



# Pointers

## Contents

Spiritual but not Religious	1
Estimating Homelessness	7
Plenary Council 2020 - The Times They Are A-Changin'	12
Changes Across the Globe	20

Christian Research Association  
Charting the faith of Australians



## Spiritual but not Religious

### Who are 'Spiritual but Not Religious'?

*The two biggest changes in the religious profile of Australia over the past fifty years are firstly the movement of people into the 'no religion' category. The second movement has been the growth of people who describe themselves as 'spiritual but not religious'.*

The first major study of the 'spiritual but not religious' was conducted in 2002, the results of which were published in *Spirit Matters*, a book by Kaldor, Hughes and Black (2010). It found 17 per cent of the adult Australian population to be spiritual but not religious. Another national survey in 2009 reported 23 per cent of Australians as 'spiritual but not religious' and the SEIROS (Study for the Economic Impact of Religion on Society) survey conducted by the Christian Research Association in 2016 reported 24 per cent of Australians as 'spiritual but not religious' as shown in Figure 1. Incidentally, adding in the 22 per cent of the population who describe themselves as 'religious and

### Christian Research Association

PO Box 206  
Nunawading LPO  
VIC 3131

T: 0432-071-876  
E: [admin@cra.org.au](mailto:admin@cra.org.au)

[www.cra.org.au](http://www.cra.org.au)

ABN: 49 124 169 966  
Registered association: A7123

spiritual', a total of 46 per cent of the adult Australian population describe themselves as 'spiritual' compared with 36 per cent who describe themselves as 'religious'.

coming decades. If, on the other hand, it represents different life foci for different stages of life, we may see younger people describing themselves as 'spiritual but not religious' later in life, which would suggest a maintaining of

### How Adult Australians Described Themselves in Relation to Religion and Spirituality

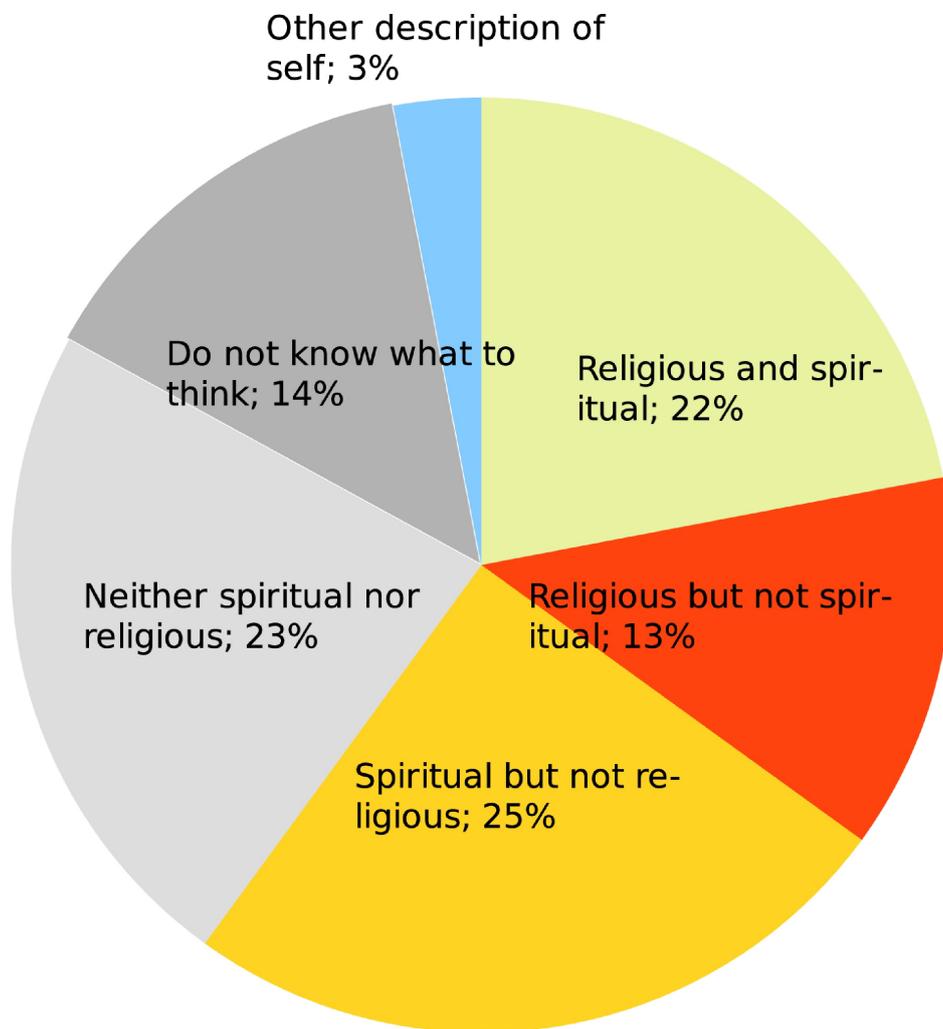


Figure 1  
Source: SEIROS Survey, 2016.

The increasing number of people identifying as 'spiritual but not religious' from 23 per cent to 24 per cent from 2009 to 2016 suggests that there is not much current growth in this category. This is reinforced by the age profile of the category. The 2016 SEIROS survey found there were higher proportions among the older population compared with the younger population:

- 21% of the population 18 to 34 years;
- 26% of people 35 to 54 years; and,
- 28% of people 55 years and over.

If these figures represent the spirituality of different historical cohorts, it seems likely that the proportion of 'spiritual but not religious' in the Australian population will decline slowly over

current proportions in that category.

The 2016 SEIROS survey found that approximately 75 per cent of those who were 'spiritual but not religious' used to attend a church, at least during their childhood. Just three per cent of them attended frequently at the time of the survey, and another 13 per cent attended a church occasionally. This suggests that many of these people may be affirming some dimensions of the religiosity that was important to them in their early years, but rejecting the institutional dimensions.

Of all the people who used to attend a church (either occasionally or frequently) when they

were children, the 2016 SEIROS survey indicated that almost half (49%) never attended at all, and 30 per cent were attending less than once a month. Of all those people:

- 36% described themselves as 'spiritual but not religious';
- 29% described themselves as 'neither spiritual nor religious';
- 16% described themselves as 'religious'; and,
- 19% said they did not know how to describe themselves.

In other words, among those dropping out or decreasing their church attendance a few continued to describe themselves as religious, even though they attended a church only occasionally or never. Another group did not know what to think about religion or spirituality, but the majority divided into two groups, the larger being the 'spiritual but not religious' group, and the other being the 'neither spiritual nor religious' group.

Among all those who described themselves as 'spiritual but not religious' the majority either used to attend a church and no longer did so, or were people on the fringes of the church attending just occasionally:

- 48% used to attend, but no longer did so at all; and,
- 20% were occasional attenders.

Another 6 per cent were attenders, and 26 per cent had never attended a church.

One possible explanation of this dynamic is the rejection of institutional religion is the particular form that individualism has taken in Australian and other Western societies. The rejection of religion has occurred more strongly among those whose first language was English. Thus of all those who attended a church frequently as a child but now never attend, 92 per cent said their first language was English (compared with 85 per cent of the population).

The rejection of traditions, including those of religion, is a particular Western, and Anglophile phenomenon. Thus, 88 per cent of those describing themselves as 'spiritual but not religious' and 89 per cent of those describing themselves as 'neither religious nor spiritual', compared with 78 per cent of those who said they followed a religion, had English as their first language.

