

Diocesan Report 2007

The State of the Church in America, Diocese by Diocese

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This analysis began with the question, “Does the bishop matter?” It arrives at an interesting pair of conclusions. The first is that there is no problem ailing the Catholic Church in America that is not being addressed successfully in some place, and typically in multiple places. Second, there is a cadre of bishops, invisible to the national media, largely unknown outside their dioceses, absent from Washington political circles, who are truly unsung heroes of the Church, presiding over vibrant communities, building the Church, and effectively proclaiming the Faith—men such as Bishop Joseph Kurtz of Knoxville, Archbishop Michael Sheehan of Santa Fe, and Bishop Daniel Conlon of Steubenville, to name just a few.

So to the original question: Does the bishop matter? To be sure, among the local Catholic laity, the bishop has a certain celebrity; his visits to our parishes are occasions. Faithful Catholics monitor the comings and goings of the episcopate with more than passing interest. But does a particular bishop *really* affect, for better or ill, the health of the Church in his see?

The first consideration in answering this question is whether variations in the vitality of the American dioceses can be detected, such that some dioceses can be said to be unusually robust and others unusually anemic. Absent such variations, there is nothing to attribute to the bishop. After all, the Church in America as a whole is beset by macro trends, such as the emergence of a now-dominant (and hostile) secular culture. All dioceses swim, as it were, in the same sea. Our question is whether some are better swimmers than others.

But if, on the other hand, differentiations among dioceses are observable, then a judgment can be rendered as to the extent to which those differentiations are attributable to the bishop. How we judge the health of the dioceses depends in part on available data, and in part on how we view the role of the bishop, the successor to the apostles. In keeping with the thoughts of the third chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, we expect the bishop first of all to tend to the well-being of his priests. He must also guard the stability of the Church by taking personal responsibility for providing a growing population of priests through vocations. We expect the bishop to evangelize the area encompassed by his see, to be a steadfast teacher of the Faith and a holy shepherd to his flock, after the image and example of the Good Shepherd.

This characterization suggests three criteria of evaluation: the morale of the presbyterate, the number of vocations, and effective evangelization. As for data, each Latin rite diocese in the United States (of which there are 176, excluding Puerto Rico and territories) annually submits a wealth of information to the *Official Catholic Directory*, published by P. J. Kenedy and Sons. Not only are these data considerably more extensive than those reported by the Vatican via the *Annuario Pontificio*, it is voluntary (that is, not ordained by Church authority), and so it is quite remarkable that every diocese in the country participates.

The *Official Catholic Directory* reports, for example, that the total number of persons claimed as adherents by the dioceses was 65,996,019 at the end of 2005, a 19 percent increase from ten years earlier¹. During this same ten-year period, the American population grew by 13 percent (and the Hispanic population by 57 percent); i.e., the population of U.S. Catholics is growing at a higher rate than the U.S. population as a whole. American dioceses collectively claimed as adherents 22 percent of the population of the United States, consistent with the results of national surveys of public opinion, which generally peg self-identified Catholics in a range of 22 percent to 24 percent of the general public. It is interesting that our dioceses claim as Catholics persons who have not recently (if ever) set foot in church. In surveys, inactive Catholics—unlike most denominations—continue to self-identify as Catholics

long after they have stopped attending Mass. We would not expect these inactive Catholics to be on the radar screens of the dioceses, yet apparently they are.

The dioceses collectively reported 911,935 infant baptisms for 2005, representing 22 percent of persons born in the past year. This figure belies the belief that the Catholic Church is expanding through a higher rate of birth. The American dioceses received 149,306 adults into the Church, up 6 percent from ten years earlier—which was just one-fifth of 1 percent of the total number of adherents, not a dramatic source of growth.

As the body of the faithful was growing over the past decade, the national presbyterate was declining. At the end of 1995, there were 22,070 active diocesan priests in service of the Church; by the end of 2005, this number was 18,102, an 18 percent decrease. Of course, one cause of the decline was the retirement of the presbyterate and a low rate of ordination. Ten years ago, the vocations crisis had already struck so that in 1995, 398 diocesan ordinations occurred, versus 335 in 2005. While that represents a 15 percent decline in the number of ordinations overall, ordinations as a percentage of the active presbyterate—in other words, the replacement rate—actually rose slightly from 1995 to 2005. Still, at a 2 percent rate of ordination (the 2005 figure), diocesan priests would have to serve an average of 50 years to maintain our current population of priests. In 1995, 45 dioceses reported no ordinations, and four reported ten or more. In 2005, 48 dioceses had no ordinations, and three had ten or more.

In the face of declining ordinations, some dioceses are resorting to the importation of extern priests, resulting in 29 dioceses that experienced an increase in the number of active priests from 1995 to 2005, either because of the success of their extern strategy or because of unusual success in attracting vocations, or both. And the phrase “attracting vocations” is today particularly apt. Whereas once it would have been exceedingly rare for a young man to enter the priesthood outside of the diocese in which he grew up, today diocese-shopping is more common. We have reports of seminarians selecting their diocese based on a scan of Web sites. The persona of the bishop is therefore all the more important in attracting vocations, both from without and from within.

Criteria of Diocesan Health

The change in the total number of adherents in a diocese was not taken as a measure of the health of a diocese, as this dynamic has more to do with the population migrations of our increasingly mobile society and is therefore well beyond the competence of a bishop to affect. Sixty-eight dioceses (39 percent) lost adherents between 1995 and 2005, while 59 dioceses (34 percent) experienced moderate growth and 49 dioceses (28 percent) saw dramatic growth. Predictably, half of the dioceses reporting a declining number of adherents are in the states of the Industrial Midwest (from Pennsylvania to Minnesota), but population erosion is also prevalent in the Northeast. On the other hand, half of the dioceses in Pacific Coast states and nearly half in the South are growing dramatically (20 percent-plus in the ten-year period). There is significant correlation between a diocese’s growth rate and other indicators of vitality, but we suspect this correlation has more to do with the regional effect, on which more will be said later. Within each of these categories of growth (negative, moderate, and dramatic), there are both very vibrant and anemic dioceses—indicating that, while growing dioceses tend to be vibrant, a growing population of adherents does not in and of itself ensure a vibrant diocese.

Returning to those functions proper to a bishop, priestly morale is not available to us directly as quantitative data. But as a surrogate datum, we know whether the number of active priests in a diocese is increasing or decreasing. To be sure, priestly retirements are mostly—but not totally—beyond the

influence of the bishop. But in addition to attracting extern priests to the diocese, the bishop can contribute to a climate in which priests remain eager to serve beyond the earliest opportunity for retirement. In the words of a longtime observer, “The experience of the Church is that the influence of the bishop over his priests is very real.”

Then, of course, the number of ordinations in each diocese can be examined, and for reasons discussed above, bishops are ever more influential over vocations; as one put it, “Increasingly men are seeking out congenial bishops and seminaries.” Finally, the number of adult receptions into the Church is an excellent measure of the local church’s investment in and success at evangelization activities.

Take a look at these three measures in turn.

Changes in Active Presbyterate, 1995–2005

Twenty-nine dioceses (16 percent) experienced an increase in the number of active priests between 1995 and 2005² (see table on page 6). The most outstanding diocese by this measure is Tyler, Texas (see sidebar below), which experienced a 128 percent increase in active priests (from 25 to 57). Brownsville, Texas, was second with a 64 percent increase.

Five dioceses saw no change in the number of active priests between 1995 and 2005, leaving 141 dioceses with a declining number of active priests. The decline was most pronounced in Camden, New Jersey (down 43 percent); Amarillo, Texas (down 42 percent); Albany, New York (down 41 percent); and Rochester, New York (down 40 percent). We rank by the percentage change in the presbyterate so as not to discriminate against larger dioceses. [*Continued on page 5*]

Tyler, Texas

Imagine that you find yourself appointed bishop in rural east Texas—a diocese of 22,971 square miles, a territory nearly equivalent to the entire state of West Virginia. It is an area with some 56,000 Catholics—4.3 percent of the total population. The first incumbent died in office, and the diocese is now on its third bishop after just 20 years in existence. Moreover, apart from the see city of Tyler, with a population just in excess of 83,000, the diocese is composed of small communities that provide minimal statistical hope for recruiting vocations to the diocesan priesthood. As bishop, you are also confronting religious orders—once the backbone of regions with few Catholics like east Texas—with fewer and fewer missionary priests to deploy.

That the Diocese of Tyler finds itself with a 128 percent increase in diocesan priests in the ten-year span of our study is attributable to the work of Bishop Edmond Carmody and Bishop Alvaro Corrada del Rio, S.J.

Bishop Carmody, himself a missionary from Ireland who came to the United States to supplement the work of the American clergy, had no qualms about searching the whole of the Lord’s vineyard for laborers; the Diocese of Tyler has imported priests from Eastern Europe, India, and Latin America. The bishops have made the building up of their presbyterate a priority to the well-being of their diocese.

Across the country, dioceses are finding that importing priests is effective in easing the shortfalls they are confronting. The positives are many: Dioceses are spared the years of study and waiting involved in seminary preparation—the priests arrive with their studies accomplished and their ordination behind them—and the concern about whether the seminarian will persevere to ordination is a moot point. Some priests are quite young, while others arrive with a wealth of pastoral experience from their own lands. These priests are expressions of the Church Universal, and the parishes in which they serve benefit from the unique perspectives that come from their cultures and backgrounds. Many parishioners are grateful, knowing that without them their parish might have no priest at all.

Certainly, the opportunity to work in a U.S. diocese fulfills a desire to be a missionary and to make a tremendous difference in a particular church that would be poorer sacramentally without them. Living in America also provides many of these priests with a standard of living they could not otherwise attain. One priest from India, working as a hospital chaplain in a diocese in the South, was able to provide significant support for his parents and siblings back home in India—something he would not have been able to do had he remained in his own diocese in Kerala.

