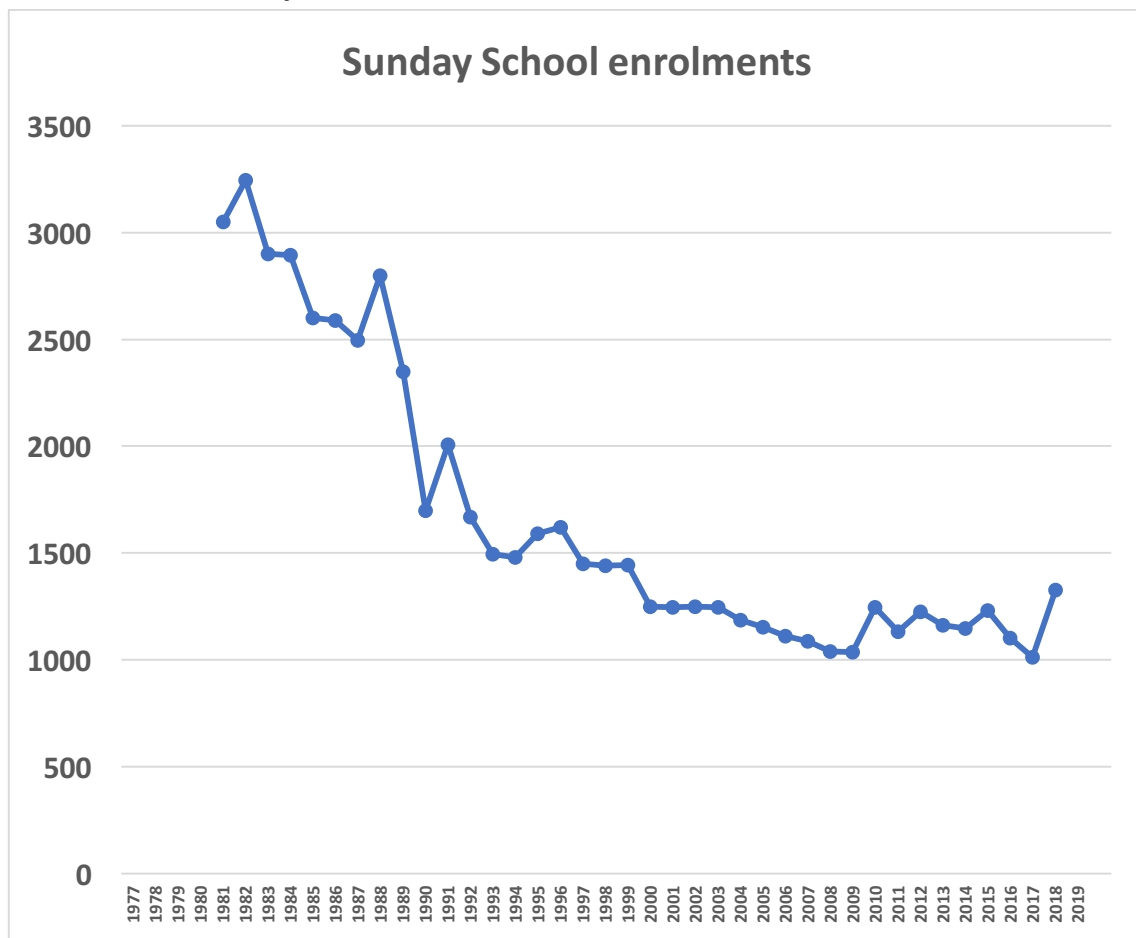
Overall (the last 3 decades) - three trends:

- numbers fluctuate, but from wherever we start the analysis, the number of annual professions of faith is increasing - remembering our maths: this shows an increase in the rate of adding members to PCV congregations;²²
- from wherever we start, the number of annual infant baptisms (one of the distinctives of our denomination) has fallen;
- adult baptism is the 'sleeper' in that many non-Presbyterians do not know that the church practices it;²³ its frequency has risen over the years.

²² Though most 'Presbyterians' have been baptised as an infant, this act of profession of faith is only taken after reaching the years of understanding (but with no age limit) and only after preparation classes in basic Christian doctrine. Names are added to the Communicant's Roll of a PCA congregation either by transfer from another congregation of the PCA or following profession of faith. The requirements of communicant membership are, in part, set out in the PCV Code (2020), Rule 3.26.2, 'If anyone applies to become a communicant of a congregation, the session must satisfy itself of the applicant's ... (b) baptism; (c) profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; (d) knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith ...; and (e) consistency between life and profession.'

²³ The Westminster Confession of Faith (ch 28) and the Westminster Shorter Catechism (question no. 95) make it clear that baptism is for Christian believers and their children. The number of adults being baptised is important as it shows (in the main) people are joining the church in adult life from non-Christian families.

7. Number of Sunday School enrolments:



This graph is designed to display the overall number of Sunday School children enrolled in PCV charges since the mid-1980s.

