

Pastoral Research Online

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NCPR Staff at the 2025 ANZATS Conference



Members of the NCPR, L-R: Katherine Jelavic, Trudy Dantis, Stephen Reid, Leith Dudfield, Marilyn Chee and Carole Gan

In July 2025, members of the NCPR attended the annual Australian and New Zealand Association of Theological Studies (ANZATS) Conference, *Remembering Nicaea: A Contested Legacy*. It was an opportunity for all NCPR staff, who are usually spread across three Australian states, to spend time together and present on several topics. Staff spent three days at the Melbourne event before returning to their everyday work locations. More information about the topics presented can be found on page 8.

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the 70th edition of Pastoral Research Online!

This milestone issue arrives at a time of dynamic change and renewed engagement within the Catholic community, both in Australia and globally. In July, the NCPR team came together in Melbourne for the 2025 ANZATS Conference, sharing research and reflections on clergy wellbeing, social justice, synodality and Mass attendance. These presentations underscore the Centre's commitment to exploring the lived experience of faith and the evolving needs of the Church in Australia.

This edition continues to delve deeply into the latest Census data, revealing significant shifts in religious identification and participation among young adult Catholics aged 18–34. We examine the implications of these trends and what they might mean for the future of pastoral care and Church engagement.

You'll also find insights from the 2021 National Count of Attendance, where we compare differences in the dioceses among young adult Mass attenders. The newsletter features updates on the Australian Catholic Mapping Online tool, the global rise in Catholic conversions, and the next phase of the Synod on Synodality, including the upcoming Jubilee in Rome.

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Australian Catholics Aged 18-34

