

Worship service resources for the 2011 National Church Life Survey

20 years of experience has shown that churches find the National Church Life Survey process most useful when survey completion is effectively integrated into the worship service or Mass for that day. Doing so encourages attenders to participate in the survey in a reflective way, and with a view to contributing to the further development of the life and mission of their church.

To help churches to integrate the survey into worship, NCLS Research offers a series of worship resources. These resources are optional, and have been prepared by people from a diversity of denominations and worship traditions. We encourage you to peruse the following, and to use and adapt any which you may find helpful:

[Preparing your congregation](#) – a series of points to help explain the purpose and benefits of the survey to attenders

[Integrating the survey into the liturgy](#) – suggestions for churches which follow a more formal liturgical structure

[Prayers](#) – for use during a time of intercessory prayer

[Reflections on the lectionary](#) – linking the survey to the Sunday gospel readings

[Other Biblical reflections](#) – to help churches prepare for evaluation and feedback

[Some suggested songs](#) – for churches that use 'Together in Song'

Preparing your congregation

Introducing a written survey during the worship service without any warning can create a negative reaction in people. They may just feel flustered for a moment or they may even feel resentment at being asked to do something out of the norm. So it is important to prepare people either on the day itself or even the week(s) beforehand.

People will respond better if they know why they are being asked to do this and what the potential benefits are.

Some points to make:

1. Once every 5 years church congregations all over Australia have participated in the National Church Life Survey. In 2011 hundreds of thousands of attenders in thousands of churches in 21 denominations are taking part. It's the second largest survey in Australia after the National Census.
2. Like the Census it gathers some demographic information, but unlike the Census it also focuses on your opinions, your hopes and concerns and your evaluation of the life and mission of your church. It also seeks to spotlight newcomers and youth.
3. From this we gain a clearer understanding of our strengths as a Christian community, on mission and caring for each other. Our ministry groups gain precise feedback on their area of ministry. And we are all better equipped to hold meaningful discussions about our future that are based on reality rather than surmise.
4. Through a separate survey connected to this one your leaders also gain insights into their leadership in the church.
5. It is important that we plan, so that we can be the best we can be as a church, so that we can more clearly respond to God's call here and now.
6. This survey gathers the voices of Australian church attenders and it's important for as many voices as possible to be part of this. The gathering of voices informs us in our local planning. Yet it also informs out regional and denominational leaders as they allocate resources and develop policy, and it informs and encourages our brothers and sisters in other Christian churches as well.
7. Even more than this, it speaks with an authoritative voice through press releases and academic studies to the wider Australian community, challenging the myth of a dying and irrelevant church, and attesting to the vibrancy of the mission of Jesus Christ through these ordinary churches in every town and neighbourhood.
8. So for us to participate in this survey is not just a reflective act, it's not just a planning act, it is also a missional act.

Integrating the survey into the liturgy

Consider where the survey is best placed

Previous experience suggests that the most effective way to run the survey is to set aside 20 minutes in the middle of the service for people to complete it. Anyone who needs more time can complete it at the end.

Many churches have found that it is best placed during intercessions, with worshippers asked to commend to God the different aspects of church life which the questions explore. In this case, the survey forms (placed earlier on people's seats) would be filled in after prayer, and when completed presented with the offertory.

Others set aside time before the closing hymn and blessing, in which case participants could be asked to think about their answers in the light of their being 'Sent forth' to continue their part in God's mission.

Consider more carefully than usual how the time available may be best used

Fewer Lectionary readings could be used

Lengthy or highly repetitious songs could be avoided

Consider providing more stations than usual for the administer of communion

Instead of having verbal announcements, include them in written form on a pew slip.

Suggestions regarding Prayers

While they may be used more widely, some prayers were prepared with particular faith communities in mind.

The first group of petitions were prepared for use in Catholic parishes. It is suggested that they are options in the place of the Prayer of the Faithful.

