

NOTRE DAME STUDY OF CATHOLIC PARISH LIFE

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PARTICIPATION IN CATHOLIC PARISH LIFE: RELIGIOUS RITES AND PARISH ACTIVITIES IN THE 1980s

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Introduction: The Mingling of Past and Present

Roman Catholics, like members of other religious denominations in the United States, participate in religious rites and other church activities for a variety of reasons. One factor is their intrinsic need for religious expression either in private or in the community of fellow believers. A second factor is their social location and the stage in the human life-cycle at which they find themselves. A third factor is their personal understanding of the purposes for which a parish exists. And finally, participation is a function of the availability of satisfying religious rites and other activities within their parish.

Studies done in the 1960s and 1970s have shown that religious commitment and expression involve several dimensions. The type of religious activity in which people engage often depends on their stage in the life-cycle and their social location. For example, women are more likely to participate in worship services, to accept traditional beliefs, and to engage in an active devotional life, while men are more likely to be better informed on the doctrinal aspects of their religion. The young generally devote more attention to learning the complexities of religious doctrine, parents and the middle-aged practice their religion in worship services and other church activities, and the elderly practice it in devotional life and embrace its tenets in simple faith and hope. The better-educated and the middle-class manifest their religiosity more in worship life, parish associations, and factual knowledge of their religion, while the less-educated and less economically well-off tend to practice it in their devotional life. Thus, people may be "religious" but in quite different ways.

Catholics in the American Mainstream

Previous reports from the Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life have described a U.S. Catholic population quite different from the stereotypes of perhaps thirty years ago. Catholics are increasingly in the American mainstream. Often economically and socially segregated from the rest of the U.S. population in the past, Catholics now more closely resemble other Americans, and hold typical American cultural values, ways of thinking and acting, and triumphs and frailties. During the decades of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, in education, types of jobs, income, and social class, younger Catholics showed tremendous upward mobility over previous generations of Catholics. To some extent this mobility has slowed down in the 1980s, but only because the Catholic generation now in its mid-30s to mid-50s had already equaled or surpassed the achievements of members of other denominations.

Ethnics are now identifiable more by name than by underprivilege; some members of old Catholic immigrant groups — e.g. Irish and German — are at the top of the economic pecking order in the corporate boardrooms and the councils of the mighty; the process is a bit slower for Italians, Poles and other Eastern Europeans, but even here, educational achievement of twenty years ago is beginning to be matched by current occupational status. Those Catholics on the outside looking in are the newer ethnics — Hispanics, Asians, and a modestly growing middle-class Black membership. They are often found in the same city neighborhoods vacated by the achieving Catholic ethnics after their move to suburbia. These rapid changes since World War II have produced an upwardly mobile but very heterogeneous U.S. Catholic population.

It should come as no surprise, then, that Catholic parishes across the country reflect this mosaic of social and cultural changes, as well as local adaptations to changes encouraged by the Second Vatican Council. It is a church that calls for a people of God, a participatory people. And, the American Catholic population has reached a level of educational, social, and economic development where it has all the capabilities to *be* a participatory people. It is no coincidence, for example, that a hierarchical and clerical

church is giving way to shared parish governance and increased *lay* responsibility for ministries. If in times past, religious vocations were always associated with a regimen of learning in seminaries and abbeys, today's educated laity, men and women, feel increasingly confident about service to God and the people of God without the specific self-denials associated with religious vows.

Where parishioners are capable and confident in their religious involvements, the sacramental celebration continues to flow upward to God, but it also flows outward to the people of God and embraces them increasingly in liturgical roles such as communion ministers, rectors, cantors, and petition readers. It is no surprise that an educated Catholic laity seeks constant spiritual renewal in adult education, Bible study, and biblically-centered devotional materials; parochial school or CCD for the child is no longer thought sufficient for religious formation. *Lifelong learning and serving are highly valued by middle-class Americans and that is what most non-Hispanic American Catholics are.* Perhaps that is one reason why American Catholics are finding that they have so much in common with mainline confessional, sacramental, and even evangelical Protestant churches. When people are similar socially, their parish ministries and programs begin to resemble each other.

