

Faith and Belief

Te Patapātai Whakapono

Exploring the spiritual landscape
in Aotearoa New Zealand

November 2023

Rārangi upoko

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Wāhinga kōrero

Foreword

Tēnā koutou katoa, ngā mihi nui kia a tātou.

Our society is not as disinterested in faith and spirituality as we might think. This is one of the key findings from the 2023 Faith and Belief Study. The decline in formal religious affiliation continues, but we are also seeing a rise in the breadth of spiritual practices and an increasing appetite, especially among younger people living in Aotearoa New Zealand, to explore issues of spirituality.

The 2023 Faith and Belief Study, commissioned by the Wilberforce Foundation and undertaken by McCrindle (an independent social research organisation), explores attitudes towards spirituality and religious faith in Aotearoa New Zealand. It examines people's hopes, fears, and longings, the factors that draw us toward and away from faith, and our society's perceptions of Christianity, Jesus, and the church.

This study is undertaken at five-year intervals, coinciding with the nationwide Census, and uses quantitative and qualitative measures to ascertain the views of a representative group of people living in Aotearoa New Zealand towards faith and belief. The 2023 study incorporates many elements of the inaugural 2018 study, but it has been strengthened to ensure better demographic representation, deeper engagement of the Aotearoa New Zealand research community in the survey design, and greater use of open-ended and qualitative questions. The 2023 report also includes responses to the study's findings from church, academic, and social sector leaders.

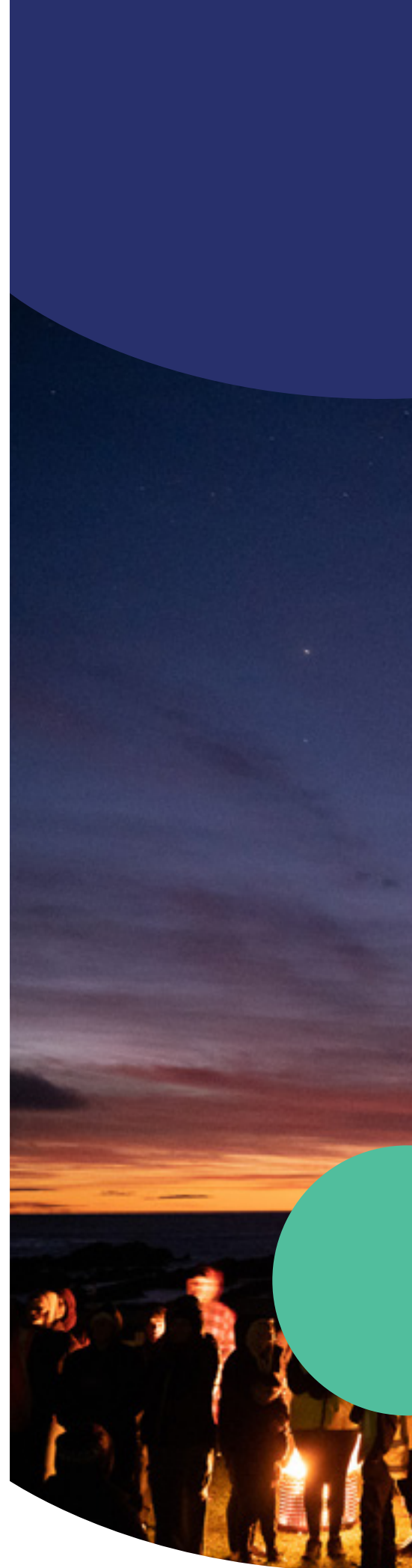
This study does not offer solutions. Rather, we hope it will spark reflection and conversation among faith leaders, commentators, adherents, and academics, about the changing 'shape' of faith in Aotearoa New Zealand and what this might mean for our society – for local communities, families, and individuals.

Our thanks to the many contributors who helped to develop the study and especially to the 1009 people who responded to the survey.

Ngā mihi nui,



Chris Clarke
Chief Executive
Wilberforce Foundation



Acknowledgements

This project benefited from the support, expertise, and guidance of a range of contributors. Wilberforce Foundation is grateful to each of these. In particular, we would like to thank Bradford Haami, Allen Hou, Peter Lineham, Lui Ponifasio, Lynne Taylor, Luke Fenwick, Karen Kemp, and Andrew Shepherd for their significant roles advising on this research. We are deeply grateful to the McCrindle team for their efforts designing and executing the project.

Te Mana o Te Reo Rangatira

Wilberforce Foundation would especially like to acknowledge the work of Junior Tana (Ngā Puhī) in translating the Faith and Belief Study into Te Reo Māori. The organisation wanted to make this option available to enable te iwi Māori to participate fully in this process and to honour the indigenous language of this land. We also would like to thank Emerson Rikiriki (Raukawa ki te Kaokaoroa o Pātetere) for his cultural guidance and support.

Some photos in this report showcase the artistic work of Māori photographer Eru Walker.



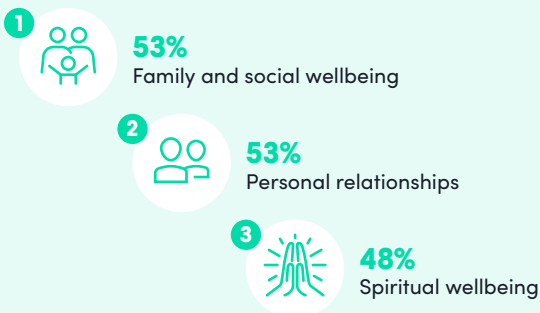
A snapshot of

Faith and Spirituality

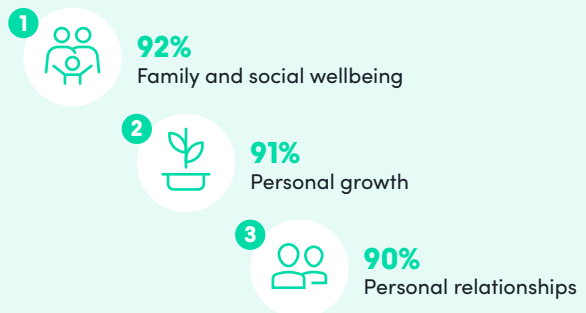
Insights from a national study of 1,009 people who live in Aotearoa New Zealand, representative by age, gender, and location

Participants feel satisfied and hopeful about their relationships and close community

Top areas of satisfaction in life: Extremely/very satisfied

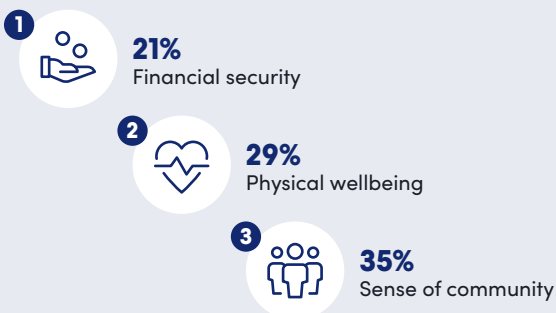


In the next three years, participants feel hopeful about:

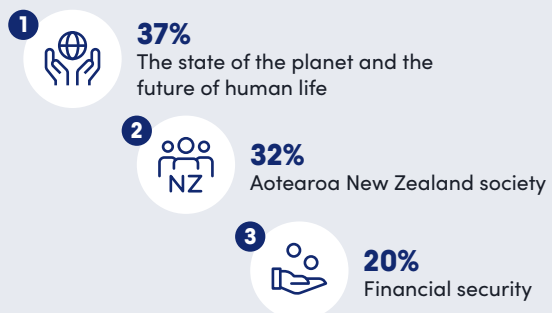


Financial insecurity and the state of the planet contribute to low satisfaction and feeling hopeless

Lowest areas of satisfaction in life: Extremely/very satisfied

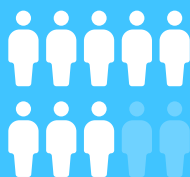
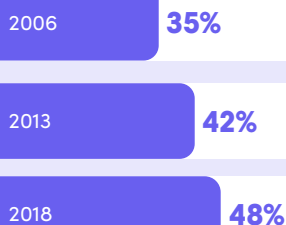


In the next three years, participants feel hopeless about:



Affiliation with religion decreases, while connection to spirituality is strong

% who report no religion in the Census¹:



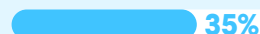
81%
of participants resonate with some form of spiritual belief

Most commonly shared spiritual beliefs:

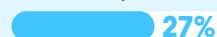
there is an ultimate purpose and meaning in life