But the coin has two sides. Priests from other lands can find it difficult to adjust to the culture, and the languages (both English and Spanish) and expectations of parishioners are often far removed from what the priests previously experienced. The language barrier is real. There is also real concern on the part of parishioners about the extern priests' lack of understanding regarding the roles of women in American society. The very active role that the American laity takes in the liturgy and in parish life is also often very different from what these priests may have experienced in their homeland. The myriad parish activities and social ministries can be challenging. Parishes with confrontations and misunderstandings can cause much pain to priests and parishioners alike. Still, priests and parishes that are willing to grow together and accept that there will be moments of adjustment can find the experience mutually enriching.

The phenomenon has raised concerns on the part of the Holy See's Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. In a June 2001 document titled *Instruction on the Sending Abroad and Sojourn of Diocesan Priests from Mission Territories*, the Holy See expressed some trepidation about the fact that, in some dioceses of Africa, one-third to one-half of the secular priests live abroad—enough, the document warns, to create entire dioceses with native clergy in these mission lands that are still getting on their feet.

The trend exemplified in Tyler is not likely to go away in the near term, however. In our country's earliest years, it was Jesuit missionaries from France who planted the seeds of faith across North America and became our region's first saints, the North American martyrs. It has been the legacy of the United States to welcome missionaries, to send forth missionaries—and now, to welcome them again.
—R. H. and S. W.

Ordinations, 2005

Rather than looking at the total number of priests ordained in 2005, we rank dioceses by the number of ordained priests as a percentage of the total active presbyterate (see table on page 6). This eliminates discrimination against smaller dioceses. The leading diocese by this measure is Las Cruces, New Mexico, which in 2005 ordained 14 percent of its presbyterate (three new priests out of 21 total). At the other

end of the spectrum, 48 dioceses saw no ordinations, the largest of which is Galveston–Houston, Texas, with 1.5 million adherents. The top-ranked dioceses by the actual number of ordinations are Chicago (17); St. Paul–Minneapolis (15); and Newark, New Jersey (12).

Greatest Increase and Decrease in Active Priests (1995-2005)

Rank	Diocese	Change	Rank	Diocese	Change
1	Tyler (TX)	128%	167	Portland (ME)	-35%
2	Brownsville (GA)	64%	168	Green Bay (WI)	-36%
3	Atlanta (GA)*	49%	169	Covington (KY)	-37%
4	Venice (FL)	40%	170	Marquette (MI)	-37%
5	Austin (TX)	40%	171	Honolulu (HI)	-38%
6	Raleigh (NC)	40%	172	Dodge City (KS)	-38%
7	Knoxville (TN)	26%	173	Rochester (NY)	-40%
8	Colorado Springs (CO)	26%	174	Albany (NY)	-41%
9	Lake Charles (LA)	26%	175	Amarillo (TX)	-42%
10	Reno (NV)	20%	176	Camden (NJ)	-43%

* indicates archdiocese

Most and Fewest Ordinations in 2005[†]

Rank	Diocese	Ords.	% [‡]	Rank	Diocese	Ords.	% [‡]
1	Las Cruces (NM)	3	14%	167	Tucson (AZ)	0	0%
2	Savannah (GA)	5	10%	168	Orlando (FL)	0	0%
3	Anchorage (AK)*	1	9%	169	Corpus Christi (TX)	0	0%
4	Beaumont (TX)	3	9%	170	Austin (TX)	0	0%
5	Alexandria (LA)	3	8%	171	Metuchen (NJ)	0	0%
6	Springfield (IL)	7	8%	172	El Paso (TX)	0	0%
7	Duluth (MN)	4	8%	173	Hartford (CT)	0	0%
8	Las Vegas (NV)	2	7%	174	Brownsville (TX)	0	0%
9	Kalamazoo (MI)	3	7%	175	Dallas (TX)	0	0%
10	Knoxville (TN)	3	7%	176	Galv.-Houston (TX)	0	0%

* indicates archdiocese

[†]tie broken by size of diocese

[‡]percent of presbyterate

Adults Received into the Church

Of course the baptism of infants is an important measure of the Church’s evangelical activities, but a better measure, more reflective of the efforts of the local church to engage the community, is the number of adults received by the Church into full communion (see table on page 7). Again, to prevent putting smaller dioceses at a disadvantage, we examined receptions as a percentage of adherents. The most successful diocese—Kansas City–St. Joseph in Missouri—reportedly experienced a 3.2 percent reception rate, followed by neighboring Springfield–Cape Girardeau (1.3 percent) and Helena, Montana (1.1 percent). The lowest reception rate was 0.05 percent, experienced by the dioceses of Fall River, Massachusetts, and Allentown, Pennsylvania. Leaders in terms of aggregate number of adult receptions were Phoenix (5,644); Brownsville, Texas (5,015); and Los Angeles (4,375).

Most and Fewest Adult Receptions in 2005

Rank	Diocese	Recp. [†]	% [‡]	Rank	Diocese	Recp.	%
1	Kansas City (MO)	4,177	3.20%	167	Paterson (NJ)	371	0.09%
2	Springfield (MO)	831	1.29%	168	Newark (NJ)	1,096	0.08%
3	Helena (MT)	617	1.05%	169	El Paso (TX)	527	0.08%
4	Phoenix (AZ)	5,644	1.02%	170	New York (NY)	2,042	0.08%
5	Biloxi (MS)	674	1.00%	171	Metuchen (NJ)	472	0.08%
6	Charleston (SC)	1,541	0.98%	172	Providence (RI)	461	0.07%
7	Jackson (MS)	473	0.93%	173	Rockville Centre (NY)	942	0.07%
8	Lexington (KY)	446	0.93%	174	Bridgeport (CT)	265	0.06%
9	Oklahoma City (OK)	894	0.85%	175	Fall River (MA)	176	0.05%
10	Knoxville (TN)	444	0.82%	176	Allentown (PA)	134	0.05%

* indicates archdiocese

†receptions

‡percent of adherents

Summary Rating of Dioceses

If these three measures imperfectly reflect the vitality of the dioceses, they are a pretty good start. The change in the size of the priesthood and the effort invested in increasing vocations and adult receptions do say something fundamental about the state of the dioceses. Some dioceses excel in one area and not others; the most healthy dioceses excel in all three.

In order to arrive at a composite rating, each diocese was ordered by each of these three measures, and the ranks were added together. The lower the score, the better the rank; the best possible score, therefore, is a three, meaning the diocese ranked first in the nation on all three measures. The higher the score, the worse the relative condition of the diocese (see tables on pages 8–9 and 17–20).

Like most products of statistical analysis, this rating scheme has its defects. It is, at best, an approximation of the reality we seek to represent. We are constrained by available data. By using an ordinal ranking, we lose potentially important differences in the arithmetic distance between dioceses. The difference between the number one-rated diocese and the tenth or 20th is probably not too material. But perhaps the biggest defect is that each of these measures is relative. We can say which diocese had the greatest success at, say, converting vocations into ordinations, but we cannot say whether that result is, objectively, an excellent outcome. “Best” gets defined here by what was accomplished, not by what might have been accomplished.

That is the main defect; the main controversy inherent in a ranking scheme such as this is that it is based on qualitative data. The criticisms are that these statistics do not capture the health of a diocese, that there are qualitative considerations invisible to statistical analysis, and—most disturbing of all—that growth (more priests, more conversions, more parishes) should not be used to gauge diocesan health. There are those who think the Catholic laity needs to become acclimated to the new realities affecting the Church (acclimated, for example, to the supposed inevitability of not seeing a priest every Sunday). For someone of such an accommodationist inclination, this analysis will be deemed anachronistic.

20 Highest-Ranked Dioceses Overall

Overall Rank	Diocese	Rank Change in Priests	Rank Ordinations	Rank Receptions
1	Knoxville (TN)	8	10	10
2	Savannah (GA)	14	2	24
3	Kalamazoo (MI)	24	9	20
4	Alexandria (LA)	30	5	54
5	Pens.-Tall. (FL)	49	16	35
6	Santa Fe (NM)*	19	50	36
7	Birmingham (AL)	20	69	17
8	Wheel.-Charles. (WV)	60	26	22
8	Anchorage (AK)*	30	3	75
10	Biloxi (MS)	55	50	5
10	Lansing (MI)	45	21	44
12	Lubbock (TX)	30	33	49
13	Little Rock (AR)	67	30	16
14	Cheyenne (WY)	73	15	26
15	Colorado Springs (CO)	9	34	76
16	Denver (CO)	28	14	80
16	Venice (FL)	4	29	89
18	Beaumont (TX)	64	4	65
19	Lexington (KY)	89	40	8
19	Charlotte (NC)	13	87	37

*indicates archdiocese

20 Lowest-Ranked Dioceses Overall

Overall Rank	Diocese	Rank Change in Priests	Rank Ordinations	Rank Receptions
157	Burlington (VT)	162	85	143
158	Winona (MN)	142	129	120
159	Dubuque (IA)*	151	119	122
160	Boston (MA)*	156	73	164
161	Crosse (WI)	138	129	130
162	Milwaukee (WI)*	155	95	150
162	Providence (RI)	103	125	172
164	Philadelphia (PA)*	129	111	161
164	Green Bay (WI)	168	71	162
166	Marquette (MI)	169	129	105
167	Camden (NJ)	176	124	107
168	El Paso (TX)	111	129	153
169	Allentown (PA)	132	103	176
170	Madison (WI)	131	129	169
171	Pittsburgh (PA)	140	122	152
172	Albany (NY)	174	89	158
173	Metuchen (NJ)	125	129	171
174	Rochester (NY)	173	115	142
175	Rockville Centre (NY)	148	126	173
176	Hartford (CT)*	165	129	165

* indicates archdiocese

Change in Diocesan Rankings

Even more interesting than the overall ranking of dioceses for 2005 is the change in ranking experienced between 1995 and 2005. Large shifts, either up or down, over that ten-year period say something profound about the condition of the diocese. In order to detect such change, we ranked each diocese for 1995, using the same data, but for the 1985–1995 period. The dioceses with the most dramatic improvements and deteriorations can be seen on the tables on page 10.

