

# Pastoral Research Online

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## NCPR Out and About

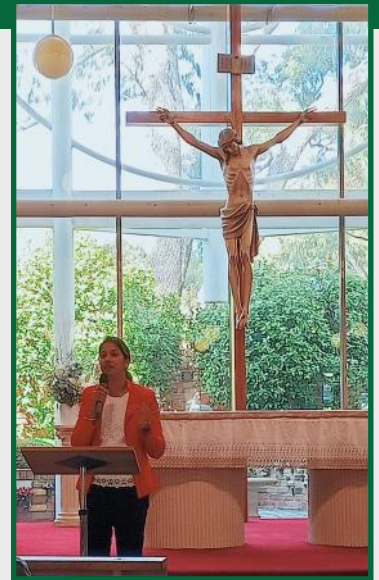


Dr Stephen Reid delivered a presentation to the Trustees, Sponsors, Ministry Board Chairs, Principals and staff of Dominican Education at their annual Symposium. His presentation offered a sociological overview of the current and evolving landscape of the Catholic Church in Australia, as well as a reflection on how to respond to the signs of the times in the future.



Dr Trudy Dantis addressed the Clergy Convocation of the Archdiocese of Brisbane, providing insights from the 2021 Diocesan Social Profile and guiding them in the process of gathering learnings for ministry using their parish profiles. In another presentation at the South

Tuggeranong Parish Planning day in the Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn (*photo*), Dr Dantis unpacked the 2021 Social Profile of the Corpus Christi Catholic community, drawing insights for parishioners to help them review their services and ministries.



Dear Readers,

*I will shortly be travelling to attend the Second Assembly of the Synod on Synodality. As we wait in anticipation for the outcomes of this event, as a team we reflected on the journey that the Australian Church has been on in this process. We have included in this report a summary of that journey, from its first beginnings in October 2021. We wish all Oceania participants every blessing for their participation in the October event.*

*We are happy to share with you in this newsletter an analysis of the Median Weekly Income of Catholic families from the 2021 Census. This customised data is provided by the ABS and has been examined in depth for the first time. We illustrate the median weekly family income levels of Catholic families for every diocese using ACMO (Australia Catholic Mapping Online), presenting the change from 2016 to 2021.*

*Meanwhile, the Centre is continuing work on several ongoing initiatives; we have given some updates on each to let you know how they are developing. Brief highlights of the findings are also included. Additional features in this edition are website updates, pointing you to fresh content on several new pages.*

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE



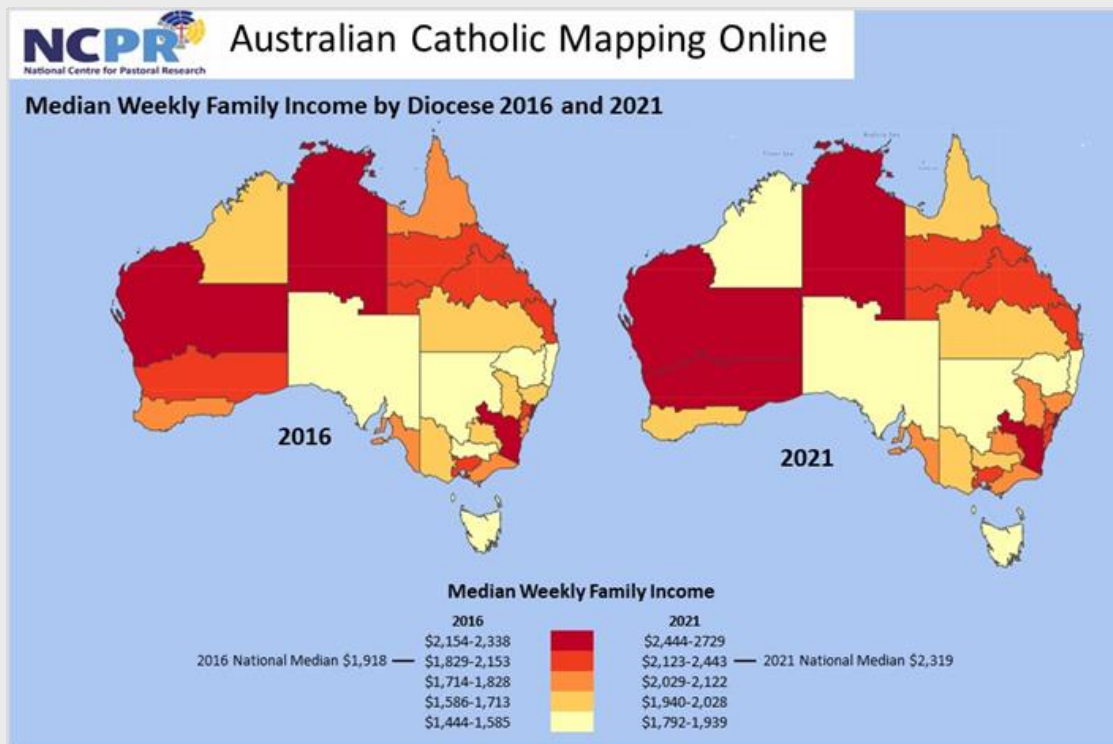
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# 2021 National Catholic Census Project