The question, then, is why some people with an Australian or Anglophile background who attend a religious group very occasionally, or having dropped out of religious involvement altogether, have described themselves as 'spiritual but not religious' while others have dropped both the language of religion and spirituality.

The answer to this may lay in different value orientations. In the work by Edith Cowan, NCLS and CRA in 2003, four value orientations were recognised, published in the monograph *Exploring What Australians Value*:

1. self-enhancement (exciting life, enjoying life, wealth, success and social recognition);
2. social orientation (valuing equality, freedom, social justice, protecting the environment, broadmindedness, wisdom, helpfulness and friends);
3. order (national security, cleanliness and politeness); and,
4. spiritual orientation (devout and spiritual life) (Hughes and Bond, et al., 2003).

There has been substantial work around the first two value orientations in Western societies. The first value orientation revolves around self-enhancement, and around the measurable goals in terms of production and economic success. It is associated with occupations in business, manufacturing and other forms of production. Success is measured in terms of what is produced or in terms of financial gain (Hughes and Bond, et. al., 2003, p.23).

The second value orientation revolves around people and knowledge. It is associated with health and education. It is measured in terms of the incremental development in people's wellbeing, in their education or in their health, for example. Those people who develop strength in the people orientation are more likely to value those aspects of life which are abstract. They

place more importance than the business-oriented people on beauty, for example. Earlier work on this value orientation found that these people were often not strongly religious, but were

open to the spiritual dimension of life.

Probably because of the ways they are raised, but also because of personality characteristics, more women than men tend to have a people-oriented value system. More women than men are employed in people-oriented occupations,

---

**"... more women than men describe themselves as 'spiritual but not religious'"**

---

such as teaching or nursing. It is not surprising, then, that more women than men describe themselves as 'spiritual but not religious': 28 per cent compared with 21 per cent of men.

The SEIROS survey did not allow a full examination of value orientations. However, respondents to the survey were asked two relevant questions. The first was how much they measured their achievements in their work by changes in the lives of people, for example, in education, health or wellbeing, and how much they measured their achievements by profits or surpluses made. The SEIROS survey found that the spiritual but not religious valued achievement in the benefits they brought to people more than those neither spiritual nor religious.

The second question was about what made life worth-while for the respondent. Most respondents reported that, above all, it was family and friends. However, those who identified themselves as 'spiritual but not religious' rated being in nature, music and cooking or craft more highly than either the religious or the non-religious as shown in Table 1. When asked about the importance of 'being in tune with nature', 27 per cent strongly affirmed it, compared with 23 per cent of the religious and just 8 per cent of those neither spiritual nor religious (SEIROS Survey 2016).

These value orientations are deeply rooted. It is likely that they arise partly from different personality types. Low levels of psychoticism, which means higher levels of tendermindedness, for example, have been found to be related to an openness to spirituality. The socialisation of

children through the home environment, school and friends also has an impact. The cultural environment also plays a role. For example, it was clear in the Australian study of values that people who had lived through the depression

---

**"Many of them felt deeply about the protection of the environment."**

---

and World War II were more likely to place greater importance on order in life and society, while those who grew up in the relative affluence and peace of the 1970s valued more the values of social wellbeing (Hughes and Bond, et al., 2003, p.15). There is a parallel here with what Ronald Inglehart (1977) has described as 'post-materialism'.

In summary, many of those who describe themselves as 'spiritual but not religious' are people born since 1950 with an Anglophile background. Many went to church as children, but have rejected institutional forms of religion. While many of these people now simply identify themselves as having no religion and those who have a social and non-material orientation in their values, valuing equality and freedom, social justice and the environment, wisdom and helpfulness, continue to speak of the spiritual dimension of life.

**Table 1. Priorities in What Makes Life Worthwhile for Australian Adults in the Religious, Spiritual, and Those Who are Neither Religious Nor Spiritual**

Priorities	Religious	Spiritual but not religious	Neither spiritual nor religious
1	Family	Family	Family
2	Religious faith	Friends	Friends
3	Friends	Time in nature	Paid work
4	Volunteering	Doing things for others	Travel
5	Doing things for others	Music	Music
6	Time in nature	Travel	Time in nature
7	Paid work	Volunteering	Doing things for others
8	Music	Paid work	Watching films/TV
9	Travel	Cooking or craft	Volunteering
10	Participation in community	Participation in community	Cooking or craft
11	Cooking or craft	Watching films / TV	Sport
12	Watching films/TV	Sport	Participation in community
13	Sport	Religious faith	Religious faith

Source: SEIROS Survey (2016)

Note: In the above table, no thick line between items means scores on the scale of 1 to 10 were equal for those items.

## What Does 'Spiritual but not Religious' Mean?

Analysis of the 2002 Security and Wellbeing survey in *Spirit Matters* (Kaldor, et. al., 2010), identified two major categories of those who were 'spiritual but not religious'. The first group were *eclectic*. These people described themselves as drawing on a wide range of religious and other sources in making sense of life and nurturing their spirituality. Many drew on some Buddhist ideas, as well as some Christian sources. Some of these people came out of the New Age movement and some continued to draw on some New Age resources, although few saw themselves as influenced by New Age ideas.

The second group was focussed on *nature or the environment* for their sense of peace and wellbeing. Many of them identified themselves as part of the natural order, continuous with the animal world. Some were committed to animal rights. Many of them felt deeply about the protection of the environment. They found inspiration in the landscape, in the trees and forest, in the bush or in the sea (Kaldor et. al., 2010).

This notion of 'spiritual but not religious' has been criticised for its vagueness. People mean very different things when they describe themselves as 'spiritual'. At one level, the notion of being 'spiritual but not religious' is identified more precisely by its negative assertions rather than positive assertions. The phrase is a protest against religion. These people have rejected religion, particularly in its institutional forms. Their confidence in religious organisations is very low with just 6 per cent expressing a fair degree of confidence in religious organisations compared with 44 per cent of the religious. They do not want to become members of a religious institution. They object to the idea of clericalism, of a certain group of people being identified as mediators of the sacred. They object to the notion of creeds and doctrines as the basis of their spirituality. They want tolerance and openness and are strongly affirming of multiculturalism. They have affirmed same-sex relationships and the right of the terminally ill to die at a time of their own choosing (Hughes and Bond, et al., 2003, p.18).

---

**"The phrase is a protest against religion. These people have rejected religion, particularly in its institutional forms."**

---

The SEIROS survey (2016) found that just 11 per cent of those who identified themselves as 'spiritual but not religious' affirmed the idea of God who is external to us and is concerned with human beings. Many of them do believe there are spiritual forces in the universe. Many of them would affirm the idea that there is a Mystery at the heart of the universe (Bodycomb, 2018). Others would see the spiritual as something deep within us, rather than as something external to us.

Drawing on a range of research, Antoon Geels, Professor at Lund University in Sweden, has identified a number of differences between traditional forms of religion and the new forms of spirituality. They are:

1. Acceptance of eclectic sources rather than a particular historical tradition;
2. Emphasis on experience rather than on dogma;
3. Focus on the personal rather than the collective;
4. A life-view that is egalitarian rather than hierarchical;
5. Emphasis on the anthropological dimension of life, such as individual growth and wellbeing, rather than the theological; and,
6. A focus on this-worldliness rather than life after death.

He suggests that the first four are all consonant with globalisation, with living in a world where many traditions are recognised and where it is necessary to find ways of living together in a pluralistic environment. The fifth and sixth points arise out of the emphasis on personal experience (Geels, 2009, pp.13-15).

