



# Special Report

Serving Dioceses, Parishes, and Religious Communities Since 1964

Fall 2002

## Young Adult Catholics

**T**his report was designed by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University for the Secretariat for Family, Laity, Women, and Youth of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). The report is based on recent CARA research and highlights major findings on the demographic, attitudinal, and behavioral characteristics of Young Adult Catholics in the United States.

Data for this report come from two main sources:

- ◆ The CARA Catholic Poll (CCP), an annual national random sample telephone survey of Catholics in the United States. The CCP includes a wide range of questions on the characteristics and religious beliefs and practices of Catholics in the United States. For this report, data are drawn from CCP 2000, CCP 2001, and CCP 2002.
- ◆ Focus groups with diocesan, parish, and campus young adult ministers that were conducted by CARA in 1999 and 2000 as part of CARA's comprehensive evaluation of Ministry with Young Adults—A National Catholic Initiative, a project of the Catholic Campus Ministry Association (CCMA) and the National Catholic Young Adult Ministry Association (NCYAMA).

### Catholic Generations

For purposes of generational analysis, CARA typically categorizes adult respondents into three generations based on their year of birth:

- ◆ The **Pre-Vatican II Generation** includes those born before 1943. Its members, ages 60 and over in 2002, came of age prior to the Second Vatican Council. They were raised in a Church that changed dramatically after their formative years. Members of this generation played a crucial role in creating and sustaining many of the institutions of twentieth century Catholic life. They tend to exhibit relatively high levels of loyalty to the institutional Church. In 2002, 22 percent of adult Catholics are members of the Pre-Vatican II Generation.
- ◆ Members of the **Vatican II Generation** were born between 1943 and 1960 and are between the ages of 42 and 59 in 2002. Members of this generation came of age during the time of the Second Vatican Council and their formative years spanned a period of profound changes in the Church. To a large extent, this generation overlaps with the "Baby Boomers." In general, members of this generation are more likely than those before them to emphasize concerns of individual self-actualization over institutional commitment. A little more than a third of adult Catholics in 2002, 36 percent, are of the Vatican II Generation.
- ◆ The **Post-Vatican II Generation**, born after 1960, consists of those who were age 41 or younger in 2002. Members of this generation, sometimes called "Generation X," have

almost no lived experience of the pre-Vatican II Church. Their religious training occurred during the 1970s and 1980s, a time when religious education patterns and methods were very different from those used up to the late 1960s. Members of this generation are relatively less likely to make long-term commitments, are more pragmatic and less ideological, and are relatively more interested in issues of identity and community than those before them. In 2002, 42 percent of adult Catholics are of the Post-Vatican II Generation.

To correspond with the definition used by the USCCB in *Sons and Daughters of the Light: A Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Young Adults*, "Young Adults" refers to those in their 20s and 30s. In this report, "Young Adults" includes only those Catholics of these ages at the time a particular survey was conducted. "Post-Vatican II" Catholics also includes only those between the ages of 20 and 39. Where there are significant differences between those in their 20s and those in their 30s, these differences are noted.

### Catholic Youth

In addition to comparing the three generations described above, this report also examines differences between these generations and the next generation of adult Catholics, that is, those who born since 1982, on selected items. Members of this next generation, which has been called "Generation Y" or the "Millennial Generation," are age 20 and younger in 2002. For the purposes of this report, however, only those who were between the ages of 14 and 19 are considered.

# The CARA Catholic Poll

The **CARA Catholic Poll (CCP)** is an annual telephone survey of self-identified adult Catholics in the United States that is conducted in late January and early February of each year, a time when telephone polls typically have relatively high response rates. The poll is conducted using standard random digit dialing sampling and a seven call-back protocol. Bilingual interviewers are available for Spanish-speaking respondents.

