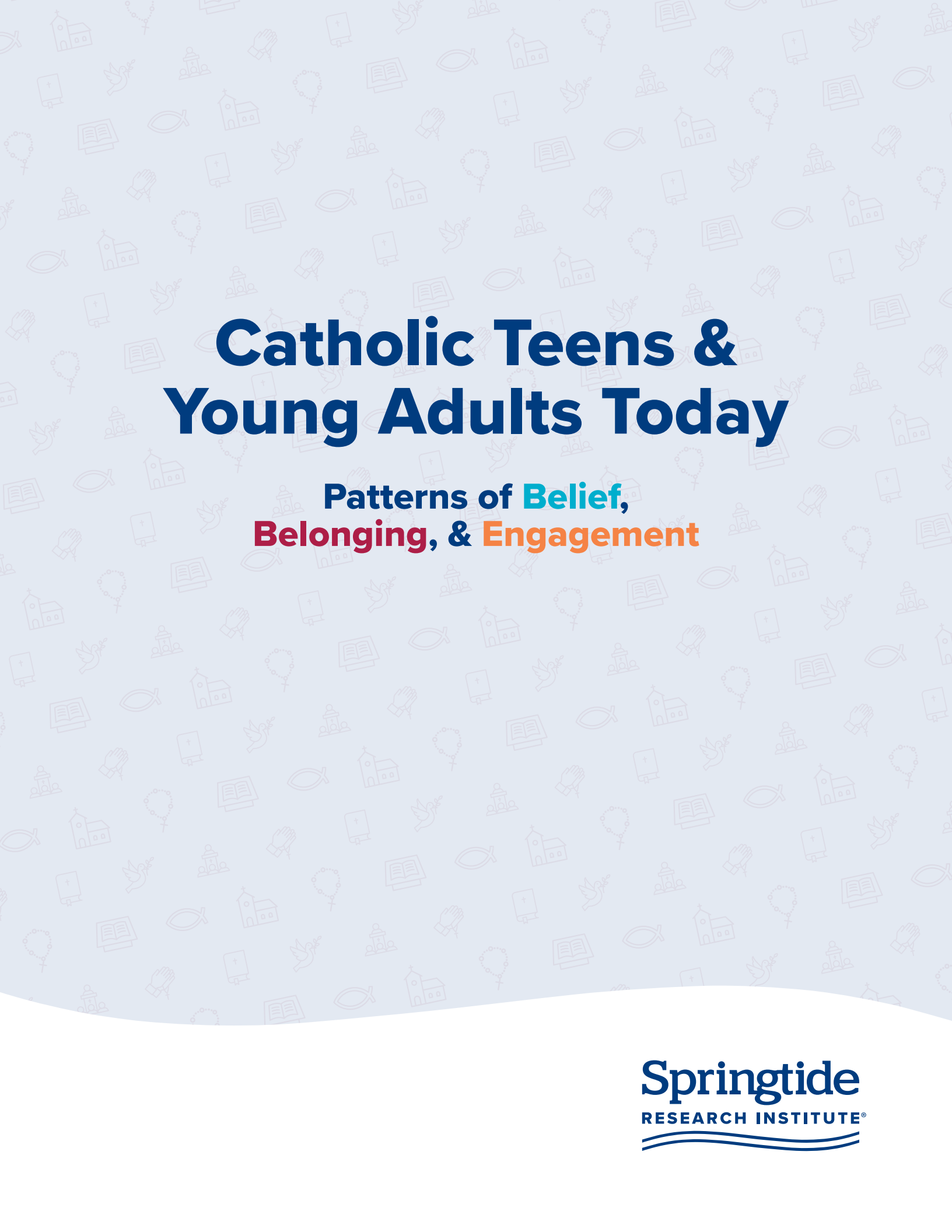




Catholic Teens & Young Adults Today

Patterns of **Belief**,
Belonging, & **Engagement**

We Are Springtide



Springtide Research Institute engages the power of social science to learn from and about young people ages 13 to 25. As a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, we deliver accessible research on the perspectives and experiences of the newest generations. Our empirical data amplify the voices of young people, inform those who know and serve them, and lead the way in showing what's next.

To learn more about us, check out the “About Us” page on our website: springtideresearch.org. Here you can read more about our mission, our approach to research, and more.

About This Study

Springtide Research Institute conducted this mixed-methods study of current and former US Catholics, ages 13 to 25, from April to August 2025. We secured informed consent for all participants, and parental consent for participants under the age of 18.

The survey was administered by an online panel provider, Alchemer, using a recruitment strategy guided by quotas to match census demographics for age, gender, region, and race/ethnicity. To improve data quality from Alchemer's opt-in sample, Springtide Research Institute eliminated all identifiable phony and inattentive responses from the resulting dataset. The final dataset includes 1,211 respondents.

Additionally, we conducted 20 interviews with current and former Catholics. Over an average of 75 minutes, interviewees answered questions related to their religious identity, beliefs, practices, and upbringing. A team of researchers recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed interviews for themes.

To see study methodology and top-line results visit springtideresearch.org/catholic-teen-report.

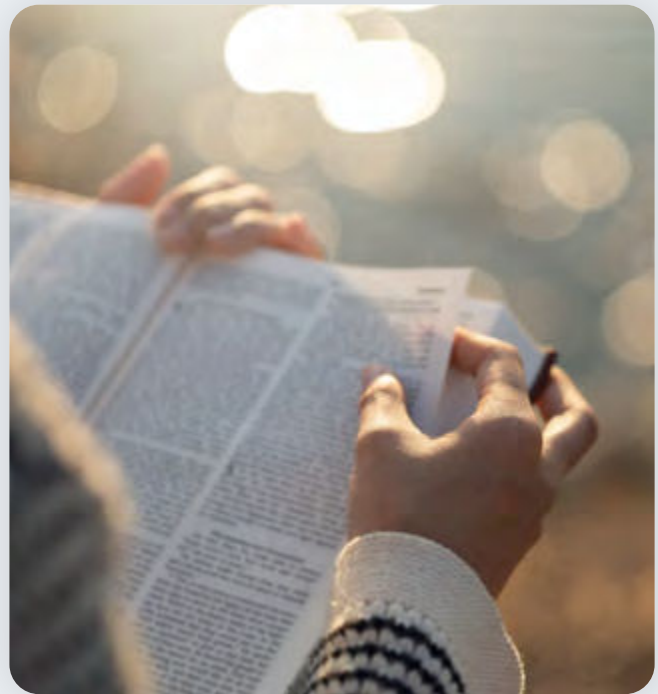
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Introduction

Catholic young people in the US often appear in competing narratives. Some observers point to declining affiliation and disengagement, while others describe signs of resurgent interest and vitality. Underlying many of these stories are shared questions about retention: Who continues to identify as Catholic over time and why? What are the conditions under which Catholic affiliation is more or less likely to persist?

Drawing on original survey data and in-depth interviews with current and former Catholic teens and young adults, this study aims to shed light on these questions by documenting patterns in Catholic (dis)affiliation, relationships, and practice among young people in the United States. We describe where identity is more common and meaningful, where it is less so, and how it shows up across contexts and relationships.



This report is intended for educators, ministers, practitioners, and parents seeking clear information about Catholic young people today. By offering a descriptive account of where Catholic affiliation persists and where it is less prevalent, this report provides a shared point of reference to support reflection, discussion, and application.

Key Findings



Meaning, Identity, and (Dis)Affiliation

- Catholic young people widely experience Catholic life as meaningful, reporting connection to Catholic culture and traditions beyond religious belief. Many of them value their familial and social ties to the Church and see their faith as a salient part of their everyday lives.
- Catholic young people most commonly cite family tradition, personal belief, identity, emotional support, and connection to community as reasons why they remain affiliated.
- Race/ethnicity emerges as the strongest predictor of Catholic disaffiliation, followed by LGBTQ+ identity. Political ideology plays a smaller role in explaining disaffiliation, while gender does not independently predict Catholic affiliation.
- The three most common reasons young people give for no longer identifying as Catholic are drifting away from the Church, no longer finding its religious teachings convincing or meaningful, and finding a different religion or faith community that better fits their lives.
- Former Catholics are almost evenly split between those who now identify as Protestant or “just Christian” (45%), and those who identify as religiously unaffiliated (43%).
- Half of former Catholics report disaffiliating during adolescence, particularly between early- to mid-adolescence. Most say it is unlikely they will ever identify as Catholic again.



Participation in the Life of the Church

- Mass attendance varies by affiliation, with current Catholics attending more frequently than former Catholics. However, disaffiliation is not always preceded by minimal participation: a substantial share of former Catholics say they once attended Mass on a weekly or monthly basis.
- While Baptism is relatively common among both current and former Catholics, incorporation into the sacramental life of the Church declines over time, especially among disaffiliated young people.
- Many young people encounter Catholicism early through parish-based formation or Catholic schooling, but few report sustained accompaniment throughout adolescence and young adulthood.



The Domestic Church

- Catholic identity is more present in older generation and family-of-origin relationships than in young people's peer and chosen relationships.
- Current Catholics are embedded in denser Catholic family networks than former Catholics.
- Parents surface as strong sustainers of Catholicism by making faith a stable part of everyday life, helping young people make sense of difficult experiences, and defining the relational costs of belief or doubt.



