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Ministry in the Midst of Pandemic: A Survey of Bishops

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Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate

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Executive Summary

The Survey of Bishops about Ministry in the Midst of Pandemic was designed by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) in Spring 2020. Seeking to investigate the impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the 177 U.S. arch/dioceses and 20 eparchies, CARA mailed the survey to all bishops, representing all of the dioceses and eparchies included in the United States on May 18. A follow up reminder was mailed to the non-responding bishops on June 8. By the time of the release of this report, a total of 116 bishops have responded, for an overall response rate of 59% -- 60% for bishops of dioceses and 50% for bishops of eparchies.¹

A complicating factor in the findings presented below is that some dioceses responded to the survey while in a total lockdown phase of the pandemic in their diocese while others responded as their diocese entered a later phase. Many dioceses on the coasts of the United States, for example, experienced the height of their pandemic crisis months earlier than dioceses in other parts of the country did.

With that caveat, major findings can be summarized as follows:

- Parishes' celebrations of sacraments and rites and their sacramental preparation programs are most likely to have been affected strongly by the Covid-19 pandemic, with more than half of dioceses reporting that their celebration of or programs for the following have been "very much" affected: Confirmations (81%), First Communions (78%), the RCIA process (63%), other sacramental preparation (64%), Marriages (59%), Baptisms (57%), and Funerals (54%).
- While other aspects of the dioceses did not have a majority of bishops saying they have been "very much" affected, that does not mean that they were not affected at all. Combining those responding "somewhat" and "very much," more than half of dioceses say the pandemic has at least "somewhat" affected: the morale of their lay ecclesial ministers (71%), the morale of their priests (68%), the morale of their chancery staff members (67%), the morale of their deacons (62%), the morale of the responding bishops themselves (60%), and the ability of Catholic Charities to serve people in need (54%).
- Bishops were asked to write a response to this topic: "If you issued any special pastoral or practical provisions for your diocese as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, please briefly describe what they were." Bishops are most likely to report issuing directives to address the celebration of sacraments, to suspend public Masses, and for parishes to comply with state and local government orders.

¹ One diocese/eparchy did not write in any identifying information so its identity could not be determined.

- To address the financial issues facing their dioceses due to the pandemic, bishops are most likely to say their dioceses have done the following: helped their parishes apply to Federal or State assistance programs (95%) and encouraged parishioners to consider giving electronically to their parish collections (87%).
- Bishops who wrote a response to the question of what their biggest concern is regarding the financial health of their diocese and its parishes, schools, and programs are most likely to have mentioned issues related to parishes not having their regular offertory collections, the unemployment rate among parishioners, how to pay parish and diocesan staff members in the short- and long-term, whether or not parish and diocesan programs will need to be cut or eliminated, and the solvency of some parishes and of some Catholic schools.
- When asked if they have modified the assessments that parishes pay to the chancery, most bishops say they have. Among those who have not, a great majority report that they are waiting to see how much of a financial impact the crisis has on parishes before deciding on a new policy.
- About six in ten bishops (62%) say their diocese was “very much” involved in helping their parishes set up online Masses, with another 22% saying their diocese was “somewhat” involved. Four in five bishops (79%) say their diocese was “very much” involved in helping the Catholic schools in their diocese set up distance learning, with another 12% saying their diocese was “somewhat” involved.

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Ministry in the Midst of Pandemic: A Survey of Bishops

Introduction

The Survey of Bishops about Ministry in the Midst of Pandemic was designed by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) in Spring 2020. Seeking to investigate the impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the 177 U.S. arch/dioceses and 20 eparchies, CARA mailed the survey to all bishops, representing all of the dioceses and eparchies included in the United States on May 18. A follow up reminder was mailed to the non-responding bishops on June 8. By the time of the release of this report, a total of 116 bishops have responded, for an overall response rate of 59% -- 60% for bishops of dioceses and 50% for bishops of eparchies..²

A similar survey was developed at the same time and sent out to a random sample of priests. The findings from that survey are reported in a separate report.

A complicating factor in the findings presented below is that some dioceses and eparchies responded to the survey while in a total lockdown phase of the pandemic in their diocese or eparchy while others responded as their diocese or eparchy entered a later phase. Many dioceses on the coasts of the United States, for example, experienced the height of their pandemic crisis months earlier than dioceses in other parts of the country did.