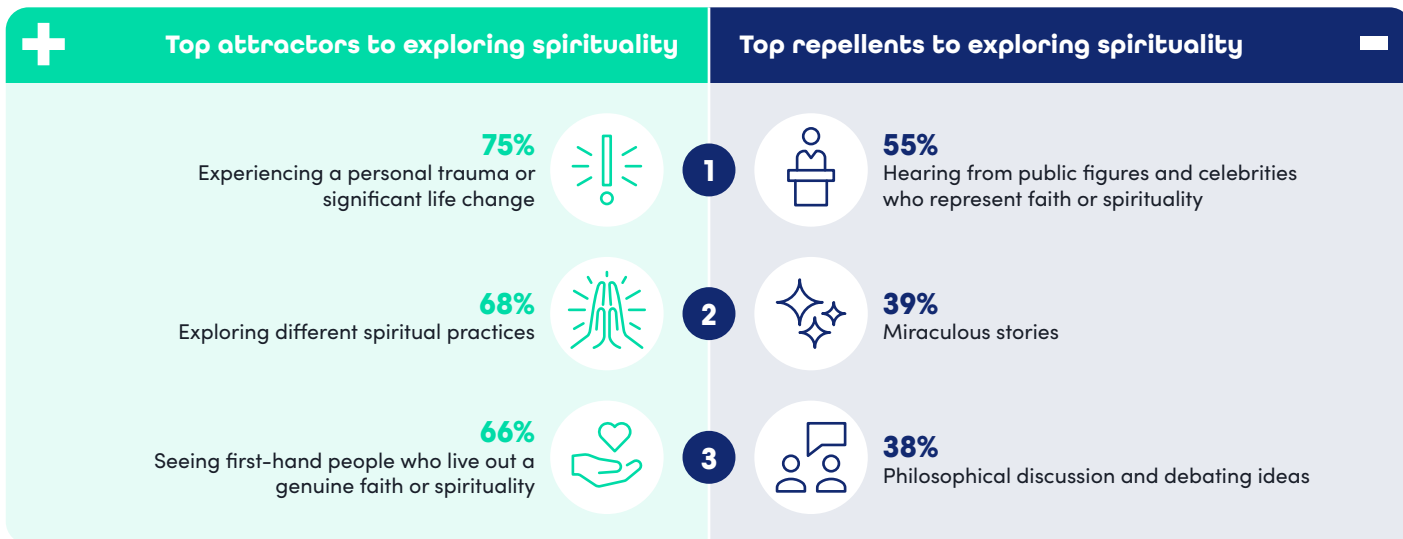
there is one god



belief in a spiritual realm



Personal challenges, spiritual practices, and authenticity attract individuals to investigate faith and spirituality



Religion provides hope and belonging



There is warmth towards Christianity, Jesus, and the church





Ngā wawata, ngā wehi me ngā ingoingō

Hopes, fears, and longings

Social relationships are key for people living in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Building strong, close relationships is a priority for people living in Aotearoa New Zealand. The top areas of life satisfaction are family and social wellbeing (53%) and personal relationships (53%). Building connections beyond these close relationships is more challenging, however, with having a sense of community being the third lowest area of life satisfaction (35%). This value on relationships is further highlighted by what participants feel hopeful about in the next three years, which includes their family and social wellbeing (92%) and personal relationships (90%).

Participants are more likely to be satisfied with their spiritual wellbeing (48%), sense of purpose (46%), and mental wellbeing (43%) than with their physical wellbeing (29%). Other key areas of low satisfaction for participants relate to things they have less agency over, such as financial security (21%) and employment (38%). This is echoed in the areas about which participants are most likely to feel hopeless when they consider the next three years, namely the state of the planet (37%), Aotearoa New Zealand society (32%), and their own financial security (20%).



Happiness comes from building a strong community around me, my friends and family, just having someone to lean on.

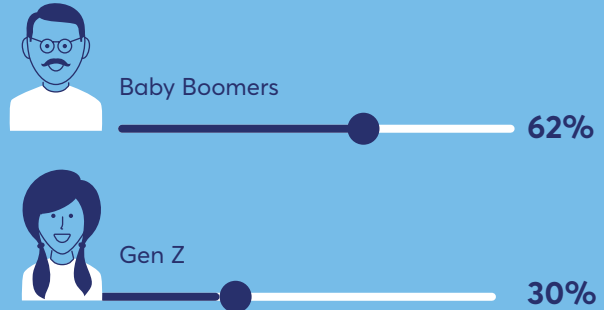
Gen Z

Generationally, Baby Boomers are more likely to be satisfied with their spiritual wellbeing than their younger counterparts (61% extremely/very satisfied cf. 43% Gen X, 46% Gen Y, 38% Gen Z).

In fact, the younger generations are the least likely to be extremely or very satisfied across many of the areas tested. The gap is most evident in satisfaction with mental wellbeing, where just 30% of Gen Z are extremely or very satisfied (cf. 39% Gen Y, 37% Gen X, 62% Baby Boomers).

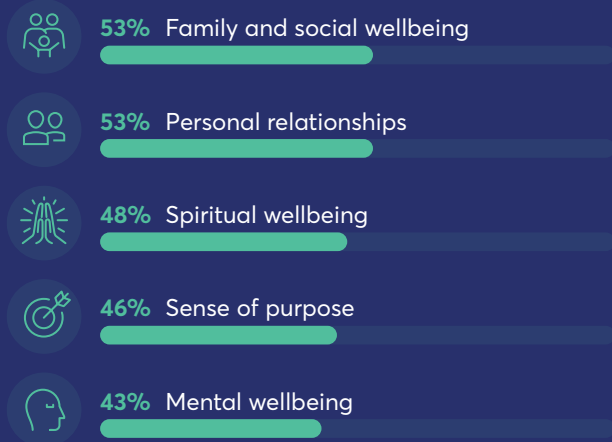
Māori (38%), Pacific Peoples (39%), and Pākehā (41%) are similarly less satisfied with their mental wellbeing, compared to people of Asian ethnicity (54%).

Baby Boomers are 2x more likely than Gen Z to be extremely/very satisfied with their mental wellbeing



% EXTREMELY/VERY SATISFIED

Top areas of satisfaction



Lowest areas of satisfaction



IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS, PARTICIPANTS FEEL MOST...

(extremely/very/somewhat)

Hopeful about...



Hopeless about...





When I reflect on the circumstances around Gen Z's upbringing, their hopes, fears, and longings begin to make sense. Gen Z have lived through a global financial crisis and a COVID-19 pandemic that likely contribute to their fears around finance. They have grown up during an information and digital revolution that has made it easier to connect through online communities but harder to find face-to-face connections and significant relationships. The same revolution has also meant they are overloaded with information and opinions about the state of the world and its suffering.


It makes sense that Gen Z find hope (or happiness) in their immediate sphere of close relationships. This might have been magnified by the opportunity to spend more time with family and friends due to COVID-19 restrictions in 2020-21. Gen Z's low satisfaction with mental wellbeing could be connected

to the fact that they grew up in a volatile world, with so much (often confusing) information. Their low satisfaction with spiritual wellbeing could suggest that they have a less robust worldview with which to make sense of world events. All of the above lead this generation to long for certainty and assurance. As for their fear of loneliness, perhaps this is linked to their sense of not being known in deep, meaningful ways.

We are looking at a generation who desires to be known through building deeper relationships. Maybe these could lead to more purpose-driven communities that will bring a positive impact to the world.



Allen Hou
Founder of Asian Community Transformation Trust and Advisor to immigrant communities



He whakakitenga tā tēnei rīpoata mō te whakapono ki Aotearoa nei. E rua tau i tēnei rangi nei, i mohoao tō tātou noho i raro i ngā ture Mate Kōwhe-iwa. Kāhore hoki au i paku ohore ki ngā tohutohu o tēnei rīpoata e whakaatu atu ana i te mana motuhaketanga o Aotearoa ki te taha whānau, me te tūhonotanga. I te mea ka noho matua ko te whānau te mea nui, ka tika hoki ko ngā momo e whā i noho hei whakawehi i ā tātou o te motu nei; te hinganga o tētahi o te whānau; kāore e nawhe ana ngā pūtea āwhina i te oranga me te manaakitanga i te whānau; māuiuitanga, e tāmi nei i ō tātou whānau; me ngā hara, hei āpiti atu ki te manako nui ki a haumarū ō tātou whānau. I tēnei ao hurihuri, i tua atu o te Mate Kōwhe-iwa, me ngā panonitanga o te ao nei, ka tika hoki ko te wehi tātou ki te noho mohoao, moke hārukiruki, hei āpiti atu ki te mate hinengaro. He oranga kei roto i te tūhono i te muka tangata ki te muka taiao. Ka tōmina katoa te kite atu atu i te hua o tēnei rīpoata e whakapaetia ana, matika rawa, matua te whakaaro nui ki a Papatūānuku. He tangata māuiui, kāore e kore ka māuiui ko te whenua. He tomonga whenua, he whakakipakipa ake i te mana o te tuakiritanga ā-rongoā, ā-kai, ka matua i tērā.

