

A Faithful Challenge: A Longitudinal Analysis of the Catholic Sample from Waves 1, 2, & 3 of the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR)

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Acknowledgements

The impact of the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) has been significant to the Catholic Church's understanding of its young members to say the least, so it is important to begin by acknowledging the contribution of the NSYR research team, led by Dr. Christian Smith. Their efforts to provide scientifically reliable social science research on the religious beliefs, practices, and salience of teenagers and emerging adults has been invaluable to those who minister to these age groups. Additionally, we are grateful to the Partnership for Adolescent Catechesis (PAC), a key organization that has provided leadership for the church in reflecting on the current state of catechetical ministry to its young members. As funders of this research analysis on the NSYR Catholic longitudinal sample, the PAC—through the National Initiative on Adolescent Catechesis (NIAC)—has provided ministerial leaders with essential information they need to more fully understand the impact and outcomes of adolescent catechesis.

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Part One: Introduction to the Faithful Challenge

Beginning in 2004 and 2005 with the publications *National Study of Youth and Religion: Analysis on the Population of Catholic Teenagers and Their Parents* and *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Teenagers*, the Catholic community of bishops, researchers, youth ministry practitioners, and parents has been reflecting on the findings of The National Study of Youth and Religion. Without a doubt, this seminal study on youth and religion led by Dr. Christian Smith, has informed and challenged the

Catholic Church to be faithful in examining the challenges it faces in ministering to the young church of teenagers and emerging adults. One group leading this effort for the church is the Partnership for Adolescent Catechesis, which has commissioned this report as part of the National Initiative on Adolescent Catechesis (NIAC).

This research report continues this examination by highlighting findings of the Catholic sample within NSYR longitudinal data through the lens of adolescent catechesis. This report has four major sections, the first section will provide an introduction to the research study and general characteristics of the Wave 1 sample of Catholic teens (ages 13 to 17), and the Wave 3 sample of Catholic emerging adults¹ (ages 18 to 23), using a variety of religiosity variables. The second section provides an explanation of the patterns and trends that emerge across all three of the waves of data. Next, an assessment of the NIAC outcomes for adolescent faith formation is provided in light of the NSYR data. Finally, the conclusion highlights major findings examining the church's assumptions and understandings regarding ministry to adolescents, as well as the questions and issues that need further research and reflection.

Summary of the NSYR Research Methodology

The NSYR's data collection was carried out in three waves over the course of six years, from 2002 to 2008. Each wave included a telephone survey and personal interviews with a subset of the young people surveyed. The longitudinal telephone survey began as a nationally-representative survey of 3,290 English and Spanish speaking teenagers between the ages of 13 and 17. The baseline Wave 1 survey was conducted with teen respondents and one of their parents between July 2002 and April 2003 by researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. A random-digit dial (RDD) telephone method was employed to generate numbers representative of all household telephones in the 50 United States. Among the respondents, 816 teens were identified as Catholic. In addition, researchers recorded and transcribed personal interviews with 267 teens.

The second wave of the NSYR was a re-survey of the Wave 1 teen respondents. Like Wave 1, the Wave 2 survey was conducted by telephone using a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system, this time in English only. The survey was conducted from June 2005 through November 2005 when the respondents were between the ages of 16 and 21. Every effort was made to contact and survey all of the original NSYR respondents, including those out of the country and in the military. Of the original respondents, 2,604 participated in the second wave of the survey, including 345 who later were not reached for the Wave 3 survey, resulting in an overall retention rate of 79% at Wave 2. The predominant source of attrition in the second wave was from participants who could not be found. Of the Wave 2 respondents, 607 were among the Wave 1 Catholics, including 74 who were not reached in Wave 3, giving a retention rate

of 74% at Wave 2. The Wave 2 in-person interviews were conducted with 122 of the interview participants from Wave 1.

For the third wave, a new effort was made to contact all of the respondents in Wave 1. As in Wave 2, this survey was conducted by telephone using a CATI system, again only in English. The survey was conducted from September 2007 through April 2008 when the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 23. Of the original respondents, 2,532 participated in the third wave of the survey, including 273 who were not reached for the Wave 2 survey, resulting in an overall retention rate of 77%. Of the Wave 3 respondents, 605 were among the Wave 1 Catholics, including 74 who were not reached in Wave 2, giving a retention rate of 74%. The Wave 3 interviews were conducted with 230 respondents in the Wave 3 survey, 151 of which had been interviewed in Wave 1, plus an additional 79 who had never before completed an in-person interview.

A comparison of respondents across the three waves of the study on key demographic variables is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of Wave 1, Wave 2, and Wave 3 Respondents on Key Demographic Characteristics [WEIGHTED^a].²

Wave 1	Wave 1 Respondents	Wave 2 Respondents	Wave 3 Respondents
Census Region			
Northeast	17	17	17
Midwest	22	23	22
South	37	36	37
West	24	24	24
Gender			
Male	51	49	48
Female	49	51	52
Age at Wave 1			
13	18	19	18
14	20	20	20
15	21	21	21
16	21	21	21
17	20	19	19
Teen Race/Ethnicity			
White	66	69	68
Black	16	14	15
Hispanic	12	10	11
Asian/Pacific Islander/American	5	6	5
Indian/Mixed/Other			
Missing	1	1	1
Family Structure^b			
Lives with Two Biological/Adoptive Parents	55	59	57
Income			
Less than \$10K	5	3	4
\$10K-20K	9	8	10
\$20K-30K	9	8	9
\$30K-40K	10	9	10
\$40K-50K	10	10	10
\$50K-60K	8	8	8
\$60K-70K	9	10	8
\$70K-80K	7	8	7
\$80K-90K	5	6	5
\$90K-100K	4	5	4
More than \$100K	18	18	17
Missing	6	6	6
N^c	3,259	2,530	2,458

Note: Numbers represent percents. Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding.

^aWave specific weights used

^bFamily Structure contains some missing data. The appropriate N by wave is Wave 1 = 3,227; Wave 2 = 2,510; Wave 3 = 2,433. Please note the income figures reflect the

parents' income figures at Wave 1.

†N does not include the Jewish oversample cases (N=74 for Wave 2; N=78 for Wave 3). Total Wave 2 N = 2,604; Total Wave 3 N = 2,532.

A Note Regarding Sample Bias and Data Weights

For analytic purposes, the NSYR researchers weighted the survey results to adjust for the number of teenagers in the household, the number of household telephone numbers, census region of residence, and household income. Weighting is a statistical process that was used to compensate for households with a lot of telephone numbers which are more likely to appear in the survey, for teens with a lot of siblings who are less likely to appear, as only one child was interviewed in each household, and to balance for economic and geographic variances from Census data. These weighted results are generally acknowledged to provide a more reliable and representative portrait of the target population, so they are used throughout this report for all NSYR survey results, unless otherwise indicated. Different weights are used when comparing data across all three waves such as in part two of this report versus in part three where only Wave 3 data is used; this accounts for possible discrepancies in Wave 3 data in different parts of this report.

As with all surveys, it is important to recognize the limitations of the data. In the case of the NSYR survey, institutions (group homes, hospitals, juvenile detention centers, boarding schools, etc.) and households without telephones were not included in any of the surveys. Since adolescent Hispanics in the U.S. are much more likely than their white peers to live in low-income households without a telephone, or in institutions (especially juvenile detention), the absence of these populations represents a bias in the data. Information from the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Justice indicate that teens living in institutions or households without telephones in 2002 likely made up around eight to ten percent of the Hispanic adolescent population at that time, versus about three to five percent of the white population, so the impact of this bias is proportionally larger among the Hispanic respondents.

For Waves 2 and 3, another potential source of sample error may come from attrition: those Wave 1 respondents who could not be found or refused to participate in subsequent waves. In order to compensate for attrition, new weights were developed for each subsequent wave that once again adjusted for census region of residence and household income. In theory, the loss of certain respondents through attrition is a random process, so the adjusted weights should not introduce additional sample bias, although the statistical margin of error does increase due to the smaller sample size.

Of greater concern for the Wave 2 and Wave 3 surveys is that, since they draw only from Wave 1 respondents, they do not include immigrants who arrived after 2002. It is not possible to adjust for these recent arrivals to the U.S. through weights because

numerous surveys show that recent immigrants exhibit different beliefs and attitudes than even people who arrived at an earlier age from the same country. Thus, the weights in Wave 2 and Wave 3 do not adjust for the nearly 1,000,000 individuals—roughly half of them Hispanic—in the age cohort who arrived between 2002 and 2008. This represents about four percent of the overall cohort population at Wave 3, and about 16% of the Hispanics.

