



# SUMMARY REPORT

## Baptist *Women* in ministry leadership



# Baptist Women in Ministry Leadership Summary Report

*“Australian Baptist Ministries are pleased to launch these research findings, as they give us a better picture nationally of the numbers, demographics, and experience of women in ministry in our churches.”*

*“We commend ABM for their investment in research into the views and experiences of women in leadership roles in Baptist churches. Regardless of the findings, the intentional act of listening communicates the value of the women who minister and lead in Baptist churches.”*



Rev Mark Wilson



Rev Dr Melinda Cousins



Dr Ruth Powell  
Director, NCLS Research

Australian Baptist Ministries (ABM) National Council approached NCLS Research to undertake research to provide insights into women in ministry leadership including a national picture of women in ministry, roles and responsibilities, leadership competencies, challenges and other relevant information.

This report presents findings about Baptist women in ministry leadership, their demographics; roles and training; and wellbeing; as well as their views of church health and COVID.

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## References:

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To better understand and support women in ministry leadership, this research aims to present their views and experiences.





## Aim

To explore the views and experiences of women in ministry leadership roles in Baptist churches.

## Who took part

534  
women 

with a  
**lay or pastoral**   
leadership role

in **Baptist**  
churches 

across  
**Australia** 



# Key findings



**7 in 10** participants in the study were **lay** leaders.

**3 in 10** were **pastoral** leaders.

Baptist women in ministry leadership have an average age of

**52 years.**

Most are aged between

**30 to 69 years.**



A slight majority of women leaders draw inspiration from new experiences during COVID, in their ministry practices.

**Nearly two-thirds**



have university education.

The strongest ministry foundation for women leaders is their Clarity of Purpose.

Women leaders score much higher in their foundation of Supportive Relationships compared to all senior leaders.

There appears to be a strong sense of effectiveness among women leaders.



Top three roles:

- 1 administering** the work of the church
- 2 offering prayer**/being a spiritual role model
- 3 teaching** people about faith

Compared to all Baptist leaders, women are more likely to pray/offer spiritual support and less likely to teach people about the faith.





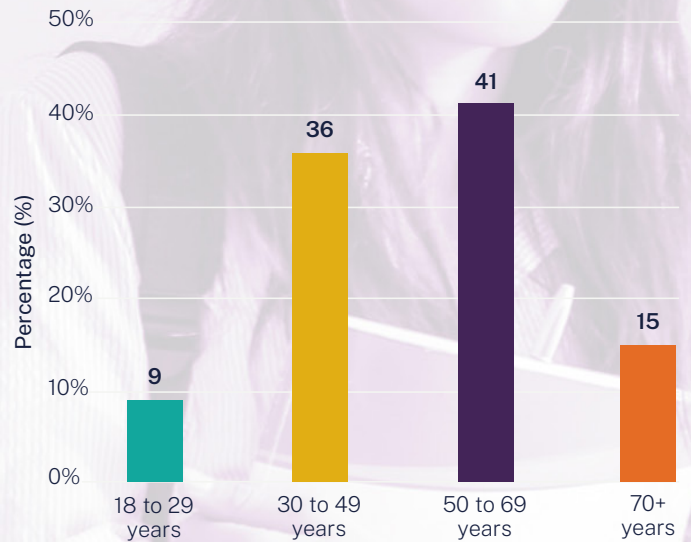
# Demographics

Baptist women across Australia undertake a variety of ministry and other leadership roles in a range of contexts, with some women performing these roles well into their senior years.

Baptist women leaders are most commonly aged 50 to 69, likely to be university educated, and born in Australia.

