

The Evolving Landscape of U.S. Catholic Beliefs in 2025

ACSI Catholic

FAITH

in

FLUX

An Update to American Beliefs Research

Terry Poplava

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Jesus Rising — and Catholics, Too:

Faith Gains Ground Amid Mixed Signals

In a time of shifting landscapes, both inside our churches and across society, U.S. Catholics are showing signs of both deepening faith and growing complexity in how they live it out. More than ever, Catholics are confident in their belief in Jesus and are cultivating a personal relationship with Him. Yet, paradoxically, many are questioning the traditional structures of parish life, with some feeling their faith doesn't depend on regular church attendance, and others wrestling with distrust of organized religion.

These nuanced and sometimes contradictory trends emerge from the latest ACST American Beliefs research, which builds on a dozen years of data to paint a rich, detailed portrait of Catholic belief and practice in America today. As we dive into these findings, we see a faith community grappling with challenges and opportunities in equal measure—seeking connection, tradition, and meaning in an evolving world.



10 They, however, were rebellious in their counsel, and so sank down in their iniquity.
11 Nevertheless He looked upon their distress.
12 When He heard their cry,
13 And He remembered His covenant for their sake,
14 And relented according to the greatness of His lovingkindness, *was over*
15 He also made them objects of compassion.
16 He said: "Let them be released from the presence of all their captors."
17 Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the nations, to give thanks to Thy holy name, and glory in Thy praise.
18 Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting even to everlasting. And let all the people say, "Amen."
19 Praise the LORD.
Halleluiah

11 Because they had despised His words of God,
12 And spurned the counsel of His voice,
13 Therefore He humbled their heart with labor.
14 They stumbled and there was no help.
15 Then they cried out to the LORD in trouble.
16 He saved them out of their distress, and He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death.
17 And broke their bands apart.
18 Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness.
19 And for His wonders to men.
20 For He has shattered bars of iron, and cut bars of iron asunder.
21 Fools, because of their rebellion, and because of their unbelief, were afflicted.
22 Their soul abhorred all food of theirs, and they drew near to the gates of death.
23 Then they cried out to the LORD for help.

Behind the Numbers:

The American Beliefs Study Unpacked

The American Beliefs Study is groundbreaking research into the religious preferences, practices, beliefs, and media habits of Americans. Initially conducted in 2012-2013 and then repeated in 2016-2017, 2020-2021, and 2024-2025, the study reflects the responses of roughly 60,000 participants over time. This decades-long timespan and significant polling sample size have established The American Beliefs Study as a recognized leader in understanding American religious preferences and practices. Details about the methodology, sampling and respondents are [available here](#).

Through the years, the questionnaire has retained its focus on these core topics:

- ★ Beliefs About God
- ★ Beliefs About Jesus
- ★ Beliefs About Social and Moral Issues
- ★ Faith Involvement or Non-Involvement
- ★ Life Concerns
- ★ Program and Ministry Preferences
- ★ Religious Affiliations
- ★ Religious Preferences

This document focuses specifically on the Catholic religious landscape. The 2025 data reflect the responses and trends specific to 3100 self-identified Catholics, a subset of the larger cross-denominational study.

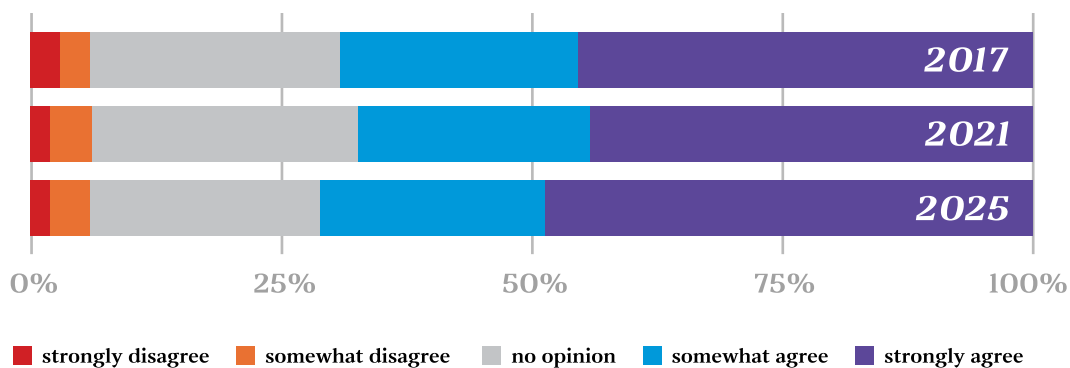
More Jesus, Less Mass?

