

Number of Catholics in the world grows by 15m in a year



Bishops from Latin America attend a papal Mass in Sao Paolo.

Half of the world's Catholics live in the Americas (Photo: CNS)

The number of Catholics, deacons, priests, bishops and dioceses all increased in 2009, while the number of women in religious orders continued to decline, according to Vatican statistics.

At the end of 2009, the worldwide Catholic population increased by 15 million or 1.3 per cent, slightly outpacing the global population growth rate, which was estimated at 1.1 per cent, according to a statement by the Vatican press office.

The statement reported a handful of the statistics contained in the 2011 “Annuario Pontificio”, a yearbook containing information about every Vatican office, every cardinal and bishop, every diocese and religious order in the world.

Officials of the Vatican Secretariat of State and its Central Office of Church Statistics presented the first copy of the 2011 yearbook to Pope Benedict XVI during an audience on Saturday.

The Vatican statement said that in the calendar year 2010, Pope Benedict established 10 new dioceses, bringing to 2,956 the number of dioceses and Church jurisdictions in the world.

The more detailed statistics in the yearbook refer to the situation reported by dioceses and religious orders as of December 31, 2009.

The number of Catholics reported was about 1.18 billion, the Vatican said, which was up 15 million from the 1.16 billion reported a year earlier.

While only 13.6 per cent of the world's people live in the Americas, 49.4 percent of all Catholics live there, the Vatican said.

The Vatican said the number of bishops in the world increased to 5,065 from 5,002; the number of priests went from 405,178 to 410,593, increasing everywhere except Europe.

The number of permanent deacons reported – 38,155 – was an increase of more than 1,000 over the previous year; 98 per cent of the world's permanent deacons live in the Americas or in Europe, it said.

The number of women in religious orders fell by almost 10,000 in 2009, despite increases in their numbers in Asia and Africa, the Vatican said. At the end of the year, Catholic women's orders had 729,371 members.

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