## Median Weekly Family Income: 2001 to 2021

Median Weekly Family Income represents the income threshold at which fifty per cent of all families in a particular community earn above and fifty per cent earn below. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) identifies median income as the “most representative measure of the ‘average’ level of earnings”<sup>1</sup> making it a useful indicator of family income levels within a diocese or parish.

The NCPR calculates median incomes of Catholic families using customised data provided by the ABS. The weekly family income aggregates the total earnings of all family members aged over 15 in a household. In 2021, weekly family income was recorded for 93.5 per cent of Catholic families across Australia, while 6.5 per cent did not fully disclose their incomes.



The figure above presents two maps of the median weekly family income levels of Catholic families in each diocese: one for the year 2016 and another for 2021. The median income for each diocese was arranged in ascending order and grouped into five ranges, each comprising five or six dioceses. Each range is represented by a colour on the map, with darker hues indicating greater median incomes.

The maps make it easy to see the distribution of median incomes in 2016 and 2021, as well as changes in diocesan ranges between the two Censuses. Typically, income levels rise with time, resulting in an increase in the lowest values for each range between 2016 and 2021, which, in most cases, exceeded the 2016 maximum for the corresponding range.

The figure shows that in both Census years, the dioceses of Darwin and Geraldton, along with the Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn were among those that recorded the highest median incomes, whereas the dioceses of Port Pirie and Bunbury, along with the Archdiocese of Hobart, were among those with the lowest incomes. In 2021, the colours depicted on the maps for the Archdiocese of Perth and the dioceses of Sandhurst and Wagga Wagga were darker, signifying an elevation into a higher income bracket. Dioceses represented by a lighter colour in 2021, such as Broome, Bunbury and Cairns, moved into a lower income bracket.

Table 1 provides supplementary information for the maps, displaying the median weekly family income of Catholic families in all dioceses at each Census between 2001 to 2021. In 2021, six dioceses were coloured in deep red on the map, compared to five in 2016. In 2021, the fifth position in this range was jointly held by Perth and Darwin, as both dioceses reported an identical median income of \$2,481. Although Perth's inclusion in the 2021 red band was the only visible change for this range on the map, Table 1 indicates that there was internal movement within the band. For example, in 2016 the Diocese of Darwin reported the highest median family income at \$2,338, while in 2021 it ranked fifth with a median income of \$2,481.

# 2021 National Catholic Census Project

Table 1 also presents an historical snapshot of Catholic family income from 2001 to 2021. In 2001, the second column indicated that the diocese with the lowest median weekly income was Lismore (\$726), while Broken Bay had the highest at \$1,286. In 2021, Lismore and Broken Bay once again reported the lowest and highest median incomes, respectively \$1,792 and \$2,729. However, the intervening years reveal that the diocese recording the highest median has varied over the years: Broken Bay in 2001, 2006 and 2021; Geraldton in 2011; and Darwin in 2016. Lismore recorded the lowest median in every Census.

The median weekly family income offers a singular insight into the Catholic population within a region. It is influenced by several factors, including the number of family members over 15 who earn an income, the family structure (e.g. couple, couple with children, single parent), and the income sources, such as salaries or wages, superannuation, or government benefits and allowances. The demographic age profile of a diocese or parish also affects its income levels, as government benefits and allowances are the main source of income for Australian residents aged over 65, whereas wages and salaries are the main income sources for individuals aged 15 to 65.<sup>2</sup> Examining the factors that influence income is one way to deepen the understanding of a Catholic population within a parish or diocese. Further information about Catholic families, including composition and number of dependent children, is available on pages 14-15 of the Social Profiles.

