

KNOW THE DIOCESES IN 2020

DIOCESE of BATHURST

The Diocese of Bathurst was established in 1865 with territory excised from the Archdiocese of Sydney. It lost part of its own territory in 1887 for the establishment of the Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes. It is one of 9 suffragan dioceses belonging to the ecclesiastical Province of Sydney with the Archdiocese of Sydney as the Metropolitan See. Its current geographical area is 103,600 square kilometres.¹

Demographics: At the 2016 Census 232,692 persons resided in the diocese, with 65,677 self-identified Catholics (28.2% of total). Since the 2001 Census (211,461 and 66,759 (31.6%)), the general population has increased by 10.0% while the Catholic population has decreased by 1.6%. Catholic numbers peaked at 67,844 in 2011. In 2016 the diocese had the 2nd highest proportion of Catholics in its general population and ranked 18th in Australia's Catholic population with the median age of Catholics at 38 years. Australia is the birthplace of 91.5% of all Catholics, including 5,212 indigenous Australians (7.9% of all Catholics), while the biggest groups born outside Australia are from the Philippines (1.0%), UK excluding Nth Ireland (0.8%), and India and New Zealand (0.5% each).

Bishop: The bishop is Michael McKenna, born in Australia in 1951, ordained a priest for the Diocese of Sale in 1983, and ordained a bishop in 2009. He was installed as the 8th bishop of Bathurst in 2009. He prepared his most recent *Quinquennial Report* for his June 2019 *ad limina* visit, but has not made it public.

Structure and Governance: The diocese has 17 parishes, one of 17 dioceses with less than 30 parishes. In January 2021 just 5 parishes had a full-time resident priest, while 12 shared a priest. The diocese has a Diocesan Finance Council, a College of Consultors, a Council of Priests, and a Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC). The DPC was established in 2017 with 48 lay and clerical members, including the bishop,² and has 6 workshops focussed on the themes of Word, Sacrament, Service, Family, Aboriginals, and Youth. Work to develop a pastoral plan has been ongoing since 2012. Twelve diocesan synods have been convened in the diocese, the last in 1911. More recently the bishop has convened a series of diocesan assemblies, the first in 2013 and then annually from 2016 to 2019. They have brought together all members of the DPC to consider the outcomes of the workshops. The diocese policy is that all parishes should have a parish pastoral council.

Priests and Deacons: At end-2019 the diocese had 33 priests, including the bishop: 26 diocesan and 7 religious. In January-2021 there were 18 priests active in parish ministry, including the bishop: 14 diocesan and 4 religious. Of these, 9 are Australian-born and 9 overseas-born (5 in India and 1 each in Philippines, Kenya, Uganda, and Vietnam). Other priests in the diocese work as a prison chaplain (1) or outside the diocese (1), live in retirement (13, including 1 in a parish),³ or are on leave (2). The diocese has 4 permanent deacons ordained in 2016 and 2017. Two Australian-born diocesan priests who were ordained prior to 1980 will likely retire in the near future and a greater reliance on priests from overseas can be expected. The diocese currently has 3 diocesan seminarians preparing for the priesthood. If only the priests actively ministering in parishes are counted, in 2019 there were an estimated 3,456 Catholics per priest. The diocese has an Episcopal vicar for clergy and a Vocations Ministry.

Lay ministers and officials: Eleven lay persons hold senior positions in the diocesan curia: 3 men, 7 women and 1 religious sister. Eight religious sisters also minister as pastoral associates or Sisters in Residence in parishes. Since the diocese's establishment, 12 religious congregations have ministered in it and their numbers peaked at around 450 in the mid-1960s. Since 2001, however, the number of religious sisters has decreased from 137 to 60 (- 56.2%), while religious brothers have decreased from 7 to 0.

Mass attendance and liturgy: In 2006 an average 8,131 Catholics attended Mass regularly (12.2%). In 2016 the average was 5,562 (8.5%) – down 31.6%. Each priest active in parish ministry currently ministers to an average 309 regular Mass attenders. Several parishes have 'Word and Faith' groups where people gather together to read and reflect on the readings for the following Sunday.

¹ This area is only a slightly larger than Iceland (103,000 sq. km).

² https://issuu.com/diobxobs/docs/dpc_members_2019

³ Two priests in retirement in 2019 have since died.

Seminary and Seminarians: The Seminary of the Good Shepherd in Sydney, established in 1996, offers a formation program for candidates for the diocesan priesthood to dioceses in NSW. It continues the tradition of the earlier seminary, St Patrick's College, at Manly. Academic studies are undertaken at the Catholic Institute of Sydney. Two Bathurst seminarians were ordained to the priesthood in 2019 and another 2 (both born in Vietnam) were recently admitted as Candidates for Ordination.

