

# The Australian Catholic Mass Attendance Report 2016

A report based on the National Count of Attendance,  
the National Church Life Survey and the National Catholic  
Census Project

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## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is an in-depth analysis of Catholic Mass attendance in Australia. The findings in this report offer a detailed review of the demographic characteristics of Mass attenders and the changes in attendance over time. These insights have been drawn from three research projects—the National Count of Attendance, the National Church Life Survey and the Australian Census.

The National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCPR) published an earlier version of this report in 2013, reporting results from data collected in 2011 (See *Mass attendance in Australia: A critical moment* authored by Bob Dixon, Stephen Reid and Marilyn Chee). This current report provides updated tables and charts using the 2016 results, with commentary on how the situation has changed in the last 20 years. Additional information on the age and sex of Mass attenders in dioceses has also been included. Some results from the 2016 National Count of Attendance have been reported in earlier print and online publications authored by the NCPR. These are reproduced here to provide a comprehensive picture of Mass Attendance in Australia at this time.

### KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF THIS REPORT

- In 2016, the number of people at Mass in Australia on a typical weekend was about 623,400, or 11.8 per cent of the Catholic population.
- The percentage of Mass attenders born in non-English-speaking countries has risen from about 18 per cent in 1996 to almost 37 per cent in 2016.
- Over the last 20 years, the number of attenders born in Australia and in other English-speaking countries has almost halved.
- Almost one third of Mass attenders (32.5%) are currently aged between 60 and 74 years, and attenders overall are ageing.
- Over three in every five attenders are women; this ratio has remained unchanged over five successive surveys.

## The 2016 National Count of Attendance

Catholic Mass attendance figures for the whole of Australia are collected once every five years in a project known as the National Count of Attendance. Initiated by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, the first National Count was conducted in 2001 and the most recent one in 2016, meaning reliable comparisons can be made over four Counts. Many Catholic dioceses also conduct annual counts.

The 2016 National Count of Attendance counted attendances at **all** Masses (and also at Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest) across Australia during the same period. It included attendances from Masses celebrated in all parishes, migrant Mass centres, hospitals and nursing homes, prisons, religious houses, university and other chaplaincies, boarding schools, and so on. The National Count is usually conducted over four Sundays during the month of May, ensuring that attendances at monthly Masses, quite common in rural areas and in non-parish settings, are included. The Count provides us with information such as average weekly attendance figures, attendance rates, trends over time, and attendances at Masses celebrated in languages other than English.

## **The 2016 National Church Life Survey**

Held in the same year as the National Count of Attendance, the multi-denominational National Church Life Survey (NCLS), is conducted in a national random sample of parishes, and provides a great deal of information about Mass attenders, including their frequency of attendance, their demographic characteristics and their beliefs and practices. In 2016, around 36,500 completed questionnaires were received from the 195 parishes in the national sample. Because these parishes were part of a carefully constructed statistical sample, we can be confident that their results are an accurate representation of all parishes in Australia. Another 162 parishes took part in the survey for their own benefit, but as they were not part of the representative sample, their figures are not included in published results.

NCLS began in 1991 as an initiative of Anglicare (NSW) and the Uniting Church Board of Mission (NSW), and the survey has been held every five years since then. In 1996, Catholic parishes participated in a parallel project known as the Catholic Church Life Survey, and in 2001 participated in the National Church Life Survey.

## **The National Catholic Census Project**

The National Catholic Census Project was established by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference at the time of the 1991 Census. Since then, and in every Census year following, the National Centre for Pastoral Research acquires a significant amount of data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics about Catholics in Australia based on the Census of Population and Housing. This information is used to produce social profiles for every Catholic parish and diocese in Australia.

Australia's most recent Census was held on the night of 9 August 2016. The data obtained from the Australian Census provides us with key Catholic population demographics such as age, birthplace, education and marital status, amongst many others.

## MASS ATTENDANCE IN AUSTRALIA

The 2016 National Count of Attendance reveals that the number of people at Mass in Australia on a typical weekend was about 623,400, or 11.8 per cent of the Catholic population. Between 2011 and 2016, there was a decline of 5.9 per cent in the total weekly attendance, which means there were 46,200 fewer attenders on an average weekend in 2016 than five years earlier. Overall, the attendance rate declined by around 0.4 per cent in the same period.

**Table 1. Australian summary**

Australia	Mean weekly total attendance	Catholic Population	Total Population	Per cent Catholic	Attendance Rate
2016	623,356	5,291,817	23,401,892	22.6	11.8
2011	662,376	5,439,268	21,507,719	25.3	12.2
Change 2011 - 2016	-46,243	-312,384	1,652,432	-3.3	-0.4
Percentage change 2011 - 2016	-5.9	-2.7	7.7	—	—

According to the 2016 National Church Life Survey (NCLS), about 85 per cent of those who attend Mass are there every weekend, the same as the reported figure five years earlier. A further eight per cent in 2016 reported that they attended two or three times a month, with the remainder attending about once a month or less often, or even attending Mass for the first time. NCLS results also show that 98 per cent of the people at Mass in parishes on weekends are Catholics, and that almost all of the others identify with another Christian denomination.

Table 2 shows selected demographic characteristics for Mass attenders in 2006, 2011 and 2016, together with corresponding characteristics for the 2016 Catholic population. All of the characteristics shown in the table are for persons aged 15 and over and, as such, may differ from other published reports that encompass all ages.

