

The Spiritual Health of Students in Lutheran Schools

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Christian Research Association

- Formed in 1985 to conduct research for churches and their agencies of all denominations
- On the nature of faith in the Australian context

Senior Members:

ACCESS Ministries

Anglican Diocese of Brisbane

Anglican Diocese of Melbourne

Baptists of Victoria

Catholic Bishops Conference

Converge International

Lutheran Church, Australia

Prahran Mission

Salvation Army

Seventh-day Adventists

Uniting Church, Synods of Victoria and NSW



Activities

- Major research projects of interest to all parts of the church
- Contracted research
- 'Clearing house' for research related to faith in the Australian context through *'Pointers'*

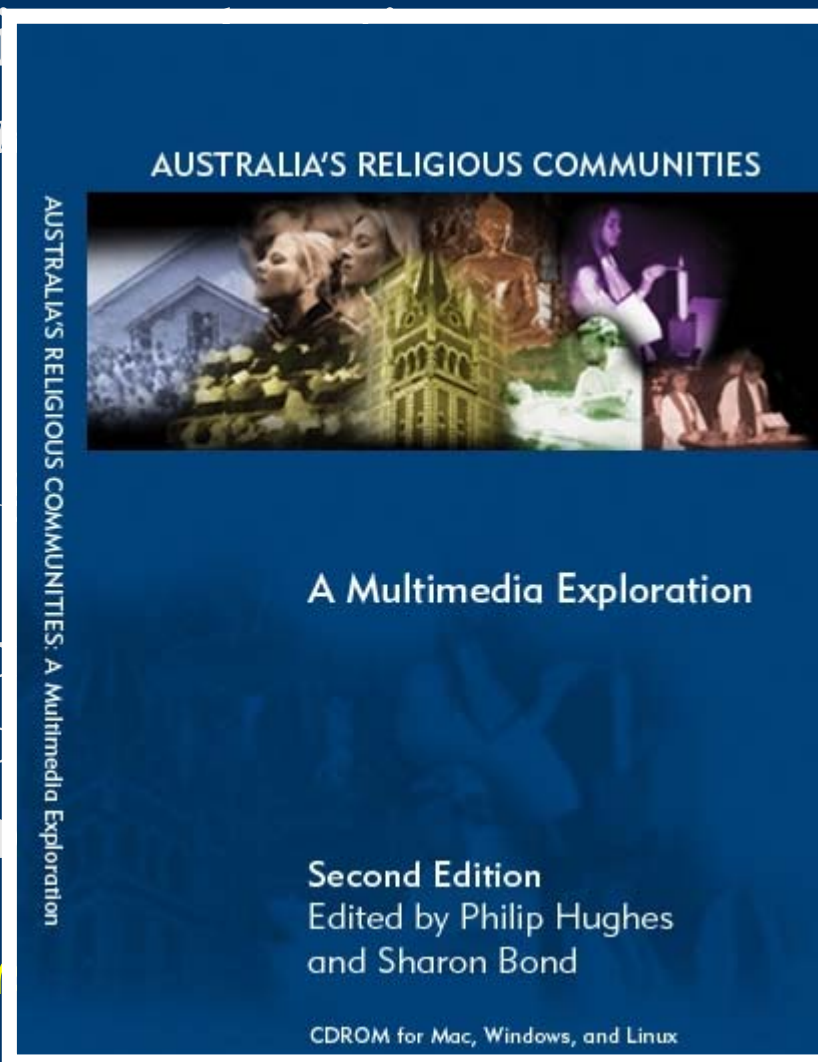
Major product: *Australian Religious Communities: A Multimedia Exploration – Encyclopedia of 174 religious organisations.*

Used everywhere from Federal Parliamentary library, to universities, secondary schools to primary schools.

What we offer schools ...

- Resources in teaching religion
 - *Australia's Religious Communities*
 - *Pointers*
 - Other books
- Surveys
 - For exploring and monitoring students' lives
 - Checking on the impact on parents
 - Indications of wellbeing – for parents
- Census reports for local schools

Many schools have become members and all materials., and discount on s

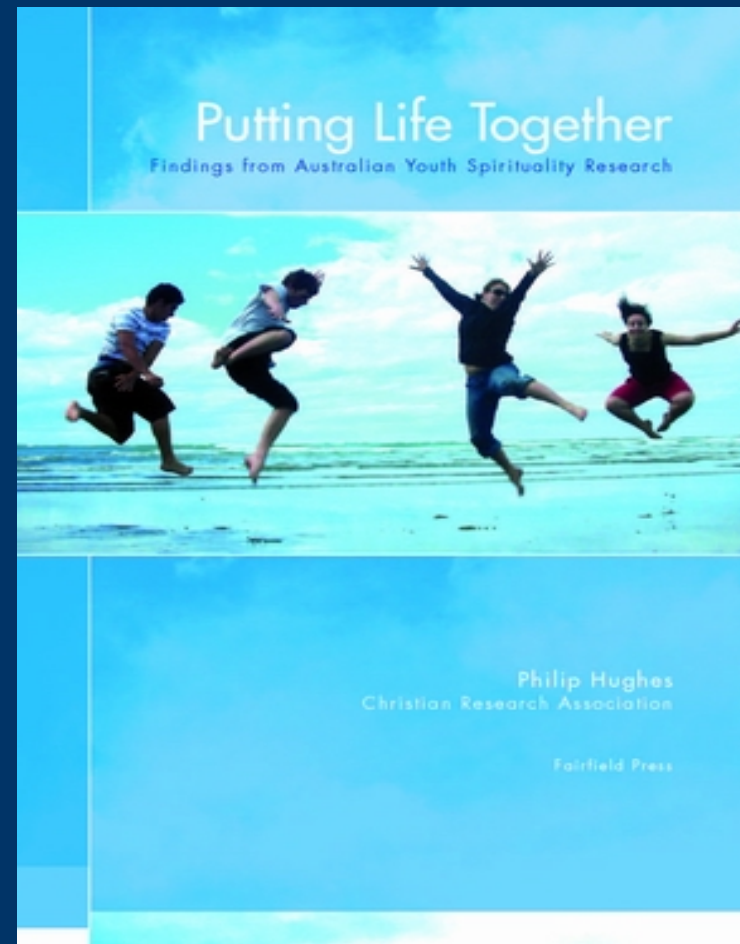


“Putting Life Together”

Follow up today's
presentation in this book.

Special price:
\$30

(Usually \$35 plus postage)



Have gathered because we share the conviction that the Church exists to proclaim its faith in word and deed

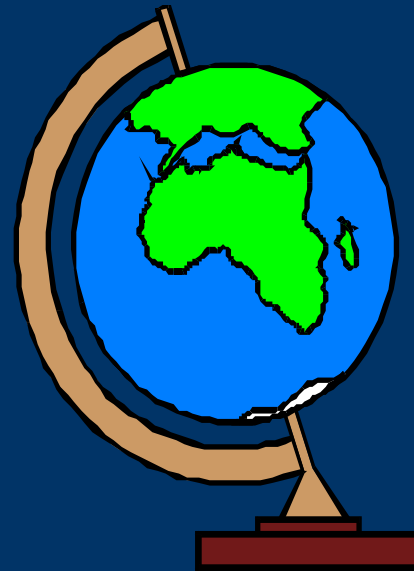
- Command left with disciples
 - Go into all the world ... to make disciples
- Greatest challenge for fulfilment
 - Our own homes and communities

...and to the next
generation of
young people



Human challenge

- To prepare the world to hand on to the next generation
- To prepare the next generation to live well in that world



