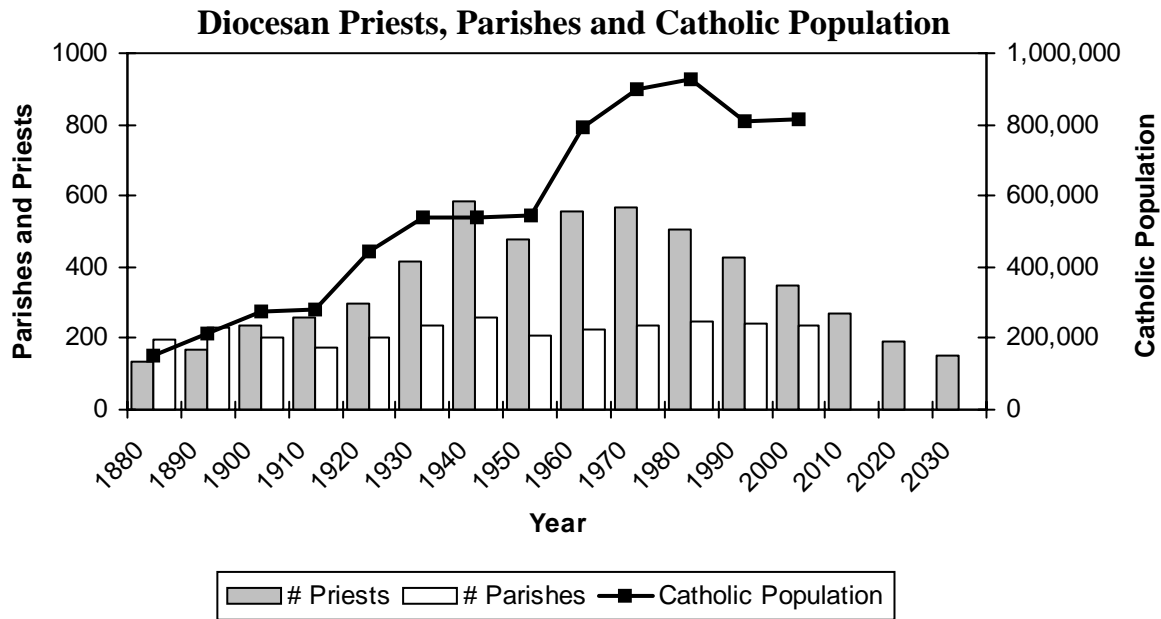


“The Times, They Are A-Changing:” Changing Realities: Priests and Clustering

Note: This is the second 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, Vibrant Parish Life II Educational Documents and the Diocesan Directory.

For the past 30 years, American Catholics have “known” that there are fewer priests being ordained. As a result, there are more older priests and fewer younger priests. For many years, this has had little practical effect on many Catholics in the Diocese of Cleveland. As one priest said, “we just keep showing up.” In more recent years, the effect has become more obvious: associate pastors are reassigned from a parish and not replaced, a pastor retires (or moves) and a Parish Life Coordinator is appointed, with a priest “coming in” to say Mass. The following charts show the changes dramatically:



