



A demographic profile of senior clergy in local churches: Catholic Church in Australia

2016 NCLS Local Church Leaders Report

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Abstract

This research paper outlines the demographic characteristics of senior clergy in local churches in the Catholic Church in Australia – ministers, pastors or priests in local senior leadership positions. The report contains information about their ages, gender, marital status and ethnicity. It also outlines their levels of education, ministry qualifications, and other occupations.

Table of contents

Profile Cover	1
Profile Contents	2
Introduction and Methodology	3
Age	4
Gender	5
Marital status	6
Ethnicity	7
Education	8
Ministry Qualifications	9
Other Occupations	10
References	11

List of tables

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

Table 2: Age and gender of local senior clergy with comparisons

Table 3: Ethnic profile of local senior clergy with comparisons

Table 4: Education profile of local senior clergy with comparisons

Table 5: Ministry qualifications of local senior clergy with comparisons

Table 6: Other occupations apart from work in ministry for local senior clergy with comparisons

List of figures

Figure 1: Age profile of local senior clergy and attenders

Figure 2: Gender profile of local senior clergy

Figure 3: Present marital status of local senior clergy

Figure 4: Ethnic profile of local senior clergy

Figure 5: Education profile of local senior clergy

Figure 6: Ministry qualifications of local senior clergy

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A demographic profile of local senior clergy

2016 NCLS Leaders Report

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 the demographic profile of local senior clergy in Australian churches.

This report is based on those local senior clergy in the Catholic Church in Australia who completed the 2016 NCLS Leader Survey. It provides a demographic profile of these local church clergy, with information about their ages, gender, marital status and ethnicity. It also outlines local senior clergy education levels, ministry qualifications, and other occupations.

Methodology

This report draws on data from the 2016 NCLS Leader Survey to provide some information on Australian church leaders.

The 2016 NCLS Leader Survey was filled out individually and anonymously by leaders of churches participating in the 2016 NCLS. Questions covered a range of topics such as leader burnout, wellbeing, training, personality and more. This current paper focuses solely on leader responses to demographic questions. Results in this paper are restricted to a subset of respondents we have defined as “local senior clergy”. In the Catholic Church some 120 survey respondents fitted this description. Leader Survey data was weighted to adjust for variations in participation levels across denominations and regions.

Defining “local senior clergy”

Participants in the 2016 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 clergy: 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).

In denominations that tend to have male senior clergy, female survey respondents also sometimes identified as ‘senior clergy’ (e.g. as a team member of equal standing).

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 Clergy
1	The minister, pastor or priest of this local church*	103	✓
2	The senior minister/pastor/priest of a ministry team here*	11	✓
3	A minister, pastor or priest in a ministry team here (but not the senior minister)	20	
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	13	
7	A layperson serving as a member of a leadership team	152	
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	4	
10	Other (Please specify)	21	
Total		333	120

*Selected as “local senior clergy” for this paper.

Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey (The Catholic Church in Australia n=333).

