



Photo by Karen Bonar / The Register

Gayle Mahin moved to rural Kansas during middle school, and never thought she'd return to north central Kansas to raise a family. She is pictured with husband, Caleb, and children (from left) Hazel, Warren and Drake near their home in rural Formoso on June 17.

Catholic Charities' July 18 annual fundraiser moves online

By The Register

SALINA — The Catholic Charities of Northern Kansas fundraiser will take a new platform this year, going entirely online.

On Saturday, July 18, at 7 p.m., the 2020 Annual Fundraiser for Catholic Charities will be streamed live on Catholic Charities website, www.ccnks.org.

While the annual event typically draws about 250 people to Salina, unknown gathering restrictions surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic prompted the Annual Fundraiser Committee to move the 15th Annual Fundraiser online, so it could be attended by everyone in the diocese.

"The Annual Fundraiser is the main source of funding for Catholic Charities," said Katie Platten, interim executive director and former board president of Catholic Charities. "We had to find a way to make this event happen this year. Our expenses have drastically increased due to our COVID-19 relief efforts, and we are currently seeing a spike in people needing rent and utility assistance."

WITH FOOD INSECURITY and evictions intensified by the coronavirus, Eric Frank said canceling this year's Catholic Charities Annual Fundraiser "was not an option."

Many of the people seeking assistance at Catholic Charities "have never asked for help before in their lives," Frank said. "They lost their jobs or had a reduction in income, and through no fault of their own, they now find themselves unable to provide food and other basic necessities and are at risk of

Please see **GREEN** / Page 15

Rural life grows on small-town mom

By Karen Bonar
The Register

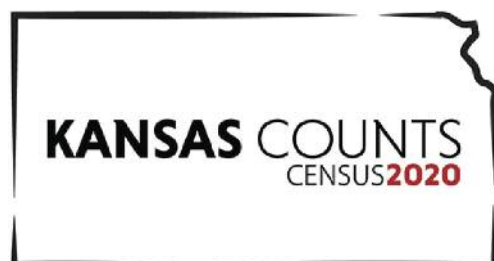
FORMOSO — On June 8, the population of Formoso grew by one when Gayle and Caleb Mahin's third child, Warren, was born.

"It wasn't until we had kids that I was like, 'Thank God that I'm here,'" Gayle said. "(Before kids), I fought moving to the country."

The young family are members of St. Edward Parish in Belleville, 20 miles east of their rural home in the small, north-central Kansas town.

WHILE THE FAMILY IS NOW comfortably settled in rural Kansas, it's not where Gayle pictured her life a dozen years ago.

Her aversion to small-town life was tied to moving to Mankato as a sixth-



grader.

"I had culture shock," she said of the change from Sterling, Colo. to Mankato. "(In Mankato), there were probably only 13 in my class in sixth grade. I probably had 400 in my class in Colorado."

She dreamed of eventually returning to Colorado.

"I loved the mountains. I loved Colorado," she said.

Gayle attended Wichita State University, and said the bigger city appealed to her.

"I love the city life," she said. "There was so much to do."

Gayle said she didn't make regular trips back to Mankato until her grandfather became ill.

"My grandma was alone after he passed away," she said. "I slowly started having more appreciation for small-town life, but I never wanted to go back. I didn't think there was opportunity."

She pursued a master's degree in social work at the University of Kansas in Kansas City and Lawrence.

"Once I decided on a master's in social work, I never felt I could become successful or have a job I enjoyed in a small town," Gayle said. "I thought I had to be in a city to be successful and find a job I like and enjoy."

And she was right — for a time. Her

Please see **APPRECIATION** / Page 10

Clergy changes announced; affects 17 priests, 22 parishes

By The Register

SALINA — New or changing assignments will affect 15 priests in the Diocese of Salina this spring and summer.

Father Andy Hammeke and Father Joshua Werth have been named co-vocational directors, which was

effective April 20.

The remainder of the changes will take effect July 1.

Sacred Heart High School in Salina will have Father Fred Gatschet and Father Andrew Rockers teaching religion classes.

