



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE
Pastoral Projects Office

MASS ATTENDANCE IN AUSTRALIA

A report based on results from the

**National Count of Attendance
National Church Life Survey
Australian Census**

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Mass attendance in Australia

An average of 708,618 people attended Mass, or a Sunday Assembly in the Absence of a Priest, each weekend during May 2006, when the most recent National Attendance Count was conducted. About 8.2 per cent of these attended Mass celebrated in a language other than English. And more than 2,300 people each week, generally in rural dioceses, attended a Sunday Assembly.

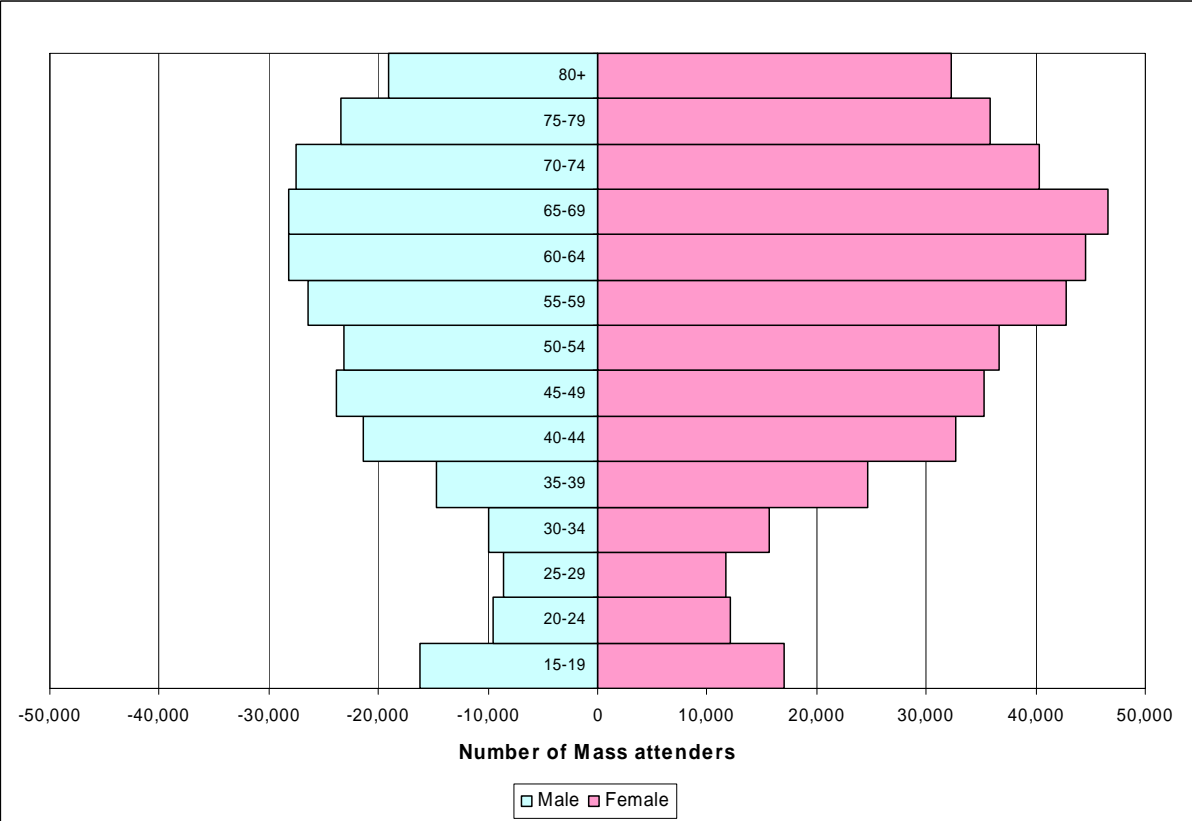
The total attendance figure represents 13.8 per cent of Australia’s 2006 Catholic population of 5,126,884. In 2001, the average weekly attendance was 763,726 and the attendance rate was 15.3 per cent.

The figure of 708,618 is the average of total attendances for the four weeks of May 2006 for all parishes and other Mass centres from which figures were received, with no adjustment for special circumstances such as Mothers Day, Confirmation Masses or other major events. An attendance figure based on average attendance rates in each diocese was imputed for parishes which did not return figures. However, not all non-parish Mass centres submitted returns, so the actual number of Mass attenders is probably a little higher than the figure published here.