Much greater challenge than in the past

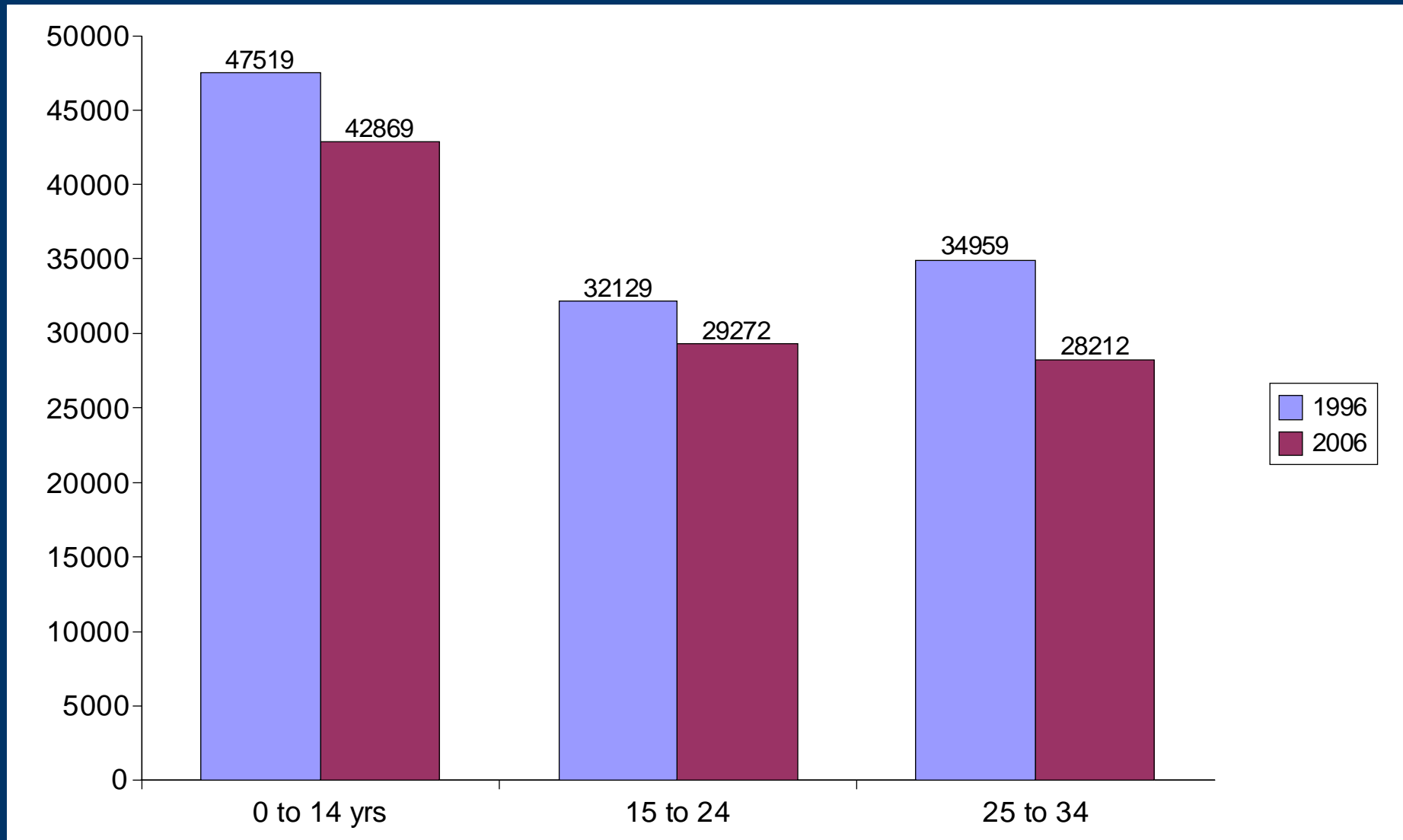
- In NT times and much of history decisions of faith made by the father
 - Wife, children and servants followed
- It meant simply passing on own patterns of life
 - Own beliefs
 - Own practices
 - Own patterns of relationships and ways of life

Today, the parents cannot simply pass their faith onto their children

The models of teaching and socialisation young people into the community of faith are no longer working well

- Sunday Schools are rapidly disappearing
 - Youth groups are struggling
 - Religious education is often not taken seriously by the students
 - Young people in general move in and out of the churches
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People Identifying as Lutherans



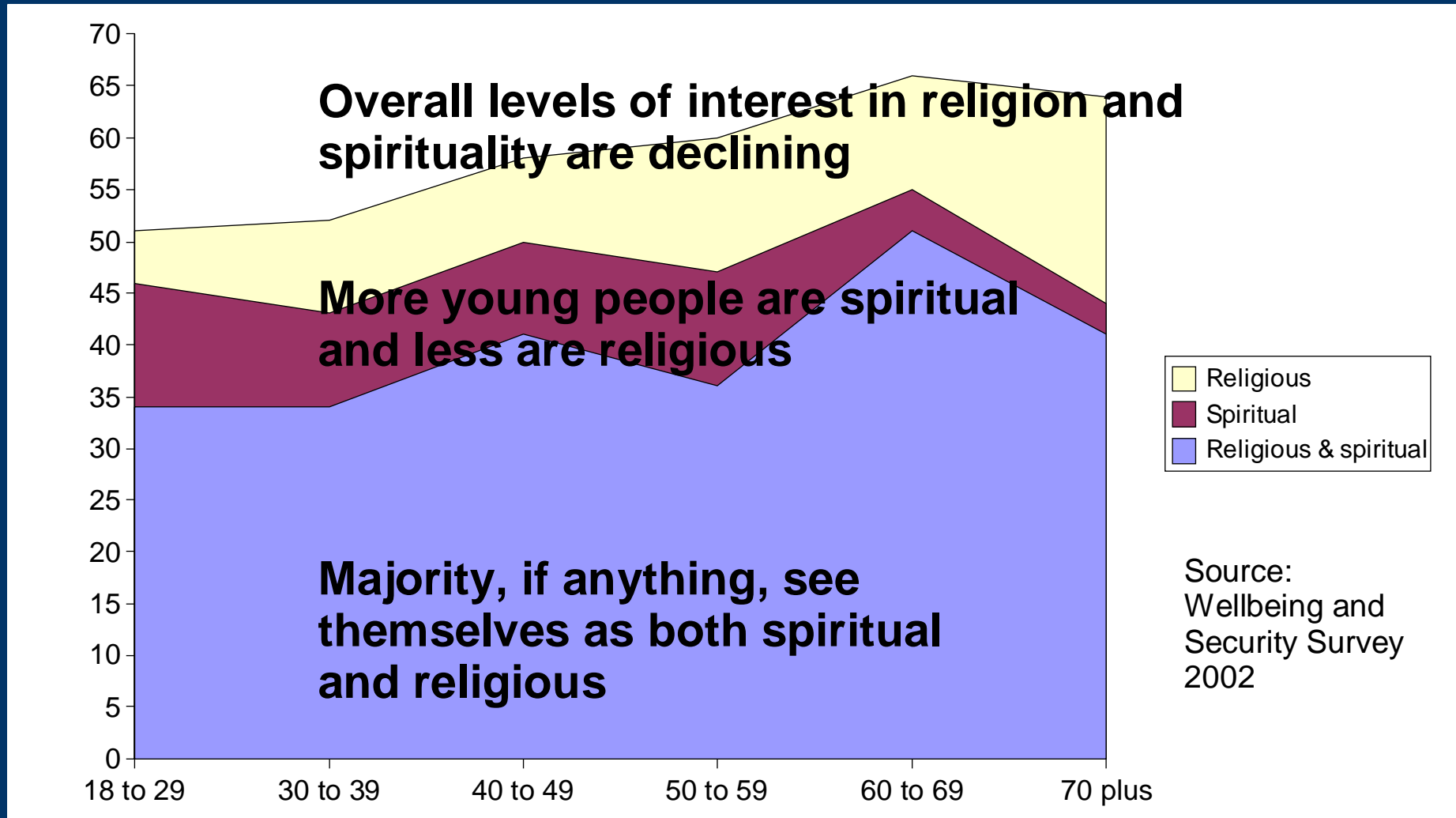
What Numbers Show

- Of those brought up as Lutheran between 5 and 14 in 1996,
 - Lost 2400 in last decade
 - Of those teenagers (15 to 24) identifying as Lutheran in 1996,
 - Lost 4000 in last decade
 - Note these are net losses (some converted, some lost)
 - Much greater in some other denominations
 - Uniting lost 100,000 in this age group in 10 years
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Yet, in comparatively good situation

- 72,141 young people under 25 described as Lutheran in last Census
 - Compared with less than 20,000 each in Salvation Army, Seventh-day Adventists and Churches of Christ
 - 104,221 Baptists
 - 90,819 Pentecostals
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Overall picture of religion and spiritual interest



Socialisation into faith communities is not working because the nature of religious faith has changed

- It was the foundation of a way of life
 - the ground of culture
 - the framework for seeing the world
 - the rules of life
 - owned by a community
 - It is now an optional set of resources
 - which young people feel they can choose if helpful
 - which has benefits and costs
 - that is constructed by the individual
 - and personally owned ... or ignored
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Evidence

- In some Christian schools we asked what they believed
 - the essence of Christian faith
 - their understanding of God
 - A range of views about God
 - some a personal God, some impersonal force
 - quite a few unsure
 - If they believed in God
 - then, a 'butler', or an 'ideal parent'
 - What did the school teach?
 - God asks us to follow, expects obedience
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The study of youth spirituality

- Core study (with ACU and Monash)
 - 80 in-depth first-round interviews
 - 1200 randomly chosen young people surveyed by telephone in 25 min conversation
 - + 400 control group of adults
 - 60 in-depth second-round interviews
 - Additional client-oriented research (CRA alone)
 - Additional 270 interviews
 - over 100 in Lutheran schools
 - Web-based surveys of 5500 young people -
 - Over 1260 in Lutheran schools
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Sponsors

- Catholic Education Commissions
 - Canberra-Goulburn
 - Queensland, Tasmania, Victoria, South Australia
 - Catholic Education Offices
 - Lismore, Parramatta, Sydney, Broken Bay
 - CCES
 - Lutheran Schools
 - Salesians
 - Salvation Army, SdA
 - VCCE
 - Uniting Church, YMCA
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Focus on understanding young people

- How they put life together
 - Their values and goals
 - How they cope with decisions and challenges
 - How they relate to the wider society
 - What part, if any, does religion and/or spirituality play in that process
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Spirituality as relationship

- Not just belief, practice and experience
- Many believe, practice ... but not spiritual
- Essentially about the ways in which we relate ...
- How we relate to God
 - In our commitment to God and to others
 - Ultimately about 'love'
- Revisited work of John Fisher and Leslie Francis and Mandy Robbins on 'spiritual health'

Francis and Robbin's domains of 'spiritual health'

- Personal domain - relationship with self
 - Self-worth, self-esteem
- Communal domain - relationship with others
 - Friends, family, others at school
- Environmental domain – relationship with the environment both social and natural
 - Attitudes to wider society, racism, social justice
 - Attitudes to the natural environment
- Transcendental domain -
 - relationship with that which transcends the physical environment
 - God

