

# **Attitudes of Catholics in England and Wales to Child Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church**

A Quantitative Report from the  
Boundary Breaking Project



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# Seven Key Findings

## Overall

1. **Regular Mass-goers** (attending at least once a month) **are better informed** about the Church's handling of child sexual abuse cases, **hold significantly more positive attitudes** regarding the Church's response to the crisis, and are more likely to view the **extent of abuse in the Church to be of similar levels to other parts of society** than self-identifying Catholics who attend less often or not at all. Regular Mass-goers have also **changed their practice significantly less** than occasional or non-attenders. Within each of these broad classifications of Mass-going, the same correlation occurs at a finer level of detail. For example, weekly Mass-goers consistently hold more positive attitudes towards to the Church than monthly attenders.

## Attitudes

2. A majority of Catholics view child sexual abuse as an **ongoing issue for the Church**; only a quarter believe it to be a thing of the past. More than three-quarters think that the Church must **change a great deal** to prevent further cases in the future.
3. Around half of all Catholics consider the Church to have experienced a **similar level of child sexual abuse to other parts of society**, or don't know. However, among those believing there to be a difference, it is considered more common in the Catholic Church.

## Awareness

4. Most Catholics received their information about child sexual abuse in the Church from **mainstream media** such as television, radio, and newspapers, with **social media** a significant but less widespread source for younger age groups.
5. **Initiatives by Pope Francis** to handle child sexual abuse cases are better known and viewed more favourably than handling of cases by the **local diocesan bishop**, or the **bishops of England and Wales** as a whole.

## Impact

6. As a result of child sexual abuse in the Church, a third of Catholics who previously attended Mass **reduced their Mass attendance** or stopped attending Mass altogether. This figure is echoed in a **reduction in financial donations** to parish or diocese giving by a third of Catholics who previously donated.
7. Despite low levels of awareness and/or participation to date, there is a widespread desire for a **Day of Prayer for Survivors of Abuse**, especially among younger Catholics.

## About the Authors

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## Acknowledgements

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## Citing this Report

Marcus Pound and Gregory A. Ryan, 'Attitudes of Catholics in England and Wales to Child Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church', Durham University, April 2024.

1. For more details of the members of both bodies, see <https://www.durham.ac.uk/research/institutes-and-centres/catholic-studies/research/boundary-breaking/>



HOLY BIBLE



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# 1. Introduction

## Boundary Breaking Project

The report is based on research undertaken by a team working within the Centre for Catholic Studies (CCS) at Durham University. This project, *Boundary Breaking*, began in 2019 and finished in 2023.

Research for *Boundary Breaking* focussed primarily on sexual abuse of children involving diocesan and religious priests or brothers that has taken place in Catholic institutions in England and Wales. That is, sexual abuse where the institution and ministry or leadership structures of the Church were implicated. It also gave priority to exploration of *sexual* abuse, whilst recognising that this is part of a spectrum which includes emotional, physical, and spiritual abuse. The focus is on sexual abuse because this is uniquely intrusive and harmful, as wider literature affirms, and on abuse by priests, because this is such a deep betrayal of ethical and theological principles which are central to Catholic faith and teaching.

The principal findings and recommendations of the detailed qualitative research which engaged closely with individuals directly affected by child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, and which constitute the heart of the *Boundary Breaking* project are published in a separate report, *The Cross of the Moment*.<sup>2</sup>

## This Report, *Attitudes of Catholics in England and Wales to Child Sex Abuse in the Catholic Church*

To enrich the overall picture presented by the qualitative research, the *Boundary Breaking* project team commissioned a survey from YouGov to find out more about the attitudes of Catholics who are less directly affected by this issue. Over 3000 self-identifying Catholics responded to an online questionnaire. The sample was representative of the Catholic population in England and Wales, including regular and occasional churchgoers as well as those who do not come to Mass but still identify as Catholics.

The survey was designed to gather data on three main areas regarding the Catholic Church's handling of child sexual abuse allegations, cases, and response in England and Wales:

- What awareness do Catholics have of these issues?
- What attitudes do Catholics hold towards the Church's handling of child sexual abuse within the Church?
- What impact has child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in England and Wales had on specific areas of the practice of ordinary Catholics? That is, not only those entrusted with a specific ministry or professional responsibility, or affected directly by, child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church.

The research was structured to explore how these data are affected not only by standard demographics (such as sex and age) but also by frequency of Mass attendance as an indicator of observable, normative Catholic behaviour.

In addition to supplementing the core *Boundary Breaking* qualitative work by providing a window onto the impact of the sexual abuse crisis on Catholics who were not necessarily impacted directly by it,<sup>3</sup> the survey also stands as a piece of statistical research into English and Welsh Catholicism as at July 2022.

## Why carry out this research?

This quantitative research is intended to:

- Enrich the overall picture of Catholic culture and practice in England and Wales in the light of the clerical sexual abuse crisis by providing statistical information from a relatively large sample to sit alongside the deep qualitative analysis done elsewhere in the *Boundary Breaking* project.<sup>4</sup>
- Assist the Catholic Church in formulating a pastoral response in respect of those indirectly affected by child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, whilst recognising the priority of listening to and working with victims, survivors, and professionals who have been directly affected by it. The differentiation of Catholics using demographic data and by grouping respondents according to general Mass-going practice is a key tool in understanding different attitudes and responses across the Catholic population of England and Wales.
- Add to the relatively sparse data on practices and attitudes within the contemporary Catholic Church in England and Wales as a standalone qualitative research dataset and analysis.
- Provide some indicative comparisons to US data on similar questions.

The following sections provide background to the study, how we carried out the research, and detailed analysis of the findings in relation to the three main research areas of awareness, attitudes, and impact among Catholics in England and Wales in relation to child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church.



2. Pat Jones, Marcus Pound, and Catherine Sexton, *The Cross of the Moment*, a Report from the *Boundary Breaking* Project, Centre for Catholic Studies, Durham University, April 2024.
3. Although the present quantitative survey did not ask whether a respondent had been directly affected by abuse of the Church, twelve voluntary disclosures of abuse were made in a free comments box at the end of the survey, not all of which related to

- the Catholic Church in England and Wales. One other respondent commented that they had professional responsibility for responding to cases of abuse within the Church. These free comments were not used to analyse the data but serve as a reminder that no assumptions can be made on the presence or absence of abuse victims/survivors in any group.
4. The qualitative research for *The Cross of the Moment* held 82 meetings and 4 focus groups,

involving 22 survivors of abuse by a priest or a person with authority in a Catholic institutional setting; 25 priests and deacons, including 3 priests who had been the subject of allegations; 17 laypeople, mostly from parishes directly affected by a case of abuse involving a priest they had known; 2 family members of survivors; 14 professional safeguarding staff; 18 members of religious communities; and 5 diocesan bishops.

## 2. Context: child sexual abuse and the Catholic Church in England and Wales

### Population: Catholics in England and Wales

The participants in this study were adults (age 18+) in England and Wales who self-identify as 'Roman Catholic'.<sup>5</sup> The Catholic population is estimated at just over 3 million (2,990,000 in England and 130,000 in Wales)—around 8% of the population.<sup>6</sup> This geographical area, excluding both Northern Ireland and Scotland is a well-defined and significant ecclesiastical boundary, reflected also in the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW), As an Episcopal Conference the bishops of England and Wales regularly meet together and collaborate in key areas of policy and public social mission, as well as dealing with pastoral matters. Communications are issued at Conference level, as well as by individual dioceses, including about cases of abuse and safeguarding issues. This research does not cover the Scottish Catholic dioceses as these have their own structures and policies. Including the Scottish dioceses in this data would mean dealing with two fundamentally distinct ecclesiastical units.

Important recent studies provide background to understanding the demographics and trends among Catholics in England and Wales in the twenty-first century. Bullivant (2016),<sup>7</sup> using pooled data from the 2012-14 BSA datasets, provides data specifically for England and Wales, and so we have drawn on this as a baseline for determining the key demographic weighting in our survey.<sup>8</sup> Although Clements and Bullivant (2022),<sup>9</sup> and Bullivant (2019)<sup>10</sup> use more recent datasets based on pooled British Social Attitudes (BSA) data (from 2015-17 and 2012-16 respectively) they work with data for the whole of Great Britain including an estimated 470,000 Scottish Catholics, who are not included in our survey.

### Gender

There is a clear difference in gender distribution in the Catholic population compared with the population at large. While the overall population in England and Wales is roughly at parity (51% female, 49% male), the Catholic profile has a 3:2 ratio of women to men (59% female, 41% male). [63:37

in Clement and Bullivant BSA 2015-17 including Scotland). The Catholic figures are almost identical to the distribution for all Christians in England and Wales.

### Ethnicity

The Catholic population of England and Wales remains predominantly White British (89%), with the remaining 11% embracing a range of ethnicities. People from Black and Asian ethnic groups (other than those of Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin) are proportionally higher among Catholics than in the population at large.<sup>11</sup> The age profile of Catholics is significantly younger than that for Christians overall in England and Wales: 44% of those who identify as Catholics are aged 18-44 compared to 33% of all Christians.<sup>12</sup>

### Belonging, Behaving, and Believing

Existing research shows that self-identifying Catholics manifest a wide range of religious practices and beliefs.<sup>13</sup> At the most fundamental level for our survey, *belonging* is indicated by simple self-identification as Catholic. This classification may differ from the official view of the Catholic Church (for example, regarding those who have disaffiliated from Catholicism, but which the Church, canonically and theologically, still regards as Catholic).<sup>14</sup>

This broad identification as Catholic does not mean homogeneity of practice. Terms such as 'practicing', 'lapsed' and 'cultural' Catholics are familiar in the pastoral and academic literature).<sup>15</sup> Differences in *behaving*, thus provide a useful way of segmenting those who identify as Catholic for the purposes of analysis. The principal indicator used for this, as in previous research, is frequency of Mass attendance. The challenges of using this metric are discussed in detail in **Section 3**.

Different datasets analysed for England and Wales, and for Great Britain over the past ten years, have produced a range of estimates on numbers attending Mass. A rough average suggests that around 1 in 4 of those identifying as Catholics attend at least once a week.



Dataset	Coverage	At least Weekly
BSA 2012-14 (Bullivant)	England and Wales	28%
BSA 2018 <sup>6</sup>	England, Wales, and Scotland	23%
<i>Catholics in Britain</i> , 2019 (Clements) <sup>17</sup>	England, Wales, and Scotland	31%
<i>Boundary Breaking</i> , 2022	England and Wales	19%

Table 2-1: Percentage of Catholics attending Mass at least weekly, according to recent surveys

These figures are considerably higher than those recorded by dioceses (around 24% in 2019 for the whole of Great Britain), and may indicate a degree of over-reporting in surveys, plausibly due to a ‘Catholic-specific social desirability bias’ (Clements).<sup>18</sup> The figures in our 2022 survey of 19% attending Mass at least once a week is lower than any of the above and may represent a genuine reduction in attendance since 2019. They may also reflect changes arising from the impact of pandemic lockdowns, or result from the larger sample size used (over 3000 respondents) or indicate the substantial margin of error in dealing with this measure.<sup>19</sup>

*Believing*, as a dimension or mode of religiosity is not a major focus of this research. Whilst questions of opinion or attitude towards aspects of church practice (such as how bishops have responded to cases of child sexual abuse) are a key part of the survey, only one question alluded to religious faith as such, and that in a very general way.

5. The Catholic Bishops’ Conference in England and Wales (CBCEW) uses the designation ‘The Catholic Church in England and Wales’, not ‘The Roman Catholic Church’, and the Vatican likewise refers to ‘The Catholic Church’. Throughout this report therefore follows the Church’s self-designation, and best practice in contemporary theological writing, in using ‘Catholic’ to refer not only the Latin rite, but also the Eastern rite churches in communion with Rome. There are approximately 50,000 Syro-Malabar rite Catholics in Great Britain (including Scotland) and 13,500 Greek-Ukrainian Catholics. Both are churches in full communion with the Bishop of Rome but are ‘Eastern Catholic’ churches.
6. Ben Clements and Stephen Bullivant, *Catholics in Contemporary Britain: Faith, Society, Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 22.
7. Bullivant, *Contemporary Catholicism in England and Wales: A Statistical Report Based on Recent British Social Attitudes Survey Data*, (Benedict XVI Centre for Religion and Society, 2016).
8. Bullivant, *Contemporary Catholicism*.
9. Clements and Bullivant.
10. Bullivant, *Mass Exodus: Catholic Disaffiliation in Britain and America since Vatican II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
11. Bullivant, *Contemporary Catholicism*, 10.
12. Bullivant, *Contemporary Catholicism*, 3.
13. The phenomena of believing, belonging, and behaving are discussed in Clements and Bullivant, 32-64.
14. On disaffiliation, see Bullivant, *Mass Exodus* pp 4-9 on the complexities of the Church’s understanding on membership.
15. Note that lapsed can be used of both infrequent attenders (belonging but different behaviour) and those who have in fact disaffiliated themselves from the Catholic Church (no longer belonging). A comparison between self-reported data and statistics from diocese in England and Wales is given in Clements and Bullivant, 37.
16. *British Social Attitudes 36 | Religion*, p. 9
17. Clements and Bullivant, 40.
18. Clements and Bullivant, 40.
19. See Clements and Bullivant, 39.

## Child sexual abuse

The focus of the *Boundary Breaking* project, and this survey, is sexual abuse of children in the Catholic Church, with a particular focus on abuse by clergy. The qualitative report explains the reason for this focus:

**We also gave priority to exploration of sexual abuse, whilst recognising that this is part of a spectrum which includes emotional, physical and spiritual abuse. Some survivors had experienced all these dimensions. All are damaging and wrong and some are criminal. Our focus is on sexual abuse because this is uniquely intrusive and harmful, as wider literature affirms, and on abuse by priests, because this is such a deep betrayal of ethical and theological principles which are central to Catholic faith and teaching.**

*The Cross of the Moment*<sup>20</sup>

In 2016 the British Government set up an independent statutory inquiry known as IICSA: The Independent inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. Its task was to investigate where and how institutions such as children's homes, local authorities and faith-based institutions had failed to protect children in their care. The Inquiry gathered evidence through fifteen investigations, which resulted in nineteen reports. Several of these investigations examined specific Catholic institutions. The report on child protection in the Catholic Church in England and Wales included examination of policies, leadership, and canon law, and whether improved policy and practice had improved in the light of the earlier Nolan (2001) and Cumberlege (2007) reports. It was published in November 2020 as *Safeguarding in the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales*.<sup>21</sup> This document provides important background to the context of the current research.

The IICSA report makes it clear that there have been institutional failings by the Catholic Church in England and Wales regarding child sexual abuse by clergy. It records over 3,000 instances of child sexual abuse connected to the Church between 1970 and 2015 and emphasises that this is not a historical problem since there have been more than 100 further allegations each year since 2016.

A further statistical survey of data from 1970-2015 relating to sexual abuse of children carried out by Stephen Bullivant<sup>22</sup> notes that the number of complaints made in each year was below 20 per year until 1995, when it rose rapidly to a peak of 84 in 2010. The complaints related to incidents said to have occurred an average of 26 years previously. The comparatively high levels of alleged abuse in the 1960s and 1970s are seen as 'broadly consistent' with research evidence from the USA.

Research among selected US dioceses has shown that the abuse crisis unsurprisingly has had an impact on the disaffiliation of Catholics, although the picture is not straightforward.<sup>23</sup> One of the goals of the current survey was to probe how Catholics in England and Wales had experienced certain aspects of the abuse crisis enfolding the Church, even if they had not been directly impacted by it.

## A comparative report from the United States

Research done in the United States by the Pew Research Center in 2010 investigated attitudes in America towards clergy sex abuse in the Catholic Church.<sup>24</sup> We were influenced by their framework and some of their questions for elements in designing the *Boundary Breaking* quantitative survey. Although the US Catholic context is different to that of England and Wales, and the two surveys differ in the scope of their population and questions, a comparative analysis can be made between the two datasets on certain issues. The key comparative sites of agreement or difference are noted in **Appendix B**.



**Our focus is on sexual abuse because this is uniquely intrusive and harmful, as wider literature affirms, and on abuse by priests, because this is such a deep betrayal of ethical and theological principles which are central to Catholic faith and teaching.**



20. Jones, Pound, and Sexton, *The Cross of the Moment*

21. IICSA, *The Roman Catholic Church: Investigation Report* (November 2020), <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/document/roman-catholic-church-investigation-report-november-2020.html>.

22. Bullivant, *Allegations of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in England and Wales between 1970 and 2015: A Statistical Summary*, St Mary's University Open Research Archive ([stmarys.ac.uk](http://stmarys.ac.uk)).

23. Bullivant, *Mass Exodus*, 223-52.

24. Pew Research Center, 11 June 2010, 'Americans See Catholic Clergy Sex Abuse as an Ongoing Problem', <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/06/11/americans-see-catholic-clergy-sex-abuse-as-an-ongoing-problem/>

## 3. Method: how we carried out the research

### YouGov survey

The purpose of conducting a quantitative survey alongside the main qualitative work on *Boundary Breaking* was to gauge the attitudes and impact of child sexual abuse on what might be called ‘ordinary Catholics’ in England and Wales. That is, based on a representative sample of self-identifying Catholics regardless of whether or not they had been directly impacted (e.g. as a survivor, church official, or professional) by child sexual abuse. To provide this large-scale research, we commissioned a survey by YouGov, an online research agency, which was carried out from 29<sup>th</sup> June–26<sup>th</sup> July 2022.

The survey questions were asked to a nationally representative 3120 adults aged 18+, self-identifying as ‘Roman Catholic’. The survey was conducted online and was estimated to take around 10 minutes to complete.

#### **Technical details:**

YouGov uses a quota sampling method known as ‘active sampling’ to randomly select a representative sample from its panel of 800,000+ UK adults, all of whom are regular internet users. Respondents were invited by email to take part on the survey, which took the form of an online questionnaire. According to the responses received, a weighting factor was applied to address any imbalances at the analysis stage and ensure that the sample remain representative of the population being studied (here, all self identifying Catholic adults in England and Wales). This weighting also addressed any imbalance caused by online-only polling. Weighting for the Catholic population was based on Stephen Bullivant’s England and Wales subset of the British Social Attitudes Data for 2012-14.<sup>25</sup>

### Sample: who took part in the survey?

For this survey pre-selection only included individuals who identified as Catholic. All of the survey questions related to aspects of a respondent’s awareness of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, and the impact of that on their own practice. To identify whether participants had in fact heard anything about the abuse crisis, an initial question asked:

**Have you ever heard about cases of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in England and Wales?**

Of the 3120 respondents, 100% (3120) answered yes to this question.

25. Bullivant, *Contemporary Catholicism*.

## Demographics: Catholics in England and Wales

95% of respondents were from England; 5% were from Wales.

### Age

Adult respondents were classified into five age categories, shown in Chart 3-1.

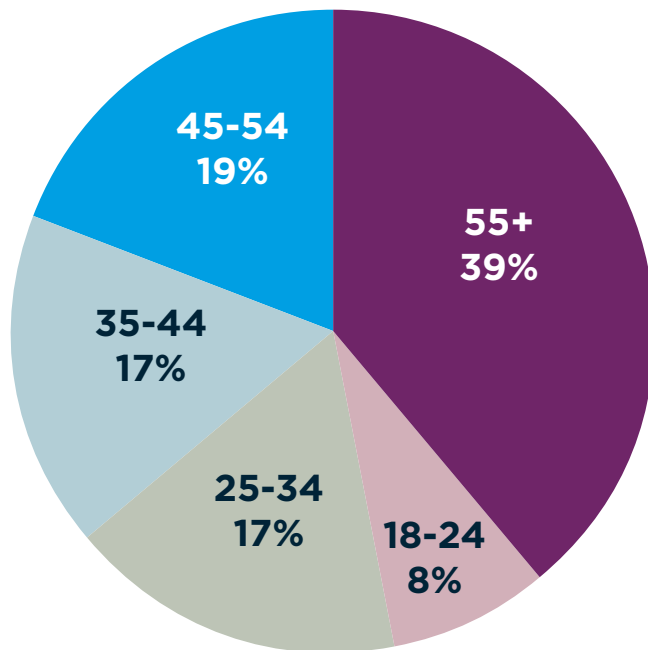
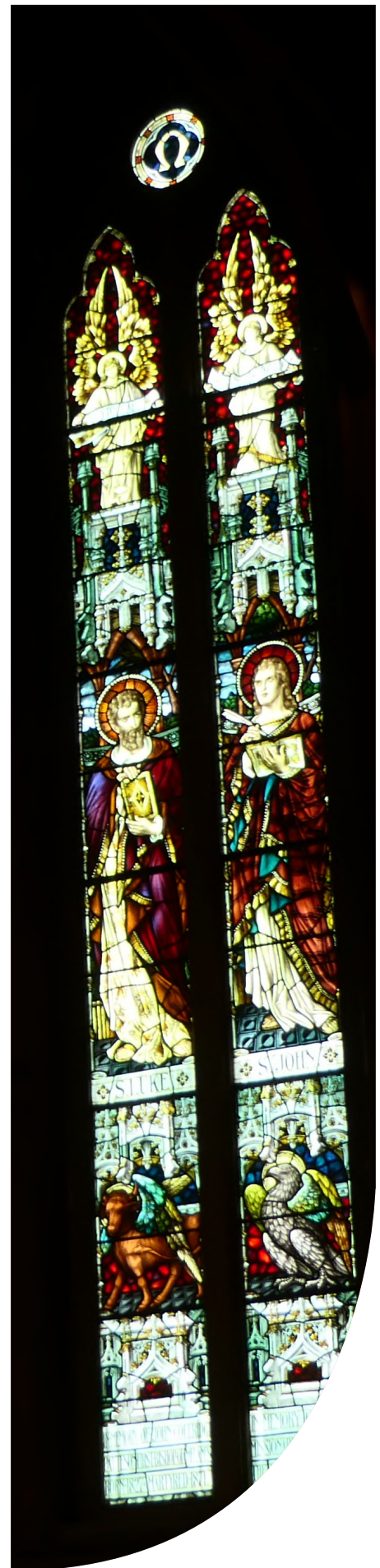


Chart 3-1: Age distribution of the survey respondents.

### Sex<sup>26</sup>

In line with the 2012-14 BSA data for England and Wales, respondents were distributed 43% male, 57% female. This distribution was broadly observed regardless of how often respondents attended Mass, with the exception of the small sample (N=138) attending more than once a week, where a substantial male majority was reported: Male = 58%; Female = 42% ( $p < .001$ ).

26. It is current practice in many UK surveys to classify respondents according to a binary 'Sex' field (male or female) in order to allow harmonisation with historical census data. Standards for collecting a category of 'Gender' with a wider range of options, are in development but were not used in this YouGov survey. See <https://analysisfunction.civilservice.gov.uk/policy-store/sex-and-gender/>



## Ethnicity

We collected a detailed list of 18 ethnic groups plus 'prefer not to say' from which participants could only select one category. A simplified classification of 'white' and 'other than white' was achieved by recoding.

87% of all Catholics reported their ethnicity as white, 13% as other than white. The latter group accounted for a greater proportion of Mass-goers attending at least monthly, which we call 'Regular attendees' than the general distribution among Catholics, and a corresponding lower level of Occasional (less than monthly) and non-attendance 'Never attending Mass other than for baptisms, weddings, and funerals'. These classifications are dealt with in more detail later in this report.

	White	Other than White
Regular	83%	17%
Occasional	88%	12%
Never	90%	10%

Table 3-1: Simplified distribution of ethnicity by Mass attendance

A more detailed self-classification of ethnic group was also collected, and is documented in **Appendix A**.

## Socio-economic classification (Social Grade)

'Social Grade' is a widely used UK classification system originally developed by the National Readership Society.<sup>27</sup> It assigns individuals a socio-economic classification from a six-point scale based on their occupation rather than on their wealth, property, or other assets. In polling data, these six categories are generally combined into two groups, broadly representing 'middle class' (ABC1) and 'working class' (C2DE). The base distribution for the Catholic population was 75% = ABC1; 25% = C2DE.

The C2DE group is significantly over-represented among Catholics who never attend Mass (34% of 'Nevers' were C2DE; 66% were ABC1), and less so among Catholics attending Mass monthly or more frequently (20% of 'Regulars' C2DE; 80% ABC1).

A detailed description of the survey demographics is given in **Appendix A**.

## Mass attendance

One of the aims of the *Boundary Breaking* project has been to understand how the Catholic church in England and Wales in its various groupings of membership has experienced the crisis of child sexual abuse, including the church's response or failure to respond adequately. While the qualitative report examines this in depth through interviews and focus groups involving those directly affected by the issue, the statistical survey looks at larger scale trends and patterns in the Catholic population. In addition to using standard demographic data as a lens, we wanted to see how proximity to the regular life of the church affected the perception, experience, and impact of the church's handling of child sexual abuse.

Regular participation at Mass is presented by the church as a normative element of Catholic life. In the old 'Penny Catechism', the obligation to attend Mass on a Sunday was known as 'the First Commandment of the Church' (#230). The current Catechism of the Catholic Church, a substantial and authoritative statement of Catholic doctrine published in 1992 in the light of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and translated into English in 1994, makes the normative nature of this 'Sunday obligation' clear:

27. The technical details of this grading can be found here: <https://www.mrs.org.uk/resources/social-grade>.

**2181 The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor. Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin.**

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*

However widespread Mass attendance may have been in the past, it can certainly not be assumed for all those self-identifying as 'Catholic' today. This diversity of Mass attendance among those who call themselves Catholic has several implications.

