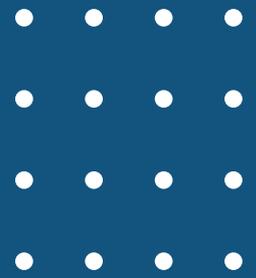


METTACOMMS

The Catholic
Church and
its people in
America



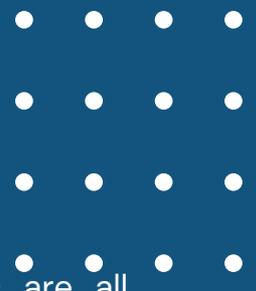
*A report based on the
presentation delivered by
Mettacomms to the Annual
Conference of the Catholic
Media Association, July 2022.*



Executive Summary

Throughout its nearly 2000-year history the Catholic Church has faced many challenges. From the persecution and discrimination of Catholics in the early years, to dwindling numbers of vocations for the clergy. Beset by scandal in the 1990s and early 2000s, the church has fought to maintain its credibility and relevance in the lives of its followers. Now the Catholic Church finds itself in a time of social and political upheaval, a polarized society, a huge movement of people, a global pandemic and all happening live in a digital age. This report seeks to cut through the noise and provide focused insights on the current and future trends impacting the church, a view of what is happening now and what the future may hold.

Growth Patterns in World Religions

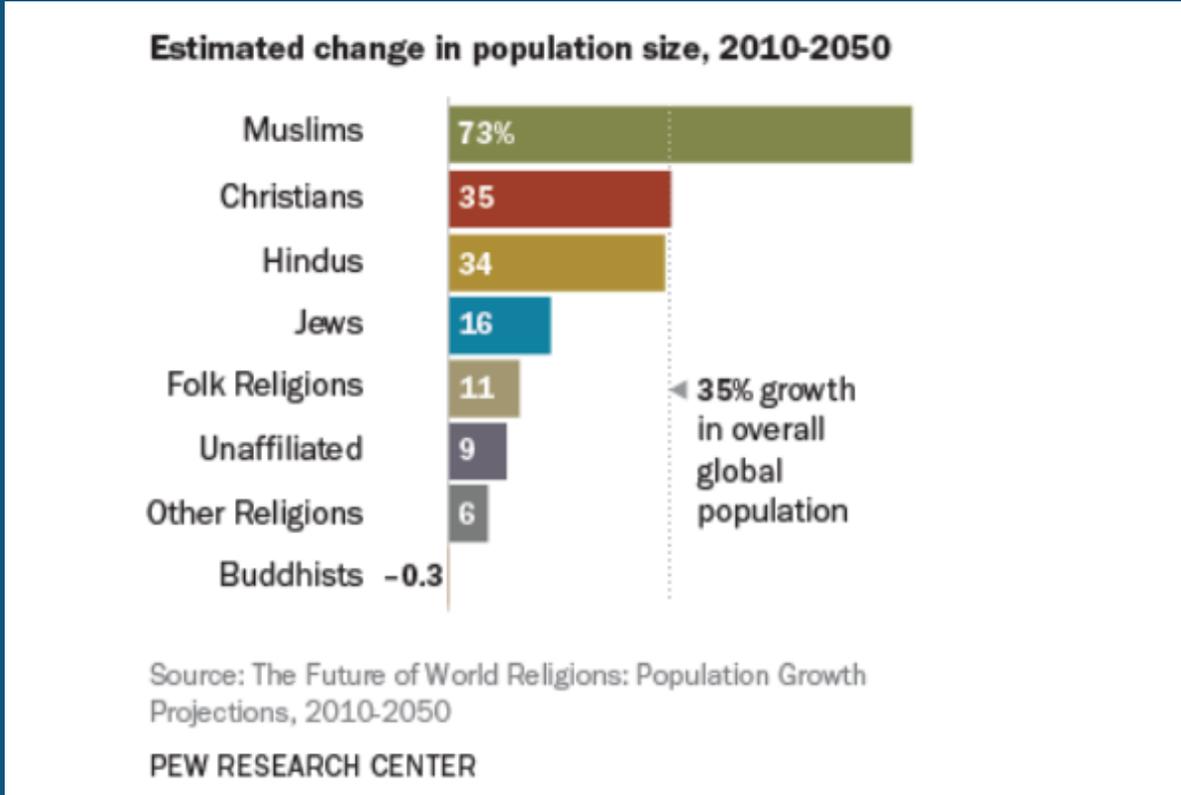


The world's biggest religions (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism) are all experiencing growth in terms of population sizes.

The large increases expected in the Muslim population is due to the size of the youth population and high fertility rates.

The Christian population will grow but at a slower rate. This will bring the Christian and Muslim population to near equal numbers for the first time.

