

Catholic Youth and Young Adults By the Numbers **A Brief Summary of What We Know About Catholic Youth and Adults.**

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There are many important numbers today that help us to understand the current realities of Catholic youth and young adults today. These numbers indicate a trend of young Catholics leaving the faith or at minimum practicing their faith less than previous generations.

Recent research conducted by The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) provides data on these realities. The numbers **63**, **13**, **23**, **50**, and **71** show that the majority of Catholics leave the Church at a young age and that their struggle with what the church teaches is a primary reason. Those who leave are just as likely to be male as they are female, and their demographics generally mirror those of all young Catholics their age.

- **63%** of those interviewed said they stopped being Catholic between the ages of 10 and 17
- **13** the typical age at which those interviewed for the CARA study said they decided to leave the Church and **13%** of respondents said they were ever likely to return to the Catholic Church
- **23%** of those interviewed for the CARA study say they left the Faith before age 10
- **50%** or more of those interviewed who have left the Church said the following two reasons were either "somewhat" or "very" important to their decision to leave: that they had stopped believing in what the Catholic Church teaches and that they did not like the Catholic Church's rules and judgmental approach
- **71%** is the "retention rate" for Hispanic or Latino/a youth which is 10% higher than non-Hispanic or Latino/a youth but still down from 82% just 10 years ago.

So why are they leaving?

To find the answer, CARA began its interviews with these former Catholics with an open-ended question: "What are the reasons that explain why you are no longer Catholic?" One in 5 answered in a manner that reflected that they no longer believed in God or religion. No other reason was provided as frequently. Some others had changed faiths when their parents did (16 percent) or independently selected another religion (15 percent). Eleven percent said they were opposed to the Catholic Church or the concept of organized religion. No other reason was given by at least 1 in 10 respondents.

Participation in the Sacramental life of the church is on decline as well according to CARA with the numbers of **24** and **72** being significant.

- **24%** of young Catholics 14-17 attend mass weekly, this number is very close to the same percentage found by the National Study of Youth and Religion by Notre Dame researcher Dr. Christian Smith.
- **26%** drop off rate of young people receiving their confirmation based upon their mass attendance rate with **97%** of those who attend mass weekly likely being confirmed versus **72%** of those who attend mass a few times a year.

Additional research by CARA shows a steady decline in the number of Catholics being confirmed (see Table 1) which is the last step in the initiation process of becoming Catholic and considered an important rite of passage to adult faith by many.

Table 1. Number of Confirmations in Previous Year

Year	2000	2005	2010	2016
Number of Confirmations	630,465	610,282	597,402	567,739

Sherry Weddell, in her book *Intentionally Forming Disciples*, highlights additional numbers in the first chapter additional numbers to cause Church leaders and parents to be alarmed.

- **30%** of Americans who were raised Catholic are still practicing (p. 24).
- **10%** of all adults in America are ex-Catholics (p. 25).
- **79%** of those adults, who have dropped the name "Catholic" and claim no religious affiliation of any kind, have done so by age 23 (p. 33).

The number **1**, maybe the most important number when it comes to understanding what influences the faith of teenagers, because the number one influence on the faith of teenagers is their parents according to the National Study of Youth and Religion. CARA's research found that two other number **8** and **20** that are a cause for alarm, *"Although many parents may express concerns about their teens not communicating enough with them in general, many Catholic teens say their parents rarely or never speak to them about religion. Only 8% report their parents talk to them about religion daily and 20% say their parents do so at least once a week."*

Conclusion

These numbers paint a bleak future for the Catholic Church and require church leaders to seriously examine its current formation practices with youth, young adults, and parents. Without a new vision and direction regarding pastoral ministry with youth and young adults, the number **0** could be a number that describes practicing Catholic in 20 years.

References

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