

**Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate  
Georgetown University  
Washington, DC**

*Attitudes of Clergy and Lay Leaders toward the  
New Translation of the Roman Missal:  
Findings from CARA's National  
Survey of Catholic Parishes*

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**Introduction**

CARA has conducted periodic single-informant surveys of parishes for at least 15 years and publishes the findings from those surveys, when possible, to increase the Church's self-understanding.<sup>1</sup> For example, in 2000 CARA published a Special Report entitled *National Parish Inventory*, which summarized parish size, composition, sacramental life, and staffing from its database of national parish surveys. In 2011, CARA published research from the Emerging Models project entitled *The Changing Face of U.S. Parishes*, which documented changes in parish life and ministry over the previous decade.

For this most recent national study of parishes, CARA received generous funding from the SC Ministry Foundation and from St. Matthew Parish in Charlotte, North Carolina. A few individual clients also commissioned some additional questions. The purpose of the present study, conducted in anticipation of CARA's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of founding (in 1964), is to update the data on parish life from these previous studies and to supplement those data with new questions about current issues and challenges in 21<sup>st</sup> century parish life.

This report presents the findings from the particular questions about the texts of the Revised Roman Missal that were commissioned by St. John's School of Theology-Seminary and were included in the National Survey of Catholic Parishes.

**Methodology**

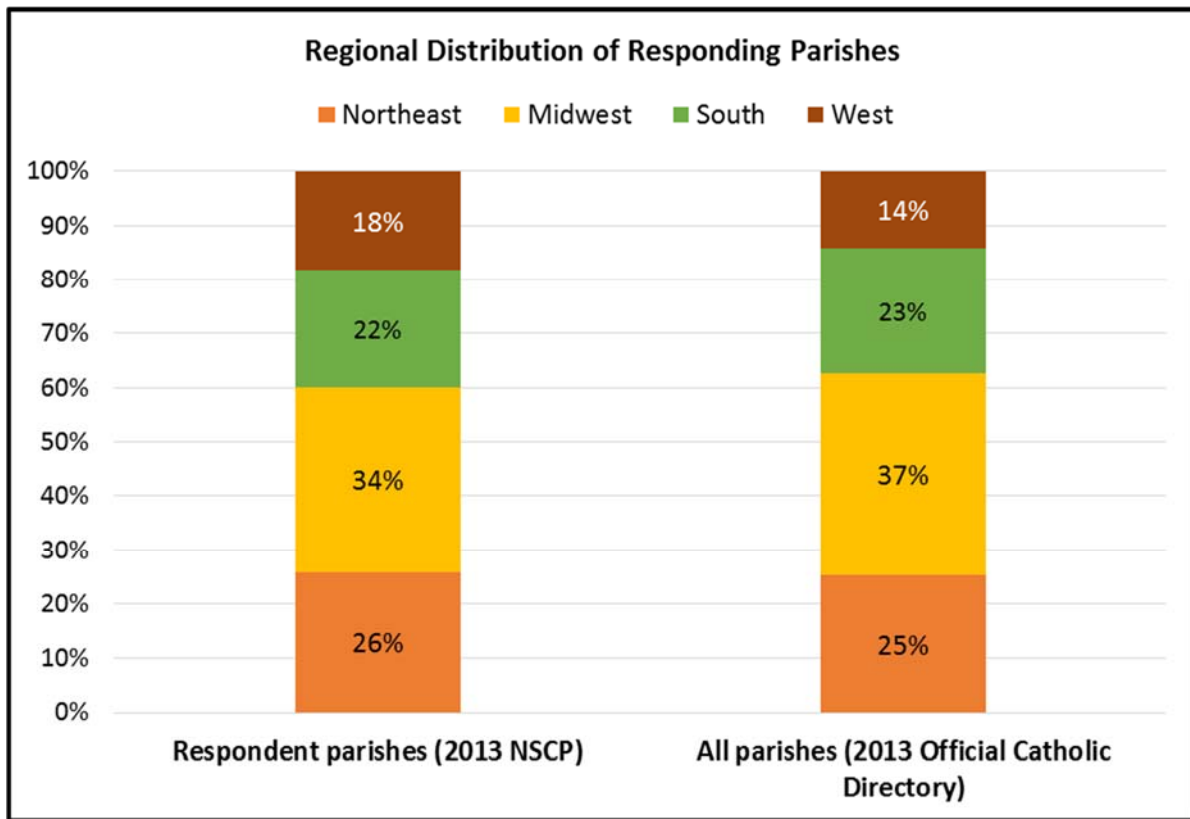
In October 2013, CARA sent invitations to 6,000 randomly selected parishes (5,000 by email and 1,000 by mail) to take part in CARA's National Survey of Catholic Parishes (NSCP). CARA stratified the population of parishes in its database of all U.S. parishes to ensure the selection of a representative random sample of parishes within dioceses. To determine the total number of parishes randomly selected in each diocese, CARA weighted the diocesan averages of the percentage of the Catholic population *and* the percentage of Catholic parishes in the United

