

A woman with dark, curly hair is sitting on a couch, smiling broadly while looking at a laptop. She is wearing a white t-shirt and blue jeans. The background is a solid teal color with faint, circular patterns.

CATH

AND

MEDIA

USE

NEW RESEARCH POINTS
TO AN INTEGRATED
APPROACH TO CATHOLIC
COMMUNICATIONS

OLICS

New research from Georgetown University's Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) reveals an evolution in the ways in which Catholics use media to support and engage in their faith. A survey of more than 1,000 self-identified Catholics shows dramatic changes in digital media usage compared to CARA's prior surveys on this subject in 2011 and 2005, including significant increases in digital media usage since the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, traditional media remain important to Catholics. Diocesan magazines and newspapers continue to be "essential sources for spiritual content and information about the local Church."

As expected, younger Catholics are more likely to engage with content in the digital space; however, responses were not appreciably different for those 18 to 34 than for those 35-54. Notable differences in media behaviors were more likely in respondents over the age of 55. Mass attendance also is a predictor of media engagement, with those who attend Mass weekly or at least a few times per month more likely to use Catholic content, both online and in print.

CARA's research concluded that most respondents aren't outwardly Catholic in their social media. While nearly everyone in the survey reported using some sort of social media, fewer than half identify themselves as Catholic on their social profiles, and only about a third share Catholic content on social media.

Perhaps the most "low-tech" communication tool remains the most effective way to reach Catholics—the parish bulletin. Most Catholics read their bulletin in print or online, whether or not they attend Mass weekly or even monthly.

What's the takeaway for Catholic communicators? "If communication with the people of God is a multiple choice question, the answer is 'all of the above,'" says FAITH President and CEO Elizabeth Martin Solsburg. "There's no one right way to reach people. Dioceses and Catholic organizations need to employ an integrated strategy. They need to keep publishing in print but also online, using content sites and social media to help Catholics learn how to be evangelizing disciples."

CE / RESEARCH REPORT

STORY BY
MARYBETH HICKS

Director of Strategic
Communications
FAITH Catholic
mhicks@faithcatholic.com

DESIGN BY
RACHEL SQUIBBS

RESEARCH CONDUCTED
BY THE CENTER FOR
APPLIED RESEARCH
IN THE APOSTOLATE

CATHOLIC MEDIA USE, 2023

The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) surveyed 1,019 self-identified Catholics from April 21 to May 5. The survey was taken online and was available in English and Spanish (97% responded in English and 3% in Spanish). This survey was commissioned by a contribution from FAITH Catholic. However, FAITH Catholic was not involved in the research process or the writing of this report. CARA had complete research independence for the study and released all survey results directly.

MORE CATHOLICS ARE ACCESSING RELIGIOUS CONTENT ONLINE...

AS EXPECTED, CARA FOUND SIGNIFICANTLY MORE PEOPLE ARE USING ONLINE CONTENT TO HELP THEM PRACTICE THEIR CATHOLIC FAITH THAN THEY DID 12 YEARS AGO.

Which of the following have you done in the last three months?

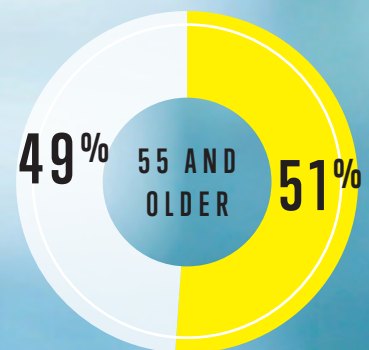
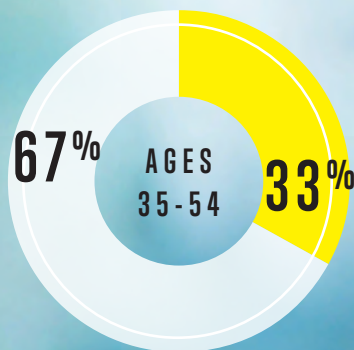
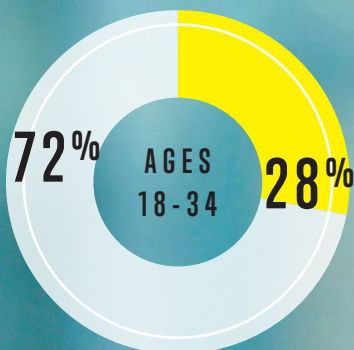
| | 2023 | 2011 |
|--|------|------|
| Watched religious or spiritual video content on any device | 45% | 24% |
| Listened to religious or spiritual audio content on any device | 29% | 13% |
| Read content from a religious or spiritual website or blog | 26% | — |
| Followed religious or spiritual related pages and/or posts on Facebook | 16% | — |
| Read a religious or spiritual magazine or newspaper online | 13% | 3% |
| Read a religious or spiritual e-book | 9% | 1% |
| Followed religious or spiritual related discussions on Twitter | 8% | 1% |

61% OF ALL CATHOLICS FOUND WAYS TO PRACTICE THEIR FAITH ONLINE DURING THE PANDEMIC, AND 58% SAY THEY STILL USE THOSE ONLINE RESOURCES (REPRESENTING 35% OF ALL RESPONDENTS). THE MAJORITY OF CATHOLICS UNDER 55 USED ONLINE RESOURCES, WHILE ABOUT HALF OF THOSE 55 AND OLDER DID.

