



ACBC Pastoral Projects Office. Australian Catholic University, PO Box 4115, Fitzroy, Vic. 3065

NCLS 2001 results for the Catholic Church in Australia

Background Profile

This report has been prepared by the Pastoral Projects Office of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference using the data, methodology and report templates of NCLS Research. NCLS Research is a joint project of the Uniting Church Board of Mission (NSW), ANGLICARE (NSW) and the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

PO Box A2178 Sydney South NSW 1235 . ph (02) 8267 4394 . www.ncls.org.au . info@ncls.org.au



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Background Profile

This Background Profile brings together a range of descriptive information about Mass attenders in Australia assembled from the responses of attenders to the 2001 National Church Life Survey (NCLS). Where possible, a comparison is provided with results from the 1996 Catholic Church Life Survey (CCLS).

More than 78,000 Mass attenders in a national random sample of 255 parishes completed an NCLS questionnaire in 2001. A number of different versions of the questionnaire were distributed to attenders in each parish, with a little over two-thirds completing Questionnaire A, a version which focussed on parish participation. Most of the results in this report are based on questions which appeared in Questionnaire A and therefore were answered by a very large national sample of Mass attenders.

The results for Catholics are placed alongside those of Anglicans and Protestants treated as a single group. However, it should be noted that Anglicans and Protestants, and even respondents from different Protestant denominations, did not always answer questions in similar ways. Comparisons in this report between Catholics, on the one hand, and Anglicans and Protestants, on the other, should therefore be seen merely as a very rough indication of how the different traditions responded to the various questions. For a more detailed account of denominational comparisons, refer to *Initial Impressions 2001*, by John Bellamy, Peter Kaldor and the NCLS Team, which is available from www.ncls.org.au.

Number of survey respondents in the 255 parishes of the national random sample

<u>Age</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Per cent</u>
15-29	8,717	11.1
30-59	37,011	47.3
60 and over	29,611	37.8
Age not provided	2,916	3.7
Total	78,255	100

Explanation of symbols used in the tables

- A dash indicates that no data are available. Either:
 - a. No figure can be provided for Anglicans and Protestants because the question was only included in the Catholic version of the questionnaire.
 - b. No 1996 figure can be provided because the question was not included in the CCLS
- * An asterisk indicates that related data do exist, but that the wording of the questions or the structure of the responses mean that results are not easily compared.

Views about church and faith

Parishes and congregations are often distinguished by their denominational heritage. The influence of this heritage can be seen in what is valued in church life and approaches to matters of faith.

What do attenders value about their parish?

Aspects of their parish most valued by attenders

	Catholics		Anglicans & Protestants
	1996 %	2001 %	2001 %
Celebrating the Eucharist / receiving Holy Communion	*	62	36
Traditional style of worship or music	*	28	28
Sermons or homilies	*	25	41
Praying for one another	*	25	14
Practical care for one another in times of need	*	18	23
The parish school	*	16	4
Contemporary style of worship or music	*	14	28
Wider community care or social justice emphasis	*	13	12
Social activities or meeting new people	*	10	15
Ministry to children or youth	*	8	17
Openness to social diversity	*	8	6
Reaching those who do not attend church	*	7	17
Small prayer, discussion or Bible study groups	*	6	23

NB: up to three options could be selected, so percentages add up to more than 100%

How do attenders view their parish?

Attenders' views on the importance of the parish in their lives

	Catholics		Anglicans & Protestants
	1996 %	2001 %	2001 %
Not at all important	*	5	-
A little important	*	21	-
Quite important	*	37	-
Very important	*	26	-
Extremely important	*	11	-

NB: this question was only asked in Catholic parishes

This parish has grown in unity and strength in the last 12 months

	Catholics		Anglicans & Protestants
	1996	2001	2001
	%	%	%
Strongly disagree	*	1	-
Disagree	*	5	-
Neutral or unsure	*	35	-
Agree	*	45	-
Strongly agree	*	14	-

NB: this question was only asked in Catholic parishes

Does attending Mass in this parish strengthen you spiritually?

