



AUSTRALIAN
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Catholics deeply connected with their faith

Catholics in Australia who do not regularly attend Sunday Mass remain deeply connected with their faith.

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference commissioned the National Centre for Pastoral Research to study the factors influencing the reduction in the practice of regularly attending Sunday Mass.

As well, the researchers examined alternative forms of engagement with the Church, attitudes towards the Eucharist and implications for the wider Church.

The first phase of the research project - *Absent from the Table: Catholics in Australia Who Do Not Regularly Attend Sunday Mass* - involved an online survey of 1973 self-selected Catholics aged 18 and over, across seven states and territories.

Phase two consisted of in-depth interviews with 67 volunteers from the first phase, providing rich insights into personal experiences and motivations.

Despite their irregular attendance, most participants remained deeply connected to their faith.

The study found continuing strong affirmation (55 per cent of participants) of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist – the bread and wine blessed and shared at Sunday Mass.

Around two-thirds said faith was very important, and more than three-quarters of respondents affirmed belief in Jesus as the Son of God.

Respondents expressed their Catholic identity primarily through praying regularly (64 per cent), as well as sending their children to a Catholic school (44 per cent), sharing their faith with others (40 per cent), wearing religious symbols or displaying them at home (40 per cent) and volunteering in the wider community (39 per cent) or parish (29 per cent).

A majority (62 per cent) reported other connections, such as working or volunteering in Catholic schools and hospitals, and participating in prayer and study groups, youth events, religious communities and Catholic cultural or social clubs.

Three-quarters of respondents attended Mass less than weekly, with 19 per cent of these attending monthly and 36 per cent attending occasionally.

Of the 14 “participant-centred” and “Church-centred” reasons for non-attendance, the main themes were: going to Mass is not a priority; crisis of faith; family or household-related issues; liturgical issues; challenges with the parish priest or other clergy; and the misuse of power and authority in the Church.

The report’s reference to the ‘table’ reflects the table of the Eucharist, the altar, where the People of God are gathered into communion - nourishing them as one body and one spirit in Christ - strengthening the bonds of faith, unity and love and making the Church a living community.

Bishop-delegate for pastoral research and Vice President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Bishop Greg Bennet, said it was crucial that Church leaders listened to the voices of those who are “absent from the table”.

“Rather than a single national response, therefore, this research is being entrusted to bishops to take forward locally,” Bishop Bennet said.

“The hope is that each diocese will listen carefully to what people have shared and respond with pastoral initiatives shaped by their own communities and contexts.”

“It is important that Mass is engaging, inclusive and involves the meaningful participation of all those who attend.

“It is also vital that we ensure all our parishes are places of welcome which foster belonging and build faith.

“We know there are many people who are open to re-engagement with the Church and we need to work harder to find ways of making those re-connections.”

Emeritus Professor Gabrielle McMullen AM, chair of the Australian Catholic Council for Pastoral Research, thanked the research team – Trudy Dantis, Stephen Reid and Leith Dudfield - for their work.

“The late Pope Francis talked about becoming a ‘listening Church, to break out of our routine and pause from our pastoral concerns in order to stop and listen’,” Prof McMullen said.

“With the *Absent from the Table* project, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has sponsored research which has brought the voices of some 2000 Australian Catholics to inform current ‘pastoral concerns’ of the Australian Church and future planning.

“The researchers and reference group are to be commended on a substantial study which can inform evangelisation in 21st century Australia.”

Since the research was conducted, many dioceses have launched pastoral strategies and synod processes which have, at least anecdotally, had a positive impact on re-engaging Catholics.

New data were collected in May when Catholic parishes and dioceses took part in the National Count of Attendance, which will provide valuable insights into long-term trends.

The full report can be found at the National Centre for Pastoral Research [website](#).

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