This report on faith and belief in Aotearoa is well-timed. Two years ago, to the day, the majority of us were sitting in COVID-19 alert Level 2 lockdown. It doesn't surprise me that the report shows we are a nation that prioritises whānau and connection. Since we place such a high premium on valuing whānau, it makes sense that our four greatest fears as a nation are: losing a whānau member; not having enough funds to live and to care for our whānau; illness, which affects us and our whānau; and crime, or a desire for our whānau to be safe. In Te Ao Hurihuri, this post-COVID-19, rapidly changing world, a fear of being alone and lonely also makes sense, and even more so for those with mental illness. Connection to each other and to our environment is healing. It's great to see that this report shows that people are starting to wake up to the need to care for Papatūānuku. Māuiui tangata, māuiui whenua (if the people are sick, so the earth will be too). Access to whenua, to enhance the mana of one's identity for medicine and food, is paramount.



Jade Hohaia-Te Uri Karaka
Raukawa, Waikato, Ngā Puhī, Ngāi Tahu

Hopes and fears play into one another

People in Aotearoa New Zealand long for hope

Almost three in five participants (58%) long for hope for the future, resonating with the uncertainty many feel about the current environment. This is followed by a desire to increase wealth and prosperity (52%) and for a sense of security in an uncertain world (47%). People in Aotearoa New Zealand also long for genuine relationships where they feel known (45%), and for a strong sense of personal identity (34%).

Losing a loved one is the greatest fear

Losing a loved one is the top fear for people living in Aotearoa New Zealand (62%), speaking directly to the importance of community and close relationships. Loneliness is also among the top fears (37%), further highlighting the value placed on togetherness. Other fears include not having enough money to live (53%), illness (47%), and crime (41%).

Gen Z are the only generation to name a fear of loneliness among their top three fears in life (44% cf. 38% Gen Y, 36% Gen X, 32% Baby Boomers).

"I think a fear of mine is the climate we live in - the economic climate, and environmental, and what's the world we leave them (future generations) going to look like?" Gen Y

TOP LONGINGS IN LIFE



58%
Hope for the future



52%
An increase in wealth and prosperity



47%
A sense of security in a world of uncertainty



45%
Genuine relationships where I feel known



34%
A strong sense of personal identity

TOP FEARS IN LIFE



62%
Losing a loved one



53%
Not having enough money to live



47%
Illness



41%
Crime



37%
Loneliness



The spiritual landscape

There is a diverse collection of beliefs about spirituality held across Aotearoa New Zealand. Some participants don't relate to spiritual concepts at all, while others relate to images or thoughts associated with spirituality without describing themselves as spiritual. For others, however, spirituality is an integral part of their identity.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the rate of those who report no religion in the Census is growing (48% 2018 cf. 42% 2013, 35% 2006, 30% 2001). Many, however, still identify with beliefs associated with spirituality. Four in five participants (81%) identify with at least one statement about spiritual beliefs. The statement that resonates most is a belief that there is an ultimate purpose and meaning in life (37%), followed closely by a belief that there is one god (35%). More than a quarter of respondents (27%) believe there is a spiritual realm.

Attitudes towards spirituality differ across the generations. Many in older generations identify as quite spiritual, while others, particularly in the younger generations, are less interested but still respectful of differing views. Baby Boomers are the most likely generation to believe there is an ultimate purpose in life (45% cf. 34% Gen X, 36% Gen Y, 30% Gen Z).

” Spirituality is a core part of me. I think about spirituality quite a lot. **Baby Boomer**

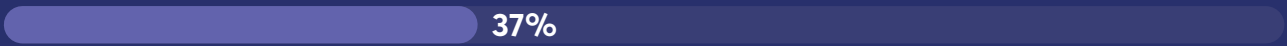
” It's really nice to see that we can all have different religions and different beliefs, and we can still coexist, and still respect each other. I think it's good to have conversations, but it's not the easiest thing to bring up. **Gen Z**

” I grew up in a family where religion wasn't really spoken about at all. I'm probably more of a spiritual person, and slightly believe that there is a bigger or higher self... In terms of religion, I've never been to church or anything. I have nothing against it, but that just wasn't how I grew up. **Gen Z**

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS BEST DESCRIBE YOUR SPIRITUAL BELIEFS?

Please select all that apply

I believe there is an ultimate purpose and meaning in life



I believe there is one god



I believe in a spiritual realm



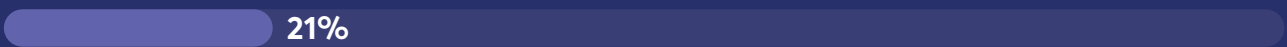
I believe in my self-developed beliefs



I believe there are supernatural powers



I believe in the inward journey of discovering the inner person



I believe any spiritual path can lead to enlightenment



I believe in a mixture of spiritual beliefs from major religions



I believe in astrology



I believe there are multiple gods



I believe in new age/eastern spirituality



I don't know how to describe my spiritual beliefs



I don't have any spiritual beliefs



TOP AGREEMENT AREAS BY GENERATION

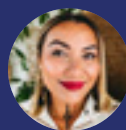
(Strongly/somewhat agree)

 Gen Z	 Gen Y	 Gen X	 Baby Boomers
I believe in life after death (52%)	I have witnessed situations that have led me to believe that there is something beyond the material world (46%)	I believe in life after death (39%)	I believe in life after death (43%)
I have witnessed situations that have led me to believe that there is something beyond the material world (47%)	I believe in life after death (44%)	I have witnessed situations that have led me to believe that there is something beyond the material world (38%)	My faith or spirituality encourages me to help others (42%)
My faith or spirituality influences my physical and mental health (47%)	My faith or spirituality encourages me to help others (40%)	My faith or spirituality encourages me to help others (36%)	I have witnessed situations that have led me to believe that there is something beyond the material world (42%)

In today's cultural landscape, it is unsurprising that 70% of Gen Z do not believe in an ultimate purpose in life. Gen Z have grown up as digital natives. We have been bombarded with more information than any other generation as our spiritual identity and religious ideas have been developing. Information from around the world is readily available and heavily consumed through social media, which consistently covers natural disasters, corrupt politicians and leaders, impending doom from climate change and recession, cost of living crises, horrific crime, and more. This type of content is marketed to Gen Z, social media's biggest demographic, as palatable, everyday news. Navigating these issues as young people is extremely difficult, as most of us do not have the processing and coping mechanisms that wisdom, age, and experience grants Gen Y, X, and Baby Boomers. Gen Z are left feeling

hopeless, unsure of how to process a persistent fear that our world is doomed. There might be a connection between this fear and sense of hopelessness and a feeling of not having a purpose in life.

Gen Z are also much more malleable with their spiritual beliefs than Baby Boomers. Since Gen Z are the most likely generation to explore spirituality because of authentic stories or testimonies from people of faith, it is extremely important that older generations see their beliefs and faith as a legacy to be passed on.



Villette Iosefa-Lowe
Well-Being Coordinator/
Chaplain, Parachute Music



This research is the greatest gift to the church in Aotearoa New Zealand since the 2018 Faith and Belief Study. Again, if you're serious about the future of the church, the impact of the gospel on society, and the growing number of people not following Jesus – this research gives us an easy 'in' to something we often struggle to comprehend.

A key finding is what attracts or repels people from investigating faith and/or spirituality. We have no influence on many of the things that draw people to explore spirituality, e.g., a death in the family. It is the ways the people of God can influence that are of most interest to me:

If you're a church leader and want to do one thing over the next five years to ensure the church's future looks bright: encourage individuals in your faith community

to live out a genuine Christian faith and spirituality. Learn how to engage well with people who are not in the Christian subculture. This is easy to say yet a difficult aspect of being Christian today. How many of us are just too busy to love our neighbours? We often only have time to love the people who are mirrors of ourselves. Let us seek countercultural lifestyles that enable the conversations this research has shown to be positive. For me, this will mean slowing down, realigning some of my own personal priorities, and creating more margin in my life to be a better expression of the Christ whom I follow.



Mike Crudge

Communications Director,
Baptist Union of New Zealand

Authenticity and challenging times draw people to explore spirituality

Significant life experiences influence people's engagement with spiritual concepts and practices. Participants are most likely to be attracted to exploring faith and spirituality as a result of personal trauma or significant life change (75%). Participants have been personally prompted to think about faith or spiritual matters as a result of personal challenges such as a death in the family (35%) or a life crisis (31%).

It's not just significant life experiences that attract individuals to investigate spirituality further, but also the opportunity to explore different spiritual practices, such as meditation, prayer, or mindfulness (68%).



