



Cultural and Generational Challenges in Religious Life

2024 CMSM ASSEMBLY

ATLANTA, GA

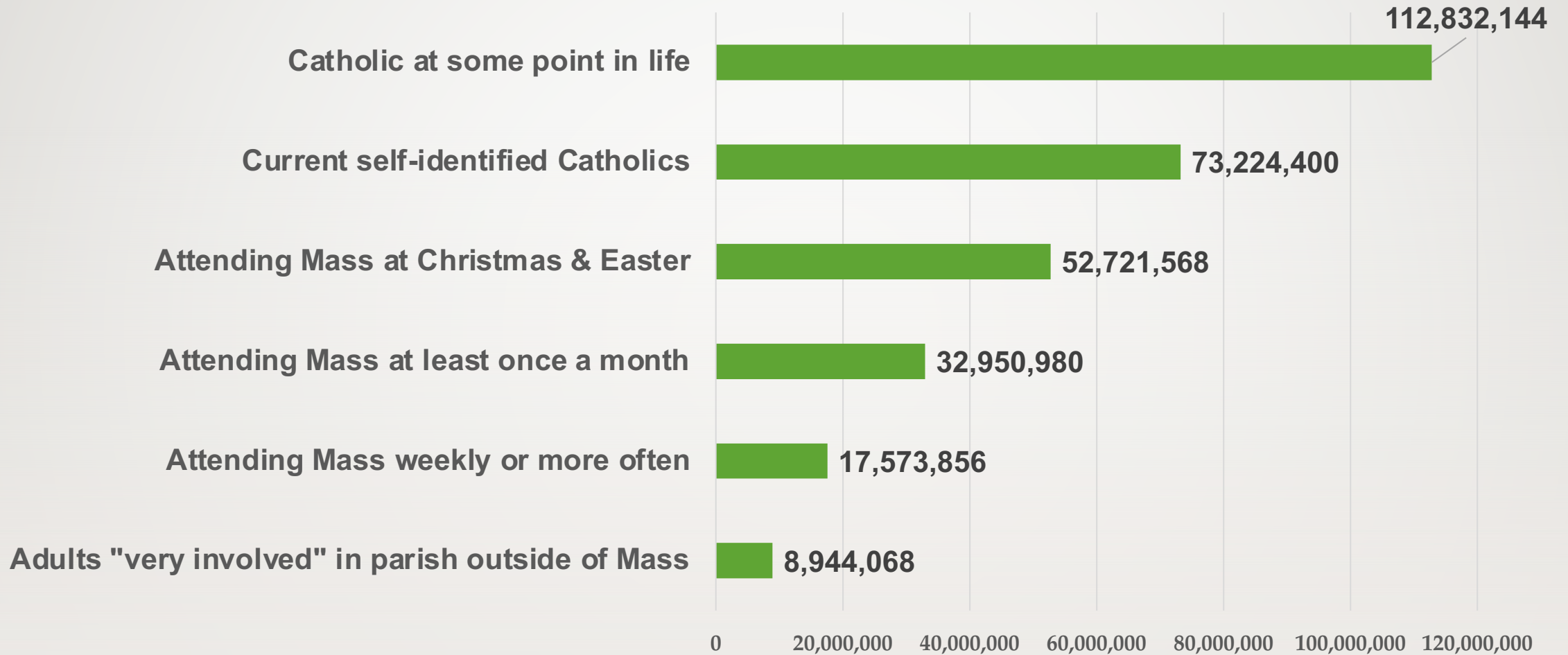
THOMAS GAUNT, SJ, PH.D.