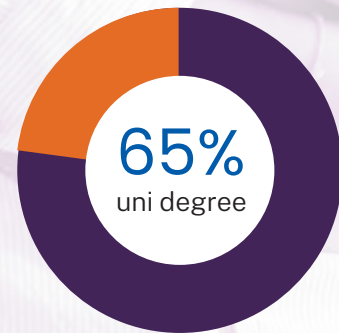
## Age

**52** was the average age  
**41%** were aged 50 to 69 years



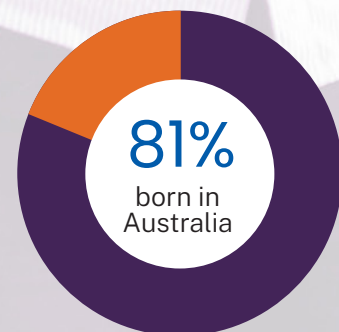
Source: 2023 NCLS Baptist Women Leader Survey (n = 578).  
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

## Education



■ Degree or higher ■ Less than degree

## Country of Birth

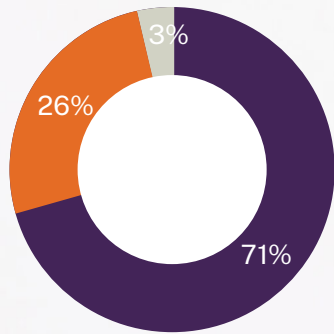


■ Australia ■ Other country

To compare... ALL senior Baptist local church leaders' age profile: 15-29 years (4%), 30-49 years (39%), 50-69 years (52%), 70+ years (5%). Average age-51 years. Education: Degree or higher (70%). Country of birth: Australia (78%), non-English speaking country (12%).



# Position



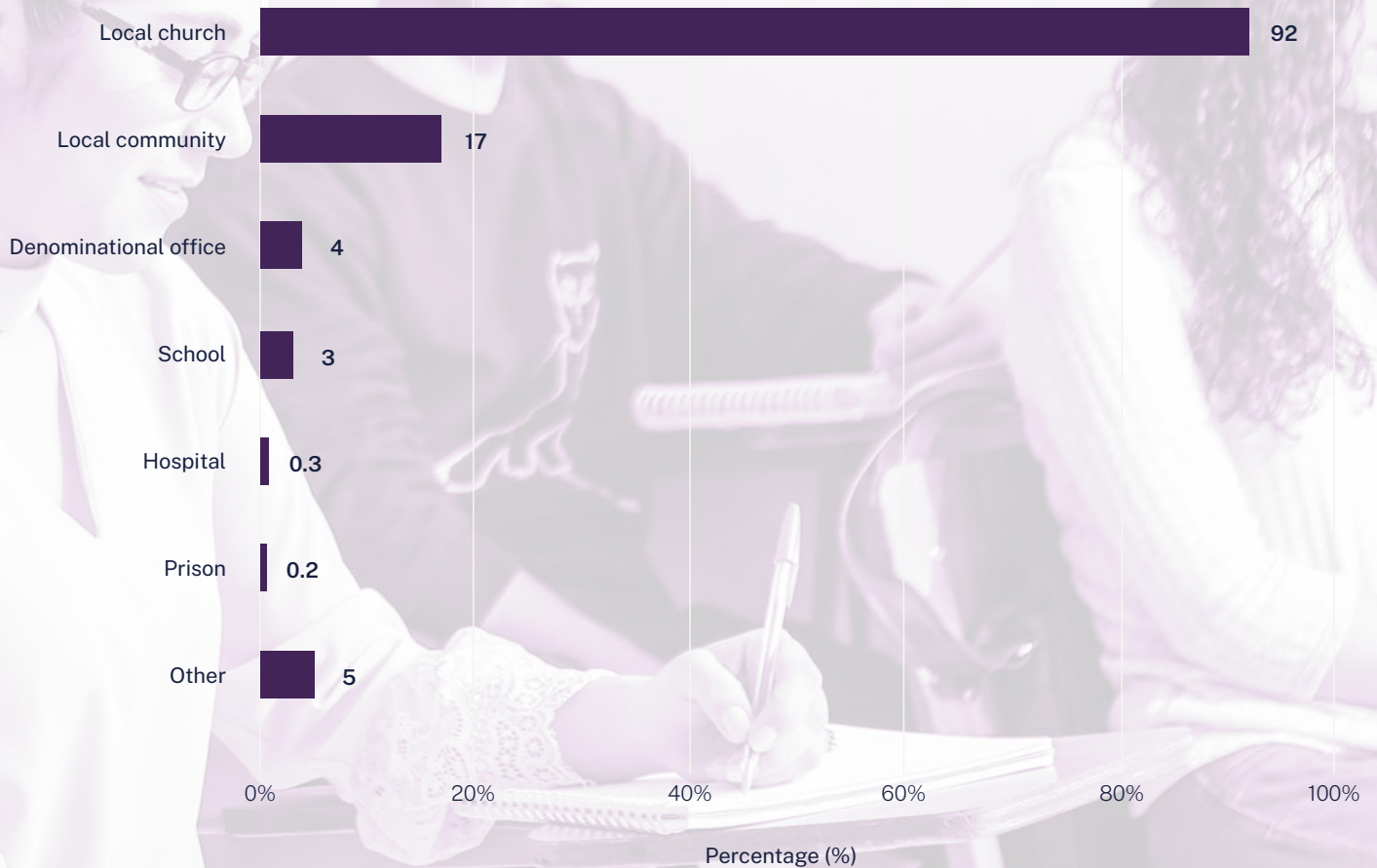
■ Lay leadership
 ■ Pastoral leadership
 ■ N/A

