

KNOW THE DIOCESES IN 2020

DIOCESE of WOLLONGONG

The Diocese of Wollongong was established in 1951 with coastal territory excised from the Archdiocese of Sydney. Its current land area is 9,942 sq. Km.¹ It is one of 9 suffragan dioceses of the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Sydney and the 10 dioceses together form the ecclesiastical Province of Sydney.

Demographics: At the 2016 Census 724,240 persons resided in the diocese, with 189,834 self-identified Catholics (26.2% of total). Since the 2001 Census (609,927 and 178,384 (29.2%)), the general population has increased by 18.7% while the Catholic population has increased 6.4% (+11,450). Catholic numbers were the highest ever in 2016 with the diocese having the 6th highest proportion of Catholics in its general population and ranked 8th in Australia's Catholic population with their median age at 40 years. Australia is the birthplace of 78.0% of all Catholics, including 5,784 Indigenous Australians (3.0% of all Catholics), while the largest groups born outside Australia are from the Philippines (2.7%), UK excluding Nth Ireland (2.4%), Italy (2.2%), South/Central America (1.5%), Spain/Portugal (1.1%), Croatia/Former Yugoslavia (1.0%), New Zealand (0.9%), and Ireland, Malta and India (each 0.8%). The ratio of male to female Catholics was 91.3:100.

Bishop: The present Bishop is Brian Mascord, born in Australia in 1959, ordained a priest for the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle in 1992, and ordained a bishop in 2018. He was installed as the 5th bishop of Wollongong in 2018. He prepared a *Quinquennial Report* for his June 2019 *ad limina* visit, but has not made it public.

Structure and Governance: At end-2019 the diocese had 32 parishes organised into 3 deaneries. It is one of 8 dioceses with 30-50 parishes. In April 2021 the diocesan website listed 31 parishes, with 17 (54.8%) having a full-time resident priest. The others shared a priest. The diocese has 11 Advisory Councils: for Priests, CatholicCare, Development Fund, People with Disabilities and their Families, Executive, Finance, Justice, Ecology and Peace, Pastoral,² Professional Standards and Child Protection, Schools and Parish SEDSO (School Enhancement and Debt Servicing Obligation). It also has a Liturgical Commission and 7 special Committees: for Clergy Life and Ministry, the Aged, Development and Community Engagement, Education Priorities, Property, Remuneration, and North West (to address developing areas). There are Episcopal Vicars for Canonical Services and Clergy, a Marriage Tribunal, an Office of Renewal and Evangelisation, and a Financial Administrator. No bishop has convened a diocesan synod since the diocese was established in 1951, but Diocesan Consultations were held in 2010 and a Diocesan Assembly convened in 2014. The pastoral plan for 2015-2017 *Bearers of Christ's Love* has expired but the bishop has recently published a Mission and Vision Statement.³ Diocesan policy is to encourage all parishes to have a parish pastoral council.

Priests and Deacons: At end-2019 there were 82 priests - including the bishop - listed as residing in or belonging to the diocese: 43 diocesan and 39 religious. Of these, 31 (including the bishop) were actively engaged in parish ministry, 13 were chaplains, 1 was in supply ministry, 12 were living in retirement (including the former bishop), 4 were resident outside the parishes, and 1 belonged to the Ukrainian Eparchy. At 10 April 2021 the diocesan website listed 34 priests active in parish ministry, including the bishop: 24 diocesan and 10 religious. Of these 20 (58.8%) were Australian-born and 14 overseas-born (3 in India, 5 in Vietnam, and 1 each in Ghana, NZ, Samoa, Korea, Italy and Poland). Three Australian-born diocesan priests ordained prior to 1980 will retire in the near future, making the diocese increasingly reliant on priests born overseas. If only the priests actively ministering in parishes are counted, there are currently an estimated 5,583 Catholics per priest. At end-2019 there were 2 diocesan seminarians in formation and there were 3 permanent deacons, all ministering in parishes.

¹ This is the area calculated by the 2016 National Census Project (called Statistical Area 1's). It is slightly larger than Cyprus (9,251 sq. Km.) and slightly smaller than Lebanon (10,452 sq. Km.).

² The Pastoral Council was established to consider the pastoral questions of the day, to make appropriate recommendations to the bishop, and to act as a significant form of collaborative dialogue and discernment in service of the pastoral needs of the diocese. <https://www.dow.org.au/directory/councils-committees/> No details of its membership or operations are provided.