Adjusting for Hispanic Underrepresentation in the Survey and the Growth in the Hispanic Immigrant Population Between Waves 1 and 3

When the NSYR researchers developed their weights for Wave 1, they determined that in general there was no need to adjust the weights for race and ethnicity. Hispanic teens represented only 12% of the weighted Wave 1 respondents, versus 16% in the larger U.S. population of 13 to 17 year-olds in 2002/2003. It also turns out that *immigrant* Hispanics were less likely to be included in the survey than U.S.-born Hispanics, constituting only 21% of the NSYR Hispanic sample, versus 26% in the general U.S. Hispanic population for this age group. Furthermore, Hispanics—and especially immigrant Hispanics—were more likely than others to be lost through attrition at Wave 2 and Wave 3. For most of the research done on the NSYR data, this underrepresentation makes very little difference, because adjusting the weights for race/ethnicity and generation seldom makes a difference greater than the statistical margin of error in the survey.

However, because Hispanics are more than twice as likely to be Catholic than other racial/ethnic groups, the Hispanic underrepresentation does make a difference on certain measures—especially demographic measures such as race/ethnicity itself, economic status, and geographic region of residence. A few religious and social measures regarding Catholic youth and young adults also are impacted by the differences between Hispanic and non-Hispanic Catholics. When compensating also for immigrant arrivals after Wave 1, the difference at Wave 3 is estimated to be close to a million Hispanic Catholics. This represents nearly 90% more than the number identified using the standard NSYR weights, effectively adding 23% to the size of the underlying Catholic emerging adult population at Wave 3. Using the same analysis, the size of other racial/ethnic groups relative to the underlying Catholic population is little changed.

It is important to reiterate, that despite such large numerical differences, *only a few of the social and religious measures studied in this report would be altered significantly by using adjusted weights.* The researchers conducting this analysis, in consultation with Dr. Christian Smith and his NSYR research team, decided to use the standard NSYR weights. When the measures show especially large differences between racial/ethnic groups, such differences will be identified in tables and/or explained in the text, in order to avoid unwarranted generalization of the findings.

The Religious Particularity of Other Racial/Ethnic Groups

On numerous measures selected for analysis in this study, African American Catholic emerging adults appear to be religiously distinct from other young Catholics. On the one hand, they report much higher levels of religious involvement at church, religious practices at home, and adherence to the teachings of the Catholic Church. Yet they are also the least likely of any of the racial/ethnic groups consistently to identify themselves as Catholic across all three waves of the NSYR.

Unfortunately, the sample size of Wave 1 African American Catholics who were retained in the Wave 3 survey is so small (24) that one cannot confidently generalize these findings to young African American Catholics as a group. As a result, the report that follows does not attempt to draw conclusions about young African American Catholics as distinct from other young Catholics. Nevertheless, the information available in the study suggests that the reader should be cautious about applying the findings in an African American community, and it certainly indicates that further research into the religious and spiritual lives of young African American Catholics is warranted.

The comparable sample sizes of Asian (11), Native American (5), Pacific Islander (5) and other/mixed (7) young Catholics at Wave 3 are so small that it is not even possible to provide an overall impression of their religious distinctiveness. As a combined group, they appear to be religiously similar to young Catholics as a whole on most measures. However, particular differences can easily be covered over or missed when such small sample sizes are involved. Pastoral workers serving communities with large numbers of young Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, or racially mixed Catholics would be well-advised to read this report critically with respect to their experience serving the young in their own community.

Longitudinal Catholic Sample Demographics

Sample Size. In Wave 1, the Catholic sample included 816 Catholic teenagers, decreasing to 504 in Wave 2, and again in Wave 3, to 443 emerging Catholic adults. Wave 1 was the only data collection in the study that included a telephone survey with one parent of each Catholic teen, of those Wave 1 parents, 86% were Catholic.

Table 2. Gender of Catholic Sample.

Gender of Catholic Teens and Emerging Adults	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
Male	50%	50%	46%
Female	50%	50%	54%
Parents of Catholic Wave 1 Teens			
Male	19%	--	--
Female	81%	--	--

Gender. In Waves 1 and 2, the gender of the sample remained consistent and evenly divided. However, Catholic respondents in Wave 3 had a higher percentage of females than in previous waves (see Table 2).

Race. Across all waves the majority of the respondents identified as white, with Hispanic being the next largest race represented. There was a higher retention of white Catholics from Wave 1 who participated in Wave 2 and 3 than Hispanics, which steadily declined in each wave of data collection (see Table 3). These numbers should be read with the understanding that Hispanic Catholic teens were significantly underrepresented in all three surveys, as explained previously.

Table 3. Race of Catholic Teens and Emerging Adults.

Race	Wave 1 %	Wave 2 %	Wave 3%
White	63	62.5	64
Black	4.5	2	5
Hispanic	25	28	26
Asian	2	1.5	1
Islander	1	0.8	Less than 1
Native American	2	3	2
Mixed	2	1	1
Other	Less than 1	Less than 1	0
Don't Know	Less than 1	Less than 1	Less than 1
Refused	Less than 1	Less than 1	Less than 1
Total	100	100	100

Note: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

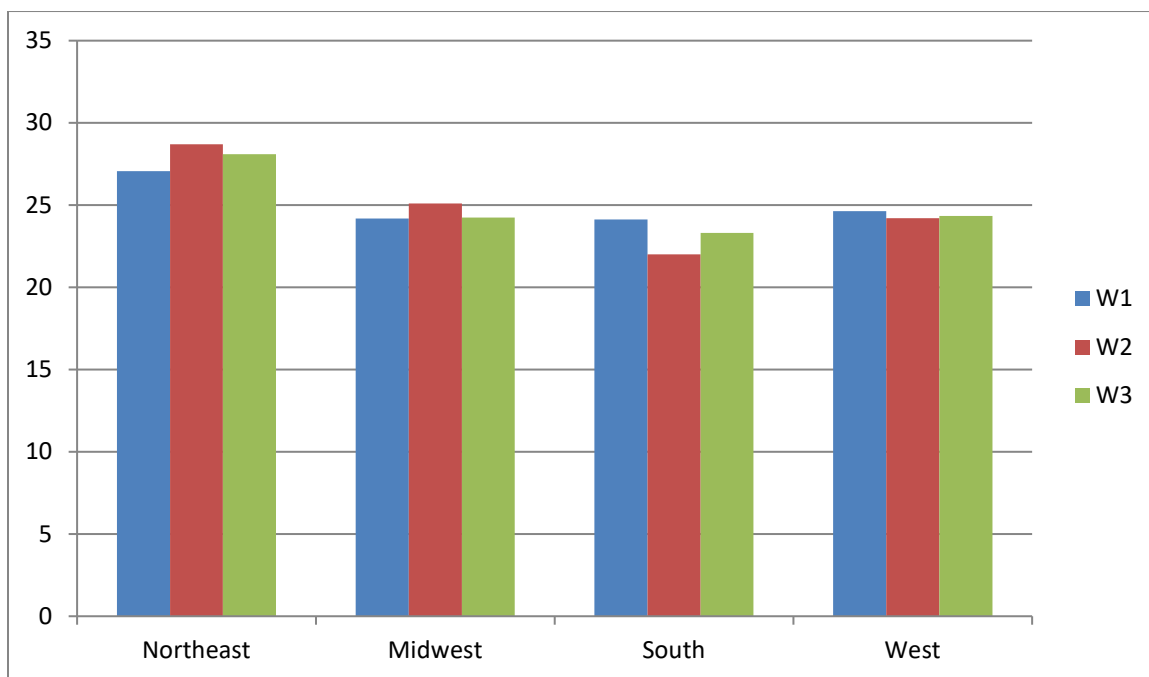
Economic Status. Questions about family income and finances were only asked of the parents in Wave 1. Prior research on the NSYR data showed that there is a large gap in

financial well-being between Hispanic and white Catholic families—even larger than the gap between Hispanic and white families in the general U.S. population. That gap increased somewhat between Wave 1 and the subsequent waves, due to the fact that teens from low-income Hispanic families were among the most likely to retain their Catholic identity in Waves 2 and 3.³

Age. Wave 1 Catholic teens ranged in age from 13 to 17 years old, with 42% of the sample being between 14 and 15 years old. Wave 2 ages ranged from 16 to 20, bridging the line between teenager and emerging adult, with almost half (48.5%) being between the ages of 16 and 17. The Wave 3 sample ages ranged between 18 and 23 years old with 61% being 20 years old or older.

