



A Snapshot of Effective and Sustainable Leadership Issues: Catholic Church in Australia

2016 NCLS Local Church Leaders Report

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Effective and sustainable leadership snapshot

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Abstract

This research paper contains a snapshot of some key leadership issues for senior leaders in the local churches of the Catholic Church – ministers, pastors, priests or laypeople in local senior leadership positions. The report contains responses to questions about priorities to different roles, where they feel they need more training, local governance, as well as health and stress levels.

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Citation

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Introduction

Local church leadership looks different from church to church and denomination to denomination. The 2016 National Church Life Survey (2016 NCLS) provides a basis to learn more about aspects of leadership among local senior leaders in Australian churches.

This report is based on those local senior leaders in the Catholic Church in Australia who completed the 2016 NCLS Leader Survey. It provides a snapshot of these local church leaders, with respect to several important aspects of effective and sustainable leadership.

Methodology

The 2016 NCLS Leader Survey was filled out individually and anonymously by leaders of churches participating in the 2016 NCLS. Participants in the 2016 NCLS Leader Survey were asked to choose the best description of their position out of a number of options (see Table 1). This paper focuses on local senior leaders: ministers, pastors or priests who are the primary or senior leader of a local church or who have equal standing in the ministry team (i.e. categories 1, 2, 4 and 5 in Table 1), as well as laypeople serving as the principal leader in a local church (i.e. category 6).

In denominations that tend to have male senior leaders, female survey respondents also sometimes identified as a 'senior leader' (either as a lay leader or a team member of equal standing). In cases where no response was received from clergy, those who identified as senior lay leaders were included in the report.

Results in this paper are restricted to a subset of respondents we have defined as "local senior leaders". In the Catholic Church some 154 survey respondents fitted this description. Leader Survey data was weighted to adjust for variations in participation levels across denominations and regions.

Table 1: Description of all church leaders in 2016 NCLS Leader Survey

"Which of the following best describes your position:"		The Catholic Church in Australia Count	Local Senior Leader
1	The minister, pastor or priest of this local church*	105	✓
2	The senior minister/pastor/priest of a ministry team here*	13	✓
3	A minister, pastor or priest in a ministry team here (but not the senior minister)	23	
4	A minister, pastor or priest of equal standing with others in a ministry team here*	4	✓
5	An interim minister, pastor or priest here*	2	✓
6	A layperson serving as the principal leader here*	30	✓
7	A layperson serving as a member of a leadership team	379	
8	A bishop, minister, pastor, priest or layperson resourcing those who are ministering in several churches	3	
9	Itinerant minister, pastor, priest or lay leader	5	
10	Other (Please specify)	66	
Total		630	154

**Selected as "local senior leader" for this report.*

Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 630).

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Leadership Roles: Practices and Preferences

Church leaders have a diversity of roles they can practice and prioritise, depending on the needs of the church, the resources and other support that is available, and their own passions and gifts.

Leaders were asked:

"Mark what you think are the main roles you ACTUALLY carry out, and what you think SHOULD BE your main roles. (Mark up to THREE options)"

Roles leaders actually carry out

Table 2 shows the percentage of The Catholic Church in Australia leaders who indicated which of the roles they actually carry out as one of their top three with a comparison to church leaders across Australia.

Table 2: Top three roles local senior leaders actually carry out

Roles leaders carry out	Denom in 2016 (%)	All NCLS in 2016 (%)
Conduct worship/administer sacraments	85	60
Teach people about the Christian faith	41	58
Train people for ministry and mission	24	27
Convert others to the faith	4	9
Administer the work of the local church	43	42
Visit, counsel and help people	38	35
Develop a vision and goals for the future	11	27
Offer prayer/be a spiritual role model	27	21
Wider community groups or social issues	11	12
Other	3	3
Don't know	2	0

Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior leaders (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 154; All NCLS n = 2124).

Note: Percentages will not add to 100% as leaders could select up to three options.

In the Catholic Church the roles most commonly in the top 3 that leaders say they actually carry out were 'Conduct worship or administer the sacraments', indicated by 85% of local senior leaders, 'Administer the work of the local church' (43%), 'Teach people about the Christian faith' (41%), and 'Visit, counsel and help people' (38%).