JULY 31, 2024

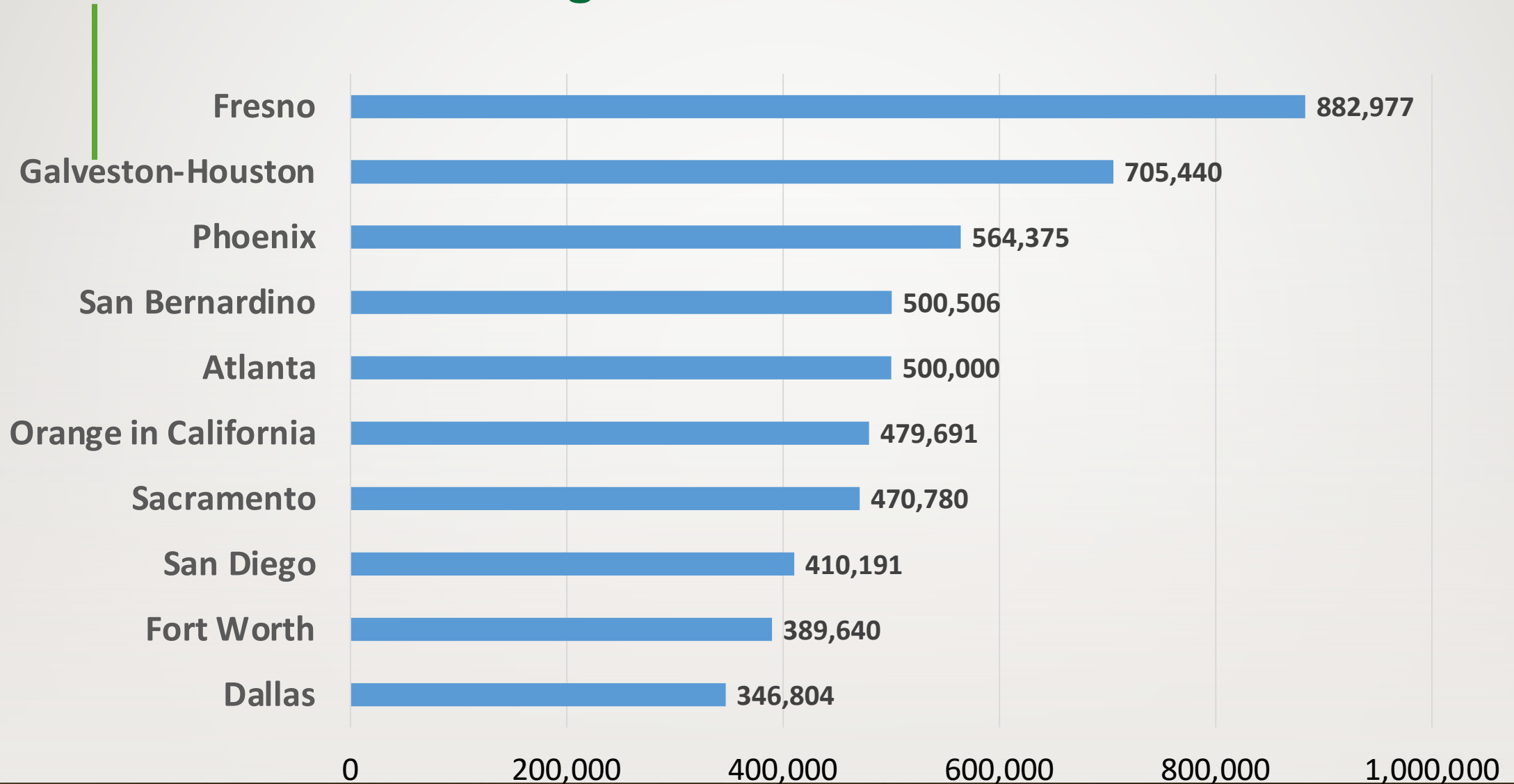


A SNAPSHOT OF U.S. CATHOLIC ENGAGEMENT

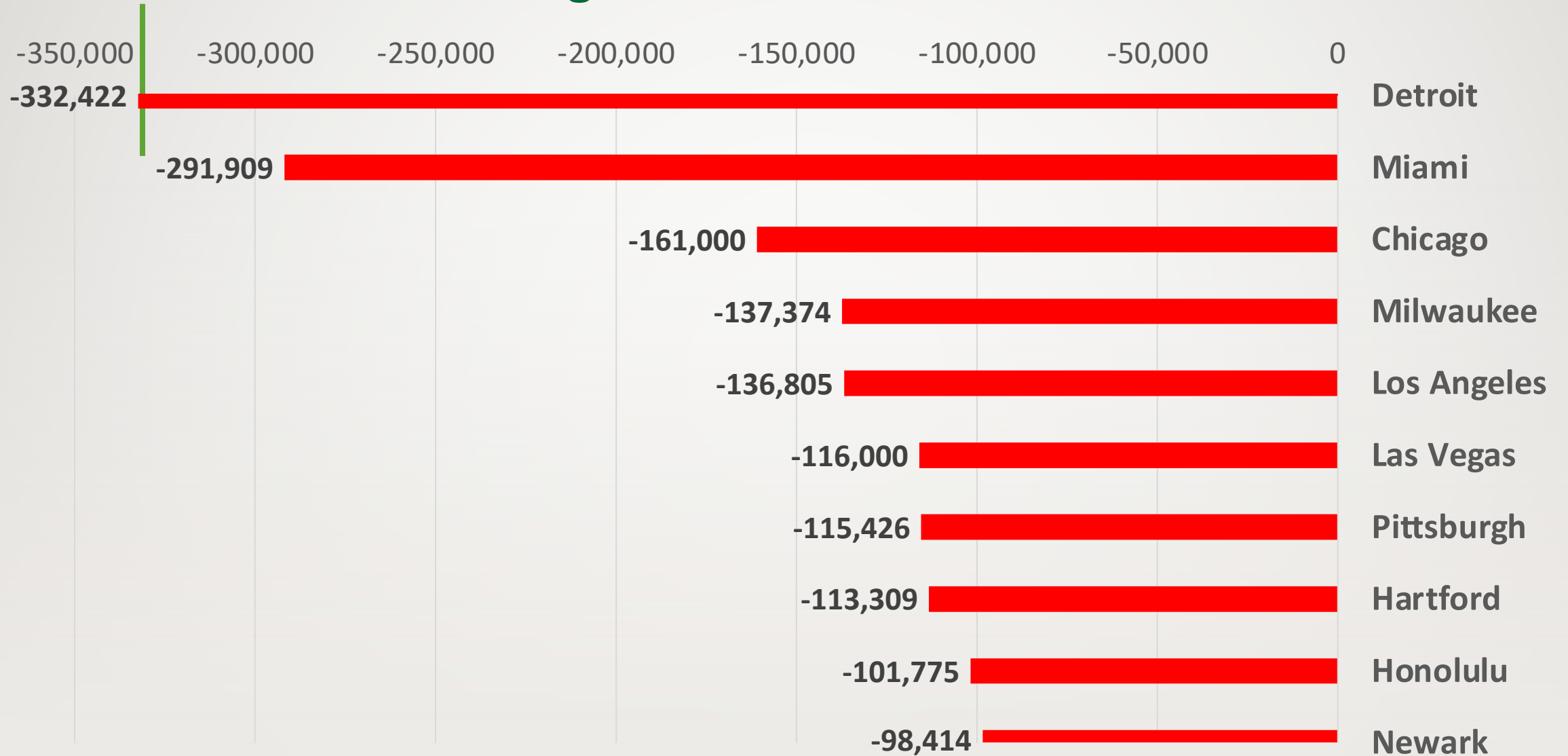
U.S. Catholic Population, 2022



Dioceses with the Largest Increase in Catholics: 2008 - 2018

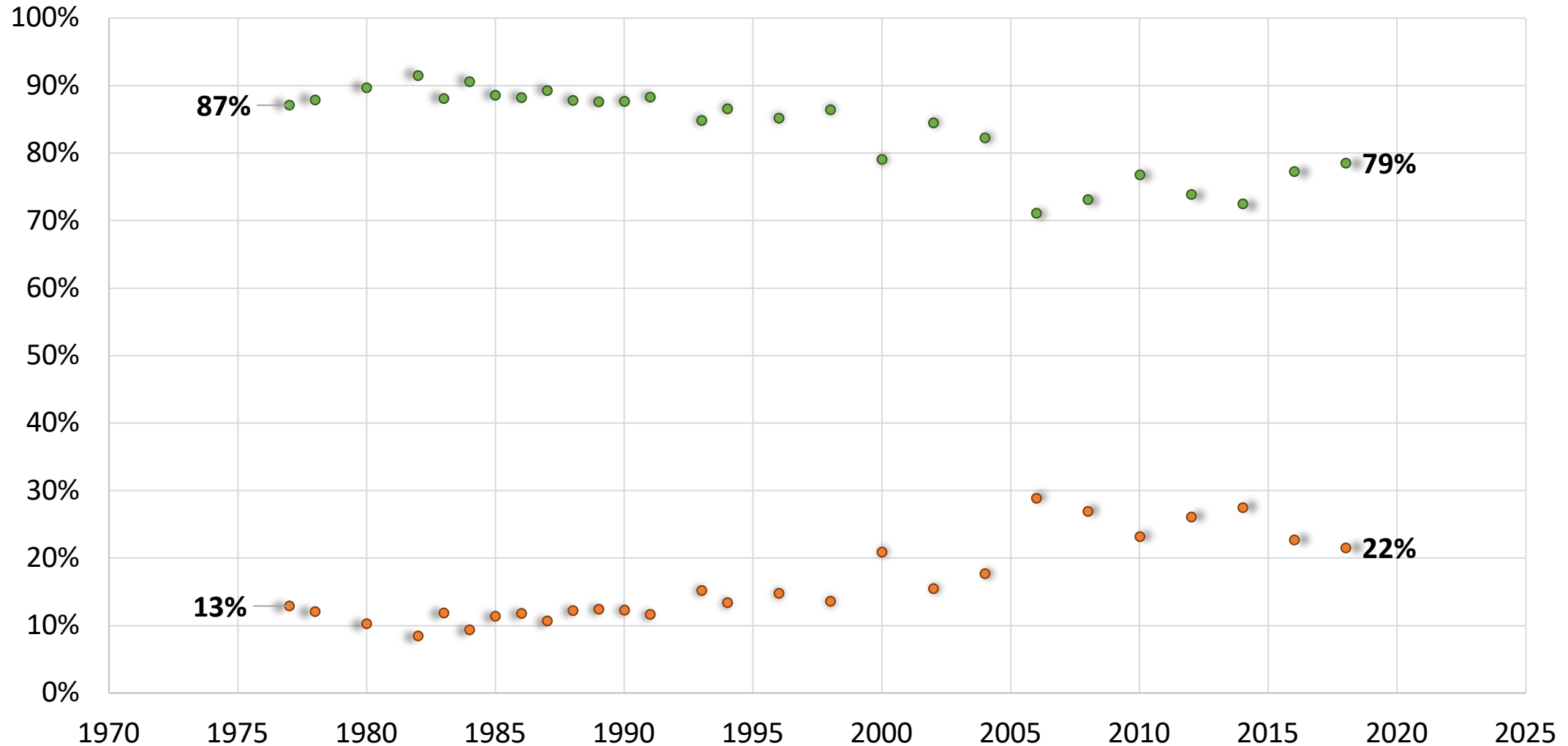


Dioceses with the Largest Decrease in Catholics: 2008 - 2018

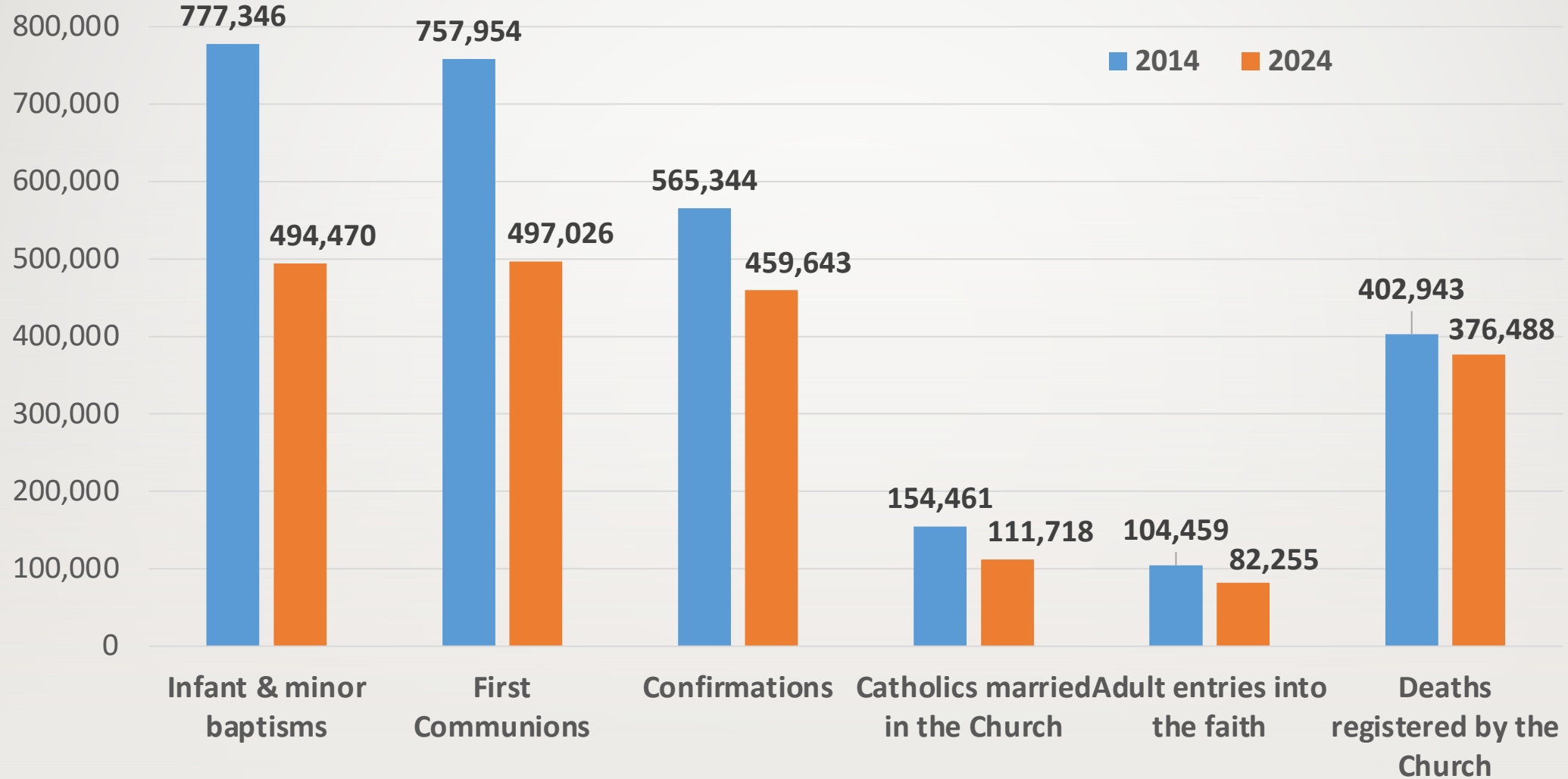


Percentage of U.S. Adult Catholics by Place of Birth

● Born in the U.S. ● Foreign-born



U.S. Catholic Sacramental Life-Cycle, 2014 and 2024



Leavers under 18

Adult Leavers

Immigration*

Converts

Age 18

