



Demographic Overview of Our Diocese: Past, Present and Future

The Catholic Diocese of Cleveland was established on April 23, 1847. Since that time, it has grown to become the 11th largest diocese in the United States, with a Catholic population of 820,110 persons representing 29% of the eight-county area population of 2,855,129 people, per the 2000 U.S. Census. A diocese is defined as “a portion of the people of God which is entrusted for pastoral care to a bishop.”

Our Location

The Cleveland Diocese comprises eight counties in the north-central part of Ohio: Ashland, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, Medina, Summit and Wayne counties, totaling 3,414 square miles. The presence and ministries of the diocese are found throughout this eight county area - in the major urban centers of Akron, Cleveland and Lorain, in suburban cities and in small rural communities.

Our Parishes

There are 235 parishes, 1 mission, 1 pastoral center and 1 oratory in the diocese serving people of many different backgrounds and cultures. They range in size from the largest parishes that serve over 5000 households to small communities that serve about 100 households. The average parish size is 1320 households. Recognizing the tradition of the diocese in serving immigrants from many different lands, over 50 of the present parishes were founded to serve people of a particular nationality. Today many of these parishes now serve more diverse populations while others maintain the use of non-English languages and unique ethnic practices.

Parishes and schools have changed with the population growth and shifts described in the sections which follow.

The number of parishes went through a growth spurt in the years following World War II as the population grew and people migrated to the suburbs. In 1950 there were 206 parishes, which grew to a high of 246 parishes in 1980. Since 1980, 5 parishes and 2 pastoral centers have been founded, and 16 parishes and 1 pastoral center have closed or merged, yielding the present totals.

Elementary and High Schools

Catholic elementary schools followed a similar course of growth after 1950, going from 148 schools to a high of 194 in 1965. Significant decreases occurred after 1965, lowering these numbers to 170 schools in 1980 and 146 in 1990. A relatively stable period followed and there are now 141 schools. Catholic elementary school enrollments peaked in the early 1960's at over 110,000 students, then dropped to about 63,000 students in 1980. Since 1987, total elementary enrollments have been fairly stable at about 50,000 students.

In 1965 there were 35 Catholic high schools. These numbers dropped to 26 schools in 1980. A relatively stable period followed and there are now 23 high schools. Total Catholic high school enrollment peaked in the mid-1960's at over 25,000 students, and has been fairly stable at 14,000-15,000 students through the 1990's to the present.

Parish School of Religion

Parish School of Religion enrollments for elementary and high school students followed similar trends with peak numbers in the mid-1970's exceeding 90,000 students. Enrollments were 40,000-42,000 in the late 1980's and have been 50,000-52,000 since the mid 1990's.

Overall Population

The overall population of the eight-county diocesan area saw rapid increases during the post-World War II years, growing by 40% from 2.2 million people in 1950 to a peak of just over 3 million in 1970. Since the latter 1970's, the total area population has had little or no growth and has remained relatively stable at a level of about 2.8 million people. There have been minor fluctuations (2.78 million in 1980, 2.75 million in 1990, 2.86 million in 2000). Between 1990 and 2000, the total population grew by 3 %. Plant closings and job losses are likely to dampen population growth in the next decade.

The Catholic population grew to about 29% of the area population in 1960 and has been at about that level for the past 40 years. The Catholic population peaked in the mid-1970's at over 950,000 and has fluctuated at levels of about 815,000-830,000 since the late 1980's.

Shifting Population and Out-Migration

Given the reality of a relatively stable total population, growth and change are related to the patterns of how people move between different areas. The out-migration from urban areas has been most significant. Suburban and rural parts of the diocese have seen substantial growth, while the major urban centers have experienced continued population loss along with an increasing proportion of minority peoples and poverty. Since 1970, losses in the central cities were 31% in Cleveland, 20% in Akron and 14 % in Lorain. Cuyahoga County lost 20% of its population but still has 49% of all people in the 8-county area. At the same time, other counties saw major growth led by a 105% increase in Medina County, 59% in Geauga, 32% in Wayne, 24% in Ashland, and 20% in Lake Counties. Lorain County had 13% growth while Summit County declined 2% since 1970. During the 1990's alone, all counties grew except for

Cuyahoga County, which lost 1% of its people. County-level growth in the past decade was led by Medina with a 23% increase, followed by Geauga with 12%, Ashland with 11% and Wayne County with 10%. *The Church in the City* initiative has attempted to address the pastoral and moral implications of these socio-economic changes and their root causes.