Census Region across Waves. The distribution of the Catholic sample by census region remains fairly consistent across the waves. Figure 1 provides an overview of the census regions of the respondents by data collection wave.

Figure 1. Distribution of Census Region across Waves.



Part Two: Longitudinal Patterns and Trends

An examination of all three waves provides approximately a five year window into the lives of Catholic teens as they grow into emerging adulthood. An explanation of the key patterns and trends relative to key variables measuring the religiosity of young Catholics is provided in this part of the report.

Retention of Catholic Identity across Waves. The religious tradition variable in Wave 1 was created through a combination of youth and parent variables, whereas in Waves 2 and 3, only the teenager's self-identification of religious tradition is utilized in creation of that variable. Therefore, when looking at Catholic identity in the NSYR, examining the Wave 2 and 3 data may be more valuable than Wave 1 data. Of Wave 1 Catholics, 691 completed Wave 2 and of that 510 are still Catholic, which equals 74% of original Wave 1 Catholics. Additionally, of Wave 1 Catholics, 691 completed Wave 3, and of that 456 are still Catholic, which equals 66% of original Wave 1 Catholics. There are 15.5% of new Catholics represented in Wave 2 and ten percent in Wave 3.

Of the Catholics identified in Wave 1 as Catholic for their religious tradition, only 75% self-identified as being Catholic, and only 59% of the Wave 1 Catholics who participated in all three waves consistently reported themselves as Catholic all three times. This number drops to 55% when excluding the indeterminate responses from Wave 3 and calls the question as to whether many of the Wave 3 indeterminates would have been in Wave 1 as well. This would be true if one assumes that the parents' religious tradition and the influence of parents in the self-religious identification of their teenage children factored more so than in the emerging adult's religious self-identification.

At W3, 72% of the W1 Hispanic Catholics were identified as Catholic, compared to 68% of the W1 white Catholics and 67% overall. However, religious switching among W1 Hispanic Catholics varied considerably by generation: 87% of W1 immigrant Hispanic Catholics were still Catholic at W3, compared to 78% of second-generation and 58% of third-generation Hispanics. Going to another Christian denomination also increased among Hispanics the longer their family had been in the U.S.: none of the W1 immigrant Hispanic Catholics were Protestant at W3, compared to 3% of second-generation Hispanics, 18% of third-generation Hispanics, and 8% of W1 Catholics overall.

Importance of Religious Faith. The extreme importance of religious faith dropped steadily from Wave 1 to Wave 3, with the responses from extremely or very important going from 42% in Wave 1, to 40% in Wave 2, and 38% in Wave 3. However, the respondents indicating that it was not very important or not important at all went from 15% in Wave 1 to 21% in Wave 2, and 21% in Wave 3.

Table 4. Importance of Religious Faith in Daily Life.

How important is religious faith in shaping your daily life?	Wave 1 %	Wave 2 %	Wave 3 %
Extremely Important	11	11	13
Very Important	31	29	25
Somewhat Important	44	39	41
Not Very Important	12	18	15
Not Important at All	3	3	7
Total	100	100	100

Note: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Catholic Teen Mass Attendance. Weekly or more Mass attendance steadily declined through the three waves of data, with a 22.5% decrease between Wave 1 (42%) and Wave 3 (19.5%). For more information see Table 5. However, there was only an eight percent increase in never attending between the same waves. When asked about their plans for attending church when they are 25, Wave 2 Catholic teens responded by a majority of 49% yes, with maybe being the next answer at 41%, and only nine percent saying no. When asked about their plans for attending church when they are 30, Wave 3 Catholic emerging adults responded by a large majority yes at 59%, with 35% saying maybe, and only 5% saying no.

Table 5. Mass and Sunday Worship Attendance across Waves.^a

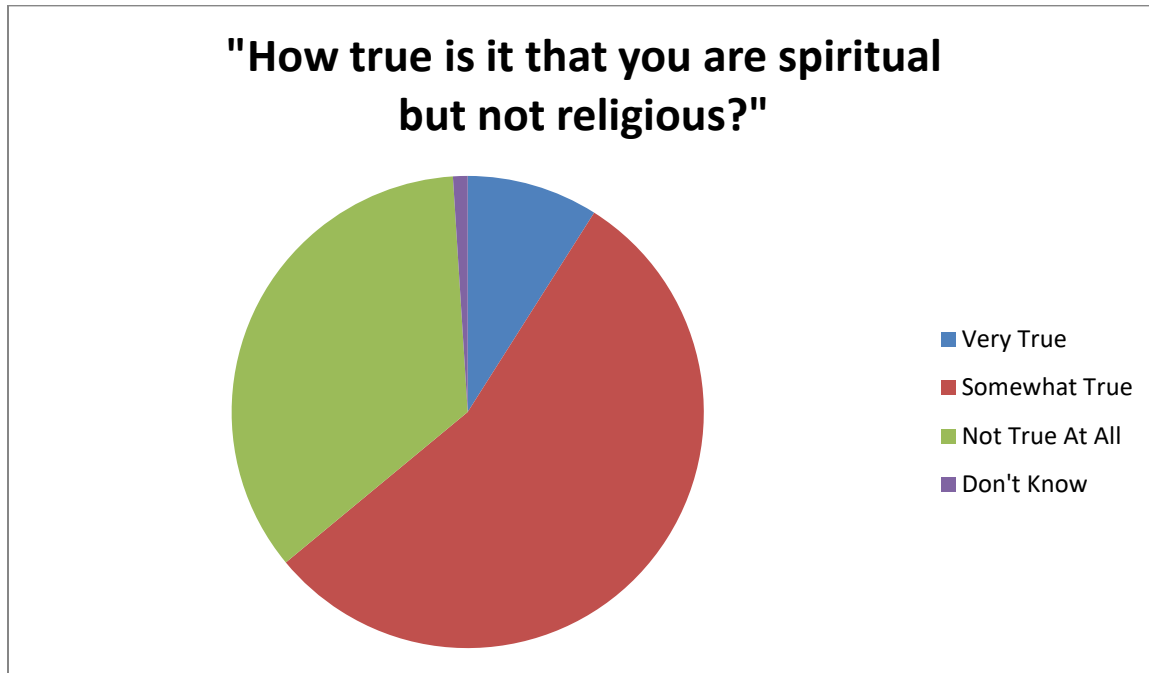
Frequency of Mass or Sunday Worship Attendance	Wave 1 Teen %	Wave 2 Teen & Emerging Adult %	Wave 3 Emerging Adult %	Wave 1 Parents %
More than once a week	6	3	2.5	5
Once a week	36	23	17	37
2-3 times a month	13	16	11.5	15
Once a month	9	12	12	8
Many times a year	7	5	9	5
Few times year	19	25	29	18
Never	11	16	20	12
Total	100	100	100	100

Note: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

^aThis includes Mass attendance by teens or emerging adults in all three waves, and Mass or attendance at their first church named by parents in wave one.

Spiritual but not Religious. When asked to respond to the question, “How true is it that you are spiritual but not religious,” responses stayed somewhat consistent across the waves, with the majority responding that it was ‘somewhat true’ in all of the waves (Wave 1 50%, Wave 2 53.5%, and Wave 3 55%).

Figure 2. Wave Three Response to Spiritual but not Religious Question.



Commitment to God and Religious Change. In Wave 1, 42% stated that they had committed their life to God; that dropped to 30% in Wave 2. Commitment to God increased slightly by three percent between Wave 2 and 3 (33%), but still shows an overall eight percent drop from Wave 1. Regarding religious change, the majority of Wave 2 (59%) and Wave 3 (64%) respondents thought they had stayed about the same, while 16% in each wave indicated that they had become less religious. However, 24% of Wave 2 and 19% of Wave 3 thought they had become more religious (see Table 6).

Table 6. Religious Change.