The world Hindu population is projected to increase by 2050. The Jewish population, will have a slower growth rate while Buddhists are set to decline as a result of an aging population and low fertility rates

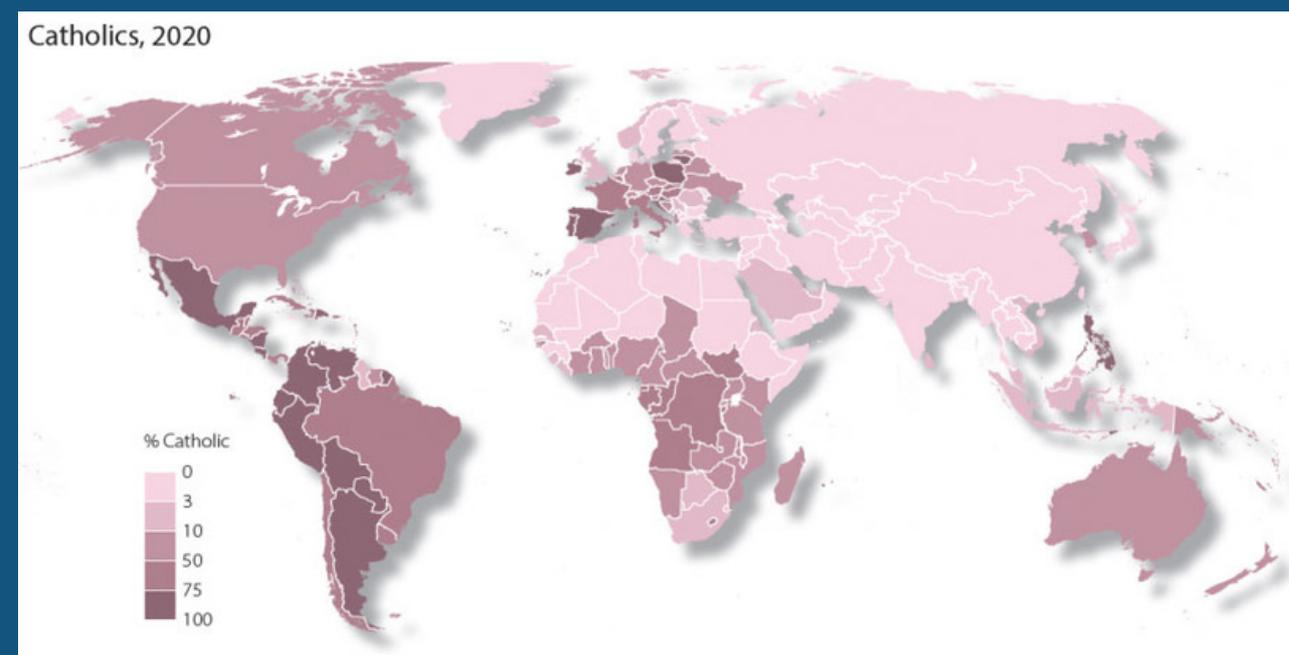


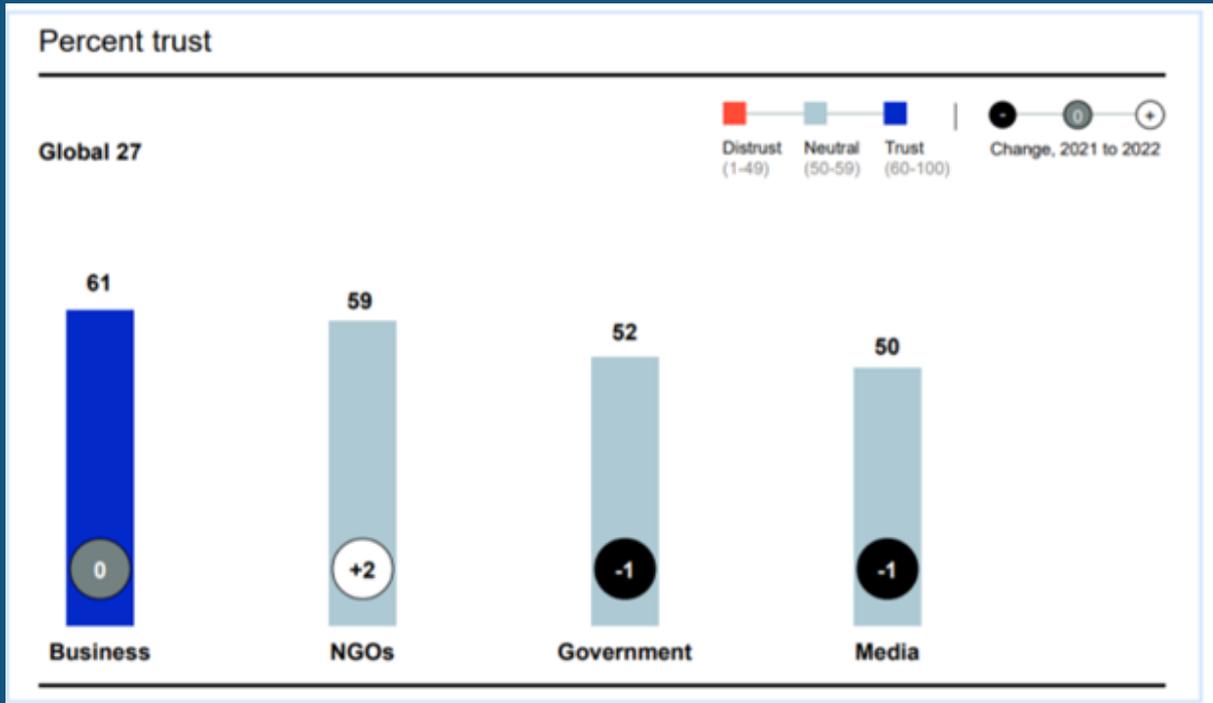
Source: <https://www.prb.org/resources/the-changing-demographics-of-roman-catholics/>