The prayer titled 'A Prayer regarding the National Church Life Survey' was prepared with Anglican parishes in mind. Some suggestions about its use are:

- as a take-home prayer, printed in the monthly parish magazine and/or weekly bulletin for a month ahead of the survey, for people to pray themselves.
- as a prayer to be used by the various parish organisations and groups, including leadership groups, during the month ahead of the survey.
- as a prayer to use on the actual day of the survey, before people actually start filling in their forms. (It could be a bridge from the actual service into the post-service form-filling period, for those who conclude the worship before doing the survey.)

The other prayers could be used as it suits local circumstances.

Prayers

Some petitions from which to choose for the Prayer of the Faithful

1. We pray for all church communities who are undertaking the National Church Life Survey, that the outcomes will help the Church to read the signs of the times and make wise decisions for the future. (pause) Lord, hear us.

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

2. We pray for ourselves as we participate today in the National Church Life Survey. May the Holy Spirit open our minds and hearts so that our responses will help assess our Church's core qualities and guide future planning for our community. (pause) Lord, hear us.

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

3. We pray that the work of the National Church Life Survey team and all involved in the project will bear much fruit through helping to build bridges between the Church and the wider community. (pause) Lord, hear us.

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

4. We pray for all those in our neighbourhood who are not part of this worshipping community. May the research work and resources provided by the National Church Life Survey assist us to become a parish where all will find a warm welcome. (pause) Lord, hear us.

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

5. We pray for all those who use their time and talents to help build the reign of God in our world. May God bless their efforts and bring them peace and hope. (pause) Lord, hear us.

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

A prayer regarding the National Church Life Survey

Lord of the Church,
we thank you for all the ways you guide, correct and bless your Church,
and we pray that you will use the National Church Life Survey
to keep us accountable to our high calling.

We thank you for the research skills and technical expertise of NCLS staff,
and for the contributions of all the people from many churches
who have shaped this year's survey.

We pray for each congregation
which is opening itself to learning by taking part in the survey.

We pray for each worshipper
who will ponder, pray and complete a survey form.

We pray for all the clergy and lay leaders
who will provide information about their congregations.
We pray for this community [parish, congregation, school, group...],
as we complete the survey,
adding our piece to the picture of church life in Australia.
We pray for the NCLS staff
who will process, interpret and distribute the information that is collected.

Through the survey, teach us
to be honest about our own faith practices
and observant about our collective culture.
Open up for us fresh opportunities
to discuss and clarify our ministry models and leadership styles,
our mission priorities and membership changes.
Give us thankful hearts for the areas of our church life
where your grace is overflowing.
Give us courage to recognise and act on the areas of our church life
where change is needed.
Use the NCLS to equip and encourage every member of your Church
for our mission to embody and proclaim your love for the world,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

A prayer about identity

Among the thousands of names, Lord Jesus Christ, you know my name.

Out of the thousands of places, you know where I am.

Out of the thousands of congregations, and points of view and ways of doing things, Lord Jesus Christ, you know and love this congregation and these people.

Remind us that in your eyes we are not a statistic but a person and a congregation, people known and beloved.

Our names are written on your hands.

A prayer about being part of a Christian community

As we complete the National Church Life Survey, let us pray for those other congregations who also are doing this across Australia.

We pray your blessing for those who are very like us; familiar, co-workers, members of the same kind of church with shared history. Fill their lives with your grace. Stir them to deep faith turning into grace-filled action.

And we pray your blessing for those fellow-Christians who are not like us.

We pray for those who worship you in other ways, on the other side of the tracks, who speak other languages and sing other songs. Fill their lives with your grace. Stir them to deep faith turning into grace-filled action.

Remind us that we are all part of your flock, that we are all listening for your voice and that you gave your life for us all.

A prayer about the purpose of NCLS

Lord Jesus Christ, as we fill in the National Church Life Survey, painting a picture of this congregation and this community, please open our eyes to the community beyond these doors.

Open our eyes to see our local streets and the people who walk in them

Open our eyes to our town and our city

Open our eyes to our rural district and our region

Help us to see the reality of these places and these people through your eyes.

Lord, please use the resources that NCLS will offer from this survey to shine a light on our part of the world. Help us to see the needs and opportunities more clearly. Show us how to use these tools as we take up our part in bringing in the reign of Christ.

