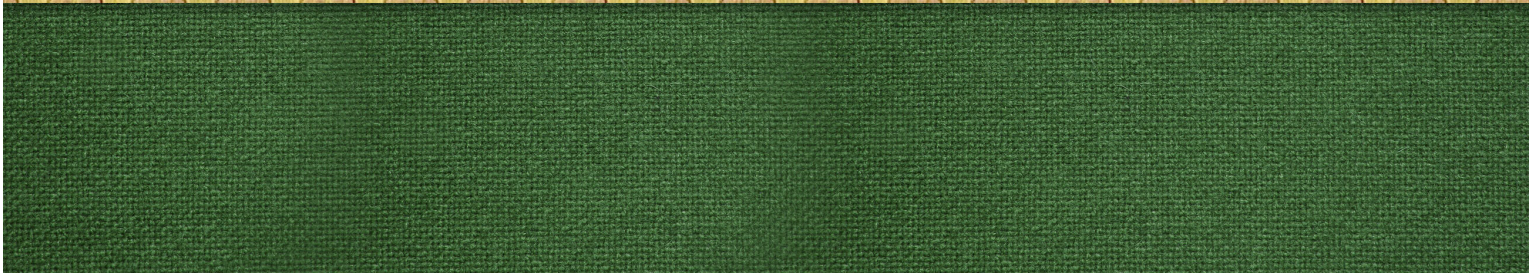


# The Australian Catholic Mass Attendance Report 2021



*A report based on the National Count of Attendance  
and the National Catholic Census Project*

Trudy Dantis, Stephen Reid, Leith Dudfield and Katherine Jelavic





Report prepared by: National Centre for Pastoral Research  
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference  
GPO Box 368  
Canberra ACT 2601  
Australia

Telephone: +61 (02) 6201 9812  
Email: [ncpr@catholic.org.au](mailto:ncpr@catholic.org.au)  
Web: [www.ncpr.catholic.org.au](http://www.ncpr.catholic.org.au)

© Copyright May 2024 Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>About this report</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Features of the 2021 National Count</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Mass attendance in 2021</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Attendance over time</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Mass attendance rates by age</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Mass attendance rates by sex</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Attendances by diocese</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Languages of Mass</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Online Mass attendance</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Mass For You At Home</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>25</b>

*This page is left blank intentionally*

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of Catholic Mass attendance in Australia, incorporating updated data from 2021. The insights presented in this report are sourced from the National Count of Attendance and the National Catholic Census Project, both of which are research projects undertaken by the National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCP), an agency of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. The findings include an examination of key demographic characteristics of Mass attendees and an analysis of attendance trends over time.

Two earlier versions of this report were published:

1. [\*The Australian Catholic Mass Attendance Report 2016\*](#), authored by Trudy Dantis, Stephen Reid and Marilyn Chee in 2020, reporting results from data collected in 2016.
2. [\*Mass Attendance in Australia: A Critical Moment\*](#), authored by Bob Dixon, Stephen Reid and Marilyn Chee in 2013, reporting results from data collected in 2011.

These reports also included national data from a third project, the National Church Life Survey, which could not be sourced in 2021.

The current report provides updated tables and charts from 2021, with commentary on how the situation of Mass attendance has changed in the last 25 years. Some results from the 2021 Count have been reported in earlier print and online publications authored by the NCP. These are reproduced here to provide a comprehensive picture of Mass Attendance in Australia at this time.

### KEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2021 NATIONAL COUNT

- The 2021 Count was conducted amidst various COVID-19 restrictions.
- In 2021, the average number of people at Mass in Australia on a typical weekend was about 417,300.
- There was a decline of around 206,000 (33%) attenders between 2016 and 2021.
- The proportion of females at Mass in 2021 was around 56 per cent, a change of just under six per cent from 2016, when it was almost 62 per cent.
- Just over one-quarter (25.8%) of attenders were aged 70 and over, while the same proportion were aged 50 to 69.
- On a typical weekend in May 2021, over 30,100 households watched the televised *Mass for You At Home* program across Australia.

### The National Catholic Census Project

The National Catholic Census Project was established by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in 1991. Since then, and in every Census year following, the NCP has acquired a significant amount of data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics about Catholics in Australia based on the Census of Population and Housing. This data 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 10 August 2021. The data obtained from the Australian Census provides us with key Catholic population demographics such as age, sex, language, amongst many others. A complete set of the *2021 Social Profiles* can be found at: <https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/2021-catholic-social-profiles/>

## The 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. The first National Count was conducted in 2001 and the most recent one in 2021, meaning reliable comparisons can be made over five Counts. Many Catholic dioceses also conduct annual counts in their parishes.

The National Count of Attendance counts attendances at **all** Masses (and also at Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest) across Australia during the same period. It includes 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 information such as average weekly attendance figures, attendance rates, trends over time, and attendances at Masses celebrated in languages other than English.



Photo Credit: Mass for You at Home (Diocese of Wollongong, ACBC), <https://massforyou.com.au/>

## FEATURES OF THE 2021 NATIONAL COUNT

The 2021 National Count of Attendance took place during the first four weekends in May between 2-23 May 2021. The vast majority of parishes undertook their Counts in May, although, due to various local and logistical reasons, some parishes commenced their Count some weeks later in June or July.



### COVID-19 Restrictions

As expected, COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns were disrupters to the normal procedures of the 2021 National Count across Australia. The 2020 liturgical guidelines developed by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in conjunction with local health authorities were still being followed in many areas.<sup>1</sup> In planning for the 2021 Count, several questions were raised in response to suggestions that it should be postponed or cancelled. These revolved around current Mass-attending patterns, the impact of the pandemic on numbers attending and the novel experience of

**Table 1: COVID-19 Restrictions by State/Territory**

State/Territory	Attendance limits	Other restrictions
<b>ACT</b>	Not stipulated. Gatherings in communal spaces were discouraged. Numbers of church leaders, choir members and others involved in Mass to be kept to a minimum.	Physical distancing of 1.5 metres.
<b>Northern Territory</b>	Not stipulated.	Physical distancing of 1.5 metres where possible.
<b>NSW</b>	One person per 2m <sup>2</sup> .	Physical distancing of 1.5 metres. Mask wearing compulsory. Congregational singing not permitted (from 6 to 16 May 2021). From 17 May, congregational singing allowed indoors for Greater Sydney, including Wollongong, Central Coast and the Blue Mountains.
<b>Queensland</b>	Density rules based on the size of the venue: Smaller venues 1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> , larger venues 1 person per 4m <sup>2</sup> .	Physical distancing of 1.5 metres. Recommendations for mask wearing.
<b>South Australia</b>	75 per cent attendance capacity.	Physical distancing.
<b>Tasmania</b>	One person per 2m <sup>2</sup> . Limits of 250 people or 100 per cent seating capacity, whichever is fewer.	Physical distancing of 1.5 metres.
<b>Victoria</b>	One person per 2m <sup>2</sup> . No group limit specified.	Physical distancing of 1.5 metres. Recommendations for mask wearing. Mandatory contact registers or sign in via Victorian Government QR Code Service or Service Victoria app. No sharing food, drink or other items.
<b>Western Australia</b>	One person per 2m <sup>2</sup> . One hundred per cent capacity for a seated service.	Physical distancing. Mandatory contact registers or sign in via Safe WA app.

1. Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (15 May 2020), 'Updated Bishops Conference Liturgical and Facilities Advice on COVID-19', <https://s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/acbcwebsite/Articles/Media%20Releases/2020-05-22%20UPDATED%20Bishops%20Conference%20Advice%20on%20COVID-19.pdf>

online Masses. None of these questions could be answered unless reliable empirical data was obtained, and in the end, the benefits of conducting the 2021 Count far outweighed all other concerns.

Table 1 shows a list of the different levels of COVID-19 restrictions that were in place in Australian states at the time of the 2021 Count. In many states, restrictions included indoor density limits, mask wearing, mandatory sign-in to buildings and group meeting limits. During the first four weekends in May, most states and territories allowed churches to conduct religious activities, albeit with some restrictions. Church capacity in local parishes was guided by the density rule to determine the maximum number of people who could attend each service.

For parishes who conducted their Count after May, attendance figures were most likely affected by additional restrictions and lockdown measures applied by some state governments. For example, between 4 and 10 June 2021, tighter restrictions were introduced in Melbourne areas, while in Greater Sydney, 'Stay at Home' rules applied from 21 June onwards, for several months. Other lockdowns in Victoria occurred between 16 to 27 July and again from 5 August onwards, which extended into September and beyond. In contrast, parishes in Western Australia and the Northern Territory had very few restrictions placed on them during and immediately after the period of the 2021 Count.

### *Impact on the collection of Mass attendance figures*

Over the first four weekends in May 2021, a majority of parishes throughout Australia were able to hold regular Mass services and complete a count of attenders. Nationally, it is estimated that around 85 per cent of parishes completed their Count during May or June, while around ten per cent completed the Count in July or August. Around five per cent of parishes did not provide any data at all. Overall the response rate of the 2021 Count was 94 per cent which was marginally higher than the 93 per cent response rate in 2016. This meant that sufficient data was collected to provide a national and diocesan picture of Mass attendance in 2021.

### **Age and Sex of Mass attenders**

In 2021, parishes were also asked to provide information on the age and sex of those who attended Mass and Sunday assemblies. Information on the sex of attenders was requested on Weekend 3, while information on age groups was sought on Weekend 4 of the Count. This was done in lieu of national data being collected from the 2021 National Church Life Survey. Nationally, about 91 per cent of parishes provided data on sex, while 87 per cent of parishes provided age-group data, enabling us to create a reliable age-sex profile of Mass attenders.