Gender Roles and Issues

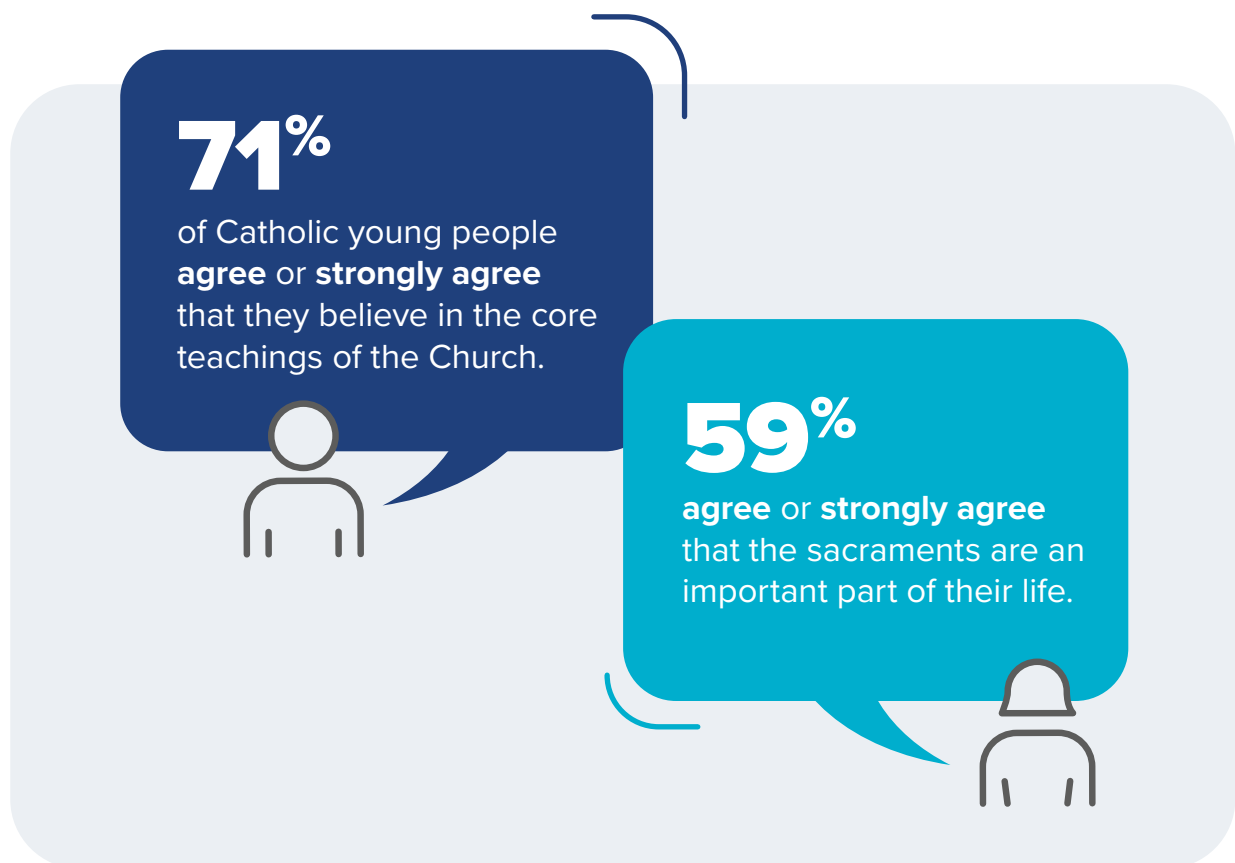
- Catholics and former Catholics in this study reveal nuanced and sometimes unresolved views about gender roles in the Church and in society.
- Many respondents support expanded leadership roles for women in the Church but are divided on questions about sacramental authority. Differences in support for women's ordination surface across affiliation and gender.
- Some respondents affirm traditional role expectations—especially for men—while others express disagreement or uncertainty.

Meaning, Identity, and (Dis)Affiliation

Where do young Catholics find meaning in the faith?

Young people who identify as Catholic describe multiple sources of meaning within Catholic life. A majority report feeling connected to Catholic culture and traditions (69%) and valuing their family's Catholic identity (69%). Two-thirds (66%) agree that their Catholic identity gives their life a sense of purpose. Most say that their faith is embedded in their daily routines (59%) and report having meaningful relationships within their parish or other Catholic communities (62%).

Doctrinal and sacramental meaning is also salient among Catholic young people:



To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

% of current Catholic young people responding:

While many young Catholics find meaning in Catholic life, between 20% and 30% of respondents consistently express ambivalence about their ties to the faith.

● Disagree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Agree

“I feel a connection to Catholic culture and traditions, even beyond religious belief.”



“My family’s Catholic identity is important to me, and I want to continue that tradition.”



“Being Catholic gives my life a sense of purpose and meaning.”



“I have meaningful relationships with people in my parish or Catholic community.”



“Practicing my Catholic faith is part of my routine and lifestyle.”

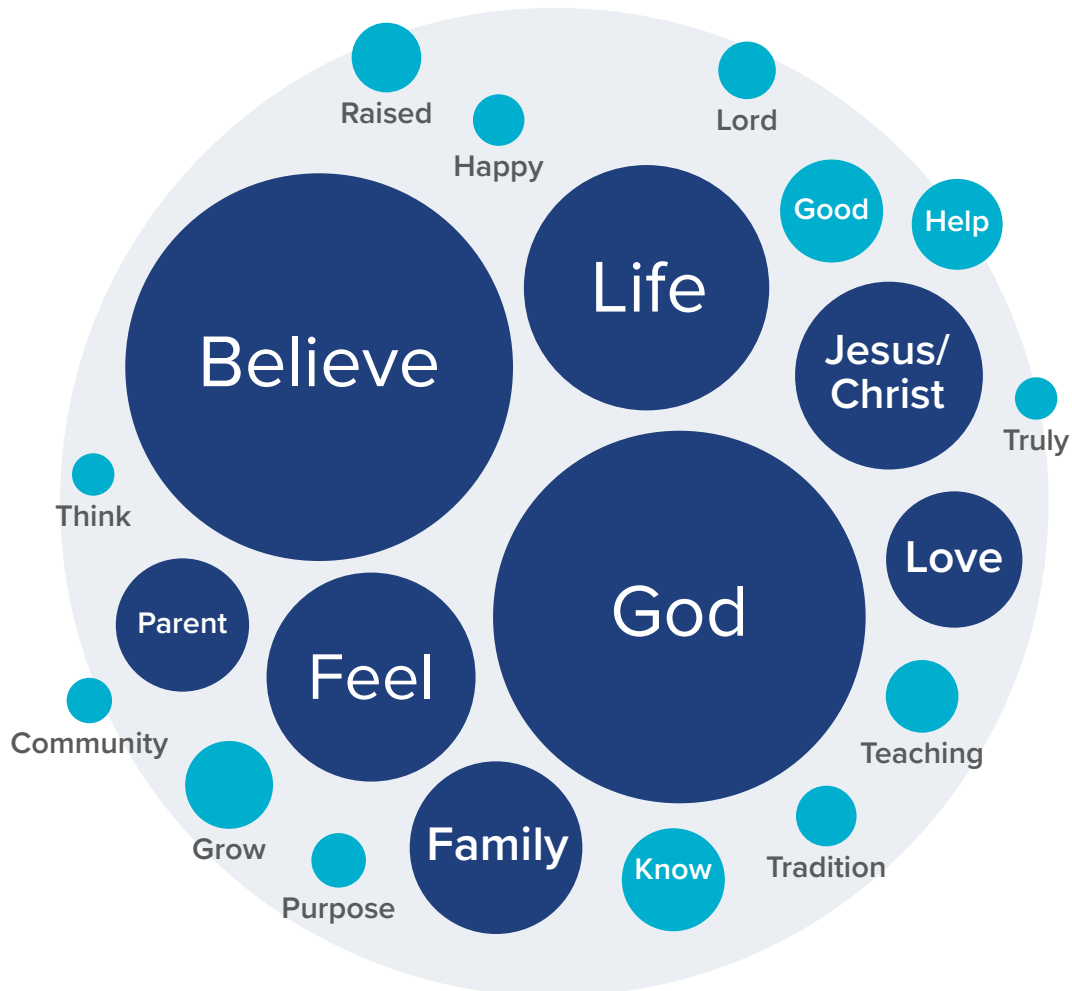


Note: The survey asked Catholic respondents (n = 589) to what extent they disagreed or agreed with each statement, from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree.” This graph consolidates these categories (e.g., strongly disagree and disagree) for clarity. Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

Source: 2025 Springtide Research Institute Study of Current and Former Catholic Young People (n = 1,211), ages 13–25, conducted between April and August 2025.

Why do young Catholics remain affiliated?

We asked Catholic teens and young adults why they continue to identify or practice as Catholic. The word cloud below visualizes the most frequently used terms in respondents' open-ended responses to this question:



Note: This graphic reflects the most frequently used words in open-ended responses to the question, “In your own words, why do you continue to identify or practice as a Catholic?” The size of the circles corresponds to the frequency with which their respective words appeared in the responses. Nearly all (95%) of the young Catholics surveyed responded to this question for a total of 585 short responses. The word count of individual responses ranged from 1 to 116 words.

Source: 2025 Springtide Research Institute Study of Current and Former Catholic Young People (n = 1,211), ages 13–25, conducted between April and August 2025.

These terms—words like *believe*, *family*, *feel*, *love*, *know*, *help*, and *happy*, among others—suggest **young Catholics’ commitment to their faith is lived, felt, and relational**. To understand the motivations underlying these language patterns, we examined the open-ended responses in greater depth. Five common themes surface when young Catholics explain, in their own words, why they remain in the Church.

1. Family tradition: Young Catholics most commonly cite family tradition as the reason why they continue to identify or practice as Catholic. Many describe Catholicism as something they were born into or raised with, often emphasizing parents' and grandparents' role in passing on the faith. Few young Catholics frame their inherited faith as coercive or merely obligatory. For some, the inherited nature of their faith functions as something that shapes and gives meaning to early life experiences. For others, remaining Catholic reflects the absence of a compelling reason to leave a tradition that has long shaped family life and personal history.

- "It is what I grew up doing, and now I feel God's love and fulfilled in the Church."
- "I was born and raised Catholic, and I believe in all that the Catholic Church does."
- "My family is Catholic, and I feel to stop that would be wrong."
- "It reminds me of my childhood."
- "I only identify as Catholic because my family is Catholic, although we don't exactly practice it or go to church."

2. Personal belief: Personal belief, particularly in God, emerges as a second major reason young Catholics remain affiliated. Respondents often describe their faith in relational terms, emphasizing trust, belief, or a sense of God's goodness and presence. Young people identify Catholicism as the tradition through which connection to God can be fully expressed and sustained.