A prayer for a local church taking part in the NCLS

Gracious God,

Thank you for having mercy on us in the Lord Jesus. Thank you for displaying your justice in his cross. And thank you for demonstrating your rock-solid commitment to your promises is raising him from the dead.

We long to offer ourselves to you -- to worship you with our bodies, serving you and your people with all that you generously entrust to us.

Please teach us to consider ourselves with sober judgement. Enable us to see ourselves clearly -- so we recognise your generous provision for us and how you are calling us to glorify you.

Stir us to respond honestly to the questions on the National Church Life Survey. Give us and those who lead us the humility we need to listen well to the results and face the reality of where our congregation currently is under you. And move us to continue trusting you, putting our hope in the Lord Jesus -- who lives and reigns with you, and who promises to be with us as we undertake the work he entrusted to us. Amen.

Sunday Gospel Readings from the Lectionary for September

and some linking reflections as your church prepares for the National Church Life Survey

Date	Gospel	Reflections
<p>Sept. 4</p> <p>23rd Sunday in Ordinary time</p> <p>Matthew 18:15-20</p>	<p>Jesus said to his disciples:</p> <p>"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that 'every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector. Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again, amen, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."</p>	<p>Jesus talks about the church community as it deals with difficult internal situations.</p> <p>If you think about our own church community you can probably think of ways that we work with each other as a community and build one another up, and ways that we fail to do so.</p> <p>The National Church Life Survey that we are soon to do helps us clearly name what sort of Christian community we are in practice and how we connect with each other and the wider community.</p> <p>It will point us towards our strengths and to ways for us to become more like the community we aspire to be in Christ.</p>

