



Thirteen: Engagement or Exodus?

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Opening Prayer

Lord of Life,
Bless and sustain all families.
Hold us close, keep us connected and protect us from all evil.
Gift us with love and patience for one another.
Help us reconcile that which divides us,
And celebrate all that unites us as one family,
where you live and reign now and forever.
We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen!

Presenter



Bob McCarty is a pastoral trainer and consultant, serving as the coordinator for the Saint Mary's Press (SMP) research project on disaffiliated young Catholics. (bobmccarty@verizon.net)

Panelists



Moderator: Andrea Kopp, Assistant Director of Professional Development, NCEA

Tom East: Director, Center for Ministry Development

Barbara McGraw Edmondson: Chief Leadership and Program Officer, NCEA

Fr. Frank DeSiano: President, Paulist Evangelization Ministries

Amy McEntee: Pastoral Associate for Youth Evangelization, St. Helen Catholic Church

Objectives

- To provide a snapshot of the findings from *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics*
- To describe common antecedents to disaffiliation
- To begin identifying pastoral implications

In Your Experience

For this webinar, identify a young person/young adult who has disaffiliated from the Catholic Church ... reflect on the factors, experiences, events that may have contributed to their leaving the Church ... and hold that person in your mind and in your prayer.

The Illusion of Paradox

1. The Catholic population of the United States has grown year to year along with the general population.
2. Studies indicate more people raised Catholic, often young, are leaving the faith than they ever have. Many are choosing no religious affiliation at all.



Church Losses

- **Pew**: 22.8% of the general population is unaffiliated – about 56 million people. 36% of young millennials (18-24) and 34% of older millennials (25-33) are religiously unaffiliated.
- **PRRI**: Catholics have experienced the largest net loss of adherents due to switching, but these losses have been largely offset by Hispanic immigration to the United States. Notably, 12 percent of Americans today are former Catholics.

Why is this Happening? The Data



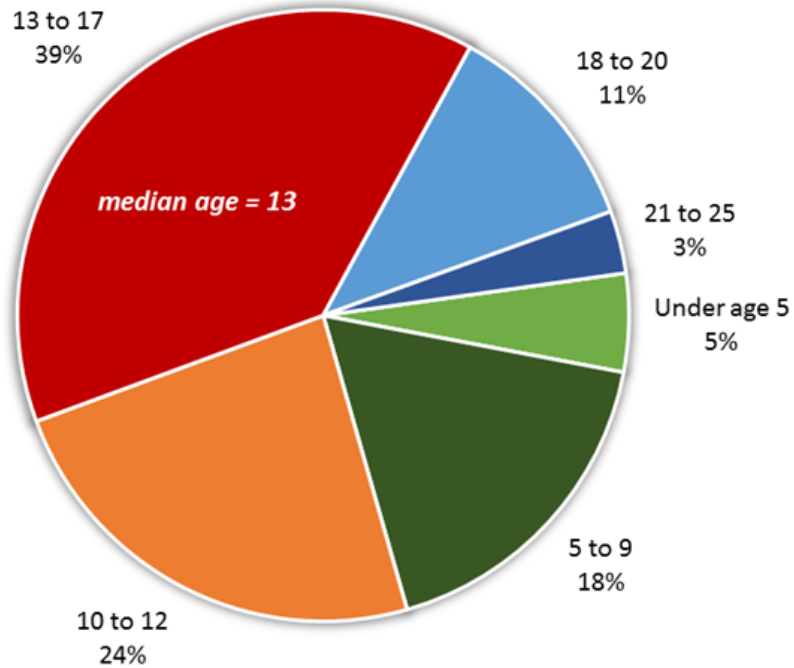
Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Data



- Saint Mary's Press contracted with CARA in 2015 to survey self-identified former Catholic young adults.
- Following the quantitative survey CARA conducted in-depth personal interviews over the phone with selected respondents.
- In 2017 Saint Mary's Press conducted a qualitative analysis of the interviews, unpacking the stories.



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



Which of the following Catholic sacraments did you receive, if any?

