

NOTRE DAME STUDY OF CATHOLIC PARISH LIFE

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Report No. 6

OF PIETY AND PLANNING: LITURGY, THE PARISHIONERS, AND THE PROFESSIONALS

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This report is the second of two examining the liturgical life of the 36 carefully selected parishes that make up our smaller sample. It uses observational data (*see Report 5*), but relies more heavily on the reactions of parishioners to the liturgies they experience. For the most part, generalizations are based on responses to questionnaire items regarding satisfaction with liturgy. These questions were introduced in *Reports 3 and 4*. Other data used in this report include: semi-structured interviews with parish staff and leaders conducted by our site visitors; complementary questionnaires filled out by pastors, staff, and volunteer leaders in the parishes; two distinct sets of anthropological field notes or parish ethnographies written by the site visitors; and historical information drawn from

parish jubilee volumes and samples of bulletins and newsletters. In general, this report makes use of a wider range of materials than did earlier reports in this series.

Limits to Generalizations

How trustworthy are such pieces of information? When we generalize about parishes from the Phase I sample of 1100 parishes, we can be confident that these generalizations are as accurate as the reporting pastor or parish administrator. Our studies have uncovered no significant biases. When we generalize about the 36 parishes selected for Phase II, we must remember that they are representative of the dimensions that distinguish parishes one from another nationally. Thirty-six, however, is not a large sample of parishes; carefully conducted studies of many parishes within a given diocese would generate more reliable data for policy making within that diocese.

When we generalize about Catholics *within* each of the 36 parishes, we can be very confident of the results because our sampling formulae and response rates meet demanding social scientific standards. Our analyses tell us that in only one and maybe two of the 36 might we suspect the representativeness of responses.

When we generalize *across* the 36 parishes, we do so with a sampling formula that adjusts for disproportionately-sized samples within the parishes. But we must again call the reader's attention to three important considerations: the respondents are registered parishioners who are more likely to be involved in parish life, i.e., they are not so representative of marginal Catholics. We also know that Catholics aged roughly 18 to 29 are far less likely than older Catholics to establish formal connections with a parish. Finally, these respondents do not represent well Catholics whose limited English language skills preclude completion of the questionnaire — a problem shared with the U.S. Census and reputable survey research centers.

Therefore, we remind readers that we are reporting on *Catholics registered in their parishes* and that our data are reliable only for these Catholics, unless otherwise indicated. Some Catholics — the Hispanic, the poor, the young — are not well represented, but only parishes with predominantly Hispanic populations were excluded from our 36-parish Study. Given that Hispanic Catholics represent about 25% of the U.S. Catholic population, this was a major decision, but it was our conviction that differences of language and, more importantly, of religiosity demanded a separate study of Hispanic Catholics. We hope to be part of such a study at a later date.

Parishioners' Evaluations of Sunday Liturgies

We decided to question people about different aspects of the Mass as they actually find it celebrated *in their own parish*. This qualification is important since parishioners can

prove quite critical of the way things are done locally without wanting a return to the past or some major new reform.

Readings, prayers, ritual, music, and singing were among the aspects of the Mass we explored. Parishioners were asked to rate each as generally unsatisfactory, in need of improvement, or generally satisfactory. We anticipated that people might have experienced some trouble with the readings and prayers, finding them hard to hear and harder to understand. Complaints about intelligibility and/or irrelevance are sometimes heard from the clergy, especially concerning the readings, and from intellectuals, especially regarding the impoverished language of the prayers.

Our respondents, however, gave an overwhelming endorsement to both the readings and prayers: across the 36 parishes, only 2.5% consider the readings unsatisfactory; 2.6% felt this way about the prayers. Just over 14% think the prayers — or the way they are prayed — could be improved. But almost 85% of the respondents are well satisfied with what they experience. Ritual fared about as well: 4% consider it unsatisfactory, 14% hope for improvement, but 82% are content.

