

# **The Role of Catholic Campus Ministries in the Formation of Young Adults**

**Project report and findings (November 2017)**

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## Project overview

"The Role of Catholic Campus Ministries in the Formation of Young Adults" is a Bass Connections project which aims to better understand the religious lives of Catholic students as they develop on-campus. In collaboration with campus ministries across the US, we've designed and administered a series of surveys to answer questions relevant campus ministries, as well as social scientific research.

This report is a brief overview of a few of the interesting findings from our pilot surveys (Fall 2016 and Spring 2017) and our follow-up multi-university survey of freshmen (Fall 2017).

# Outcomes

Our project aims to answer in what ways campus ministries impact the lives of the students they serve, and give insight into the practices that campus ministries undertake in their service to students. In particular, our project aims to answer how campus ministries influence students'...

...faith development

...professional goals

...thoughts, expectations, and behaviors regarding charity and service

...social and political attitudes

...mental health

...academic success

...sexual attitudes and behaviors

...substance use

## Short-term outcomes (1-2 years of data)

With each additional wave of data, we are given a better image of the religious changes college students go through, and the different trajectories they take. In the first two years of data collection, we will be able to see the initial impact of leaving family of origin and taking greater ownership of beliefs and practices... if they take ownership of their religion at all. Based on which students actively participate with campus ministries, we will be able to answer questions such as

How much (if at all) do students' prayer lives strengthen?

Which students contemplate consecrated life? And what attitudes to they hold regarding it?

Do students make commitments to service and charity and pursue opportunities available to them through campus ministries?

How much do students' political and social attitudes align with the teachings of the Catholic Church? And which students remain aligned with Catholic teaching?

Which students experience fewer or less intense mental health problems? And are students using the psychological and social support available to them?

Who cheats on their academic work? And who gets the most value out of their work?

Do sexually active students disengage from campus ministry? Or, on the other hand, are active students less likely to become sexually active?

Who is most likely to consume alcohol?

With this initial data, campus ministries will have a lens into understanding the major types of students at their campus (both those they serve and those who are not engaged). They will be able to see the religious beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of incoming students, as well as who disengages or grows. They will have insight into the major values that students use when thinking about the world, as well as how college life changes them (if at all). And they will be able to see the initial trajectories of students in their religious lives, alcohol and substance abuse, sexual activity, and mental health issues, and so can be better equipped to engage these issues proactively through their ministries.

## **Long-term outcomes (4-6 years of data)**

By the time we complete the project, we will have data on students' complete religious trajectories through their college years, and can assess whether they join religious communities after graduating. With the complete data, we will be able to answer questions like...

Do students who disengage from religious ministries ever join again? How do students' perceptions of the changes they went through in college align with their actual experiences?

Who commits to consecrated life? And what experiences along the way shaped that decision?

Do students give to the Church and charity as much as they expected to when they entered college?

Do students leave college more or less in-line with Catholic teaching?

Do students who experience negative mental health episodes also disengage from religious ministries? Or do students seek support available to them in their ministries?

Which students cheat or plagiarize? Do they do it repeatedly or sporadically? And do students who cheat or perform poorly in school disengage from campus ministries?

What are common patterns of alcohol use in college? And how do those patterns align with campus ministry participation

Do students who make commitments about sexual activity early in college maintain their commitments? And do students disengage from campus ministries if they do not keep those commitments?

The full data promises a rich source of insight for how campus ministries might understand and engage the students they serve. Campus ministries will be clued into the common trajectories that college students follow, and so be better equipped to engage students who might otherwise disengage. They will also have a lens into the values and attitudes that college students develop over time, which might inform programming and topical discussions.

# Study design

## Fall 2016 Duke freshmen survey

In the fall of 2016, we contacted students at Duke University who reported that they were Catholic in their application to Duke, and requested that they participate in our survey. Overall, 98 respondents (or roughly a third of all those contacted) completed the survey. The survey asked students about their...

- ...current and past religious beliefs, practices and attitudes

- ...political beliefs and social attitudes

- ...friends' and parents' religious characteristics

- ...behaviors and beliefs regarding charity and service

- ...professional goals and plans

- ...academic history and goals

- ...mental health

- ...alcohol and drug use

- ...sexual activity

With this data, we established a baseline for students starting at Duke in the fall of 2016, in order to map out their trajectory in the subsequent years.

## Spring 2017 Duke cross-section

In the spring of 2017, we contacted all undergraduate students who were in the Duke Catholic Center's e-mail list and requested that they participate in a second, similar survey. We also contacted any freshmen who completed the first survey but who was no longer in the Duke Catholic Center's e-mail list. Survey questions had since been refined by our undergraduate team members, but the survey addressed the same topical areas. With this data, we established comparison groups across years in school, as a rough indicator of the general trajectories across years of college.

## Fall 2017 multi-university freshmen survey

In the fall of 2017, we sent out a third survey. This time, we collected a sample from eight universities across the US. Freshmen students were contacted by their local Catholic campus ministry and were requested to be part of a new survey. As with the previous survey, questions had been revised in collaboration with the campus ministries. In particular, questions about religious life and the priesthood were expanded and clarified. Further, campus-specific questions were added to the survey. Overall, more than 700 students completed the survey.

