



Special Report

Serving Dioceses, Parishes, and Religious Communities Since 1964

October 2000

National Parish Inventory

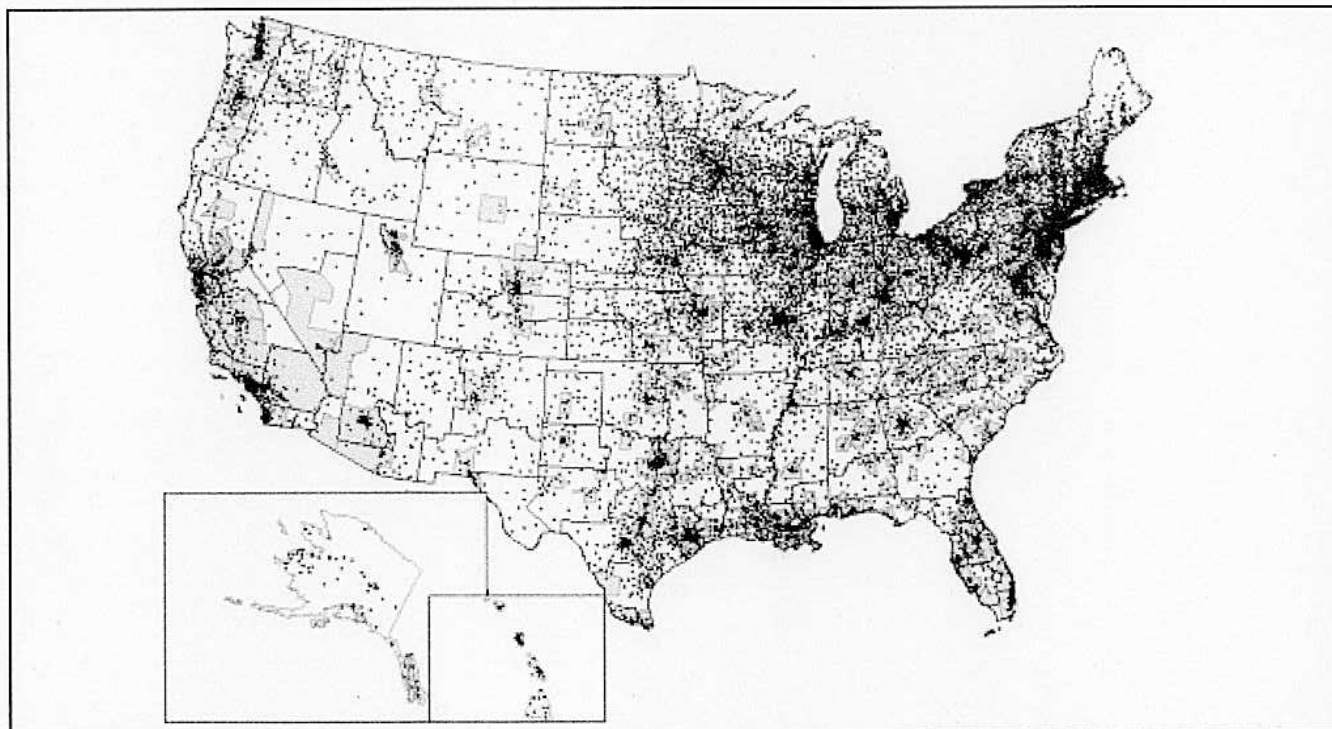
In 1998, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University began the first comprehensive computerized database of Catholic parishes in the United States, with support from *Our Sunday Visitor* Institute. CARA designed a simple, one-page questionnaire about parish composition and staffing that was mailed to 18,456 parishes, using a mailing list provided by *Our Sunday Visitor*. Approximately 750 questionnaires with address problems were returned to CARA. Out of the 17,706 questionnaires that reached existing parishes, 6,762 were completed and returned, for a response rate of 38 percent. To that data, CARA added information supplied by dioceses and by *The Official Catholic Directory (OCD)*, thereby including all 19,200 parishes in some way.