<p>Sept. 11</p> <p>24th Sunday in Ordinary time</p> <p>Matthew 18: 21-35</p>	<p>Peter approached Jesus and asked him, "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive? As many as seven times?"</p> <p>Jesus answered, "I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times.</p> <p>That is why the kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who decided to settle accounts with his servants.</p> <p>When he began the accounting, a debtor was brought before him who owed him a huge amount. Since he had no way of paying it back, his master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, his children, and all his property, in payment of the debt. At that, the servant fell down, did him homage, and said, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.'</p> <p>Moved with compassion the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan. When that servant had left, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a much smaller amount.</p> <p>He seized him and started to choke him, demanding, 'Pay back what you owe.'</p> <p>Falling to his knees, his fellow servant begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' But he refused. Instead, he had the fellow servant put in prison until he paid back the debt.</p> <p>Now when his fellow servants saw what had happened, they were deeply disturbed, and went to their master and reported the whole affair.</p> <p>His master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to. Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?'</p> <p>Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt.</p>	<p>In the midst of this teaching and parable about the importance of forgiving one another is a framework of knowing – about the king in the parable coming to know the actions of the servant he had forgiven through the witness of the many others, and about the community of disciples knowing itself to be a people who strive to forgive one another time and again.</p> <p>We are soon to complete a church survey so that we may better know ourselves as a community, and that the leadership may have a clearer picture of the strengths of this community and that regional and even denominational leadership may gain a clearer understanding of the church as it draws on its strengths and sets policy and plans.</p> <p>Of course we already know much of our community, but there are elements that we don't know or only partly know, simply because we don't often talk about all the different aspects that give a church strength and direction.</p> <p>For example: Does everybody here feel a strong and growing sense of belonging to our community, or does that apply to only some of us? Do visitors and newcomers feel welcomed here? How easy do they find it to make friends among us? To what extent is ours a community</p>
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	So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives your brother from your heart."	that reaches out to others? These are just a few of the questions in the survey.
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<p>Sept. 18</p> <p>25th Sunday in Ordinary time</p> <p>Matthew 20: 1-16a</p>	<p>Jesus told his disciples this parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out at dawn to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with them for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. Going out about nine o'clock, the landowner saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and he said to them, 'You too go into my vineyard, and I will give you what is just.' So they went off. And he went out again around noon, and around three o'clock, and did likewise. Going out about five o'clock, the landowner found others standing around, and said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' They answered, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You too go into my vineyard.' When it was evening the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Summon the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and ending with the first.'</p> <p>When those who had started about five o'clock came, each received the usual daily wage. So when the first came, they thought that they would receive more, but each of them also got the usual wage. And on receiving it they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last ones worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who bore the day's burden and the heat.' He said to one of them in reply, 'My friend, I am not cheating you. Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what is yours and go. What if I wish to give this last one the same as you? Or am I not free to do as I wish with my own money? Are you envious because I am generous?' Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last."</p>	<p>In this challenging and beautiful parable, have you ever noticed that we only hear from the workers who had been labouring in the vineyard all day? We don't hear anything from those employed at 9 at 12 at 3 and at 5 o'clock. Not a word.</p> <p>That can be the way in church communities sometimes too; we don't mean it to be, but often we only hear from those who have been here longest – and it's important that we do hear from them – but we may not hear much from those who are newcomers or those who are younger, and then there are those who have been here a long time but prefer to hold their opinions. We are all different types in a community.</p> <p>The church survey that we are soon to undertake ensures that everyone's voice is heard and everyone's voice is given equal weight.</p> <p>As we make decisions about what we're doing, about directions we're setting, it's important that we hear all voices, that we know what we as a community are thinking and hoping for.</p> <p>That's why this is important to us, to our church, to our regional leaders and indeed to Australia as a whole.</p>
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<p>Sept. 25</p> <p>26th Sunday in Ordinary time</p> <p>Matthew 21: 28-32</p>	<p>Jesus said to the chief priests and elders of the people: "What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He came to the first and said, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.' He said in reply, 'I will not,' but afterwards changed his mind and went. The man came to the other son and gave the same order. He said in reply, 'Yes, sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did his father's will?" They answered, "The first."</p> <p>Jesus said to them, "Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you. When John came to you in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him; but tax collectors and prostitutes did. Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him."</p>	<p>As we ponder about life we come to conclusions, and then we hold to those conclusions for years and years. Even when things are changing we tend to assume our conclusions still hold.</p> <p>The tax collectors and prostitutes assumed there was no way into the kingdom of God for them, while the chief priests and elders assumed they had a gold pass. Jesus tells them to look and look again, to ditch their assumptions and come to new conclusions based on the reality in front of them.</p> <p>Churches can be a bit like that too. We can assume we know the way things are because last time we checked back some years ago that's the way things were. Or we can assume that because we hold a particular opinion everyone else tends to feel that way.</p>
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		The church survey we're soon to do will cut through our assumptions and help us see our community as it really is today, to see its real strengths and its current hopes. And this will enable us to more effectively be the church community we are called to be. That's why we're doing this, that's why it's important.
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Sunday Gospel Readings from the Lectionary for October

and some linking reflections as your church prepares for the National Church Life Survey

Date	Gospel	Reflections
Oct. 2 27 th Sunday in Ordinary time Matthew 21:33-43	<p>Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people: "Hear another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went on a journey. When vintage time drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to obtain his produce. But the tenants seized the servants and one they beat, another they killed, and a third they stoned. Again he sent other servants, more numerous than the first ones, but they treated them in the same way. Finally, he sent his son to them, thinking, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and acquire his inheritance.' They seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. What will the owner of the vineyard do to those tenants when he comes?" They answered him, "He will put those wretched men to a wretched death and lease his vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the proper times." Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures: <i>The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; by the Lord has this been done, and it is wonderful in our eyes?</i> Therefore, I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit."</p>	<p>It is human to make plans, like the landowner, and we are all familiar with how our plans can sometimes go awry, just as his plans did. But even though our plans sometimes go disastrously wrong, to make no plans at all is to be adrift and helpless in a stormy sea. And often our plans don't go wrong, but set us on a path that takes us to a better place, not always the one we set out for, but nonetheless...</p> <p>We as a church make plans as we follow Jesus; we discern directions and look to organise ourselves and our resources so as to fulfill those plans.</p> <p>To make effective and realistic plans we need a strong sense of who we are as a Christian community, what we think and believe, what our hopes for our church are, what our concerns are and so on. Some of these things we tend to know, others we are just assuming and some we haven't even thought about. The church survey we are going to undertake will give us a clear overview of these things for our church. It will form the basis for the plans we make and the sort of church we strive to be.</p>