75%

are attracted to exploring faith and spirituality if they were to experience a personal trauma or significant life change.

Authentic conversations play an integral role in the exploration of spirituality

People living in Aotearoa New Zealand value authenticity, with 66% of respondents being attracted to explore spirituality if they see people living out a genuine faith or spirituality first-hand. Authenticity around faith and spirituality in conversations is particularly important, as having conversations with people (33%) is a key factor in leading individuals to consider faith or spiritual matters. It's important, however, that these conversations are done well, as one of the top repellents to exploring faith and spirituality is engaging in philosophical discussions and debating ideas (38%).

The number one repellent to exploring faith and spirituality is hearing from public figures and celebrities who represent faith or spirituality (55%), highlighting the value of personal connections as the foundation for conversations about faith and spirituality.

Interestingly, this does not hold for the younger generation, who are more open to influencers. Gen Z are the most likely to investigate faith or spirituality if they hear from a representative public figure (62% cf. 44% Gen Y, 42% Gen X, 39% Baby Boomers).

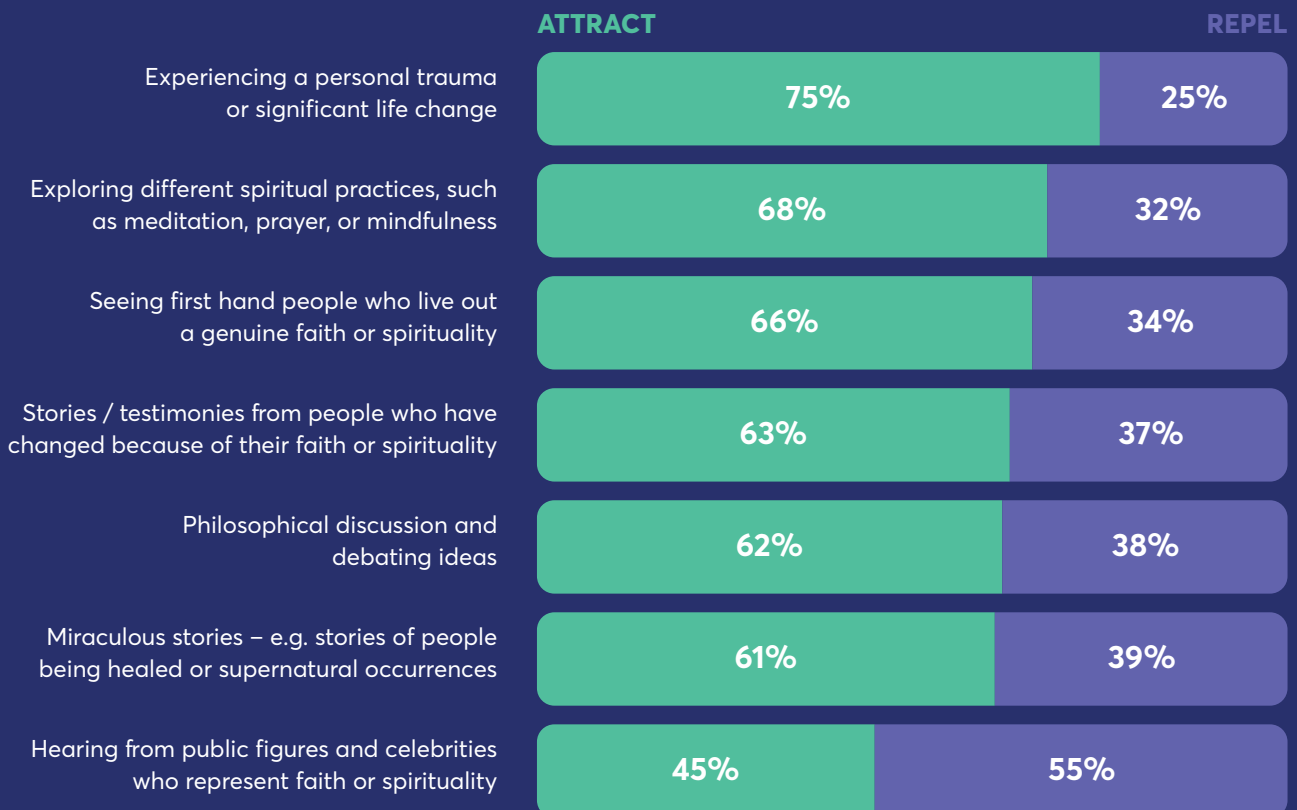
Gen Z is the most likely generation to be attracted to exploring spirituality further because of stories or testimonies from people who have changed because of their faith or spirituality (75% cf. 66% Gen Y, 61% Gen X, 54% Baby Boomers).

TOP ATTRACTORS BY GENERATION

Strongly/somewhat/slightly attract

Gen Z	Gen Y	Gen X	Baby Boomers
Experiencing a personal trauma or significant life change (79%)	Experiencing a personal trauma or significant life change (77%)	Experiencing a personal trauma or significant life change (75%)	Experiencing a personal trauma or significant life change (69%)
Exploring different spiritual practices, such as meditation, prayer, or mindfulness (76%)	Exploring different spiritual practices, such as meditation, prayer, or mindfulness (73%)	Exploring different spiritual practices, such as meditation, prayer, or mindfulness (69%)	Seeing first hand people who live out a genuine faith or spirituality (62%)
Stories / testimonies from people who have changed because of their faith or spirituality (75%)	Philosophical discussion and debating ideas (70%)	Seeing first hand people who live out a genuine faith or spirituality (66%)	Exploring different spiritual practices, such as meditation, prayer, or mindfulness (58%)

TO WHAT EXTENT WOULD THE FOLLOWING ATTRACT OR REPEL YOU FROM INVESTIGATING FAITH AND/OR SPIRITUALITY FURTHER?