As a comparison across Australia the most commonly cited roles that senior leaders in local churches say they actually carry out were 'Conduct worship or administer the sacraments' (60%), 'Teach people about the Christian faith' (58%), 'Administer the work of the local church' (42%), and 'Visit, counsel and help people' (35%).

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Roles leaders feel they should be carrying out

Table 3 shows the roles that local senior leaders indicated they should be prioritising, with the same comparison to church leaders across Australia.

Table 3: Top three roles local senior leaders believe they should be carrying out

Roles leaders should do	Denom in 2016 (%)	All NCLS in 2016 (%)
Conduct worship/administer sacraments	64	48
Teach people about the Christian faith	47	56
Train people for ministry and mission	27	52
Convert others to the faith	5	14
Administer the work of the local church	19	16
Visit, counsel and help people	28	24
Develop a vision and goals for the future	20	40
Offer prayer/be a spiritual role model	27	21
Wider community groups or social issues	22	14
Other	6	3
Don't know	3	1

Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior leaders (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 154; All NCLS n = 2124).

Note: Percentages will not add to 100% as leaders could select up to three options.

The difference between what leaders are actually doing and what they believe they should be doing is important to consider. When there is a strong sense of integration between 'practices' and 'preferences' leaders are likely to have a stronger sense of being effective in their role and also less likely to be burning out. However when there is a mismatch between practices and preferences this could be cause for concern.

Roles not carried out enough

In the Catholic Church the two areas of largest mismatch where leaders indicated they should be doing more than they are, were 'Teach people about the Christian faith' and 'Offer prayer/be a spiritual role model'.

The greatest areas of role mismatch of this kind across all denominations were 'Training people for ministry and mission', followed by 'Develop a vision and goals for the future'.

Roles that take up too much time

In contrast, the two areas where The Catholic Church in Australia leaders indicated they were doing more than they believe they should were 'Administer the work of the local church' and 'Conduct worship or administer the sacraments'.

Across all denominations the areas cited most often as taking up too much time were 'Administer the work of the local church', followed by 'Visit, counsel and help people'.

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Leader Training: Adequacy and Deficits

Leaders were asked how adequately they felt trained in a range of areas:

- Administration/finance
- Children's, families and youth ministry
- Cross-cultural ministry
- Handling conflict situations in the church
- Leading a group through change
- Mentoring/coaching/spiritual direction of others
- Mission/outreach
- Organisation management skills for church leadership
- Pastoral care/counselling
- Teaching/preaching
- Understanding a community (its make up and how it works)

They were able to respond for each area indicating 'not at all', 'poorly', 'to a basic level', and 'very well', as well as 'don't know'.

The five areas where The Catholic Church in Australia leaders most often felt 'very well' equipped for ministry are shown in Table 4. Also shown are the equivalent figures for senior leaders across Australia.

Table 4: Areas of ministry 'very well' equipped

Area of ministry	Denom in 2016 (%)	All NCLS in 2016 (%)
Teaching/preaching	75	80
Pastoral care/counselling	63	60
Understanding a community (its make up and how it works)	46	41
Mission/outreach	44	49
Childrens, families and youth ministry	42	47

Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior leaders (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 154; All NCLS n = 2124).

The areas of ministry that the largest group of leaders in the Catholic Church felt very well equipped for were 'Teaching/preaching' (75%), followed by 'Pastoral care/counselling' (63%).

Across all denominations the area where leaders felt the most equipped was 'Teaching/preaching' (80%). The other strongest areas were 'Pastoral care/counselling' (60%), 'Mentoring/coaching/spiritual direction' (53%), 'Leading a group through change' (50%), and 'Mission/outreach' (49%).

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This question also allows us to see the areas of ministry where local senior leaders feel least adequately trained or equipped. Table 5 shows the areas where leaders of the Catholic Church indicated 'not at all' or 'poorly' in the greatest numbers, with a comparison to the same areas for Australia.

Table 5: Areas of ministry 'not at all' or 'poorly' equipped

Area of ministry	Denom in 2016 (%)	All NCLS in 2016 (%)
Cross-cultural ministry	20	30
Administration/finance	16	17
Organisation management skills for church leadership	13	11
Handling conflict situations in the church	12	9
Leading a group through change	12	9

Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior leaders (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 154; All NCLS n = 2124).