### **Mass held online or broadcast on TV**

COVID-19 restrictions limited the numbers physically attending Mass on Sundays in many areas, while in other cases, people still preferred to attend a Mass online. Many dioceses and parishes continued to stream Masses via YouTube or Facebook. In order to gather information on online viewers, parishes were invited to provide the number of 'views' of Masses or Sunday assemblies streamed online. Data were also collected from television broadcasters of *Mass for You at Home*.

The discrepancies in data and inconsistencies in counting methods meant that data received from these areas could not be easily compared to that from the in-person count. This data was therefore not included in the 'Average weekly attendance' figures. Nevertheless, collecting this data allowed



us to better understand the engagement of people from different dioceses who used these means to access Mass.

## Reporting Methods

The methods used for the 2021 National Count enabled the reporting of actual numbers attending on any particular weekend of the Count and the calculation of the total number likely to be in attendance on a typical weekend after special events, like Confirmations, were considered. These methods are particularly useful in reporting parish-level figures and understanding changes in smaller areas. For this national report however, only average weekly attendances are reported.

### *Average weekly attendances*

For all dioceses, the figures reported as the '2021 Average weekly attendance' are the actual counts reported by their parishes for each of the four weekends of May that are averaged to provide this figure. These weekly attendance figures do not take into account special events in a parish.

More information on special events that affected parish attendances in 2021 can be found in the NCPR newsletter: [Pastoral Research Online – Issue 54 \(October 2021\)](#)

### *Estimating parish attendances when no figures are available*

One of the main purposes of the National Count of Attendance is to obtain an accurate estimate of the number of Catholics who attend Mass on a typical weekend around Australia. It is therefore necessary to make some estimate of attendance in those parishes which celebrated Mass yet did not return any figures at all, even after multiple follow-ups.

Where data for only three weekends was provided, figures for the missing week were calculated or estimated from figures provided in other weeks. Occasionally, a diocese provided a typical attendance figure for a parish which did not return any figures.

### *Counting persons on Military bases*

One important change in 2021 was the way persons living on military bases were counted. In 2016, such persons were counted separately as part of the Military Ordinariate and not as part of a parish or diocese. In 2021, such persons were included within the parish or diocese in which the military base was geographically situated.

## Migrant community Masses

Where migrant communities celebrated Mass in their own centre rather than a parish church, their attendance figures were listed separately. However, if they used a parish church for their Masses, their attendance figures were combined with those of the rest of the parish. This was mainly because it was not always easy to distinguish from the reports between a Mass celebrated in a language other than English for a parish's own community and a Mass celebrated for a migrant community not connected with the parish. In every occurrence where attendances were recorded in an 'Other Mass Centre', a checking process ensured migrant community counts were not included in the parish counts, and hence not counted twice.

## MASS ATTENDANCE IN 2021

The 2021 National Count of Attendance revealed that the number of people at Mass in Australia on a typical weekend in May was about 417,350, or 8.2 per cent of the Catholic population (the attendance rate). Between 2016 and 2021, there was a decline of 33 per cent in the total weekly attendance, which means there were 206,007 fewer attenders on an average weekend in 2021 than five years earlier. Overall, the attendance rate declined by around 3.6 per cent over the five years. It is important to note that the 2021 Count was conducted amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, which, due to various restrictions implemented by state and federal governments, impacted patterns of attendance at worship services for most religious groups, including Catholics.

**Table 2: Australian summary of Mass attendance, Catholic and Total population, 2016-2021**

Australia	Mean Weekly Total Attendance	Catholic Population	Total Population	Per cent Catholic	Attendance Rate
2021	417,349	5,075,791	25,422,741	20.0	8.2
2016	623,356	5,291,817	23,401,892	22.6	11.8
Change 2016 - 2021	-206,007	-216,026	2,020,849	-2.6	-3.6
Percentage change 2016 - 2021	-33.0	-2.7	7.7	—	—

Sources: ACBC National Count of Attendance, 2016 & 2021; ABS Census, 2016 & 2021.

While no national figures were available for 2021, the 2016 National Church Life Survey revealed that around 81 per cent of attenders attended Mass **in their parish** every weekend, similar to the figures reported in 2011 and 2006.<sup>2</sup> In 2016, a further nine per cent reported that they attended Mass in their parish two or three times a month, with the remainder attending about once a month or less frequently, or for the first time.<sup>3</sup> Usually, 98 per cent of the people at Mass on weekends are Catholic, and almost all others identify with another Christian denomination.

## ATTENDANCE OVER TIME

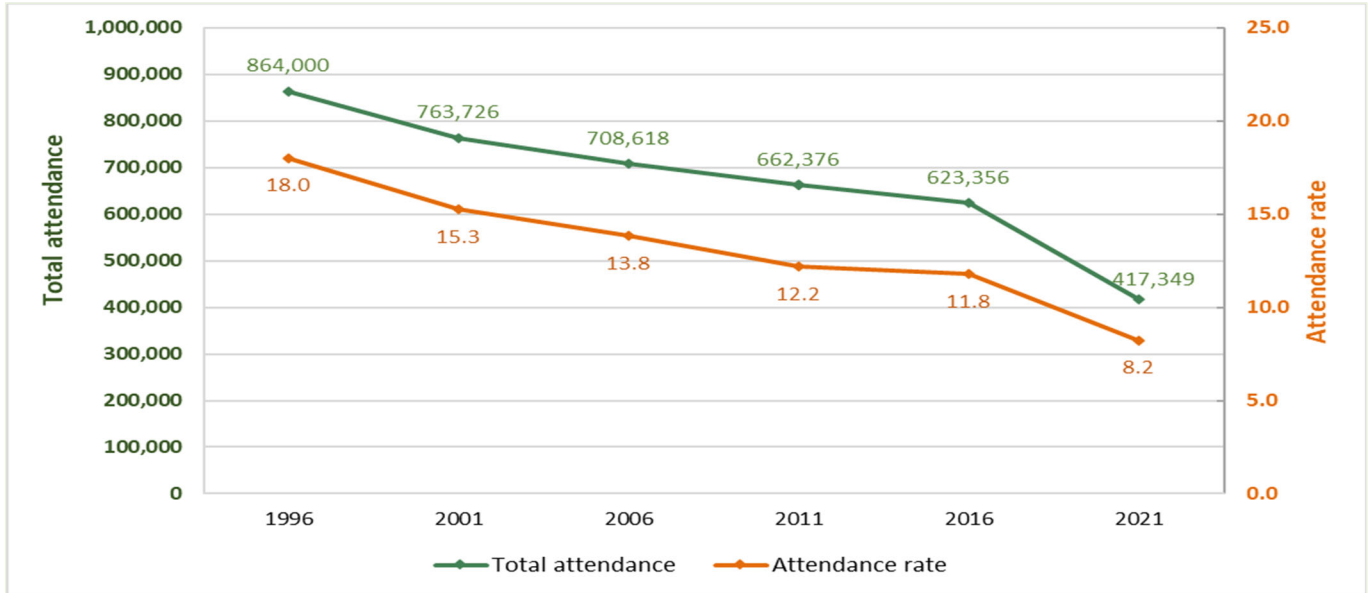
As Figure 1 shows, Mass Count estimates in 1996 found that around 18 per cent of Catholics (or 864,000 people) were at Mass on an average weekend. In 2001, the number of attenders (763,700) and the rate of attendance (15.3%) declined significantly. Between 2001 and 2016, the decline in both the total attendance and the attendance rate slowed somewhat. However, in 2021, as mentioned above, there was again a considerable decline in the average attendance (417,350) and the rate of attendance (8.2%).

In 2021, one in five Australians identified as Catholic, down slightly from 2016, when 22.6 per cent of Australians identified as such. Earlier, between 1996 and 2011, the proportion of Catholics in the population remained relatively stable, dropping from 27 per cent in 1996 to 25.3 per cent in 2011. Of course, not all Catholics attend Mass. In Figure 2, each vertical bar represents the total population in

- NCLS Research., (2017). *Church Life Profile for the Catholic Church in Australia: A report on the vitality of local churches who took part in the 2016 National Church Life Survey*. NCLS Research. <https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/CATHOLIC-CHURCH-AUSTRALIA-NCLSChurchLifeProfile2016-TA000000.pdf>
- Dantis, T, Reid S & Chee, M., (2021). *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*. Revised version. Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. <https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Mass-attendance-in-Australia-2016-Revised-July-2021.pdf>