- "I continue to practice this because I feel that God is always with me."
- "I know God knows me by my name, and I would never turn my back on that."
- "Continuing to be a Catholic has helped me maintain a good relationship with God that I hope to improve."
- "Because I believe in God. I just have not practiced it that often."
- "I fully believe in what Catholics believe and practice."

3. Identity: Many young people describe being Catholic as "who I am"—something that shapes their identity and sense of self. This identity persists even when practice is irregular or belief is loosely articulated. Being Catholic remains meaningful to the extent that it provides continuity and coherence in how young people understand themselves.

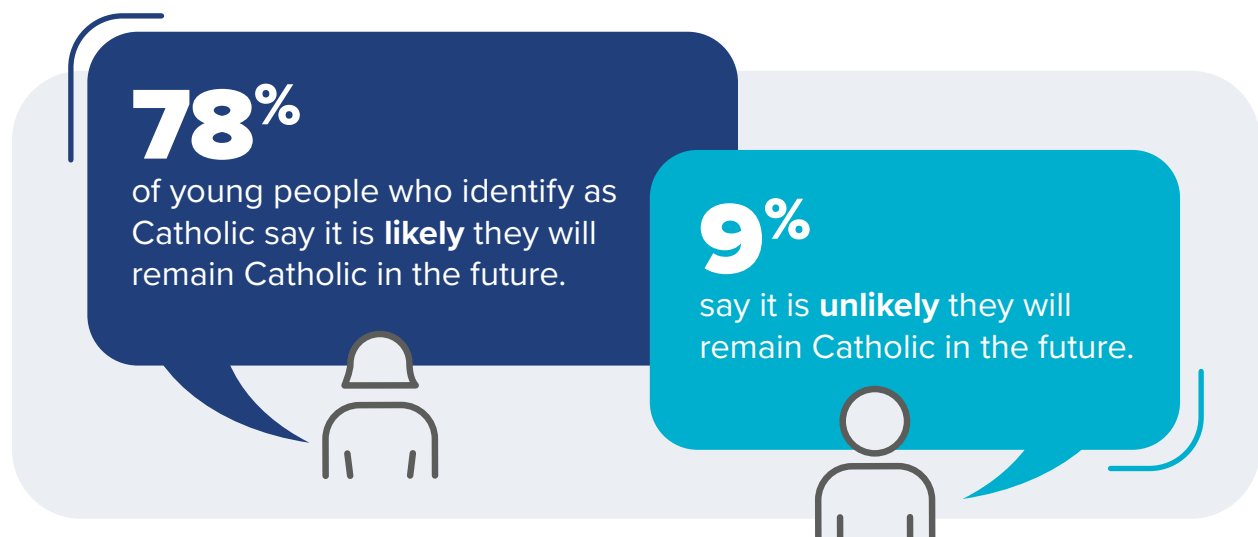
- "Catholicism defines a lot of who I am as a person."
- "It's part of how I see myself."
- "It has shaped who I am today."
- "It brings me to who I am and how to go on with life."
- "It is, and always will be, part of my identity."

4. Emotional support: Emotional support plays an important role in sustaining affiliation. Many young Catholics describe their faith as a source of comfort, peace, strength, and guidance during moments of uncertainty. It offers practical and emotional resources that make religious commitment meaningful and salient in everyday life.

- “It helps me cope with life.”
- “I see hope in God. I had a lot of life issues, and He helped me keep going.”
- “I feel less alone because of my faith.”
- “Catholicism brings me peace, community, and purpose.”
- “Being a Catholic keeps me going after tragic deaths that have happened to me. To believe is to overcome.”

5. Connection to community: Some young Catholics mention connections to their local Catholic communities, like schools or parishes, or to the broader Church as reasons for their continued commitment to the faith. These respondents tended to highlight the warmth and openness of their parishes. A smaller share cited finding meaning in the Church as established by Christ and passed on through Apostolic succession.

- “The community is nice.”
- “I feel welcomed at my church.”
- “After going to a Christian church, I just felt more comfortable and happier . . . in a Catholic church.”
- “I like attending Mass when I can. I still like what the Church and Rome represent and feel it is a force for good in the world.”
- “The Catholic Church is one of the only churches that has a direct trace back to Jesus Christ himself.”
- “The Catholic Church is the fulfillment of truth, and the Church Jesus established. It is such a blessing that I was born into it and that God has given me the ability to have such a strong faith at a young age, and I cannot express how grateful I am for that, and I do not take it for granted.”



Who disaffiliates?

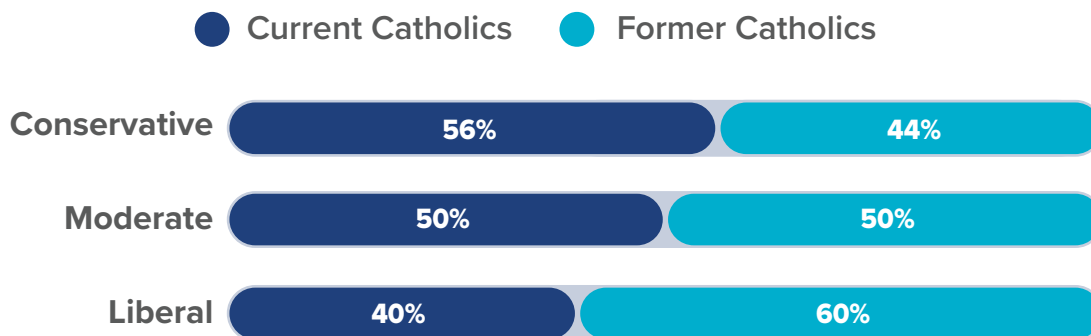
Patterns of disaffiliation surface across social characteristics like race and ethnicity, political ideology, LGBTQ+ identity, and gender, though the strength of these associations varies.

Young people who identify as politically conservative, for example, are more likely to currently identify as Catholic, while liberal young people are more likely to report having disaffiliated.

Respondents who describe themselves as politically moderate are evenly split between current and former Catholic affiliation. While there are statistical differences between these groups, the overall association between political ideology and disaffiliation is weak.

Catholic Affiliation by Political Ideology

% of respondents who identify as current vs. former Catholics:



Note: The survey asked respondents to place themselves on a 7-point scale between extremely liberal to extremely conservative. This graph consolidates these categories (e.g., extremely liberal, moderately liberal, and liberal) for clarity. The graph excludes those who responded “Not sure” to this question (n = 284). Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

Source: 2025 Springtide Research Institute Study of Current and Former Catholic Young People (n = 1,211), ages 13–25, conducted between April and August 2025.

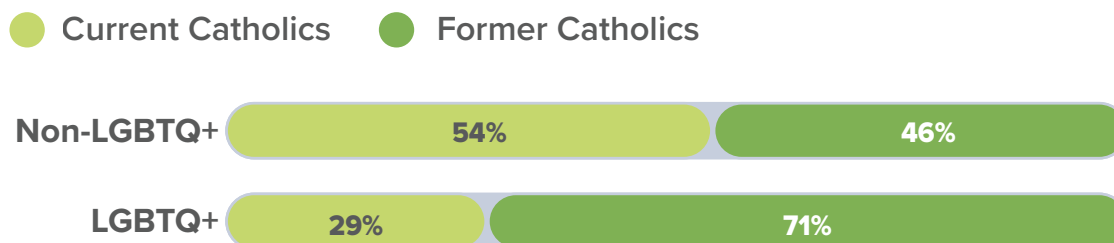
Gender differences in Catholic affiliation are even more limited in explaining disaffiliation.

While a larger share of young women, compared to men, identify as former Catholics (54% vs. 48%), this difference is statistically weak.

LGBTQ+ identification shows a more telling pattern. Among young people who identify as LGBTQ+, 71% report having disaffiliated, compared to 46% of their non-LGBTQ+ peers.

Catholic Affiliation by LGBTQ+ Identity

% of respondents who identify as current vs. former Catholics:



Note: This graph excludes those who responded, “Not sure” to the question, “Do you identify as LGBTQ+?” (n = 52). Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

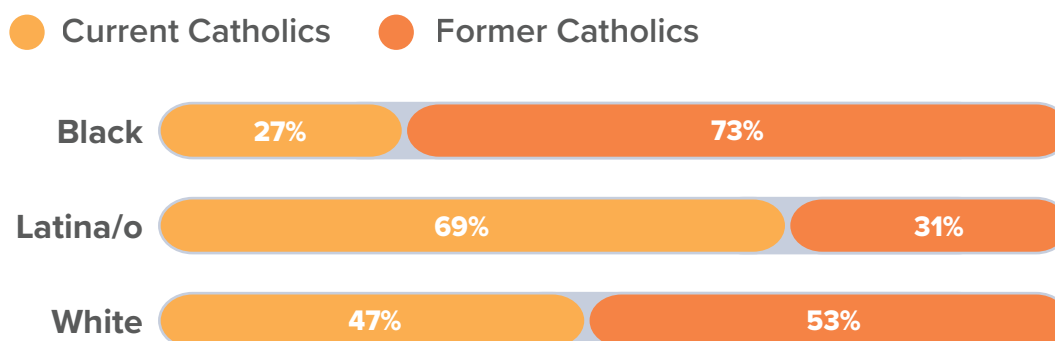
Source: 2025 Springtide Research Institute Study of Current and Former Catholic Young People (n = 1,211), ages 13–25, conducted between April and August 2025.



Race and ethnicity show the strongest association with Catholic affiliation. Disaffiliation is most common among Black respondents, nearly three-quarters (73%) of whom report no longer identifying as Catholic. White respondents are roughly evenly split between current (47%) and former (53%) Catholic affiliation. Hispanic and Latina/o young people show higher levels of retention, with fewer than one-third (31%) identifying as former Catholics.

Catholic Affiliation by Race and Ethnicity

% of respondents who identify as current vs. former Catholics:



Note: This graph includes analyses only for Black (n = 182), Latina/o (n = 280), and White (n = 596) respondents due to small sample sizes among other racial and ethnic groups. Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

Source: 2025 Springtide Research Institute Study of Current and Former Catholic Young People (n = 1,211), ages 13–25, conducted between April and August 2025.