Age and sex profile of Mass attenders

The age-sex profile of Mass attenders in Figure 1 shows a disproportionate number of women and older attenders. Women make up 60.4 per cent of Mass attenders aged 15 years and over. The median age of Mass attenders in this age group is 58 years, compared to 44 years among all people in Australia aged 15 and over who identify as Catholics.

Figure 1: Age – sex profile of Mass attenders aged 15 and over



Sources of data: National Count of Attendance 2006 and National Church Life Survey 2006


Age distribution of Mass attenders 1996 - 2006


Table 1 shows that the number of Mass attenders in all age groups under 60 has fallen in each successive 5-year period since 1996. In contrast, there were *more* attenders in each age group over 60 in 2006 than there were in 2001.

Table 1 can be read in two ways: either as the change in the number of attenders in each age group, or the change in attendance of each age cohort. For example, in 1996, there were 26,000 Mass attenders aged 25-29 but only 16,900 in the same age group ten years earlier. On the other hand, attendance for the cohort aged 25-29 in 1996 and 35-39 in 2006 had increased from 26,000 to over 32,700.

Table 1: Age profile of attenders 1996 - 2006

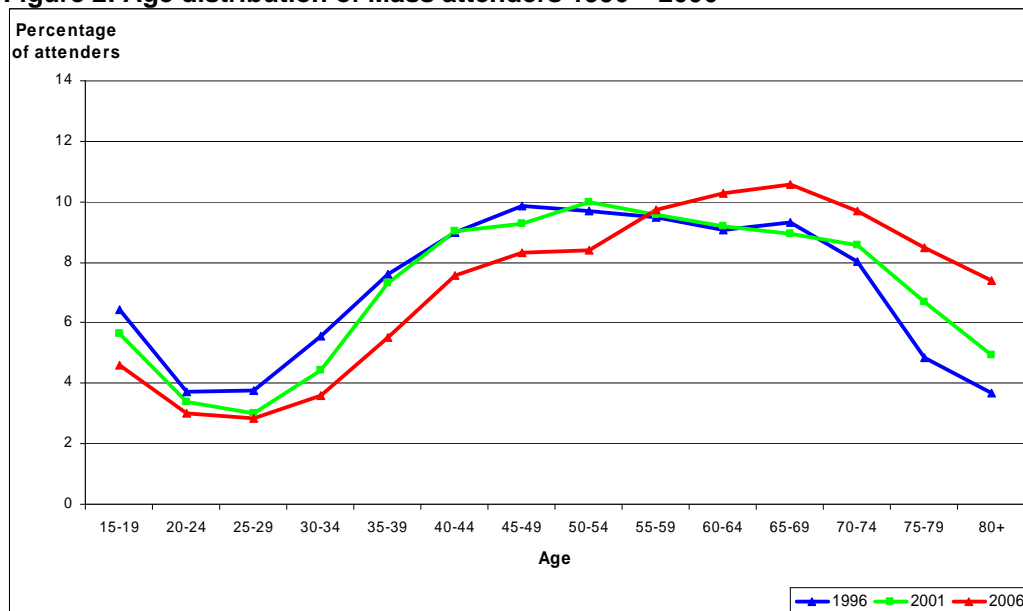
Age group	1996	2001	2006
0-14	164,000	126,779	113,379
15-19	45,000	35,987	27,442
20-24	26,000	21,551	18,003
25-29	26,000	19,059	16,905
30-34	39,000	28,228	21,410
35-39	53,000	46,513	32,728
40-44	63,000	57,440	45,032
45-49	69,000	59,187	49,513
50-54	68,000	63,724	50,023
55-59	66,000	60,981	57,974
60-64	64,000	58,667	61,076
65-69	65,000	57,018	62,986
70-74	56,000	54,600	57,670
75-79	34,000	42,692	50,412
80+	26,000	31,301	44,065
Total	864,000	763,726	708,618

 Smaller attendance in this age group compared to 5 years earlier

 Larger attendance in this age group compared to 5 years earlier

Sources of data: National Count of Attendance 2001, 2006; Diocesan estimates 1996; Catholic Church Life Survey 1996; National Church Life Survey 2001, 2006