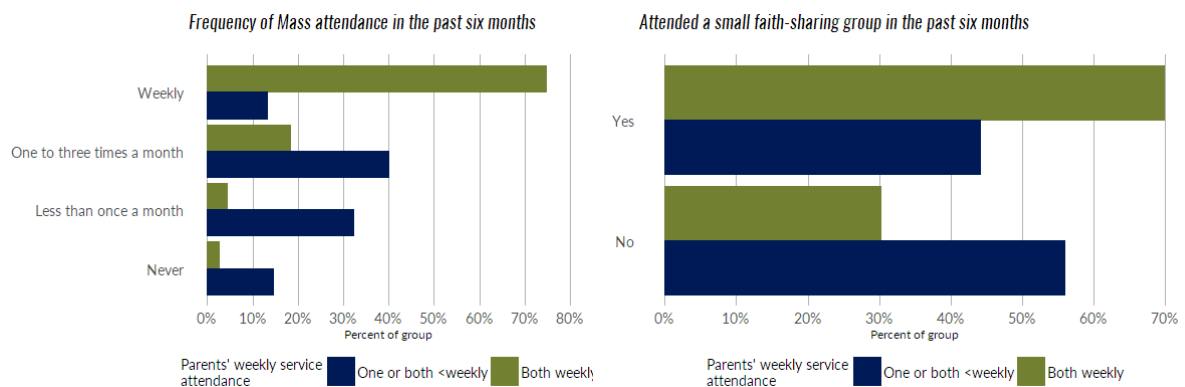
# Findings

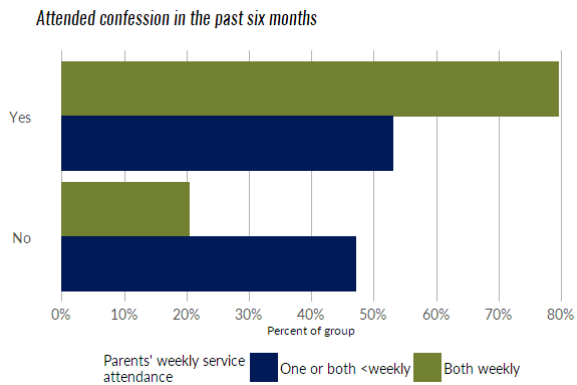
With the Fall 2017 data, we can get a good sense of the backgrounds, values, and behaviors of incoming Catholic freshmen. In this report, we describe students' religious behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes. We then describe students' attitudes about charity, their current charitable actions, and their expectation for future acts of charity. We then discuss students' current behaviors in two areas associated with the college experience: alcohol consumption and sexual activity. We then discuss students' mental health, including established measures of depression and anxiety, and who they confide in when depressed. We then conclude by discussing students' expectations for the future: what is important to them in their future work and how important marriage is to them.

To add a bit more detail to these descriptive findings, we compare students across three variables which represent the contexts in which they grew up and their present religiosity. Where illuminating, we compare students base on whether both their parents attend religious services weekly, whether three of their five closest friends are Catholic, and whether they currently attend Mass weekly.

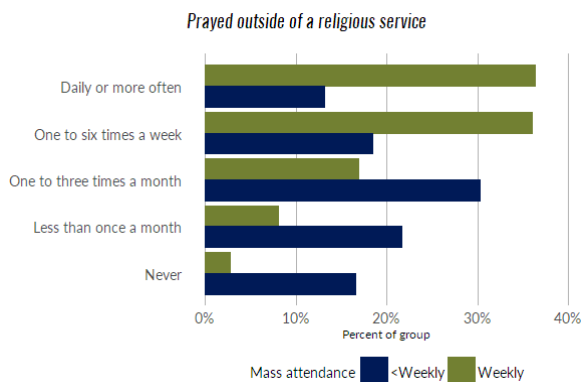
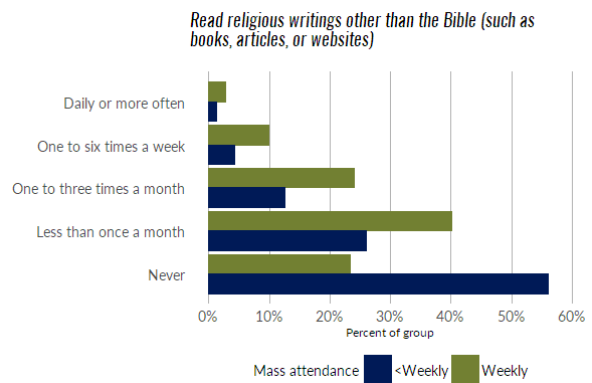
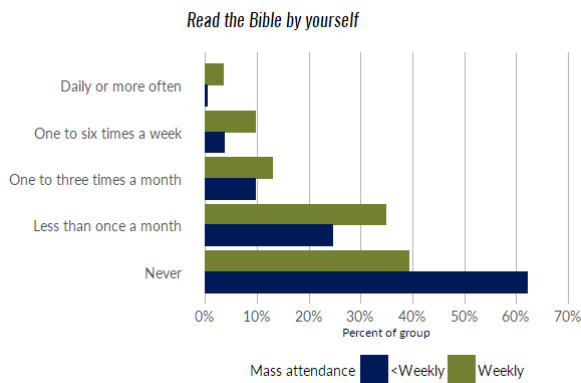
## Religious behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes

On average, the students we surveys are moderately religious. Over 70% of those students whose parents attend Mass weekly also attend Mass weekly. And over half of the students with at least one parent who attends less than weekly attend at least monthly. Likewise, 70% of students whose parents attend Mass weekly also participated in a small group during the past six months, and nearly 80% of them attended confession during the past six months. This is compared to the 40-50% of those with at least one parent who attends less than weekly.