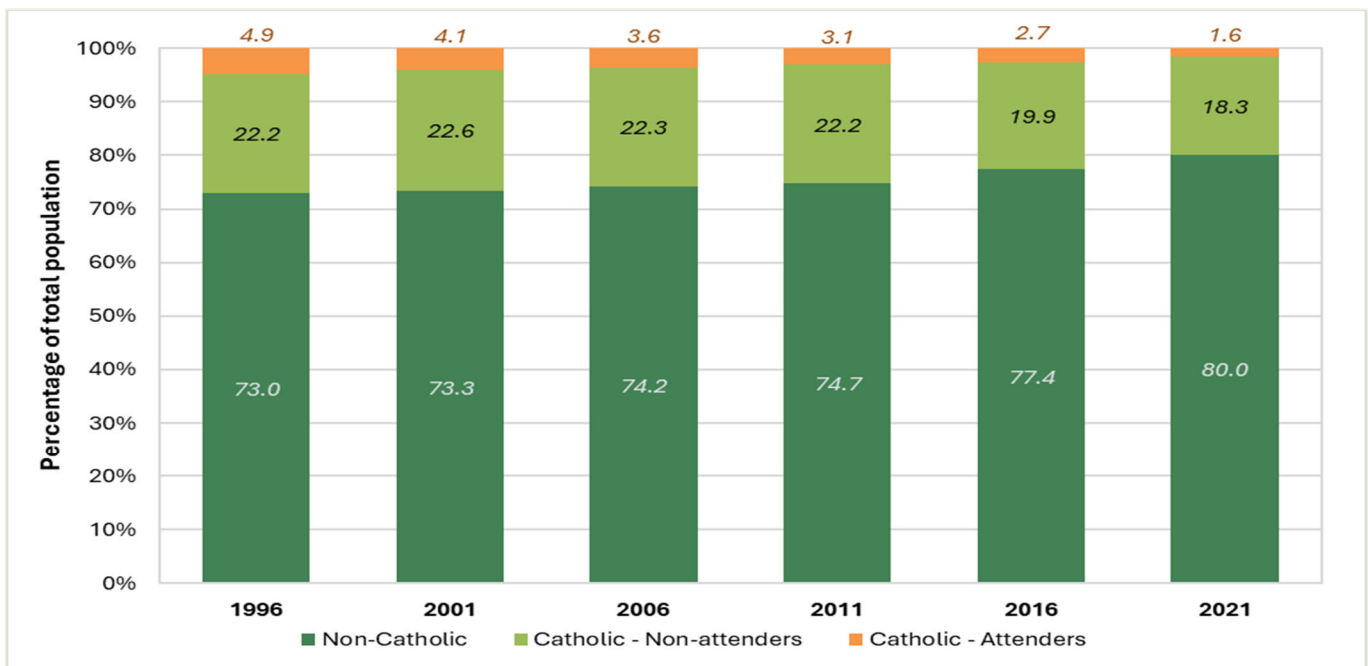
each Census year. The dark-green bars show the proportion of Australians who are not Catholic, while the lime-green bars show the proportion of the population who identified as Catholic but who do not regularly attend Mass. The thin orange bars at the top show the proportion of Australians who are Catholic and who attend Mass regularly. At every Census, Catholic Mass attenders declined as a proportion of the population. Previous research has shown that although the main reason for decline in attendances is largely the result of older attenders not being replaced by younger cohorts, the decline has somewhat been stemmed by the strong representation of Catholics from non-English speaking countries.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 1: Average Mass attendance and Mass attendance rates, 1996-2021**



Source: ACBC National Count of Attendance, 2001-2021; Mass count estimates 1996.

**Figure 2: Mass attendance, Catholic and total population, 1996-2021**



Sources: ACBC National Count of Attendance, 2001-2021; Mass count estimates 1996, ABS Census, 1996-2021.

4. Dixon, R and Powell, R.,M. (2012). Vatican II : A data-based analysis of its impact on Australian Catholic life. In N Ormerod, O Rush and D Pascoe (Ed.). *Vatican II: Reception and implementation in the Australian Church*, pp. 292-320. John Garratt Publishing, Mulgrave.

## MASS ATTENDANCE RATES BY AGE

Table 3 shows selected age and sex demographics of Mass attenders from 2006 to 2021, together with corresponding characteristics of the 2021 Catholic population. Due to differences in the method of data collection in the different years, all of the characteristics shown in the table are for persons aged 18 and over and, as such, may differ from other published reports that encompass all ages.

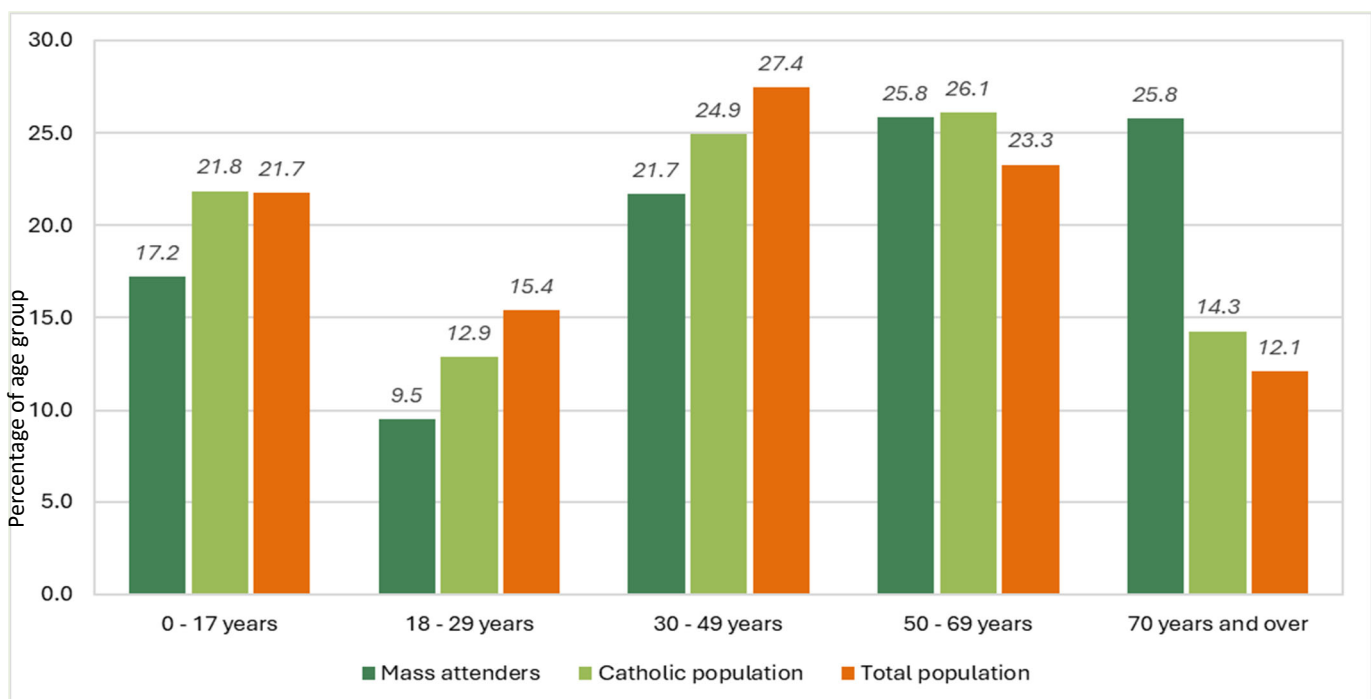
**Table 3: Age profile of Mass attenders 2006-2021, Catholic population 2021 (persons aged 18 and over), and males per 100 females (all ages)**

Age (persons aged 18 and over)	Mass attenders				Catholic population
	2006	2011	2016	2021	2021
18 - 29 years	7.8	7.7	6.7	11.8	16.5
30 - 49 years	25.7	24.6	21.3	26.2	31.9
50 - 69 years	40.2	40.1	36.1	31.2	33.4
70 years and over	26.3	27.6	35.9	30.9	18.3
Males per 100 females (all ages)	65.0	64.7	61.8	77.8	89.1

Sources: ACBC National Count of Attendance, 2021; NCLS 2006, 2011 & 2016; ABS Census, 2021.

The proportion of Mass attenders aged 70 and over increased between 2006 and 2016, then declined in the COVID-19 affected Count in 2021. It is reasonable to assume that health concerns of this population directly affected their participation in 2021. In contrast, the proportion of attenders aged 18-29 decreased between 2006 and 2016, then increased in 2021. This increase between 2016 and 2021 represented numerical growth of around 4,000 attenders aged 18-29. The proportion of attenders in the 50-69 age group steadily declined from 40 per cent in 2006 to 31 per cent in 2021, while the proportion of attenders in the 30-49 age group remained relatively stable, averaging around 24 per cent throughout the 15-year period, although with a slight dip to 21 per cent in 2016.

**Figure 3: Age profile of Mass attenders, Catholic and total population, 2021**



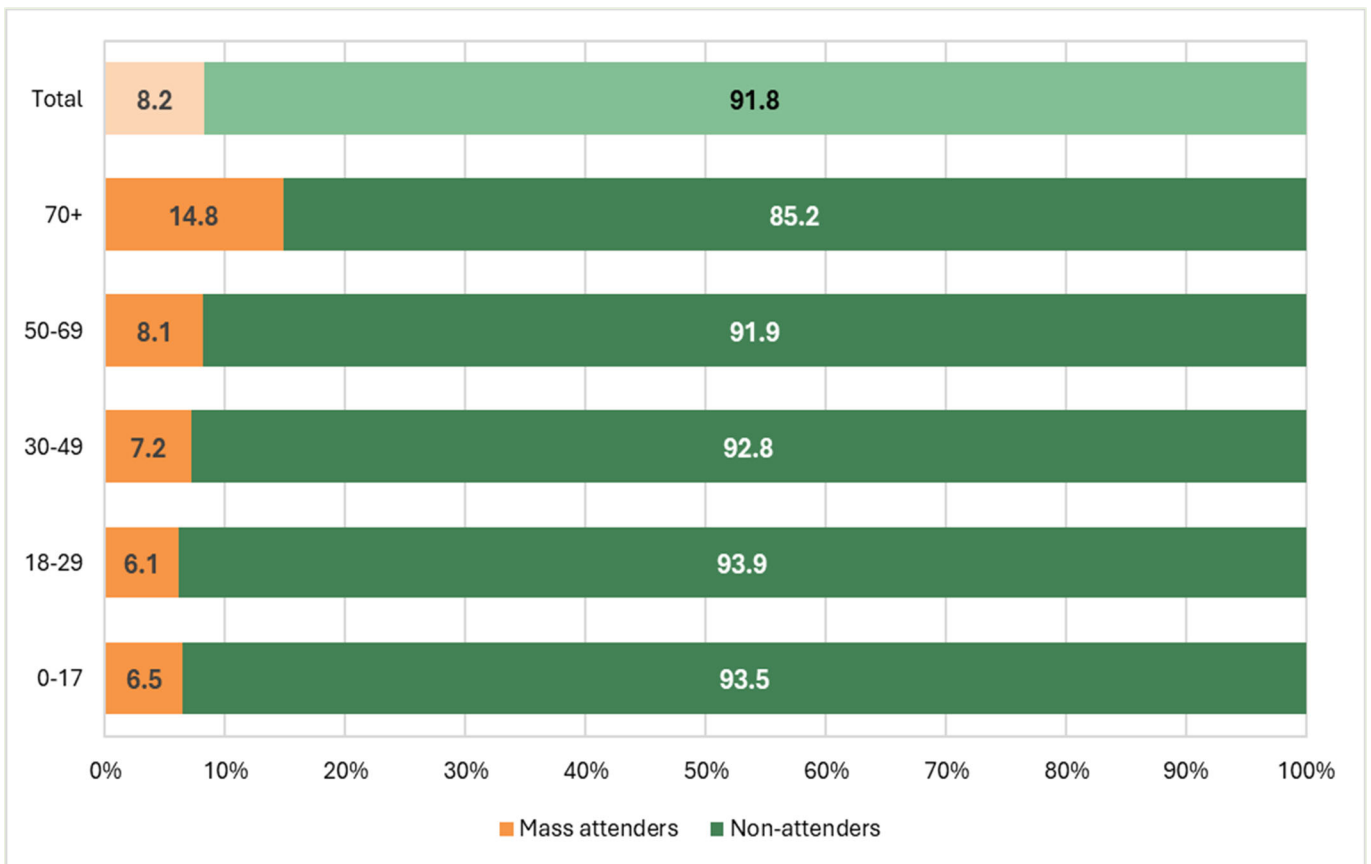
Sources: ACBC National Count of Attendance, 2021; ABS Census, 2021.