**Table 2. Demographic characteristics: Mass attenders 2006, 2011 & 2016, Catholic population 2016**

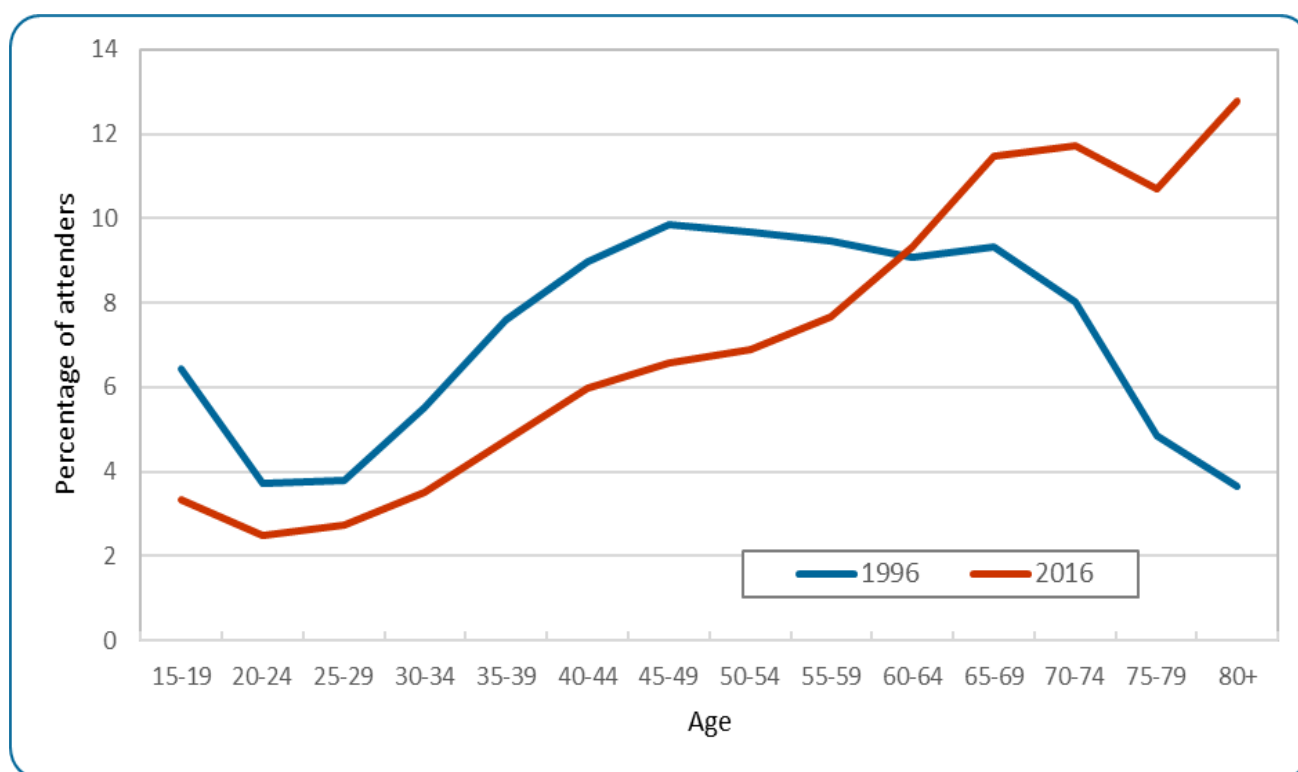
Demographic characteristics (persons aged 15 and over)	Mass attenders			Catholic population
	2006	2011	2016	2016
Median age (years)	58	59	63	47
Aged 15-24 (%)	7.6	6.9	5.8	15.5
Aged 60-74 (%)	30.5	32.1	32.5	18.3
Aged 80 or over (%)	7.4	8.5	12.8	5.4
Female (%)	60.6	60.7	61.8	53.3
With university degree (%)	27.9	33.8	37.5	20.6
Born in Australia (%)	63.9	58.8	56.8	68.9
Born in non-English-speaking country (%)	28.8	33.6	36.6	22.7
Never married (%)	16.4	16.6	14.7	33.3
In first marriage / remarried after being widowed or divorced (%)	67.3	64.1	66.9	49.7
Widowed (%)	10.0	9.8	11.0	5.8
Separated / divorced (%)	5.0	5.5	5.4	11.2
<b>Total typical weekend attendance (all ages)</b>	<b>708,618</b>	<b>662,376</b>	<b>623,356</b>	<b>-</b>

*Source of data: National Count of Attendance 2006-2016, National Church Life Survey 2006-2016, Census of Population and Housing 2016.*

## AGE AND SEX OF MASS ATTENDERS

The median age of Mass attenders rose slightly between 2006 and 2011, and then again between 2011 and 2016. The age profile of the Mass attending population is generally much older than that of Catholics in general. Almost one third of Mass attenders (32.5%) are currently aged between 60 and 74 years, and attenders overall are ageing. Figure 1 shows that, in 2016, Mass attenders aged 15 to 59 accounted for a lower proportion of attenders (44%) than they did in 1996 (65%), while attenders aged 60 and over accounted for a much higher proportion of all attenders.