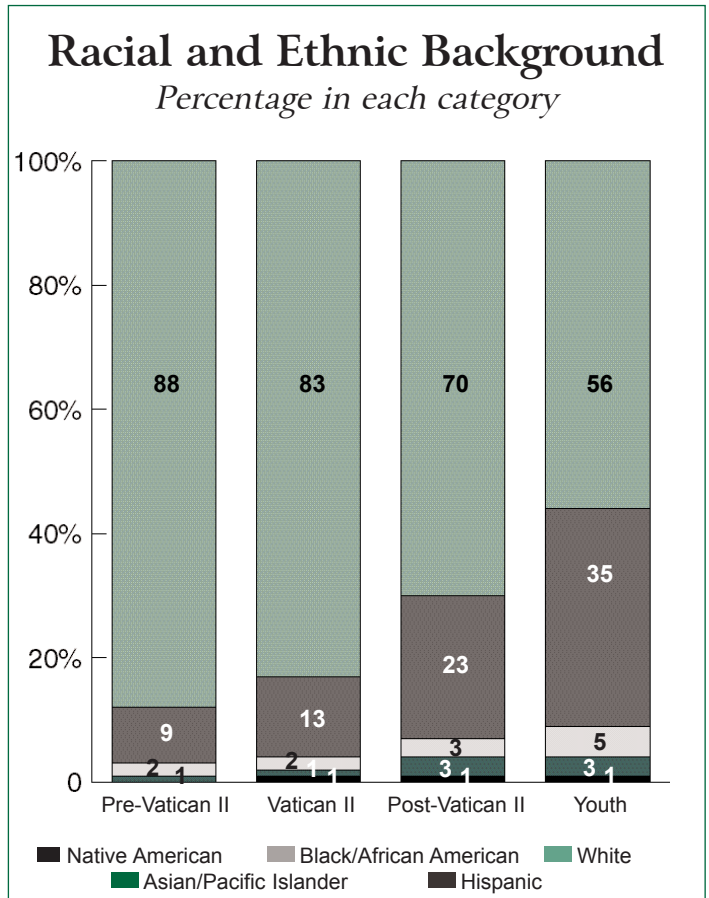
- ◆ CCP 2000 included a total of 2,635 completed interviews with self-identified Catholics age 18 and over. Following standard assumptions of statistical inference, a sample of this size corresponds to a margin of error of a little less than  $\pm 2$  percentage points. In other words, assuming random sampling, the characteristics of respondents can be assumed to be within  $\pm 2$  percentage points of the characteristics of all adult self-identified Catholics in the United States.
- ◆ CCP 2001 included completed interviews with a total of 2,100 self-identified Catholics. Unlike other CARA telephone polls, this poll included respondents age 14 and over. An additional oversample of Catholics age 14 to 17 was conducted subsequently from names generated by the CCP and yielded a total sample of 333 Catholic youth between the ages of 14 and 19. The margin of error is approximately  $\pm 2.1$  percentage points for the random sample and slightly over  $\pm 5$  percentage points for the youth sample.
- ◆ CCP 2002 included a total of 2,103 completed interviews with self-identified Catholics age 18 and over. A sample of this size corresponds to a margin of error of approximately  $\pm 2.1$  percentage points.

## Racial and Ethnic Background and National Origin

Young Adult Catholics are considerably more diverse in terms of their racial and ethnic background than previous generations of Catholics. This trend is even more pronounced among Catholic Youth. A little less than a quarter of Young Adult Catholics report that they are of Hispanic or Latino descent. Among Catholic Youth, the figure is more than a third. Almost one in ten identifies with another non-white racial or ethnic background.

Within the Hispanic population, Catholics in their 20s and 30s are less likely than older Catholics to have been born in the United States. According to the CCP 2002, nearly one-third of

Hispanic Young Adult Catholics, 32 percent, were born in a country other than the United States. By comparison, 15 percent of Pre-Vatican II Generation Hispanic Catholics and 23 percent of Vatican II Generation Hispanic Catholics were born outside the United States.



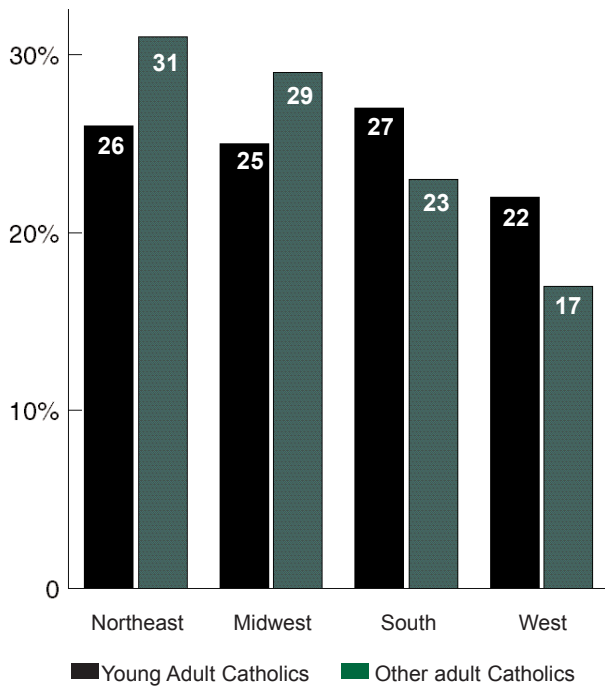
## Region and Area of Residence

Young Adult Catholics are somewhat more likely than other Catholics to reside in the West and South and less likely to reside in the Northeast and Midwest than other adult Catholics. As the next chart illustrates, they are fairly evenly distributed among the four major U.S. Census regions.

