



UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

NEW STUDY ON CULTURAL DIVERSITY DISPLAYS CATHOLIC CHURCH'S GROWING MULTICULTURAL PARISH POPULATION

November 15, 2016

**Over 6,300 US parishes now serve distinct ethnic and cultural groups
Multicultural and multiethnic communities trend likely to continue
Culturally diverse parishes are the fastest growing in the U.S.**

WASHINGTON—Culturally diverse parishes are the fastest growing type of parish in the United States, according to a report on Cultural Diversity in Catholic parishes, presented by Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller of San Antonio, chairman of the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church. The report was presented during the annual fall General Assembly in Baltimore, November 15.

The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) conducted the two-phase study, commissioned by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Secretariat on Cultural Diversity. "The Catholic Church in the United States has always been a very diverse entity, but it is the first time that all available data was brought together to map this diversity nationwide in remarkable detail," said Archbishop García-Siller. "It is also the first time that parish life was looked at from the point of view of the experience of diversity. Multicultural parishes are a growing phenomenon in the United States. This is what makes this study so fascinating and ground-breaking."

The first phase identified the populations and parishes in the United States that are known to serve specific racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic groups communities using a variety of sources. In all, 6,332 (36 percent) of parishes were identified as multicultural or as serving particular groups of Catholics.

The recently concluded second phase consisted of in-pew surveys in multicultural parishes across the U.S. Over 11,100 adults completed the survey with topics ranging from race, primary language spoken at home, marital status, sacramental life, parishioner attitudes about cultural diversity, parish understanding of different cultures, welcoming of new parishioners, interacting with priests of different cultural backgrounds, staff reflection of cultural diversity of parishioners, tension between different cultural groups, among other topics. To facilitate and encourage participation, the study was translated into 20 languages at the request of the local pastors.

Some of the key findings, as they relate to religious practices include:

- The largest segment of parishioners in multicultural parishes (37 percent) are of the Post-Vatican II Generation (born 1961 to 1981) and are between the ages of 34 and 54.
- Those with school-age children in multicultural and ethnic communities are much more likely to enroll children in a Catholic school than the general Catholic population. Enrollment is most common among multi-racial and Vietnamese respondents and is least common among foreign-born Hispanic or Latino parents.
- Regarding religious participation, 83 percent of respondents have received their First Communion and 77 percent have been confirmed.
- 76 percent consider themselves "active Catholics." Nine percent are "returned Catholics" who may have left the faith for a period of time and have now returned. Eight percent indicate they are "converts" to Catholicism. Two percent are "non-Catholics," most often attending Mass with a Catholic relative. Five percent are "inactive Catholics."
- 67 percent of respondents are registered with their parish and 83 percent say this is their primary place of worship.
- U.S. born black or African American respondents are most likely to be personally involved in multiple ministries or activities (other than Mass attendance).

As they relate to the parish experience of diversity for each group, the findings are:

- Widespread majority agreement among all sub-groups that "having people of different cultural backgrounds enriches the parish."
- Few feel like an outsider in their parish. The group most likely to do so are foreign-born Hispanic or Latino parishioners (36% agree).
- Many agree that they have a role in the "decision-making" of their parish. Those most likely to "strongly" disagree with this are Koreans (51%) and Hispanics or Latinos (28%).
- Foreign-born parishioners are more interested than U.S.-born parishioners to believe their parish should be providing pastoral care for refugees and immigrants.

CARA affirms that the study reveals some important trends, and provides the following conclusions:

- The Catholic Church in the United States is one of the most culturally diverse institutions in the country and it will become even more diverse in the future.
- Parishes, schools and colleges, hospitals, charities, and other ministries need to adapt and prepare for this growing diversity.
- In the pews, many of those who are most comfortable with growing diversity are those who immigrated to the United States, though African American Catholics are one of the most likely to say they welcome diversity in the parish and that diversity enriches parish life.
- Those who are descendants of previous waves of immigration from Europe appear to be the least comfortable with diversity and less willing to engage in parish life beyond attending Mass.

Archbishop Garcia-Siller, asked the bishops to consider how the data speaks to their local realities and how these findings may affect the way local dioceses plan, set priorities and allocate resources for the continuation of the mission of the Church. He reminded them of Pope Francis' call to a pastoral conversion and to put the entire church in a "permanent state of mission."

The report is available at: www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/upload/Cultural-Diversity-Summary-Report-October-2016.pdf.