Catholic Population Growth

Overall, the global Catholic population is set to increase. There are great variations in the growth pattern by regions with Africa, Asia and Latin America expecting large increases. Europe, following a pattern of increased secularization is projected to see a decline in the number of Catholics. This decline is affecting even countries like Poland, traditionally, a majority conservative Catholic state.

Estimations and Projections of Catholic Population by Global Region					
Region	Percent Catholic	Estimated Catholic Population	Projected Catholic Population	Projected Catholic Population	Catholic Population Change 2004 - 2050
	2004	2004	2025	2050	
Africa	17.9%	139,157,160	219,171,850	342,023,230	145.8%
Asia	4.3%	127,125,410	171,916,360	207,086,560	62.9%
Europe	36.4%	270,765,647	272,495,186	255,744,426	-5.5
Latin America & Caribbean	83.35%	454,541,400	568,040,560	646,912,570	42.3%
North America	25.15%	82,000,000	97,000,000	113,000,000	37.8%
Oceania	26.85%	9,000,000	11,000,000	13,000,000	44.4%
Total	21.65%	1,082,228,436	1,339,159,510	1,577,5,5699	45.8%



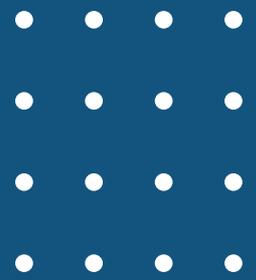


<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/01/edelman-trust-barometer-2022-report/>

CONTEXT – DISTRUST

There can be no doubt that the level of distrust in institutions is part of the context that the Catholic Church must consider. Post Covid 19, public trust is declining in government, media and social media. Even NGOs are suffering a decline in public trust. The avalanche of misinformation has jarred the public's confidence in traditional methods of information delivery and previously trusted institutions.

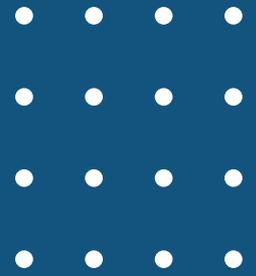
In place of traditional trusted sources, the public has turned to business leaders to address society's ills. There is an expectation that business leaders will adopt a mantle of social responsibility and address issues of the day, diversity, social justice, environment etc. Increasingly, organisations and their brands are expected to reflect the values of their customers, if they wish to keep them.



TRENDS IN AMERICA



CHURCH MEMBERSHIP BY BIRTH YEAR



A 'faith drain' of members in the US Catholic Church is apparent in more recent times. For example:

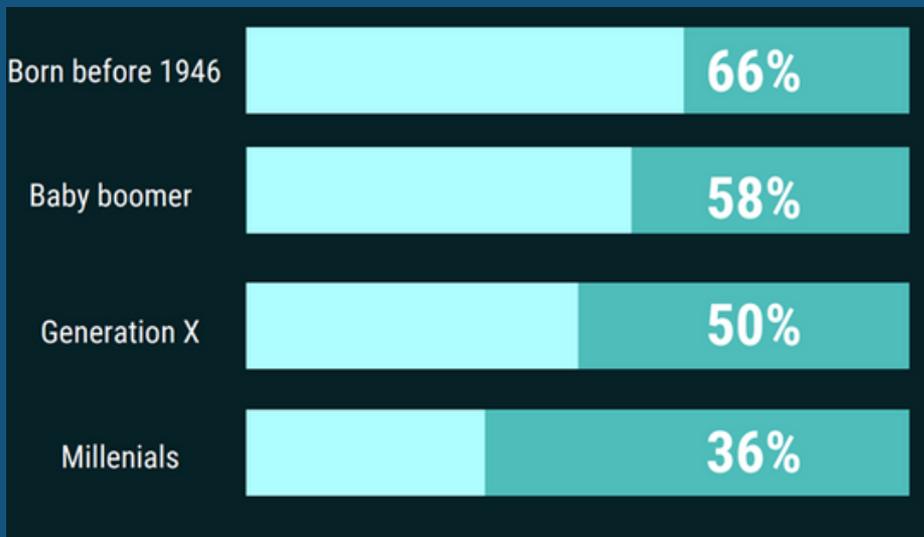
66% of US adults born before the year 1946 belong to a church.

