



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA)

Georgetown University

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Most Catholics abstain from eating meat on Fridays during Lent

For more than 30 million U.S. adults this week, meat will not be on the menu Friday.¹ Six in ten adult Catholics say they abstain from meat on Lenten Fridays according to a survey conducted in February by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University. The CARA survey also found that slightly less than half of adult Catholics (45 percent) typically receive ashes at Ash Wednesday services. A similar proportion say they try to do something positive (as opposed to giving something up) during Lent. Slightly less than four-tenths say they give up something for Lent.

Do you do any of the following during Lent, the 40-day period preceding the celebration of Easter?

Percentage responding "Yes"

Do you abstain from meat on Fridays during Lent?	60%
Do you typically receive ashes at Ash Wednesday services?	45
Besides giving something up, do you do anything positive, like giving additional money to the needy or trying to be a better person, during Lent?	44
Besides meat on Fridays, do you give up or abstain from anything else during Lent?	38

These results were obtained from a representative survey of 1,007 randomly-selected, self-identified adult Catholics (age 18 or older) in the United States conducted from February 1 to February 20, 2008 (margin of sampling error of ± 3.1 percent).²

The results of the survey include a number of important differences among sub-groups of respondents by gender, education, ethnicity, Mass attendance, and generation.

¹ The current U.S. population is estimated to be more than 303 million, of which nearly three-fourths (74 percent) are age 18 or older. Approximately 23.5 percent of these adults currently self-identify as Catholics of which 60 percent say they abstain from meat during Lent on Fridays. This 60 percent figure is equivalent to 31.7 million U.S. adults.

² In other words, characteristics and attitudes of Catholics responding to this poll, conducted by CARA and Knowledge Networks, can be assumed to be within 3.1 percentage points of those of all Catholics age 18 and over in the United States.

Catholic women are somewhat more likely than Catholic men to abstain from meat on Fridays during Lent (65 compared to 55 percent). They are also more likely to receive ashes at Ash Wednesday services (50 compared to 38 percent) and to do something positive for Lent (51 compared to 36 percent).

The more highly educated the respondent, the more likely he or she is to give something up for Lent and to make an extra effort to do something positive. Fifty-three percent of Catholics with a post-graduate degree give up something for Lent. This compares to 41 percent of those with a Bachelor’s degree, 38 percent of those with some college or an Associate’s degree, and 34 of those with a high school degree or less. Fifty-nine percent of Catholics with a post-graduate degree make extra efforts to do something positive. This compares to 48 percent of those with a Bachelor’s degree, and 41 percent of all other Catholics.

Hispanic Catholics are slightly more likely than non-Hispanic Catholics to receive ashes on Ash Wednesday (50 compared to 43 percent).

Nine in ten adult Catholics who attend Mass weekly or more often (89 percent) abstain from meat on Fridays during Lent. Slightly fewer (85 percent) say they typically receive ashes on Ash Wednesday. Two-thirds of weekly attenders (67 percent) say they give up something for Lent and nearly three in four (73 percent) say they make extra efforts to try to do something positive.

Do you do any of the following during Lent, the 40-day period preceding the celebration of Easter?

Percentage responding “Yes”

	<i>By Mass Attendance</i>		
	Weekly or more	Less than weekly but at least once a month	A few times a year only
Do you abstain from meat on Fridays during Lent?	89%	81%	41%
Do you typically receive ashes at Ash Wednesday services?	85	73	18
Besides giving something up, do you do anything positive, like giving additional money to the needy or trying to be a better person, during Lent?	73	63	25
Besides meat on Fridays, do you give up or abstain from anything else during Lent?	67	51	21

Catholics who attend Mass less than weekly—but at least once a month—are only slightly less likely than weekly attenders to observe Lenten practices. Those who attend Mass a few times a year or less are least likely to observe Lenten practices. However, four in ten of these Catholics do say they abstain from eating meat on Fridays during Lent.

There is relatively little variation across generations in the observance of Lent. About six in ten Catholics of all generations abstain from meat on Fridays. Pre-Vatican II Generation Catholics (born before 1943) are the most likely to report that they typically receive ashes on Ash Wednesday (58 percent) and that they do something positive during Lent (50 percent). Compared to older Catholics, those of the Millennial Generation (born 1982 or later) are the most likely to say they give something up during Lent (46 percent).

Do you do any of the following during Lent, the 40-day period preceding the celebration of Easter?

