



Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate

Parish Life Survey **Saint Joseph University Parish** **Terre Haute, Indiana**

Executive Summary

The St. Joseph University Parish Life Survey was designed by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University. Most of the questions were derived from CARA's database of nationally tested questions, with a few sections and questions designed specifically for the parish. The parish distributed the questionnaire to those attending its liturgies over one weekend in September 2016. In all, there were 526 valid responses, all over age 16.

Major findings can be summarized as follows:

Demographic Characteristics

- The average age of St. Joseph University Parish respondents is 52. Half are 55 or younger.
- CARA divides Catholics into four generations, reflective of the age categories used by many other social scientists. The most common generation at St. Joseph University Parish is the Vatican II Generation, ages 56 to 73.
- Nearly six in ten describe themselves as permanent parishioners, one in ten as an alumnus, and one in ten as a visitor. Among the quarter that are students, two-thirds are undergraduates, one in six a graduate student, and one in six a high school student.
- Nearly six in ten are female and about four in ten are male. Six in ten respondents to the survey say they are currently married or remarried, a quarter have never married, one in 20 is divorced or separated, one in 20 is widowed, and 2 percent are living with a partner. One in 20 reports having at least one child or stepchild under age 18 living with them.
- Slightly more than half of all of those responding have a bachelor's or graduate degree, a third have attended some college or have an associate's degree, and two in ten have a high school degree or less.

Religious Characteristics of Respondents

- On average, respondents have attended the parish for 14 years, with half having attended 10 years or less.

- Nine in ten identify the parish as their primary place of worship and three-quarters say they are registered there. Almost a quarter say they regularly attend the parish but are *not* registered and another one in ten identifies as a visitor.
- Two in three say they have been active Catholics since birth, two in ten are converts to Catholicism, and one in ten identifies as a returned Catholic. One to 3 percent each say they are inactive Catholics or are not Catholic.

Assessment of Parish Life and Needs

- Fully 98 percent give St. Joseph University Parish overall a positive evaluation (“good” and “excellent” combined). Two in three rate it as “excellent.”
- More than nine in ten at least “somewhat” agree that they feel included in parish life, with more than half agreeing “very much” that they do.
- About seven in ten report being influenced to participate in the community and/or University Ministry “very much” by its open and welcoming spirit and by the sense of belonging they feel there. Half or slightly more are as influenced by its opportunities for spiritual growth; its character as a diverse community; its commitment to justice, peace and safeguarding Creation; and its opportunities for service to others.
- Developing a parish sense of community, providing opportunities for parishioners to help the needy, and visitation to the sick and homebound are especially likely to receive high priority from respondents. Half to six in ten give each “very much” priority.

Assessment of Students

- Only students were asked to evaluate the questions presented in this section. More than nine in ten rate their university experience overall as at least “good,” with more than half rating it as “excellent.” In addition, more than nine in ten students evaluate Campus/University Ministry in general as at least “good,” with almost six in ten rating it as “excellent.”
- Students were also asked how much priority University Ministry should give to a list of parish needs. Between six- and seven-tenths of students place “very much” priority on helping students form and inform their Catholic consciences and on providing students with skills to explore and discern life choices.
- Students were also asked how much difficulty they have with specific challenges common to college life. Nearly four in ten have “very much” difficulty coping with the stress of higher education and approximately a quarter have as much difficulty with time management skills (such as balancing school, prayer, and their personal life) and discovering some direction for their lives. This last finding complements another: eight in ten university students see discerning/deciding a path for their lives as “very” important to them.

Leadership

- More than nine in ten of all responding parishioners give a positive evaluation to the vision provided by parish leaders, with nearly half rating it as “excellent.” The leadership provided by the pastor receives an “excellent” rating from three in four.
- More than seven in ten “very much” agree they would feel comfortable talking with the pastor. This is more than three times higher than the average among parishes nationally that CARA has surveyed in the past.
- The leadership of the Parish Pastoral Council receives an “excellent” rating from almost six in ten. Eight in ten give an “excellent” rating of the friendliness of the parish office staff.
- Four in ten “very much” agree that parishioners are encouraged to have a role in decision making at the parish, with those most involved most likely to agree.

