

Media Release

9 November 2017

Multicultural and female parishioners: Demographics of Australian Catholic mass attenders revealed in 2016 National Church Life Survey results

ACU hosts largest survey of church life

During 2016, ACU Tenison Woods House held the logistics operations of the National Church Life Survey (NCLS), the largest survey of its kind in the world. Over a quarter of a million survey forms, completed by churchgoers and leaders, in over 3,000 local churches, across more than 20 Christian denominations in Australia, were processed on the North Sydney campus by NCLS Research. The survey results are now being released.

The Australian Catholic University is one member of the ecumenical board of NCLS Research, along with the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Anglicare Sydney and Uniting Mission and Education (Synod of NSW and the ACT). The 2016 NCLS represents the sixth survey wave, held every five years, since 1991, alongside the national Census. Catholic parishes have taken part in Church Life Surveys since 1996. The results presented are based on a representative sample of Catholic parishes from across all Dioceses.

A multicultural church- findings of the 2016 NCLS

More than four in ten Australian Catholic mass attenders (43%) were born overseas, according to the latest National Church Life Survey results. Of those born overseas, some 37% of mass attenders were born in a non-English speaking country, which is much higher than in the general Australian population (22%). Some 30% of Catholic mass attenders who took part in the NCLS speak English plus other language(s) at home.

These latest figures demonstrate that Australian Catholic parishes are culturally diverse and can be a significant place of welcome and social inclusion for migrants.

NCLS Research Director, Dr Ruth Powell said this multicultural mix in Australian churches has increased over time, despite churches with a non-English speaking background being under-represented in the national survey "The proportion of participating mass attenders born overseas was 34% in 2006, and ten years later it was up to 43% in 2016," she said. "Compared to other nations, we have a very high proportion of multicultural parishes."

More women than men attend Catholic parishes: 62% of mass attenders are female. As in previous waves of the NCLS, this is higher than in Australian society, where females represent 51% of the population.

“The fact that women continue to be more religious than men confirms a long-term pattern, which has been found in all religions and across the world,” explained Dr Powell. “There are a lot of theories about why this is the case. While there are lots of factors involved, the evidence points to social and cultural factors, such as religious traditions and workforce participation, having an important role”.

Those in the pews are more educated than ever before. Some 36% of mass attenders held a university degree in 2016, up from 27% in 2006. The proportion of tertiary educated churchgoers continued to be higher than the Australian population, where 22% held a university degree in 2016. Another 42% of mass attenders had only a school level education. Ministry implications include the challenge of catering for highly educated younger parishioners, as well as older attenders with lower levels of formal schooling.

For additional comment contact Dr Ruth Powell, Director, NCLS Research, Associate Professor, Australian Catholic University p: +61 2 9701 4479 e: info@ncls.org.au



NCLS Research staff at ACU Tenison Woods House



Survey logistics area at ACU Tenison Woods House



St Mary MacKillop parish in Oran Park NSW was a pilot parish for the survey



NCLS Research staff briefing diocesan leaders at ACU Leadership Centre Brisbane

N.B. High resolution images can be requested from NCLS Research info@ncls.org.au

Multicultural and female: Demographics of Australian Catholic mass attenders

Findings from the 2016 National Church Life Survey

Fast Facts about Catholic mass attenders:

- 43% were born overseas, 37% were born in a non-English speaking country
- 30% speak English plus other language(s) at home, 3% speak other language(s) only at home
- 62% were female, 38% were male
- 9% were aged 15-29, 21% aged 30-49, 36% aged 50-69, and 34% aged 70 and over
- 36% held a university degree, 42% had primary or high schooling
- 45% were employed, 8% had full time home duties, and 41% were retired

Source: 2016 National Church Life Survey, Attender AC survey (n=36,532 mass attenders aged 15 years and over). <http://2016ncls.org.au>. Based on a representative sample of Catholic parishes across all Dioceses.

Australian population data source: 2016 Census of Population & Housing, Australian Bureau of Statistics http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/036?opendocument

N.B. The ABS percentage showing 22% of Australians with a tertiary qualification is based on total persons aged 15+. If the ABS percentage is calculated excluding people who did not complete the Census question, then 25% of Australian population have a tertiary qualification. This allows better comparison with NCLS data.

2016 NCLS results for 'All Australia' (Protestant & Catholic figures combined)

Infographics: ('All Australia' results: Protestant & Catholic figures combined)

- ncls.org.au/news/2016-attender-demographics-infographics

Web Articles: ('All Australia' results: Protestant & Catholic figures combined)

- "Cultural diversity on the increase in Australian churches" ncls.org.au/news/cultural-diversity-increase
- "Why are women more religious than men" ncls.org.au/news/women-more-religious
- "Age profile of attenders continues to get older" ncls.org.au/news/ageing-church

2016 NCLS findings in the media: ('All Australia' results: Protestant & Catholic figures combined)

- www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-04/is-multiculturalism-the-new-face-of-australian-church-life/
- www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/religionandethicsreport/the-new-face-of-the-australian-church:-multicultural-and-female/8993562
- www.eternitynews.com.au/australia/highly-educated-church-attenders-on-the-rise
- www.eternitynews.com.au/australia/fact-more-women-go-to-church-than-men
- www.eternitynews.com.au/australia/an-agent-for-change-at-denominational-level

Media Centre release of 2016 NCLS results: ncls.org.au/news/media-centre

- Fast Facts
- Infographics
- Web Articles
- First Impressions Results

Contact NCLS Research p: +61 2 9701 4479 e: info@ncls.org.au w: ncls.org.au/news/media-centre