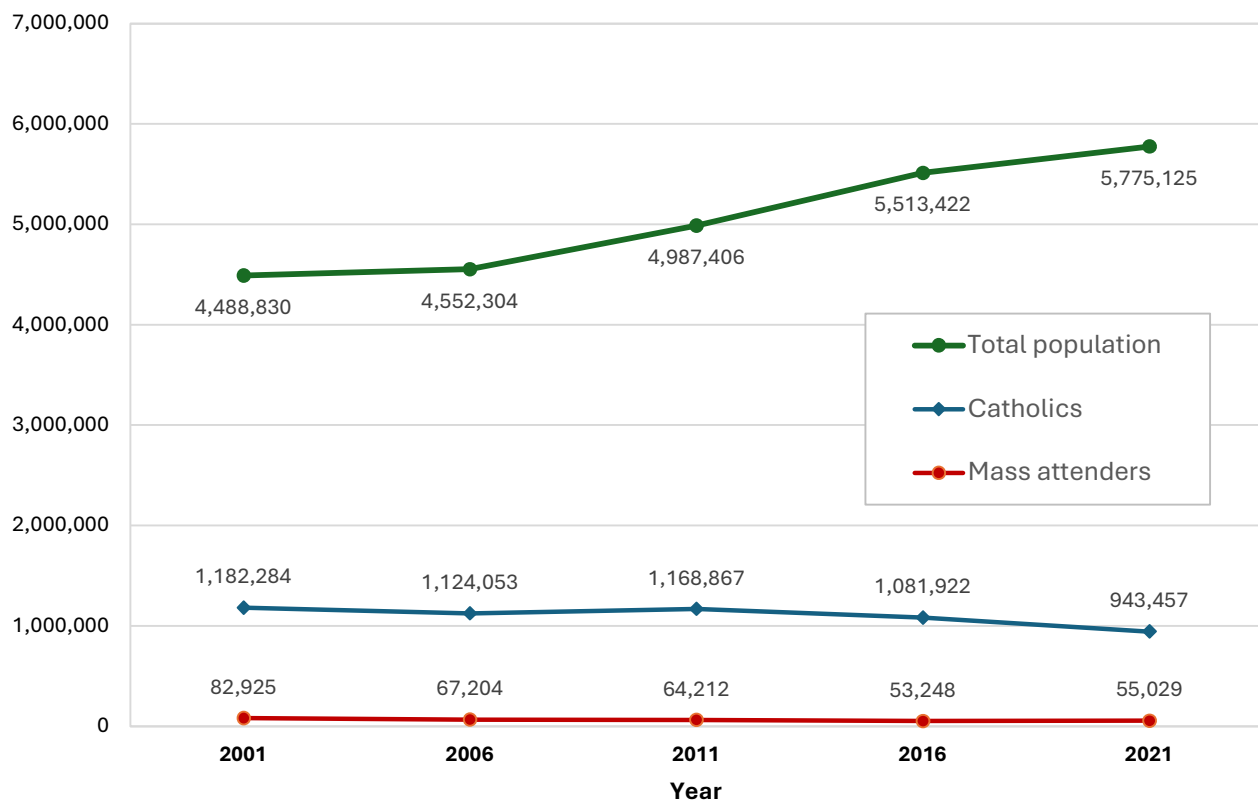
National Patterns of Change

There has been considerable discussion for some years about the changing patterns of Mass attendance in Australia and the shifting demographics of those who identify as Catholic. Between 2001 and 2021, the proportion of Catholics in the Australian population declined from 27 per cent to 20 per cent, with the number of Catholics decreasing by around 363,000 between 2011 and 2021.¹ These trends were among the concerns raised during the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia (2018-2021)² and more recently, during consultations for the Synod on Synodality.³

While these patterns have been examined across the broader Catholic population in Australia, particular interest lies in the changes observed among young adult Catholics aged 18 to 34 years. The NCPR has recently examined Census data on those who identified as Catholic and those who attended Mass within this age group.

As illustrated in Figure 1 below, the total Australian population of 18–34 year olds increased by 29 per cent between 2001 and 2021. In contrast, the number of 18–34 year olds who identified as Catholic declined by 20 per cent over the same period. Even more striking is the 34 per cent decrease in the number of young adult Catholics who attended Mass during this 20-year span.

Figure 1. Catholics, Mass Attenders and Total Population Aged 18-34 Years in Australia, 2001-2021



Sources: ABS Census 2001-2021, ACBC National Count of Attendance 2001-2021 & National Church Life Survey 2001-2016.

¹ National Centre for Pastoral Research, *Social Profile of the Catholic Community in Australia: Based on the 2021 Australian Census*, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (2023), 4, <https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/2021-catholic-social-profiles/>.

² Trudy Dantis et al., *Listen to What the Spirit is Saying: Final Report for the Plenary Council, Phase 1: Listening and Dialogue*, (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 2019), 44, <https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/resources/reports/>.

³ Trudy Dantis et al., *Synod of Bishops: Australian Synthesis*, (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 2022), 6, https://s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/acbcwebsite/Articles/Documents/ACBC/Synod_of_Bishops_Australian_Synthesis_-_FINAL.pdf.

