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*Faith and Spiritual Life of Catholics
in the United States*

Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate
Georgetown University
Washington, D.C.

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This report was researched and written by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.

Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate

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Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a study about faith and spiritual life of Catholics in the United States (especially, Hispanics/Latinos and youth/young adults) to help better understand their spiritual needs and how existing spiritual formation programs cater to these needs. The study was conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA). The report is based on the national poll of young Catholics, national survey of Small Christian Communities, and interviews about Small Christian Communities.

Major Findings from the National Poll of Young Catholics

CARA conducted a national survey including 2,214 young adults between the ages of 18 and 35. Interviews were conducted between July 10 and August 16, 2020. The respondents were drawn from NORC's AmeriSpeak® Panel for the sample source (394 respondents). The AmeriSpeak sample was supplemented by nonprobability online opt-in sample (Dynata; 1,820 respondents). Due to the coronavirus pandemic occurring at the time of the survey, some of the study was dedicated to asking about faith practices and experiences with the Catholic community during the pandemic. This study was offered in English and Spanish, and it was administered as online web survey and telephone interview. The weighted AAPOR RR3 cumulative response rate for the survey was 4.2%. The margin of sampling error for the sample is $\pm 3.59\%$.

When the survey was in the field the Census estimated the U.S. population to be 328,239,523. Of this population, 97,732,596 are young adults between the ages of 18 and 35. The 2018 General Social Survey (GSS) estimates that 21.1% of this demographic self-identifies as Catholic. Thus, the universe from which our sample is drawn includes 20,621,578 young adult Catholics between the ages of 18 and 35. Every 1 percentage point in the overall sample can be extrapolated as representing approximately 206,000 individuals in the population.

Demographics

- Forty-three percent of respondents are Hispanic and 44% are non-Hispanic white. Six percent of respondents are Asian, 4% black or African American, and 3% are some other race or ethnicity.
- Twenty-one percent of respondents are between the ages of 18 and 20. Twenty-four percent are between the ages of 21 to 24 and 20% between 25 and 29. Thirty-five percent of respondents are ages 30 to 35.
- Fifty-three percent of respondents are female and 47% are male.

- Thirty percent of respondents have a high school degree or less. Forty-eight percent have attended some college. Fifteen percent have obtained a bachelor's degree and 7% a graduate degree.
- Sixty-one percent of respondents have never married. Twenty-five percent are married and 10% are not married but living with a partner. Four percent are separated or divorced and less than 1% are widowed. Among those who are married, separated, or living with a partner, 59% have a Catholic spouse or partner.
- Twenty-eight percent of respondents reside in the South and 27% in the West. Twenty-five percent live in the Northeast and 20% in the Midwest.

Catholic Background

- More than seven in ten respondents were baptized Catholic before the age of one. Eighteen percent were baptized as children and 4% as teenagers. Six percent of respondents were baptized or were received into full communion as adults. Among those who became Catholic as adults, most, 41%, previously had no other religious affiliation and were what is commonly referred to as “nones.”
- Eighty-two percent have celebrated their First Communion. Seventy-three percent have received Confirmation.
- Sixty-eight percent of respondents have participated in a parish-based Catholic religious education program for youth. Twenty-four percent have taken part in a parish youth group. Twelve percent have been involved with Catholic campus ministry while at college. Nine percent participated in Catholic scouting groups.
- Thirty percent of respondents attended a Catholic primary school, 17% a Catholic high school, and 10% a Catholic college or university. Five percent of respondents attended Catholic schools from primary school through to college.

Catholic Communities, Movements, and Groups

- When asked about Catholic groups they may have been involved with, respondents are most likely to say they have been active in a parish or diocesan young adult group (15%), a religious institute volunteer group (9%), the Knights of Columbus (6%), pro-Life groups (5%), or a St. Vincent de Paul Society group.
- Respondents were also asked to identify participation in communities and movements by the type of work these may do. Overall 34% indicated regular involvement with a Catholic community or group to practice their faith. Twenty-eight percent said they are involved with a Catholic community or group that provides service or assistance to others. Fifteen percent indicated they belong to a Catholic group or community that evangelizes and spreads the faith to others.
- The primary reasons given by respondents for participating in their Catholic group or community is to reduce negative feelings (38% “very much” only and 69% “very much” or “somewhat”), and to nourish their spiritual life (37% “very much” only and 70% “very much” or “somewhat”). Other frequent reasons for participation include: a desire to learn from new experiences (34% “very much” only and 74% “very much” or “somewhat”), to act or express important convictions concerning serving others (34% “very much” only and 69% “very much” or “somewhat”), and to develop and strengthen social ties to others (28% “very much” only and 65% “very much” or “somewhat”).

- Prior to the pandemic, 55% of those participating in Catholic community or group were active in it at least once a month. About one in ten were active more than once a week. About one in ten were only active quarterly and 30% seasonally.
- The most common location of meeting for the group was within a parish (41%). However, more often than not the activity is done somewhere else, such as: a school, college, or university (21%), a public space (21%), or in members' homes (20%). Thirteen percent note meeting online.
- The most common activities at group meetings are: prayer (65%), socializing (36%), reading and discussing scripture (30%), faith sharing (29%), group silence (23%), and discussing spirituality (19%). Less often these included raising money or collecting donations (18%), recreational group activities (15%), directly serving others (15%), or the Eucharist (14%).
- Young adults are the most common group served by the respondents' communities or groups (67% of communities). These also commonly serve families, couples, and single parents (56%), seniors (55%), minors (54%), the homeless, hungry, and poor (52%), and the sick and disabled (40%). A third say they serve those people seeking to deepen their faith and 30% serve parishioners.
- Young adults are most likely to say they participate in the following Catholic communities: Bible study communities (15%), choirs (9%), youth groups (8%), community at a local parish (7%), Rosary circles (6%), and college student communities (5%).

Parish Life

- Prior to the pandemic, 13% of Catholic young adults attended Mass at least once a week. Twenty-one percent attend Mass less than weekly, but at least once a month. Thirty-one percent attended Mass a few times a year. Thirty-six percent say they rarely or never attend Mass.
- Respondents who attend Mass less than weekly were asked about how well a list of reasons explain their missing Mass prior to the pandemic. The most common response was having a busy schedule or lack of time (57% "somewhat" or "very much") followed by not believing that missing Mass is a sin (55%), family responsibilities (44%), that they are not a very religious person (43%), and/or that they prefer to practice their faith outside of the parish (43%).
- Six percent of respondents say they were "very" involved with parish activities and ministries, other than attending Mass, prior to the pandemic. Thirteen percent say they were "somewhat" involved, and 17% were involved "a little." Most, 64% say they were not involved "at all" in these ministries and activities.
- Forty-four percent of respondents said that allegations of clergy sexually abusing minors has made them less likely to be active in parish life "somewhat" or "very" much. Forty-two percent say the Church's teachings on homosexuality similarly make them less likely to be active in parish life. Next, a feeling that older generations have too much influence in their parish make 35% "somewhat" or "very" much less likely to be active in parish life. Other factors with a similar influence are the Church's teachings on birth control (34% "somewhat" or "very" much less likely), the roles available to women in the Church (33%), a feeling that the Church is not open to dialog with other religious faiths (33%), and the Church's teachings on divorce and remarriage (32%).
- Sixteen percent of respondents have participated in Eucharistic Adoration at their parish or elsewhere in the 12 months prior to being surveyed.

- Three percent of respondents said that they participated in the Sacrament of Reconciliation once a month or more, prior to the pandemic. Eleven percent participated several times a year and 17% once a year. Most either participated less than once a year (31%) or never (38%).
- Twenty-eight percent of respondents have participated in quinceañera. A quarter have celebrated Day of the Dead or Día de Muertos. Twenty-four percent have celebrated the feast day for Our Lady of Guadalupe. A majority, 57% have never celebrated any of these.

Faith at Home and in Everyday Life

- More than a quarter of Catholic young adults (27%) wear or carry a crucifix or cross. Fewer, 17%, wear or carry a religious medal or pin of a saint or angel. Twelve percent carry prayer cards or coins, and 4% wear or carry a scapular. A majority, 56%, does not wear or carry any of these. The most common items respondents have in their homes or cars is a visible cross or crucifix (45%) or a rosary (42%). About one in five to a quarter have the following in their home or car: art depicting Mary (24%), art depicting Jesus (24%), holy water (21%), or prayer cards (18%).
- Twenty-four percent pray individually daily or more often, 15% do so more than once a week, and 6% do so once a week. Twenty-two percent pray individually less than weekly but at least once a month. Fifteen percent pray individually a few times a year and 18 percent do so rarely or never. Respondents are less likely to pray with others. Forty-one percent rarely or never pray with family and 61% rarely or never pray with a group of people outside their family, aside from attending Mass. A quarter pray with family at least once a week. Eleven percent pray with a group outside of their family at least weekly, aside from attending Mass.
- Seventy-three percent of respondents agree “somewhat” or “strongly” that they can be a good Catholic without going to Mass every Sunday.
- Forty-four percent agree “somewhat” or “strongly” that they think of themselves as a practicing Catholic.
- Fifty-seven percent agree “somewhat” or “strongly” that helping the poor and needy is a moral obligation for Catholics.
- Thirty-nine percent agree “somewhat” or “strongly” that they could never imagine themselves leaving the Catholic Church, 33% neither agree nor disagree, and 28% either disagree “somewhat” or “strongly.”
- Seventeen “strongly” agree that there have been times recently when they have struggled with their faith and 29% “somewhat” agree.
- A third agree “somewhat” or “strongly” that sacraments are essential to their faith. Four in ten neither agree nor disagree with that statement and 28% either disagree “somewhat” or “strongly.”
- Thirty-one percent agree “somewhat” or “strongly” that in deciding what is morally acceptable, they look to Catholic Church teachings and statements made by the Pope and Bishops for forming their conscience.
- Fifty-three percent of respondents abstained from meat on Fridays during Lent in 2020. About four in ten gave up or abstained from something else besides meat on Fridays. Thirty-five percent received ashes at an Ash Wednesday service. Thirty-four percent made extra efforts during Lent in 2020 to give additional money to the needy or tried to improve their personal habits and behavior.

- Respondents are most likely to say they did the following at least once a month prior to the pandemic: helping neighbors (34%), volunteering at a school (20%), assisting a fundraiser with donations (20%), a community service project (18%), and visiting the sick or elderly (18%).
- Among those who indicated that they do community or volunteer work, 16% say that their Catholic faith is “very” important in motivating them to do these things. Thirty percent said their faith was “somewhat” important and 34% said this was “only a little” important in motivating them. One in five said their faith did “not at all” motivate them.

The Pandemic

- Eleven percent of Catholic young adults say they watch Mass on television or online “very” often while staying at home during the pandemic. Fourteen percent say they have watched “somewhat” often. Twenty-two percent have watched “a little” often. A majority, 54% have watched “not at all.”
- Most respondents have not changed how often they pray during the pandemic (57%). However, 28% say they have prayed more during the pandemic compared to 14% who say they have prayed less often.
- Overall, 18% of respondents say their parish has reached out to them during the pandemic. Among those in households registered with a parish, 34% indicate that their parish has reached out to them. This is less frequent among those in households that are not registered with a parish (7%).
- Most respondents, eight in ten, have not video chatted with other Catholics at their parish or in groups they may be involved with during the pandemic. Four percent of respondents report that they have “very” often done this, 8% said they have done so “somewhat” often.
- In the post-pandemic future, 46% expect to participate with faith groups outside of their parish with the same frequency that they did prior to the pandemic. Forty-one percent expect to do this less frequently in the future compared to 13% who expect to do this more frequently.
- Twenty-one percent say experiencing the pandemic has strengthened their faith compared to 8% who say their faith has been weakened. Seventy-one percent say experiencing the pandemic has not changed their faith.
- Thirty percent of respondents said that their household regularly contributed to the weekly offertory collection at their parish. The median amount given was \$10 per week. Thirteen percent indicate this has continued during the pandemic. The median amount given during the pandemic is \$20 per week.
- A majority, 53%, expect to contribute to their parish with the same frequency that they used to when the pandemic has ended. Thirty-four percent expect to give less frequently and 13% more frequently.
- In an open-ended question about how they practiced their faith outside of the parish *before* the pandemic, about three in ten respondents indicated they did so by praying (31%). Nearly a quarter indicated they did not practice their faith outside of their parish or attending Mass (24%). In an open-ended question asking about how they were practicing their faith *during* the pandemic 42% of respondents said they were praying. Twenty-one percent indicated they were not doing anything to practice their faith at home. The third most common type of comment about practicing faith during the pandemic is related to either watching or participating in faith-related activities online. This represented 15% of comments.

Major Findings from the National Survey of Small Christian Communities

For the purpose of this study, Small Christian Communities (also referred to as SCCs or groups in this report) are defined as groups that have at least some Catholic members, are located in the United States, and are not communities of men or women religious. “They are called faith communities, faith groups, faith sharing groups, base communities, basic Christian communities, basic ecclesial communities, house churches, small church communities, small Christian communities, intentional Eucharistic communities, charismatic communities, and so forth. Reverend Joseph Healey, a Maryknoll missionary in Africa, has collected over a thousand ways of labeling these groups.”¹ Despite being called Small Christian Communities some of those groups may have a large number of members.²

This study, the National Survey of Small Christian Communities, was conducted between November 2019 and July 2020 using snowball sampling. The final sample included 646 groups.

All Groups

Half (52%) of Small Christian Communities that participated in the survey were founded by lay person(s), on average, 20 years ago (in year 2000). Nine in ten (86%) are entirely Catholic. They are most often described as communities at local parish (39%) and/or Bible study groups (33%). Three in ten of those groups are located in the Midwest (30%), South (30%), and Northeast (29%). The remaining tenth (11%) is located in the West. Half of the groups is based in the suburbs (49%) while the other half can be found in the city (36%) and rural areas (16%).

More than half of all groups has an established meeting format (80%), leadership structure (59%), and clearly articulated charism, spirituality, purpose, or mission (58%). One quarter (24%) has an established leadership selection process, which most commonly takes a form of election (54% of those who have this process in place) and/or individuals volunteering themselves (46%).

Half of the groups (51%) are affiliated with a bigger organization or religious order. Examples of those affiliating organizations include: Cursillo, Fellowship of Catholic University Students, National Council of Catholic Women, Dominican Friars, Franciscans, Marianists, Discalced Carmelites, Evangelical Catholic, Knights of Columbus, Knights of Peter Claver, Legatus, Legion of Mary, Opus Dei, Renovación Carismática Católica, That Man is You, Neocatechumenal Way, Vietnamese Eucharist Youth Movement, Walking with Purpose, and Work of Mary (Focolare Movement).

Group meetings most commonly take place once every week (in 42% of groups), once every month (23%), or once every two weeks (15%). A typical meeting lasts for an average of one hour and 43 minutes. The meetings are most often held at a parish (66% of groups) or in members’ home (27%). One in ten groups (9%) meets online. Most of those online meetings (81%) are accessible only to the members of their group (e.g., by using email, voice/video calls, private chatrooms, private Facebook community feature, or WhatsApp messenger). A typical meeting is most likely to include prayer (96%), faith sharing (80%), reading and discussing scripture (70%), socializing (65%), and discussing spirituality (63%). Additionally, 33% of groups engage in social action/ directly

¹ Lee, Bernard J., William V. D’Antonio, and Virgilio P. Elizondo. 2000. *The Catholic Experience of Small Christian Communities*. New York: Paulist Press.

² It was up to the study participants to define what small means. Some groups may have a large number of members but still are able to offer small community experience.

servicing others, 16% raise money or collect donations, and 8% engage in advocacy. Among groups involved in those last three activities, the most common types of beneficiaries are women (68%), parishioners (68%), and men (64%).

Group membership includes, on average, eight people married with children and two without children, five single people, one divorced or separated person, one priest or bishop, and one person of an unknown marital/ecclesial status. In terms of race and ethnicity, groups include, on average, 13 Caucasian/European American/white members, four Hispanic/Latino members, two Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian members, one African/African American/black, and one member of mixed/unknown/other race/ethnicity. In terms of age, groups have on average seven members under 35 years old, six members who are between 35 and 64 years old, and six members who are over 64 years old.

In terms of gender, groups include, on average, 12 women and seven men. There are, on average, more than two women and less than two men in leadership positions in those groups. Among groups that have members of only one gender, 52% are women-only groups and 33% are men-only. The other 15% happen to have members of only one gender at the time of taking the survey, but welcome both sexes at their meetings.

Respondents completing the survey on behalf of their groups were asked what led them to becoming interested in becoming members. Half (52%) became interested in their group through conversation with a friend or relative, 45% became interested due to personal inner need that inspired them to seek out a community, 41% became interested through information they came across at their parish, and 41% became interested because they had prior experience with a similar group.

Overall, virtually all respondents (98%) feel personally “somewhat satisfied” or “very satisfied” (as opposed to “not at all satisfied” or “somewhat unsatisfied”) with their group experience (with 74% being “very” satisfied). The biggest challenges groups are facing include finding time to meet that works for everyone (reported by 36% of all groups) and absenteeism of members (35%). On the other hand, the biggest benefits of the groups include community and friendship (84%), sharing and exchanging (82%), personal or spiritual growth (76%), relationship with God (66%), prayer, praise, worship (62%), and learning (58%).

Hispanic Groups

For the purpose of this study, Hispanic/Latino groups are defined as groups located in the United States, that have at least some Catholic members, that self-identified as Hispanic/Latino groups and/or report half or more of their members being Hispanic/Latino. Overall, 9% of Small Christian Communities participating in this survey are classified as Hispanic groups based on this definition. For the sake of brevity, words “Hispanic” and “Latino”/ “Latina” are used interchangeably.

In terms of location, by comparison to all the other groups included in the survey, Hispanic groups are:

- 30 percentage points (57% - 28%) more likely to be located in the South.
- 30 percentage points (63% - 33%) more likely to be located in the urban/city environment.

- 18 percentage points (83% - 64%) more likely to meet in parishes.

In regard to group structure, by comparison to other groups, Hispanic groups are 14 percentage points (71% - 57%) more likely to have clearly articulated charism, spirituality, purpose, or mission.

In terms of distribution of time during a typical meeting, relative to other groups, Hispanic groups spend, on average:

- 13 minutes (18 - 5) more on service to others (e.g., by volunteering).
- Ten minutes (13 - 3) more on evangelization to non-members.
- Eight minutes (17 - 9) more on administrative/ business matters.

Hispanic groups' meetings are attended by four people (10 - 6) more, on average. In terms of group composition, Hispanic groups' meetings are attended by:

- Seven women (18 - 11) more. However, Hispanic groups have one man more, on average, in leadership positions than other groups.
- (unsurprisingly) 25 (27 - 2) more Hispanics/ Latinos and by 12 (15 - 3) fewer Caucasians/European Americans/whites, on average, than other groups' meetings.
- Six people who are married with children (14 - 8) more, one person who is divorced or separated (2 - 1) more, one religious brother or sister (1 - 0) more, and by two people who are cohabiting/ living unmarried with a romantic partner (2 - 0) more, on average, than other groups' meetings.
- Nine people (15 - 6) more who are 35 to 64 years old, on average, than other groups' meetings.

Respondents in Hispanic groups are more likely than respondents in other groups to feel "very satisfied" with their group:

- "As a way to learn and develop skills"- by 24 percentage points (75% - 51%).
- "As a way to grow spiritually"- by 17 percentage points (84% - 67%).
- "As a way to put their faith in action"- by 16 percentage points (79% - 63%).

Youth/Young Adult Groups

For the purpose of this study, youth/ young adult groups (referred to as "under 35 groups") are defined as groups located in the United States, that have at least some Catholic members, that self-identified as youth group, high school, or college group, and/or report half of their members or more being under 35 years old. Overall, 22% of Small Christian Communities participating in this survey are classified as under 35 groups based on this definition.

In terms of location, as compared to other groups, under 35 groups are:

- 25 percentage points (55% - 30%) more likely to be located in urban/city environment.
- 17 percentage points (43% - 26%) less likely to meet at a local parish.
- 16 percentage points (53% - 36%) less likely to be located in the suburbs.

In terms of structure, as compared to other groups, under 35 groups are:

- 12 percentage points (30% - 18%) more likely to have a budget.

- 12 percentage points (34% - 21%) more likely to have an established leadership selection process.
- 9 percentage points (83% - 73%) less likely to have an established meeting format.

In terms of activities they undertake, under 35 groups are:

- 32 percentage points (41% - 9%) more likely to engage in recreational group activities, not religious in nature and spend 8 minutes (26 - 18) more, on average, on recreation and/or socializing.
- 13 percentage points (43% - 30%) more likely to engage in social action/ directly serving others and they spend five minutes (10 - 5) more, on average, on directly serving others (e.g., by volunteering).
- 11 percentage points (31% - 21%) more likely to engage in evangelization.
- 10 percentage points (73% - 63%) more likely to socialize.

On the other side, they spend 15 minutes (52 - 37) less, on average, on prayer, group silence, Eucharist, faith sharing, and/or discussing scripture.

Among those groups who are engaged in advocacy, raising money or collecting donations, and/or social action/ directly serving others, under 35 groups are:

- 32 percentage points (81% - 49%) more likely to serve young adults (18 to 34 years old).
- 14 percentage points (72% - 58%) less likely to serve parishioners.

As compared to other groups, under 35 groups are attended by, on average:

- 15 people ages 18 to 34 (16 - 1) more.
- 12 single people (14 - 2) more.
- Seven people over 64 years old (8 - 1) fewer.
- Six people under 18 (6 - 0) more.
- Five married people with children (10 - 5) fewer.
- Five (6 - 1) people of Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian race/ethnicity more.
- Five women (15 - 10) more.
- Four men (10 - 6) more.
- Three people between 35 to 64 years old (7 - 4) fewer.
- One (1 - 0) person of mixed/unknown/other race/ethnicity more.
- One divorced or separated person (1 - 0) more.
- One religious brother or sister (1 - 0) more.
- One man (2.3 - 1.6) more, on average, in leadership positions.

Respondents in under 35 groups have been members of their groups for four years (10 - 6) less, on average, than respondents in other groups.

Respondents in under 35 groups are 13 percentage points (44% - 31%) less likely than respondents in other groups to become interested in their group through information they came across at their parish.

In regard to challenges faced by Small Christian Communities, youth groups are:

- 13 percentage points (46% - 32%) more likely to find it challenging to find time to meet that works for everyone.
- 10 percentage points (43% - 33%) more likely to struggle with absenteeism.
- 8 percentage points (84% - 76%) less likely to consider sharing and exchanging to be the best part of being a member.

Overall, respondents in under 35 groups are 10 percentage points (74% - 64%) less likely than those in other groups to be “very satisfied” with their group “as a way to participate in parish life.”

Major Findings from the Interviews about Small Christian Communities

The findings from the National Survey of Small Christian Communities (also referred to as SCCs or groups in this report) were further supplemented by interviews with 14 English-speaking and eight Spanish-speaking Catholics working with Small Christian Communities in the United States (this includes among others pastors, religious sisters, university professors/researchers, parish and diocesan staff members, as well as leaders of national and international umbrella organizations fostering Small Christian Communities in the Catholic Church, in particular youth groups, campus groups, young adult groups, and Hispanic/Latino groups). For the sake of brevity, words “Hispanic” and “Latino”/ “Latina” are used interchangeably.

Attracting New Members

The topic which received the most commentary from the interviewees focused on problems and ideas related to drawing in new members to Small Christian Communities (SCCs). This includes interviewees observations about **insufficient number of people working with SCCs (i.e., paid staff and volunteer group leaders)**. A few stated that before the pandemic those human resources were very limited and that during the financial crises in parishes caused by the pandemic, SCCs’ coordinators were among the first staff members to be laid off, which made the situation even more difficult. Interviewees believe that this has major negative consequences during the pandemic (at a time when young Catholics need SCCs more than usual) and in the future (because the decrease in SCCs may lead to a decrease in the number of Church vocations in the current generation).

A few interviewees described **general lack of involvement or, in some cases, negative influence of pastors on the proliferation of SCCs in parishes**. Interviewees seem to believe that this situation developed over the last two decades (between 2000s and 2020) and may be related to the shortage of priests, to pastors not realizing the beneficial potential of SCCs, to pastors being more controlling than before, and to pastors being weary of SCCs after the sexual abuse scandals. Some interviewees postulated for greater support from pastors as well as bishops and parish communities to make SCCs more central to Churches’ lives.

A couple of interviewees suggested that **big events (such as World Youth Day, national gatherings of FOCUS and NCYC, and parish festivals) can help grow SCCs**. Specifically, big events bring more people and new energy into the Church. This can be utilized to form new and strengthen currently existing SCCs. A few interviewees observed that instead of complimenting each other, currently, big events and SCCs often act as substitutes that are competing for limited resources.

Interviewees feel strongly that the **successful engagement of young people in SCCs requires that the Church listens to these young people, supports them and gives them agency**. The Church needs to listen to young people, both on the institutional level and human level. The Church needs to meet them where they are (rather than waiting for them in the parish), reach out to them (rather than wait for them to make the contact), give them space to talk about things important to them, accompany them in their suffering and struggles, make them feel accepted, affirm them, encourage them (as opposed to laying “on them burdens and regulations”). Some interviewees observed how the pandemic intensified problems of young people (e.g., loneliness and problems with unemployment) and that this is a particularly important time for the Church to listen to and to support young people. Some interviewees postulated that young people need to be leaders both in their own ministry (with support from adult leaders) and in the Church in general (e.g., by being invited to parish councils), because they’re the ones in touch with the culture of their peers and they are the present and the future of the Church.

Several interviewees observed that engaging young people in SCCs is made difficult by **hypocrisy and inauthenticity in the Church** (whether real or perceived). From the perspective of some people, the Church appears silent on its own shortcomings (including sexual abuse, racism, judgementalism, gossip). There appears to be a disconnect between what the Church teaches and how the Church acts (both as a hierarchy and as the body of faithful). Interviewees postulated that the Church needs to create safe venues for exploring/ discussing and addressing those issues with young people.

Some interviewees pointed out that when it comes to working with Catholics under 35 years old, **different age groups have different needs**. Recognizing and addressing those needs is important to the success of SCCs. For instance, engaging youth in SCCs requires also engaging their parents while engaging young adults requires flexible yet consistent scheduling. Similarly, interviewees observed that SCCs need to be sensitive to **the needs of different races/ethnicities** if they want to attract more young people from those demographics.

One interviewee observed that currently **SCCs tend to attract more conservative Catholics while young people overall tend to be more progressive**. Thus, there is a need to reach out more to the progressive types. This may mean incorporating more discussion (and activities) focusing on social issues at the forefront of the mainstream society (such as LBGTQ, climate justice, and racial justice). It may also mean exploring/addressing discrepancy between Church’s teaching and mainstream practices among young adults (such as cohabiting before marriage).

Racial Equality

Hispanic interviewees stated that racism is prevalent and it can be accompanied (or replaced) by colorism, classism, and/or religious discrimination. They pointed out that racism often becomes a black-and-white issue, leaving Hispanics out. Some interviewees said that some Hispanics tend to treat this situation as a fact of life and are not inclined to discuss/address it.

Some of the interviewees indicated that Small Christian Communities see themselves as a venue for learning about God, for acting upon Biblically-mandated issues (e.g., feeding the hungry), and for pro-life activism but not for much else (thus leaving issues such as racism out). On the other hand, other interviewees provided a number of examples ranging from local parish communities to national Catholic organizations that encourage discussion and action on racial justice. Based on their

comments, overall, the Church, as a body of faithful, appears to be increasingly aware and active in this area. However, the Catholic Church hierarchy is viewed as largely missing from those efforts.

Cultural Differences

Hispanic groups meetings are attended by significantly more people than other groups' meetings. This raised a question of why Hispanics are more interested in joining those groups in bigger numbers. Several of the interviewees who have been involved in Small Christian Communities both in the United States and in other places around the world (including South America, Europe, Africa, and Asia) observed that it is not that Hispanics are more interested in joining those groups in bigger numbers, but rather that whites are harder to engage. These interviewees described whites/ western American-Europeans as more individualistic (as opposed to communal and family-centered), more agenda-driven, more focused on accomplishing things (as opposed to relationships-driven, focused on spending time with each other), more private (as opposed to willing to freely share their inner life with others), and more intellectual, sharing from their head (as opposed to being more natural, sharing from their heart).

Online Meetings

In most places, the pandemic led to suspension of Small Christian Communities' meetings or to a switch from in-person to online format (e.g., over Zoom, Facebook, or WhatsApp). This switch created a number of opportunities as well as challenges with some places and demographics being better suited than others to make the transition.

The opportunities identified in the interviews include the ease of access and the removal of geographic limitations on who can participate in the meetings (allowing for easier participation by, for example, people with disabilities, people who are sick, people without access to transportation, people living in different parts of the world, and people of different backgrounds).

On the other hand, the challenges related to online meetings include "screen fatigue," the lack of the "experience" that in-person meetings offer (something that may be a bigger issue for Hispanics than for primarily white groups), a risk of shifting the focus from creating quality relationships to pursuing high number of participants, problems with technology (e.g., reliability of internet connection, access to internet-enabled devices and ability to operate these devices).

Introduction

This report focuses on developing better understanding of faith and spiritual life of Catholics in the United States (especially, Hispanics/Latinos and youth/young adults), better understanding of their spiritual needs and how existing spiritual formation programs cater to these needs. The study was conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA). The study is based on:

- The National Poll of Young Catholics which was conducted between July 10 and August 16, 2020.
- National Survey of Small Christian Communities which was conducted electronically between November 2019 and July 2020. For the purpose of the study, Small Christian Communities were defined as groups that have at least some Catholic members, that are located in the United States, and that are not communities of men or women religious. Since there is no list of such groups, the study relied on a snowball sampling. Initially, CARA identified and contacted 47 national associations of Small Christian Communities: 19 of them did not respond, 15 opted out of participation in the study, and 13 agreed to participate by forwarding survey invitation to their members. Additionally, CARA contacted 177 Hispanic ministry diocesan offices and 14,361 Catholic parishes inviting them to forward survey invitation to their small groups. Despite this broad collection effort and multiple follow-ups, just 646 responded to the survey (the final sample was 646). This relatively low response rate may be related to the 2020 pandemic.
- Interviews about Small Christian Communities were conducted by video calls and phone calls between July and September, 2020. Overall, 22 interviews were completed. This included 14 interviews with English-speaking and eight interviews with Spanish-speaking Catholics working with Small Christian Communities in the United States (this includes among others pastors, university professors/researchers, parish and diocesan staff members, as well as leaders of national and international umbrella organizations fostering Small Christian Communities in the Catholic Church, in particular youth groups, campus groups, young adult groups, and Hispanic/Latino groups).

For a succinct overview of the overall research project and summary of the main findings, proceed to the *Executive Summary* (on p. 1).

To examine more detailed analyses, including tables and/or charts with verbose interpretation of those results, proceed to the main parts of the report:

- *Part I* (on p. 15) provides an overview of findings from the National Poll of Young Catholics. This includes sub-group analyses by Mass attendance, gender, life stage, ethnicity, and group activity levels.
- *Part II* (on p. 84) presents the results from the National Survey of Small Christian Communities including their demographic composition (such as religious affiliation, racial/ethnic backgrounds, age groups, and genders of groups' members), types of activities members engage in during typical group meetings, as well as biggest challenges and biggest benefits of group membership.

- *Part III* (on p. 140) includes the major themes from the interviews, which focused on: how to attract more participants to Small Christian Communities, how cultural differences affect Small Christian Communities, what are the perspectives on racism in the Church, what are the benefits and challenges of switching from in-person to online meetings.

Part I. National Poll of Young Catholics

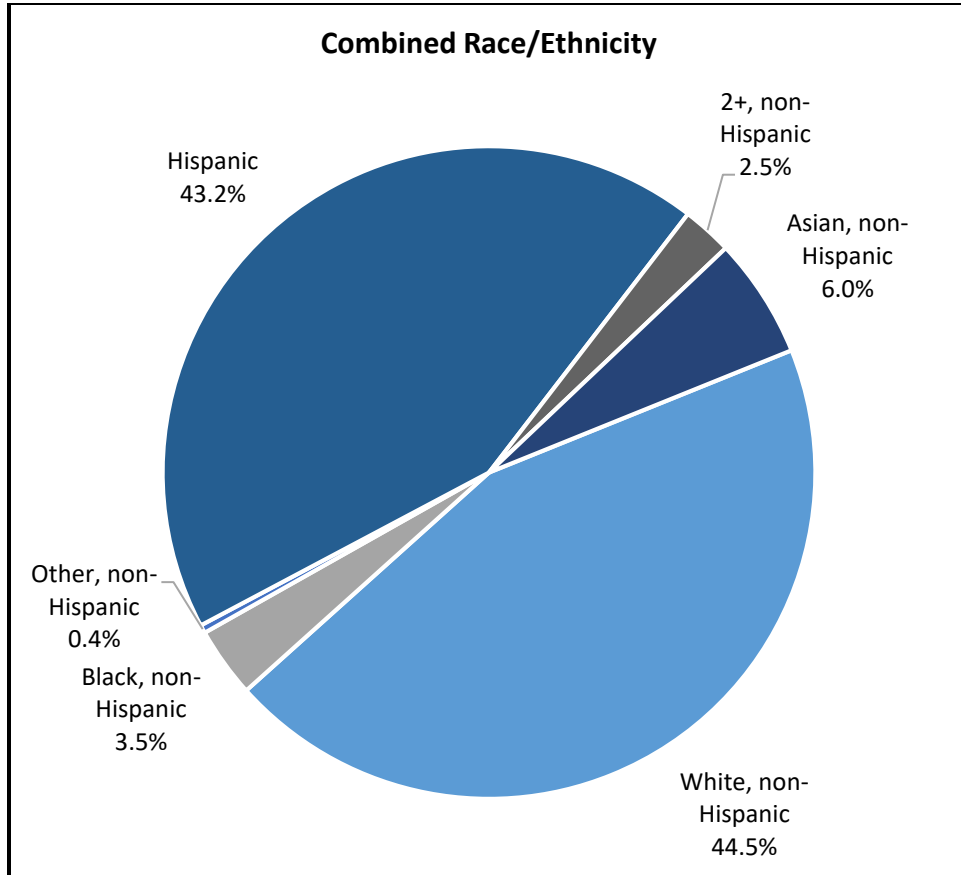
CARA conducted a national survey including 2,214 young adults between the ages of 18 and 35. Interviews were conducted between July 10 and August 16, 2020. The respondents were drawn from NORC's AmeriSpeak® Panel for the sample source (394 respondents). The AmeriSpeak sample was supplemented by nonprobability online opt-in sample (Dynata; 1,820 respondents). This research was done to support a better understanding of young adult (18-35 years old) Catholics and their experiences with and attitudes towards the Catholic Church and the ways they practice their religion. Due to the coronavirus pandemic occurring at the time of the survey, a some of the study was dedicated to asking about faith practices and experiences with the Catholic community during the pandemic. This study was offered in English and Spanish, and it was administered as online web survey and telephone interview. The weighted AAPOR RR3 cumulative response rate for the survey was 4.2%. The margin of sampling error for the sample is $\pm 3.59\%$.

Demographics and Background

This section of the report describes the demographics and background of survey respondents.

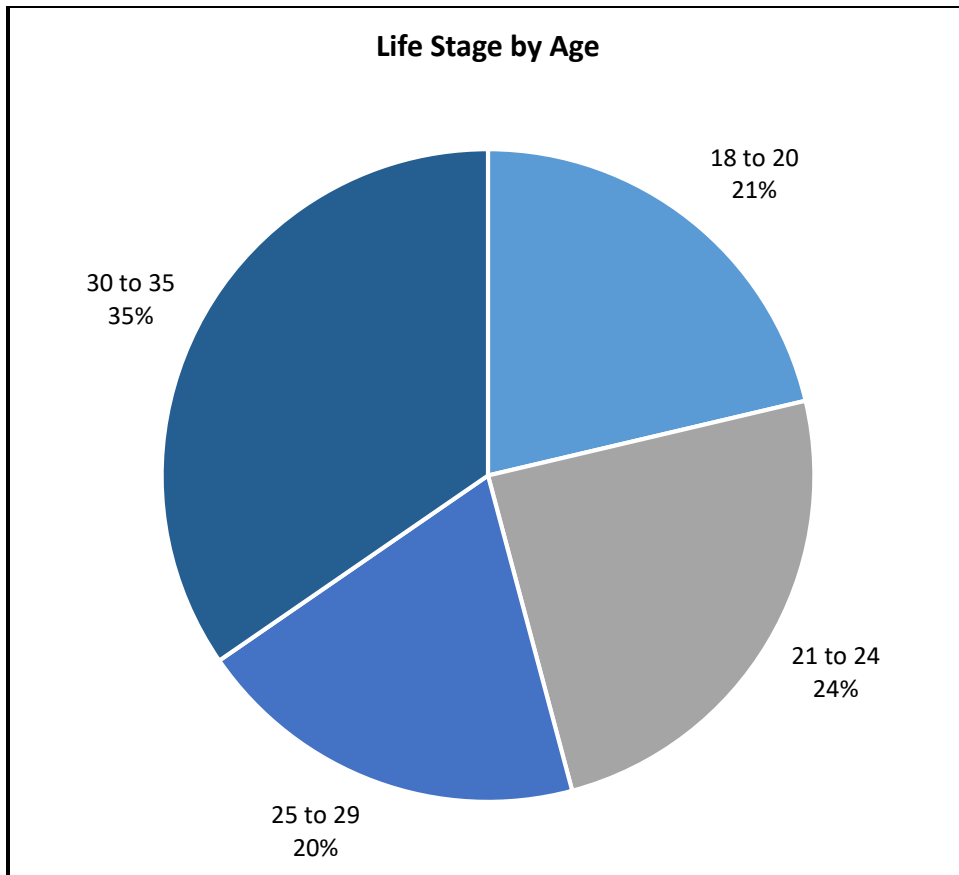
Race and Ethnicity

Forty-three percent of respondents are Hispanic and 44% are non-Hispanic white. Six percent of respondents are Asian, 4% black or African American, and 3% are some other race or ethnicity.



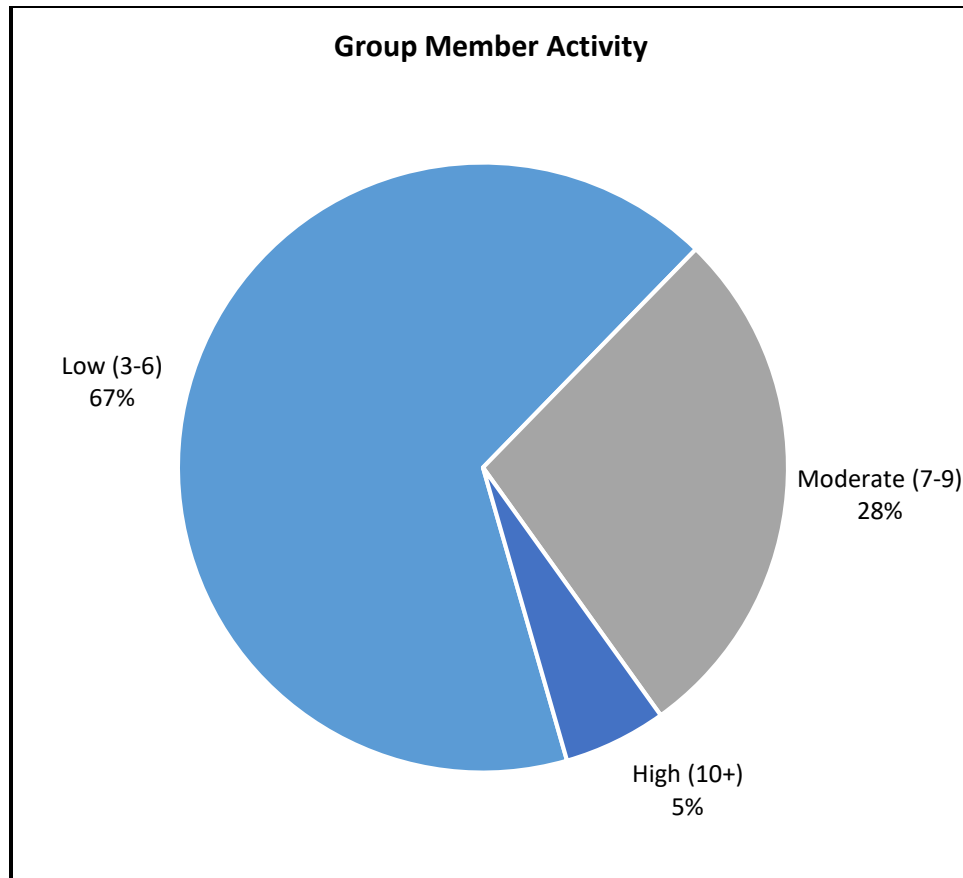
Life Stage by Age

Twenty-one percent of respondents are between the ages of 18 and 20. Twenty-four percent are between the ages of 21 to 24 and 20% between 25 and 29. Thirty-five percent of respondents are ages 30 to 35. Thus, the youngest were born in 2002 and the oldest in 1985. Based on the research of Neil Howe and William Strauss this would place all respondents in the Millennial Generation. There is general agreement that this generation begins with those born in 1982. There is disagreement for the last birth year for this cohort. For this report, we use these four life stages to discuss variations in the survey data by age.



Group Activity

The survey includes many questions about activity in faith groups. Responses to these questions were used to create an additive scale. Scoring highly means that a respondent indicated being involved in many faith group activities. This scale was further simplified into three categories for sub-group analysis of high, moderate, and low group activity. Overall, about two-thirds of respondents are in the low activity group followed by 28% in the moderate activity group. Five percent are in the high activity group.



Sub-Group Differences

- Hispanic respondents are less likely than non-Hispanic respondents to be in the low group activity category (60% compared to 72%)
- Weekly Mass attenders, prior to the pandemic, are more likely to be in the high group activity category than those who used to attend monthly or less often (16% compared to 9% and 3%, respectively).
- Overall, Half of all respondents attended Mass a few times a year or less often before the pandemic and had low levels of group activity.
- Seventeen percent of respondents attends Mass only a few times a year or less often but have moderate (15%) to high (2%) levels of group activity. These respondents are the most active in their faith but do so outside of weekly or monthly Mass attendance. Fifty-eight percent of these respondents are Hispanic and 36% reside in the West.
- There are no statistically significant differences in group activity by age or sex.

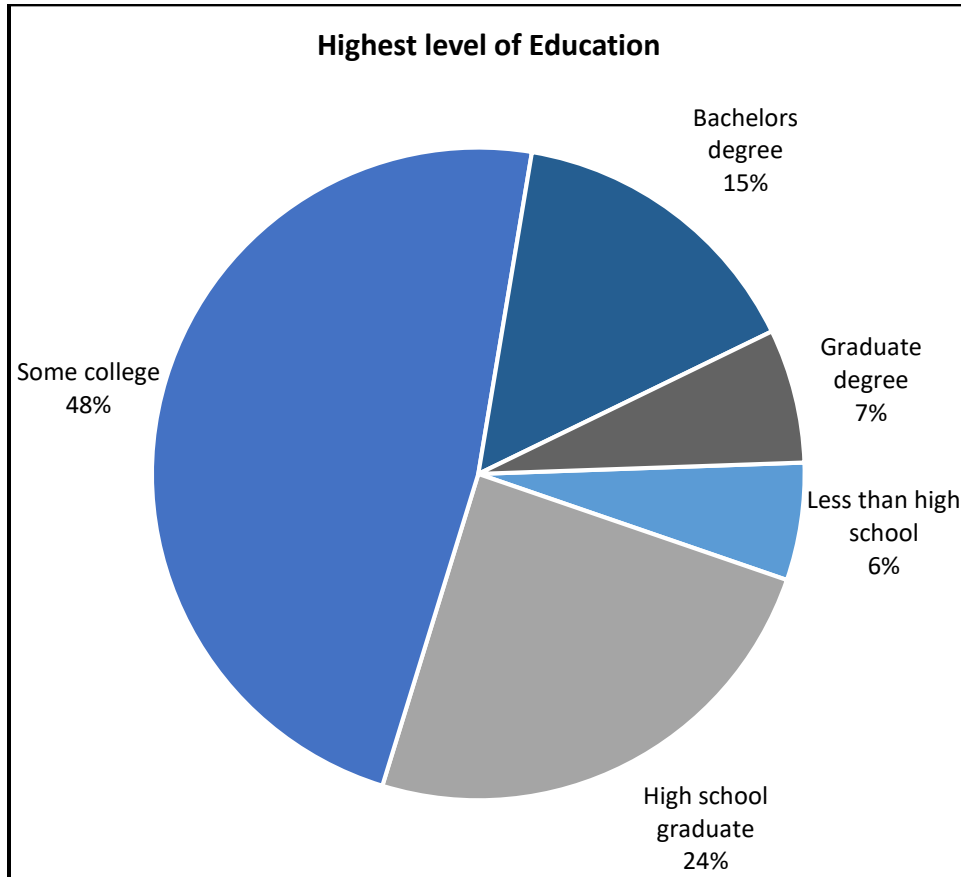
Sex

Fifty-three percent of respondents are female and 47% are male.

Sex	
Female	53%
Male	47

Education

Thirty percent of respondents have a high school degree or less. Forty-eight percent have attended some college. Fifteen percent have obtained a bachelor's degree and 7% a graduate degree.



Marital Status

Sixty-one percent of respondents have never married. Twenty-five percent are married and 10% are not married but living with a partner. Four percent are separated or divorced and less than 1% are widowed. Among those who are married, separated, or living with a partner, 59% have a Catholic spouse or partner.