Figure 2: Age distribution of Mass attenders 1996 – 2006



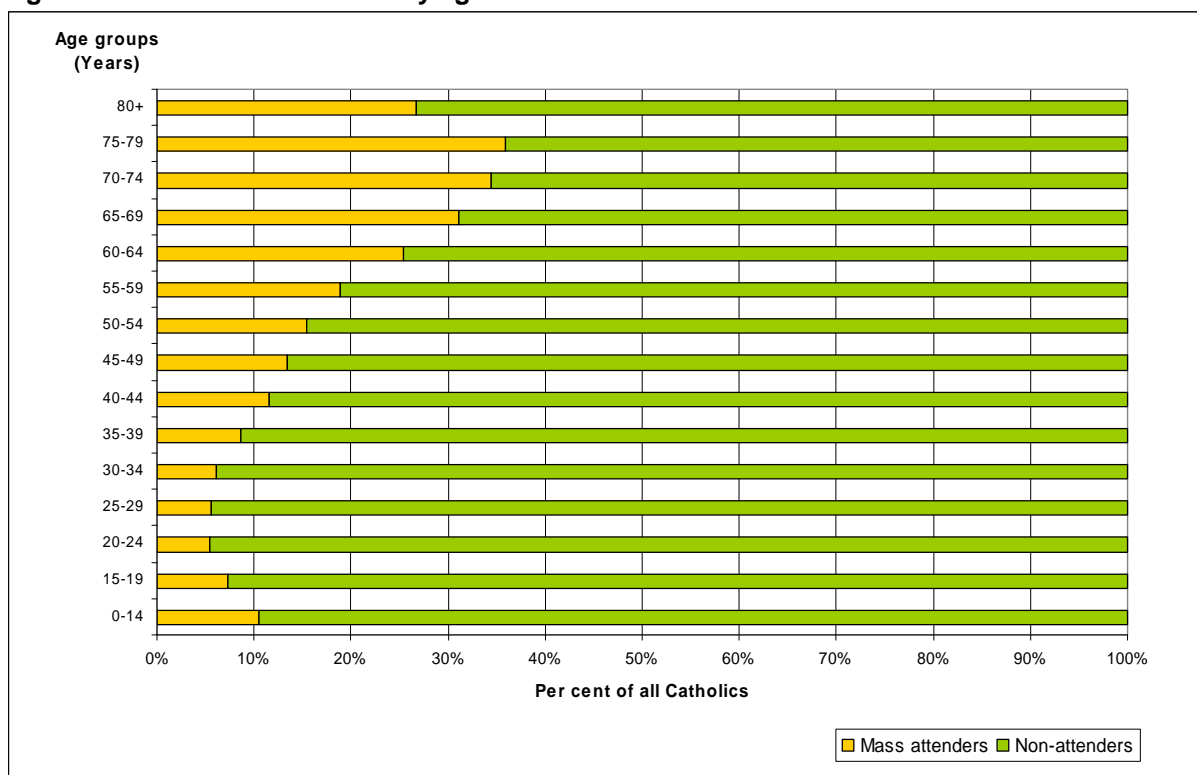
Sources of data: Catholic Church Life Survey 1996; National Church Life Survey 2001, 2006

Figure 2 shows how the shape of the age distribution has changed since 1996. Each line of the graph accounts for 100 per cent of the Mass attenders aged 15 years and over in that particular year. In 1996, more attenders belonged to the 45-49 year age group (the modal age group) than to any other. By 2001, the modal age group had shifted to 50-54 but, by 2006, it had moved to 65-69. In each successive survey year, the proportion of younger attenders has fallen while the proportion of older attenders has risen. The graphs for 1996 and 2001 are very similar, but there was a much more dramatic change between 2001 and 2006.

Mass attendance rates

Although an average of 13.8 per cent of all people who identify as Catholics in the Census attended Mass each week in May 2006, it can be seen from Figure 3 that this attendance rate is not constant across age groups. The highest attendance rate (36%) was among Catholics aged 75-79, in contrast to Catholics aged 15 through to 39 years, where fewer than ten per cent attended each week.

