

KNOW THE DIOCESES IN 2020

DIOCESE of TOWNSVILLE

In 1930 a land area of 434,400 sq. Km. was excised from the Diocese of Rockhampton to establish the Diocese of Townsville.¹ It is one of 4 suffragan dioceses – with Cairns, Toowoomba and Rockhampton – of the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Brisbane. Together the 5 dioceses form the ecclesiastical Province of Brisbane.

Demographics: At the 2016 Census 288,740 persons lived in the diocese, with 79,008 self-identified Catholics (27.4% of total). Since the 2001 Census (253,652 and 74,433 (29.3%)), the general population has increased by 13.8% and the Catholic population by 6.1%. The Catholic population peaked at 80,243 in 2011, but since 2001, as a proportion of the total population, it has decreased by 1.9%. In 2016 the diocese ranked 17th in Australia's Catholic population and 4th in the proportion of Catholics in the total population. Catholics had a median age of 35 years. Australia is the birthplace of 87.1% of all Catholics, including 6,453 Indigenous Australians (8.2% of all Catholics), while the biggest groups born outside Australia are from the Philippines (2.6%), Italy (1.4%), New Zealand and UK excluding Nth Ireland (both 1.2%), Other Oceania (0.8%), and India (0.5%). The ratio of Catholic males to females in 2016 was 95.2:100.

Bishop: The present bishop is Timothy Harris, born in Australia in 1962, ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Brisbane in 1992, and ordained a bishop in 2017. He was installed as the 6th Bishop of Townsville in 2017. He prepared a *Quinquennial Report* for his June 2019 *ad limina* visit, but has not made it public.

Structure and Governance: The diocese had 27 parishes at end-2019 with 10 parishes (37%) having a resident full-time priest. At April 2021 there were 26 parishes with 11 (42.3%) having a full-time resident priest. The diocese has a Finance Council and Financial Administrator, a Council of Priests, a Marriage Tribunal, a College of Consultors, a Diocesan Education Council, and a Diocesan Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council that advises the Bishop.² A Diocesan Catholic Youth Commission was established in 2021 to strategise, advocate for, support and oversee youth ministry in the diocese. A Diocesan Pastoral Council operated until 2014 and its potential reestablishment is on the agenda for the Diocesan Assembly scheduled for 10-11 September 2021. Two diocesan synods have been held since the diocese's establishment, in 1948 and 1958, but none since then. In 2021 the diocese commenced a multi-year parish mission renewal journey *Becoming New in Christ*, intended to produce a future parish mission renewal framework and the foundational component for a diocesan pastoral plan, also an important focus for the Diocesan Assembly. The diocesan expectation is that parishes have pastoral councils. The diocese has a large number of written policies. It has not published an annual report.

Priests and Deacons: At end-2019 there were 29 priests, including the bishop, living in or connected to the diocese: 20 diocesan and 9 religious. Twenty (including the bishop) were engaged in parish ministry, 1 in hospital chaplaincy, 7 living in retirement, and 1 lecturing at the ACU in Brisbane. In April 2021, 19 priests, mostly the same as in 2019 and including the bishop, were engaged in parish ministry: 9 diocesan and 10 religious. Of these 4 were Australian-born (21%) and 15 overseas-born (9 in India, 2 in Nigeria, 2 in Ghana, and 1 each in Tokelau Islands and Vietnam). If only the priests actively ministering in parishes are counted, there are an estimated 3,950 Catholics per priest. There has been a significant turnover of priests in parish ministry in the last 10 years, mainly due to retirements and movement of overseas priests. This will continue as 1 of the Australian-born diocesan priests still in parish ministry was ordained prior to 1980 and another is well past retirement age. The diocese currently has 1 diocesan seminarian preparing for priesthood. The diocese has a Vocations Committee, a Priests' Support Committee, and a Clergy Foundation. No permanent deacons are currently ordained.

¹ This data is from the NCPR's 2016 National Census Project (called Statistical Area 1's). The land size is only slightly smaller than Turkmenistan (488,100 sq. Km.).

² A Diocesan Pastoral Council was established by the previous bishop, with one of its strategic directions the fostering of ecumenical and inter-religious relations. In 2007, when the Commission for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations was established, the Pastoral Council ceased to continue.