Interpreting This Report

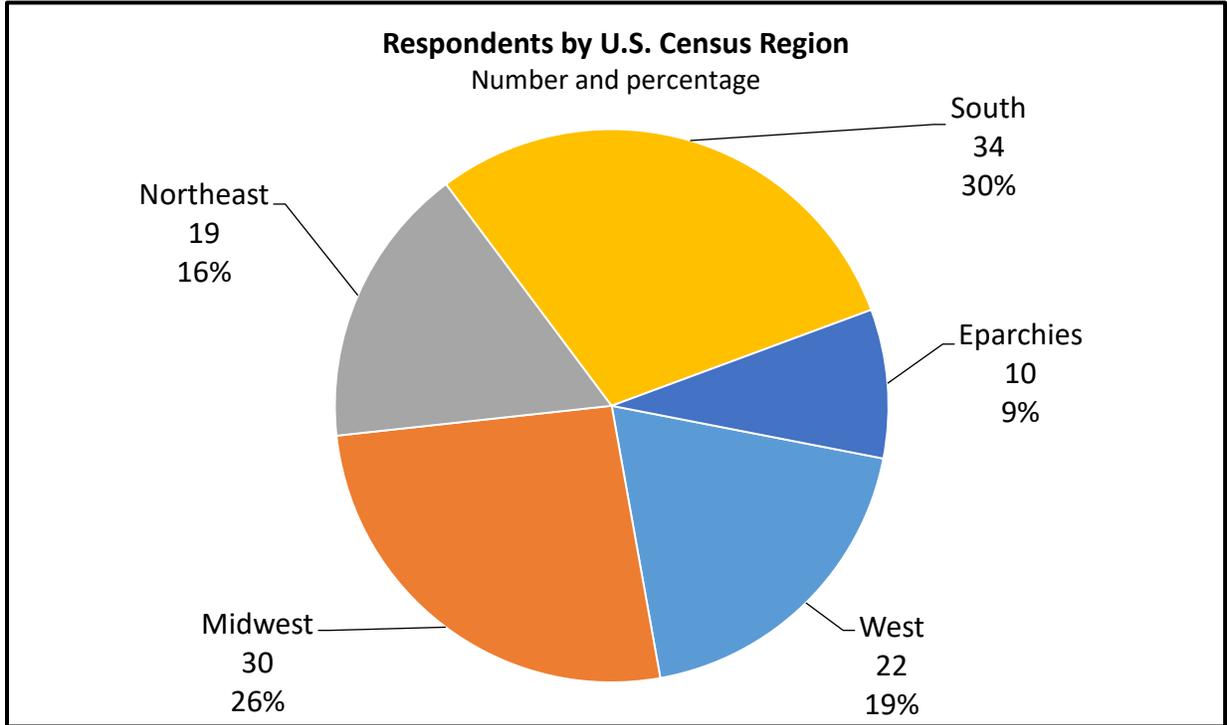
Most of the questions in this survey use four-point response scales (i.e., “not at all,” “only a little,” “somewhat,” “very much”). These scales allow respondents to choose between two relatively “negative” choices (e.g., “not at all” and “only a little”) and two relatively “positive” choices (e.g., “somewhat” and “very much”). In parts of the analysis in this report, these responses are combined to allow for clearer comparisons. However, as sometimes examining the most positive response distinguishes important contrasts in level of support, those responses are presented separately. Additionally, the appendix shows the percentage responses for each item, calculated out of 100%, as well as the percentage of all respondents that did not respond to each question, separately calculated out of 100% for clarity of comparison.

In addition to the quantitative data analyzed in this report, three open-ended questions on the survey collected qualitative data. For these data, bishops were prompted with a question and given an open box for written comments, rather than select from a set of response options. These comments are analyzed in separate sections throughout this report.

² One diocese/eparchy did not write in any identifying information so its identity could not be determined.

Responses by U.S. Census Region

Among the valid responses, 30% responded from the South U.S. Census Region, 26% from the Midwest U.S. Census Region, 19% from the West U.S. Census Region, and 16% from the Northeast U.S. Census Region. Nine percent responded from eparchies, which are often spread across the country and so do not fit into any of the U.S. Census regions.



Where relevant throughout the rest of the report, comparisons are made among those who responded from the various regions.

Assessment of Pandemic Damage and Diocesan Response

Six particular areas were addressed in the survey instrument. These areas are featured in this section of the report, though readers are advised to consult the response frequencies in Appendix I of this document for response rates and other pertinent information about these data. The areas addressed are:

- Covid-19 Pandemic's Effect on Dioceses
- Special Pastoral Provisions Issued by Dioceses
- Financial Concerns Related to the Covid-19 Pandemic
- Actions Taken to Address the Financial Health of the Diocese
- The Pandemic's Effect on Parish Assessments
- Diocesan Technological Assistance of Parishes and Schools

Covid-19 Pandemic's Effect on Dioceses

This section of the questionnaire asked responding bishops to estimate the effect the pandemic has had on various aspects of their dioceses and parishes. Respondents were asked if each aspect has been affected “not at all,” “only a little,” “somewhat,” or “very much.” The table below shows these percentages, ordered from those most affected (i.e., those saying “very much”) to those least affected.³

Parishes' celebrations of sacraments and rites and their sacramental preparation programs are most likely to have been affected strongly by the Covid-19 pandemic, with more than half of dioceses reporting that celebration of or programs for the following have been “very much” affected: Confirmations (81%), First Communion (78%), other sacramental preparation (64%), the RCIA process (63%), Marriages (59%), Baptisms (57%), and Funerals (54%). Among the other measures shown in the table below, all other aspects have less than 30% of dioceses saying these areas have been “very much” affected.

How significantly has the Covid-19 pandemic affected:				
<i>Percentage responding</i>				
	Very Much	Somewhat	Only a Little	Not at All
	%	%	%	%
The celebration of Confirmations in your diocese	81	18	1	0
The celebration of First Communion in your diocese	78	21	1	0
Other sacramental preparation in your diocese	64	30	7	0
The RCIA process in your diocese	63	29	6	1
The celebration of Marriages in your diocese	59	39	3	0
The celebration of Baptisms in your diocese	57	34	9	1
The celebration of Funerals in your diocese	54	39	6	1
The ability of Catholic Charities to serve people in need in your diocese	27	27	35	11
The morale of the priests of your diocese	21	47	32	1
The morale of the lay ecclesial ministers of your diocese	20	51	27	2
Your own morale as the bishop of your diocese	20	40	34	5
The morale of the staff at the chancery	18	49	28	5
The morale of the deacons of your diocese	14	48	35	3

³ As was discussed in the Introduction, the complete record of each response, including the percentages not responding to each question, are presented in the Appendix.

