

YOUTH & YOUNG ADULT ENGAGEMENT SUMMIT

1 | FAMILY

TRAFFORD FISCHER

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
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How do we define **‘family’**

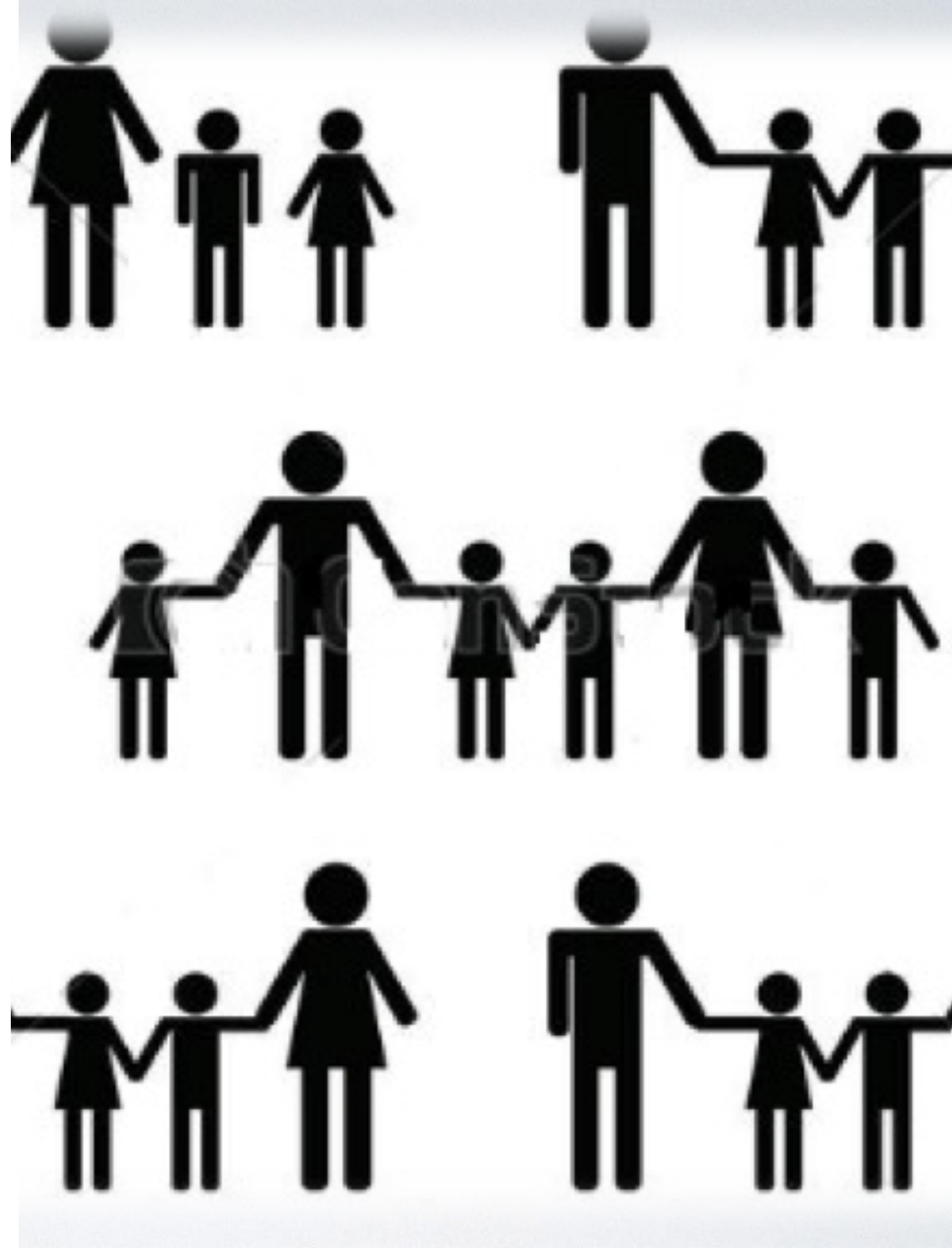
FAMILY



Back in 1997, Tricia Blomberry presented a paper at the National Christian Family Conference, entitled “Does the Church Minister to Families in Australia?” She suggests defining ‘Australia’ was pretty tough, but even more difficult was how to define ‘church.’



Then she said:
“The real definitional problem is
‘family.’ This varies
enormously, dependent on who
is making the definition. It
seems we have moved from a
fairly homogenous situation . . .
to one of incredible variety, all in
the space of one generation.”





