



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Pastoral Projects Office

Media Release - June 5, 2008 Profile of Catholics in Australia

The latest snapshot of church life in Australia shows that Mass attenders are on average older, better educated and more likely to be female, married and born overseas than Catholics in general.

This is the picture from the 2006 National Church Life Survey (NCLS), based on a random sample of around 70,000 Mass attenders from 229 Catholic parishes from every Australian diocese.

The survey found that 61 per cent of Mass attenders aged 15 and over (the age group covered by NCLS) were female, compared to 53 per cent of the same age group among Catholics as a whole. Among Mass attenders aged 15 and over, 28 per cent had a degree or higher qualification, while 68 per cent were married, 10 per cent were widowed, five per cent were separated or divorced and one per cent were in a de facto relationship.

Mass attenders were also more likely than Catholics in general to be born overseas: among those aged 20 or more, 36 per cent of Mass attenders were born overseas compared to 29 per cent of the Catholic population.

The percentage of Catholics attending Mass every week dropped slightly from 2001 to 2006. The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Pastoral Projects Office conducted a national count in May 2006, which showed that the total number of people at Mass on a typical weekend was 708,600, or about 14 per cent of the Census Catholic population. This was down from a little over 15 per cent, or 764,000, in 2001.

Meanwhile, the 2006 Australian Census showed that Catholics remain the largest religious group in the country. There were 5,126,884 Catholics in Australia, making up 25.8 per cent of the total population of 19,855,288. The next two largest groups in terms of religious affiliation were Anglicans and those who said they had no religion, with both accounting for 18.7 per cent of the population.

The Catholic population grew by 125,260 between the 2001 and 2006 Censuses, but declined slightly as a proportion of the total population from the 2001 figure of 26.6 per cent.

The median age of Australian Catholics in 2006 was 36.6 years, slightly younger than that of other Australians (37.2 years). Five years earlier, the median age of the two groups had been 34.7 years and 36.0 years respectively, so the gap in median age between Catholics and the rest of the population is narrowing.

More than one-fifth of Australian Catholics (22.7%) were born overseas, including 17.6 per cent who were born in non-English-speaking countries.

Fifteen per cent of Catholics aged 15 and over had a university degree or higher qualification, a considerable increase over the 2001 figure of 12 per cent. Identical proportions – 52 per cent – of Catholic primary students and Catholic secondary students attended Catholic schools, the same as in 2001. Non-Catholics made up 21 per cent of the students at Catholic primary schools and 28 per cent at Catholic secondary schools, up from 19 per cent and 26 per cent respectively in 2001.

These Census figures are part of a comprehensive package of 2006 Census data on the Australian Catholic population obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics by the ACBC.

An extended profile of Australia's Catholics can be found on the ACBC website at <http://www.acbc.catholic.org.au/org/ppo/20080605608.htm> and also at www.ppo.catholic.org.au. For further details, contact Bob Dixon on 03 9953 3456.