Pastoral ministries: The diocese has a Catechists Co-ordinating Team and a Faith Education Worker who train and organize parish volunteer Special Religious Education (SRE) teachers and assistants to provide religious instruction to students in state schools. A Youth Ministry focuses on bringing young people together in festivals, including the 2020 RISE Festival. In 2020 five persons were accredited as youth ministers by Catholic Schools Youth Ministry International (CSYMI) via the *Signum Fidei* program. In recent years (2018-19) the diocese has run a Ministry Formation Program offering individuals the opportunity to deepen their understanding of faith and their relationship with God. The diocese has the Shalom Diocesan House of Prayer at Carcoar.

Ecumenism and Inter-Faith: In 2012 the diocese signed a Covenant with the Anglican Diocese of Bathurst to work together. Bishop McKenna, who is a member of the Bishops Commission for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations and the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, recently co-signed - on the first anniversary of the Abu Dhabi *Document on Human Fraternity* - an Australian Christian-Muslim Interfaith Commitment Statement pledging to promote fraternity in Australia.

Plenary Council: A total of 1392 persons – 77 as individuals (62% women and 22% men) and 1315 in 41 groups – responded to the Plenary Council's Listening and Dialogue phase. They identified 11 priority issues for the Council: greater Inclusion of all; fighting for human rights issues; greater focus on Jesus Christ; greater trust, faith and hope in God; ending mandatory celibacy and allowing priests to marry; a greater role for women; ending clericalism; making the Mass more appealing to youth & children with translations using inclusive language; greater emphasis on prayer and sacraments; stronger parish communities; and sharing the faith with others. A priest and layman of the diocese were selected for the Discernment and Writing Groups, and 5 persons have been called to participate in the Council sessions: the bishop, vicar general and Episcopal vicar, and 2 lay persons (Ms Haley Farrugia and Mr Matthew Brown).

Education: Bathurst Diocese has 34 Catholic schools: 26 primary, 5 secondary and 3 combined. They educate 9,471 students: 5,606 primary and 3,865 secondary. Of all Catholic children of primary school age, 56.0% attend Catholic primary schools, while 46.7% of secondary school age attend Catholic secondary schools.⁴ The diocese has its own Catholic Education Council and Catholic Education Office, and an Episcopal vicar for education. In 2017 the Catholic Education Commission NSW (CECNSW) was replaced with Catholic Schools New South Wales Ltd (CSNSW) to coordinate and represent Catholic education in NSW and ACT at a state level. It is a company with the 11 Bishop Ordinaries of NSW as its members. While each Bishop has responsibility for the Catholic School Agency (CSA) in his diocese, collectively these agencies are recognised by governments as the NSW Catholic school system and as the representative body for NSW Catholic schools. CSNSW has 10 Board Directors and 5 committees. The Board is responsible for receiving and distributing government funding to diocesan Catholic schools for their day-to-day operations and capital works. It ensures that schools and agencies are government-compliant, provides policy advice and direction, reports to the Bishops, fosters resource collaboration and efficiency, and promotes and advocates for Catholic education in NSW. In 2020 the NSW Catholic school system received \$2.8 billion in lump sum grants from the State and federal governments which CSNSW allocated to the 11 dioceses according to a transparent and publicly available 'needs-based' model. The separate dioceses allocate the funds on their own "needs-based" model to individual schools. The 2018 Financial Report for The Catholic Education Diocese of Bathurst shows total revenue of \$147.2 million, including government grants of \$121.5 million.⁵ Of the 34 school principals in 2019, 18 were women (53%), including 1 religious sister. In 2018 the Bathurst Catholic Development Fund provided, \$16.3 million in loans to schools. There is no Catholic tertiary education institute operating in the diocese.

⁴ [Bathurst 2016-Diocesan-Profile.pdf \(catholic.org.au\)](#) Cf. Table 5

⁵ [https://acncpubfilesprodstorage.blob.core.windows.net/public/323a26dd-2daf-e811-a963-000d3ad24077-61d7751c-9bbf-4473-8571-06545208dc0f-Financial%20Report-ad11d534-5a58-ea11-a811-000d3ad1cc03-1_13855_Diocese_of_Bathurst_CE_2018_AFS_\(13855\).pdf](https://acncpubfilesprodstorage.blob.core.windows.net/public/323a26dd-2daf-e811-a963-000d3ad24077-61d7751c-9bbf-4473-8571-06545208dc0f-Financial%20Report-ad11d534-5a58-ea11-a811-000d3ad1cc03-1_13855_Diocese_of_Bathurst_CE_2018_AFS_(13855).pdf)

Health and Welfare Services: Centacare – Child, Adolescent and Family Counselling is the diocese’s main social welfare organisation providing services to children and families across the region from offices in Bathurst and Dubbo. It also has Aboriginal Community Support Centres in Bathurst, Coonabarabran, Gilgandra, Orange and Wellington. Its 2019 Financial Report shows it had income of \$5.7 million, with government grants of \$2.5 million.⁶ St Vincent de Paul and the Bathurst Region Natural Family Planning also offer services. Catholic Healthcare Ltd runs the Lourdes Hospital in Dubbo, as well as outreach services and 5 accommodation facilities for aged persons. This has been in response to a significant increase in the proportion of Catholics aged 65 yrs and over in the diocese in the past 20 years: from 10.3% in 1996 to 17.2% in 2016.

