

Pastoral Research Online

Issue 71

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Jubilee of Synodal Teams



In late October 2025, 25 Australians attended the Jubilee of Synodal Teams and Participatory Bodies at the Vatican. The event was organised to celebrate and recognise the efforts of people throughout the world who had not only embraced the practice of synodality but had also begun implementing it in their own dioceses and other organisations.

The Australian participants included Conference members and representatives from dioceses and Catholic agencies. NCPR Director, Dr Trudy Dantis, shares her experience of the event.

Details inside...

Left: Australian participants gather at the Jubilee of the Synodal Teams and Participatory Bodies in Rome.

Dear Readers,

As we come to the close of 2025, we take a moment to reflect on what has been a busy and rewarding year for the team at the National Centre for Pastoral Research. This edition of Pastoral Research Online highlights some of the major projects we have completed and the exciting initiatives that will shape our work in the year ahead.

Among the key developments, preparations are well underway for the 2026 National Count of Attendance, marking 25 years of valuable data collection. We also share news about the upcoming Census, with confirmation that the religion question will remain unchanged—an important outcome for pastoral planning. Another significant milestone this year was the publication of our report on clergy health and wellbeing, 'Thriving (& Surviving) in Ministry', which offers insights into the lives of priests and deacons across Australia.

On a personal note, I was privileged to represent Australia at the Jubilee of Synodal Teams in Rome, a truly inspiring experience that reaffirmed the importance of synodality in the life of the Church. You can read more about this global gathering and its implications for our local context in this issue.

As always, we are grateful for the support and collaboration of bishops, diocesan contacts, and all who contribute to our mission. Thank you for journeying with us through 2025. We wish you a blessed Christmas and a joyful New Year, and we look forward to continuing to serve you in 2026. God bless you and your loved ones!

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National Count of Attendance 2026

Five Year Count Returns in 2026

As we step into 2026, preparations are underway for the next five-yearly Mass attendance count across all dioceses and eparchies in Australia. Commonly known as the “Mass Count,” this important exercise will take place over four weekends of May. At each service, parishes will record the number of attendees.

In 2021, the Count included additional data on the sex and age groups of attendees during the third and fourth weekends—a practice expected to continue in 2026.

This year’s Count marks a significant milestone: 25 years of attendance data collected since the first national Count in 2001. The 2026 results will be particularly valuable in assessing the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was thought to have influenced attendance patterns in 2021.

Dioceses have already been contacted to confirm details of their Diocesan Contact for the Count. Further details, including parish requirements and guidelines, will be shared in early 2026. For previous reports and resources, visit the NCPR website: <https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/national-count-of-attendance/>



2026 Census Update

Religion Question Confirmed for 2026 Census

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) will conduct the next Australian Census on **Tuesday, 11 August 2026**.

The NCPR and its predecessors have been analysing Census data on Australian Catholics since the 1991 Census. The religious identification questions remains vital for two key reasons. Firstly, it underpins pastoral planning and helps the Church understand the faith landscape across the country, including the presence of Eastern Catholics, which are critical for clergy allocation and meeting the needs of diverse communities. Secondly, it assists parishes, schools, health services, welfare organisations and other agencies in understanding the religious demographics of the communities they serve, enabling the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic institutions to respond effectively to current and emerging needs.

Early reports on the 2026 Census religion question (see *Pastoral Research Online* no. 68, March 2025) suggested the ABS were considering significant changes. However, the latest update confirms that the question will remain in its 2021 format: respondents can tick a box for a common religion, write in their religion, or select ‘No religion’. This outcome reflects that concerns raised by the ACBC and the NCPR about proposed changes to the religion question during consultations with the ABS from 2022 to 2024 have been addressed, ensuring continuity and reliability in reporting religious identification.

The ABS has confirmed that the 2026 Census will include some new questions, such as those on gender and sexual orientation, along with updates to existing questions to improve data quality and inclusivity. These changes reflect broader societal trends but will not affect how the religion question is asked or reported.

