

KNOW THE DIOCESES IN 2020

DIOCESE of DARWIN

In 1845 the Holy See excised a northern part of the territory of the Archdiocese of Sydney to establish the Vicariate Apostolic of Essington (NT). In 1847 the Vicariate was elevated to become the Diocese of Victoria, and in 1888 its name was changed to the Diocese of Victoria-Palmerston. In 1938, it became the Diocese of Darwin. Its geographical area is 1,295,000 square kilometres¹ encompassing the whole of the Northern Territory including Bathurst and Melville (Tiwi) Islands. It is the 2nd largest diocese by land size in Australia. The diocese is part of an ecclesiastical Province of Adelaide and a suffragan diocese of the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Adelaide.

Demographics: At the 2016 Census 224,604 persons lived in the diocese, with 45,151 self-identified Catholics (20.1% of total). Since the 2001 Census (203,063 and 45,196 (22.3%) the general population has increased by 10.5%, while the Catholic population has remained static. In 2016 the diocese ranked 23rd in Catholic population with the median age of Catholics at 34 years. Australia is the birthplace of 71.7% of all Catholics, including 11,286 indigenous Australians (25% of all Catholics)², while the biggest groups born outside Australia are from the Philippines (10.1%), New Zealand and Oceania (together 2.0%), India and Ireland (each 1.9%), UK (1.8%), other SE Asia (1.5%), and Italy (0.8%).

Bishop: The bishop is Charles Gauci, born in Malta in 1952, ordained a priest for the Adelaide Archdiocese in 1977, and ordained a bishop in 2018. He was installed as the 7th bishop of the diocese in 2018. His most recent *Quinquennial Report* was prepared for his June 2019 *ad limina* visit. It has not been made public.

Structure and Governance: The diocese has 16 parishes, the second lowest number (with Port Pirie and Geraldton) of all the territorial dioceses. Nine parishes have a full-time resident priest (56%), 5 parishes share a priest, and 2 have no assigned priest. The diocese has a diocesan financial council and council of priests, but no diocesan pastoral council. However, there is an Advisory Leadership Team (Advisory Council) to the Bishop whose main focus is the implementation of the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (NCSS). In October 2019 Bishop Gauci said he would be forming a 'leadership group' of 3 lay women and 2 lay men who, alongside the bishop, will be the key Leadership Team in the diocese. That Leadership Team is now in place.³ A diocesan synod has never been held, nor has there been a diocesan assembly. A strategic pastoral plan for 2011-2015 was introduced, but it has not been reinstated. Diocesan policy is to encourage parish pastoral councils.

Priests and Deacons: The diocese has 25 resident priests, including the bishop⁴: 5 diocesan and 20 religious of 6 congregations. Only 20 are active in parish ministry: 4 diocesan and 16 religious. Of these 8 are Australian-born and 12 overseas-born (4 in India, 2 in Vietnam, and 1 each in Tanzania, Malta, Philippines, Italy and Vanuatu). The former bishop lives in the diocese in retirement and 4 priests work in other ministries. The diocese has 1 permanent deacon who ministers at the cathedral and directs Caritas. There has been a significant turnover of priests in parish ministry in the last 10 years. Only 5 priests who were in parish ministry in 2011 still remain. As at least 4 of the Australian-born priests were ordained prior to 1980, within 5 years the diocese will be overwhelmingly reliant on overseas-born priests. Currently, the diocese has 1 diocesan seminarian preparing for priesthood. If only the priests actively ministering in parishes are counted, there are an estimated 2,257 Catholics per priest.

Lay ministers and officials: Sixteen lay persons hold senior positions in the diocesan curia: 9 women and 7 men. There are no lay persons ministering as pastoral associates in the parishes. The presence of religious brothers and sisters has been in significant decline since 2001: brothers down 35% to 13, and sisters down 33%

¹ This is a similar geographic area to Peru (1,285,216 sq. km)

² Indigenous Catholics in 2011 numbered 12,028 and constituted 26.4% of the Catholic population.