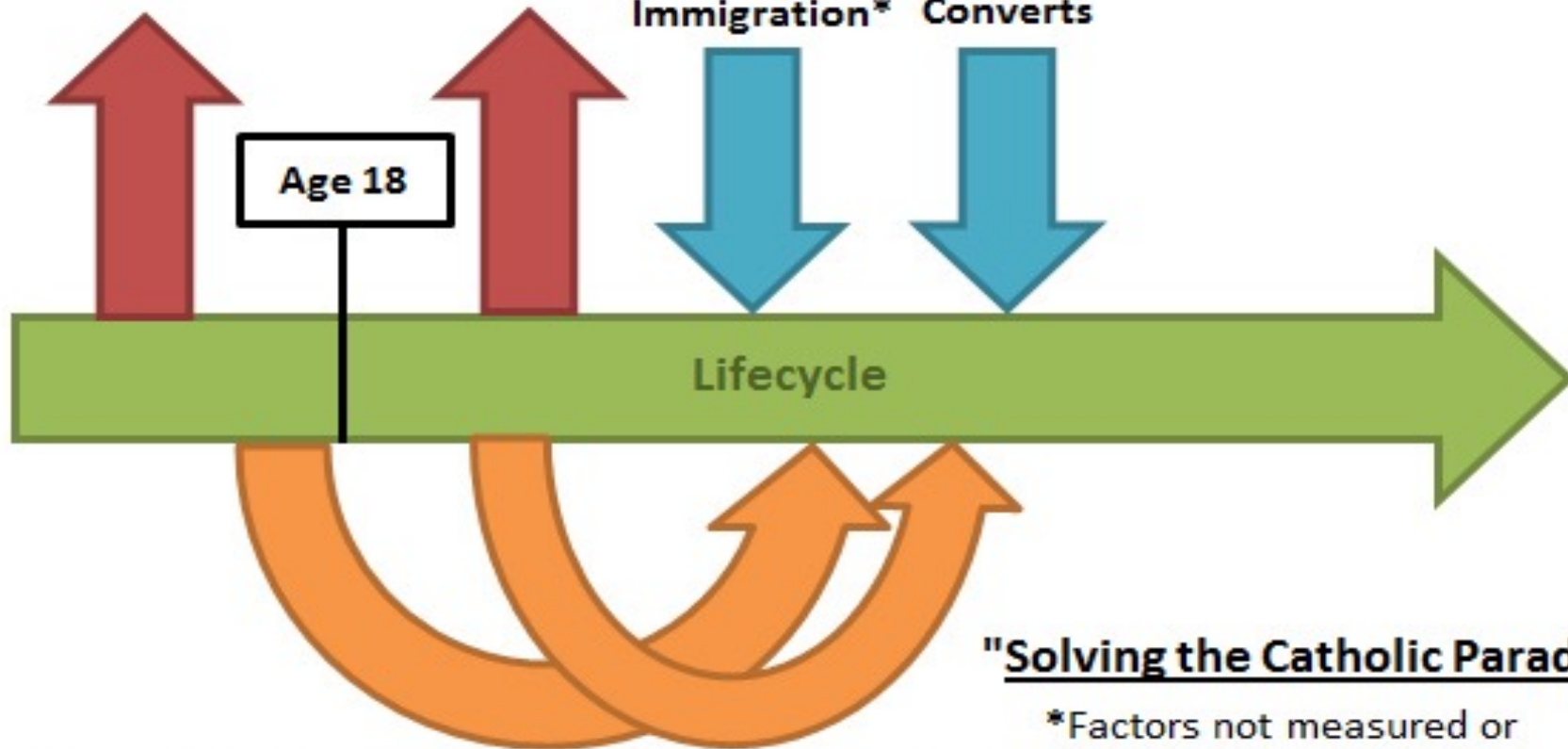
Lifecycle

Reverts who left before age 18*

Adult Reverts*

"Solving the Catholic Paradox"

*Factors not measured or accounted for in existing "snapshot" surveys of changes in religious affiliation



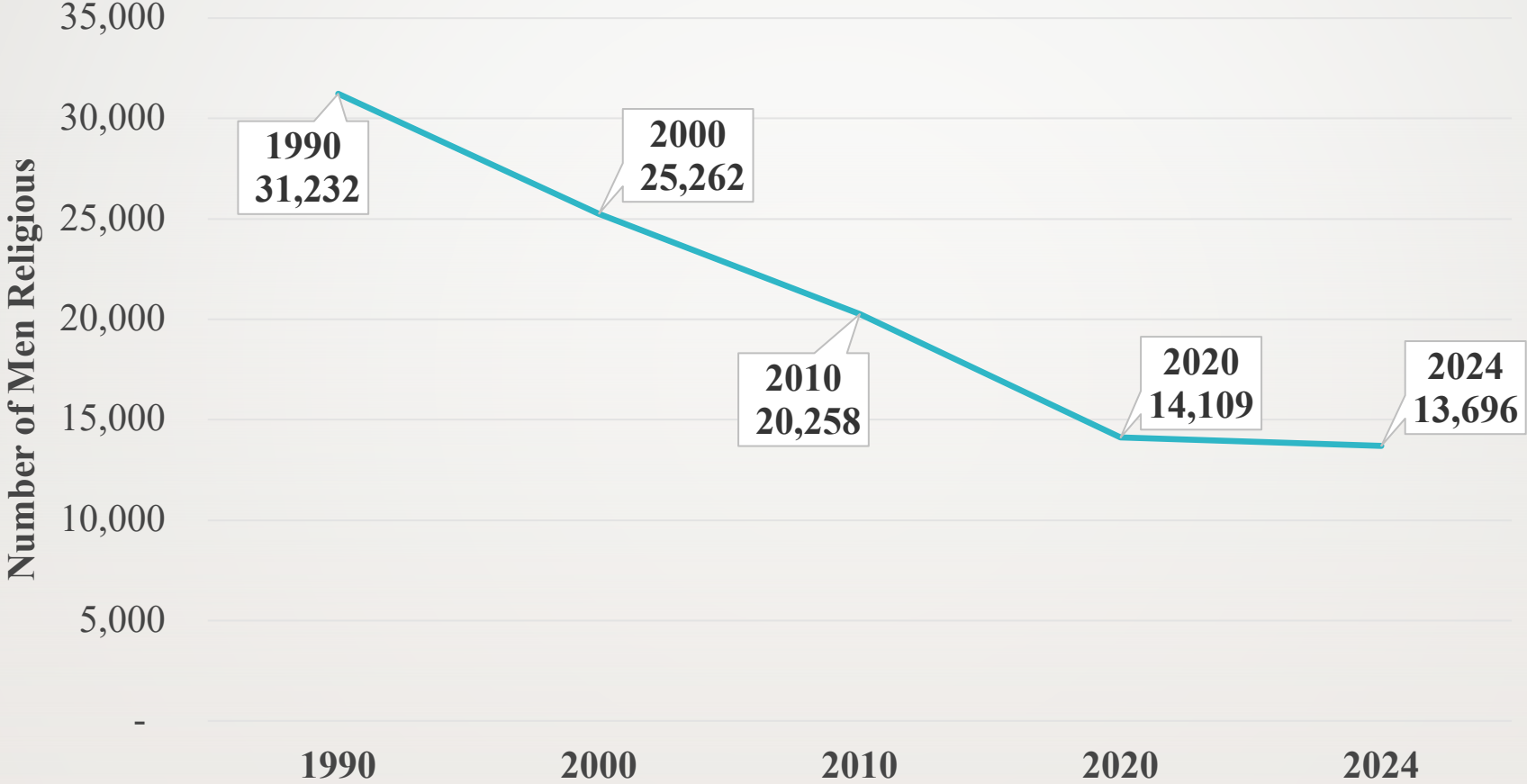
Size & Geography

- **Catholics remain about a quarter of the U.S. population**
- **But no longer live in the traditionally Catholic areas of the previous century**
- **About 25% of Catholics are foreign-born**
- **Empty pews vs. packed parking lots**
- **Catholics have become “disengaged” from Sacraments**