The areas of ministry where The Catholic Church in Australia leaders felt the least equipped was 'Cross-cultural ministry' (20%), followed by 'Administration/finance' (16%) and 'Organisation management skills for church leadership' (13%).

Across all denominations the area where leaders by far felt the least equipped was 'Cross-cultural ministry' (30%). This highlights an important issue for church leaders and those who train them. The other areas with high figures were 'Administration/finance' (17%), 'Organisational management skills' (11%), 'Understanding a community' (10%), 'Handling conflict' (9%), 'Children/Family/Youth ministry' (9%), and 'Leading a group through change' (9%).

Results of these kind are an opportunity for denominational leaders to consider where extra training may help local leaders meet the challenges of ministry more effectively, and also experience less stress by feeling better equipped.

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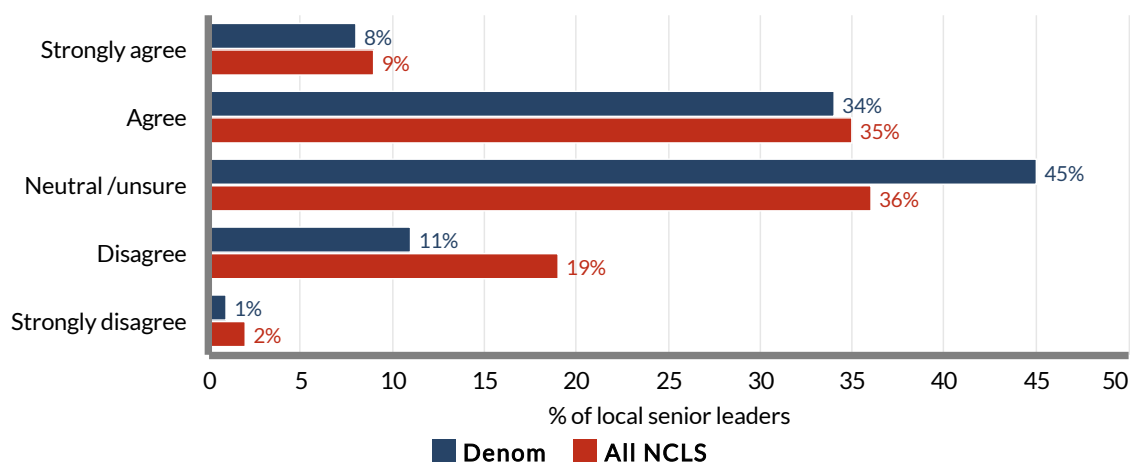
Governance: Church Council Effectiveness

There are a great variety of church governance arrangements in churches around Australia. Apart from staff (who may be solo or a team) there are also church councils, boards, leadership teams or executives. The functions and effectiveness of the church council or similar group are potentially important to the overall leadership and health of the church. NCLS Research asked leaders' opinions on a range of issues including whether the church council:

- has clear methods for monitoring the church's progress against goals
- has the skills and experience to take the church forward
- checks whether actions align with plans for the future
- has a process for reviewing pastoral staff
- has a clear governing structure for the church
- works harmoniously together as a team
- is supportive of each other
- understands relevant legal obligations
- is active in seeking new resources

Figure 1 shows leaders' responses to the question "Our council has clear methods for monitoring our church's progress against our goals." Results for the Catholic Church are compared to leaders across Australia.

