



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

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National survey shows Australia's Catholics are online and multicultural

A new report has shed light on the changing nature of the Catholic Church in Australia, with more of the faithful shifting online and worshipping in non-English languages.

However, the number of Catholics worshipping regularly in parishes across the country is declining.

The latest Australian Catholic Mass Attendance Report was released this week by the National Centre for Pastoral Research.

According to the National Count of Attendance – which is conducted every five years - Mass was celebrated in at least 42 languages across the country.

In May 2021, when the most recent survey was conducted, 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 – a rise of 3.3 per cent since the last count in 2016.

The four most common languages other than English were Vietnamese, Arabic, Chaldean and Italian.

Most of the National Count was conducted during the first four weekends in May 2021 amidst COVID-19 restrictions, while a small number of counts took place in June, July and August.

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, with women making up 56 per cent of attenders.

Accounting for the rise in Australian population and decline in Catholic population over the five years, the rate of Mass attendance among Australian Catholics was 8.2 per cent, a decline of 3.6 per cent from 2016 to 2021.

The report found much of the decline could be explained by the impact of COVID-19 restrictions and people's cautious approach towards resuming regular patterns of social interactions in the community.

However, it noted the impact of other factors, such as changes in the demographics of the Catholic population, the presence or absence of immigrants and the decrease in young adult attenders.

One interesting observation was 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.

“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,” National Centre for Pastoral Research director Dr Trudy Dantis said.

“Participating in Mass at the parish may have provided a chance for social engagement while other such options may have still been unavailable.

“Since 2021, some parishes have experienced a growth in Mass attendance as COVID-19 presented opportunities for them to adapt and cultivate more involvement.”

The report noted anecdotal evidence that some people who moved to participating in online Mass during COVID-19 had developed a preference for continuing this practice, while others who ceased attending Mass altogether had not felt the desire to return.

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 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.

Also popular during the restrictions was the Diocese of Wollongong-produced Mass for You at Home, airing at 6am on Ten, with an average of over 30,000 households across regional and city areas viewing the TV program each weekend.

The full report can be found [here](#).