

FINDING FAITH IN IRELAND

THE SHIFTING SPIRITUAL LANDSCAPE OF TEENS & YOUNG ADULTS
IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

A Barna Report Produced in
Partnership with Christ in Youth



FINDING
FAITH
IN
IRELAND

THE SHIFTING SPIRITUAL LANDSCAPE OF
TEENS & YOUNG ADULTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Copyright © 2017 by Barna Group. All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-945269-24-0

All information contained in this document is copyrighted by Barna Group and shall remain the property of Barna Group. U.S. and international copyright laws protect the contents of this document in their entirety. Any reproduction, modification, distribution, transmission, publication, translation, display, hosting or sale of all or any portion of the contents of this document is strictly prohibited without written permission of an authorized representative of Barna Group.

The information contained in this report is true and accurate to the best knowledge of the copyright holder. It is provided without warranty of any kind: express, implied or otherwise. In no event shall Barna Group or its officers or employees be liable for any special, incidental, indirect or consequential damages of any kind, or any damages whatsoever resulting from the use of this information, whether or not users have been advised of the possibility of damage, or on any theory of liability, arising out of or in connection with the use of this information.

With the support of research partners Christ In Youth, Barna Group was solely responsible for data collection, analysis and writing of the report.

INTRODUCTION

Under Pressure	5
At a Glance	10

CHAPTERS

1. Religious Legacy & Identity	11
<i>Making Room for Youth by Gerard Gallagher</i>	30
2. Morality & Culture	33
<i>Q&A with Ruth Garvey-Williams</i>	37
3. Purpose & Success	57

CONCLUSION

The Need for Spiritual Guides & Encounters	65
------------------------------------------------------	----

APPENDIX

A. Notes	69
B. Methodology	71
C. Glossary	73
D. Acknowledgments	75
E. About	77

UNDER PRESSURE

Ireland is globally recognised for its long history of Christianity. There is debate over when people in Ireland first became Christian in large numbers, but most sources agree that Christianity had made inroads by the early 5th century AD, during the lifetime of Augustine of Hippo. Over the centuries, Ireland's religious reputation was further formed by its monasteries, missionaries and Roman Catholicism. The Republic of Ireland emerged during the 20th century as one of the most Catholic countries in Western Europe.

Religion in Ireland is changing, however, as a global shift toward secularism gradually and inevitably makes an imprint on a population where Christianity has long been the dominant religion. One example: “Regular mass attendance has fallen significantly since the early 1980s, when some parishes recorded rates of up to 90 percent,” reports *The Irish Times*. “In some of the poorest areas of Dublin, it has fallen as low as 2 percent, while in more middle-class areas it is between 30 and 40 percent.”¹ Barna has observed similar phenomena in studies conducted on primary faith segments in England and Scotland: While many remain very and sincerely engaged with the majority religion, others maintain it merely as a social or nominal faith—meaning, in the context of Ireland, a large body of Irish Christians are Catholic in name only.

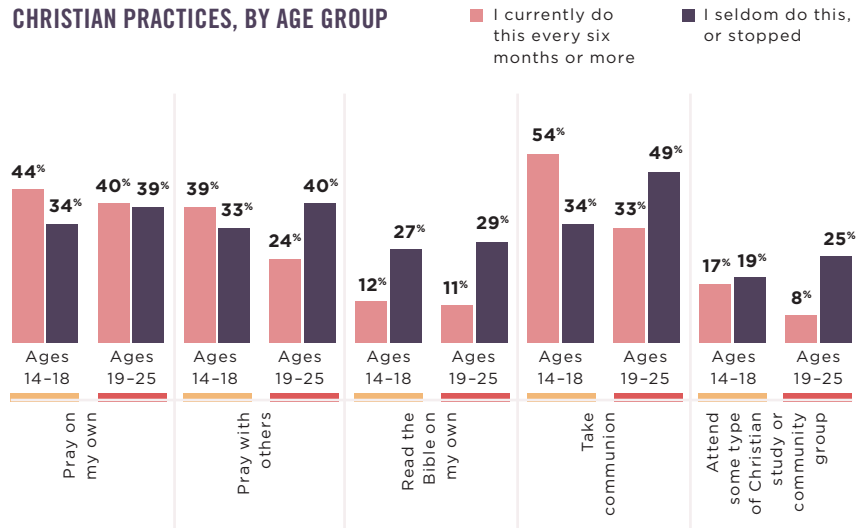
In the midst of these changes is a young generation that is anxious and searching. This report, based on qualitative and quantitative studies conducted in partnership with Christ In Youth, examines young people in the Republic of Ireland between 14 and 25 years old, with a specific emphasis on their faith, worries and perceptions of Christianity.

As a precursor to research with young people, youth workers were gathered from a variety of denominations in Dublin for focus groups. Then, local interviewers conducted 96 face-to-face interviews with young people all over Ireland. At the same time, interviewers asked youth workers about their ministry and faith. Youth leaders who weren't interviewed in person also had the opportunity to respond to the same survey online, contributing to a total of 51 online and 12 in-person interviews with youth workers. In addition to these qualitative methods, Barna conducted a randomised, representative survey of youth. Seven hundred fifty young people responded to questions in an online

survey, and an oversample of 40 youth involved in church activities responded to the same questions.

For the purposes of this report, “teens” refers to respondents ages 14–18, and “young adults” refers to respondents ages 19–25. In addition, data and analysis refers to those who are “Irish” or in “Ireland,” though this is within the context of the study’s sample—nationally representative of the 26 counties of the Republic of Ireland—and not the six other counties that comprise Northern Ireland. Beyond historical divergences between the two countries that share the island, the difference is key to Barna’s analysis, as the Republic is much more associated with Catholicism (84%, compared to Northern Ireland’s 41%). In addition, the Republic of Ireland’s population is growing at more than twice the rate of Northern Ireland (17% and 7%, respectively), but the density of its population is only half of Northern Ireland’s, at 78,000 people per square kilometer²—geographical and sociological differences which can greatly affect young people and their future, as this report will detail.

In interviews with youth workers, Ireland’s young people are commonly described as “lost” and “curious.” Those characteristics are accompanied by a drive toward morality and befuddled by image-consciousness and the



January–February 2017, n=790 young people (ages 14–25) in the Republic of Ireland.

Those who “seldom do this or stopped” = those who report never doing this activity more than once every six months + those who used to do this and no longer do.

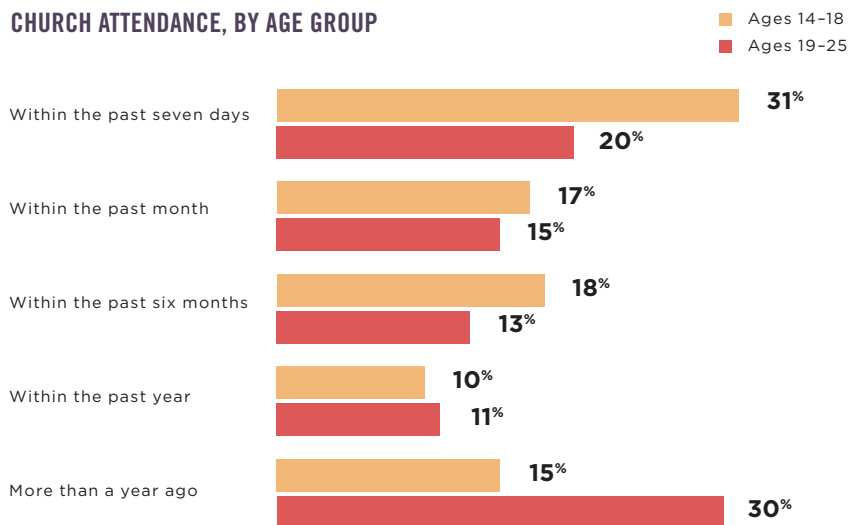
ubiquity of technology. Even as young Irish people are drawn toward big and important questions about their faith, purpose and identity, they are susceptible to any number of conclusions.

As Barna’s study reveals, developing a deep and lasting faith is not an easy task, even in a culture long associated with the Church. More young adults—nearly half (48%)—than teenagers (40%) say they are less spiritual today than when they were 12. Young adult Christians are less likely than teenagers to agree with the statement: “It’s important to me that the way I live reflects my relationship with God.” Nearly half say this is not at all true of them (48%, compared to 35% of teens).

Teens are also more likely than young adults to have been to church in the last week (31% vs. 20% of young adults). Young adults confirm that their church attendance has declined over time; two-thirds of them (67%) say they are less active in church than when they were children. Meanwhile, half of teenagers (51%), only newly out of their childhood years, report they are less active in church today than at age 12. Still, a significant number (21%, compared to 12% of young adults) says they are more active now than they were a few years ago.

HALF OF YOUNG ADULTS SAY THEY ARE LESS SPIRITUAL TODAY THAN WHEN THEY WERE 12

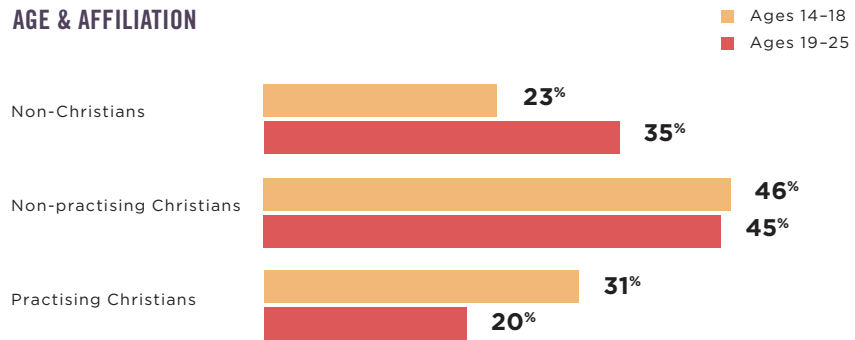
CHURCH ATTENDANCE, BY AGE GROUP



January–February 2017, n=790 young people (ages 14–25) in the Republic of Ireland.

There has been a reduction in young practising Christians—defined by Barna as those who identify as Christian, say their faith is very important in their life and have attended a religious service in the past month—similar to that of Irish citizens of all ages. The older youths are, the less likely they are to have continued practising their faith.³ There are likely generational differences at work, tied to the ideologies and behaviors of this specific group rather than only the spiritual transitions of growing older.

AGE & AFFILIATION



January–February 2017, n=790 young people (ages 14–25) in the Republic of Ireland.

*THIS REPORT EXPLORES
THE FORMIDABLE
PRESSURES THAT
BURDEN IRISH YOUTH
SEARCHING FOR A
SINCERE FAITH*

Each chapter of this report explores some of the formidable pressures that burden Irish youth searching for a sincere faith, including:

- 1. Pressures of religious legacy and identity.** Irish youth face a conflict over religious heritage. Most Irish youth, like the rest of the nation, consider themselves Christians, usually identifying as Catholic. But this label becomes an awkward fit as some grow up and struggle to see Christianity as more than a series of required ceremonies. Nominal Christianity presents a threat to thoughtful Christianity. Other countries in the region do not have quite the same conflict, given existing low rates of Christianity.
- 2. Pressures of popular morality and culture.** Young people in Ireland face a conflict similar to young people worldwide: the struggle to anchor their sense of morality at all, let alone to God or teachings of the Church. Broader youth culture and public opinion can make religious devotion and faith practice seem irrelevant, posing great social and ethical challenges to maturing Christians.

- 3. Pressures of purpose and success.** Individuals presently coming of age in the Republic of Ireland experience a pointed fear of the future. This group of Irish youth were born during or after the Celtic Tiger years, when Ireland rose dramatically from being one of the poorest to one of the richest western European countries, but the economy has not kept up. Since the global recession of the early 2000s, Ireland's economy has contracted, then recovered somewhat. The pressure to succeed academically and then professionally can complicate the pursuit of a purposeful life and contribute to feelings of anxiety and aimlessness.

In this report, Barna combs through the reports of youth workers and firsthand accounts from Ireland's young people to determine what makes the difference in developing an enduring and meaningful spiritual life.

AT A GLANCE

01

A majority of Irish youth are Christian . . .

70 percent are Christian, and 60 percent are Catholic specifically. 89 percent have attended a church service at some point.

02

. . . in name only.

Despite the long-standing presence of the Church, 63 percent of young people in Ireland qualify as nominal Christians.

03

One in four young people in Ireland is currently going through a crisis of faith.

Church attendance, Christian practices and interest in spirituality are on the decline among young adults.

04

Just three in 10 young people feel confident about their knowledge of theology or the Bible.

Accordingly, even Christian respondents indicate a muddled understanding of core Christian teachings.

05

The generation feels increasing conflict between progressive values and Christian morality.

Even among practising Christians, three in 10 say Church teachings on sexuality are completely wrong.

06

Attending Christian events is linked to a more personal and active faith life.

Christians who go to such programmes are more likely to report a personal prayer life, attend church monthly and say that Jesus has deeply transformed their lives.

07

Academic and professional pressures weigh significantly on the minds of young Irish people.

Teens are most concerned about test scores, while young adults stress about finances and job security.

08

Young Christians in Ireland are eager for a closer relationship between Catholic and Protestant communities.

51 percent say there is too much tension between the Churches, and 79 percent agree someone can be a good Christian regardless of their denomination.

09

Parents, church leaders and teachers are identified as influences who can make Christianity more appealing.

Yet more than half of Christian youth do not know an adult who regularly talks with them about their faith.

10

Seventy-one percent of young practising Christians in Ireland want to find a way to follow Jesus that connects to the world they live in.

Who will help them?

RELIGIOUS LEGACY & IDENTITY

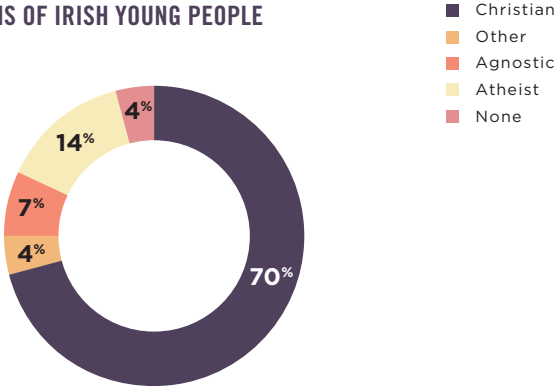
Ireland’s history is steeped in Christianity, and most Irish youth (70%) consequently think of themselves as Christians. Of those, 86 percent say they are Catholics, making Catholicism the majority religious identity in the Republic of Ireland (60%).⁴

Although it may seem that the pervasiveness of Christian identity lays a foundation for faithfulness, young people seem to be drifting away from an active, embodied religion, in more ways than one.

AFFILIATION

An initial sign of this drift is the significant percentage of young people who do *not* affiliate with religion. Much has been written about the “nones,” referring to those who either do not subscribe to or do not practise a religion. Barna’s study shows that Ireland is not excluded from a surge of religious skeptics, atheists and agnostics. As in all things, young people today feel they have options, and many begin to identify as non-religious during their youth. One-quarter of young people in Ireland (25%) says they are non-religious—and the older a young person is, the less likely he or she is to be Christian.

SELF-IDENTIFIED RELIGIONS OF IRISH YOUNG PEOPLE



January–February 2017, n=790 young people (ages 14–25) in the Republic of Ireland.

A MAJORITY OF THOSE
IN BARNÁ'S SURVEY
OF IRISH YOUTH
QUALIFY AS NOMINAL
CHRISTIANS

Even if Irish youth don't abandon the label of religion, they may discard its key tenets or spiritual postures. A majority (63%) of those in Barná's survey qualifies as nominal Christians—essentially, they are Christians in name only. (See the glossary in the Appendix for full definitions of all faith segments.) Overall, less than half (47%) feel their religious faith is very important, and one in five (19%) affirms the idea of salvation through grace.

A young woman from Cork says her biggest frustration with Christianity is this nominal form, which she feels misrepresents the Christian faith. "People even now think that it's all about the rituals, [when] it's all about relationship. People cling onto what the past has told them about our faith, but they don't actually know it for themselves."

In other words, many Irish youths identify with a religion whose content and claims they disagree with. The pressure to continue with this in-name-only version of faith is strong; consider how many desirable schools require baptism for students to attend, which some speculate may support high levels of baptism. In the summer of 2017, the Irish government again stated its intention to no longer permit religious criteria for school admission, a change which, if implemented, may reveal how much of an incentive Catholic schooling was for baptism.⁵ Still, other incentives to "be Catholic" remain, like required chapel attendance in some schools or the prospect of having a church wedding.

RELIGIOUS HERITAGE OF MINORITIES

The demographics of this study also reflect the changing demographics of the Republic of Ireland. Of the 790 youth surveyed in the quantitative portion, 72 percent are at least partly white Irish. Of the remaining quarter who did not list themselves as white Irish, most have other European backgrounds (15% of all surveyed). About 6 percent are of African descent, either recent or distant. Five percent have Asian heritage. One percent are Travellers. It remains to be seen how Ireland's population may continue to change along with that of post-Brexit Europe.

Ethnicity affects how likely someone is to identify as Christian. Of those with non-Irish heritage, almost two-thirds (64%) say they are Christian; of those with Irish heritage, the proportion is nearly three-quarters (73%).

Although a majority of those who are not white Irish is Christian, the remaining 36 percent are more widely spread across religious groups compared

to white Irish; 13 percent of youth who are not white Irish identify with non-Christian faiths, and one-quarter (23%) says they are not religious. Ninety-six percent of non-Christian white Irish youth are non-religious.

