

# COMPLEX CATHOLICISM

The Lives and Faith of Young Catholics  
in England and Wales today

Matthew van Duyvenbode

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## KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS IN SUMMARY

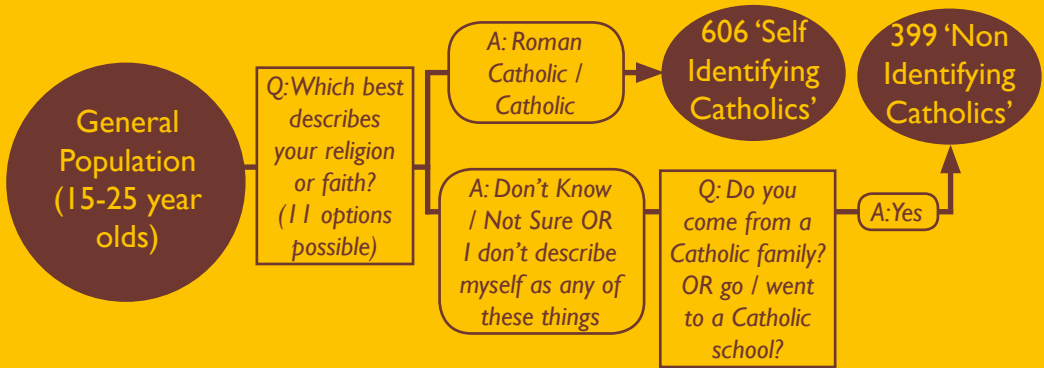
- Young Catholics typically divide into three groups related to their stance on the interaction between faith and society: ‘apologists’, ‘abstainers’ and ‘assimilators’.
- Young Catholics in 2017 are more likely than those in 2009 to view ‘helping others’ as a desirable aspiration, and more expect to help others in the future.
- Young Catholics in 2017 expressed stronger levels of concern about local and global issues than in 2009, particularly about terrorism.
- Female young Catholics say they have taken more action on social issues in the past year than their male counterparts; but they are also more likely to say that they have experienced stress and other negative emotions in the past week.
- Young Catholics in 2017 say that they attend Mass more regularly than their counterparts in 2009; males are more likely to say they attend Mass than females.
- Young Catholics might not always choose to describe themselves as such; those who do describe themselves as ‘Roman Catholic / Catholic’ may have a pick-and-mix approach to their Catholic identity.
- Young Catholics in 2017 express lower levels of agnosticism and atheism and higher levels of belief than their counterparts did in 2009; this is particularly striking amongst ‘Non Identifying Catholics’.

# INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH METHOD

The origins of this research date back to 2009, when a group of youth ministry practitioners commissioned a detailed study into the lives, concerns, beliefs and faith practices of young Catholics. The resulting data were presented in the form of two resources for ministry ('Mapping the Terrain' and 'Detailed Typology') which helped to shape the outlook and priorities for youth ministry in the Catholic community for some years.

To mark and inform the 2018 Catholic Synod for Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment, elements of the original 2009 online study were tracked, updated and revised to provide a realistic and timely snapshot of contemporary young Catholics in England and Wales, as well as to provide a comparison over time.

1,005 15-25 year old Catholics participated in an online survey between 20 September and 18 October 2017. Eligible participants were taken from the general population of 15-25 year olds, and then asked various questions about their religious identity and background in order to qualify for participation in the survey (see below). This means that the data presented here is as inclusive and representative of the youth Catholic community as possible, as well as being robust and statistically reliable validated by the number of respondents.



606 participants described themselves as Catholic / Roman Catholic. We call these 'Self Identifying Catholics'. Others didn't identify as coming from any other faith group, and identified as coming from a Catholic family or attending / having attended a Catholic school. We call these 'Non Identifying Catholics'. You might be surprised by how devout some of these are! Mostly, the two groups act and feel similarly, but when the two groups answers distinctively from one another, we have made this clear in this report. You can find out more about Catholic identity on the following pages.

A copy of all headline statistical data for the survey is freely available. You can request this via [caminohouse.com/complexcatholicism](http://caminohouse.com/complexcatholicism)

## SECTION 1

# IDENTITY



### KEY HEADLINES

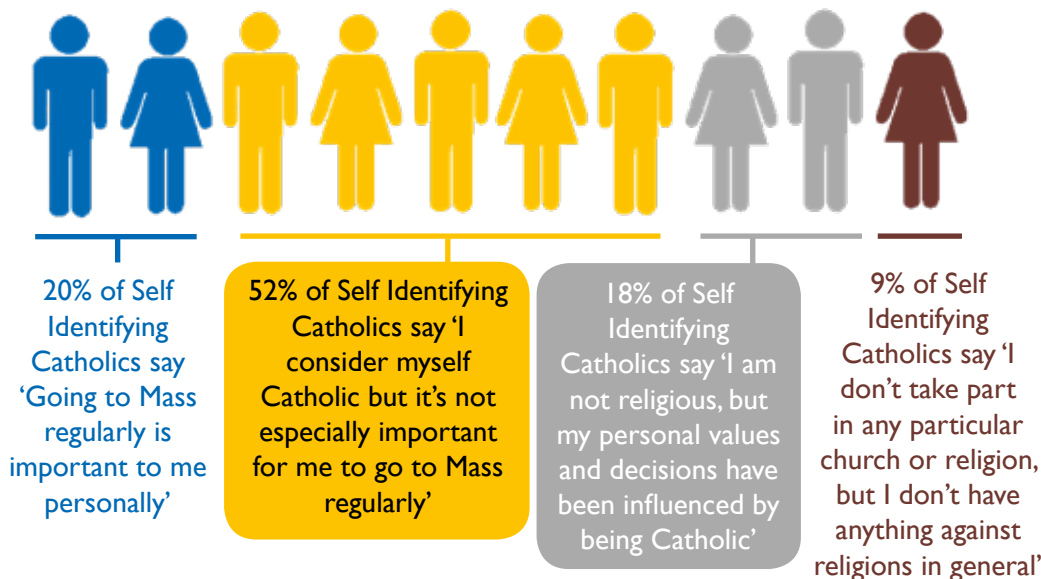
- Young Catholics might not always choose to describe themselves as such; those who do describe themselves as ‘Roman Catholic / Catholic may have a pick-and-mix approach to their Catholic identity.
- These young people consider ‘being a good person’, ‘believing in God’ and ‘following Catholic guidelines about helping others’ as the most important factors in somebody being Catholic.
- Family has the potential to remain a strong influence on the faith and moral development of 15-25 year olds, moreso than friendships.

