

CARA surveys Catholics on observance of Lent

WASHINGTON – While a majority of U.S. Catholics say they abstain from meat on Fridays during Lent, slightly less than half follow other customary Lenten practices.

The findings, released March 11, come from a survey of 1,007 randomly selected self-identified Catholics, age 18 or older, conducted Feb. 1-20 by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University. The survey had a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points.

Sixty percent said they do not eat meat on Fridays during Lent, but only 45 percent said they typically receive ashes on Ash Wednesday. A slightly smaller percentage, 44 percent, said that besides giving up something, they do something positive during Lent, like giving money to the needy or trying to be a better person. Only 38 percent said that besides meat on Fridays, they give up or abstain from something else during Lent.

Stronger adherence to those Lenten practices were seen in the nine in 10 Catholic adults who said they attend Mass at least weekly. Among that group, 89 percent said they abstained from meat on Fridays; 85 percent said they receive ashes; 73 percent said they make efforts to do something positive; and 67 percent said they abstain from something else besides meat on Fridays.

But among those who said they go to Mass only a few times a year, distinct minorities were recorded for all four Lenten practices.

Women were more likely than men to abstain from meat on Fridays, 65 percent compared to 55 percent. They also were more likely to receive ashes, 50 percent to 38 percent, and to do something positive for Lent, 51 percent to 36 percent.

The more highly educated the respondents, the more likely they were to give up something for Lent and make an effort to do something positive.

Fifty-three percent of Catholics with a postgraduate degree give up something for

Lent, compared to 41 percent of those with a bachelor's degree and smaller percentages of those with less education, such as some college, an associate's degree or high school diploma or less.

Fifty-nine percent of those with a postgraduate degree said they made extra efforts to do something positive, compared to 48 percent of those with a bachelor's degree and 41 percent of all other Catholics.

The survey showed that 64 percent of Catholics born before 1943, identified by CARA as "pre-Vatican II" Catholics, said they abstain from meat on Fridays. The percentages of the "Vatican II" Catholics, born 1943-60, "post-Vatican II" Catholics, born 1961-81, and "millennial" Catholics, born since 1981, who said they abstain from meat on Fridays were: 59 percent, 59 percent and 61 percent, respectively.

Only 33 percent of the "pre-Vatican II" group said they give up something else in addition to meat on Fridays during Lent; 46 percent of the "millennial" respondents said they do. For the "Vatican II" group it was 34 percent, and for the "post-Vatican II" group, 38 percent.

Overall Catholics ages 18 to 26 were more likely to observe Lenten obligations and traditions than those ages 27 to 47.