A demographic profile of local senior clergy

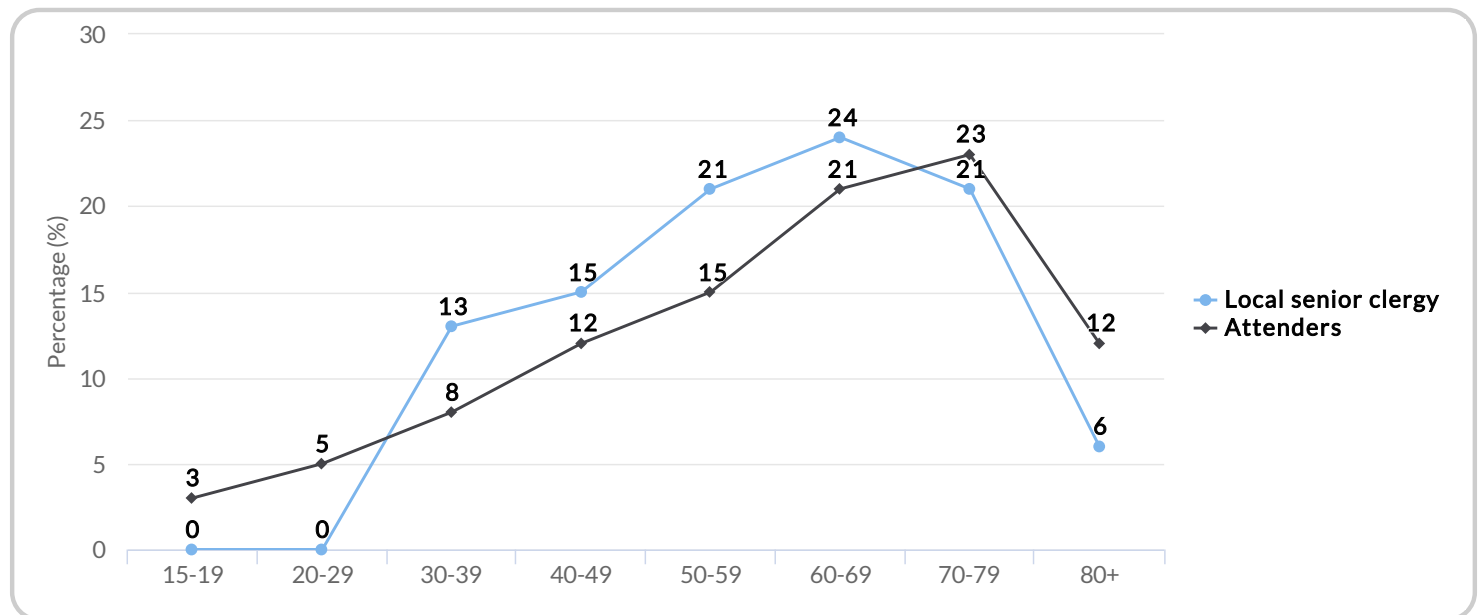
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Age profile

In the Catholic Church, 36% of local senior clergy were middle-aged (40-59 years), while 13% were aged between 20 and 39 years.

Figure 1 shows the age distribution of local senior clergy compared to the age distribution of church attenders in the Catholic Church.

Figure 1: Age profile of local senior clergy and attenders



Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior clergy (The Catholic Church in Australia n=120); 2016 NCLS Attender Survey (The Catholic Church in Australia n=80797).

In the 2016 NCLS, the average age of local senior clergy across denominations was 52 years. This ranged from a low average of 43 years for C3 Church senior pastors to a high average of 58 for Catholic priests. Major denominations with lower proportions of younger local senior clergy (20 to 39 years) included the Uniting Church (8%), the Catholic Church (13%) and the Lutheran Church (15%). The following denominations had the highest proportions of young local senior clergy aged between 20 and 39 years: C3 Church (39%), and INC (International Network of Churches, 28%).

Some denominations face significant issues to do with the ageing of their local senior clergy. Not only do they have difficulty supplying adequate numbers of leaders, but existing leadership may find it hard to understand and relate to the cultures and values of younger attenders. Research based on 2011 NCLS data found that churches with older senior clergy were significantly less able to retain their young people (Pepper & Powell, 2017).

A demographic profile of local senior clergy

2016 NCLS Leaders Report

Gender

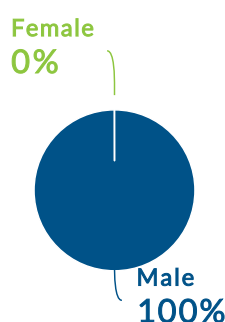
In 2016, 0% of local senior clergy in the Catholic Church who took part in the 2016 NCLS were women and 100% were men.

While represented in many denominations, the highest proportions of women in local senior clergy leadership in the 2016 NCLS occurred in the Salvation Army (55%), followed by C3 Church (43%), and INC (International Network of Churches, 36%).

In denominations that tend to have male senior clergy in local churches, some female survey respondents in the 2016 NCLS also identified as 'senior clergy' (e.g. as a team member of equal standing). See page 3 for more information.

Analysis of Protestant churches in the 2011 NCLS found that having a female senior or associate minister on staff was not related to newcomer levels, growth, or young adult retention of the church (Pepper & Powell, 2017).

Figure 2: Gender profile of local senior clergy



Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior clergy (The Catholic Church in Australia n=120).

Table 2: Age and gender of local senior clergy with comparisons

Age and gender	Denom in 2016 (%)	Denom in 2011 (%)	All NCLS in 2016 (%)
Age			
15-19 years	0	0	0
20-29 years	0	1	3
30-39 years	13	7	15
40-49 years	15	22	23
50-59 years	21	28	29
60-69 years	24	23	22
70-79 years	21	18	8
Over 80 years	6	2	1
Gender			
Female	0	0	0
Male	100	100	100

Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior clergy (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 120; All NCLS n = 1538); 2011 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior clergy (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 129).

