



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate
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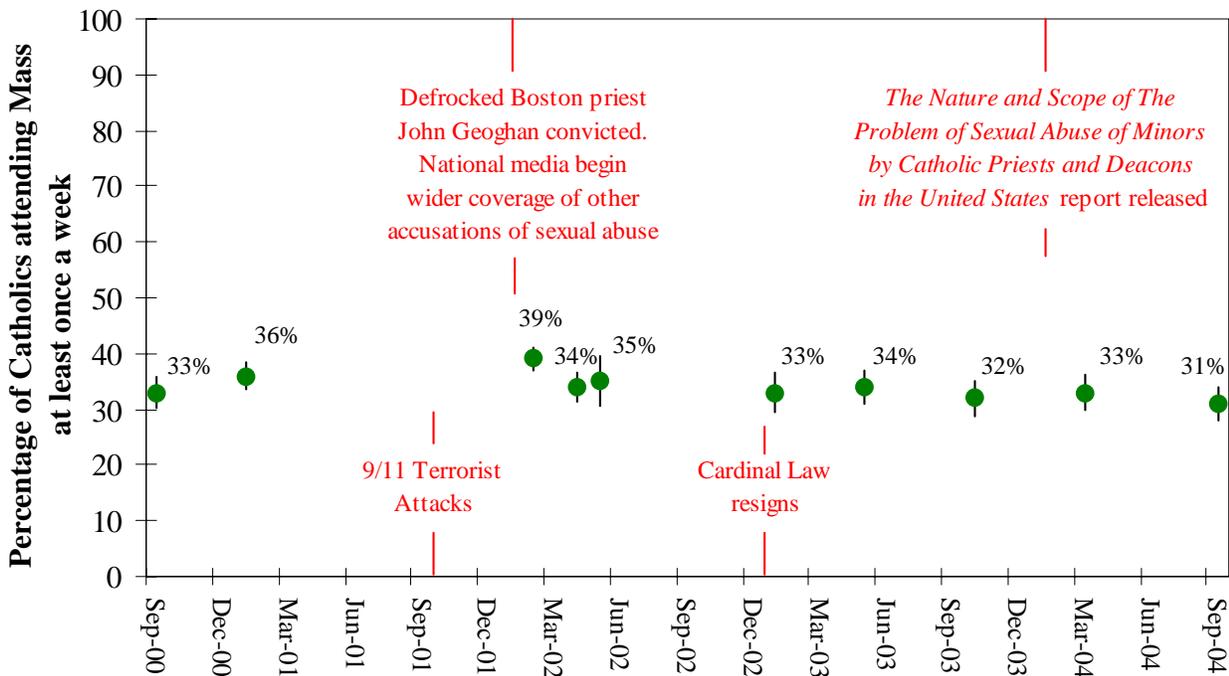
Self-reported Mass Attendance of U.S. Catholics Unchanged during Last Five Years

About a third of adult Catholics say they attend Mass every week and about four in ten attend Mass during any given week.

Weekly Mass attendance among self-identifying Catholics in the United States remained fairly unchanged during the period beginning in September 2000 through September 2004 according to a series of ten national random-sample telephone polls of adult Catholics conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University. The annual CARA Catholic Polls (CCP) and other CARA surveys precede, coincide with, and follow the periods during which the clergy sexual abuse issue was in the forefront of national media attention.

Aside from weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend Mass?