Percentage responding as such:

First Communion/Eucharist	63%
Sacrament of Confirmation	33

Weakly attached?:

More than six in ten have celebrated First Communion but only a third have been Confirmed.

In the pews infrequently:

A majority attended Mass a few times a year or less often when they were Catholic.

Aside from weddings and funerals, about how often did you attend Mass when you were Catholic?

Percentage responding as such:

Rarely or never	28%
A few times a year	26
Once or twice a month	12
Almost every week	17
Every week	13
More than once a week	4

Did you ever attend...?
Percentage responding as such:

A Catholic elementary or middle school	19%
A Catholic high school	8
A Catholic college or university	2
None of these	76

Many lack Catholic school education:
Two-thirds never in a Catholic religious institution

Many lack parish formation:

Six in ten never in any parish or campus ministry program

Were you ever involved in...?
Percentage responding as such:

A parish-based Catholic religious education program	34%
A youth ministry program	12
A Catholic campus ministry on a college or university campus	1
None of these	58

What is your present religion, if any? Are you...

Percentage responding as such:

No religious affiliation	35%
Other Christian affiliation	29
Atheist or agnostic	14
Protestant	9
Other religious affiliation	8
Mormon	1
Eastern Orthodox Christian	1
Jewish	1
Buddhist	1
Hindu	1
Muslim	<1
Catholic	0

Would you currently describe yourself as a “born again” or evangelical Christian or not?

Percentage responding as such:

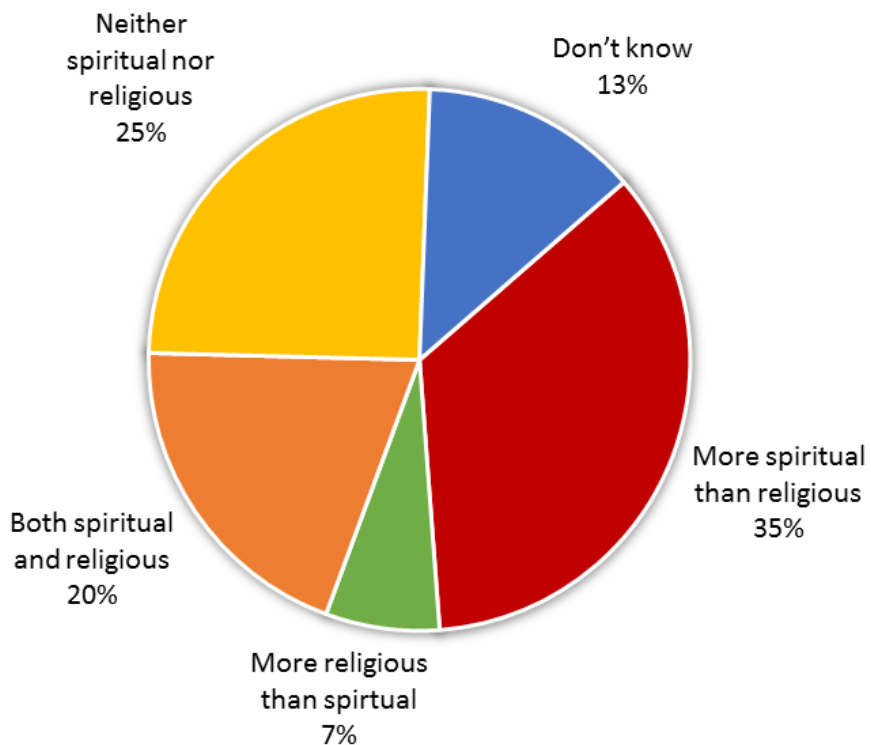
Yes	21%
No	79

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

Percentage responding “yes”:

Mother	43%
Father	36
Any siblings	30
Any grandparents	61

Do you consider yourself to be...?