Catholics Longing for the Past

But the picture of American Catholics and their parishes would be grossly incomplete if we stopped with the middle-class parishioner and the suburban or small city parish. Alongside the post-World War II generations and the post-Vatican II parishes are the working-class peoples and, as we characterized in Report 2, the "immigrant church" Their pieties, their devotions, their sense of the mystery in the Eucharist and Confession, their sense of the holiness and authority of the priest — all remain unshaken. We are not simply referring to an older, dying generation. Rather, there are educated Catholics in their 40s and 50s who, while perhaps harboring not so fond memories of the rigidity of the sisters at the parochial school, nevertheless have a yearning for the order, the legal clarity, or the devotional comfort of the Church as it was — "growing up Catholic" Enough with experimentation, enough with pluralism! Back to the one way. It is not so much that order in doctrine and practice is an end in itself; rather there is a sense of community in the knowledge that all around us share the same spiritual folkways and rules.

Again when people have such conflicting models of the parish, is it any wonder that pluralism and heterogeneity are found not only between parishes but especially within the same parish? Is it any wonder that participants in the 8:00 Mass claim that devotion to a patron saint, spoken liturgy, and priestly dominance characterize their parish, while the participants in the 11:00 Mass tell us that their parish shows joyful participation in sung liturgies, sharing of the peace, and lay involvement as rectors and communion ministers? Different parishes? Maybe. More likely-same parish, different congregations.

With heterogeneity of people and pluralism of practices in the background, we are ready to take a closer look at the ways American Catholics participate in religious rites and parish activities.

Sources of Data

The data for this report are drawn chiefly from the Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life (CPL). Based on analysis of 1,100 parishes nationwide, we drew a sample of 36 parishes for intensive study. These latter parishes are representative of the principal dimensions along which Catholic parishes differ. With scientific sampling procedures, we are able to generalize about Catholic parishes across the country and about Catholics within different types of parishes. Social scientists call this procedure "sampling for contextual effects" Our generalizations are based on questionnaires addressed to scientific samples of 2,667 responding parishioners within these parishes, 202 volunteer leaders, 89 paid staff, and 35 pastors. We also observed their liturgies and made other studies of each parish community and its history. The studies were conducted in the field from 1982 through 1984.

By comparison with other survey data about American Catholics, we know that CPL has a "bias" in favor of *core* Catholics, i.e. Catholics with parish connections. It is estimated that between 1/4 and 1/3 of all U.S. Catholics probably do not have parish connections. They attend Mass so infrequently that they are not known to personnel in the parish where they reside. Or if they have made it onto a parish membership list, they are insufficiently interested in the life of the parish to respond to successive attempts to survey their views. In cases where it is essential to generalize about *all* U.S. Catholics rather than those core Catholics with parish connections, we will rely on the General Social Surveys (GSS) conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. These surveys are widely respected among social scientists. During the three years we conducted the CPL field work, 1982-84, the GSS surveys yielded 1,213 people nationwide who claimed to be Catholic, 954 of whom were of non-Hispanic background.

That suggests the second caution about CPL. We purposely omitted Hispanic parishes from our 36-parish analysis. Our 1,100 parish study and other research has indicated that Hispanic religiosity is very different from that of other predominantly Catholic ethnic groups. We would have also faced severe language and cultural equivalency problems on our questionnaires. Thus, we hope in due time to conduct an additional study of Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and other Hispanic groups in the U.S. We have also excluded Hispanic Catholics from generalizations based on GSS.

Most of the findings presented in this report, deal with core Catholics, those with parish connections. When we are talking about *all* Catholics, including those who are "unchurched" we will make specific reference to GSS. Although the GSS data are supplied through the National Opinion Research Center and the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, neither organization is responsible for our interpretations. Finally, while these reports are aimed at informed Church and public

readers and are based on varied data analytic techniques, we continue to prepare reports aimed at social scientists, where a more complex range of analytic techniques is used.

Participation in Religious Rites

The Mass: Age and Gender

Other studies have indicated that the gap between the attendance of Protestants and Catholics at weekly religious services has narrowed considerably in recent years. The GSS data for 1982-84 show that about 27% of adult Catholics and 30% of adult Protestants attend services once a year or never, and that 44% of adult Catholics and 37% of Protestants claim to be regular attenders (i.e., weekly or almost weekly). These findings are similar to recent Gallup Poll data. Among core Catholics, i.e., those with parish connections who responded to the CPL, weekly attendance is, of course, much more regular.

The young are less likely to be regular attenders according to both the GSS and CPL data. Among young adults under age 30 in the CPL study, only 5% rarely if ever attend Mass; among young Catholics in the GSS, however, 34% rarely if ever attend. In CPL, 50% of young adults attend almost weekly while only 29% of the GSS have a similar pattern. Attendance improves with increasing age in both studies, although the CPL data show attendance for core Catholics to be about 20 percentage points ahead of all U.S. Catholics in each age grouping. Attendance shows substantial decline after age 70 in both studies.

