

KNOW THE DIOCESES IN 2020

DIOCESE of CAIRNS

Established in 1941, the Diocese of Cairns was excised from the Diocese of Brisbane. It was initially established as the Vicariate Apostolic of North Queensland for the Aborigines (1877-1887) to evangelize the originally isolated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. When gold was discovered, they were displaced by European immigrants and the Vicariate was never formally erected. From 1887-1941 the territory became the Vicariate Apostolic of Cooktown (1887-1941) and in 1906 the cathedral was moved from Cooktown to Cairns. Its geographical area is 377,000 square kilometres and takes in the islands in the Torres Strait and the Gulf of Carpentaria.¹ The diocese is part of the ecclesiastical Province of Brisbane and a suffragan diocese of the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Brisbane.

Demographics: At the 2016 Census 277,414 persons lived in the diocese, with 60,977 self-identified Catholics (22% of total). Since the 2001 Census (228,335 and 59,887 (26.2%)) the general population is up 21% and the Catholic population up 2%.² In 2016 it ranked 21st in Catholic population with the median age of Catholics at 40 years. Australia is the birthplace of 81% of Catholics, including 4,732 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (8% of all Catholics), while the largest groups born outside Australia are from the Philippines (3.2%), Italy (2.4%), UK (1.8%), Pacific Islands (1.8%) and New Zealand (1.6%).

Bishop: The bishop is James Foley PhD, born in Australia in 1948, ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Brisbane in 1973, and ordained a bishop in 1992. He is the 7th bishop of the diocese/vicariate. His most recent *Quinquennial Report* was prepared for his June 2019 *ad limina* visit. It has not been made public. In late 2019, aged 71, he tendered his resignation to Pope Francis for health reasons, but is to receive a response.

Structure and Governance: The diocese has 23 parishes and parish clusters, organized into 3 deaneries. It is one of 17 dioceses with less than 30 parishes. Fifteen parishes have a full-time resident priest (65%), while 8 are served by visiting priests.³ Lay pastoral workers reside in 2 parishes. There is a diocesan financial council, a council of priests, and diocesan consultors, but no diocesan pastoral council. There have been 3 diocesan synods convened since 1949, with the most recent, in annual sessions, from 2008-15. This assembly of clergy and nominated parish delegates produced a 3-year (2016-2019) Pastoral Plan, *Encountering Christ, Sharing our Joy*, which expired in 2019 and has not been updated or renewed.

Priests and Deacons: The diocese has 27 priests, including the bishop⁴: 21 diocesan and 6 religious. Only 16 priests are currently active in parish ministry: 8 diocesan and 8 religious. Of these, 9 are Australian-born and 7 overseas-born (5 in India⁵ and 2 in Poland). Five other priests live in retirement, 3 live outside the diocese, and 2 are on leave. The diocese has 7 permanent deacons (including one indigenous), with 5 ministering in parishes and 1 in school leadership. Six of the Australian-born priests (including the bishop) were ordained in 1980 or prior, and there are no seminarians preparing for priesthood.⁶ Within 5 years the diocese will be overwhelmingly reliant on overseas-born priests. Diocesan data from the July 2019 governance survey indicated there were 1793 Catholics per priest.⁷ This is incorrect, as it is based on clergy numbers of 34, of whom 7 were deacons. If only the 16 priests actively ministering in parishes are counted, there are an estimated 3,811 Catholics per priest.

Lay ministers and officials: The diocese has 10 stipended lay male and female pastoral care workers ministering in parishes, aged care and hospitals. Four 4 lay women and 1 lay man also hold senior positions in

¹ This is a similar geographic area to Japan (377,975 sq. km.)

² Bishop Foley points out (email to author 21 October 2020) that the Census figures for the general and Catholic population are very distorted by the tourist and the transient mining populations.

³ Advice received from Bishop Foley (21 October 2020) states that parish appointments made prior to COVID-19 were not followed through for pastoral reasons, and that with his retirement pending, new appointments may be held over until his successor is installed.