Marital Status	
Never Married	61%
Married	25
Living with a partner	10
Separated or divorced	4
Widowed	<1

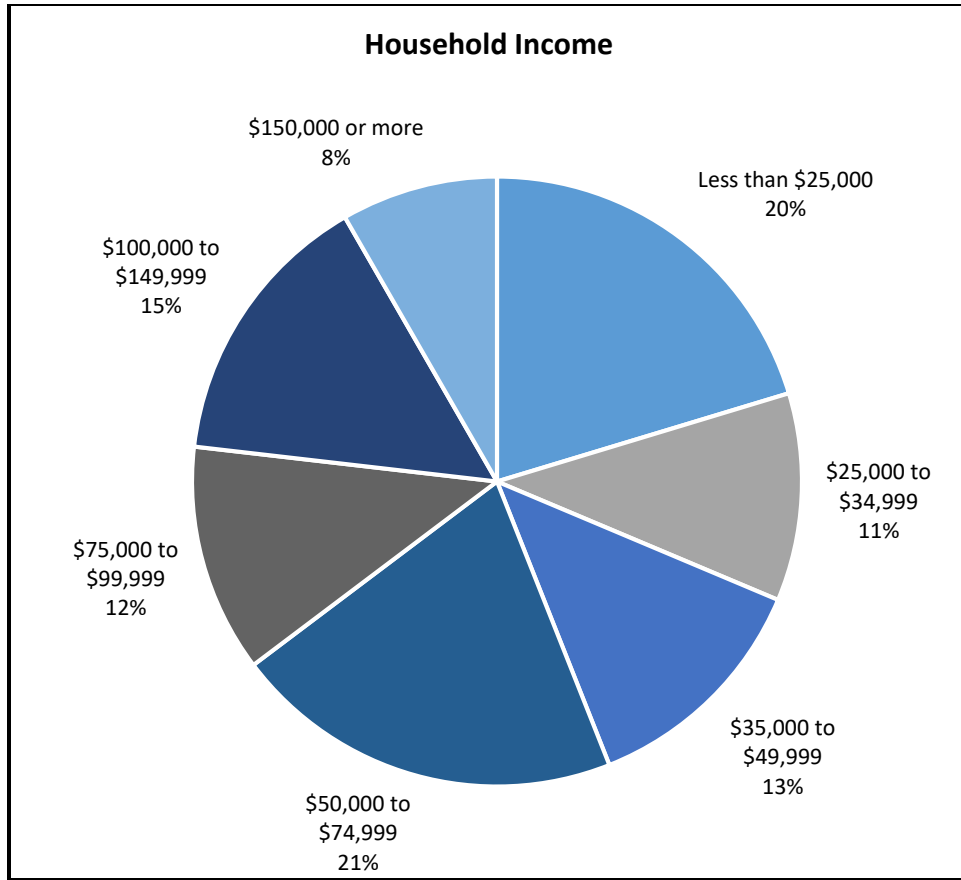
Employment Status

Fifty-nine percent are working and 5% are self-employed. Nineteen percent are laid off or looking for a job. Two percent are retired or disabled. Fifteen percent are in an another employment segment—most as full-time students.

Employment Status	
Working	59%
Self-employed	5
Layoff or looking for job	19
Retired or disabled	2
Other (including full-time student)	15

Household Income

Twenty percent of respondents are in households earning less than \$25,000 per year. A quarter are in households earning \$25,000 to \$49,999 per year. Twenty-one percent living in homes where the household income per year is \$50,000 to \$74,999. Twelve percent are in households earning \$75,000 to \$99,999 per year. Fifteen percent have household incomes of \$100,000 to \$149,999 and 8% are in homes earning \$150,000 or more per year.



Census Region

Twenty-eight percent of respondents reside in the South and 27% in the West. Twenty-five percent live in the Northeast and 20% in the Midwest.

Census Region	
Northeast	25%
Midwest	20%
South	28%
West	27%

Age becoming Catholic

More than seven in ten respondents were baptized Catholic before the age of one. Eighteen percent were baptized as children and 4% as teenagers. Six percent of respondents were baptized or were received into full communion as adults.

<i>When did you become Catholic?</i>	
Infant (under age 1)	72%
Child (ages 1-12)	18
Teenager (ages 13 to 17)	4
Adult (ages 18 and older)	6

Among those who became Catholic as adults, most, 41%, previously had no other religious affiliation and were what is commonly referred to as “nones.” Twenty-three percent had grown up as Evangelical Christians and 9% as Mainline Protestants. Six percent had been raised as Eastern Orthodox Christians and 10% were some “other” Christian faith. Less than 1% were Jewish or Muslim. Ten percent were some “other” unidentified religion.

Sacraments

Eighty-one percent of respondents have had their first confession and 82% have celebrated their First Communion. Seventy-three percent have received Confirmation.

<i>Which of the following Catholic sacraments have you celebrated?</i>	
First Reconciliation or Confession	81%
First Communion or Eucharist	82
Confirmation	73

Youth Groups

Sixty-eight percent of respondents have participated in a parish-based Catholic religious education program for youth. Twenty-four percent have taken part in a parish youth group. Twelve percent have been involved with Catholic campus ministry while at college. Nine percent participated in Catholic scouting groups.

<i>Have you ever participated in any of the following Church-related programs, groups, or activities growing up?</i>	
A parish-based Catholic religious education program for youth (e.g., CCD)	68%
Parish youth group	24
Catholic campus ministry on a college or university campus	12
Scouting groups	9

Sub-Group Differences

- Hispanic respondents are less likely than non-Hispanic respondents to have participated in parish-based religious education (61% compared to 73%).
- Weekly Mass attenders, prior to the pandemic, are more likely than monthly or less frequent attenders to have participated in parish-based religious education (78% compared to 71% and 65%, respectively), parish youth groups (38% compared to 30% and 19%, respectively), and campus ministries (21% compared to 17% and 9%, respectively).

Catholic Schooling

Thirty percent of respondents attended a Catholic primary school, 17% a Catholic high school, and 10% a Catholic college or university. Five percent of respondents attended Catholic schools from primary school through to college.

<i>Have you ever attended...?</i>	
Catholic elementary, middle or junior high school	30%
Catholic high school	17
Catholic college or university	10

Sub-Group Differences

- Hispanic respondents are less likely than non-Hispanic respondents to have attended a Catholic primary school (21% compared to 36%), Catholic high school (11% compared to 22%), and Catholic college or university (5% compared to 14%).
- Weekly Mass attenders, prior to the pandemic, are more likely than monthly or less frequent attenders to have attended Catholic primary school (40% compared to 34% and 26%, respectively), Catholic high school (30% compared to 24% and 13%, respectively), and Catholic college or university (19% compared to 10% and 9%, respectively).
- Male respondents are more likely than female respondents to have attended a Catholic primary school (34% compared to 26%).
- Respondents who have higher group activity scores now are more likely than those with lower scores to have attended Catholic schools. More than half of high group activity respondents attended a Catholic primary school (55%) and nearly half attended a Catholic high school (47%). More than a quarter attended a Catholic college or university (28%).

Faith Life in Adulthood

This section explores responses to questions about how respondents participate in their faith life as adults. Because the survey occurred during a pandemic with many churches closed and people staying at home these questions asked about their participation prior to the pandemic.

Participation in Communities and Movements

When the survey was in the field the Census estimated the U.S. population to be 328,239,523. Of this population, 97,732,596 are young adults between the ages of 18 and 35. The 2018 General Social Survey (GSS) estimates that 21.1% of this demographic self-identifies as Catholic. Thus, the universe from which our sample is drawn includes 20,621,578 young adult Catholics between the ages of 18 and 35. The table below shows how many respondents reported involvement with the communities and movements listed below. We also report how these percentages translate into total populations. Note that the questions asks about “ever” participating as an adult so these are not necessarily people still active prior to the pandemic.

Respondents are most likely to report involvement with a parish or diocesan young adult group (15%), a religious institute volunteer group (9%), the Knights of Columbus (6%), pro-Life groups (5%), or a St. Vincent de Paul Society group.

<i>Have you ever participated in any of the following Church-related programs, groups, or activities as an adult?</i>		
	Percentage “Yes”	Estimated Population
Parish or diocesan young adult group	14.7%	3,031,372
Religious institute volunteer (e.g., Mercy Volunteer Corps)	9.1	1,876,564
Knights of Columbus	5.5	1,134,187
Pro-Life events/groups	5.2	1,072,322
St. Vincent de Paul Society	4.0	824,863
Jóvenes Para Cristo	2.6	536,161
Legion of Mary	2.2	453,675
Charismatic Renewal	2.1	433,053
Cursillo	1.5	309,324
Amor en Acción	1.4	288,702
Movimiento Familiar Cristianno	1.2	247,459
Juan XXIII	0.9	185,594
Neochatecumenal Way	0.5	103,108
“Other”	3.0	618,647

Many of the “other” groups named by respondents were things like Catholic school, altar server, choir, mission trips, RCIA, names of parishes, Vacation Bible School, and youth group. Others indicated they participate in Bible study, Catholic Daughters of the Americas, Catholic

Women of the Chapel, Conquistando las Naciones para Cristo, Emaus, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, FOCUS, Frassati Chapter, Theology on Tap, Young Life, Youth for Christ. Often just one or two respondents noted one of these “other” groups.

Overall, 36.8% of respondents indicated they had participated in at least one of the groups listed. This represents a population of 7,588,741.

Sub-Group Differences

- Weekly Mass attenders are generally more likely than those attending Mass less often, prior to the pandemic, to say they have participated in all the groups listed. The most frequent participation for these weekly attenders is in parish or diocesan young adult groups (34%), religious institute volunteer groups (19%), Pro-Life events or groups (15%), St. Vincent de Paul Society (11%), and Knights of Columbus (10%).
- The following groups are majority Hispanic: Jóvenes Para Cristo (80%), Cursillo (58%), Movimiento Familiar Cristianno (54%), Legion of Mary (53%), Amor en Acción (53%), and Juan XXIII (52%).

Participation by Type of Group

Respondents were also asked to identify participation in communities and movements by the type of work these may do. Overall 34.2% indicated regular involvement with a Catholic community or group to practice their faith. This represents an estimated population of 7,052,580. Twenty-eight percent said they are involved with a Catholic community or group that provides service or assistance to others. This represents an estimated population of 5,774,042. Finally, 15.3% indicated they belong to a Catholic group or community that evangelizes and spreads the faith to others. This represents an estimated population of 3,155,101.

<i>Besides attending Mass at your parish, did you participate in any Catholic group or community of people with whom you regularly met to...?</i>		
	Percentage "Yes"	Estimated Population
Practice my faith (e.g., Bible study, prayer, devotions, faith sharing)	34.2%	7,052,580
Provide service or assistance to others	28.0	5,774,042
Evangelize and spread the faith to others	15.3	3,155,101

Sub-Group Differences

- Respondents in the 18 to 20 age group are more likely than older respondents to meet with a group to practice their faith (45% compared to 34% of those 21 to 24, 35% of those 25 to 29, and 27% of those 30 to 35).
- Respondents in the 18 to 24 age group are more likely than older respondents to meet with a group to provide service or assistance to others (30% of those 18 to 20 and 35% of those 21 to 24 compared to 25% of those 25 to 29, and 24% of those 30 to 35).
- Weekly Mass attenders, prior to the pandemic, are the most likely to participate in all three types of groups (62% to practice their faith, 47% to provide assistance to others, and 35% to evangelize and spread the faith to others).

Motivations for Participation

The primary reasons given by respondents for participating in their Catholic group or community is to reduce negative feelings (38% “very much” only and 69% “very much” or “somewhat”), and to nourish their spiritual life (37% “very much” only and 70% “very much” or “somewhat”). Other frequent reasons for participation include: a desire to learn from new experiences (34% “very much” only and 74% “very much” or “somewhat”), to act or express important convictions concerning serving others (34% “very much” only and 69% “very much” or “somewhat”), and to develop and strengthen social ties to others (28% “very much” only and 65% “very much” or “somewhat”).

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%	18%	13%
To nourish my spiritual life	37	33	19	11
A desire to learn from new experiences	34	40	17	9
To act or express important convictions concerning serving others	34	35	20	22
To develop and strengthen social ties with others	28	37	21	14
To improve career opportunities	27	27	17	29
To explore different religious traditions	18	30	25	27

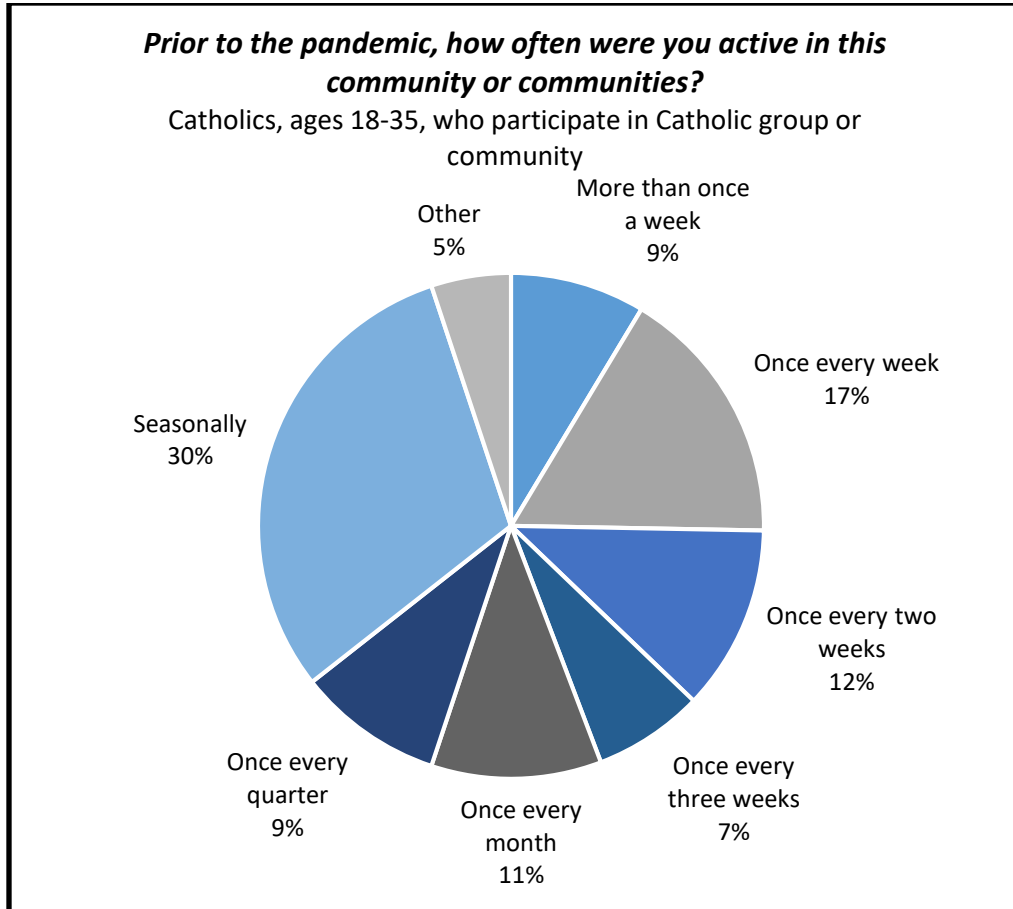
Sub-group Differences

- Respondents ages 18 to 20 are most likely to say reducing negative feelings was “very much” a motivation for them to participate in a group (44%).
- Respondents ages 21 to 24 are most likely to say improving career opportunities was “very much” a motivation for them to participate in a group (32%).
- Respondents ages 25 to 29 are most likely to say developing and strengthening social ties to others was “very much” a motivation for them to participate in a group (33%).
- Respondents ages 25 to 29 are most likely to say nourishing their spiritual life was “very much” a motivation for them to participate in a group (41%).
- Hispanics are slightly more likely than non-Hispanics to cite a desire to learn from new experiences (37% compared to 32%) and reducing negative feelings (42% compared to 34%) as being “very much” motivations for them to participate in a group.

- Weekly Mass attenders, prior to the pandemic, are more likely than those attending less frequently to cite all reasons as being “very much” a motivation to them participating in a group. This is especially the case for nourishing their spiritual life (65%).
- Female respondents are more likely than males to say nourishing their spiritual life was “very much” a motivation for their participation in a group (40% compared to 33%).

Frequency of Participation in Groups

Prior to the pandemic, 55% of those participating in Catholic community or group were active in it at least once a month. About one in ten were active more than once a week. About one in ten were only active quarterly and 30% seasonally.



Sub-group Differences

- Weekly Mass attenders, prior to the pandemic, are more likely than those attending monthly or less often to say they were active in their community at least once a month (83% compared to 67% and 38%, respectively).

Location of Group Activity and Meetings

The most common location of meeting for the group was within a parish (41%). However, more often than not the activity is done somewhere else, such as: a school, college, or university (21%), a public space (21%), or in members' homes (20%). Thirteen percent note meeting online.

Where did your community or communities meet?	
Catholics, ages 18-35, who participate in Catholic group or community	
Parish	41%
School, college, or university	21
Other public space	21
Members' home(s)	20
Community-owned space	17
Online	13
Convent or monastery	8
"Other"	5

Sub-group Differences

- Weekly Mass attenders, prior to the pandemic, are more likely than those attending monthly or less often to say their community meets at a parish (60% compared to 45% and 33%, respectively).
- Those who attended Mass a few times a year or less often are among the most likely to say their community meets online (16%).
- Hispanic respondents are more likely than non-Hispanics to say their community meets in members' homes (25% compared to 16%).
- Younger respondents are less likely than older respondents to indicate their community meets at a parish (39% of those 18 to 20 and 35% of those 21 to 24 compared to 46% of those 25 to 29 and 47% of those 30 to 35).
- Those ages 18 to 24 are especially likely to say their community meets at a school, college, or university (31% of those 18 to 21 and 24% of those 21 to 24).
- Those ages 30 to 35 are most likely to say their community meets in some other public space (27%).
- Those ages 21 to 24 are especially likely to say their community meets online (17%).
- Male respondents are more likely than female respondents to say their community meets online (16% compared to 9%).

Group Activities at Meetings

The most common activities at group meetings are: prayer (65%), socializing (36%), reading and discussing scripture (30%), faith sharing (29%), group silence (23%), and discussing spirituality (19%). Less often these included raising money or collecting donations (18%), recreational group activities (15%), directly serving others (15%), or the Eucharist (14%).

<i>At a typical community meeting, did you engage in any of the following?</i>	
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

Sub-group Differences

- Those ages 18 to 20 are more likely than older community members to say prayer is part of their meetings (74% compared to 61% of those ages 21 to 24, 65% of those ages 25 to 29, and 61% of those ages 30 to 35).
- Those ages 18 to 20 are more likely than older community members to say group silence is part of their meetings (28% compared to 21% of those ages 21 to 24, 22% of those ages 25 to 29, and 20% of those ages 30 to 35).
- Those ages 18 to 20 are more likely than older community members to say reading and/or discussing scripture is part of their meetings (38% compared to 28% of those ages 21 to 24, 29% of those ages 25 to 29, and 27% of those ages 30 to 35).
- Hispanics are more likely than non-Hispanics to say group silence is part of their meetings (27% compared to 19%).

- Weekly Mass attenders, prior to the pandemic, are more likely than those attending less frequently to say all but one of the practices is present at their meetings. They are about as likely as others to say discussion of political or social issues is part of their meetings.
- Female respondents are more likely than males to say the following are part of their community meetings prayer (71% compared to 58%), group silence (27% compared to 18%), reading and/or discussing scripture (36% compared to 24%), and discussing spirituality (23% compared to 15%).

Those Served by Communities and Groups

Young adults are the most common group served by the respondents' communities or groups (67% of communities). These also commonly serve families, couples, and single parents (56%), seniors (55%), minors (54%), the homeless, hungry, and poor (52%), and the sick and disabled (40%). A third say they serve those people seeking to deepen their faith and 30% serve parishioners.

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

Sub-group Differences

- Those ages 21 to 24 are not as likely as others to say their community serves seniors (47%), families, couples or single parents (45%), the homeless, hungry or poor (46%), people seeking to deepen their faith (26%), or prisoners (9%).
- Hispanics are more likely than non-Hispanics to say their community serves young adults (73% compared to 64%), seniors (61% compared to 52%), families, couples or single parents (68% compared to 48%), and people of a particular nationality or race/ethnicity (27% compared to 16%).
- Those attending Mass weekly, prior to the pandemic, are more likely than others to say their community serves parishioners (48% compared to 29% of those attending monthly, and 22% of those attending a few times a year or less often) and people seeking to deepen their faith (45% compared to 30% of those attending monthly, and 28% of those attending a few times a year or less often).
- Females are more likely than males to say their community serves: minors (63% compared to 43%), young adults (71% compared to 63%), families, couples or single parents (65% compared to 46%), parishioners (36% compared to 24%), and people seeking to deepen their faith (40% compared to 24%).

Participation in Groups and Communities by Description

Overall, 58% of Catholic young adults between 18 and 35 say a Catholic group or community listed below is one that they participate in. Most commonly, these are Bible study communities (15%), choirs (9%), youth groups (8%), community at a local parish (7%), Rosary circles (6%), and college student communities (5%).

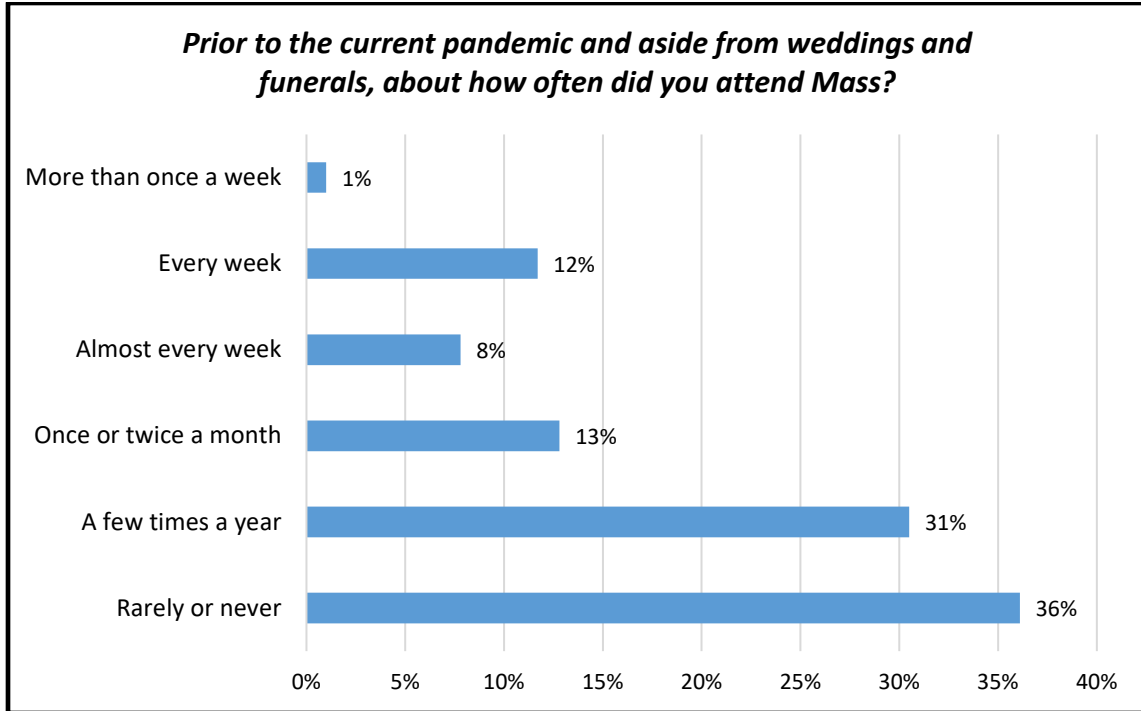
<i>Do any of the types of groups below describe a Catholic community or communities you participate in?</i>		
Catholics, ages 18-35		
	Percentage "Yes"	Estimated Population
Bible study community	14.7%	3,031,372
Hispanic/Latino community	12.1	2,495,211
Choir	9.0	1,855,942
Youth group	8.1	1,670,348
Community at a local parish	6.5	1,340,403
Rosary circle	5.7	1,175,430
College student community (e.g., Newman house)	5.4	1,113,565
Charismatic community	4.8	989,836
Associate community of a religious order	3.9	804,242
Weekend retreat (e.g., Cursillo or its derivatives, like Teens Encounter Christ)	3.5	721,755
Eucharistic centered community	2.5	515,539
Third order	1.3	268,081
Other	1.1	226,837

Sub-group Differences

- Those ages 18 to 20 are more likely than those ages 30 to 35 to say their community is a Bible study (22% compared to 12%), a choir (13% compared to 6%), a college student community (10% compared to 3%), or a youth group (12% compared to 6%).
- Hispanics are more likely than non-Hispanics to say their community is a Hispanic/Latino community (27% compared to 1%). Hispanics are also among the most likely to describe their community a Rosary circle (8%).
- The following are majority Hispanic: Hispanic/Latino community (95%), Rosary circle (59%), and weekend retreats (55%).
- Weekly Mass attenders, prior to the pandemic, are among the most likely to say their community is a Bible study (32%), a Hispanic/Latino community (19%), a choir (18%), a community at a local parish (18%), a Rosary circle (15%), a charismatic community (11%), or an associate community of a religious order (10%).

Mass Attendance

Prior to the pandemic, 13% of Catholic young adults attended Mass at least once a week. Twenty-one percent attend Mass less than weekly, but at least once a month. Thirty-one percent attended Mass a few times a year. Thirty-six percent say they rarely or never attend Mass.



Sub-group Differences

- Respondents with high levels of group activity are more likely than those with lower levels of activity to attend Mass weekly or more often (37% compared to 20% of monthly attenders, and 8% of those who attend Mass a few times a year or less often).

Reasons for Missing Mass

Respondents who attend Mass less than weekly were asked about how well a list of reasons explain their missing Mass prior to the pandemic. The most common response was having a busy schedule or lack of time (57% “somewhat” or “very much”) followed by not believing that missing Mass is a sin (55%), family responsibilities (44%), that they are not a very religious person (43%), and/or that they prefer to practice their faith outside of the parish (43%).

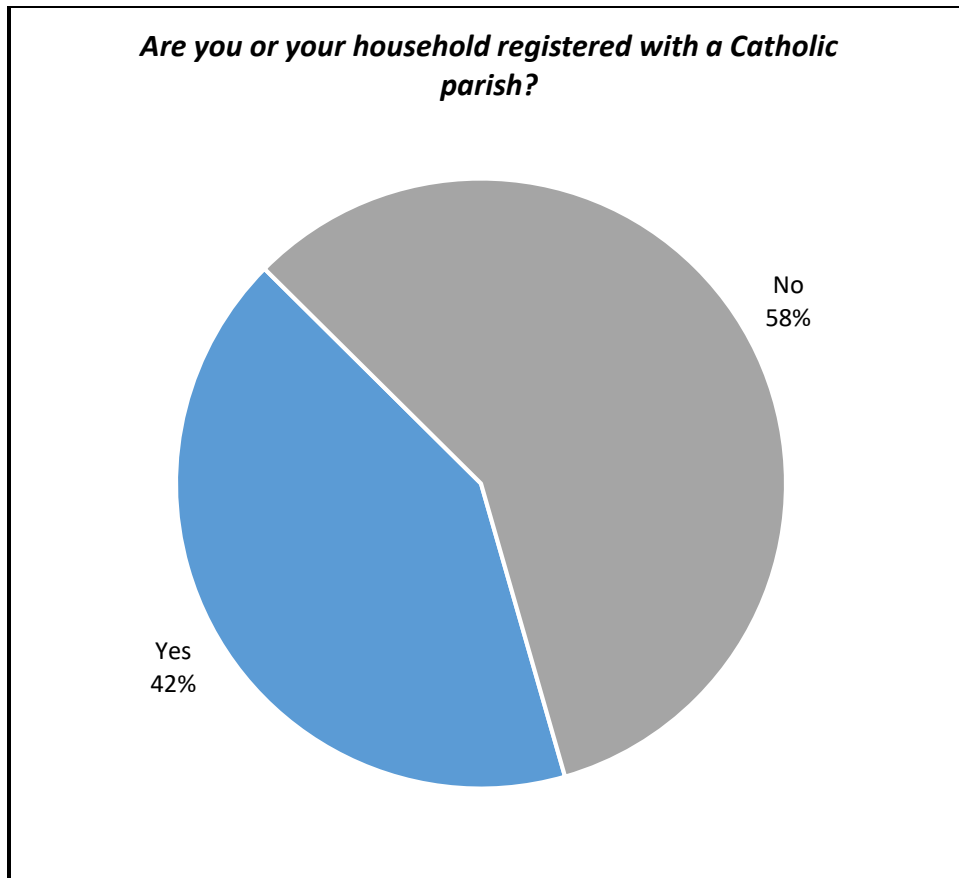
How well did each of the following explain, if at all, why you missed Mass?		
Percentage of Catholics, ages 18-35, who attends Mass less than weekly		
	“Somewhat” or “Very much”	“Very much” only
Busy schedule or lack of time	57%	29%
I don’t believe that missing Mass is a sin	55	31
Family responsibilities	44	20
I am not a very religious person	43	18
I prefer to practice my faith outside of the parish	43	19
Inconvenient Mass schedule	34	12
Masses don’t meet my spiritual needs	31	12
I find Mass too boring	31	12
Conflict with work	28	13
Out of town travel	23	7
I feel alienated from the Church	22	7
Health problems or a disability	16	7
Unable to find transportation	14	6
I am divorced or married outside the Church	10	4

Sub-group Differences

- Those ages 21 to 24 are among the most likely to cite a busy schedule or lack of time as “very much” a reason for missing Mass (36%).
- Those ages 18 to 24 are especially likely to cite not being a very religious person as “very much” a reason for missing Mass (24% of those 18 to 20 and 21% of those 21 to 24).

Parish Registration

Forty-two percent of respondents reside in households that are registered with a Catholic parish.

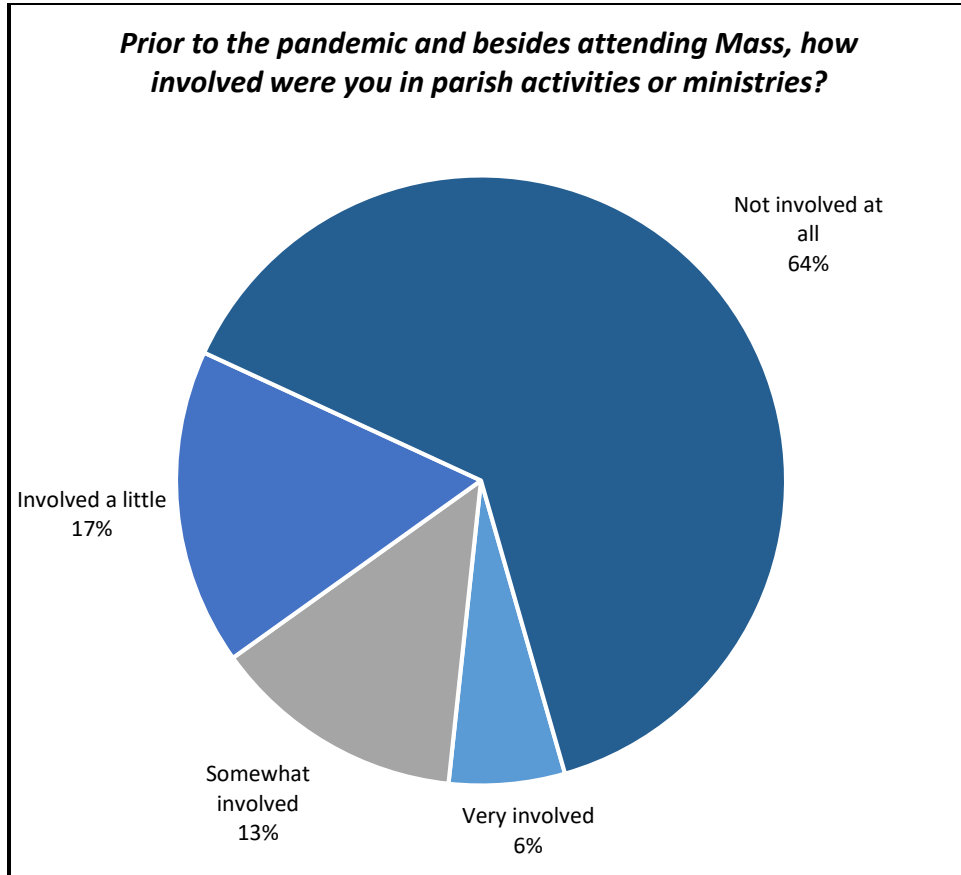


Sub-group Differences

- Hispanics are less likely than non-Hispanics to say they live in a household that is registered with a Catholic parish (36% compared to 47%).
- Weekly Mass attenders are the most likely to be registered with a parish (71% compared to 51% of monthly attenders, and 33% of those who attend Mass a few times a year or less often).
- Those with high levels of group activity are very likely to be registered with a parish (70% compared to 47% of those with moderate levels of activity and 38% with low levels of activity).

Parish Activities and Ministries

Six percent of respondents say they were “very” involved with parish activities and ministries, other than attending Mass, prior to the pandemic. Thirteen percent say they were “somewhat” involved, and 17% were involved “a little.” Most, 64% say they were not involved “at all” in these ministries and activities.



Sub-group Differences

- Those who frequently attended Mass prior to the pandemic are more likely than less frequent attenders to say they were “very” active in parish activities and ministries (24% of weekly attenders, 6% of monthly attenders, and 3% of those attending Mass a few times a year or less often).
- Those with high levels of group activity are more likely than others to be “very” active in parish activities and ministries (26% compared to 8% of those with moderate levels of activity and 3% with low levels of activity).

Factors Affecting Parish Activity

Respondents were presented with a list of items and asked how much each has made them less likely to participate in parish life. Forty-four percent of respondents said that allegations of clergy sexually abusing minors has made them less likely to be active in parish life “somewhat” or “very” much. Forty-two percent say the Church’s teachings on homosexuality similarly make them less likely to be active in parish life. Next, a feeling that older generations have too much influence in their parish make 35% “somewhat” or “very” much less likely to be active in parish life. Other factors with a similar influence are the Church’s teachings on birth control (34% “somewhat” or “very” much less likely), the roles available to women in the Church (33%), a feeling that the Church is not open to dialog with other religious faiths (33%), and the Church’s teachings on divorce and remarriage (32%).

<i>How much, if at all, have the following ever made you less likely to be active in parish life?</i>				
	Very	Somewhat	Only a little	Not at all
The Church's teachings on homosexuality	22%	20%	14%	44%
Allegations of Catholic clergy sexually abusing minors	21	23	17	40
The Church's teachings on the use of birth control	16	18	15	51
Feeling that older generations have too much influence in the parish	14	21	21	44
The roles available to women in the Church	14	18	17	51
My perception of the Church's participation in politics and elections	14	17	19	50
Feeling like the Church is not open to dialog with other religious faiths	13	20	19	48
The Church's teachings on divorce and remarriage	13	19	18	51
Being asked for donations	11	18	24	47
The parish is not welcoming to different ethnic or cultural Catholic groups	10	15	15	60
The parish is not welcoming to a family member or friend	9	13	13	66
The parish is not very welcoming to young adults	7	18	17	58
Feeling like the parish is not sufficiently adhering to the traditions of the Church	7	15	14	65

Sub-group Differences

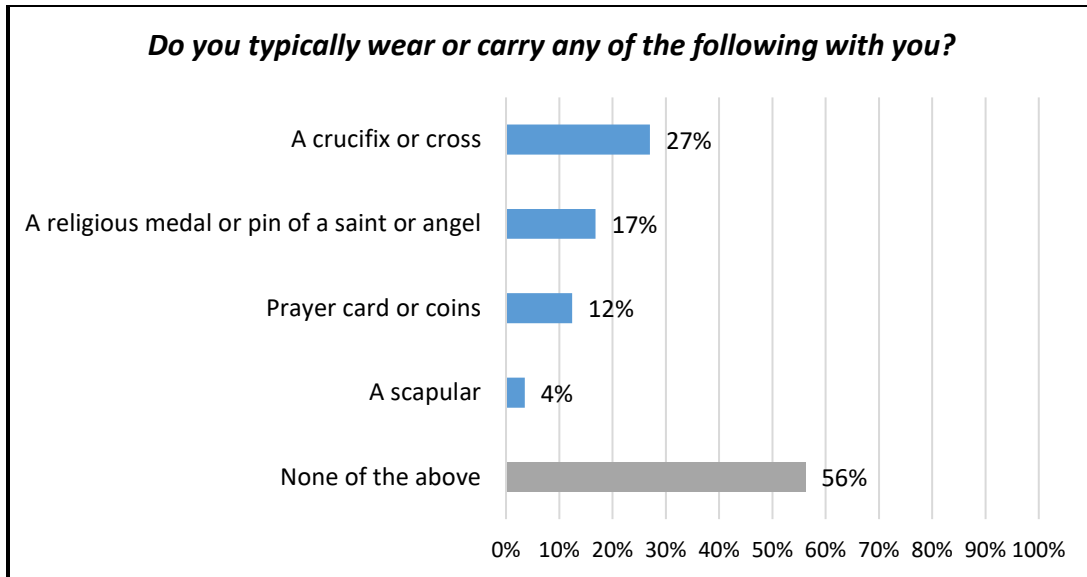
- Non-Hispanic Catholics are more likely than Hispanic Catholics to say the Church’s teachings on the use of birth control have made them “very” less likely to be active in parish life (19% compared to 11%).
- Those attending Mass a few times a year or less often, prior to the pandemic, are more likely than others to say the Church’s teachings on homosexuality have made them “very” less

likely to be active in parish life (25% compared to 16% of those attending monthly and 18% of those attending weekly).

- Females are more likely than males to say allegations of Catholic clergy sexually abusing minors has made them “very” less likely to be active in parish life (24% compared to 16%).
- Females are more likely than males to say the Church’s teachings on homosexuality has made them “very” less likely to be active in parish life (27% compared to 17%).
- Females are more likely than males to the Church’s teachings on the use of birth control has made them “very” less likely to be active in parish life (20% compared to 11%).

Religious Items

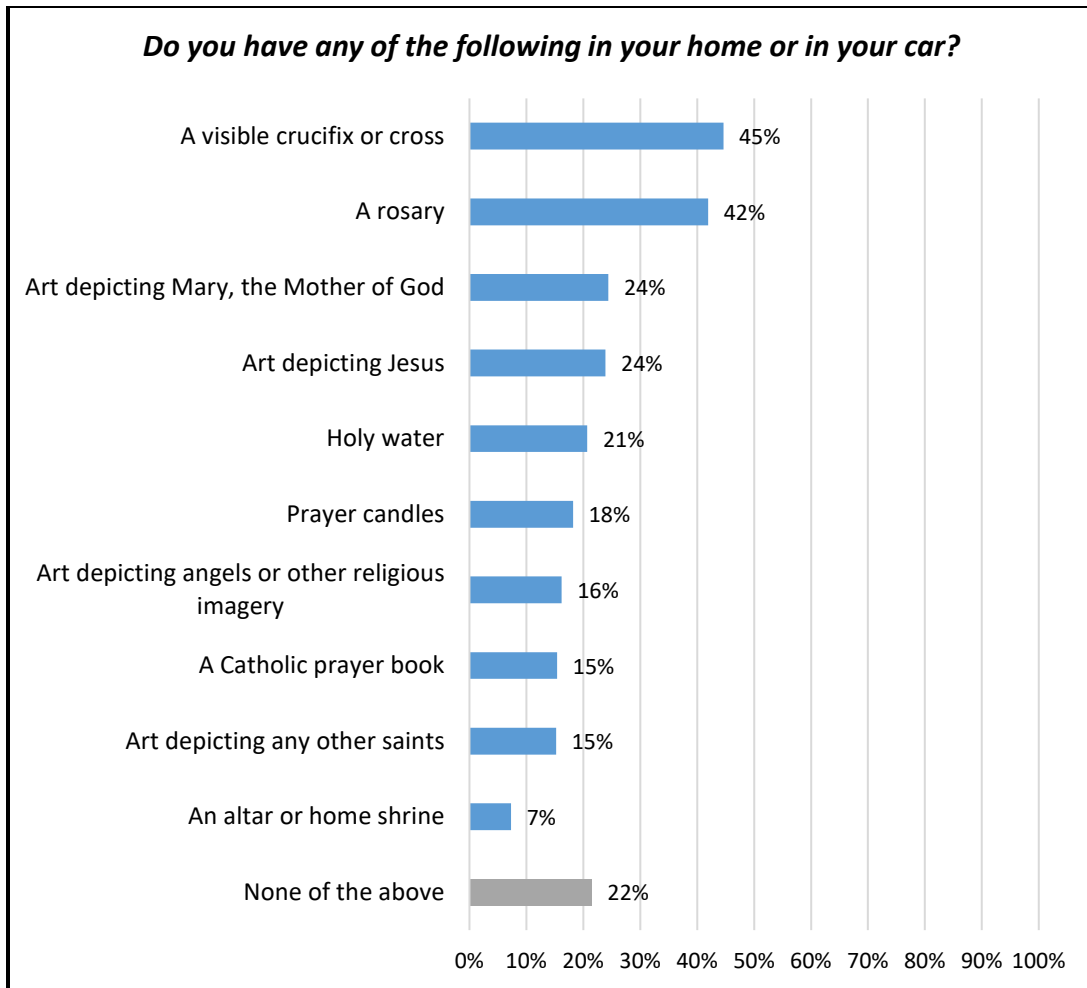
More than a quarter of Catholic young adults (27%) wear or carry a crucifix or cross. Fewer, 17%, wear or carry a religious medal or pin of a saint or angel. Twelve percent carry prayer cards or coins, and 4% wear or carry a scapular. A majority, 56%, does not wear or carry any of these.%



Sub-group Differences

- Hispanics are more likely than non-Hispanics to say they typically wear or carry a crucifix or cross (31% compared to 24%) and prayer cards or coins (17% compared to 9%).
- Weekly Mass attenders, prior to the pandemic, are especially likely to wear a scapular (10%).
- Those with high levels of group activity are among the most likely to wear or carry the items listed (59% a crucifix or cross, 40% a religious medal or pin, 33% prayer cards or coins, 19% a scapular).

The most common items respondents have in their homes or cars is a visible cross or crucifix (45%) or a rosary (42%). About one in five to a quarter have the following in their home or car: art depicting Mary (24%), art depicting Jesus (24%), holy water (21%), or prayer cards (18%). Fewer have the following: art depicting angels or other religious imagery (16%), a Catholic prayer book (15%), art depicting other Saints (15%), or an altar or home shrine (7). Only 22% have none of the items listed in their home or car.



Sub-group Differences

- Younger respondents are more likely to have art depicting Jesus (31% of those 18 to 20 compared to 20% of those 30 to 35), Mary (29% of those 18 to 20 compared to 17% of those 30 to 35), or angels or other religious imagery (20% of those 18 to 20 compared to 10% of those 30 to 35).
- Younger respondents are more likely to have a Bible than older respondents (51% compared to 43% of those 21 to 24, 44% of those ages 25 to 29, and 37% of those ages 30 to 35).
- Hispanics are more likely than non-Hispanics to have: a visible crucifix or cross (50% compared to 40%), art depicting Jesus (33% compared to 17%), art depicting Mary (32% compared to 18%), art depicting saints (21% compared to 11%), prayer candles (29% compared to 10%), and Holy water (27% compared to 16%).

- Weekly Mass attenders and those who have high group activity levels are more likely than those who attend less frequently or who are less active in groups to have all of the items listed.
- Females are more likely than males to have a visible crucifix or cross (49% compared to 40%), a rosary (50% compared to 33%), and a Bible (48% compared to 37%).

Open-ended Question: *Prior to the pandemic, in what ways did you practice your Catholic faith with others outside of the parish or attending Mass?*

Respondents were asked to share how they practiced their faith outside of the parish prior to the pandemic in their own words.³ There were 2,014 responses. About three in ten of the responses indicate the respondent practiced their faith outside the parish by praying (31%). Nearly a quarter indicated they did not practice their faith outside of their parish.

The most common way young adults practiced their faith outside their home during the pandemic was personal prayer. Although, some reported praying with others. Two percent of all responses to the question referenced praying the rosary. Examples among the 31% citing prayer include:

- *As a family we do the required prayers for the religion*
- *At home in prayer or mass prayer phone calls*
- *Attended rosaries hosted by the community of the church... prayed and talked about Gods promise*
- *Attending rosaries over Zoom*
- *Praying with my family once in a while*
- *Prayer circles*
- *By prayer during a feast*
- *By praying in people's houses*
- *By praying when alone*
- *By praying and by reading the Bible*
- *Church prayer groups*
- *Daily prayer before all meals*
- *Did daily Devotional and Hail Mary*
- *Praying almost every night*
- *Evening prayer*
- *Going to pray outside abortion clinics*
- *Grace before meals*
- *Group prayers were mostly what we did*
- *Pray for those in need*
- *I pray when I wake up and when I sleep*
- *I regularly visited the grotto with my mom for prayer time*
- *I went to pray in different houses*
- *I went to praying events with my homies*
- *I will pray with my grandma the Rosary*

Twenty-four percent of comments indicated the respondent was not doing anything to practice their faith during the pandemic. Examples of these comments include:

³ All responses to open-ends are presented in English and with corrections to grammar and spelling for readability.