Consider How Young People Put Life Together in terms of 5 Basic Relationships

- With the self
- With family and friends
- With wider community
- With the natural environment
- A way of seeing the world and a way of life,
 - For Christians: God and Christian faith

Adelaide Statement of Goals of Education

- SELF:
 - 'have qualities of self-confidence, optimism, high self-esteem, and a commitment to personal excellence ...'
- OTHERS:
 - 'as a basis for their potential life roles as family, community and workforce members'.
- SOCIETY:
 - 'have the capacity to exercise judgement and responsibility in matters of morality, ethics and social justice ... to be active and informed citizens'

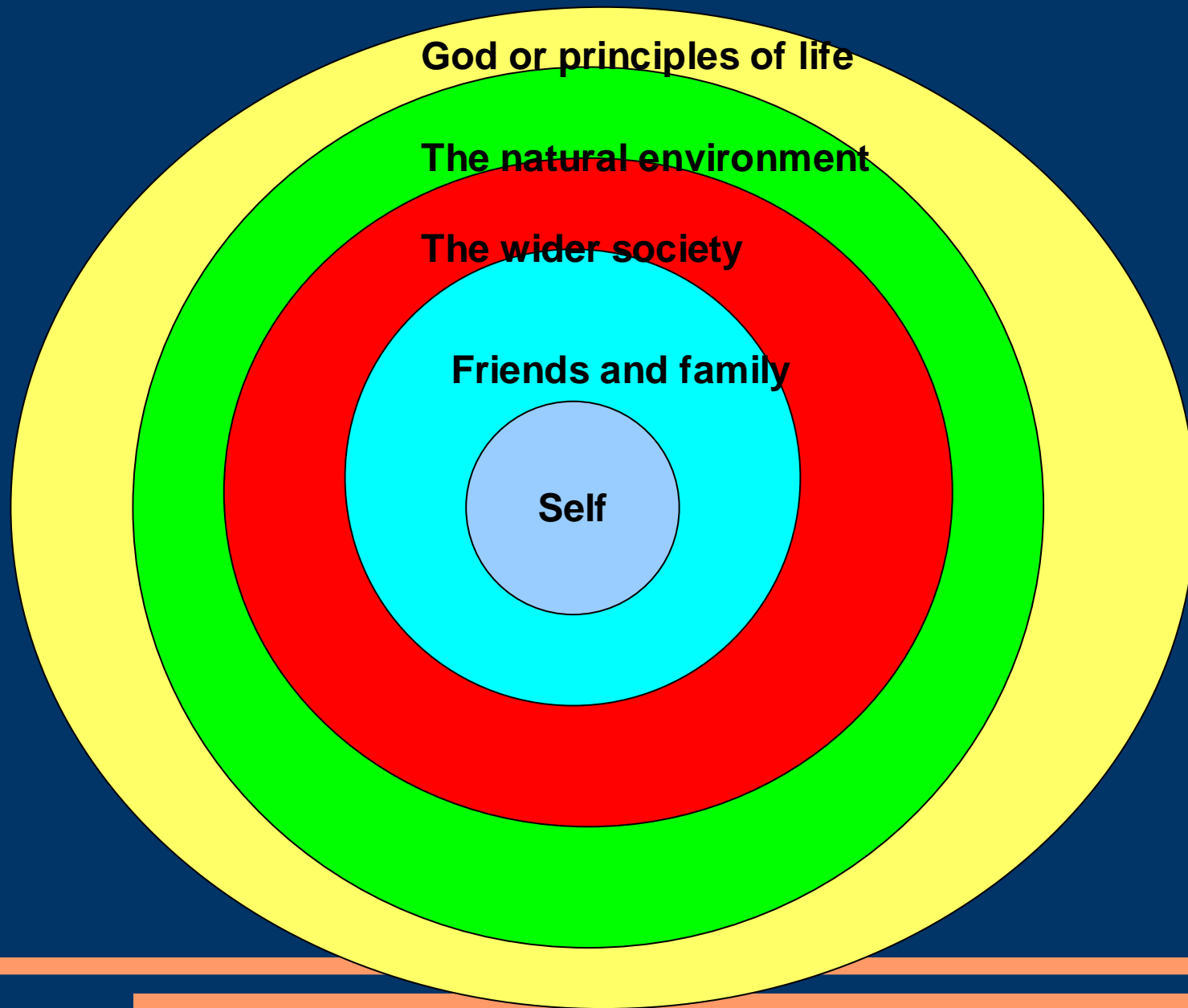
Further parts of the Adelaide Statement

- NATURAL ENVIRONMENT:
 - 'have an understanding of, and concern for, stewardship of the natural environment, and the knowledge and skills to contribute to ecological sustainable development'.
- WAY OF SEEING THE WORLD / WAY OF LIFE:
 - 'the capacity to make sense of their world, to think about how things got to be the way they are, to make rational and informed decisions about their own lives, and to accept responsibility for their own actions'

Summarise results in terms of 5 relationships ... with

- self
 - how they felt about themselves
 - friends and family
 - extent to which they had relationships with close others whom they could rely on
 - wider society
 - attitudes to and participation in the wider society
 - natural environment
 - interest in protecting the natural environment
 - God or a philosophy of life
 - extent to which have beliefs and put them into practice
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5 basic relationships: circles of life



Levels of relationship



Spiritual – commitment in relationship. Love

Ethical – responsibility in relationship. Care

Positive – enjoyment and interest

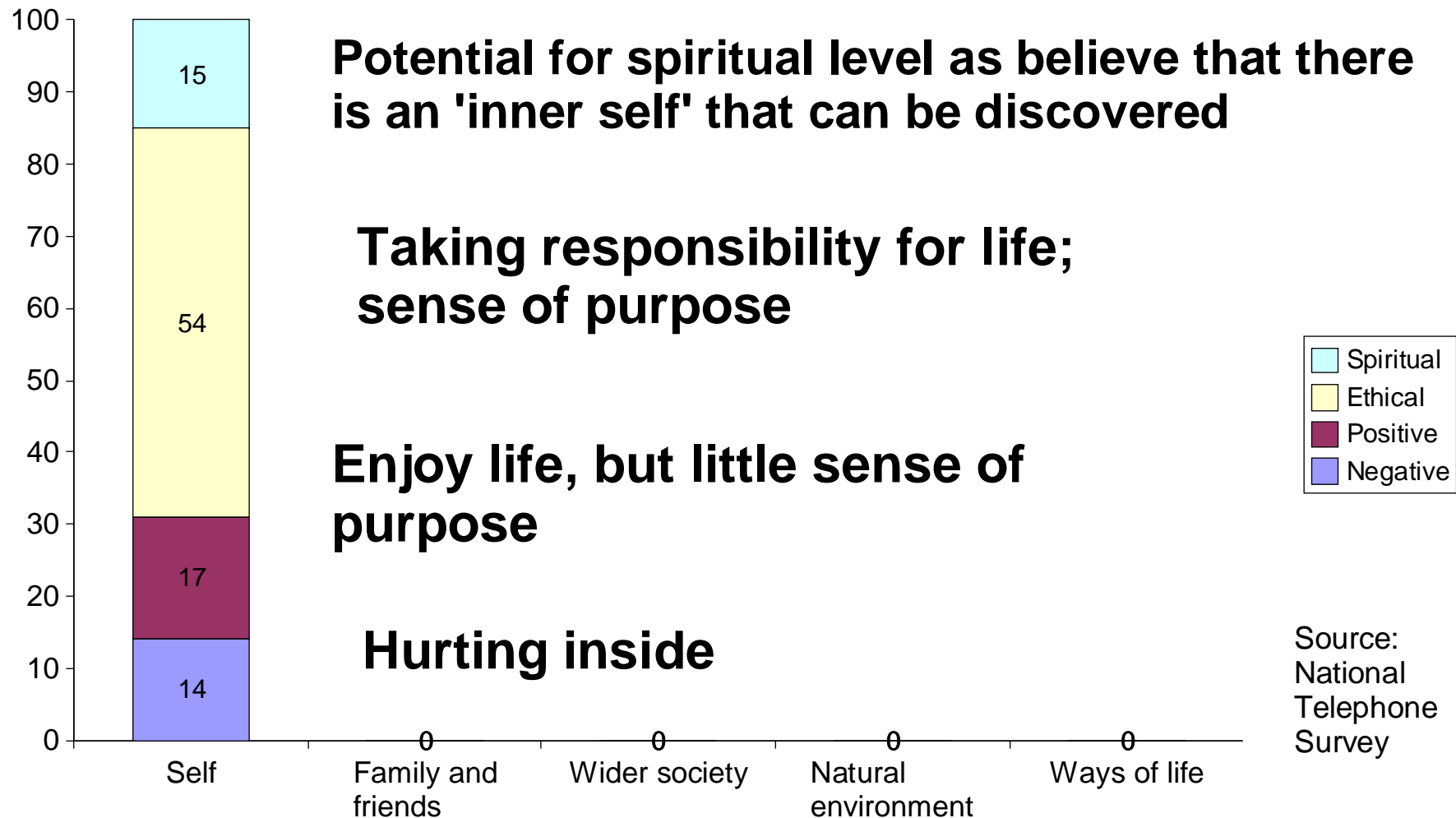
Negative - dissatisfaction, lack of participation, anger and distrust



This grid of relationships and levels of relation provides basis for formal analysis