The age profile of the Mass attending population is generally much older than that of the Catholic population. Figure 3 shows an all-ages comparison of the age profile of Mass attenders, the Catholic population and the Australian population overall in 2021.

Just over half (52%) of all attenders in 2021 were aged 50 and over compared with 40 per cent of the Catholic population and 35 per cent of Australia’s population. The proportion of the Catholic population aged under 18 was similar (21.8%) to that of the overall population (21.7%), although the proportion of attenders under 18 was lower at 17.2 per cent. The largest difference between the Mass attending population and the Catholic population was in those aged 70 and over: just over one-quarter of attenders were in this age group, compared with 14.3 per cent of the Catholic population.

There were also significant differences in the Mass attendance rates in the various age groups, as shown in Figure 4. The orange section of each horizontal bar in the graph indicates the proportion of those in the age group who regularly attended Mass, while the green section of each bar shows those Catholics who did not attend Mass regularly. In 2021, the overall rate of attendance at Mass of Australian Catholics was 8.2 per cent. The highest rate was for those aged 70 and over, with 14.8 per cent regularly attending Mass. The lowest rate of attendance was for those aged 18-29, with 6.1 per cent. However, many Catholics who do not attend Mass regularly may attend occasionally, such as at Christmas, Easter or for family occasions, although it is not possible to determine the patterns of attendance from the data collected as part of the 2021 National Count of Attendance.

**Figure 4: Mass attendance rates by age, 2021**



Sources: ACBC National Count of Attendance, 2021; ABS Census, 2021.



## MASS ATTENDANCE RATES BY SEX

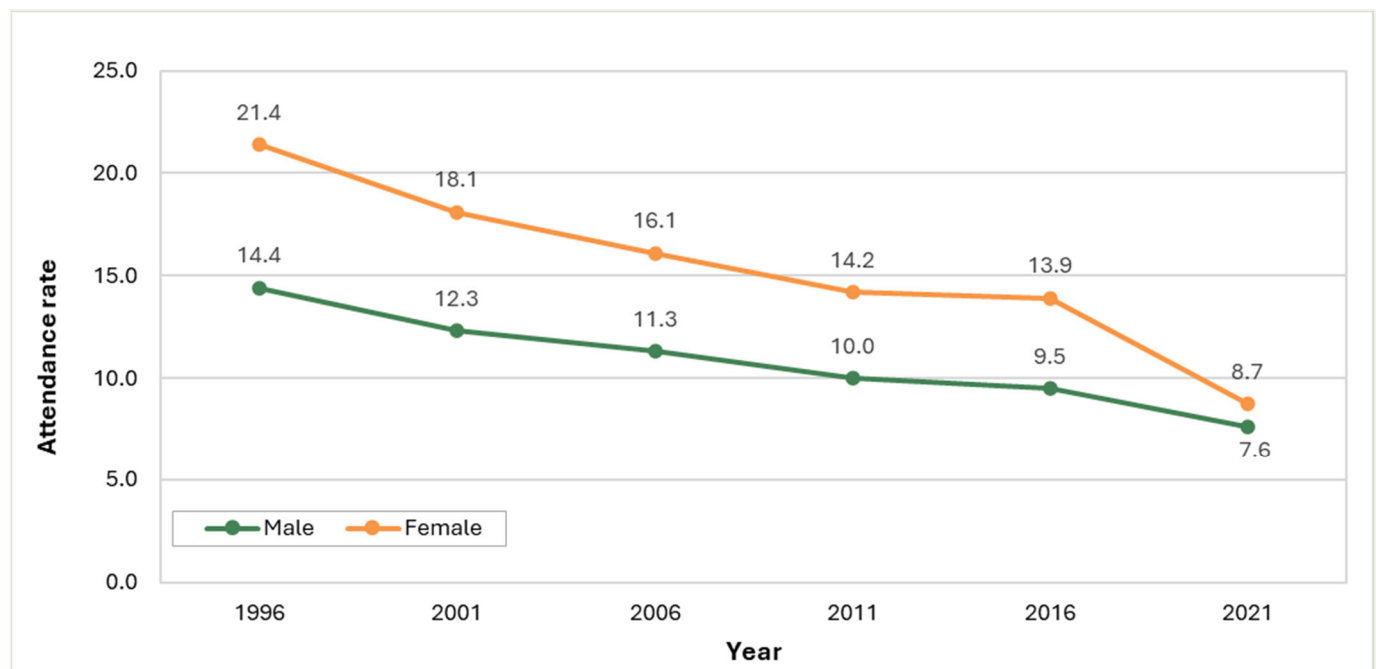
As shown in Table 4 and Figure 5 below, the Mass attendance rates for males and females declined steadily from 1996 to 2016, with a steeper decline in 2021. The attendance rate for women has remained higher than for men, but with a much smaller gap in 2021 than in previous years. From 2016 to 2021, the rate of women's attendance dropped by 5.1 per cent compared to the reduction in the rate of men's attendance of 1.8 per cent. Over the 25 year period reported, the rate for women dropped by 12.6 per cent, nearly double that of the reduction in men's attendance of 6.8 per cent over the same period.

**Table 4. Mass attendance rates of males and females, 1996-2021**

MALES	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021
Catholic population	2,332,441	2,417,235	2,462,138	2,607,240	2,515,115	2,391,273
Average weekly Mass attendance	336,960	297,089	279,195	260,314	238,122	182,799
Mass attendance rate	14.4	12.3	11.3	10.0	9.5	7.6
FEMALES	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021
Catholic population	2,466,509	2,584,408	2,664,739	2,832,026	2,776,705	2,684,621
Average weekly Mass attendance	527,040	466,637	429,423	402,062	385,234	234,550
Mass attendance rate	21.4	18.1	16.1	14.2	13.9	8.7

Sources: Censuses of Population and Housing 1996-2021; ACBC National Count of Attendance 1996-2021; Catholic Church Life Survey 1996; National Church Life Surveys 2001-2016.

**Figure 5: Male and female attendance rates, 1996 - 2021**



Sources: Censuses of Population and Housing 1996-2021; ACBC National Count of Attendance 1996-2021.

## ATTENDANCES BY DIOCESE

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

Nationally, total attendances at Mass fell by around 206,000 between 2016 and 2021 with every geographic diocese recording falls during that period. Increased attendances were recorded by the Chaldean and Syro-Malabar eparchies and the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of the Southern Cross. Of these, the Syro-Malabar Eparchy had the largest increase: 90 per cent from 4,390 in 2016 to 8,352 in 2021.

Attendance rates in the 28 geographical dioceses varied from a high of 10.4 per cent in the Archdiocese of Sydney and Diocese of Darwin to 3.7 per cent in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.

Since the attendance rate is calculated from the number of Mass 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 a growth in attendance numbers even if there is an increase or decrease in the Catholic population. In 2021, all geographical dioceses had declines in their Catholic populations, with the exception of the Dioceses of Sale and Wollongong, which grew by 154 and 8,010 Catholics respectively.

Historically, attendance rates have been strongly influenced by the demographic composition of the Catholic population in each diocese. Statistical analysis undertaken by Dixon, Reid and Chee for the 2011 National Count of Attendance, which has not been replicated since, showed that more than half of the variation between dioceses can be explained by just five demographic characteristics (shown in Table 5):<sup>5</sup>

1. The number of Catholics living in the diocese,
2. The percentage of Catholics in the total population of the diocese,
3. The percentage of Catholics living at the same address as at the time of the previous Census,
4. The percentage of the adult Catholic population with a university degree, and,
5. The percentage of the diocesan Catholic population born in non-English-speaking countries (NESC).

The Archdiocese of Sydney, for example, a geographical diocese with one of the highest attendance rates in 2021 (10.4%), has a large Catholic population (590,175) representing 22.9 per cent of the total population. It has the highest percentage of any diocese of Catholics born in non-English-speaking countries (33.5%), and the second highest percentage, after the Diocese of Broken Bay, of adult Catholics with a university degree (31.1%).