The “Jesus Without Church” Paradox

In 2025, a larger percentage of Catholics expressed agreement that Jesus actually rose from the dead and that Jesus was both divine and human. In 2021, 44% of Catholics strongly agreed Jesus rose from the dead (67% somewhat and strongly agreed). In 2025, 49% strongly agree (72% somewhat and strongly agree). Regarding the belief that Jesus was both divine and human, agreement increased to 78%, with 50% strongly agreeing, compared to 74% overall in 2021. (See graphs 1 and 2)

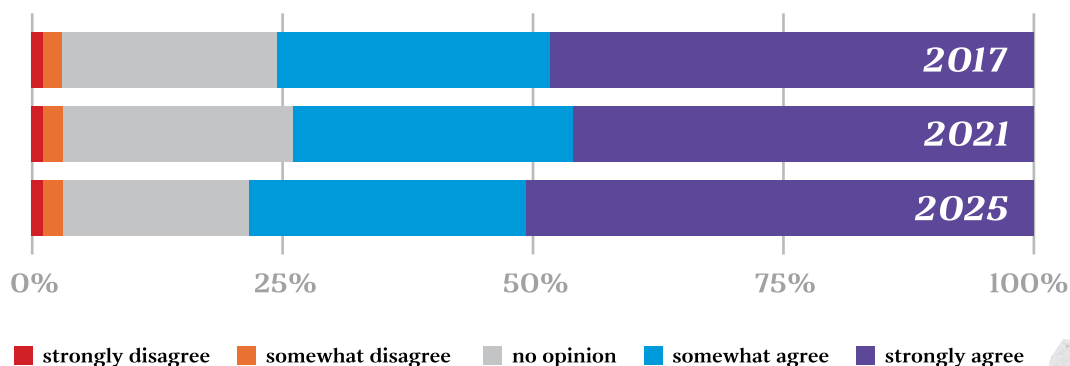
graph 1

Jesus actually rose from the dead



graph 2

Jesus was both divine and human

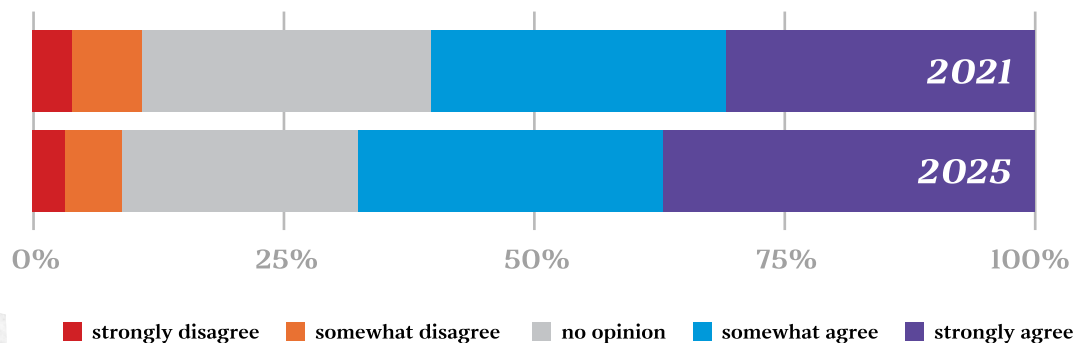


These significant changes likely stem from the national Eucharistic Revival and a renewed focus within parishes on the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In addition, the percentage of Catholics who say they have a personal relationship with Jesus has soared to 68% (37% strongly agree) from 61% in 2021 (Graph 3). This is good news for the US Catholic Church.

