

2025 *October* COUNT REPORT

SUSTAINING THE MISSION: THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN NORTHWEST PENNSYLVANIA

The October Count is an annual process in which parishes across the Diocese of Erie record Sunday Mass attendance throughout the month of October. Collected across all 13 counties, this data offers a consistent snapshot of participation. Within these pages, you will find the results of that effort—insights that support ongoing pastoral planning and help guide how the Church continues to serve its people with care, intention and a focus on mission.



DIOCESE of ERIE

Sharing the Catholic faith in northwest Pennsylvania

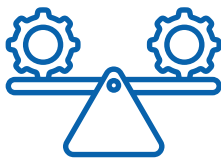
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SUMMARY

This report highlights encouraging signs of stabilization in Sunday Mass attendance across the Diocese of Erie. While Mass attendance had been steadily declining prior to COVID-19, recent data shows a modest increase post pandemic and a leveling of participation as the faithful continue to return to Mass. Additionally, sacramental life has experienced a notable rebound from the previous year, reflecting renewed engagement in the life of the Church in our diocese.

At the same time, the priest-to-parishioner ratio has remained consistent. Despite lower attendance levels, the Church continues to sustain regular Mass schedules, sacramental life and parish ministry across the Diocese of Erie, with priests serving multiple communities throughout the region.

Take a deeper look at the findings of the 2025 attendance report.



Mass participation is stabilizing.



Sacramental life is rebounding.



Baptism celebrations are increasing



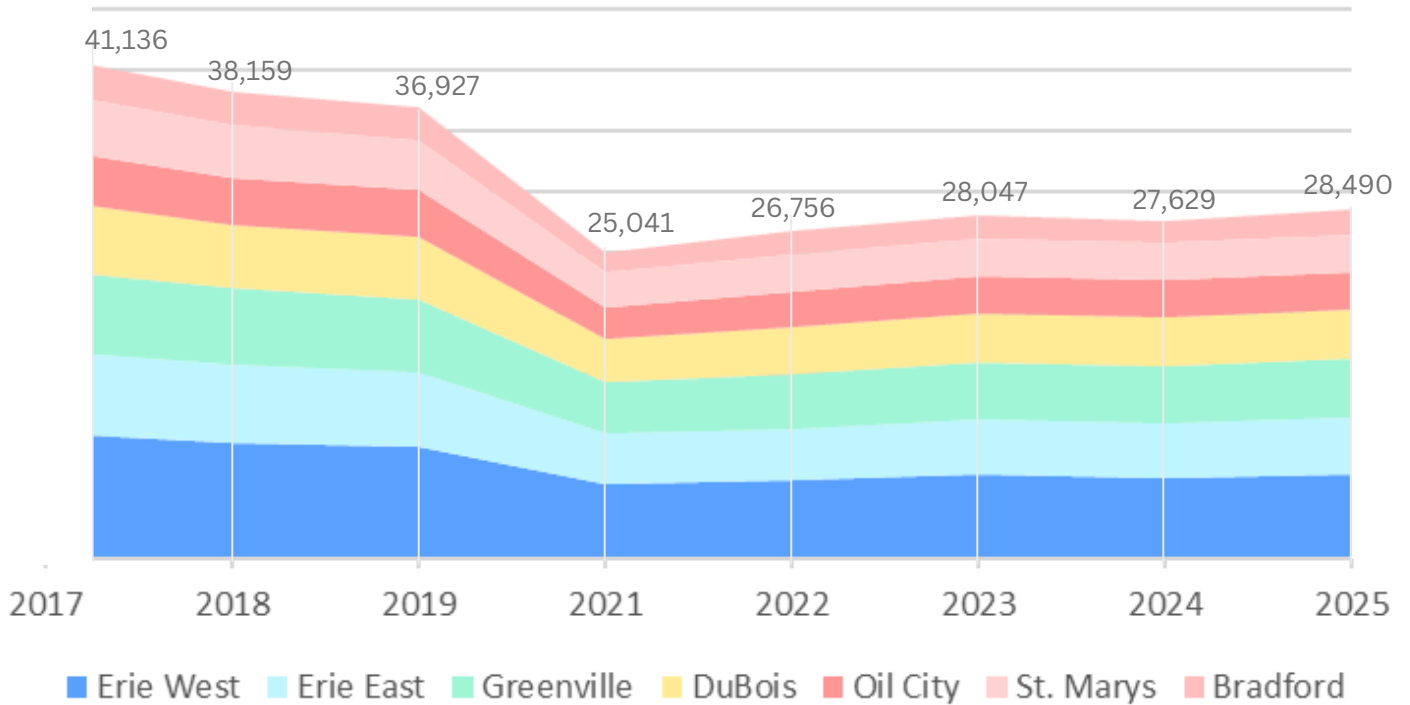
Parish engagement is strengthening.

Sunday Deanery Mass attendance by year

	2017	2018	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Annual Change (24-25)	Percent Change
● Erie West	10,248	9462	9092	6005	6276	6771	6513	6858	345	5%
● Erie East	6756	6402	6070	4256	4311	4644	4513	4674	161	4%
● Greenville	6614	6192	6062	4135	4485	4646	4635	4825	190	4%
● DuBois	5753	5234	5007	3464	3866	3961	3963	3964	1	0%
● Oil City	4224	3836	3873	2659	2903	2977	3106	3109	3	0%
● St. Marys	4585	4307	4165	2838	3030	3065	3010	3077	67	2%
● Bradford	2956	2726	2678	1684	1885	1983	1889	1983	94	5%
TOTAL	41,136	38,159	36,927	25,041	26,756	28,047	27,629	28,490	+861	+3%

Please note that these figures are reported at the deanery level. Visit our website for parish data.

Sunday Mass - October Count

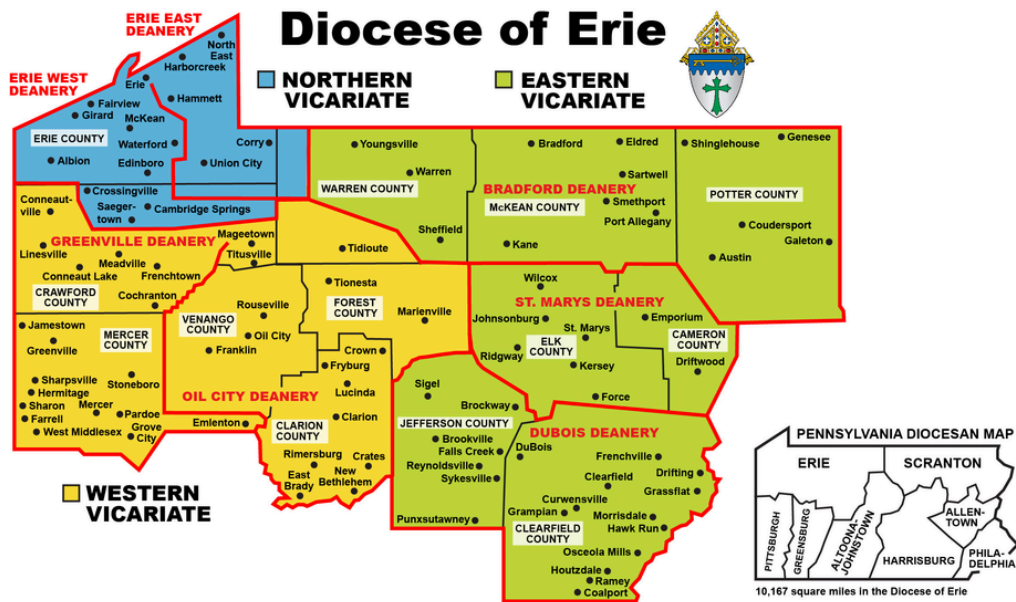


SUNDAY MASS ATTENDANCE

Since the first round of pastoral planning in 2017, Sunday Mass attendance across the Diocese of Erie has shifted significantly, reflecting broader changes in participation over time. At the same time, data from 2022 through the present suggests that attendance has begun to stabilize, with totals holding more steadily across the diocese in recent years.

Individual deaneries show similar patterns, pointing to widespread demographic and participation changes rather than isolated local trends. Even within this environment, the faithful continue to gather each weekend across the diocese’s 13 counties — a visible sign of ongoing commitment to parish life and the Eucharist.

