



Faith Group Activity among Catholic Young Adults

MANY LIVING THE FAITH OUTSIDE OF THE PARISH



The Survey

- CARA conducted a national survey including 2,214 young adults between the ages of 18 and 35 during the summer of 2020
- CARA asked many of the standard questions we've asked for 20 years
- Additionally, we asked about how young adults practice their faith outside of the parish before and during the pandemic
- The margin of sampling error for the survey is ± 3.6 percentage points

Overall, 60% Indicated Faith Group Participation

Have you ever participated in any of the following Church-related programs, groups, or activities as an adult?

	Percentage "Yes"
Parish or diocesan young adult group	15%
Religious institute volunteer (e.g., Mercy Volunteer Corps)	9%
Knights of Columbus	6%
Pro-Life events/groups	5%
St. Vincent de Paul Society	4%
Jóvenes Para Cristo	3%
Legion of Mary	2%
Charismatic Renewal	2%
Cursillo	2%
Amor en Acción	1%
Movimiento Familiar Cristianno	1%
Juan XXIII	1%
Neochatecumenal Way	1%
"Other"	3%

37%

Besides attending Mass at your parish, did you participate in any Catholic group or community of people with whom you regularly met to...?

	Percentage "Yes"
Practice my faith (e.g., Bible study, prayer, devotions, faith sharing)	34.2%
Provide service or assistance to others	28.0
Evangelize and spread the faith to others	15.3

46%

Prior to the pandemic, in what ways did you practice your Catholic faith with others outside of the parish or attending Mass?

10% of respondents provided a response that was coded as being active in a faith group other than attending Mass at their parish

10%

Young Adults Are More Active in Faith Groups than Older Catholics

Besides attending Mass at your parish, do you currently participate in any Catholic group or community of people with whom you regularly meet to?

Check all that apply

		18 to 35	Older than 35
Practice your faith (e.g., Bible study, prayer, devotions, faith sharing)	+12	34%	22%
Provide service to others	+12	28%	16%
Evangelize and spread your faith to others	+9	15%	6%

*Data for older Catholics comes from a 2021 national survey conducted by CARA asking the same question

Faith Group Activity and Mass Attendance

Mass Attendance and Faith Group Participation

	Participates in faith group(s) outside of Mass and parish	Does not participate in faith group(s)
Attends Mass at least monthly or more often	26%	7%
Attends Mass a few times a year or less often	34%	33%

Reasons Why Some Faith Group Members Attend Mass Infrequently

- The most often cited reason for missing Mass is “a busy schedule or a lack of time” (64%). The next most common is “not believing missing Mass is a sin” (55%). These reasons are commonly cited among others
- The next most important reason is a preference “to practice their faith outside of the parish” (49%). This is not similar to other respondents
- This is followed by “family responsibilities” (44%), that they are “not a very religious person” (43%), and an “inconvenient Mass schedule (43%)”

Reasons Why Some Faith Group Members Are Less Active in Parish Life

- The most often cited reasons for being less likely to be active in parish life for faith group members who attend Mass infrequently are the Church's teachings on homosexuality (42%) and allegations of clergy sex abuse (41%). These reasons are commonly cited among others
- The next most important reasons are "feeling that older generations have too much influence in the parish" (39%) and "the roles available to women in the Church" (37%). These feeling are shared by other faith group members with frequent Mass attendance but not by those inactive in any faith groups.



Profile of Faith Group Activity

Who, What, When, Where, and Why...

Few Demographic Differences

- Women are similarly likely to be active in faith groups as men (59% compared to 61%)
- Non-Hispanic white respondents are only slightly less active than Hispanic respondents to be active in a group (56% compared to 61%). One outlier are young adult black Catholics who are especially likely to be active in a faith group (88%)
- Respondents with a high school education only are slightly more likely than those with a college degree to be active in a group (64% compared to 57%)
- Group activity is slightly higher in the West than in the Midwest (63% compared to 57%)

Key Differences

- Fifty-five percent of faith group participants agree that they think of themselves as a practicing Catholic compared to 27% of non-participants. Faith group participants are more likely than non-participants to agree that there have been times recently when they have struggled with their faith (50% compared to 39%)
- Nearly half of those involved in a faith group (48%) say that prior to the pandemic they would spend a social evening with someone in their neighborhood at least once a month compared to about a third of those (32%) who are not involved in a faith group.
- Faith group participants are also slightly more likely than others to spend a social evening with someone who lives outside their neighborhood (60% compared to 50%)

At a typical community meeting, did you engage in any of the following?

