

WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

EYE ON THE CAPITOL

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GROWING LATINO PRESENCE MAKES WISCONSIN MORE DIVERSE

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The Applied Population Laboratory in Madison is a little-known but very valuable resource for anyone interested in demographic trends and information about our state. Recently, the Laboratory cooperated with the UW-Extension to examine what the 2010 census data and other demographic research can tell us about the Latino population in Wisconsin.

The study offers a rich source of information for planners in both the public and private sectors who want a glimpse not only of our state's present situation, but also its future. In the case of Catholic dioceses and agencies, the data can offer a tool for assessing future pastoral needs.

Here are some key findings:

- In 2010, 5.9 percent of our state's population was Latino, making Latinos the third largest race or ethnicity category behind Non-Hispanic whites (83.3) and Non-Hispanic Blacks (6.2). This places Wisconsin near the middle of the 50 states in terms of the number and proportion of its Latino population.
- The Latino population, which grew from 193,000 in 2000 to 336,000 in the 2010 census, is increasing at a faster rate than ever.
- The Latino population is still concentrated in southeastern Wisconsin. But a growing percentage of Latinos are found outside the southeastern region. Indeed, several counties in the southwestern corner of the state and several more in central Wisconsin reported increases in excess of 20 percent for the Latino population.
- Migration continues to be an important "driver" of this increase in population. Nonetheless, the share of Latinos that were born in Wisconsin between 2000 and 2010 also increased. In the latter year, nearly half, or 45 percent, of Latinos in Wisconsin were born in the Badger State.

The report examines several other areas of interest.

Age and Family Structure. The Latino population is younger than that of the state as whole. Further, whereas the largest categories for Wisconsin's entire population are married couples without children and persons living alone, the largest share of Latino households are couples or single parents with children.

Education. Latinos in Wisconsin were less likely to lack a high school diploma in 2010 (40 percent) than they were in 2000 (45 percent). However, this is still about four times higher than the population as a whole. In addition, income among Latinos lags behind that of the rest of the population. About one-third of Latinos have either some college education, a bachelor's degree, or more, compared to 56 percent of the state's entire population.

Economic status. The jobless rate for Latinos is one and a half times higher than the statewide average. In addition, the poverty rate among Latinos increased in Wisconsin between 2000 and 2010. Latinos are also "significantly less likely" to have health insurance than Non-Latinos.

This census data makes it clear that in Wisconsin, like the nation, the Latino presence is growing and making our state more diverse. The challenge for all Wisconsinites is to see past the challenges of adjusting to diversity and grasp how it enhances our state.

We should consider one more thing. Census data cannot tell us everything. The study did not examine the religious affiliation of Latinos in Wisconsin. However, we know from other research that a majority are Catholic. Thus, in addition to being our friends and neighbors, Latinos in Wisconsin are also our fellow parishioners. Like the Catholics whose ancestors came from Ireland, Germany, and southern and eastern Europe, they will also share the gifts of their rich cultural heritage and their own faith traditions with the churches of our five dioceses. If we make them welcome, we Catholics in Wisconsin will be the richer for it.