Compared to other adult Catholics, Young Adults are more likely to live in large cities and less likely to live in rural areas. Within the Young Adult Catholic population, however, those in their 20s are somewhat more likely to live in a large city while those in their 30s are somewhat more likely to live in a suburb.

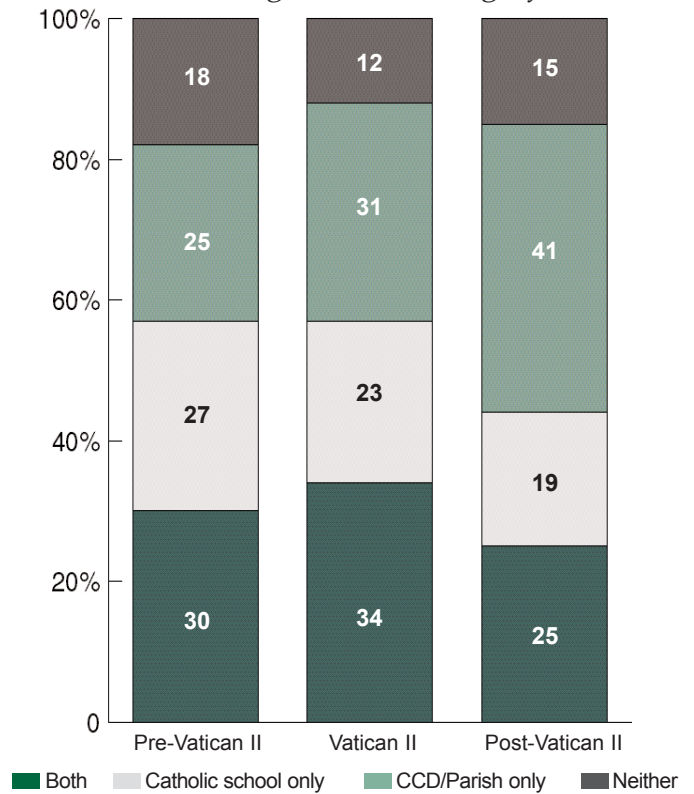
## Regional Distribution of Catholics

Percentage in each U.S. Census region



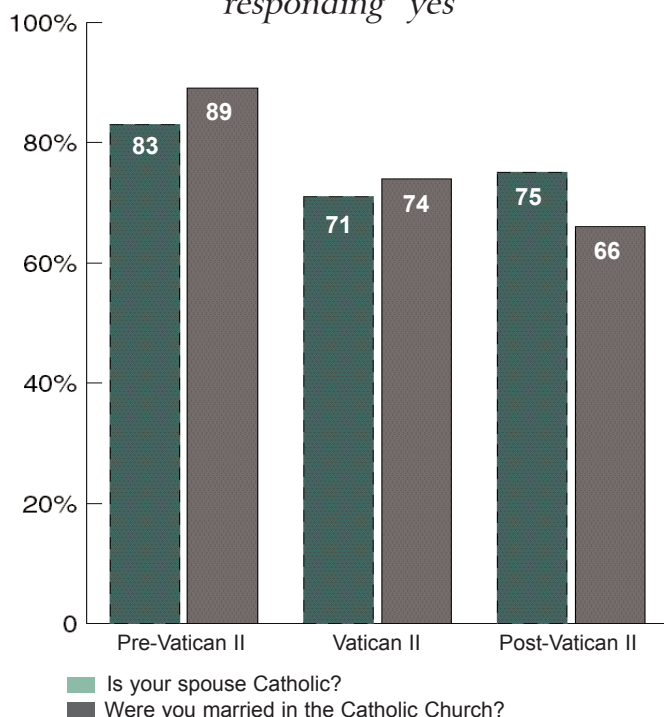
## Catholic Education

Percentage in each category



## Marriage

Percentage of married Catholics responding "yes"



## Marriage

Among Catholics who are married, younger Catholics are less likely than older Catholics both to have a Catholic spouse and to have been married in the Catholic Church. Three-fourths of married Young Adult Catholics are married to another Catholic. Only two-thirds were married in the Catholic Church.

## Catholic Education

In CCP 2000, Catholics were asked if they had attended Catholic elementary or high schools and if they had attended parish based religious education programs, like CCD. The chart above shows the percentages in each generation that reported receiving Catholic education in both settings, in neither setting, or in only one or the other of these settings. Post-Vatican II Generation Catholics are less likely than Vatican II and Pre-Vatican II Generation Catholics to have attended Catholic schools. They are more likely than either of the two older generations to have received their Catholic education only through CCD or parish based religious education programs.

