

# Pastoral Research Online

Issue 65

June 2024

## A synodal perspective to Council matters

In May, members of the Australian Catholic Council for Pastoral Research (ACCPR) gathered at Mary Mackillop Place for a day of synodal consultation. Through a series of *Conversations in the Spirit*, Council members explored a synodal approach to the Council's mandate and processes, notably their role in overseeing the NCPR's work and serving as an advisory body on pastoral research to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

*Back row L-R: Bishop Michael McCarthy, Dr Trudy Dantis, Prof Gabrielle McMullen AM, Dr Louise Guillaume, Mr Daniel Ang, Fr Chris de Souza, Fr Brian Lucas, Mons Shora Maree (Guest) and Mrs Sophy Morley. Front Row L-R: Ms Carole Gan, Dr Stephen Reid and Dr Joel Hodge.*



Dear Readers,

*The middle of the year has been a busy period for NCPR staff as we juggle work on several important projects. We recently concluded our analysis for the 2024 Consultations of the Synod on Synodality and released the Australian Summary report. Thank you to all those who participated in the diocesan and national conversations, especially those who helped plan consultations, manage queries, gather submissions and write reports.*

*We are happy to have published the long-awaited 2021 National Count of Attendance report in late May. Some highlights from this report are included in this newsletter. Two additional special reports from the 2021 Census are now available. These are the '2021 Disability Report' and the 2021 'Engaging with your Parish Social Profile' reports. We've also created a new printable map using Australian Catholic Mapping Online that shows the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics in each diocese.*

*In other announcements, the deadline for the online 'Profile of Catholic Clergy in Australia Survey' has been extended to 15 July 2024 and eligible Catholics are invited to participate in the 'Absent From the Table' online survey. This edition also examines the 2023 statistics on Australian Clergy and Religious with 20-year comparisons to 2003 and to global trends. More news inside...*

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 2021 Disability Report
- Engaging with your Parish Social Profile
- New Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics Map
- Extension: A Profile of Catholic Clergy in Australia Survey
- National Count of Attendance
- Synod on Synodality Update
- Australian Clergy and Religious Statistics 2023
- Absent from the Table Survey
- Pastoral Ministry of Sport

# 2021 Disability Report

The NCPR recently published a new report on Disability for the Catholic Church in Australia. The report draws on Census data from 2006 to 2021 and provides information about Catholics who required assistance with self-care, mobility and/or communication, as well as Catholics who provided unpaid care in the two weeks leading up to the Census.

**Figure 1: Catholics who needed assistance with core activities 2006-2021 (% of Catholics) and All persons, 2021**

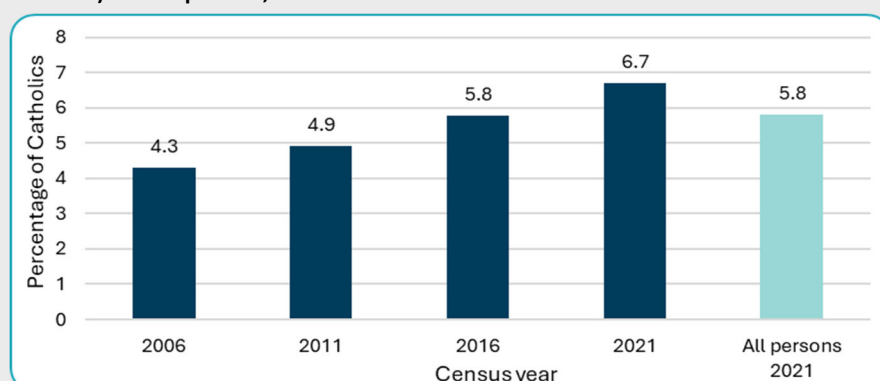
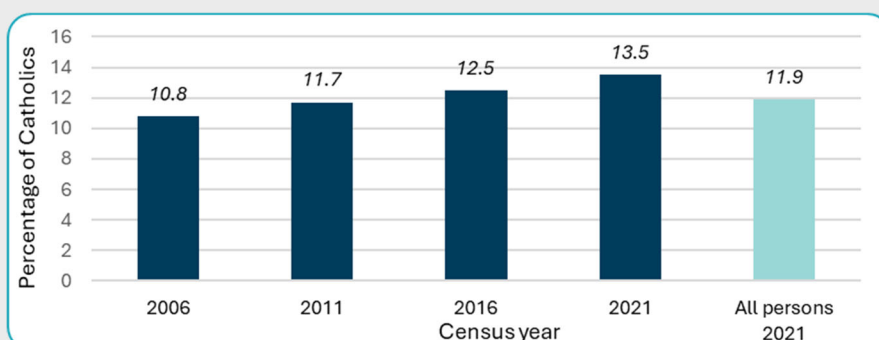