Finances: The diocese does not publish an annual financial report. It is registered with the Charities Commission (ACNC) as the Trustees of the Roman Catholic Church for the Diocese of Bathurst with 6 other entities: Centacare, Catholic Education Office, Clergy Remuneration & Retirement Fund, Catholic Development Fund, Shalom House of Prayer, and operator of a PBI. 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, but financial reports for 2 entities are published: Centacare (see above) and the Catholic Development Fund (CDF) showing total assets of \$153.5 million in 2020 and net assets of \$19.3 million.⁷

Communications: The diocese has a website and publishes the quarterly print and online magazine *Catholic Observer* containing diocesan, national and international news. The magazine is distributed via schools, parishes and subscriptions.⁸ An email service, *Diocesan Information Network*, communicates key issues, events and messages from the Bishop, and a daily email service, *Connect@home*, offers parishioners a range of resources for worship at home. The diocese does not publish an annual report.

Safeguarding and Child Sexual Abuse: The Royal Commission did not identify the diocese as such as a significant setting of abuse, but it did single out the Catholic boys’ boarding school, St Stanislaus College, located in the diocese, as a significant setting. Its June 2017 *Analysis of Claims* report notes 9 claims made against the diocese, with 8 payments made for a total of \$550,000 (average \$69,000 per payment).⁹ The Vincentian Fathers, who operate St Stanislaus, had a total of 29 claims made against them related to the college, and paid out an average \$132,000 per claim. The diocese has a published Professional Standards Office, a Safeguarding Officer, and a published Safeguarding Policy. The Policy, based on the key documents of the National Committee for Professional Standards, mandates the *Towards Healing* protocol, and conforms with all relevant NSW legislation. During 2021 the diocese will transition from *Towards Healing* to the new *National Response Protocol*.¹⁰ The diocese, with 97 other diocesan entities, is a registered participant in the National Redress Scheme as part of Australian Catholic Redress Limited.¹¹

⁶ [379dfdbf-38af-e811-a961-000d3ad24182-ef732e58-919e-4a94-b8e9-17f424a9f40a-Financial Report-c1bb88b3-dd5d-ea11-a811-000d3acae853-70549189541_CC Signed 2019 financial statements.pdf \(windows.net\)](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hpNO-El2wUdB8tiZRYnSbMs2CQZ7Mw9o/view)

⁷ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hpNO-El2wUdB8tiZRYnSbMs2CQZ7Mw9o/view>

⁸ <https://bathurst.catholic.org.au/?i=66&catholic-observer>

⁹ 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>

¹⁰ [file \(catholic.org.au\)](https://www.catholic.org.au)

¹¹ https://www.nationalredress.gov.au/institutions/search?search_api_views_fulltext=catholic+diocese+of+ballarat

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

	2001	2006	2011	2016	2019	Change 2001 to 2019
Total Population (at Census)	211,461	212,895	221,227	232,692		+10.0%*
Catholic Population (at Census) (% of Total)	66,759 (31.6%)	66,394 (31.2%)	67,844 (30.7%)	65,677 (28.2%)		-1082* -1.6%*
Number of Parishes	21	21	19	17	17	-19.0%
Diocesan priests	42	37	33	27	26	-38.1%
Religious priests	3	0	7	7	7	133.3%
Total Priests	45	37	40	34	33	-26.7%
Priests in active parish ministry			18		19	+5.6%**
- Australian-born			15		10	-33.3%**
- Overseas-born			3		9	+200%**
Parishes with full-time resident priest			8		4	-50%**
Catholics per priest in parish ministry			3,769		3,456 (est)	
Permanent deacons	0	0	0	4	4	+400%
Religious Sisters	137	91	96	67	60	-56.2%
Religious Brothers	6	1	1	1	0	
Diocesan Seminarians	0	0	1	8	8	+800%
Diocesan Pastoral Council in operation		No	No	Yes	Yes	
Last Diocesan Synod (Diocesan Assembly)	1911	1911	1911	1911 (2013)	1911 (2019)	
Diocesan Pastoral Plan in place			No	No	No	
Catholic schools	35	35	35	34	34	-2.9%
Students in Catholic schools	9,506	9,759	9,644	9,774	9,471	No change
Hospitals	2	0	1	1	1	-100%
Nursing & Convalescence Homes	8	2	6	5	5	-37.5%
Regular Mass attenders (% of all Catholics)	n/a	8,131 (12.2%)	7,094 (10.5%)	5,562 (8.5%)		-2,569*** (-31.6%)***

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:

Bathurst diocesan website: <http://www.bathurst.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 Bathurst*, Canberra, September 2019.

https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Bathurst_2016-Diocesan-Profile.pdf

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

<https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Diocesan-Final-Report-Phase-1-Bathurst.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](https://www.acnc.gov.au/tools/topic-guides/basic-religious-charities)

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

Note: The draft profile of the Diocese was forwarded to Bishop McKenna 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*. Bishop McKenna did not respond to the invitation, being on leave at the time.