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*Survey of the Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on
Catholic Parishes in Nigeria*

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Executive Summary

This study of the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the Catholic Church in Nigeria surveys priests and religious sisters who are engaged in full-time pastoral apostolates, as well as catechists in parishes. In total, 72 responded to the survey online and 44 on paper, for a total of 116 respondents. The survey document was sent via social media to diocesan and religious priests in the different Nigerian Ecclesiastical Provinces. In addition, printed copies were distributed and others sent to some priests and catechists as well as to some religious sisters engaged in pastoral work in parishes in Nigeria. Follow-up social media messages and calls were made to non-responding priests, religious sisters and the catechists from early November to December 12, 2020. As at the time of writing this report, a total of 116 persons responded to the survey. Four types of parish personnel responded: diocesan priests (59%), religious priests (30%), religious sisters (7%), and catechists (4%).

Major findings can be summarized as follows.

- A majority of respondents at Nigerian parishes says that morale has decreased among parishioners overall (66%) and others who work in parishes (50%), with fewer saying the same about the morale of priests overall (44%) or themselves (21%).
- At least half of respondents say their parishes have seen increasing numbers of people seeking counseling (55%) and seeking spiritual guidance (50%).
- Half or more (50% to 82%) say the number of people coming for food assistance (82%), for financial assistance (80%), and for medical assistance (50%) has increased.
- Respondents report an increase in the number of Masses celebrated on site in parishes (44%), with a similar percentage saying the number of Masses celebrated online has remained the same (41%). Concerning the other sacraments and rites, respondents are most likely to say there has been a decrease in the number of Confirmations (57%), First Holy Communions (55%), weddings (44%), and Confessions (38%). The number of Funerals, on the other hand, are split between those saying they have remained the same (42%) or have increased (38%).
- Concerning adult parishioners, 62% report that the number of people participating in Small Christian Communities has decreased. Between 43% and 48% say the number of children participating or attending local Catholic grade schools (48%), parish religious education classes (47%), parish catechetical classes (44%), and local Catholic high schools (43%) has decreased.
- While donations to the parishes from parishioners (75%) and from outside charitable agencies (72%) are decreasing, the amount of help parishes receive from their arch/diocese is almost evenly split between those saying it has decreased (41%) and those saying it has remained the same (37%).

Survey of the Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Catholic Parishes in Nigeria

Introduction

This study of the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the Catholic Church in Nigeria surveys priests and religious sisters who are engaged in full-time pastoral apostolates, as well as catechists in parishes. In total, 72 responded to the survey online and 44 on paper, for a total of 116 respondents. The survey document was sent via social media to diocesan and religious priests in the different Nigerian Ecclesiastical Provinces. In addition, printed copies were distributed and others sent to some priests and catechists as well as to some religious sisters engaged in pastoral work in parishes in Nigeria. Follow-up social media messages and calls were made to non-responding priests, religious sisters and the catechists from early November to December 12, 2020. As at the time of writing this report, a total of 116 persons responded to the survey.

Nigeria Catholic Church at a Glance

Nigeria, with its fast-growing population, is estimated to have a population of about 206 million people in 2020. According to the World Population review, Nigeria is regarded as the most populous nation in Africa. Nigeria is made up of different ethnic groups, cultures and dialects. However, English language is the main language used in communicating in Nigeria. Nigeria as a Federation has 36 states with 1 Federal Capital Territory. These states are further divided into local government areas.

The religious make-up of Nigeria varies from place to place. It is worth noting that religion in the country is divided into three (3) groups: Islam dominates the Northern part of the country, Christianity dominates the southern part of the country, and those practicing the traditional religion are mostly scattered about in the southern part of the country.

In 2010, approximately 12.6% of the population in Nigeria identifies as Catholic. The Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria is composed of 44 Dioceses and 9 Archdioceses. In the midst of Christian persecution and suffering in Nigeria, and amongst large numbers of believers of different Christian denominations and the Islamic religion, Catholics also practice their faith. As an article puts it, “The majority of Christians in Nigeria belong to Protestant and African Independent Churches. Nonetheless, given its huge overall population, Nigeria is home to some 29 million Catholics, the twelfth largest population of Catholics in the world, and the second largest population of Catholics in Africa.”¹

Nigeria, just like most other countries in the world, has been faced with the deadly wide spread COVID 19 pandemic which greatly affected the country in terms of finances, health, people becoming so vulnerable, etc. This situation led to measures taken to curtail the spread of the

¹ [Nigeria | Catholics & Cultures \(catholicsandcultures.org\)](https://catholicsandcultures.org/). Retrieved January 2021.

virus. One of the measures adopted by the government was the lockdown. As a result, many people were affected leading to increase in hunger as supplies became scarce. This measure as well as continuous pleas for the wearing of the face mask, and the use of hand sanitizer helped to reduce the spread and it also led to increase in hygiene. The pandemic brought in new innovation in the use of virtual learning at all levels of education as well as the use of video conferencing in meetings and other activities such as workshops, seminars, etc.

In response to the pandemic, the Catholic Church in Nigeria also took bold measures to reduce the spread. The Church abided by the laid down protocols of the Country by obeying the closure measure, wearing of the face mask, use of hand sanitizer and social distancing. The Church went the extra mile to stop the sign of peace which usually was done through hand shake and also allow the reception of Holy Communion by hand, avoiding social and religious gathering etc. The introduction of online Masses and prayer section was also geared toward reducing the spread of the virus. The Church also respond to the need of the vulnerable in the country through palliative donations both to the country and to her members as well as reaching out to the poor in terms of feeding, medical attention and also making available her medical facilities for those infected.

Characteristics of Respondents

This study surveyed four categories of personnel members of parish communities. Those responding are diocesan priests (68 respondents or 58%), religious priests (35 respondents or 30%), religious sisters (8 respondents or 7%) and catechists (5 respondents or 4%). Two respondents (2%) did not specify their relationship to their parish community. Responses come from eight of the nine ecclesial Provinces (Archdioceses and their suffragan dioceses) in Nigeria.

Ecclesiastical Provinces Surveyed

Analysis of this study was based on Ecclesial Provinces rather than individual Dioceses. This is because participants from some Dioceses were too few to be analyzed independently. Thus, eight Ecclesial Provinces (an Archdiocese and its area suffragen Dioceses) were represented in this survey but at different levels of participation. Nearly half of respondents (46%) come from the Ecclesiastical Province of Lagos.² Ecclesiastical Provinces in Nigeria who responded to the survey are:

- Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja (2 responses or 3%)
- Ecclesiastical Province of Benin (18 responses or 16%)
- Ecclesiastical Province of Calabar (8 responses or 7%)
- Ecclesiastical Province of Ibadan (12 responses or 10%)
- Ecclesiastical Province of Jos (6 responses or 5%)
- Ecclesiastical Province of Kaduna (11 responses or 10%)
- Ecclesiastical Province of Lagos (53 responses or 46%)
- Ecclesiastical Province of Onitsha (4 responses or 3%)

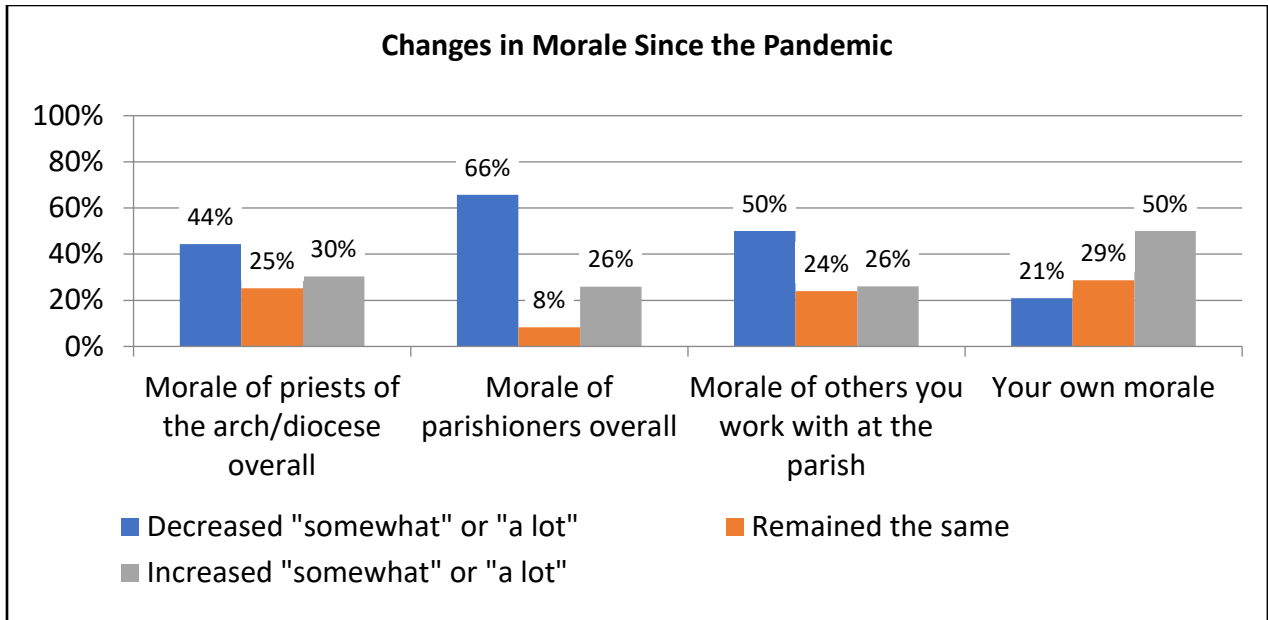
² No respondents came from the Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri.

