

# Pastoral Research Online

Issue 54

October 2021

## 25th Anniversary Lecture



*Above: Bishop Michael McKenna*

### How Do We Know What We Don't Know?

**Free Online Public Lecture**

by Most Rev Michael McKenna, Bishop of Bathurst,  
in celebration of 25 years of ACBC commitment to  
Pastoral Research.

**Wednesday, 17 November 2021**

**5:00 pm-6:30pm AEDT**

*(more details on page 2)*



*Dear Readers,*

*As we continue our 25-year celebrations, we are pleased to announce a jubilee lecture by Bishop Michael McKenna commemorating this occasion. Bishop McKenna was General Secretary in 1996 and oversaw the establishment of the Pastoral Projects Office (a forerunner to the NCPR). We warmly invite you to this special event. Details of the lecture and the registration link are provided in this newsletter.*

*In other news, we bring you a short report of the events and circumstances impacting Mass attendance in the 2021 National Count. We also provide updated Vatican statistics on sacraments in Australia and trends over five years.*

*Also included this month, is a short reflection on the First Assembly of the Plenary Council that has just ended, along with news of our involvement with the Synod of Bishops, particularly our role in coordinating the Australian consultative process for this event.*

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# 25 Year Anniversary Lecture



Online  
public  
lecture



How do we  
know what  
we don't  
know?



In 2021 the National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCPR) is celebrating 25 years of service to the Church.

To mark the occasion, this lecture will look at how research and analyses undertaken by the NCPR have informed the planning for parish, school and other ministry developments, and have supported major Church initiatives, including the Plenary Council.

**Delivered by**  
**Most Rev Michael McKenna**  
Bishop of Bathurst

**Respondents**  
**Mr Daniel Ang**  
Director, Sydney Centre for  
Evangelisation, Archdiocese of  
Sydney  
**Ms Danielle Cronin**  
Director, Education Policy, Catholic  
Schools NSW

**Date**  
Wednesday 17 November 2021

**Time**  
5pm (AEDT)

**Cost**  
Free to participate

**Registration is essential by**  
Monday 15 November 2021

**Information and registration**  
[acu.edu.au/nopr25](http://acu.edu.au/nopr25)

Disclaimer (October 2021): Information correct at time of printing. The university reserves the right to amend, cancel or otherwise modify the content without notice.



# 2021 Mass Attendance

## ***Thank you for your help with the 2021 National Count of Attendance!***

The 2021 National Count of Attendance was conducted in May, and since then around 94 per cent of all parishes have provided a return. This year's Count was the first time we requested age and sex data, and a good majority of parishes have provided accurate figures, which will allow us to report a reliable age-sex profile of Mass attenders.



### **Events and circumstances impacting Mass attendance in 2021**

In calculating the Mass attendance averages for each parish, we take into account any special events or other circumstances that may cause attendance to be higher or lower than it normally would be. Holding the National Count of Attendance in May (every five years) reduces the number of special circumstances, as May is generally considered the most 'normal' of months in the Church's calendar, as well as clear of school holidays in all states.

However, there are common circumstances which take place in nearly every parish throughout the year which attract additional Mass attenders, such as when a parish has Confirmations, other sacramental programs, or youth Masses. Sometimes, it is often difficult to determine what is 'special' and what is 'normal' when a parish holds an event on just about every weekend. Of course, for the 2021 Count, COVID-19 restrictions have caused additional stress on Mass attendance in nearly every diocese.

There are also geographical and social circumstances which can impact on Mass attendance. The following examples provide just a snapshot of some of those circumstances in some of the more than 1,300 parishes throughout Australia.



