

Pastoral Research Online

Issue 52

March 2021



New Melbourne Office

L-R: Marilyn Chee, Trudy Dantis and Stephen Reid at the new office in the Cardinal Knox Centre, 383 Albert Street, East Melbourne VIC.

Come visit us for coffee and a chat!

Dear Readers,

Welcome to our March newsletter! We have many exciting projects to look forward to this year. 2021 is the year of the Australian Census and the year of the National Count of Attendance. These are two of our main projects that operate over a five-year period. Beginning this month, we will provide you with up-to-date information and helpful instructions on how parishes and dioceses can help prepare their communities for participating in these two projects.

Meanwhile, in Melbourne, our NCPR staff have had a challenging year to say the least, with extended lockdowns and a lack of an office space. But at the beginning of March 2021, the staff have moved into a new office in the Cardinal Knox Centre in East Melbourne.

While the main NCPR office continues to remain in Canberra, we are very pleased to have a new home for our Melbourne colleagues. This is expected to be a temporary move, with more permanent lodgings becoming available later in the year.

This issue of our newsletter features research findings on Disability from the Australian Census, details of a new project with the National Catholic Education Commission, insights on how data can drive mission planning and much more.

We wish all our readers a blessed Holy Week and a very Happy Easter!

INSIDE THIS ISSUE



- 2021 National Count of Attendance
- Disability Report Released
- New Research Projects in 2021
- Call for 2021 diocesan statistics
- Data & Mission Planning
- Journey to Plenary Council
- CRA projects

2021 National Count of Attendance



PC: [Mateus Campos Felipe](#) on [Unsplash](#)

The National Count of Attendance will be conducted again throughout Australia during 2021. All dioceses and parishes are urged to take part.

Church attendance is perhaps the most basic measure of religious practice. Most dioceses conduct counts of attenders, but not every diocese does it with the same frequency, in the same way or at the same time.

The National Count of Attendance is conducted over the first four consecutive Sundays (and Saturday evenings) in May. Counting over four Sundays ensures that fortnightly and monthly Masses are not overlooked. This is particularly important for many country towns and migrant communities.

The method used for the count enables reporting of actual numbers attending on any particular weekend of the count and also the calculation of the total number likely to be in attendance on a typical weekend after special events, like Confirmations, have been considered.

Why are we doing it this year?

The National Count is conducted in the same year as the Australian Census (to be held on 10 August 2021) so that the information collected can most effectively be used in association with results from the other project.

According to the most recent national count, conducted in 2016, about 11.8 per cent of Australia's Catholic population, or 623,400 people, went to church on a typical weekend. Most of those attended Mass in a parish, but the figure also included people attending Mass in non-parish centres, such as migrant centres, hospitals, jails and boarding schools, and also some who were not attending Mass at all, but rather a Sunday assembly in the absence of a priest. A report based on the 2016 National Count of Attendance can be downloaded from our website free of charge at this link:

<https://ncpr.catholic.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Mass-attendance-in-Australia-2016.pdf>.

What about COVID-19 affecting Mass attendances?

In many areas around Australia, COVID-19 restrictions still limit the numbers attending Mass on Sundays. In other cases, people still prefer to attend a Mass online and many dioceses and parishes continue to stream Masses via YouTube or Facebook. In order to include these online viewers, this year, parishes will be invited to provide the number of 'views' of Masses or Sunday assemblies streamed online. This will allow us to measure the number of households across the country that viewed Mass online on a typical weekend in May.



How do I prepare for the 2021 National Count?

The 2021 Count will be conducted in all parishes and other Mass centres, such as migrant community centres, throughout Australia. The count will be as comprehensive as possible and include people of all ages at Mass (including babies), and other types of Sunday Assemblies.

Most parishes have already been notified about the Count in May. Parish Priests will be contacted by their dioceses in late April and provided with the survey link and detailed instructions of how to complete the Count.

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference National Attendance Count 2021 Counter's Record Form	
Date:	_____
Church or centre:	_____
Starting time of Mass or Sunday Assembly:	_____
Language of celebration (if other than English):	_____
Total number of people in attendance:	<input type="text"/>

The 2021 National Count is a simple headcount: individual attenders will not have to fill in any detailed survey forms. The main exercise does not disrupt Mass; it can be done, for example, while the collection is being taken up, or as people are arriving or leaving the service.