There is a female face to participation in Catholic religious rite, as there is in all Christian denominations. The GSS data indicate that 57% of those adults nationwide who claim to be Catholic are women, but 63% of the regular Mass attenders are women. Among the core Catholics in CPL, women comprise 55% of the adults on parish membership lists, however accurate these are, but 61% of the regular Mass attenders are women. Daily Mass attendance, when it occurs among the general Catholic populace, is about 80% female, while among the core Catholics in our CPL sample it is 65% female. Regardless of the gender of its participants, Mass during the week is reserved primarily for Holy Days; 44% of the core Catholics never attend Mass during weekdays, 40% attend weekday Mass a few times a year, 7% attend once or more each month, and 8% attend weekday Mass at least once a week.

Communion and Devotions

When we examine various other Catholic rites we must rely exclusively on the Catholic Parish Life data. Appropriate questions are not included on GSS. Again we stress that these findings are limited to the core Catholic population we surveyed. When legal sanctions were stronger in pre-Vatican II days, it is sometimes claimed, a greater proportion of Catholics attended Sunday Mass but a smaller proportion of those in attendance actually received the Eucharist. We cannot say from our data whether this

contention is accurate. We can say, however, that communion participation *now* does not lag greatly behind Mass attendance. Of weekly Mass attenders among core Catholics, about 80% are receiving the Eucharist. The figure trails off somewhat for less regular Mass attenders.

Age and, to a lesser extent, sex differences were observed in other rituals. Stations of the cross, public rosary, and novenas are practices maintained by women and disproportionately the older women. Attendance at benediction differs little by gender. The major differences are among age groups, however. Well over half and sometimes as high as 85% of young Catholics rarely or never participate in stations, public rosary, novenas, or benediction. Participation increases with age but the major increase is typically around the age of 60. Further analysis needs to be done to determine whether these patterns reflect the movement toward devotional practices that comes in the later years, or whether the apparent generational gap signals different emphases between the immigrant church and the post-Vatican II church in the U.S.

Confession and Communal Penance

Confession and communal penance services require special attention. In recent months Pope John Paul II and many of the American bishops have sought to focus more attention on private confession. Weekly confession before communion is a practice common to some Catholic countries and some say it is the defining characteristic of Catholics in Poland; long lines for confession are reportedly rivaled only by long lines at food stores. Many claim, however, that in much of Western Europe and the United States, confession is practiced during the later stages of Lent and Advent, if at all.

For those deeply concerned about the *infrequent* use of confession, the CPL data are instructive. Among *core* Catholics, 27% never go to confession. (Remember that only 5% of core Catholics rarely or never attend Mass and 11% rarely or never commune.) Another 35% go to confession once a year; 33%, several times a year; 5%, once a month; and 1%, more frequently than that. Among those identified as volunteer leaders with responsibility for important ministries in the local parish, the figures improve somewhat, although 15% of the parish leaders never go to confession; 33% go once a year; 44%, several times a year; and 8%, monthly or more frequently. Thus, although confession may not be practiced *frequently* by core Catholics, it remains part of being a Catholic in the practice of nearly three-quarters of those with parish connections.

There seems to be considerable confusion about communal penance services. Communal penance rites have become common in U.S. parishes only within the last decade. A sizable portion of the core Catholic parishioners said this was never available in their parish. A few of their pastors responded that communal penance services are in violation of church law, presumably because a general absolution might be pronounced on parishioners who substitute these rites for private confession. Whatever the situation, 50% of the CPL sample had never participated in a communal penance *rite that they had recognized as such*; 29% had done so about once a year; 18%, several times a year; and

3%, more regularly than that. We suspect these figures reflect some misunderstandings among parishioners about the relationships among private confession to a priest and the resultant absolution, private confession directly in prayer with God or another person, public confession in the *Confiteor* during Mass, and mixed public/private confession in the communal penance service.

Further analysis of the data indicates that communal penance rites may have replaced private confession only for a small proportion of the core Catholics. More commonly people practice both, or rely on private confession alone. Among core Catholics, 18% neither go to confession nor participate in communal penance rites; 7% participate in communal penance rites but do not go to confession; 31% go to confession but never participate in communal penance rites; and 43% of core Catholics do both. Contrary to the fears about younger Catholics, one age group is no more likely than another to replace confession with communal penance. Furthermore, the more frequent use of one practice is associated with the more frequent use of the other, where available.