**Sport #1:** "Saturday Vigil - AFL Showdown Sunday 9am - Netball Jnr Carnival"



**Sport #2:** "Mass not able to be held due to road closure for Great Ocean Road marathon annual event"



**Farming:** "Attendances lower as farmers sowing their crop"



**Weather #1:** "Due to heavy rains the attendance was lower at all Masses"



**Weather #2:** "It appears the older parishioners may have chosen to stay home and watch it live on such a cold morning"



**Recreation:** "Long weekend the men had gone fishing"



**Natural disaster:** "Attendance is lower due to aftereffects of cyclone Seroja. Mass held in private home as church lost roof"



**Food:** "Attendance higher – BBQ after main Mass"



**Sleep:** "Mothers' Day – women sleeping in"

### **Mass For You At Home**

For the first time, the NCPA was able to access viewership data from the television program *Mass For You At Home*. Especially during a time when many regular Mass-goers are in lockdown and unable to attend regular services, *Mass For You At Home* provides a valuable service. Viewership numbers help us to understand the different ways that people are accessing Mass. A particular thank you to Anastasia Cowan (Head Of Enterprise Content and Licensing – Network 10) and Tim Straw (Director, Rise Media Placement Pty Ltd) for assisting with accessing the data.





# Journey to Plenary Council 2018-2022 Update

## The Plenary Council's First Assembly

The Fifth Plenary Council in Australia held its First Assembly from 3-10 October. NCPR staff, Paul Bowell and Trudy Dantis were in attendance, providing support through the Plenary Council Secretariat, which included documenting the proceedings of each day, preparing minutes and receiving interventions. The eight-day assembly opened on 3 October with a Mass celebrated by the Plenary Council President, Archbishop Timothy Costelloe. In his homily Archbishop Costelloe reminded members what would transpire in the coming week's assembly:

*"As this week we consider our life together, our pastoral care and our outreach in education, health and aged-care, our social services, our structures and governance, and many other things besides, the Lord is inviting us to reflect deeply and courageously on how we can better, as individuals and as communities of faith, be this living image of the life-giving God who, in Christ, is always seeking to be present and active in our world".*

With large parts of the country being in lockdown, the First Assembly was conducted wholly online. The virtual assembly sessions commenced on Monday with formal proceedings required to open a Plenary Council in keeping with the statutory norms and regulations of Canon Law. The Assembly soon embraced a rhythm in the coming days of daily Mass, prayer, and plenary and breakout sessions. Ten small working groups were formed as members discerned the 16 questions of the Council agenda that were grouped into six inter-related themes: Conversion; Prayer; Formation; Structures; Governance; and Institutions. The complete agenda can be accessed at:

<https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Plenary-Council-Agenda.pdf>

In the final session held on Saturday, each group presented recommendations from their particular agenda question that they had discerned throughout the week. This material will form the basis for the preparation of papers for the second Plenary Council assembly to be held in Sydney from 4-9 July 2022.

Since 2018, the Plenary Council has been a major project for the NCPR and we have assisted the process in many different ways. We are grateful to be a part of the First Assembly and help the continuing journey of discernment for the Catholic Church in Australia.

There will now be a time of prayer and discernment for the members of the Council as the fruits of their labour come to bear. At the NCPR, we will keep you updated over the coming months as the documents of the First Assembly are published, and work begins on the next Assembly in 2022.



# Synod of Bishops 2021 to 2023

*A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel,  
“journeys together”.*

*How is this “journeying together” happening today  
in your local Church?*

*What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to  
grow in our “journeying together”?*



Pope Francis is calling the Church to practice synodality, that is listening to – and hearing – one another in all facets of Church life. Dioceses across the world hosted local Synod celebrations on Sunday 17 October 2021, a week after Pope Francis officially opened the global process for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

