



Detroit Catholic

Catholic officials encourage parishioners to take 2020 census, if they haven't yet

[Daniel Meloy](#), Jul 23, 2020



Fr. Tim McCabe, SJ, executive director of the Pope Francis Center in downtown Detroit, smiles along with a client of the center in December 2019. The Michigan Catholic Conference is working with parishes to promote the 2020 census among groups that are traditionally undercounted, including the homeless population and non-native English speakers. (Valaurian Waller | Detroit Catholic)

Accurate count affects congressional representation, funding for everything from Medicaid to infrastructure and social services

DETROIT — The COVID-19 pandemic has uprooted just about everything in normal American life.

Masses, family gatherings, camping trips and a full Major League Baseball season have all been either suspended, altered or simply canceled. But one thing that must constitutionally continue is the census.

The official count of the U.S. population, which occurs every decade, affects everything from funding of local community services and civic centers to congressional and legislative districts.

The coronavirus forced the U.S. Census Bureau to push the census deadline from April to Oct. 31, giving people more time to complete the online questionnaire.

“The Michigan Catholic Conference has always felt participation in the U.S. Census is really important,” said Annie Bennett, communications and outreach associate with the conference, which represents the Church in Michigan in public policy discussions. “When COVID came, we made sure we had the resources available for parishes and people to fill out the census, particularly when information changed.”

Michigan currently has a 68.3% response rate for the census, the third best in the country, but census officials are worried about undercounting lower-income populations in urban areas and Spanish-speaking households.

Households have until Aug. 11 to complete the census before officials send in-person census-takers to track down addresses that haven’t replied — a situation officials would like to avoid in a time of social distancing.

“While we are excited with the results we have so far, considering all the challenges our communities are facing now, we still have some weak areas,” said Kerry Eberfole Singh, executive director of the 2020 Census for the State of Michigan.

Singh pointed to areas like Detroit, Flint, Benton Harbor and Muskegon that are behind in responding, along with rural areas of the state where internet access is limited.

“Traditionally, census response rates track closely with household income,” Singh said. “Those with lower incomes tend not to complete the census forms, along with students and renters living in a multi-unit house where they may just throw out the mail instead.”

The census influences the country’s congressional representation — states with more people have a higher number of representatives — but also affects funding levels for critical services, including Medicaid, programs to assist low-income women, children and families with nutritional needs and education, road infrastructure and grants for tutoring, textbooks and other school programs.

In 2016, Michigan received almost \$30 billion through federal programs that used 2010 census data.

“When the state’s people are not counted, Michigan communities lose out,” Bennett said. “We’ve seen in so many ways how an accurate count matters for everyone in the community.”

The census data even affected money for coronavirus relief. This pandemic is one more way of showing how important it is to be counted, making sure the local community has the resources it needs.”

The Michigan Catholic Conference is working with certain communities, particularly those with limited internet access and those who live in apartment complexes where the unique identifier number needed to complete the online census may have been lost in the mail-delivery process, to boost response rates.

“One of things we did this year was provide additional parish resources that are in Spanish,” Bennett said. “We want to make sure they get accurate information in a way parishioners feel comfortable responding. We also know the homeless population is undercounted, so we’re providing resources to parishes that work with the homeless to make sure they are counted as well.”

The Michigan Catholic Conference also is offering resources at www.micatholic.org/2020census for parishes to host in-person census responses if internet access is an issue for a household.

The coronavirus prohibited many parishes and organizations from hosting in-person census events, but Singh said churches and community groups still play a vital role in distributing census information.

As society begins to reopen, parishes can host events for parishioners who don’t have access to the internet, where they can fill out the census at a central location without their unique identification number by visiting www.my2020census.gov.

People can also complete the census through a toll-free number or a paper form that every household in the state was sent.

“We get questions about how long it takes to fill out the census — it’s only 10 minutes,” Singh said. “It’s actually nine questions that are asked, and all the information is confidential. The questions are pretty basic, and the census can’t share it with any government agency or individual. You probably are giving more information out on Facebook.”

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