This year, parishes will also be asked to provide aggregate information on the age and sex of those who attend Mass and Sunday assemblies. This information is requested in Week 3 and 4 respectively. While this may seem difficult, it really will be quite simple. Our office has prepared special guidance documents and counters forms to help parishes with this task.

Where do I get more Information?

A document providing background information on the 2021 Count is available from our website:

<https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/national-count-of-attendance/>

More resources such as training videos, sample forms and other instructions will be added to the webpage in the coming month. For further assistance and to have your questions answered, feel free to contact one of the following:

Trudy Dantis: trudy.dantis@catholic.org.au

Stephen Reid: stephen.reid@catholic.org.au



2016 National Catholic Census Project

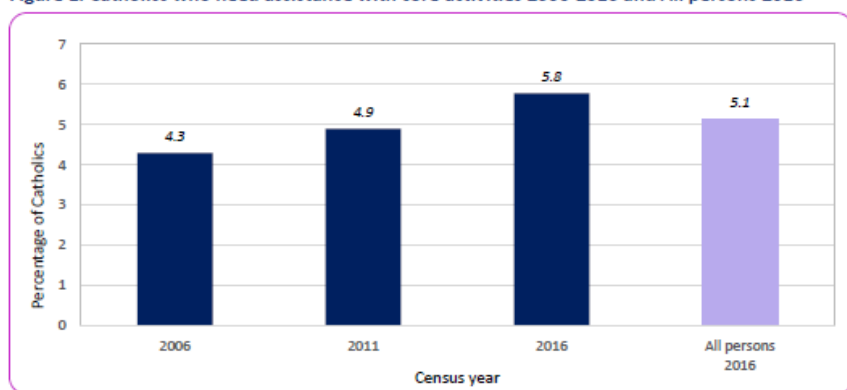
Release of Disability Report

The 2016 National Census provides valuable information about the needs of people within our communities. The latest report released by the NCPR draws together the information available related to disability, both on a national level and across the geographical dioceses. The national information primarily reports on people's need for assistance and the provision of unpaid support, as well as the use of sign languages within the Catholic population.

The 2006 Census was the first to include the variable 'Core Activity Need for Assistance' which was developed to measure the number of people with a profound or severe disability. The ABS defines these as "people needing help or assistance in one or more three core activity areas of self-care, mobility and communication, because of a long-term health condition (lasting six months or more), a disability (lasting six months or more), or old age". Figure 1 below shows the percentage of Catholics across Australia who needed such assistance over the last three Census years, compared to the general Australian population in 2016. The graph shows that the number of Catholics who need assistance is rising, and the figure for Catholics was greater than that of the Australian population in 2016.



Figure 1. Catholics who need assistance with core activities 2006-2016 and All persons 2016

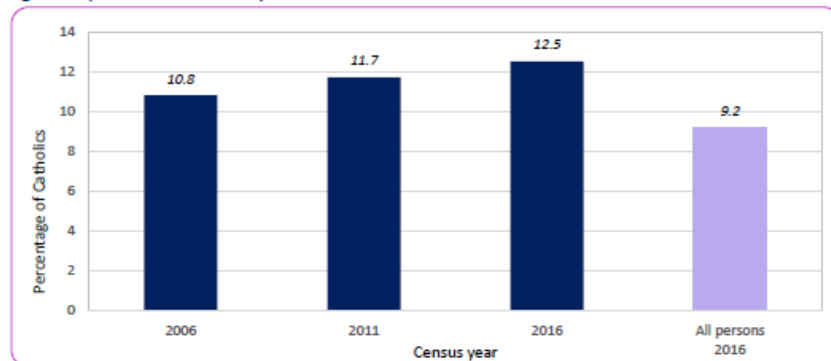


The disability report also examined the number of Catholics who provide unpaid assistance to a person with a disability. As Figure 2 shows, the number of people who provide such assistance has risen over the last three Censuses. The number of Catholics who provide such help is significantly higher than the proportion of the general Australian population. This is the case across almost all Catholic dioceses. In

2016, the Archdiocese of Melbourne reported the highest number of Catholics providing unpaid assistance (112,218), while the Diocese of Sandhurst reported the highest proportion of Catholics (14%).

