

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION, PRACTICE, AND SALIENCE AMONG NIAGARA UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A FAITH SNAPSHOT

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Table of Contents

	Page
List of Tables	ii
Section 1: Introduction	1
Section 2: Religious Affiliation, Practice, and Salience	3
Section 3: Changes in Religious Practice and Salience	7
Section 4: Race/Ethnicity and Religious Affiliation, Practice, and Salience	9
Section 5: Discussion and Conclusions	12
References	15
Appendix A: Survey Instrument	16
Appendix B: List of “Other” Religions	22

List of Tables

	Page
Table 1: Religious Affiliation	3
Table 2: Frequency of Religious Service Attendance	3
Table 2a. Frequency of Religious Service Attendance by Religious Affiliation	4
Table 3: Frequency of Prayer (other than during religious services)	4
Table 3a. Frequency of Prayer by Religious Affiliation	5
Table 4: Frequency of Scripture Reading (other than during religious services)	5
Table 4a. Frequency of Scripture Reading by Religious Affiliation	6
Table 5: Religious Salience	6
Table 5a. Religious Salience by Religious Affiliation	7
Table 6: Changes in Religious Practice and Salience Since Coming to College	7
Table 6a. Change in Frequency of Religious Service Attendance by Religious Affiliation	8
Table 6b. Change in Frequency of Prayer by Religious Affiliation	8
Table 6c. Change in Frequency of Scripture Reading by Religious Affiliation	8
Table 6d. Change in Religious Salience by Religious Affiliation	9
Table 7: Religious Affiliation by Race and Ethnicity	9
Table 8: Frequency of Religious Service Attendance by Race and Ethnicity	10
Table 9: Frequency of Prayer by Race and Ethnicity	10
Table 10: Frequency of Scripture Reading by Race and Ethnicity	11
Table 11: Religious Salience by Race and Ethnicity	11

Religious Affiliation, Practice, And Salience Among Niagara University Students: A Faith Snapshot

Section I: Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide a glimpse at one point in time, or a “snapshot,” into the religious faith and practice of Niagara University students. The data presented here are part of a larger survey research project conducted with all Niagara students during the spring 2019 semester that focused on their knowledge of and views about the sex abuse crisis and the Catholic Church’s response. As part of that project, students were also asked questions about the extent of their involvement in various religious practices as well as the importance of religion in their life. The answers to those questions provide the basis for this report. Learning more detail about where students are at in terms of religious faith is certainly important from a pastoral perspective, as this is an issue many young adults grapple with, and it is an impactful dimension of an individual’s holistic development (e.g., Pargament et al., 2005; Smith, 2003). From an even more “practical” perspective, religiousness, which is a combination of faith and practice, has been found to be associated with positive outcomes such as stronger attachment to parents, improved school performance, and increased involvement in volunteer service, to name a few (e.g., Mooney, 2010; Smith and Snell, 2009). Research has also reported that religiousness serves as a protective factor against a variety of negative outcomes such as drug and alcohol abuse, crime, risky sexual behavior, and depression (e.g., Adamczyk et al., 2017; Brechting and Carlson, 2015; Ellison et al, 2008; Hoffmann, 2014; Smith and Snell, 2009).

A more detailed description of the methodology, including the sample and the relevant survey questions, will be presented in this section. Section 2 will present the data on students’ religious affiliation, extent of involvement in various religious practices, and the importance of religion and spirituality in their life, also known as religious salience. Section 3 will discuss the extent to which, if at all, students’ involvement in religious practices and religious salience has changed since coming to college. Sections 4 will examine the associations between race/ethnicity and religious affiliation, practice, and salience.¹ A discussion of the results, including limitations of the study, will be presented in Section 5.

Methodology

Sample

As mentioned above, the data for this report are part of a larger survey research project conducted with all Niagara University students during the spring 2019 semester. A survey focusing on students’ knowledge and views of the sex abuse crisis and the Church’s response, but also containing questions on personal religious affiliation, practice, and salience, was emailed to all undergraduate and graduate students on February 6th, 2019 (see Appendix A for a copy of the full

¹ A majority of the affiliation, practice, and salience items did not differ significantly by gender. The only two exceptions were prayer (76.5% of females prayed at least sometimes vs. 67.3% of males) and salience (80.7% of females reported religion or spirituality was at least somewhat important vs. 69.3% of males).

survey). A follow-up email was sent on February 19th. Students were informed in the emails about the purpose of the survey and that it was voluntary and anonymous. Also, as an incentive to participate, they were also told they could enter a drawing to win one of two \$50 Amazon gift cards if they entered their email address after completing the survey. They were assured their email address would be stored in a separate data file, and could in no way be associated with their responses to the survey questions.