As discussed in the Introduction, another lens by which to examine these findings is to combine the two most positive responses, “very much” and “somewhat.” When those percentages are summed:

- Similar to the findings presented above, the parish-based celebrations of sacraments and rites and their sacramental preparation programs are most likely to have been “somewhat” or “very much” affected by the Covid-19 pandemic: Confirmations (99%), First Communion (99%), Marriages (98%), other sacramental preparation (94%), Funerals (93%), the RCIA process (92%), and Baptisms (91%).
- Half to seven-tenths of dioceses say that the following have been “somewhat” or “very much” affected by the pandemic: the morale of their lay ecclesial ministers (71%), the morale of their priests (68%), the morale of their chancery staff members (67%), the morale of their deacons (62%), the morale of the responding bishops themselves (60%), and the ability of Catholic Charities to serve people in need (54%).

Differences by U.S. Census Region

The table below presents the percentage of dioceses responding that the pandemic “very much” affected them, by their location in U.S. Census regions. The responses of eparchies are also included, despite them usually having parishes in more than one region. Especially notable are the dioceses in the Midwest, which are the *least* likely to report that the following have been “very much” affected: celebrating Confirmations, celebrating First Communion, other sacramental preparation, celebrating Baptisms, celebrating Funerals, the morale of their lay ecclesial ministers, the morale of the chancery staff, the morale of their priests, the morale of the bishop responding, and the morale of their deacons.

“Very Much” Affected by the Covid-19 Pandemic, by Diocese’s Location in U.S. Census Region

	West %	Midwest %	Northeast %	South %	Eparchies %
The celebration of Confirmations in your diocese	86	62	95	88	67
The celebration of First Communion in your diocese	86	52	95	79	100
The celebration of Marriages in your diocese	77	52	50	56	70
The RCIA process in your diocese	77	50	75	61	40
Other sacramental preparation in your diocese	73	45	70	73	50
The celebration of Baptisms in your diocese	68	35	70	55	70
The celebration of Funerals in your diocese	59	31	65	58	70
The morale of the lay ecclesial ministers of your diocese	41	7	21	13	29
The morale of the staff at the chancery	36	3	35	9	10
The ability of Catholic Charities to serve people in need in your diocese	23	30	26	33	13
The morale of the priests of your diocese	23	14	30	19	30
Your own morale as the bishop of your diocese	23	7	35	16	30
The morale of the deacons of your diocese	18	3	26	13	25

Eparchies are notable that they are *least* likely to say the following have been “very much” affected by the pandemic: the ability of Catholic Charities to serve the people in need and the RCIA process.

Special Pastoral Provisions Issued by Dioceses

Bishops were asked to write a response to this topic: *If you issued any special pastoral or practical provisions for your diocese as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, please briefly describe what they were.* Some 106 wrote in a response to the topic.

Responses are classified into the four broad categories below, presented in the order of most often mentioned to least often mentioned. A discussion of each category follows. Bishops report issuing:

- Directives addressing the celebration of sacraments
- Directives to suspend public Masses
- Directives to comply with state and local government orders
- Other directives and communications

Directives Addressing the Celebration of Sacraments

A plurality of bishops reports that they have issued sets of directives and have granted dispensations of parishioners' obligation for attending Sunday and holy day Masses during the pandemic. Included are guidelines for celebrating Masses with social distancing in place, celebrating liturgies safely, and other practical measures for keeping people safe. Also, they provided updates as often as weekly regarding liturgies, finances, how to contribute to one's parish, and how to reopen parishes for public Masses, sacraments and donations. A sample of these responses is listed below:

I have issued seven sets of directives addressing sacramental celebrations finances and personal issues.

Dispensed obligation for Sundays and holydays.

Instructions for rescheduling of first communion, confirmations, ordinations, school graduation.

1. Liturgical guidelines. 2. Help for financial planning.

Yes. All directed at celebration of sacraments with given state health mandates.

Directives for opening up Mass to public Directives; to not open school this year but reopen next school year.

Various liturgical guidance as to the celebration of sacraments with limited numbers and in the social distancing.

1. Phased-in-opening. 2. Liturgical guidelines.

a) Churches open for public prayer. b) Confessions and anointings when requested. c) Baptisms, weddings, funerals with 10 people or less. d) No Sunday Mass obligation/ all Masses with public suspended.

All public Masses prohibited. Live streaming of Masses, prayers, novenas, etc.

Dispensed with obligation to attend Sunday Mass. Dispensed meatless Fridays during last Fridays of Lent but NOT Good Friday.

Currently developing directives to replace current down of public services, we will employ a phased-in approach that for now, will limit meetings (other than liturgy) and fund raising.

How to celebrate private or public Masses according to state or local ordinances. How to keep open our churches for prayer and visits and confession.

At least weekly updates on Mass restrictions, social distancing guidelines, sanitizing.

Only liturgical and administrative. How to celebrate liturgy safely and practical matters to keep people safe.

A number of protocols for re-opening also sent a weekly briefing to all priests.

I delegated pastors to administer the sacrament of confirmation to those whom I was scheduled to confirm this year.

Communion in the hand only. Sunday obligation suspended until a vaccine created and distributed.

Guidelines for open Masses with social distancing, priests and clergy of churches before and after.

We have provided our priests consistent "updates" on the directives for coronavirus -re: churches, Masses sacraments, etc. We will provide more direct - communication in the 're-opening phase'.

Directives to Suspend Public Masses

Responding bishops state they have granted a dispensation of all Catholics from their Sunday Mass obligations, as well as permission to temporarily close churches and schools. There are also instructions to guide priests on how to celebrate sacraments like Anointing of the Sick. Below are examples of their responses.

