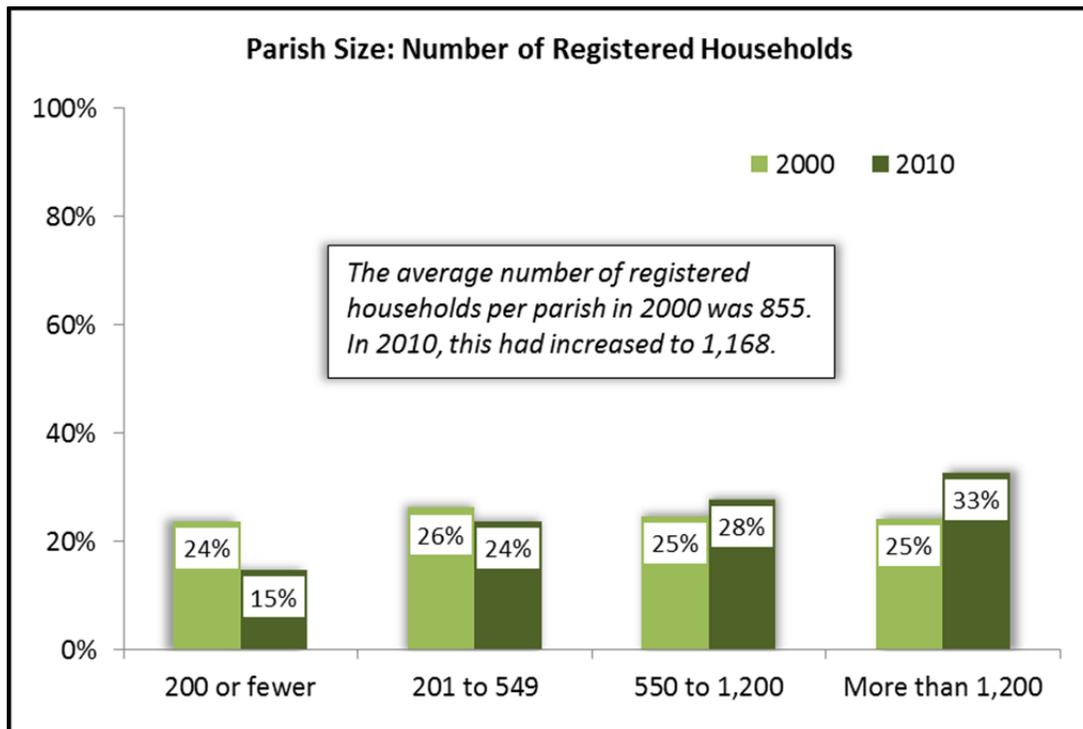


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Study Documents the ‘Supersizing’ the U.S. Catholic Parish Life

In the last decade, the numbers of Catholic priests and Catholic parishes have declined in number, but the scale of parish life in the United States has expanded along with the nation’s growing Catholic population. Bigger parishes, more Masses, and ministries in languages other than English are becoming the norm. This is one of many new findings from the Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership project that will be released Monday in the first report, *The Changing Face of U.S. Catholic Parishes*, from its ongoing landmark study of parish life. The report details the findings from the first phase of the study, a 2010 national survey of pastors and other parish leaders at 846 randomly selected U.S. parishes. The report will be available at: www.emergingmodels.org

The survey documents changes in parish life as the U.S. Catholic Church has downsized its number of parishes in recent years. In the last decade, through a combination of closing and mergers, U.S. Catholic Church leaders have reduced the number of parishes in the United States by 1,359 (a decline of 7.1 percent). In 2000, the Church had more than 19,000 parishes nationally and by decade’s end it had fewer than 17,800, almost the same number it had in 1965.



The survey shows that in the wake of these closures, the average number of registered households in U.S. parishes has grown to 1,168. A third of parishes now have more than 1,200

registered households. The percentage of parishes with 200 or fewer households dropped from 24 percent in 2000 to 15 percent in 2010. The survey results indicate that 40 percent of the increase in registered parishioners from 2005 to 2010 was among Hispanic/Latino(a) Catholics.