In my personal acquaintance, for example, I have the privilege of knowing:

- a middle-aged couple who have lived faithfully together for over 20 years and raised two children without the legal bonds of marriage
- two males as a couple who have also been together for 20 years
- two females in a long-term relationship who together are raising the biological son of one partner
- a woman who lives in a permanent relationship with a married couple
- several Christian people who have divorced and remarried



- a single woman who has chosen to have a child and raise her alone
- several couples who live individual celibate lives within the social convention of marriage
- several people who choose to be celibate
- several couples who have remained monogamously married for over 40 years
- and other married couples whose relationships have survived despite affairs.

**“A group of people,
under the same roof,
sharing a common
cause.”**

Australian Politician



**How do we define
‘family’**

**Australian Bureau
of Statistics**

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The 2016 Census counted more than six million families in Australia on Census night.

About - 45% of these families were couples with children;

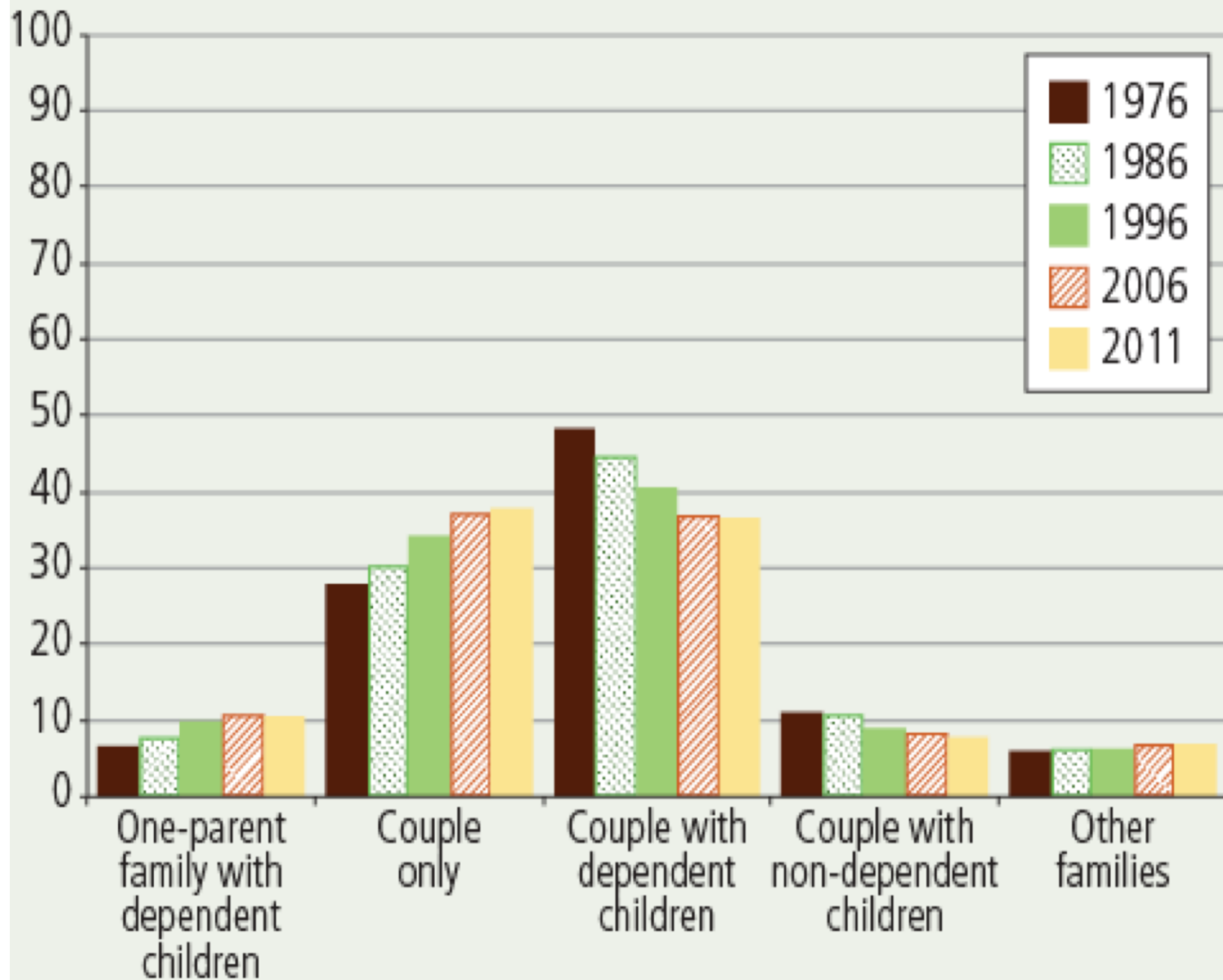
- 38% were couples without children

- 16% were single parent families. (82% - female; 18% male).