### SOME BACKGROUND STATISTICS

- 52% of respondents were aged 15-19, 48% were aged 20-25.
- 23% of young Catholics live in London; 16% in the North West; 12% in the South East. 44% live elsewhere in England, and 4% in Wales.
- 86% of the group consider themselves ‘straight’, 6% consider themselves ‘bisexual’ and 3% ‘gay’. 4% say ‘it’s complicated’ and 1% prefer not to say.

## SELF IDENTIFYING CATHOLICS

The majority of our participants selected **Roman Catholic / Catholic** from a list of possible religious identities.<sup>1</sup> Whilst they were happy to identify as Catholic, the variety of their beliefs, behaviours, experiences and attitudes demonstrates the vast range of opinion about what it means for a young person to call themselves a Catholic. This is exemplified by their responses to the question, *'Which of the following statements is closest to your personal feeling about religion or being Catholic?'*<sup>1</sup>:-



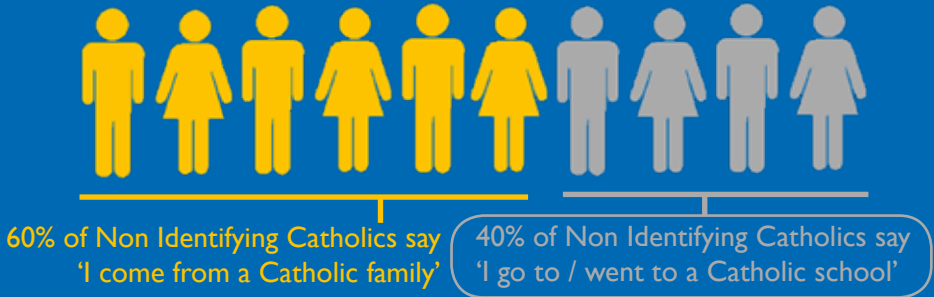
The diversity of attitudes towards Catholicism in general continues into both the beliefs and behaviours of Self Identifying Catholics. Asked to choose from a range of titles, 39% chose to avoid 'Son of God', and described Jesus as either a **very wise person** an **ordinary person** or a **very holy person**. Meanwhile, only 37% said that **following Catholic guidelines about their personal lives** was an important factor in being Catholic (in comparison to 47% of Non Identifying Catholics).

<sup>1</sup> Q: 'Which of the following best describes your religion or faith? This does not necessarily mean you take part in religious activities, just that you call yourself by that name' and offered a choice of: *Muslim; Hindu; Sikh; Jewish; Church of England/Anglican; Roman Catholic/Catholic; Other Christian; Member of another religious group (please specify); I don't describe myself as any of these things; I don't know/I'm not sure; Prefer not to answer*

## NON IDENTIFYING CATHOLICS

Previous research as well as practitioner experience has demonstrated that many young people are reticent about categorising themselves using formal, denominational language. As such, we wanted to provide an opportunity to capture the voice of young Catholics who might not want to self-categorise, or who were unsure about their religious status.

40% of the participants did not identify as Roman Catholic / Catholic as their religious identity (nor did they identify as any other religious group, or as hostile to religion), but they said they were **unsure** or that they **didn't describe themselves** as any of the categories provided. We then asked a question about their religious background / heritage:



Conversely to their Self Identifying peers, Non Identifying Catholics (who tend to be older) often behave and believe with more religiosity than might be expected:-

- In total, 50% of young people who don't describe themselves as Catholic attend Mass at least irregularly.
- 1 in 10 attend Mass weekly, and another 1 in 10 attend somewhere between monthly and weekly.
- 64% can identify having had a spiritual experience; 55% say they pray; 74% either say that they believe in something transcendent, or are unsure

These statistics demonstrate that those who choose to self identify as Catholics may not be as coherent in their faith as we assume; likewise, other young people may not choose to identify as Catholic, but may have more connection with Catholicism than we first imagine. Catholic identity is complex, comprising a blend of heritage, culture, practices, experiences, traditions and beliefs.

Young Catholics tend to prioritise moral behaviours above religious observance when they think about what exemplifies a Catholic identity.

*Q: How important do you think the following things are in somebody being Catholic?*

Ranking	Top 7 Factors	Mean Score <sup>2</sup>
1	Being a good person	4.37
2	Believing in God	4.17
3	Following Catholic guidelines about helping others <sup>3</sup>	3.92
4	Being baptised or christened	3.87
5	Believing in Catholic ideas <sup>4</sup>	3.80
6	Knowing Jesus as Saviour	3.75
7	Going to Mass	3.46

For many young Catholics, family still remains the prime context for the potential development of faith and morality - if families are equipped to nurture this:

Statement	Friends (Mean Score) <sup>2</sup>	Family (Mean Score) <sup>2</sup>
I hold beliefs similar to...	3.44	3.70
My ....are religious	2.65	3.37
I feel comfortable talking about religious beliefs with my....	3.67	3.76
I share the same morals or values as my....	3.72	3.86
My .....are a good influence on me	3.78	4.07

## IDENTITY: APPLICATION

- How do you connect with those who do not identify as Catholic?
- What assumptions might you make about those who say they're Catholic?
- What do you think is important about somebody having a Catholic identity? What does the teaching of the Church say? And how does this overlap and/or challenge what young people themselves say?
- How do you support families in their faith development of young people?

<sup>2</sup> Mean Score is the average rating from 1-5, where 1 is strong disagreement, 5 is strong agreement

<sup>3</sup> Full wording included '(e.g. giving money to charity, living simply, speaking up against injustice)'

<sup>4</sup> Full wording included '(e.g. Mary, the Pope, saints)'





# EVERYDAY LIFE

## KEY HEADLINES

- Young Catholics, like all young people, are leading stressful lives - with young females feeling this even more acutely than their male counterparts.
- The vast majority of young Catholics feel supported by adults and peers; they will talk with parents and friends when considering important decisions.
- Young Catholics in 2017 expressed stronger levels of concern about local and global issues than in 2009, particularly about terrorism.

## SOME BACKGROUND STATISTICS

- 35% of the group are currently attending university; 26% are at school. 18% are in full time work. 9% are not in paid employment or studying.
- Of those aged 16 or over, 45% are living with family, 18% are living with a partner but not married, 17% are living with friends and 6% are married. 14% said 'other'.
- 15-16 year olds tended to feel more supported by adults than all other age groups; they also tend to feel less stressed than their older peers. 17-18 year olds conversely are the most worried about pleasing others, and about their performance at school/study/work.

