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A file photo shows a baby during her baptism. Baptisms in the Catholic Church in Ireland have fallen by almost a third since 2015, with just one Irish diocese seeing any positive change, according to a new report released Aug. 18, 2026. (OSV News/Gregory A. Shemitz)

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Baptisms in the Catholic Church in Ireland have fallen by almost a third since 2015, with just one Irish diocese seeing any positive change, a new report shows.

While around 60% of the 30% collapse can be attributed to declining births, the rest is accounted for by "rising secularism," according to the Catholic nonprofit Iona Institute.

The effect of secularization is "very significant," continues the Iona Institute's report, "Baptism trends in Ireland," released Aug. 18.

The decline is in line with census figures, which show that the number of people who identify as having "no religion" — the so-called "nones" — has been "rising fast" in Ireland over the past 10 years, the report states.

Irish census figures show that the number of people identifying as Catholic fell from over 79% in 2016 to 69% in 2022.

Hostility toward the Church is also widely prevalent in Ireland. A 2025 study by Irish pollster Amárach found that two-fifths (40%) of the Irish population view the Church negatively, with another third indifferent.

This hostility is largely attributed to the fallout from revelations over the past three decades of abuses in Church-led institutions.

However, the report sees a glimmer of hope in the continued rates of baptism among "cultural" Catholics, suggesting that it is a sign that negative attitudes toward the Church are not as entrenched as has been feared.

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Commenting on the figures, Chairman of The Iona Institute Tom Finegan said that "In a way the figures are not a surprise given the rapidly falling number of births and growing secularisation. Given that births have fallen by almost a fifth in the last 10 years, and more people are ticking the 'No Religion' box in the Census, we could expect nothing but a big drop in baptism figures."

The most dramatic decline was experienced in Ireland's largest diocese, the Archdiocese of Dublin, which saw almost a 40% drop in the number of children being baptized.

Some 9,465 were recorded in 2025 compared to 15,759 baptisms in 2015 in the Irish capital.

Removing the Irish capital from the picture shows that baptisms are down by just over a quarter (26.1%) in the last decade.

The Diocese of Meath also saw a dramatic decline in percentage with baptisms down by 40.8% but the actual numbers were much lower than in Dublin — 4,675 baptisms in 2015 and 2,768 in 2025.

The only diocese to see an increase in the number of baptisms was Elphin, a small diocese in the west of Ireland, where baptisms rose by 0.9%.

A neighboring diocese, Achonry, saw the next lowest change and the rest of Ireland's 26 dioceses saw declines in the double digits, ranging from 10.7% to 40.8% with no response from two dioceses.

The discrepancy between Dublin and the rest of the country is partly explained by a faster decline in birth rates.

Births fell by 17.9% in Ireland between 2015 and 2025, while in Dublin they fell by 21.9%.

However, Dublin also has a higher percentage of children marked down in the "no religion" and "other religions" categories on the Irish census.

The most recent census in 2022 found that, across Ireland, 15.6% of children ages 0-4 have no religion, and 10.5% belong to a religion other than Catholicism.

The numbers for Dublin were 21.9% and 14.4% respectively, suggesting that the "more secularized nature" of Ireland's capital explains the difference between it and the rest of the country, according to the Iona Institute.

However, the Catholic think tank finds some cause for hope in the census figures. Examining the data suggests that the "vast majority" of parents who identify as Catholic still have their children baptized.

Over 65.4% of 0- to 4-year-olds were marked down as Catholic in a 2022 census. This corresponds "very closely" to the percentage of mothers ages 25-39 who identified as Catholic in that year.

The "relative popularity" of baptism means that hostility to the Church "might not be as widespread in the population as can sometimes be assumed," the report states.

"No one who is very anti-Catholic would have their child baptized," it concludes.

Finegan warned that it "remains to be seen" whether the phenomenon will continue to be a "force in Irish life."