Summary of All Findings

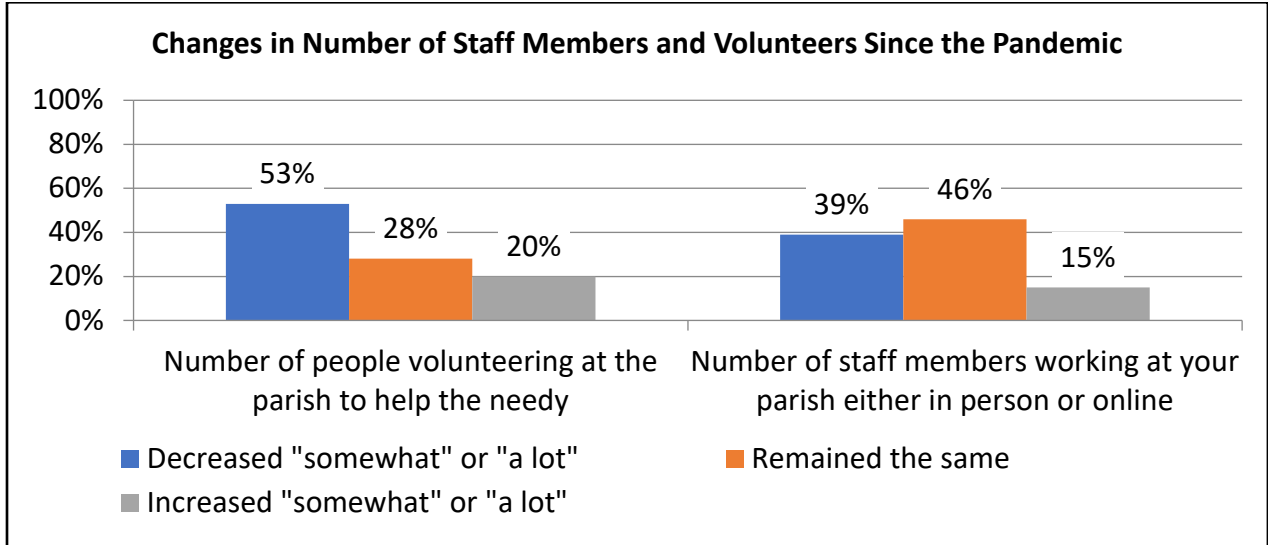
The responses to the main body of the survey are presented below.

Evaluation of Parish Morale and Presence of Staff and Volunteers

As can be seen in the figure below, a majority of respondents say that morale has decreased among parishioners overall (66%) and others who work in parishes (50%), with fewer saying the same about the morale of priests overall (44%) or themselves (21%).

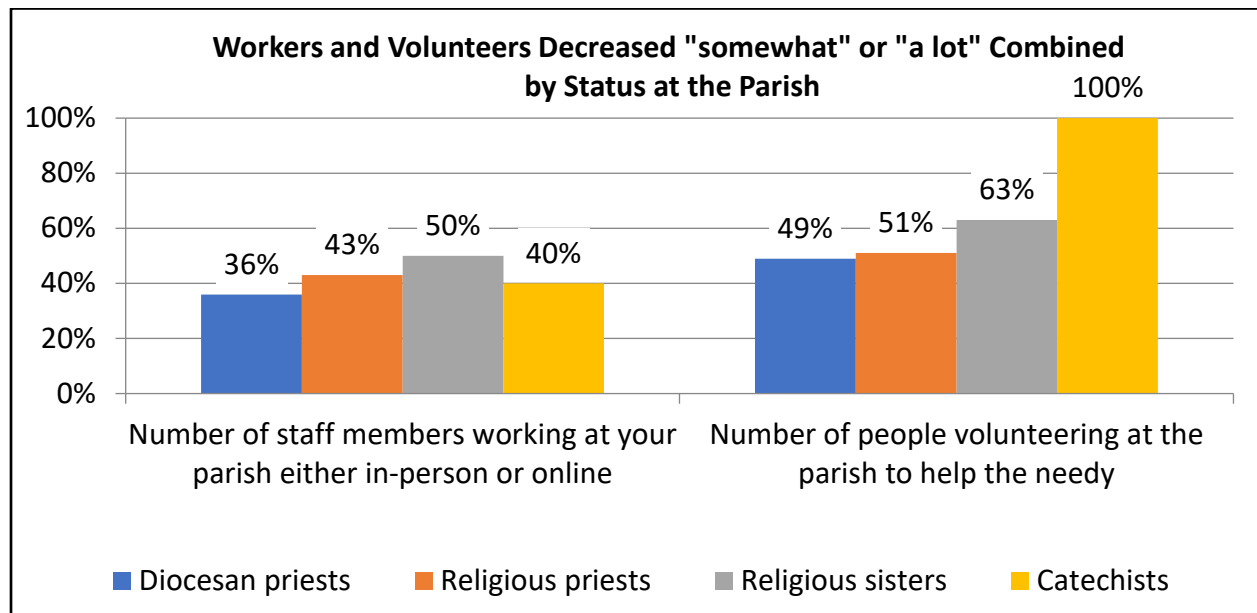
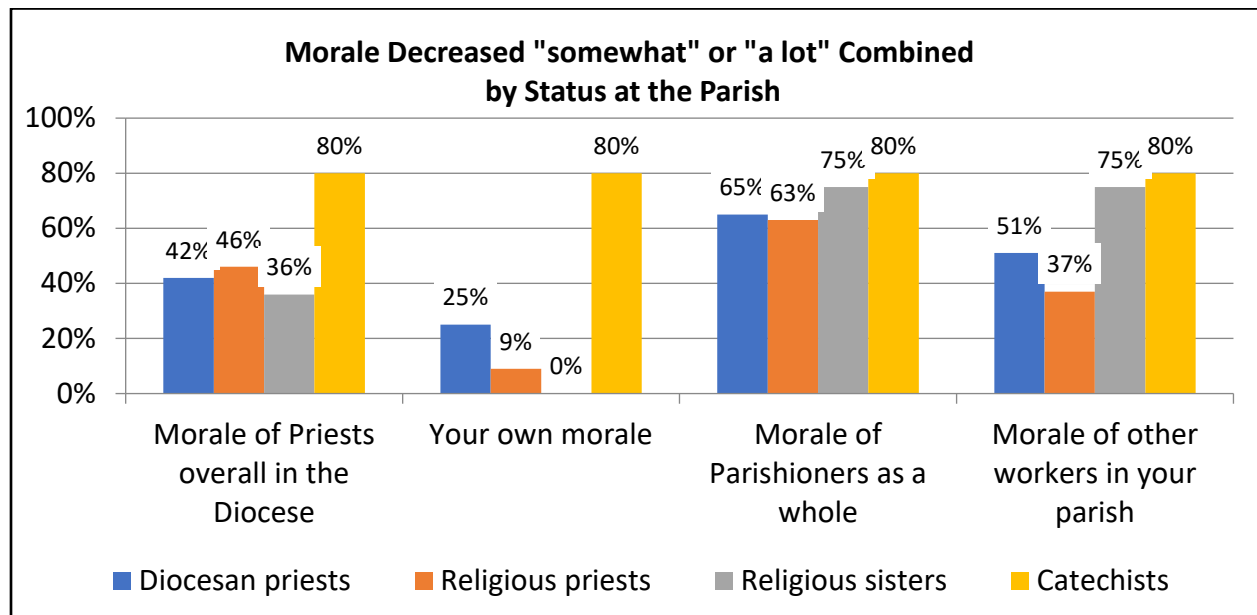


A majority says that the number of people volunteering at the parish to help the needy has decreased (53%). Respondents are more split about changes to the number of staff members working at the parish in person or online, with 46% reporting that the number had remained the same and 39% reporting that it had decreased.