A total of 898 students responded to the survey between February 6th and March 5th, when the survey was officially closed. Of the 898 respondents, 145 chose to not complete the questions about personal religious affiliation and practice. This leaves a sample of 753 who did answer these questions and who thus comprise the sample for this report. Of these 753 respondents, 74% were female and ages ranged from 18 to 61 (average age = 22). In terms of race and ethnicity, 85% of the respondents identified as White, 5% as African-American, 3% as Hispanic, 4% as Asian, and 3% as Other. The respondents were relatively equally distributed across classes, with 19% being freshmen, 16% sophomore, 20% junior, 22% senior, and 23% graduate students.

Survey Items

The survey questions on personal religious affiliation, involvement in religious practices, and religious salience, described below, are based on standard items used in the sociology of religion literature (e.g., Smith and Snell, 2009). Although these items do not provide an exhaustive inventory of an individual's religious faith and practice, they are among the most commonly used in the literature.

To begin, students were asked about their personal *religious affiliation* with the options being "Catholic – Roman Catholic," "Christian – non-Roman Catholic," "Jewish," "Muslim," "Other," and "None." Respondents could specify further if they chose "Other," and a full list of these other religions listed by respondents is contained in Appendix B. Due to a low number of responses, the categories of Jewish and Muslim were combined with the Other category for the current analyses. Also, although technically not all respondents in the Christian – non-Roman Catholic category are Protestant, since for example a small portion could be Eastern Orthodox, for the sake of convenience the group will be referred to as Protestant in this report.

In terms of religious practice, *religious service attendance* was measured with the question, "Other than for special occasions and ceremonies (e.g., weddings and funerals), how often do you attend religious services?" with response categories ranging from "Never" to "More than once a week." *Frequency of prayer* was assessed with the question, "Other than during religious services, how often do you pray?" with response categories ranging from "Never" to "Once a day or more." *Frequency of scripture reading* was measured with the question, "Other than during religious services, how often do you read the scriptures of your religious tradition?" with response categories ranging from "Never" to "Once a day or more." Students were also asked about *religious salience* with the question, "How important is religious faith or spirituality for how you live your life and make decisions?" with response categories ranging from "Not at all important" to "Extremely important."

Finally, after each question about the various religious practices and the importance of religion, students were also asked if this has changed at all since coming to college. For example, after the religious service attendance question students were asked, "Has your attendance at religious

services changed at all since coming to college?” with response categories of “No,” “Yes – decreased,” and “Yes – increased.” Prior research has produced mixed results on the question of whether or not an individual’s religious faith and practice decrease during college (e.g., Smith and Snell, 2009; Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler, 2007). Although of course a longitudinal panel study would provide a superior methodology, including these questions in the analysis allows for a basic examination of this issue among Niagara students.

Section 2: Religious Affiliation, Practice, and Salience

Section 2 presents the data on the religious affiliation, involvement in religious practices, and salience of religion for the survey respondents. It also compares the level of involvement in religious practices and the salience of religion across the various religious affiliation groups.

Religious Affiliation

Table 1 contains the details of the religious affiliation of the respondents. Nearly 45% reported being Roman Catholic and approximately 27% reported being Protestant (Christian – non-Roman Catholic), for a total of nearly 72% who reported a Christian religious affiliation. 4.1% reported affiliation with another religion, approximately half of whom were Jewish or Muslim. 24% of respondents reported no religious affiliation.