- Leaves open the question of content
 - Content of these relationships may be given by the content of people's beliefs about self, society and world
 - The content is informed by
 - culture and
 - religious faith
 - No one all encompassing picture of the world
 - No 'meta-narrative'
 - But a common story about personal life
 - A 'midi-narrative'
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The levels of relationship among Lutheran school students



Post-traditional society is a society in which the provision of 'traditions' and roles has become very weak

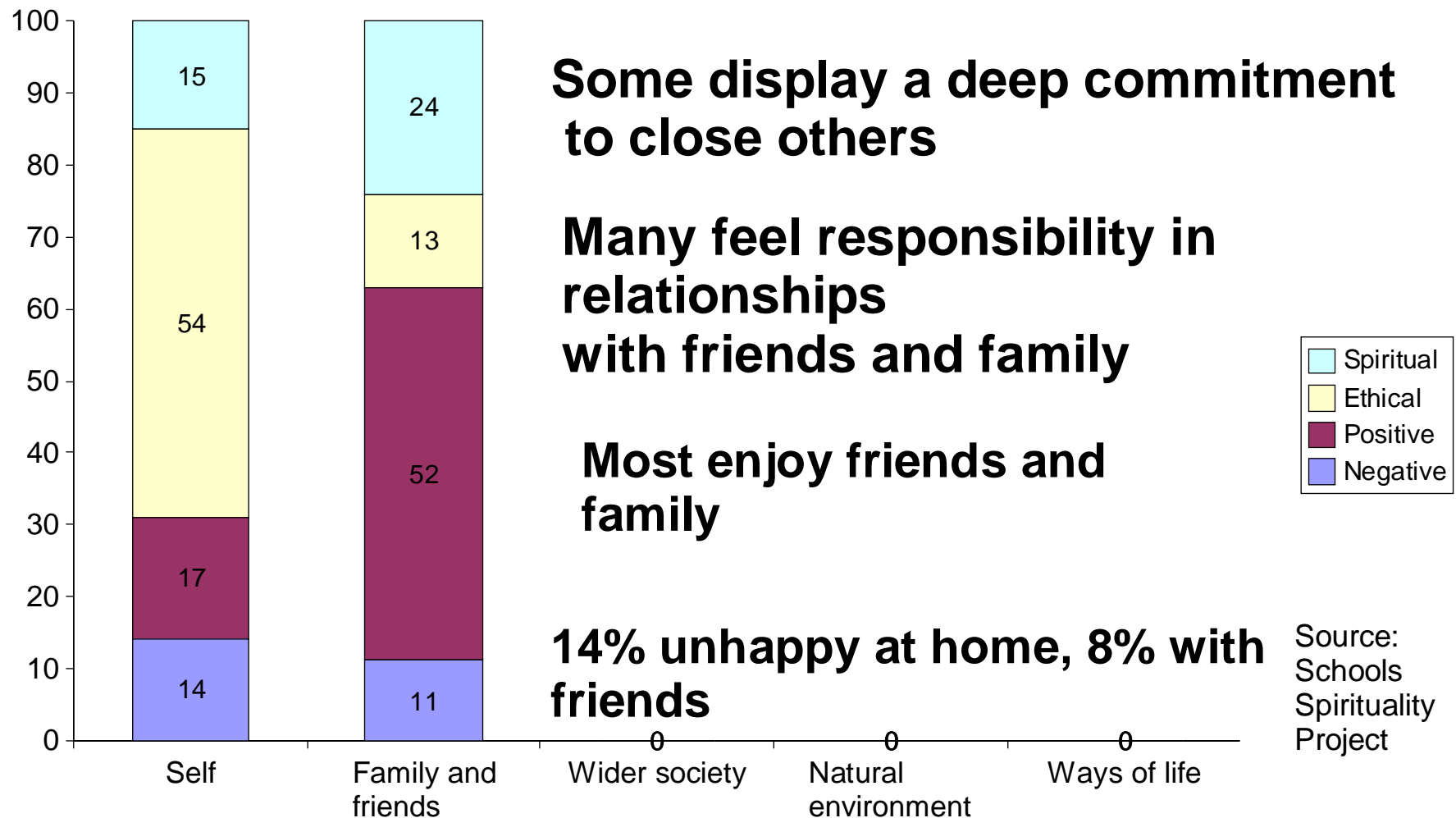
- Self is not given, but must be constructed by the individual
 - See this in that more than 50 per cent of teenagers have changed image or fashion style in past 2 years
 - In that, some are 'living life to the max', embracing freedom, but ...
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Some are hurting badly

- Confused about who they are, where they belong
- By breakdown of family relationships
 - Hardest decision – to live with Mum or Dad
- By immigrant situation
 - Caught between homeland culture and Australian culture
- Without clear beliefs
 - about what the world and their lives are all about

Some who are hurting seek peace and happiness by trying to mask the pain with alcohol and drugs.

The levels of relationship among Lutheran school students



Some display a deep commitment to close others

Many feel responsibility in relationships with friends and family

Most enjoy friends and family

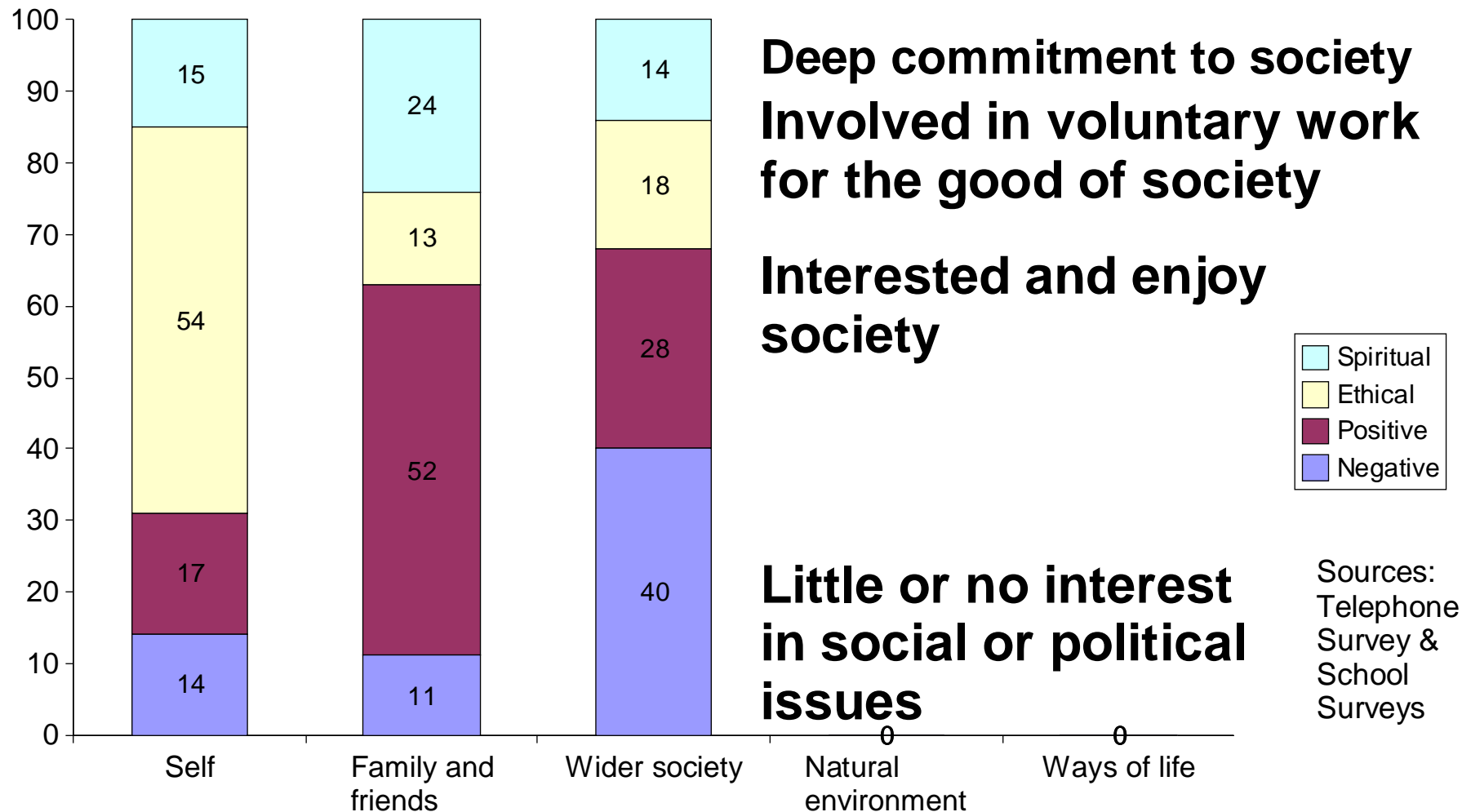
14% unhappy at home, 8% with friends

Source:
Schools
Spirituality
Project

In contemporary urban society, young people not born into a community

- They construct their own community
- Highly intentional in developing networks of close friends
- Relationships increasingly independent of physical location as keep in close touch electronically
- Yet ...
 - 'single households' fastest growing sector
 - more than half of all partnerships fail