	Catholics		Anglicans & Protestants
	1996	2001	2001
	%	%	%
Always	52	48	-
Usually	32	34	-
Sometimes	13	17	-
Never	2	2	-
Don't know ¹	2	-	-

NB: this question was only asked in Catholic parishes

¹ The category 'Don't know' in the 1996 version of the question was dropped in the 2001 version.

As well, since the 1996 version did not specify in this parish, the two versions of the question are not strictly comparable.

Attendees' views on Church authority

Attendees were asked 'Do you accept the authority of the Church to teach that certain doctrines of faith and morals are true, are essential to the Catholic faith, and are to be believed by all Catholics?'

	Catholics		Anglicans & Protestants
	1996	2001	2001
	%	%	%
Yes, with no difficulty	47	49	-
Yes, with some difficulty	38	38	-
Yes, with great difficulty	6	7	-
No	6	6	-
Don't know ¹	3	-	-

NB: this question was only asked in Catholic parishes

¹ The category 'Don't know' in the 1996 version of the question was dropped in the 2001 version.

Attendees' views about the Bible

	Catholics		Anglicans & Protestants
	1996	2001	2001
	%	%	%
<i>The Bible is ...</i>			
The word of God, to be taken literally word for word	*	15	33
The word of God, to be interpreted in its historical and cultural context	*	19	35
The word of God, to be interpreted in the light of its historical context and the Church's teaching	*	52	25
Not the word of God	*	9	5
Don't know	*	5	2

Levels of involvement

How are people involved in parish life?

How are people involved in parishes and how does that affect church life?

The real rate of involvement in leadership and ministry roles is likely to be considerably lower than those shown here due to the high non-response rate to this question. It is likely that people who have no leadership or ministry role simply skipped the long question on this topic. As well, the figure for the percentage involved in parish groups and other activities is based on the responses of attenders who answered both the question on group involvement and the question on parish activities.

Summary of parish involvement

	Catholics		Anglicans & Protestants
	1996 %	2001 %	2001 %
Go to church <u>at this parish</u> at least monthly	-	91	96
Attenders involved in parish groups or other activities	*	28	68
<i>Per cent of attenders <u>not</u> answering <u>both the questions</u> contributing to this figure</i>	*	18	15
Attenders with a leadership or ministry role	*	37	62
<i>Per cent of attenders <u>not</u> answering this question</i>		18	15

Frequency of attendance at Mass

Generally	Catholics		Anglicans & Protestants
	1996 %	2001 %	2001 %
Less than monthly / hardly ever / first time	3	4	3
Once a month	2	2	2
Two or three times a month	6	7	10
Usually every week	71	72	67
More than once a week	17	15	17

In <u>this</u> parish	Catholics		Anglicans & Protestants
	1996 %	2001 %	2001 %
Less than monthly / hardly ever / first time	-	8	4
Once a month	-	3	3
Two or three times a month	-	10	11
Usually every week	-	66	67
More than once a week	-	12	16

Attenders' involvement in groups at church

	Catholics		Anglicans & Protestants
	1996	2001	2001
	%	%	%
In small prayer, discussion or Bible study groups only	13	8	24
In clubs, social groups or other types of groups only	8	16	25
In <i>both</i> of the above types of groups	3	3	20
Our parish has no such groups / not regularly involved	76	73	32