First, it shows the diversity of practice in those who call themselves 'Catholic'. This has a direct impact on the interpretation of the data, insofar as distinct groups of respondents can be identified. It suggests that the Church's response to child sexual abuse and communication of that response might be better adapted to these differences.

Second, it also acts as a proxy for approximating a degree of affiliation with the Catholic Church (not personal faith), which raises questions about how groups develop and maintain attitudes towards the Church's handling of child sexual abuse. Some research in Britain has also correlated more frequent Mass-going with more frequent prayer outside of Mass.<sup>28</sup>

Third, the diversity of Mass attendance, and the probable diversity of affiliation with the Church lying behind that requires careful interpretation of statistics relating to 'All Catholics', which are on this measure and others, an extremely diverse group. For example, questions which were asked regarding parish communications and activities or awareness of bishops' responses are likely to be less relevant for that segment of the population who attend Mass rarely or never.

Survey participants were asked to select from a list of nine options on frequency of Mass attendance plus options for 'Never' and 'Don't know' in answer to the following question:

**Apart from special occasions such as weddings, funerals and baptisms, how often, if at all, do you attend Catholic Mass either online or in person?**



28. Clements and Bullivant, 52-6.

29. <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/spring-plenary-2022-resolution-returning-to-Mass-at-pentecost/>

Although by the time the survey was run, the Catholic Church in England and Wales had reinstated the Sunday obligation (May 2022)<sup>29</sup> and encouraged a return to attending Mass in person following the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic, the experience of that pandemic revealed that some Catholics would regularly attend an online Mass where offered, for example due to ill-health. Accordingly, online participation in the Mass was included in our definition of Mass-going, and therefore as an indicator of commitment to Church practice. No distinction between online and in-person attendance was made in the data collection.

Although the fine-grained data collected from this question allowed for some more detailed analysis—revealing for example differences in attitudes and impact from child sexual abuse between weekly attendees and those attending more than once a week or once a fortnight—using this fine-grained classification throughout the analysis would make the report indigestible. It also raises a risk of reduced statistical significance and higher margins of error as the sample sizes become smaller, especially for multi-variable analysis.

As has been widely done in other research, therefore, we aggregated the responses to produce a simple threefold classification:

	Mass Attendance*	Proportion of this dataset
Regular	Once a month or more frequently	27%
Occasional	Less frequently than once a month	53%
Never	Non-attenders	20%

Table 3-2: Simplified Groupings for Mass Attendance<sup>30</sup>

(\* *excluding baptisms, weddings, and funerals.* 'Don't know' responses (N=25, <1% of respondents) are ignored for the above categories but are included in the data for 'All Catholics').

30. *Regular*: more than once, once, every 2 weeks, once a month (27%); *Occasional*: every 2-3 months, 4-5 months, 6 months, once a year, less often (53%); *Never*: Those who do not attend Mass apart from occasions such as baptisms, wedding, and funerals (20%).

### Challenges in classifying Mass-going

The difficulties and discrepancies in using this aggregated data are real but given the relatively large sample sizes, can be used to indicate some general trend with a degree of confidence. Nonetheless, some challenges and caveats should be mentioned.

Firstly, there is a suspicion of over-reporting in similar surveys in the past.<sup>31</sup> The figures in our data are lower than recent surveys in England and Wales, and this may reflect a lessening of the effect of a Catholic-specific social desirability bias,<sup>32</sup> to which the reputational impact of the abuse crisis, as well as a disaffiliation trend, plausibly plays a part.

Second, cross-tabulation of survey questions regarding Mass attendance and the impact on this from the Church's response to child sexual abuse reveals some inconstancies and highlights a margin of error in the data. While 20% of respondents identified as never attending Mass (apart from special occasions) a question on impact on Mass attendance following hearing of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, 23% of participants claimed not to have attended Mass before or after hearing about the abuse scandal. While these two datasets substantially overlap, outlying discrepancies can be identified. While some of this may simply represent errors in replying, it may also reflect the fact that Mass attendance is not a stable demographic datum for an individual but rather a dynamic series which can fluctuate over time for many reasons including slow disaffiliation (Bullivant). Plausibly some respondents answered the question on Mass attendance in terms of their historical or typical attendance (which might explain the small number of cases of 'Regular' attendees who claimed not to attend before or after the crisis). More likely it reflects the position as at the time of input, which may have changed as a result of abuse cases, as with the 'Nevers' who reported that they had *stopped* attending as a result of awareness of abuses in the Church—but who therefore must have *previously* attended.

31. Clements and Bullivant, 31.

32. Clements and Bullivant, 40.

33. See Bullivant, *Mass Exodus*, 223-52.



Bearing this in mind, care needs to be exercised in making generalised assumptions regarding the familiarity of Nevers with parish and diocesan media, Catholics friends etc. While many are likely to be long-term non-attenders, the data cross tabulation suggests that others may have been regular or occasional attenders until a change of practice arising from the impact of the Church's handling of child sexual abuses.<sup>33</sup>

A more fundamental problem relates to the boundaries chosen for these three categories. For example, should weekly (which is normative Church discipline) be treated as Regular, and anything less as Occasional, or is monthly a more generous (and realistic) category to capture regular commitment to Mass-going? At the other end of the scale, what does it mean to attend 'less than once a year? Is this best classified as functionally 'never' or taken at face value as self-designation (perhaps an intention) which falls short of determined non-attendance? Recent surveys in Britain and the US have faced the same problem and adopted various solutions,<sup>34</sup> depending on the goals and nature of the research, shown in Table 33:

Classification Scheme	Frequency of Attending Mass
Bullivant, <i>Catholicism in England and Wales</i> (2016)	Once a week or more
	Less often but at least once a month
	Less often but at least once a year
	Never or practically never
Bullivant, <i>Mass Exodus</i> (2019)	Regular practice: at least monthly
	Low/non-practice: less frequently (including never)
Bullivant and Clements, <i>Catholics in Contemporary Britain</i> (2022)	Weeklies: Every day, 'Three of four times a week', 'once a week'
	Irregulars: Every fortnight, Every month, every two to three months, once or twice a year
	Nevers
Pew Research Center (US, 2019)	At least weekly
	Less frequent (including never)

Table 3-3: Classification Schemes for Catholic Mass attendance

Our research was not interested in the dynamics of Mass-going as such, but only as a variable by which attitudes and impacts of child sexual abuse could be differentiated across strata in the Catholic population. Clearly, some differentiation between regular or frequent Mass-goers and less frequent or non-attenders was essential. Following Bullivant (2019) we have been cautious about making the weekly or more category the essential indicator of regular practice and associated commitment. This would have led to a very unevenly distributed set of classifications for analysis, and risked missing scrupulous Catholics who might not quite attend fifty-two weeks a year for various reasons, as well as those discovering new patterns of regular attendance. We considered monthly to be a generous boundary to capture a range of broadly regular Mass-going, At the

34. Clements and Bullivant, 37-45.



other end of the scale, there is much to be said for analysing the frequency of attendance over a fixed period (e.g. in the last year) which would have moved much or all the data from less than once a year into 'never'. In fact, on key questions regarding child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, the detailed data sometimes closely mirrored that of the 'Nevers', with a distribution between this and the other occasional attendees, whereas for other questions, it more closely followed the pattern of low occasional attenders (1-3 times a year).

For the sake of clarity in definitions, therefore, we settled on monthly and above as indicators of regular attendance, and any notified attendance as an indicator of occasional Mass-going, with only explicit 'Nevers' being in the final category.

The demographic data from our surveys, and findings from earlier research on Catholics in England and Wales can give a richer picture of these three categories of Mass-going.

### **Regular Mass-goers**

We treated as 'Regular' Mass-goers respondents who said that they attended Mass (excluding baptisms, weddings, and funerals) more than once a week, once a week, every 2 weeks, or once a month. This accounted for 27% of the population.

On the basis of normative Catholic practice, and the availability of services, it is reasonable to assume that the vast majority of weekly attenders attend Mass on a Sunday (or Saturday night, counting for the Sunday in Catholic practice). Those attending more than once a week probably attend during the week, rather than multiple Sunday services.

Various explanations can be advanced for those attending every two weeks or monthly. Apart from perhaps indicating a looser level of affiliation with the Church (belonging and believing) it is also possible that this reflects a diversity of practice (behaving) in some cases independent of fundamental beliefs or Catholic identity.

For example, among Interchurch families—so-called 'mixed marriages'—it is not unknown for couples to alternate attendance between two churches on a weekly basis. More common perhaps are non-religious obligations which affect attendance without necessarily indicating a changed identity (Sunday sports and other activities – either as participant or guardian). The possible impact of complex family situations cannot be ruled out, as some may have shared responsibility for care of a child or dependent relative, as well as work patterns (e.g. shift work, and increasingly, zero-hour 'gig economy' work). None of the above can be proved from the data but is included to indicate the complexity of Mass attendance as a variable, even for regular attenders.

Regarding attitudes towards the Church's handling of child sexual abuse, these regular attendees will have had greater opportunity to be informed through communication channels associated with the Church at various levels, both formally (e.g. through homilies, parish newsletters or Bishops' letters) as well as informal channels such as talking with other parishioners. The survey tests whether this is the case, and how the complex of practices and culture shared by such Regular Mass-goers affected their perception of the Church's handling of child sexual abuse.

In our survey, Regular Mass-goers had a significantly greater proportion of Catholics with an ethnic background other than white. They also evidenced a higher proportion of older Catholics (55+), and a low level of representation among 25-34 year-olds. See Chart 3-3.

Although women still form the majority of this Regular Mass-going segment, the ratio of women to men is, surprisingly slightly lower (54:46) than in the overall Catholic population (57:43).

The relative number of middle-class Catholics (social grade = ABC1) is significantly higher at 80% than in the overall Catholic population (75%).

35. Although the principal Good Friday service includes the reception of Holy Communion it is not technically Mass. However it can often have a

larger attendance and more diverse congregation than Easter Sunday and the liturgical distinction is unlikely to be widely recognised.

36. Catholics have memorial Masses said for the dead which otherwise non-practicing family members will sometimes attend.

## *Occasional Mass-goers*

This included respondents who registered their Mass attendance (excluding baptism, weddings, and funerals) as one of: every 2-3 months; 4-5 months; 6 months; once a year; less often (53%)

Catholics attending Mass once or two-three times a year could reasonably be assumed to attend at Christmas and Easter (including Good Friday),<sup>35</sup> for religious, cultural, or social reasons. Other significant annual dates such as the date of a loved one's death or Masses linked to family events such as schools, are also plausible explanations.<sup>36</sup> However, all of these consider the data on Mass attendance as a static piece of demographic data for an individual, interesting only in the large-scale trends it can show. Bullivant's work on disaffiliation clearly shows that varying frequency of Mass attendance can also be a function of fluctuating affiliation.

Remembering that this question in the survey collects a snapshot of what is in reality (and perhaps especially for Occasional Mass-goers) a potentially dynamic piece of data, it is likely that the Occasional grouping includes 'lapsed' Catholics who are at various points on a journey towards disaffiliation but who have not quite yet let go of the most normative practice (even if the formal rule of weekly attendance is ignored), and have certainly not stopped self-identifying as Catholic.

A particularly interesting subgroup within the Occasional segment is those attending every 2-3 months. This subset has a significantly higher proportion of both working Catholics (who make up 72% of all Occasional attenders, compared with 62% for All Catholics) and parents/guardians of 12-16 year-olds (17% of the Occasional Mass-goers) both of which factors may contribute to an irregular attendance pattern.

A similar pattern is seen among the once-every-two-weeks Mass-goers regarding workers (who comprise 77% of those attending every-two-weeks subset), and parent/guardians of 5-11 year olds (23%).

In our survey Occasional Mass-goers included a lower number of those aged 55+ (34%) compared to the overall distribution (39%) and Regulars (45%), but a larger proportion of 25-34-year olds (20% versus 17% for All Catholics, and 13% for Regular Mass-goers).

Demographics for sex, ethnicity, and social grade for Occasional attenders were very similar to the distribution for all Catholics (see Appendix A).



## Non-Mass-goers (Nevers)

This group is apparently the most straightforward to define, being simply those who self-identify as Catholic but who never go to Mass apart from occasions such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals. It is reasonable to expect this group to include those who consider themselves 'culturally' Catholic, or Catholic simply as a fact of childhood baptism or upbringing, but where any residual religious aspect may be long-forgotten or never in place. However, the notion of Catholic identity is complex and any assumptions about this group need to be held lightly in the absence of detailed data regarding their religious and cultural identity.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, bearing in mind the dynamic nature of data on Mass-going, and the possibility of disaffiliation in practice before disaffiliation in belonging, it is important to note that the survey data collects two pieces of information which are not straightforward to interpret in relation to each other. While the question on Mass-going implicitly asked about *present practice*, questions later in the survey asked *historical questions about changes in practice* as a result of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church.

Taking these data at face value, without any allowance for error or confusion in the data input, only 66% of Nevers said '*Not applicable—I never attended Mass before or after hearing about this*' when asked about the impact on their practice, and a further 4% answered 'don't' know'. Therefore 30% of the 'Nevers' were Mass-going Catholics before being aware of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church.

16% of the Nevers say their Mass attendance stopped completely. But the rest of the data is more difficult to interpret: 11% of Nevers say that their Mass attendance did not reduce at all. Given that the option 'It has not reduced my attendance at all' occurred earlier in the list than 'Not applicable—I never attended Mass before or after hearing about this', it may simply reflect the fact that this 11% also never attended Mass before or after child sexual abuse awareness.

However, 3% of Nevers state that their Mass attendance has *reduced* a little due to child sexual abuse – despite the attendance in question being 'Never'. Is this a simple error in the response, or does it reflect those who had *already* reduced affiliation to the level of once a year or less and who have now stepped over the threshold to complete non-attendance? Therefore, the data suggests that 16-19% of those categorised as never attending Mass at the time the survey was completed may have previously attended to some degree but stopped partially or entirely as a result of their perception of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church.

In interpreting this it is important to note that the survey took place very shortly after Covid-19 restrictions were lifted, and that the impact of the pandemic on Mass-going, either as a primary or auxiliary cause cannot be ignored, although the effect cannot be deduced from this survey.

In our survey, Nevers showed an age distribution close to Regular Mass-goers, with slightly lower percentages of younger (18-34) groups and slightly higher representation among older groups (Chart 3-3).

Gender balance mirror Regular Mass-goers, with slightly higher number of men than the overall Catholic population: 45% male, 55% female. The ethnicity of this segment has more individuals from a white background (90% versus 87% overall and 83% for Regulars).

Nevers also accounted for a significant proportion of working-class Catholics (socio-economic group C2DE): 34%, compared to 25% for All Catholics.

37. See Bullivant, *Mass Exodus*, 18-22.

### Don't Know

Respondents who replied 'Don't Know' when asked about Mass attendance constituted less than 0.01% of the survey (0.008%, N=25) and no strong correlation was evident with a particular demographic or with the answers to questions on practice and attitudes). In this report, they are excluded from the three sub-categories for Mass attendance but are included in the total for 'All Catholics'.

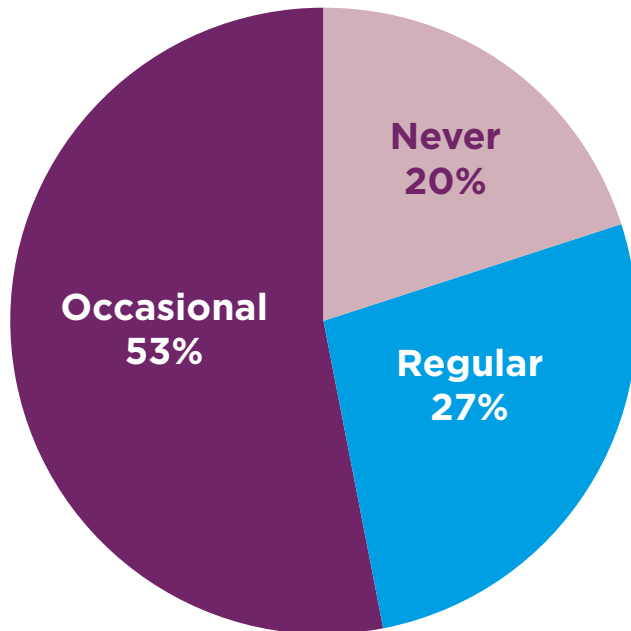


Chart 3-2: Distribution of simplified grouping for Mass attendance (excluding "Don't know", <0.01%).

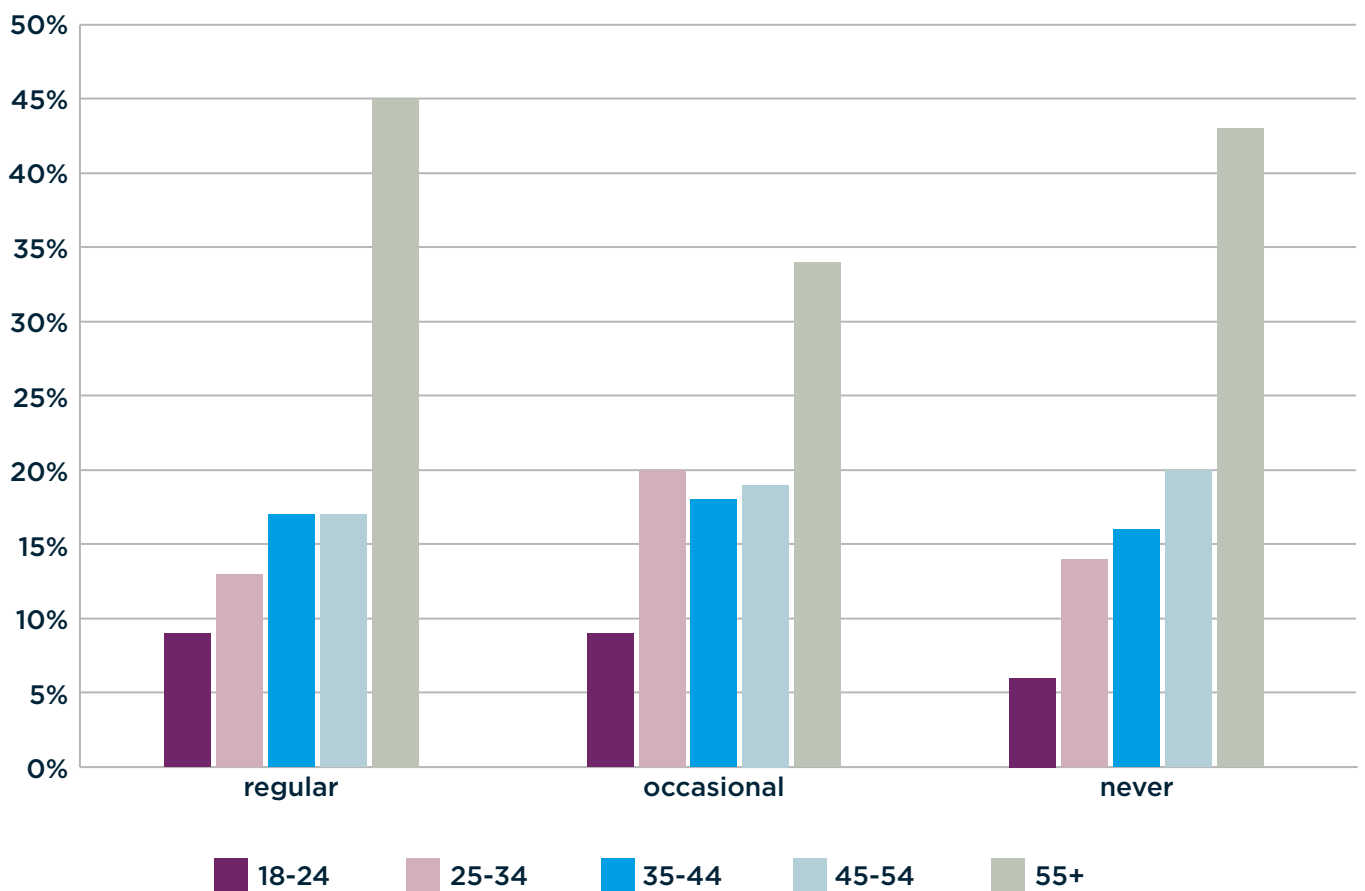


Chart 3-3: Composition of Mass-going segments by age.

## Questionnaire design

In addition to gathering data on Mass attendance and demographics, the survey explored three key questions:

- What **awareness** do Catholics have of issues relating to child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, and how did they come by that information?
- What **attitudes** do Catholics hold towards the Church's handling of child sexual abuse within the Church?
- What **impact** has child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in England and Wales had on key elements of practice for ordinary Catholics? (i.e. not just those entrusted with a specific ministry or professional responsibility, or affected directly by child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church)?

## Free text comments

In addition to the structured questions, we allowed respondents to add a text comment on any aspect of child sexual abuse.

**'Is there anything else you wish to say in regard of child sexual abuse and the Catholic Church in England and Wales?'**

734 responses were received (24% of participants). This was not designed to be correlated with the quantitative data, nor to replicate the qualitative work being done elsewhere in the project, but to help the researchers construct a more fully fleshed-out, three-dimensional picture of the real people who took part, allowing some individual voices to surface, and to provoke and assist interpretation of the data in concrete English and Welsh Catholic contexts. The responses collected do not therefore form part of a coded analysis but reminded the investigators of the complexity of the reality outlined in the bare data. For example,

- that Mass-going is a dynamic practice, not a simple demographic – one respondent described returning to Mass after two years keeping away from the church.
- that faith in God and a spiritual life can be intellectually and practically distinct from faith in the Church or the clergy.
- That among this survey of over three thousand Catholics, which neither selected on the basis of, nor enquired regarding, direct experience of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, some individuals nonetheless named themselves as survivors or victims, and others volunteered that they held an official role in formulating some element of the Church's responses. As survivors have elsewhere reminded the Church, there is no way of knowing in advance whether survivors will be present in any given audience.

The free text comments have also helped in identifying areas for possible further investigation.

No detailed analysis of the free text data was performed for two reasons. Technically, the survey was not designed to collect this data in a way that would lend itself to analysis. More significantly, in term of the methodology for the overall *Boundary Breaking* project, the quantitative analysis of child sexual abuse in the Church should be led by hearing the voices of the survivors and victims, as the complementary qualitative report addresses.

## Relationship of this report to Qualitative Research

The quantitative survey which forms the basis of this report was commissioned to complement the principal *Boundary Breaking* report, *The Cross of the Moment*, which is a major piece of qualitative research focussed on those directly impacted by abuse, or in close proximity to those directly affected. It gives primacy to survivors in its scope and methodology, and is intentionally theological both in attending to the theology of stories people tell and how they act, and in its mode of reflection. The present quantitative report, *Attitudes of Catholics in England and Wales*, complements *The Cross of the Moment* by providing a large-scale, quantitative survey of some aspects of how the diverse group of people self-identifying as Catholic in England and Wales experienced certain important aspects of the abuse crisis regardless of whether or not they were directly impacted or professionally involved in dealing with cases.

Each of the research reports identifies both impact and resilience among Catholics affected by the abuse crisis.

## Ethics

Our research was conducted according to the ethical standards and practices required by Durham University. The potentially traumatic nature of the topic raised the need for particular ethical sensitivity in formulating and operating the survey. Although the questions in this survey did not inquire as to any personal experience of child sexual abuse, we were alert to the likelihood of some participants having direct or indirect experience of abuse (not only in the Church, and not only relating to sexual abuse of children). At the start of the survey, we emphasised the limited scope of this particular piece of research: to ‘measure awareness of and/or being informed about the issues, concerns, and cares concerning child sexual abuse within the Catholic Church in England and Wales.’ The survey reassured participants that survey responses would remain anonymous, and that answers would never be analysed individually. Part way through the survey, as a reminder, participants were advised: ‘If you find them difficult, please take a break and come back to them. Please do not proceed if you think you will be adversely affected by answering questions on this topic.’ For particularly sensitive questions, a ‘Prefer not to say’ option was given. A contact list of organisations able to offer various kinds of support was provided in case any participants felt a need to talk to someone after taking the survey.

## Terminology

For ease of reading in the detailed sections of the report, references to ‘Church’ without further qualification refer to the Catholic Church; ‘abuse’ refers specifically to cases of child sexual abuse; and ‘Catholics’ refers to self-identified Roman Catholics in England and Wales.



## 4. How do Catholics in England and Wales view child sexual abuse in the Church?

The Roman Catholic Church Investigation Report produced by IICSA reports that between 1970 and 2015, the Catholic Church in England and Wales received more than 3,000 complaints of child sexual abuse against more than 900 individuals connected to the Church and involving over 1,750 victims and complainants. However many cases pass unreported and hence the true scale of child sexual abuse is likely to be greater.<sup>38</sup>

This paints a familiar picture in the Anglophone world of Catholicism and beyond, with many allegations and disclosures being historical, relating to events during the 1970s and 1980s. This twenty to thirty-year gap in reporting is now widely understood to be in line with data on the delayed onset of post-traumatic stress, with many children unable to process traumatic events and so repressing those memories for decades (26 years on average).<sup>39</sup> The historical nature of many allegations also reminds us that abuse happens in specific historical and social contexts. Since the cluster of cases relating to the 1970s and 1980s, new sites of abuse with distinct characteristics have been uncovered in Church and elsewhere, such as the various forms of internet-based child abuse and other online offences.