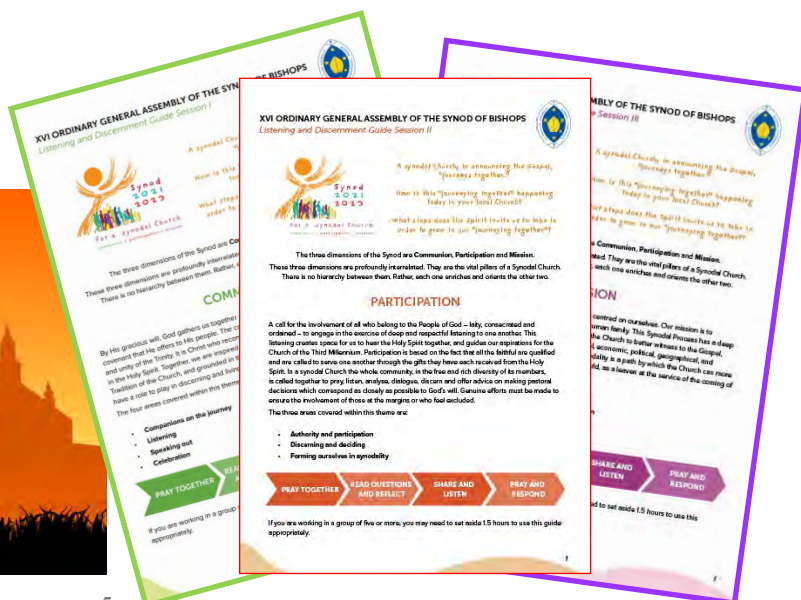
The Synod theme is “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission”.

All members of the church are being invited to participate in the consultation process. Ten areas of synodality are being explored with questions in each area across the themes of communion, participation and mission. Catholics are invited to pray with, reflect upon and respond to the questions, through a process of communal spiritual discernment.

The NCPR is assisting dioceses with the adoption of widespread consultation and with the collation and reporting of responses provided through the submission process. Dr Trudy Dantis has been appointed as National Coordinator for the Synod to oversee this process. A suite of *Listening and Discernment Adult Sessions* 1 – 3 have been created using the questions provided by the Synod, and based on the approach of Spiritual Conversation recommended for this process. An *Individual Reflection Guide* based on Lectio Divina has also been prepared.

An online portal has been set up to receive submissions nationally and will be open until mid-December. These submissions will initially be considered at the diocesan level, and then be used to develop a national report that will be provided to the Synod of Bishops secretariat for the drafting of key documents to support the Synod process.

For more information on the process, visit:  
<https://www.catholic.org.au/synodalchurch>



# Vatican Statistics 2019: Sacraments in Australia

## Baptisms, First Communions, Confirmations and Marriages

The latest statistical data for 2019 has been released by the Vatican, painting a picture of Catholic life around the world. A number of different topics are covered, but of particular interest are those statistics referring to sacraments, such as baptisms, marriages, Confirmations and First Communions. When looked at over a number of years, these provide an indicator of trends in the region, and give some insight as to what pastoral actions might be needed.

### Baptisms

Table 1 shows the number of baptisms in Australia from 2015–2019. Over the five year period, baptisms of

Table 1: Baptisms in Australia 2015-2019					
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Up to 7 years	55,770	53,231	50,480	47,625	45,993
Over 7 years	4,967	4,876	4,735	4,138	4,212
<b>Total Baptisms</b>	<b>60,737</b>	<b>58,107</b>	<b>55,215</b>	<b>51,763</b>	<b>50,205</b>

children up to the age of 7 years declined, with the number of baptisms in 2019 nearly 18 per cent lower than five years earlier. However, among those aged over 7, while baptisms had declined in the previous four years, there was a slight increase in 2019 (increase of 74). This figure particularly relates to those who made a personal decision to be baptised, so the increase is quite interesting. While it may just be a peculiarity, it could also relate to some event or situation in the previous year that had increased interest in joining the Catholic faith.

### Marriages

Like baptisms, the number of Catholic marriages declined over the five year period. However, there is

Table 2: Marriages in Australia 2015-2019					
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Between Catholics	4,987	4,534	4,458	4,069	4,070
Between a Catholic and a non-Catholic	4,004	3,632	3,437	3,198	2,801
<b>Total Marriages</b>	<b>8,991</b>	<b>8,166</b>	<b>7,895</b>	<b>7,267</b>	<b>6,871</b>

little difference in the figures between 2018 (4,069) and 2019 (4,070) for marriages between two Catholic people (Table 2). However, marriages where only one party was a Catholic steadily declined over the five-year period.