At the same time as being related to globalisation, the notion of 'spiritual but not religious' is a protest against materialism and

placing value on the accumulation of material goods. It is noteworthy that in the SEIROS survey they placed volunteering and paid work at a similar level in their priorities for making life worthwhile, while those who were neither religious nor spiritual

put paid work much higher. The most valuable aspects of life are not those sold in the shops. They see the most important things in life as relationships and beauty in nature, music and

art. Most would hold an account of reality in which there are dimensions of life which cannot be reduced to chemical and physical forces. Achievement is not measured less in financial gain and more in the wellbeing of the individual and in the depth of relationships.

## ‘Spiritual but not religious’ and the Future of the Church

What does this group mean for Christian churches in the future? Is there any way in which the churches can connect with this large group of people in the Australian population?

At one level, some aspects of the thinking of this group go back to elements in Christian heritage that have been lost. Jesus himself often acted in anti-institutional ways, and opposed the clericalism of his time. There was an early respect for the natural world, which comes to the fore, for example, in early Celtic Christian thinking. There is a sense of respect for the wholeness of nature and the indivisibility of life.

Having identified the characteristics of contemporary spirituality noted above, Geels argues that:

the fundamental traits of the new spiritualities of life are in harmony with the great mystical and spiritual traditions within world religion (Geels, 2009, p.15).

He notes that mystics have always drawn attention to a God who is "Mystery" - hidden as well as revealed. In seeking God, the mystics have relied on their own personal experience of that Mystery, which they have often seen as immanent in creation (Geels, 2009, p.17). They have argued that the divine Mystery cannot be limited by dogma and transcends any particular institutional formulation or historical tradition. Their emphasis has often been on union with the divine Mystery in the here and now.

Just as many mystics have stood outside or at the fringes of religious institutions, most people who identify themselves as ‘spiritual but not religious’ are unlikely to return to a church, or anything like it. Most people who are ‘spiritual but not religious’ are not interested in any form of organisational structure, especially those that may seek to confine their behaviour by expecting attendance at regular gatherings or by requiring adherence to a set of rules or beliefs. They will not enter into hierarchical organisations in which they are expected to allow the organisation to define what they believe and how they should

live.

Some scholars, such as David Voas and Steve Bruce (2007), in the UK, have argued the rise of the ‘spiritual but not religious’ is part of a general movement away from religion into secularism. Many of these people act in secular ways and, in time, will drop all reference to the spiritual. In some respects, ‘spirituality’ is being reduced to secular forms, and some scholars (Carrette and King, 2005) have suggested that this is ultimately a consumer-driven way of turning what was religious into something ‘marketable’ to the individual.

On the other hand, the protests against both secularism and religion may remain. These people look for resources which nurture their spirit. They find those resources in nature, often in meditation and forms of contemplation, in pilgrimage and reflective travel, in music and art, as well as in massages and aromas. Some find nurture through educational programs and philosophical discussions. Some are engaged in social justice and political action. Many who do not use the language of spirituality join them in these activities, and also look for that which contributes to personal and communal wellbeing.

---

**"...these people act in secular ways and, in time, will drop all reference to the spiritual."**

---

Some churches have developed programs to enter into the spiritual market-place, offering a range of resources to people, rather than seeking to draw people into community. Many churches offer music performances and some have held art exhibitions. In many churches there is an intentional emphasis on creating and valuing what is beautiful, recognising its value for nurturing the spirit. One example has been the Community Living Centres which a number of Uniting Churches have sought to run.

In entering into the spiritual market-place, there is a real tension for churches. On the one hand, they may find something of the truth to which the Christian mystics have long been pointing, recognising that the divine Mystery cannot be contained in dogmas or institutions, and is found in personal experience, in the here and now. On the other hand, many people within the

institutional churches will wonder what they are forfeiting, and whether a program which focuses on nurturing personal spirituality can be sufficient to carry the weight of the Christian heritage. From the perspective of the many people who describe themselves as 'spiritual but not religious', what the churches offer will be seen as being in competition with many other providers of spiritual nurturing. Ultimately, such programs will be judged by their authenticity and effectiveness.

*Philip Hughes*

## References:

Bodycomb, John. (2018) *Two Elephants in the Room: Evolving Christianity and Leadership*, Richmond, Victoria: Spectrum Publications.

Carrette, Jeremy R., and King, Richard. (2005) *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*. London; New York: Routledge.

Geels, Antoon. (2009) 'Glocal Spirituality' in T. Ahlbäck and B. Dhala, *Postmodern Spirituality*, Åbo, Finland: Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History.

Heelas, P. (2007). 'The Holistic Milieu: Reflections on Voas and Bruce'. In K. Flanagan and P. Jupp, *A Sociology of Spirituality*, Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, pp.63-80.

Hughes, P. and Bond, S., Bellamy, J. and Black, A. (2003) *Exploring What Australians Value*,

Adelaide: Openbook Publishers.

Inglehart, R. (1977) *The Silent Revolution*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Kaldor, Peter, Hughes, Philip, and Black, Alan. (2010) *Spirit Matters: How Making Sense of Life Affects Wellbeing*. Melbourne: Mosaic Press.

Voas, David and Bruce, Steve. (2007). 'The Spiritual Revolution: Another False Dawn for the Sacred'. In K. Flanagan and P. Jupp, *A Sociology of Spirituality*, Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, pp.43-62.

## Acknowledgement:

*Much of this material was first given as a paper to the Progressive Christian Network of Victoria on 24 March 2019.*

*The SEIROS Survey was conducted by the Christian Research Association in 2016, and involved the collection of responses from a random sample of 7756 Australian adults aged 18 years and older. In total, 6825 Australians answered the question about whether they were religious, spiritual or neither. The data from the SEIROS Survey was used with the permission of SEIROS (Study for the Economic Impact of Religion on Society).*

# Estimating Homelessness

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), on Tuesday 9 August 2016 there were around 116,400 people who were defined as 'homeless' in Australia (ABS, 2018). This reflects a 13.7 per cent increase in the number of homeless people since the previous Census estimate in 2011.

Whilst the Census of Population and Housing does not set out specifically to collect information on homelessness, the ABS uses statistical techniques on the data to estimate the number of individuals homeless at a given point in time (Census night).

## What is homelessness?

The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) rightly asserts that homelessness is not just the result of too few houses (FaHCSIA, 2008). In fact, according to the 2016 Census, there were over one million dwellings which were unoccupied on the night of the Census. By definition, unoccupied dwellings are dwellings such as vacant houses, holiday houses, huts or cabins, which were built to be habitable, but were not inhabited on Census night.

Similarly, the ABS definition of homelessness is informed in terms of understanding

homelessness not as 'rooflessness', but 'homelessness' which includes a lack of elements such as a sense of security, stability, privacy, safety, and the ability to have control over one's living space (ABS, 2012). As such, it defines someone as homeless if that person's current living situation:

- Is in an inadequate dwelling,
- Has no tenure, or if the tenure is short or not extendable, or,
- Does not allow control over space for social relations (ABS, 2012).

While popular belief may see rough sleepers - those living on the streets - as making up the majority of those who experience homelessness, the fact is that such people only accounted for a small proportion of all those who were homeless on Census night in 2016. As Figure 1 shows, rough sleepers accounted for seven per cent of the homeless, while the most common experience of homelessness were for those who were living in 'severely' crowded dwellings (44%), defined as "needing four or more extra bedrooms to accommodate the people who normally live there" (ABS, 2018). Those persons who were in supported accommodation made up 15 per cent of all homeless persons in 2016, while those who were staying temporarily with others in a household ('couch surfers'), and those living in boarding houses each made up around 15 per cent overall.