How do Catholics view the situation in the Church now? Given the widespread reporting of historical and recent abuse, and of systemic failures in dealing with this, a deep suspicion might be expected. On the other hand, there have been changes in how the Church listens to victims, sustains safeguarding, and cooperates with civil authorities, among other changes in practice and culture. Nonetheless, highly respected voices have criticised the Church for failing to make necessary reforms, or not making them quickly enough.<sup>40</sup> But what does the evidence tell us

of the views of ‘ordinary Catholics’—those not selected on the basis of their proximity to abuse, but as representative of the Catholic population of England sitting in the pews (or not) each week?

While the evidence for knowing whether child sexual abuse is a thing of the past in the Church may take decades to emerge for the reasons given above (and, globally, recognising the different stages of maturity of local churches and cultures in recognizing the reality of abuse) we wanted to understand the attitudes held by Catholics towards a claim that this was the case.

Well-substantiated media reports of abuse in other institutions and faith groups from across the globe have arguably configured the local understanding against a widespread background of institutional and global abuse: the local and the Universal coincide. Does the evidence demonstrate any patterns regarding what kind of opinions are dominant in different segments of the Catholic population on these comparative issues?

Our research showed that on all these metrics there is a significant variation between segments of the population. Catholics who attend Mass more frequently (Regulars) are more likely to hold a positive view of how the Catholic Church has handled the abuse crisis, both in relation to history and in relation to other sites of abuse. Non-attenders (Nevers) are much more likely to hold more negative views.

Care is needed in interpreting this general pattern, for sociological and theological reasons.

As previously observed, the precise nature of infrequent and non-attenders is complex, and research suggests it can include various stages in a protracted disaffiliation, cultural, familial, or

38. IICSA, *The Roman Catholic Church Investigation Report*, A.1.2

39. Ali M. Al-Asadi, ‘A Comparison Between Male and Female Survivors of Sexual Abuse and Assault in Relation to Age at Admission to Therapy, Age of Onset, and Age at

*Last Sexual Assault: Retrospective Observational Study*, *JMIRx Med* 2/4:e23713 (2021), doi: 10.2196/23713.

40. For example, the critical resignations of Marie Collins (2017) and Hans Zollner (2023) from the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of

Minors: See respectively <https://www.ncronline.org/exclusive-survivor-explains-decision-leave-vaticans-abuse-commission> and <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/16881/fr-hans-zollner-resigns-from-child-protection-body>.



political sense of belonging, residual childhood identity and other factors.<sup>41</sup> Free text comments in the survey qualified individual Catholic identity as being 'born a Catholic' or being a 'Baptised Catholic', for example. In a survey of this kind, the data must be allowed to speak for itself and not be pre-formed to fit assumptions about who these people are, how they interact or are informed about the church, and so on. To give a very simple example, a consistent non-attender may be married to or living with a weekly Mass-goer. The findings of our research therefore present data for 'All Catholics', as well as for the three major Mass-going classifications.

Theologically too, recent initiatives in 'synodality' within the Catholic Church under Pope Francis have emphasised that the Church is for everyone. In this light, understanding those who identify as Catholic, not just Regular Mass-goers, as part of the rich and messy body of 'Catholics' in England and Wales, is appropriate.

Finally, although the numbers of abuse survivors in our sample is unknown and likely to be statistically small, qualitative research has shown that for some survivors attending Mass, or entering a church building, is difficult or impossible because of their experience of abuse. Taking seriously respondents' self-identification as Catholic regardless of their Mass-going profile acknowledges this fact.

Having treated Catholics as a single, if complex body, further analysis looks at the significant differences correlated to Mass-going practice, and to selected demographics.

As some of the free-text comments reminded us, Mass attendance does not indicate strength of faith in God, but rather the mode of religious (specifically ecclesial) practice.

41. See Bullivant, *Mass Exodus*.



**There is a significant variation between segments of the population. Catholics who attend Mass more frequently (Regulars) are more likely to hold a positive view of how the Catholic Church has handled the abuse crisis, both in relation to history and in relation to other sites of abuse. Non-attenders (Nevers) are much more likely to hold more negative views.**



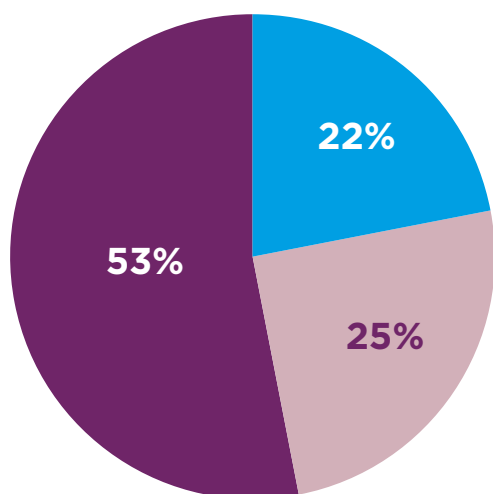
## Is child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church seen as a thing of the past?

Half of all Catholics view child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church as an ongoing issue. A quarter consider it 'history'.

Despite the historical nature of many cases, and the efforts made at international, national, and local levels to listen to and respect survivors and to put safeguarding practices in place, our survey showed that among Catholics in England and Wales, around half (53%) believe child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church remains an ongoing issue. Only a quarter of respondents (25%) believed it to be a thing of the past.

**Respondents were asked to select which of the following statements best applied to them:**

- **I believe child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church is a thing of the past.**
- **I believe child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church remains an ongoing issue.**
- **Don't know.**



- I believe that child sex abuse in the Catholic Church is a thing of the past
- I believe child sex abuse in the Catholic Church remains an ongoing issue
- Don't know

Chart 4-1: Perception of Catholics in England and Wales as to whether child sexual abuse in the Church is a thing of the past.

## *Attitudes vary significantly depending on Mass attendance*

When this overall figure is broken down by Mass attendance, a pattern begins to emerge which is seen much more strongly elsewhere in the survey. There is a positive correlation between frequency of Mass-going and a more positive or optimistic view of the Church in relation to handling the abuse crisis.

Stated in general terms: Catholics who attend Mass on a regular basis are more likely to view child sexual abuse as problem which the church is addressing reasonably well, whilst those who never attend but identify as Catholic tend to view the extent of abuse and the effectiveness of the Church's response is a much more negative or pessimistic way, with Occasional Mass attenders (less than monthly) falling between these two extremes. Among Regular Mass attendees, weekly and once every two week attendees often have a significantly more positive attitude to the Church's efforts than those attending less often.

Even so, among Regular Mass attenders—the groups with the most optimistic view on this—half (50%) view child sexual abuse as an ongoing issue for the Church. The more significant difference in this group compared to the overall Catholic population is that a much larger percentage are confident that child sexual abuse is consigned to history, with a third (32%) of Regular Mass-goers viewing child sexual abuse as a thing of the past. Even among the small sample of those attending more than once a week (4.4% of respondents), almost half (49%) consider child sexual abuse to be an ongoing issue, with 38% seeing it as a thing of the past. In general, and even among Regular Mass-goers around half view child sexual abuse as an ongoing issue for the Church.

Among Nevers, in contrast, only 17% consider child sexual abuse a thing of the past, with 61% viewing it as an ongoing issue.

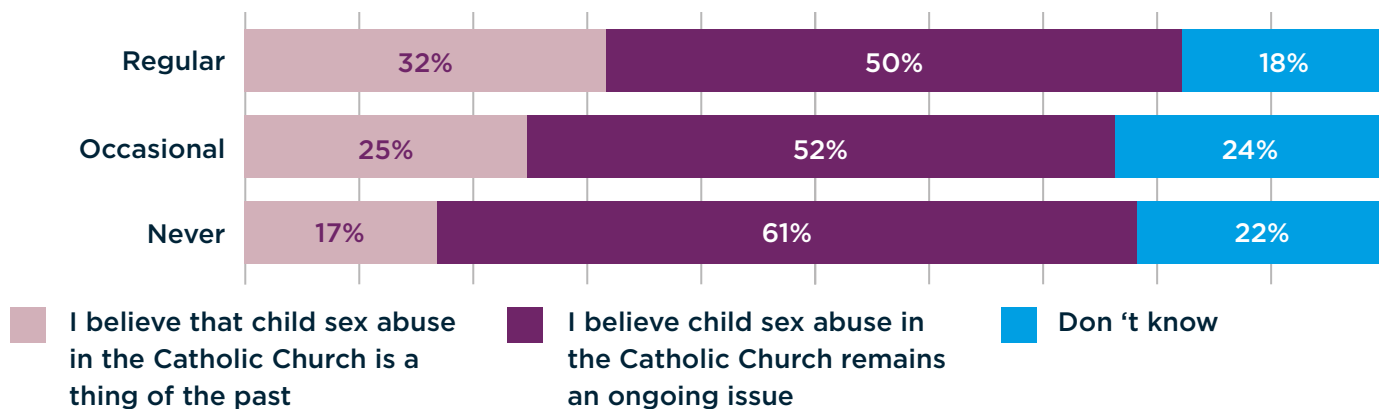


Chart 4-2: Perception of child sexual abuse as an ongoing issue, by Mass attendance.

**Overall, Younger Catholics have a less optimistic view**

Although Mass attendance is the most significant factor in the distribution of perception of child sexual abuse as historical or ongoing, and no significant variation is found among older age brackets (25+), 18-24 years old show a significantly different pattern. Among this youngest age group only 18% believe child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church to be a thing of the past (All Catholics = 25%), with two-thirds (66%) believing it to be an ongoing issue.

Breaking this down by Mass attendance shows an unexpected pattern. 18-24 year-olds who are Regular Mass-goers hold very similar views to the Regular Mass-going population as a whole on whether child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church is a thing of the past or not. However, for Occasional Mass-goers the 18-24 age group shows a markedly more negative or pessimistic view in this regard (the sample of 18-24 year-old Nevers, N=38, is too small to draw robust conclusion). See Table 4-1. 'Don't know' answers account for the shortfall from 100%.

This is plausibly a function of survivorship bias insofar as young Catholics who regularly attend Mass, given the social cost involved, are likely to be deeply committed in a way that cannot be assumed for older regular attenders. Conversely young Catholics who might have held more critical views are likely to have simply left the Church and be missing from the sample.<sup>42</sup> It may also relate to the reinforcing emotional, cognitive, and social effects of regular practice, as well as pragmatically having access to internal Catholic communications showing positive developments (e.g. in safeguarding) in addition to more critical mainstream media coverage. These sources are considered further in Chapter 6.



42. Clement and Bullivant, 42-5.

No significant variation on this question was observed between male and female, or among socio-economic class. However, two-thirds of Catholics (67%) who were aware of abuse cases in their own diocese believe child sexual abuse to be an ongoing issue, with only one in five (20%) believing it to be historical.

	Thing of the Past	Ongoing Issue
Regular: All	32%	50%
Regular: 18-24	34%	51%
Occasional: All	25%	52%
Occasional: 18-24	12%	70%
Never: All	17%	61%

Table 4-1: Is child sexual abuse within the Catholic Church seen as a thing of the past? 18-24 age groups by Mass-going frequency.

***Further change is seen as necessary, regardless of whether abuse is considered primarily historical or ongoing.***

One further piece of data can help in interpreting this picture. We also asked participants to agree or disagree with the statement ‘I feel that the Church has to change a great deal to prevent any further child sexual abuse’.

Although over half of the Catholics surveyed had considered child sexual abuse to be an ongoing issue for the church, almost four-fifths (79%) thought that the Church has to change a great deal to prevent any further child sexual abuse.<sup>43</sup> Cross-tabulating the two sets of data, two-thirds (66%) of Catholics *who considered child sexual abuse to be a thing of the past* nonetheless also agreed that the Church needs to change to prevent further cases.

Whilst much has been done by the Catholic Church to address systematic failings and risks, as well as individual cases of abuse, our research shows that, nonetheless, an overwhelming attitude prevails among Catholics in England and Wales that the Church needs to take further preventative—as well as pastoral and restorative—actions regarding child sexual abuse in order to establish and sustain a safe and healthy Church.

**Is child sexual abuse viewed as more prevalent in the Catholic Church than in other parts of society?**

We also explored how Catholics viewed the prevalence of child sexual abuse among Catholic clergy compared to leaders in other faith groups, among other institutions working with children and in other parts of society.

Behind the attitudes to child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church lies an empirical question which the current survey was not designed to answer: Is child sexual abuse actually more prevalent in the Catholic Church than other religious institutions, organisations, or indeed, other sectors of society that work with children, including the institution of family? Historically, the Home Office’s counting rules for recorded crime have not required police forces to record whether the criminal circumstances involved a religious organisation or setting. Hence, there is no way of reliably knowing the extent to which many of the child sexual offences reported to police in England and Wales involved religious organisations and settings.<sup>44</sup> Information on non-recent child sexual abuse cases provided by The National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) for IICSA suggests that offences committed within religious organisations or setting amounted to 11% of all known institutions, and 10%

43. This was calculated as the sum of those who replied ‘strongly agree’ or ‘tend to agree’ on a five-point Likert scale.

44. IICSA ‘Child protection in religious organisations and settings investigation report’ Section B.2.4.

of suspects were employed by, or somehow linked to, a religious organisation or setting.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, as IICSA suggested, abuse within religious settings suggest that occurrences may be under-reported, both internally within the organisations and externally to statutory agencies, and that religious organisations have their own organisational and cultural barriers to reporting which are ‘numerous, varied, and powerful.’<sup>46</sup> For example, ‘Work carried out in the Church of England suggests that those who are religious believers find it difficult to contemplate that fellow members of a congregation or religious leaders could perpetrate abuse.’<sup>47</sup> Research in a Catholic context reached a similar conclusion, arguing that institutional loyalties contributed to the failure of institutions to respond appropriately to allegations of child sexual abuse.<sup>48</sup>

In the light of such research, what does the evidence tell us about the relationships between one (not absolute) marker of institutional loyalty (frequency of Mass attendance) and perception of the prevalence of child sexual abuse within the Catholic Church, compared to other social groups?

We asked self-identifying Catholics in England and Wales to say how they thought the level of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church compared to three other groups:

- Leaders of other faith communities
- Other institutions that work with children
- Other parts of society

Across these three related questions, a substantial majority of Catholics consider the prevalence of child sexual abuse among Catholic clergy to be similar to other parts of society or simply don’t know. There is nonetheless a substantial belief that child sexual abuse is more prevalent among Catholic clergy than other parts of society (around 28% for all 3 comparisons) with 7-8% believing it to be much more prevalent. The degree to which this negative view of the Church is held increases among less frequent and non- Mass attenders (Table 4-2 to 4-3),

When ‘about the same’ and ‘don’t know’ responses are taken out, the differences between the three Mass-going groups become clear, showing more positive attitudes associated with more frequent Mass attendance (Chart 4-3 to 4-5).



45. IICSA ‘Child protection in religious organisations and settings investigation report’ Section B.2.5.

46. IICSA ‘Child protection in religious organisations and settings investigation report’ Section B.1.3.

47. IICSA ‘Child protection in religious organisations and settings investigation report’ Section B.1.3.

48. Kiara Minto, Matthew J. Hornsey, Nicole Gillespie, Karen Healy, and Jolanda Jetten, ‘A Social Identity Approach to Understanding Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Allegations’, PLoS ONE 11/4: e0153205 (2016).

*In general, do you think child sexual abuse is more or less common among Catholic clergy when compared to leaders in other faith communities, or it is about the same?*

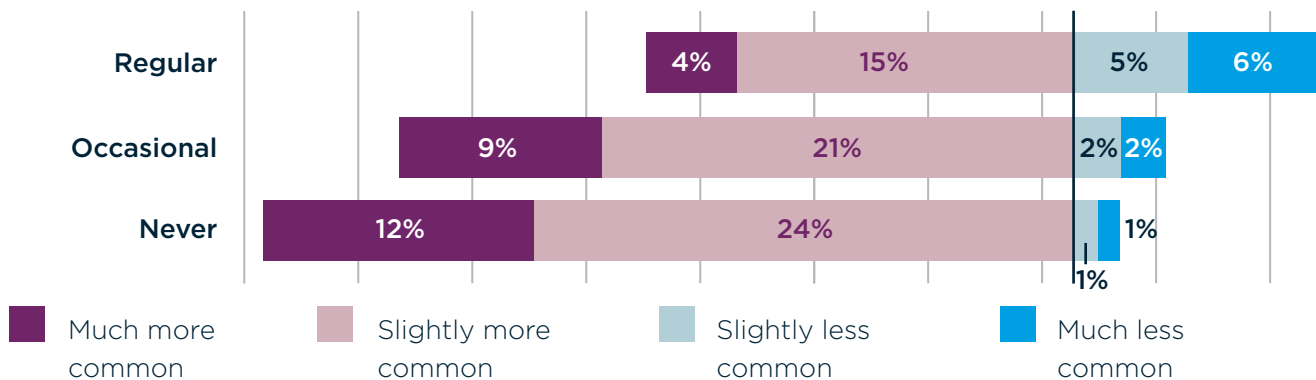


Chart 4-3: Perception of child sexual abuse as more or less common in Catholic clergy compared to leaders of other faith communities (excluding 'about the same', 'don't know' and 'prefer not to say').

Compared to leaders of other faith communities	ALL	Regular	Occasional	Never
Much more common among Catholic clergy	8%	4%	9%	12%
Slightly more common among Catholic Clergy	20%	15%	21%	24%
<b>About the same as other faith communities</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>42%</b>
Slightly less common among Catholic clergy	3%	5%	2%	1%
Much less common among Catholic clergy	3%	6%	2%	1%
Don't know	16%	13%	15%	20%
Prefer not to say	0%	0%	1%	0%

Table 4-2: Perception that child sexual abuse is more or less common among Catholic clergy compared to leaders of other faith communities.

*In general, do you think child sexual abuse is more or less common among Catholic clergy when compared to other institutions that work with children, or it is about the same?*

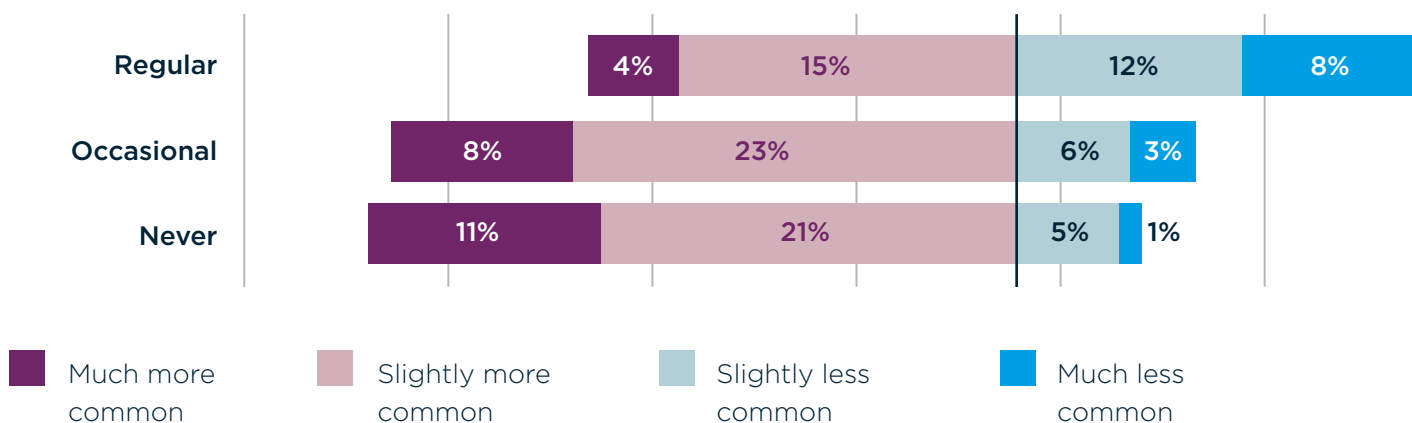


Chart 4-4: Perception of child sexual abuse as more or less common in Catholic clergy compared to other institutions that work with children (excluding 'about the same', 'don't know' and 'prefer not to say').

Compared to other institutions that work with children	ALL	Regular	Occasional	Never
Much more common among Catholic clergy	7%	4%	8%	11%
Slightly more common among Catholic clergy	20%	15%	23%	21%
<b>About the same as other institutions</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>41%</b>
Slightly less common among Catholic clergy	7%	12%	6%	5%
Much less common among Catholic clergy	4%	8%	3%	1%
Don't know	16%	13%	16%	21%
Prefer not to say	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 4-3: Perception that child sexual abuse is more or less common among Catholic clergy compared to other institutions that work with children (excluding 'about the same', 'don't know' and 'prefer not to say').

*In general, do you think child sexual abuse is much more or less common among Catholic clergy when compared to other parts of society or it is about the same?*

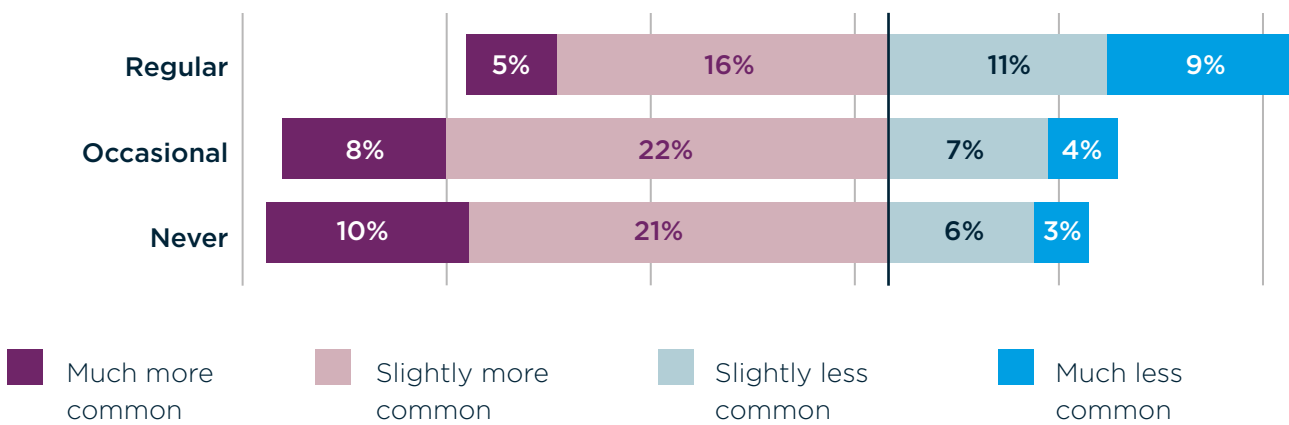


Chart 4-5: Perception of child sexual abuse as more or less common in Catholic clergy compared to other parts of society (excluding 'about the same', 'don't know' and 'prefer not to say').

Compared to other parts of society	ALL	Regular	Occasional	Never
Much more common among Catholic clergy	8%	5%	8%	10%
Slightly more common among Catholic clergy	20%	16%	22%	21%
<b>About the same as other parts of society</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>41%</b>
Slightly less common among Catholic clergy	8%	11%	7%	6%
Much less common among Catholic clergy	5%	9%	4%	3%
Don't know	14%	10%	14%	19%
Prefer not to say	0%	0%	1%	0%

Table 4-4: Perception that child sexual abuse is more or less common among Catholic clergy compared to other parts of society.

## Comparing trends across attitudes to different parts of society

To make the data relating to these degrees of perception, Mass-going groups, and different comparison groups more digestible, while taking strength of opinion into account rather than a simple net positive/net negative count, a weighted average score was calculated on the following 1-5, with higher values representing a positive or optimistic view of the Catholic Church in this regard:

Response	Score
Much more common among Catholic clergy	1
Slightly more common among Catholic clergy	2
About the same	3
Slightly less common among Catholic clergy	4
Much less common among Catholic clergy	5
<i>Don't know</i>	<i>Excluded</i>
<i>Prefer to not to say.</i>	<i>Excluded</i>

Table 4-5: Scoring grid for sentiment analysis on Catholic clergy compared to other parts of society.

The pattern already observed whereby increasing distance from Catholic practice (Mass-going) tends to a more negative view of the Church in relation to child sexual abuse, while greater proximity to this normative practice correlates with a more positive view of Catholic clergy vis-a-vis other parts of society in this regard.

There are a few differences in detail, which will be noted below, but the pattern for all three comparisons is strikingly consistent, as can be seen in the chart below. Significantly, the sentiment score is below 3 ('about the same') for all three sectors of society except for regular Mass-goers, which are clustered tightly around this midpoint value. On the one hand, this sounds like a strongly negative judgement on the Church. On the other hand, even the lowest sentiment score—among non-Mass-goers—in relation to other faith leaders and other institutions, are scored at 2.5, which is as near to 'about the same' as to 'slightly more common in the Catholic Church'. In other words, the typical view across the Catholic population in England and Wales is that child sexual abuse is slightly more prevalent in the Catholic church than in other sectors of society, with other faith communities seen as closest to the Church in terms of this issue.



Chart 4-6: Perception (sentiment score) of the extent of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church compared with other sectors of society. 1= much more common in Catholic Church to 5= much less common in Catholic Church).<sup>49</sup>

49. These sentiment scores did not form part of the YouGov report and are based on our own analysis of the YouGov data.



For all three comparisons, the proportion of regular attendees viewing abuse as less prevalent among Catholic clergy is significantly higher than across Catholics as a whole. For example, comparing child sexual abuse between Catholic Clergy and leaders of other faith communities, 5% of Catholics consider this to be less among Catholic clergy, but 10% of regular Mass-goers consider this to be the case. Among those attending Mass more than once a week, this figure increases to almost 1 in 5 (20%). Conversely only 3% of non-attenders (Nevers) consider such abuse to be less widespread among Catholic clergy than leaders of other faiths.

