

Living Church in Hope - Rural/Remote

Elizabeth Young RSM, Catholic Mission Conference 2025

Catholics and Mass Attendance Stats

ABS, 2021; Philippa Martyr, *Witness: The Future Catholic Church in Australia*, Conor Court, 2025

Diocese	Catholics 2021	Mass-going Catholics 2021	Rate of Mass attendance 2021 %	Projected Mass-going 2051
Armidale	37,976	2,950	7.8	1,638
Ballarat	89,131	7,117	8	3,332
Bathurst	62,137	3,523	5.7	1,256
Broome	7,459	592	7.9	440
Bunbury	56,976	3,757	6.6	2,465
Cairns	55,142	3,070	5.6	2,009
Darwin	39,003	4,061	10.4	4,493
Geraldton	21,377	1,254	5.9	541
Lismore	97,956	5,391	5.5	2,186
Port Pirie	22,152	2,036	9.2	1,278
Sale	123,706	7,733	6.2	4,643
Sandhurst	84,607	5,619	6.6	2,710
Rockhampton	93,464	4,745	5.1	2,011
Toowoomba	59,031	3,420	5.8	1,167
Townsville	69,405	3,787	5.5	2,023
Wagga Wagga	58,408	5,439	9.3	3,215
Wilcannia-Forbes	25,274	1,447	5.7	569

Signs of God's Mission: Living Church

- Baptisms ("So those who welcomed his message were baptized" Acts 2:41)
- Funerals ("But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him." Rom 6:8)
- Compassion ("Be compassionate/merciful, just as your Father is compassionate/merciful." Lk 6:36)
- Justice ("you...have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith." Matt 23:23)
- Good news to the poor ("just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." Matt 25:40)
- Personal encounter with Jesus ("Your faith has saved you; go in peace." Luke 7:50)
- Joy ("my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." John 15:11)
- Gathering ("They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." Acts 2:42)
- Religious education/formation ("It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ." Col 1:28)
- Community ("By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Jn 13:35)
- Lit by a fire ("I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you" 2 Tim 1:6)
- Response to the Spirit ("the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'" Acts 13:2)
- Know God within ("And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Jn 17:3)

- Love God, poor, each other, creation (“Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” Col 3:14)

Living Church Strengths

- Liturgical and pastoral roles taken on by everyone (confidence in ministry)
- Creativity (venues, adaptations, visiting/liturgical teams)
- Volunteerism (community pitches in, apologies if away)
- Relationships (other churches, community organisations, business, media)
- Sense of community and tradition

“The Christian substratum of certain peoples – most of all in the West – is a living reality. Here we find, especially among the most needy, a moral resource which preserves the values of an authentic Christian humanism. Seeing reality with the eyes of faith, we cannot fail to acknowledge what the Holy Spirit is sowing. It would show a lack of trust in his free and unstinting activity to think that authentic Christian values are absent where great numbers of people have received baptism and express their faith and solidarity with others in a variety of ways. This means more than acknowledging occasional “seeds of the word”, since it has to do with an authentic Christian faith which has its own expressions and means of showing its relationship to the Church.” **Evangeli Gaudium #68**

“Despite a trend of overall decline in Christian affiliation in Australia, there has been a steady stream of people moving towards the Christian faith over the last two decades. More than 784,000 Australians identified with Christianity in the most recent Census (2021) who had previously identified with no religion, and similar numbers have been moving towards Christianity between each Census for the last 20 years. The most common reasons Australians change their religious identity to Christian are because they feel a spiritual connection or sense of divine presence that draws them to Christianity or because they find personal meaning and purpose through Christianity.

While there is movement towards Christianity across various groups in society, it is largely older Australians that are changing their identity to Christian... In an ageing population that is living longer than ever, how the church engages those in their retirement years is more important than ever.

The religious status of young Australians is nuanced. On one hand, young Australians are continuing to turn to Christianity. From 2006 to 2011, one in five young (aged 15-24) non-religious Australians became Christian (19%). While this has dropped to 8% from 2016 to 2021, numerically, this represents over 85,000 young people finding Christianity in the five years to 2021... (36%) have moved from Christianity to no religion. This rate is almost twice as high as the rate of the overall population (19%).

Although less than half of Australians currently consider themselves Christians, many are quite warm towards Christianity or at least open to spiritual conversations involving perspectives that differ from their own. More than two in five Australians (45%) are extremely or very open to spiritual conversations that involve different views to their own. One in five Australians (19%) are extremely or significantly open to changing their current religious view. The most attractive features of Christianity for non-Christians are the sense of community and belonging (36%), the peace and hope that Christianity can offer (33%) and the focus on caring for others (30%). In an age of social isolation and increasing loneliness, the Church is uniquely positioned to be an example of community and human relationships done well... Even though younger Australians are becoming less likely to move towards Christianity, those who are Christians are more likely than older Christians to attend church regularly.”

McCrinkle Research Pty Ltd, An Undercurrent of Faith: Exploring Australians' renewed relationship with Christianity, mccrinkle.com, 2025.