

Pastoral Research Online

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2021 Australian Census

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) released the first round of data from the 2021 Census on Tuesday 28 June 2022.

The 2021 Census counted nearly 25.5 million people (25,422,788) in Australia, excluding overseas visitors—an increase of over two million people (2,020,896), or 8.6 per cent, since the 2016 Census.

The number of Australians identifying with a Christian denomination declined from 52 per cent in 2016 to 44 per cent in 2021. However, the overall picture conceals the trends in the different groups, including the Catholic community. The NCPR has collated some key statistics that provide a glimpse of the changing demography of Australia. *Read more inside...*

Dear Readers,

Our office has been extremely busy these past weeks as we work to finish off some key projects and prepare for our next big one—the analysis of the 2021 Census data.

This issue of the newsletter brings you the very first batch of national results from the 2021 Census as we provide a demographic overview and take a brief look at the religion variable. In forthcoming editions, we will explore other variables in greater detail as more data becomes available to us. The release of data also marks the beginning of our work on the Social Profiles, beginning with the National profile and followed by Diocesan and Parish profiles. We have provided some details on an estimated timeline for these reports.

This month, we also bring you updates on our work with the Bishops Synod on Synodality and the upcoming Second Assembly of the Plenary Council that begins this weekend.

In May, we marked our Silver Jubilee anniversary with a final celebratory lunch at the Melbourne office for past and present staff, colleagues and friends. We are grateful to those who were able to make it and fondly missed those who could not be there. We thank Bishop Michael McCarthy for his address on this occasion, which is provided herein.

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Census 2021 - First Results

The changing face of Australia's religious community



The 2021 Census revealed that the Australian community shows much diversity in its religious make up. Christianity continued to be the most common of the religious groups, by far, comprising 43.9 per cent of the population, a decrease from 52.1 per cent in the 2016 Census. Australians identifying with non-Christian religions grew from 8.2 per cent of the population in 2016 to ten per cent in 2021. The percentage of Australians not identifying with any religious group continued to grow, and in 2021 made up 38.9 per cent of the population, up from 30.1 per cent in 2016.

Although the religion question is the only optional question in the Census, it was completed by 93 per cent of all Australians. The table below shows the number and percentage of Australians who identified with each of the major religious groups in 2016 and 2021.

Religion in Australia, 2016 & 2021 (number of people identifying with each group, percentage of population)

Religious group	2016		2021	
	Number of people	% of total population	Number of people	% of total population
Catholic	5,291,834	22.6	5,075,907	20.0
Anglican	3,101,185	13.3	2,496,273	9.8
Baptist	345,142	1.5	347,334	1.4
Eastern Orthodox	502,801	2.1	535,470	2.1
Lutheran	174,019	0.7	145,868	0.6
Pentecostal	260,558	1.1	255,838	1.0
Presbyterian and Reformed	526,689	2.3	414,882	1.6
Uniting Church	870,183	3.7	673,260	2.6
Other Christian	1,129,180	4.8	1,203,985	4.7
Non-Christian	1,920,825	8.2	2,538,594	10.0
No Religion	7,040,717	30.1	9,886,957	38.9
Not Stated	2,238,735	9.6	1,848,426	7.3
Total	23,401,868	100.0	25,422,794	100.0