³ <https://catholicleader.com.au/news/shepherd-charles-roams-the-top-end>

⁴ According to the data table in the *Official Directory* for 2020-2021 there are 22 priests (including 2 bishops) resident in the diocese. In the main diocesan entry, however, 25 priests are listed as resident in the diocese, as well as 1 permanent deacon (data was correct at 31 December 2019). An SVD priest in Fiji was assigned to the diocese in 2020 but could not enter due to COVID-19 restrictions on travel. Catholics For Renewal 10 December 2020, catholicforrenewal.org.au

to 39 (from 64 in 2001). Fourteen congregations of religious sisters and 2 congregations of religious brothers reside in the diocese.

Mass attendance: In 2006 an average 4,140 Catholics attended Mass regularly (10.2%). In 2016 the average was 5,994 (13.3%) – an increase of 44.8% - making Darwin one of just 4 dioceses (others are Perth, Bunbury and Sale) where there has been a numerical and percentage increase in Mass attendance. It has the highest percentage increase by far.

Seminary and Seminarians: There is currently only 1 diocesan seminarian (born in Philippines) preparing for the priesthood. He is receiving his formation at the Regional Seminary of Corpus Christi College in Melbourne.

Pastoral ministries: The diocese has special ministries among First Peoples communities in Alice Springs, Darwin and Central Australia. It also has chaplains working in jails, hospitals, nursing homes, Chares Darwin University, Port of Darwin, and with 7 ethnic communities. A Youth and Young Adult ministry is active with groups in several parishes.

Ecumenism and Inter-faith: The diocese has an office for Ecumenical Affairs.

Plenary Council: A total of 427 persons – 38 as individuals (52% women and 44% men) and 389 in 44 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 trust, faith and hope in God; better faith formation; ending compulsory celibacy & allowing priests to marry; greater role for women; greater involvement of laity; greater connection with & inclusion of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders; outreach to youth; and greater emphasis on prayer (especially the Rosary) & sacraments. Three persons were selected from Darwin for the Discernment and Writing Groups (Bishop, Fay Gurr, and Laura Avery), and 5 persons have been called to participate in the Council sessions: 3 clerics (bishop, vicar general and Episcopal vicar) and 2 lay persons (Mrs Clalia Mar and Mr Shaun De Zylva). In September 2020 the diocese was the first to commission its ‘delegates’ called to attend the Council, with Bishop Gauci stating that “we must work towards always renewing the vision of the Church; we cannot continue with ‘business as usual’. We need special emphasis on connecting with young people in effective ways and ensure that we have a special outreach and connection with our Aboriginal people. I’ve been hearing many people say, and rightly so, that lay people need to share in leadership of the Church, women especially who have not been given their rights.”⁵

Education: The diocese has 18 Catholic schools including a Flexible Learning Centre at Alice Springs, 5 Aboriginal Catholic Community Schools (ACCS) in remote communities, and 12 primary and secondary schools in the more populated areas. Together they educate 4,846 students: 2,463 primary and 2,383 secondary. One third (34.2%) of all enrolments (879 primary and 780 secondary) are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. A total of 411 teaching staff, almost all lay, are employed, and of the 18 principals, 10 are lay women. The Catholic Education Council of the NT is the key advisory body to the bishop in the diocese. Its *2019 Annual Report* states that the Catholic Education Office (CEO) continues to focus on the Key Areas of the *2018–2022 Strategic Plan*, which includes development of a systemic Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) as well as local school plans, providing a clear focus on the role and contribution of Aboriginal staff and their ongoing skills enhancement.⁶ The CEO participates in the Australian Government’s Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment Non-Government Schools Agreement (NTRAI) and all schools are supported in embedding Aboriginal and Islander perspectives across the curriculum. Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers (AIEW) are also supported in the development and delivery of community-specific Cultural Education Programs. The Growing Our Own (GOO) project, aimed at developing a quality Aboriginal teacher workforce in Catholic schools, offers a place-based, heavily resourced, and supported pre-service teacher education program for Aboriginal staff, in partnership with Charles Darwin University (CDU). It can lead to a Bachelor of Education (Primary Teaching) degree. The project is funded by Federal Government grants under the NTRAI. Commonwealth grants to Catholic schools for general recurrent expenses and targeted programs in 2019 totalled \$83.93 million. Grants from the NT Government for per capita expenses and other programs totalled

