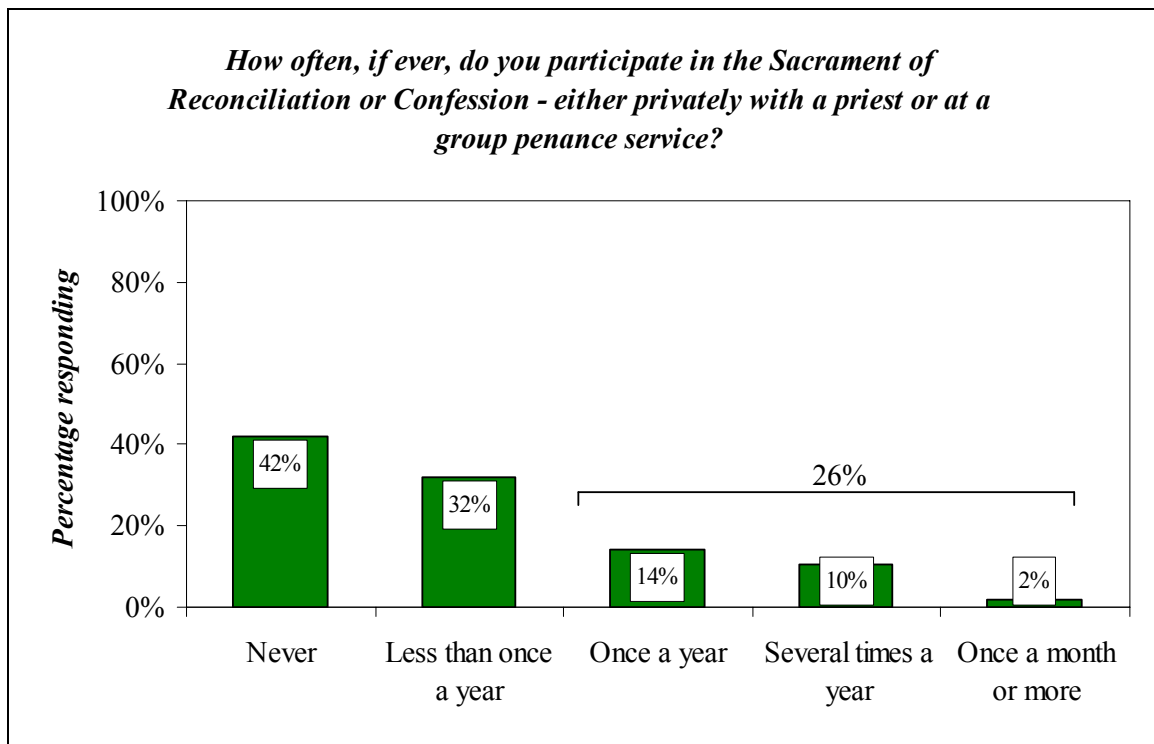


## ***The CARA Catholic Poll Digest*** **Fall 2007**

***The Confessional Is Open: About one in four Catholics fulfills obligation to go to Confession at least once a year.***