³ [About us – Catholic Diocese of Wollongong \(dow.org.au\)](https://www.dow.org.au/about-us/)

Lay ministers and officials: At end-2019 18 lay persons held responsible positions in the diocesan curia: 12 men, 5 women and 1 religious sister. No lay pastoral associates or workers were listed in the parishes, but 1 lay woman was listed as chaplain to the Deaf Community. Since its establishment, many male and female lay religious congregations have ministered in the diocese. Currently there are 13 congregations of religious sisters and 3 of religious brothers. Their combined numbers peaked at 346 in 1961, but since 2001 the number of religious sisters has decreased from 173 to 100 (- 42.2%), while religious brothers have decreased from 51 to 38 (-25.5%). At present, there are few young religious sisters and brothers in Australia.⁴ A religious sister is the diocesan Vicar for Religious.

Mass attendance and liturgy: In 2006 the typical weekend Mass attendance in the diocese was 22,306 or 12.4% of all Catholics. In 2016 the typical weekend attendance was 18,108 (9.5%) – down 4,198 or 18.8%. Each priest active in parish ministry currently ministers to an average 532 regular Mass attenders. The diocese has a Liturgical Commission and the Office of Renewal and Evangelisation provides liturgical resources to the parishes.

Seminary and Seminarians: The Seminary of the Good Shepherd in Sydney, established in 1996, provides formation for diocesan seminarians from to all NSW dioceses, continuing the tradition of the earlier seminary, St Patrick's College at Manly. Academic studies are undertaken at the Catholic Institute of Sydney. At the beginning of 2021 4 Wollongong seminarians were being prepared for the priesthood. The diocese has a Vocations Office.

Pastoral ministries: Much of the pastoral care in the diocese takes place in the parishes, but is greatly assisted by the Office of Renewal and Evangelisation (ORE). It supports the renewal of Catholic life and culture in vibrant communities and incorporates the diocesan staff of youth ministry, liturgy and the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (catechists in government schools). One program it offers to explore life and the Christian faith is Alpha - an experiential program run over 10 weeks - which many parishes now use. The diocese also provides priest chaplains to 12 different ethnic communities, to 9 hospitals, 3 Catholic lay organisations, and to the University of Wollongong. Three Eastern Churches – Maronite, Ukrainian and Syro-Malabar – have a presence in the diocese and have their own priest chaplains. Five religious congregations and organisations in the diocese offer facilities for retreats (individual and groups), prayer, and spiritual direction, and several other organisations, such as Legion of Mary, Cursillo, Catholic Women's League and Marriage Encounter, provide pastoral accompaniment.

Ecumenism and Inter-Faith: The Office of Renewal and Evangelisation works closely with the wider local Christian community, is a lead organiser of the bi-annual Together for the Illawarra Prayer Breakfasts attended by representatives from over 52 Christian churches, and a board member of 'Together for the Illawarra', a collaborative project of the Christian churches. The *Journey* Catholic Radio Program, an ecumenical initiative, produces a weekly show which airs on over 25 Christian Radio stations. In 2020 the diocese was an initiator and major contributor to the Cinnamon Project, an International Christian network, which chose Wollongong as its starting point for to its well-known ecumenical collaboration. Cinnamon surveys the annual 'good works' of all Christian churches and - excluding government funded programs - puts a minimum wage value on them. Focusing on outreach, it measures the impact of Christian churches on the common good in the region and enables greater ecumenical collaboration in sharing programs and initiatives. Its reports are given to all levels of government, enabling the churches to build more and better local partnerships. The Wollongong report detailed over \$11 million of volunteer work benefiting the broader community in the Illawarra.⁵ Bishop Mascord meets regularly with leaders from the Buddhist community (Nan Tien Temple) and Muslim community, noting significant celebrations and attending an Iftar dinner at the conclusion of Ramadan.

Plenary Council: A total of 7,135 persons – 1,244 as individuals (66% women and 13% men) and 5,891 in 207 groups – responded to the Plenary Council's Listening and Dialogue phase. They identified the 10 priority issues for the Council as: greater Inclusion of all; care for the environment; care for neighbour; a new model of

⁴ A 2015 study of 93 religious congregations of men and women, with a total membership of 4,427, representing 64 per cent of all religious in Australia, found that only 4% of the women and 11% of the men in the participating congregations were aged under-45 years at the time of the survey. <https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CVMA-Report-Final-report-Feb-2018.pdf>

⁵ <https://cinnamonnetwork.com/au/illawarra/>

church, diocese and parish; greater role for women; greater trust, faith and hope in God; ending mandatory celibacy and allowing priests to marry; ordination of women; sharing the faith with others; and outreach to youth. No one from the diocese was selected for the Discernment and Writing Groups, but 7 persons have been called to participate in the Council assemblies: the Bishop, the Vicar General, 2 Episcopal Vicars, and 3 lay persons (Ms Erin Gillard, Dr Jodi Steel and Mr Paul Fleming).