Communal penance is available to a higher degree than parishioners realize. Within the 36 parishes across the nation where we conducted our intensive analyses, all but five parishes offered Rite II at least during Lent and often during Advent. Several parishes offered it more often, and one offered it weekly. Rite II is a service of communal reflection coupled with private confession and Reconciliation involving a priest. Typically the entire congregation participates in a common process of examination of conscience; then, priests are stationed at several locations around the church to hear private confession and offer the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Nine of the 36 parishes also have used Rite III; three parishes offer it exclusively. In Rite III, general absolution is pronounced over the confessing corporate body. In the interests of Church discipline, pastors are expected to report to their bishop those instances when general absolution is offered. General absolution is meant to be reserved for emergency situations when it is impossible to receive private confession and pronounce Reconciliation over such a large group of Catholics.

The data do hint that in those few parishes which use Rite III exclusively with its general absolution, a higher proportion of parishioners never go to confession. In the parishes that use communal penance Rite II exclusively or together with occasional use of Rite III, between 21% and 33% of the parishioners never go to private confession. In the three parishes that use Rite III exclusively, however, between 41% and 49% never go to confession. Some argue that the availability of general absolution without private confession is the "cause" of parishioners not going to confession. Others contend that communal penance with general absolution is a pastoral instrument to bring the means of grace nearer to parishioners who would *never* otherwise confess, in community or in private. Pastors and bishops are continuing to debate both sides of this issue.

Some observers claim that communal penance rites were generally introduced in the post-Vatican II period but with considerable uneasiness. Church leadership, the argument runs, neglected to devote much attention to educating Catholics on the intended

use of the communal penance rites, and to the relationship between these rites and private confession. Perhaps the inability of many parishioners to recognize that their parish is offering these rites is the best indicator of the resulting confusion. Where the rites are *used in conjunction with confession*, however there is little reason to be alarmed that they will become the occasion of "cheap grace"

Confession continues to be readily available in the parishes. Of the 36 parishes, 32 had a weekly confession schedule ranging from fifteen minutes to six hours. All parishes pointed to the availability of unscheduled confession, i.e., confession outside these hours, and typically their priests heard a handful to a dozen each week. If scheduled confessions are to increase, some pastors pointed out, either more priests will be needed or they will have to alter their priorities in parish ministries considerably.

Nine of the parishes have the traditional confessional that encourages anonymity. Eleven of the parishes have the modern confessional that allows face-to-face contact. Fourteen of the parishes have both the traditional and the modern confessionals. Parishes without confessionals in the church itself use the rectory office or some other location as a reconciliation room. Even when traditional confessionals are the only facilities visible, pastors report hearing confessions on a face-to-face basis in many settings outside visitations to the sick. Furthermore, the physical presence of a confessional does not mean the confessional is the location where most confessions are heard; in five parishes the confessional was either unused or was used for storage, and confessions were heard in face-to-face counseling settings. There seems to be some movement away from a "check-list," impersonal confession in the United States in favor of longer personal discussions of guilt and healing.

The predominant use of both confession and communal penance rites is associated with age. Those core Catholics in their 60s, 70s, or 80s are far more likely to avail themselves of confession than younger core Catholics. The same is true, within the limits of the availability of the communal penance rite. Fully 38% of core Catholics under the age of thirty never go to confession and another 37% go once a year; 20% go several times a year; and 5% go once a month or more.

The Educated Young Catholic

How shall Catholics interpret these figures regarding participation in various religious rites, particularly those showing less frequent participation by the young core Catholics? Some are pleased that the figures are as high as they are; they were afraid the situation was worse. Others have argued that young Catholics are highly educated nowadays. Being educated, they are better able to make informed judgments about the actions and policies of the Pope and bishops. They manifest their disillusionment with the leadership's policies by lack of involvement in religious rites. While our CPL questionnaires yield data on parishioners' feelings about Church policies, the sample is not well suited to determining whether the young are abstaining from Mass due to the

leadership's policies. The CPL data are based on a parish connected sample and few of the young people in it are staying away from parish rites.

The GSS, on the other hand, includes national data on both churched and unchurched Catholics. It includes questions about education and church attendance, but unfortunately lacks a battery of questions about church policies. Thus, we can only test part of the argument about education, leadership policy, and participation. Interestingly enough, despite the fact that the Catholic Church of the 1980s is populated by far more educated people than it was forty years ago, education does not lead *uniformly* to a decline in Mass attendance. Quite the opposite. The higher the education of Catholics, the higher the level of Mass attendance.