However, those who identify as Christian and non-Irish are more likely to practise their faith and to be evangelical in their beliefs. Many of them come from families rooted in highly religious places, such as Nigeria. They are more likely to have a personal relationship with Jesus, agreeing in higher proportions that Jesus speaks to them in a way that is relevant, has deeply transformed their lives and understands what their lives are like today. They are also more likely to say they are Christians because of a conversion experience—a specific, private experience of committing their lives to Christ (15% of non-Irish Christians). Sixty-seven percent of white Irish young people have never read the Bible on their own, compared to 45 percent of non-Irish ethnicities.

THEOLOGY

The overall religious apathy of most Irish youth who identify as Christian becomes clear when they're asked about their commitments to core teachings of the faith, such as those presented in the Apostles' Creed. Only about half of Christian youth in Ireland agree with any of the ideas in the Apostle's Creed included in the survey (see table). The statement Barna often heard from youth workers—that young people's grasp of Christian theology is quite poor—appears to be accurate.

Self-identified Christians have a broad range of orthodox and unorthodox ideas about God, with confusion over equality within the Trinity, God's power and the doctrine of hell. For example, four in 10 (41%) believe that Jesus is equal to God the Father. Among practising Christians, the proportion is higher (50%), but still smaller than youth workers would hope.

It's likely, of course, that some young people simply disagree with traditional Christian theology. One youth worker says this has to do with a “postmodern pluralist mindset. ... ‘Yes, God is good, but I like the idea of reincarnation, too.’” On that point, the same percentages of Catholic and non-Christian youth (10% each) believe that “when you die, you will become another being, such as an animal.”

General Christian theology differs between Catholics and non-Catholic Christians, and tends to show Catholic youth to be less convinced of certain

APOSTLES' CREED	% of Irish Christians ages 14-25 who agree	Parallel survey question
I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth	53%	"God is the all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect creator of the universe who rules the world today" (agree strongly or somewhat)
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord	36%	"Jesus was God in human form who lived among people in the 1 st century"
On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven	47%	"Jesus was physically raised from the dead" (agree strongly or somewhat)
and he will come to judge the living and the dead	31%	"Jesus will actually return to Earth someday"
I believe in the Holy Spirit,	52%	"There is only one God who exists in three distinct persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (agree strongly or somewhat)
the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints,	45%	"Christianity will eventually die out" (disagree strongly or somewhat)
the forgiveness of sins,	20%	"If a person is generally good, or does enough good things for others during their life, they will earn a place in heaven" (disagree strongly or somewhat)
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.	15%	"When you die you will go to heaven because you have confessed your sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior"

January-February 2017, n=497 young people (ages 14-25) in the Republic of Ireland.

*Given the familiarity of the ideas of the Apostle's Creed, respondents were not asked to affirm these exact phrases, but rather paraphrased, parallel statements of these beliefs.

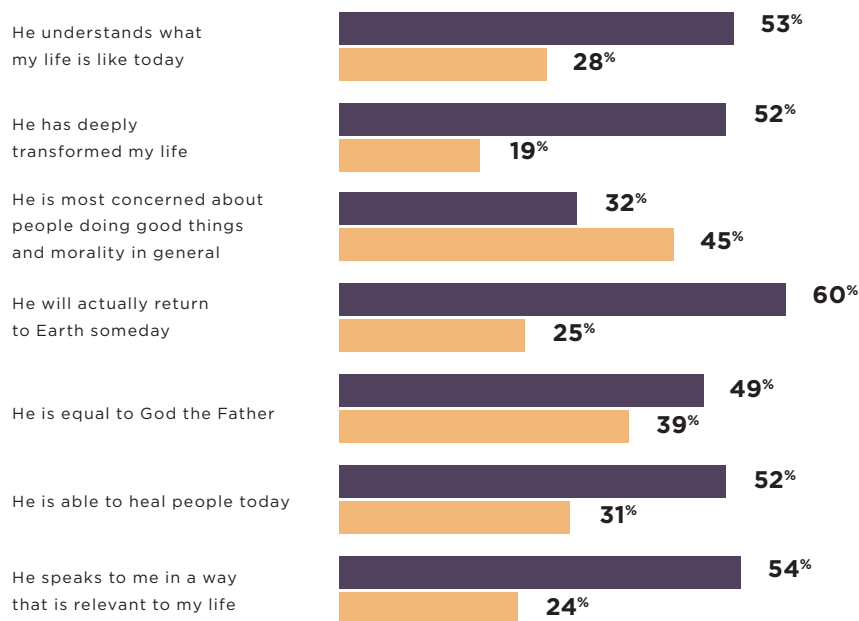
Christian teachings. More than one-quarter of Catholics say they do not know whether hell is a real place (29%), whether Jesus was physically raised from the dead (26%) and whether God is the Trinity (24%). Meanwhile, two-thirds of non-Catholic Christians believe in Jesus' resurrection (67% vs. 44% Catholics) and the Trinity (65% vs. 49% Catholics), and more than half (53% vs. 36% Catholics) agree hell is real.

Perhaps most telling: Regardless of their theological ideas, few young Christians seem to believe God understands them. Only one-third of Christians (32%) trusts that Jesus can understand what their lives are like today. One in four (24%) says Jesus has transformed their life; even among practising Christians, the number is low (39%).

*FEW YOUNG
CHRISTIANS SEEM
TO BELIEVE GOD
UNDERSTANDS THEM*

CATHOLICS' & NON-CATHOLIC CHRISTIANS' VIEWS OF JESUS

■ Non-Catholic Christians
 ■ Catholics



January–February 2017, n=458 Catholic and non-Catholic Christian young people (ages 14–25) in the Republic of Ireland.

Instead, the young Irish view of Christianity puts more emphasis on rule-following over a relationship with a loving and gracious God. Six in 10 (60%) agree that “if a person is generally good, or does enough good things for others during their life, they will earn a place in Heaven.” Similarly, 43 percent of Christians believe that Jesus is mostly “concerned about people doing good things and morality in general.”

KNOWLEDGE OF THE BIBLE

Young Christians have a lot of questions and doubts about the Bible’s trustworthiness. One teenager from Cork says, “I always ask questions to my parents like, *How do we know this is true?* And they’re always [saying], ‘It dates

back to real life; it actually happened.’ But some stuff in the Bible I question. My sister thinks the Bible is written by men. A lot of men lie a lot of the time.”

Age makes no difference in how well young people say they know the Bible or theology, in spite of the fact religious education is usually part of schooling. Even though more than half of young people (57%) have already learned about Christianity in the course of their education, and another one-fifth (20%) is currently taking a course on it, only three in 10 feel confident about church teachings and theology (29% “completely” + “mostly” true), or in their knowledge of the Bible (31% “completely” + “mostly” true). Only four in ten young people who participate in Christian events are self-assured in their knowledge of the Bible (40%) or church teachings (38%). Young people who are less involved in Bible or other Christian studies, group prayer, communion or serving in church are even less confident, with 43 percent saying it is not at all true that they know the Bible well (compared to 20% among those who are more involved).

Interviews indicate a common belief even among Christians that the texts of the Bible were written long after the events described and were altered for political reasons. Miracles are a barrier to some, teachings on homosexuality to others. One boy wonders about the authorship and how the canon was put together: “How exactly did these four [Gospel writers] know the stories? Who are they to write about it? Why did no one else get to write about it?”

BELIEFS ABOUT BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

In a country where nearly three-quarters of infants (73% in 2013¹) receive a Catholic baptism, half of Christian youth (51%) believe baptism is the point at which someone fully becomes a Christian. Others believe this exchange occurs by being born into a Christian family (17%) or participating in a confirmation or church membership ceremony (10%). Many interviewees also support the idea that baptism and confirmation are key to fully becoming a Christian. Committing one’s life to Christ is ranked fourth (8%), just higher than the experience of becoming a Christian in a gradual process (6%).

As making a personal commitment to Jesus Christ is not seen as a universal requirement for people of faith, less than half of those who self-identify as Christian (47%) say they have made such a commitment. Those with a private spiritual life (that is, Christians who say they are more spiritual

*HALF OF IRISH CHRISTIAN
YOUTH BELIEVE BAPTISM
IS THE POINT AT WHICH
SOMEONE FULLY
BECOMES A CHRISTIAN*

AT WHAT POINT DID YOU FULLY BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

base: self-identified Christian

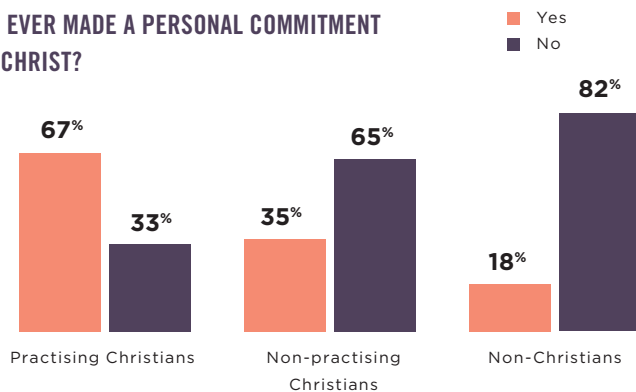
When I was baptised	51%
This is my family's faith, so I have been a full Christian since birth	17%
When I became a full member of my church, in a confirmation or other ceremony	10%
When I had a specific, private experience of committing my life to Christ	8%
It was more gradual than an event I can pinpoint	6%
I have not become fully Christian	6%
Other	1%

January–February 2017, n=553 young Christians (ages 14–25) in the Republic of Ireland.

than when they were 12, agree strongly or somewhat that their religious faith is important in their lives today and do at least two of the following: “read the Bible on my own,” “pray on my own,” “pray the rosary”) are most likely to have had that experience (80%).

Of those who have had a conversion experience, some abandoned Christianity first, only to return to it later. Other interviewees share about making a deliberate commitment to Christ and / or achieving a new understanding of God at church, youth group or camp.

HAVE YOU EVER MADE A PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO JESUS CHRIST?



January–February 2017, n=790 young people (ages 14–25) in the Republic of Ireland.

IRISH YOUTH NEED
HELP IN BRINGING
SUBSTANCE TO A
MORE CEREMONIAL
UNDERSTANDING OF
RELIGION

Some young people who are less active in their faith want to know more about practising religion. Irish youth express frustration about the lack of teaching on what ceremonies really mean or how theology is applied to daily life, even though there are school courses on religion. One Wicklow youth says, “When it came to confirmation, it was just ‘learn this and learn that.’ We never knew what it was or what we were learning about religion. It was just a bit frustrating.”

The rites and milestones may, in many young people’s minds, make them Christians, but Irish youth need help in bringing substance to a more ceremonial understanding of religion.

CHURCH ATTENDANCE

In keeping with the high percentage of Irish youth who regard themselves as Christians, nearly all have experience with church services. One-third of Christian youth (33%) attended church in the last week, as did 5 percent of non-Christian youth. Three-quarters of non-Christians (75%) have attended a regular church service, but more than half (53%) say it was more than six months ago. Even those of no faith still go to church at least occasionally (22% in the past six months), with just one in four (24%) having never attended. While more non-Catholic (44%) than Catholic Christians (31%) attend church weekly, the proportions among the two groups who have never been to church (5% Catholics, 4% non-Catholics) or who are dechurched (27% Catholics, 21% non-Catholics)—meaning they have not been to a church service in the past six months—are similar.

A majority of Irish young people feels that church attendance is optional (65% “completely” + “mostly” true), the same percentage as Catholic youth. Though fewer non-Catholic Christians hold this view, 42 percent still don’t feel church attendance is mandatory. Churchgoing is part of the family life of many young people, but the family expectations of going to church are usually relaxed at some point in secondary school. Of youth who say secondary school is their highest level of education, 29 percent are dechurched. This percentage climbs among students in post-secondary education who have not completed their bachelor’s degree (40% dechurched, compared to 49% churching). This is one of the symptoms of decreasing religious practice among young adults as they mature.

A YOUTH WORKER'S PERSPECTIVE

A Catholic educator discusses the gaps she's seen in Irish youth's theological instruction during her decade of experience.

Q. How would you describe ministry to Irish youth?

A. Hired positions in the Catholic Church for youth ministry are far and few between. There could be one person assigned per diocese. So I don't think [youth ministry] is a priority, if I'm being very honest.

I know due to the scandals and all that in the Church they have had to tighten up; most of the resources are going to child protection. By the church's official leadership, [youth ministry] is minimum, but I think the lay organisations in the church are definitely far more active and efficient than our own church.

Q. If fewer young people are going to church or mass, especially as they get older, where are they getting their perception of church?

A. I think they've seen it as something not relevant to them ... that has no impact on their life. They have no communication even with the church. They

come to school, they receive whatever religious instruction [to] make the sacraments, then they're good until they have to get married. Literally. No one comes near them. They have no incentive to attend.

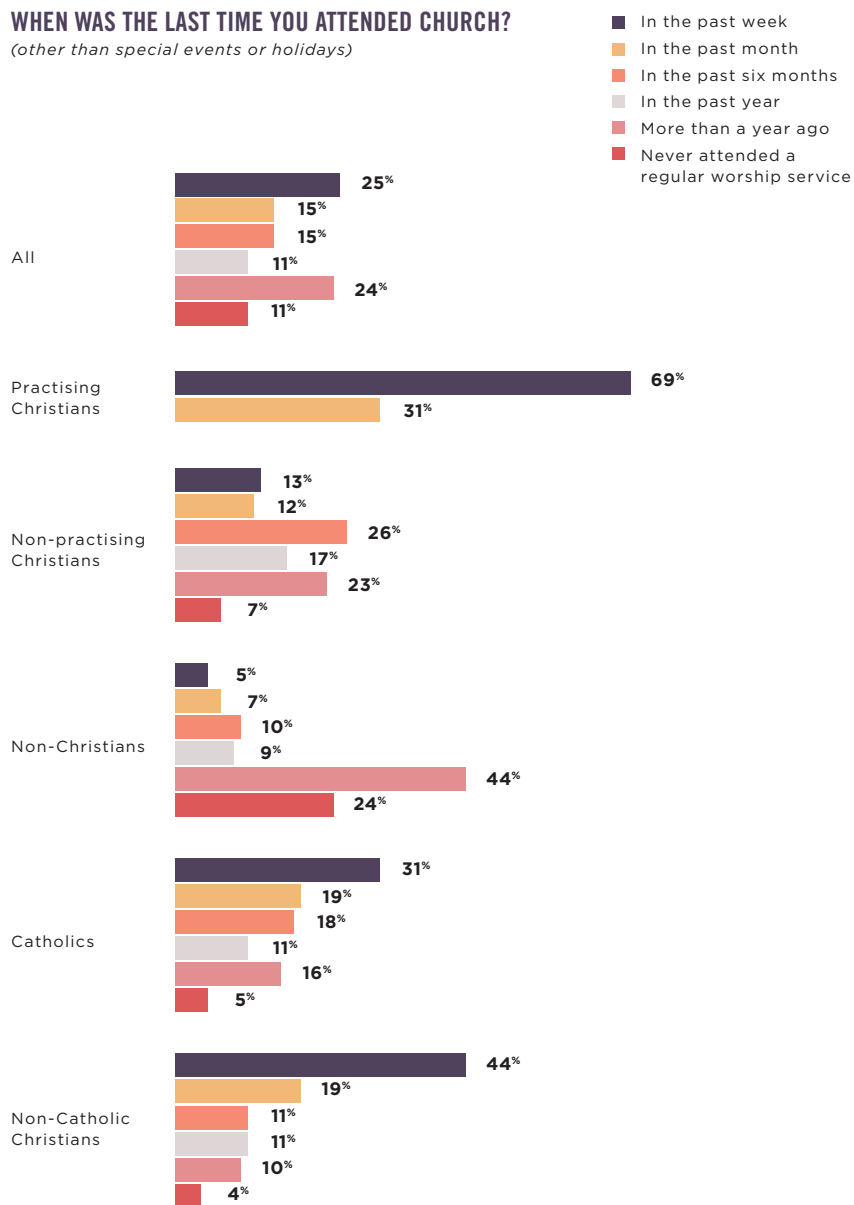
Q. How would you rate young people's level of engagement with the Bible?

A. I'll be honest, for a long time people would joke if you read the Bible, "Why? Are you Protestant?" ... Yet there's the serious truth in that.

On retreats we give out Bibles, and we instruct them. But if you give somebody a Bible and [say], "There you go. Good luck," it's pretty difficult to make that journey on your own. Some of the people involved in the faith, I doubt they know the story of salvation. And I only unearthed that in my second master's [degree]. Imagine that. The story of salvation, the bigger picture, isn't really given. Because if it was, then something clicks, and they have a sense of ownership that "This is my story—God's story, my story."

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU ATTENDED CHURCH?

(other than special events or holidays)



January–February 2017, n=790 young people (ages 14–25) in the Republic of Ireland.

Others, however, find that they enjoy being full participants in church, particularly when it is accompanied by a sense of community. “I went [to church] because of my parents,” one young man says. “But I’ve stayed because of the family that I feel like I’ve created in there. I honestly feel that I could go to anyone of any age, have a coffee afterwards and have a conversation. I suppose I’m comfortable there.”

The higher the proportion of youth attending a church, the greater the likelihood that those young people will attend regularly, have a faith integrated into their own lives and say that Jesus has deeply transformed their lives. This points to a key part of resolving the tension between a chaotic world and a purposeful life: Christian community.

Feeling part of a community does not eliminate the trend toward abandoning Christianity and its practices in young adulthood, however. With jobs and other aspects of adulthood that compete for attention, young adult Christians are still less likely to go to church.

