

Entry into the Catholic Church

This section summarizes responses to several questions about when respondents became Catholic. Catholics were asked if they entered the Church as infants, children, teens, or adults. Subsequent questions asked about the exact age of entry for those who became Catholic after infancy, the experience of RCIA for adult converts, and the prior religion of those who entered the Church as adults.

Time of Entry into the Church

More than eight in ten adult Catholics entered the Church as infants. Eight percent became Catholic as children and 7 percent as adults. Just 1 percent became Catholic as teenagers.

<i>When did you become Catholic? As an...</i>	
Infant (under age 1)	84%
Child (ages 1 – 12)	8
Teenager (ages 13 -17)	1
Adult (ages 18 and over)	7

Differences by Ethnicity

Eight percent of non-Hispanic whites but just 2 percent of Hispanics became Catholic as adults. Though small, this difference is statistically significant.

Differences by Region

Ninety-seven percent of Catholics in the Northeast entered the Church before the age of 12. By comparison, 93 percent of Catholics in the West entered the Church by this age followed by 90 percent of those in the South, and 87 percent of those in the Midwest.

Age at Baptism or Entry Into the Church

Respondents who became Catholic prior to adulthood were asked the age at which they were baptized. The question was asked separately to those who became Catholic as adults.

Age at Baptism among Those who Became Catholic Prior to Adulthood

Nine in ten respondents who became Catholic prior to adulthood were baptized as infants. Four percent were baptized from ages one to five and 3 percent from ages six to ten. One percent were baptized from ages 11 to 17. The median age at baptism for those entering the Church before adulthood is 5.

<i>How old were you when you were baptized in the Catholic Church?</i>	
Respondents who became Catholic prior to adulthood	
Less than a year old	90%
One to five years old	4
Six to ten years old	3
Eleven to seventeen years old	1
I was baptized in another Christian faith	<1

Fewer than one percent (just five respondents) report that they were baptized in another Christian faith. Among these five respondents, two were baptized as infants, two at the age of six, and one at the age of 15.

Age at Adult Entrance to Catholicism

Among those who became Catholics as adults, nearly half did so between the ages of 18 to 29. About one in six did so from ages 30 to 39. About one in five from 40 to 49. Fifteen percent became Catholic at an older age. The median age for those entering the Church as adults is 35.

How old were you when you entered the Catholic Church?

Respondents who became Catholic as adults

18 to 29 years old	48%
30 to 39 years old	16
40 to 49 years old	21
50 or older	15

Participation in RCIA

Three-quarters of adult converts to Catholicism report that they participated in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA).

Did you go through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), the formal process that brings adult converts into the Catholic Church?

Respondents who became Catholic as adults

Yes	75%
No	25

Length of the RCIA Process

Among respondents who participated in RCIA, nearly two-thirds report that the process was less than a year long in their parish. About one-quarter report that it lasted a year, and about one tenth that it lasted two years or longer.

<i>How long was the RCIA process in your parish?</i>	
Respondents who went through RCIA	
Less than one year	66%
One year	24
Two years or more	9

Prior Religion Before Becoming Catholic

More than six in ten adult converts to Catholicism were previously Protestant. More than three-quarters say they had “no religion.” Slightly fewer than one-tenth were members of some other religion.

<i>What was your religion before becoming Catholic?</i>	
<i>[If “Protestant, ”] What Protestant denomination was this?</i>	
Respondents who became Catholic as adults	
Protestant	64%
No religion	28
Other religion	8
Orthodox	0
Jewish	0
Muslim	0

Sacramental Beliefs and Participation

Many of the questions in this survey focus on Catholics' participation in and attitudes about the sacraments. This section of the report provides an overview of general issues related to the sacraments: which sacraments Catholics have personally celebrated, which sacraments they find most meaningful; and the importance they place on having their children receiving the sacraments of Reconciliation, Confession, and the Eucharist.

Personal Celebration of the Sacraments

About nine in ten Catholics have celebrated their First Communion/Eucharist or their first Reconciliation. Slightly fewer, 84 percent, have been confirmed.

Which of the following sacraments have you celebrated?

