

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

Respondents were asked how frequently they participate in the sacrament of Reconciliation and about their beliefs regarding this sacrament.

Participation in the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Three-quarters of Catholics report that they never participate in the sacrament of Reconciliation or that they do so less than once a year.

	2005	2008
Once a month or more	2%	2%
Several times a year	10	12
Once a year	14	12
Less than once a year	32	30
Never	42	45

About one in eight Catholics (12 percent), participate in Reconciliation once a year and an identical proportion do so several times a year. Two percent report that they participate in Reconciliation at least once a month.

Results of a 2005 poll conducted by CARA with Knowledge Networks show similar patterns of participation in this sacrament.

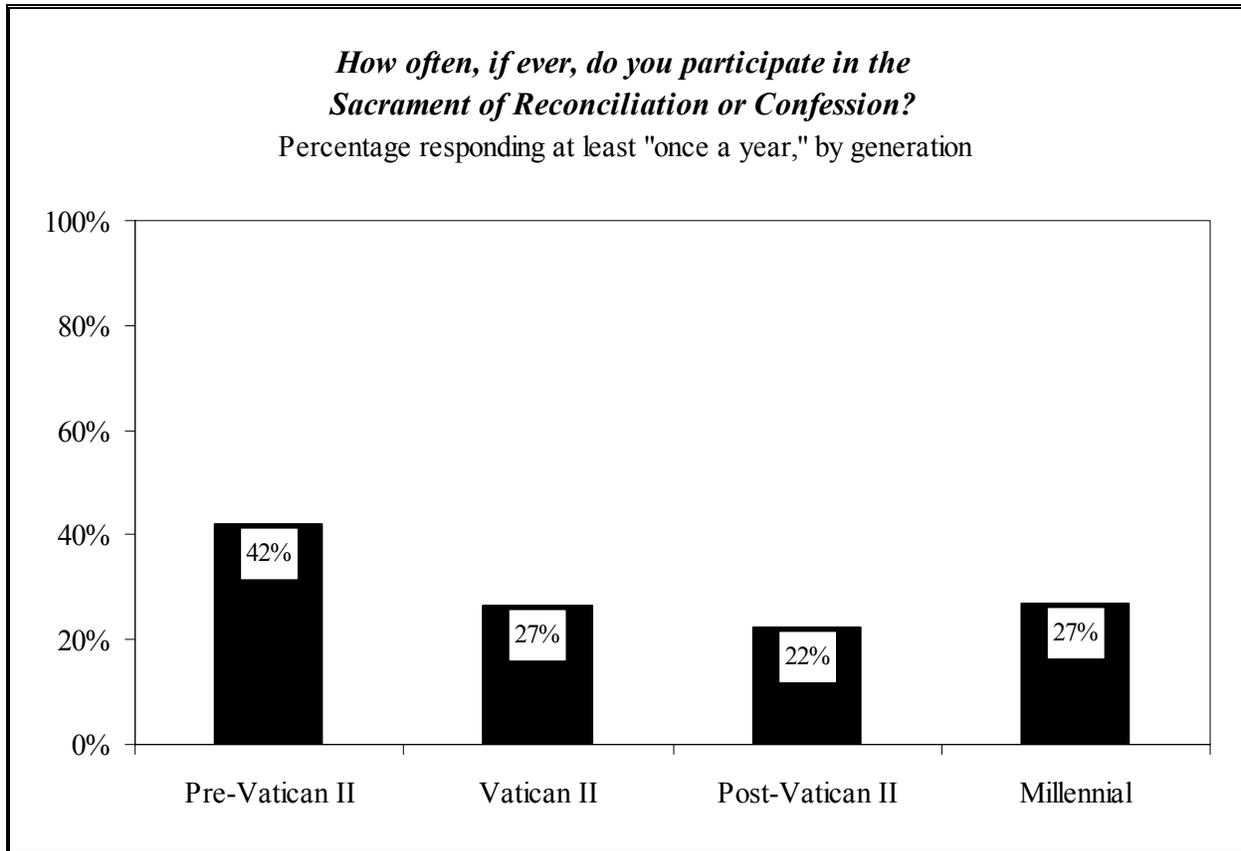
Differences by Mass Attendance

More than six in ten weekly Mass attenders (62 percent) say they participate in Reconciliation at least once a year, compared to 37 percent of those attending Mass less than weekly but at least once a month and only 6 percent of those attending less often.

