

Faith Perspective on the 2020 Census

According to the UN 2020 World Population and Housing Census Program, almost every country will hold a census between 2015 and 2024, what it calls the “2020 round.”¹ The United States is now conducting its 2020 Census, the 22nd census held since the first in 1790. The U.S. Constitution’s Article 1, Section 2 calls for counting the entire actual population in the U.S. every ten years, and this has occurred every ten years in our nation’s history.² (The 2020 Census deadlines were adjusted due to COVID-19.)

The main purpose of the 2020 Census is to ensure a fair share of power in the House of Representatives and a fair distribution of Federal government resources.³ The census is used to determine the distribution of nearly \$900 billion for federally funded programs, which are apportioned based on an area’s population, income, age, and other factors. These include educational and healthcare resources as well as some of the country’s largest social support programs, including Medicaid, Medicare, food stamps, Section 8 housing vouchers, job training, child care, and services for the elderly.⁴ The common good is best served when resource sharing and political representation are based on accurate assessments of the population in all areas in the United States.

This population includes citizens—and documented as well as undocumented individuals; the human dignity of each resident is thus honored by recognizing their existence and their rights to basic services. Catholic Social Teaching (CST) has always proclaimed that every human person is sacred and thus all have rights to food, housing, medical care, education, and decent work, as well as just representation, so they may participate in democracy. In past censuses, millions of children, people of color, low-income people, and immigrants, in rural and urban communities,

have gone uncounted, thus perpetuating systemic racism by undermining political representation and underfunding basic resources.

Given the current administration’s policies toward undocumented immigrants, many in the immigrant community fear filling out the 2020 Census forms because they believe it may lead to detention and deportation. Indeed, the current administration wanted to include a “citizen” question (all 22 former censuses counted residents without dividing them into citizenship categories); in 2019 the Supreme Court decided to block a new question on citizenship status. It is important to note that private data collected during the 2020 Census is protected by law and cannot be used to identify you to law enforcement or any government agency. Violation of this law is a federal crime, punishable by imprisonment and/or a \$250,000 fine.⁵ (Learn more about how your 2020 Census data is protected: bit.ly/3k0wGaM).

In a time of pandemic, reaching all residents, especially those who are not able to fill it out online, is a difficult challenge. Members of groups that are often underreported in the census: immigrants, low-income communities, and people experiencing homelessness, need to be counted so they may have a place at the table where all God’s children should be welcomed and are represented in our political process. **People of faith are called to support the census as part of their responsibilities as citizens and as an affirmation of solidarity with those who need supportive resources so they may live in dignity and have the opportunity for human flourishing, a basic value of CST.** When all residents can live in dignity, our democracy is strengthened and all our communities can thrive.

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REFLECTION

Reflect

1. What is your understanding, as a person of faith, of the U.S. Census and its importance?
2. In what ways does completing the 2020 Census uplift themes of Catholic Social Teaching such as Human Dignity, Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable, and Rights and Responsibilities?
3. How would you explain the 2020 Census' importance to others in your circle and community?

Act

While in-person service will be harder due to the pandemic, making an action plan to ensure that people in your community and family have filled out the 2020 Census is an important work of advocacy and justice that you can do from your home.

- Make sure your household has filled out the [2020 Census](#), and remind your family, friends, neighbors as well. College students living in off-campus housing, you (and roommates) need to respond at the address where you resided on April 1, 2020.
- Use the [2020 Census Action Guide for the Faith Community](#) to make an Census action plan in your community.
- See additional suggestions for action in the [Faith in Public Life 2020 Census Faith Toolkit](#)

Pray

God of all, help us to recognize the human dignity of all your children who live in our nation. Guide all efforts to recognize us as U.S. residents as the 2020 Census continues. Give us a deeper understanding of the importance of this census so we may support efforts to gather accurate and full information so all may share in your abundance and so all may have a voice and a place at the table. Amen.

ENDNOTES

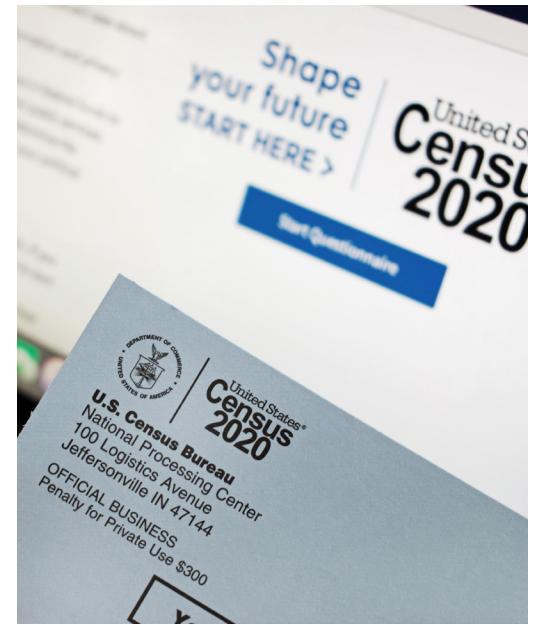
¹ *UNSD - Demographic and Social Statistics*. United Nations. United Nations, February 26, 2020.

² Greenspan, Jesse. *10 Things You May Not Know About the US Census*. History.com, July 29, 2015.

³ Mather, Mark, and Paola Scommegna. *Why Is the U.S. Census So Important?* Population Reference Bureau, September 17, 2019

⁴ Faith in Public Life. *2020 Census Faith Toolkit: Mobilizing Your Community to be Counted*. PDF file.

⁵ Bureau, US Census. "How the Census Bureau Protects Your Data." Accessed July 31, 2020. <https://2020census.gov/en/data-protection.html>.



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The Ignatian Solidarity Network is an official partner of the U.S. Census. For love of your neighbor and yourself, encourage your community to be counted.

To see the current 2020 Census response rate in your state, please visit: 2020census.gov/en/response-rates.html

For more information on the 2020 Census, please visit: 2020census.gov