

The Secularization Project

Survey #3 Results collated 23 July 2021

Please find the results of the third survey of The Secularization Project below. The steering committee encourages you to discuss the results with other friars and to consider writing to *Inforum*.

Keep your eyes open for upcoming events in the Project.

I. Responses to **How do you experience secularization in your family of origin?**

Church is less and less at the center of the lives of my siblings and nieces and nephews. I have seen hope in some of my nieces and nephews with regards to bringing up their children to receive the sacraments, but they are a minority. In general in my family I don't think they reflect much on the sacred and its relationship to the choices they make in their lives.

Not having been blessed with brothers or sisters, my family of origin is limited to a few cousins. The one thing I have noticed among them is a general lack of formal religious behavior. There is a tendency to see Sunday worship as "optional" or "occasional". At the same time there is also a religious searching for meaning in life and a trend toward the "spiritual" which takes the form of personal prayer and asking me to remember in prayer family members who are struggling.

Nieces & Nephews see no need to belong to a church. However, they will ask to get married or have their children baptized receives sacraments, or a funeral in the Catholic Church. It's a common trend with many of the younger folks.

By the lack of apparent participation in ecclesial matters, it would seem that the majority of my siblings do not feel an invitation to belong to the church. I have one sibling who finds meaning in attending church, from reasons of personal motivation.

Most of my siblings don't attend church of any kind. I have a sister who sings at whatever church is paying her, whatever the denomination. I have only one sibling married in the Church and one of their kids doesn't have a "Christian" name and the second hasn't been baptized and probably won't be if my mom doesn't sneak him into a bathtub at some point. All of my siblings would consider themselves spiritual, however, and will go to mass when visiting my parents. My one brother who does attend services goes to his wife's non-denominational place in Indiana. They are all, however, very tolerant of diversity, most of them being fairly to strongly liberal in their politics.

(1) Of 8 siblings, only two (my twin brother and I) go to church regularly and are members of a faith community. (2) Christmas greetings (e.g., cards) tend to be more generic or don't

refer to the Nativity. (3) Other things tie us together (e.g., devotion to the Green Bay Packers).

The loss of the practice of Sunday Mass attendance: only one of my 6 nieces and nephews attends Mass; likewise my sisters had not attended Mass since her high school years. Praying the rosary after dinner was a common practice in my family...and is no longer practiced. The practices of Catholicism is no longer a topic of interest to my family.

I see a growing disinterest from my younger siblings with the religious rituals and an attitude of opposing reason to faith and/or christian doctrines.

I'm sure my family's diminishing Catholic involvement is no different from others'. Fewer if any baptisms and Catholic marriages in family. Nephews worried about offending me for not asking me to have the wedding. I'm left feeling as I imagine early Christians did, converting from Jewish and Pagan families. As support for my faith and Capuchin vocation diminishes from my family, I must look elsewhere. Our Capuchin fraternity becomes more important than ever, as it becomes the primary support of my own faith and vocational choices.

We were what might be considered a "poor" family because we lived from my Dad's paycheck to paycheck. He worked at a milk factory and was the bread winner. A friend of the family lived with us and also worked there which was a source of income, but we never found out how much he gave. As children we received five cents allowance each week for the various jobs we were assigned, and we looked for the biggest candy bar we could find. We also sold rags. I had a job at a local bar and did all the odd jobs like sweeping, cleaning spittoons and received fifty cents a week. Later I worked at a meat market and during the summer months at a resort where the owner paid my tuition of three hundred dollars while studying at Mt. Calvary. Our family lived frugally.

Half my family of origin is in heaven, and so it's hard to speak in reference to them. Right now I don't see a lot of secularization in our family. One brother is also a Capuchin, and the other two remain practicing Catholics, living within their means. I would not want to stand in judgment of anything they are doing.

I would not say that I do. My family is still very much a religious compared to most Catholic families in North America.

Experiences of Secularization in Our Families

- Going to church only on an "emergency" basis (i.e., during a crisis)
- Young adults—"nones"
- Catholic identity is more cultural than spiritual or religious
- Generational shift: younger people increasingly secularized, non-practicing, non-believing
- Non-Catholic or non-religious weddings

- Avoiding the Sacrament of Penance (Confession)
- Negative reactions to Church teachings and practices, e.g., re: LGBTQ
- Sacramentalized but not evangelized or catechized
- Boy Scout troops less affiliated with churches
- Church less convenient
- Church less relevant and engaged on college campuses
- Divorce
- “Spiritual but not religious”
- Lack of knowledge and appreciation of the Roman Catholic Church

As I grew up as a young man I do not think that I was affected by secularization at all. Our whole life in those days revolved around our church and Parish. Ours was a very simple life style. As secularization has affected me in the order so too it affected my family. They began going out to restaurants to eat. They started investing money in the stock market etc.

My experience with family is the absence of prayer. I do not mean to say they do not pray or experience the Mystery of God in some way but we cannot share at that level.

While all my family has been "proud" of both Fr. Mike and me, pride does not translate into a lived appreciation for our Catholic faith. Both my sisters-in-law have turned their backs on the Church as have all their children. One is zealously committed to an extremely conservative evangelical sect; the others practice no faith at all. Good people, but it's very difficult to feel true common ground with them.