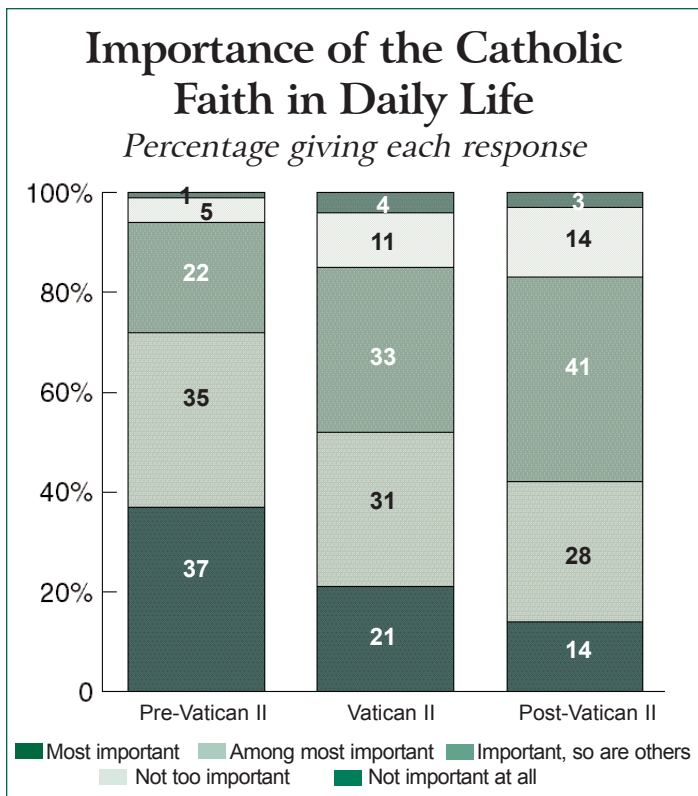


# Importance of the Catholic Faith in Daily Life

In response to the question “How important is your Catholic faith in your daily life?,” Young Adult Catholics gave the following responses:

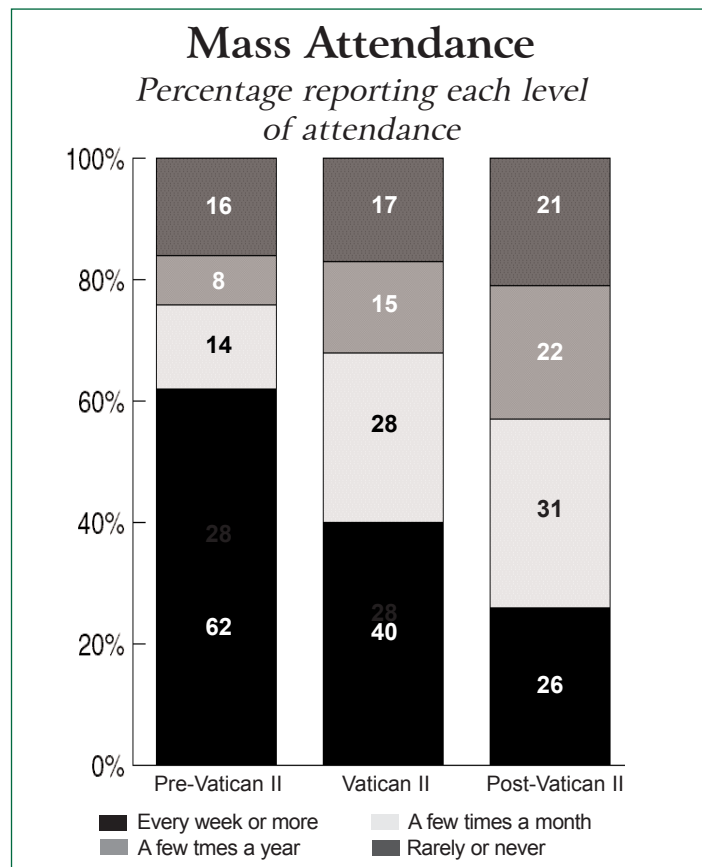
- ◆ The most important part of your life—14%
- ◆ Among the most important parts of your life—28%
- ◆ Important, but so are many other areas of your life—41%
- ◆ Not too important in your life—14%
- ◆ Not important in your life at all—3%

As the chart below illustrates, Young Adult Catholics are less likely than their elders to say that their faith is “the most important part” or “among the most important parts” of their lives. A plurality indicate that it is “important, but so are many other areas” of their lives.