Of the younger generation of US baby boomers, 58% of them belong to a church.

Of people who sit in the US Generation X category, 50% of them belong to a church.

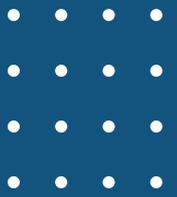
The one cohort which sees a significant decrease in church membership is the millennial generation, with just 36% of them belonging to a church.

A concerning figure for the US catholic church is, that there are 6.5 former Catholics for every new convert.



<https://www.prii.org/research/2020-census-of-american-religion/t>

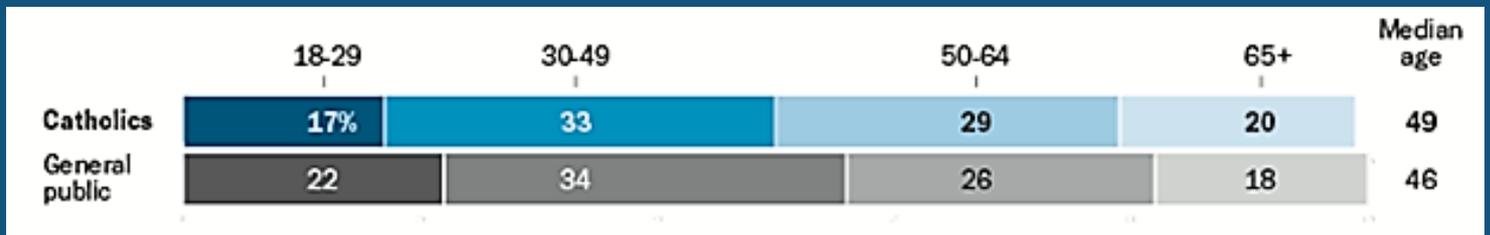
AGE DISTRIBUTION



The age distribution of US Catholics has gone through dramatic changes over the years. As the baby boomer generation approaches retirement, the population of US Catholics are becoming older.

In 1987, 32% of US Catholics were over the age of 50. This is a stark contrast to the recorded US Catholic population in 2014, as 50% were over the age of 50.

This is clearly a problem that the US Catholic church faces, as the young parishioners are moving away from the church at a fast rate.



