



Joy and Grievance in an American Diocese

Results from
Online Surveys
of Active and
Inactive Catholics
in Central Illinois

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Submitted September 10, 2014

 **Benedictine University**[®]
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Executive Summary

Like many Catholic dioceses throughout the U.S., the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois¹ has experienced declines in Mass attendance over the last decade or more. Concerned about this apparent trend, Bishop Thomas Paprocki and the Presbyteral Council of the Diocese of Springfield consulted with Benedictine University's president, Dr. William Carroll, about developing a strategy for studying why some individuals were no longer attending Mass and, in some cases, why people were leaving the Catholic Church altogether. A group of social scientists from Benedictine University was asked to conduct two separate studies of Catholics in the Springfield Diocese: those who had lapsed or drifted from the Church and are currently inactive in a Diocesan parish and those who are registered in a Diocesan parish and currently attending Mass. A volunteer sample of inactive, lapsed and drifting parishioners was first recruited to complete an online survey from November 2012-March 2013 and a second volunteer sample of active parishioners was recruited to complete a separate online survey from February-March 2014. Sample sizes were 575 and 827, respectively. The first survey featured questions that asked individuals to explain why they had stopped attending Mass regularly, what changes their parish might make that would prompt them to return, and what they would like to say if they could communicate directly with the bishop. Questions also asked individuals to rate their level of agreement on whether a variety of factors, such as work schedule and unfriendly pastoral staff, contributed to their decision to stop attending Mass or leave the Church, as well as individuals' feelings about the Catholic Church, including Church doctrine on abortion and homosexuality. The second survey featured questions that asked individuals about their satisfaction with aspects of their parish, including church facilities, Mass setting, quality of homilies, and general parish atmosphere and environment. Other items assessed levels of satisfaction with the pastoral staff and parish priests and whether individuals' spiritual and religious needs were being met. Additionally, level of agreement with the Catholic Church was measured for a number of issues and policies, including abortion, gay marriage, divorce, priest celibacy, and capital punishment, as was whether the parishioners had ever separated from their parish or the Church or considered separation.

¹ All references to "Diocese," "Springfield Diocese," and "Diocese of Springfield" in this report are taken to refer to the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois.

Major findings for inactive Catholics include:

- Most of the respondents felt they were a part of a parish community before leaving the Church, however, they made a conscious decision to stop attending Mass six months or more prior to filling out the survey and most separated from both their parish and the Catholic Church.
- Four major reasons emerged why respondents stopped attending Mass or distanced themselves from the Catholic Church:
 - Issues with Church doctrine, especially among more educated individuals. Those with graduate school experience take higher exception with Church doctrine on birth control, women as priests, divorce/remarriage, fertility treatments, and homosexuality than individuals with a high school degree.
 - Lack of connection to the Catholic Church. Many individuals reported their spiritual needs were not being met, they lost interest in going to Mass, they were dissatisfied with the Mass, and/or they no longer believe the teachings of the Catholic Church.
 - Church scandals. Individuals, particularly those 50 years old or older, felt there are too many scandals in the Catholic Church and inappropriate behavior such as sex scandals, lying, and cover-ups showed up frequently in open-ended responses.
 - A perceived lack of Christian values at the level of Church, parish, or priest. Some individuals felt judged in their congregation whereas others have had many friends leave the Church due to unfriendly or unwelcoming experiences.
- The inclusion of politics, experiences with parish priest(s) and staff, and time limitations emerged as other issues responsible for individuals distancing themselves from the Catholic Church or not attending Mass.
- Most respondents do not consider themselves members of another faith community and some indicate a willingness to return to their parish if their concerns were addressed.
- When asked if their parish could make any changes that might prompt them to return a majority indicated they want change with the larger Church or more modern views, and many cited specific Church doctrine they would like to see change, such as less hierarchy in the Church, an expanded role of women, and acceptance of birth control and divorce or remarriage.

Major findings for active Catholics include:

- Most of the respondents indicated sense of community was the most important reason why they attend their parish and what they like most about their parish.
- The sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, were indicated by many respondents as being especially important to their Catholic beliefs or practices.
- Church doctrines, especially birth control, were indicated by many respondents as Catholic beliefs or practices that they find troubling.
- Although overall extremely satisfied with their parish experience, some respondents suggested Mass changes (e.g., homily or music) or more welcoming or approachable priests would improve their parish experience.
- Parish priests or pastors were the most frequently given responses for what parishioners liked least about their parish and for those considering separating from their Parish, the Catholic Church or both.
- A personal invitation from a parish priest or parishioner was most often indicated as advice for how to reach Springfield Catholics who had left their parish, the Catholic Church, or both.

Limitations to these surveys include sampling issues and response bias. As such, results may not generalize to all inactive or active Catholics in the Diocese of Springfield in IL.

These results suggest a large number of people have left the Catholic Church because they object to its doctrinal positions and it may be difficult to bring these individuals back to their faith community. Despite being overall satisfied with their parish experiences, some current, active Catholics also share these objections and they have considered separating from their parish or the Church. However, there is some evidence indicating parishes and pastors may have opportunities to attract and retain their parishioners, not least of which would be the continued pursuit of a welcoming and friendly atmosphere in their church and extending the human community that so many seek through group worship.

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Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois or Benedictine University.

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About the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois

Under the direction of Bishop Thomas Paprocki, the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois provides services to 142,847 Catholics from 28 counties in Central Illinois (12% of the general population of this area). One hundred and thirty parishes offer Mass services that are predominantly in English, with some Spanish Masses as well. Catholic education is delivered in the form of 43 Catholic elementary schools and six Catholic secondary schools. Founded in 1853, the Diocese of Springfield presents the following mission statement on its website:

“Loved and chosen by God we are the Catholic Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. Through Baptism, we share responsibility for continuing the mission of Jesus.

We are called to be a community whose members enable and support the gifts given to each by the Spirit.

We are sent to make Christ visible in our world through worship, proclamation of the Word and service to all God’s people.”

Introduction

Approximately 25% of adults self-identify as Catholic in the United States, a number that has held steady in the U.S. dating to the early 1970s (Pew Research Center 2008). The stability of this number, however, is largely explained by Catholic identification among immigrants, as nearly one-third of respondents in recent surveys who say they were raised Catholic no longer identify with this religious tradition. As much as 10% of the U.S. population are former Catholics; scholars and pollsters have spent considerable time and resources gauging the attitudes and practices of U.S. Catholics (D'Antonio et al. 2013; Gray et al. 2011; Putnam and Campbell 2011) and there likewise exists a growing number of studies of ex-Catholics in the social scientific literature (see, e.g., Byron 2001; D'Antonio 2011; Greeley 2011). Many assumptions have been made as to why certain individuals might “drift” from the Church, or leave it altogether, but just a handful of studies have taken on the task of systematically investigating the factors that contribute to the loss of identity or sense of belonging among some U.S. Catholics.

Like many Catholic dioceses throughout the U.S., the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois has experienced declines in Mass attendance over the last decade or more. Official diocesan attendance counts for the period 1996-2011 reveal that although some of the 130 parishes in this diocese have not lost parishioners or Mass attendees, others have seen drops by as much as 30%. Concerned about this apparent trend, Bishop Thomas Paprocki and the Presbyteral Council of the Diocese of Springfield consulted with Benedictine University's president, Dr. William Carroll, about developing a strategy for studying why some individuals were no longer attending Mass (and, in some cases, why people were leaving the Catholic Church altogether), while other individuals remained as members or participants in one of the Diocese of Springfield parishes.

A group of social scientists from Benedictine University was asked to develop and implement two unique online surveys of (1) lapsed and drifting Catholics in the Springfield Diocese (i.e., these individuals are no longer attending Mass or actively participating in their parish); and (2) parishioners from this diocese who remain active in their parish and regularly attend Mass. The present report reflects the findings from two confidential and unique surveys that were available online for separate periods of time. Using both qualitative and quantitative measures for both sets of survey responses, these results may help the Diocese of Springfield better understand the opinions of Catholics who have remained faithful to their parish and the Catholic Church compared with others who made the choice to distance themselves.

Methodology

Recruitment and Sample of Inactive Catholics (Survey A)

Two unique survey instruments were developed for this project. The first survey instrument was designed to capture the opinions of a sample of self-identified inactive, lapsed, or drifting Catholics in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. As data collection commenced for the first survey the Diocese requested a second, companion survey for individuals who were still regularly attending Mass in a Diocesan parish. Thus, the first survey data on inactive members was collected in November 2012 through March 2013, and the second survey data on active members was gathered through February to March 2014. Although the survey instruments were designed differently because they were aimed at different target audiences, some individual survey items were identical or similar across the surveys, allowing for a certain degree of qualified comparison of the two samples.

For the first survey of inactive members, a volunteer sample was recruited through various means to complete the online survey. Myriad paper and electronic communication media were utilized to recruit as many lapsed and drifting Diocese of Springfield parishioners as possible. This multi-faceted approach, which was aided by the Diocese of Springfield and the Marketing and Communications Department at Benedictine University, resulted in the following recruitment efforts:

- A press release distributed by Benedictine University's Marketing and Communications Department to 68 news outlets in Central Illinois that provided details of the survey, as well as a link for participation or further information (see Appendix A).
- Full-page and half-page advertisements in *The Catholic Times* that were created by the Marketing and Communications Department at Benedictine University and paid for by the Diocese of Springfield that recruited people from the Diocese of Springfield who had drifted or left the Catholic Church or no longer attended Mass to participate in the survey (see Appendix B).
- An article in *The Catholic Times* on November 18, 2012, that promoted the availability of the survey and who should participate (Sass 2012).
- A front page article in *The Springfield Journal Register* on December 15, 2012, that featured information about how people could complete the survey, contact information for the principal investigators, and a web link to the survey itself (Spearie 2012).
- Parish bulletin announcements that provided details about the study and requested participants.

- Weekly parish announcements at the beginning of Mass that asked parishioners to reach out to anyone they knew who had stopped attending Mass services and inform them about the survey.
- Printed pew cards that provided information about the survey were given to every parish in the Diocese and distributed during Mass services.
- A link on the official Diocesan Facebook page that directed individuals to *The Catholic Times* advertisements and survey.
- A dedicated Benedictine University webpage that provided information about the study and a link to the survey.

Parish-level recruitment, as well as a dedicated webpage and social media (e.g., the Facebook page) were maintained for the duration of the five months that the online survey was available, from November 2012 through March 2013. Approximately 940 individuals clicked on the survey link and 575 people chose to take the survey; however not all respondents answered every question.

Recruitment and Sample of Active Catholics (Survey B)

Parishioners from the Diocese of Springfield were primarily recruited through Diocesan, parish, and bulletin announcements that provided details about the online survey and requested parishioners complete the survey. To control costs, printed pew cards provided information about the study and were circulated at 21 parishes across 3 of the 7 deaneries from the Diocese. These parishes varied in size from between 200 and 800 families per parish. An advertisement was also run in the *Catholic Times* at the beginning of the data collection period. The Diocese placed an announcement with a link on the official Diocesan Facebook page and its website, and a dedicated webpage with survey link was also available on Benedictine University's website. The survey was open and available for completion from February 1 through March 14, 2014, which resulted in 829 individuals clicking on the survey link and 827 people opting to take the survey. However, not all respondents answered every question.

Survey Questions for Inactive Catholics (Survey A)

In order to measure why Catholics in the Diocese of Springfield, IL, had stopped attending Mass or distanced themselves from the Church, the survey featured a mixed methods approach utilizing both quantitative and qualitative response formats. Specifically, open-ended questions asked respondents to explain why they had stopped attending Mass regularly, what changes their parish might make that would prompt them to return, and what they would like to say if they could communicate directly with the bishop. Closed-ended questions asked respondents to rate their level of agreement from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*, with a *neutral* option, on whether a variety of factors, such as work schedule and unfriendly pastoral staff, contributed to their decision to stop attending Mass or leave the Church, as well as individuals' feelings about different aspects of the Catholic Church (e.g., I am dissatisfied with the atmosphere at Catholic Masses). Additional closed-ended questions asked respondents to indicate how much a list of

issues and policies (e.g., Church doctrine on abortion and homosexuality) were reasons for distancing themselves or leaving the Catholic Church, with 1 indicating *not at all* to 5 indicating *very much*. There were also several partially-open-ended questions that provided individuals with a given set of responses, but allowed them to provide any comments. Some of these questions included whether respondents separated from the Catholic Church, their parish, or both, and if their decision to stop attending Mass was conscious, as well as the parish in which they most frequently attended Mass, whether they really considered themselves to be a member of that parish and if they have had any “bad experience” with any person associated with the Catholic Church. Finally, basic, closed-ended demographic questions (e.g., age, race, marital status) were also asked, as well as Catholic heritage questions (e.g., married to a fellow Catholic, attended Catholic school). The survey questions were mainly adapted from research conducted by Fr. William Byron of St. Joseph’s University and Dr. Charles Zech, founder and director of the Center for the Study of Church Management of Villanova’s School of Business, on drifting Catholics in the Diocese of Trenton in New Jersey. However, other questions came from Pew Research, as well as Fr. Andrew Greeley’s research on Chicago Catholics. In addition, some survey questions were developed by the principal investigators to meet the needs of this particular study. Benedictine University’s Institutional Review Board approved the survey instrument and procedure, and the Diocese of Springfield’s Presbyteral Council and Bishop Paprocki voiced no substantive objections regarding survey instrument or methodology. The survey was evaluated by two accomplished scholars of religion and politics, and was pilot tested by 30 undergraduate Psychology, Sociology, and Criminal Justice majors in a research methods course.

Survey Questions for Active Catholics (Survey B)

The survey instrument utilized for this study was similar to the one used for inactive Springfield Catholics. This survey also featured a mixed methods approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative response formats. Closed-ended, quantitative questions asked respondents to identify the name of their parish, membership status, if they encountered any bad experiences at church, and whether they had considered leaving their parish or the Catholic Church. Other items queried respondents on their level and type of parish volunteerism and social involvement. Member satisfaction with church facilities, Mass setting, quality of homilies, and general church atmosphere and environment (e.g., sense of community, warmth, friendliness) were gauged using a 5-point rating scale. Similar metrics were used to assess levels of satisfaction with the pastoral staff and parish priests, and whether individuals’ spiritual and religious needs were being met. Additionally, level of agreement with the Catholic Church, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, was measured for a number of issues and policies, including abortion, gay marriage, divorce, priest celibacy, and capital punishment.

Open-ended, qualitative questions allowed survey participants to share their opinions on what they liked most and least about their parish, what Catholic beliefs or practices they considered especially important and what Catholic beliefs or practices they found troubling. Other open-ended items asked respondents for suggestions on ways to improve the parish experience, feedback they would like to specifically share with the bishop, and ways to bring back lapsed and former parish members. Finally, a set of basic demographic and Catholic heritage questions were offered at the end of the survey.

Data Analysis

Closed-ended and partially open-ended questions were analyzed for both surveys using Excel and IBM's advanced statistics software, SPSS. Statistics generated include frequencies and percents. Differences for gender, age, and level of education were assessed for statistical significance at $p < .05$. Age was subdivided into under 35, between 36 and 49, and 50 and older and level of education was subdivided into high school diploma or less, some college or a college degree, and some graduate school or a graduate degree.

Open-ended questions and comments from some of the partially open-ended questions were analyzed using ATLAS.ti Version 7. Responses to these items were coded for recurring themes and ideas. The codes were created by one or two independent researchers who sampled responses from each question. If a given response did not fit into any of the generated codes, the response was classified as "miscellaneous." Given the wide variety and random nature of miscellaneous responses, they are not included in the results.

The open-ended question that asked individuals what they would say if they could communicate with the bishop generated more than 450 highly individual responses for the inactive respondents and 589 highly individual responses for the active respondents. Given the nature of these responses, they were not analyzed for recurring themes and patterns. Instead, they were screened by the principal investigators and all references to respondent identifiers, specific individuals or parishes, or profanity were removed. A complete list of these responses for inactive and active Catholics was given directly to Bishop Paprocki and the Diocese of Springfield.

Results: Opinions of Inactive Catholics (Survey A)

Demographics

As can be seen in Table 1, respondents were well educated (77% have at least one degree past high school) and over the age of 50 (58%). In addition, respondents were predominantly male, first time married, and were raised in the Catholic tradition. Finally, 98% identified themselves as Caucasian.

Table 1: Demographics

Demographic Variable	%
Gender	
Female	41
Male	59
Age	
18-24	6
25-34	12
35-49	25
50-64	45
≥ 65	13
Ethnic Identity	
Caucasian	98
Other	2
Marital Status	
Married	61
Single	17
Divorced and Remarried	11
Divorced and Single	8
Widowed	4
Raised Catholic	
Yes	87
No	13
Education	
High School Degree or Less	24
Post-High School Degree	38
Some Graduate School or Graduate Degree	39

Parish and Church Separation

When asked about their parish community and separation from their parish, the Catholic Church, or both, a majority of respondents indicated they did consider themselves a parish member and their separation occurred with both their parish and the Catholic Church (see Table 2).

Furthermore, most respondents had not attended Mass in six or more months prior to completing the survey and over three-fourths indicated their decision to stop attending Mass was a conscious one (see Table 2).

Table 2: Church Separation Characteristics

Variable	%
Parish Membership	
Yes	67
No	26
Not Sure	7
Separation	
Parish Only	24
Catholic Church Only	20
Both Parish and Catholic Church	56
Conscious Decision to Stop Attending Mass	
Yes	76
No	11
Not Sure	13
Last Attended Mass	
Within the Past Week	13
Within the Past Month	13
More than A Month	11
Six Months to a Year	17
One to Five Years	26
More Than Five Years	22

Reasons for Separation

Issues with Church Doctrine

Many individuals gave a variety of reasons for why they stopped attending Mass; however, Church doctrine appears to be a major reason (see Figure 1). Over three-fourths of respondents indicated they are troubled by religious beliefs or practices of the Catholic Church and when provided with a list of specific Catholic Church doctrine over three-fourths of the respondents indicated that at least one of these issues was a factor in their decision to distance themselves or leave the Church. Of the eight specific Church doctrines given, six (homosexuality, birth control, fertility treatments, divorce/remarriage, women as priests, and the marital status of priests) were selected by more than half of respondents as reasons for distancing themselves or leaving the Catholic Church (see Figure 2). Issues with Church doctrine were especially problematic for those with a graduate degree or graduate school experience, as these individuals had significantly higher agreement that doctrine on homosexuality, abortion, birth control, fertility treatments, divorce, and women as priests were reasons for distancing themselves or leaving the Church (see Figure 3). Women were also found to have significantly higher agreement on Church doctrine issues as reasons for distancing themselves or leaving the Church,

although these differences were only among two separate issues: homosexuality and women as priests (see Figure 4). As for age, those 35 years old or younger had significantly higher levels of agreement that homosexuality doctrine and abortion doctrine were reasons why they distanced themselves or left the Church whereas those 50 years old or older had significantly higher agreement regarding doctrine on divorce/remarriage as reasons for why they distanced themselves or left the Church (see Figure 5).