My parents were very religious, as are my brother and I. However, my brother's children have only one of four practicing Catholic faith. The others do not attend services, or are part of another faith. Not sure of the status of my extended family.

Of my 29 aunts and uncles I believe all of them were church active. (my mother's brother married a Protestant, but all others were Catholic. As far as I know most of my cousins were church active, but there are a couple that are iffy. When we get to my nephews and nieces half had church weddings the other half have no church affiliation. One of those who married in church did so in his forties and his wife is a convert.

Within my family it has increased along with the society around us. Whereas 40 years ago, the majority of us would've identified as Catholic/Christian, now perhaps half or more might identify as culturally Christian rather than religiously as such. Where the norm originally would have meant the majority of my family identifying as Catholic and attending Mass regularly on Sundays, now, despite the majority identifying as Christian, how that gets expressed has taken on much more nuance ranging from regular attendance at worship services (any # of denominations to little/no attendance) and/or relegating religion to just one aspect of their overall spirituality.

It remains to be seen whether the next generation will have a Catholic-centered faith life, or to what extent faith will guide their life choices. The generation following mine did not attend Catholic school, the first for which this is true, which in my experience raises the likelihood faith will not have a principal place in life choices.

Although generally speaking there is much religiosity still left in my family of origin, when I look close, there are lots of traits of Secularization happening. Compared to earlier times, Sunday Mass attendance, sacramental life, family prayer at night, yearly devotions and observances like lenten fast etc have less gravity now. Critical attitude is on the rise towards the clergymen and the institutional Church. One can see emerging tendencies of humanism and syncretism. Religion and God have become ornamental.

Secularization in the 30's and 40's meant get educated and that was a powerful force.

I feel that secularization slowly questions the significance and relevance of religious beliefs in one's life and it creates an initial taste of God-less man in family as well as in society.

I am one of only a few Catholics left in my family; my godfather has been married/divorced 3 times and my godmother converted to "7th day adventist" when i was 7 years old. My family and my cousins have all expressed their support for my vocation and the ministry that we do, but that has not translated into conversion for my family.

II. Responses to **How do you experience secularization within our own Capuchin life, not focusing on ministry at this time?**

I feel blessed that my Capuchin life gives me a daily rhythm of prayer and a focus on the sacred. I do not watch much TV at all, but have found news on the internet (or on my ipad) can suck me in - so I have tried to limit that. My experience of younger friars is that they are extremely plugged in to "all the latest" with regards to technology, the latest gadgets, and everything on the web. There is a spiritual center in most of them I would say, which gives hope.

Since my early years of formation, I have noticed a trend toward trying to integrate new scientific and social developments into the form of Capuchin life and the values of ministry, contemplation, fraternity and minority. Lots of trial and error along side much success in my view. As the world has changed, we have changed as we struggle to make sense of that change and influence those most effected by that change, especially the poor and outcasts of society.

Not so much in community, with the exception of differing views on theology or church law & practices. We can sometimes coast along with the rest of society and not be different or contradictory to society's values. We sometimes avoiding clashes with our culture's values.

Depending on the community, the style of Capuchin life can be determined by a variety of motivating factors. It could be a matter of spirit, of tradition, the letter of the law, Franciscan motivational aspects, personal history or experience. What seems essential if we are going to have good community life is the willingness of all the parties involved to be flexible, both in the behaviors in that community life, and understanding a variety of motivations.

My experience in the current situation is that community life has been without controversy around secularization. The term in itself seems to suggest that there are issues around the effect of modern culture or society on our way of living. I would hope that that continues, in as much as we are a component of the modern society, and while we are affected by the society, we also, by how we live and serve, can have an effect on that larger society.

My experience of Capuchin life has only been for less than 15 years and I don't know what the life was like beforehand to compare it. I haven't seen shifts. I am a shift. I don't need daily mass. I'm not devoted to the Rosary. Orthodoxy and "thinking with the Church" is not high on my list and I feel I have the right to dissent. I haven't been taught by religious, even at Catholic schools. My first time having religious as teachers was at CTU. If I miss Sunday mass, I don't see that as an issue. I see people coming into formation after me, though, who are seeking all of that... perhaps as a reaction to secularization.

(1) Individualism. (2) Greater reliance/relationship with electronic devices (mobile phone, tablet, etc.). (3) Stronger bonds around common interests like sports, cosplay, entertainment, politics, etc. than around explicitly religious things.

We have dropped the practice of wearing our Capuchin habit when we are in public and when we are not ministering.

Our tendency to reduce our spiritual exercises to the bare minimum with a similar attitude in our approach to liturgies. We tend to focus on "utility" rather than beauty for beauty's sake in our liturgies.

Our province has slowly reversed the influence of secularization among us as a group. In the 70s, 80s, and 90s, we increasingly minimized our religious practice and outward symbols. Little habit wearing, preference for clerical garb over habit, infrequent community Eucharist, lessening Morning and Evening Prayer, discouragement of devotions, especially anything to do with Eucharist, preference for parish activities over Capuchin life. It's no wonder so few were joining us then. What was there to join? The "Capuchin" in our life was invisible. Things have slowly changed since around 2000. I hope that change continues to grow.