Even more important are the results for each age cohort. We divided the Catholic population into age cohorts: 18-30, 31-39, 40-49, 50-69, and 70 and over. We also divided Catholics into five levels of education completed: some high school or less, completed high school, some college or technical study, completed college, and advanced degree work such as graduate or professional study. For each level of education within each age cohort we examined the mean level of Mass attendance. (A more complex procedure is used for our social scientific papers.) While Mass attendance increases with age and education, within each age cohort there is a considerable gap in mean Mass attendance from those with low education to high education. *The gap infrequency of Mass attendance from low to high education is most pronounced in the younger age cohorts.* In the GSS data, then, it is the less educated young Catholic who is less likely to attend Mass. If there is policy discontent among *educated* young Catholics, therefore, it is manifested in a different way than in failure to participate in Mass. But we need to examine the argument more carefully.

We well know from previous studies that education, middle-class status, "joining" and participation in organizational activities are closely linked. Thus, we should have expected *higher* participation in Mass by educated young Catholics. But we also know from other studies that parish connections, including Mass attendance, are slower to develop among those who are yet unmarried and have not started raising families. Since young Catholics are postponing the age of first marriage and commencement of families — *in part because more of them are now staying in the educational system longer* — we should have expected lower Mass participation among young educated Catholics. When two theories offer conflicting predictions, social scientists call it an "anomaly" Given these conflicting predictions, it is difficult to set an interpretable criterion for low or high Mass attendance among the young.

We have tried to untangle the anomaly by testing whether marriage and the presence of children leads to higher Mass attendance among the young than does their educational attainment. Unfortunately, the small proportion of the total GSS 1980s sample within each analysis group renders our findings inconclusive. Neither the size of differences nor the consistency of patterns is convincing enough by social science standards to resolve the anomaly. Lacking that, as social scientists we will look for more

evidence that the higher level of education among younger Catholics will manifest itself in the failure to practice the principal religious rites. The higher education of young Catholics may have some impact on the legitimacy of church authority and, depending on how bishops and pastors exercise that authority, it may dampen Mass attendance. Based on hints in our data, there is some reason to believe that the legitimacy issue affected the generation now in its 30s and 40s. Whether the large, increasingly well-educated young generation of Catholics now under 30 will react in similar ways is not yet clear from the data. The entire issue is of sufficient impact to the life of the Catholic Church in the U.S., however, that it beckons careful empirical analysis before the debate lines are drawn. Some of our future reports will address the perspectives of core Catholics on Church policy issues.

The Effects of Life-Cycle

Our Report 2 pointed to the large number of singles among U.S. Catholics. Based on GSS data, about 44% of adult Catholics are currently single — i.e., never married (22%), widowed (9%), separated or divorced (13%). Beyond the *current* singles, another 12% were separated and reconciled, or divorced and remarried. The life-cycle for Catholics has become far more complex than the usual pattern: young and single, then married, later children, then widowed. If religious needs and parish participation are in part a function of stage in the life-cycle, we need to examine the religious practices of Catholics in different marital stages and family compositions.

Within the CPL data, those who are currently widowed, married, or have never married are likely to attend Mass more frequently than those who are separated, divorced and remarried, or divorced and remain single, in that order. The mean Mass attendance for the former is nearly every week. The mean Mass attendance for the latter is about every other week. But that is for a sample of Catholics with parish connections. When we look at the GSS data for *all* Catholics, we find the gap even wider between the married and those who have suffered some marital difficulties. The widowed in the national samples are attending Mass about three times a month; married people on the average attend 2-3 times a month; the never-married average a little over once a month; but the separated and the divorced-and-remarried are slightly under once a month; and the divorced-but-not-remarried attend substantially less than once a month.

Returning to the core Catholics, we find large differences in patterns of communion reception. The widowed, more often than not elderly, commune virtually every time they are at Mass. Those currently married and those never-married are communing an estimated 85% of the time they are at Mass; separated, about 90% of the time they are at Mass; divorced and single, about 70% of the time; and divorced and remarried persons about 35% of the time they are at Mass. We do not know the proportion of the remarried Catholics communing who have received annulments, and are thus "legally" within the sacramental ministry of the Church, or the proportion that are "pastorally" received to the communion without annulment. But the data are very striking: even among those Catholics with parish connections, those who suffer divorce are more

isolated from the Mass; but those who are divorced and remarried show some evidence of trying to reconnect with the Church — their Mass attendance is slightly higher than the divorced — and yet they do not commune, either because their pastor will not allow it or, more likely, they are apprehensive that Church norms will not tolerate it.