Furthermore, when asked to explain why they stopped attending Mass regularly, Church doctrine was included in more responses than any other reason (mentioned 272 times; See Figure 1).

Examples of these responses include:

- “I do not approve of the churches [*sic*] stance on many issues. Abortion, gays, women as priests, and several others.”
- “My daughter came out to me as gay, and I went through a divorce after 28 years of marriage. The Church doesn't want either one of us.”
- “Being divorced they do not let you take communion. Treat you like an outsider. But they allowed priest [*sic*] that they knew were bad to stay in the church.”
- “The archaic idea that only men can lead a congregation and be in the clergy, the underlying message of guilt and fear and the lack of diversity and openness to gays.”
- “We were both devout catholics [*sic*] who tried to have children with no luck. We decided to go with in-vitro fertilization and the result is 3 awesome boys through 2 pregnancies. The catholis [*sic*] church rails against that.”
- “I do not feel that the Church respects or allows full participation of women. I also feel that the Church's stance on birth control to be wrong and not in step with modern medical science and the real world.”

Figure 1: Reasons Why Respondents Stopped Attending Mass

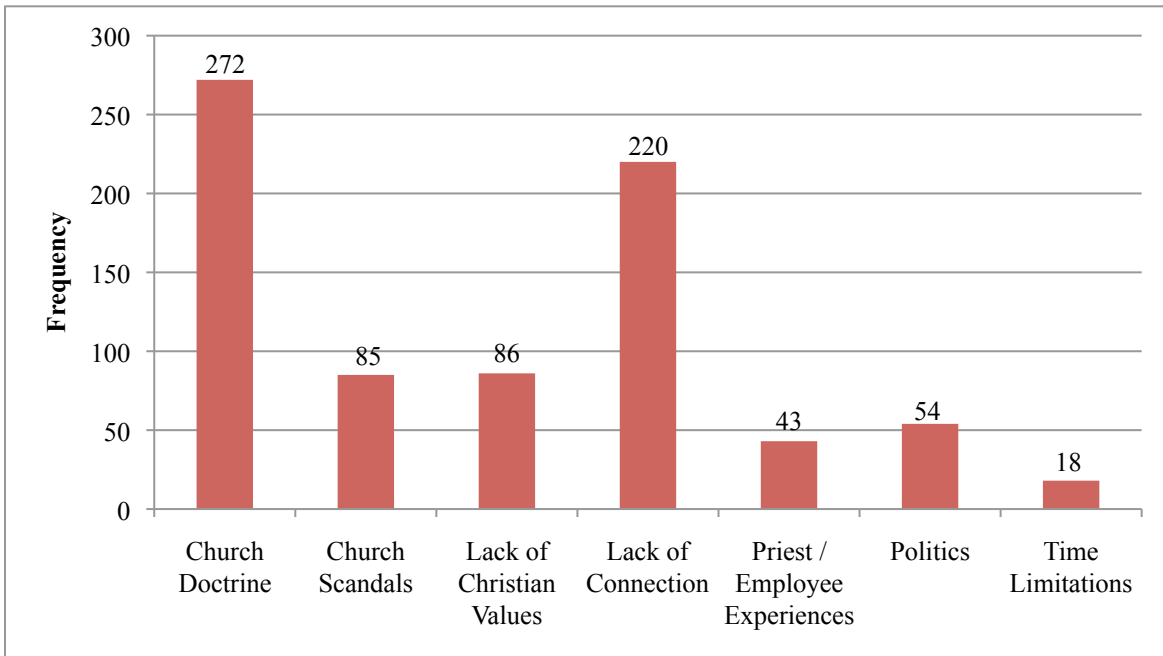


Figure 2: Catholic Doctrines as Reasons for Distancing or Leaving Catholic Church

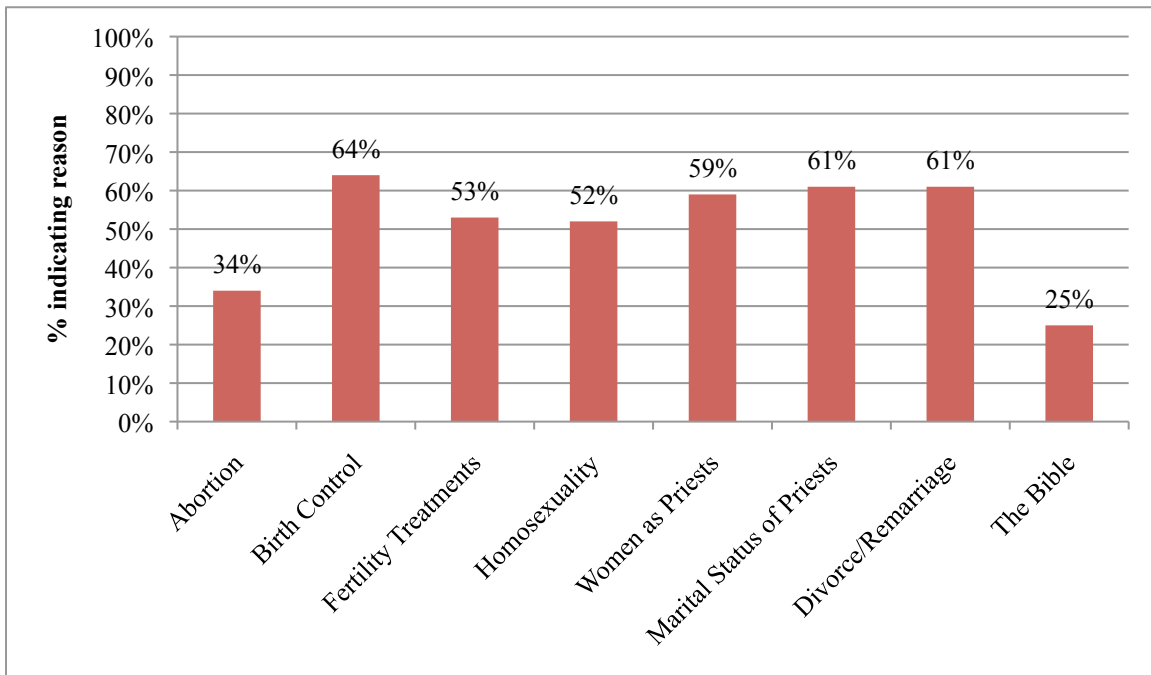


Figure 3: Education Level Differences in Reasons for Distancing or Leaving Catholic Church

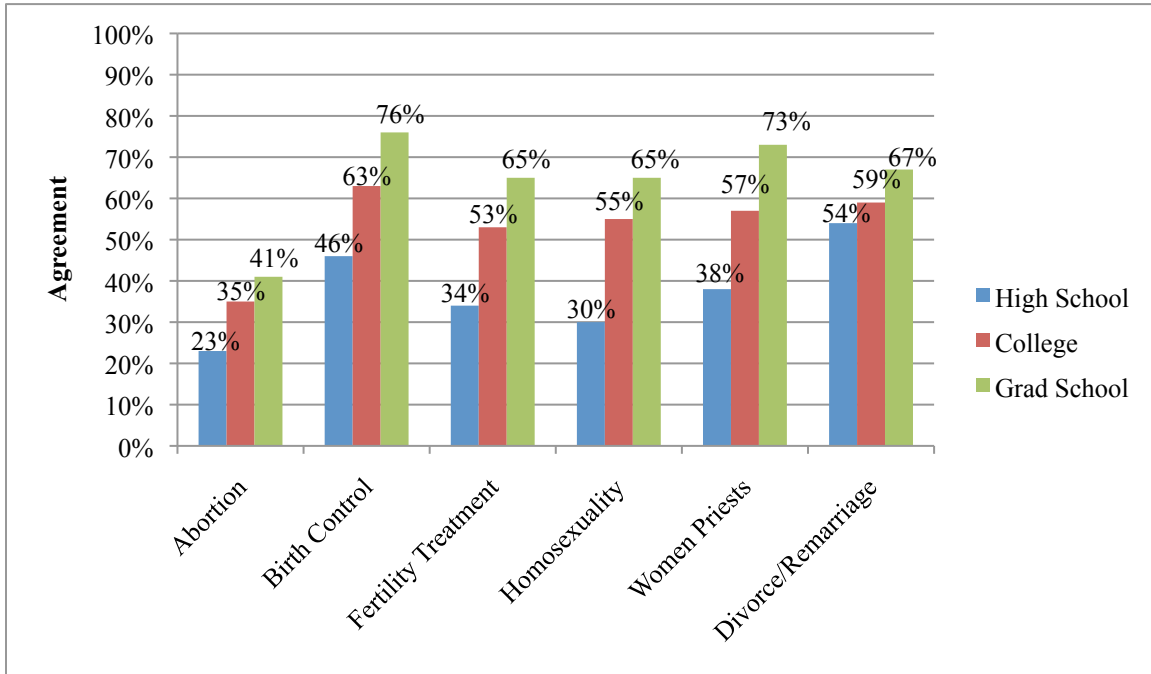


Figure 4: Gender Differences in Reasons for Distancing or Leaving Catholic Church

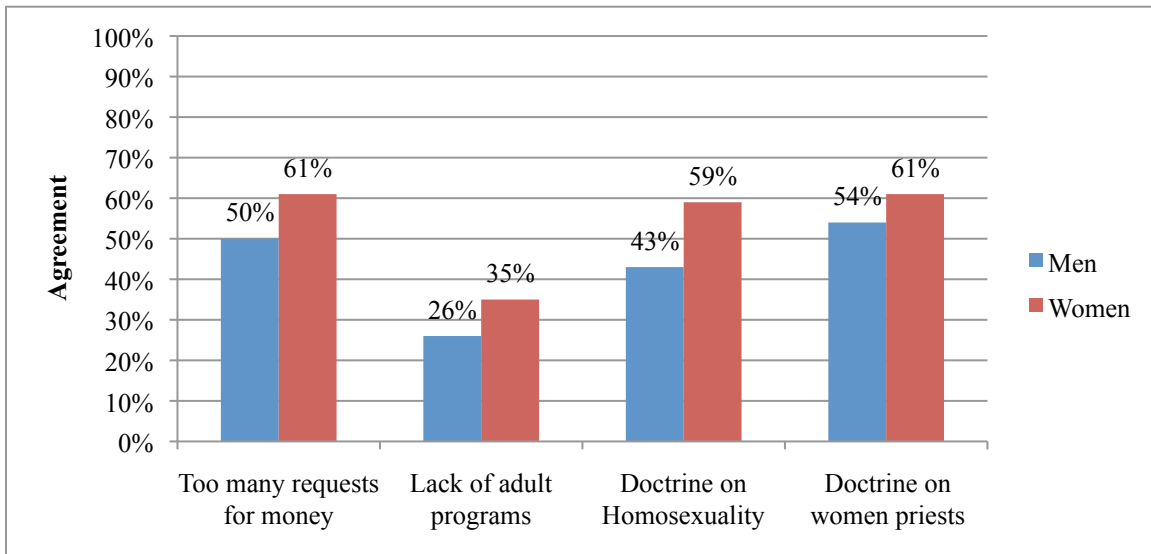
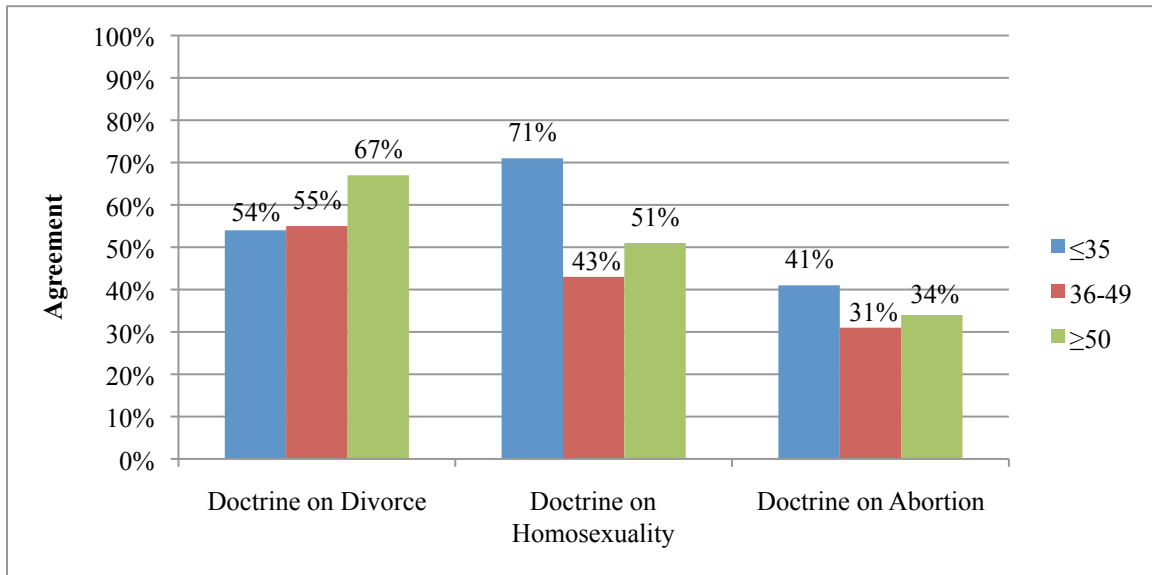


Figure 5: Age Differences in Reasons for Distancing or Leaving Catholic Church



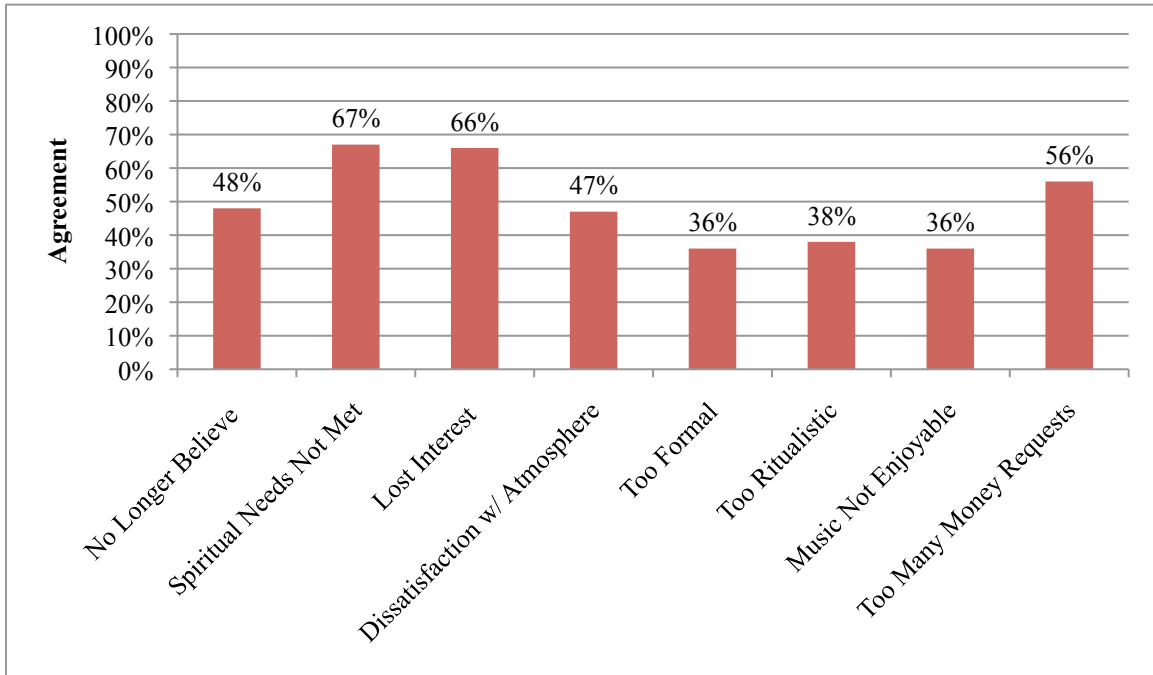
Lack of Connection to Catholic Faith

Another main reason why individuals stopped attending Mass or distanced themselves was a lack of connection to the Catholic Church, mentioned approximately 220 times in individuals' responses (see Figure 1). Examples of these responses include:

- “I was only going through the motions and when I asked the Pastor for Spiritual help with my struggles I was basically just told to pray.”
- “I didn't get anything out of the sermons, sermons did not relate to real world happenings. Sermons not thought provoking. Did not like the changes in the mass.”
- “I struggle with the way the Catholic Church has not adapted an ever changing world. I also feel sometimes people are looked down upon instead of being lifted up by the church.”
- “Catholic Church attendance did not feed my faith; it was all about getting my money.”

Furthermore, when asked about specific aspects of the Catholic Church, two-thirds indicated their spiritual needs were not being met and they gradually lost interest in going to Mass (see Figure 6). In addition, almost half indicated they no longer believe the teachings of the Catholic Church and 72% are dissatisfied with some aspect of Mass (i.e., Mass is too formal, too ritualistic, did not like music, or dissatisfied with atmosphere of Mass).