Percentage who have celebrated each

First Communion/Eucharist	92%
First Reconciliation or Confession ¹⁷	91
Sacrament of Confirmation	84

In a 2002 survey,¹⁸ 86 percent of Catholics reported that they had received the Sacrament of Confirmation—a proportion very similar to that reported in the present survey.

Differences by Time of Entry into the Church

- Among those who were baptized Catholic as infants, 92 percent have celebrated the Sacrament of Confirmation. This compares to 81 percent of those who became Catholic as adults and 74 percent of those who became Catholic as children or teens.
- Those who became Catholic as children (ages 1 to 12) are *less* likely than all other respondents to have celebrated their First Communion (76 compared to 94 percent) and their First Reconciliation (79 compared to 92 percent).

¹⁷ In very rare cases, Catholics may have received their First Communion before making their First Confession. This may account for more respondents reporting First Communion than First Confession. The responses to this question were recoded to replace those who answered “No” that they had not celebrated their First Confession but who later in the survey said they do go to Confession with some frequency. This appears to be an issue with a small number of respondents having been confused by the question wording—specifically the “First” in First Confession. A total of 11 respondents (1 percent) say they did not receive their First Confession and that they never go to Confession but that they did receive their First Communion.

¹⁸ The 2002 CARA Catholic Poll (CCP), a national telephone poll. Results have been weighted to adjust for methodological differences from the online Knowledge Networks format.

Differences by Frequency of Mass Attendance

More than nine in ten Catholics who attend Mass at least once a month have personally celebrated their First Communion, First Reconciliation, or Confirmation. Those attending Mass a few times a year or less often are less likely to have received all three sacraments.

<i>Which of the following sacraments have <u>you</u> celebrated?</i>			
Percentage who have celebrated each			
	<i>By Mass Attendance</i>		
	Weekly or more	Less than weekly but at least once a month	A few times a year or less
First Communion/Eucharist	96%	98%	89%
First Reconciliation or Confession	97	97	87
Sacrament of Confirmation	93	92	77

Differences by Ethnicity

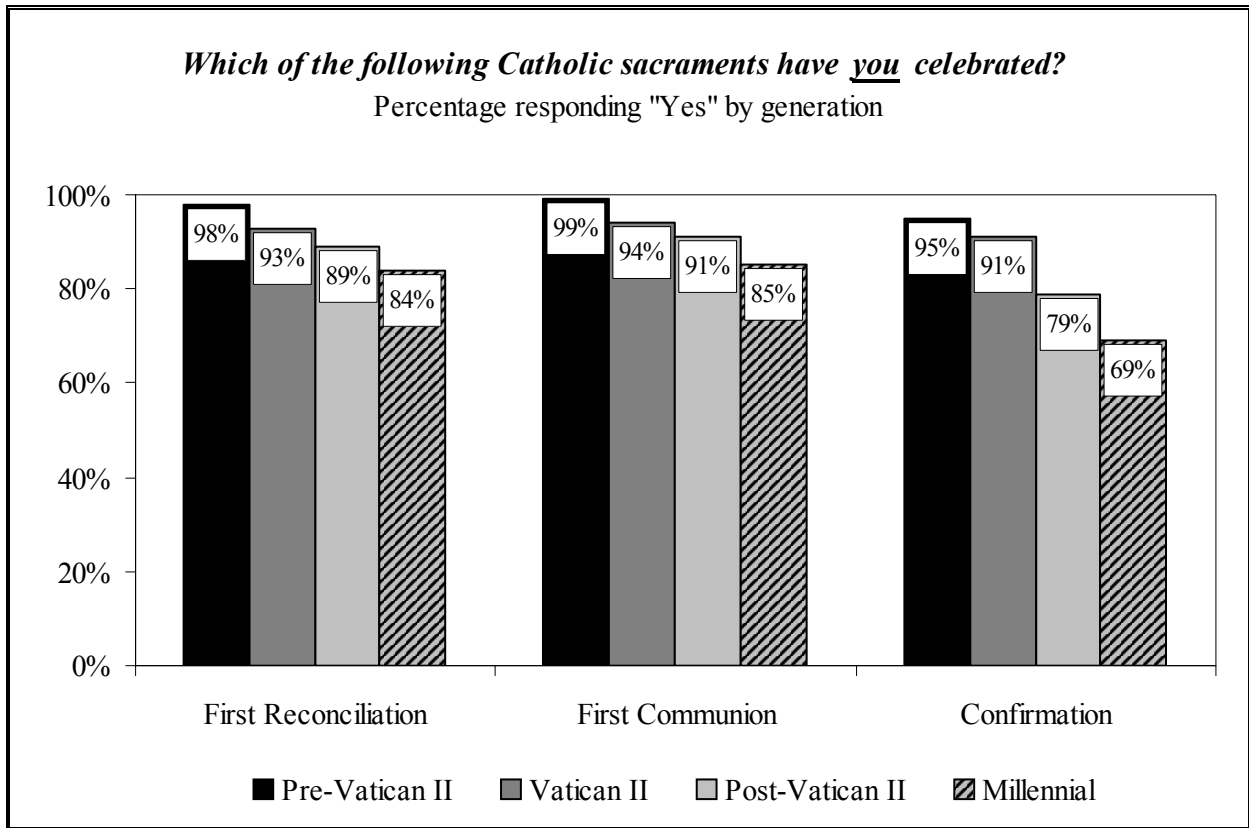
Hispanics are slightly *less* likely than non-Hispanic whites to have celebrated each of the three sacraments (86 percent compared to 95 percent for the Eucharist; 83 percent compared to 94 percent for Reconciliation; and 75 percent compared to 88 percent for Confirmation).