- *Did not*
- *Didn't want to*
- *Don't have much time*
- *I did not practice my Catholic faith with others*
- *I did not, I practiced on my own*
- *I didn't practice anything*
- *I don't think I did*
- *I truly did not*
- *I was not doing anything prior to the pandemic*
- *Never really did anything*
- *No other ways*
- *None*
- *Sadly not as much as I should've. I do wish to settle down in my faith and begin practicing again.*

Eleven percent indicated faith practices specifically in their home or occasionally someone else's home. Many of these comments include references to types of practices. This group of comments is specific to the place of the activity. Examples include:

- *Alone at home*
- *At home*
- *At home prayer*
- *At home service*
- *At home with a bible and family*
- *At home with my wife*
- *At home, watch Mass on TV*
- *By staying home and practice some religious Catholic faith*
- *Family dinners and gatherings*
- *Going to my house*
- *Holidays at home with family*
- *I practiced at home in my own way*
- *I pray at home*
- *I would invite them to my house and we would practice there*
- *In home prayer group, group Rosary sessions*
- *In my home or other people's home*
- *Praying at home, blessing the home*
- *Watching Mass on television together with my household members.*

Ten percent of comments were positive and indicated an activity but did so in a generic fashion. Examples of these comments include:

- *All time*
- *Being a good citizen*

- *Being a good human being*
- *Being a good person*
- *Being and doing good things, helping who needs it*
- *By being a decent human being who shows grace toward others and resists casting judgment.*
- *By being joyful and pointing my joy to the Catholic faith when asked*
- *Doing God's will and helping others and trying to make God proud*
- *Everyday*
- *Giving the love that Maria gave us*
- *Good*
- *Having faith*
- *Helping out*
- *I did quietly*
- *I was more active*
- *In my free time*
- *In personal ways*
- *In everyday living*
- *I'm religious*
- *It's good church*
- *Kindness and love*
- *Leading by example*
- *Living a proper lifestyle*
- *Love and hope*
- *Personal time*
- *Practiced beliefs*
- *Spiritual*
- *Self-respect*
- *Showing love and support*
- *Very well and excellent*

Eight percent of comments referenced attendance at meetings. Fewer than five comments specified a specific group or community. Some of these comments overlap with other categories (e.g., prayer group meetings are also counted for prayer comments). Examples of these meeting-related comments include:

- *Church related events*
- *Attending meetups with other Catholic college students*
- *Attending outside groups*
- *By having a church-related group gatherings*
- *Catholic mom's group*
- *Christian groups. Going to talks.*
- *Church gathering/picnics*
- *Couples groups*

- *Professional conference*
- *Family events and religious festivities*
- *family get together to celebrate*
- *Game Night every Friday night and Bible Study group every Tuesday night*
- *Gather in the church with my family and friends*
- *Gatherings*
- *Going to groups*
- *Got together*
- *Group studies*
- *Having faith group sessions with friends*
- *Having meetings with other fathers*
- *Holding gatherings*
- *I had started attending Legion of Mary meetings*
- *I met up with friends on Sundays*
- *I met with a group of women for a book study*
- *I was involved in the Young Adult Group and Pro-Life activities*
- *I would attend gatherings at other member's homes to discuss how faith has enriched our lives*
- *I would usually gather with my family and friends to pray and wish everything was going to be okay and be thankful*
- *In a group with other people every week*
- *Invite people to join me*
- *Meet and greet*
- *Meet in groups with my church friends and discuss the Bible*
- *Meeting*
- *Moms groups*
- *Participated in an Alpha group*
- *Pray in small groups*
- *Prayed in a group event with others every week*
- *Prayer meetings*
- *Making family or friends gatherings to pray a Rosary*
- *Praying in the car with other passengers*
- *Read the Bible with a close group of friends*
- *Religious groups*
- *Saying my Rosary with some of my colleagues*
- *Service, social events, Rosary prayers, etc.*
- *Small group meeting every week, bible study*
- *Social meetings*
- *We attended marriage group*

Six percent of comments specifically referenced Bible or religious text study and/or reading. Examples of these comments include:

- *Attend Bible study*
- *Bible groups*
- *Bible reading*
- *Bible study*
- *Bible study at home with kids*
- *Bible study at school*
- *Bible study gatherings*
- *By praying and by reading the Bible*
- *Did Bible study with others*
- *Discussing Bible studies with peers*
- *Talking about the scripture teachings together*
- *Bible Study group every Tuesday night*
- *Generally just speaking about scripture and how it relates to the current sociopolitical climate*
- *Holding a Bible study*
- *I have a Bible at home that I read sometimes*
- *Read the Bible and read some awesome spiritual books*
- *Just study with books*
- *Listened to audio books. Read Bible on phone.*
- *Pray or discuss the Bible with my husband*
- *Read Bible verses*
- *Sharing New American Bible translations and telling people about our traditions in my non-denominational Bible study. Occasionally attending Catholic Bible study.*

Six percent of comments reference religious discussions and talks. More often than not this refers to informal discussions about faith with others. Examples of these comments include:

- *I occasionally discuss my beliefs, but not much more than this*
- *I talk about religion with others*
- *A couple of other women in my church held groups where we hold discussions together. We talk about how we're feeling and where we are at with our spirituality. We used to meet in person.*
- *After Mass we always gathered with people to chat and celebrate Sunday*
- *Conversations with friends*
- *By talking about my beliefs with others*
- *Having theological discussions with friends*
- *Conversation*
- *Conversations with family and friends*
- *Conversing about faith*
- *Discuss our beliefs*
- *Discussed the faith with others*
- *Discussing Bible studies with peers*

- *Discussing religion among family members*
- *Discussing thoughts of God and religion*
- *Discussions among coworkers and friends*
- *Discussions with partner*
- *Engage in religious conversations*
- *Family prayer and discussions*
- *Had open discussions regarding faith with roommates and friends*
- *Had talks about faith a lot*
- *I mostly had discussions with people*
- *Sharing my faith with friends*
- *We do our own small group and talk about religion*
- *Just talking or having conversation with people*

Five percent of comments reference service and/or volunteering. Examples of these comments include:

- *Volunteering*
- *Trying to help others*
- *Acts of kindness*
- *Volunteered in parish activities*
- *Volunteer opportunities*
- *Helping in my community*
- *CCD volunteer*
- *Volunteering in the local community (since doing acts of good is part of my faith)*
- *Community service*
- *Did good deeds, helped others*
- *Fundraising volunteer*
- *Acts of service*
- *Food drives*
- *Helped others, donated time*
- *Helped with lessons or Bible Camp*
- *Help community*
- *Helping classes in church*
- *Helping in church event*
- *Volunteered in my community*
- *Help lead high school retreats*
- *I volunteer at a youth group center*
- *I also volunteer for young adult events*
- *I also did a lot of volunteer work and some missions trips*
- *Local food drives*

Five percent of comments referred to Mass attendance and participation in Mass. The question asked for practice and activities outside of the parish and Mass.

An additional 5% of responses were non-responsive and could not be interpreted as a response to the question.⁴

The remaining comments did not fit within the previously discussed categories and were not similar or numerous enough to be significant or representative of what respondents said. Examples of these include:

- *A youth group*
- *A zoom call*
- *At events like baptisms*
- *Attended church school for 10 years and participated in the catholic youth group (TNNT)*
- *Attending a CCD class*
- *Bake sales*
- *Donating food*
- *Christmas caroling*
- *Bingo*
- *By meditating*
- *Catechism*
- *Social media sharing*
- *Celebrated holidays*
- *Church*
- *Classes on Wednesday evening*
- *Complying with the 10 Commandments*
- *Confession*
- *Discipleship*
- *Catholic ritual worship*
- *Evangelizing*
- *Game night*
- *Going to reunions*
- *Summer camps*
- *Lent*
- *I watch the Mass more than 3 times a week on the television*
- *Looking up online helps a lot*
- *Online*
- *Playing music*
- *RCIA*
- *Singing*
- *Sunday*
- *Virtually*

⁴ This occurs occasionally in online self-administered surveys as respondents enter something to move on to the next question.

Socializing and Faith Sharing with Others

Respondents were most likely to do the following at least once a month prior to the pandemic: spend a social evening with relatives at least once a month (71%) and spend a social evening with someone who lives outside their neighborhood (56%). Nearly half report doing the following at least monthly: invite someone outside of their family to their home for a meal (46%), go to the home of someone outside their family for a meal (45%), and spend a social evening with someone who lives in their neighborhood (42%). Less than one in five do the following at least once a month: invite someone outside of their family to their home for faith sharing or prayer (18%) and go to the home of someone outside their family for faith sharing or prayer (16%).

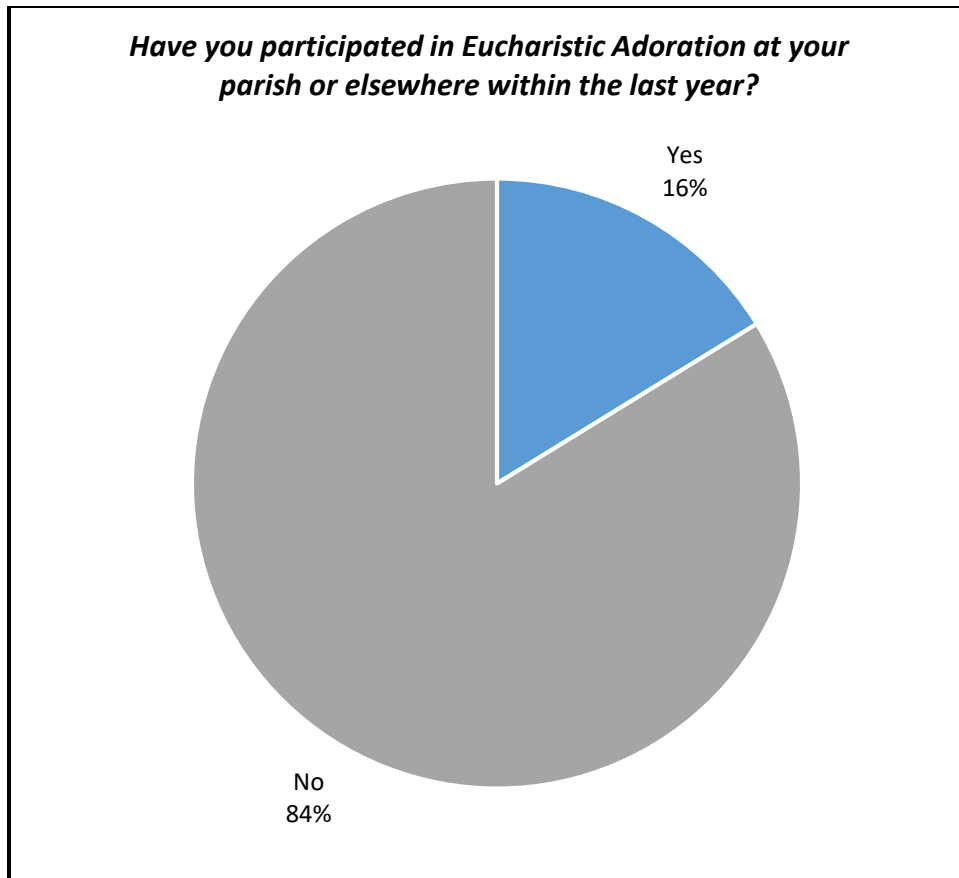
<i>Prior to the pandemic, how often did you...?</i>							
	Almost daily	Several times a week	Several times a month	Once a month	Several times a year	Once a year	Rarely or never
Spend a social evening with relatives	13%	17%	28%	13%	14%	5%	10%
Spend a social evening with someone who lives in my neighborhood	5	10	14	13	10	4	44
Spend a social evening with someone who lives outside my neighborhood	4	13	25	14	15	3	26
Invite someone outside of my family to my home for a meal	4	7	19	16	16	6	32
Go to the home of someone outside my family for a meal	3	8	20	14	20	6	29
Invite someone outside of my family to my home for faith sharing or prayer	3	4	6	5	3	3	76
Go to the home of someone outside my family for faith sharing or prayer	2	3	6	5	4	3	77

Sub-group Differences

- Hispanics were less likely than non-Hispanics to spend a social evening with someone who lives outside their neighborhood (52% compared to 60%).
- Those who attend Mass a few times a year or less often are less likely than monthly and weekly attenders to do all of the things listed.
- Those with the lowest levels of group activity are less likely to do all the things listed than those with moderate or high levels of group activity.

Eucharistic Adoration

Sixteen percent of respondents have participated in Eucharistic Adoration at their parish or elsewhere in the 12 months prior to being surveyed.



Sub-group Differences

- Weekly Mass attenders, prior to the pandemic, are more likely than those with less frequent attendance to have participated in Eucharistic Adoration (45% compared to 24% of monthly attenders and 8% of those attending Mass a few times a year or less often).
- Respondents with high levels of group activity are more likely to have participated in Eucharistic adoration (55%) than those with moderate (22%) or low (11%) levels of group participation.

Prayer

Twenty-four percent pray individually daily or more often, 15% do so more than once a week, and 6% do so once a week. Twenty-two percent pray individually less than weekly but at least once a month. Fifteen percent pray individually a few times a year and 18 percent do so rarely or never. Respondents are less likely to pray with others. Forty-one percent rarely or never pray with family and 61% rarely or never pray with a group of people outside their family, aside from attending Mass. A quarter pray with family at least once a week. Eleven percent pray with a group outside of their family at least weekly, aside from attending Mass.

<i>Aside from Mass, about how often do you pray...?</i>							
	Daily or more often	More than once a week	Once a week	Almost every week	Once or twice a month	A few times a year	Rarely or never
Individually	24%	15%	6%	10%	12%	15%	18%
With family (including before meals)	11	8	6	5	8	21	41
In a group including people outside of my family	3	2	6	5	6	17	61

Sub-group Differences

- Those ages 30 to 35 are more likely than those who are 18 to 20 to pray at least once a week individually (48% compared to 40%).
- Females are more likely than males to pray at least once a week individually (50% compared to 40%).
- Weekly Mass attenders and those with high levels of group activity are among the most likely to pray at least once a week individually (69% and 58%, respectively), with family (61% and 50%, respectively), or in a group outside of their family (33% and 43%, respectively).

Agreement with Statements about Faith

Seventy-three percent of respondents agree “somewhat” or “strongly” that they can be a good Catholic without going to Mass every Sunday. Forty-four percent agree “somewhat” or “strongly” that they think of themselves as a practicing Catholic. Fifty-seven percent agree “somewhat” or “strongly” that helping the poor and needy is a moral obligation for Catholics. Thirty-nine percent agree “somewhat” or “strongly” that they could never imagine themselves leaving the Catholic Church, 33% neither agree nor disagree, and 28% either disagree “somewhat” or “strongly.” Seventeen “strongly” agree that there have been times recently when they have struggled with their faith and 29% “somewhat” agree. A third agree “somewhat” or “strongly” that sacraments are essential to their faith. Four in ten neither agree nor disagree with that statement and 28% either disagree “somewhat” or “strongly.” Thirty-one percent agree “somewhat” or “strongly” that in deciding what is morally acceptable, they look to Catholic Church teachings and statements made by the Pope and Bishops for forming their conscience.

<i>How much do you agree with the following statements...?</i>					
	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I can be a good Catholic without going to Mass every Sunday	44%	29%	18%	6%	3%
Helping the poor and needy is a moral obligation for Catholics	26	32	32	5	5
I could never imagine myself leaving the Catholic Church	21	18	33	15	13
There have been times recently when I have struggled with my faith	17	29	27	10	17
I think of myself as a practicing Catholic	16	28	26	15	15
Sacraments are essential to my faith	15	18	39	13	15
In deciding what is morally acceptable, I look to Catholic Church teachings and statements made by the Pope and Bishops for form my conscience	12	19	42	13	14

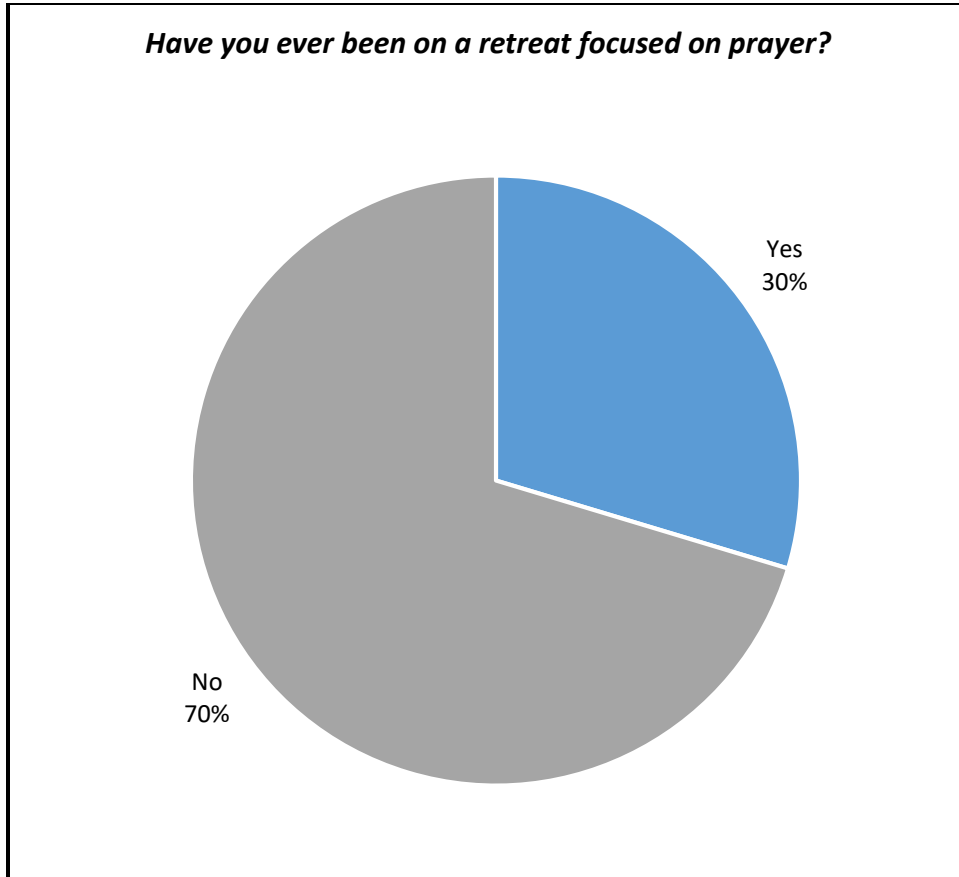
Sub-group Differences

- Older respondents are more likely than younger respondents to agree “somewhat” or “strongly” that sacraments are essential to their faith (37% of those ages 30 to 35, 33% of those 25 to 29, 29% of those 21 to 24, and 27% of those 18 to 20).
- Non-Hispanics are more likely than Hispanics to agree “somewhat” or “strongly” that there have been times recently when they have struggles with their faith (49% compared to 41%).
- Females are more likely than males to agree “somewhat” or “strongly” that there have been times recently when they have struggles with their faith (51% compared to 40%).
- Respondents with more frequent Mass attendance, prior to the pandemic, and with high levels of group activity are more likely than those with less frequent attendance and group

activity to agree with all of the statements listed with the exception of one. Both groups of more active Catholics are less likely than others to agree that you can be a good Catholic without going to Mass every Sunday.

Retreats

Three in ten Catholic young adults have ever been on a retreat focused on prayer.

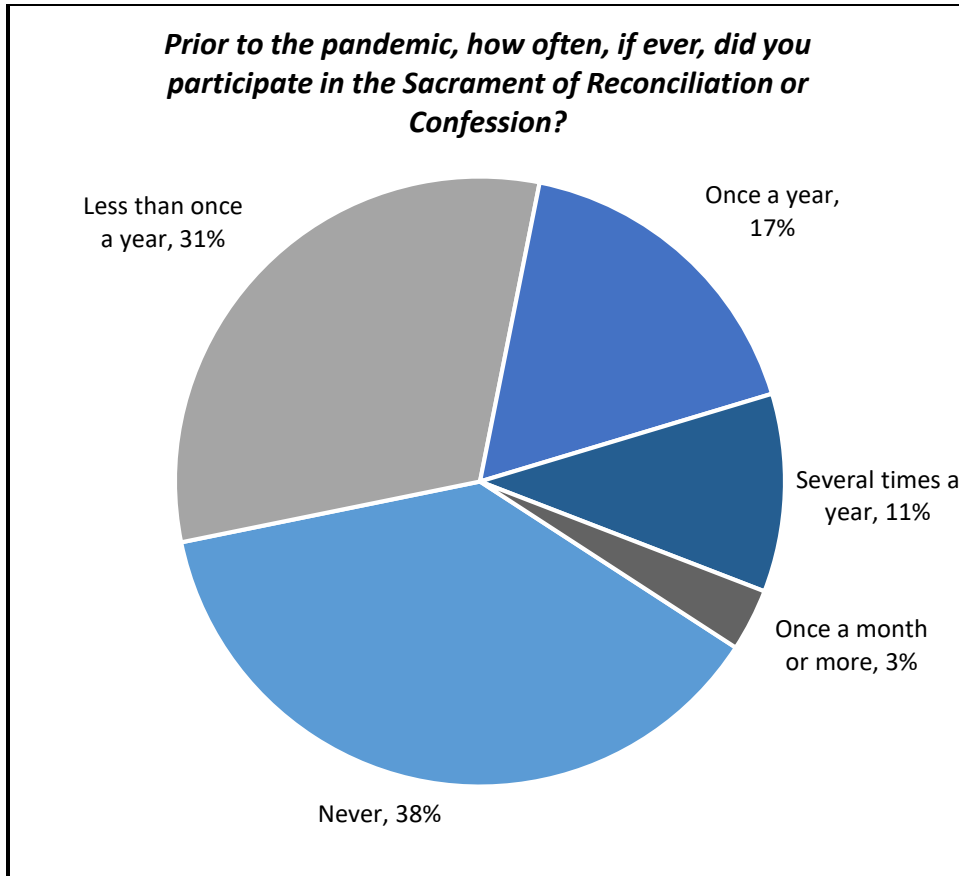


Sub-group Differences

- Weekly and monthly Mass attenders, prior to the pandemic, are especially likely to have been on a retreat focused on prayer (49% of weekly attenders and 42% of monthly attenders compared to 22% of those attending Mass a few times a year or less often).

Reconciliation

Three percent of respondents said that they participated in the Sacrament of Reconciliation once a month or more, prior to the pandemic. Eleven percent participated several times a year and 17% once a year. Most either participated less than once a year (31%) or never (38%). Of those who have celebrated their First Reconciliation, 29% say they “never” participated in Confession prior to the pandemic. Thus, for these respondents the response of “never” to this question does not literally mean they have never participated only that they never do anymore.

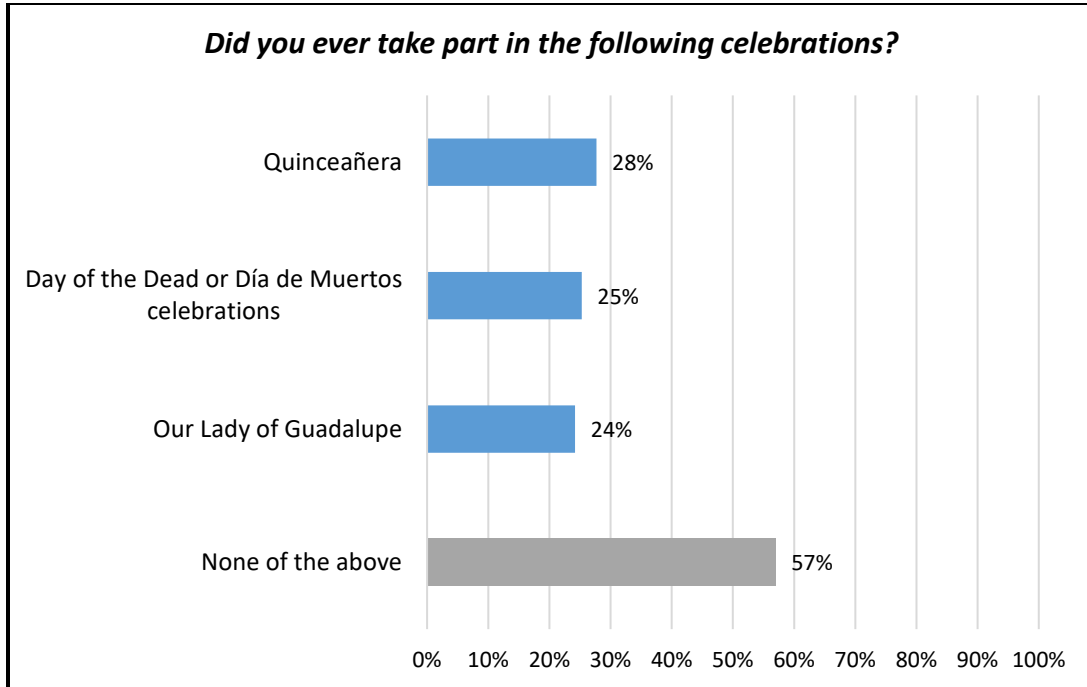


Sub-group Differences

- Those ages 18 to 20 are more likely than those ages 30 to 35 to go to confession at least once a year (37% compared to 27%).
- Seven in ten of those who attended Mass weekly before the pandemic went to confession at least once a year. By comparison, only 47% of monthly attenders and 19% of those attending Mass less frequently went to confession at least annually.
- Seventy-one percent of those with high levels of group activity went to confession at least once a year. By comparison, only 44% of those with moderate levels of group activity and 22% of those with low levels of group activity went to confession at least annually.

Celebrations

Twenty-eight percent of respondents have participated in quinceañera. A quarter have celebrated Day of the Dead or Día de Muertos. Twenty-four percent have celebrated the feast day for Our Lady of Guadalupe. A majority, 57% have never celebrated any of these.

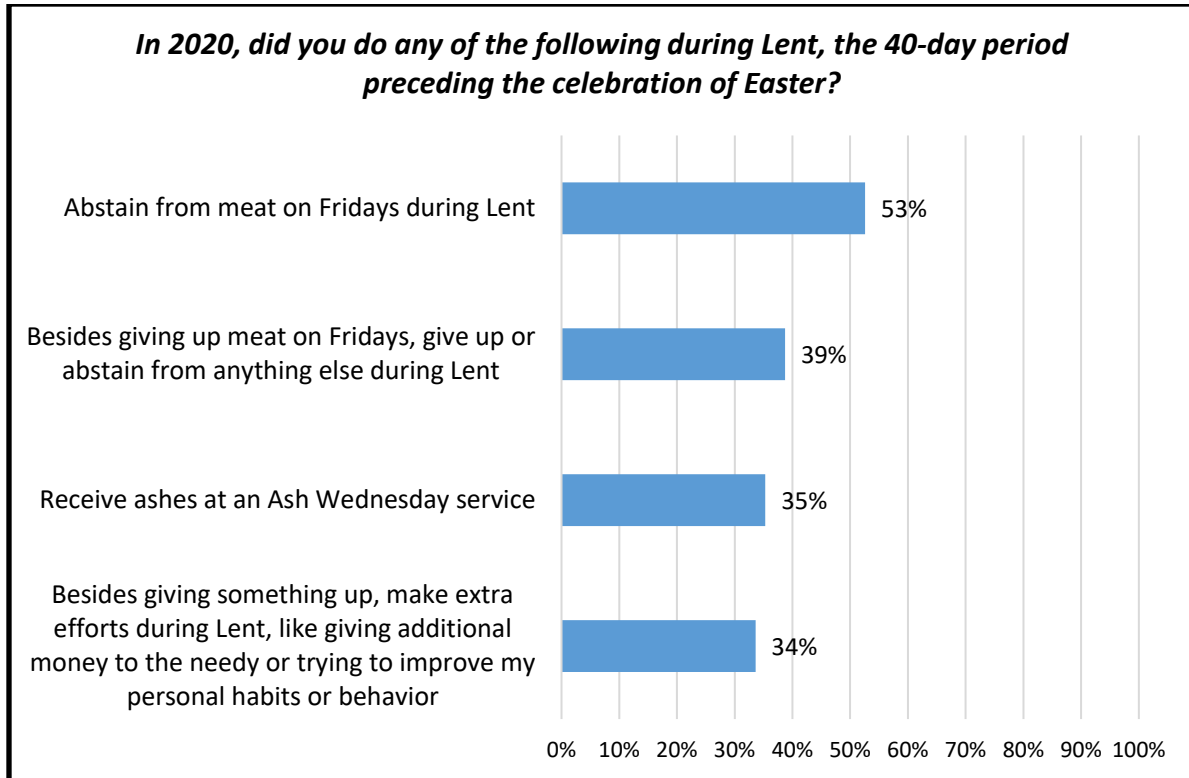


Sub-group Differences

- Those ages 30 to 35 are more likely than those ages 18 to 20 to say they have celebrated Day of the Dead or Día de Muertos (79% compared to 67%) and the feast day for Our Lady of Guadalupe (80% compared to 69%).
- Hispanics are more likely than non-Hispanics to have celebrated Day of the Dead or Día de Muertos (46% compared to 10%), the feast day for Our Lady of Guadalupe (42% compared to 10%), and quinceañera (56% compared to 6%).
- Females are more likely than males to have celebrated the feast day for Our Lady of Guadalupe (27% compared to 20%), and quinceañera (31% compared to 24%).
- Those with high levels of group activity are especially likely to have celebrated Day of the Dead or Día de Muertos (53%), the feast day for Our Lady of Guadalupe (43%), and quinceañera (45%).

Lent in 2020

Fifty-three percent of respondents abstained from meat on Fridays during Lent in 2020. About four in ten gave up or abstained from something else besides meat on Fridays. Thirty-five percent received ashes at an Ash Wednesday service. Thirty-four percent made extra efforts during Lent in 2020 to give additional money to the needy or tried to improve their personal habits and behavior.



Sub-group Differences

- Those ages 18 to 20 are more likely than those ages 30 to 35 to have received ashes on Ash Wednesday in 2020 (41% compared to 31%).
- Those ages 21 to 24 are more likely than those ages 30 to 35 to have abstained from meat on Fridays during lent in 2020 (61% compared to 48%).
- Younger respondents were more likely than older respondents to give up or abstain from something other than meat during lent in 2020 (46% of those 18 to 20 and 43% of those 21 to 24 compared to 34% of those 25 to 29 and 34% of those 30 to 35).
- Those who attended Mass weekly prior to the pandemic were especially likely to take part in Lenten practices. Sixty-nine percent received ashes, 83% abstained from meat on Fridays, 66% gave up something other than meat, and 60% gave additional money to the needy or tried to improve personal habits or behavior.

Volunteering and Community Work

Respondents are most likely to say they did the following at least once a month prior to the pandemic: helping neighbors (34%), volunteering at a school (20%), assisting a fundraiser with donations (20%), a community service project (18%), and visiting the sick or elderly (18%).

Respondents are slightly less likely to do the following monthly: assisting a fundraiser with volunteer work (17%), volunteering at their parish (17%), a service project outside of their community (15%), volunteering for community safety work (15%), volunteering at a foodbank or thrift store (15%), and volunteering in programs to help at-risk youth (15%).

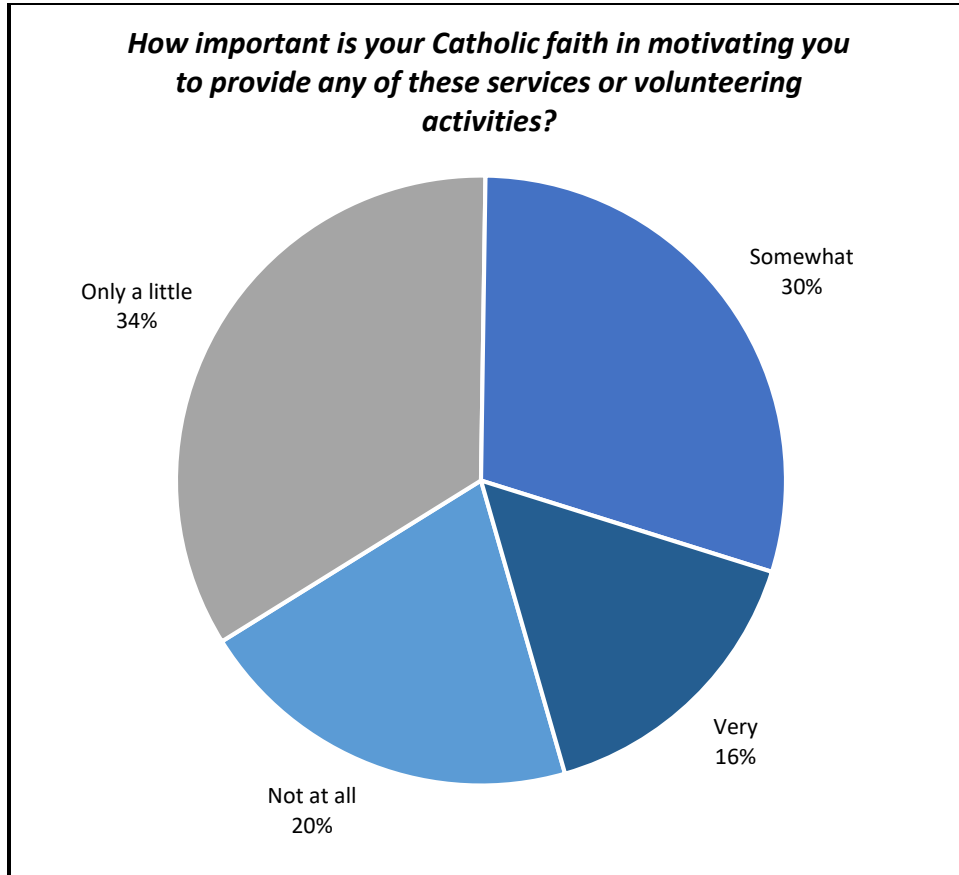
<i>Prior to the pandemic, how often would you say you worked with others on...?</i>				
	At least once a week	Less than weekly, at least once a month	A few times a year	Rarely or never
Helping neighbors	11%	23%	28%	39%
Visiting the sick or elderly	8	10	14	68
Volunteering at my parish	8	9	12	71
Assisting a fundraiser with donations	7	13	25	55
Volunteering at a school	7	13	17	64
A community service project	7	11	21	61
Volunteering at a foodbank or thrift store	7	8	14	71
Volunteering in programs to help at-risk youth	7	8	9	76
Assisting a fundraiser with volunteer work	6	11	19	64
A service project outside of my community	6	10	16	69
Volunteering for community safety work	6	9	11	74

Sub-group Differences

- Younger respondents are more likely than older to work on a community service project at least once a year (24% of those 18 to 20, 20% of those 21 to 24, 16% of those 25 to 29, and 14% of those 30 to 35).
- Younger respondents are more likely than older to volunteer at their parish at least once a year (21% of those 18 to 20, 19% of those 21 to 24, 15% of those 25 to 29, and 15% of those 30 to 35).
- Younger respondents are more likely than older to volunteer at a school at least once a year (28% of those 18 to 20, 20% of those 21 to 24, 21% of those 25 to 29, and 14% of those 30 to 35).
- Younger respondents are more likely than older to assist as fundraiser with donations at least once a year (24% of those 18 to 20, 22% of those 21 to 24, 20% of those 25 to 29, and 16% of those 30 to 35).

- Younger respondents are more likely than older to assist as fundraiser with volunteer work at least once a year (21% of those 18 to 20, 19% of those 21 to 24, 15% of those 25 to 29, and 13% of those 30 to 35).
- Those who attended Mass weekly prior to the pandemic are among the most likely to do all things listed. This is most evident with: helping neighbors (52%), volunteering at their parish (44%), and community service projects (41%).

Among those who indicated that they do community or volunteer work, 16% say that their Catholic faith is “very” important in motivating them to do these things. Thirty percent said their faith was “somewhat” important and 34% said this was “only a little” important in motivating them. One in five said their faith did “not at all” motivate them.



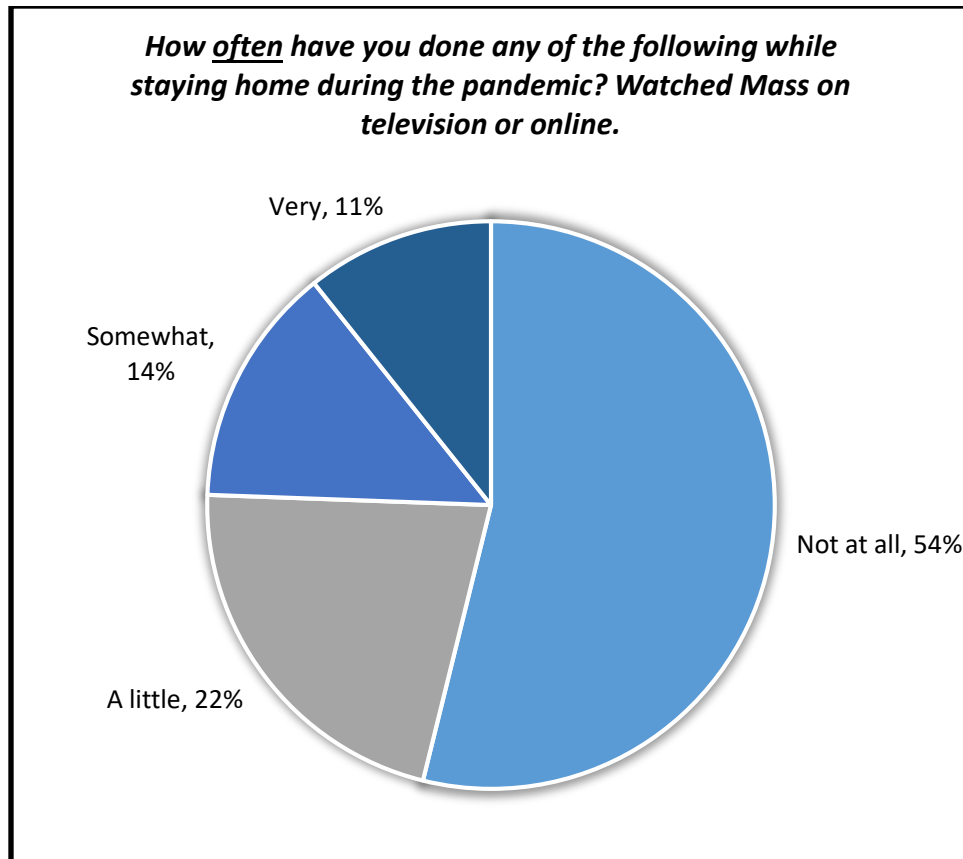
Sub-group Differences

- Weekly Mass attenders, prior to the pandemic, are more likely than those who attended less frequently to say their faith was “very” important in motivating them to take part in services and volunteering activities (43% compared to 16% of monthly attenders and 9% of those who attend Mass a few times a year or less often).

The Pandemic

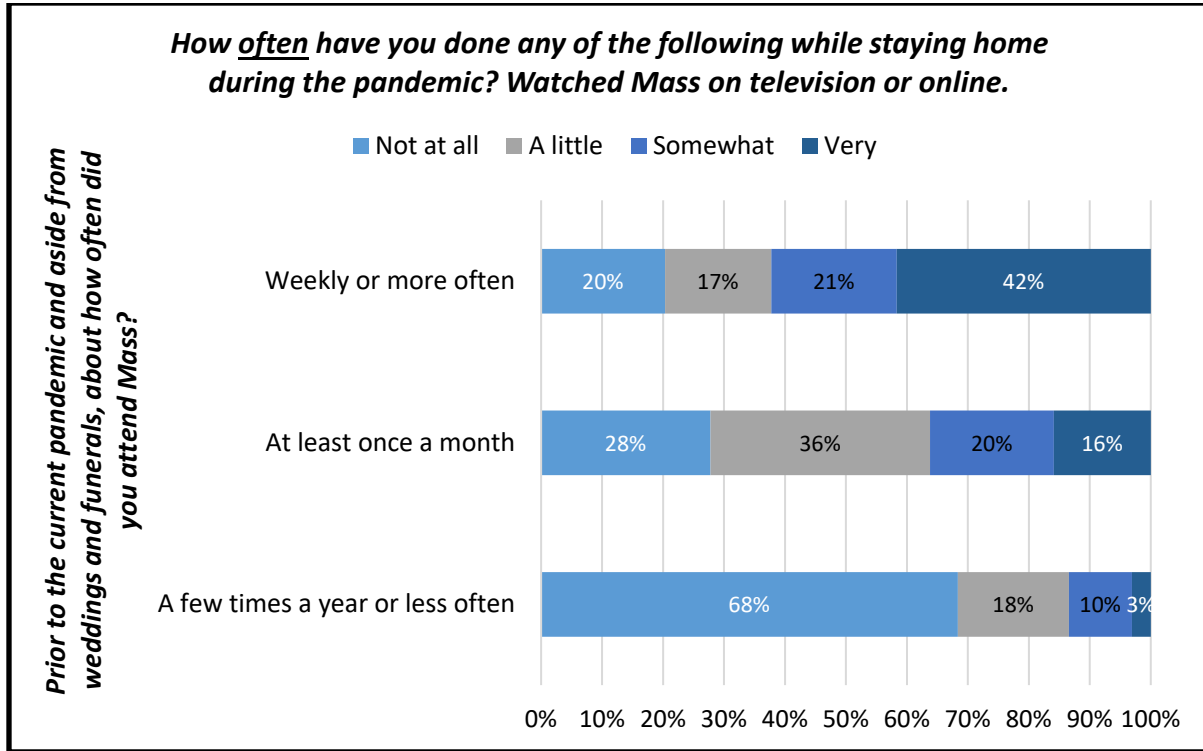
Mass Attendance

Eleven percent of Catholic young adults say they watch Mass on television or online “very” often while staying at home during the pandemic. Fourteen percent say they have watched “somewhat” often. Twenty-two percent have watched “a little” often. A majority, 54% have watched “not at all.”

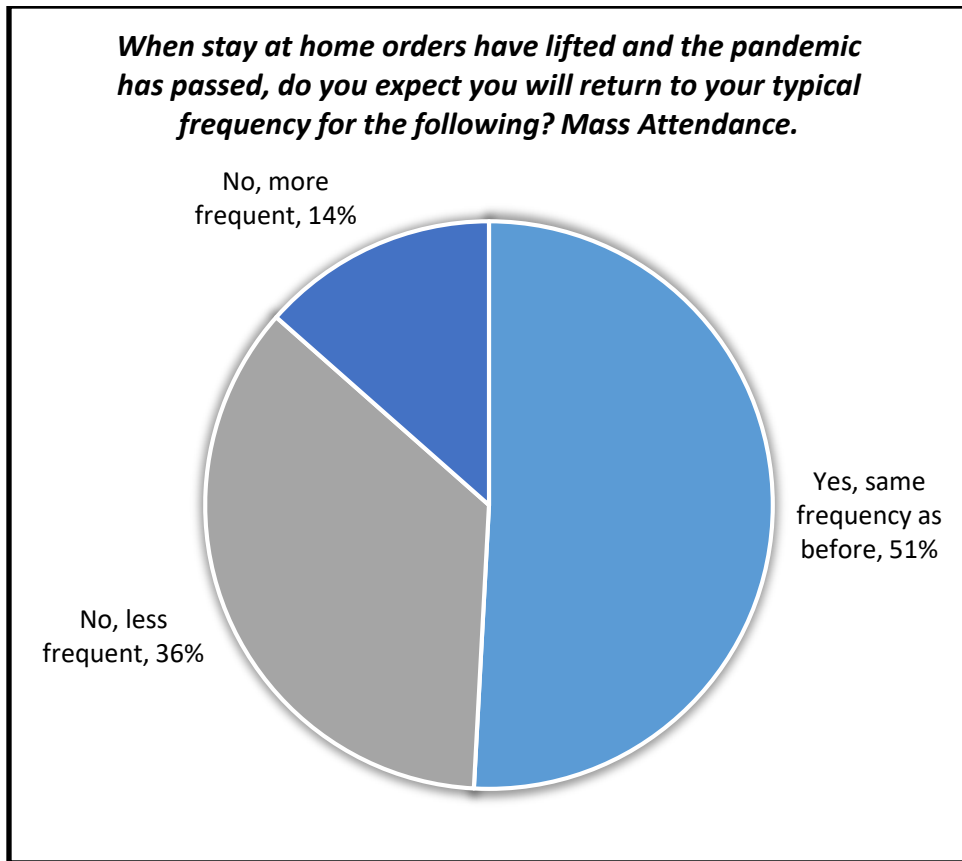


Sub-group Differences

Catholics who attended Mass weekly prior to the pandemic are more likely than those who attended less often to watch Mass on television or online now (42% of weekly attenders compared to 16% of monthly attenders, and 3% of those who attend a few times a year or less often).

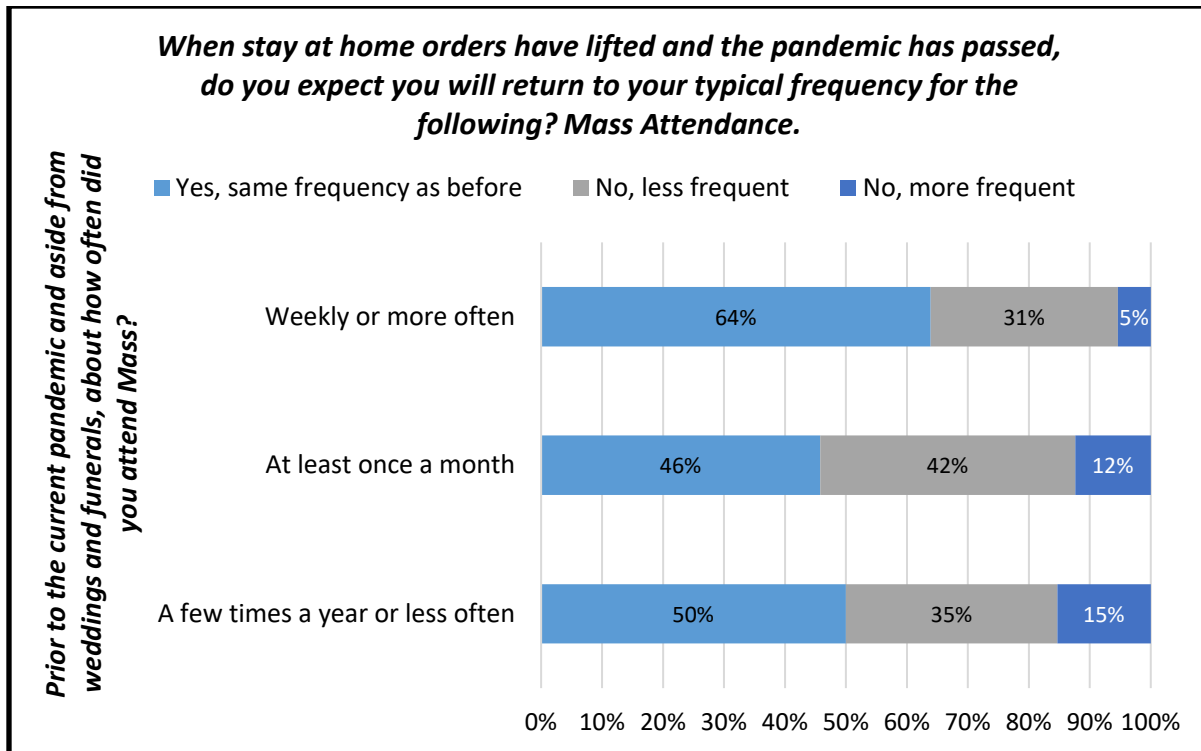


A majority of respondents say they will return to their typical frequency of Mass attendance once the pandemic has passed (51%). However, 36% say they will attend Mass less frequently when this happens compared to 14% who say they will attend more frequently.



Sub-group Differences

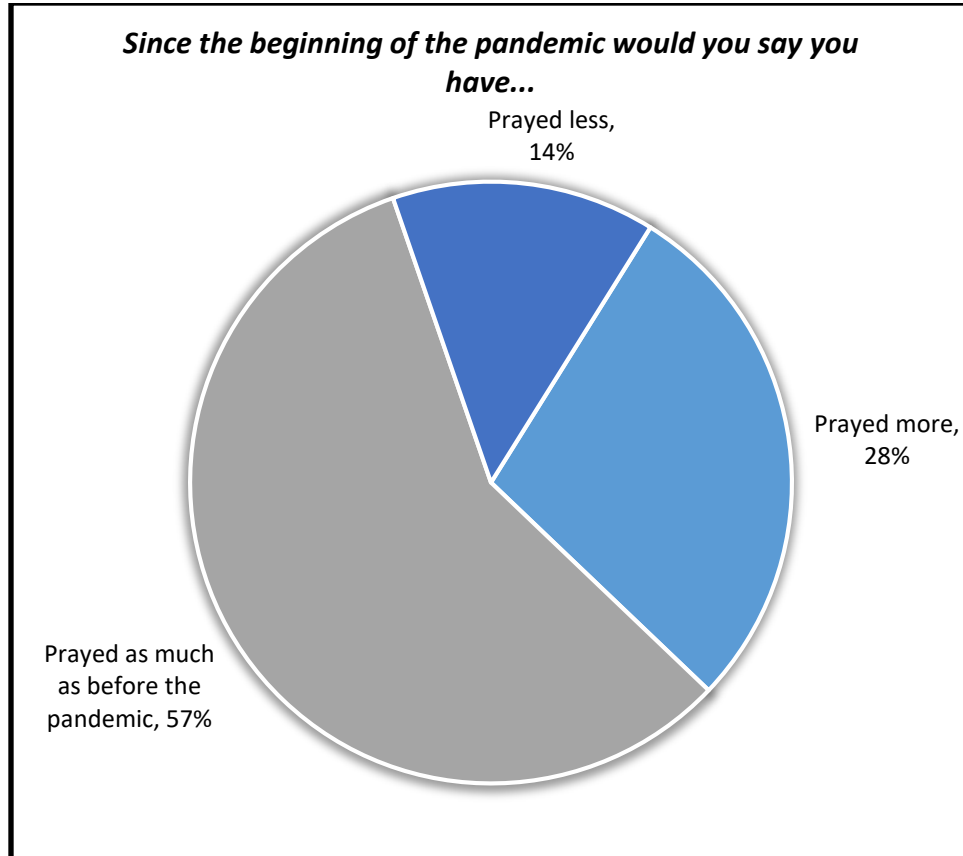
Across different frequencies of Mass attendance prior to the pandemic, many say they will attend Mass less frequently than they used to when the pandemic ends. Thirty-one percent of those who used to attend Mass weekly say they will attend less frequently in the future. Forty-two percent of those who used to attend monthly say this as do 35% of those who attended a few times a year or less often. Most say they will attend as frequently as they used to and smaller percentages say they will attend Mass more frequently when the pandemic ends.