Figure 6: Catholic Church and Mass Issues as Reasons for Distancing or Leaving Catholic Church

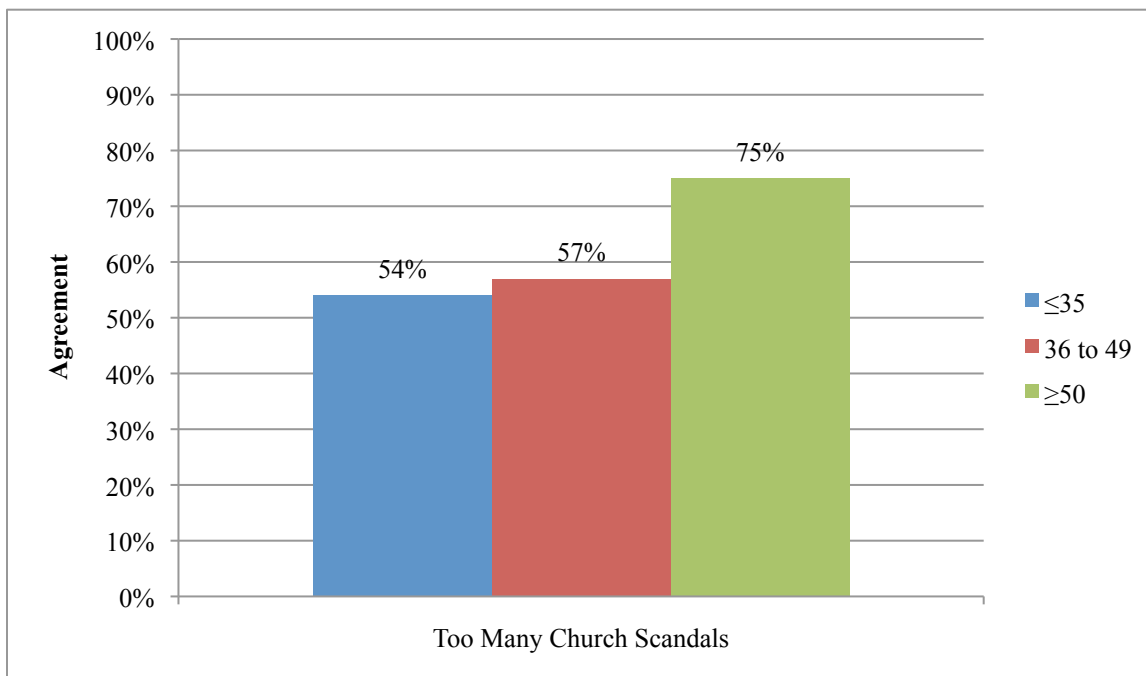


Disappointment with the Catholic Church

Two other main issues emerged as reasons why respondents stopped attending Mass or left the Catholic Church: Church scandals and a perceived lack of Christian values in the Church, their parish, or a priest (see Figure 1). Over two-thirds of respondents indicated there are too many scandals in the Catholic Church. This was especially true for respondents 50-years or older, as they had significantly higher agreement that too many church scandals contributed to why they distanced themselves or left the Church (see Figure 7). In addition, inappropriate behavior such as sex scandals, lying, and cover-ups showed up 85 separate times when respondents were asked to explain why they stopped attending Mass. These responses include comments such as:

- “I no longer felt that I could endorse the philosophies and views of a church that would exclude so many on the basis of gender and sexual orientation [*sic*] while protecting it [*sic*] own pedophilia [*sic*] clergy during and after they have abused children.”
- “too many HYPOCRITES and LIARS and PERVERTS.”¹
- “This began with the gluttonous priest and the sexual molestation scandal. He couldn't talk of anything but his next meal and apparently the bishop was only concerned with covering up all the perverts. RESPECT LIFE--I'm not see'in [*sic*] it!”

Figure 7: Age Differences in Too Many Church Scandals



¹ All respondent statements are presented throughout this report with original emphasis included.

Furthermore, a perceived lack of Christian values in the Church occurred 42 times in respondents' explanations for why they stopped attending Mass versus 30 separate instances of a perceived lack of Christian values in their parish and 14 separate instances of a perceived lack of Christian values in their pastor or a priest. In fact, when specifically asked about their church community 30% indicated they are uncomfortable with the feeling of community in their congregation and one-third indicated many of their friends have left the Catholic Church. Examples of comments include:

- “The key words are compassion and tolerance. Society teaches us to improve in these areas. The Church does not and does not exhibit or model these traits.”
- “I found the Church to be teaching hate, not love. I felt like intolerance, not tolerance was being preached. I found that I disagreed with most of what was being preached. I left the Church, and am still very spiritual, but I am simply not Catholic.”
- “Atmosphere and people were not inviting.”
- “I'm still seeking a church with a sense of community, friendliness. I joke with my friends that I've gone to a church for 7 years and no one has ever spoken to me.”
- “I have visited many parishes in the Springfield community trying to find a priest that seems dedicated to his parishioners and the word of God. All of the priests seem too wrapped up in themselves and the ‘power’ they perceive they hold. They all seem more wrapped up in themselves, much like politicians.”
- “I believe in the Catholic religion. I just don't trust the people who represent it...that being the priest, bishops, etc. Deacons...I'm more religious then [*sic*] some I know who have become deacons”

Other Reasons for Church Separation

Politics, experiences with the parish priest(s) and staff, and time limitations were also mentioned by respondents as reasons for why they stopped attending Mass, although the frequency of these responses was lower than other reasons given (see Figure 1). Generally, respondents feel that their church is not an appropriate venue for political discussions. For example:

- “Before the 2012 election, the church became way too heavily involved in political issues. Even if I agreed with the church's position on issues like gay marriage and birth control (and I do not), I do not feel it's the church's place to ‘legislate from the pulpit’ and tell churchgoers how they must vote on these issues.”
- “I was tired of hearing I was a bad person for voting for a democrat. While I do not believe in abortion, I identify more with the Democratic Party on other issues. I felt alienated every time I went to mass.”

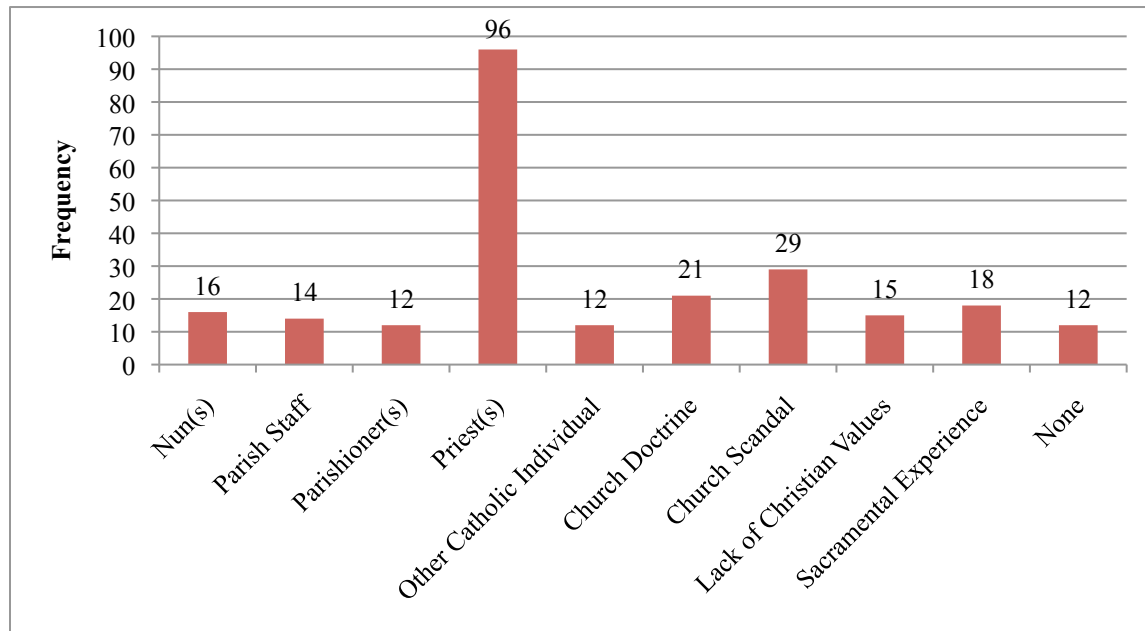
- “Yes - ENOUGH with the politics, especially the conservative Republican politics! I am beyond sick of the implication that Catholics need to vote Republican to be good Catholics, and that being anti-abortion and anti-gay marriage are the only ‘morality’ issues that should matter to Catholics - what happened to social justice, poverty, or God's love for all?”

As for experiences with the parish priest(s) and staff, respondents typically described negative interactions using words such as “distant,” “judgmental,” and “lacking empathy.” Interactions with priests occurred more than any other response when respondents were asked about having a “bad experience” with any person associated with the Church (see Figure 8). Furthermore, approximately 33% felt their pastor was not approachable or welcoming whereas 27% felt the parish staff was not approachable or welcoming. When asked specifically if an unfriendly priest or parish staff were reasons why they stopped attending Mass or left the Catholic Church, approximately 27% agreed about the pastor and 15% agreed about the staff. Specific examples of responses include:

- “I was disillusioned and uncomfortable with the message that our priest was sending. He is very strict and castigates [*sic*] those who do not believe every piece of canon law and who do not attend confession regularly. It is not a comforting place anymore.”
- “The priest there insulted and embarrassed me in front of my family due to my marriage status.”
- “when my ex-husband was very ill and near death. I asked a deacon at St. Al’s if he could give him a blessing. He said he could not because he was not a Catholic. I have heard of priests blessing bibles, houses and rosaries - but they cannot bless a human being?”
- “the pastor has made disparaging remarks about people which are know [*sic*] to be untrue and represent an archaic view of the modern world.”
- “I felt that the priest in the church that I belong to in XXXX kind of distanced himself from me when I was going through the divorce.”
- “Father XXXX and the offices [*sic*] staff at the church. (see comments above) Impersonal, non-compassionate and unprofessional!”
- “When I asked the clerical staff at XXXX about our Convalidation Ceremony, she said, ‘There will be no such...You're living in sin.’ It [*sic*] still very painful.”

Finally, a few individuals said they stopped attending Mass because of a lack of time. Approximately 10% had work conflicts and 16% had personal conflicts.

Figure 8: Respondents’ “Bad Experiences” With Any Person Associated with the Church



Returning to the Church

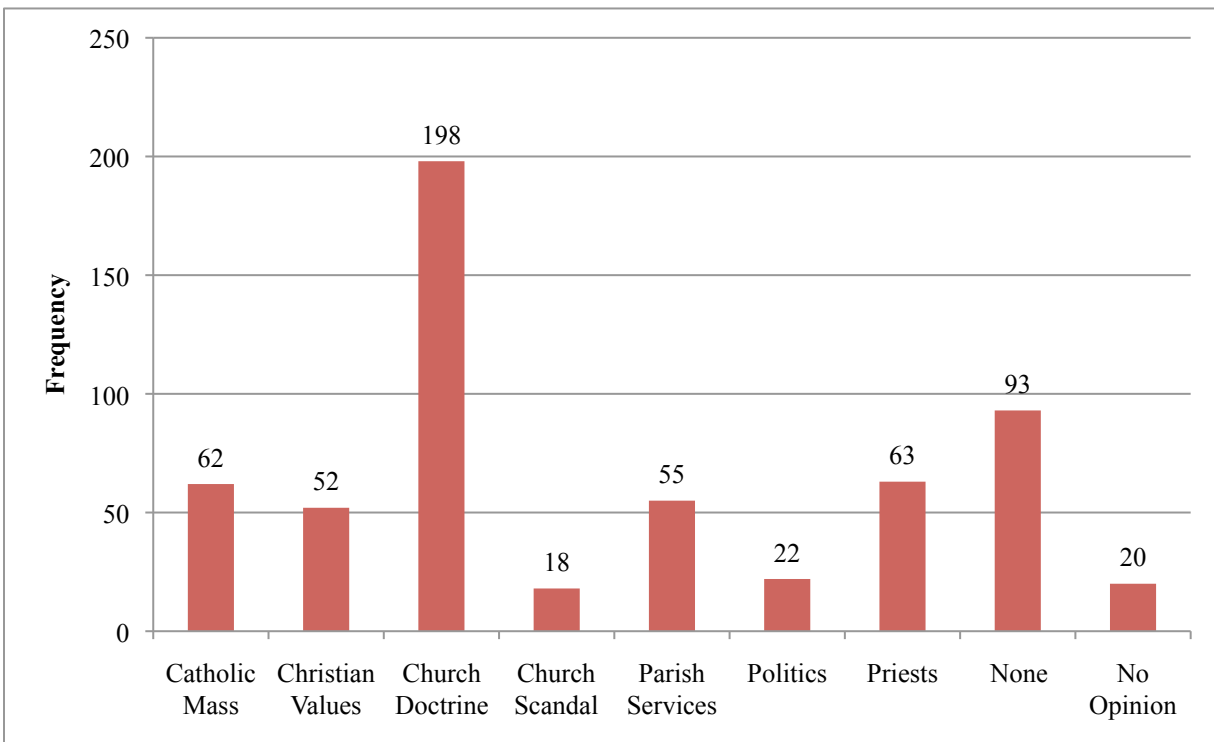
When asked if they were a member of another faith community, 76% of respondents indicated no and 54% further indicated they had not found a religion they like more. Respondents were also asked if their parish could make any changes that might prompt them to return and most provided a multitude of changes that they would like to see, although some indicated they would not return under any circumstances (see Figure 9). A majority of respondents want change with the larger Church or more modern views, and many individuals cited specific Church doctrine they would like to see change, such as the hierarchy of the Church, the role of women, and pro-life issues. Examples of these responses include:

- “allow civil marriage equality, approve birth control, consider ordaining women.”
- “Hierarchy start [*sic*] living like Christ.”
- “The church needs to stop focusing on fighting abortion, birth control, and gay marriage. I would suggest focusing on building our community and helping those in poverty”
- “Allowing priests to marry. Treating women as equals. Advocating birth control.”

Others would like to see changes within their parish Mass. Respondents recommended a more interesting Mass with more meaningful homilies and possibly different Mass times. There were also some individuals who want the Mass to be more traditional in presentation. Specific comments include:

- “Make EVERYTHING more upbeat, passionate and energetic. Make people look forward to coming to Mass because it energizes them and their faith.”
- “Jesus spent his days preaching to the people with stories and doing good works and most priests couldn't give a good homily to save their life. Even the gospel readings are done like a seventh grader reading to class and not like an important lesson from the book of God.”
- “Sunday night mass! I don't like to make the 20 minute drive to another city just to go to mass on Sunday nights, I would rather donate that money I spend on gas to my local church instead of going and giving very little.”
- “Yes, greatly reduce the performance and celebrate the Spirit's power through silence. Make the 90-minute human-led spectacle a 60-minute Spirit-led rejuvenation [*sic*]”

Figure 9: Changes That Might Prompt Respondents to Return to Parish



Addressing issues with priests could also prompt some respondents to return to their parish (see Figure 9). Many of these individuals simply want a different priest or pastor while others would like a priest with more positive personality characteristics. Priests that are more in touch with today's world were also requested by respondents. Typical responses included:

- “Hard to say, other than new priest.”
- “replace the current priest.”
- “we need Priests, Deacons and Bishop that are willing to work love into the hearts of these parishioners.”

- “only a kind, gentle, and loving priest”
- “priests that speak with passion and apply the knowledge to today's time.”
- “younger more enlightened priest that could relate the sermons to todays [*sic*] world.”

Additionally, some want to see changes in parish services (see Figure 9). A majority of these individuals want more fellowship, and community outreach. Others would like to see the Bible incorporated into the parish more or more youth programs offered. These include responses such as:

- “increase programming for the youth, and have more small faith groups so we bond outside of going to mass.”
- “My parish was a cold place. You could walk in on Sunday, go to mass and walk out without speaking to another soul, I longed for fellowship.”
- “Our parish is old and wants no changes in the way it's always been done. There is no outreach into the community and hardly any amongst themselves. They do not welcome new people and do not want any new ideas proposed.”
- “conducting themselves as a New Testament Church, encouraging all to read the Bible, getting rid of pagan traditions.”

Individuals also want to see changes in how the Church promotes Christian values (see Figure 9). Many of these individuals responded that the Church needs to be more open and honest in their attitudes, while others want the Church to demonstrate tolerance. Examples of specific responses include:

- “if the catholic church [*sic*] began sending a message of honesty, truthfulness and a message that we are all simply human and are trying to navigate this life with out [*sic*] the impeding guilt and better than though i [*sic*] would consider returning.”
- “quit threatening us and tell us more about God loving and forgiving us. Stop being so pious when you're human like we are.”
- “yes, the Catholic Church needs to accept all people if they love God and love the Catholic Church as I do. I refuse to have an annulment which is basically saying my first marriage of 19 years which bore 2 children did not exist.”
- “only God will be our judge.. [*sic*] so how can we be critical of those that have alternative lifestyles.”

Results: Opinions of Active Catholic Parishioners (Survey B)

Demographics, Membership and Attendance Rates

This sample of respondents was well educated (61% with at least one degree beyond high school), over 50 (79%), and mostly female (65%; see Table 3). Sizeable majorities of the sample responded that they were first time married (78.3%) and raised Catholic (82.5%), and nearly all respondents were Caucasian (97%). Virtually all respondents indicated that they were members of a specific parish, and less than 10% of survey participants indicated that they had considered Church or parish separation. Weekly church attendance was the most frequent response, with 73.2% attending Mass weekly, and 11.4% attending Mass daily (see Table 4).

Table 3: Demographics

Demographic Variable	%
Gender	
Female	65.0
Male	35.0
Age	
18-24	1.0
25-34	15.0
35-49	5.0
50-64	46.0
≥ 65	33.0
Ethnic Identity	
Caucasian	97.0
Other	3.0
Marital Status	
Married	78.3
Single	7.4
Divorced and Remarried	5.9
Divorced and Single	2.2
Widowed	6.2
Raised Catholic	
Yes	82.5
No	17.5
Education	
High School Degree or Less	14.0
Some College	16.0
Post-High School Degree	31.0
Some Graduate School or Graduate Degree	30.0

Table 4: Church Membership and Attendance Characteristics

Variable	%
Parish Membership	
Yes	96.5
No	1.8
Not Sure	7.0
Considered Separation	
Parish Only	9.3
Catholic Church Only	3.1
Both Parish and Catholic Church	3.8
Frequency of Mass Attendance	
Daily	11.4
Weekly	73.2
Almost weekly	12.0
At least once a month	2.5
A few times per year	1.0

Important Reasons Why Parish Is Attended

When asked to identify the most important reason for attending their parish, 704 open-ended responses were provided, and about half indicated that a sense of community was one of the most important reasons why they attended their parish (see Figure 10). This pattern was similarly observed in the quantitative data, with 77.4% agreement with the statement “I am comfortable with the feeling of community at my parish.” For some individuals, their sense of community comes from family participation, while others feel like their parish is “home.” Over 85% of respondents agreed with closed-ended statements that their “parish is hospitable,” they “feel welcome,” and their parish provided “a warm and friendly atmosphere” (see Figure 11). In addition, having history with the parish as a long-time member is important to individuals, as is spiritual fulfillment or growth. One-hundred seventy-six open-ended statements about spiritual fulfillment and growth were recorded, and 78.7% of respondents agreed that their “spiritual needs are being met.”

