

# The U.S. Catholic Family

Demographics

The Second Special Report  
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*The Family That Prays  
Together Stays Together*



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## **The U.S. Catholic Family: Demographics**

Among U.S. adult Catholics starting families in the twentieth century, those of the Lost (born 1883 to 1900), G.I. (born 1901 to 1924), and Silent (born 1925 to 1942) generations were more likely to have five or more children in their lifetimes than to have no children at all. This has not been the case in among the three generations of Catholics that followed. Of course many younger members of Generation X (born 1961 to 1981) and the Millennial Generation (born 1982 or later) have yet to complete, or in some cases even start, their families. Yet, it is unlikely that many of these young Catholic parents will include five or more children.

According to the General Social Survey (GSS), the median number of children for Catholics of the Lost, G.I., and Silent generations was three. For Baby Boomers (born 1943 to 1960) and Generation X Catholics the median number of children is two. It is too early to know if adult Millennial Catholics today will differ as they currently range in age from 18 to 33. However, as of 2014, 67 percent of Millennial adult Catholics had no children and only 30 percent had married.

Researchers at the National Center for Health Statistics note that “Current low and late fertility and increased childlessness has been observed in all of Europe and in much of North America. This ‘second demographic transition’ is consistent with an observed increase in individual autonomy and a growth in gender equality. At the same time, there is the increase in socioeconomic activities competitive with childbearing” (“Transitions Between Childlessness and First Birth: Three Generations of U.S. WomenSeries” *Vital Health Stat* 2(153), 2011, pg. 11). They predict that “In the United States, childlessness may have plateaued or may continue to rise as this country adopts more of the demographic and social attributes recently seen in Europe.” These researchers also note that, “Childbearing outside of marriage has increased significantly: the percentage of births occurring outside of marriage has increased from 33.2 percent in 2000 ... to 41 percent in 2009.”

In the United States, the families served by the Catholic Church in the twenty-first century are remarkably different demographically than those ministered to in the last century. In fall 2014, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University conducted a national poll of adult Catholics, ages 25 to 45 (i.e., Generation X and Millennials) who are parents of a minor child to explore the emerging 21<sup>st</sup> Century Catholic family. This research was made possible by Holy Cross Family Ministries. The survey, completed in September and October 2014, included interviews with 1,014 self-identified Catholic parents resulting in a sampling margin of error of  $\pm 3.1$  percentage points.

Similar questions to those used in other recent CARA Catholic Polls (CCPs) were utilized making comparisons possible between Catholic parents and all Catholic adults. Using Census and survey data, CARA estimates that there are approximately 15 million Catholic parents between the ages of 25 and 45 in the United States in 2014.

### **Age and Generation**

The median age of respondent parents was 37 (in other words, half were 37 or under, and half are 37 or older). The Generation X respondents were between the ages 33 to 45 in 2014.

Born between 1961 and 1981, this generation has no lived experience of the pre-Vatican II Church and came of age during a time of general peace and prosperity. The Millennial Generation respondents were between the ages 25 to 32 in 2014. Born in 1982 or later, this generation has come of age primarily under the papacies of Benedict XVI and Francis and grew up using computers, the internet, and cellphones. As children and teenagers they witnessed war after 9/11 and generally stagnant economic growth.

**Generation Among U.S. Catholic Parents Ages 25 to 45  
and All U.S. Catholic Adults**

	<b>Catholic Parents</b>	<b>All Catholic adults</b>
G.I. and Silent generations (born before 1943)	--%	10%
Baby Boomers (born 1943-1960)	--	34
Generation X (born 1961 to 1981)	77	35
Millennials (born 1982 or later)	23	21

There are some notable differences among Catholic parents by generation. Generation X parents, on average, earn more than Millennial Generation parents. This is not unexpected as many Generation X parents are likely to be later in their careers. The typical household income in Generation X family homes is \$60,000 to \$74,999. By comparison, typical Millennial parent households earn \$50,000 to \$59,000 per year.

On a national level, income is known to be related to decisions about family size. This has been especially evident since the Great Recession from 2007 to 2009 and the resulting slow economic recovery.

Demographers at the Pew Research Center note that “A sharp decline in fertility rates in the United States that started in 2008 is closely linked to the souring of the economy that began about the same time” (*In a Down Economy, Fewer Births*, Pew Research Center Social and Demographic Trends, October 12, 2011, pg. 1).