Suspensions of public Mass - March 18 -May 18 2. Slowly reviving public celebration w/ social distance, hygiene, face masks, etc.

Protocol to be followed when public celebration of Mass begins.

Dispensed all Catholics from Sunday obligation. Suspended (then re-instated) Masses in a congregation. Instructions on celebrating other sacraments, e.g. Anointing.

Suspended public celebration of Mass. Liturgical guidelines for the social distancing and other recommendations needed for the limited reopening of Mass, hopefully to happen next week.

Suspension of Mass. Directives for Holy week. Guidelines for opening limited public Masses.

1. Dispensation from the obligation from Sunday Mass and Holydays of obligation. 2. Dispensation from Lenten Abstinence/sacramental. Regulations during pandemic public. 3. Provisions for Holy Week. 4. Closure of churches for worship, but not private prayer.

Phase I: March 15 - May 22. no public Masses, churches locked, Catholic schools physically shut, in-person print activities stopped. (much on-line interactions). Phase II: May 23 - Public Masses resume with good restrictions. Phase III: - Normal liturgical and pastoral activity.

Return to Masses practical - 33% occupancy of churches. Social distancing. Continued dispensation indefinitely.

I've issued several provisions as called for from the beginning. Now we're working on resuming public Masses and the required protocols.

Closed the church. Promoted live-streaming in different. Published special video and written communications from archbishop.

Liturgical protocols. Dispensations from Sunday obligations. Official degrees. Pastoral letters.

Directives to Comply with State and Local Government Orders

Participating bishops say they issued letters informing their parishes to comply with state and local orders concerning the pandemic. Following the government guidelines, parishes were instructed to do such things as respect social distancing by celebrating Sunday Masses in open spaces like parking lots. Some examples of these comments include:

Following governor's procedures. Relying on the wisdom of our people.

Letter informing all of compliance with State orders.

Implementing social distancing requirements for all sacraments and pastoral activities. We also implemented the formation of a disaster response team in every parish, coordinated by Catholic Charities.

Follow government guidelines - Respect social distancing. - Celebrate Sunday Masses in Parking Lot (stay in your cars).

Depending upon ongoing government restrictions, regular guidelines and instructions have been issued as they relate to specific areas of ministry.

Followed lead of governor of LA. Exempt obligation to attend Mass- Kept all diocesan and parish staff on full compensation.

The PPP is giving us some breathing room meanwhile. Our diocesan staff has been proactive in their accompaniment of parish staffs' level of support.

Other Directives and Communications

Some responding bishops mentioned other directives they have put out concerning matters such as sacramental preparation as well as messages they sent to particular groups, including hospital workers and those with delayed celebrations of sacraments. Others say they had a system in place for regular communications to those affected. Below are a few typical responses:

I've issued some supportive videos for hospital workers and a special video for the lay people with delayed sacraments.

We have been in quite constant communication with our various constituencies. This is number and type of decrees and pastoral messages: we have sent 10 priority memos to our presbyterate, along with related materials; the Archbishop has made 3 major decrees to the Church since March 13, with 2 preliminary letters initially in late February and early March and 3 further updates of those decrees; Catholic Charities has sent 5 major information pieces; the Catholic School Office has sent 8 major messages to principals, teachers, parents and students; our Catholic TV station has presented 18 messages related to the pandemic; the Moderator of the Curia/Vicar General has developed some 21 communications to the clergy, finance officers and bookkeepers, and Pastoral Center staff we have passed on 5 communications from Texas Conference of Catholic Bishops and 3 from the USCCB. There has been 27 of these involving direct communication from the Archbishop. The COVID-19 page on the Archdiocesan website has been a tremendous resource for clergy and laity alike. Virtually all material has been communicated bi-lingually, English-Spanish.

Religion education on-line. Family and youth formation on-line. Adult education on-line.

Providing Our Sunday Visitor program (New) for restoring parish income.

Decrees are on our website. Weekly communication.

Regular communications and directives.

Frequent updates via written statements and podcasts about availability of sacraments and encouragement to stay home with dispensation for Sunday Mass obligation and suspension of Easter duty.

Recorded Sunday Masses. Recorded public announcements. Held weekly Zoom meetings with covid-19 Response Team and with clergy, parish staff and diocesan staffs.

Technology use: flock notes, zoom meetings, daily communications from moderator.

Online giving and direct deposit for some of our multicultural parishes -- has to be presented and implemented with pastoral understanding.

Circular letters were issued regarding lives stream presentation of the Holy Qurbane (Mass) and other sacraments.

Policies on celebration of the sacraments. Videos explaining and providing messages. Homilies, letters to benefactors.

Yes, both. We have issued pastoral statements, videos of social media and various liturgical, financial and education directives.

Financial Concerns Related to Covid-19 Pandemic

Bishops were asked to write a response to this question: *What is your biggest concern regarding the financial health of your diocese and its parishes, schools, and programs?* Some 108 wrote in a response to that question.

Responses can be grouped into the three broad categories below, ordered from most to least frequently mentioned. A discussion of each category follows.

- Parish and parishioner financial issues
- Diocesan financial issues
- Catholic school financial issues

Parish and Parishioner Financial Issues

A plurality of responding bishops wrote about financial issues related to their dioceses' parishes. Noteworthy, five wrote how financially healthy their parishes are despite the pandemic. Among those writing in that their parishes are experiencing financial difficulties, the most common area of concern is the missed weekend collections that the parishes have been unable to have due to not celebrating Masses publicly (or online only). Also included here are comments regarding their parishioners' financial health due to unemployment, a poor rural economy, or a great deal of poverty among parishioners. Other difficulties encountered include paying the salaries and wages of parish staffs.