Figure 10: Most Important Reasons Why Parish Is Attended

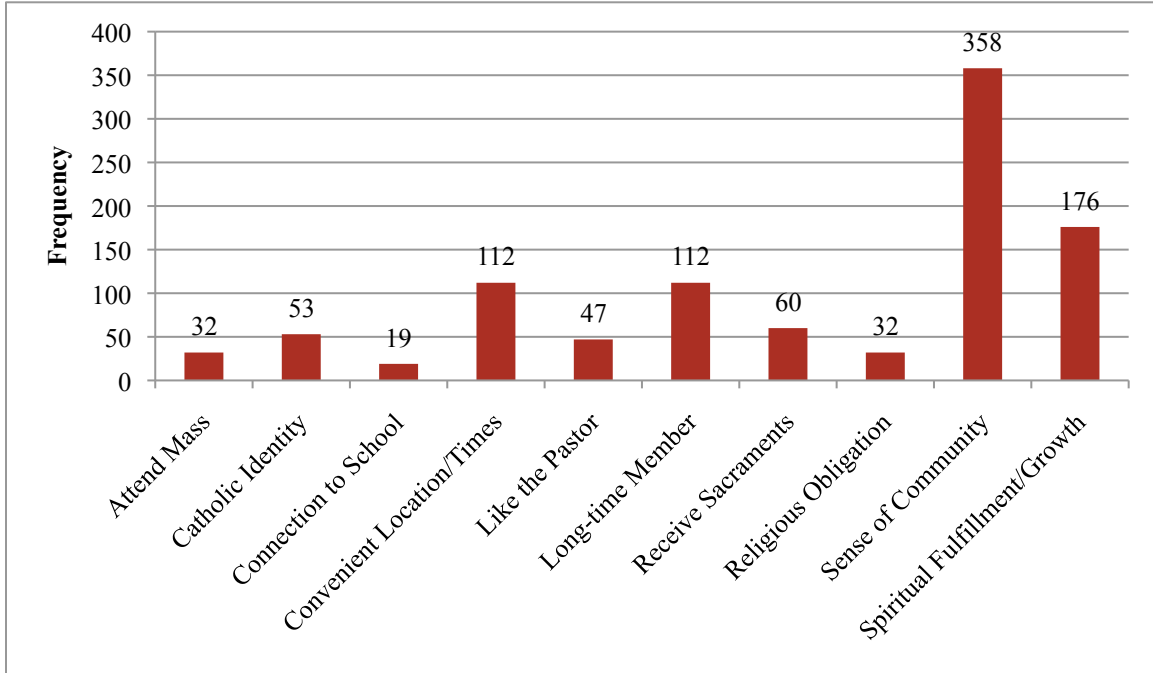
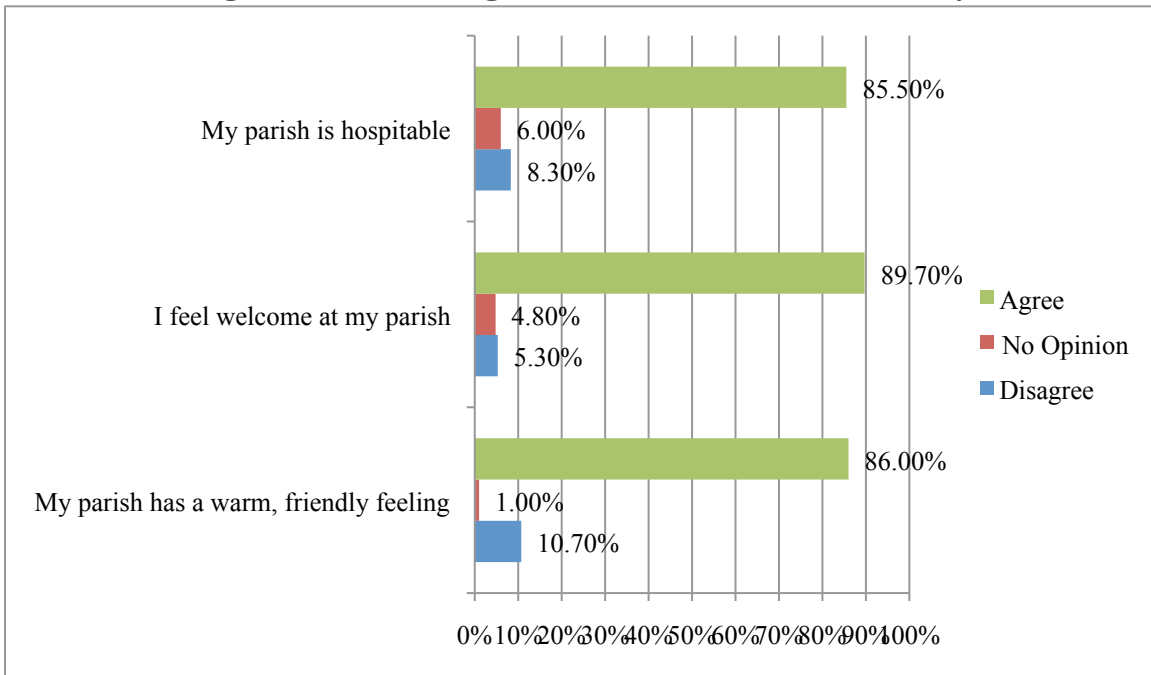


Figure 11: Level of Agreement with Sense of Community



Parish location and Mass times also make a difference to individuals in terms of why they attend their parish. Virtually all respondents to closed-ended items expressed satisfaction with Mass times and locations (see Figure 12). Parishioners were likewise happy with the condition and cleanliness of their church buildings and facilities, as well as the room temperature, comfort of seating, and quality of music selections (see Figure 13). For some, receiving the sacraments (mentioned 60 times in open-ended responses) is the most important reason why they attend their parish whereas others simply identified as being Catholic (mentioned 53 times in open-ended responses) as their most important reason for attending their parish (see Figure 10).

Figure 12: Level of Satisfaction with Accessibility to Mass

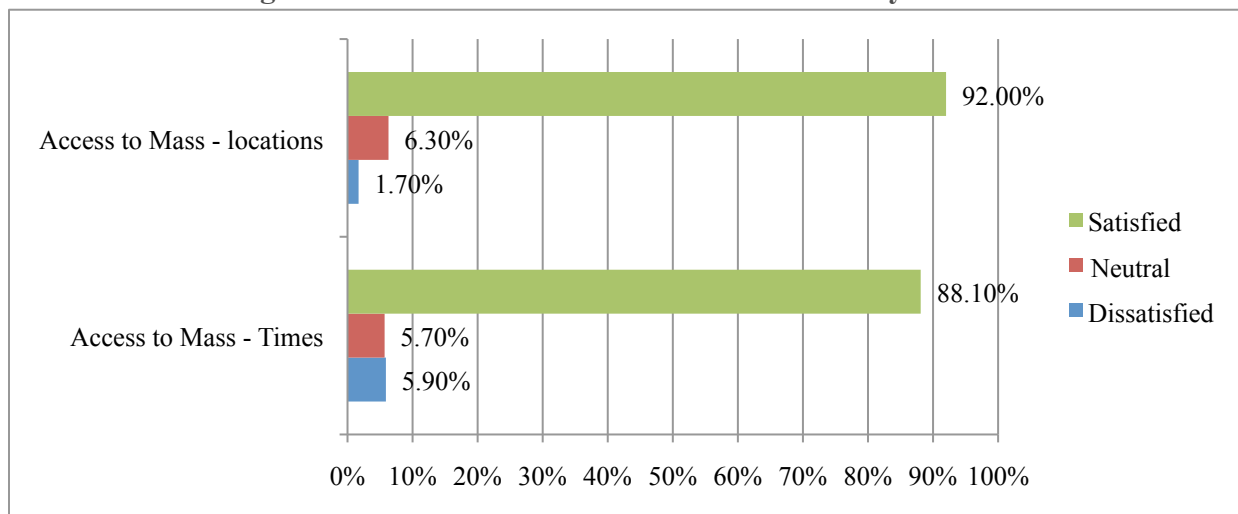
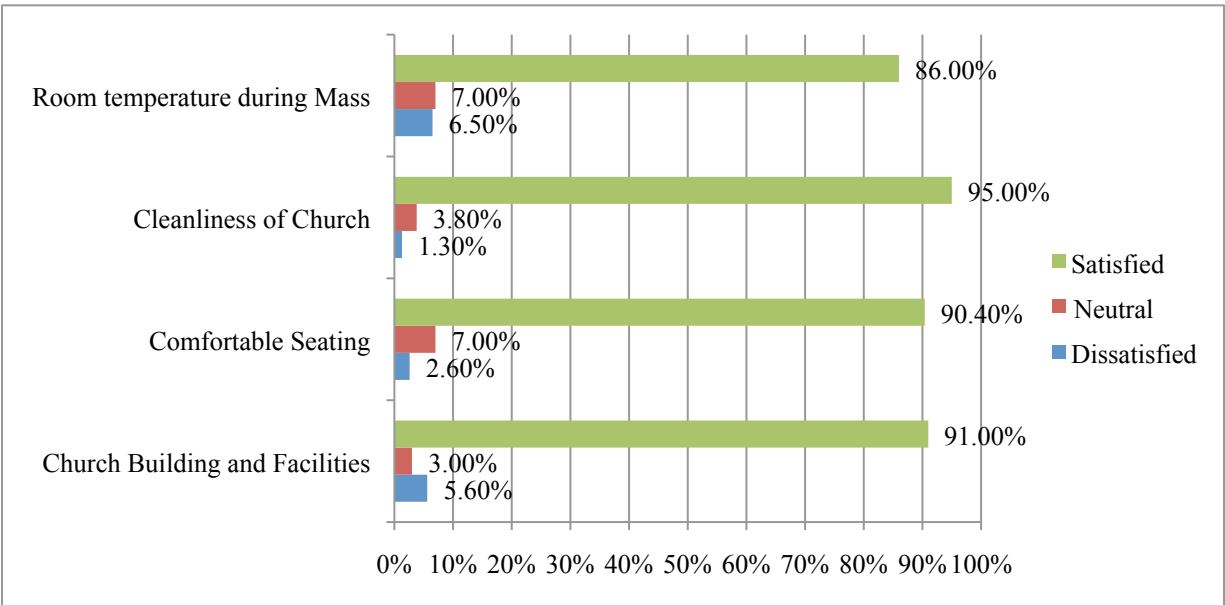


Figure 13: Level of Satisfaction with Church and Facilities



Liking the pastor was also mentioned as an important reason for attending a parish and approximately 70% of respondents expressed satisfaction with their priests across various measures (see Figures 14 and 15); conversely, 14-15% expressed dissatisfaction. Similarly, when asked whether their priest cares about them, 77.6% agreed (13.2% disagreed), and 75.2% felt their priest is warm (14.5% were not satisfied with priest warmth). When asked if they thought their pastor was approachable, 75% indicated yes and 14% indicated no (11% were not sure).

Figure 14: Level of Satisfaction with Parish Priests

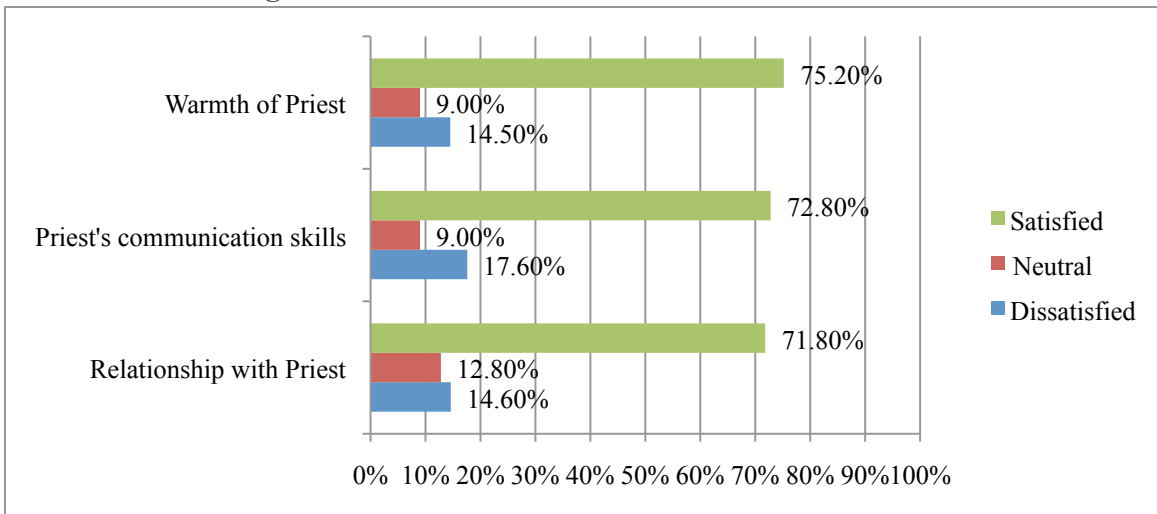
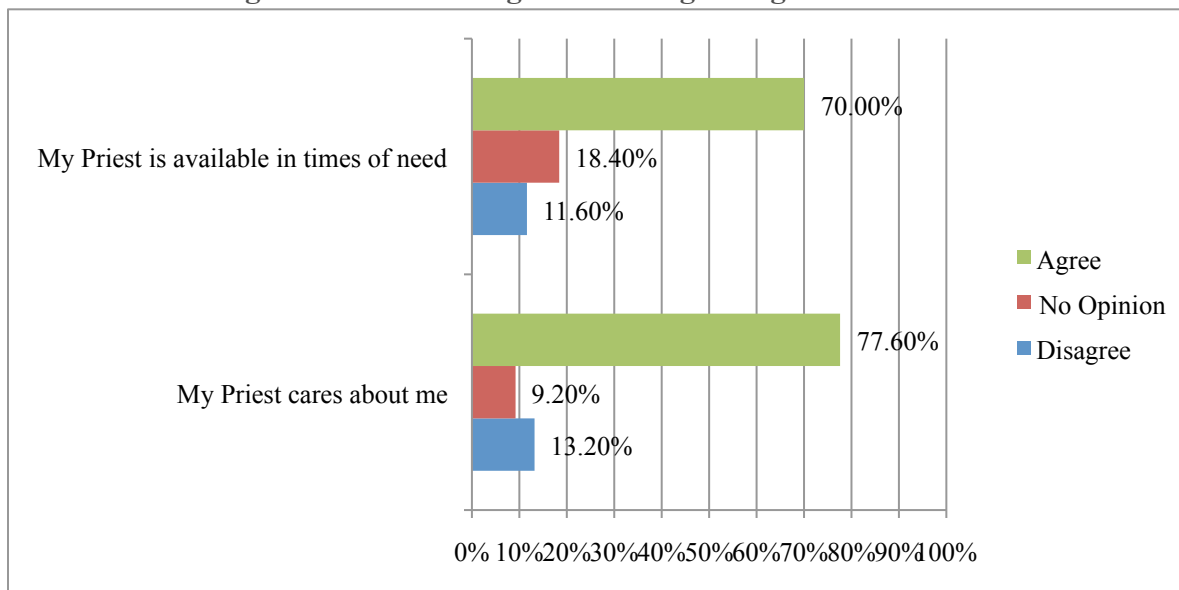


Figure 15: Level of Agreement Regarding Parish Priests



Other individuals responded they attend their parish out of a sense of religious obligation or simply to attend Mass. Finally, there were a few individuals who value the school associated with the parish as their most important reason for attending.

Examples of open-ended responses include:

- “I feel comfortable there. I know a lot of people. I like the priests. I feel most of the people are trying to live good lives. We pray and sing well together.”
- “I like being a Catholic and XXXX is where I have gone for over 40 years. I like Father XXXX and the reason I go to church is for the mass. The people of the parish and it also helps that it is only one block from my house!”
- “Our faith is an integral part of who we are. Attending church gives us strength in meeting the challenges of daily life. Because we have been members for a long time we also feel very connected to the families that attend the same mass we do as many of our children have "grown up" together. We've gotten to know many of the families and individuals who attend the same mass we do and enjoy the "connectedness" we have with them.”
- “I believe in the Catholic Church and this is my parish, born and raised where I raised my family. This parish has supported me thru good times and bad, it is where Our Lord gives me comfort”
- “I was raised in the Catholic Church, I believe it is my duty to attend Sunday Mass.”
- “I love my Catholic faith, our parish family, and the opportunities available at XXXX to pray, study, celebrate Mass and other sacraments in a warm, inviting family atmosphere.”
- “I attend to serve Jesus and the people. I attend to be close to Jesus, and partake of the Eucharist. I go to honor God as he has commanded. I enjoy the people around me, I go to be inspired throughout the week.”
- “At first it was for the school, but since our kids have graduated we have come to enjoy the liveliness of the parish.”

- “Proximity to my home and the pastor--his character, his love for all, his viewpoints.”
- “I love God and I can't imagine not wanting to spend time with Him in his house of worship. Our priest is so knowledgeable about God and the bible and I learn something new at every Mass. He has a way of explaining things, making it easier to understand.”

What Springfield Catholics Like Most About Their Parish

Most participants provided more than one aspect of their parish that they like most, but of the 683 responses provided, parish community was given in 446 separate responses (see Figure 16). Many of these individuals specified it was the friendly and welcoming attitude of their parish, while others indicated their parish felt like family or it had a sense of “home” for them. Still, others liked that they had friends in the parish or that the parish had a youthful vibe to it. A lot of individuals also liked their priest, which was the second most frequently coded response (177 occurrences) and, subsequently, how their parish Mass is celebrated also occurred often (mentioned 60 times) as a response of what individuals like most. 86.7% of individuals in this sample were satisfied with various qualities regarding the Masses (see Figure 17). For others, however, it is the physical beauty of their church that they like the most (mentioned 80 times, see figure 16).