graph 3

I have a personal relationship with Jesus

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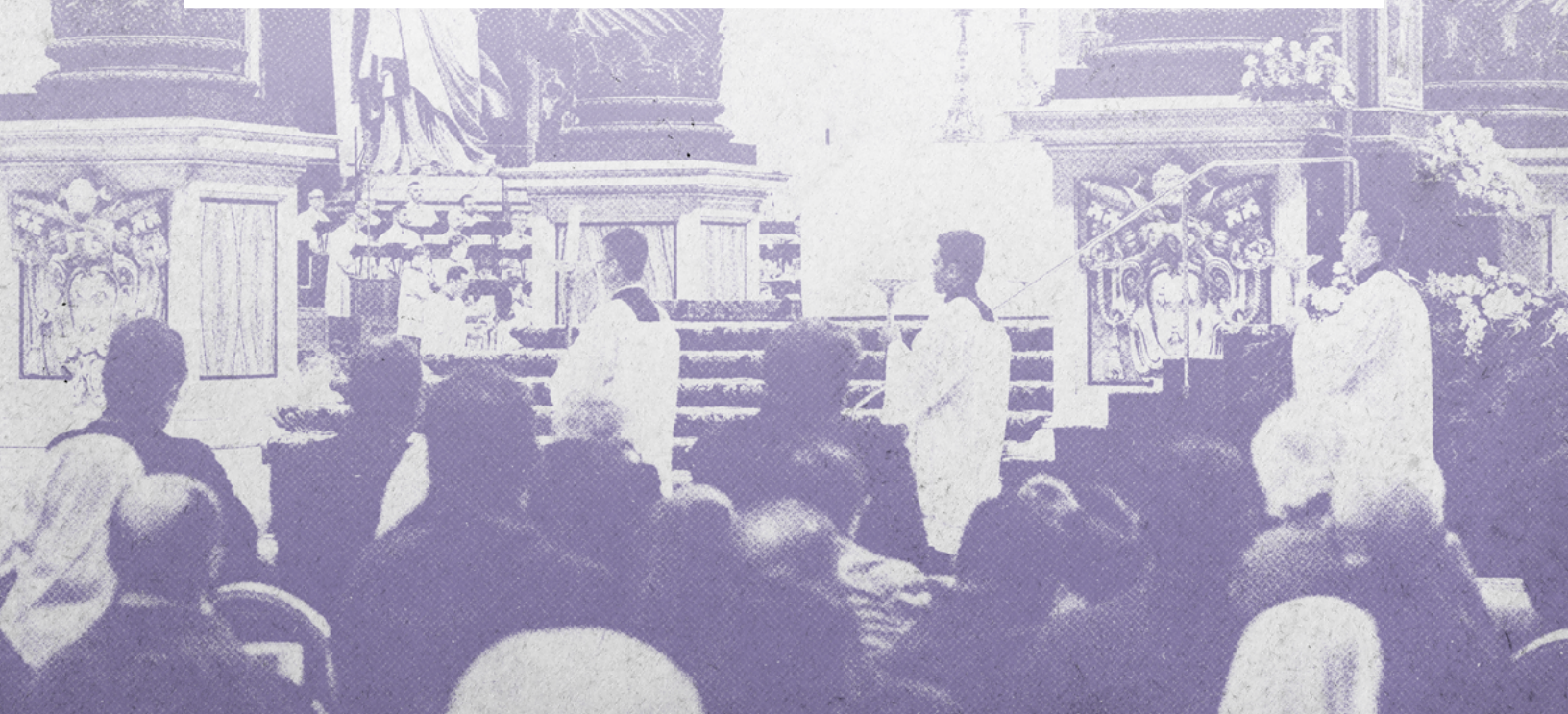
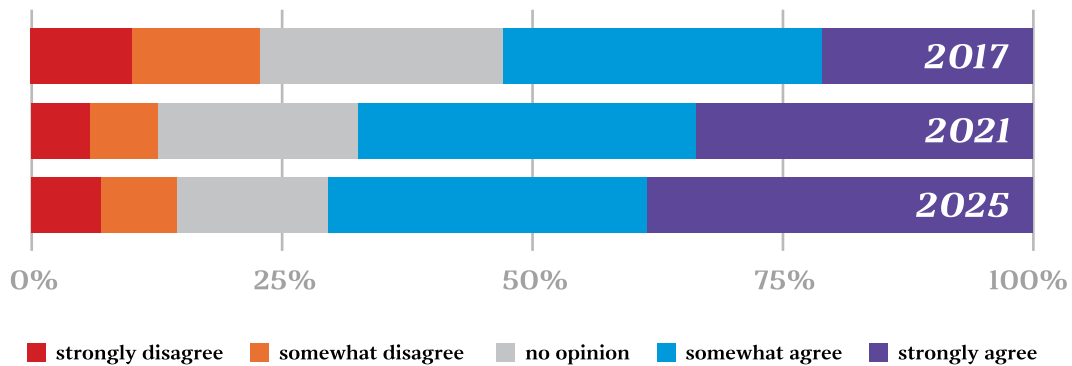
The closures and disruptions caused by COVID appear to have led to two contrasting outcomes. For some, the pandemic exposed a shallow attachment to the Church, as many Catholics who were attending Mass out of habit simply “fell out of the habit” and have not returned. Conversely, for those who remained engaged, the disruption may have deepened their faith. The data shows that those who are participating today are more aligned with Church teaching and have a stronger personal relationship with Jesus.

An area of some concern, however, is an increase in responses that believing in Jesus does not require participation in a church. (Graph 4). This grew to 71% from 68% in 2021. At an academic level, it makes sense that one can separate belief in Jesus from being part of a parish. Yet given that the Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith, we should pay attention to this response. The Catechism clearly indicates that we were meant for each other and meant to live in community with other people. *“The human person needs to live in society. Society is not for him an extraneous addition but a requirement of his nature. Through the exchange with others, mutual service and dialog with his brethren, man develops his potential; he thus responds to his vocation. (CCC 1879)”*. A personal relationship with Jesus outside of participation in a parish does not fulfill this teaching.