Table 1 provides a summary of the number of homeless persons by Census year and the

**Table 1. Number of Homeless Persons in Australia, 2001-2016**

Homeless category	2001	2006	2011	2016
Rough sleeping	8,946	7,247	6,810	8,201
Supported accommodation	13,420	17,329	21,258	21,238
Couch surfing	17,880	17,663	17,374	17,722
Boarding houses	21,300	15,460	14,944	17,500
Temporary lodgings	338	500	682	673
Overcrowded dwellings	33,430	31,531	41,370	51,092
<b>All homeless persons</b>	<b>95,314</b>	<b>89,723</b>	<b>102,438</b>	<b>116,426</b>

Source: ABS, Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016. Homeless categories developed by author using ABS Operational Group definitions.

homeless category in which they fall.

It is worth noting that three other categories of

living situations, while not classified officially as homelessness, represent individuals at risk of falling into homelessness.

These categories include:

- Persons living in other crowded dwellings (needing three extra bedrooms),
- Persons in other improvised dwellings, or,
- Persons who are marginally housed in caravan parks.

According to the ABS, together these three groups represented a further 97,000 people in 2016 (ABS, TableBuilder).

## Who is homeless?

The ABS estimates also provided key demographic and geographical information about those who were homeless in 2016.

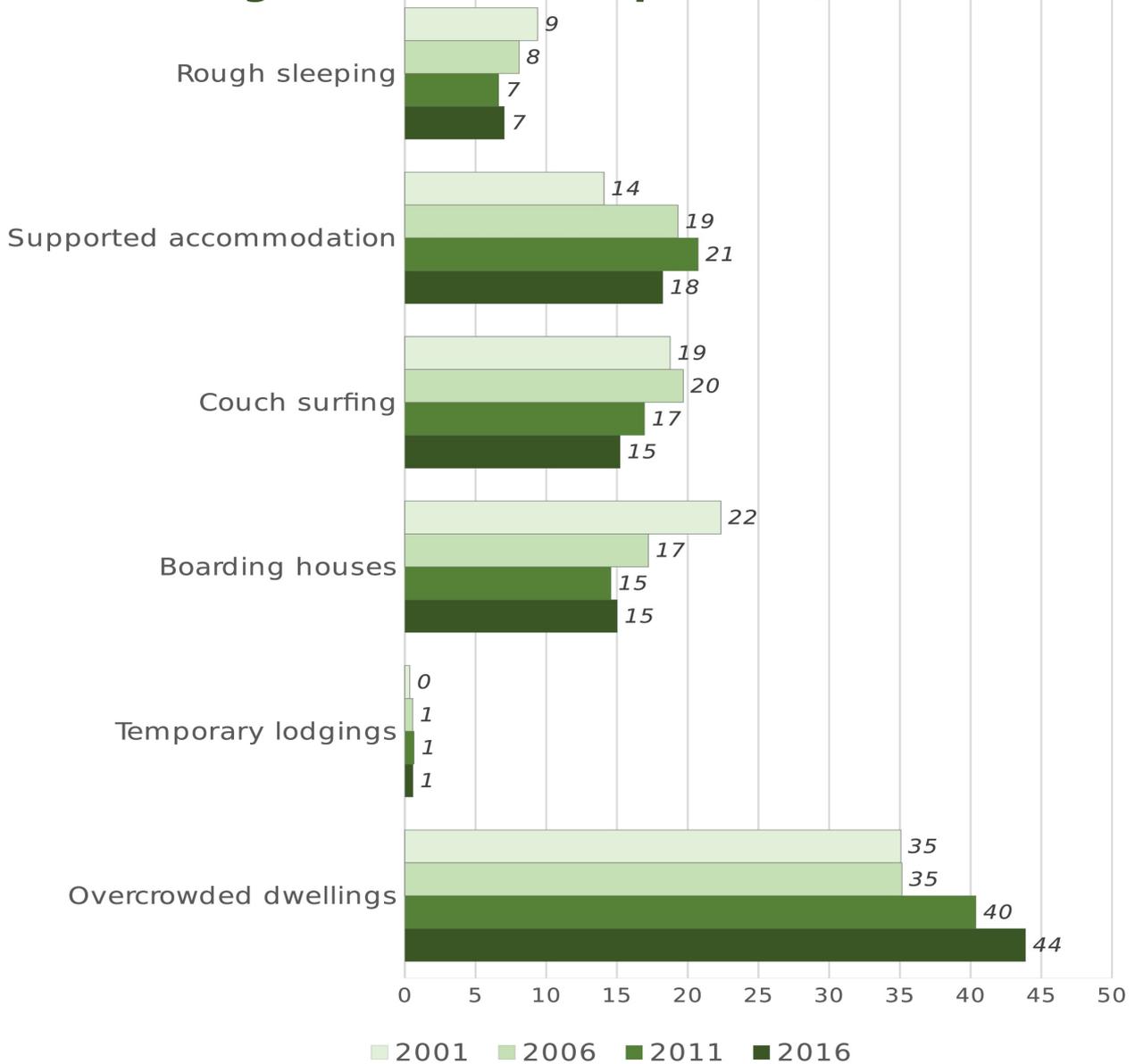
### Geography

New South Wales (37,715) and Victoria (24,817) had the largest homeless populations, and made up 53 per cent of homeless persons in Australia. While the Northern Territory represented 12 per cent of all homeless, or 13,717 persons, it was represented disproportionately by the number of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders. Tasmania had a considerably lower rate of homelessness in comparison to its population, with 1,622 persons homeless, or 1.4 per cent of the Australian total.

In order to get an accurate perspective by state

and territory, the ABS calculates a per capita homelessness rate; that is, the number of homeless persons for every 10,000 persons of

**Figure 1. Homeless Persons in Australia  
Percentage of all homeless persons, 2001-2016**



Source: ABS, Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016. Homeless categories developed by author using ABS Operational Group definitions.

the population. Nationally, on average, there were 50 persons homeless for every 10,000 people. The Northern Territory far exceeded that average with 599 homeless persons per 10,000 of the population. Although that rate has decreased significantly since 2001, when it was 904 persons per 10,000, the figure grossly exceeded any other state or territory homelessness rates. Of the other states and territories, New South Wales had the highest rate and the same as the national average (50 per 10,000 population), while Tasmania (32), Western Australia (36) and South Australia (37) had the lowest rates.

Remote areas and Very Remote areas of

Australia had the highest rates of homelessness, with 565 and 117 persons homeless for every 10,000 people respectively. Outer Regional areas – which includes Darwin and other smaller regional cities such as Broken Hill, Cairns, Mildura, and Horsham – had slightly lower rates of homelessness than the national average, with around 48 person homeless for every 10,000. Inner Regional areas of Australia had the lowest rates of homelessness (32) while areas in Major Cities had a rate of 45 for every 10,000 in the population.

Within the various Local Government Areas (LGA's) across Australia, the rate of

homelessness was highest in those areas with high concentrations of Aboriginal persons, such as in the Northern Territory and some areas in northern Western Australia and parts of Queensland. However, within some of the other states there was a combination of urban areas and rural areas which contained high rates of homelessness. For example, in New South Wales, the Sydney LGA had the highest rate of homelessness with 243 persons per 10,000, while Walgett LGA, in central northern NSW, had a rate of 206. In South Australia, the urban area of the Adelaide LGA (292) and the Ceduna LGA (117), in the west coast of the Eyre Peninsula, had the highest rates. On the other hand, in Victoria, metropolitan LGA's, such as Greater Dandenong (128), Melbourne (127), and Port Philip (112), had the highest rates of homelessness in the state.