Table 1. Religious Affiliation

	<i>% of Respondents (n=753)</i>
<i>Roman Catholic</i>	44.8%
<i>Protestant</i>	27.1%
<i>Other</i>	4.1%
<i>None</i>	24.0%
	100%

Religious Service Attendance

Table 2. Frequency of Religious Service Attendance

	<i>% of Respondents (n=753)</i>
<i>Never</i>	29.1%
<i>A few times a year</i>	42.4%
<i>Once a month</i>	6.8%
<i>2-3 times a month</i>	9.4%
<i>Once a week</i>	10.2%
<i>More than once a week</i>	2.1%
	100%

Table 2 contains the details for how often the respondents attended religious services. Overall, approximately 29% of students reported never attending religious services, and slightly more than 42% reported attending a few times a year. Thus, about 71% reported attending services

less than monthly. At the other end of the spectrum, about 10% and 2% reported attending either once a week or more than once a week, respectively.

Table 2a presents the religious service attendance data by religious affiliation. Attendance did differ significantly across religious affiliation ($\chi^2 = 226.21$; $df = 15$; $p < .001$). Not surprisingly, students with no religious affiliation were least likely to attend, although 30.4% did report attending a few times a year, and Protestants were the most likely to attend with only 15.7% reporting never attending. In fact, less than 20% of students in each of the religious affiliations (Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Other) reported never attending services, although on the other hand it is also true that less than 20% of each of the affiliations reported attending once a week or more than once per week. Protestants were the most likely to report attending a few times a month or more (i.e., 2-3 times per month, once a week, or more than once a week) at 36.3%, followed by adherents to other religions (25.8%) and Roman Catholics (24.4%).

Table 2a. Frequency of Religious Service Attendance by Religious Affiliation

	<i>Roman Catholic</i>	<i>Protestant</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>None</i>
<i>Never</i>	16.3%	15.7%	19.4%	69.6%
<i>A few times a year</i>	50.1%	40.2%	41.9%	30.4%
<i>Once a month</i>	9.2%	7.8%	12.9%	0%
<i>2-3 times a month</i>	9.5%	17.2%	12.9%	0%
<i>Once a week</i>	12.8%	15.2%	9.7%	0%
<i>More than once a week</i>	2.1%	3.9%	3.2%	0%
	100%	100%	100%	100%

$\chi^2 = 226.21$; $df = 15$; $p < .001$

Prayer

Table 3 contains the results for the frequency of prayer among all respondents. It is important to note that this question asked students how often they pray *other than during religious services*. Approximately three-quarters of students prayed at least some times (i.e., 26% reported never praying), slightly more than 41% reported praying once a week or more frequently, and nearly 18% reported praying once a day or more.

Table 3. Frequency of Prayer (other than during religious services)

	<i>% of Respondents (n=753)</i>
<i>Never</i>	26.0%
<i>Once a month or less</i>	20.1%
<i>2-3 times a month</i>	12.6%
<i>About once a week</i>	11.0%
<i>A few times a week</i>	12.7%
<i>Once a day or more</i>	17.5%
	100%

Frequency of prayer did differ significantly by respondents' religious affiliation ($\chi^2 = 291.23$; $df = 15$; $p < .001$), as can be seen from the data presented in Table 3a. Students with no religious

affiliation prayed least frequently, although nearly 30% did pray at least some times. Among respondents with a religious affiliation, Roman Catholics generally prayed less frequently than Protestants and adherents of other religions, with minimal difference between the latter two groups. For example, 17.8% of Roman Catholic students reported praying once a day or more, compared to 28.4% of Protestants and 35.5% of students with a religious affiliation of Other. Expanding the response set a bit, 46.8% of Roman Catholics reported praying about once a week or more, compared to 58.1% of students with a religious affiliation of Other and 59.8% of Protestants.

Table 3a. Frequency of Prayer by Religious Affiliation

	<i>Roman Catholic</i>	<i>Protestant</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>None</i>
<i>Never</i>	12.5%	9.3%	19.4%	71.3%
<i>Once a month or less</i>	23.7%	17.6%	19.4%	16.0%
<i>2-3 times a month</i>	16.9%	13.2%	3.2%	5.5%
<i>About once a week</i>	14.8%	11.8%	12.9%	2.8%
<i>A few times a week</i>	14.2%	19.6%	9.7%	2.8%
<i>Once a day or more</i>	17.8%	28.4%	35.5%	1.7%
	100%	100%	100%	100%

$\chi^2 = 291.23$; $df = 15$; $p < .001$

Scripture Reading

Table 4 contains results for the frequency of scripture reading. As with the question on prayer, it is important to note that this question asked students how often they read the scriptures of their religious tradition *other than during religious services*.