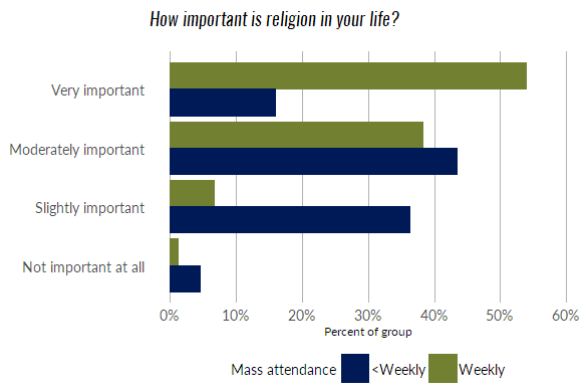
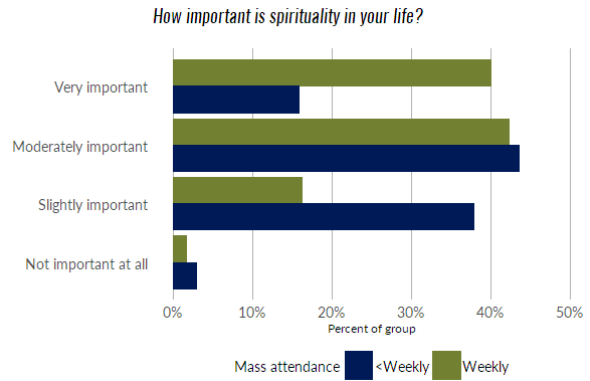
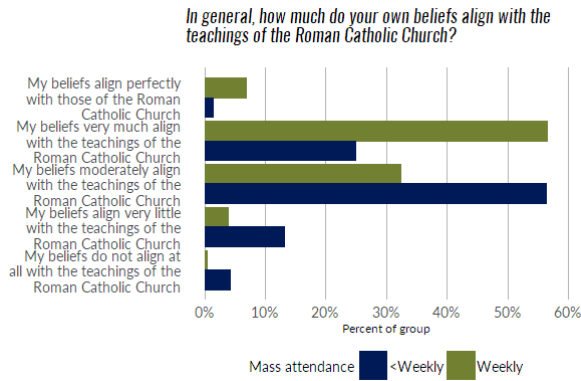


And those students who attend Mass weekly are more active in their faith in other ways when compared to students who attend Mass less than weekly. They are 20 percentage points more likely to have read the Bible in the past six months, 30 percentage points more likely to have read some other religious writing, and 40 percentage points more likely to have prayed at least weekly.

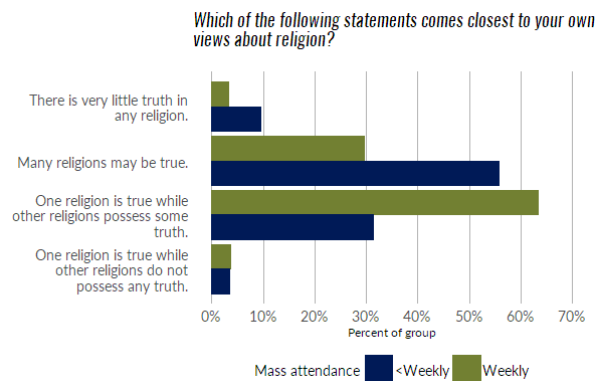
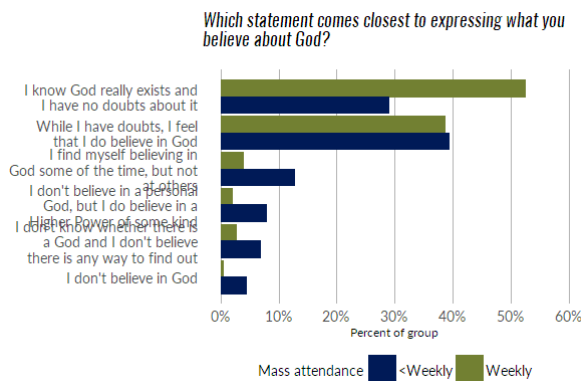


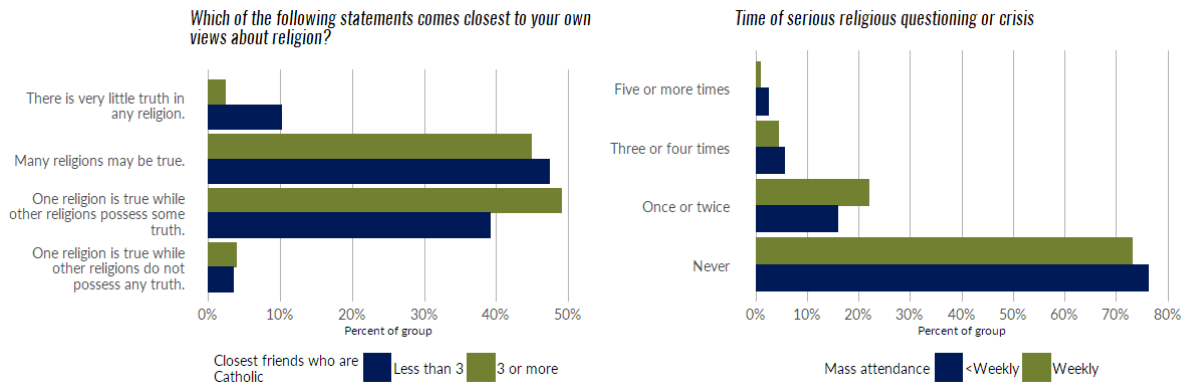
Regular attenders are also more in-line with Catholic teaching—at least according to the students themselves. While about 80% of students say their beliefs are at least moderately in-line with Catholic teaching, regardless of their Mass attendance, weekly attenders are twice as likely to report being very much in-line compared to less than weekly attenders. They are 25 and 40 percentage points more likely to report that spirituality and religion, respectively, are very important in their life.