Percentage of Catholics, ages 18-35, who participate in Catholic group or community responding “yes”

Prayer	65%
Socializing	36
Reading and discussing scripture	30
Faith sharing	29
Group silence	23
Discussing spirituality	19
Raising money or collecting donations	18
Recreational group activities	15
Directly serving others	15
Eucharist	14
Sharing religious visions	12
Discussion on political or social issues	10
Evangelization	7
Advocacy	7
Administrative/business matters	6
Promotion of ecumenical/interfaith dialogue	5
Other activities	3

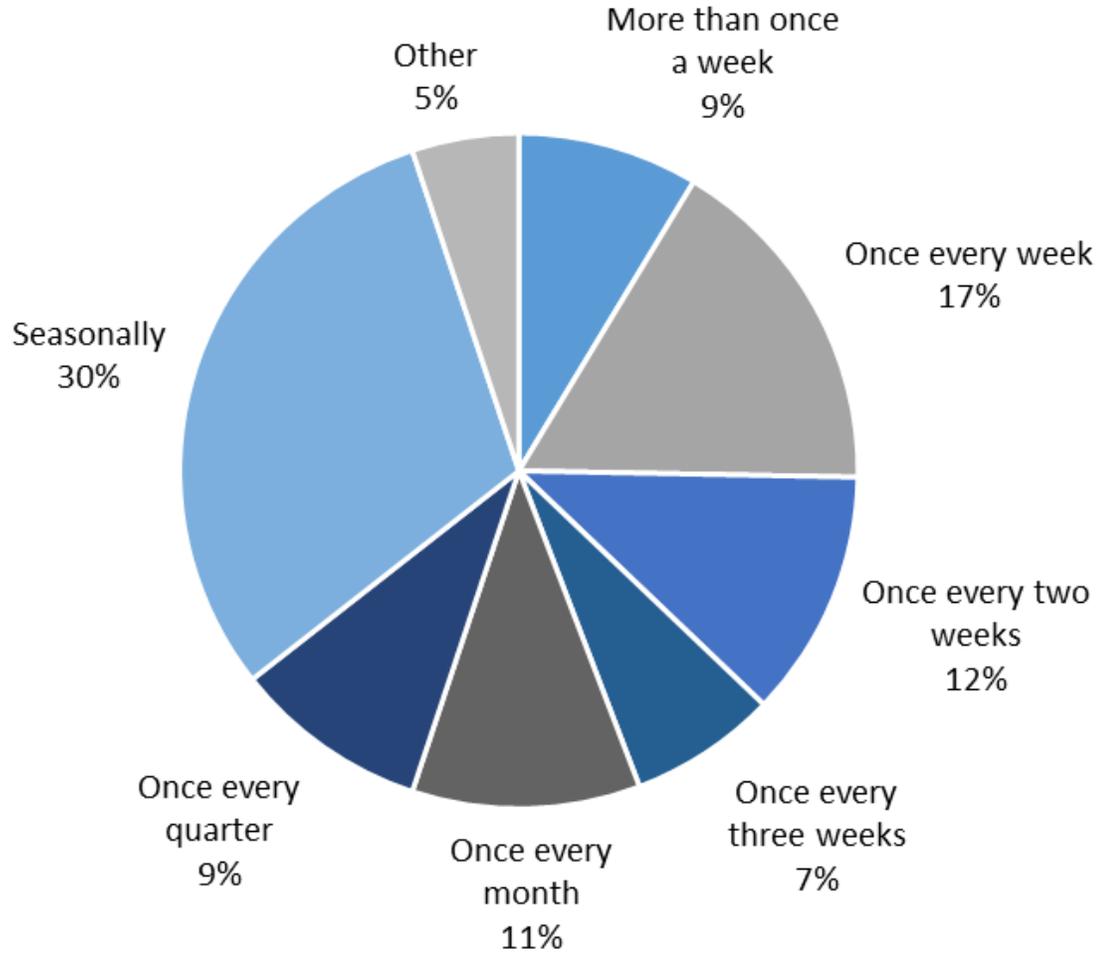
Who is served by your community or communities?