Father Norbert Dlabal

will come out of retirement and return to western Kansas, this time to Atwood and Herndon.

A few minor changes include reassigning parish clusters, such as combining St. Andrew Parish in Abilene with St. John Parish in Herington, St. Philip Parish

in Hope and St. Columba Parish in Elmo.

Additionally, a priest from the diocese of Gaylord, Mich., will assist at St. Joseph Parish in Hays and at the Comeau Catholic Campus Center (please see biography of Father Matthew Cowan on p. 12).

Clergy assignments can be found on page 3. Priests' biographies and other related stories may be found on pages 12-13.

Shuffling
spring
fundraisers

Schools around diocese
adjust efforts.
Page 3, 5

Bishop's
Annual
Appeal

Faithful support
annual fundraiser.
Page 6



Waiting

Teacher gives
students advice
as they wait,
prepare to receive
their First
Communion.
Page 14



AROUND THE DIOCESE

Census participation essential for all communities

By Karen Bonar

The Register

Your response matters. This is the simple message going out across the country as city, county and community leaders are encouraging all residents to fill out the 2020 Census.

"People don't understand your county and city funding is tied to the census. The federal funding counties receive is tied to the census numbers," said Kim Reynolds, the executive director of Cloud Corp., Concordia, as well as the chair of the Complete Count Committee for Cloud County.

Reynolds, who is a parishioner of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Concordia, moved to town more than two decades ago.

"A lot of programs our people use like school lunch programs are tied to federal money (via population counts)," she said. "In the county we average above 55 percent of students who are on free and reduced lunches, so we need those dollars to help with the school lunch programs."

It's not only school breakfast and lunches. The federal government gives grants for housing, special education, Head Start, Medicaid, community facility loans, sewer replacement, street replacement, housing rehab ... and the list continues, she said.

"It's not out of greed that motivates us," Reynolds said. "As a community and as a county, we look at the community. We are thinking about the people we know that utilize these programs. Having a cut in that funding could be detrimental to a household."

AS THE CHAIR OF THE Complete Count Committee, Reynolds said she has been coordinating with 15 others throughout the county to

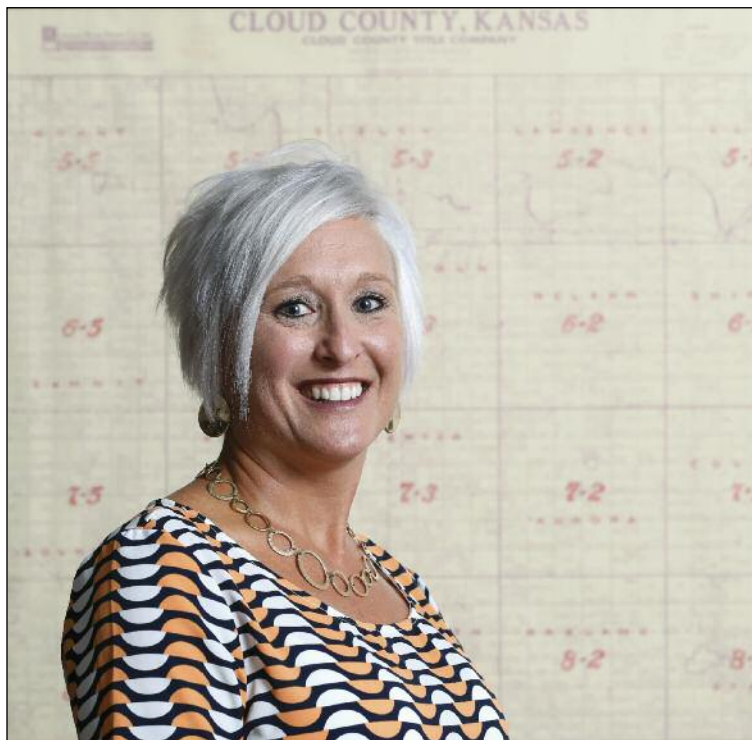


Photo by Karen Bonar / The Register

Kim Reynolds, a member of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Concordia, is the executive director of Cloud Corp in Concordia, and works with economic development. She is working to encourage all residents to participate in the census.

promote census responses.