	<i>By Mass Attendance</i>		
	Weekly or more	Less than weekly but at least once a month	A few times a year or less
Once a month or more	6%	2%	0%
Several times a year	31	17	2
Once a year	25	18	4
Less than once a year	23	41	28
Never	15	22	66

Differences by Generation

More than four in ten members of the Pre-Vatican II Generation say they participate in Reconciliation at least once a year.

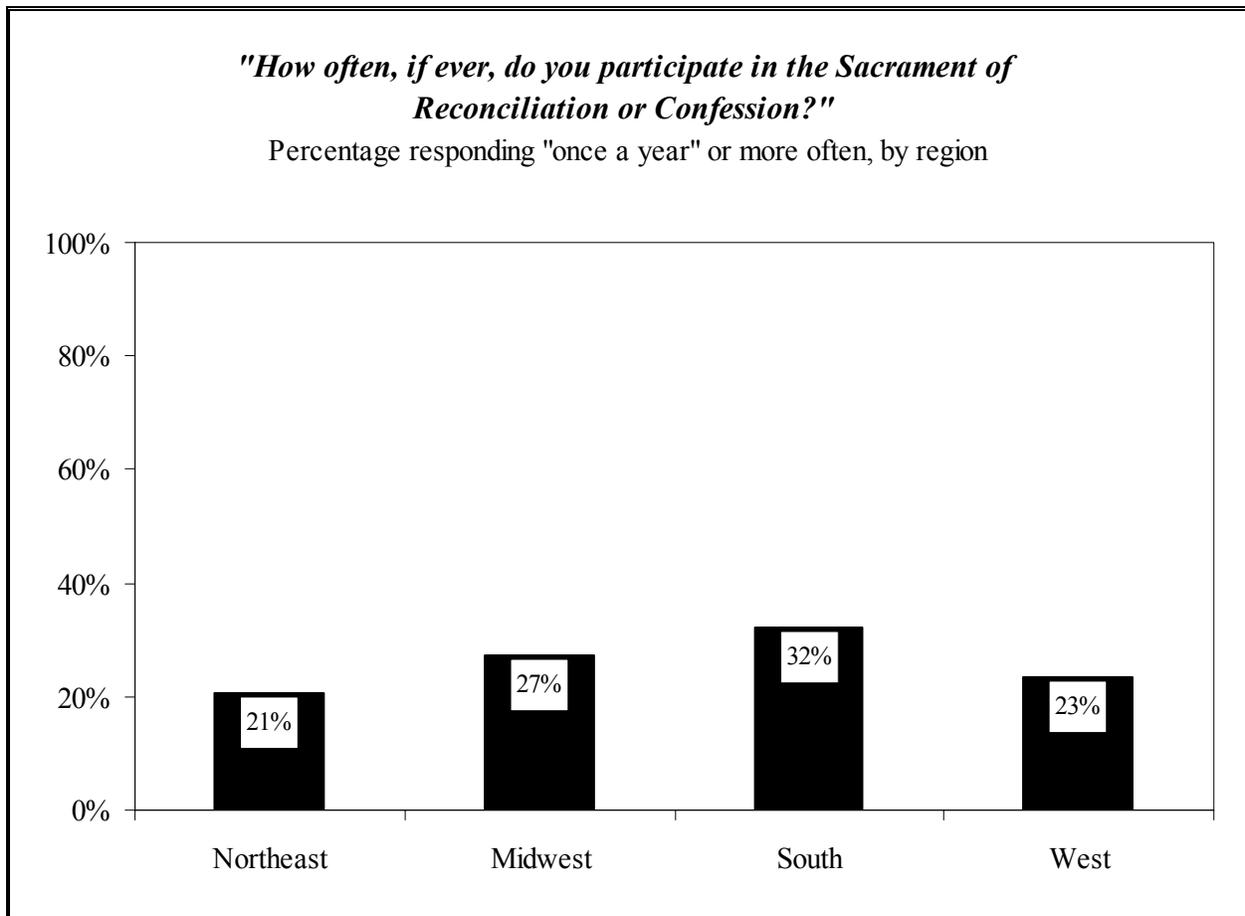


Differences by Education

Among those who attended at least some college, 36 percent of those who went to Catholic colleges or universities go to Confession at least once a year, compared to 23 percent who attended non-Catholic institutions.