The first wave of the study was published by CARA as *The National Parish Inventory Project Report* in Fall 1999. In Spring 2000, CARA mailed a second wave of National Parish Inventory questionnaires to all parishes in its list, using the same multi-stage follow-up procedure as in 1998. Some 10,134 parishes returned data, for a 53 percent response rate. In addition, CARA contacted every diocese or eparchy of the Eastern Churches in the U.S., asking for the names of parishes that had been created or closed in the past year. These updates were also entered into the database.

In all, CARA's National Parish Inventory now covers 16,860 parishes, or 87 percent of all parishes in the U.S. Most of this information is current as of 2000, but in 40 percent of cases some data may be up to two years old.

Dioceses and Parishes in the U.S.

Shaded areas indicate U.S. Census-designated metropolitan areas



Parish Life Today

According to the National Parish Inventory (NPI), as of June 30, 2000, there are 19,338 Catholic parishes in the territory represented by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (the fifty states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands). In 1950, there were 15,295 parishes in that same area. The net increase in the number of Catholic parishes over the last half of the 20th century is therefore 4,043, or 26 percent. Catholic population in that same territory, as reported to the *OCD*, has grown by some 108 percent since 1950, from 28.8 million to 59.9 million. In 1950 there were, on average, 1,881 Catholics per parish. Today, there are 3,097.

Far more than such overall statistics and trends, however, the profile of parish ministry in terms of ethnic diversity, geographic distribution, socioeconomic factors, involvement in parish life, and other aspects, raises many new questions. What do Catholic parishes look like today? Where are they located? How are they staffed? This *Special Report* on NPI 2000 is devoted to these questions.

The NPI reveals portraits of parish life in different contexts: big parishes, small parishes; rural parishes, urban and suburban parishes; parishes with relatively large proportions of younger parishioners, parishes with relatively large proportions of older parishioners; parishes with substantial percentages of African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, Asians/Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and several European ethnic groups. This report presents a general overview of these and other parish characteristics.

Composition and Structure of Parish Life

The NPI contains a wealth of data on the composition and structure of parish life. Ranking parishes according to size on several characteristics of parish life, and then dividing the results into four equal parts—quartiles—is a relatively straightforward way to demonstrate

Table 1

Registered Families or Households

Families per Parish	Parishes
1,201 - 10,756	3,747
550 - 1,200	3,818
201 - 549	4,047
200 or fewer	3,662

how parishes differ on each of these characteristics. These quartile differences are displayed for each of the tables in this section.

Families per Parish

Catholic canon law defines a parish as a “community of the faithful stably established within a diocese” (c.515.1). In addition, “parishes are generally territorial or, where useful, personal parishes are established based on rite, language, or nationality” (c.518). Parish registration figures are less than ideal measures of who identifies with a parish, but are among the only readily available figures. This is especially true in areas with large numbers of recent immigrants who have no tradition of parish registration, or areas with a relatively transient population. The NPI contains data on registered families per parish for 79 percent of parishes.

Catholic parishes today average 855 registered families or households, with an average of 2.6 members in each household—identical to the U.S. average of 2.6 members per household. Half of all parishes have more than 535 registered households. The distribution is shown in *Table 1*.

Registered Members per Parish

As noted above, there are significant limitations with the use of registration figures. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that the median parish size, in terms of reported persons, is 1,230, and parishes report an average of 2,260 registered parishioners. The NPI contains data on registered members for 72 percent of parishes. As *Table 2* shows, even the smallest 25 percent of parishes have up to 430 registered parishioners.