When compared to other institutions working with children the polarisation is even more pronounced, with 38% of more-than-weekly Mass-goers considering abuse to be less prevalent among Catholic clergy, but only 5% of Nevers believing this. We did not ask participants to identify with which institutions they were comparing the Catholic Church in this question, but widespread media coverage of abuse in organisations such as the BBC, sporting institutions, and the Scouting movement is a likely point of reference for respondents considering 'Other institutions who work with children'. Data for the comparisons between the Catholic Church and other faith leaders, institutions working with children, and other parts of society, are presented by Mass-going groups in Table 4-2 to Table 4-4.

As with views on child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church as an ongoing issue or historical, there is no significant difference between male and female in respect of an overall positive or negative perception of the church. However, men are twice as likely to hold a strongly positive view ('Much less common in the Catholic Church' across all three categories than women, whilst women are consistently more likely than men to express 'don't know' (Table 4-6).



**When compared to other institutions working with children the polarisation is even more pronounced, with 38% of more-than-weekly Mass-goers considering abuse to be less prevalent among Catholic clergy, but only 5% of Nevers believing this.**



### Younger Catholics are more likely to hold strong opinions

Among the 18-24 age group, significantly lower numbers of respondents hold a view that abuse is about the same among Catholic clergy (Table 47), with correspondingly higher numbers in both more positive and more negative views of the Church across all three comparisons with other parts of society.

In general, there is a correlation between a more positive view of the church vis-à-vis society and increasing age, dramatically so for the 55+ group. However the 18-24 age group does not entirely

follow this trend. Although a higher proportion of this youngest age group hold a negative opinion of the Church than is found in the overall Catholic population, it is also the case that the 18-24 year-old group has a higher proportion of respondents holding a more positive view than is found in the overall Catholic population. The effect of these two factors is that the 18-24 year-old group is more polarised on this issue, and has a significantly smaller population of 18-24 year old Catholics who think that occurrences of abuse are about the same in the church as elsewhere in society.

	Faith Leaders		Institutions that work with children		Society	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Much more common among Catholic clergy	8%	9%	7%	7%	10%	6%
Slightly more common among Catholic clergy	19%	20%	21%	20%	19%	21%
About the same as other faith communities	52%	49%	44%	45%	44%	45%
<b>Slightly less common among Catholic clergy*</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>9%</b>
<b>Much less common among Catholic clergy*</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>4%</b>
Don't know	13%	18%	13%	19%	12%	16%
Prefer not to say	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 4-6: Effect of gender on perception of child sexual abuse in Catholic Church compared to other parts of society (P < 0.001).

	Faith Leaders		Institutions that work with children		Society	
	18-24	All	18-24	All	18-24	All
About the same	39%	51%	27%	44%	33%	44%
More common (sum of much more + slightly more common)	37%	28%	37%	28%	31%	28%
Less common (sum of much less + slightly less common)	9%	5%	19%	11%	20%	13%

Table 4-7: Difference in perception of 18-24 year-olds regarding abuse in Catholic Church compared to other parts of society (P<0.001).

The close correlation between levels of Mass attendance and more optimistic or positive views on the extent and persistence of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church raises important questions for what further steps the Church might take to prevent further occurrences and treat historical cases justly. Here ‘the Church’ cannot simply be those in positions of authority but must include all active members and permeate the culture, identity, and practice of the Church at all levels. While effecting change in Nevers through church rather than society may be unrealistic, the data at least raises the issue for practicing Catholics to be alert to the possibility of their own bias and limited perspective.

A comparison with similar questions asked in the US Pew Research Center Survey is given in **Appendix B**.



## 5. How do Catholics in England and Wales view the Church's handling of child sexual abuse cases?

Attitudes towards the crisis of abuse in the Church are not based only on the existence of individual cases, but on a perception of systemic failures in the Church's response at all levels, including moving clergy accused of abuse rather than dealing with the issues, failure to cooperate or notify civil authorities, and a code of silence—compared to the Mafia's *omerta*<sup>50</sup>—which prioritised the reputation of the institution and those in power above the victims. *The Cross of the Moment* contrasts this with a desire in some circles for a 'Gospel-based approach' recognising a fundamental incompatibility between practices of ecclesial self-interest or clericalism and the Christian Gospel.<sup>51</sup> But how do Catholics hear of the Church's response, and how do they evaluate it? Given the complexity of the Catholic population already mentioned, what does the evidence show regarding the perception of Catholics of abuse cases and responses at different levels of Church organisation?

The distancing trend we have already noted regarding Mass-going and attitudes towards the prevalence and persistence of child sexual abuse is also seen in the attitude of Catholics towards the activities of bishops (including Pope Francis) in response to cases and allegations of child sexual abuse in the Church. This calls for some care in interpretation. On the one hand, the

three types of Mass-goers—Regular, Occasional, Never—will generally have very different levels of opportunity to access information that is shared in a church setting, particularly during Mass, but also—if we take Mass-going as a proxy for church involvement—through such things as documents available in the church building (e.g. safeguarding policies and guidance on a noticeboard, or available to take away). On the other hand, it is presumptive to assume that individuals with low or even no Mass attendance have no access to such things. Church buildings often fulfil a social function, and 'lapsed' Catholics may nonetheless be living with more regular attenders who bring material home or discuss it. Furthermore, hearing about cases is a historical question, whereas Mass attendance is a question of current practice. Catholics classed in this research as 'Nevers' but who were previously Mass-going may have heard of cases in their previous Mass-going state (and this may even have been a factor in their change of practice).

Chapter 6 of this report will take a more detailed look at these different sources of information to probe some of these relations, but the data in this chapter allows us to see the scale of awareness and the attitudes to the Church's response to child sexual abuse initially in broader terms.

50. The term *omerta* was used by Archbishop Charles Scicluna of Malta in this context in Feb 2016. See <https://www.ncronline.org/abuse-expert-bishops-must-watch-spotlight-learn-reporting-key>.

51. See especially Chapters 5 and 6.

## Awareness and Attitudes regarding local, regional, and universal responses to abuse

Starting at the most local level, this section considered handling of the abuse crisis in the local diocese, led by an individual bishop, before looking at the Bishops Conference of England and Wales, and then the global or 'Universal' Catholic Church under Pope Francis.

For each of these levels, we probed how much Catholics knew about the handling of abuse cases by the relevant authority (diocesan bishop, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, and Pope Francis) and for those that expressed some knowledge, how they rated the authorities' handling of cases for each of these.

The percentage of Catholics who thought they knew a 'great deal' or a 'fair amount' of how abuse cases were handled at the various levels of church organisation is shown in Table 5-1, which shows an unsurprising correlation between more frequent Mass-going and a greater awareness. There is also a negative correlation between the proximity to abuse cases and awareness of how they are handled, with the global situation under Pope Francis known far better than that of England and Wales, and with local procedures within a diocese least well understood.

	Diocese (Bishop)	National (CBCEW)	Global (Pope Francis)
<b>All Catholics</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>20%</b>
Regular	18%	24%	39%
Occasional	4%	7%	16%
Never	2%	3%	8%

Table 5-1: Proportion of Catholics who knew a *great deal or fair amount* about the handling of abuse cases by these authorities.

Detailed breakdowns of the response are given in the subsection below for the local diocesan bishop, the Bishops of England and Wales as a whole, and for Pope Francis (responsible for the Universal Church).



When interpreting this data, it is important to note that although the survey questions asked about the handling of abuse cases by various bishops (including Pope Francis) the bishops at every level are assisted in their responsibilities regarding abuse by specialists including safeguarding teams and canon lawyers. However, the more positive ratings for Pope Francis are likely to reflect not only the apparatus of the Vatican bodies for the protection of minors, but the visibility of his public statements, changes to procedures, and direct interventions (e.g. sending an envoy to investigate the Chilean bishops, resulting in their offer of mass resignation).<sup>52</sup>

The overall picture of knowledge and of perception shows a great awareness of, and much more positive perception of, the Pope's efforts. It otherwise follows the pattern previously observed with greater awareness and more positive attitudes towards the Church being associated with Catholics who regularly attend Mass.

As in the comparison with other parts of society in the previous chapter, a weighted average score was calculated on a 1-5 scale, from 1 (very poor) to 5 (very well). As before, higher values represent a positive or optimistic view of the Catholic Church in this regard (Chart 5-1).

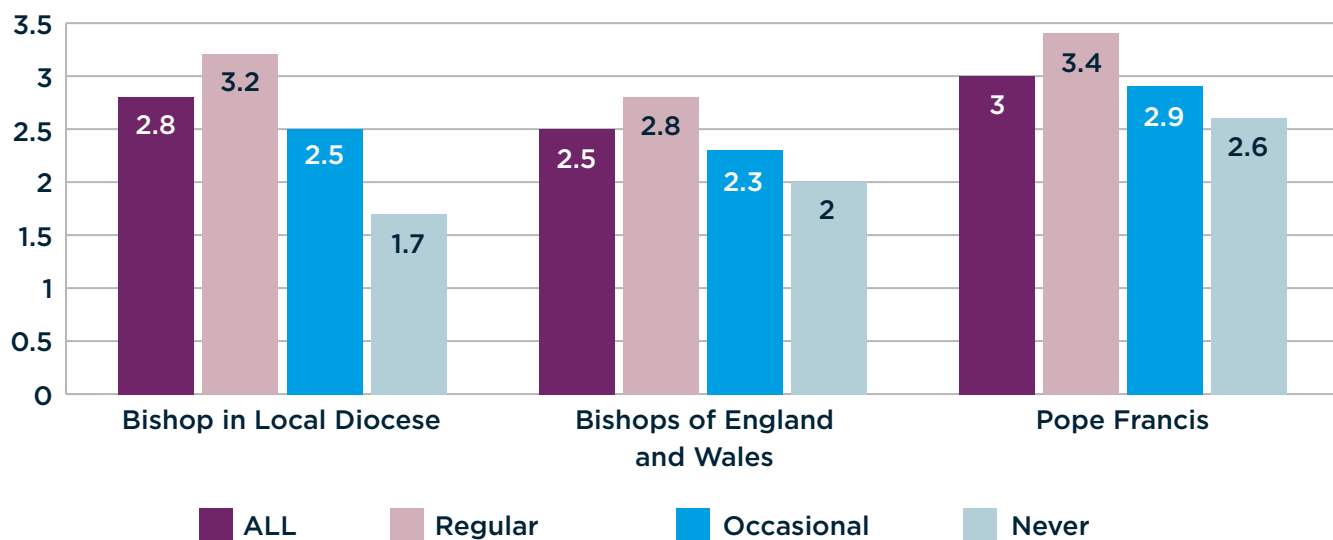


Chart 5-1: Rating of local, national, and global handling of abuse cases on 5-point scale from 1 (very poor) to 5 (very well).<sup>53</sup>

52. <https://www.ncronline.org/feature-series/chilean-bishops-resign/stories>

53. These calculated ratings did not form part of the YouGov report and are based on our own analysis of the YouGov data.

## Responding to abuse in the local diocese

An additional question for the local diocese asked if participants had heard of abuse cases in their diocese:

**Have you ever heard of cases of child sexual abuse in your Diocese?**

**Responses: Yes, I have / No, I haven't / Prefer not to say**

15% of Catholics have heard of cases in their own diocese. 5% of these Catholics knew a great deal, whilst 17% knew a fair amount, about their own bishop's handling of cases.

	Yes	No	Prefer not to say
ALL	15%	84%	1%
Regular	26%	73%	1%
Occasional	12%	87%	1%
Never	9%	89%	1%

Table 5-2: Awareness of Abuse Cases in Own Diocese by Mass-going classification ( $p < .001$ ).

**How much, if anything, do you know about your Bishop's handling of the cases concerning child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church?**

Across the entire population studied, over half (55%) knew nothing about their bishop's handling of cases, and a further 8% who replied 'don't know' are also likely to fall into this category.

Regular Mass-goers are far more likely to have a better awareness, with a quarter (26%) having heard of cases and 18% knowing either a great deal (3%) or a fair amount (15%) about their bishop's handling of cases (Table 5-3).



For those who had some knowledge of their bishop's handling of abuse cases, a further question was asked:

**Thinking about all you know, how poor or well would you rate your Bishop's handling of cases of child sexual abuse in the Church?**

	ALL	Regular	Occasional	Never
A great deal	1%	3%	0%	1%
A fair amount	6%	15%	4%	2%
Not very much	30%	44%	28%	15%
Nothing at all	55%	34%	59%	71%
Don't know	8%	5%	8%	11%

Table 5-3: Awareness of local Bishop's handling of abuse cases.

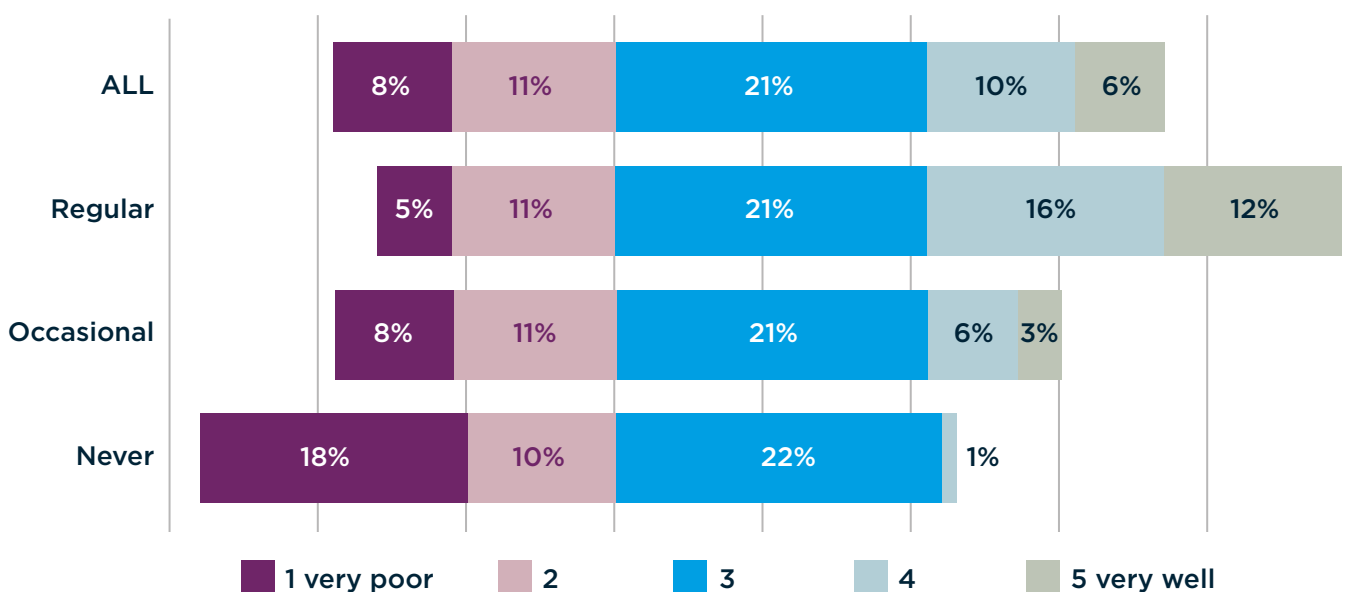


Chart 5-2: Rating for how well Diocesan Bishop handled abuse cases on scale of 1 (very poor) to 5 (very well).

Of those who had heard something about cases (N=1157) their opinion of the bishop's handling was fairly evenly divided across Catholics as a whole, with 19% expressing a negative sentiment, and 16% positive, but with the bulk of respondents giving a middling score, or stating 'Don't know'.

As shown in Chart 5-2, regular Mass-goers rate their bishop's handling better than occasional and non-attenders, continuing the trend of more positive attitudes from those most closely related to this key church practice.



## Responding to abuse in England and Wales

While fewer Catholics knew a great deal about initiatives taken at the level of the Bishops' Conference than about the local situation, almost twice as many knew 'a fair amount'. The overall degree of awareness was thus higher than for individual dioceses, but the perception of how well cases had been handled was lower.

We asked:

**How much, if anything, do you know about the Bishops of England and Wales's handling of the cases concerning child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church?**

Among all Catholics only a tiny proportion (1%) considered themselves to know a great deal of the national Catholic response, with a further 10% knowing a fair amount. As with the local diocese, the majority of Catholics knew not very much (38%) or nothing (43%) of the details, with 8% responding 'don't know'.

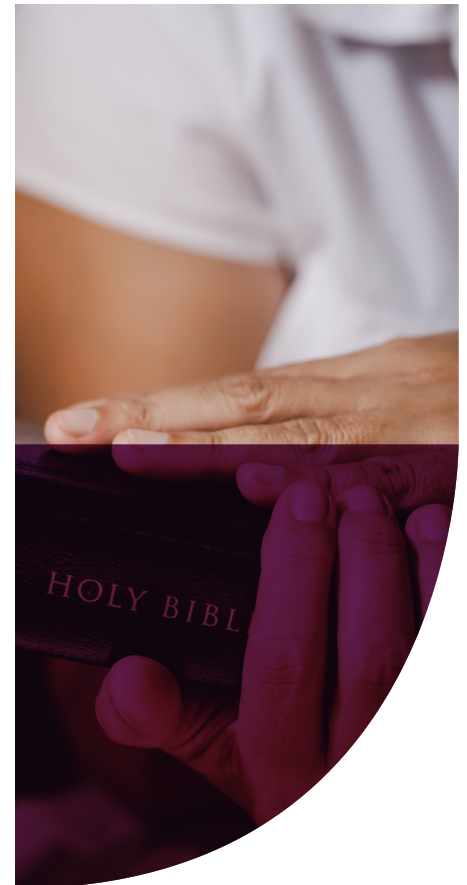
Given the overall low awareness of how the CBCEW had responded, it is interesting that among regular Mass-goers, there was a greater awareness of the national responses than the specifics of their own bishop's involvement. A possible factor in this is the national safeguarding initiatives, various reports into abuse and safeguarding in the Church, and reportage in the mainstream and Catholic press of bishops meeting with survivors. Diocesan work in these areas is perhaps less visible. Among those attending Mass at least monthly, Regular: 24% reported knowing a great deal (2%) or a fair amount (22%) about the responses of the Bishops of England and Wales.

Knowledge of Occasional Mass-goers and Nevers was significantly lower than regular Mass-goers, as shown in (Table 5-4).

For those who did have some awareness of the CBCEW response, Chart 5-3 shows how they rated the English and Welsh Bishops' handling of cases.

	ALL	Regular	Occasional	Never
A great deal	1%	2%	0%	0%
A fair amount	10%	22%	7%	3%
Not very much	38%	47%	38%	25%
Nothing at all	43%	23%	47%	62%
Don't know	8%	6%	8%	10%

Table 5-4: Proportion of Catholics with knowledge of abuse case handling – England and Wales.



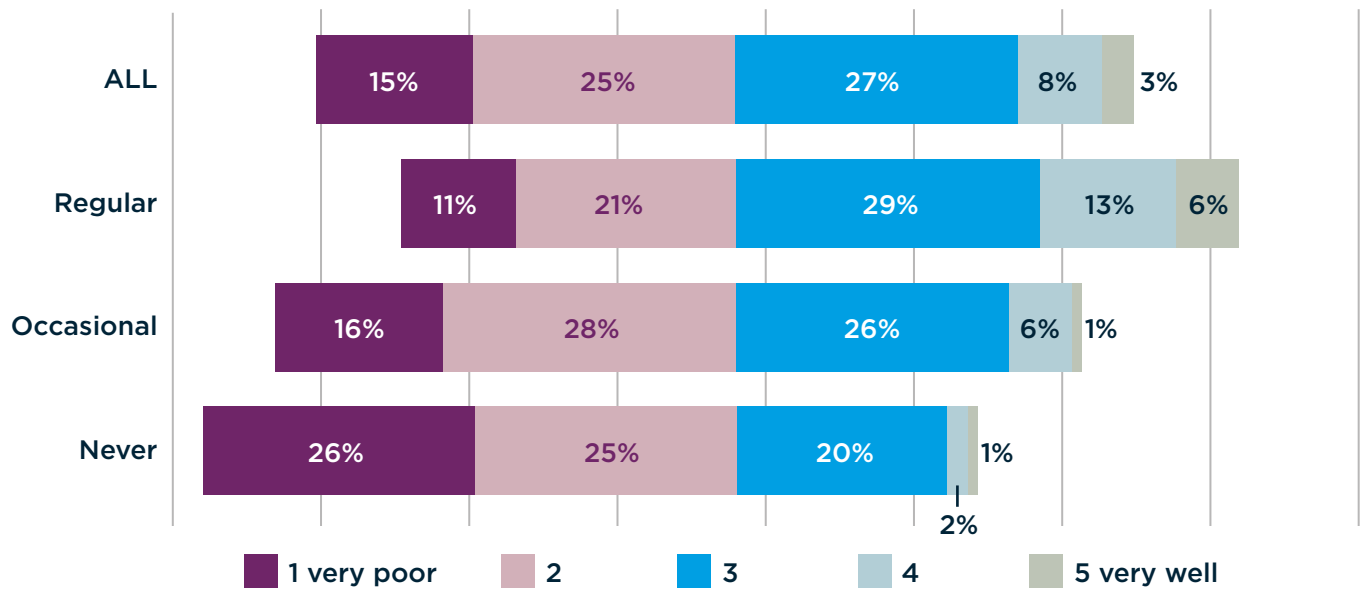


Chart 5-3: Rating for how Bishops of England and Wales handled abuse cases on scale of 1 (very poor) to 5 (very well).

**Almost three-quarters (72%) of Catholics in England and Wales have not heard of the IICSA Report regarding the Catholic Church**

At the national level for England and Wales, a significant secular intervention relating to child sexual abuse in the Church has been the IICSA report. Is there any evidence for the impact on this report on Catholics attitudes towards the efforts of the English and Welsh bishops?

To explore this, we asked an additional question at the national level:

**Before taking this survey, had you ever heard about the Independent inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA), established by the British Government?**

The results, shown in Chart 5-4, reveal that slightly more than a quarter of Catholics in England and Wales (28%) were aware of the IICSA report, although that figure rises to 41% for Regular Mass-goers. We found a significant under-awareness of IICSA among 18-24 and 25-34 age groups: only 20% were aware of IICSA in these age brackets.

For those who said that they had heard of the IICSA inquiry, a follow-on question to gauge the nature of that awareness asked respondents to select the statement which best applied to them from the options shown in Table 5-5.

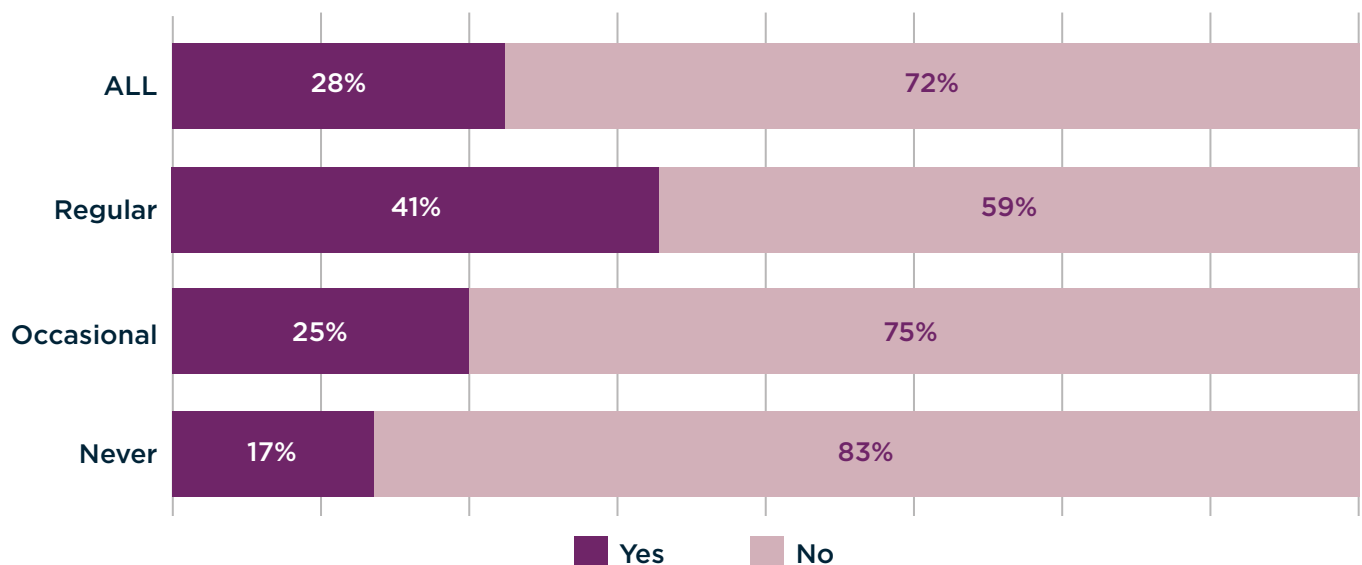


Chart 5-4: Proportion of Catholics aware of IICSA, by Mass attendance (N=3120).

	ALL	Regular	Occasional	Never
I am aware of what IICSA said about the Catholic Church in England and Wales	26%	44%	14%	16%
I am aware that IICSA commented about the Catholic Church in England and Wales but not what was said	50%	37%	59%	56%
I am not aware that IICSA commented about the Catholic Church in England and Wales	24%	19%	27%	27%

Table 5-5: Proportion of Catholics who had heard of the IICSA report, and awareness of what is says regarding the Church (N=882)

### Responding to abuse in the Universal Church

The pattern of awareness and rating changes again when Catholics were asked to say what they knew of the efforts made by the Catholic Church acting globally. Specifically, the handling of child abuse cases by Pope Francis was both more widely known and more positively rated by Catholics than was the case for national (but not local) responses.