The difficulty, however, is in interpreting precisely what parishioners had in mind when they expressed dissatisfaction. In one parish, 42% of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the ritual; yet this is a parish where our observers reported strong efforts to develop a liturgy consistent with the standards of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. It is possible that where efforts have been made to educate the people about the meaning of parts of the liturgy, the people will set even more rigorous standards for its performance.

The picture is clearer regarding music and singing. Serious reflection — and improvement — is needed. In *Report 5*, we demonstrated the importance of music and singing to the overall quality of people's participation. The findings from the parishioners' questionnaire underscore the importance of music: across the parishes 63% are satisfied with the music in their own parish and just under 60% regard the quality of singing as generally satisfactory. Yet 37% and 40%, respectively, are dissatisfied with the quality of music and singing. Compared with the figures on the readings, prayers, and ritual, it is obvious that there is room for improvement.

Some might argue that American Catholics do not like the emphasis on singing at Mass. The data for parish-connected Catholics suggest otherwise. Parishioners are critical of the musical fare they experience at Mass, but they seem to want something better. Only 4% would really prefer to have no congregational singing; 67% are happy that there is singing and another 26% said they do not mind. So, while parishioners are generally happy to sing, a sizable proportion of them are unhappy with the music used in their parish. They also believe that congregations could sing better.

Even more interesting than the numbers across parishes are numbers that speak about conditions within specific parishes. There is great diversity: for instance, in one rural

Western parish, 93% were satisfied with the music and 83% with the singing; in another rural Western parish only 33% were satisfied with the music and 21% with the singing. Not surprisingly, the number saying they are happy with hymn-singing is usually higher where they are satisfied with the music in their own parish. Correspondingly, hymn-singing is rated lower where there is widespread dissatisfaction with the music. But even in the second parish just mentioned, which has the lowest satisfaction rating in our sample, less than 3% really wanted congregational singing dropped altogether. But again we remind readers that parishioners in this Study are people who continue to be active Catholics and to attend Mass. We have no way of telling how many people may have dropped off parish lists because they have given up on the liturgy in their parish.

We asked another set of questions about some of the more striking post-conciliar innovations which affect the congregation, inquiring whether parishioners were happy they had been introduced, didn't mind them, wished they were omitted, or in fact, didn't have them in their parish at the Mass they habitually attend. Among all the parishioners, 3% said the sign of peace is not practiced in their parish and another 12% would prefer it were omitted, but 61% are glad it is now part of the liturgy.

Communion from the cup is another matter, however. We know from the data presented in *Report 5*, that the cup is available in less than half of the Masses in these parishes, but is more likely to be available in Masses where more people attend. Yet in only a handful of the parishes did the overwhelming portion of communicants drink from the cup. The questionnaire data corroborate these observations: across the parishes 17% of the parishioners say the cup is never available at the Mass they attend, 15% more wish it were not offered, 32% do not care either way. Only 35% feel positively about its availability. (These are data that predate the AIDS concern.) Communion under both kinds was the last post-conciliar reform to be introduced and was surrounded with a good deal of official apprehension. Under the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the laity are not more demanding of the cup: they may have received little encouragement or instruction as to its meaning. For a Church that has so stressed the sacrificial character of the Mass, it is anomalous that this major symbol of sacrificial participation should remain so suspect.

Parishioners' opinions on other aspects of the Mass include communion in the hand (59% happy, 10% against it), lay readers (60% happy, 6% against), male communion ministers (44% happy, 15% against) and female ministers of communion (13% claim their parish does not have them, 39% are happy to have them, 18% are uncomfortable with them). Not the least significant aspect of these figures is the large number of people who simply "don't mind": 26% for congregational singing, 24% for the sign of peace, 32% for communion under both kinds, 34% for lay readers, 37% for male ministers of communion and 31% for female ministers of communion. If the people expressing indifference are added to those who dislike these practices, it is clear that a major effort is still needed to help Catholics understand the symbolic meaning and theological importance of these practices.

Planning and Resources

Observers sent to the 36 parishes used a semi-structured interview schedule to find out as much as possible about the process of liturgical preparation. They asked questions such as: Is there a liturgy committee in the parish? Is it functioning? Is there a planning group, or who actually decides what will be done and what will be sung? How are liturgical changes introduced? Is there any opportunity for feedback from the congregation? Is there a professional liturgist on the parish staff? What help is available from the diocese and does the parish make use of it?