More Households

While the total population growth has been flat, the number of households has increased at a greater level. During the 1990's, the number of households grew by 7% while the number of people grew by only 3 %. There are fewer people on average in each household, which is the result of fewer children and more households with 1 or 2 people. Female-headed households increased by 11% in the overall diocese; other County increases were 32% in Medina, 21% in Ashland, 20% in Geauga, and 18% in Wayne and Lorain. These figures reflect divorces, separations and the deaths of elderly husbands. Such changes can produce financial stress and shifts from home-ownership to renting. In Medina County, the number of renters rose by 18%.

Changes in the Age of People

The major demographic change that is occurring is the aging of the population. The average age in the diocesan area has increased from 33.7 to 37.1 from 1990 - 2000.

In 1970, persons age 19 and under comprised over 38% of the area population, but declined to 29% in 2000, with the sharpest decrease of 23% occurring in the 1970's. The sharp rise in the number of young people, due to the post World War II baby boom, led to the dramatic increase in the number of schools and their total enrollment, which peaked in the 1960's. The total population of young people is likely to be fairly stable with some gradual decline over the next 10 years.

The number of people over age 40 has steadily increased from 37% in 1970 to over 45% in 2000, and will continue to do so with the aging of the baby boom generation. By the year 2010, people in their 50's will have increased by 30% with the graying of the baby-boomers. The over-65 population will show marked increases after 2010 as the forefront of this baby boom generation reaches age 65. The elderly are the fastest growing segment of the diocese, and that is likely to be the case for the next 20 years, barring an unlikely dramatic increase in birth rates.

Our Priests

The diocese is presently served by a total of 455 diocesan priests. There are 336 priests in active ministry and 95 retired priests. In addition, 24 priests are in special classifications, (e.g. military service, mission work, graduate studies or released from diocesan ministry). A team of 4 priests, 2 women religious and 3 lay women serve in the diocesan mission in El Salvador which has been maintained since 1964.

In parishes served by diocesan priests, there are now 131 one-priest parishes, 55 two-priest parishes, 17 three-priest parishes, and 2 four-priest parishes. Several parishes share priests. Five parishes have pastoral teams. Sixteen parishes are entrusted to religious communities.

The numbers of priests have shown marked decline from the peak number of almost 600 priests in active ministry in 1970, a reality across the United States and in other parts of the world. More striking are the changes in the number of priests under age 40, which went from 240 in 1970 (36% of all diocesan priests) to 33 in 2001 (7% of priests, a percentage likely to continue). This trend of significantly fewer younger clergy has been experienced in other denominations as well.

Projections of the Number of Priests

Using some trend analysis, the following projections are offered. In 2012, there will be 380-385 total diocesan priests. This includes 265-275 priests in active ministry in the diocese, or 60-70 fewer priests than at present. The average age of priests in active ministry will continue to increase annually by about 1 year from the present average of 56 to 66 years of age in 2012. The average age of all diocesan priests, including those who are retired, is now 61 and will also increase in a similar way each year. These projections are based upon the seminary population, the number of diocesan priests in active ministry and those who will continue their ministry in the diocese after 70 years of age, and projections of ordinations, retirements, sick leave, leave of absence and release from diocesan assignment. Based upon these projections and the trends described below, there will be fewer priests available to serve in parishes and a greater number of permanent deacons and lay ecclesial ministers.

Religious Communities

Religious communities serving in the diocese provide 134 religious order priests, 59 brothers, and 1,433 women religious. Aging is particularly significant, with a median age of 69.7 for women religious and 64 for men religious. Significant declines have continued in recent years, but have been much less than the sharp drops from the over 3000 women religious and 275 religious priests in 1970. The peak numbers of priests and religious following the two World Wars stand out as a historic anomaly when trends are observed over the longer-term history of the Church.

Researchers suggest that the trend of fewer religious is beginning to experience a reversal. Young people of the "millennium generation" are more interested in the kind of prayer, spirituality and service which characterize consecrated life. While this is encouraging, it is not likely that members will join these communities in the same numbers that characterized the mid-1900's.

Permanent Deacons

There has been significant growth in the number of permanent deacons since the first deacon was ordained in our diocese in 1971. This growth has gone from 5 in 1975, to 32 in 1980, to 172 men at present. Projections based on the trends and numbers in formation indicate a total of 235-240 permanent deacons in 2012.

Certified Lay Ecclesial Ministers

Since the first four persons were certified for lay ecclesial ministry in 1985, following inception of the formation process in 1980, there are now 219 certified lay ecclesial ministers active in the diocese. Projections indicate there will be approximately 100 additional certified lay ecclesial ministers in the next 10 years for a total of 300-320 available for active ministry in 2012.

Parish Life Coordinators

In recent years, 6 Parish Life Coordinators have been appointed to oversee the daily administration of parishes. These persons include women religious, a religious brother and permanent deacons. It is anticipated that additional Parish Life Coordinators will continue to be assigned to other parishes.