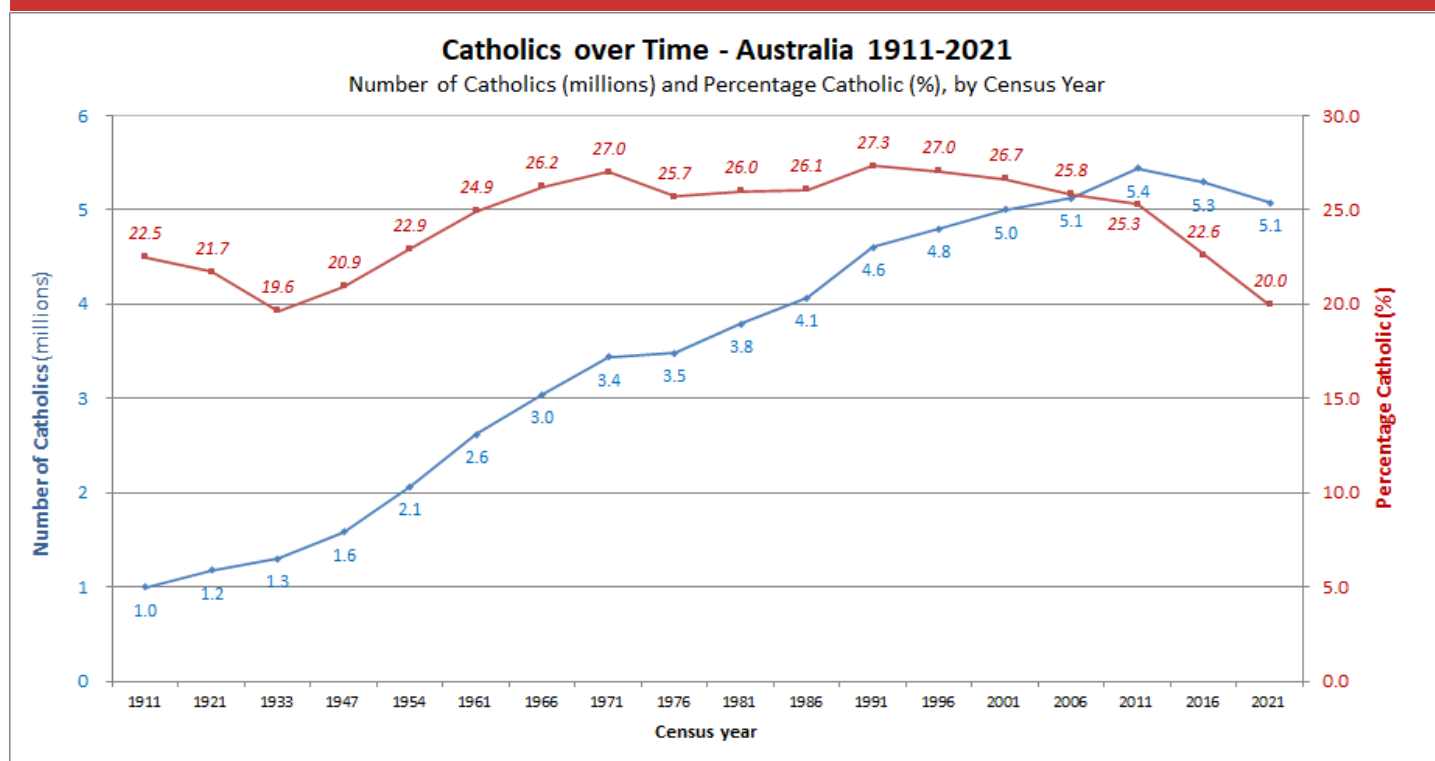
Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2016 & 2021.

One in five Australians identify as Catholic

According to the 2021 Census, Catholics comprised around twenty per cent of the Australian population, a slight decrease from the previous Census in 2016, when Catholics made up 22.6 per cent of all Australians. As shown in the graph on the following page, the number of Catholics (the **blue line**) grew at every Census until 2016, when there was a decline from around 5.4 million from five years earlier to 5.3 million. The decline continued in 2021, when there were around 215,000 fewer people identifying as Catholic than five years prior in 2016.

The **red line** on the graph shows the proportion of the population who identified as Catholic at every Australian Census. While the percentage of Catholics in the community remained relatively steady in the 50 years between 1961 and 2011, the declines in 2016 and in 2021 mean that the proportion of Catholics in the Australia population is now similar to the first few decades of the twentieth century.

Census 2021 - First Results



Some other highlights from the 2021 Census

- Females accounted for 52.9 per cent of the Catholic population, slightly higher than in 2016, when 52.5 per cent of all Catholics were female.
- Seventy-two per cent of all Catholics were born in Australia, slightly lower than the 73.6 per cent in 2016.
- The highest proportion of Catholics born overseas immigrated from South-East Asia (6.6%), followed by Southern and Eastern Europe (5.6%) and North-West Europe (4.8%). *(Detailed Census data on country of birth data is not yet available.)*
- The suburbs of Craigieburn (VIC) and Reservoir (VIC) had the highest number of Catholics, with 17,048 and 14,199 Catholics respectively.
- Two remote Aboriginal localities (with total populations of more than 300) had the highest percentage of Catholics in Australia: Kalumburu WA (83.8% were Catholic) and Milikapiti (Melville Island) NT (82.6%).
- New South Wales (not including ACT) had the highest proportion of its population who identified as Catholic (22.4%), while Tasmania had the lowest (12.7%).