Figure 3: Mass attendance rate by age 2006



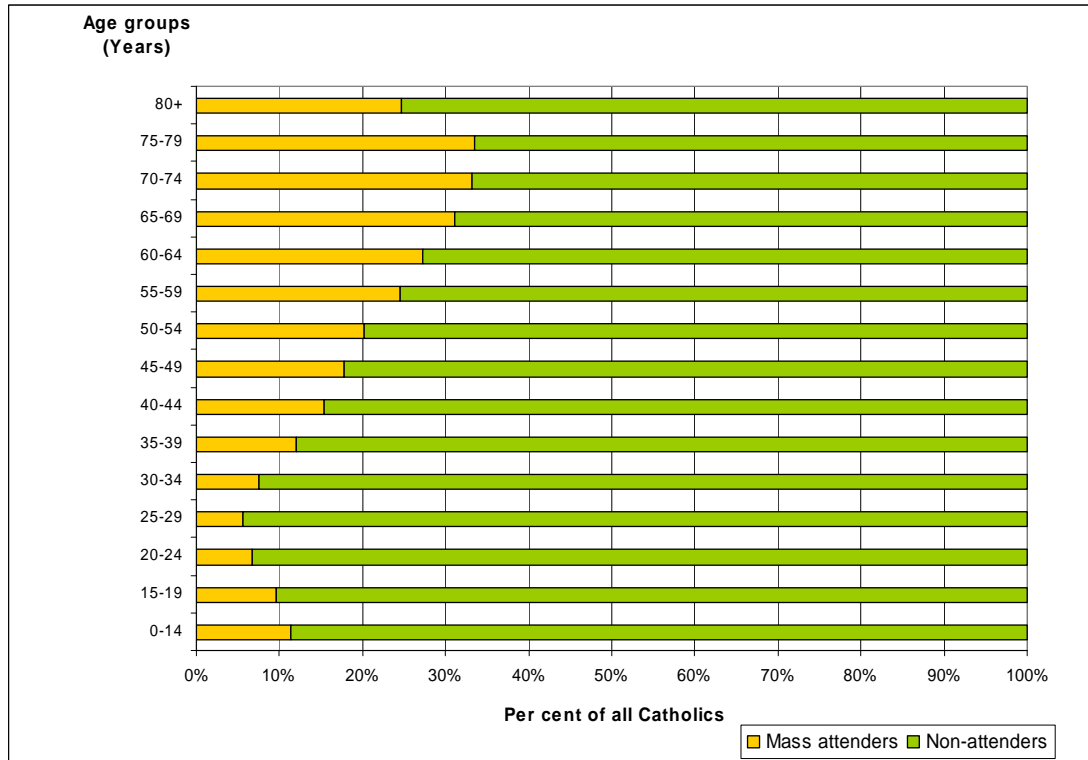
Sources of data: National Count of Attendance 2006, National Church Life Survey 2006, & Australian Census 2006

A comparison of Figure 3 with Figures 4 and 5 reveals that the broad shape of this graph has not changed over ten years. But a careful inspection of the graphs reveals some major changes, particularly among Catholics aged in their fifties. Between 1996 and 2006, the attendance rate of Catholics aged 50-54 dropped from 27 per cent to 15 per cent. For the 55-59 age group, the attendance rate fell from 30 per cent to 19 per cent. In other words, whereas in 1996 more than a quarter of all Catholics in their fifties attended Mass each weekend, less than one-fifth did so just ten years later.

The question is often asked as to whether the attendance rate of a particular age cohort will increase as the cohort ages. These three graphs enable that question to be answered, at least for the period 1996 to 2006. The attendance rates of each of the three cohorts aged from 25 to 40 in 1996 *did* increase by 2001, but in each case their new attendance rate was less than that of the age cohort immediately ahead of them had been in 1996. For example, in 1996, ten per cent of Catholics aged 30 to 34 years attended Mass; five years later, 12 per cent of that age cohort, now aged 35 to 39, were attending Mass. But the attendance rate for the 35-39 age group back in 1996 had been 14 per cent. Only one age cohort under

