



V ENCUENTRO

DISCÍPULOS MISIONEROS: TESTIGOS DEL AMOR DE DIOS
MISSIONARY DISCIPLES: WITNESSES OF GOD'S LOVE

REPORT



REGION 4 CATHOLIC POPULATION BY RACE / ETHNICITY

SUMMARY OF REGIONAL AND DIOCESAN ESTIMATES

Based on 2021 Survey Data and Census Estimates



V Encuentro Catholic Population Update for 2021

With the arrival of data from the 2020 U.S. Decennial Census, there has been widespread interest within the Church for an update on the V Encuentro Catholic population estimates that were published for 2016. Because the U.S. Census Bureau does not track religious affiliation, Catholic population estimates must rely on either sacramental records or large social surveys. With the increasing phenomena of religious switching and disaffiliation among the baptized, social surveys are seen by most sociologists today as the preferred way to develop estimates. The 2016 work for the V Encuentro was pioneering¹ in its development of a statistical model for the Catholic population at the diocesan level, based on several large social surveys that were conducted between 2013 and 2016, and taking into account variations in the demographics of religious affiliation by age, race/ethnicity, and geographic location.

The 2020 Census provides an important update on the underlying population in each diocese. However, it is clear from recent data on attendance at church services that the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic has had a far-reaching impact on the way Catholics live their faith. This begs the question whether it has also impacted their sense of religious identity and their faith commitment to a religious institution. In order to update the statistical model, it would be ideal to rely on a very large survey that employs best practices in establishing a representative sample of the U.S. population, such as the 2014 Religious Landscape Survey (RLS), which included over 35,000 responses. Unfortunately, no such survey data are currently available. However, the Pew Research Center and the Public Religion Research Institute both produced research from less robust 2021 surveys that showed a significant increase in the Catholic adult population, reversing the long-standing trend of decline.²

Did the Self-Identifying Catholic Population Grow in 2020-2021?

Both studies showed that this growth among Catholics took place in sharp contrast to a continuing decline in the Mainline and Evangelical Protestant populations. Although the size and quality of these two studies are not ideal, their close agreement on these data points lend credence that there may be something more than random fluctuations and sampling error here. A closer look at the Pew survey data, which were kindly made available to the V Encuentro research team, reveals:

- The population of older white Catholics experienced a large increase, especially among the 65+ population, which more than offset significant declines among younger white Catholics.

¹ See the full methodological explanation at: <https://vencuentro.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/VE-Statistical-Reports-Methodology-EN.pdf>.

² See <https://www.prrri.org/spotlight/prri-2021-american-values-atlas-religious-affiliation-updates-and-trends-white-christian-decline-slows-unaffiliated-growth-levels-off/> and <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/>.

- In contrast, the Hispanic/Latino Catholic population saw roughly proportional losses across all age groups, continuing the trend of gradual disaffiliation over the last 30 years, offset by even faster growth in the overall Hispanic/Latino population, resulting in continued numeric growth.
- Declines in the Black, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, and other Catholic populations did appear, but the differences from the 2014 RLS survey were within the statistical margin of error.

A Tentative Update to the V Encuentro Statistical Model

While it is not ideal to make broad changes to a national statistical model based on a survey with less than 4,000 responses, the shifts in the white and Hispanic/Latino Catholic populations did meet the standard of statistical significance. However, there were not sufficient data to attempt a full revision of the statistical model accounting for racial/ethnic, geographic, and age-related factors. Instead, the following was done:

- The statistical model from the 2016 V Encuentro analysis was incorporated as the starting point.
- The diocesan coefficients for Hispanic/Latino catholicity were multiplied by 0.95 (a 5% reduction).
- The dioceses were ranked according to the age profile of the underlying white, non-Hispanic population from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS 2021) by taking the geometric mean of their rankings in each of the four main age categories (18 to 29, 30 to 49, 50 to 64, and 65+). Coefficients were then applied to the original statistical model, ranging from 0.91 to 1.15, resulting in an overall 3.5% increase in white catholicity, in keeping with the 2021 Pew data.
- No changes were made in the model for the Black, Asian, and other Catholic populations.