<https://www.prii.org/research/2020-census-of-american-religion/>



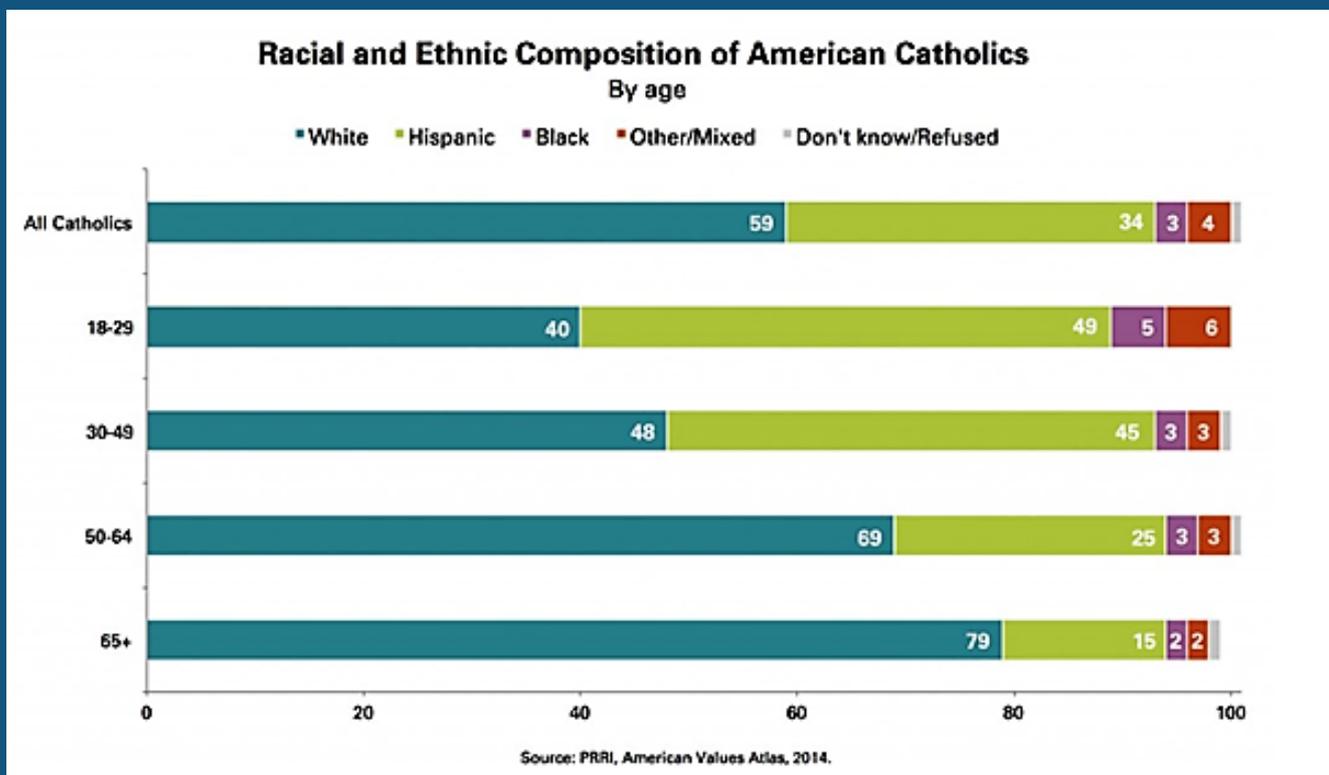
IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION

New immigrants arriving in the US – particularly from Latin America – bring the Catholic faith with them. The influence of immigration on Catholicism in North America is evident from a comparison of statistics in 1987 and 2014.

In 1987, 87% of Catholics in the US were Caucasian, with only 10% being from a Hispanic background.

An additional 5% of Catholics in the US, are derived from an African American or Asian background in 1987.

As we look at a comparative statistic in 2014, just 58% of US Catholics were Caucasian. We can also clearly identify the influence of immigration, as the Hispanic composition in the US Catholic population rose to 34% in 2014.



Other ethnic minorities such as African American and the Asian population also increased from 5% to 8% in 2014.

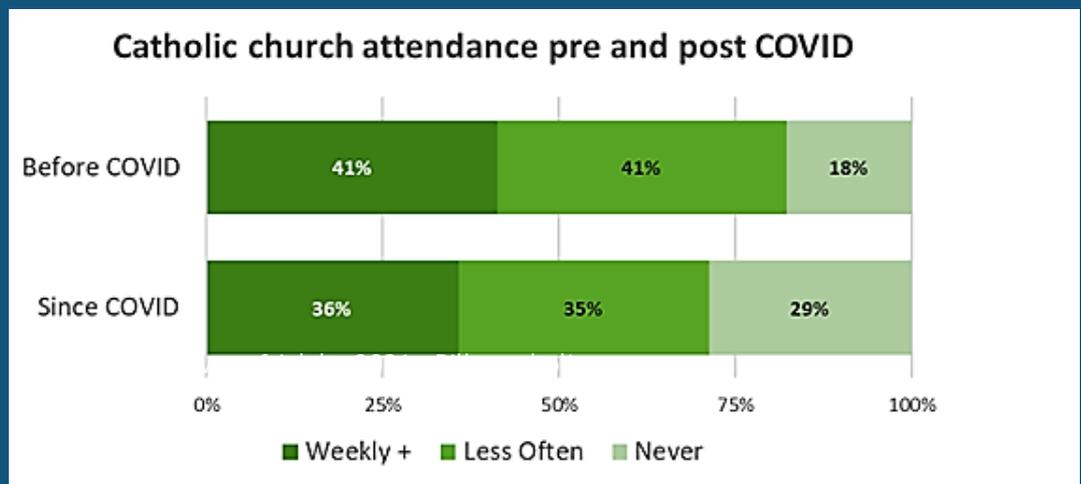
We can clearly identify that the immigrant influence in the US has been a contributing factor to the growing numbers in the US Catholic population in recent years.

MASS ATTENDANCE



During the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, in person Mass attendance numbers were majorly affected with churches being forced to close their doors. Numerous churches then changed the way Mass was operated, with restrictions set in place such as social distancing and the introduction of face masks.

Mass, traditionally had high attendance for Catholics in the US, with millions flocking to their local church every weekend. In 1970, 54.9% of US Catholics attended their local church for Mass every week. This figure had declined to just 21.2% of US Catholics attended Mass pre-pandemic. Recent post-pandemic figures indicate that 12% of US Catholics attend Mass. However, figures may change over time due to the recent ease of restrictions.