Men Religious: Age, Ethnicity, Activity



Total Number of Men Religious in the United States

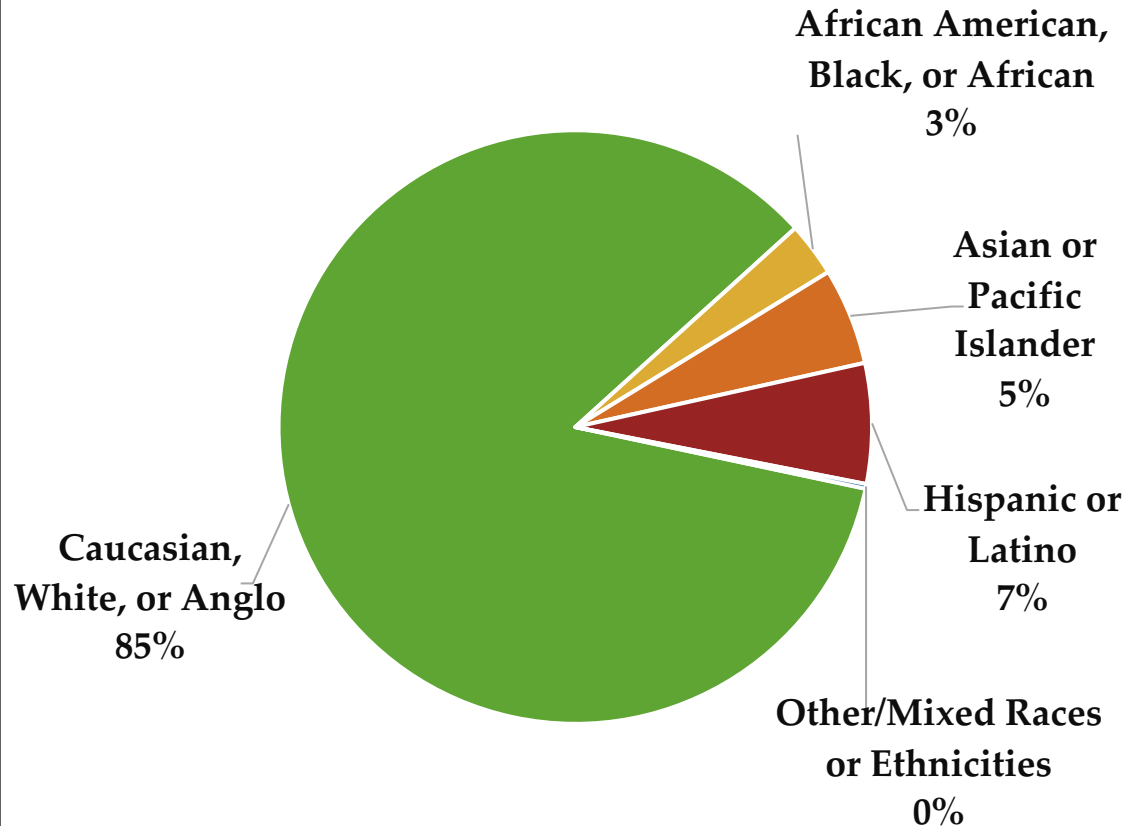


All Men Identified by Decade of Birth, 2023
CMSM Survey of Major Superiors

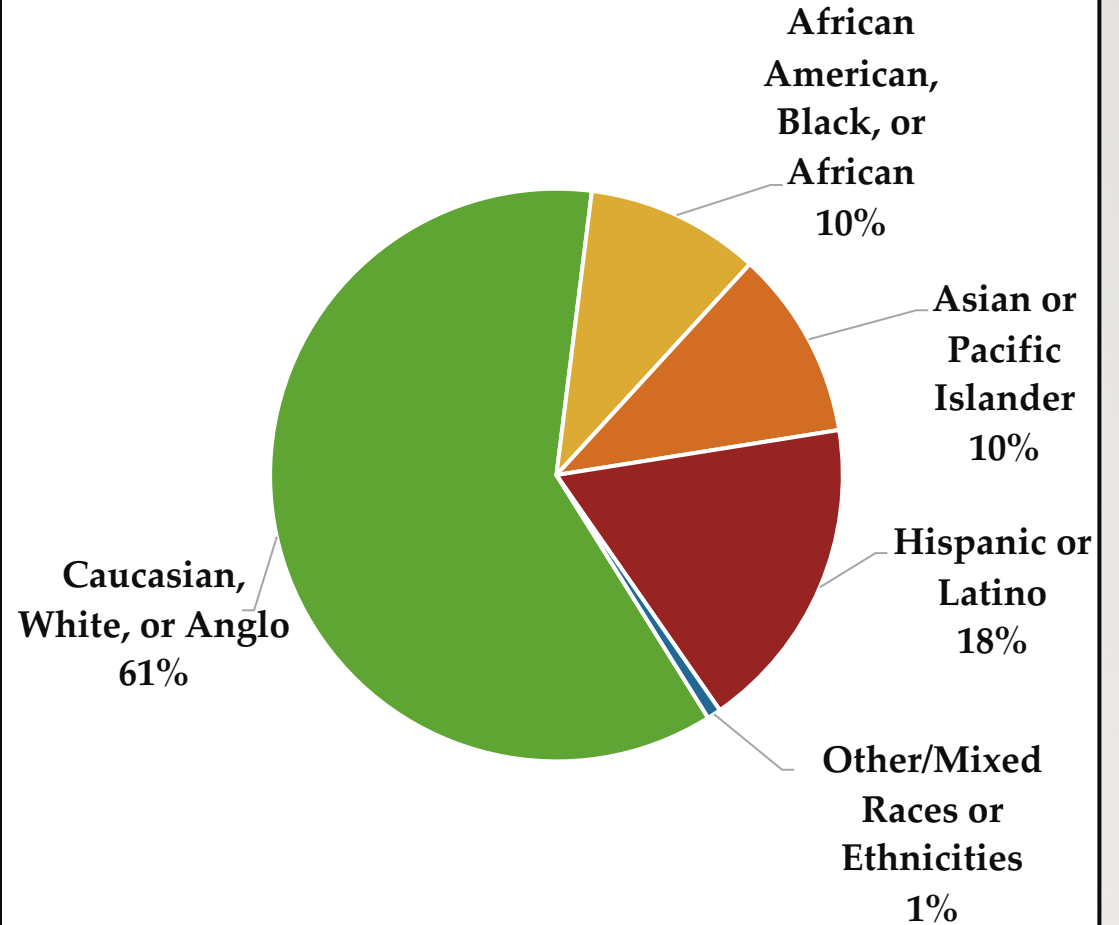
	1939 or Earlier	1940s- 1950s	1960s- 1970s	1980s- 1990s	2000 or After
All perpetually professed	20%	47%	22%	11%	<1%
All candidates/postulants, novices and temporarily professed	0%	2%	15%	73%	10%
<i>Candidates/postulants</i>	0%	1%	6%	78%	15%
<i>Novices</i>	0%	1%	16%	72%	11%
<i>Temporarily professed</i>	0%	1%	7%	41%	51%
Total Percentage	17%	41%	22%	19%	9%

