

# DECLINE IN NUMBER OF PRIESTS AND NUNS IN CATHOLIC CHURCHES

**The number of men and women belonging to Catholic religious orders has fallen drastically. During the pontificate of the late Pope John Paul II, the number of Catholic nuns worldwide declined by a full 25%. One Catholic publication commented on it in these words of appeal to the faithful:**

“My child, We watch and see the houses of My Son crumbling, being destroyed throughout your world. Doors are closing, convents are emptying, and the dedicated are leaving and falling into all manner of sin and abominations. Who shall be in the remnant? Only a few will be saved.”—*Our Lady of the Roses*, May 26, 1976.

**In 1965, 104,000 nuns were teaching; while, in 2002, there were only 8,200 of them. This is a 79% decline. Here is a BBC report, dated February 5, 2008:**

*The Vatican has reported a further dramatic fall in the number of Roman Catholic monks and nuns worldwide.*

Newly published statistics showed that **the number of men and women belonging to religious orders fell by 10%** to just under a million between 2005 and 2006.

During the pontificate of Pope John Paul II, the number of Catholic nuns worldwide declined by a quarter.

The downward trend accelerated despite a slight, steady increase in the membership of the Catholic Church to more than 1.1 billion [primarily in Africa and South America].

However, correspondents say even this failed to keep pace with the overall increase in world population.

On the back page of its official newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican published on Monday new statistics revealing that, **between 2005 and 2006, the number of “members of the consecrated life” fell by just under 10%.**

The number of members, predominantly women, fell 94,790 less, down to 945,210.

**Of the total, 753,400 members were women while 191,810 were men, including 136,171 priests and 532 permanent deacons.**

The figures were published next to a report of Pope Benedict XVI's meeting with nuns, monks, and priests from many countries gathered in St. Peter's

Basilica in Rome last weekend.

The BBC's David Willey, in the Italian capital, says the accelerating downward trend must have caused concern to the Pope.

**The Roman Catholic Church has an aging and diminishing number of parish and diocesan clergy; and this latest fall is quite dramatic,** our correspondent says.

The number of Catholic nuns, worldwide, declined by about a quarter during the reign of Pope John Paul; and this further drop shows that **new recruits are failing to replace those nuns who die or decide to abandon their vows.**

---

**Statistical decline of the Catholic Church since Vatican II - Kenneth Jones' Index of Leading Catholic Indicators—**

**Priests.** After skyrocketing from about 27,000 in 1930 to 58,000 in 1965, **the number of priests in the United States** dropped to 45,000 in 2002. By 2020, there will be about 31,000 priests—and only 15,000 will be under the age of 70. Right now **there are more priests aged 80 to 84 than there are aged 30 to 34.**

**Ordinations.** In 1965, there were 1,575 **ordinations to the priesthood; in 2002, there were 450, a decline of 350 percent.** Taking into account ordinations, deaths, and departures, in 1965 there was a net gain of 725 priests. In 1998, there was a net loss of 810.

**Priestless parishes.** About 1 percent of parishes, 549, were without a resident priest in 1965. **In 2002, there were 2,928 priestless parishes, about 15 percent of U.S. parishes.** By 2020, a quarter of all parishes, 4,656, will have no priest.

**Seminarians.** **Between 1965 and 2002, the number of seminarians dropped from 49,000 to 4,700—a 90 percent decrease.** Without any students, seminaries across the country have been sold or shuttered. **There were 596 seminaries in 1965, and only 200 in 2002.**

**Nuns.** 180,000 nuns were the backbone of the Catholic education and health systems in 1965. **In 2002, there were 75,000 nuns, with an average age of 68.** By 2020, the number of nuns will drop to 40,000—and, of these, only 21,000 will be aged 70 or under. In 1965, 104,000 nuns were teaching; while in 2002 there were only 8,200 teachers.

**Brothers.** The number of professed brothers decreased from about 12,000 in 1965 to 5,700 in 2002, with a further drop to 3,100 projected for 2020.