Further information on the religion question (under “Cultural Diversity”) and details about the new questions in the 2026 Census can be found at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/research/2026-census-topics-and-data-release-plan>

What is Person 1's religion?

Answering this question is **OPTIONAL**.

Use 'Other (specify)' to provide a religion or a level of detail not included in the list.

For example: Macedonian Orthodox, Lutheran, Salvation Army, Judaism, Sikhism, Taoism.

• [More information](#)

The religious groups listed in the response options were those most commonly reported in the 2021 Census.

If the person wants to provide more detail on their Catholic religion, provide the full name of the religion in the 'Other (specify)' box. For example, Chaldean Catholic, Maronite Catholic, Melkite Catholic, Syriac Catholic, Syro Malabar Catholic, Ukrainian Catholic, or Western Catholic.

If the person wants to provide an Orthodox religion such as Antiochian Orthodox, Romanian Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox, Ukrainian Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, Coptic Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox or Syrian Orthodox, provide the full name of the religion in the 'Other (specify)' box.

People who have non-theistic religious beliefs or other life philosophies can provide their response in the 'Other (specify)' box.

If the person identifies with no religion at all, select 'No religion'.

Examples of non-religious beliefs include Agnosticism, Atheism, Humanism and Rationalism.

- ☐ No religion
- ☐ Catholic
- ☐ Anglican (Church of England)
- ☐ Islam
- ☐ Hinduism
- ☐ Uniting Church
- ☐ Buddhism
- ☐ Presbyterian
- ☐ Greek Orthodox
- ☐ Baptist
- ☐ Other (specify)

A Profile of Catholic Clergy in Australia

Thriving (& Surviving) in Ministry

On 18 November 2025, the NCPR published their report *Thriving (& Surviving) in Ministry. A Profile of Catholic Clergy in Australia: Health and Wellbeing*. The report was the culmination of two years of research to examine the health and wellbeing of Catholic clergy in Australia. The study was undertaken in two phases. In the first phase, a survey was sent out to all Catholic clergy in Australia, with 825 priests and deacons responding (27 per cent of the total clergy population in Australia). In the second phase, 78 volunteers from the first phase were interviewed. Both phases included a diverse mix of diocesan and religious clergy, ranging in age from 30 to over 80 years. They were from various cultural backgrounds, geographical contexts and work arrangements, although in the second phase, older participants were over-represented with 61 per cent aged over 70 years.

Overall, the wellbeing of Australian clergy was found to be positive, with 75 per cent reporting 'good' or 'very good' self-confidence. About two-thirds (66%) reported maintaining a healthy diet, and 61 per cent believed they were getting sufficient rest. More than half (55%) also reported experiencing high energy levels.

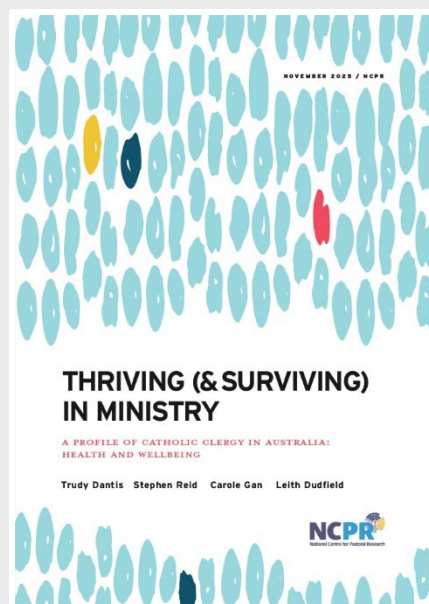
Findings in spiritual health were also positive, with nearly four in five (79%) describing their relationship with God as 'good' or 'extremely good' and 63 per cent feeling similarly about their ability to pray and meditate daily. Most clergy (65%) reported being able to take at least three weeks of vacation each year, and 83 per cent participated in annual spiritual retreats. Participants reported strong involvement with the wider community, with 62 per cent involved in some capacity through social clubs (37%), sports (36%) and volunteering (32%) in areas such as welfare, healthcare and education.