By multiplying the average number of registered members per parish (2,260) by the total number of parishes in 2000 (19,338) one may estimate the total number of registered Catholic parishioners in the U.S. at 43,703,880, or 73 percent of the *OCD* reported number of Catholics in the U.S. This is not a definitive estimate of the total Catholic population, however, nor should it be taken to represent the number of “active” or “parish-connected” Catholics. Registration is not mandated for Catholics and is a relatively poor indicator of actual baptized Catholic population. Indeed, the *CARA Catholic Poll 2000 (CCP)* found that only 65 percent of self-identified Catholics report being registered in a parish.

Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate Georgetown University



CARA was founded by Catholic leaders in 1964 to put social science research tools at the service of the Catholic Church in the United States. For information on CARA and its mission of research, analysis and planning, contact:

Bryan T. Froehle, Ph.D., Executive Director
CARA · Georgetown University · Washington, DC 20057-1203
Phone: 202-687-8080 FAX: 202-687-8083

CARA@georgetown.edu · www.georgetown.edu/research/CARA
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This Special Report is written by CARA researchers Mary L. Gautier, Ph.D. and Paul M. Perl, Ph.D. \$15 per copy; \$5 each for 7 or more copies.

Table 2

Registered Parishioners	
Individuals per Parish	Parishes
over 3,000	3,414
1,201 - 3,000	3,532
431 - 1,200	3,454
10 - 430	3,403

Table 3

Parish Church Seating Capacity	
Seating Capacity of Church	Parishes
630 - 3,000	2,894
420 - 629	2,768
270 - 419	3,004
20 - 269	2,880

Parish Seating Capacity

The typical Catholic parish church can seat about 500 people, but the range is quite large—from 20 to 3,000. The NPI has seating capacity data on 60 percent of parishes (See *Table 3*).

Since half of all parish churches accommodate fewer than 420 persons at a time, it is not surprising that most parishes celebrate multiple Sunday Masses. The average number of Masses is 3.5 per weekend, including Saturday Vigil and Sunday Masses. Thirteen percent of parishes have only one Mass, while five percent have as many as seven or more (See *Table 4*).

Mass Attendance

Because attendance fluctuates seasonally, Catholic pastoral planners have found that a count of persons attending Mass on one or more weekends in October is among the best estimates of regular Mass-attending parishioners. By that time, most vacation travel has ended, the school calendar has brought families back to a normal routine, and there are no major liturgical feasts to inflate estimates. The “head count” approach, of course, cannot measure how many people attend every week as compared to a few times a month or other levels of frequency. Thus, actual “regular” attendance over a multi-week period may, in fact, be much higher.

The NPI has “October count” figures for Mass attendance from 60 percent of parishes. According to that data, weekend Mass attendance reportedly varies from as few as five to over 10,000.

Average parish attendance on a typical weekend in October is 966. However, this average is relatively high due to particularly large figures for some parishes. Median attendance is about 620; that is, half the parishes report having fewer than 620 in attendance, and half report more than 620 in attendance (See *Table 5*). Using average figures calculated for the parishes for which CARA has complete data, the following patterns emerge:

- An average parish church is filled to approximately 58 percent of capacity over the course of all the Saturday Vigil and Sunday Masses celebrated during a typical weekend.
- Attendance figures for a typical weekend represent about 43 percent of the total number of registered members of an average parish. The median figure is 50 percent. Note that these figures are different than Mass attendance figures as reported by surveys since they are not based on the entire Catholic population. The *CCP 2000* found that 34 percent of all self-identified Catholics—both registered and unregistered—report weekly Mass attendance.
- Using the figure of 966 average attenders per parish, the estimated number of Mass-attending Catholics for all parishes on a given weekend is 18,680,508. This is 31 percent of the *OCD* reported number of all Catholics in the U.S. Again, this figure does not represent total Mass attendees, since many may attend one week,

Table 4

Number of Saturday Vigil & Sunday Masses	
Masses Celebrated	Parishes
Five or more	2,969
Four	2,508
Three	3,482
One to two	3,629

Table 5

Mass Attendance		
	Weekend Attenders	Parishes
Largest 25 percent	1,276 - 10,100	2,969
Second largest 25 percent	621 - 1,275	2,885
Second smallest 25	276 - 620	2,903
Smallest 25 percent	10 - 275	2,901

but not another. Rather, this figure represents the estimated total who attend during an average weekend in a "typical" month.