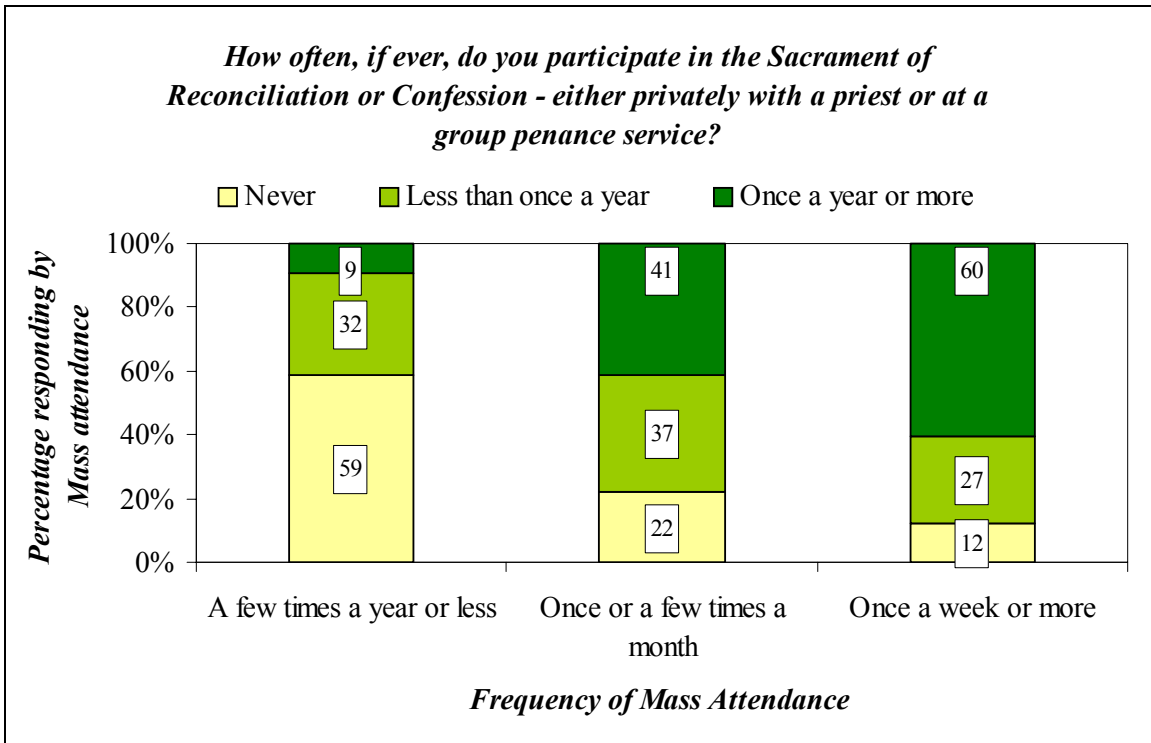
By Mark M. Gray, Ph.D.

The Catholic Church teaches that “each of the faithful is bound by an obligation to faithfully confess serious sins at least once a year” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1457). However, only about a quarter of adult self-identified Catholics (26 percent) say they do so, according to recently released results of a 2005 national poll of adult Catholics conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University. Nearly a third of adult Catholic respondents (32 percent) say they go to Confession less than once a year and 42 percent say they “never” go.

