

World now has greater number of Muslims than Catholics

VATICAN CITY - A Vatican official said that, for the first time, the world's Muslim population is greater than the number of Catholics.

Monsignor Vittorio Formenti, who heads the Vatican's statistics office, said the shift was the result of larger families among Muslims.

According to statistics at the end of 2006, Muslims now represent 19.2 percent of the world population, while Catholics represent 17.4 percent, he said.

"For the first time in history, we're no longer at the top. The Muslims have surpassed us," Monsignor Formenti said in an interview March 30 with the Vatican newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano.

He noted that if other Christian denominations are taken into consideration, the global Christian population is about 33 percent of the total, still far greater than the Muslim population.

Monsignor Formenti said the Catholic population continues to keep pace with world population growth. However, Muslims' families have more children and are outpacing the average growth rate, he said.

He said statistics on Catholics are tabulated methodically, while statistics on Muslims are estimates transmitted to the United Nations.

Other sources, including the World Almanac, have reported for several years that the world's Muslim population exceeded that of Catholics.