That parishioners will not contribute after a time of absence.

Loss of income in missed collections, parishioners in financial need due to loss of job, not able to donate, need our help.

Many parishes were struggling financially before this pandemic, what happens when and if they reopen?

Concern for the poor. Return to the sacraments. Increased unemployment. Ability to give.

The offertory is taking quite a hit. The ministries and staff of the parishes may suffer. Parishes may not be able to make loan payments. They may not be able to pay their bills.

As the economy worsens, more unemployment - harder for families to continue level of giving.

Families and parishes are our top priority - have to keep them strong and healthy. Savings were already low prior to pandemic. It will be difficult to recoup that and what has been lost in the past 2 months.

The biggest concern is the financial condition of our parishioners and to what degree they will be able to continue supporting their parish, school or diocese.

Decrease in offertory. Identify parishioners, students' tuitions.

Healthy parishes. Concern families without jobs may need support and not be able to provide support.

A few parishes where the priest was not proactive are hurting but most are doing well even considering the pandemic.

Whether people will return in similar or greater numbers, rather than fewer.

Diocesan Financial Issues

Responding bishops also mentioned financial issues related to loss of investment income and their loss of revenue for their annual Catholic appeal. In addition, much of dioceses' funding comes from the parishes, which are also suffering financially during the pandemic. Since it is unpredictable how long churches will be shut down, the bishops' comments concern the future of diocesan programming and long-term budgetary consequences. Below are a few typical responses:

The loss of revenue for an annual Catholic appeal.

92% of our funding comes from the lower 48. We are truly a mission diocese with 37 of 46 parishes in impoverished native Alaskan west.

We are currently in Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

We are planning for a 30 percent reduction in funds remitted to the Archdiocese from parishes. This was proven true during the month of April. The absence of public Masses and collections are being felt by the parishes. Therefore, there will be a similar reduction of cathedralicium offerings to the Archdiocese. The ability of parents, many of whom have lost their jobs to pay tuition in Catholic schools affected significantly the enrollment and therefore the viability of our Catholic Schools. The PPP SBA "forgivable" loans have been quite helpful thus far.

Long term budgetary consequences. We postponed the annual appeal till June instead of May.

Diocesan programming.

Our annual diocesan services appeal.

Future income.

Inability to fund operations.

How long will it take to recover financially- We may not be able to do so.

Debt structure.

Keeping the churches shut down is really a great concern. It will be very difficult to return to normal parish life. The unemployment situation will affect the finance of the parish. Faith formation and sacramental preparations are very difficult.

Setting the economy opened up again.

That we might have to let employees go. Won't be able to carry out the vision of the new evangelization and catechesis as planned including faith formation programs. That school enrollment will go down due to the loss of jobs of parents.

Reduction in revenue from collections for parishes and tuition payments for schools.

People have been very generous and for now our financial health is doing well.

Whether people will return in similar or greater numbers, rather than fewer.

While we have striven to encourage online giving, giving by mail, one direct "drop-off" donations to our churches, the financial numbers are down a good 1/3.

Savings were already low prior to pandemic. It will be difficult to recoup that and what has been lost in the past 2 months.

We are just coming out of bankruptcy. Worries about envelopes and plate each week. Tracking the Bishops' Appeal.

We are monitoring this very closely, 16% overall March and April in giving.

How long this will last - we have been in good shape with savings and have been able to make some adjustments so far, but this is still only May 5.

Catholic School Financial Issues

Responding bishops also mentioned the financial health of their parish and diocesan schools, worrying that low future enrollments may reduce the financial solvency of schools. They are also aware of the financial impact of the pandemic on families will trickle down to their ability to afford the tuition for their Catholic schools. Below is a sampling of these responses:

Attendance for both parishes and schools.

Solvency of schools and parishes.

The parents will be deterred from (re)enrolling in schools if distance/remote learning models resume in the Fall, since they will feel there is less value-added in comparison to public schools.

Financial impact on families -trickle down to schools/parishes.

Solvency of schools and parishes.

The overall economic situation of our country/people who live in diocese. Will our people be able to support our parishes/schools?

Actions Taken to Address the Financial Health of the Diocese

This section asked responding bishops what actions their dioceses have considered or taken to address the financial health of the diocese due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Respondents were asked to indicate for each if: “we considered doing so,” “we considered doing so, but decided against it,” “we are currently deciding whether to do so,” or “we have done so as a result of the pandemic.” The table below shows these percentages, ordered from those most likely to have been done to those least likely.⁴

To address the financial issues facing their dioceses due to the pandemic, bishops are most likely to say their dioceses have done the following: help their parishes apply to Federal or State assistance programs (95%) and encouraged parishioners to consider giving electronically to their parish collections (87%).

How has your diocese considered and/or acted upon these means to address the financial health of the diocese as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic?

Percentage responding

	We Have Done So as a Result of the Pandemic	We Are Currently Deciding Whether to Do So	We Considered Doing So, But Decided Against It	We Considered Doing So
Helping parishes apply to Federal or State assistance programs (e.g., Paycheck Protection Program)	95	2	2	2
Encouraging parishioners to consider electronic giving for parish collections	87	4	0	9
Closing one or more Catholic elementary schools	20	25	38	18
Laying off some diocesan staff	17	16	50	18
Furloughing some diocesan staff	16	15	51	17
Eliminating one or more diocesan programs	15	34	30	21
Closing one or more Catholic high schools	14	12	58	17
Closing one or more parishes	3	23	52	22

- About a quarter to a third of dioceses are currently deciding whether to eliminate one or more diocesan programs (34%), close one or more Catholic elementary schools (25%), and close one or more parishes (23%).

