

POPE, BISHOPS GET HIGH MARKS FOR LEADERSHIP, CARA POLL FINDS
MILLENNIALS RESEMBLE PRE-VATICAN II CATHOLICS IN ATTITUDES, PRACTICES

WASHINGTON—More than eight out of ten Catholics are satisfied with the leadership of Pope Benedict XVI, according to a poll of Catholic adults in the United States. More than seven out of ten are equally satisfied with the leadership of the U.S. bishops, a 14-point jump, from 58 to 72 percent, since 2004.

The same poll found that among those who attend Mass at least once a month, Millennial Catholics (born after 1981) pursue religious practice with fervor akin to pre-Vatican II Catholic (born before 1943). However, 36 percent of Millennial Catholics (2.7 million individuals) attend Mass at least once a month compared to 64 percent of pre-Vatican II Catholics (5.5 million individuals.)

The results are found in “Sacraments Today: Belief and Practice among U.S. Catholics,” a report from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA). The Georgetown University-based researchers polled 1,007 self-identified adult Catholics in February 2008 and compared responses from pre-Vatican, Vatican II (born between 1943 and 1960), post-Vatican II (born between 1961-1981) and Millennial Catholics.

Data on the Millennial generation show young Mass-attending Catholics more akin to pre-Vatican Catholics in regard to religious beliefs as well as practices.

Among Catholics attending Mass at least once a month, the Millennials are just as likely to believe the basic Catholic tenet that Christ is really present in the Eucharist as pre-Vatican II Catholics.

Among this same group, the Millennials are the most likely to observe Lenten practices. More than nine in ten of them abstain from meat on Fridays in Lent (91 percent) and receive ashes on Ash Wednesday (91 percent).

Among those attending Mass at least once a month, Millennial Catholics are more likely than older Catholics to say they are at least somewhat involved in parish life, are among the most likely to consider their faith the most important part of their life, and that receiving the Eucharist is “very” important to their sense of what it means to be Catholic.

Among this group, the Millennials are most likely to say that having devotion to the saints is “very” important to their sense of what it means to be Catholic.

Millennials stand apart when saying which sacrament is most meaningful to them personally. For Catholics overall, 39 percent said baptism is the most meaningful; 43 percent of Millennials said marriage is.

The wide-ranging poll found that Catholics hold that helping those in need is important, and two-thirds agreed with the statement: “Helping the poor and needy is a moral obligation for Catholics.”

The poll offers a snapshot of the Church in the United States today.

“Older Catholics, especially those who came of age prior to the Second Vatican Council, are typically more involved in Church life and attend Mass more frequently than younger generations of Catholics,” the report said. “In general, they tend to score higher on most survey items that measure ‘commitment’ to Catholicism.”

Knowledge about the Catholic faith varies by generation and is frequently greatest among older Catholics, yet this depends on the topic.

“For example, knowledge of Church teachings and obligations is usually higher among older Catholics, but knowledge of the bible is typically greater among younger generations,” the report said.

Agreement with Church teachings is, again, often relatively high among the oldest Catholics, the pre-Vatican II generation. To a lesser extent this is also true of the Millennial generation, currently in their mid-20s and younger.

Agreement with Church teaching is typically lowest among the generation of Catholics who came of age during the changes associated with Vatican II and among post-Vatican II generation Catholics, though this too depends on the teaching in question.

Frequency of Mass attendance is a strong indicator of the general importance of Catholicism in a person’s life and of his or her level of commitment to living out the faith. In general, the more frequently one attends Mass, the more frequently he or she participates in other Church or religious activities, the greater his or her knowledge about the Catholic faith, the greater his or her awareness of current events in the Church, and the greater his or her adherence to Church teachings. CARA found that Catholics who attend Mass at least monthly hold similar views to those who attend weekly. Catholics are obliged to attend Sunday Mass each week.