graph 4

Belief in Jesus does not require attending Mass

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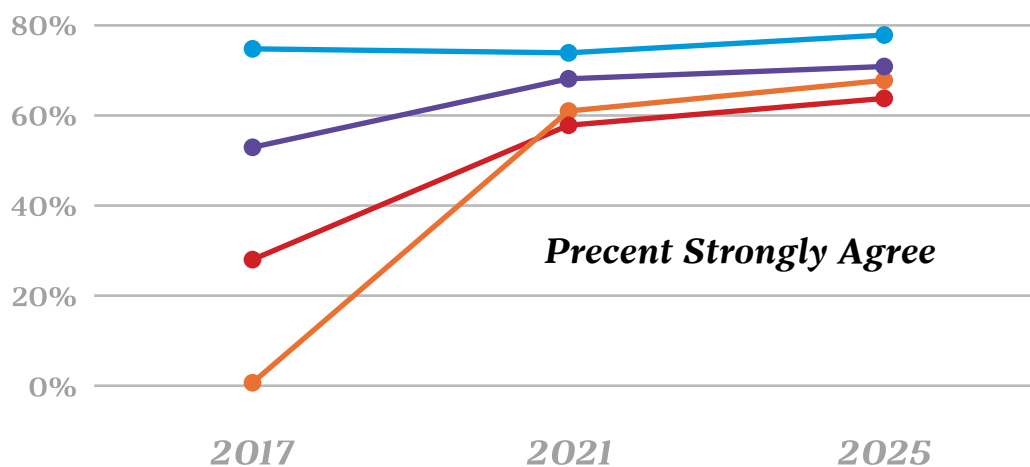
Looking at responses in line graphs shows the story over time. (Graph 5)
In this particular graph, I added the data indicating “people in the church do not behave as Jesus would behave.” There is mixed news for our parishes. Catholics believe in Jesus, but are not all experiencing their faith through their parish. We will look at more of the reasons later in this document.

graph 5

Catholic Beliefs

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- Belief in Jesus does not require participation in a church.
- I have a personal relationship with Jesus.
- People in the church do not behave as Jesus would behave.
- Jesus was both divine and human.



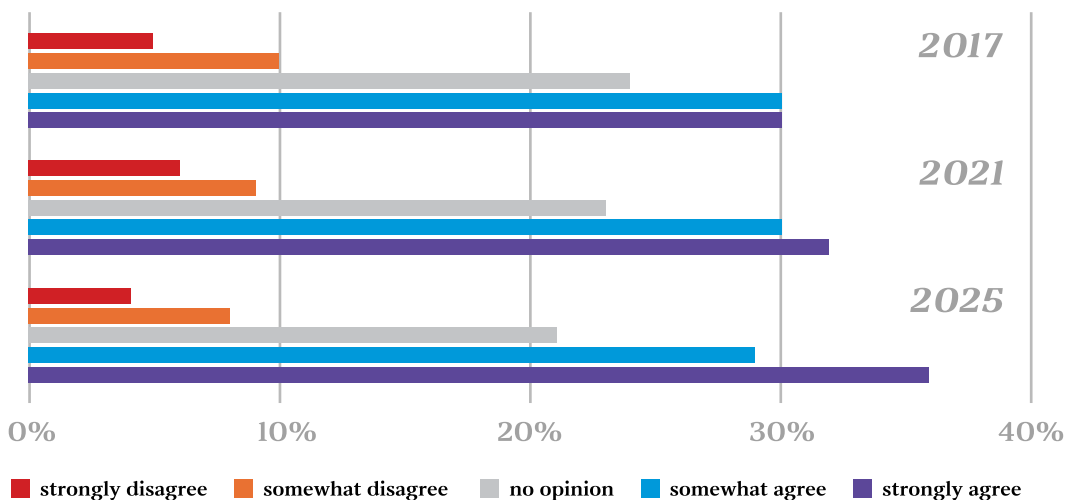
Next, let's look at the update on responses about what Catholics seek in a parish.

Looking for Love and Liturgy: What Catholics Want in a Parish

One of the surprises in the 2021 research was that Catholics most often seek “warm and friendly encounters” when looking for a new parish (a total of somewhat and strongly agree). We did an additional study in 2024 to dig into what is meant by “warm and friendly.” The 2025 response reinforces the importance of our relational Church. The top three things Catholics seek: Warm and friendly encounters (63%), Quality sermons (56%), and Celebration of Sacraments (53%). (Graphs 6, 7, and 8). Our parishes truly are a place for us to experience community, to feel that we belong together. Catholics who strongly agree that they seek warm and friendly encounters in a parish grew from 32% to 36%. However, the importance of both the celebration of sacraments (down from 37% to 33%) and quality sermons (down from 31% to 30%) both decreased.

