



CATHOLICS IN THE UNITED STATES:

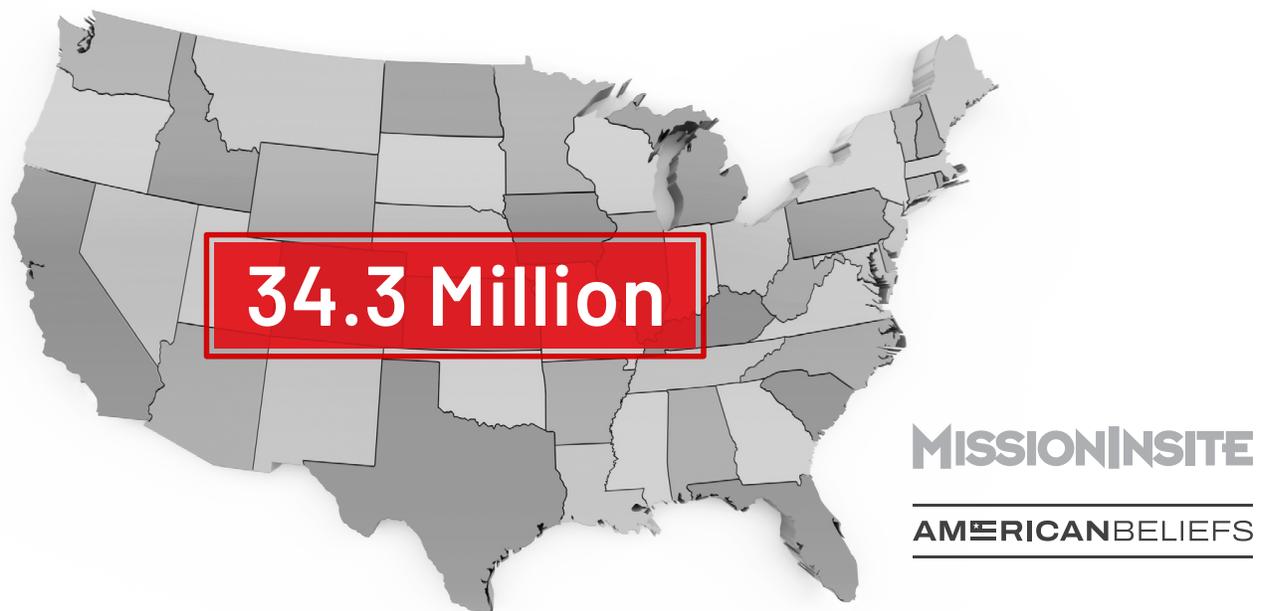
# Who are We, and Who is Missing?

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ACS Technologies.

The study *Catholics in the United States: Who Are We, and Who is Missing* has been conducted to fully understand the people who identify as active Catholics in the United States. It also identifies opportunities to foster broader relationships that encourage new people to the Catholic faith. The study identifies and describes the most and least represented lifestyles of the U.S. population who are active Catholics.

The research is based on a statistically sound sample of the 34.3 Million people in the U.S. who identify as active Catholics. Researchers used MissionInsite, a data modeling software from ACS Technologies, to produce the analysis. Sources of input include Epsilon, Experian 'Mosaics,' Synergos, the U.S. Census, and research from the American Beliefs Study (an ACST longitudinal study of over 14,900 respondents across the United States).



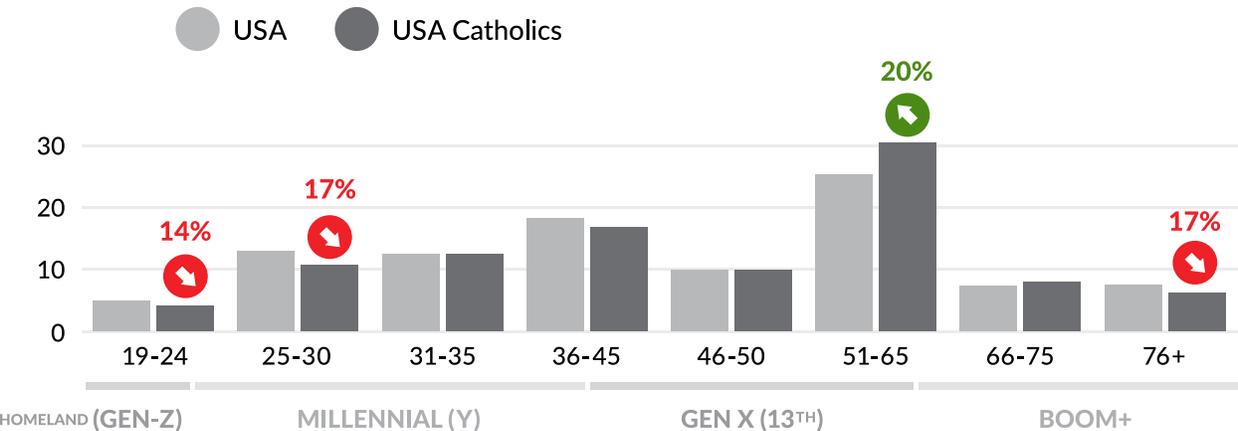
The information provides church leaders insights into who comprises U.S. Catholics, their beliefs and life concerns, and the generational trends associated with Catholics. Perhaps more importantly, it provides a view of the lifestyles of those who are present in the population but missing as active Catholics, the people who could be invited into a relationship with the Catholic Church.