For 2020, Reynolds said the census is urging residents to input the information online, and the local Complete Count Committee made preparations with the local library. The group was prepared to hit the ground running, but the Frank Carlson Library in Concordia closed March 16.

"The 60 and older population were calling saying, 'I don't have computer access, I always went to the library,'" Reynolds said.

Reynolds had the phone number handy to direct residents to call the information in (1-800-923-8282). Additionally, the census questionnaire was mailed to every household. They ran into another snag, however, with the mail.

"They don't deliver the questionnaire to P.O. boxes," Reynolds said. "A lot of people get their mail at the P.O. Box rather than their home."

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 Sister 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," Sister Scholz said.

There are two "populations" that Reynolds said are often undercounted: the young and the elderly.

"If that baby takes a breath of air on April 1, then count 'em," she said. "If they haven't been born prior to April 1, then they would not be counted this year."

Reynolds said she thinks the population age 65 and older can tend to be skeptical about items they receive in the mail.

"That age group is targeted so much by scammers, I think they are concerned about whether or not it's true," she said.

ACCORDING TO CENSUS data, the population of Cloud County peaked in 1890, with more than 19,000 residents. The population rose and fell for several decades, but since 1940, has experienced a steady decline.

This trend is one seen across rural Kansas, said Xan Wedel, the state data

In messages being sent before Census Day, April 1, to LCWR members, Sister 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 underpreparation for critical health emergencies like COVID-19."

SISTERS SIGNALING their support for the U.S. census

June 22-28 has been designated as a time to "Call for the Count," a week-long, concentrated campaign to promote self-response to the 2020 Census.

RESPOND TO THE CENSUS:

my2020census.gov
1-800-923-8282

Self-reporting concludes Oct. 31.

center lead at the Kansas State Data Center at Institute for Policy and Social Research at the University of Kansas in Lawrence.

"The northwest Kansas regional population in 2010 was 96,833. This was six percent lower than the 2000 Census," she said. "Current population estimates indicate continued population loss for most counties except Ellis, Logan and Wallace."

The Institute for Policy and Social Research considers northwest Kansas as 18 counties: Cheyenne, Rawlins, Decatur, Norton, Phillips, Smith, Sherman, Thomas, Sheridan, Graham, Rooks, Osborne, Wallace, Logan, Gove, Trego, Ellis and Russell counties.

She terms the population shift "urban migration."

"We had a lot of farm-based jobs before 1940," Wedel said. "As our farms got larger and larger, they need fewer people to operate them because of modern technology. With less demand in rural employment, people move to urban areas with more employment opportunities."

In 2010, she said, more than 50 percent of the state's 2.8 million people lived in five counties: Johnson, Sedgwick, Shawnee, Wyandotte and Douglas.

"We have 105 counties, but more than half the people live in five of them," she said. "There's almost a million people living in the top

two counties."

WHILE MANY RURAL areas in Kansas have shrunk in population, Riley and Geary counties, home to Junction City, Fort Riley and Manhattan, have experienced consistent growth.

Jason Hilgers, the Deputy City Manager of Manhattan, is also a parishioner of St. Thomas More in Manhattan. The population of Manhattan and Riley County, on the eastern edge of the Salina Diocese, has increased by 15 percent or more in every decade since 1910.

"Population factors are centered around the university and Fort Riley," Hilgers said.

For many years, the 1st Infantry Division was housed at Fort Riley. He said it moved away in 1995, then returned in 2006.

"It impacted us from an economic standpoint," Hilgers said. "Manhattan is an entitlement community, and we get \$500-600,000 annually for community block grants."

The city pushed hard in 2010 to reach all of its households, with the goal of reaching a population count of 50,000 residents in the census.

"If you're under 50,000 residents, then you compete at the state level with other cities that are under 50,000 for funding," he said. "Getting over the 50,000 threshold has resulted in millions of dollars from the federal government for our city."

While the trend has been historically increasing, he said the numbers could dip for the 2020 census.