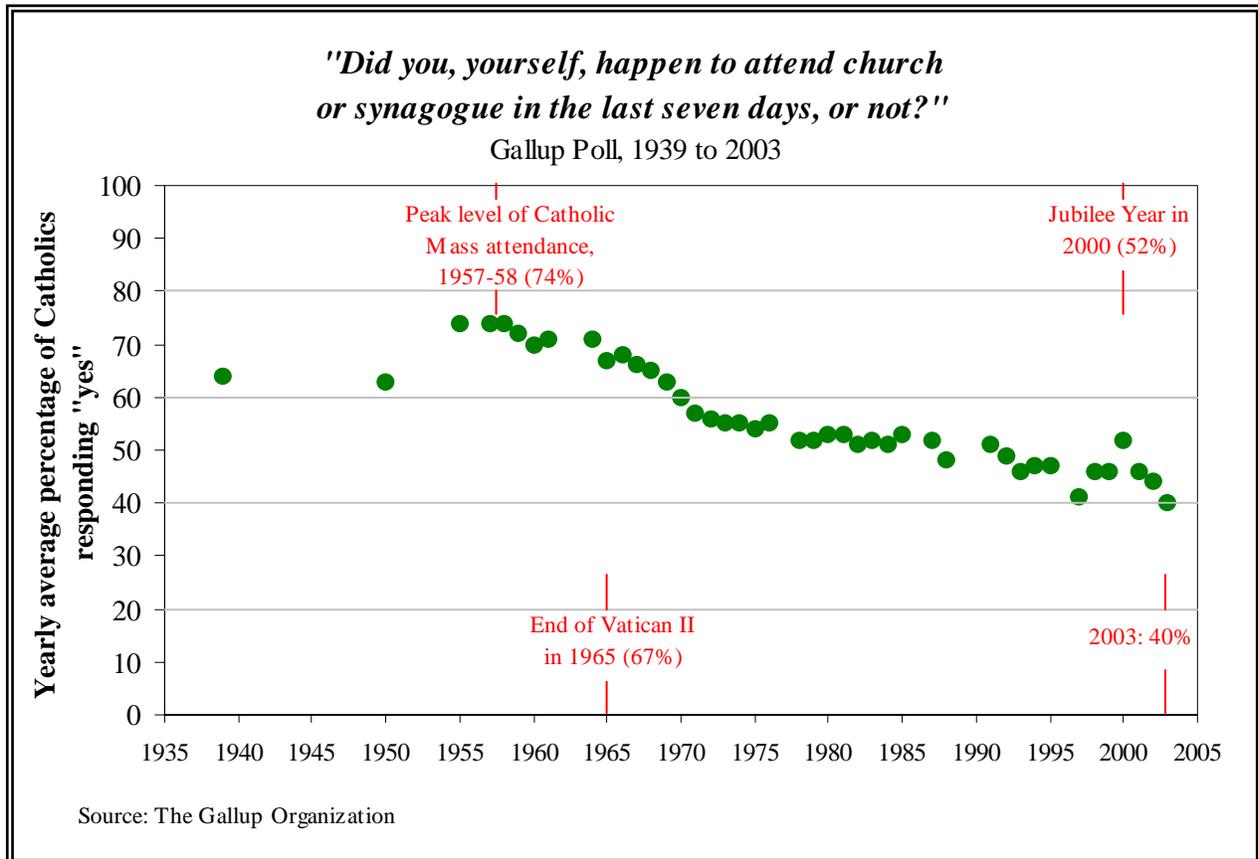
The CARA Catholic Polls (CCP), September 2000 to September 2004



Note: Bars extending from data points represent the margins of sampling error

“Contrary to the notions that the allegations and cases of sex abuse may have led to a noticeable decrease in Mass attendance or that the longer historical trend of declining Mass attendance among Catholics had begun advancing more quickly, these surveys indicate little, if any change, in the percentage of adult Catholics who say they attend Mass every week in the last five years,” said Dr. Mark M. Gray, CARA Research Associate.

Survey data collected by the Gallup Organization indicate that Catholic Mass attendance has been in decline from a peak in 1957 and 1958.



The Gallup Organization’s religious services attendance question differs in wording from the one used in CARA’s polls. Gallup measures attendance in the week prior to the survey, whereas the CARA question measures generalized attendance. Gallup’s surveys estimate Mass attendance in *any given week* and the CARA measures the percentage of Catholics who attend Mass *every week*. In 2003, Gallup surveys indicated that, on average, 40 percent of Catholics said they attended Mass within seven days of being surveyed (compared to 74 percent in 1958). The three polls conducted by CARA in 2003 indicated, on average, that 33 percent of Catholics said they attend Mass every week (compared to 33 percent in 2000).

“These data are more alike than they may seem,” said Gray. “Basically the data are consistent responses to slightly different questions.”

CARA uses the following question to measure frequency of Mass attendance: “Aside from weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend Mass?” Respondents select from the following responses: “rarely or never,” “a few times a year,” “once or twice a month,” “almost every week,” “every week,” or “more than once a week.” Gallup on the other hand asks, “Did you, yourself, happen to attend church or synagogue in the last seven days, or not?”

By chance one might expect about 2 percent of those who say they “rarely or never” attend Mass to have attended Mass in any given seven-day period. If one takes the 18 percent of Catholics responding in this manner and multiplies by 2 percent, one can estimate that 0.3 percent of Catholic Mass attendance in any given week is made up of those who say they “rarely or never” attend. This same calculation can be done for each category of responses that indicate less than weekly attendance.