Figure 1 shows that the proportion of Catholics requiring assistance in 2021 (6.7%) was higher than that of the overall Australian population of 5.8 per cent. Since 2006, when the question was first asked on the Census form, both the proportion and the number of Catholics requiring assistance has increased at each census, from 4.3 per cent in 2006 (representing 220,860 Catholics) to 6.7 per cent in 2021 (342,068 Catholics).

Sixty-four per cent of Catholics who required assistance lived in a family setting (220,373 people), 18 per cent (61,675) lived alone and just under 18 per cent (59,986) lived with non-family members, which for many of those aged over 75 is usually a hospital or nursing home.

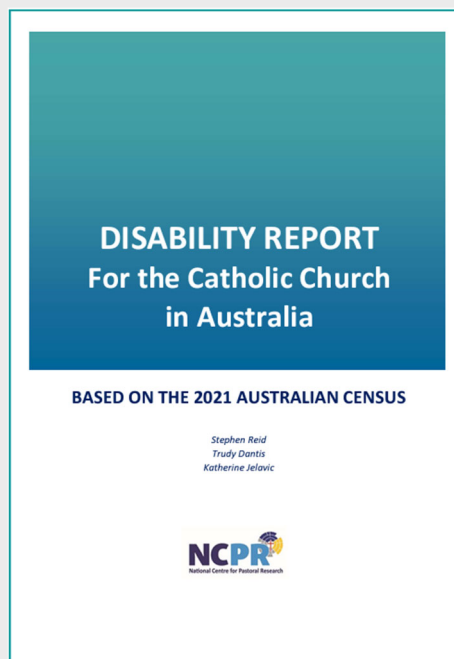
In 2021, 13.5 per cent of Catholics in Australia (560,870 people) provided unpaid assistance to a person with a disability, as shown in Figure 2. This number has also increased annually since 2006, both numerically and proportionally, increasing from 435,303 in 2006 (10.8 per cent of all Catholics) to 560,870 in 2021 (13.5%). The proportion of Catholics aged 15 and over who provided assistance in 2021 was greater than that of the general Australian population aged 15 and over who provided assistance (11.9%).

**Figure 2. Catholics who provided unpaid assistance to a person with a disability (% of Catholics aged 15+), 2006-2021, and All persons, 2021**



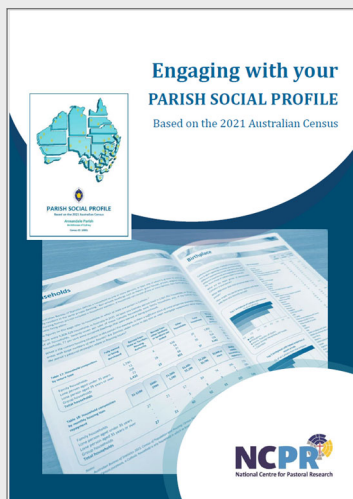
The largest cohorts of Catholics who provided unpaid care in 2021 were aged 55-65 years (139,975) and 65 and over (133,287). A small but significant number of Catholics who provided unpaid care were aged 15-24 (32,547). Around 21,000 of these young carers were studying at university (45%), at secondary school (42%) or enrolled in TAFE or other vocational courses (13%). Around 62 per cent of young carers were in full-time or part-time employment.