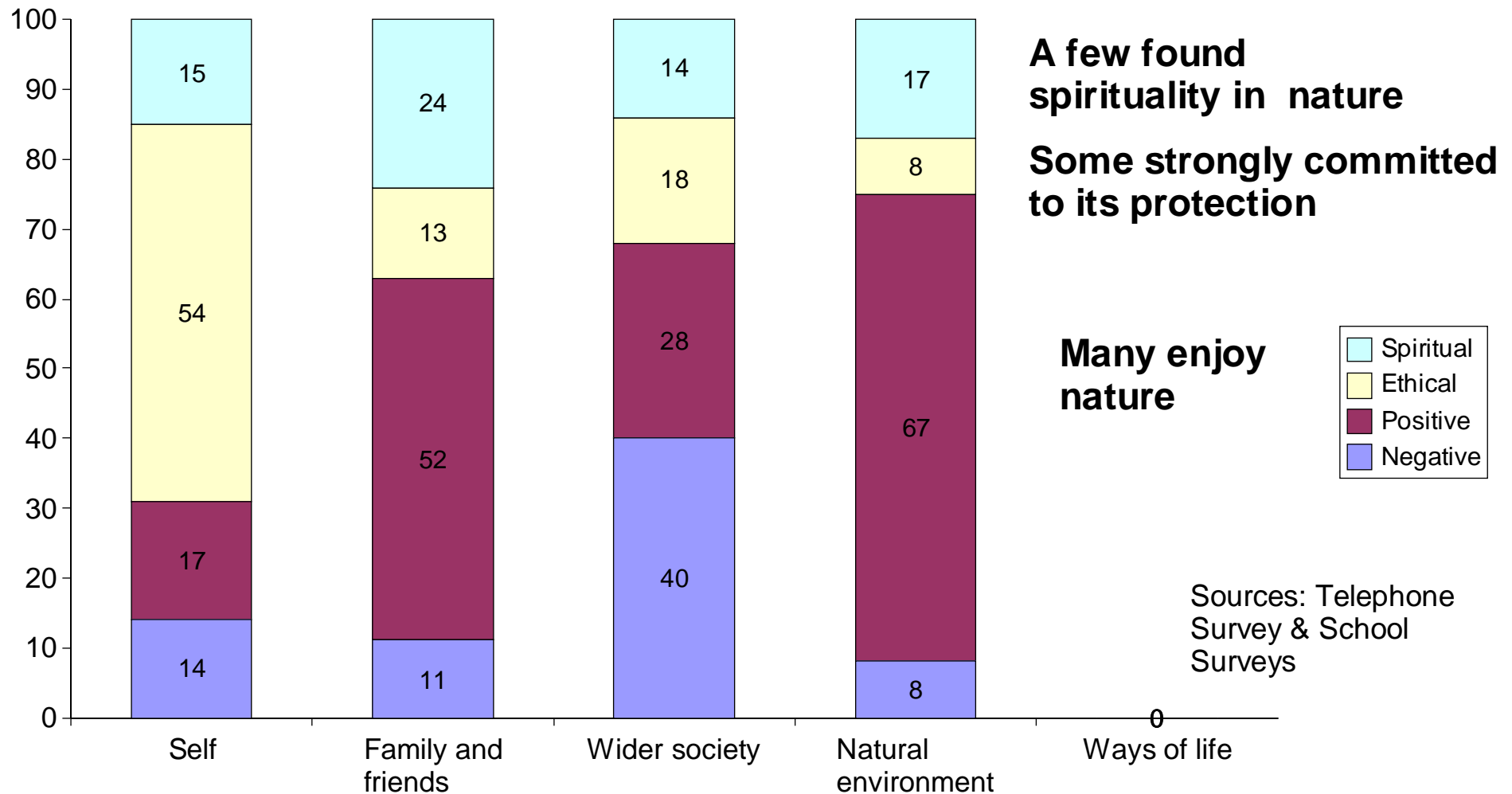
The levels of relationship among Lutheran school students



Young people clear about what sort of society they want ... but not clear about how they can contribute to it

- Some do not understand how society works
 - Some cynical about leaders and big organisations
 - Some feel powerless
 - Other than 'being a good person'
 - Major contribution through occupation / employment
 - But few understand it as a way of contributing
 - Believe that voluntary work good: 30% involved
 - Many more help others at a personal level
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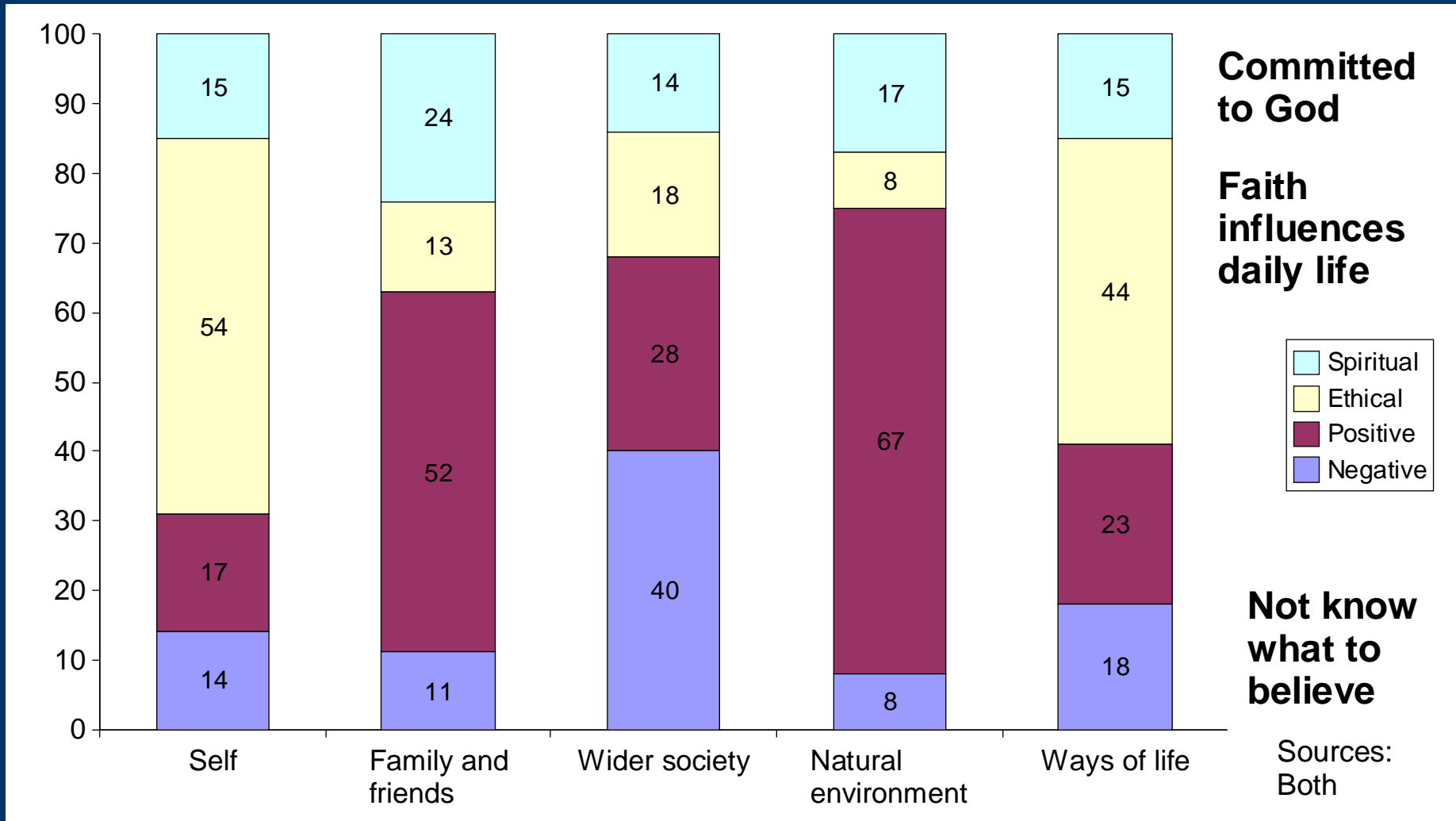
The levels of relationship among Lutheran school students



Widespread awareness of ethical issues

- But not as committed to the protection of the environment as older age groups
 - People in 40s and 50s much more attuned to nature
 - About 5% or 6% have definitely experienced something which might be described as spiritual in nature
 - Many more find a sense of peace and happiness in nature
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The levels of relationship among Lutheran school students



View of the world and way of life

- 18% definitely true that it is hard to know what to believe about life
- 29% generally true
- 32% sometimes true
- 4% don't know how to answer the question
- This means that ...
 - 83% sometimes or often confused about what to believe
 - 17% confident in their beliefs

Sense of purpose and satisfaction in life also related to

Relationships at home



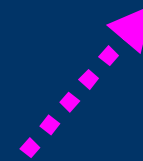
Sense of achievement -
in school studies or other things



Friendships



Resilience
Moral attitudes



Purpose/
Satisfac
tion
with life



Having a big picture of life



Why?