Oct. 9 28 th Sunday in Ordinary time Matthew 22: 1-14	<p>Jesus again in reply spoke to the chief priests and elders of the people in parables, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. He dispatched his servants to summon the invited guests to the feast, but they refused to come. A second time he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those invited: "Behold, I have prepared my banquet, my calves and fattened cattle are killed, and everything is ready; come to the feast."' Some ignored the invitation and went away, one to his farm, another to his business. The rest laid</p>	<p>When you throw a party, you want people to come, don't you. And you want the party to be a lively and happy affair where people are enjoying themselves. You don't want it to be dreary and dull and lifeless. In fact if a party is a bit lifeless then people tend to gravitate towards those few groups that <i>are</i> lively.</p> <p>The church life survey we are soon to undertake</p>
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	<p>hold of his servants, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged and sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The feast is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy to come. Go out, therefore, into the main roads and invite to the feast whomever you find.' The servants went out into the streets and gathered all they found, bad and good alike, and the hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to meet the guests, he saw a man there not dressed in a wedding garment. The king said to him, 'My friend, how is it that you came in here without a wedding garment?' But he was reduced to silence. Then the king said to his attendants, 'Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.' Many are invited, but few are chosen."</p>	<p>is not just for telling us things about us, the people who attend, it's more about pointing out where our church is most lively, most vital. It's about pointing out the strengths we have as a Christian community and looking at how we can build on those strengths.</p> <p>The feedback we get will gives us measures of the liveliness of our church, the vitality of our community; it will make clear the areas of church life that we're particularly good at and can build on.</p>
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<p>Oct. 16</p> <p>29th Sunday in Ordinary time</p> <p>Matthew 22: 15-21</p>	<p>The Pharisees went off and plotted how they might entrap Jesus in speech. They sent their disciples to him, with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. And you are not concerned with anyone's opinion, for you do not regard a person's status. Tell us, then, what is your opinion: Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?" Knowing their malice, Jesus said, "Why are you testing me, you hypocrites? Show me the coin that pays the census tax." Then they handed him the Roman coin. He said to them, "Whose image is this and whose inscription?" They replied, "Caesar's." At that he said to them, "Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."</p>	<p>Sometimes it's good not to mince words, to tell it like it is.</p> <p>The church life survey we are going to do is an exercise in telling it like it is for us.</p> <p>It's an exercise in speaking from the heart as to who we are, what we believe, what we hope for, what we're concerned about; of what works for us here and what doesn't.</p> <p>It's about giving a clear and honest picture of who we are as a Christian community, where our strengths lie, where we are most alive and have most to contribute to the Christian mission.</p>
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<p>Oct. 23</p> <p>30th Sunday in Ordinary time</p> <p>Matthew 22: 34-40</p>	<p>When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a scholar of the law tested him by asking, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."</p>	<p>The love of God and neighbour is at the heart of all we are called to as a Christian Community. Everything else fades into the background in the light of this – even the church life survey that we are soon to do.</p> <p>What the survey <i>can</i> do is to help us see more clearly how we as a church are making the love of God and neighbour present in real and practical ways and how much these two commandments shape who we are and what we are on about. That's why this survey is important to us.</p>
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<p>Oct. 30</p> <p>31st Sunday in Ordinary</p>	<p>Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples, saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees have taken their seat on the chair of Moses. Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example. For they preach but</p>	<p>Jesus holds a mirror up to the scribes and Pharisees. He gives a clear overview of them. He helps people clearly see their strengths and their weaknesses and from that draws</p>
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time Matthew 23: 1-12	<p>they do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens hard to carry and lay them on people's shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them. All their works are performed to be seen. They widen their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels.</p> <p>They love places of honor at banquets, seats of honor in synagogues, greetings in marketplaces, and the salutation 'Rabbi.'</p> <p>As for you, do not be called 'Rabbi.'</p> <p>You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers.</p> <p>Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven.</p> <p>Do not be called 'Master'; you have but one master, the Christ.</p> <p>The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.</p>	<p>conclusions for his people.</p> <p>The church life survey we're about to do aims to do something similar for our Christian community here, for our church. It aims to hold a mirror up that we can look into and gain a clear overview of what we do, what we hope for, how effective we are and so on.</p> <p>It draws in the opinions, hopes and concerns of all attenders, newcomers and old timers, young and not so young and presents us with a detailed composite picture of the vitality of our church and it's particular strengths.</p> <p>This is very useful to us and to the denomination as we look to be the church we're called to be.</p>
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Sunday Gospel Readings from the Lectionary for November