Figure 16: What Springfield Parishioners Like Most

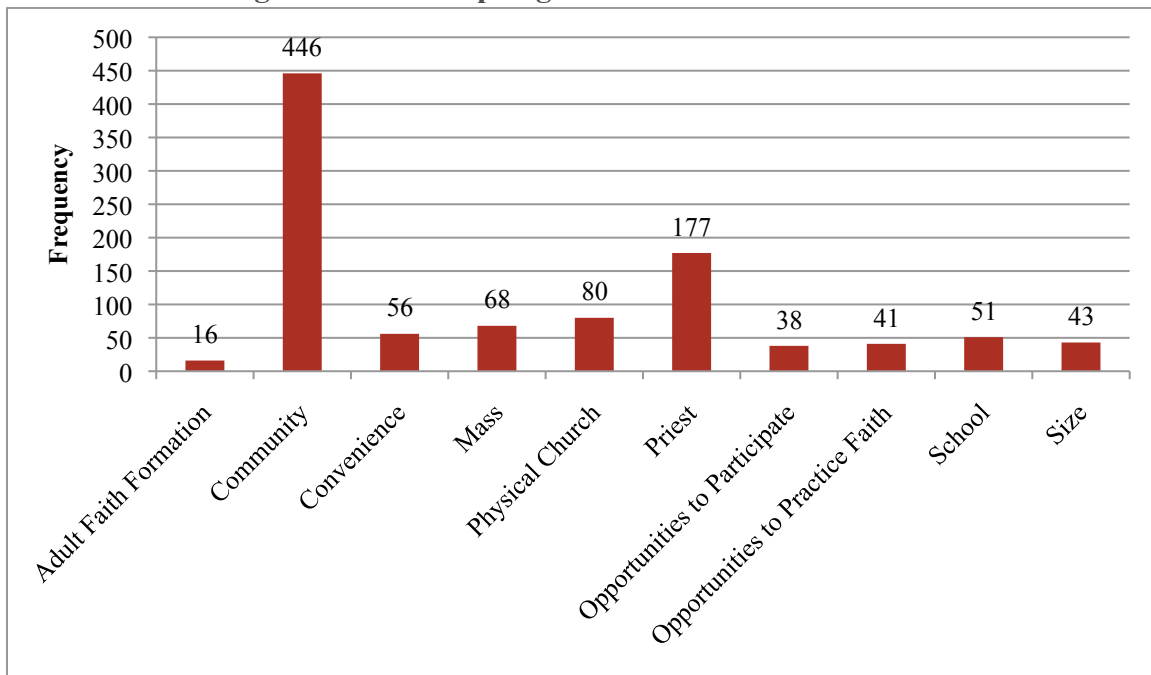
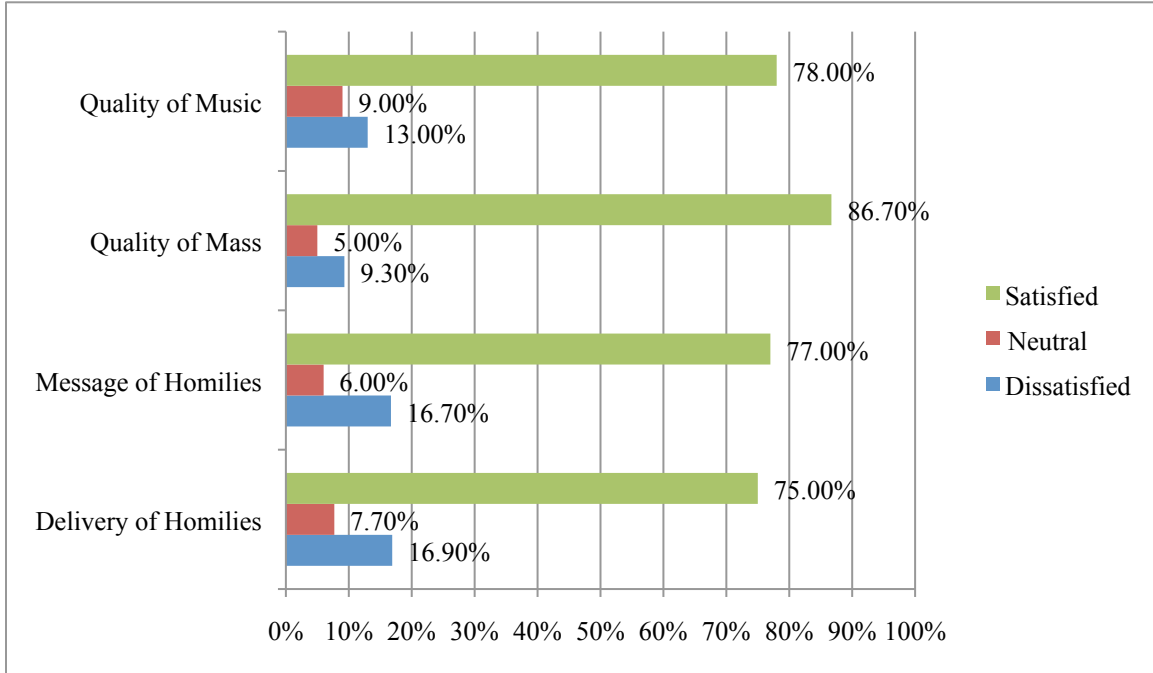
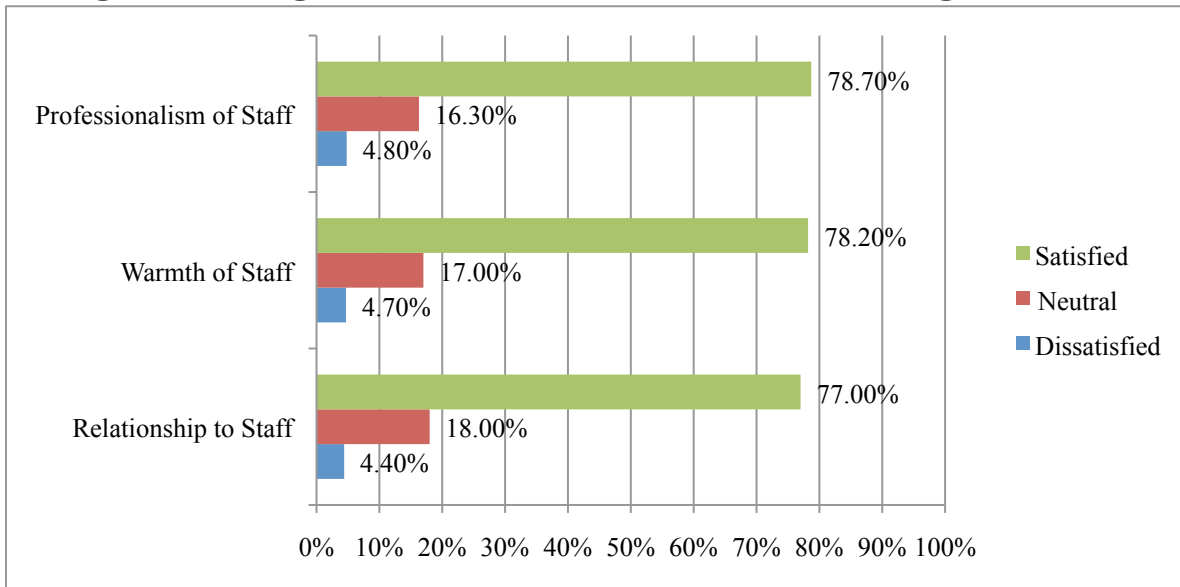


Figure 17: Level of Satisfaction with Mass Qualities



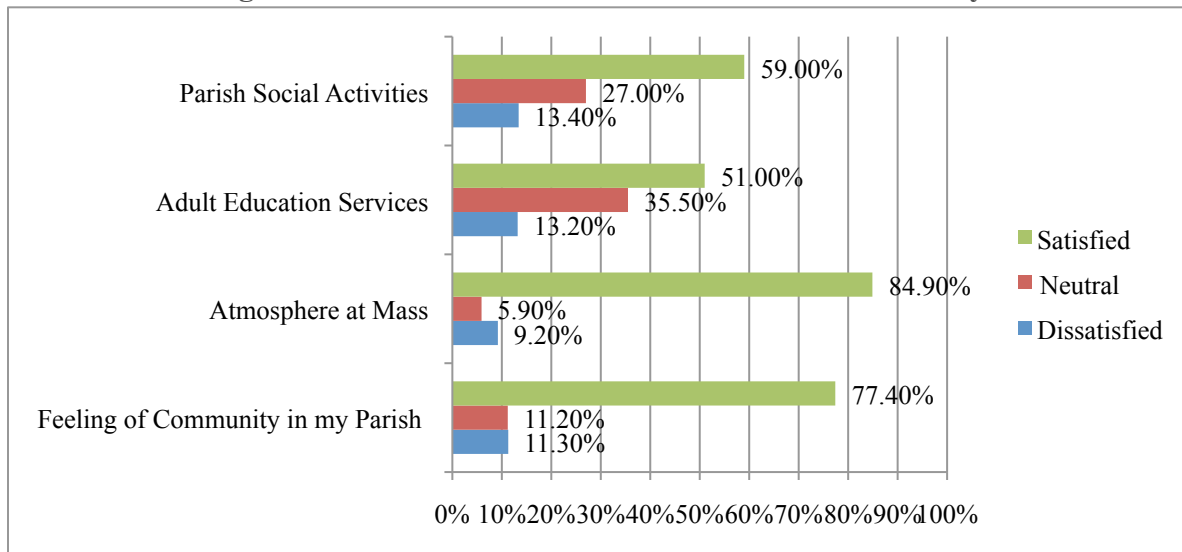
Furthermore, pastoral staff were also held in high regard among parishioners (see Figure 18), although no one indicated pastoral staff as what they like most about their parish. Quantitative data indicated that most individuals are satisfied with their relationship (77.0%), the warmth (78.2%), and the level of professionalism (78.7%) from parish staff.

Figure 18: Rating of Level of Satisfaction with Items Referencing Parish Staff



Convenience in terms of location and Mass times was indicated in 56 responses as what individuals liked most, as was the presence of a school (indicated in 51 responses), and the size of their parish (indicated in 43 responses). In addition, some also felt that what they liked most were opportunities to practice faith (indicated in 41 responses) or participate in their parish (indicated in 38 responses). Parish participation is also demonstrated in the quantitative responses, with 75.6% at least somewhat involved in volunteer opportunities, and 65.6% sometimes taking part in social activities and when compared with other parish aspects, parishioners generally seem less pleased with adult education offerings and social activities, with only modest numbers of respondents expressing satisfaction with adult education or social opportunities (see Figure 19). However, these results do not indicate that parishioners are dissatisfied in these areas, just that they do not have an opinion on these matters, with 35.5% indicating no opinion about adult education and 27% indicating no opinion about social activities. Consequently, adult faith formation was the least often mentioned response for what individuals like the most about their parish, with only 16 coded responses.

Figure 19: Levels of Satisfaction with Parish Community



Examples of open-ended responses include:

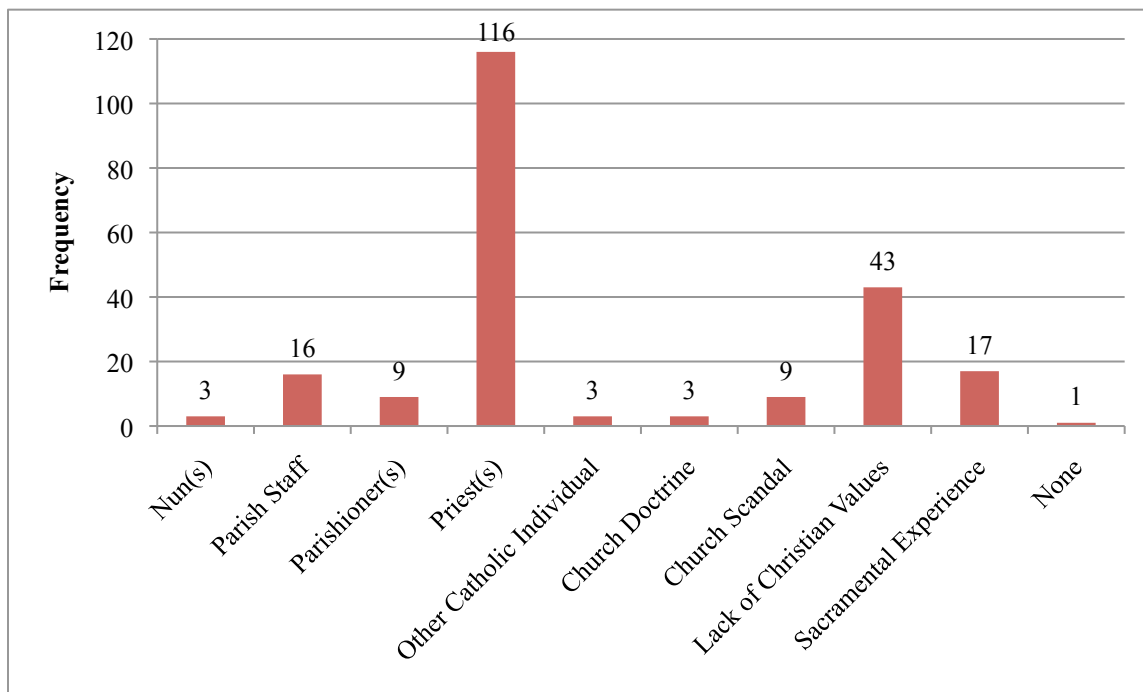
- “The sense of family and shared Faith [*sic*]”
- “Our parish is a friendly parish. When you go to church you feel like a family where people greet each other and their [*sic*] is a very caring attitude within the parish. We work together to support the needs of the parish.”
- “This is the parish of my youth, so returning here after retirement was like coming home. I find the priests and the people here friendly and approachable. I like the physical church and the liturgy here.”
- “The people of the parish are always there for each other in times of need and in times of fun too.”
- “The fact that we can attend Mass as a family and that there are a couple of Mass times offered for our children who work. Our current priest is a man for the people in the name of Jesus.”
- “Our priest is amazing, very down to earth, loves the people. We have a wonderful choir that adds to our masses. There are so many very special people in this parish that work together to make things happen. We have a group of young families that are also very active.”
- “We have a beautiful Parish, both in it's [*sic*] physical facility (the Church, Parish center, and school), and it's Parishioners and staff who come together to Worship and Serve God and His people”
- “The friendliness of the people I know, the continuing education of adults in Scripture, Father XXXX takes an interest in everyone and he gives terrific homilies with history of the Church in them.”
- “It allows us to practice our Catholic faith without going far. We also like seeing our friends and fellow parishioners each week.”

- “It has been my home parish for more than 60 years. I feel very comfortable there. I like the priests we have now and the past ones. It is home for me. I like that we are getting new programs that deal with our Catholic faith.”

What Springfield Catholics Like Least About Their Parish

Despite generally positive feedback from respondents across the more than 25 qualitative and quantitative measures in this survey, there are areas of concern that were revealed. Perhaps most obviously, 25.5% of respondents replied “yes” when asked if they had any bad experiences with any person associated with the Church (68.0% answered “no” to this question). Of the 194 parishioners who provided a comment, priests were mentioned 116 separate times (see Figure 20).

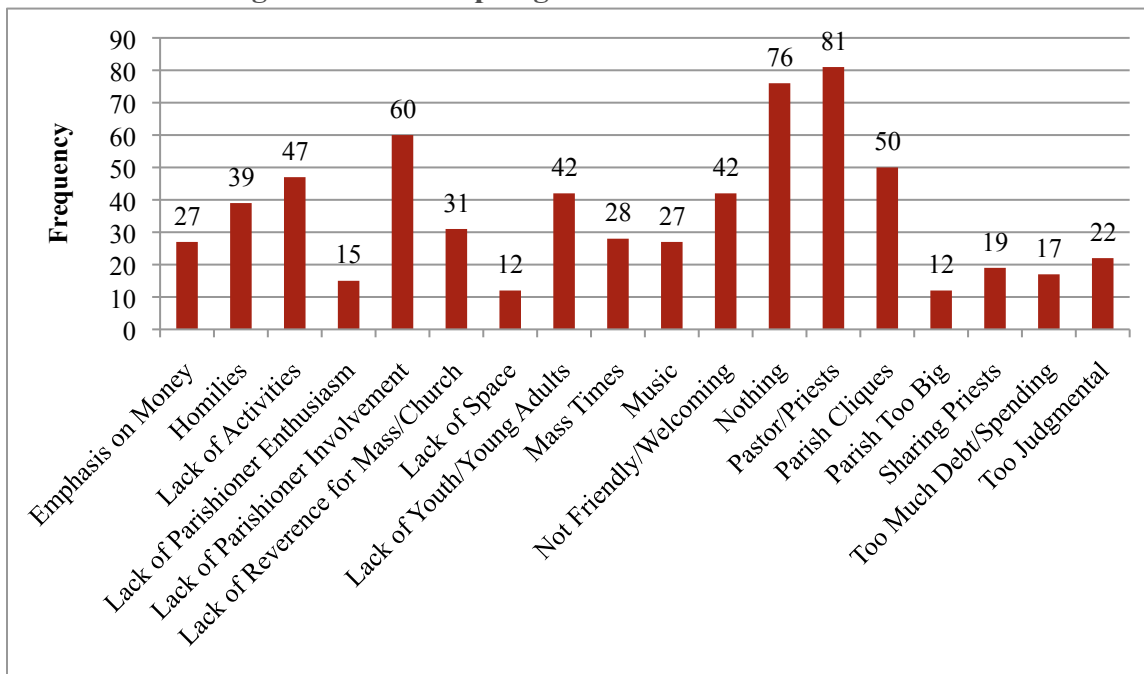
Figure 20: Active Respondents’ “Bad Experiences” With Any Person Associated with the Church



Parish priests or pastors were also the most frequently given response from the 631 individuals who provided an open-ended response when queried about the things they like least about their parish (mentioned in 81 separate responses; see Figure 21). According to these responses, some parishioners felt that their parish priests can be unwelcoming, unapproachable, and judgmental, and parishioners indicated they especially feel judged during homilies. Despite high levels of agreement and satisfaction with pastoral relations and communications, it should be noted the levels of *disagreement* or *dissatisfaction* with these priests’ traits were found to be higher than in other attitudinal closed-ended items (e.g., attitudes towards quality of facilities, pastoral staff, etc.). Although still fairly low percentages, disagreement and dissatisfaction ranged from

between 12% and 18% of respondents whereas other items ranged from 1.7% to 5.9%. Some parishioners lamented having to share a priest with other parishes and indicated that it was then difficult to get to know them. Many other parishioners, however, felt differently about their priests and parishes, in general, as the second most frequent response given was that they had nothing they liked least (76 coded responses, see Figure 21).

Figure 21: What Springfield Parishioners Like Least



Other areas of discontent (see Figure 21) included a lack of parishioner involvement or contribution to the parish (60 coded responses) and a presence of parish cliques (50 coded responses). Some individuals also felt their parishes were not friendly or welcoming (42 coded responses), especially to new individuals, and having a judgmental, unwilling-to-change attitude was indicated by some parishioners as what they liked least (22 coded responses). There were also individuals who indicated their parishes lacked activities and education (47 coded responses), especially across the age spectrum and many individuals noted that there was a lack of youth involvement (i.e., children, teenagers, young adults, and young families) in their parish (42 coded responses). Specifically, some respondents voiced concern about the vitality or growth of their parishes, particularly as a majority of them are aging. There were also some issues with the parish Mass, including the times (28 coded responses), music (27 coded responses), lack of reverence (31 coded responses), and lack of enthusiasm by those parishioners attending (15 coded responses) whereas others indicated they had issues with their parish's emphasis on money or their overspending and accumulation of debt (17 coded responses). Although not as commonly indicated, there were some parishioners who felt their parish had a lack of space (12 coded responses) or was too big in size which prevented them from getting to know others (12 coded responses).