⁴ This is the *Official Directory* figure. *The Light from the Southern Cross* gives figure of 34. There were 25 priests in 2010.

⁵ The Indian priests belong to the Congregation of Sons of the Immaculate Conception (CFIC) and are on contractual arrangements with temporary visas.

⁶ Bishop Foley notes that, as the diocese was for a long period served exclusively by religious priests, vocations to the diocesan priesthood have been exceedingly few (email to author, 21 October 2020).

⁷ IAG, GPRT, *The Light from the Southern Cross: Promoting Co-Responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia*, 15 August 2020

the diocesan curia. Six religious brothers and 19 religious sisters reside in the diocese, but none are active in parish ministry. Two Sisters of the PNG Handmaids of Our Lord reside in Cairns.

Mass attendance: In 2006 an average 5,005 Catholics attended Mass regularly (8.8%). In 2016 the average was 4,266 (7.0%) – down 14.8%.⁸

Seminary and Seminarians: The Regional Seminary of the Holy Spirit in Brisbane serves the diocese, but currently the diocese has no seminarians.⁹

Pastoral ministries: The diocese has a dedicated youth ministry, and an active branch of the Cursillo Movement. Chaplains are provided to the Filipino, Syro-Malabar (Indian) and PNG communities. An *Indigenous Connections* team, including the indigenous permanent deacon, provides special services to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Catholics. The Knights of the Southern Cross, the Catenians, and St Vincent de Paul Society are active, and the Charismatic Renewal has a long tradition across the diocese.

Plenary Council: Local preparations for the Plenary Council began in 2018 with a shift from the annual (from 2008) diocesan synod/assembly sessions to a series of deanery gatherings open to all voices and adopting a process of reflection, listening and discernment. Initially focussed on ‘synodality’ these gathering aimed at making a meaningful contribution to the national conversation. One person from Cairns was selected for the Discernment and Writing Groups (Sharon O’Keefe), and 6 persons have been called to participate in the Council sessions: 4 clerics and 2 lay women (Anna Montgomery and Tanya Gleeson Rodney). A total of 1,787 persons from the diocese – 120 as individuals (58% women and 25% men) and 1,667 in groups – responded to the Plenary Council’s Listening and Dialogue phase and identified the top 10 priority issues for the Council as: greater Inclusion of all; fighting for human rights issues; greater focus on Jesus Christ; greater trust, faith and hope in God; ordination of women; ending celibacy/allowing priests to marry; greater role for women; new leadership and governance model; outreach to youth; and more transparency and accountability regarding clergy sexual abuse.

Education: The diocese has 30 Catholic schools: 21 primary, 7 secondary and 2 combined. They educate 11,115 students: 6,719 primary and 4396 secondary. A total of 943 teaching staff are employed (2019), with 19 of the 29 principals being lay women. A total of 1082 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attend the schools and occupy many places in the 3 boarding schools. The annual financial reports of the diocesan Catholic Education Services and Catholic Early Learning and Care are published on the Charities Commission (ACNC) website and show capital and recurrent grant revenue of \$156.7 for primary and secondary schools in 2018. Government grants of \$169K were also received for Early Learning and Care.

Welfare Services: The diocese provides services for the aged, sick, migrants, and family planning. Since 2014 Cairns has received the highest number of permanent migrant and humanitarian arrivals in Regional Queensland and Centacare FNQ, as a major support provider to refugees and migrants settling in the region, helping them access education, housing and community support, has received substantial Federal and State Government grants. CentraCare employs 89 people.

Finances: The diocese is registered with the Charities Commission (ACNC) as The Roman Catholic Trust Corporation for the Diocese of Cairns. As a ‘Basic Religious Charity’ it is not required to answer the financial questions in the Annual Information Statement, submit annual financial reports, or comply with any Governance Standards. It is also registered as Catholic Education Services Cairns and Catholic Early Learning and Care and provides financial reports for both entities. The diocese does not publish an annual financial report for its own activities.