Differences by Status at the Parish

The following two figures indicate how parish administrators perceive the decrease in the morale of different groups of people as well as the number of people working at or volunteering at the parish, with respondents categorized by their status at their parish. The catechists are *more* likely than others to agree that the Priests, Religious Sisters, parishioners and parish workers to indicate that their own morale have decreased. “somewhat” or “a lot”. In addition, as is seen in the second figure below, catechists are also most likely to say that the number of people volunteering at the parish to help the needy has decreased.



Differences by Ecclesiastical Province

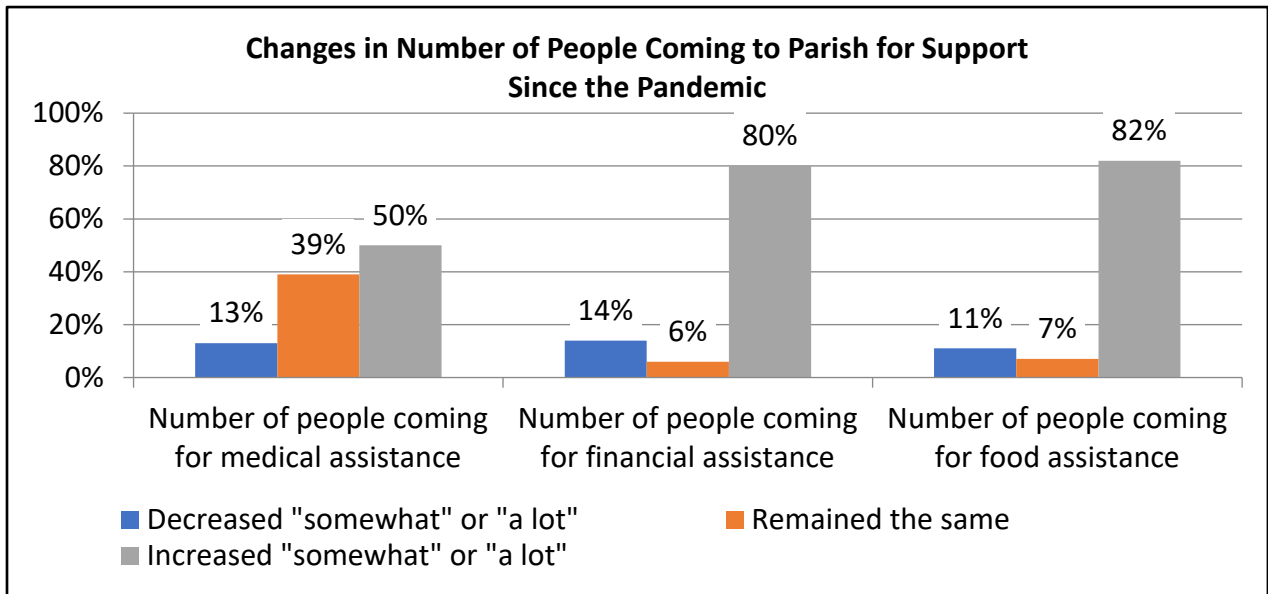
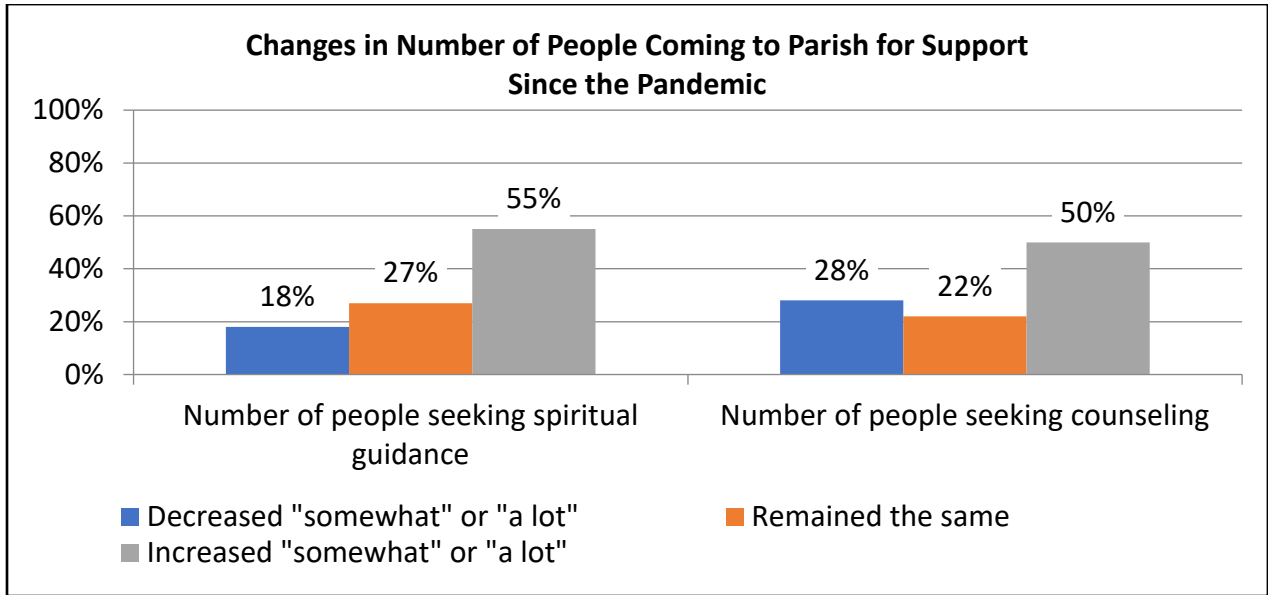
The results show the number of Ecclesiastical Provinces who responded to the survey. This table shows those responding that morale has decreased “somewhat” or “a lot”, combined. Those from the province of Jos are most likely to report a lowering of morale. Least likely to list decreases are the few respondents from the province of Onitsha.

	Abuja (2 rs)	Benin (18 rs)	Calabar (8 rs)	Ibadan (12 rs)	Jos (6 rs)	Kaduna (11 rs)	Lagos (53 rs)	Onitsha (4 rs)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Morale of priests overall	0	24	75	50	33	55	51	0
Your morale	50	11	25	33	0	27	23	0
Morale of parishioners overall	100	39	75	58	100	64	80	0
Morale of others you work with	50	17	75	58	100	55	56	0
The number of staff members working at your parish either in-person or online	0	11	63	67	33	46	46	0
The number of people volunteering at the parish to help the needy	0	28	63	67	100	46	55	25

- Between 80% and 100% of those in the Abuja (100%), Jos (100%), and Lagos (80%) provinces say the morale of parishioners decreased during the pandemic.
- More than six in ten of those in the provinces of Calabar (75%) and Kaduna (64%) say the pandemic has decreased the morale of their parishioners.
- The numbers of volunteers who help the needy at the parish level decreased in Jos (100%), Ibadan (67%), Calabar (63%), and Lagos (55%).