**71%** were lay leaders

**26%** were pastoral leaders

**3%** were in other roles  
(e.g. in Association or Union roles, and with Baptist agencies)

# Context



To compare... ALL senior Baptist local church leaders' context for ministry: Local church (99%), local community (20%), denominational office (3%), school (2%), hospital (1%), other (1%).



# Roles and Training

Compared to all senior leaders, Baptist women in ministry leadership are more likely to offer prayer and act as a spiritual role model for people.

They are less likely to have a role in teaching people about the faith and less likely to be trained.

Safe churches training is most common. When this is excluded, 42% of women have not received any other training.

## Roles

Top three roles undertaken by Baptist women leaders

**45%** administer work of church

**43%** prayer/spiritual role model

**40%** teach people about faith

## Training

Top areas of training undertaken by Baptist women leaders in past few years

**60%** safe churches

**17%** children's ministry

**17%** teaching/preaching

**17%** administration

## Roles undertaken by Baptist women leaders

Administer work of local church	45%
Offer prayer/be spiritual role model	43%
Teach people about faith	40%
Visit/counsel/help people	29%
Develop vision/goals for future	28%
Conduct worship/administer sacraments	22%
Involved in wider community/social issues	18%
Train people for ministry/mission	17%
Convert others to the faith	4%

To compare... ALL senior Baptist local church leaders' main roles: teach people about faith (68%), administer work of the local church (42%), develop vision/goals for the future (38%), conduct worship/administer sacraments (37%), train people for ministry and mission (30%), visit/counsel/help people (30%), offer prayer/be spiritual role model (26%), wider community groups or social issues (15%), convert others to the faith (6%).

## Training received in the previous two years

Safe churches training	60%
Children's ministry	17%
Teaching/preaching	17%
Management/administration	17%
Small group leadership	14%
Pastoral care visitation	13%
Outreach/evangelis	11%
Leading church services	8%
Youth ministry	7%
Music ministry	5%
Social group leadership	2%
Other training	21%

To compare... ALL senior Baptist local church leaders' areas of training: safe churches training (85%), children's ministry (12%), teaching/preaching (41%), management/admin roles (27%).