Nearly all of the students surveyed believe that God exists, though weekly Mass attenders are less likely to have doubts. But there are bigger differences in students' views about religion. Nearly 70% of weekly attenders believe that one religion is true —while other religions *may* possess some truth—compared to only 35% of less than weekly attenders. Meanwhile, 30% of weekly attenders believe many religions may be true, compared to more than half of less than weekly attenders. Surprisingly, we see very little difference in views of religion when we compare students according to how many of their closest friends are Catholic, suggesting that students adopt relativistic views of religion largely independent of whether their close friends share their religion, and very few argue that religions in general do not contain any truth. In the same vein, nearly three quarters of respondents reported never having a time of serious religious questioning over the past six months, and fewer than 10% report having three or more times of questioning.



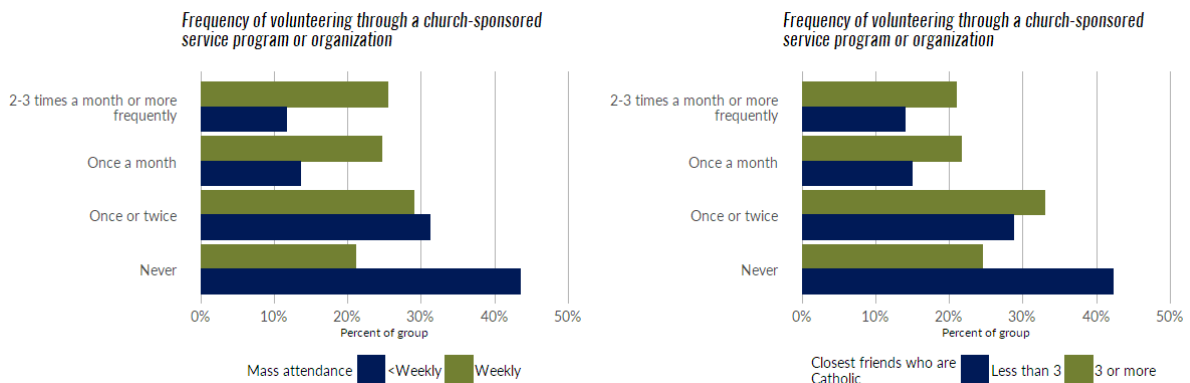


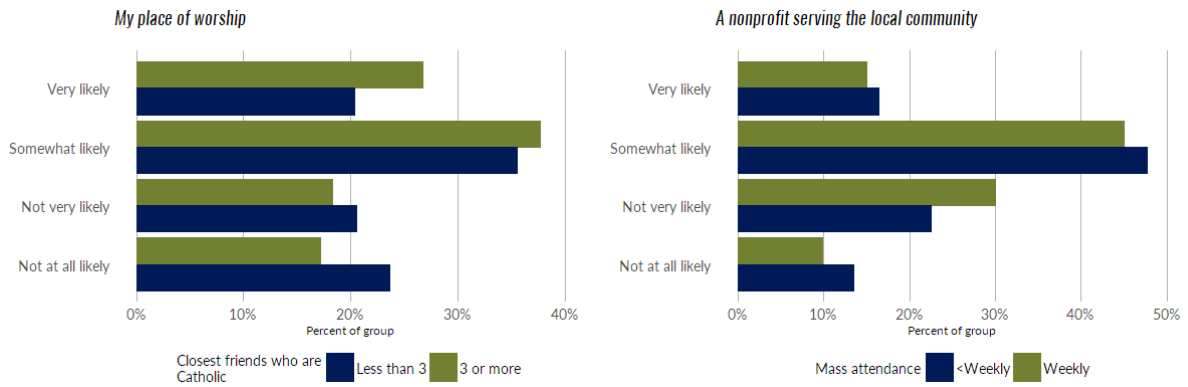
What does this tell us about the students that ministries are likely to see on campus, assuming students continue to be just as religious in college as they were before attending? First, the freshmen Catholic students surveyed look, on average, moderately religious, and a significant number are very religious. Most have at least some somewhat-regular relationship with the Church, and even a number of the less-regular attenders are involved in ways other than Mass. And most see themselves as moderately religious, spiritual, and in-line with Catholic teaching.

Clearly, campus ministries are most likely to see students whose families were actively religious. Yet even those students from less religious family contexts are relatively likely to have some relationship with the Church, even if infrequent. Time will tell whether these students maintain infrequent contact, or, without the comfort of their home parish or pressure from family, they drop altogether.