"We have roughly 20,000 students, give or take," Hilgers said. "It's grown from 2000 to 2016, and the last four years, there were declines (in enrollment)."

Universities are being

Please see POPULATION / Page 8

Catholic organizations urge communities to respond to U.S. census

By Mark Pattison

Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — 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 Sister 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," Sister Scholz said.

In messages being sent before Census Day, April 1, to LCWR members, Sister 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 underpreparation 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," Sister 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.

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.

Information is available online at <https://2020census.gov/en/ways-to-respond>

Due to COVID-19, the census self-response phase concludes on Oct. 31.

Residing Rural

Atwood couple chooses to return to hometown to work, raise family

By Karen Bonar
The Register

ATWOOD — With deep ties in Rawlins County in northwest Kansas, Andrea and Jordan Hagler never considered any other location to call home.

“I just love it here. I grew up out in the country, I love the country, love our community and I love our church,” said Andrea, who is 34 years old. “It was important to come back.”

Her husband grew up about 15 miles south of Atwood.

“There is something about the farm life that was engrained,” Jordan said. “If you grow up that way, you just know you want to come back.”

“I love the wide open spaces, the country, the farm life,” Andrea chimed in.

Her great-great grandparents settled in rural Beardsley, near St. John Nepomucene Church.

Jordan’s family moved to Kansas because of the church.

“His great-grandpa on the Kanak side came out from Wisconsin to St. John’s to measure the altars to be built,” Andrea said, adding the great-grandfather worked for Josef Svoboda furniture company. “He went back to Wisconsin, built the altar, and came back to install it. When he was back, he met a local girl in the area, and that’s how that side ended up here.”

The main altar and side altars of St. John Nepomucene Church — which are still in use today — were built by Jordan’s ancestors.

AS WITH LOVE OF THE LAND, faith was woven through the fabric of their childhoods.

“The way we were brought up, we prayed together before every meal, said morning and evening prayer together, prayed the rosary together,” Andrea said. “Faith is just a way of life. It was something that was instilled in me as a kid.”

The couple’s 4-year-old son,

Atwood population

1900	486
1910	680
1920	919
1930	1,106
1940	1,408
1950	1,613
1960	1,906
1970	1,658
1980	1,665
1990	1,388
2000	1,279
2010	1,194

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Aidan, built block on the living room floor as Andrea continued.

“It’s the same thing with Aidan,” she said. “We take him to church with us, pray before every meal, pray morning and bedtime. He enjoys praying.”

The couple’s son is a sixth-generation member of the parish; Andrea and all four of her siblings were married in the church, and she is still an active parishioner.

JORDAN AND ANDREA MET during high school and began dating during his senior year at Atwood High School. The duo attended Kansas State University in Manhattan and Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Okla., where they studied optometry.

They each had an interest in the medical field, and it was important to find something that would meld their rural background with professional interest.

“I was debating between medical school and optometry school, knowing I wanted to come back to a rural area,” Andrea said. “My senior year in college, I was in the choir loft (during Mass) and one of the doctors got a call and had to go to the ER on Christmas Eve. I didn’t want to be on call 24/7.”

Which is why optometry felt like a more attractive option than family medicine.

“If I wanted to live in a big city, I probably would have gone the med school route, but in a rural area, optometry was more appealing to me,” she said.



Photo by Karen Bonar / The Register

Andrea and Jordan Hagler met during high school at Atwood High School, and moved back to their hometown upon completing their college studies. The couple lives in Atwood with their 4-year-old son, Aidan. “I think it’s the attitude in high school. (They) want to go out and do something big with their lives. They think in a rural area it can’t be done — that you have to go to a big city and that there are more opportunities in the big city. We just love it back here. It’s all we ever wanted to do since high school — come back to the area.”

As they progressed through school, they remained committed to returning to their rural roots.

“Even optometry school, all the other kids knew they would go to big cities. They were like, ‘You’re

going to western Kansas when you’re done?’” Jordan said. “Many taking the board (exams) were going to Kansas City and Wichita.

“The mentality was that you have to go to a big city to make

this work. We were the only ones taking the boards who planned to work west of Hays.”

