

KNOW THE DIOCESES IN 2020

DIOCESE of BUNBURY

In 1954 an area of 184,000 square kilometres in the south-western section of the Archdiocese of Perth was excised to establish the new Diocese of Bunbury.¹ It is one of 3 suffragan dioceses – with Geraldton and Broome – of the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Perth and forming the ecclesiastical Province of Perth.

Demographics: At the 2016 Census 363,109 persons lived in the diocese, with 64,296 self-identified Catholics (17.7% of total). Since the 2001 Census (257,818 and 50,184 (19.5%)), the general population has increased by 40.8%, while the Catholic population has increased by 28.1%. Catholic numbers are now at their highest ever, though as a proportion of the total population there has been a decrease of 1.8%. In 2016 the diocese ranked 20th in Australia's Catholic population with the median age of Catholics at 42 years. Australia is the birthplace of 76.7% of all Catholics, including 1,267 indigenous Australians (2.0% of all Catholics), while the biggest groups born outside Australia are from the UK excluding Nth Ireland (4.9%), Philippines (4.0%), New Zealand (2.0%), Italy (1.8%), Ireland (1.6%), South Africa and Germany (0.7%), and Netherlands and India (0.6%).

Bishop: The bishop is Gerard Holohan, born in Australia in 1947, ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Perth in 1971, and ordained a bishop in 2001. He was installed as the 4th bishop of Bunbury in 2001. He prepared his most recent *Quinquennial Report* for his June 2019 *ad limina* visit, but he has not made it public.

Structure and Governance: The diocese has 28 parishes, with just 9 having a full-time resident priest. Twelve priests care for more than one parish. The diocese has a Financial Administrator, College of Consultors, and Council of Priests, but not a Diocesan Pastoral Council. Two diocesan synods have been held since the diocese was established, the first in 1961 and the most recent in 2019, which identified the priorities of the diocese as proclaiming the Gospel, especially to the 'disconnected', parish renewal, giving lay persons a greater role in parish and diocesan initiatives and decision-making, empowering parishioners for leadership in synodal parishes and diocese, and supporting priests in fulfilling their ministry. Following the synod, the bishop proposed a draft vision and mission statements, but the proposed new synodal structures have yet to be established.² Diocesan policy is to encourage parish pastoral councils.

Priests and Deacons: in 2019 the diocese had 42 priests, including the bishop: 27 diocesan and 15 religious. At end-2020 there were 27 priests active in parish ministry, including the bishop: 13 diocesan and 14 religious. Of these 3 were Australian-born and 24 overseas-born (15 in Philippines, 5 in India, 2 in Nigeria, and 1 each in Sri Lanka and Poland). Six other priests live in retirement (1 in another diocese), 1 works outside the diocese, and 1 is on leave. The diocese has 6 permanent deacons working in parish ministry, and 6 who have retired. There has been a significant turnover of priests in parish ministry in the last 10 years, mainly due to retirements. The presence of overseas-born priests has also increased substantially. A further 2 Australian-born priests (including the bishop) ordained prior to 1973 will retire over the next 5 years and leave the diocese almost totally reliant on overseas-born priests.³ The diocese currently has 1 diocesan seminarian preparing for priesthood. If only the priests actively ministering in parishes are counted, there are an estimated 2,381 Catholics per priest. The diocese has an office for Priestly Life and Ministry.

Lay ministers and officials: Eight lay persons hold senior positions in the diocesan curia (4 men and 4 women), but no lay persons minister as pastoral associates/assistants in the parishes. The number of religious sisters has decreased from 17 in 2001 to 16 in 2016 (-5.9%) while 2 religious brothers are present for the first time in decades. A Carmelite Monastery of enclosed religious sisters in the diocese was founded from Thailand in 1976.

Mass attendance and liturgy: In 2006 an average 4,805 Catholics attended Mass regularly (9.0%). In 2016 the average was 5,573 (8.7%) – a substantial increase in numbers (768), but a slight decrease (-0.3%) as a proportion of the Catholic population. Each priest active in parish ministry currently ministers to an average 206 regular Mass attenders.

¹ This area is only a slightly smaller than Syria (185,180 sq. km).

² Recommendations of the 2019 Synod: <https://bunburycatholic.org.au/what-are-the-fruits-of-our-2019-diocesan-synod/>

³ Under the diocesan plan, the retirement age for priests is set at 75 years.

Seminary and Seminarians: The Perth diocesan Seminary of the St Charles Borromeo serves all four WA dioceses for the formation of candidates for the diocesan priesthood. Bunbury had its most recent ordinations in 2015 (2 overseas-born), and 1 candidate was in formation in 2019.

