



Executive Summary of the Real Presence Coalition's Survey of U.S. Lay Catholics

September 2024

Purpose

- The survey conducted by an informal group of influential Catholics called the [Real Presence Coalition \(RPC\)](#).
- Our mission was to assist U.S. Bishops in their [National Eucharistic Revival Campaign](#) launched in response to a [2019 Pew Research survey](#) revealing the majority of U.S. Catholics no longer believe that Jesus Christ is truly present in the Eucharist.
- The RPC Survey was unique in that it focused on identifying why lay Catholics have experienced a loss of faith and what are their recommendations for how to restore belief in the Real Presence.

Methodology

- RPC engaged a nationally recognized polling firm, [Public Opinion Strategies \(POS\)](#), to assist in the survey development and results analysis.
- The online survey was conducted using [Survey Monkey](#), the global leader in online surveys.
- Survey questions were developed based upon extensive research of recent articles addressing the loss of faith in the Real Presence.
- The survey was open to all U.S. lay Catholics during the month of July 2024.
- Only one response allowed per person (based upon respondent's IP address).
- Responses were solicited using email and social media invitations, as well as online advertising targeting attendees of the National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis, Indiana.
- Response options were randomly sorted for each respondent to avoid possible response bias based upon the ordering.

Response Characteristics

- This is the single largest survey of lay Catholics ever completed in the United States, far exceeding the number of responses required for a statistically valid survey. There were a total of 15,843 responses (14,725 from U.S. lay Catholics) with an 80% completion rate yielding a total of 12,680 completed surveys
- A total of 780 surveys came from attendees of the National Eucharistic Congress held in Indianapolis in July 2004 (6% of completed responses).
- This is the only survey that has specifically probed the underlying reasons for why lay Catholic believe there has been a loss of faith in the Real Presence.



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- Demographic statistics:
 - **Geography:** Responses received from 194 U.S. dioceses and eparchies.
 - **Gender:** 63% women, 37% men.
 - **Age:** 6% under the age of 25, 20% ages 25 to 44, 12% ages 45 to 54, 23% ages 55 to 64, 24% ages 65 to 74, and 16% ages 75 and older.
 - **Race:** 85% white and 15% minorities.
 - **Length of time being a Catholic:** 84% since infancy, 11% over 10 years and 5% 10 years or less.
 - **Type of Mass Attended:** 21% exclusively attend the Traditional Latin Mass, 43% primarily attending the Novus Ordo Mass along with periodically attending the TLM and 36% exclusively attend the Novus Ordo.

Issues Contributing to a Loss of Faith in the Real Presence

- A list of 28 issues potentially contributing to the loss of faith in the Real Presence was presented to each respondent. Respondents were required to rate each issue using a 5-point scale ranging from having "NO IMPACT" to having the "GREATEST IMPACT."
- Upon completing the rating of these issues, respondents were optionally given the opportunity to provide additional open-ended feedback if they felt their concerns were not adequately addressed by the standard list of issues.
- 42% of respondents elected to submit open-ended responses to this question, yielding a total of 5,313 responses consisting of over 220,000 words of feedback. Each response was subsequently categorized using one or more of 60 different topic tags.
- The top 5 ranked issues, along with a summary of related open-ended feedback, is presented below:
 1. **Receiving the Eucharist in the hand while standing:**
 - Many respondents advocate for the reception of the Eucharist kneeling and on the tongue, reflecting greater reverence and respect for the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.
 - Concerns were raised about the practice of receiving Communion in the hand, as it is believed to lead to a loss of reverence and increases the risk of profaning the Eucharist.
 - Discomfort with the use of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, suggesting that only priests and deacons should distribute the Eucharist.
 2. **Scandal created by offering the Holy Eucharist to public sinners who obstinately reject Catholic teaching:**



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- Frustration with the failure of Church authorities to enforce Canon 915, particularly regarding Catholic politicians who publicly support positions contrary to Church teachings.
 - Perceived hypocrisy and weak leadership among Church leaders, undermining the Church's moral authority and causing scandal among the faithful.
3. **Lack of humility and reverence in the presence of the Eucharist:**
- Concerns over a general decline in reverence during Mass, including casual dress, loud talking, and treating the Mass as a social event.
 - Criticism of the clergy's lack of reverence, with reports of priests rushing through liturgical prayers and failing to handle the Eucharist with care.
4. **Clergy's casual attitude towards the Eucharist:**
- Perception that many clergy do not genuinely believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, leading to casual behavior during Mass.
 - Concerns about the casual and sometimes irreverent conduct of priests during liturgical celebrations.
5. **Failure to catechize the faithful on transubstantiation:**
- Inadequate catechesis for several decades, affecting both children and adults.
 - Strong call for better religious education in Catholic schools, CCD programs, and for adults.

