

Catholic Trends-2/Spring 2024). *Raising Catholic children to be active Catholic adults.*

That is certainly the goal which is imbued in our baptismal promises and the mission of the Church. We are called to baptize all nations in “the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19b) and “Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15). That’s the mission of the Church and it begins at home, which Vatican II described as the *domestic church*.

Sounds good: we’ve got our marching orders—how are we doing? Uh, not very well when it comes to our children. According to data from the *General Social Survey (GSS)*, **some 85 percent of Catholic young people leave the faith as adults for other religions or none at all.** Think about it: all our children who are baptized, receive 1st Communion, are Confirmed, many of whom attend Catholic primary schools, secondary schools, and even universities by the time they get to be adults, 85% are “*going, going, gone*”! That is a staggering statistic, which does not bode well for the vitality of the Catholic Church in America if that trend becomes the norm.

Now, what about the 15% who stay? While they do participate in their faith, their involvement is not exactly robust? According to the GSS in the 1970s, 36% of those who were raised Catholic in the U.S. attended Mass weekly; that figure topped at 40% in 1977. The average percentage declined in the 2010 to 15%. Current data reveals the following about those children raised Catholic who remain in the faith as adults.

- they are more likely to be women than men (58% compared to 42%);
- they are disproportionately likely to be married (59%) as compared to 50% who remain Catholic but don’t attend Mass weekly;
- they are more likely to have been born outside the U.S. (29%), as compared to 18% of former Catholics;
- they were raised in a household with their mother and father present (81%);
- they were raised by stay-at-home mom while they were growing up (41%);
- they are regular readers of Scripture (78%) compared to 41% of those who don’t attend weekly Mass;
- they are disproportionately to have a Catholic spouse if married (75%) as compared to 58% of those who don’t regularly attend Mass.

For those 15% of Catholic children who remain active Catholics as adults, CARA (Center for the Applied Research of the Apostolate) in collaboration with the

National Opinion Research Center, found that their parents are more likely to have the following characteristics:

- been confirmed Catholic (100%);
- been through parish-based religious education (52%), Catholic primary school (58%), Catholic secondary school (28%), and Catholic college (14%);
- registered with their parish (100%);
- been somewhat or very much involved with their parish outside of weekly Mass (60%);
- been to confession at least once a year (69%).

Demographically, taken as a whole, the Catholic parents most likely to raise their children to adulthood as active Catholics are Hispanic, married, with bachelor's degrees, living in the South, and earning an income equivalent to the U.S. median family income.

CARA conducted interviews with parents and their adult children who are active in their faith, which identified certain practices that helped families pass their faith to their adult children:

- prioritizing family time and being careful not to let extracurricular activities crowd out family activities and rituals;
- showing generous, healthy affection between parents and children;
- taking a gentler approach to discipline that focused on teaching good behavior and virtue instead of punishment;
- establishing strong family rituals that enabled the family to regularly work, play, talk, and pray together, often daily;
- teaching good manners in and outside the home;
- encouraging children to discuss personal and/or faith struggles freely and openly without fear of receiving lectures or negative judgments;
- regularly discussing ways to take better care of each other;
- regularly discussing ways they could care for others, including simple things like being polite to strangers and more involved in things like family service projects, family charitable giving, and hospitality.

--taken from the CARA Report (Applied Research in the Apostolate; Georgetown University; *Spring 2024*)