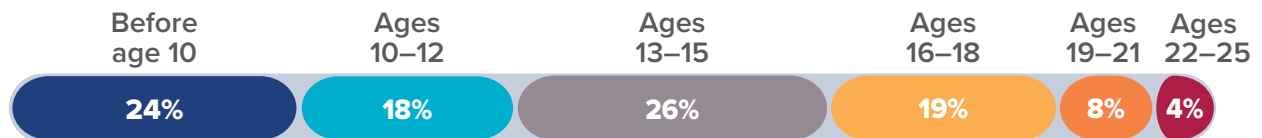
When considering these demographic characteristics together, race/ethnicity emerges as the strongest predictor of Catholic disaffiliation, followed by LGBTQ+ identity. Political ideology plays a smaller role in explaining disaffiliation, and gender does not independently predict Catholic affiliation once other factors are taken into account.

When and why do former Catholics disaffiliate?

Most former Catholics report disaffiliating during adolescence: 42% of former Catholics stopped identifying as such before turning 13, and 87% disaffiliated by age 18.

At what age did you stop self-identifying as Catholic?

% of former Catholic young people responding:



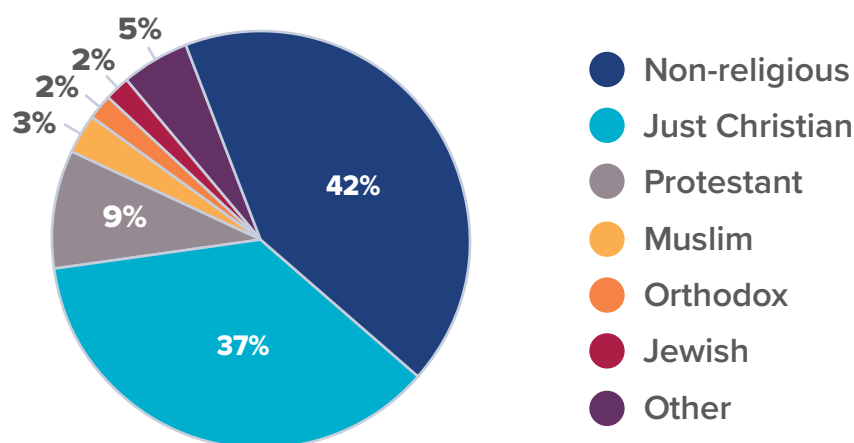
Note: Only former Catholics (n = 620) answered this question. Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

Source: 2025 Springtide Research Institute Study of Current and Former Catholic Young People (n = 1,211), ages 13–25, conducted between April and August 2025.

Just under half of former Catholics now identify as “just Christian” (37%) or Protestant (9%). Another 42% identify as non-religious, including those who identify as unaffiliated with organized religion, agnostic, atheist, and “spiritual but not religious.” Smaller shares identify as Muslim (3%), Orthodox (2%), Jewish (2%), or “other” (5%).

What is your present religious tradition or spiritual worldview?

% of former Catholic young people responding:



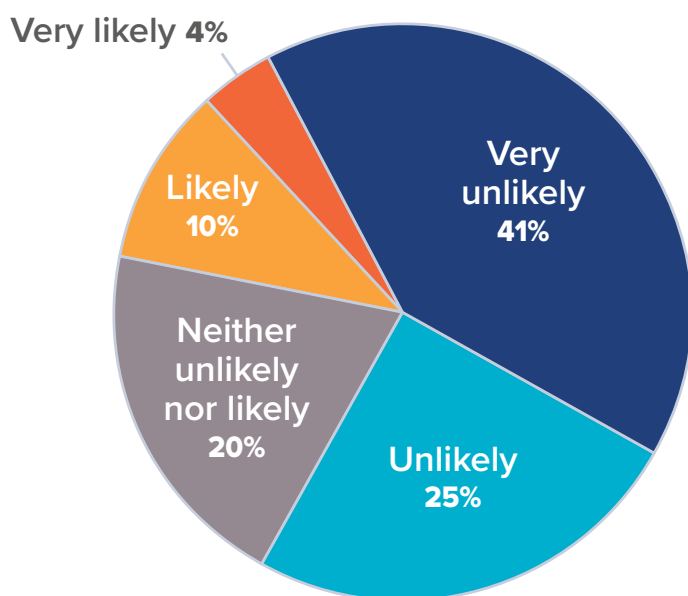
Note: This graph represents former Catholics’ (n = 620) present religious or spiritual worldview. The “non-religious” category groups together young people who indicated they do not identify with a religious tradition along with those who identified as atheist, agnostic, and as “spiritual but not religious.” Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

Source: 2025 Springtide Research Institute Study of Current and Former Catholic Young People (n = 1,211), ages 13–25, conducted between April and August 2025.

Two-thirds of former Catholics say it is unlikely or very unlikely they will ever identify as Catholic again.

How likely are you to identify as Catholic again?

% of former Catholic young people responding:



Note: Only former Catholics (n = 620) answered this question. Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

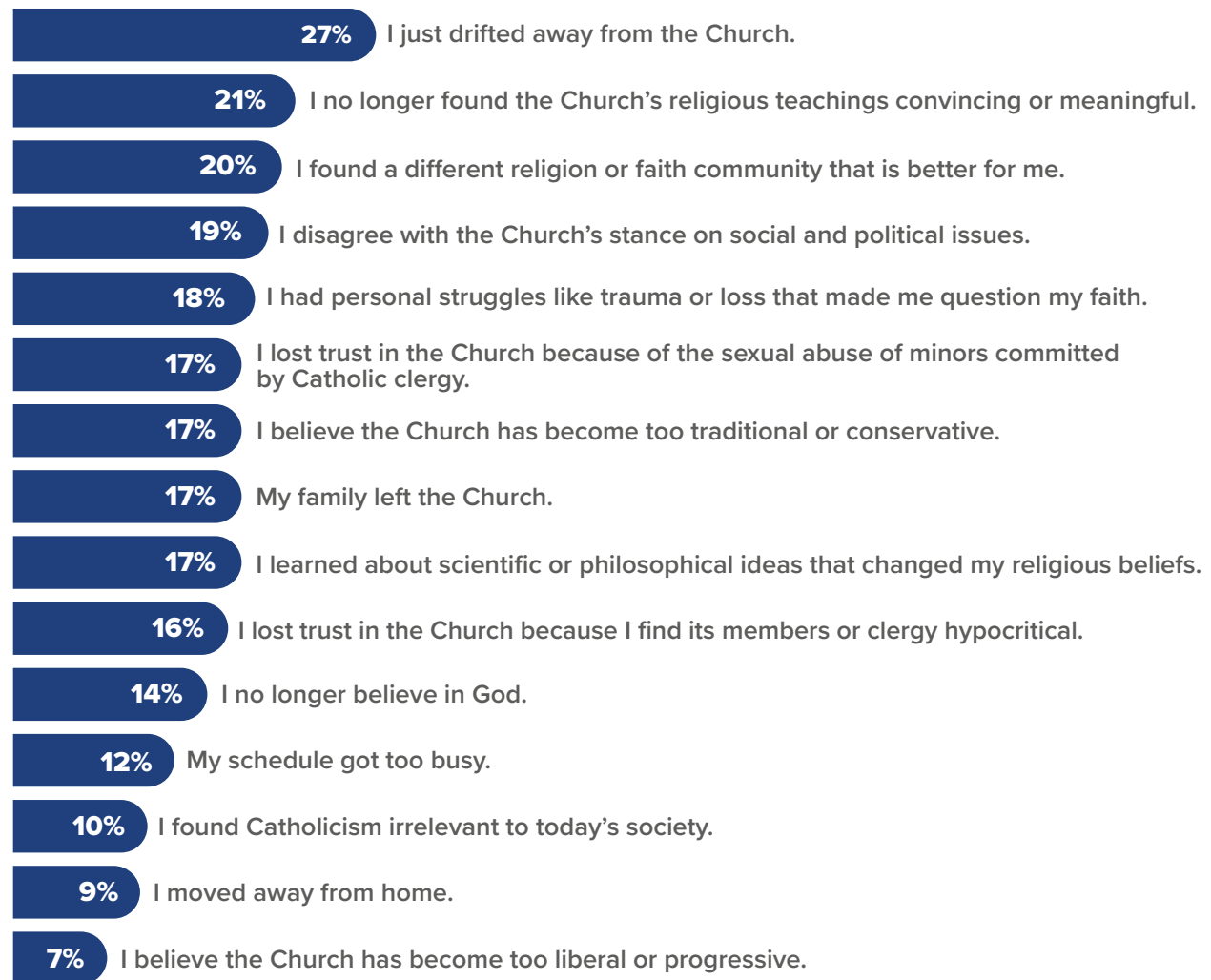
Source: 2025 Springtide Research Institute Study of Current and Former Catholic Young People (n = 1,211), ages 13–25, conducted between April and August 2025.

Young people disaffiliate from the Church for many reasons. Most commonly, however, former Catholics say it is because they “drifted away from the Church” (27%). The second most common reason former Catholics cite for their disaffiliation is no longer finding the Church’s religious teachings convincing or meaningful (21%), followed by “finding a different religion or faith community that is better for me” (20%).

Nineteen percent of young people report disaffiliating because they disagree with the Church’s stances on social and political issues. Seventeen percent say they no longer identify as Catholic because the Church has become too traditional and conservative, while 7% say they it has become too liberal or progressive. Slightly fewer (17%) left the Church due to the sexual abuse of minors committed by Catholic clergy. Just 14% say they disaffiliated because they no longer believe in God.

What are your personal reasons for no longer identifying as Catholic?

% of former Catholic young people responding:



Note: This graph represents former Catholics' (n = 620) responses to the question, "There are many reasons why people might no longer identify as Catholic. What are your personal reasons for no longer identifying as Catholic?" Respondents could select more than one option. This graph features only the top 15 reasons selected by respondents. For the full list, please see the survey topline. Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

Source: 2025 Springtide Research Institute Study of Current and Former Catholic Young People (n = 1,211), ages 13–25, conducted between April and August 2025.