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, 2014 was the first year since 2007 to show an increasing number of births. However, the total fertility rate remains at 1.86, well below replacement fertility rates which are 2.1 children per woman over the course of her lifetime (“Births: Preliminary data for 2014” *National Vital Statistics Reports*; (6)64,2015, pg. 4).

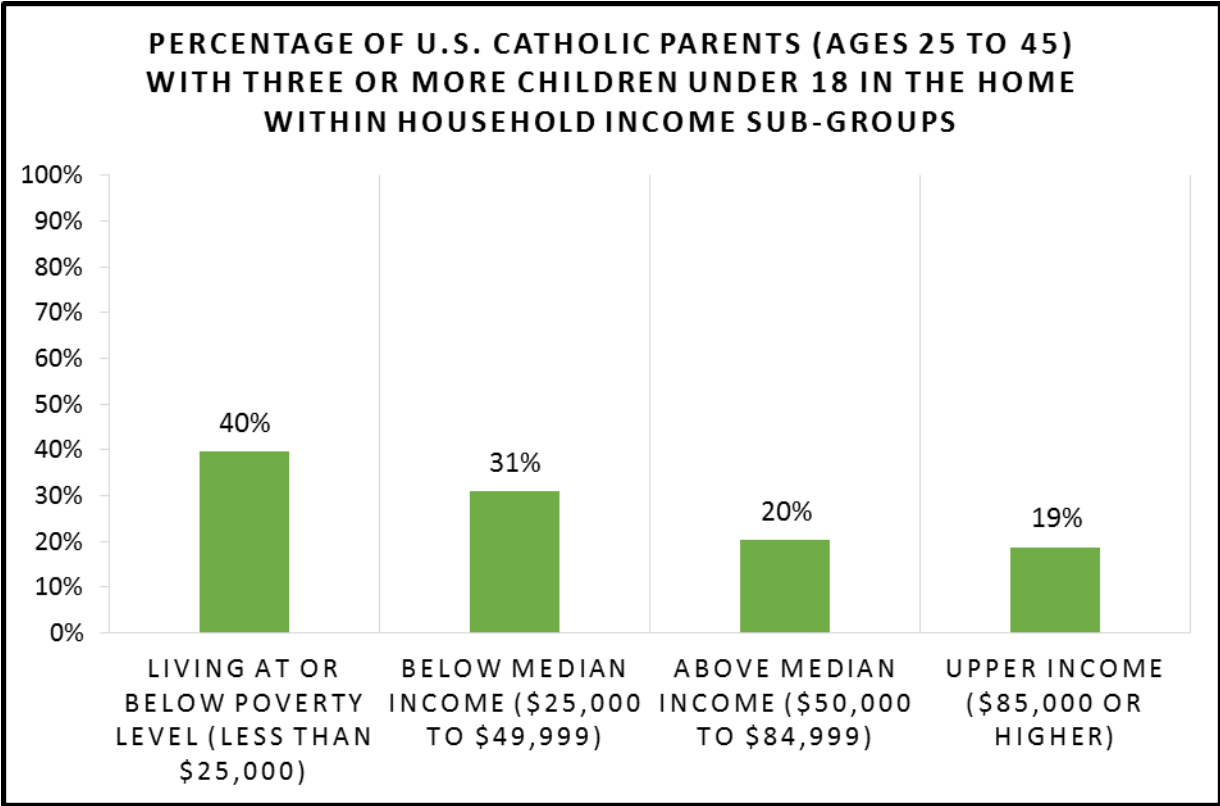
**Household Income**

Eighteen percent of parents reside in households that earn less than \$25,000 a year in income likely placing them at or below the poverty line. About a third are in households earning \$85,000 or more. These shares are similar to the percentages for the overall adult Catholic population.

**Household Income Among U.S. Catholic Parents Ages 25 to 45  
and All U.S. Catholic Adults**

	<b>Catholic Parents</b>	<b>All Catholic adults</b>
Living at or below poverty (less than \$25,000)	18%	17%
Below median income (\$25,000 to \$49,999)	25	24
Above median income (\$50,000 to \$84,999)	23	25
Upper income (\$85,000 or more)	34	34

Among individual Catholic families, family size is *inversely* related to income. Overall, 26 percent of parent respondents have three or more children under age 18 in their home. However, this ranges from 40 percent among those living at or below the poverty level to 19 percent of those in homes earning \$85,000 or more annually.