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<sup>1</sup> Published reports from CARA's national parish surveys are available at <http://cara.georgetown.edu/Publications/parishlife.html>

States in each diocese as reported in *The Official Catholic Directory (OCD)*. This stratification ensures that parishes representing the full Catholic population were included rather than a sample dominated by areas where there are many small parishes with comparatively small Catholic populations.

From the total sample, 486 email addresses were not valid and 68 of the mailed invitations were returned as bad addresses or as being closed parishes. Thus, the survey likely reached 5,446 parishes. The survey remained in the field as periodic reminders by email and mail were made until February 2014.<sup>2</sup> A total of 539 valid responses to the survey were returned to CARA for a response rate of 10.0 percent.<sup>3</sup> This number of responses results in a margin of sampling error of  $\pm 4.2$  percentage points at the 95 percent confidence interval.



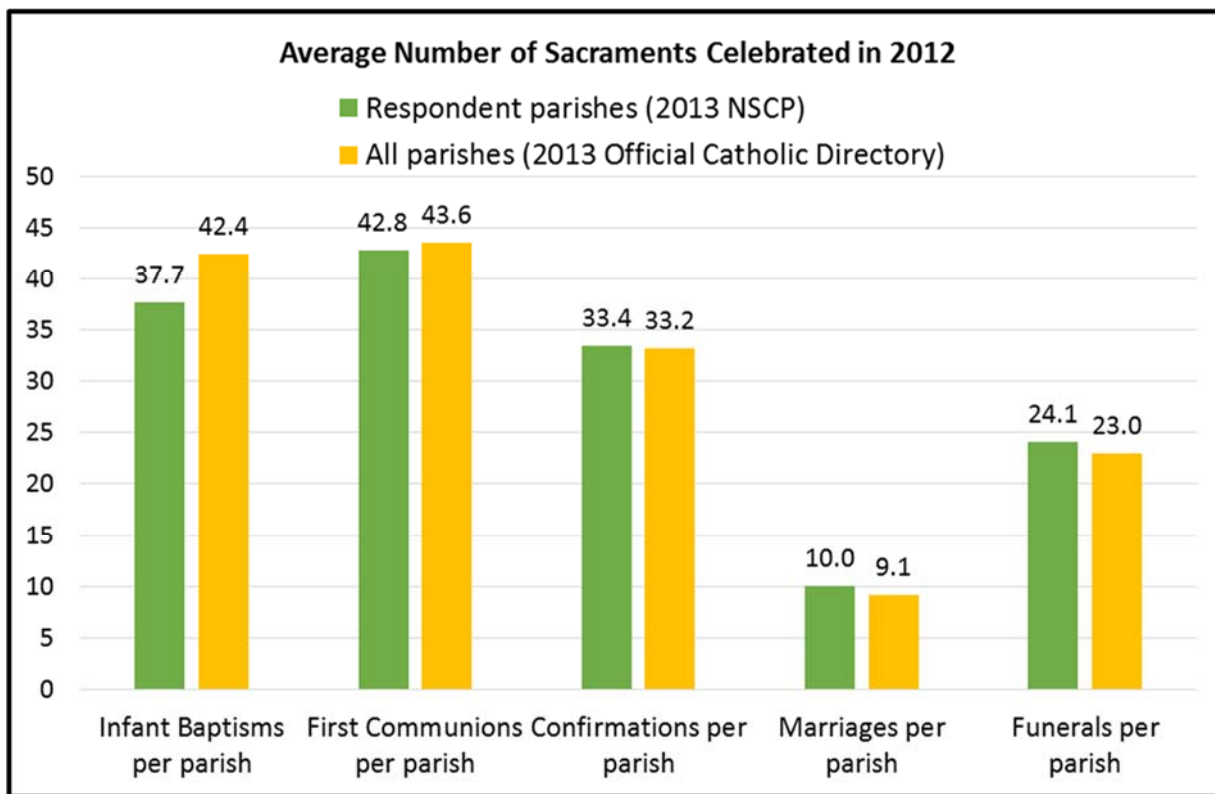
As shown in the figure on the preceding page, the stratification used for selecting the sample results in parishes in the West, which include larger percentages of the Catholic population, being slightly overrepresented and those in the Midwest, where a smaller share of the Catholic population resides, slightly underrepresented.

