

in a

Word™

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Highlights of The 2011 National Black Survey

Photo by: Father James Pawlicki, SVD



The 2011 National Black Catholic Survey

Highlights of Key Findings

The 2011 National Black Catholic Survey (NBCS) is the first national survey of its kind to assess the level of religious engagement of African American Catholics.

Questions that motivated the study include:

- To what extent are African American Catholics religiously engaged in the church?
- Can their level of religious engagement be interpreted as an indicator of a willingness to remain involved and committed to their Catholic faith and identity?
- Is there a cultural effect and a Catholic effect influencing the level of religious engagement among African American Catholics?
- What are the particular characteristics of African American Catholics that might strengthen their Catholic faith?

The study of race often implies a comparison with other groups. Understanding the social and religious dynamics of African American Catholics will depend on the dynamics of other groups. The NBCS examined the religious engagement of African American Catholics and compared it to white Catholics, African American Protestants and white Protestants.

Conducted by Knowledge Networks, the NBCS was fielded from July 7 to August 1, 2011. The National Black Catholic Congress, the Institute Church Life at the University of Notre Dame and the Office of the President at University of Notre Dame sponsored the survey.

Understanding the factors that shape the faithfulness of African American Catholics can be instrumental in creating pastoral strategies to enhance religious engagement.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

A clear theme in the study is that African American Catholics' faith and religious identity are quite strong.

In terms of their level of religious engagement, African American Catholics appear similar to African American Protestants and are much more engaged in their church than white Catholics.

African American Catholics are highly involved in parish life. By comparison, white Catholics stand out for their low level of religious commitment.

Religious engagement among African Americans is enhanced through the extent to which they are socially networked. African American Catholics value social interaction

in their parishes and churches. The challenge on the parish level is to find ways to connect individuals in parish life outside of Mass. Strengthening social connectedness enhances religious engagement.

Formal registration in a parish is a significant way to intensify religious engagement and parish life because it is one of the first steps in building an attachment and identity with a parish community.

African American Catholic young adults are more religiously engaged and consider religion to be more important than whites of the same age. Older African Americans are more engaged than younger adults.

White Catholic young adults, by contrast, have an extremely low level of religious commitment.

On direct questions of racism in the Church, African Americans overwhelmingly do not consider the Church racist.

About one in four African American Catholics report some form of personal intolerance in their parish, such as being avoided because of their race, the reluctance of others to shake hands and insensitivity and indifference of priests on issues of race.

One of the most influential factors enhancing African American Catholics' religious engagement is membership in a black parish. Membership in a black parish reflects shared social and cultural experiences that connect people through a common identity. The importance of social connections of African American Catholics and the influence on religious engagement cannot be overstated.

On almost every conceivable measure of religious engagement, ranging from religious beliefs to practice, African Americans are more religious than most other Americans. African American Catholics, as part of a larger historical and cultural community, consider faith and its institutions vital to their survival.

ATTITUDINAL RESEARCH

Why are African Americans drawn or attracted to Catholicism? **Ritual in the church was essential to African American converts. The Catholic Mass was seen as a sacred experience and reception of Holy Communion was central.**

Studies have shown that African American Catholics are more likely than white Catholics to participate in Bible studies and traditional Catholic devotions, such as benediction, confession and novenas.



AGE DIFFERENCES

African Americans at all age categories indicate stronger religious engagement than whites and African American Catholics are very similar to African American Protestants. Remarkably, **young African American adults, regardless of religion, show stronger level of engagement than young white adults in the same age categories.** The oldest age category (60+) among African American Catholics shows that **74.9% are strongly engaged in their parish, where as 52.8% of 18- to 29 year-olds.** White Catholics, on the other hand, have significantly lower engagement in all age categories, **55.8% of 60-year-olds and 26.8% of 18- to 29-year-olds.**

RELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENT

African American Catholics are engaged in their parish and church. The racial and cultural norms of the African American community that result in the greater importance of religious, spirituality and church affect African American Catholics in the same way as they do African American Protestants.

African American Catholics (70%) say they are very satisfied with their parish, which is a larger percentage than white Catholics.

African American Catholics register more satisfaction with having their spiritual, emotional and social needs met by their parish than white Catholics. For example, 62% of African American Catholics say their social needs are being met and only 40.5% of whites say theirs are being met.

About 48.2% of African American Catholics attend church once a week compared with white Catholics (30.4%) who attend weekly. African American Catholics have comparable attendance at weekly services with African American Protestants (50.5%) and better than white Protestants (37.3%).

REASONS FOR ATTENDING MASS

The need to hear God's Word and to feel spiritually uplifted are the two most accepted motivations for attending Mass. Of African American Catholics, 82% said they attend Mass to feel spiritually uplifted compared to 61.7% of white Catholics who felt that way. Reactions to "I need to hear God's Word" shows that African American Catholics go to church (79.1%) and white Catholics say they go for this reason (56.6%). African American Catholics (31.7%) perceive more of an obligation and believe they are required to attend Mass, compared to only 20.5% of white Catholics.