**Table 1: Median Weekly Family Income of Catholic Families by Diocese, 2001-2021**

Diocese Name	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021	Percentage change 2001-2021
Sydney	1,232	1,478	1,876	2,242	2,640	114
Armidale	824	1,078	1,266	1,575	1,939	135
Bathurst	899	1,137	1,408	1,687	2,109	135
Broken Bay	1,286	1,575	1,938	2,298	2,729	112
Lismore	726	988	1,149	1,444	1,792	147
Maitland-Newcastle	892	1,173	1,512	1,713	2,100	135
Parramatta	1,175	1,381	1,726	2,047	2,443	108
Wagga Wagga	949	1,182	1,400	1,703	2,104	122
Wilcannia-Forbes	784	1,014	1,192	1,496	1,853	136
Wollongong	1,015	1,249	1,540	1,828	2,239	121
Canberra & Goulburn	1,110	1,417	1,910	2,191	2,629	137
Melbourne	1,086	1,321	1,697	1,968	2,401	121
Ballarat	859	1,122	1,317	1,593	1,969	129
Sandhurst	881	1,128	1,313	1,585	1,949	121
Sale	947	1,202	1,488	1,717	2,090	121
Brisbane	986	1,296	1,667	1,903	2,293	133
Cairns	904	1,211	1,467	1,716	2,021	123
Rockhampton	938	1,302	1,798	1,861	2,239	139
Toowoomba	880	1,156	1,435	1,693	1,980	125
Townsville	991	1,294	1,701	1,841	2,225	124
Adelaide	940	1,215	1,519	1,744	2,122	126
Port Pirie	814	1,098	1,309	1,529	1,821	124
Perth	1,046	1,386	1,924	2,153	2,481	137
Broome	760	1,040	1,468	1,711	1,828	141
Bunbury	879	1,213	1,554	1,757	2,028	131
Geraldton	1,086	1,477	2,082	2,325	2,601	139
Hobart	827	1,118	1,347	1,568	1,876	127
Darwin	1,131	1,429	1,942	2,338	2,481	119
<b>Australia</b>	<b>1,027</b>	<b>1,291</b>	<b>1,657</b>	<b>1,918</b>	<b>2,319</b>	<b>126</b>

The information in the maps and Table 1 in the above article comes from Tables 14 and 15 of the Diocesan Social Profiles which can be downloaded from the NCPR website. Source of data: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2001-2021.

1. ABS, Average Earnings Guide, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/understanding-statistics/guide-labour-statistics/earnings-guide/average-earnings-guide>
2. ABS New Census insights on income in Australia using administrative data, <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/new-census-insights-income-australia-using-administrative-data>

# Synod on Synodality

## The Journey to the Second Assembly

In 2021, Pope Francis declared that the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops would be celebrated in 2023 on the topic of Synodality. The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) commissioned the Centre to coordinate the first consultation phase of the Synod.



**The Diocesan Phase:** The inaugural celebration in Australian dioceses on Sunday 17 October 2021 marked the opening of the first phase of the consultation. Submissions were collected through an online portal from mid-October 2021 to February 2022. Local churches were encouraged to conduct such consultations, and the NCPR developed a variety of documents to facilitate this process, including Listening and Discernment Guides and a ‘Questions for Reflection’ document which was translated into seven languages.

In March 2022, the NCPR generated reports for each diocese, which included the full texts of that diocese’s submissions and a summary of the demographics (age and sex) of participants. Reports were prepared for all geographic dioceses (28), as well as the Military diocese and two Eastern Church eparchies. The total number of submissions received was 1,084, with 686 (63.6%) from individuals and 398 (36.7%) from groups. At least 3,170 participants were represented in the group submissions, resulting in at least 3,856 people participating in the first round.

Fifty-five per cent of the individual submissions were made by women, and 42 per cent by men (4% did not say). Group submissions did not record the sex of participants. Figure 1 depicts the reported age ranges of individuals and groups. The 60-79 years group submitted the most submissions, while the 30-59 years group submitted the second-highest number of submissions. Less than 10 per cent of both types of submissions came from people aged 29 years or below.

