

## CONTINUED...

## Marry

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in the church. The survey found that younger adult Catholics in the United States are less church-connected and considerably less likely to marry in the church than were their parents or grandparents.

The *National Catholic Reporter*, a Kansas City-based Catholic weekly newspaper, devoted 10 pages of its Oct. 29 issue to findings of the survey, commissioned by the paper and conducted by the Gallup Organization, which polled 875 Catholics nationwide.

The new study, overseen by a team of researchers from various U.S. universities, replicated many of the questions asked in similar surveys conducted in 1987 and 1993 so that researchers could assess trends in Catholic attitudes and practices.

"In 1987, 44 percent of Catholics attended Mass at least once a week. By 1999, only 37 percent attended on a weekly basis," Purdue University sociologist James D. Davidson wrote in the *NCR* article.

He explained that various studies have uncovered a growing indifference to the church. Davidson also noted that many studies have found Catholics increasingly are marrying non-Catholics.

"Our survey is unique in confirming two additional marriage trends: Marriages are increasingly taking place outside the church, and the trend toward unsanctioned marriages includes marriages between two Catholics as well as interfaith marriages," Davidson wrote.

"Together," he continued, "these trends indicate that Catholics are paying less and less attention to the church when they are marrying."

The researchers broke those surveyed into three age groups or "cohorts": those 59 and older, those 39-58 years old, and those 18-38 years old. They labeled these cohorts pre-Vatican II, Vatican II and post-Vatican II, reflecting whether they were part of the generation that grew up entirely before the Second Vatican Council, during it, or entirely after it.

"While 88 percent of pre-Vatican II Catholics were married in the church, only 59 percent of post-Vatican II Catholics say their marriages are valid in the eyes of the church," Davidson said.

"Among Catholics who are married to Catholics," he added, "unsanctioned marriages have increased from only 6 percent for pre-Vatican II Catholics to 15 percent among Vatican II Catholics and 31 percent among post-Vatican II Catholics."

Among Catholics who were married to non-Catholics, 35 percent of the pre-Vatican II age group said they married without church sanction. That rose to 59 percent in the Vatican II group and 55 percent in the post-Vatican II group.

While the overall margin of error for



the survey was about 4 percent, the margin of error for data on such smaller subgroups rises to about 7 or 8 percent.

The new survey, like the two earlier ones, found that most Catholics approach moral issues individually and do not regard church leaders as the final moral authority on contraception, abortion, homosexual behavior, sex outside marriage or remarriage after divorce.

## Behind the stats

In a phone interview with the *Catholic Courier*, Davidson noted that the researchers are still analyzing their data. However, after speaking with pastors and other church leaders as well as focus groups of young Catholics, he said he had come to some preliminary conclusions about why young adult Catholics are increasingly marrying non-Catholics, and choosing to marry without the church's blessing.

For one thing, he said, some young Catholics find the waiting period to get married in the church — ranging from six months to a year — to be too long. He added that because many young Catholics don't believe in the church's teachings against artificial contraception, they are unwilling to attend marriage-preparation sessions in which they may feel uncomfortable when such teachings are presented.

Furthermore, he said, a number of young Catholics feel that their faith is "personal" or "spiritual" and not reliant upon organized religion. Such Catholics may have mixed or negative feelings about organized religion in general, he said.

Davidson added that younger Catholics tend to be more ecumenical in both outlook and in forming friendships than were previous generations of Catholics. Hence, they are less likely to have qualms about marrying non-Catholics, he said.

Father Gary Tyman, parochial vicar at Church of the Assumption in Fairport, served as chaplain to the Newman Com-

munity at the University of Rochester from July 1990 to June 1999. He said many of the survey's findings rang true with his experience.

Father Tyman added that young Catholics today grow up in a culture that lacks the pressures to marry within one's "tribe" that existed in previous eras. He also pointed out that Catholics in general are imbued with the individualism that prevails in U.S. society, which tends to work against creating a sense of community obligation on the part of marrying couples.

"It does seem to me that many couples see marriage as a totally individualistic thing," he said. "They don't seem to see much connection between that and any larger community ... They have a hard time understanding the thought that a larger community like the church would have any input into (their marriage)."

## Dissenting views

Davidson's conclusions have not gone unchallenged. In particular, Father Andrew M. Greeley, famed author and sociologist, wrote an article in the Dec. 17 issue of *Commonweal* questioning Davidson's conclusion that young Catholics are marrying non-Catholics in greater numbers because young Catholics are less attached to the church than were their predecessors.