## Mass Attendance

Post-Vatican II Generation Catholics are considerably less likely than Catholics from the Vatican II Generation and especially those from the Pre-Vatican II Generation to report that “aside from weddings and funerals” they attend Mass at least every week.



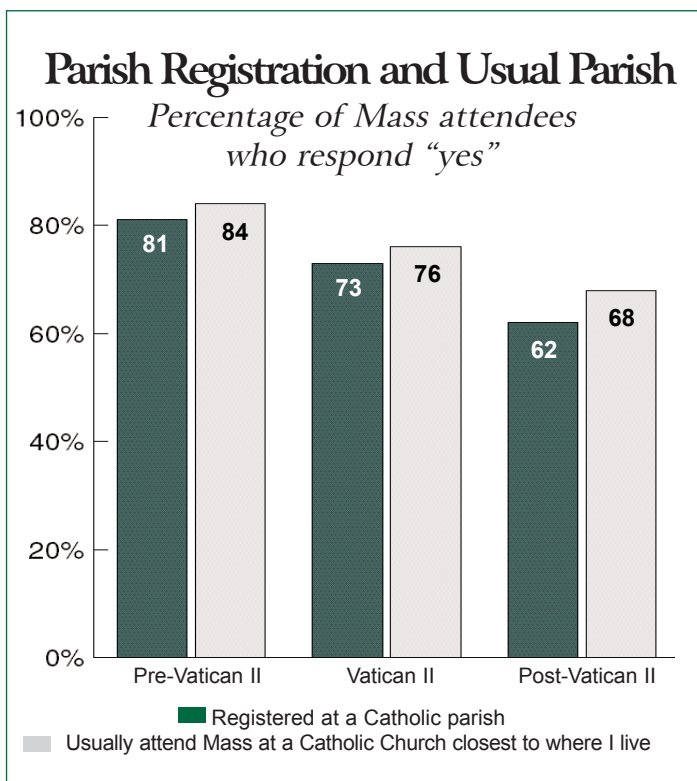
Nonetheless, about one-fourth say they attend at least each week (26 percent) and nearly another third say they attend either “once or twice a month” (18 percent) or “almost every week” (13 percent).

There are important differences between Catholics in their 20s and those in their 30s. Those in the latter age group are more likely to report more frequent Mass attendance. About six in ten Young Adult Catholics in their 30s attend Mass at least once or twice a month, while just over half of those in their 20s say they do so.

## Parish Registration and Usual Parish of Attendance

There are also important differences between Catholics in their 20s and Catholics in their 30s in parish registration and, if they attend Mass at least a few times a year, in whether they usually attend Mass at the parish closest to home or somewhere else.

Two-thirds of Young Adults age 30 to 39 (67 percent) say they are registered in a parish, but only a little more than half (55



percent) of their younger counterparts age 20 to 29 report parish registration. Compared to the Pre-Vatican II and Vatican II Generations, however, Post-Vatican II Generation Catholics are still considerably less likely to be registered in a parish.

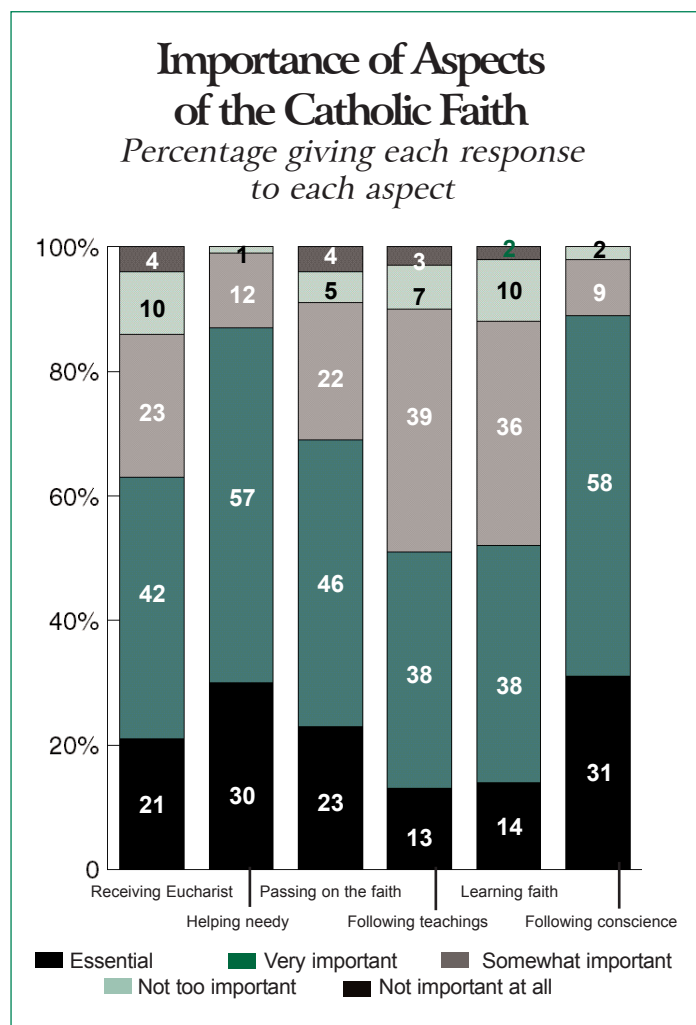
Among those who attend Mass a few times a year or more, Young Adults are less likely than older Catholics to attend Mass at the parish closest to home. Those in their 30s are more likely than those in their 20s to attend the local parish, however, (71 percent compared to 64 percent).

