



Pastoral Research Online

ATTENDERS' ATTITUDES AND RESPONSES TO ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES—PART 2

The 23rd edition of *Pastoral Research Online* has gone green to celebrate the release of *Laudato Si'*, the encyclical letter of Pope Francis. Jacqui Rémond, the director of Catholic Earthcare Australia, has described the encyclical as an “inspiration” and a “game-changer”.

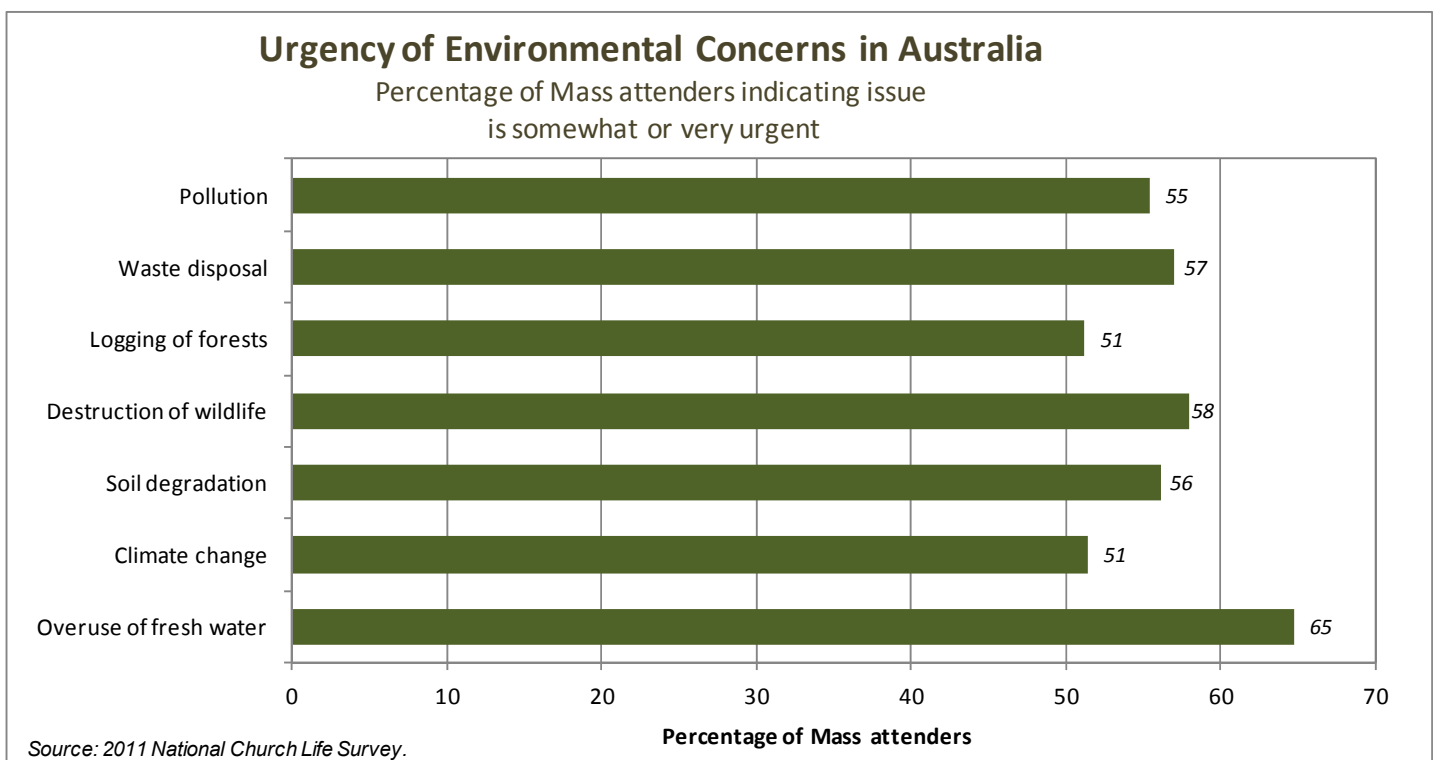
To discover what Australian Mass attenders believe about environmental issues, and what actions attenders take about environmental matters, continue to read on.