### Age and sex

In 2016, 58 per cent of all homeless persons were male and 42 per cent were female. While those aged 25-34 made up the largest group of homeless (21%), what is sobering is the number of young people represented in the figures. Fourteen per cent of all homeless - almost 16,000 people - were under the age of 12. The vast majority of those children were living in overcrowded dwellings (61%) or in supported accommodation (26%). A further 10,000 (9%) homeless were aged 12 to 18 years. At the other end of the age spectrum, those aged 65 or older represented seven per cent (7,940 people) of the homeless population.

### Ethnicity

In comparison to the general population, a significantly lower proportion of homeless persons were Australian-born: 67 per cent of the population compared with 54 per cent of the homeless. Other than Australia, the main birthplaces which had higher proportions of homeless people were Southern Asia (particularly India and Afghanistan), South-East Asia (particularly Vietnam), and China. While 41 per cent of Australian-born homeless were living

in overcrowded dwellings, 81 per cent of those born in Southern Asia, three-quarters of those born in South-East Asia and 71 per cent of those born in China were living in such situations.

Many of those born overseas, as well as a small proportion born in Australia, spoke languages other than English as their first language. Overall one in ten homeless people did not speak English well or at all. Of those born overseas, two-thirds - or 24,000 people - had arrived in Australia in the previous ten years.

### Religion

An analysis of the religious identification variable in the 2016 Census reveals some groups were represented among the homeless more than others. Almost one in five (19%) of the 116,400 estimated homeless persons chose not to answer the optional religion question on the Census. In comparison, overall, nine per cent of the Australian population did not answer the

religion question. The variance is perhaps not surprising given that many of the other compulsory Census questions were also unanswered by a similar proportion of those who were homeless. However, when the 'Not stated' is removed from the analysis, Islam, Buddhism, Uniting Church and Aboriginal traditional religions were more highly

---

**"...Islam, Buddhism, Uniting Church and Aboriginal traditional religions were more highly represented amongst the homeless than in the general population as a whole."**

---

represented amongst the homeless than in the general population as a whole. In contrast, a much lower proportion of homeless persons identified as Catholic, Anglican and 'No religion' in comparison to the general population.

### Summary

The ABS data suggests that the demographic makeup of homeless persons can be similar to that of society as a whole. That also suggests that a homeless person or family we meet on the street, in the shopping centre, or at church, may not be too dissimilar to ourselves. While many identify the homeless issue as an issue that the Australian government needs to address (see, for example, Chamberlain et al., 2014), such needs demand that the churches and associated

organisations need to play a more significant role in advocacy and in service delivery. Many Australians know what it is like to have security, stability, privacy, safety and the ability to have control over one's living space. As Christians we should strive to ensure a similar future for those who currently do not have those privileges. Understanding who the homeless are is one step on the road to addressing such inequalities.

*Stephen Reid*

## References

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012). Cat. 4922.0 - *Information Paper - A Statistical Definition of Homelessness*, 2012. Canberra.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018). *20490DO001\_2016 Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016*. Canberra.

Chamberlain, Chris, Guy Johnson and Catherine Robinson. (eds) (2014). *Homelessness in Australia: An Introduction*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press.

## Data source

Some customised data was extracted from the 2016 Census of Population and Housing datasets using TableBuilder Pro.

## About CRA

The Christian Research Association was formed in 1985 to serve the churches of Australia. Its task is to provide up-to-date and reliable information about religious faith and church life in Australia.

### Our Supporters

The CRA is directly supported by the following organisations which have members on its board:

Anglican Diocese of Melbourne

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

Lutheran Church of Australia

The Salvation Army (Southern Territory)

Eastern College (Melbourne)

Seventh-day Adventist Church

Uniting Church in Australia (Synod of Victoria and Tasmania)

Stirling Theological College

About 200 organisations, churches, schools and individuals are Associate Members of the CRA. Individual Associate Members pay \$120 and Institutional Members pay \$150 per year. They receive Pointers and all other publications of the Christian Research Association. Subscription to Pointers alone is \$45 per annum for a printed hardcopy within Australia or \$20 by e-mail.

### Pointers

Contributing editor: Stephen Reid. Each edition is reviewed by a committee of the CRA Board prior to publication. Acceptance of copy does not indicate editorial endorsement. Material from Pointers may be quoted provided appropriate acknowledgement and citation of the source are given. Whole articles, charts, tables and graphs may not be reproduced without written permission.

Find us on 

[www.facebook.com/christianresearchassociation](http://www.facebook.com/christianresearchassociation)

 **Linked in**

[www.linkedin.com/company/christianresearchassociation](http://www.linkedin.com/company/christianresearchassociation)

# Plenary Council 2020 – The Times They Are A-Changin’

The Catholic Church in Australia is in a period of significant change, impacted not only by the changing context of Australian society, but specifically by the effects wrought by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Coleridge, 2016, 348). The Church as a whole is being challenged to change its ways and the people who make up the Church are in equal parts hopeful, hurting and confused as they navigate the process of doing so (Brierly, 2018; Connolly, 2018a, 1; Connolly, 2018c, 1; Connolly, 2018d, 1; Connolly, 2018f, 1). Consequently, in 2017, the Australian Catholics Bishops Conference (ACBC), the assembly of all the Catholic bishops in Australia, sought permission to hold a Plenary Council (Connolly, 2018b, 1). A Plenary Council is the most significant gathering that can be held for the Church (Ang, 2018, 32; Wilkinson, 2017b, 12). The resolutions made at the Council have both legislative and governance authority, allowing decisions to become binding for the Catholic Church in Australia (Ang, 2018, 32). In early 2018,

---

**"...a Plenary Council had not been undertaken in Australia for more than 80 years..."**

---

Pope Francis gave his permission for the Australian Church to hold a Plenary Council (ACBC Media Blog, 2018). It was decided the Council would be celebrated over two sessions: in October 2020 in Adelaide and in May 2021 in Sydney (Plenary Council 2020, 2019).

A Plenary Council is held in three stages: preparation, celebration and implementation (Wilkinson, 2017b, 13). Preparation is the first stage from the decision to hold a Council until the first session of the Council is held (Plenary Council 2020, 2017, 9). Celebration is the time of the Council itself, and implementation is the ongoing process of applying the decrees and decisions made at the Council to the life of the Church (Plenary Council 2020, 2017, 9).

It was decided that the agenda for this Australian Plenary Council would be the result of a true consultative process, seeking the voices of the

entire Australian Catholic Church (Connolly, 2017, 6; Connolly, 2018e, 1; Fermio & Thomson, 2018, 1). The decision to undertake a Plenary Council with a completely open agenda is unique in the world (Connolly, 2018b, 1). Adding to the fact that a Plenary Council had not been undertaken in Australia for more than 80 years, and that only two other Plenary Councils had been held internationally in the last 50 years, makes this undertaking of great international interest (Connolly, 2018b, 1; Wilkinson, 2017b, 12).