It is no surprise that we received many expressions of alienation, anger, and frustration from the divorced and remarried, both on our questionnaires and in letters addressed to us. About 1/4 of adult Catholics in the GSS data have suffered divorce or separation; about half of that group has remarried. In the perceptions of divorced and remarried Catholics, the Church has not yet fashioned a pastoral way to cope with the pervasive American cultural phenomenon of *serial polygamy*. Some observers contend that the average length of a marriage has not varied greatly in this country from earlier times to the present, but the length of life has. Therefore, in earlier times spouses died younger and death was the cause of parting. Remarriage was common. Now, spouses live longer and divorce is the manner of parting. And remarriage is common. The implications of this cultural phenomenon for Church norms are likely to draw increasing study and pastoral attention. (And as we will see in the next section of this report, only 20% of the American parishes offer an organized ministry to the divorced or separated.)

Even within the intact family, there are differences in religious participation that reflect stages in the life-cycle. To test the effect of life-cycle on religious rite, we divided the CPL sample into different groups — (1) the never married; (2) those who were ever married, under 40, and thus far had no children; (3) those who were ever married, over 40, and probably would not have children; (4) those who were ever married with all children under eighteen; (5) those who were ever married with some children under eighteen and some over eighteen; (6) those who were ever married with all children over eighteen; and (7) the widowed. The interplay between both age and family situation is apparent in the data. Those least likely to participate in three rites — Mass, communion, and confession — are group 2, those married, under 40, and with no children. Those next least likely to participate are group 3, those married with young children. From there, participation increases with each stage from married with growing children, married with grown children, on up to the highest participation by the widowed. That stage in the family cycle alone does not explain religious participation can be seen with never married Catholics; their participation level in these three rites is closest to that of married people with grown children. (Other analyses we are doing sort out the extent to which participation in religious rites is a function of both age and the presence of children, of marriage alone, or of any combination of these.)

Some social scientists have claimed that deep participation in religious rites and church activities becomes a surrogate for family involvements among those whose children are grown. We have sufficient data to address that issue but will defer it to Report 4 where we will examine the purposes for which Catholics feel their parish exists.

Parish Activities

Catholic parishes offer a diverse range of ministries, programs, or activities for the participation or service of parishioners. Many activities are formally organized and often involve staff time. Others develop episodically as a group of parishioners band together to explore common interests. Table I presents a summary of formally organized programs in the approximately 1,100 parishes nationwide in our Study. Beyond regular religious rites, individual parishes try to put together the constellation of activities that meet their particular needs. The table attests that parishes have far more experience with programs addressed to the young or the sick than with programs addressed to divorced, to social action, or to lay ministry training. The immigrant parish is still in transition toward a post-Vatican II parish within contemporary American culture.

Table I
Organized Programs in U.S. Catholic Parishes

<i>Program, Activity</i>	<i>% of Parishes Having Program</i>
Parish Grade School	45
CCD — Elementary Level	93
CCD — High School Level	84
Adult Religious Education Programs	63
Liturgical Planning Group	72
Prayer/Reflection Groups	46
Youth Ministry Programs	62
Marriage/Family Development Programs	48
Social Service Programs	52
Social Action Programs	20
Evangelization Programs	32
Charismatic Renewal	23
Ministry to Divorced/Separated	20
Ministry to Aged	59
Rite of Christian Initiation (Catechumenate)	32
Music and Cultural Program	49
Programs for Care of Sick	71
Parish Council	76
Ministry Training Programs	37
Parish Leadership Training Programs	27
Parish Planning Process	34
Parish Renewal Program	29

Earlier we characterized U.S. Catholics as being highly capable of participation in parish ministries and programs nowadays. What are their patterns of participation? To answer this question, we turn to the individual parishioners and leadership data from our 36-parish intensive study. Keep in mind that we are generalizing about *core* Catholics, i.e., those with parish connections, not *all* Catholics in the U.S. Keep in mind also that there is

great variation from one parish to another; for example in small parishes, nearly half of the core Catholics may be communion ministers; in large parishes it may be less than 1/2 of one percent who do this. Yet the total number of people may be the same in each. Thus, the generalizations presented below come from estimation procedures that try to adjust for parish size. While this first report on participation gives general estimates on core Catholics, we feel that our later analyses that examine participation within *different types of parishes* will be more meaningful.