With this taken into consideration, the CARA and Gallup data are remarkably consistent. The CARA poll conducted in September 2004 estimates that 31 percent of Catholics attend Mass *every* week. Assuming the less frequent attendees are relatively random in their attendance we can estimate that an additional 9 percent of Catholics attend Mass in any given week. Thus, the estimated Catholic Mass attendance in any week using the CARA question is identical to the 2003 Gallup estimate – about 40 percent.

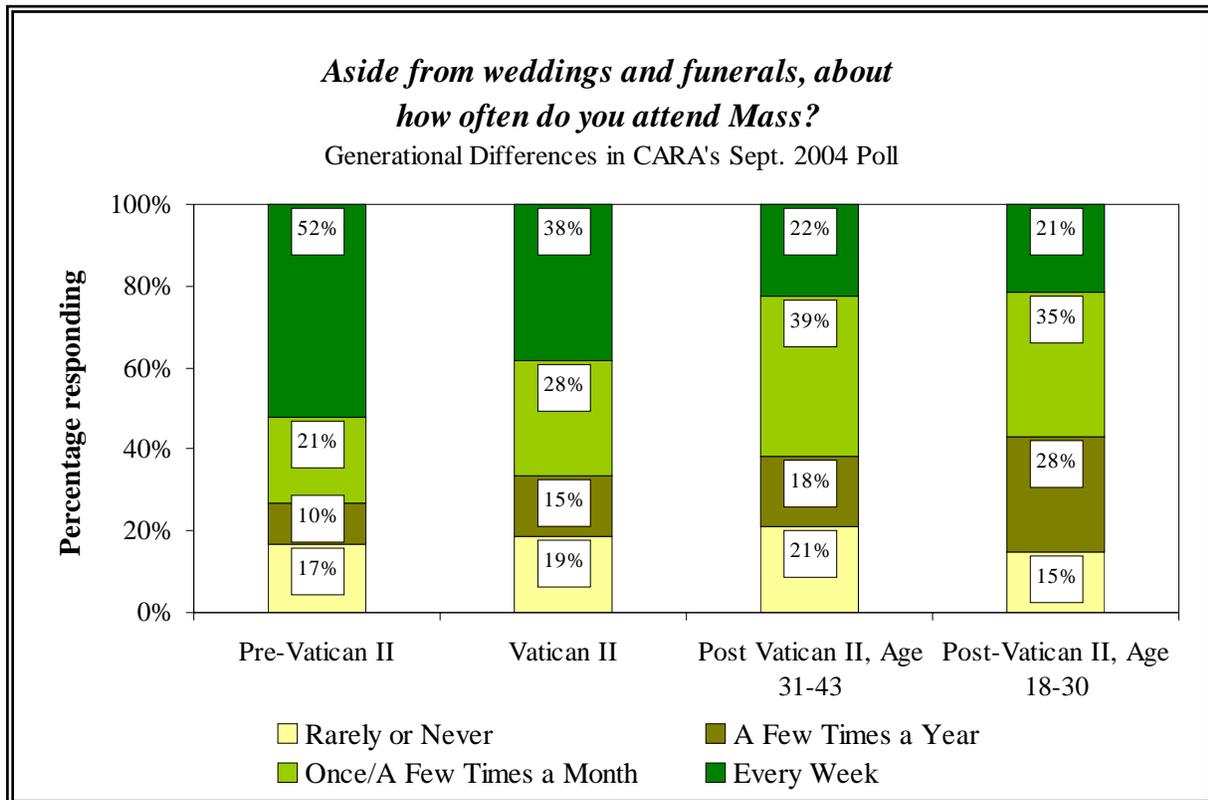
The CARA Question: <i>Aside from weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend Mass?</i>			
	Percentage responding to the question as follows in Sept. 2004	Chance of being at Mass in any given week	Estimated percentage attending in any given week
Rarely or never	18%	1 in 52 or less	0%
A few times a year	19	1 in 17	1
Once or twice a month	20	1 in 12 or less	2
Almost every week	12	1 in 2	6
Every week	27	1 in 1	27
More than once a week	4	1 in 1	4
			Total: 40%

Gallup samples the entire U.S. adult population and thus their Catholic sub-samples are subject to higher margins of error. Thus, the Gallup trends often suggest greater volatility in Catholic Mass attendance than what is represented in the much larger Catholic samples used in CARA polls, which in turn have much smaller margins of sampling error.