This study is a broad look at Catholics across the United States and provides directional information for church leadership. More specific detail can be gained from similar studies based on a specific diocese or parish's geography.

# National Landscape

## Age

Overall, U.S. Catholics tend to be older than the average U.S. population. When viewed by generational age groups, Catholics are most likely early Gen Xers and late Boomers. Over 30% of Catholics are aged 51-65, which is 20% more than the U.S. population. The second largest group (17%) of Catholics are early Millennials and some early Gen Xers. There are 14% fewer very young and 17% fewer very elderly Catholics compared to the U.S. population.



National 10-year generation projections indicate significant (34%) growth in Gen Z (19-24 years old) and a decline in all other generational groups. This is a warning for The Catholic Church. Catholics are less likely to be part of the growing generations of people in the U.S. The most likely Catholic generational groups, Boomers and Gen Xers are expected to decrease by 23% and 2.6%, respectively, over the next decade. Active Gen Z Catholics are mostly the children of Gen X and Millennial parents, which indicates a possible decline in the impact of the domestic church on the beliefs and practices of Gen Z adults.

## Income

Catholic average income is 19% higher than in the general population, but they hold fewer advanced degrees. The median Catholic income is 20% lower than the national median, indicating a wide distribution of incomes, with a few very high-income levels skewing the average higher for Catholics. The giving potential of Catholics is enormous. Based on average incomes, if all active Catholics gave a tithe of 10%, it would total \$2.4 trillion in additional income for the Catholic church.

## Ethnicity/Race

Catholics are more likely to be Hispanic in comparison to the U.S. population. Over 50% of the Catholic population is White, which is 20% lower than the average U.S. population. 36% of Catholics are Hispanic, which is 78% higher than the U.S. average. Those people of Asian or African heritage only represent single-digit percentages of Catholics.

In summary, Catholics are more likely to be older, Hispanic, and hold fewer advanced degrees than the average person in the United States. Some Catholics are significantly wealthier, while the majority have lower average incomes. While 17% of Catholics are 36-45, there are fewer Gen Z Catholics, which compounds the potential decline in attendance and a more rapid decline in giving to fund The Church.



**HOMELAND (Z)**  
+ 24,957,404  
+ 35.7%



**BOOM**  
- 11,779,816  
- 22.7%



**MILLENNIAL (Y)**  
- 560,052  
- 0.6%



**SILENT**  
- 11,189,047  
- 63.2%



**GEN X (13<sup>TH</sup>)**  
- 2,267,872  
- 2.6%



**GI**  
- 1,908,093  
- 67.2%

Generational Population 10 Year Change | Total 2022 Population: 330,018,993 | 2032 Projected Population: 327, 271, 517

# Who are We? Lifestyle and priorities

The study examines the top Mosaics for Catholics in the U.S. Mosaics are produced based on Experian credit agency demographic and behavioral profiles on nearly every American household. The profiles are a segmentation system describing over 126,000,000 households across over 800 different lifestyle and interest attributes. The system seeks to provide a multi-dimensional view of a household considering multiple socio-economic and life-stage factors.

By examining the extremes of which lifestyle segments are most likely and least likely to be active Catholic households, the study provides a clear picture of the interests and priorities of most typical Catholics. The study compares the segments most often occurring as active Catholics to those segments that occur significantly less often than in the general U.S. population to foster ideas about engaging people in a personal experience with a parish.

The study seeks to equip Catholic leaders with information that can help form more personal relationships with current active parishioners, identify informed connections to inactive or disassociated Catholics, and identify ways the parish can invite them into the community.

## Most Likely Catholic

There are three Mosaic types that represent over 13% of Catholics in the U.S. In other words, most Catholics could be described as *Expanding Horizons*, *Fast Track Couples*, or *Aging in Place*.