**Religious Orders. The religious orders will soon be virtually nonexistent in the United States.** For example, in 1965 there were 5,277 Jesuit priests and 3,559 seminarians; in 2000, there were 3,172 priests and 38 seminarians. In 1965, there were 2,534 OFM Franciscan priests and 2,251 seminarians; in 2000, there were 1,492 priests and 60 seminarians. In 1965, there were 2,434 Christian Brothers and 912 seminarians; in 2000, there were 959 Brothers and 7 seminarians. In 1965, there were 1,148 Redemptorist priests and 1,128 seminarians; in 2000, there were 349 priests and 24 seminarians. **Every major Catholic religious order in the United States mirrors these statistics.**

**High Schools. Between 1965 and 2002 the number of diocesan high schools fell from 1,566 to 786.** At the same time the number of students dropped from almost 700,000 to 386,000.

**Parochial Grade Schools. There were 10,503 parochial grade schools in 1965 and 6,623 in 2002.** The number of students went from 4.5 million to 1.9 million.

**Sacramental Life. In 1965, there were 1.3 million infant baptisms; in 2002, there were 1 million.** (In the same period the number of Catholics in the United States rose from 45 million to 65 million.) In 1965, there were 126,000 adult baptisms (converts); **in 2002, there were 80,000.** In 1965, there were 352,000 Catholic marriages; in 2002, there were 256,000. In 1965, there were 338 annulments; **in 2002, there were 50,000 annulments.**

**Mass attendance.** A 1958 *Gallup* poll reported that 74 percent of Catholics went to Sunday Mass in 1958. A 1994 *University of Notre Dame* study found that the attendance rate was 26.6 percent. A more recent study, by *Fordham University* professor James Lothian, concluded that 65 percent of Catholics went to Sunday Mass in 1965; **while the rate dropped to 25 percent in 2000.**

---

**Church struggles with change - USA Today—The Catholic Church is changing in America** at its most visible point: the parish church where believers pray, sing, and clasp hands across pews to share the peace of God.

**Today there are fewer parishes and fewer priests than in 1990 and fewer of the nation's 65 million Catholics in those pews. And there's no sign of return.**

Some blame the explosive 2002 clergy sexual abuse scandal and its financial price tag. But a *USA*

*Today* study of 176 Roman Catholic dioceses shows no statistically significant link between the decline in priests and parishes and the \$772 million the church has spent to date on dealing with the scandal.

*Rather, the changes are driven by a constellation of factors:*

- **Catholics are moving** from cities in the Northeast and Midwest to the suburbs in the South and Southwest.

- For decades, so **few men have become priests** that one in five dioceses now can't put a priest in every parish.

- **Mass attendance has fallen** as each generation has become less religiously observant.

- **Bishops—trained to bless, not to budget—lack the managerial skills** to govern multimillion-dollar institutions.

**All these trends had begun years before the scandal piled on financial pressures to cover settlements, legal costs, care, and counseling for victims and abusers.**

**From 1990 to 2003, the number of active diocesan and religious-order priests fell 22%, and the number of parishes in 176 dioceses and archdioceses dropped to 18,441.** That's a loss of 547 parishes.

**The Archdiocese of Boston,** epicenter of the crisis, **sold chancery property to cover \$85 million in settlements last year; and this year will close 67 churches** and recast 16 others as new parishes or worship sites without a full-time priest.

Archbishop Sean O'Malley has said the crisis and the reconfiguration plan are "in no way" related. He cites demographic shifts, the priest shortage and aging, and crumbling buildings too costly to keep up.

**Fargo, N.D., which spent \$821,000 on the abuse crisis, will close 23 parishes;** but it's because **the diocese is short more than 50 priests** for its 158 parishes, **some with fewer than a dozen families attending Mass.**

They know how this feels in **Milwaukee.** That archdiocese shuttered about one in five parishes from 1995 to 2003.

From 1990 to 2003, **Pittsburgh** closed 30% of its parishes; **Grand Island, Neb.,** 29%; and **Altoona-Johnstown, Pa.,** 27%.

In the same period, **Springfield, Mass.,** lost 44% of active priests; **Dubuque,** 41%; and **Rochester, N.Y.,** 40%. The national total of priests was 9,264 less, down to 33,028.