- Not lack of teaching
- Year 7 students most confident
- Level of confidence drops through secondary school
- Most know 'what they have been taught'
- Often different from what they believe

Most young people feel that religious knowledge is of a very different kind to other types of knowledge

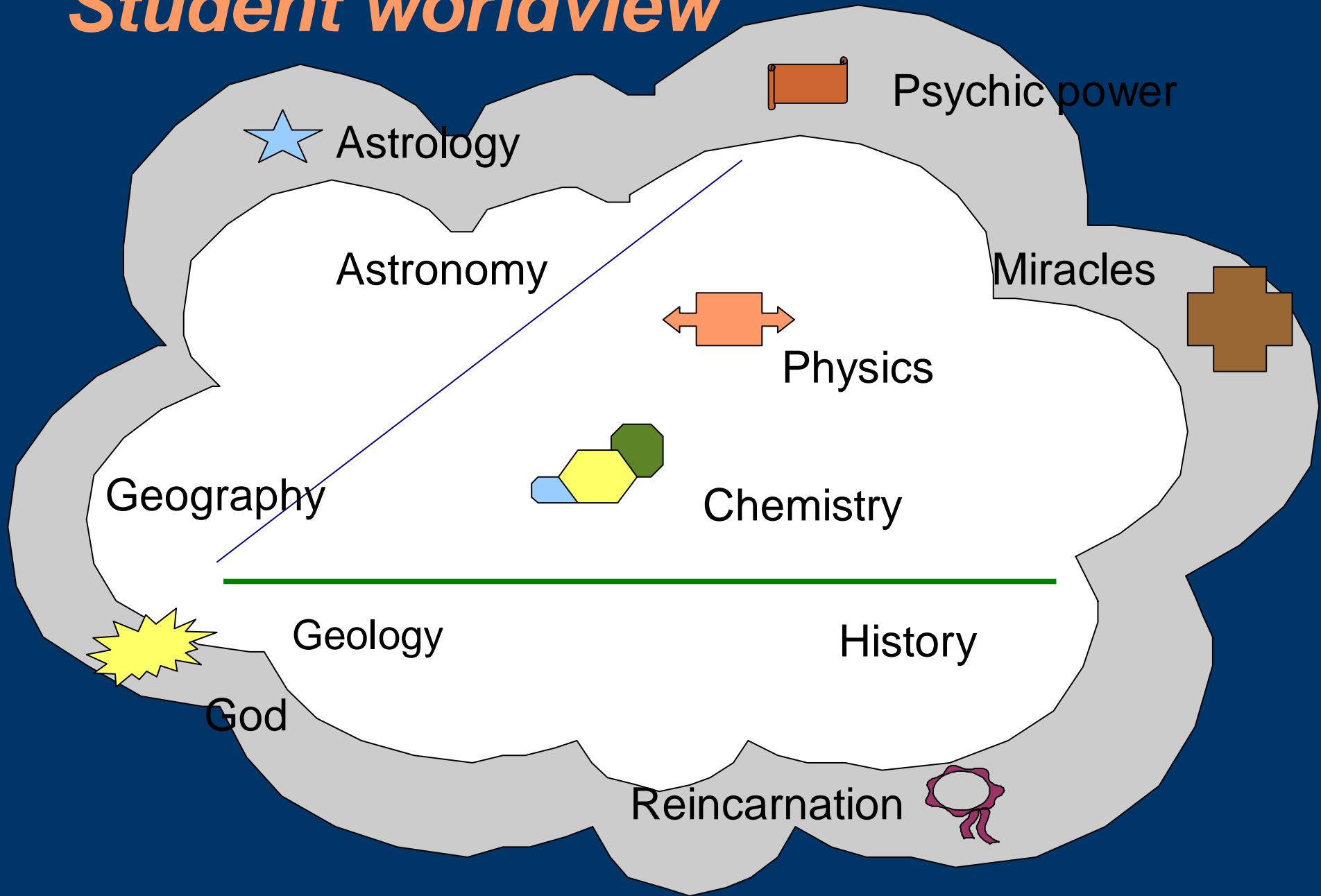
Fundamental Change in the Nature of Religious Faith

- **It was ...**
 - Foundation of life and society
 - Owned by the community of faith – the church
 - Expressed in the repetition of ritual
 - Passed on by with the authority of the community
- **It is now ...**
 - A life-style choice
 - Owned by the individual
 - Expressed by the individual, with greater emphasis to the affective than the cognitive
 - Developed by the individual
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Examples from school students

- 14 year-old girl
 - **Self: Man, could be female, beard, skinny, brown hair, kind, gentle, fair**
 - School: He created earth, made Mary have baby Jesus, sends people to hell/heaven
 - 16 year-old girl:
 - **Self: God is like a second Dad, loves us so much**
 - School: to pray to Saints, confession, when we go to communion we receive the body and blood of Christ.
 - 17 year-old girl:
 - **Self: Doesn't exist**
 - School: That He'll look after you unconditionally, perfect, created the world
 - 14 year-old boy:
 - **Self: Loves his people and doesn't shove them in a corner, respects us**
 - School: Jesus came down, how he calls his disciples
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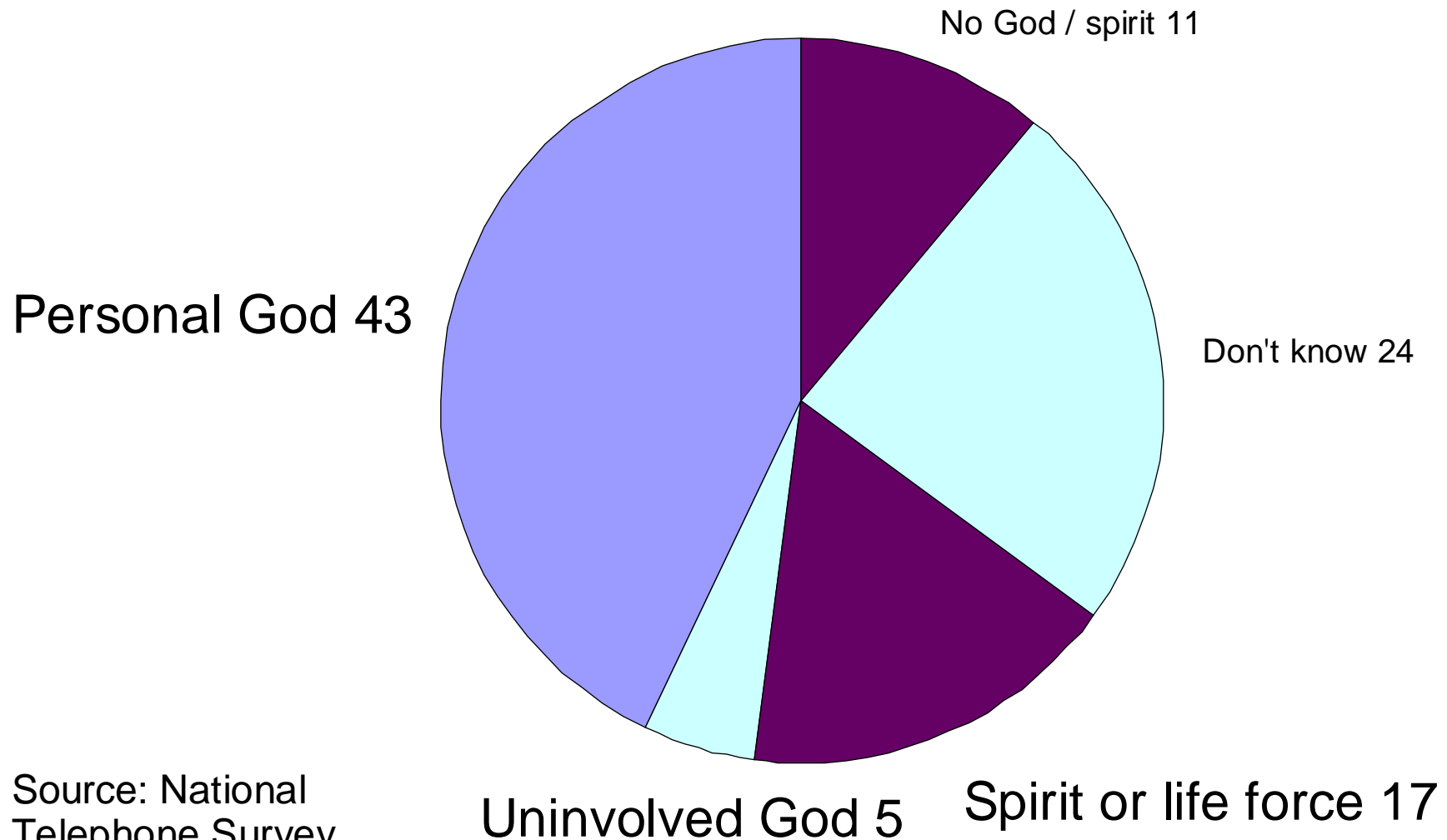
Student worldview



Distinctive characteristics of knowledge in the 'grey area'