On the other hand, the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, with the lowest attendance rate of 3.7 per cent, has a relatively small Catholic population (147,073), which accounts for 19 per cent of its total population, but has a significantly smaller proportion of Catholics from non-English-speaking countries (8.1%) and of university-educated Catholics (17.2%).

5. Dixon, R, Reid S & Chee, M. (2013). *Mass Attendance in Australia: A Critical moment, A report based on the National Count of Attendance, the National Church Life Survey and the Australian Census*. Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Pastoral Research Office.

**Table 5. Attendances and attendance rates by diocese, 2021**

Diocese	2021 Average weekly total attendance <sup>1</sup>	2016 Average weekly total attendance <sup>1</sup>	2021 Catholic Population	2021 Total Population	2021 Per cent Catholic	2021 Attendance Rate	2021 Per cent at same address <sup>5</sup>	2021 Per cent with a degree <sup>6</sup>	2021 Per cent born in NESCS <sup>7</sup>
Adelaide	19,848	28,340	253,871	1,615,557	15.7	7.8	64.2	23.3	23.1
Armidale	2,950	3,875	37,973	187,686	20.2	7.8	58.7	15.6	5.5
Ballarat	7,117	10,024	89,124	450,401	19.8	8.0	61.8	17.5	8.3
Bathurst	3,523	5,562	62,141	245,232	25.3	5.7	58.2	16.1	5.4
Brisbane	39,735	57,539	684,423	3,815,443	17.9	5.8	52.8	25.9	16.7
Broken Bay	14,138	22,586	205,207	998,724	20.5	6.9	61.0	31.4	19.0
Broome	592	694	7,454	35,998	20.7	7.9	53.0	15.4	6.8
Bunbury	3,757	5,573	56,960	388,460	14.7	6.6	60.0	15.8	14.1
Cairns	3,070	4,266	55,137	290,875	19.0	5.6	57.3	17.5	14.8
Canberra & Goulburn	10,725	16,156	151,053	734,694	20.6	7.1	58.9	27.4	15.3
Darwin	4,061	5,994	39,006	230,861	16.9	10.4	51.2	23.5	25.4
Geraldton	1,254	1,962	21,371	122,918	17.4	5.9	49.9	15.8	14.1
Hobart	4,062	5,352	71,045	557,572	12.7	5.7	63.3	18.7	10.5
Lismore	5,391	8,699	97,971	543,186	18.0	5.5	58.8	17.0	7.4
Maitland-Newcastle	5,443	10,465	147,073	772,347	19.0	3.7	57.6	17.2	8.1
Melbourne	83,925	138,724	1,038,276	4,962,398	20.9	8.1	62.4	27.6	27.6
Parramatta	27,871	47,005	322,448	1,304,175	24.7	8.6	62.4	24.4	29.2
Perth	40,333	56,119	411,173	2,114,911	19.4	9.8	60.5	26.5	25.9
Port Pirie	2,036	2,857	22,150	167,681	13.2	9.2	65.0	12.6	11.4
Rockhampton	4,745	8,119	93,451	465,676	20.1	5.1	55.9	15.1	8.9
Sale	7,733	11,960	123,748	680,681	18.2	6.2	57.7	18.3	23.8
Sandhurst	5,619	8,572	84,607	409,994	20.6	6.6	60.7	16.9	9.0
Sydney	61,247	93,365	590,175	2,582,298	22.9	10.4	58.9	31.1	33.5
Toowoomba	3,420	5,510	59,025	286,096	20.6	5.8	57.0	17.3	7.7
Townsville	3,787	5,544	69,426	298,039	23.3	5.5	57.1	17.1	9.6
Wagga Wagga	5,439	7,274	58,388	219,967	26.5	9.3	58.8	16.2	7.6
Wilcannia-Forbes	1,447	2,275	25,271	105,894	23.9	5.7	62.5	12.3	5.0
Wollongong	12,064	18,108	197,844	834,977	23.7	6.1	58.0	19.0	17.6
Military Ordinariate of Australia <sup>2</sup>	65	583	[2,615]	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chaldean <sup>3</sup>	6,657	3,779	[14,104]	-	-	[47.2]	[37.7]	[41.4]	[76.7]
Maronite <sup>3</sup>	13,661	18,081	[47,016]	-	-	[29.1]	[67.8]	[50.8]	[32.7]
Melkite <sup>3</sup>	1,785	1,884	[3,094]	-	-	[57.7]	[63.9]	[50.8]	[50.1]
Syro-Malabar <sup>3</sup>	8,352	4,390	[10,305]	-	-	[81.0]	[34.0]	[35.4]	[68.7]
Ukrainian <sup>3</sup>	1,164	1,930	[2,882]	-	-	[40.4]	[72.7]	[70.3]	[30.6]
Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of the Southern Cross	333	196	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Territories <sup>4</sup>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>417,349</b>	<b>623,356</b>	<b>5,075,791</b>	<b>25,422,741</b>	<b>20.0</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>59.4</b>	<b>24.6</b>	<b>21.4</b>

Source of data: National Count of Attendance 2016 and 2021 and Census of Population and Housing 2021

Table 5 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 2016.
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.

---

## Why do these five factors have such a strong influence on attendance?

Previous research has shown that a high proportion of Mass attenders have university degrees and were born in non-English-speaking countries.<sup>6</sup> For example, in 2016, around 37 per cent of Mass attenders were born in non-English-speaking countries, an increase from 26 per cent in 2006. A similar proportion (36%) had university degrees.

University-educated Catholics and Catholics born in non-English-speaking countries, for various practical reasons, often 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 reason is the increased ease of finding a Mass at a convenient time and place in 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 has been the most difficult to explain; it is likely that a higher percentage of Catholics in the population are likely to lead to greater visibility, a stronger sense of belonging to a community, and the availability of more resources.

Of course, the five factors cannot always predict high attendance rates. In 2021, for example, the Diocese of Darwin had the equal highest attendance rate of 10.4 per cent. However, it also had a small Catholic population (39,006) that accounted for 16.9 per cent of the total population and a lower than average residential stability of 51.2 per cent. A quarter of all Catholics (25.4%) were from non-English-speaking countries and a lower than average proportion (23.5%) had a university degree. Nevertheless, the relatively high attendance rate in 2021 could be attributed to the absence of COVID-19 restrictions. Other than physical distancing, the Diocese of Darwin had no density rule or capacity restrictions (See Table 1), and most parishes were able to celebrate Masses as usual. While Darwin's attendance rate followed national trends, falling from 13.3 per cent in 2016 to 10.4 per cent in 2021, the diocese fared slightly better than all other geographical dioceses in the 2021 Count.

Changes in the Catholic population are particularly affected by migration patterns, population movements and other societal changes. All the Eastern eparchies, with the exception of the Ukrainian eparchy, which remained almost the same, reported increases in their Catholic populations in 2021, which were likely due to immigration patterns, alongside an increased awareness within the local parish community to identify themselves correctly on the Census form (which those not involved with a local community would not know about). Most of these dioceses have significantly higher proportions of highly-educated and NESC-born Catholics. Of the five Eastern Churches, the Chaldean and Syro-Malabar eparchies had increased attendance rates in 2021, with the Syro-Malabar eparchy moving from 52.6 per cent in 2016 to 81 per cent in 2021. Overall, trends in Mass attendance and the Catholic population should always be interpreted in the context of wider religious, societal and historical trends within a particular diocese or parish.

6. NCLS Research., (2017). *Church Life Profile for the Catholic Church in Australia: A report on the vitality of local churches who took part in the 2016 National Church Life Survey*. NCLS Research. <https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/CATHOLIC-CHURCH-AUSTRALIA-NCLChurchLifeProfile2016-TA000000.pdf>.