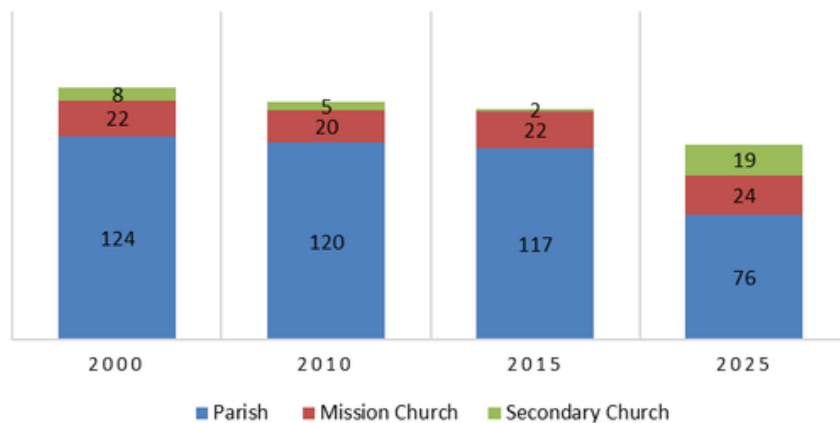
Participation in Sunday Mass remains at the heart of Catholic life, grounding parish communities in worship, sacramental grace and shared mission. Recent years suggest a period of greater stability as the Diocese of Erie continues to serve its people, sustain parish communities and look toward the future with faith and resolve.



The Diocese of Erie is organized into three vicariates — Northern, Eastern and Western — which together encompass seven deaneries: Erie West, Erie East, Greenville, DuBois, Oil City, Bradford and St. Marys.

The map above illustrates these regions, offering a visual representation of the geographic breadth of the diocese and the expansive square mileage it serves.

PARISH COMMUNITY



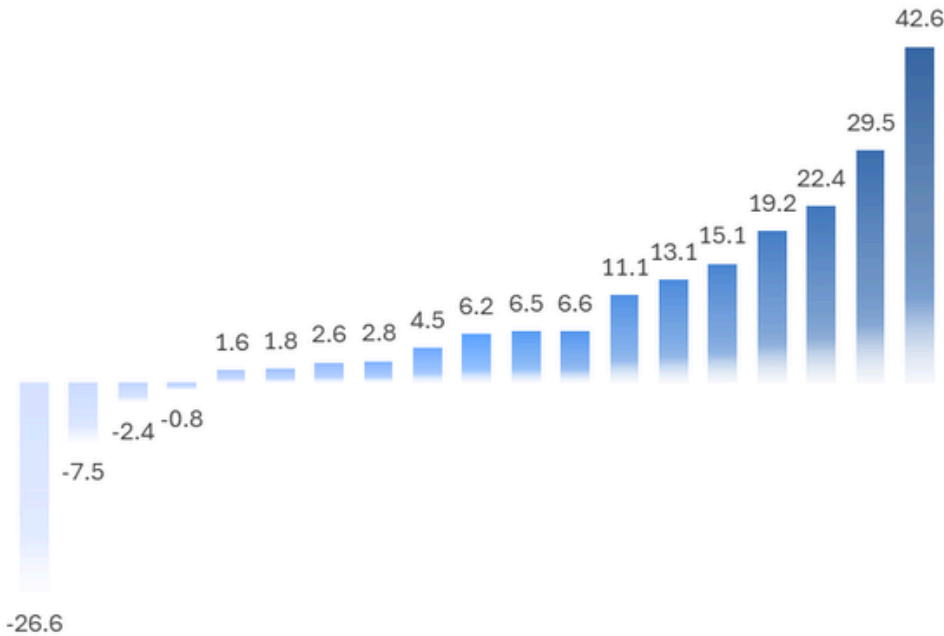
The number of parishes across the Diocese of Erie reflects ongoing pastoral planning and a commitment to long-term vitality and sustainability. Since the initial round of pastoral planning began in 2017, the number of parishes has gradually decreased—from 124 in 2000 to 76 today—reflecting a thoughtful response to demographic shifts, priest availability and changing patterns of participation. At the same time, there has been an increase in both mission and secondary churches. Mergers, partnerships and shared ministry models are helping to better align leadership and resources while supporting both parish life and the care of these spaces.

Nationally, dioceses are undertaking similar efforts, recognizing that collaboration is essential to sustaining vibrant parish communities. Here in NWP, this moment reflects a unified Church, rooted in the Eucharist and committed to serving all 13 deaneries.

Mass Count by Parish

ERIE WEST DEANERY

Values represent the percentage change from 2024 to 2025, indicating either growth or decline.



The Erie West Deanery data reflects a wide range of recovery experiences across parishes. A small number continue to show notable declines — including one significant decrease of more than 25% — alongside several more moderate drops between 1% and 8%. This points to ongoing rebuilding in certain communities as they navigate post-pandemic participation patterns, demographic shifts and adjustments to Mass schedules.

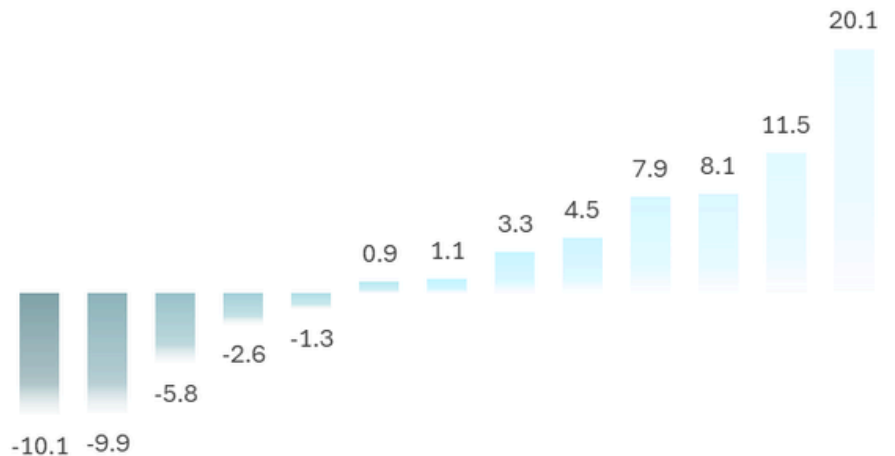
At the same time, many parishes are demonstrating strong growth. Multiple communities report increases between 6% and 15%, with several experiencing substantial gains above 20% and one exceeding 40%. These increases suggest encouraging signs of renewed engagement, effective local outreach and strengthening participation in key areas of the deanery.

The Erie East Deanery data reflects a mixed but stabilizing recovery pattern in Mass attendance. Several parishes continue to experience declines year-over-year (ranging from -1% to nearly -10%), indicating ongoing post-pandemic rebuilding and the impact of shifting Mass schedules, parish consolidation and demographic changes.

At the same time, multiple parishes are showing meaningful growth — including increases above 8%, 11% and even 20% — signaling renewed participation in certain communities and the positive effects of local pastoral outreach, evangelization efforts and collaborative ministry models.

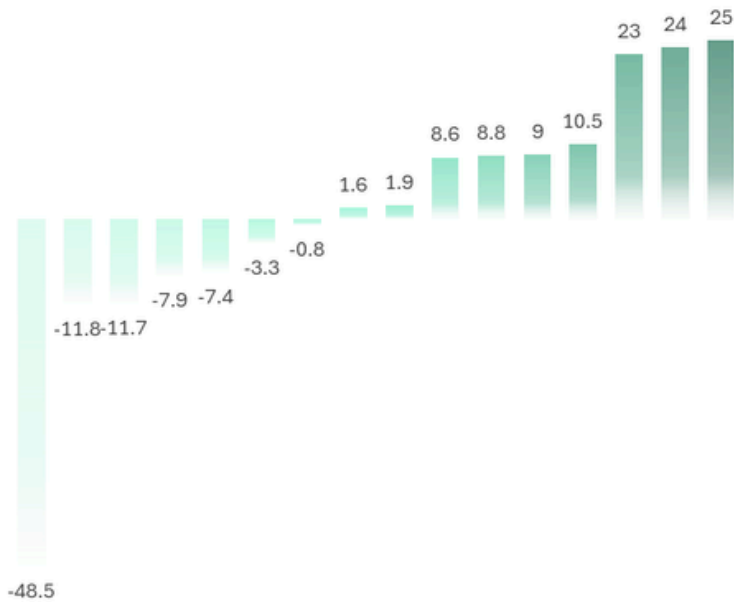
ERIE EAST DEANERY

Values represent the percentage change from 2024 to 2025, indicating either growth or decline.



GREENVILLE DEANERY

Values represent the percentage change from 2024 to 2025, indicating either growth or decline.



The Greenville Deanery data reflects a balanced recovery landscape, with both declines and strong areas of growth across parishes. Several communities continue to experience decreases — most notably in the range of 7% to nearly 12% — with a few smaller declines closer to 1–3%. These figures point to ongoing rebuilding in certain locations as participation continues to stabilize following pandemic disruption and local demographic realities.