- Hispanic respondents are more likely than non-Hispanic respondents to say they intend to attend Mass more frequently once the pandemic is over (18% compared to 10%). They are also more likely to say they plans to attend less frequently (40% compared to 33%). Thus, Hispanic respondents are more likely than non-Hispanic respondents to see a change in their Mass attendance frequency once the pandemic is over.

Prayer

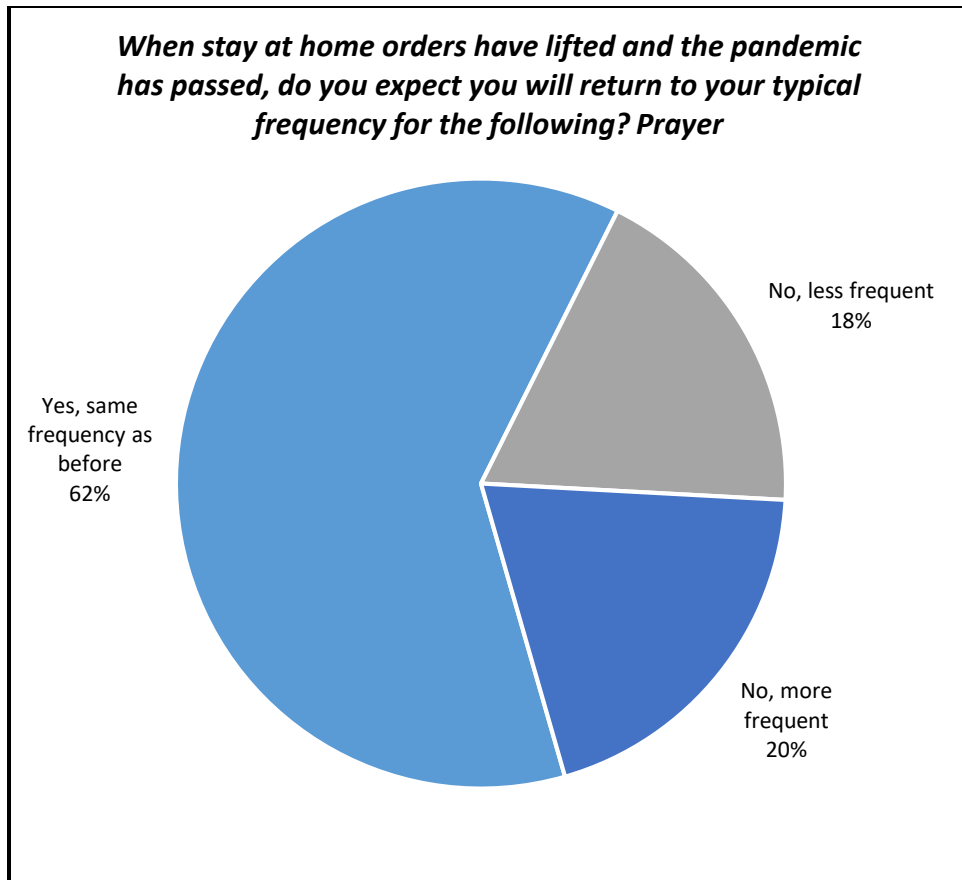
Most respondents have not changed how often they pray during the pandemic (57%). However, 28% say they have prayed more during the pandemic compared to 14% who say they have prayed less often.



Sub-group Differences

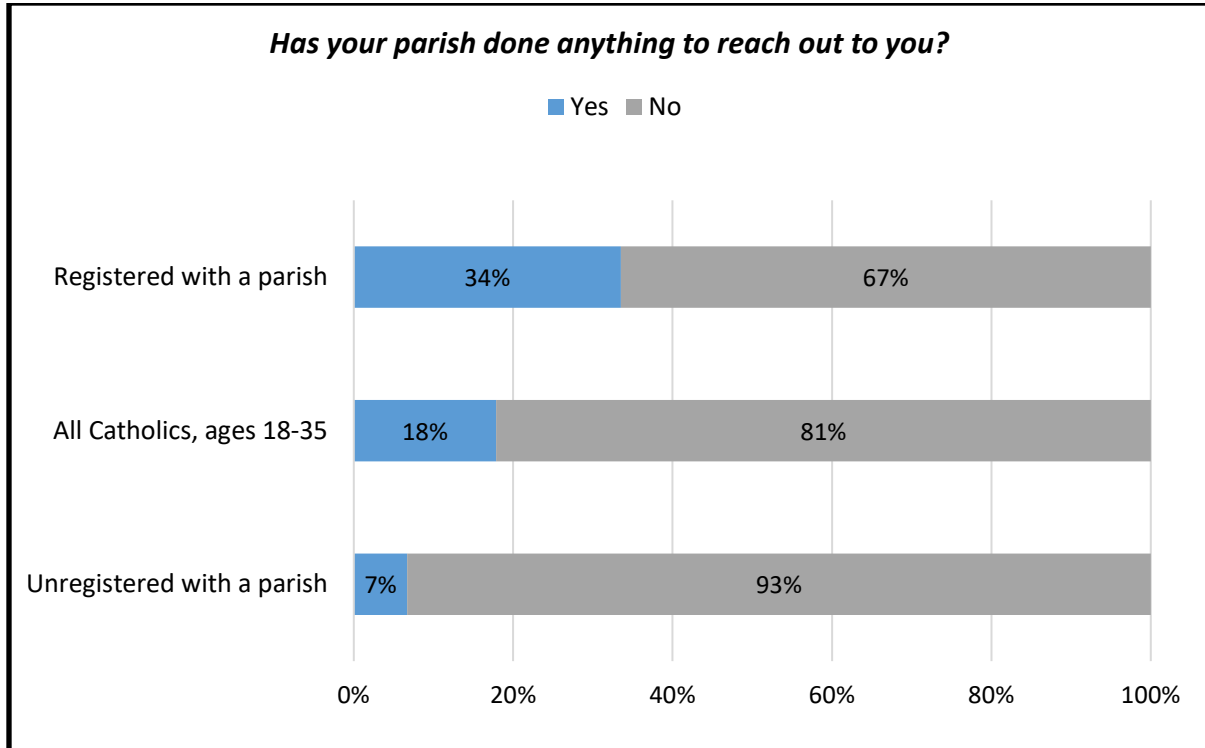
- Younger respondents are more likely than older respondents to say they have prayed less since the pandemic began (25% of those 18 to 20, 15% of those 21 to 24, 12% of those 25 to 29, and 8% of those 30 to 35).
- Female respondents are more likely than males to say they have prayed more since the pandemic (32% compared to 24%).
- Those who attended Mass weekly, prior to the pandemic, are more likely than those who attend a few times a year or less often to say they have prayed more since the pandemic (27% compared to 25%).

Sixty-two percent of respondents say they expect to pray with the same frequency that they do now when the pandemic ends. One in five expect to pray more frequently when the pandemic ends and 18% expect to pray less frequently when this happens.



Parish Outreach

Overall, 18% of respondents say their parish has reached out to them during the pandemic. Among those in households registered with a parish, 34% indicate that their parish has reached out to them. This is less frequent among those in households that are not registered with a parish (7%).



Sub-group Differences

- Those who attended Mass weekly or more often before the pandemic are much more likely than others to report their parish has reached out to them. Forty-eight percent of weekly attenders have reported this compared to 29% of monthly attenders and 9% of those who attended Mass a few times a year or less often.

Open Ended Follow-up Question

Those who indicated that their parish had reached out to them were asked an open-ended question, *What has your parish done?*

Thirty-one percent of those who were contacted and responded to the open-ended question said they were called, emailed, or texted. Examples of these comments include:

- *By calling*
- *Call and emailed*
- *Call and text me*
- *Call me or do this using the Zoom app*
- *Called my house*
- *Email and chats*
- *Email and text*

Additionally, 6% said they received something from their parish through mail. Examples of comments include:

- *Just sent me a letter in the mail*
- *Letters*
- *Mail*
- *Mailed letters*
- *Mailings, postcard, letter*
- *Sent a letter with a palm for palm Sunday*
- *Sent a letter with a prayer*
- *Sent flyers and Bibles*

Additionally, 3% said they were contacted or made aware of their parish outreach through social media. Examples of comments include:

- *Communicated through Facebook*
- *Communicated via letters and social media*
- *Facebook*
- *Facebook communication*
- *Facebook Instagram and Twitter*
- *Facebook posts*

Also, 3% of comments described generic contact but did not specify how this was done in terms of telephone, texting, email, or social media. Examples of comments include:

- *Contacted me*
- *Contacted us directly and guided us*
- *Frequent contact and checking in to see if we are OK*
- *I have been contacted so that we can keep the faith and attend activities in a virtual way*
- *Reach out and lend support*

Fourteen percent of comments described contact from their parish in a generic but positive manner. Examples of these comments include:

- *A lot*
- *Do good*
- *Everything*
- *Gave us hope that the pandemic will be over*
- *Given me new thoughts*
- *Good*
- *Good for checking on me*
- *Good services*
- *Great*

- *Great work*
- *Guided me*
- *He has done so many stuff that I can't explain*
- *Help to improve religion*
- *Helped me see the path*
- *I honestly love it*
- *It's a good thing*
- *Made me a better person*
- *Not to lose hope or faith*
- *Really nice*
- *Stay strong and positive*
- *Supported me during personal hardships*
- *Taught me to be a better person*

Eleven percent of comments described assistance or offers of assistance that their parish provided them. Examples of these comments include:

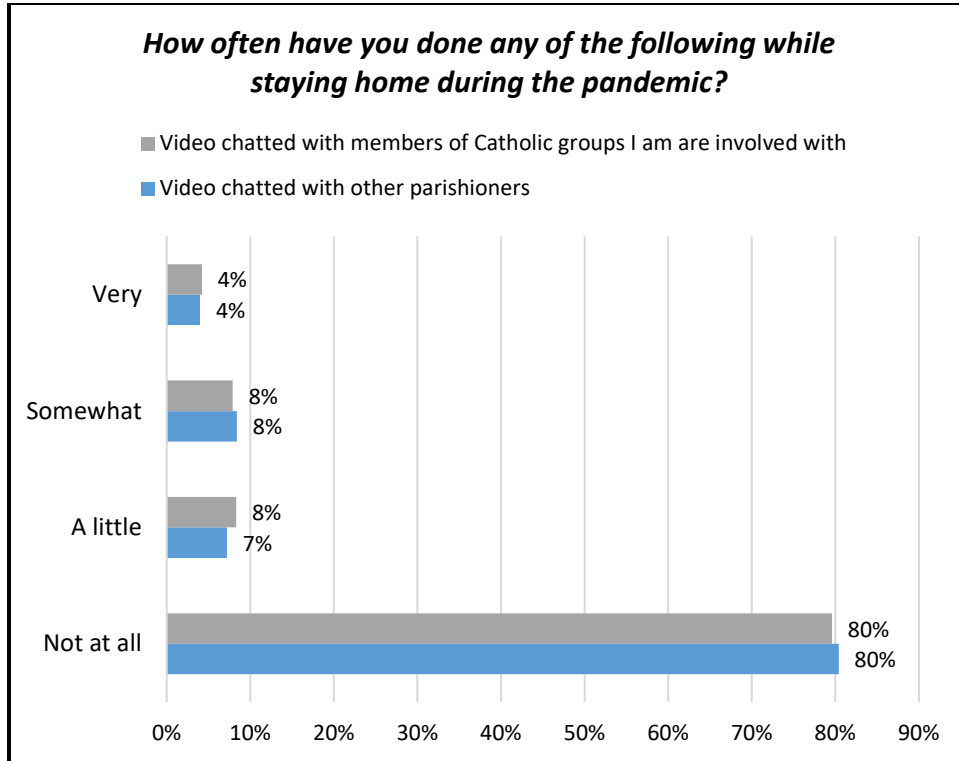
- *Donated food*
- *Donated masks, hand sanitizers*
- *Donated money*
- *Dropped off food and extra baby items*
- *Emailed me about food banks*
- *Emailed and mailed me asking if there is anything me or my family needed during the pandemic*
- *Food and financial help*
- *Gave out meals*
- *Gave us food*
- *Give guidelines to confront Covid-19*
- *Give me Bibles*
- *Giving us help money and food*
- *Help me with my personal items*
- *Help the community*
- *Help to clean my yard*
- *Made sure my family was doing good*
- *Provided help with a scholarship for my brother*
- *Reached out for spiritual counseling*
- *Supported me during personal hardships*
- *The parish has reached out to know if my family is safe and has offered to donate certain goods that might be scarce in the community due to the pandemic*

Ten percent of comments referred to their parish contacting them and letting them know about online Masses and helping people view these. Examples of these comments include:

- *Done online church sessions*
- *Done the Masses online through different platforms*
- *Done Zoom Masses*
- *The parish does online Mass*
- *Online Masses*
- *Streaming Mass*
- *Move Mass online*
- *Offered online Mass*
- *Posted online Mass ceremonies via Facebook*
- *Record Mass*
- *Sent links to mass livestream*

Video Chatting

Most respondents, eight in ten, have not video chatted with other Catholics at their parish or in groups they may be involved with during the pandemic. Four percent of respondents report that they have “very” often done this, 8% said they have done so “somewhat” often.

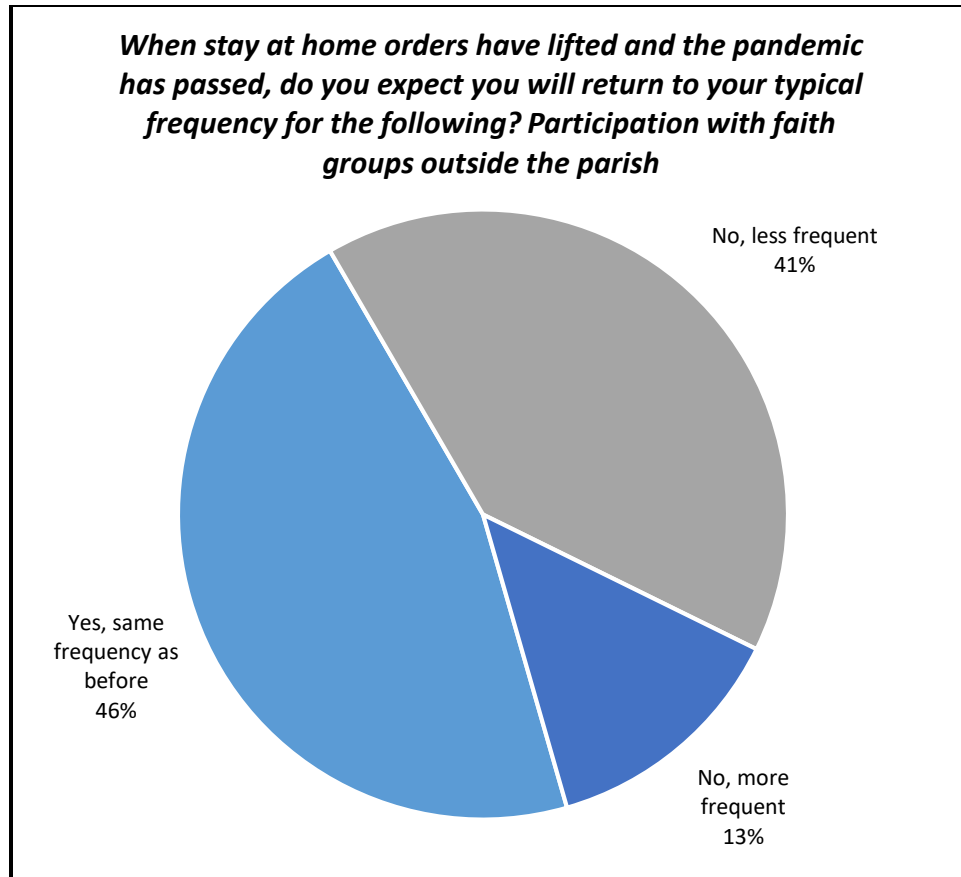


Sub-group Differences

- Weekly Mass attenders are among the most likely to say that they have “very” often video chatted during the pandemic with members of Catholic groups (13%) and with other parishioners (11%).
- Those with high group activity are the most likely group to have video “very” often video chatted during the pandemic with members of Catholic groups (21%) and with other parishioners (22%).

Expected Future Participation with Groups Outside of the Parish

In the post-pandemic future, 46% expect to participate with faith groups outside of their parish with the same frequency that they did prior to the pandemic. Forty-one percent expect to do this less frequently in the future compared to 13% who expect to do this more frequently.

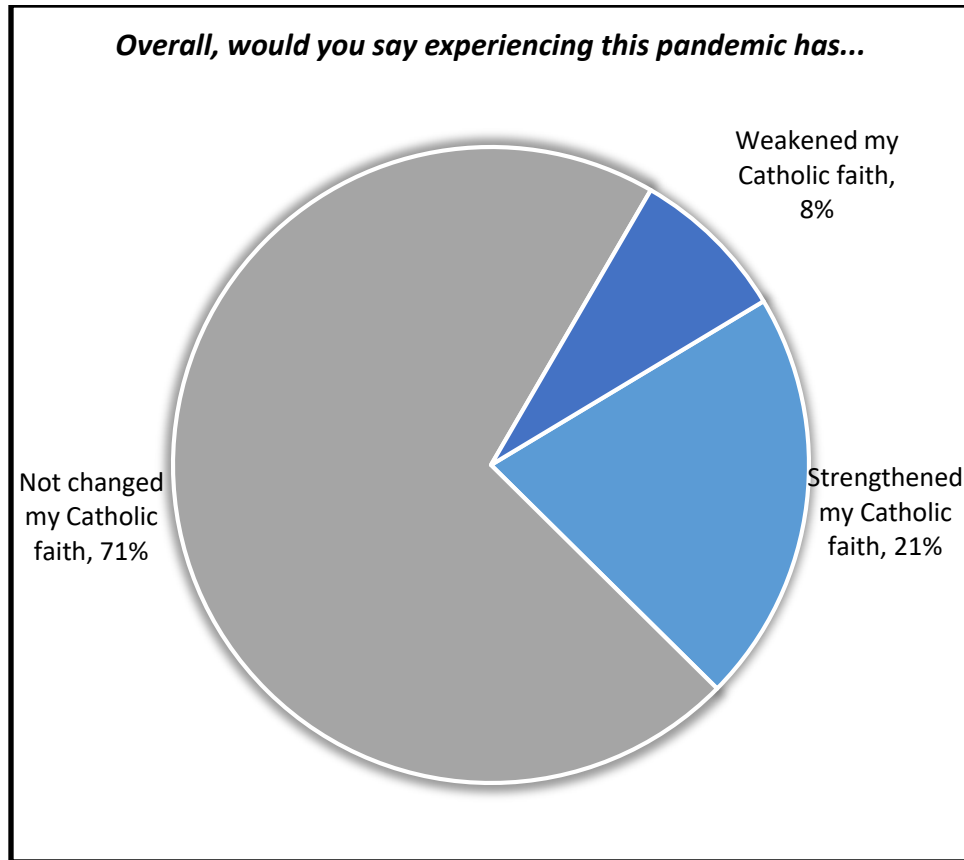


Sub-group Differences

- Older respondents are less likely than younger respondents to say they expect to be less frequent participants in faith groups outside their parish once the pandemic ends. Thirty-five percent in this age group responded as such compared to 48% of those ages 18 to 20.
- Hispanics are more likely than non-Hispanics to say they expect to be less frequent participants in faith groups outside their parish once the pandemic ends (47% compared to 36%).

Changes in Faith

Twenty-one percent say experiencing the pandemic has strengthened their faith compared to 8% who say their faith has been weakened. Seventy-one percent say experiencing the pandemic has not changed their faith.



Sub-group Differences

- Those ages 18 to 20 are more likely than those ages 30 to 35 to say the pandemic has weakened their faith (14% compared to 6%).
- The more often respondents attended Mass before the pandemic the more likely they are to say the pandemic has strengthened their faith (40% of weekly attenders, 30% of monthly attenders, and 15% of those who attended Mass a few times a year or less often).

Parish Giving

Thirty percent of respondents said that their household regularly contributed to the weekly offertory collection at their parish. The median amount given was \$10 per week. Thirteen percent indicate this has continued during the pandemic. The median amount given during the pandemic is \$20 per week.

Parish Giving		
	<i>Prior to the pandemic, did you or your household regularly contribute to the weekly offertory collection at your local parish?</i>	<i>Since stay at home orders were put in place, have you or your household regularly contributed to the weekly offertory collection at your local parish?</i>
Yes	30%	13%
Median amount given weekly	\$10	\$20
No	70	87

A majority, 53%, expect to contribute to their parish with the same frequency that they used to when the pandemic has ended. Thirty-four percent expect to give less frequently and 13% more frequently.

<i>When stay at home orders have lifted and the pandemic has passed, do you expect you will return to your typical frequency for the following? Giving to my parish offertory collection.</i>	
Yes, same frequency as before	53%
No, less frequent	34
No, more frequent	13

Sub-group Differences

- Three-quarters of those who attended Mass weekly prior to the pandemic gave to their parish collection regularly compared to half of monthly attenders and 14% of those who attended Mass a few times a year or less often.
- Former weekly Mass attenders are the most likely to be still giving to their parish regularly during the pandemic (38% compared to 20% of former monthly attenders and 6% of those who attended Mas less often).
- Younger respondents are more likely to be in households that gave regularly to their parish prior to the pandemic (35% of those ages 18 to 20 compared to 26% of those ages 30 to 35).
- Hispanic respondents are more likely than non-Hispanic respondents to say they will give to their parish less frequently once the pandemic has passed (39% compared to 31%).

Open-Ended Question: *Since stay at home orders were issued, how have you practiced your faith at home?*

Respondents were asked to describe in their own words how they had been practicing their faith at home during the pandemic lockdowns. A total of 2,002 respondents provided a response. We describe some of the most common response topics, with examples below. In general, there has been a mixture of prayer, Bible reading and or/study, and activities online or through television. Although some express that they are not practicing their faith during the pandemic.

Overwhelmingly the most common response topic was related to prayer. Forty-two percent of all comments included a reference to prayer (31% of comments to the open-end question about faith practices prior to the pandemic cited prayer). Sometimes this is individual prayer and other times include others. Examples include:

- *Praying at home*
- *Prayed with family*
- *Doing prayers*
- *Praying alone in my room*
- *Praying and talking about God*
- *Praying in the morning and night*
- *Praying more frequently*
- *Praying silently for all those who have been impacted by Covid-19*
- *Continued praying together and watching Mass together*
- *Continuous prayer*
- *Conversations and prayers with friends*
- *Daily family prayer*
- *Daily prayer before all meals*
- *Even more prayers than usual*
- *Grace before meals*
- *Still pray occasionally*
- *Personal prayer*
- *I like to have long talks with Jesus Christ, my favorite homie*
- *I pray with family*
- *I would pray at the alter I have at home*
- *I've prayed things will get better*
- *Lots of prayer*
- *Online prayer*
- *Pray the rosary every evening, as a family*
- *Praying, lighting candles*
- *Praying, listening to Christian music*

Other than prayer, the most common comments indicated the respondent was not doing anything to practice their faith at home during the pandemic. This was represented in 21% of comments (24% of comments to the open-end question about faith practices prior to the pandemic indicated respondents doing nothing to practice their faith outside of the parish). Examples include:

- *Didn't*
- *Do not*
- *Don't know*
- *For the most part I have not*
- *Have not*
- *I don't remember*
- *In no way*
- *N/A*
- *No*
- *No I have not and I feel terrible for not doing so.*
- *No really busy with other things*
- *None*
- *Not at all*
- *Nothing*

The third most common type of comment about practicing faith during the pandemic is related to either watching or participating in faith-related activities online. This represents 15% of comments. Examples include:

- *Abide app*
- *Attend Mass live stream*
- *Attended virtual Mass*
- *Attending Mass via TV*
- *Occasional online Mass*
- *Religious social media accounts*
- *Attending daily Mass via livestream, watching EWTN, adoration via livestream*
- *Our family has been attending Mass through Zoom*
- *I have watched Mass on YouTube*
- *I connect with my friends through Webex and we have our classes and Bible studies through there*
- *I have watched mass over a live on Facebook*
- *I log on and watch daily Masses participate and Holy Hours and healing Masses*
- *On Sundays I watch Mass either alone or with my grandparents*
- *I try to follow the church online*
- *I watch prayer online*
- *I've streamed a few Masses online and received Spiritual Communion*
- *Joined an online Bible study*
- *Online social groups*

- *Watched several Christian videos*

One in ten indicated a generic but positive description of how they were practicing their faith during the pandemic. Examples include:

- *Being a good Christian*
- *Being good people*
- *Being positive*
- *By doing the right thing*
- *By doing the same thing I've always done*
- *By practicing*
- *Cherishing moments with my family*
- *Good*
- *Great*
- *Hope*
- *I enjoy it*
- *I have faith*
- *I love*
- *I love being with my family*
- *I try every day*
- *I would practice everyday*
- *It has been the same*
- *It is OK*
- *It works well*
- *It's easy*
- *It's lit*
- *I've done what I can, when I can*
- *Just personally in my mind*
- *Living*
- *Love Church*
- *More self-care*
- *My family is my parish*
- *Of course I have*
- *Privately*
- *Stay focused*
- *Stay home*
- *Together with a family member*
- *We are doing OK*
- *Yes*

Nine percent indicated that they were doing something on a daily basis to practice their faith. These comments include activities that fit into other categories. However, they are viewed here collectively as those who say they specifically practice their faith every day. In fact, many of the comments are just “daily,” “every day,” or “every night.” Examples of these comments include:

- *By praying at night every day*
- *Daily*
- *Daily family prayer*
- *Daily prayer and Bible study*
- *Every day*
- *Every night, before I go to sleep, I say a prayer.*
- *I have practiced my faith by engaging in daily prayer, lighting religious candles for good faith, and making an effort to improve my behavior, so I can become a better person*
- *I have prayed every day and asked God to help everyone get through the pandemic*
- *I just do my best to treat people fair and pray daily*
- *I pray daily. Multiple times a day.*
- *I read the Bible and prayed everyday*
- *Daily Rosary*
- *I continue daily readings*

Seven percent of comments referenced the Bible. Most referred to reading the Bible or participating in Bible study groups. Examples of these comments include:

- *Bible*
- *Bible reading and analysis*
- *Bible studies*
- *Bible study video chats*
- *Bible study, reading scripture, devotionals*
- *By praying and reading the Bible*
- *By reading and studying the Bible as well as through prayer*
- *I have continued to read the Bible*
- *Trying to read my Bible more*
- *I've been doing bible study with my family*
- *Prayed and read the Bible a lot*
- *Prayed and read the Gospel*
- *Read Bible stories*
- *Scriptures*
- *Discussing the Bible*
- *Reading the Holy Book*

Fewer than 1% of respondents reported attending Mass, sacramental ceremonies, or a faith group in-person. Examples include:

- *Church*
- *When we do have gatherings we practice social distancing and everyone wears a mask*

- *Mass at Church*
- *Got my sons Christened*
- *Baptized my niece. Sponsored my nieces into the faith.*
- *Group church “done at home.”*

The remaining comments did not fit within the previously discussed categories and were not similar or numerous enough to be significant or representative of what respondents said. Examples of these include:

- *5 times*
- *At home in my backyard*
- *Awesome*
- *Between me and God*
- *Choir by myself*
- *Crazy timing*
- *I think so*
- *No comment*
- *Parents*
- *We celebrated holidays at the home, weren’t able to extend the invitation to family due to Covid*

Part II. National Survey of Small Christian Communities

For the purpose of this study, Small Christian Communities (SCCs or groups) are defined as groups that have at least some Catholic members, are located in the United States, and are not communities of men or women religious. “They are called faith communities, faith groups, faith sharing groups, base communities, basic Christian communities, basic ecclesial communities, house churches, small church communities, small Christian communities, intentional Eucharistic communities, charismatic communities, and so forth. Reverend Joseph Healey, a Maryknoll missionary in Africa, has collected over a thousand ways of labeling these groups.”⁵ Despite being called Small Christian Communities those groups can have a large number of members.⁶

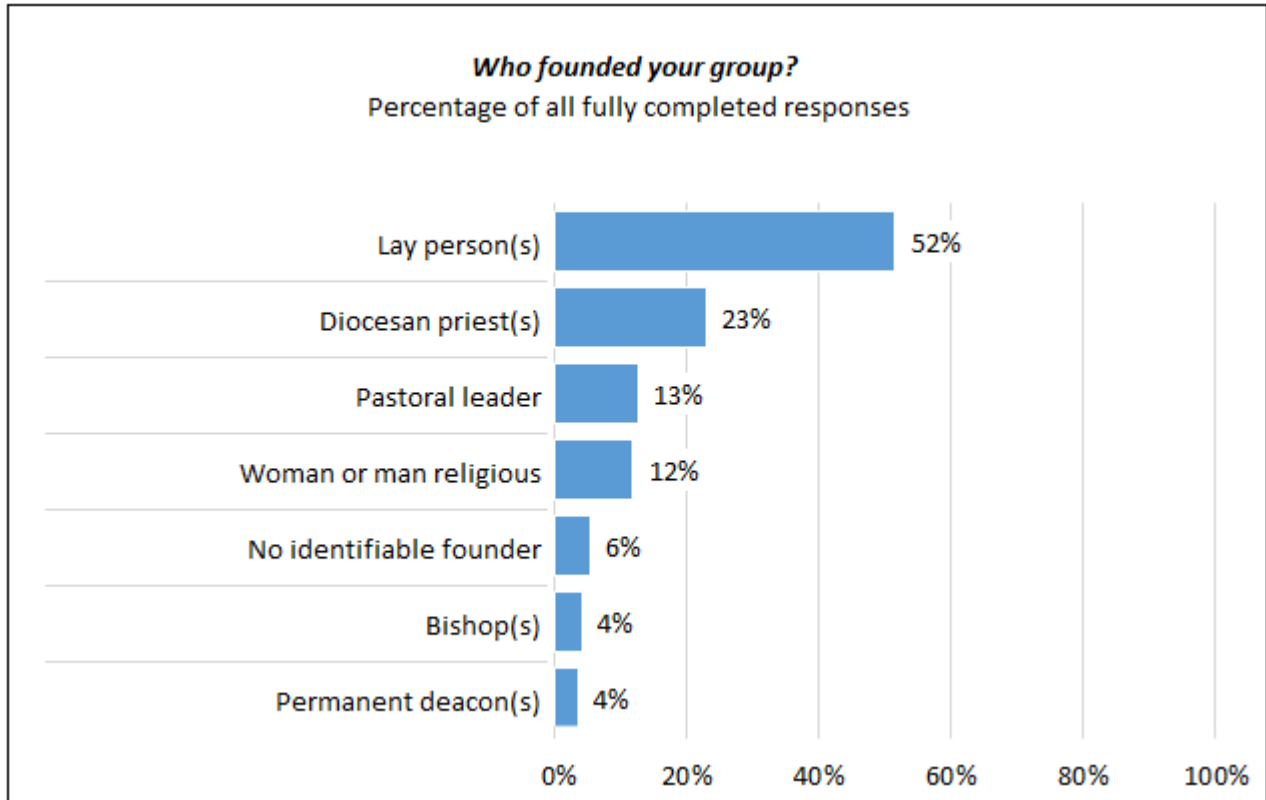
The analysis presented below includes comparisons between two types of Small Christian Communities and all other groups: Hispanic/Latino groups and under 35 groups. These groups are defined as follows:

- Hispanic/Latino groups (for the sake of brevity referred to as Hispanic groups) are defined as groups located in the United States, that have at least some Catholic members, that self-identified as Hispanic/Latino groups and/or report half of their members or more being Hispanic/Latino. Overall, 9% of Small Christian Communities participating in this survey are classified as Hispanic groups based on this definition.
- Under 35 groups are defined as groups located in the United States, that have at least some Catholic members, that self-identified as youth group, high school, or college group and/or report half of their members or more being under 35 years old. Overall, 22% of Small Christian Communities participating in this survey are classified as under 35 groups based on this definition.

⁵ Lee, Bernard J., William V. D’Antonio, and Virgilio P. Elizondo. 2000. *The Catholic Experience of Small Christian Communities*. New York: Paulist Press.

⁶ It was up to the study participants to define what small means. Some groups may have a large number of members but still are able to offer small community experience. For example, some groups have large group presentations followed up by small group discussion.

Foundation



Among those who completed the entire survey:

- 52% of groups were founded by lay person(s).
- 23% of groups were founded by diocesan priest(s).
- 13% of groups were founded by pastoral leader(s). Significantly, under 35 groups are 7 percentage points (15% - 8%) less likely than other groups to be founded by pastoral leader(s).⁷
- 12% of groups were founded by a woman or man religious.
- 6% (29 respondents) of groups do not have an identifiable founder. Significantly, under 35 groups are 5 percentage points (9% - 4%) more likely than other groups to report no identifiable founder.⁸
- 4% (23 respondents) of groups were founded by bishop(s). Significantly, Hispanic groups are 12 percentage points (15% - 3%) more likely than other groups to be founded by a bishop.⁹

⁷ Note that the second subgroup includes only ten respondents.

⁸ Note that the first subgroup includes only 12 respondents and the second subgroup includes only 17 respondents.

⁹ Note that the first subgroup includes only eight respondents and the second subgroup includes only 15 respondents.

- 4% (20 respondents) of groups were founded by permanent deacon(s). Significantly, under 35 groups are 4 percentage points (5% - 1%) less likely than other groups to be founded by permanent deacon(s).¹⁰

<i>What year was your local group established?</i>		
All responses		
Mean [years]	Median [years]	Range [years]
2000	2010	1812 - 2020

As of 2020 (when this report was prepared), an average age of local groups participating in the survey was 20 years (with half being founded between 1812 and 2010 and the other half between 2010 and 2020).

Responses from under 35 groups and Hispanic groups are not significantly different from other groups.

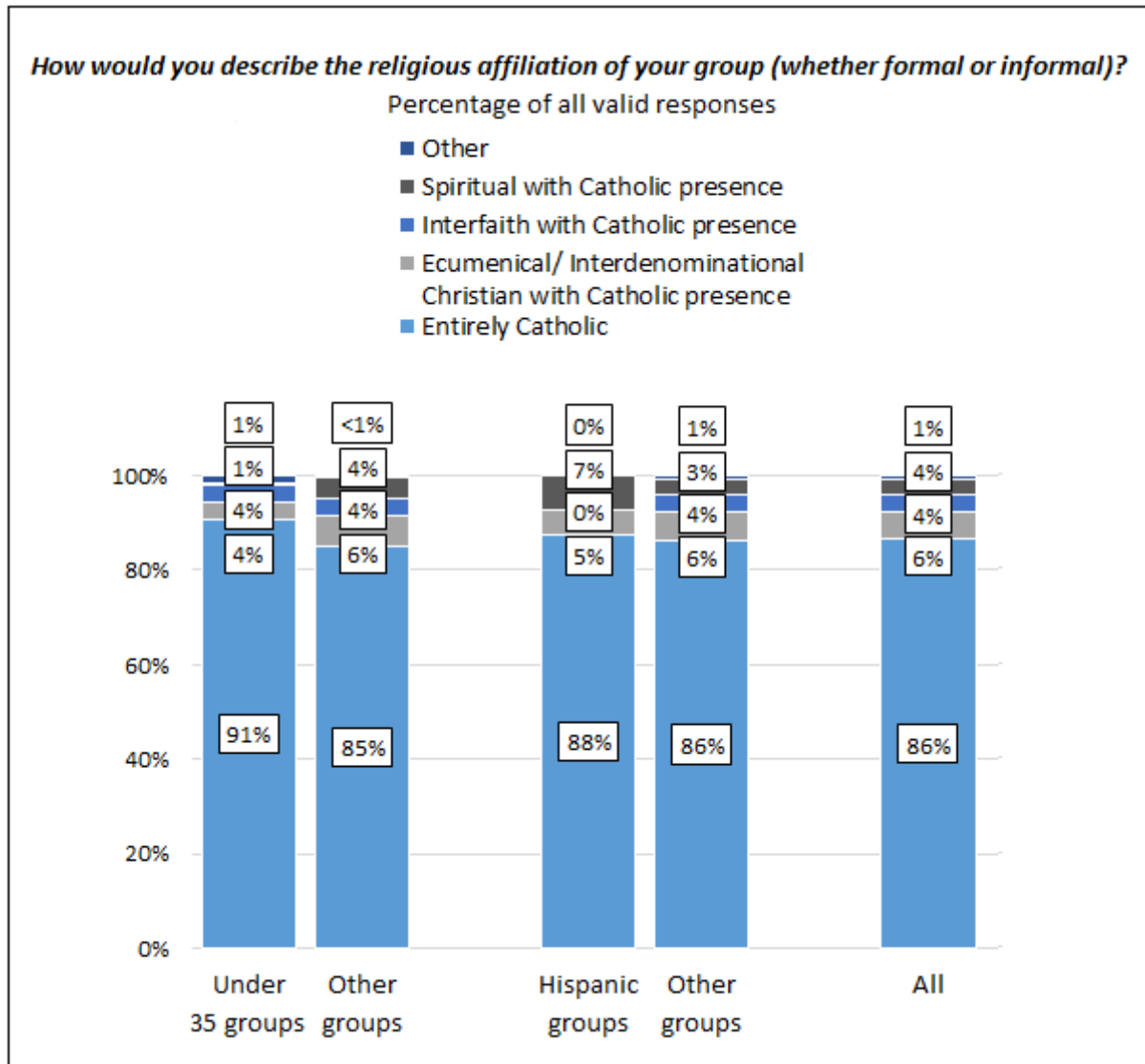
<i>How many years have you been a member of your group?</i>		
All responses		
Mean [years]	Median [years]	Range¹¹ [years]
8.67	5	0.5 - 77

Respondents who answered this question reported that they have been members of their group, on average, for nine years (with half of the respondents having been involved for 0.5 to five years and the other half for five to 77 years). Significantly, respondents in under 35 groups have been members of their groups for four years (10 - 6) less, on average, than respondents in other groups.

¹⁰ Note that the first subgroup includes only 19 respondents and the second subgroup includes only one respondent.

¹¹ If respondents have been members of their group for less than a year, they were asked to enter 0.5 years as a response to this question.

Religious Affiliation

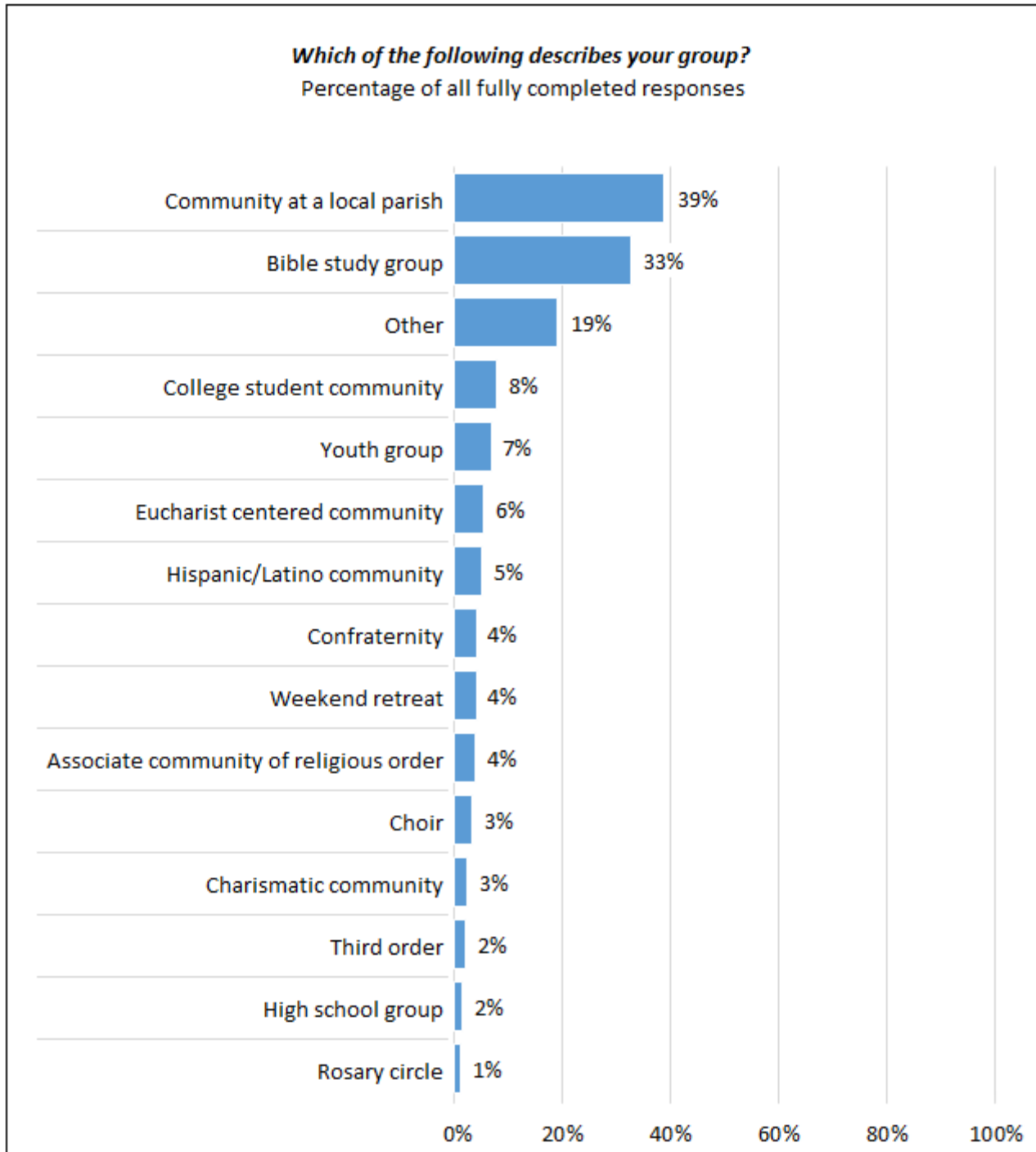


When asked how they would describe the religious affiliation of their group (whether formal or informal), nine in ten (86%) respondents reported that their groups are entirely Catholic (no significant presence from other denominations or faiths) as compared to 6% who described their groups as ecumenical/ interdenominational Christian with Catholic presence, 4% (22 groups) who described their groups as spiritual with Catholic presence, 4% (22 groups) who described their groups as interfaith with Catholic presence, and 1% (4 groups) who described their groups as having some other religious affiliation (but still including Catholic presence).

Significantly, under 35 groups are 4 percentage points (4% - 1%) less likely than other groups to describe their group as spiritual with Catholic presence.¹²

¹² Note that the first subgroup includes only 21 respondents and the second subgroup includes only one respondent.

Taxonomy



Among those groups who completed the entire survey:

- 39% are communities based at a local parish. Significantly, under 35 groups are 17 percentage points (43% - 26%) less likely than other groups to be based at a local parish.
- 33% are Bible study groups.

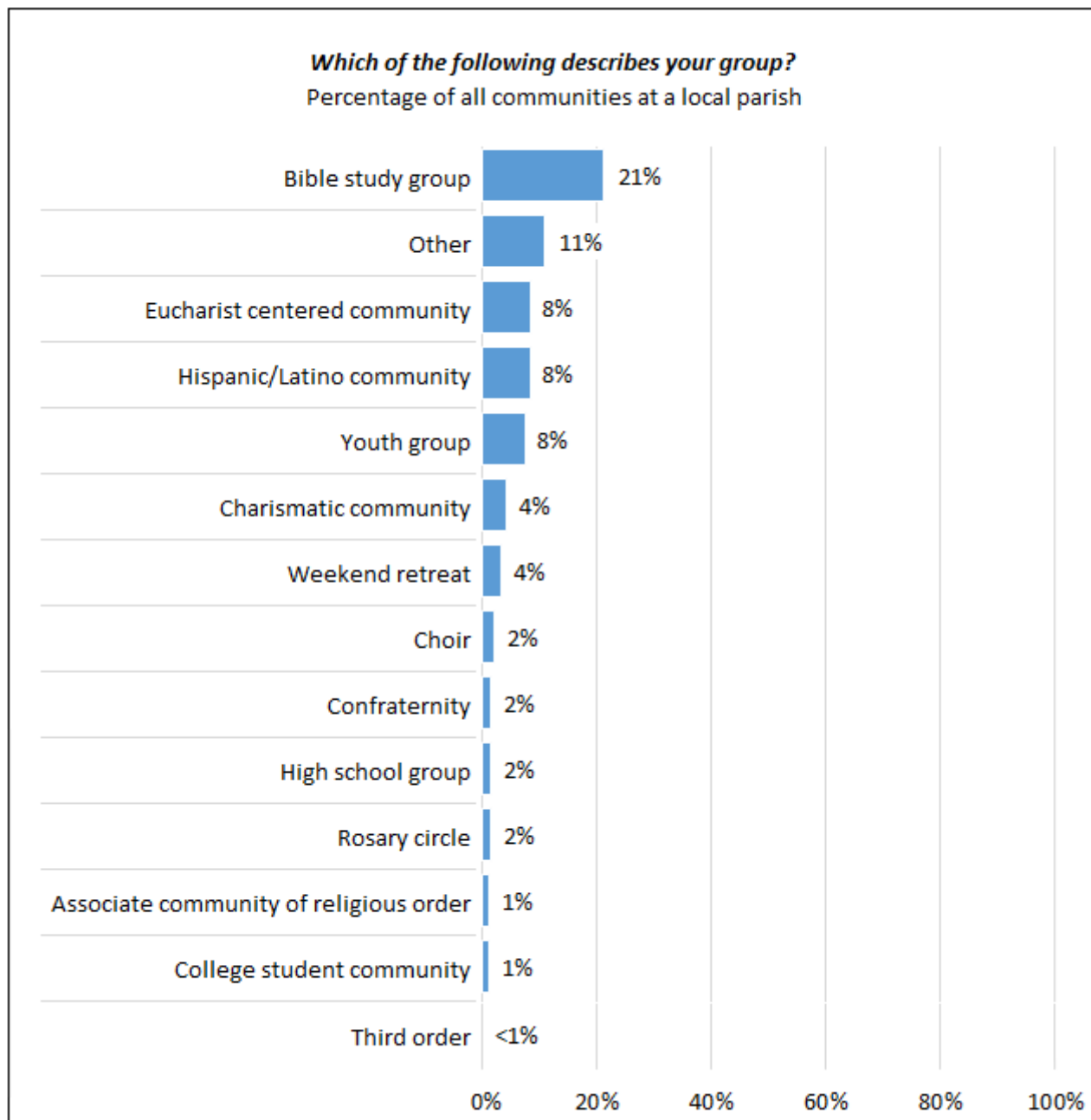
- 19% can be described in some other way not listed here (e.g., book club, catechism study group, faith sharing group, Lectio Divina group, private/public association of the faithful, parish/diocesan coworker group, and service group).
- 8% are college student communities (e.g., Newman house).
- 7% are youth groups.
- 6% (29 respondents) are Eucharist centered communities. Significantly, under 35 groups are 8 percentage points (11% - 4%) more likely than other groups to take the form of Eucharist centered community.¹³
- 5% (27 respondents) are Hispanic/Latino communities.
- 4% (22 respondents) are confraternities.
- 4% (22 respondents) are weekend retreats (e.g., Cursillo or its derivatives, like Teens Encounter Christ). Significantly, Hispanic groups are eight percentage points (12% - 3%) more likely than other groups to take the form of weekend retreats.¹⁴
- 4% (21 respondents) are associate communities of religious orders. Significantly, Hispanic groups are ten percentage points (13% - 3%) more likely than other groups to be described this way.¹⁵
- 3% (18 respondents) are choirs.
- 3% (14 respondents) are charismatic communities. Significantly, Hispanic groups are 12 percentage points (13% - 2%) more likely than other groups to be described this way.¹⁶
- 2% (12 respondents) are third orders.
- 2% (9 respondents) are high school groups.
- 1% (7 respondents) are rosary circles.