Australian Catholics Aged 18-34

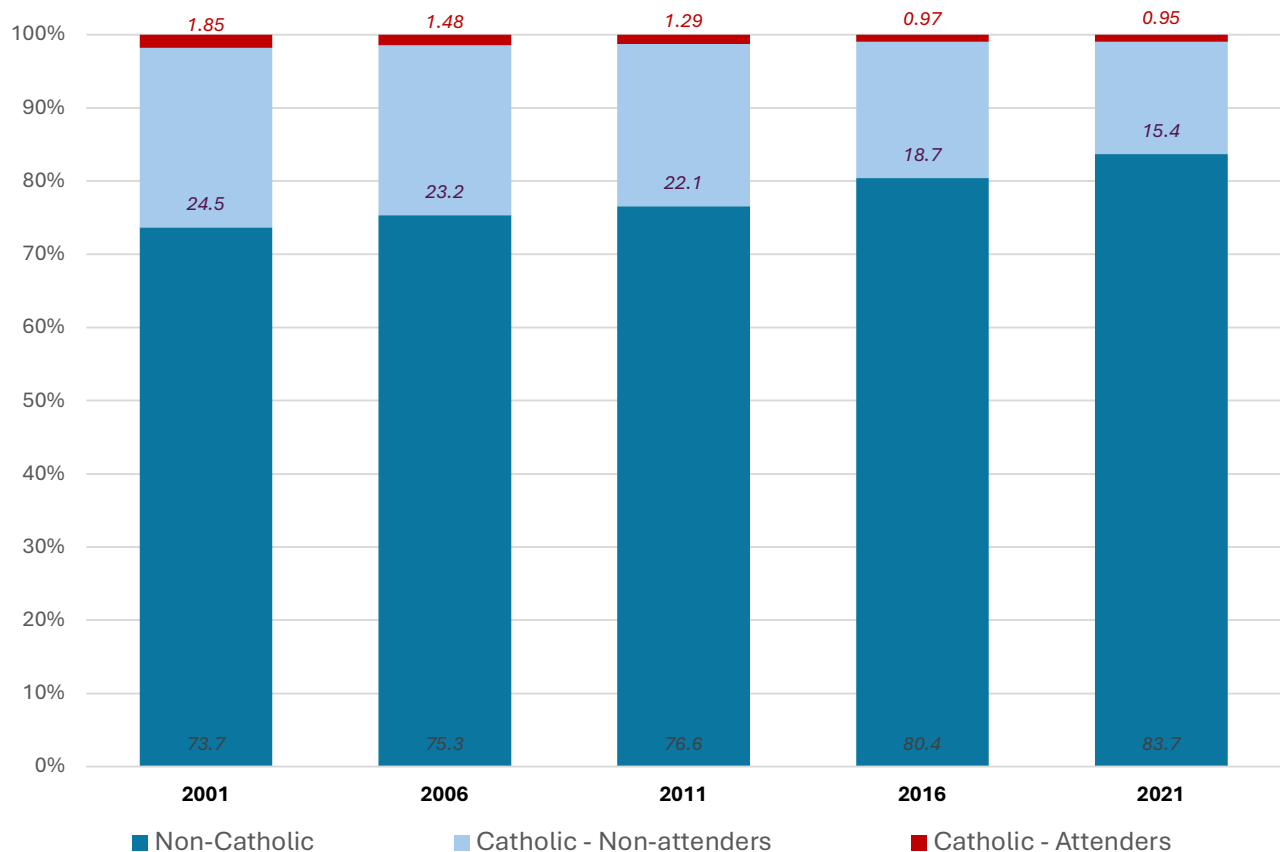
Figure 2, below, illustrates the proportion of Australians aged 18 to 34 years across the five Censuses since 2001, grouped into non-Catholics, Catholic non-Mass attenders and Catholic attenders. The chart highlights a clear trend: the proportion of young adults identifying as non-Catholic has increased, while the relative proportions of both non-Mass-attending and Mass-attending young Catholics have declined.

Specifically, those aged 18 to 34 who identified as Catholic but did not attend Mass decreased from 24.5 per cent of the population in 2001 to 15.4 per cent in 2021. Over the same period, the proportion of Mass attenders in this age group declined from 1.85 per cent to 0.95 per cent.

However, when looking at the 20-year period between 2001 and 2021, although the number of attenders declined across all age groups, the rate of decline among young adult attenders was slower compared to the overall Mass attending population—34 per cent compared to 52 per cent.⁴

It is important to note that the 2021 attendance figures were likely to have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a particular impact on older Australians and may have disproportionately influenced the overall number of older Mass attenders that year. The results of the 2026 National Count of Attendance will be crucial in determining whether this trend continues.

Figure 2. Catholics, Mass attenders and Total population Aged 18-34
(Proportion of each group by year), AUSTRALIA, 2001-2021



