

Want a Vibrant Parish?

New study suggests well-formed male leaders are the key



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Perspectives for pastors and clergy

A recently conducted survey found men who regularly practice their faith are critical to family involvement in local parishes and Church ministries. **Compared to all Catholics in America**, Catholic households with a male father or parent who regularly practices his faith were statistically more likely to participate in parish life and Church-related ministries. **According to the survey, such households were:**



- Nearly twice as likely to be involved in parish activities on a weekly basis or more.
- Two and a half times more likely to attend Mass on a weekly basis.
- Actively involved in discussing and promoting vocations to priestly and religious life.
- Committed to personal and family prayer on a weekly basis or more.

What does a Catholic male leader look like? The survey identified the following traits and characteristics associated with well-formed Catholic male leaders.

Religious beliefs and practices:

- 98% indicate their faith is very important to them, compared to 58% of Catholics nationwide. 83% state their faith is a part of daily life.
- 99% report they believe Christ is truly present in the Eucharist. In general these men are twice as likely to accept the teachings of the Magisterium compared to Catholics at large.
- 98% report going to Mass on a weekly basis with 23% attending daily. Among Catholics at large, only 39% report weekly attendance.
- 87% indicate they spend at least a few minutes in prayer each day with 12% praying for a two hours or more daily. Nationally, less than 60% of Catholics report daily prayer.
- 68% report family participation in their local parish at least weekly and nearly half (47%) participate in a parish men's group. This compares to 63% of Catholics nationwide who report "seldom or never" participating in parish activities.
- 62% report participating in the Sacrament of Reconciliation every few months, 35% on a monthly basis.

Marriage and spousal relations:

- Catholic male leaders are more likely to be married (84%) compared to 52% of Catholics nationwide.
- 57.87% indicate having three or more children, with almost 40% reporting families with four or more children.
- Catholic male leaders are 40% less likely to experience divorce than Catholics in general.
- 64% report they split household responsibilities evenly or personally do more of the chores.
- 92% say they view their wives as equal in dignity and respect though each spouse has distinct gender-based roles and gifts given to them by God.
- 64% report strong or very strong feelings of connection to their wives.
- 67% say they are always or in most cases able to communicate their feelings, emotions and relationship needs. Less than 4% view their spouse as controlling or dominating.
- 62% indicate they are satisfied or very satisfied with the level of sexual activity in their life.
- 87% report they are either the primary decision-maker or are responsible for financially providing and protecting members of their family.
- 27% report they split childcare duties equally.

Social and professional relationships

- 87% report a high or very high level () of self-confidence and personal ability to reach life goals.
- 77% report they are satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of their lives at present.
- Catholic male leaders report strong or very strong relationships with superiors and coworkers.
- Those surveyed earn, on average, twice the income of the average U.S. household. Occupationally, more than one third are employed as managers, business or finance professionals or health care practitioners.

Implications for Pastoral Formation

According to the results of this study, increased male participation at parishes leads to increased family participation at parishes. Thus pastoral formation directors interested in increasing Mass attendance, volunteerism, prayer and Sacramental life among all parishioners would do well to invest in effective, parish-based male-formation programs.

Additional considerations for pastors and parish staff are the relatively significant deviations between the surveyed population and U.S. households in general in terms of income, occupation, professional and social relationships, self-esteem, alcohol and drug abuse, and divorce. While stewardship and tithing were not specifically explored in this study, reported household income results do suggest at minimum a greater household capacity for financial gifts or donations.

Finally, several questions within the study point to what may be an intergenerational benefit associated with well-formed male leaders and members of the household: more than 70% of survey participants reported growing up in households with clearly defined gender roles within the family.

Learn more about this research project and effective, parish-based, male-formation programs at www.menofchrist.net/impact