Making Sense of the New Data

An important question for the V Encuentro research team in this analysis is: does the change in the white Catholic population make sense? The clear external factor that could have played into the trend reversal was the Covid-19 pandemic. Since the white Catholic population has a much older profile than other Catholic racial/ethnic groups and most other Christian denominations, it does make sense that those who may have been most at risk of Covid-19 would do some religious introspection and perhaps return to identifying with the faith of their younger years. This begs the question: will that change last? That is unknown. It is certainly possible that the proportion of white Catholics will soon revert to the historical trendline, reversing the apparent gains seen in 2021. In any case, the trend among younger white Catholics continues to be one of significant disaffiliation. If the overall trends continue, the future Catholic Church in the United States will be smaller and more diverse.

The new diocesan-level Catholic population tables should therefore be taken with a degree of caution. The underlying Census data and the comparative data from 2016 are both shown in

order to help in that process. Keep in mind that the Catholic numbers do not represent people who attend Mass regularly—it is just those who would have identified themselves as Catholic if asked in 2021. They may or may not continue to do so today or next year. Some dioceses may show a large increase in their white Catholic population; that is due to the fact that they have a substantial elderly population that at least at the national level was more likely to identify as Catholic in 2021. That may or may not have been true locally.

Similarly, given the rapid increase in the Asian population throughout the country, some dioceses may see significantly larger numbers in their table for “Asian/Native Am./Other” Catholics. However, if the reality was that a sizeable Chinese or Japanese population arrived, it would have a far smaller impact in the shape of the local Catholic community than if those who arrived had been of Filipino origin.

The bottom line is that the new data provide an essential reference point for pastoral leaders as they develop programs and activities to serve the Church in their area. It is important to take stock of the changes revealed in the Census 2020 data. However, such leaders should understand that these numbers represent a snapshot in time, and the community they are called to serve will continue to change in its demographic composition and numerical size as the years pass. May God bless their efforts!

EPISCOPAL REGION 4

Episcopal Region IV Overall Population and Catholic Population Estimates for 2016 and 2021 by Race / Ethnicity

Racial/Ethnic Group	Census Estimated Population in 2016**	Census Estimated Population in 2021	% Change	Estimated Catholics in 2016	Estimated Catholics in 2021	% Change	% Catholic	% of Catholics
White, non-Hispanic	10,856,486	10,517,714	-3.1%	1,682,000	1,678,000	-0.2%	16.0%	59.8%
Hispanic/Latino	1,533,992	1,773,817	15.6%	713,000	784,000	10.0%	44.2%	27.9%
Black/African American	4,208,165	4,306,737	2.3%	172,000	176,000	2.3%	4.1%	6.3%
Asian/Native Am./Other*	1,293,949	1,665,528	28.7%	131,000	168,000	28.2%	10.1%	6.0%
Total***	17,892,592	18,263,796	2.1%	2,698,000	2,806,000	4.0%	15.4%	

* The surveys on which the Catholic population are based were not large enough to generate reliable estimates of the Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, and "Other" Catholic populations separately, so they are grouped together here.

** Overall population estimates are taken from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Surveys (ACS) for each corresponding year.

*** The Catholic Totals may not add up exactly due to rounding errors. Round numbers are used because these are statistical estimates, not actual population counts.

Diocese of Arlington
Overall Population and Catholic Population Estimates
for 2016 and 2021 by Race / Ethnicity

Racial/Ethnic Group	Census Estimated Population in 2016**	Census Estimated Population in 2021	% Change	Estimated Catholics in 2016	Estimated Catholics in 2021	% Change	% Catholic	% of Catholics
White, non-Hispanic	1,842,595	1,802,122	-2.2%	228,000	223,000	-2.2%	12.4%	42.6%
Hispanic/Latino	495,818	552,686	11.5%	219,000	231,000	5.5%	41.8%	44.1%
Black/African American	429,401	463,595	8.0%	11,500	12,000	4.3%	2.6%	2.3%
Asian/Native Am./Other*	471,186	560,058	18.9%	48,000	57,000	18.8%	10.2%	10.9%
Total***	3,239,000	3,378,461	4.3%	507,000	524,000	3.4%	15.5%	

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Archdiocese of Baltimore
Overall Population and Catholic Population Estimates
for 2016 and 2021 by Race / Ethnicity