Differences by Education

More than nine in ten respondents who attended a Catholic educational institution at the primary, secondary, or college-level have celebrated these three sacraments.

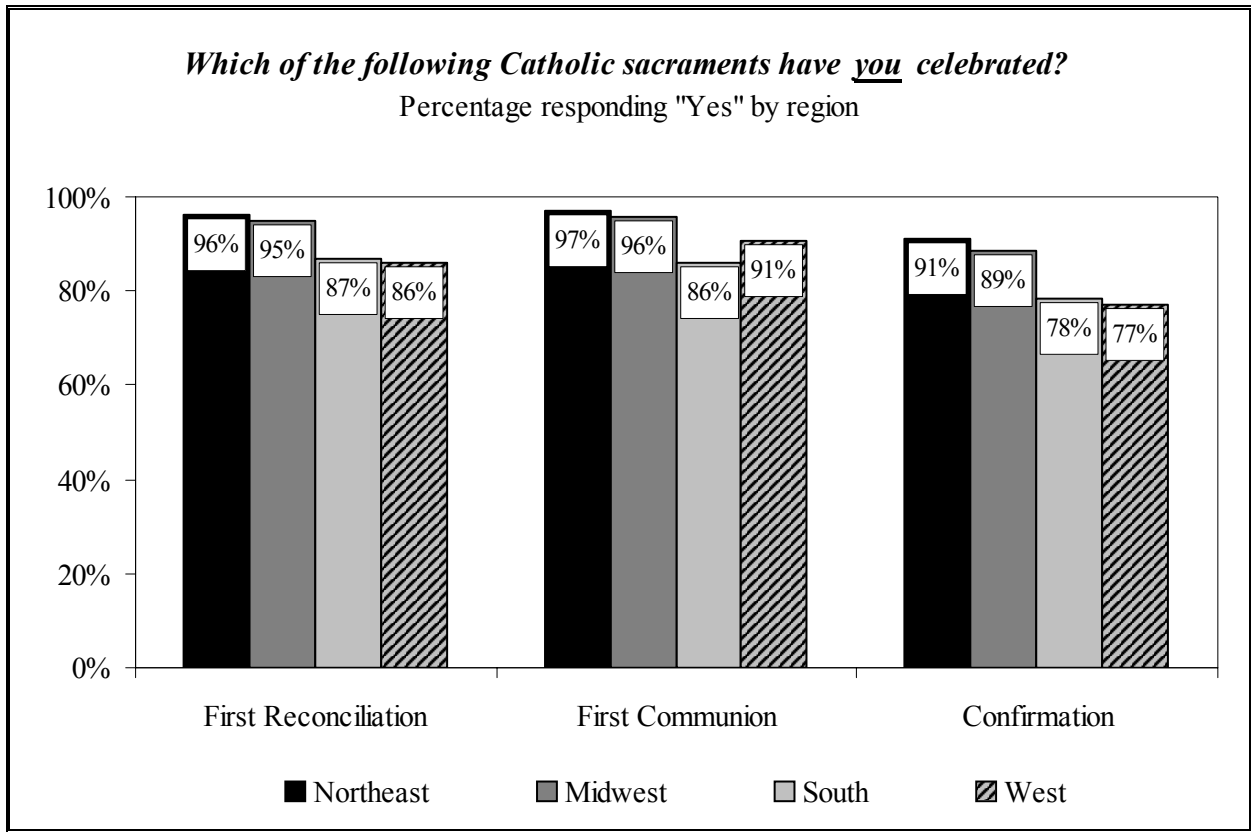
Differences by Generation

Older respondents are more likely to have celebrated each of the sacraments. Generational differences are largest for Confirmation.



Differences by Region

Catholics in the Northeast and Midwest are more likely than those in the South and West to have celebrated each of the sacraments.



Meaningfulness of the Sacraments

About seven in ten respondents report that they find the sacraments of Marriage and Baptism “very” meaningful to them.

	“Somewhat” or “Very” Meaningful	“Very” Meaningful Only
Marriage	89%	71%
Baptism	88	72
Eucharist/Holy Communion	84	64
Confirmation	83	59
Anointing of the Sick	78	52
Holy Orders/Ordination	71	46
Reconciliation/Confession	66	39

Respondents were asked how meaningful they find each of the seven sacraments, on a scale ranging from “not meaningful at all” to “very meaningful.” As the first column in the table shows, a majority of Catholics find all of the sacraments at least “somewhat” meaningful. Nearly nine in ten Catholics say Marriage and Baptism are either “somewhat” or “very” meaningful to them. About two-thirds find the sacrament of Reconciliation at least “somewhat” meaningful.

- Slightly less than two-thirds say that the Eucharist is “very” meaningful to them.
- About six in ten find Confirmation “very” meaningful and more than half find Anointing of the Sick “very” meaningful to them.