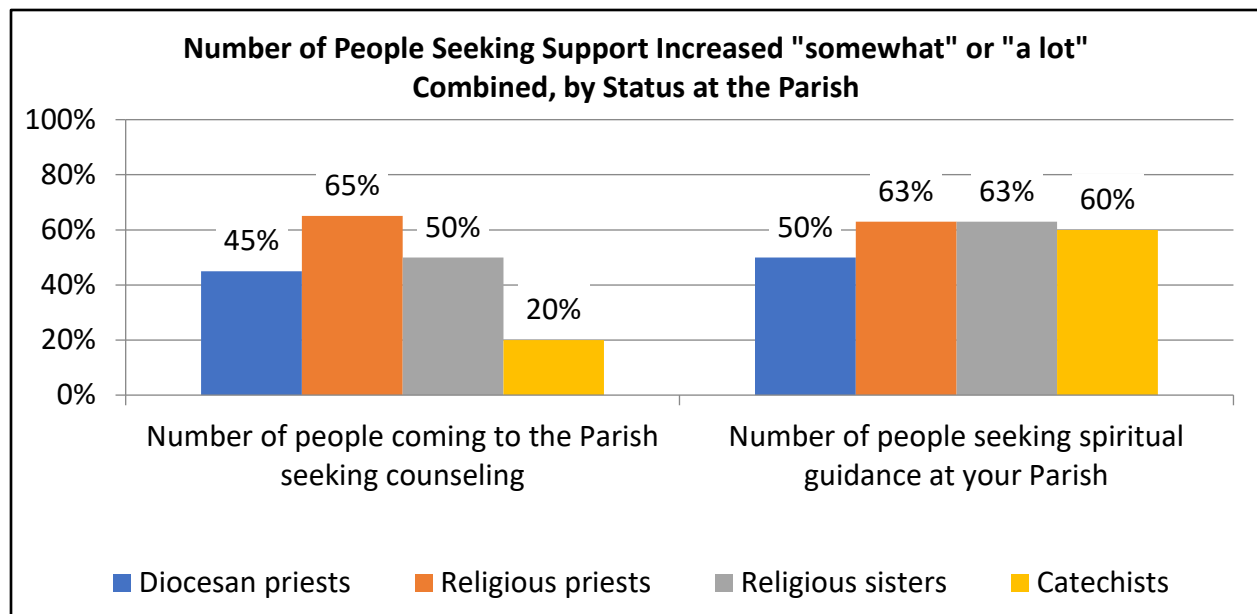
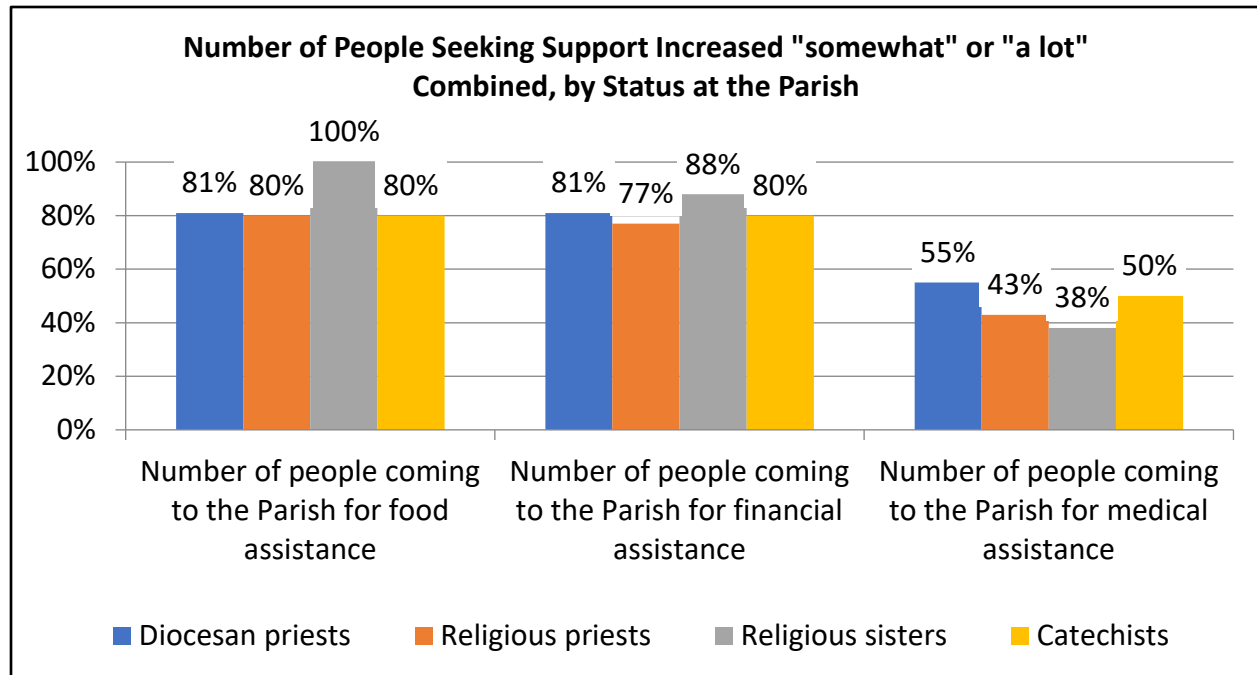
Frequency of People Seeking Parish Support

Half or more of respondents say their parishes have seen increasing number of people seeking counseling and seeking spiritual guidance. Less than three-tenths say these numbers have either decreased or remained the same. Similarly, as is seen in the second figure below, more than half (50% to 82%) say the number of people coming for food assistance (82%), for financial assistance (80%), and for medical assistance (50%) has increased.



Differences by Status at the Parish

At least half of those of all four types of respondents say the number of people coming to the parish for food assistance, for financial assistance, and for spiritual guidance has increased. The results are more mixed for the number of people coming for medical assistance or for counseling.



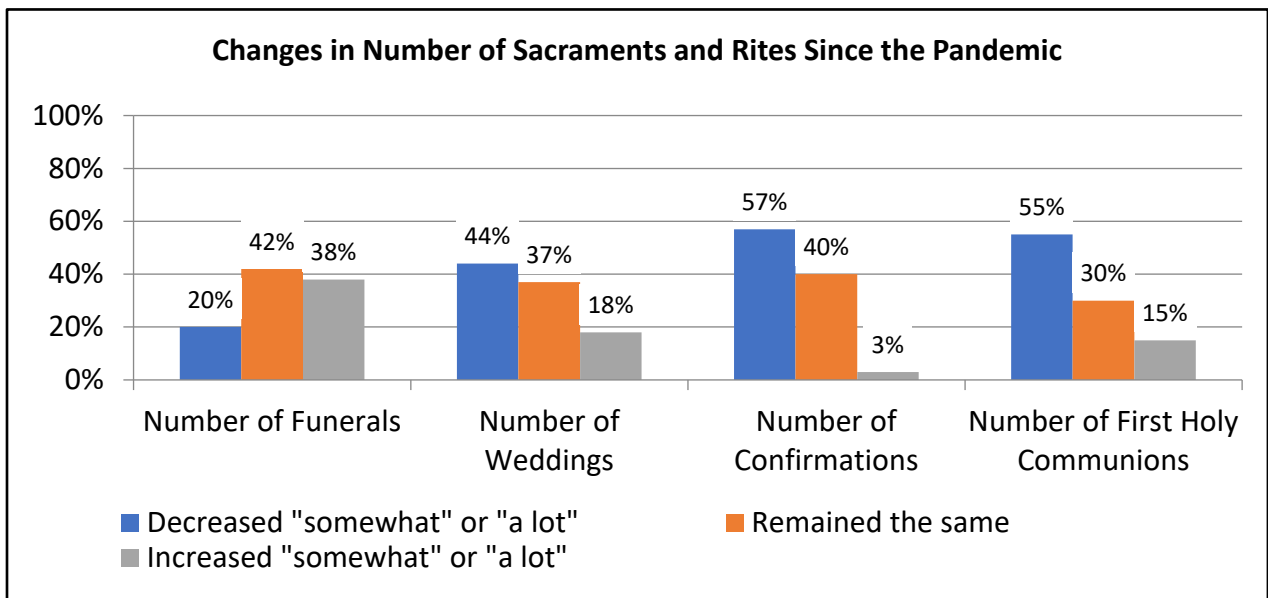
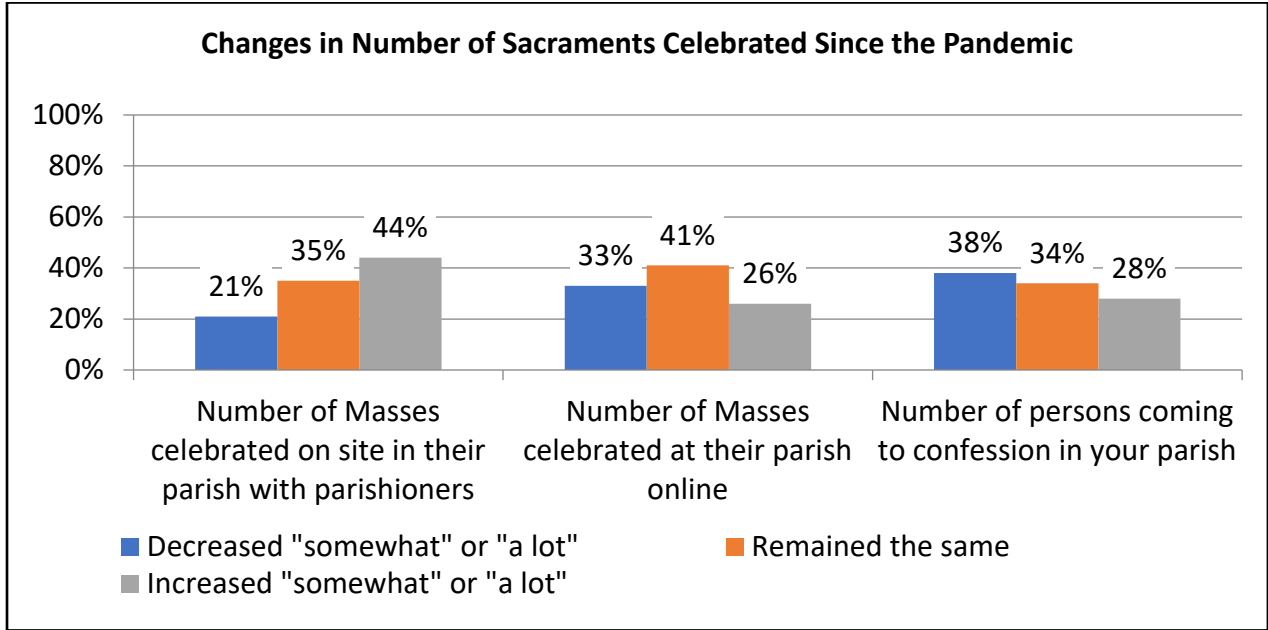
Differences by Ecclesiastical Province

