

## Religion in Australia

Religion in Australia is diverse: there is no state religion, the establishment of which is prohibited by the Australian Constitution.

Australia is a country with a wide range of religious affiliations; of the 22 major religions of the world all except three are practiced in Australia.

According to the 2006 Census, Australia is a predominantly Christian country, with more than 5 million Catholics and almost 4 million Anglicans. Of the 5 million Catholics in Australia around 1.5 million live in the greater Sydney region. There are 1,363 parishes in Australia, with 138 parishes and some 450 priests in the Sydney Archdiocese.

### Religious Affiliations in Australia 2006

	Number	%
<b>Christian</b>		<b>63.9</b>
- Catholic	5,126,880	25.8
- Anglican	3,718,252	18.7
- Uniting Church in Australia	1,135,427	5.7
- Presbyterian and Reformed	596,671	3.0
- Baptist	316,738	1.6
- Lutheran	251,107	1.3
- Pentecostal	219,689	1.1
- Other Protestant	736,012	3.7
- Orthodox	544,160	2.7
- Oriental Orthodox	40,900	0.2
<b>Total Christian</b>	<b>12,685,836</b>	<b>63.9</b>
- Buddhist	418,756	2.1
- Muslim	340,392	1.7
- Hindu	148,119	0.7
- Jewish	88,831	0.4
- <b>Other Religions</b>	<b>109,022</b>	<b>0.5</b>
- <b>No Religions</b>	<b>3,706,555</b>	<b>18.7</b>
- <b>Not stated/inadequately described</b>	<b>2,357,777</b>	<b>11.9</b>
<b>Total Population</b>	<b>19,855,288</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: [www.censusdata.abs.gov.au](http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au)

As in many Western countries, the level of active participation in church worship is much lower than this; weekly attendance at church services is about 1.5 million, approximately 7.5% of the population.

## **History of Major Religions in Australia**

### **Indigenous Australia**

Indigenous Australians are considered to represent the world's most ancient culture and have a unique belief system that has existed for more than 50,000 years – The Dreamtime. Aboriginals are spiritually connected to the land and refer to the Dreamtime as ways to explain their existence and tell the creation stories of this ancient place. Aboriginal beliefs and spirituality, even among those Aborigines who identify themselves as affiliates of a traditional organised religion, are intrinsically linked to the land and to certain sacred sites in particular.

Prior to European settlement in 1788 there was contact with Indigenous Australians from people of various faiths. These contacts were with explorers, fishermen and survivors of the numerous shipwrecks. There has been countless artifacts retrieved from these contacts, although there is no record of this influencing the religion of Indigenous Australians.

### **European Settlement**

Christianity was introduced with the European settlement of Australia in 1788. Predominately Roman Catholics were represented amongst the Irish convicts and Anglicans and Methodists among other convicts. During the 1800's European settlers brought all of their traditional churches to Australia. These included the Church of England (now the Anglican Church), Methodist, Catholic, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Congregationalist and Baptist Churches.

In the early fleets of European settlers, Muslims from coastal Africa and the island territories under the British Empire came to Australia as both sailors and convicts. The first significant semi-permanent Muslim population was formed with the arrival in Australia of Afghan camel drivers in the 1800s. Coming from the Indian sub-continent, they were vital in the early exploration of inland Australia and in the establishment of service links particularly The Ghan Railway.

With the exception of a small but significant Lutheran population of German descent, Australian society in 1901 was predominantly Anglo-Celtic, with 40% of the population being Anglican (then Church of England), 23% Catholic, 34% other Christian and about 1% professing non-Christian religions. The first census in 1911 showed 96 percent identified themselves as Christian.

Further waves of migration helped to reshape the profile of Australia's religious affiliations over subsequent decades. The impact of migration from Europe in the aftermath of World War II led to increases in affiliates of the Orthodox Churches, the establishment of Reformed bodies, growth in the number of Catholics (largely from Italian migration) and Jews (Holocaust survivors), and the creation of ethnic parishes among many other denominations.

A significant and permanent Muslim population established a base in Australia during the economic boom which occurred after the Second World War, which created new labour opportunities. Many European Muslims, mainly Cypriot Turks, took advantage of these opportunities, to seek a new life and home in Australia.

More recently (post-1970s), immigration from South-East Asia and the Middle East has expanded Buddhist and Muslim numbers considerably, and increased the ethnic diversity of existing Christian denominations.

### **Useful Websites**

[www.dfat.gov.au](http://www.dfat.gov.au)

[www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)