Pastoral ministries: The diocese has a Pastoral Office providing educational and resource support to parishes, especially in adult education. Its programs include *Church Alive*, training people for parish ministries, as well as training liturgical ministers, parish council members, deacons, schools staff, and retired persons. The diocese has active programs for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) introducing adults and older children to the Catholic faith and way of life, and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Children (RCIC) primarily for children not baptised as infants who have attained the use of reason and are of catechetical age (around 7 years). It also has an office for Youth Ministry, a Youth Ministry Coordinator, and a Youth Camp at Busselton.

Plenary Council: A total of 371 persons – 44 as individuals (48% women and 46% men) and 327 in 9 groups – responded to the Plenary Council's Listening and Dialogue phase. They identified the top 11 priority issues for the Council as: greater Inclusion of all; care of neighbour; ending clericalism; greater role for the laity; better preparation and support for married couples; greater concern for victims/survivors of sexual abuse; a focus on ecumenism; a greater role for women; ordination of women; different translations of Mass with inclusive language; and care for the environment. Noone from the diocese was selected for the Discernment and Writing Groups, but 4 persons have been called to participate in the Council sessions: the bishop and vicar general, and 2 lay women (Dr Deborah Robertson and Mrs Maria Parkinson).

Education: In 2019, following an extensive review, the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA) recommended transitioning the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (CEOWA) to a company structure, Catholic Education Western Australia Ltd (CEWA), as the coordinating body for Catholic education in the WA, effective from 1 January 2020. CEWA's mandate is to foster the continuous development and improvement of Catholic schools in WA, and to act on behalf of the Catholic community for the benefit of all Catholic school-aged children, be they in Catholic schools or not. CEWA has a regional office in Bunbury. CECWA governs the CEWA system and has responsibility for providing leadership, directing the development of learning communities according to the Bishops' Mandate, developing, promulgating and evaluating school policy and programs, and providing responsible governance.⁴ At the end of 2019 Bunbury diocese had 26 Catholic schools: 21 primary, 1 secondary, and 4 combined. They were educating 9,136 students: 5,142 primary and 3,994 secondary. Of all Catholic children of primary school age, 52.1% attended Catholic primary schools, while 47.5% of secondary school age attended Catholic secondary schools.⁵ Of the 35 lay school principals in 2019, just 10 were women (28.6%). Total income for all Catholic systemic schools in WA in 2019 was \$1.16 billion, with \$889.6 in recurrent and capital funding coming from government grants.⁶ The amalgamated Bunbury, Melbourne and Sale diocesan Development Fund, with total assets of \$1.69 billion in 2019, provided 12 loans of \$4.2 million to Bunbury Diocese in 2019, most for education projects.⁷ There is no tertiary education institution in the diocese.

Health and Welfare Services: The CatholicCare Foundation is the welfare arm of the diocese, providing financial assistance to Catholic agencies such as Centrecare, Pregnancy Assistance, Stella Maris Mission to Seafarers, St Vincent de Paul Society and the SJOG South West Community Alcohol and Drug Service. Funds are raised in bi-annual appeals. Bunbury Counselling and Family Support Service, a part of Centrecare, provides counselling, support and case management to individuals and parents whose children are identified as 'at risk' and who require individual support to develop or increase their parenting skills. St John of God Health Care Inc. operates 2 private hospitals at Bunbury and Busselton and 4 other agencies operate 4 accommodation facilities for aged persons. In 1996 10.5% of all Catholics in the diocese were 65 yrs and over; in 2016 the proportion was 11.8%.

Finances: The diocese is registered with the Charities Commission (ACNC) as The Roman Catholic Bishop of Bunbury Diocese, together with The Priests Welfare Foundation of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Bunbury. As

⁴ CEWA Ltd incorporates the operations of 147 Diocesan schools, CEOWA, Catholic Schools (WA) Long Service Leave Fund, Catholic Schools (WA) Co-responsibility Building Fund, Teacher Housing and the Catholic Education Commission of WA Trustees Inc (Block Grant Authority).