FAITH TRANSITIONS

Teenage years are a developmental stage in which individuals form their own opinions, apart from their parents or teachers. As a result, Christian teenagers often go through a process of questioning and claiming their faith. Some emerge with a more mature understanding of their faith; between early childhood and the end of secondary school, some teenagers (13%) develop a private prayer and devotional life. One in four Irish youth (25%) is currently going through a crisis of faith, and four in 10 (40%) have already done so. Fewer practising Christians (16%) are now experiencing this, but nearly half (49%) have questioned their faith in the past.

Interestingly, among Barna’s sample of teenagers and young adults, age has no significant impact on whether an individual has experienced a time of doubting their faith. This indicates that reaching a spiritual crisis has less to do with an individual’s age and is more likely related to larger cultural shifts.

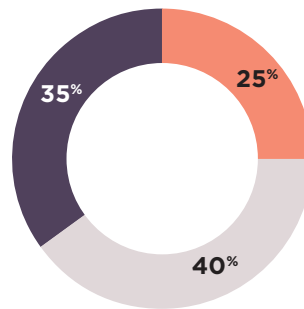
Additionally, people who go to church are no more or less likely to have ever had a spiritual crisis than those who no longer go to church (67% of each group are experiencing or have experienced doubt), suggesting that the process of questioning faith alone does not lead young people to leave the church. While they might be going through the motions, this willingness to retain a faith identity or remain active in a faith community leaves some opportunity

THE MORE YOUNG PEOPLE ATTEND THE SAME CHURCH, THE MORE LIKELY THEY ARE TO SAY THAT JESUS HAS DEEPLY TRANSFORMED THEIR LIVES

ONE IN FOUR IRISH YOUTH IS CURRENTLY GOING THROUGH A CRISIS OF FAITH

HAVE YOU EVER SIGNIFICANTLY DOUBTED YOUR FAITH?

- Yes, currently
- Yes, in the past
- No



January–February 2017, *n*=790 young people (ages 14–25) in the Republic of Ireland.

for youth workers and leaders to help individuals address questions and translate their presence into practice.

Understandably, those who have never been to church have a much lower rate of questioning faith; 53 percent never have. Similarly, for youth who say they are Christian but indicate a disbelief in God, their exposure to the doctrines of Christianity is so vague and their cultural ties to the faith are so weak that holding a stance of skepticism or apathy provokes little turmoil. One interviewee describes a sense of having little to lose: “My Dad would always pray with me, and after a while, I just sort of stopped. ... None of my prayers were answered. And it’s nothing against God. I just didn’t feel the need to continue it. I didn’t feel it benefitting me.”

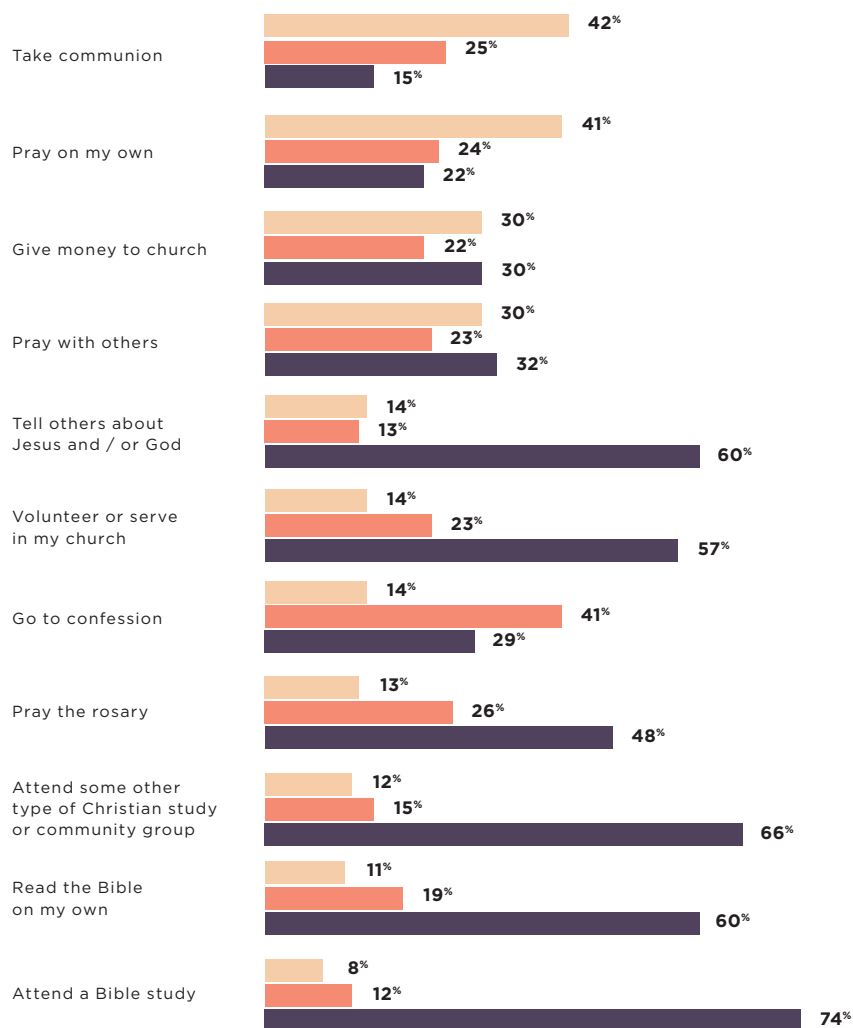
CHRISTIAN PRACTICES

A majority of Irish youth have prayed the rosary (52%) or gone to confession (70%) at some time. Unsurprisingly, these practices are most common among Catholics, due to the denominational significance of these acts: 85 percent of Catholics have gone to confession, and two-thirds (66%) have prayed the rosary. Only a few Irish young people, however, continue these practices on a regular basis (13% and 14%, respectively).

Communion and prayer are also common Christian practices of Irish youth, and remain consistent disciplines. Similar percentages of young people

CHRISTIAN PRACTICES OF IRISH YOUNG PEOPLE

- I currently do this every six months or more
- I used to do this and no longer do
- I have never done this



January–February 2017, n=790 young people (ages 14–25) in the Republic of Ireland.

in Ireland currently take communion (42%) and pray on their own (41%) every six months or more. Minorities indicate they have never participated in these traditions at all (22% personal prayer, 15% taking communion).

Church-led liturgy or scripture reading are likely a part of many Irish youth's religious upbringing, though more personal forms of Bible study or engagement generally play a smaller role in young people's spiritual lives. A majority has never attended a Bible study (74%) or read the Bible on their own (60%). The data reflects a denominational divide in emphasizing individual examination of scripture. Fifty-nine percent of Catholic youths report they have never read the Bible on their own, and three of four (75%) say they have never attended a Bible study. Meanwhile, four in 10 non-Catholic Christians (40%) read scripture every six months or more frequently. Just one in four (25%) has not read the Bible on their own and one in three (32%) has not participated in a Bible study.

Despite the accentuation of good works among religious Irish youth, volunteering at a church is not an incredibly common act. It is, however, more frequent among practising Christians (38% volunteer in church every six months or more), perhaps as a result of a more active faith life and community. Financial generosity is consistent (30% currently give money to a church), and Catholics and non-Catholic Christians are equally likely to give a tithe (38% and 43% every six months or more, respectively).

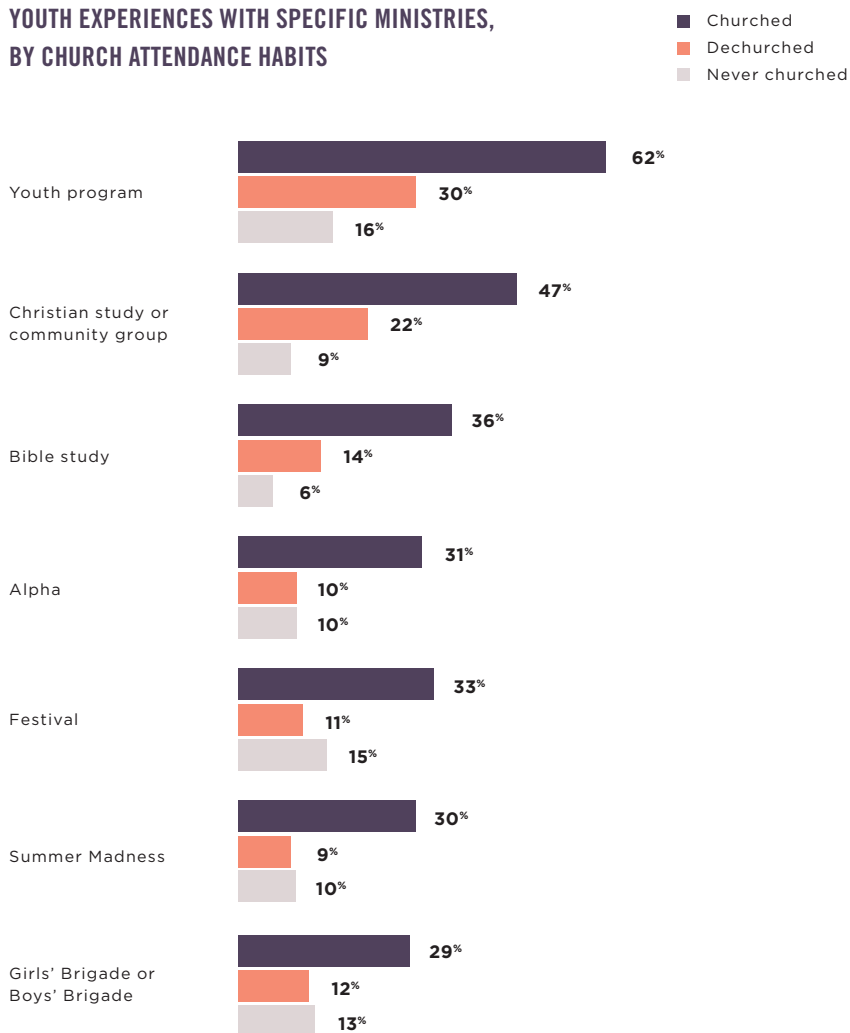
Some young people and youth workers say there is a good deal of pressure from peers to suppress Christian behaviors. In addition, most are unlikely to have gone to a Christian group outside of a church service (66%) or told someone else about God (60%). One interviewee expresses keeping spiritual interests secret from peers: "I pray at night sometimes when I need something there. I mean, I wouldn't be really into it. But I know my friends would say it's a lot of rubbish."

YOUTH EVENTS & MINISTRIES

Christian events—which may include festivals, retreats, weekends away, community outreach events, pilgrimages, local mission trips and overseas mission trips—reach a majority of young people (58%). Popular types of these programmes include courses such as Alpha; uniformed organisations like the Girls' and Boys' Brigades; groups that meet regularly, such as Youth for Christ;

and less frequent events, such as World Youth Day, Youth 2000 and Summer Madness. Among churched youth (those who have attended church within the past six months), reported attendance is even higher; nearly two-thirds (62%) have experienced a youth programme, and 47 percent have been to a Christian study group (other than a Bible study) that wasn't specifically for

YOUTH EXPERIENCES WITH SPECIFIC MINISTRIES, BY CHURCH ATTENDANCE HABITS



January–February 2017, n=790 young people (ages 14–25) in the Republic of Ireland.

youth. Eighty-four percent of practising Christians have been to a Christian event.

Christians with a private spiritual life also often give positive reports of such programmes (though some respondents may have picked up these practices following their time in the programme). For example, the biggest gap among the groups who found Summer Madness spiritually helpful and those who did not occurs between those who pray and read scripture on their own and those who do not. Whether or not these disciplines began as a result of attending the event, those who practise Christianity on their own overwhelmingly remember their experience with Summer Madness as helpful (88%), while less than half of those who do not have a private spiritual life believe their experience helped them understand Christianity better or strengthened their faith (45%).

*IF THE GOAL OF
CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES IS
TO ENCOURAGE ACTIVE
CHRISTIANS TO BE
PERSISTENT, THEY SEEM
TO BE SUCCESSFUL*

If the goal of Christian ministries is to encourage active Christians to be persistent, they seem to be successful: There is a high correlation between all Christian practices examined here and participation in Christian events. In interviews, Christians also find these events to be important to their persistence in the faith, which the conclusion of this report will examine more closely.

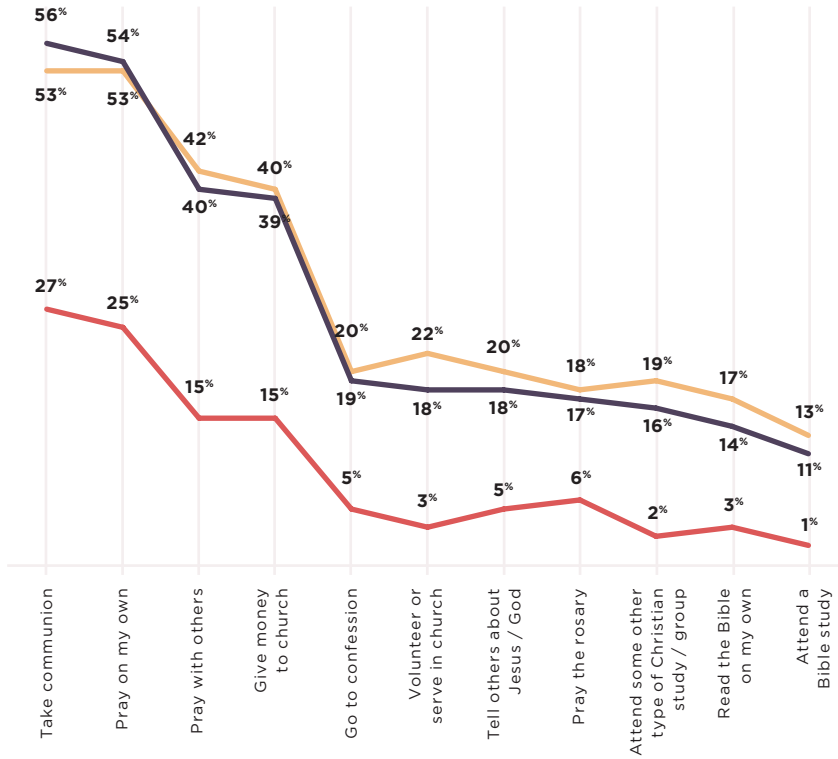
When asked whether they have seen long-term results among youth who attended Christian events, most youth workers say yes. Barna also observed that if a Christian has attended a Christian event, he or she is significantly more likely than those who have not attended one to report a personal prayer life (53% vs. 25%), to attend church monthly (53% vs. 22%) and to say that Jesus has deeply transformed his or her life (25% vs. 11%). In the absence of experimental data, this report cannot conclude if youth events and ministries catalyse personal spiritual practices where they do not yet exist, or whether they prod those with weaker faith into a more active faith category. Many workers add, though, that they think the effects of Christian events do fade after time—what some might refer to as “mountain-top Christianity”—and that the inspiration and fellowship youth feel at an event or festival need periodic refreshing.

The following chapter delves into the everyday pressures and generational expectations that may fortify—or threaten—a young Irish person’s faith.

CHRISTIAN EVENTS AND FAITH PRACTICES

% who have participated in any of the following activities at least every six months

- Average Christian
- Have attended a Christian event
- Have not attended a Christian event

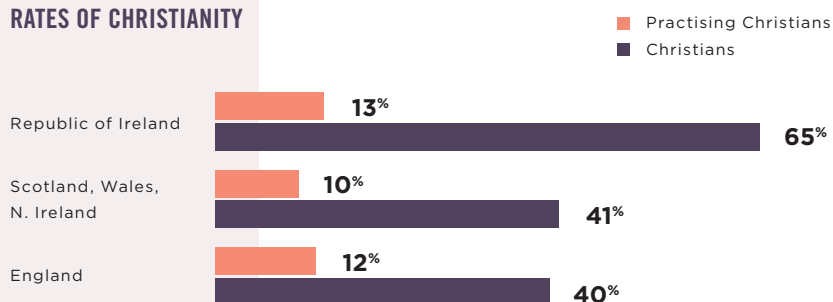


January–February 2017, n=790 young people (ages 14–25) in the Republic of Ireland.

COMPARING TO REGIONAL NEIGHBOURS

A majority of young adults in the Republic of Ireland identify as Christian—65 percent—which is somewhat high for the region. However, the Republic’s rate of practising Christians drops to 13 percent, which is similar to some of its prominent geographical neighbours.⁶

RATES OF CHRISTIANITY



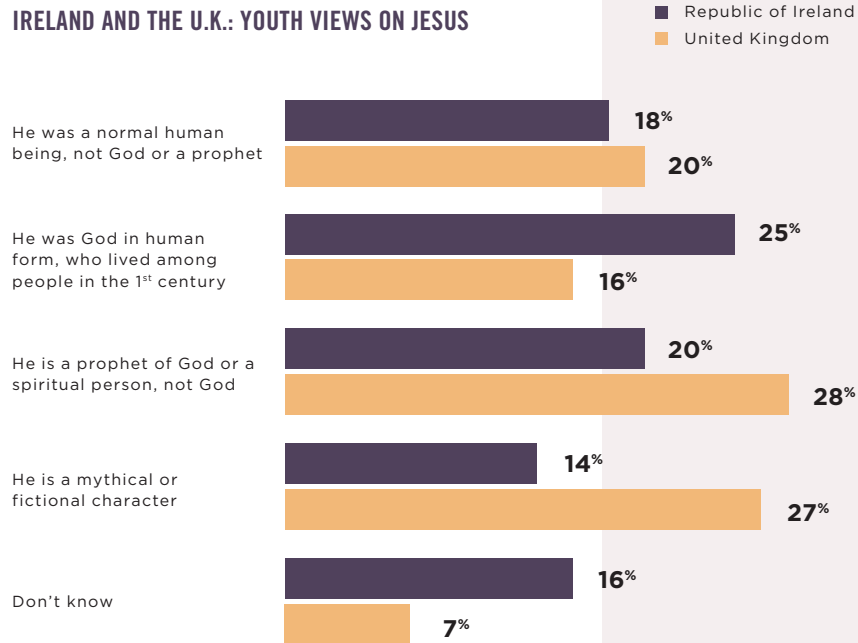
January–February 2017, *n*=449 young adults (ages 19–25) in the Republic of Ireland; July 2015, *n*=370 young adults (ages 18–24) in England; July 2015, *n*=52 young adults (ages 18–24) in Scotland, Wales and N. Ireland.