CARA estimates that there are more than 51 million adult Catholics, about 22-23 percent of the nation's adults, making Catholicism the religion chosen by most Americans. Of this number:

-- 31 percent, or approximately 16 million adult Catholics, attend Mass in any given week (23 percent of Catholics say they attend Mass every week). Mass attendance is highest among Catholics who are older, female, married to another Catholic, who have a college degree or more, and who attended Catholic educational institutions – especially a Catholic college or university. Majorities of adult Catholics agree with the following statements: “I can be a good Catholic without going to Mass every Sunday” (68 percent) and “I think of myself as a practicing Catholic (55 percent).

-- 61 percent agree “somewhat” or “very much” with the statement “Sacraments are essential to my faith.” Older Catholics are more likely than younger Catholics to have celebrated their First Reconciliation, First Communion or the Sacrament of Confirmation. With each generation the percentage having celebrated each of these sacraments decreases. For example, 99 percent of those of the Pre-Vatican II generation celebrated their First Communion compared to 94 percent of the Vatican II generation, 91 percent of the Post-Vatican II generation and 85 percent of the Millennial Generation.

-- Of the seven sacraments -- baptism, confirmation, Holy Eucharist, reconciliation, sacrament of the sick, holy orders and marriage – the vast majority of Catholics find meaningful four of the seven sacraments: marriage (89 percent), baptism (88 percent), the Eucharist (84 percent) and confirmation (83 percent.) Only two-thirds said reconciliation was somewhat or very meaningful to them.

About six in ten have a statue or picture of Mary on display in their home (about 30.1 million adult Catholics). This is most common among Hispanics (67 percent) and weekly Mass attendees (80 percent). A third say that they wear or carry a cross or crucifix and nearly a quarter (23 percent) carry a rosary. Religious medals or pins are carried by nearly three in ten adult Catholics and one in five carry prayer cards or coins. Those who attend Mass weekly are more likely to carry a rosary than a cross (45 percent compared to 39 percent).

This poll offers guidance to church leaders, said Archbishop George Niederauer, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Communications Committee, which authorized the poll. “It reveals good will, healthy attitudes toward neighbor and an openness to the church among young

Catholics. Yet it also points out a need for greater efforts in education for both adults and young people. It's heartening that so many are proud to call themselves Catholic. The challenge for church leaders is to help them see what Catholicism really means.”

Other findings of the survey included:

- Respondents with children are most likely to say it is “somewhat” or “very” important that their children celebrate First Communion (81 percent), followed by Confirmation (78 percent), and finally First Reconciliation (77 percent). Nearly all parents who attend Mass at least once a month say it is at least “somewhat” important that their children celebrate all three sacraments.
- Nine in ten or more Mass-attending Catholics (attending at least a “few times a year”) say the following aspects of Mass are at least “somewhat” important to them: feeling the presence of God (94 percent), prayer and reflection (93 percent), and receiving Eucharist (92 percent). Aspects of less importance include the music (71 percent) and the Church environment and decorations (66 percent).
- Twenty-six percent of adult Catholics say they participate in the sacrament of reconciliation once a year or more often (this is equivalent to 13.3 million adults). Only 2 percent of Catholics do so once a month or more often. Thirty percent say they go to confession less than once a year and 45 percent say they never do so.
- More than three in four respondents (77 percent) agree at least “somewhat” with the statement, “I am proud to be Catholic” (56 percent agree “strongly”). More than eight in ten (81 percent) consider their Catholic faith to be important in their daily life (41 percent say that this is either “among the most important parts” of their life or “the most important part” of their life).
- Eighty-three percent of respondents say that helping those in need is either “somewhat” or “very” important to their “sense of what it means to be a Catholic.” Eight in ten say receiving the Eucharist is equally important (79 percent), followed by receiving Confirmation (74 percent), living a life consistent with Church teaching (73 percent), having devotion to Mary (68 percent), attending Mass (66 percent), having devotion to the saints (63 percent), and going to Confession (56 percent).
- Those who have attended Catholic educational institutions are among the *most* likely to say that “living my life consistent with Church teaching” is “very” important to their sense of what it means to be Catholic. Fifty-four percent of those who attended a Catholic college or university responded as such, as did 49 percent of those who attended Catholic high schools and 46 percent of those who attended Catholic elementary and middle schools.

The full poll can be found at <http://cara.georgetown.edu/sacraments.html>

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