- Slightly fewer than half of Catholics find Holy Orders to be “very” meaningful, and about four in ten find Reconciliation this meaningful.

Differences by Frequency of Mass Attendance

Catholics attending Mass at least once a month (including weekly or more often) are more likely than those attending less often to find all seven sacraments “somewhat” or “very” meaningful to them. Also, Catholics attending Mass weekly or more often are more likely than those attending less than weekly but at least once a month, to find the Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Reconciliation to be at least “somewhat” meaningful.

***How meaningful for you are each of the Catholic sacraments listed below?
This includes celebrating, receiving, or living the sacrament yourself
or in witnessing someone else close to you experience this sacrament.***

Percentage responding “Somewhat” or “Very” meaningful

	<i>By Mass Attendance</i>		
	Weekly or more	Less than weekly but at least once a month	A few times a year or less
Baptism	99%	96%	80%
Eucharist/Holy Communion	98	97	73
Marriage	97	97	83
Confirmation	97	96	72
Anointing of the Sick	97	88	66
Holy Orders/Ordination	93	84	57
Reconciliation/Confession	90	80	51

Differences by Gender

Women are more likely than men to say that each of the seven sacraments is “very” meaningful to them. Differences are largest for Anointing of the Sick (63 compared to 41 percent), Marriage (79 compared to 62 percent), Eucharist (72 compared to 56 percent), and Holy Orders (52 compared to 38 percent).