Liturgy Committees, Professionals, and Pastors

We suspected that many parishes have a liturgical planning committee, but it either does not function at all, is regularly over-ruled by a pastor or musician, or is of little significance in the life of the parish. Our survey of 1100 parishes in Phase I of the Study found that 72% of the American parishes claimed to do liturgical planning. Yet for all the presumed significance of weekly Mass in the lives of parishioners, liturgical planning was seldom seen by pastors or parish administrators as one of the three most important sources of vitality in the parish. It appeared as such in only 7% of the 1100 parishes, a figure far below weekly Mass itself, the parish school or religious education, or even, embarrassingly, bingo. If parish pastors and administrators offered such a modest assessment of the impact of liturgical planning on the vitality of parish life, we needed to know more about how it was done.

The questions on our interview schedule had several sets of planning structures and processes in mind. Yet the situation varies so greatly from one parish to the next that we have been unable to reduce the mass of data to any simple set of categories. The "liturgy committee" would be an example. There are some parishes that have no committee at all. Others have a committee, but no one is quite sure who is on it or what it does. In still others, the committee meets twice a year to plan for the liturgical seasons ahead. In some parishes the liturgy committee has ceased to exist, or is in the process of being revived. In still others it is really concerned with nothing more than recruiting and scheduling lay ministers.

Similarly, when we look at the reports concerning staff members responsible for liturgy, the parish's "liturgy coordinator" may be an organist who chooses four hymns each week; or the "liturgist" may be someone who knows how to play an organ, a piano, or a guitar, but has no liturgical training; or it may be a person with professional liturgical training but no musical background. The liturgical planning reality is so disparate, resources and roles differ so greatly, parish processes are so unique, that it is unwise to draw hard-and-fast rules about patterns of successful and unsuccessful planning from our 36 parishes. There are some unmistakable hints, however, and we would not be surprised to find these replicated in other studies.

The pastor's role is quite clear. Having taken a close look at the patterns of parish decision-making, we find that the pastor retains responsibility for the liturgy in most parishes, even to the point of overruling or ignoring what the planning committee or professional staff has proposed. Certainly, there is little evidence that liturgy is suffering from too much delegation to music professionals or lay amateurs. There were several parishes, however, where an unfortunate division of responsibilities has been allowed to develop: the selection of music is made by one person or group while the pastor is responsible for everything else. Often there is no communication between them; it is then simply good fortune if the liturgical celebration manages to be a coherent whole.

After the pastor, the most important influence in the liturgy is the musician. In 12 parishes all planning is left to the musicians; in another 7, responsibility is shared by pastor and musicians. About half the 36 parishes have some kind of liturgy committee, while the other half have liturgies planned by the priest or the musician, either alone or in combination, or by a parish liturgy coordinator. Three parishes have no formal planning at all.

Planning and Parishioner Satisfaction

Does a careful process of liturgical planning make for good liturgy? To answer that question it is first necessary to determine what sort of planning process deserves to be called "careful" and what criteria should be used for "good" liturgy.

Liturgical planning appears to operate at two levels: weekly or seasonal planning sessions. Regardless of who makes the decisions, music is usually chosen week-by-week. Rare is the pastor, liturgical coordinator, or musician who selects music 3-6 months in advance, the amount of time it may take to acquire and rehearse music. Few parishes go beyond music selection to plan the introductory remarks for the Mass, to write the General Intercessions, or to provide suggestions for the homily. Liturgy committees as such rarely get involved in these weekly tasks. More often they will be responsible for planning seasons of the year or for preparing special sacramental or parochial occasions. They also discuss ways of improving the ritual and matters relating to the decoration of the church and sanctuary, and the decorum of altar servers. Despite the relative newness of participatory liturgies in most American parishes, in only one parish of the 36 has the parish liturgy committee assumed responsibility for liturgical education of parishioners. In seven parishes the liturgy committee is responsible for the training of liturgical ministers.