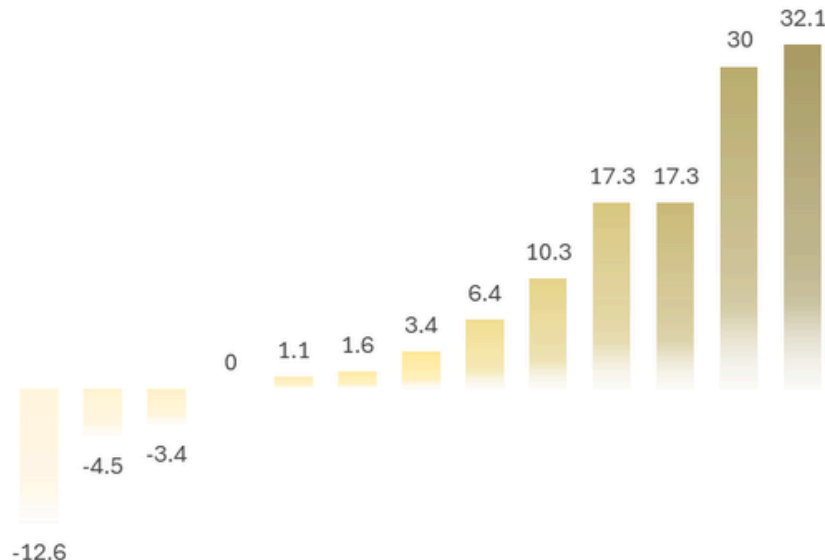
Conversely, a number of parishes are seeing measurable gains. Moderate increases between 8% and 11% are present, alongside several significant surges ranging from 23% to 25%. These higher-growth communities signal encouraging renewal in Mass participation and the impact of sustained pastoral engagement at the parish level.

The DuBois Deanery data shows a generally positive recovery trend, with growth present in the majority of parishes. A few communities continue to experience declines — most notably one decrease exceeding 12% and several smaller drops between 3% and 5% — reflecting localized rebuilding and participation shifts. One parish remains steady year-over-year with no change.

Encouragingly, most parishes report increases, ranging from modest gains of 1–6% to more substantial growth above 10%. Several communities are experiencing significant surges between 17% and 32%, signaling renewed engagement and strengthening Mass participation across key areas of the deanery.

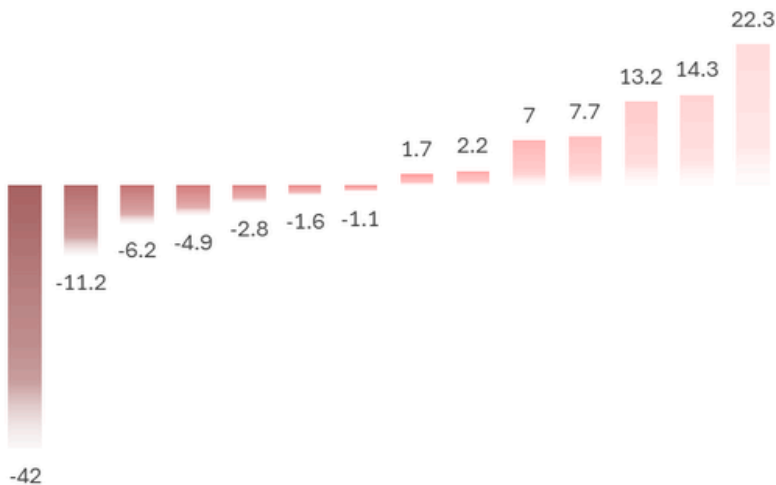
DUBOIS DEANERY

Values represent the percentage change from 2024 to 2025, indicating either growth or decline.



OIL CITY DEANERY

Values represent the percentage change from 2024 to 2025, indicating either growth or decline.

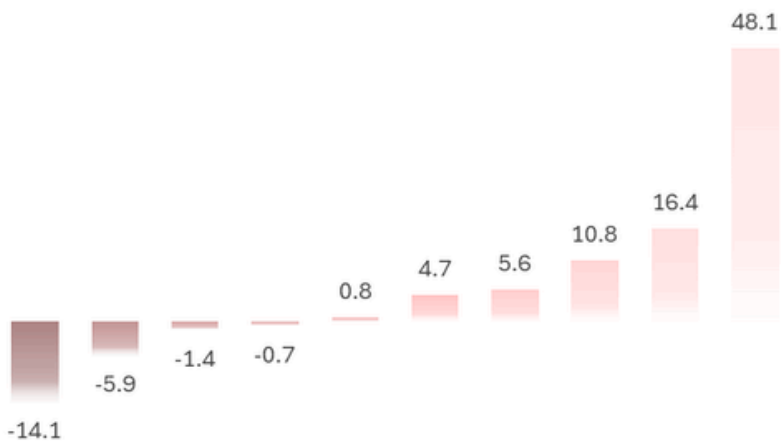


The Oil City Deanery data reflects a varied recovery picture, with several parishes still experiencing declines alongside areas of meaningful growth. A number of communities show decreases — most notably one significant drop exceeding 40%, with additional declines ranging from 1% to 11%. These figures indicate continued rebuilding in certain parishes as participation patterns stabilize.

At the same time, multiple parishes are reporting increases in Mass attendance. Growth ranges from modest gains of 1–2% to stronger rises between 7% and 14%, with one parish exceeding 22% growth. These upward trends point to encouraging signs of renewed engagement within portions of the deanery.

ST. MARYS DEANERY

Values represent the percentage change from 2024 to 2025, indicating either growth or decline.

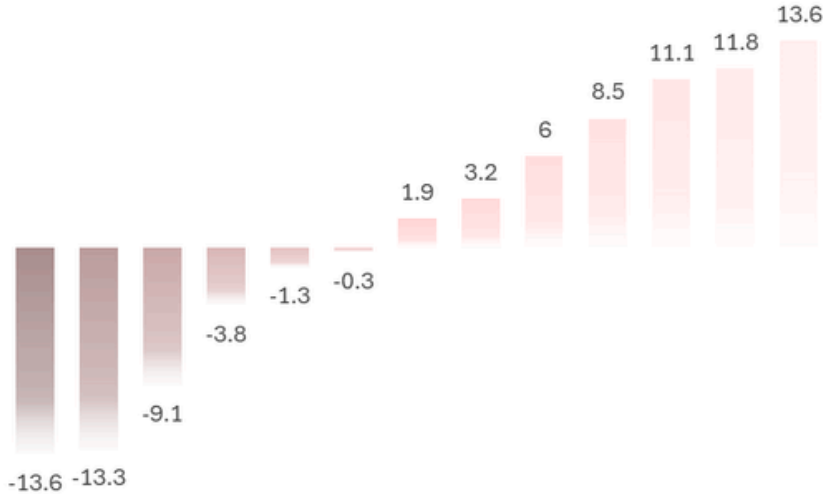


The St. Marys Deanery data reflects a recovery pattern marked by both modest declines and notable growth. Several parishes continue to experience decreases — the largest just over 16%, with additional smaller declines between 1% and 6% — indicating ongoing stabilization in certain communities.

Conversely, many parishes are showing positive movement. Growth ranges from modest increases under 1% to steady gains between 4% and 11%, with stronger surges above 16% and one parish experiencing a significant increase exceeding 48%. These gains highlight meaningful renewal in Mass participation across multiple areas of the deanery.

BRADFORD DEANERY

Values represent the percentage change from 2024 to 2025, indicating either growth or decline.



The Bradford Deanery data reflects a measured recovery, with a blend of ongoing declines and steady growth across parishes. Several communities continue to see decreases — the most significant just over 13%, with additional declines ranging from 1% to 9% — pointing to continued rebuilding in portions of the deanery.

At the same time, many parishes are experiencing positive gains. Increases range from modest growth around 2–3% to stronger rises between 6% and nearly 14%. These upward trends signal encouraging stabilization and renewed Mass participation in multiple parish communities.