Two-thirds of parents own their home (including those paying a mortgage) and three in ten rent (31 percent). Three percent reside in a home that they do not own, without paying rent. This includes those living with other family members or friends. Home ownership among parents is similar to the overall adult Catholic population.

**Household Ownership Among U.S. Catholic Parents Ages 25 to 45  
and All U.S. Catholic Adults**

	<b>Catholic Parents</b>	<b>All Catholic adults</b>
Owned or mortgaged	66%	69%
Rented	31	28
Occupied without rent	3	3

**Family Size**

In order to be surveyed, parent respondents had to respond “yes” when asked, “Are you currently a parent, foster-parent, or guardian to a child under the age of 18?” Seven in ten parents have either one (29 percent) or two (41 percent) minor children residing with them in the household. Five percent of parents do not have primary custody of their child/children and they reside in another parent or guardian’s household. More than one in four parents has three or more minor children residing in their home. Sixty-two percent of all adult Catholics have no minor children residing in their household. Three in ten have two or three. Fewer than one in ten has three or more children at home.

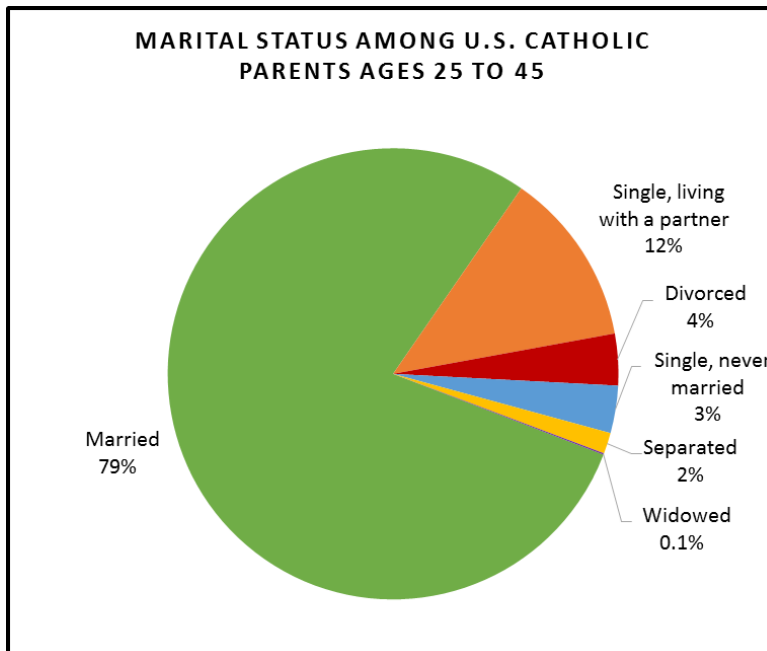
**Minor Children Residing in the Households of U.S. Catholic Parents  
Ages 25 to 45 and All U.S. Catholic Adults**

	<b>Catholic Parents</b>	<b>All Catholic adults</b>
None	5%	62%
One	29	15
Two	41	15
Three	17	5
Four	7	2
Five	1	<1
Six	<1	<1
Seven or more	<1	1

Seventeen percent of parents have an infant residing in the household (i.e., younger than 1-year-old). Thirty-six percent of parents have at least one teenage in their household (i.e., ages 13 to 17). Sixty percent of parents has a child between the ages of 6 and 12 residing in their home. This is the most common age for children among respondents. Twenty-four percent have two or more children ages 6 to 12 in their home. As noted in a previous report on this study, *The Catholic Family: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenges in the United States* (June 2015), two-thirds of parents with three or more children in the household attend Mass at least once a month compared to 48 percent of those with two or fewer children.

**Marital Status**

Nearly eight in ten parents are married (79 percent) and 13 percent are unmarried but living with a partner. Additionally, 4 percent are divorced, 3 percent are single and have never married, 1 percent are currently separated from their spouse, and less than 1 percent are widowed. Seventy-six percent of married parents indicate their spouse is Catholic. Among all Catholic adults, more report never marrying (16 percent compared to 3 percent of Catholic parents ages 25 to 45), being divorced (8 percent compared to 4 percent) or being widowed (5 percent compared to less than 1 percent). Catholic parents are more likely than all Catholic adults to be married (79 percent compared to 62 percent) or single living with a partner (13 percent compared to 8 percent). About the same small percentage of parents and all adults report currently being separated.