Greatest Positive Change in Ranking

Diocese	2005	1995	Change
Anchorage (AK)*	8	147	139
Santa Fe (NM)*	6	144	138
San Jose (CA)	52	174	122
Las Cruces (NM)	22	138	116
Springfield (IL)	33	131	98
Beaumont (TX)	18	111	93
Las Vegas (NV)	35	127	92
Steubenville (OH)	21	108	87
Helena (MT)	64	142	78
Gallup (NM)	50	123	73

*indicates archdiocese

Greatest Negative Change in Ranking

Diocese	2005	1995	Change
Shreveport (LA)	88	11	-77
Metuchen (NJ)	173	80	-93
Dodge City (KS)	134	40	-94
Yakima (WA)	105	10	-95
El Paso (TX)	168	66	-102
Des Moines (IA)	123	19	-104
Houma-Thibodaux (LA)	150	42	-108
Dallas (TX)	131	20	-111
Honolulu (HI)	151	32	-119
Amarillo (TX)	139	5	-134

*indicates archdiocese

What's Wrong with New England?

Several characteristics of the dioceses strongly correlate with their ranking. One is the size of the diocese in terms of the number of adherents. Another is the region in which the diocese is located. Among the 27 dioceses in the Northeast—stretching from Maryland, the cradle of American Catholicism, into New England—the average rating is 136, three times higher than the region with the best average rating, the South (where there are 30 dioceses with an average rating of 49). The other regions, the Rocky Mountain West/Agricultural Midwest (43 dioceses, average ranking of 67), the Pacific Coast (21 dioceses, average ranking of 86), and the Industrial Midwest (55 dioceses, average ranking of 104) span the middle.

So the Church is, by this measure, most healthy in that region that is traditionally the least hospitable to it, and is least healthy in that region where it has the longest history, and in which are found both the greatest concentration of Catholics (as a percent of the population) and the largest number of Catholics

(19,851,345, according to diocesan reports, versus 16,857,896 in the Industrial Midwest, where other surveys suggest a plurality of Catholics live).

Perhaps contrary to the expectation of some, the Northeast is not experiencing a declining Catholic population—no region is (although in the Industrial Midwest, the Catholic population is static, with a 1995–2005 aggregate growth rate of 0.2 percent). Yet New England has the greatest decline in the number of priests over the recent ten-year period, the lowest rate of ordination (as a percentage of the number of priests in the region), and the lowest rate of adult reception (as a percentage of adherents). Is there a cultural explanation for this malaise? One astute observer of Catholic affairs attributes it to a multi-generational pursuit of social legitimacy by the Church hierarchy. Seeking admission to the Brahmin clubhouse has led, in part, to a muting of the Catholic identity, according to this view—“It’s the Kennedy family phenomenon writ large.”

This may indeed be a factor, but the Church in New England may also be a victim of its historical success, measured by the penetration of the population of that region. The Church in New England has not had the same impetus to evangelization, since as it looks around, more or less everyone it sees is already Catholic. Of course, today every Church operates in a predominately secular environment, so that evangelization ought everywhere to be an urgent priority, but some churches are slower than others to recognize this development. Globally, Pope John Paul II was really the first pope to understand his role in evangelizing a secular world.

It is unmistakable that many of the most vibrant dioceses in the country are confronting adversity. This fact has emerged from conversations with dioceses in the South, the Southwest, and the Pacific Coast. This is most especially true in the South, where the Catholic Church has never been the largest denomination. “We are outnumbered, we are young, we are building churches, we are growing, there is an enthusiasm for evangelization among the laity,” reported a priest in the number one–ranked Diocese of Knoxville. Catholic dioceses seem to be most successful when they are self-consciously the *pilgrim* Church on earth.

Of course, it matters how one responds to adversity. There are less-than-healthy dioceses in the South. There is nothing automatic about the success of dioceses there. And it is not merely the fact of growth that creates vitality; the fastest-growing diocese in the country over the past ten-year period, Dallas, also fell 111 places during the same ten-year period, and is now ranked 131 out of 176. In order to be successful in a situation of adversity, the bishop and the diocese have to be willing to wrestle with that adversity.

Size Impedes Success

The size of the diocese, measured by the number of adherents in 2006, is also significantly—and negatively—related to vibrancy. Fifty-one of the dioceses (29 percent) have 100,000 adherents or fewer. These dioceses have an average ranking of 62 (again, on a scale of 1 to 176). Thirty-seven dioceses have more than 500,000 adherents; the average ranking of these dioceses is 115—a ranking twice as high as the average of the smallest dioceses. In other words, there is a clear inverse linear relationship between the size of the diocese and the health of the diocese: As size increases, vitality deteriorates.

This is an old story. Among institutions, bigger is generally not better. The larger the student body in a high school, to take one example, the greater the extent of problems such as drug use, student-on-student violence, and poor academic performance. The quality of institutional performance is often a

function of the will of the top administrator to achieve success, and the assertion of that will becomes ever more difficult as the institution expands. In general, the division of large dioceses into smaller ones is beneficial.

The Abuse Scandal

Any assessment of the health of the dioceses must take into consideration the extent of sexual predation by clergy. Unfortunately, such data are not available. The John Jay College of Criminal Justice (City University of New York) was commissioned by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) to conduct a canvass of dioceses regarding the prevalence of abuse. The college's publicly available report shows the total number of clergy credibly accused of abuse and the number of victims, but not broken down by diocese. The USCCB, of course, has this information but has chosen not to release it, in accordance with the confidentiality promises made to the bishops when the John Jay canvass was conducted. We asked the bishops' conference if they could tell us if any diocese in the country reported no instances of abuse. Tantalizingly, they responded that at least one diocese had no allegations of abuse by clergy.

SNAP (the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests) collects allegations of abuse and catalogs judicial proceedings against clergy, but does not summarize these actions by diocese. Its view is that instances of abuse rising to the level of public visibility have more to do with the civil legal environment than with the prevalence of abuse. Places such as Los Angeles—which is said to have a particularly stern civil-justice system—only appear to have more allegations of abuse because victims are encouraged to come forward, whereas elsewhere victims are discouraged, and therefore remain silent. It is the opinion of SNAP that the percentage of clergy engaging in acts of sexual predation is generally uniform across the country, affecting all dioceses equally. —**R. H. and S. W.**

But Does the Bishop Matter?

The final question, however, is how much influence a bishop has on diocesan ranking. The clear answer: a great deal. After having systematically examined a number of external factors that might account for the vitality of a diocese, the bottom line remains that variations in the ranking of the dioceses cannot be definitively accounted for by region, size, or population change. Neighboring dioceses can and do have substantially different ratings. And most compelling, the ranking of the dioceses do change—sometimes dramatically—from one decade to the next. Absent other explanations, the number-one factor that accounts for this variation is the quality of the diocesan leadership.

Michael Kelly, a quintessentially Catholic journalistic voice silenced in Iraq, once argued, “Leo Tolstoy wrote in *Anna Karenina* one of the great founding untruths of the intellectual age: ‘Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.’ This is exactly, entirely wrong.” We could have the same debate about dioceses. In terms of how successful bishops go about the tasks of nurturing priestly morale and spirituality, of attracting vocations, and of evangelizing the community, each successful diocese is different, responding to the particularities of its environment aggressively and confidently. The bishops' conference could serve a very useful role by chronicling and promulgating the

best practices devised by the dioceses to meet these and other challenges faced by the Church in America—for truly there is no challenge that is not being met somewhere.

On the other hand, perhaps Tolstoy was correct: There are striking commonalities among the most successful stewards of the American dioceses. In seeking to understand why successful dioceses succeed, we spoke with diocesan officials in a sample of top-rated dioceses. This is the picture that emerges from those conversations.

The most striking similarity is that successful bishops attribute their success to the Holy Spirit. The motto of the number one–ranked diocese in the country—Knoxville, Tennessee—is “Hope in the Lord.” This motto captures the prevailing attitude among bishops of the most vibrant dioceses. Successful bishops are joyful. They evince an enthusiasm for the Faith and for the Church. They are unabashedly confident in what the Faith offers and teaches; they are not apologetic for being Catholic. Successful bishops assume personal responsibility for the outcomes that are their priorities. They are *personally* involved in leading men to discern a vocation. (Significant for the future of women religious, the bishop is not institutionally responsible for promoting female vocations.) They are *personally* involved in promoting the morale of their priests. And they are investing themselves in programs of evangelization.

In critiquing a diocese, priests often cited the willingness (or unwillingness) of the bishop and his curia to be open to reassessing the success or failure of pastoral initiatives. This is especially true of vocations. Most priests can cite the influence of one or several priests who initiated a process within them to begin considering a call to the priesthood. In contrast, there are men who declare that they never considered the priesthood because they were never invited to consider it.

Finally, successful bishops are unwilling to acquiesce to decline. They are intent on doing their part to help the Church flourish.

This is not to say that bishops in non-vibrant dioceses do not have these qualities. We certainly do not suggest that any bishop lacks confidence in the Holy Spirit. And there are dioceses of which lay observers say the bishop is doing all the right things, but in which the results are nonetheless disappointing. There are poorly rated dioceses in which lay members contend that the faith community is doing quite well, while the data tell another story.

It may strike one as superficial, but diocesan-sponsored Web sites provide significant insight into the personality of the dioceses. Good signs: easy access to substantive information for persons considering becoming Catholic, returning to the Faith, or considering a vocation. Bad signs: prominently featuring on the home page references to clergy abuse or helpful guides to making an on-line donation.