**Figure 1: Age profile of Mass attenders, 1996 and 2016**



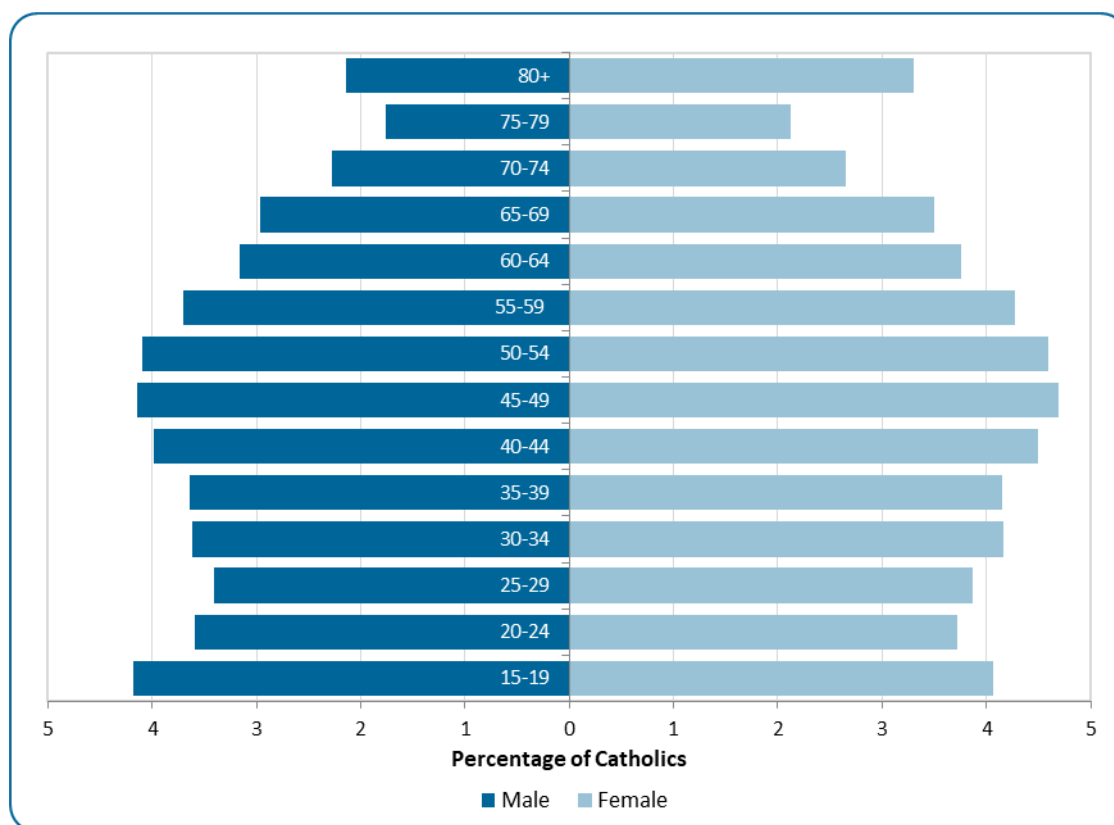
*Source of data: Catholic Church Life Survey 1996 and National Church Life Survey 2016.*

Figure 2, on the following page, shows the age-sex profile of the Catholic population in 2016, while Figure 3 shows the Mass attending population. A comparison of these two figures shows a striking contrast between the Catholic population overall and the Mass attending population.

Among Mass attenders, just over three in every five attenders are women; this ratio has remained unchanged over five successive Church Life Surveys. The age-sex profile in Figure 3 clearly shows the preponderance of women and the lack of youth and young adults of both sexes.

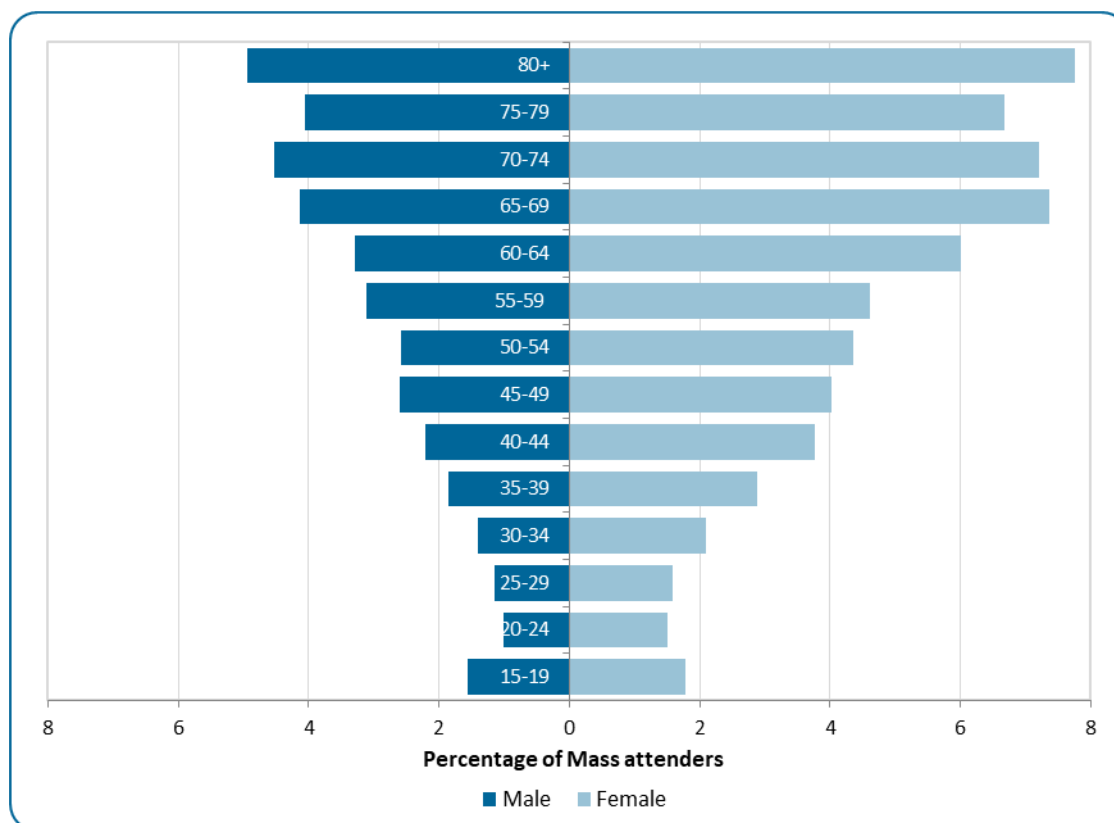


**Figure 2: Age-sex profile of Catholics aged 15 and over, 2016**



Source of data: Census of Population and Housing 2016.