and some linking reflections as your church prepares for the National Church Life Survey

Date	Gospel	Reflections
Nov. 6 32 nd Sunday in Ordinary time Matthew 25:1-13	<p>Jesus told his disciples this parable: "The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones, when taking their lamps, brought no oil with them, but the wise brought flasks of oil with their lamps. Since the bridegroom was long delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight, there was a cry, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all those virgins got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise ones replied, 'No, for there may not be enough for us and you. Go instead to the merchants and buy some for yourselves.' While they went off to buy it, the bridegroom came and those who were ready went into the wedding feast with him. Then the door was locked. Afterwards the other virgins came and said, 'Lord, Lord, open the door for us!' But he said in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, I do not know you.' Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour."</p>	<p>One aspect of this parable is the benefits of planning ahead, and one of the essential elements of planning is knowing how things are – 'How much oil have I got? How much will I need if the bridegroom is delayed?' Then you can decide whether you'll have enough, whether you should carry some with you or whether you can get more easily.</p> <p>The church life survey we're going to do is all about giving us a clearer picture of our church so that we can be more effective in our planning. The picture we'll gain is not just about who we are – our demographics as it were – but how we're involved, what we want for and from our church, how our faith is growing and so on.</p> <p>It will show us clearly the strengths we have as a church that we can build on as we become a more effective Christian community on mission.</p>

Nov. 13 33 rd Sunday in Ordinary time Matthew	<p>Jesus told his disciples this parable: "A man going on a journey called in his servants and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents; to another, two; to a third, one-to each according to his ability. Then he went away. Immediately the one who received five talents went and traded with them, and made another five. Likewise, the one who received two made another two. But the man who received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and buried his master's money. After a long time the master of those servants came</p>	<p>One aspect of this parable is a teaching about the responsibility we have to make the best use of what we have been given.</p> <p>The church life survey we are soon to undertake will affirm for us what sort of Christian community we are and in particular will name our community's strengths. It will show in what areas our</p>
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25: 14-30	<p>back and settled accounts with them. The one who had received five talents came forward bringing the additional five. He said, 'Master, you gave me five talents. See, I have made five more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy.' Then the one who had received two talents also came forward and said, 'Master, you gave me two talents. See, I have made two more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy.' Then the one who had received the one talent came forward and said, 'Master, I knew you were a demanding person, harvesting where you did not plant and gathering where you did not scatter; so out of fear I went off and buried your talent in the ground. Here it is back.' His master said to him in reply, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I did not plant and gather where I did not scatter? Should you not then have put my money in the bank so that I could have got it back with interest on my return? Now then! Take the talent from him and give it to the one with ten. For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And throw this useless servant into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.'"</p>	<p>church is most effective. In a sense it will name what we have been given as a community.</p> <p>The next step from there of course is to look at how we are using our strengths and how we might make the best use of them, but until we can name what we have that can be difficult to do.</p>
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<p>Nov. 20</p> <p>Feast of Christ the King</p> <p>Matthew 25: 31-46</p>	<p>Jesus said to his disciples: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me.' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.' Then they will answer and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or</p>	<p>I guess we all have a sense of how each of us as individuals lives out our Christianity, especially as we listen to this gospel reading.</p> <p>We are about to do the church life survey and that survey will give us a clear sense of how effective our <i>parish/church</i> is at living its Christianity and being a worthy Christian community.</p> <p>The feedback from it will give us a view of our outreach, our commitment, our sense of belonging, our growth in Faith and so on in ways that are not just about us as individuals, but of us as a Christian community.</p> <p>It will show us the areas of Christian communal life where we have particular strengths that we may build on as we reach out to others and foster the Christian life in ourselves.</p> <p>It also gives our regional leadership a clearer overview and indeed informs the whole Australian church.</p>
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	<p>naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?' He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.' And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."</p>	
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<p>Nov. 27</p> <p>1st Sunday of Advent</p> <p>Mark 13: 33-37</p>	<p>Jesus said to his disciples: "Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come. It is like a man traveling abroad. He leaves home and places his servants in charge, each with his own work, and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch. Watch, therefore; you do not know when the Lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to all: 'Watch!'"</p>	<p>Jesus entreats us to be alert, to be ready, and part of that is to be truly aware of ourselves as Christians to be aware of the goodness and the weakness of the community we live in and are part of.</p> <p>The church life survey we are soon to do will contribute to feedback for us that will give us a clear overview of our effectiveness as a Christian community, of the strengths we have as a parish/church that we can bring to bear on being true to our calling. It enables us to plan to become more effective in this.</p> <p>It also adds our voice to the voices of other parishes and churches all over the nation so that the Christian values and life that the Australian church lives and proclaims can be clearly and authoritatively heard by all.</p>
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Other Biblical reflections

