



Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate

Parish Life Survey Our Lady of Loretto Parish Novato, California

Executive Summary

The Our Lady of Loretto Parish Life Survey was designed by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University. Most of the questions were derived from CARA's database of nationally tested questions, with some questions designed specifically for the parish. The parish distributed English-language and Spanish-language versions of the questionnaire to those attending its liturgies over one weekend in December 2019. In addition, an English-language version of the survey was offered online, with a link to the survey (hosted on CARA's website) shared with parishioners by the parish. In all, there were 870 valid responses, with an additional 28 respondents under age 16 not included in the analysis. There were 674 valid responses to the English-language version of the questionnaire (601 in pew and 73 online) and 196 valid responses to the in-pew Spanish-language version.

Major findings can be summarized as follows:

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

- In calendar year 2019, the average age of valid respondents to the in-pew and online surveys at Our Lady of Loretto Parish is 61. Half are 64 or younger.
- CARA divides parishioners into these three age groups for purposes of comparison: ages 16 to 35 (9%), ages 36 to 64 (42%), and ages 65 and older (49%).
- Nearly two in three respondents to the survey are female (64%) and 36% are male. Nineteen percent report having at least one child or stepchild high school age or younger living with them.

Religious Characteristics of Respondents

- On average, respondents have attended the parish for 26 years, with half having attended 25 years or more.
- Some 88% identify the parish as their primary place of worship and 76% say they are registered there. Examining this more deeply, 16% say they do regularly attend the parish but are *not* registered and another 7% were identified as visitors on the weekend of the survey.

Assessment of Parish Life and Needs

- Nearly nine in ten (86%) give Our Lady of Loretto Parish overall a positive evaluation (“good” and “excellent” combined). Some 30% rate it as “excellent.”
- Some 84% at least “somewhat” agree that participation in this faith community has deepened their faith. Forty-eight percent “very much” agree that it has.
- Nearly half (47%) say they volunteer for and/or attend activities or events at the parish once a month or more. Thirty percent agree “very much” that they want to be more involved in parish life.
- The following needs are especially likely to receive high priority from respondents: children’s religious education or formation (76%), youth ministry (71%), and visitation of the sick and homebound (67%).
- Respondents were also asked to write in any additional ministries they would like to see the parish provide. Ministries related to formation, outreach and worship are most likely to be mentioned.
- Three in ten “strongly” agree that their faith in Church leaders has been shaken by the recent abuse scandal (31%). Nearly three in four agree “strongly,” in a follow-up question, that they trust that God is guiding the Catholic Church (73%).
- Responding parishioners are particularly likely to say that parish bulletins (61%) are “very” effective ways of communicating parish news to them. About three in ten say that the parish website (30%) and email (28%) are “very” effective.
- When asked to write in what they believe the biggest challenge facing the parish in the next five years is, respondents are most likely to have written in challenges related to decreasing attendance and involvement at the parish; attracting, forming, and retaining children, youth and young adults; and challenges related to leadership and staffing.

Leadership

- Sixty-seven percent give a positive evaluation to the vision provided by parish leaders, with 22% rating it as “excellent.” The leadership provided by the pastor receives an “excellent” rating from 39%.
- Some 55% “strongly” agree they would feel comfortable talking with the pastor.
- Twenty-two percent agree “strongly” that there is sufficient qualified parish staff (paid and volunteer) to meet the parish’s needs. Some 53% give an “excellent” rating to the friendliness of the parish office staff.

- Twenty percent “strongly” agree that they are not aware of how the parish spends its money. Ten percent agree as strongly that they have issues with parish spending priorities.

Worship

- Masses in general receive a positive evaluation from 86% of respondents. Thirty-five percent rate them as “excellent.”
- Roughly half give an “excellent” rating to the homilies overall (54%), the prayerful, reverent atmosphere at Mass (50%), and the music overall (48%).
- At least seven in ten “strongly” agree that they receive the Body and Blood of Jesus at Communion (86%), that receiving Communion weekly is important to them (77%), that Catholics should attend a Sunday/Saturday vigil Mass weekly (75%), and that hearing weekly homilies is helpful to them (70%).
- Some 85% attend Mass at least once a week and another 11% attend once or twice a month. Mass attendance varies some by generation, with those ages 65 and older (90%) and ages 36 to 64 (89%) most likely to attend at least once a week, and those ages 16 to 35 (76%) relatively less likely.
- Catholics who say they have missed Mass in the last six months are especially likely to cite the following reasons strongly: they do not believe that missing Mass is a sin (41%) and their children’s scheduled activities (35%).
- Some 53% report going to Confession/Reconciliation at least once a year, with 17% attending at once a month.

Sense of Community

- The sense of community within the parish receives a positive rating from 87% of respondents. Some 21% give it an “excellent” rating.
- Social activities receive an “excellent” rating from 26% of respondents.
- Some 66% agree “strongly” that they are comfortable with the increasing racial or ethnic diversity of the parish. Fewer – 25% – agree “strongly” that the parish’s various ethnic and cultural groups are unified into one parish community.

Formation

- Parish efforts to educate parishioners in the faith receive a positive evaluation from 77% of respondents, with 30% giving these efforts an “excellent” rating.

- Seventy-one percent agree “strongly” that they think of themselves as practicing Catholics. This varies some by frequency of Mass attendance, with 79% of those who attend Mass weekly or more “strongly” agreeing that they consider themselves practicing Catholics, compared to 29% of those who attend less than weekly.
- Twenty-two percent rate efforts to offer a Catholic view on current issues as “excellent.” Some 28% say the parish is “excellent” at helping them practice gospel values in their daily lives.
- Just under half give an “excellent” rating to the quality of Our Lady of Loretto School (46%) and to the quality of the teaching at the school (45%). In related findings, half or more “strongly” agree that Our Lady of Loretto School has a good reputation (57%) and that education at Our Lady of Loretto School is better than at area public schools (50%).
- About four-tenths to six-tenths “strongly” agree with these statements about the parish school: if affordable, they would be interested in sending their children to Our Lady of Loretto School (59%) and that they are seriously considering sending their children to the school (45%).
- Children’s religious education programs receive an “excellent” rating from 43%, with 48% giving as high a rating to youth ministry. Faith formation for adults receives an “excellent” rating from 34%.

Stewardship

- Parish efforts to encourage parishioners to share their time and talents with the parish receive a positive evaluation from 64%. Some 24% rate these efforts as “excellent.”
- A quarter to a third “strongly” agree that they would volunteer more if they knew parish needs (33%) and that they are not sure who to contact to volunteer more (26%).
- More than half “strongly” agree that they contribute financially to the parish (55%). A quarter agree “strongly” that they prefer to give to specific projects rather than a general fund (26%).

Evangelization, Parish Outreach and Social Justice

- Efforts to spread the Gospel/evangelize receive a positive rating from 64% of respondents. Some 21% give these efforts an “excellent” rating.
- Parish outreach to visitors and guests receives an “excellent” rating from 19% of respondents. A greater percentage – 37% – give as high of a rating to parish outreach to Hispanics/Latinos in the area.
- Outreach to and advocacy for those in need receives a positive rating from 81% of respondents. Thirty-seven percent rate these efforts as “excellent.”