A more detailed analysis of data related to disability, unpaid assistance and use of sign languages can be found by downloading the full report from: <https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/national-catholic-census-project/>.



Compiled data in various formats from the **2021 Parish Social Profiles** is now available for purchase for a nominal fee. For a quote, or more information about how the NCPR can support your organisation, please contact us at [ncpr@catholic.org.au](mailto:ncpr@catholic.org.au)

# 2021 National Catholic Census Project



## Engaging with your Parish Social Profile

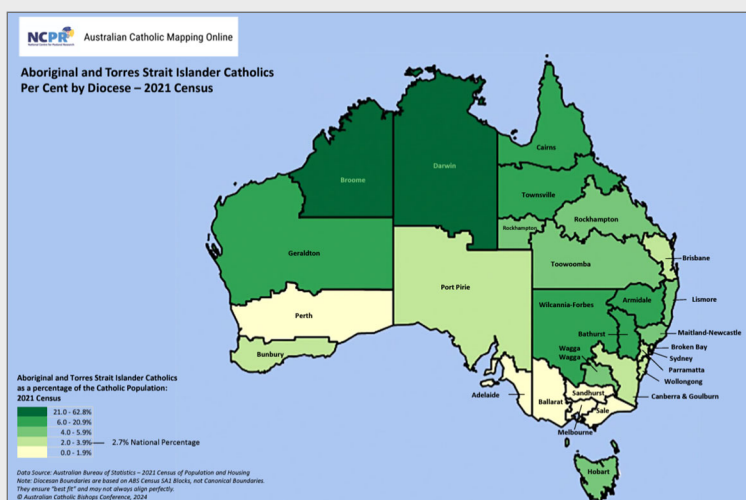
With the recent release of the 2021 Parish Social Profiles, the NCPR are offering resources to help parishes to engage with and interpret the information in their profiles. The 2021 *Engaging with your Parish Social Profile* report has been released and is available on the NCPR website at:

<https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/national-catholic-census-project/>

The report takes the reader through the history of the Catholic Census project, provides some helpful tips for looking at the figures, charts and information presented in the profiles, and some reflective questions to help parishes go beyond the numbers and consider the pastoral implications of what the data represents.

## New Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics Map

As part of the Australian Catholic Mapping Online project, the NCPR has developed a new map which illustrates the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics in each diocese based on 2021 Census data.



The *2021 Percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics by Diocese Map* is shaded in five shades of light yellow to dark green to show the proportion of people in each diocese. Dioceses shaded the darkest green (Broome and Darwin) have the highest proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics, while the dioceses shaded in lighter shades have lesser proportions.

Nationally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics account for 2.7 per cent of the Australian Catholic population. Seven dioceses (Adelaide, Ballarat, Sandhurst, Melbourne, Sale, Sydney and Perth) shaded in light yellow have the lowest proportions ranging from 0.5 to 1.9 per cent. The

map is available for download and printing in A3 and A4 on the NCPR website at: <https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/australian-catholic-mapping-online/>

## EXTENSION: A Profile of Catholic Clergy in Australia Survey

The NCPR is currently undertaking a survey of Catholic Clergy in Australia to inform a discussion on their spiritual, physical, mental and general wellbeing, including areas that require more care and support.

All clergy (priests and permanent deacons) should have received an invitation to participate in the online survey through their institute, religious congregation, diocese, organisation or group office.

**The closing date for the survey has now been extended to 9am, Monday 15 July 2024.**

The survey is anonymous and confidential and has been approved by the Christian Research Association Human Research Ethics Committee.

**If you would like to participate in the survey and have not received the link, please contact Dr Trudy Dantis, Director, National Centre for Pastoral Research: [trudy.dantis@catholic.org.au](mailto:trudy.dantis@catholic.org.au).**

# 2021 National Count of Attendance

## National Report released

The Australian Catholic Mass Attendance Report for 2021 has now been published and is available online at:

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

The 2021 report draws on data collected from the National Count of Attendance project and the National Catholic Census project, and provides a picture of Mass attendance in 2021 as well as an analysis of the trends in Mass attendance observed since 1996. In 2021, parishes were also asked to provide the age and sex of attenders in lieu of data being collected from the National Church Life Survey.