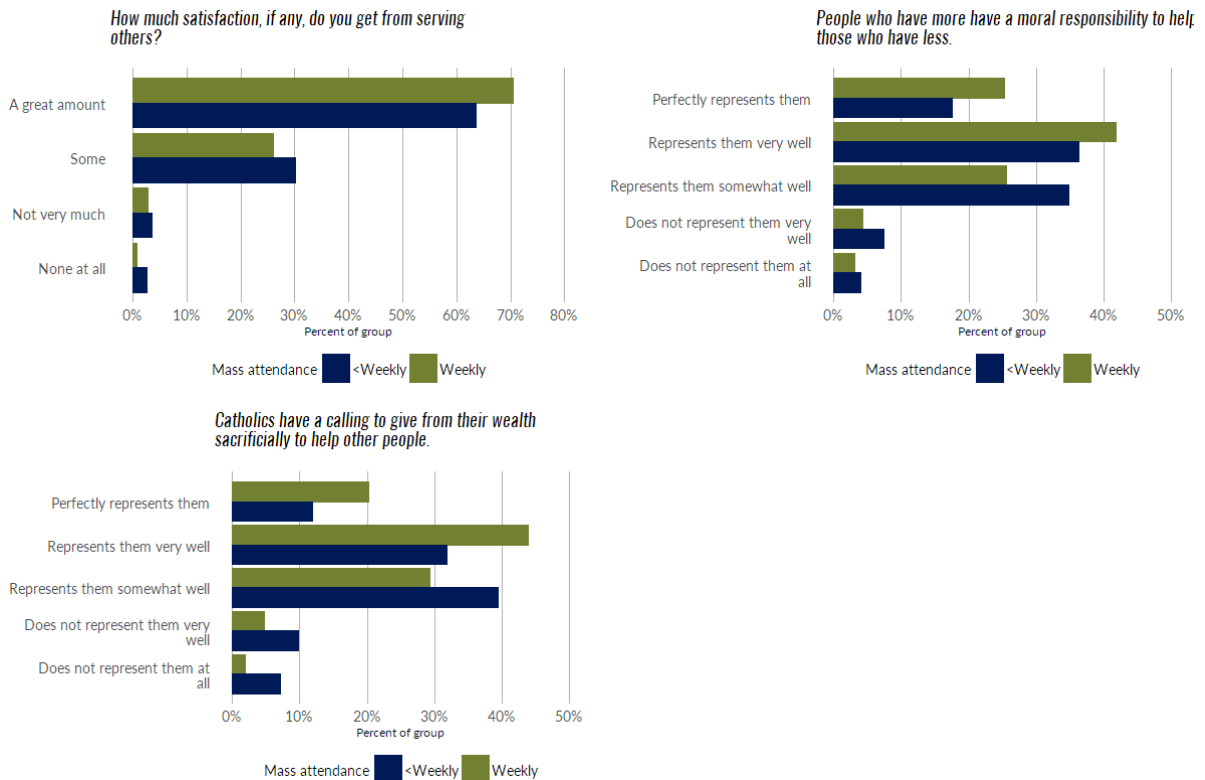
## Charity and service

A number of our respondents have volunteered through a Church-sponsored program or organization in the past six months. As might be expected, weekly Mass attenders are substantially more likely to volunteer at all, but we also can see that respondents with a larger number of close Catholic friends are more likely to volunteer. And more than half of the respondents report being at least somewhat likely to give to their place of worship as well as a nonprofit.





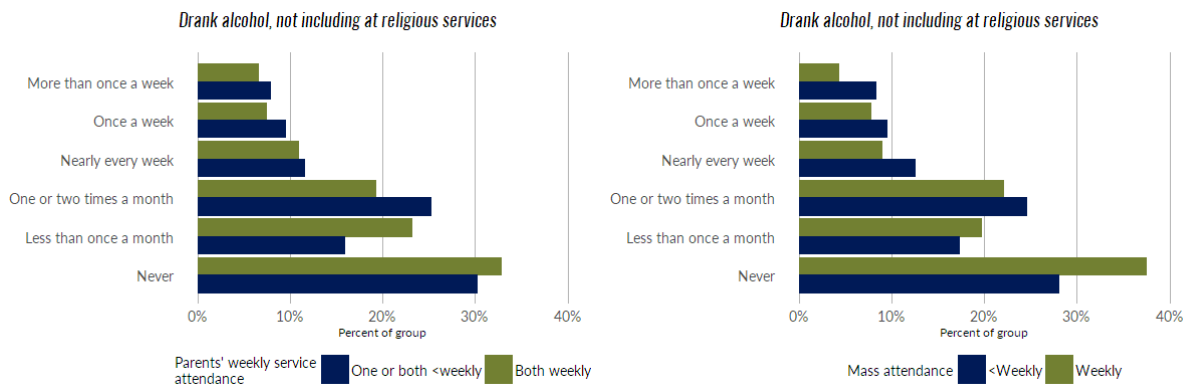
Respondents also reported that they get quite a bit of satisfaction from serving others, regardless of their Mass attendance or number of close Catholic friends. Further, when asked how closely their views align with the statement, "People who have more have a moral responsibility to help those who have less," More than half reported that it either represented them very well or perfectly, with weekly Mass attenders being slightly more likely to say it represents their views perfectly. Likewise, a majority of weekly attenders and a near-majority of less than weekly attenders were very well or perfectly represented by the statement, "Catholics have a calling to give from their wealth sacrificially to help other people."