### **EXPANDING HORIZONS**

5% or  
1,735,000 Households



### **FAST TRACK COUPLES**

4.1% or  
1,417,000 Households



### **AGING IN PLACE**

4% or  
1,367,000 Households

5% of the Catholic population (approximately 1.7 million households) are described as *Expanding Horizons*. This group is middle-aged and mid-scale in income. They tend to be Hispanic and live primarily in U.S. border cities. They have a high devotion to family and place high importance on their religious faith. They seek worship programs that give them strength and hope and rely on the parish as a community center for social service and self-help.

*TIP: The best way to reach these people is on Instagram, Snapchat, or via radio video casts.*

*Fast Track Couples* are 4% or about 1.4 million U.S. Catholic households. This segment is a mix of singles and couples living fashionable lives in urban neighborhoods. They have a great deal of change in their lives, including homes, possessions, and the volume of instant messaging. *Fast Track Couples* have few absolute principles and do not spend time thinking about moral and ethical behavior. They are self-focused and not involved in their community. These couples and individuals are lonely, with few, if any, authentic, deep, and lasting relationships.

*TIP: The best way to reach them is on Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, and text.*

The *Aging in Place* segment represents 4% or about 1.37 million U.S. Catholic households. People who are *Aging in Place* are living solid middle-class suburban lifestyles, establishing deep roots in their communities. They are devoted to faith and family and enjoy being at home. Most are ready to retire but settled and comfortable in locations across the country near large and mid-size cities. This segment tends to identify as social conservatives. They attend Mass each week and are generally happy with their standard of living.

*TIP: The best way to reach this group is via direct mail or newspaper.*

Of these three groups, only one, *Expanding Horizons*, is both one of the largest Catholic segments and more likely to be Catholic in comparison to the general U.S. population. People who are *Expanding Horizons* are almost four times more likely to be Catholic.

The other two groups that are more highly found in the Catholic data than in the U.S. Population are *Steadfast Conventionalists* and *Balance and Harmony*.



**STEADFAST  
CONVENTIONALISTS**

3.9% or  
1,335,000 Households



**BALANCE  
& HARMONY**

2.9% or  
1,006,000 Households

*Steadfast Conventionalists* are 2.8 times more likely to be Catholic than the average person in the U.S. This group of 1.3 Million households is comprised of conventional Gen X families located in selected coastal city homes. This segment is multicultural, with a strong work ethic and a drive for affluence. Typically first-generation immigrants in their 40s and 50s, Spanish culture informs their lives, which includes a high priority on religion.

*TIP: The best way to reach this group is on their phone or via email.*

The 1.0 Million households considered to be *Balance and Harmony* are 2.4 times more likely to be Catholic than the overall U.S. population. These are middle-class families living in city neighborhoods. This group is committed to career and affluence over simplicity. They are first-generation immigrants, younger than *Steadfast Conventionalists*, who also are informed by Spanish culture, particularly Mexican. They are influenced by marketing, media, and their peers. While religion is important to them, they can be flexible on family values.

*TIP: The best way to connect with them is by email and podcast/radio.*

# Least Often Catholic

An understanding of the lifestyle segments who are less represented as active Catholics can inform our opportunity for evangelization and missionary discipleship in the United States. The three segments who are least represented from the US population are *Picture Perfect Families*, *Red White and Bluegrass* and *Sport Utility Families*.



## **PICTURE PERFECT FAMILIES**

0.4% or  
145,000 Households



## **RED, WHITE, AND BLUEGRASS**

0.6% or  
214,000 Households



## **SPORT UTILITY FAMILIES**

0.5% or  
168,000 Households

145,000 Catholics (0.4%) are classified as *Picture Perfect Families*. A Catholic community is 67% less likely to include people from this lifestyle segment in comparison to the overall population distribution. The families in this segment tend to be established, raising children and living in wealthy suburbs. They are civic-minded and place importance on their communities and the morality of society. The church is important for helping to ensure societal mores and for fellowship and community. They want Church to “make sense” and fit into their rational way of viewing the world.

*TIP: The best way to contact these households is through email or direct mail.*

Catholic communities are 64% less likely to include *Red, White and Bluegrass* households. This study indicates that 0.6% or 214,000 Catholic households are in this lifestyle segment. These lower-middle-income families often have adult children and live in the rural eastern and southern U.S.. They have a strong sense of history and tradition and have moved from farming to construction, transportation, and healthcare jobs. God and Church are very important and are part of their lives, especially a Church that focuses on family. Faith and a Christian lifestyle are a priority.