Table 2 shows the age and gender profile of local senior clergy in The Catholic Church in Australia compared with the profile of The Catholic Church in Australia in 2011 and with a second benchmark, All NCLS in 2016 .

A demographic profile of local senior clergy

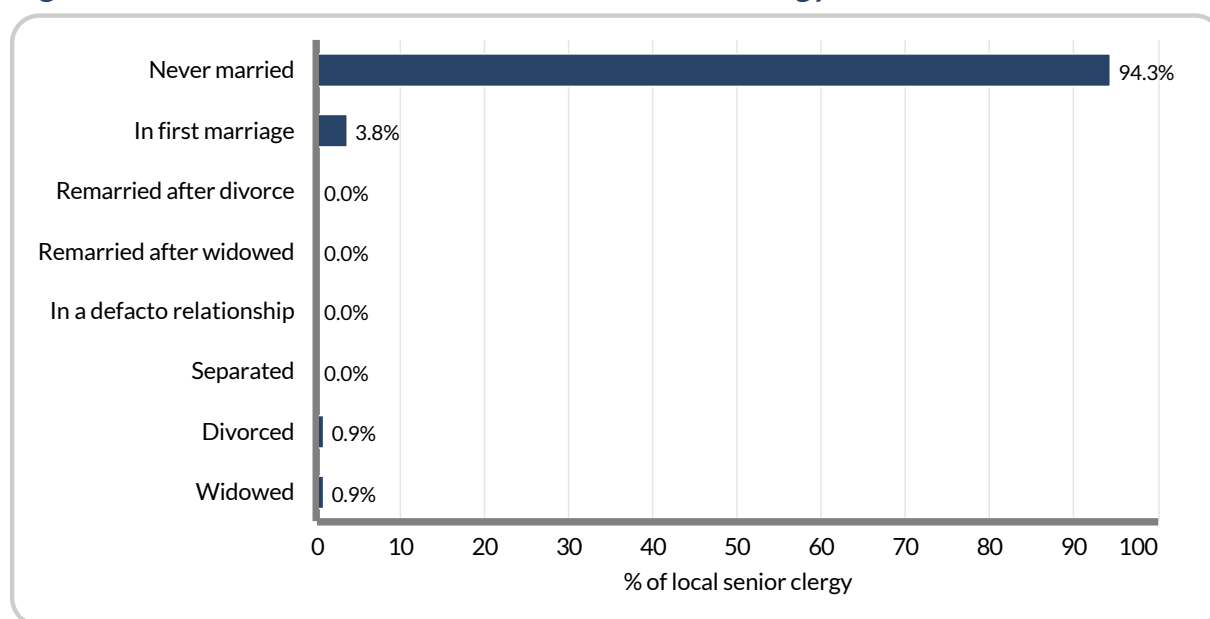
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Marital status

Some 4% of local senior clergy in the Catholic Church were in their first marriage. Further details about the present (2016) marital status of local senior clergy can be found in Figure 3.

Across Protestant denominations in the 2016 NCLS, 85% were in their first marriage, 5% were remarried after divorce, 2% remarried after being widowed, while 0% were separated or in a de facto relationship. Of those not married, 3% of local senior clergy were never married, 2% were divorced, and 2% were widowed.

Figure 3: Present marital status of local senior clergy



Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior clergy (The Catholic Church in Australia n=106).

Please note: This question on marital status was asked in Part B of the 2016 Leader Survey, which was designed to only be answered by pastoral staff or those leaders employed in their ministry role. Results on this page may therefore be based on fewer cases than other results in this report.

