

Catholic Trends/Spring-2026 (#3)

Young Catholic priests are VERY conservative. Some of the compelling data in the book *The Vanishing Church: How the Hollowing out of Moderate Congregations is Hurting Democracy, and Us* by P. Bunge is just how young, Catholic priests are straight-out conservative. According to Bunge's research, about 5% of priests are liberal now, and 80% are conservative. If that trend continues, there is no way of looking at that data and think the Catholic Church in the United States is going to be moderate in the future.

What's the most polarizing question you can ask in an American parish? Would you believe it is whether the parish has a Spanish Mass? One of the problems for many parishes is that it creates two churches under one roof, one for the Spanish speakers and one for the English. One may be creating inadvertent division, though that is not the intent. But despite the cultural backlash in our current political climate, the question of dealing with diversity with increasingly conservative white Catholics and nonwhite Catholics will be a problem that will not go away. When the current Boomer generation fades from the scene, the Catholic Church, especially in California, will be 40% Hispanic.

In the Diocese of Sacramento, over 50% of parish priests are foreign born, mostly from the Philippines, so having different linguistic Masses is not an issue. At St. John the Baptist parish (Folsom, CA), for example, there are three multi-lingual Masses during the month: besides English, there are Spanish, Filipino, and Indonesian Masses.

The Catholic Church in America is undergoing a religious epidemic among young people. Bishop Robert Barron's *Word on Fire* has released an important book, *Return: How to Draw Your Child Back to the Faith* by Brandon Vogt which is a must-read for a parent or grandparent whose child has drifted away from the Catholic faith. Citing reliable data from various sources, Vogt states half (50% exactly) of young Americans who were raised Catholic no longer call themselves

Catholic today. Think about it: for the last 20-30 years, half the babies who have been baptized, received 1st Communion, and have been Confirmed, have left the Church. Researchers at the University of Notre Dame paint a worse picture. Using a more stringent criteria, of the remaining 50% of young people who still identify as Catholic, only 7% still actively practice their faith, meaning they attend Mass regularly, pray a few times a week, and say that their Catholic faith is “extremely” or “moderately” important to them.

Along this line, a recent Pew Foundation Research Center study showed that 79% of those who drift away from their Catholic faith do so before their 23rd birthday.

The book does offer an encouraging “game plan” to engage your disengaged child or grandchild and draw them back into the fold. More to come...

Catholic NY Governor Goes After Nuns. Whether it’s a case of Catholic self-hatred or be careful what battles you fight, the case of New York Governor Kathy Hochul, who identifies as a practicing Catholic, is being sued by nuns because they will not call their trans patients “they,” and they will not allow those of the opposite sex in the same room in their care facilities.

The Dominican Sisters of Hawthorne operate a Westchester, NY facility that serves the sick and the dying, especially cancer patients, who cannot afford care. Many of them are homeless or abandoned. The nuns provide treatment, companionship, meals, and a stable environment. And people of all faiths, or none at all, are welcome.

But none of this is relevant to Governor Hochul who is determined to superimpose her radical LGBTQ agenda upon the religious order. Hochul would rather close down the facility before allowing the nuns to honor their religious tenets. To be specific, unless these nuns allow men who falsely claim to be women the right to access a women’s bathroom and refer to them as “she” and “her,” they will have to go out of business. If the nuns do not go against their religious beliefs, they

will be fined \$2,000 for the first violation, \$5,000 for repeat violations, and \$10,000, or one year in prison for “willful violations.”

It’s a Milo-Minder Bender instance where a professed Catholic politician who would go after a Catholic religious order that is serving the poor and is striving to be faithful to its Catholic beliefs. Hochul seems to be an enemy of not only the nuns but the Catholic Church herself. How does that work?

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The majority of Catholics support Mass Deportations. An EWTN News/Clear Opinion Research poll of 1,000 Catholic voters showed that 52% of surveyed Catholics view the President favorably and that 54% favor the detention and deportation on a broad scale.

Perhaps surprisingly, about 75% of daily and more-than-weekly Mass attendees support mass deportation, as do 49% who attend Mass weekly. Perhaps less surprising, while 60% of white Catholics favor deportation, only 41% of Latino Catholics do so.

These preferences run counter to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and individual bishops. Even Pope Leo has criticized mass deportations on multiple occasions, as did his predecessor, Pope Francis.

Catholics rank low in educational attainment among religious groups. A report based on data from the 2023-2024 *Pew Religious Landscape Study (RLS)* shows the percentage of members of major U.S. groups who hold bachelor’s degrees or higher:

Following is the overall summary: All U.S. adults (35%), Hindu (70%), Jewish (65%), Orthodox Christian (45%), Muslim (44%), Buddhist (41%), Mainline Protestant (40%), Religiously Unaffiliated (37%), Latter-day-Saint (36%), **Catholic** (35%), Evangelical Protestant (29%), Black Protestant (24%).

Attitudes by Religion on Culture War Issues. Researchers Ryan Burge of Washington U. in St. Louis, MO, using data from the 2023-2024 *Pew RLS* study, reports the results of a battery of four statements on so-called social issues ranks by religious tradition:

- *Abortion should be legal:* Non-religious (85%), Black Protestant (72%), Mainline Protestant (69%), **Catholic** (59%), Evangelical Protestant (33%).

- *Gay and lesbian people should be allowed to marry.* Non-Religious (88%), Mainline Protestant (71%), **Catholic** (70%), Black Protestant (56%), Evangelical Protestant (36%).

- *Acceptance of transgender people is a positive change:* Non-religious (58%), Mainline Protestant (39%), **Catholic** (36%), Black Protestant (36%), Evangelical Protestant (8%).

- *Homosexuality should be accepted by society:* Non-Religious (87%), **Catholic** (74%), Mainline Protestant (72%), Black Protestant (61%), Evangelical Protestant (36%).

A remarkable aspect of the above results is the disparity that exists between the magisterial teachings of the Catholic Church and the beliefs of those in the pews.

Good News—and How to Spread it. The number of young people turning to the Catholic Church need not be overwhelming or even statistically significant to be a cause for joy. It's always a sign of hope when people want to come into full membership in the Church. How is the Church called to respond to this moment?

America magazine (January 2026) put it this way in "Our Take":
"The mission of the Church is not to tailor its teaching or liturgy to suit the preferences of each generation; it is to draw each person into relationship with Christ. And the best way to do that is to do what the Church has been doing for 2,000 years: building communities of worship, communities of practice."