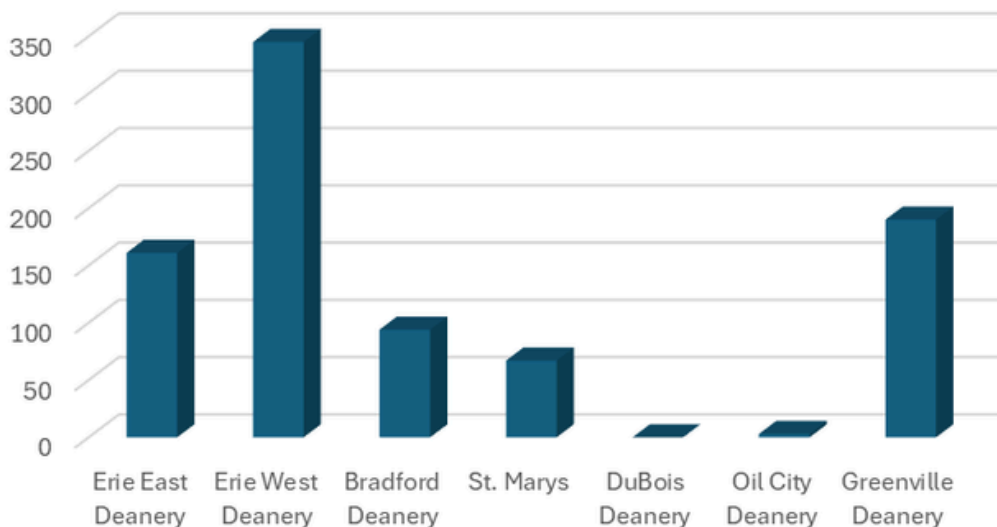
DEANERY RECOVERY

We continue to report primarily at the deanery level rather than focusing solely on individual parishes or churches, recognizing the pressures that Mass schedules and availability place on parishioners and their decisions on where to attend Mass. This reality can cause fluctuations within a specific parish that do not necessarily reflect the overall health, engagement or vitality of the broader deanery. Viewing participation through a deanery lens better captures the collaborative pastoral planning underway and the continued good-faith efforts of pastors and parish communities to ensure Mass time options meet the needs of the faithful across each region.

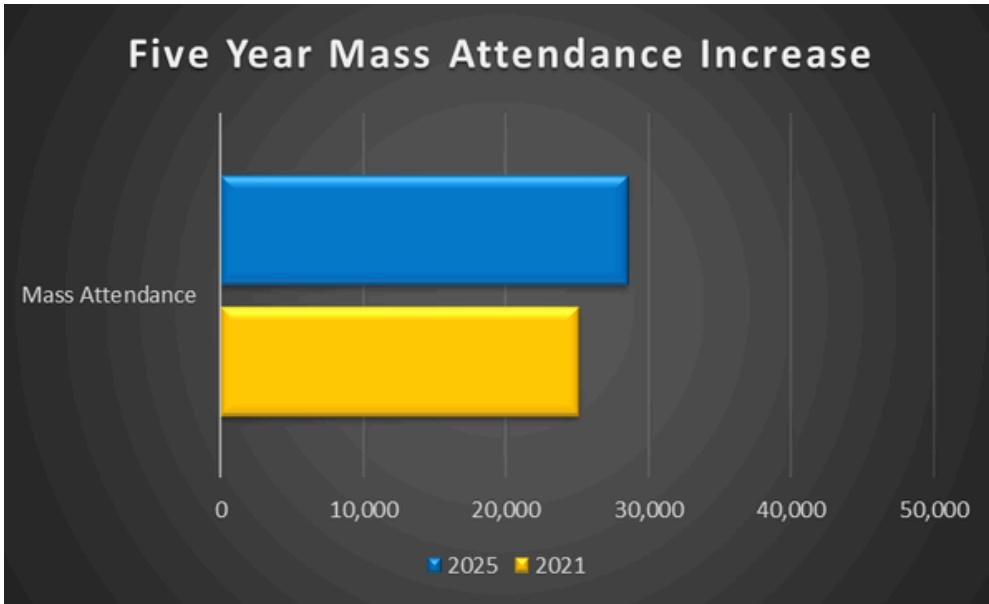
Across the Diocese of Erie, deaneries are showing a generally positive year-over-year trajectory. Erie West (+5.3%), Bradford (+5.0%), Greenville (+4.1%) and Erie East (+3.6%) are demonstrating the strongest gains, with St. Marys (+2.2%) also reflecting measured growth. Oil City (+0.1%) remains stable, while DuBois (0.0%) held even year over year.

The graph below illustrates increasing stabilization and growth across multiple deaneries — a continued movement away from post-pandemic decline. Should this steady pattern continue over the next several years, the diocese is positioned to move closer to — and potentially exceed — pre-pandemic Mass attendance levels, reflecting a strengthening participation trend consistent with broader national patterns.

Increase in Attendance



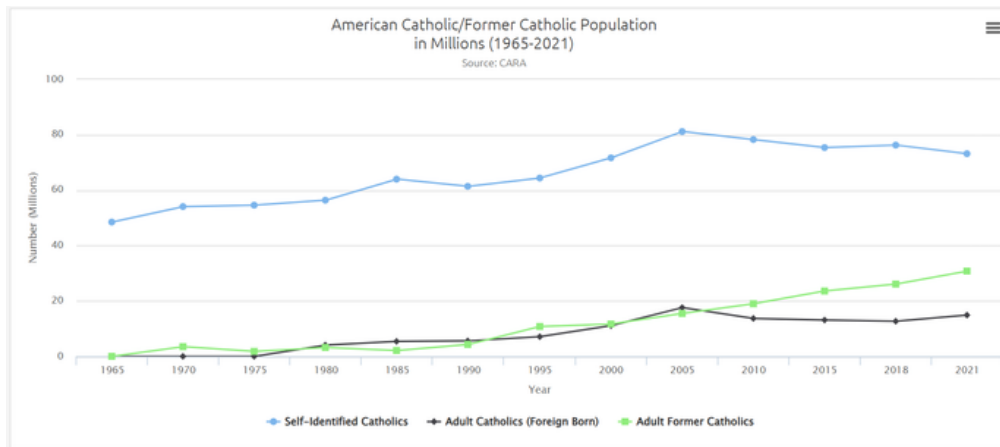
MASS ATTENDANCE COMPARED TO 2021



Following the pause in October Count data collection in 2020, Mass attendance across the Diocese of Erie has shown signs of stabilization in recent years. From 25,041 in 2021 to 28,490 in 2025, participation has leveled in a more consistent range, though not returning to previous levels.

This period reflects ongoing discernment, as parishes have thoughtfully evaluated Mass schedules, resources and community needs. Through collaboration and a continued focus on parish life, communities are maintaining regular participation.

NATIONAL TRENDS



Mass attendance among U.S. Catholics has remained relatively steady in percentage terms over time, with a gradual decline in participation since 2010. After holding nearly consistent between 2000 and 2010, participation decreased through 2020 and into 2025, with recent years showing signs of stabilization rather than continued decline.

During this same period, adult conversions into the Catholic Church also declined, falling from a peak in 2010 to lower levels in 2025. Together, these trends reflect a softening in overall engagement among Catholics, even as recent data suggests a leveling off following earlier declines.

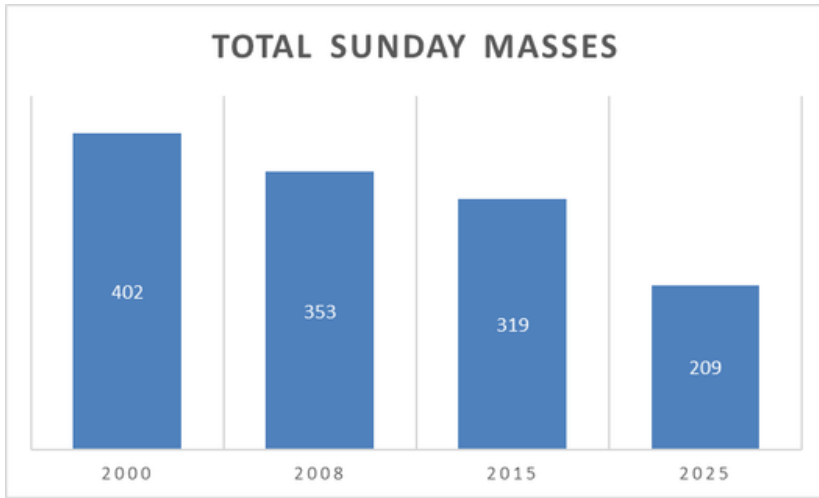
Source: CARA, Georgetown University.

COMPARISON — DIOCESE OF ERIE:

The Diocese of Erie reflects this same national pattern. The October Count shows a pandemic-related decline followed by steady recovery and stabilization, aligning with broader trends of softened participation and recent signs of leveling.