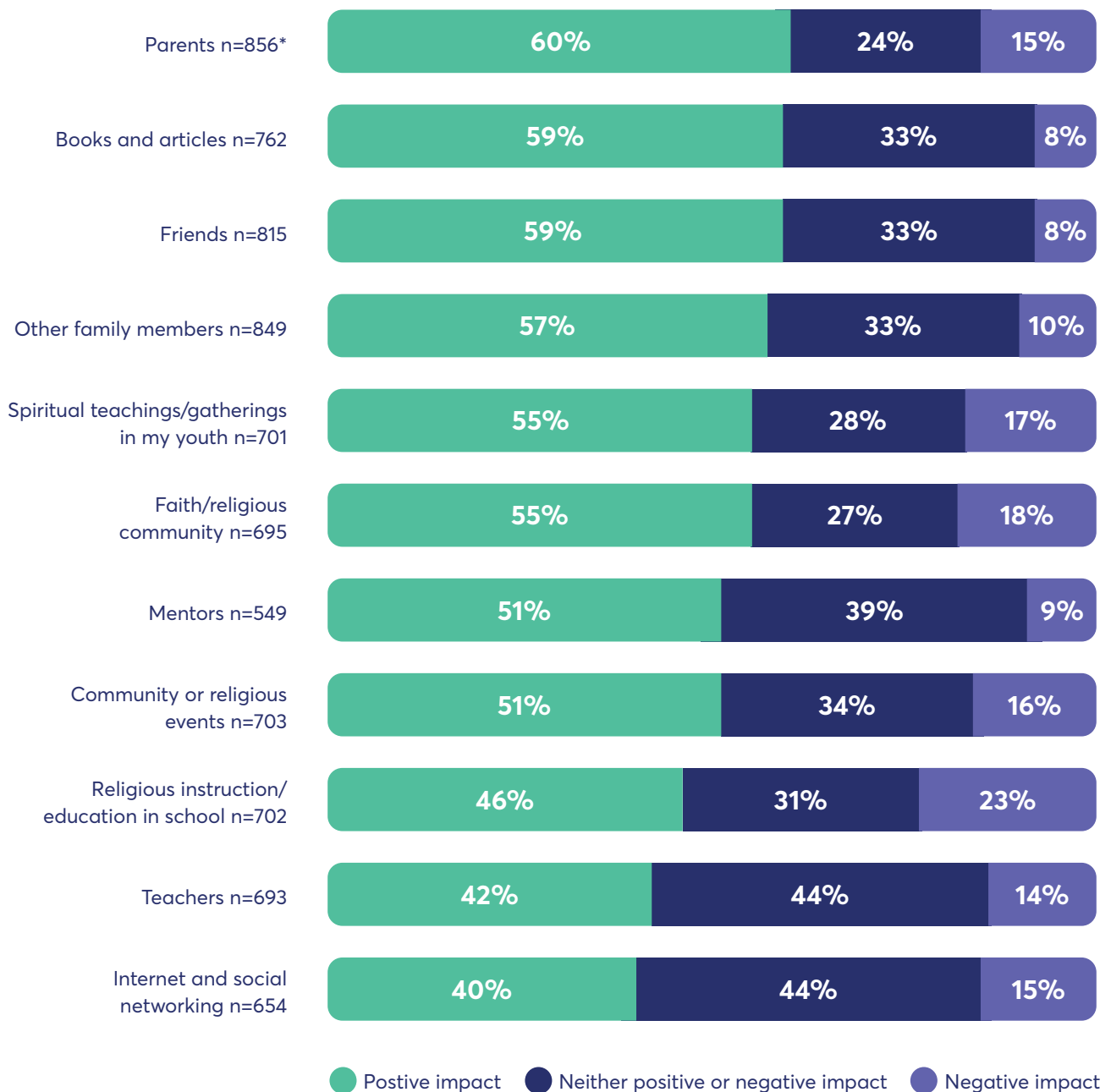


Parents and family are important in nurturing spiritual wellbeing

Close relationships are not only important in forming ideas around spirituality, but they also help to support and nurture spiritual wellbeing. Two in five participants (39%) turn to their family at least weekly for help with their faith or spirituality, while 34% turn to friends. Those who have been impacted by their parents in this area of life are more likely to describe their parents as having a positive (60%) rather than negative (15%) influence on the development of their spiritual or religious practices.

The areas that are most likely to impact an individual's spiritual development negatively are religious instruction or education in schools (23%), faith or religious communities (18%), and spiritual teachings and gatherings in their youth (17%). Whilst people are more likely to have had positive experiences in these areas, it's critical to understand where negative experiences are most likely to emerge.

TO WHAT EXTENT HAVE THE FOLLOWING POSITIVELY OR NEGATIVELY IMPACTED THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR SPIRITUAL AND/OR RELIGIOUS PRACTICES OVERALL?



*n= refers to the number of respondents for this option

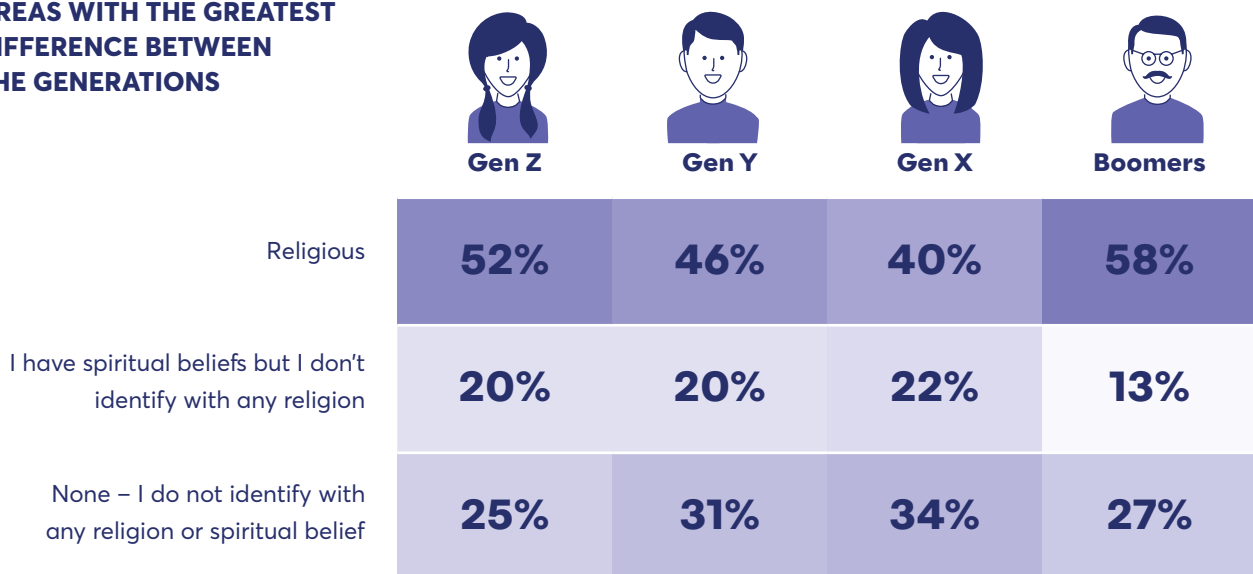
Religion in Aotearoa New Zealand

Almost half of participants (49%) practice or identify with a religion. This includes Christianity (39%), Hinduism (3%), Māori spirituality, beliefs, and philosophies (2%), Buddhism (2%), Islam (2%), Sikhism (1%), and Judaism (0.2%). A further 19% have spiritual beliefs but don't identify with any religion, and 30% don't identify with any religion or spiritual belief at all.

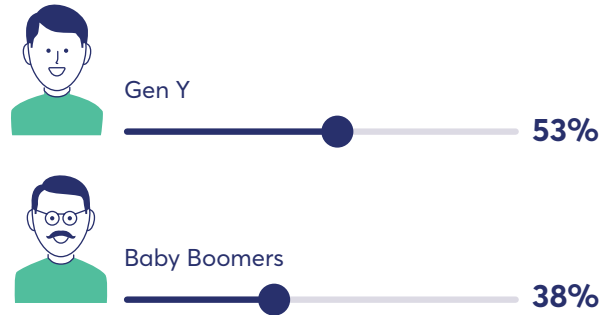
Those with Asian ethnicity (74%) and Pacific Peoples (70%) are more likely than Māori (46%) or Pākehā (39%) to be religious.

Christianity is the most common religious identity for all generations; however, this is most evident for Baby Boomers (50%). While Gen X (34%) and Gen Y (31%) are less likely to identify with Christianity, Gen Z pick the trend back up (39%). In fact, Gen Z's openness to spirituality or religion is seen in their being the least likely to identify with no religion or spirituality, followed closely by Baby Boomers.

AREAS WITH THE GREATEST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE GENERATIONS



Religious Gen Ys are the most likely to be extremely or often engaged in the practice of their religion



Participation in religious practice

Of those who identify with or practice a religion, just under half (46%) are extremely or often engaged in the practice of their religion. A further 40% sometimes or rarely engage in the practice of their religion, while 15% describe themselves as not at all engaged in practising their religion. Of those who are religious, two in five (45%) regularly attend a place of worship in person at least monthly, while 26% attend online at least monthly.

While Baby Boomers are most likely to identify as religious, they are least likely to be extremely or often engaged in the practice of their religion. Religious Gen Ys, however, are the most engaged (53% Gen Y cf. 48% Gen Z, 46% Gen X, 38% Baby Boomers).





The Faith and Belief report raises a range of interesting questions. The report asks participants whether given “the right circumstances” and “evidence” they would be open to changing their spiritual/religious beliefs or practices. 13% said they were extremely or significantly open to doing so. This leads us to consider what these circumstances and evidence might be.

The report raises other questions that require deep thought. Why are people of Asian ethnicity (74%) and Pacific Peoples (70%) more likely to be religious than Māori (46%) and Pākehā (39%) in 2023? Why are religious Gen Ys more often engaged than others in the practice of their religion? Why do people seem to be more positive than negative towards religion overall?

In interpreting the data in this report, one cannot ignore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and other significant social changes within Aotearoa New Zealand. The report will assist the church with the missional challenge of how to speak and live out the gospel in a forever-evolving world.



Chris Sola
Pastor, The Dream Centre NZ



Lui Ponifasio
Pastor, LifeChurch Manurewa



WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS DESCRIBES YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT RELIGION?