graph 6

Seeking a parish: Warm and friendly encounters

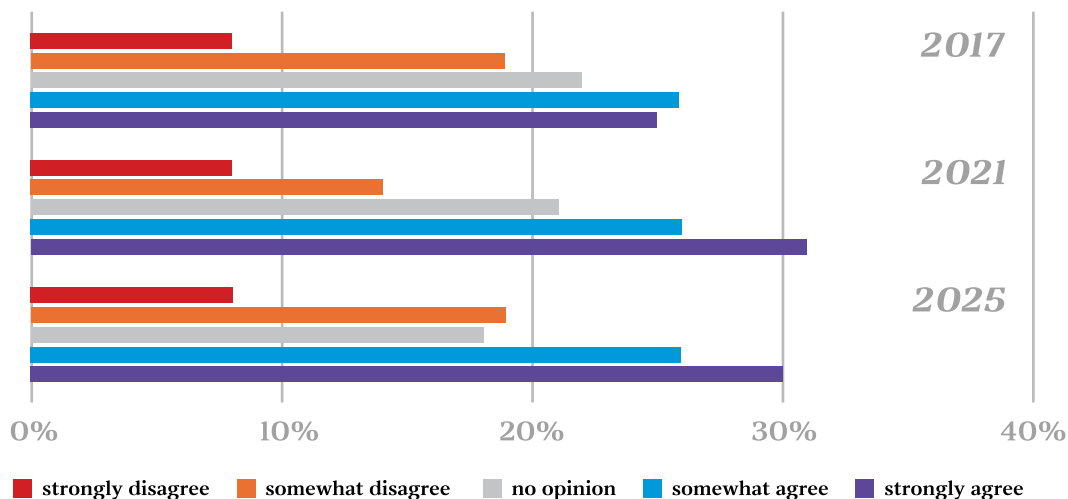


65%
Agree

graph 7

Seeking a new parish: Quality sermons

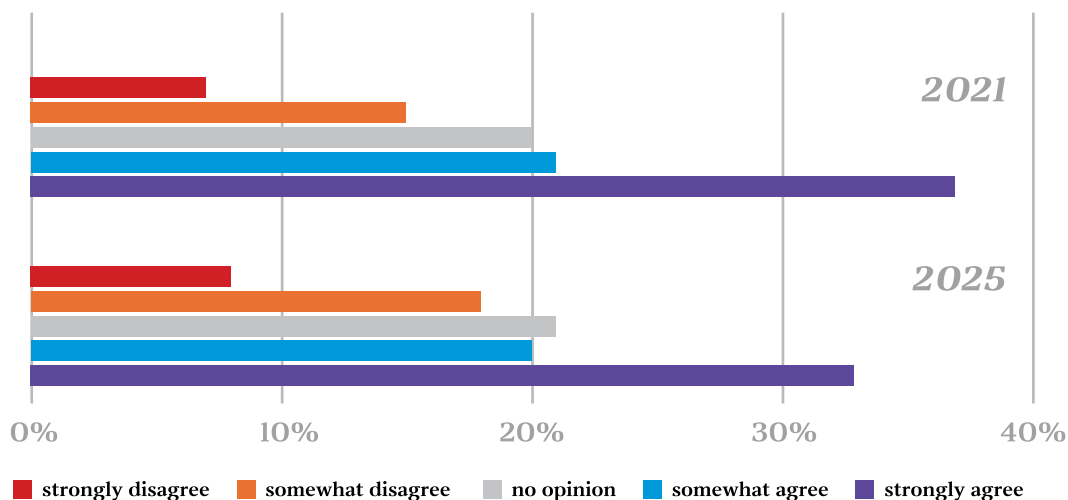
56%
Agree



graph 8

Seeking a parish: Celebration of Sacraments

53%
Agree

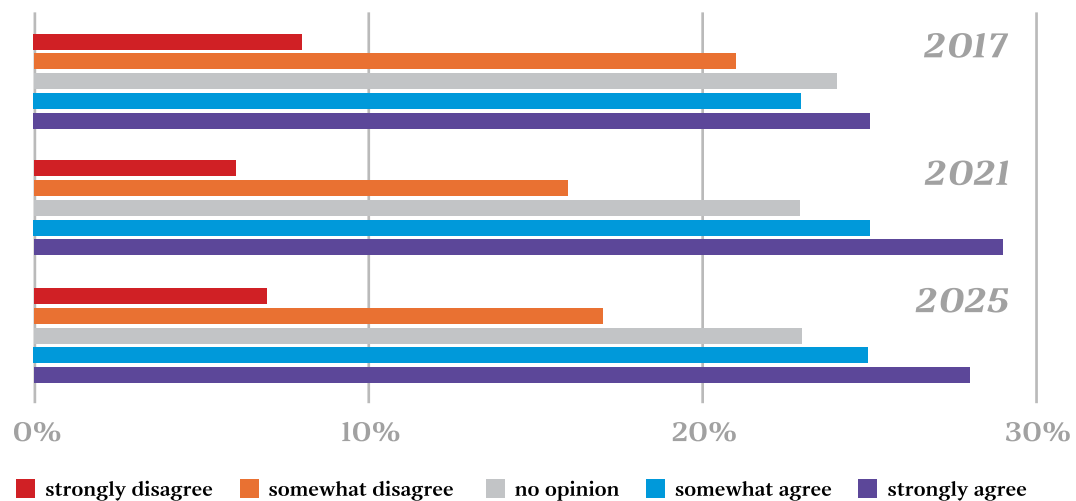


I thought it would be interesting to look at the type of worship experience Catholics are looking for. Parishioners often comment about the music at Mass and the formality of the liturgy. However, in the study, Catholics unequivocally preferred a traditional worship experience (53%) to contemporary (30%) (Graphs 9 and 10). In response to this, we see new churches designed in the traditional cruciform layout rather than “in the round” or a stadium style. Existing churches are being renovated to appear more traditional, including icons, candles, and windows. All of this is intended to instill a sense of reverence, awe, and respect for the sacred space.