Race/Ethnicity of Men Religious

Perpetual Profession

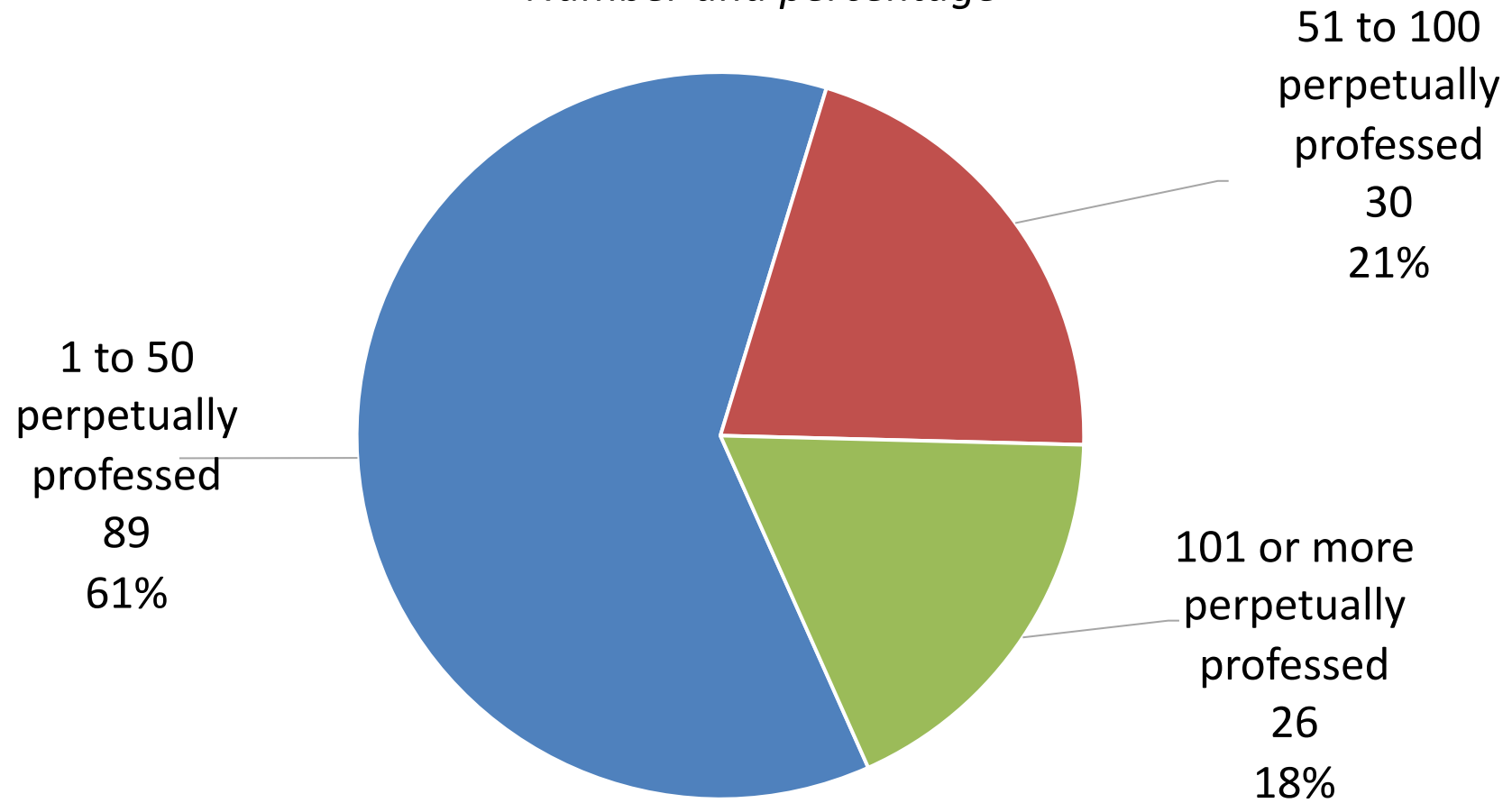


Initial Formation



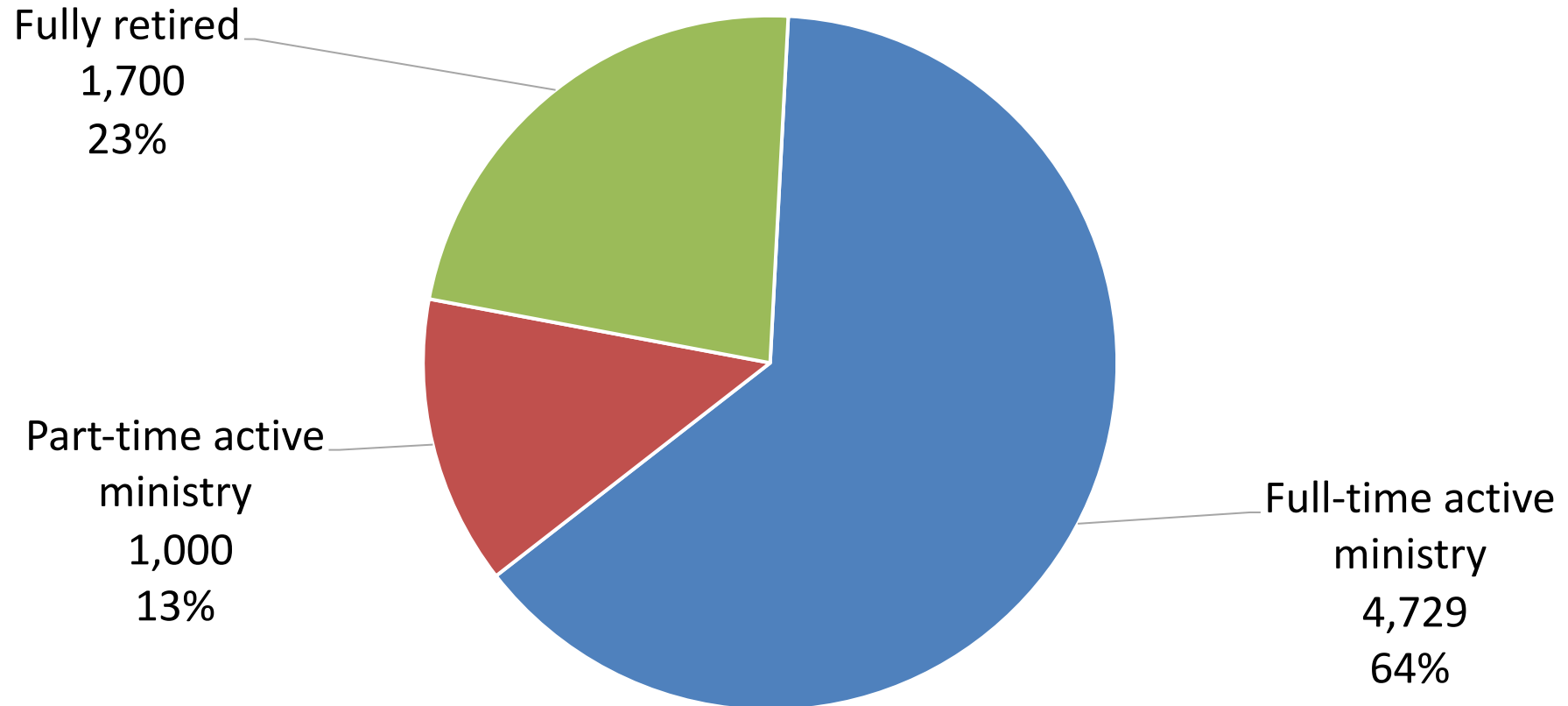
Size of Religious Communities, 2023

Number and percentage



Ministry Status of Perpetually Professed Members, 2023

Number and Percentage



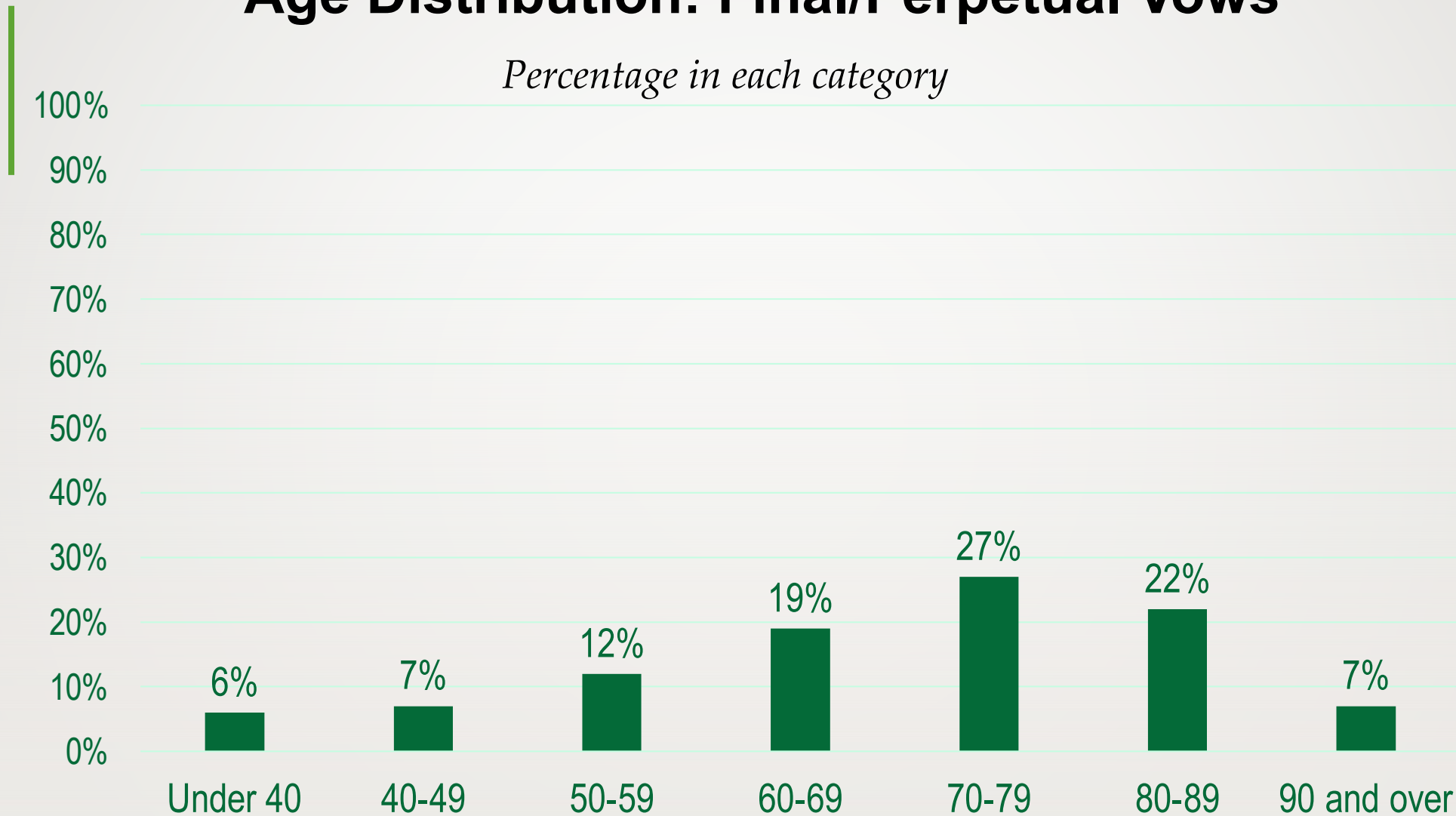
Generational Differences in Religious Life



- Vatican II Generation (born 1943 – 1960), ages 59+ in 2019
- Post-Vatican II Generation (born 1961-1981), ages 38 - 58 in 2019
- Early Millennial Generation (born 1982-1991), ages 28-37 in 2019
- Late Millennial Generation (born 1992 or later), ages 27 or younger in 2019