We asked:

**How much, if anything do you know about the current Pope, Pope Francis's handling of the cases concerning child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church?**

2% of all Catholic replied 'a great deal', 18% 'a fair amount'(Table 5-6). While these figures may seem low, they are significantly higher than the responses for awareness of regional or local initiatives.

For those who had some awareness of Pope Francis's response (N=2105), we asked:

**How would you rate the current Pope, Pope Francis's handling of cases of child sexual abuse in the Church?**

The profile of responses is significantly different to those received for diocesan and Bishop's Conference level in England and Wales. Particularly striking is that 'don't know' is no longer the dominant category (Chart 5-5).



**The pattern of awareness and rating changes again when Catholics were asked to say what they knew of the efforts made by the Catholic Church acting globally. Specifically, the handling of child abuse cases by Pope Francis was both more widely known and more positively rated by Catholics than was the case for national (but not local) responses.**



Nonetheless notice must be taken of the significant negative ratings, even among regular Mass-goers.

	ALL	Regular	Occasional	Never
A great deal	2%	6%	1%	0%
A fair amount	18%	32%	15%	7%
Not very much	47%	45%	51%	40%
Nothing at all	26%	13%	26%	44%
Don't know	7%	4%	7%	8%

Table 5-6: Proportion of Catholics with knowledge of Pope Francis's handling of abuse cases.

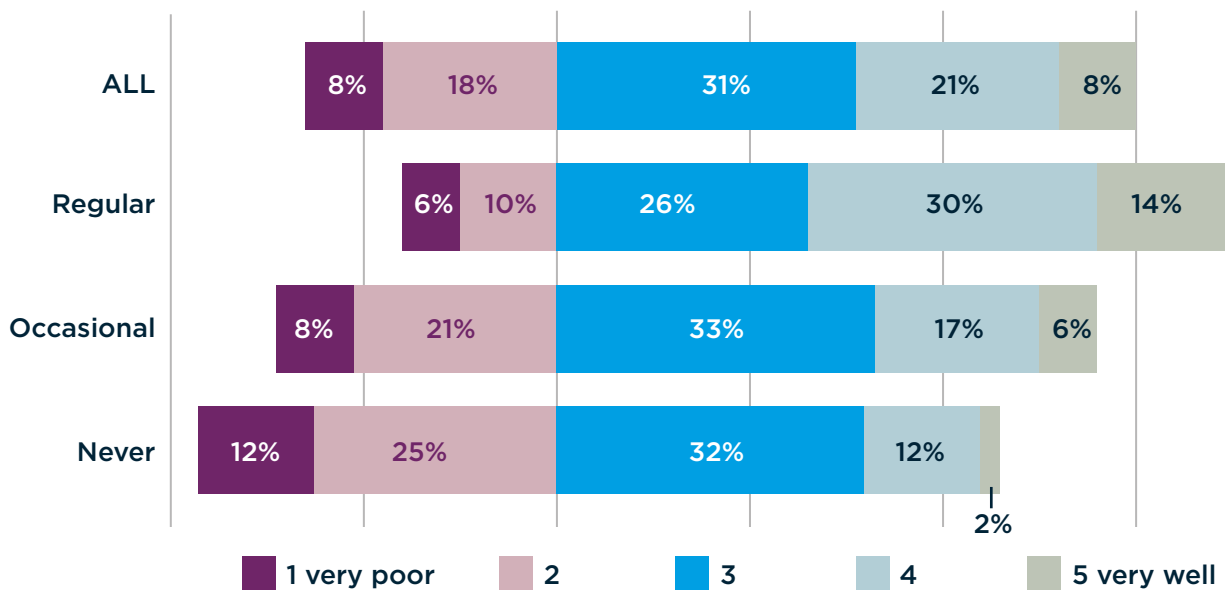


Chart 5-5: Rating for Pope Francis's handling of abuse cases on scale of 1 (very poor) to 5 (very well).



## Exploring 'Not Much' and estimating 'Some'

The most concerning aspect of these figures for the Church must be the poor awareness and perception of what local diocesan bishops are doing to respond to cases.

The raw data for awareness is however difficult to interpret with confidence. Does a response of 'not much' knowledge mean 'some awareness' (as opposed to the 'nothing' category) or does it mean a vague awareness that there is a diocesan response, but no idea of what it is?

Analysing how the bishop's response is rated can perhaps give a clearer picture. This question was only asked of those who said they had at least some knowledge of the response to abuse cases including 'not much'. But at each level, and especially for the diocesan category, a sizeable proportion of these respondents subsequently answer that they 'don't know' when asked to rate the Bishop's activity regarding abuse cases.

Cross-tabulating 'not much' with 'don't know' allows us to make a reasonable inference of the proportion of Catholics within the 'not much' knowledge response have virtually no knowledge, and more usefully therefore how many in the 'not much' category have some basic knowledge. This approximation allows us to provide a more refined estimate of awareness at each organisational level.

On this basis, the 30% of Catholics who said they knew not much about the bishop's handling of cases can be divided as follows:

54% of these replied 'Don't know' when it came to rating the bishop. Thus, the 30% who said they knew 'not much' about the bishop's handling can be assumed to be split as: 16% Catholics who have practically no knowledge of how the bishop is handling cases, and therefore 14% who have at least some basic knowledge. A reasonable estimate of the number of Catholics in the diocese with some knowledge of the bishop's handling of abuse cases, can thus be calculated (Table 5-7).

Clearly this is more encouraging, that there is a basic 7% awareness, using only the sum of the 'great deal' and fair amount' categories but it still suggests that there is much to do in this regard at the diocesan level. Although all of the figures for some working knowledge of how cases are handled increase using this method, the pattern of increasing awareness from diocesan to global level remains the same (Table 5-7).

Handling of Abuse Cases by...	Estimated % with at least some knowledge
Own Diocesan Bishop	= 1% (great) + 6% (fair) + 14% (calculated some) = <b>21%</b>
Bishops of England and Wales	= 1% (great) + 10% (fair) + 27% (calculated some) = <b>38%</b>
Pope Francis	= 2% (great) + 18% (fair) + 37% (calculated some) = <b>57%</b>

**Table 5-7: Estimated % of Catholics with some knowledge of the handling of abuse cases in each organisational level.**

## 6. How are Catholics in England and Wales informed about child sexual abuse and the Church's response?

The findings so far illustrate that Catholics hold a variety of positions in how they perceive the continuing impact of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, and the effectiveness of its response. We have noted a consistent correlation between frequency of Mass-going and more positive or optimistic attitudes towards the Church's handling of child sexual abuse and have tentatively suggested that social dynamics reinforcing group credibility may plausibly account for some of this trend. However, there are also more immediate and practical factors to consider. Where do self-identifying Catholics hear about cases and their handling? Is there a difference in the sources of information available to Catholics along demographic or religious-behavioural lines? What evidence is there for information sources internal to and external to the Catholic Church being used by Catholics in England and Wales informing the opinions revealed in this research?

We asked participants to select from a list all applicable sources of information about cases of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church or about how the Church was responding. The main categories are shown in Chart 6-1.

Almost nine out of ten (89%) of Catholics in England and Wales heard about child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church from mainstream media ('TV, newspapers etc'). This is by far the most common source of information. For almost a third of Catholics, (32%) social media had been a source of information on this topic, with a slightly smaller number (26%) hearing about cases and/or the Church's response from friends, family, or other Catholics.

Social media and conversations are a significant source of information on child sexual abuse among younger age groups (Chart 6-2).

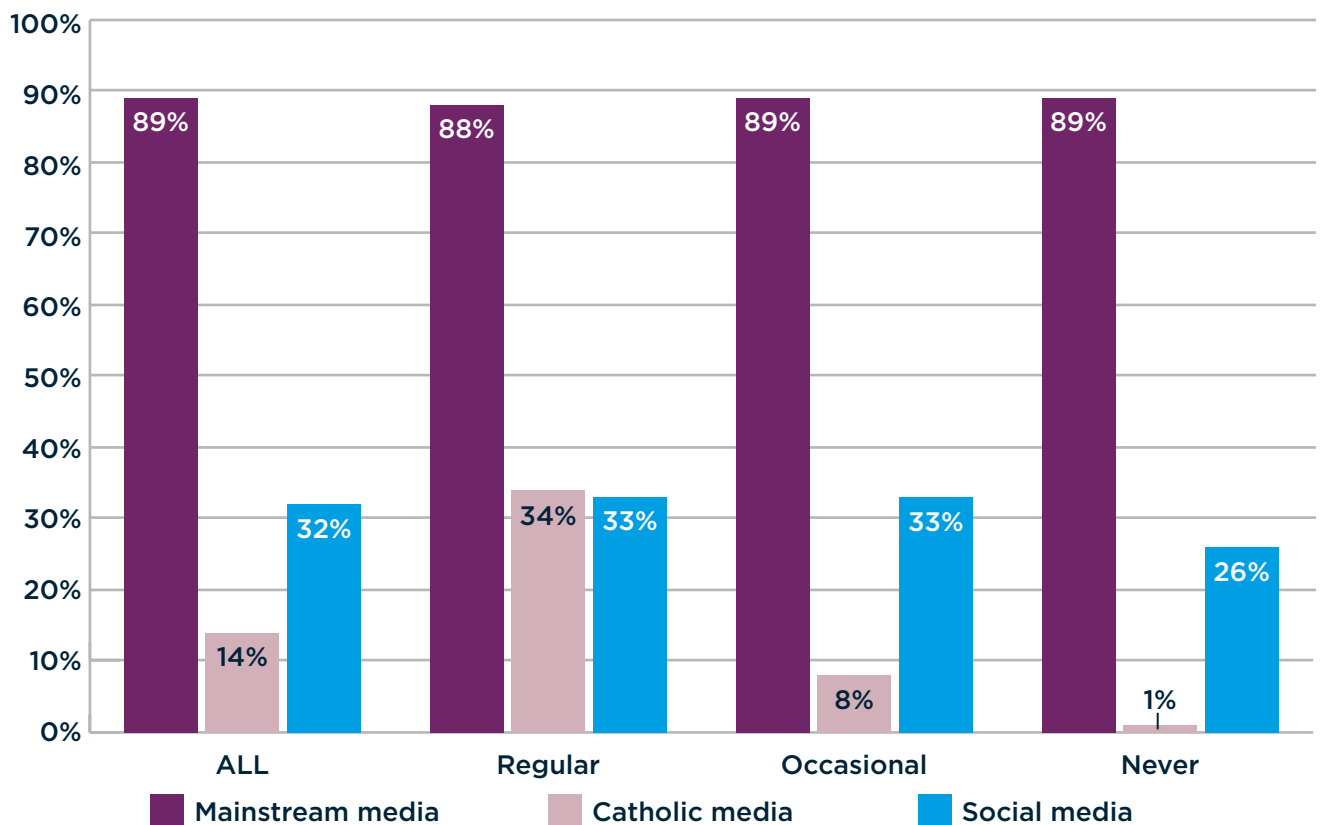


Chart 6-1: Media Sources for Information on Abuse in the Church.

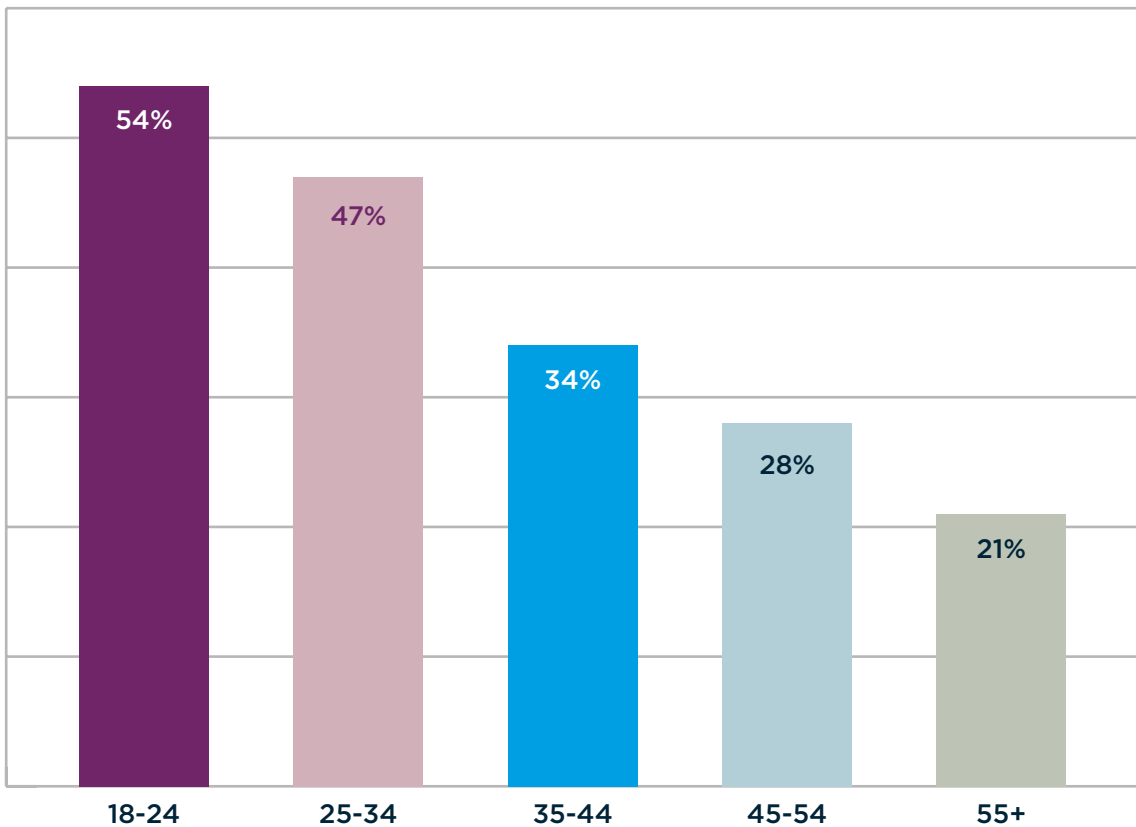


Chart 6-2: Social media as source of Information on clerical abuse (all Catholics, by age).

Although mainstream media is the most widespread source of information on child sexual abuse across all demographics, with 82% utilisation even among 18-24 year olds who are least likely to rely on it, social media also plays a significant role for younger age groups. More than half of the 18-24 age group (54%) had heard of child sexual abuse from social media, with an almost linear reduction across the age groups down to a fifth of those aged 55+ (21%). Among those who never attend Mass, social media use was even higher among 18-24 year-olds, at 65%. In other respects, the profiles for different Mass-going frequencies were not significant regarding mainstream and social media as sources of information on abuse, although they predictably differ in their use of Catholic media.

18-24 year-olds also had the highest usage of ‘friends or family or other Catholics I know’ as a source of information about abuse cases (39%). Some of this—perhaps most of it—is likely to be via social media.

***Conversations are more likely within the family than in the parish***

Two questions probed whether conversations in the parish and/or among family members were sources of information about child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, and to what degree the topic was discussed in these settings.



## Sources of Conversation on Abuse Cases (% of Catholics)

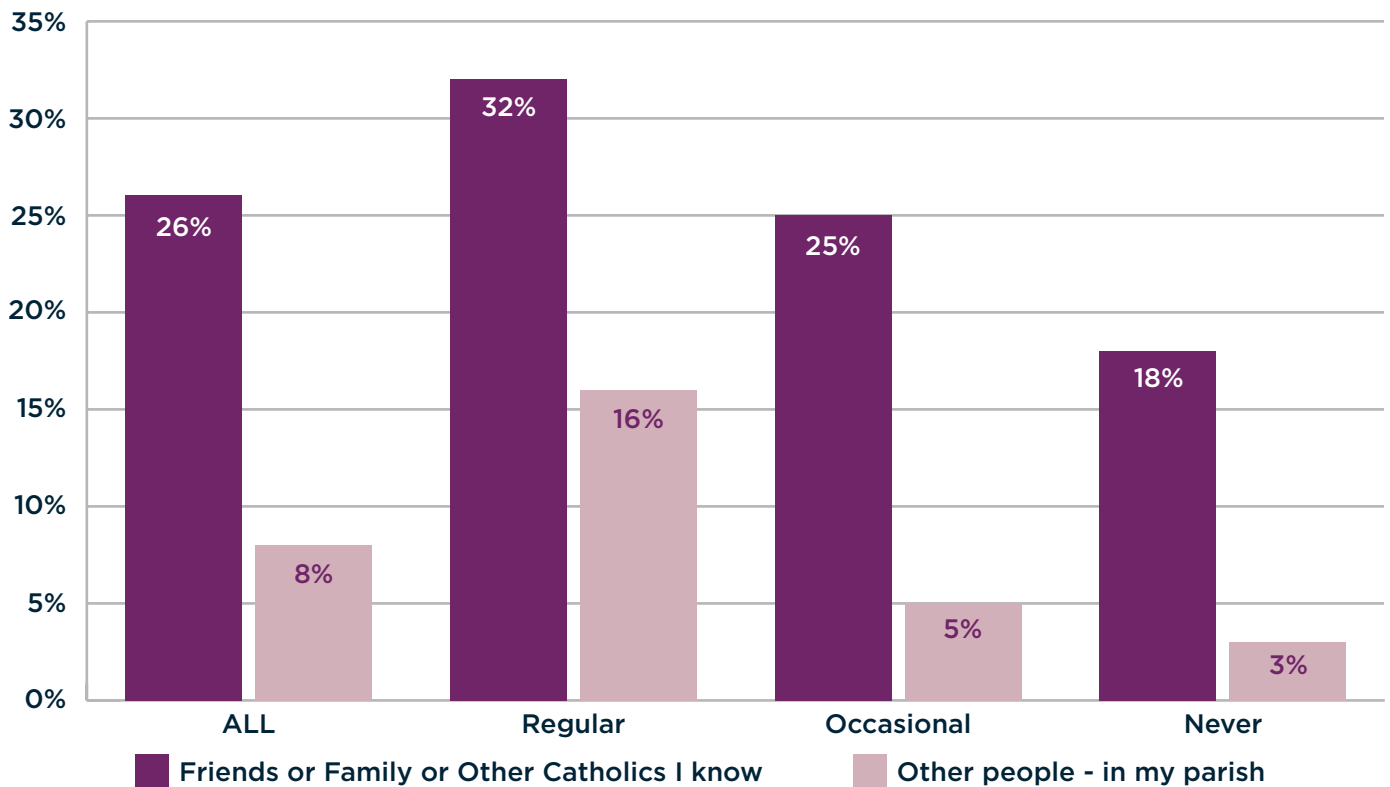


Chart 6-3: Sources of Conversation on Abuse Cases (% of Catholics).

### *Catholics also have access to internal Church communications*

In addition to these external, locally available sources of information, Catholics have varying degrees of access to formal and informal information produced and distributed within the Catholic Church, locally, nationally, and globally. These might be grouped under the heading of 'Catholic Media' if it is borne in mind that this covers a wide range of sites, such as:

- Catholic instances of mainstream media (such as news outlets *The Tablet* and the *Catholic Herald* in the UK, both of which have print and online presence).
- formal communication from bishops to Catholics, normally delivered through a 'Pastoral Letter', a formal communication issued to the whole Catholic community in a diocese or territory. Pastoral letters deal with a wide range of topics affecting the faith, worship, or life of the community, and are often associated with a particular church season (e.g. Lent) or feast day. Pastoral letters would typically be read out at all Masses on a given Sunday, and often made available on diocesan and parish websites. Printed copies are often provided for parishioners to take home or to read on a church noticeboard.
- Communication from bishops could also, more or less formally, take place through articles and statements and reportage in the local Catholic press.
- Self-identifying 'Catholic' websites, spanning an extremely wide range of views, some of which are incompatible with, or directly critical of, formal Church teaching and Church leaders.
- Preaching in the homily by the parish priest, deacon, or bishop. A homily is a sermon or short talk given at Mass by the priest, bishop, or deacon based on the bible readings prescribed for the day.
- Prayers during Mass for particular intentions (known as 'bidding prayers' or 'intercessions').
- Informal or formal conversation in the parish
- Meetings in the parish (or diocese).
- Formal teaching as part of safeguarding training.
- Informal conversation in the family, which may include people outside of the parish, of different Mass-going practices, or non-Catholics.



### *Internal Catholic communications are selectively received*

Unsurprisingly Mass-going Catholics made greatest use of information made available through internal church channels. Among all Catholics, 14% reported that they had heard something of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church via ‘Catholic Media’. This does not necessarily imply that all such channels were official organs of the Catholic Church—globally, regionally, or locally—but only that the respondent considered the source to be ‘Catholic media’. More frequent Mass-goers benefitted most from this source of information, with a third of Regular Mass-goers (34%) informed in this way. Within this group, more than half (56%) of those attending more than once a week had been informed through Catholic media. For Occasional attenders the figure was much lower at 8%, with, predictably, only a tiny figure (1%) for those who never attended Mass.

Regular Mass attenders were also more likely to hear about child sexual abuse in Catholic settings from friends, family, and other Catholics (32%) compared with occasional attendees (25%) and non-attenders (18%). Similar trends were evidenced for conversations within the parish and beyond it. Although the figure for non-attenders making use of these channels remains very low, it is notable that it never drops to zero, once again underlining the complex character of self-identifying Catholics who no longer attend Mass. Whilst the use of Catholic media is, as expected, lowest among those who never attend, it is not entirely missing. This may be accounted for by access to media through family or friends, through another connection with the Church (not Mass attendance), a residual connection with Catholic media (e.g. visiting a diocesan or parish website), as well as representing those who were regular or occasional attenders and who reduced or stopped attending Mass as a result of hearing about child sexual abuse or for other reasons not collected in this survey.

### *There is a consistent ranking of internal communication methods*

To look more closely at the use of formal and informal sources of ‘Catholic Media’, we asked participants to name the sources from which they had heard reference to clerical child sexual abuse by clergy or to the importance of listening to victims and survivors of child sexual abuse. Respondents were provided with the following list of sources and asked to indicate all sources which applied:

	ALL	Regular	Occasional	Never
Pastoral letters from a Bishop	16%	44%	7%	2%
Homily	10%	26%	5%	1%
Bidding prayers	8%	23%	2%	1%
Parish newsletter	8%	20%	4%	1%
Church notices	6%	17%	3%	0%
Others in my parish	8%	13%	7%	3%
Parish meetings	4%	12%	2%	0%

Table 6-1: Percentage of Catholics hearing about child sexual abuse by clergy or the importance of listening to survivors via internal church channels.

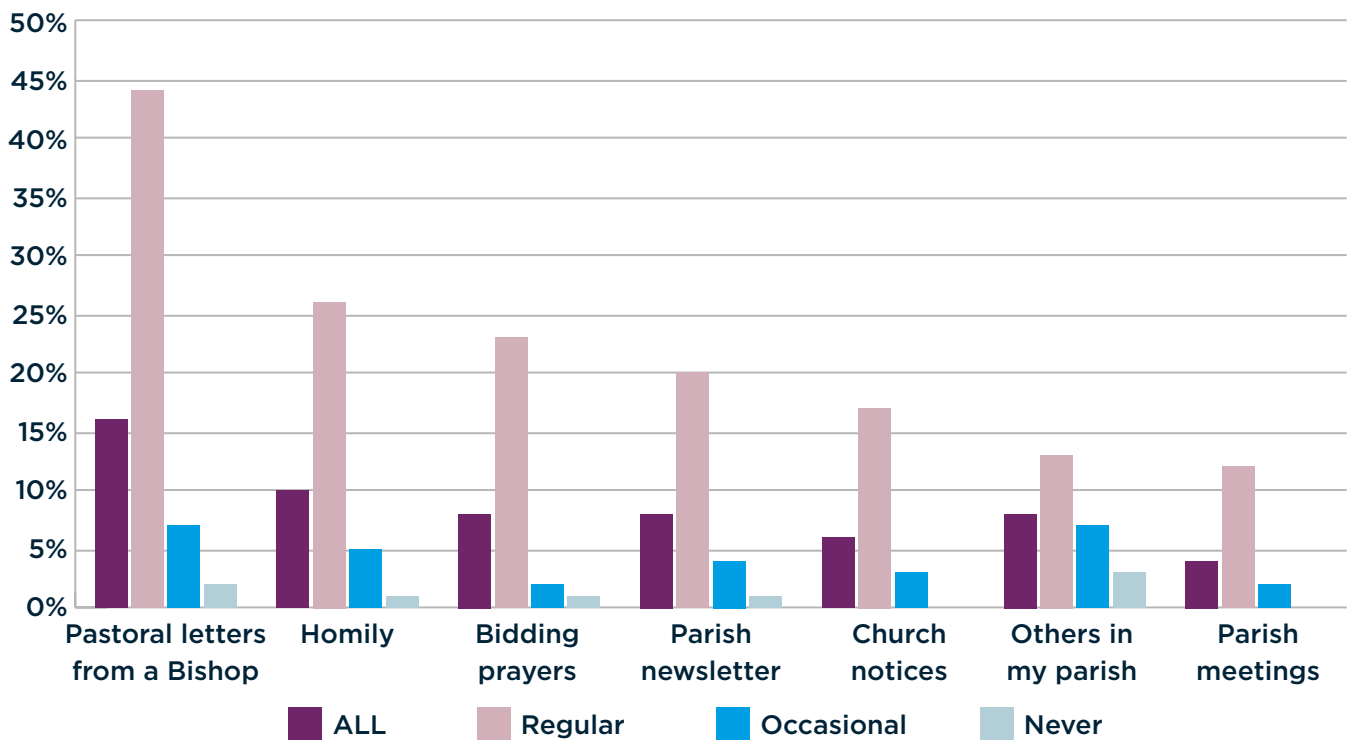


Chart 6-4: Proportion of Catholics hearing about child sexual abuse by clergy or the importance of listening to survivors via internal church channels. (See Table 6-1 for figures).