Amount of Self-Identified Religious Change	Wave Two %	Wave Three %
Stayed about the same	60	64
Became less religious	16	17
Became more religious	24	19
Don't know/refused	--	Less than 1
Total	100	100

Note: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Religious Education and Learning. Attendance at parish religious education drastically declined between Waves 1 and 3: 61% in Wave 1 participated at least a few times a year, down to 24% in Wave 3 (see Table 7). Interest in learning more about religion stayed fairly consistent among waves, with six percent in each wave expressing *no interest at all* in learning about their religion and 22% in Wave 1 and 21% in Wave 3 responding that they were *very interested* in learning about their religion.

Table 7. Frequency of Attendance at Parish Religious Education.

Frequency of Attendance at Parish Religious Education	Wave 1 Teen %	Wave 2 Teen & Emerging Adult %	Wave 3 Emerging Adult %
More than once a week	3	1	Less than 1
Once a week	17.5	7	4
Almost every week	10	5	1
Few times a month	11	9	3
Once a month	3	3	3
Few times year	16	13	13
Never	39	62	76
Total	100	100	100

Note: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Religious Beliefs. Belief in God remained high, above 80%, throughout the waves, with 87% in Wave 1, 83.5% in Wave 2, and 88.5% in Wave 3. However, agreement with picking and choosing your religious beliefs increased across the waves, with Wave 1 at 53%, Wave 2 at 54%, and Wave 3 at 60%. Over 75% in both Waves 2 and 3 believe “Jesus was the Son of God who was raised from the dead” is an accurate description of their beliefs about Jesus, with at least 16% being unsure of what they believe (17% in Wave 2 and 16% in Wave 3). Only 33% in Wave 1, 25.5% in Wave 2, and 25% in Wave 3 agree that believers should be involved in their congregations in order to be good

Catholics. Seventy four percent in Wave 2 and 75% in Wave 3 disagree with that statement, which is slightly higher than the 66% that disagreed in Wave 1.

Individual Spiritual Practices. In Wave 1, 51% never read the Bible alone; that percentage grows to 62% in both Waves 2 and 3 (see Table 8). The percentage of respondents who never prayed alone remains low across waves at 12% in Wave 1 and ten percent in both Waves 2 and 3 (see Table 9). However, the percentage that prayed at least once a day varied, from 33% in Wave 1 to 20% in Wave 2 and 24% in Wave 3. Wave 3 emerging adults reported that 23% had read a spiritual or religious book in the last year.

Table 8. Frequency of Reading the Bible.

Frequency	Wave 1 %	Wave 2 %	Wave 3 %
Many times a day	1	1	Less than 1
About once a day	2	1	1
A few times a week	5	3	2.5
About once a week	6	4	5
One to two times a month	18	12	11
Less than once a month	17	16	17.5
Never	51	62	62
Don't know/Skip	Less than 1	1	1
Total	100	100	100

Note: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Table 9. Frequency of Praying Alone.

Frequency	Wave 1 %	Wave 2 %	Wave 3 %
Many times a day	10	5	9
About once a day	23	15	15
A few times a week	17	20	14
About once a week	14	14	13
One to two times a month	15.5	24	23
Less than once a month	8	12	15
Never	12	10	10
Don't know/Skip	Less than 1	Less than 1	Less than 1
Total	100	100	100

Note: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Alcohol and Drug Use. As they got older, respondents' alcohol use increased steadily, with those reporting that they drink alcohol at least once a week going from 9% in Wave 1, to 24% in Wave 2, to 40.5% in Wave 3 (see Table 10). Of Wave 3 respondents, 69%

report drinking at least four to five drinks in one night sometime in the past two weeks. The number of respondents reporting never using marijuana dropped between Wave 1 and Waves 2 and 3, with Wave 1 at 81%, Wave 2 at 74%, and Wave 3 at 74% (see Table 11).

Table 10. Frequency of Alcohol Use.

Frequency	Wave 1 %	Wave 2 %	Wave 3 %
Never	59	26	14
A few times a year	24	24.5	14
About once a month	6	9	7
A few times a month	7	16	23
About once a week	8	10.5	19.5
A few times a week	1	11.5	21
Almost every day to once a day or more	n/a	2	Less than 1
Total	100	100	100

Note: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Table 11. Frequency of Marijuana Use.

Frequency	Wave 1 %	Wave 2 %	Wave 3 %
Never	81	74	74
A few times a year	12	15	13
About once a month	5	2	1
A few times a month	--	2	4
About once a week	--	2	Less than 1
A few times a week	2	3	3.5
Almost every day	--	2	4
Total	100	100	100

Note: Responses choices varied between Wave 1 and Wave 3. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Part Three. Examination of the Wave 3 NSYR data in light of the Eight Outcomes of Adolescent Catechesis

Introduction to the NIAC Outcomes

In developing the Vision and Outcomes, Partnership for Adolescent Catechesis wanted to develop a common vision of what adolescent catechesis is actually trying to accomplish. The vision and outcomes provide a common language that can be used across ministries and organizations to examine the effectiveness and goals of adolescent catechesis. The NIAC Vision and Outcomes statement is firmly rooted in the documents of the Catholic Church. The church has been and continues to be very articulate about the role of and the purpose of catechesis in the life of her people. The discussions and insights of the National Symposium on Adolescent Catechesis provided a context to surround the outcomes, placing them in the realities of families, parish, schools, and culture. (See Vision and Outcomes Statement in Appendix)

In conducting analysis on the NIAC outcomes of adolescent catechesis, the first step was to identify variables from the NSYR data and match them to the NIAC outcomes. In some cases, this was challenging, resulting in fewer variables for some outcomes than others. While the NSYR data was not designed specifically to measure these outcomes, examination of the NSYR data in light of these outcomes has provided interesting insights into the effectiveness of adolescent catechesis as these young Catholics reach emerging adulthood.

Analysis of the Impact of Faith Formation

What follows are the eight outcomes, along with an overview of important findings from the NSYR, coupled with tables listing the variables within the three settings of religious formation: Catholic school, the parish, and the family. This analysis utilized data from Wave 1 of the NSYR, assessing data on adolescents who were formed by attending Catholic school, by the parish (through religious education programs, youth group, and those who were formed for and received the sacrament of confirmation) and those who were formed by the family with religiously committed parents.

Of these three settings, the contribution of the family has the greatest potential to make a difference due to the sheer number of hours young people spend at home, yet in many ways it is also the most difficult to quantify and analyze. For example, two families with the exact same frequency of Mass attendance may differ greatly with respect to the value they place on religious practices, the centrality of God in their lives, their spirituality, their knowledge of Christian doctrine, and the importance they attach to living a life of integrity, service, and justice as a coherent witness to the Gospel.

While an in-depth understanding of individual families cannot easily be gleaned from the NSYR survey data alone, there are nevertheless certain indicators that point to intentional efforts parents make to form their children in the faith. Of these, four stand out as particularly important and complementary:

- frequency of the parents' participation in the celebration of the Eucharist
- religious salience—in other words, the stated importance of faith in the parents' daily life
- habitual prayer, whether alone or as a family
- frequency of talking about God, faith, prayer, or other religious themes as a family

Of the four measures, the first three are standard sociological measures of an individual's religious engagement. However, the fourth—frequency of teens and their parents talking together about their faith—is not a question most sociologists refer to in their work. Nevertheless, it is a critical reference point in this analysis because it is the only question in the survey that gives an indication of parental efforts to transmit their faith to their children through direct personal testimony, sharing of values and stories, and perhaps in some cases formal teaching. In order to qualify as an “engaged” Catholic family, parents and teens only needed to talk about their faith a few times a month or more. This represents a rather minimal level of faith sharing. On most of the measures there was a direct correlation between greater frequency of discussing faith as adolescents and religiosity as emerging adults. In fact, it can be fairly said that the most significant predictor of religious engagement among emerging adult Catholics in the NSYR is the frequency with which they spoke about religious matters at home as teens.

Please note that the modes of faith formation examined here are not mutually exclusive or independent of one another; a young person attending youth group might also be involved in confirmation preparation or a young person attending Catholic school might also be involved in youth group and have religiously committed parents. All data below evaluating the impact of formation modes are taken from the Wave 3 data on emerging adults, based on formation participation reported in Wave 1.

In these tables, it is important to note the column labeled “No Formation” could have been regular Mass attenders and have had active spiritual lives at Wave 1. This category simply means that at the time of the first survey, they were not involved in or being exposed to the specific modes of faith formation identified for comparative analysis in this research. The final column, “All Emerging Adults,” refers to respondents in the Wave 3 sample than were Catholic in Wave 1, in order to provide a comparison of the impact of various modes of formation with the entire Catholic sample of emerging adults.