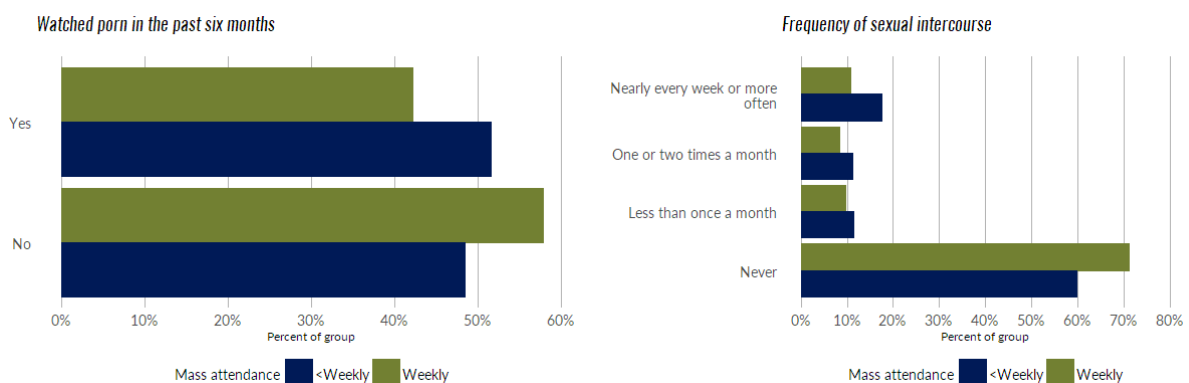
In summary, Catholic freshmen, even the less-engaged, are likely to be active in some service activity, support their places of worship monetarily, and see charitable giving as a responsibility and calling. Given these attitudes, we might expect—or at least hope—that students continue to live out these values in college. We will return to this question as subsequent waves of data are collected.

## Alcohol consumption and sexual activity

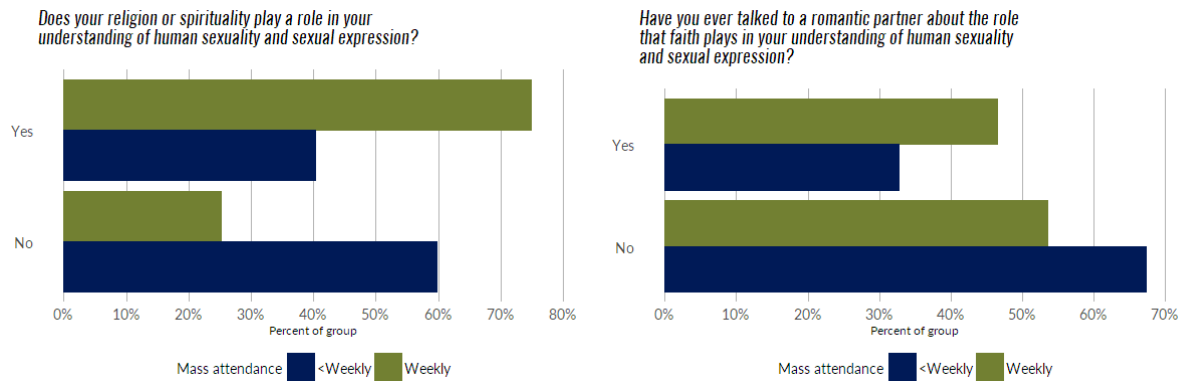
Unsurprisingly, a majority of our respondents have consumed alcohol in the past six months (not including at religious services, of course). While the number of close Catholic friends alone doesn't indicate much of a difference, weekly Mass attenders are nearly 10 percentage points more likely to never drink (though this is still less than 40% of weekly attenders). Roughly half of respondents, meanwhile, drank alcohol at least once a month, though we did not probe further about the amount consumed in each incident.



Turning to sexual activity, we see that a little over 40% of weekly Mass attenders and a little over 50% of less than weekly attenders have watched pornography in the past six months. Meanwhile, nearly three quarters of weekly Mass attenders did not have sexual intercourse in the past six months, compared to 60% of less than weekly attenders. Interestingly, this gap is slightly larger when comparing students whose parents attend Mass weekly to those whose parents do not (74% never had sexual intercourse compared to 58%), a small indication that parental oversight (whether physical presence or cognitive salience) plays a role in students' sexual activity. If parental oversight is a significant factor, we might see a larger increase in sexual activity in our next survey wave than would otherwise be expected.



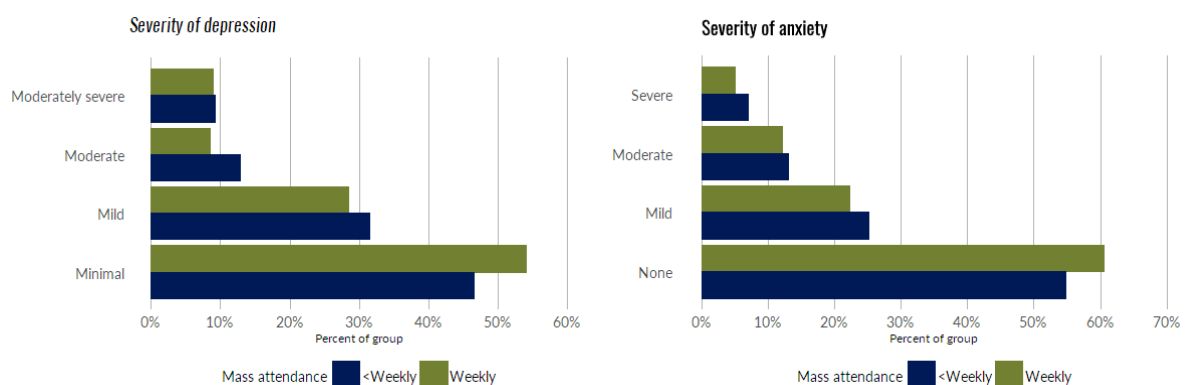
A similar proportion of weekly attenders report that religion or spirituality play a role in their understanding of human sexuality, though only 40% of less than weekly attenders say so. And while fewer respondents have discussed these issues with a significant other, nearly half of weekly attenders and more than 30% of less than weekly attenders report that they have discussed faith and sexuality with a romantic partner.