Figure 1: Church council has clear methods to monitor progress: Leader views



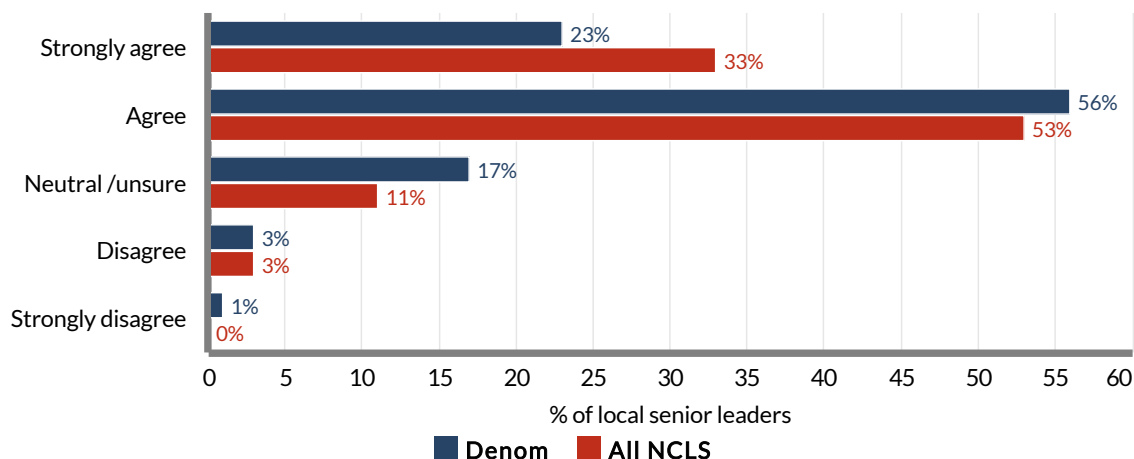
Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior leaders (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 154; All NCLS n = 2124).

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Figure 2 shows local church senior leaders' responses to the question "Our council works harmoniously as a team".

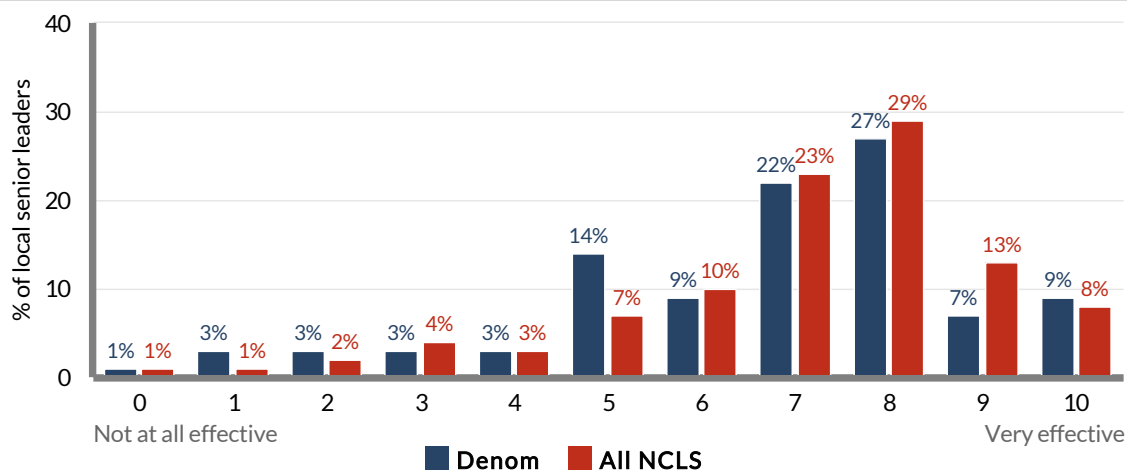
Figure 2: Church council works harmoniously as a team: Leader views



Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior leaders (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 154; All NCLS n = 2124).

Leaders were also asked to rate how effective they would say their church's council (or board, main leadership team, executive etc) is on a scale from zero to ten. Results are shown in Figure 3 for the Catholic Church, with a comparison to leaders across Australia.

Figure 3: Rating of church council effectiveness (0-10): Leader views



Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior leaders (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 154; All NCLS n = 2124).

Across all denominations the majority of local church senior leaders rated their church council's effectiveness highly, with 82% placing it at 6 or above on the scale. Effective leadership in the church is not only a matter of the staff employed, but about how the church council operates. The perceived effectiveness of the council is also an issue that can impact local leaders in their own sense of effectiveness as well as stress levels or sense of their own sustainability in ministry.