Participation in the Life of the Church

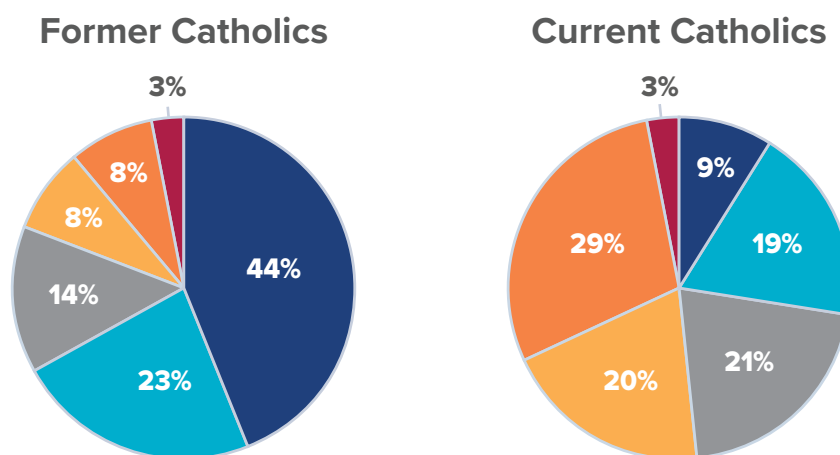
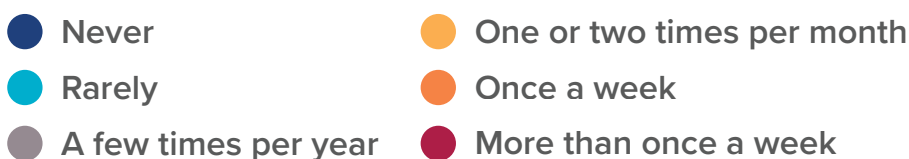
Mass

Across the full sample, Mass attendance is infrequent. Nearly half (48%) of respondents report never or rarely attending Mass aside from weddings and funerals, while 17% attend a few times a year, and 14% attend once or twice a month. By contrast, 22% of current and former Catholic young people attend once a week or more.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Mass attendance varies sharply by Catholic affiliation. Under half (44%) of former Catholic respondents report never attending Mass, compared to 9% of Catholic respondents. Catholics are concentrated at the high end of the attendance spectrum: 33% attend Mass weekly or more, compared to 11% of former Catholics.

Aside from weddings and funerals, about how often do you currently attend Mass at a Catholic Church?

% of current vs. former Catholic young people responding by affiliation:



Note: Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

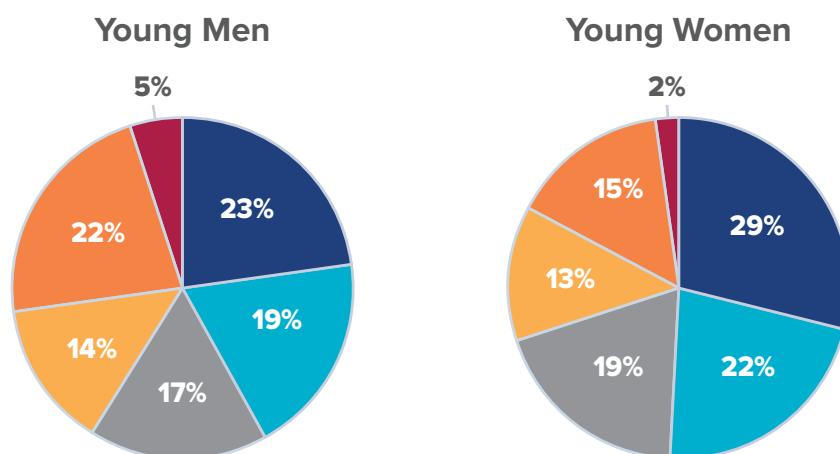
Source: 2025 Springtide Research Institute Study of Current and Former Catholic Young People (n = 1,211), ages 13–25, conducted between April and August 2025.

Yet, disaffiliation is not always preceded by minimal participation. In fact, a substantial share of young former Catholics once attended Mass regularly. Twenty-nine percent attended weekly or more when they still identified as Catholic, and 42% attended at least monthly.

Patterns in Mass attendance differ slightly by gender: Catholic young men attend religious services slightly more frequently than Catholic young women, though the statistical difference is small.

Aside from weddings and funerals, about how often do you currently attend Mass at a Catholic Church?

% of current and former Catholic young people responding by gender:



Note: Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

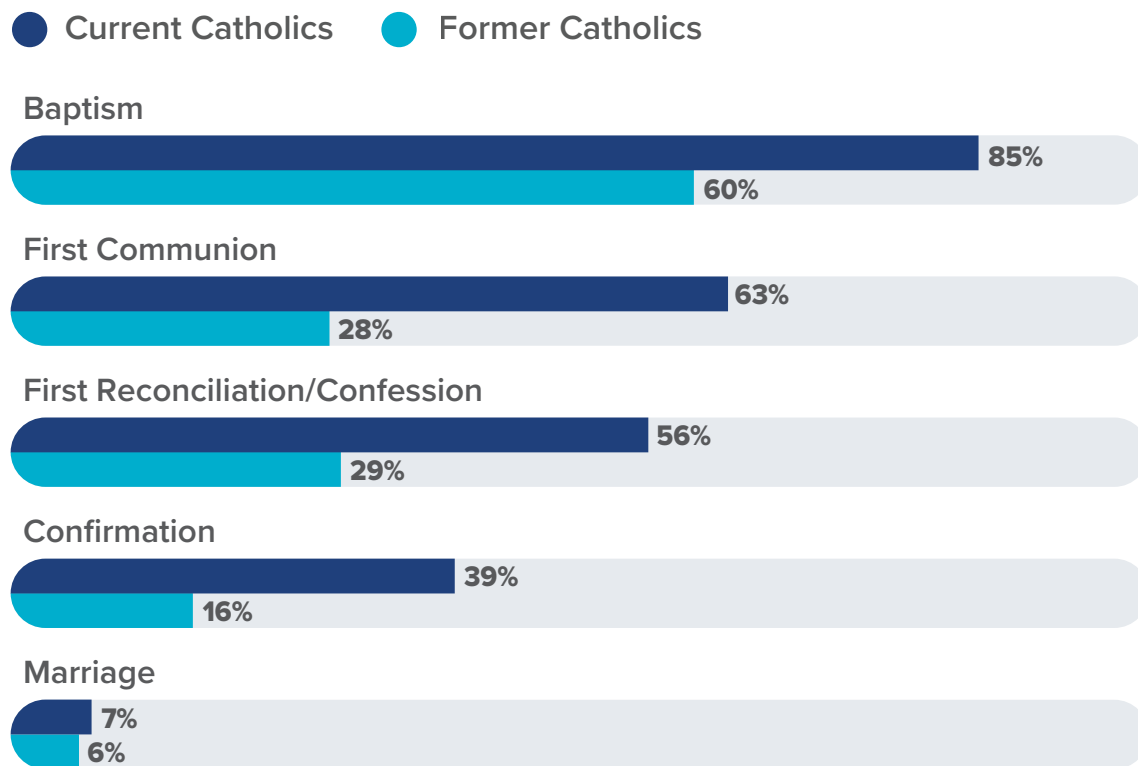
Source: 2025 Springtide Research Institute Study of Current and Former Catholic Young People (n = 1,211), ages 13–25, conducted between April and August 2025.

Sacraments

Most young people who identify as Catholic (85%) and over half of former Catholics (60%) report having been baptized. Sacramental participation drops, however, for subsequent sacraments. Nearly two-thirds of current Catholics (63%) say they received First Communion compared to 28% of former Catholics. These data suggest that **while Baptism is relatively common across both groups, incorporation into the sacramental life of the Church declines, particularly among young people who no longer identify as Catholic.**

Have you ever received any of the following Catholic sacraments?

% of current vs. former Catholic young people responding:



Note: Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

Source: 2025 Springtide Research Institute Study of Current and Former Catholic Young People (n = 1,211), ages 13–25, conducted between April and August 2025.



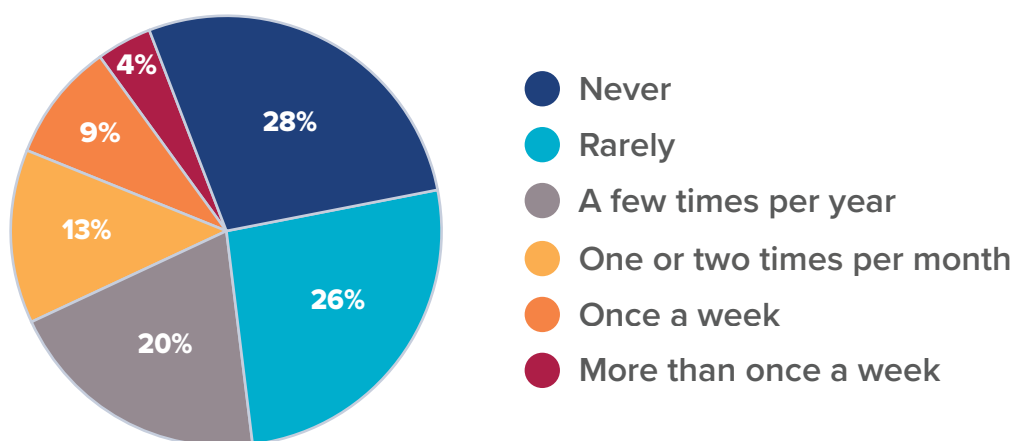
Formation and Community Involvement

The current and former Catholic young people in our study report limited contact with Catholic schooling, parish-based formation, and communal parish life.

For example, about half (54%) of respondents say they never or rarely take part in activities in their parish outside of attending Mass. Twenty percent say they participate a few times a year, while 26% participate on a monthly, weekly, or more than weekly basis.

Outside of attending Mass, how often do you take part in other activities at your parish, for example, participating in prayer or study groups, parish ministries, or other communal events?

% of current and former Catholic young people responding:



Note: Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

Source: 2025 Springtide Research Institute Study of Current and Former Catholic Young People (n = 1,211), ages 13–25, conducted between April and August 2025.

Furthermore, a plurality of respondents (39%) report no involvement in any listed youth or young adult programming.