## Features of the 2021 National Count

The 2021 Count was particularly impacted by restrictions and limitations imposed by COVID-19 at the time of the Count, conducted over four weekends in May 2021. Some states had only minor restrictions, such as Western Australia, which allowed 100 per cent capacity at a seated service during the time of the Count, whereas others had more stringent constraints. The 2021 Count, in consideration of this, also collected data on the viewership of streamed Mass services and the viewership of the *Mass for You at Home* pre-recorded, televised Mass.

## Age profile of Mass Attenders

Figure 1 shows the age profile of Mass attenders compared with the Catholic population (those who identified as Catholic in the 2021 Census) and the total Australian population. In the first three (youngest) age groups, the

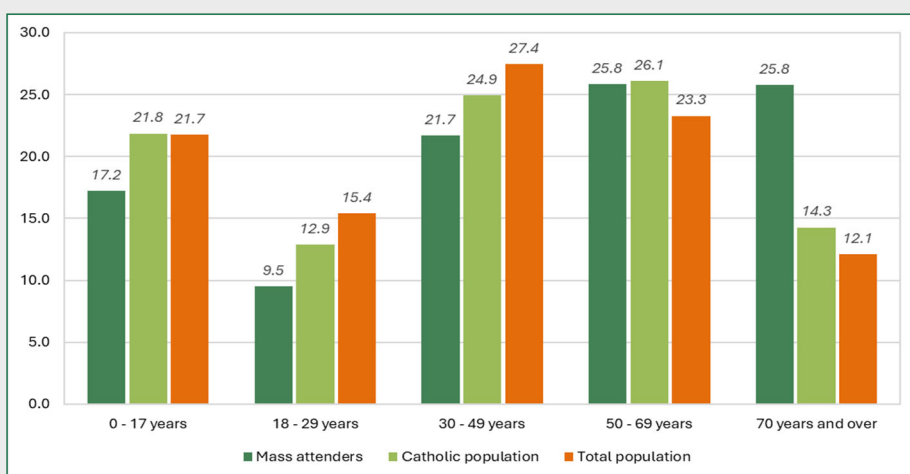
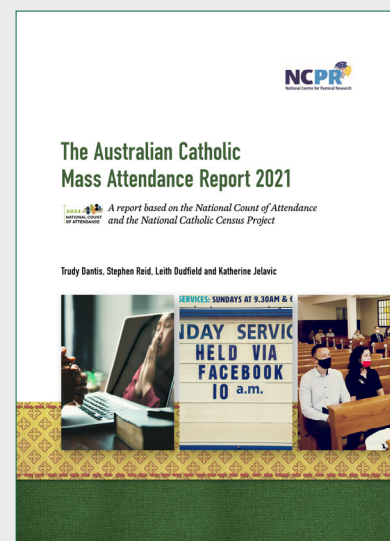


Figure 1: Age profile of Mass attenders, Catholic and total population, 2021

## Key highlights from the National Report

- ◆ 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.



proportion of Mass attenders was less than the proportion of the Catholic population or total population in those age groups. However, the proportion of Mass attenders surpassed the total population in the 50-69 age group, and the proportion of Mass attenders aged 70 and over was much greater than either the Catholic or total population in that same age bracket.