CATHOLICS WERE ASKED: DURING THE PANDEMIC, DID YOU FIND WAYS TO PRACTICE YOUR FAITH ONLINE?

Yes

No



BUT THE MAJORITY DON'T FOLLOW CATHOLIC INFLUENCERS OR SHARE CATHOLIC CONTENT.

ONLY 33%

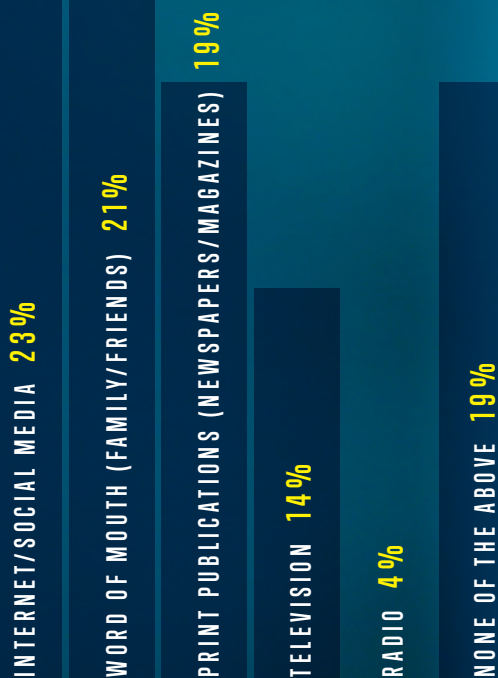
say they share content about Catholicism on social media; 67% do not.

ONLY 22%

follow Catholic influencers such as Bishop Barron, Fr. Mike Schmitz, Sr. Helena Burns, and others; 78% do not.

98% OF CATHOLICS USE SOCIAL MEDIA, BUT FEWER SPECIFY THAT THEY ARE CATHOLIC IN THEIR SOCIAL PROFILES THAN IN THE PAST.

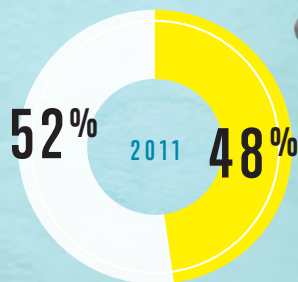
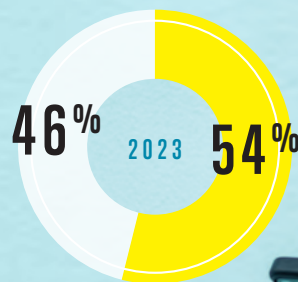
THE INTERNET, WORD OF MOUTH AND PRINT PUBLICATIONS ARE TOP RESOURCES FOR RELIGIOUS CONTENT



Do you specify that you are Catholic on any of your profiles?

Yes

No



MORE CATHOLICS
HAD READ THEIR
DIOCESAN
MAGAZINES OR
NEWSPAPERS IN THE
THREE MONTHS PRIOR
TO THE SURVEY THAN
HAD DONE SO IN PAST
CARA SURVEYS.

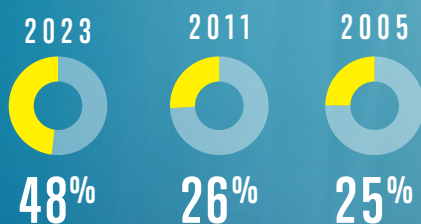
CATHOLICS RELY ON THEIR DIOCESAN MAGAZINES AND NEWSPAPERS

READERSHIP IS GROWING



In the last three months, have you read a copy of your diocesan newspaper or magazine?

Yes, in print and online



TAKEAWAY STRATEGY

DIOCESAN PUBLICATIONS HELP BUILD DISCIPLES AND GIVE THEM TOOLS TO EVANGELIZE

The majority of church-going Catholics read their diocesan magazines or newspapers, either in print or online.



75%

of weekly Mass attenders read their diocesan newspaper or magazine in print and/or online.

57%

of those who attend Mass less than weekly but at least once a month read their publication in print and/or online.

33%

of those who attend Mass a few times a year or less often read their diocesan publication.

Those who attend Mass regularly believe their diocesan publication is an essential part of how the diocese communicates with Catholics.

62% of weekly Mass attenders and 60% of monthly Mass attenders agree that they believe the print version of their diocesan newspaper or magazine is an essential part of how the diocese communicates.

54% of weekly attenders and 53% of monthly attenders agree that they would be upset by any suggestion that their diocese stop producing a print version of its publication.

Respondents want to be able to access diocesan content **both in print and online.**

43%

say a print version of the diocese's newspaper or magazine is important to them.

42%

would like both print and online versions of their diocesan newspaper or magazine.