There were more than 300 languages spoken in our homes, more than 100 religions and more than 300 different ancestries represented.

Australia has a higher proportion of overseas-born people (26%) than the United States (14%), Canada (22%) New Zealand (23%) and the United Kingdom (13%).

One in four
Australians
(24%) now live
in single person
households.
(2016)



Blended families

“This is our daughter, my son from my first marriage, John’s daughter from his first marriage, and I’ve no idea who the one on the end is!”

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Same-sex couple families

There were approximately 47,000 same-sex couples in 2016 – up from 33,000 in 2011 (a 42% increase) and 26,000 in 2006 (an 81% increase).



Grandparent families

Couple families with grandchildren under 15 years old were the most commonly represented, followed by single grandparents with grandchildren of this age.



Families with "fuzzy" boundaries



Couples “Living
apart together”



Teens living with
separated parents



Homeless

A STRUCTURAL Definition of Family



Definitions of nuclear family and the traditional family have been extremely significant in the study of families but also in shaping social responses to those primary groups defined as families and those that are not.

Sociology and society has more often defined family as a structure, a set of statuses and roles (parent-child, spouse-spouse).

A STRUCTURAL Definition of Family



A structural definition of family will describe a family in how persons are related to one another by blood lineage or legal bonds of adoption and marriage.

Primary groups are 'families' when they consist of a married couple and their biological or adopted children, or any remnant of these relationships (such as a single parent and his or her children, or an elderly parent living with an adult child).

A STRUCTURAL Definition of Family



The defining features for family in this schema are marriage and parenthood. It is the patterns (structures of relationship) created by marriage, adoption and parenthood that define what a family is.

Persons are family because of legal relationship or biological relationship with one another, regardless of the strength or quality of the relationship.



The functional definition of families requires defining the functions that families play in person's lives that are distinct from other interpersonal relationships.



Implications



1. A functional definition means we expand our vision to see all the ways persons in our congregation and community live in family groups. “Ministry” becomes sensitive to the life experiences of everyone, not just those living in nuclear families

2. We cannot always know who families are by looking at the church roll and seeing who is married to or parenting whom. Instead we must ask people to tell us who their families are.

Implications

3. Youth leaders (all Church leaders) need to assess their own perceptions of what constitutes a 'God-shaped' family and recognise that their effectiveness as a leader may be limited by their bias and beliefs about what constitutes a 'correct' and 'proper' family.

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Paul Gotthardt | How Can I Transfer My Faith to My Kids



In a recent survey, researchers asked Christian parents to define their greatest fear. The #1 response was, “I’m afraid that I will not be able to transfer my faith to my kids.”

When George Barna surveyed teenagers leaving the church after high school, the number 1 response they gave for walking away from the church was: “God has never been real to my parents.”

[http://paulgotthardt.com/2012/08/15/how-can-i-transfer-my-faith-to-my-kids-\(part 1,2,3,\)](http://paulgotthardt.com/2012/08/15/how-can-i-transfer-my-faith-to-my-kids-(part-1,2,3,))

Chap and Dee Clark

The more your child feels that they are a part of something bigger than themselves and that they are included in not only a family but the family of God, the more they will allow themselves to be drawn into a level of faith that will strengthen and lead them for the rest of their lives.

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Helping Kids Keep the Faith



The status of the next generation of Christians has been the cause of much hand-wringing, guess-making, and anecdote-peddling for about as long as there has been a next generation to worry about, but only recently has there been much reliable data from which parents and youth workers can learn.

What's even better is that more and more consensus is building around what actually works in helping faith stick into young adulthood.

<https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/articles/helping-kids-keep-the-faith>



The following key findings were based on a 35-year study of families begun in 1970, and focused on the question of how religion is passed across generations.

Four key findings:

1. Parent's Influence is Critical

Whether looking at religious affiliation (What religion are you?), religious intensity (How religious are you?), religious participation (How often do you attend?), Biblical literalism (What's your view of the Bible?), or civic religiosity (How important should religion be in public life?), across all these markers, parental influence is just as high as it was a generation ago.

“In other words, parents continue to be the single greatest influence on their children's faith.”

Grandparents are a close second! Grandfathers who are highly religious were more likely to have grandkids who were also highly religious.



2. Bland Faith Doesn't Transfer

The data “indicates a trend towards polarization in religious intensity over time.” Those at either end of the spectrum of religiosity (either very religious or not at all religious) transferred that quality to the next generation at significantly higher rates than those in the middle.

“If the parents are not themselves involved in religious activities, if their actions are not consistent with what they preach, children are rarely motivated to follow in their parent’s religious footsteps.” (Bengtson)



3. The Power of a Close Relationship

The single greatest factor in whether a parent successfully imparted their faith to their children was the quality of their relationship with those children.