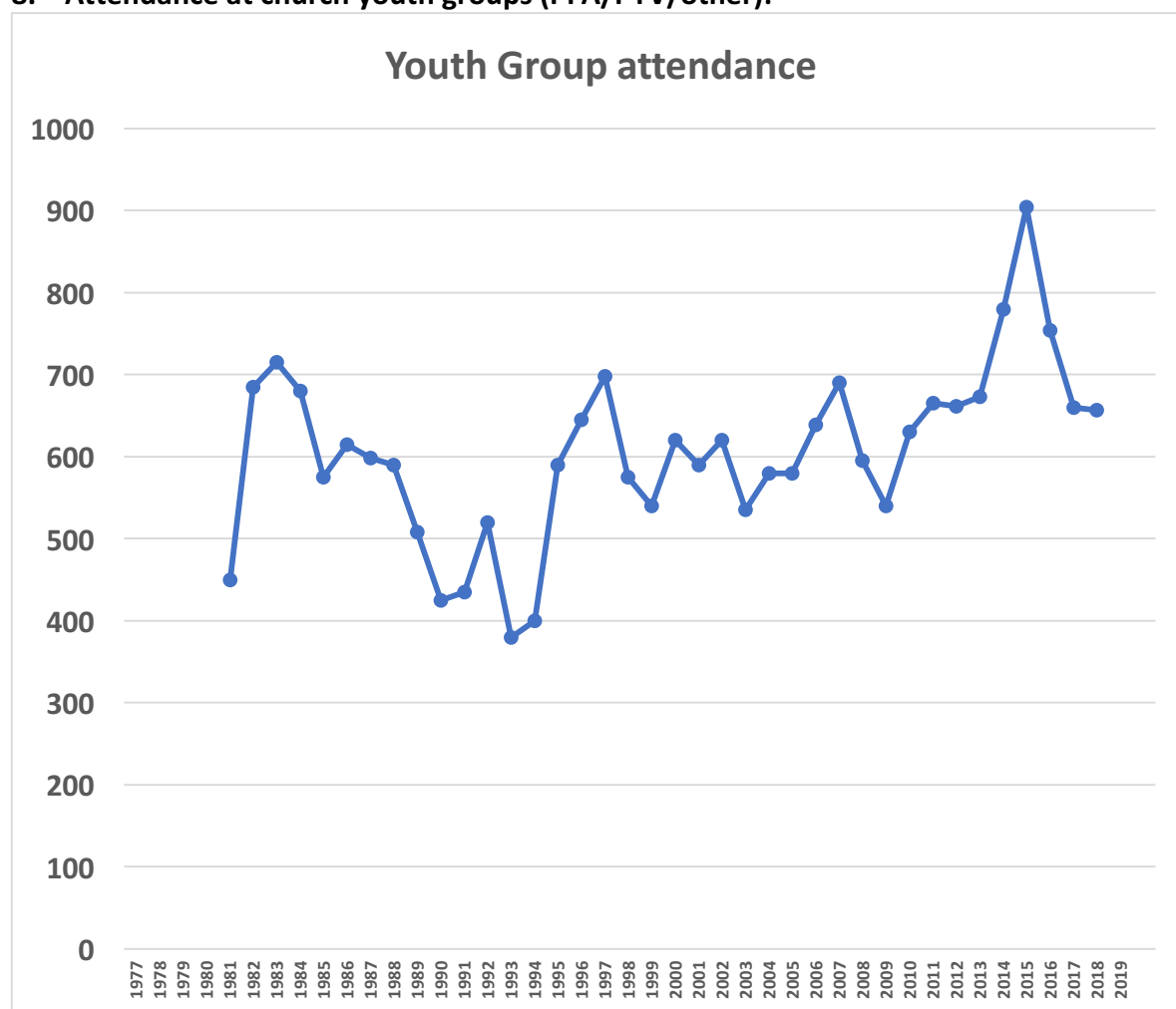
Trends:

- steady decline in Sunday School children.

Overall (30 years):

- nothing much can be said to mitigate this indicator to make it more palatable; the only positive thing to be said is that since 2002 the enrolment numbers seem to have plateaued;
- if the 1326 children (counted in 2018) were spread evenly throughout the state then the average number of Sunday School children expected in each of our 139 congregations is 9.5;
- the only other mitigating factor is that there has been an overall increase in ministry to children through after-school or holiday children's clubs (something unheard of pre-union).

8. Attendance at church youth groups (PFA/PYV/other):



This graph is designed to display the overall number of youth attending youth groups in PCV charges since the mid-1980s.