**Figure 3: Age-sex profile of Mass attenders aged 15 and over, 2016**



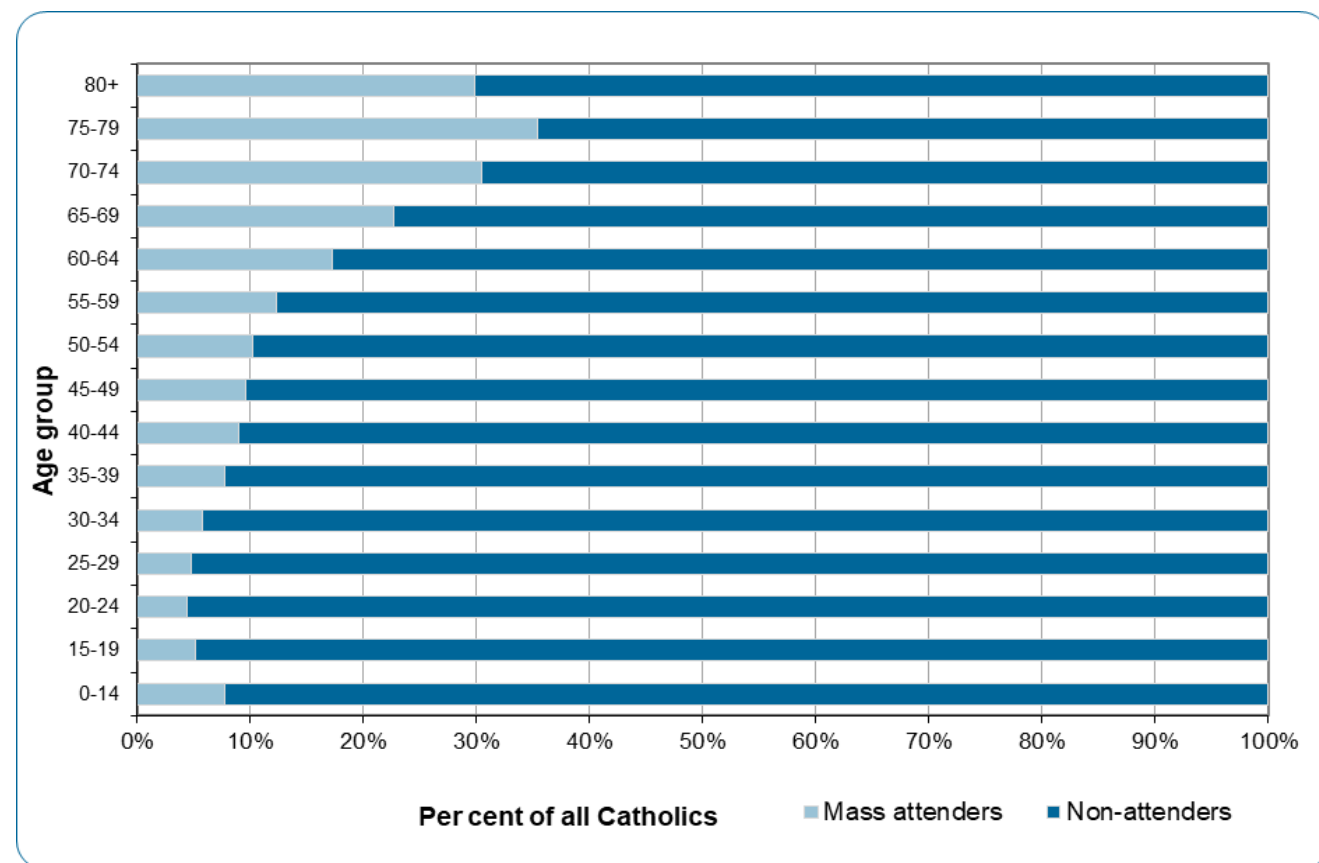
Source of data: National Church Life Survey 2016.

## MASS ATTENDANCE RATES BY AGE

As Figure 4 illustrates, attendance rates vary considerably by age. Among Catholic young adults aged 20-34, less than six per cent attend Mass on a typical weekend. The highest attendance rates are found among those aged 70 and over, where attendance is typically around 30 per cent or more in each five-year age group. Combined, their attendance made up almost 50 per cent of all attenders.

The dark blue areas of the graph represent non-attending Catholics for each age group. Many of these are associated with Catholic schools, either as parents, teachers or as students. Others are employed in Catholic organisations such as hospitals, universities or social service organisations. Still others have little or no regular association with the Church, but may occasionally attend Mass at Christmas, Easter or for family occasions. There are also some for whom their Catholic identity is limited to ticking the 'Catholic' box on the Australian Census form. Nevertheless, research studies have shown that Catholic identity continues to make a difference. People who identify as Catholic but who do not attend Mass have quite different beliefs compared to people who used to be Catholic but who no longer identify as such.

**Figure 4: Mass attendance rates by age, 2016**



*Derived from data from the 2016 National Church Life Survey, the 2016 National Count of Attendance and Census of Population and Housing 2016.*

## Median age of Mass Attenders by diocese

Of course, the age profile of the Catholic community differs widely across the country, and Mass attenders are a subgroup of that broader Catholic community. Many rural dioceses have relatively older age profiles in comparison to urban or more populated dioceses. On the other hand, a number of dioceses with high numbers of Indigenous Catholics, such as Darwin, Broome and Geraldton, have a much younger age profile, reflective of the general Indigenous population which has a higher fertility rate as well as higher mortality rates than the non-Indigenous population.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 3. Median age of Mass attenders and Catholics aged 15 and over by diocese, 2016**

Diocese	Mass attenders (aged 15 & over)	Catholics (aged 15 & over)
Adelaide	57	49
Armidale	72	48
Ballarat	69	50
Bathurst	71	48
Brisbane	63	46
Broken Bay	67	48
Broome	54	40
Bunbury	66	49
Cairns	67	48
Canberra & Goulburn	65	47
Darwin	49	40
Geraldton *	-	43
Hobart	68	51
Lismore	71	53
Maitland-Newcastle	69	48
Melbourne	65	47
Parramatta	54	45
Perth	62	45
Port Pirie	66	50
Rockhampton	63	45
Sale	58	47
Sandhurst *	-	50
Sydney	59	45
Toowoomba *	-	47
Townsville	65	44
Wagga Wagga	71	48
Wilcannia-Forbes	72	49
Wollongong	64	47
<b>Overall Average Age</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>47</b>

- *Geraldton, Sandhurst and Toowoomba dioceses did not have enough returned survey forms to allow reliable calculation of median ages.*

*Source: NCLS 2016, 'Attender A' electronic dataset (N = 25,244).*

*Median age: Half of all Mass attenders/Catholics were above this age and half were below it.*

As Table 3 shows, across every diocese, Mass attenders are older than Catholics in general. The dioceses of Armidale and Wilcannia-Forbes have the oldest Mass attending median age profiles (both 72 years), while Darwin (49 years), Parramatta and Broome dioceses (both 54 years) have the youngest.