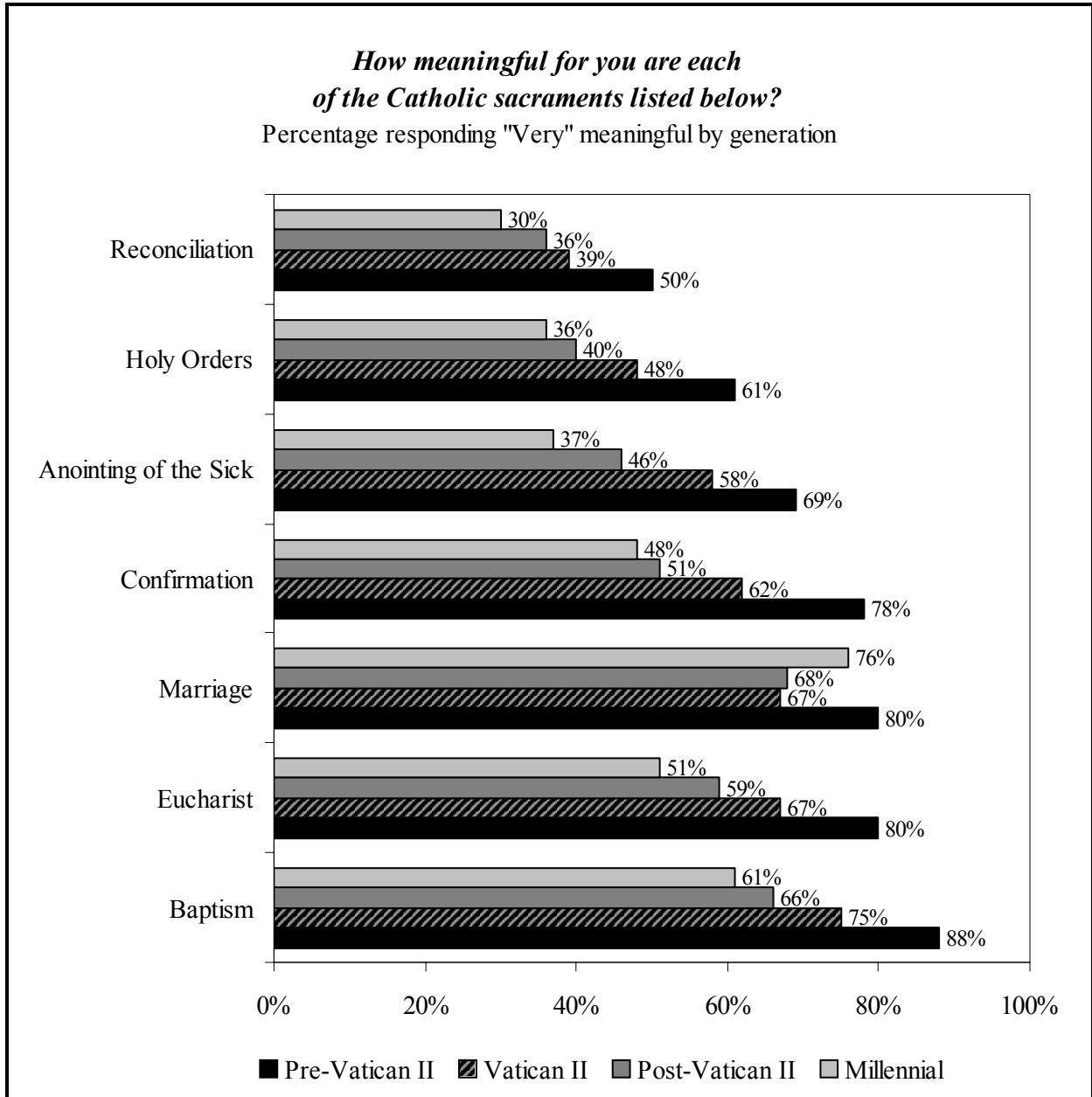
Differences by Education

Respondents who attended a Catholic elementary or middle school are more likely than those who did not to say all seven sacraments are “very” meaningful to them. This is especially the case for the Eucharist (71 percent compared to 58 percent).

Respondents who attended a Catholic high school are more likely than those who did not to say all seven sacraments are “very” meaningful to them. This is especially the case for the Holy Orders (62 percent compared to 45 percent).