## HIGHS AND LOWS

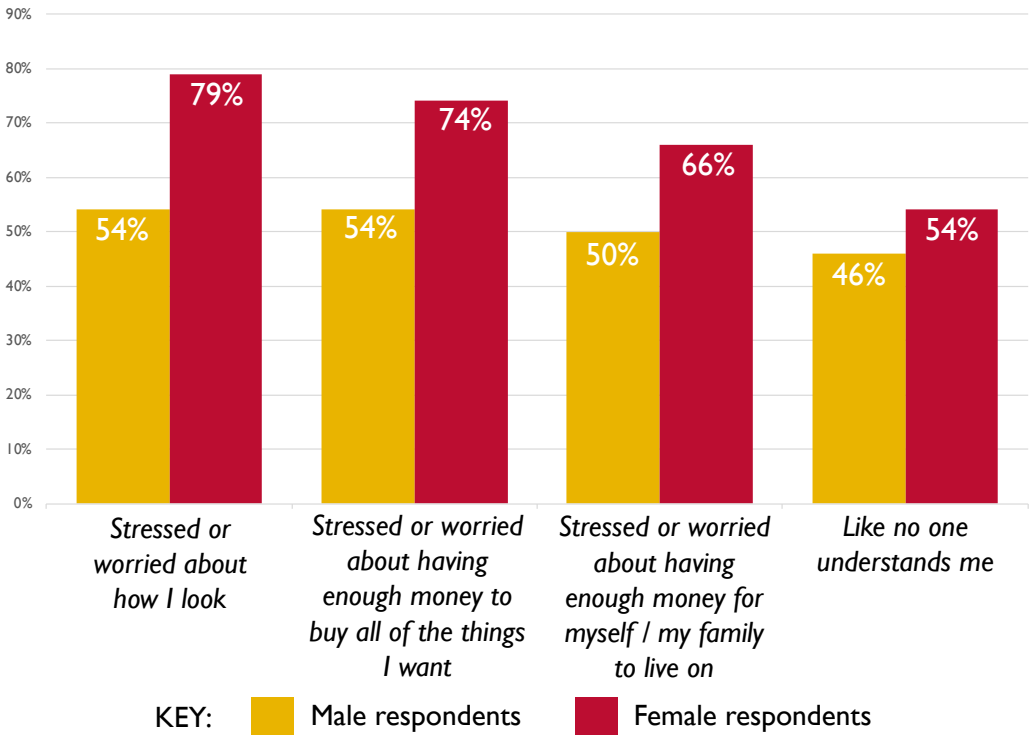
Young Catholics are balancing highs and lows in their day-to-day experiences. The vast majority say that they have felt **happy** (85%), **excited or looking forward to something** (82%) or **hopeful about their future** (72%) in the past week (at the time of surveying).

Meanwhile, many also identified having felt stress or worry in a wide variety of areas over the same period, including **how they were doing at school / study / work** (72%), about **how they look** (71%) and **what others think of them** (69%).

## STRESS AND GENDER

Female young Catholics are more likely than their male counterparts to say they have had negative feelings across every factor. Most notably, 79% of females said they felt stressed or worried about how they look, vs 54% of males. On average, 13% more females were likely to say that they had felt a negative factor in the past week than males.

*Q: When you think about the past week, would you say you have felt the following things?*



## SOURCES OF SUPPORT



Over 8 in 10 young Catholics express confidence in their support networks. When asked *'When you think about your life right now, how much do you agree with the following statements?'*:-

- 87% agree that they have people in their life who set a good example of morals and values.
- 86% agree that they feel valued by their family.
- 83% agree that there are adults to turn to for advice or when they are worried.
- 82% agree that they receive help from adults in achieving the things they want to achieve.
- 82% agree that they are valued by their friends.

## SOURCES OF GUIDANCE

Young Catholics say they will draw on a wide range of resources to help them make an important decision, principally by **talking with trusted people** and finding **information online**, but also through trying to **experience different options**, and **considering their faith**.

*Q:Thinking generally about times that you have had to make an important decision, which of these things would you do to help you make your choice? (tick all that apply)*



66% would talk with their parents; 15% with their grandparents



53% would find out more information online



51% would talk with a trusted friend; 37% with a group of friends



23% would try out different options they're exploring



16% would pray about it

## INCREASINGLY CONCERNED?

When asked ‘*How concerned are you personally about the following things?*’, **Terrorism**, **Wars and Conflicts** and **Racial Discrimination** are the top three concerns for young Catholics, with 83%, 77% and 76% respectively saying they have concerns in these areas.

In comparison to the respondents in 2009, young Catholics in 2017 express higher levels of concern across all issues, except about ‘violence in the streets or in public places’. This means that as a whole, they are typically more likely to say that they are ‘very’ or ‘quite’ concerned.

Again, compared with their male counterparts, females expressed more strong concern on every issue except for the Economy. This was particularly striking in the areas of **Terrorism** (55% vs 38%), **People being treated differently because of their sexual orientation** (40% vs 22%), and **Gender inequality** (36% vs 15%):

Overall Mean Rank <sup>5</sup>	Issue	% Strong Concern - Female	% Strong Concern - Male
1	Terrorism	55	38
2	Wars and Conflicts	40	28
3	Racial Discrimination	42	31
4	Bullying	38	26
5	Disasters and Emergencies	33	21
8	People being treated differently because of their sexual orientation	40	22
12	Gender inequality	36	15

### EVERYDAY LIFE: APPLICATION

- How might you harness the joys of young people, whilst recognising that stress will often be just below the surface?
- How can you create a culture in which young women (in particular) feel secure and supported?
- How can you use the places where young people are already looking for guidance and support to help foster vocational discernment?
- Are there practical ways you can help young people address the issues they feel most concerned about?

<sup>5</sup> Higher mean rank will suggest an overall higher level of concern, despite not always attracting the highest % of strong concern

## SECTION 3

# BELIEF



### KEY HEADLINES

- Young Catholics in 2017 express lower levels of agnosticism and atheism and higher levels of belief than their counterparts did in 2009; this is particularly striking amongst Non Identifying Catholics.
- A majority of Self Identifying Catholics say that they believe Jesus is/was the Son of God, whilst 40% choose human language to describe Jesus.
- Around 1 in 10 Non Identifying Catholics say that they believe Jesus never existed.

