News



Bishops listen to a speaker Nov. 14, 2018, at the fall general assembly of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Baltimore. (CNS/Bob Roller)



by Heidi Schlumpf

View Author Profile

Follow on Twitter at @heidischlumpf

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

June 3, 2019

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

There are 441 active and retired Catholic bishops who oversee 196 Latin- and Eastern-rite dioceses and archdioceses and one "personal ordinariate" (for former Anglican groups and clergy in the United States who became Catholic) in the United States and U.S. Virgin Islands. This includes 15 cardinals: six who lead archdioceses, five who are retired and four in other positions.

More than a third (168) of U.S. bishops are retired; the remaining 273 active ones include six cardinals, 29 archbishops, 162 diocesan bishops and 76 auxiliary bishops. Bishops submit their retirement to the pope at the age of 75; about six to eight bishops retire each year and are replaced, so the total number of active bishops remains roughly the same.

The bishops themselves make up the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and are served by a staff of approximately 315 laypeople, priests, deacons and religious located at the Conference headquarters in Washington, D.C., according to the U.S. bishops' conference website. The staff work is overseen by the General Secretariat, an office currently headed by Msgr. Brian Bransfield.

The average bishop in the U.S., according to survey data from 2016, is a non-Hispanic white 65-year-old. (In fact, about 88% of bishops are white.) He has served for 12 years in a diocese of about 250,000 Catholics in 92 parishes, with 87 active diocesan priests (another 51 retired, infirm or serving elsewhere), 98 permanent deacons and about 200 mostly-retired sisters.

He graduated from a Catholic high school, went to college seminary and earned a graduate degree in theology, before being serving as an associate pastor and pastor. He also spent several years in an administrative role in a diocese, according to the survey, published this year in the book *Catholic Bishops in the United States: Church Leadership in the Third Millennium*.

The average age of a bishop's ordination to the priesthood is 27 for ordinaries who head dioceses or archdioceses, and 30 for auxiliary bishops, who assist ordinaries. About half (42%) went straight from being a priest to an ordinary, while another 42% served first as an auxiliary. Six percent were coadjutors, or bishops named to assist an ordinary but who have a right of succession.

Advertisement

Other data from the 2016 survey of U.S. bishops include:

- Two geographic regions have produced the most bishops: the Philadelphia Province (which includes the eight dioceses of Pennsylvania) with 22 bishops, and the Chicago Province (which includes the six dioceses of Illinois) with 11 bishops.
- Less than 10% of U.S. bishops (as of 2016) were from religious orders. Pope John Paul II was more likely to appoint bishops from religious orders than Pope Benedict XVI or Pope Francis, so far.
- Bishops are highly educated; 71% of survey respondents said they have three or more graduate degrees. About half studied in Rome at some point, either for seminary or graduate work.
- Bishops report sleeping about two hours less than the average adult male. They pray about two hours a day and spend more than an hour reading or watching the news. About two-thirds say they exercise every day.
- They work an estimated 62.5 hours per week, with an average of 38 confirmations a year and another 36 parish visits per year. They report taking about three weeks of vacation a year.
- Almost half of U.S. bishops who responded to the survey said they watch news on the FOX channel; only 4% watch MSNBC. The most popular daily source of secular printed news is a local daily newspaper (88%), with The New York Times the most frequently mentioned national newspaper (38%).
- The National Catholic Register (owned by EWTN) is the most frequently read religious periodical, with self-identified traditionalist or even moderate bishops more likely than progressives ones to read it (Still, 40% of progressive bishops did). The opposite was true with America magazine, which came in second with 60% of bishops reading, but more progressive bishops more likely to read it than traditionalists. Only 33% of bishops read the National Catholic Reporter.

Read this next: Conservatives still rule the US bishops' conference

[Heidi Schlumpf is NCR national correspondent. Her email address is hschlumpf@ncronline.org. Follow her on Twitter @HeidiSchlumpf.]

This story appears in the **USCCB Spring Assembly 2019** feature series. View the full series.