

# New Study Finds That 67% of Catholics Who Haven't Been to Confession in the Past Year Are Open to Returning

*New research from Vinea Research Group shows absence from Confession is driven more by hesitation and habit than rejection, with a desire for mercy emerging as the strongest motivator to return*

**Baltimore, MD, March 24, 2026** — As Lent continues, a first-of-its-kind national study finds that most Catholics who have stepped away from Confession haven't given up on it. Among 1,500 U.S. Catholics surveyed in 2026, 67% of those who haven't been to Confession in the past year say they are open to returning, with roughly half expressing a desire to go more often.

Findings from [The Catholic Pulse Report: The Confession Study](#), conducted by Vinea Research Group, challenge the conventional narrative of a sacrament in irreversible decline. Distance from Confession, the research shows, is shaped more by hesitation, uncertainty, and the absence of habit than by disbelief or rejection.

The study goes beyond prior surveys that measured participation alone, exploring what draws Catholics to Confession, what keeps them away, and how the sacrament shapes their spiritual and personal lives.

“As central as Confession is to Catholic life, in-depth national research on this sacrament has been surprisingly limited,” said Hans Plate, Founder of Vinea Research Group. “This study illuminates not just how often Catholics go, but why they go, why they don't, and what they experience when they do.”

## Key Findings

*U.S. Catholic Pulse Report, 2026 | n=1,500 Catholics*

- 67% of Catholics who have not been to Confession in the past year are open to returning, with roughly half expressing a clear desire to return.
- 83% of Catholics who go to Confession cite receiving God's mercy and forgiveness as a primary reason for going; 75% of those who have not gone in the past year say mercy is a reason they would return, making it the strongest draw across both groups.
- The most common barrier is the belief that forgiveness can be sought directly from God without Confession (63% overall; 73% among those who have not been in the past year).
- Among those who haven't been to Confession in over a year, 50% report embarrassment about speaking their sins, and 53% find the sacrament uncomfortable—both pointing to personal discomfort with the Confession experience.
- 43% of those who go infrequently say they would go more often if they heard that struggling with the same sins is normal, an equal percentage desire a greater emphasis on mercy over judgment.
- Among those who go to Confession, approximately two-thirds report a clear sense of forgiveness, reassurance of God's mercy, and interior peace.

- Catholics who attend Mass at least monthly score above national benchmarks on human flourishing, with those who go to Confession regularly reporting the highest levels—particularly in meaning, peace, and overall well-being.

Plate called the findings deeply encouraging. “Many Catholics still believe in the sacrament, many have experienced it personally, and many remain open to returning,” he said. “This presents a real opportunity for renewal—not just by inviting Catholics back, but by helping them more fully understand the meaning and power of the sacrament.”

To download the full report and access a complete press kit, visit <https://catholicpulsereport.org/media/>

Hans Plate is available for comment. To schedule an interview, contact Carrie Kline at [carriek@missionadvancementpartners.com](mailto:carriek@missionadvancementpartners.com).

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### **About Vinea Research Group**

[Vinea Research Group](#) is a Catholic nonprofit research initiative dedicated to equipping the Church with faithful, data-driven insights and helping the broader public better understand Catholic life. Through nationally representative studies and ongoing analysis, Vinea helps Church leaders better understand the beliefs, experiences, and spiritual lives of Catholics today. In a landscape where much research on religion is shaped by secular frameworks, Vinea exists to provide a clearer and more faithful picture of Catholic life—one that supports evangelization, strengthens pastoral decision-making, and helps the Church communicate with clarity and confidence.

### **About the Catholic Pulse Report**

[The Catholic Pulse Report](#), a flagship initiative of Vinea Research Group, is a national research platform being developed to provide quarterly insights into Catholic life. The initiative includes three core components: U.S. research examining Catholic belief, practice, and engagement; Trends Reports exploring patterns and emerging themes across key topics; and Global Research highlighting developments across the worldwide Church.