graph 9

Seeking a parish: Traditional worship experiences

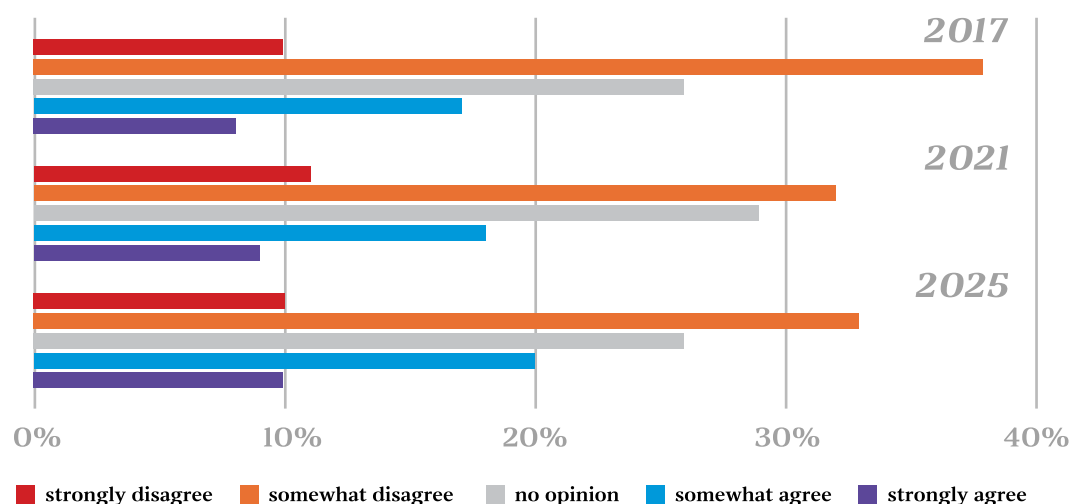
53%
Agree



graph 10

Seeking a parish: Contemporary worship experiences

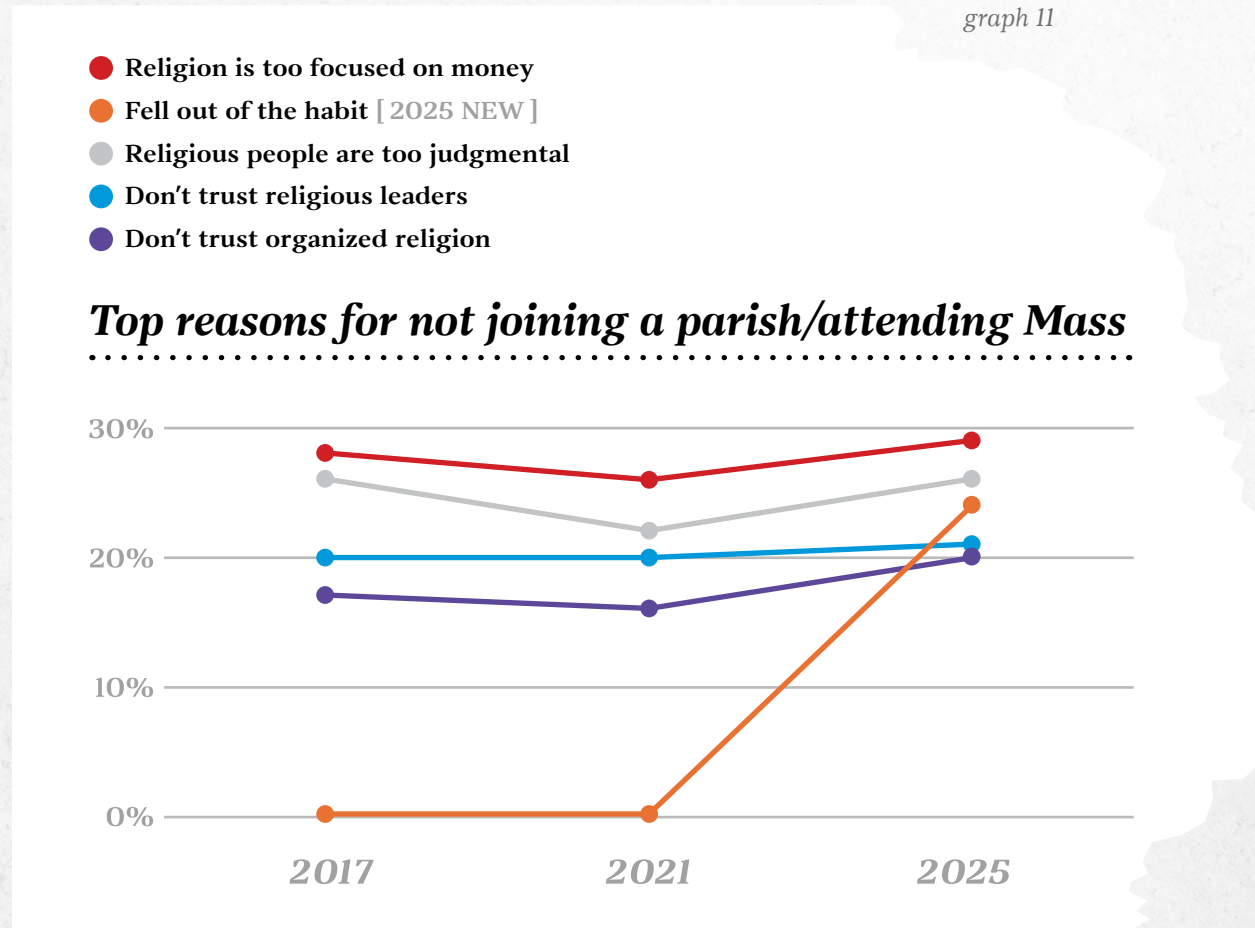
30%
Agree



Out of the Habit, Into Distrust: *The Reasons Catholics Skip Mass*

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Almost half of the Catholic respondents indicate they are not attending Mass regularly. The reasons have been consistent over time, with all key reasons increasing in this most recent study. The top reasons for not joining a parish or attending Mass are (Graph 11):



We can guess why respondents selected these answers. It's somewhat concerning that the percentage who somewhat or strongly agree has increased since 2021. It's possible the political situation in the United States has contributed to a general mistrust of those in leadership positions. There is some indication of this in the data for top social concerns in the next section.

This is the first year "fell out of the habit" was an option, and it was the second largest reason for people not attending, with 26% agreeing. This is an opportunity for parish leaders to take action to connect with people who have lapsed. Use this time to express that they are missed and offer an invitation to return to the community.

