

KNOW THE DIOCESES IN 2020

DIOCESE OF LISMORE

In 1887 the eastern seaboard section of the Diocese of Armidale was excised to establish the new Diocese of Grafton with a geographical area of 28,660 square kilometres.¹ It was renamed the Diocese of Lismore in 1900. The diocese belongs to the ecclesiastical Province of Sydney, and is one of 9 suffragan dioceses of the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Sydney.

Demographics: At the 2016 Census 504,442 persons lived in the diocese, with 104,580 self-identified Catholics (20.7% of total). Since the 2001 Census (421,216 and 105,586 (23.8%)), the general population has increased 14.3%, and the Catholic population by 1%. Catholic numbers peaked at 111,429 in 2011. In 2016 it ranked 13th in Australia's Catholic population with the median age of Catholics at 46 years. Australia is the birthplace of 87.8% of all Catholics, including 5,478 indigenous Australians (5.27% of all Catholics), while the biggest groups born outside Australia are from the UK - excluding Nth Ireland - (1.9%), Philippines (1.3%), New Zealand (0.9%), and Ireland and Italy (each 0.6%).

Bishop: The bishop is Gregory Paul Homeming OCD, born in Australia in 1958, ordained a priest of the Carmelite Friars in 1991, and ordained a bishop in 2017. He was installed as the 6th bishop of Lismore in 2017. His most recent *Quinquennial Report* was prepared for his June 2019 *ad limina* visit, but it has not been made public.

Structure and Governance: The diocese has 22 parishes organised into 3 regions². It is one of 17 dioceses with less than 30 parishes. Twenty parishes have a full-time resident priest (91%), while 2 share a priest. The diocese has a diocesan financial council, a college of consultors, and council of priests, but no diocesan pastoral council.³ The last diocesan synod was held in 1958 and no diocesan assembly has been convened since then. The diocese does not have a pastoral plan. Diocesan policy is to encourage parish pastoral councils.

Priests and Deacons: The diocese has 47 priests, including the bishop: 44 diocesan and 3 religious. Only 30 are active in parish ministry: 25 diocesan and 5 religious. Of these 18 are Australian-born and 12 overseas-born (5 in Philippines, 3 in India, 3 in Nigeria, and 1 in Kenya). Fourteen priests (including previous bishop) live in retirement, 1 works outside the diocese, 1 is studying overseas, and 3 are on leave. The diocese has 3 permanent deacons: 1 in parish ministry, 1 retired, and 1 working outside the diocese. There has been a significant turnover of priests in parish ministry in the last 10 years, with a large increase in the number of overseas-born priests. However, as only 3 of the Australian-born were ordained prior to 1980, there is likely to be more stability in the near future. The diocese recruits overseas-born seminarians, with their formation taking place in local seminaries. Currently, there are 3 diocesan seminarians preparing for priesthood. If only the priests actively ministering in parishes are counted, there are an estimated 3,486 Catholics per priest.

Lay ministers and officials: Eight lay persons minister as pastoral associates/assistants and youth coordinator in the parishes: 2 religious sisters, 4 lay women and 2 lay men. Twelve lay persons also hold senior positions in the diocesan curia: 5 men, 6 women and 1 religious brother. The presence of lay religious sisters in 2019 has increased by 20% since 2001, though down from a peak of 93 in 2011. Seven congregations of religious sisters have served in the diocese since its establishment. Lay religious brothers have decreased by 25% since 2001 to just 6 in 2019.

Mass attendance: In 2006 an average 12,072 Catholics attended Mass regularly (11.2%). In 2016 the average was 8,699 (8.3%) – down 27.9%.

¹ This is a similar geographic area to Albania (28,748 sq. km)

² The diocesan website states that there are 28 parishes, which is at variance with the 22 listed in the current *Official Directory*.

³ Under the previous bishop a diocesan pastoral council operated from 2009-2011.

Seminary and Seminarians: The Regional Seminary of the Good Shepherd in Sydney and Vianney College in Wagga provide formation for diocesan seminarians for the priesthood. Three seminarians are currently in formation. The diocese has a Director of Seminarians as well as a Director of Vocations Promotion.

Pastoral ministries: The diocese has offices for youth ministry, Aboriginal ministry, and catechesis.

Plenary Council: A total of 1455 persons – 156 as individuals (58% women and 31% men) and 1299 in 87 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; better faith formation; ending mandatory celibacy and allowing priests to marry; a greater role for women; a new leadership and governance model; outreach to youth; greater emphasis on prayer (especially the Rosary) and sacraments; and sharing the faith with others. Only the bishop was selected from Lismore for the Discernment and Writing Groups and 5 persons have been called to participate in the Council sessions: 3 clerics (bishop, vicar general and Episcopal vicar) and 2 lay women (Dr Deidre Little and Ms Ellen Hayles).