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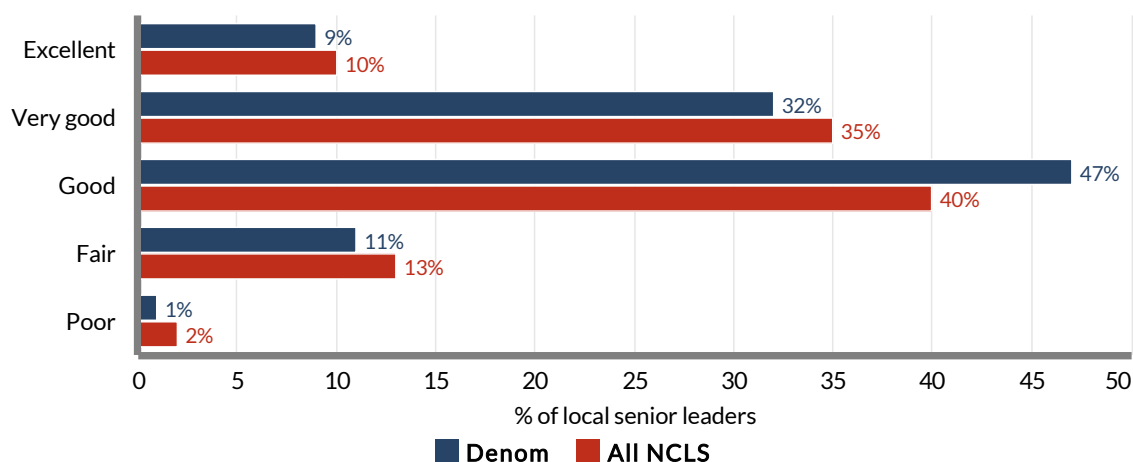
Leader Wellbeing

Leaders were asked a range of questions about their wellbeing, including physical health and common medications, stress, anxiety and depression scales, burnout and thriving in ministry scales, and personal sense of wellbeing. This report shows results for two indicators for the Catholic Church with a comparison to Australia: physical health and levels of stress.

Leaders were asked the following question about their physical health:

In general, would you say your health is... Excellent/Very good/Good/Fair/Poor

Figure 4: General physical health of local senior leaders

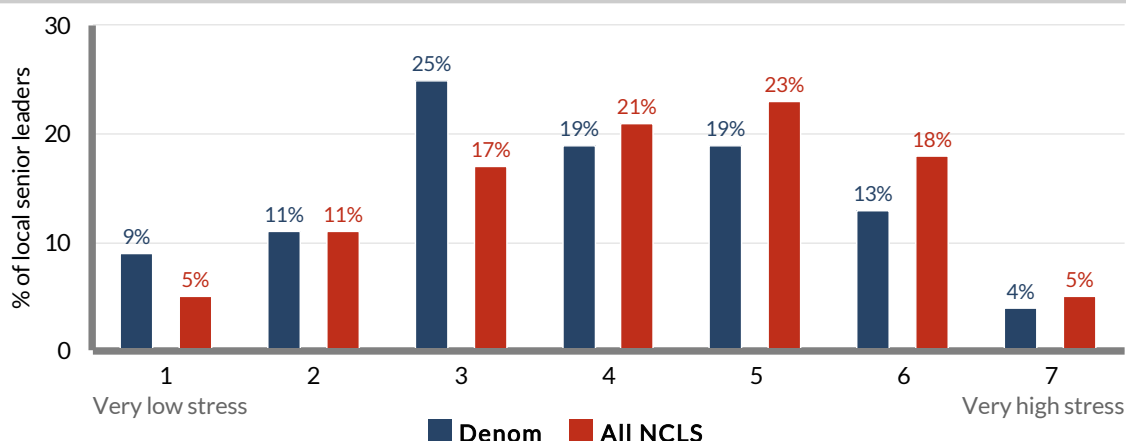


Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior leaders (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 154; All NCLS n = 2124).

Leaders were also asked to rate on a seven-point scale their level of stress recently in their role:

How stressed do you feel in your present role here over the last few months?

Figure 5: How stressed leaders felt in their role in the last few months



Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior leaders (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 154; All NCLS n = 2124).

Physical health is influenced by a range of factors, one of which can be stress. Not all stress is destructive, in fact it can at times help develop resilience. Dealing with stress well is an essential part of thriving in church ministry.

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The NCLS Personal Foundations of Sustainable Leadership highlight areas of personal resilience and vulnerability in leaders. They are useful for leaders to consider to avoid burnout and move towards thriving in ministry. See www.ncls.org.au/sustainable-leadership for more.