Attenders' involvement in leadership and ministry roles at church

	Catholics		Anglicans & Protestants
	1996	2001	2001
	%	%	%
Reader (lector) or special minister of the Eucharist	*	17	-
Music ministry (eg choir, organist, musician)	*	6	-
Member of a liturgy planning group	*	2	-
Member of a children's liturgy group	*	2	-
Teacher in the parish school	*	2	-
Religious Education teacher in a government school	*	2	-
Member of the baptism team	*	1	-
Member of the children's sacrament preparation team	*	2	-
RCIA team member or sponsor	*	1	-
Preparing couples for marriage	*	1	-
Member of the parish council or similar leadership group	*	3	-
Member of a committee	*	5	-
Leader of a prayer, discussion or Bible study group	*	2	-
Leader of an adult social group	*	1	-
Leader in youth ministry or youth group	*	1	-
Visitor to the sick or elderly or others in need	*	7	-
Another role not mentioned above	*	9	-
No such leadership or ministry role at present	*	63	-

NB: more than one option could be selected, so percentages add to more than 100%.

No Anglican & Protestant figure is given here because different leadership and ministry categories were used in the Anglican and Protestant version of the questionnaire.

Attenders' involvement in making important decisions in the parish

	Catholics		Anglicans & Protestants
	1996	2001	2001
	%	%	%
Often participate	-	7	21
Occasionally participate	-	15	27
Don't usually participate	-	34	52

Religious denomination

	Catholics		Anglicans & Protestants
	1996	2001	2001
	%	%	%
Attenders			
Catholic	97	98	-
Not Catholic	3	2	-
Spouse			
Catholic	82	82	-
Not Catholic	18	18	-

NB: this question was only asked in Catholic parishes

Who goes to church?

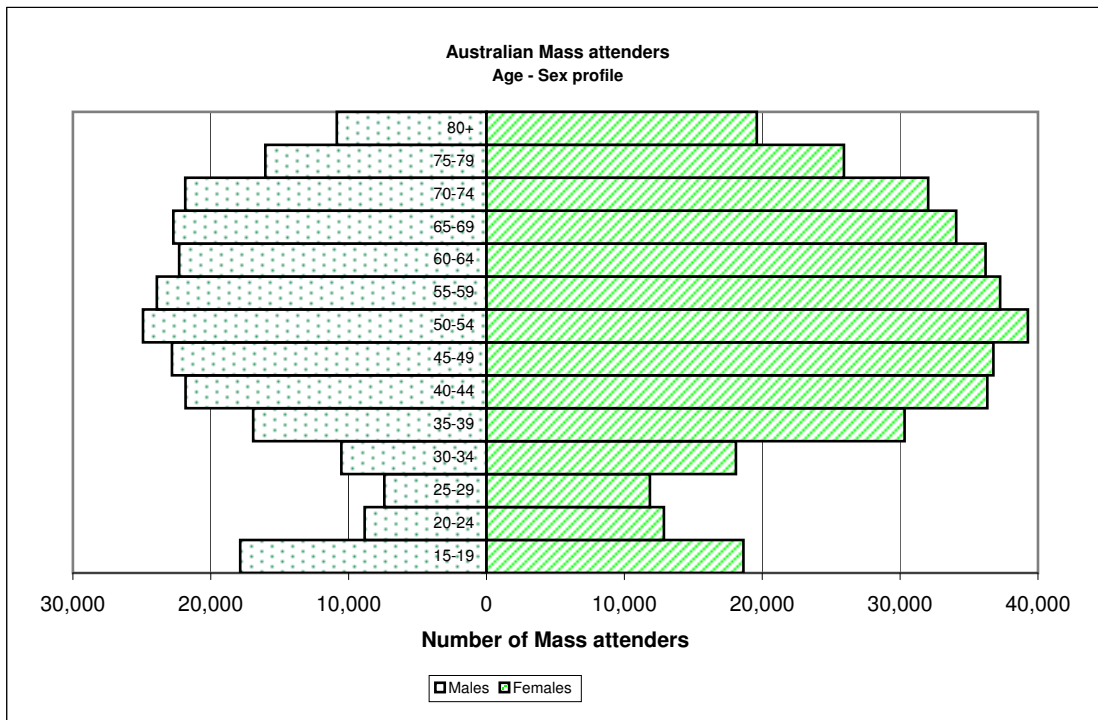
Attenders' age

	Catholics		Anglicans & Protestants
	1996	2001	2001
	%	%	%
Average (mean) age of attenders (those over 15 years)	51	53	51
Median age of attenders (those over 15 years)	52	54	51