### Confirmations and First Communions

Table 3 shows that from 2015 to 2019, there was an overall decline in both Confirmations and First

Table 3: Confirmations and First Communions in Australia 2015-2019					
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Confirmations	49,791	51,080	48,481	47,691	46,621
First Communions	49,707	47,218	48,625	46,793	45,630

Communions. Confirmations dropped by six per cent and First Communions by eight per cent in the same period. However, Confirmations peaked at 51,080 in 2016 before dropping steadily. On the other hand, First Communions dropped between 2015 and 2016, then rose slightly in 2017 before dropping again over the ensuing couple of years.

While these figures provide useful information about sacramental trends in Australia, it is worth noting that they do not provide more nuanced information on the ages of those undertaking sacraments, or their motivations for doing so. For example, they do not distinguish those who have entered the church

through the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) at the age of 22 from those who may have been baptised at the age of 8 at their family's request. Nor do they identify the age or circumstance of those making their Confirmation or First Communions.

The other aspect to be mindful of is the process of data collection. The statistics are directly provided by Catholic dioceses to the Vatican each year, with methods of collection set up in each diocese for this purpose. The uniformity and accuracy of these methods may be inconsistent across the region. Nevertheless, the major trends that can be observed from these findings, rather than singular figures, provide useful information about the Catholic Church in Australia.

## Overseas Research News



### US Ordinations in 2021

Every year, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) undertakes a survey of men scheduled to be ordained to the priesthood. The most recent survey occurred between 15 January and 13 March 2021 and the results were reported in The CARA Report, Summer 2021 edition.

CARA reported that 75 per cent of the ordinands were preparing to become diocesan priests, with the remaining 25 per cent being members of religious institutes. On average, diocesan ordinands lived in the diocese or eparchy in which they were being ordained for an average of 17 years before entering the seminary. Whereas within the religious institute cohort, ordinands knew their religious institutes for an average of seven years before entering the seminary. The table below sets out the age ordinands were when they first considered a vocation to the priesthood.

Overall, most ordinands first considered a vocation to the priesthood before they were adults (64%), with around 20 per cent coming to first consider such a vocation in their college years, and the remainder at the age of 22 or older.

How old were you when you first considered a vocation to the priesthood?			
Age	All	Religious	Diocesan
Adulthood (22 or older)	17%	18%	16%
College (18-21)	20%	25%	18%
High School (14-17)	33%	34%	32%
Elementary (6-13)	28%	23%	29%
Preschool (5 or younger)	3%	0%	4%

Regarding ethnicity, 65 per cent of ordinands were white, 16 per cent Hispanic/Latino, 10 per cent Asian/Pacific Islander, six per cent African/African American/Black, and two per cent other or mixed race. Twenty-seven percent were born outside of the United States, mostly in Mexico, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Poland. On average, they came to the United States 13 years ago at an average age of 23.

Among the ordinands, 44 per cent attended Catholic elementary school, 40 per cent Catholic high school, and 38 per cent Catholic college or university. Six per cent were home-schooled. Sixty per cent had completed an undergraduate and graduate degree before entering the seminary, most commonly in social science liberal arts, philosophy or theology, and business.

Considering work experience, 58 per cent of ordinands worked full-time before entering the seminary. Of these, nine per cent worked in education, and five per cent served in the US Armed Forces. Ninety-three per cent of ordinands were encouraged to consider the priesthood by someone in their life—most frequently a parish priest, friend, or another parishioner. At the same time, 47 per cent were discouraged by one or more persons, usually a non-parent family member or a friend/classmate. For more information on the CARA report, go to: <https://cara.georgetown.edu/publication/the-cara-report/>



## Our Melbourne office has moved...

On 4 October, the staff at our Melbourne office moved to their new location at:

**St Paschal's Estate: Research, Education, Community**

**90 Albion Road**

**Box Hill Victoria 3128**

Our heartfelt thanks goes to the Archdiocese of Melbourne for providing us with temporary accommodation while the buildings were being prepared.

*More details to come in our next issue...*



**Left:** Aerial shot of St Paschal's Estate by photographer Jesse Hibbs. **Right:** Entrance to St Paschal's Estate.

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