Live Streamed Mass

The pandemic compelled churches to broadcast Mass to their congregations, and forced churchgoers to tune-in online. This created a societal expectation, however, of virtual Mass attendance. It also changed the location-specific nature of worship with 33% of churchgoers finding their current churches online.

In March 2020, as individual parishes struggled to put online resources in place to stream the Mass to their congregations, the popular streaming platform – Life.Church – increased its reach from 4.7 million devices to 7 million devices in just one week.

Impact of Live Streaming on Donations

Churches can also receive monetary benefits by streaming ceremonies online, as opposed to the traditional way of donating by ‘passing the donation box around’. Champions Centre, a platform which hosts live streaming events for churches, reported that their donations increased by 70% when moving to online streaming.





Catholic registered voters are evenly split between those who identify with or lean towards the Democratic Party (47%) and those who favour of the Republican Party (46%).

The 2020 election saw Biden take 52% of the Catholic vote to Trump's 47%.

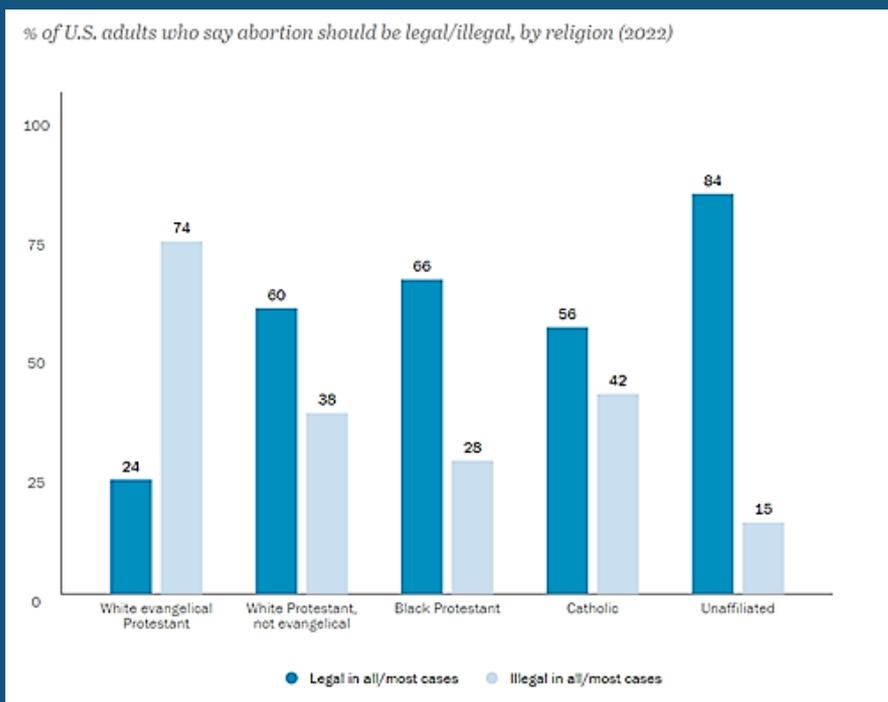
A majority of Catholics do not think the Church should be involved in politics, according to Pew Research.

For example, 62% of US Catholics say the Church should stay completely out of politics and not comment on any political matter.

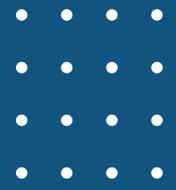
However, 37% believe the Catholic Church should engage on day to day social and political matters.

Moreover, 76% of US Catholics say the Church should not endorse any candidates for political offices.

There is a tendency to separate faith and political loyalty, with 42% of Catholics supporting access to abortion, despite the views of the Church.



Source Pew Research 2022



Bubbling Under Trends

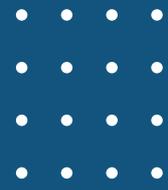
By using Mettacomms' metrics and data tools, we are able to identify some of the 'bubbling under' themes to identify issues which may need to be addressed by the Catholic Church in the future. We selected 16 themes which we believe represent a broad sweep of issues based on societal changes, the international movement of people, cultural and secular influences, changing expectations of Church members and the likely impact of financial and personnel shortages. Our focus was very much on the secular issues which may affect the Catholic Church. There were numerous religious issues which were also bubbling under, (specifically the power of the Holy Spirit and Eucharistic Trans-substantiation) but these did not form part of our brief.