Patterns of Participation

The most notable feature is that slightly under half of the core Catholics in our sample are participating in one or more parish activities beyond religious rites. Of the parishioner sample, 21% participate in just one activity, 15% in two, 8% in three, and 6% in four or more. Among the special sample of people identified as leaders in their parishes, 14% participate in just one activity, 23% in two, 20% in three, 18% in four, and fully 25% in five or more parish activities. Many volunteers in this last group have nearly as much responsibility and spend as much time on parish programs and ministries as the pastor does.

Within the combined sample of parishioners and volunteer leaders some activities are especially noteworthy. For example, nearly seven percent are involved in parish governance through a parish council, commission or its equivalent. A fairly high proportion of core Catholics, about 1/4, are involved in some formal role connected with the celebration of liturgies: 4% are involved in liturgical planning, 6% provide music through organ, choir, cantor, or guitar; 7% are Eucharistic ministers; 4% are rectors; 7% are involved in altar preparation, breadbaking, etc.; and 2% are ushers or ministers of hospitality. When one considers the centrality and visibility of such roles as rector and Eucharistic minister in the church, as well as the proportion of core Catholics integrated into these roles, it is clear that the post-Vatican II parish reminds its parishioners that they, not just the priest, are to be deeply involved in the celebration of liturgies.

The laity are also deeply involved in religious formation, education, and spiritual renewal. Approximately 1/4 of the parishioners participate in religious growth and spiritual renewal activities: 3% are involved in Christian education planning; 10% are teaching CCD or work toward the formation of catechumens; 1% are parochial or pre-school teachers; 1% are adult discussion leaders; 6% are involved in Bible study groups within their parish; 2% are joined in prayer groups; and 5% participate in parish renewal or spiritual renewal programs. It is interesting to note that people will often go outside of the parish in search of Bible study or prayer opportunities; an additional 3% of the weighted CPL sample is involved in such extra-parish religious groups. Although formation and renewal attracts many parishioners, evangelism does not; less than 1/2 of 1% of core Catholic parishioners spend time with their parishes' evangelism efforts.

Social and charitable activities involve another substantial portion of the parishioners: 14% work on special church socials, dinners, fund-raisers, etc.; 10% are in

the sodalities and women's clubs; church fraternal organizations attract just under 8%; bingo is an important activity to 1%; 1% are in church recreational activities; 1% work with youth groups; and 1% are involved in seniors groups. Despite the high proportion of Catholics who are single, involvement in singles groups is negligible; that tempted one elderly pastor to retort, "That is why they are still single!" Ministries to the poor, the sick, the elderly, or the handicapped draw a combined 9% of the parishioners. Marriage renewal or preparation involve over 2% of the parishioners. Just as evangelism draws a minute proportion of parishioners, so do *parish* activities devoted to justice and peace, social action, and ecumenism. Participation in such activities does attract about 2% of core Catholics, but it is almost always done through some extra-parish group.

Some volunteer effort, of course, is devoted to paying the bills and keeping the church operating. Four percent of the parishioners work on parish finance, half of 1% on building committees, 3% on janitorial or maintenance duties, and 3% on secretarial, book-keeping, or parish communications chores.

Many person-hours are directed to parish activities. While 30% of core Catholics are spending an average of 5 hours per month on parish activities outside of religious rites, another 10% average 15 hours, 3% average 25 hours, and another 2% devote upwards to almost all of their discretionary time to parish activities. Within the volunteer leadership sample, however, 22% spend an average of 5 hours per month on parish activities, 25% average 15 hours, 8% average 25 hours, and 12% devote almost all their discretionary time to parish activities.

Woman's Prominent Role

Just as participation in religious rite has a female face, so does participation in parish activities. More so. But, there is also a male/female division of labor in certain parish activities. Some are no surprises. For example, over 80% of the ushers and ministers of hospitality are men, but over 85% of those responsible for altar preparation are women. Some other roles are differentiated in ways that are traditional, but the implications of the difference may not be clearly understood. For example, women have traditionally been in nurturing roles; to some extent, religious formation is a nurturing role. Thus over 80% of the CCD teachers and sponsors of the catechumenate are women. Yet, do young males then assume that serious religious studies are a women's business? Certainly parish males do not develop a habit of religious study that carries into adulthood: among those who lead or participate in adult Bible studies or religious discussion, for example, over 75% are women; among those who are active in parish renewal and spiritual growth, over 70% are women; among those who join with prayer groups, 80% are women. Even with recreational programs and youth ministries we find that nearly 60% of those involved are women. As more women enter the labor market and have less discretionary time for parish activities, are we to assume that religious learning and related activities will be more evenly distributed among men and women? Probably not — unless laymen take on greater responsibility for the nurturance and religious formation of young people in the parish.