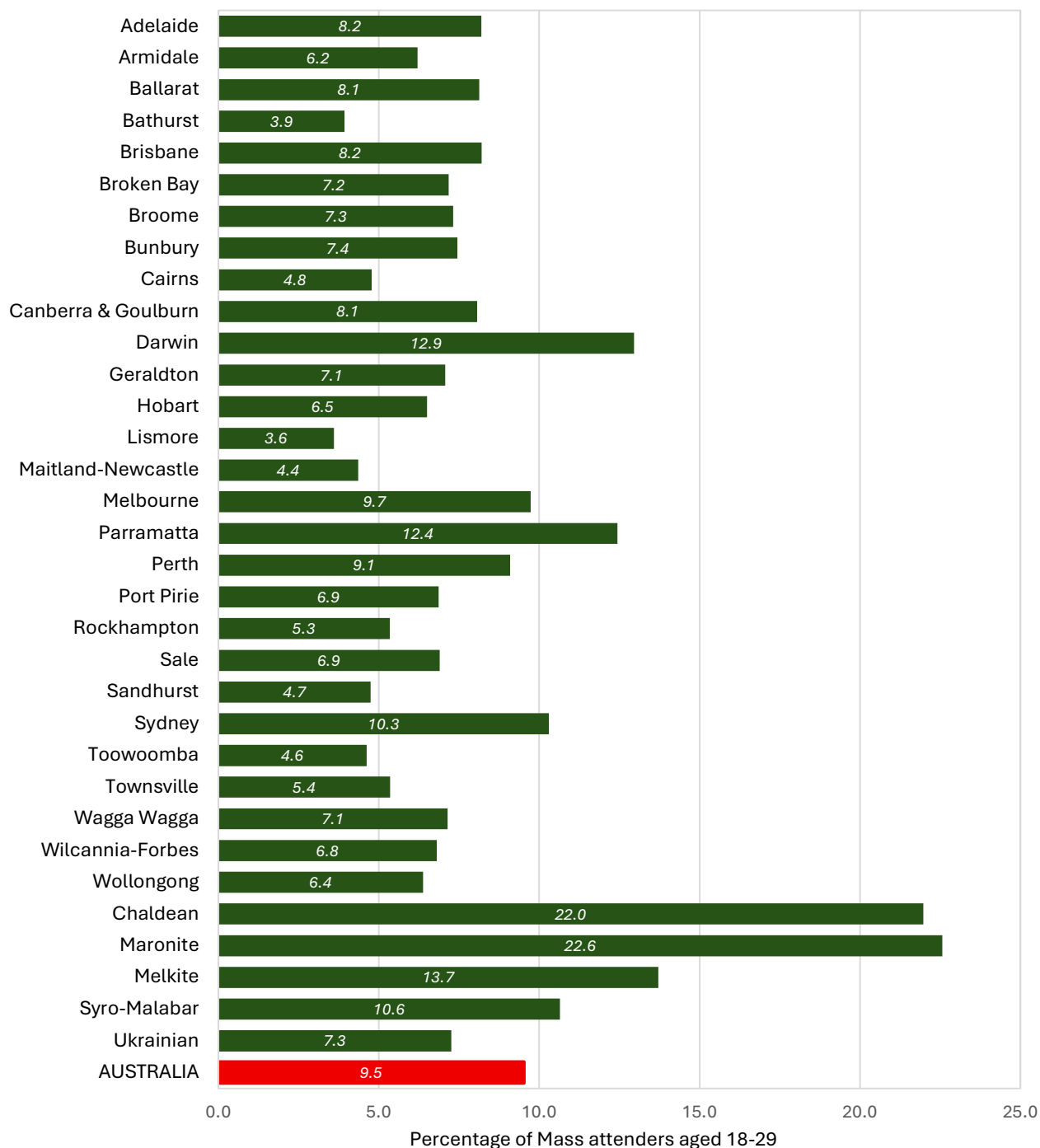
Sources: ABS Census 2001-2021, ACBC National Count of Attendance 2001-2021 & National Church Life Survey 2001-2016.

⁴ Dantis et al., *The Australian Catholic Mass Attendance Report 2021*, 7.

Australian Mass Attenders Aged 18-29

The 2021 National Count of Attendance revealed significant variations between dioceses and eparchies in terms of the number of young adults at Mass. As the bottom dark-coloured bar on Figure 3 shows below, nationally, 9.5 per cent of Mass attenders were aged 18-29 (a slightly younger group than the 18-34 year olds presented in the previous two pages!).

