

KNOW THE DIOCESES IN 2020

DIOCESE of BALLARAT

In 1874 an area of 117,138 square kilometres in the western section of the Diocese of Melbourne was excised to establish the new Diocese of Ballarat.¹ It is one of 4 dioceses belonging to the ecclesiastical Province of Melbourne with the Archdiocese of Melbourne as the Metropolitan See.

Demographics: At the 2016 Census 422,854 persons lived in the diocese, with 95,696 self-identified Catholics (22.6% of total). Since the 2001 Census (379,973 and 96,878 (25.5%)), the general population has increased by 11.9% while the Catholic population has decreased by 2.9%. Catholic numbers peaked at 102,006 in 2011. In 2016 the diocese ranked 14th in Australia's Catholic population with the median age of Catholics at 42 years. Australia is the birthplace of 88.6% of all Catholics, including 1,310 indigenous Australians (1.4% of all Catholics), while the biggest groups born outside Australia are from the Philippines (1.3%), Italy (1.2%), UK excluding Nth Ireland (1.1%), and Netherlands (0.8%).

Bishop: The bishop is Paul Bird CSsR, born in Australia in 1949, ordained a priest of the Redemptorist Congregation in 1975, and ordained a bishop in 2012. He was installed as the 8th bishop of Ballarat in 2012. His most recent *Quinquennial Report* was prepared for his June 2019 *ad limina* visit, and the Executive Summary was published in the diocesan magazine *Our Diocesan Community* in August 2019.²

Structure and Governance: The diocese has 41 parishes organised into 3 zones and 10 Ministry Districts to enable the mutual support and gathering of neighbouring parishes and priests.³ At end-2020 just 8 parishes had a full-time resident priest, with 33 having to share a priest. The diocese has a Diocesan Finance Committee, a College of Consultors, a Council of Priests, and a Diocesan Pastoral Council with 6 lay and 2 clerical members, including the bishop.⁴ The last diocesan synod was held in 1944, and the last diocesan assembly in 2004. Since 2014 the diocese has conducted annual regional *Looking Forward* consultations across the diocese for continuous management improvement and pastoral planning,⁵ and following diocesan consultations in 2019 a new Vision and Mission Statement was developed.⁶ Diocesan policy is to encourage parish pastoral councils.

Priests and Deacons: At end-2019 the diocese had 58 priests, including the bishop: 46 diocesan and 12 religious. At start-2021, 30 priests are active in parish ministry: 26 diocesan and 4 religious.⁷ Of these 23 are Australian-born and 7 overseas-born (4 in India and 2 in Philippines and 1 in Sri Lanka). Eighteen other priests (including the previous bishop) live in retirement (2 in parishes), 3 work outside the diocese in tertiary education, and 2 work in pastoral care. The diocese has no permanent deacons. There has been a significant turnover of priests in parish ministry in the last 10 years, mainly due to retirements, and the number of overseas-born priests has increased. As 11 Australian-born priests were ordained prior to 1980, and will retire over the next 10 years, a greater reliance on priests from overseas can be expected.⁸ Since 2020, following Recs. 19 and 83 of *The Light from the Southern Cross*, a new Clergy Appointments Panel, including 3 lay persons (2 women, 1 man) advises the bishop on appointments.⁹ The diocese currently has 3 diocesan

¹ The area, formerly thought to be 58,000 sq. Km., was revised in 2017. The diocese is only a slightly smaller than Eritrea (117,600 sq. km). In 1874, other territory of the Melbourne Diocese was excised to establish the Diocese of Sandhurst.

² [026667_fcdd.pdf \(catholic.org.au\)](#)

³ The *Official Directory* incorrectly lists 40 parishes. Three new parishes were formed in 2018 by amalgamating 13 neighbouring parishes: Saint Mary MacKillop Parish, Western Border; Holy Family Parish, Northeast Mallee; and Mary Glowrey Parish, East Wimmera.

⁴ Under the previous bishop a diocesan pastoral council operated in 2006.