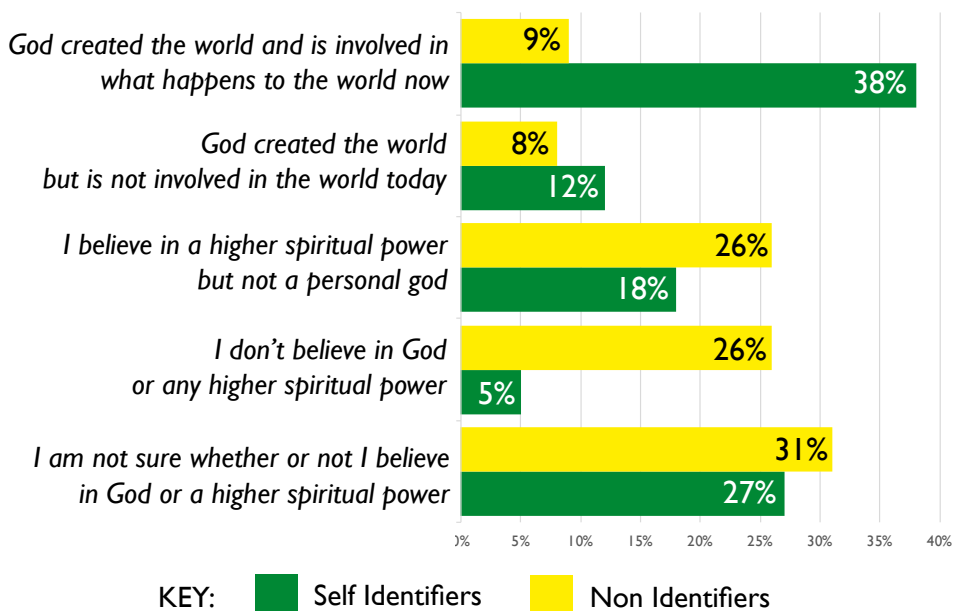
### SOME BACKGROUND STATISTICS

- 52% of young Catholics say that they hold beliefs similar to their closest friends; the group that felt this most strongly were those who said they didn't believe in God or any higher spiritual power (about two thirds of these agreed).
- 68% of Self Identifying Catholics and 52% of Non Identifying Catholics say that they hold beliefs similar to their family.
- 15-16 year olds think 'believing in God' is a less important part of somebody being Catholic than any other age group.

## BELIEF IN GOD

The majority of young Catholics believe in God or a higher power, with only 13% taking an atheistic approach to belief. Self Identifying Catholics are much more likely to say they believe in a **Creator God who is involved in what happens to the world now** (38% vs 9% of Non Identifiers). Conversely, Non Identifying Catholics are much more likely to say that they **don't believe in God or any higher spiritual power** (26% vs 5% of Self Identifiers):

*Q: Which of the following is closest to your personal belief?*



## BELIEF AND MASSGOING<sup>6</sup>

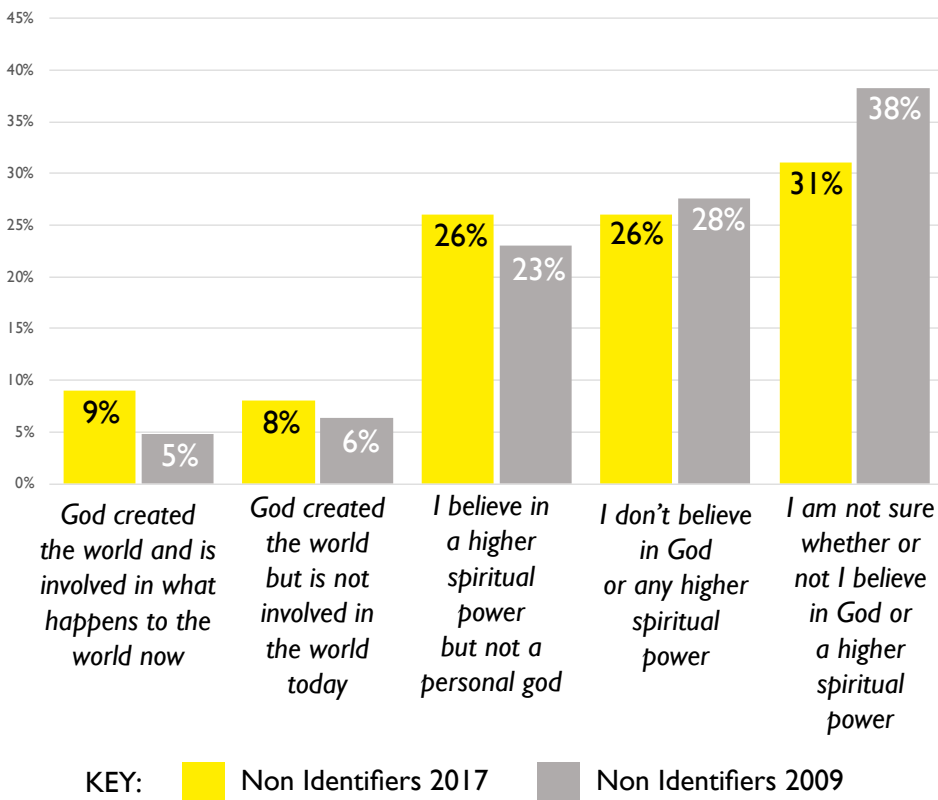
Most young Catholics who say that they attend Mass frequently or regularly believe **God created the world and is involved in what happens to the world now** (53% / 37% respectively). Most irregular Mass goers say that they're **not sure whether they believe in God or a higher spiritual power** (38%). Most of those who say they never attend Mass say they **don't believe in God or any higher spiritual power** (32%), but around 39% of the same group say that they believe either in a creator God or a higher spiritual power.

<sup>6</sup>Throughout this report, frequent Mass goers are those who attend weekly or more; regular Mass goers attend less than weekly but at least monthly; irregular Mass goers attend less than monthly (but attend); Nevers say they never attend. For more on Mass attendance, see section 4

## A CHANGING PICTURE?

Comparison between the 2017 and 2009 groups indicate slightly different patterns of belief. As an overall group, more of the 2017 young Catholics expressed belief in a creator, involved God (26% vs 22% in 2009) or a creator God who is uninvolved (10% vs 8% in 2009). Conversely, the proportion of those who don't believe in God, or are unsure has decreased (from 16% to 13%, and 33% to 29% respectively). Intriguingly, this change is most pronounced amongst Non Identifying Catholics:-

*Q: Which of the following is closest to your personal belief?*



## BELIEFS ABOUT JESUS

Overall, 43% of young Catholics say they believe that Jesus is the **Son of God**. Self Identifiers are much more likely to say this (58% vs 21% of Non Identifiers), whilst 23% of those who never attend Mass also choose to use this descriptor.