The highest rates for this age group were in two Eastern Rite dioceses: the Maronite diocese (22.6%) and the Chaldean diocese (22%). Of the geographical dioceses, Darwin (12.9%) and Parramatta (12.4%) had the highest proportions of young adults aged 18-29 attending Mass.



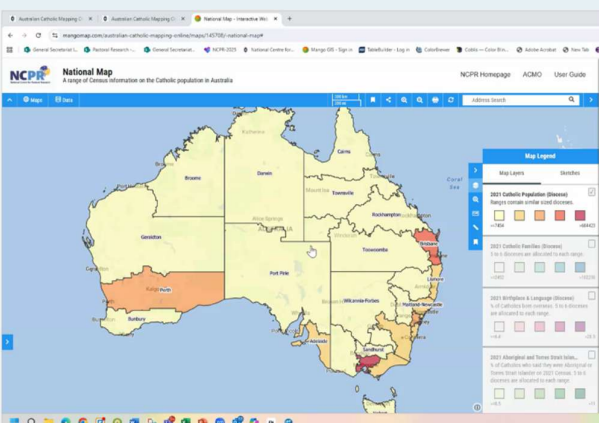
Australian Catholic Mapping Online

Mapping Webinar

On 26 August 2025, the NCPR hosted a webinar to showcase the Australian Catholic Mapping Online (ACMO) software, to demonstrate how to navigate the portal and to share the features of the various layers in the map.

In addition to sharing the basic features of the software, the webinar also demonstrated the various layers that could be displayed on the maps. These include the *Population* layer, which shows the Catholic population in each

area of the map; the *Catholic families* layer, which shares the number of Catholic families in each area; the *Birthplace and Language* layer which provides information about the birthplaces and languages spoken in each area; and the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander* layer which illustrates the population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics in each area, and the prevalence of Indigenous languages spoken.



Electoral Divisions, suburbs and postal areas. Other customised data for Catholic families and households may need to be requested at cost. Please contact the NCPR at ncpr@catholic.org.au.

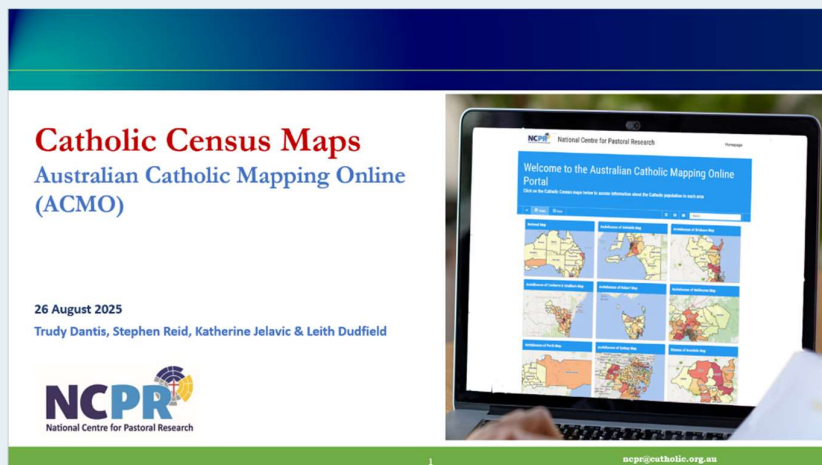
What types of families are included in "other" in the Catholic Families data - extended families living together? Share households? What kinds of others?

The types of families in the "other" category of Catholic families are all Catholic family groups that are not one of the most common types of Catholic families, such as a couple family or families where children (including adult children) live with at least one parent. The extended families mentioned in the question are one example of "other" families. Additional examples include grandchildren living with their grandparents, or siblings, or cousins who reside at the same address where at least one family member is Catholic.

Share households where no members are related are not included in the families information on the maps.