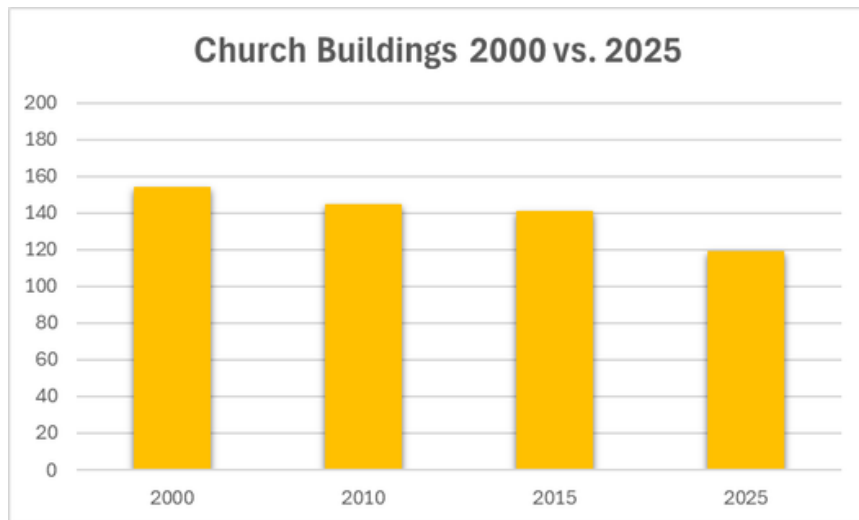
Mass Schedule Changes

The number of Sunday Masses has declined from 402 in 2000 to 353 in 2008, 319 in 2015 and 209 in 2025 — a reduction of nearly 50% over time.



This reflects clergy availability and parish restructuring, with Mass schedules thoughtfully consolidated in response to changing participation and the reality of many empty seats. These adjustments also allow priests to celebrate the liturgy with greater focus and care, balancing their time and pastoral responsibilities across multiple communities. Parishes continue to be cared for and maintained as vibrant places of worship, with Masses, ministries and services offered consistently each week, ensuring the faithful have access to the Eucharist across the diocese.

CHURCH UTILIZATION



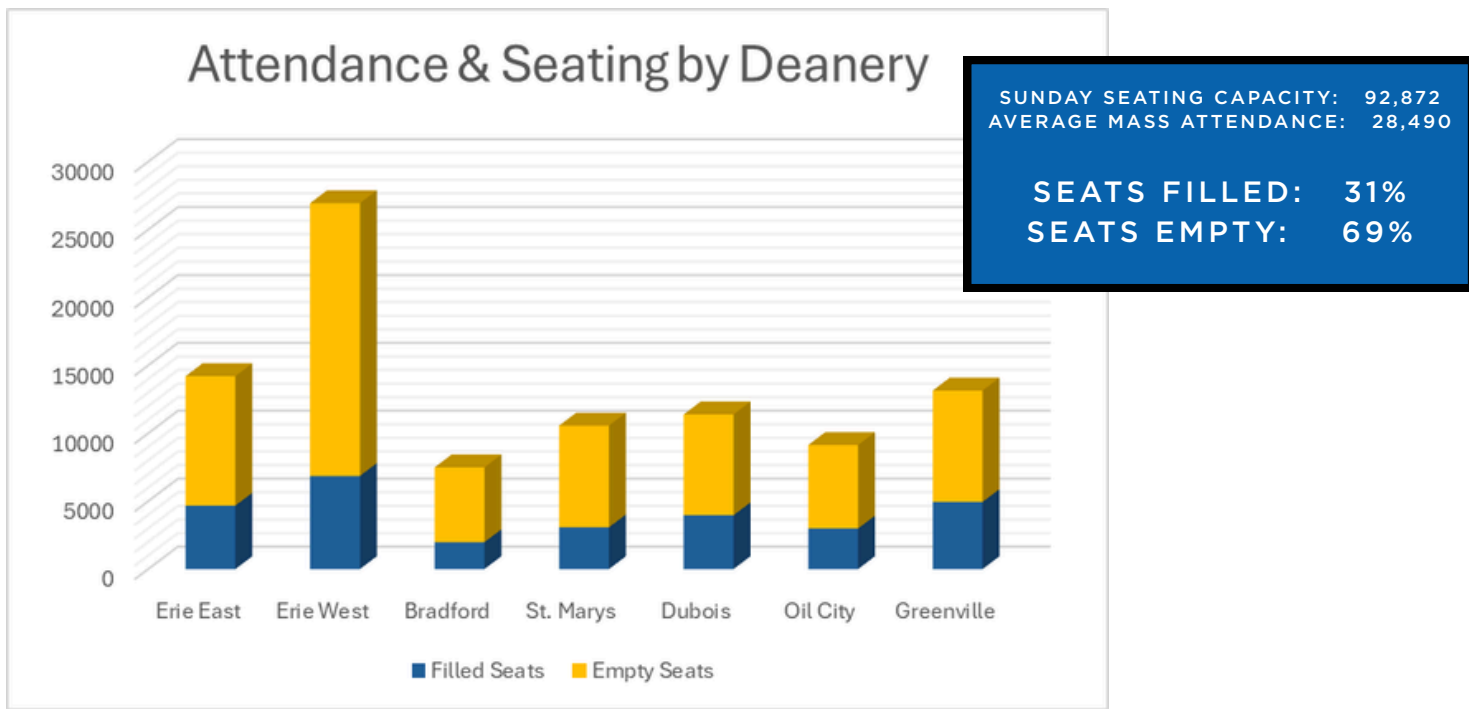
CHURCH BUILDINGS: 2000 VS. 2025

This comparison illustrates how the diocesan footprint has evolved through pastoral planning and parish restructuring.

Since Bishop Persico arrived in 2012, the total number of church buildings has declined — driven primarily by a reduction in parish churches. At the same time, mission and secondary worship sites now represent a larger share of active locations.

This shift reflects a move away from maintaining multiple full parish structures toward a more collaborative model of ministry — preserving access to worship while more responsibly stewarding buildings that require ongoing care, upkeep and investment, alongside clergy availability and parish populations.

In short, while the number of parish-designated churches has decreased, the Church's sacramental presence across the diocese remains broad through mission and secondary sites that continue to serve local communities.



CHURCH CAPACITY AND SUNDAY MASS PARTICIPATION

One of the most significant insights revealed through the October Count is the relationship between church seating capacity and the number of Catholics attending Mass each weekend.

Across the Diocese of Erie, parish churches collectively provide more than 92,000 available seats for Sunday Mass. Yet the most recent October Count recorded 28,490 Catholics attending Mass on an average weekend.

This means that less than one-third of available seating across the diocese is currently filled, while a substantial portion of church space remains unused during weekend liturgies.

When viewed by deanery, a similar pattern appears. For example:

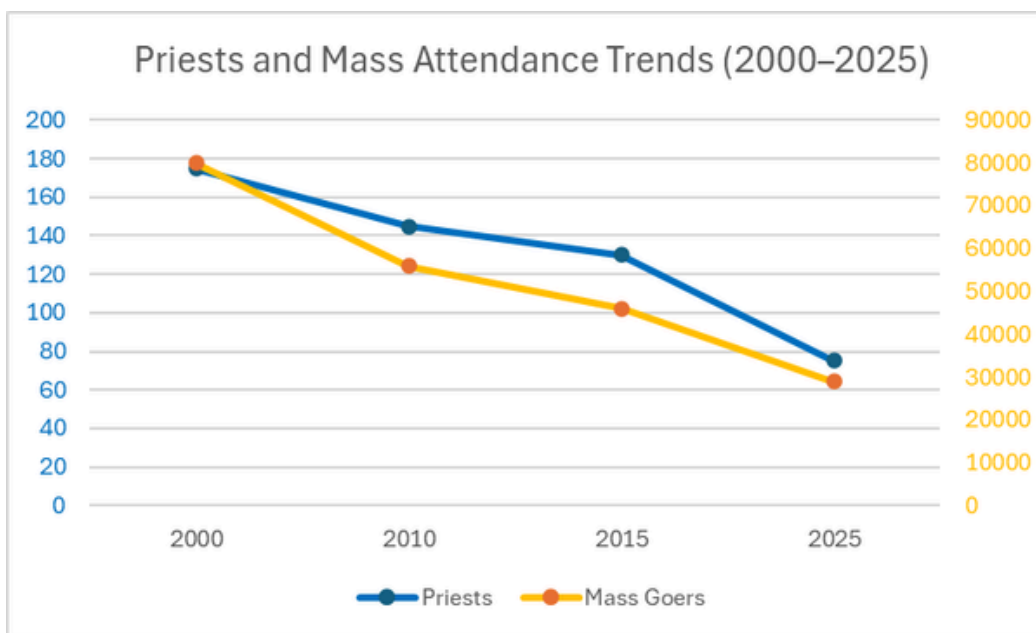
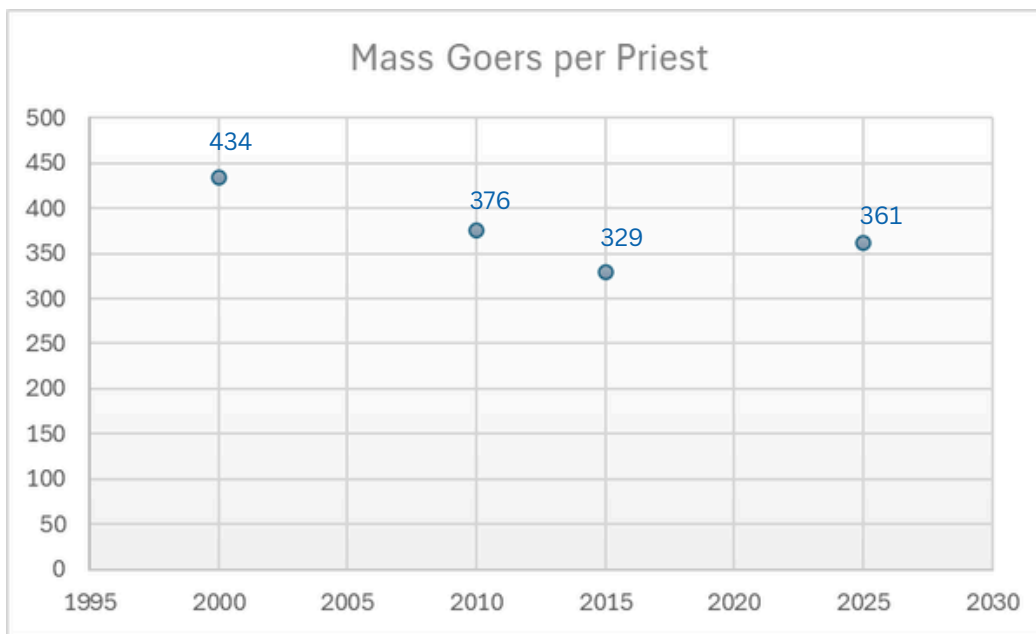
- Erie West Deanery has seating for nearly 27,000 people, while approximately 6,800 attend Mass each weekend.
- Erie East Deanery offers more than 14,000 seats, with roughly 4,600 people attending.
- Greenville Deanery has seating capacity for over 13,000, with about 4,900 attending weekly.
- St. Marys, DuBois, Oil City and Bradford deaneries reflect comparable patterns, with large numbers of available seats alongside smaller but faithful congregations.