Leaders were asked a range of questions exploring their personal foundations of sustainable leadership, including:

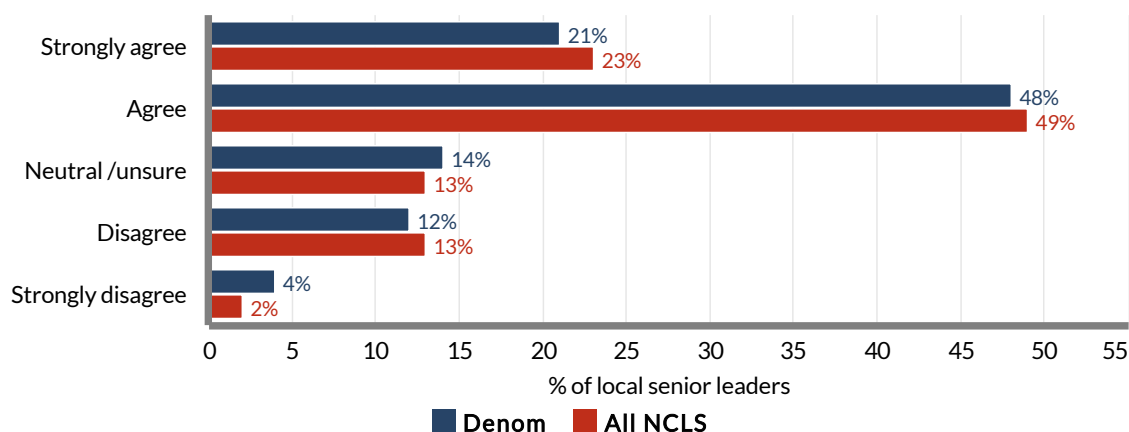
- | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Spiritual Foundations</i> | 3. <i>Sense of Self</i> | 5. <i>Supportive Relationships</i> |
| 2. <i>Clarity of Purpose</i> | 4. <i>Integration</i> | 6. <i>Balance and Boundaries</i> |

From these foundations two results for the Catholic Church are shown in this report, with a comparison to leaders across Australia.

Personal Foundation 1: Spiritual Foundations

Most days I spend time alone in private devotional activities (prayer, Bible reading)

Figure 6: Time spent alone in private devotional activities most days

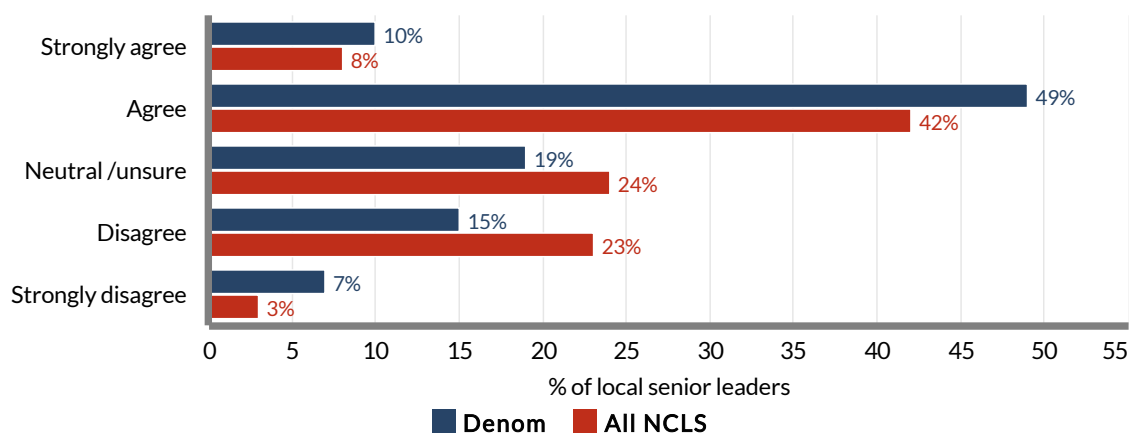


Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior leaders (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 154; All NCLS n = 2124).

Personal Foundation 6: Balance and Boundaries

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

Figure 7: Managing to keep good boundaries between work and rest of life



Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior leaders (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 154; All NCLS n = 2124).

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Data Sources: Powell, R., Sterland, S., Pepper, M., & Hancock, N. (2016) [computer file], 2016 NCLS Leaders Survey. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

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