To read a response of Catholic Earthcare to the encyclical, and to find resources for schools and parishes, go to: <http://catholicearthcare.org.au/>



How urgent are some environmental concerns?

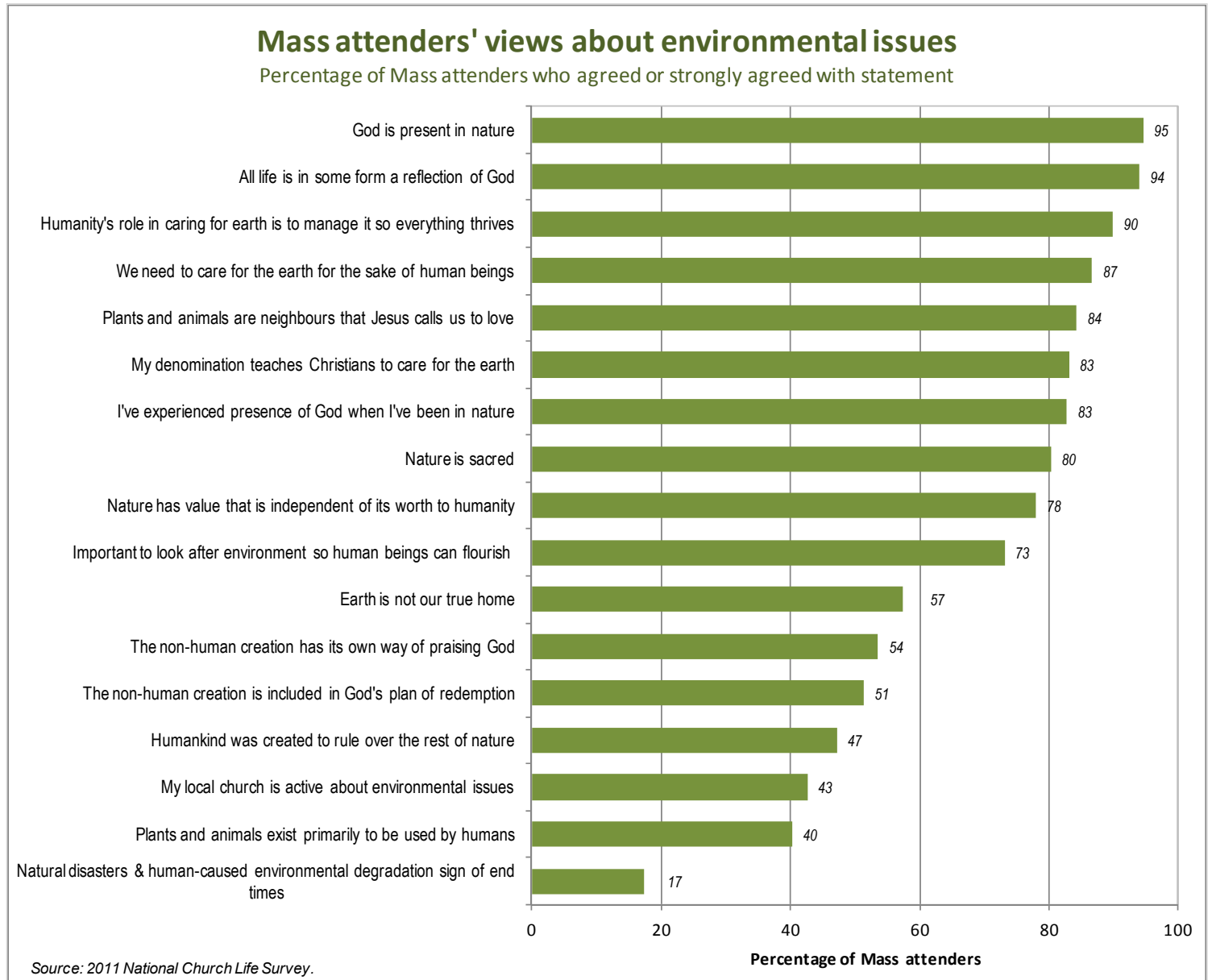
In the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a sample of Mass attenders (N=474) were asked how urgent they considered various environmental concerns in Australia to be. The most pressing concern was the overuse of fresh water, with almost two-thirds of attenders (65%) considering it somewhat or very urgent. Destruction of wildlife, waste disposal, soil degradation and pollution were considered somewhat or very urgent issues by between 55 and 58 per cent of attenders. Just over half of all attenders felt that logging of forests and climate change were somewhat or very urgent issues. Generally, attenders with a bachelor degree or higher felt that the issues were more urgent than those without a degree. Women attenders were more likely to rate each environmental concern more urgent than males, although not significantly so.