A demographic profile of local senior clergy

2016 NCLS Leaders Report

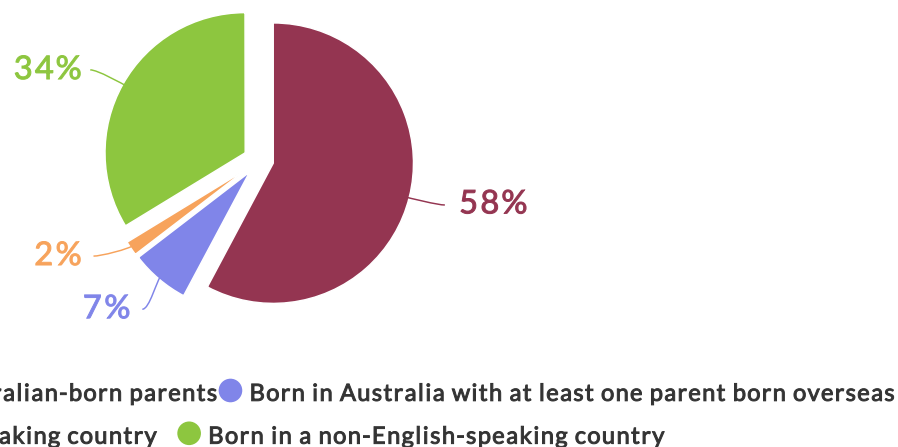
Ethnicity

Some 64% of local senior clergy in the Catholic Church who took part in the 2016 NCLS were Australian-born. Another 2% were born overseas in an English-speaking country, whereas 34% were born in a non-English-speaking country.

Some 26% speak a language other than English at home. Of this group, 23% speak English plus another language and 3% speak non-English languages only at home.

In 2016, Catholic and Baptist churches had among the highest percentages of local senior clergy born in a non-English-speaking country (35% and 16%, respectively). By contrast, less than 5% of C3, INC and Salvation Army local senior clergy were in this category. It should be noted that non-English-speaking leaders and churches were underrepresented in the 2016 NCLS.

Figure 4: Ethnic profile of local senior clergy



Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior clergy (The Catholic Church in Australia n=120).

Table 3 provides further information about the country of birth of local senior clergy and their parents. This helps to identify the proportion of first and second generation migrants who are in leadership. In the Catholic Church 36% are first generation migrants and 7% are second generation migrants.

Table 3: Ethnic profile of local senior clergy with comparisons

Ethnic profile	Denom in 2016 (%)	Denom in 2011 (%)	All NCLS in 2016 (%)
Country of birth			
Born in Australia	64	69	75
Born in other English-speaking country	2	5	11
Born in non-English-speaking country	34	27	14
Country of birth with parents' country of birth			
Born in Australia with Australian-born parents	58	60	59
Born in Australia with at least one parent born overseas...	7	10	17
...in an English-speaking country	3	5	11
...in a non-English-speaking country	3	5	7

Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior clergy (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 120; All NCLS n = 1538); 2011 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior clergy (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 129).

A demographic profile of local senior clergy

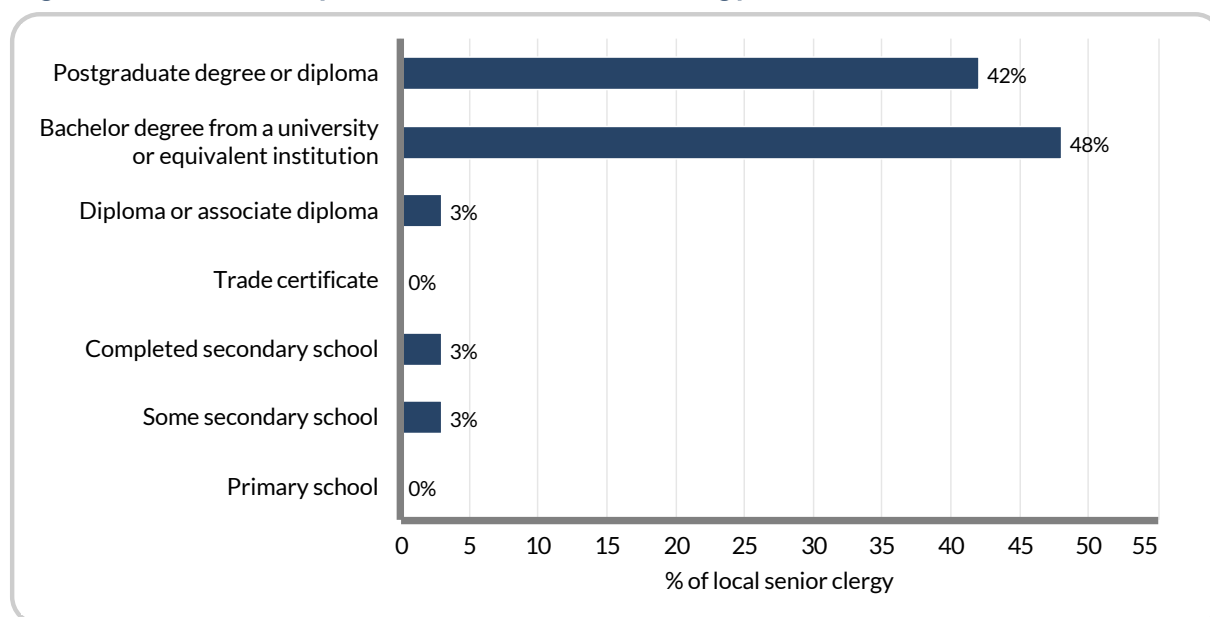
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Education

In 2016, 91% of all local senior clergy in the Catholic Church were university graduates.