While the vastness of the plains can seem empty to some, with emptiness between rural commu-

nities, the couple said it works in their favor. The duo works for Vision Source, with five doctors in six offices: Atwood, Colby, Oakley, St. Francis, Goodland and Burlington, Colo.

“In a strange way, it’s been a better opportunity,” Jordan said. “We don’t get as influenced by the Walmarts.”

Please see COUPLE / Page 10

Population could result in financial loss for communities, representation loss nationally

From page 7

more competitive to attract students, he said.

“You can get reciprocal tuition at Oklahoma State and in Arkansas,” Hilgers said. “They’re looking to honor in-state tuition (for students from Kansas). There are financial breaks to travel to those schools.”

With this knowledge, Manhattan is diversifying as it recruits businesses.

“We can’t sit back and rest on our laurels,” Hilgers said. “It takes real effort (to recruit new businesses). We’ve focused on becoming more attractive as a community — to attract faculty, staff and other industries to Manhattan because it’s a very competitive world out there.”

WITH COLLEGE STUDENTS, REYNOLDS SAID they are supposed to be counted in the city or county where they attend college, not the address where their parents reside. For students who live in dormitories, she said the university takes care of the paperwork.

Yet this year provided unforeseen complications when state universities announced the closure of on-campus classes on March 12 and 13.

Census day was April 1. “The census said the college kids are to be counted in the city or county where they would have been if the shutdown did not happen,” Reynolds said. “The problem is, however, that everything shut down and sent the kids home mid-March.”

ANOTHER ASPECT THE CENSUS AFFECTS is voting districts.

Allen Dinkel is the city manager in Junction City, but was born west of Schoenchen in Ellis County.

“When I was born 64 years ago, there was six congressional districts,” he said, and added Kansas is down to four seats in the United States House of Representatives (there are 435 members total).

“If we don’t grow or don’t get accurate counts, we risk dropping to three congressional districts,” he added. “Going from four

seats to three would be a big deal. The “Big First” (District) would get even bigger.”

Reynolds said losing seats is a possibility.

“In 2010, states like Illinois and Iowa and Missouri lost a congressional seat,” she said. “Those are Midwest states. When you’re looking at losing representation at the federal level, that’s huge for your state.”

Wedel said Kansas had eight seats in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1894-1934. Due to population decline, the state lost a seat in 1930, 1940, 1960 and 1990.

“If rural Kansas doesn’t respond to the census, they’re giving up their voice,” she said.

CURRENTLY, ALL RESIDENTS ARE encouraged to fill out the census form that was mailed to their house, Reynolds said. The survey is also available online at my2020census.gov.

Right now, she said the “self reporting” phase is still ongoing.

As of June 22, the self-response rate in Kansas was 65.4 percent; the national self-

response rate was 61.6 percent.

While the overall response rate is strong in Kansas, the response rate is lower in more rural counties, such as Cheyenne County, where the self-response rate is about 53 percent, with 19 percent of residents utilizing the online submission option. In contrast, Saline County has almost a 71 percent response rate, with more than 55 percent of residents submitting their information online.

Wedel said COVID-19 has slightly altered the census timeline. Normally, census workers would be visiting homes that have not responded during the summer months. The census is typically wrapping up by July 30, but this year, the self-reporting deadline has been extended to Oct. 31.

Wedel said the census has been whittled down to nine questions.