Please select all that apply

Religion provides hope for people

56%

Religion provides a community for people

49%

I think religion has its place in society

45%

Religion helps people connect with life and existence outside of the physical realm

30%

Religion is a tool for control and manipulation

26%

Religion promotes war and violence

22%

Religion makes the world a better place

22%

Religion doesn't align with my scientific and rational, 'evidence-based' approach to life

21%

Religion is integral to authentic human life

16%

I think that religion is a crutch for the weak to lean on

15%

I think that religions are outdated and traditional approaches to life

15%

Religion provides an avenue for altruism

11%

There is no spiritual realm

9%

Religions are for uneducated people

5%

There is continuity in religious identity

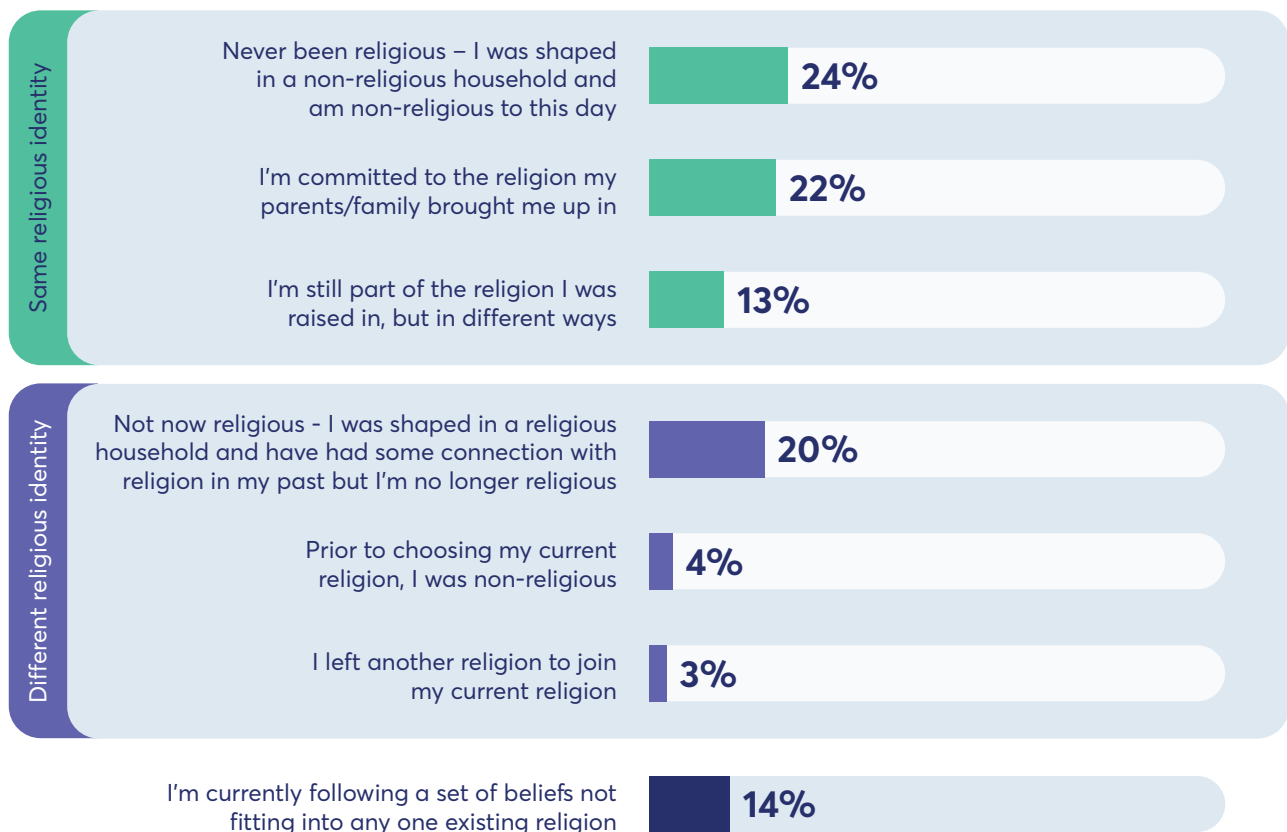
The younger years are formative for developing religious and spiritual identity. This is seen through the three in five participants (60%) who have kept the religious identity with which they grew up. One in four (27%), however, have changed their religious identity, including those who were shaped in a religious household but are no longer religious (20%), those who were previously non-religious but now identify with a religion (4%), and those who left one religion to join a different one (3%). Just 14% follow a set of beliefs that do not fit into any one existing religion.

Participants of Asian ethnicity are the most likely to remain committed to the religion in which their parents brought them up (49% cf. 41% Pacific Peoples, 20% Māori, 15% Pākehā).

The greatest proportion of participants have maintained their existing religious identity to some extent. Just 13% describe themselves as extremely or significantly open to changing their current spiritual/religious beliefs or practices if given the right circumstances and evidence. Half (49%), however, are not at all open, rising slightly from 2018 (46%).

Younger generations have a reputation for being more flexible and open to new ideas, and this is true for Gen Z, who are the most likely to be extremely or significantly open to changing their current spiritual or religious beliefs (22% Gen Z cf. 17% Gen Y, 11% Gen X, 6% Baby Boomers).

Please indicate which of the following best describes your current religious status.

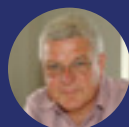




This report is a significant tool in the hands of people seeking to understand the religious and spiritual state of Aotearoa New Zealand society. We should be enormously grateful to the Wilberforce Foundation for making it available. It is crucial to interpret it carefully. It is not a map that tells the church how to convert the people of Aotearoa New Zealand. It is a record of the broad religious, spiritual and attitudinal landscape of our society. We may see in it the broad contours of the religious and irreligious culture around us and the extent to which a Christian heritage remains. But if this survey is to assist the Christian community, we will need to think carefully about the connection between the first part of the survey, on well-being and values, and the later parts, on spirituality, religion, and Christianity.

In some ways, none of the findings is strikingly new. Aotearoa New Zealand sits alongside many affluent

Western societies in their preoccupation with well-being and limited concern for problems in the wider world until they threaten to disturb that well-being. But while these points have been made by many social commentators, rarely have they been tightly integrated with spiritual and religious values. And I think we need to reflect carefully. We need to keep a careful watch on reactions to the church. We need to reflect on the proportion of people who were raised in the church and have left it. While they may be interested in spirituality, they will be selective in terms of where it is received. This data enables us to rethink our priorities, but the challenge then is how we should change our actions.



Peter Lineham

Professor Emeritus of History,
Massey University



Karaitiana, Ihu me te hāhi

Christianity, Jesus, and the church

There is warmth towards Christianity

People living in Aotearoa New Zealand are warm towards Christianity. This comes from three in ten (31%) who consider themselves to be Christian, and a further 26% who are warm towards Christianity, aligning to some extent with its claims or values. This proportion who consider themselves a Christian, or who are warm towards Christianity, has remained unchanged since 2018 (31% and 26% respectively).

Those who feel neutral towards Christianity, believing churches and Christianity should have religious freedoms but not wanting to be involved, has also remained consistent since 2018 (13% 2023 cf. 12% 2018). Three in ten participants (30%), however, are cool towards Christianity – from feeling like Christianity is not for them to being passionately opposed.

The younger generations are slightly more likely than their older counterparts to be warm towards Christianity (30% Gen Z, 28% Gen Y cf. 24% Gen X, 25% Baby Boomers).

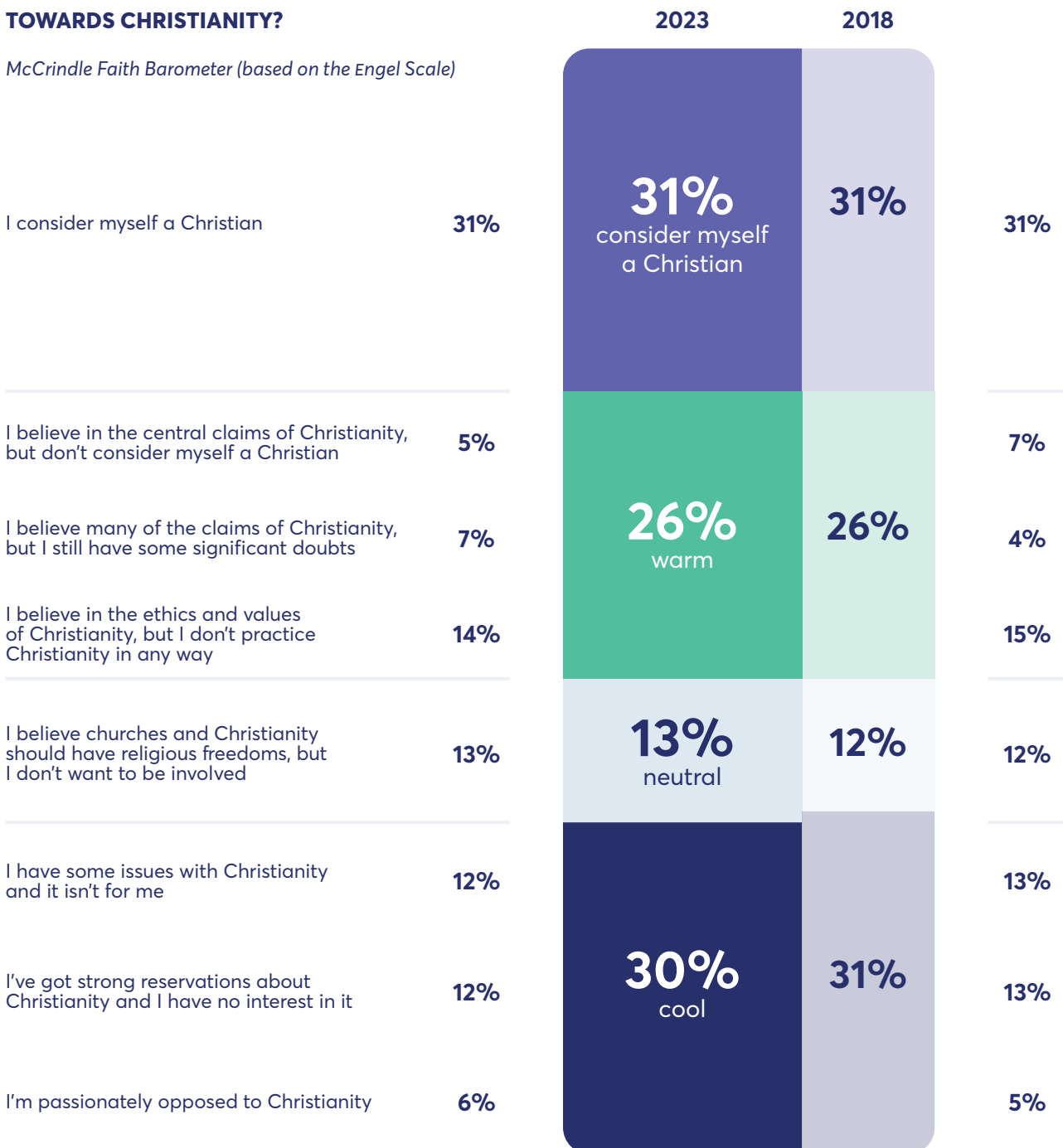
” When I look at Christianity, I really like the idea of it. I think that the core values are really good. Treat others how you want to be treated and be nice to your neighbour. **Gen Z**