⁴ As was discussed in the Introduction, the complete record of each response, including the percentages not responding to each question, are presented in the Appendix.

- Three- to six-tenths of responding bishops say their dioceses had considered doing the following, but decided against it: closing one or more Catholic high schools (58%), closing one or more parishes (52%), furloughing some diocesan staff (51%), laying off some diocesan staff (50%), closing one or more Catholic elementary schools (38%), and eliminating one or more diocesan programs (30%).
- One-sixth or slightly more of the bishops say their dioceses have considered doing the following as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic: closing one or more parishes (22%), eliminating one or more diocesan programs (21%), laying off some diocesan staff (18%), closing one or more Catholic elementary schools (18%), furloughing some diocesan staff (17%), and closing one or more Catholic high schools (17%).

Differences by U.S. Census Region

The table below presents the percentage of dioceses responding that they have taken an action as a result of the pandemic, by their location in U.S. Census regions. Especially notable is that the eparchies are *least* likely to report having done the following: encouraging parishioners to consider electronic giving for parish collections, helping parishes apply to Federal or State assistance programs, furloughing some diocesan staff, laying off some diocesan staff, closing one or more Catholic elementary schools, and closing one or more high schools. In some cases, it may be that these questions do not apply to responding eparchies.

“Have Done So as a Result of the Pandemic,” by Diocese’s Location in U.S. Census Region

	West %	Midwest %	Northeast %	South %	Eparchies %
Encouraging parishioners to consider electronic giving for parish collections	91	90	90	91	56
Helping parishes apply to Federal or State assistance programs (e.g., Paycheck Protection Program)	86	100	100	100	63
Eliminating one or more diocesan programs	25	13	12	9	14
Furloughing some diocesan staff	23	19	30	7	0
Laying off some diocesan staff	19	15	35	10	0
Closing one or more Catholic elementary schools	11	12	47	13	0
Closing one or more Catholic high schools	8	18	29	5	0
Closing one or more parishes	0	6	0	0	14

The Pandemic's Effect on Parish Assessments

Bishops were asked to write a response to this question: *Did you waive or modify the assessments that parishes pay to the chancery? If so, please describe.* Some 111 wrote in a response to that question.

Responses can be grouped into the two broad categories below. As the pandemic is continuing at the time this report is being written, it is assumed that such decisions are a work in progress in most dioceses for the near and longer-term future. A discussion of each category follows.

- Have modified the assessments that parishes pay to the diocese
- Have not waived the assessments and/or are in the process of deciding whether to do so

Have Modified the Assessments that Parishes Pay to the Diocese

A majority of responding bishops considered the financial crises that parishes are undergoing due to pandemic and have waived assessments according to the needs of each parish. Mostly, bishops forgave their assessments and their property liability insurance payments. In some cases, some parishes will be allowed to pay a certain percentage of their regular collections while others will be given mercy to delay their payments. Below are examples of the bishops' responses.

Parishes pay a percentage of their regular collections. Thus, if the collection is down, the assessment is down.

Yes- 2-month reprieve from assessments. However, many of our parishes decided to remain current.

Yes. Cancelled for 3 months.

Yes. Parishes instructed to pay all other bills first.

Yes, we have temporarily waived cathedradicum and school assessment.

We are considering this possibility which is connected to the annual Diocesan Appeal that is currently postponed.

Yes. Some delayed, some forgiven.

Yes, forgave assessments for April, May and June.

On a case by case basis.

Have Not Waived the Assessments and/or Are in the Process of Deciding Whether to Do So

Some bishops say they either have not modified the assessments that parishes pay to the chancery or that they are still deciding how to proceed. Some find it too soon to step in, instead

preferring to observe closely to what is happening in the fourth-quarter of the fiscal year. Some examples of their responses are as follows;

Not at this time. Although we have offered interest free loans.

Not currently.

No. It is very small - has not changed for 40 years.

We do not have a diocesan tax (cathedradicum).

No. Simply not expecting 100%; maybe 50%.

No. We will simply postpone obligations and waive or reduce if necessary in the future.