Lay ministers and officials: At end-2019 24 lay persons (11 part-time) held responsible positions in the diocesan curia: 6 men, 18 women, and 1 religious sister. In the parishes a religious sister was a Regional Ministry Team Leader. In 2019 there were 4 congregations of religious sisters ministering in the diocese and one congregation of religious brothers. Their numbers peaked at 261 in 1967 and then began to decline. Since 2001 the number of religious sisters in the diocese has decreased from 76 to 43 (-43.4%), while religious brothers have reduced from 16 to 6 (-62.5%). In 2019 the Diocese welcomed a new community of Holy Spirit Sisters from Fiji, East Timor and South Korea who now are ministering in indigenous, prison and hospital ministries. At present, across Australia, there are few young religious sisters or brothers.³

Mass attendance and liturgy: In 2006 the typical weekend Mass attendance was 6,177 (8.4%). In 2016 the typical weekend attendance was 5,544 (7.0%) – down 10.2%. Each priest active in parish ministry currently ministers to an average 292 regular Mass attenders. A religious sister acts as the diocesan Liturgical Consultant.

Seminary and Seminarians: Queensland's Regional Seminary of Pius XII, established at Banyo in 1939 for the formation of diocesan priests for the 5 Queensland dioceses, had 134 seminarians in 1967 but just 5 in 2005. Following the establishment of the Australian Catholic University's McAuley Campus at Banyo in 2003, the new replacement Holy Spirit Regional Seminary, adjacent to ACU in Banyo, was opened in 2008. At end-2019 21 seminarians from all 5 Queensland dioceses were in formation, with 1 from Townsville. The diocese has a Vocations Committee, Director, and Coordinator.

Pastoral ministries: The diocese does not currently have a pastoral plan or a diocesan pastoral council but is actively engaged in a renewal process that is intended to lead to both. Most of the pastoral ministry in the diocese is undertaken in the parishes, but there are also diocesan and special ministries: the Diocesan Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (DATSICC) represents the Church throughout the diocese and across Queensland; the Charismatic group Yona Shalom brings together Catholics and others to proclaim the power of the Holy Spirit and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ; the diocesan Environmental Awareness Team, with Catholic Earthcare Australia (CEA), advises and supports the bishop to respond to Pope John Paul II's call "to stimulate and sustain ecological conversion"; the House of Prayer and Spirituality offers opportunities for contemplation, stillness and prayer; priests offer culturally and linguistically sensitive liturgies to 6 different ethnic communities; the Western Ministry for Spirituality reaches out to the parishes and isolated communities in the West of the diocese offering opportunities for spiritual formation and development; the Office of the Bishop also provides a range of Church Life and Mission Services including support for adult faith formation, RCIA, pastoral planning and pastoral council formation, diocesan Youth Ministry with its Youth Support Worker and YCS Coordinator; and a Director of Clergy Formation and Ministry accompanies and supports priests in their ministry, including the overseeing of their professional supervision.

Plenary Council: A total of 890 persons – 133 as individuals (65% women and 22% men) and 757 in 105 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; ending LGBTIQ discrimination; sharing the faith with others; outreach to youth; greater focus on Jesus Christ; better faith formation; ending mandatory celibacy and allowing priests to marry; a greater role for women; greater involvement of the laity; and ordination of women. One person was selected for the Discernment and Writing Groups, and 5 persons have been called to the Council as voting members: the Bishop, Vicar General, and 3 lay persons (Ms Helen Melarekere, Mrs Louise Vella-Cox, and Ms Stephanie Sullivan).

Education: At end-2019 the diocese had 33 Catholic schools: 18 primary, 9 secondary, and 6 combined. They were educating 13,883 students: 7,339 primary and 6,544 secondary. Two Catholic flexible learning centres are also operated by the Edmund Rice Foundation at Mount Isa and Townsville. Of all Catholic children of school age, 52.4% were attending Catholic primary schools and 53.2% were attending Catholic secondary schools.⁴

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) represents the Queensland bishops, religious institute leaders, parents, diocesan councils and boards, and other incorporated bodies with schools, as the peak body

³ 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>

⁴ [Townsville 2016-Diocesan-Profile.pdf \(catholic.org.au\)](https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Townsville-2016-Diocesan-Profile.pdf)

for Catholic education in Queensland. It sets state-wide policy on funding and advocacy with governments and other peak bodies at state and national levels, as well as policy on research, industrial relations, public relations and communications. Its current *Strategic Plan* covers 2021-2023.⁵ Catholic systemic schools receive federal recurrent funding based on each school's socio-economic score (SES) determined according to the school's size, location and student population profile. The grants received from the Australian and state government are distributed to the systemic primary and secondary schools in each diocese.