Dioceses at the top of the ranking consistently make use of their diocesan Web sites to focus on vocations. The Archdiocese of Santa Fe, for example, features letters from the archbishop and the vocations director to those who are interested in the priesthood, materials to answer initial questions, an in-depth introduction to the archdiocese and its history, and profiles of seminarians in the archdiocese that introduce the range of young men who studied for Santa Fe. The archdiocese provides detailed information about how to pursue one’s interest in studying for the priesthood and introduces the seminaries to where its priests are trained—and even provides a selection of prayers for those making an initial discernment.

Conversely, dioceses that ranked at the bottom are making less use of this particular means of outreach. The Diocese of Honolulu, for example, does not make vocation information on the Web site available to the unregistered public, and the Diocese of Houma–Thibodaux has no vocation site at all.

The Diocese of San Jose, California, and others in the top ranking give particular prominence to the sanctity of marriage and family-life issues, among many other topics related to the Church’s teachings on doctrinal matters. The Internet is one of the means at the disposal of a diocese to communicate to the faithful. If St. Paul had had access to 21st-century technology, one can only imagine how it would have spurred his evangelization.

At times, however, the message conveyed on diocesan Web sites can be less positive. The words that are framed and centered on the home page of the Diocese of Pittsburgh read, “To renew what is broken,” followed by a toll-free number to report sexual abuse; while the words across the top of the Web site of the Diocese of Dallas are invitations to report sexual abuse, to contribute online to the Catholic Community Appeal, or to make a donation of \$50 to the cathedral renovation fund. Perhaps the issue is whether a diocese thinks of the Internet as an intranet for the faithful or a window on the Faith for a vast secular audience.

Best in Class

Region	Overall Rank	Size	Overall Rank
Northeast:		Under 100,000:	
Washington, DC*	48	Knoxville (TN)	1
Wilmington (DC)	55	Savannah (GA)	2
Trenton (NJ)	70	Alexandria (LA)	4
Industrial Midwest:		100,000–199,999:	
Kalamazoo (MI)	3	Kalamazoo (MI)	3
Lansing (MI)	10	Little Rock (AR)	13
Lexington (KY)	19	Colorado Springs (CO)	15
South:		200,000–499,999:	
Knoxville (TN)	1	Santa Fe (NM)*	6
Savannah (GA)	2	Lansing (MI)	10
Alexandria (LA)	4	Denver (CO)*	16
Rocky Mountain West/ Agricultural Midwest:		500,000+:	
Santa Fe (NM)*	6	Las Vegas (NV)	35
Lubbock (TX)	12	Brownsville (TX)	36
Cheyenne (WY)	14	St. Paul–Minneapolis (MN)	40
Pacific Coast:			
Anchorage (AK)*	8		
Stockton (CA)	41		
Portland (OR)*	42		

*indicates archdiocese

Moving Forward

That there should be such significant variation in the vitality of the American Church from diocese to diocese sends us, the Church—leaders and laity alike—several rather profound messages. The first is that the health of the Church in America is ours to affect. While a thorough confidence in the Holy Spirit is a *sine qua non*, as unusually successful bishops so evidently recognize, there is also a role for human will in achieving God’s plan for the Church. The Church has been slow to come to terms with changes in the societal environment of the United States in which it functions, most especially the emergence of a dominant culture that is thoroughly secular. Many—too many—in positions of authority have perceived their jobs as simply to manage the decline, having become dispirited over the adversity that this new cultural environment poses. But the Church is slowly, incrementally, coming to perceive the current reality with greater clarity. And the Church is decidedly, as one bishop put it, “moving beyond the post-conciliar silliness,” that dreadful period of confusion following Vatican II when all manner of “innovation” was attempted to make the Church “relevant.”

The best evidence for this optimistic appraisal is the existence of flourishing dioceses led by energetic, enthusiastic, and holy shepherds. The tough question now confronting the American episcopate and the Vatican curia is whether the Church is willing to recognize the characteristics common to successful bishops of the United States, and to systematically elevate priests with an appropriate profile. The history has been uneven: The fact that some dioceses are robust reveals, by comparison, that many are not. But all persons who wish the Church in America well can rejoice in the fact that we are blessed to have extraordinary and effective (if unsung) leaders in numerous places across the country. Truly, there is no challenge the Church faces that cannot be confronted.

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Growth in Dioceses

Growth has little correlation with diocesan vitality. One might well think that a diocese with a growing Catholic population is *de facto* a more exciting, vibrant faith community. But the data do not support such common sense. Some of the fastest-growing dioceses are among the least vibrant, and vice versa. And this makes sense upon reflection: Growth in the Catholic population has little to do with the quality of the diocese; rather, dioceses are captive to larger population dynamics, to which they respond more or less well.

Regionally, the dioceses of the Pacific Coast region are the fastest growing, with an average ten-year growth rate of 29 percent. But the dioceses of the Pacific Coast have an average rating of 86, third best of five regions. The slowest-growing region for Catholics is the Industrial Midwest, which is the second worst in average ratings. —**R. H. and S. W.**

Ten Smallest and Largest Dioceses

Rank	Diocese	2005 Adher.	Rank	Diocese	2005 Adher.
1	Juneau (AK)	5,473	167	Detroit (MI)	1,286,985
2	Fairbanks (AK)	18,000	168	Newark (NJ)	1,319,558
3	Rapid City (SD)	25,729	169	Rockville Centre (NY)	1,431,774
4	Anchorage (AK)*	32,170	170	Philadelphia (PA)*	1,462,388
5	Baker (OR)	35,647	171	Galveston–Houston (TX)	1,495,030
6	Crookston (MN)	35,780	172	Brooklyn (NY)	1,556,575
7	Steubenville (OH)	40,001	173	Chicago (IL)*	2,348,000
8	Shreveport (LA)	40,155	174	New York (NY)	2,542,432
9	Amarillo (TX)	40,293	175	Boston (MA)*	3,974,846
10	Dodge City (KS)	43,682	176	Los Angeles (CA)*	4,448,763

*indicates archdiocese

Ratio of Adherents per Priest: Best and Worst

Rank	Diocese	Adher./Priest	Rank	Diocese	Adher./Priest
1	Steubenville (OH)	741	167	Boston (MA)*	8,912
2	Lincoln (NE)	783	168	Fort Worth (TX)	10,000
3	Fargo (ND)	953	169	Galveston–Houston (TX)	10,170
4	Rapid City (SD)	953	170	Orange (CA)	10,776
5	Mobile (AL)*	963	171	Los Angeles (CA)*	12,675
6	Sioux City (IA)	973	172	El Paso (TX)	13,388
7	Owensboro (KY)	1,027	173	San Bernardino (CA)	13,987
8	Tyler (TX)	1,077	174	Dallas (TX)	14,049
9	Juneau (AK)	1,095	175	Brownsville (TX)	15,993
10	Wheeling–Charles. (WV)	1,103	176	Las Vegas (NV)	19,998

*indicates archdiocese

Fastest- and Slowest-Growing Dioceses, 1995-2005

Rank	Diocese	% Chg in Adher.	Rank	Diocese	% Chg in Adher.
1	Dallas (TX)	199%	167	Duluth (MN)	-16%
2	Salt Lake City (UT)	155%	168	Salina (KS)	-16%
3	Fort Worth (TX)	140%	169	Greensburg (PA)	-18%
4	Boston (MA)*	98%	170	Burlington (VT)	-20%
5	Colorado Springs (CO)	96%	171	Portland (ME)	-21%
6	Lubbock (TX)	94%	172	Wheeling–Charles. (WV)	-22%
7	Orange (CA)	90%	173	Springfield (MA)	-26%
8	Galveston–Houston (TX)	89%	174	Peoria (IL)	-26%
9	San Bernardino (CA)	88%	175	Rapid City (SD)	-35%
10	Austin (TX)	85%	176	Honolulu (HI)	-38%

*indicates archdiocese

Find Your Diocese

Diocese	2005 Rank	1995 Rank	Change in Rank	Rank Chg/Priests	Rank Ords.	Rank Recp.
Albany (NY)	172	145	-27	174	89	158
Alexandria (LA)	4	55	51	30	5	54
Allentown (PA)	69	139	-30	132	103	176
Altoona–Johnstown (PA)	147	159	12	116	129	124
Amarillo (TX)	139	5	-134	175	129	52
Anchorage (AK)*	8	147	139	30	3	75
Arlington (VA)	25	1	-24	17	36	93
Atlanta (GA)*	27	14	-13	3	121	25
Austin (TX)	73	8	-65	5	129	96
Baker (OR)	57	92	35	149	17	43
Baltimore (MD)*	79	95	16	26	113	97
Baton Rouge (LA)	115	59	-56	137	66	103
Beaumont (TX)	18	111	93	64	4	65
Belleville (IL)	61	81	20	109	46	58
Biloxi (MS)	10	31	21	55	50	5
Birmingham (AL)	7	47	40	20	69	17
Bismarck (ND)	56	71	15	84	22	99
Boise (ID)	108	106	-2	166	50	77
Boston (MA)*	160	143	-17	156	73	164
Bridgeport (CT)	132	135	3	58	108	174
Brooklyn (NY)	154	136	-18	150	70	166
Brownsville (TX)	36	68	32	2	129	38
Buffalo (NY)	156	172	16	157	77	155
Burlington (VT)	157	156	-1	162	85	143
Camden (NJ)	167	157	-10	176	124	107
Charleston (SC)	24	3	-21	119	19	6
Charlotte (NC)	19	6	-13	13	87	37
Cheyenne (WY)	14	13	-1	73	15	26
Chicago (IL)*	96	150	54	77	38	149
Cincinnati (OH)*	111	148	37	144	79	78
Cleveland (OH)	153	133	-20	126	127	128
Colorado Springs (CO)	15	69	54	9	34	76
Columbus (OH)	83	29	-54	112	74	57
Corpus Christi (TX)	103	38	-65	7	129	148
Covington (KY)	106	124	18	169	59	62
Crookston (MN)	106	128	22	53	129	108
Dallas (TX)	131	20	-111	70	129	139
Davenport (IA)	117	90	-27	146	97	66
Denver (CO)*	16	48	32	28	14	80
Des Moines (IA)	123	19	-104	163	129	27
Detroit (MI)*	135	103	-32	121	112	118
Dodge City (KS)	134	40	-94	172	129	40
Dubuque (IA)*	159	173	14	151	119	122