Have you ever been involved in . . . ?

% of current and former Catholic young people responding:

A Catholic campus ministry on a college or university campus

6%

A parish or diocesan young adult group

7%

A parish-based Catholic religious education program

29%

A Catholic youth ministry program

37%

None of the above

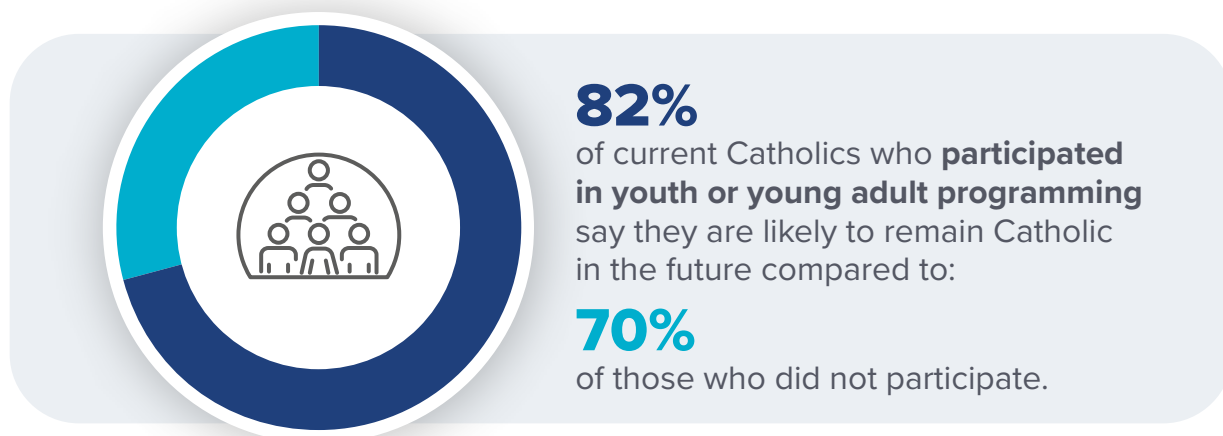
39%

Note: Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

Source: 2025 Springtide Research Institute Study of Current and Former Catholic Young People (n = 1,211), ages 13–25, conducted between April and August 2025.



Young people who participated in youth or young adult programming are slightly more likely to say they intend to remain Catholic in the future.



The majority of current and former Catholic respondents (57%) have never attended a Catholic school. Among those who have attended, participation drops gradually from elementary school through college.

Have you ever attended . . . ?

% of current and former Catholic young people responding:

A Catholic elementary school

30%

A Catholic middle school

18%

A Catholic high school

14%

A Catholic college or university

5%

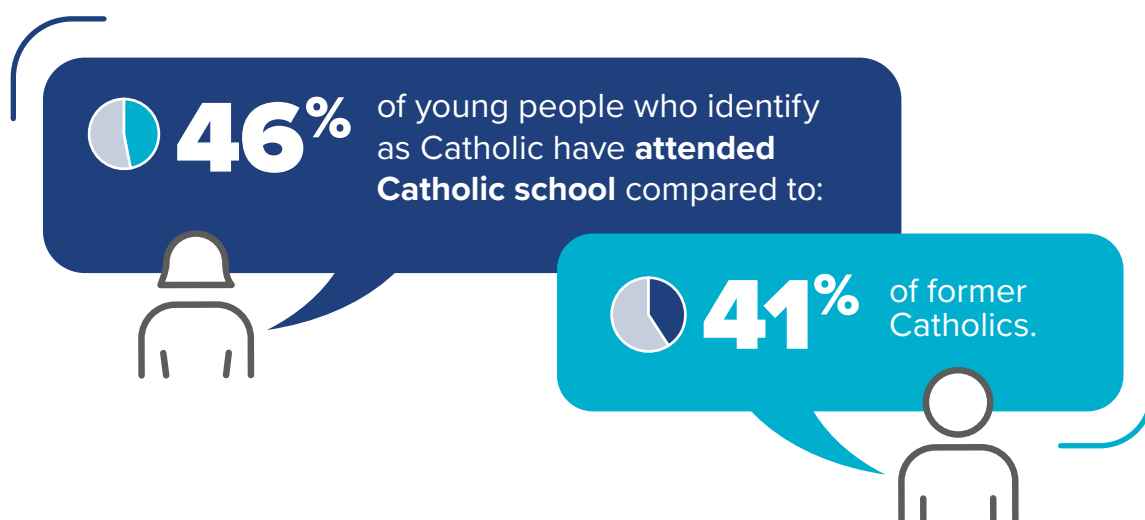
None of the above

57%

Note: Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

Source: 2025 Springtide Research Institute Study of Current and Former Catholic Young People (n = 1,211), ages 13–25, conducted between April and August 2025.

Not all forms of Catholic institutional exposure function the same way. For example, Catholic schooling alone does little to distinguish current Catholics from former Catholics:



Youth or young adult formation, by contrast, is positively linked to Catholic affiliation. Former Catholics are significantly more likely than current Catholics to report no involvement in youth programming:



The Domestic Church

Family Ties to the Catholic Faith

Our survey data suggest that **Catholic identity is more present in older generations and family-of-origin relationships than in young people's peer and chosen relationships.**

Catholic affiliation is most common among grandparents (68%), followed by parents, with higher affiliation among mothers (58%) than fathers (50%). Fewer than half of respondents report Catholic affiliation among closest friends (48%) and siblings (45%). Nineteen percent report having a romantic partner who is Catholic.

Do any of the following people in your life currently self-identify as Catholic?

% of current and former Catholic young people responding:

Any of your grandparents



Your mother



Your father



Any of your closest friends



Any of your siblings



Your romantic partner



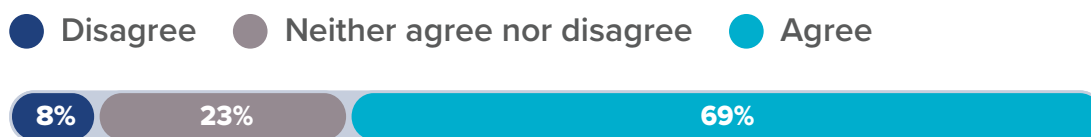
Note: Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

Source: 2025 Springtide Research Institute Study of Current and Former Catholic Young People (n = 1,211), ages 13–25, conducted between April and August 2025.

Among current Catholics, affiliation is at least partially rooted in family tradition. Over two-thirds (69%) agree that their family's faith is important to them and they want to continue that tradition.

“My family’s Catholic identity is important to me, and I want to continue that tradition.”

% of current Catholic young people responding:

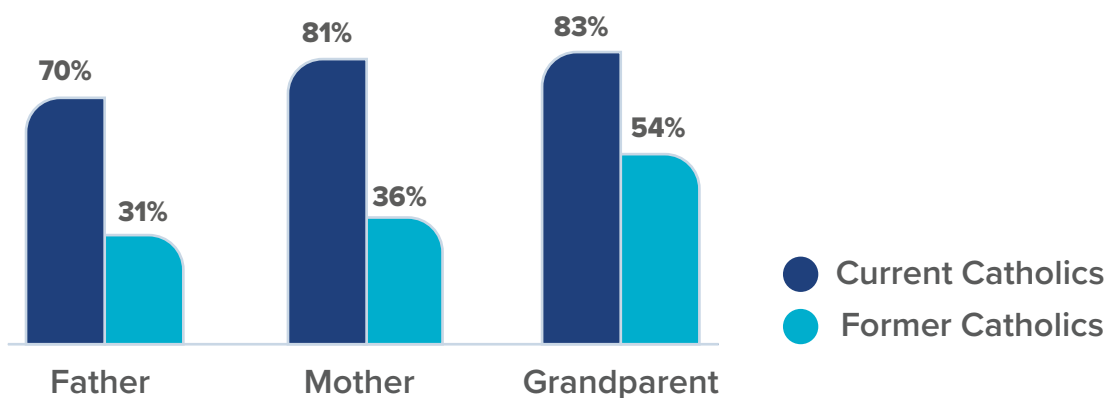


Note: Only current Catholics (n = 589) answered this question. The survey asked respondents to what extent they disagreed or agreed with the statement, from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree.” This graph consolidates these categories (e.g., strongly disagree and disagree) for clarity. Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

Source: 2025 Springtide Research Institute Study of Current and Former Catholic Young People (n = 1,211), ages 13–25, conducted between April and August 2025.

Current Catholics are embedded in denser Catholic family networks than former Catholics. For example, current Catholics are more likely than former Catholics to have parents who identify as Catholic. Eighty-one percent of current Catholics say their mother identifies as Catholic compared to 36% of former Catholics. Seventy percent of current Catholics report having a Catholic father, while 31% of former Catholics do. Catholic identity is common among grandparents, but it is more prevalent among current Catholics than former.

% of respondents whose _____ is still Catholic:



Note: Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

Source: 2025 Springtide Research Institute Study of Current and Former Catholic Young People (n = 1,211), ages 13–25, conducted between April and August 2025.

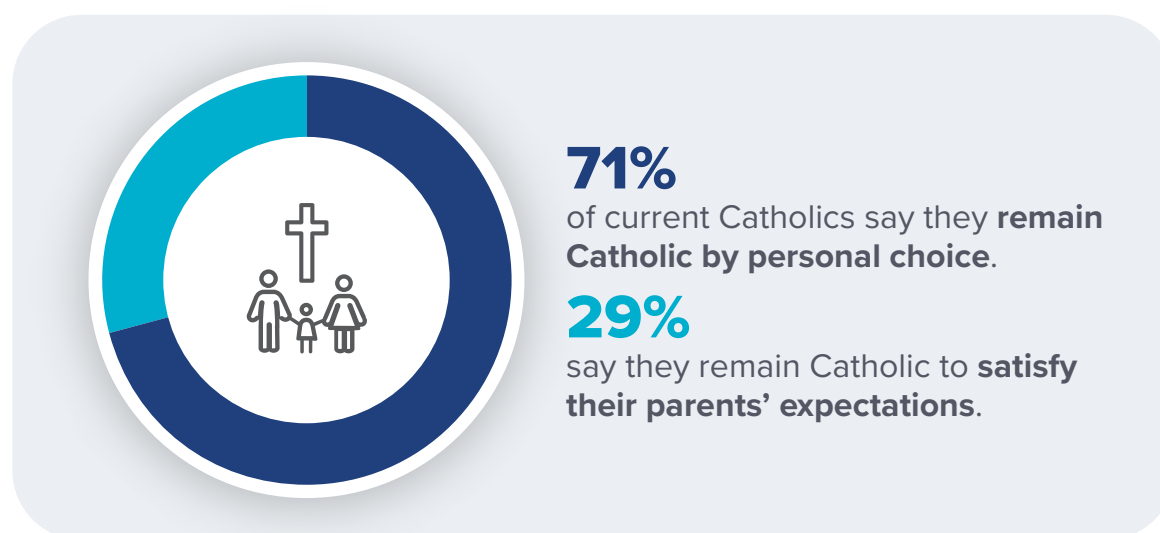
Even though family identity distinguishes current from former Catholic young people, few former Catholics (17%) cite their family leaving the Church as a reason for their own disaffiliation.