There are many different approaches to liturgical planning. Whatever approach is taken and however the process is structured, pastoral liturgists generally feel that the following tasks need to be undertaken in a *collaborative* manner: development of homily themes through reflection on assigned readings for the day and applying them to the current situation locally and in the world at large; in the same manner and within the available repertoire, selection of music appropriate to the mood and text of the day; selection from among appropriate ritual options; the composition of introductions, prayers, commentaries, or bulletin notices; and finally, the continuous pastoral task of

nurturing technical competence, theological understanding, and spiritual motivation for lay ministers in their roles as musicians, readers, communion ministers, altar servers, ushers, etc. This would be the ideal, but few parishes seem to reach it completely — certainly none in our Survey.

Nevertheless, using the above criteria, we felt justified in classifying the planning arrangements in each parish as strong, moderate, weak, or absent, depending on how closely they approximated the ideal. To determine whether "good planning" makes for "good liturgy" we then had to decide which parishes had "good liturgy" Initially we decided to follow, not the impressions of our observers, but a "satisfaction quotient" registered by parishioners in the questions concerning music, readings, singing, ritual and prayers (discussed earlier).

Does careful planning make for satisfied parishioners? The answer is guardedly affirmative. We divided the 36 parishes into four groups. Comparing the nine parishes with the highest satisfaction rates and the nine parishes with the lowest satisfaction, we find that of the nine top parishes, four have strong liturgy planning, two are moderately strong, and three are weak. Of the most dissatisfied parishes six have weak planning processes and three strong. It is interesting to note that the six parishes that have weak liturgical planning are all in small-town or rural settings. The three small-town or rural parishes with weak planning, but where the parishioners are most satisfied, are in transition: one is living off the legacy of the last pastor's leadership, but is beginning to falter, while two have new pastors who are trying to bind up the wounds of an unhappy history over the past few years. Thus it seems fair to say that while the liturgy needs planning and while planning needs to be done well, the existence or non-existence of a convincing planning process is less a sufficient cause of good liturgy than an indicator of a parish's general state of health.

In looking at the total profile of specific parishes one can see how the style of liturgy and the levels of parishioner satisfaction are entirely congruent with the rest of the parish picture and yet be unable to draw any confident conclusions about what makes for good liturgy. Of the nine most satisfied parishes, six have energetic pastoral leadership and wide engagement of the laity in the life of the parish; two of the others have had such leadership in the past but are now suffering through a period of retrenchment; the last had had a very rough recent history, but is currently experiencing a renewal of morale. Of the nine least satisfied parishes, two are suburban parishes with strong liturgy planning processes but troubled histories, resulting in relatively low feelings of community in the parish. Both report strong factional struggles between "progressives" and "traditionalists"; in both, the pastor and staff are identified with the "progressives" The one urban parish in the least satisfied group has had problems of a different kind, largely the result of shifting demographic patterns, and seems uncertain of its identity. The parishioners' attitudes seem closer to a "traditionalist" sister who is pastoral associate than to a social justice-oriented pastor. Five of the other six least satisfied parishes are one-priest rural or small-town parishes with little sense of community and little lay involvement. The one exception is a parish with a very strong sense of community, whose pastor has held his position and the affection of his people for forty-eight years! In all six instances, the future of the parish

seems very uncertain. From such closer examination of individual parishes, it is clear that improving the process of liturgy planning is not, of itself, likely to improve the situation nor, under the circumstances, is it likely to occur.

Style of Celebration and Conciliar Goals

If not just liturgical planning, is there any other factor, or combination of factors, which can account for the difference between parishes with high levels of satisfaction and those with low levels of satisfaction? In the hope of isolating some single, most influential factor, we screened both sets of parishes in terms of their location (rural, small town, urban or suburban), the planning process, the sense of community feeling evinced by parishioners, and even the personality types of their pastors.

When one looks at parish location, rural and small-town parishioners usually registered higher levels of dissatisfaction with liturgies than did urban and suburban parishioners, although there are some notable exceptions.