Examples of open-ended responses include:

- “We may not be perfect but I really don't have a least.”
- “We have a new pastor who is very judgmental, authoritarian and arrogant. He has driven many good people away from our church. His homilies are legalistic and depressing. Our Masses have lost their joy and are sad.”
- “Our pastor. Since XXXX and the arrival of the new pastor I no longer enjoy going to mass. I have tried to understand this man but have given up. I leave mass so frustrated I feel like I got nothing out of mass. The pastor makes me feel like there is nothing we are doing right. Many parishioners have left and contributions have dropped considerably. If there are not some changes made I will be leaving the parish also.”
- “I do not like the fact that there is no pastor. If we need a priest there is no one to help. If someone dies the priest does not know the deceased or family... Therefore the funeral is very vague not personal. Sunday Sermons are very long and boring the [*sic*] do not correlate to what is going on in the world all they do is reiterate the readings.”
- “The old cliques who have gone to Mass there forever and are less than welcoming to newcomers. Our new parish priest is not a warm and welcoming person.”
- “We don't have anything for the elderly, such as a potluck, we don't have anything to give support to young mothers, to give parenting skills to young families [*sic*]. We have nothing for young, single adults, or for college kids.”
- “Sometimes it feels like they are always asking for money and if you don't give, you are not welcomed at some events. Some people seem to be friendly toward you but don't include you in some events.”
- “like most church communities there seem to be a shortage of youth, and a church community that is void of youth is a dying community”
- “We never seem to be caught up financially, it is stressful”
- “people not being open minded about differences they may have...we are still one church”
- “We are suffering from apathy. Our pastor is ailing and not able to raise enthusiasm”
- “Sometimes the music is drab, some people are not friendly, our school, which is over 50% non-Catholic [*sic*] is a drain on our finances”

Beliefs or Practices Specific to the Catholic Church Considered Especially Important

There are a variety of Catholic beliefs and practices that were considered especially important to these individuals (see Figure 22). Across the 487 responses to this question, the sacraments were most often mentioned as especially important, with particular emphasis placed on the Eucharist (cited by 197 individuals). Church doctrine was also considered especially important (coded 146 separate times), and over half of the individuals who mentioned Church doctrine indicated pro-life issues were especially important (see Figure 23). Likewise, 90.9% of respondents answered in agreement when asked about the Church's position on abortion.

Many individuals also felt that Catholic rituals and traditions, such as the Mass or Eucharistic adoration, are especially important to them (coded 86 separate times, see Figure 22) and over 88% of individuals indicated agreement with believing in Catholicism's teachings or the Church's interpretation of the Bible. In addition, although not as frequently cited, other Catholic beliefs and practices considered especially important include God's love and love for fellow humans, social teachings, Catholicism being the true faith founded by Jesus, and veneration of Mary and the Saints.

Figure 22: Catholic Beliefs/Practices Considered Especially Important

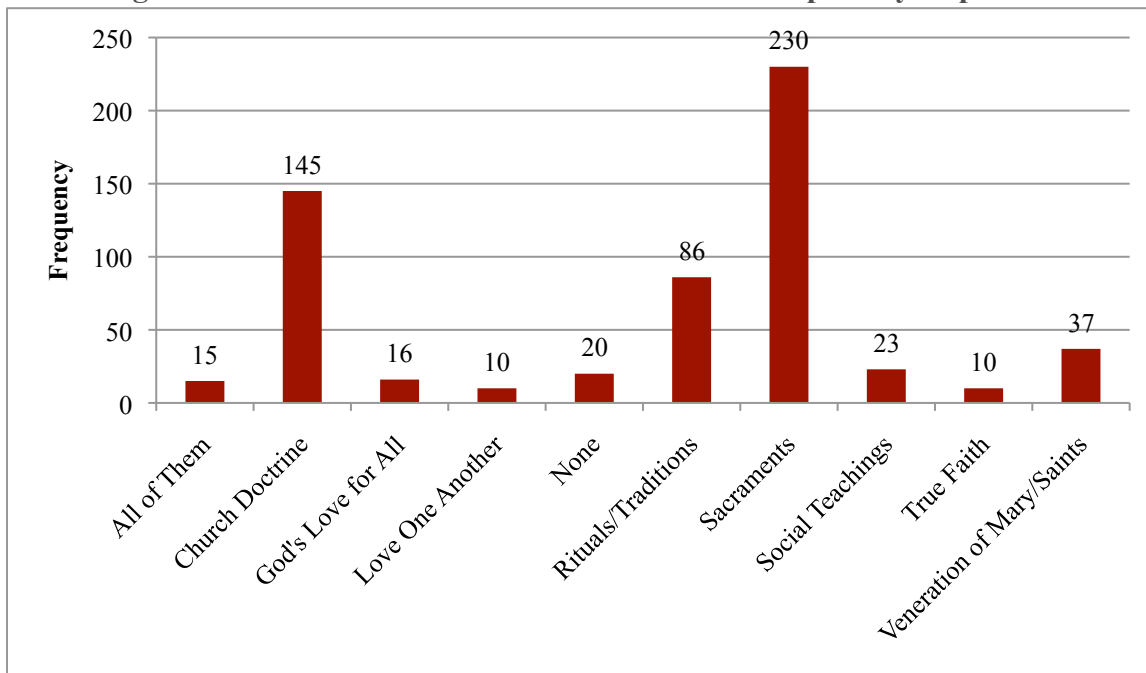
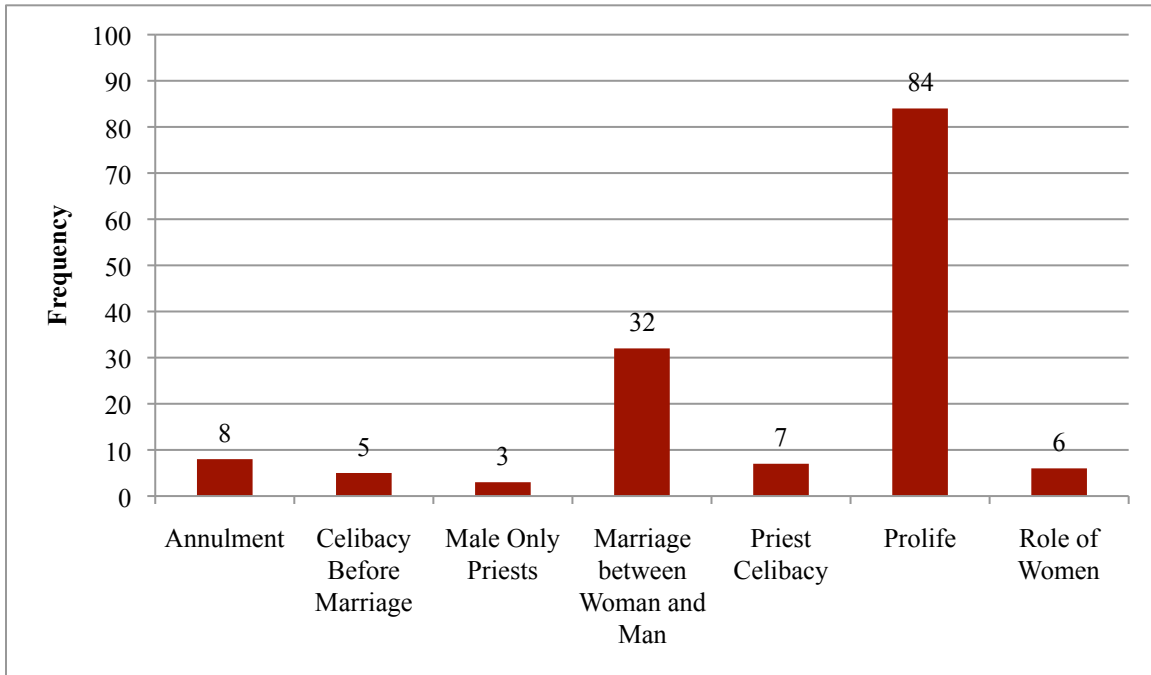


Figure 23: Catholic Doctrine Considered Especially Important



Examples of open-ended responses include:

- “The Eucharist is first and foremost. The other sacraments (especially Confession) and the grace they convey to help us on our journey. Devotion to Our Blessed Mother and the rosary are important to me also.”
- “The knowledge that at communion we as Catholics [*sic*] receive the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus.”
- “The traditions surrounding the liturgy and the liturgical seasons. Of course, the true presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. The strong social teaching of the Catholic Church and all its charitable endeavors.”
- “I heartily agree that the Church should be pro-life and support our moral framework.”
- “I do believe marriage is between a man and a woman. I do believe in the protection of life.”
- “The Eucharist is paramount! I love our teachings on the sanctity of life.”
- “Respect for life at all stages..... Support of marriage, family Eucharistic reverence and celebration...the essence of our Catholic faith Celebration of the Sacraments e.g. Baptism.”
- “The traditions at funerals, Holy Week, Advent, etc. are always important to me as they tie me to the generations who have gone before me, especially my parents and grandparents who were devout Catholics and lived their faith in their daily living.”
- “I believe that being able to attend Mass and receive Communion and know that God is with us is most important to me.”
- “Love thy neighbor. He with the least sin throws the first stone.”

Beliefs or Practices That Trouble Springfield Catholics

Of the 508 individuals who responded to this question, many indicated that there were no beliefs or practices they found troubling; however, the most frequently coded response indicated doctrinal issues troubled them (316 coded responses, see Figure 24) and many of these individuals cited multiple doctrinal issues. Birth control was the most often mentioned doctrinal issue that troubled the respondents in the qualitative responses (see Figure 25), and 39% disagreed with the Church's teaching on birth control in the quantitative responses (see Figure 26a). Homosexuality, marriage/divorce/annulment, and the role of women were also frequently coded as practices or beliefs that trouble Springfield Catholics (see Figure 25). In the quantitative responses, 23% of respondents expressed disagreement with Church doctrine on gay marriage, 31% expressed disagreement with Church doctrine divorce and annulment, and 39% expressed disagreement with church doctrine on the non-ordination of women. Priest celibacy/inability to marry was also given as a belief or practice that troubles Springfield Catholics (occurring in 47 separate responses, see Figure 25), and 36% of respondents expressed disagreement with Church doctrine on the celibacy of priests and 45% expressed disagreement with Church doctrine on priests being unable to marry in the quantitative responses. Disagreement was least for Church doctrine on interpretation of the Bible and abortion, which was also reflected in the open-ended responses as interpretation of the Bible was not mentioned once and the Church's position on abortion was only mentioned seven times as a troubling belief or practice.

Figure 24: Catholic Beliefs/Practices That Trouble Springfield Catholics

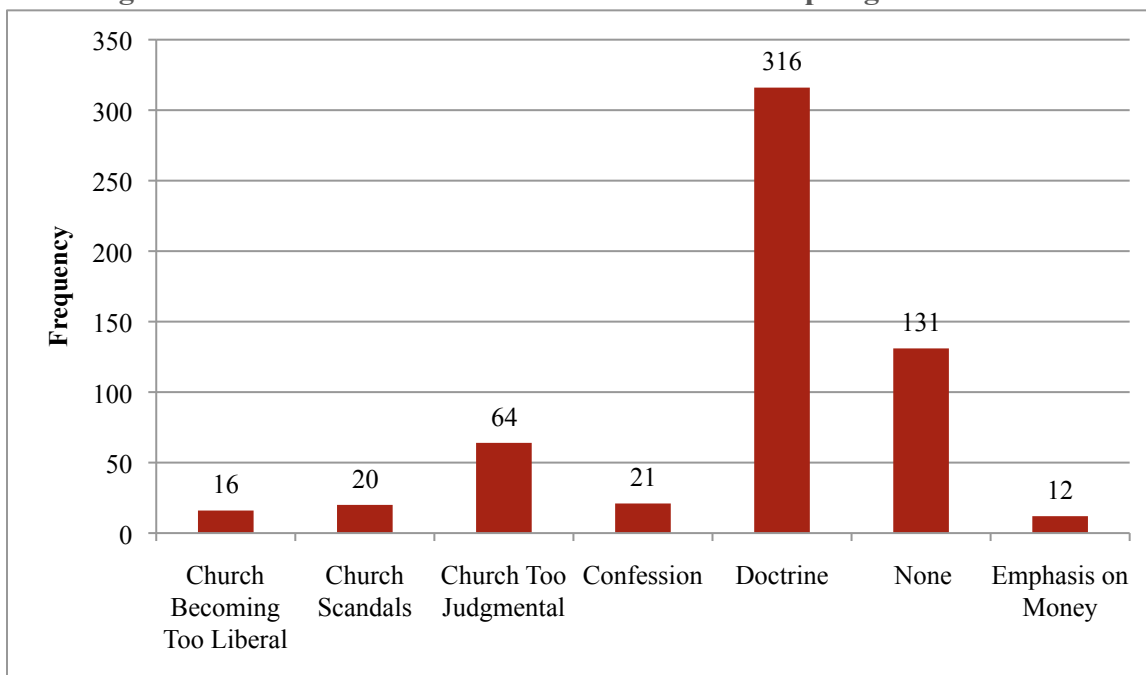


Figure 25: Church Doctrines That Trouble Springfield Catholics

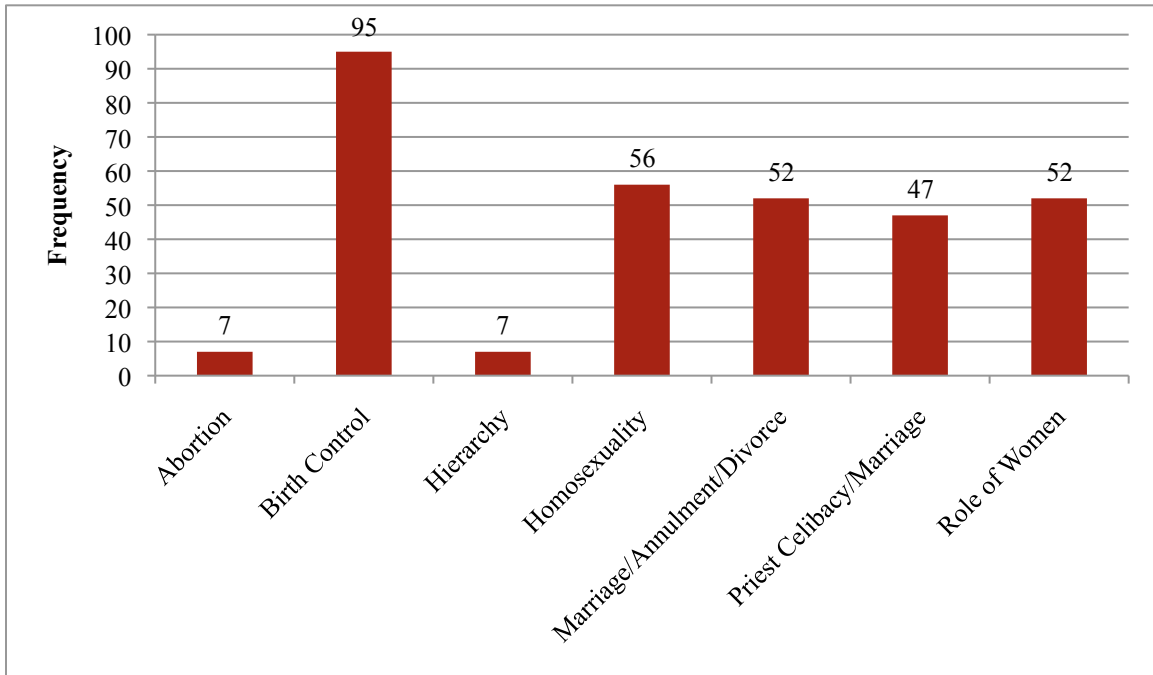


Figure 26a: Level of Agreement with Various Aspects of Church Doctrine

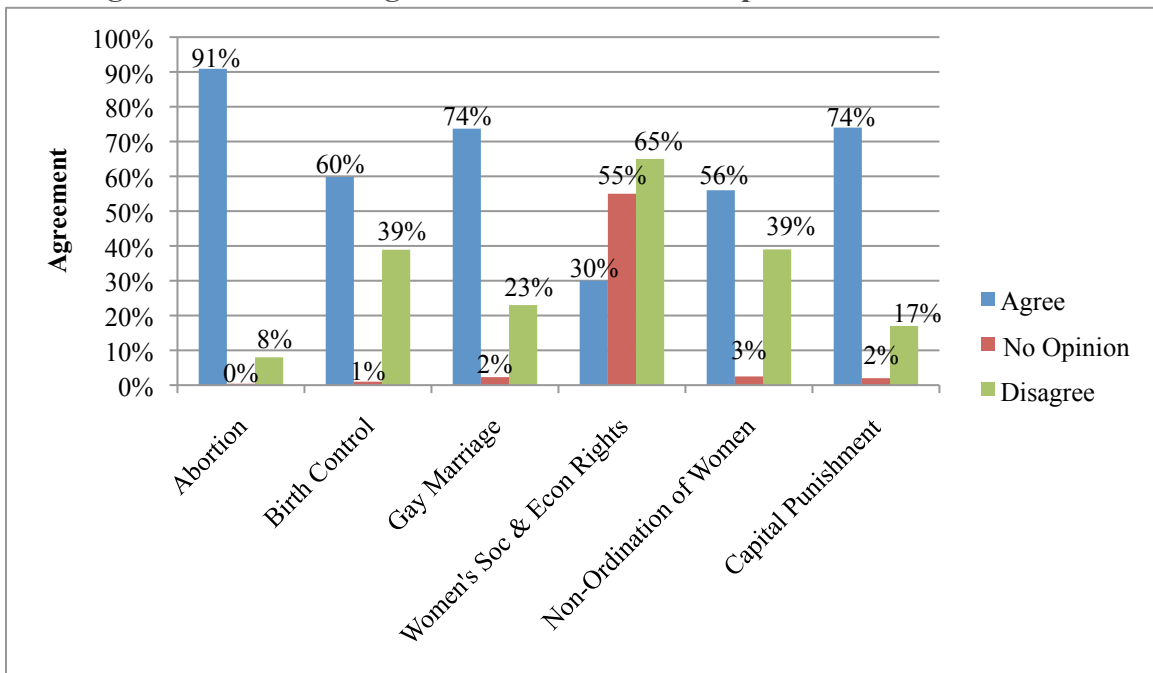
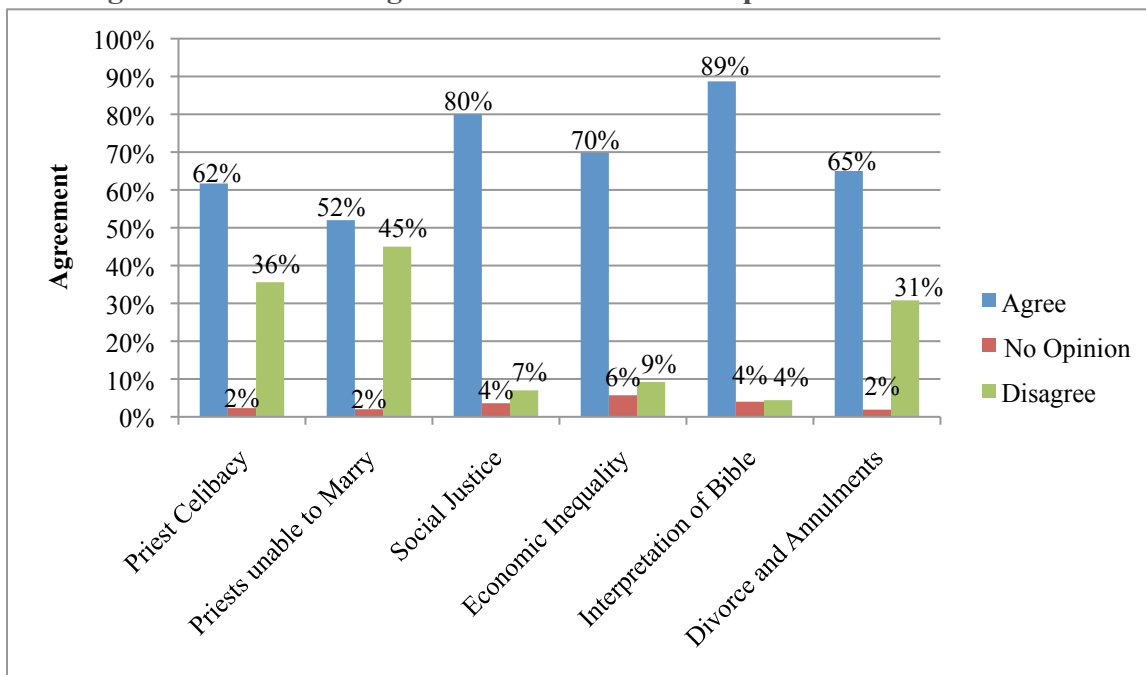


Figure 26b: Level of Agreement with Various Aspects of Church Doctrine



Individuals also indicated the Church is too judgmental (see Figure 24) and these individuals felt especially judged when it comes to sin. There were also individuals who indicated they were troubled about confession, particularly about the need to confess to someone other than God. Church scandals troubled other individuals, as did the Church's emphasis on money. There were, however, some individuals who felt the Church is moving in a direction away from their teachings and these individuals felt troubled by that (see Figure 24).