There are small differences again in this area between the Non Identifier respondents from 2017 and those from 2009, where belief in Jesus as **Son of God** rose from 18% to 21%, and belief in Jesus as **a very holy person** rose from 10% to 16%, displacing **a very wise person**, which reduced from 28% to 20%. However, this period also saw a growth in the percentage of Non Identifiers who either believe Jesus to be **a conman** (1% to 4%) or that **he never existed** (7% to 10%).

*Q. Which of these is closest to who you believe Jesus is / was?*



### BELIEF: APPLICATION

- How might you open up a discussion around the nature or character of God that young people believe in?
- How can you use moments of occasional encounter with irregular Mass goes to help them explore their questions about the transcendent?
- Do you sometimes assume those on the fringes might not have firm ideas about God? How can this data increase your confidence to talk about belief?
- How can you build on the beliefs young people have about the human nature of Jesus Christ?
- How can our educational and formation opportunities best challenge misinformed views about Jesus never existing?





# PRACTICE AND EXPERIENCE

## KEY HEADLINES

- Young Catholics in 2017 say that they attend Mass more regularly than their counterparts in 2009; males are more likely to say they attend Mass than females.
- Broadly, young Catholics tend to divide into four groups to describe spiritual experiences they've had: using theological language; using language of nature and togetherness; using supernatural or spooky language; or using language of angels and the deceased.
- Around 10% of young Catholics have a strongly positive personal view of the Catholic Church; around half of all young Catholics agree that they have felt welcomed in their local Catholic parish.

## SOME BACKGROUND STATISTICS

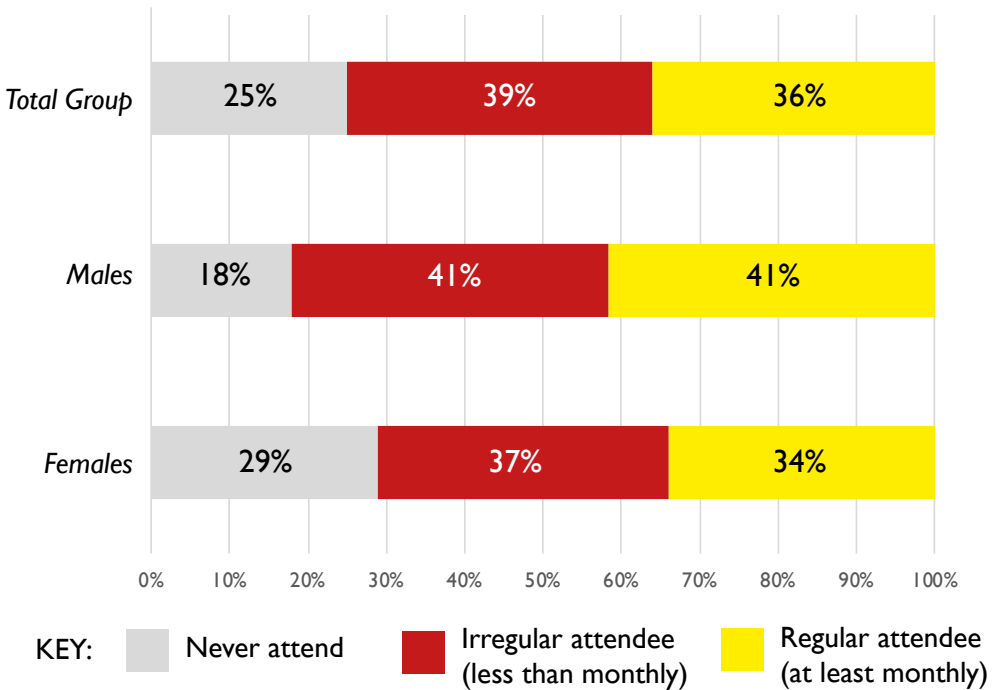
- 80% of Self Identifying Catholics say they pray or meditate on their own (18% daily); 55% of Non Identifiers agree (7% daily).
- 8% of young Catholics have taken part in a church youth group during the past year; this is a similar figure for 15-19 year olds as 20-25 year olds.
- 37% of Self Identifying Catholics have given up something for Lent in the past year; 21% attended a Christian festival or large gathering, and 10% went on a pilgrimage / retreat voluntarily.

## MASS ATTENDANCE

75% of young Catholics say that they are attending Mass - at least irregularly. Overall, 20% say that they are frequent attenders (attending Mass at least once a week) with 26% of Self Identifiers and 10% of Non Identifiers saying this. Meanwhile, half of those who are Non Identifying Catholics say that they never attend Mass.

Across the whole group, males were more likely to attend Mass than females, with 82% attending at least irregularly (vs 71% of females).

*Q: How often, if at all, would you say you attend Catholic Mass?*



## A CHANGING PICTURE?

The overall group in 2017 say that they attend Mass more frequently than their 2009 counterparts. 75% of 2017 participants, vs 59% of 2009 participants, attend Mass at least irregularly. This difference is most pronounced amongst Non Identifying Catholics, where regular attendance in 2017 is 19% (8% in 2009), irregular attendance in 2017 is 32% (20% in 2009), and those who say they never attend in 2017 is 50% (72% in 2009).

## DESCRIBING SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

Given a list of 14 options, as well as the opportunity to 'prefer not to say', around  $\frac{3}{4}$  of young Catholics identified that they had **personally had a spiritual experience**. Participants selecting multiple options tended to fall into four distinct groups in the language they used to articulate their spiritual experience:

### TRADITIONAL TRINITARIAN LANGUAGE

e.g. 'A sense of the presence of God; Awareness of the Holy Spirit; Being forgiven by God; Confidence to commit your life to God' etc.



This group are more likely to:

- be younger (15-19)
- say that they never pray / meditate on their own
- never talk about God or religion with friends or family

### LANGUAGE OF NATURE AND CONNECTEDNESS

e.g. 'A feeling that you are at one with nature and the universe'; 'A sense of being part of something bigger alongside others' etc.



This group are more likely to:

- be older (20-25)
- say that they pray / meditate on their own
- feel strongly that being Catholic is about being a good person

### SUPERNATURAL LANGUAGE

e.g. 'Feeling as if somebody or something were trying to communicate with you'; 'Something beyond description'; 'Something spooky or supernatural' etc.



This group are more likely to:

- believe Catholics can hold different religions / teachings at the same time
- say that they hold dissimilar beliefs to their family

### LIMINAL LANGUAGE

e.g. 'A sense of the presence of an angel'; 'A sense of the presence of somebody who has died' etc.