**Archdioceses, the 31 traditional Catholic centers where about 40% of U.S. Catholics live, are hit hard.** All but one, Miami, saw a double-digit percentage decline in the number of priests. **More than**

## Decline in Number of Priests and Nuns in Catholic Churches

3

**half of archdioceses lost parishes** in the past 14 years.

**The number of lapsed Catholics is harder to quantify.** Like many Americans who view their faith as a cultural flourish, not an active commitment, **they rarely go to church.** Their Catholic identity gives a language and lilt to their prayers but makes little claim on their time, talents, or income.

It's an established trend abroad where "parishes are often sacramental filling stations—**people come for the Eucharist, baptisms, marriages and funerals, but little else,**" writes John Allen, Vatican columnist for the weekly *National Catholic Reporter*, a weekly newspaper.

**Mass attendance is dwindling. The "most damaging change in Catholic life is the precipitous decline in Mass attendance. It's the sign of a church collapsing,"** says *Catholic University* sociologist William D'Antonio, co-author of statistical studies of American Catholics.

Nationally, attendance slid from 44% in 1987 to 37% in 1999. D'Antonio predicts it will be 33% in 2005.

**"Each generation starts with a lower attendance rating. People don't grow into attending Mass,"** he says.

It's the bishops who must negotiate these torrents of change—all conflicting, costly, and traumatic. Many see their budgets pinched less by the costs of the abuse crisis than by the impact of the sluggish economy and the rising costs of operations.

They need help. "Planning, personnel, and funding—the big trio—all require expertise that's not built into church training," Reynolds says.

Yet, **just one in three bishops follows "best practices"** outlined by the *U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops*, says Francis Butler of *Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities, Inc.*

They don't have to. Bishops are autonomous. They act with only as much guidance from laity, experts, and each other as they choose.

But they're mistrustful of outside voices. **Many of the same critics calling for financial transparency also challenge traditions, such as celibacy.**

**The bishops see any reform as a slippery slope:** "Give up oversight of the books and the next thing you know they'll want women priests," says David Gibson, author of *The Coming Catholic Church*. "They can't separate . . . doctrine and [financial] book-keeping."

And now, **after the abuse crisis, the laity is wary of the bishops.** They feel excluded from significant decisions that will shape their parish life for years to come.

"You can't trust your bishops. You can't trust your

priest. The parish where you were baptized and raised is being closed. And they want money to build a suburban church, but your kids aren't going to Mass. For a church that prides itself on tradition and certainty, these are uncertain times," says Gibson.

Shuffling a dwindling number of people into bigger Masses at fewer parish churches is no solution, says Steve Krueger, former spokesman for *Voice of the Faithful*, the Boston-based lay activist group formed during the abuse crisis that is a leading critic of the reconfiguration.

**"They haven't addressed the real problem of plummeting Mass attendance. The demographic trends aren't turning around. And they are far from solving the priest shortage,"** says Krueger.

"The Catholic world was once marked by stability," Gibson says. "Now all it is marked by is change."

---

**The percentage of Catholics who say they attend Mass every week is steadily declining.**

1987	44%
1993	41%
1999	37%
2005	33%

Source: *American Catholics: Gender, Generation and Commitment*, quoted in *USA Today*.

---

**Small Increases in Priests and Seminarians Indicates Decline Overall in the Catholic Church, ROME, March 3, 2009**—Official statistics released this weekend by the Vatican on the numbers of adult converts, priests, and seminarians, show that **the small growth in some areas is not matching the needs of the Church.** Despite several media reports highlighting a modest growth in critical statistics in the Church, the numbers actually reveal a backward trend.

Monsignor Ingacio Barreiro, head of the Rome office of *Human Life International* and an experienced UN diplomat, said that the numbers do not indicate overall health and growth in the Catholic Church, but **a steady decline that could be disastrous** for the fight for life and family.

"The main defender," Msgr. Barreiro said, "of life and family in the world is the Roman Catholic Church. So when we see statistical figures that create a doubt about the growth of the Church we are very concerned."

