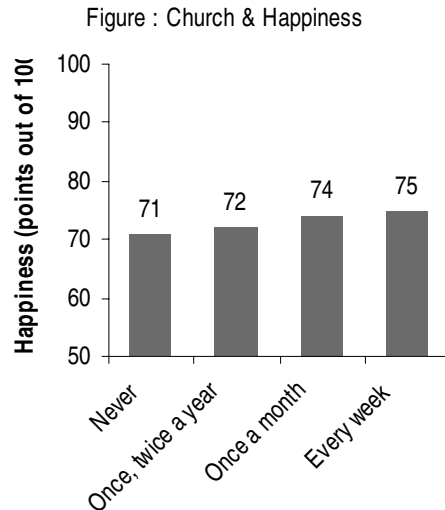

GOING TO CHURCH MAKES PEOPLE HAPPIER¹

Does going to church make people happier or less happy? One might expect that foregoing the pleasures of leisure time and being confronted with the errors of one's ways might make church-goers a grim bunch compared to church-shunners lapping up the unfettered freedom of their Sundays. Alternatively, one might expect that the company of other people who are also striving to be good, the ritual enactment of the ultimate altruism, and the aesthetic experience of music and architectural beauty that accompany most church services hearten and cheer people for their struggles in the coming week. Which of these views is correct?

People who go to church regularly are happier than those who do not.²

- For example, someone who goes to church every week is likely to be 4 points happier (75 points to 71) than another person of the same age, sex, family background and family circumstances who never goes to church.



There are no significant differences between religious groups: Catholics, Anglicans, other Protestants, and those in non-Christians religions are all equally happy. But there is one exception.

- People who explicitly decline to affiliate themselves with any religious group, who say they belong to “no religion” constitute about 18% of the Australian population. They are a little less happy, by about 2 points, than nominalists who think of themselves belonging to a religion but never go to church (and with a greater happiness deficit than that compared to those who do go to church).³

¹ Source: Evans & Kelley, *Australian Economy and Society 2002: Religion, Morality, and Public Policy in International Perspective, 1984-2002*. Sydney: Federation Press, 2004.

² Happiness is measured by averaging the answers to two questions: “How do you feel about your life as a whole?” and , after a further series of questions about satisfaction with “standard of living”, “sense of purpose and meaning in life”, “hobbies”, “neighbourhood”, etc. “All in all, how do you feel about your life as a whole?” The results shown are predicted values from a multivariate analysis, adjusting statistically for differences in age, marital status, number of children, migrant status, number of siblings, parent’s education, father’s occupational status, parental divorce, volunteer work, and religious denomination. The effect of church attendance on happiness is statistically significant ($t=5.64, p<.001$).

³ The difference between those who report themselves as belonging to “no religion” and others, although small, is statistically significant ($t=-2.98, p<.05$).