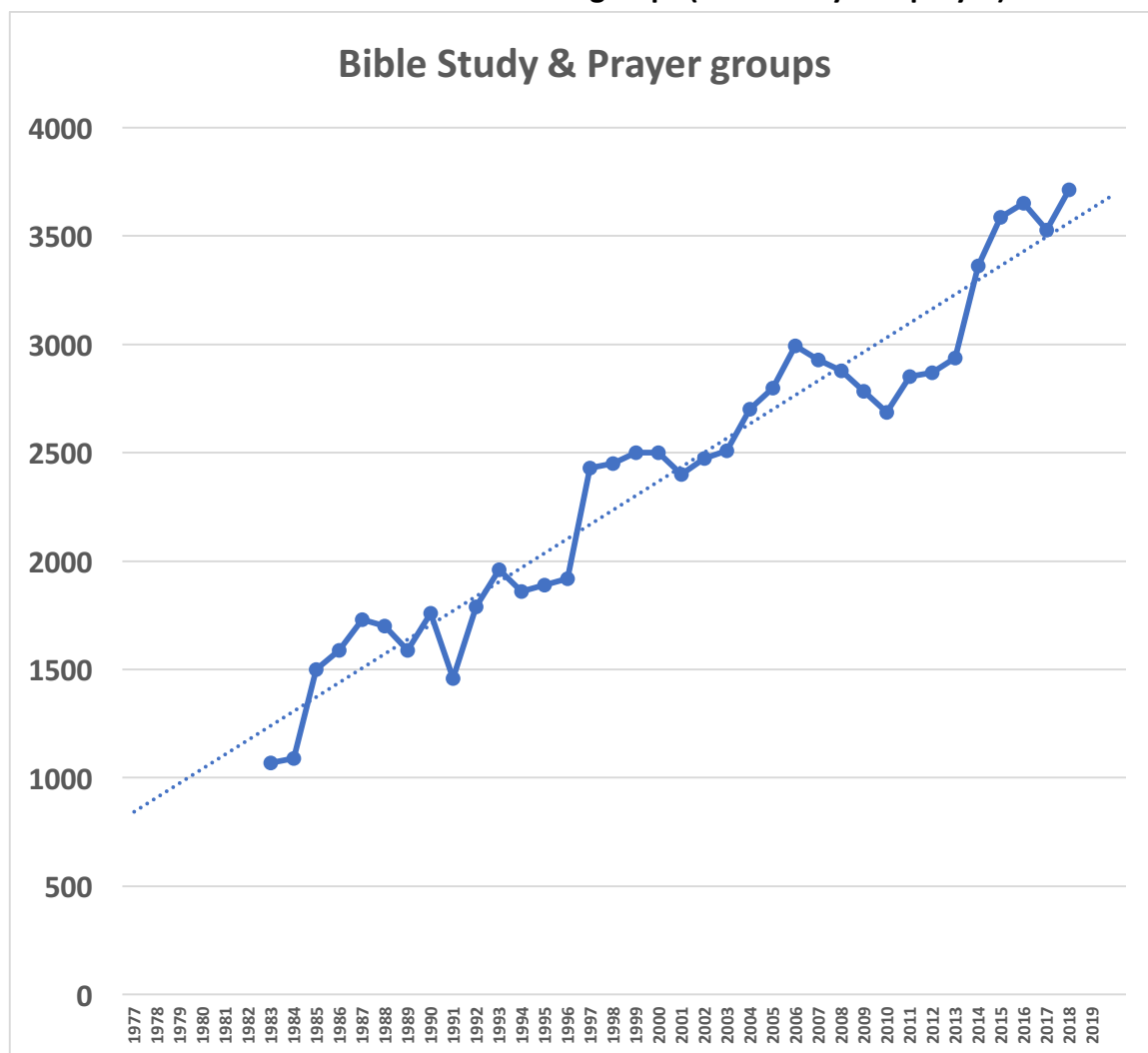
Overall (30 years), two trends emerge:

- downward in the similar fashion to Sunday School enrolments: here, a 50% plummet from 1984 to 1994
- upward ... 15% rise from 1998 to now

It is interesting to note the significant decision of the General Assembly of the PCV to restructure the ministry to youth and launch it under the new banner 'Presbyterian Youth in Victoria' in 1995.²⁴ An inference may be drawn without absolute proof of cause and effect but the steady growth in youth ministry began the year that the constitution of youth ministries underwent a complete overhaul.

²⁴ Presbyterian Church of Victoria, *Minutes of Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria* (Melbourne: Brown, Prior, Anderson, 1995), 89.

9. Number of adults in attendance at small groups (Bible study and prayer):



This graph is designed to display the overall number of adults attending small group Bible study or prayer in PCV charges since the mid-1980s.

Overall (30 years):

There has been spectacular growth of nearly 120% over 30 years. This is so clearly a particular trend in the PCV that it deserves separate comment and reflection.

Home groups have enjoyed a recent re-invention in mainline Australian churches, and Presbyterianism in Victoria is no exception. The church of the pre-war era and that of the post-war boom years thrived without them. Church life was busy and bustling on Sundays with children thronging to Sunday school without much planned recruitment. The church was held together by Sunday busyness, community respect, and deeply held traditions. The minister-led 'midweek prayer meeting' (of the English/Scottish type) was the only form of Bible study during the week. The really committed went to that and listened to the minister give another sermon, his third for the week.