* In Barna’s previous U.K. study, “practising Christian” was defined as monthly engagement in prayer, Bible reading and regular worship services.

The proportion of orthodox views of Jesus—defined as the belief that Jesus was God in human form who lived among people in the 1st century—is higher in Ireland compared to regions of the United Kingdom. In the Republic of Ireland, 25 percent of young adults ages 19–25 affirm this belief about Jesus. In the United Kingdom, 16 percent of young people ages 18–24 do. Other ideas about Jesus that counter traditional Christian teachings are less popular in these regions, including the belief that he was just a normal person (18% Ireland, 20% U.K.) and that he was a prophet but not divine (20% Ireland, 28% U.K.).

Among Christian youth, a similar percentage in Ireland and England have an orthodox view of Jesus (34% of Irish Christians ages 19–25 in Ireland vs. 35% of English Christians ages 18–24).

IRELAND AND THE U.K.: YOUTH VIEWS ON JESUS



January–February 2017, *n*=449 young adults (ages 19–25) in the Republic of Ireland; July 2015, *n*=422 young adults (ages 18–24) in U.K.

Although views of Jesus are similar in these neighbouring nations, more young people in the U.K. think that Jesus was a fictional person, rather than a historical figure (27% U.K., 14% Ireland).

Young people in Ireland, in other words, are not all that different from those in nearby places. Time will tell whether their ideas about God and Christianity are part of a developmental phase, or whether they are lasting characteristics of this generation or locale.

MAKING ROOM FOR YOUTH

By Gerard Gallagher

*Gerard Gallagher has worked for the Church for over 20 years with a particular focus on youth. Currently, he works within the Office for Evangelisation and Ecumenism for the Archdiocese of Dublin. He is the author of *Are We Losing the Young Church?*, a history of youth ministry in Ireland, and *Your Child's Confirmation*.*



Recently I've had the opportunity to reconnect with people I've met over the years. Though nostalgic, it has also alerted me to the reality that many people who are active in ministry are busy maintaining structures and systems that have less relevance to the faith needs of emerging generations. While reading *Finding Faith in Ireland* is very thought-provoking, it should not really surprise those who work closely with young people.

Ireland has undergone profound change in the last 50 years, which this survey reflects. Contrasting statistics show that over 80 percent of the Irish feel Catholic. However, large parts of our towns and cities have regular participation of less than 10 percent. Some parishes in cities have less than 5 percent participation.⁷ A number of

commentators have referred to the Irish as over-sacramentalised and under-evangelised. Barna's research would seem to endorse this opinion.

It is important to remember that recent generations in Ireland have become more individualistic and separated from the emotions of statehood or Church across many denominations. Catholic Ireland, for many, has disappeared. Some people haven't noticed its disappearance. Others struggle with their religious heritage. It would seem that identifying as Catholic is an even heavier burden than identifying as Christian. Clearly young people pick and choose parts of Christianity that resonate with them and choose to ignore parts of the faith that they don't agree with. The values of Church are not shared by all youth in Ireland.

Amid all the cultural changes in Ireland over the last 20 years, we forgot to understand and listen to those who belong to what sociologists call Generation X and the Millennials. The generation born and formed in recent decades is quite distant from and very different in its relationship to the Church. They inhabit different worlds. As many of these young people watched TV while eating their breakfast before school or in the evening, all they witnessed was a series of church scandals. No wonder many have abandoned faith and chosen to follow a different path, as echoed in chapter two's overview of perceptions of the Church.

Young people who do have some type of faith commitment speak of a fear of talking to their friends about it. In an expanding culture of ridicule of anything Catholic or Christian, the faith of the younger generation has been suppressed. This has been the norm for many years. Church leaders and adults need to reflect on the salient points noted in chapter three, where young people speak about “hiding” their faith. Persecution of Christians and peer pressure are not new, however, young Irish people are now identifying with their faith in an “underground” manner.

Pope Francis asked the gathering of Bishops in Brazil, “Are we as a Church still capable of warming hearts?” In his encyclical, *Evangelii Gaudium*, he notes

that we all need to reach out to the “peripheries” and find ways of bringing the gospel to all situations. He has also said that we need to go out and meet young people on their search, where they are. They will be part of a Church where they feel welcomed. Youth leaders and emerging leaders will have to inspire a new generation to be part of the Church.

Young people want to contribute and to make a difference. They care about the world, the environment, justice and the poor. As Pope Francis has also said, “Young people are the windows through which the future enters the world.” This means that we have to create the material and spiritual conditions for their full development. For example, Pope Francis has called for the whole of the Catholic Church to prepare for a Synod on youth in 2018. For him, young people and their presence in Church and society are important.

Youth workers should feel validated that, as this report observes, teenagers are more likely than young adults to have been at church in the last week. If we approach youth ministry with an attitude of failure or dejection, it will contaminate our efforts. Young people need to have a space to develop, nurture and explore their faith. As we listen to young people, hopefully we can make room for them to be fully part of the Church—for the long term.

IN THEIR WORDS: *YOUTH WORKERS DESCRIBE IRISH YOUNG PEOPLE*

A key part of Barna’s study included face-to-face, in-depth interviews with youth workers in the Republic of Ireland. Interviewees were asked, “What words or phrases describe today’s Irish teenagers and young adults?” Their candid responses were enlightening, painting a

picture of a generation that is both vulnerable and powerful. The following visualization depicts the phrases—positive and negative—that came up most frequently in discussions with adults who are connecting with and leading young Irish people.



In-person youth worker interviews were conducted among a small, non-representative sample. Though helpful in gaining insight into the personality and spirituality of young Irish people, these particular conclusions should not be generalised to all youth workers in the Republic of Ireland.

MORALITY & CULTURE

In describing ideas about morality, young people from the Republic of Ireland feel strongly and similarly about their values. Despite Ireland's religious roots, these instincts about how people should treat each other often form around ideals of popular culture, rather than Church teachings. As Irish youth find their moral compass, some of the topics the Church has traditionally spoken about are now seen as off limits, especially interpersonal relationships and sexuality. Young people are also reluctant to discuss a final judgment or God's role in framing reality.

Popular morality prompts many young people to contend with the source of their values; one youth worker describes this present movement as a "powerful wave of atheistic secularism, in the form of progressivism, and the strong tendency of youth toward conformity to it." Subsequently, a polarization of views prevents dialogue.

A collision between cultural paradigms and biblical convictions may spark some separate and seemingly contradictory reactions in the young people of Ireland—to abandon religion entirely or to attempt to fit it within a hazy sense of morality.

GENERATIONAL VALUES

MORALITY & RELIGION

Non-Christians' development of ideas about Christian theology began—and ended, according to many of them—in primary school. Interviewees' descriptions of God frequently include a white-haired old man, and more than one-quarter (27%) doubt Jesus' historical existence.

Non-Christians expect believers to interpret their religion in line with contemporary values of acceptance, morality and non-judgmentalism—what Barna has referred to as a "morality of self-fulfillment." To Irish youth, especially non-Christians, God is seen as a loving, yet restrained figure. One girl paints a picture of God "sitting on top of clouds ... a very happy person that just accepts everyone and listens to everyone and doesn't judge anyone."

Counterintuitively, many young people find some of the rules in the Bible its most appealing part. Some interviewees—both Christians and non-Christians—thought the Ten Commandments were “a good idea.” Rather, intensity or fervency about the rest of scripture is what others find offensive; rules for living well appeal to the young people Barna surveyed when they are an *option*, rather than an *imposition*. After all, 62 percent of non-Christians say it’s mostly or completely true that they just don’t understand Christian beliefs.

Non-Christians’ limited perceptions of God make sense alongside the ideals of non-interference and non-judgmentalism that young people in Ireland value so highly. In the minds of many young people, judgment is not something that’s just dangerous in the hands of fallible people; it’s something that is inherently wrong—meaning even a good God would not judge.

“Minding your own business” is one of the moral values many Irish youth have adopted. With that contemporary value of non-interference comes a distaste for evangelism; even among Christians, just over a third (37% agree strongly or somewhat) personally feels a responsibility to share their faith with others. One teenaged girl expresses concern that a school chaplain seemed to be evangelizing to a non-Christian student: “Sometimes you see people trying to force other people to be Christians or have a different religion or change their religion. ... Everyone has the right to believe in whichever one they want.” Another teenager says, “I hate when people push their views on you.” For youth today, and not only those in Ireland, each person is welcome to have his or her own views, but not to try to convince others of them, perhaps because the concept of eternal consequences is not of great concern to many young people.

“MINDING YOUR OWN
BUSINESS” IS ONE OF
THE MORAL VALUES
MANY IRISH YOUTH HAVE
ADOPTED

There is a commonly held idea among Irish young people that religions are, at their core, different shades of the same essentially good moral system—“like a book with guidelines of life that you can choose to follow,” as one young woman puts it. Karl Marx’s description of religion as “the opiate of the masses” is, to many young people, both apt and acceptable. It’s a really nice way to distract people and make them feel more comfortable about people coming to the end of their lives. And, like, having morality in all this. It keeps people sane about panicking about the end of their life because they know that there’s something after this,” one Dublin girl says. However, she adds, “It’s like a safety net. ... It’s really nice to have that, and it’s really nice to teach children as well. Because it really set up my morals, and it set up how to feel about other people.

To youth workers, this hollow brand of Christianity is exactly what young people need to avoid. “I’d like them to see that Jesus is that thing that they can be passionate about,” a Methodist youth pastor says.

PROGRESSIVISM & SEXUALITY

Barna found that the subject of sexuality weighs heavily on the minds of Irish youth and proves to be an obstacle in their willingness to identify with or practise Christianity; more than 20 of the 96 in-person interviewees brought up homosexuality or gay marriage without prompting. None of those who brought it up saw a Christian theological stance against gay marriage or related progressive issues as a positive thing. Opposing homosexual marriage is generally seen as “inappropriate” and “regressive.”

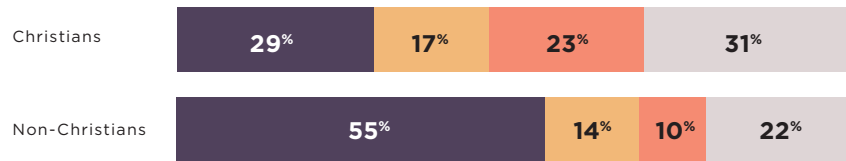
Given the current political and social atmosphere of the Republic of Ireland, this isn’t surprising. In 2015, Ireland became the first nation to legalise same-sex marriage by popular vote—and by a wide margin, according to *The Irish Times*: 62 percent voted for legally recognised gay marriage, while 38 percent voted against it.⁸ Irish non-Christians’ criticisms of the religious—and Christians’ hang-ups with their own faith—often have to do with what they perceive as the Church standing in the way of progress or human rights. Liberal beliefs about sexuality and politics encapsulate this clash. One young person says, “The Church teaches ... opinions of the past. And because we’re more of a new generation, we have problems with the Church being against things like abortion, things like gay marriage. Things really shouldn’t be a problem but are a problem because of the Church.”

Eighty-one percent of young people at least partially agree with the statement, “I think the Church’s teachings on sexuality and homosexuality are wrong,” with 45 percent of all youth in complete agreement with the statement. More than half (53% “completely” + “mostly”) say they cannot personally live by the Church’s teachings on sexuality. One young person says of same-sex marriage, “It just seemed like the Church was holding lots of people back. So, that was one of the main things that made me question [Christianity].”

Occasionally Christian youths make an attempt to reconcile liberal values with belief in the Bible. One young man says, “I feel it’s interesting because there’s a lot of controversial stuff in [the Bible] that doesn’t have a place in modern society. I feel there are parts of the Bible that are very sexist, very

“I PERSONALLY CAN’T LIVE BY THE CHURCH’S TEACHING ON SEXUALITY”

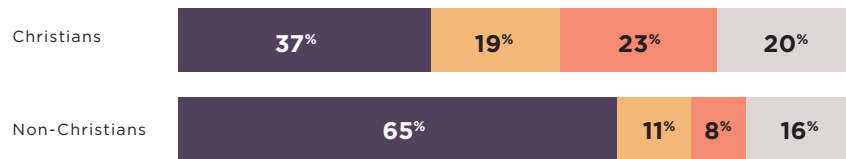
- Completely true
- Mostly true
- Somewhat true
- Not at all true



January–February 2017, n=790 young people (ages 14–25) in the Republic of Ireland.

“I THINK THE CHURCH’S TEACHINGS ON SEXUALITY AND HOMOSEXUALITY ARE WRONG”

- Completely true
- Mostly true
- Somewhat true
- Not at all true



January–February 2017, n=790 young people (ages 14–25) in the Republic of Ireland.

homophobic, very racist. But I feel overall the message we’re taking from it, especially after the Christian Reformation, is a message of peace and positivity.”

Behind many of these statements is the idea that standards of right and wrong change over time or that a sense of morality should be rooted in social consensus (a mindset Barna has also observed in studies of young people and adults in other countries, including the U.K. and U.S.).

Questions of sexuality affect non-practising Christians more than those who go to Christian activities. Reinforced by exposure to Christian teaching and a community that more often accepts it, practising Christians are less likely than non-practising Christians to feel conflicted over traditional theology on sexuality. Still, three in 10 practising Christians (28%) feel the Church is completely wrong on this subject.

Angst and confusion about sexuality not only occurs among young people, but also among youth workers. Several workers criticise Christians for

(Continued on page 40)

THREE IN 10 PRACTISING CHRISTIANS FEEL CHURCH TEACHINGS ON SEXUALITY ARE COMPLETELY WRONG

A Q&A WITH RUTH GARVEY-WILLIAMS



Ruth Garvey-Williams is the editor of Ireland's cross-denominational Christian magazine VOX. She has travelled throughout every county on the island, visiting churches and individual Christians from all different denominations and church backgrounds. In her spare time, she is a youth leader with over 20 years of experience working with both Christian and secular youth groups, clubs and drop-in centres.

Q. How does the Church's long history in Ireland affect current efforts to disciple young people?

A. Over the last 100 years, religion has become deeply entwined (some may even say entangled) with cultural identity in Ireland. This has created a "Christianity" in which loyalty, conformity and adherence to religious practise and moral boundaries are more important than a consciously chosen relationship with God. In the clash between allegiances, national, ethnic and denominational ties win out over any sense of "heavenly citizenship."

As a result, many view God as a distant being who has to be appeased

through a series of rules or rituals. A blanket religious observance also leads to widespread hypocrisy. People might faithfully attend their particular church and then go out to live lives that are far from Christ-like throughout the week. The challenge we face today is to change this historic and rather bankrupt understanding of tick-box "Christianity."

Some churches have simply rejected all historic forms of church and seek to create new streams of vibrant faith. Others are rediscovering the heritage of Celtic Christianity, finding authentic and holistic expressions that are informed by Ireland's history but still relevant to our modern context.

Still others are working within the mainstream denominations, embracing tradition but encouraging those with a loose affiliation to come to a deeper understanding of their faith.

Q. A common theme in Barna's study is that young people sense their progressive values are at odds with their faith. What would you recommend for older Christians who hope to spiritually mentor young adults as they wrestle with their questions and concerns?

A. With the seismic shifts that have taken place in Irish culture over the last 20 years, along with the digital revolution of the last decade, young people are bombarded with myriad messages from every conceivable perspective. More than ever before, young people are hungry for mentors who will journey with them as they explore their questions around faith and spirituality. And yet, it is also evident that older Christians often seem unable to provide the kind of environment in which there is freedom and safety for young people to wrestle with their concerns.

There is a significant opportunity for older Christians who will live out their faith with integrity and authenticity—people who will be like Jesus (bearing fruit of the Spirit) and point to

Jesus. Healthy discipleship will create safe spaces for younger people to ask their questions without fear of immediate condemnation or criticism. It will also focus on teaching young people the tools to think through the tough issues by seeking God and searching the scriptures rather than demanding conformity to one particular view (Luke's description of the Bereans springs to mind, from Acts 17:11).

Q. As a person of faith producing media for a modern Ireland, what do you think it will take for the Church to continue to be seen as credible or distinctly beneficial, particularly to a generation that doesn't necessarily place lasting value on religion?

A. I would question whether the Church is currently seen as credible or distinctly beneficial in modern Ireland. While there are wonderful exceptions, the Church has often failed to be good news for our nation. But there is also a tremendous window of opportunity. Although turned off by organised religion, people are interested and curious about spirituality.