60% reported ‘don’t know’/can’t recall’ or ‘Prefer not to say’. A further 15% answered ‘other’.

As expected, Regular Mass-goers recorded greater exposure to internal Catholic communications, with Occasionals and Nevers showing proportionally less usage of these sources. The ranking of sources is however consistent across these three main groupings of Mass-goers. The most widely received source is a pastoral letter from a bishop (16% of all Catholics; 44% of Regular Mass-goers).

Three other sources form a cluster of similarly ranked media, below the bishops’ letters: homilies (All Catholics:10%; Regular Mass-goers: 26%), bidding prayers (All: 8%; Regular 23%) and parish newsletters (All 8%; Regular 20%). The first two of these take place in the Mass, and the figures reflect this, with much higher recognition of these sources from those attending weekly or more often, and very low values for those attending once a year or less (>4%).

A third cluster of sources prove less widely informative for Catholics in regard of child sexual abuse. Church notices (which could be spoken in Mass or published in the church building or distributed electronically, e.g. by email) other people in the parish, and parish meetings provided information for around 6% of all Catholics, and 17% of Regular Mass-goers.

Overall, 52% of Catholics who said they had heard something about abuse cases from Catholic media were men, and 48% women, a significant difference ( $P < 0.001$ ) in a dataset composed of 43% men and 57% women.

***Safeguarding training is a source of information on abuse, even for those who never attend Mass***

Information received from safeguarding training highlights an area of intentional change in practice for the Catholic Church in respect of child sexual abuse.

11% of Catholics said that they had heard about abuse cases, or the Church’s handling of them, from safeguarding training (Chart 6-5). The Church is of course not the only institution to implement safeguarding practices, which may account for the 6% of respondents who never attend Mass but who reported that they have been informed about abuse from safeguarding training.

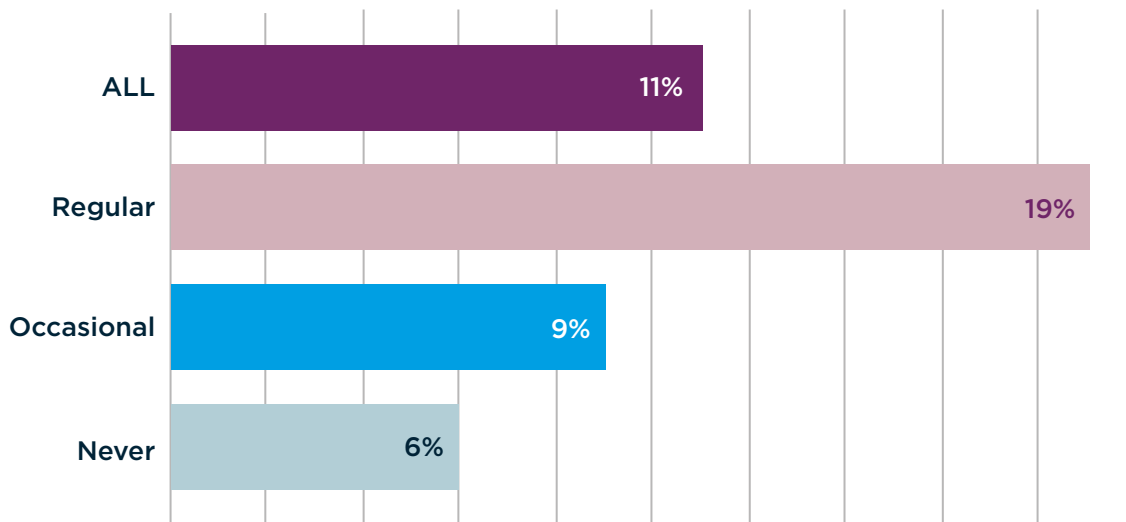


Chart 6-5: Proportion of Catholics who have heard about abuse in the Church through safeguarding training.

Given the significance of direct communication from clergy (the pastoral letter, the homily, and often also the writing or approval of the bidding prayers) what kind of content were Catholics hearing from priests, bishops, and deacons?

### *Clergy speaking out*

Two potential (and somewhat opposed) themes which have been heard among clergy are on the one hand, supporting victims and survivors of abuse, and on the other hand, criticisms of media coverage of the Catholic Church in relation to child sexual abuse. What does the evidence say on whether these form part of the experience of Catholics in England and Wales?

We asked respondents to select which of the following statements about child sexual abuse cases in the Church applied to them:

- **I have heard clergy speaking out in support of Church victims of child sexual abuse.**
- **I have heard clergy speaking out critically about the media coverage of the Church in relation to child sexual abuse.**
- **I don't remember hearing clergy talking about child sexual abuse cases in the Church.**
- **Don't know/Can't recall.**



Fewer than a third of Catholics (29%) had heard clergy speak in support of victims, although this figure was much higher among regular Mass-goers, with half (50%) of those attending once a month or more hearing clergy speak out on this topic. While there are other public opportunities for clergy to be heard, such as mainstream media and public talks, the typical setting for talking about child sexual abuse remains the parish, so Catholics attending Mass less regularly, or not at all are likely to be exposed to fewer opportunities to hear any such comments from clergy. The data bears this out, with 24% of occasional Mass-goers, and 14% of non-attenders reporting that they had heard clergy speak on support for victims (Chart 6-6).

The number of Catholics hearing clergy criticize media coverage of the issues was lower, but still substantial with almost 1 in 10 experiencing this (9%). Although this figure was slightly higher for Regular Mass-goers (13%), and lower for Occasional (8%) and Non-attenders (6%), there is less variation across the segments than might be expected.

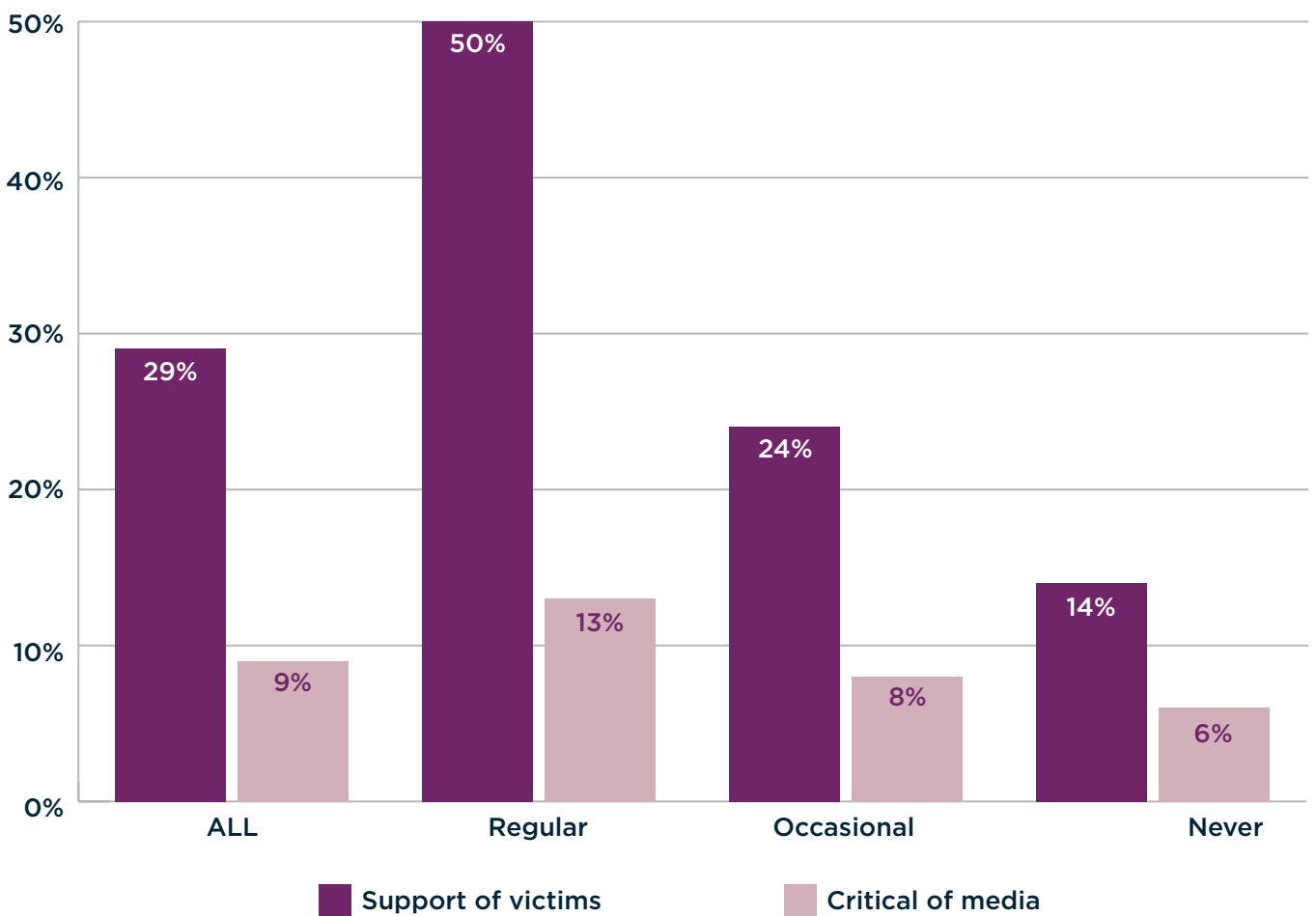


Chart 6-6: Proportion of Catholics who have heard clergy speaking out on abuse-related issues.

## 7. How have Catholics in England and Wales changed their practice as a result of child sexual abuse in the Church?

So far, this report has explored ways in which Catholics in England and Wales have heard about child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, and their assessment of the Church's handling of cases. These are essentially questions about the impact that the institutional Church and related organisations have had on Catholics' experience of the abuse crisis, both in terms of immediate response and remediation or reparation. An equally valid question in understanding the experience of ordinary Catholics, is to enquire into the impact that the abuse has had on their own religious experience and practice.

In exploring this, it is important to acknowledge that changes to Mass-going practice arising from the Church's handling of child sexual abuse are occurring and being measured at the same time as changes in practice because of the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as a longer-term trend of disaffiliation in the Church in England and Wales, as in other countries. Our survey questions attempted to tie changes in practice directly to awareness of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, while remaining aware that changes in practice, and various forms of disaffiliation are complex and not always amenable to assignation to a single cause. Alongside the direct findings, therefore, it is likely that some of the markers of distancing from Church practice may contribute to longer-term disaffiliation.

The richness of lived experience among Catholics in England and Wales of course means that a quantitative analysis can only very selectively look for some specific markers, acknowledging that further qualitative and quantitative research would be needed to examine this in adequate depth.<sup>54</sup> We asked survey participants a deliberately broad question on whether child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church had impacted their Catholic faith and practice:

**Thinking in general about how the Catholic Church has responded to child sexual abuse cases and all you know about their response, to what extent, if at all, has your faith (in God, the Church, or clergy) been NEGATIVELY impacted?**

54. In addition to the qualitative work with survivors in Jones, Pound, and Sexton, *The Cross of the Moment*, see Bullivant, *Mass Exodus*, 223-38.

**Our survey questions attempted to tie changes in practice directly to awareness of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, while remaining aware that changes in practice, and various forms of disaffiliation are complex and not always amenable to assignation to a single cause.**

As several participants noted in their free text comments, this is a very broad question, and demands a distinction between faith in God and faith in the Church. 'Faith' has an immensely rich theological vocabulary, the analysis of which goes well beyond the scope of this report, but to have 'faith in the Church' can also express a more everyday use of the term, representing not an ultimate concern, but confidence, trustworthiness, integrity. So too, whilst there are reasonable ecclesial and human expectations of priests as trustworthy and moral, 'faith' in the clergy is of a human order, in the ways that one might have faith in the justice system, or faith in a relationship, and different to faith in God (as ultimate reality). In the lived experience and culture—the 'life world' of Catholicism, these different kinds and objects of faith form part of a complex web of beliefs and practices. Asking if any of these very different elements had been negatively affected, probes the potential fracturing, loosening, or disintegration of relationships in that complex web or life world as a result of abuse in the Church.

Out of that complexity, two basic and easily measurable markers were used to quantify negative impacts on practice:

- Was there a reduction or cessation of Mass attendance?
- Was there a reduction or cessation of financial donations to local church (parish or diocese)?

Two further questions explored potentially constructive or reparative responses to the crisis:

- Emotional or spiritual support of affected clergy
- A day of prayer for victims and survivors of abuse

How, then, does this survey suggest that the faith and/or practice of Catholics in England and Wales was impacted by the abuse crisis?

## The abuse crisis has had no significant impact on faith for around half of the Catholic population

50% of All Catholics in the survey reported that their faith had *not* been affected, or not very much. This figure increased with increasing frequency of Mass attendance, with more than two-thirds (67%) of regular Mass-goers stating that child sexual abuse had not impacted their faith very much or not at all.

Using more fine-grained analysis, this trend can be seen to continue within the Regular segment itself: 79% for the small sample attending *more than once a week* (N=138) and 71% for *weekly* attenders, but dropping to 54% for those attending less than weekly but at least *monthly*. Interestingly, within this more detailed dataset, the percentage of regular Mass-goers impacted 'a lot' is not significantly different across the various fine-grained categories from 'more than weekly' to 'monthly', although increased percentages for 'impacted a fair amount' correlated with less frequent Mass-going within the Regular segment.

Regular Mass-goers were correspondingly less likely to be negatively affected overall (21% a fair amount, 6% a lot). However almost half of Occasional (46%) and Non-attenders (46%) reported an overall negative impact to faith, with the degree of impact greatest in Non-attenders (20% affected a lot, compared to 13% of Occasionals).

Analysing the precise nature of any impacts of faith is a task best suited to more qualitative analysis than a simple survey. Recent research by Liam Hayes at the Centre of Ecclesial Ethics has done this for Catholics who no longer come to church in the Diocese of Brentwood. While not representative of the Catholic population as a whole, the findings are at least indicative of the kind of impacts likely in England and Wales.<sup>55</sup>

55. Liam Hayes, *Believing, not Belonging: A research into why Catholics no longer come to church. Ecclesial drift, estrangement, and disaffiliation*, Centre for Ecclesial

Ethics, Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology (2024). See especially the section on 'Ecclesial discord and the clerical abuse scandal', 81-6.

## Majority of Catholics consider the Church's moral authority has been weakened

A much higher proportion of Catholics considered that the Church had lost moral authority because of clerical sexual abuse than reported an impact to their own faith. This evidence adds weight to the view that Catholics do not 'have faith' in the Church in the same way as they might have faith in God.

77% of all Catholics strongly agreed (33%) or tended to agree (44%) that the Church had lost moral authority as a result of its handling of child sexual abuse cases. Even among those who reported that their own faith had been impacted only a little bit or not at all 65% agreed that the Church had lost some moral authority.

Only 8% of Catholics disagreed with the statement regarding a loss of moral authority. As with the general sentiments revealed in this survey, more positive or optimistic views were held by Regular Mass-goers (15% disagreed; 66% agreed).

## Impact on practice

### *A third of Mass-going Catholics reduced Mass attendance due to child sexual abuse*

The significance of Mass for Catholics, noted earlier, and evident from the effect it has on perception of the Church in relation to child sexual abuse lends itself to a direct measure of impact by asking about reductions in Mass attendance as a result of hearing about child sexual abuse cases in the Church (Chart 7-1). The figures do not add up to 100% due to those who replied 'don't know' who have been excluded from these charts for clarity.

However, as the population contains a significant number of self-identifying Catholics who do not attend Mass (and therefore could not be expected to register an impact through reduced attendance), some care is needed in the interpretation of this data. On the basis of the survey question on Mass attendance, 20% of respondents replied that they never attended (excluding special occasions, such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals).

When surveying the impact of what participants had heard about child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church on Mass attendance, therefore, we included an option to select '*Not applicable- I never attended Mass before or after hearing about this*'. 23% of respondents selected this, which, while comparable to the 20% who earlier classified themselves as never attending, highlights a margin of error to be considered in interpreting these results.<sup>56</sup> Excluding respondents who selected this N/A option, and also removing those who replied with a 'Don't know' response when asked about the impact on their Mass-going, gives a baseline population of Catholics (N=2176) who previously attended Mass and who were able to quantify the impact to their practice (Chart 7-2).<sup>57</sup>

56. Of those who selected this option but were not classified as 'Nevers' a tiny number (N=5) had previously classified themselves as regular attenders (N=5) or between 4 and 6 months (N=8) and a larger group of once a year attenders (13%, N=45) but the discrepancy is most likely to come from those classifying

themselves as attending less than once a year but who account for 36% of those selecting 'Not applicable-I never attended Mass before or after hearing about this'. This suggests that around a third (36%) of those claiming to attend Mass less than once a year are functionally non-attenders.

57. The small number of Nevers who selected 'No impact' rather than 'N/A' are an anomaly, but a numerically insignificant one (N=64).

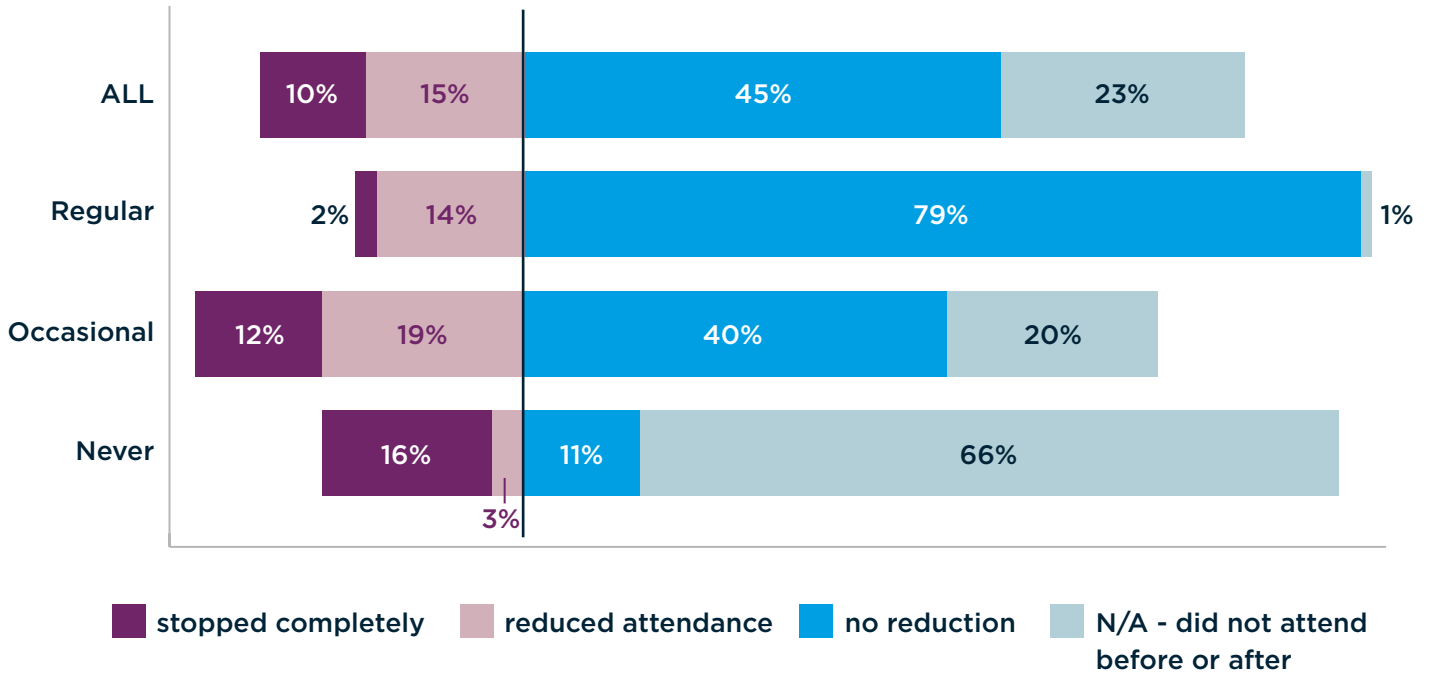


Chart 7-1: Impact of abuse cases on frequency of Mass-going

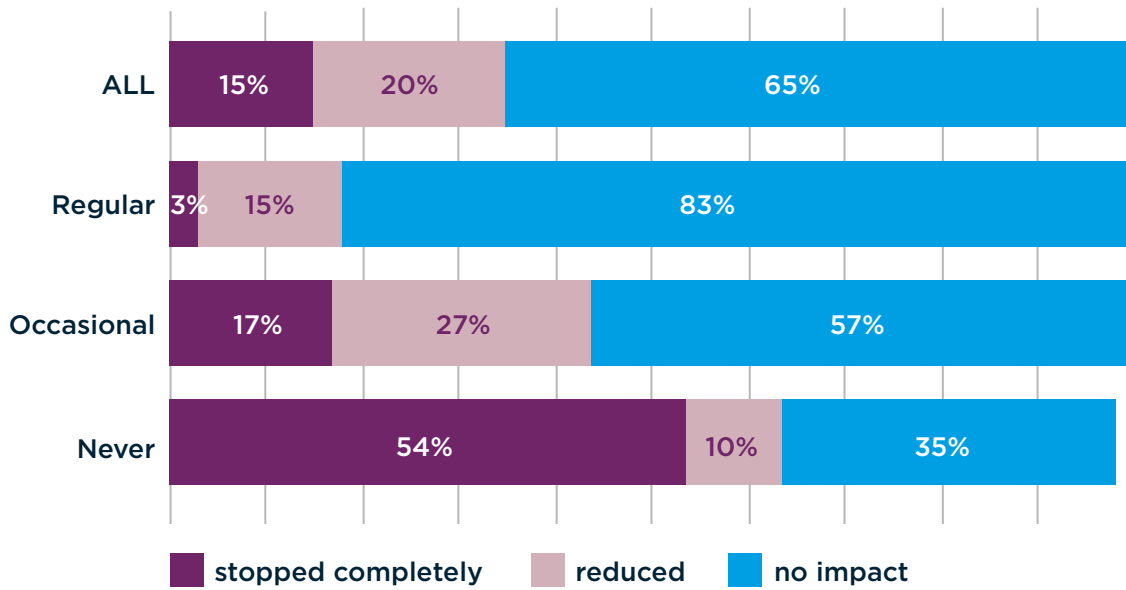


Chart 7-2: Impact on Mass attendance among Catholics who previously attended



On this basis, around one-third (35%) of Catholics who previously attended Mass, reduced their Mass-going as a result of child sexual abuse, with 15% stopping completely and 21% reducing their attendance.

However it would be misleading to simply cite this headline figure without two observations. Firstly, there is a strong negative correlation between the frequency of Mass attendance selected by respondents and the impact of Mass-going as a result of the abuse crisis. The data by no means suggest that reduction in Mass-going was homogeneous across the Catholic population, and frequency of attendance is the most significant differentiating factor. Second, however, this could be attributable in large part to individuals who might previously have been classed as Regular, but by the time of the survey, were no longer attending so frequently. The figures for Regular Mass-goers are therefore vulnerable to a certain amount of survivorship bias.<sup>58</sup>

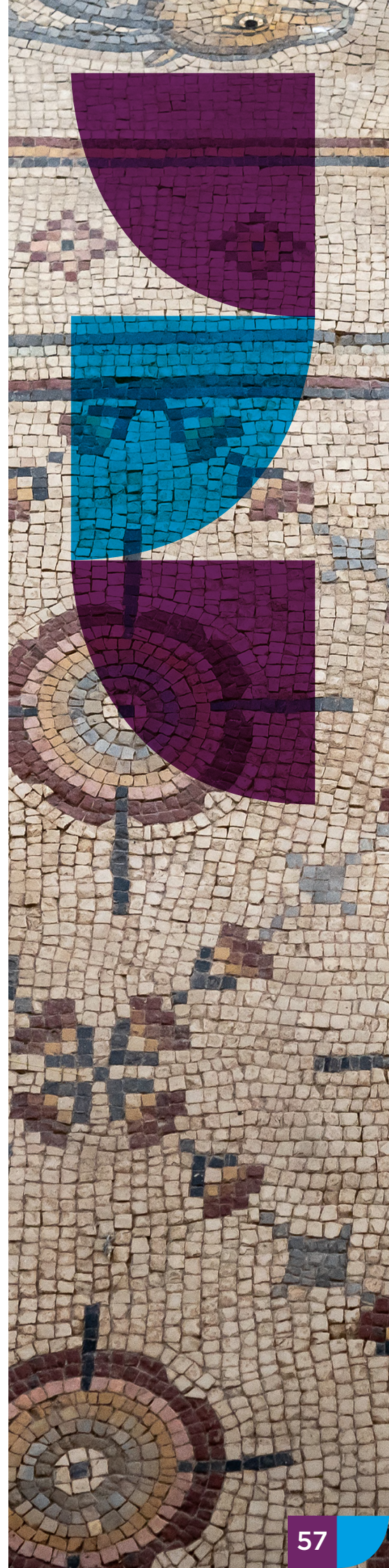
Once again regular Mass-goers demonstrate the greatest resilience, with only 3% of this group stopping completely, with a further 15% reducing their attendance, but an overwhelming 83% not changing their attendance as result of the abuse crisis. Occasional Mass-goers were impacted more significantly, with slightly less than half reducing or stopping (43%) and slightly more than half (57%) making no change.