However, the participants also shared their various struggles. On average, the clergy surveyed reported working an average of 8.6 hours daily and nearly half (49%) of clergy under 40 worked more than 10 hours per day. Some interviewees reported feeling overwhelmed by heavy workloads and the unpredictable nature of their work. When it came to forming relationships after ordination, while some found it easier, others struggled more, depending on their personality and ministerial context. Feelings of anxiety were the highest negative emotion reported by 53 per cent of participants on at least an occasional basis, with 17 per cent under age 40 reporting feeling anxious frequently. Over the past year, clergy reported facing stress (65%), lack of sleep (49%), anxiety (44%), and loneliness or isolation (43%). A small proportion (13%) reported using alcohol to cope, and seven per cent reported other mental health issues.

A majority of clergy (61%) made comments about negative impacts from cultural or societal changes, with the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse prompting the most extensive responses, including stress, anxiety, shame, and diminished confidence in ministry. Many felt their priestly identity and credibility were harmed, while others feared unjust accusations or struggled with the growing safeguarding workload. Declines in clergy numbers were also reported as a concern, with participants noting increases in workloads and stress, challenges in adapting to cultural shifts in the presbyterate, and concerns about inadequate leadership formation.

Participants offered key suggestions for better support in eight areas: more personal interest or support from bishops or leaders; stronger peer support; increased administrative help; improved leadership from the bishop; enhanced formation and training; greater spiritual support and supervision; financial assistance; and better work-life balance. Despite challenges, many expressed gratitude for their ministry.

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, at its November plenary meeting, agreed to set up a working group to explore ways to better support clergy. To learn more about the study and to access the report, visit the NCPR website: <https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/a-profile-of-catholic-clergy-in-australia/>



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

Synod on Synodality



Jubilee of Synodal Teams and Participatory Bodies

In late October, I had the privilege of representing Australia at the Jubilee of Synodal Teams in Rome—a global gathering that brought together nearly 2,000 participants from across continents to celebrate and reflect on the synodal journey we had been on since 2021.

A Global Encounter

Our Australian delegation comprised 24 participants, joined by colleagues from Oceania, including Mrs Susan Sela from Fiji, and Mrs Pauline Camacho and Sr Angela Perez from Guam. The event began with registration at the Vatican and an opening session that set the tone for the days ahead. While seating in rows was a change from previous small-table group format, it was understandable given the scale of the gathering. One of our Australian participants noted that we were the only country that sent our Conference President, Vice President, and General Secretary—a strong sign of commitment and leadership from Australia.



Above and below: Australian participants at the Synod of Jubilee Teams



*Above: Pope Leo, with members from the seven continents, presenting their reports.
Right: Dr Susan Sela presenting Oceania's question.*

Dialogue with Pope Leo

One of the highlights of the first day was an Encounter and Dialogue with Pope Leo. Representatives from each continent presented their report and also posed a question to the Pope. Mrs Susan Sela presented the Oceania report and asked the Pope whether Continental Synodal Teams would continue to grow and shape the life of the Church. Pope Leo's response was clear and encouraging:

"Yes, I do expect, and I hope, that the different groupings of Churches will continue to grow as expressions of communion in the Church, drawing on the gifts we are all receiving through this exercise - this 'life of synodality'." He emphasised that synodality was not merely theoretical but deeply connected to urgent realities, citing climate change as an example: a bishop from Oceania had warned that his country could disappear within 50 years if trends continue. Pope Leo reminded us of the call in *Laudato Si'* to respond to the cry of the earth and stressed that the Church must be courageous in raising its voice to address poverty, injustice, and ecological crises. Through Bishops' Conferences, Ecclesial Provinces and Continental structures, he hoped the Church could make a real difference.



Synod on Synodality



Left and Above: Pilgrimage through the Holy Door.

Right: 'Conversation in the Spirit' groups.