So, as might be expected, Catholic students are consuming alcohol (a significant minority nearly every week) and sexually active. And weekly Mass attenders are clearly less likely to participate, they are by no means opting out entirely. At least at this stage of their life, students have not abandoned religion for partying and sex. Over time, we may very well observe some interesting trends away from religious engagement in relationship to students' sexual activity and alcohol consumption. But regardless of what we observe in the future, campus ministries can be sure—if they weren't already—that discussions of responsible alcohol consumption and sexuality are immediately relevant to the lives of their students.

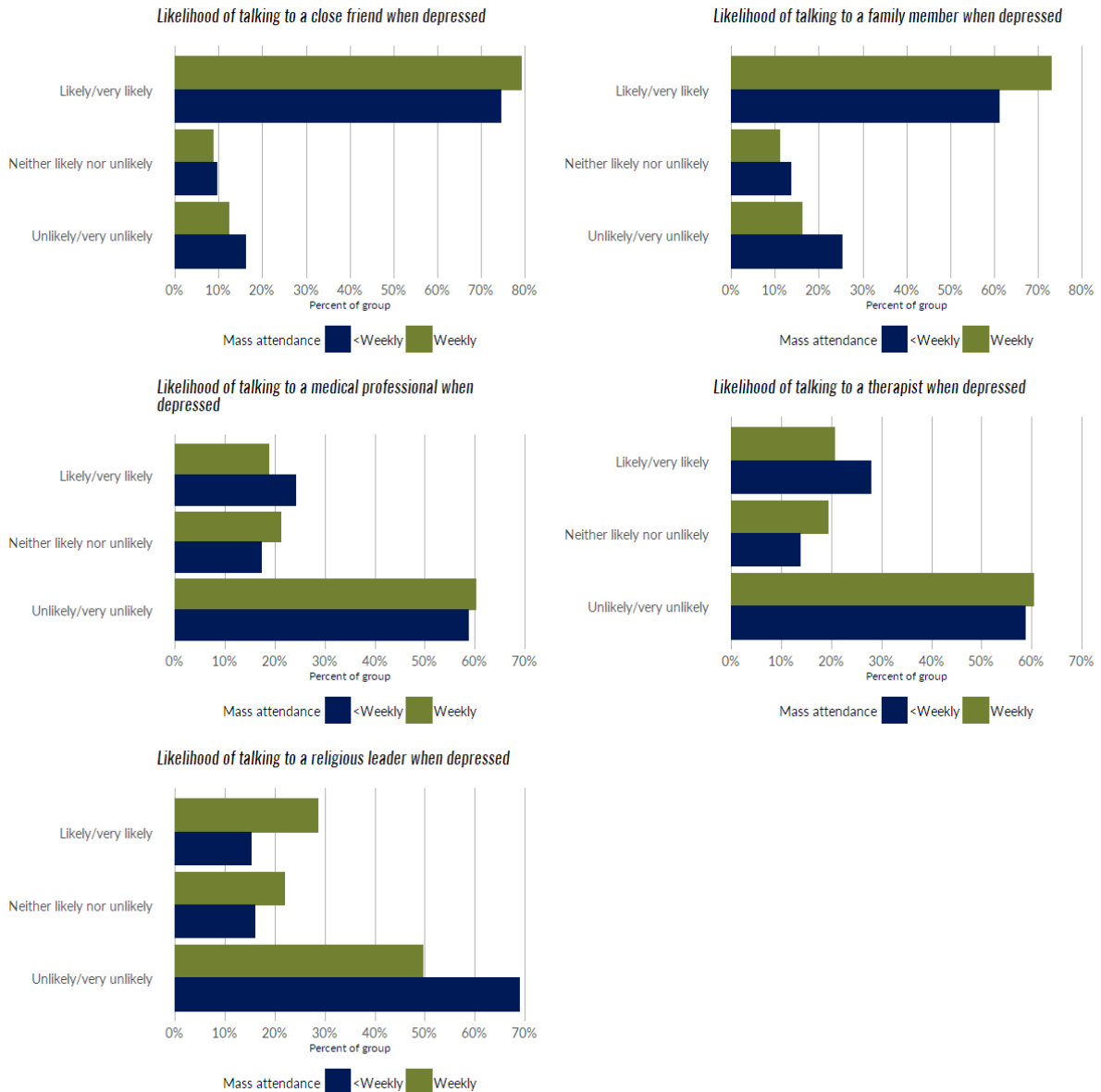
## Mental health

A significant body of research shows that religiously active people exhibit better physical and mental health—the reasons why are hotly debated. We used two short but effective mental health indicies: the Patient Health Questionnaire 9 (PHQ9) and the General Anxiety Disorder Questionnaire 7 (GAD7) to assess depression and generalized anxiety, respectively. When assessing depression, we can see that roughly half of all students report at least mild depressive symptoms, and just under 10% report moderately severe symptoms. While weekly Mass attenders *are* less likely to report any symptoms, they are by no means immune from depressive symptoms. The same is true of generalized anxiety, though with slightly lower incidence rate across the board.



But incidence of mental health symptoms is only one aspect of the experience of mental illness. Support seeking is also important. As might be expected more than three quarters of respondents report that it is likely or very likely that they would talk to a close friend when depressed and slightly fewer would talk to a family member.

Far fewer respondents are likely or very likely to talk to a medical professional (22%), a therapist (23%), or a religious leader (20%). And while weekly Mass attenders are, as expected, more likely to talk to a religious leader than less than weekly attenders, they are also slightly less likely than less than weekly attenders to talk to medical professionals or therapists.