The replies for participants identifying as Never attending Mass are more difficult to interpret. 19% (N=121) reported that they had reduced their Mass attendance as a result of child sexual abuse. Whilst the possibility of error, or a respondent simply representing a negative sentiment rather than a matter of fact, cannot be excluded, the nature of this quantitative survey demands the data be taken seriously as it stands. A plausible explanation is that this figure represents Catholics who formerly attended more regularly but who have ceased completely or practically so, and now considered themselves as non-attenders. This highlights the complexity of dealing with such categories.

Analysis of the fine-grained data for Regular and Occasional Mass-goers (without rebasing to exclude those who replied 'Don't know' or 'not applicable') reveals a critical threshold: for those attending Mass at least once a week, 87% saw no reduction in Mass-going, whereas for all of those attending once every two weeks to once every six months, 30% reduced a little, in addition to those who stopped completely, some of whom were found across all Mass-going frequencies (Table 7-2).

58. 'Survivorship bias is a systematic under or overestimation of an effect on a parameter of interest due to the difference in the population that is *remaining* at the end of an

experiment versus the one which entered it.', <https://www.analytics-toolkit.com/glossary/survivorship-bias/>.



Mass Attendance	Effect of Abuse Crisis on Mass Attendance				
	Stopped Completely	Reduced a Little	No reduction	Don't know	Not applicable: never attended
More often than once a week	4%	4%	92%	0%	1%
Once a week	2%	9%	85%	3%	1%
Once every 2 weeks	2%	31%	61%	5%	1%
Once a month	3%	30%	58%	9%	0%
Once every 2 to 3 months	6%	31%	55%	8%	0%
Once every 4 to 5 months	6%	30%	50%	10%	4%
Once every 6 months	8%	28%	53%	9%	2%
Once a year	15%	19%	43%	10%	13%
Less often than once a year	13%	12%	30%	10%	34%
Never	16%	3%	11%	4%	66%

Table 7-1: Reduction in Mass-going, by detailed Mass attendance

**A third of Catholics reduced financial donations to the Church due to child sexual abuse**

Among all Catholics in the sample, 19% reduced their giving as a result of abuse in the Church, with greatest impact on Occasional Mass-goers, rather than on regular Mass-goers who appear somewhat resilient again, or non-attenders who, logically enough, tended not to give in the first place (Chart 7-3).

However, as with the evaluation of impact on Mass attendance, a revised baseline was required for the data to be meaningfully interpreted, in this case excluding Catholics who replied that they did not donate before or after hearing about child sexual abuse, and also excluding the Don't Knows so as to retain only those Catholics who previously donated and who were able to classify the impact on their practice as a result of hearing about child sexual abuse in the Church (Chart 7-4).

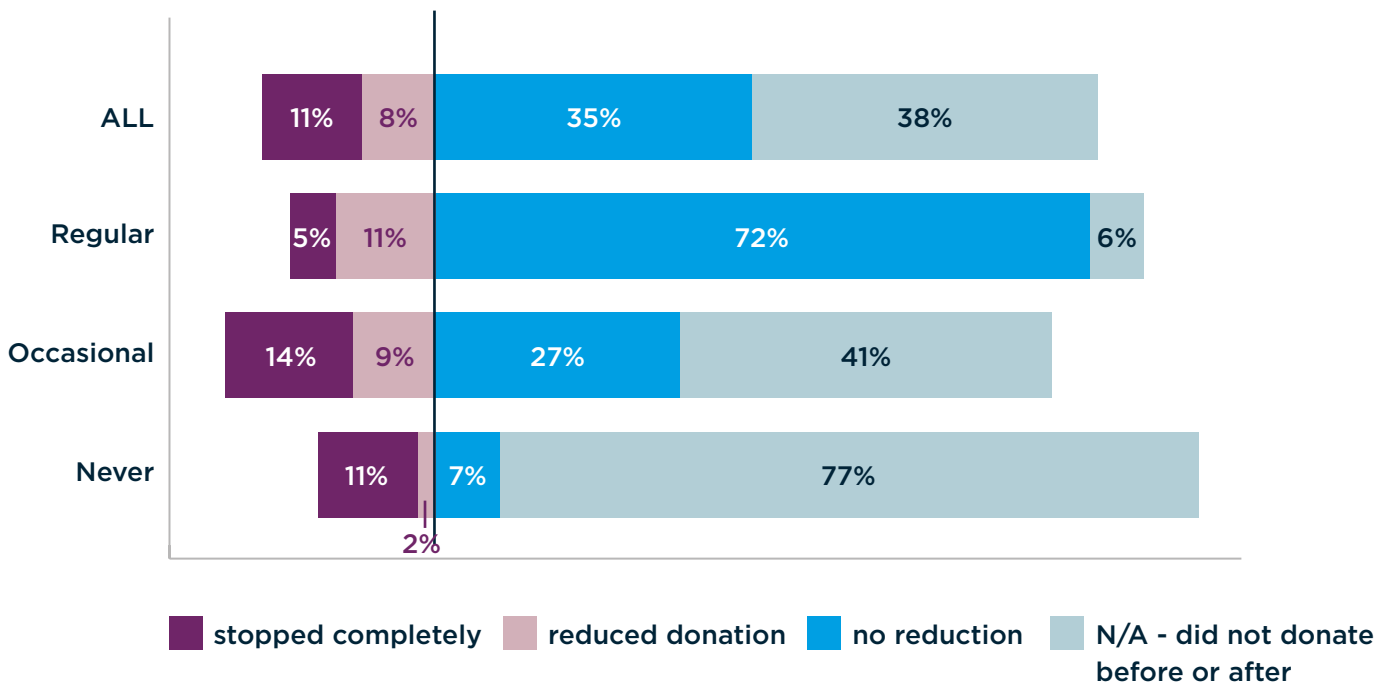


Chart 7-3: Impact of abuse cases on amount of money donated to Parish or Diocese (N=3120).

The results were strikingly similar to the impact on Mass attendance, with around one-third (35%) of Catholics who had previously donated, reporting that they had stopped (20%) or reduced (14%) their financial donations to the parish and diocese. While the overall impact figure is similar to Mass attendance, it appears that Catholics are readier to take drastic action regarding their donations (stopping completely) while being more likely to reduce rather than abruptly stop attending Mass. Figures for occasional and non-attenders are close to those seen for reducing Mass attendance.

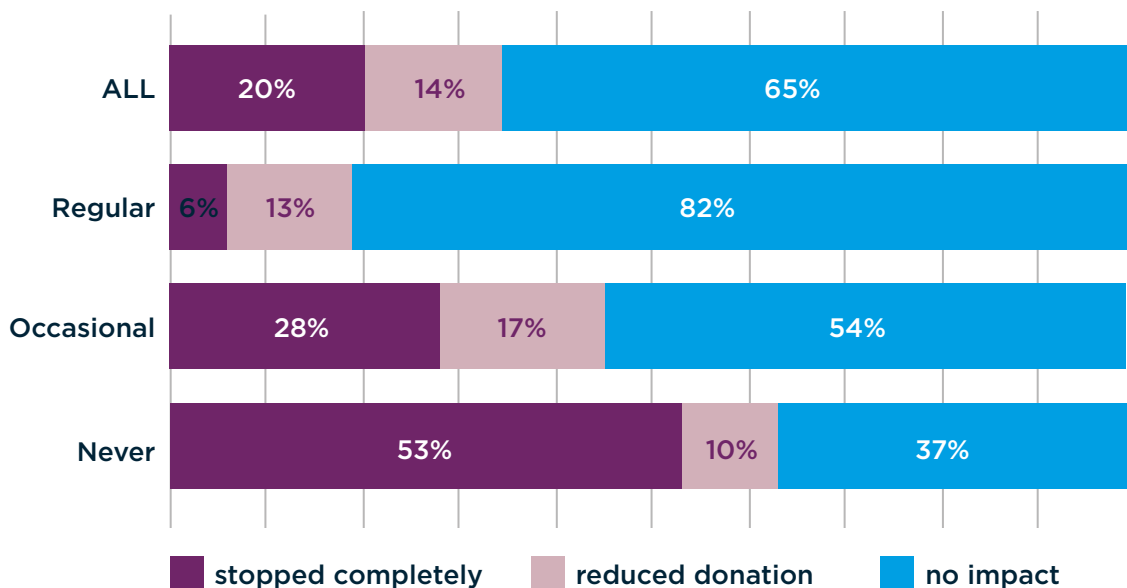


Chart 7-4: Impact of abuse cases on donations among Catholics who previously gave money to local church. (N=1720)

The similarity of the figures for these two measures of impact raises the question as to whether they are different types of responses, or whether they are linked as a hybrid response by the same people. The data from our survey shows that while there are some cases of either Mass attendance or donations being reduced, the two are often found as part of a wider response. 84% of those who reduced their donations and previously attended Mass also reduced their Mass-going, whilst 87% of those who reduced their Mass-going and previously donated also reduced their financial contributions. This correlation is largely to be expected: although options to donate by direct debit or through online banking are widely available, many Catholics still contribute by placing money in the collection taken at Mass.

As with reductions in Mass attendance, analysis of the fine-grained data for Regular and Occasional Mass-goers reveals a critical threshold regarding reduction in giving: For those attending Mass at least once a week, only 8% reduce their giving a little, whereas across the range of those attending once every two weeks to once every four-to-five months, around 20% do so (Table 7-2).



Mass Attendance	Effect of Abuse Crisis on Financial Donations to Church				
	Stopped Completely	Reduced a Little	No reduction	Don't know	Not applicable: never donated
More often than once a week	7%	8%	82%	0%	3%
Once a week	4%	8%	79%	6%	5%
Once every 2 weeks	5%	21%	56%	10%	8%
Once a month	9%	18%	47%	15%	11%
Once every 2 to 3 months	12%	18%	49%	6%	16%
Once every 4 to 5 months	8%	20%	41%	11%	20%
Once every 6 months	14%	13%	34%	10%	29%
Once a year	17%	7%	28%	10%	38%
Less often than once a year	15%	4%	18%	8%	54%
Never	11%	2%	7%	3%	77%

Table 7-2: Reduction in amount of money donated, by detailed Mass attendance.

### Towards some Constructive Responses

It is easy to assume that the response of ordinary Catholics (i.e. not only those directly affected by child sexual abuse as, for example, a survivor, minister, or professional) would be negative, as the questions on impact to faith, Mass-going, and donations, have explored, and that the burden of constructive and reparative action sits with those in positions of power and authority in the Church. However, the US Pew Research Center report also explored a particular site where a constructive response had been made in relation to the overall impact of child sexual abuse, not just particular cases. The US survey discovered that among American Catholics 35% of those who attend Mass at least weekly had noticed and offered emotional or spiritual support to a priest affected by the damage done by child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. Might a similar phenomenon be observed among Catholics in England and Wales?

### *Clergy affected by child sexual abuse in Catholic Church are unlikely to receive (or be seen as needing) support from parishioners*

Clearly the opportunities for occasional and non-attenders to observe a cleric who has been affected by the child sexual abuse crisis are far fewer than those afforded regular Mass-goers, not to mention the likelihood that regular Mass-goers are likely to have a relationship with the priest or deacon which enables them to offer such support. The figures for the overall population and the three main groupings of Mass-going groups are given in Table 7-3, and the fact that there are some (even if small) positive values for occasional and non-attenders is noteworthy.

	ALL	Regular	Occasional	Never
<b>Noticed and offered support to clergy</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>
Noticed clergy affected but did not offer emotional/spiritual support	4%	10%	3%	1%
Have not noticed any clergy affected	61%	62%	64%	51%
Prefer not to say	1%	2%	1%	1%
<i>Don't know</i>	<i>30%</i>	<i>17%</i>	<i>30%</i>	<i>46%</i>

Table 7-3: Proportion of Catholics who noticed and offered emotional or spiritual support to clergy affected by the abuse crisis

The very low figures for occasional and never attend Mass are as expected, but what are we to make of the small percentage—9%—of regular Mass attenders who offered support, and the slightly larger number (10%) who noticed a need but did not offer support? These figures are certainly much lower than seen in the similar US survey. Among Catholics attending Mass at least weekly, 35% of US Catholics had offered support to clergy, compared to just 10% in England and Wales among those attending Mass at least weekly. Our dataset used a larger numerical sample of weekly attenders (N=609) than the US survey (N=326), and accordingly a much higher sample as a percentage of the national figure for Catholics, although both datasets were designed to be representative using appropriate sampling and statistical techniques. The US data was surveyed in 2019, whilst the England and Wales data was from 2022, and there may be an effect arising from Covid-19 affecting the data, with parishioners having fewer in-person interactions with priests in much of the period preceding the 2022 survey. However, there is no direct evidence for this explanation. Cultural differences, approachability of clergy, pastoral practices such as social gatherings, and overall availability of clergy are likely to all play a part.

The relatively large group in England and Wales who replied ‘Don’t know’ (30%) to this survey question may suggest that the notion of clergy needing such support is not even on their radar. Regardless of the precise figures and reasons, the fact that 77% of Catholics *attending Mass at least weekly* had not noticed a need for support or were unsure about answering the question (‘Don’t know’), with a further 2% answering ‘prefer not to say’ raises significant questions about the awareness of the impact on priests, bishops and deacons (other than those directly involved in child sexual abuse cases) and the role of the whole community, not just diocesan authorities in their health and wellbeing. The complementary *Boundary Breaking* qualitative report, *The Cross of the Moment* investigates the experience, accountability, and support of priests in greater detail.<sup>59</sup>

59. Jones, Pound, and Sexton, *The Cross of the Moment*, Chapters 3 and 5.



## Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors of Abuse little known but is welcomed, especially among younger Catholics

A more widespread opportunity for Catholics to respond by a positive action is offered by the Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors of Abuse. The proposal for a Day of Prayer was made to the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. Members agreed a proposal in February 2016 and submitted it to Pope Francis for his approval. The Pope welcomed the initiative and asked that each episcopal conference choose an appropriate day for annual Day of Prayer in their nation or territory.<sup>60</sup> The proposal was implemented in Ireland in February 2017, and in England and Wales on Friday of the Fifth Week of Lent, 2018. The Bishops' Conference of England and Wales changed this date in 2021, giving the following rationale:

**'listening to the voices of victims and survivors, the Bishops received a proposal that the day should be changed to a time in Easter Season. It was felt that the inclusion of this day in Lent was penitential. The original motivation for the day was not on the Church seeking forgiveness for its failings, but on the hope and renewal that is necessary for the victims, survivors and others affected by abuse (for example families, parish communities).**

**As such, the Bishops have moved this Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors of Abuse to the Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Easter.'**<sup>61</sup>

The raw statistics regarding participation in, or even awareness of, the Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors of Abuse do not at first appear encouraging, with only 4% of Catholics having attended a service. A further 18% had heard of the Day of Prayer, but never attended. Predictably, Regular Mass-goers are more like to have attended a Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors of Abuse (10%) or heard about it but not attended (34%).

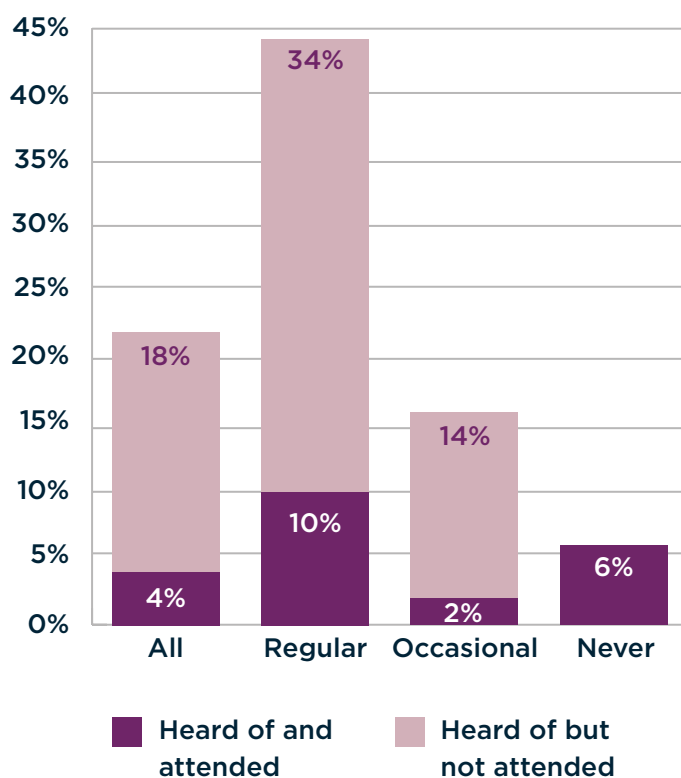


Chart 7-5: Proportion of Catholics who have heard of or attended a Day of Prayer for Survivors and Victims of Abuse

60. <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/6107/francis-approves-day-of-prayer-for-survivors-of-abuse>

61. <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/new-date-for-the-day-of-prayer-for-the-victims-and-survivors-of-abuse/>

Annual days of prayer, and dedicated years or seasons for particular intentions are commonplace in the Catholic Church and can easily go unnoticed apart from those involved with them, or who are deeply committed to church activities. For a day introduced into England and Wales in 2018, which would have had just four commemorations (held on two different dates) by the time the survey took place, two of them during the 2020-21 Covid pandemic and its associated lockdowns and restrictions on in-person services, this is a remarkable degree of awareness, if not yet participation.

The picture becomes even more interesting when the questions turn from past practice to *attitudes* among Catholics towards such a day of prayer who had not previously been aware of it. This was a much larger group (N=2466), with some unusual patterns of distribution.

Excluding those who had heard of the Day of Prayer before starting our survey, we asked:

**Would you like to see the Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors of Abuse in your Parish?**

Among all Catholics who had not previously heard of the Day of Prayer, 59% replied Yes, with only 9% saying No (32% Don't Know). These replies were unevenly distributed among men and women, with women being significantly more favourable to the proposal and Men significantly more opposed to holding such a service (Table 7-4).

Most strikingly, and for the Church perhaps most encouragingly, the popularity of holding a Day of Prayer increased in inverse proportion to age, with 73% of 18-24 year-olds in favour, and only 5% against (Chart 7-6). This compared with 51% of those aged 55+ in favour with 11% against.

	Yes	No	Don't know
ALL	59%	9%	32%
Regular	71%	6%	23%
Occasional	60%	8%	32%
Never	46%	12%	42%
Male*	53%	12%	35%
Female*	63%	7%	31%
Male and at least weekly Mass	67%	11%	22%
Female and at least weekly Mass	73%	4%	23%

Table 7-4: Would you like to see the day of prayer in your parish? % of Catholics who had not previously heard of the Day of Prayer. (P<.001)



**Most strikingly, and for the Church perhaps most encouragingly, the popularity of holding a Day of Prayer increased in inverse proportion to age, with 73% of 18-24 year-olds in favour, and only 5% against (Chart 7-6). This compared with 51% of those aged 55+ in favour with 11% against.**



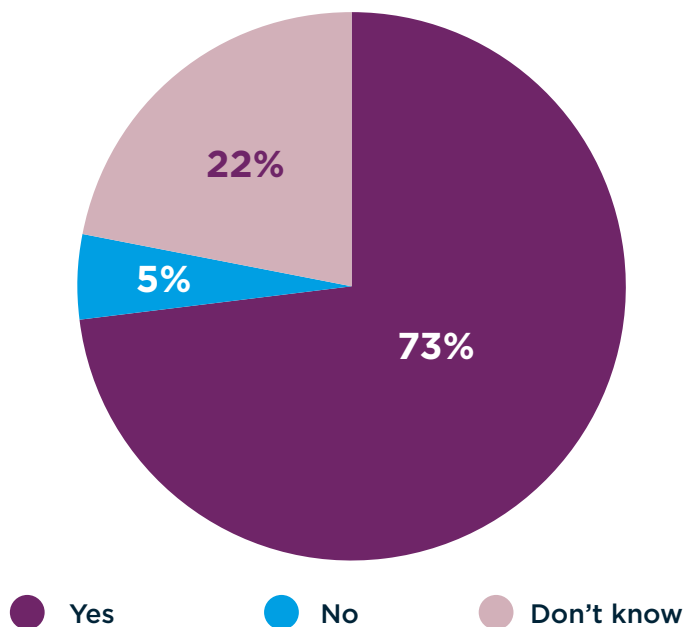


Chart 7-6: Preference for a Day of Prayer for Abuse Survivors among 18-24-year old Catholics.

Once again, a positive correlation between a positive view of the Church, and frequency of Mass attendance was observed, with 71% of Regular, and 60% of Occasional Mass-goers in favour of the Day of Prayer in their Parish. Among non-attenders, 46% were in favour, with not unexpectedly, a much larger number expressing the opinion 'don't know' (42%). All three groups of Mass attendance followed the same pattern observed for the whole group answering this question regarding overall figures, gender, and age distribution (Table 7-4).

The unexpected positive trend for younger Catholics, previously unaware of the Day of Prayer, to support having it in their parish (even for occasional or non-attenders) invites reflection and responses from the Church in England and Wales. It also perhaps highlights the potential and significance for symbolic actions as well as

practical and juridical ones, whilst being acutely aware of the danger of any such action being 'purely' symbolic and a surrogate for the actions the situation demands. Awareness of, and even more so desire for, the Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors of Abuse points to the potential effectiveness of communication also within the church's liturgical and devotional life—when done well. The possibilities and risks of spiritual and theological responses by the Church, both for survivors and for Catholic communities, are sensitively discussed in the principal *Boundary Breaking* report, *The Cross of Moment*, and recommendations regarding the Day of Prayer and other Church-located initiatives need to be considered in the light of the attentiveness to survivors set out in that research.



## 8. Conclusions

### An ecclesial trauma

Sexual abuse of children by clergy has been, and continues to be, a site of trauma in the Catholic Church. Although listening to abuse survivors was not an explicit dimension of this survey, we recognise it as the priority in any discussion of the abuse crisis. For victims and survivors of abuse, the Church—understood as both the institution and the community, and sometimes the very building – has been a site of trauma, affecting physical and mental health, relationships, and experience of the Church, to name just a few of the wounds recorded in listening to survivors, such as the conversations underlying *The Cross of the Moment*.

The survey data explored in the present report, however, also points to the abuse crisis having effects on the wider church community. This might be understood as *ecclesial trauma*. Clearly this term, like the concept of ‘secondary abuse victim’ needs to be used with care, so as not to obscure or mis-appropriate the primacy of victim/survivor experiences. However, the term is a helpful one to describe the rending of the social and religious fabric caused not only by the reporting of individual cases, but the scale and pervasiveness of abuse, the recognised failings of the Church to address it adequately, and a prioritisation of the reputation of the Church and clergy above care for victims, justice, truth, or gospel. The research questions we explored regarding the awareness of, attitudes towards, and impact arising from the abuse crisis for ‘ordinary Catholics’ can be understood as asking how the Church in England and Wales (as People of God, not as institution) has recognised and responded to this trauma.

Thinking of the abuse crisis as an ecclesial trauma allows us to draw some conclusions across the data as a whole, to complement, not replace, the detailed analysis in the main body of the report. Throughout the study a key category for understanding the changes in practice and in the distribution of attitudes and awareness between different Mass-going segments has been the concept of disaffiliation. A major contribution of Stephen Bullivant’s work in this field has been to show how disaffiliation in the Catholic Church is not a binary switch but a potentially long drawn-out sequence of progressive loosening of ties. Liam Hayes helpfully suggests the categories of ‘ecclesial drift’, ‘ecclesial estrangement’ and ‘ecclesial disaffiliation’ to distinguish between a distancing occasioned by, respectively: competing life commitment; a sense of the Church moving away from the individual; and an intentional decision to separate from the Church.<sup>62</sup>

62. Hayes, 11-12.

Disaffiliation can have many complex causes: sometimes these are slow and cumulative; but at other times a particular significant event which shakes the convictions of faith and/or identity and/or practice. These latter might be considered as instances of religious trauma.<sup>63</sup> This is perhaps most easily seen when a religious person must deal with a tragic bereavement such as the loss of a child or has a sense of overpowering evil in the world. In both cases the cry ‘how could a good God allow this?’ can cause the cognitive, social, and emotional bonds with a religious practice and underlying faith to be weakened and ruptured.<sup>64</sup>

The abuse crisis has sometimes been described as a ‘scandal’. If this means a sensationalist concern with the church’s self-image, it is deeply inappropriate. But in the original sense of *σκανδαλον* (*skandalon*)—a stumbling block—it points to the experience of ecclesial trauma. What happens when the abuse crisis causes Catholics to stumble in their religious path? Evidence from our survey shows that the abuse

crisis has had a direct and substantial impact on at least two key indicators—Mass attendance and financial donations – of church affiliation. These are practices which are costly in terms of time, resources, or money or self- commitment, knowns as CREDs – credibility enhancing displays.<sup>65</sup> For around a third of Mass-going Catholics, our evidence suggests that the scandal of abuse has been a direct cause of increased disaffiliation, as the Mass-going and financial donation figures indicate. Furthermore, the consistent correlation between frequency of Mass attendance and more positive views of the Church across a range of measures, whilst not showing causality, certainly confirms the hypothesis that disaffiliation occurs across a broad spectrum, and that CREDs such as Mass attendance cannot simply be isolated from a wider religious life or cognitive, social, and emotional schema of situating oneself in the (religious) world: if there is a loosening of affiliation in one area of practice or attitudes, there is likely to be loosening elsewhere.<sup>66</sup>

63. The impact of the abuse scandal on Catholic disaffiliation—and resilience—are discussed in Bullivant, *Mass Exodus* 227-38. On religious trauma as a cause of disaffiliation, see also Aaron T. McLaughlin et al, ‘Who are the religious “dones?”: A cross-cultural latent profile analysis of formerly religious individuals’, *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 14/4 (2022), 512-24.

