

Catholics' religious media tastes favor print publications



Catholics tend to prefer traditional print and television media for their religious news and commentary. They particularly favor their local diocese's publication, according to a new survey from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.

One in five respondents said they watched a religious or spiritual program on television in the last three months. Eighteen percent said they have read a print copy of a religious or spiritual magazine or newspaper in the same period, while fourteen percent said they have read a religious or spiritual book.

About 14.8 million U.S. adult Catholics, 26 percent of the population, read their diocesan newspapers or magazines regularly, meaning at least once in the last three months. Among weekly Mass attendees, 55 percent read the paper copy of their diocesan publication, reports the new survey.

About eight in ten readers rated the diocesan publications as "good" or "excellent" sources of news, information and dialogue about their diocese and the Catholic faith. One in five said their diocese's publication is "fair" and only one percent said it is "poor." Over half of respondents said a print publication is important to them.

About 42 percent of publication readers receive it through their parish or diocese at no charge, while nine percent pay for a subscription. Forty-two percent receive it through other means, such as picking it up at their parish.

Though the survey found Catholic use of dioceses' online publications is very low, not all dioceses provide online content. Only four percent of all adult Catholics read their diocesan newspaper online at least once in the three months before the survey.

The percentage of Catholics who use religious websites or online videos ranks in the mid-single digits for all age groups. The typical Catholic who uses Facebook to follow religious and spiritual content is

a non-Hispanic white, divorced woman from the Midwest aged 51 to 68, the report says.

The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University conducted the survey with Knowledge Networks, after being commissioned by the Catholic Press Association of the United States and Canada.

The survey took place in May and June 2011. It polled 1,239 self-identified Catholics 18 years of age or older. It claims a margin of error of plus or minus 2.8 percentage points.

The survey report also shows low media use among the young.

Two thirds of Millennial Catholics reported no religious or spiritual media use in the three months before the survey. This compares with 42 percent of all respondents and only 30 percent of Catholics born before 1943. Catholics who frequently attend Mass are more likely to report using any type of religious or spiritual media, and Mass attendance is more likely among older Catholics.

Only 16 percent of Millennials, those born 1981 or later, say they have a print subscription to a local secular daily newspaper, while 22 percent report regularly reading their diocesan publication.

The report rejected the idea that younger Americans will one day give the attention to news that their grandparents have today.

“The dramatic news and entertainment consumption changes brought about through the introduction and widespread use of cable television, the Internet, and digital transmission and recording have led to a more ‘narrowcasted’ world,” it said.

Younger Catholics developed in a news environment of hundreds of television and radio channels and the ability to read newspapers around the world over the Internet.

“Ironically, it is the ease with which these new media resources became available that has led to lower attention.”

Respondents also showed less awareness of the 28 national Catholic newspapers and magazines, such as Catholic Digest, Our Sunday Visitor, and the St. Anthony Messenger. Fifty-six percent were not aware of any of the publications, while 70 percent of Millennial Catholics were unaware of them.

In 2005, only 46 percent were unaware of the publications.

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