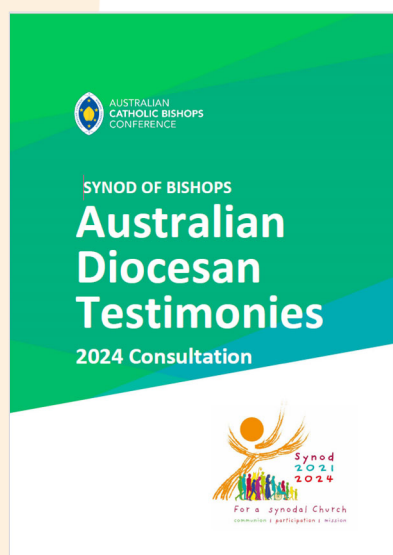


# Synod on Synodality Update

## Australian Summary of the 2024 Consultation

From February to April 2024, a two-tiered consultation process was undertaken to unpack synodal processes in greater depth, based on the chapters of the *Synthesis Report from the First Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*. The results of those consultations were gathered into the *Australian Summary* which was sent to the General Secretariat of the Synod on 15 May 2024 and made available on the Synod website shortly after. The *Australian Summary* and companion document, the *Australian Diocesan Testimonies*, are available from the Synod website at: <https://catholic.org.au/synodalchurch>

The *Australian Summary* describes the consultations held at a 'local level', coordinated by dioceses, and at a 'national level' where relevant national Catholic organisations were invited to consult. The report is organized around the themes that emerged from each of these levels of consultations.



While many of the themes were based on chapters found in the Synod's *Synthesis Report*, there were also reflections that went beyond the report, such as the one on Gifts, Skills and Charisms, or reflections that recognised the distinctiveness of the Australian Church, such as the section on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The *Summary* reported that synodal processes are becoming more familiar to the Australian Church, and several groups commented on the growing acceptance of methods such as *Conversations in the Spirit*. However, it also acknowledged that groups were experiencing 'consultation fatigue' and there was a desire for action to be taken following the conversation. Nevertheless, numerous groups professed hope for the outcomes of the Second Assembly of the Synod, which will take place later this year.

Dioceses were invited to provide a two-page testimony on their synodal experience thus far. Twelve dioceses provided their reflections and these were collated into the *Australian Diocesan Testimonies* document.

## Overseas Summaries

Countries around the world have held similar consultations and provided summaries of what was discussed. The New Zealand report considered the relevant chapters of the *Synthesis Report* and the questions posed, and provided a number of practical suggestions for the ongoing mission of the Church.

<https://www.catholic.org.nz/news/media-releases/synod-4/>

The report from the United States discussed the hopes for the Church in the dual images of a "safe harbor" and a "fiery communion".

<https://www.usccb.org/resources/Interim%20Stage%20Document%20English%20-%20FINAL.pdf>



# Australian Clergy and Religious Statistics 2023

## Vatican Statistics

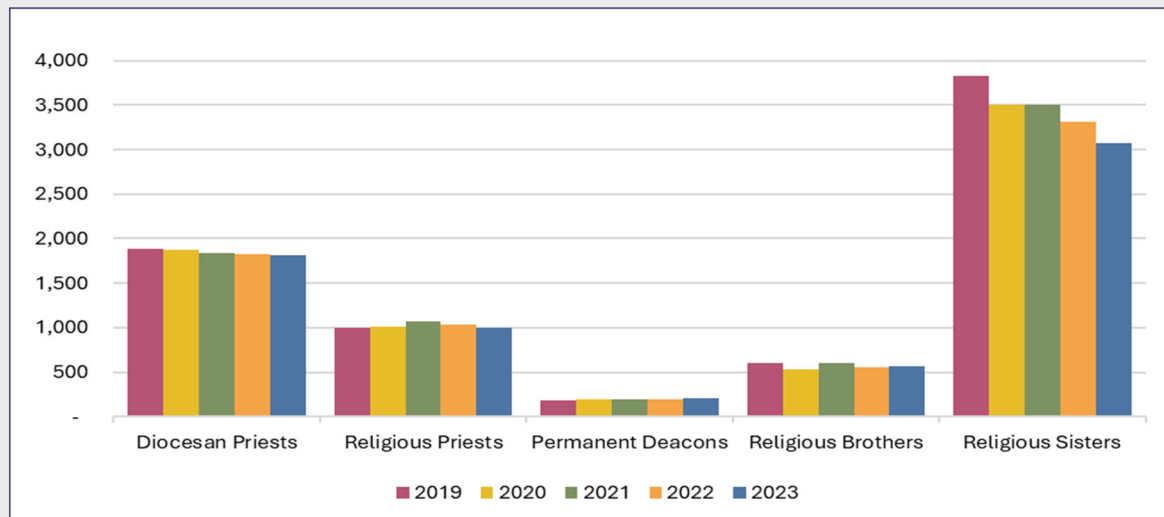
The NCPR recently collated statistics on Australian Catholics using figures from the annual Vatican returns for 31 December 2023. Comparisons to previous years' returns show a number of trends occurring in the Australian Church. Of particular interest are the changing numbers of clergy and religious men and women. Table 1 below shows the number of clergy and religious in each group in the last five years and a 20-year comparison to 2003.