NIAC Outcome One: Sustaining a personal relationship with Jesus Christ supported through regular prayer, faith sharing, and Scripture.

This outcome focuses on forming young people in their relationship with Jesus Christ and sustaining that relationship in various ways. About 80% of Catholic emerging adults say that they believe in God, but belief in God was lowest among white respondents at 76%, compared to 87% for everyone else. The children of committed parents reported the highest levels of agreement, at 88%. In fact, across the variables under this outcome, those with committed parents have some of the highest levels of agreement or activity, with those formed by youth group participation outpacing them on some measures. If “no formation” had occurred for the emerging adult then 49% of those reported this same belief, demonstrating the importance of any formation regarding this basic belief of the Catholic faith.

Surprisingly, only 69% of Catholic emerging adults believe that “Jesus was the Son of God who was raised from the dead” (with a range of 68% of confirmed youth, which is the same for the general Catholic population, to 79% of those with committed parents). Involvement in a college-based religious group is very minimal, which may indicate that either these groups are not available or this program method of sustaining a relationship with Jesus is not of interest to this age group. However, past youth group attendees report the greatest involvement (17%) in college-based groups while most other modes come in at just under half that percentage (nine percent).

It is clear from this data that different modes of faith formation impact emerging adults’ ability to sustain a relationship with Jesus Christ; however, the faith formation by committed parents has the greatest impact on most variables measuring this outcome. For more detailed responses, see Table 12.

Table 12. Outcome One in Light of Five Modes of Formation.

	Catholic School	Parish Religious Education	Youth Group	Confirmed	Committed Parents	No Formation	All Emerging Adults
Variables:							
Has made a commitment to live life for God in the past two years.	29%	30%	36%	28%	37%	17%	28%
Believes in God.	83%	82%	85.5%	80%	88%	70%	80%
Believes Jesus Christ was the Son of God who was raised from the dead.	69%	70%	74%	68%	79%	49%	67%
Prays alone at least a few times a week (includes once a day and many times a day).	28%	36%	38.5%	35%	43%	33%	35%
Reads from the Bible alone at least one or two times a month (includes once a week, a few times a week, once a day, and many times a day).	10%	20%	22%	20%	21%	14%	18%

Is now or has in the past been involved in any college-based religious groups.	9%	10%	17%	9%	9%	7%	8%
Has shared religious faith with another in the past year.	34%	37%	44%	38%	42%	27%	36%

NIAC Outcome Two: Sharing the Good News through words and actions, through Christian stewardship and working for peace, justice, and human dignity.

This outcome focuses on encouraging adolescents to put faith in action in various ways. Although youth group participants report giving away their own money to support organizations or causes—over a third of them—Catholic school students are still most likely to have engaged in organized volunteer work or community service in the past year (64%); however, those with “no formation” reported only 33% in this measure. More than twenty-one percent of this work was organized at least to some extent by a religious group. Given that the typical Catholic school requires service hours prior to graduation, this finding should ring true.

Catholic school students also report helping the homeless or needy at greater levels in the past year—84% say they have helped anywhere from a little to a lot—directly, not through an organization. Across the board, Catholic emerging adults report high levels of caring about the needs of the elderly and poor; 84%—regardless of mode of formation—care somewhat or very much about the needs of the poor, but when asked how much they care about racial equality, the responses drop off greatly (only 68% of emerging adult Catholics care somewhat or very much). Young Hispanic Catholics stand out for caring more about the poor (90% vs. 82% for all others) and less about racial equality (64% vs. 70% for all others).

Generally, it is clear that Catholic emerging adults care for others both in belief and action, with 89% caring somewhat or very much about the needs of the poor and elderly, almost half having engaged in organized volunteer work, and three-quarters having helped homeless people, needy neighbors, family, friends, or others in need directly. For more detailed responses, see Table 13.

Table 13 .Outcome Two in Light of Five Modes of Formation.

	Catholic School	Parish Religious Education	Youth Group	Confirmed	Committed Parents	No Formation	All Emerging Adults
Variables:							
Has given own money, totaling more than \$50, in the last year to any organizations or causes.	25%	34%	38%	32.5%	33%	20.5%	30%
Has done organized volunteer work or service in the last year.	64%	47%	53%	51%	50%	33%	55%
At least half (includes most and all) of the volunteer work was organized by religious groups.	21.5%	9.5%	10%	9%	12%	1%	8%
Has helped homeless people, needy neighbors, family, friends, or others in need directly, not through an organization at least a	84%	77%	78%	71%	73%	63%	74%

little (includes some and a lot) in the past year.							
Has shared religious faith with another in the past year.	34%	37%	44%	38%	42%	27%	36%
Cares somewhat or very much about the needs of elderly people in this country.	89%	91.5%	90%	88%	88%	81%	89%
Cares somewhat or very much about the needs of poor people in this country.	85%	85%	86%	81%	84%	83%	84%
Cares somewhat or very much about equality between different racial groups.	75.5%	71%	78%	70%	76%	60%	68%

NIAC Outcome Three: Participating fully, consciously, actively, and regularly in the celebrations of the sacramental life of the Catholic Church.

This is an outcome focusing upon participation in the sacramental life of the church. However due to the limitations of the NSYR data, the only variables that could be measured included participation in Eucharist and belief in the need to be actively involved in the church.

Those with committed parents report attending Mass at greater frequency, with 80% saying that they attend more than once or twice a year, and 24% of those saying that they attend once a week or more. Past or current youth group participants were not far behind, with 79% attending more than once or twice a year, and 23% of them attending weekly or more often. This leaves a rather large majority of Catholic emerging adults that does not attend Mass weekly, at least in the parish in which they report the most regular attendance.

It is important to note that any type of intentional formation—regardless of the mode—does result in a higher attendance rate on a sporadic basis (more than once or twice a year) and on a weekly basis when compared to the total sample of Catholic emerging adults, this can most easily be seen in the percentages of Mass attendance by those with “no formation.” Also, it was found that Catholic school students (14%) attend slightly less on a weekly basis than all emerging adults (15%) but still twice as much as those with “no formation.” One explanation for low weekly Mass attendance by this age group of Catholics could be found in the fact only 25% believe being involved in the church is needed to be truly religious or spiritual. For more detailed responses, see Table 14.

Table 14. Outcome Three in Light of Five Modes of Formation.

	Catholic School	Parish Religious Education	Youth Group	Confirmed	Committed Parents	No Formation	All Emerging Adults
Variables:							
Attends Mass more than once or twice a year, not counting weddings, baptisms, and funerals.	77%	66%	79%	70%	80%	45%	64%
Attends Mass once a week or more than once a week.	14%	17%	23%	18%	24%	8%	15%
Agrees that in order for Catholics to be truly religious and spiritual they need to be involved in a church.	21%	23%	23%	20.5%	27%	8%	21%

NIAC Outcome Four: Articulating the fundamental teachings of the Catholic faith and demonstrating a commitment to learning and growing in this faith.

This outcome focuses upon both articulating the church's teaching, as well as being committed to continued growth in faith. Readers of the initial NSYR research findings, *Soul Searching*, will recall that Catholic youth were characterized as particularly inarticulate when it comes to talking about what they believe about their faith. Catholic emerging adults in Wave 3 stated beliefs that do not reflect church teaching in the areas of life after death, the creation of the world by God, and divine miracles.

For example, of all young adult Catholics, only 44 percent believe definitely that there is life after death, although intentional formation in parish, school, or family provides some support for this belief. Additionally, alarming is that at least 52% of all emerging adult Catholics (and two-thirds of second-generation Hispanics) believe reincarnation may be possible—clearly not a teaching of the Catholic Church. Parish faith formation does not appear to move these beliefs any closer to church teaching, although Catholic school and committed parents do seem to have a positive effect. In contrast, the large majority (85% or higher) of young Catholics do believe that heaven is the place people go when they die.

Across the board, roughly a third of Catholic emerging adults believe that the teaching of religion and science are entirely compatible regardless of their mode of formation, however less than half believe that God used evolution to create the world. Only fifty-nine percent of young adults believe that God created the world alone. Again only committed parents have a significant outcome on increasing this belief and Catholic school students believe this even less at 45%. These findings conclude that current formal religious education curriculums in the school or parish may not have the hoped for impact on the beliefs of Catholic emerging adults; although it is important to note that the NSYR falls far short of providing a complete picture of the beliefs of emerging adults in the core areas of the Catholic faith.