The Archdiocese of Melbourne recorded the highest number of Catholics in this category (66,436), while the Diocese of Lismore recorded the highest percentage (7.3%) of Catholics who were in need of such assistance. Lismore, along with the Archdioceses of Hobart and Adelaide reported consistently high proportions over the last 10 years.

Figure 2. Catholics who provided unpaid assistance to a person with a disability (% of Catholics aged 15+) 2006-2016 and All persons 2016



The Disability Report can be viewed on or downloaded from our website at: <https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Disability-Report-Final.pdf>

New Research Projects in 2021

National Catholic Education Commission Project

The NCPR has been commissioned by the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) to undertake a project titled “Pedagogy Development: Building on Positive Learnings from COVID-19”.

As the name suggests, this project will examine the innovative approaches to online learning and other blended learning styles that were implemented in Australian Catholic schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study will investigate the challenges faced and seek to identify best practices that can be applied to learning practices in the future.

The project will begin with a comprehensive literature review of the research already undertaken in this area, followed by a document analysis of the policy documents and other guidance materials provided by and to Australian Catholic schools during the time of the pandemic.

The second phase of the project will involve a number of case studies to better understand the experience of remote or blended learning in a range of schools around Australia. We hope to interview and meet with principals, teachers, and other Catholic Education staff to learn about their experience of COVID-19 and the strategies they implemented which were most effective in improving learning and wellbeing outcomes for students in Catholic primary and secondary schools. The project is expected to be completed in 2022.



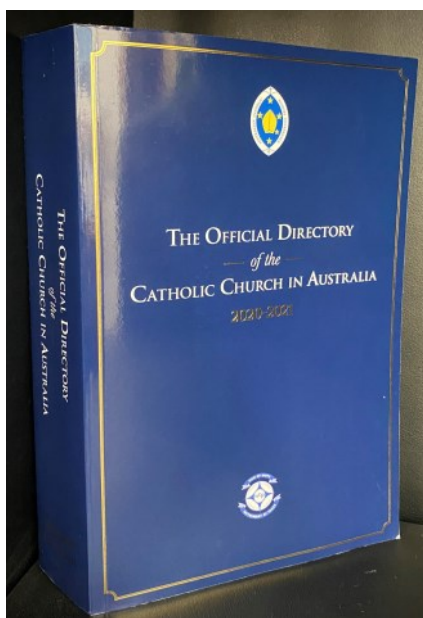
Call for Diocesan Statistics

Diocesan statistics due by 9 April 2021

Diocesan contacts will have received a request to provide the annual statistics for the *Official Directory of the Catholic Church in Australia*. The directory provides a valuable reference for the Catholic Church and presents a picture of the current population, clergy and numerous ministries in various dioceses.

The request includes a copy of last year's figures to assist with the process. Responses should be returned to NCPR staff by no later than **Friday 9 April 2021**.

Any questions about the process, or the information required, can be directed to Stephen Reid at stephen.reid@catholic.org.au or Lavina Thomas at lavina.thomas@catholic.org.au.



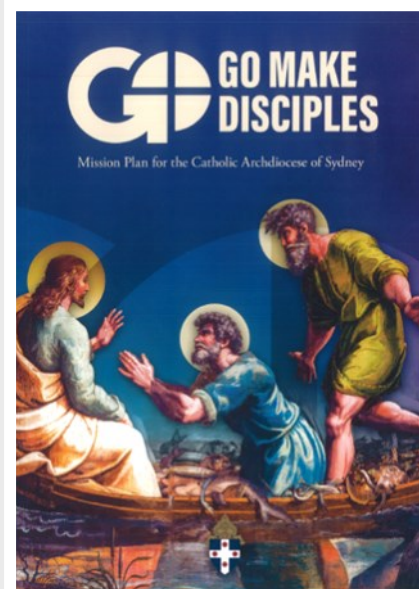
Data and Mission Planning

Go Make Disciples

In December 2020, the Archdiocese of Sydney released their Mission Plan titled *Go Make Disciples*. The NCPR was consulted as part of the process to provide appropriate data to support the planning process being undertaken. While some of the data, such as diocesan Census data, was readily available, other information required more detailed analysis.