Worship

- Masses and liturgies in general receive a positive evaluation from nearly all (97 percent) respondents. Two in three rate them as “excellent.”
- Three in four rate the hospitality or sense of welcome, the weekend Mass schedule, and liturgical decorations and environment in general as “excellent.”
- Two in three give an “excellent” rating to the music in general at the parish. The homilies in general receive an “excellent” rating from nearly six in ten, with those responding at the 5 p.m. Saturday Mass most likely to rate them as “excellent.”
- Students and permanent parishioners report similar frequencies of Mass attendance. More than seven in ten attend Mass at least once a week and another quarter attend almost every week.
- Parish efforts to make prayer a regular part of their day receive an “excellent” rating from nearly half of respondents.
- Just over a quarter give “very much” priority to the parish providing more small group prayer opportunities. Having more opportunities for devotions such as rosaries and Eucharistic Adoration receives “very much” priority from just over a third of respondents. In a related question, students only were asked how much priority University Ministry should give to small faith-based communities of prayer and reflection. Just over a third of students give such communities “very much” priority.

Sense of Community

- The sense of community within the parish receives a positive rating from more than nine in ten respondents. Just over half give it an “excellent” rating.

- Social activities receive an “excellent” rating from four in ten respondents. However, those currently *not* involved in any parish ministries or activities are more likely to give these activities an “excellent” evaluation than those relatively more involved.
- Developing a parish sense of community receives “very much” priority from six in ten.

Formation

- Parish efforts to educate parishioners in the faith receive a positive evaluation from more than nine in ten respondents, with almost six in ten giving these efforts an “excellent” rating.
- Almost half of responding parishioners say the parish is “excellent” at helping them practice gospel values in their daily lives. A third rate as “excellent” efforts to offer a Catholic view on current issues.
- Children’s religious education programs receive an “excellent” rating from more than half, with nearly half giving the same rating to youth ministry.
- One in six says she or he has attended adult faith formation classes at the parish. Adult spiritual development and growth receive an “excellent” rating from almost half.
- Half of those already involved with at least two ministries or activities at the parish give “very much” priority to providing retreat opportunities, with about three in ten of others giving such opportunities as much priority.
- More than half of respondents express “very much” interest in the topics of personal prayer and spirituality, social teachings of the Catholic Church, and basic teachings of the Catholic Church.
- Seven in ten university students say University Ministry should give “very much” priority to helping students form and inform their Catholic consciences. Six in ten say University Ministry should place as much priority on providing students with the skills to explore and discern life choices.

Stewardship

- Efforts to encourage parishioners to share their time, talents and treasure with the parish receive a positive rating from nine in ten. About half rate these efforts as “excellent.”
- Nearly six in ten University Parish respondents report being involved with at least one ministry or activity. Just over four in ten are not involved with any, a quarter are involved with one, and three in ten are involved with two or more.

- A quarter of responding parishioners agree “very much” that they want to volunteer more for the parish. When asked how much different factors prevent them from volunteering more for the parish and/or University Ministry, more than six in ten say their busy schedules or lack of time “very much” prevent them from doing so. This reason is especially cited by those in the younger two generations.
- At least three in ten of those of the three older generations indicate that they are prevented from volunteering more because they “very much” already volunteer as much as they would like, compared to one in six of those of the Millennial Generation. Members of the oldest generation are also the most likely to cite problems with transportation and health problems or a disability.

Evangelization and Parish Outreach

- Efforts to spread the Gospel/evangelize receive a positive rating from nearly nine in ten respondents. Four in ten give these efforts an “excellent” rating. However, the more involved respondents are in parish ministries or activities, the less likely they are to give an “excellent” evaluation in this area.
- On average, responding parishioners have invited someone to attend a parish worship service or activity five times in the past year.
- Four in ten give “very much” priority to reaching out to inactive Catholics. Three in ten place as much priority on ministry to the divorced and separated.

Social Justice

- Outreach to and advocacy for those in need or distress receives a positive rating from more than nine in ten respondents. Almost six in ten rate these efforts as “excellent.”
- Visitation of the sick and homebound receives “very much” priority from about half of respondents. Providing opportunities for parishioners to help the needy receives “very much” priority from more than half.
- Four-tenths to half of university students say University Ministry should place “very much” priority on outreach to the most vulnerable in the university community and neighborhood and to education about social justice and equality.

Parish Communications

- Parish efforts to communicate with parishioners receive a positive evaluation from more than nine in ten respondents, with more than six in ten rating these efforts as “excellent.”
- Responding parishioners are particularly likely to say the Sunday bulletins are “very” effective ways of communicating parish news to them. Half of permanent parishioners report that the parish newsletter (*Faith Journey*) and email are “very” effective, compared to less than a third of responding university students.