

Paradis, Wilfrid H.
Attendance--
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ATTENDANCE AT
CATHOLIC FORMAL RELIGIOUS
EDUCATION PROGRAMS
BY CHILDREN AND YOUTH
IN 1974 AND 1975

by

Msgr. Wilfrid H. Paradis, J.C.D., Ph.D.
Associate Secretary
Office of Research Policy and Program Development
Department of Education
United States Catholic Conference

and

Andrew D. Thompson, Ph.D.
The School of Religious Studies
The Catholic University of America
Washington, D.C.

An Update of "Where are the 6.6 Million?"

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ATTENDANCE AT CATHOLIC FORMAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAMS BY CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN 1974 AND 1975¹

In 1975 the decrease in Catholic school attendance was less than one percent for the third consecutive year. While Catholic elementary and secondary schools enrolled 2,109,653 fewer students last year than they did in 1965, the amount of the decrease is steadily getting smaller.

Moreover, the number of grade school-age Catholic children receiving no formal Catholic religious instruction actually declined for the first time in 10 years. It should be noted, however, that this change in pattern may be accounted for by the decrease, between 1974 and 1975, of the number of Catholic youngsters in this age bracket.

And when the totals for elementary school-age children is combined with that of high school youth, the result shows that the overall number receiving some form of Catholic religious instruction decreased by 223,521 between 1974 and 1975. The 8,378,356 young people enrolled in either Catholic schools or CCD programs in 1975 constituted 55.6% of Catholics between the ages of six and eighteen.

These were among the principal findings of a study conducted by Msgr. Wilfrid H. Paradis, Associate Secretary, Office of Research, Policy and Program Development in the Department of Education, U.S. Catholic Conference and Dr. Andrew A. Thompson of The School of Religious Studies of The Catholic University of America. It follows an earlier study, *Where Are the 6.6 Million?* which was made public last March. That study found that the number of Catholic grade and high school age children receiving no formal religious instruction grew from 3.1 million in 1965 to 6.6 million in 1974, and that the 8.6 million youngsters who were being reached by some type of formal religious instruction constituted 56.6% of Catholics in their age bracket. The new study updates the statistics by one year.

¹The statistics in this study were taken from Kenedy's *The Official Catholic Directory* as were those in the booklet "Where are the 6.6 Million?" published by the United States Catholic Conference. The statistics on Catholic schools vary slightly with those gathered by the National Catholic Educational Association. That organization has been collecting statistical information on Catholic schools since the 1967-1968 school year.

In 1975 the total of Catholic children and youth (6 to 18 years old) was 15,060,336, a decrease of 169,575 from 1974. This age group has decreased by 328,764 since the peak of 1972.

The decrease has occurred only at the grade school level, whose population has gone down steadily for the past five years. There were 9,742,070 in this age group in 1975, a decrease of 806,146 since 1971.

By contrast, the number of Catholics of high school age rose to an all-time high of 5,318,266 in 1975, an increase of 95,938 over the previous year.

The 1975 Catholic elementary school enrollment of 2,576,856 meant 22,371 fewer students at this level than in 1974. This represents an increase of 0.48% — the first percentage increase in over 10 years. During the two previous years the decline had been less than one percent per year. In 1967 and 1968 the decrease was more than 3% each year. Since 1965 Catholic elementary school enrollment has declined by 1,915,097 or 42.6%.

Despite the numerical decline of 22,371 the percentage of children enrolled in elementary schools as compared to the total population of eligible children, actually increased — a fact explained by the smaller population (the decrease in Catholics in this age bracket from 1974 to 1975 amounted to 265,513). Thus, the 2,576,856 Catholics enrolled in elementary schools in 1975 represented 26.45% of the population of this age group whereas the 2,599,227 enrolled in 1974 constituted 25.97% of the group.

At the high school level attendance dropped 24,671 (0.79%) in 1975. The 895,845 high school students enrolled in 1975 represented 219,505 (19.7%) fewer students than in 1968 which saw a high of 1,115,351. Even at the high school level, however, 1975 marked the third consecutive year in which the decrease was less than one percent.

Total Catholic elementary and high school enrollment decreased by 47,042 between 1974 and 1975, a drop of 0.05%. In 1975 the Catholic elementary and secondary school systems had 2,109,653 fewer students than in 1965.