Characteristics of Parishes According to Size

After ranking all parishes by the number of registered families or households, they were divided into four groups of approximately equal size. The single criterion used was the number of registered households. No attempt is made here to separate out parishes "twinned" or "clustered" with other parishes to share parish staff. Mission parishes and parishes with non-resident pastors are counted as separate parishes as long as they were so reported by their diocese or eparchy.

Table 6 reports other characteristics of parishes, classified by parish size to show important differences between smaller and larger parishes. Each of the four divisions used here represents approximately one-fourth each of all parishes in the United States.

- Nearly all "mega" and "corporate" parishes have a resident pastor, but only 63 percent of "family" parishes have a resident pastor.
- Ninety-three percent of "mega" parishes are located in urban/suburban areas; one-third of "family" parishes are in such metropolitan areas.
- Very large "mega" parishes average nearly three baptisms for every funeral. Small "family" parishes have an average of two baptisms for every funeral. Nationally, parishes average 2.5 baptisms per funeral.

Population Density and Parish Life

In 1996, 80 percent of people in the United States lived in "metropolitan" areas as defined by the United States Bureau of the Census. This term describes areas with a central place of at least 50,000 persons or an urbanized area with a total population of at least 100,000, including both urban and suburban areas. About 64 percent of parishes in the United States are located in these "metropolitan areas." Slightly more than one-third of parishes are in rural or "non-metropolitan" areas as designated by the United States Census. The map on page one shows the distribution of parishes today relative to these metropolitan areas.

Table 7 describes some important differences between metropolitan and non-metropolitan parishes. The National Parish Inventory contains these data for nearly 70 percent of parishes. Notable differences include:

- Metropolitan area parishes average about three times the number of families than non-metropolitan parishes, although the church building itself has the capacity to seat only 1.7 times as many parishioners.
- Metropolitan parishes offer proportionately more Masses per weekend to accommodate their parishioners.

Table 6

Characteristics of Parishes by Size

(includes both full-time and part-time assignments)

"Mega" Parishes (more than 1,200 registered households)

- 93% located in "metropolitan" areas
- 2.9 ratio of infant baptisms to funerals
- 25% are identified as having an Hispanic/Latino ministry
- 97% have a resident pastor
- 2.3 average number of priests assigned to each parish
- 3.8 average number of lay professional ministerial staff
- 92% have a director of religious education
- 45% have a separate position for adult faith formation
- 66% have a parish youth minister
- 97% have a parish pastoral council

"Corporate" Parishes (from 550 to 1,200 registered households)

- 79% located in "metropolitan" areas
- 2.5 ratio of infant baptisms to funerals
- 23% are identified as having an Hispanic/Latino ministry
- 96% have a resident pastor
- 1.5 average number of priests assigned to each parish
- 2.4 average number of lay professional ministerial staff
- 86% have a director of religious education
- 35% have a separate position for adult faith formation
- 49% have a parish youth minister
- 96% have a parish pastoral council

"Community" Parishes (from 201 to 549 registered households)

- 61% located in "metropolitan" areas
- 2.6 ratio of infant baptisms to funerals
- 20% are identified as having an Hispanic/Latino ministry
- 91% have a resident pastor
- 1.2 average number of priests assigned to each parish
- 1.5 average number of lay professional ministerial staff
- 79% have a director of religious education
- 27% have a separate position for adult faith formation
- 41% have a parish youth minister
- 94% have a parish pastoral council

"Family" Parishes (200 or fewer registered households)

