

# SAID ED October 22, 2017

## Catholic Facts and Figures

Recently I was looking at some figures from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. CARA, as it is known commonly, is a wonderful source of statistics that reflect the life of the church in the United States. The first figures (which were no surprise) verified what we all know to be true: a comparison of the number of priests in 1970 versus 2016 shows a reduction of over 12,000 men.

Ordained priests are called to preside over the community of faith in love. This role is celebrated liturgically at the altar when the priest breaks open the Word of God and proclaims the words of consecration and the Eucharist is celebrated. In 1970 there were 1.8 priests for every one of the 18,224 parishes in our country. Today there are 17,233 parishes but 3499 of them do not have a resident priest as pastor. Many smaller parishes have been consolidated to make larger ones.

Church law provides for the disparity of priests in Canon Law # 517.2. This Canon allows the local Bishop to appoint other persons as Pastoral Leaders when a priest is not available. Presently there are 379 of these men and women serving around our country.

Whereas in 1970, 90% of priests were active in priestly Ministry, today only 63% are active, this due to the large number of priests who have exceeded retirement age. In our own neighborhood we are blessed with the ministry of Frs. Bill Graf, Jim Boyle, Alex Bradshaw, Bob Kreckel and Bill Aman. In 1970 the Catholic population was 47.9 million people, last year the Catholic population was 67.7 million. The survey mentioned that there are 30.1 million people who identify themselves as former Catholics. Catholicism has a higher retention rate than any other religion in the United States including all Protestant denominations. Non practicing Catholics are the second largest religious group in the country. Practicing Catholics are still the largest!

Now, while the number of priests is declining, the number of “lay ecclesial ministers” in Parish Ministry stands at 39,651. These dedicated lay men and women have been educated and trained to carry on the much of the ministry of the church. There were no such official ministers in 1970.

I believe the Holy Spirit is working in our midst even though we may not fully see that influence at times. While the number of Catholic grade schools has diminished in number and enrollment, the enrollment in Catholic Colleges and Universities has increased from 400,111 in 1970 to 770,644 in 2016. Clearly Catholics today are among the most well-educated in church history.

These large numbers of Catholic graduates are helping lead the church into the future with their questions about our tradition and their desire to make religion meaning-filled and relatable in their daily lives..

Among ways in which our influence as Catholics is seen can be found in the large number of people who are treated in Catholic Hospitals. The statistics reveal that while 21.5 million people were in Catholic Hospitals in 1970, today 87.7 million have been served in these institutions.

The value of services provided by Catholic Charities acting out the Social Ministry of the church in 2015 was 6.679 billion dollars! 8,265 million people were served by Catholic Charities that year! This is a wonderful commentary on the faith of people trying to live out the values of our Catholic Tradition.

The number of priests continues to diminish in relation to the total Catholic population, the people of God continue to minister in the Lord's name. I hope you will trust that the Lord will continue to raise up the leaders that we need to be His faith filled people. And that we will be open to the many wonderful ways that the Holy Spirit continues to renew the Church!

Have a great week.

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