High rates of pastor turnover might be a factor, especially where the pastor has had personal problems, but the scale of the study is too small for us to be able to lay primary responsibility on this factor. Certainly, a parish is likely to suffer confusion and discouragement where succeeding pastors have introduced successive changes of direction in such matters as lay involvement, priority given to liturgy, or policy on matters like communion from the cup. Parishioners did express considerable frustration with these kinds of leadership turnovers.

The kind of hints that appear in our data suggest that if "good liturgy" is to be measured in terms of parishioner satisfaction, it is more a barometer of parochial health than the primary cause of high or low morale in the parish. Thus it would seem incorrect and unfair to seek to lay the blame for low parish morale on the "new liturgy" At the same time, while the liturgy provides an important focus for a parish community's sense of identity, that identity cannot be provided by the liturgy alone. Vatican II taught that the celebration of the liturgy is the "source and summit" of the Christian life, but it also recognized that there is more to the life of the Church than liturgy. The liturgy does not exist as an abstract ideal but as a concrete reality whose shape and vigor derive not merely from the official books, but from the histories, hopes, experiences and relationships of the people who gather to celebrate it at particular times in particular places. In a sense, the Study confirms what liturgists have held as fundamental: liturgy often mirrors what is happening in the parish community.

There is a second way to measure "good liturgy": to analyze the cluster of characteristics that often are associated with each other in a liturgy; then, select those clusters closest to the goals the Council sought to promote; and finally, identify which parishes typically celebrate their Masses this way. In *Report 5*, we described a factor analysis that isolated one set of characteristics close to the Council's goals: the celebrant's horizontal awareness of the community of God's people at the same time reverence for

God is maintained; widespread parishioner participation in the Mass both in formal liturgical roles and in the singing of music appropriate to the lessons; the homilist's careful application of the texts to current situations; etc. It is instructive to explore the interplay between liturgies that implement the conciliar objectives and parishioners' satisfaction with their parish's liturgies. The relationship is shown in Table 1.

TABLE I
Relationship of Liturgical Celebration Style to
Parishioners' Satisfaction with Liturgies

Post-Conciliar Liturgical Celebration (High Positive is Most Consistent)	Nine Most Satisfied Parishes	Nine Least Satisfied Parishes
High Positive	9	3
Medium Positive	3	—
Neutral	2	2
Medium Negative	3	1
High Negative	1	12

The columns in Table I list the 36 liturgies observed in the nine most satisfied parishes and the nine least satisfied parishes. The classification from positive to negative is based on the extent to which a given liturgy, in the judgment of our site visitors, reflects a postconciliar liturgical style. The observers' evaluations and the parishioners' satisfaction levels were measured independently of each other. Nevertheless, a clear pattern emerges in the data.

Generally parishes where the people are least satisfied with their liturgies are ones where the conciliar goals are not evident in the celebration; the reverse also appears to be true. Even the parishes where the scores do not fit the pattern are interesting: among the least satisfied parishes, one of the badly split, dissatisfied suburban parishes celebrates a principal Mass that is decidedly post-conciliar in style and a secondary Mass that is decidedly not; the other badly split, dissatisfied suburban parish celebrates Masses that are hard to classify as conciliar or not conciliar; the other two high scores on the conciliar style are in a rural parish with a worker-priest whose parishioners feel very negatively about him and are unhappy with parish life generally. The negative or neutral entries in the most satisfied column range from a small-town parish where the parishioners deeply dislike (and ignore) a new pastor who feels the Council went too far, and an urban and a rural parish who appear to celebrate their Masses primarily as Marian devotions, which seems to suit the devotional needs of the large body of parishioners.

Even with this general pattern based on comparisons between the most satisfied and least satisfied quarters of the sample, it is important to note that implementation of a post-conciliar style of celebration may not be associated uniformly with higher levels of

parishioner satisfaction with liturgies. Some would argue that each parish is much too heterogeneous in its membership to permit a single style of liturgy; such parishes may offer successive liturgies celebrated in quite different styles on the same Sunday morning, hoping thereby to satisfy the spiritual needs of quite different Catholics. In fact, such practices may be quite consistent with the *spirit* of liturgical reform. While we suspect that people are more likely to be satisfied with liturgical celebrations that match their personal style of religiosity, regrettably the nature of our data, which identify parishioners by the parish they belong to rather than by the style of celebration in the Mass they usually attend, makes it impossible to offer a strong test of the hypothesis.

