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Census 2010: Everyone needs to be counted

Every 10 years the federal government aims to count everyone living in the United States. The U.S. Census Bureau, the government agency that administers the 2010 Census, will count individuals living in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories such as Puerto Rico and Guam. People of all ages, races, and ethnic groups will be counted. The Census count will encompass citizens and non-citizens, including undocumented immigrants.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and their local dioceses and parishes are partnering with the U.S. Census Bureau to encourage participation in the 2010 Census. As a respected and trusted institution, the Catholic Church will help to ensure that hard to reach communities, like immigrants, the homeless and individuals with limited English, know about and partake in the Census.

The 2010 Census count will be done through a Census form that will be mailed to individuals' primary residence. The Census form consists of 10 questions that ask for information like: number of people living or staying in the household as of April 1, 2010; number of additional people staying at the residence not included in Question 1; whether the residence is a house, apartment or mobile home and whether it is owned or rented; telephone number at the residence; information for each person living in the residence, including, name, sex, age and date of birth, race, and whether the person is of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. The Census Bureau estimates that it will take 10 minutes to fill out the Census form.

Complete confidentiality

Census answers are completely confidential and protected by privacy laws. Responses to the questions cannot be used against individuals in any way. The Census form does not ask about immigration status or ask for a Social Security Number.

The Census Bureau has a solid record of protecting the confidentiality of personal census responses. No other government agency – not immigration officials, law enforcement, housing authorities or the courts – can obtain any person's individual census answers. Also, every census worker has to swear an oath to keep information confidential and anyone who violates that confidentiality can be imprisoned for up to five years and fined \$250,000. These laws are strictly enforced.

Mandatory participation

Filling out the Census form is mandatory. After individuals have completed the form, they are instructed to place it in the attached postage-paid envelope and mail it back to the Census Bureau. If a household does not mail back its form, a Census worker may call or come to the door to help fill out the Census form.

All should be counted

The Census is important to everyone. Census data directly impacts communities in three critical ways: political representation, government funding, and civil rights. Additionally, governments, businesses, and nonprofits (like the Catholic Church, the Catholic Legal Immigration Network and Catholic Charities programs) rely on Census data to plan for growth and development of their programs and to assess the needs of the communities they serve.

Political Representation: Census data determines the number of Congressional seats each state has. The data is used to draw Congressional and state legislative district lines, and in some communities, it also decides city, county and school board seats. Thus, being counted as part of the Census is an important path to political empowerment.

Funding: The Census data affects how more than \$400 billion per year in federal and state funding is allocated to communities for public health services, education, transportation, parks, etc. Thus, filling out and mailing back the 2010 Census form is crucial to ensure that communities get their fair share of federal funds for important programs like public schools, Medicaid, CHIP, childcare, early child education, school lunch programs, English and civics classes, and more. All of these programs play a significant role in the future prosperity and well-being of all communities. Each uncounted person could cost his or her community between \$11,000 and \$12,500 over the next decade.

Civil Rights: Census data is used to protect individuals' civil rights, such as the enforcement of the Voting Rights Act.

For more information, contact the North Dakota Catholic Conference at (701) 223-2519.

Key Dates for Census 2010

January -- March 2010: Census advance letters mailed to all households.

The advance letter notifies households to look for their questionnaire and explains why it is important for them to participate in the Census. The letter will let individuals know that their participation is mandatory and that their answers will be kept confidential.

March 2010: Census questionnaires mailed and or delivered to households.

More than 130 million household throughout the country will receive a Census form in March 2010, either by mail or in person by Census workers.

April 1, 2010 -- Census Day.

April 1 is the day established by the Census Bureau as Census Day. This day is used as a point of reference for sending in completed Census forms. Households do not need to wait until April 1 to complete and return their forms. The Census Bureau asks households to complete the Census form as soon as possible.

April – July 2010: Census workers visit households that did not return a form my mail. Census workers are individuals from local communities who are hired by the Census Bureau to make sure that your neighborhood gets represented as accurately as possible. The census workers' primary responsibility is to collect census information from residences that have not sent back their 2010 Census form.

December 2010: By law, the Census Bureau delivers population information to the President for apportionment.

March 2011: By law, the Census Bureau completes delivery of redistricting data to states.