Australia's largest research and teaching centre for the study of the early Christian world, from New Testament times to the rise of Islam, is the Centre for Early Christian Studies at ACU National.

Directed by Professor Pauline Allen FAHA, it has 16 members across five campuses and 12 international consultants, with expertise in biblical studies, early church history, literature, art history, early Christian theology and philosophy.

Connected with the two foremost such centres in the world, based at The Catholic University of America in Washington DC and the Augustinianum in Rome, the Centre focuses on research and community activities that shed light on present concerns.

“The work of the Centre has contemporary relevance because of its study of the interface of early Christianity with paganism, Judaism and early Islam,” Professor Allen said, adding that the Centre’s motto sums up the timeless importance of accurately studying early history. Tam antiqua et tam nova means “as old as it is new”. This is reflected in the triennial conferences on Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church organised by Centre member Very Reverend Archpriest Associate Professor BJ Lawrence Cross OAM.

The Centre’s pre-eminence in the field of patristics, focusing on early Church Fathers and their times, was further recognised earlier this year with the Centre’s Burke Lecturer in Ecclesiastical Latin Dr Bronwen Neil winning a prestigious Alexander von Humbold-Stiftung Fellowship to the University of Bonn to work on her project, Leo the Great and poverty in fifth-century Rome.

Three members of the Centre, in collaboration with a team of five Japanese scholars, have also won major research grants from both the Australian Research Council (ARC) and the Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science. Their combined study on Perspectives of poverty in an era of crisis – testing some social models of early Christianity, builds on the major ARC-funded project of the Centre, Poverty and Welfare in Late Antiquity.

In other collaborative research, the Centre is working with a group of scholars from major Korean Presbyterian theological seminaries who will visit, along with the Japanese scholars, later this year. The Centre has been instrumental in establishing the Asian Pacific Early Christian Studies Society, and Professor Allen is considered by South African colleagues to be a “Renowned International Researcher”.

Email earlychristian@mcauley.acu.edu.au for information on postgraduate courses offered by the Centre, for details on a unique online course on ecclesiastical Latin or for any other information about the Centre.