Future timeline

2021 Census data will be released in a phased approach by the ABS. Other data such as employment data and additional location variables, will become available in October 2022, while more complex topics will be released in 2023. After the second round of data is released, the NCPR will begin working on the 2021 National Social Profile of the Catholic Community in Australia, with an expected release of data in the first quarter of 2023. Diocesan Social Profiles will follow in the second half of 2023. The Parish Social Profiles need additional work to define parish boundaries, particularly those which may have changed since the 2016 Census. Once those boundaries and their relation to the ABS Statistical Area 1s (SA1s) have been mapped, around 1,300 individual Parish Profiles will be developed. All being well, it is hoped these will be available by late 2023 or early 2024.

Bishops Synod on Synodality Update

Preparing the National Synthesis Report

The XVth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops is due to be held in 2023 with the theme of *Synodality: Communion, Participation, Mission*. In preparation for the Synod, people around the world have been invited to explore what synodality looks like for the Church in their regions.

In Australia, the process had already begun through the calling of the Plenary Council, the second meeting of which is due to take place in the first week of July 2022. For the Synod on Synodality, dioceses were invited to explore the concept further and their responses were developed into Diocesan Synthesis reports, representing the joys, the concerns, the questions and the experiences of those who took part. A complete set of these reports are available on the Synod website at <https://www.catholic.org.au/synodalchurch>.



The next step in the process is for the diocesan reports to be synthesised into one national report which will be provided to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops in August this year. The NCPR has been intimately involved in developing this report which aims to provide an accurate and transparent picture of the views presented from around Australia.

The bishops of Australia have been involved in three meetings with NCPR staff to provide their feedback and reflections on the final report. The outcomes from the upcoming Plenary Council related to the areas of synodality will also be included. Once the consolidated report is provided to the Holy See, the Australian bishops will also engage with other episcopal conferences in the Pacific to prepare a regional contribution.

More information on the Synod is available on the website at: <https://www.catholic.org.au/synodalchurch>

Journey to Plenary Council 2018-2022 Update

Second Plenary Council Assembly

The second, and final, assembly of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia is due to take place from 3-9 July 2022. More than 300 people—members, advisers, observers and support personnel—will be in Sydney to join the assembly as the Plenary Council reaches its final stages. The **Motion and Amendments** document which will be debated and voted on during the assembly will be made available at: <https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/>

As with the first meeting of the Plenary Council, Masses and some sessions will be live-streamed, beginning with the opening Mass on Sunday 3 July 2022 at 5:00pm AEST. A live-streaming schedule, and the portal for sending messages, is also available on the Plenary Council website at the link above.

The closing Mass of the Plenary Council, to be celebrated at 10.30am AEST on Saturday July 9 at St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, is also open to the public.

Please keep this event and all those participating in it in your prayers over the coming week!



Central Coast Project

Developing an extended social profile

The NCPR is frequently asked for information or data from an array of people and organisations, both within and outside the Catholic Church. Often the requests seek small amounts of information about a specific topic, such as population figures from Census data. Occasionally, requests seek much more comprehensive information and analysis of data from multiple sources. One such recent request came from the Diocese of Broken Bay.

In an effort to gain a greater understanding of the community within this specific region, the diocese commissioned the NCPR to develop an extended social profile for the Central Coast district of New South Wales—an area comprising nine parishes spread over 1,861 square kilometres, located mid-way between Greater Sydney and Newcastle.