An opportunity to think of yourselves with sober judgement (Romans 12.1-8)

It's often said that humility is not about thinking less of yourself but thinking about yourself less. And there's probably some truth to that. But, according to the Apostle Paul, it's about thinking of yourself with sober judgement.

At the high point of the majestic arc traced by the letter to the Romans, Paul calls us to respond to God's mercy in Jesus by offering our bodies as 'living sacrifices' in spiritual worship. A key aspect of this is the task of thinking of yourselves with sober judgement (verse 3).

In fact, this is the first specific application of the general call to spiritual radicalism (verse 2) -- displayed not simply in non-conformity to the habits of feeling and acting characteristic of an assertion of independence from God, but also such thorough transformation and inner renewal that you now begin to recognise and delight in what pleases God.

For Paul, thinking of yourselves with sober judgement clearly involves a kind of spiritual stocktake. It means making an honest assessment of yourselves -- on the one hand, resisting our deeply ingrained inclination to rate ourselves more highly than we should; and, on the other, acknowledging the God-given diversity of your faith community. Only this will allow us to see how the different gifts God has given your community are designed to enable each of you to make a *faith*-full contribution to the good of all.

The National Church Life Survey is a terrific opportunity to help you and your congregation think of yourselves with sober judgement. It's about exactly the kind of spiritual stocktake Paul speaks of.

Ultimately, it's about being better informed and equipped so you can work together to serve and please the Lord.

Are you secure enough to open yourself up to honest feedback? (Mark 10.35-45)

When Jesus hammers his disciples about their hunger for power and privilege, he completely upends their thinking:

"You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all."

In Jesus' kingdom, leadership is radically redefined. It's not about power and privilege but service and even slavery!

And what makes this possible -- and sets the pattern for it -- is nothing short of the blood, sweat and tears of the Lord himself: "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

This is easy enough to pay lip service to. But it's much harder to rigorously apply. The old ways keep coming creeping back in.

It's worth asking yourself the question, are you willing to let go of being the sole 'expert' and authority on your congregation? Are you secure enough as a servant-leader to open yourself up to honest feedback -- to let the people in your congregation speak freely, and even to allow others to analyse the data and give you their perspective on how your congregation's doing?

The 2011 National Church Life Survey is one opportunity to take this risk, face the facts (brutal or otherwise), and put your hope in the God who is willing and able to transform you...

A solemn charge and an offer too good to refuse (1 Peter 4.1-11)

The Apostle Peter lays a very solemn charge upon the church -- to be "good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (verse 10).

For Peter, this means learning to "serve one another with whatever gift each has received". This is a matter of showing the kind of love that isn't afraid to open up life and home to share with one another (verses 8-9). And it's hard to see how this wouldn't involve at least some self-awareness on the part of congregation members.