Acts of mercy also belong to the women. When we examine the range of programs designed to help the poor, visit the sick, comfort the grieving, and minister to the handicapped, we find that over 85% of those who lead or assist in these ministries are women. Involvement in justice and peace efforts is also heavily female.

"Surely *policy-making* in the parish is the man's domain" Curiously, the data suggest that parish councils are split about 48% male and 52% female. When one considers that parishes in our sample were about 45% male and 55% female, the tendency toward male over-representation is ever so slight. In fact, many parishes have made special efforts to place both the husband and wife in a married couple on the parish council. "Even if there are not as many men, surely they are more *influential* in parish governance," some would argue. Beyond the role of the pastor, always male, even that is questionable. Our efforts to identify the most influential parishioners in our 36 parishes — the parish leaders — produced a list that is 58% female, 42% male, exclusive of the pastor.

"Well surely the visible roles in the liturgy are held predominately by men" you say. That is where another surprise came. Indeed rectors are split about 50/50. With Eucharistic ministers it is another matter. We have two ways of discovering what types of people serve as communion ministers. We asked pastors of the 1,100 parishes to list how many men and women serve in this role within their parish. Then we asked parishioners in the 36-parish intensive study what activities they participated in. Using figures supplied by the pastors, we find that half the communion ministers are male and half are female. Using figures supplied by parishioners themselves in the 36-parish study, we find that 60% of the Eucharistic ministers are women, a figure almost identical to the proportion of regular Mass attenders who are women.

Regardless of which figure is the more accurate, clearly within 20 years after Vatican II, women have become visible in liturgical roles that were previously reserved for men, and ordained men at that. Obviously also, parishioners are noticing the presence of laymen and laywomen in these important responsibilities in the Mass; 17% feel uneasy about laypersons serving as communion ministers and 20% are uncomfortable with laywomen in such roles. But another way to state the second finding is that 80% of core Catholics either welcome or have adjusted to women in the sanctuary. And these are not only women religious, but especially laywomen. Perhaps that is to be expected in a Catholic population that is increasingly educated and participatory.

Probably few of us are fully aware of the extent to which we depend on women to conduct the ministries, programs, and activities of Catholic parishes in the United States. From traditional nurture and mercy roles to new governance and liturgical roles—besides their priests, American Catholic parishes rely heavily on their women members. This is not to slight the role of *lay* men but to recognize the many responsibilities shouldered by women.

Singles, Marrieds, Parents

In nearly all categories of parish programs and ministries, married persons are more likely to be active than single persons. When we compare different life-cycle groups we find that those who devote the most time to parish activities are the parents of families with children some of whom are under age 18 and some of whom are grown. Not surprisingly, these are the same people who felt their parish did the best job of meeting their social needs. In a sense, participating is its own reward. But the figures may also attest that many parishes have made the intact family unit the primary focus of their attention and have ignored the needs of singles. The only activities, for example, that attract a disproportionately large number of young singles, or the separated or divorced, are liturgical planning and music. All other activities disproportionately attract marrieds and older singles or the widowed. The fraternals and the ushers corps are heavily populated by men in their 50s to 70s; the acts of mercy are performed by the women in the same age groups.

Some specialization in activities is also reminiscent of the differences between the immigrant church and the post-Vatican II church. Younger people are not only more active in children's formation, as is to be expected, but in biblically-centered adult education and discussion groups; older people are more involved in a devotional life that manifests itself in prayer and a social life located in the sodalities and fraternals. Interestingly, the visible liturgical roles such as rector and communion minister span the generations and are heavily populated by married people in their 40s through 60s. Again, our data do not yet indicate whether the devotional activities associated with the immigrant church will attract the present young and middle-aged parishioners as they grow older, or whether they will maintain interest in the activities that have had more emphasis in the post-Vatican II parish. Those would be speculations moving well beyond our data. But at least we now have base lines against which to measure future developments within the U.S. Catholic parishes.

Report 4 will continue to examine participation within the parish. However, instead of a primary focus on the social location and life-cycle of parishioners, it will address their normative definition of what a parish is supposed to be, what activities and services they expect from their parishes, and their sense of what should be future priorities for their parishes.

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PREVIOUS REPORTS

Report #1

The U.S. Parish Twenty Years After Vatican II: An Introduction To The Study

Report #2

A Profile of American Catholic Parishes and Parishioners: 1820s to the 1980s