This data illustrates an important reality: the Diocese of Erie continues to maintain significantly more physical worship space than is currently being utilized on a typical weekend.

These numbers do not diminish the importance of the faithful who gather each week. Rather, they provide an honest picture of the environment in which parish leaders and diocesan leadership are working to steward resources responsibly.

In response, the diocese has been carefully evaluating parish structures, Mass schedules and building usage to ensure that sacramental life remains strong while resources are used sustainably. In some areas this has meant adjusting Mass times, strengthening collaboration between neighboring parishes or consolidating parish communities.

The goal of these efforts is not simply efficiency, but the long-term vitality of parish life — ensuring that vibrant Catholic communities can continue to gather around the Eucharist across all 13 counties of northwest Pennsylvania. Seen through this lens, the October Count provides more than statistics. It offers a pastoral snapshot of how the Church is living its mission today while planning responsibly for the future.



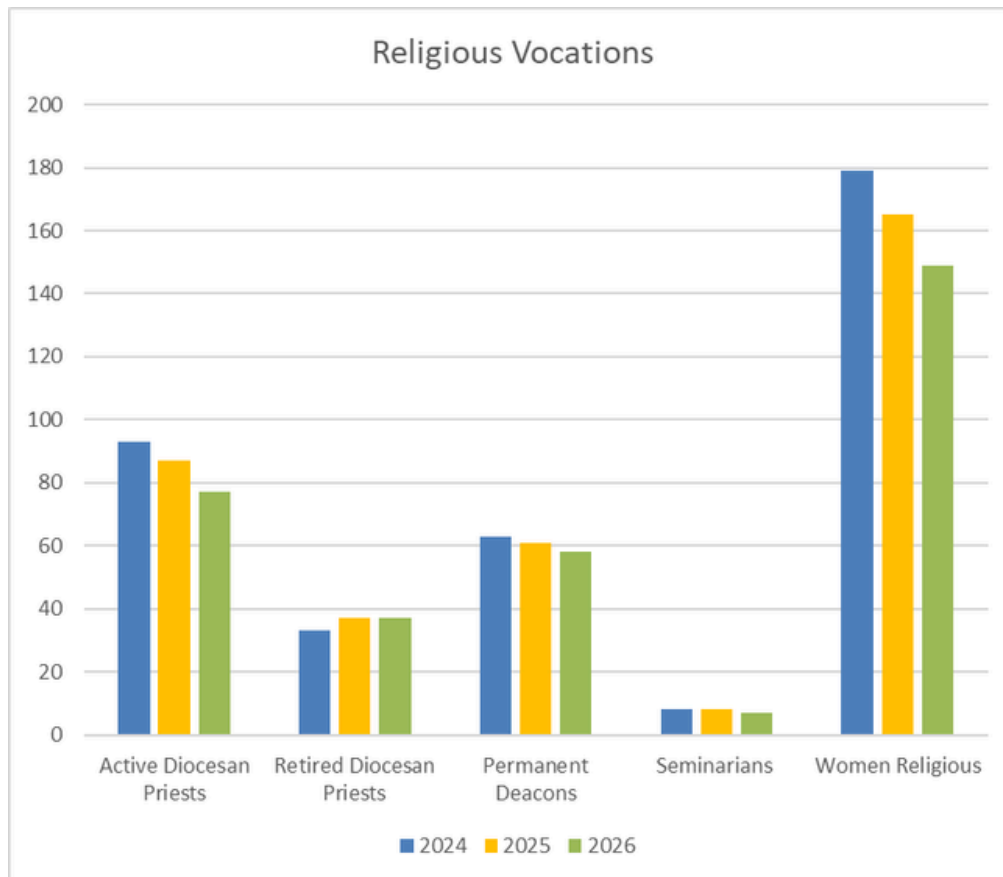
MASS GOERS: PER PRIEST

Across the Diocese of Erie, the relationship between the number of priests serving in ministry and the number of Catholics gathering for Sunday Mass has shifted over the past two decades, but remains closely aligned. In 2000, the diocese was served by 186 priests, including diocesan clergy and extern priests, with more than 80,000 Catholics participating in Sunday Mass. By 2025, the number of priests actively serving has declined to 79, while Sunday Mass participation has also decreased to 28,490.

This parallel change reflects broader trends impacting Catholic dioceses nationwide, including priest retirements, fewer ordinations and changing patterns of participation. Seminary enrollment has also shifted during this same period. In 2000, 25 seminarians were in formation for the Diocese of Erie. Today, 7 men are currently discerning and preparing for priestly ministry, continuing the important work of vocational discernment that will shape the future of the Church in northwest Pennsylvania.

Taken together, these trends show that while both the number of priests and Mass participation have declined, the relationship between them has remained steady. In practical terms, priests today are serving communities of a similar relative size as in previous decades, even as the overall numbers have changed. This consistency underscores the ongoing commitment to providing pastoral care, celebrating the sacraments and accompanying the faithful across the diocese, even as the realities of ministry continue to evolve.