As shown in the figure below, other characteristics of parish life that were asked on the survey match closely with parish data that can be verified externally. The figure shows the

<sup>2</sup> Reminders were halted during Advent.

<sup>3</sup> The survey consisted of 169 questions and spanned eight printed pages. A slightly smaller national CARA parish survey, including 141 questions from 2010, obtained a 15.3 percent response rate. Response rates for CARA parish surveys are correlated with the length of the questionnaire.

average number of sacraments celebrated per parish in 2012 from the NSCP and the same figures as reported in the *Official Catholic Directory*.<sup>4</sup> The only slight difference is in the average number of infant baptisms reported.



### Subgroups Used in This Analysis

The invitation to participate in the survey was directed to the pastor or other parish leader in each parish. At the end of the survey, a few demographic questions about the person completing the survey permit classification of the survey responses according to the ecclesial status of the key informant. Although there are too few respondents for statistically meaningful comparisons according to each category of ecclesial status, responses of clergy can be compared to responses of lay parish leaders within reasonable standards of statistical significance.

A total of 444 clergy (421 diocesan or religious order priests and 13 permanent deacons) responded to the survey and comprise 85 percent of responding parish leaders. This number of responses results in a margin of sampling error for clergy of  $\pm 4.6$  percentage points at the 95 percent confidence interval. A total of 75 lay leaders (57 women religious or other lay women and 18 religious brothers or other lay men) responded to the survey and comprise 15 percent of responding parish leaders. This number of responses results in a margin of sampling error for lay leaders of  $\pm 11.3$  percentage points at the 95 percent confidence interval.

<sup>4</sup> Although the NSCP was conducted in 2013 and the *OCD* was published in 2013, both data sources are asking about sacramental totals from the previous year, in 2012.

This report presents overall combined findings from all respondents for each question. Within each section, the report also compares responses of clergy to responses of lay leaders and points out statistically meaningful differences when they occur. Due to the relatively small number of responding lay parish leaders and the corresponding high margin of error, only relatively large differences in attitudes between the two groups are presented here as they may be suggestive of possible real differences in the population.

## **Interpreting This Report**

The questions analyzed in this report ask respondents to select one response from a set of responses or to select from a five point response scale (“strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”) with an option for “don’t know or no opinion.” This scale allows half the responses to be interpreted as relatively more “negative” (“strongly disagree” and “disagree”) and half as relatively more “positive” (“agree” and “strongly agree”), with “don’t know or no opinion” as a middle category. In tables presenting these five point response scales, the “positive” responses are combined and presented in one column, while the most “positive” response (“strongly agree”) is presented next to it for comparison.