Differences by Region

Catholics in the South and Midwest are more likely than those in the Northeast and West to participate in Reconciliation at least once a year.



Beliefs About the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Two-thirds of Catholics agree at least “somewhat” with the statement that “Forgiveness or absolution of a confessed sin requires one to make a confession with contrition.”

<i>How much do you agree with the following statements?</i>	Agree “Somewhat” or “Strongly”	Agree “Strongly” Only
Forgiveness or absolution of a confessed sin requires one to make a confession with contrition, an internal attitude of sorrow and repentance.	67%	44%
I can be a good Catholic without celebrating the sacrament of Reconciliation at least once a year.	62	33
By going to confession and making acts of contrition and penance I am reconciled with God and the Church.	52	26
Acts of penance such as prayer or fasting are necessary to gain forgiveness of one’s sins.	48	22
The sacrament of Reconciliation is only necessary for the forgiveness of very serious sins.	25	8

Respondents were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with each of five statements about forgiveness and the sacrament of Reconciliation.

- About six in ten respondents agree at least “somewhat” that they can be a good Catholic without celebrating the sacrament of Reconciliation at least yearly. One-third agree “strongly.”
- Just over half of Catholics agree that by going to Confession and making acts of contrition and penance, they are reconciled with God and the Church. One-quarter agree strongly.
- Slightly fewer, just under half of Catholics, agree that acts of penance such as prayer or fasting are necessary for forgiveness of sins.
- Only one-quarter of Catholics agree that the Reconciliation is only necessary for forgiveness of very serious sins, with fewer than one in ten agreeing “strongly.”

Differences by Mass Attendance

More than eight in ten Catholics attending Mass at least weekly agree “somewhat” or “strongly” that absolution of a confessed sin requires one to make a confession with contrition (86 percent) and that going to Confession and making acts of penance and contrition reconciles them with God and the Church (80 percent). Just more than half of weekly attenders (54 percent) agree similarly that acts of penance, such as prayer or fasting, are necessary to gain forgiveness of sins. Only a third of these weekly attendees agree at least “somewhat” that the sacrament of Reconciliation is only necessary for the forgiveness of very serious sins.

<i>How often, if ever, do you participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation or Confession?</i>			
Percentage of those agreeing “somewhat” or “strongly”			
	<i>By Mass Attendance</i>		
	Weekly or more	Less than weekly but at least once a month	A few times a year or less
Forgiveness or absolution of a confessed sin requires one to make a confession with contrition, an internal attitude of sorrow and repentance.	86%	80%	55%
By going to confession and making acts of contrition and penance I am reconciled with God and the Church.	80	60	36
I can be a good Catholic without celebrating the sacrament of Reconciliation at least once a year.	54	62	65
Acts of penance such as prayer or fasting are necessary to gain forgiveness of one’s sins.	54	57	36
The sacrament of Reconciliation is only necessary for the forgiveness of very serious sins.	34	29	19

A majority of Catholics of all levels of Mass attendance agree at least “somewhat” that they can be a good Catholic *without* celebrating the sacrament of Reconciliation at least once a year.

Catholics attending Mass less than weekly are generally less likely than weekly attenders to be in agreement with Church teachings regarding the sacrament of Reconciliation. This is especially the case for those attending Mass a few times a year or less often.

Differences by Generation

The older Catholics are, the more likely that they express agreement with statements that are consistent with Church teachings on the sacrament of Reconciliation.

- Older Catholics are more likely to agree “strongly” that forgiveness requires making a confession with contrition (51 percent of the Pre-Vatican II Generation, 49 percent of the Vatican II Generation, 42 percent of the Post-Vatican II Generation, and 33 percent of the Millennial Generation).
- Similarly, older Catholics are more likely to agree “strongly” that penance is required for forgiveness (33 percent of the Pre-Vatican II Generation, 25 percent of the Vatican II Generation, 18 percent of the Post-Vatican II Generation, and 11 percent of the Millennial Generation).
- Members of the Pre-Vatican II Generation are more likely than all other respondents to agree at least “somewhat” that confession and acts of contrition and penance and confession reconcile one with the Church (66 compared to 49 percent).