## Younger leaders

aged 18-29 were more likely to have been:

teaching **68%**  
(vs 25-42% in other age groups)

praying spiritual role model **52%**  
(vs 34% of leaders aged 30-49, 46-49% of leaders aged 50+)

converting **12%**  
(vs 2-4% in other age groups)

## Pastoral leaders

were more likely to have received training on:

teaching **40%**  
(vs 9% of lay leaders, 18% of other leaders)

leading services **16%**  
(vs 5% of lay leaders, 6% of other leaders)

pastoral care **23%**  
(vs 11% of lay leaders, 6% of other leaders)

outreach **21%**  
(vs 8% of lay leaders, 6% of other leaders)



# Wellbeing

There is a strong sense of effectiveness among women leaders.

Baptist female pastors are more likely to feel very effective compared to all leaders and to lay leaders.

Women leaders reported a range of stress levels over the previous months.

# Overall wellbeing

Women were asked if they felt drained and whether they were satisfied in fulfilling their functions

- 51%** thriving  
(satisfied not drained)
- 42%** satisfied but drained
- 7%** not satisfied

Younger leaders under 50 years were more likely to report being satisfied and not drained than older women.

Older women were more likely than younger women to claim to be satisfied but drained.

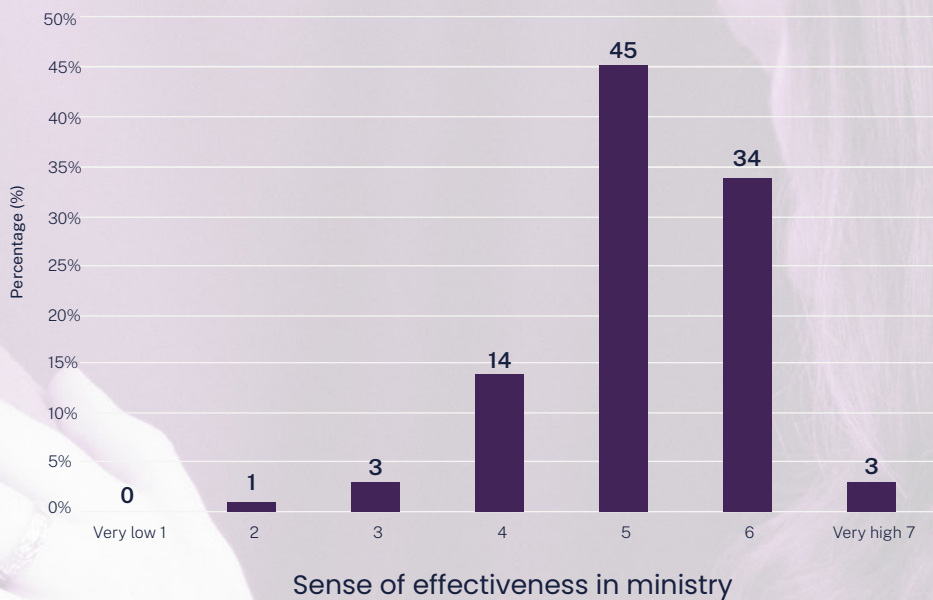
# Overall effectiveness

Sense of effectiveness experiences by Baptist women in local church role over past few months

**82%** higher levels (rated 5 to 7)

**4%** lower levels (rated 1 to 3)

88% of pastoral leaders had high sense of effectiveness.



To compare... ALL senior Baptist local church leaders' sense of effectiveness: rating of 5 (52%), rating of 6 (25%), rating of 7 (2%).

