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Francis? papacy spotlights state of Latin American church

Brian Roewe | Mar. 15, 2013 NCR Today
Pope Francis

Many have pointed toward the selection of Pope Francis of Argentina as a reflection of the growth of the Catholic church in the global south, particularly in the Americas.

To help illustrate the state of the church in Latin America, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life produced an infographic [1] (see right) using 2010 data from its report on Global Christianity, published in December 2011. According to their data, the 4.25 million Catholics living in Central and South America

comprise 72 percent of all Latin Americans, and 39 percent of Catholics worldwide.

Looking at Francis? home country of Argentina, it contains the 11th largest Catholic population worldwide, and constitute nearly 77 percent of the overall Argentine population.

A more detailed spotlight of the church in South America's second largest country is found at the 1964 blog [2], run by Georgetown University?s Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. Using Vatican and Pew data, editor Mark Gray found the number of Catholics in Argentina rising steadily, from 21.2 million in 1970, to 37.8 million in 2010. Over the same span, baptisms have remained fairly steady, while marriages have dropped significantly in the past decade.

Gray also found diocesan priest vocations rising, and the number of churches had increased by nearly 1,000 during 40-year span, bringing the total to 2,754 in 2010. That figure is diminished when viewed through Catholic population, Gray stated, presenting a ratio of nearly 11,000 Catholics per church.

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Links:
[1] http://www.pewforum.org/Christian/Catholic/Conclave-Elects-Pope-Francis.aspx
[2] http://nineteensixty-four.blogspot.com/2013/03/pope-francis-spotlight-on-argentina.html