

focus

VOL. 48, NO. 1, FEBRUARY 2020



MICHIGAN
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

2020 Census Counting Our Communities

“The actual enumeration shall be made...within every subsequent term of ten years, in such manner as they shall by law direct.”—U.S. Constitution, Article I, Section 2

Every decade, the people of the United States are counted, as required by the U.S. Constitution. The process is called the census. Throughout history, census counts have served as records for a variety of communities, detailing the characteristics and numbers of a group of people at that point in time. In fact, as discussed in the Bible, the Holy Family was traveling to participate in a census prior to Jesus’s birth (Luke: 2). This year, Christians remember that biblical tradition as individuals across the entire country—citizens, non-citizens, legal residents, and temporary and seasonal workers—participate in the counting process.

The U.S. Census has continued to utilize new tools and information-gathering methods since its beginning in 1790, when U.S. marshals rode door-to-door to each household. The 2020 Census, for example, will be the first to implement digital tools to record responses online. Over the past 230 years, however, the importance of the numbers gathered—and their accuracy—remains the same. The 2020 Census

matters to Michiganders and local communities for several reasons, including its role in public safety and policy planning, federal and state legislative representation, and the risk that an undercount could cost Michigan \$3,000 per person per year.

While the census is an important component of American democracy, the challenge is always making sure people participate. The 2020 Census Faith Council outlined the stakes well: *“If we get undercounted, we get underfunded and underrepresented.”* A 2019 U.S. Department of Commerce study found approximately sixty-eight percent of respondents were “extremely” or “very likely” to fill out the census form.¹ Unfortunately, the research also shows disparities among participation rates, especially with younger generations, those with lower levels of income or education, and members of racial minority groups. Michigan has already begun preparing ways to improve resident response rates. This **focus** will outline the upcoming 2020 Census, including its significance, implementation methods, potential challenges to its accuracy, and actions Catholics can take to ensure Michigan is fully counted. ■

Why Does the Census Matter?

The Allocation of Federal Funding

The census informs how federal funding is allocated to communities for the next decade, including dollars for education, health care, nutrition, and highway construction.² In 2010, only sixty-four percent of Detroit residents participated in the census, the lowest rate of all major U.S. cities. When participation rates are low, Michigan loses federal support for critical infrastructure and those in need. The loss of federal aid in 2010 was approximately \$1,800 per person per year.

Public Safety and Policy Planning

Local governments use census data to understand where people live and to determine which areas are growing or changing. This information is critical when creating emergency preparedness and public safety plans, especially in the case of a natural disaster. Greater census participation can lead to greater effectiveness for these plans. The census data is also often used in academic research to identify economic, social, and political trends, which can influence public policy.



The Determination of Congressional Seats

The census will determine Michigan's representation in the U.S. Congress. Since the early 1900s, the number of seats in the House of Representatives has been set at 435 voting members, and population data helps divide those seats amongst the states. States with population growth gain seats, while states with declines lose them. After the 1970 Census, Michigan received nineteen U.S. House seats. Now, the state has fourteen and is at risk of losing another. It is critical that Michigan's voice in Washington D.C. reflects its population, as federal decisions routinely impact local communities. ■

FEDERAL FUNDS FOR MICHIGAN

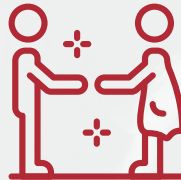
In Fiscal Year 2016, Michigan received almost \$30 billion through federal programs that used 2010 census data. That included:



More than
\$510 million
for grants for tutoring,
textbooks, and other school
programs.



Approximately
\$12.7 billion
in Medicaid funding for
hospitals and clinics.



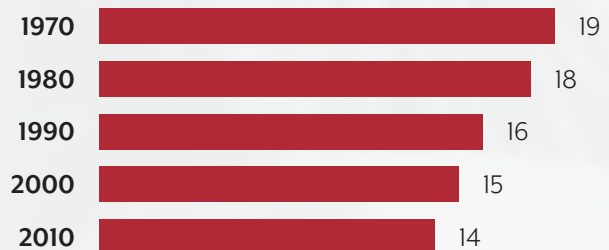
Almost
\$2.4 billion
for programs to assist
low-income women, chil-
dren, and families with nutri-
tional needs and education
(WIC and SNAP).