*TIP: The best way to reach these people is through radio or Pinterest.*

*Sport Utility Families* comprise 0.5% or 168,000 Catholic households. This is 62% less than is typical across the U.S. population. These upscale Gen X families have school-age children and live a fairly conservative lifestyle in new outlying suburban developments. Family is important, and may include adult children or elderly parents living in the household. They are focused on their children, driving SUVs or trucks to transport them to many activities. These families also tend to get involved in their school, community, and church groups.

*TIP: The best way to connect with them is through television, direct mail, or email.*

The Catholic church has been especially successful in serving and inspiring Hispanic people. The efforts of dioceses across the United States to incorporate Spanish culture and language and the focus and learning provided by Encuentro are evident in the overrepresentation of *Expanding Horizons*, *Steadfast Conventionalists*, and *Balance and Harmony*. Note that these segments differ in their priorities and preferred forms of communication. *Aging in Place* and *Fast Track Couples* are the particular lifestyle segments the Catholic Church engages from the Gen X and Boomer age groups. The missing groups are in rural, suburban, and urban households whose lifestyles seem to align with Catholic priorities yet want Church to make sense and fit their schedules.

*ACTION ITEM: Evaluate what ministries you offer that may appeal to these underrepresented groups in your community. Hold events that appeal to these groups and make a special effort to invite and engage them.*

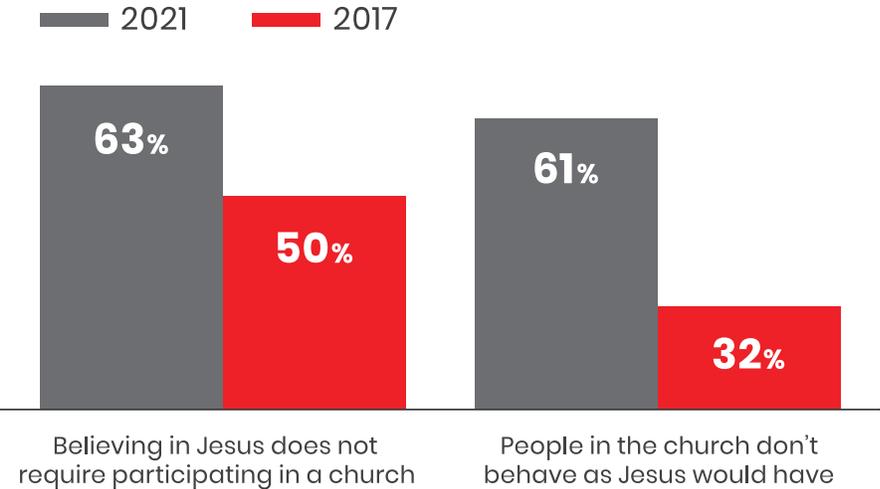
# Catholic Beliefs

Catholic responses to questions about beliefs, Mass, and attendance show a distinction between believing in Jesus and the importance of attending Mass. 71% agree (45% strongly agree) that Jesus was divine and human. 66% agree (44% strongly agree) that Jesus actually rose from the dead. At the same time, 63% of all respondents and 69% of Catholics agree (34% strongly agree) that belief in Jesus does not require participation in a Church, a response that has increased from 50% to 69% since 2010. This indicates a loss in personal connection to the parish community and a serious lack of understanding of the importance and meaning of the Eucharist.

*ACTION ITEM: Discussing why the church is an important element within the Catholic faith may resonate with some members who are waivering on attending regularly. Post this discussion on your website and encourage lapsed attendees to view it.*

## GROWING MAJORITY OF AMERICANS ISOLATES FROM CHURCH

Six in ten say churchgoing is irrelevant and Christians are hypocritical



Source: American Beliefs Study, Surveys conducted with 45,000+ respondents 2013-2023. © 2023 ACS Technologies Group Inc

# Reasons for not attending

There are many possible reasons Catholics have lost the connection to participating in Mass. Covid-19 broke the rhythm of the people who were participating out of habit. Technological and societal shifts allow people to be more independent and therefore lose some of the perceived need for community.

Another reason people may respond that “believing in Jesus does not require participation in a church” is that our parishes are not inspiring or helping them in their belief. People have left the church but not the faith. The top three reasons respondents use for not participating in church, according to the American Beliefs study, are:

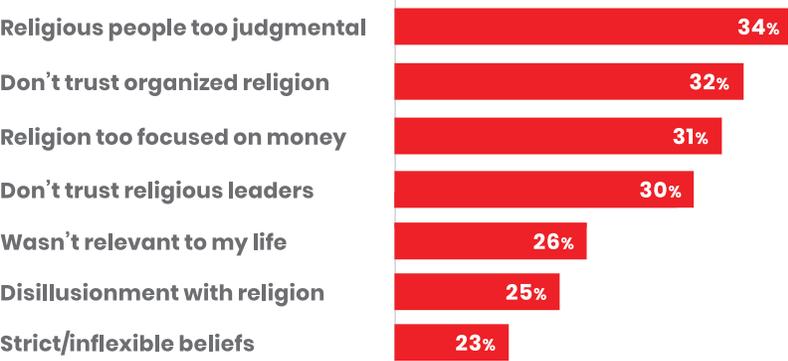
- 1. Religious people are too judgmental.
- 2. They don't trust organized religion.
- 3. Religion is too focused on money.