Education: At end-2019 the diocese operated 46 Catholic schools: 29 primary, 14 secondary, 2 combined, and 1 special. They were educating 24,365 students: 11,200 primary and 13,165 secondary. Some 2000 teaching and support staff are employed in these schools. They are also 8 'congregational' or independent Catholic schools operating in the diocese. Of all Catholic children of school age, just 47.1% attend Catholic primary schools, while 55.8% attend Catholic secondary schools.⁶ The diocesan schools are managed through Catholic Education Diocese of Wollongong which provides administrative and educational support. Its Director is directly responsible to the Bishop through the Diocesan Schools Council which advises the bishop on the evangelising thrust of Catholic schools, religious education, learning and teaching, strategic planning and resourcing. The Vision and Strategic Direction document *Lighting the Way* covers the period 2019-2022. School policy is to welcome Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, support them to reach their full potential, and to embrace their culture and identity.

In 2017 Catholic Schools New South Wales Ltd (CSNSW) replaced the former Catholic Education Commission NSW (CECNSW) to coordinate and represent Catholic education in NSW and the ACT at a state level. The 11 Bishop Ordinaries of NSW are 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. The CSNSW Board is responsible for receiving and distributing government funding to diocesan Catholic schools for their day-to-day operations and capital works, for ensuring that schools and agencies are government-compliant, for providing policy advice and direction, reporting to the Bishops, for fostering resource collaboration and efficiency, and for promoting and advocating Catholic education in NSW. In 2020 the NSW Catholic school system received \$2.8 billion in lump sum grants from 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. A detailed *Catholic Education Wollongong Financial Report 2019* is published on the ACNC website showing annual turnover of \$298 million with government grants of \$246 million.⁷ Of the 46 Catholic school principals in 2019, 21 were women (45.7%), including 1 religious sister. The diocese has its own Catholic Development Fund with a dedicated Advisory Council, drawn from a cross-section of church, community and business personnel to ensure ethical management and wise use of resources to promote the pastoral works of the diocese. There are no Catholic tertiary education institutions in the diocese.

Health and Welfare Services: The principal social services agency for the diocese is CatholicCare. Its services provide social and emotional support, so that its clients can have positive relationships and connected lives, achieve the dignity of self-reliance, and realise their full human potential. Its services include counselling, aged care, NDIS, foster care, parenting workshops, marriage and relationship education, children's contact services, out-of-school hours care, job ready programs, and pastoral support. Its 6 sites throughout the diocese have 305 predominantly female staff who provide over 85,000 hours of support annually. The *CatholicCare 2018/19 Annual Report* shows income of \$22 million with \$20.5 million contributed by governments.⁸ Other agencies offering social services are St Vincent de Paul, Mater Dei School (disability services), and CatholicCare Natural Family Planning Services. Since the 1990s the proportion of Catholics in the diocese aged 65 years and over has increased significantly: from 9.3% in 1996 to 16.9% in 2016. Catholic Healthcare Limited now operates 3 aged care accommodation facilities in the diocese, but no nursing accommodation. CatholicCare provides social outings for the aged and made over 1500 visits to the elderly in aged care accommodation in 2018/19. The diocese has an Aged Care Advocate. There is no Catholic hospital in the diocese.

Finances: The diocese does not publish an annual financial report. However, it is registered with the Charities Commission (ACNC) as the Trustees of the Roman Catholic Church for the Diocese of Wollongong together

⁶ ACBC, NCP, *Diocesan Social Profile, Based on 2016 Australian Census: Diocese of Wollongong*, Canberra, September 2019

⁷ https://acncpubfilesprodstorage.blob.core.windows.net/public/7da72671-39af-e811-a95e-000d3ad24c60-d65358b1-edfe-4b8e-9147-933c92804422-Financial%20Report-8798d888-5d72-eb11-a812-000d3acba8cc-13862_1.pdf

⁸ https://www.catholiccare.dow.org.au/media/3qbh5wya/annual-report-2018-19_final.pdf

with other entities including the Catholic Development Fund, Catholic Clergy Financing System, and Catholic Education. 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. Though the diocese does not publish a financial report, Catholic Education and the diocesan Catholic Development Fund (CDF) do. The CDF was established in 1961 to assist the works of the diocese and its 2019 *Annual Report* showed total assets of \$245 million and net assets of \$15 million. It lends funds to parishes, schools and diocesan agencies to support the educational, charitable and pastoral works of the diocese, and from the CDF's 2019 surplus \$4 million was distributed to the Bishop.⁹

Communications: The diocesan website was updated in 2019. The *Journey podcasts* are produced weekly, aired on over 25 Christian radio stations around Australia, and listened by an estimated 70,000 people each week.¹⁰ In them, religious and lay presenters focus short segments on scripture, discipleship, prayerfulness, marriage and family life and feature contemporary Christian music. In early 2021 the Office of Communications also began videoing 'Mass for you at home' for the ACBC. It is broadcast nationally each week by Southern Cross Ten, the Sky Network and via YouTube. The diocesan website links to its own publications and resources - Advent and Lenten programs, liturgy aids - and the Office of Renewal and Evangelisation produces weekly bulletin notices for parish newsletters and weekly small group resources for parishes throughout Australia, including Faith Circles resource.