Calabar, Jos and Kaduna Ecclesiastical Metropolitan Provinces recorded 100% increases in the number of people who approach the parishes for food support. Lagos and Benin recorded (89%) and (67%) increases, respectively. In the area of financial support, Abuja, Calabar, and Kaduna recorded (100%) increase combined of “somewhat” or “a lot”. Those in the provinces of Benin, Lagos and Jos say the number increased by 79% to 83%.

Number of People at the Parish Seeking Support Increasing “somewhat” or “a lot” Combined, by Ecclesial Province								
	Abuja (2 rs)	Benin (18 rs)	Calabar (8 rs)	Ibadan (12 rs)	Jos (6 rs)	Kaduna (11 rs)	Lagos (53 rs)	Onitsha (4 rs)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
The number of people coming to the Parish for food assistance	50	67	100	58	100	100	89	35
The number of people coming to the Parish for financial assistance	100	78	100	58	83	100	81	25
The number of people coming to the Parish for medical assistance	0	56	38	42	33	56	58	25
The number of people coming to the Parish seeking counselling	0	39	0	58	83	64	53	100
The number of people seeking spiritual guidance at your Parish	0	44	25	58	83	73	57	100

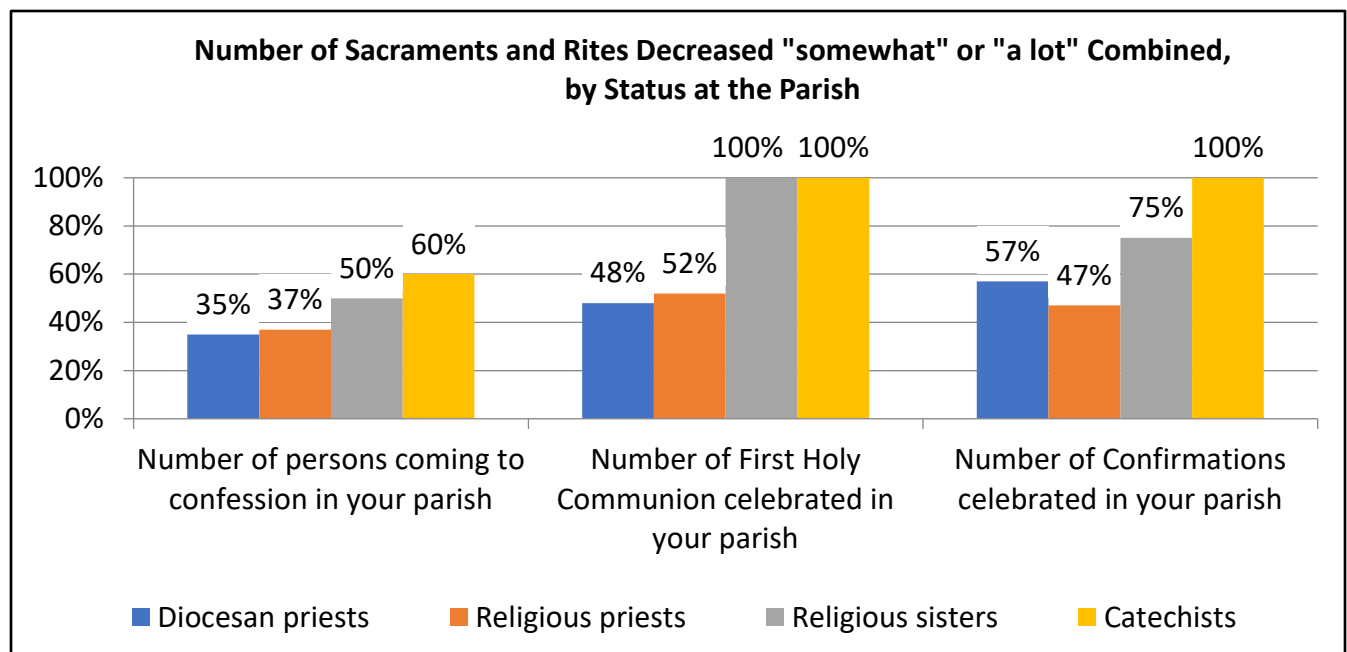
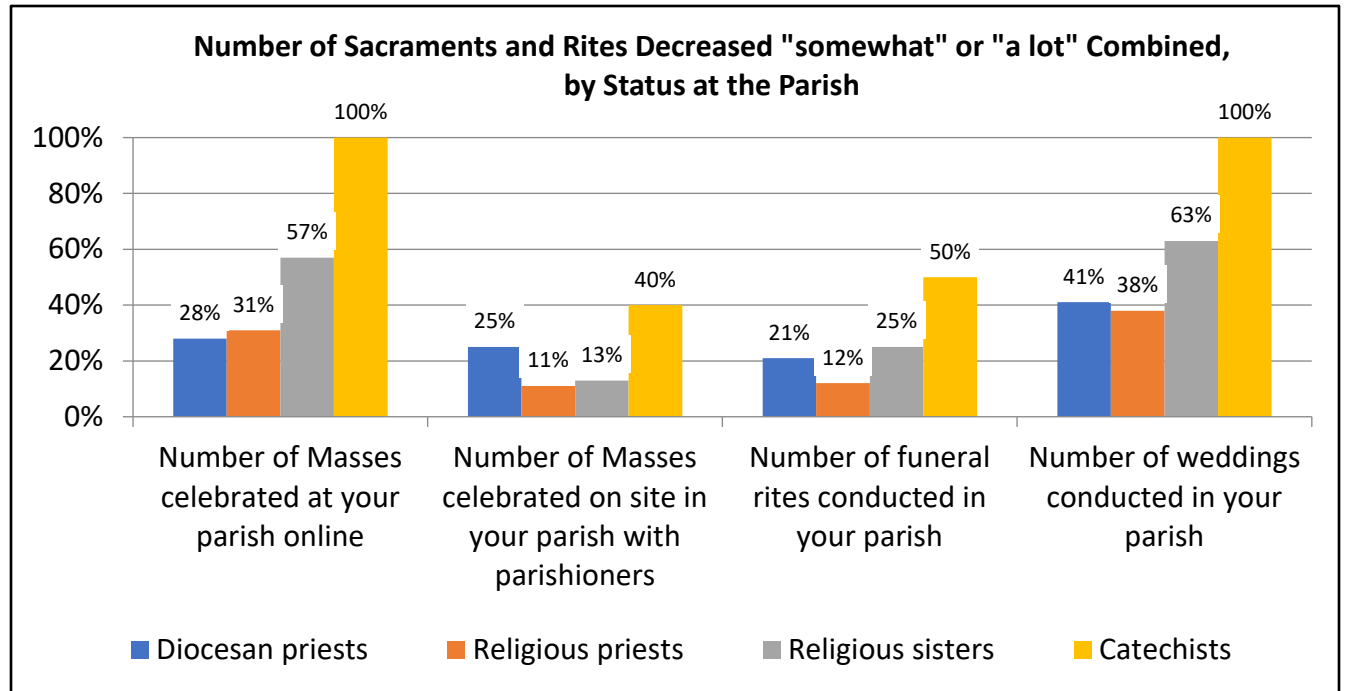
Masses, Sacraments and Rites Offered

Generally, respondents report an increase in the number of Masses celebrated on site in parishes (44%), with a similar percentage saying the number of Masses celebrated online has remained the same (41%). Concerning the other sacraments and rites, respondents are most likely to say there has been a decrease in these: Confirmations (57%), First Holy Communions (55%), weddings (44%), and Confessions (38%). The number of Funerals, on the other hand, are split between those saying they have remained the same (42%) or have increased (38%).