Note, the median ages shown in the table are for persons aged 15 and over and, as such, may differ from other published reports that calculate medians based on all ages.

<sup>1</sup> See ABS, "Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians", Cat. 3238.0.55.001, available from [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au).

## MASS ATTENDANCE RATES BY SEX

As seen in Table 4 below, the Mass attendance rate for males and females declined steadily between 1996 and 2016. In general, the rate of women attending Mass since 1996 has always been higher than men, although the gap has declined during that same period.

**Table 4. Mass attendance rates of males and females, 1996-2016**

<b>Males</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2016</b>
Catholic population	2,332,441	2,417,235	2,462,138	2,607,240	2,515,115
Average weekly Mass attendance	336,960	297,089	279,195	260,314	238,122
Mass attendance rate	14.4	12.3	11.3	10.0	9.5
<b>Females</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2016</b>
Catholic population	2,466,509	2,584,408	2,664,739	2,832,026	2,776,705
Average weekly Mass attendance	527,040	466,637	429,423	402,062	385,234
Mass attendance rate	21.4	18.1	16.1	14.2	13.9

*Sources: Censuses of Population and Housing 1996-2016; ACBC National Count of Attendance 1996-2016; Catholic Church Life Survey 1996; National Church Life Surveys 2001-2016.*

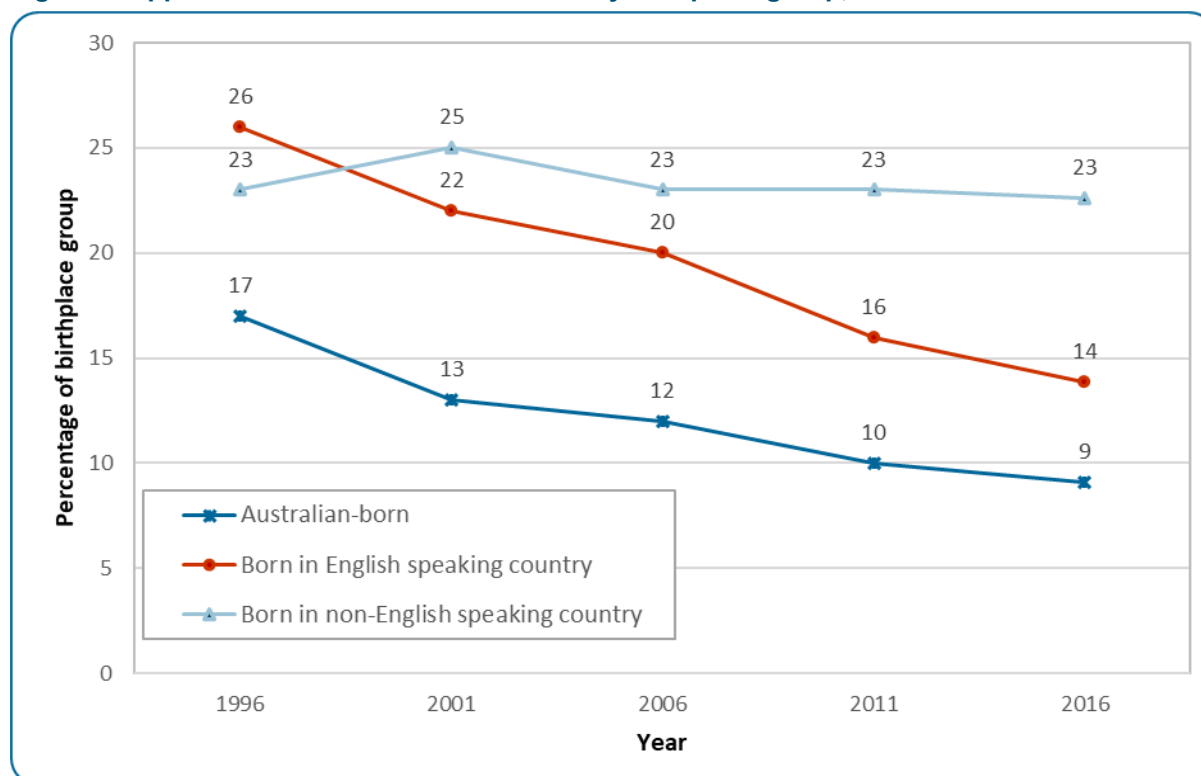
## CHANGE IN MASS ATTENDANCE OVER TIME

Research findings have consistently shown that Mass attendances have been in a more or less constant state of decline since the 1950s. Although the first National Count of Attendance was not conducted until 2001, a quite reliable national figure calculated by aggregating diocesan counts exists for 1996. This trend of decline continues. Between 1996 and 2016, a twenty-year period, typical weekly attendance in Australia fell from approximately 864,000 to 623,350, a net average fall of around 12,000 people per year.

Since 1996, the percentage of Mass attenders born in non-English-speaking countries has risen from about 18 per cent to almost 37 per cent in 2016, resulting in an increase of attenders born in non-English-speaking countries of about 72,600. Despite this increase, overall Mass attendances declined by about 28 per cent during this period. This happened because the number of Australian-born attenders and those born in English-speaking countries has continued to decrease.

Figure 5 shows how attendance rates of people born in non-English-speaking countries have remained relatively stable since 1996, while those born in Australia have declined, from 17 per cent in 1996 to nine per cent in 2016. The rate of attendance for those born in other English-speaking countries also declined from 26 per cent to 14 per cent. From both these groups, the results show that around half the number of people currently attend Mass in comparison to 20 years ago. The attendance rates in Figure 5 are approximate, due mainly to the fact that we do not have birthplace or age data for several thousand people who attend Mass in migrant Mass centres or parishes belonging to Eastern Catholic Churches.