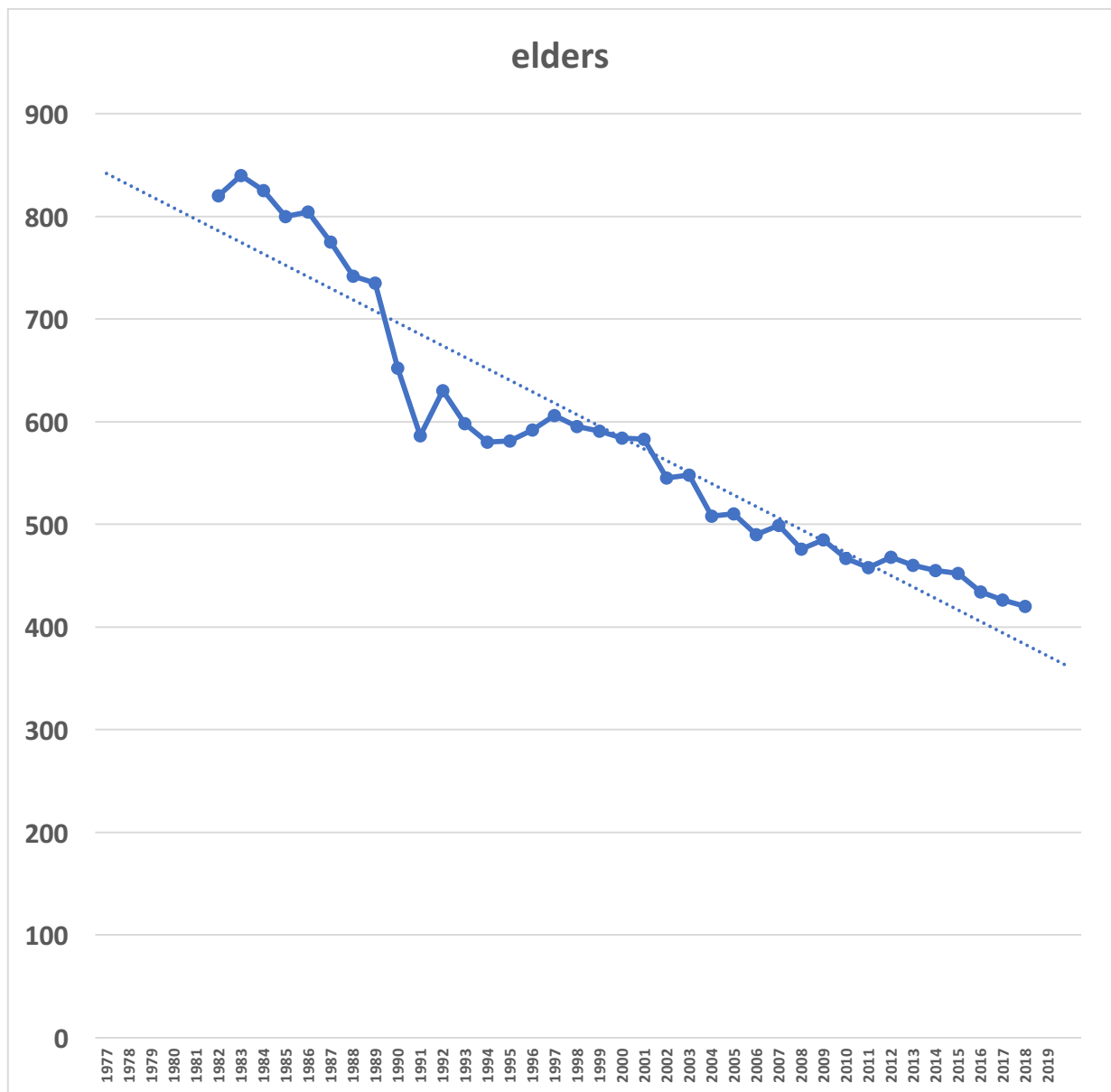
The 1960s saw the emergence of youth-led recovery of the use of the home. Youth Group Bible studies moved around the neighbourhood, interspersed with social nights and progressive suppers. Adult studies seemed to follow a similar pattern, and by the 1970s a newly settled pattern of home Bible studies had arrived.

Emerging from this was a new style of Bible study, less centred on teaching and more open to the inductive style of learning. The 1990s saw the emergence of the question-led study where the leader sits in the background as the facilitator of the group, allowing the group to discover biblical truth and then own its discovery.

There are strengths to this current trend:

- today's home groups help the church reach out to the newcomer, making the transition from the world into church life smoother and less of a threat;
- they involve more people than previously in active leadership;
- they invite participation from each member, and provide the joy of self-discovery and personal ownership of biblical truths;
- they help provide a regular forum for mutual pastoral care;
- they create for participants a sense of community that is needed and appreciated in today's increasingly fractured world.

10. Number of elders:



This graph is designed to display the overall number of elders serving in PCV charges since the mid-1980s.

Overall (30 years):

- steady decline in the number of men being available for eldership duty.

There is a need to explain the 50% loss of total eldership, and this despite the increase in the number of congregations. Several reasons can be suggested:

- In 1977 the church reinstituted eldership vows and the signing of The Formula – thus committing elders to a confessional (WCF) or doctrinal position (that which is outlined in the Westminster Confession of Faith), rather than to just an inclination towards

‘practical helps’. Why did the church change? Why are elders required to subscribe to a doctrinal confession of faith? Isn’t it enough to ask them to ‘confess your faith in God, revealed to us in Jesus Christ’, as the PCV used to ask prior to the 1970s? There is nothing wrong with asking an incoming elder to profess personal faith in Jesus – nothing at all. But if the elder is expected to be able to ‘hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught’, and ‘encourage others by sound doctrine’ and ‘refute those who oppose it’ (Titus 1:9), then more is required.

- b) The Westminster Confession of Faith teaches a system of doctrine that the PCV believes best expresses biblical truth and provides a framework in which the church can see the message that has been taught, is then able to pass it on to others and can refute opponents of faith. The Confession serves as a standard from which the church teaches and against which error can be measured. So, over the years that followed, this heightened commitment made it more difficult to find willing elders. The raising of the bar took its toll on those who had just ‘coasted’ into the continuing church with a low-key, and not very informed, commitment to the church, and so some of these elders resigned.
- c) Further, it needs to be pointed out that in 1998 the PCV General Assembly (after a protracted three-year process), decided, on theological grounds, to remove the words ‘and female’ as one of the qualifications for eldership.²⁵ This meant that the church returned to its earlier position of permitting only qualified males into the position of elder. Such a decision prompted some resignations.
- d) Also, the PCV made a declaration about Freemasonry – finding that it is ‘totally incompatible with Christianity’ in 1997 – and so more resignations followed, as a significant proportion of the PCV eldership, post-union, were Freemasons.²⁶
- e) Then in 2001 the church changed its rules to reflect what was going on in practice anyway – insisting on training for eldership prior to induction.

So, in many ways, it just became harder (and more accountable) to be an elder in the PCV. More was required. The standard of eldership was raised, and the total number of serving elders diminished.

²⁵ From the PCV Code, 2020, rule 3.11 **Persons eligible for election as elders**. ‘male communicants of the congregation, aged at least 21 years, whose membership exceeds one year ...’