The long-term decline in Catholic Mass attendance is noticeable in current surveys of Catholics by looking at generational differences. The trend is best explained in terms of generational change and not any large segment of the Catholic population changing their

patterns of Mass attendance. Instead the aggregated percentage of Catholic Mass attendance reflects the death of older Catholics who attended Mass more often and the coming of age of new adult Catholics who attend Mass much less often.

CARA uses three generations based on life experiences relevant to Catholics. These include the Pre-Vatican II Generation, the Vatican II Generation, and the Post-Vatican II Generation. Those Catholics born before 1943 came of age in a period prior to the changes of the Second Vatican Council and tend to exhibit high levels of institutional loyalty, including loyalty to the Catholic Church. Members of the Vatican II Generations were born between 1943 and 1960 and encompass the cohorts that came of age during a time of profound change in the Catholic Church. These Catholics overlap the generation more widely known as the Baby Boomers and entered adulthood during a time of great questioning of civic and cultural institutions. The Post-Vatican II Generation, born after 1960, includes the largest numbers of adult Catholics (about half) who have no lived experience of the Catholic Church prior to the Second Vatican Council. Due to its disproportionate size, CARA divides the Post-Vatican II Generation into two segments, one for those older than 30 and one for those between the ages of 18 and 30.



In CARA's September 2004 poll, slightly more than one in five Post-Vatican II Generation Catholics say they attend Mass at least once a week or more. By comparison, 52 percent of Pre-Vatican II Generation Catholics and 38 percent of Vatican II Generation Catholics report weekly Mass attendance. These levels of attendance by these generations are unchanged from CARA's September 2000 poll.

“There is not evidence that the Mass attendance of younger or older Catholics changed after allegations of clergy sexual abuse entered the news,” said Dr. Gray. “However, stark generational differences in Mass attendance are evident that may in part reflect changes in the way Catholic teachings were communicated prior to and after the Second Vatican Council. Pre-Vatican II Generation Catholics grew up in an era where deliberately failing to attend Sunday Mass or other day of obligation, without good reason, was quite clearly communicated as a mortal sin. For the Vatican II and Post-Vatican II generations this has not been emphasized to the same degree.”

The CARA Catholic Poll (CCP)

The CARA Catholic Poll (CCP) has been conducted once a year since 2000. Typically conducted in the winter of each year, CCP 2005 is scheduled for February/March 2005. For more information about CARA or CCP 2005 contact Dr. Mark M. Gray at 202-687-0885 (email: mmg34@georgetown.edu) or Dr. Paul M. Perl at 202-687-1365 (email: pmp2@georgetown.edu).

The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate

The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) is a non-profit, independent and non-partisan research institution at Georgetown University. CARA researchers conduct applied social scientific research related to the Catholic Church in the United States. CARA was created in 1964 and has been affiliated with Georgetown University since 1989. CARA’s Web site address is: <http://cara.georgetown.edu/>

CARA Polls, 2000 to 2004: Adult Catholic Mass Attendance

	<i>Aside from weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend Mass?</i>				
	Every week	Once or a few times a month	A few times a year	Rarely or never	Sample Size (margin of error)
Sept. 2000	33%	31%	15%	21%	1,190 (±2.9)
Jan. 2001	36	29	18	16	1,871 (±2.3)
Feb. 2002	39	27	16	19	2,083 (±2.2)
Apr. 2002	34	33	20	14	1,588 (±2.5)
May 2002	35	32	17	15	498 (±4.4)
Jan. 2003	33	31	19	17	794 (±3.5)
May 2003	34	31	17	17	994 (±3.1)
Oct. 2003	32	31	21	15	994 (±3.1)
March 2004	33	29	18	20	990 (±3.1)
Sept. 2004	31	32	19	18	986 (±3.1)

Note: Rows may add up to 99 or 101 percent due to rounding error. Percentages reflect the combination of some of the response categories. Dates represent month and year during which interviews were completed. CARA surveys always include both English and Spanish language interviewing based on the respondent’s preference. The complete question and response set is: *Aside from weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend Mass? Rarely or never, a few times a year, once or twice a month, almost every week, every week, more than once a week.*