Generally, Catholic emerging adults do not participate in religious education regularly in the young adult years. However, the data indicates that exposure to most faith formation opportunities as an adolescent will increase the likelihood of continuing participation as an emerging adult; only Catholic schools appear to have a negative impact.

Another significant finding regarding this outcome is that over sixty percent believe it is okay to pick and choose their religious beliefs, with the largest group holding this belief being Catholic school students at 80%. Only a quarter (24%) of past or present Catholic

school attendees reports having had no doubts about the truth of their religious beliefs in the past year, compared to 38% for emerging adults with committed parents and youth group participants. Lastly, nearly two-thirds say they are somewhat or very interested in learning more about their religion, with the greatest interest expressed by those with committed parents at 74%. For more detailed responses, see Table 15.

Table 15: Outcome Four in Light of Five Modes of Formation.

	Catholic School	Parish Religious Education	Youth Group	Confirmed	Committed Parents	No Formation	All Emerging Adults
Variables:							
Has attended a religious education class in the past year at least a few times a month (includes almost every week, once a week, and more than once a week).	4%	12%	17%	9%	12%	1%	8%
Has had no doubt about whether religious beliefs are true in the last year.	24%	37%	38%	35%	38%	33%	36%
Definitely believes that there is life after death.	52%	44%	53%	47%	54%	36%	44%

Definitely believes in the possibility of divine miracles from God.	61%	57%	61%	59%	67%	43%	57%
Maybe or definitely believes in reincarnation, that people have lived previous lives.	43%	52%	50%	50%	44%	57%	52%
Believes that God (alone) created the world.	45%	63%	63%	59%	69%	56%	59%
Believes that God may have used evolution to create the world.	48%	48%	54%	51%	57%	35%	48%
Believes that heaven is a place where some people go after death.	93%	88%	86%	85%	89%	80%	86%

Believes that only people whose sins are forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ go to heaven.	25%	34%	40%	30%	36%	24%	29%
Agrees that it is okay to pick and choose religious beliefs.	80%	58.5%	62%	61%	63%	53%	61%
Is somewhat or very interested in learning more about his/her religion.	65%	57%	64.5%	57%	74%	66%	64%
Agrees or strongly agrees that the findings of science and teachings of religion are entirely compatible with each other.	30.5%	35%	33%	30%	32%	24%	34%

NIAC Outcome Five: Applying Catholic ethics, virtues, principles, values and social teaching to moral decision-making, life situations, and in interactions with the larger culture.

This outcome deals with applying the Catholic faith to decision-making and life in general. If Catholic emerging adults do not embrace some of these core teachings of the Catholic faith, it follows that their faith may not inform their actions, especially when it comes to making moral decisions. This is demonstrated when 80% of emerging adult Catholic school attendees say that they would consider living with a romantic partner. Just under half (48%) of youth group participants said they would consider it, however, 17% of them report that they have already lived with a romantic partner without being married. Immigrant Hispanics also stand out as the most likely to have cohabited with a romantic partner, at 32%, and Hispanics in general were the least likely to have used birth control during their last experience of sexual intercourse—61% did not use it, compared to 38% of all other sexually active emerging adult Catholics (data not in table).

Nearly two-thirds of all Catholic emerging adults, regardless of how they were religiously formed, report having had sexual intercourse several or many times. Those who have had no formation of any kind in Wave 1 are the most sexually active group of Catholic emerging adults. The vast majority of Catholic emerging adults do not believe in waiting for marriage to have sex: as much as 65% for Catholic school students and 63% youth group attendees.) Thirty nine percent of all those emerging adults who report having been sexually or physically intimate report having no regrets and only 4% having a lot or very many regrets.

Continuing the trend from Wave 1, Catholic school students continue to be more likely than their peers to drink alcohol, with only four percent reporting that they never drink. In fact, Catholic school students report drinking at least once at week up 14% to 24% more than all other categories of Catholic emerging adults. Sixty eight percent of Catholic school students have had (at least) 4 or 5 drinks once or more in the past two weeks, the highest of any other group. Binge drinking may be an issue for many Catholic emerging adults, with 54% reporting that, in the past two weeks, there has been at least one occasion when they have had more than four (females) or five (males) drinks in one night; and only 14% in the last year report having never been drunk. Another area of concern regarding emerging adults who attended Catholic school is viewing X-Rated, pornographic movies, videos, or cable programs in the last year.

This generation also echoes the moral relativism talked about so much at the beginning of the millennium. Across the board, at least half say that morals are relative, that there

are no definite rights or wrongs (more than half of Catholic school, religious education, and youth group attendees agree). Majorities of all groups agree or strongly agree that the world is always changing and we should adjust our views of what is morally right and wrong to reflect those changes. For more detailed responses, see Table 16.

Table 16. Outcome Five in Light of Five Modes of Formation.

	Catholic School	Parish Religious Education	Youth Group	Confirmed	Committed Parents	No Formation	All Emerging Adults
Variables:							
Would consider living with a romantic partner that he/she is not married to in the future.	80%	53%	48%	57%	54%	44%	57%
Has lived together with someone without being married.	4%	19%	17%	14.5%	13%	29%	18.5%
Has had sexual intercourse several or many times.	62%	67%	64%	66%	62.5%	70%	68%
Drinks alcohol once a week or more	61%	39%	38%	47%	37%	28.5%	40%

Has had (at least) 4 or 5 drinks once or more in the past two weeks.	68%	52%	48%	55%	48%	46%	54%
Never uses marijuana.	59%	74%	75%	70%	73%	77%	72.5%
Has watched no X-Rated, pornographic movies, videos, or cable programs in the last year.	37%	50.5%	51%	48.5%	48.5%	50%	48%
Agrees or strongly agrees that morals are relative, that there are no definite rights and wrongs.	57%	54%	54%	50%	57%	58%	54%
Agrees or strongly agrees that it is alright for two unmarried people not in love to have sex.	65%	57%	57.5%	63%	59%	72%	62.5%

Agrees or strongly agrees that religion is a private matter that should be kept out of public debates about social and political issues.	68%	66%	57%	68%	66%	78%	70.5%
Thinks that people should wait to have sex until they are married.	15%	18%	24%	15%	19%	13%	16%
Agrees or strongly agrees that the world is always changing and we should adjust our views of what is morally right and wrong to reflect those changes.	70%	68%	65%	69%	69%	75%	70%

NIAC Outcome Six: Discerning and using their gifts to actively belong to and participate in the life and mission of the parish, school, and larger community.

In this outcome, the notion of “actively belong[ing] to and participat[ing] in” parish life seemingly has a much different connotation for Catholic emerging adults than for previous generations, when being involved in the church was a higher priority. Only 21% agree that Catholics need to be involved in a church in order to be “truly religious and spiritual.” That percentage has increased the most among those who have been formed by committed parents. The experience of no formation in their early years seems to have reinforced this belief in those young adults since only 8% believe involvement in church is important. Consistently, between one-third and one-half say that religious faith is extremely or very important in shaping their daily lives with those being formed by committed parents having the highest percentage of such responses compared to all other groups of Catholic emerging adults.

Interestingly, though, respect for organized religion is high, with greater than 80% agreeing or strongly agreeing while at the same time 40% agree that mainstream religion is irrelevant, so respect for religion does not necessarily mean that emerging adults see it as relevant. Along those lines, 26% or fewer agree or strongly agree that organized religion is usually a turn off. So, it seems that this generation of emerging adults has great respect for the church, but does not necessarily believe that it is important to participate in parish life. However, beliefs about organized religion and religious participation from this data seem to be most influenced by the formation of committed parents. It is difficult to assess the aspect of discerning and using one’s gifts for this outcome, as there were no questions in the NSYR that asked those questions. For more detailed responses see Table 17.

Table 17. Outcome Six in Light of Five Modes of Formation.

	Catholic School	Parish Religious Education	Youth Group	Confirmed	Committed Parents	No Formation	All Emerging Adults
Variables:							
Agrees that in order for Catholics to be truly religious and spiritual they need to be involved in a church.	21%	23%	23%	20.5%	27%	8%	21%
Says that religious faith is extremely or very important in shaping daily life.	35%	34%	38%	34%	48%	26%	34%
Has a lot of respect for organized religion in this country (agrees or strongly agrees).	83%	82%	80%	81%	84%	81%	81%

Agrees or strongly agrees that organized religion is usually a big turn-off for him/her.	26%	24%	22%	24%	24%	29%	26%
Agrees or strongly agrees that most mainstream religion is irrelevant to the needs and concerns of most people his/her age.	41%	38%	33%	42%	42%	53%	42%

NIAC Outcome Seven: Celebrating cultural/racial and ethnic diversity as a gift from God, and pursuing the development of Christian community across cultural/racial and ethnic backgrounds in their parishes, schools, and broader communities.