Each diocese has its own Catholic Schools Office (CSO) which provides leadership, service and support to all systemic schools. The Townsville Catholic Education Office (TCEO), operating under the direction of the Bishop, supports 29 systemic schools and employs more than 2,500 staff. Three school authorities operate in the Diocese. The TCEO has jurisdiction for the 29 systemic schools, Mercy Partners and Edmund Rice Education Australia oversee one school each, and the two Flexible Learning Centres are under the governance of Edmund Rice Education Australia. Among the 33 principals of all schools in the diocese, 19 (61.3%) are women. In 2019 some 1,220 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were enrolled in the schools which are committed to implementing a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) to improve outcomes for Indigenous students through high quality teaching and the embedding of cross cultural priorities. The *2019 Annual Report* of Townsville Catholic Education shows total income of \$193 million and government grants of \$152.5 million.⁶ The diocese operates Saints Catholic Residential College at James Cook University and provides a chaplain ministry.

Health and Welfare Services: Centacare North Queensland, in operation since 1979, is the primary social services agency of the diocese. Its 160 staff members deliver an extensive range of counselling, care and family support services across one-third of Queensland from 11 centres. Service provision in the 2018-19 year reached almost 4,500 individual clients and provided approximately 51,500 instances of service to people and families in the region. Centacare's clientele, reflecting the agency's ongoing appreciation of and commitment to social justice and culturally respectful service, comprises 32% identifying as Indigenous, and 27% under-18 years of age. Centacare NQ builds stronger individuals, families and communities through service provision to all. It also supports the broader community through capacity-building initiatives in line with its Catholic mission, values and ethos. The organisation derives approximately 75% of funding from state and commonwealth governments and the remainder from fee-for-service activities.

Special services offered by the Diocese include: North West Queensland Indigenous Catholic Social Services for Indigenous communities, Migrant and Refugee Support, prison ministry, hospital visitors, a helpline and other services from St Vincent de Paul, Natural Family Planning. Mercy Partners operate 2 hospitals in Townsville as Mater Health Service NQ. As in most Australian dioceses, the proportion of Catholics in Townsville aged 65 years and over has increased significantly, from 9.4% in 1996 to 13.1% in 2016, and the diocese responded early. There are now 4 accommodation facilities and a nursing home for the aged provided by the Canossian Sisters, Mercy Sisters, Mercy Partners, and St Vincent de Paul.

Early Education and Care Services: Mary MacKillop Childcare North Queensland commenced operation in January 2020 bringing together into one new diocesan agency 29 centres including Early Learning Centres, Kindergartens and Out of School Hours Care operations.

Finances: The diocese is registered with the Charities Commission (ACNC) as The Roman Catholic Trust Corporation for the Diocese of Townsville, together with other related entities. 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. It does not publish an annual financial report. The diocese has a Diocesan Development Fund (DDF) whose principal activity is to receive and hold deposits from Catholic institutions, parishes and schools to support the charitable, religious and educational works of the Church via internal lending for capital development and distributions to the diocese. The DDF's *2020 Annual Report* shows total assets of \$133.3 million and net assets of \$8.8 million. Current loans (2020) to schools, parishes and Catholic institutions total \$49.1 million.⁷

⁵ https://qcec.catholic.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/QCEC_Annual_Report_2019_Final_WEB.pdf

⁶ https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/os-data/tsv-catholic-edu-au/documents/210_tce_annual_report_final.pdf

⁷ <https://www.tsv.catholic.org.au/diocese/diocesan-office/development-fund/>

Communications and Media: The diocese has a Communications and Media Office, a diocesan website, and a newspaper titled *Catholic News* which is published quarterly. Some 34,000 copies are distributed to parishes and schools. The website offers short videos on the priests of the diocese, life in the seminary, youth events, Bishop’s messages including his introductions to the ‘seasons of consultation’ for the current mission renewal journey. The diocese communicates to the community through a number of social media channels including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. The Bishop also communicates through Facebook and Twitter. Several parishes also operate through Facebook.