CONSECRATED LIFE



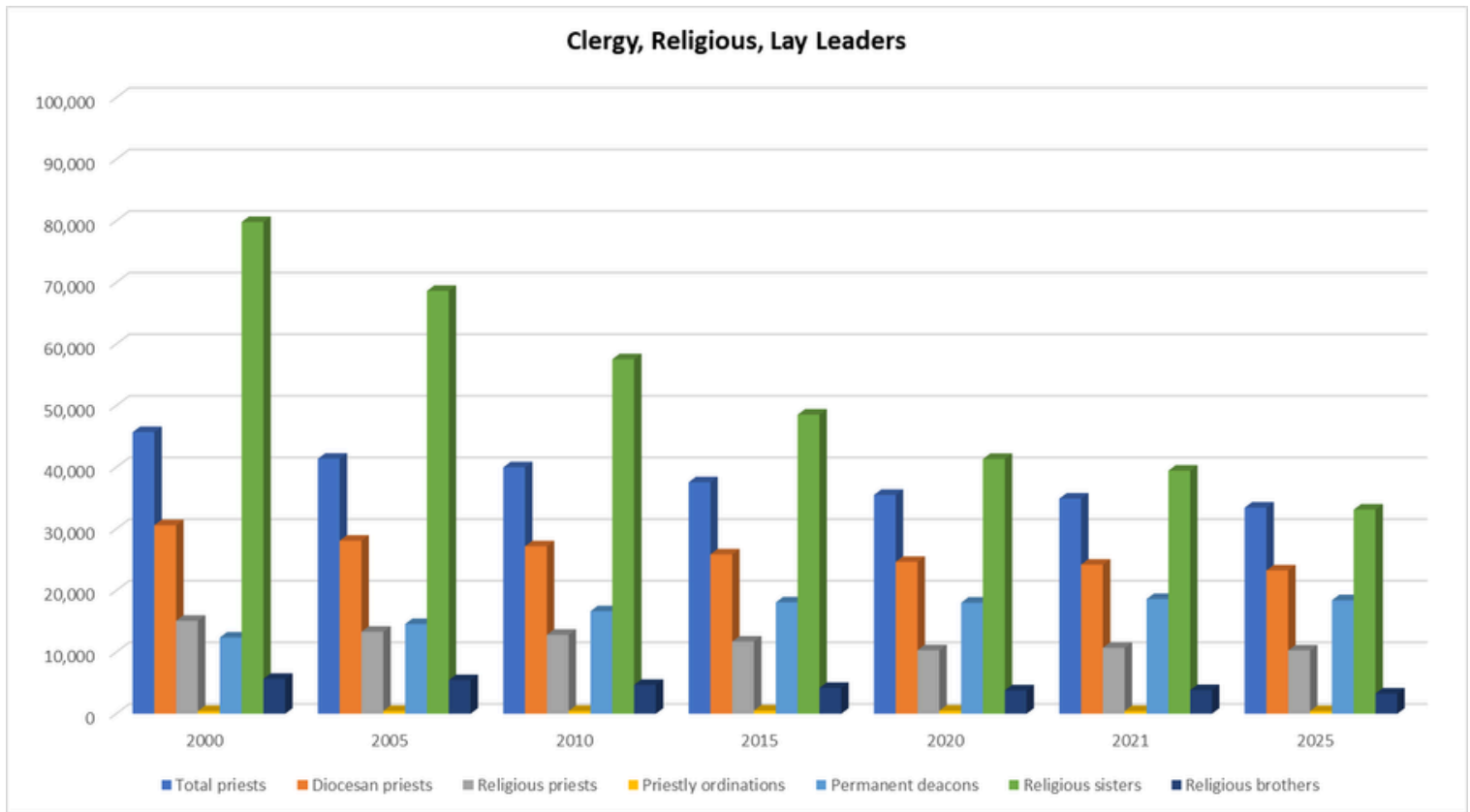
VOCATION MINISTRY

The most recent diocesan vocation and ministry data reflects a pattern that is consistent both locally and nationally — a gradual decline in active clergy and religious, accompanied by smaller seminary cohorts and a modest but steady presence of permanent deacons. Active diocesan priests decreased from 93 in 2024 to 87 in 2025 and 77 in 2026, while the number of women religious declined from 179 to 159 over the same period.

Retired priests increased slightly, signaling the continued aging of the presbyterate. Seminarian totals remain small but stable, with minor movement between formation stages. In contrast, permanent deacons show only a slight decrease, continuing to provide important ministerial support.

These trends mirror national realities: fewer ordinations, an aging priest population, and fewer women entering religious life — balanced by the growing reliance on collaborative ministry models and lay leadership to sustain parish life and sacramental care.

NATIONAL TRENDS



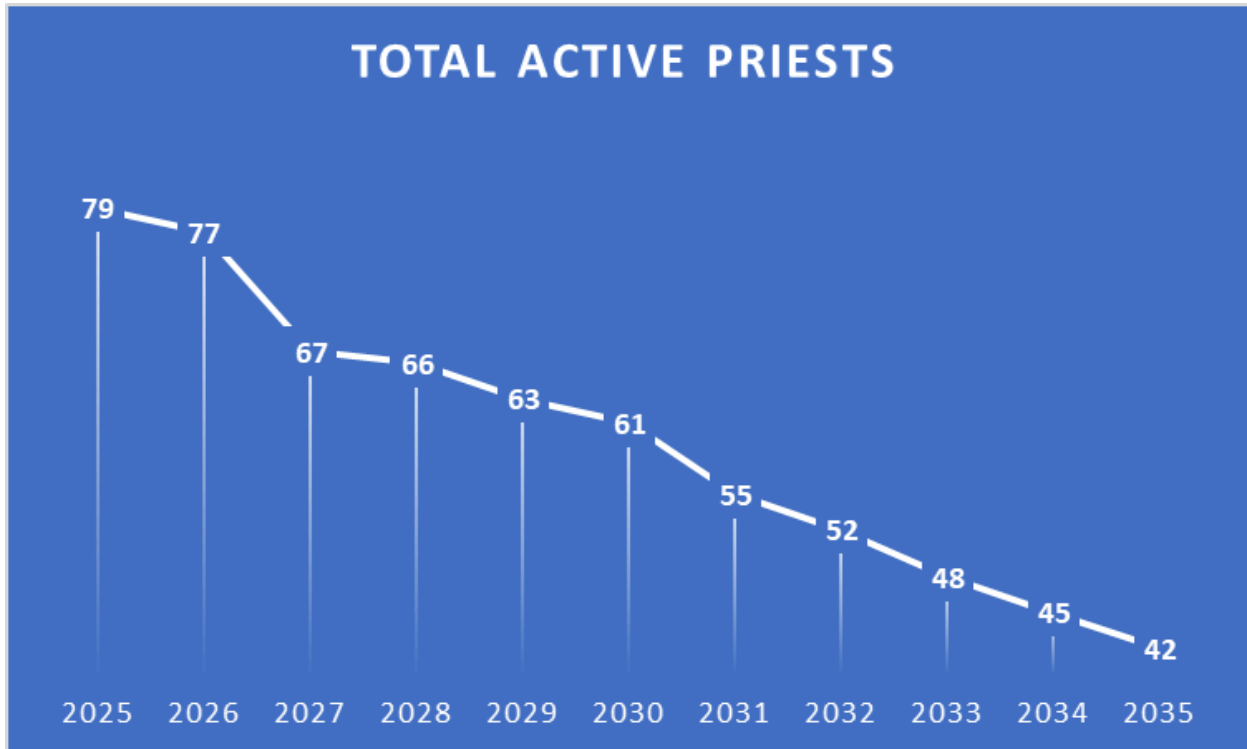
Nationally, the Catholic Church in the United States has experienced a sustained decline in ordained and religious vocations over the past 25 years. Total priests have decreased from 45,699 in 2000 to 33,462 in 2025 — a loss of more than 12,000. Diocesan priests have declined steadily over time, while religious priests have also decreased, with some fluctuation in recent years. Religious sisters have experienced the most significant change, falling from 79,814 in 2000 to 33,135 in 2025, reflecting broader aging trends within religious communities. Religious brothers have also declined, from 5,662 to 3,290 during the same period.

In contrast, permanent deacons remain the only vocation showing long-term growth, increasing from 12,378 in 2000 to 18,425 in 2025, highlighting the expanding role of ordained ministry in service to parish life.

COMPARATIVE — DIOCESE OF ERIE

In comparison, the Diocese of Erie reflects these same national realities, though on a localized scale shaped by pastoral planning and regional demographics. Like the national Church, the number of active priests has declined over time, requiring increased collaboration across parishes and deaneries. However, Erie's strategic pastoral planning efforts — including parish partnerships, clergy sharing and vocational outreach — have helped maintain sacramental access and parish vitality despite fewer priests. Similar to national patterns, the diocese has also seen the stabilizing presence of permanent deacons and lay ecclesial ministers grow in importance, ensuring that ministry, pastoral care and parish leadership remain strong across all 13 counties.

CLERGY PROJECTIONS



CLERGY PROJECTIONS AND PASTORAL PLANNING

Clergy projections indicate a continued decline in the number of active priests serving the Diocese of Erie over the next decade. In 2025, the diocese has 79 priests in active ministry. By 2035, that number is projected to decline to 42 — a reduction of nearly half the current workforce.