Information about Catholic households is available on page 16 of the Social Profiles: <https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/2021-catholic-social-profiles/>

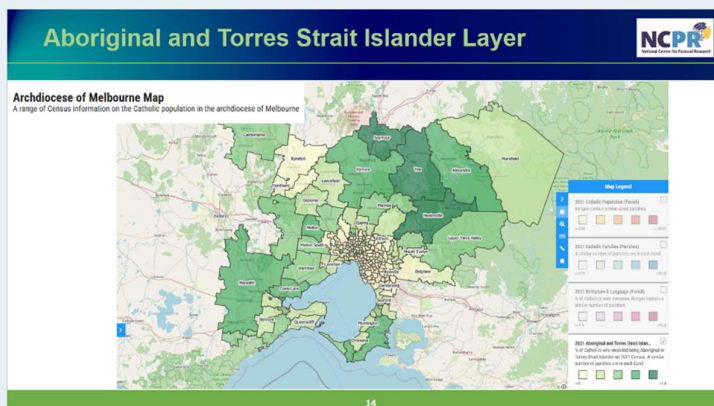
The webinar was well attended, and the recording is now available to those who are interested. Please email ncpr@catholic.org.au if you would like to receive access to the webinar.



Several questions were asked by participants, and some of the answers to those questions are provided below.

Is this data available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics at more granular geographic levels, such as SA1 or SA2, or Commonwealth Electoral Divisions?

While the NCPR collates the census data for Catholic parishes and dioceses, a wealth of data is available for other types of geographies, including SA1s, SA2s, Commonwealth



Synod on Synodality: Implementation



Jubilee of Synodal Teams and Participatory Bodies

In October 2025, 23 Australians will join hundreds of people from around the world to celebrate the Jubilee of Synodal Teams and Participatory Bodies. The event is a recognition of these bodies' contribution to the synodal journey and an opportunity to celebrate the commitment to a more synodal Church throughout the world.



The Jubilee will take place over three days from 24 to 26 October 2025. The first day will be primarily occupied with registration and opening sessions.

On Saturday, 25 October, the group will join others to make a jubilee pilgrimage and pass through the Holy Door at St Peter's Basilica in Rome. Some members of the team will participate in workshops and seminars during the day before a concluding dinner and prayer vigil.

On Sunday, there will be a Holy Mass presided by Pope Leo XIV at St Peter's Basilica. The Mass is open to the public, but those wishing to attend it will need to request a free ticket issued by the Prefecture of the Papal Household through this link: <https://eventi.pontificalisdomus.va/>

Implementation Phase Webpage and Study Groups Reports

As we enter the Implementation Phase of the Synod, the General Secretariat has launched a new webpage dedicated to this phase. In addition to providing access to the Implementation Phase documents, the first reports from the ten study groups, released in October 2024, are also available. The ten study groups examined the following aspects, which were identified as needing more in-depth investigation during the First Assembly of the Synod.

- Some aspects of the relations between the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Latin Church.
- Listening to the Cry of the Poor.
- The Mission in the Digital Environment.
- The revision of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* in a missionary synodal perspective.
- Some Theological and Canonical Matters Regarding Specific Ministerial Forms.
- The revision, in a synodal missionary perspective, of the documents touching on the relationship between bishops, consecrated life, and ecclesial associations.
- Some aspects of the person and ministry of the bishop (criteria for selecting candidates to Episcopacy, judicial function of the bishops, nature and course of *ad limina Apostolorum* visits) from a missionary synodal perspective.
- The Role of Papal Representatives in a Missionary Synodal Perspective.
- Synodal theological and methodological criteria for shared discernment of controversial doctrinal, pastoral and ethical issues.
- The Reception of the Fruits of the Ecumenical Journey in Ecclesial Practices.

Two other Commissions also presented reports with the ten study groups. These were the Canonical Commission of the Synod and the Polygamy Commission, SECAM (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar) Report. These reports are all available through the following link:

<https://www.synod.va/en/the-synodal-process/phase-3-the-implementation/the-study-groups.html>

To find out more about synodal activities being implemented throughout Australia, visit the webpage at: <https://bit.ly/SynodalityAustNextSteps> or share your stories, resources, feedback and suggestions by sending them to synodality@catholic.org.au

Overseas Research



Photo by [Kyle Glenn](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Catholic Converts Increasing Worldwide

Several news outlets around the world are reporting an increase in Catholic converts, after decades of decline.