Diocese	2005 Rank	1995 Rank	Change in Rank	Rank Chg/Priests	Rank Ords.	Rank Recp.
Duluth (MN)	45	106	61	86	7	98
El Paso (TX)	168	66	-102	111	129	169
Erie (PA)	132	130	-2	88	101	151
Evansville (IN)	95	63	-32	152	30	81
Fairbanks (AK)	113	54	-59	16	129	160
Fall River (MA)	145	91	-54	114	76	175
Fargo (ND)	27	53	26	39	18	92
Ft. Wayne–South Bend (IN)	81	104	23	106	81	55
Fort Worth (TX)	59	74	15	37	59	114
Fresno (CA)	59	124	65	22	106	82
Gallup (NM)	50	123	73	40	129	30
Galveston–Houston (TX)	100	76	-24	21	129	125
Gary (IN)	142	128	-14	136	92	133
Gaylord (MI)	31	87	56	65	23	69
Grand Island (NE)	109	83	-26	118	129	47
Grand Rapids (MI)	129	85	-44	91	99	135
Great Falls–Billings (MT)	71	134	63	115	39	74
Green Bay (WI)	164	105	-59	168	71	162
Greensburg (PA)	141	169	28	104	129	127
Harrisburg (PA)	120	94	-26	127	114	73
Hartford (CT)*	176	165	-11	165	129	165
Helena (MT)	64	142	78	85	129	3
Honolulu (HI)	151	32	-119	171	129	79
Houma–Thibodaux (LA)	150	42	-108	109	129	136
Indianapolis (IN)*	49	61	12	99	66	33
Jackson (MS)	71	26	-45	92	129	7
Jefferson City (MO)	83	34	-49	123	88	32
Joliet (IL)	138	86	-52	117	84	154
Juneau (AK)	116	48	-68	147	129	31
Kalamazoo (MI)	3	55	52	24	9	20
Kansas City (MO)	43	109	66	57	129	1
Kansas City (KS)*	64	78	14	62	96	59
Knoxville (TN)	1	2	1	8	10	10
La Crosse (WI)	161	118	-43	138	129	130
Lafayette (LA)	73	112	39	27	74	129
Lafayette (IN)	69	45	-24	75	129	21
Lake Charles (LA)	29	27	-2	10	129	14
Lansing (MI)	10	9	-1	45	21	44
Laredo (TX)	68	N/A	N/A	30	129	64
Las Cruces (NM)	22	138	116	18	1	123
Las Vegas (NV)	35	127	92	12	8	147
Lexington (KY)	19	35	16	82	40	8
Lincoln (NE)	26	25	-1	15	50	83
Little Rock (AR)	13	61	48	67	30	16
Los Angeles (CA)*	143	115	-28	108	91	163

Diocese	2005 Rank	1995 Rank	Change in Rank	Rank Chg/Priests	Rank Ords.	Rank Recp.
Louisville (KY)*	136	122	-14	153	129	70
Lubbock (TX)	12	16	4	30	33	49
Madison (WI)	170	164	-6	131	129	153
Manchester (NH)	149	161	12	159	71	141
Marquette (MI)	166	100	-66	169	129	105
Memphis (TN)	30	43	13	96	24	34
Metuchen (NJ)	173	80	-93	125	129	171
Miami (FL)*	110	76	-34	90	78	131
Milwaukee (WI)*	162	167	5	155	95	150
Mobile (AL)*	38	4	-34	63	89	23
Monterey (CA)	61	59	-2	49	26	138
Nashville (TN)	46	73	27	52	129	11
New Orleans (LA)*	119	137	18	68	123	121
New Ulm (MN)	148	165	17	139	129	102
New York (NY)*	140	163	23	94	94	170
Newark (NJ)	137	82	-55	143	43	168
Norwich (CT)	116	55	-62	128	47	134
Oakland (CA)	99	55	-44	145	28	101
Ogdensburg (NY)	103	141	38	154	58	72
Oklahoma City (OK)	64	16	-48	122	86	9
Omaha (NE)*	38	74	36	80	32	63
Orange (CA)	81	45	-36	74	11	157
Orlando (FL)	94	23	-71	43	129	85
Owensboro (KY)	73	11	-62	86	129	15
Palm Beach (FL)	91	24	-67	36	100	113
Paterson (NJ)	146	120	-26	135	65	167
Pensacola–Tallahassee (FL)	5	64	59	49	16	35
Peoria (IL)	34	21	-13	76	44	46
Philadelphia (PA)*	164	158	-6	129	111	161
Phoenix (AZ)	50	41	-9	93	102	4
Pittsburgh (PA)	171	161	-10	140	122	152
Portland (ME)	151	88	-63	167	106	106
Portland (OR)	42	52	10	56	37	91
Providence (RI)	162	171	9	103	125	172
Pueblo (CO)	53	113	60	124	40	39
Raleigh (NC)	32	37	5	5	129	28
Rapid City (SD)	67	51	-16	41	129	51
Reno (NV)	85	152	67	11	129	104
Richmond (VA)	92	96	4	72	117	61
Rochester (NY)	174	160	-14	173	115	142
Rockford (IL)	53	124	71	23	35	145
Rockville Centre (NY)	175	175	0	148	126	173
Sacramento (CA)	88	50	-38	46	116	84
Saginaw (MI)	155	84	-71	164	129	94
Salina (KS)	77	28	-49	133	50	50

Diocese	2005 Rank	1995 Rank	Change in Rank	Rank Chg/Priests	Rank Ords.	Rank Recp.
Salt Lake City (UT)	85	15	-70	47	129	68
San Angelo (TX)	130	89	-41	157	129	42
San Antonio (TX)	121	109	-12	79	110	126
San Bernardino (CA)	128	69	-59	81	104	137
San Diego (CA)	93	139	46	82	25	146
San Francisco (CA)*	124	116	-8	97	83	140
San Jose (CA)	52	174	122	29	13	159
Santa Fe (NM)*	6	144	138	19	50	36
Santa Rosa (CA)	102	145	43	30	129	119
Savannah (GA)	2	67	65	14	2	24
Scranton (PA)	112	153	41	95	98	110
Seattle (WA)*	90	98	8	42	117	88
Shreveport (LA)	88	11	-77	61	129	56
Sioux City (IA)	126	119	-7	141	109	71
Sioux Falls (SD)	57	92	35	51	49	109
Spokane (WA)	47	114	67	69	57	67
Springfield (MO)	85	36	-49	113	129	2
Springfield (IL)	33	131	98	98	6	60
Springfield (MA)	124	155	31	161	42	117
St. Augustine (FL)	63	43	-20	83	79	53
St. Cloud (MN)	144	101	-43	160	92	112
St. Louis (MO)*	97	102	5	48	128	90
St. Paul–Minneapolis (MN)*	40	98	58	54	12	111
St. Petersburg (FL)	78	39	-39	78	61	95
Steubenville (OH)	21	108	87	102	20	18
Stockton (CA)	41	18	-23	30	62	86
Superior (WI)	76	97	21	133	50	48
Syracuse (NY)	113	167	54	107	82	116
Toledo (OH)	97	154	57	101	120	45
Trenton (NJ)	70	121	51	38	56	132
Tucson (AZ)	100	169	69	59	129	87
Tulsa (OK)	37	33	-4	100	62	12
Tyler (TX)	23	7	-16	1	129	13
Venice (FL)	16	79	63	4	29	89
Victoria (TX)	122	131	9	44	129	144
Washington (DC)*	48	71	23	105	48	41
Wheeling–Charleston (WV)	8	29	21	60	26	22
Wichita (KS)	44	22	-22	66	104	19
Wilmington (DE)	55	65	10	25	64	115
Winona (MN)	158	117	-41	142	129	120
Worcester (MA)	126	148	22	120	45	156
Yakima (WA)	105	10	-95	130	129	29
Youngstown (OH)	80	150	70	71	68	100

What Does the Study Tell Us? Seven Prominent Catholics Respond

Russell Shaw

If they gave a prize for most illuminating comment of the year by an American Catholic, a remark by a 25-year-old associate director of a Bronx senior center would have been a serious contender in 2006. After viewing the movie version of *The Da Vinci Code*, this canny young observer of religious affairs, a product of six years of religious education who goes to Mass twice a month, told the *New York Times*: “The Catholic Church has hidden a lot of things—proof about the actual life of Jesus, about who wrote the Bible. All these people—the famous Luke, Mark, and John—how did they know so much about Jesus’ life? If there was a Bible, who created it and how many times has it been changed?”

What makes these musings noteworthy is that here, at its abysmal worst, is the representative voice of a large and quite possibly growing school of thought in contemporary American Catholicism. Hearing it, you hear that discouraging mix of unselfconscious ignorance and complacent readiness to set aside the Christian Tradition at the drop of Dan Brown’s hat that seems endemic in some sectors of the Catholic community.

It’s relevant, too, to this magazine’s special report on American dioceses. Consider: Of the three criteria used in ranking sees, two (priestly morale and priestly vocations) concern clerics, while the third (“effective evangelization”) refers to newcomers to the Church. None reflects the situation of the great majority of Catholics—the longtime lay faithful. Casual readiness to disbelieve, as manifested by the moviegoer quoted above, is typical of an alienated, marginalized, and apparently large segment of this mass. But the laity doesn’t make it into the special report.

