



# The CARA Report

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## UPDATE ON U.S. SEMINARIES TODAY

Former CARA board member and Luzbetak awardee Katarina Schuth, OSF, has held the Endowed Chair for the Social Scientific Study of Religion at The Saint Paul Seminary School of Divinity at the University of Saint Thomas since 1991. Her newest book, *Seminary Formation: Recent History, Current Circumstances, New Directions*, analyzes changes in seminary education and formation from 1985 to the present. Sr. Schuth uses data from CARA's Catholic Ministry Formation database for much of her analysis. She begins her book with a look at the effects of Vatican II on the seminaries, followed by a chapter on institutional mission, vision, and structures, and another on seminary leadership. She then devotes chapters to seminarians and lay students, human and spiritual formation development, and intellectual and pastoral formation programs. A final chapter presents her analysis of new directions in the future, followed by commentaries by Ronald Rolheiser, OMI, Thomas Walters, Rev. Leon M. Hutton, Barbara E. Reid, OP, and Msgr. Peter Vaccari.

In her concluding chapter, Sister Schuth says, "My hope for the future rests on the theologates making improvements in directions that respond more fully to the spiritual needs in people's lives and the requirements of the new evangelization. As I reflect on my research, certain specific recommendations emerge that I suggest are evident in the data. While it is the responsibility of researchers to report faithfully their findings, we also have an obligation to raise up for wider consideration what these findings seem to suggest. I begin with three

*See Update on U.S. Seminaries Today, page 10*

## Catholic Parishes of the 21st Century

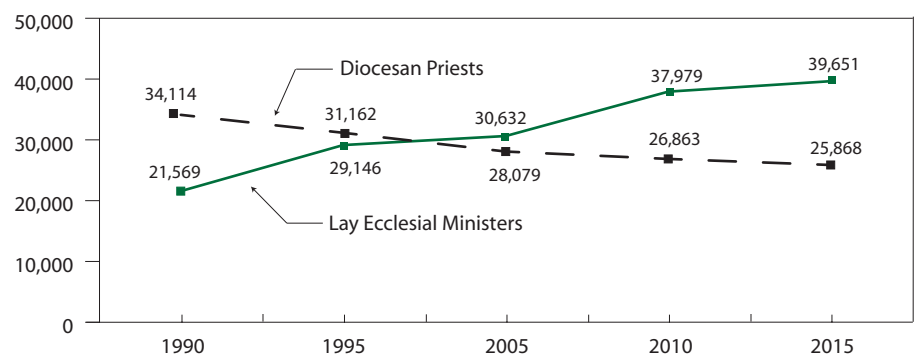
Two decades after the end of Vatican Council II in 1965, scholars at Notre Dame University analyzed changes in the beliefs and practices of American Catholics and produced the *Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life*. Thirty years later, a research team from CARA replicated the study, with results that will be of interest to both Church leaders and individual Catholics.

The driving force behind the new work was the Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership Project, begun in 2003, funded by the Lilly Endowment, and supported by a consortium of Catholic organizations, which "was designed to identify and promote emerging pastoral leadership models that sustain vibrant Catholic parish communities." As the research arm of this collaboration, CARA conducted a comprehensive national study of U.S. parishes, pastoral leaders, and parishioners in the pews. The research included a random sample of 5,549 U.S. parishes, roughly three times the number in the Notre Dame study, and included replication of questions from the 1980 study and others required by the reality of the present-day Church.

The results of this study, *Catholic Parishes of the 21st Century*, has just been published by Oxford University Press. Authors include CARA board member Charles E. Zech, who is also director of the Center for the Study of Church Management at Villanova University, CARA researchers Mary L. Gautier, Mark M. Gray, and Jonathon L. Wiggins, and CARA executive director Thomas P. Gaunt, SJ. Chapters summarize CARA's major recent research, addressing more than a quarter-century of change, demographics in pastoral leadership and membership, strategies for parish reconfiguration, parish administration and finances, who's in the pews, and the view from the pews. A final chapter summarizes major trends that have affected the Church in the United States during the past 30 years and the effects they have had on parish life.