⁵ [Looking-Forward-2019-21-May-2019-final.pdf \(catholic.org.au\)](#)

⁶ [www.ballarat.catholic.org.au/our-diocese/diocesan-vision-mission](#)

⁷ In 2019 priest numbers were boosted by the short-term deployment of five newly ordained priests from the Redemptorist Congregation, but they do not appear in the diocesan data of the 2020/21 *Official Directory*. As well as assisting the diocese, this was part of their training in priestly ministry. They were subsequently appointed to other Redemptorist ministries around Australia and New Zealand.

⁸ Under the diocesan plan, the retirement age for priests is set at 75 years.

⁹ *Light from the Southern Cross*, Rec. 19: *That lay persons with appropriate expertise be involved in decisions regarding the placement of priests in parishes*; Rec. 83: *That bishops are to consult with the college of consultors or a clergy appointments panel when making changes with regard to clergy. These meetings are to include lay women and men.*

seminarians preparing for priesthood. If only the priests actively ministering in parishes are counted, there are an estimated 3,190 Catholics per priest.

Lay ministers and officials: Thirteen lay persons hold senior positions in the diocesan curia: 3 men, 8 women and 2 religious sisters. No lay persons minister as pastoral associates/assistants in the parishes, but several have lay parish coordinators. The presence of religious sisters has decreased by 64% since 2001 (from 179 to 65) and religious brothers by 73% (from 15 to 2). Currently 6 congregations of religious sisters and 1 congregation of religious brothers serve in the diocese. The diocese has a Council for Religious.

Mass attendance and liturgy: In 2006 an average 14,499 Catholics attended Mass regularly (14.6%). In 2016 the average was 10,024 (10.5%) – down 30.9%. Each priest active in parish ministry currently ministers to an average 334 regular Mass attenders. The diocese has a Liturgical Commission.

Seminary and Seminarians: The Regional Seminary of Corpus Christi College in Melbourne provides formation for Ballarat's diocesan seminarians, and three are currently in formation. The diocese has 2 priests working in the formation program.

Pastoral ministries: The diocese has a Pastoral Ministry Office as well as an office for Youth and Young Adult Ministry. The *Looking Forward* pastoral planning process has had a major impact on the diocese, leading to the amalgamation of 13 parishes into three new parishes and the development of Ministry Districts for the sharing of resources, including personnel. The diocese partners with the University of Dayton (Ohio, USA) for its Virtual Learning Community for Faith Formation (VLCFF). It provides catechetical and faith formation courses online for parishes and individuals.¹⁰

Ecumenism and Inter-Faith: The diocese has a Commission for Ecumenism and Inter-Religious Relations which fosters positive connections with other Christian churches and members of other faiths, including the Jewish and Muslim communities.

Plenary Council: A total of 1357 persons – 184 as individuals (58% women and 27% men) and 1173 in 93 groups – responded to the Plenary Council's Listening and Dialogue phase. They identified the top 10 priority issues for the Council as: greater Inclusion of all; fighting for human rights issues; greater focus on Jesus Christ; care of neighbour; ending mandatory celibacy and allowing priests to marry; a greater role for women; a new leadership and governance model; greater emphasis on prayer and sacraments; listening to each other more; and sharing the faith with others. The bishop was selected for the Discernment and Writing Groups, and 4 persons have been called to participate in the Council sessions: the bishop and vicar general, and 2 lay women (Ms Felicity Knobel and Mrs Marie Shaddock).

Education: The Diocese has 64 Catholic schools: 53 primary and 11 secondary. They educate 18,204 students: 9,994 primary and 8,210 secondary. Of the Catholic children of primary school age, 61% attend Catholic primary schools, while 57.4% of those of secondary school age attend Catholic secondary schools.¹¹ Among the 66 lay school principals, 28 are women (42.4%). The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV), whose members are the 4 diocesan bishops, is responsible for Catholic schools in Victoria, receives bulk grants from the Australian and state governments, and distributes the monies to the systemic primary and secondary schools in each diocese. Total income for all schools in Victoria in 2019 was \$2.7 billion, with \$2.6 billion in government grants.¹² The distribution to Ballarat schools and Catholic Education Office totalled \$266.4 million. Following a Royal Commission recommendation, a new governing body, Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education Limited (DOBCEL), has been established and is the governor and proprietor of all the diocese's systemic schools from 1 January 2021. It provides a new school governance model, enables priests to continue pastoral ministry in parish schools, and is the employer of all school staff.¹³ The diocese has a Development Fund, with assets of \$181 million, and lends primarily for school building projects.¹⁴ The Australian Catholic University has its Aquinas Campus in Ballarat City providing degree courses in health, education and theology.¹⁵