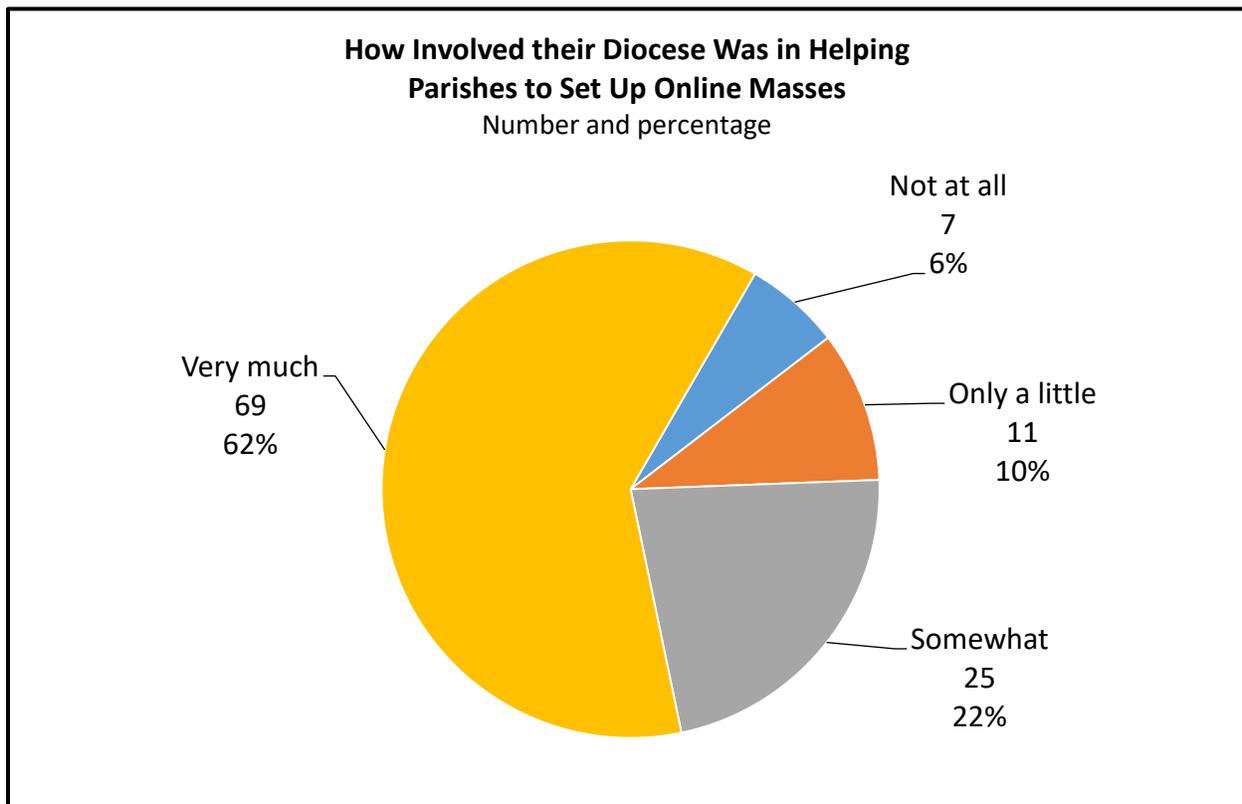
No. The diocesan office of temporal affairs was instructional in helping the parishes and schools. All in procuring PPP support. In addition, assessments are current for this fiscal year. The new fiscal year modifications which will affect ministries and services.

No. I have not. What happens in this 4th quarter of the fiscal year remains to be seen.

Diocesan Technological Assistance of Parishes and Schools

Bishops were asked how involved their diocese was in helping to set up and operate the technology for online Masses in their parishes and distance learning in their Catholic schools. The results are presented in the two pie charts below.⁵

About six in ten bishops (62%) say their diocese was “very much” involved in helping parishes set up online Masses, with another 22% saying their diocese was “somewhat” involved. On the other side of the scale, 10% report that their diocese was “only a little” involved in helping parishes in this way, with 6% being “not at all” involved.

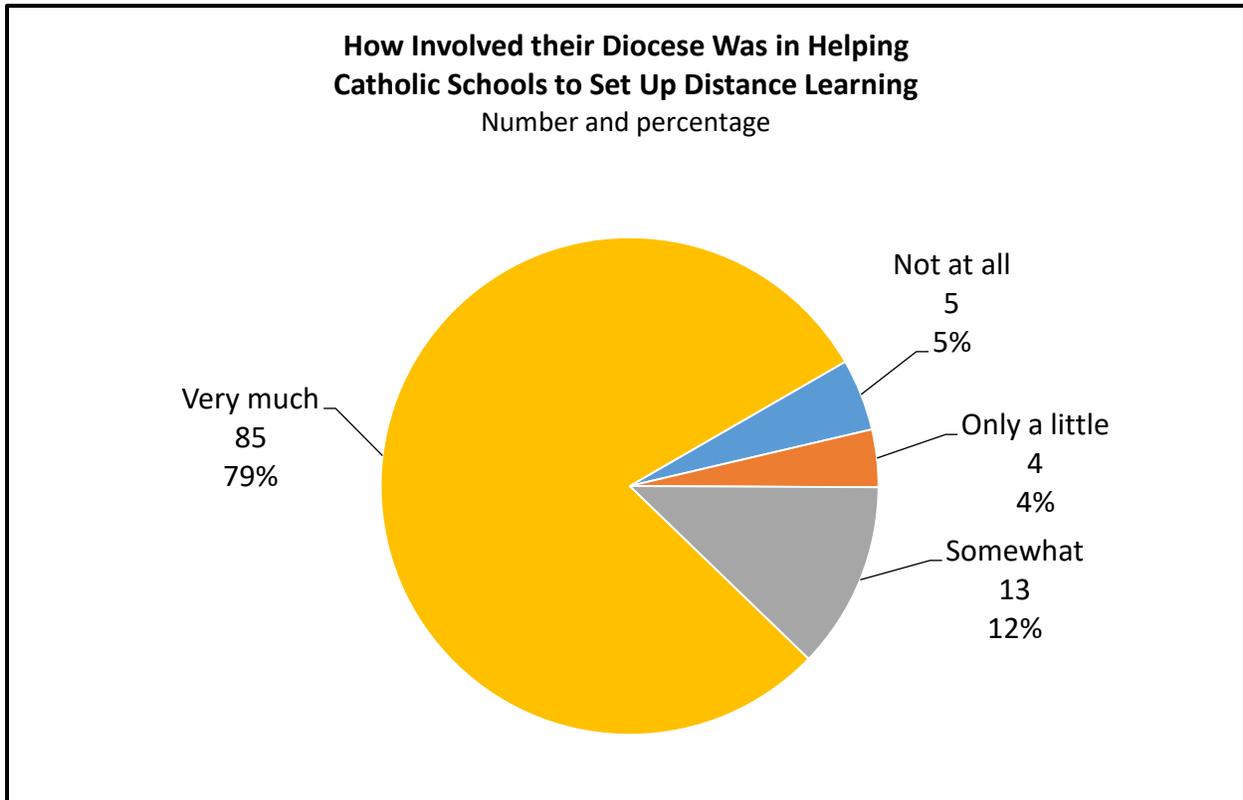


Differences by Location in U.S. Census Regions

Dioceses in the Northeast Census region (80%) are most likely to say their diocese was “very much” involved in helping set up and operate online Masses in parishes, followed by dioceses in the West (62%), Midwest (59%), and South (53%) regions. Some 56% of eparchies also say they were “very much” involved in doing so.