- 34% located in "metropolitan" areas
- 2.0 ratio of infant baptisms to funerals
- 13% are identified as having an Hispanic/Latino ministry
- 63% have a resident pastor
- 1.1 average number of priests assigned to each parish
- 0.7 average number of lay professional ministerial staff
- 64% have a director of religious education
- 13% have a separate position for adult faith formation
- 26% have a parish youth minister
- 88% have a parish pastoral council

Table 7

Average Characteristics of Metropolitan and Non-metropolitan Parishes

	Metropolitan Parishes	Non-metropolitan parishes
Median number of households	773	225
Seating capacity of church	554	329
Masses per weekend	2.8	2.0
Ratio of infant baptisms to funerals	3.1	2.3
Parishes identified with an Hispanic/Latino ministry	19%	22%
Parishes with a resident pastor	93%	79%
Parishes with a religious (non-diocesan) priest(s)	23%	20%
Priests assigned per parish (including part-time)	1.7	1.2
Parishes with a nun/sister on staff	33%	22%
Parishes with a deacon on staff	38%	19%
Lay ecclesial ministry staff per parish	2.4	1.3

• Metropolitan parishes are significantly more likely to have a resident pastor and twice as likely to have a deacon.

Ethnic Diversity and Parish Life

The NPI uses several measures to help identify a parish's ethnic composition. It includes a request for the number and language of Masses celebrated each month in a language other than English, as well as the approximate racial/ethnic composition of the parish. It also asks for the particular ethnic groups or nationalities, if any, with which the parish identifies. Approximately 95 percent of parishes that returned surveys reported figures for at least one of these measures of ethnicity. However, only 15 percent of diocesan-provided parish reports include data on parish ethnicity.

In addition to the NPI questions, parishes listed in the *OCD* as identified with a particular ethnic group or nationality are also so identified in the NPI database. In addition, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Secretary for Hispanic Affairs maintains a list of parishes with Hispanic/Latino ministry, also included here.

A similar list of African American parishes was provided by the National Black Catholic Congress. For those parishes and dioceses that do report ethnicity, the NPI reveals some important differences in parish life. While this information does not represent every parish, it does suggest important patterns.

Non-English Language Masses

About 22 percent of parishes responding report at least one Mass per month in a language other than English. On average, those parishes celebrate about eight Masses per month in a language other than English. Most frequently, that language is Spanish. Three-quarters of parishes that report non-English language Masses have at least one Mass a month in Spanish, as shown in *Table 8*.

Ethnic/National Identification

About 38 percent of the parishes that responded to the NPI parish questionnaire self-identify with a particular ethnic group or nationality. The most common identifications are shown in *Table 9*. A much greater percent of all parishes have a substantial presence of particular ethnic and national groups among their parishioners.

Racial/Ethnic Composition of the Parish

Of the 11,512 parishes that estimate the racial or ethnic composition of their parish, 86 percent say their parish is more than 40 percent white. Another 10 percent say their parish is more than 40 percent Hispanic/Latino. Three percent of parishes are more than 40

Table 8

Language Used in Mass

(of the parishes that report using languages other than English at Mass)

Language	Percent	Language	Percent
Spanish	76%	Sign	1.4%
Polish	6	Slavonic	1.3
Vietnamese	4	Ukrainian	1.3
Italian	3	Filipino	.8
Latin	2.5	Arabic	.7
Portuguese	2	Creole	.7
Korean	1.7	Chinese	.6
French	1.7	Lithuanian	.6

Table 9

Ethnic/National Self-Identification of Parishes*

Self-identification	Percent
Hispanic, Latino, Mexican, Dominican, Puerto Rican, etc.	22%
Polish or Polish and another identification	11
German or German and another identification	10
Slovak, Lithuanian, Russian, Hungarian, Czech, or other Central or Eastern European	9
Italian or Italian and another identification	8
Irish or Irish and another identification	6
African American, African, or African American and another identification	6
French, French Canadian, or French and another identification	3
Filipino or Filipino and another identification	3
Vietnamese, Hmong, Laotian	1.5
Portuguese or Portuguese and another identification	1.4
Native American, or a named Native American tribe/nation	1.4
Lebanese, Maronite, Arabic	1
Korean or Korean and another identification	.9

* For parishes that responded to the National Parish Inventory question about ethnic or national identification and those parishes with an ethnic/national identification given in *The Official Catholic Directory*

percent African American or of African descent. One percent report the parish is more than 40 percent Asian, and one percent report their parish is more than 40 percent American Indian/Native American. These percentages reflect the proportion of parishioners that exceed 40 percent, therefore include many multi-cultural parishes.