Over
\$1.1 billion
for highway planning and
construction.

Citation: "Counting For Dollars 2020: Michigan (Fiscal Year 2016)," George Washington University, 1/30/19: bit.ly/3alPNqY

MICHIGAN CONGRESSIONAL SEATS BY DECADE



What Will the Census **Ask?**

The census questions guide government financial decisions and inform implementation of laws such as the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act. The 2020 questionnaire, as released on the U.S. Census Bureau's website, will ask households for simple information, including:

- How many people are living or staying at the home on April 1, 2020?
- Is the home owned or rented?
- What is the sex, age, and race of each person in the home?
- Is any person in the home of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?
- What is the relationship of each person in the home?

A recent study indicated that some Americans do not participate in the census as they believe the questions are too extensive and time consuming. Unfortunately, while the questions do require a small amount of time, a misconception that the questions take too long often lowers participation rates.³ In reality, the questions are simple to fill out and have significant benefits for communities. An additional concern related to participation in the census relates to citizenship status. In the summer of 2019, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the 2020 Census could not include a citizenship question. ■



How Will the Census be **Implemented?**

To determine where questionnaires will be sent, the U.S. Census Bureau is tasked with collecting the most accurate list of residences in the United States and its five territories. The Bureau uses data from the postal service; tribal, state, and local governments; third party providers; and other tools. The lists also help determine where additional field-work is needed for address verification. With this database, the Bureau invites each household to participate in the census. For homes that do not initially respond, follow up efforts will take place by mail and then in person. Online and phone responses can be completed in Arabic, Chinese, Creole, English, French, Haitian Creole, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. This year, digital tools will play a significant role in an attempt to boost participation rates. ■



“The questions are simple to fill out and have significant benefits for communities.”

When Will Census Counting **Begin?**

While a small percentage of Americans in remote areas will begin earlier, most will receive their invitation to participate beginning in March or April of 2020. Below is a list of significant dates:

2020

- Mid-March** • Census invitations will be mailed to households. Only one person per household should respond for all those that live there.
- April 1** • Each home is encouraged to respond online, by phone, or by mail, indicating their place of residence as of that day.
Census Day
- April** • Census takers will visit individuals who live among large groups, (i.e. college campuses, senior centers) and begin quality check interviews to ensure count accuracy.
- May 13** • The Census Bureau will begin visiting homes that have not yet responded.
- July 31** • Household responses are due.
- December** • Census counts are delivered to the President and the U.S. Congress.

2021

- March 31** • The Census Bureau will send official counts and information on population changes to the states, which will inform their redistricting processes.
- November** • An independent commission of citizens will redraw Michigan's Congressional and state legislative districts.

CATHOLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE 2020 CENSUS

The Catholic Church has a rich tradition—and indeed a Gospel mandate—of caring for the most vulnerable in society. While individual Catholics and Catholic organizations have a responsibility to address local needs, government programs and funding also play a role in combatting poverty, educating children, and providing support for the vulnerable. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has shared the significance of the census and its accuracy, a message that the Catholic bishops in Michigan echo:

“Our country conducts a Census every ten years to count the number of men, women and children residing in the United States. Census data helps direct more than \$800 billion annually to key programs designed to advance the common good, strengthen families and reduce poverty. The Catholic Church and other service providers rely on the national Census to provide an accurate count in order to effectively serve those in need. We urge for all people to be counted in the Census, regardless of their citizenship...Our society, rooted in the strength of the family, cannot risk missing this opportunity to give children and parents the tools they need to succeed.”⁴

Several federal programs that use census data include nutrition assistance, Medicaid, housing vouchers, K-12 education, Title I and Special Education grants, and foster care and childcare grants, all of which significantly impact Michiganders across the state. ■

Is the Census Data Confidential?

A person's answers to questions from the U.S. Census can only be used for statistical purposes (Title 12 of the U.S. Code). No identifiable information from the census may be released or shared, including with law enforcement or other government agencies. Doing so would be a violation of federal law. The census is not used as a tracking tool for law enforcement, nor as a method of determining property taxes or unemployment rates. Any U.S. Census Bureau staff that violate this provision are subject to a fine of up to \$250,000 and/or up to five years in prison.⁵ A 1982 U.S. Supreme Court case, *Baldrige v. Shapiro*, decided census responses could not be subpoenaed. ■

Who is at Risk of Undercounting?