Safeguarding and Child Sexual Abuse: The Royal Commission identified the diocese as a significant setting of abuse. It found the diocese as having the 5th highest overall proportion of priests (11.7%) who were alleged perpetrators, taking into account the duration of ministry.¹¹ Its June 2017 *Analysis of Claims* states that 33 claims were made against the diocese, with 11 payments made for a total of \$511,000 (average \$46,000 per payment).¹² In response to recommendations from the Royal Commission, the Office of Professional Standards and Safeguarding (OPSS) was established in August 2017. The OPSS is focused on the development and maintenance of a safe institutional culture for both children and adults across all its sectors, services and activities. The OPSS provides ongoing professional development opportunities in the areas of child protection, safeguarding and professional standards to all persons in positions of leadership in the diocese, as well as to ministry and parish volunteers and employees who work with children and vulnerable people. The OPSS also works with persons who have experienced abuse to ensure that their voices are heard and the appropriate actions taken to support them. The OPSS both acknowledges and is committed to the provision of ongoing support to victims and survivors of harm within the diocese. In 2021 the Diocese implemented the new National Response Protocol and continues to implement best practice investigation and compliance frameworks to manage matters in accordance with government and safeguarding standards.¹³ The Diocese of Wollongong is committed to the practical and consistent application of child safe standards as promoted by the Royal Commission and the Office of the Children's Guardian. The Diocese is one of a total of 141 diocesan entities that are registered participants in the National Redress Scheme as part of Australian Catholic Redress Limited.¹⁴

Table 1: Statistical data for Wollongong Diocese: 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016, 2019 and 2021

	2001	2006	2011	2016	2019 At 31 December	2021 At 10 April	Change 2001 to 2019
Total Population (at Census)	609,927	624,441	657,160	724,240			+18.7%*
Catholic Population (at Census) (% of Total)	178,384 (29.2%)	178,892 (28.6%)	186,347 (28.4%)	189,834 (26.2%)			+11,450* +6.4%*
Number of Parishes	32	31	31	32	32	31	No change
Diocesan priests	47	49	47	44	43		-8.5%
Religious priests	44	38	36	36	39		-11.4%
Total Priests	91	87	83	80	82		-9.9%

⁹ <https://www.dow.org.au/resource/cdf-financial-statements-2019/>

¹⁰ It can be listened to via broadcast or podcast via www.jcr.org.au

¹¹ <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/CARC.0050.025.0283.pdf>

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

¹⁴ https://www.nationalredress.gov.au/institutions/search?search_api_views_fulltext=catholic+diocese+of+wollongong

Priests in active parish ministry (% of Total Priests)			42 (50.6%)		31 (37.8%)	34	-28.6%**
- Australian-born			36 (85.7%)		17 (56.7%)	20 (58.8%)	-52.8%**
- Overseas-born			6 (14.3%)		13 (43.3%)	14 (41.2%)	+116.7%**
Parishes with full-time resident priest			24 (77.4%)		16 (50.1%)	17 (54.8%)	-29.2%**
Catholics per priest in parish ministry			4,436		6,327 (est.)	5,583 (est.)	
Permanent deacons	0	0	1	1	2	3	+200%
Religious Sisters	173	132	110	107	100		-42.2%
Religious Brothers	51	42	47	33	38		-25.5%
Diocesan Seminarians	4	2	3	2	2		-50%
Diocesan Pastoral Council in operation		Yes	No	No	No		
Last Diocesan Synod (Diocesan Assembly)	Never	Never	Never (2010)	Never (2014)	Never (2014)		
Diocesan Pastoral Plan in place					No		
Catholic schools	43	43	44	45	46		+7.0%
Students in Catholic schools	20,185	21,049	21,587	21,915	24,365		+20.7%
Hospitals	0	0	1	0	0		No change
Nursing & Convalescence Homes	4	1	0	3	3		-25%
Typical weekend Mass attendance (% of all Catholics)		22,306 (12.4%)	19,598 (10.5%)	18,108 (9.5%)			-4,198*** -18.8%***

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; diocesan website; 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 2021; *** Change from 2006 to 2016

Sources:

Wollongong diocesan website: <http://www.dow.org.au>

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

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

Note: The draft profile of the Diocese was forwarded to Bishop Mascord 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*. He responded advising of some recent developments and these have been incorporated into the text.