**Table 1: Australian Catholic Statistics: Number of priests, deacons, religious brothers and religious sisters, 2003, 2019-2023**

Year	Priests (including bishops)	Deacons	Religious Brothers	Religious Sisters
2003	3,317	57	1,050	7,479
2019	2,896	187	605	3,833
2020	2,881	195	528	3,503
2021	2,900	192	608	3,501
2022	2,856	192	550	3,318
2023	2,813	204	572	3,070

Source: Figures for 2019-2023 are from each year's Official Directory of the Catholic Church in Australia. Figures for 2003 are from the Statistical Yearbook of the Church 2003, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 20025), 100.

**Figure 1: Clergy and Religious in Australia 2019-2023**



### Fewer priests

Over the last five years, the total number of priests, including bishops, decreased by 83 from 2,896 in 2019 to 2,813 in 2023. Figure 1 shows that most of this change can be attributable to a decline in the number of diocesan clergy, which decreased by 82 in that period, while the number of religious priests (1,000) remained stable. Twenty years earlier, in 2003, Australia reported 3,317 priests and bishops.

### More permanent deacons

In contrast to the number of bishops and priests, the population of permanent deacons grew over the five-year period between 2019 and 2023, from 187 to 204, as shown in Table 1. The largest change occurred in 2023 when there was an increase of 12 permanent deacons. This is the only Australian group where the population has increased both over the last twenty years and since 2019.

## Fewer professed religious

The reported population of religious brothers has remained relatively stable over the five years under review. In 2019, there were 605 religious brothers and in 2023 this number had dropped to 572, as shown in Figure 1. Over the 20-year period, however, the number of religious brothers in 2023 represented just 54 per cent of the 2003 number.

In Australia, for many years, religious sisters have formed the largest cohort of ordained or consecrated Catholics. Figure 1 shows that the number of professed women have declined slowly over the five years from 2019 to 2023, although this does not tell the whole story of women religious. Since 1976, the number of religious sisters has declined substantially (see Reid, Dixon and Connelly, 2010, *See I am Doing A New Thing!*, available from the NCPR website), and the trend has continued. In 2019, the number of professed women, totaling 3,833, exceeded the combined total of ordained and professed men. By 2023, there were 3,070 religious sisters. This decline has meant that fewer women, compared with men, are now participating in ordained or religious life. Religious women is the only group among Australia's ordained and religious where the current population is less than half of the 2003 population.

## Global comparison

The Vatican collects and collates data for the Catholic Church worldwide, and Table 2 shows the global figures for clergy and religious for 2018 to 2022, as well as a comparison to 2003. Although these numbers conceal differences in regional growth and decline, they show that Australia's trends are similar to those of the global Church. While there are now more ordained clergy than in 2003, Table 2 shows that over the 2018-2022 five-year period, the number of priests, religious brothers and religious sisters has declined, while the number of deacons has steadily increased.

**Table 2: Vatican statistics: Number of priests, deacons, religious brothers and religious sisters worldwide, 2003, 2018-2022**

Year	Priests (including bishops)	Deacons	Religious Brothers	Religious Sisters
2003	410,192	31,524	54,620	776,269
2018	419,442	47,504	50,941	641,661
2019	419,770	48,238	50,295	630,099
2020	415,582	48,635	50,569	619,546
2021	413,212	49,176	49,774	608,958
2022	413,083	50,150	49,414	599,228

Source: Figures are from the *Statistical Yearbook of the Church 2023*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2025), 100.