**Figure 1: Age Ranges of 2022 Synod Consultation Submissions**

Age range	Individual	Group
0-17 years/16-17 years*	1%	4%
18-29 years	5%	4%
30-59 years	34%	29%
60-79 years	44%	44%
80+ years	14%	12%
No age reported	3%	7%

\* Individual submissions were accepted from persons aged 16 years and over. Groups were able to include younger children with their guardian's permission.

Following the receipt of the diocesan reports, dioceses held pre-synodal meetings as part of their discernment process, submitting final reports to the NCPR in May 2022. Reports were also received from Catholic Religious Australia and the Association of Ministerial Public Juridic Persons. Meetings were conducted with the bishops from May to June 2022 to finalise the Australian synthesis, which was published in August 2022.

**The Episcopal Conference Phase:** In October 2022, the General Secretariat for the Synod released the *Working Document for the Continental Stage*. The NCPR was once again commissioned to coordinate a second round of consultation on that document. An article published on the ACBC Media Blog on 26 October encouraged groups to engage in the discernment process. Additionally, the NCPR reached out to diocesan contacts from the previous phase. From this, 52 individuals volunteered to lead small groups. The NCPR developed a Reflection Guide to complement the *Document for the Continental Stage*, and an online portal for submissions.

At the beginning of December 2022, 77 submissions were received for the Continental stage, representing at least 750 individuals. Additionally, two were received from individuals who were unable to access a group. The Australian Synthesis of the submissions from the Continental Stage was published at the end of the month.



# Synod on Synodality

**The Continental Phase:** In January 2023, the Oceania taskforce convened and composed a submission to the Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania (FCBCO) that was informed by the consultations from the various Oceanic conferences. The document was presented to the FCBCO in February 2023 and the bishops offered a pastoral reflection which was included in the final publication. The document titled, *Oceania Discernment on the Working Document for the Continental Stage* was submitted to the Holy See and published on the Synod webpage.

**The Universal Phase:** The announcement in April 2023 that Pope Francis would be granting voting rights at the Synod to non-bishop members, including priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, and secular men and women, was a groundbreaking development. Women had been appointed as "auditors" in previous synods; however, this was the first time they were granted voting rights.

On 29 May 2023, the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the First Assembly of the Synod was released. The list of participants was announced on 7 July 2023, which included five voting participants and six experts and facilitators from Australia.

**The First Assembly:** The First Assembly of the Synod was held from 4 to 29 October 2023 in Rome. This was followed by the publication of a *Letter to the People of God* and the *Synthesis Report* from the Assembly.

**The 2024 Consultation:** In December 2023, local churches were tasked with consulting with dioceses and leadership groups on the contents of the *Synthesis Report*, responding to the question "How can we be a synodal Church in mission?" The NCPR coordinated consultations held between February and April 2024. Dioceses were assigned the responsibility of consulting with groups on a set of three questions discussing 'differentiated co-responsibility'. The ACBC extended an invitation to an additional 24 national-level organisations on a separate question examining relations between the local and universal Church.

In April 2024, responses to the local-level consultation on the Synthesis Report were received from 25 geographical dioceses and three Eastern Catholic Church eparchies. Twelve dioceses also provided a two-page testimonial of their experience of synodality. Thirteen responses were received from groups for the national level consultation.

Earlier in March, the General Secretariat of the Synod had issued two documents in response to the request to continue the synodal journey on themes raised at the First Assembly. The first document detailed Five Perspectives to be explored at the Second Assembly. The second outlined the Study Groups that will be formed to examine ten topics.