Pilgrimage and Workshops

Saturday was particularly memorable, beginning with the Jubilee pilgrimage through the Holy Door at St Peter's Basilica—a profound spiritual experience. Later, we engaged in “Conversations in the Spirit” within small groups, sharing both challenges and highlights of implementing synodality at the parish, diocesan, and national levels.

I facilitated one group with participants from 10 countries. It was wonderful to meet a very different set of participants from the last two years, all sharing diverse stories of synodal practices in their various contexts.

The afternoon offered a rich array of Workshops—over 30 in total. I attended sessions on ‘Navigating polarities in ecclesial discernment’ and ‘Synodal approaches to pastoral planning’, led by experts from the US and Singapore. Australian participants also contributed to workshops, including Archbishop Timothy Costello, who facilitated a session on ‘Organisms of participation for a synodal Church.’

Closing Mass and Reflections

Sunday's Closing Mass, in St Peter's Basilica, was a fitting conclusion to the Jubilee. Security was tight, and crowds immense, but the experience was deeply moving.

In his homily, Pope Leo reminded us that love is the supreme principle in the Church. “No one is called to dominate; all are called to serve,” he explained, “No one is excluded; we are all called to participate.” He urged us to humility, drawing on the Gospel image of the tax collector, and encouraged us to find unity amid tensions within the Church.

From Reflection to Action: Deepening Synodality in Australia

On Monday, our Australian group gathered at Domus Australia for a debrief to reflect on our experience and discuss key insights and next steps. Participants emphasised living synodality as a culture rather than merely implementing it. Building on current initiatives, fostering discernment and embedding synodal practices in diocesan and parish life emerged as priorities. Examples of good practices that were shared included youth-religious dialogues in Brisbane and collaborative leadership in Perth.

While we acknowledged that challenges remain—particularly in identifying effective formation pathways for facilitators of synodal conversations—the commitment to continue the journey was strong. As we move forward, these questions remain: How do we grow in being synodal? How can we be faithful to this way of living and allow more people to share this experience? These will guide our ongoing efforts to make synodality a lived reality in Australia.



2025 in Review



In 2025, the NCPR concentrated on completing three major projects initiated in 2024, while also advancing several new initiatives for the Bishops Conference and the wider Catholic community. Below is a snapshot of our key achievements this year.

National Catholic Census Project

- Submitted a funding proposal to the Finance Council to support the project over the next five years.
- Continued liaison with the ABS regarding changes to the religion question in the 2026 Census.

National Count of Attendance

- Began preparations for the 2026 Count, including drafting a schedule of events and communicating with key stakeholders.
- Completed analysis of Mass languages used in 2011, previously omitted from reports.

A Profile of Catholic Clergy in Australia

- Conducted Stage 2 interviews with 70 priests and 8 deacons.
- Published and distributed the Final Report: *Thriving (& Surviving) in Ministry*.

Absent from the Table

- Completed analysis of Stage 1 and prepared the Interim Report.
- Completed 68 interviews for Stage 2 and completed the analysis.
- Prepared the draft Final Report and sent it for approval.

Evaluating the Implementation of 'Woman and Man'

- Completed data analysis for Stage 1 and prepared the Preliminary Report.
- Initiated the Stage 2a survey and analysed responses from dioceses, eparchies, MPJPs, and religious congregations.
- Conducted 24 interviews for Stage 2b and completed the analysis.
- Prepared the draft Final Report and sent it for approval.

Australian Catholic Mapping Online (ACMO)

- Launched the national map and 28 diocesan maps with layers for *Population* and *Catholic Families*.
- Developed and launched two additional layers: *Birthplace & Language* and *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics* (in collaboration with NATSICC).
- Delivered a successful workshop on using ACMO.
- Began development on the *Catholics with Disabilities* layer in collaboration with the ACBC Disability Projects Office.

Updating Parish and Diocesan Canonical Boundaries

- Initiated updates using ACMO software and liaised with dioceses to complete verification.
- Created new boundaries or redrew incorrect ones as necessary.