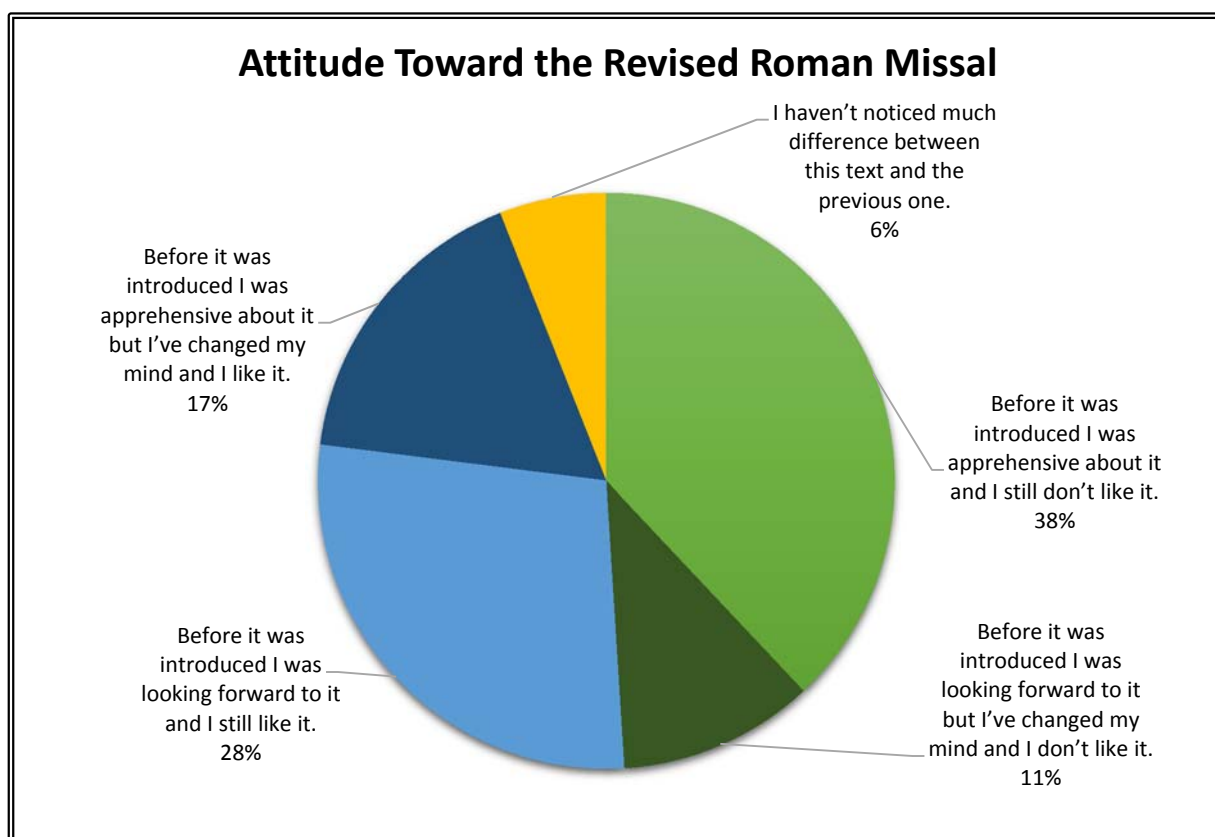
In addition, readers may wish to compare the difference between the two extreme responses, say “strongly agree” and “strongly disagree,” to compare the level of intensity with which opposing opinions are held. These comparisons and others may be made by referring to the actual percentage responses given in Appendix I. That appendix shows the percentage responses for each item as well as the percentage of all respondents that selected “don’t know or no opinion.”

## Results

This report results for the questions about the texts of the Revised Roman Missal that were commissioned by St. John's School of Theology-Seminary and were included in the National Survey of Catholic Parishes.

### Attitude toward the Revised Roman Missal

In a section of the survey under the heading "Worship" parish leaders were asked, "*The texts of the Roman Missal were revised by the Holy See and introduced in U.S. parishes on the First Sunday of Advent in 2011. Which of the following best sums up your attitude toward the new texts? Check only one response.*"



- Virtually all parish leaders note the difference in texts in either a positive or a negative fashion. Just over one in twenty (6 percent) indicate they haven't noticed much difference between this text and the previous one.
- Not quite half (45 percent) are positive about the change (shaded in blue in the graphic above): either looked forward to it and still like it (28 percent) or were apprehensive but now like it (17 percent).

- About half (49 percent) are negative about the change (shaded in green in the graphic above): 38 percent were apprehensive and still don't like it and 11 percent were looking forward to the change but now don't like it.

*Comparisons between Clergy and Lay Leaders*

	Clergy	Laity
Before it was introduced I was apprehensive about it and I still don't like it.	41%	19%
Before it was introduced I was apprehensive about it but I've changed my mind and I like it.	15	26
Before it was introduced I was looking forward to it and I still like it.	27	33
Before it was introduced I was looking forward to it but I've changed my mind and I don't like it.	11	10
I haven't noticed much difference between this text and the previous one.	05	13

Clergy are more likely than lay leaders to express a negative attitude about the new texts.

- More than half of clergy (52 percent) say they “don't like” the new texts (41 percent were apprehensive before it was introduced and still don't like it and 11 percent were looking forward to it but now don't like it). By comparison, 29 percent of lay leaders are negative about the new texts (19 percent were apprehensive before and still don't like it and 10 percent were looking forward to it but now don't like it).
- Three in five lay leaders (59 percent) compared to two in five clergy (42 percent) express a positive attitude about the new texts. Just over a quarter of clergy (27 percent) looked forward to the new texts and still like it, and 15 percent were apprehensive before it was introduced but now like it. A third of lay leaders (33 percent) were looking forward to the new texts and still like it and a quarter (26 percent) were apprehensive before it was introduced but now like it.
- There is no difference between clergy and lay leaders in the proportion who say they haven't noticed much difference between the new text and the previous one.

## Statements about the Revised Roman Missal

Parish leaders were next asked how much they agree or disagree with eight statements having to do with the Revised Missal. Nearly all who responded to the first question about their attitude toward the new texts also responded to this set of questions.