Australian Mass attenders' views on environmental issues

The same sample of Mass attenders were asked to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with certain statements about environmental issues. The graph below shows the proportion of attenders who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement. (The statements have been sorted from highest proportion agreeing to lowest proportion agreeing, and do not appear in the order in which they were asked.)

Almost all (95%) of the respondents agreed to some extent that God is present in nature, and a similar proportion (94%) agreed that all life is in some form a reflection of God. There was agreement or strong agreement that humanity's role in caring for the earth is so that everything thrives (90%), that there is a need to care for the earth for the sake of human beings (87%), that plants and animals are neighbours that Jesus calls us to love (84%), that their denomination teaches Christians to care for the earth (83%), that they have experienced the presence of God when in nature (83%), and that nature is sacred (80%).



Around three-quarters of attenders agreed that it is important to look after the environment to ensure that human beings can flourish (73%), and that nature has value that is independent of its worth to humanity (78%). Fifty-seven per cent of attenders agreed to an extent that the earth is not our true home, while just over half agreed that non-human creation has its own way of praising God (54%), and that non-human creation is included in God's plan of redemption (51%).

Fewer than half of the Mass attenders agreed or strongly agreed that humankind was created to rule over the rest of nature (47%), that their local church was active in environmental issues (43%), and, that plants and animals exist primarily to be used by humans (40%). Just 17 per cent of attenders agreed to some extent that natural disasters and human-caused environmental degradation are signs of the end times.

Environmental activities of Australian Mass attenders

Last month's edition of *Pastoral Research Online* revealed that although almost two-thirds of Mass attenders responding to the questionnaire about the environment felt that protection of the environment should take priority over economic growth, fewer attenders were willing to pay higher prices or higher taxes in order to protect the environment.

Have you taken any of the following actions to reduce your impact on the environment?	% of attenders
Most of my cleaning products are environmentally friendly	37
I have switched to products that are more environmentally friendly	41
I have reduced the amount of water I use around the house and in the garden	67
I have reduced the amount of gas and/or electricity I use around the house	59
I recycle my household waste	68
I switch lights off around the house whenever possible	80
Total	353

Note: Total adds to more than 100 per cent as respondents could choose all that applied.

Source: 2011 National Church Life Survey.

The 2011 National Church Life Survey also asked respondents to that questionnaire about their own activity in regard to the environment. The most common activity attenders undertook was switching off lights wherever possible,

with four in five respondents stating they had done so whenever possible. Two-thirds of respondents said they had reduced the amount of water they used in their house and garden, while a similar proportion said that they recycled household waste. Over one-third of attenders (37%) said that they used mostly environmentally friendly cleaning products, and 41 per cent stated that they had switched to more environmentally friendly products.