The Role of Parents in Catholic Affiliation

As mentioned previously, Catholic young people most commonly cite family tradition as the reason why they continue to identify or practice as Catholic (see page 8). **Parents in particular surface as strong sustainers of the faith.** Respondents whose mothers currently identify as Catholic are more likely to identify as Catholic and say they expect to remain Catholic in the future. Fathers' Catholic affiliation is also associated with retention, though the differences between those with and without Catholic fathers are smaller than those observed for mothers.

In interviews with Catholic young people, three themes surface regarding how parents relate to Catholic affiliation:

- 1. Making faith salient in everyday life:** Across interviews, young people tend to describe their parents' faith in behavioral terms. They tell us whether parents went to Mass regularly, prayed together, or marked liturgical seasons at home. Paul, 25, told us that on birthdays, his family would sing “happy birthday” to Jesus before singing it to him. Meztli, 15, told us that her mother would encourage her to talk to God throughout the day, expressing gratitude for everyday blessings and asking for guidance through life's bumps or challenges. Faith becomes stable and routine for respondents like these. Interviewees for whom faith practices were inconsistent tended to conclude that faith matters but not enough to structure or guide their lives.





- 2. Helping make sense of questions, suffering, and disagreement:** A second pattern emerges when young people explain why they remain connected to the Church despite experiencing difficulties in life or doubts about the faith. Many point to formative moments when parents modeled how to wrestle with doubt, seek meaning, and make peace with uncertainty. Parents who acknowledged young people’s concerns without rushing to provide tidy answers helped young people make sense of these experiences. By contrast, responses that dismissed, avoided, or spiritualized pain too quickly led some young people to experience faith and “real life” as incompatible.
- 3. Defining the relational costs of belief, doubt, and disaffiliation:** Parents shape young people’s religious lives not only through what they teach about the faith, but also through the relational signals they send about belief, doubt, and belonging. Young people infer the “relational costs” of their faith by observing how parents respond to questions, disagreement, hesitation, or expressions of non-belief. Over time, young people learn whether and to what extent they can discuss their faith openly within their family. Interviewees who say they felt relationally safe to ask questions note how this led them to deepen their faith and make it their own. Those who didn’t feel relationally safe say they learned to *present* themselves as Catholic in order to preserve the peace.

Gender Roles and Issues

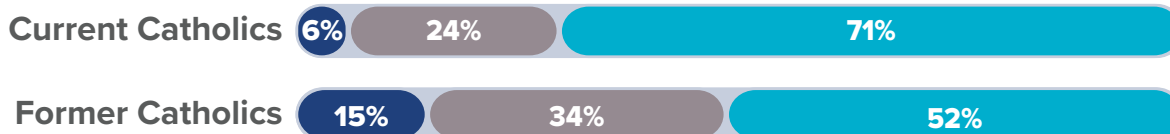
Current and former Catholics in this study reveal nuanced and sometimes unresolved views about gender roles in the Church and in society. Many support expanded leadership roles for women in the Church but are divided on questions about sacramental authority. There are respondents who affirm some traditional role expectations—especially for men—while others express disagreement or uncertainty.

The majority of respondents recognize some form of women’s leadership in the Church. Most agree that women already play important leadership roles, though current Catholics are disproportionately likely to affirm women’s leadership compared to former Catholics (71% vs. 52%).

Women, in their own way, play important leadership roles in the Church.

% of current vs. former Catholic young people responding:

● Disagree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Agree



Note: The survey asked respondents to what extent they disagreed or agreed with the statement, from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree.” This graph consolidates these categories (e.g., strongly disagree and disagree) for clarity. Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

Source: 2025 Springtide Research Institute Study of Current and Former Catholic Young People (n = 1,211), ages 13–25, conducted between April and August 2025.

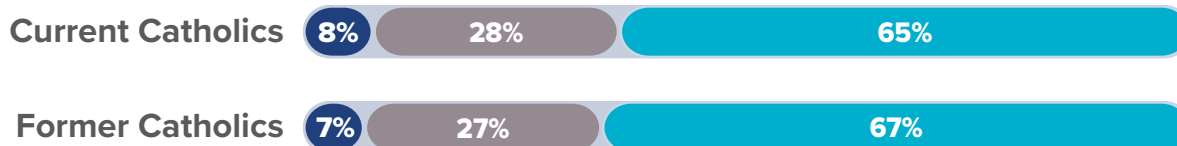


Two-thirds (66%) agree or strongly agree that the Church should expand opportunities for women to participate in decision-making.

The Church should expand opportunities for women to make decisions.

% of current vs. former Catholic young people responding:

● Disagree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Agree



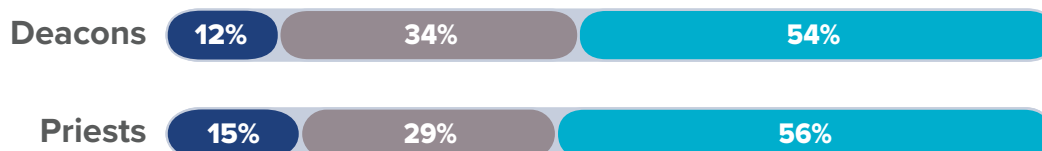
Note: The survey asked respondents to what extent they disagreed or agreed with the statement, from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree.” This graph consolidates these categories (e.g., strongly disagree and disagree) for clarity. Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

Source: 2025 Springtide Research Institute Study of Current and Former Catholic Young People (n = 1,211), ages 13–25, conducted between April and August 2025.

There is less consensus when questions turn to ordination. Over half of current and former Catholic young people agree that women should be able to become priests (56%) and that they should be able to become deacons (54%). Substantial shares of respondents neither agree nor disagree on each question: 34% remain neutral on the question of deacons, and 29% on the question of ordination to the priesthood. Fifteen percent oppose women’s ordination to the priesthood and 12% oppose women’s ordination to the diaconate.

% of current and former Catholic young people who disagree or agree that the Church should make it possible for women to become _____:

● Disagree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Agree



Note: The survey asked respondents to what extent they disagreed or agreed with each statement, from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree.” This graph consolidates these categories (e.g., strongly disagree and disagree) for clarity. Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

Source: 2025 Springtide Research Institute Study of Current and Former Catholic Young People (n = 1,211), ages 13–25, conducted between April and August 2025.

Here's what respondents had to say, in their own words, about women's ordination:

It's very clear that women will never be priests. It's not the way that the Lord designed the priesthood, [but] it doesn't mean that women are not worthy to be in other leadership roles . . . In terms of women deacons, I know it's being studied right now, and if it's something where they say this did happen in the early Church, and it's gonna be returned, I wouldn't be opposed to it. Whatever decision they make on that issue, they would be doing in the fullness of truth. So yeah, I would need to research that more to have a full opinion, but if the Church said that it's okay, I wouldn't be opposed.

—Paul, 25, Catholic

Women can't be priests, and that's okay. Not everything is for everybody, and women have their own special positions in the church . . . I think when I was younger, I was like, "Oh, women should be able to be priests. That's not fair—girl power!" But there's "girl power" to do so many other things . . . I don't know if I've really given much thought to [women becoming deacons]. I know of course there are permanent deacons, and then there are deacons who are gonna be priests. So, obviously, [women] couldn't become the deacons who become priests. But I haven't really thought about it to be honest.

—Harmony, 25, Catholic

I haven't really thought about [this] a lot, but I sometimes think that maybe women should be able to preach. I mean, I know there are nuns and stuff like that, but sometimes I do wonder why it's a rule [that they can't be deacons or priests].

—Meztli, 15, Catholic

I understand sticking to tradition and things like that, [but] I wish that women had a more elevated position somehow, even if it wasn't becoming a full priest.

—Lucas, 16, former Catholic

I think it would be cool to have female priests and deacons. I think it also would be helpful to a lot of women, especially young teens, because it's kind of scary to go to confession, even if I know the priest, because society has taught me to fear a lot of men. So, then I feel kind of uncomfortable to go to them with my problems. I think that it might just be more welcoming to some people to have somebody who identifies the same as them.

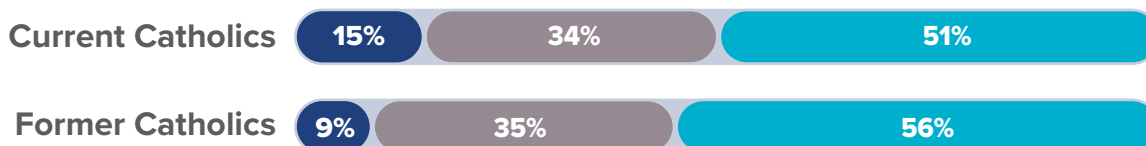
—Angelina, 17, Catholic

There are some statistical differences between Catholics and former Catholics on questions of women’s ordination. Regarding support for women’s ordination as deacons, current and former Catholics are similar (51% and 56%, respectively). While current Catholics are slightly more likely to oppose the change, the overall gap between the two groups of young people is small. On the question of women as priests, however, the divide between current and former Catholics widens. Former Catholics are more likely to support women’s ordination to the priesthood (63%), while current Catholics are more likely to express opposition or neutrality (19% disagree, 32% neutral).