## “Absent from the Table”—Call for survey participants

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference is undertaking a research project aimed at investigating why some Catholics do not participate in regular weekly Sunday Mass (which includes the Saturday Vigil). The project will provide in-depth information about contemporary religious practices and beliefs of Catholics in Australia. The insights will enable parishes, movements, and school communities to respond to the trends in participation in the Church, update the Church's awareness and understanding of the current situation, and enable responses and collaboration around the underlying factors for non/dis-engagement.



If you or someone you know is interested in participating in this research, please click on the link below (or copy and paste the link into your browser) to learn more about the project, and complete the survey .

<https://bit.ly/AbsentFromTheTableSurvey>

The survey will close on **Tuesday, 20 August 2024**. Thank you for considering this invitation.

# Pastoral Ministry of Sport

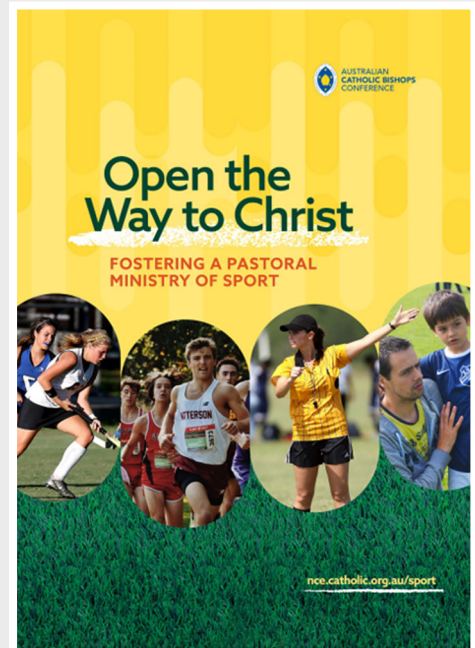
## Open the Way to Christ

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has released a statement titled *Open the Way to Christ* which discusses the opportunities that sport offers to spread the message of the gospel. The initiative and the writing of the statement was developed over a period of almost 12 months with a team of experts before being finalised by the Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry. The contributors including the NCPR's Dr Stephen Reid, who provided his expertise in sports chaplaincy.

The document expands on the statement of Pope Francis that "Sports can open the way to Christ in those places or environments where, for different reasons, it is not possible to announce him directly". It examines the Church's role in mission in a sporting context.

A copy of the statement can be found here:

<https://nce.catholic.au/s/sport/open-the-way-to-christ>



*Do you enjoy this newsletter?*

*Do you know someone who would benefit from receiving it?*

*Catch up on previous issues or subscribe to ensure that you get all the latest research findings and news straight to your inbox.*

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



## NCPR Staff

Trudy Dantis

Director

[trudy.dantis@catholic.org.au](mailto:trudy.dantis@catholic.org.au)

(02) 6201 9812

Leith Dudfield

Research Assistant

[leith.dudfield@catholic.org.au](mailto:leith.dudfield@catholic.org.au)

(02) 6201 9813

Carole Gan

Research Assistant

[carole.gan@catholic.org.au](mailto:carole.gan@catholic.org.au)

### Melbourne Office:

90 Albion Road

Box Hill ViC 3128

Stephen Reid

Senior Researcher

[stephen.reid@catholic.org.au](mailto:stephen.reid@catholic.org.au)

(02) 6201 9808

Katherine Jelavic

Research Assistant

[Katherine.jelavic@catholic.org.au](mailto:Katherine.jelavic@catholic.org.au)

(02) 6201 9801

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](mailto:ncpr@catholic.org.au)  
W: [www.ncpr.catholic.org.au](http://www.ncpr.catholic.org.au)

Copyright © 2024 Australian Catholic  
Bishops Conference, All rights reserved.