²⁶ Presbyterian Church of Victoria, *Minutes of Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria* (Melbourne: Brown, Prior, Anderson, 1997), 87.

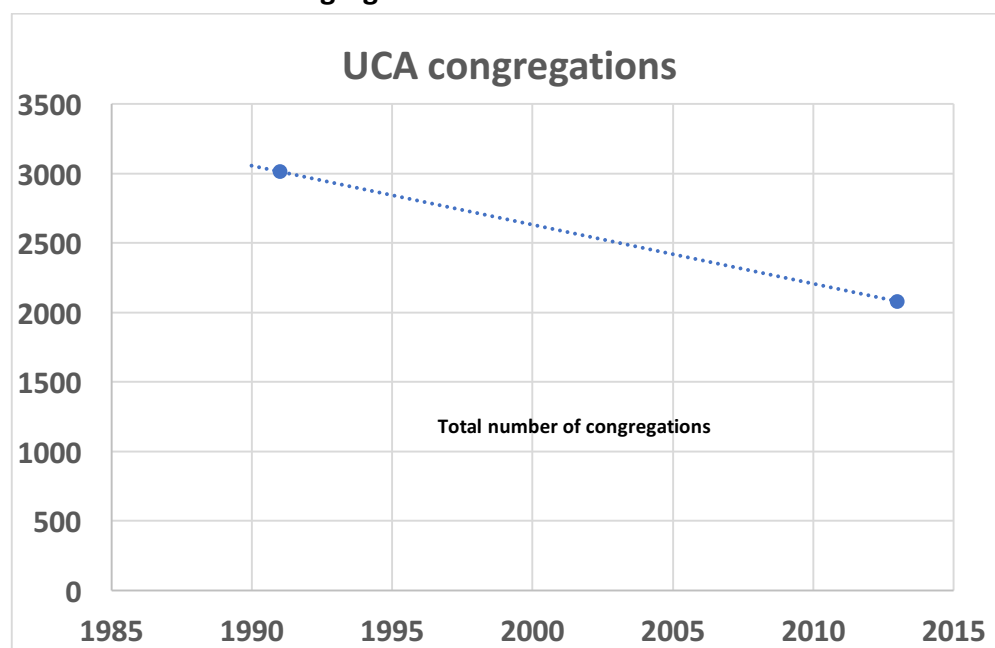
Chapter four – how did the Uniting Church fare?

Those of us with long memories recall repeated accusations made against the continuing PCA for daring to stand out against union. In the 1970s, we heard predictions: ‘that little remnant will never survive.’ Even more lately, within the corridors of the UCA Vic/Tas office, the author heard the PCV referred to – not necessarily unkindly – but as that ‘rump that might soon disappear.’

So, having verified that the Presbyterian Church, at least in Victoria, is a growing church, it’s only reasonable to ask how our larger cousins are faring. How did the Uniting Church fare? It’s difficult to say because that church does not consistently record statistics as we do. But there is one record: published by the National Church Life Survey research team for the Uniting Church in 2014²⁷.

The research was conducted nationally and presented to the UCA predominantly as a picture of the UCA from 1991 – 2013. In the only two areas where UCA statistics overlap with ours (congregations and ministers), the comparison will be made directly with the PCV for the same 22 year period.

1. Total number of congregations



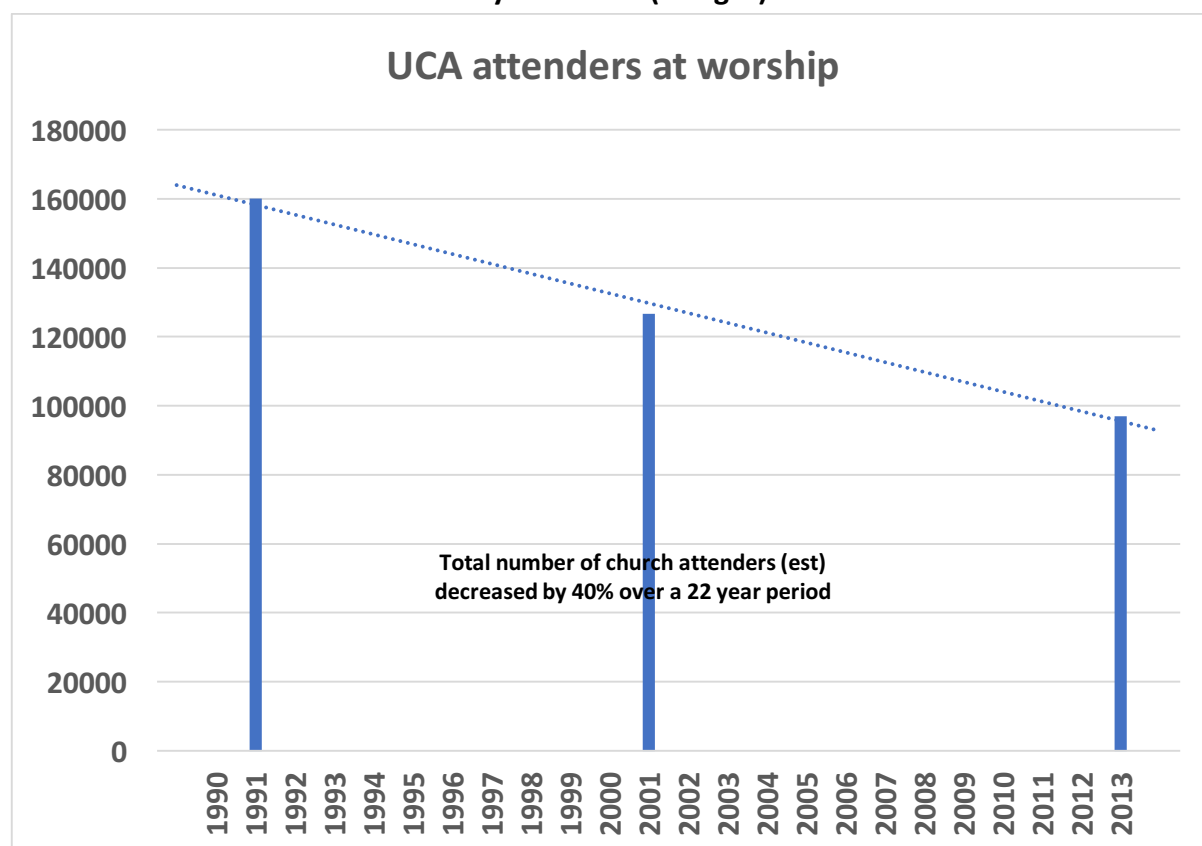
For Vic/Tas Synod of the UCA, the figures are even worse – **33%** decline in the number of congregations²⁸.