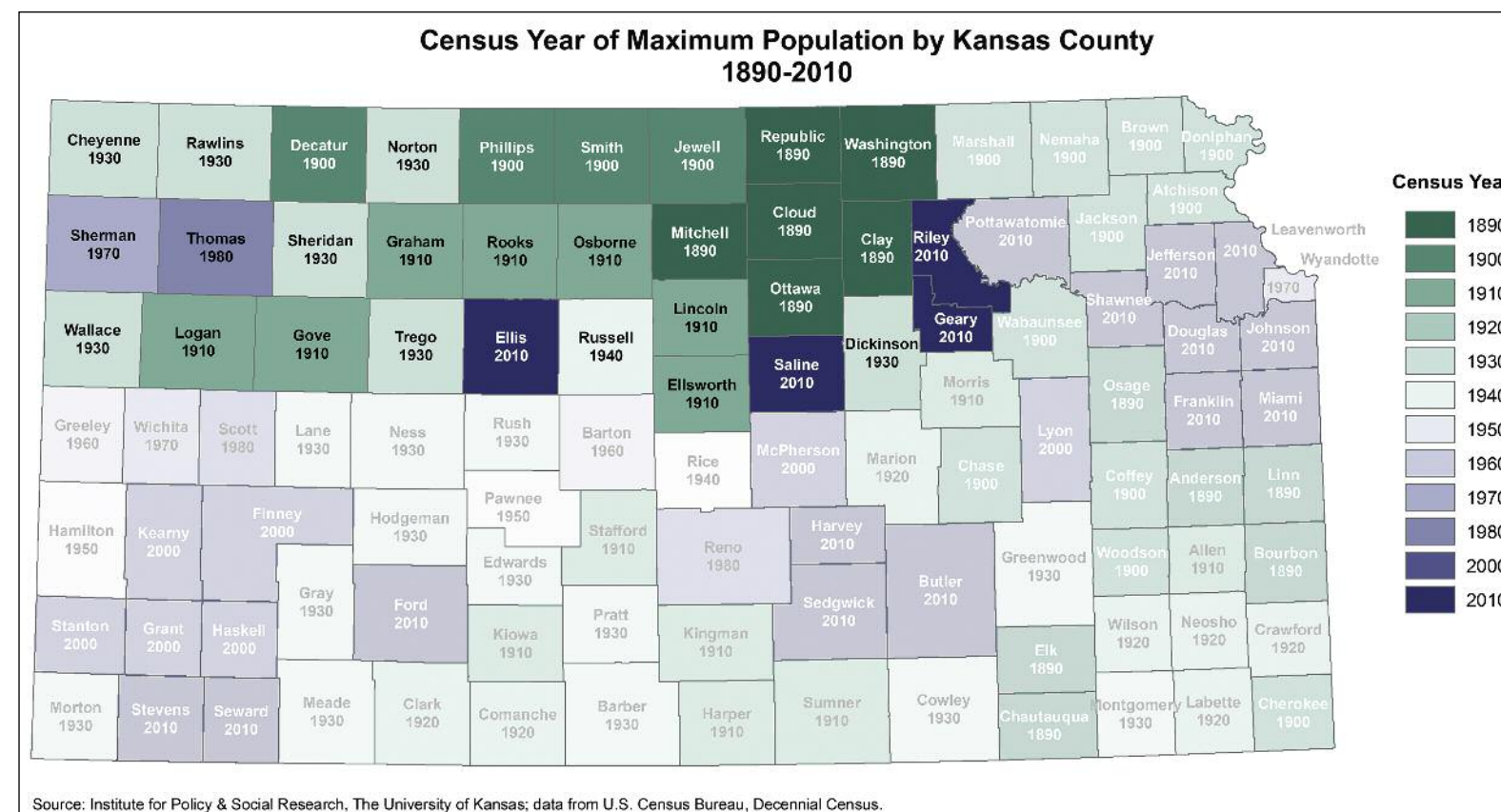
“They used to ask income and job and what time do you leave for work and ‘Do you have complete plumbing facilities in your house,’”

Please see CENSUS / Page 10

Fast facts: Census 2020

- The U.S. Census is required by law (U.S. Constitution, Article 1, Section 2) and has been conducted every 10 years since 1790.
- The Census Bureau includes every person living in the U.S. — regardless of citizenship or immigration status. Residents are counted at the address where they usually live and sleep.
- Population numbers derived from the decennial census are used to distribute over \$6 billion in federal funds to Kansas every year.
- Every uncounted person costs the state of Kansas approximately \$2,082 in federal funding.
- If 1 percent of the Kansas population is uncounted in the 2020 Census, the state of Kansas could miss receiving nearly \$604 million in federal funding over a 10-year period
- Census data is used to determine federal, state and local voting districts.
- Government, businesses and other stakeholders use census data for infrastructure and transportation planning; emergency preparedness, disaster relief, education funding, health tracking and disease control, and a multitude of other things.
- Businesses and government agencies consider population trends when choosing places to locate, which in turn boosts economic growth.
- As the census is only a once-every-10-years process, it is crucial to get the count right. If Kansas is under counted, we will be shortchanged for a decade.
- Under current federal law, the bureau cannot share census responses identifying individuals with the public or other federal agencies, including immigration authorities and other law enforcement, until 72 years after the information is collected.