Differences by Education

Sixty-seven percent of Catholics with a post-graduate degree agree “strongly” that forgiveness requires a confession with contrition. This compares to 47 percent of those with a bachelor’s degree, 45 percent of those with some college or an associate’s degree, and 39 percent of those with a high school diploma or less.

More than half of those who attended a Catholic elementary or middle school (51 percent) or a Catholic high school (53 percent) “strongly” agree that forgiveness of a confessed sin requires one to make a confession with contrition and repentance, compared to 41 percent who attended non-Catholic schools.

Also, among those who attended at least some college, 58 percent of those enrolled at a Catholic college or university “strongly” agree that forgiveness of a confessed sin requires one to make a confession with contrition and repentance, compared to 48 percent of those attending a non-Catholic college or university.

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

Respondents were asked if they or a member of their immediate family have ever requested the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. Additionally, they were asked how much importance they place on this sacrament.

Request for the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick

About half of Catholics report that they or a member of their immediate family has ever requested the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick at a time of serious illness.

As you may know, the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick used to be known as “last rites” or “extreme unction.” Nowadays, seriously ill people, not just those who are dying, can receive this sacrament. Have you or a member of your immediate family ever requested the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick at a time of serious illness?

	2001	2008
Yes	52%	51%
No	48	49

In 2001, a nearly identical proportion of Catholics (52 percent) reported that they or a member of their family had requested Anointing of the Sick.²⁰

²⁰ The 2001 CCP. Results have been weighted to adjust for methodological differences from Knowledge Networks polls. The wording of the 2001 question was limited to: “Have you or a member of your immediate family ever requested the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick at a time of serious illness?”

Differences by Mass Attendance

Sixty-three percent of respondents who attend Mass weekly or more say that they or a member of their immediate family have requested the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. This compares to 54 percent of those attending less than weekly but at least once a month and 45 percent of those who attend Mass a few times a year or less often.

As you may know, the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick used to be known as “last rites” or “extreme unction.” Nowadays, seriously ill people, not just those who are dying, can receive this sacrament. Have you or a member of your immediate family ever requested the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick at a time of serious illness?

	<i>By Mass Attendance</i>		
	Weekly or more	Less than weekly but at least once a month	A few times a year or less
Yes	63%	54%	45%
No	37	46	55

Differences by Gender

Women are more likely than men to report that they or a member of their immediate family have requested the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick (57 percent compared to 45 percent).

Differences by Generation

Members of the Vatican II Generation are most likely to report that they or a member of their family have requested Anointing of the Sick (59 percent). This compares to 53 percent of members of the Pre-Vatican II Generation, 46 percent of the Post-Vatican II Generation, and 43 percent of the Millennial Generation.

Importance Placed on Receiving the Sacrament

More than four-tenths of Catholics (45 percent) say it is “very” important to them that they receive the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick at some point. One in seven (14 percent) say this is “somewhat” important and about three in ten (31 percent) say that it is “a little” important. Just one in ten say it is “not at all” important to them.

How important is it to you that you receive the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick at some point?

Very important	45%
Somewhat important	14
A little important	31
Not at all important	10

Differences by Mass Attendance

About two in three of those attending Mass weekly or more often (68 percent) say that receiving the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is “very important” to them compared to more than half of those attending Mass less often but at least once a month (53 percent) and a third of those who attend Mass a few times a year or less often (33 percent).

How important is it to you that you receive the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick at some point?

	<i>By Mass Attendance</i>		
	Weekly or more	Less than weekly but at least once a month	A few times a year or less
Very important	68%	53%	33%
Somewhat important	25	32	33
A little important	4	11	19
Not at all important	3	4	15

Differences by Gender

Women are slightly more likely than men to report that it is “very” important to them to receive the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick at some point (51 percent compared to 39 percent).

Differences by Generation

Eighty-eight percent of Pre-Vatican II Catholics say receiving the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is “somewhat” or “very” important to them. By comparison, only 60 percent of Millennial Generation Catholics respond as such.

As shown in the graph below, across generations, those attending Mass at least once a month are about equally likely to say that receiving the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is “very” important to them. However, among those attending Mass only a few times a year or less, the oldest and youngest generations are less likely than other Catholics to say this is “very” important to them.

