

## **“The Times, They Are A-Changing:” Changing Demographics and Clustering**

**Note:** This is the first of a series on “the big picture” of the changing realities and emerging trends facing the Diocese of Cleveland. On March 12, 2007, Rick Krivanka from the Diocesan Pastoral Planning Office, John Maimone, Chief Financial Officer of the Diocese of Cleveland, and Fr. Lawrence Jurcak, Secretary and Vicar for Clergy and Religious gave a presentation at the Central West District meeting. The data presented in this article is from their presentation, as well as the presentation given by John Maimone at the First Friday Club of Cleveland on April 5, 2007.

The numbers tell a now-familiar story. In a country with a growing population (which recently reached 300 million), Northeast Ohio – the area encompassed by the Diocese of Cleveland – has basically stayed flat. But in the last few years, the population has been shrinking. Cuyahoga County has been losing population (a recent article claimed that 26,000 people left last year), while surrounding counties have grown. Large cities and their inner-ring suburbs have lost population as out-migration has continued. Some numbers:

### Eight County Population (i.e. Diocese area)

- 1960 - 2,754,820
- 1970 - 3,004,834
- 1980 - 2,841,802
- 1990 - 2,766,206
- 2000 - 2,855,129
- 2005 - 2,839,103
- 2010 - 2,863,520 (+4% from 1960)

### Cuyahoga County Population

- 1970 – 1,721,300
- 2000 – 1,393,978
- 2005 – 1,330,428 (-23% from 1970)
- 2030 – 1,274,020

### Cleveland Population

- Early 1900’s – approaching 400,000
- 1950 – 915,000 (7<sup>th</sup> largest)
- 1970 – 750,879
- 1990 – 505,616
- 2000 – 478,403 (43<sup>rd</sup> largest)
- Early 2000’s – approaching 400,000

### Population Changes by County, 1960-2000

Ashland : +35%	Lorain: +31%
Cuyahoga: -15%	Medina: + 131%
Geauga: + 91%	Summit: +6%
Lake: + 53%	Wayne: +48%

What are the implications of these trends for our Church? There are several.

The mission of the Church is to proclaim the Gospel “to the ends of the earth” (cf. Mt. 28) and to provide pastoral care and ministry for the people of God. There are Catholic parishes in every area of Northeastern Ohio. As people moved into new areas, in most cases they found a local Catholic parish already existing. With an increasing population, those parishes have grown. What were small, rural parishes have become large, suburban parishes. In some areas, the influx of new housing has led to establishing a new parish. In areas where there has been growth, the Church has grown, too – in size, in activity, in ministry.

At the same time, especially in the urban areas and (more recently) the inner-ring suburbs, the population has declined. There are fewer people, and a higher percentage of those people are poorer. What once were large, flourishing parishes have become much smaller faith communities. Many city parishes were created to serve immigrants of a particular nationality, who needed and wanted pastoral care in the own language and within their own cultural traditions. In our Central West District, 13 of the 19 parishes are considered “nationality” or

“ethnic” parishes. Although immigrants still come to Northeast Ohio, most of the nationality groups have long-since assimilated and are part of mainstream American life and culture. Often, these nationality parishes are supported by people who once lived in the neighborhood, but now come back to “the old neighborhood” – and the number of those willing to do so shrinks each year.

The result? Parishes in growing areas struggle to meet growing needs, with their facilities often stretched to the limit and city/inner-ring suburb parishes struggle with shrinking populations and facilities that are much too big for their current needs. As a church, we have only partially adjusted to changing demographics. We have grown to meet increased need, but have not downsized where the population and needs have decreased. Often, where there has been population decline, we have more parishes and larger facilities than we need, either now or in the foreseeable future.

There is a second aspect to changing demographics: the changes in the Catholic population. There are fewer people in Northeast Ohio who consider themselves “Catholic” and are registered in any parish.

#### Catholic Population of the Diocese

- 1975 – 965,000
- 2006 – 780,000 (-19% since 1975)

Additionally, since the 1960's the number of Catholics who attend Saturday/Sunday Mass has continued to decline.

#### Catholics at Mass

- 1970 – 900,00 x 56% = 504,000
- 2006 – 780,00 x 29% = 226,000

***Decrease: (278,000) (-55%)***

i.e. 55% fewer Catholics at Mass, active in parish, financially supporting etc.

A simple way to make the numbers real is to think about how many people are in church every Sunday and how many more are in church for Christmas or Easter. Fewer Catholics at Mass means fewer resources. There are fewer people who are active in the life of the parish, fewer people to serve as lectors and Eucharistic ministers, fewer people to serve on Parish Council, fewer people contributing in the collection, fewer people to reach out to the poor and the needy.

Fr. Tony Schuerger