Racial/Ethnic Group	Census Estimated Population in 2016**	Census Estimated Population in 2021	% Change	Estimated Catholics in 2016	Estimated Catholics in 2021	% Change	% Catholic	% of Catholics
White, non-Hispanic	1,946,855	1,877,233	-3.6%	420,000	415,000	-1.2%	22.1%	68.7%
Hispanic/Latino	186,631	230,524	23.5%	98,000	115,000	17.3%	49.9%	19.0%
Black/African American	895,505	931,720	4.0%	45,000	46,000	2.2%	4.9%	7.6%
Asian/Native Am./Other*	219,355	279,733	27.5%	21,500	27,000	25.6%	9.7%	4.5%
Total***	3,248,346	3,319,210	2.2%	584,000	604,000	3.4%	18.2%	

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Diocese of Richmond
Overall Population and Catholic Population Estimates
for 2016 and 2021 by Race / Ethnicity

Racial/Ethnic Group	Census Estimated Population in 2016**	Census Estimated Population in 2021	% Change	Estimated Catholics in 2016	Estimated Catholics in 2021	% Change	% Catholic	% of Catholics
White, non-Hispanic	3,393,186	3,317,153	-2.2%	429,000	430,000	0.2%	13.0%	67.6%
Hispanic/Latino	264,279	327,367	23.9%	115,000	135,000	17.4%	41.2%	21.2%
Black/African American	1,287,617	1,287,918	0.0%	39,000	39,000	0.0%	3.0%	6.1%
Asian/Native Am./Other*	227,726	331,375	45.5%	22,000	32,000	45.5%	9.7%	5.0%
Total***	5,172,808	5,263,813	1.8%	605,000	636,000	5.1%	12.1%	

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Archdiocese of Washington
Overall Population and Catholic Population Estimates
for 2016 and 2021 by Race / Ethnicity

Racial/Ethnic Group	Census Estimated Population in 2016**	Census Estimated Population in 2021	% Change	Estimated Catholics in 2016	Estimated Catholics in 2021	% Change	% Catholic	% of Catholics
White, non-Hispanic	1,052,982	986,871	-6.3%	266,000	240,000	-9.8%	24.3%	42.8%
Hispanic/Latino	452,597	505,340	11.7%	209,000	222,000	6.2%	43.9%	39.6%
Black/African American	1,212,274	1,236,225	2.0%	60,000	61,000	1.7%	4.9%	10.9%
Asian/Native Am./Other*	277,949	328,390	18.1%	31,000	37,000	19.4%	11.3%	6.6%
Total***	2,995,802	3,056,826	2.0%	567,000	561,000	-1.1%	18.4%	

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Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston
Overall Population and Catholic Population Estimates
for 2016 and 2021 by Race / Ethnicity

Racial/Ethnic Group	Census Estimated Population in 2016**	Census Estimated Population in 2021	% Change	Estimated Catholics in 2016	Estimated Catholics in 2021	% Change	% Catholic	% of Catholics
White, non-Hispanic	1,684,552	1,609,308	-4.5%	112,000	121,000	8.0%	7.5%	85.2%
Hispanic/Latino	26,154	31,226	19.4%	12,500	14,000	12.0%	44.8%	9.9%
Black/African American	86,008	75,044	-12.7%	3,200	2,800	-12.5%	3.7%	2.0%
Asian/Native Am./Other*	34,388	67,381	95.9%	2,500	5,000	100.0%	7.4%	3.5%
Total***	1,831,102	1,782,959	-2.6%	130,000	142,000	9.2%	8.0%	

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Diocese of Wilmington
Overall Population and Catholic Population Estimates
for 2016 and 2021 by Race / Ethnicity

Racial/Ethnic Group	Census Estimated Population in 2016**	Census Estimated Population in 2021	% Change	Estimated Catholics in 2016	Estimated Catholics in 2021	% Change	% Catholic	% of Catholics
White, non-Hispanic	936,316	925,027	-1.2%	226,000	249,000	10.2%	26.9%	73.5%
Hispanic/Latino	108,513	126,674	16.7%	59,000	66,000	11.9%	52.1%	19.5%
Black/African American	297,360	312,235	5.0%	14,000	15,000	7.1%	4.8%	4.4%
Asian/Native Am./Other*	63,345	98,591	55.6%	6,000	9,500	58.3%	9.6%	2.8%
Total***	1,405,534	1,462,527	4.1%	306,000	339,000	10.8%	23.2%	

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