“By every measure in this study, a young adult was more likely to share their parent’s religious beliefs and participation if they felt that they had a close relationship with those parents. This held true for all of the religious traditions studied.” (Fulleryouthinstitute)



While a close relationship with her mother does significantly improve the odds of a child sharing her beliefs when she becomes an adult, the relationship with her father is far more predictive.

Among Evangelical and Mainline Protestants, a relationship with Mum has a very small effect on the likelihood of religious transmission, while a close relationship with their father has a gigantic effect.



4. Love the Prodigal

“The prodigals in our sample were rebels who later came back to the family religion: in almost every case we found that their parents have been patient and supportive – and perhaps more tolerant and open than they had been before the prodigal’s departure.” (Bengston)

The best way to bring a prodigal back is to love them even more tangibly than before they left.

NOTE: Mark 8:22-26

TAKE HOME POINTS



1. **Parents matter!!** They matter a lot! Especially fathers! And grandparents!

SO:

- a) get this information to our Church families
- b) encourage parents to take up their calling seriously
- c) inform, encourage and resource fathers to step-up
- d) inform and resource grandparents to 'be invested' in faith-transfer

ELLEN WHITE, MH, 349

“The restoration and uplifting of humanity begins in the home. The work of parents underlies every other...the well being of society, the success of the church, the prosperity of the nation, depend upon home influence.”

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“The Christian home is, in fact, by far the most powerful evangelizing agency in the world. . . . By their gracious influence, Christian homes win more converts than all the preachers put together. Give us enough of them, and the world would soon be a Christian world; for the world’s life rises to the higher levels only as its homes do so.”

TAKE HOME POINTS



2. Bland faith doesn't transfer!

SO:

- a) get this information to our Church families
- b) encourage parents to take, and express, their faith seriously
- c) disciple parents in how to express and live their faith
- d) encourage parents to remain faithful in their church attendance and sustain positive and warm expressions of their love for God

Mark De Vries

Parents who simply talk about their faith in the home and who involve their teens in serving alongside them can actually double and sometimes even triple their children's chances of living out their faith as adults.

Family-Based Youth Ministry

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TAKE HOME POINTS



3. A close relationship seriously counts!

SO:

- a) get this information to our Church families
- b) encourage and equip parents to build and sustain a warm, close relationship with each of their children
- c) encourage fathers to live and express their love for God on a regular basis

TAKE HOME POINTS



4. Love the prodigal

SO:

- a) get this information to our Church families
- b) encourage parents to sustain their commitment to their kids in the tough times
- c) encourage parents to learn how to be nurturing and supportive while their kids are with the pigs!

FURTHER



5. Focus less on connecting youth with those who will scatter and focus more on connecting youth with those who will stay.

“When discipleship occurs primarily in age-organised contexts, few opportunities exist for children and youth to develop meaningful relationships with older Christians. As a result, the youth become more connected to their peers – who are likely to scatter after high school graduation – than to church members who will be present and available for decades to come.” Timothy P Jones – A New Definition of Family Ministry.

SO:

- a) get this information to our Church families
- b) encourage and facilitate diverse, intergenerational faith-communities
- c) initiate opportunities for youth to interact and serve alongside other age-groups

FURTHER



6. The 11.00 am Family Worship service isn't family worship!

SO:

- a) get this information to our Pastors and Church families
- b) urge pastors to feel okay about NOT regularly preaching, and get them interacting with a diverse spread of age-groups
- c) encourage pastors to connect with their members through dialogue and reflection on the issues that matter to all the various age-groups ('Lifeology' more than Theology)
- d) encourage pastors and members to see Sabbath School as the designated time for study of the Scriptures, and the Service as a time to celebrate together whatever lessons emerged in that time of study!

Questions



1. How do we uphold our commitment to marriage and family and at the same time allow those members who struggle, or have failed, to sustain their marriage and their family, to feel welcome and wanted, and find a safe place for them and their kids in our faith communities?
2. How do we shift our Church to be more of a safe place for men to express and share their 'male' expressions of their faith (and they in turn can then act as a model for their kids?)
3. How do we get the message to our faith communities that family 'counts' when it comes to the transfer of faith? What might be the most effective strategies?
4. Can we comfortably 'let go' of the traditional age-segregated ways of doing church and build an acceptance of the validity, and significance, of an intergenerational faith-community who worship together?
5. Can we shift current church culture that insists on a '1/2 hr preliminaries' and '1/2 hr sermon' structure and move towards seeing church (service) as a genuinely family-time celebration?