Pardon the outburst. I’m sure those responsible for the crisis study don’t really think lay people are beside the point. To a great extent, what’s missing from their analysis isn’t even their fault. One can only analyze information that’s available, and a lot of important information about the Catholic Church in America either isn’t available or, by design, is available to only a few.

The report notes, for instance, that although every diocese knows how many sex-abuse cases it’s handled, that information hasn’t been shared with the Catholic people even at this late date. Many other facts—about diocesan and parish finances and much else—also are closely guarded secrets. The upshot is that there’s much Catholics don’t and can’t know about their Church. To that extent, the young man from the Bronx got it right.

Even as it stands, of course, the crisis report sheds helpful light on what makes a local church succeed or fail. The most important lesson may be the role played by size. Quite simply, the gigantism afflicting many American dioceses appears to be a major obstacle to pastoral success. More on that below.

Still, the study’s limitations are real. Although you’d hardly know it from this exercise in number-crunching, the Catholic Church in the United States is more than bishops, priests, and recent converts. The *Da Vinci Code* fan quoted above is also part of it, along with 70 million or so other lay people. Although many things about a diocese’s condition can be determined without reference to its lay faithful, in the end no comprehensive judgment is possible that leaves them out of account.

Suppose someone were to try to measure what's not covered in this report—what would he look at? Research in a number of areas of Catholic life not discussed here is needed to determine whether there are significant variations from diocese to diocese and also among groups within particular dioceses. Knowing that, we might be able to do something about the problems. Here are a few thoughts on areas that should be examined that way.

Mass attendance and sacramental participation would be a central part of it. The rate of Sunday (or Sunday-plus-Saturday-evening) Mass attendance in the United States has declined sharply in the past 40 years. The numbers vary depending on how they're collected, but in general it is fair to say that, nationwide, the rate of attendance is currently around 30 percent. On any given weekend, 70 percent of American Catholics don't go to Mass. That's good compared with some other places (Western Europe and Canada come to mind), but it's pretty bad compared with four decades ago, when the percentages were reversed—70 percent at Sunday Mass, 30 percent doing something else. Are some dioceses doing significantly better or significantly worse than the norm?

At this point, incidentally, Catholic happy-talk used to require saying that there's far more to being a good Catholic than going to church. Battling for social justice and peace, it usually was said, is vastly more important. But you don't hear that bit of wisdom so often any more, since even among the happy-talkers it seems to have sunk in that something is seriously wrong when only three Catholics out of ten attend Mass each week—especially when it's perfectly clear that the other seven aren't skipping Mass in order to fight for peace and justice.

Mass attendance isn't the only problem. The sacrament of reconciliation—"going to confession," it used to be called—pretty well disappeared in many parishes years ago. Catholic marriage may now be headed the same way. In 1986 there were 348,300 Catholic marriages in the United States; in 1996 there were 294,144. The figure in the Catholic Directory for 2006 is an anemic 212,456. That's a 20-year drop of nearly 136,000 couples.

How about matters of belief and practice? For years polls have showed that huge numbers of American Catholics reject key elements of Catholic faith and morality. A random sample in 2003, for instance, found 86 percent of the Catholics agreeing that "if you believe in God, it doesn't really matter what religion you belong to." As for morality, only 4 percent of Catholic married couples of childbearing age use a natural family planning method approved by the Church; the rest apparently couldn't care less about *Humanae Vitae* and the theology of the body.

To be sure, the polls also routinely demonstrate that Catholics who attend Sunday Mass are much more likely to stand with the Church than Catholics who don't. Unfortunately, whatever consolation that affords is dimmed by the fall in the rate of attendance—to say nothing of the fact that even many regular Mass-goers part company with the Church on some issues. Again, the obvious question all this raises is: Are there dioceses where the situation is either much better or much worse?

Another factor to crank into the equation when rating dioceses concerns the explosion of the Hispanic population in the United States over the past 40 years. During this time, Catholics increased from 46.2 million to 69.1 million. That's a rise of nearly 23 million—half again as many Catholics now as there were four decades ago. But the astonishing fact is that Hispanics accounted for between 70 percent and 90 percent of the increase (the estimates vary). Spanish-speakers in the United States now number about 42 million, and most are still Catholics. In the Catholic population as a whole, they make up 36 percent

(some would say more), with the figure rising fast. Among younger Catholics, it's already 44 percent. Hispanics are well on the way to becoming a majority in U.S. Catholicism.

Rating the performance of dioceses obviously must involve noting successes and failures in ministering to the Spanish-speaking, among whom losses to the Church are known to be disturbingly large. The challenge of ministry to this group can be seen in the fact that 93 percent of the Catholic priests in this country are white non-Hispanics, while only 3 percent are Hispanics.

Relevant questions about Hispanic ministry would include: How many of the Spanish-speaking get married in the Church? How many have their children baptized as Catholics and raise them as such? What is *their* Mass attendance rate? How many drift away from the Church into Pentecostalism or something else? Are there any diocesan success stories in raising the disappointingly low figures on Hispanic priestly and religious vocations? Is there a correlation between the answers to questions like these and diocesan size?

As the crisis study notes, many American dioceses are just too big to be pastorally effective units. While there probably are several explanations for the inverse relationship of effectiveness to size, one especially seems to stand out: If a bishop is crucial to the life of his diocese, as the study contends, it stands to reason that diocesan vitality will be impaired in a see of such geographical and numerical magnitude that the ordinary becomes an isolated figure in a remote chancery office, cut off from direct pastoral contact with his flock.

The figures assembled here illustrate the problem. Total Catholic population of the 20 highest-rated dioceses is 2,447,408 (figures as of January 1, 2006). That's an average of a modest 122,370 per diocese, with the actual sizes ranging from Denver's 384,611 down to Anchorage's 32,170. By contrast, the 20 lowest-rated sees have a combined Catholic population of 11,615,715—an average of 580,786 faithful per diocese. The list includes giants like Boston (1,845,846 Catholics), Philadelphia (1,462,388), and Rockville Centre in New York (1,431,774).

Why are some dioceses so big? Demographics—immigration, birth rates, and population shifts—created them, but the familiar patterns of clerical careers operate to keep them as they are. These ecclesiastical baronies are prizes—burdensome ones, of course—capping lives spent in upper-level service to the Church. Not only their incumbents but lower-ranking clerics with reasonable prospects of someday being rewarded in this manner have an incentive to support the status quo. The fact that regular, living contact with their people may be a near-impossibility for the bishops of such places seems not to matter so much.

That underlines something Pope Benedict XVI said recently. Speaking late last year to Swiss bishops making their *ad limina* visits, he called it “a fundamental task of pastoral care to teach people how to pray.” Many of our contemporaries, the pope maintained, “seek meditation elsewhere because they think that they will not be able to find a spiritual dimension in Christianity. We must show them once again not only that this spiritual dimension exists but that it is the source of all things.” More than anything else, perhaps, neglecting the fundamental spiritual dimension of the Faith may explain the problematical situation of some American dioceses today.

How do you measure grace? If there's ever another crisis study of dioceses, the researchers needn't worry—you can't. But it's no great trick to measure the problems that sprout and multiply where the

spiritual soil is thin. Note that these are problems for Catholic lay people, including those who admire *The Da Vinci Code*, at least as much as they are for their bishops and priests.

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Deal W. Hudson

“Bishops do not like to be scrutinized by the laity” was the reaction of a friend of mine to the news of this survey. He predicted that the bishops would be irritated, to say the least, at the presumption of a Catholic magazine, owned and operated by lay faithful, to publish ratings of Catholic dioceses. That is certainly not the spirit in which Mr. Wagner and Father Hunter-Hall have presented their findings, the first of which is an appreciation of those bishops who are “truly unsung heroes of the Church.”

I hope Church leaders will find these rankings interesting and helpful. For example, with apologies to Bishop Kurtz, I had no idea the Diocese of Knoxville was so vibrant, or the Diocese of Savannah, either. This survey is valuable only if it gives credit to some “unsung heroes” and expands our awareness of where the Church has grown stronger over the past decade.

The authors offer a statistical baseline for evaluating the strength of dioceses, without the imposition of an alien theological agenda. Who can argue with the importance of clergy growth, vocations, baptisms, and conversions? Yes, there are many other indicators, such as the number of students entering seminary, but that information is difficult to obtain from a diocese.

Numbers never tell the whole story: Renewal may well be underway in a diocese, the fruits of which are not yet seen in the statistics present here. The survey is, no doubt, simply a snapshot, but a valuable one. What we see in the various rankings is attributable to many factors, not just to bishops. Bishops can be appointed to places where the deterioration is so serious that it will take a lifetime to rebuild. And, as was pointed out to me by an insurance man, this particular snapshot may have caught a diocese in its growth years and is not necessarily predicative of the years to come. Can the dioceses of Knoxville or Savannah sustain their growth patterns, or does this survey come in at the end of an upward trend line—and vice versa for some of the dioceses lower in the ranking? That is why it is important for crisis to repeat this survey on a regular basis, perhaps adding other criteria made available through the cooperation of the 176 dioceses.

In terms of some of the success stories here, it comes as no surprise to me that the Archdiocese of Chicago is high on the list of vocations. In mid-2006 I wrote a story on vocations for my e-report, “The Window,” and reported that Chicago’s Web site for vocations was both welcoming and comprehensive. It’s also a tribute to Francis Cardinal George’s spiritual leadership that such growth is occurring in one of the “old” Catholic cities of the Midwest. As the survey suggests, it’s much harder to generate new growth and vitality in the places where Catholics first settled in the United States. This makes Cardinal George’s accomplishment in Chicago even more significant.

I’m particularly taken by the authors’ conclusion about the characteristics of bishops whose dioceses show growth: belief in the work of the Holy Spirit, joy, personal responsibility, and the engagement of the world through media like the Internet. Joy and a reliance on the Holy Spirit go together, of course. It has been my experience that when a bishop exudes these qualities, good things happen. When people

meet bishops like this, they want to be more a part of their church, and they want to help their bishop. It's just the common sense of leadership. Who wants to serve a spiritual leader who makes their burdens heavier?

