

Report: Fewer priests celebrating more Masses

Nancy Frazier O'Brien Catholic News Service | Jul. 18, 2011

WASHINGTON -- More U.S. Catholics are attending Masses at fewer parishes staffed by a rapidly declining corps of priests, according to a new report on "The Changing Face of U.S. Catholic Parishes."

Produced by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate for the Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership project of five national Catholic ministerial organizations, the report documents what it calls the "supersizing" of U.S. Catholic parish life.

"Bigger parishes, more Masses and ministries in languages other than English are becoming the norm," said a news release on the report released July 18.

CARA found that the number of Catholic parishes has declined by 1,359 since the year 2000 to 17,784 in 2010, representing a 7.1 percent decrease. The 2010 number is roughly equal to the 17,637 U.S. parishes in 1965 and 1,836 fewer than the peak number of U.S. parishes in 1990.

The average number of registered households in each U.S. parish grew to 1,168, and the average number of people attending Mass at Catholic parishes was 1,110 in 2010, up from an average of 966 a decade earlier.

Half of U.S. parishes celebrate four or more weekend Masses each week. But the Masses are being celebrated by a corps of priests that declined by 11 percent in the past decade.

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