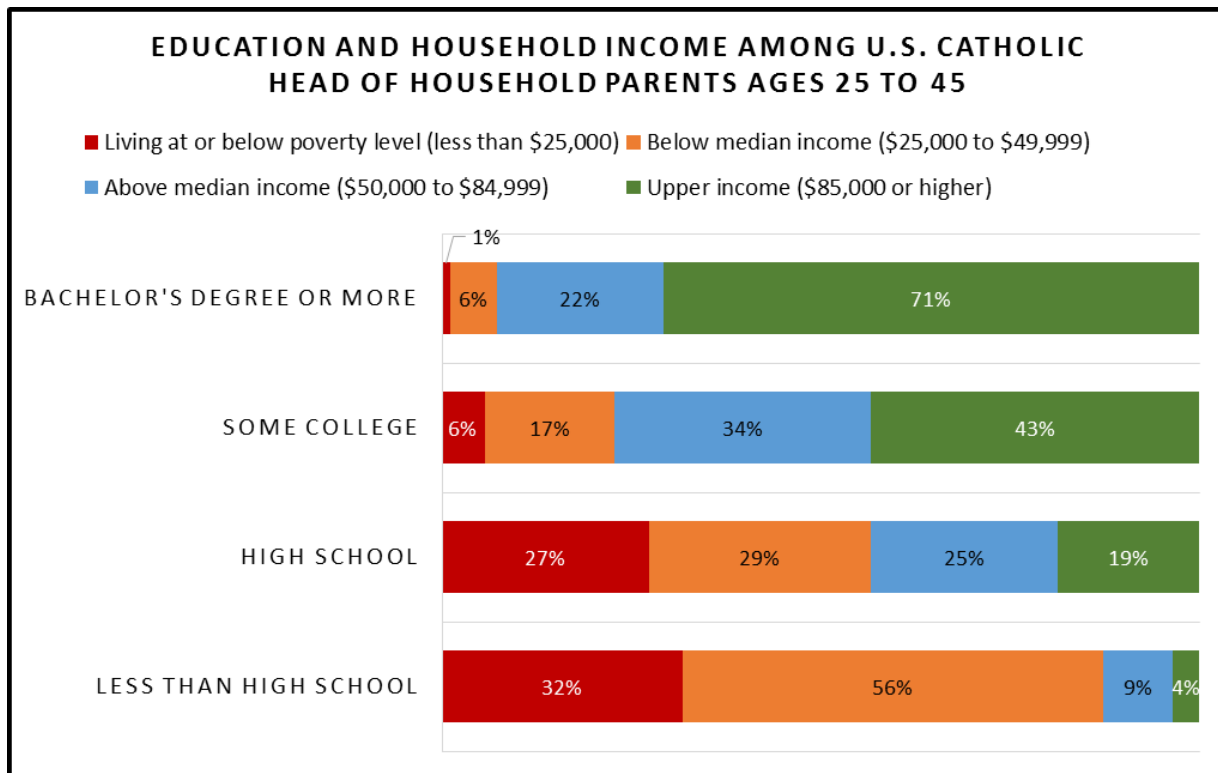
As noted in a previous report on this study, *The Catholic Family: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenges in the United States* (June 2015), parents who have separated or divorced or who are single and have never married are among the least likely to attend Mass weekly. Thirteen percent of separated or divorced Catholic parents are weekly Mass attenders. Fifteen percent of parents who have never married attends weekly. This becomes a bit more frequent if they are unmarried and living with a partner (20 percent). Weekly Mass attendance is most common among parents who are married at 23 percent.

### Education

Nearly half of parents have a high school diploma or less. This is similar to the percentage of the overall adult Catholic population (44 percent). About a quarter of parents have had some college (24 percent) and 28 percent have a bachelor’s degree or more. Overall, 8 percent of parents indicate having a master’s degree and 2 percent a professional or doctoral degree. Eight percent of parents indicate they have less than a 9<sup>th</sup> grade education.