**Table 6: Sex and Age Profile of Mass Attenders and Catholic Population by Diocese, 2021**

Diocese	Mass attenders		Catholic population		Mass attenders Age			Catholic population Age						
	Female %	Male %	Female %	Male %	0-17 %	18-29 %	30-49 %	50-69 %	70 + %	0-17 %	18-29 %	30-49 %	50-69 %	70 + %
Adelaide	57.1	42.9	53.6	46.4	14.1	8.2	18.4	24.9	34.4	18.6	12.2	23.2	28.7	17.3
Armidale	57.2	42.8	52.9	47.1	14.2	6.2	18.8	23.5	37.2	24.1	12.3	22.3	26.2	15.2
Ballarat	58.5	41.5	53.0	47.0	17.6	8.1	18.9	16.1	39.3	22.4	11.2	21.8	28.2	16.3
Bathurst	59.0	41.0	52.3	47.7	14.4	3.9	13.5	25.5	42.7	25.0	12.2	22.2	26.0	14.6
Brisbane	56.1	43.9	53.6	46.4	17.9	8.2	20.5	24.7	28.7	22.0	12.4	25.4	26.3	13.9
Broken Bay	57.5	42.5	53.2	46.8	15.3	7.2	18.7	25.4	33.3	23.8	11.4	23.6	25.9	15.3
Broome	60.7	39.3	53.3	46.7	19.3	7.3	25.3	29.3	18.8	28.7	16.1	29.8	20.8	4.5
Bunbury	60.9	39.1	53.6	46.4	17.3	7.4	18.7	27.6	28.9	21.0	8.9	23.1	30.0	17.1
Cairns	61.5	38.5	52.5	47.5	13.9	4.8	15.6	30.4	35.3	23.1	10.6	23.9	28.5	13.9
Canberra & Goulburn	57.7	42.3	52.7	47.3	17.2	8.1	21.0	25.6	28.2	22.3	12.6	24.8	25.9	14.4
Darwin	58.8	41.2	52.5	47.5	20.2	12.9	29.8	24.7	12.4	24.2	15.1	31.0	23.1	6.6
Geraldton	57.7	42.3	50.1	49.9	21.9	7.1	23.6	22.8	24.6	24.6	11.6	29.3	25.4	9.1
Hobart	60.2	39.8	54.3	45.7	11.4	6.5	16.9	23.4	41.7	17.5	10.6	22.0	31.9	18.0
Lismore	61.0	39.0	53.8	46.2	11.7	3.6	11.7	22.5	50.5	20.2	9.4	20.1	30.3	19.9
Maitland-Newcastle	60.2	39.8	53.2	46.8	10.4	4.4	13.6	30.7	40.9	21.1	12.1	23.0	27.6	16.2
Melbourne	55.4	44.6	52.9	47.1	15.0	9.7	20.6	27.4	27.3	20.7	13.5	25.2	26.0	14.7
Parramatta	54.3	45.7	52.1	47.9	18.4	12.4	25.4	26.4	17.4	24.4	14.3	25.9	23.9	11.5
Perth	56.8	43.2	53.0	47.0	19.8	9.1	23.5	25.8	21.7	22.4	12.9	26.1	25.4	13.2
Port Pirie	60.5	39.5	52.8	47.2	16.2	6.9	15.3	27.4	34.3	19.0	10.2	21.4	31.0	18.4
Rockhampton	60.1	39.9	52.2	47.8	17.3	5.3	17.3	26.6	33.4	24.6	11.9	24.8	26.8	12.0
Sale	56.8	43.2	52.7	47.3	17.9	6.9	20.0	23.0	32.2	22.0	12.4	24.8	27.1	13.6
Sandhurst	56.5	43.5	52.9	47.1	11.4	4.7	14.5	30.5	38.8	21.8	11.0	21.9	28.6	16.8
Sydney	55.4	44.6	52.3	47.7	17.1	10.3	22.9	29.2	20.5	21.0	14.8	27.3	23.7	13.3
Toowoomba	56.9	43.1	52.5	47.5	14.5	4.6	17.7	26.3	36.9	24.2	12.1	23.0	26.2	14.5
Townsville	56.7	43.3	52.5	47.5	21.7	5.4	19.5	23.6	29.9	24.6	13.8	24.4	25.4	11.8
Wagga Wagga	56.0	44.0	52.2	47.8	22.0	7.1	19.0	24.5	27.4	24.7	13.0	22.2	25.3	14.8
Wilcannia-Forbes	61.6	38.4	51.6	48.4	15.1	6.8	16.2	27.6	34.3	22.6	11.9	21.4	28.0	16.1
Wollongong	56.0	44.0	52.6	47.4	19.7	6.4	20.1	25.7	28.1	23.3	13.2	24.5	25.4	13.6
Military Ordinariate of Australia <sup>1</sup>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chaldean Diocese of St Thomas	52.5	47.5	50.3	49.7	14.5	22.0	24.1	24.8	14.6	31.6	18.3	26.7	18.7	4.7
Maronite Diocese of St Maroun	55.5	44.5	50.4	49.6	14.8	22.6	32.0	23.0	7.7	27.7	16.2	27.4	20.3	8.4
Eparchy of Saint Michael the Archangel (Melkites)	48.5	51.5	50.0	50.0	11.1	13.7	29.7	30.9	14.6	24.8	14.5	25.5	23.8	11.5
Syro-Malabar Eparchy of St Thomas the Apostle	53.7	46.3	49.7	50.3	42.6	10.6	37.2	8.9	0.7	43.8	8.6	36.9	10.0	0.7
Ukrainian Eparchy of Saints Peter and Paul	60.5	39.5	55.8	44.2	7.3	7.3	11.3	34.7	39.5	15.6	8.3	20.5	30.6	25.0
Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of the Southern Cross	50.2	49.8	-	-	18.5	9.5	20.1	26.2	25.7	-	-	-	-	-
<b>AUSTRALIA</b>	<b>56.2</b>	<b>43.8</b>	<b>52.9</b>	<b>47.1</b>	<b>17.2</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>21.7</b>	<b>25.8</b>	<b>25.8</b>	<b>21.8</b>	<b>12.9</b>	<b>24.9</b>	<b>26.1</b>	<b>14.3</b>



*Table 6 notes:*

1. *Due to COVID-19, the Military Ordinariate had just one military chapel operating during the Count period in 2021. As such, most Defence Force personnel attended Mass at their local parish. In 2016, persons who lived on a military base were counted separately as part of the Military Ordinariate and not as part of a parish or diocese in which the military base was geographically situated.*

## Age of Mass Attenders by diocese

The age profile of the Catholic community differs widely across the country, and Mass attenders are a subgroup of that broader Catholic community. Rural dioceses have relatively older age profiles in comparison to urban or more populated dioceses. On the other hand, a number of dioceses with a high number 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>7</sup>

In general, it could be argued that a 'healthy' Mass-attending population should mirror the male to female and age group proportions of the Catholic population in the parish, although, of course, unique demographic factors in local populations will always exist. In 2021, the impact of COVID-19 on Mass attendance made it significantly more difficult to identify such factors. However some differences could offer further insights. For example:

- A significantly higher proportion of female Mass attenders compared to the Catholic population may indicate a need for greater outreach to men.
- A greater proportion of Mass attenders in the 0-17 and 18–29 age groups compared to that of the Catholic population in a parish may indicate a significant presence of children and young people at Mass and could be a sign of a thriving community.
- Conversely, a greater proportion of Mass attenders in the 50-69 and 70 and over age groups compared to that of the Catholic population may reveal an aging profile of attenders that will likely impact Mass attendance in the longer term.

<sup>7</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).

## LANGUAGES OF MASS

According to the National Count of Attendance, during May 2021, Mass was celebrated in at least 42 different languages, including English. Overall, in 2021, while around 86 per cent of attenders attended Masses celebrated in English, just over 53,000 people attended Mass celebrated in a language other than English each weekend, which represented 13.6 per cent of all Mass attenders. This was an increase of 3.3 per cent since 2016. As shown in Table 7, the number of non-English languages in which Mass was celebrated in Australia has increased slightly over time, from 35 reported languages in 2001, to 41 in 2021.



Photo credit: Mass for You at Home (Diocese of Wollongong, ACBC), <https://massforyou.com.au/>

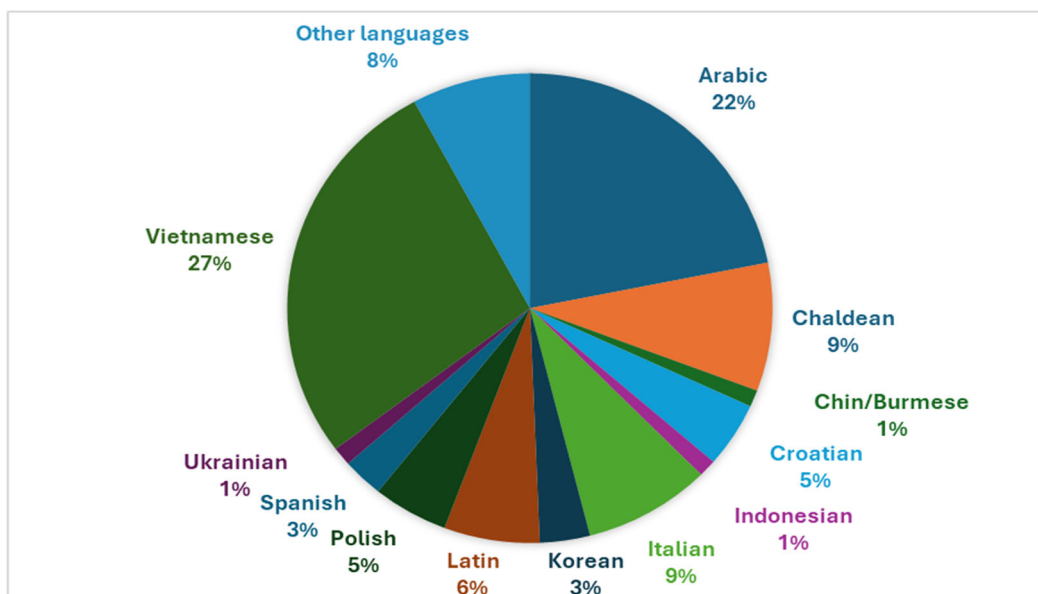
**Table 7. Attendances at Masses celebrated in languages other than English 2001- 2021**

Year	2001*	2006	2011*	2016	2021
Number of non-English languages	35	30	-	43	41
Average attenders per weekend	-	53,500	-	64,016	53,035
Percentage of total attendance	6.7	7.5	-	10.3	13.6

\* Detailed analysis of languages was not done for the 2011 Count, while only minimal analysis was done for the 2001 Count. Sources: National Count of Attendance 2001, 2006, 2016 & 2021; National Church Life Survey 2006 & 2016.

In 2021, the most common languages other than English were Vietnamese with 14,490 attenders, and Arabic with 11,607 attenders. The third top language was Chaldean, which was exclusively reported within the Chaldean Church, with 4,681 attenders. The top five were rounded out with Italian at 4,498 and the liturgical language of Latin with 3,379 attenders.

**Figure 6. Languages other than English Masses: Proportion of Attenders (%)**



Source: National Count of Attendance 2021.

Figure 6 shows the proportion of attenders at Masses in languages other than English. Where the attendance at Masses in a certain language was less than one per cent, it has been included in the group “Other languages”.

While some of the languages of Mass were relatively common, such as Vietnamese and Arabic, other languages, including Zomi and Swahili, had only one monthly Mass held during the four weekends in May, the period when the Count was conducted.

