



The second national Australian Catholic Youth and Youth Ministry Research Seminar was held over two days in Brisbane recently. Over 100 people attended each day in a jam-packed program of speakers and workshops. Keynote speakers included Dr Trudy Dantis and Stephen Reid from the Pastoral Research Office, presenting analysis of the research gathered through the online survey and diocesan reports completed last year. These are part of preparations for the Synod of Bishops on *Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*, taking place in Rome in October 2018. More than 15,000 Catholics aged 16 to 29 participated in the online survey, making it the largest survey of its type the Church has ever undertaken in Australia. Ballarat Diocese survey results and the national report to the Synod are available on the Ballarat diocese website Year of Youth pages.

Fr Chris Ryan MGL, Chair of the Australian Catholic Youth Council Research Task Group and well-known to Australian Catholic Youth Festival-goers, started proceedings speaking on *Youth Ministers as Practical Theologians*. Chris later spoke on *Youth Evangelisation in Australia* drawing on his soon to be published doctoral research. Richard Rymarz spoke to his recent research on the experiences of people in paid Youth Ministry roles in Australia. This was pilot research and a further study is being developed. From the United States, John Vitek talked about research he undertook and published as *Going, Going, Gone* (St Mary's Press, 2017). It is now available in Australia. The qualitative research used in-depth interviews to examine the dynamics of disaffiliation in young Catholics. The conference participants engaged strongly with these and indeed all the presentations. Perhaps the loudest response was the gasps that came when Stephen Reid from the Australian Pastoral Research Office (PRO) presented analysis of Australian Census information for the 10 years until 2011, regarding disaffiliation across all age groups:



- At least 525,000 people who identified with a Christian denomination in 2001 ticked the 'No religion' box in the 2011 Census. Approximately 72% were under 35 years. (Hughes, *Pointers*, March 2013, 23-1)
- Between 2001 and 2011, across all age groups, more than 20,000 Australians **every year** were ceasing to identify themselves as Catholics. (Dixon & Reid, *ACR*, April 2013, 90-2)
- Analysis of 2016 Census data shows this trend has continued at a greater rate.

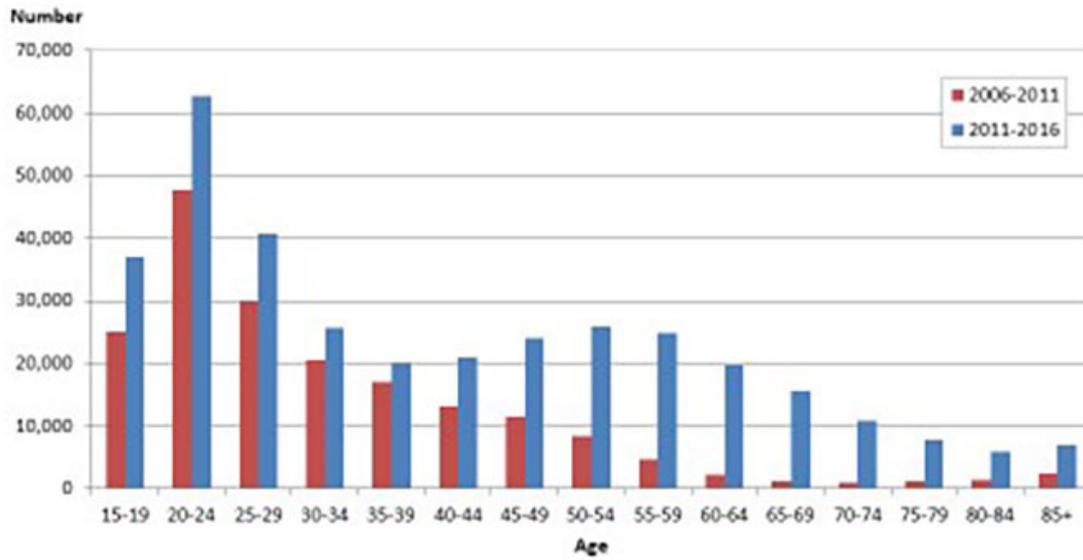
Stephen showed a graphic summary of the disaffiliation of Australian Catholics in the chart shown below.

Analysis of the 2016 Census figures, including individual diocese and parish profiles, is currently being undertaken by the PRO and will be available soon – e-News will let you know.

Another valuable part of the event was the opportunity to connect in person with colleagues from around Australia and talk about initiatives in different parts of the country. Presenting both hope and challenges, the Australian Catholic Youth and Youth Ministry Research Seminar was well worth attending.

Amanda Smith, Pastoral Services Consultant, including Pastoral Planning & Youth and Young Adult Ministry

Australian Census Catholics dis-identifying 2006-2011 and 2011-2016



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics – Census of Population and Housing 2006-2016

With thanks to Dr Bob Dixon and Stephen Reid, Australian Pastoral Research Office