Characteristics of Parishes with Identified Ethnic Subgroups

The NPI parish questions described above permit the identification of ethnic subgroups within parishes. Using that information, it is possible to create criteria to categorize parishes with identified ministry to Hispanic/Latino, African American, Asian, or Native American subgroups.

Twenty percent of parishes are identified as parishes with a ministry to Hispanics/Latinos (3,425 parishes). This figure includes parishes that either:

- Celebrate a Sunday (or Saturday Vigil) Mass in Spanish at least monthly;
- Report identification with a particular Hispanic or Latino ethnic group or nationality;

- Identify at least 40 percent of the parish as Hispanic/Latino;
- Had information submitted by their diocese that identified at least 40 percent of the parish as Hispanic/Latino; or
- Were listed by the USCCB Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs as a parish that provides Hispanic/Latino ministry.

A similar process was used to identify parishes with a ministry to other ethnic groups. In each case, information from a parish or diocese that reports a parish having at least 40 percent of a particular ethnic group is counted as a parish with a ministry to that group. This is an arbitrary number chosen for reasons of convenience; one could just as well analyze for 60 percent, 30 percent, or some other percentage.

Using this approach, approximately 4 percent of parishes for which race or ethnic data exist may be estimated as having an African American identity. Using similar criteria, 4 percent of parishes are identified as ministering to Asians. These parishes either report using an Asian language at Mass at least once a month, say the parish is at least 40 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, or identify with an Asian or Pacific Island nationality.

Finally, 1 percent of parishes identify themselves as ministering to American Indians or Native Americans. These parishes either report using a Native American language at Mass at least once a month, or report the parish is at least 40 percent American Indian/Native American, or the parish identifies with an American Indian tribe or nationality.

Table 10 compares parishes with identities, ministries, or populations greater than 40 percent for each major racial or ethnic group.

Findings about parish life in these parishes include:

- Parishes that minister to African Americans and Native Americans are more likely to be small, while parishes with ministries to Hispanics/Latinos and Asians are likely to be larger. On average, white parishes are neither as large as Hispanic/Latino or Asian parishes nor as small as African American or Native American parishes. However, no efforts have been made to subtract members of other ethnic groups within multi-cultural parishes that may have substantial numbers of a variety of ethnic groups.
- Parishes that minister to Hispanics/Latinos and Asians have larger church buildings and celebrate on average about four Masses per weekend. African American parishes celebrate about three Masses per weekend; Native American parishes about two.

- Native American parishes are primarily located outside metropolitan areas. African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian parishes are primarily located in metropolitan areas.

- Hispanic/Latino parishes have 4.5 infant baptisms for every funeral, suggesting that parishes ministries to Hispanics/Latinos have a younger age structure than other parishes.

- Parishes with ministry to Hispanics/Latinos and Asians have a greater number of priests, deacons, and lay staff per parish, as well as higher average numbers participating in parish sacramental life. This may be due primarily to the larger size of these particular parishes.

- Thirty-one percent of parishes with ministries to Hispanics/Latinos are served by religious, rather than diocesan, priests.

- This percentage is even higher for parishes with ministry to African Americans (40 percent), Asians (39 percent), and Native Americans (62 percent). Twenty-two percent of all parishes in the country are served by a religious priest. Fewer than one in five predominantly white parishes are served by a religious priest.

