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Women pray the rosary before Mass in 2018 at Our Lady of Loretto Church in Hempstead, N.Y. (CNS/Gregory A. Shemitz)



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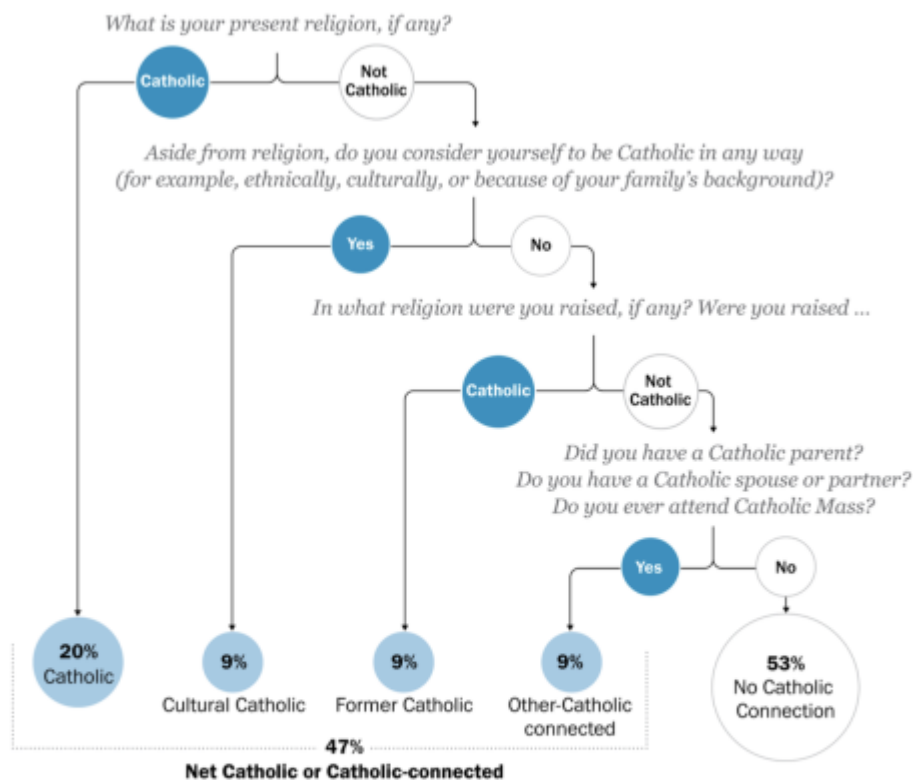
One-fifth of the people in the United States are Catholic, but nearly half of U.S. adults have some connection to the church, according to a study by the Pew Research Center released today.

That includes about equal numbers, 9% each, who are considered cultural Catholics, or former Catholics, or who are connected to the church in other ways. The last group incorporates people who have a Catholic parent, spouse or partner, and people who sometimes attend Catholic Mass, said the report.

Several people interviewed by National Catholic Reporter summarized their reasons for staying Catholic and for leaving it behind. Though not participants in the study, those interviewed by NCR echoed the Pew results.

Nearly half of Americans have Catholic connections

% of U.S. adults who are (a) ...



Note: Figures may not sum to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding. "Catholics" are respondents who say they are Catholic when asked about their present religion. "Cultural Catholics" are those who do not identify as Catholic religiously but say that aside from religion they consider themselves Catholic in some other way (for example, ethnically, culturally or because of their family's background). "Former Catholics" say they were raised Catholic but do not identify as Catholic today, either religiously or aside from religion. The "Other Catholic-connected" category includes adults who are not Catholic by religion, culturally Catholic, or formerly Catholic, but who have a Catholic spouse, partner or parent or say "yes" when asked if they ever attend Catholic Mass.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Feb. 3-9, 2025.

47% of U.S. Adults Have a Personal or Family Connection to Catholicism

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Susan Jackson, a Phoenix resident, was a practicing Catholic into adulthood, though she said that even as a child she had doubts about church teachings. "I have struggled all my life with faith," Jackson said.

The breaking point for her was seeing how her two gay brothers were treated by the church, she said. Finding out about the extent of sexual abuse by priests and the institutional cover-ups of this pushed her away further.

"I couldn't walk into a church" after the sexual abuse stories came out, Jackson said. Despite that, she still calls herself Catholic, though it's mostly a cultural description, she said.

The study released June 16 also found little difference between Hispanic Catholics and white Catholics in most areas of practice and belief, although a few topics set them apart, such as the importance of following certain devotional practices and caring for immigrants.

"It was striking to see how widespread the connection to Catholicism is" among U.S. adults, said Gregory Smith, senior associate director of religion research for the Pew Center. Smith is co-author, with Patricia Tevington, of the report, which is titled "[47% of U.S. Adults Have a Personal or Family Connection to Catholicism: A closer look at Catholic life in the U.S.](#)"

About 7 in 10 Catholics say having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is an essential part of what being Catholic means to them

% of U.S. Catholics who say each of the following is a(n) ___ of what "being Catholic" means to them



Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Feb. 3-9, 2025.

"47% of U.S. Adults Have a Personal or Family Connection to Catholicism"

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Smith said Pew has in the past asked similar questions to consider Americans' connections to Judaism and Islam. But the data showing that nearly half the country says they have some tie to the Catholic Church "is striking in its breadth. Catholic connections run deep."