There is a large variation between denominations in this area, as the results from the 2016 NCLS show: the groups with the largest proportions of local senior clergy who are university graduates were Lutheran (97%), Anglican (92%) and Uniting (91%), while among the smallest were INC (24%) and the Salvation Army (43%).

Figure 5: Education profile of local senior clergy



Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior clergy (The Catholic Church in Australia n=120).

Table 4: Education profile of local senior clergy with comparisons

Educational qualifications	Denom in 2016 (%)	Denom in 2011 (%)	All NCLS in 2016 (%)
Highest education qualification obtained			
Postgraduate degree or diploma	42	55	45
Bachelor degree from a university or equivalent institution	48	37	35
Diploma or associate diploma	3	5	11
Trade certificate	0	0	4
Completed secondary school	3	2	2
Some secondary school	3	1	2
Primary school	0	0	0

Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior clergy (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 120; All NCLS n = 1538); 2011 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior clergy (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 129).

A demographic profile of local senior clergy

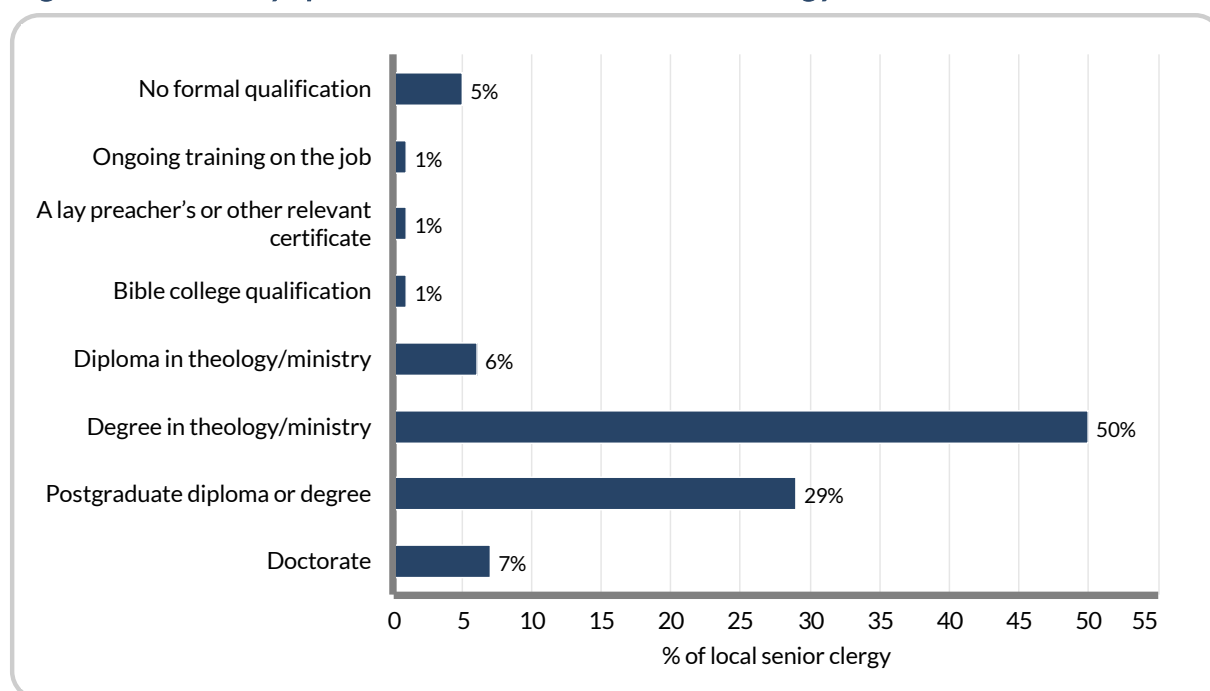
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Ministry qualifications

Local senior clergy were also asked about the highest level of ministry qualification they had obtained.