Across the United States, those conducting the census face different challenges. At times, those challenges come from geography. In rural areas, homes hidden from main roads, unconventional addresses, and in some areas, large numbers of seasonal or temporary workers, can lead to households being missed in the count. In cities, factors such as high rates of typically undercounted populations—such as recent immigrants, those in poverty, and minority families—can contribute to challenges in carrying out an accurate count. Detroit, for example, has been identified as a hard-to-count city due to its large rate of vacant homes and poverty, as well as its low rates of internet access. Previous census counts have also undercounted households with young children; households with higher rates of unemployment or low educational attainment; and households whose first language is one other than English. The key for the 2020 Census is to identify potentially vulnerable areas or populations and make accommodations accordingly.⁶ The Bureau has identified four “hard to count” populations that require extra attention:

Those more challenging to interview:

- Language barriers
- Low literacy levels
- Lack of internet access

Those more difficult to locate:

- Irregular housing units
- Persons wanting to remain hidden

PROTECT AGAINST SCAMS

- The U.S. Census Bureau **does not** ask for social security numbers, donations, bank or credit account numbers, or requests on behalf of a political party. If any such items are asked, they are not from the Census Bureau.
- If any representatives visit to follow-up about the census, ask to see their badge from the Department of Commerce and their laptop or bag with the U.S. Census Bureau logo.



Those more challenging to contact:

- Highly mobile
- Homeless
- Physical barriers, gated communities

Those more difficult to persuade:

- Suspicious of the government
- Low levels of civic engagement

All people deserve to be counted; therefore, it is critical to reach all populations. In June 2019, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer established the 2020 Complete Count Committee. The committee is charged with identifying barriers to an accurate census count and developing potential solutions, especially in reaching out to those who are traditionally undercounted. The committee brings together over fifty agencies and individuals from various perspectives, including representatives of state and local government, immigrant and minority groups, business and health communities, and faith-based organizations such as Michigan Catholic Conference (MCC). Learn more at becountedmi2020.com. ■

HOW CAN CATHOLICS AND CATHOLIC AGENCIES PROMOTE CENSUS PARTICIPATION?



MCC President and CEO Paul Long and Michigan Nonprofit Association President and CEO Donna Murray-Brown at the announcement of the Complete Count Committee

- Share upcoming dates and U.S. Census resources such as FAQs, flyers, faith toolkit, and MCC bulletin announcements found at the websites listed on this page.
- Use resources to dispel misconceptions about the census.
- Host an event where community members can ask questions about the census. For speakers, contact census.partners@census.gov.
- Participate in local training sessions and initiatives: becountedmi2020.com/engage/.
- Share U.S. Census job opportunities: 2020census.gov/jobs.
- Offer spaces for the community to access translation services or to use the internet safely and securely, especially for those who do not have internet access at home. ■

RELATED 2020 CENSUS WEBSITES

- Michigan Census Resources: becountedmi2020.com
- Faith Toolkit: becountedmi2020.com/wp-content/uploads/Faith-Toolkit.pdf
- U.S. Census Bureau: 2020census.gov/en
- MCC: micatholic.org/2020Census

1,4. "2020 Census Barriers, Attitudes, and Motivators Study Survey Report," U.S. Census Bureau, 1/24/19: bit.ly/39MzxyX. **2.** "Why It Matters," Be Counted Michigan 2020 website, accessed 1/1/20: bit.ly/35vaNYC. **3.** "Bishops Urge That All People Count and Must Be Included in Census Efforts," USCCB, 4/23/19: bit.ly/2N0aBum. **5.** "The 2020 Census and Confidentiality," U.S. Census 2020, accessed 1/6/20: bit.ly/2rYaeZM. **6.** "2020 Census Faces Challenges in Rural America," William O'Hare, Carsey Research, Winter 2017: bit.ly/2NIFH4u.

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Vol. 48, No. 1, February 2020

focus is published by the Michigan Catholic Conference
510 South Capitol Avenue
Lansing, Michigan 48933

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