Source: kansascensus.org



Source: Institute for Policy & Social Research, The University of Kansas; data from U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census.

AROUND THE DIOCESE

Couple set sights on returning to rural Kansas

From page 9

“There’s a big need in the rural areas,” Andrea added. “It’s kind of a blessing. Nobody (from our college) wants to come out to this area, and we want to.”

With an aging population in northwest Kansas, Jordan said it’s important to maintain medical access in the rural communities.

WITH A POPULATION OF ABOUT 1,200 residents, Andrea said the community makes efforts to retain its young adults. Toward the end of her high school tenure, someone from community development visited her class to talk about rural opportunities.

“They asked if anyone wanted to come back (to Atwood after college),” she said. “I was the only one



Photo by Karen Bonar / The Register

Jordan Hagler examines a patient’s eyes in the Vision Source office in Atwood on Feb. 25.

who raised my hand.

“I think it’s the attitude in high school. (They) want to go out and do something big with their lives. They think in a rural area it can’t

be done — that you have to go to a big city and that there are more opportunities in the big city.”

Andrea said Jordan knew the local optometrist.

“I think it’s the attitude in high school. (They) want to go out and do something big with their lives. They think in a rural area it can’t be done — that you have to go to a big city and that there are more opportunities in the big city.”

Andrea Hagler
Atwood resident

“I knew there was one in the process of retiring here in Atwood,” she said.

“They said, ‘We’ll be ready to bring someone new on by the time you’re done

(with optometry school),” Jordan added.

The couple was able to return to their hometown, and work in the community. Andrea works in Atwood, Colby and Oakley, while Jordan maintains office hours in Atwood, Colby and Goodland.

“We just love it back here,” Andrea said. “It’s all we ever wanted to do since high school — come back to the area.”

Both grew up on a family farm.

“We both grew up farming, and we still like to farm, even though we’re eye doctors,” Jordan said.

“Some people have big ambitions and want to get away from the ‘boring,’ but I think you can see the beauty in the small or simple stuff if you know what to look for.”

Census responses are confidential

From page 9

she said. “All of those questions were pulled out of the decennial census after 2000. In 2010, we had the simplified version.”

The questions include names and ages of those in the residence, as well as if the home is rented, owned free and clear or has a mortgage.

“All responses are confidential, it is safe (to respond),” Wedel said. “Under law, the data is confidential for 72 years. It is illegal for the Census Bureau to share this information, even with others in the federal government.”

The questions surrounding income, religious affiliation, etc., are now in The American Community Survey, she added.

“I WOULD REALLY LIKE people to know how important the census is, and how it affects programs that are vital to our community and our residents’ survival,” Reynolds said. “This isn’t about the government trying to track down where you live and what nationality you are. It’s just, ‘Let us know how many people live in your household so we can fund programs accordingly to how many people live in your community.’”

Wedel said it’s important to have a full view of the state.

“The census really paints a picture of who we are. Every household we miss is a missing pixel in the picture,” Wedel said. “This is why it’s so important to count everyone and count them in the right place.”

Appreciation of rural life grew slowly over time

From page 1

first job after college was in Grand Island, Neb., where she worked as a school social worker for the alternative middle school.

“I fell in love with it,” Gayle said. “Caleb was willing to do whatever he needed to do to come to Grand Island. It wasn’t until later, as I got older, I grew more in appreciation for my grandma and small-town life.”

WHILE CALEB LEFT HIS hometown of Courtland to attend college at Fort Hays State University, returning home was an option he wanted to keep open. He talked about the desire to return home with the guys in his graduating class.