Using data and research gathered by the National Opinion Research Center, Father Greeley argued that because the church relaxed pressures on non-Catholic spouses to convert to Catholicism in the latter half of the century, many Catholics today are married to non-Catholics who, in the old days, would have converted for the sake of the marriage. Furthermore, he argued, when one looks at the percentage of Catholics who marry Catholics over the entire course of the 20th century, the decline is fairly slight, from 73 percent among those born from 1910-19 to 64 percent among those born from 1960-69.

"(T)he phenomenon which must be explained is not why (young Catholics) leave, but why they stay, not why they marry those who were not raised Catholic, but why most of them marry those who, like

themselves, were also raised Catholic," Father Greeley wrote.

Msgr. Joseph M. Champlin, a priest of the Diocese of Syracuse and expert on marriage and family life, also challenged Davidson's conclusions about young Catholics and marriage. Of the 80 weddings he celebrated last year, he said two-thirds were Catholic-to-Catholic, and even the non-Catholic spouses said they wanted a Mass for the ceremony.

"What I find is there probably is a resurgence of traditionalism," he said of marrying couples.

Regardless of their conclusions, Fathers Greeley and Tyman and Msgr. Champlin all echoed Davidson's point that the church needs to do more catechetical work on the subject of marriage. Davidson noted that many young Catholics are naive about the potential conflicts interfaith marriages present, particularly in the area of raising children in a faith. Father Greeley and Msgr. Champlin also pointed out that pastors and parish staffs need to make sure they present a warm, welcoming presence to couples seeking to get married, particularly if they have been away from the church for awhile.

"It's a wonderful moment of evangelization," Msgr. Champlin said, adding that many young couples "want to get reconnected to the church."

Father Tyman also said the church needs to educate young people on how to choose a spouse long before they even begin dating someone they might marry.

"The church could helpfully provide some thought on relationships and intimacy," he said.

To help couples think through various issues before their marriage, the Diocese of Rochester is beginning to use an individualized pre-marriage counseling approach called FOCCUS (see story on Page 9): The program is intended to become a standard part of sacramental preparation for marriage, according to Sister Karen Dietz, SSJ, coordinator of sacramental catechesis.

"The whole sacrament is at risk in our country today," she said. FOCCUS is being introduced to help enhance "the whole understanding that marriage is a serious step in our church," she added.

## Sacramental moment

Regardless of whether they think an alarming number of young Catholics are bypassing the church when it comes to marriage, or still turning to the church in encouraging numbers, commentators agree that today's young Catholics live in a world filled with marriage options unavailable to prior generations.

For Henneberg, though, the decision has been made, the date set, and the issue of faith's role in her marriage resolved.

"Marriage is a sacrament," she said. "It wasn't even a consideration to get married outside the church."

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Contains reporting from Catholic News Service.

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## Partial-birth

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coincide with this year's presidential campaigns. Alvarez said the candidates' and main political party positions on the issue are likely to be predictable, but with a nationwide discussion of the partial-birth abortion procedure, "the pro-life argument should win hands down."

The procedure, in medical terms called dilation and extraction, involves partially removing a live fetus through the birth canal, cutting into the skull and suctioning out the brains to enable easier removal of the body.

Opponents of the procedure, ranging from the U.S. bishops to the legislatures of dozens of states, liken it to infanticide, because in legal terms, a matter of inches separates a live birth from an abortion. Those who want the procedure kept legal say among abortion procedures, it is safer for the mother late in pregnancy, particularly

when a fetal abnormality is discovered or when there is risk to the mother's life in carrying the pregnancy to term.

When the 8th Circuit struck down Nebraska's law, it said the wording might also outlaw a more common type of abortion, called dilation and evacuation.

"Such a prohibition places an undue burden on the right of women to choose whether to have an abortion," the appeals court said.

Two attempts to pass a nationwide law prohibiting partial-birth abortion were vetoed by President Clinton in 1996 and 1997.

A statement from the National Right to Life Committee general counsel, James Bopp Jr., said the Nebraska case is important "because it will set the outer limit of the so-called right to abortion, but it is not a challenge to *Roe vs. Wade*."

"The Supreme Court would have to expand the so-called right to abortion beyond the womb in order to uphold the 8th Circuit decision," Bopp said.