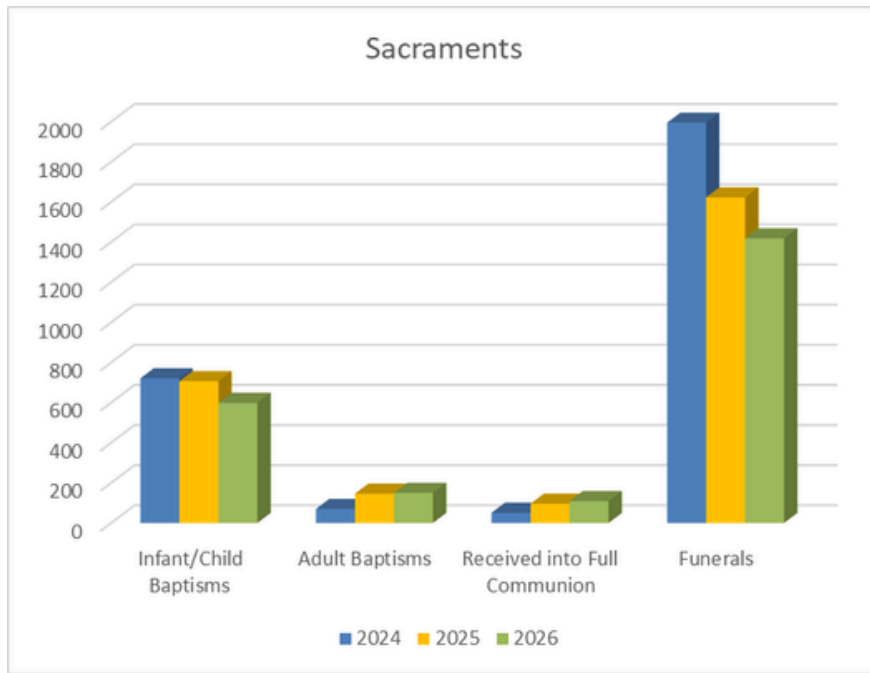
Retirements account for the largest impact, with ordinations occurring at a lower rate and unable to offset annual losses. In some cases, retirements are being deferred, which has helped to temporarily stabilize numbers, but these delays are expected to result in more pronounced declines in the years ahead. The most significant single-year decrease is projected between 2026 and 2027, with a loss of 10 priests. This projection reflects several priests who are generously continuing in ministry beyond age 75 through one-year assignment extensions. While their retirements may not occur all at once, the projection accounts for the possibility of these transitions within that period. In the years that follow, decreases of three to four priests annually are anticipated.

These trends directly affect parish life, increasing the ratio of priests to Masses, sacraments and pastoral responsibilities.

In response, the Diocese of Erie is proactively engaged in pastoral planning — evaluating parish structures, strengthening collaborative ministry models, promoting vocations and welcoming missionary priests to support sacramental life.

Together, these efforts aim to ensure sustainable pastoral care while continuing the Church's mission across the region.

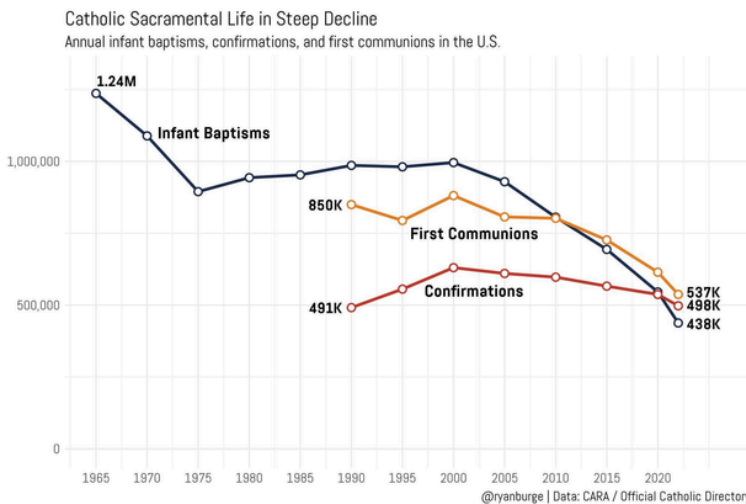
SACRAMENTAL TRENDS



Recent sacramental data within the diocese reflects both challenge and opportunity when viewed alongside national Catholic trends. Infant and child baptisms have declined from 721 in 2024 to 599 in 2026, mirroring broader demographic realities, lower birth rates and fewer young families actively connected to parish life. At the same time, adult baptisms and receptions into full communion are rising — increasing from 70 adult baptisms in 2024 to 150 in 2026, with those received into the Church also steadily growing. This reflects a national resurgence of adult initiation through OCIA/RCIA and points to evangelization bearing fruit. Funerals, while decreasing from 1,995 to 1,419, continue to outpace baptisms, underscoring the aging Catholic population.

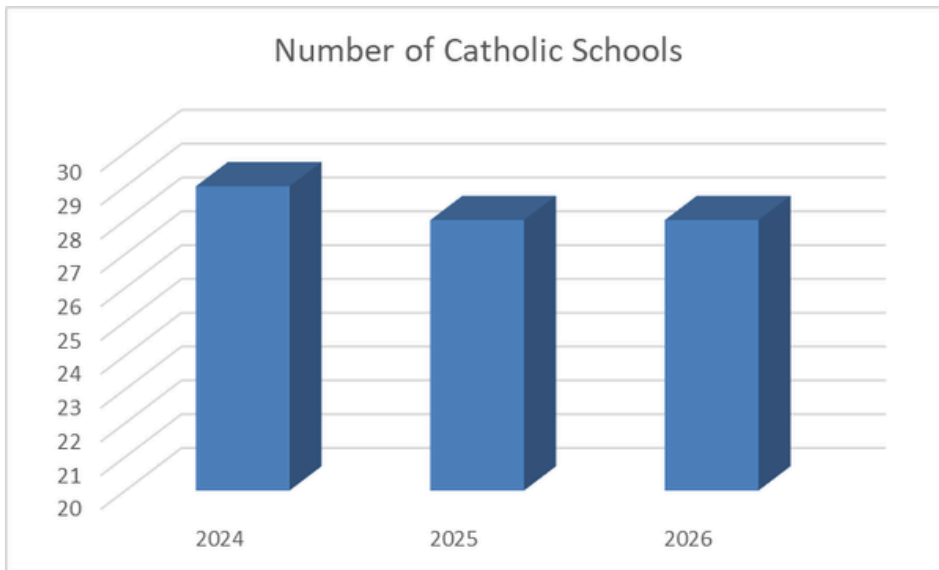
Taken together, these sacramental trends highlight a Church experiencing demographic contraction in cradle Catholics, yet meaningful growth through adult conversion — laying the groundwork for thoughtful discernment, pastoral planning and renewed missionary outreach to sustain a healthy, vibrant diocesan future.

NATIONAL SACRAMENTAL TRENDS



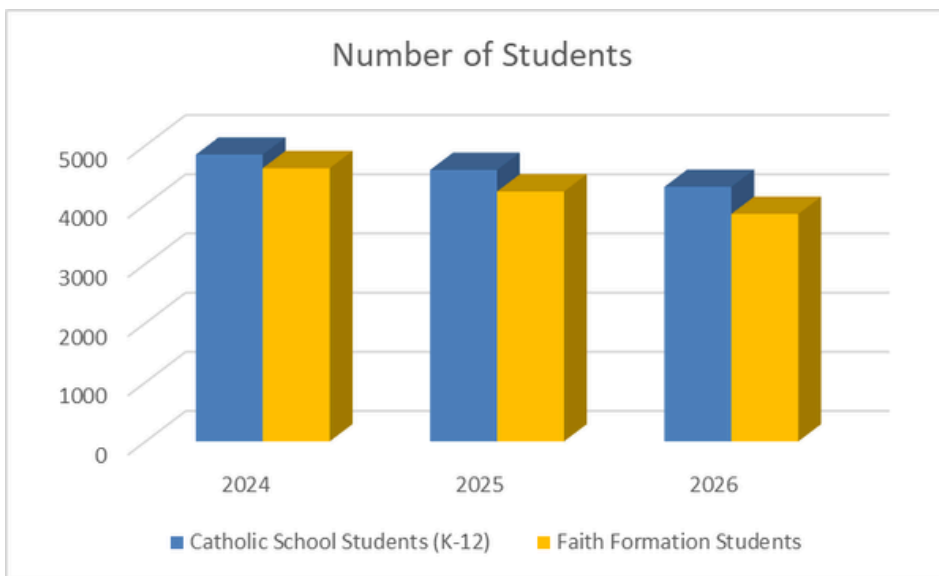
Over the past several decades, the number of infant baptisms, first Communions and confirmations in the United States has declined significantly. Infant baptisms have fallen most sharply, while first Communions and confirmations have also gradually decreased. Together, these trends illustrate a shrinking sacramental pipeline, with fewer children entering and progressing through the life of the Church.

Catholic Education and Faith Formation



Enrollment trends across Catholic schools and parish faith formation programs reflect both the demographic realities facing the church and the critical importance of sustained investment in evangelization and catechesis.

Catholic school enrollment has declined from 4,844 students in 2024 to 4,300 in 2026, while parish faith formation participation has decreased from 4,615 to 3,842. The number of Catholic schools has remained relatively stable, shifting only slightly from 29 to 28, demonstrating a continued institutional commitment to Catholic education even amid enrollment pressures.



Nationally, these patterns align with lower birth rates, shifting family dynamics and increased competition in the educational landscape. Moving forward, the work of the Catholic Schools Office and the Office for Faith Formation will be essential — strengthening academic excellence, deepening discipleship, supporting families and expanding outreach — ensuring that both school and parish formation pathways remain vibrant, accessible and mission-driven for the next generation of Catholics.



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