“Ten of us talked and said it’d really be cool if we could move back home and make it work,” Caleb said. “A lot of those guys had family farms to go back to. I was jealous, because they had something to go back and take over.”

Because Caleb had no family farm to draw him home, he began exploring other employment options near his hometown. On Easter weekend of 2010, he said he asked Gayle’s grandma about how she began working in crop insurance.

“She was 80 then and still running the little crop insurance agency all by herself,” he said. “A couple months later, she had me taking my test to get licensed.”

He began selling crop insurance with Loretta, in addition to a few other jobs.

CALEB WAS WARMING TO the idea of returning to rural Kansas, but Gayle was not. “We had been dating for

awhile, and I thought things were getting serious and was excited about our future,” Caleb said. “Gayle accidentally texted me instead of one of her friends saying, ‘This guy wants to move home to podunk Kansas, and I don’t think I can make this work.’”

As the couple continued to date, and as her grandmother eventually gave the business to Caleb in 2013, Gayle said her perspective about small-town living began to shift slightly.

“Once we got serious and engaged, I knew something would have to change,” she said. “He was still willing to go to Colorado, but I knew his heart was at home. He hated the city. He would have been miserable. Once we got to the serious point of wanting to have kids, we knew we needed family nearby to support us.”

“I guess it comes down to when you love someone, you have to do what’s best for both of you, not be selfish about it.”

The couple wed in 2013, and Caleb split his time between Courtland and Grand Island, where Gayle worked for the first year of their marriage.

As the couple became serious about moving to rural Kansas, Gayle said she wanted a little space from the communities they grew up in — Mankato and Courtland.

“I didn’t want people knowing my business or noticing if the bathroom light was on in the middle of the night,” she said.

They looked at a three-bedroom house on the outskirts of Formoso.

“I looked at this house and was like, ‘I could never live in Formoso, are you

kidding?’” Gayle said. “I turned this house down multiple times.”

Yet eventually, they bought the house and made it home.

ONE STRUGGLE CALEB said the small community faces is dilapidated properties.

“There are so many houses that have fallen in and have been abandoned and not been cared for,” he said.

A prime example was the house down the road from them. While run down, it had a solid structure and roof.

“I wanted to save that house from further deterioration — to try and stop the trend of all the housing that’s been abandoned and not cared for. I thought we could turn it into a rental house and save a nice property from falling in,” he said. “Then Gayle brought up the idea of a hunting cabin. That’s why we went down that road. We thought, ‘We’ll try it out for a year, and we can rent it out or sell it.’”

With a rural location and few hotels, Caleb said the house gets plenty of visitors through VRBO or Air B&B website bookings.

“It’s a little different type of lodging that people can cook and do their laundry,” he said. “Like their own little home.”

He and a friend are currently working on improvements of another property that they will similarly list; and Caleb and Gayle manage another Air B&B property in Formoso for a family member.

WHILE ONCE GAYLE FELT like success hinged on a large population, she cur-

Formoso population

1910	453
1920	374
1930	381
1940	293
1950	271
1960	192
1970	180
1980	166
1990	128
2000	129
2010	93

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

rently works as a virtual fitness and nutrition coach, connecting with clients online.

“You can make anything work any place,” she said. “You can be successful anywhere ... if you are willing to put in the work! We’ve had so much support from the community and our family. It’s made it a lot easier.”

A convert to Catholicism while pregnant with their oldest, Gayle said Caleb’s family was a model for love, support and faith.

“His family is amazing. They showed me what a family is and does for each other,” she said. “I wanted to be united in faith with my husband. I admired his family’s mores and values. They modeled things for me that I never saw as a kid.”

But it’s something she’s working to provide for her own children, Drake, 4, Hazel, 2, and newborn Warren.

“I think small-town life is really beneficial. I feel like it’s a safe place to raise kids,” Caleb said. “Everybody pitches in to be sure kids are doing what they’re supposed to and being safe and looking out for each other in that way. I feel like the whole community helps raise the kids.”