Until about 10 years ago, about a quarter of Americans described themselves as Catholic in Pew studies, Smith said in an interview. Since then, the figure has been stable at about 20%. Similar declines in religious affiliation are reflected across most faiths, Smith said. The main exception is that affiliation has ticked up in non-Christian faiths, such as Islam. Non-Christian faiths still count only about 7% of the U.S. population.*

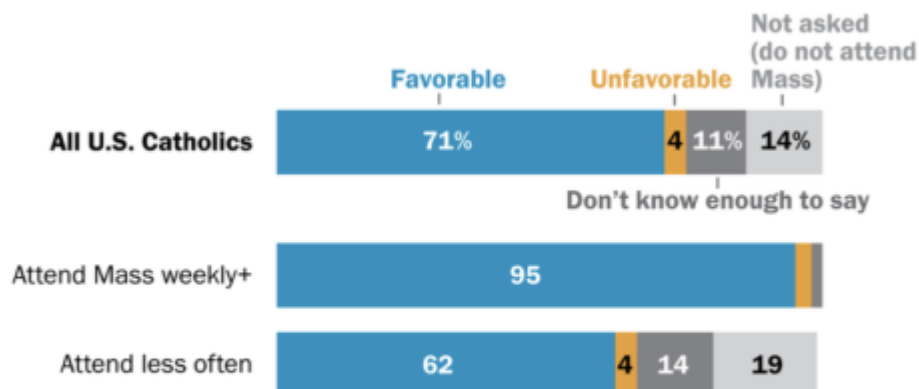
Pew asked the Catholics in the study what they consider "essential" to being Catholic. A category broadly labeled as "having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ" had the largest response, with nearly seven in 10 suggesting that was important. One half of Catholics cited "devotion to the Virgin Mary." Working to help the poor and needy was cited by 47%; receiving the Eucharist was listed by 46%; getting married in the church was mentioned by 40% and "the leadership of the pope" was cited by one-third of the respondents.

Those elements also were cited in interviews with NCR by both active Catholics and those whose ties are primarily cultural.

Patricia Rogers, a retiree who lives in suburban Maryland, said the Catholic Church is "my spiritual home. I'm a cradle Catholic. It has never occurred to me not to be Catholic."

71% of Catholics view their parish priests favorably

% of U.S. Catholics who have a(n) ___ view of the priests at their parish



Note: Those who did not answer not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Feb. 3-9, 2025.

*47% of U.S. Adults Have a Personal or Family Connection to Catholicism"

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She said receiving the Eucharist and the sacramental life of the church are key elements of the faith to her. But, she added, being with a parish community is also important. "I was away for several weeks after I had surgery and I really missed the people," Rogers said.

Both Jackson and another person contacted by NCR who is not an active Catholic said the liturgy is one thing they miss. However, both were firm that their reasons for leaving active Catholicism have not changed.

Maria Mercedes Bejarano, also from Maryland, grew up in Colombia with a devoutly Catholic mother who believed it would be a grave sin to leave her abusive husband. So she stayed. When Bejarano divorced to escape domestic violence in her own marriage, she felt chastised by the church and unwelcome, she said.

She said she is now an Episcopalian, in a church where she said she feels valued as a woman.

When she went to an Episcopal church for the first time for Mass, "I arrived for the ordination of a woman. It was the most exhilarating experience of my life. A woman laying down to become a priest felt like God's gift to me."

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But Bejarano still said: "I am a Catholic at my core. I will never *not* be a Catholic. I pray the rosary every day. I pray at Catholic churches." She said she has multiple images of Mary in an altar in her home and she closely follows what the pope is doing. But being told she cannot receive Communion keeps her at a distance from the Catholic Church.

Even from outside the church, Bejarano's affinity for the rosary and Mary are reflective of how Hispanic Catholics practice their faith.

The study found that Hispanic Catholics continue to be a growing share of U.S. Catholic adults, now 36%, up from 29% in 2007.

Hispanics are similar to white Catholics in how frequently they attend Mass and in the major elements of the faith that they say they value, the report said. Forty percent of white Catholics attend Mass at least once or twice a month. Thirty-eight percent of Hispanics attend Mass that frequently.

34% of Hispanic Catholics receive Communion most or all the time when at Mass

% of U.S. Catholics who receive Communion ___ when they go to Mass

	All U.S. Catholics	Among Catholics who are ...		
		Hispanic	White	Other race
Net Every time/Most of the time	50%	34%	58%	61%
Every time	36	21	44	40
Most of the time	15	13	14	21
About half the time	6	8	4	8
Less than half the time	13	21	9	7
Never	16	24	11	15
No answer	2	1	2	3
Not asked (does not attend Mass)	14	12	16	5
	100	100	100	100

Note: Figures may not sum to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding. White adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanic adults are of any race. "Other race" includes Asian Catholics, Black Catholics, Catholics of other races (including those who are multiracial), and those who did not answer questions about their race/ethnicity. The survey did not include enough respondents from these categories to be able to report on them individually.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Feb. 3-9, 2025.

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But there are wide differences between the two demographics when it comes to outward expressions of faith. Sixty-three percent of Hispanic Catholics said devotion to the Virgin Mary is essential to their faith, compared to 42% of white Catholics. There was a 19 point difference between Hispanics (43%) and white Catholics (24%) over whether taking care of the environment is essential.

As to whether "caring for immigrants" is essential, the difference was even greater. Forty-seven percent of Hispanics and 20% of whites said that is essential.

When it comes to wearing or carrying religious items, 56% of Hispanics and 39% of white Catholics said they do that at least monthly. Hispanics are also more likely to pray the rosary, Pew found. Thirty-seven percent of Hispanics and 22% of whites said they do that at least monthly.

Smith said such differences might relate to the cultural traditions of Hispanic and white Catholics, but the study did not gather data to further explain.

The report was based on two surveys, the [2023-24 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey](#) and a 2025 survey of 1,787 people who identify as Catholic who are a part of the Pew Center's ongoing [American Trends Panel](#). In the American Trends Panel, which the report cited as the more significant information to the report, the margin of error within the entire Catholic sample was given as plus or minus 3.1 percentage points.

**This article has been edited to clarify who is included in the 7% figure.*