

## ***Catholic Trends: Winter-2026 (#2)***

### ***ON RAISING LIFELONG CATHOLICS***

Two scientists\* have produced an analysis of “arguably the single biggest problem in the U.S.” namely, “We are losing nine out of ten cradle Catholics.” As the Tom Hanks character in *Apollo 13* intones: “Houston, we have a problem!”

***The causes of Catholic Disaffiliation.*** Children form their religious beliefs based upon the testimony and witness of those whom they trust, primarily their parents, as well as participating in meaningful religious activities themselves. As they grow into adolescence and young adults, their religious commitments are strongly influenced by their close personal relationships, as well as the wider culture. In their book *Going, Going, Gone*, authors claimed that if an adolescent has not embraced discipleship by the time they are 18 years old, they probably won't as adults.

- **What are the influences for promoting Catholic affiliation?**

***Consensus.*** Children are more likely to accept religious claims if both parents are on the same page; i.e., if both are united in making those claims. Yet, over the last century interreligious marriages have become more common which mitigates against such consensus.

***Certainty.*** Children pick up in subtle ways what their parents really believe based on their behavior. In a culture with less religious consensus, parents will mirror that ambiguity and the kids will pick that up.

***Credibility.*** It's one thing for parents to tell their children that God exists, that Jesus is Lord and Savior, but it's another thing for parents to live their lives in such a way that only makes sense that they deeply believe what they're saying.

- ***Predictors of successful religious transmission.***

Some Catholic parents do hand on their faith to their children quite successfully while others don't. What's the difference? While not full-proof, here are some of the conditions that help:

- + Both parents have the same religious identity.
- + The parent's marriage is intact and is a viable sacramental marriage.
- + The parents, especially the father, live their Catholic faith showing that their faith is important to them.
- + Parents provide both warmth and structure, and children form secure attachments to their parents.
- + As young teenagers, their Catholic faith is important to them and they're moving towards commitment and discipleship.

- + They attend a Catholic high school, which is committed to the Church's Mission.
- + They have many faith-supporting peer relationships.
- + Lastly, and this may be key: when children grow up with many supportive Catholic adults in their lives, that increases their likelihood of remaining Catholic.

\*Michal Rota, prof. of philosophy at U. of St. Thomas and Stephen Bullivant, prof. of theology and religious psychology at St. Mary U. in England.

### ***WHERE THE U.S. CATHOLIC POPULATION HAS GROWN THE MOST***

In the last 25 years, the South has experienced a net gain of more than 7.4 million Catholics. The West has held its own, whereas the Northeast has lost 4.4 million Catholics and the Midwest 2.3 million.

### ***Democrats May Have a Religion Problem***

Researcher Ryan Burge, of the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics at Washington University in St. Louis, suggests that "Most Americans (60%) are still Christian (which) is something that Democrats have seemed to have forgotten." The breakdown of the 2024 presidential election of the religious affiliation of voters tends to bear this out.

- 80% of those who voted for Donald Trump identified as some type of Christian, versus 45% of Harris voters.
- Just 17% of Trump voters identified as atheist, agnostic, or nothing in particular versus 45% of Harris voters who were non-religious.

Another demonstration of this phenomenon is the religious attendance rates among Democratic voters:

- White voter attendance: Never (52%), seldom (21%), yearly (10%), monthly (5%), weekly (9%), weekly+ (0%).
- Non-White voter attendance: Never (32%), seldom (22%), yearly (15%), monthly (8%), weekly (17%), weekly+ (7%).

Accordingly, Dr. Burge suggests that it is much easier for a Republican than a Democrat to deliver a coherent religious message. "If you're working for the GOP, something like the lines of 'God, Country, and Traditional Family Values' resonate with nearly all your voters. For Democrats, it's not that simple. A message of faith and values will probably turn off as many voters as it attracts."

## **GERMAN BISHOPS SAY SEX IS NOT BINARY**

Oh, boy: the German Bishops' conference has issued a document to be implemented in Catholic schools that rejects the Church's teachings on sexuality. Gone is the teaching that there are but two sexes, male and female. The bishops, with three exceptions, teach that there is a "diversity of sexual identities." Not only that, but they falsely claim it is a "fact" rooted in science.

Should teachers in Catholic schools address a boy named Sam, who now claims he is a girl named Sue, as Sam or Sue? The bishops, the spiritual shepherds of the flock in Germany, say that teachers should use language that reflects "the diversity of sexual identities," allowing students to make their own judgments. So, the right answer is "Sue."

This division in the Catholic Church is taking place at a time when Pope Leo XIV is striving to promote Christian unity in the Christian world. He has his hands full.

Leo has been very clear on Church teaching on sexuality, saying the family is founded on the "stable union between a man and a woman." When he was the bishop in Peru, he spoke against the idea that there is a "diversity of sexual identities," which is what gender ideology holds to be true.

He has said that "The idea of promoting gender ideology is confusing because it seeks to create genders that don't exist. God created man and woman, and the attempts to confuse ideas about nature will only harm families and people."

This is consistent with what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: "God created man in his own image...male and female he created them."

Leo's predecessor, Pope Francis, was even more blunt. He once referred to gender ideology as "demonic." In his 2016 Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, he wrote, "We cannot separate the masculine and the feminine from God's work of creation," saying the "biological elements" are "impossible to ignore."

In 2019, the Vatican's Congregation for Catholic Education issued an authoritative document, *Male and Female: He Created Them*. It said that gender ideology "denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family."

In 2024, the Vatican Declaration on Human Dignity, *Dignitas Infinita*, underscored the Church's teachings on this subject. It said gender ideology "is extremely dangerous since it cancels differences in its claim to make everyone equal. Similarly, this ideology intends to deny the greatest possible difference that exists between living beings: sexual difference."

What explains the shift of the German Bishops Conference? It's a complex situation but here are some opinions. Like most of Europe, Germany has long since settled into a post-modern secular culture, where the religious landscape is shifting. Where 23.7% of the total German population is Catholic (19.8 million people), the number of Catholics who attend Sunday Mass has decreased from 22% in 1990 to 13% in 2009.

Along this line, German Catholics are becoming loosely tethered to magisterial teaching. For example, and according to Wikipedia, a poll from universities in Berlin and Münster, advises that 70% of German Catholics approve of blessings for same-sex couples, 80% accept unmarried couples living together and 85% believe priests should be allowed to marry. 70% of German Catholics support [same-sex marriage](#) and 29% oppose it. 93% of German Catholics believe society should accept [homosexuality](#) while 6% believe society should not accept homosexuality.

Complicating this situation is the fact that the German state supports both Catholic and Protestant churches; namely, it collects taxes for the churches provided their members retain their church affiliation. If Catholics disaffiliate, then the German Church loses those tax monies. So, there is pressure on the German prelates to mirror the secularization of their flock.

Let's pray that the German bishops find their way back into the Catholic fold.

-Aside from the Wikipedia reference, the above was taken from the *Catalyst* (January-February 2026) issue.

### ***U.S. Permanent Deacons in 2024***

According to CARA, "93% of active permanent deacons are married, 4% are widowers, and 2% have never been married. 97% are at least 50 years old; 18% are in their 50s, 41% are in their 60s, and 38% are 70 or older."

After years of growth since the permanent diaconate was re-instated following Vatican II, recently there has been a slight decline on account of attrition. "During the calendar year of 2024, 393 new permanent deacons were ordained, while 545 deacons retired from active ministry, and another 361 died."