	<b>Catholic Parents</b>	<b>All Catholic adults</b>
High school diploma or less	48%	44%
Some college	24	28
Bachelor’s degree or more	28	28

Among parents who self-identify as a “head of household,” those who have attained higher levels of education are more likely to be in higher household income levels. Seventy-one percent of those with a bachelor’s degree or more are in the upper income household bracket that collectively earns \$85,000 or more per year. By comparison, only 4 percent of those who have not finished high school are in households earning this level of income. Nearly a third of head of household parents who have not finished high school (32 percent) resides in a home with income at or below the poverty level.



Although higher household incomes and education levels are associated with Catholic parents having fewer children than parents with less education living in lower income households, there is also a correlation between higher income and more education and parents being married.

Only 55 percent of Catholic parents in households earning less than \$25,000 a year are married. Eighteen percent of parents in this income bracket are single never-married, divorced, or separated and may be limited to one income.

<b>Education, and Marital Status Among U.S. Catholic Parents Ages 25 to 45</b>				
<b><i>Education</i></b>				
	<b>Married</b>	<b>Divorced or separated</b>	<b>Single, never married</b>	<b>Single, living with a partner</b>
Less than high school	71%	5%	3%	20%
High school diploma	72	6	5	16
Some college	77	7	5	11
Bachelor's degree or more	92	3	1	4
<b><i>Household Income</i></b>				
	<b>Married</b>	<b>Divorced or separated</b>	<b>Single, never married</b>	<b>Single, living with a partner</b>
Less than \$25,000	55%	10%	8%	27%
\$25,000 to \$49,999	77	6	6	11
\$50,000 to \$84,999	84	6	1	9
\$85,000 or higher	89	2	1	8
Note: There are too few widowed parents for inclusion as a sub-group. Thus row totals do not sum to 100.				

Nearly nine in ten parents (89 percent) in the highest income bracket, in homes earning \$85,000 or more per year, are married. Only three percent of these parents are single never-married, divorced, or separated. More than nine in ten parents with a bachelor's degree or more are married (92 percent). Those with less education are more likely to be single and living with a partner. There is an association between having lower levels of education and lower household income and cohabitating with a partner and having children.

**Race and Ethnicity**

A majority of parents self-identify their race and ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino (54 percent). Only about a third of the overall adult self-identified Catholic population responds as such in recent CARA Catholic Polls. The disparity between these figures is attributable to the growing diversity of the Catholic population being more concentrated in its youngest generations.

<b>Race and Ethnicity Among U.S. Catholic Parents Ages 25 to 45 and All U.S. Catholic Adults</b>		
	<b>Catholic Parents</b>	<b>All Catholic adults</b>
White, non-Hispanic	40%	62%
Hispanic or Latino	54	32
Other race or ethnicity	6	6



Overall, 31 percent of respondents chose to take the survey in Spanish (59 percent of Hispanic or Latino respondents). As noted in a previous report on this study, *The Catholic Family: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenges in the United States* (June 2015), 40 percent of parents pray in Spanish and 59 percent in English. One percent pray in some other language (e.g., Polish, Portuguese).

Hispanic or Latino respondents are more likely than other parents to attend Mass at least once a month (56 percent compared to 48 percent) and to have three or more children (31 percent compared to 19 percent). At the same time, Hispanic or Latino parents are less likely than others to be married (73 percent compared to 85 percent) and more likely to be living with a partner (18 percent compared to 7 percent). However, among those parents who are married, Hispanics or Latinos are more likely than others to be married to a Catholic spouse (82 percent compared to 69 percent).

Sixty-five percent of parents in the South are Hispanic as are 81 percent in the West, compared to 18 percent of parents in the Northeast and Midwest.

Sixty-five percent of parents in homes earning \$85,000 or more per year are non-Hispanic white. By comparison, 87 percent of those in homes earning less than \$25,000 per year are Hispanic or Latino. Differences by region or household income are thus strongly related to racial and ethnic differences among parents.

Twenty-nine percent of Hispanic parents are in households with incomes at or below the poverty line. Only 4 percent of non-Hispanic white parents report this level of household income. Hispanic or Latino parents are also more likely than other parents to not have completed high school (37 percent compared to 3 percent).

Hispanic or Latino parents are also less likely than others to have their children enrolled in some formal religious education program. Seventy-three percent reported that none of their children were enrolled in Catholic schools or parish-based religious education. By comparison, 62 percent of non-Hispanic parents reported this in the survey. Differences are most evident for enrollment in Catholic elementary and middle schools. Here, only 5 percent of Hispanic or Latino parents indicate they have a child enrolled compared to 12 percent of all other parents. Income differences may play a key role in limiting these parents from enrolling children in Catholic schools.