Education: The diocese has 46 Catholic schools: 34 primary and 12 secondary. They educate 18,352 students: 9,267 primary and 9,085 secondary. Fourteen of the 46 school principals are lay women (30.4%). Revenue for the diocesan primary and secondary schools in 2018 was \$257.1 million, with \$239.8 million coming from government grants.⁴ There is a Diocesan Investment Fund with investor funds approaching \$600 million.⁵ There is no Catholic tertiary education facility in the diocese, but the diocese recently announced a partnership with the University of Dayton (Ohio, USA) for its Virtual Learning Community for Faith Formation (VLCFF), which will provide catechetical and faith formation courses online for parishes and individuals in the diocese.⁶

Health and Welfare Services: In 1996 Catholics aged 65 yrs and over were 14.6% of all Catholics in the diocese. In 2016 the same age group constituted 22.9% of all Catholics. The diocese now has extensive services for the aged in 36 residential, hostel, independent-living and nursing home facilities provided by Catholic Care of the Aged, Catholic Healthcare, and Southern Cross Care NSW/ACT. The diocese also owns and operates St Vincent’s Private Hospital. Social welfare services are provided by Catholic Care of the Aged and Centacare Amalgamation, Catholic Homes and Community Services, Family Planning Services (natural family planning advice), Hastings Accommodation Solutions (support for homeless), MacKillop Family Services (support for children and youth), St Cathage’s Community Care (home care and disability services), and St Vincent de Paul Society.

Finances: The diocese is registered with the Charities Commission (ACNC) as the Catholic Diocese of Lismore, Trustees of the Roman Catholic Church Diocese of Lismore, Diocese of Catholic Schools Limited and as Trustees for 19 other legal 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. The diocese does not publish an annual financial report for its own activities, but some of the other entities do provide annual financial reports to ACNC.

Communications: The diocese has a basic website⁷ and publishes a free quarterly magazine *Catholic Life*, containing diocesan news. The most recent edition is December 2019. The diocese also has its own *YouTube* channel and during the COVID-19 restrictions its diocesan Mass has been the most-viewed throughout Australia.

Safeguarding and Child Sexual Abuse: The Royal Commission’s statistical report included the diocese as a significant setting of abuse. Its June 2017 *Analysis of Claims* records the diocese as having the fourth highest overall proportion of priests (13.9%) who were alleged perpetrators, taking into account the duration of ministry.⁸ Its June 2017 *Analysis of Claims* report notes 16 claims made against the Diocese, with 16 payments

⁴ [https://acncpubfilesprodstorage.blob.core.windows.net/public/a54c7ba6-2daf-e811-a963-000d3ad244fd-8b384131-5bf5-4732-a4a6-f919ba9f755d-Financial%20Report-2e01aa3c-5a58-ea11-a811-000d3acae853-1_13858_Lismore_CSO_2018_AFS_\(13858\).pdf](https://acncpubfilesprodstorage.blob.core.windows.net/public/a54c7ba6-2daf-e811-a963-000d3ad244fd-8b384131-5bf5-4732-a4a6-f919ba9f755d-Financial%20Report-2e01aa3c-5a58-ea11-a811-000d3acae853-1_13858_Lismore_CSO_2018_AFS_(13858).pdf)

⁵ <http://dif.org.au/annual-report/DIF%20Annual%20Report%202017%20Web.PDF>

⁶ [Lismore's Catholic Diocese joins American university for faith courses - News - News & Sport - The Lismore App](#)

⁷ Some of the information on the website is incorrect or out-of-date.

⁸ 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>
Catholics For Renewal 10 December 2020, catholicsforrenewal.org.au

made for a total of \$1.81 million (average \$113,000 per payment).⁹ The diocese has a comprehensive Child Protection Policy (revised 2014) with the Bishop having the responsibility as Head of Agency for all matters related to child protection in the diocese and related entities. It does not have a diocesan safeguarding or professional standards council or committee. The diocese, with 148 other diocesan entities, is a registered participant in the National Redress Scheme as part of Australian Catholic Redress Limited.¹⁰

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

	2001	2006	2011	2016	2019	Change 2001 to 2019
Total Population (at Census)	441,216	458,846	479,759	504,442		+14.3%*
Catholic Population (at Census) (% of Total)	100,055 (23.8%)	108,173 (23.6%)	111,429 (23.2%)	104,580 (20.7%)		+4.5%* (-3.1%)
Number of Parishes	28	28	28	22	22	-21.4%
Diocesan priests	33	52	44	51	44	+33.3%
Religious priests	6	5	6	3	3	-50%
Total Priests	39	57	50	54	47	+20.5%
Priests in active parish ministry			32 (64%)		30 (63.8%)	-6.3%**
- Australian-born			26 (81.3%)		18 (60%)	-30.8%**
- Overseas-born			6 (18.7%)		12 (40%)	+100%**
Parishes with full-time resident priest			16 (57.2%)		20 (90.9%)	+25%**
Catholics per priest in parish ministry			3,482		3,486 (est.)	
Permanent deacons	2	2	2	2	2	No change
Religious Sisters	58	78	93	82	70	+20.7%
Religious Brothers	8	15	7	5	6	-25%
Diocesan Seminarians	2	5	6	5	3	+50%
Diocesan Pastoral Council in operation		Yes	Yes	No	No	
Last Diocesan Synod (Diocesan Assembly)	1958	1958	1958	1958	1958	
Diocesan Pastoral Plan in place					No	
Catholic schools	46	45	47	46	46	No change
Students in Catholic schools	16,489	17,555	18,057	18,579	18,352	+11.3%
Hospitals	1	1	1	1	1	No change
Nursing & Convalescence Homes	16	11	8	10	7	-56.3%
Regular Mass attenders (% of all Catholics)	n/a	12,072 (11.2%)	10,103 (9.1%)	8,699 (8.3%)		-27.9%*** (-2.9%)

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:

Lismore diocesan website: <http://www.lismorediocese.org>

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 Lismore*, Canberra, September 2019.

https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Lismore_2016-Diocesan-Profile.pdf

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

<https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Diocesan-Final-Report-Phase-1-Lismore.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 Homeming 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*. No response was received.

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