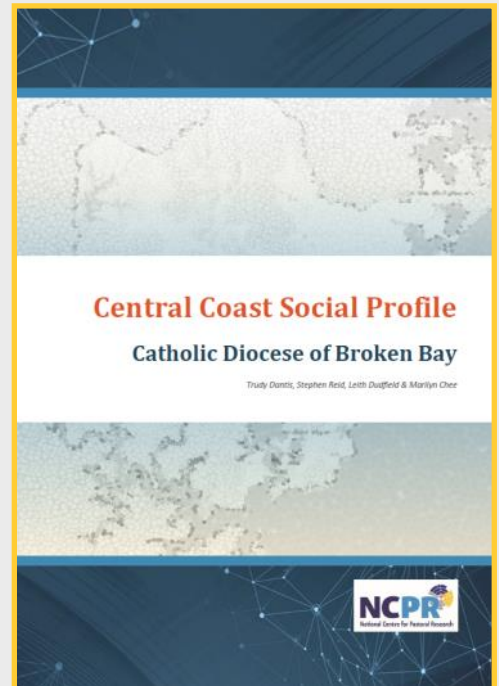
The NCPR utilised numerous sources of data in developing the social profile. In addition to NCPR-held data, such as Mass attendance figures and parish and diocesan Census data, other sources included diocesan sacramental statistics, Catholic Schools data, National Church Life Survey data, local government health statistics, and a variety of other state government demographic, social and health information.

Broadly, the social profile report presented five key sections of the Central Coast which provided an in-depth snapshot of the community.

1. An **overview of the region** highlighted the key demographics of the region, as well as the distinctive features of the community.
2. A comprehensive **investigation of the Catholic community** provided a snapshot of individuals, households and families in the area.
3. An **exploration of parishes and the Mass-attending community** provided important insights from the Mass Attendance counts and the National Church Life Survey.
4. **Catholic schools and their students** were examined by looking at key datasets related to enrolments, school fees, demographics, counselling, wellbeing and future planning.
5. Exploring the range and level of available **health and other social services** in the region highlighted valuable insights for the diocese's planning for service provision.

Incorporated throughout the report were questions and areas for further reflection which meant the information provided allowed readers to not only familiarise themselves with the local community, but also consider the pastoral response of the diocese to the people living in the Central Coast.

The report will be updated when customised data from the 2021 Census becomes available later this year.



If you would like more information about how the NCPR can provide a similar social profile for a region in your diocese or support your organisation in another way please contact us at ncpr@catholic.org.au

25th Anniversary Lunch



Celebrating 25 years of pastoral research

On 19 May 22, the current NCPR staff joined with the members of the Australian Catholic Council for Pastoral Research (ACCPR), former staff and other supporters to celebrate 25 years of pastoral research with a lunch at the NCPR's Melbourne office, located at the University of Divinity.

Attendees were addressed by Prof Gabrielle McMullen, the chair of the ACCPR, and by Dr Bob Dixon, the founding director of the NCPR. The event allowed attendees an opportunity to reminisce on the challenges and successes over the past 25 years, and to build or renew acquaintances with many of the NCPR's most valuable allies.



Above: Prof Gabrielle McMullen addresses the attendees at the 25th anniversary celebration lunch.

While disappointed not to be able attend in person, the current bishops' delegate to the ACCPR, Most Rev Michael McCarthy,

Bishop of Rockhampton, gave the following speech via video-conference to those present. It is produced in its entirety below:

Gabrielle has asked me to say a few words around the significance of the gathering today and the importance of the National Centre for Pastoral Research, whose role has been to assist the planning of the Bishops in ministry, and its significance for the Australian Church.

Firstly, I wish to express my thanks to all of you who gather and reflect on the mission of the Church, and you, Gabrielle, who leads us in that reflection. On behalf of the Bishops of this land, we thank you for your leadership, Gabrielle, and all those of the ACCPR and staff of the National Centre for Pastoral Research.

Last night, I read the paper Bishop McKenna delivered on the 25th Anniversary in which he highlighted the unique position of this group and it being the only Bishops Conference research centre in the Catholic world. As Michael reflected on his own immersion into the mathematical world of statistics, which were common courses in many of our undergraduate studies, for all of us these studies set us on the path of valuing the importance of gathering experimental and factual data and offering a scientific interpretation to our various disciplines.

The book, Mission or Maintenance, was offered as a pastoral text in our seminaries and then the Papal letter for the future, Evangelii Nuntiandi, opened a new vista of pastoral excitement as it mapped a missionary Church for the future.