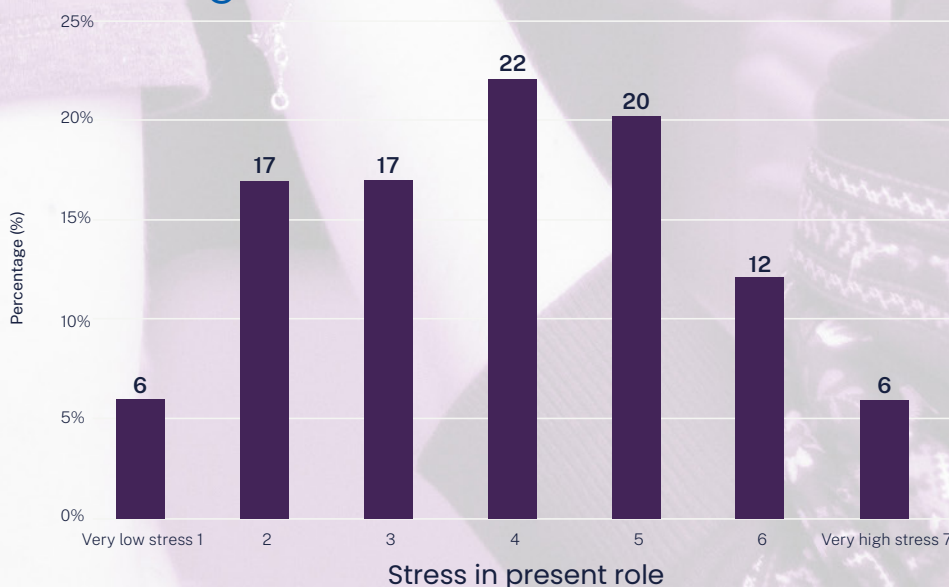
# Overall stress

Stress experiences by Baptist women in local church role over past few months

**40%** lower levels (rated 1 to 3)

**38%** higher levels (rated 5 to 7)

Older women aged 70+ were more likely than younger women to report lower levels of stress.



**66%** of leaders aged 70+

(vs 38% of leaders aged 50-69 and 33% of leaders aged 15-49)

To compare... ALL senior Baptist local church leaders' overall level of stress: rating of 1 (1%), rating of 2 (7%), rating of 3 (18%), rating of 5 (32%), rating of 6 (19%), rating of 7 (5%).



# Resilience

Most Baptist women leaders had not given serious consideration to quitting their role in the last 5 years.

Ministry resilience is measured by six foundational qualities that help leaders to thrive and survive well in the face of challenges.

Women in ministry have strong Clarity of Purpose (similar to all leaders). They also have strong Supportive Relationships (scoring much higher than all Baptist leaders).

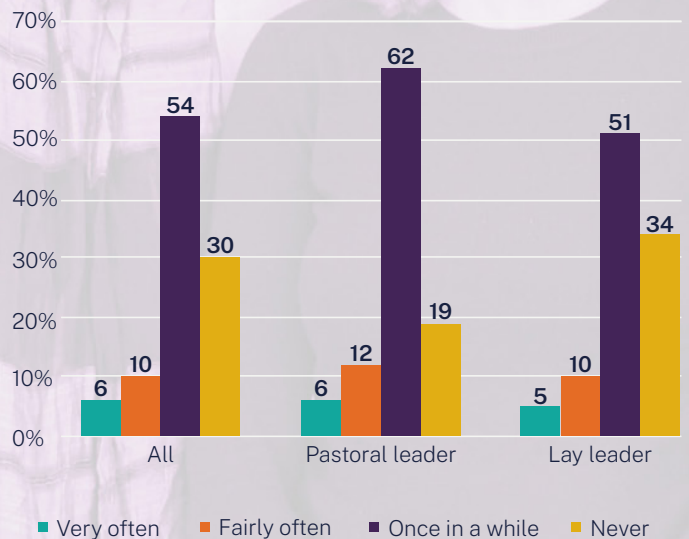
# Thoughts of quitting

Serious consideration of quitting leadership role

**30%** never

**54%** once in a while

Thoughts of quitting leadership roles in the last 5 years



Pastoral leaders were more likely than lay leaders to consider quitting once in a while

**62%** (vs 51% of lay leaders)

# Foundations for ministry resilience

## Spiritual foundations


'The quality of my spiritual practice has improved over my time in ministry'

52%  5% 

Average score: 6.45/10

Older leaders tended to have stronger spiritual foundations

(70+ yrs: 7.07, 50-69 yrs: 6.65, 18-49 yrs: 6.05)