¹⁰ <https://vlcff.udayton.edu/>

¹¹ [Ballarat_2016-Diocesan-Profile.pdf \(catholic.org.au\)](#) Cf. Table 5

¹² [CECV Annual Report 2019](#)

¹³ https://mcusercontent.com/904e76c839232ddc552d4311d/files/f29f08ce-9a57-4bb3-8f1a-52337e7076c3/dec10School_Transfer_Update_DOBCEL.pdf

¹⁴ [2019-annual-report-1.pdf \(catholic.org.au\)](#)

¹⁵ [Australian Catholic University \(ACU\)](#)

Health and Welfare Services: Centacare, Catholic Diocese of Ballarat (which in 2021 has expanded to become CatholicCare Victoria) is the diocese's main social welfare organisation with offices in 7 regional centres. It provides services for employment, housing, disability, counselling and family, mental health, victims' assistance, homelessness support, and community and advocacy support. In 2019 it had income of \$22.5 million including government grants of \$15.9 million.¹⁶ In 2011 the bishops of the Melbourne, Ballarat, Sale, Sandhurst and Hobart dioceses established a joint entity, CatholicCare Victoria Tasmania (CCVT), to coordinate and promote quality program delivery of their CatholicCare and Centacare agencies, capitalise on their professional expertise, and monitor programs for continuous improvement. CCVT applies for government and other funding support. From January 1, 2021, for the delivery of social services throughout Victoria, the four Victorian dioceses have combined their agencies to form CatholicCare Victoria. The St John of God Sisters operate hospitals in Ballarat and Warrnambool, and since Catholics aged 65 yrs and over in the diocese now constitute 18.8% of all Catholics in 2016 (11.4% in 1996), the Sisters of Mercy and Sisters of Nazareth currently provide 5 aged care accommodation facilities as well as home and community care services. St Vincent de Paul Society also provides services in the diocese.

Finances: The diocese is registered with the Charities Commission (ACNC) as the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat Foundation, Catholic Diocese of Ballarat, and Roman Catholic Trusts Corp for the Diocese of Ballarat. While as a 'Basic Religious Charity' the diocese is not required to answer the financial questions in the Annual Information Statement, submit annual financial reports, or comply with any Governance Standards, the Diocese Foundation published an Income Statement for 2019 showing income of \$1.3 million, expenditure of \$31,000 and net assets of \$7.3 million.¹⁷ Three other registered diocesan entities - Centacare, the Clergy Support Fund, and Catholic Education Ltd – also published financial reports on the ACNC website.

Communications: The diocese has a website which was re-launched in 2015 and updated in 2020. It also publishes a free print and online quarterly magazine titled *Our Diocesan Community* containing diocesan news,¹⁸ and an online e-news service.¹⁹ It does not publish a diocesan annual report.

¹⁶ [https://acncpubfilesprodstorage.blob.core.windows.net/public/acdc070a-39af-e811-a963-000d3ad244fd-b9f9a14c-d299-4ae2-beaf-7cdc8fafc4d2-Financial%20Report-d96b1f88-ab44-ea11-a812-000d3ad1cf4f-Centacare Financial Report 2019 - Final SIGNED with Independent Audit Report \(reduced DPI\).pdf](https://acncpubfilesprodstorage.blob.core.windows.net/public/acdc070a-39af-e811-a963-000d3ad244fd-b9f9a14c-d299-4ae2-beaf-7cdc8fafc4d2-Financial%20Report-d96b1f88-ab44-ea11-a812-000d3ad1cf4f-Centacare%20Financial%20Report%202019-Final%20SIGNED%20with%20Independent%20Audit%20Report%20(reduced%20DPI).pdf)