## Importance of Aspects of the Catholic Faith

In CCP 2001, CARA asked Catholics how important a number of different aspects of the Catholic faith are to their sense of what it means to be a Catholic. Response choices ranged from essential, very important, somewhat important, not too important, to not important at all.

- ◆ Receiving the Eucharist
- ◆ Helping those in need
- ◆ Passing on the Catholic faith to the next generation
- ◆ Following Catholic teachings
- ◆ Learning more about the Catholic faith
- ◆ Following your conscience

Following one's conscience and helping those in need are the two areas that are most likely to be deemed "essential" or "very important" by Young Adult Catholics. Passing on the faith to the next generation and receiving the Eucharist are considered "essential" or "very important" by roughly two-thirds while following Church teachings and learning more about the Catholic faith receive this level of importance by a little more than half. The chart below shows the responses of Young Adult Catholics.



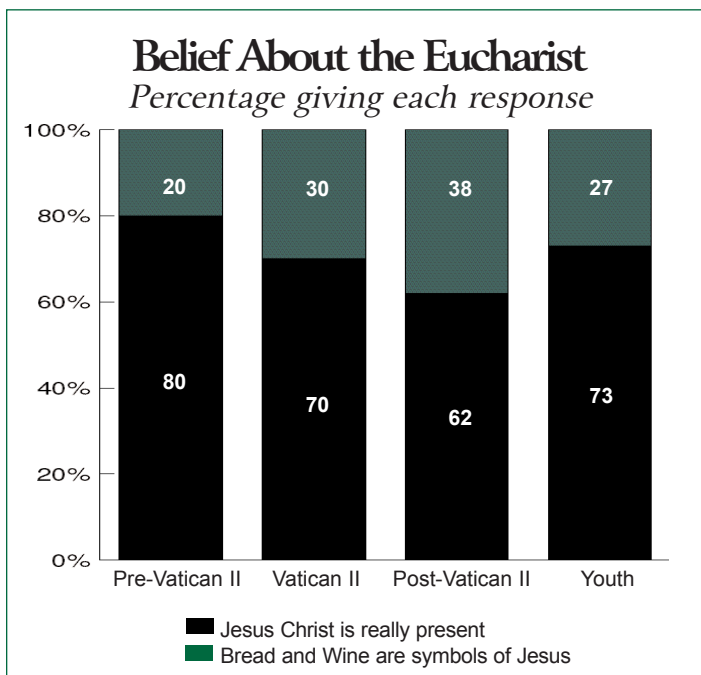
In all but one case, Catholics in their 30s are a little more likely than those in their 20s to place a higher level of importance on each of these practices. The one exception is helping the needy, upon which those in their 20s place greater importance than those in their 30s.

The differences between these two groups of Catholics are largest on receiving the Eucharist, following Church teachings, and passing on the faith to the next generation. Although these differences are relatively small, they become larger when marriage and chil-

dren are factored in, particularly when the spouse is Catholic and the marriage took place within the Church.

## Belief About the Eucharist

While respondents from the Pre-Vatican II Generation are most likely to accept the doctrine of the Real Presence, respondents from the Youth Generation are somewhat more likely than members of the Post-Vatican II Generation to believe that “Jesus Christ is really present in the bread and wine of the Eucharist” (73 percent compared to 62 percent).