**Figure 5. Approximate Mass attendance rates by birthplace group, 1996 – 2016**



*Derived from Catholic Church Life Survey 1996 and National Church Life Survey 2001-2016, National Counts of Attendance 2001-2016. Mass count estimates 1996. Censuses of Population and Housing 1996-2016.*

As our 2011 report noted, two other major factors have contributed to the decline and continue to do so. Firstly, a large percentage of people in particular age cohorts have stopped going to Mass. The reasons for this are many. However, in the period leading up to 2016, the impact of the findings from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was particularly significant. Secondly, young adult attenders are not being replaced by younger attenders as they age. For example, in 1996, about 136,000 Catholics aged 15 to 34 attended Mass on a typical weekend, but by 2016, the number of Mass attenders aged 15 to 34 had more than halved to about 65,500.

On the other hand, Figure 5 is one example of how much the Church in Australia owes to our immigrants, particularly those from non-English-speaking countries. However, it cannot be assumed that the situation will remain the same; for one thing, the religious composition of immigrants might change at any time, resulting in fewer Catholic immigrants. Furthermore, some research suggests that the beliefs, attitudes and Mass attendance behaviour of second generation Australians, that is, the children of immigrants, are more like those of third and later generation Australians than they are like that of their parents.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Dixon, Robert (2014). *What do Mass Attenders Believe? Contemporary cultural change and the acceptance of key Catholic beliefs and moral teachings by Australian Mass attenders*, ACBC Pastoral Research Office, Fitzroy, p. 15; Hughes, Philip (2017). "Immigration and its Continuing Impact on Religion in Australia", *Pointers*, 27-4, pp. 1-6 and Hughes, Philip (2007). *Putting Life Together*, Christian Research Association, Nunawading, pp. 61-63.

## ATTENDANCES BY DIOCESE

Table 5 on the next page, shows detailed attendance results for every diocese in Australia, as well as a number of demographic characteristics for each geographical diocese.

We have already seen that total attendances fell by around 39,000 between 2011 and 2016, so it is hardly surprising that attendances fell in most geographical dioceses, with the exception of Darwin, Sale, Bunbury and Cairns. Attendance rates in the 28 geographical dioceses varied from a high of 15.7 per cent in the Archdiocese of Sydney to 6.7 per cent in the Diocese of Hobart and 6.8 in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle. Eleven geographical dioceses recorded attendance rates of ten per cent or above and the other 17 recorded rates below ten per cent. In contrast, 14 dioceses had attendance rates below ten per cent in 2011. Since attendance rate is calculated from the number of attenders and the Catholic population, it is important to note that attendance rates can fall both because of a decrease in attendance numbers and a rise in the Catholic population. Conversely, attendance rates can increase due to an increase in attendance numbers or a fall in the Catholic population.

Attendance rates are strongly influenced by the demographic composition of the Catholic population in each diocese. Statistical analysis shows that more than half of the variation between dioceses can be explained by just five demographic characteristics:

- The number of Catholics living in the diocese,

- The percentage of Catholics in the total population of the diocese,

- The percentage of Catholics living at the same address as at the time of the previous Census,

- The percentage of the adult Catholic population with a university degree, and,

- The percentage of the diocesan Catholic population born in non-English-speaking countries.

The Archdiocese of Sydney, for example, the geographical diocese with the highest attendance rate (15.7%), has a large Catholic population (594,145) making up 24.2 per cent of the total population. It has the highest percentage of any diocese of Catholics born in non-English-speaking countries (31.4%), and the second highest percentage, after the Diocese of Broken Bay, of adult Catholics with a university degree (27.3%). Its Catholic population is relatively stable, residentially speaking, with 57.9 per cent living at the same address for both the 2011 and the 2016 Censuses.

On the other hand, the Archdiocese of Hobart, with an attendance rate of 6.7 per cent, has a relatively small Catholic population (79,454) that accounts for only 15.6 per cent of the total population. While it has a residential stability much higher than the Archdiocese of Sydney (61.8%), it has a very low percentage of Catholics from non-English-speaking countries (7.4%) and of university-educated Catholics (14.4%).

Why do these five factors have such a strong influence on attendance? We know that a high proportion of Mass attenders have university degrees and were born in non-English-speaking countries. These people also tend to live in the major cities, which is one reason why the size of the Catholic population in a diocese has an impact on attendance rates; another is the ease of finding a Mass at a convenient time and place in the cities relative to rural areas. Residential stability is a factor because when people live in the one location for an extended period they are more likely to be more engaged in their local community, and that includes becoming involved in their parish. The reason why the percentage of Catholics in the total population is related to attendance rates is perhaps the most difficult to explain; it may be that a higher percentage of Catholics in the population leads to greater visibility, a stronger sense of belonging to a community, and the availability of more resources.