Percentage of Catholics, ages 18-35, who participate in Catholic group or community responding “yes”

Young adults (18 to 35 years old)	67%
Families, couples, single parents	56
Seniors (over 65 years old)	55
Minors (younger than 18 years old)	54
Homeless, hungry, poor	52
Sick, disabled	40
People seeking to deepen their faith	33
Parishioners	30
Victims of disasters	27
People of a particular nationality or race/ethnicity	21
Unborn	18
Prisoners	17
Others	1

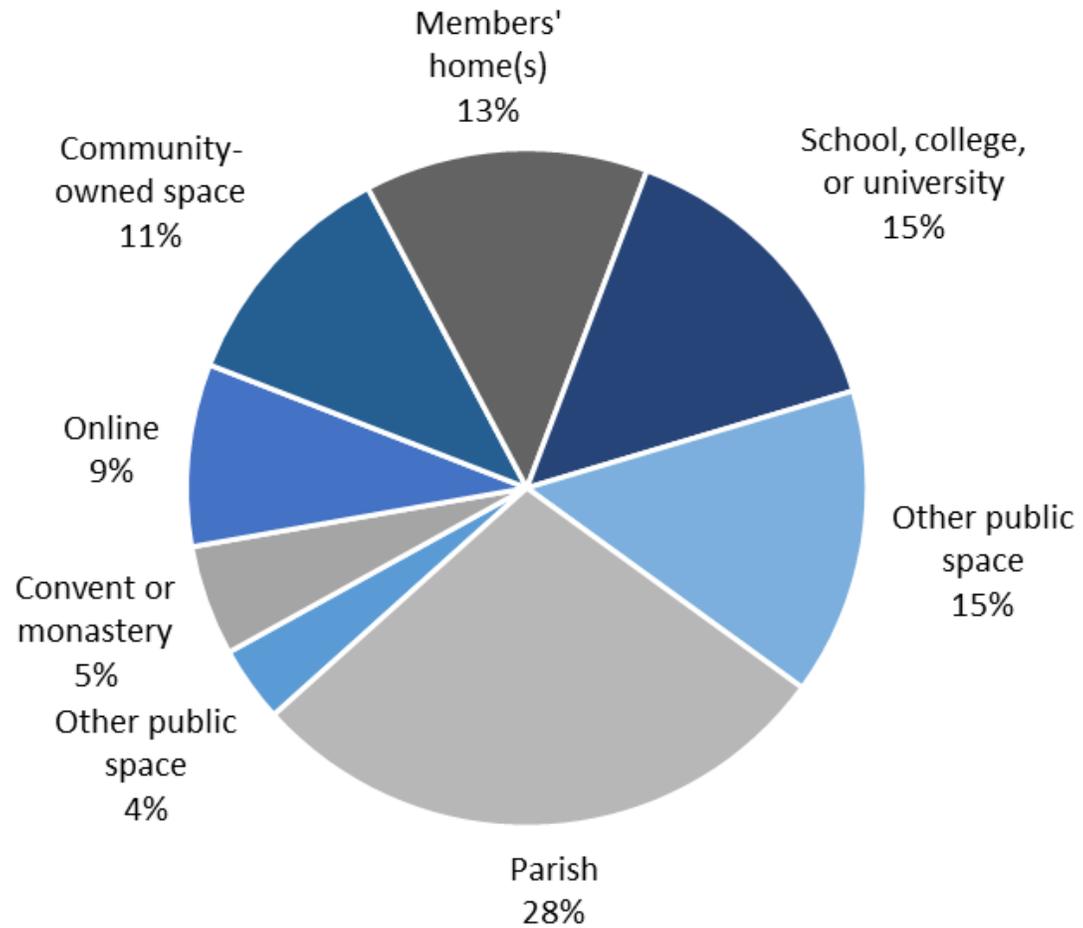
Prior to the pandemic, how often were you active in this community or communities?

Catholics, ages 18-35, who participate in Catholic group or community



56% were participating with their group at least once a month prior to the pandemic

Where did your community or communities meet?
Catholics, ages 18-35, who participate in Catholic group or community



***How much, if at all, have the following been a motivation
for your participation in this group or groups?***

Catholics, ages 18-35, who participate in Catholic group or community

	Very much		Somewhat	A little bit	Not at all	
To reduce negative feelings	38%	+	31%	69%	18%	13%
To nourish my spiritual life	37	+	33	70%	19	11
A desire to learn from new experiences	34	+	40	74%	17	9
To act or express important convictions concerning serving others	34	+	35	69%	20	22
To develop and strengthen social ties with others	28	+	37	65%	21	14
To improve career opportunities	27	+	27	54%	17	29
To explore different religious traditions	18	+	30	48%	25	27

Conclusions

- Young adult Catholics are much more likely to be involved in faith groups outside of attending Mass or their parish life than what is acknowledged publicly.
- This participation appears to be grounded in a desire to live out their faith in daily life and the fact that these participants are generally more socially active than non-participants.
- It will likely surprise many that a significant segment of young adult Catholics are interested in and already regularly participating in Bible study and social prayer—often outside of the parish context.