

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Religion and Networking

Associate Professor Rosemary Leonard from the Social Justice Social Change Research Centre and Associate Professor Richard Ollerton from the School of Computing and Mathematics are collaborating with partner investigator Dr John Bellamy from NCLS Research to explore differences in social networking patterns amongst different religious denominations through an ARC Linkage Grant.

'In Australia, the 20% of people who attend church are assumed to be privileged in terms of social capital' says Associate Professor Leonard. 'Social capital is a resource that we create when we are part of a well-functioning group or community. We can use this resource to facilitate group projects or to help each other in times of difficulty. The social capital benefits for church-goers are assumed, but the benefits are not clear either for church congregations as a whole or for the wider society. This project aims to explore the link between belonging to a church and maximising social capital, for church congregations and for the wider community. How these benefits or alternatively costs accrue for groups and society because of different patterns or profiles for different religious denominations will also be explored.'

Working closely with research partners NCLS Research, the team will survey church attendees to identify factors such as religious denomination, church attendance patterns, their activities in the church and participation in the community. The surveys and analysis will identify different ways in which social capital can be generated in the church and the wider community; the ways that formal and informal connections can be used by groups to be inclusive or exclusive; and how social capital can be generated in the church and the wider community; the ways that formal and informal connections can



be used by groups to be inclusive or exclusive; and how social capital can help bridge or exacerbate gaps in social divides such as ethnicity or education level.

This project will contribute to strengthening Australia's social and economic fabric by providing an understanding of key concepts of social capital and how social capital can transform small congregational and community activities into wider benefits for the welfare and wellbeing of Australians.

Project Title: Investing and Cashing in Social Capital: Using denominational differences among Christian churches to identify the costs and benefits of different network patterns

Funding has been set at: \$125,000 ARC contribution and \$178,059 in-kind partner contribution

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