Some of the language names provided by parishes or other Mass centres were regional area language names, sometimes called dialects. For example, the language of one Mass was described as ‘Indian’ but can be classified within any of the two Southern Asian language groups of Dravidian (which includes at least five languages) or Indo-Aryan (which includes at least 15 languages). Malayalam, the language of many Syro-Malabar Catholic Masses, was the most common of the Indian languages spoken at Mass.

A number of parishes held Mass in Aboriginal languages. Two of these were Arrernte, spoken by those around Alice Springs, and Murrinhpatha, spoken by those from Wadeye and the western coast of the Northern Territory.

Figure 7 shows the different languages in which Mass was celebrated during the 2021 National Count of Attendance period.

**Figure 7. Languages of Mass, 2021.**



Source: National Count of Attendance, 2021. wordclouds.com

## Languages other than English in the Dioceses

As shown in Table 8, the prevalence of Masses in languages other than English was highest in parishes in the dioceses in the capital cities. Not all dioceses had parishes which celebrated Mass in languages other than English during the period of the Count, and those that did not have been omitted from the below table.

**Table 8. Mass Celebrated in Languages other than English (LOTE) by Diocese**

Diocese	No. of LOTE	Diocesan LOTE total attendance	Diocesan LOTE % attendance	Top Language	Top Language % attendance
Adelaide	15	3,748	19.1	Vietnamese	7.1
Ballarat	2	147	2.1	Syriac	2.0
Brisbane	15	3,393	8.5	Vietnamese	3.6
Broken Bay	9	725	5.2	Korean	2.6
Cairns	2	25	0.8	Filipino	0.7
Canberra & Goulburn	5	206	2.0	Latin	1.3
Chaldean	2	6,291	79.2	Chaldean	59.0
Darwin	9	354	9.1	Murrinhpatha	4.2
Hobart	1	93	2.3	Polish	2.3
Lismore	1	20	0.4	Filipino	0.4
Maitland-Newcastle	3	88	1.7	Polish	0.9
Maronite	1	7,952	60.2	Arabic	60.2
Melbourne	26	10,773	13.5	Vietnamese	4.2
Melkite	1	1,625	91.0	Arabic	91.0
Parramatta	13	1,159	4.9	Latin	1.3
Perth	13	2,709	7.5	Vietnamese	3.0
Sydney	17	11,653	20.0	Vietnamese	11.8
Syro-Malabar	1	429	46.9	Malayalam	46.9
Ukrainian	1	685	95.5	Ukrainian	95.5
Wagga Wagga	3	364	6.7	Latin	5.4
Wilcannia-Forbes	1	27	2.2	Latin	2.2
Wollongong	7	571	4.8	Croatian	1.6

Source: National Count of Attendance 2021.

Parishes in the Archdiocese of Melbourne offered Masses in the broadest range of languages (26). The Eastern Catholic Churches indicated the highest proportions of Mass attendance in a language other than English, with the Ukrainian Eparchy at 95.5 per cent of attenders, the Melkite Eparchy at 91 per cent, the Chaldean Eparchy at 79.2 per cent, the Maronite Eparchy at 60.2 per cent and the Syro-Malabar Diocese at 46.9 per cent. Outside of the Eastern Catholic Churches, the diocese with the highest proportion of attenders at Mass celebrated in a language other than English was the Archdiocese of Sydney with 20 per cent, closely followed by the Archdiocese of Adelaide with 19.1 per cent.

Table 7 also shows the language (other than English) with the highest proportion of Mass attenders in each diocese. Five dioceses reported Vietnamese as the most commonly attended Mass in a language other than English, while a further four dioceses reported Latin. The remaining dioceses reported a broad range of languages which may indicate the relevant concentration of ethnicities in each location.



Photo Credit: Mass for You at Home (Diocese of Wollongong, ACBC), <https://massforyou.com.au/>



## ONLINE MASS ATTENDANCE

During COVID-19, many Catholics across Australia accessed Mass online through a range of digital methods. Many Australian parishes and dioceses livestreamed services online or uploaded them on channels such as YouTube or Facebook. There was also the option of watching the weekly nationally televised Mass service, *Mass For You At Home*, broadcast every Sunday morning.

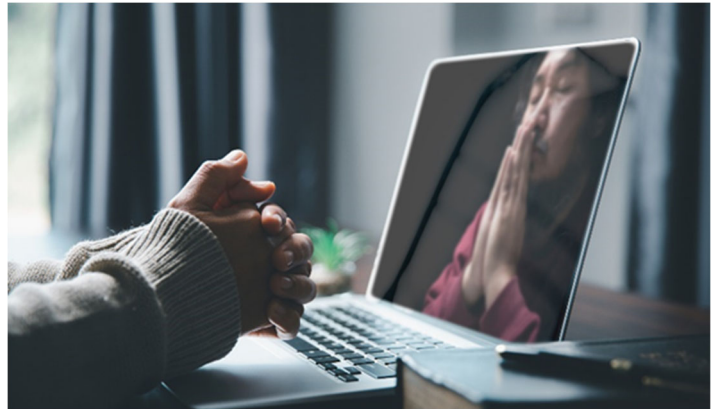


Photo credit: Bigstock

### Masses accessed through online platforms

In the 2021 Count, parishes were invited to provide the number of 'views' to Masses or Sunday assemblies streamed or uploaded online. As expected, not all parishes offered this service or may not have provided online services every weekend, and therefore the data have been aggregated at a diocesan level only.

**Table 9: Average number of views - Top Ten Dioceses**

Diocese	No. of parishes that offered online Masses	Avg no. of views per weekend
Sydney	30	20,275
Lismore	2	9,689
Sale	3	3,529
Brisbane	17	3,315
Syro-Malabar	3	2,773
Adelaide	2	2,684
Maronite	4	2,043
Parramatta	13	2,039
Melbourne	24	1,694
Wollongong	7	1,280

Source of data: ACBC National Count of Attendance, 2021.

Of the 35 dioceses, eparchies and ordinariates for which data was received, 26 offered online Masses at least once during the period of the Count. Across Australia, these were managed by 149 parishes.

The number of average views per weekend ranged from 11 in the Diocese of Sandhurst to 20,275 in the Archdiocese of Sydney. Table 9 identifies the top ten dioceses based on the number of average views per weekend. Lismore was second (9,689), followed by Sale (3,529), Brisbane (3,315) and the Syro-Malabar Eparchy (2,773). There was not a great deal of correlation between the number of parishes offering Mass, with the average number of views. For example, while the Archdiocese of Sydney had the largest number of parishes offering online Mass (30) and 20,275 average views, the Diocese of Lismore had only two parishes offering online Mass, but had the second highest average number of views at 9,689.

The number of views in an individual parish ranged from 11 in the parish of Eaglehawk (Diocese of Sandhurst) to 12,100 at St Mary's Cathedral parish in the Archdiocese of Sydney. As shown in Table 10, apart from St Mary's Cathedral, the parishes with the highest number of individual views were Lismore Cathedral (9,487), Cranbourne (3,095), Adelaide Cathedral (2,600) and Knanaya, Melbourne (2,350).

**Table 10: Highest number of views in an individual parish - Top Ten Parishes**

Diocese	No. of parishes that offered online Masses	Highest no. of views	Highest no. of views - parish
Sydney	30	12,100	St Mary's Cathedral
Lismore	2	9,487	Lismore Cathedral
Sale	3	3,095	Cranbourne
Adelaide	2	2,600	Adelaide Cathedral
Syro-Malabar	3	2,350	Knanaya, Melbourne
Maronite	4	1,187	St John the Beloved, Mt Druitt
Parramatta	13	960	Seven Hills
Brisbane	17	941	Burleigh Heads
Melbourne	24	561	Hoppers Crossing
Melkite	2	548	Fairfield, VIC - St Joseph

Source of data: ACBC National Count of Attendance, 2021.

As shown in Table 11, 54 parishes used YouTube as their medium, 52 used Facebook, eight parishes used Zoom, 29 used a combination of media, such as both Facebook and YouTube, or Facebook and Zoom, and six parishes either did not provide details or used another medium entirely. For example, two parishes reported using Vimeo, and one distributed online Masses via email.

**Table 11: Media used by dioceses to offer online Masses**

Diocese	No. of parishes that offered online Masses	Facebook	YouTube	Zoom	Mixed media	No details/ Other
Adelaide	2	1	1			
Brisbane	17	12	2	1	2	
Hobart	7	4	1		1	
Melbourne	24	3	15	2	4	1
Perth	6	2	1	1		2
Sydney	30	10	15		4	
Ballarat	3			2		1
Broken Bay	5	1	4			
Bunbury	1	1				
Cairns	2		2			1
Darwin	3	3				
Lismore	2		1		1	
Maitland-Newcastle	3	1	1	1		
Parramatta	13	7	4	1	1	
Port Pirie	2	1	1			
Sale	3	2			1	
Sandhurst	1		1			
Toowoomba	1				1	
Townsville	2	1	1			
Wagga Wagga	3	2	1			
Wollongong	7	1	3		2	1
Maronite	4				4	
Melkite	2				2	
Personal Ordinariate	1				1	
Syro-Malabar	3				3	
Ukrainian	2				2	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>6</b>

Source of data: ACBC National Count of Attendance, 2021.

## Interpreting the data

The number of views does not tell us the total number of people who watched Mass online. It is important to remember that each online platform measures views quite differently. At the time of the Count, YouTube 'views' were counted when a person intentionally watched a video for 30 seconds or more, while a Facebook video 'view' was logged when a video played for at least three seconds. This makes it impossible to tell how many people watched

the entire service or how many only watched a snippet of the video. Parishioners were also not limited to accessing Mass through their own parish or diocesan channels. With a variety of options on offer, parishioners could access online Mass that was being celebrated in another diocese, in a religious community or even in another country. The inability to record such data makes it difficult to gauge the effects that online Mass had on Mass attendances.