In preparation for the Council, a Plenary Council Executive Committee was established by the ACBC (Wilkinson, 2017b, 13). The committee outlined a three-year project: "Journey to Plenary Council 2018-2020" to guide the focus and agenda of the Council. Stage One of "Journey to Plenary Council 2018-2020" was titled Listening and Dialogue (Plenary Council 2020, 2017, 9). The people of the Church were invited to participate in Listening and Dialogue encounters, which offered an opportunity for both groups and individuals to reflect on and respond to the question: What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time? (Plenary Council 2020, 2017, 9).

Stage Two of the journey, which began at Pentecost on 9 June 2019, was to undertake discernment of the responses received (Plenary Council 2020, 2019b). Stage Three will be the development of the focus and agenda for the Plenary Council 2020, based on the discernment in the previous stages and from the "sense of faith" (*sensus fidelium*) of the people of God in Australia (Rush, 2017, 1, 12; Wilkinson, 2017b, 14). See Figure 1 for a timeline of this process.

## Plenary Councils in Australia

Plenary Council 2020 is the fifth Plenary Council in Australia's history, with the last Council being held in 1937, (Wilkinson, 2017b, 12). Previous Plenary Councils were held in Australia in 1885, 1895, 1905 and 1937 (Wilkinson, 2017b, 12). The bishops of New Zealand were full participants in both the first (1885) and fourth (1937) Plenary Councils (Waters, 2006, 460; Wilkinson, 2017b, 14; Wilkinson, 2018a, 8; Wilkinson, 2019, 8). The Councils of 1885, 1895 and 1905, under the guidance of Cardinal Patrick Francis Moran

## THE PLENARY COUNCIL JOURNEY IN 2019

Ash Wednesday marks the close of the Listening and Dialogue stage.

6  
March

National Centre for Pastoral Research collates and analyses all responses. A draft preliminary National Report is developed, with emergent themes for the Plenary Council identified.

Pentecost marks the launch of the next stage of preparation – *Listening and Discernment* – with the themes for national discernment announced.

April  
May

9  
June

Applications and selection of Working Group Chairs and members, with one working group per theme developing Council papers for discussion at the first session of the Plenary Council.

First meeting of Working Groups and local small group discernment to begin.

June

July

Sept

Nominations open for the lay delegates of the Plenary Council 2020.

National Centre for Pastoral Research will publish Diocesan qualitative reports.

October

April  
2020

At Easter, draft Plenary Council papers discerned by the Working Group become available for download and discussion.

The first session of the Plenary Council 2020 will be held in Adelaide on October 4th - 11th, 2020.

4-11  
Oct 2020

May  
2021

The second session of the Plenary Council will be held in Sydney.



Figure 1: The Plenary Council Journey in 2019  
<http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/>

(1830-1911), established dioceses and decrees that supported the pastoral actions of the then newly established Catholic Church in Australia (Waters, 2006, 463; Wilkinson, 2018a, 12; Wilkinson 2018b, 12-13; Wilkinson, 2019, 11). The agendas were determined locally by the bishops and the acts and decrees resulting from them were sent to the Holy See for recognitio (approval of the decrees by the Vatican; Waters, 2006, 463; Wilkinson, 2017a, 11; Wilkinson, 2018b, 12-13; Wilkinson, 2019, 11).

The fourth Council in 1937 was conceived in a different manner and was driven by a focus on implementing the 1917 Code of Canon Law, which had been promulgated since the last Plenary Council (Waters, 2006, 452, 463, 466).

---

## **"Following the fourth Council, tensions between the bishops in Australia and Rome increased..."**

---

The agenda and schema for the 1937 Council were determined solely by the Apostolic Delegate, who was the newly installed representative of the Vatican in Australia (Waters, 2006, 456-463). At the Council, the decrees were read out and unanimously approved by the Council members with amendments to only three of the 685 decrees (Waters, 2006, 460). This was in contrast to previous Councils where discussion of the subject matter, and consultation with other clergy, was the main focus of the Council (Waters, 2006, 463). Most of the decrees of the previous three Councils were repealed (Waters, 2006, 463).

Following the fourth Council, tensions between the bishops in Australia and Rome increased, as each sought a different model of working (Waters, 2006, 466). The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), which took place from 1962 to 1965, brought with it respite as it mandated the need for episcopal conferences, a model that the Australian bishops had already implemented (Waters, 2006, 466). Vatican II had an enormous impact on the Church, chiefly in the translation of the traditional Latin Mass into the vernacular tongues of the people, in the way the liturgy was celebrated with the priests facing the congregation and in a renewed love and central place of the scriptures in the liturgy and spiritual

life of the Church (Johnson, 2012, 20-21, 38; Moloney, 2012, 47).

The reforms proposed by Vatican II were both ambitious and revolutionary, and the implementation since has been met with both joy and trepidation (Connolly, 2018e, 1-2; Ormerod, 2012, 62-68; Wilkinson 2017a, 10-11). While some reforms were embraced, others were implemented only partially or not at all (Connolly, 2018e, Wilkinson 2017a, 10-11). One of the desires expressed by the Vatican II Council was for synods and councils to "flourish with fresh vigor" (Christus Dominus 36). But apart from the episcopal conferences, few nations took up the opportunity to embrace reform (Wilkinson 2017a, 10-11).

At his address at the ceremony commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis encouraged the development of a synodal Church which "journeys together" (Francis, 2015). He explained his vision of a synodal Church as one which "listens, which realizes that listening is 'more than simply hearing'. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn" (Francis, 2015). Inspired by this encouragement, at their plenary meeting in November 2015, a decision was made by the Australian bishops that a national ecclesial event would be held (Coleridge, 2016, 348; Wilkinson, 2017b, 12). "The decision was recognition that we can no longer put up a sign saying, 'Business as usual'. The Royal Commission has made that

---

## **"The reforms proposed by Vatican II were both ambitious and revolutionary, and the implementation since has been met with both joy and trepidation"**

---

abundantly clear" (Coleridge, 2016, 348). In November 2016, the ACBC determined to seek approval to hold a plenary council in 2020 (Coleridge, 2016, 348).

The ACBC accordingly sought the consent of Pope Francis in 2017 (Wilkinson, 2017b, 12-13). A Facilitation Team was appointed in late 2017 to develop the process by which the Catholic

Church in Australia would be consulted (Wilkinson, 2017b, 15). Consent to hold a plenary council was granted by the Pope in March 2018, and the preparation phase of the Plenary Council 2020 began in earnest (ACBC Media Blog, 2018).

## Preparation for Plenary Council 2020

The preparation phase of the “Journey to Plenary Council 2018-2020” was more than an administrative task. It was a period of listening, deep reflection and prayer by the people of Australia, and a process using best practice in

---

**"It was a period of listening, deep reflection and prayer by the people of Australia..."**

---

social science research to gather and analyse their submissions. The ACBC commissioned the National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCPDR) to oversee the data collection and analysis of the Listening and Dialogue stage. The NCPDR is the research office of the ACBC whose mission is to assist the Catholic Church in Australia at all levels in understanding the cultural, social and personal dimensions of religion in the changing contemporary context by undertaking research.

In preparation for the first stage, the NCPDR formed a research task group to guide the three-year process. The research task group included members from the Plenary Council Executive Committee, the Australian Catholic Council for Pastoral Research and experienced researchers renowned for their expertise, such as Rev Prof Phillip Hughes, the former director of the Christian Research Association, and Dr Bob Dixon, the former director of the Pastoral Research Office. The preparation process also involved the NCPDR applying for and obtaining ethics approval for analysis of the *Listening and Dialogue* data through the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Christian Research Association.