Recommendations to the Bishops

- The final survey question asked respondents to identify their number one recommendation to the U.S. bishops on how best to restore belief in the Real Presence. Respondents were asked to select one from among a list of seven potential recommendations: The options, ranked in order of their response rates are provided below:
 1. **Encourage the practice of receiving the Eucharist on the tongue while kneeling.** (29% of respondents)
 2. **Catechize the faithful** (24% of respondents)
 3. **Encourage greater reverence for the Eucharist** (10% of respondents)
 4. **Eliminate Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion** (10% of respondents)
 5. **Withhold the Eucharist from public officials who obstinately reject Catholic teaching** (9% of respondents)
 6. **Increase the number of Eucharistic events** (4% of respondents)
 7. **Other** (15% of respondents)



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- Respondents who selecting the "OTHER" option submitted a total of 1,944 open-ended responses spanning over 35,000 words. The vast majority of these responses called for the implementations of all or most of the recommendations on the list.

Additional Observations Regarding the Traditional Latin Mass (TLM) vs. the Novus Ordo (NO)

- **Higher Frequency of Sacramental Practices:** TLM survey respondents show a higher frequency of attending weekly Mass and confession compared to NO attendees. This suggests a stronger commitment to traditional sacramental practices among TLM attendees.
- **Stronger Belief in the Real Presence:** TLM survey respondents have a greater belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, indicating a deeper adherence to traditional Catholic teachings.
- **Younger Demographic:** TLM survey respondents were generally younger than NO attendees, which may reflect a growing interest in traditional liturgical practices among younger Catholics.
- **Preference for Receiving from Clergy:** The majority of Novus Ordo survey respondents prefer to receive the Eucharist from a priest or deacon, highlighting a desire for a more traditional and reverent approach to the sacrament.

Survey Findings Consistent with U.S. Regional Synod Reports

- **Centrality of the Eucharist:** Across all regions, the Eucharist is emphasized as the "source and summit" of Catholic life. Participants highlighted its role in fostering personal faith and community unity, but there is a widespread concern about declining understanding and reverence for the Real Presence.
- **Need for Catechesis:** Many regions expressed the need for renewed and deeper catechesis on the Eucharist, especially to address misunderstandings among younger generations and reemphasize the theological significance of the Real Presence.
- **Declining Mass Attendance:** A major concern in nearly every region is the decline in regular Mass attendance, particularly among young people. The pandemic exacerbated this trend, with many parishes struggling to bring people back to in-person worship.
- **Reverence and Liturgy:** Participants called for more reverent and meaningful liturgical celebrations. This includes calls for better homilies, music, and preparation to restore the sense of sacredness and improve engagement in the Eucharistic celebration.
- **Traditional Latin Mass:** Some regions noted tensions regarding preferences for the Traditional Latin Mass versus the Novus. Participants expressed frustration over the limitations on celebrating the Latin Mass.

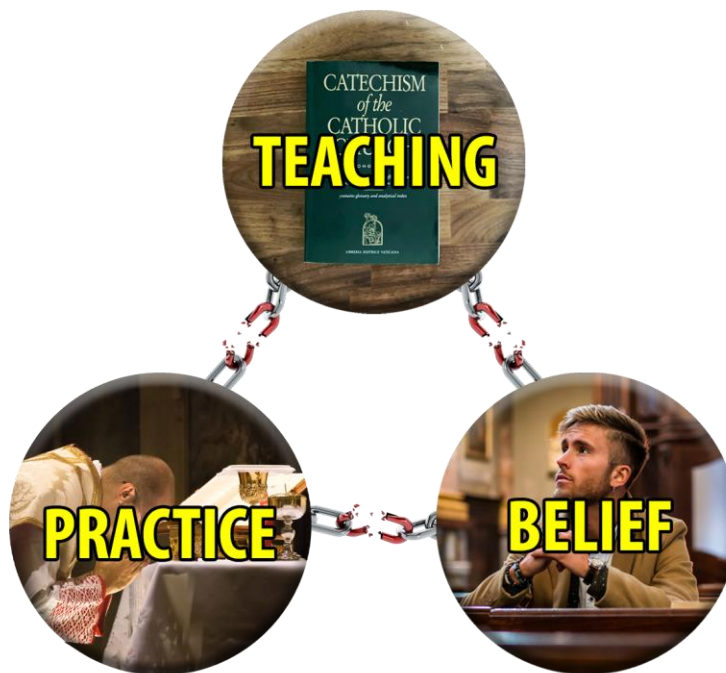


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Conclusions

- Overall findings can be best summarized by ancient Latin maxim: **“Lex orandi, lex credendi”** - or - “the way we worship is what we believe.”
- Catholics are saying there is a **“disconnect”** between the teachings of the Church, the way we worship and the laity's belief; and that this disconnect has been the major contributor to a loss of faith in the Real Presence.



- The laity feel that the U.S. bishops must repair this disconnect in order to restore belief in the Real Presence.
- They also believe there is no single “silver bullet” answer to this problem, and that an integrated, multifaceted approach will be required.
- It's also worthy to note that the findings of this survey were also consistent with several of the observations noted in the interim reports from U.S. dioceses for the Synod on Synodality.
- The comprehensive survey results can be found at <https://realpresencecoalition.com/results>.