<i>How much do you agree or disagree with the following?</i> (Percentage agreeing with each statement)		
	<b>“Agree” or “Strongly Agree”</b>	<b>“Strongly Agree” Only</b>
Some of the language of the new text is awkward and distracting.	75%	47%
I think the new translation urgently needs to be revised.	50	33
I approve of the leadership of the Holy See in bringing about the new Missal.	46	19
I like the more formal style of language of the new text.	42	16
I think work should go forward in translating the Liturgy of the Hours and all of the other rites (e.g., Marriage, Confirmation) in the same style as the new Missal.	41	21
I think the new translation is an improvement on the old one.	40	20
I like the Missal’s English chant settings.	40	10
I am confident that the views of priests will be taken seriously in future decisions about liturgical translation.	23	07

A majority of responding parish leaders express dissatisfaction with the language of the Revised Missal.

- Three in four responding parish leaders (75 percent) agree that some of the language of the new text is awkward and distracting. Close to half (47 percent) “strongly agree” with that statement.
- Half (50 percent) agree that “the new translation urgently needs to be revised.” A third (33 percent) “strongly agree” with the statement.

More than four in ten agree at least “somewhat” that they approve of the leadership of the Holy See in bringing about the new Missal, they think that work should go forward in translating the other rites in the same style, and they like the more formal language of the new text.



- Almost half (46 percent) say they approve of the leadership of the Holy See in bringing about the new Missal. One in five (19 percent) “strongly agree” with that statement.
- About four in ten (42 percent) like the more formal style of language of the new text. One in six “strongly agrees” with that statement (16 percent), while three in ten “strongly disagree” (31 percent).
- About four in ten (41 percent) agree that work should go forward in translating the other rites in the same style as the new Missal. While one in five “strongly agrees” with this statement, twice as many (37 percent) “strongly disagree.”
- Four in ten (40 percent) agree that the new translation is an improvement on the old one. One in five “strongly agrees.”
- More than a third (36 percent) responded “don’t know” to the statement “I like the Missal’s English chant settings.” Among those who did express an opinion, four in ten (40 percent) agreed that they like the English chant setting, with 10 percent strongly agreeing. One in four (24 percent) do not like the Missal’s English chant settings.

Parish leaders express reservations about whether the views of priests will be taken seriously in future decisions about liturgical translation.

- About one in six (17 percent) responded “don’t know” to the statement “I am confident that the views of priests will be taken seriously in future decisions about liturgical translation. Among those who did express an opinion, about a quarter (23 percent) agree with the statement (7 percent “strongly agree”).
- By contrast, six in ten respondents disagree with the statement, evenly divided between those who “disagree” and those who “strongly disagree” with the statement.

In none of these six statements do the attitudes of clergy and lay leaders differ statistically.

## **Appendix I: Questionnaire with Response Frequencies**



## **National Survey of Catholic Parishes**

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Questions for St. John's School of Theology-Seminary  
N=539

Percentage response for each item presented below:

35. The texts of the Roman Missal were revised by the Holy See and introduced in U.S. parishes on the First Sunday of Advent in 2011. Which of the following best sums up your attitude toward the new texts? **Check one.**

- 38 1. Before it was introduced I was apprehensive about it and I still don't like it.
- 17 2. Before it was introduced I was apprehensive about it but I've changed my mind and I like it.
- 28 3. Before it was introduced I was looking forward to it and I still like it.
- 11 4. Before it was introduced I was looking forward to it but I've changed my mind and I don't like it.
- 06 5. I haven't noticed much difference between this text and the previous one.

**Use the following responses for questions 36-42:**

**1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Agree 4 = Strongly agree DK = Don't know or no opinion**

*How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?*

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>DK</b>	
30	25	26	16	03	36. I like the more formal style of language of the new text.
10	14	28	47	01	37. Some of the language of the new text is awkward and distracting.
28	27	20	20	05	38. I think the new translation is an improvement on the old one.
19	23	17	33	07	39. I think the new translation urgently needs to be revised.
07	17	30	10	36	40. I like the Missal's English chant settings.
30	30	16	07	17	41. I am confident that the views of priests will be taken seriously in future decisions about liturgical translation.
28	17	27	19	09	42. I approve of the leadership of the Holy See in bringing about the new Missal.
37	16	20	21	05	43. I think work should go forward in translating the Liturgy of the Hours and all of the other rites (e.g., Marriage, Confirmation) in the same style as the new Missal.