Differences by Generation

With the exception of Marriage, older generations of Catholics are more likely than their younger counterparts to describe all the sacraments as being “very” meaningful to them. Differences are largest for Anointing of the Sick (69 percent of the Pre-Vatican II Generation compared to 37 percent of the Millennial Generation) and for Confirmation (78 compared to 48 percent).



Most Meaningful Sacrament

Four in ten Catholics say Baptism is the “most meaningful” of the seven sacraments.

<i>Which of these Catholic sacraments is the <u>most</u> meaningful to you? Select one.</i>	
Baptism	39%
Marriage	26
Eucharist/Holy Communion	25
Confirmation	3
Reconciliation/Confession	3
Anointing of the Sick	3
Holy Orders/Ordination	1

- One-quarter of Catholics say that Marriage is the most meaningful sacrament and another quarter that the Eucharist is most meaningful.
- Relatively few respondents, 3 percent each, report that Confirmation, Reconciliation, or Anointing of the Sick is the most meaningful sacrament to them.
- Just 1 percent identify Holy Orders as the most meaningful sacrament to them.

Differences by Personal Experience of Sacrament

Those who have had more personal experience of a sacrament are more likely to select it as being most meaningful.

- Thirty-eight percent of those who say they “always” receive the Eucharist at Mass say that Holy Communion is the most meaningful to them, compared to 21 percent of those who receive the Eucharist “frequently or usually,” 13 percent who “seldom” receive it, and 10 percent of those who never receive it when attending Mass (see page 44 for the frequency of receiving Eucharist).
- Eighteen percent or more of those who go to Confession once a month or more often say Reconciliation is the most meaningful, compared to 8 percent who go several times a year, and 2 percent of those who go once a year or less often (see page 57 for the frequency of going to Confession).
- Those who have *not* celebrated their First Communion or who have not been confirmed are most likely to select Marriage as the most meaningful sacrament (39 percent each).
- Thirty-one percent of Catholics who are married select Marriage as the most meaningful sacrament, compared to 27 percent of those who have never been married, 14 percent of

those who are divorced, and 18 percent of those who are unmarried and currently living with a partner.

Differences by Frequency of Mass Attendance

Catholics who attend Mass at least once a week are most likely to say the Eucharist is most meaningful to them (52 percent). By comparison, those attending Mass less than weekly are most likely to say they find Baptism to be most meaningful (38 percent of those attending at least once a month but not weekly and 42 percent of those attending a few times a year or less often).

	<i>Which of these Catholic sacraments is the <u>most</u> meaningful to you? Select one.</i>		
	<i>By Mass Attendance</i>		
	Weekly or more	Less than weekly but at least once a month	A few times a year or less
Eucharist/Holy Communion	52%	32%	11%
Baptism	32	38	42
Marriage	11	22	34
Reconciliation/Confession	4	3	3
Confirmation	<1	4	4
Anointing of the Sick	<1	1	5
Holy Orders/Ordination	0	0	1