**Table 5. Attendances and attendance rates by diocese, 2016**

Diocese	2016 Average weekly total attendance <sup>1</sup>	2011 Average weekly total attendance <sup>1</sup>	2016 Catholic Pop- ulation	2016 Total Population	2016 Per cent Cath- olic	2016 Attend- ance Rate	2016 Per cent at same address <sup>5</sup>	2016 Per cent with a degree <sup>6</sup>	2016 Per cent born in NESC <sup>7</sup>
Adelaide	28,340	31,984	274,135	1,511,572	18.1	10.3	62.8	18.9	20.9
Armidale	3,875	4,389	42,490	184,223	23.1	9.1	57.1	13.1	4.3
Ballarat	10,024	11,896	95,696	422,854	22.6	10.5	60.5	14.3	6.5
Bathurst	5,562	7,094	65,677	232,692	28.2	8.5	56.1	13.3	4.3
Brisbane	57,539	65,952	708,701	3,418,905	20.7	8.1	51.4	21.5	13.9
Broken Bay	22,586	25,532	215,449	942,450	22.9	10.5	57.8	27.4	16.6
Broome	694	724	8,480	35,478	23.9	8.2	49.4	13.4	7.3
Bunbury	5,573	5,246	64,296	363,109	17.7	8.7	53.0	13.0	11.8
Cairns	4,266	4,196	60,977	277,414	22.0	7.0	54.5	14.3	13.1
Canberra & Goulburn	16,156	17,327	155,088	655,897	23.6	10.4	57.2	23.5	13.4
Darwin	5,994	4,313	45,151	224,604	20.1	13.3	47.0	19.2	20.8
Geraldton	1,962	2,248	27,596	126,104	21.9	7.1	42.4	13.0	12.3
Hobart	5,352	6,208	79,454	509,965	15.6	6.7	61.8	14.4	7.4
Lismore	8,699	10,103	104,580	504,442	20.7	8.3	57.1	13.5	6.0
Maitland-Newcastle	10,465	12,774	154,475	706,928	21.9	6.8	56.5	14.2	6.7
Melbourne	138,724	148,759	1,067,030	4,554,453	23.4	13.0	61.1	23.5	25.6
Parramatta	47,005	50,613	322,677	1,155,461	27.9	14.6	62.2	20.1	26.6
Perth	56,119	56,616	429,715	1,948,731	22.1	13.1	54.2	23.1	23.8
Port Pirie	2,857	2,861	27,069	166,871	16.2	10.6	62.0	10.1	9.7
Rockhampton	8,119	8,855	108,566	445,772	24.4	7.5	51.0	12.6	7.3
Sale	11,960	11,503	123,594	566,075	21.8	9.7	56.9	13.8	19.1
Sandhurst	8,572	9,388	90,189	380,584	23.7	9.5	59.4	13.8	7.3
Sydney	93,365	98,308	594,145	2,455,169	24.2	15.7	57.9	27.3	31.4
Toowoomba	5,510	7,084	65,212	272,118	24.0	8.4	53.1	14.3	6.2
Townsville	5,544	5,895	79,008	288,740	27.4	7.0	52.7	14.0	8.0
Wagga Wagga	7,274	7,817	60,674	205,325	29.6	12.0	57.7	13.5	6.8
Wilcannia-Forbes	2,275	2,747	29,264	107,511	27.2	7.8	61.2	9.6	3.8
Wollongong	18,108	19,598	189,834	724,240	26.2	9.5	57.8	15.1	15.5
Military Ordinariate of Australia <sup>2</sup>	583	539	2,193	10,006	21.9	26.6	-	-	-
Chaldean <sup>3</sup>	3,779	3,200	[10,029]	-	-	37.7	-	-	-
Maronite <sup>3</sup>	18,081	15,243	[36,434]	-	-	49.6	-	-	-
Melkite <sup>3</sup>	1,884	1,609	[2,579]	-	-	73.1	-	-	-
Syro-Malabar <sup>3</sup>	4,390	0	[8,353]	-	-	52.6	-	-	-
Ukrainian <sup>3</sup>	1,930	1,756	[2,906]	-	-	66.4	-	-	-
Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of the Southern Cross	196	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Territories <sup>4</sup>	-	-	402	4,189	-	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>623,356</b>	<b>662,376</b>	<b>5,291,817</b>	<b>23,401,882</b>	<b>22.6</b>	<b>11.8</b>	<b>57.3</b>	<b>20.6</b>	<b>19.1</b>



*Source of data: National Count of Attendance 2016 and Census of Population and Housing 2016.*

*Notes:*

- 1. 'Average weekly total attendance' is the average attendance for the four weeks of the Count and does not take into account special circumstances.*
- 2. Population figures for the Military Ordinariate refer to persons living on military bases. They do not include all Armed Services personnel and their families, most of whom do not live on military bases.*
- 3. The Chaldean, Maronite, Melkite, Syro-Malabar and Ukrainian Catholic population figures are included within individual Diocesan Catholic Population totals but are also shown here to allow calculation of attendance rates.*
- 4. Other Territories comprises people on off-shore oil rigs, drilling platforms and the like, people on an overnight journey by train or bus, and people whose usual address could not be determined from the Census form. They have been added to this table to preserve national totals.*
- 5. Per cent of Catholics living at the same address as at the time of the previous Census in 2011.*
- 6. Percentage of the Catholic population aged 15+ with a university degree.*
- 7. Percentage of the Catholic population born in non-English-speaking countries.*

*Attendances at Masses of the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei have been included in the individual dioceses.*

## BIRTHPLACES OF MASS ATTENDERS

In 2016, around 37 per cent of Mass attenders were born in non-English-speaking countries, which was slightly higher than in 2011 (34%). Attenders born in the Philippines, India, Sri Lanka and Vietnam accounted for much larger proportions of attenders compared to the Catholic population as a whole. The principal countries or regions of birth for Mass attenders are shown in Table 6, alongside comparable figures for the Catholic population aged 15 and over.

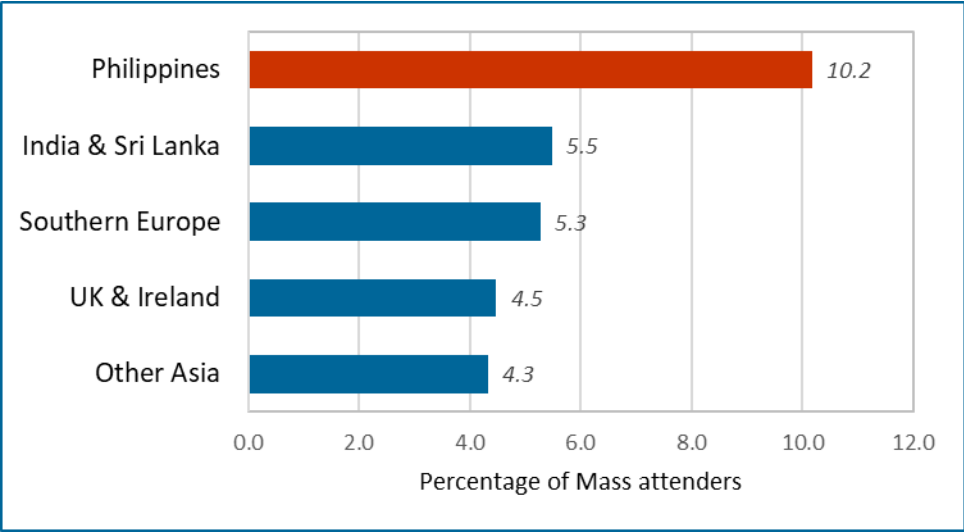
**Table 6. Country of birth of Mass attenders and Catholic population aged 15 years and over, 2016**