Mr. Wagner and Father Hunter-Hall might have called this the “evangelical” dimension of a bishop—but Catholics seem to be afraid of that word. Such evangelical bishops, as the authors say so well, are “unwilling to acquiesce to decline.” The Catholic world in this country is divided in many ways, but one of those divides is between those who are confident in and committed to Church growth, and those who see it only in terms of the hand-off between successive generations of Catholics, hoping against hope that their children and grandchildren remain in the Church.

What this latter group needs to realize is that a vital, joyful Church is the best bet for successfully sharing the Faith with the next generation. There is much more to being a Catholic than grimly carrying out our spiritual obligations. The added dimension is precisely the joy that these shepherds are sharing with their sheep.

Perhaps the most provocative observation made in this survey is that the Catholic Church counts as Catholic anyone who claims to be Catholic, regardless of whether he or she ever darkens the door of a parish. The authors point out how different this way of counting adherents is from Protestants', especially evangelicals.

What would happen if Catholic priests and bishops began to count only religiously active Catholics as adherents? The numbers, naturally, would plummet. Catholics in the United States might not be any larger in number than, say, Southern Baptists. What would be the criteria used to distinguish a Catholic from a non-Catholic in this measure? If the criterion is Mass attendance, would it be weekly, the obligatory requirement? Would regular confession be thrown in?

I am not, by inclination, a “numbers guy.” But I have realized over the years that numbers tell an important part of the story about the past and present. Numbers also provide an opportunity to set practical goals for the future. Certainly the one number that did not come under the purview of this survey, but is central to the strength of the Church, is the percentage of Catholics who attend Mass. Mr. Wagner and Father Hunter-Hall are right, I think, to intimate that the time has come to reconsider whether Catholics who never attend Mass can be counted as Catholic at all.

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Most Reverend Joseph E. Kurtz, D.D.

Pope Benedict XVI, then—Cardinal Ratzinger, in a homily delivered in 1986 at the 400th celebration of Bamberg Seminary, spoke of “having the courage to be near the fire” and “proclaiming joy.” This twin call for courage and joy permeates the crisis report and, I believe, captures the spirit of the Diocese of Knoxville. Three factors, though difficult to determine their precise interrelation, clearly affect one another: unity of the bishop and priests, attraction of priestly vocations, and active participation of the faithful.

Central is the unity of the presbyterate with the bishop. Such unity, always seen more clearly by those coming from the outside, is nonetheless very evident to me. A good bishop needs to be both a brother and father to his priests. We have an atmosphere in Knoxville that encourages both. It is reciprocal: A bishop needs love, courage, and trust in God; priests need the good faith and fidelity to receive a bishop well. I have completed seven years here and can testify to the lively and vibrant faith. While we have grown greatly since our founding 18 years ago, there remains the small-town feel. I do believe that the report captures the key role of the bishop taking personal initiative. I must admit that such day-to-day direct contact with priests and seminarians is extraordinarily beneficial. This would not be possible if our size were ten or 20 times what we are.

What contributes is a cycle of well-attended gatherings to deepen the priestly commitment: an October three-day retreat, a January overnight, a June three-day convocation (shared with Nashville), bimonthly general meetings, small-group gatherings with the bishop, and a number of support groups. "Well-attended" does not mean perfectly attended, and so I always encourage even more participation; however, I will admit that we have a fine track record. Likewise, we are still of a size that allows firsthand contact between bishop and priests. I find it unique that we do not have a personnel committee but rather direct contact between bishop and priest in dealing with pastoral assignments.

Our response to the Lord's call to priestly vocations takes center stage. It has been said of vocations that young people will give their lives for an exclamation point, but they will not give them for a question mark. Two factors here are the active relationship of the bishop and key priests with the seminarians and potential candidates, and the general positive attitude within the diocese. Our vocation director and vocation promoter are both pastors and extremely active in promoting vocations, as are many of our parish priests. A gathering at the end of the summer at a parish includes priests, chancery staff, seminarians, and their families, as well as candidates invited by priests. After Christmas, seminarians, priests, and candidates gather at my residence. I visit each seminarian and his seminary annually.

Sharing the stage with vocation promotion is a pro-active evangelization that takes pride in our Catholic Faith. Active involvement of the faithful throughout the diocese has resulted in tremendous participation in diocesan activities: a full Chrism Mass annually and an overwhelming response to our recent Capital Stewardship Campaign, with more than 50 percent of families giving a pledge. I anticipate the same results from our evangelization outreach, *Why Catholic?*, offered by Renew International, which will begin this fall in our parishes and be the source of adult faith formation.

Thank you for highlighting the vibrancy of the Catholic Church in East Tennessee. While we Catholics remain a minority, the Catholic Faith is respected and grows in esteem and numbers each year. In union with our Holy Father, we pray for the grace to continue in a courageous and joyful path.

Most Reverend Joseph E. Kurtz, D.D., is bishop of the Diocese of Knoxville.

David R. Carlin

The study and the tables it produced remind me of a remark attributed to Abraham Lincoln: "This is the kind of thing you will like if you like this kind of thing." It so happens that I am one of those who enjoy examining tables full of numbers, so I liked the study. But do these tables tell us anything about which

bishops are good and which not so good? I'm afraid not. The study is a pleasant thing, but it proves nothing.

Take, for example, the number of converts to Catholicism. On the basis of mere common sense, one could have predicted before the study that these converts would be most common in regions of the country in which (a) the average level of religiosity is high; (b) the pool of potential converts (i.e., non-Catholics) is large; (c) these non-Catholics are overwhelmingly Christian and not Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, atheistic, etc.; and (d) these non-Catholic Christians come from a religious tradition in which it is common for people to switch from one denomination to another. In short, one could have predicted that the highest rates of converts would come from the Protestant South. And for converse reasons, one could have predicted that the lowest rates of conversion would come from the Catholic Northeast—where the pool of non-Catholics is relatively small, a notable portion of this non-Catholic population is made up of non-Protestants (i.e., Jews and secularists), and the average level of religiosity is low.

One of the few merits of the study is that it corroborates the above hypothesis. Everything, it turns out, is pretty much explained by demography. Bishops, for all we can tell, have little or nothing to do with it.

Or take the question of the increase or decrease in the number of active diocesan priests. One of the reasons an older priest may keep working beyond the retirement age is that he has been inspired to do so by his bishop, but there are many other possible reasons. Perhaps he is a man of education and high culture who enjoys working with the well-educated men and women of his upscale parish; or perhaps he is a saintly man who is gratified to be able to work with the down-and-out people found in his impoverished inner-city parish; or perhaps he keeps working for a hundred other reasons. Likewise, if a priest is eager to retire, this may be for any of a hundred reasons having nothing to do with his bishop. And if it has to do with his bishop, this may be a bishop he had unhappy dealings with ten or 20 years ago, not his current bishop.

Finally, there is the issue of the number of diocesan ordinations. In most dioceses this number is typically so small that any slight increase or decrease in numbers will produce a tremendous percentage increase or decrease. It is like a small town in which murder almost never occurs; and then one year a triple homicide takes place, as a result of which the murder rate in this town skyrockets, a percentage increase far greater than the percentage increase in great murder centers like Houston, Miami, Baltimore, and Detroit.

If you want to do a comparative study, you must compare apples with apples. If, for example, you want to measure the effectiveness of the death penalty in the United States, you would have to compare two states that are very similar to one another in almost every respect, except that State A has capital punishment and State B does not. Moreover, it is doubtful that you can find two states, one with and one without the death penalty, that are sufficiently similar to one another to allow you to make an apples-to-apples comparison.

Likewise it is doubtful that you can find two dioceses that are sufficiently similar to one another for you to conclude that any differences you discover are due to the qualities of their respective bishops. And it is more than merely probable—it is absolutely certain—that the dissimilarities in the 176 Catholic dioceses in the United States are so great that it is impossible to conclude that the differential achievements of these dioceses must be the result of the goodness or badness of their bishops.

I don't want to suggest that evaluating bishops is not worth doing. Far from it. The bishop is at the top of the organizational pyramid in any diocese, and, as President Truman once famously said, "The buck stops here." One of the reasons we have a single person at the top of most of our organizational pyramids—whether in churches, governments, corporations, sports teams, etc.—is so that we will know where to place the blame when things go wrong. When somebody is appointed to the top post, an implicit warning goes with the appointment: "If things go wrong, we will blame you. Even if it is not your fault, we'll blame you. Henceforth you will be the blame-taker-in-chief." Think of all the baseball managers who have been fired because their team had a losing season, even when it was not the manager's fault. The assignment of blame to the man at the top will often not be just. Nonetheless it is socially expedient, for it makes him try harder. Knowing that he will be blamed for anything and everything that goes wrong, he is more likely to do all he can to make sure that very little *does* go wrong. And this goes for bishops just as surely as it does for baseball managers.

It is regrettable, it seems to me, that there is no valid instrument that can be used by laypersons to evaluate Catholic bishops. It is regrettable for the laity and for the bishops, too, who could profit, as politicians do, from a certain amount of critical feedback from their constituents. The study at hand is a valiant—but, alas, unsuccessful—attempt to create such an instrument.

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Mary Jo Anderson

The bishop *does* matter. More importantly, these bishops matter very specifically to the time and place of their calling. The 2001 Synod of Bishops in Rome inquired, "Therefore, into what kind of world are the Bishops sent forth to proclaim the Gospel?"

As the article indicates, there is one constant for all American bishops: The "now dominant (and hostile) secular culture" erodes the shared Christian cultural markers that earlier bishops counted upon as part of the American heritage. The fastest-growing self-identified cultural group is adult atheists or agnostics. A significant number of them insist that Christianity infringes on their "rights." Often the rights they claim are dehumanizing: cloning, same-sex unions, euthanasia, and abortion. No day passes without news of the conflict between faith and public policy. This is the kind of world an American bishop must confront—impossible when the health of his own diocese is on life-support.