Nevertheless, the figures collected through Masses held online do tell us how many people can be reached through these channels and what their levels of engagement or popularity are. Where the number of views is consistently high, this may be a means of evangelisation, or a focus of mission not previously considered. The data may also be useful to inform decisions for holding online Masses in future scenarios when the celebration of Masses are restricted, or when people are prevented from physically attending Masses in their local parishes.



Photo credit: Bigstock



Photo credit: Bigstock

## MASS FOR YOU AT HOME



Photo Credit: *Mass for You at Home* (Diocese of Wollongong, ACBC), <https://massforyou.com.au/>

*Mass for You at Home* is a pre-recorded televised Mass service and is currently a production of the Diocese of Wollongong in partnership with the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. It is thought to be the longest-running program on Australian commercial television, broadcast since 1971, and initially a project of the Archdiocese of Melbourne. Mass is celebrated at St John Vianney Co-Cathedral in the Diocese of Wollongong and is broadcast nationally each Sunday at 6am on Channel 10. It also premieres on the Aurora Channel on Foxtel each Sunday morning, then airs several times a day throughout the week. The program can also be accessed from the *Mass for You at Home* and *10Play* websites.

Viewership data for the metropolitan area of five capital cities (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth) were received from Network 10 and regional viewership data were received from Rise Media Placement Pty. Ltd.

Over the first four weekends of May 2021, across the five cities, an average of around 22,300 households viewed *Mass for You at Home* each weekend. In regional areas where *Mass for You at Home* was commercially broadcast (not all areas broadcast the program), an average of around 7,800 households viewed the program on each weekend during the same period.

Overall, on a typical weekend in May 2021, over 30,100 households watched the program across Australia. It is important to note, however, that a 'household' may include more than one individual watching the program. In some instances, such as an aged care facility or a prison, a 'household' will include multiple viewers.



Additionally, during the full month of May 2021, there were around 1,650 unique visitors to the *Mass for You at Home* program through the *10Play* website, with 3,660 videos started and 5,653 video segments (portions of the program) viewed. A further 5,000-6,000 views were logged each week directly via the *Mass for You at Home* website. There is also additional viewership through Foxtel, however, we were unable to obtain reliable figures.

In general, the viewership of *Mass for You at Home* rates highly on free to air television, in comparison to other religious programs broadcast before and after it. For example, in May 2021 in the regional areas, the 30-minute *Mass for You at Home* received on average a 30 per cent viewership share during three hours of religious programs broadcast each Sunday morning between 5am and 8am.

The NCPMR acknowledges Tim Straw from Rise Media Placement and Anastasia Cowan from Network10 for their generosity of time and expertise in providing the *Mass for You at Home* viewership data and additional contextual advice.

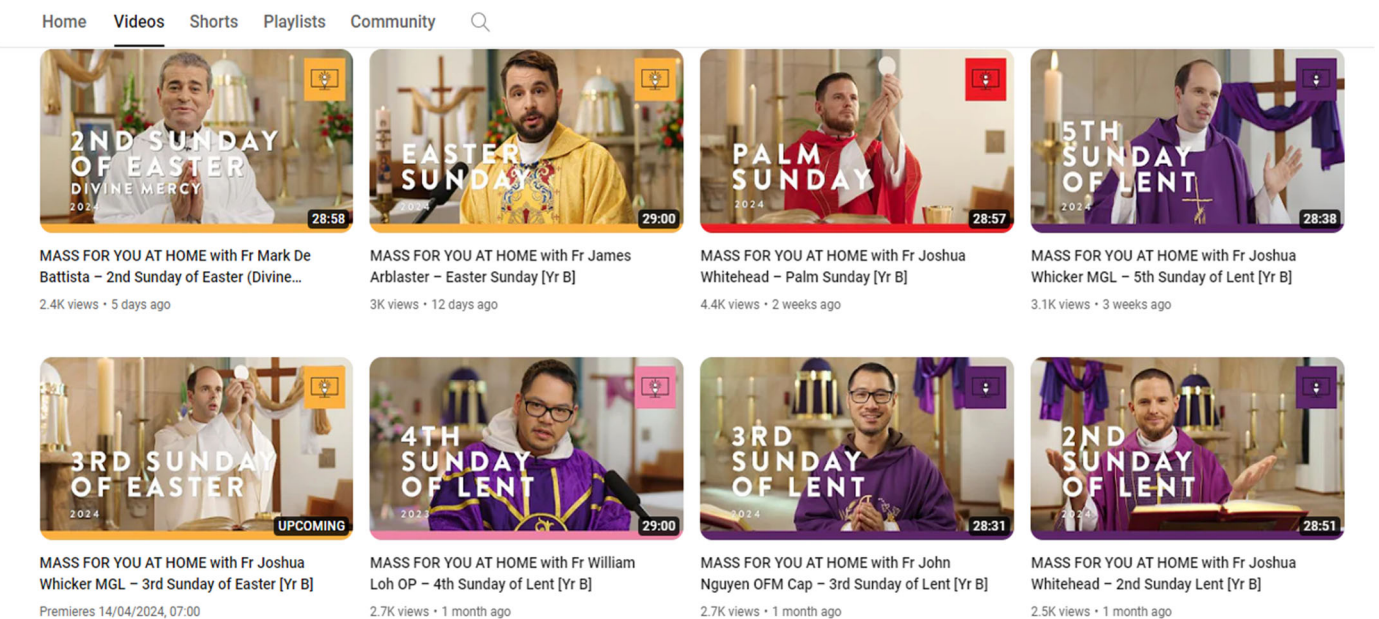


Photo Credit: *Mass for You at Home* (Diocese of Wollongong, ACBC), <https://massforyou.com.au/>



## CONCLUSION

The significance of conducting the National Count of Attendance in 2021 cannot be understated. As anticipated, there was a notable decrease in the attendance of Mass compared to prior years. The average attendance declined to 417,350 and the rate of attendance was 8.2 per cent, which was a decline of 3.6 per cent from 2016 to 2021.

Most dioceses experienced substantial decreases in their attendance and rates of attendance. It is expected that much of this decline can be explained by the impact of COVID-19 restrictions and people's cautious approach towards resuming regular patterns of social interactions in the community. It is crucial to note, however, that the decline in Mass attendance cannot be solely attributed to COVID-19. Other factors, such as changes in the demographics of the Catholic population, the presence or absence of immigrants, the attendance patterns of different age groups of attenders and other issues affecting the overall Catholic population in Australia, also play a role.

The 2021 Count revealed one interesting observation. The proportion of attenders aged 18-29 declined between 2006 and 2016, but showed an upward trend in 2021. This cohort numerically increased by 4,000 attenders between 2016 and 2021. This rise could be attributed to the influence of COVID-19. While older age groups cautiously returned to normal patterns of engagement, this may have had a contrasting impact on those in the younger age groups who were eager to reintegrate into society following a period of restrictions and lockdowns. Participating in Mass at the parish may have provided a chance for social engagement while other such options may have still been unavailable.

The 2021 Count does not provide a comprehensive assessment of the extent to which the pandemic has impacted routine Mass-attending practices of Catholics in Australia. There has been limited research conducted on the global effects of the pandemic on Mass attendance, with some initial studies showing a slight decline<sup>8</sup>. Further investigations will be needed in the coming years.

In Australia, there has been a gradual resumption of pre-COVID-19 lifestyles. Nevertheless, Catholic parishes around the nation have witnessed people respond in different ways. According to the 2021 National Church Life Survey, 40 per cent of attenders reported changes in their engagement, with some people becoming more involved, and others less so.<sup>9</sup> Around one in five attenders (19%) at Catholic services said they attended Mass online. Since 2021, some parishes have experienced a growth in Mass attendance as COVID-19 presented opportunities for them to adapt and cultivate more involvement. In other areas, parish life will never return to 'the way it used to be'. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some people who moved to participating in online Mass during COVID-19 have developed a preference for continuing this practice, while others who ceased attending Mass altogether have not felt the desire to return. Consequently, many parishes are experiencing a new normal due to the irreversible consequences of the global pandemic.

Results from the 2021 National Count of Attendance present the Catholic Church in Australia with an opportunity to lead the way in post-COVID-19 research about parish life. The availability of empirical evidence from the Count provides bishops and other leaders with reliable data for future mission planning in their dioceses and at a national level. By taking a snapshot of Mass attendance in 2021, we have obtained an accurate picture of the extent of participation across the country. Explaining the changes, however, will require data from the 2026 Count to understand whether the sharp decline during this period was an isolated occurrence or part of broader trends occurring in the Church.

<sup>8</sup> Pew Research Centre. (28 March 2023). "How the Pandemic Has Affected Attendance at U.S. Religious Services" <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/03/28/how-the-pandemic-has-affected-attendance-at-u-s-religious-services/>.

<sup>9</sup> NCLS Research (n.d.). "COVID and church: what effect did it have?" 2021 National Church Life Survey. <https://www.ncls.org.au/articles/covid-and-church-what-effect-did-it-have/#:~:text=What%20long%20term%20impact%20has,religius%20service%20attendance%20in%202020>.

*This page is left blank intentionally*

*This page is left blank intentionally*

**Report prepared by: National Centre for Pastoral Research  
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference  
GPO Box 368  
Canberra ACT 2601  
Australia**

**Telephone: +61 (02) 6201 9812  
Email: [ncpr@catholic.org.au](mailto:ncpr@catholic.org.au)  
Web: [www.ncpr.catholic.org.au](http://www.ncpr.catholic.org.au)**

**© Copyright May 2024 Australian Catholic Bishops Conference**