In novitiate we were trained that all our possessions were "ad usum" for our use. During our training we did not have much outside of our clothing and a few other articles. Once ordained I started to accumulate things like a typewriter and later a computer. My sister became upset when she found out that I gave them away. With the advent of television, we

were exposed to many TV ads and I fell into the trap of wanting more rather than asking what do I really need? My belongings increased which became evident when I moved from Crown Point to the retreat center in Appleton. Some friars needed U-hauls when they moved or had multiple boxes. It was most challenging to live the vow of poverty and not to acquire the latest digital gadget, or when we received credit cards. To live simply so that others might live became a challenge for me in our secular society.

Sometimes I wonder about what has become acceptable in the way we live, the way we spend money. Sometimes it seems that, whatever the household thinks it needs, it gets. I wonder at the amount of refreshments consumed: beer, pop, liquor. I wonder if we, in general, are careful enough about our health, in terms of food and drink and continued smoking by some friars. And yet I don't want to stand in judgment and need to look at myself. I appreciate the use of a car for myself. And, as I say these things, I am not sure I am getting at the issue of "secularization."

I do not believe that I experienced secularization in our own Capuchin life (i.e., Province of St. Joseph). I see the brothers strive to live out the evangelical counsels and remain faithful to their religious vocation, each in his own capacity.

Experiences of Secularization in Capuchin Life

- “Generic” prayers at inter-faith events
- Less wearing of the habit
- More reactions to wearing the habit
- Catechetical gaps, especially after adolescence/Confirmation
- Increased relationships with technology
- Consumerism

(A much shorter response) I see secularization having a positive effect on our community life. Having lived in the process of change to the Order after Vatican II, there was a remarkable conversion event that took us from being monks to friars involved in the world beyond the cloister walls. Some of our responses to needs of both the friars and the wider community seemed to take advantage of the wisdom in the wider community, and also provided us the opportunity to speak from a Franciscan and Christian perspective to wider issues.

Wow, there have been tremendous changes. As I grew up in the order our world was very small. Until I was in theology we did not have a secular newspaper to read. We did not have television and we would huddle around a radio to get a half hour news cast each day. As we moved into our first appointments our world was turned upside down. We began to travel. We began to visit families in their homes. We were invited to parties. Alcohol became a part of our lives. We would go out for drinks and steak dinner. We would begin to wear civilian clothes. Each day we would experience our spiritual life and then jump into our secular life.

My present experience is we openly share our experience of the work of the Good Spirit in our lives. We question and review our lives together on a daily basis, often in the context of communal prayer. When this cannot happen, for whatever reason, religious life limps.

As Americans we drink in the values/behavior of our increasingly secularistic society, so its exaggerated individualism and pursuit of comfort/security will necessarily creep into our Capuchin life. We look upon Capuchin "austerity" as antiquated; in spite of our vows we feel "entitled" (a word unheard of 40-50 years ago) to our own car as well as money for trips, gifts -- sometimes our own furniture. We need U-Hauls when we agree to a transfer. The word "sacrifice" is almost non-existent among us. Growing secularization is among us -- and unless we have leadership to help us reclaim the revolutionary challenge of genuine Gospel/Capuchin living, what do we have to offer brothers/sisters who are even more secularized than we?

I don't have much to say about this, but I would say the lack of vocations in our province and Order are a sign of secularization.

Some friars are faithful to community prayer and other not so much. This would have been relatively rare 40 years ago. Some lead a more secular life style; rather than a traditional religious style of life.

My experience of secularization within Capuchin life in general is felt primarily within the theme of absence. Absence of everyday encounters/conversations that allow grace to challenge us to live a more Gospel way of life. Absence at times of both an individual and communal sense of accountability of one another. And absence of taking intentional healthy risks that better allow the Holy Spirit to guide and grow us rather than our overly acting out of the default (i.e., safe, convenient, and efficient practices/routines we've grown accustomed to out of comfort.)

Risk aversion has a co-equal place among the Gospel values that guide our choices. This is prudent and responsible. However, its impact in our manner of making choices in itself risks being open to the power of the Holy Spirit.

Diminishing contemplative trait; emphasis on work to the detriment of community meditation; diminishing sense of silence; covert ways of bragging; growing individualism and need for personal space; emphasis on beauty and professionalism rather than provisionality etc are some of the traits of secularization one might be able to find within the Order

Social media is a tsunami of information and it is a challenge and a struggle to discern what to attend to that is really important and what to stay away from. Too much of everything!

I think that a similar effect, which is seen in society, is slowly transferred to our capuchin life as well. I feel that there is tendency to keep God away as far as possible to avoid His presence-a willful ignorance.

For me, Capuchin life is still religious: when I visit family and friends, I am reminded of how catholic our Order remains, even if some of the customs and traditions have changed. For me, the experience of secularization in the Order is a simple equation: are we affecting the world by our commitment to Christ at the same level that we are effected by the changes in society?