AFRICAN AMERICAN CATHOLICS

The perspective of African American Catholics is positive regarding their perception of the nature of the church and race. But, for African American Catholics, the church has significant room for improvement when it comes to their perceptions on racial issues.

African American Catholics are the least satisfied with the church's position on targeting black vocations (only 36.6% are satisfied) and black saints (only 38.1% are satisfied).

On policy issues external to the church, the satisfaction with the church's position is lukewarm: 40.2% are satisfied with the church's position on support for affirmative action; 44.2% are satisfied with the church's perceived position on calling attention to problems in Africa; and 45.1% are satisfied with the church's position on promoting racial inclusiveness.

An overwhelming 85.7% find it important to include African American religious expression into Catholic worship.

THE BLACK CATHOLIC PARISH

Most African American Catholics (76%) do not attend a predominately black Catholic parish.

For African American Catholics who attend a black parish, Mass attendance and satisfaction with the church improves. On every measure of racial inclusiveness or sensitivity, African American Catholics who attend a black parish are more satisfied than African Americans who do not attend a black parish.

For more information on the 2011 National Black Catholic Survey call the National Black Catholic Congress at 410-740-5009 or 410-547-8496. Full survey can be found at the National Black Catholic Congress website www.nbccongress.org

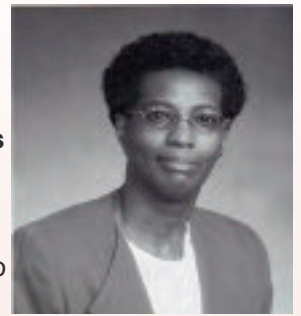
in a word or two

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Catholic social teaching and the Occupy Wall Street movement agree that the economy should be at the service of the human person and that strong action must be taken to reduce the growing gap between rich and poor, Vatican officials said. “The basic sentiment” behind the protests is in line with Catholic social teaching and the new document on global finance issued October, 24 by Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, said Cardinal Peter Turkson, council president. The U.S. protesters have focused on Wall Street because “Wall Street is considered to be a big engine house — a big financial structure whose power extends all over the world,” the cardinal told Catholic News Service. People who suffer from the way the financial markets currently operate have a right to say, “Do business differently. Look at the way you’re doing business because this is not leading to our welfare and our good,” he said. “If people can hold their government to account, why can we not hold other institutions in society to accountability if they are not achieving or not helping us live peacefully or well,” Cardinal Turkson said. “The Vatican is not behind any of these movements, but the basic inspirations can be the same,” he said.

Catholics have a responsibility to impel business, government and civil society to eradicate poverty by adopting policies that respect human dignity, promote the common good, protect human rights and address systemic ills, said speakers at an Oct. 22 program at St. John’s University. The conference theme was “Poverty Eradication and Intergenerational Justice: Stewardship, Solidarity and Subsidiarity”. Keynote speaker Daniel Finn said “The Catholic view of morality is not a constraint on freedom but a condition for human flourishing”. Catholic social thought “does not give us nice, neat answers” but proposes justice, solidarity, subsidiarity, sustainability and participation, he added. He said the economic goal is not wealth, but prosperity that helps the entire community to flourish. The event was sponsored by St. John’s University’s Vincentian Center for Church and Society.

Pax Christi USA has named Sr. Patricia Chappell, SNDdeN, as the national Catholic peace organization’s new Executive Director. Sr. Chappell begins her tenure following Pax Christi USA’s recent relocation of its national office to Washington, D.C.



“This is an exciting time for Pax Christi USA as we explore new opportunities under Sr. Chappell’s leadership,” stated Sr. Josie Chrosniak, HM, National Council Chair of Pax Christi USA. “Sr. Chappell brings a wealth of experience in working with religious communities, youth and young adults, and marginalized communities which will enhance and grow our work for peace and justice in the world.”

Sr. Chappell is a member of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Connecticut unit, and served on the Provincial Leadership Team for her community. She holds a Master’s degree in Social Work from the Catholic University of America and was the Director of Youth Ministry at Holy Comforter-St. Cyprian Parish in Washington, D.C.

The role of racism in injustice has been a concern of Pax Christi USA for 20 years and has been the motivating factor for the organization’s leader to undertake a years-long initiative to become a multicultural, anti-racist Catholic peace and justice movement. Sister Patricia said she wants to reach people in the pews to understand that Pax Christi’s work is rooted in Catholic social teaching.



IN A WORD wishes all our friends a Merry Christmas !



Xavier University of Louisiana
Institute for Black Catholic Studies
2012 Summer Session
June 22—July 14, 2012

Founded in 1980, the Institute for Black Catholic Studies prepares lay men and women, vowed religious, priests and deacons for a more meaningful ministry within the Black Community. It is the only such program in the nation offering an interdisciplinary Master’s Degree in Black Catholic Theological Studies, along with certification and enrichment programs focused on educating catechists, youth ministers and pastoral leaders for a variety of ministries in the Church.

Norman C. Francis, President
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Divine Word Missionaries is an international missionary community of over 7,000 brothers and priests. In 1905 the SVDs began working among African Americans in the Southern United States. Today, Divine Word Missionaries work in over 35 parishes in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Arkansas.

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