Attenders' sex

	Catholics		Anglicans & Protestants
	1996	2001	2001
	%	%	%
Female	60	61	61
Male	40	39	39

Attenders' age and sex profile



Attenders' employment status

	Catholics		Anglicans & Protestants
	1996	2001	2001
	%	%	%
Employed full time (30+ hours per week)	*	29	27
Employed part time	*	13	14
Self employed	*	8	10
Unemployed	2	3	3
Home duties / family responsibilities	18	14	15
Student	8	8	10
Retired	25	31	29
Other	*	2	3

NB: more than one option could be selected, so percentages may add to more than 100%

Attenders with children at home

	Catholics		Anglicans & Protestants
	1996	2001	2001
	%	%	%
Attenders with children at home aged 0 to 14 years	-	22	21
Attenders with children at home aged 15 years or over	-	23	18

Attenders' highest educational qualification

	Catholics		Anglicans & Protestants
	1996	2001	2001
	%	%	%
Primary school	10	9	6
Secondary school	51	48	46
Trade certificate	8	9	10
Diploma or associate diploma	11	12	15
Degree from a university or equivalent	13	15	14
Post graduate degree or diploma	7	8	9

Attenders' place of birth

	Catholics		Anglicans & Protestants
	1996	2001	2001
	%	%	%
Australia	69	67	79
Great Britain	4	3	-
Ireland, including Northern Ireland	2	1	-
Italy	5	4	-
Malta	2	2	-
Vietnam	2	2	-
Philippines	3	5	-
India / Sri Lanka	3	4	-
Another English-speaking country	1	2	-
Another non English-speaking country	9	9	-

* the above categories for place of birth were specific to the Catholic version of the questionnaire. Among Anglican and Protestant attenders, 12 per cent were born in other English-speaking countries and 9 per cent were born in non-English-speaking countries.

Attenders' marital status

	Catholics		Anglicans & Protestants
	1996	2001	2001
	%	%	%
Never married	19	17	18
In first marriage	64	65	58
Remarried after divorce	2	3	6
Remarried after death of spouse	1	1	2
Divorced / separated / defacto	5	6	7
Widowed	9	9	10

Patterns of growth and decline

Changes in average attendance may be the result of people entering or leaving the parish, or attenders changing their frequency of involvement.

Attenders joining their parish in the five years prior to the survey

	Catholics		Anglicans & Protestants
	1996	2001	2001
	%	%	%
Visitors	9	7	3
Newcomers (not regularly attending anywhere else)	2	4	9
Switchers (from another denomination)	1	1	13
Transfers (from another Catholic parish)	17	22	13

Change in attenders' frequency of involvement in the two years prior to the survey

	Catholics		Anglicans & Protestants
	1996	2001	2001
	%	%	%
Participate more than two years previously	-	17	31
Participate about the same as two years previously	-	59	46
Participate less than two years previously	-	14	13
Not applicable (attended less than two years)	-	10	10

Church attendance of attenders' children (aged 15 years or over)

	Catholics		Anglicans & Protestants
	1996	2001	2001
	%	%	%
Children of attenders, aged 15 years or over, who:			
- still attend parents' parish	-	43	47
- attend another Catholic parish	-	10	-
- attend a church which is not Catholic	-	1	-
- do not attend any church	-	44	38

NB. Only the children of attenders who are still living at home are included here.

In the Anglican and Protestant version of the questionnaire, the two categories about attendance at Catholic parishes and other churches were combined into the single category 'attend elsewhere'. Twelve per cent of the children, aged 15 or over and still living at home, of Anglican & Protestant attenders attend church elsewhere.