¹³ Note that the first subgroup includes only 15 respondents and the second subgroup includes only 14 respondents.

¹⁴ Note that the first subgroup includes only six respondents and the second subgroup includes 16 respondents.

¹⁵ Note that the first subgroup includes only seven respondents and the second subgroup includes only 14 respondents.

¹⁶ Note that both subgroups include only seven respondents.



Among communities at a local parish:

- 21% are Bible study groups. Significantly:
 - Under 35 parish communities are 24 percentage points (42% - 18%) more likely than other groups to be Bible study groups.¹⁷
 - Hispanic parish communities are 16 percentage points (36% - 19%) more likely than non-Hispanic groups to be Bible study groups.¹⁸

¹⁷ Note that the first subgroup includes only 15 respondents.

¹⁸ Note that the first subgroup includes only ten respondents.

- 11% (25 respondents) fall under some other category not included in the chart. Significantly, under 35 parish communities are 13 percentage points (22% - 9%) more likely than other communities to be in this “other” category.¹⁹
- 8% (19 respondents) are Eucharist centered communities. Significantly:
 - Under 35 parish communities are 26 percentage points (31% - 4%) more likely than other communities to be Eucharist centered communities.²⁰
 - Hispanic parish communities are 15 percentage points (21% - 7%) more likely than non-Hispanic communities to be Eucharist centered communities.²¹
- 8% (19 respondents) are Hispanic/Latino communities.
- 8% (17 respondents) are youth groups. Significantly, Hispanic parish communities are 16 percentage points (21% - 6%) more likely than non-Hispanic groups to be youth groups.²²
- 4% (ten respondents) are charismatic communities. Significantly:
 - Under 35 parish communities are eight percentage points (11% - 3%) more likely than other communities to be charismatic communities.²³
 - Hispanic parish communities are 15 percentage points (18% - 3%) more likely than non-Hispanic communities to be charismatic community.²⁴
- 4% (eight respondents) have a format of weekend retreats (e.g., Cursillo or its derivatives, like Teens Encounter Christ). Significantly:
 - Under 35 parish communities are 9 percentage points (11% - 2%) more likely than other communities to be weekend retreats.²⁵
 - Hispanic parish communities are 16 percentage points (18% - 2%) more likely than non-Hispanic communities to be weekend retreats.²⁶
- 2% (five respondents) are choirs.

¹⁹ Note that the first subgroup includes only eight respondents and the second subgroup includes only 17 respondents.

²⁰ Note that the first subgroup includes only 11 respondents and the second subgroup includes only eight respondents.

²¹ Note that the first subgroup includes only six respondents and the second subgroup includes only 13 respondents.

²² Note that the first subgroup includes only six respondents and the second subgroup includes only 11 respondents.

²³ Note that the first subgroup includes only four respondents and the second subgroup includes only six respondents.

²⁴ Note that both subgroups include only five respondents.

²⁵ Note that both subgroups include only four respondents.

²⁶ Note that the first subgroup includes only five respondents and the second subgroup includes only three respondents.

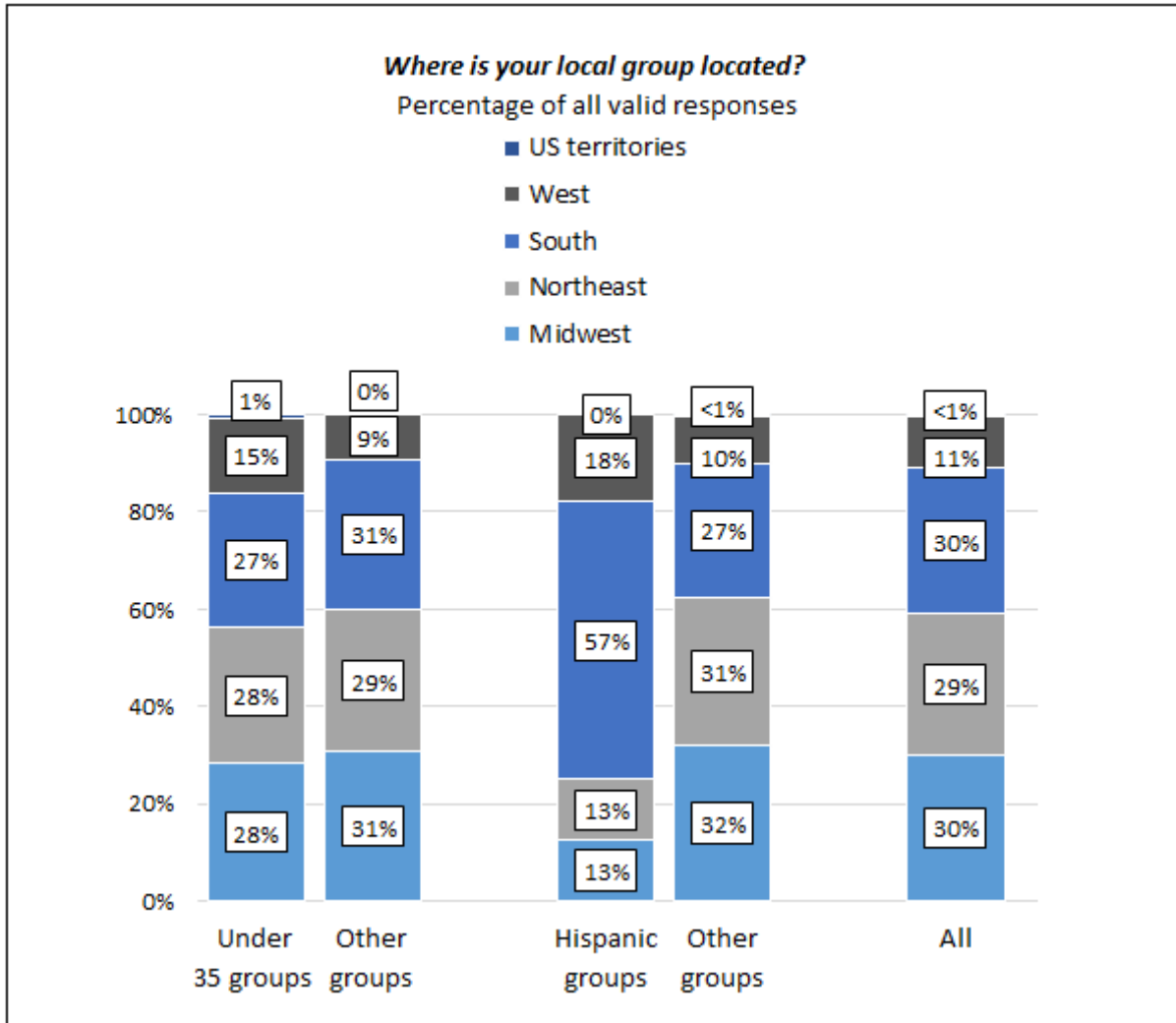
- 2% (four respondents) are confraternities. Significantly, Hispanic parish communities are six percentage points (7% - 1%) more likely than non-Hispanic communities to be confraternities.²⁷
- 2% (four respondents) are high school groups.
- 2% (four respondents) are rosary circles. Significantly:
 - Under 35 parish communities are eight percentage points (8% - 1%) more likely than other communities to be rosary circles.²⁸
 - Hispanic parish communities are ten percentage points (11% - 1%) more likely than non-Hispanic communities to be rosary circles.²⁹
- 1% (three respondents) are associate communities of religious orders.
- 1% (three respondents) are college student communities (e.g., Newman house).
- Less than 1% (zero respondents in our sample) are third orders.

²⁷ Note that both subgroups include only two respondents.

²⁸ Note that the first subgroup includes only three respondents and the second subgroup includes only one respondents.

²⁹ Note that the first subgroup includes only three respondents and the second subgroup includes only one respondents.

Location



When asked where their local group is located:

- 30% reported being located in the Midwest (per U.S. Census Bureau defined as: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin).
- 30% reported being located in the South (i.e., Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia).
- 29% reported being located in the Northeast (i.e., Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont).
- 11% reported being located in the West (i.e., Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming).

- Less than 1% (1 respondent) reported being located in the U.S. territories (i.e., American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, or the U.S. Virgin Islands).

Significantly:

- Other groups are 19 percentage points (32% - 13%) more likely than Hispanic groups to be located in the Midwest.³⁰
- Other groups are 18 percentage points (31% - 13%) more likely than Hispanic groups to be located in the Northeast.³¹
- Hispanic groups are 30 percentage points (57% - 28%) more likely than other groups to be located in the South.
- Under 35 groups are 6 percentage points (15% - 9%) more likely than other groups to be located in the West.³²

Average number of group members by region					
All valid responses					
	Under 35 groups	Other groups	Hispanic groups	Non-Hispanic groups	All
	 [#]	 [#]	 [#]	 [#]	 [#]
West	35	37	36	36	36
South	31	19	30	20	22
Northeast	28	19	26	21	21
Midwest	21	17	33	17	18

While the survey identified disproportionately low number of groups in the West (11% of respondents are located in the West), the size of those groups is much larger (on average, 36 members) than in other regions (22 in the South, 21 in the Northeast, and 18 in the West).

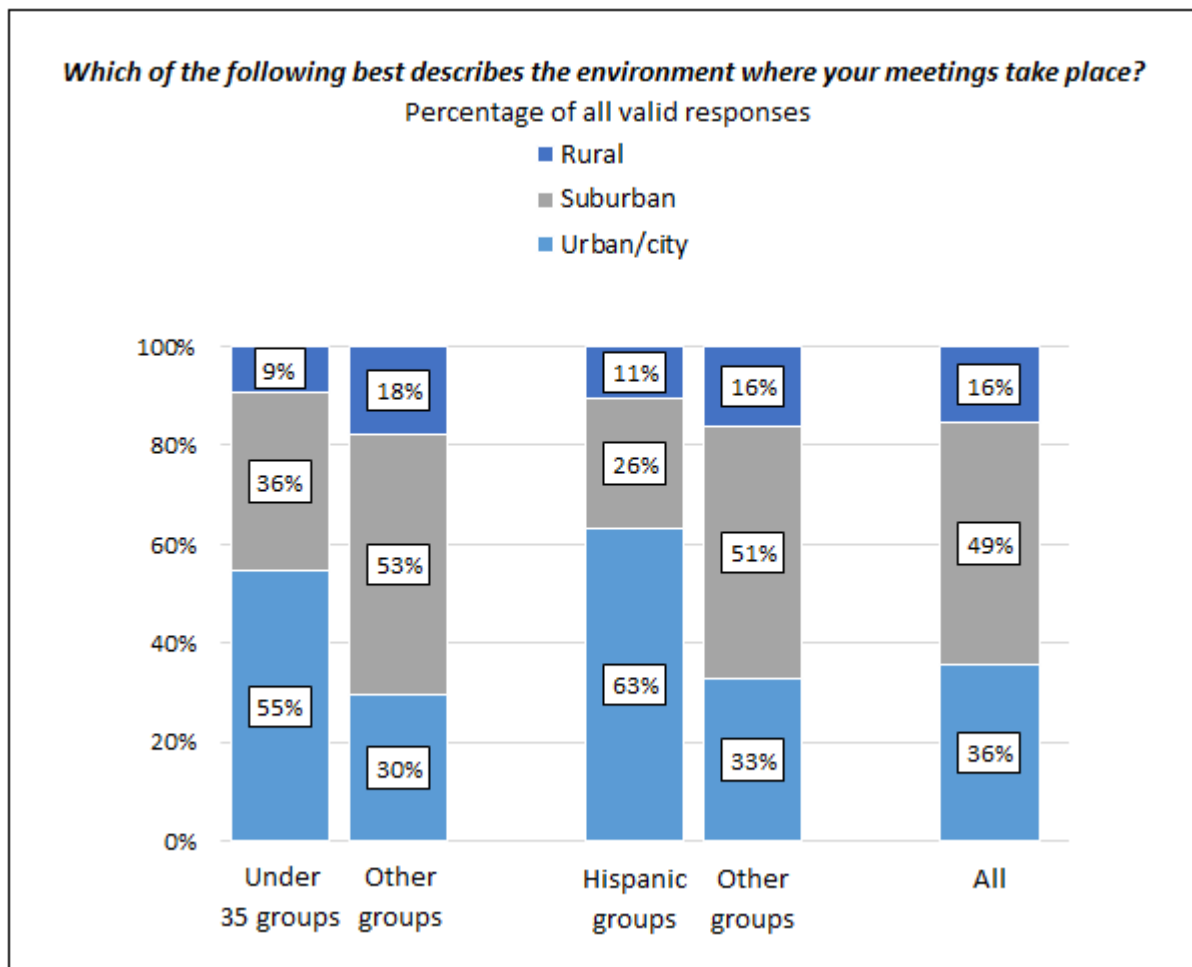
In terms of the distribution people involved in Small Christian Communities (as opposed to the distribution of groups), approximately 17% are in the West as compared to 30% in the South, 28% in the Northeast, and 25% in the Midwest.

Notably, validity of those findings is limited by the survey methodology which employed snowball sampling.

³⁰ Note that the second subgroup includes only seven respondents.

³¹ Note that the second subgroup includes only seven respondents.

³² Note that the first subgroup includes only 22 respondents.



When asked about the type of environment where their meetings take place, two in five respondents (36%) reported operating in the urban/city environment as compared to 49% who meet in suburban environment, and 16% who operate in rural environment. Significantly:

- Under 35 groups are 25 percentage points (55% - 30%) more likely than other groups to be located in urban/city environment, 16 percentage points (53% - 36%) less likely to be located in the suburbs, and 9 percentage points (18% - 9%) less likely to be in a rural area.³³
- Hispanic groups are 30 percentage points (63% - 33%) more likely than other groups to be located in the urban/city environment and 25 percentage points (51% - 26%) less likely to be located in the suburban environment.³⁴

In terms of other significant differences, meetings of groups located in urban/city areas are attended by 9 people (26 - 17) more, on average, than meetings of groups located in rural areas. Furthermore, groups are:

³³ Note that the second subgroup in the last comparison includes only 13 respondents.

³⁴ Note that the second subgroup includes only 15 respondents.

- 20 percentage points more likely to meet in the suburbs in the Northeast than in the Midwest (60% - 40%).
- less likely to be founded by a bishop in the suburbs than in a:
 - rural area by 10 percentage points (13% - 3%),³⁵
 - urban/city area by 6 percentage points (9% - 3%).³⁶
- 5 percentage points (6% - 1%) more likely to be founded by a permanent deacon in a rural area than in an urban/city area.³⁷
- 14 percentage points (44% - 30%) more likely to be located at a local parish in the suburbs than in an urban/city area.
- more likely to take a form of college student community (e.g., Newman house) if they are located in an urban/city area than in a:
 - rural area by 13 percentage points (14% - 1%),³⁸
 - suburbs by 8 percentage points (14% - 6%).³⁹
- 8 percentage points (10% - 2%) more likely to be Hispanic/Latino community in urban/city areas than in the suburbs.⁴⁰
- 7 percentage points (12% - 5%) more likely to be youth groups in an urban/city area than in the suburbs.⁴¹
- more likely to be associate communities of religious orders in urban/city areas than in:
 - suburbs by 7 percentage points (9% - 1%),⁴²
 - rural areas by 8 percentage points (9% - 1%).⁴³

³⁵ Note that the first subgroup includes only 12 respondents and the second subgroup includes only eight respondents.

³⁶ Note that the first subgroup includes only 19 respondents and the second subgroup includes only eight respondents.

³⁷ Note that the first subgroup includes only five respondents and the second subgroup includes only two respondents.

³⁸ Note that the first subgroup includes only 30 respondents and the second subgroup includes only one respondent.

³⁹ Note that the first subgroup includes only 30 respondents and the second subgroup includes only 17 respondents.

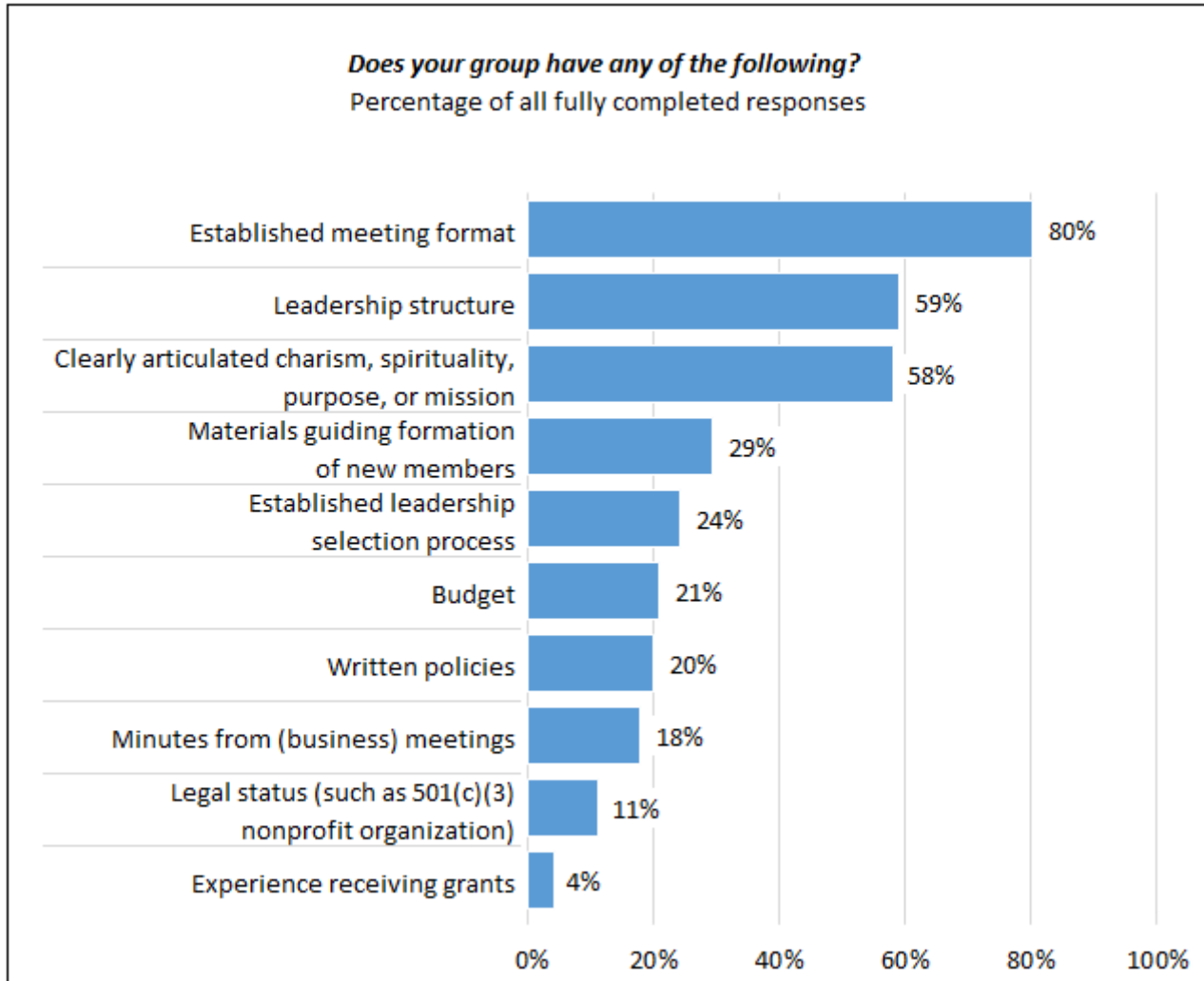
⁴⁰ Note that the first subgroup includes only 21 respondents and the second subgroup includes only six respondents.

⁴¹ Note that the first subgroup includes only 25 respondents and the second subgroup includes only 14 respondents.

⁴² Note that the first subgroup includes only 18 respondents and the second subgroup includes only four respondents.

⁴³ Note that the first subgroup includes only 18 respondents and the second subgroup includes only one respondent.

Structure and Leadership



Among those groups who completed the entire survey:

- 80% have an established meeting format. Significantly, under 35 groups are 9 percentage points (83% - 73%) less likely than other groups to have an established meeting format.
- 59% have a leadership structure.
- 58% have clearly articulated charism, spirituality, purpose, or mission.
- 29% have materials guiding formation of new members. Significantly, Hispanic groups are 16 percentage points (44% - 28%) more likely than other groups to have those materials.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Note that the first subgroup includes only 23 respondents.

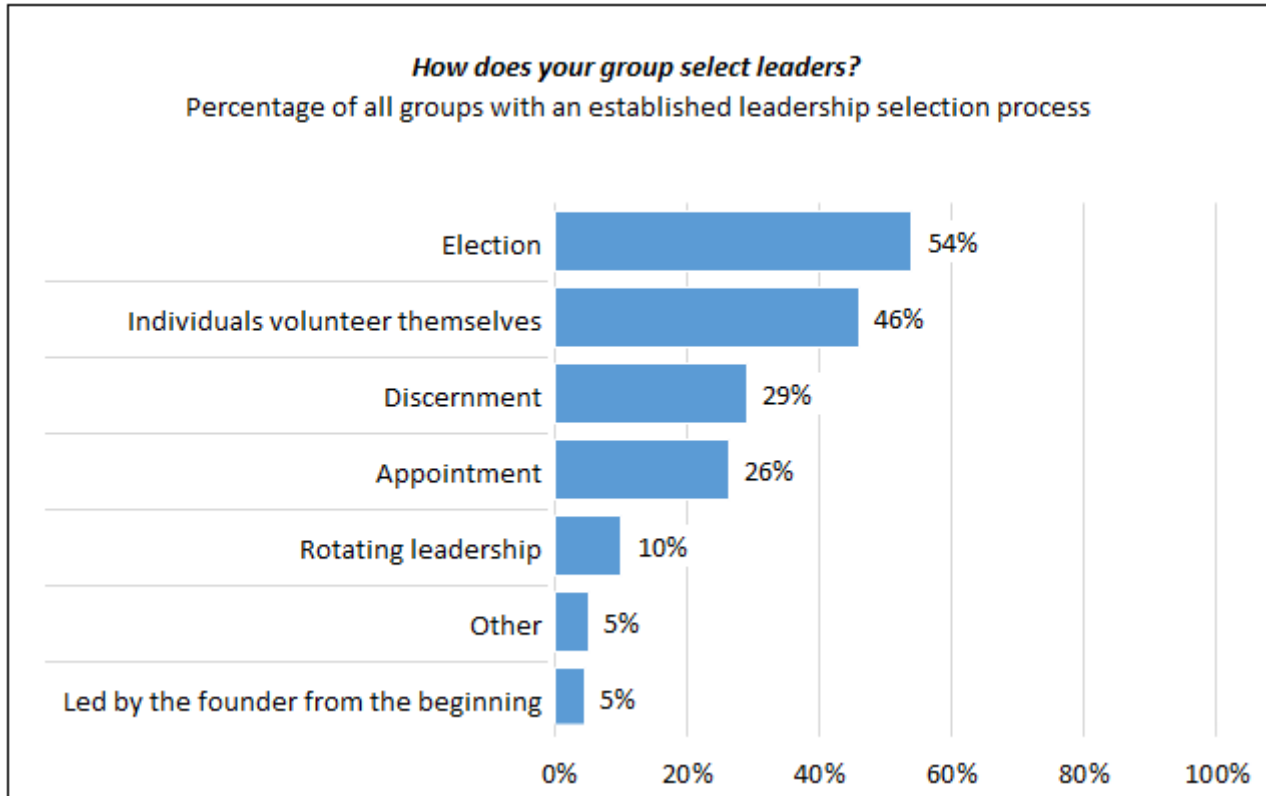
- 24% have an established leadership selection process. Significantly, under 35 groups are 12 percentage points (34% - 21%) more likely than other groups to have an established leadership selection process.
- 21% have a budget. Significantly:
 - Under 35 groups are 12 percentage points (30% - 18%) more likely than other groups to have a budget.
 - Hispanic groups are 13 percentage points (33% - 20%) more likely than other groups to have a budget.⁴⁵
- 20% have written policies. Significantly, Hispanic groups are 14 percentage points (33% - 19%) more likely than other groups to have written policies.⁴⁶
- 18% have keep minutes from (business) meetings. Significantly, Hispanic groups are 14 percentage points (31% - 17%) more likely than other groups to keep minutes.⁴⁷
- 11% have legal status (such as 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization).
- 4% (22 respondents) have experience receiving grants. Significantly, under 35 groups are 8 percentage points (10% - 2%) more likely than other groups to have experience receiving grants.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Note that the first subgroup includes only 17 respondents.

⁴⁶ Note that the first subgroup includes only 17 respondents.

⁴⁷ Note that the first subgroup includes only 16 respondents.

⁴⁸ Note that the first subgroup includes only 13 respondents and the second subgroup includes only nine respondents.

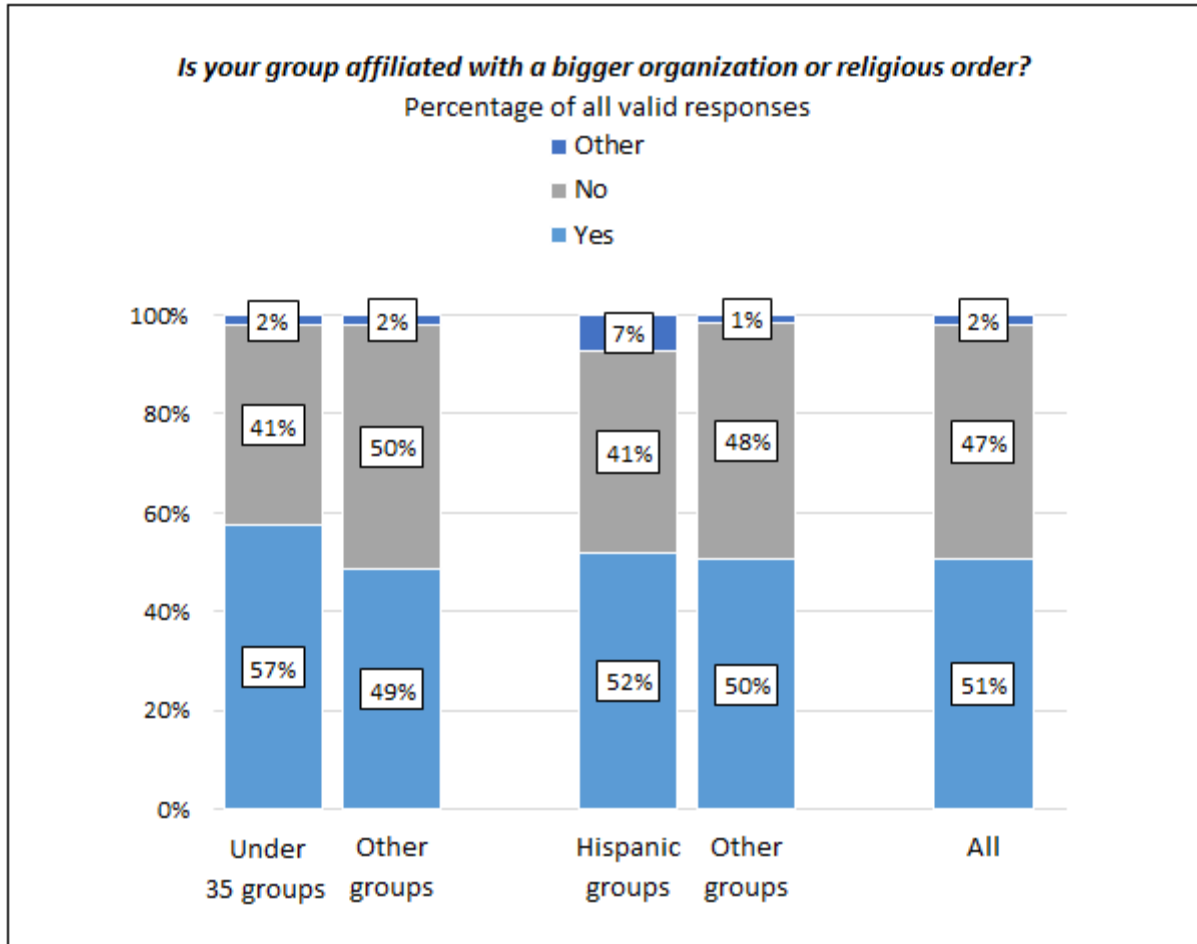


Among groups with an established leadership selection process:

- 54% of groups hold elections.
- 46% of groups have individuals volunteer themselves. Significantly, other groups are 33 percentage points (50% - 17%) more likely than Hispanic groups to select their leaders this way.⁴⁹
- 29% of groups incorporate discernment into their selection process.
- 26% of groups appoint their leaders. Significantly, under 35 groups are 30 percentage points (46% - 16%) more likely than other groups to select their leaders this way.⁵⁰
- 10% (15 respondents) have rotating leadership (e.g., whoever hosts the meeting at their home leads the group).
- 5% (8 respondents) of groups use some other methods of selecting their leadership.
- 5% (7 respondents) have been led by the founder from the beginning.

⁴⁹ Note that the second subgroup includes only three respondents.

⁵⁰ Note that the first subgroup includes only 23 respondents and the second subgroup includes only 16 respondents.



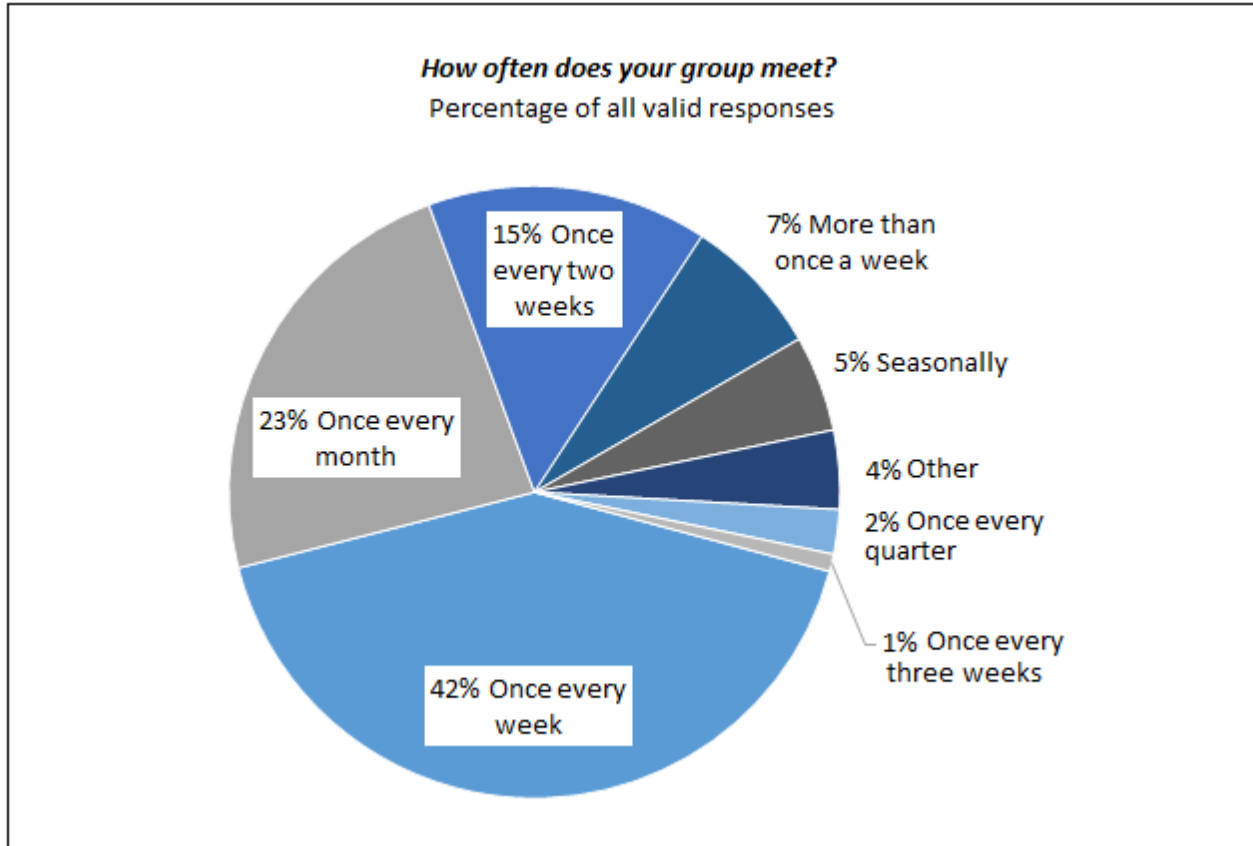
When asked whether their group is affiliated with a bigger organization or religious order, half of respondents (51%) said “yes,” as compared to 47% who said “no,” and 2% (12 respondents) who indicated some more nuanced situation. Significantly:

- Youth groups are 18 percentage points (66% - 48%) more likely than other groups to be affiliated with a bigger organization or religious order.
- Hispanic groups are six percentage points (7% - 1%) more likely than other groups to indicate some other situation.⁵¹

Respondents indicated that their groups are affiliated with various parishes, campus ministries, (arch)dioceses, and eparchies. Examples of organizations mentioned more than once include: Cursillo, Fellowship of Catholic University Students, National Council of Catholic Women, Dominican Friars, Franciscans, Marianists, Discalced Carmelites, Evangelical Catholic, Knights of Columbus, Knights of Peter Claver, Legatus, Legion of Mary, Opus Dei, Renovación Carismática Católica, That Man is You, Neocatechumenal Way, Vietnamese Eucharist Youth Movement, Walking with Purpose, and Work of Mary (Focolare Movement).

⁵¹ Note that the first subgroup includes only four respondents and the second subgroup includes only eight respondents.

Group Meetings

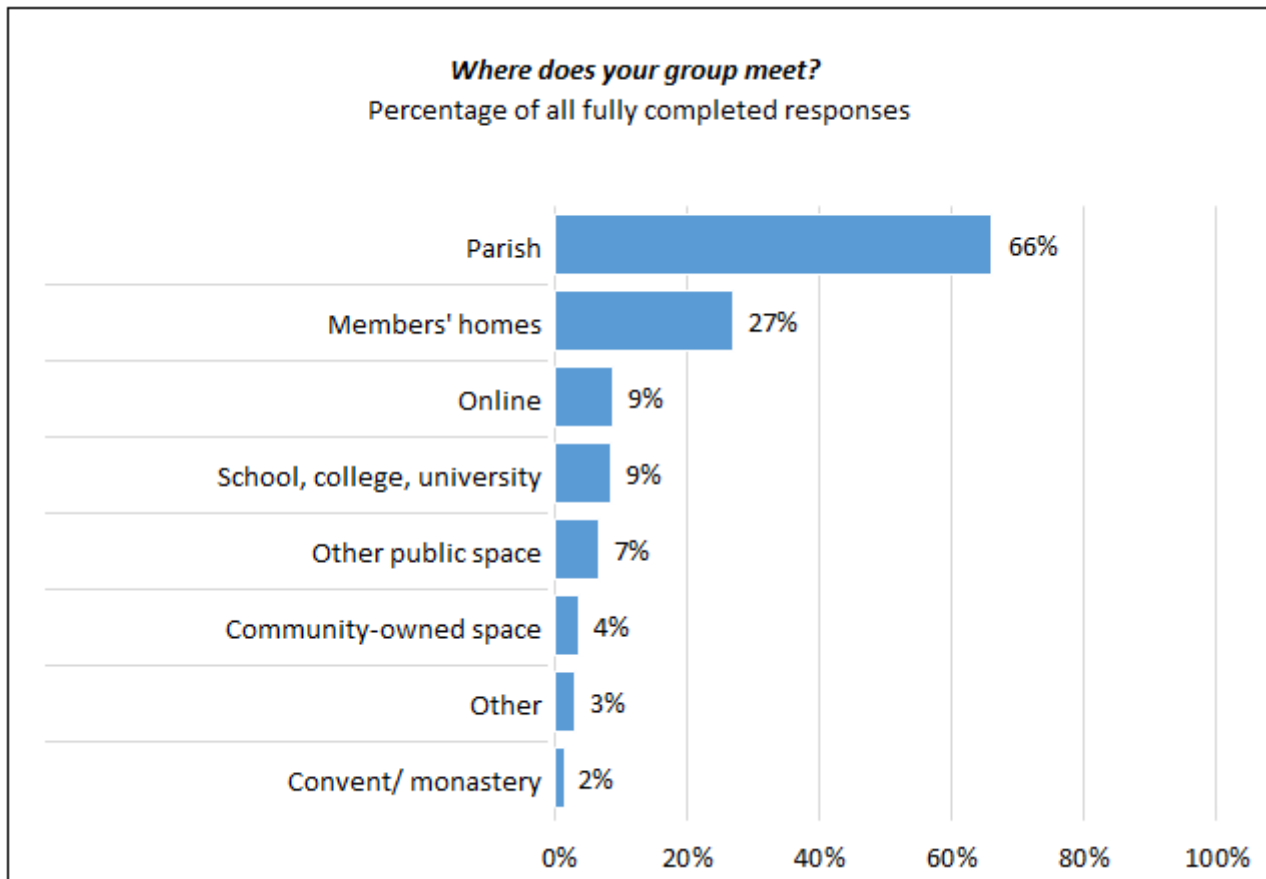


When asked how often their group meets,

- 42% reported meeting once every week.
- 23% reported meeting once every month.
- 15% reported meeting once every two weeks.
- 7% reported meeting more than once a week.
- 5% (28 respondents) reported meeting seasonally.
- 4% (23 respondents) reported meeting on some other schedule not listed here.
- 2% (13 respondents) reported meeting once every quarter.
- 1% (5 respondents) reported meeting once every three weeks.

Significantly:

- Under 35 groups are 10 percentage points (15% - 5%) more likely than other groups to meet more than once a week.⁵²
- Under 35 groups are 10 percentage points (26% - 16%) less likely than other groups to meet once every month.⁵³



Among those groups who completed the entire survey:

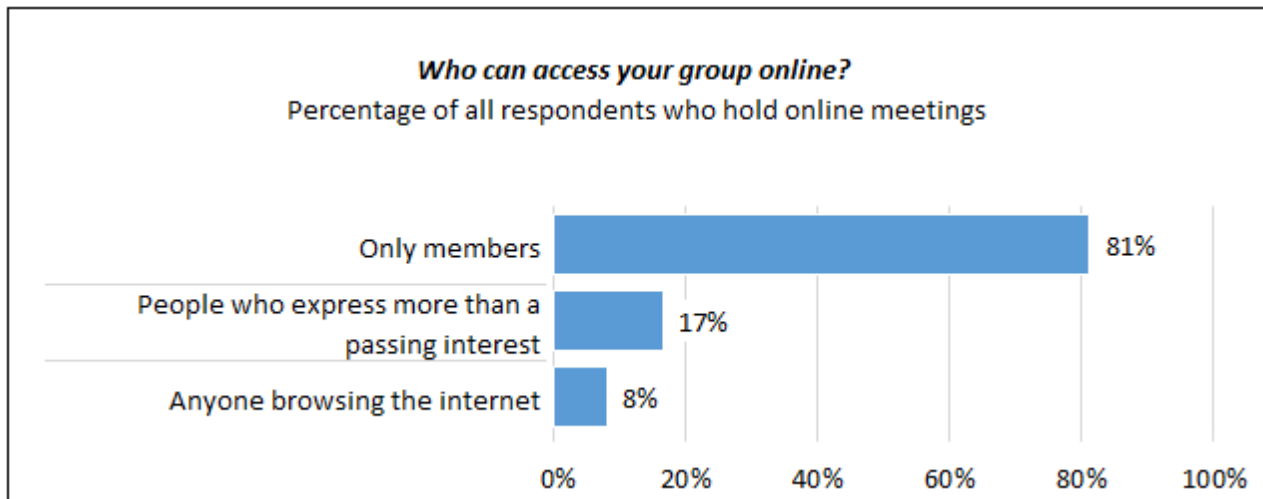
- 66% meet at parishes. Significantly, Hispanic groups are 18 percentage points (83% - 64%) more likely than other groups to meet there.
- 27% meet at members' homes.
- 9% meet at online. Significantly, under 35 groups are 11 percentage points (17% - 6%) more likely than other groups to meet online.⁵⁴

⁵² Note that the first subgroup includes only 21 respondents and the second subgroup includes only 20 respondents.

⁵³ Note that the second subgroup includes only 22 respondents.

⁵⁴ Note that the first subgroup includes only 22 respondents and the second subgroup includes only 24 respondents.

- 9% meet at school, college, or university. Significantly, under 35 groups are 31 percentage points (31% - 1%) more likely than other groups to meet at school, college, university.⁵⁵
- 7% meet at other public spaces not listed here. Significantly, under 35 groups are 13 percentage points (17% - 3%) more likely than other groups to meet in other public spaces.⁵⁶
- 4% (19 respondents) meet in community-owned space. Significantly, under 35 groups are 4 percentage points (7% - 3%) more likely than other groups to meet in community-owned space.⁵⁷
- 3% (16 respondents) meet at other (non-public) places not listed here.
- 2% (8 respondents) meet at convent/ monastery.



Among all of those who hold online meetings:

- 81% of groups give access to their online meetings to members only (e.g., they use email, voice/video calls, private chatrooms, private Facebook community, WhatsApp messenger).
- 17% (8 respondents) of groups give access to their online meetings to people who express more than a passing interest, for example by signing up for electronic mailing list, or joining Facebook community.
- 8% (4 respondents) of groups give access to their online meetings to anyone browsing the internet (e.g., they have public websites, forums/ discussion boards).

⁵⁵ Note that the second subgroup includes only three respondents.

⁵⁶ Note that the first subgroup includes only 22 respondents and the second subgroup includes only 13 respondents.

⁵⁷ Note that the first subgroup includes only nine respondents and the second subgroup includes only ten respondents.

***On average, how long are your
typical group meetings?***

All responses⁵⁸

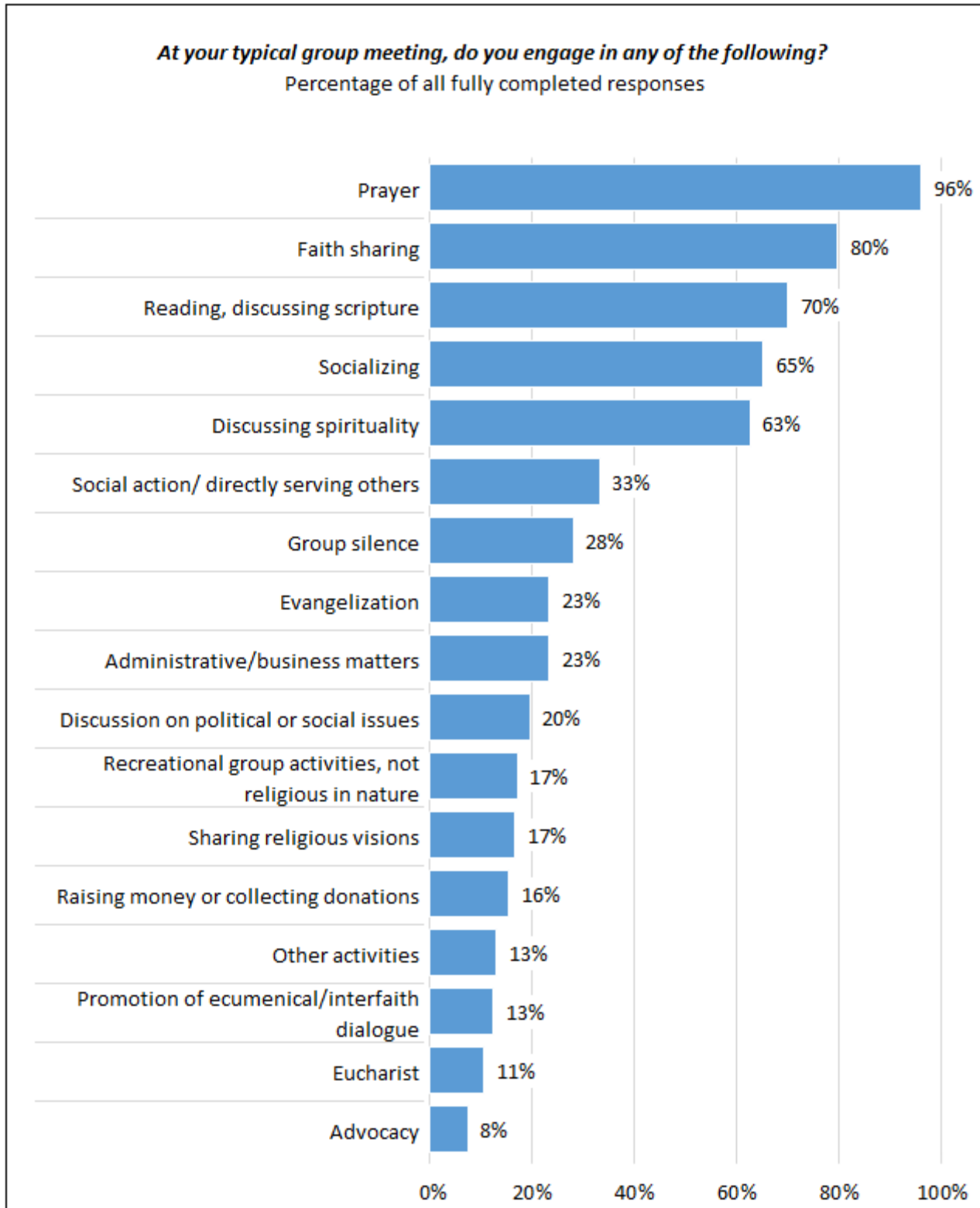
Mean [hours]	Median [hours]	Range [hours]
1.72	1.5	0.25 - 10

Respondents reported that their typical group meeting lasts an hour and 43 minutes (with half reporting typical meetings of 15 minutes to an hour and a half and the other half of respondents reporting meeting of an hour and a half to ten hours long).

Responses from under 35 groups and Hispanic groups are not significantly different from other groups.