The data provided to the Archdiocese of Sydney included:

- A time-change analysis of weekly Mass attendance figures for all parishes from 2001 to 2019, using data from the five-yearly ACBC National Count of Attendance and Archdiocesan Mass count
- A time-change analysis of Mass attendance rates for all parishes from 2001 to 2019, using data from the National Count of Attendance, National Catholic Census Project and Archdiocesan Mass count
- Estimates of 2029 Mass attendance figures for all parishes
- Estimates of 2029 Catholic populations for all parishes
- Estimates of 2029 Mass attendance rates
- Demographic information about Catholics and the overall population 2001–2016, using data from the National Catholic Census Project.
- Demographic information about Mass attenders 2001–2016, using data from the National Church Life Survey



Go Make Disciples can be read and downloaded at www.gomakedisciples.org.au

Daniel Ang, Director of the Sydney Centre for Evangelisation, explains the purpose of the Mission Plan, and how the information provided by the NCPR supported its development:

“The strategic intent of *Go Make Disciples* is to bring together a focus on discipleship—the personal encounter of Christ and the response and decision of faith—that is at the heart of authentic renewal, together with those present challenges and opportunities before many parish and chaplaincies in this time of change. Too often these concerns can be treated apart from one another, despite our best intentions.

We recognise that if we only change the structures of our parishes without spiritual renewal, the decline of vulnerable communities may continue apace, only on a larger scale. However, without revisiting our structures—the way we are organised for God’s mission—some parishes may lack the people and resources for sustainable and effective outreach so that some may be denied outreach from the Church.

This approach demanded a clear theology of mission, centred in discipleship and personal conversion in the midst of the Church, and a clear account of our own situation in the Archdiocese of Sydney, an appraisal that was gleaned through use of data provided by the NCPR.

The NCPR assisted us with advice and insight around various aspects of our Archdiocesan life, including a time-change analysis of attendance trends over the past twenty years and extrapolations of Catholic population figures and attendance rates over the next ten years or so assuming current trends persist. The demographic information that NCPR was able to provide has also helped us gain an objective view of our communities, which will be further enriched by parish self-assessments for those communities struggling with rates of participation, temporal resources for mission and personnel to support the priest and volunteers in the work of deepening faith and increasing outreach.

The research data and analysis from the NCPR was complemented by internal data including annual parochial returns, the insights of episcopal visitations, discussions at the Council of Priests, Council of Deans and Diocesan Curia, and collaboration with the agencies of the Archdiocese including finance, education and social support agencies.

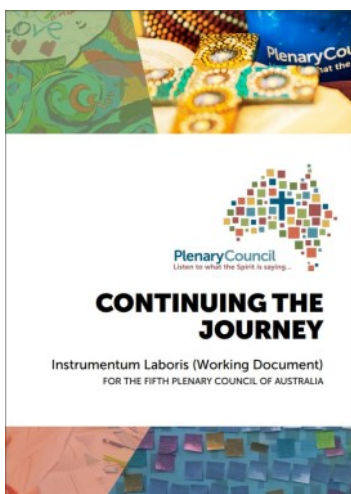
Our Sydney Centre for Evangelisation was also established in mid-2020 to drive implementation of *Go Make Disciples*. The Archdiocesan Mission Plan includes 176 pages of practical ideas for parishes to apply in five key foundational areas that were identified by consultation and literature in evangelisation and that have a demonstrated impact on the renewal of parish culture.

As intimated, apart from its immediate utility in the slow recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, in the longer term *Go Make Disciples* seeks to serve our Sydney parishes by supporting not only the 'new wine' of spiritual renewal but also 'new wineskins' in the form of new structures. We desire that every parish, migrant community or chaplaincy flourish for generations to come but how they might best thrive and be sustained into the future will look different in each particular situation. The research data provided by NCPR will assist us to ensure discernment and decisions are informed and not arbitrary as can sometimes be the case.