²⁷ Powell, Pepper, Hancock, Sterland, Mollitor, *NCLS Research*, commissioned by the UCA, 2014.

²⁸ A further decline in the number of Vic/Tas congregations is projected to the year 2026, statistics reported to the 2016 meeting of the Vic/Tas Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia.

During the same period of time, the number of PCV charges (filled or vacant) increased from 79 to 101 – an increase of **27%**.

2. Estimated total number of Sunday attenders (all ages)



For Vic/Tas Synod of the UCA, there was an estimated **40%** decline in the number of Sunday attendees in Uniting churches²⁹.

During the same period of time, the average number of attenders at churches in PCV increased from 5100 to 6624 – an increase of **29%**.

Later, this research was reflected on by John Sandeman in *Eternity* magazine³⁰ under the heading 'Decision time for Uniting Church'.

UCA's Major Strategic Review

Although moving beyond solely statistics, it is of interest to read the Uniting Church's serious reflection on the state of their church – something that we as Presbyterians have not be bold enough to do on the same scale.

²⁹ A further decline in the number of Vic/Tas church attenders is projected to the year 2032, statistics reported to the 2016 meeting of the Vic/Tas Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia.

³⁰ Sandeman J, *Eternity* (June 2017), 7.

Reporting to the 8th Assembly of the national UCA, Rev Gregor Henderson lamented how the role of General Secretary was taking personal toll on him because of: 'knowing that the thousands and thousands of faithful Christians in the Uniting Church are becoming fewer every year'³¹.

The same Assembly report affirmed that local church ministry and mission remains the most vital challenge facing the UCA. In exploring how they were setting out to address this downslide, the Assembly indicated it would look to the following as possible answers to decline, while admitting that no one answer will lead to the desired outcome of the rebirth of local congregational life:

- lively youth ministry;
- evangelical ministerial leadership;
- non-traditional worship patterns (especially in music);
- multicultural inclusiveness;
- self-giving community service;
- openness to various minority groupings.

Victorian Synod reflections

In the light this reported national decline, the Victorian/Tasmanian Synod of the UCA conducted a major review tabled at Synod in 2016. The chair of this Major Strategic Review (MSR), Rev Dr Mark Lawrence, admitted: 'despite the considerable achievements (*and he cites these: recognition of First Peoples, embrace of multicultural diversity, welcoming of women into leadership roles and honouring of the laity*) our membership has declined and aged³² significantly over the past 30 years ... and as we have become fewer in number some have become anxious and tired and have dropped their church associations ... (*and this*) makes the load heavier and time consuming for those who remain.'³³

The Victorian MSR then explores how the UCA will address the decline, suggesting, among other remedies, that it should bear in mind that the nature of the local congregation is changing and that it's not all about 'what we do on a Sunday morning' ... 'we have observed that there are also many working to explore fresh ways to engage in worship ... to inject life back into their gathered communities. There are also numerous other forms of gathered community emerging'.

Two trends emerging

Although it's hard to assess fairly if you are not there in their Synod meetings, yet we're left with two clear impressions – two emerging trends within the UCA:

³¹ From the General Secretary's report to the 8th Assembly of the Uniting Church of Australia (1997).

³² A snapshot of the age-spread of attenders within the UCA was taken in 1996: 55% of Uniting Church attendees were over 60 years of age, with 93% over 30 years (compared with 69% for the PCV).

³³ Reported to the 2016 meeting of the Vic/Tas Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia by its General Secretary, Rev Dr Mark Lawrence.

- a) A diminished appreciation of the value of the local congregation as God's vehicle for defending and proclaiming the gospel. The impression is that the church doesn't care so much if local congregations fold, merge or stop meeting; indeed, it expects this. It no longer values as much what happens locally on Sundays provided the progressive and liberal arms of mercy continue to flourish. The UCA view of the local gathering of believers acting as the bride of Christ has changed.
- b) In their posting of remedies, and as an outcome of their genuine prayer for revival, the church no longer turns to what the church has always resorted to for ushering in refreshment, reformation and regrowth. The UCA remedies no longer mention: congregational prayer to Almighty God to intervene, clearer and more persuasive biblical preaching, taking the power of the gospel to the unsaved or planting new churches.

In summary, the Vic/Tas Synod's statement of intent (guiding the church as to how they are 'to arrest the decline, move forward and achieve a sustainable future') is tenfold³⁴:

- focus on vision and mission principles,
- be lighter and simpler (this is in relation to worship services),
- share our resources,
- grow leadership capacity,
- build resilience, strengthen accountability,
- foster faith, deepen discipleship,
- seek reconciliation between First and Second Peoples,
- deepen partnerships and trust,
- nourish contextual expressions of church,
- act together across cultures and generations.