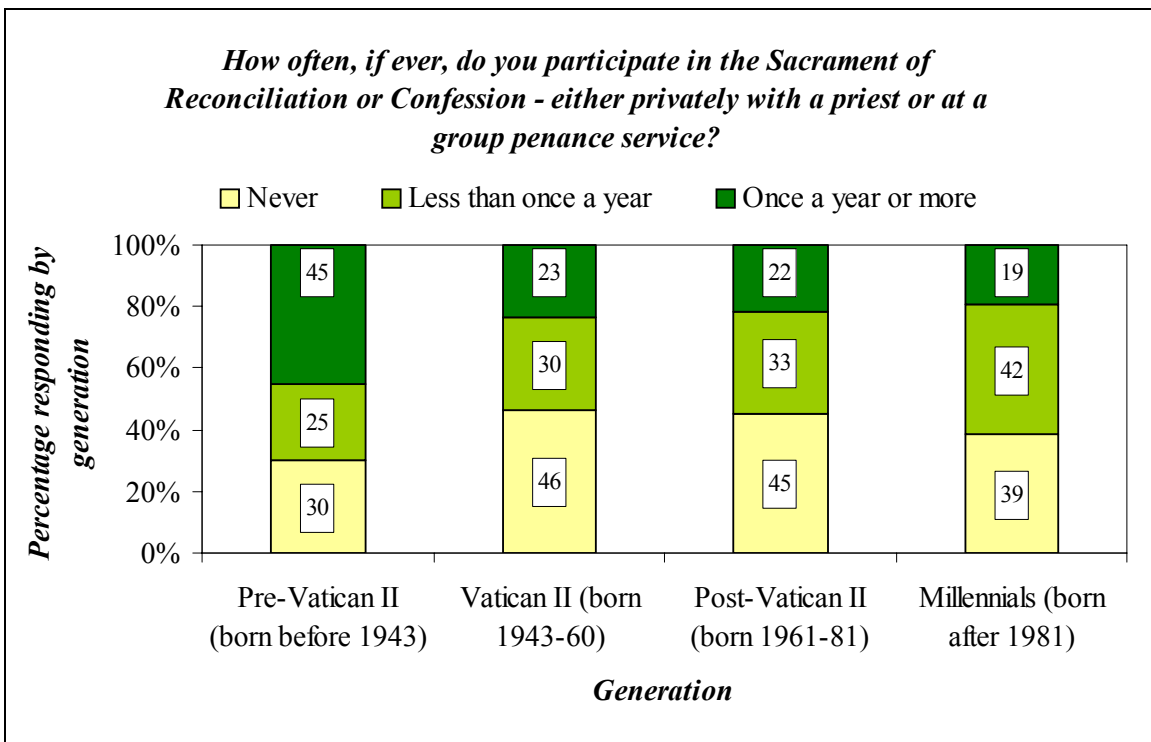


Catholics who attend Mass once a week or more often are most likely to report that they go to Confession at least once a year. Six in ten weekly Mass attenders (60 percent) say they go to Confession once a year or more often. Twelve percent of weekly Mass attenders say they “never” go to Confession and 27 percent say they go to Confession less than once a year.

In comparison, 41 percent of those who attend Mass once or a few times a month go to Confession at least once a year and only 9 percent of those who attend Mass a few times a year or less often go to Confession at least annually.



Generational differences are also apparent. Forty-five percent of Catholics of the Pre-Vatican II Generation (born before 1943) say they go to Confession at least once a year. Less than a quarter of Catholics of younger generations go this frequently.



Twenty-three percent of Vatican II Generation (born 1943 to 1960) Catholics say they go to Confession once a year or more often. Post-Vatican II Generation (born 1961 to 1981) Catholics are nearly as likely to go once a year or more (22 percent). Less than one in five Millennial Generation (born after 1981) Catholics (19 percent) go to Confession annually or more often. However, Catholics of this youngest generation (ages 25 and younger in 2007) are *less* likely than Vatican II and Post-Vatican II Catholics to say they “never” go to Confession (39 percent compared to 45 percent of the Post-Vatican II Generation and 46 percent of the Vatican II Generation).

There are well-known differences in Mass attendance by generation as well. Yet, both factors appear to influence the frequency of Confession. For example, among Catholics who attend Mass a few times a year or less often, 14 percent of Pre-Vatican II Generation Catholics go to Confession at least annually, whereas 10 percent of Millennial Generation Catholics celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once a year. Among weekly Mass attenders, 73 percent of Pre-Vatican II Generation Catholics go to Confession annually compared to 44 percent of Millennial Generation Catholics.

The survey reveals several other demographic sub-group differences:

- Women are more likely to go to Confession than men (30 percent compared to 22 percent, respectively). However, some of this difference is because women are more likely than men to attend Mass and women are more numerous among older generations due to differences in life expectancy.
- Catholics who have a high school diploma only are more likely than those with other levels of education to go to Confession at least annually (31 percent compared to 24 percent, respectively).
- Single and divorced Catholics are less likely than those of other marital status to go to Confession once a year or more often (18 percent of singles and 20 percent of those divorced, compared to 31 percent of those who are married, separated, or widowed).
- Catholics in the Midwest and South (35 and 37 percent, respectively) are more likely than those in the Northeast and West to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once a year (24 percent and 23 percent, respectively).
- Non-Hispanics are slightly more likely than Hispanics to go to Confession at least once a year (28 percent compared to 21 percent, respectively).

Catholics who have committed a mortal sin are required by the Church to receive the absolution provided by the Sacrament of Reconciliation before receiving Holy Communion. This type of sin involves acts of a grave matter, committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent (*CCC* 1857). Such sin includes violations of the Ten Commandments such as the taking of a human life (e.g., murder, abortion, euthanasia, suicide, etc.), preventing the conception of human life through artificial birth control, committing adultery or having pre-marital sex, theft, perjury, etc. This would also include missing Mass on Sunday (or other days of obligation) if one is in good health, physically able to attend, and one is able to travel to a local parish celebrating Mass. A

priest may dispense a person from attending Mass due to sickness or risks of traveling in bad weather, and missing Mass would not be considered a sin if one were traveling or residing in an area where there is no parish celebrating Mass. One must deliberately fail to attend Mass when it would be possible to attend for it to be considered a grave sin. Confession of less serious sins (i.e., venial sins) need not be made before receiving the Eucharist, although this is strongly recommended by the Church.

*Copies of the complete report, "Catholic Media Use in the United States" can be ordered from the CARA website or by calling 202-687-8080.*