Above: Dr Bob Dixon, founding director of the NCPR, and Prof Peter Sherlock, Vice Chancellor of the University of Divinity.

As Bishop Michael told the story, which began in 1996 with the establishment of the National Catholic Research Council with himself as Chair and funded through the ACBC's Bishop's Commission for Catholic Education, this anchored pastoral research within the ACBC. This underpinned the importance of connecting research for the Catholic Church and the collection of the five yearly Census data. For Catholic education, this data ensured an accuracy in modelling the placement of Catholic schools and the flow-on effect

25th Anniversary Lunch

to the dioceses and the expansion of the mission with the establishment of parishes and churches as centres of outreach.

I found the history of Bishop McKenna informative as it documented the strong connection of the Research Office, the ACBC and the General Secretariat, the Bishops of the ACBC and its expansion into working with the Christian churches of Australia. Some of the names from that era include Father Brian Finnigan, Mr Bob Dixon, Bishops Peter Ingham, Adrian Doyle and Denis Hart, and Professor Nick Tonti-Filippini.

We honour all those today who have been a valuable part of the history, our own Gabrielle, whose connection as the Pro Vice-Chancellor and Head of Melbourne Campus of ACU, supported this office and is now our Chair.

Trudy and Stephen are the ones leading the office and providing valuable support to the Church and its mission. For me as the Bishop of a rural diocese, mapping the changes in demographics and attitudes and connections is vitally important.

On behalf of the Bishops, Thank you!



Above: Dr Rowan Ireland, Rev Dr Michael Mason, Fr Stephen Hackett, Dr Ruth Powell, Prof James McLaren, Ms Audra Kuncinas, Dr Ruth Webber, Prof Peter Sherlock, Prof Gabrielle McMullen, Rev Prof Philip Hughes, Dr Bob Dixon, Prof Des Cahill, Peter Wilkinson, Dr Trudy Dantis, Ms Leith Dudfield, Ms Marilyn Chee and Mr Stephen Reid.



Above: Dr Rowan Ireland and Rev Dr Michael Mason



Above: Ms Marilyn Chee, current staff member at the NCPR, and Ms Sophy Morley, member of the ACCPR and Diocesan Coordinator for Liturgy and Pastoral Ministry in the diocese of Sale.

New Publication

Bishop McKenna's 25th Anniversary Lecture

On 17 November 2021, Bishop Michael McKenna, with the support of the Australian Catholic University, delivered a lecture titled "How do we know what we don't know?" commemorating the past 25 years of pastoral research by the National Centre for Pastoral Research and its previous iterations.

This lecture has now been published in the April 2022 edition of the Australasian Catholic Record:

How Do We Know What We Don't Know? McKenna, Michael. *The Australasian Catholic Record*; Strathfield Vol. 99, Iss. 2, (Apr 2022): 224-231.

For information about how you can view a copy, please visit: <https://www.acr.catholic.org.au/>

New President of the ACBC

Welcome Archbishop Timothy Costelloe

At the bishops plenary meeting held in May, Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB, from the Archdiocese of Perth, was elected as the new president of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC). He will take the reins from Archbishop Mark Coleridge, who has been the president of the Conference for the past four years, and was ineligible to take on a third term as he turns 75 in September 2023. Archbishop Costelloe, together with Archbishop of Sydney, Anthony Fisher, who has been elected for a further term as vice-president, will begin their terms from 13 July 2022, after the conclusion of the upcoming Second General Assembly of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia.

Archbishop Costelloe is a priest of the Salesians of Don Bosco and, as such, is the first president of the Bishops Conference from a religious order. He is also the first president of the Conference from Western Australia. The archbishop is most recently Chair of the Bishops Commission for, and President of, the Plenary Council.



We welcome Archbishop Costelloe to his new role and look forward to working with him as we continue to provide valuable pastoral research to further the mission of the Church in Australia.

More information about this election can be found at: https://www.perthcatholic.org.au/News_Events-News-2022-May-Week_1-Bishops_Conference_elects_Archbishop_Costelloe_president.htm

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<https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/pro-newsletter/>

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

Melbourne Office:
90 Albion Road
Box Hill VIC 3128

Stephen Reid
Senior Researcher
stephen.reid@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