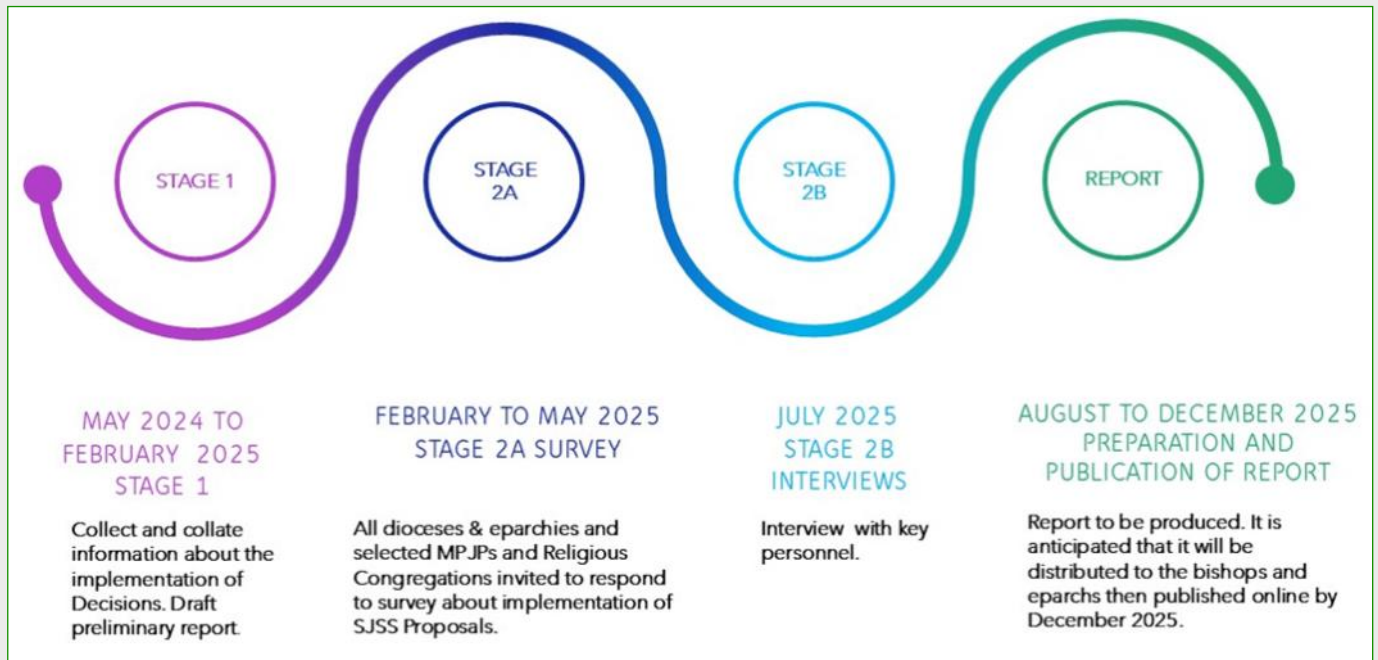
The Australian Summary of the 2024 consultation and the Diocesan Testimonies were published and submitted to the Holy See by the ACBC in May 2024. The *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Second Assembly of the Synod was released by the General Secretariat in July 2024, based on the summaries and testimonies that were received from around the globe.

**The Second Assembly:** Preparations for the Second Assembly are now underway, with participants soon arriving in Rome for a retreat on 30 September to 1 October, followed by the opening of the Assembly on 2 October 2024. We look forward to the fruitful conclusion of the Synod and the continued engagement with a synodal mission within the Church.

Additional information regarding the Synod and copies of the documents referenced in this article can be obtained at: <https://catholic.org.au/synodalchurch>

### Evaluating the Implementation of *Woman and Man: The Bishops Respond* (Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000)

The NCPR is evaluating the implementation of the two types of practical actions outlined in the Social Justice Sunday 2000 Statement, *Woman and Man: The Bishops Respond*. ‘Decisions’ were measures that the bishops agreed to implement on a national level, while ‘Proposals’ were included for consideration by bishops and eparchs. The timeline for the project is shown in the graphic below:



Stage One is currently underway. The NCPR has been provided with the relevant information regarding the implementation of the Decisions. We are currently reviewing the evidence and preparing a preliminary report.

Preparations for Stage 2 have begun. This step begins in early 2025 with a survey addressed to dioceses, eparchies, and selected religious congregations and MPJPs, asking for information on how the Decisions and Proposals were selected and implemented. The survey will be followed by interviews in the latter half of the year.

More information on the project is available at: <https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/evaluating-the-implementation-of-woman-and-man-the-bishops-respond-social-justice-sunday-statement-2000/>

### Absent from the Table: Australian Catholics who do not regularly attend Sunday Mass

In light of recent declines in Mass attendance, the NCPR is conducting research to determine why some Australian Catholics do not regularly attend Sunday Mass. The study updates the 2007 study titled, *“Catholics who have stopped attending Mass”*, undertaken by the previous iteration of the Centre.