So what will it take? This is a time for Christians to serve sacrificially rather than being consumed with our own interests. This is a time for Christ-followers who will be gracious and

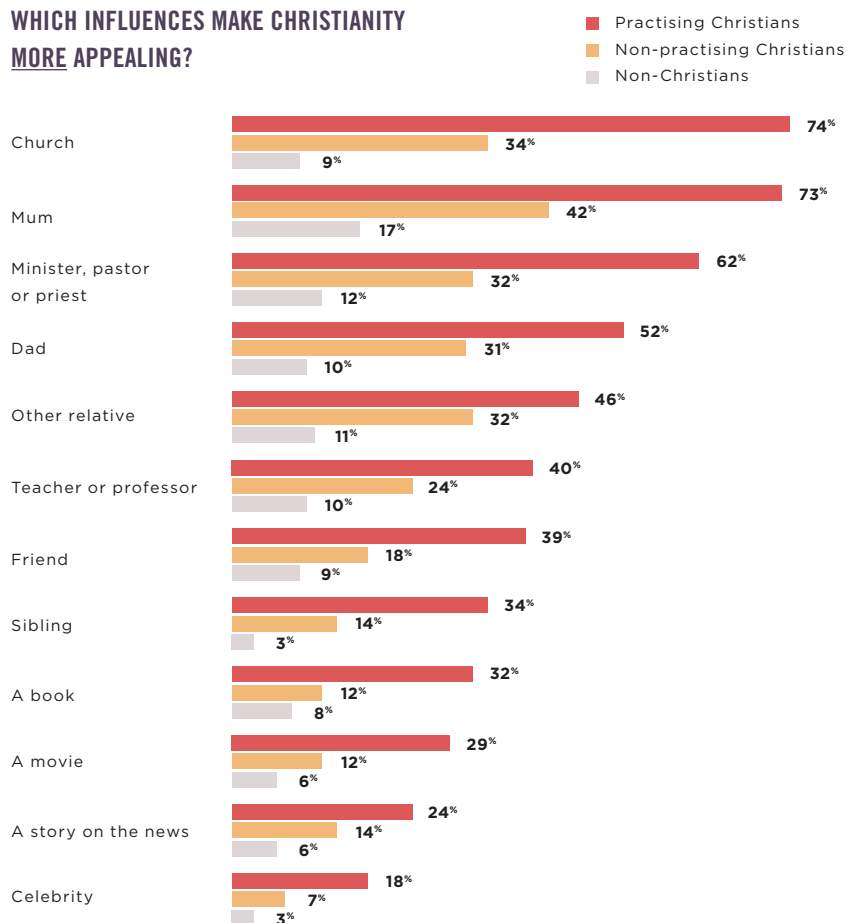
wise in their interaction with others (both online and in real life). This is a time for believing the best, esteeming one another better than ourselves, loving each other deeply and honouring one another. This is a time for incarnational mission—loving the people in our community so much that we don't just share the gospel with them, but we share our whole lives. This is a time to listen to people's concerns and issues rather than making assumptions. This is a time to be so secure in our identity in Christ that we don't fight to defend our own rights but rather champion the rights of the oppressed, the poor and the marginalised.

a stance that alienates people. Youth workers say LGBT issues highlight the need for conflicting views to be discussed respectfully and for the ability to understand someone else's perspective. "We don't hold conflict and tension that well as a community, as a people and as a culture," one youth leader states.

CULTURAL & SPIRITUAL INFLUENCES

Many young people today, especially those who are less religious, like to regard themselves as independent of outside influence, or at least have a difficult

WHICH INFLUENCES MAKE CHRISTIANITY MORE APPEALING?

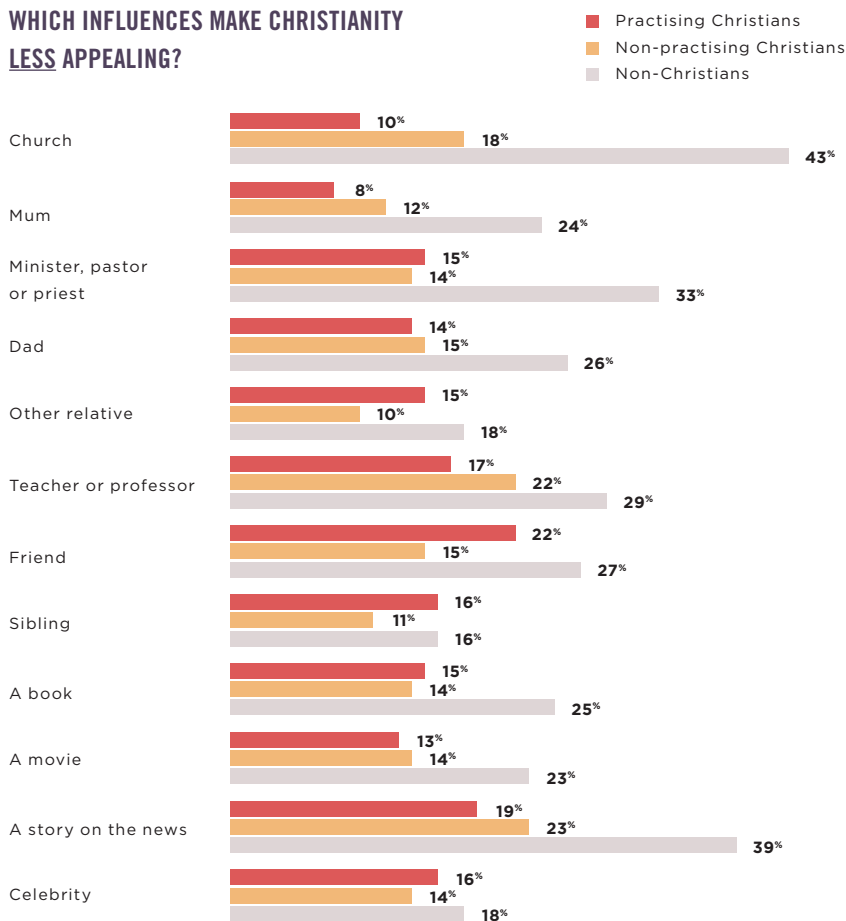


January–February 2017, n=790 young people (ages 14–25) in the Republic of Ireland.

time identifying *how* they are influenced. Youth workers with whom Barna spoke, however, see young people as very impressionable, open to a variety of voices such as celebrities, friendships and more. In Barna’s own survey of and discussions with Irish youth, it is clear that both shallow and serious culture affect what young people believe, as well as what they value.

When asked about factors that influence their connection to Christianity, young people list experiences with church first, then a variety of relationships, followed by media.

WHICH INFLUENCES MAKE CHRISTIANITY LESS APPEALING?



January–February 2017, n=790 young people (ages 14–25) in the Republic of Ireland.

For practising Christians, all sorts of influences are more likely to make Christianity more appealing, though mothers and experiences at church are most likely to influence Christians toward the faith. This isn't surprising, considering that those who are actively practising religion and seeking God may find many sources of spiritual insight, while less religious young people may likewise encounter more reasons to be skeptical of or resistant to faith.

CHURCH

As mentioned in the first chapter, a majority of Irish youth has had experiences with church, and for more than a third (36%), attending church has made Christianity more appealing. Interestingly, church is more likely to make no impact on a young person (28%) than to give them a negative impression (23%). Practising Christians (74%) and non-Catholic Christians (65%) are especially energised by church attendance. Illustrating a connection between corporate and personal spirituality, almost all of those with a private spiritual life (91%) say going to church made Christianity more appealing. Among non-Christian young people, however, the takeaway is less positive; more than four in 10 non-Christian youth (43%) who have had a church experience say it pushed them further from Christianity.

The individual leading the service is key in this equation; one in three (33%) says a minister, pastor or priest has made Christianity more appealing to them. Among non-Christians, it's the opposite (33% less appealing), and one in five overall (20%) says a church leader influenced them against Christianity. In some interviews, young people intimated that their awareness of church scandals may negatively color their experiences with church and its leadership.

RELATIONSHIPS

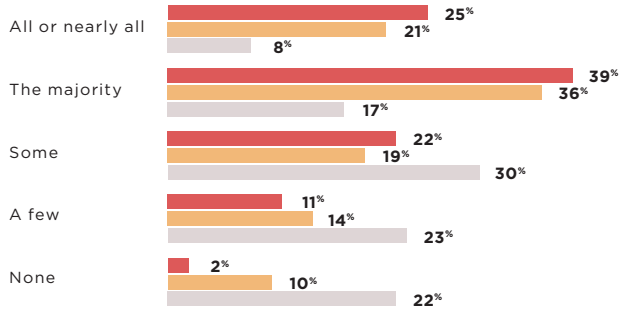
*MOTHERS ARE
ESPECIALLY
INFLUENTIAL, USUALLY
IN DRAWING A MORE
APPEALING PICTURE
OF CHRISTIANITY*

Personal relationships with parents have a significant impact on the way young people in Ireland view Christianity, something the concluding chapter will examine more closely. Mothers are especially influential, usually in drawing a more appealing picture of the religion (42%) as opposed to a less appealing one (15%). Fathers still play a major role in shaping ideas about Christianity (30% more appealing, 18% less appealing), though not much

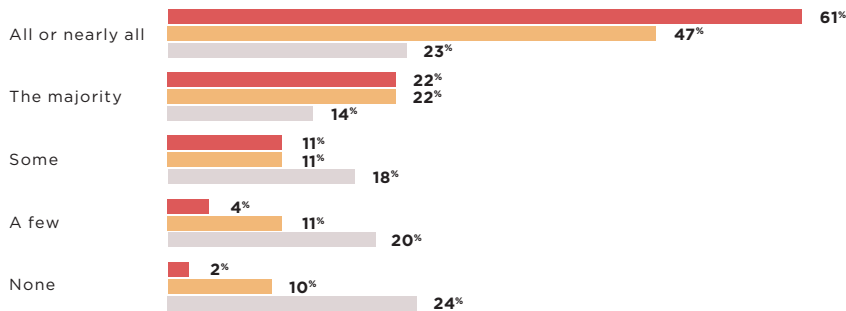
FINDING FAITH COMMUNITY

- Practising Christians
- Non-practising Christians
- Non-Christians

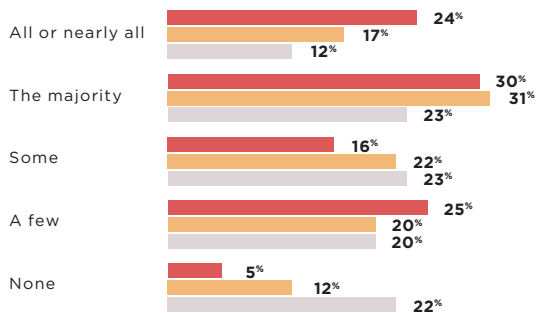
WHERE YOU LIVE, HOW MANY SHARE YOUR FAITH?



HOW MANY OF YOUR FAMILY MEMBERS SHARE YOUR FAITH?



HOW MANY OF YOUR WORKMATES / SCHOOLMATES SHARE YOUR FAITH?



January–February 2017, n=790 young people (ages 14–25) in the Republic of Ireland.

more so than other relatives (29% more appealing, 14% less appealing). Half of Irish youth (51%) say a sibling has had no impact on their connection to Christianity, perhaps because they are often forming religious identity alongside one another. Almost two-thirds of Irish young people (63%) say that a majority (20%) if not all of their family members (43%) share the same faith.

The influence of friends on Irish youth is fairly split; one in five says these bonds have contributed to positive (20% more appealing) or negative (21% less appealing) ideas of Christianity. However, of the ties that give practising Christians an uneasy sense about their faith, peers are number one (22% less appealing).

Teachers and professors also have the potential to turn young people one way or the other (24% more appealing, 23% less appealing), though the non-religious are particularly susceptible to educators who may influence them against the faith (29% less appealing). The spiritual pull of teachers is more pronounced during secondary years and is usually positive during that time (30% more appealing, 24% less appealing among Irish teens). Many young people (28%) say the majority of their schoolmates or workmates share their faith, and one in five (21%) says only some or a few (21%) subscribe to their same religion.

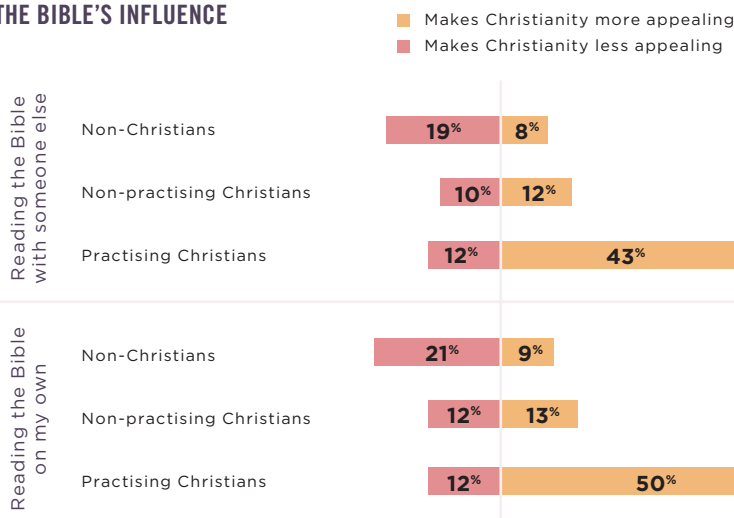
MEDIA

As social consensus is quite often expressed through books and films, Barna also explored how certain types of media might influence Irish youth toward or against Christianity.

Fourteen percent of young people say a movie made Christianity more appealing to them; 16 percent say it made Christianity less appealing.

Books had a similar amount of influence on youth's perceptions of Christianity; 16 percent of youth say they were influenced toward the faith by a book. About an equal proportion (17%) says a book made Christianity less appealing. A third of young Irish people says that reading the Bible, either on their own (36%) or with someone else (31%), has had an impact on their faith, whether positive or negative. Identifying as a Christian barely seems to make any difference in this, although almost two-thirds of non-Catholic Christians (63%) have found that reading the Bible positively influences their faith.

THE BIBLE'S INFLUENCE



January–February 2017, n=790 young people (ages 14–25) in the Republic of Ireland.

Celebrities do not hold great sway over young people’s beliefs about Christianity; half (50%) say such figures have no impact, non-Christians (54%) even more so. If entertainers do have an influence, however, it’s more likely to put Christianity in an unflattering light (15% less appealing, 9% more appealing).

Headlines have a particularly negative effect; more than a quarter overall (27%), including four in 10 non-Christians (39%), say a news story has given them a bad feeling about Christianity. Indeed, in Barna’s interviews, many young people discuss feeling driven away from Christianity by unanswered questions, injustices and controversies highlighted in the media, such as reporting on the activities of Westboro Baptist, the 2016 presidential election in the United States or ongoing revelations about long-term abuses within the Catholic Church. Concerning the broader and often discouraging impact of news reporting, an 18-year-old in Dublin adds, “I suppose there’s a lot going on in the world right now. Like different terrorist stuff going on around the world, and all this stuff in America with the election. ... If you don’t understand it properly, it can be quite daunting to think there’s so many crazy things going on in the world that we can’t really understand.”

*FOUR IN 10
NON-CHRISTIANS
SAY A NEWS STORY
HAS GIVEN THEM A
BAD FEELING ABOUT
CHRISTIANITY*

MORE THAN ENTERTAINMENT

Respondents had the opportunity to specify the titles and types of books or films that made Christianity seem more or less appealing.

Works that influenced Irish youth toward Christianity include:

- *The Passion of the Christ*
- Kendrick Brothers films (such as *War Room*, *Courageous*, *Fireproof*, etc.)
- *1984*
- *Dubliners*
- *The Cost of Discipleship*
- *Tuesdays with Morrie*
- Spiritual classics

Works that influenced Irish youth away from Christianity include:

- *The Passion of the Christ*
- *Eat Pray Love*
- *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*
- *The DaVinci Code*
- *Dogma*
- *God's Not Dead*
- *Ambush in Waco*
- *The God Delusion*
- Books by "new atheists"
- Science and history books (unspecified)

Interviews reveal a need for youth workers and adults to help prepare young Irish Christians to sort through the troubling events presented in movies, books and the news, as well as arguments presented by influencers or celebrities who don't represent their faith.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHURCH

LESS THAN HALF OF
CHRISTIANS SAY THAT
CHRISTIANITY WILL LAST

One thing that pressures young people to avoid overt religious expression is negative cultural perception of the Church. Church is generally seen as something for old people, and Christians as a group violate some of this generation's core values, as explored earlier in this chapter. Many young people see the Church as a temporary institution, perhaps one that will fade away as Catholic influence wanes. Nearly a third of Christians (31%) agrees that Christianity will die out, leaving less than half of Christians (45%) who say

that Christianity will last. A quarter of Christian youth (24%) says they simply do not know whether the Church is eternal.

Both Catholic and non-Catholic Christian young adults struggle with feeling like their faith community is focused on simplistic affirmations of belief and behavior when their own experience is marked by uncertainty and complexity. Similarly, many Christians are frustrated with the structures, misunderstandings and mixed legacy of the Church.