⁵ <https://mediablog.catholic.org.au/darwin-diocese-commissions-its-plenary-council-delegates/>

⁶ https://os-data-2.s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/ceont/bundle3/catholic_education_northern_territory_2019_annual_report_upload.pdf

\$20.78 million. There is no Catholic tertiary education facility in the diocese, but the Broken Bay Institute provided sessional face-to-face lectures in Darwin in 2019 to students seeking tertiary qualifications.

Health and Welfare Services: Homelessness in the NT is 12 times higher than the national average, and 90% of Indigenous people living in remote communities endure dire housing shortages. In response to this crisis, the bishop is handing back Church-owned land in the Daly River region to the local Aboriginal people to provide opportunities for work.⁷ CatholicCare NT, with grant income of \$20.6 million, provides the bulk of the diocese's social welfare services in 20 locations. They include family support, safe houses, employment assistance, accessing mental health care, alcohol and drugs programs, financial and domestic violence counselling, housing support, and assistance with transitioning to the NDIS. Other services are provided by Jesuit Social Services, Preeti Kunj Child Care Centre, Queen of Peace Refuge, and St Vincent de Paul Centres. The Natural Family Planning Council NT provides Billings Method advice at 2 centres and with Freecall.

Finances: The diocese is registered with the Charities Commission (ACNC) as The Catholic Church of the Diocese of Darwin, together with several other related entities. 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. However, the 2018/19 Financial Report for the diocese published on the ACNC website shows income of \$2.1 million, expenses of \$1.9 million, and net assets of \$3.3 million.⁸

Communications: The diocese has a website, and since 2009 has been publishing a quarterly print and online edition of its magazine *Unity*. It replaced the newsletters of 4 local Catholic organisations and contains predominantly local diocesan news and stories. Only 3 of the 16 parishes have a website.

Safeguarding and Child Sexual Abuse: In 1997 the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission conducted a National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families. In its submission to the inquiry, the Diocese of Darwin stated: "... we can only wonder how as a nation, and as a Church, we failed to see the violence of what we were doing."⁹ The Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart submitted: "... we recognize that our provision of services enabled these policies to be implemented."¹⁰ Bishop Gauci recently stated that "many of the Aboriginal people are amongst the most traumatised people I've ever met, and maybe even on this planet. They have gone through the whole process of colonisation where horrible and violent acts were done against them, were treated as less than human, were poisoned, shot at, dispossessed, dominated and controlled by others – within living memory for some of them. Over decades the Catholic Church was [part of] the forcible relocation of Indigenous families to missions, making intergenerational trauma a gaping wound. Positive Church action today, walking alongside the Aboriginal people, to come up with their own solutions, can be part of the remedy."¹¹ The recent Royal Commission's statistical report did not include the diocese as a significant setting of abuse and its June 2017 *Analysis of Claims* report states that the diocese was one of 30 Catholic Church authorities that received between one and three claims and made either one or no payments in relation to these claims.¹² In 2015 the previous bishop launched the Darwin Diocese *Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy and Procedure* with instructions for it be implemented fully in every parish.¹³ In November 2019 Catholic Professional Standards Limited (CPSL) completed its audit of the diocese and found that 92 (89 percent) of the 103 indicators relevant to its operations under the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (NCSS) had been implemented (or substantially progressed) and made 13 recommendations to improve safeguarding policies and practices – especially cultural safety training. None were Priority 1 (high rated) recommendations.¹⁴ The diocese operates under the SA & NT Provincial Office for Professional Standards and has its own office of Child