The 2009 *"Anuario Pontificio"* (*Pontifical Annual*) that provides official statistical data on the Catholic Church for the year 2006-2007 was presented formally to the Pope this weekend before being disseminated throughout the world.

Over the past two years, it shows that **the increase in the number of Catholics in the world**

## 4

## Waymarks

has generally only matched the overall growth of the human population. The world's population of Catholics stands at about 17.3 percent of the total global population. In 2007, there were just under 1,147 billion baptized Catholics, compared with 1,131 billion in 2006. **This growth, at 1.4 percent, is only 0.3 percent more than that of the growth of the human population,** giving rise to questions on the effectiveness of the Church's evangelization efforts.

While **in Africa and Asia, the number of priests has dramatically increased,** at 27.6 percent and 21.2 percent respectively. **These increases do not balance out the loss of priests throughout the Western world. Europe and Oceania record dramatic decreases** of 6.8 percent and 5.5 percent in only one year. In addition, **the growth of the priesthood in Africa and Asia is regularly outstripped by the steady rise in Catholic converts in those parts of the world.**

Globally, the number of seminarians studying for the priesthood has increased by 0.4 percent; but this number does not match the 1.4 percent increase in the number of Catholics and **will not come close to the numbers required to replace the losses the Church will soon experience when currently active priests die or retire.** With the number of priests in the Americas remaining "stationary," according to the Vatican report, and given the losses in Europe and Oceania, **the overall picture is that of a shrinking priesthood in the West, relative to a small growth of the number of Catholics.**

Msgr. Barreiro added, **"What growth there has been can, more or less, be assimilated to the growth of the whole population of the world.** This indicates that there is a very limited effort of evangelization, particularly in the Western world.

"In the meanwhile the Culture of Death [legalized abortion] is growing objectively and the election of Barack Obama in the U.S. is a clear objective proof of that growth, in comparison with a very limited objective growth of the Church."

Msgr. Barreiro pointed to the global 0.4 percent increase in the number of seminarians compared to the 1.4 increase of overall Catholics, saying that **it is not growth but "a decrease."**

**"It is not a step forward, but a trend of falling backwards,"** he said.

***As Priests Decline, Deacons Step In. Balti-***

**more (RNS), May 18, 2010**—He's performed so many funerals, they call him "Burying Joe."

A recent Saturday afternoon found Joe Krysiak again at a cemetery, his white alb and paisley stole whipping in the wind as he recited the Rite of Christian Burial and sprinkled holy water drawn from a Smucker's jar on the ground below the flag-draped coffin.

The day and night before, Krysiak put in six hours at St. Anthony of Padua/Most Precious Blood (the joint [combined] parishes he runs in Baltimore). He visited a sick parishioner in the hospital and comforted a bereaved family at a funeral home.

**Krysiak is on call 24/7 for his Catholic parishes, doing everything, or almost everything, a priest would do. But the spry 79-year-old is not a priest—he's a deacon.**

"Everybody sees us on the altar and thinks we are almost like mini-priests," Krysiak said. "Nobody realizes all the things that deacons do."

For more than a millennium, the Roman Catholic Church relied on a corps of celibate priests to celebrate its sacraments, run its parishes, and offer spiritual guidance to its faithful. **But the number of U.S. priests has plummeted from 59,000 in 1975 to 40,600 last year.**

***Catholic Church faces new crisis: Ireland is running out of priests - The Times, February 27, 2008***—Ireland, a country that used to export its Catholic clergy around the world, is **running out of priests** at such a rate that their numbers will have dropped by two thirds in the next 20 years, leaving parishes up and down the land vacant.

The decline of Catholic Ireland, for decades the Pope's favorite bastion of faith in Europe, has been regularly predicted, as the economic successes of the Celtic Tiger brought growing secularization. But new figures have starkly set out the fate of the Irish priesthood if action is not taken by the Church to reverse the trend.

**One-hundred and sixty priests died last year, but only nine were ordained. Figures for nuns were even more dramatic, with the deaths of 228 nuns and only two taking final vows** for service in religious life.

Based upon these figures, *The Irish Catholic* newspaper predicts that the number of priests will drop from the current 4,752 to about 1,500 by 2028.