How Parishioners See the Liturgy

The Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life sought to examine not only the forms of parochial liturgy and the evaluations of the parishioners, but also something of the inner life of those parishioners. How do they understand God, or the place of Christ and the Church in their lives? To whom do they pray when free of the rubrics of the Church's public worship? How does their religious imagination envisage the purpose and goal of the Christian life? Insofar as parishioners tell us their answers to these questions, can we determine whether the profound transformation of their liturgical experience over these past twenty years has left any recognizable traces upon the patterns of their devotion and upon their Catholic vision?

In at least two of our previous reports we have published data relating to these questions. In *Report 3* we described the state of the public religious practices engaged in by our parishioners, particularly Mass attendance, frequency of receiving communion, and participation in the various forms of penitential liturgy. In particular, we discussed the relationships among religious practices, stages in the life cycle, and extended education. In *Report 4*, we looked at how Catholics see the mission of the Church at large and the purpose of the parish in particular.

Why Attend Mass?

What motivates Catholics to attend Mass? Only 6% of the respondents in our 36-parish sample said they attended Mass because the Church requires them to do so, whereas 28% say they go because they enjoy taking part in the liturgy. A further 37% cite the feeling of being in contact with God as their main motivation, as compared with 20% who go to receive Holy Communion and 19% who are drawn by the need to hear the Word of God. (More than one reason could be mentioned.) When asked whether they attend Mass outside their parish, 40% said they occasionally did so, usually citing convenience of time or place, vacation, or visiting relatives as their reasons for doing so. Only 3% of these parish-connected Catholics said they went elsewhere because the liturgy was better in another parish (a figure rising to 11% in the suburbs), and only two-tenths of 1% admitted to avoiding their own parish because they disliked the liturgy there. Very few of them, therefore, seem to "shop around" for good liturgy.

In some ways it might be comforting to find people giving more positive reasons than duty or habit for wanting to take part in the Mass. In view of the specter of individualism raised in the last part of *Report 4*, however, one cannot rush too quickly to conclude that motives like "I enjoy the feeling of being with God" or "I enjoy taking part in the liturgy" really reflect the *ecclesial* consciousness which it was the intention of the Liturgy Constitution to foster.

How Do They Pray during Liturgy?

Another way of probing this matter is to look at what people said about how they pray at the liturgy. Less than half are content to join others in the prayers and chants of the rite. Only 4% are exclusively involved with their own prayers. The majority (50%) join in the common parts but also engage in their own private prayers.

Surely not all parts of the Mass are equally engaging. People report feeling closer to God at some points in the liturgy than at other points: e.g., people feel closest to God in personal or intimate moments of the liturgy such as receiving communion (86%) or being absolved or anointed (70%). The former, incidentally, approximates the figure for private prayer (85%). In other parts of the liturgy that seem to involve greater awareness of those around them (e.g., gathering with the congregation, joining in singing and prayer) the feeling of being extremely close to God is reported by only 50-60% of the respondents.

Is Liturgy a Deeply Moving Experience?

It seems that the liturgy does a reasonably good job of providing most Catholics with a recognizable place of encounter with God, even if it is not always clear that it is an encounter with God shared corporately, i.e., in the body of the Church. Our questions about "religious experiences" (which we left to the respondents themselves to identify) showed that, while the liturgy may sometimes serve as the occasion for such powerful and meaningful experiences, this is not normal and should not be used as a measure of the liturgy's effectiveness. Forty-six percent of all our respondents claimed they had had what they defined as a religious experience at some time in their lives: 6% near death, 5% in private prayer outside church, 3.5% during the liturgy, 0.7% during baptism, 2.5% at childbirth, 4.3% in association with major transitions in life, and so on. Thus, while the liturgy is not excluded as an occasion for deeply moving religious experiences, neither is it the setting where such experiences happen very often.