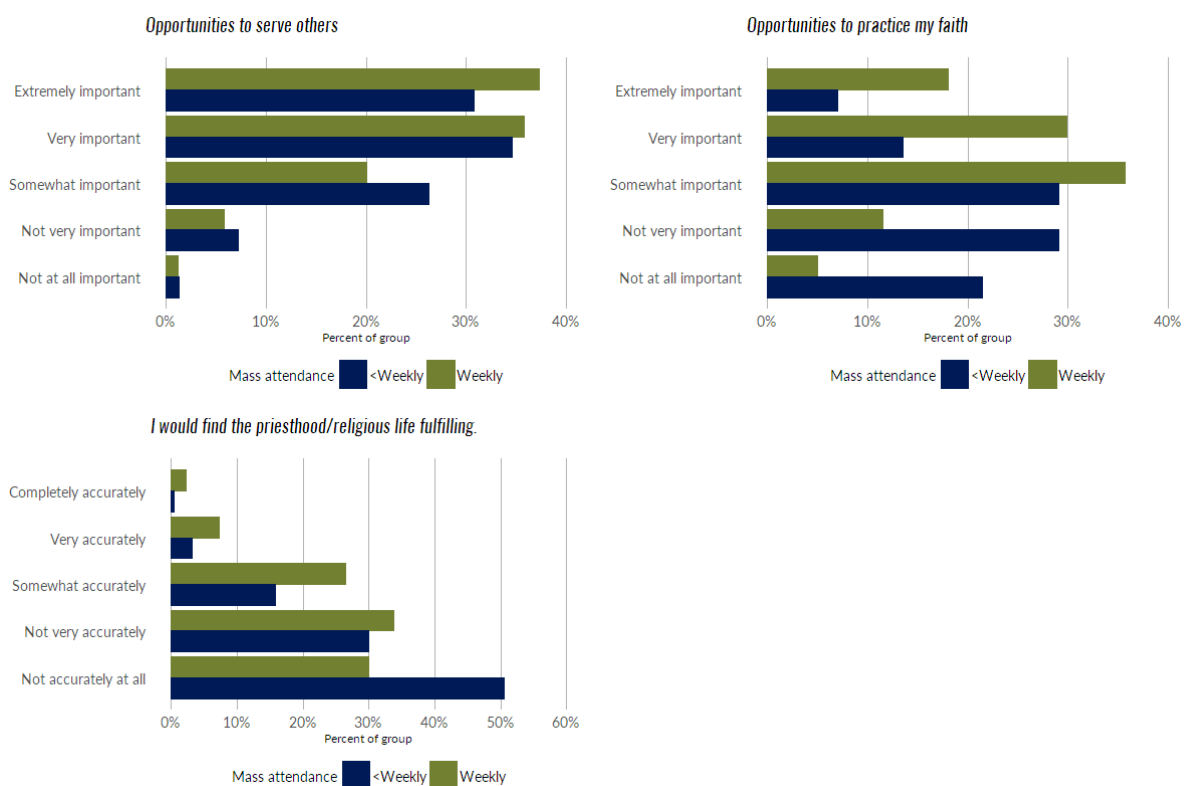


It should come as no surprise that mental health issues play a role in the lives of college students. And it might also be unsurprising to see that most students don't expect to talk with a religious leader when experiencing a mental health issue. But it is helpful knowing what role campus ministries *can* play in students' support systems, as one piece in the university network to help students in their times of struggle.

## Professional values

We asked students a number of questions about their career aspirations, but here we focus on a few that stood out. First, we asked students how important certain job characteristics were to them. In one, we asked how important it was to have

opportunities to serve others. As you might expect from the positive attitudes toward charity and service reported above, a majority of students said that this was very or extremely important, regardless of their Mass attendance. And less than 10% reported that it was not at all or not very important. By comparison, respondents were much more mixed, and divided by Mass attendance, when asked how important opportunities to practice their faith was. Nearly half of weekly Mass attenders reported that it was very or extremely important, compared to less than a quarter of less than weekly attenders. And roughly half of less than weekly attenders reported that it was not very or not at all important. More specifically, when we look at attitudes about entering the priesthood or religious life, we see even less enthusiasm. When asked how accurately the statement, "I would find the priesthood/religious life interesting," describes their attitudes, more than 60% of weekly attenders and more than 80% of less than weekly attenders say that it is not very or not at all accurate.



So while students report interest in serving others through their work, only the highly religious hope their work and faith life intersect in a more explicit way, and fewer still have high expectations for how fulfilling the priesthood would be. So, in some ways, campus ministries have a lot to work with in how they might engage vocation and the life of faith. But many students might be turned off—or at least need some coaxing—if faith in the workplace is framed in too explicit of a manner.

## Conclusions

These analyses are only the first few pieces of information we'll be gleaning from the data we collected. What we can see is that we not only have many, very religious students in our sample, as well as students who identify as Catholic but are not actively involved. We see that Sunday Mass is more popular than regular small faith-sharing groups. We see that students care about charity and service and, to some extent, live out those values. We see that the active Catholic students in our sample are less likely to drink alcohol or be depressed—but are by no means teetotalers or free from negative mental health experiences. And we see that while the most active Catholics are much more likely to value opportunities to practice their faith through their work, a majority of all students value opportunities to serve others through their work.

Ultimately, the value of these findings will be magnified by our future surveys, which help answer whether active students continue to participate, whether friends actually bring others to the Church, and so on. As we continue to analyze the data, we look forward to sharing more of our findings with you. Please continue to check in to our website, [sites.duke.edu/basscatholic](https://sites.duke.edu/basscatholic).