

# Number of priests increases, but not as fast as Catholics

VATICAN CITY – The latest church statistics show that the number of priests and seminarians in the world continues to increase, but not as fast as the general Catholic population.

The statistics from the end of 2006 also confirm a gradual geographical shift in vocations from Europe and the Americas to Africa and Asia.

The sampling of statistics was released Feb. 29 in connection with the presentation of the 2008 edition of the Vatican yearbook, known as the *Annuario Pontificio*, which catalogs the church's presence in each diocese.

The Vatican said the global Catholic population increased during 2006 by 1.4 percent, from 1.115 billion to 1.131 billion.

The number of priests in the world also rose, but by 0.21 percent. At the end of 2006 there were 407,262 priests in the world, 851 more than at the beginning of the year.

The ratio of Catholics to priests has increased steadily in recent decades. In 2006, it was 2,777 Catholics for every priest, while in 1981 it was 1,932 Catholics per priest.

The Vatican said the number of seminarians had increased by 0.9 percent in 2006. At the end of the year, there were 115,480 seminarians: 37,150 in the Americas; 30,702 in Asia; 24,034 in Africa; 22,618 in Europe; and 976 in Oceania.

African and Asian seminarians made up 47 percent of the global total. Twenty-five years ago, they represented 28 percent of the total.