## Data collection

The data collection process of the Listening and Dialogue stage was launched at Pentecost on 20

May 2018. Submissions were made primarily through an online survey, although there were also a number of submissions received via email or in hard copy format, such as letters, books and Christmas cards. The three main questions asked on the survey were:

What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?

What questions emerge from your listening and dialogue encounter that you would like the Plenary Council to consider?

You are invited to share a story about your experience of faith or an experience of the Church in Australia that has shaped you.

A key facet of the Listening and Dialogue stage was the Listening and Dialogue encounters that were held in many parishes and organisations around Australia. Groups from Catholic parishes and dioceses, Catholic schools and other Church agencies came together and prayed, discussed, listened and then formulated submissions that were uploaded via the online portal. The Plenary Council Facilitation Team travelled to many metropolitan and regional areas across Australia during the ten-month data collection stage, and hosted a number of Listening and Dialogue encounters. At the end of the data collection process, more than 55 per cent of the total number of participants had taken part in a Listening and Dialogue encounter.

The response to the first stage of the Plenary Council process was overwhelming, which led the NCPDR to expand their team for the month of February to process the increased volume of

---

**"The response to the first stage of the Plenary Council process was overwhelming..."**

---

submissions. Each handwritten submission was typed out verbatim and individually uploaded to the online survey. Data collection was scheduled to culminate on Ash Wednesday (6 March) 2019, but was extended to 13 March to accommodate the high volume of submissions. At the close of the survey there had been 17,457 submissions from 12,758 individuals and 4,699 groups, representing a total of over 222,000 people. A majority of participants represented were

Over  
**222,000**  
PARTICIPANTS

Plenary  
Council  
Submissions

May 2018 to  
March 2019

**17,457**  
SUBMISSIONS



GROUPS 4,699

**12,758**  
INDIVIDUALS

HIGHEST SUBMISSIONS

**Melbourne**  
**2,440**

Brisbane 2,269

Perth 1,601

Sydney 1,550

1,451 Wollongong

1,038 Parramatta

930 Broken Bay

**MEN**

**29%**



**WOMEN**

**49%**

*Individual submissions only*

**9,195**

CATHOLIC



**364**

CHRISTIAN

**114 NON**  
CHRISTIAN

**312 NO**  
RELIGION

*Individual submissions only*

LARGEST GROUPS

- ✦ Catholic Social Services Victoria
- ✦ Holy Spirit Parish ACT
- ✦ Passionist Family Group Movement
- ✦ St Mary Mackillop College ACT
- ✦ The Parish of St Martin De Porres, Avondale Heights

COUNTRIES OF BIRTH

AUSTRALIA 8,335

UK & NORTHERN

IRELAND 338

PHILIPPINES 180

INDIA 172

NEW ZEALAND 112

*Individual submissions only*

Over 209,170  
individuals  
represented  
through 4,699  
groups



Plenary Council 2020  
Listen to what the Spirit is saying...

Figure 2: Stage One "Listening & Dialogue" Summary of Submissions  
<https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/pro-research-projects/plenary-council-2020/>

Catholic, however, other Christians, non-Christians and people of no religion also contributed their responses. There were participants who were born in 95 different countries and people of different age groups, ranging from the minimum age of 13 to 96 years of age. See Figure 2, for a summary of the *Listening and Dialogue* submissions.

## Coding Process

Once the data collection was complete, the NCPN conducted a rigorous process of cleaning the data. This entailed removing duplicate submissions and combining multiple submissions (from the same individual) as necessary. There was also a process carried out to obtain parent or guardian consent for submissions received from young people between the ages of 13 to 15. Any submission from an underage person that the NCPN did not receive consent for was not used in the analysis. Once the data was cleaned and organised it was uploaded to the qualitative software program NVivo and prepared for coding.

Before the coding process began, the NCPN team gave due consideration to the weighting of the data and the coding structure itself. After consultation with the research task group it was decided that it was not possible to weight any submission over another. The main reasons for this were the scope and intention of the survey (listening to all the voices) and the fact that not every group submission sent in their total number of members. Therefore, each submission was read, coded and treated the same no matter if it was a group submission of 17,000 people or an individual one.

In the middle of March 2019, the first few thousand submissions were read and the coding structure began to emerge for the main question: What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time? At the end of April 2019, thematic saturation was reached, that is, no new themes were emerging from the data (Hinnink, Kasier and Marconi, 2017, 592).

The responses were varied and mixed on a wide array of topics. A total of over 120 themes

emerged that were grouped into 15 significant topics. These included issues relating to the sacraments and liturgy; leadership; social justice; The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse; youth involvement; Catholic schools; parish life; modernising the Church and evangelisation. The NCPN are currently working on a national report, containing a detailed explanation of the themes which will be released at the end of July 2019.

---

**"... reflected on the voices of the participants of the Listening and Dialogue stage and then engaged in an intense period of prayer and discernment."**

---

## Towards Stage Two: National Discernment Process

In late May 2019, the NCPN team met with the Plenary Council Facilitation Team and the Plenary Council Executive Committee to present the findings of the Listening and

Dialogue stage. The data was presented in a workshop over an intensive three-day "data camp". Coding maps were created to display the extent and spread of the data with the themes. The members of the Plenary Council Facilitation Team and the Plenary Council Executive Committee reflected on the voices of the participants of the Listening and Dialogue stage and then engaged in an intense period of prayer and discernment. What resulted was the forming of the six National Themes for Discernment that are presented as the question How is God calling us to be a Christ-Centred Church in Australia that is:

1. Missionary and evangelising
2. Inclusive, participatory and synodal
3. Prayerful and Eucharistic
4. Humble, healing and merciful
5. A joyful, hope-filled and servant community
6. Open to conversion, renewal and reform

These six National Themes for Discernment are informed by the data and call the Catholic Church towards greater discernment for the future. The second stage of "Journey to Plenary Council 2018-2020" is the "Listening and Discernment" process which will involve establishing Working Groups for each National Theme. People in faith communities across Australia will also be called to participate locally in their own communal Listening and Discernment encounters. The fruits of what is

discerned during this time will shape the agenda of the first session of the Plenary Council held in Adelaide from 4 - 11 October 2020.

The Plenary Council in 2020 has the potential to shape the Catholic Church in Australia for years to come. The method of consultation, allowing all people in Australia a voice, and the approach of using robust modern social scientific methods,

combined with time-honoured processes of spiritual discernment, provide a unique opportunity for the Church to journey together. The outcome of the Council will be watched the world over.

*Leith Dudfield and Paul Bowell  
Research Assistants with the Australian Catholic  
Bishops Conference National Centre for Pastoral*

## Glossary

Term	Definition
Apostolic Delegate	The Pope's representative to an area, in this case, Australia.
Ash Wednesday	Ash Wednesday is a Christian holy day of prayer and fasting. It falls on the first day of Lent, the six weeks of penitence before Easter.
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) Episcopal Conference	The Australian episcopal conference. The body formed by all the bishops of a particular area, usually a nation, for the purposes of making joint decisions for that area.
Pentecost	Celebrated fifty days after Easter Sunday, Pentecost commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and other followers of Jesus Christ.
Plenary Council	A meeting whereby the whole Church of that area is represented and decisions are made that have legislative and governance authority.
Plenary meeting	A meeting of all the bishops of the nation. While decisions may be made, it does not have the legislative and governance authority of a Plenary Council.
Recognitio (Recognition)	The official approval by the Vatican of various decisions made at a Council.
Sensus Fidelium (Sense of the Faith)	The supernatural appreciation of faith on the part of the whole people, from laity to bishops, when they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals.
Vatican II	The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) which introduced sweeping reforms to the Catholic Church.