This group are more likely to:

- describe their ethnicity as White British
- feel that supporting others who experience poverty or injustice is important

## EXPERIENCE OF CATHOLICISM TODAY

48% of young Catholics agree that they have felt welcomed in their local Catholic parish; 13% disagree that they have felt welcomed. 68% of those who say they believe in an involved, creator God agree that they have felt welcomed; whilst 10% of those who say that they attend Mass regularly disagree that they feel welcomed in their local parish.

Within the overall group, around 1 in 10 have a strong positive perception of the Catholic Church. Asked to select up to five words from a list of 43 positive, neutral and negative adjectives, 9% selected a minimum of four of the following:-

Approachable

Supportive

Positive

Trustworthy

Caring / Compassionate

Generous

Reputable

Accountable

Fair

Sympathetic

Empowering

Inclusive

Informative

Friendly / Welcoming

Honest

### PRACTICE AND EXPERIENCE: APPLICATION

- What is your experience of Mass going amongst young people? Are there ways to help encourage both young women and young men to experience the rich depths of Mass?
- Do you recognise the language of the different spiritual experiences? What language might you yourself use - how does this connect with young people?
- How might you help build on existing spiritual experiences and help young people discover the dynamic richness of Christian Spirituality?
- In what ways can you encourage your local parish to become intentional in its welcome of young people? Can you identify ambassadors amongst young people who are already strongly positive about the Church?

# FAITH IN SOCIETY



## KEY HEADLINES

- Young Catholics typically divide into three groups related to their stance on the interaction between faith and society: ‘apologists’, ‘abstainers’ and ‘assimilators’.
- Young Catholics say that the main reasons they stop connecting with the practicing community are time pressures and life / family transitions.
- Around a third of young Catholics are positive about the future of the Catholic religion in this country.

## SOME BACKGROUND STATISTICS

- Self Identifying Catholics are less likely to have emailed or written to their MP in the past year than Non Identifying Catholics.
- 14% of those attending Mass at least monthly have shared a Bible verse or Christian quote on social media in the past year.
- Those who never attend Mass or are infrequent Mass goers are considerably more likely to have signed a petition in the past year than regular Mass goers.

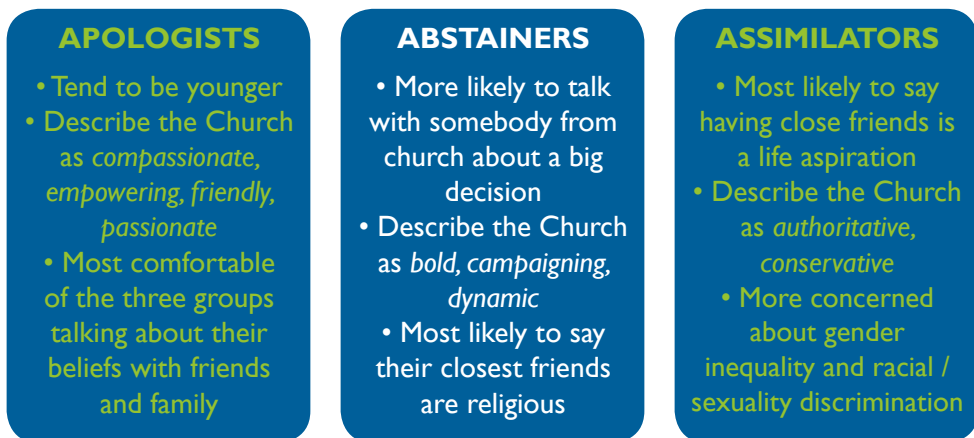
## FAITH-SOCIETY STANCE

Participants were asked about their strength of agreement or disagreement with six foundational statements designed to explore their experience of the intersections between faith and the modern world:

- *If you are part of the Catholic religion, you should follow all of its rules and teachings.*
- *It is okay for a Catholic to try to convert other people to his or her religion.*
- *It is okay for a Catholic to explain their religion to another person.*
- *It is okay for a Catholic to follow parts or teachings of different religions at the same time.*
- *Catholics should keep their religious views to themselves to avoid hurting other people's feelings.*
- *The Catholic religion causes more problems or harm than good.*

Looking in detail at the pattern of responses to these questions, three distinct, similarly-sized groups emerged from the data. These three groups appear to have different 'centres of gravity' when thinking about the place of their faith in the world:

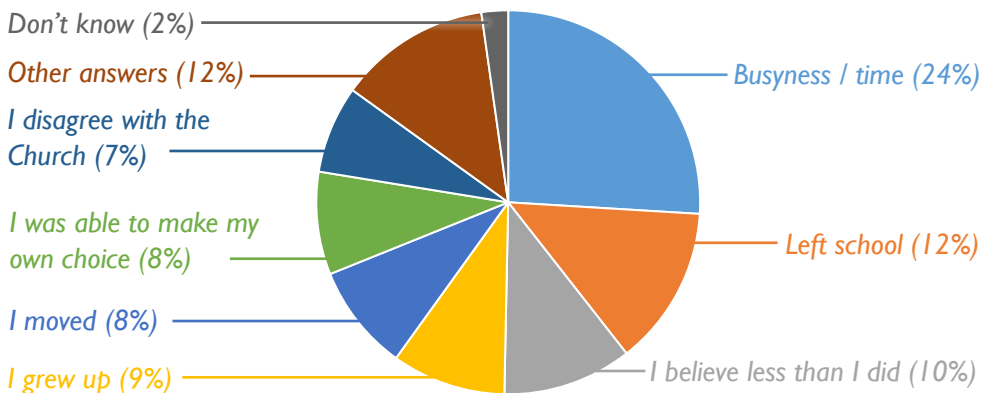
- The first group place greater emphasis on **Catholicism as their centre of gravity**; they believe in the Catholic religion as a force for good, and don't think Catholics should keep their religious views to themselves to avoid hurting other people's feelings. We've called this group **APOLOGISTS**.
- The second group look **neither towards Catholicism nor Society as their centre of gravity - or perhaps look towards both**, but don't try to integrate these views. They disagree with the Apologists and think that Catholics should keep their religious views to themselves. They also say that if you're part of the Catholic religion you should follow all of its rules and teachings, but are mixed about whether the Catholic Church is a force for good. Owing to their relative ambivalence about the public nature of faith, we've called this group **ABSTAINERS**.
- The third group place greater emphasis on **Society as their centre of gravity**; they are strongly positive that Catholics can follow parts or teachings of different religions at the same time, and are deeply negative about Catholics seeking to try to convert others to Catholicism. Because they look to their social context as a starting point for thinking about faith, we've called this group **ASSIMILATORS**.