The Catholic Education Office publishes a quarterly magazine titled *Love Our Catholic Schools* including material on Indigenous Education.

Safeguarding and Child Sexual Abuse: The Royal Commission identified the diocese as a significant setting of abuse. It recorded the diocese as having the 15th highest overall proportion of priests (5.7%) who were alleged perpetrators, taking into account the duration of ministry.⁸ Its June 2017 *Analysis of Claims* states that 29 claims were made against the diocese, with 17 payments made for a total of \$604,000 (average \$36,000 per payment).⁹ The diocese has a published *Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy* and a risk management strategy with 8 key procedures to ensure a safe environment for children, young people and vulnerable adults. The policy conforms to State legislation and the protocols recommended by the Royal Commission. It will be updated in 2021 to accord with the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (NCSS) developed by Catholic Professional Standards Limited and endorsed by the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference and Catholic Religious Australia. The Diocesan Safeguarding Coordinator ensures that all ministries are compliant, accountable and transparent and works closely with the Queensland Catholic Professional Standards Office. During 2021 the diocese will transition from the *Towards Healing* protocol to the new National Response Protocol and receive an Audit Report of the diocese’s implementation of the NCSS.¹⁰ A total of 180 diocesan entities are registered participants in the National Redress Scheme as part of Australian Catholic Redress Limited.¹¹

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

	2001	2006	2011	2016	2019 at 31 December	2021 at 14 April	Change 2001 to 2019
Total Population (at Census)	253,652	254,156	278,498	288,740			+13.8%*
Catholic Population (at Census) (% of Total)	74,433 (29.3%)	72,952 (28.7%)	80,243 (28.8%)	79,008 (27.4%)			+4,575* +6.1%*
Number of Parishes	27	26	26	27	27	26	-3.7%
Diocesan priests	26	26	22	20	20		-34.6%
Religious priests	7	6	5	6	9		+28.6%
Total Priests	33	32	27	26	29		-12.1%
Priests in active parish ministry (% of Total Priests)			20 (74.1%)		20 (69.0%)	19	-5%**
- Australian-born			11 (55%)		5 (26.0%)	4 (21.0%)	-63.6%**
- Overseas-born			9 (45%)		15 (75.0%)	15 (79.0%)	+66.7%**
Parishes with full-time resident priest (%)			16 (61.5%)		10 (37.0%)	11 (42.3%)	-31.3%**
Catholics per priest in parish ministry			4,012		3,950 (est.)		
Permanent deacons	1	1	0	0	0		-100%
Religious Sisters	76	62	54	40	43		-43.4%
Religious Brothers	16	10	9	7	6		-62.5%
Diocesan Seminarians	0	0	1	1	1		+100%
Diocesan Pastoral Council in operation		Yes	Yes (to 2014)	No	No	In prospect in 2021	
Last Diocesan Synod	1958	1958	1958	1958	1958	1958	
Diocesan Pastoral Plan in place						No	
Catholic schools	32	31	33	32	33		+3.1%

⁸ <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/CARC.0050.025.0283.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. <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/CARC.0050.025.0001.pdf>

¹⁰ file.catholic.org.au

¹¹ [Search for institutions that have joined the Scheme | National Redress Scheme](#)

Students in Catholic schools	9,324	11,154	12,444	13,397	13,883		+48.8%
Hospitals	1	0	1	2	2		+100%
Aged Care Accommodation Facilities	5	1	2	2	5		No change
Typical weekend Mass attendance (% of all Catholics)		6,177(8.4%)	5,895(7.3%)	5,544(7.0%)			-633***(-10.2%)***

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:

Townsville diocesan website: www.tsv.catholic.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 Townsville*, Canberra, September 2019.

https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Townsville_2016-Diocesan-Profile.pdf

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

<https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Diocesan-Final-Report-Phase-1-Townsville.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 Harris 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*. A response was received with suggested corrections and updates and all these have been incorporated into the text and table.