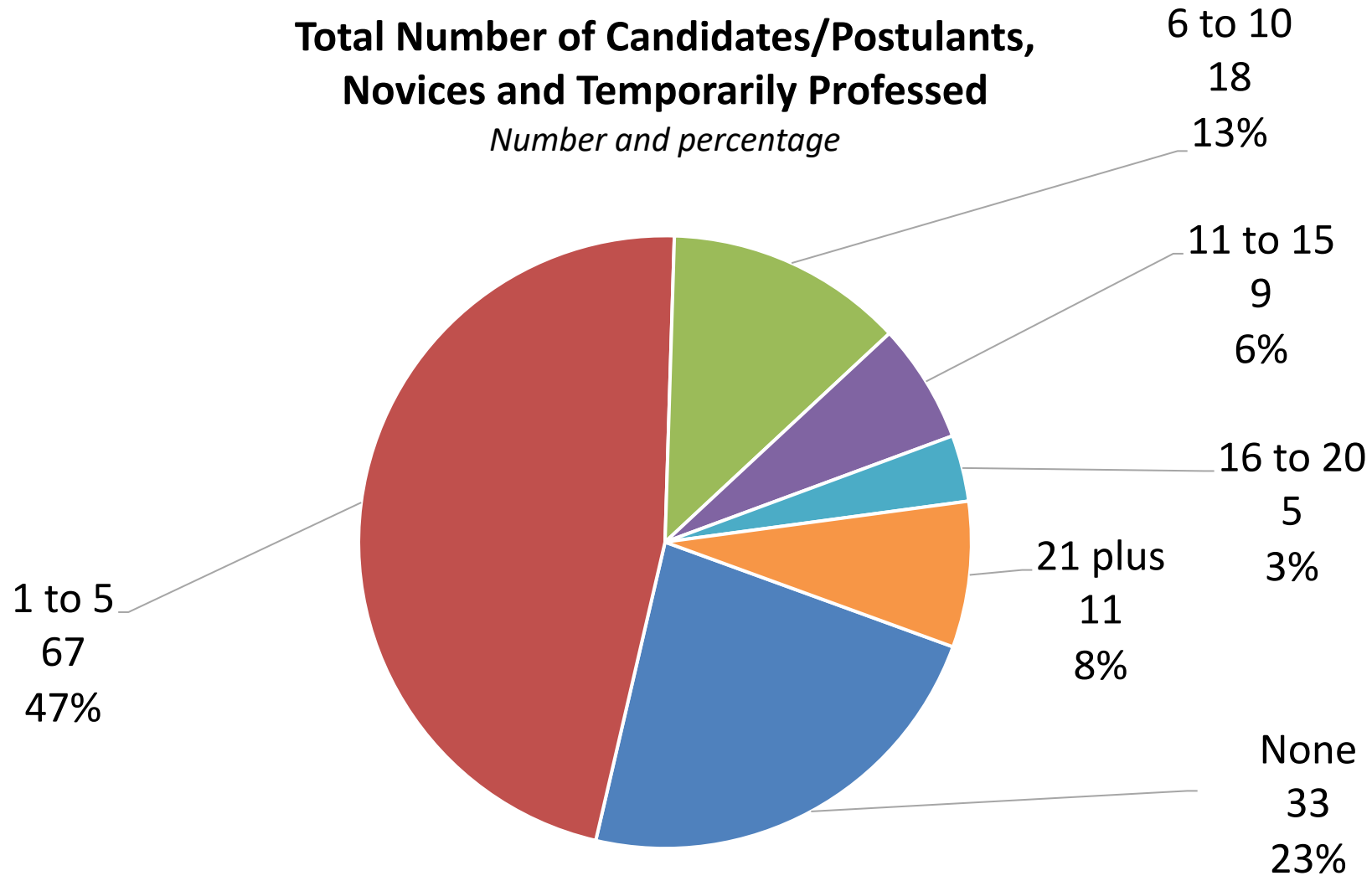
Age Distribution: Final/Perpetual Vows

Percentage in each category



Total Number of Candidates/Postulants, Novices and Temporarily Professed

Number and percentage



All Men Religious Identified by Place of Birth

	Born in the United States		Born Outside of the United States		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Candidates/postulants, novices and temporarily professed	856	66%	440	34%	1,296	12%
Perpetually professed members	7,681	84%	1,501	16%	9,182	88%
Total number	8,537	81%	1,941	19%	10,478	100%

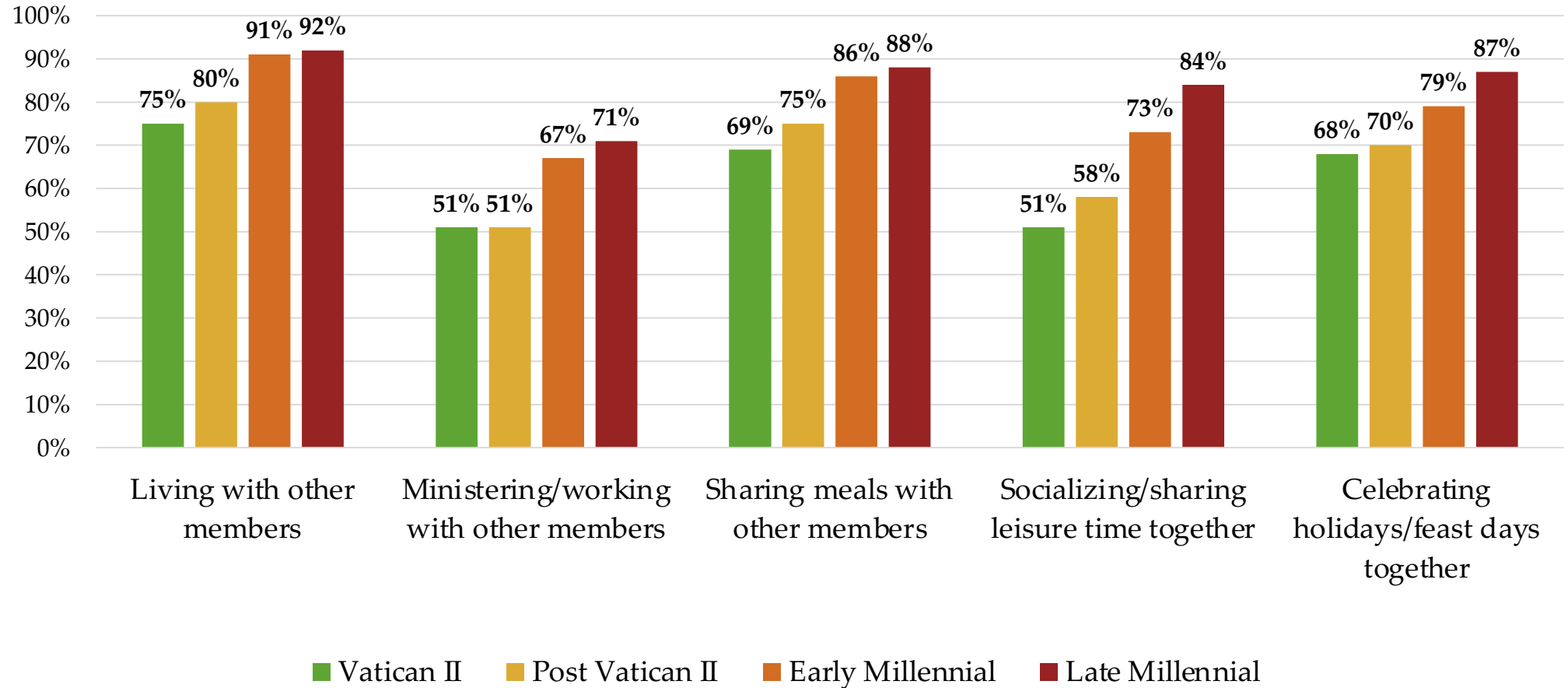
Country of Birth of New Members

Percentage responding

	Men
	%
United States	75
Vietnam	5
Mexico	3
Philippines	2
Canada	1
Other countries	14

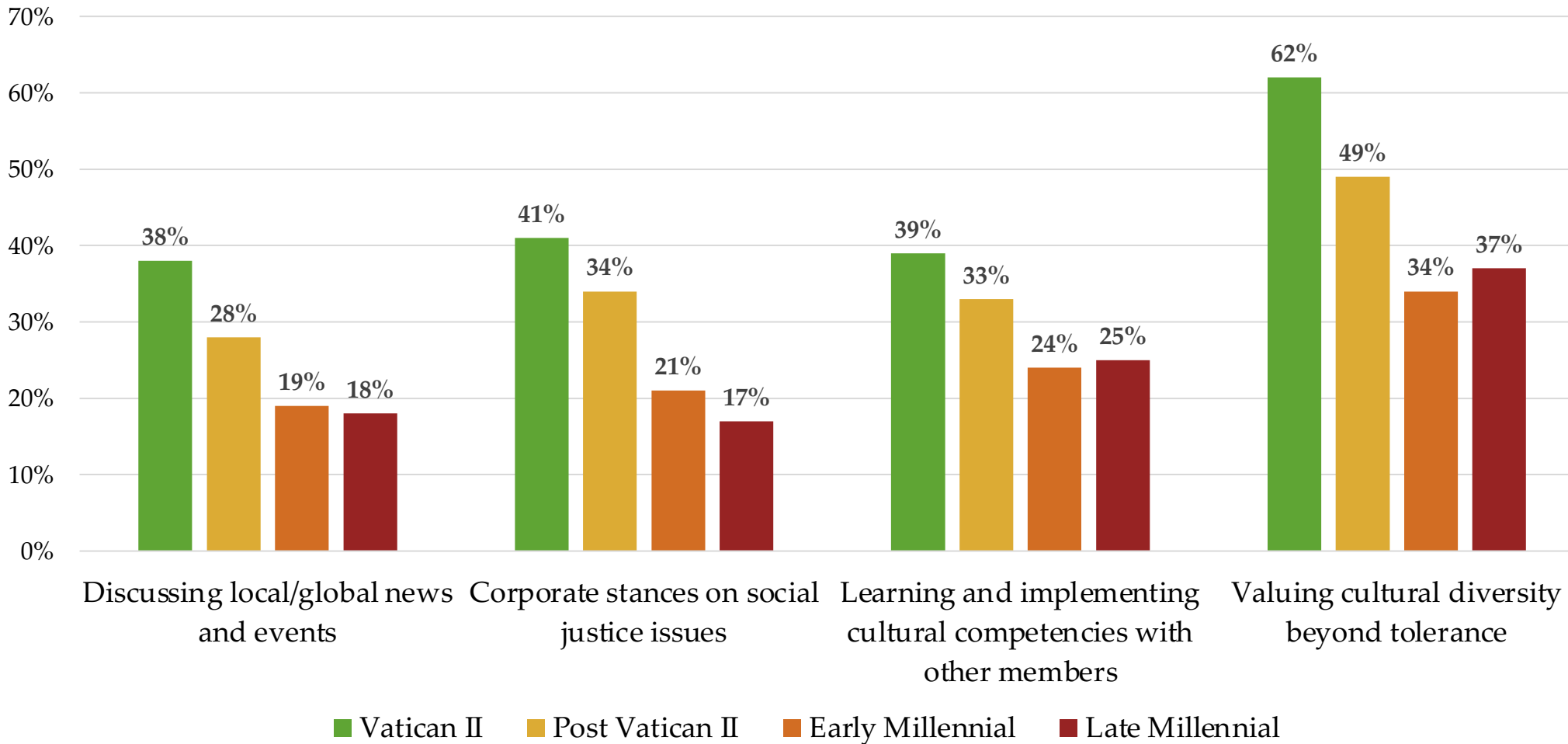
How important to you are these aspects of community life?