Differences by Status at the Parish

As can be seen in the two figures below, catechists are most likely to say the number of sacraments and rites have decreased “somewhat” or “a lot”.



Differences by Ecclesiastical Province

Those in the province of Calabar are most likely to say that the number of Masses celebrated online and persons for the sacrament of confession have decreased. Jos ecclesiastical province respondents are most likely to report a decrease in the number of weddings and first Holy Communion (100%) respectively.

Number of Sacraments and Rites Decreasing “somewhat” or “a Lot” Combined, by Ecclesiastical Province								
	Abuja (2 rs)	Benin (18 rs)	Calabar (8 rs)	Ibadan (12 rs)	Jos (11 rs)	Kaduna (11 rs)	Lagos (53 rs)	Onitsha (4 rs)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
The number of Masses celebrated at your parish online	0	7	83	17	0	43	38	25
The number of Masses celebrated on site in your parish with parishioners	0	6	25	33	0	27	26	0
The number of funeral rites conducted in your parish	0	0	25	33	0	22	28	0
The number of weddings conducted in your parish	0	11	63	33	100	64	46	25
The number of persons coming to confession in your parish	0	22	88	42	0	46	40	0
The number of First Holy Communion celebrated in your parish	100	25	50	55	100	44	63	0
The number of Confirmations celebrated in your parish	0	43	50	73	33	44	67	0

How Ministries Have Continued and Issues Parishes Have Encountered

In an open-ended question, respondents were asked: *Please describe how your parish has continued to minister to others during this time of pandemic. Also, what problems have you encountered and how have you addressed them?* A summary of their responses is presented below in three subject areas.

How Masses and Sacraments Have Continued

Responses varied, but these patterns emerged from the responses:

- Many parishes only offer Masses online, with others encouraging their parishioners to watch Masses and participate in prayers on the radio or television; some report, however, that the challenges encountered were lack of resources, lack of sponsorship and irregular power supply of electricity; others report that the online attendance is now significantly less after the lockdown than during the pandemic.
- A few parishes have increased the number of in-person Masses offered so parishioners can comply with the government distancing and mask rules; some parishes report that some parishioners have not been cooperative with these rules; some had to bar children under age 12 from attending; and, finally, some hold open-air celebrations and increase the number of Masses celebrated to reduce the risk
- A few parishes have moved to household Masses or to the priest celebrating Mass privately and then informing parishioners who requested for Mass that it was celebrated.
- Many parishes say their members have had network issues that have prevented them from participating in online services and others say their parishioners lack sufficient data to participate
- A few parishes say they continue to offer Confessions, Anointing of the Sick, and Baptisms with a limited number of attenders.

How Parishes Have Continued Serving the Needy

Parishes report continuing to serve the needy in these ways:

- Parishes have experienced increased parishioner need for financial assistance, food assistance, and counseling during this time of pandemic, but have limited resources to give to those who come around
- A few parishes report receiving donations from some people/organizations and to have been encouraging parishioners to be charitable to others.
- Two say their leaders visit the sick, but one says they had to suspend their prison ministry
- Some graft has taken place with a few parishioners asking for assistance they do not need

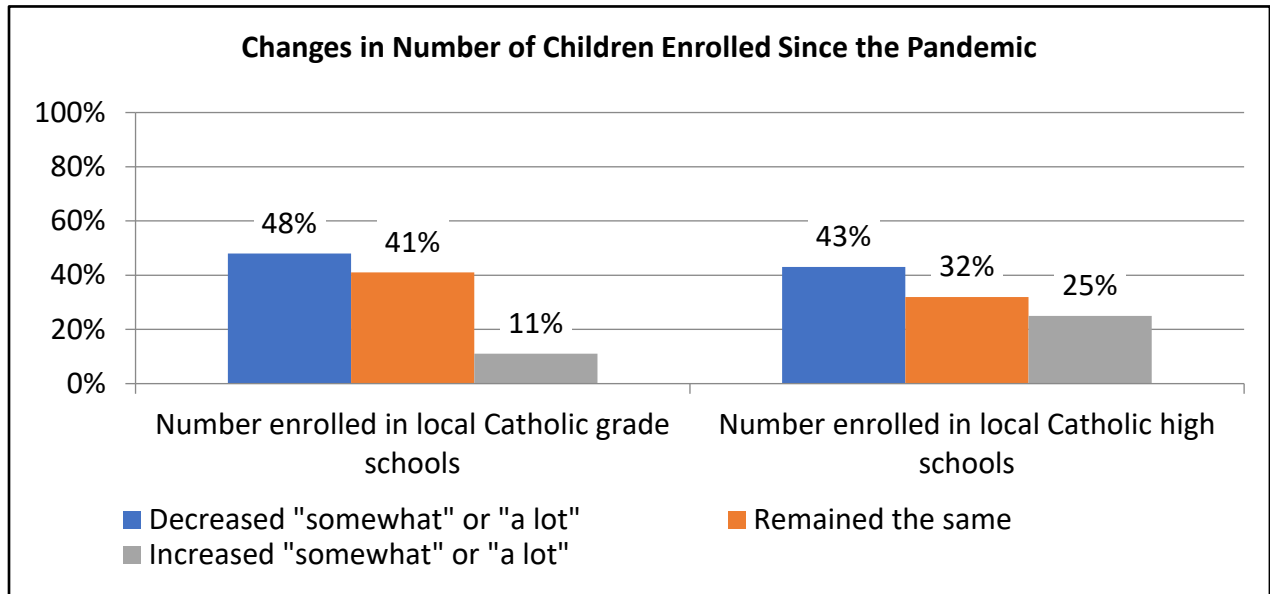
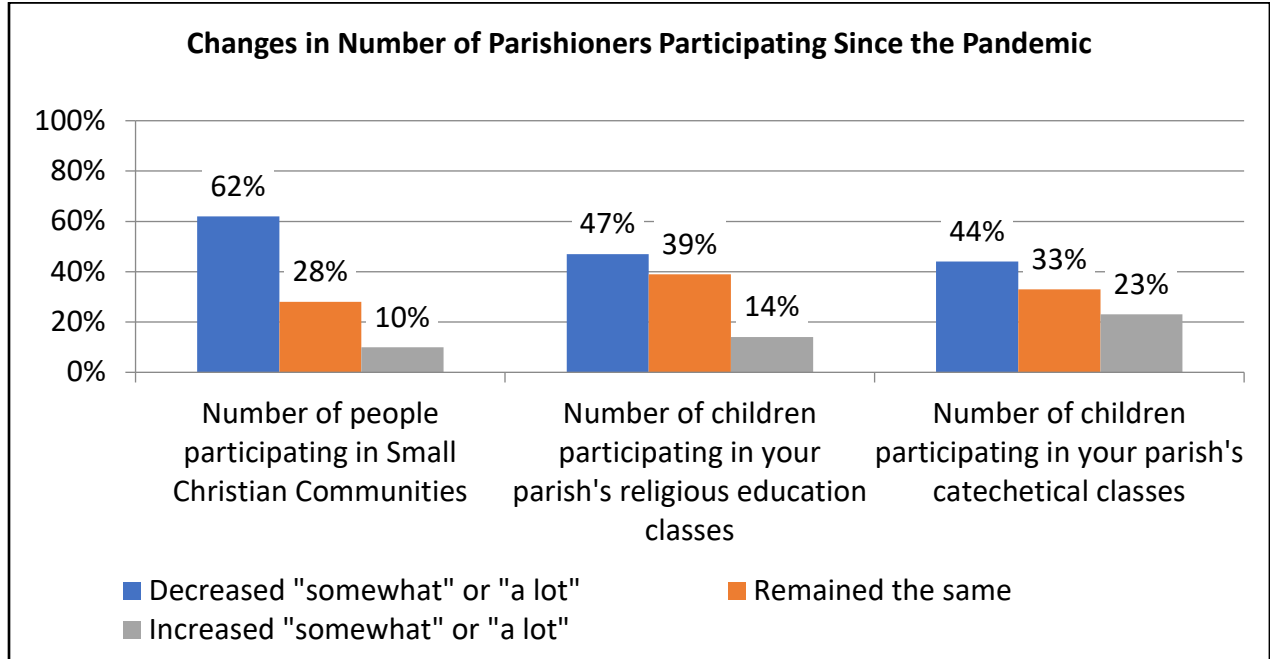
How Parishes Have Kept Parishioners Connected to Each Other and to the Parish