Figure 6 shows that 36% of local senior clergy in the Catholic Church have a postgraduate qualification, including doctorates. Some 50% have a degree in theology/ministry.

Figure 6: Ministry qualifications of local senior clergy



Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior clergy (The Catholic Church in Australia n=120).

Table 5 shows how the current profile for highest ministry qualifications compared with some other benchmarks.

Analysis of Protestant churches that participated in the 2011 NCLS found that having a theological degree was not statistically related to the church's newcomer levels, growth, or young adult retention of the church (Pepper & Powell, 2017).

Table 5: Ministry qualifications of local senior clergy with comparisons

Ministry qualifications	Denom in 2016 (%)	Denom in 2011 (%)	All NCLS in 2016 (%)
Highest ministry qualification obtained			
No formal qualification	5	2	5
Ongoing training on the job	1	3	2
A lay preacher's or other relevant certificate	1	1	2
Bible college qualification	1	6	6
Diploma in theology/ministry	6	9	12
Degree in theology/ministry	50	34	36
Postgraduate diploma or degree	29	38	31
Doctorate	7	8	5

Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior clergy (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 120; All NCLS n = 1538); 2011 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior clergy (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 129).

A demographic profile of local senior clergy

2016 NCLS Leaders Report

Occupations other than work in ministry

Local senior clergy were also asked about other occupations they were currently involved in, in addition to their ministry position. On average across denominations, 27% of local senior clergy had another job (including 15% whose job was 'nonchurch related'). Among the denominations with the highest proportions with another job were C3 Church (59%) and INC (57%), while The Salvation Army and the Lutheran Church had the lowest (8% and 15%).

In the Catholic Church 20% had other jobs, while 12% had home duties or family responsibilities. Another 71% had no other work, 4% were semi-retired, while 4% were also studying.

Table 6: Other occupations apart from work in ministry for local senior clergy with comparisons

Occupations other than work in ministry	Denom in 2016 (%)	Denom in 2011 (%)	All NCLS in 2016 (%)
Home duties/family responsibilities	12	8	29
Non-church related job	0	3	12
Another job associated with a church (e.g. counsellor)	7	11	4
Another church-related job (e.g. regional ministry)	17	26	10
Semi-retired	4	5	6
Also studying	4	6	9
No other occupations	71	55	52

Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior clergy (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 120; All NCLS n = 1538); 2011 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior clergy (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 129).

Summary

This report provided a demographic profile of senior clergy in local churches in the Catholic Church. Local senior clergy were defined as ministers, pastors or priests who are the primary or senior leader of a congregation/parish, or who have equal standing in the ministry team. Results are based on responses from the participants in the 2016 National Church Life Survey.

Some key findings about the demographic profile of senior clergy in local churches for the Catholic Church in 2016 are:

- 36% were middle-aged (40-59 years) and 13% were aged between 20 and 39 years
- 0% were women and 100% were men
- 4% were in their first marriage
- 64% were Australian-born, 2% were born overseas in an English-speaking country, whereas 34% were born in a non-English speaking country
- 91% were university graduates
- 86% had a degree or postgraduate qualifications as their highest level of ministry qualification
- 71% had no occupation or responsibilities other than their work in ministry.



A demographic profile of local senior clergy

2016 NCLS Leaders Report

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About NCLS Research

NCLS Research is a joint project of several denominational partners. Established in the early 1990s, it is a world leader in research focused on connecting churches and their communities. The most well-known project is the five-yearly National Church Life Survey.

About the National Church Life Survey

The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a quantitative survey of 260,000-450,000 church attenders, 6,000-10,000 church leaders and 3,000-7,000 churches in more than 20 Australian denominations (Catholic, Anglican and Protestant denominations) every census year since 1991. The survey covers a wide range of areas of religious faith and practice and social concern. The NCLS includes three major survey types:

- Attender Surveys (comprising a main survey variant and multiple small sample survey variants);
- Several variants of a Leader Survey which is completed by local church leaders; and
- An Operations Survey audit of local church activities.

Data used in this paper is weighted to adjust for variations in participation levels across denominations and regions.

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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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NCLS Research is a leading research organisation whose research aims include studying Australian spirituality, church health, effective and sustainable leadership, and the connections between church and community. The National Church Life Survey is a collaborative project involving millions of participants in over 20 denominations since 1991.

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