Geographic Issues

The key growth areas for Catholic Church evangelization and membership growth are Latin America, Africa and Asia. Growth is coming from the southern hemisphere. This is not matched in the northern hemisphere. Membership of the Church is in decline throughout Europe. Two European countries are declining at a slower pace than others, these are Poland (where faith is still a strong component of cultural identity) and Italy (which is the headquarters of the Catholic Church worldwide). North America appears to buck the trend as the numbers of Catholics are holding steady or increasing. This, however, is due to the influx of immigrants in the USA. In excess of 50% of these immigrants are bringing the Catholic religion with them. The slight increase in membership numbers in North America, therefore, is not due to successful evangelization or a natural growth in existing members. Rather it is because the faith is strong in those parts of the world that immigrants are coming from.



The future trend, therefore, is for initial membership to hold steady or increase slightly based on an ethnically diverse influx into the USA. This, in turn, will affect the ethnic balance of Church membership. However, cultural identity and 'fitting in' are important components of the change from immigrant to the status of belonging. In a secular society, the trend is for Catholics to drop their religion in an effort to integrate themselves and their children into the mainstream and avoid being labelled as 'other'. This trend does not appear to be driven by lack of religious faith. Rather is driven by a need to merge with existing societal norms.



Bubbling Under Trends

Ethnic Breakdown

One of the obvious trends at the moment is the growth of the Hispanic community within the Church. This will continue into the future, but the breakdown of immigrants will reflect a wider background than Hispanic, and the future of the church in North America is that, within thirty years (by 2050) there will be no, one, dominant ethnic group within the church.

Pentecostalism

Southern hemisphere Catholicism is strong and growing. It is also a form of Catholicism which is Pentecostal, engaged, charismatic, prone to singing in praise of the Lord, interactive, welcoming and engaging. This is different to the style of Catholicism practiced in North America. Our bubbling under themes show a growth of desire for southern hemisphere style religious engagement in North America.

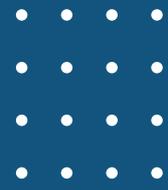


Young leaders

There is a very strong theme which percolates through from young people. They believe that they are the drivers of change. They also believe that the Church needs young leaders to help it grow and develop. It is an interesting challenge for the Church. If the younger congregation, which is the future of the church, needs to “see it to be it”, there might be a need for positive discrimination on the grounds of youth or the introduction of a quota system.

Younger people and Counter Culture

One of the interesting themes is the growth of Catholicism among middle-class students engaged in college education which is counter-cultural.



Bubbling Under Trends

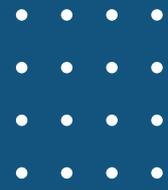
Church Plantings.

In lots of the bubbling under themes we saw a trend towards pro-activity. Church plantings was one of the them. This is not a new idea. Irish Missionaries travelled throughout the world, and are particularly respected in USA and Africa, as evangelists bringing the faith to the people and baptizing them into the Church. This trend is re-emerging as a necessary element of Church growth, but the future trend is for this pro-active evangelization to be relevant in the northern hemisphere. New congregations and new parishes will be actively recruited. The membership drives will be pull-based not push-focused. The Church will be pro-actively reaching out to communities and seeking to engage them and convert them in a structured way, in order to create new parishes.



Physical Buildings.

The Church, in the past, has built churches as a public symbol of faith and a location for congregations to gather and worship. Our bubbling under themes point to the death of this style of Catholicism. In the future, the focus will be on the experience and not on the building. Weddings will be held on beaches, in private homes, in golf clubs. The Church and its ministers will travel to meet the congregation where it suits them. Similarly, the power of technology will allow Catholics to take confession, with a priest, at any hour of the day or not, in any language of their choosing, remotely, online. The need for people to attend at a building at an appointed time will disappear. The use of Church buildings will also change. For example, people might choose to sit in church and eat their lunch and drink their coffee while contemplating religious themes, or taking some 'spiritual' time for themselves. The current restrictions, designed to show respect for the location, will cease to apply.



Bubbling Under Trends

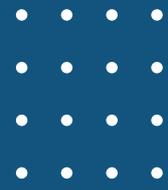
Specialized Staff.

One of the key personnel areas which appears in our bubbling under trends, is the recruitment of highly specialized staff. The Church will become more business focused. There are three key areas of future professional recruitment – Communications, Marketing and Fundraising. The Catholic Church will begin to more closely resemble mega-churches of other faiths in its approach. Consumer choice is demanding that that Church find professional ways to recruit and retain members. (Recruitment is expensive so professional retention strategies are vital to success). The Church will also use professional marketing methods not only to recruit but to communicate the faith, find new influencers to work with, reflect the choice that consumers of the future are seeking, and brand the Church in a coherent and cohesive way. Professional fundraisers will also play a much greater role in the future. Without funds, the Church cannot do the good work and spread the gospel in the way that it is called to do. Professional fundraisers, skilled in techniques to attract recurring revenue, will be a key strategic hire.