Leaders report these problems and solutions when trying to keep parishioners connected:

- Many parishes have increased their presence on social media (WhatsApp, Facebook), but find the parish itself and parishioners do not have enough data to do so as regularly as needed
- Catechism classes and small Christian Communities have continued to meet, mostly online
- Not everyone has a phone or data, so some meet at or visit parishioners' homes

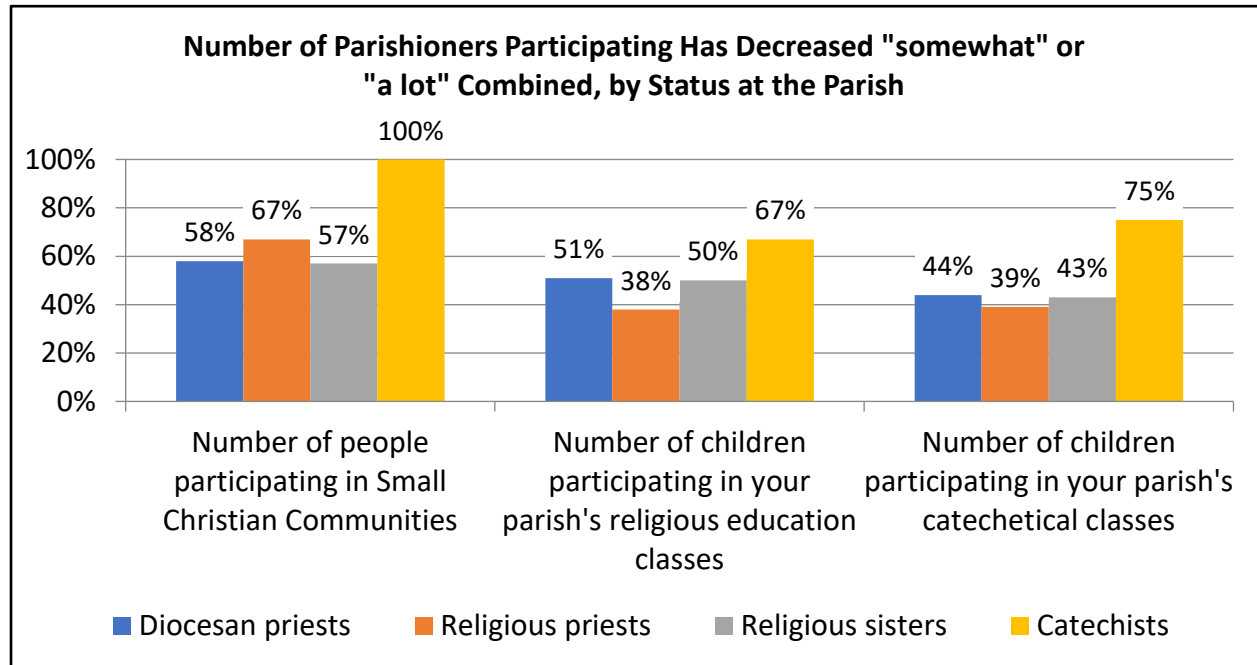
Number of Parishioners Participating in Christian Communities and Programs

Concerning adult parishioners, 62% report that the number of people participating in Small Christian Communities has decreased. Between 43% and 48% say the number of children participating or attending local Catholic grade schools (48%), parish religious education classes (47%), parish catechetical classes (44%), and local Catholic high schools (43%). The second greatest percentages among children's participation (32% to 41%) are for those who say the numbers have remained the same.

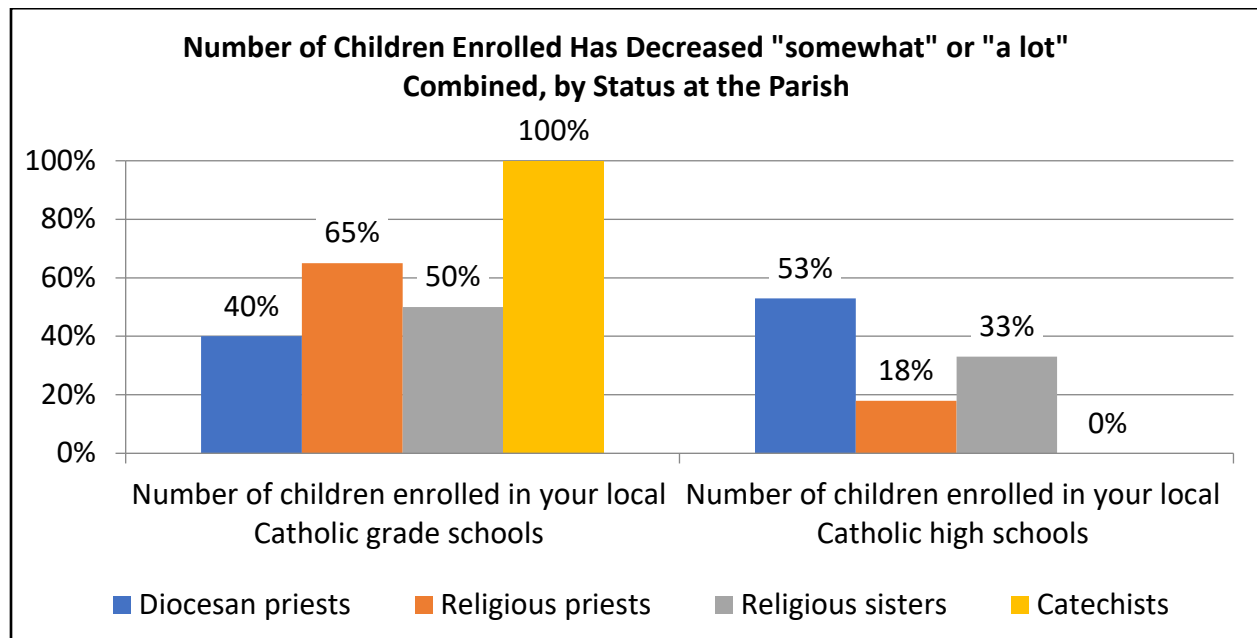


Differences by Status at the Parish

Catechists have a unique perspective about participation in catechetical programs in the parishes. At least three-quarters (75%) of catechists say the number of children participating in parish catechetical classes, (100%) say people participating in Small Christian Communities, and (67%) in parish religious education classes have decreased.