⁵ [Bunbury 2016-Diocesan-Profile.pdf \(catholic.org.au\)](https://www.catholic.org.au/bunbury-2016-diocesan-profile.pdf) Cf. Table 5

⁶ [AnnualReport2019_SpreadsWeb_LR.pdf \(cewa.edu.au\)](https://www.cewa.edu.au/AnnualReport2019_SpreadsWeb_LR.pdf)

⁷ <https://catholicdevelopmentfund.org.au/wp-content/uploads/CDF-Annual-Report-2019-FINAL.pdf>

'Basic Religious Charities' they are not required to answer the financial questions in the Annual Information Statement, submit annual financial reports, or comply with any Governance Standards. However, the Priests Foundation did report income of \$27,087 in 2019 and net assets of \$108,301. In 2016 the Bunbury diocesan Development Fund amalgamated with the equivalent Development Funds of Melbourne and Sale dioceses. Their combined assets in 2019 totalled \$1.98 billion (net assets \$204.5 million). The combined Fund lends low-cost money to Catholic parishes, aged care facilities, hospitals and social service organisations, but most is allocated for school building and development projects.⁸

Communications: The diocese has a website, but does not publish a print or online newspaper. It does not publish a diocesan annual report.

Safeguarding and Child Sexual Abuse: The Royal Commission identified the diocese as a significant setting of abuse. Its June 2017 *Analysis of Claims* records the diocese as having the 13th highest percentage of alleged priest abusers (7.8%), taking into account the duration of ministry.⁹ Its June 2017 *Analysis of Claims* report notes 29 claims made against the Diocese with 15 payments made for a total of \$400,000 (average \$25,000 per payment).¹⁰ The diocese has a Safeguarding Office and Coordinator working to establish safeguarding policies and protocols informed by the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards across all its parishes. It published a *Safeguarding Handbook* in 2018. All WA dioceses collaborated to produce CEWA's *Strategic Directions 2019-2021, Commitment Statement on Child Safety, and Child Safe Framework*. During 2021 the diocese will transition from the *Towards Healing* protocol to the new *National Response Protocol*.¹¹ The diocese, with 81 other diocesan entities, is a registered participant in the National Redress Scheme as part of Australian Catholic Redress Limited.¹²

⁸ <https://catholicdevelopmentfund.org.au/wp-content/uploads/AnnualReport2016FINALCDFWEBUpdated09012017.pdf>

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, pp. 16, 31 :

<https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/CARC.0050.025.0001.pdf>

¹⁰ 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>

¹¹ [file \(catholic.org.au\)](file://catholic.org.au)

¹² https://www.nationalredress.gov.au/institutions/search?search_api_views_fulltext=catholic+diocese+of+ballarat

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

	2001	2006	2011	2016	2019	Change 2001 to 2019
Total Population (at Census)	257,818	287,057	327,618	363,109		+40.8%*
Catholic Population (at Census) (% of Total)	50,184 (19.5%)	53,622 (18.7%)	63,107 (19.3%)	64,296 (17.7%)		+28.1%* (-1.8%)*
Number of Parishes	26	28	27	28	28	+7.7%
Diocesan priests	20	28	30	29	27	+35%
Religious priests	5	7	14	12	15	+200%
Total Priests	25	35	44	41	42	+68%
Priests in active parish ministry			31 (70.5%)		27 (64.3%)	-12.9%
- Australian-born			6 (19.4%)		3 (11.1%)	-50%
- Overseas-born			25 (80.6%)		24 (88.9%)	-4%
Parishes with full-time resident priest			11		9	-18.2%
Catholics per priest in parish ministry			2,035		2,381 (est)	
Permanent deacons	8	13	12	14	12	+62.5%
Religious Sisters	17	23	18	19	16	-5.9%
Religious Brothers	0	0	0	0	2	+200%
Diocesan Seminarians	2	1	0	0	1	-50%
Diocesan Pastoral Council in operation		Yes	No	No	No	
Last Diocesan Synod (Diocesan Assembly)	1961	1961	1961	1961	2019	
Diocesan Pastoral Plan in place					No	
Catholic schools	25	27	27	21	26	+4.0%
Students in Catholic schools	7,012	7,593	8,573	6,577	9,136	+30.3%
Hospitals	1	1	2	2	2	+100%
Aged, Nursing & Convalescence Homes	2	2	2	1	4	+100%
Regular Mass attenders (% of all Catholics)	n/a	4,805 (9.0%)	5,246 (8.3%)	5,573 (8.7%)		+768 (-0.3%)

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:

Bunbury diocesan website: <http://www.bunburycatholic.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 Bunbury*, Canberra, September 2019.

https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Bunbury_2016-Diocesan-Profile.pdf

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

<https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Diocesan-Final-Report-Phase-1-Bunbury.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 (February 2021)

Note: The draft profile of the Diocese was forwarded to Bishop Holohan 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 Holohan did not respond to the invitation.