What is more, Peter prefaces all this with a reminder about what God has been doing among them, rehearsing the tremendous journey his readers have been on. By God's grace, they're no longer living their earthly lives for human desires, indulging themselves in ways indistinguishable from those around them (verses 1-4). This old way of life has been done away with and a new life 'in the Spirit' has been opened by the power of the good news about Jesus they've received (verses 5-6).

The 2011 National Church Life Survey is one opportunity to gain some self-awareness and to pay attention to what has been God doing in your church community.

It's about taking an honest look your strengths as well as the areas you could potentially grow in -- all so you can better love and serve one another. Surely help with that is an offer too good to refuse!

Taking stock: the good, the bad and the ugly (Exodus 30:11-16, Numbers 1, 2 Samuel 24)

Sometimes, we can view surveys negatively because they are impersonal. But even from Israel's early history, counting the people was a good, God-ordained thing for their leaders to do.

When Moses receives instructions about the Tabernacle on Mt Sinai, God instructs him to take a census of the people. The Israelites even have to pay to be counted as a reminder of the ransom given for their lives (Exodus 30:16). In Numbers 1, we see this census actually being carried out to good purpose.

But we can count people badly. King David, incited by the Lord, commissioned a census of the people of Israel that ended very, very badly. David's attempt to take account of the nation -- and its military might in particular -- somehow expressed his deep failure to trust God.

Perhaps the key lies in the context of this episode in the bigger story being told in 2 Samuel. There, God's always timely and abundant provision of able warriors to support King David and protect the kingdom of Israel has just been mentioned. But here David is wanting to bolster his own sense of control and self-sufficiency.

What ensues is tragic for David -- and for the whole nation. In judgement, God presents David with an impossible choice: three years of famine, three months of military humiliation, or three days of ravaging disease. He opts for disease and people perish in their thousands.

In God's great kindness, the plague was halted. Amazingly, God himself made provision for David's sin to be dealt with and its consequences mitigated. Even more amazingly, God chooses the very place where his anger was turned aside for the temple to be built -- it becomes the place where he would meet with his people!

There is nothing intrinsically bad about taking stock of your people by counting them and listening to their opinions. Nevertheless, rash participants in the 2011 National Church Life Survey beware: don't fall into David's trap of thinking this gives you control and failing to trust God. Taking stock of God's good provision for you and your church family should be an expression of trust in the living God who supplies all our needs.

Is your church an impossible-to-miss beacon to God's glory? (Matthew 5.13-16)

Jesus famously used two images to describe the public life and witness of his followers: salt and light.

Lots of ink has been spilt over the precise significance of each image. But one thing is clear -- Christians are supposed to be an unmistakable presence and influence for the good in their neighbourhoods, communities, and wider societies.

Like salt preserving and flavouring food in a pre-refrigeration world, like an elevated city in the oppressive darkness of a desert night or a lamp on a stand in the middle of a pre-electric household, our identity is to be an impossible-to-miss beacon to God's glory and for the good of all:

"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

All too often, though, Australian congregations are anything but impossible to miss -- pre-occupied with internal issues we can be virtually absent from our communities. Either that or we're known for anything but our God-glorifying good works -- living lives that tragically fail to bear witness to the Lord Jesus.

The 2011 National Church Life Survey will show you where your church is healthy and true to its identity as well as revealing where you could have further to go in being a faithful presence within your neighbourhood, community, and wider social context -- to the greater glory of God.

Some Suggested Songs

For churches that use 'Together in Song'.

Songs related to the Church:

TiS 467 I am the church! You are the church!

TiS 468 We are your people

TiS 474 Here in this place new light is streaming

TiS 477 Jesus calls us here to meet him

Songs related to a vision for our community and our world:

TiS 473 Community of Christ, who make the cross your own

Tis 687 God gives us a future

Tis 677 Christ's is the world in which we move

Tis 672 Lord of earth and all creation

Tis 658 I, the Lord of sea and sky

Tis 653 This is a day of new beginnings

Tis 608 Where cross the crowded ways of life