Money Talks and Immigration Matters: *The Bigger Fears at Play*

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Catholics are very concerned about financial matters. Combined with concerns about illegal immigration and social and political discord, it is understandable why there is a level of distrust. Immigration actions are a significant concern for Hispanic people, who represent over 35% of US Catholics and the numbers continue to grow.

Over the past 12 years, Catholics have consistently identified financing the future, as well as savings and retirement, as their top concerns. This long-standing trend was interrupted only by a spike in social and political tensions during the COVID pandemic. These financial matters remain a top concern for 35% of Catholics. However, new and growing concerns are challenging this dominance. Concerns over day-to-day financial matters have significantly increased from 16% to 29%. Concerns about illegal immigration have risen to essentially tie for a top concern at 34%. See graph 12.

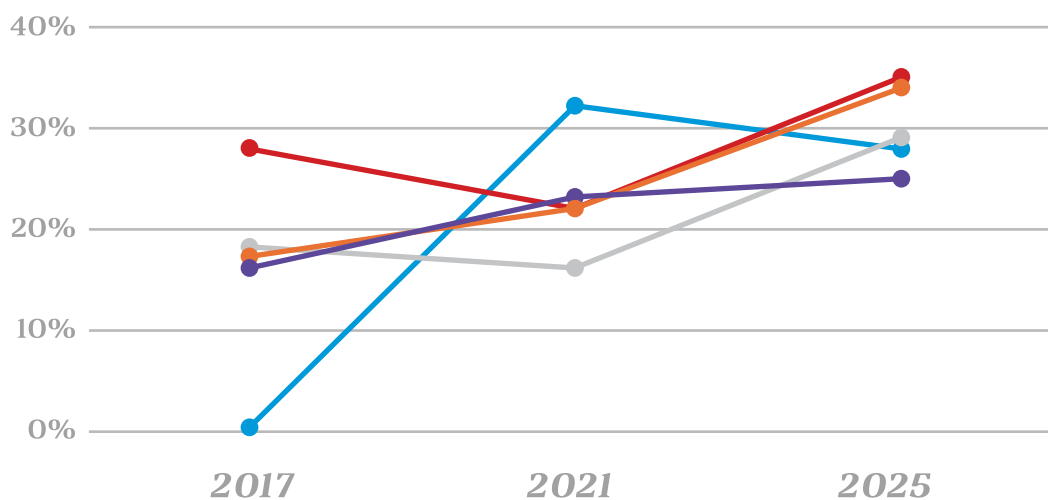
graph 12


Top concerns for Catholics

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- Financing the future/savings/retirement
- Illegal immigration
- Day-to-day financial matters
- Social & political tensions/discord
- Fear of the future or the unknown