¹⁷ [https://acncpubfilesprodstorage.blob.core.windows.net/public/56829f76-d760-e911-a983-000d3ad05e15-b6f4b462-cd11-443b-ab7b-392950ae455a-Financial%20Report-fcd4660b-93d7-ea11-a813-000d3ad1cc03-Foundation 2019 Accounts \(signed\).pdf](https://acncpubfilesprodstorage.blob.core.windows.net/public/56829f76-d760-e911-a983-000d3ad05e15-b6f4b462-cd11-443b-ab7b-392950ae455a-Financial%20Report-fcd4660b-93d7-ea11-a813-000d3ad1cc03-Foundation%202019%20Accounts%20(signed).pdf)

¹⁸ https://www.ballarat.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/027818_aede.pdf

¹⁹ The former journal *Light* was replaced in 1988. The online e-news is here: <https://mailchi.mp/4a6707db359e/edition-93-october-8-5096844>

Safeguarding and Child Sexual Abuse: The Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry (2012-13) found that the response of the 4 Victorian dioceses - Melbourne, Ballarat, Sandhurst and Sale - to criminal child abuse was to conceal rather than expose it.²⁰ The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2012-17) identified Ballarat Diocese as a significant setting of abuse and in 2015-16 conducted a special inquiry (Case Study 28) into Catholic Church authorities in the diocese. Its report identified several notorious priest and Christian Brother abusers, found “a catastrophic failure in the leadership of the Diocese and ultimately in the structure and culture of the Church”, and identified a range of systemic issues.²¹ The Commission’s June 2017 statistical report records the diocese as having the 7th highest percentage of alleged priest abusers (8.7%), taking into account the duration of ministry.²² Its June 2017 Analysis of Claims report notes 139 claims made against the Diocese – including 58 at 2 schools - with 98 payments made for a total of \$4.96 million (average \$51,000 per payment).²³ In a significant 2019 claim and settlement case the Bishop of Ballarat accepted liability for the abuse perpetrated by a Ballarat diocesan priest and opened up an avenue for other abuse victims to make damages claims against any Victorian diocese.²⁴ In 2013 the diocese established a Diocesan Professional Standards Consultative Panel to advise the bishop on safeguarding and professional standards matters and in 2014 appointed a Coordinator for Professional Standards. The diocese was audited by Catholic Professional Standards Ltd (CPSL) in 2019 and found to have implemented 73 percent of the NCSS indicators relevant to their operations under the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (NCSS). It was given 16 recommendations to strengthen its safeguarding practices.²⁵ The diocese follows the Towards Healing protocol, which will continue until end-2021. It will be replaced by a new National Protocol starting February 2021.²⁶ The diocese, with 260 other diocesan entities, is a registered participant in the National Redress Scheme as part of Australian Catholic Redress Limited.²⁷

Table 1: Statistical data for Ballarat Diocese: 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016, and 2019

	2001	2006	2011	2016	2019	Change 2001 to 2019
Total Population (at Census)	377,848	396,282	407,400	422,854		+11.9%*
Catholic Population (at Census) (% of Total)	96,576 (25.5%)	98,954 (25.0%)	102,018 (25.0%)	95,696 (22.6%)		No change* -2.9%
Number of Parishes	52	52	51	51	41	-21.2%
Diocesan priests	64	60	56	48	46	-28.1%
Religious priests	10	9	6	9	12	+20.0%
Total Priests	74	69	62	57	58	-21.6%
Priests in active parish ministry			39		30	-23.1%**
- Australian-born			37		23	-37.8%**
- Overseas-born			2		7	+250%**
Parishes with full-time resident priest			18		11	--38.9%**
Catholics per priest in parish ministry			2,616		3,190 (est.)	
Permanent deacons	0	0	0	0	0	No change
Religious Sisters	179	148	103	75	65	-63.7%
Religious Brothers	15	20	14	3	4	-73.3%
Diocesan Seminarians	3	2	1	0	3	No change
Diocesan Pastoral Council in operation		Yes	No	Yes	Yes	
Last Diocesan Synod (Diocesan Assembly)		1944 (2004)	1944 (2004)	1944 (2004)	1944 (2004)	
Diocesan Pastoral Plan in place				Yes	Yes	
Catholic schools	70	63	64	63	64	-8.6%