Ministry

Ministry within the Church will change substantially in the future. There are three dominant themes bubbling under. The first is the acceptance of women priests (similar to protestant religions). The second is the welcoming of married priests which is trending as becoming more acceptable as years progress. The third, which we found surprising, is the changing nature of the employment of priests. Currently, priests are full time professional 'workers' for the Church. In the future, priestly duties will form just one part of the ministers profession. The need to provide financial support for ministers will lead to the creation of part-time ministries, which will free-up ministers to earn their own living. In the future there will be lawyers who are also priests, farmers who are priests, fashion designers, mechanics, company directors etc. Being a priest will remain a calling, but it will be one which is complemented by another form of employment.



Bubbling Under Trends

Social Media

Social media will continue to grow in importance and influence. Changing cultural patterns of news and information consumption, points a finger at the need for the Church to develop a holistic and strategic approach to social media. Platforms will be used not only for Church bulletin boards and access to live streaming of masses, but will also be used to generate two-way engagement with parishioners and the congregation. Social media will be used to highlight good works and reward achievement (there's a potential here for digital badging for good works). The Church in the future will be masterful in its use of communications platforms to reach existing and potential members. Engagement will drive future growth.

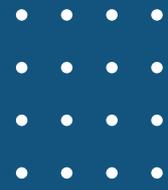
Online Church Reviews

When members engage with the Church, they will expect a certain quality of experience. Our trend clearly shows that people want to feel welcomed and loved when they attend a ceremony, either in person or online. The Church of the future will be ranked, in much the same way that Trip Advisor ranks hotels and restaurants, by the quality of the experience. A star rating that others will review before taking a decision to attend your parish event.



Communications

The need for professional communications at all levels is a big theme in the future. We looked at the recruitment of professional communicators earlier, but we are also seeing a trend where priests need to become polished preachers. Their storytelling and narration skills need to be exemplary to either hold a physical audience at an event (we already looked at the review system) or to keep people engaged online. The need for preachers to engage with social media, interact with parishioners and embrace new technology, as well as hone their oratorical and presentation skills, is a real trend, especially in the northern hemisphere.



Bubbling Under Trends

Individualized faith.

Cultural changes now and in the future, continue to indicate that the growth of a 'me' culture is here to stay. People want an individualized experience of the church. They will be demanding, and expect the church to represent their values and belief systems outside of, as well as 'within' the formal church setting. Our trends reflect the growth in humanism, environmental concerns, ethical standards, an acceptance of all ethnicities and sexualities, which the church in the future will be expected to reflect.

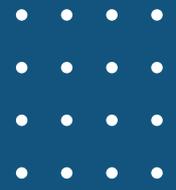
Discussion Fatigue

In the future, people will demand a very clear-cut, almost black and white, version of religion which everyone can either agree or disagree with. Their decision to remain or leave the church will be based on the position they take in relation to these issues. In previous generations, and currently among older members of the church, there is a patience with the pace of change. There is a willingness to wait, listen, debate, discuss the nuances of a situation, dig deep to find a Christian response to an issue. The future trend is for time poor, decision exhausted church members. They will need a clear, simple, categorical statement of where the church stands on an issue. The future involves even more scrolling for micro-bites of news, zapping of visual content if it does not appeal after 10-15 seconds, and a simplicity of response to challenging issues.



Disconnection

Currently, only 8% of parishioners feel that they are close to their clergy in the Catholic Church. This is much lower than in other Christian churches. We mentioned earlier that people want to feel welcomed and loved. This is very difficult if you do not know the people in key leadership positions in your parish. Social media will undoubtedly play a role in the future, but perhaps the greatest impact will be from the part-time nature of ministry. If clergy are working in the community as fellow farmers, butchers, schoolteachers etc. that will reduce the disconnection considerably.



Bubbling Under Trends

Resistance to Authority.

We know from the Edelman Trust Barometer, that trust in figures of authority has been declining for years. Church leaders, politicians and academics used to have authority and respect by virtue of the position they held. This is not the case now, and will not be the trend in the future. Our trend shows the need for inclusive decision making, in effect getting buy-in from the congregation, so that decisions are communal and not communicated by senior leadership. This would be a radical change in the way the church operates.



Conclusion

The key bubbling under trends identified in this report were chosen from a multitude of potential trends identified by the Mettacomms platform. The ones which resonated with us and best reflected the brief we were given. A different brief on the same topic, with a different demographic or geographic focus, might well have resulted in the identification of different trends.

These findings are a snapshot of the data available, based on a general brief. Mettacomms is available to carry out deeper research into any of the above trends and areas that would be of interest.

If you would like to discuss this report, or any research needs, please contact us at colette@mettacomms.com
www.mettacomms.com