This outcome asserts that celebrating our diversity as a faith community is important. The NSYR had only two variables that provided a measure of the openness of emerging adults to diversity, neither of which was directly related to celebrating diversity in a faith context. Sixty-eight percent of Catholic emerging adults say that they care somewhat or very much about equality among racial groups. Faith formation that occurs in Catholic schools, youth group, and committed parents increases slightly the care emerging adults have for equality among races since those with “no formation” believe this at the lowest percentage.

Only about four in ten Catholic emerging adults report having friends of different races; the figure is highest for youth with committed parents (47%) and lowest for confirmed youth (33%). It may very well be that racial equality is not a priority issue for some because they do not perceive inequality, or it may also be true that most Catholic emerging adults are not as exposed to people of other races as may have been assumed. Racial diversity in many U.S. cities today is also manifested in economic inequality. Low-income families are exposed to much greater racial diversity in their communities than higher-income families. The NSYR data reflects this as well, with 51% of emerging adults from low-income families having at least one close friend of another race, versus only 33% of those from middle to higher-income families. For detailed responses see Table 18.

Table 18. Outcome Seven in Light of Five Modes of Formation.

	Catholic School	Parish Religious Education	Youth Group	Confirmed	Committed Parents	No Formation	All Emerging Adults
Variables:							
Cares somewhat or very much about equality between different racial groups.	75.5%	71%	78%	70%	76%	60%	68%
Has at least one close friend of a different race.	42%	39%	43%	33%	47%	41%	37%

NIAC Outcome Eight: Exploring God’s call to vocation through prayer, reflection, and discernment.

This outcome relates to understanding God’s call in life through prayer and discernment. Similar to Outcome Six, there are no ideal variables for assessing the notion of one’s call to vocation, only indicators about one’s life, future, and corresponding goals. Oddly, those who attended Catholic school are least likely (47%) to report that they always think about their future, versus 62% of those with committed parents. Catholic school students are also least likely to think very often about the meaning of life. With the cost of Catholic school tuition making that education more easily accessible to wealthier families, these youth may think less about their future because they feel more secure, or because they already have their futures mapped out.

Overwhelmingly (roughly eight in ten), Catholic emerging adults agree or strongly agree that “some people wander aimlessly through life,” regardless of mode of formation with the exception of those formed by a committed parent who report higher levels of life direction. Those who attended Catholic school or youth group are most likely to have read a religious or spiritual book in the past year (31%), but the vast majority of Catholic emerging adults do no such reading. Catholic school students are least likely (28%) to report praying alone at least a few times a week, compared to those with committed parents, at 43%. For more detailed responses, see Table 19.

Table 19. Outcome Eight in Light of Five Modes of Formation.

	Catholic School	Parish Religious Education	Youth Group	Confirmed	Committed Parents	No Formation	All Emerging Adults
Variables:							
Always thinks about or plans for his/her future.	46%	57%	55%	55%	62%	52%	58%
Thinks very often about the meaning of life.	15.5%	22%	20%	18.5%	28%	21.5%	22%
Agrees or strongly agrees that his/her life often seems to lack clear goals or sense of direction.	15%	27%	23%	23%	24%	18%	25%
Agrees or strongly agrees that he/she doesn't have a good sense of what he/she is trying to accomplish in life.	17%	22%	16%	22%	20%	16%	20%

Agrees or strongly agrees that while some people wander aimlessly through life, he/she is not one of them.	88%	82%	82%	84%	79%	80%	82%
Has read a devotional, religious, or spiritual book other than Scripture in the last year.	31%	23%	31%	28%	26%	13%	22%
Prays alone at least a few times a week (includes once a day and many times a day).	28%	36%	38.5%	35%	43%	33%	35%
Says that religious faith is extremely or very important in shaping daily life.	35%	34%	38%	34%	48%	26%	34%

Part Four Conclusions: What we knew, what we know, and what we do not know about the faithful challenge of adolescent catechesis.

Overview

Sociological research is conducted and analyzed so that we can recognize patterns, trends, and other information that helps us all to understand better the human condition. With a longitudinal survey, such as the NSYR, those patterns and trends emerge over a longer period of time. This means that what we conclude early in the data analysis and what we conclude later may not be the same.

This conclusion will revisit findings presented in *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* and the Catholic report, titled, *National Study of Youth and Religion: Analysis of the Population of Catholic Teenagers and Their Parents*. It will also highlight conclusions from the latest volume from the NSYR researchers, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*, in an attempt to understand what the NSYR tells us about today's Catholic emerging adults.

What we knew: Wave One Conclusions

The Catholic report⁴ (shorthand for the lengthy title above) centered its conclusion on the three goals of Catholic youth ministry from the USCCB document, *Renewing the Vision*, in order to have a metric or framework for evaluation. Goal One has to do with making disciples; the report concluded that it was difficult, if not impossible, to form young disciples when youth are not part of the faith community. Conclusion 6 offered: "While youth that are involved in youth group and religious education show a significantly higher frequency of religious practices, most young people seem to be involved very little in communal or public religious practice" (p. 58). The report highlighted the encouraging numbers related to learning more about the faith and the positive correlation between attending things like rallies, retreats, and mission trips with greater religiosity, but also pointed out the large majority of youth who do not attend religious education or special trips. However, in *Soul Searching*, the researchers pointed out that, "...Catholic teenagers, who represent nearly one-quarter of all U.S. teens, stand out among the U.S. Christian teenagers as consistently scoring lower on most measures of religiosity" (p. 194). The researchers went on to say, "Perhaps more important for Catholics, our findings regarding Catholic teenagers show many of them to be living far outside of official Church norms defining true Catholic faithfulness" (p. 194).

Goal Two of Catholic youth ministry speaks of drawing youth into participating responsibly in the life of the parish. Here, the report concluded, “More equals more for young people who participate and attend” (p. 59). But the report acknowledged that the church failed to reach and include many Catholic young people. Conclusion 2 asserted, “The Catholic identity of youth appears to be solid, in that 76% report they will attend the same church when they are 25 years old” (p. 59). At the time, 50% of youth reported attending Mass two to three times a month or more (p. 59). So, while failing to reach most Catholic youth, the report concluded that the church did a very good job with those it did reach. *Soul Searching* found that levels of religiosity and participation in church were directly correlated to parental involvement in church: “the lower levels of church attendance... [and] the lower levels of importance of faith reported by U.S. Catholic teens compared to mainline Protestant teens can be explained partly by the lower levels of religiosity of their parents” (p. 210). In fact, it was found that the best single-measure indicator of “practicing Catholics” in Wave 3 was families that spoke daily about religion in the home in Wave 1.

In Goal Three, the focus is on the individual young person, seeking to “foster [their] total personal and spiritual growth” (p. 15). Here, the Catholic report concluded that most Catholic youth were doing pretty well and reported having good relationships with parents and other adults. This report, also pointed out that “active participation in parish programming, regular Mass attendance, and enrollment in Catholic schools reduces at-risk behavior in youth” (p. 60). The one exception to this rule was that Catholic school students reported “a higher frequency of regular alcohol use” (p. 60). Again, contrasting that with the findings in *Soul Searching*, that report painted a picture of the majority of Catholic youth as being “religiously indifferent and permissive” (p. 195).

What we do know: Wave Three Conclusions

The Catholic report painted an optimistic, albeit short-lived, portrait of Catholic teens, 13-17 years old, concluding that when the church effectively reached these youth, then positive outcomes occurred. In *Soul Searching*, however, the researchers offered a portrait of most Catholic youth as being “particularly incredibly inarticulate about their faith.”⁵ Six years later, with the benefit of data from Waves 2 and 3, what we know now offers a less optimistic portrayal of Catholic emerging adults, ages 18 to 23. This tells us that faithful adolescents will not necessarily become faithful adults.

In the Catholic report, we concluded that religious formation had a positive impact on high school youth and that parents were key in that process, both of which were true. Life course, the natural process of growing up, dictates that youth will become more independent as they become emerging adults. The data presented here on emerging adults indicate that religious formation—unless reinforced in the home—has had no

great impact on them, leading us to question whether they will become faith-filled adults.