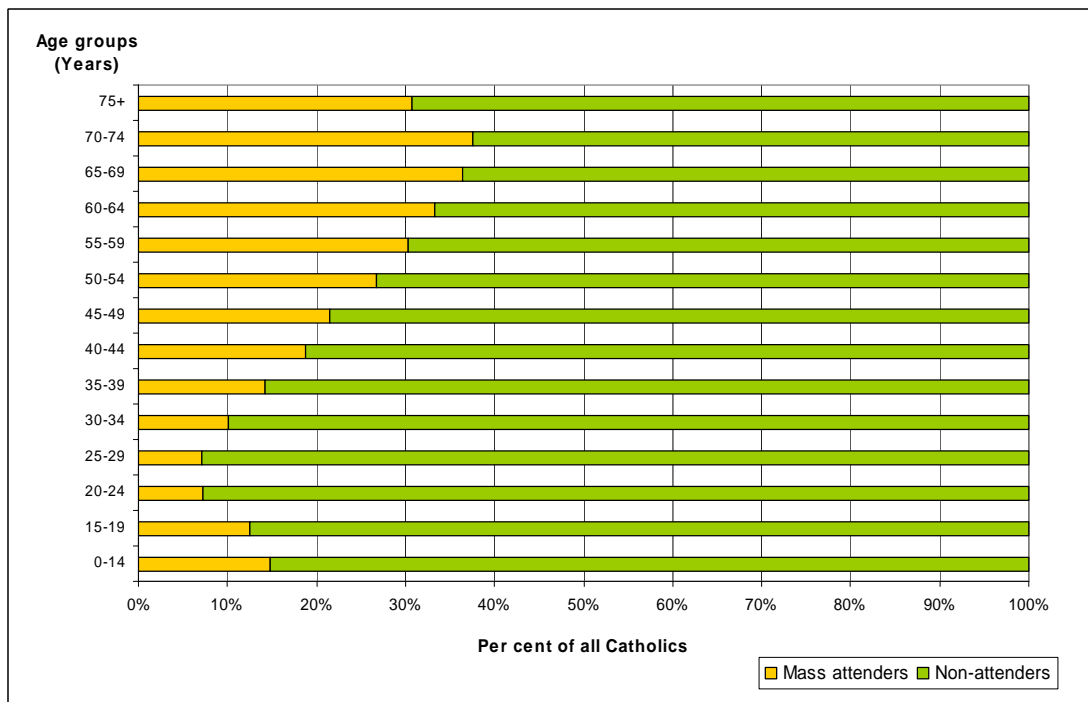
60 years in 2001 increased its attendance rate between 2001 and 2006, the 30-34 age cohort, which increased its attendance rate from eight per cent in 2001 to nine per cent five years later, when its members were aged 35-39. The only age cohorts whose attendance rates equaled or exceeded those of the cohorts ahead of them were those aged 60-64 or older in 1996.

Figure 4: Mass attendance rate by age 2001



Sources of data: National Count of Attendance 2001, National Church Life Survey 2001 & Australian Census 2001

Figure 5: Mass attendance rate by age 1996



Sources of data: Diocesan estimates 1996, Catholic Church Life Survey 1996 & Australian Census 1996

Attendance at Masses in languages other than English

An average of at least 58,000 people attended Mass celebrated in one of 30 languages other than English each weekend during May 2006, including about 760 who attended Masses celebrated in Latin. This amounts to just over eight per cent of the total weekly attendance. More than 10,000 people each week attended Masses celebrated in Vietnamese, Arabic and Italian.

The actual attendance at Masses in other languages (and therefore the total attendance) is likely to be considerably higher than the figure published here because, while the Pastoral Projects Office can impute an attendance figure based on average diocesan attendance rates for parishes which do not return figures, no such imputation is possible for non-parish centres, such as those associated with ethnic chaplaincies. Some dioceses are more assiduous than others in collecting figures from these centres.

