ACU National takes a leading role in promoting effective religious education, inspiring new teachers, researching faith, communicating with other educators and sharing news at conferences.

Brisbane Campus education graduate Casey Bromilow, 24, began teaching maths, english and religious education this year at Clairvaux Mackillop College in Queensland’s Upper Mt Gravatt. Although he had been inspired by his Catholic secondary school experiences, it wasn’t until his third year at University that he chose to become baptised.

While at ACU National, Casey joined the University’s Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA), finding the chapel life and campus clergy a welcome source of encouragement. Now, as a young teacher of religion, he considers his newly confirmed faith essential to his teaching.

“My religion is an important part of my life,” said Casey, pictured above. “It impacts a lot on my decisions.”

Research into how young people stay connected with churches is being carried out by sociologists and psychologists from ACU National’s Melbourne Campus and Monash University, in consultation with a range of Christian denominations.

Results so far have shown that a number of factors help keep young people involved, including large church youth groups which provide a balance of activities between having fun and serving others, a range of age groups, and the maintenance of strong links with local schools.

Higher degree students are also involved in research into effective religious education and its theological foundations. For example, the doctoral research of Catherine O’Brien addresses The faith of younger Christians: crisis or opportunities for growth?

“Living out the Catholic faith in an increasingly secular world is challenging, particularly for young Catholics,” Catherine said. “For many their faith is something that remains on the periphery of daily life, for some it becomes totally irrelevant. This research attempts to discern, from a theological and pedagogical standpoint, how faith can become incarnate for Catholic youth within the complex cultural matrix that is their life.”

Professor Richard Rymarz of the University of Alberts, formerly of ACU National, is doing further doctoral research into The Principles of John Paul II’s New Evangelisation in the Australian Context.

“This research is important,” said ACU National’s Institute of Theology, Philosophy and Religious Education Professor Anthony Kelly CSSR, the principal supervisor of both these projects and a member of the International Theological Commission.

“The involvement of the Church in religious education demands that it be refreshed in its theological vision and tested in its ability to communicate with today’s young people.”

The University maintains a leading role in hosting and attending national and international conferences on religious education. For example, a recent forum on Catholic school curriculum in Queensland focused on the full spectrum of contemporary education issues, including religious education, inclusive education, ICT early years, Indigenous education, literacy and numeracy. ACU National took a leading part in the conference, with ACU National professorial fellow Dr Therese D’Orsa giving the keynote speech.

The Australian Association for Religious Education will hold its biennial national conference Wind, Fire and Water: finding God in the 21st Century from 28 September to 1 October at Melbourne Grammar School. See www.aare.org.au for full details.