Stage 1 of the present study involved an online survey that was distributed to dioceses, Catholic organisations, and renewal groups, as well as promoted via radio interviews, social media, CathNews, and this newsletter. The survey closed on 20 August 2024, and after deleting duplicate and incomplete responses, 2,014 responses were received.

The survey data will be analysed, and themes emerging from the responses will inform the project's Stage Two. The second stage involves in-depth interviews with survey respondents who agreed to be involved further. We are now seeking ethics approval for this stage and hope to begin interviews early in 2025.

For further information about the project, please visit:

<https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/absent-from-the-table-australian-catholics-who-do-not-regularly-attend-sunday-mass/>

## A Profile of Catholic Clergy in Australia

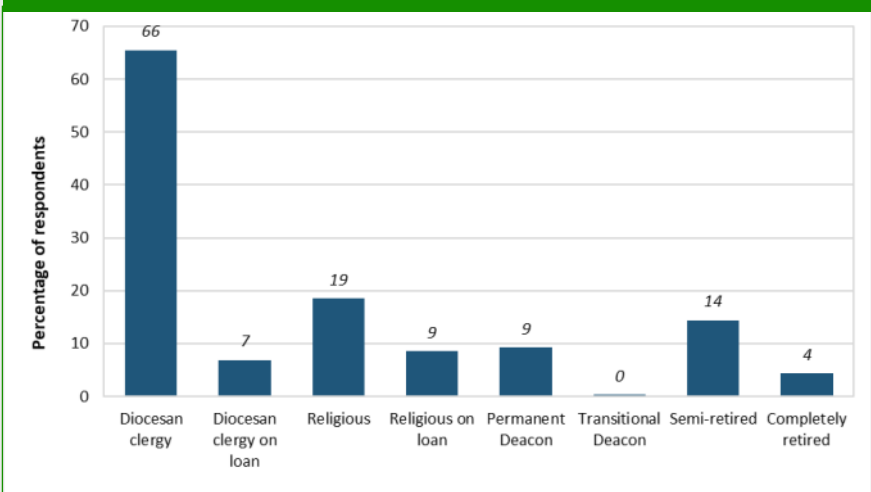
The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference is conducting research to establish a profile of Catholic clergy in Australia, including those born in Australia and those born overseas. The project will provide detailed information on their spiritual, physical, mental and general wellbeing, including areas that require additional care and support.

Stage One of this study involved collecting data via an online survey, in which all clergy (except bishops) in Australia were invited to participate. At the close of the survey on 15 July 2024, the Centre received 825 completed responses.

As Figure 1 indicates, two-thirds of respondents (66%) were diocesan clergy, with an additional seven per cent being diocesan clergy from overseas on loan to an Australian diocese.

Nineteen per cent of respondents were religious clergy, with another nine per cent being religious clergy on loan from overseas. Nine per cent of respondents were Permanent Deacons, whereas only 0.3 per cent were Transitional Deacons. Overall, 14 per cent of respondents said they were semi-retired and four per cent were fully retired.

Figure 1: Clergy background



The data analysis from Stage One continues, and the first report will be published early next year. We have now commenced Stage Two which includes interviews with 85 survey respondents who consented to participate further. Data collection for this stage will continue until the middle of 2025. More information on the project is available at: <https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/a-profile-of-catholic-clergy-in-australia/>

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



# NCPR Website Updates

## A Fresh New Look

A number of webpages on the NCPR website have been updated to include new information on projects in which the NCPR and its previous iterations have participated. Make sure to visit these pages:

- **Absent from the Table: Australian Catholics who do not regularly attend Sunday Mass (2024-2025)**  
<https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/absent-from-the-table-australian-catholics-who-do-not-regularly-attend-sunday-mass/>
- **Review of the Australian Catholic Youth Festival (2020)**  
<https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/review-of-the-australian-catholic-youth-festival/>
- **Survey of Religious Congregations in Australia 2018 (2018-2019)**  
<https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/2018-survey-of-religious-congregations-in-australia/>
- **Governance in Australia Survey (2019)**  
<https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/governance-in-australia-survey-2019/>
- **Exploring Lay Pastoral ministry in the Catholic Church (2014-2016)**  
<https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/exploring-lay-pastoral-ministry-in-the-catholic-church/>
- **Priests in Australia 1950-2010 (2014-2016)**  
<https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/priests-in-australia-1950-2010/>
- **Miscellaneous Projects**  
<https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/miscellaneous-research-projects/>



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