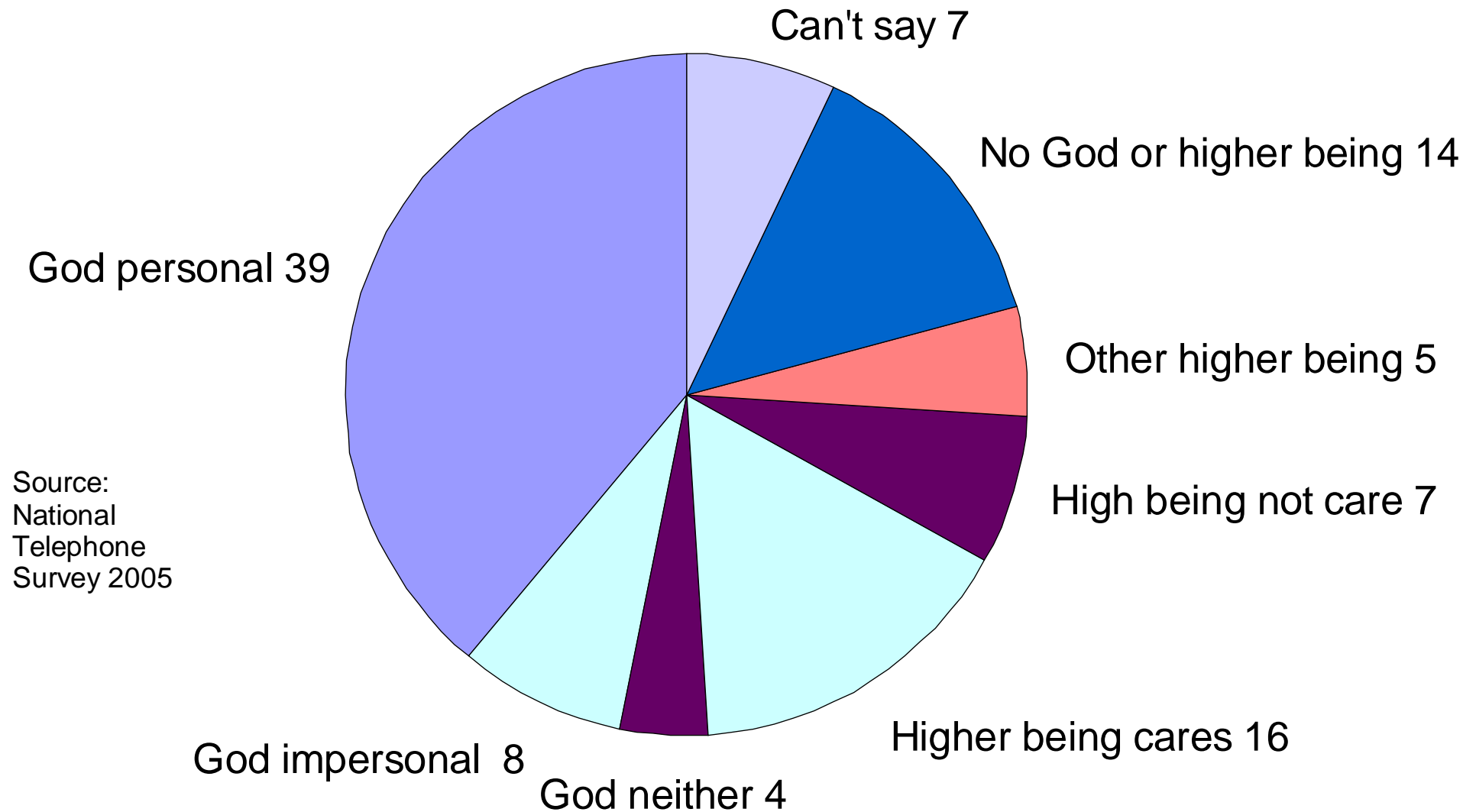
- Diversity of opinion
- Lack of clear beliefs – rather than disagreement
- Belief that one can pick and choose what to believe
- Belief that it is one's personal responsibility to decide what to believe

Diversity of opinion about God among Lutheran school students



Source: National Telephone Survey 2005

Diversity of opinion about God

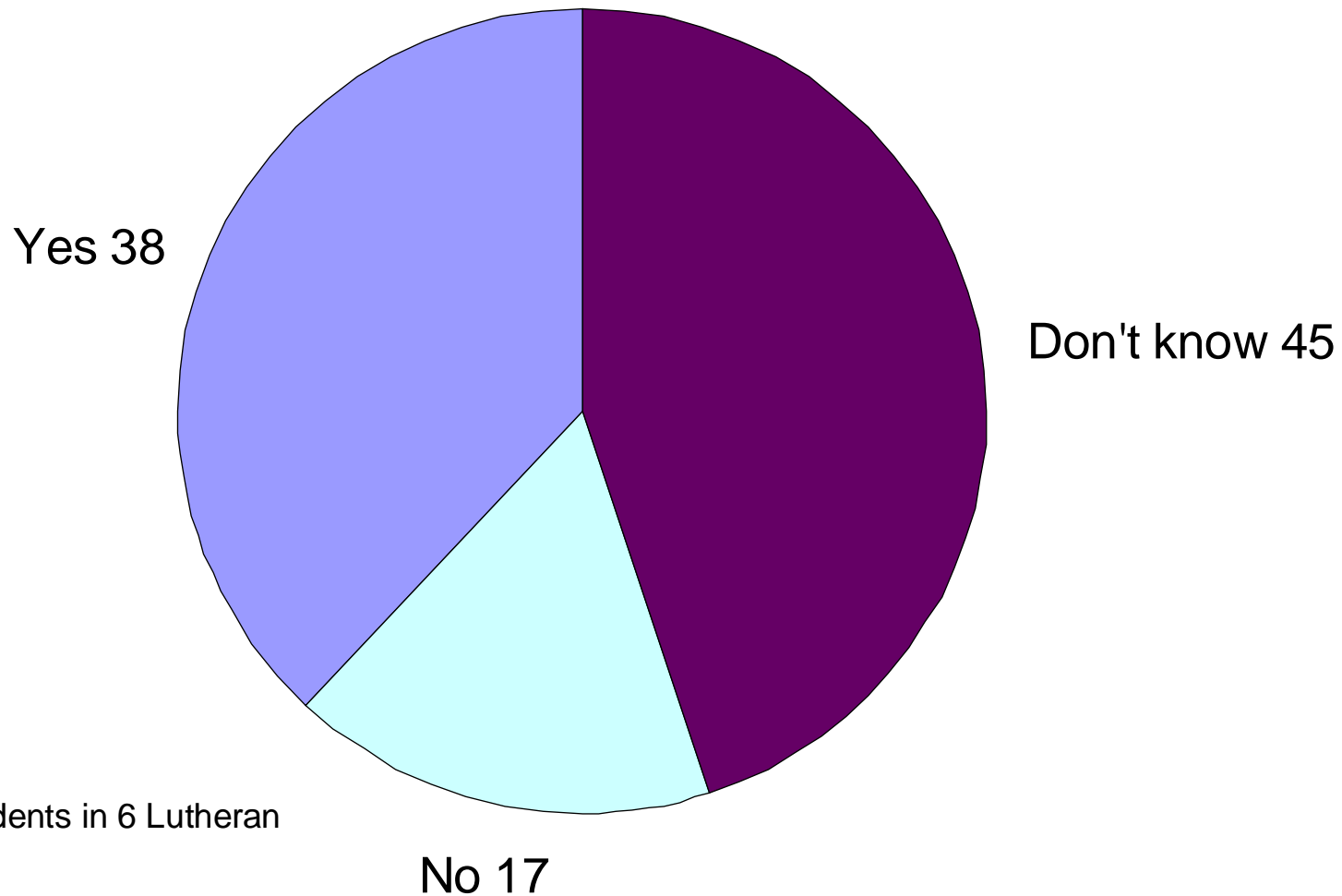


Source:
National
Telephone
Survey 2005

Lack of clarity in belief – students of Lutheran schools

- Angels 47% + 24% maybe
- Astrology 21% + 26% maybe
- Life after death 55% + 28% maybe
- Jesus Christ is truly God 44% + 36% maybe
- Reincarnation 28% + 27%