Additionally, Mass attenders who responded to that questionnaire were asked if they had, in the previous five years, undertaken certain activities. Around half of them (51%) said that they had taken part in an environmental event, such as Earth Hour, while 45 per cent said that they had based their vote for a government election on an environmental issue. One in five had taken part in a conservation activity in the previous five years. Around one in ten said they had been a member of an environmental group or movement, and a similar number said they had contacted an elected

government member about an environmental issue.

Few attenders (6%) had taken part in an environmental protest or demonstration in the previous five years.

In the last five years, have you undertaken any of the following actions?	% of attenders
Been a member of an environmental group or movement	11
Taken part in a protest or demonstration to protect the environment	6
Contacted an elected government member about an environmental issue	12
Taken part in an environmental event (eg Earth Hour)	51
Taken part in a conservation activity (eg Landcare, bush regeneration)	21
Voted in a government election on the basis of an environmental issue	45
Total	145

Note: Total adds to more than 100 per cent as respondents could choose all that applied.

Source: 2011 National Church Life Survey.

Want to know more?

To find out more about the environmental activities of Australian church attenders of all denominations, go to the NCLS Research website to watch informative videos or to purchase reports:

www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=7252



The Building Stronger Parishes project report is now available for order from the Pastoral Research Office.

The cost of the hardcopy report is \$20 (including postage and handling, excluding GST), and there are also plans for an 'e-copy' to be made available.



The material for this edition of *Pastoral Research Online* was prepared by the following PRO staff:

Stephen Reid
Research Officer
s.reid@pro.catholic.org.au
(03) 9953 3457

Bob Dixon
Director
r.dixon@pro.catholic.org.au
(03) 9953 3456

For more information about the office, or how we can assist you, please contact:

ACBC Pastoral Research Office,
Australian Catholic University,
Locked Bag 4115
Fitzroy VIC 3065
P: (03) 9953 3457
E: office@pro.catholic.org.au
W: www.pro.catholic.org.au

“CARA sociologists take guesswork out of understanding the Catholic world”



The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) is a research centre, based at Georgetown University in Washington, that has been conducting social scientific studies about the Catholic Church in the US for 50 years.

Take the time to read about the work of CARA and the Pastoral Research Office’s 2014 Distinguished Visiting Scholar, Mary Gautier, from the National Catholic Reporter:

<http://nconline.org/news/people/cara-sociologists-take-guesswork-out-understanding-catholic-world>

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Who else has the luxury of having 80 million of anything to study? I mean it's never a dull moment. It's just a great church."

- Dr Mary Gautier about CARA’s work researching Catholics in the US.



STAFF TRAVEL NEWS

Next week, Bob Dixon will be attending the 33rd Conference of the International Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (ISSR) in Louvain-la-Neuve in Belgium. As well as presenting his own paper on “The impact on Mass attendance of structural and personnel changes in Australian Catholic parishes”, he will be chairing a panel of eleven researchers presenting papers to do with the general topic of “Current Concerns in Parish and Congregational Research”. The eleven presenters come from the United Kingdom, Norway, Germany, Switzerland, Portugal and Australia. Bob will also be chairing an “Author meets Critics” session in which Grace Davie, one of the world’s leading sociologist of religion and a recent visitor to the Pastoral Research Office, will discuss her latest book with a panel of other scholars. Professor Davie’s book, *Religion in Britain: a persistent paradox*, will be reviewed in a later edition of this newsletter.

Bob has also succeeded in persuading the ISSR to hold its next conference, in 2017, at ACU in Melbourne. It will be only the third time the conference has been held outside Europe, and the first in the Southern Hemisphere. So an important part of his work next week will be to invite the 500 or so delegates to come to Australia in two years’ time.



Introducing: **THE SOCIAL PROFILE OF THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY IN AUSTRALIA**

The national version of the already-available Parish and Diocesan Social Profiles. Available now for free download from the PRO website: pro.catholic.org.au