Communications: The diocese has a website and publishes a quarterly print and online version of the *Cairns Diocesan News*. No pastoral letters of the bishop are published on the diocesan website. However, Bishop Foley was one of 5 Queensland bishops who called for action on climate change and protection of the Great Barrier Reef in a 2004 joint Pastoral Letter.

⁸ In 1949, Bishop Thomas Cahill (from Victoria), was “immediately taken aback by the low Mass attendance compared to his Victorian experiences”. The customs of a large Southern European Catholic population impacted in the 20th century, and recent arrivals from Southern India, the Philippines and Africa are now influencing attendance (Bishop Foley, 21 October 2020).

⁹ The diocese has provided several priests for formation and teaching in the regional seminary (Bishop Foley, 21 October 2020).

Safeguarding and Child Sexual Abuse: The Royal Commission’s statistical report did not include the diocese as a significant setting of abuse. However, in its June 2017 *Analysis of Claims* report, it records that 9 claims (mostly in school settings) were made against diocese and 6 payments totalling \$1,198,271 made (average \$199,712 per payment).¹⁰ The diocese, with 100 other diocesan entities, is a registered participant in the National Redress Scheme as part of Australian Catholic Redress Limited. The diocese has a Professional Standards Office employing 6 skilled people including a barrister. It does not have a diocesan safeguarding or professional standards council. The *Criminal Code (Child Sexual Offences Reform) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019*, passed by the Queensland Parliament in September 2020, legislates mandatory reporting for ministers of religion, including where knowledge or belief of child sexual abuse was gained in a religious confession.

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

	2001	2006	2011	2016	2019	% Change 2001 to 2019
Total Population (at Census)	228,335	235,607	259,344	277,414	277,414	+21.4%
Catholic Population (at Census) (%)	59,887 (26.2%)	57,157 (24.3%)	62,247 (24%)	60,977 (22%)	60,977 (22%)	+1.8%
Number of Parishes	22	24	23	23	23	+4.5%
Diocesan priests	34	28	24	17	21	-38.2%
Religious priests	2	1	7	10	6	+200.0%
Total Priests	36	29	31	27	27	-25.0%
Priests in active parish ministry			21		17	-19.0%*
- Australian-born			18		10	-44.4%*
- Overseas-born			3 (14%)		7 (41%)	+133.3%*
Parishes with full-time resident priest			14 (61%)		15 (65%)	+7.12.9%*
Catholics per priest in parish ministry			2964		3586	
Permanent deacons	0	1	3	7	7	+700%
Religious Sisters	47	36	32	25	19	-59.6%
Religious Brothers	9	5	10	6	6	-33.3%
Diocesan Seminarians	1	0	1	0	0	-100%
Diocesan Pastoral Council in operation	No	No	No	No	No	
Last Diocesan Synod (Diocesan Assembly)	1967	1967	2008-2015	2008-2015	2008-2015	
Diocesan Pastoral Plan in place				2016-2019	2016-2019	
Catholic schools	24	26	26	29	29	+20.8%
Students in Catholic schools	7,816	9028	9,914	10,957	11,115	+42.2%
Hospitals	1	0	0	0	0	-100%
Nursing & Convalescence Homes	5	3	0	0	0	-500%
Regular weekly Mass attenders (% of all Catholics)		5,005 (8.8%)	4,196 (6.7%)	4,266 (7.0%)		-14.8%**

Source: *Official Catholic Directory* for 2002/03, 2007/08, 2012/13, 2016/17, 2020/21. Data is accurate at 31 December of the previous year for 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016, but not for 2019 (Bishop’s correspondence of 21 October 2020); 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 2011 to 2019; ** Change from 2006 to 2016

Sources:

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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, p. 188 :

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

IAG and GRPT, *The Light from the Southern Cross: Promoting Co-Responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia*, Canberra, 2020

Text and table prepared by Peter J Wilkinson (October 2020)

Note: The draft profile of the diocese was forwarded to Bishop Foley with an invitation to correct any errors and to advise of any recent changes made or future plans being contemplated in relation to the recommendations in *The Light from the Southern Cross*. He responded with several corrections and background observations which have been incorporated.