⁷ <https://catholicleader.com.au/news/shepherd-charles-roams-the-top-end>

⁸ <https://acncpubfilesprodstorage.blob.core.windows.net/public/6499de6f-39af-e811-a963-000d3ad244fd-f643543d-9ac0-4289-b125-be41d92bb484-Financial%20Report-ff839f40-ac3c-ea11-a812-000d3ad1cf4f-CCDD - Signed Financial Report 2019.pdf>

⁹ <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/bringing-them-home-chapter-19#a>

¹⁰ *Ibidem*

¹¹ <https://catholicleader.com.au/news/shepherd-charles-roams-the-top-end>

¹² 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>

¹³ <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/CTJH.291.90001.0050.pdf> and <http://www.darwin.catholic.org.au/policies>

¹⁴ CPSL Audit Report: <https://www.cpsltd.org.au/media/1591/darwin-cpsl-final-audit-report-december-2019.pdf> and <https://www.cpsltd.org.au/news-and-media/audit-reports-for-the-archdiocese-of-brisbane-and-diocese-of-darwin-released/>
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Protection with an Integrity Officer/Child Safety Coordinator. The diocese, with 38 other diocesan entities, is a registered participant in the National Redress Scheme as part of Australian Catholic Redress Limited.¹⁵

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

	2001	2006	2011	2016	2019	Change 2001 to 2019
Total Population (at Census)	203,063	192,904	210,095	224,604		+10.6%*
Catholic Population (at Census) (% of Total)	45,196 (22.3%)	40,783 (21.1%)	45,546 (21.7%)	45,151 (20.1%)		No change* (-2.2%)
Number of Parishes	16	11	15	15	16	No change
Diocesan priests	3	7	5	3	3	No change
Religious priests	21	18	21	24	19	-9.5%
Total Priests	24	25	26	27	22	-8.3%
Priests in active parish ministry			20 (76.9%)		20 (90.9%)	No change**
- Australian-born			10 (50%)		8 (40%)	-20%**
- Overseas-born			10 (50%)		12 (60%)	+20%**
Parishes with full-time resident priest			14 (93.3%)		9 (56.3%)	-35.7%**
Catholics per priest in parish ministry			2,277		2,257 (est)	No change**
Permanent deacons	3	3	6	3	1	-66.6.3%
Religious Sisters	64	61	42	44	39	-39.1%
Religious Brothers	20	19	15	13	13	-35%
Diocesan Seminarians	0	0	0	1	1	+100%
Diocesan Pastoral Council in operation		No	No	No	Yes ¹⁶	
Last Diocesan Synod (Diocesan Assembly)	Never	Never	Never	Never	Never	
Diocesan Pastoral Plan in place			Yes	No	No	
Catholic schools	17	15	15	17	18	+5.9%
Students in Catholic schools	4,993	4,484	4,561	5,186	4,846	-2.9%
Hospitals	0	0	0	0	0	No change
Nursing & Convalescence Homes	3	1	3	2	1	-66.6%
Regular Mass attenders (% of all Catholics)	n/a	4,140 (10.2%)	4,313 (9.6%)	5,994 (13.3%)		+44.8%*** (+3.1%)

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, NCP. 2016 *National Count of Attendance – National Summary*, Pastoral Research Online, Edition 44, April 2019. Notes: *Change from 2001 to 2016; ** Change from 2011 to 2016; *** Change from 2006 to 2016

Sources:

Darwin diocesan website: <http://www.darwin.catholic.org.au/>

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

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

https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Darwin_2016-Diocesan-Profile.pdf

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

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

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

Note: The draft profile of the diocese was forwarded to Bishop Gauci 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 a correction and update which have been incorporated.

¹⁵ https://www.nationalredress.gov.au/institutions/search?search_api_views_fulltext=catholic+diocese+of+darwin

¹⁶ The diocese does not have a Diocesan Pastoral Council, but has two other advisory bodies: Advisory Leadership Team to the Bishop, and Resource Persons for Aboriginal Apostolate.