

Number of priests showing steady, moderate increase, Vatican says

VATICAN CITY – The latest church statistics show that the number of priests and seminarians around the world has been showing a modest, yet steady increase.

The statistics from the end of 2007 also showed that the number of Catholics remains stable at 1.147 billion people across the globe.

The sampling of statistics was released Feb. 28 in connection with the presentation of the 2009 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 2007 by 1.4 percent, which more or less kept pace with the 1.1 percent global birthrate that year.

For the past two years, Catholics have made up 17.3 percent of the world's population, it said.

The number of priests in the world also rose, but just by 0.18 percent. At the end of 2007 there were 408,024 priests in the world, 762 more than at the beginning of the year.

The figure on the number of priests was showing a continued "trend of moderate growth which began in 2000 after more than 20 years of disappointing results," the Vatican report said.

However, that growth has been confined to Africa and Asia, which showed substantial increases in ordinations with 27.6 percent growth and 21.1 percent growth, respectively, it said.

The number of priests has remained more or less the same in the Americas, while Europe registered a 6.8 percent decline and Oceania reported a 5.5 percent decrease in the total number of priests, said the Vatican.

The number of seminarians increased by 0.4 percent in 2007. At the end of the year, there were 115,919 seminarians. However, only Africa and Asia saw significant growth in priestly vocations, while numbers fell by 2.1 percent in Europe and by 1 percent in the Americas, the Vatican said.

The report said the number of permanent deacons continued to show significant growth. There were 35,942 deacons at the end of 2007 - an increase of 4.1 percent over the previous year, it said.