Percentage responding "Very Much"



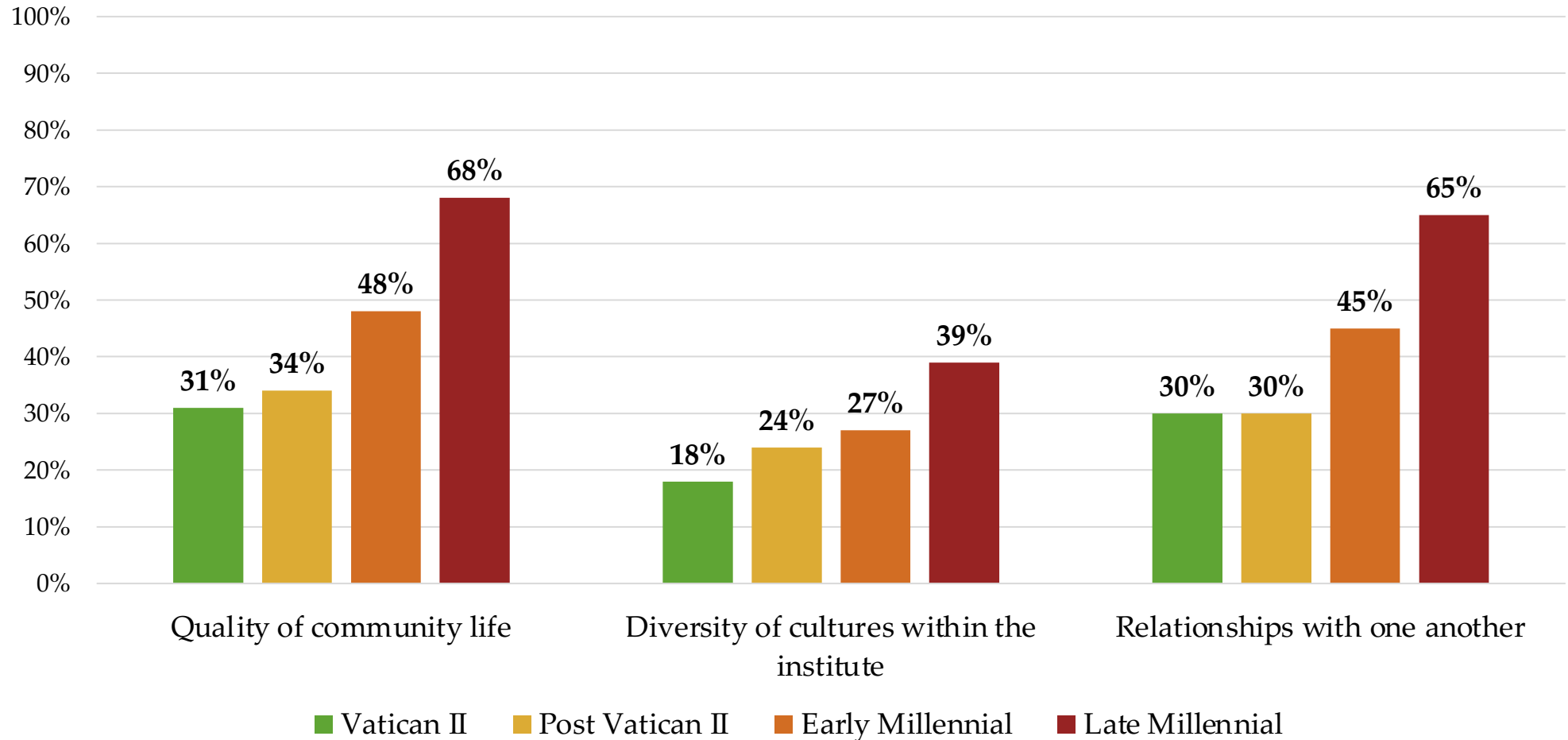
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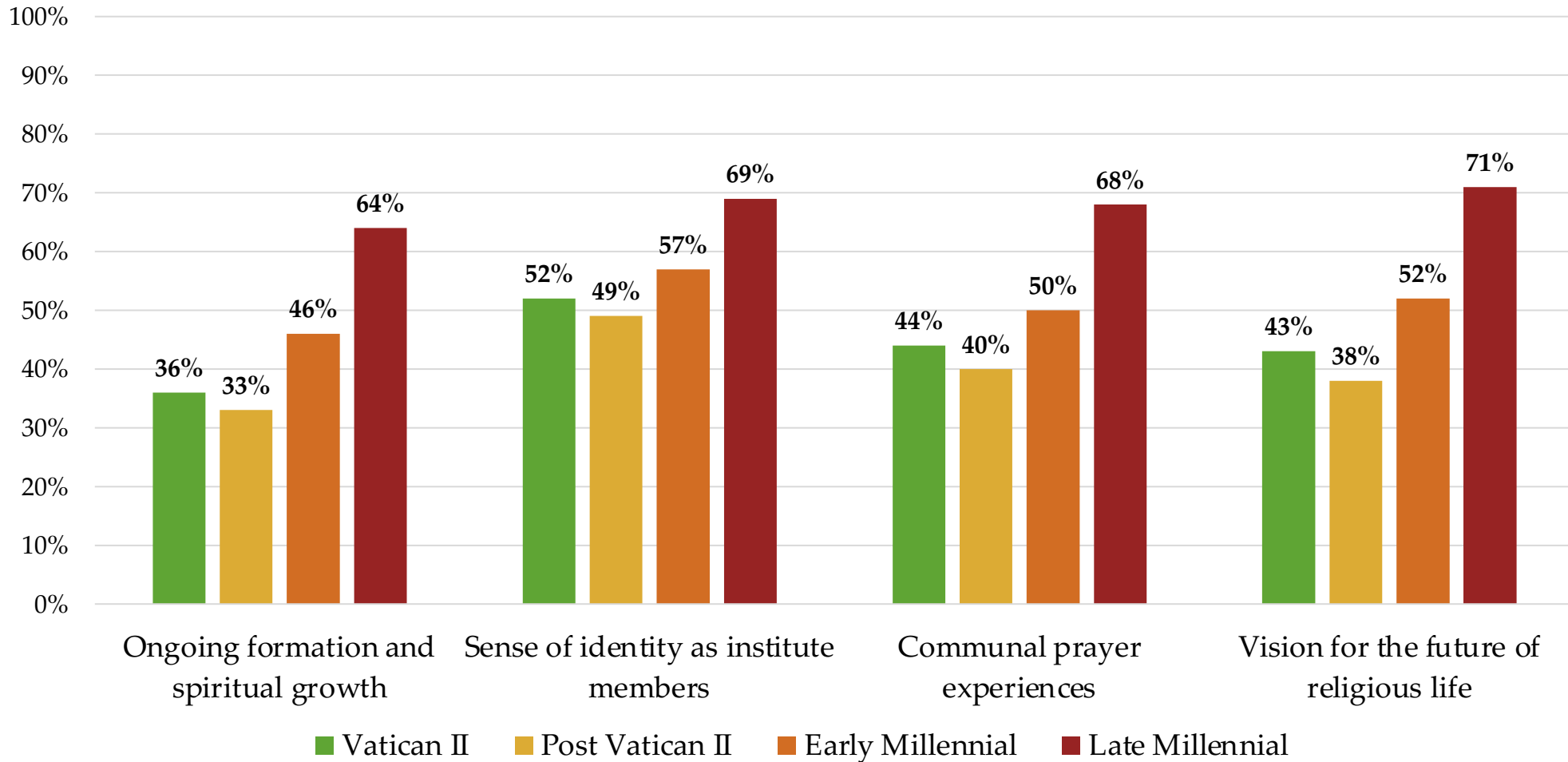
How would you rate the following in your religious institute?