” The core aspects I think are really good, but then the specifics are not so great... people do a lot of good with it and then some people do terrible things with it. **Gen Y**



WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES YOUR CURRENT ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHRISTIANITY?

McCrimdle Faith Barometer (based on the Engel Scale)





Jesus and Christians are perceived positively

Many people living in Aotearoa New Zealand know about Jesus, can describe who they think he is, and think highly of him. More than nine in ten participants (96%) have some degree of familiarity with his life, including 41% who say they know a significant amount about it. Those who are familiar with Jesus are most likely to describe him as the Son of God (56%), followed by a source of inspiration and guidance for many people around the world (38%), or a wise teacher and prophet (33%).

Those familiar with Jesus also describe him in a positive light, using words such as loving (57%), caring (54%), kind (51%), and faithful (50%). Negative sentiments towards Jesus are held by less than one in ten participants. The most common negative words used to describe him are old-fashioned (7%), divisive (7%), opinionated (6%), or judgemental (6%).

JESUS IS DESCRIBED AS

Top five responses | Those who have heard of Jesus n=972

Loving



Caring



Kind



Faithful



Honest



Nine in ten know a Christian

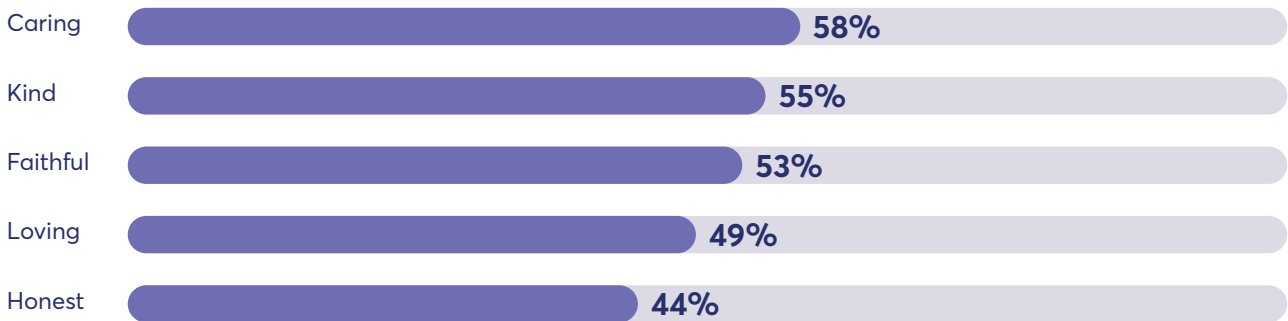
Nine in ten respondents (91%) know at least one person who is a Christian, which has remained consistent since 2018 (91%). The proportion who know more than ten Christians, however, has grown (50% cf. 42% 2018). The most likely way people have encountered Christians is through a friend or family member who is Christian (63%), at a church or religious gathering (43%), or at a community event or social group (29%). People are less likely to engage with Christians through volunteer work/community service (18%), or online communities or social media (12%).

Those who know a Christian are likely to describe them as caring (58%), kind (55%), faithful (53%), and loving (49%), while some associate more negative perceptions with the Christians they know (21% opinionated, 21% judgemental, 17% old-fashioned, 17% hypocritical).

Gen Y are more likely than other generations to associate Christians they know with negative sentiments. They are the most likely to describe Christians as judgemental, while their younger counterparts in Gen Z are least likely to describe Christians in this way (14% Gen Z cf. 27% Gen Y, 23% Gen X, 20% Baby Boomers).

CHRISTIANS ARE DESCRIBED AS

Top five responses | Those who know a Christian n=920



Invitations are important for people to consider attending church

The top reason for someone to attend a Christian church service or event is if they were invited to a special event like a wedding, funeral, or christening (48%). Others would be motivated to attend for special occasions such as Christmas or Easter (28%). The power of an invitation is evident, with 25% considering attending if a family member

or friend invited them to an event, or for the opportunity to help in the community (24%).

Gen Z are the most likely to be open to attending if they were invited to a weekend service by a family member or friend (27% Gen Z cf. 22% Gen Y, 15% Gen X, 16% Baby Boomers).

Churches are perceived as having a positive impact on society

One in three people living in Aotearoa New Zealand are extremely or very aware of the churches near them (37%). They are more likely to describe the impact of the churches near them as positive (38%) rather than negative (6%). Three in ten (30%), however, believe the impact of local churches is neither positive nor negative, and 26% don't know enough to answer. Some, though, believe churches can promote harmful perspectives through their beliefs and actions.

Gen Z have the greatest awareness of the churches near them, and, reflective of their more open attitude toward faith and spirituality, half of Gen Z (50%) believe the churches near them have had a positive impact.

” Preaching intolerance of others. **Baby Boomer**

” They push their beliefs and agenda onto the community. **Gen Z**

GEN Z HAVE THE GREATEST AWARENESS AND THE MOST POSITIVE PERSPECTIVE ON THE CHURCHES NEAR THEM



Gen Z



Gen Y



Gen X



Boomers

	Gen Z	Gen Y	Gen X	Boomers
Awareness of churches nearby (Extremely/very aware)	47%	35%	29%	41%
Positive impact of churches nearby (Extremely/somewhat/slightly positive)	50%	34%	35%	38%



Churches are valued for supporting local communities

The work of churches is noticed and valued across Aotearoa New Zealand, particularly in key community service areas. The areas where the work of churches was least valued was in their response to climate change (31%) and teaching on faith and spirituality (24%). Pacific Peoples (64%), those of Asian ethnicity (60%), and Māori (50%) are more likely than Pākehā (37%) to value the work of the church in responding to climate change.

Gen Z are more likely than other generations to highly or somewhat value the work of churches and Christian organisations in responding to climate change (58% cf. 43% Gen Y, 43% Gen X, 39% Baby Boomers).

” [Churches in my area are] taking care of some social issues, and providing a place for folk to gather together. **Baby Boomer**

THE AREAS IN WHICH PARTICIPANTS MOST VALUE THE WORK OF THE CHURCH INCLUDE

(Highly/somewhat value)



72%

Offering financial assistance/
food relief programs



72%

Looking after people
who are homeless



72%

Providing disaster
relief assistance



71%

Providing a place
for community



68%

Providing aged
care facilities



This report is crucial for reflecting on our life as a faith community. 31% of respondents consider themselves Christians. A further 26% are warm toward Christianity, aligning to some extent with Christian claims and/or values. There are many in our society who will be looking to the church to live in a way that is consistent with our identity. These statistics should encourage us to do so.

The report also highlights a 96% level of familiarity with Jesus' life. People feel positively toward Jesus in Aotearoa New Zealand, describing him as loving, caring, kind, and faithful. This should further encourage us to consider the values that people in this country hold most dear and the need for us to reflect who Jesus is, not just as individuals but also as Christian communities.

The first part of the report notes that 75% of respondents are attracted to investigating faith or spirituality further if they were to experience a personal trauma or a significant life change. This

shows how important it is in any church context to have a trauma-informed framework. If we are called to build the kingdom of God, it is essential to shed light on those sufferings that persist with long-term consequences, harming children, young people, and adults without distinction.