Examples of open-ended responses include:

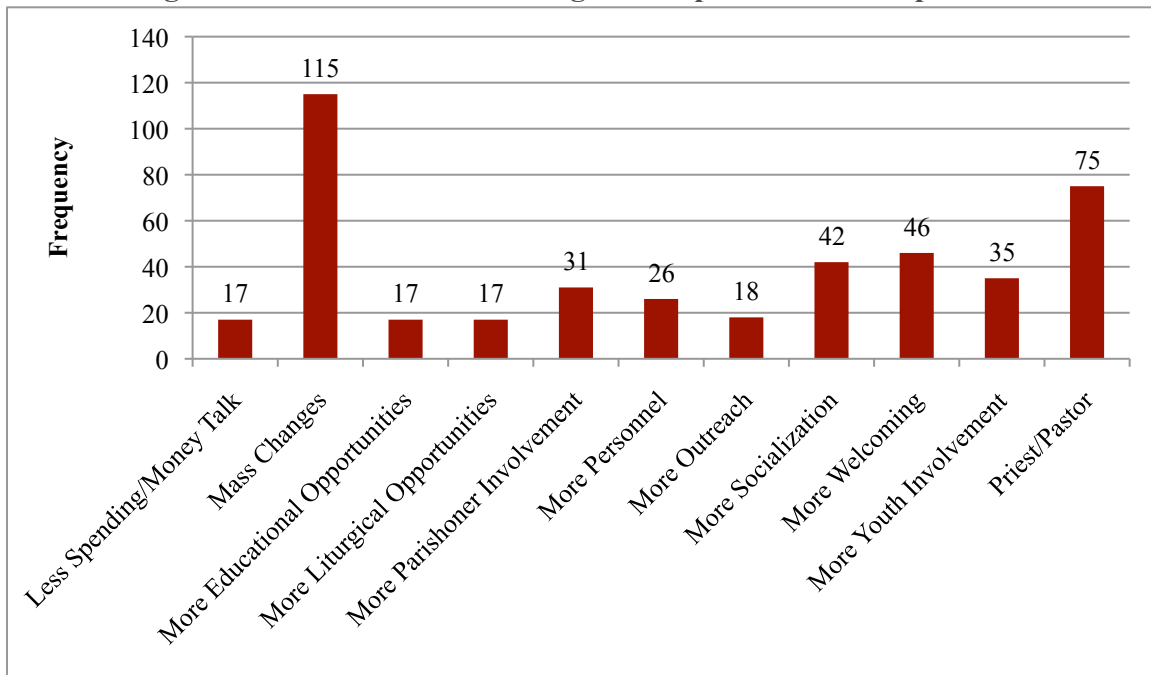
- "I don't understand why the Church is opposed to birth control that prevents conception - I think birth control is immeasurably better than abortion. I think priests should be allowed to marry and that women should have a larger voice. (I am a 60+ year old man)."
- "I think that the Catholic church [*sic*] should be more tolerant of people with different sexual orientation. I believe that this is genetically determined, and therefore determined by God. I also do not agree with the church's stance on birth control."
- "I feel that sometimes Catholics become to [*sic*] critical of people who have different beliefs on birth control, abortion etc. I believe in the teachings of the church but feel that certain times the church gets to [*sic*] involved in political parties and elections."
- "Many younger couples are banned from communion due to marriage problems. A failed marriage is NOT an unforgivable sin!"
- "Trouble, no, but I do sometimes disagree with the way the church, at large, confronts issues. Pope Francis speaks my thoughts."

- “I would not have a problem seeing women have the option of becoming priests. Also, it would not bother me if priests could marry. Lastly, I think people should attend mass because they really want to be there and not attend because they are afraid of committing a mortal sin.”
- “I feel that we get bogged down in legislation and that maybe our efforts need to go to education more. Abortion will never go away, but we can educate our young people as to what it is. We seem to be in the dark ages still. Women deserve leadership roles. We judge instead of accept people. Condemning gays does not feel loving. The whole pedophile thing is disgraceful. Acting like it never happens is not a solution. I'm glad our Pope sees this.”
- “Confession - since we have had so many questionable priest [*sic*], I don't trust any of them anymore to confess to.”
- “Beliefs against gays. Politics shouldn't mix with religion. Always demanding money.”
- “As a Traditional Catholic I don't like seeing the True Faith being undermined by a much more liberal Church of Nice crowd.”

Recommended Changes to Improve Parish Experience

Recommended changes were provided by 423 individuals (see Figure 27) and the most frequently coded response recommends Mass changes (coded 115 times). Within the Mass, most individuals recommended changes to the homily (44 comments) or music (39 comments). Specifically individuals want homilies more meaningful, relevant, and to the point and although some individuals would like to have different music, others would like to have less music. In addition, others would like to see different Mass times (e.g., later Saturday or Sunday night, coded 19 times) or more reverence in the Mass (e.g., more silence or proper attire, coded 13 times). Recommendations were also made regarding priests, which was the second most frequently coded response (coded 75 times), such that many individuals want a new pastor or priest, especially one who is warm or welcoming while others want a warmer or more welcoming community. More socialization was also recommended with 42 coded responses and others would like to see more involvement from fellow parishioners (31 coded responses) or youth (35 coded responses), as well as more church personnel including additional priests, deacons, choir directors, or youth ministers (26 coded responses). In addition, some individuals want more educational opportunities while others want more liturgical opportunities (both recommendations coded 17 times) and there were also some individuals who recommended more outreach (coded 18 times), particularly with lapsed parishioners or those underserved in the community. Other recommendations included limiting the emphasis on money or decreasing parish spending (17 coded responses).

Figure 27: Recommended Changes to Improve Parish Experience



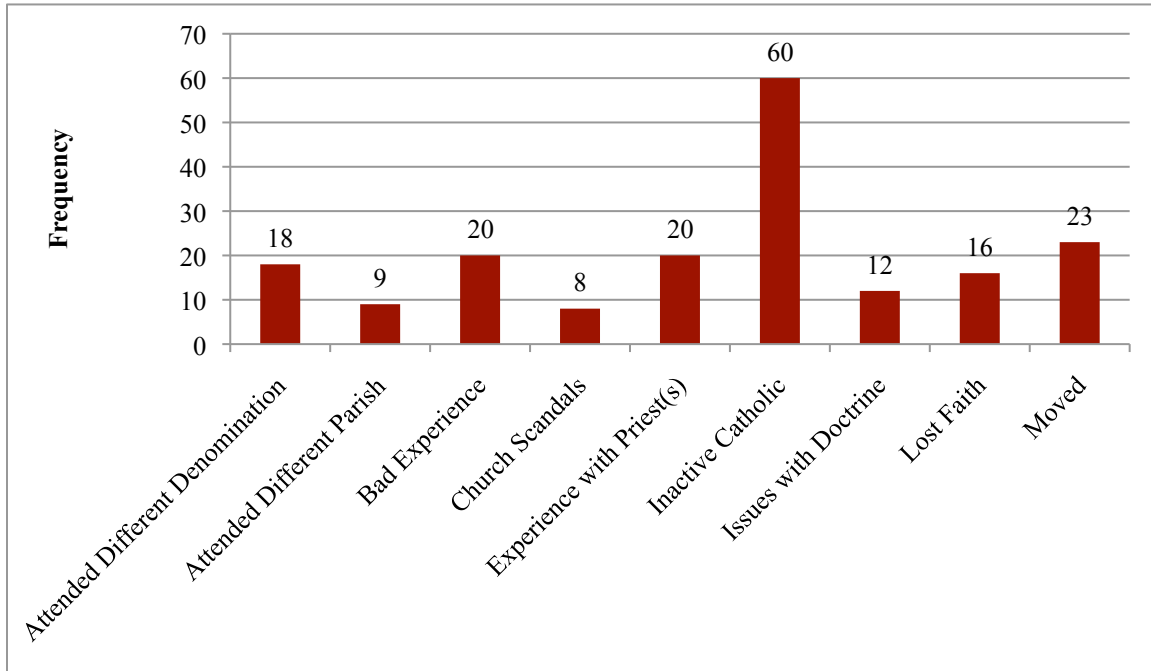
Examples of open-ended responses include:

- “PLEASE teach our priests how to give meaningful sermons, and quit watching the clock. WHY do they do this, convey a good idea then start talking in circles and by the time it's done I take away nothing.”
- “Start with enhancing the music and go from there. Liturgy without music is like going to the gym and not exercising.”
- “Again, one mass where the priest leads the Mass and sets the tone rather than the choir. I am 73 and was used to a silent Mass. I love some of the hymns but I would prefer to recite some of the prayers rather than singing them. I would just like to have a choice”
- “We need a priest who will promote a more friendly welcoming parish.”
- “That our Priest be more open and welcoming to everyone. A little ,’How are you? Good to see you today’ would go a long way. People, themselves, need to feel wanted and cared about Not just there [*sic*] wallets. He does give a great Homily, and that is very much appreciated. In order for more people to participate in the parish, hold an open house/sign up letting all people know how they can be a better part of the community.”
- “I want to feel like I belong to a COMMUNITY of saints. It feels so very fake and artificial. No one is friendly. The priest appears as so put out to be there. But he drones on about money and guilt.”
- “A more active youth ministry. A better overall music program. Emphasis on adult small groups. More systematic approach to fostering fellowship after Mass.”
- “We need music and a choir like we had at one time. We need Eucharistic ministers to take Holy Communion to shut ins. We need a better outreach program to visit people who live alone and are lonely. We need to engage outsiders in conversation after Mass and make them feel welcome. We need one or two social events each year for the adults in addition to the monthly coffees and working on the fish and chicken dinners.”

Separation from Parish, Catholic Church, or Both

When providing comments about separating from their parish, the Catholic Church or both, many individuals indicated that they were inactive for a time, particularly in their younger years. Out of these 218 individuals, this was the most frequently given response (coded 60 separate times; see Figure 28). For other individuals, separation came as a result of their experiences, particularly with priests (20 coded responses), or disagreement/issues with Church doctrine (12 coded responses). Some, however, moved too far away to attend their parish (23 coded responses) while others purposefully chose to attend different parishes or denominations (27 coded responses). There were also some individuals who indicated church scandals and cover-ups were reasons why they separated (8 coded responses) whereas other individuals separated because the Catholic faith no longer sustained them (16 coded responses).

Figure 28: Comments Regarding Parish/Church Separation



Examples of open-ended items include:

- “In my high school/young adult years, I was Catholic in name only. I attended Mass rarely, and did not give much thought to the Church's teachings or living in a Christian way”
- “During an unsure time in my late teens through my early 30's I stopped going to mass at all but I never stopped believing in God”
- “I did for sure during college, but I feel like that was just the stage in my life. Now I struggle because I have two young kids, and I find it difficult to attend when I spend all my focus on

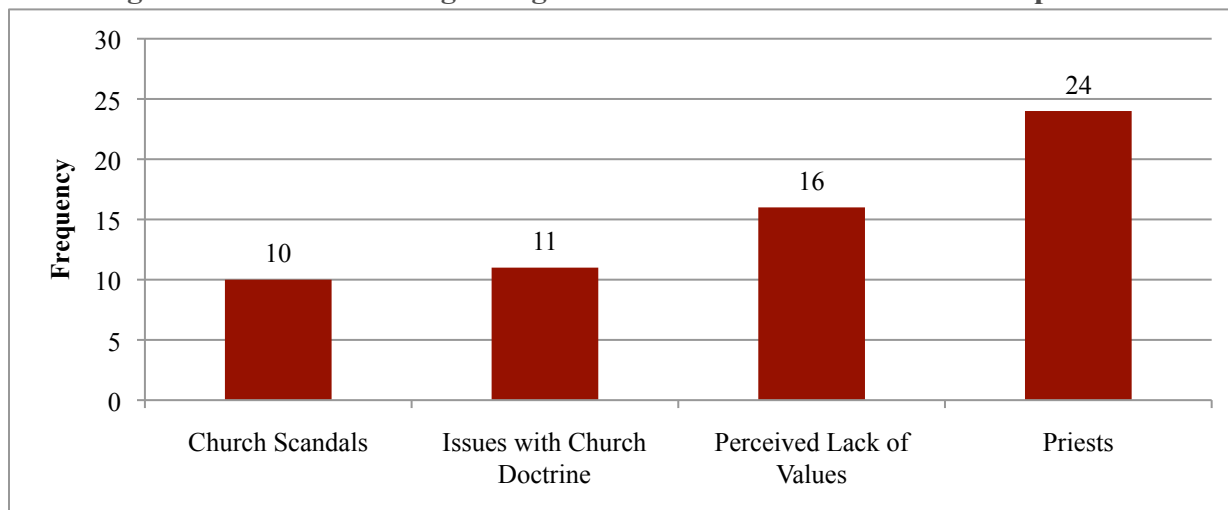
keeping them quiet. I also find it hard to go because we are always being told about coming to church regularly, and fire and brim stone. I'm looking for positive messages and I feel like there is a lot of negativity in our homilies and towards so many different walks of life”

- “several years in my young adult life until I was called back and briefly when Fr. XXXX was our pastor and had an incident with pornographic material”
- “separated from XXXX Church and the Catholic Church after the Fr. XXXX ordeal. The way that church responded to his actions was less than respectable. Not enough reprimand for his actions. After he left, the priests that replaced him were disappointing as well- they seemed to only care about the select parishioners who brown nosed them”
- “Refuse [*sic*] to marry us because we had lived together for 2 years. We were 60 and 50”
- “I have quit going to my church and have started going to a neighboring town. The priest in our church does not make me like I got anything out of it. He is not friendly and I feel he doesn’t want to be around us”
- “I was away from the church for over 40 years. The main cause was the issue of birth control. After being educated in 12 years of Catholic schools, which told me what was true and what to think and feel, I could not feel it was my own decision to make. I had three children in three years and could not continue that way, so used birth control. To me, that meant I could not make a good confession and receive communion. Hence, I eventually stopped going all together”

Considering Separation from Parish, Catholic Church, or Both

For those individuals who have not separated from their parish or the Catholic Church, but have considered it ($n = 93$), experiences with priests were given as the most frequent comment to explain their responses and this response occurred in one-fourth of those individuals who answered this question (see Figure 29). In addition, individuals indicated that a perceived lack of Christian values could lead to them separating from their parish or the Church (coded in 16 responses), as could issues with Church doctrine (coded in 11 responses). There were also some individuals who considered separation because of Church scandals (10 coded responses).

Figure 29: Comments Regarding Consideration of Parish/Church Separation



Examples of open-ended responses include:

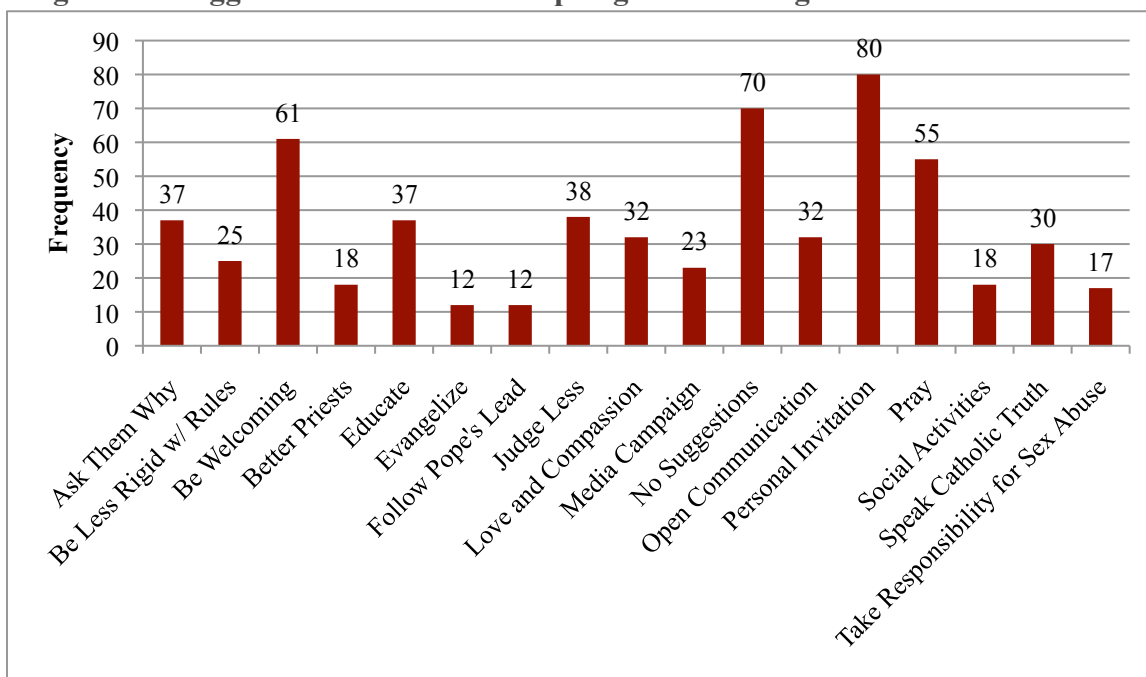
- “We don't have an assigned parish priest. How can anyone develop [sic] a relationship if your church feels like we only have visiting priest?”
- “I am not happy with our current priest and feel he is hurting our church.”
- “Things have become intolerable since the arrival of our new pastor.”
- “Sometimes I do not feel welcome there. Priest is not always opening and welcoming to everyone.”
- “Sometimes, it seems we stray too far from Jesus's mandate to love one another.”
- “I have a difficult time with the church's stance on [sic] some social issues, ie contraception and sexuality. I also feel that the church gets away from teaching about faith and what it means to be catholic.”