DESCRIPTIONS OF CHRISTIANS

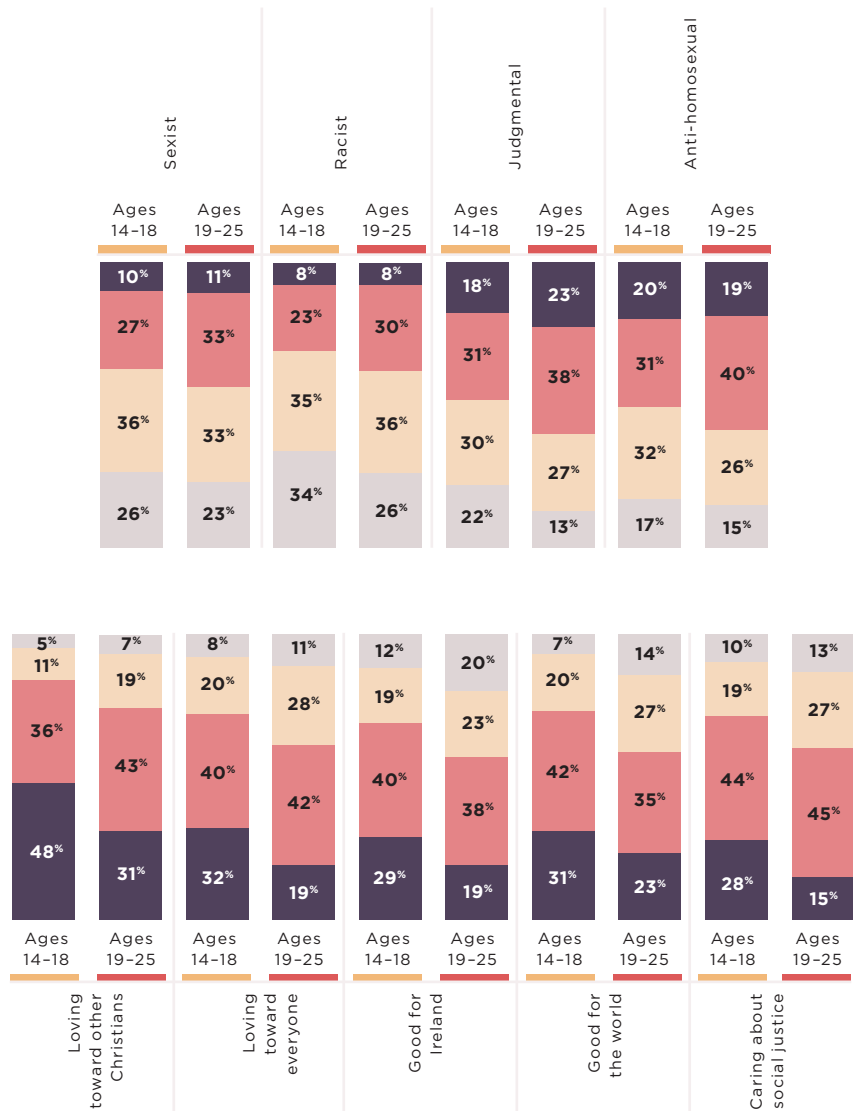
As mentioned, almost all young people in Ireland (97%) have been to a church service, and in a Christian-majority country, most encounter Christians on a regular basis. Not all of those experiences are positive, however: When Barna asked young people about their impressions of Christians and of the Church, about a quarter of Christians (27%) and 40 percent of non-Christians say it's mostly or completely true that they have had a bad interaction with Christians.

Perceptions are very different for those who participate in a faith community than for those who don't, despite many shared experiences. One key difference between Christians and non-Christians is whether they deem followers of Christ to be generally loving. Many young Christians describe their fellow believers as welcoming, loving and hospitable (in the broadest sense). They feel like a family, albeit a sometimes dysfunctional one. One young Christian says Christians are "probably the nicest people that I've met. Generally Christians are just a lot friendlier." Another young man says, "Christians changed my life before I realised that it's God [acting] through Christians." Yet another interviewee adds, "I think the average Christian is exceptional and very loving. And I think that's something the average person doesn't do [well]: loving." These statements are an interesting companion to Barna's data (explored in chapter one) showing all Irish youth's struggle to feel understood by Jesus and highlight the importance of healthy, personal representations of Christianity.

When non-Christians select descriptions of Christians in general, opinions are still gentle, though slightly less benign. For example, Christians are commonly seen as judgmental (70%) and anti-homosexual (66%). As this report has already discussed, these characteristics clash with some of the most

YOUNG ADULTS THINK LESS OF CHRISTIANS THAN TEENS DO

- True of most
- True of some
- True of a few
- Not true at all



January-February 2017, n=790 young people (ages 14-25) in the Republic of Ireland.

strongly held values among young people today. The more a young person disagrees with Church teachings on sexuality, the more likely he or she is to say that the institutional Church is a difficult place to live out faith. Seventy percent of Christian youth who completely agree with the Church's teachings on sexuality say it is not at all difficult to be part of the institutional Church (higher than the Christian average of 37%), while more than four in 10 of those who mostly or completely disagree with the Church's teachings on sexuality (42%) find it difficult to practise their faith as part of a church.

Christians and non-Christians inevitably disagree on whether people of faith are boring, sexist or out-of-touch. The biggest difference between Christians' and non-Christians' perceptions occurs when asking whether Christianity is good for the world, or for Ireland specifically. Nearly a third of non-Christians (31%) doubts that Christians are good for Ireland, and a quarter (24%) says no Christians are good for the world. Meanwhile, a majority of Christians feels at least some if not most people of their faith are a benefit to the world (74%) and their country (71%).

Practising Christians are keenly aware of differences between nominal Christians and those who practise, asserting that the discrepancy often leads to misperceptions. To define the Church as something more than a cultural artifact, young people will have to help make a distinction between nominal and thoughtful Christianity, as well as between the individuals who merely identify as Christians and the larger truths of the Christian faith.

Age is another factor in how young people perceive the Church. Even when church attendance (which drops with age) is taken into account, the older a youth is, the less likely he or she is to see Christians in general as: kind, good for Ireland or the world, moral, wise, caring about social justice, loving toward everyone / other Christians or joyful. Instead, the older a youth is, the more likely he or she is to think Christians are out-of-touch, judgmental or racist.

CHURCH ABUSE SCANDALS

Ireland has been witness to a long wave of alarming scandals concerning the Church, accompanied by a series of high-profile investigations and commissions on "endemic" levels of child abuse in church-run organisations.⁹ Parents and older generations' disillusionment with the Church and its activities has been passed down, compounding the spiritual wariness of Irish young people.

A YOUTH WORKER'S PERSPECTIVE

An urban youth pastor comments on the passions and insecurities of young Irish people today.

Q. What words or phrases describe today's Irish teenagers and young adults?

A. The older generation, a lot of times, thinks youth aren't passionate. They think youth are kind of lazy or [that] you can't really trust youth. But I do think when youth get behind something, they are passionate.

Now, finding that thing and encouraging them to get passionate about it can be a real challenge. Youth today in Ireland are very influenced by media, and they're very influenced by social media. We're moving to a point where we search for validation constantly. Youth are constantly searching for "likes" or just people to affirm what they are doing and what they're saying. So there's this pull away from them being able to just say, "This is my identity; this is who I am," because they're always seeking that approval of others.

Q. What makes you hopeful about the future of Christianity with young people?

A. The genuine passion for a lot of social issues among youth makes me excited. There are a lot of youth who, if you give them a cause, are like, "Woo! I want to go and do something about that." And I think that's super cool. That's encouraging, and it aligns really well with what Jesus was about.

Q. What resources do you find to be most helpful in your ministry work?

A. There's not a lot of Irish material. I think if there [were] more culturally Irish material, that would be cool. I would definitely use that. As far as materials go, I write a lot of my own stuff.

My relationship with other youth workers is a big support. District Methodist youth workers started meeting sometimes, and we'll just chat. "How did you do? And how does that work?" ... fellowship and encouragement and pushing each other on. ... Just picking other people's brains is really probably my most valuable resource.

Q. What would you like to change or influence in today's young Christians?

A. I just see youth struggling to find identity, struggling to find approval in the eyes of friends or in the eyes of the world. And I see God just looking at them with such love. And I want them to know that when we find our identity in Him, we're really set free.

Forty-two percent of Christian youth agree at least somewhat that when they think of the Catholic Church, they also think of child abuse scandals.

In describing things that have driven them away from Church, relatively few interviewees candidly bring up scandals within the Church. However, 27 percent—and 42 percent among non-religious young people—say a story on the news has made Christianity less appealing to them.

Though it has not universally resulted in a withdrawal from faith, the impact of abuse scandals has been broad. One in three Irish young people (32%) says it's completely true that they cannot go to a church that has not properly dealt with the guilt of these abuses, a percentage that remains fairly consistent regardless of one's current churchgoing status (29% churchgoing, 36% de-churched, 37% never churchgoing). Youth workers are quick to acknowledge the fallout of these controversies. One leader says, "When you try to approach an Irish youth to talk about God, the first [response] they have is what the priests have done and what God has done to us and, I think, pain and not understanding who God really is."

Another Catholic youth worker discusses the responsibility of churches to both confront hearsay and lovingly engage those who have questions: "The whole priest scandal stuff—that just rocked people to the core. People associate that scandal with God. When people have been beaten and raped and abused, there's no judgment from me certainly as to why they're not a part of the church. Because it's a violation to the core of who they are. Years of your life taken from you, and then we're supposed to say, 'Sorry they did that, come on ahead back.' So I understand why people don't go, I really do."

CATHOLIC & NON-CATHOLIC RELATIONS

71 PERCENT OF YOUNG CHRISTIANS AGREE THEY WOULD BE HAPPY TO GO TO AN EVENT HELD FOR BOTH CATHOLICS AND NON-CATHOLICS

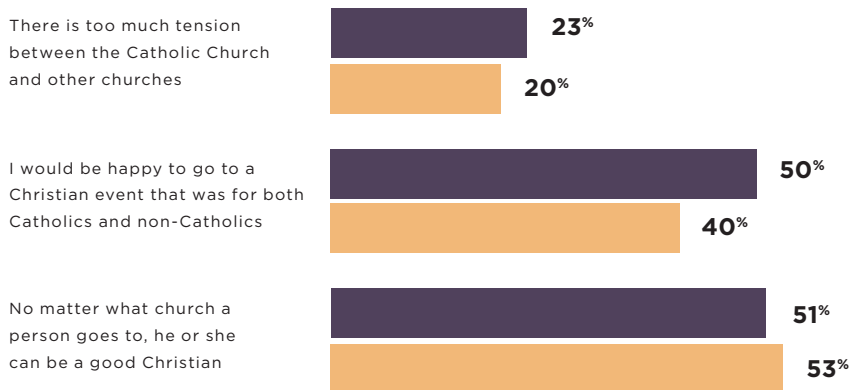
Young people in Ireland are eager for a closer relationship with more unity across denominational ministries. More than half of young Christians (51%) and nearly all youth workers in this sample say there is too much tension between the Catholic Church and other Christian churches, and a large majority of Christian young people (71%) agrees, they would be happy to go to an event held for both Catholics and non-Catholics.

One youth worker says that unity among Christians can enliven young people's faith: "I see the Holy Spirit at work and I see young people wanting to get involved in that work. I also see young people soften in their angst against

COMMON GROUND BETWEEN CATHOLICS AND NON-CATHOLICS

% who strongly agree

■ Non-Catholic Christians
■ Catholics



January–February 2017, n=553 Catholic and non-Catholic Christian young people (ages 14–25) in the Republic of Ireland.

God and the church when they see Catholics and Protestants working together, people giving testimony to the Holy Spirit at work in their lives.”

About half of Christian youths (49%) say that Catholics and non-Catholic Christians share the same faith, with no significant difference in how enthusiastically each group agrees with the other. On distinctly Catholic teachings, however, Catholic and non-Catholics are bound to show a few differences. For example, non-Catholic Christians strongly disagree that the pope is able to speak directly for Christ (44%, compared to 23% of Catholics), that it is good to pray to an intermediary (45%, compared to 12% of Catholics) or that communion elements become Christ’s literal body and blood (35%, compared to 20% of Catholics). Most agree that Catholic priests and non-Catholic ministers share equal authority; the only clear distinction is that between the large number of Catholics who choose “I don’t know” (28%, compared to 16% non-Catholic Christians). In fact, Catholics select “I don’t know” at a significantly higher rate on all these issues.

Regardless of theological differences or questions, young people and their youth leaders from Catholic and non-Catholic circles affirm a closeness between the two categories of Christians. In addition, 79 percent of Christian youth and all but a few youth workers agree at least somewhat that a person can be a good Christian regardless of the church he or she attends. One youth

(Continued on page 56)

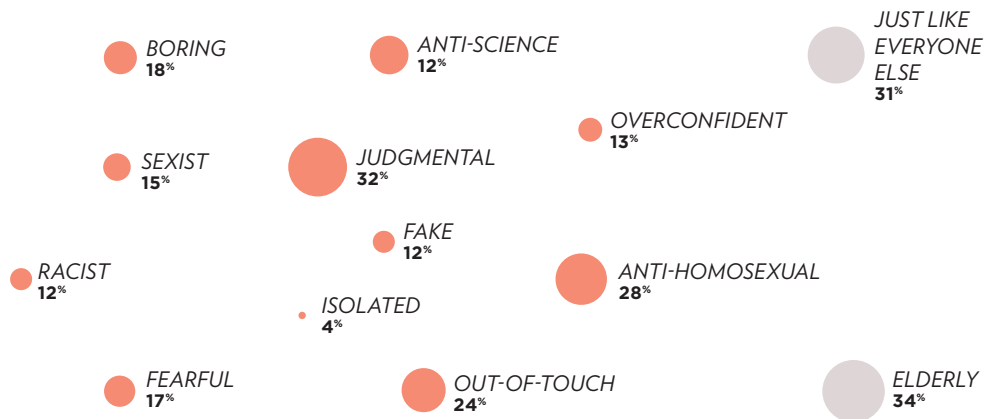
CHRISTIANITY'S REPUTATION

AMONG IRISH YOUTH

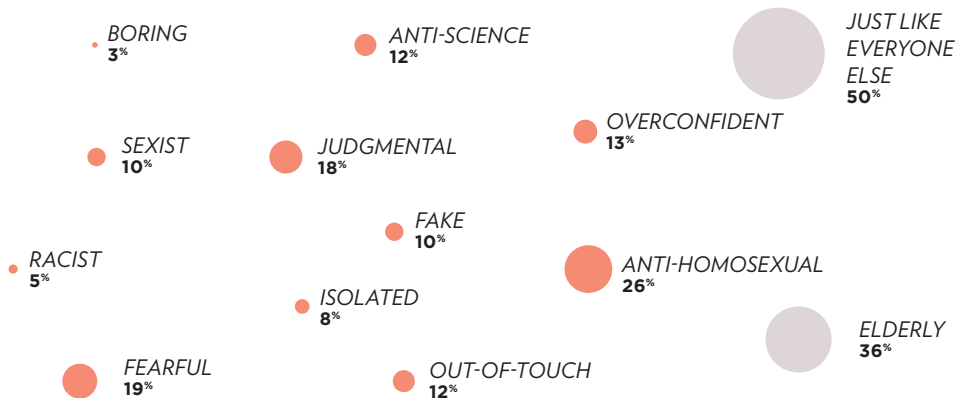
When Irish youth are asked to identify adjectives they believe apply to most Christians, there are, understandably, some significant gaps between how non-Christians and practising Christians view those within the Church. Overall, believers tend to see

- Positive
- Neutral
- Negative

NON-CHRISTIANS

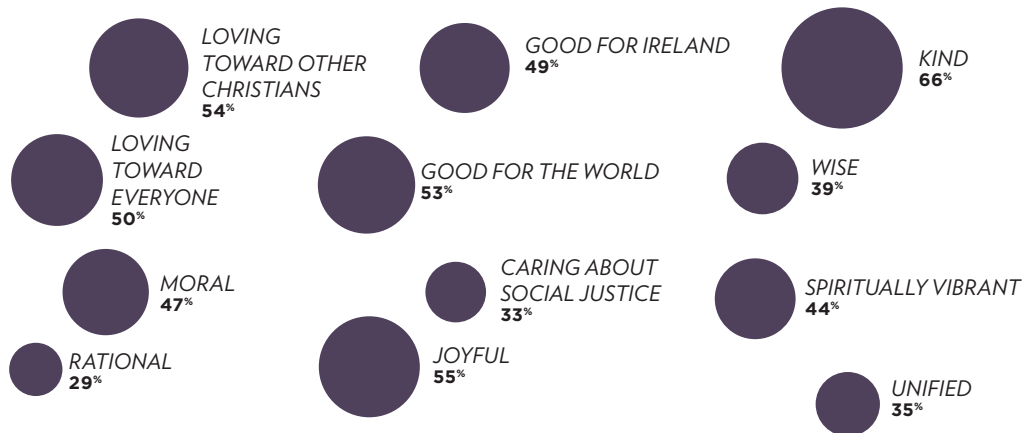
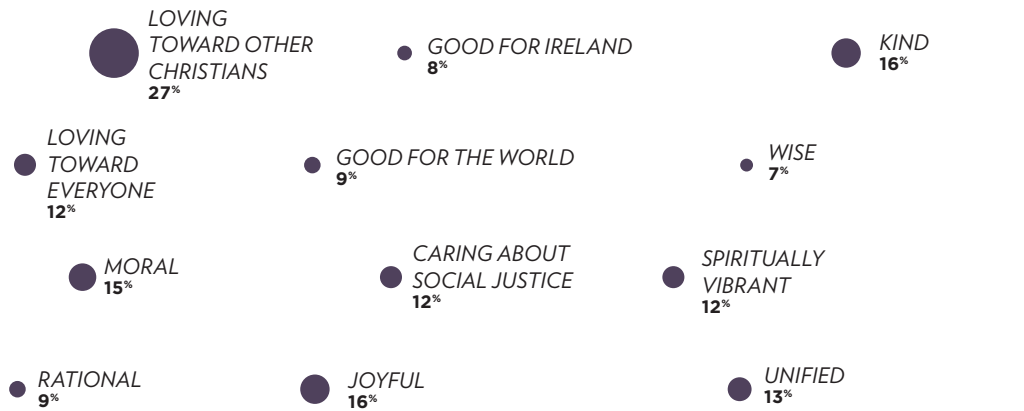


PRACTISING CHRISTIANS



their camp as wise, warm and relevant—while their non-Christian peers generally feel the opposite. One particularly bleak divergence: About half of young practising Christians believe most people of faith are good for Ireland and the world, while

less than one in 10 non-Christians says the same. Perhaps just as telling of the Church’s standing among teens and young adults are the few terms that non-Christians and practising Christians can actually agree upon, such as “elderly.”