64. On the cognitive, social and emotional aspects of religious attendance, see Patty Van Cappellen, Vassilis Saroglou, and Maria Toth-Gauthier, ‘Religiosity and prosocial behavior among churchgoers:

Exploring underlying mechanisms. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 26/1 (2016), 19-30. On the effect of trauma on religious schemas, Daniel N. McIntosh, ‘Religion-as-schema, with implications for the relation between religion and coping’, *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 5/1 (1995), 1-16 (12).

65. The notion of CREDs was introduced by the American psychologist, Joe Henrich in 2009, and has been a topic of considerable empirical research since then. For a discussion of CREDs and the anti-pattern of Credibility *Undermining* Displays

(CRUDs) proposed by Hugh Turpin in Catholic disaffiliation see Bullivant, *Mass Exodus*, 102-9, 227-8 and H. Turpin, M. Andersen, and J.A. Lanman, ‘CREDs, CRUDs, and Catholic Scandals: Experimentally Examining the Effects of Religious Paragon Behaviour on Co-Religionist Belief’, *Religion, Brain, and Behavior*, 9/2 (2019), 143-55.

66. Qualitative analysis of the impact of clerical sex abuse and the ‘accumulation of ecclesial discord and disillusionment’ to which the contributes can be found in Hayes, 83-88.

## Distancing effects

Overall, analysis of the survey data shows a Catholic community in England and Wales which has resisted the temptation to think that abuse is a uniquely or particularly Catholic or clerical problem. Around half of the Catholics in the survey viewed abuse in the Church to be broadly comparable to other parts of society where vulnerable children and adult power come into contact. Does this mean that Catholics have simply ignored the particular evils of abuse in their own church? The responses suggest not. Even among those who view child sexual abuse in the Church as a largely historical failing, there is a conviction that the Church needs to make changes to prevent such abuse happening in the future. The consistently low rating for handling of abuse cases by bishops in England and Wales indicates that Catholics recognise that structural, procedural, and pastoral responses to the impact of abuse in the Church have been underwhelming and implicitly have room for improvement.

Within this overall picture, our research shows that effect has been greatest on those who have a greater degree of disaffiliation. At opposite ends of the scale of affiliation there are two important ways in which this effect is not linear—one arising from the nature of the classification, and one observed in the data. At the highly disaffiliated end of the scale—those who still identify as Catholic but who do not attend Mass or donate funds—then these measures clearly cannot be used to identify further degrees of disaffiliation (hence, a greater proportion of occasional Mass-goers reported a drop in attendance compared to Nevers, although self-reported Nevers who said they previously attended and stopped due to the abuse crisis did represent a higher proportion of that classification, than was the case among Occasional Mass-goers). At the upper end of the scale, the observed data showed a much stronger effect of Mass-going practice on positive attitudes for Catholics attending weekly or more. This coheres with other research into disaffiliation and retention among church communities.<sup>67</sup>



67. In addition to Bullivant's work, see for example, McLaughlin et al, 'Who are the religious "dones?"'.

Why should this overall pattern, and intensification of the effect of religious practice at the upper end of the Regular group, be the case? One hypothesis might be a general rule that those invested in religious identity will tend to defend that identity, especially against criticism from outsiders. While this may be true in some cases, it satisfies neither in terms of the situation—abuse victims had often been Church members—nor the observed data. The survey data shows that, although a higher proportion of Regular attenders are more likely to evidence strongly positive attitudes compared to other groups (and Nevers to evidence strongly negative ones), across all Mass-going groups, a substantial body hold neutral or weakly positive/negative attitudes. The sentiment scores comparing the Catholic church to other parts of society, and those for the response of bishops to abuses cases demonstrate this. The presence of significant numbers of critical views of the Church's handling of abuse, even among weekly Mass-goers, and the relatively low figures for Catholics who have heard clergy speaking critical of the media coverage of the Church with regard to abuse suggests that there is something more subtle than Catholic groupthink going on here.

Can a more prosaic explanation be advanced? The data shows that Catholics who attend Mass have access to additional information through internal Church channels, with regular attenders hearing and absorbing this more than others, predictably. This certainly helps to account for the greater awareness of Mass-going Catholics but must be balanced with the clear indication that mainstream media remains the dominant source of information about abuse in the church across all Mass-going segments. Some research on the effect of CREDs in family settings suggests that this can enable successful 'reactive strategies' to religious trauma.<sup>68</sup> Our data showing that regular Mass-goers are more likely to discuss the abuse crisis with friends and family aligns with such studies.

### *Rehabilitating Catholic schemas*

Taking all these data into account, our research suggests that regular Mass-goers, especially those attending weekly or more, are able to respond to the ecclesial trauma of the abuse scandal without triggering a significant disaffiliation. A useful way of conceptualising this is to consider the set of relationships and practice and beliefs (cognitive, emotions, social bonds) available to regular Mass-goers as allowing them to reconfigure their religious schema in a way that neither necessitates the dissolution of that schema, nor any rejection of the data regarding abuse in the Church (for example through using a 'bad apple' rationale to quarantine the damage to the Church; accusing victims of being interested in financial gain; or by rejecting the data as an out-group attack on the Church by modern secular society).<sup>69</sup> In other words Regular Mass-goers seem better equipped to avoid two responses which assume incommensurability in one domain or another: either rejecting/disaffiliating from the Church or rejecting/minimising the data on abuse – and thereby the victims and survivors. In a healthy church, can the trauma of abuse be treated as serious, but not necessarily fatal to religious affiliation, without it becoming gangrenous through being trivialised or ignored? In dealing with the *personal* trauma of abuse—the direct impact on survivors and perpetrators, and the resulting impact on procedures, and structures—there is quite rightly a prioritisation of the survivor (*The Cross of the Moment*), but in dealing with the *ecclesial* trauma, however, cases of abuse, admissions of historical culpability, reparation, and procedures such as safeguarding form only part of the whole religious (Catholic) schema.

68. Daniel N. McIntosh, 'Religion-as-schema, with implications for the relation between religion and coping', *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 5(1) (1995), 1-16.

69. The notion of religious schemas in relation to trauma is introduced in McIntosh, 'Religion-as-schema'.

The Church's response therefore involves even more than listening, reparations, and robust safeguarding procedures. In the context of ecclesial schemas, not only individuals but communities and the worldwide Church must face the question of how faith, practices, belonging, and more are to be reconfigured in the light of disturbing data about clerical sexual abuse of children and deficiencies in the Church's response, the experience of victims, and the experience of ordinary Catholics trying to make sense of what has happened in their Church. In other words, the abuse crisis has created a situation where Catholics may need to reconfigure their religious *schema*. This can be understood as incorporating 'information from their social worlds in ways that are consistent with their schemas or they modify their schemas to fit their experiences'.<sup>70</sup> At the ecclesial level, this is sometimes portrayed as church communities and individuals reweaving of the web of belief and practice, or a making adjustments to a framework of belief to maintain coherence between data and theories.<sup>71</sup> Given the pathological-therapeutic language of trauma, it is perhaps best described here as a capacity for rehabilitation exercised by individuals, church communities, and in the culture of the Church as a whole.

In a healthy church, an immune system which can deal with ecclesial trauma such as the abuse crisis requires a breadth of perspectives so as to avoid the dangers of religious groupthink. The concept of groupthink, first proposed by the psychologist Irving L. Janis in the 1970s can be thought of as 'a collective coping process ... where stressful events or external threats to the group are handled by collective denial, and by omnipotent and self-sufficient group behaviour'.<sup>72</sup> The applicability of such a concept to the Catholic Church's handling of abuse is obvious, but it need not be the only strategy available for Catholics indirectly impacted by the abuse scandal.

The ability to reconfigure—*rehabilitate*—in the light of ecclesial trauma requires not a set of predetermined answers, regardless of whether from religious or secular narratives. It also requires time to heal – to process and reconfigure substantively but non-destructively. And it demands an ability to deal with differences in affiliation and differences in practice among the diverse Catholic community, recognising that practice is not a simple marker of religiosity but a pointer to a complex raft of social, emotional, and cognitive relationships. Catholics cannot simply be divided neatly into practicing and lapsed based on weekly Mass attendance. Catholic identity is more complex than that. Practically, this could be a significant consideration for Church bodies (such as CBCEW, or individual dioceses or agencies) considering how to respond to the abuse crisis in the longer term, with a view to its ecclesial impacts. Our data suggests that those attending less than weekly but more than once every two months are groups of particular interest here, and indeed may be typical of the practice for many Catholics who are far from being entirely disaffiliated.



70. Daryl R. Van Tongeren, C. Nathan DeWall, Zhansheng Chen, Chris G. Sibley, and Joseph Bulbulia, 'Religious residue: Cross-cultural evidence that religious psychology and behavior persist following deidentification', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 120/2 (2021), 484–503 (486).

71. See Paul D. Murray, 'Discerning the Dynamics of Doctrinal Development: A Post-Foundationalist Perspective', in *Faithful Reading: New Essays in Theology in Honour of Fergus Kerr, OP*, edited by Simon Oliver, Karen Kilby, and Thomas O'Loughlin (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 193–220; and, Gregory A. Ryan, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine in a Learning Church: The Dynamics of Receptive Integrity* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020), 33–40, 82–130.

72. Michael Rosander, Kjell Granstrom, and Dan Stiwne, 'Group mind in Christian communities', *Nordic Psychology*, 58 (2006), 74–88.

## A healthier Church?

In 2013 Gerry O’Hanlon suggested the need for a healthy immune system in the Church regarding the abuse crisis, connecting it to the first inklings of Pope Francis’ project for a more synodal Catholic church.<sup>73</sup> The evidence from our research supports the notion that a healthy ecclesial immune system is needed. Not indeed one which understands the reports of victims as pathogens to be neutralised – if we were to follow the medical analogy through they would be symptoms of the infection, not its cause. Rather, what is needed is an ‘ordinary way of living and working’ that is able to maintain the health of the whole body in the face of the trauma brought about by the entire crisis – not only individual cases but institutional failings and secondary damage to church communities and mission.

*Quo vadis?* Abuse in the Catholic Church generates trauma in different sites. Principal among these of course is the trauma of the individual experience by the individual victim/survivor. Closely related to this is the ecclesial experience of those individual traumas—how the Church has responded to individual cases and to the conditions which made it possible. While the qualitative research in *Boundary Breaking (The Cross of the Moment)* has focussed on these sites of trauma, the quantitative research in the present report has addressed individual experiences of the ecclesial trauma arising from clergy sexual abuse of children. What seems to be the next logical step would be deeper research into ecclesial experiences of ecclesial trauma arising from the abuse crisis, both in terms of individual church communities (e.g. parishes) and the Catholic Church itself—within a territory (e.g. England and Wales, or a particular diocese) and as a worldwide church.

## Are there local pastoral applications?

While such an understanding of the data in terms of ecclesial trauma may be helpful for scholars and church leaders, it leaves open questions of what, if any, pastoral lessons might be learned from the survey for Catholics in local communities such as parishes and dioceses in England and Wales. Here, we can do no more than suggest some findings which might be relevant: reception of the *Boundary Breaking* reports in individual contexts and communities will determine how any learning might best be turned into local recommendations.

### Critically faithful

First, the Catholic community as a whole, whilst recognising the diversity that entails, holds a reasonably balanced perspective on the prevalence of child sexual abuse in the church and in society. Overall, the church in England and Wales seems not to have been overwhelmed by a negative media narrative, and recognises that abuse is an evil not only to be found in the Catholic Church. Having said that, the data across all Mass-going classifications points to a church which sees this as an ongoing concern, not consigned to history, and one that requires further changes in the church to prevent cases in the future. These data suggest a good degree of realistic and reasonable understanding on which to build a healthier church. Material in the free text comments and the limited data available on the impact on faith, suggest that religious faith may prove more resilient than sustained Catholic practice, and therefore that the possibility of people rejecting belonging (to a visible Church community) without a prior rejection of believing (in God, or even in elements of Catholic faith) is entirely possible. When considering this, the impact of the abuse crisis needs to be considered within the wider framework of stresses and potential traumas in Catholic life, for example those relating to sexuality and ethics. Emerging synodal processes offer a space for such stresses to surface and be brought into conversation, hopefully before they become traumatic triggers for disaffiliation. Can dioceses and parishes provide ongoing structures and practices to enable this?

73. Gerry O’Hanlon, ‘Learning from the Murphy Report: A Theological Reflection’, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 102/408 (2013): 423–33.

### *Effective internal communications*

Second, by comparing the data across different levels of Mass attendance, it is evident that internal church communications, particularly pastoral letters and homilies, but also bidding prayers and newsletters are heard to a surprising degree. This is no small achievement: anecdotally, bishops and priests often have a sense of ‘speaking into a void’, and this sense can be shared by those preparing prayers or producing diocesan and parish communications. Since the survey was completed, responses in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle to the publication of a substantial report by the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA)<sup>74</sup> and documents from a major listening exercise including Bishop Stephen Wright’s response, have been consumed and discussed avidly within the diocese, circumstantially supporting the observation that internal channels of communication, while limited in reach, can still be highly effective. Comments received in the Hexham and Newcastle listening exercises also support a picture of a resilient but not uncritical body of the faithful. How can the critical faithfulness of those remaining in the Church be recognised and respected at local level by fuller opportunities for participation in decision-making, and transparent sharing of information pertaining to the parish, not only regarding abuse cases, but for example proposed clergy moves or diocesan restructuring? And how, at every level including local communities and groups, can effective communication via social media be delivered, bearing in mind that social media is not so much a delivery channel for pushing information as a platform for personalised networks and interaction. Learning from and leading by younger Catholics is likely to be of the first importance here.

### *Diverse parish communities*

Third, and not only significant for responding to the abuse crisis, but relevant to almost every aspect of church life, is the data on the Catholic population in England and Wales revealed by this survey, which adds to a body of work, especially the various studies by Bullivant and Clements, allowing a clear picture of the changing nature of Catholicism in England and Wales to be constructed. There is an obvious challenge for the Bishops’ Conference, and for diocesan bishops, regarding how to make best use of quantitative and qualitative data, both as social scientific data as such, and when interpreted in a theological and ecclesial horizon. However, for parishes without access to data and analysis, this survey should give pause for thought in recognising a continuum of believing, belonging, and behaving, not a simply binary of (weekly) practicing ‘Good’ Catholics and ‘Bad’ or lapsed ones. Taking the three keywords from the 2021-24 Synod, for example, how might parishes actively plan issues of *communion*, *participation*, and *mission* for those ‘Regular’ attenders who come once a month or every two weeks, or those working parent/guardians with school age children who are far from lapsed but only attend every few weeks? While reassessing the notion of a ‘Sunday obligation’ belongs to higher levels of ecclesial organisation, at a parish (and diocesan) level, can the ‘people of the parish’ be re-imagined in hearts and minds in local communities, to extend—conceptually, practically, and liturgically—beyond a normative model of weekly attenders?

74. <https://catholicsafeguarding.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/CSSA-Report-Hexham-Newcastle.pdf>

## A wounded body

Fourth, the survey data on the impact of the abuse crisis on Catholic practice supports other studies on disaffiliation which shows that a) disaffiliation is often a long journey of distancing and disconnecting, but, b) sometimes traumatic events can be the trigger to break the remaining thread, or to cross the threshold from regular, committed members, to starting a path of disaffiliation. Despite the apparent resilience of regular Mass-goers to the counter witness of credibility-undermining displays ('CRUDs') of clerical abuse, the statistics for reduced Mass attendance and financial donations, show there is no possibility of complacency here. Real damage has been done to the corporate Body of Christ in addition to the primary wounding of abuse victims. Without letting secondary victimhood define them, parish communities may need to be realistic that they are likely to have lost people, fully or in part, as a result of the abuse crisis, regardless of whether there were cases in the parish.



## Youthful voices

Finally, particular attention to the data regarding young Catholics is required. Our report only dealt with adults, so the youngest category is 18-24 and leaves questions of awareness, attitudes and impact on children, young families, and schools largely untouched. In several places, the 18-24 age groups shows significant difference from the large population, whether considered as the whole survey group, or by Mass-going segments. Young Catholics are bigger users of social media, which may account for some of these differences, but it is more reasonable to assume that there is a whole social matrix at play among this age group, which the survey was not instrumented to observe. What was observed was the tendency for young Catholics to hold stronger views and be less likely to hold 'don't know' positions. In the case of those who do not attend Mass at least monthly (remembering that this is a likely a proxy for a host of identity-affirming behaviours), negative views of the Church in relation to child sexual abuse are much more likely. However, the data on the Day of Prayer for Abuse Victims and Survivors suggests a productive aspect to such critical attitudes, and an opportunity for the Church to respond to the abuse crisis not only through prioritising listening to survivors, and taking reparative action, or by improving procedures regarding safeguarding, but also through finding ways—precisely as *church*, with all the particular gifts, possibilities, and perspectives of that reality— of creating a healthier ecclesial environment. Given the age-related patterns emerging in this survey, parishes and dioceses might want to consider whether a healthy church needs to seek far better not only the medicine of elders to heal the wounds of the past, but the fitness and energy of youth to decisively shape the future.



# Appendix A: Demographic constituency of the survey sample

Our survey was conducted during June-July 2022, using Bullivant’s aggregated data for England and Wales from the British Social Attitudes data for 2012-14 in order to establish a broadly representative dataset.

## Gender

Female	57%
Male	43%

## Age

18-24	8%
25-24	17%
35-44	17%
45-54	19%
55+	39%

## Social Grade

ABC1	75%
CD2E	25%

## Ethnicity

Ethnicity: Classification 1	
English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/ British	78.4%
Irish	5.6%
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0.2%
Any other white background	7.9%
White and Black Caribbean	0.4%
White and Black African	0.3%
White and Asian	0.9%
Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background	1.2%
Indian	1.2%
Pakistani	0%
Bangladeshi	0.1%
Chinese	0.3%
Any other Asian background	1.1%
African	1.4%
Caribbean	0.5%
Any other Black/African/Caribbean background	0.3%
Arab	0.1%
Any other ethnic group	0.2%
Prefer not to say	0%

Ethnicity: Classification 2	
White	87%
Other than White	13%

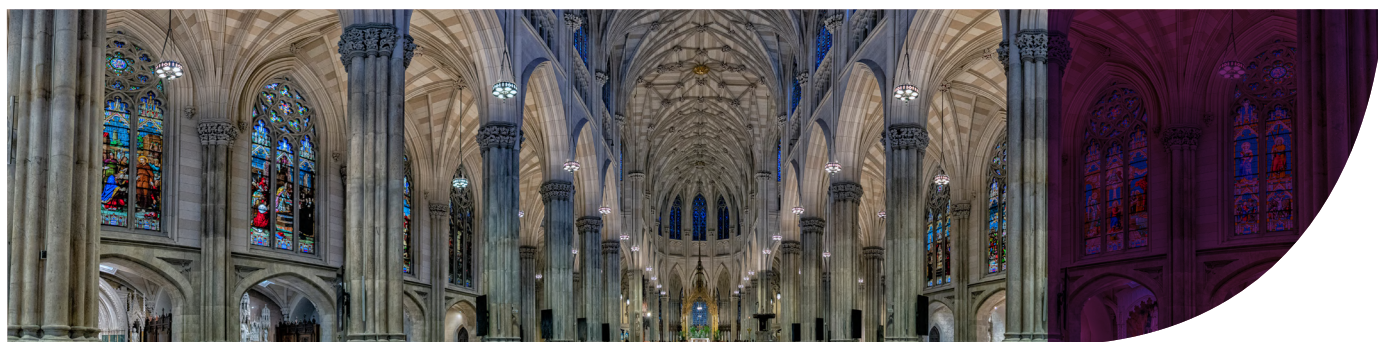
## Appendix B: Comparison with US Pew Report

Some questions asked in the YouGov survey were based on questions in a 2019 Pew Research Center report on attitudes of US Catholics (and other faith traditions) towards sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. In comparing these datasets, a number of cautions are necessary.

- The US data represent a much smaller sample (unweighted N=1116), both numerically and compared to the overall Catholic population of the territory than our survey (N=3120).
- The US Catholic data on self-reported Mass-going practice shows a markedly different profile to England and Wales, with 29% attending Mass weekly in the US compared to 19% for England and Wales in our survey. This is highly likely to affect the overall results and tend to more positive attitudes in the US data.
- The wording of the question was different in some cases, which may have affected responses.
- In particular, while some questions in the Pew Report refer explicitly to child sexual abuse by Catholic clergy, others refer more generally to 'sexual abuse and misconduct'. This included not only child sexual abuse but extramarital affairs, verbal sexual harassment, sexual abuse of adults, and sexual activity between Catholic priests.
- Questions in the Pew report referring to abuse in the Catholic Church used the phrasing 'among Catholic priests/bishops'. Our report referred to 'Catholic clergy' (which includes deacons) or simply 'in the Catholic Church'.
- The US survey took place March-April 2019, the England and Wales survey in June 2022. Between these dates, churches were impacted by Covid-19 in both countries.

For all the reasons listed above, none of these comparisons can be taken as strong evidence of differences in attitudes, far less offer any basis for why such similarities and difference might arise but are noted here as observations of interest which may invite further study and controlled experiments. The most interest observations arising from these comparisons are:

- the substantial similarity for figures showing an impact of Mass attendance and financial donations;
- the significant differences in perception of how well bishops and the Pope have handled issues of sexual abuses in the Church;
- confirmation of the pattern observed in our survey of more positive attitudes associated with more frequent Mass-going.



The following tables compare the data from the two surveys for questions with a reasonable degree of compatibility in terms of wording and scope.

	More Common	Less Common	Equally as Common	No Answer / Don't Know
<b>Pew Report</b> Is sexual abuse and misconduct more or less common among Catholic priests/bishops than it is among leaders in other religious traditions?	33%	4%	61%	2%
<b>Boundary Breaking</b> In general, do you think child sexual abuse is more or less common among Catholic clergy when compared to leaders in other faith communities, or it is about the same?	28%	5%	51%	16%

Table B-0-1: Comparison of US/England & Wales attitudes to prevalence of sexual abuse among Catholic clergy.

	Ongoing	Past	No Answer/ Don't know
<b>Pew Report: U.S. Catholics</b> Do recent reports of sex abuse reflect ongoing problems that are still happening or things that happening in past and mostly don't anymore?	69%	24%	7%
<b>Boundary Breaking: All Catholics</b> Is child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church is a thing of the past or does it remain an ongoing issue?	53%	25%	22%
<b>Pew Report: attend Mass at least weekly</b> Do recent reports of sex abuse reflect ongoing problems that are still happening or things that happened in the past and mostly don't anymore?	63%	34%	3%
<b>Boundary Breaking: attend Mass at least weekly</b> Is child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church is a thing of the past or does it remain an ongoing issue?	52%	32%	16%

Table B-0-2: Comparison of US/England & Wales attitudes regarding historical or ongoing nature of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church.

Reduced Mass attendance	All Catholics	Attend Mass at least weekly
<b>Pew Report</b> % of US Catholics who have gone to Mass less often in response to recent reports of sexual abuse and misconduct	27%	15%
<b>Boundary Breaking</b> % of Catholics who have reduced Mass attendance as a result of sexual abuse of children in the Catholic Church and/or the way it has been handled by the Church	25%	10%

Table B-0-3: Comparison of US/England & Wales impact of sexual abuse cases on Mass attendance.

Reduced donations	All Catholics	Attend Mass at least weekly
<b>Pew Report</b> % of US Catholics who have reduced the amount of money they donate to their parish/diocese in response to recent report of sexual abuse and misconduct	26%	20%
<b>Boundary Breaking</b> % of Catholics who have reduced the amount of money they donate to their parish/diocese as a result of sexual abuse of children in the Catholic Church and/or the way it has been handled by the Church	19%	12%

Table B-0-4: Comparison of US/England & Wales impact of sexual abuse cases on financial donations.

Support to Priests	All Catholics	Attend Mass at least weekly
<b>Pew Report</b> % of US Catholics who have expressed support/encouragement to the priests in their parish in response to recent reports of sexual abuse and misconduct	18%	35%
<b>Boundary Breaking</b> % Of Catholics who have noticed a priest affected by the abuse crisis and have offered them emotional/spiritual support	3%	10%

Table B-0-5: Comparison of US/England & Wales data on offering support to priests.

	Pope Francis	Diocesan Bishop	US Bishops / Bishops of England and Wales
<b>Pew Report: US Catholics</b> % of US Catholics who say ... has done an excellent/good job responding to the recent reports of sexual abuse and misconduct by Catholic priests and bishops	55%	49%	35%
<b>Boundary Breaking: All Catholics</b> % of Catholics scoring the handling of child sexual abuse cases by ... as 4 or 5 on a 1-5 scale from 'Very poor' (1) to 'Very well' (5)	29%	16%	12%
<b>Pew Report: attend Mass at least weekly</b> % of US Catholics who say ... has done an excellent/good job responding to the recent reports of sexual abuse and misconduct by Catholic priests and bishops	64%	66%	51%
<b>Boundary Breaking: attend Mass at least weekly</b> % of Catholics scoring the handling of child sexual abuse cases by ... as 4 or 5 on a 1-5 scale from 'Very poor' (1) to 'Very well' (5)	48%	31%	21%

Table B-0-6: Comparison of attitudes towards handling of abuses case by Pope Francis and Bishops' Conference, and Diocesan Bishop among Catholics in the US, and in England & Wales.

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