Table 2: Summary of attendances at Masses in languages other than English

Diocese / Eparchy	Languages other than English in which Mass is celebrated	Average weekly attendance in languages other than English	Per cent attendance in languages other than English *
Adelaide	13	4,290	13
Armidale	--	--	--
Ballarat	--	--	--
Bathurst	--	--	--
Brisbane	11	2,762	4
Broken Bay	6	1,043	4
Broome	2	82	10
Bunbury	1	8	0
Cairns	1	10	0
Canberra & Goulburn	6	709	3
Darwin	3	25	1
Geraldton	--	--	--
Hobart	3	195	3
Lismore	--	--	--
Maitland-Newcastle	3	295	2
Melbourne	19	17,145	11
Parramatta	12	2,889	6
Perth	10	3,826	7
Port Pirie	--	--	--
Rockhampton	2	12	0
Sale	1	23	0
Sandhurst	2	407	4
Sydney	15	7,398	7
Toowoomba	--	--	--
Townsville	1	24	0
Wagga Wagga	3	236	3
Wilcannia-Forbes	--	--	--
Wollongong	8	1,229	6
Military Ordinariate	--	--	--
Maronite	1	8,131	63
Melkite	1	1,424	84
Ukrainian	1	1,335	92
Chaldean	1	4,500	100
Australia	30	57,998	8.2

Source of data: National Count of Attendance 2006

* 0% indicates an attendance rate of less than 0.5%

Table 3: Average weekly attendance at Masses in languages other than English, by Diocese or Eparchy

Diocese / Eparchy	Language	Arabic	Chaldean	Chinese Languages*	Croatian	Czech	Fijian	Filipino Languages**	French	German	Indonesian	Italian	Korean	Kukatja	Latin	Lithuanian
Adelaide		50		12	300			28			13	2,046	22		223	
Armidale																
Ballarat																
Bathurst																
Brisbane	15			186	92			49			47	641	312		152	
Broken Bay				115	100			33				144	597			
Broome														59		
Bunbury															8	
Cairns												10				
Canberra & Goulburn					76							150	68		105	
Darwin				12								4				
Geraldton																
Hobart												10				
Lismore																
Maitland-Newcastle												115				
Melbourne			66	361	1,187			449		75	26	6,237	146		42	83
Parramatta	253			419	728			104				177	70			
Perth	174			101	303						188	1,201			177	
Port Pirie																
Rockhampton															8	
Sale																
Sandhurst												382			25	
Sydney	117			299	93	27	40	153	59		131	1,772	25			
Toowoomba																
Townsville																
Wagga Wagga												205			23	
Wilcannia-Forbes																
Wollongong	16				246			30		11		365				
Military Ordinariate																
Maronite	8,131															
Melkite	1,424															
Ukrainian																
Chaldean			4,500													
Totals		10,180	4,566	1,505	3,125	27	40	846	59	86	405	13,459	1,240	59	763	83

* Includes Cantonese and Mandarin

** Includes Tagalog

Diocese / Eparchy	Language	Malayalam	Maltese	Polish	Portuguese	Romanian	Samoa	Slovak	Slovenian	Spanish	Sudanese Arabic	Tamil	Tokelauan	Ukrainian	Vietnamese	Walmajarri
Adelaide		32		803				10		375					376	
Armidale																
Ballarat																
Bathurst																
Brisbane				424			24								820	
Broken Bay				54												
Broome																23
Bunbury																
Cairns																
Canberra & Goulburn				90						9					220	
Darwin																
Geraldton				170												
Hobart																
Lismore																
Maitland-Newcastle				177										3		
Melbourne		31	334	1,903	145				267	533	53	19			5,188	
Parramatta			188	414					186	112		33			205	
Perth				312	69					141					1,160	
Port Pirie																
Rockhampton														4		
Sale				23												
Sandhurst																
Sydney				709	133	11				299					3,530	
Toowoomba																
Townsville													24			
Wagga Wagga				8												
Wilcannia-Forbes																
Wollongong				247	73				19	222						
Military Ordinariate																
Maronite																
Melkite																
Ukrainian																
Chaldean														1,335		
Totals		63	522	5,334	420	11	24	10	472	1,691	53	52	24	1,342	11,514	23

Source of data: National Count of Attendance 2006

Note:

The purpose of this table is to show the average number of people attending Mass in languages other than English each week. Therefore, the figure in any particular cell of the table refers to the average weekly attendance in a particular language and diocese. Where there is only one Mass for the month in that language and diocese, the figure shown here is one-quarter of the actual attendance at that Mass. For example, the attendance of 12 recorded for Chinese Languages in the Archdiocese of Adelaide refers to an attendance of 48 at a monthly Mass held at Tranmere Parish.