Recent research from the US suggested that since 2020, conversions to the Catholic faith had more than doubled. Shane Schaetzel compiled figures from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), the Pew Research Center, the *National Catholic Register*, and Vatican statistics to determine that around the year 2000, while

conversions were about 175,000 per year and had declined to 70,000 per year by 2020, by 2025, nearly 160,000 American adults were projected to enter the Catholic Church.

In France, more than 10,000 adults entered the Catholic Church at Easter 2025, which was reported to be an increase of 45 per cent from the previous year. Moreover, it was noted that more than 40 per cent of these catechumens were young adults aged 18 to 25 years. This appears to be a continuation of a trend since 2015, when adult baptisms numbered only 3,900.

A survey of over 13,000 people in the UK revealed that 41 per cent of church attenders aged between 18 and 35 in England and Wales identified as Catholic, while 20 per cent identified as Church of England, and 18 per cent identified as Pentecostal. Overall, 31 per cent of church attenders of all age groups were Catholic, an increase from a similar survey in 2018, where Catholics made up only 23 per cent of those surveyed. The authors speculated that immigration, particularly from Poland, Ukraine, and South America, may be contributing to the growth in both Catholic and Protestant churches, but there also appears to be a significant area of growth from conversions.

In Ireland, it was reported that there is a “noticeable increase” in adults seeking to be baptised, with a record number of 70 baptisms occurring in the Dublin Archdiocese at Easter 2025.

The Catholic World Report investigated the number of adult baptisms compared with the total Catholic population in each nation and found that the 12 nations with the proportionally highest number of adult baptisms were: Mongolia, Azerbaijan, Nepal, Turkmenistan, South Korea, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mozambique, Tajikistan, Ethiopia and the Central African Republic.

To read more about this phenomenon, go to:

- <https://thecatholicherald.com/article/more-americans-joining-catholic-church-than-leaving-for-first-time-in-decades>
- <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2025/apr/14/france-sees-record-surge-conversions-catholicism/>
- <https://theweek.com/religion/the-young-converts-leading-catholicisms-uk-comeback>
- <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/264517/record-number-of-adults-baptized-in-dublin-as-faith-grows-among-young-irish>
- <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2011/05/12/where-converts-are-made/>

If you would like more information about how the NCPR can support your organisation, please contact us at ncpr@catholic.org.au

NCPR Staff at Theological Conference



ANZATS Conference 2025

In July 2025, NCPR staff attended the annual Australian and New Zealand Association of Theological Studies (ANZATS) Conference, *Remembering Nicaea: A Contested Legacy*. The conference was held jointly with the Australasian Centre for Wesleyan Research and the Christian Research Association.

The keynote speaker, Dr Martin Shedd, presented with his co-authors on their book *Remembering Nicaea: The Ecclesiastical History of Anonymous Cyzicenus*. NCPR staff delivered four presentations:

- *A Profile of Catholic Clergy in Australia: A Study on the Wellbeing of Catholic Clergy* - Carole Gan & Stephen Reid
- *The Implementation of Actions Listed in the Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000 – Woman & Man: The Bishops Respond* - Katherine Jelavic
- *Grassroots to Global: The Synodal Journey of Consultation and Decision-making at the Synod on Synodality* - Trudy Dantis
- *Absent from the Table: Investigating Why Australian Catholics Do Not Regularly Attend Sunday Mass* - Leith Dudfield.



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



NCPR Staff

Trudy Dantis Director
trudy.dantis@catholic.org.au
(02) 6201 9812

Leith Dudfield
Research Assistant
leith.dudfield@catholic.org.au
(02) 6201 9813

Carole Gan
Research Assistant
carole.gan@catholic.org.au
(02) 6201 9810

Melbourne Office:

90 Albion Road
Box Hill VIC 3128

Stephen Reid
Senior Research Officer
stephen.reid@catholic.org.au
(02) 6201 9808

Katherine Jelavic
Research Assistant
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
W: www.ncpr.catholic.org.au

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