The fact that the most likely way people have encountered Christianity is through a friend or family member who is Christian (63%) shows how Christians, in their daily lives, need to respond to and support those who are affected by trauma and are trying to find meaning in that experience. Trauma is not solely a topic for psychologists; it is also a challenge for any Christian in terms of how to talk about God, faith, and hope with someone who is suffering or has suffered from trauma.



Rocío Figueroa
Theologian, Catholic
Theological College



The report paints a picture of two worlds struggling to connect across a hazy divide. The church is making genuine and well-received efforts to relieve suffering in our wider community, while a surprisingly youthful percentage express warmth toward Christianity generally and Jesus specifically, and an openness to engage. Both worlds share similar longings for a hope-filled future, and value relationships with family and friends. It seems they also share a lack of clarity around what a hope-filled future constitutes. This lack of clarity no doubt contributes to the view that Christians are lacking in transparency and congruence with their Christian values.

The challenge for the church is to reconnect with the good news of our own story and regain the congruence, transparency, and inclusive hospitality people respond to. All but one of the barriers to engagement with Christianity are

symptomatic of a poorly embodied gospel. It seems people are not rejecting Jesus or Christianity, but our weak and dissonant discipleship.

The good news for the church is that 91% of respondents know at least one Christian, and a third are warm to Christianity! The challenge is that people look to their Christian relatives and friends as first points of connection, as sources of what it means to nurture their spirituality and follow Christ in Aotearoa New Zealand today. In other words, it behoves each and every one of us who say we follow Christ to nurture a clear, credible, and embodied discipleship within our own families and communities. And it behoves the church to support her members to do just that.



Karen Kemp
Senior Coach/Lecturer, Centre
for Church Leadership

How churches relate to society can improve

While the church is broadly seen as having a positive impact in Aotearoa New Zealand, people are looking to Christians to work on some critical areas. Some would like to see the church improve in its transparency and be more upfront and clear about its work, mission, and finances. Others would like to see the church find a helpful balance between being authentic to its values and traditions and considering how to relate to society in the contemporary age.

*"I'd like some transparency from the churches. If they are the upstanding members of society, and the community as they claim to be, why aren't they contributing to the community?" **Gen Z***

*"I would bring Christianity into the modern world, hold on to those values and beliefs, but increase your tolerance and understanding of some of the other social issues that are going on, because conversely, I see the good that Christianity is doing in the community as well." **Baby Boomer***

When participants were asked what aspects of Christianity they find problematic or challenging, various themes emerged. These barriers highlight areas for the church to be attentive to in its engagement with Aotearoa New Zealand society.

For some participants, Christian beliefs and values simply do not align with their own. Many participants, however, point to a significant mismatch between Christian beliefs and values and how they see Christians living these out in the world.

*"I disagree with conservative social views e.g. condemnation of sex before marriage / divorce / homosexuality." **Gen Z***

*"[The elements of Christianity I find challenging are] that they believe their God is the only God." **Gen Y***

*"There are lovely people who are Christians. Unfortunately, I have met a few who are hypocritical and try to shove religion down your throat. I prefer humans who have great morals, and are kind, caring and just believe in Karma and good vibes. They are my people." **Gen X***

For those who desire to be a help to others in the area of faith and spirituality, it is important to continue to listen to these voices – both to the real challenges that are impacting on this aspect of life today and to the profound place that it still holds for the people of Aotearoa New Zealand.

KEY BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT WITH CHRISTIANITY

1

Christian beliefs

2

Intolerance

3

Judgementalism

4

Behaviour & morals

5

Hypocrisy

6

Unwelcome evangelism



Research design

The Faith and Belief report is the collation of quantitative and qualitative data gained through an online survey of 1,009 people aged 18-77 who live in Aotearoa New Zealand, representative by age, gender, and location, with a representative sample of those from a Māori and Pasifika background. The survey was in field from the 19th May – 2nd June 2023.

In addition to the survey, four focus groups were conducted with people from Aotearoa New Zealand, similarly representing an array of cultural and religious backgrounds from across the country. Each group had between nine and ten participants. The groups each represented one generational cohort, namely Gen Z (aged 18-28), Gen Y (aged 29-43), Gen X (aged 44-58), and Baby Boomers (aged 59-77). The focus groups were conducted on the 5th and 6th July 2023.

Data labels on the graphs in this report have been rounded for simplicity. Some graphs may, therefore, sum to 99% or 101%. Any calculations where two data points have been added are based on raw data (not the rounded data labels on the graph), which have been rounded once combined.

To see the detailed results and all of the questions asked in the study, please refer to the Faith and Belief comprehensive report, which can be downloaded through the Faith and Belief website via this QR code:

<https://faithandbeliefstudynz.org/>



Key demographics

What is your gender?

Female



Male



What is your age?

Gen Z (18-28)



Gen Y (29-43)



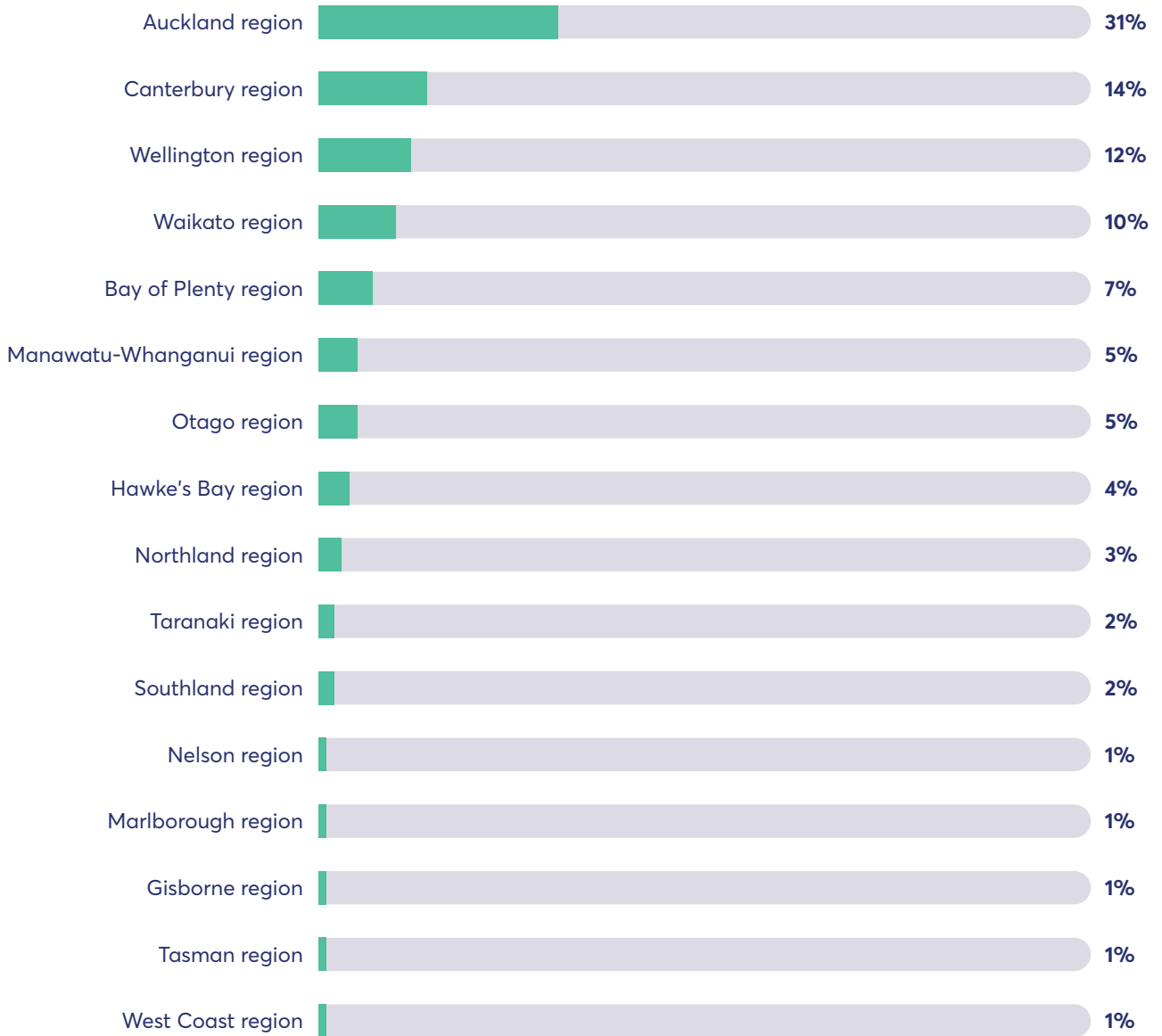
Gen X (44-58)



Baby Boomers (59-77)



Where do you usually live?



Which of the following ethnicities do you identify with?

Please select all that apply.