*See Catholic Parishes of the 21st Century, page 11*

### DIOCESAN PRIESTS AND LAY ECCLESIAL MINISTERS IN PARISHES



Source: *Catholic Parishes of the 21st Century*, Zech, Gautier, Gray, Wiggins, and Gaunt

## FIVE TRENDS AFFECTING PARISH LIFE

**Trend 1. Declining vocations to ordained and non-ordained religious life.** The number of priests has been declining and the number of Catholic per priest has been increasing. This pattern began in the late 1960s and has continued unabated. During the same period the decrease among non-ordained religious sisters and brothers was even more dramatic. Further, these figures mask a related trend—the aging of active clergy and vowed religious. Not only are there fewer of them, but they are much older. This trend has been partially mitigated by the growth in the use of foreign-born priests, which introduces its own set of concerns. There has also been a slight uptick in the number of seminarians. The only clergy group that is growing is the permanent diaconate, reestablished after Vatican II, with 18,000 U.S. members and 40 percent of parishes served by at least one deacon.

**Trend 2. Catholics' migration from the inner city to the suburbs and from the North and Midwest to the South and West.** The early waves of Catholic immigrants tended to settle in the urban Northeast or the rural Midwest. That is where they built their parishes and their schools. But following World War II, as their socioeconomic status improved, they began to migrate to suburban communities. More recently, as employment prospects grew in the South and West, Catholics migrated to those parts of the country, leaving behind the inner-city and rural churches and schools that had been built to serve them. This disconnect between where facilities are sited and where Catholics live is one factor behind the reconfiguration of parish organizational structures that is occurring now in many dioceses in the Northeast and Midwest.

**Trend 3. Growth in the U.S. Catholic population fueled by immigration.** The U.S. Catholic population has continued to grow in numbers, holding steady at about a quarter of the U.S. population. A significant component of this growth is the result of immigration, especially of Spanish-speaking Catholics but also of Catholics from areas of the world other than Europe. In fact one in four U.S. Catholics was born outside the United States. From 2005 to 2010 the average proportion of non-Hispanic white parishioners decreased by nearly 3 percent, while Asian and Hispanic parishioners increased by 17 percent. As many as one in four U.S. Catholic parishes celebrate weekend liturgies in more than one language.

**Trend 4. The continuing impact of Vatican II.** Although most of the reforms of Vatican II were already well underway by the time of the Notre Dame Study, the meanings of “the priesthood of the laity” and “lay ecclesial minister” were still being formulated. In the past 30 years lay involvement as an important component of parish life has

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- Declining vocations to ordained and non-ordained religious life.
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grown exponentially, culminating in the 2005 USCCB document *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, which officially recognized the importance of well-formed laity serving in parish ministry roles.

**Trend 5. Declining participation in the sacraments.** Today, about one in four adult Catholics attends Mass weekly, and participation in other sacraments have also been in decline. Since 1985 the U.S. Catholic population that is connected to a parish has grown by 30 percent, but Catholic marriages are down by 57 percent and infant baptisms have decreased by 27 percent, according to *The Official Catholic Directory*. The decrease in Mass participation can be explained in large part by differences in generations. Within every group studied, Mass attendance is lower for members of the millennial generation than it is for both the Vatican II and post-Vatican II generations.

## FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

U.S. parishes have experienced many changes since researchers at Notre Dame conducted their study. Parish life today, which tends to be organizationally complex and multicultural, is dramatically different than it was in the mid-1980s. The nature of parish leadership has also changed as well as parishioners' attachment to their parish. But many things have not changed, including the centrality of the Eucharist to parish life, the efforts of dedicated clergy and lay people to serve God while serving their parishioners, and the attitude of parishioners who recognize that the Church is a human organization that will make mistakes, but who remain faithful and committed nevertheless. Thus, there are many reasons to be optimistic about the future of U.S. Catholic parish life over the next 30 years.

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*Catholic Parishes of the 21st Century*, by Charles E. Zech, Mary L. Gautier, Mary M. Gray, John L. Wiggins, and Thomas P. Gaunt, SJ, was published in 2017 by Oxford University Press, 198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016 (Order online at [www.oup.com/us](http://www.oup.com/us), using promotion code AAFLYG6 to save 30%).

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