⁵⁸ Responses indicating meeting longer than ten hours were excluded from the analysis.

Activities



Among those groups who completed the entire survey, at a typical meeting:

- 96% engage in prayer.
- 80% engage in faith sharing.
- 70% read and discuss scripture.
- 65% socialize. Significantly:
 - Under 35 groups are 10 percentage points (73% - 63%) more likely than other groups to socialize.
 - Hispanic groups are 19 percentage points (67% - 48%) more likely than other groups to socialize at a typical meeting.⁵⁹
- 63% engage in discussing spirituality.
- 33% engage in social action/ directly serving others. Significantly, under 35 groups are 13 percentage points (43% - 30%) more likely than other groups to engage in social action/ directly serving others.
- 28% practice group silence.
- 23% engage in evangelization. Significantly:
 - Under 35 groups are 11 percentage points (31% - 21%) more likely than other groups to engage in evangelization.
 - Hispanic groups are 27 percentage points (48% - 21%) more likely than other groups to evangelize.⁶⁰
- 23% spend time on administrative/business matters.
- 20% discuss political or social issues.
- 17% engage in recreational group activities, not religious in nature. Significantly, under 35 groups are 32 percentage points (41% - 9%) more likely than other groups to engage in recreational group activities, not religious in nature.
- 17% share religious visions.
- 16% raise money or collect donations. Significantly, Hispanic groups are 17 percentage points (31% - 14%) more likely than other groups to do this.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Note that the second subgroup includes only 25 respondents.

⁶⁰ Note that the first subgroup includes only 25 respondents.

⁶¹ Note that the first subgroup includes only 16 respondents.

- 13% engage in other activities not listed here. Significantly, under 35 groups are 12 percentage points (22% - 10%) more likely than other groups to engage in other activities.⁶²
- 13% engage in promotion of ecumenical/interfaith dialogue.
- 11% celebrate the Eucharist. Significantly:
 - Under 35 groups are 14 percentage points (21% - 7%) more likely than other groups to celebrate Eucharist.⁶³
 - Hispanic groups are nine percentage points (19% - 10%) more likely than other groups to celebrate the Eucharist.⁶⁴
- 8% engage in advocacy. Respondents in this category indicated that their groups focus their advocacy efforts, among other things, on ex-prisoners, juveniles in detention centers, youth, victims of sexual-abuse, poor, homeless, immigrants, and refugees. Examples of other areas of advocacy activity include promote liturgical focus, protecting religious liberty, protecting the sanctity of human life, seafarer welfare, and social justice in general.

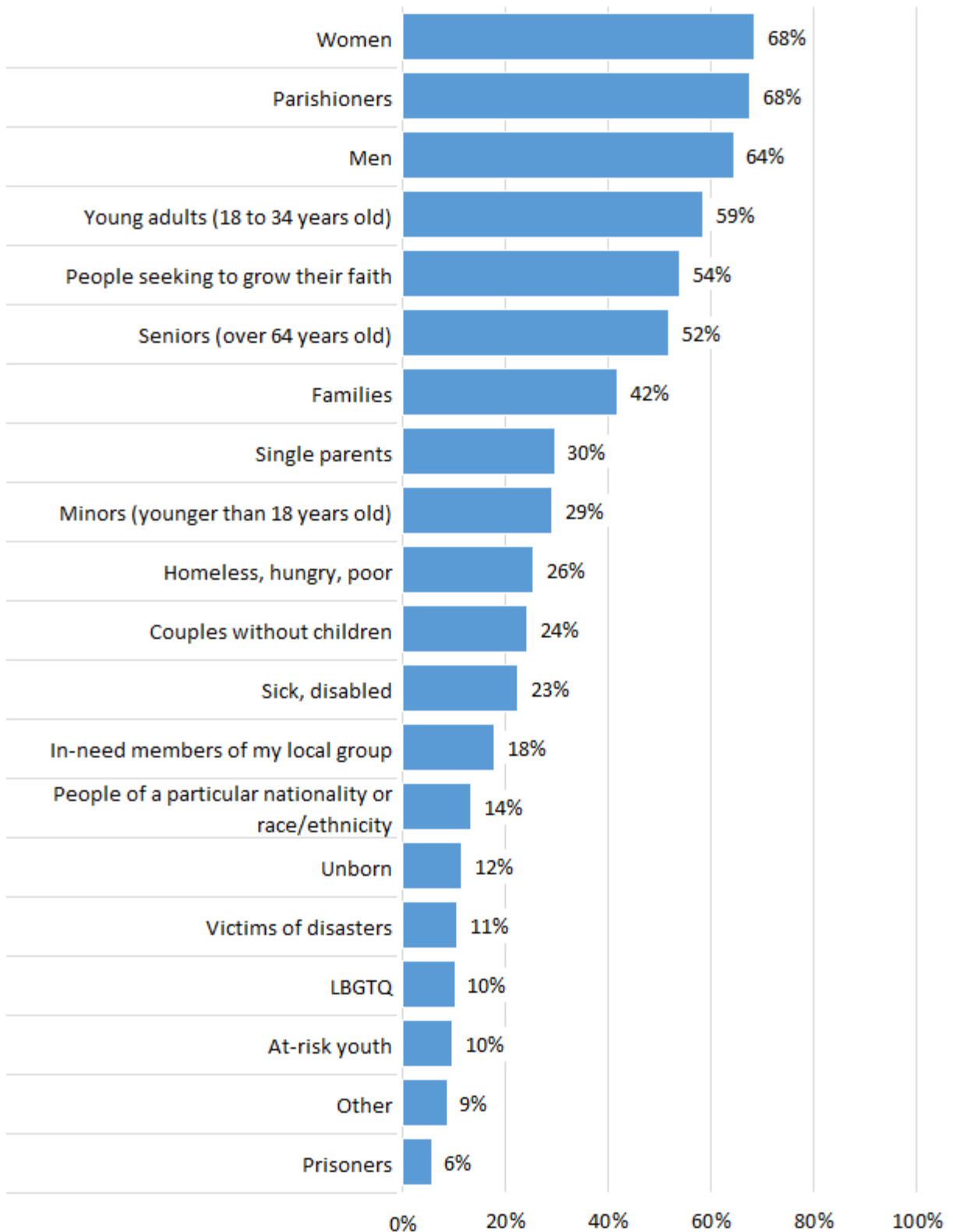
⁶² Note that the first subgroup includes only 29 respondents.

⁶³ Note that both subgroups include only 28 respondents.

⁶⁴ Note that the first subgroup includes only ten respondents.

Who is served by your group?

Percentage of all groups engaged in advocacy, fundraising, or social action/ directly serving others



Among those groups who are engaged in advocacy, raising money or collecting donations, and/or social action/ directly serving others:

- 68% of groups serve women.
- 68% of groups serve parishioners. Significantly, under 35 groups are 14 percentage points (72% - 58%) less likely than other groups to serve parishioners.
- 64% of groups serve men.
- 59% of groups serve young adults (18 to 34 years old). Significantly, under 35 groups are 32 percentage points (81% - 49%) more likely than other groups to serve young adults (18 to 34 years old).
- 54% of groups serve people seeking to grow their faith. Significantly, Hispanic groups are 25 percentage points (76% - 51%) more likely than other groups to serve this population.⁶⁵
- 52% of groups serve seniors (over 64 years old). Significantly, under 35 groups are 44 percentage points (65% - 20%) less likely than other groups to serve seniors (over 64 years old).⁶⁶
- 42% of groups serve families.
- 30% of groups serve single parents.
- 29% of groups serve minors (younger than 18 years old).
- 26% of groups serve homeless, hungry, and/or poor. Significantly, under 35 groups are 21 percentage points (32% - 11%) less likely than other groups to serve the homeless, hungry, and/or poor.⁶⁷
- 24% of groups serve couples without children.
- 23% of groups serve sick and/or disabled. Significantly, under 35 groups are 16 percentage points (27% - 11%) less likely than other groups to serve the sick and/or disabled.⁶⁸
- 18% of groups serve in-need members of my local group. Significantly, under 35 groups are 14 percentage points (22% - 8%) less likely than other groups to serve in-need members of their local group.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Note that the first subgroup includes only 22 respondents.

⁶⁶ Note that the second subgroup includes only 13 respondents.

⁶⁷ Note that the second subgroup includes only seven respondents.

⁶⁸ Note that the second subgroup includes only seven respondents.

⁶⁹ Note that the second subgroup includes only five respondents.

- 14% (30 respondents) of groups serve people of a particular nationality or race/ethnicity. Significantly, Hispanic groups are 16 percentage points (28% - 11%) more likely than other groups to serve this population.⁷⁰
- 12% (26 respondents) of groups serve the unborn.
- 11% (24 respondents) of groups serve the victims of disasters.
- 10% (23 respondents) of groups serve LBGTQ.
- 10% (22 respondents) of groups serve at-risk youth.
- 9% (20 respondents) of groups serve some other populations not listed here.
- 6% (13 respondents) of groups serve prisoners.

At your typical group meeting, how many minutes approximately do you spend on each of the following activities?

All responses⁷¹

	Mean [minutes]	Median [minutes]	Range [minutes]
Prayer, group silence, Eucharist, faith sharing	49	50	0 - 270
Recreation, socializing	20	15	0 - 300
Other activities	12	0	0 - 120
Administrative/ business matters	10	0	0 - 120
Directly serving others	6	0	0 - 300
Evangelizing to non-members	4	0	0 - 180

Respondents who answered this question reported that, on average, at the typical group meeting, they spend:

- Four minutes on evangelizing to non-members (with half spending zero minutes and the other half between zero and three hours). Significantly, Hispanic groups spend ten minutes (13 - 3) more, on average, than other groups on evangelization.
- Six minutes on directly serving others (e.g., by volunteering) (with half spending zero minutes and the other half between zero and five hours). Significantly:

⁷⁰ Note that the first subgroup includes only eight respondents and the second subgroup includes only 22 respondents.

⁷¹ Survey participants were asked to enter time under each category, if categories of activities overlap. Responses indicating more than five hours spent on each category of activities were excluded from the analysis.

- Under 35 groups spend five minutes (10 - 5) more, on average, than other groups on directly serving others (e.g., by volunteering).
- Hispanic groups spend 13 minutes (18 - 5) more, on average, than other groups on service to others.
- Ten minutes on administrative/ business matters (with half spending zero minutes and the other half between zero and two hours). Significantly, Hispanic groups spend eight minutes (17 - 9) more, on average, than other groups on those matters.
- 12 minutes on other activities not listed here (with half spending zero minutes and the other half between zero and two hours).
- 20 minutes on recreation and socializing (with half spending between 0 and 15 minutes and the other half between 15 and 300 minutes). Significantly, under 35 groups spend 8 minutes (26 - 18) more, on average, than other groups on recreation and/or socializing.
- 49 minutes on prayer, group silence, Eucharist, faith sharing, and discussing scripture (with half spending between 0 and 50 minutes and the other half between 50 and 270 minutes). Significantly, under 35 groups spend 15 minutes (52 - 37) less, on average, than other groups on prayer, group silence, Eucharist, faith sharing, and/or discussing scripture.

Race/Ethnicity

How many people of each race/ethnicity attend a typical meeting of your group?

All responses⁷²

	Mean [#]	Median [#]	Range [#]
Caucasian/European American/white	13	9	0 - 250
Hispanic/Latino	4	0	0 - 245
Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian	2	0	0 - 290
African/African American/black	1	0	0 - 60
Mixed/unknown/other	1	0	0 - 23
Native American/Alaska Native	0	0	0 - 5

Respondents reported that, on average, a typical group meeting is attended by:

- No Native American/Alaska Natives (with half of the group meetings being attended by no Native people and the other half by between zero and five people).
- One person who is African/African American/black (with half of the group meetings being attended by zero people of this race/ethnicity and the other half by zero to 60).
- One person who is of mixed/unknown/other race/ethnicity (with half of the group meetings being attended by zero people of this race/ethnicity and the other half by zero to 23 people). Significantly, under 35 groups' meetings are attended by one (1 - 0) more person of mixed/unknown/other race/ethnicity, on average, than other groups' meetings.
- Two people who are Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian (with half of the group meetings being attended by zero people of this race/ethnicity and the other half by zero to 290 people). Significantly, under 35 groups' meetings are attended by five (6 - 1) more people of this race/ethnicity, on average, than other groups' meetings.
- Four people who are Hispanic/Latino (with half of the group meetings being attended by zero people of this race/ethnicity and the other half by zero to 245 people). Significantly, Hispanic groups' meetings are attended by 25 (27 - 2) more people of this race/ethnicity, on average, than other groups' meetings.
- 13 people who are Caucasian/European American/white (with half of the group meetings being attended by zero and nine people of this race/ethnicity and the other half

⁷² Responses that indicated more than 300 meeting participants of each race/ethnicity were excluded from the analysis.

by nine to 250 people). Significantly, other groups' meetings are attended by 12 (15 - 3) more people of this race/ethnicity, on average, than Hispanic groups' meetings.

Martial and Ecclesial Status

<i>How many people attending a typical meeting of your group are...</i>			
All responses			
	Mean	Median	Range
	[#]	[#]	[#]
Married with children	8	6	0 - 89
Single	5	1	0 - 150
Married without children	2	0	0 - 50
Divorced or separated	1	0	0 - 30
Diocesan and religious priests, bishops	1	0	0 - 42
Other/ unknown	1	0	0 - 79
Religious brothers and sisters	0	0	0 - 20
Permanent deacons	0	0	0 - 5
Cohabiting/ living unmarried with a romantic partner	0	0	0 - 20

Respondents who answered this question reported that, on average, a typical group meeting is attended by:

- Eight people who are married with children (with half of the group meetings being attended by zero to six people and the other half by six to 89 people). Significantly:
 - Under 35 groups' meetings are attended by five married people with children (10 - 5) fewer, on average, than other groups' meetings.
 - Hispanic groups' meetings are attended by six people who are married with children (14 - 8) more, on average, than other groups' meetings.
- Five people who are single (with half of the group meetings being attended by zero to one person and the other half by one to 150 people). Significantly, under 35 groups' meetings are attended by 12 single people (14 - 2) more, on average, than other groups' meetings.
- Two people who are married without children (with half of the group meetings being attended by zero people who are married without children and the other half by zero to 50 people).
- One person who is divorced or separated (with half of the group meeting being attended by zero people who are divorced or separated and the other half by zero to 30 people). Significantly:

- Under 35 groups' meetings are attended by one divorced or separated person (1 - 0) more, on average, than other groups' meetings.
- Hispanic groups' meetings are attended by one person who is divorced or separated (2 - 1) more, on average, than other groups' meetings.
- One person who is a diocesan or religious priest, or bishop (with half of the group meetings being attended by none of them and the other half by zero to 42 people).
- One person who has some other/ unknown status (with half of the group meeting being attended by none of those people and the other half by zero to 79 people).
- No religious brothers and sisters (with half of the group meetings being attended by none of them and the other half by zero to 20 people). Significantly:
 - Under 35 groups' meetings are attended by one religious brother or sister (1 - 0) more, on average, than other groups' meetings.
 - Hispanic groups' meetings are attended by one religious brother or sister (1 - 0) more, on average, than other groups' meetings.
- No permanent deacons (with half of the group meeting being attended by zero permanent deacons and the other half by zero to and five people).
- No people who are cohabiting/ living unmarried with a romantic partner (with half of the group meetings being attended by none of them and the other half by zero to 20 people). Significantly, Hispanic groups' meetings are attended by two people who are cohabiting/ living unmarried with a romantic partner (2 - 0) more, on average, than other groups' meetings.

Age

How many people in each of the following age groups attend a typical meeting of your group?
All responses⁷³

	Mean [#]	Median [#]	Range [#]
Under 18	2	0	0 - 88
18 to 34	5	0	0 - 150
35 to 64	6	4	0 - 100
Over 64	6	3	0 - 80
Unknown	0	0	0 - 50

Respondents reported that, on average, a typical group meeting is attended by:

- Six people who are 35 to 64 years old (with half of the group meetings being attended by zero to four people and the other half by four to 100 people). Significantly:
 - Under 35 groups' meetings are attended by three people between 35 to 64 years old (7 - 4) fewer, on average, than other groups' meetings.
 - Hispanic groups' meetings are attended by nine people (15 - 6) more people in this age group, on average, than other groups' meetings.
- Six people who are over 64 years old (with half of the group meetings being attended by zero to three people and the other half by three to 80 people of this age group). Significantly, under 35 groups' meetings are attended by seven people over 64 years old (8 - 1) fewer, on average, than other groups' meetings.
- Five people who are 18 to 34 years old (with half of the group meetings being attended by zero people and the other half by zero to 150 people of this age group). Significantly, under 35 groups' meetings are attended by 15 people ages 18 to 34 (16 - 1) more, on average, than other groups' meetings.
- Two people who are under 18 (with half of the group meetings being attended zero people and the other half by zero to 88 people of this age group). Significantly, under 35 groups' meetings are attended by six people under 18 (6 - 0) more, on average, than other groups' meetings.
- Fewer than one person who of unknown age (with half of the group meetings being attended by zero people and the other half by zero to 50 people of unknown ages).

⁷³ Responses that indicated 300 participants or more in each age group were excluded from the analysis.

Significantly, Hispanic groups' meetings are attended by two people (2 - 0) more in this age group, on average, than other groups' meetings.

Gender

How many people in each of the following categories attend a typical meeting of your group?			
All responses ⁷⁴			
	Mean	Median	Range
	 [#]	 [#]	 [#]
Women	12	7	0 - 87
Men	7	4	0 - 58

Respondents who answered this question reported that, on average, a typical group meeting is attended by:

- 12 women (with half of the group meetings being attended by zero to seven women and the other half by seven to 87 women). Significantly:
 - Under 35 groups' meetings are attended by five women (15 - 10) more, on average, than other groups' meetings.
 - Hispanic groups' meetings are attended by seven women (18 - 11) more, on average, than in other groups' meeting.
- Seven men (with half of the group meetings being attended by zero to four men and the other half by four to 58 men). Significantly:
 - Under 35 groups' meetings are attended by four men (10 - 6) more, on average, than other groups' meetings.
 - Hispanic groups' meetings are attended by four people (10 - 6) more, on average, than other groups' meeting.

⁷⁴ Responses that indicated 300 participants or more of each gender were excluded from the analysis. The survey also asked about leaders of gender other than man or woman, but due to concerns over the validity of responses, this item was excluded from the analysis.

How many people of each gender⁷⁵ hold leadership positions in your group, at this moment?

All responses⁷⁶

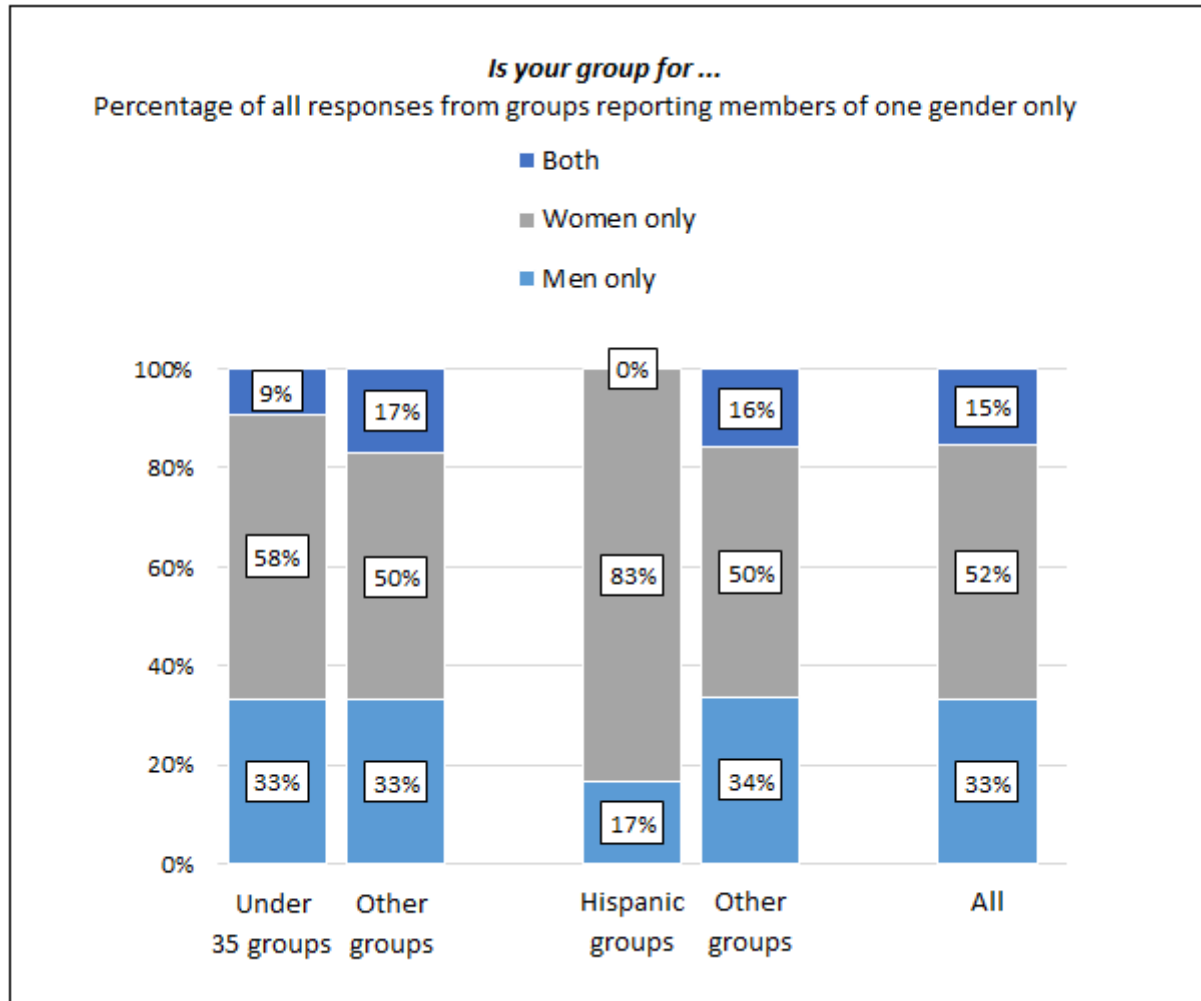
	Mean [#]	Median [#]	Range [#]
Women	2.4	2	0 - 9
Men	1.8	1	0 - 9

Respondents who answered this question reported that in their groups, at the time of completing the survey, on average:

- Two men held leadership positions (with half reporting between zero and one man and the other half between one and nine men). Significantly:
 - Under 35 groups have one man (2.3 – 1.6) more, on average, in leadership positions than other groups.
 - Hispanic groups have one man (2 - 2) more, on average, in leadership positions than other groups.
- Two women held leadership positions (with half reporting between zero and two women and the other half between two and nine women).

⁷⁵ The survey also asked about leaders of gender other than man or woman, but due to concerns over the validity of responses, this item was excluded from the analysis.

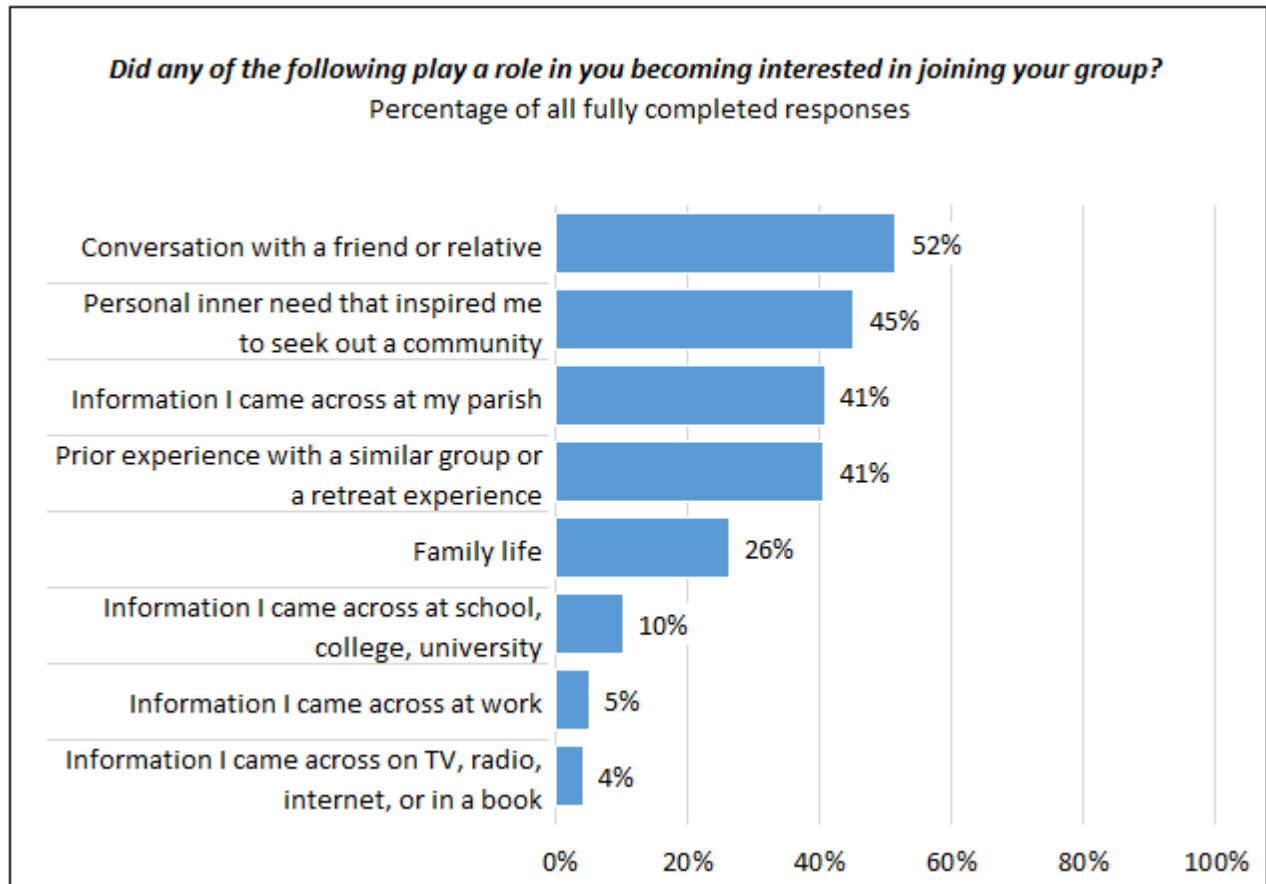
⁷⁶ Responses indicating ten individuals of each gender in leadership positions were excluded from the analysis.



Those respondents who reported having members of one gender only were asked whether their group accepts only members of gender. Half of them (52%) admitted to accepting women only, as compared to 33% who accepted men only, and 15% (23 respondents) who accepted both, but happened to have members of one gender only at the time of completing the survey. Among all survey participants, the share of those who indicated accepting men only was 8%, women only was 12%, and both was 4%.

Responses from under 35 groups and Hispanic groups are not significantly different from other groups.

Reasons for Joining Groups



Among those who completed the entire survey:

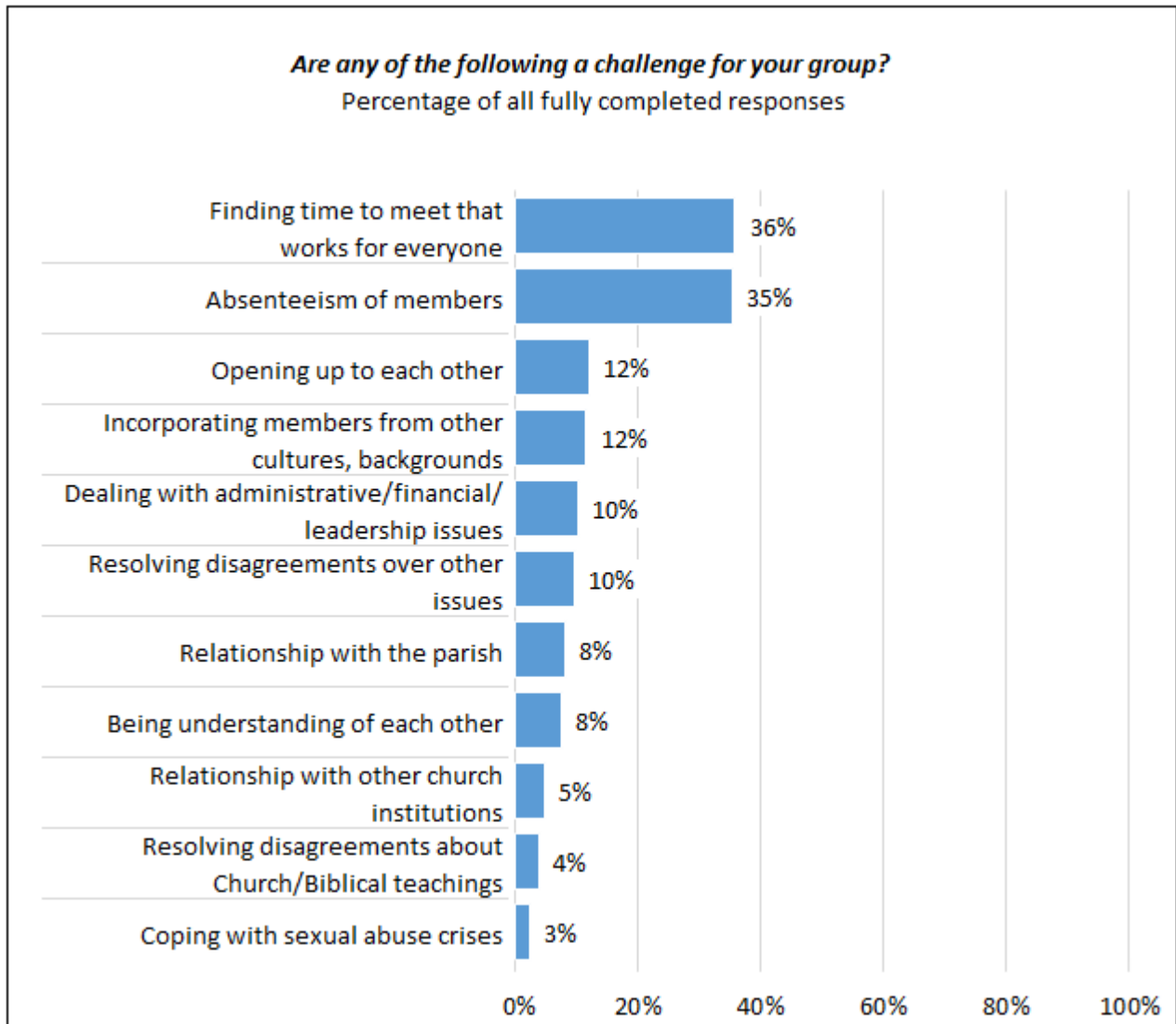
- 52% became interested in their group through conversation with a friend or relative.
- 45% became interested in their group due to personal inner need that inspired them to seek out a community.
- 41% became interested in their group through information they came across at their parish. Significantly, respondents in under 35 groups are 13 percentage points (44% - 31%) less likely than respondents in other groups to become interested in their group through information they came across at their parish.
- 41% became interested in their group because they had prior experience with a similar group or a retreat experience.
- 26% became interested in their group through family. Significantly, Hispanic groups are 26 percentage points (50% - 24%) more likely than other groups to become interested in their group this way.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Note that the first subgroup includes only 26 respondents.

- 10% became interested in their group when they came across information about it at school, college, or university. Significantly, under 35 groups are 29 percentage points (32% - 3%) more likely than other groups to become interested in their group this way.⁷⁸
- 5% (27 respondents) became interested in their group when they came across information about it at work.
- 4% (23 respondents) became interested in their group when they came across information about it on TV, radio, internet, or in a book.

⁷⁸ Note that the second subgroup includes only 11 respondents.

Biggest Challenges



Among those who completed the entire survey:

- 36% find it challenging for their group to find time to meet that works for everyone. Significantly:
 - Under 35 groups are 13 percentage points (46% - 32%) more likely than other groups to find it challenging to find time to meet that works for everyone.
 - Groups with more than half of members who are 18 to 34 are 18 percentage points (45% - 27%) more likely than those with majority of members who are over 64 to struggle with finding time to meet that works for everyone.
- 35% find absenteeism of members to be a challenge. Significantly, under 35 groups are 10 percentage points (43% - 33%) more likely than other groups to find absenteeism of members challenging.

- 12% find it challenging for members to open up to each other. Significantly, under 35 groups are 8 percentage points (18% - 10%) more likely than other groups to find it challenging to open up to each other.⁷⁹
- 12% find it challenging for their group to incorporating members from other cultures, backgrounds.
- 10% find it challenging for their group to dealing with administrative, financial, or leadership issues. Significantly:
 - Under 35 groups are 11 percentage points (18% - 8%) more likely than other groups to find it challenging to deal with administrative/financial/leadership issues.⁸⁰
 - Groups with more than half of members who are under 18 are 28 percentage points (36% - 9%) more likely than those with majority of members who are 35 to 64⁸¹ and 31 percentage points (36% - 5%) more likely than those with majority of members who are over 64⁸² to struggle with dealing with administrative/financial/leadership issues.
- 10% find it challenging to resolve disagreements over other issues not listed here. Significantly, under 35 groups are 8 percentage points (16% - 8%) more likely than other groups to find it challenging to resolve disagreements over other issues.⁸³
- 8% find their group's relationship with the parish to be challenging. Significantly:
 - Under 35 groups are 7 percentage points (14% - 6%) more likely than other groups to find relationship with the parish challenging.⁸⁴
 - Respondents in Hispanic groups are 12 percentage points (19% - 7%) more likely than those in other groups to find it challenging.⁸⁵
 - Groups with more than half of members who are under 18 are 20 percentage points (27% - 7%) more likely than those with majority of members who are 35 to 64⁸⁶ and 20 percentage points (27% - 7%) more likely than those with majority of members who are over 64⁸⁷ to struggle with relationship with the parish.
- 8% find it challenging for their members to being understanding of each other. Significantly:

⁷⁹ Note that the first subgroup includes only 24 respondents.

⁸⁰ Note that the first subgroup includes only 24 respondents and the second subgroup includes only 29 respondents.

⁸¹ Note that the first subgroup includes only 8 groups and the second subgroup includes only 14 groups.

⁸² Note that the first subgroup includes only 8 groups and the second subgroup includes only 9 groups.

⁸³ Note that the first subgroup includes only 21 respondents and the second subgroup includes only 29 respondents.

⁸⁴ Note that the first subgroup includes only 18 respondents and the second subgroup includes only 25 respondents.

⁸⁵ Note that the first subgroup includes only ten respondents.

⁸⁶ Note that the first subgroup includes only 6 groups and the second subgroup includes only 11 groups.

⁸⁷ Note that the first subgroup includes only 6 groups and the second subgroup includes only 12 groups.

- Under 35 groups are 9 percentage points (15% - 5%) more likely than other groups to find it challenging to be understanding of each other.⁸⁸
- Respondents in Hispanic groups are 13 percentage points (19% - 6%) more likely than those in other groups to find it challenging.⁸⁹
- Groups with more than half of members who are under 18 are 21 percentage points (27% - 6%) more likely than those with majority of members who are 35 to 64⁹⁰ and 21 percentage points (27% - 6%) more likely than those with majority of members who are over 64⁹¹ to struggle with being understanding of each other.
- 5% (26 respondents) find their group's relationship with other church institutions to be challenging. Significantly, under 35 groups are 6 percentage points (9% - 4%) more likely than other groups to find relationship with other church institutions challenging.⁹²
- 4% (21 respondents) find it challenging to resolve disagreements about Church/Biblical teachings.
- 3% (14 respondents) find it challenging to cope with sexual abuse crises.

⁸⁸ Note that the first subgroup includes only 19 respondents and the second subgroup includes only 21 respondents.

⁸⁹ Note that the first subgroup includes only ten respondents and the second subgroup includes only 30 respondents.

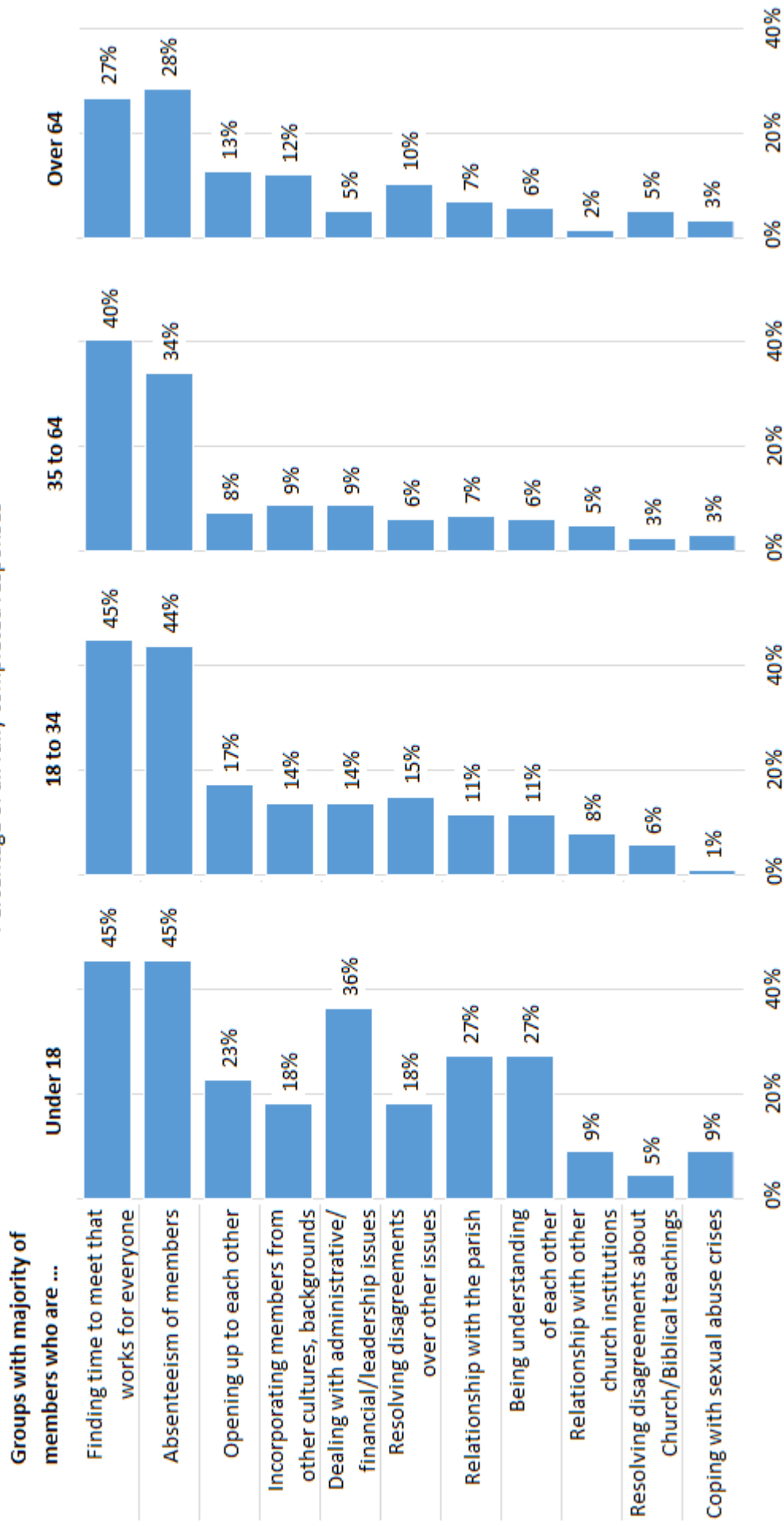
⁹⁰ Note that the first subgroup includes only 6 groups and the second subgroup includes only 10 groups.

⁹¹ Note that the first subgroup includes only 6 groups and the second subgroup includes only 10 groups.

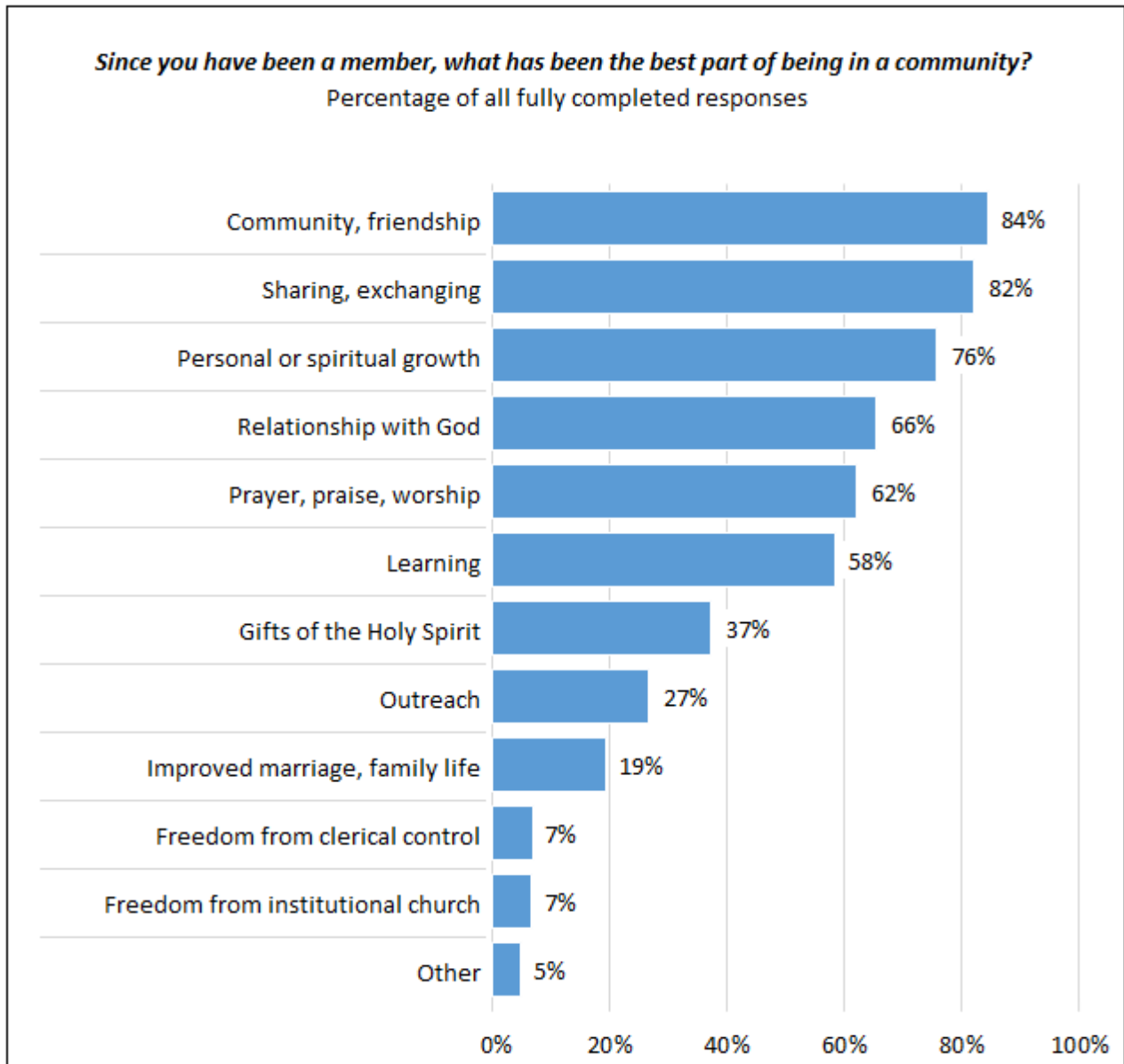
⁹² Note that the first subgroup includes only 12 respondents and the second subgroup includes only 14 respondents.

Are any of the following a challenge for your group?

Percentage of all fully completed responses



Biggest Benefits



Among those who completed the entire survey:

- 84% feel that the best part of being a member is community and friendship.
- 82% feel that the best part of being a member is sharing and exchanging. Significantly, under 35 groups are 8 percentage points (84% - 76%) less likely than other groups to consider sharing and exchanging to be the best part of being a member.
- 76% feel that the best part of being a member is personal or spiritual growth.
- 66% feel that the best part of being a member is relationship with God.

- 62% feel that the best part of being a member is prayer, praise, worship.
- 58% feel that the best part of being a member is learning.
- 37% feel that the best part of being a member is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Significantly, respondents from Hispanic groups are 14 percentage points (50% - 36%) more likely than those in other groups to consider it to be the best part of being a member.⁹³
- 27% feel that the best part of being a member is outreach. Significantly, respondents in Hispanic groups are 19 percentage points (44% - 25%) more likely than those in other groups to consider it to be the best part of being a member.⁹⁴
- 19% feel that the best part of being a member is improved marriage and family life. Significantly, respondents in Hispanic groups are 25 percentage points (42% - 17%) more likely than those in other groups to consider it to be the best part of being a member.⁹⁵
- 7% feel that the best part of being a member is freedom from clerical control.
- 7% feel that the best part of being a member is freedom from institutional Church. Significantly, under 35 groups are 5 percentage points (8% - 3%) less likely than other groups to consider freedom from institutional church to be the best part of being a member.⁹⁶
- 5% (26 respondents) feel that the best part of being a member is something else. Significantly, under 35 groups are 6 percentage points (9% - 4%) more likely than other groups to consider other things not listed here to be the best part of being a member.⁹⁷

⁹³ Note that the first subgroup includes only 26 respondents.

⁹⁴ Note that the first subgroup includes only 23 respondents.

⁹⁵ Note that the first subgroup includes only 22 respondents.

⁹⁶ Note that the second subgroup includes only four respondents.

⁹⁷ Note that the first subgroup includes only 12 respondents and the second subgroup includes only 14 respondents.



Virtually all respondents feel personally “somewhat satisfied” or “very satisfied” (as opposed to “not at all satisfied” or “somewhat unsatisfied”) with their group experience:

- “As a way to be an engaged member of the Church” (98% of respondents, which includes 79% who are “very satisfied”).
- “Overall” (98% of respondents, which includes 74% who are “very satisfied”).
- “As a way to grow spiritually” (96% of respondents, which includes 69% who are “very satisfied”). Significantly, respondents in Hispanic groups are 17 percentage points (84% - 67%) more likely than those in other groups to be “very satisfied” with their group in this regard.
- “As a way to grow my social relationships” (96% of respondents, which includes 64% who are “very satisfied”).
- “As a way to participate in parish life” (96% of respondents, which includes 72% who are “very satisfied”). Significantly, respondents in under 35 groups are 10 percentage points (74% - 64%) less likely than those in other groups to be “very satisfied” with their group in this regard.

Nine in ten respondents are at least “somewhat satisfied” satisfied with their group:

- “As a way to learn and develop skills” (92% of respondents, which includes 54% who are “very satisfied”). Significantly, respondents in Hispanic groups are 24 percentage

points (75% - 51%) more likely than those in other groups to be “very satisfied” with their group in this regard.

- “As a way to put their faith in action” (92% of respondents, which includes 64% who are “very satisfied”). Significantly, respondents in Hispanic groups are 16 percentage points (79% - 63%) more likely than those in other groups to be “very satisfied” with their group in this regard.