In Numbers: an Overview of Key Diocesan Realities: Priests in the Diocese

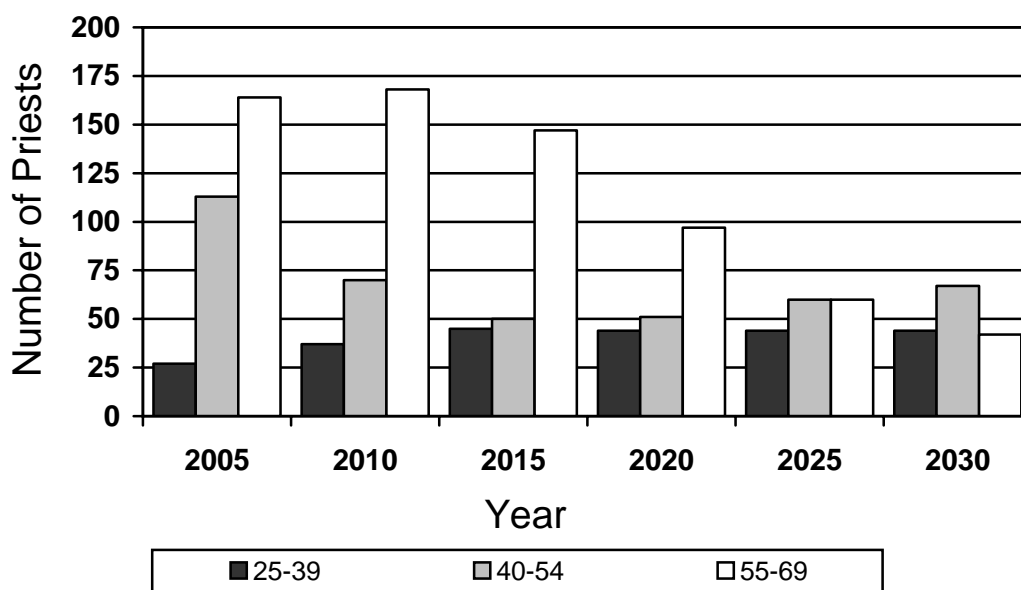
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| Active Diocesan and Religious Order Priests, Jan, 2007 | 330 |
| Religious Order Priests, serving 16 parishes | (30) |
| Active Diocesan Priests, age over 70 (i.e. retirement age) | <u>(27)</u> |
| Active Diocesan Priests, under 70, Jan 2007 | 273 |
| Active Diocesan Priests, Age 65 to 69, at present | (36) |
| Projected Diocesan Priesthood Ordinations through 2011 | <u>21</u> |
| Projected Diocesan Priests, 2011, under 70 | <u>258</u> |

Note: Projection for 2030: 151 active Diocesan priests

Note: Currently 231 parishes; 38 priests in non-parish posts

Note: Peak, 1940: 582 Diocesan priests (258 parishes)

Diocesan Priests Available for Active Service Under Age 70 in Specific Age-Ranges: 2005-2030 (projected)^a



To be more specific, our Central West District has 18 parishes and one Pastoral Center. St. Andrew Kim (which is served by a diocesan priest from the Archdiocese of Taegu, South Korea). Two parishes (Our Lady of Mount Carmel and St. Rocco) are served by a religious community, the Mercedarian Fathers. The 16 remaining parishes are served by 15 diocesan priests. Of these, three have diocesan assignments and serve the parish part-time (including one “Presbyteral Moderator” who is assigned at St. Procop Parish, where there is a Parish Life Coordinator). As of January, 2007, the diocesan priests in our District range in age thus: 0 are under 55 years old; 5 are between 55-60; 5 are between 61-65; 4 are between 66-70; 1 is over 70. Considering the numbers of priests, if we keep the same number of parishes we currently have the day will come in the next 10-15 years when we have more parishes than we have priests.

Another reality that cannot be described precisely is work-load. Each parish is different and the demands that are placed on a priest in a particular parish are, to some extent, unique. It is also true that pastoral ministers can provide pastoral care in many areas that, in the past, typically were done by a priest. It should also be remembered that deacons can provide some sacramental ministry (e.g. baptizing, officiating at marriages and funerals outside of Mass). However, most sacramental ministry can only be done by a priest.

Consider: the current diocesan policy is that a parish must have 2,800 households in order to have an associate pastor assigned. This means that a parish with 2,500 households and perhaps 25 weddings and 65 funerals has one priest assigned, the pastor. In our district, to reach 2,500 households might mean totaling the population of 5 or 6 parishes, the weddings from 5-6 parishes and the funerals from 4-5 parishes. In other words, in our district 4-6 priests are providing essentially the same sacramental care that 1 priest is asked to do in a larger parish. Can we understand if that one priest (and that parish’s parishioners) ask: “How is this fair?”

Fr. Tony Schuerger

^a A Projection of Priests for the Diocese of Cleveland, Study by CARA, June 2005