Attempts to turn the liturgy into "meaningful worship experiences" should, therefore, be very carefully considered lest they foster unrealistic expectations. The liturgy for these parishioners is more a "source" than a "summit" of religious life. Sunday liturgy appears to be a regular exercise which keeps people's faith alive and sustains their religious identity. Thus, when we asked our parishioners which of a whole series of religious acts — ranging from public worship, through shared and private acts of devotion, to faith-sharing and religious broadcasting — they found most fulfilling, the week-end Mass came

out as clearly the most popular choice. Forty-three percent of parishioners mentioned it in first place and another 15% put it in second place, compared with 29% for private prayer (plus 23% second-place votes) and 7.5% (16% in second place) for receiving Holy Communion. None of the other options achieved double-figure percentages, even on first and second choices combined.

Is Liturgy Taken for Granted?

But how important a place do Catholics accord liturgy in the life of the parish? Open-ended questions about the purpose of the parish elicited a profusion of answers. As indicated in *Report 4*, 28% mentioned the worship of God, the celebration of the Mass or of the liturgy, or the proclamation of the Word as being the chief purpose of the parish; 42% saw the parish's purpose as building a community of the people of God, and 32% saw it in terms of general spiritual enrichment. Asked about parish priorities, parishioners overwhelmingly supported putting more effort into religious education, especially for teenagers. Only 17% thought their parish ought to make the celebration of the liturgy more of a priority, a percentage that just about tied improving parish social life and helping the poor outside the boundaries of the parish. Liturgy lagged far behind not only education but evangelization (34%), helping the poor of the parish (32%), improving unjust economic conditions (20%) and fostering ecumenical relations (18.5%).

This may be evidence of a tendency to take the parish's liturgical expression for granted, at least when it is in competition with more immediately felt needs such as ensuring the religious upbringing of children or bringing back the lapsed and the unchurched. Certainly these data from parishioners run parallel to the data from pastors that judge liturgical planning to be of modest importance to the vitality of the parish. Paradoxically then, parishioners usually identify their parish's purpose with something liturgical and pastors are the primary liturgical planners and executors, but neither seems to rate liturgical celebration as highly important in comparison with other undertakings.

For the future, the Catholics in our Study certainly see a continuing increase in the role of the laity in the parish and in its liturgical celebrations. Twelve percent expect more official liturgical reforms, 3% expect the liturgy to become less formal over the next decade, and a handful (.4%) expect it to grow more disciplined. Only a small minority (2.5%) are facing up to the possibility of not having their own resident priest, or of having local parishes consolidated in the next decade. That is because it is a pressing issue in a couple of parishes in our Study, but not in most. In the instances where priest-sharing or consolidation have already occurred, the laity appear to be heavily involved in the preparation and conduct of the liturgies. These liturgies do not appear to be characteristically good or bad, by whichever standard we use, but they do come off slightly better on the satisfaction measure than in similarly situated parishes that still have their own priest. The sample is too small, however, to draw any firm conclusions.

Patterns of Devotion

Catholic parishioners differ not only in their public religious practices but in their private devotional life. Parishioners who belong to the same parish may display great heterogeneity in their private devotional practices. Some parishes may stress one devotion more than another and, thus, their parishioners may be more likely than others to practice that devotion. Historically, certain devotions — such as to the Blessed Mother, the Sacred Heart, or a saint — are associated with certain ethnic groups or with certain religious communities. Some of the richness of this devotional mosaic can be portrayed by examining the private prayer life of parishioners.

To Whom Do Catholics Pray?

We asked parishioners to describe their prayer life — to whom do you usually pray, and what do you pray about? There were many persons to whom people prayed including the Father, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, Mary, various saints specified or unspecified, etc. Most parishioners mentioned at least two. We coded up to five mentions. These are presented in Table 2. Remember that multiple mentions are possible.