With more Catholics and fewer parishes, the number of Masses offered per parish has increased as well. Half of U.S. parishes celebrate four or more Sunday/Saturday Vigil Masses each week. Only one in ten parishes (10 percent) celebrate just one weekend Mass per week, while 28 percent celebrate five or more. The average number of weekend Masses per parish has increased from 3.5 in 2000 to 3.8 in 2010.

The average number of people attending Mass on a typical weekend at Catholic parishes is 1,110, up from an average of 966 in 2000. On average, these attenders represent 38 percent of registered parishioners and 47 percent of parish capacity (number of Masses multiplied by seating capacity). Smaller parishes have a higher proportion of parishioners attending Mass than larger parishes.

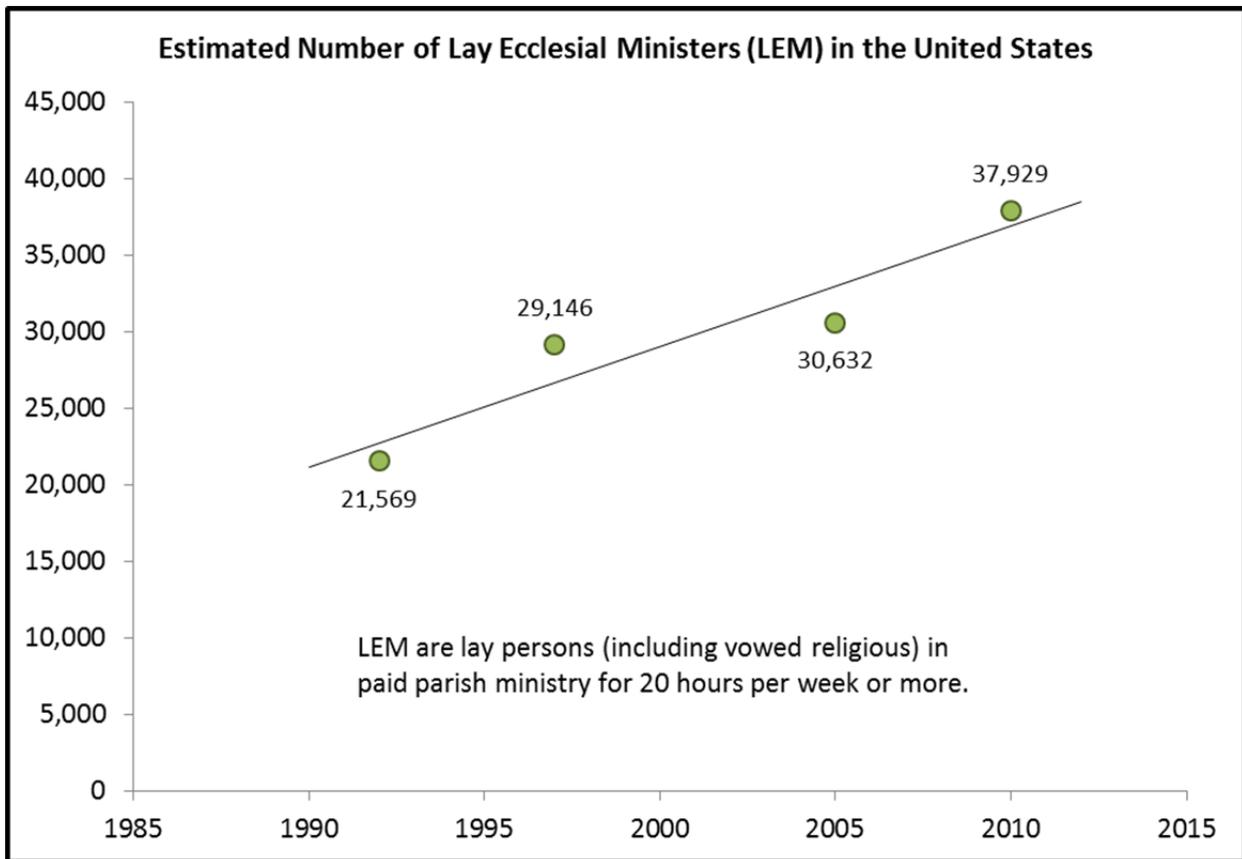
One in three parishes (29 percent) celebrates Mass at least once a month in a language other than English. This is an increase from 22 percent of parishes in 2000. Most of these Masses, 81 percent, are in Spanish. Overall, about 6 percent of Masses (weekday and weekend) are celebrated in Spanish in the United States.