Important to pick and choose beliefs from all religions and ideas



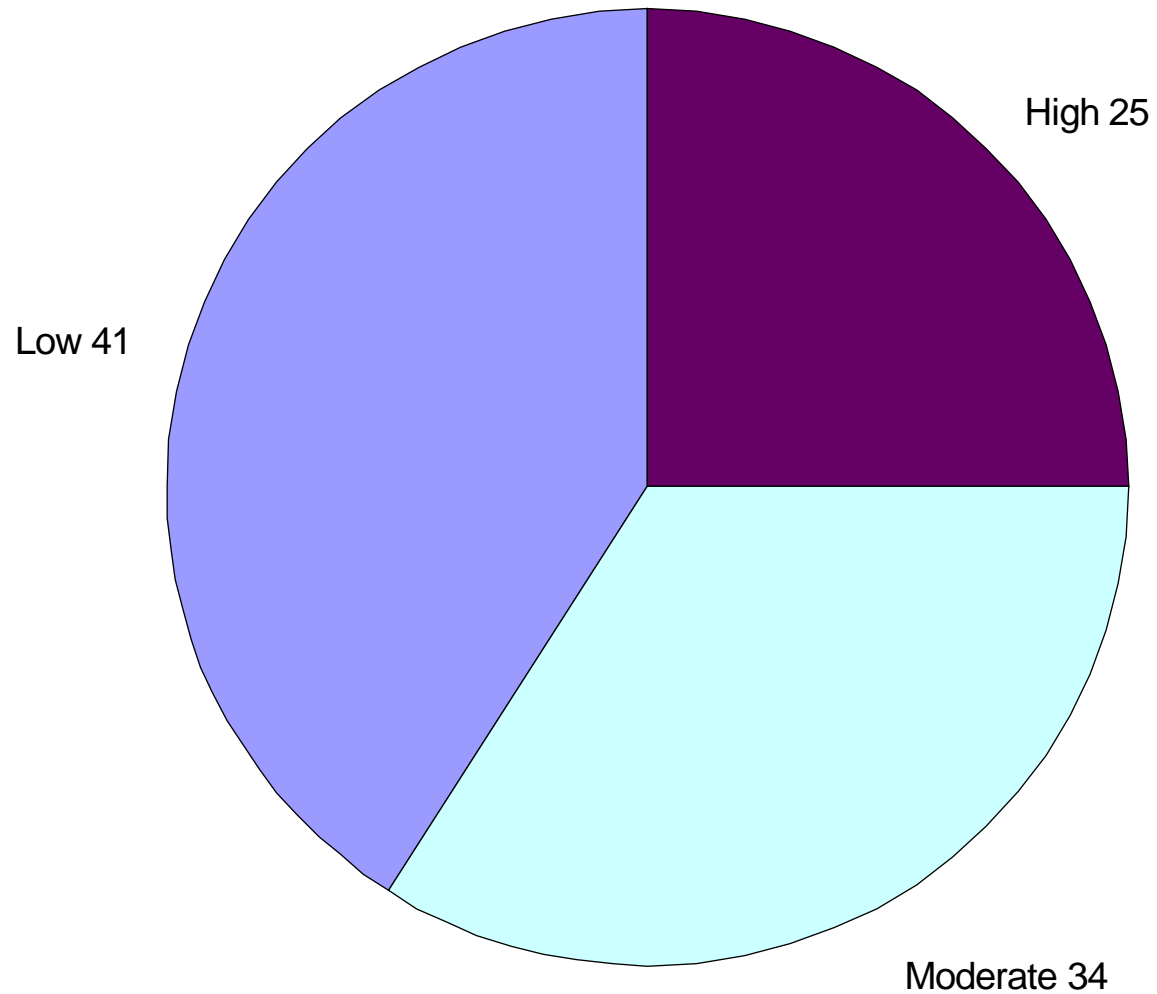
Source: Students in 6 Lutheran schools

Beliefs are a personal responsibility

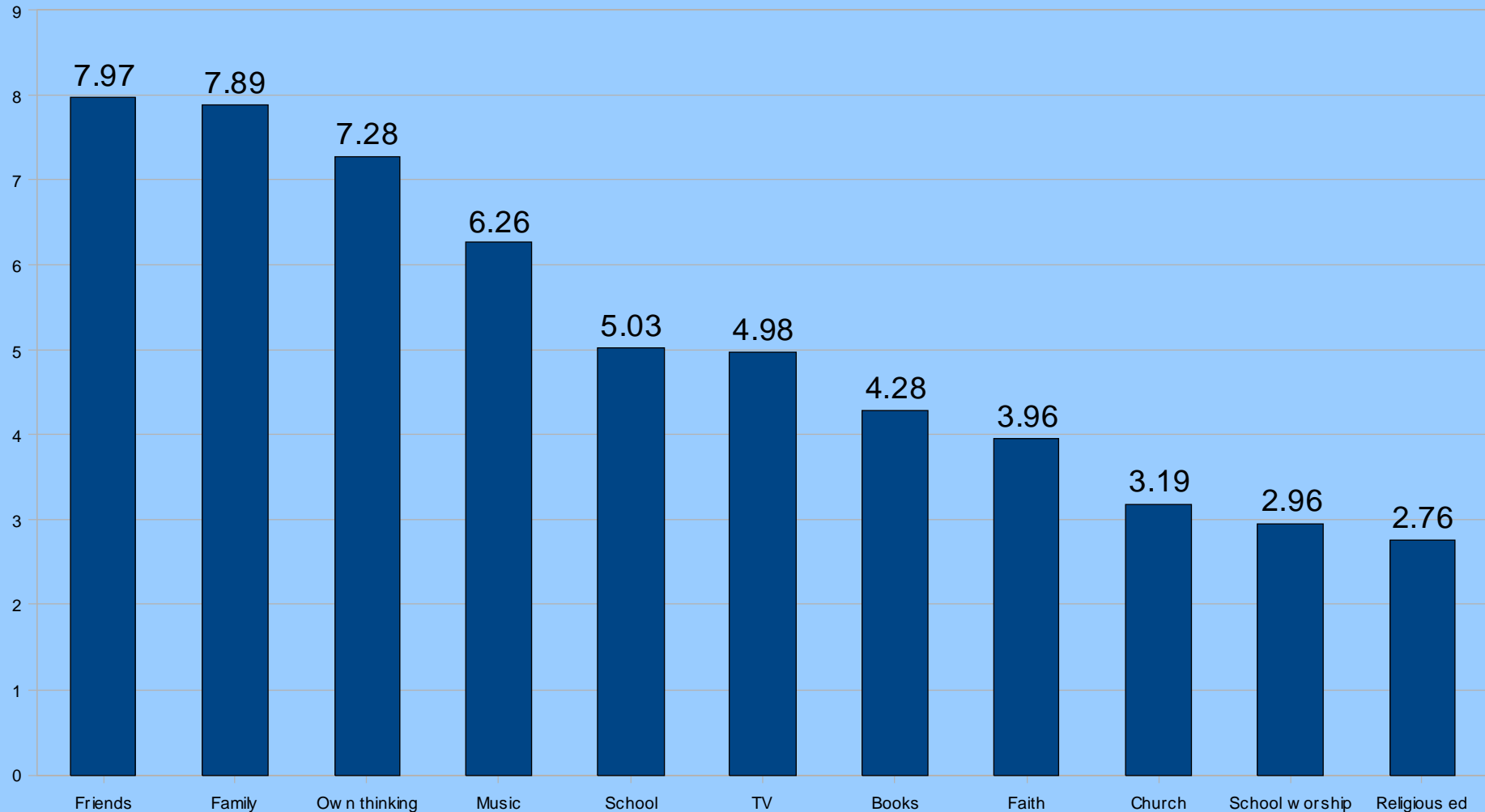
[Religion at school] confuses me. We're told to believe in things sometimes. Like at our assembly last year our principal pretty much told us we had to believe in God and the Church. Kind of annoying because we all feel that we want to believe in what we want to. I was kind of confused. I just kind of thought we don't have to do that because you tell us to.

15 year old girl in a church-run school

Importance of spiritual life – Lutheran school students



What Lutheran students say influences their thinking about life



How should we respond?

- People absorb into their lives that which 'fits'
 - New understanding must building on the old
- Must relate faith to their way of seeing life and the world
- In their language
- Expressed in the terms with which they are familiar

Challenges

- Helping young people develop all basic relationships
 - Particular problem: developing a 'big picture'
 - If traditional patterns of teaching religious knowledge is not working
 - How do we communicate the content of faith?
 - Developing communities
 - Young people not simply 'growing up' in communities of faith, but make own decisions
 - Young people are not joining organisations (such as churches), but find community in close networks
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Primary challenge – in post-traditional culture, helping young people to ...

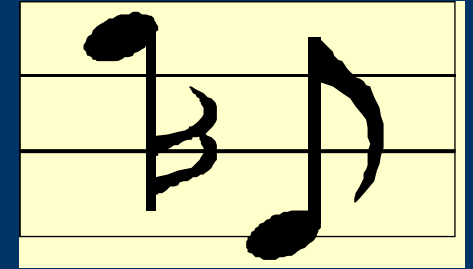
- construct meaningful and relevant faith
 - relate to the natural world when often mesmerised by the city lights
 - relate positively and responsibly in a society in which much power is invested in the market and large organisations
 - construct supportive communities in an age of electronic networks
 - construct themselves in a positive and fulfilling way
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Means of doing this

- Take seriously where young people are at in their journeys ... and their ownership of their lives
 - Develop 'spiritual literacy'
 - Understanding of options
 - Skills of making decisions
 - Appreciation of nature of commitment
 - Providing an environment where can experience options
 - provide immersion experiences
 - share the experiences of others they trust
 - teach how to make wise decisions
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The 'midi-narrative' of contemporary young people

Ways of dealing with problems



Life is about enjoyment

Study

Interesting job

Major means of attaining an enjoyable life

Feel good about oneself

Excitement

Have good friends

God

Society which is

Secure

Peaceful

Sustainable environment

Cooperative

Socially just - gives one a fair go



Relate to ...

- Theme of the enjoyment of life
 - What offers real enjoyment?
 - Theme of excitement
 - What should be 'exciting'?
 - Relate to the music of young people
 - In curricula
 - As a form of expression of basic values
 - God as a friend who walks beside us
 - A resource in difficult times
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Youth ministry is cross-cultural

- Basic principal of cross-cultural ministry
 - Christ enters into our ways of life
 - Speaks our language
 - Participates in our activities
- But Christ also transforms our lives
 - Brings new dimensions to them
 - Challenges us to see life in new ways
 - Calls us to a new relationship with God

**We must ask what aspects of our faith, our worship, our community belong to another culture and are no longer relevant?
In what ways, does Christ seek to transform contemporary youth culture?**

Cultural practices from a bygone era or part of the essence of faith?

- Hymn-singing versus use of contemporary music
 - Music is listened to rather than sung?
- Preaching versus discussion
 - How is it best to engage young people in thinking about matters of faith?
- Local congregations
 - Vs the mega-church, the festival, the retreat?

Young people interviewed affirmed the importance of camps and retreats; seen as more influential than religious education or chapel: time to reflect for themselves, to work through issues with friends ...

Transformation of contemporary way of life

- Individualistic way of life
 - Challenge the slide towards selfishness
 - Find joy as we give up the quest for pleasure
 - Consumeristic way of life
 - Happiness not in possessions
 - Cannot evaluate everything in terms of 'how it benefits me'
 - A mature understanding of the friendship of God
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Effective engagement of young people involves ...

- Authenticity of our own relationships with them
 - Taking them seriously
 - Sharing their journeys
- Integrity of our own spirituality
 - Demonstrating that our faith makes a positive difference to our lives
- Recognising that we are all on the journey of life together

