

On Marriage Trends II

For this insert, I'll focus on local trends. The information comes from a study done by a corporation called Core Insights (CI), which was done for the Archdiocese of Denver (AOD). The results were published in November, 2007. OLMC was not a part of the survey.

Of all those living within the boundaries of the AOD, 16% are Roman Catholic, so Catholics are a real minority here.

A total of 45% of Catholics in the AOD say they attended Mass in the prior week (compared to 32% nationally). But Mass attendance is often overstated. CI reports that actual attendance may be only 50-75 % of the self-reported levels.

- The reasons for not attending Mass vary in the survey; some see themselves as too busy, too stressed out from the week and wanting personal down-time; some think they are overcommitted and overscheduled as is. The largest group dropped out of circulation as young adults and simply drifted away over time, thinking they might go back to it "later." Interestingly, nearly 50% of those who did not attend Mass have the intention to "go back."

- Another large group was labeled by CI as Detached Doubters, and they constituted 29% of the survey. Of this group:

1. The predominant attitudes of this group are: A feeling that individual prayer is an acceptable substitute for Mass; a feeling that the Mass is too formal; that not attending Mass is not a sin, with a strong disagreement with many Catholic teachings.

2. The predominant behaviors of this group are: A Mass attendance of 15%; unlikely to be registered; low volunteerism at the parish and low tithing; very unlikely to pray or meditate outside of Mass (this contrasts with the attitude that individual prayer outside of Mass is an acceptable substitute!).

3. Demographically this group tends to be: White/Anglo in ethnicity; lowest in the level of religious education as an adult; highest in divorce and separation; highest in income.

- Of registered parishioners in the AOD, 63% are likely to be female, 64% are likely to be over 55 years of age, and 65% are likely to be married. 77 % of them are likely to be a weekly reader of the Denver Catholic Register.

- Of those frequently attending Mass: 21% go to be in the presence of God, 16% because they made a commitment, 12% because it is good for the family, 6% because they like the church leadership, 5% to experience the holy, 5% for the community, 5% because it fit into their schedule, 4% to support their parish, 3% to learn more, 3% for the sermons, 3% just to pray, 3% because it is a sin not to attend, 3% for the Sacred Liturgy. In this group 92% say they are satisfied with their parish.

The things this group most liked about their parish were: 42% the community and feeling at home, 14% Mass and sermons, 13% church leadership, 10% social activi-

ties, 9% the church as a place of worship, 7% for spiritual enrichment, 6% participation in activities.

The attitudes of this group for going to Mass are: Experiencing a sense of community, hearing a good sermon is one of the most important reasons to attend Mass, the Eucharist; in that order. 55% agreed that prayer and spiritual reflection is a reasonable substitute for Mass. 44% thought that Catholics today are too casual and not reverent when attending Mass.

- A few stray figures are: 38% thought that the AOD should speak more about immigration issues. 37% had less confidence in AOD because of priest's bad behavior. 57% had a high level of trust in priests today. 48% wish they could give more to the Church. 48% fear that donations will be used to fight lawsuits. 37% agree with all the beliefs of the Catholic Church. 54% do nothing to volunteer at their parishes.

- 63% among those of Hispanic ethnicity prefer accommodation (Spanish Masses and ministries). 52% of Anglos prefer assimilation.

One of the most interesting things I found in the study was that the Sacred Liturgy was mentioned only once (unless you count 'Mass'). In the meetings I regularly go to for the Archdiocese, many solutions are proposed to help the faithful more, and to reach out to those who have fallen away. The intentions and zeal are excellent in these meetings. All the solutions proposed are almost universally didactic; more and better sermons, more conferences, more education, etc. But the Liturgy is not considered, or if it is, I haven't heard it. As far as I can tell from the study, only 3% of those surveyed go to Mass for the liturgy.

None of these statistics are of any great surprise to me, and you probably don't find them surprising. But here is one that did startle me: 62% of all engaged couples to be married in the Church are cohabiting. This is a pastoral disaster.

The conclusion of AOD is that there is a crucial need for a "new catechesis" in human sexuality. Perhaps that is so, but I should like to see such a catechesis coupled with a liturgy which forms the soul in the sacred.

In the meantime, I want to write some things about cohabitation for the next insert.