In reverse order of the stated criteria for a healthy diocese, the task of U.S. bishops is in large measure to *re-evangelize* their flocks and inoculate them against the toxic culture. The American Religious Identification Survey of 2001 reported that only 59 percent of self-identified Catholics attend Mass regularly. Growth will come first from reclaiming our own who have left the Church. This internal evangelization begins with a sincere outreach to those who struggle with issues of abortion, divorce, homosexuality, etc. Evangelization means proper catechesis is urgent: Few understand *why* the Church defends life and natural marriage beyond a mere authoritative edict.

Equally as crucial for re-evangelization is care for the liturgy. How many have left the Church in disgust over clown Masses and other abuses? Liturgy is the language of the Church. When that language becomes

unintelligible, when it has no clear message, when it is a personal platform for this or that priest's "vision of the church that is being born," it is no longer Christ's message, but a banal, passing trend.

The bishop has the charism of governing. Strong governance in the matter of proper liturgical practice is imperative for the health of a diocese. Where reverent Masses, Eucharistic adoration, and devotions like the Stations of the Cross and the rosary are offered, grace is abundant and the vitality of the diocese increases. This is the grace Catholics desperately need; they gain strength against secular influences and wisdom that overflows into their families, neighborhoods, and work. The bishop's flock becomes salt and light to the surrounding community. When Catholics are known for their joyful, confident hope in God, their lives evangelize those whom they encounter.

Bishops see the signs of the times: Despite abundant freedoms and prosperity, many Americans report suffering from depression, alienation, and confusion. People are searching for meaning that secularism cannot provide. Secularism is a tool for evangelization, for as the pressures of secular culture increase, more people will be open to the gospel message of hope.

This is especially true as family life comes under greater assault. The Church must be the bastion of healthy family life. The bishop who fosters authentic Catholic family life cannot fail to build a healthy diocese. Family-friendly programs and Catholic schools are a major contribution to a healthy diocese. Furthermore, it is within solid Catholic family life that vocations are born.

Vocations depend most significantly on the bishop as shepherd. My own diocese of Orlando serves as an example. The vocations program was lackluster when Bishop Thomas Wenski was installed as the ordinary two years ago. "Our bishop *is* the vocations director," notes Rev. Miguel Gonzales, the director of vocations for the diocese. "He changed [the director of vocations] position to a full-time position, he has potential candidates to his home where he shares his own vocation story, and has held a synod for vocations. I have to say that vocations is a top priority for Bishop Wenski." Three priests will be ordained this year, and two more are set to be ordained in 2008. Currently 18 men are in formation for the Diocese of Orlando. Where evangelization and vocations flourish, the morale of the presbyterate naturally follows.

As a southerner, I am intrigued by the finding that the Church is healthier in the anti-Catholic South than in the heavily Catholic Northeast. (My student years at St. Richard's in Jackson, Mississippi, meant enduring the taunts of "mackerel snapper" in the wider neighborhood.) A Barna Group survey reports, "The South is not only the nation's most populous region but also that which has traditionally been the bastion of evangelical Protestant faith."

I am persuaded that the Church flourishes in the South today by the observation of Catholic southern writer Flannery O'Connor, who stated, "The notion of perfectibility of man came about at the time of the Enlightenment . . . This is what the South has traditionally opposed . . . The South, in other words, still believes that man has fallen and that he is perfectible by God's grace, not by his own unaided efforts." That is to say, the modern South inherits the truth about man: He is fallen and in need of God. It is no accident that as the secularized culture encroaches on public life, southern Evangelicals and others are suddenly welcoming the Catholic Church, the one unified voice against Enlightenment dehumanization.

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Amy Welborn

The study summarized here in the pages of *Crisis* is a valuable step forward in assessing the health of the Church in the United States, and one that is refreshingly free of polemic and presuppositions about what *must* define a “healthy” diocese. The study also makes an excellent attempt to factor out demographic shifts from the equation, which is important. I’ve lived and participated in Catholic life in the Northeast, many areas of the South, and the upper Midwest. Those who constantly mourn parish and school closings never seem to grasp that when an area loses a fourth of its population over a decade or two, parishes are going to close, as are schools.

I do have some nitpicks, however.

The ordination question is a crucial one, and this study begins to address it. However, one point is not examined as closely as it could be: the composition of ordination classes. How many ordinands actually hail from the diocese for which they are being ordained? In May 2006, a Chicago pastor wrote a forthright note in his parish bulletin about the ordinations in his archdiocese, noting that none of the ordinands was a native of Chicago, none had had his faith formed in a parish in the archdiocese, and all but one were born outside the United States.

As the study notes, the presence of non-native priests has sustained the Church in the United States and probably will continue to do so. They function as a marvelous witness to what catholicity really means. But there are questions raised by the declining proportion of priests native to their dioceses or even this country, and they are not questions that hint of xenophobia or prejudice. They are questions, as the Chicago pastor said, of “spiritual leukemia”—why is it that settled generations of American Catholics produce so few vocations to the religious life? Can one really assess the health of a diocese by ordinations if large numbers of the ordinands didn’t live in that diocese until they considered seminary?

Secondly, the “adherents” measure seems reasonable on the surface, but I wonder if it comes with qualifications as well. Many parishes and dioceses put returning Catholics through RCIA. In the RCIA programs in which I have been involved, invariably a third to one-half of the participants have been returning Catholics. One could argue that a person baptized Catholic and finally returning to practice is just as much the “fruit” of evangelization as a Methodist coming into full communion, but that is questionable.

In addition, marriage issues play a large role in bringing people to RCIA. Once again, we’re not saying that only the individual who has no Catholic background and shows up at the door drawn by the Faith, apart from any other personal or cultural factors, should be “counted”—that’s not the way life is. But because of those normal personal and social factors that work in many people’s decision to approach the Catholic Church for full communion, I’m not sure how reliable a picture of a diocese’s evangelization efforts the number of new believers actually is, ironically.

Finally, a comment on the general issue of diocesan health and regionalism. The study quite rightly pulls the statistics from the Northeast and asks, “What’s wrong here?” The answers offered by the study suggest accommodationism and a sense of success in which the Church is majority or near-majority in most areas. The elephant in the room that the study doesn’t mention is a tricky one: ethnicity, or, more specifically, the links between ethnic identity and Catholicism. This link is a classic double-edged sword,

one of many we encounter historically in Catholicism. So often what appears to be our strength in one stage plants the seeds for future problems.

The historical strength of Catholicism in the Northeast has been intimately tied to ethnic groups with a Catholic identity: primarily French-Canadians, Irish, Italians, and Portuguese. What seems almost invariably to happen in these communities is that religion evolves into just one more aspect of ethnic identity, something of which members are proud and protective, but the meaning of which tends to diminish over time as Catholic identity becomes just that—identity—not faith.

This is a point to remember in terms of our past, and also—as we look to the impact that many of us hope the presence of Hispanic Catholics will have on the Church in the United States—in terms of our future, as well.

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George Sim Johnston

The challenge for the new generation of bishops is what to do with diocesan middle management. There are dedicated, talented Catholics who work in CCD, RCIA, and Pre-Cana programs; but there are also legions of functionaries who somehow got on the payroll and want to turn the Church into yet another Protestant denomination. In many places, a person who wishes to become Catholic will discover that the local RCIA program does not teach Catholic doctrine; rather, it subjects the unfortunate catechumen to endless hours of non-directional group psychotherapy. You learn about the feelings of everyone in the room, but not much about the Real Presence. And it's never easy to correct these aberrations. Recently, the bishop of a neighboring diocese, after biding his time, fired his entire catechetical office, and for his pains was treated like Torquemada in the pages of the *New York Times*.

Those pink slips are encouraging, however, and may be an early sign of spring. In certain dioceses there ought to be a blizzard of them. But the laity need not wait for this to happen. Indeed, it's not healthy to get fixated on the internal workings of the chancery. We have our own jobs to do, and we don't need permission from the local ordinary to do them. Especially in a large diocese, the health of the Church is going to depend on the initiative of the laity, regardless of the strengths and weaknesses of the bishop. I get impatient with conservative Catholics who complain about the deficiencies of episcopal leadership and use the sometimes glaring lassitude of the clergy as an excuse not to follow St. Paul's injunction to be importunate in season and out of season. We need to purge the last vestiges of clericalism, which oddly linger on both the Catholic right and left. The Church is not simply an institution run by the clergy; it is an evangelical movement that should involve everyone.

The good news right now is the apostolate going on at the grass roots, much of it inspired by the teachings of John Paul II. In most places, there is a small but critical mass of young Catholics who have responded to the late pope's marching orders. In addition, Pope Benedict XVI, in his brilliant writings, has provided these new evangelizers with a compelling story to tell—an up-to-date Christian humanism that ought to resonate with anyone who has ears to hear. Those dioceses where the bishop and his staff

are eager to promote and harness these energies are the ones that are going to thrive in the coming decades.

The other good news is the increasing number of bishops who champion a vibrant orthodoxy. We are at a tipping point in this regard. Although there are still bishops whose core convictions are political rather than apostolic, they are a minority. The statements on contraception and homosexuality that recently issued from the U.S. bishops' conference meeting in Baltimore would not have happened a decade ago.

The Church itself needs re-evangelizing, and it remains to be seen how all those minimalist Catholics will respond to the efforts of even the most fervent bishops to win them back. Most Catholics I know do not attend Mass on Sunday. They regard the sacraments mainly as social occasions and teach their children little about a faith that they themselves hardly practice. In 1943, two French priests published a small book asking whether France, the "eldest daughter" of the Church, had not reverted to being a mission territory. The archbishop of Paris read the book and it kept him up all night. Two generations later, one might ask the same question on this side of the Atlantic. There is little to be complacent about.

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