How has membership in your group affected you?

Overall, 398 respondents answered the open-ended question asking them how membership in their group affected them. Overall, 45 of them responded off topic. The remaining 353 respondents provided answers that can be classified into several categories:

- Membership helps navigate the difficulties of life.
- Membership provides a way to practice values.
- Membership helps improve life skills and professional skills.
- Membership provides a way to develop and strengthen social ties.
- Membership helps acquire knowledge and understanding.
- Membership is a way to become a better person.
- Membership has negative effects on person’s life.

Membership Provides a Way to Develop and Strengthen Social Ties

The largest share of respondents felt that membership in their group developed and strengthened their social ties. This was primarily expressed by stating that their group provided them with a **sense of belonging**, fellowship, meaningful connection with others. A number of respondents described their group as their “family.” Examples of responses in this category include the following:

It’s very rewarding to belong to something.

I have made lifelong friendships grounded in faith and found a place where I feel welcome always.

I love belonging to this community because I am surrounded my students/friends my age that are also committed to their faith, as well as many strong leaders like staff and religious who help guide, lead, and form my growth.

My group has been extremely loving and nurturing in my 15 years I have spent with them. Not only is it a community of faith, but also a family. As I continue to participate in the group, I find myself appreciating the life and opportunity I have to share in the

beautiful life the God has given me. Through thick and thin, the group has been a place where I am loved and cared for.

My involvement with [redacted] has given me one of the only experiences of community that I have ever experienced. It is an inter-generational family where peers and mentors encounter Christ and each other authentically.

A love and respect and a feeling of belonging to a community that really cares.

Feel that I am part of a family other than my own.

I enjoy my time with this group being connected to individuals of similar mindset.

I feel that I as a divorced young adult belong and I don't feel that way in parish life.

Increased sense of community and connectedness.

It is just like a family. We share all things with each other and support each other.

Suddenly finding myself the only member of my religious community within 600 miles, I have greatly appreciated meeting regularly with a group of parish women who want to focus on and share their spiritual perspectives and journeys.

A few people felt that their group led to **developing strong friendships**. Examples of their responses include the following:

I have made lifelong friendships grounded in faith and found a place where I feel welcome always.

It has allowed me to find a community where I can (...) create deep friendships.

Deep friendships have come about because of the relationships formed in small group.

Builds strong friendships over time.

It has helped me to build stronger faith-based friendships.

Some people pointed out that groups give them a **venue to socialize**. For example:

*Really it gives me an opportunity to socialize and get to know who is in my community.
(...)*

[redacted] is definitely a leisured group. Most of the members are widows who look forward to the monthly social meeting and refreshments.

I am pastor and I get to know people better.

Have met new people when I first moved to town.

I was new to town and it was a way to meet others.

Membership Provides a Way to Practice Values

A substantial share of responses focused on different ways groups allow practicing values. This may take a form of **growing in faith, growing spiritually, and/or growing in relationship with God**. Examples of those responses include the following:

It has allowed me to find a community where I can grow in my faith (...)

Ha habido un crecimiento espiritual extraordinario mi relación con Dios a aumentada por medio de el conocimiento de nuestra madre María [There has been an extraordinary spiritual growth my relationship with God has increased through the knowledge of our mother Mary.]

I have grown in my love and devotion to Our Eucharistic Lord. And I have developed a true relationship with Jesus that continues to grow.

Ha sido la bendicion mas grande el poder haber escuchado el llamado de dios. Dejarlo entrar en mi vida me ha abierto los ojos a servir mas a los demas. Ver necesidades de otros. Estar ahi para ayudar al necesitado o buscar la via que encuentre ayuda. [It has been the greatest blessing to have been able to hear God's call. Letting him into my life has opened my eyes to serve others more. See others' needs. Be there to help the needy or look for the way to find help.]

Membership in [redacted] has allowed me to grow in my faith as well as in my service of others. I love belonging to this community because I am surrounded my students/friends my age that are also committed to their faith, as well as many strong leaders like staff and religious who help guide, lead, and form my growth.

Some respondents described how belonging to their group provided a way to **put their faith into action**. This includes creating groups and facilitating the meetings that serve group members as well as evangelization and undertaking volunteering activities that serve others outside the group. For example, their responses include the following:

Being a member of [redacted] has increased my faith and allowed me to grow in volunteerism and community with others.

Ha sido la bendicion mas grande el poder haber escuchado el llamado de dios. Dejarlo entrar en mi vida me ha abierto los ojos a servir mas a los demas. Ver necesidades de otros. Estar ahi para ayudar al necesitado o buscar la via que encuentre ayuda. [It has been the greatest blessing to have been able to hear God's call. Letting him into my life has opened my eyes to serve others more. See others' needs. Be there to help the needy or look for the way to find help.]

Given me a place to be the kind of Church I'd like to see.

I have grown in the works of Charity and many other areas also. this brings our church together to know, love and serve the Lord in many ways.

We have done a lot of really good charity work (...)

It makes me feel like what we do makes a huge difference!! We have started or supported many large projects for the poor that have continued for many years.

Membership in [redacted] has allowed me to provide assistance to those less fortunate, grow the parish community through outreach and establish strong bonds with other Catholic men.

I have been in group leadership for 12 of our 13 years. It gives me a tangible way to contribute to my parish and use my teaching and organizational skills.

A few people felt that their group **strengthens their prayer life**. Examples of their responses include the following:

(...) We have become very dependent on sharing our prayers. Everyone needs prayers so we include others from our parish and friends who may not be Catholic. The rosary is very important part of our prayer life. When we can't meet we say the rosary over the phone with others.

Spending more time in prayer. (...)

My group specializes in praying the rosary. It has been a great way to grow/remain close to the Lord and our great intercessor over time. It's a low-key, informal meeting that allows people to come and go as they need/see fit and opens all attendees new, sporadic, and regular with open arms.

It has been a good way to add more silent prayer into my schedule and provided a source of priestly fraternity.

Membership Helps Acquire Knowledge and Understanding

A number of respondents indicated that membership in small groups helps them acquire knowledge and understanding. This most often focuses on improving the **understanding of the Church's teachings**. Examples of those responses include the following:

El concepto de iglesia ha crecido fuera de la cuatro paredes del edificio donde nos reunimos y comienza a participar en asuntos que afectan a todo el mundo. [The concept of church has grown out of the four walls of the building where we meet and begins to participate in issues that affect everyone.]

*(...) I have learned so much more about Catholicism even though I am a cradle Catholic.
(...)*

This group is basically a review of the teachings of the Church: Back to Basics. It has been a wonderful review. I have enjoyed every minute.

We study the coming Sunday's scriptures on Monday morning and that gives me a whole week to contemplate them and put them into action before I go to Mass on Sunday.

Some respondents pointed out that their groups not only help them better understand Church's teachings but also **apply those teachings in their life**. For example:

This group of dedicated women in the Church have helped me to better integrated my faith life with my everyday life experience. We share about our families, our and our families struggles with faith and children and grandchildren's lack of faith in the Catholic Church. This is a very life-giving group to me. I don't miss unless I am sick.

Enabled me to expand the connection of my faith as related to the business environment.

*It helped me get over a personal tragedy; it has given me purpose during my retirement years; it's helped me to put my faith into action in our parish community; I've learned a lot and am able to apply the lessons not only in my ministry, but also in my everyday life;
(...)*

Demonstrated application of Christian principles, attitudes.

A few respondents felt participating in their group helps them **better understand other's perspectives and struggles**. It provides them with role models and examples of people who are successfully able to transform their lives. Examples of their responses include the following:

Diversity of Hispanic cultures and others.

He tenido la oportunidad de aprender de diferentes culturas. Eso me ha ayudado a reconocer que aunque hablemos el mismo idioma tenemos diferencias en costumbres. Cociendo más culturas o costumbres me ayuda a conocer más del amor De Dios. [I have had the opportunity to learn from different cultures. This has helped me to recognize that although we speak the same language we have differences in customs. (?) more cultures or customs helps me to know more about the love of God.]

I have become more understanding of the other participating religions. The interaction with different people. The sharing of faith.

The aridity of ages and perspectives is of great value.

Positive faith sharing experience. We all learn from each other.

I have become aware of the great challenges faced by many married couples and their families which has expanded my appreciation of the work that goes into family life.

Hearing other people's stories, and hearing how they've dealt with it. Also, it has touched me that I've related to so many people in these groups. Relating to these different types of people has allowed me to be more positive.

Helped me to understand how others I respect deal with faith tensions.

Many have the same challenges which encourage me. Some make suggestions in how they managed situations which helps.

It has given me a deeper spirituality and compassion for others who are suffering.

I value the examples of faithful and strong mothers. As I am one of the youngers in the group, the others model a role as a strong faithful woman. I don't feel alone in my difficulties. (...)

Membership is a Way to Become a Better Person

Some respondents focused on how group membership makes them a better person. This includes responses from people who feel that they **became better parents, spouses, and friends**. For example:

A mejorado nuestra vida matrimonial y como padres. (...) [It has improved our married life and as parents.]

Me ayuda en mi relación con Dios y con mis hermanos, hacemos amistades más fuertes basadas en el amor y respeto. Tratamos de Evangelizar a los demás de a uno en uno. Es algo que podemos hacer juntos, mi esposo y yo. [It helps me in my relationship with God and with my brothers, we make stronger friendships based on love and respect. We try to evangelize others one by one. It is something we can do together, my husband and me.]

Me ha ayudado a mejorar mi relación con Dios y con los demás. [It has helped me improve my relationship with God and with others.]

Challenged and helped me grow to become a better husband.

Helps me be more compassionate because I've gotten to know people and their experiences behind the "first impression".

A few respondents felt that participating in their group helps them **become better Catholics**. Examples of their responses include the following:

More firm in my faith.

(...) Joining my group has honestly been my best decision at college. It has exposed me to a better way of life and ultimately taught me to trust God in everything.

I'm a better Catholic.

I've become more Jesus centered. I've grown in humility, simplicity, love for all, peacemaking, and love of the Eucharist and the Church.

My personal [redacted] has been an essential of my life and its ongoing commitment to piety and holiness, study and formation in the faith, and true apostolic actions has been a pursuit that I will practice forever.

Some respondents felt that participating in their group makes them **more confident, more hopeful, and a better person in general**. These respondents wrote, for example, that:

Me ayudo a conocer mas mi cultura y fe. Estoy orgullosa de ser una Joven Hispana Catolica Soltera mayor de 18 anos. [It helped me to know more about my culture and faith. I am proud to be a Single Hispanic Catholic Young Woman over the age of 18.]

The membership in my group has truly molded me to become the person I am today. I have learned much more than just things about my faith. I feel more confident in the person that I am and the person that I wish to become.

It has made me a better person in how I think and act.

It gives me encouragement.

It gives me hope for the future of the Church.

Membership Helps Navigate the Difficulties of Life

A number of respondents indicated that membership in small groups helps them navigate various difficulties of life. This takes among other things a form of **spiritual support**. Examples of those responses include the following:

Membership in my group has helped me with my grieving process, spiritually and my closer relationship with God.

It has helped me spiritually as I have recently returned to the church after a long absence.

My group has been a source of strength for me during several family crises, as well as practical assistance when I was sick or injured.

The encouragement that we extend to each other as we meet today's demanding needs is of great help. If we are struggling we encourage and pray for their needs. We had met at a location at our parish, however, one of our member's spouse has cancer and we were currently meeting in their home.

It has provided (...) a place of strength and safety. It has provided me support, understanding, and a safe place to share my experiences as a priest with brother priests.

Some respondents described **support during health crises** which they received from other members. For example:

I don't feel alone in my difficulties. When I've been sick, they have helped me bringing food. I would have died without them. My parish has an outreach program but they didn't work during the summer. My small group helped me taking me to my doctors' appointments and sustained me in prayers. Lastly, this year during isolation during the

pandemic, we all remained in contact online and our mutual support has been stronger than ever.

My group has been a source of strength for me during several family crises, as well as practical assistance when I was sick or injured.

(...) I had surgery and a number of the women visited me, offered rides until I could drive, one brought Communion to me. Everyone that can is so willing to help a member that needs it.

A few people felt that their group gives them **refuge from the world**, a place to experience peace and joy. Examples of their responses include the following:

It gives me peace and strengthens me.

Has given me a consistent place to pray and share my faith with other people in a similar situation, which keeps me calmer about the other parts of life and more grounded.

I always feel much happier when I attend my church group.

I feel happy when I spend time with my friends and we can share a common faith.

[I] found comfort and support among my group members.

Membership Helps Improve Life Skills and Professional Skills

A number of respondents indicated that membership in small groups helps them improve life skills and professional skills. The most commonly mentioned among them were **leadership skills**. Examples of those responses include the following:

It has giving me the opportunity to grow and enhance my leadership experience.

(...) So thankful for my opportunities leading retreats!

I have developed leadership skills. I have developed a better understanding of putting my faith in practice.

I have learned to lead a Small Faith-Sharing Group & make sure that everyone is heard and listened to.

As a college student, leading the music ministry has equipped me to take leadership roles in my future home parishes.

A few people mentioned that joining small groups helped them develop better **life skills** and communication skills in particular. They stated, for example, that:

I have been affected greatly. I have improved my relationship with God and others. I have opened up and not afraid to ask question. (...) I look forward to coming every week. I have served others and learned how to sacrifice.

Improved my spirituality and speaking in front of people.

My life skill, experience, and knowledge improved.

Developed empathy, patience, an understanding of group dynamics and personalities, and an understanding of how an organization is run.

A few people, most of whom seem to work for various church institutions, observed that participating in small groups **helps them in their professional lives**. They stated, for example, that:

It has helped me to better collaborate with coworkers for the purposes of evangelization.

I am one of the group leaders from archdiocesan office. Participation in the group has helped me become more insightful about the impact of disability on family life, as well as more aware of the struggles we and joys we share.

It has always pushed me both spiritually and professionally. Working with other high caliber leaders who are not satisfied with the status quo has always been exciting and stretching.

Membership with other pastoral associates has definitely enhanced my ministry. I have been able to share in leadership and to enjoy companionship at retreats and national meetings. It has informed me of the benefits of collaboration. (...)

This bi-monthly gathering of priests has been a great source of spiritual encouragement and help to me both spiritually and practically.

It has allowed me to continue vocal training under expert guidance.

Membership Has Negative Effects on Person's Life

A handful of respondents described how group membership had a negative effect on their lives. Their responses include the following:

It has been bad for my marriage. My husband does not attend church and does not understand the time involvement required when you dedicate yourself to participating in a small church where there are very few volunteers but much to be done.

(...) I've also experienced, to my horror, how little white Catholics in their 20's and 30's in my diocese know about racial dynamics, gender dynamics, poverty in general, and their

own roles in these issues. The vast majority of this group say they don't want to discuss anything related to race because it's "too political." Although they've had questions about gender dynamics and feminist theology, they refuse to read anything about it. The leader of the group, a priest, has had a very difficult time getting members of the group to actively learn anything about anyone different from them. After months of hard work, the priest finally got the men of the group to discuss toxic masculinity in their own private meeting, emulating this video series [on YouTube]. At that meeting, 2 of the 15 men present said that toxic masculinity isn't real, that men are inherently more virtuous than women, that men are smarter and stronger and more equipped for leadership than women, and that there is no gender bias in the American academic/military/business system. After that meeting, those 2 men have dominated every group meeting by mansplaining, talking over women, laughing at the things women say, and generally talking so much that nobody else can get in a word. The group had already been male-dominated, a term that I had to teach the men in the group as none of them had ever heard it before, and at least 4 women have left because of those men. I am probably going to leave soon too.

It has been both fulfilling at times, and other times it has been less so. Recent decisions by the highest levels of leadership of the group's national office has made me disillusioned and concerned about the future of the organization.

It originally awakened me to the idea that I was not alone in seeking a closer relationship with God and that sharing and listening could be a part of that. It felt like a family. My group, unfortunately, leaned more to the social over time and, though the speakers and events were inspiring, the fellowship declined to the feeling of a social club. I found myself being less involved with God and more involved in the administrative. We are currently trying to revive our charism and are making some steps forward. This is helping me to pay attention to my spirituality in a renewed way.

Older, experienced members pass away. New members are hard to come by. Members are too busy with other things or lifestyle keeps them from being fully committed. Makes it harder to get things accomplished.

One person seems to monopolize the discussion. This bothers me as I feel we should all have a chance to express our fillings.

The most difficult issue I find is that as a leader, and those of us who choose to lead, are the only ones who step forward to lead. We have an aging population and very rarely do we have younger parishioners stepping forward to lead. Due to this, the same people always lead groups and at times it would be nice to be just a participant and not a leader. But because "I'm good at it" others expect it. Then if other leaders or I choose not to do it, there may be no Adult Catechetical development. I hope this makes sense.

Part III. Interviews about Small Christian Communities

Part III of this report explores in more depth those characteristics of young Catholics and their small communities, which were identified in the National Poll of Young Catholics and the National Survey of Small Christian Communities (see *Part I* and *Part II* respectively). The analysis described here is based on interviews with 14 English-speaking and eight Spanish-speaking Catholics working with Small Christian Communities in the United States (this includes among others pastors, religious sisters, university professors/researchers, parish and diocesan staff members, as well as leaders of national and international umbrella organizations fostering Small Christian Communities in the Catholic Church, in particular youth groups, campus groups, young adult groups, and Hispanic/Latino groups). The interviews were conducted over video calls between July and September, 2020. All of the interviews were recorded and analyzed for themes.

The findings are organized into six sections:

- Attracting new members – this section describes observations and recommendations from interviewees on drawing in new members to Small Christian Communities. This includes postulates to recruit more paid staff and volunteer leaders; enlist support from pastors and bishops; bolster small groups through big events; listen to young people, support them, and give them agency; address hypocrisy and inauthenticity in the Church; recognize different needs of different age groups; recognize different needs of people from different cultural backgrounds; and reach out to progressive types.
- Racial equality – this section summarizes interviewees’ observations on racism in the American society and in the Catholic Church in the United States, as well as the response to racism from Catholic Hierarchy and from Catholic faithful (in particular, from Small Christian Community members).
- Cultural differences – this section explores cultural differences between white American-Europeans and ethnic/racial minorities (in particular Hispanics) that affect Small Christian Communities’ dynamics. Those differences include individualism vs. communitarianism, agenda-driven vs. relationship-driven attitudes, sharing from one’s head vs heart, reserved vs. open personalities, and satisfaction with group experiences.
- Online meetings – this section describes opportunities and challenges related to switching from in-person to online meeting format in the midst of the pandemic. This section concludes with observations about the future of online meetings in anticipation of quarantine’s end.
- Venue for meetings – this section explores reasons why some groups are more likely than others to meet in parishes.
- Formal character – this section explores different factors affecting varying degrees of formalization of Small Christian Communities.

Attracting New Members

Interviewees offered seven postulates for drawing in new members to Small Christian Communities (SCCs). Each of those postulates is described below.

Recruit More Paid Staff and Volunteer Leaders

Often, SCCs are led by volunteer group leaders. A lack of those volunteer group leaders may be a major bottle neck in growing SCCs especially in environments such as campus ministry where there is constant turnover. One of the interviewees working at a university-based parish stated that he could have as many groups as young adult leaders available. Another one said that “[p]eople want to meet in communities, but nobody wants to lead.” These communities need people who “are prepared to lead, have the charism to lead, who are open, who have the space in their homes, etc.” Other interviewees added a caveat that putting young adults in leadership positions should be a carefully paced process. Examples of their responses include the following:

I think if we had 100 leaders, we could have 50 groups. I think that it is getting people to make that commitment that sad, yeah, we're all called to share the good news of Jesus Christ and that means me.

Well, I think that the great emphasis is more on...given small steps of belonging, I think that sometimes I'm afraid when people feel that they get the young people and immediately they want to be leaders. My experience and what I'm trying to do is let's experience being with one another, not having a task, just contributing and sharing who you are, what makes you tick, those kinds of things. And then you'll find out what are the gifts. (...) I think young people have to feel...and these are young adults whether they're married or single, that they're not going to put expectations on them before they are ready to say yes. Not to presume that you say yes.

Overall, volunteers are a very important component of SCC but they cannot fully replace trained, experienced, and specialized paid personnel (in parishes and dioceses). A major challenge related to attracting more people to SCCs is in limited availability of such personnel due to insufficient funds. This problem is exacerbated during the pandemic. The interviewees described it in the following way:

So, the biggest issues in terms of the recruitment side beyond the more sociological factors are just the lack of personnel. There's just [no] people who are given the space to do this work. We don't have people doing it. I mean, when (...) there's two or three of us that kind of do what I'm doing in the Archdiocese of [redacted] which covers millions of people and we wonder why they're not joining the groups. Well, there's nobody there to get them to join the groups. And so just how spread thin the resources are at a parish level, at a diocesan level, at an organizational level, is very tricky.

The church has not invested nearly as much money in the accompaniment of young adults as it has with teenagers. And so, I would draw the connection mostly with investment of personnel to kind of oversee that. Because the coordination of those Small

Christian Communities is a very complex process. So, having somebody on staff to really oversee that, accompany that, train leaders and provide the resources needed for what the small groups do, that's something that while volunteers or while people who are not paid can certainly do that, there's a consistency and I want to say the authority that comes from the pastor that sometimes conveys a lot stronger through a paid staff person. (...) So, I think that Small Christian Community model works (...) when there is investment that is in the form of a person that's been paid and is equipped and trained to lead those kind of small group leaders.

[O]bviously parishes and diocese were spending a lot of money on [sexual abuse] cases and were solving cases, so there's reverberations from that and usually it's youth ministry, young adult ministry who get hit first by cuts because we're seen more on the margins, if you will, in terms of perhaps our importance in the overall ministry scheme. So, often it's those people who are...their positions are cut or their hours are cut (...).

Now the parishes are still the mystery. That's the weakest part. I don't see many parishes coming up with a Small Christian Community model for young people in the parish. I think youth ministry is very rocky. Again, this is my research. For example, in New Jersey, people don't have money to pay for a full-time youth minister in the parish. And with the payouts of the sexual abuse cases. And now the lack of collections for COVID-19, youth ministry is at a low.

We may have a programming budget but how many people have a decent advertising budget or if they did have a decent advertising budget, it would have to be skillset to be an effective communicator in the advertising realm (...).

We have seen so many layoffs across the country especially at the parish level and often some of the first people to go are the youth ministers, right. In my world of young adult ministry, there aren't young adult ministers to begin with, so they couldn't be cut. But usually the people who would often do that work of young adult ministry in addition to their job of youth ministry were the youth ministers. Not saying that's the best model, but that's just often what the case was. But now that you've cut out the youth minister, there's been so many of not just friends but I've just seen colleagues across the country lose their jobs at the diocesan level and especially at the parish level because of this.

[I]t's not necessarily that we need specialized youth ministers and specialized young adult ministers. It's great, I think, we do need specialist at least in clusters, right. You don't need a specialized young adult minister at every parish in the country. But you do need one in every deanery in the country who can then help that whole region on a regional basis to help the rest of the people do their work.

One interviewee noted that while the number of personnel is declining as sexual abuse cases and pandemic negatively affect Church's finances, the amount of work to facilitate and fulfill

administrative requirements for youth SCCs has increased in recent years. He had the following to say:

Certainly, the whole clergy abuse crisis that created...that gave rise to the safe environment protocols, that created a big change in terms of more focused attention on supervision and just relational aspects of doing gathered ministry and what can and what cannot happen. There's much more oversight of it now than there ever was. And some of it could be seen as inhibiting some of the relational elements. (...) especially when those guidelines first came out in terms of there was some overreaction by some bishops and other administrators at a higher level saying, "Well, we can't have any more overnight retreats" or...and retreats had always been one of the principal formative experiences for young people especially. Not everyone was saying that and people have adapted but it makes having and hosting those events a little more work. And in terms of the paperwork, the permissions, the getting more adults who have been trained in the safe environment protocols and certified or what have you. So, there's been a lot of those administrative elements that have come in to play that could be creating the structure you're referring to, but also it creates a bit of an administrative stress.

Enlist Support from Pastors and Bishops

SCCs would benefit from greater support from bishops and priests, in particular parish pastors. It seems that SCCs enjoyed this greater support in the past but largely lost it in the past two decades. One of the interviewees observed that the generation of priests ordained after year 2000 has a more controlling approach to SCCs, which limits the proliferation of those groups. Some of the other interviewees seem to agree that currently pastors' attitudes and actions are not supportive of SCCs. They said, for example:

[In the early 2000's] there was this changing of the guard where the pastors that were coming out of seminary were, like, 'I will control it all now' and [Small Christian Communities] disappeared by and large.

What I find is that the Catholic people are very interested in getting together in small groups to talk about Scripture (...) but I'll say that sometimes pastors are not. Like they don't see it as an essential part of parish life. They see it as another activity or something for folks to do. I just had an experience with a pastor who didn't want me to have a Small Christian Communities in the parish for various reasons, but it's mystifying to me.

One of the interviewees believes that this more negative, controlling attitude towards SCCs may have to do with the sexual abuse scandal while others pointed out that pastors may not understand the potential of SCCs. They said that:

A lot of young priests don't want to work with young people in the parish because of the dangers of the sexual abuse accusations. So, that is not successful on the parish level.

I think the biggest issue is trying to get the pastors to understand that this is...it's something that they could use to their advantage in terms of gathering people, forming people, having people be able to understand their life in relationship to Jesus' life. And I think especially with young people...and it just seems that we're not tapping that area as well as we could be in a parish. (...) I don't think there's enough depth of understanding of what Small Christian Communities could be.

[T]he only way that the Catholic Church can survive in the future is through small communities. If we lose that structure, we are losing the opportunity because we already lost the parish structure. The parish structure as the canon law says is no longer effective. Because my people that come to this parish, they don't live in the territory. They live outside the territory but this is the parish for them. So, the concept of parish by canon law is not applying to them anymore. So, as we lost the parish canonically as the entity, and the parish becomes global, so the small communities can keep us interconnected.

Parish-based SCCs greatly benefit from the support of pastors. This includes among other things encouraging faithful to participate in those groups, dedicating resources (e.g., paid coordinators, space) to those groups, and allowing for group continuity from the previous pastor to the next one. For example, the interviewees had this to say:

[Y]our pastors get moved in and out every eight or 12 years. If your pastor was supportive of it and you got a new guy that came in that's not, they're gone then. So, like, everything rests unfortunately with whether or not a pastor that is put into your parish supports these movements. (...) so you could just kind of do all the help or all the harm you can with one person who is not accountable to anyone but themselves. That's the challenge I see. I think the ecclesial ministry is the way of the future, but it's very hard to fight the person who signs your paycheck that doesn't believe in any of the work that you're doing.

But the bishop changes and a pastor changes. That's what you have. You don't have...there's no system for continuity where there's no system for someone to look at what's been going on in this particular parish, what's working, what can be moved forward. We don't have a system. Next guy comes in and says, 'I don't like that guy, I don't like what he did, done, we're not doing that.' (...) it's like the president. The president comes in and says, 'I don't want anything to do with the last president,' I mean this is crazy stuff. Instead of taking a good analytical look at how have people been fed here, how have people come out of these situations and really lived discipleship as Pope Francis is asking us to do, but instead there's not a lot of intentional thinking about this.

[Paraphrasing a Spanish-speaking interviewee:] The main need of SCCs is having more and more closely involved priests. As the number of priests is being reduced, they should be undertaking less administrative duties and more pastoral duties. One of the main problems of the SCCs is that there are not enough priests and pastors, that they are too

involved in administrative and bureaucratic duties and that they don't have enough time to be pastors, to accompany these groups- they don't have enough time to guide the flock.

Some of the interviews noted that, in addition to the need for more pastoral support, SCCs would benefit from more support at the diocesan level. They had the following to say:

I think it has to start with the bishop because one of the things (...) why RENEW was so successful was that the bishops would push it and promote it and talk about it and have it as a regular part of the Roman Catholic [life]. (...) it's harder in a big diocese, but in a smaller diocese, they would know what week we were on, they could talk about it, they would do a homily. There was a sense of trying to pull everybody together. Now it's very difficult to pull everybody together. That's what I'm finding.

[Paraphrasing a Spanish-speaking interviewee:] Since I came to the U.S. more than ten years ago, I have been worried that SCCs are not appropriately accompanied by the dioceses, by the parishes, and even by the religious people. I see how some of SCCs can feel lost and might not feel part of the apostolic body of the Church. I am worried that if this continues for long, some of these groups will start to disappear or grow apart from the Church.

Notably, the responsibility for creating culture that is welcoming of SCCs in the Catholic Church does not rest solely on the bishops and priests. As interviews pointed out:

[What is needed to attract more people to join SCCs] is that shift in mindset that everybody has responsibility for our youth ministry and everybody has responsibility for young adult ministry. And that (...) it's about bringing all of those people into the parish, into all the programming of the parish, into discipleship.

There has to be somebody in the community committed to advocating for young adults. It's not the work of one minister, it's the work of the entire parish to see themselves as a mentoring community, as a space that wants to share the wisdom of the old generation with the younger generation, that wants to walk with them, that wants them to know that they belong somewhere, that they have a home instead of just a place to go for Mass on Sunday.

Bolster Small Groups Through Big Events

Relative decline of SCCs in the Catholic Church in the United States in late 1990's and 2000's might have been related to the changing attitudes of bishops and priests. Another factor contributing to this trend (especially in youth and young adult ministry) might be the rise of big events (with the prime example of the World Youth Day). Big events and SCCs often are substitutes, with big events taking up the resources and attention away from SCCs. However, when approached with intentionality they may compliment each other. In this scenario, big events bring more people into the Church and bring new energy that comes with large grouping. This can be utilized to form new and continue currently existing SCCs. Interviewees explained it in the following way:

Since [World Youth Day in Denver in 1993], ministry with young people [in the United States] has had a decidedly event driven focus. You look at FOCUS and Steubenville and you look at NCYC, these national gatherings, these national big events are what drives a lot of these ministers. There's the big, huge flash moment. World Youth Day still thrives on that and it's only since the 1990s, World Youth Day has only expanded the number of people that come internationally to it. (...) So, it's been a very event driven ministry, whereas, small groups have not been. Now, FOCUS has been an interesting anomaly in this. So, they have tried to do a mix of the event driven which they do have with their annual conferences were very high numbers, big event, let's draw everyone together. But their bread and butter is in small group, Small Christian Communities. So, they've been able to manage that and I think that that took to the great success of that balance between small group and big event. I wouldn't say that success is shared elsewhere in the Church. I think there's been more of a focus even on the diocesan and parish level for big events where it's a big diocesan event or a big parish event, there's a youth rally, these rise of these big events I think has drawn people away from small group. Not that they're disappearing away, I guess let's just say the emphasis and the resourcing...I think more ministers are spending more time in planning the next big event than they are planning for the resourcing of a Small Christian Community.

We do [outreach], our young people do it (...) one of the ways (...) was through a festival that we did in the parish and a lot of people came to that and at least we used the festival itself to promote the community and to welcome the community event to register people. And we're also doing the same thing with celebrations of the Blessed Mother in the Hispanic community (...). So, it's an invitation through events that people would like.

Several interviewees stressed the distinct nature of SCCs and big events. Specifically, they stated that SCCs are about building high quality relationships (as opposed to growing high numbers of participants). They said, for example:

I don't think numbers change hearts (...).

[W]e're really pushing in the field to go (...) to focus on the quality of your relationships with the young adults and the youths that you have in front of you, not so much on how many came to a program. Like, oh, I have this program and 50 people came.

*And this is what some of the idea that people have. They think that the evangelization with young people is to fill the pews in the temple. That's my last goal. Sorry, but that's my last goal. Because I don't perceive a church filled with benches full of pagans, of people who haven't had a personal encounter with Christ and a commitment that it says it's important for me to be here even if I don't do anything. (...) I think it's a different concept of *acompañamiento*. Is you accompany. You model before you throw them in the furnace. (...) So, the idea is that we don't want them to come to church because we want people in there and they feel that we're growing. Well, we're not growing. (...) We did not begin with evangelization filling of the temple. We began with community. Every new church is one that is a community. And Pope Francis keep begging us, "Let our parish be a community of communities."*

Listen to Young People, Support Them, and Give Them Agency

Interviewees feel strongly that the successful engagement of young people in SCCs requires that the Church listens to them, supports them and gives them agency. The Church needs to listen to young people, both on the institutional level and human level. She needs to meet them where they are (rather than waiting for them in the parish), reach out to them (rather than wait for them to make the contact), give them space to talk about things important to them, accompany them in their suffering and struggles, make them feel accepted, affirm them, encourage them (as opposed to laying "on them burdens and regulations"). The Church needs to build relationship with young people. Interviews stated, for example, the following:

I mean, that was one of the things Pope Francis highlighted in his exhortation to young people last year "Christus vivit." He highlighted that...one of the lines that to me was one of the most striking was when he said the line, "Young people frequently fail to find in our programs a response to their concerns, their needs." That struck me. That said that the greatest need that young people have, the Church was not a place where many of them found a response to it. That's sad because the Church has not been quiet. The Church has not been doing nothing, but it hasn't been responding to their needs.

[Cardinal Czerny] was asked when he was receiving the red hat, "What's the biggest challenge in the Catholic Church today?" His answer, "The gap between young people and the institutional Catholic Church." (...) And if you ask me what is my ministry with young people? It's to listen to young people and accompany them. And that's what the pope is stressing. Accompany young people wherever they're at. Wherever they're at and don't lay burdens on them rules and regulations.

I think the other area where I think we need to gravitate around is pastoral care. I think that...one of the things that young people are struggling with is...well they're struggling,

first of all. I think that's one of the big things that I don't think anybody...people don't think of...when I think of a 20-something, let's just say, they don't think of somebody who is suffering. They don't think of somebody who is in need of care. When we think of pastoral care, we often think of senior citizens and the elderly, and the sick and the dying. (...) So, people in their 20s are, whether it's through economic, health, loneliness, mental health, racism, there's mental health issues...there's health, there's pastoral care issues that are just being rampant. To me, I think the way we re-engage young people is by re-emphasizing pastoral care. Re-emphasizing. And so small groups, I think, have...I think our small groups have less to be about scripture studies on the Gospel of John, instead, small groups around struggling with employment issues, struggling with mental health issues, struggling with racism issues.

When I did the research in America, it was [inaudible] personal relationships, boy-girl relationships, sexuality. That's what they want to talk about by themselves. (...) They want to be on their own. They don't want supervision from adults. So, the energy that I see coming from young people is that the young people are energized by talking about topics they want. And another big one, which is a huge one for America today, is unemployment. I bet you these young people small Christian communities, if I join one of their online sessions, I'm sure they'd be talking about unemployment. And especially seniors in college, that's the biggest thing on their mind, getting a job after they graduate. And then the third topic is social justice. They like to talk about that.

[Some young people] would not necessarily be saying sign me up, there's a small group on the Gospel of John. No disrespect against the Gospel of John, but that's not what's catching their interest. What's catching their interest is you're talking about issues that are relevant to my life where I am being directly impacted by. That's going to be the touchstones of small group dynamics going forward. If the Church is going to work on the old model of let's just crack open the lectionary or let's just talk about a papal letter or in cyclical or a church history, that's not going to draw people. What's going to draw our young adults, young and youth today are going to be pastoral issues, pastoral care issues. So, to me that's what the future is.

[H]ow do we create actual community of belonging and that really takes somebody who is committed to changing the ways of the old parish of saying everyone that comes...calling people that are on your registry that were married there and saying hey, how's it going. What can we help you with in terms of your first early years of being married? Do you have children? Do you need...what can a parish do to help you? And just reaching out, I would say. The first thing to do is tell them that you care.

[O]nce they feel accepted, and encouraged, and affirmed, they fly.

And you can see that if you encourage, if you affirm the young people, they multiply.

[Paraphrasing a Spanish-speaking interviewee:] The best way to attract more people to SCCs is to “offer the best” and “satisfy the necessities well” of the people who are already involved. When they are satisfied with what they get, then they will for sure invite others to join and the groups will grow.

Some interviewees observed how the pandemic intensified problems of young people and that this is a particularly important time for the Church to listen and support them. For example:

[N]ow more than ever, the Church needs to be accompanying young people. At the very same time, it is cutting ministries and accompaniment to those young people. So, the very thing the Church needs to be doing at this time is the very thing that it's not doing. That's horrible. It just is. It's also a reality and I get it.

[L]oneliness before the pandemic was a growing issue for today's generation of youth and young adults. The isolation from each other, and then added to that, the forced isolation of locked down and quarantine and social distancing has only compounded that loneliness further. And so, the Church before the pandemic, my big thing that I was advocating that the Church do is have more resources to accompany young adults who are lonely and isolated. And now we have this, where lonely and isolated is what everyone is going through, so it's only amplified the issue. So, now more than ever, young people need to be accompanied by the Church. And at the same time we're seeing this has been cut, that's been cut, and this has been cut.

A few interviewees offered additional caveats on how the Church ought to engage young adults. They stated for example:

I would say you have to look at the local context. All of my writing has been on the local context is king and queen I call it. The local context determines everything.

[Out young adults] tend to not like to sit at meetings and discuss things. They like to be out there doing things.

I think there's a dynamic of making sure that there are many voices around the table. Because what small group realities can do is sometimes enforce these insular groups, these echo chambers where, if you have a group that is completely of one culture or one political perspective or one gender or one whatever, the danger...not that those are bad groups, but the danger and the sensitivity that has to be developed is that it doesn't become a group that doesn't think beyond its own limitations.

Several interviewees postulated that young people need to be leaders both in their own ministry (with support from adult leaders) and in the Church in general (e.g., parish council), because they're the ones in touch with the culture of their peers and they are the present and the future of the Church. Interviewees explained it in the following way:

Well, Francis uses the term that [young people] need to be the protagonists of their ministry (...). So, they're not just passive recipients that we fill up with knowledge or good works or what have you. But the most successful programs and initiatives and those with more long-standing results are always going to be ones where we actively engage them as the protagonist in this ministry, so they're being the leaders, they're being the voices, they're getting to share their faith actively and consistently with their peers because they have a leadership role. So, leadership training and formation is probably one of the best things we can do with young people so that we give them and help them with the skills they need to be those protagonists, to be the leaders within their own ministry, being able to help direct the place...the direction it needs to go because they're the ones in touch with the culture of their peers, with the needs and the issues and they can address it, but not on their own. They're still in formation themselves, so that's why adult leaders are needed to help guide them and prepare them, but then step back and allow them to take the lead and allow them to share their faith.

Now, we are promoting a model of parish lives where young people would be on the parish pastoral council so that they would have a voice in the decision making in the parish, that they're just not receivers but they're participants.

We, older people, are still holding on [organizational] maintenance. We don't allow the young people to come into leadership and get their own ideas and get their own methods.

We have to have a leadership that is: "I'm not going to be here for long. Even if I am, I'm not going to hold your hand. I would share anything that I have but you had to make it and you make it better."

I think that a challenge we're facing as a Church with the next generation of Hispanic young adults is to really connect with them [to reach] beyond the cultural value from the cultural Catholicism. And I think some of those challenges is: we have to be willing to allow them to be agents of change and transformation and listening to their priorities. (...) They're the ones that have the answers, so the more we can listen, the more we can invite them to the table early on the better (...).

Address Hypocrisy and Inauthenticity in the Church

Several interviewees observed that engaging young people in SCCs is made difficult by hypocrisy and inauthenticity in the Church (whether real or perceived). From the perspective of some people, the Church appears silent on its own shortcomings (including sexual abuse, racism, judgementalism, gossip). There appears to be a disconnect between what the Church teaches and how the Church acts (both as a hierarchy and as a body of faithful). Interviewees postulate that the Church needs to create safe venues for exploring/ discussing and addressing those issues with young people. For example, interviewees had the following to say:

[O]ne of the biggest issues is the perceived or real lack of authenticity and hypocrisy in Christianity. So, young people and young adults in particular are quick to point out and just struggle with the hypocrisy and lack of authenticity not only from their leaders that comes up from fellow Christians. So, the feelings of judgmentalism from fellow Christians and then obviously the scandals from leaders, and not just in terms of the sex abuse crisis, but in terms of just a general lack of relevance in their life is a huge issue.

Can I trust what these people are saying? The Catholic church's overarching image has a lot to be desired, right. There are some things that people are just really, really upset about it, the Church is not speaking to or acknowledging error or seeking forgiveness or whatever. And I think there's a lot of people who are just upset with it and that's proof to be a challenge.

I would say some other big challenges are the perception of people of faith, of being judgmental, of being closed minded, of being hypocritical. I think that some people think that they could be better people or be holier if they're not part of a Church community. I think they've been part of some communities where there have been some very bad behaviors, some bad things happening. And I'm not even talking necessarily...I know for some people that would mean like the sex abuse scandal or things like that. But even just the way that people are treated in a parish, how nice someone was to them or how nice someone wasn't to them. Watching how gossips and how other things affect a community. All of that, young adults are paying very close attention to that.

[C]an people come in [the Church] and feel like they're not going to be judged or become judgmental or be perceived as being judgmental by association, and then can they find something relevant to their lived situation, right.

[T]here's a lot of Church hurt that's going on that we are not acknowledging [in] churches. And the first step is towards healing and reconciliation. The amount of young people that have been hurt or wounded by the Church or someone in the Church, I mean, it's pretty powerful. (...) And so, our first efforts at gathering young adults was by just creating a very, very safe space that says I'm not here to judge you, I'm not here to shove the doctrine down your throat. I am here to listen to your experience of Church. And they say well, if that's the case, sure. And then once you hear from them, you're a part of their life and their story then. (...). It's, like, you're now a mentor to them and without really realizing it. And it comes naturally because they've shared pain and joy with you, sorrow and longing with you. When somebody shares that with you and you're an authentic person, you can't just, like, turn away and never talk to that person again. I mean, you could but you'd be real cold (...).

I think the main challenge is trusting the people who are in the small community, right. So, I really think that it takes that personal invitation and then once the person is invited,

they really have the trust that what's going to happen in that small group is going to stay in that small group.

Recognize Different Needs of Different Age Groups

Some interviewees pointed out that when it comes to working with Catholics under 35 years old, different age groups have different needs. Recognizing and addressing those needs is important to the success of SCCs. For instance, a couple of interviewees pointed out that, when working with youth groups, it is important to engage parents too:

I would say on the primacy of parents in the faith formation process and the need to truly partner with them and not just say, "Hey, it's your job, you're the primary catechist of your children," but just say, "What role do you want faith to play in the lives of your children? (...)" So, that's the accompaniment angle of not just walking with young people or young adults but also with the parents and the families as well.

[W]ith the Hispanic, we know that the family is still value (...) the sacraments are very important but what happened is [parents] made sure that their children receive the sacraments. But after confirmation, and that's not only the Hispanics, but after confirmation, we just don't see [their children] anymore. Their family feel that now they begin, especially those who are Spanglish, introducing to the culture. Now I should make my decisions and I don't have to go with my mom and dad. They're going to think I'm still a kid.

A couple of interviewees observed that people between 18 and 25 are at a crucial moment in their lifecycle making decisions about the direction of their lives and laying foundation for virtuous life. It is important that the Church is there to support their discernment process:

[W]ith older teens and then the young adults in that kind of 18 to 25-year place, that's the primary period of that deep discernment about what difference do I want to make in the world, what do I want my life to be about, kind of setting those important directions. And if the Church isn't there with our message, with our invitation to consider this journey or what...or not just what difference will your life make but what difference does God want you to make in the world. So, bringing in that faith element but the Church needs to be present to do that and the young adult needs to be attentive and open to hearing it.

I think [college] students are just desiring to turn inwards rather than outwards with how they spend their time. So, whether that's on, what we would call kind of, like, our big three that we work on with students: chastity, sobriety, and excellence, those are all attempts to please or fulfill ourselves with happiness in the wrong places.

A few interviewees observed that young adults at the beginning of their careers need their SCCs to be flexible with scheduling, to offer different options, because young people often do not work regular hours. For example:

I think how busy young adults are, and it's not just this distracting, like they're out partying or doing things like that. Most of the young adults that I know are working a lot

of hours or they're working multiple jobs. And they're not working Monday through Friday 8 to 5, they're working evenings, they're working weekends. So, finding things that are flexible in timing, flexible in scheduling (...).

[W]hen I was gathering young people on a regular basis into each small group, I found that it is important that young people understand there's a fluidity to meetings that you may not come every meeting and that's okay. That you may only take a part of the meeting and that's okay. (...) I think consistency is really important. So, if a group is going to be meeting on Wednesdays at 7 p.m., it needs to continue to be on Wednesdays at 7 p.m. because young adult life is complicated.

[T]hese committed young adult Catholics who are engaged in ministry, whether it is paid or volunteer, are trying to find their own spirituality, like, spiritual needs met and fed like the spiritual hunger they have, they're trying to go to their parishes and their parishes are not welcoming. So, for example (...) they want to start some kind of a Bible study or faith sharing group and the parish says, oh, we have one of those. It's Wednesday at 8 a.m. at a time when people who have jobs have to go to work and can't gather. And there's no efforts to try to help them beat that need in any other way other than here's the program that already exists, fill yourselves into that.

Recognize Different Needs of People from Different Cultural Backgrounds

Interviewees observed that SCCs need to be sensitive to the needs of different races/ethnicities if they want to attract more young people from those demographics. For example, some of the Spanish-speaking interviewees noted that:

[Paraphrasing a Spanish-speaking interviewee:] The challenge is main to find people with time availability. The profile of Hispanics is one that works many hours a day. They have many primary needs to attend before they can dedicate time to God.

[Paraphrasing a Spanish-speaking interviewee:] Hispanic communities are not promoted. There needs to be a better communication of the exitance and mission of small Catholic Hispanic communities.

[Paraphrasing a Spanish-speaking interviewee:] Hispanic SCCs are more communitarian in nature (than white groups) and they find it more difficult to transition from in-person to online meeting format during the pandemic. COVID-19 has made the encounters not so personal, communities are being lost.

[Paraphrasing a Spanish-speaking interviewee:] Hispanics have a different way of proceeding with the matters of the Church than Americans. For example, American have too many rules, too many formalities, no spontaneity, everything is controlled.

[Paraphrasing a Spanish-speaking interviewee:] For some Hispanic newcomers to SCCs, the Church/spiritual/faith vocabulary may be “inaccessible.” On the other hand, the communities find it difficult to use a less advanced vocabulary that might be more understandable to new members.

[Paraphrasing a Spanish-speaking interviewee:] Priest are not always very connected to Hispanic Catholic groups (he does not accompany closely their progress) and the language used might also be a barrier of entrance.

[Paraphrasing a Spanish-speaking interviewee:] Hispanic groups don’t have enough visibility in their parishes. For example, “in the parish, materials, manuals for Hispanic groups normally appear on the last page.” “Priests could give more time in the announcements at the end of the Mass to talk about these groups. There are too many administrative announcements.” “For people to join first they need to know that these groups exist”.