*ACTION ITEM: Take a look at your parish. Have you lost people post-COVID because of any of these reasons? Do an outreach effort and ask why they haven't returned.*

These, along with the other top reasons, infer that our parishes and churches have become accustomed to doing things a certain way and no longer works for large numbers of people. In *From Christendom to Apostolic Mission: Pastoral Strategies for an Apostolic Age*, Msgr. Shea writes: “In a Christendom culture the Church as a whole is tempted to lose its spiritual and otherworldly character and to become merely a this-worldly body, a department of state or a promising career path, a center of civilized activities rather than the mystical body of Christ...Attending to the moral and ritual life of the church can become perfunctory, valued only for immediately tangible effects.”

## AMERICANS SHUN RELIGIOUS LIFE DUE TO THE PEOPLE, THE LEADERS, AND THE RELIGION

Top responses to “How much did each of these items influence your reasons for not participating in a religious congregation or religious community?”



Source: American Beliefs Study, Surveys conducted with 45,000+ respondents 2013-2023. © 2023 ACS Technologies Group Inc

# Life Concerns and Parish Community

Covid-19 has been the overriding top concern for Catholics across the country. With this noted, 53% of Catholics are concerned about social/political tensions that find their way into the church. Catholics are also concerned about potential issues with health (24%) and finance for the future or general fear of the future (21%). Gen Z respondents are most fearful of the future (37%) and financing the future (32%), followed by social/political tensions.

When asked what they seek in a parish community, Catholics most often responded with “warm and friendly encounters” (62% agree, 31% strongly agree). Second, with 57% agreeing (37% strongly agree) is “celebration of the sacraments,” closely followed by “quality sermons” (57% agree, 31% strongly agree).

People seek the environment and community to help them overcome their fears and concerns. They are seeking relationships in addition to inspiration from Mass and the sacraments. They are concerned about their financial resources and a social environment that is increasingly divisive. When parishes fail to prioritize deep hospitality, there is little opportunity for a visitor or occasional attendee to build trust and confidence in the parish community. When the parish fails to prioritize the excellence of the Mass experience, few people are inspired to hope and believe.

*ACTION ITEM: How is your parish welcoming visitors and those that only attend occasionally? Beyond donuts and coffee, are you welcoming them at the door? Engaging them as they leave the service? Encouraging them to fill out a visitor card? Reaching out to them within days to invite them back?*

# Summary

On a national level, active Catholics tend to be older and, while 50% of Catholics are Caucasian, more likely than the general population to be Hispanic. Active Catholics have a higher average income, therefore more financial potential to support the Church.

A look at Mosaic lifestyles confirms that Catholics are more likely Hispanic, with those lifestyles represented more often than the general population. There is opportunity to build on the relationships of the active Catholics who are not well represented to build connections to more people in Picture Perfect Families, Red, White and Bluegrass and Sport Utility Families.

There is an increase in 'disconnection' with parish communities as Catholics say that believing in Jesus does not require participation in a parish. Yet Catholics have concerns about discord, finances and the future. Catholic parishes can provide the security and inspiration people seek. But to accomplish this, parishes must prioritize an environment of welcome and hospitality that creates space for people to form trust and begin to develop relationships in the community.

Catholic parishes can provide the opportunity for the Holy Spirit to act through understanding who the people are in the parish and the surrounding community, their interests and lifestyles, and using this information for personal interaction. By prioritizing welcome, encouraging personal connections and conducting inspiring Mass celebration, parishes increase participation, serve the community, and become vibrant and thriving centers of faith.

## Let's Talk

**Terry Poplava** serves as General Manager, ACST Catholic. As a cradle Catholic, his faith was lukewarm until he was challenged by the intense challenge and commitment he heard in the message about Stewardship. "*What do I own and what owns me?*" which led him to executive roles at Our Sunday Visitor and Catholic Leadership Institute before his current focus on serving the Catholic Church at ACS Technologies. Terry has extensive experience working with churches across the U.S., supporting their planning, stewardship, and engagement efforts.

email [TerryP@acst.com](mailto:TerryP@acst.com)