Armenian Catholics in Australia

- Analysed Census statistics and provided a report on the presence of the Armenian Church in Australia through community chaplaincies, schools and other activities to the Permanent Committee.

MSC Senior Living Review

- Conducted focus groups with MSC priests and brothers aged 70 and over residing in Australia.
- Analysed data and prepared and submitted the Final Report.

The Synod on Synodality

- Supported the review of the National Working Committee and its restructuring into the Interim Coordinating Group for the Synod, with expanded membership.
- Collated national and international synodal activities.
- Established and maintained the *Synod Next Steps* website to report on synodal activities.
- Supported the establishment of the *Synod Next Steps* newsletter.
- Director attended the Jubilee for Synodal Teams and Participatory Bodies in Rome.

Other Key Activities

- Conducted the 2025 ACBC Employee Engagement Survey.
- Delivered 21 international and national seminars and workshops.
- Processed 17 data requests, ranging from simple Census data requests to more complex analyses of data from several projects.

Staff News

Goodbye to Carole

Carole Gan joined the National Centre for Pastoral Research in February 2024 as a research assistant, contributing significantly to the Clergy Health and Wellbeing project, recently published in the report *Thriving (& Surviving) in Ministry* (see p. 3).

Beyond her primary role, Carole also supported several other NCPR projects over the last two years. These included *Absent from the Table: Australian Catholics Who Do Not Regularly Attend Sunday Mass*, *Evaluating the Implementation of "Woman and Man: The Bishops Respond" (Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000)*, the MSC Senior Living Review and the development of the Australian Catholic Mapping Online (ACMO) portal.

She also represented the NCPR at key events, presenting project updates at conferences such as the Australia and New Zealand Association of Theological Schools (ANZATS) Conference in Melbourne in July 2025.

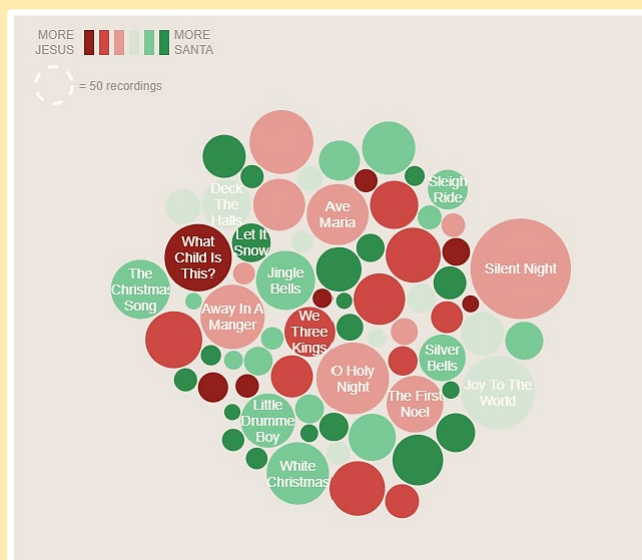
Carole's enthusiasm, expertise, and dedication have left a lasting impact on our team. We will miss having her with us. We thank Carole for her outstanding contribution and wish her every success in the future.



DID YOU KNOW?

According to TIME Magazine, "Silent Night", with lyrics written by Joseph Mohr in 1816 and music added by Franz Xaver Gruber in 1818, was the most popular Christmas song. It had been recorded 733 times between 1978 and 2014, more than any other Christmas song. The second most popular song is "Joy to the World" with only 391 recordings in the same period.

TIME has ranked all the recordings between 1978 and 2014 and identified which songs are the most religious (in red) to the most secular (in green). Their interactive graphic on the website shows the most popular songs and how many times they have been recorded: <https://time.com/3613551/christmas-song/>



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Christmas Greetings From the National Centre for Pastoral Research



From the NCPR staff: Trudy, Stephen, Leith and Katherine.

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



CHRISTMAS SHUTDOWN



The NCPR office will be closed from **Monday 22 December 2025** and reopen on **Monday 19 January 2026**. During this entire period, we will be unable to process any research requests.

We thank you for your understanding.