²⁰ Finding 7.4:

https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/fcdc/inquiries/57th/Child_Abuse_Inquiry/Report/Inquiry_into_Handling_of_Abuse_Volume_1_FINAL_web.pdf

²¹ “There is no doubt from the many documents which are in evidence that, at various times, the Bishop of Ballarat, knew or strongly suspected that these priests had sexually abused children in the diocese. His concern was overwhelmingly about protecting the reputation of the Church and avoiding scandal. There was little evidence that he was concerned to protect children from these priests.”

[un-redacted report of case study 28 - catholic church authorities in ballarat.pdf](#) (cf. p.16 and p. 440)

²² Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Proportion of Priests and non-ordained religious subject to a claim of child sexual abuse, 1950-2020*, June 2017 (revised version) :

<https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/CARC.0050.025.0283.pdf>

²³ Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Analysis of Claims of Child Sexual Abuse Made with Respect to Catholic Church Institutions*, June 2017. <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/CARC.0050.025.0001.pdf>

²⁴ <https://www.judycourtinlegal.com/the-latest-in-the-law>

²⁵ Audit Report available at [Catholic Professional Standards | Church Reports \(cpsltd.org.au\)](https://www.catholicprofessionalstandards.org.au)

²⁶ [National Response Protocol - Catholic Church in Australia](#)

²⁷ https://www.nationalredress.gov.au/institutions/search?search_api_views_fulltext=catholic+diocese+of+ballarat

Students in Catholic schools	15,453	15,754	17,089	18,126	18,204	+17.8%
Hospitals	2	2	2	2	2	No change
Nursing & Convalescence Homes	1	1	1	4	4	+300%
Regular Mass attenders (% of all Catholics)		14,499 (14.6%)	11,896 (11.7%)	10,024 (10.5%)		-4,475*** -30.9%***

Sources: *Official Catholic Directory* for 2002/03, 2007/08, 2012/13, 2016/17, 2020/21. Data is accurate at 31 December of the previous year, namely, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016, and 2019; ACBC, PRO, *Mass Attendance in Australia*, September 2008; ACBC, PRO, *Mass Attendance in Australia: A Critical Moment*, December 2013; ACBC, NCPR. 2016 *National Count of Attendance – National Summary*, Pastoral Research Online, Edition 44, April 2019. Notes: * Change from 2001-2016; ** 2011 to 2019; *** Change from 2006 to 2016

Sources:

Ballarat diocesan website: <http://www.ballarat.catholic.org.au>

The Official Directory of the Catholic Church in Australia, 2020-2021 (data is accurate at 31 December 2019)

ACBC, NCPR, *Diocesan Social Profile, Based on 2016 Australian Census: Diocese of Ballarat*, Canberra, September 2019.

https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Ballarat_2016-Diocesan-Profile.pdf

ACBC, NCPR, *Final Report for Phase I: Listening and Dialogue A Report to the Diocese of Ballarat*, Canberra, January 2020.

<https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Diocesan-Final-Report-Phase-1-Ballarat.pdf>

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Proportion of Priests and non-ordained religious subject to a claim of child sexual abuse, 1950-2020*, June 2017 (revised version) :

<https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/CARC.0050.025.0283.pdf>

Charities Commission: <https://www.acnc.gov.au/tools/topic-guides/basic-religious-charities>

2020 Annual Progress Report on Implementation of the Recommendations from the Final Report of the Royal

Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse: [FINAL Catholic Church Annual Report to NOCS.pdf - Google Drive](#)

Text and table prepared by Peter J Wilkinson (January 2021)

Note: The draft profile of the Diocese was forwarded to Bishop Bird with an invitation to correct any errors and to provide advice on any recent changes made or future plans being contemplated in relation to the recommendations in *The Light from the Southern Cross*.