

New Study on Catholic Life in the U.S.

A Pew Research Center report took a look at Catholic life and began with the observation that “Catholicism’s roots in the U.S. run deep. Nearly half of U.S. adults claim some connection to the Catholic faith” (47%). The study found that:

- 20% of U.S. adults are Catholic.
- 9% are cultural Catholics: they don’t identify with Catholicism religiously, Still consider themselves connected in some way.
- 9% are former Catholics: they neither identify with being Catholic nor consider themselves culturally Catholic, but say they were raised in the Catholic faith.
- 9% say they are connected to Catholicism in other ways: they have a Catholic spouse or parent or say “yes” if they have ever attend Mass.

Some Catholics consult astrology, Tarot Cards, or Fortune Tellers

A 2024 survey by the Pew Research Center finds that “30% of U.S. adults say they consult astrology (or a horoscope), tarot cards, or a fortune teller at least once a year, but most do it for fun, and few Americans say they make a major decision based on what they learn along the way.

11% Catholics look to these sources for helpful insights, where 23% used it just for fun. 66% of Catholics never use them.

Churches Show Resilience Five Years after the Pandemic

The Exploring the Pandemic Impact on Congregations project surveyed 80 religious organizations and found that “Our comprehensive new survey reveals that congregational participants have weathered the pandemic and are experiencing notable spiritual growth and renewed engagement.”

Specifically, “More than 20% of congregations report increased attendance compared to pre-pandemic levels, and 38% of surveyed church attenders joined their current congregation within the last five years.”

The Impact of Mary, Mother of the Church, on Ecclesial Vocations

CARA (Center for the Applied Research in the Apostolate) completed a study which found that 59% of respondents reported their devotion to Mary had an impact on their original sense of vocation to serve Christ and the Church.

89% of ordained or consecrated religious practice a devotion to Mary, with 74% reporting that their devotion has strengthened them in living out their vocation.

Respondents engage in Marian devotion once a week or more through reciting the rosary alone or with others (72%/37%) meditative/contemplative prayer with our Lady (46%), or engaging in spiritual reading (28%). 62% have made a pilgrimage to at least one Marian site after their commitment to an ecclesial vocation, most commonly Lourdes (45%), Guadalupe (40%), or Fatima (39%).

Praying the Rosary is Good for You!

The *Journal of Religion and Health* found that the ancient practice of praying the rosary offers a positive moderate correlation with reducing depression, increasing empathy, and lowering religious struggles. The research also suggests that praying the rosary “can contribute to social integration and is often associated with community and communion in the present sample.”

Changes in Worldwide Church Stats

The Vatican’s *Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae* (2023) begins by noting that “New Church statistics reveal a growing Catholic population, but a decreasing number of priests”

The global Catholic population saw a growth of 1.5% increasing to 1.4 billion. If the Catholic Church was a country, we’d have the 3rd largest population in the world.

Africa now accounts for 20% of the global Catholic population, demonstrating a robust expansion of the Church. At the turn of the 20th century there were approximately 3 million Catholics in Africa. Today there are 281 million which amounts to a Pentecost experience every year. In 2022 the growth rate was +3.31% or 9 million more Catholics. The Democratic Republic of the Congo leads with 55 million Catholics, followed by Nigeria (35 million), along with notable numbers in Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya.

In the Americas, which holds 47.8% of the world’s Catholics, there was a modest growth of 0.9%. South America, home to 27.4% Catholics, is led by Brazil,

where 182 million Catholics represent 13% of the global total. Argentina, Colombia, and Paraguay show a Catholic presence exceeding 90%

Europe, which is home to 20.4% of the global Catholic community, experienced the slowest growth of just 0.25, with significant concentrations remaining in Italy, Poland, and Spain.

The number of bishops in the Catholic Church rose by 1.4%, from 5,353 in 2022 to 5,430 in 2023, with the most notable increases in Africa and Asia. Meanwhile, the number of priests declined slightly to 406,996, with notable growth in Africa and Asia but decreases in Europe, Oceania, and the Americas. The distribution of priests in 2023 by geographical areas shows 38.1% of the total priests are in Europe, 29.1% in the Americas, 18.2% in Asia, 13.5% in Africa, and 1.1% in Oceania.

Permanent deacons saw an increase of 2.6% reaching 51,433 in 2023. There are 18,723 in the U.S., which constitutes 36% worldwide. The number of professed religious sisters decreased by 1.6% to 589,423. In the U.S. there are 34,776 (in 1965 there were 179,954 which reflects a dramatic drop). The trend of declining seminarians continued dropping to 106,495, with Africa being the only continent to show an increase. In the U.S. there are 2,556 graduate-level seminarians (down from 8,325 in 1965).

U.S. Parish Snap-shot

There are 16,267 parishes in the U.S., a 0.9% drop from 2015 (17,337). There are 3,471 parishes without a resident priest and 264 are entrusted to someone other than a priest.

The Catholic population in the U.S. is 67.3 million down slightly from 2015 (68.1 m). The percentage of the U.S. population is 20%.

--compiled from *The CARA Report* (Fall 2025)