Table 10

Profile of Parishes with Ministries to Hispanic/Latinos, African Americans, Asians, and Native Americans

(as compared to parishes that report 60 percent or more white parishioners)

	Hispanic/ Latino	African American	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Native American	White
Median number of households	704	375	1,007	125	567
Seating capacity of church	519	490	566	228	470
Masses per weekend	4.2	2.9	4.5	2.1	3.3
Located in metropolitan areas	70%	92%	85%	22%	67%
Infants baptized per year	95	30	78	26	36
Funerals per year	31	17	32	15	25
Ratio of infant baptisms to funerals	4.5	2.0	3.5	2.4	1.9
Confirmations per year	45	21	46	16	32
Marriages per year	22	10	25	6	13
Resident pastor	91%	86%	91%	69%	87%
Religious (non-diocesan) priest(s)	31%	40%	39%	62%	19%
Number of priest(s) assigned per parish*	1.8	1.5	2	1.3	1.5
Parishes with a nun/sister on staff	36%	36%	43%	44%	29%
Parishes with a deacon on staff	40%	38%	38%	23%	31%
Lay ecclesial ministry staff per parish	2.5	1.9	3.1	1.0	2.4

* includes full-time and part-time assignments

Table 11

Parishes without a Resident Pastor as Reported in NPI 2000

	Northeast	South	Midwest	West	Total
Percent administered by a resident pastor	92%	87%	82%	86%	87%
Percent without a resident pastor	8	13	18	14	13
Of those parishes without a resident pastor:					
Administered by a non-resident pastor	70%	50%	72%	53%	65%
Entrusted to a deacon	10	14	5	12	9
Entrusted to a religious brother	2	6	2	2	2
Entrusted to a woman religious	13	19	15	15	16
Entrusted to a lay person or community of persons	5	11	6	18	8

Parish Staff

Parishes today are about one-third larger than they were in the 1950s, and are staffed by fewer priests. Many parish roles formerly reserved for priests are increasingly being performed by lay ecclesial ministers. Of the more than 85 percent of parishes with resident priests, 61 percent have a single priest, 25 percent have two priests, and 14 percent have more than two.

Administration of Parishes without a Resident Pastor

Of the 19,338 parishes in the U.S., slightly fewer than 12,000 reported information on staffing patterns. *Table 11* summarizes these patterns. It shows that 13 percent of parishes reporting information on staffing are without a resident pastor. Findings for parishes without a resident pastor include the following:

- The Midwest has the highest percentage (18 percent) of parishes with no resident pastor. The Northeast has the smallest percentage (8 percent).
- Over 80 percent of parishes without a resident pastor in the Northeast are administered by a non-resident pastor. About three-quarters in the Midwest are administered by a non-resident pastor.

But only between 55 and 60 percent of such parishes in the South and West are administered by a non-resident pastor.

- The South is most likely to have parishes entrusted to women religious. About 18 percent of parishes in the South with no resident pastor are entrusted to women religious.
- The West has the highest percentage of parishes entrusted to a lay person or a community of persons. About 18 percent of parishes in the West with no resident pastor are entrusted to non-vowed lay persons.

Parish Ministry Staff

Parish ministry staff is comprised of deacons and lay ecclesial ministers—including vowed religious—as well as priests. The average number of deacons per parish is fewer than one; large “corporate” and “mega” parishes, however, average two deacons.

Table 12 shows average parish ministry staff by region, illustrating differences across regions and between lay and ordained staff. Professional lay ministers heavily outnumber priests in parishes in every region of the country.

Table 12

Average Parish Ministry Staff by Region

(includes both full-time and part-time assignments)

	Northeast	South	Midwest	West
Diocesan Priests	1.45	1.08	1.12	1.13
Religious Priests	.32	.43	.25	.47
Deacons	.45	.62	.43	.44
Religious brothers	.03	.06	.03	.04
Religious sisters	.50	.43	.39	.42
Laypersons	1.87	2.24	1.90	2.81