I mean it’s all around the world but in this country, if you trace back any movements, most movements are from Spain. So, if you look at anything from Cursillo, Neocatechumenal Way, whatever, they tend to be kind of coming out of that kind of a culture. So, with the...actually, the Small Christian Communities trace back to Europe, meaning not Spain, meaning really basically the Catholic Worker Movement from the late 1900s, I guess, with Canon Cardijn and so forth, and coming out of the Christian Family Movement in the United States. So, there’s a little bit of a difference in how they came to be, both the Latino groups and the English groups.

So, in the development of a small group, it's making sure that there are opportunities for people of all cultures to feel welcome. And the way that different cultures feel welcome into small community is different. How African-Americans and how Asian-Pacific Islanders, how Native Americans will perceive a sense of welcome will be different based on history, based on who's doing the asking, the tone of the asking, what is the ask, and is it a mutual asking? Is it not just an invitation but does it actually respond to a perceived need? Even where the small group meets, there's a sensitivity of that aspect, that dynamic of making sure that when small groups are done, they're done in a situation that the location feels safe for all cultures to feel welcome in.

Reach Out to Progressive Types

One interviewee observed that currently SCCs tend to attract more conservative Catholics while young people overall tend to be more progressive. Thus, there is a need to reach out more to the progressive types. This may mean incorporating more discussion (and activities) focusing on social issues at the forefront of the mainstream society (such as LGBTQ, climate justice, and racial justice). It may also mean exploring/addressing discrepancy between Church’s teaching and mainstream practices among young adults (such as cohabiting before marriage). Examples of the comments made on this issue include the following:

I see these major obstacles of women are second class and the gay-lesbian issue is very strong to discourage young people. So, you're getting a more conservative evangelical young person coming to church on Sunday. That's my experience.

The young people that I've interviewed many times have said the institutional Church turns them off. Is not attractive, the institutional church, which is a Church of rules and regulations. For example, the whole area of people living together before they get married. In the statistics I saw from, like, New Jersey, 95% of the young people who come to the parish church to prepare for a church wedding are already living together. So, they see young people Masses is all talking about sex and morality and Church law, so that turns them off. Several people said to me, for me, the litmus test for being a good Catholic is no longer going to Mass on Sunday, but its participation in service projects, social action. (...) what I found is they rally around protests and marches and they like that kind of aspect. (...) They respond to that very, very much more so than church services. That's what I found. So, that was a big change to me. I grew up as a Catholic thinking that Mass on Sunday was the most important thing and the central thing. But I think the millennial generation does not see that.

If you're going to get young people involved, they want to do it hands-on. So, I don't think that if you just have a pure prayer group you'll attract a specific group like evangelical Catholics. Well, maybe go toward Eucharistic adoration, for example. Or they'll go through saying the rosary. But the more progressive young people, I think it's the different activities, the outreach. Now, climate control is, for me, number one. As I go around the United States, almost every young person says we have to do something about climate control. And they gave me a new word that I had not heard before "climate justice."

Racial Equality

Hispanics interviewees stated that racism is prevalent and it can be accompanied (or replaced) by colorism, classism, and/or religious discrimination. They pointed out that racism often becomes a black-and-white issue, leaving Hispanics out. Some interviewees said that some Hispanics tend to treat this situation as a fact of life and are not inclined to discuss/address it.

Some of the interviewees indicated that Small Christian Communities see themselves as a venue for learning about God, for acting upon Biblically-mandated issues (e.g., feeding the hungry), and for pro-life activism but not for much else (thus leaving issues such as racism out). On the other hand, other interviewees provided a number of examples ranging from local parish communities to national Catholic organizations that encourage discussion and action on racial justice. Based on their comments, overall, the Church, as a body of faithful, appears to be increasingly aware and active in this area. However, Catholic Church hierarchy is viewed as largely missing from those efforts. The following description explores those views in more detail.

Racism in the Catholic Church in the United States

Long history of racism in the American society is reflected in the life of the Church. One of the interviewees shared the following anecdote about the extent of racial segregation of one essentially Catholic Church in the past:

I remember when I came to this country in the '50s and I had an African-American friend and I used to go on Sunday to a Polish church, Catholic. It was Catholic but they called it Polish Church. (...) And I would go because I was a little bit white, you know, so I passed. And one time, I used to go with my friend to see a movie (...), but first, we will go to Mass, have lunch in the house and then we will go. And so, this Sunday, I asked her to come and we will go to my parish, go to my parish. They won't let us in because she was black.

Some interviewees pointed out that racism in the Catholic Church is still prevalent this day to the point that it negatively affects involvement of racial/ethnic minorities in SCCs. This problem is present across the country, but in some ways may be worse in more progressive areas (because it is more hidden and people are less aware of it). The interviewees had this to say:

I think [the African-American communities] tend to be a smaller number, (...) I don't know how many people are participating in them, you know what I mean, because of our own diocese, our own racism of the Church.

[Paraphrasing a Spanish-speaking interviewee:] Hispanic does not feel welcomed in some parishes, "they don't feel at home."

Well, in my community right now in [the parish], racism is obvious; that it's part of the fabric of what we do because [we are from South America]. But here racisms, we don't say that because we live in the eternal battle of racism because we are Latinos. And even

if in this area of Northeast that is more progressive, being Latino in some points are a citizen of second class, so second-class citizen.

Catholic Faithful's Response to Racism

A couple of interviewees indicated that while the Catholic faithful acknowledge the presence of racism in the society in general, they do not actively discuss it or act on it within their SCCs. Those interviewees stated, for example:

I think most people in the parish are very upset about the discrimination that could exist or existed in many parts of the country. (...) it hasn't come up as a source of discussion unless... I had brought it up in the homilies so, sort of, it hasn't come up later on in small groups.

[W]hen you see that those communities are looking for doctrinal (...) information, the only thing that they are concerned [about] is abortion. But nothing related with social justice issues like racism or social equality or anything else. So, you have these two tendencies very clear because these two tendencies also transverse the Catholic Church in United States more than anywhere else. Because abortion for one side, gay marriages and racism or equality on the other side have been politicized, so the small communities have been also politicized.

Hispanics tend to treat this situation as a fact of life and often are not inclined to discuss/address it. One interviewee summarized it in the following way:

[Paraphrasing a Spanish-speaking interviewee:] Racial injustice is very present in Hispanic Catholic communities, many community members face racism/discrimination in their day to day. The main problem is that they don't want to talk about it, that although they suffer it they prefer to avoid approaching it (e.g., group conversations, conferences, activities, therapy, etc.) and therefore healing is very difficult.

[We, Hispanics,] don't talk about racisms because we live it and we need to survive and we need to go around the wall in order to... not to ignore, but to get down the obstacles that we have on the road, okay. So, we don't say that it's racism but we know that. We don't name it, we live it.

The above-described tendency of Hispanics to keep silent on the issue of racism may require greater initiative from group leaders if they want to see it explored. Several interviewees offered descriptions on how they try to navigate racial equality issues in their SCCs:

[I]n my small group (...), they didn't think of themselves as a race or a culture. They just thought oh, I'm American. Oh, I'm just, you know, maybe I'm a rich family or whatever, I'm just American. And then to really delve in and start telling your story of your family's history and origin was something few of us... I hadn't done it in a long time and few of them had done it and it was a really powerful way to get to know one another in a

meaningful way. Now that we have told our story and said it out loud and named it, we can now start looking at the stories of people with different races and ethnicities and cultures which is our next session. We're going to start exploring the way...we kind of have like a handout, a homework of experiences of what it is to be Catholic in different racial and ethnic groups in the country.

So, we have this kind of gamut when it comes to young adults. There are some young adults that have been so culturally and racially siloed as white European-American young adults that they don't...they haven't done any of the work to understand white supremacy as it operates in their own lives. And then there are some that are so totally on the other side of standing in solidarity with people of color and just out protesting in trying to deconstruct racism with their friends and family, like, doing the active work of really trying to get in there. And then there's this middle ground I'm finding of young adults that want to know what to do. They're, like, I'm ready but I don't know how to talk about it. So, they need a safe space. So, it's, like, how can we be as a Church be providing the space for young adults to be engaging in all these...

So, I led a Bible study of three or four Filipino guys and really seeking to understand where they're coming from, their family's history and why they believe what they believe in accordance with where they came from was something that you don't often do when you're just looking at a white or a European ethnicity. Because really, it's more concentrated on what we believe in terms of faith, not so much am I German or am I Irish. But for some of these minorities, it matters a little more so it was enlightening for me.

In our parish, especially among the younger people, we're mixed. I think especially like with our young adult group, they just want to be with young adults who are interested in faith and who have about the same kind of morals and values and background interest, that type of thing. I think that seems to kind of override any of the cultural things. They will bring it up in conversation, which I welcome and which I encourage as we're talking and sharing about different things. They will mention, as an African-American or as a Latino, they'll say like this is my experience or things like that. So, I think we actually are pretty lucky that we have a very healthy mix and that they don't mind hanging out with people who are different from them culturally. I think it's just having the common bond of faith and just having friends.

[I]t's a very well-educated parish. So, when we started talking about racism, of course, they didn't think that there was anybody that was racist (...). And what we found out from our black parishioners is that they don't experience overt racism, they experienced actions or responses that people probably aren't aware of. And so, for example, the black person sees that we're praying the Our Father and they'll hold hands with people next to them, but if they're next a black person they may not do that. (...) One of our priests who happens to be black was preaching that weekend [when nine African-Americans were killed in Charleston, South Carolina]. (...) And he didn't say anything at

all about it. Now we have a couple of very prominent people in the community- one is the dean of one of the schools. She's a professor on campus- both are blacks. They were stunned (...)- it would be like having 9/11 happened and this Sunday after 9/11 as far as they were concerned, that was a very traumatic event for them and it needs to be addressed by the church. And he, I talked to him about it, he kind of gets...well, I'm the black guy, am I supposed to be always the one that's saying something about [it-] yes you are. It doesn't matter whether you're black or white, people want us to say something (...). So, that's the sort of thing that they're going through now. I think that it's got to all be based on conversation. That's where it's going to start in raising awareness with people that even we, who feel ourselves very inclusive, we're probably the most diverse parish in the diocese because of the being so close to the university.

The group has four pre-established manuals. In the third one, we look at the theme of social inequality (...) We all have the same dignity before God, we are all worth the same.

Several interviewees described how the killing of George Floyd among other things led to discussions on racial equality in already existing SCCs as well as to the creation of new ministries and initiatives. Examples of their responses include the following:

So, in this current advocacy series, we have been focusing in on diversity and inclusion issues and racism issues, civic engagements. Obviously in the wake of George Floyd's murder, we wanted to just allow, I mean, help our young adults to know how to get engaged and what are the...a lot of them want to do something but often don't know how to do something. There's a lot of missing civic education and so we're trying to fill in that hole and help people know, okay, well, this is what you can do in a very tangible way. So, we've had a number of speakers who are, kind of, experts in this work come in and teach them how to get involved in a Christian Catholic way.

[E]very week, I think like since right when the story about George Floyd broke, it's come up [in our young adult group's meetings]. And actually, it came up so much that I took it back to my pastor and we're creating a parish-wide racism ministry. So, not just...so we wanted to do more than just make a statement about it, we wanted to actually create a ministry. And so, to create something that would show ongoing efforts that would provide some guidance and education for different groups in the parish that we would participate. Just because we do have especially strong African-American presence in our community, we felt that we needed to do something. So, that is something that came up from our conversation and that we were able to bring back to our parish staff, and that we brought to our pastor. And so now we're in the process of creating a racism ministry in our parish.

There's a part of [our organization] which goes after helping [us] embrace the ideal that we need to be welcoming to all ethnicities and helps to form our [group leaders] in such a way that our outreach is completely wide open but with the cultural sensitivity and that humility of knowing that we don't have the same experiences as a lot of those

around us. So, [this started relatively recently in our organization], I think in the last year or so, and it has been really making strides in helping the [group leaders] be formed for some of the campus outreach.

Catholic Hierarchy's Response to Racism

Those above-described initiatives mostly take place in SCCs and their umbrella organizations (and sometimes, on a parish level). A couple of interviewees pointed out that there is a general lack of coordinated direction and leadership, because at diocesan and national levels, Catholic Church does not offer practical guidance on racial equality issues. One interviewee pointed out that there is a USCCB initiative on racial justice. The interviewees had the following to say:

[T]here doesn't seem to be a unified Catholic response that is being attempted to the racial issues and how things could play out. (...) it would seem to me that the small communities are actually going to end up being the leaders in this and that leadership has been silent.

[Paraphrasing a Spanish-speaking interviewee:] Young members of Hispanic groups are very active in marches for racial justice, but the Diocese can't animate or be active in encouraging members to participate in these marches since they don't want to take a position on certain topics.

[T]he USCCB is currently going through a process called "Journeying Together." And what it's doing is it's gathering young adult and ministry leaders of all cultures to talk about some of the cultural issues, racism, prejudice, immigration, issues related to race and culture. And everyone from every culture in the United States, since we're such a pluralistic culture, everyone has been invited to the table to talk about these very important issues. The feedback (...) from young adults wanting to participate in these small groups has been incredible because they say "The Church wants to have an honest conversation about racism? Sign me up. I want to go to that."

Additionally, a few interviewees made observations about "institutionalized" racism or discrimination in the Catholic Church on parish and diocesan levels. They said, for example, that:

[T]he young adults that were [attending a large Catholic online group meeting], what came out very powerfully was number one, they are so deeply frustrated. These are European-American Catholics deeply frustrated that the leadership in their parishes is not addressing racism and/or is doing more harm than good, like, kind of, being negative about Black Lives Matter and things like that. And they're just, like, I can't take it anymore. I don't know how much longer I'm supposed to listen to my pastor making disparaging remarks about people of color. (...) they can preach about it and apparently that's okay and nobody ever, like, says maybe this guy should get called into somebody's office somewhere. So, there's a real level of frustration and that's one level.

[Paraphrasing a Spanish-speaking interviewee:] Hispanic groups receive fewer resources than to Anglo-Saxon groups, because Hispanics are a minority and maybe because they give less to the diocese.

[Paraphrasing a Spanish-speaking interviewee:] Economic administration of the parish ends in racism. The economy of the parish is dominated by the Anglo-Saxons, and so far, that has made it difficult to open up the conversation in the parishes in general to the topic of racism.

[Paraphrasing a Spanish-speaking interviewee:] "In many parishes, the Hispanic does not feel welcome, does not feel at home". In [a city in the South] the dominant one in the parishes is the American. "In many parishes there is not even a Mass in Spanish." The Hispanics are retiring from the parishes.

The immigrant in the United States does not yet have a visible space in the Diocesan Church, it does not receive formation and it needs to be provided one.

Despite those challenges, some national organizations in the Church are making progress. One interviewee expressed optimism about Church's ability to tackle issues related to racial equality. He stated the following:

[O]ne of the things I am very enthused about is that when it comes to ministries with young people, a lot of the ministry networks and organizations that support ministries with youth and young adults, such as the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, the Catholic Campus Ministry Association, the National Advisory Team on Young Adult Ministry, La RED which is the Hispanic Latino Ministry, all of them have been doing...they're working overtime this year, really raising consciousness of these issues [of racial dynamics in SCCs] so that ministry leaders of the parish with their access in the movement level are aware of these issues. So, I have much greater confidence going forward from 2020 that those in ministry with youth and young adults are more equipped to handle those dynamics now than they were before. Just like I would say in 2005, I feel more confident that people were more equipped to deal with child abuse protection issues than they were in 1995.

Additional Observations

A caveat should be added that, according to the interviewees, Hispanic communities face discrimination not only due to racist attitudes but also due to colorism, classism, and anti-Catholic stances. For example, interviewees pointed out that:

Sometimes with the Hispanic experience, I think [racism is] not always in the forefront [for several reasons]. One is the issue of class because many of our countries in Latin America where fascism was strong that leads into what we call colorism, the tone of

your skin, so the darker you are like a Latino, the more discrimination or more racist attitudes, microaggression is probably experienced (...).

[I]n our communities, we have a kind of like a hidden racism that we need to point out and we need to work on it because it's hidden but it's there. I see this kind of hidden racism here in my community [redacted]. The way of the interactions is different. (...) For instance, this is a very, very subtle racism among Venezuelans. So, when you go to a Venezuelan party and you present yourself and you say your name and your first last name, immediately somebody else will say, "And your second last name was?" [redacted] it's very important because it's important to pre-determine where you've come from and what is your background.

[T]hey label us, we're a Marian Catholic, not Jesus Catholic. Well, I don't know any Hispanic who say that Mary is God. Or, that they don't have to go through Mary. They go to Mary to tell her son, her son, to do a favor for us.

Cultural Differences

According to the national survey, on average, a typical group meeting is attended by 19 to 22 people. Significantly, Hispanic groups meetings are attended by 9 to 11 people more, on average, than other groups' meetings. Interviewees' responses were consistent with this finding. Several of the interviewees who have been involved in Small Christian Communities (SCCs) around the world (including South America, Europe, Africa, and Asia) observed that it is not that Hispanics are more interested in joining those groups in bigger numbers, but rather that whites are harder to engage. They described whites/ western American-Europeans as more individualistic (as opposed to communal and family-centered), more agenda-driven, more focused on accomplishing things (as opposed to relationships-driven, focused on spending time with each other), more private (as opposed to willing to share their inner life with others), and more intellectual, sharing from their head (as opposed to being more natural, sharing from their heart).

Defining Distinct Cultural Groups

A couple caveats should be added here. First, according to one of the interviewees, these cultural differences are not between white American-Europeans and ethnic/racial minorities, but can be more accurately seen between westerners who are 60 years old or younger and others. He had this to say:

[I]f you ask me the white Americans older than 60, means 60s, 70s, 80s, they have almost the same approach of the Latinos and Africans. Because remember that they live the whole process of changes from Vatican II and they are in that way. For those that really didn't live this experience of the changes from Vatican II, that means 40 and younger, their approach as a white Americans is more intellectual, much more intellectual and much more individual. But the interaction, the social interaction and the fraternity is less than the older ones, the Latinos, Africans and those older Americans (...).

Another caveat is that the cultural characteristics of Hispanic groups can be intensified by the fact that they are an immigrant minority that is more consciously focused on cultivating their culture. Several Spanish-speaking interviewees explained it in the following way:

Latin/Hispanic people are normally closer to each other and that makes relationships more intense. The Latin American roots of immigrants are also present and when they come to the U.S., they look for things that they used to have in their countries [such as their religion].

[Paraphrasing a Spanish-speaking interviewee:] Young Hispanic groups don't have their families in the U.S. and "find a home at their parishes." All members are very involved in the activities. Their very high level of engagement and activity of these groups can be attributed to the Hispanic culture (spirituality and the way they live their faith) and to immigrant status of groups' members (who are missing their culture and traditions, not living with their family, etc.).

[Paraphrasing a Spanish-speaking interviewee:] Small Hispanic Catholic groups have a large presence because of immigrants, people who are far from home, far from their roots (i.e., traditions, culture) and far from family. This really marks the nature of the group, it makes members attachment to the group and to each other very intense. These people have a "strong need" to find a community, and in this small groups they "find more than a group of friends, they find family," they find people with similar cultures and needs as them, and this makes them feel accompanied.

Hispanics left their family, environment, and culture, the only space where they find refuge is faith.

The only place where I feel Mexican [in the United States] is when I hear the Mass in Spanish.

Individualism vs. Communitarianism

Overall, the interviewees felt that it is much harder to start white-majority groups, because whites/ western American-Europeans are more individualistic (as opposed to communal and family-centered). As some of the interviewees commented:

It's easier to organize the Hispanic communities into communities than it is the other communities. There's more of an affinity for each other. I think you just put out a word and everybody comes together. I'm trying to do that with the English-speaking community, whether they're white, whether they're black, whether they're anybody else, they're more like, "What?"

I found that, like, in the Filipino culture and Korean culture, (...) because of the more communal, less individualistic nature of the society or the culture in which those young people have grown up, yeah, it's much easier to get a group together without a formal structure because they just tend to do more things in groups. So, yeah, part of the issue about forming groups in the European-American culture of the U.S. is just the European-American individualism. And that is a big sticking issue. But I think that (...) when we get into a relationship that are in truly mixed groups, that softens quite a bit. So, if you find groups that are...you bring in...and I see this a lot in California, which is such a mixing bowl, like, when you bring all those groups together, it's not nearly as difficult. So, Texas and California have a big advantage that way, even New York City has a big advantage that way in terms of where groups come from. And those are not necessarily places where people would think of group behavior, but it is.

So, that would be another challenge for bringing young people from among the whites to those communities to kind of address that individualism. Well you take, for example, Notre Dame University which is a very Catholic university. I don't know if you know the percentage of Catholics on campus going to Mass on Sunday is the highest in the United States today. But most of the students are in business administration. That's what they want, money. To make money and to move up their economic ladder, but that's the white middle class, so individualism and privacy even in their living situations.

While not all interviewees agreed on this point, some observed that Hispanic groups may be more diverse/ inclusive due to their family-orientation. This may mean literally bringing their whole families to group meetings (as opposed to coming individually). For example, they stated that:

I think the Hispanic groups are more age-inclusive, like they'll bring their kids to it.

I find a lot of more diversity in the Hispanic community, which makes it for them very multicultural from the Hispanic point of view.

Whites tend to organically separate into groups by gender, while Hispanics meet altogether (even though the numbers are big enough).

Agenda-Driven vs. Relationship-Driven Attitudes

Whites/ western American-Europeans are more agenda-driven, more focused on accomplishing things (as opposed to relationships-driven, focused on spending time with each other). In practice this means, that white-groups often prefer to meet for a pre-determined period (e.g., advent). Interviewees described it in the following way:

[B]ecause I've done a lot of work with the Hispanic Latino community, I can say that, yeah, there's a great difference. The notion of fraternal communion, the notion of a lived experience and appreciating the real life is much more profound in small communities with Hispanic Latinos. White European, I think, there's an efficiency model. We have a

task to do. So, we're going to do some small talk for, like, five minutes but they already get right to it. That type of desire to get to the task supersedes the pleasantries, supersedes the relational fraternal communion that's being fostered. And so therefore, I would say that in the white European communities, I think that (...) there's a greater awareness (...) that they're there for a purpose. And this is the purpose and we have to do that purpose. I don't necessarily sense that from some of the other cultural communities where the idea of accompaniment and relationship is of higher value than the functionality of a small group. If we don't even get to the Bible study that we're meant to talk about, so be it. We learned about each other. And so, I think that (...) because of that, the strength of the rootedness of those conversations I feel is stronger and lasts longer. (...) I see many young adult groups, say, we're going to do a six-week series for lent. And they emphasize the six-week series. You only have to do this for six-weeks so there's an efficiency to it. It's almost perceived as the time sacrifice (...) All you got to worry about is just six weeks. Six weeks you can be done with us. That type of tone is not as prevalent in Hispanic Latino communities, in African-American communities. I think that that is a difference in that. So, yeah, I think that's a dynamic that's very different. I don't know if it's good or bad, it is different though.

Sharing from One's Head vs Heart

Whites/ western American-Europeans approach SCCs more intellectually, sharing from their head (as opposed to being more natural, sharing from their heart). For example:

If you come from Western (...) background, you will look more for the intellectual approach of the small communities and you will look more to know the doctrine instead to live the faith- it is a very different approach. So, what I learned from my experience in United States is depending on your cultural and ecclesial background, you're looking at the small communities as a way to live your faith or a trampoline to know your faith.

So, for those that believe that small communities are the way to live the faith, they don't care if they need to travel an hour every week to the place where the small communities will be. They don't care about if they don't pay the rent for a month but help somebody else that is in need. So, the sense of solidarity and the sense of communion, the sense of fraternity is really, really deep and comes naturally. And, I'm not opposing one to another- these are two different approaches. And the other one is more consistently intellectual, so they gather to read the Bible but know what the Bible says and also know better what the Church says about something in particular.

A few interviewees also observed that Hispanic (and other minority groups) like to meet for substantially longer periods of time (several hours at a time) than primarily white groups. Rather than meeting for a pre-defined amount of time (to complete a set agenda, such as Bible study or prayers), Hispanic groups' meetings may last as long as there is food and company of others available. For example:

[For Hispanics] the meal is very important, the meal and also singing. So, they have activities connected to their weekly or monthly small Christian community meetings. So, they're not just prayer sessions. Whereas among white communities, we find theirs is much more focused just on the prayer and reflection and Bible reading.

Hispanic groups also want food and we don't typically have food. (...) that's an expectation that they kind of have. It doesn't have to be a dinner, but just something, some snacks or something like that.

I want to say that if there was a difference, those African-Americans would meet for longer periods of time. So, if there was two and a half hours, they would hang around for maybe another half an hour, another hour of really practicing things and stuff especially if food was still there. A timing was definitely different, right. So, the African-Americans, young adults would really invest in the time that it took to share with one another, challenge one another, and typically I would have to just say 'Okay, we've been meeting for three and a half hours, it's time to call it a night.' And I would just be exhausted myself, but they would be like, 'Okay, well, we'll see you.' And, I would have to get them out of the building. And by the time I got them out of the building and to my car, many of them would still be in the parking lot continuing the conversation (...).

Reserved vs. Open Personalities

Another distinguishing characteristic of whites that contributes to smaller group size is that they are more private (as opposed to freely sharing their inner life with others). One of the interviewees described how this private mindset interferes with process of engaging in communities:

I asked a Catholic sister who coordinated the Small Christian Communities in New Jersey. And I asked her what's the biggest obstacle when you're forming these small Christian communities in this middle-class parishes? And her answer was shocking to me. Fear. Fear. She said, 'People don't want to be vulnerable to their neighbors, to share their weaknesses.' I mean, weaknesses may be divorce, alcoholism, a child on drug abuse. They don't like to do that and they feel that if they're pressured into these Small Christian Communities, people are sharing what we call their vulnerability and their weaknesses. She said that's, for many middle-class whites, they want to avoid that.

Satisfaction with Group Experiences

In addition to meeting in greater numbers, Hispanic group members are more likely to be “very satisfied” with their experience in those groups. According to the national survey, Hispanics are more likely to be very satisfied with their group experience “as a way to learn and develop skills” (by 24 percentage points), “as a way to grow spiritually” (by 17 percentage points), and “as a way to put their faith in action” (by 16 percentage points).

In general, interviewees tended to point out that all the SCCs they work with have high levels of satisfaction regardless of race/ethnicity and other demographics. However, some interviewees acknowledged that Hispanics may feel more satisfied with their groups, because communal lifestyle is part of their culture and because Hispanics immigrants are more focused on supporting one another. One interviewee pointed out that parish groups in the United States have access to more resources available, which makes them relatively more satisfying as compared to parish groups in home countries. Specifically, “in the U.S. there are more facilities, more priests, better transportation, more and better spaces to meet.” Parishes are better equipped in the U.S. than in Latin American countries and these “makes it possible to live your faith more freely.”

Online Meetings

In most places, the pandemic led to suspension of Small Christian Community (SCC) meetings or to a switch from in-person to online format (popular platforms include Zoom, Facebook, and WhatsApp).⁹⁸ The online meeting format created a number of opportunities as well as challenges. Some places and demographics appear to be better suited than others to make this transition. The description below lists the main ways community leaders try to take advantage of the opportunities and navigate the challenges of the online meeting format.

Opportunities

A major benefit of the online format is that it largely removes geographic limitations for those who want to participate in the group meetings. Interviewees described it in the following way:

So, in terms of the ability for us to reach people that we wouldn't normally reach, we're reaching a much wider audience in this training series that we're in right now. We've had people from 22 different states sign up and be part of it, which has been incredible and not something you would normally have. Normally, we'd have people from Maryland and Virginia and DC for the most part, but now we have a much wider audience because it's digital and the ease of being able to get in.

Well, one of the things I love about technology that it has given us is that young people have started to redefine what community means. Community is no longer geographical. Community meant a small group, meant let's gather people who live on the same block, in the same neighborhood, in the same city. Now, community can mean I can be in touch...my small group, for instance, I can have people from all over the country, from all over the world even (...).

The absence of geographic boundaries in online meetings is particularly beneficial to people with limited mobility (e.g., the disabled and sick), people who moved to a new location (e.g., university alumni), young adults with limited financial resources, and people who feel disconnected from their local Catholic parish. Interviewees provided the following examples:

⁹⁸ As one interviewee pointed out some Small Christian Communities continue meeting in person, wearing masks.

[T]he big change for me is alumni. I struggled for ten years to encourage alumni [associations of various] universities to have something for the graduating students. (...) Many students have good Small Christian Community experiences on campus. But then after graduation, there's nothing in parishes to attract them, to invite them, so that's the issue. Now with online Small Christian Communities, these are both students who are finishing their schooling online and alumna. (...) Just the student group. [For example,] there are other graduates of Yale living in New York City who could not figure out a way of physically getting together in New York who now are meeting online. So, I'm saying alumni Small Christian Communities on Zoom are growing in popularity.

Okay, see, what's happening that I see in the States is people are not happy with the parish activities. (...) Everything the same for the Mass but without a priest and it's online on Zoom. They're not meeting physically. But the big thing I see is people are finding it very nourishing (...).

I thought, this is what the pandemic has opened up, a voice for young adults and a platform for leadership for them to form their own Small Christian Communities because the parishes won't support them. And I thought to myself this is powerful and devastating at the same time (...). So, the pandemic opened up opportunities for young adults to gather in a way that the parish won't let them. So, you can't stop them, so I thought that was really powerful but very sad. It has a sad connotation for our churches (...).

Well, the one thing I found especially with this [particular] group that we have is that when it comes to actually gathering young adults, I mean, it's a cohort especially the millennial generation, especially Gen-Z coming up. They're the most financially unstable, like, they're economically doing poorly. This is a bad economic time. I don't care what anybody says. And so, to ask them to fly somewhere and stay in a hotel, they're not going to do it. They can't do it. Take time off work, which is probably several jobs and side hustles and who knows what else, like, it's asking a lot. So, the fact that we can actually reach those people that could not gather in person because of finances and because of life circumstances, that's beautiful.

Another consequence of removing geographical barriers to participation in Small Christian Community meetings can be greater diversity of the participants, which may lead to more engaging experiences. As one interviewee observed:

I think diversity has a greater residence in the online thing because when you see like a Zoom call (...) you can visually see faces. And if you see it's a diverse makeup, if the small group is reflective of the reality that young people are facing in their everyday lives, I think there's more of an interest. But when you see people who just look like yourself and it's just made up of that people, it's more obvious in the Zoom meeting than maybe in the live meeting. So, I think the live is actually calling our attention because we can literally see faces right in front of us, whereas in a small group, you're kind of a little bit

removed, you don't really quite notice that, gee, I guess everyone in the room is of the same culture, the same language, the same whatever it is whereas you can clearly see that in the settings. So, I think the call to diversity in small groups is even more important in an online setting because you visually see that. You can hear that in the language spoken or the accents or whatever it might be.

[Y]ou can have people from across the country in [online] small groups which widens the opportunity for gathering and broadens the experience. (...) And it might make us more conscious when we go back to the live gatherings of who is missing around our table. Because if in our small groups online we have seen a variety of cultures, for instance, or even a variety of political and ecclesial perspectives, and then we go back to a live gathering next year and we have a small group, and we notice that there's not much diversity of opinion, there's not much diversity in culture there, will it compel us to that ends of the table, can we expand this group and who has been missing because those different cultures and those different perspectives exist everywhere.

The online meeting format has other distinct qualities that may attract some people who would not otherwise participate in SCCs. For example, one interviewee pointed out:

So, there are a lot of people that we have found are watching Masses that wouldn't normally watch Masses, that are showing up to events that wouldn't normally show up to events because of the ease of it, because of the anonymity of it, and they're dipping their toe in the water.

A few interviewees pointed out that some populations (in particular, students) have more time and more flexibility in their schedules which makes it easier for them to attend online SCCs. This opportunity is partially created by the online meeting format and partially by the lack of in-person activities of any type during the pandemic. Interviewees stated, for example, that:

[Students are] able to kind of attend a Bible study well for a lot of reasons. Number one, you have less extracurricular so you don't have volleyball practice or a chemistry lab or this friend hang out after 7:00. So, now you can say 'yes' to the Bible study invitation at 7:00.

Actually, [online meetings] work better [than in-person]. (...) Because we're able to set something up that's scheduled. And it's easier...I think now that people are being a little more attentive to staying home, it's easier to catch them at home. Our attendance has been up. (...) Actually, I think all of the young adults I have on my list in our parish, I don't think we've all been in the same room together. But this is probably the closest that we've come in terms of being able to just have that set space. People can do it from the comfort of home. Truth be told, some people are in their pajamas and I don't mind. They bring their coffee with them, which is great. It's casual, it's conversational. So, for us, it's working very well.

Challenges

An often mention challenge of online meetings is the lack of the “experience” that in-person meetings offer. Interviewees described it in the following way:

[O]ur young adults very much are missing and craving in-person community. And that was a big hallmark of what we did is that kind very intentional, radical hospitality of in-person gatherings and that kind of very, yeah, tactile community and our young adults are very much missing that not just in general in their lives but also missing it as an experience of ministry.

I think young people are still craving the in-person experience and so the online can only do so much.

[The challenge of online format is that it's] hard to not be with people. It's hard to... there's something about relationship and it's great to see other people and it's great to be able to talk. I think it helps a little bit, but it doesn't take the place of being in the same room with the person. (...) Being able to pick up on certain things like body language and try to keep a finger on the pulse of what's happening with my young adults. And you can tell a lot being in the same room with somebody that you may not necessarily be able to tell online. So, that can be pretty challenging. Yeah, I mean just...that's hard just not being able to have that one-on-one contact.

I believe if there are chances to get together in person, those are excellent when you share fellowship, when you're laughing and joking together, when you become real people in front of one another and you're not just doing what the Zoom thing says. Those are when you really form relationships that endure over time and so that can't necessarily be replaced, but I would not... I'm not that quick to say technology is bad.

One interviewee very successful at attracting large online young adult meetings (with hundreds of participants) expressed concern that technology enabling online gatherings may lead to a shift in focus from building quality relationships to chasing the biggest number of participants. She also pointed out strategies to mitigate this problem. She said:

[T]hat's my fear with technology is we're going to see how many numbers can we reach and people just become numbers again like they have in ministry of programming.

I mean, people, I mean, hunger for physical connection. But what we all hunger for is meaningful connection to somebody. So, you can join in events of 200 people and you can go into a small breakout room on Zoom with four people. Those four people could become very meaningful and very close to you.

A caveat should be added that online groups may work better for Bible study than for prayer groups/ communal groups which rely more on the in-person experience. As described in the section on *Cultural Differences*, due to cultural differences, white Catholics tend to prefer agenda driven,

learning focused types of groups (such as Bible study) while Hispanics tend to prefer communal type of groups (e.g., faith sharing). Consequently, Hispanic groups may have a more difficult time making the transition from in-person to online format.

Another set of challenges related to online meetings has to do with technology (since, participating in online meetings requires access to technology and ability to use it). According to one of the interviewees these requirements proved challenging to some Latino communities he is working with. Commenting on the problems with technology in general (not specifically in the Latino community), he observed that:

Technology in and of itself, there are some times where the internet is slow or just my laptop is not working right or something's wrong with Zoom. So, you have somebody struggling on their end with their computer or whatever it may be. So, just some of those nuances of just the joys of technology can be challenging (...).

Another interviewee observed that online format may not work as well for developing new mentoring relationships in the context of SCCs. He stated that:

When (...) we looked at our mentorship numbers, they always increase throughout the year. In April, we normally see a sharp increase because there's a lot of invitations (...). And instead [during the pandemic], we kind of just stay the same or maybe even just kind of plateau. So, it's not like people are dropping off or saying I can't connect with the one-on-one anymore. If they already had that relationship, it's strong enough to keep going one-on-one. It's more so if I'm going to ask you in to this new one-on-one relationship (...).

Other interviewees made similar observations stating that regardless of the specific group type, it is harder to recruit new members into their SCCs when meeting online. They said, for example, that:

It's mostly... and that's been one of the challenges, is that we've had some young adults who have returned home from... they were either living elsewhere or away at school and they came home for the pandemic. So, it's been a little challenging to get them to be part of the fold. But I'm working with them to build those relationships, to welcome them into the group. It's not just it's automatic that you put something out for young adults and they all come and automatically feel comfortable. There's always those relationships and things that you have to do. So, I would say that has been a challenge. It hasn't been impossible, but it's definitely been different right now. But the majority of our attendants have been some of our regular people who are already involved in the parish and in various different ways, though.

[A]bout being able to invite new people in, it's awkward to come in on a Zoom meeting...it's awkward to come in in an in-person meeting if you're brand new, let alone coming in on a Zoom meeting. So, that's a big challenge, is trying to welcome in new

people, to encourage them to be part of the group, encourage them to feel comfortable. And that can be really challenging.

One of the interviewees observed that effective work with youth groups relies on the involvement and support of parents. Switch to online meeting format further increased the important role of those parents. As one he explained:

[I]n the last six months or less, we've gone to a huge increase in virtual gatherings and ministry, but that's a whole new way of interacting and connecting. And because of that, more focus is also happening on the centrality of family and the domestic church. Their role in the whole faith formation process...and we've always been real big advocates of saying families are the center and need to be at the center of our efforts. So, we can't do ministry to youth without really partnering with parents in the process because we can give them the best retreat experience in the world but if they go back to a home where there's not prayer, there's not daily conversations about faith and life and merging that together, then we're spinning our wheels really.

Some interviewees noted that, several months into the pandemic, people are struggling with “screen fatigue” (from working, studying, relaxing, and socializing in front of monitors). This possess a challenge for organizers of voluntary activities. A few interviewees described ways in which they are trying to navigate it:

[Young people are] zoomed out with having to have school through online classes, but many ministry leaders are continuing to find creative ways to gather young people online to get them to interact with a combination of online gathering and then perhaps using some time to...like giving them a 5 or 10-minute break to just pray or do whatever and come back online and share their reflection (...).

[D]oing it online doesn't help that especially if they are people who have jobs where they are in Zoom meetings all day. They don't want another Zoom meeting necessarily to...even if it's to be with friends after work.

I think there's a screen fatigue (...). I think that increasingly there may be waning because of the length of time.

I mean frankly, students are getting sick of it all. (...) They do it all day in their classroom and then they have to do that with everything else, too.

Finally, one challenge of switching to the online meeting format may be in recognizing it as an opportunity (as opposed to a temporary solution used when in-person meetings are not possible). One interview described it in the following way:

[W]hile we saw a lot of live stream Masses, we didn't see a huge scaling up of moving all of the small communities into online spaces or into digital spaces or just any kind of non-gathered.... physically gathered spaces. So, I think that's been a real challenge is that we

did it...for Mass, it's just great. But it was not...what we needed to do was do that with all of the especially the small faith sharing groups. And to even increase the number of offerings of small groups or Bible studies or all of those things that are out there that are possibilities in the other creative parts of doing ministry and being community and a lot of those didn't get scaled up. Now, I'm not saying there are some incredibly creative work that's happened (...) there has been incredible things but we did not scale up the way we could have. And again, it would have been fairly cheap to do that. It's just a matter of the staff people being able to make that happen or to be able to think through that happening rather than trying to get back to the old way of doing things. I think there's a lot of just okay, we'll get through this and this is okay in the meantime, but how fast can we get back to the old way of doing things. And that did not take advantage of the crisis the way it could have.

Observations about the Future of Online Meetings Post-Pandemic

The above listed challenges and advantages of online meetings for SCCs produced mixed feelings in the interviewees. While some cautiously await what the future may bring, some express hope for returning to pre-pandemic normal and yet others embrace current situation as the new normal. Following are a few examples of their perspectives:

So, my thought is that the online experience in small group may not have a long... there may not be longevity in sustaining it. Whereas I think that there is a longevity in sustaining the live gatherings, maybe not so much the online ones. (...) I'm not sure, I think we're going to need more work to be done to figure out of how sustainable this can be for a long-term and I pray that maybe we won't have to worry about that and maybe we will get back to live gatherings in the next year or so.

There's a saying 'go digital or die.' Go digital or die. The digital world is here, it's the new normal. And are we going to be creative in this new normal? That's the thing, are we going to be creative with young people especially in the digital world.

It has definitely helped move the needle in terms of people's familiarity and comfortability with the technology and being able to do that. But what I've found is that as soon as people are allowed to go back to their old habits, they are quickly going back to the old habits and clicking off the camera, right.

I don't know [if I will want to continue with that online format]. I'm questioning that. I'm certainly open to it. If that's what's working for our young people, I'm definitely open to continuing it. But as life kind of gets back to normal, whatever that is in-person, I don't know if the busyness is going to take over again. I don't know what that's going to be like. So, I'm definitely open to it. I think that we have opened up kind of a box with technology in the space, from live streaming Masses to doing online meetings, to having a bunch of resources online for people to use at their disposal. And I think they're all

good. I think they're all good. I think it's just kind of finding the right combination of what works for your community. And the one thing I've learned about young adult ministry and working in a parish is the need to be adaptable. So, certainly I'm open to it, but if down the line it doesn't work, then we'll have to move on. But I'd like to see it continue, but we'll just have to wait and see what happens.

[Some parishes] don't want to do live stream because people are going to get used to them and they're not going to come back to the Mass. I don't believe that's going to happen. We have sacraments. We aren't like the Protestants that they can say...because the Protestants have been doing this for years. (...) And I think that people are longing for that part of their life. And once we're able to come back safely, I think that they will.

I have a feeling that the effects of this pandemic will mean that event driven ministry will take a hit. (...) I think that this pandemic the longer it goes on, the more fearful people will be towards large group ministry with young people (...). I see a return to small groups as a result of this.

Venue for Meetings

Among the groups that participated in the national survey, seven in ten (66%) meet in parishes. Significantly, Hispanic groups are 18 percentage points more likely than other groups to meet there. Spanish-speaking interviewees offered a number of reasons why Hispanics are more likely to meet in parishes. One of those reasons is that Hispanic groups need larger venues than other groups, because they tend to have more participants attending a typical meeting (according to the national survey, about 50% or ten people more). Hispanic groups also tend to socialize more (according to the national survey, they are 19 percentage points more likely than other groups to socialize at a typical meeting). As one interviewee put it, Hispanics have more “intense” human relationships. Also, Hispanic groups’ meeting are likely to involve food, which may require extra space to prepare and serve.

The need for larger venues is exacerbated by the fact that Hispanics tend to have smaller homes. As one interviewee explained immigrants do not live in big homes, they normally live in small flats. Therefore, they cannot fit everyone. Another interviewee added that if Hispanics meet in parishes this is because the size of their homes does not allow otherwise. Another interviewee concurred that as leaders/members of a small Hispanic community they prefer meeting at home because “it feels like being with family, is more relaxed.”

The preference for meeting at a parish may also have to do with the “sanctifying nature” of this location. Hispanic groups may feel closer to God at the parish (as one interviewee put it, parish is “the temple of God”) and members of these groups may fear that if they do not meet at the parish (or at least having a priest involved), the activities and the conversations of the group might end up not being totally aligned with original mission of the group.

Lastly, parish is a good meeting place, because it is a convenient location. As one interviewee stated, “parish is in a central location- it's closer to everybody than people's homes. (...) It is more

pragmatic” and it is more “natural” to meet at the parish in the United States (as compared to Latin America, where it may be more “natural” to meet at home). Parish is also a place where it might be easier to find other people interested in joining the group. According to another interviewee, for Hispanics, parish is a “space to find people that share the same faith, Christian values, same family values. (...) In the church you find people who support you, who are looking for the same thing for their children that you are looking for, it is a calm and healthy environment”.

Formal Character

Small Christian Communities are characterized by varying degrees of formalization. According to the national survey, four in five (80%) have an established meeting format, three in five have an established leadership structure (59%) and articulated charism, spirituality, purpose, or mission (58%). One in five has a budget (21%), written policies (20%), and keep minutes from (business) meetings. Relatively few of them have a legal status (11%) or experience receiving grants (4%).

Significantly, groups whose members are primarily under 35 years old tend to be more formalized than other groups included in the study. Under 35 groups are more likely to have an established leadership selection process (by 12 percentage points), to have a budget (by 12 percentage points), and to have experience receiving grants (by 8 percentage points).⁹⁹

In general, interviewees confirmed those findings but provided a few caveats based around three age groups within the under 35-year-old category: youth groups, college students, and young adults. Youth groups (up to 18 years old) are organized by adults who need to ensure the meetings take place in a safe environment.¹⁰⁰ The supervising adults have to be trained and follow youth protection protocols and other regulations. The interviewees described the factors that contribute to the formalization of youth groups in the following way:

I mean, we certainly do have a lot of guidelines and I would say support documents in best practices in terms of forming youth ministry groups, utilizing peer leadership as well as other adult leadership. Of course, the whole issue of safe environment when you're talking about those under 18 require more attention and detail in terms of the logistics. So, you need at least two adults involved in a pretty much any gathered session that you run. (...) Renewing the Vision is one of our major guiding documents in developing and forming a comprehensive youth ministry model. But now with Pope Francis' Christus Vivit out giving us a (...) renewed direction focusing on accompaniment, (...) there's a lot of energy and excitement over moving his vision into more of a model-like or document that Renewing the Vision had been since the '80s or the '70s really.

Well, when it comes to minors, one of the things that is very important to keep in mind is, first, the child and youth protection areas. And Small Christian Communities when it comes to minors certainly have to, kind of, keep an eye on how and where they gather.

⁹⁹ Notably, under 35 groups are 9 percentage points less likely than other groups to have an established meeting format.

¹⁰⁰ Two interviewees pointed out that youths are not the only focus of safe environment regulations. The Church also has protocols to ensure proper treatment of women, minorities, and other vulnerable populations.

They have to make sure that there is more than one adult, for instance, somebody who's over the age of 18 to do that. So, (...) in many other Small Christian Communities, you can have a leader and several participants. With minors, you should probably have two. And you should meet in a space that is safe wherever safe might be. It might be in a public space, it might be in a space at the church. There's been a move away from working in people's homes, (...) because homes can be places where (...) where the Church cannot monitor the activities, it's generally avoided.

The second group within the under 35-year-old category is comprised of college students. According to the interviewees working with this population, Small Christian Communities operating on campuses do not have to follow special regulations just because they are working on campuses and they do not deal with minors. However, groups can still be relatively formalized because these groups often follow a pre-defined format provided by campus ministers, campus missionaries and others. The interviewees commented that:

In campus ministry and college campuses, I would (...) say it's pretty formalized.

I think [our organization] as a whole, you know, just tries to go about things in a common-sense way, so it's normally single gender. I guess that would maybe be the bigger piece and that is to, for multiple reasons, to allow for these genders to go deeper with each other on certain topics that'd be difficult in a cross-gender or mixed-gender atmosphere. And then secondly so that there is probably (...) the whole reason you're at this small group is to actually really grow in your faith and get to know the same gender in terms of authentic friendship so there's no distraction in terms of what could be their romantic ideas.

The third group within the under 35-year-old category includes young adults (25 to 35-year-old). People in this age group sometimes start SCCs on their own, but they often are so busy that they find it beneficial to have someone organizing groups for them. Overall these groups are less formal than youth and college groups. As one of the interviewees stated:

I mean, there might be some instances where there might be a formalized experience like after the college age range, I would say, people in their 20s, early 30s, it's a more informal process.