Percentage responding “Yes”

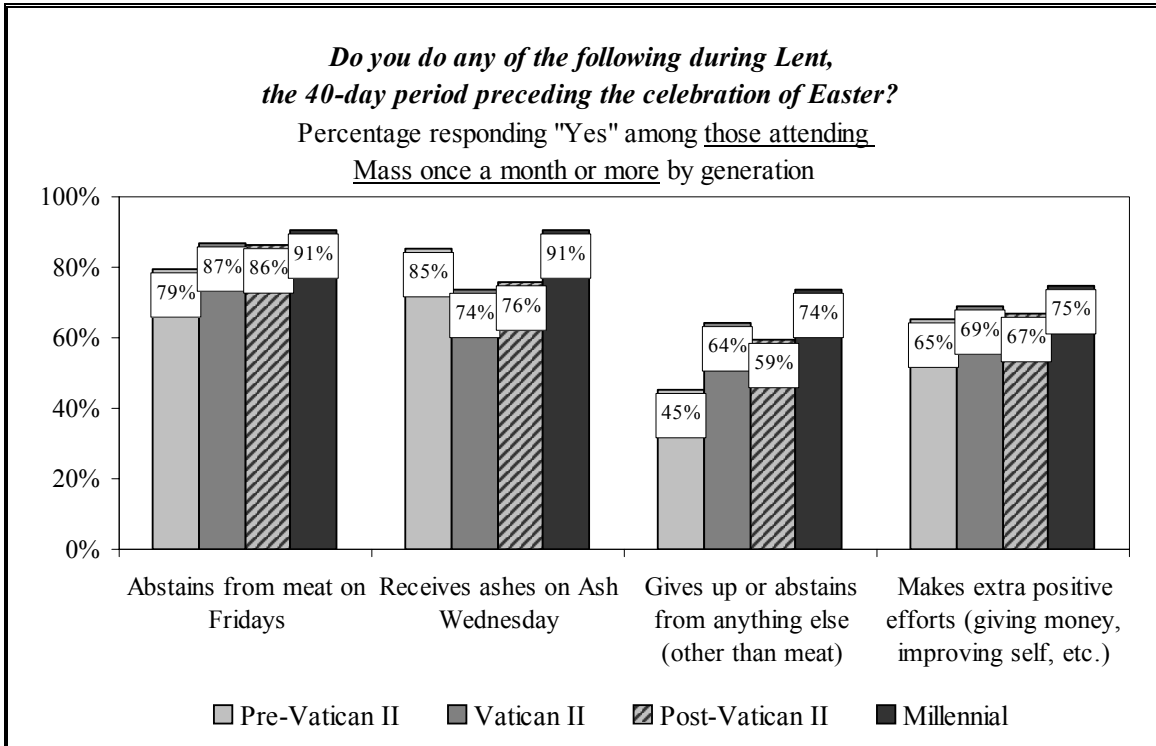
By Generation

	Pre-Vatican II	Vatican II	Post-Vatican II	Millennial
Do you abstain from meat on Fridays during Lent?	64%	59%	59%	61%
Do you typically receive ashes at Ash Wednesday services?	58	40	40	50
Besides giving something up, do you do anything positive, like giving additional money to the needy or trying to be a better person, during Lent?	50	45	41	40
Besides meat on Fridays, do you give up or abstain from anything else during Lent?	33	34	38	46

Catholics of the Vatican II Generation (born 1943 to 1960) and the Post-Vatican II Generation (born 1961 to 1981) are the least likely to say they typically receive ashes on Ash Wednesday (40 percent). The oldest generation of Catholics is least likely to say they give up anything else besides eating meat on Fridays (33 percent).

Among Catholics who attend Mass at least once a month, those of the Millennial Generation are the *most* likely to observe Lenten practices (see the graph on the following page). More than nine in ten of these Catholics report that they abstain from meat on Fridays and receive ashes on Ash Wednesday. About three-quarters of these young adult

Catholics also give up something during Lent. A similar percentage makes other positive efforts.



However, Millennial Generation Catholics are *less* likely than older Catholics to attend Mass at least once a month. Some 36 percent of this youngest generation attend Mass this frequently. By comparison, 39 percent of Post-Vatican II Catholics attend at least once a month as do 42 percent of the Vatican II Catholics and 65 percent of Pre-Vatican II Catholics.

“These results suggest that there really is something exceptional about the youngest generation of Catholics who are active in their faith,” said Mark M. Gray, Director of CARA Catholic Polls (CCP). “In terms of Lenten practices, young adult Catholics who are attending Mass at least once a month are more likely to observe the Church’s obligations and traditions—more so than their parents and grandparents.”

The obligation to abstain from eating meat on Fridays during Lent is only mandatory for Catholics ages 14 and older and the Lenten obligation to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are only mandatory for Catholics ages 18 to 59.

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. To speak with a CARA researcher about the Lenten practices results contact Mark M. Gray at 202-687-0885 or mmg34@georgetown.edu