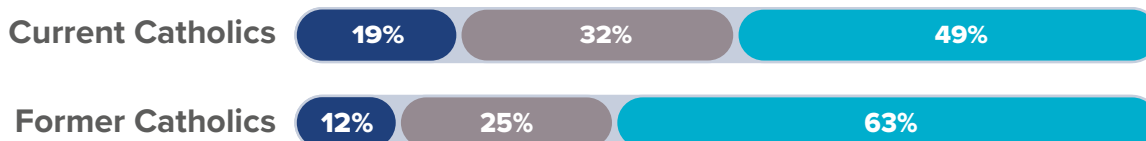
% of respondents who agree/disagree that the Church should make it possible for women to become _____:

● Disagree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Agree

Deacons:



Priests:



Note: The survey asked respondents to what extent they disagreed or agreed with each statement, from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree.” This graph consolidates these categories (e.g., strongly disagree and disagree) for clarity. Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

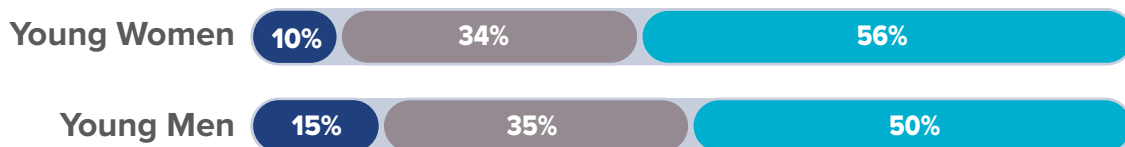
Source: 2025 Springtide Research Institute Study of Current and Former Catholic Young People (n = 1,211), ages 13–25, conducted between April and August 2025.

Opinions on women’s ordination also vary by gender. Young women are more likely than young men to express support for women in the priesthood, while young men and women hold more similar views on expanding the diaconate.

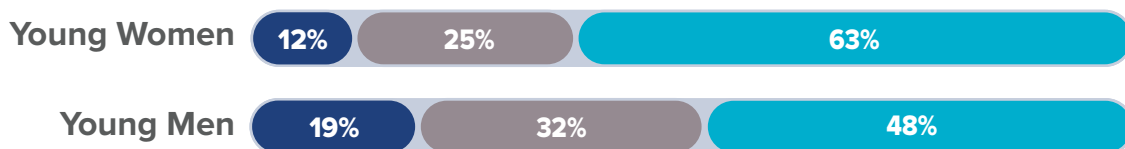
% of current and former Catholic young people who agree/disagree that the Church should make it possible for women to become _____:

● Disagree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Agree

Deacons:



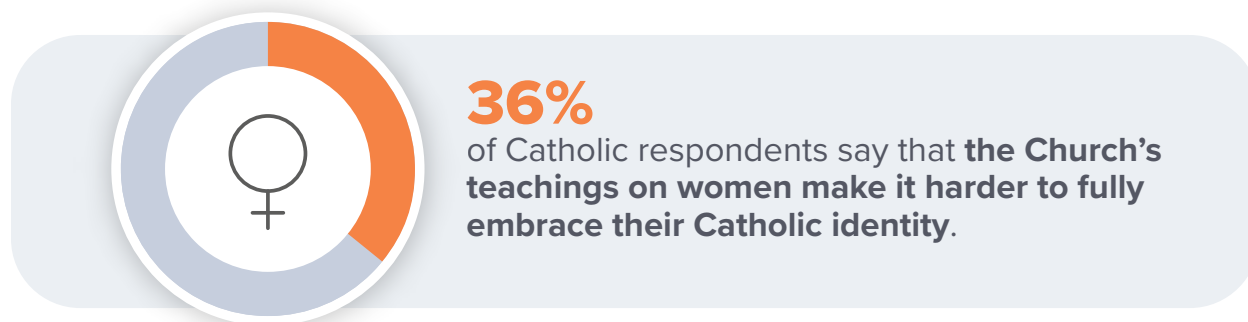
Priests:



Note: The survey asked respondents to what extent they disagreed or agreed with each statement, from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree.” This graph consolidates these categories (e.g., strongly disagree and disagree) for clarity. Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

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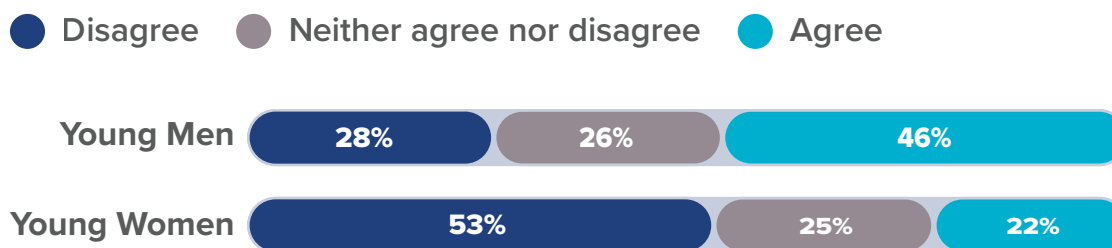
Most respondents endorse some gendered responsibilities while rejecting or hedging stricter social scripts. When asked about men’s roles, for example, over half (54%) agree or strongly agree that men should embrace traditional roles as providers and protectors, while 21% disagree and 26% are neutral.



By contrast, **respondents are less enthusiastic about a broader return to traditional gender roles throughout society.** Thirty-four percent agree or strongly agree that society would be stronger if both men and women returned to traditional gender roles, while 41% disagree, and 25% remain neutral. Young men are more likely than women to agree with the statement, while twice as many young women strongly disagree.

Our society would be stronger if more men and women returned to traditional gender roles.

% of current and former Catholic young people responding:



Note: The survey asked respondents to what extent they disagreed or agreed with the statement, from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree.” This graph consolidates these categories (e.g., strongly disagree and disagree) for clarity. Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

Source: 2025 Springtide Research Institute Study of Current and Former Catholic Young People (n = 1,211), ages 13–25, conducted between April and August 2025.

Here's what respondents had to say about traditional gender roles:

“If we go back to women having 10 kids and staying in the kitchen, that’s when I’d [disaffiliate from the Church] . . . because at that point, you’re rejecting the humanity of a whole gender.

—Levi, 24, Catholic

“People should be able to do what they want to. So, if women want to work outside of the home, they should be able to. And if men want to be stay-at-home-fathers, they should be able to.

—Kelsey, 15, Catholic

“God created a man to be the provider, so he’s the one that works. He provides the money and is a father in the family. And then God says the woman is like the supplement of the father—something like that. She’s complimentary. Like, man and woman work together.

—Julian, 23, Catholic

“I think [gender roles]—more than being what God would say must be the case—more than likely are just something that the people at the time came up with. They would’ve just said, like, “Well of course only men can do these roles,” and that’s just carried over for 2,000 years.

—Adam, 21, Former Catholic

“If people [say] women are supposed to be quiet and that men are supposed to do all this other kind of stuff—well, obviously God doesn’t want that. But men and women are very different, and we have very different and specific roles . . . so, we should be meant for different kinds of things, and there’s nothing wrong with that.

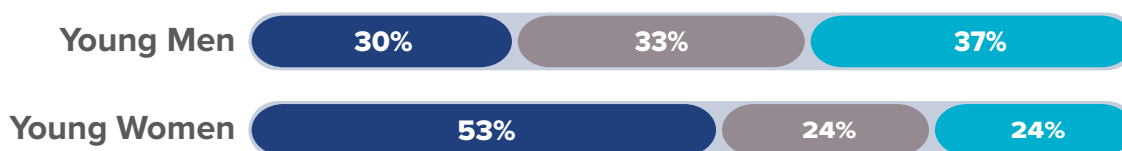
—Bernadette, 22, Catholic

Questions about women’s primary roles reveal similar splits in opinion. Thirty percent agree that a woman’s primary role should be caring for the home and family, while 42% disagree and 28% neither agree nor disagree. When asked whether a woman’s most important role is motherhood, 38% agree, 36% disagree, and 26% are neutral. These views, too, differ significantly by gender: men are more likely than women to agree with these statements.

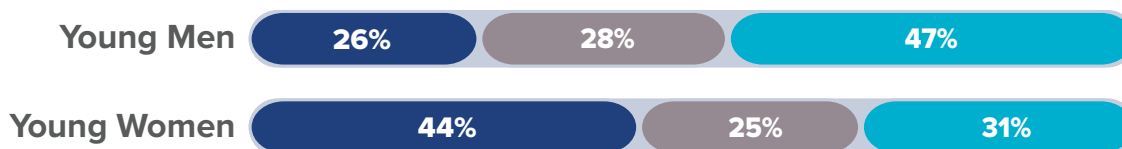
% of current and former Catholic young people responding to the statements:

● Disagree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Agree

“A woman’s primary role should be taking care of the home and family.”



“A woman’s most important role is as a mother.”



Note: The survey asked respondents to what extent they disagreed or agreed with each statement, from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree.” This graph consolidates these categories (e.g., strongly disagree and disagree) for clarity. Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

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Conclusion

The findings in this report provide an empirical picture of current and former Catholic young people, including where the experiences of these two groups overlap and diverge. Across our survey and interview data, Catholic affiliation remains largely tied to family tradition, and to parents' support in particular. Former Catholics describe a wider range of pathways away from Catholic affiliation, ranging from simply "drifting away" to disagreement with Church teachings on social issues. By placing these patterns side by side, the report highlights areas of continuity as well as points of distance within young people's religious worlds.

For educators, ministers, practitioners, and parents, these findings offer a shared point of reference grounded in a systematic analysis of survey and interview data. Used alongside lived expertise and pastoral experience, we hope these data can support informed reflection, conversations, and decision making. Because religious affiliation shifts gradually across cohorts and contexts, sustained attention over time will be necessary to interpret these patterns fully. Indeed, as discussions about young Catholics continue to evolve, distinguishing between short-term fluctuations and enduring trends will remain an essential foundation for responsible interpretation and engagement with young people today.

Acknowledgments

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