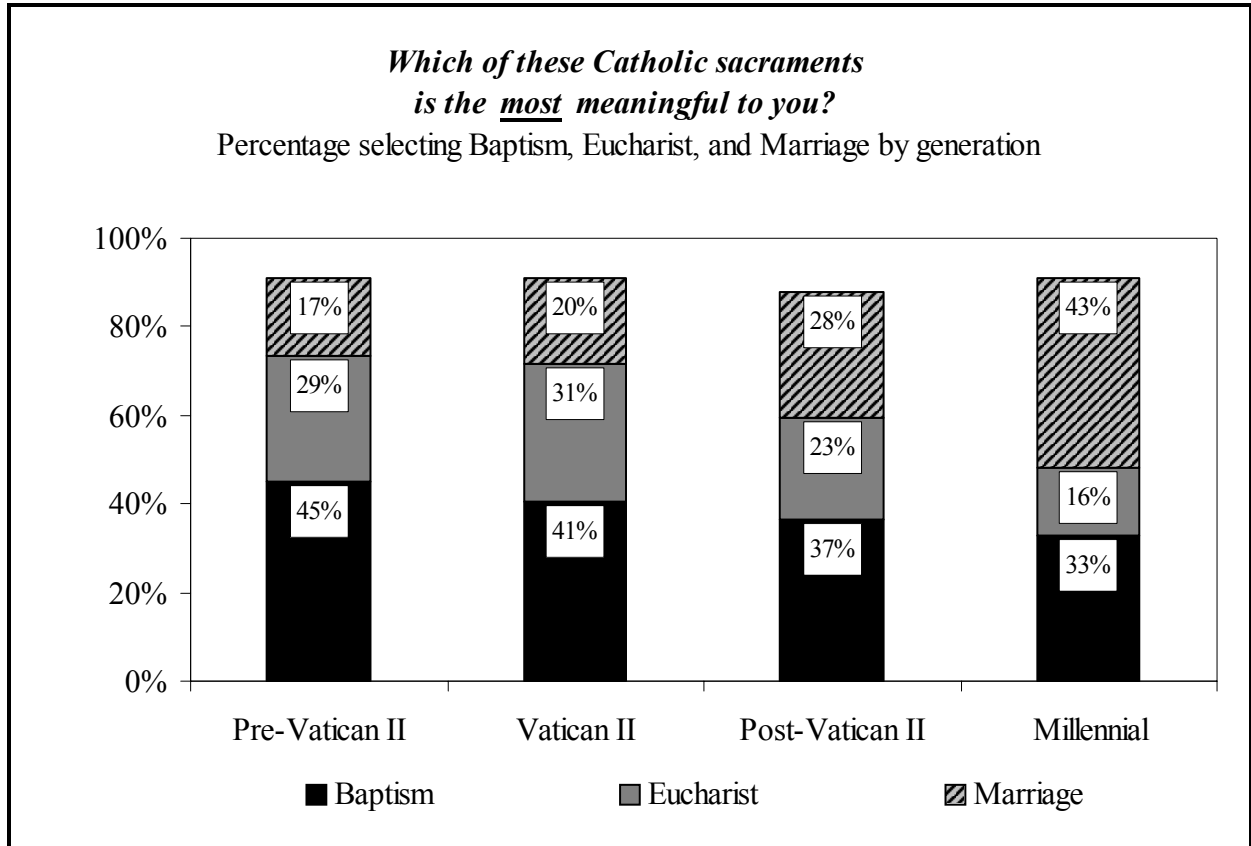
- One in 20 of those who attend Mass a few times a year or less selected Anointing of the Sick as the most meaningful sacrament.
- There is little variation across Mass attendance sub-groups in the percentages selecting Reconciliation as the most meaningful sacrament.
- The only respondents to select Holy Orders as the most meaningful sacrament attend Mass a few times a year or less often.

Differences by Education

Those who attended a Catholic elementary or middle school are more likely than those who did not to say the Eucharist is most meaningful to them (36 percent compared to 22 percent). A similar proportions of those who attended a Catholic high school say the same (37 percent).

Differences by Generation

Older Catholics are more likely than younger Catholics to perceive Baptism as the most meaningful sacrament. The two oldest generations (Pre-Vatican II and Vatican II) are also more likely to identify the Eucharist as the most meaningful sacrament. In contrast, those of the youngest generation are more likely than older Catholics to declare Marriage as the most meaningful sacrament to them.



Importance of Having One’s Children Participate in the Sacraments

Eight in ten Catholics who are parents say it is at least “somewhat” important that their children celebrate their First Communion. About two-thirds say this is “very” important to them.

How important is it to you that your child or children have celebrated each of the following Catholic sacraments?

Respondents who have children

	“Somewhat” or “Very” Important	“Very” Important Only
First Communion/Eucharist	81%	65%
Confirmation	78	61
First Reconciliation/Confession	77	60

Slightly more than three-quarters of Catholic parents say it is at least “somewhat” important that their children celebrate First Reconciliation and Confirmation, with six in ten saying each is “very” important.

Differences by Frequency of Mass Attendance

Nearly all parents who attend Mass at least once a month say it is at least “somewhat” important that their children celebrate these three sacraments. By comparison, less than two-thirds of parents attending Mass a few times a year or less often give the celebration of these sacraments by their children similar importance.

