



Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate

Parish Life Survey Saint Patrick-Saint Anthony Parish Grand Haven, Michigan

Executive Summary

The St. Patrick-St. Anthony Parish Life Survey was designed by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University.¹ Most of the questions were derived from CARA's database of nationally tested questions, with some questions designed specifically for the parish. The parish distributed the questionnaire to those attending its liturgies over one weekend in September 2019. In all, there were 763 valid responses, with an additional nine respondents under age 16 not included in the analysis. There were 763 valid responses to the paper version of the questionnaire and 152 valid responses to the online version.

Major findings can be summarized as follows:

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

- In calendar year 2019, the average age of valid respondents to the in-pew survey at St. Patrick-St. Anthony Parish is 59. Half are 61 or younger.
- CARA divides Catholics into three age groups: ages 16 to 35 (10%), ages 36 to 64 (48%), and ages 65 and older (42%).
- Six in ten (61%) respondents to the survey are female and 39% are male. Seventy-seven percent say they are currently married or remarried. Some 8% have never married, 8% are divorced or separated, and 7% are widowed.
- Some 12% have attained a high school diploma or less, 28% have attended some college or have an associate's degree, and 60% have a bachelor's or graduate degree.

Religious Characteristics of Respondents

- On average, respondents have attended the parish for 20 years, with half having attended 16 years or more.

¹ CARA is a national, non-profit research center that conducts social scientific studies about the Catholic Church. Founded in 1964 and affiliated with Georgetown University since 1989, CARA has three major dimensions to its mission: to increase the Church's self-understanding, to serve the applied research needs of Church decision-makers, and to advance scholarly research on religion, particularly Catholicism.

- Some 84% both identify the parish as their primary place of worship *and* say they are registered there. Six percent say they regularly attend the parish but are *not* registered and another 5% were identified as visitors on the weekend of the survey.
- Two in three (68%) say they have been active Catholics since birth, 17% are converts to Catholicism, and 12% identify as returned Catholics. Some 2% say they are inactive Catholics and 1% identifies as a non-Catholic.

Assessment of Parish Life and Needs

- More than nine in ten (92%) give St. Patrick-St. Anthony Parish overall a positive evaluation (“good” and “excellent” combined). Some 42% rate it as “excellent.”
- Being part of a parish community is “very” important to 61% of respondents.
- The sense of community within the parish receives a positive rating from 80% of respondents. Some 30% give it an “excellent” rating. Developing a parish sense of community receives “very much” priority from 62% of respondents.
- Some 83% at least “somewhat” agree that participation in this faith community has deepened their faith. Forty-four percent agree “strongly” that it has.
- Efforts to meet people’s spiritual needs receive an “excellent” rating from 34% of respondents.
- St. Patrick-St. Anthony respondents are particularly likely to report being attracted to the parish “very much” by its open and welcoming spirit (52%).
- The following needs are especially likely to receive high priority from respondents: developing a parish sense of community (62%), visitation of the sick and homebound (54%), outreach to inactive Catholics (48%), and senior citizen programs (42%).
- Efforts to reach out to inactive Catholics receive a positive rating from 42% of respondents. Twelve percent give these efforts an “excellent” rating. Some 48% give an “excellent” rating to its outreach to inactive Catholics.

Worship

- Masses and liturgies in general receive a positive evaluation from 90% of respondents. Forty-seven percent rate them as “excellent.”
- Just over half give the music at weekend Masses overall (53%) and the homilies at weekend Masses overall (52%) an “excellent” rating. Parish efforts to welcome visitors and guests receives an “excellent” evaluation from 33% of respondents.

- Some 71% attend Mass at least once a week and another 21% attend almost every week. Mass attendance varies some by age groups, with those ages 65 and older (81%) most likely to attend at least once a week and those ages 36 to 64 (64%) least likely.
- Some 13% “strongly” agree that they can be good Catholics without going to Mass every week. Among those saying the currently attend less than weekly, 27% “strongly” agree.
- Catholics who say they have missed Mass in the last six months are especially likely to strongly cite the following reasons: their busy schedules or lack of time (24%), family responsibilities (23%), and health problems or disabilities (21%).
- Twenty-eight percent give “very much” priority to the parish providing more small group prayer opportunities.

Formation

- Parish efforts to educate parishioners in the faith receive a positive evaluation from 83% of respondents, with 36% giving these efforts an “excellent” rating.
- Efforts to nurture one’s relationship with Jesus Christ receive an “excellent” rating from 40% of respondents.
- Learning more about the Catholic faith is “very” important to 58% of respondents. When asked how familiar they are with aspects of their faith, 29% report being “very” familiar with Catholic doctrine and beliefs, 23% with Church teachings related to social justice, and 22% with the content of the Bible.
- Responding parishioners were asked how interested they would be in learning more about eight different topics. They are most likely to be “very” interested in the topic of how the Scriptures relate to their daily lives (59%), followed by personal prayer and spirituality (51%) and getting a Catholic perspective on current topics (48%).

Leadership

- Some 85% “somewhat” or “strongly” agree they would feel comfortable talking with the pastor. Fifty-five percent “strongly” agree they would.
- Fifty percent agree “strongly” that there is sufficient qualified parish staff (paid and volunteer) to meet the parish’s needs.
- Thirty-six percent agree “strongly” that they feel informed about parish finances.
- Responding parishioners are particularly likely to say the following are “very” effective ways of communicating parish news to them: the Sunday bulletins (66%), inserts in the bulletins (52%), the announcements read at Mass (48%), St. Patrick-St. Anthony Newsletter (48%), and email (44%).

Stewardship

- Ninety-four percent agree at least “somewhat” that they understand the concept of stewardship, with 65% agreeing “strongly” that they do.
- Parish efforts to encourage parishioners to share their time, talents and treasure with the parish receive a positive evaluation from 84%. Some 38% rate these efforts as “excellent.”
- Some 40% “strongly” agree that they feel invited and encouraged to participate in parish ministries. In a related finding, 32% place “very much” priority on the parish helping them to discern their gifts and talents.
- Forty percent report not being involved with any ministries or activities at the parish, 26% are involved with one, and 35% are involved with two or more.
- When asked how much different factors prevent them from volunteering more for the parish, respondents are particularly likely to say the following “very much” prevent them from doing so: their busy schedules or lack of time (39%) and already feeling that they volunteer as much as they would like to (27%).
- Some 20% “strongly” agree that parish financial appeals are excessive.
- When asked how much different factors prevent them from contributing more financially to the parish, respondents are particularly likely to say the following “very much” prevent them from doing so: them feeling they already contribute all they can afford (40%) and their support for other causes (25%).