Thirty-seven percent of parishes indicate that they have some special observance for particular cultural or ethnic groups in the parish. By far, the most common of these is a celebration for the Feast Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Twenty-one percent of all U.S. parishes indicate a special observance of this day. More than 6,700 U.S. parishes (38 percent) meet the study's criteria for being considered as a multicultural parish.

In the average U.S. parish, the total operating revenue of about \$695,000 exceeds expenses of \$626,500. However, 30 percent of parishes indicate that their expenses exceed their revenue. Of those parishes reporting a deficit, the average size for the shortfall is 15.8 percent of revenue. Total weekly offertory is about \$9,200 or \$9.57 per registered household. Offertory has grown in the last five years, on average, by more than 14 percent in U.S. parishes. Smaller parishes generally collect more per registered household in offertory than larger parishes.

The total number of people on parish staffs in the United States is estimated to be 168,448. This total includes ministry staff and volunteers as well as non-ministry staff and volunteers (including parish bookkeepers, groundskeepers, cooks, etc.). The average parish has a total staff of 9.5 members with 5.4 individuals in ministry positions.

The estimated number of lay ecclesial ministers (lay persons paid in ministry for at least 20 hours per week) in the United States is approximately 38,000 (2.1 per parish). Fourteen percent of these are vowed religious and 86 percent are other lay persons. Overall, 80 percent are female and 20 percent male. Four in ten LEMs are under the age of 50. It is estimated that the U.S. Church is adding about 790 new lay ecclesial ministers to parish ministry staffs each year.



Growth in the number of lay ecclesial ministers is in part related to fewer priests available to serve in U.S. parishes. Although the average number of priestly ordinations in the U.S. has been about 500 per year over the last 25 years, there are fewer men being ordained than what is needed to replace an aging clergy population. The number of diocesan priests in the United States declined by 11 percent in the last decade and many more priests plan to retire in the next decade. The number of religious priests, religious brothers, and religious sisters is also declining. However, the number of permanent deacons is increasing. Together, the total number of clergy and vowed religious in the United States in 2010 was 117,080. By comparison this totaled 197,172 in 1980. This change represents a decline of 41 percent in the last three decades.

U.S. parishes are likely to continue to get bigger because the number of Catholics continues to grow and is expected to continue to do so in the future. Since the end of World War II, on average, 25 percent of the U.S. adult population has self-identified in national surveys as Catholic. In the last 40 years, the Catholic population has grown by about 75 percent to 77.7 million according to self-identification of religion in national surveys. Even by conservative estimates, there are likely to be more than 110 million U.S. Catholics by the middle of the century.

Although Mass attendance has declined since the 1950s, there has been no recent decline or increase in attendance in national surveys in the last decade and this study confirms this trend. If Mass attendance remains steady and the Catholic population grows as expected, the results of

this study suggest demands will increase on parishes and parish staffs as the real number of Catholics attending and needing sacraments increases.

About this Study

The Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership Project was founded to address a variety of issues facing U.S. Catholic parish leadership in a rapidly changing social environment. These issues include multicultural and generational diversity; ministry in linked parishes; and various roles and dimensions of lay ecclesial ministry. The Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership Project is a collaborative undertaking of the National Association for Lay Ministry (NALM), the Conference for Pastoral Planning and Council Development (CPPCD), the National Association of Church Personnel Administrators (NACPA), the National Catholic Young Adult Ministry Association (NCYAMA), and the National Federation of Priests' Councils (NFPC).

In 2009, the Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership project, a Lilly Endowment Inc. funded collaboration of five Catholic national ministerial organizations, commissioned the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University to conduct a series of three surveys in parishes nationwide. The first of these, described here, was a single informant survey sent to parishes to develop a portrait of parish life in the United States today. This survey was based on a sample of 5,549 U.S. parishes. A total of 846 parishes responded, for a response rate of 15.3 percent. The margin of sampling error for the results is ± 3.3 percentage points. The second and third surveys are in the field now. These are surveys of parish leaders and surveys of parishioners in a sample of 60 parishes from the 846 that participated in the first survey.

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