Precent Highly Concerned

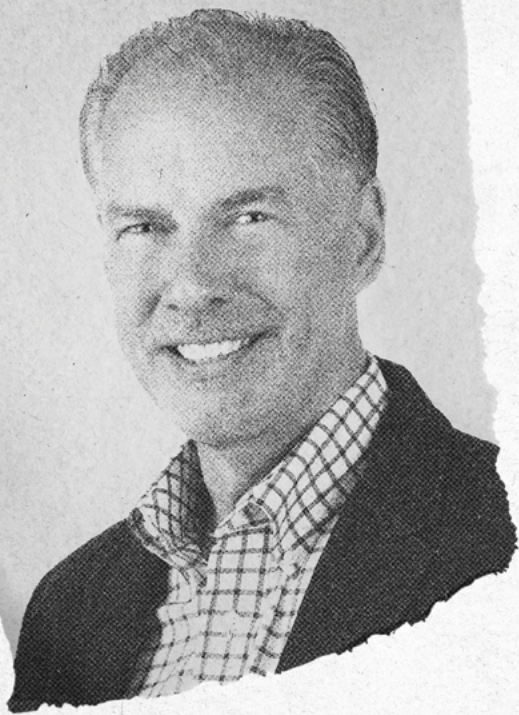




Faith on the Rise, Parish Life on the Fence: *What's Next for U.S. Catholics?*

The 2025 American Beliefs Study for U.S. Catholics reveals a number of significant, and at times contradictory, trends. On the one hand, core Catholic beliefs are strengthening: more Catholics express a personal relationship with Jesus, and there is a notable increase in the belief in His divinity and resurrection. This positive shift is likely connected to the national Eucharistic Revival. However, this growth in personal faith does not always translate into parish engagement. A growing number of Catholics believe their relationship with Jesus does not require participation in a church, and post-COVID data highlights a significant portion of the faithful who have simply “fallen out of the habit” of attending Mass.

The report also identifies what Catholics are looking for in a parish and the reasons for non-attendance. When seeking a new parish, Catholics highly value “warm and friendly encounters” and overwhelmingly prefer a traditional worship experience over a contemporary one. The top reasons for not attending Mass are related to mistrust of religious leaders and institutions, financial concerns, and a feeling that religious people are judgmental. These feelings of mistrust are compounded by a high level of concern among Catholics about broader social issues, including financial matters and illegal immigration, with the latter now tying for a top concern. Overall, the data points to a Catholic landscape where personal faith is deepening, but trust in organized religion and engagement with parish life face persistent challenges.



About the Author

Terry Poplava serves as General Manager, ACST Catholic. As a cradle Catholic, his faith was lukewarm until he was confronted 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.

About ACST Catholic

ACST Catholic, a business of ACS Technologies, is devoted to serving and equipping Catholic parishes and dioceses with the tools to engage, inspire, and accompany their communities and form missionary disciples. By harnessing technology as a tool for connection and growth, we amplify ministry impact and foster more meaningful experiences that can lead to intentional discipleship.

About ACS Technologies

ACS Technologies, founded in 1978, is the leading provider of comprehensive church ministry tools, support, and expertise to nearly 50,000 churches, schools, dioceses, and denominational offices. As the parent company of ACST Catholic, ACS Technologies is committed to creating personalized ministry environments that enable churches to make God-honoring decisions. Based in Florence, SC, ACS Technologies remains a privately held, independent Christian family-led company with team members across the U.S.

Choosing the right ministry partner matters.

The know-how you need from experts you trust.

ACS Technologies is the original pioneer of Church Management Software (ChMS). But we know and care about more than technology and software; we know how to help you put it to best use to keep parishioners engaged, feeling welcome, and tending to their pastoral needs. We are evolving and changing to meet the changing needs of the Church. We're with you every step of the way.

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We build great software, but we don't stop there. We have a "service-first" approach that truly sets us apart. With hundreds of dedicated support and consulting personnel, your staff can reach our team 24/7. We're in your corner to help you with the challenges you and your staff face every week.

Ideas and solutions powered by integrity.

Integrity is fundamental for us. It means consistently being faithful stewards by doing the right thing for church success. For over 40 years, we have earned the trust of parish and diocese staff, our employees, and our colleagues.

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Your satisfaction is the starting point. We see ourselves as your real ministry partner and will work with you to make disciples who are formed and confident in sharing their faith with others. We're excited to talk about your goals, create a plan together, and set you up with the software, service, and resources you need.

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1-844-467-3256

ACSTCatholic.com

180 Dunbarton Dr, Florence, SC 29501

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