To compare... ALL senior Baptist local church leaders'  52%

## Integration


'Much of my life seems to be spent on things that do not reflect what really matters to me'

5%  52% 

Average score: 6.36/10

Older leaders tended to have a greater level of integration between their aspirations and ministry tasks

(70+ yrs: 7.05, 50-69 yrs: 6.62, 18-49 yrs: 5.87)

To compare... ALL senior Baptist local church leaders'  6%

## Clarity of purpose


'My life has a strong sense of purpose'

81%  1% 

Average score: 8.07/10

Pastoral leaders and the oldest age group were more likely to have a strong sense of purpose

(Pastoral leader: 8.48, Lay leader: 7.93  
(70+ yrs: 8.55, 50-69 yrs: 8.12, 18-49 yrs: 7.85)

To compare... ALL senior Baptist local church leaders'  84%


## Sense of self

'If people criticise the church, I tend to take it personally'

24%  27% 

Average score: \*

\* not included due to poor statistical reliability of scale

To compare... ALL senior Baptist local church leaders'  29%

## Supportive relationships


'I have a strong and growing circle of close friends from whom I get a great deal of support'

56%  7% 

Average score: 7.70/10

Older leaders had the highest scores for supportive relationships

(70+ yrs: 8.52, 50-69 yrs: 7.74, 18-49 yrs: 7.40)

To compare... ALL senior Baptist local church leaders'  35%

## Balance and boundaries


'I manage to keep good boundaries between work and the rest of my life'

34%  18% 

Average score: 6.07/10

Older leaders tended to have a greater sense of work life balance

(70+ yrs: 6.89, 50-69 yrs: 6.23, 18-49 yrs: 5.63)

To compare... ALL senior Baptist local church leaders'  36%



# Church health and COVID

Most women in ministry leadership see their church health as thriving or strong and steady.

Levels of strong commitment to the church's vision are higher than confidence it will be achieved.

Nearly all women leaders support new initiatives, but only two thirds see their church as open.

Around two thirds say they will draw inspiration from new ministry practices acquired after the pandemic.

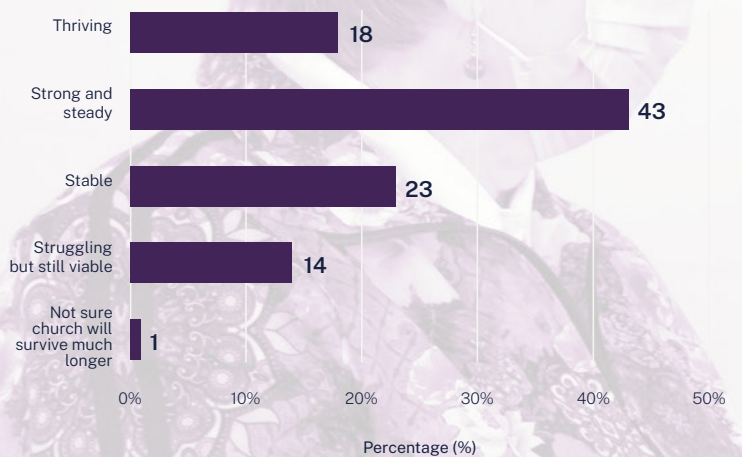
## Church health

### Vitality of local church

Perceptions of local church's vitality

18% thriving

43% strong and steady



To compare... ALL senior Baptist local church leaders: Thriving (7%), strong and steady (44%), stable (31%), struggling but still viable (17%), not sure church will survive much longer (1%).

### Vision, goals and direction

Commitment to local church's vision, goals or direction

66% strongly committed

11% partly committed

Confidence in local church achieving vision, goals or direction

45% fully confident

42% partly confident

To compare... ALL senior Baptist local church leaders: Commitment: strongly committed (69%), partly committed (3%); Confidence: fully confident (37%), partly confident (50%).