These foundational groupings are a lens through which we can view diverse tribes of young people. Apologists, Abstainers and Assimilators may look similar in terms of age, background, life experience and spiritual expression, but the life decisions they make and their motivating convictions will often be formed by this underlying stance.

## POINTS OF DISCONNECTION

56% of young Catholics who say that they never attend Mass or attend irregularly also say that they used to go to Mass more in the past. 337 young people offered a reason why they now attend less frequently:



## THE FUTURE OF CATHOLICISM IN ENGLAND AND WALES

33% of young Catholics agree with the statement *I'm hopeful about the future of the Catholic religion in this country*, whilst another 1/3 neither agree nor disagree. Males are more hopeful about the future, with 41% agreeing, whilst only 29% of females agree. There is also a clear distinction between Self Identifiers (43% agree) and Non Identifiers (only 18% agree).

Young Catholics in 2017 are less likely to describe themselves as **White British** than those surveyed in 2009. Conversely, the proportion describing their ethnicity as **Asian** or **Mixed** is higher in 2017.

*Q: Which of the following best describes your ethnicity?*

Ethnicity	2009	2017
White British	77%	70%
White Irish	3%	2%
White Other	9%	10%
Asian	3%	6%
Black African	2%	3%
Black Caribbean	1%	1%
Mixed	4%	6%
Prefer not to say	Did not ask	1%

### FAITH IN SOCIETY: APPLICATION

- Do you recognise the Apologists, Abstainers and Assimilators amongst the young Catholics you come into contact with?
- Which one of these groups would you consider yourself part of? How might you need to adapt or shape your language and style to engage authentically with those from different groups?
- What plans could you make to help young Catholics negotiate life transitions which they say stop them attending Mass?
- How can you encourage young Catholics to help shape the future of Catholicism?
- As Catholics become more ethnically diverse, what challenges and opportunities does this bring to your ministry?



# MAKING A DIFFERENCE



### KEY HEADLINES

- Young Catholics in 2017 are more likely than those in 2009 to view ‘helping others’ as a desirable aspiration, and more expect to help others in the future. We have called this trait ‘aspirational altruism’.
- Around 6 in 10 young Catholics say that helping others who experience injustice or poverty is important to the way they live their lives. Those who attend Mass frequently / believe in a personal God feel this more strongly than their peers.
- Females say they have taken more action on social issues in the past year than their male counterparts, especially by donating money and sharing a campaign action on social media.

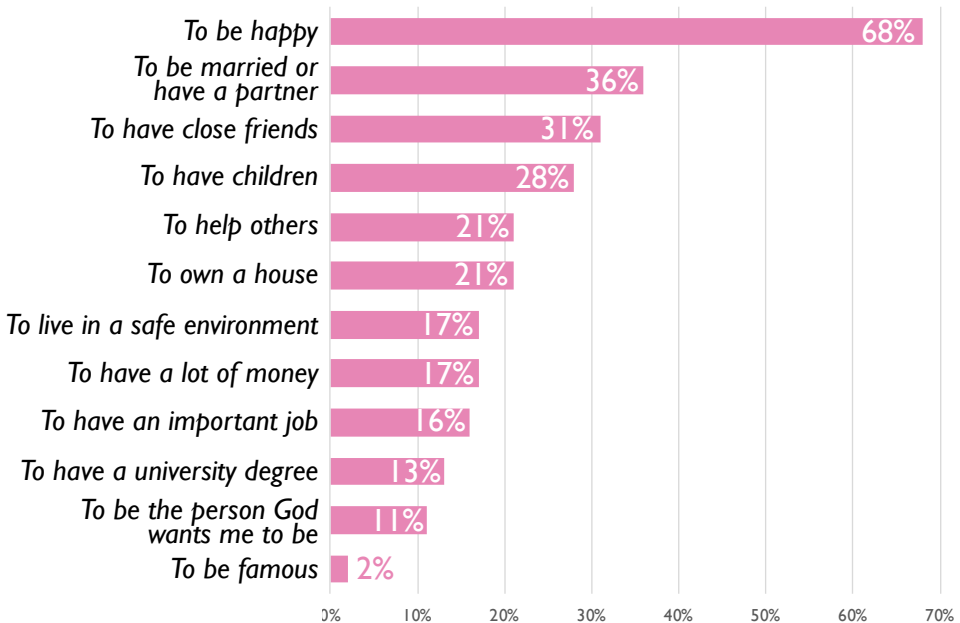
### SOME BACKGROUND STATISTICS

- The top three actions that young Catholics say they would take in response to an issue of concern are ‘signing a petition’ (41%), ‘giving money to charity’ (40%) and ‘volunteering to help’ (39%). 16% say they would ‘pray about the issue’.
- Those who attended a church youth group in the last year are the most likely people to say ‘following Catholic guidelines about helping others’ is very important in somebody being Catholic.

## ASPIRATIONAL ALTRUISM

Asked to select 3 options from a list of 12, young Catholics were most likely to aspire **to be happy (68%)**, **to be married or have a partner (36%)** and **to have close friends (31%)**.

*Q: When you think about what you would like your life to look like in the future, which are the **most important** to you among the ones listed below?*



The top four aspirations amongst young Catholics are identical in 2017 and 2009. But the fifth aspiration, **to help others** has moved from ninth in the list in 2009 (12% selected this) to fifth in 2017 (21% selected this):

Aspiration	% 2009	% 2017	Rank 2009	Rank 2017
To be happy	76	68	1	1
To be married or have a partner	42	36	2	2
To have close friends	41	31	3	3
To have children	34	28	4	4
To help others	12	21	9	5

The concept of ‘helping others’ (or ‘altruism’) also rose to significance when young Catholics were asked about their expectations for the future. Asked about their likelihood to experience the same list of options, they were most confident that they would ‘help others’. In 2009, this had been their fifth most likely option:

Expectation	Mean Score 2009 <sup>7</sup>	Mean Score 2017 <sup>7</sup>	Rank 2009	Rank 2017
To help others	4.04	4.31	5	1
To have close friends	4.26	4.21	1	2
To be happy	4.15	4.16	2	3
To live in a safe environment	3.84	4.06	8	4
To be married or have a partner	4.08	4.02	3	5

The language of altruism or ‘helping others’ seems to resonate more amongst young Catholics in 2017 than in 2009, both in terms of aspirations and expectations. Yet, asked about their charitable activity over the past 12 months, there is no evidence of a parallel increase in having helped others through charitable activity. Indeed, the percentage of young Catholics sponsoring someone who took part in a charity event over the past 12 months in 2017 was 30% (compared to 54% in 2009); and the percentage taking part in a charity event in 2017 was 25% (compared to 35% in 2009). Altruism may be an aspiration, but is it translating into activity?