## Satisfaction with the Catholic Church

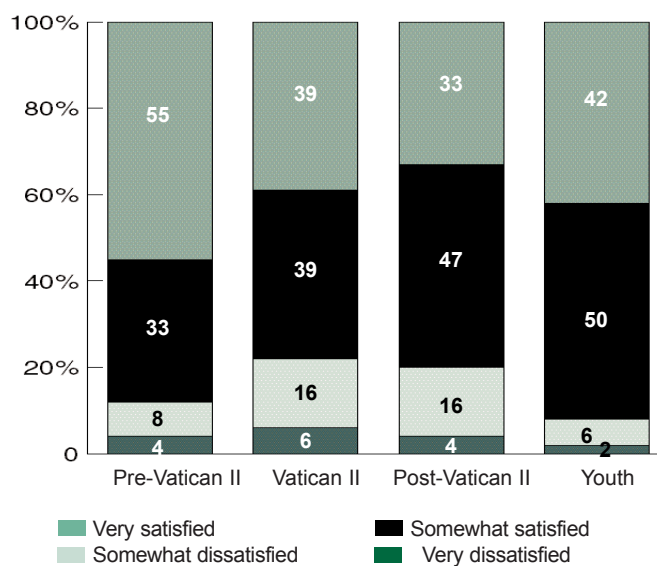
In CCP 2001, respondents were asked how satisfied they are with various aspects of the Catholic Church, such as how well the Church meets their spiritual needs and how satisfied they are with Church leadership.

### MEETING OF SPIRITUAL NEEDS

Although a majority of members of each generation say they are at least “somewhat satisfied” with how the Catholic Church meets their spiritual needs, Young Adults are least likely to say they are “very satisfied.”

## Satisfaction with Church Response to Spiritual Needs

Percentage giving each response

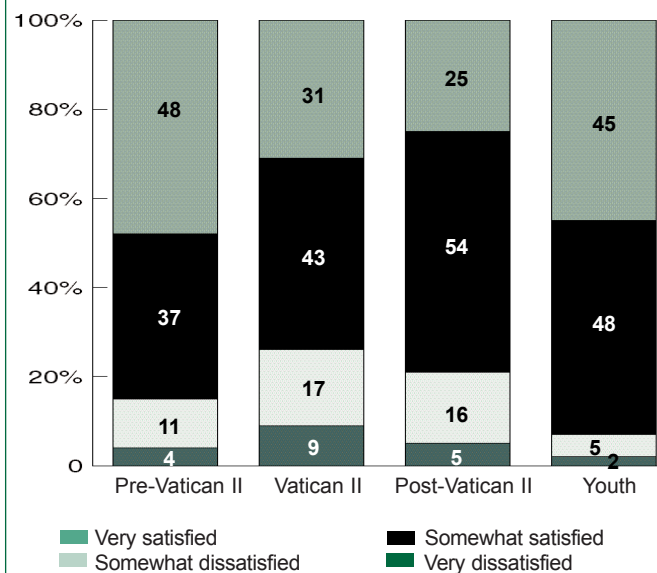


### CHURCH LEADERSHIP

While more than three-fourths of respondents are at least “somewhat satisfied” with the leadership of the Catholic Church, once again Young Adults are least likely to express the highest level of satisfaction with Church leadership. Only one-fourth say they are “very satisfied” with Church leadership.

## Satisfaction with Church Leadership

Percentage giving each response



# Consideration of a Vocation to the Priesthood or Religious Life

While about one in four Pre-Vatican II and Vatican II Catholics say they have considered a vocation to the priesthood or religious life, only about one in six Post-Vatican II Catholics have done so.

## Consideration of Priesthood or Religious Life among Young Adults

Yes, have considered it 16%

If Yes, Would you say you have considered it...

Very seriously 21%

Somewhat seriously 28%

Only a little seriously 44%

Not seriously at all 7%

# Voices of Young Adult Ministers

A total of seven focus groups were conducted with young adult ministers as part of the evaluation of Ministry with Young Adults--A National Catholic Initiative. These groups were arranged to allow for broad representation from across the United States in a variety of ministry settings. Four of the focus groups were conducted during national-level meetings. One of these groups was composed of diocesan-level young adult ministers and one was composed of parish-level young adult ministers. The other two groups consisted entirely of campus ministers. The other three focus groups were mixed, that is, each included young adult ministers from diocesan, parish, and campus settings. These last three groups were conducted in Philadelphia, Milwaukee, and San Diego.

### On defining young adults:

*"[O]ne of the biggest needs is to define what it is to be a young adult. One of the hardest things I've found is how to incorporate all young people. . . when they are in such different places. . . . Some are college bound. Some have chosen careers. Some are. . . close to being married. But you have to try and minister to all of them."*

*"[We need]. . . to really broaden the notion of young adult ministry to include - especially for people who are in a primary rela-*

*tionship—marriage preparation and baptismal preparation and even RCIA and confirmation preparation. . . . [I]f somehow those sacramental preparation things can also be integrated, then the parish sees a much wider arena of young adults than just the single people. . . . Each of those subgroups has specific needs."*