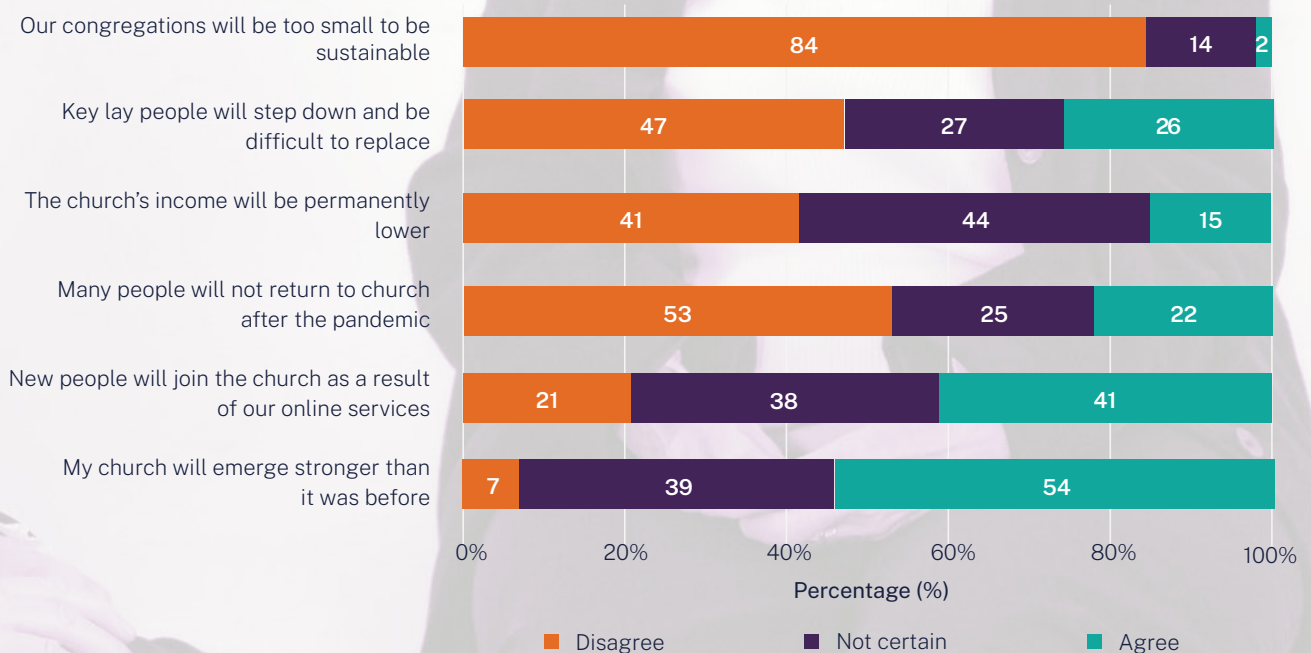
## Innovation

- 94% 👍 support new initiatives in ministry and mission
- 67% 👍 favour church supporting a new church with finances or people
- 65% 👍 agree their church is always willing to try something new

To compare... ALL senior Baptist local church leaders: Support new initiatives: strongly agree/agree ~ 100%. Supporting a new church: Definitely favour/tend to favour (70%). Local church openness to innovation: Strongly agree/agree (62%).

## Impact of COVID-19

### Leaders mostly took a positive posture, with some unsure



## Views of ministry practices post-pandemic

- 64% draw inspiration from new practices
- 44% go back to previous ways

Lay leaders were more likely to go back to previous ways

53% of lay leaders (vs 22% of pastoral leaders)

Note: 👍 agreed/strongly agreed or definitely favour/tend to favour





# Baptist *Women* in Ministry Leadership

## SUMMARY REPORT

This report presents an overview of key findings about Baptist women in ministry leadership.

Topics include demographics; roles and training; wellbeing; as well as their views of church health and the impact of COVID.