*Research.*

## REFERENCES

- ACBC Media Blog. 2018. "Pope Francis backs decision to hold Plenary Council in Australia." <http://mediablog.catholic.org.au/pope-francis-backs-decision-hold-plenary-council-australia/>
- Ang, Daniel. 2018. "Plenary Council 2020 and the Diocese of Broken Bay." *Broken Bay News*, February 2018: 32-33. <https://gallery.mailchimp.com/9d4348a071b7eaca33e0f72a7/files/36949e95-a335-49c0-b1eb-715554f268e7/DanielAngPreparingforPC2020.pdf>
- Brierly, Teresa. 2018. "Tuesdays with Teresa: What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?" <http://mnnews.today/opinion-comment/2018/32478-tuesdays-with-teresa-what-do-you-think-god-is-asking-of-us-in-australia-at-this-time/>
- Coleridge, Mark. 2016. "From Wandering to Journeying: Thoughts on a Synodal Church." *The Australasian*

*Catholic Record* 93, no. 3: 340-350.

Connolly, Noel. 2017. "Preparing to be a synodal church in Australia." *The Swag* 25, no. 3: 6.

Connolly, Noel. 2018a. "A Pope who is not afraid of open discussion and even dissent in the Church." *PlenaryPost* 1.

<https://gallery.mailchimp.com/9d4348a071b7eaca33e0f72a7/files/49b599d8-3ae7-47de-9126-9c506a5898c2/TalkTheologyV1.pdf>

Connolly, Noel. 2018b. "When we meet in Adelaide, we won't be doing something completely novel." *PlenaryPost* 2.

<https://gallery.mailchimp.com/9d4348a071b7eaca33e0f72a7/files/997aa085-ed24-450e-9fe1-ef91932f88d1/TalkTheologyV2.pdf>

Connolly, Noel. 2018c. "We need a missionary Church, rather than a perfect Church." *PlenaryPost* 7.

<https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/TalkTheologyV7.pdf>

Connolly, Noel. 2018d. "Will they listen? Will anything change?" *PlenaryPost* 8.

<https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/TalkTheologyV8.pdf>

Connolly, Noel. 2018e. "Realising the dream of Vatican II." *PlenaryPost* 10.

<https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/TalkTheologyV10.pdf>

Connolly, Noel. 2018f. "The Kingdom Within." *PlenaryPost* 11.

<https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/TalkTheologyV11.pdf>

Fermio, Mary, and Audrey Thomson. 2018. "A Pope who is not afraid of open discussion and even dissent in the Church." *PlenaryPost* 5.

<https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/TalkTheologyV5.pdf>

Francis. 2015. *Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops Address of his Holiness Pope Francis Saturday, 17 October 2015*.

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151017\\_50-anniversario-sinodo.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html)

Hennink, Monique M., Bonnie N. Kaiser, and Vincent C. Marconi. 2017. "Code Saturation Versus Meaning Saturation: How Many Interviews are enough?" *Qualitative Health Research* 27, no. 4: 591-608.

Johnson, Clare V. 2012. "A Deep and Vast Renewal of the Church's Inmost Life." in *Vatican II: Reception and Implementation in the Australian Church*, Edited by Neil Ormerod, Ormond Rush, David Pascoe, Clare Johnson and Joel Hodges, 20-46. Mulgrave, VIC: Garratt Publishing.

Moloney, Francis J. 2012. "Scripture Since Vatican II." in *Vatican II: Reception and Implementation in the Australian Church*, Edited by Neil Ormerod, Ormond Rush, David Pascoe, Clare Johnson and Joel Hodges, 47-61. Mulgrave, VIC: Garratt Publishing.

Ormerod, Neil. 2012. "The Laity in the Australian Church" in *Vatican II: Reception and Implementation in the Australian Church*, Edited by Neil Ormerod, Ormond Rush, David Pascoe, Clare Johnson and Joel Hodges, 62-75. Mulgrave, VIC: Garratt Publishing.

Plenary Council 2020. 2017. *Parish Guide*.

<https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au>

Plenary Council 2020. 2019a. "Frequently Asked Questions: When is the Plenary Council?"

<https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/frequently-asked-questions/>

Plenary Council 2020. 2019b. "About the National Themes for Discernment".

<https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/about-the-themes/>

Rush, Ormond. 2017. "Plenary Council Participation and Reception: Synodality and Discerning the *Sensus*

*Fidelium.*” 1-13.

<https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/OrmRushParticipationReception.pdf>

Second Vatican Council. “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Christus Dominus*, 28 October, 1965,” in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, 564-589. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014.

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651028\\_christus-dominus\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_christus-dominus_en.html)

Waters, Ian. B. 2006. “The Fourth Plenary Council of Australia & New Zealand.” *Annuario Historiae Conciliorum* 38, 2: 451-467.

[https://repository.divinity.edu.au/3000/1/2008JA\\_Waters%252CIB\\_The\\_Fourth\\_Plenary\\_Council.pdf](https://repository.divinity.edu.au/3000/1/2008JA_Waters%252CIB_The_Fourth_Plenary_Council.pdf)

Wilkinson, Peter. 2017a. “Particular Councils: a resource rarely used in Australia.” *The Swag* 25, no. 3: 9-11.

Wilkinson, Peter. 2017b. “Preparing for the 2020 Australian Plenary Council” *The Swag* 25, no. 3: 12-15.

Wilkinson, Peter. 2018a. “First Plenary Council of Australasia 1885.” *The Swag* 26, 2: 8-12.

Wilkinson, Peter. 2018b. “First Plenary Council of Australasia, 14-29 November 1885.” *The Swag* 26, 3: 10-13.

Wilkinson, Peter. 2019. “Second Australian Plenary Council, 17 November—1 December 1895.” *The Swag* 27, 1: 8-11.

## Changes Across the Globe

*Peter Brierley, the former director of the Christian Research Association in the UK, has summarised some of the major religious trends in his newsletter, FutureFirst. The material is based on the Global Christian Database developed at Gordon-Conwell University and materials gathered by Operation World.*

Brierley states that, in 2050, one-third of the world’s population will call itself Christian. The birth-rate in Islamic countries is higher than in most Christian countries and the result is that their numbers will be almost up to Christian numbers. The non-religious parts of the world, however, are shrinking because their birth-rates are lower.

The numbers of Hindus and Buddhists will rise, but not as fast as the overall world population. So, in terms of the percentage of the global population, these religions will have shrunk a little.

In 2050, approximately four out of every 10 Christians will live in sub-Saharan Africa, Brierley reported. Another four will live in other parts of the ‘Global South’. Just one-fifth of Christians will live in Europe or North America.

Another article in *FutureFirst* written by Dr Peter Rowan, the UK director of OMF International,

noted that in 2014, South America became the continent with the most Christians. However, in 2018, South America was surpassed by Africa. In 2050, there will probably be more Christians in Africa (1.25 billion) than in South America and Europe combined.

One of the results of these trends is that mission is now “from everywhere to everywhere”, said Peter Rowan. This means thinking differently about mission. The colonial language of “home” and “field” in relation to mission is no longer relevant. This is a time to embrace collaboration and a real sense of mutuality in mission across the globe, he argued.

*Philip Hughes*

### References

Rowan, Peter, ‘The Demographics of Missiology’, *Future First*, no.61, February 2019.

Brierley, Peter, ‘The Next Thirty Years’, *Future First*, no. 61, February 2019.