January–February 2017, n=790 young people (ages 14–25) in the Republic of Ireland.

leader describes her first cross-denominational encounter: “Growing up in a really Catholic environment, the first Protestant I met was when I was 15. And that was even a shock. It was something so foreign. ... Now, I would focus on where we stand together. So, that’s our belief in Christ, how we live, how we serve God’s people.”

Trust between Catholics and non-Catholic Christians, though improving, has room to grow, youth workers say. Many say that higher church leadership must lead the way in bridging the gap before youth and other ministries can move forward. They acknowledge the Catholic-Protestant divide has a legacy effect, but believe it is dissipating over time—becoming a part of religious and political history, rather than a present ill will. This could be due in part to the reality that neither Catholic nor Protestant youth know much about the other’s religious context, as well as to the value young Irish people place on resisting judgment and prejudice.

Lingering tension between Catholic and non-Catholic Christian groups at times reflects the continued—and, as some youth workers report, much greater—chasm between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. One youth worker says, “Even among youth who live 25 miles from the border with Northern Ireland, in some cases, there is still a great sense of difference between Southern Protestant young people and Northern Protestant young people. We have Southern Protestant young people perceived to have a lot more in common with their neighbours—Catholic friends—than they have with Protestant friends from across the border.”

PURPOSE & SUCCESS

This final chapter looks at the pressures perhaps felt most acutely and frequently for young people in the Republic of Ireland: to find purpose in a chaotic world, where self-esteem may be measured in test points or pixels.

One young interviewee says, “We’ve inherited from our parents’ generation this drive to earn money and accomplish things through material possessions. And we’ve inherited the whole [mindset] from the [Celtic] Tiger [years], where if you want something, you just get it. It’s self-entitlement.” This young man—along with many of his peers—senses that achieving such goals may be difficult, and the satisfaction of attaining them may be elusive.

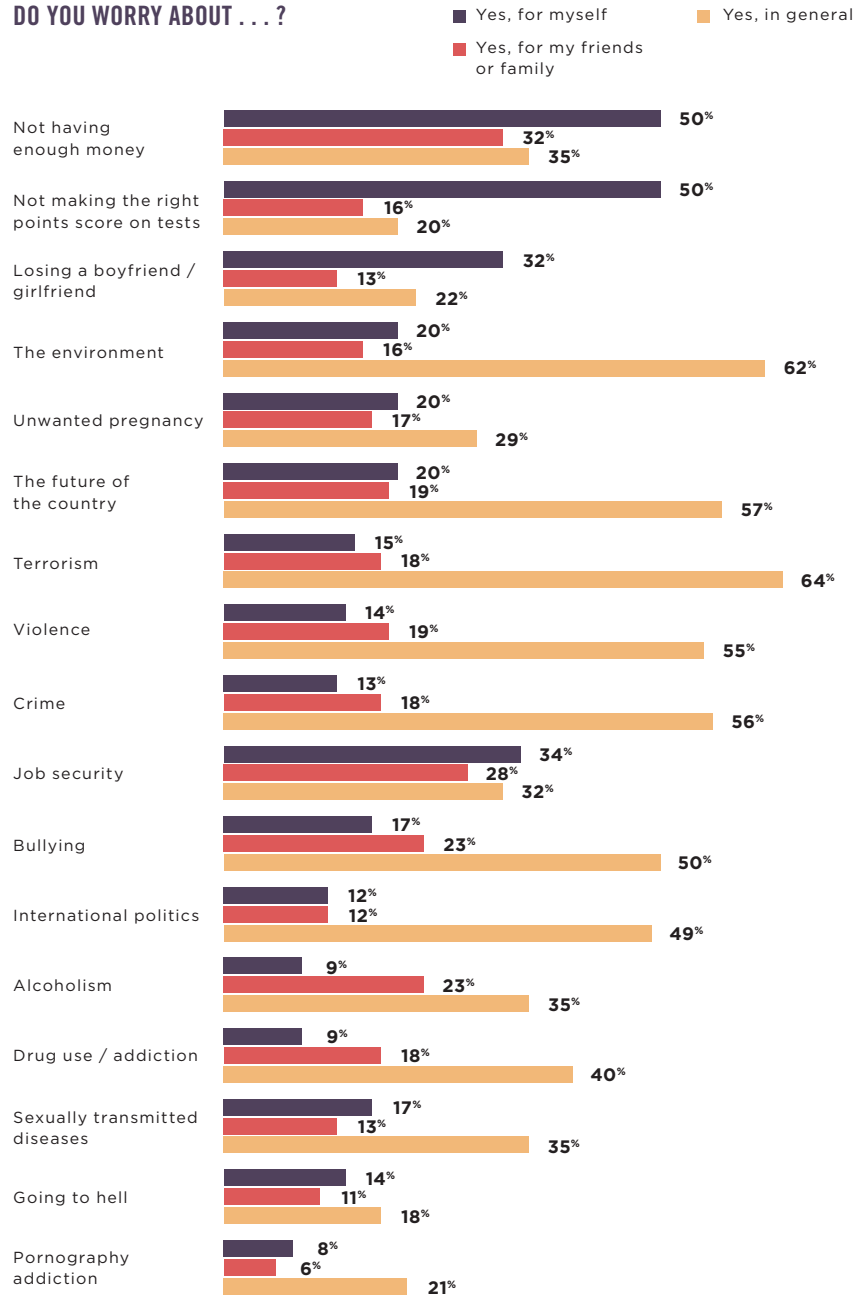
In addition to traditional and national standards of success, today’s digital world of curated social media profiles and cyber bullying magnifies Irish young people’s sense that they don’t measure up. “Acceptance and self-worth is a game that everyone seems to be playing,” one young man says. One girl says her peers are mostly concerned about “trying to fit in” on social media, which usually means having “the right size, shape or clothes.” Both young people and youth workers in this study consistently point to a felt need to cultivate an online image.

The following sections identify the micro and macro concerns of young people in the Republic of Ireland, as well as how they might change as youths mature into adults.

WORRIES OF IRISH YOUTH

Barna’s survey presented Irish youth with a broad list of circumstances—political, spiritual, financial, social, sexual and so on—that young people previously raised in the in-person interviews. Their strongest concerns are closely connected with a pursuit of success and stability, as evidenced in preoccupations with money, test scores and job security. Indecent behaviors and topics like pornography, STDs, drug use and alcoholism rank on the low end of the list of things youth are worried about, alongside a fear of going to hell. Worries ranked in the middle are an interesting mix of national and relational concerns, from terrorism to unwanted pregnancy.

DO YOU WORRY ABOUT ... ?



January–February 2017, n=790 young people (ages 14–25) in the Republic of Ireland.

When it comes to what worries young people, there are very few distinctions based on faith groups, with one stark exception: Non-Catholic Christians (20%) are more likely than Catholics (8%) or other religious groups to indicate that they are worried about their own pornography addiction. This may represent not rates of use, but the presence of a sense of guilt.

SECONDARY SCHOOL

Secondary school in Ireland has its own set of priorities and pressures, particularly surrounding national tests for Junior Certificates and Leaving Certificates, which can determine an individual's university admission and set the course for their further study and potential work opportunities. Unsurprisingly, this causes teenagers in secondary school to worry most about their scores; tests are in the top three stressors for more than two-thirds of teens (67%). One young woman points out that many lose perspective of their own value, and it becomes tempting to “measure your life by your leaver's points.”

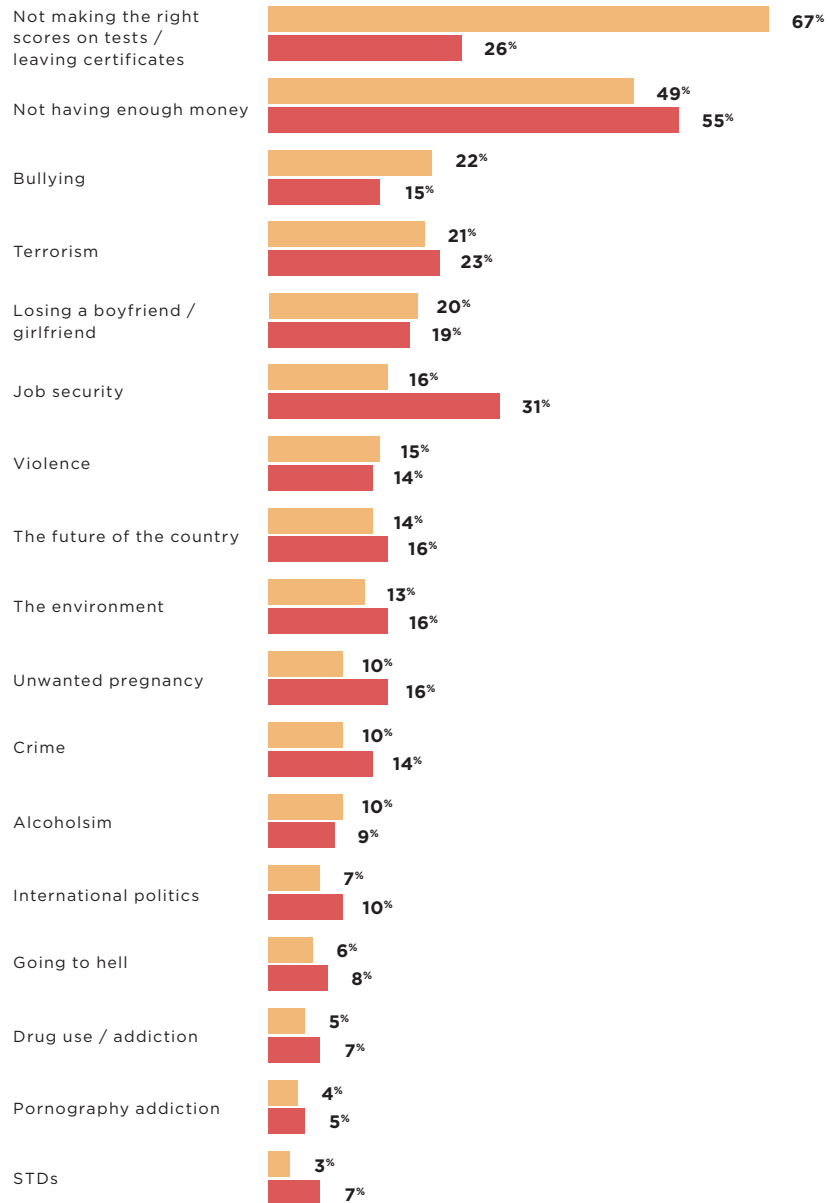
Peer relationships and future concerns drive other secondary school worries. When asked an open-ended question about their worries, secondary school students primarily cited concerns about social relationships within their peer network. In particular, the fear of being judged or mocked looms large.

Churchgoing Christians often feel misunderstood by their peers and isolated in secondary school; even in a region with a rich Christian legacy, religious practice can feel like a dark secret. One interviewee faces this anxiety in her religious school: “Obviously you have prayers and assembly every morning. To be honest, most people would talk through them. It makes me nervous: when I bow my head people stare at me, and that worries me a bit.” Another young man says, “I know a lot of teenagers who put genuine effort into hiding the fact that they are Christian.” One girl remembers the isolation of turning down opportunities to go drinking with underage classmates: “You get judged by that. They're like, ‘It's because she's a Christian. She's probably going to church.’” Many churchgoing Christians hide their faith at school to avoid bullying or to meet a perceived expectation of universalism. Still, other Christians find school invigorating to their faith: “Same way as a footballer finds it natural to be on a field, it's just natural to represent God.”

*TEST SCORES ARE
IN THE TOP THREE
STRESSORS FOR MORE
THAN TWO-THIRDS
OF TEENS*

MOST STRESSFUL CONCERNS, BY AGE

■ Ages 14-18
■ Ages 19-25



January-February 2017, n=790 young people (ages 14-25) in the Republic of Ireland.

Exposure to a spectrum of ideas in secondary school presents new mental demands—some positive, some negative. For example, students in secondary school begin to feel burdened for society and social justice, including homelessness, sexism, racism, extremism, the environment and local crime. They also become more attuned to the role of Christianity in society, whether that means awareness of how media mishandles spirituality or an internal dissonance with the teachings of the Church. One young man shared his apprehension about wrestling with required religion coursework during secondary school: “I think in first year we were reading a religion book on what atheists [are] and what materialists [are]. It opened new doors for people. And I think that was one of the reasons why there’s more people who don’t believe in God, and they don’t even know people that do.”

POST-SECONDARY SCHOOL

The world opens up as students leave secondary school, bringing different worries to the forefront. Not having enough money jumps to a first-place concern in early adulthood. Crime and international politics also rise in importance. The latter—perhaps particularly during early 2017, when the surveys were conducted—baffled and alarmed many young adults and worried more than one about, “The divide between all the politics, Trump and Brexit and stuff. There’s a whole new landscape of politics being formed, and we don’t really know what’s going on.”

The context of independent or city living may also influence primary concerns: While teenagers are more likely to live in a rural area (30% of 14–18-year-olds, 21% of 19–25-year-olds), young adults are more likely to live in an urban area (28% of 14–18-year-olds, 35% of 19–25-year-olds).

Qualitative interviews made it clear that broader society and life’s purpose become pressing issues after secondary school. Young people worry about their generation’s preparedness to face challenges. They cite a desire for material and social success, which can feel elusive in Ireland’s current academic and professional environment, one with more young people and less money, that remains attractive to foreign students. “Nowadays, there’s just more competition for everything,” one young adult says. “And everything’s more expensive.”

*NOT HAVING ENOUGH
MONEY JUMPS TO A
FIRST-PLACE CONCERN
IN EARLY ADULTHOOD*

AN ANXIOUS AGE

What keeps Irish youth up at night? When presented with a list of circumstances or problems they might be concerned about, teens and young adults from the Republic of Ireland confirm that

I WORRY ABOUT THIS ...

FOR MYSELF

FOR MY FRIENDS & FAMILY

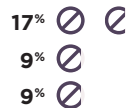
PROFESSIONAL AND ACADEMIC CONCERNS

The anxieties that Irish young people are most intimate with in their own lives relate to academic and career achievements (or lack thereof). They also hope to see their relatives and peers find success.



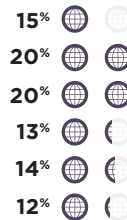
LIFESTYLE CONCERNS

When Irish teens and young adults are troubled by the specific impact of harmful behaviors, it's more often directed toward their family and friends than themselves.



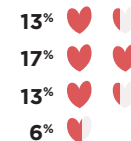
GLOBAL AND NATIONAL CONCERNS

Systemic and political issues are big-picture stressors for a majority of young Irish people, though respondents seem to worry less about how these might affect themselves or their community.



LOVE LIFE CONCERNS

Irish youth aren't too preoccupied with potential relational or sexual dilemmas—though, of course, they'd prefer to keep dating their significant other.



January–February 2017, n=790 young people (ages 14–25) in the Republic of Ireland. The list of potential worries included in Barna's questionnaire was based on concerns previously raised by Irish youth in in-person interviews.

the worries on their minds are broad, though sometimes focused internally or externally. Here's a look at some of the themes that emerge when youth are asked how far these anxieties extend—

to their own lives, their social circle or the world at-large.



Each icon = 10 percent. Rows do not add up to 100 percent as respondents were able to select more than one answer.

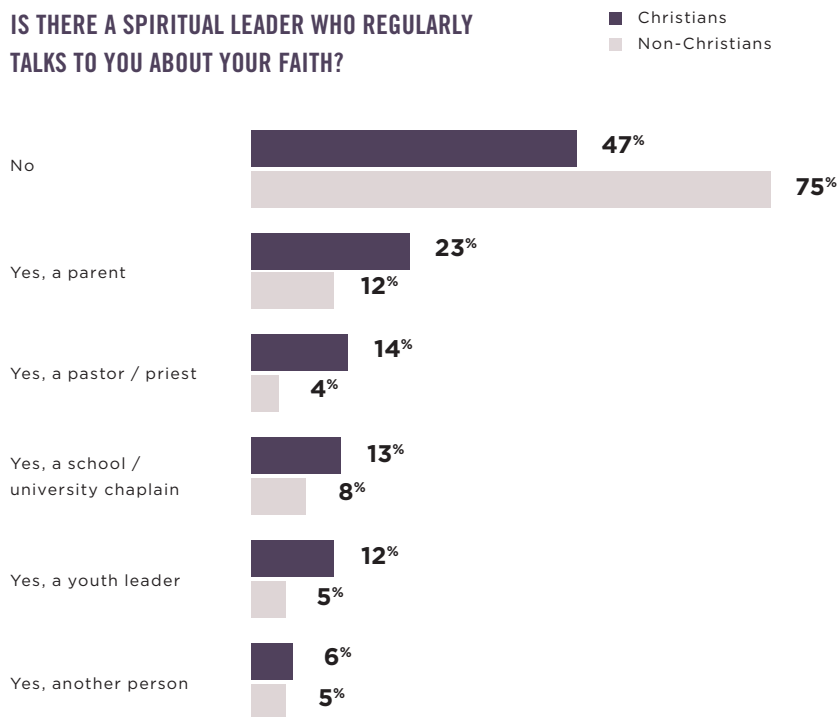
Even the freedoms of the university social experience unnerve some students. One young man says, “I feel that a lot of college students are chained slaves to the feeling of going out and getting with girls and look[ing] cool in front of other guys.” While some young Christian adults may encounter a fresh and welcoming peer group and a context that seemingly invites self-expression, many also sense hostility from non-religious students and professors. One university student said, “If you’re a Catholic, you’re somehow related to child abusers and oppressors [among] the Christian Brothers. You come under attack for how charities are run; you come under attack for being an oppressor.”