Country of birth	Mass attenders (%)	Catholic population (%)
Australia	56.9	70.3
New Zealand	0.9	1.5
Pacific Islands	0.9	0.5
UK & Ireland	4.5	4.1
Northern & Western Europe	2.1	1.6
Southern Europe	5.3	4.9
Eastern Europe	0.9	2.6
Middle East & North Africa	0.7	1.8
South Africa	0.6	0.4
Other Africa	1.2	0.4
North America	0.5	0.4
Central & South America	0.8	1.8
China & Hong Kong	0.7	0.5
South Korea	0.3	0.4
Vietnam	3.8	1.0
Philippines	10.2	3.8
India & Sri Lanka	5.5	1.8
Other Asia	4.3	1.3
Other countries	0.0	0.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source of data: National Church Life Survey 2016 and Census of Population and Housing 2016.*

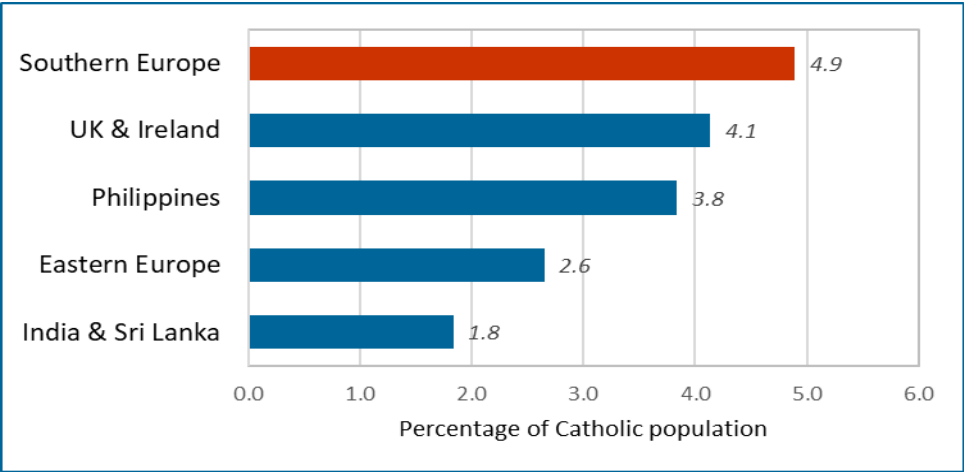
Figures 6 and 7 show the Top 5 overseas birthplaces of Mass attenders and the Catholic population, aged 15 and over, in 2016. While the two main birthplaces of attenders born overseas were Asian countries (Philippines and India & Sri Lanka), the main birthplaces of Catholics overall were in Europe (Southern Europe and the United Kingdom & Ireland).

Figure 6. Top 5 overseas birthplaces of Mass attenders (aged 15+), 2016



Source of data: National Church Life Survey 2016.

Figure 7. Top 5 overseas birthplaces of the Catholic population (aged 15+), 2016



Source of data: Census of Population and Housing 2016.

## LANGUAGES OF MASS

According to the 2016 National Count of Attendance, Mass was celebrated in at least 43 different languages. Overall, around 64,000 people attended Mass celebrated in a language other than English, representing around one in every ten Mass attenders. In 2001, Mass was celebrated in 35 different languages, and around one in every 15 attenders took part in a Mass in a language other than English. In 2006, the Count recorded 30 different languages, representing around 53,500 attenders, or 7.5 per cent of all attenders. No detailed analysis of languages was carried out for the 2011 Count.

In 2016, other than English, Arabic and Vietnamese were the most common Mass languages, with 15,400 and 14,900 people respectively attending Mass in each language.

Other Mass languages commonly used included Italian (6,730 attenders), Malayalam (5,679), Polish (3,540), Chaldean (3,450), Korean (3,240) and Latin (1,730). Additionally, in some places the deaf community took part in a Mass in Auslan.

**Figure 8. 2016 languages of Mass.**



*Source of data: National Count of Attendance 2016.*

*Word Cloud: worditout.com*

## CONCLUSION

The report on the 2011 National Count of Attendance noted that we had reached a critical moment regarding Mass attendance in Australia. Five years on, there is solid evidence to suggest that the moment is more critical and urgent than ever before in Australia's history.

Between 2011 and 2016, the number of dioceses with attendance rates below ten per cent rose from 14 to 17. It is likely that this number could increase by the time of the next National Count of Attendance in 2021. The increasingly aged profile of Mass attenders exacerbated the decline in total attendances.

As Catholics in Australia become increasingly diverse in the practice of their faith, it would appear that an extraordinary event or events would need to occur before we witness a reversal—or even a plateau—of the declining attendance trends. There would need to be an surge in younger people attending Mass, or the unanticipated arrival of large numbers of Catholics from overseas, to offset the advancing age profile of attenders. The ongoing journey to the Plenary Council 2021 has been one attempt to reignite the engagement of Catholics with parishes throughout the country. Many dioceses have redoubled their efforts in the areas of evangelisation and missionary discipleship. It remains to be seen if these initiatives will bear fruit in the years ahead and make a discernible difference in the next National Count of Attendance due to be conducted in May 2021.

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