What would we think is missing from this list of stated intents? It would be very interesting and helpful for the PCV to specifically consider our own progress (or lack of it), hold a major review and establish our own version of a tenfold statement of intent.

³⁴ Reported to the 2016 meeting of the Vic/Tas Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Chapter five – Australia's dwindling allegiance to Christianity

Since 1961, the Federal Government has conducted an Australia-wide census once every five years. It's of interest to track trends in church affiliation over the same 40 years as for the period of this research project, i.e. examining figures from the census periods: 1976 - 2016.

From 1991 onwards, the census questions were changed to provide respondents with boxes to tick indicating which branch of 'other Protestant' they were claiming allegiance to. So, from 1991 census, trends can be identified as to the number of people claiming affiliation with the Reformed or Presbyterian branches of the Christian faith in Australia.

In 1996 residents were invited to tick one of the boxes or write in their religion. The options given are:

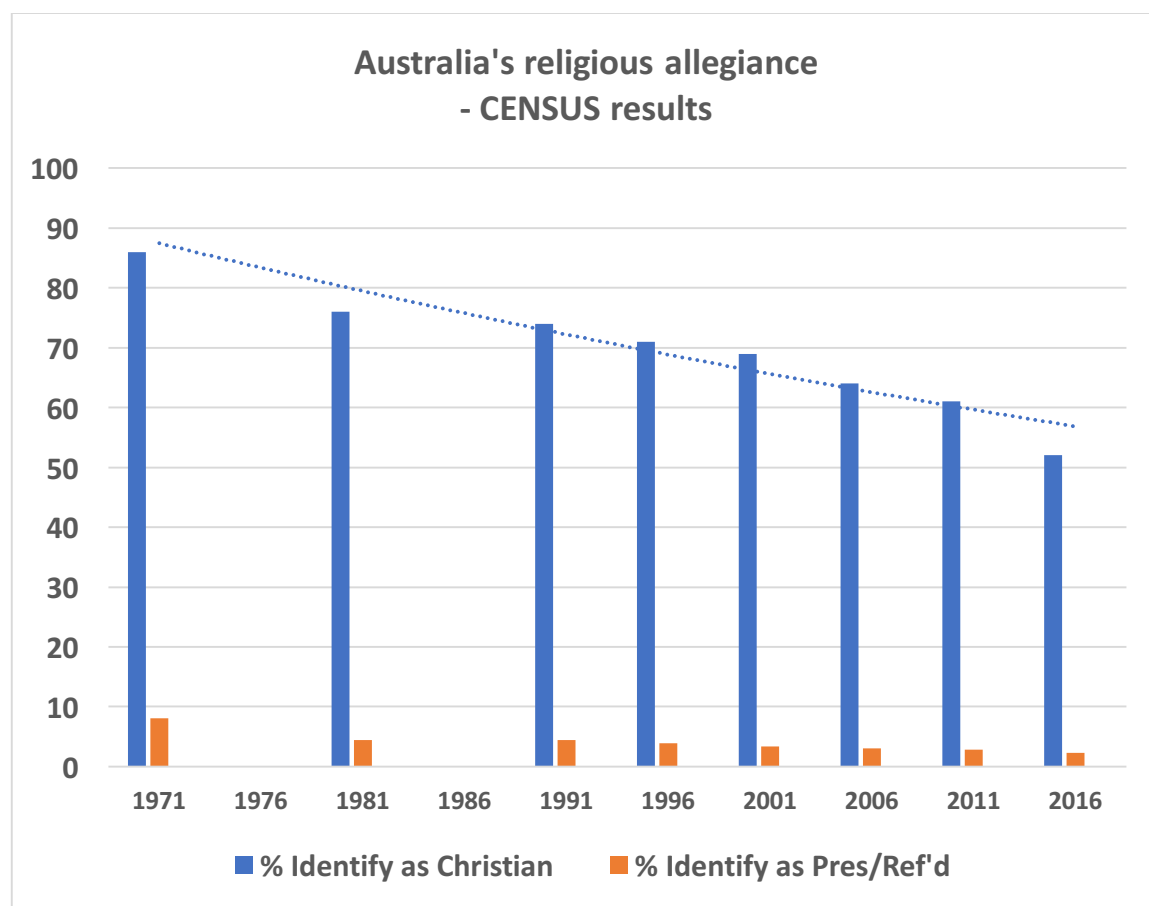
- Catholic
- Anglican (Church of England)
- Uniting Church
- Presbyterian
- Greek Orthodox
- Baptist
- Lutheran
- Other - please specify
- No religion

Philip Hughes explains the reasons behind the choice of these options, and why there are not other denominations on it:

*All denominations which claimed over 1% of the population in the 1986 census were listed on the census form, and so people only had to tick the box.*³⁵

³⁵ Philip Hughes. Overview of Religious Affiliation in the 1991 Census. *Pointers* vol 3:3, June 1993.

Percentage of Australians identifying as Christian³⁶



It's to be expected a large fall from 1971 to 1981 as this covers the years in which the Uniting Church in Australia formed and so there was a significant departure from the Presbyterian/Reformed group.