Percentage responding "Excellent"



How would you rate the following in your religious institute?

Percentage responding "Excellent"



Challenges in Integrating New Members

- ❖ Age gap challenges - generations not understanding each other and the older generation of members being resistant to change
- ❖ Language challenges - including strong accents and not being able to communicate the nuances of one's native tongue
- ❖ Cultural challenges - including lack of initiative in trying to understand another's culture, food issues, and new members feeling uncomfortable expressing themselves, speaking, or assuming leadership roles
- ❖ Challenges related to infrequent vocations - which lead to not having a stable formation team and new members not having peers with whom to bond while going through formation

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?



I. Ministries and Youth

In our ministries, how do we engage the youth?

Do our ministries have retreat programs for youth that appropriately incorporate our Institute's spirituality and charism?

II. Personal Witness and Visibility of Religious

How does someone recognize a member of my Institute?

What is distinctive?

III. Community Life

Is our Institute's community life inviting and attractive to young adults?

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Is our Institute's community life inviting and attractive to young adults?

V. Cross-Generational Commonalities

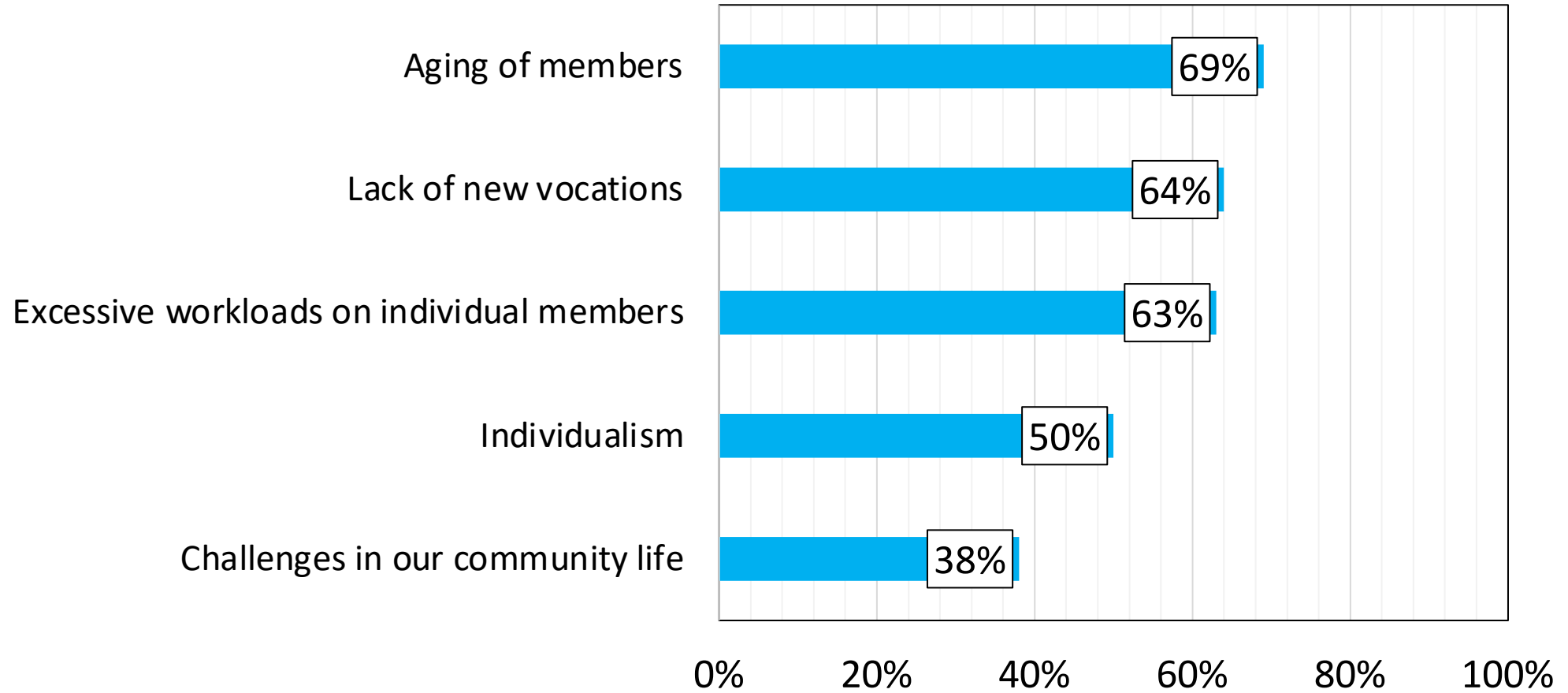
Are our Institute's communities willing to change and adapt to a multi-generational community?

VI. Cross-Cultural Commonalities

Are our communities willing to welcome and positively engage members of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds?

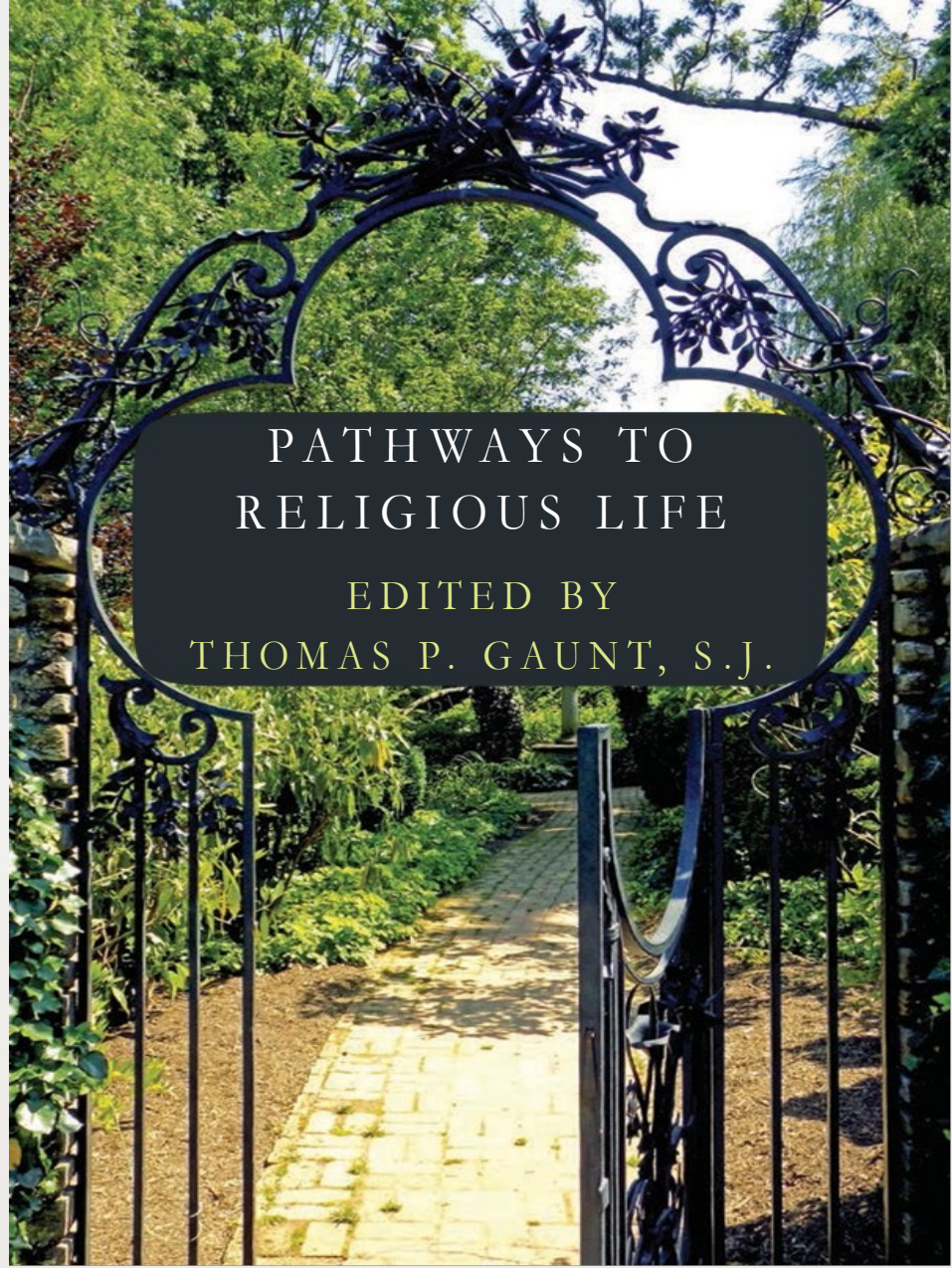
Are our men in formation reflective of the immigrant reality of the Catholic Church in the United States?

Top Five Challenges in the Next Five Years CMSM Survey of Major Superiors 2023



Final Thoughts - Context Matters...

- Most CMSM Institutes are 50 or fewer men
- Six in ten male religious are over age 63
- One-quarter of Institutes have no one in formation, one-half have 1 to 5
- Issues are: Aging, Work Load, and Lack of New Vocations
- Challenge of preparing men for Major Ministry Leadership roles, Superiors, Formators.



PATHWAYS TO
RELIGIOUS LIFE
EDITED BY
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