Young adult Christians say they feel a lack of support from youth and adult ministries. Barna’s data shows that during this transitional life period, and in the years leading up to it, the real-world counsel of genuine believers is crucial.

THE NEED FOR SPIRITUAL GUIDES & ENCOUNTERS

Adults who care about young people’s spiritual development could play a key role in taking them from a nominal to a sincere faith—a shift that could redefine an individual’s life, and on a larger scale, the spiritual landscape of the Republic of Ireland. However, a majority of Christian youth in Ireland (55%) does not know any adult who regularly talks with them about their faith. Even fewer non-Christians have a spiritual mentor, with only a quarter (25%) identifying any adult who asks them regularly about their faith. Young adults (35%) are less likely than teens (57%) to have an older spiritual guide who talks to them about their faith life on a regular basis.

IS THERE A SPIRITUAL LEADER WHO REGULARLY TALKS TO YOU ABOUT YOUR FAITH?



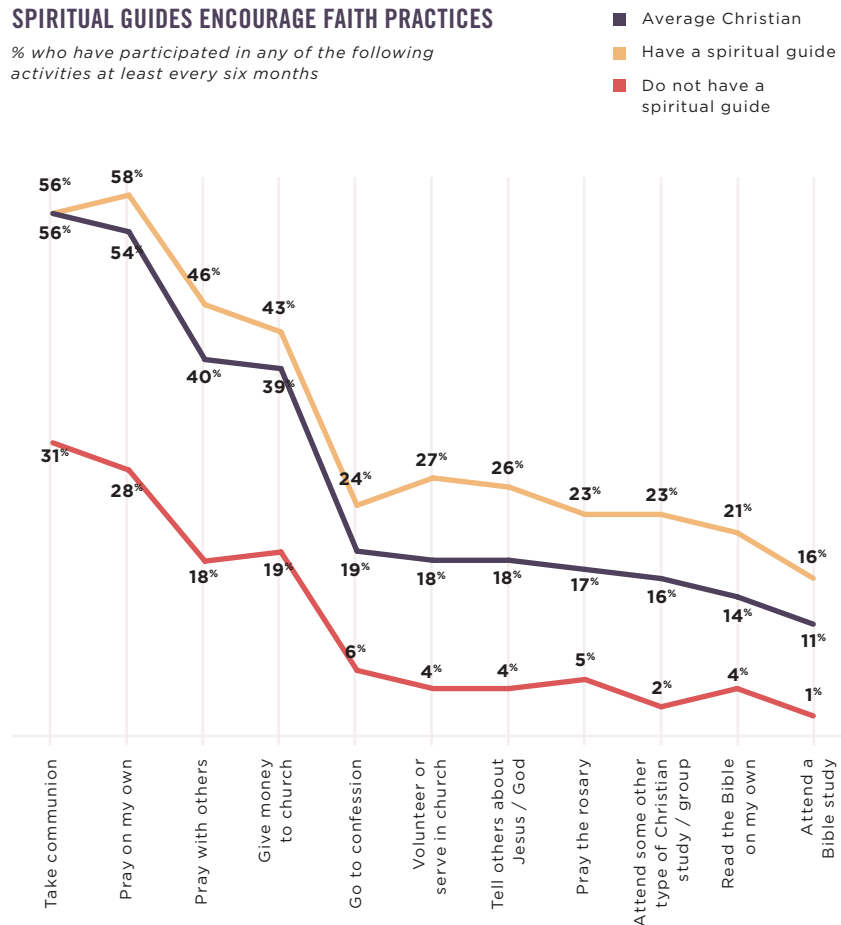
January–February 2017, n=790 young people (ages 14–25) in the Republic of Ireland.

A YOUNG PERSON WITH
A PARENT WHO OFTEN
ASKS ABOUT THEIR FAITH
IS MUCH MORE LIKELY
TO HAVE A PRIVATE
SPIRITUAL LIFE

As explained in chapter two, parents are the most cited spiritual influence for young people, and mothers are particularly effective in demonstrating the appeal of Christianity. It follows, then, that Irish youth who say their mothers have had a positive influence on their faith are more likely than average to be practising Christians (43%). Young people interviewed in this study often remember their parents making sure they went to church, talking about God, praying with them at night and telling them to go to youth group in their teenaged years.

SPIRITUAL GUIDES ENCOURAGE FAITH PRACTICES

% who have participated in any of the following activities at least every six months



January–February 2017, n=790 young people (ages 14–25) in the Republic of Ireland.

Further, a young person with a parent who often asks about their faith is much more likely to have a private spiritual life (31%, compared to 7% of those without a parent as a spiritual guide). This influence transcends distance; there is barely a change among young people who no longer live at home.

Other young people point out the example or care of Christians outside their families, like encouragement from chaplains placed in schools. Anecdotally, friends and peers are very influential on young people's spiritual life. When asked more specific questions about faith influences, however, many young people say friends have not influenced their faith (45%).

Given the lack of mature spiritual guides for young people—as well as their potentially significant impact on young people when they *are* present—youth workers recognise that mentorship could be a force to keep Irish youth involved in Christianity, despite the cultural pressures to retreat. As one says, “Most parents encourage them to attend church activities, but only few model faith in the home. Where God is a priority in the home, there is a significant difference in the faith and engagement of those young people.” Analysis suggests youth workers may need to develop closer relationships with parents and with mentors in order to facilitate this kind of ministry.

Christian events and programmes—often a strong force connected to Irish youths' church attendance and personal faith practice, as shown in chapter one—may also be a place where youth can encounter spiritual guides and youth leaders. In general, such programmes seem to enhance connection both to Christianity and to other Christians, offering both positive examples and the relief of not having to deemphasise one's faith in social settings. A young Pentecostal woman says, “When you're a teenager, you feel like very much a minority. ... The only kinds of Christians you knew were the ones that were in your church, and [you never heard] of any other ones around you. And then suddenly you go to this event and there [are] thousands, and it's like, *OK, I guess we're not on our own.*”

Despite the numerous pressures facing their generation, some members of the young groups Barna surveyed are compassionate and eager for a dynamic religious expression. More than a third of Irish youth (37%) say it's mostly or completely true that they'd like to find a way to follow Jesus that connects to the world they live in. This is even more true of Christians (47%), particularly practising ones (71%). One in four young Christians (25%) feels it's important that their lifestyle reflect their relationship with God, and one

in five (19%) wants to help the Church return to the priorities Jesus intended for it.

In this unique era in the Republic of Ireland—when the nation’s spiritual landscape is shifting, the values of popular culture are often at odds with religious conviction, and success is by no means guaranteed—young Irish people need meaningful spiritual relationships and encounters to achieve a healthy sense of perspective on their life and faith.

NOTES

1. Carl O'Brien, "Baptisms remain popular as mass attendance declines," *The Irish Times*, November 30, 2015, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/baptisms-remain-popular-as-mass-attendance-declines-1.2448687> (accessed July 20, 2017).
2. Steven Carroll, "Census comparison shows differences between Republic and NI," *The Irish Times*, June 12, 2014, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/census-comparison-shows-differences-between-republic-and-ni-1.1830021> (accessed July 20, 2017).
3. This study cannot deduce the sequence Irish young adults take when backing away from Christianity—whether from practising to non-practising, non-practising to non-Christian or straight from Christian to non-Christian.
4. This is a weighted percentage, based on Irish census data, which estimates 83 percent of the population is Catholic. www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasepublications/documents/population/2017/Chapter_8_Religion.pdf
5. Sean Murray, "No more baptism barrier': Catholic schools won't use religion as admission criteria, says Bruton," *The Journal.ie*, June 28, 2017, <http://www.thejournal.ie/baptism-barrier-education-3468727-Jun2017/> (accessed July 21, 2017).
6. For more information on Barna's research of the United Kingdom, commissioned by the Church of England, Evangelical Alliance and HOPE, visit www.talkingjesus.org.
7. For other signs of a significant drop-off in the practice of religion by people in Ireland, refer to a series of essays in the spring 2017 issue of *Studies* (www.studiesirishreview.ie) as well as this report from the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference (<http://www.catholicbishops.ie/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Practice-and-Belief-among-Catholics-in-the-Republic-of-Ireland.pdf>).
8. Éanna Ó Caollaí, Mark Hilliard, "Ireland becomes first country to approve same-sex marriage by popular vote," *The Irish Times*, May 23, 2015, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/ireland-becomes-first->

- country-to-approve-same-sex-marriage-by-popular-vote-1.2223646 (accessed July 20, 2017).
9. Henry McDonald, “‘Endemic’ rape and abuse of Irish children in Catholic care, inquiry finds,” *The Guardian*, May 20, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/may/20/irish-catholic-schools-child-abuse-claims> (accessed July 20, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

The data contained in this report originated through a research study conducted by the Barna Group of Ventura, California. The study was commissioned by Christ in Youth in Joplin, Missouri.

To understand the state of faith among Irish youth, Barna conducted a study that approached the question from several angles. In the first phase, Barna and Christ in Youth gathered youth workers from a variety of denominations for focus groups. In the second phase, four Irish interviewers spoke to young people and their youth leaders. Youth leaders who weren't interviewed in person also had the opportunity to respond to the same survey online.

The online youth study was distributed to young people in the Republic of Ireland, ages 14–25. A total of 790 youth participated in this research study. Based on this sample size, the sampling error for this study is 3.5 percentage points at the 95-percent confidence level.

Two different methods of data collection were used for this survey: panel-based sampling and church-based sampling.

Panel-based sample

Participants in this study were provided through the Harris Panel, including members of its third-party panel providers. The survey was made available through this panel from January 24 to February 21, 2017. In all, 750 youth completed this survey. The sample error on this survey is plus or minus 3.6 percentage points at the 95-percent confidence level.

The responses were weighted by age and denomination, according to the 2011 Republic of Ireland Census. Note that between 2011 and 2016, the percentage of all Irish adults who identify as Catholic fell from 84.2 percent to 78.3 percent. However, because this religious affiliation data is not available by age, data from *this* study is weighted based on 2011 census information.

Church-based sample

To supplement the panel data, churches throughout the Republic of Ireland were asked to share a link to the online survey with their youth. Data was collected this way from February 25 through March 13, 2017. A total of 40 youth were recruited through their churches to complete this survey.

In-person interviews with young people

Four interviewers experienced in youth work in Ireland conducted 96 in-depth interviews with young people ages 14–25 between October 2016 to January 2017. These interviews lasted 5–25 minutes, with a majority under 10 minutes.

Online sample

The youth worker study was conducted online February 21 through March 30, 2017. A total of 51 youth workers completed the survey during this time. The sample error on this survey is plus or minus 13.7 percentage points at the 95-percent confidence level.

In-person interviews with youth workers

In addition, Irish interviewers conducted in-person interviews including the same questions, as well as some additional questions, with 12 youth workers. *Because of this small sample, the youth worker survey conclusions should not be generalised to all youth workers in the Republic of Ireland.*

GLOSSARY

Age

Unless otherwise noted, Irish young people in this report are separated between:

- *Teens*: ages 14–18 (often of secondary school age)
- *Young adults*: ages 19–25 (often of post-secondary school age)

Faith Segments

- *Self-identified Christians* select Christian from a list of religious affiliations
- *Non-Christians* select Buddhist, Hindu, Jehovah’s Witness, Jewish, Mormon, Muslim, Other
- *No faith* or *no religious affiliation* are atheists or agnostics, or choose “none of the above” from a list of religious affiliations
- *Catholics* select Catholic
- *Non-Catholic Christians* select Christian, Protestant, Evangelical Christian
- *Practising Christians* identify as Christian; say their faith is very important in their life (agree strongly or somewhat); and have attended a religious service or gathering in the past month
- *Nominal Christians* identify as Christian, but do not agree that religious faith is very important in their life today, have not made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ, and do not believe that their entrance to heaven depends on the confession of sins and acceptance of Jesus Christ as savior

Church Attendance and Faith Practices

- *Churched*: attended a service within the past six months
- *Dechurched*: formerly churched but have not attended a service in the past six months
- *Never churched*: have never attended a church service besides a special event such as a wedding or a funeral

- *Corporate spiritual life*: applies to those who identify as Christian and participate every six months in at least two of the following: Bible study, Christian study, group prayer, communion and serving in church
- *Private / personal spiritual life*: applies to those who identify as Christian, agree strongly or somewhat that their religious faith is important in their lives today, are not less spiritual than when they were 12 years old, and do at least two of the following: pray the rosary, read the Bible on their own or pray on their own
- *Christian event*: may include festival, retreat, weekend away, community outreach event, pilgrimage, local mission trip or overseas mission trip

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Barna Group offers our heartfelt thanks to the team at Christ In Youth, sponsors and partners in this research, specifically: Jasper Rutherford, Wade Landers and Jayson French. Additionally, we'd like to acknowledge Summer Madness and J33 for their support of this study.

This monograph would have been impossible without the many youth workers, interviewees and expert readers from Ireland whose insights helped shape this report. We're especially grateful for the responses of Ruth Garvey-Williams and Gerard Gallagher and the reviews of Peter Rigney and Dominic Perrem.

The research team for this study is Brooke Hempell, Traci Hochmuth and Susan Mettes. Under the editorial direction of Roxanne Stone, the writing team includes Susan Mettes and Alyce Youngblood. Annette Allen designed and laid out the monograph. Brenda Usery managed production.

Additional thanks to our Barna colleagues: Amy Brands, Chrisandra Bolton, Matt Carobini, Joyce Chiu, Inga Dahlstedt, Bill Denzel, Aly Hawkins, David Kinnaman, Elaine Klautzsch, Steve McBeth, Elise Miller, Lisa Schoke, Caitlin Schuman, Sara Tandon, Jess Turner and Todd White.

ABOUT BARN A GROUP

BARN A GROUP is a research firm dedicated to providing actionable insights on faith and culture, with a particular focus on the Christian church. In its 30-year history, Barna has conducted more than one million interviews in the course of hundreds of studies, and has become a go-to source for organisations that want to better understand a complex and changing world from a faith perspective.

Barna's clients and partners include a broad range of academic institutions, churches, nonprofits and businesses, such as Alpha, the Templeton Foundation, Fuller Seminary, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Maclellan Foundation, DreamWorks Animation, Focus Features, Habitat for Humanity, The Navigators, NBC-Universal, the ONE Campaign, Paramount Pictures, the Salvation Army, Walden Media, Sony and World Vision. The firm's studies are frequently quoted by major media outlets such as *The Economist*, BBC, CNN, *USA Today*, the *Wall Street Journal*, Fox News, *Huffington Post*, *The New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*.

www.Barna.com

ABOUT CHRIST IN YOUTH

CHRIST IN YOUTH (CIY) has spent more than 40 years calling students and leaders to boldly live for Christ through the hope of the gospel message and a call to Kingdom action. In partnership with the local church, CIY reaches more than 65,000 students and adult leaders by way of more than 100 events across the United States and in more than 10 foreign countries. Within the next decade, CIY estimates more than one million students and leaders will be impacted worldwide through its programmes, curriculum and resources. As an innovative voice in student ministry, the organisation's programmes are directed toward enhancing the spiritual formation of students, in an effort to help young generations respond in faith and in service to the call of Christ. CIY's partnership on this research study, intended as a resource for the Church and other youth ministry organisations in Ireland, is part of a broader focus to work alongside local churches in Europe.

www.CIY.com

INSIDE THE MINDS OF IRISH YOUTH

Barna's research often speaks to the difficulty of developing a deep and lasting faith, even in cultures and regions long associated with the Church. This report focuses on the Republic of Ireland, where the majority religion is becoming a nominal expression and pluralism and secularization are increasingly influential. In the midst of these changes is a young generation that is anxious and searching. As Irish youth wrestle with the values of popular culture, societal expectations for success and the nation's transforming spiritual identity, they need guidance from mature believers.

This study, conducted in partnership with Christ in Youth, closely examines Irish teenagers and young adults, with a specific emphasis on their faith, worries and perceptions of Christianity. Anchored in unique qualitative and quantitative studies, *Finding Faith in Ireland* includes:

- Insights and commentary from youth workers
- New data about the beliefs, concerns and ambitions of Irish youth
- Infographics and charts visualizing how young Irish people see and relate to the Church
- Barna analysis about the importance of spiritual mentors, encounters and events
- Revelations from in-depth interviews with young people in the Republic of Ireland

Finding Faith in Ireland is an essential read about the mindsets of Irish teens and young adults, for the people who lead and care about them. In this report, parents, ministers and youth workers will find information and motivation to help younger generations cultivate a faith that not only survives these formative years but endures into adulthood.

Barna

www.barna.com

CIY
CHRIST
IN YOUTH

www.CIY.com