### On involvement and connection:

*"I think, oftentimes, they're looking for a way to be involved, and I don't think they feel they're invited enough, and they'd like to be involved but don't know how to go about it. They don't like to go to Mass on Sunday alone and, you know, they feel isolated in so many ways and how do they find that welcoming spirit. The other thing is just meeting other people with like values."*

*"I think some of it is just connection, that sense that so many young adults are alone, they are not with their families, or they are no longer in a college setting. I have found over and over again that they are willing to learn about their faith, they are willing to do service, but the strongest reason is that they just want to connect with other people and they want to form lasting relationships. So that hunger for relationships really drives a lot of people to seek community within the Church."*

### On inviting young adults:

*"I find people have to be asked and 95 percent of the people who come to our stuff, somebody asked them to come."*

*"But the young adults seem to want to be personally invited. They want to have a connection with somebody who will say, . . . 'I think this may be something you want to check or look into,' or 'If you have a little extra time, maybe this would be something you'd be interested in.'"*

### On spirituality:

*"There is a great spiritual hunger among young adults who really desire to grow in their faith, but they are not finding the avenues once they come back to local parishes in various areas."*

*"I think there's a great sense of spirituality in our young people. But I don't think they know what to do with that."*

### On Catholic identity and knowledge of the faith:

*"[They are] . . . really seeking a Catholic identity. 'What does it mean to be a Catholic, and how do I define that?'"*

*"They also want to know that there's something in the Church worth connecting to in terms of their intellectual and moral challenges."*

*"I think we've done a very poor job in educating our young adults in terms of Catholicism. We went through that high-time psychology era,*



and it was really all the gimmicks you could find. And now they do not have a solid foundation on which to create that moral and ethical decision-making process. I think that's one of our biggest weaknesses. And do the courses we provide at the colleges really help them understand what it means to be a young Catholic in the world today?"

"[O]ne of the challenges a lot of the students face is that others will come up and ask them questions about being Catholic, and they don't know the answers. And so they think, 'Well, if I don't know, then what's the use of being Catholic?' Or if some misconception is brought forward, then 'They must be right about it. This must be a bad religion or denomination.' And yet I don't want us to swing all the way back to 'Memorize your Catechism, and that's what it means to be a good Catholic.' We need to find that balance of head and heart, so that people don't have to be defensive, and so people don't have to jettison their faith because of the questions. That they really can grow in the Church as they're growing in so many other ways."

#### **On service:**

"If there's one thing young adults do, is they like to serve. So if there's a chance for them to serve and we give them that opportunity, but then we need to go back and tell them that's what this religion is about too, tie that back in. It's not just theology and service, it's both."

"They are committed to service, and if we aren't connecting that service with the faith. . . we are missing a great opportunity."

#### **On successful programs:**

"Our most successful opportunity that we've offered is the 'Theology on Tap' program. And we offer it diocesan-sponsored, and this gives opportunity to really hit all of the focuses: the service, social, outreach, communication, and spiritual education needs of young adults."

"We just had a speaker series. . . and the topic was 'how do you live your faith in your everyday life?'. . . A lot of young adults are saying to me, 'I don't necessarily want you to plan a social for me. If you plan a social that's fine, but I want the content. I want the Catechism. I want to know my faith, and I want to know how I can live it each day. And if you have a social at the end, that's great because then I can talk and meet with other people.' But a lot of them are saying, 'I don't have time to come to [a] social. I want to know my faith.'"

"If I can come and just try something out, I'm much more likely to be there. And I'm much more likely to come back for subsequent ones so long as I don't have to sign up for the 12-month, life-long commitment. But 'come, don't join' seems to be very successful."

"If they don't have to say they're going to be there every week, and they don't have to say that they're going to read ahead of time, then they'll come."

#### **On integrating young adults:**

"[I]t's about integration. It's about coming together as a family, all generations, not just young adults. There's certain things that need to be focused on, just that age bracket and the developmental needs. But not everything has to be about being separate."

"[O]ne of the big tasks is raising the awareness of the parish. You know, they say, 'Where are the young adults?' But I see older pastors and the older group of people that are helping to run the parish have no confidence in the younger people to be really involved because they feel they do not know their faith the way they do." And I think, for us, that's the first step: just saying these things and educating the parish. . . I just asked, 'How many young adults are serving on your finance council, your parish council, and are you inviting them to come?'"

"But it's the same trap people fall into mentally when they say 'Oh, our youth and young adults are our future.' No, they're not. They're our present. They're who they are right now. They're part of the Church now. They're not just going to be a Church in the future. They're now."



#### **Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate**

CARA was founded by Catholic leaders in 1964 to put social science research tools at the service of the Catholic Church in the United States.

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