These trends and the processes intended around change were recently presented at our 22 March clergy conference, with over 220 priests and deacons present in discussion with the Archbishop, ourselves and each other around the future of the Archdiocese and the dual elements of spiritual and structural renewal to which we are committed. As Archbishop Anthony shared, the focused work of the past eighteen months and consultations prior has yielded a framework or scaffolding which will be a sure guide for the evangelising initiatives and changes to take place in Sydney so we can better serve the Gospel call to 'make disciples' of Jesus Christ."

If you would like more information about how the NCPR can support your organisation, please contact us at ncpr@catholic.org.au

Journey to Plenary Council 2018-2022 Update



Continuing the Journey

At the end of February another significant step in the journey toward the first assembly of the Plenary Council was reached with the release of the *Instrumentum Laboris* (working document), entitled *Continuing the Journey*. The *Instrumentum Laboris* draws from the past phases of the Plenary Council: 'Listening and Dialogue' and 'Listening and Discernment', as well as scripture teachings and Vatican documents; papal encyclicals, speeches, and homilies; bishops' statements and research documents from within and beyond the Church.

A key architect of the *Instrumentum Laboris* was Archbishop Tim Costelloe, Chair of the Commission & President of the Plenary Council. Reflecting on the working document, Archbishop Costelloe said, "This is an exciting step forward and we take it together, amidst a time of great change.

More than 220,000 people participated in the first stages of Listening and Dialogue, and those voices can be heard clearly in the working document".

For more information about the *Instrumentum Laboris*, *Continuing the Journey*, access or download a copy from this link:

<https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/instrumentum-laboris/>



Other Australian Research

Research from the Christian Research Association

The Christian Research Association (CRA) ecumenically serves Christian churches across Australia by providing contemporary and reliable research about religious faith and issues impacting parishes, churches and their agencies.



The organisation recently undertook two projects which parishes, dioceses and other Catholic organisations might be interested in similarly undertaking.

The first project was a two-stage community engagement project for a suburban Catholic parish, which sought to understand how the local community was engaging with the parish's mission. Part One of the research used an online survey to obtain a comprehensive picture of the local community's attitudes, beliefs and views of the parish. The survey also asked respondents if they wanted to be involved in Part Two of the project, a series of focus groups. The focus groups allowed for a much deeper understanding of people's attitudes than those explored in the survey. The data from the survey and the focus groups provided the parish leadership team with an opportunity to understand the needs of people in their local community and to adapt their pastoral planning processes accordingly.

The second project was part of a review for a future building development project. A suburban Protestant church sought to understand the current and future needs of the community in its immediate local government area. By firstly undertaking an analysis of official public data and statistics, including Census data, the research was able to provide a comprehensive picture for how the church's buildings and ministries might play a pivotal role within the community in the future. A follow-up survey of its church community then sought to update its own database and obtain an overview of the attitudes, beliefs and practices of the community.

The Christian Research Association also operates its own Human Research Ethics Committee, which most sociological investigations require clearance from to ensure ethical conduct of research. To discuss the work of the CRA or potential research projects, please contact Stephen Reid via email: s.reid@cra.org.au.

NCPR Staff

Trudy Dantis
Director

trudy.dantis@catholic.org.au
(02) 6201 9812

Leith Dudfield
Research Assistant

leith.dudfield@catholic.org.au
(02) 6201 9813

Lavina Thomas
Research Assistant

lavina.thomas@catholic.org.au

Stephen Reid
Senior Researcher

stephen.reid@catholic.org.au

Paul Bowell
Research Assistant
(Plenary Council)

paul.bowell@catholic.org.au

Marilyn Chee
Research Assistant

marilyn.chee@catholic.org.au

For more information please contact:
National Centre for Pastoral Research
Australian Catholic Bishops
Conference,
GPO Box 368 Canberra ACT 2601
P: (02) 6201 9812
E: ncpr@catholic.org.au
W: www.ncpr.catholic.org.au