For the fourth consecutive year attendance at out-of-school religious education programs (CCD) declined at the elementary level. There were 3,892,457 children in parish catechetical programs at this level in 1975, a decrease of 96,493 from 1974. Once again, however, because of the decline in the total number of grade school-age Catholic children, the percentage in parish programs actually rose — by 0.1 percent. This means that despite the numerical decline, 39.96% of eligible children were enrolled at this level in 1975 compared to 39.86% in 1974.

Participation in high school level CCD-type programs was down for the eighth consecutive year and — in this case — the decrease was in terms of percentages as well as overall numbers. The 1,013,198 youngsters enrolled in these programs in 1975 were 79,986 fewer than in 1974. These programs enrolled 19.05% of eligible Catholic youth in 1975. In 1974 they enrolled 20.93 percent.

The total number of grade school age Catholics receiving Catholic formal religious instruction in 1975 was 6,469,313, a decrease of 118,864 from 1974 and the ninth consecutive year of numerical decrease. Since 1966 the decrease here has been 1,564,602. Nonetheless, the percentage of eligible children enrolled went from 65.83% in 1974 to 66.41% in 1975.

It should be noted that in 1966 and 1975 the number of Catholic children in this age group was close to the same: 9,893,076 and 9,742,070 respectively. But in 1966 Catholic formal religious instruction was reaching 81.21% of these children.

At the high school level the number receiving formal religious instruction of some type — whether schools or CCD — continued the numerical and percentage decline begun in 1967. The numerical decrease since that year has been 679,944; between 1974 and 1975 it was 104,657. The 1,909,043 youth in this group receiving some form of religious instruction represented 35.9% of their population.

In marked contrast to the grade school scene, the number of Catholics of high school age increased by 1,133,400 since 1967.

In summary, the number of Catholic elementary and secondary age children and youth receiving formal Catholic religious instruction in 1975 was 8,378,356, down 223,521 from the previous year. In percentage terms, the decrease was from 56.48% in 1974 to 55.63% in 1975.

The number of elementary age Catholic children receiving no formal Catholic religious instruction declined for the first time in 10 years. There were 3,272,757 children in this group in 1975, down by 146,649 from 1974. This change in pattern may be accounted for by a decrease, between 1974 and 1975, of 265,513 Catholic children in this age bracket. Some 33.59% in this group are not receiving formal instruction.

At the high school level, the number receiving no formal Catholic religious instruction rose by 200,595 in 1975, to 3,409,223 students. This is 64.1% of this population.

In sum, in 1975 there were 8,378,356 (55.63%) children and youth of grade and high school age receiving formal Catholic religious

instruction. That was 223,521 fewer than in the previous year. In 1975 there were 6,681,980 (44.3%) not receiving instruction, up 53,946 over 1974. During that same period the total number of Catholic elementary and secondary age children and youth decreased by 169,575.

On a percentage basis the number of elementary age children not receiving formal Catholic religious instruction decreased 0.58% and on the high school level, it went up by 2.66%. Since 1965 the number not receiving instruction has risen 17.38% at the elementary level and 27.63% for the high school grades. For both the increase has been over one-fifth (21.52%).

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CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY AGE CHILDREN

	Total Population		Catholic Schools		Parish Catechetical Programs		Receiving Formal Instructions		Not Receiving	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
(1974)	10,007,583		2,599,227	25.97	3,988,950	39.86	6,583,177	65.83	3,419,406	34.17
(1975)	9,742,070		2,576,856	26.45	3,892,457	39.96	6,469,313	66.41	3,272,757	33.59
	-265,513		-22,371	+0.48	-96,493	+0.10	-118,864	+0.58	-146,649	-0.58
<u>CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL AGE YOUTH</u>										
(1974)	5,222,328		920,516	17.63	1,093,184	20.93	2,013,700	38.56	3,208,628	61.44
(1975)	5,318,266		895,845	16.84	1,013,198	19.05	1,909,043	35.89	3,409,223	64.10
	+95,938		-24,671	-0.79	-79,986	-1.88	-104,657	-2.67	+200,595	+2.66
<u>CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY AND HIGH SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN AND YOUTH (TOTAL)</u>										
(1974)	15,229,911		3,519,743	23.11	5,082,134	33.37	8,601,877	56.48	6,628,034	43.52
(1975)	15,060,336		3,472,701	23.06	4,905,655	32.57	8,378,356	55.63	6,681,980	44.37
	-169,575		-47,042	-0.05	-176,479	-0.80	-223,521	-0.85	+53,946	+0.85