**Gender**

Fifty-eight percent of Catholic parents surveyed are female compared to 51 percent of the overall Catholic adult population. The disparity between these figures is from single-parent households disproportionately being headed by mothers. Eighty-five percent of divorced or separated parents surveyed are mothers and 69 percent of single, never-married parents surveyed are mothers.

**Region**

Nearly two-thirds of parents reside in the South and West (65 percent). By comparison, 52 percent of the adult Catholic population resides in these regions. Parents are more likely than Catholic adults to be Hispanic or Latino and, as previously mentioned, this population is disproportionately concentrated geographically in the South and West. Only 17 percent of Catholic parents reside in the Midwest and 18 percent in the Northeast.

<b>Geographic Region of Residence for U.S. Catholic Parents Ages 25 to 45 and All U.S. Catholic Adults</b>		
	<b>Catholic Parents</b>	<b>All Catholic adults</b>
Northeast	18%	27%
Midwest	17	21
South	31	27
West	34	25

### **“The Average Catholic Family”**

Combining the results reported here with what was previously released in *The Catholic Family: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenges in the United States* (June 2015), the average Catholic family with minor children in the household today includes two Catholic married parents in their late 30s. They attend Mass two to three times a month. They live in a suburban area near a city in the American Southwest and are bilingual. They have two kids between the ages of 6 and 12 who are *not* currently enrolled in any formal religious education (i.e., Catholic school or parish-based religious education). At the same time, they say it is “very important” that their children celebrate their First Communion and Confirmation.

The parents have a high school diploma and may have been enrolled in a few college courses in their life. They reside in a detached single family home that they either own or have a mortgage on. They are both working and have a combined household income of approximately \$65,000 per year. They eat dinner together nearly every night as a family and spend at least one night a week gathered together for family time such as playing a game, watching a movie, or having a discussion. Few parents indicate that they pray together as a family and instead consider prayer to be their personal conversation with God.

### **Conclusion**

An unusual pattern in infant baptisms has begun to emerge in the Catholic Church in recent years. Historically, the number of infant baptisms in the Church has been correlated with the number of births in the United States. In the last few years infant baptisms have fallen below expectations based on birth trends. In the most recent year these baptisms represented only about 17 percent of all births. With a Catholic population percentage in the country ranging from 21 to 25 percent in national polls, this represents a significant shortfall. Although infant baptisms are declining year to year, baptisms of children are up by more than 23 percent since 2007.

Are some among the 15 percent of parents who are unmarried and living with a partner or single and never married waiting to baptize their babies until after they are married when they are then children? Are some with lower incomes delaying marriage for financial reasons?

Once children are baptized, why are so few Catholic parents enrolling them in religious education? It appears that lower average incomes among Hispanic Catholic parents may in some cases prevent enrollments in Catholic schools. But why would these parents then not enroll children in parish-based religious education? It’s not for a lack of more frequent Mass attendance as a majority attends at least once a month. Is it possible that language could be an issue? Forty percent of all parents in the study pray in Spanish. Are there sufficient numbers of Spanish language resources and educators in U.S. Catholic parishes for these parents to send their children to parish-based catechesis?

Among those families living at or below the poverty line, 45 percent are unmarried and 40 percent have three or more children. Are U.S. parishes serving the needs of these families who are most in need of assistance? Is there any reluctance among them to look to the Church for help?

The demographic answers provided in the survey surface new questions and challenges. Clearly, the Church is ministering to a more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse population. Among these families are some who are struggling financially and others who have yet to marry in the Church. In an era where increasing numbers of young Catholics are leaving the faith it may be more important than ever for the Catholic Church to help address the many needs of Catholic families today to ensure that young Catholics today do not become a new “lost generation.”

CARA’s survey of parents reveals much about Catholic family life today. One report has been published and two additional special reports from this research will be released as noted below.

Holy Cross Family Ministries and The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) will be releasing four Special Reports:

- June 2015: The Catholic Family: 21st Century Challenges - overview report
- July 2015: The Catholic Family Today - Demographics
- Aug 2015: Practice of Faith in the Catholic Family
- Sept 2015: Catholic Families and Media Usage

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