## ACTIVE FAITH AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Around 6 in 10 young Catholics agree that *supporting others who experience injustice or poverty is important to the way they live their lives*. Whilst there is little difference between Self Identifying Catholics and Non Identifying Catholics in this area, frequent Mass goers feel this more strongly than their peers (36% strongly agreed vs 21% overall strong agreement). Similarly, those who express a belief in a creator, involved God are more likely to agree with this statement (71% agreement vs 59% overall).

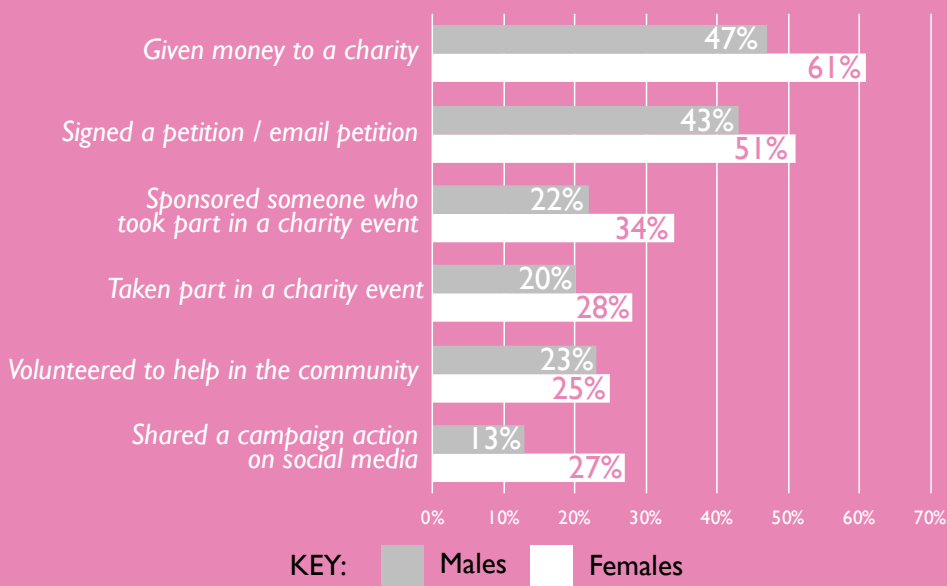
<sup>7</sup> Mean Score is the average rating from 1-5, where 1 is strong disagreement, 5 is strong agreement

## AGE, GENDER AND ACTION

92% of young Catholics can identify at least one social or community action that they had undertaken in the past year, from a list of 14. Overall, 15-19 year olds were more likely than their older peers to be involved in activities which require collaboration, for example taking part in a charity event (28% vs 23%). 20-25 year olds were more likely to have engaged individually - often digitally, for example sharing a campaign action on social media (25% vs 20%).

Female young Catholics were more likely than their male peers to say that they had taken action on a range of social issues in the past 12 months:

Q: Have you done any of the following things in the past year?



### MAKING A DIFFERENCE: APPLICATION

- How can you help young people discover the connections between happiness, fulfilment and self-sacrifice?
- Consider discussing with some young people what ‘helping others’ might mean to them, and what practical steps they can do to make this a reality.
- Can you help those who are unsure about God or don’t attend Mass discover how God’s presence in the Eucharist can fuel their desire for social activism?
- How can you provide opportunities for collaborative social engagement for those who have left school / home?
- Are there opportunities or causes which might engage more young men in social action?

## NEXT STEPS

Research is only useful insofar as it informs and shapes the way that we act.

Why not get together with one or two others who you know are also engaging with young Catholics and read through this report together, discussing the application questions in each section.

You might want to use this guide as a parish, chaplaincy or ministry process in a wider group, meeting weekly and reflecting on 1 or 2 sections each week, with an aim to developing a fresh approach to youth and young adult ministry.

Dioceses, organisations, religious orders and youth specialists often run training sessions reflecting on ministry with young people - why not ask for a session exploring this research in more detail?

Camino House - the team who conducted the research in partnership with CYMFed - are also available to book to facilitate training or strategy development with parishes, pastoral areas, schools and dioceses.

## BRINGING IT TO LIFE: TYPOLOGIES

You can discover more about how these insights can be visualised and embodied through use of our companion tool to this research: 'A Detailed Typology'.



This tool describes 12 'types' or characters who symbolise major groups of young people and young adults found through the research. Picturing these young people - their preferences, hopes, aspirations, beliefs and behaviours - can be a really powerful way of extending your knowledge about the young people you're already in contact with, and expanding your horizons to encompass those you're not in touch with.... yet!

You can find this tool available to download for free at [caminohouse.com](http://caminohouse.com) and [cymfed.org.uk](http://cymfed.org.uk)

## FURTHER READING

If you're interested in learning more about the Synod on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment, visit [www.synod2018.va](http://www.synod2018.va)

If you're interested in discovering more research into the lives and faith of young Catholics and the wider youth population in England and Wales, here are a few places you can look:

Report on Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment in England and Wales - Teresa Carvalho and Fr Christopher Jamison OSB

*The official summary of research conducted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales in preparation for the 2018 Synod*

[www.cbcew.org.uk](http://www.cbcew.org.uk)

Europe's Young Adults and Religion: Findings from the European Social Survey (2014-16) to inform the 2018 Synod of Bishops - Stephen Bullivant

*Profiling the religious affiliation of young people around Europe, including England and Wales*

<https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/research/centres/benedict-xvi/europes-young-adults-and-religion.aspx>

How to Disrupt the 'Limbo of Non-Belonging' - Research among Catholic Youth Adults in England and Wales - Káren North

*Examining examples of best practice in faith-transmission amongst young adults*

<https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/research/centres/aquinas/docs/2018-apr-limbo-of-non-belonging.pdf>

Contemporary Catholicism in England and Wales: A statistical report based on recent British Social Attitudes survey data - Stephen Bullivant

*A statistical study of faith and belief, including statistics on 16-25 year olds*

<https://faithsurvey.co.uk/download/catholicism-report.pdf>

Gen Z: Rethinking Culture - Youth for Christ

*A broad piece of research into the lives and faith of 11-18 year olds*

[www.yfc.co.uk/rethinkingculture](http://www.yfc.co.uk/rethinkingculture)

Youthscape Research

*An online repository of Youthscape's own research and digest of national research relevant to youth ministers*

[www.youthscape.co.uk/research](http://www.youthscape.co.uk/research)

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