This point becomes more significant because of the socio-cultural changes that have occurred in America. Today in the United States it is less likely than ever that a single denomination or religion would make up the majority of households in a given area much less be a contained community that publicly celebrates religious feasts outside of Christmas and Easter, e.g. Saint Joseph Day parades or Las Posadas. With this religious plurality comes the decrease likelihood that a given family's faith beliefs would be re-enforced by the larger community. Family faith life becomes more critical given that many young people are exposed to a plethora of messages that may or may not reflect Catholic beliefs, values, and practices. The blessing is that postmodern young people are more likely to talk to their parents regarding these issues and messages. The question now is whether parents believe they have the knowledge and tools to effectively engage in the discussion.

Speaking to the entire sample of emerging adults, *Souls in Transitions* summarizes the features of this stage as, "intense identity exploration, instability, a focus on self, feeling in limbo or in transition or in between, and a sense of possibilities, opportunities, and unparalleled hope" (p. 6). These adults are quite fluid, picking and choosing what to believe, while living a "no regrets" lifestyle that does not judge others' choices. *Souls in Transition* calls them "moral intuitionists—that is, they believe that they know what is right and wrong by attending to the subjective feelings or intuitions that they sense within themselves..." (p. 46). Some may say that the data reveal what we have always known about young adults, at least over the past five decades; however, this new generation seems to be a unique blend of 1960s activism and 1980s "slackerism." The NSYR researchers classify them as "social constructionists," using the language of feeling rather than believing or thinking, "...a shift in language use that expresses an essentially subjectivistic and emotivistic approach to moral reasoning and rational argument" (pp. 50-51).

Speaking specifically of Wave 3 Catholic emerging adults, this is what we know about their faith beliefs, practices, and salience:

- Only 59% of Wave 1 Catholics who participated in all three waves consistently reported themselves to be Catholic (the percentage drops to 55% when excluding Wave 3 indeterminate responses).
- The importance of religious faith dropped steadily from Wave 1 to 3, with responses of extremely or very important going from 41% (Wave 1) to 40% (Wave 2) to 38% (Wave 3). Over the same time, not very important or not important at all responses went from 16% to 21%.

- In Wave 2, only 49% of Catholic teens planned to attend the same church at 25 years old; in Wave 3, 59% of emerging adults indicate they plan to attend the same church when they are 30. These large fluctuations seem to indicate a “put it off” attitude, perhaps related to their plans to marry and have children.
- Agreement with the statement, “it is okay to pick and choose religious beliefs” increased steadily across the waves, going from 53% in Wave 1 to 56% in Wave 2 and 61% in Wave 3.
- When asked if believers need to be involved in their congregations, agreement levels also steadily decreased across the waves: from 31% (Wave 1) to 26% (Wave 2) to just 25% in Wave 3.
- In Wave 3, only 31% of Catholic emerging adults reported attending Mass two or three times a month or more, down from 50% in Wave 1. There was a 19.5% decrease in weekly Mass attendance from Wave 1 teenagers (39%) to Wave 3 emerging adults (19.5%)

The longitudinal data is clear that there is a steady decline in most measures of religiosity from Catholic Wave 1 teenagers to Wave 3 emerging adults. Although the majority of Wave 2 (59%) and Wave 3 (64%) respondents thought they had stayed about the same when asked about religious change in their lives.

Two things stand out among the conclusions regarding the impact of faith formation in measuring the outcomes in Wave 3 emerging adults. First, the positive impact of any faith formation versus none is clear in this analysis; second, formation by committed parents in the teenage years results in more positive outcomes in many of the measures. Other conclusions that may be drawn in terms of the Outcomes of Faith Formation:

1. Different settings of faith formation impact emerging adults’ ability to sustain a relationship with Jesus Christ; however faith formation by committed parents has the greatest impact.
2. Catholic emerging adults have been formed to care for others, especially the poor and elderly, both in belief and action.
3. Any type of intentional formation, regardless of the setting, results in a higher Mass attendance rate on a sporadic basic (more than once or twice a year) but not on a weekly basis, when compared to the total sample of Catholic emerging adults. Adolescents formed by committed parents and youth group participants had the highest levels of weekly Mass attendance.
4. These findings suggest that formal religious education in the school or parish does not consistently have the intended outcomes on the beliefs and practices of Catholic emerging adults.
5. This generation of young Catholics echoes the moral relativism talked about so much at the beginning of the millennium, as roughly half say that morals are relative and that there are no definite rights or wrongs. Formation in Catholic

schools, religious education, and youth group seem to increase this belief in relativism.

6. Beliefs about organized religion and religious participation seem to be most effectively shaped by the formation from committed parents.
7. Faith formation that occurs in Catholic schools, youth group, and committed parents increases slightly the care emerging adults have for equality among races.
8. Those who have been formed in all modes except by committed parents report higher levels of a sense life direction.

The assertion that participation in Mass and other church programs, such as youth group, increased religiosity and decreased at-risk behavior may have been true only while youth were still in junior high and high school and living under their parents' roofs. Wave 3 emerging adults largely have left religion behind, perhaps to pick it up again in the future. Given the moral relativism and the inclination to pick and choose what to believe, one must wonder what faith they will pick up. Might it be a return to the fundamentals of faith, a deepening relativism and "Whateverism," a resolve toward reclaiming a Catholic culture, or some new strain of postmodern faith that is yet to be named.

What we do not know

Most research provides insight; it may affirm what our experience tells us is true or challenge our assumptions. The NSYR has provided a wealth of data; it has both affirmed the experience of those serving in pastoral and catechetical ministry with young Catholics, and challenged assumptions. Most importantly, it provided insight into new directions that must be taken in order to engage more effectively the younger members of the Catholic faith community. However, it has limitations as in any social science research, especially in understanding the growing population of young Hispanic Catholics. The NSYR research studied all young people from varied religious traditions, which limited the ability of researchers to focus on the unique and specific aspects of particular traditions. This limits our ability to understand fully all aspects of the faith of emerging adults and evaluate completely the eight outcomes for adolescent catechesis. Due to these limitations and the many questions generated by the NSYR, further research and reflection is needed in order more fully understand the challenges the church faces as it attempts to engage its younger members in matters of faith.

Final Thoughts on the Faithful Challenge

The data indicate that the church has a great task before it. Some might call it a faithful challenge, one that involves effectively catechizing and evangelizing today's Catholic youth and emerging adults. In order to truly answer the questions posed here, only time and more research will provide accurate answers. One thing is clear, as it was stated in the Catholic report: "New creativity and energy along with alternative models for

catechesis are needed to educate the young of our faith communities” (p. 58). The same recommendation exists in *Soul Searching*: “...achieving the huge religious potential that appears to exist for them [Catholic youth] would seem to require that the church invest a great deal more attention, creativity, and institutional resources into its young members—and therefore into its own life” (p. 217). Without this investment, it seems likely that we will continue to produce generations of youth and emerging adults that will find it a challenge to become faith-filled adult Catholics.

Endnotes

¹ Dr. Christian Smith (with Patricia Snell) opted to use the phrase “emerging adults” to refer to the 18 to 23 years olds reported on in *Souls in Transition* (2009, New York: Oxford University Press). It refers only to this age group, and takes many sociological factors into account. For more on the phrase, see pages 4-7 in their book. For the purposes of this report, the authors use emerging adults and young adults interchangeably, as the latter term is more familiar to most readers.

² Table 1 copied from Table 12 in the NSYR report, “Methodological Design and Procedures for the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) Longitudinal Telephone Survey (Waves 1, 2, & 3) (08-19-08).” Access full report at http://www.youthandreligion.org/sites/default/files/imported/research/docs/master_just_methods_11_12_2008.pdf

³ Ken Johnson-Mondragón, ed., *Pathways of Hope and Faith Among Hispanic Teens: Pastoral Reflections and Strategies Inspired by the National Study of Youth and Religion* (Stockton, CA: Instituto Fe y Vida, 2007), 29-31.

⁴ See *National Study of Youth and Religion: Analysis of the Population of Catholic Teenagers and their Parents*, McCorquodale, Shepp, and Sterten. 2004, Washington, D.C.: NFCYM.

⁵ See *Soul Searching*, Smith with Denton. 2005, New York: Oxford University Press.