

Vox Populi - The Voice of the People

6 July 2022

Many Catholics will have seen the headlines last week: *Abandoning God: Christianity plummets as 'non-religious' surges in census.*

For the first time in Australia's history, the number of people self-identifying as Christians has fallen below 50 per cent, while the wave of people citing no religious affiliation has climbed.

On the face of it, the numbers paint a bleak picture for the faith in Australia. While the Census hardly ranks in many people's mind as an ideal bedtime read, the raw numbers offer a greater hope to Catholics than many other Christian denominations and are well worth engaging. While total Christianity fell by 8.6 per cent, Roman Catholicism only fell by 4.5 per cent. The next three largest denominations: the Anglican Church, Uniting Church and Presbyterian Church, each fell by a staggering 20 per cent or more. Meanwhile, many of our brothers and sisters in the Eastern Catholic rites are actually growing.

The statistics suggest a strong desire for the faithful to remain connected to the Catholic faith, even if in name only. That presents a powerful opportunity for our parishes to reach out to those Catholics with the Good News of Jesus and connect them with our worshipping community.

A timely way for parishes to seize upon that opportunity is through the *Laying a Missionary Foundation Course*, being offered by the Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay through July and August.

The course will equip parish leaders, ministers and parishioners with the knowledge and skills needed to live out the mission of the church fruitfully.

"I'm seeing this as a potential game changer for a parish," said Pina Bernard, Team Leader for Parish Renewal and Discipleship at the Diocese. "It's the shift we all need to make as a Church: to see Church different and to be Church different."

The course will begin with an in-person retreat day, encouraging people to renew their encounter with Jesus through the Holy Spirit. This will be followed by five online zoom

sessions over the following five weeks, with presentations from guests such as Rev Dr Chris Ryan MGL and Cathy Kennedy from St Declan's Catholic Church, a parish which has a history of strong outreach.

"We have this missionary vision, so let's dare to dream and let's set up a vision for what could be and make it happen," said Pina.

"We need to change the culture. Let's increase the joy in our Parishes and send that out into the communities."

The course is suitable for clergy, parish pastoral council members, parish leaders, pastoral associates, parish staff, ministry leaders and teams, and any other interested parishioners.

"After the challenges of recent years, now is the ideal time to plan for where we would like to see our parishes in the years to come," said Pina. "We need to stand firm in our common mission, to dare to dream a God-sized vision, and trusting in the Holy Spirit, to plan the pathways and steps to get there."

To register for the *Laying a Missionary Foundation Course*, go to www.bbcatholic.org.au/PRAD

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