*What are the top three reasons respondents gave for disaffiliating from the Church?
Select and rank-order your top three guesses.*

1. Does not believe in God and/or religion
2. Parents or family
3. Changed to another religion
4. Opposition to Catholic Church or religious institutions
5. Specific Church teachings or issues
6. Drifted away
7. Church, parish was not welcoming to me
8. Clergy sexual abuse crisis

*In your own words, what are the reasons
that explain why you are no longer Catholic?*

Comments referring to each:

	Percentage	Comments
Does not believe in God and/or religion	20%	47
Parents or family	16	38
Changed to another religion	15	37
Opposition to Catholic Church or religious institutions	11	27
Specific Church teachings or issues	8	19
Drifted away	8	19
Church, parish was not welcoming to me	3	7
Clergy sexual abuse crisis	2	4
Other	17	41

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QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

In Their Own Words: Listening to Their Stories

From In-depth Interviews

“I’m glad to actually finally tell my story.
I have never really sat down and told anyone.
Thank you for listening.”
—Edward

Drifters

Traits:

Shallow engagement or connection to the community

What difference does faith make:

- *I believe there could be a God. I don't entirely say there isn't one. I cannot prove in my life that there is one. Barb*
- *My parents stopped making me go and I had no desire to go to church. Diane*
- *I didn't particularly want to or not want to [receive Confirmation]. I just kind of went with it. Fran*



Dissenters

Traits:

Active resistance to Church and faith

Unanswered questions

- *This is what I know, I believe in birth control, I had sex when I was like 17. I am a complete supporter of gay marriage and being able to choose who you want to be with. Diane*
- *I was immersed in science, and studied a lot of science that can be proven. I believe science more than a retold story that has been distorted, mistranslated, misinterpreted, and contorted to certain people's beliefs.*



Injured / Damaged

Traits:

Family disruptions

Negative Church experiences



She [mother] forced me to be confirmed and join the religion. That is when I put my foot down after that happened. OK now I did exactly what you wanted and now I am done with it because I couldn't take it anymore. ... I never wanted to be a part of the faith. I was forced into it. Doug

I was in fifth grade when my uncle died, he was in his 40's. How can something like that happen to someone so young? Why do bad things happen to good people type thing. Diane

It sounds, like, really stupid, it started to happen around the same time there was the whole, like, issues with LGBT people being stigmatized started coming out. The people I went to school with were using Catholicism as a reason to say that people who are LGBT shouldn't have rights. Barb

Common Denominators

A precipitating event or series of events or insight or awareness triggers a wonderment or process of questioning or doubt.

Rationale for disaffiliation reflects the secularization of culture where faith and religious practice are seen as options among many in the search for meaning.

Common Denominators

They have a sense of being happy and free or relieved by their decision to disaffiliate with the church.

They believe that religion was forced on them and they are determined to not force religion/religious practice or a particular faith on their own children, but instead will allow their own children to choose for themselves.

Common Denominators

They see themselves as moral and committed to living a moral life, but reflect Peter Berger's observation about secularism – "I can be ethical without religion."

Whether they still somewhat "believe" or "disbelieve" in God or "something bigger", they are not closed to belief (or fuller belief) if a rational argument or provable evidence can be presented to them.

Preliminary Considerations

- There is a persistent and perhaps even growing culture of personal autonomy and “choice” among young families and children. Parents are more likely than those in the past to allow their children to choose their faith.
- The New Atheism and Evangelical Christianity are attractive to people questioning their faith. If they seek to remain religious, they will likely switch. If they have doubts, they will likely embrace no religion and increasingly emphasize “science” as a guiding force.
- There does not appear to be any significant way for the Church to attract back many who have left the faith. Some do return at some point as they age. This is the “life-cycle effect” that is more common to all religions.
- Church scandals, specific teachings, or personalities surprisingly seem to be less important than many assume.
- The concept of faith is becoming more and more challenging. Can we genuinely state why faith is important? How do we address the “so what?”

Theological Reflection

What is the grace that the disaffiliated are bestowing on the Church?

Their stories serve as a mirror, reflecting back to the Church their live experiences.

What is the Holy Spirit telling the Church through the life stories of those who have disaffiliated?

Those Who Have Disaffiliated

Do we know who they are?

Do we miss them now that they are gone?

More Important

Do *they* know they are missed
now that they are gone?

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Questions?



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