TABLE 2
Persons to Whom Non-Hispanic
Parish-Connected Catholics Pray (2667 respondents)

Person	% Naming Person
Jesus	63
Mary	46
Father, Lord	28
Holy Spirit	15
St. Jude	6
St. Joseph	4
St. Anthony	3
St. Theresa	2
Sacred Heart	1
Other (includes all saints with less than 1% or unspecified "saints")	15

Among parish-connected Catholics in the postconciliar church, clearly Jesus is the preferred person to whom one prays. Not only is He the most mentioned but He is the first mention of over half of the respondents. The other members of the Triune God — the Father and the Holy Spirit — are substantially behind Jesus and trail Mary, the Blessed Virgin. Typically Mary is the second person to whom parish-connected Catholics will pray. Saints remain important in the private devotional life of parish-connected Catholics: at least one saint — or the generic "saints" — is named at least once by nearly as many

Catholics as address prayer to God the Father. Behind these overall figures, however, there are some very important distinctions.

*Differences in Devotional Life:
Age, Involvement, and Regions*

Since Vatican II restored emphasis on the Christocentric nature of the faith and increased emphasis on study of the Holy Scriptures, it is interesting to see to what extent devotional life shows differences among age groups. We classified parish-connected Catholics: (1) by the extent to which their prayer is directed exclusively to a member of the Trinitarian Godhead (Father, Jesus, or Holy Spirit), (2) whether it is directed to a member of the Godhead and Mary, (3) whether it includes the Godhead, Mary, and saints, or (4) whether prayer is not addressed at all to the Godhead but only to Mary and/or saints. The result is shown in Table 3 in two ways: (1) by age, and (2) by parish leaders compared to rank-and-file parishioners. Only those who report private prayer are included in the figures; about 13% of our registered parishioners and 3% of the lay leaders do not maintain a private prayer life.

TABLE 3
Patterns of Private Prayer, by
Age and Parish Involvement

Pattern	Age		Involvement	
	Under 40	Over 40	Lay Leaders	Rank-and-File
Exclusively Godhead	57%	34%	48%	41%
Godhead, Mary	22%	29%	23%	25%
Godhead, Mary, Saints	17%	28%	22%	23%
Exclusively Mary and/or Saints	4%	8%	7%	9%

The data indicate rather clear age differences in the direction of private prayer. Younger parish-connected Catholics are far more likely to address the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit alone; less than a majority pray to Mary or a saint. Older parish-connected Catholics are still likely to address prayer to a member of the Godhead, but also to Mary and saints. The lay leadership, too, is more oriented to the Triune God, a figure all the more significant when one considers that lay leaders are slightly older than rank-and-file parishioners.

It is not alone on age grouping and parish involvement that we find differences. There are wide regional differences of emphasis in prayer life. To look at the extremes, all 14 parishes who have 45% or more of their parishioners praying exclusively to a member of the Triune Godhead are located South of the Mason-Dixon line or West of the

Mississippi River. On the other hand, 7 of the 9 parishes where 10% or more of the parishioners pray exclusively to Mary and/or saints are in the Northeast or upper Midwest, typically in recognizably ethnic parishes. To some extent age interacts with these regional differences, but age alone does not tell the whole story.

There seems to be a parish "prayer culture" that is shared by old and young alike. For example, in parishes where very high proportions of older women pray to Mary and the saints, higher than average proportions of younger women also pray to Mary and the saints. In parishes where prayer exclusively to the Triune God is very common among the younger people, on the average it is also slightly more common among the older people.

We suspect there is a process of assimilation operating behind these devotional patterns. In some states or urban enclaves where Catholics predominate, it seems quite natural to involve Mary and saints in one's devotional life. In other states or locales where Protestants are predominant, prayer life involving only members of the Triune God seems more natural.

In future years, it will be interesting to see whether the continuing assimilation of Catholics to the culture around them will affect private devotion, or whether the migration of Catholics to parts of the country where they have not typically lived in large numbers will transplant the devotional styles of the older enclaves. We do know that on a wide range of church policy questions, parish-connected Catholics espouse positions that increasingly reflect predominant American cultural values. To those matters we will turn in *Report 7*.

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