Attendances at Sunday Assemblies in the Absence of a Priest

More than 400 Sunday Assemblies in the Absence of a Priest, attended by 9,426 people in 24 dioceses, were held during May 2006. Weekly averages were 102 assemblies and 2,357 attenders, meaning that the average attendance at each assembly was 23 people.

Nine dioceses and eparchies had no assemblies at all, while in three dioceses (Perth, Sydney and the Melkite Eparchy), only one such assembly was held during the entire month. Ballarat was the diocese with the most assemblies during the month (73), and the highest attendance at assemblies (1,730). In many places, assemblies are held fortnightly or monthly rather than every week, so the number of separate individuals attending an assembly during the month is likely to have been much higher than the average weekly attendance.

Table 4: Average attendances at Sunday Assemblies in the Absence of a Priest

Diocese	Average number of assemblies per week	Average weekly attendance at assemblies	Average attendance at each assembly
Adelaide	0.8	3	4
Armidale	--	--	--
Ballarat	18.3	433	24
Bathurst	5.5	104	19
Brisbane	5.5	191	35
Broken Bay	--	--	--
Broome	2.8	33	12
Bunbury	4.0	95	24
Cairns	1.3	42	33
Canberra & Goulburn	5.3	114	22
Darwin	--	--	--
Geraldton	8.0	73	9
Hobart	8.0	105	13
Lismore	3.5	29	8
Maitland-Newcastle	4.5	127	28
Melbourne	0.5	25	49
Parramatta	1.5	70	47
Perth	0.3	3	12
Port Pirie	1.0	16	16
Rockhampton	7.3	237	33
Sale	9.0	173	19
Sandhurst	5.0	191	38
Sydney	0.3	4	15
Toowoomba	4.3	113	26
Townsville	1.8	55	31
Wagga Wagga	--	--	--
Wilcannia-Forbes	3.8	123	33
Wollongong	--	--	--
Military Ordinariate	--	--	--
Maronite	--	--	--
Melkite	0.3	4	16
Ukrainian	--	--	--
Chaldean	--	--	--
Australia	102	2,357	23

Source: National Count of Attendance 2006

Notes on the data

National Count of Attendance

In this report, gross attendance figures, attendances at Masses celebrated in languages other than English, and attendances at Sunday Assemblies in the Absence of a Priest come from the National Count of Attendance.

The National Count of Attendance, conducted by the Pastoral Projects Office, consists of a simple headcount of all attenders in all parishes and other Mass centres throughout the whole of Australia on the four Sundays of May. It was conducted for the first time in 2001 and again in 2006. Information collected, in addition to the number of people in attendance, includes the language and frequency (e.g., weekly, fortnightly, monthly) of celebration. This information is collected both for Masses and for Sunday Assemblies in the Absence of a Priest.

Attendance figures for 1996 are estimates based on assorted diocesan counts conducted with different methods and at different times of the year.

National Church Life Survey

In this report, data about the age and sex distribution of Mass attenders comes from the National Church Life Surveys and the Catholic Church Life Survey.

The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a joint project of the Uniting Church Board of Mission (NSW), ANGLICARE (NSW) and the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. Catholic parishes have participated in the last two National Church Life Surveys, in 2001 and 2006. A separate but parallel project, the Catholic Church Life Survey (CCLS), was conducted in 1996.

In each of these surveys, a questionnaire was completed by Mass attenders aged 15 and over in a national random sample of parishes, selected so as to ensure there was a representative sample of parishes from each diocese. The number of parishes in the random sample and the number of completed questionnaires in each of the three surveys was as follows:

Survey	Year	Sample size (parishes)	Mass attenders
CCLS	1996	281	101,000
NCLS	2001	255	78,000
NCLS	2006	229	67,000

Australian Census

The data in this report on the size of the Catholic population of Australia and its age distribution, used in the construction of the graphs of Mass attendance rates by age (Figures 3, 4 and 5), comes from the 2006, 2001 and 1996 Australian Censuses of Population and Housing conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

Through the National Catholic Census Project, the Pastoral Projects Office acquires from ABS comprehensive Census data on the Catholic population of every parish in Australia. The data is available to parishes, dioceses and Catholic agencies and organisations.

For further information:

ACBC Pastoral Projects Office: www.ppo.catholic.org.au

National Church Life Survey: www.ncls.org.au