Social Justice




Signs advertising the 2020 U.S. census are seen in Seattle March 23, 2020. (CNS/Reuters/Brian Snyder)



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A baker's dozen of Catholic organizations, from dioceses to religious orders to Catholic Charities affiliates, have signed on to a joint statement urging all to take part in the 2020 U.S. census.

"We affirm the right of all people to participate in the 2020 census and remain committed to helping our neighbors be counted," said the statement, issued March 26 by the group Faith in Public Life. "All people, regardless of race, religion or immigration status have God-given dignity and it is imperative that our government counts every person living in this country."

The Catholic signatories were part of a larger multi-faith effort to encourage participation in the decennial census, which is a constitutional mandate.

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious, one of the signatories, has long been part of Faith in Public Life's "Faithful Census" initiative, said Sr. Ann Scholz, a School Sister of Notre Dame, who is LCWR's associate director of social mission. LCWR also has signed on to the Census Bureau's National Partnership Program, she added.

"We've been spreading the word about the critical importance of the 2020 census count," Scholz told Catholic News Service.

In messages being sent before Census Day, April 1, to LCWR members, Scholz said LCWR wants to make the point that "we know that in past censuses, millions of people of color, children and immigrants have gone uncounted."

"We believe this undercount," she continued, "has resulted in systemic injustice resulting in underfunding of resources that we all use, like schools, hospitals, critical infrastructure and — a new twist that's going out in my emails ... we think that it's even resulted in the under-preparation for critical health emergencies like COVID-

19."

Sisters signaling their support for the U.S. census "reflects our faith, and it reflects our belief in the life and dignity of each and every person. Catholic teaching is grounded in the absolute dignity of each and every individual," Scholz said.

"God counts us. Certainly we can do no less in our decennial census. We're each made in God's image and endowed with God's spirit. No matter our creed, our race, our gender, our immigration status — we're worthy of being counted," she added.

"A full and accurate count lays the foundation for a healthy democracy and healthy communities. By completing the census and encouraging our communities to do so, we claim our rightful political representation in Congress and fulfill our responsibility to our neighbors and to future generations," the Faith in Public Life joint statement said.

It took note of the coronavirus pandemic as well. "In the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, we encourage all people to be counted in the 2020 census," it said. Scholz told CNS that when the pandemic wanes, she expects sisters to be "on the front lines, enabling people to get counted."

"We are committed to ensuring that our children have lunch to eat at school. We are committed to ensuring that all families can access health care. We are committed to ensuring that our community is represented in government. We are committed to ensuring that all people receive the recognition they deserve," the statement said.

Mail from the Census Bureau was sent to millions of U.S. homes March 12. Inside the envelope was a distinct 12-character code that would allow the recipient to complete the brief — five to seven minutes — census questionnaire online. Residents also may complete a census form by phone or mail.

Other Catholic signatories on the joint statement include the U.S. region of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ; Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington; the Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach; the Conference of Major Superiors of Men; U.S. provinces of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd; the Diocese of Monterey, California; the Franciscan Action Network; the Hope Border Institute; the National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd; the Catholic social justice lobby Network; Pax Christi USA; and the U.S.-Ontario Province of the Sisters of the Holy Names.

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