Advice for Inactive Catholics

Although many of the 574 responses indicated Springfield parishioners had no suggestions for how the Diocese could bring inactive Catholics back ($n = 70$), the most frequently given response indicated that a personal invitation (coded in 80 responses), either from a parish priest or parishioners themselves, would be their recommendation (see Figure 30). Many others (61 coded responses) also suggested a more welcoming attitude from the Church, parishes, and priests or that the Church, parishes, and priests could be less judgmental (38 coded responses). Prayer also was a frequently given response, with 55 coded responses, and some suggested personal prayer whereas others suggested intentions during the Mass. Some individuals (37 responses) felt it was important to ask these inactive Catholics why they left and that open communication was necessary to bring these individuals back, mentioned in 32 responses. Quite a few individuals suggested that more education was necessary for both active and inactive Catholics (37 coded responses). For active Catholics, there was a sense that with more education they would be better to openly communicate with inactive Catholics about why those individuals left and for inactive Catholics there was a sense that more education might bring more understanding as to what the Church actually teaches. In addition, when communicating with inactive Catholics, other Springfield parishioners suggested that Catholic Truth be spoken (mentioned in 30 responses), so that fundamental beliefs and traditions of Catholicism are highlighted. There were also a few suggestions that inactive Catholics be shown love and compassion and perhaps the Church could be less rigid about their rules (25 coded responses), particularly when it comes to inviting back divorced or remarried parishioners. Some Springfield parishioners suggested that a media campaign (23 coded responses), including television, radio, and mailings, would be helpful and other individuals suggested the best way to bring lapsed Catholics back was for the Church to take full responsibility for the child sexual abuse scandals. There were also suggestions that priests of a higher quality could bring lapsed Catholics back (18 coded responses). Social activities were mentioned by a few individuals as a

way to reach out to these individuals (18 coded responses), as was parishioner responsibility to evangelize (12 coded responses). Finally, several Springfield parishioners suggested that following Pope Francis' lead would help with bringing back lapsed Catholics (12 coded responses).

Figure 30: Suggestions for Diocese of Springfield to Bring Back Inactive Catholics



Examples of open-ended responses include:

- “Priest make [*sic*] personal, friendly contact and be very careful when and how to judge the person involved. The personal contact needs to be loving, understanding, sympathetic. Slow to judge and full of sympathy and understanding for the cause of the person leaving the Church in the first place and not returning on their own.”
- “Invitation!!!! I think every parish should have a "visitor Sunday" one Sunday a month where parishioners [*sic*] are encouraged to bring a friend to mass, and there should then be a social event for parishioners [*sic*] and visitors after mass. Teens and children should be encouraged to invite their friends also, and they should be involved for planning fun activities for kids, teens and their friends so that they'd want to come back.”
- “Be very welcoming; listen to their stories; express forgiveness on the part if church personnel or members that have offended people; teach what we believe without watering it down and in a manner that they can hear and hopefully accept.”

- “Encourage [*sic*] prayer for their return. Find out why they left and share (if not too confidential) the reasons with the parish priest so that outreach can be made at the parish level. The Church can express [*sic*] the Joy of the Catholic faith!!”
- “educating the people in the pews so that they are well informed of the Truths of the Church and are offered opportunity for true conversion...that they may be true witnesses to all around them....both spoken and unspoken...in true charity.”
- “More education on what the Church believes and why we are passionate about these issues. ‘Why we do what we do’ seems to be a big question for most people. Adult education is important, because at a lot of parishes people did not get an adequate education as children/teens.”
- “I think clarifying some beliefs of the Catholic church would be helpful. Many people have a preconcieved [*sic*] idea that Catholics are rigid and traditional and don't understand all the "rules" and parts of the mass. They see other churches as more modern and meaningful/related to their life today.”
- “Joyfully inviting them home. The Catholics Come Home campaign is on target for inviting and reminding fallen away Catholics about the beauty of their faith. Maybe more instruction on WHY the Church teaches what it does... (blurbs on official Church teaching in the bulletin? a different topic each week?”
- “Assure them that no one is perfect and that a divorce, or any other breech [*sic*] of catholic "rules" doesnt [*sic*] mean they dont [*sic*] belong.”
- “Individuals I have talked to who have left the church have talked a lot about guilt. Feelings of not living up to the expectations of the Church. We can work on this by loving people right where they are and shining God's light through our example of love and acceptance”
- “I think parishes should try to find dynamic social events to attract people on that level first. I also think the parish should try to advertise about open opportunities or groups that welcome fallen away catholics [*sic*].”
- “We should be accepting of ALL people. There are many in our parish who have left because of our priest and deacon. There are 13 [*sic*] off the top of my head that have left the parish because of things said by the priest or deacon. We are in desperate need of someone to minister to our parish.”
- “Take 100% responsibility [*sic*] for the clergy sex scandals. This would mean complete cooperation with legal authorities regarding the crimes and especially the cover-ups. If these practices had occurred [*sic*] in any institution other than the Catholic Church, the leaders would be in prison for criminal conspiracy [*sic*] and obstruction of justice.”
- “Ask yourself what Jesus would do and then do it. Forgiveness [*sic*] and reconciliation [*sic*]. The Catholic Church had lost its way. Hopefully Pope Francis can be a little more forward thinking and bring a breath of fresh air into the Church.”

Discussion

The present study was designed to: provide answers to the leadership of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois as to why some Springfield parishioners are choosing to leave the Catholic Church whereas others have remained faithful; provide active and inactive Catholics with an opportunity to express their opinions confidentially, while knowing that their responses would be shared directly with the Bishop of this Diocese; and, to do so using a methodological approach that followed accepted “best practices” in social science.

Although similar in terms of ethnicity, there were some differences between the two samples. There were more female active Catholics compared to those who are inactive and there were more older (≥ 65 years old) active Catholics than inactive Catholics. There were also more divorced inactive Catholics compared to those still active and inactive Catholics had higher rates of graduate school education. Despite these differences, some similarities emerged across both surveys. Overall, a majority of inactive Catholics and some active Catholics want to see changes with Catholic Church doctrine. Church doctrine was cited most often as the reason why inactive Catholics separated from their parish and/or the Church and Church doctrine was cited most often as beliefs or practices of the Catholic Church that active Catholics find troubling. Furthermore, Church doctrine did emerge as a common theme when active Catholics were asked if they had ever separated or considered separation from their parish or the Catholic Church. These findings are similar to what Zech and Byron (2011) found in their online survey of drifting Catholics. Unfortunately, as Zech and Byron note, many Catholic doctrines (e.g., birth control and gay marriage) are “non-negotiable” at this time. Short of new teachings and doctrinal direction from the Vatican, there might be very little that dioceses can do to prevent people with objections to these aspects of Catholic life from drifting or leaving the Church.

The good news, however, is it appears there *are* “negotiable” areas (Zech and Byron 2011) that the Diocese of Springfield might give additional consideration to moving forward that could potentially bring lapsed Catholics back and keep active Catholics from drifting. This could include more reliable access to their priests during times of need, recognition by priests of challenges in today’s world, and a broader array of parish services. Parish pastors and priests were the most frequently given responses among inactive and active Catholics when asked about having a bad experience associated with anyone in the Church and common critiques of the priests themselves included that priests were overworked and unavailable in parishioners’ times of need, lacked empathy, and were not always welcoming at church. Furthermore, some active Catholics revealed that they sometimes feel judged by their priests and inactive Catholics felt a sense of hypocrisy with certain priests’ actions being covered up, yet they felt judged for their actions, such as divorce or remarriage. These results suggest that parishes need to take care to cultivate a sense of friendliness and belonging that many have left the Church or no longer feel compelled to attend Mass because they feel unwelcomed and disconnected from their pastors and priests.

One way that pastors or parish priests could be more welcoming to inactive Catholics is to connect with them through a personal invitation. Of active Catholics who offered suggestions for how to reach inactive Catholics, being more welcoming and a personal invitation were the two highest responses. Considering priests were the second most frequently given response to what active Catholics like most about their parish and active Catholics in the Diocese of Springfield already feel their parish has a wonderful sense of community, including that it is their “family” or “home,” it appears as if there is potential for more positive priest and parish experiences and the time may be ripe for an invitation to return.

Of course, an invitation to return to their parish can only go so far with inactive Catholics. The second most frequently given response from these individuals as to why they left their parish or the Church was due to a lack of connection. These individuals felt like their spiritual needs were not being met and many were dissatisfied with various aspects of the Mass. Although active Catholics are overwhelmingly satisfied with their Mass experiences and spiritual fulfillment and growth, changes to the music and homily were the most frequently given suggestions as how to improve their parish experience, which were also suggestions given by inactive Catholics as changes that could prompt them to return. The Diocese of Springfield may want to consider ways of trying new music or promoting more topical messages in their homilies.

Finally, the handling of Church scandals and politics being preached from the pulpit have also resulted in some leaving their parish or the Church, although these themes were not prominent among active Catholics. In addition to the national scandals, the Diocese of Springfield has seen their own controversies (Bakke 2005; Spearie 2012) and many inactive Catholics felt “betrayed by all associated with the Catholic faith.”¹ Others felt “tired and discouraged of the church getting involved in politics.”² The Diocese may want to consider engaging in less partisan discourse and more open and honest dialogue with their parishes in an attempt to bring back some of these individuals.

Limitations

This research is not without limitations. The opinions of more than 1,300 individuals from the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois were measured in online surveys. As scholars, pollsters, and others increasingly rely on the World Wide Web to gauge people’s opinions about a range of subjects, it should be noted this methodological approach has not yet been perfected. It is possible that the individuals who participated in our survey carried (and were motivated to express) more positive or negative feelings and opinions about their parish experiences and therefore are not representative of all active, lapsed, or drifting Catholics in the Diocese of Springfield, IL. However, recent research suggests online surveys are an acceptable means of

¹ After several of the sex scandal [*sic*] came out in the news, along with the cover ups by the church, I felt that I had been betrayed by all associated with the catholic faith

² I got so tired and discouraged of the church getting involved in politics in light of its cover-up of the child sex abuse scandal. The latest anti-gay marriage screeds from the bishop is part of this. Is this a church or is it the Republican Party at prayer?

measuring public opinion and online samples tend to be more demographically diverse than laboratory samples (Birnbaum as cited in McBride 2013).

Another limitation, specific to the lapsed and drifting Catholics survey, is the drop in participation from providing electronic consent in the first section to the more substantive sections of the survey. The initial decay from more than 900 who gave electronic consent to the 575 who answered a majority of the survey questions remains something of a mystery. We suspect that curious individuals who wanted to examine the survey provided consent in order to proceed to the next section of the survey, but decided against participating upon reviewing this section of the questionnaire. Of course, it is possible that some people provided electronic consent, failed to complete the survey due to its length, but returned when they had more time. This latter consideration would make the apparent level of decay less pronounced and perhaps more emphasis on survey time completion could circumvent this issue in the future. The active Catholics survey had no such concerns, as only two individuals of the 829 who clicked on the survey opted not to complete it.

Finally, the inactive Catholics survey had one methodological limitation identified that had to do with the way respondents were asked to identify their parish. Rather than providing a list of the 130 parishes from the Diocese, survey participants were asked to provide the name of their parish. Twenty-two percent of respondents chose not to provide this information. Others, however, attempted to give the name of their parish, but provided either incomplete or inaccurate information, such that we were unable to determine the actual parish name with certainty. For example, some respondents provided the name “St. Mary’s” as their parish, but the Diocese of Springfield has multiple St. Mary’s (e.g., St. Mary’s of Green Creek and St. Mary’s of Neoga). Rather than speculate as to which parish a respondent was referring to, we opted to leave the parish name as “unknown” when any doubts about the validity of the parish name were raised. This shortcoming had the unfortunate result of limiting our ability to provide more detailed parish-level analyses.

Conclusion

Facing declining Mass attendance rates in some parishes over a course of many years, and with concerns about individuals who may have ceased their association with the Catholic Church altogether, Bishop Thomas Paprocki and the leadership of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois sought to understand the reasons underlying drops in Mass attendance and parish roll counts while others continued to attend Mass. The Diocese cooperated fully throughout this study, and at no time interfered or attempted to influence the work that is presented here. This reflects very favorably on the Diocese of Springfield and their attempts to strengthen relations with their members and visitors. Using two confidential online surveys and accepted social scientific procedures, one must hope that the contents of this report will prove useful to all who read it, and that it will serve as a resource moving forward for Bishop Paprocki and the Springfield Diocese.

This study suggests Church doctrine plays a key role in individuals separating from the Catholic Church and it may be difficult to prevent current parishioners from leaving or to bring lapsed or drifting parishioners back to this faith community.

However, in the recent words of Pope Francis, “no one is saved alone, as an isolated individual, but God attracts us looking at the complex web of relationships that take place in the human community. God enters into this dynamic, this participation in the web of human relationships” (Spadaro 2013). Given our findings, parishes and pastors in the Diocese of Springfield may have opportunities to attract and retain those Catholics who currently consider themselves distanced or lapsed from their parish or Church through this web of human relationships. The continued pursuit of a welcoming, friendly, and judgment-free atmosphere in their church may create this human community that so many seek through group worship and therefore bring back those who have lapsed or drifted away.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Press Release



Attention: Managing, News and Community Editors

Date: Thursday, November 8, 2012

Contact: Phil Brozynski (630) 829-6094 or Elliott Peppers (630) 829-6079

Benedictine University researchers study former and drifting Catholics

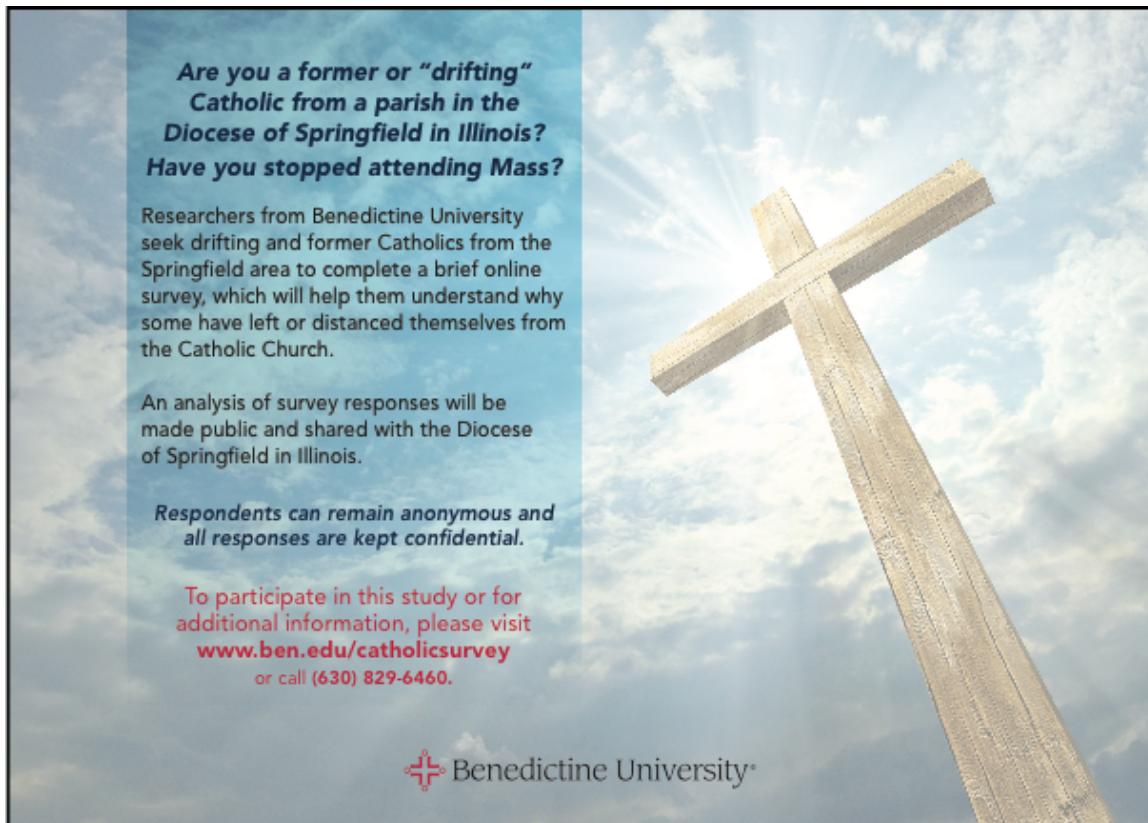
Lisle, Illinois ~ Three social science faculty members from Benedictine University are beginning an online survey of people from the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois who have drifted from or left the Catholic Church or are no longer attending mass regularly.

Phillip Hardy, Ph.D., of the Department of Political Science, and Kelly Kandra, Ph.D., and Brian Patterson, Ph.D., of the Department of Psychology, Sociology and Criminal Justice, hope to gather survey responses from several hundred participants during the coming months. The survey is confidential and can be completed anonymously if respondents do not wish to be contacted by the researchers at a later date.

The study aims to understand the factors that contribute to declining mass attendance among parishioners in the Diocese of Springfield, as well as some of the reasons why some Catholics no longer attend mass regularly or no longer feel as much of a personal connection to their church. A summary report will be made public and a copy will be provided to the Diocese of Springfield.

A companion survey, for active Catholics in the diocese, will be offered at a later date. To participate in the study or for further information, please visit www.ben.edu/catholicsurvey.

Appendix B. Sample Print and Online Advertisement




Are you a former or "drifting" Catholic from a parish in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois? Have you stopped attending Mass?

Researchers from Benedictine University seek drifting and former Catholics from the Springfield area to complete a brief online survey, which will help them understand why some have left or distanced themselves from the Catholic Church.

An analysis of survey responses will be made public and shared with the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois.

Respondents can remain anonymous and all responses are kept confidential.

To participate in this study or for additional information, please visit www.ben.edu/catholicsurvey or call (630) 829-6460.

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