⁵ As was discussed in the Introduction, the complete record of each response, including the percentages not responding to each question, are presented in the Appendix.

Four in five bishops (79%) say their diocese was “very much” involved in helping the Catholic schools in their diocese set up distance learning, with another 12% saying their diocese was “somewhat” involved. On the other side of the scale, 4% report that their diocese was “only a little” involved in helping schools in this way, with 5% being “not at all” involved.



Differences by Location in U.S. Census Regions

One hundred percent of dioceses in the Northeast Census region report that their diocese was “very much” involved in helping set up and operate distance learning in schools, followed by dioceses in the Midwest (93%), South (75%), and West (67%) regions. Some 33% of eparchies say they were “very much” involved in doing so.

Appendix: Questionnaire with Response Frequencies



Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY • <https://cara.georgetown.edu>
2300 WISCONSIN AVENUE, NW • SUITE 400A • WASHINGTON, DC 20007

July 7, 2020

Dear Bishop,

The current Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted and challenged practically every dimension of life and activities across our nation and the world. CARA seeks to gather some basic information on how this has affected the ministers and ministries of dioceses across the nation. We invite you to complete the brief survey on both sides of this page and return it to CARA.

CARA will send to all Bishops a copy of the completed report later this summer. We hope this will assist you to better understand the impact of the pandemic on the Church in the United States.

If you have any questions please contact me at tpg9@georgetown.edu.

In Our Resurrected Lord,

Thomas Gaunt, S.J.

Fr. Thomas Gaunt, S.J., Ph.D.
Executive Director

Survey of Bishops on the Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Please respond for the parishes, schools, and other Catholic organizations for which you are responsible.

Please use these responses for each item in question 1.

1=Not at all

2=Only a little

3=Somewhat

4=Very much

1. How significantly has the Covid-19 pandemic affected:

1 2 3 4 NR

- 1 32 47 21 1 A. The morale of the priests of your diocese?
- 3 35 48 14 4 B. The morale of the deacons of your diocese?
- 2 27 51 20 4 C. The morale of the lay ecclesial ministers of your diocese?
- 5 34 40 20 1 D. Your own morale as the bishop of your diocese?
- 5 28 49 18 1 E. The morale of your staff at the chancery?
- 11 35 27 27 4 F. The ability of Catholic Charities to serve people in need in your diocese?
- 1 6 29 63 4 G. The RCIA process in your diocese?
- 0 7 30 64 0 H. Other sacramental preparation in your diocese?
- 1 9 34 57 0 I. The celebration of Baptisms in your diocese?
- 0 1 21 78 3 J. The celebration of First Communions in your diocese?
- 0 1 18 81 4 K. The celebration of Confirmations in your diocese?
- 0 3 39 59 1 L. The celebration of Marriages in your diocese?
- 1 6 39 54 0 M. The celebration of Funerals in your diocese?

(questions continue on the back)

Phone: 202-687-8080 • Fax: 202-687-8083 • E-mail: CARA@georgetown.edu

PLACING SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH AT THE SERVICE OF THE CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES SINCE 1964

Please use these responses for each item in question 2.

1=We have considered doing so

2=We considered doing so, but decided against it

3=We are currently deciding whether to do so

4=We have done so as a result of the pandemic

2. How has your diocese considered and/or acted upon these means to address the financial health of the diocese as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic?

1 2 3 4 NR

9 0 4 87 2 A. Encouraging parishioners to consider electronic giving for parish collections

17 51 15 16 9 B. Furloughing some diocesan staff

18 50 16 17 11 C. Laying off some diocesan staff

2 2 2 95 3 D. Helping parishes apply to Federal or State assistance programs (e.g., Paycheck Protection Program)

18 38 25 20 33 E. Closing one or more Catholic elementary schools

17 58 12 14 42 F. Closing one or more Catholic high schools

22 52 23 3 36 G. Closing one or more parishes

21 30 34 15 22 H. Eliminating one or more diocesan programs

Please use these responses for each item in question 3.

1=Not at all

2=Only a little

3=Somewhat

4=Very much

3. How involved is the diocese in helping to set up and operate the technology for these activities:

1 2 3 4 NR

6 10 22 62 3 A. Online Masses in parishes?

5 4 12 79 7 B. Distance learning in schools?

4. What is your biggest concern regarding the financial health of your diocese and its parishes, schools, and programs? NR=6%

5. If you issued any special pastoral or practical provisions for your diocese as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, please briefly describe what they were: NR=8%

6. Did you waive or modify the assessments that parishes pay to the chancery? If so, please briefly describe: NR=4%

Your (Arch)Diocese: _____ NR=1%

Please return this completed survey to:
Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate
2300 Wisconsin Ave NW, Suite 400A Washington, DC 20007
FAX: 202-687-8080 Email: cara@georgetown.edu