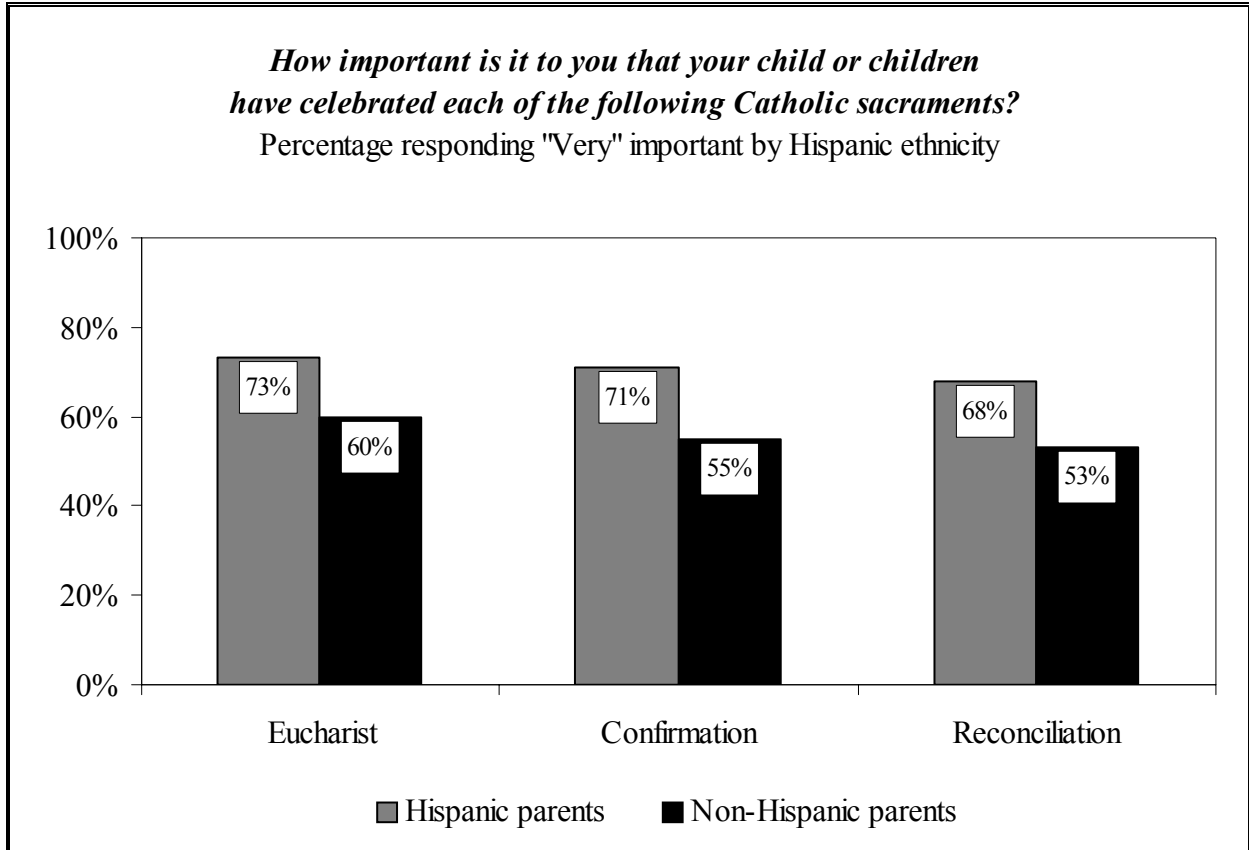
How important is it to you that your child or children have celebrated each of the following Catholic sacraments?

Those who have children responding “Somewhat” or “Very” important

	<i>By Mass Attendance</i>		
	Weekly or more	Less than weekly but at least once a month	A few times a year or less
First Communion/Eucharist	97%	100%	65%
Confirmation	97	96	60
First Reconciliation/Confession	95	96	60

Differences by Ethnicity

Hispanics are more likely than non-Hispanic whites to say it is “very” important that their children celebrate each of these three sacraments.



Differences by Gender

Mothers are more likely than fathers to say it is “very” important that their children celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation (68 compared to 53 percent).