

Send your children to college or they might lose the faith

Parents have long worried about what goes on at college. Catholic parents, in particular, worry that their children will fall away from the faith, with peers pressuring them into abandoning religious practices and liberal professors swaying them from their religious beliefs. Concerned parents might go as far as keeping their children away from college for fear of its negative side effects. At least, that is the narrative that has been circulating since the 1960s, but the data demonstrates the complete opposite.

While young adults experience a decline in religious activity, education plays a positive role in retaining religiosity. In the 2007 study [*Losing My Religion: The Social Sources of Religious Decline in Early Adulthood*](#), the results show that the group *most likely* to experience a decline in church attendance was those who did not attend college (76%) and the group *least likely* to experience a decline was those who earned at least a bachelor's degree (59%).



(Table from Uecker, J.; Regnerus, M. D.; & Vaaler, M. (2007). Losing my religion: The Social Sources of Religious Decline in Early Adulthood. Social Forces, 85(4), 1667-1692.)

The shocking evidence flies in the face of standard assumptions. Several other studies, however, confirm the results. Brad Wilcox, the lead researcher in a study called [*No Money, No Honey, No Church: The Deinstitutionalization of Religious Life Among the White Working Class*](#), argues that poor, unmarried, and undereducated “middle America” has been experiencing a significant drop in church attendance. According to Wilcox, college-educated whites saw a drop of 51% to 46% for at least monthly church attendance between the 1970s and 2000s, whereas among people with only a high school degree, attendance dropped from 38% to 23%.

The crisis of faith in modern America is not what the pundits would have you believe. It is not an intellectual crisis, where educated people are abandoning the faith because it conflicts with their enlightened worldview. Educated people, rather, are the one group keeping churches afloat.

I have also experienced this phenomenon on a personal level. I was raised in a blue-collar area in New England, and when I return home, I hear about church closings and mergers and see an older crowd at Masses. Now, I live a suburban, white-collar area, and conversely, the church is full with families. Though anecdotal, I am hardly the

first to recognize this dynamic (Charles Murray documents it as part of his book, [*Coming Apart*](#))