Trends observed:

- In the first national census, 1911, 96% of all Australians stated their religion as 'Christian'. By 1933 this figure had fallen to 86%, assumed to be largely due to a growing realisation that this question could be left blank. It further declined to 74% in 1991. By 2001, it's 12.6 million out of a census population of 18.8 million who claim one form or other of Christian faith – 67%.
- Relative to general population increase (5.7%) church identification has declined during the period between the 1996 census and 2001; the increase of numbers identifying with Christianity grew by only 1.4% in this 5-year period.
- Several mainline denominations saw a decline in numbers between 1996 and 2001:
 - Congregationalists, 22% decline
 - Churches of Christ, 18% decline
 - Brethren, 12% decline

³⁶ Philip Hughes, 'What do the 2006 Census Figures about Religion Mean?' *Pointers*, vol 17.3, Sept 2007.

- Uniting, 6.5% decline
- Presbyterian/Reformed, 5.5% decline
- Salvation Army, 3.5% decline
- It's interesting to note that for the same period there were denominations that grew:
 - Pentecostals (now including all forms, whereas in the previous survey a significant grouping was listed separately), 11% increase
 - Baptists, 5% increase
 - those designated 'other Christian', 28% increase
 - orthodox churches, 10% increase
 - Roman Catholic, 4% increase

Conclusion

Statistics aren't everything. There are many ways to interpret statistics and data sets, not all of them valid. Raw figures are one thing, analysis toward statistical significance is a further step we leave for the reader.

The key to the valid use of statistics is to extract meaning and patterns from the data in a way that is logical and demonstrable you, the reader. It's now over to you to cognitively re-engage with what is presented and draw your own inferences. This way we draw strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow.

Whatever the flaws in the collection of data, at least this is true: they convey trends – and trends over a forty-year period are hard to ignore.

The real story, however, is played out 'behind the curtain' – in heaven. It's always God who blesses and brings growth to his people. Also, it's God who, for purposes known only to him, who withholds blessings and allows decline. Either way it's the Lord who builds his church and the church of the living God will never be defeated or extinguished.

Should statistics indicate growth, then God should be thanked and receive the glory because this is no less than what we expect from what Jesus said to the Apostle Peter: 'I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.'³⁷ To give credit for growth to some other cause is dishonouring to God.

Should statistics indicate downslide, then let's look to God and his revealed Word for a God-honouring and Spirit-inspired response to trust God, obey his Word, pray and continue to preach the gospel. We remember those parting words of Jesus to Peter: 'Feed my sheep ... follow me'.³⁸

Our final plea is for the right use of statistics, lest it lead to pride in one's own achievements or reliance on our own strength and methods. There is a warning in Scripture in this regard. The reason for God's rebuke of King David when he insisted on counting numbers of his fighting men is not made explicit in the biblical record.³⁹ However, what is sure is that the punishment for David's census was to do with a lack of trust in God and pride in his own strength of numbers.

We do not want to make the same mistake.

³⁷ Matthew 16:18

³⁸ John 21:17,19

³⁹ 2 Samuel 24

We wrote a Vision Statement for the PCV in 1997. Although it's 23 years old, it stands out today as a good effort in expressing our basic desires as a church. Maybe it needs re-visiting.

Summary Vision Statement

By God's grace we exist to glorify and enjoy God through worship, teaching God's Word, evangelism and social interaction, always in the light of the inspired Scriptures and relying on God's presence, power and wisdom.

Vision Statement

As part of the redeemed people of God, having been brought out of darkness into God's light through faith in Jesus Christ, the Presbyterian Church of Victoria seeks to glorify and enjoy God – as Father, Son and Holy Spirit – serving, loving and obeying him, in the light of his revealed Word, the Bible.

The Presbyterian Church of Victoria holds the Bible to be the inspired and inerrant revelation of God, a book fully trustworthy to guide the Church in all matters of faith and practice. Embracing this particular view of inspiration of Scripture means that our work and witness has distinctive guiding values, these being expressed in what is known as:

- reformed doctrines and church practice
- the confessional position of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647).

We seek to serve and obey God by:

- worshipping God in Spirit and truth;
- edifying God's people, by teaching God's Word, in order that they become mature in Christ, living a holy life;
- evangelising the lost through proclaiming and living the gospel;
- engaging in social witness, demonstrating God's love and righteousness in both word and deed.

By being faithful in these things it is our passionate prayer that, by God's grace:

- lives will be changed according to the pattern of Christ's life;
- there will be growth and maturity in existing churches;
- the unsaved will come to faith in Christ;
- new churches will be planted;
- and in all this, churches will have an effect in changing society's values for good.

In pursuing this mission we seek to:

- depend at all times on God's leading,
- be aware of the culture in which we minister,
- be prepared to take bold steps to fulfil this mission in the State of Victoria, throughout Australia and toward all parts of the world.

Our specific goal, both individually and as a denomination, is to be engaged in making disciples of the Lord Jesus, to direct all our efforts to preaching repentance to God and faith in Jesus, and to nurturing those who believe the gospel.

We believe that there is a connection between the third and fourth paragraph of our vision statement. That what we set out to do (worship God as he requires, preach the Scriptures, evangelise the lost) is linked to expectations (changed lives, maturity of faith, the unsaved saved and new churches planted).

May God give us ears to hear what he is saying to us, humility to repent of our sin, and greater faith in what the Lord can do even through a small and marginalised church.

Author:

Rev Dr John P Wilson is a minister of the Presbyterian Church of Australia with 40 years' experience. He has served the church at Numurkah, Reservoir, Kangaroo Ground and the Presbyterian Theological College). He is now Clerk of Assembly for the state church (PCV) and formerly was Moderator of the national church (PCA). He often serves our partner Presbyterian churches in Zambia and Malawi.