Opinions of the different groups varied considerably as to the enrollment in local Catholic schools



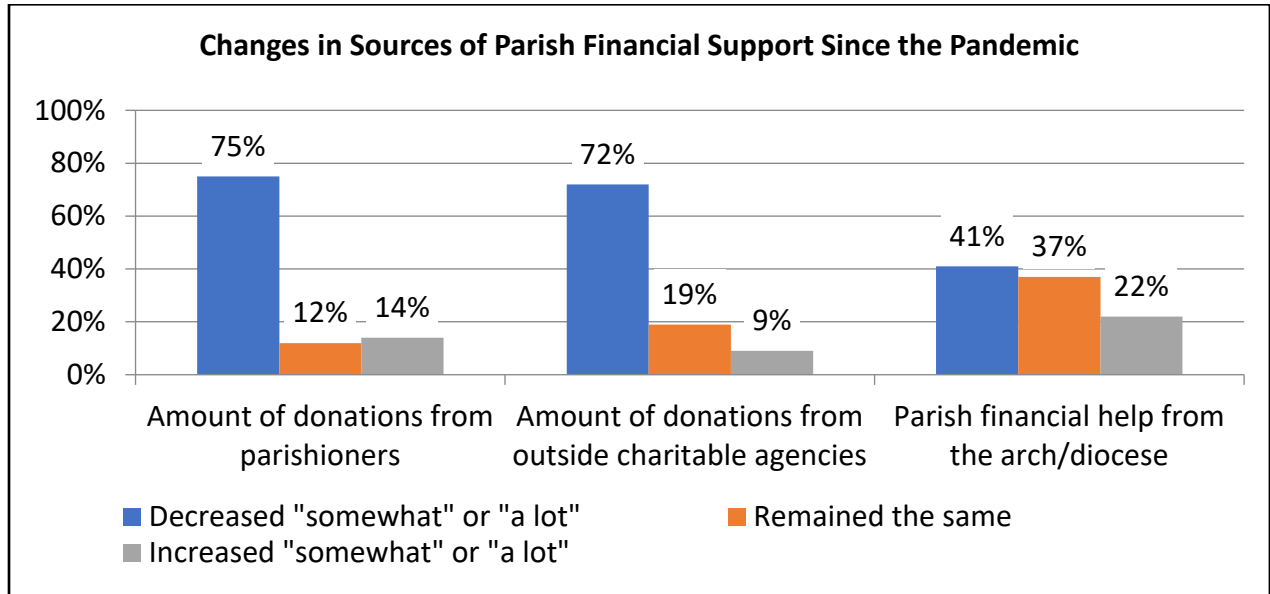
Differences by Ecclesiastical Province

Those in the Lagos (76%) and Benin (71%) provinces are most likely to report decreases in those participating in Small Christian Communities. Nearly half to six in ten of the provinces of Benin, Ibadan, Kaduna and Lagos are likely to report decreases in children classes programs respectively. While Catholic schools enrollment shows decrease in the provinces of Benin, Calabar, Ibadan, Jos, Kaduna and Lagos either at the grade schools and the high schools levels.

Number of Parishioners Participating Decreasing “somewhat” or “a lot” Combined, by Ecclesiastical Province								
	Abuja (2 rs)	Benin (18 rs)	Calabar (8 rs)	Ibadan (12 rs)	Jos (11 rs)	Kaduna (11 rs)	Lagos (53rs)	Onitsha (4 rs)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Number of people participating in Small Christian Communities	50	71	57	40	33	22	76	25
Number of children participating in your parish's religious education classes	0	47	25	50	33	50	57	25
Number of children participating in your parish's catechetical classes	0	28	50	50	33	44	51	0
Number of children enrolled in your local Catholic grade schools	0	33	50	50	33	57	59	25
Number of children enrolled in your local Catholic high schools	0	75	71	17	50	67	33	25

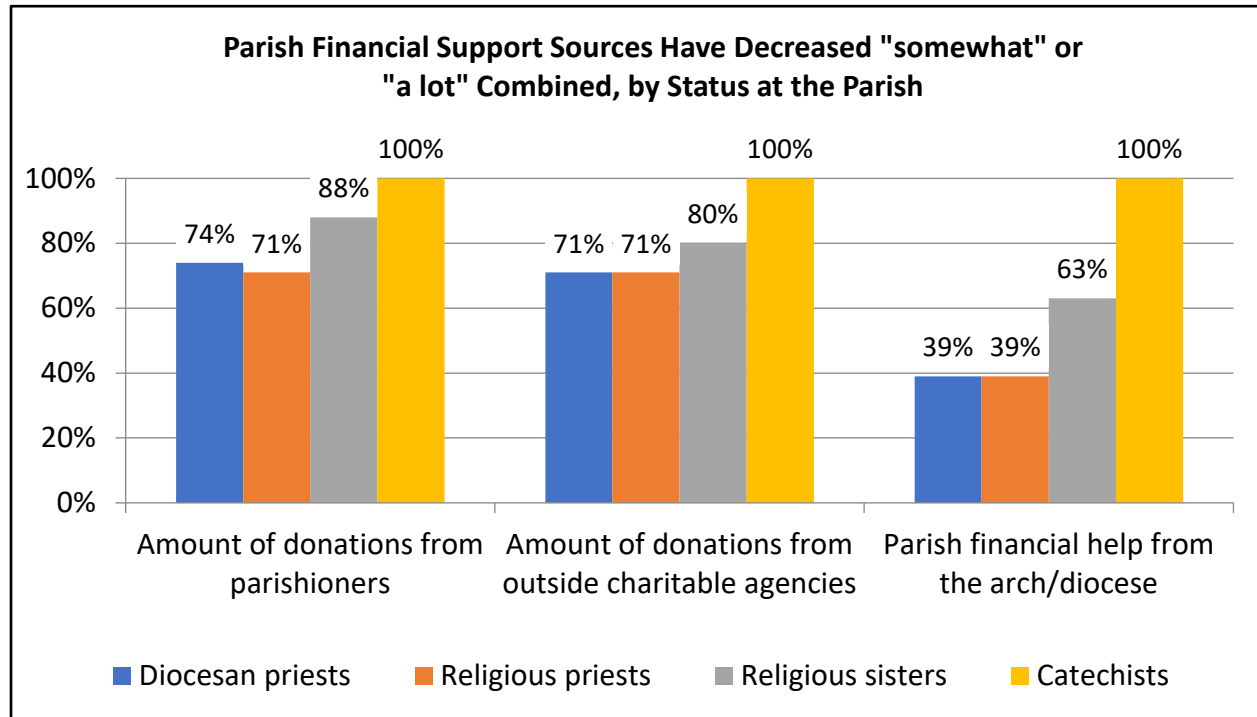
Financial Health of the Parishes

While donations to the parishes from parishioners (75%) and from outside charitable agencies (72%) are decreasing, the amount of help parishes receive from their arch/diocese is more evenly split between those saying it has decreased (41%) and those saying it has remained the same (37%).



Differences by Status at the Parish

More than seven in ten diocesan priests, religious priests, religious sisters, and catechists say that donations from parishioners and from outside charitable agencies have decreased during the pandemic. Concerning financial help from arch/dioceses, priests are the least likely to report decreases.



Differences by Ecclesiastical Province

More than eight in ten of those in the provinces of Calabar (83% to 88%) and Lagos (82% to 85%) report that donations from parishioners and outside charitable agencies have decreased. Half or more of those in the provinces of Jos (100%), Ibadan (55%), and Kaduna (50%) report decreases in the amount of financial help they are receiving from their arch/dioceses.

Parish Financial Support Sources Have Decreased “somewhat” or “a lot” Combined, by Ecclesial Province								
	Abuja (2 rs)	Benin (18 rs)	Calabar (8 rs)	Ibadan (12 rs)	Jos (11 rs)	Kaduna (11 rs)	Lagos (53rs)	Onitsha (4 rs)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Amount of donations from parishioners	51	61	88	67	100	67	82	25
Amount of donations from outside charitable agencies	0	62	83	60	50	75	85	25
Parish financial help from the arch/diocese	0	29	29	55	100	50	40	25

Analysis of Open-Ended Responses about Finances

- Respondents were also asked to write in about the financial health of their parishes. Respondents report that the financial health has decreased significantly. While the pandemic is the major contributor, some mentioned pre-existing financial challenges making the situation worse. They also reported that they cut down expenses while others source for funds within and outside the parish and from friends.
- Financial challenges were minimized by reducing unnecessary costs and spending, appealing to parishioner to assist and donate to the parish, and generating funds through the establishment of self-reliant micro projects. In spite of the challenges experienced by the pandemic, most apostolates continued as usual but with caution.
- The kinds of support most often received from their Dioceses or Archdioceses was palliatives, financial assistance in some Ecclesiastical Provinces, and emotional support and encouragement.

For More Information

Sr. Florence Emurayevya, EHJ, M. Ed. – Visiting Scholar at CARA from Nigeria – conducted the research for this report and wrote up the findings with CARA researcher Jonathon Wiggins, Ph.D. This research is funded through a grant from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation to further the research of women religious and Catholicism on the continent of Africa.

For more information on CARA, please see: <https://cara.georgetown.edu/>