



## Newspaper Excerpt

# Australian Catholics bad Church goers because better thinkers, Bishop says

From the *Sydney Morning Herald*

Australian Catholics: older, but not wiser

By **Kelly Burke, Religious Affairs Writer**

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Australian Catholics are older, less educated and vastly more dissatisfied with their church than their American brethren, an international survey has found.

Data also suggests that the lapsed-Catholic syndrome is far more prevalent in Australia than the US, although that gap may narrow as the full impact of the Boston sex abuse scandal hits the American faithful.

But Australian Catholics are a much more ethnically diverse bunch and less prone to divorce.

The International Congregational Life survey - the first of its kind and scope, with data collected from more than 900,000 Christian participants across Australia, New Zealand, the US and England - was conducted in April and May of last year, and instigated by the Australian organisation National Church Life Survey (NCLS).

After extracting the Catholic-specific data, the survey found that while differences between US and Australian Catholics were few, those differences were marked. American Catholics were far more likely to hold a tertiary degree than their Australian counterparts, and **US parishes boasted a higher proportion of attendees in the 25 to 49 years age bracket**. The median age of Catholics attending church in the US is 50.6 years, compared to 53.9 in Australia.

But the most significant difference between the two countries was the satisfaction level Catholics registered, with **only 36 per cent of Australian respondents believing their parish was "very or extremely important to their daily lives"**, compared to **65 per cent of American respondents**. Americans were also more likely to say they "always or sometimes experienced inspiration and awe or

mystery" during the weekly church service.

**Parramatta Bishop Kevin Manning**, who is chairman of the Bishop's Committee for Liturgy, **said the survey's findings merely reflected the practical down-to-earth character of the Australian people.**

**"I don't think we could call ourselves a mystically orientated nation," he said. "Americans seem to display a more superficial character in a way, in terms of values. Americans [are] much more 'surface' people, while Australians are deeper thinkers. We're more reflective."**

The paper, prepared by NCLS researcher and Catholic pastoral projects director Bob Dixon, was submitted to all Australian bishops in late October. An edited analysis has been published in the December issue of the Christian Research Association's Pointers bulletin.

A national attendance count conducted by the NCLS reveals only 15 per cent of Australia's five million Catholics can be found in church on any given Sunday.

[Bold print added.]

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