Table 4. Frequency of Scripture Reading (other than during religious services)

	<i>% of Respondents (n=741)</i>
<i>Never</i>	64.5%
<i>Once a month or less</i>	21.2%
<i>2-3 times a month</i>	4.3%
<i>About once a week</i>	4.3%
<i>A few times a week</i>	2.6%
<i>Once a day or more</i>	3.1%
	100%

Nearly two-thirds (64.5%) of respondents reported never reading scripture, although slightly more than 20% do read it a few times a year (once a month or less). At the other end of the spectrum, exactly 10% of students reported reading scripture either once a week (4.3%), a few times a week (2.6%), or once a day or more (3.1%).

As can be seen in Table 4a, frequency of scripture reading did differ significantly across religious affiliation ($\chi^2 = 134.29$; $df = 15$; $p < .001$). As with the other religious practices, students without any religious affiliation were far less likely to read scripture, with more than 90% reporting never reading it. Among students with a religious affiliation, Roman Catholics reported reading scripture least frequently, and students with a religious affiliation of Other reported the most

frequent scripture reading. Specifically, a total of 8.1% of Roman Catholic students reported reading scripture either once a week, a few times a week, or once a day or more, compared to 19.5% of Protestant students and 25.9% of students affiliated with another religion. Focusing in on daily scripture reading, 11.5% of students with a religious affiliation of Other reported reading scripture once a day or more, compared to 7.0% of Protestants and 1.5% of Roman Catholics.

Table 4a. Frequency of Scripture Reading by Religious Affiliation

	<i>Roman Catholic</i>	<i>Protestant</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>None</i>
<i>Never</i>	64.5%	42.8%	40.7%	92.7%
<i>Once a month or less</i>	23.9%	29.4%	22.2%	6.7%
<i>2-3 times a month</i>	3.6%	8.5%	11.1%	0%
<i>About once a week</i>	4.2%	8.5%	3.7%	0%
<i>A few times a week</i>	2.4%	4.0%	11.1%	0%
<i>Once a day or more</i>	1.5%	7.0%	11.1%	0.6%
	100%	100%	100%	100%

$\chi^2 = 134.29$; $df = 15$; $p < .001$

Religious Salience

Table 5 presents the results for the religious salience item measuring the importance of religion or spirituality for how the respondent lives his or her life and makes decisions. Just under 78% of all respondents considered religion or spirituality at least somewhat important in their life, and nearly one-third considered it either very or extremely important (31.6%).

Table 5. Religious Salience

	<i>% of Respondents (n=741)</i>
<i>Not at all important</i>	22.1%
<i>Somewhat important</i>	46.3%
<i>Very important</i>	18.9%
<i>Extremely important</i>	12.7%
	100%

The results presented in Table 5a indicate that, as with the religious practice items, religious salience did differ significantly by religious affiliation ($\chi^2 = 242.98$; $df = 9$; $p < .001$). Students with no religious affiliation reported the lowest religious salience with nearly 62% reporting that religion or spirituality was not at all important in their life, a percentage that is more than five times higher than the next highest group (Other at 11.1%). Out of the three groups with a religious affiliation, the Roman Catholics reported the lowest religious salience, with 33.7% reporting religion or spirituality is either very or extremely important in their life, compared to 44.8% for Protestants and 59.2% for those with an affiliation of Other.

Table 5a. Religious Salience by Religious Affiliation

	<i>Roman Catholic</i>	<i>Protestant</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>None</i>
<i>Not at all important</i>	11.0%	7.0%	11.1%	61.8%
<i>Somewhat important</i>	55.2%	48.3%	29.6%	29.8%
<i>Very important</i>	21.5%	22.4%	44.4%	6.2%
<i>Extremely important</i>	12.2%	22.4%	14.8%	2.2%
	100%	100%	100%	100%

$$\chi^2 = 242.98; df = 9; p < .001$$

Section 3: Changes in Religious Practice and Salience

This section presents the data concerning the extent to which, if at all, students' involvement in religious practices and religious salience has changed since coming to college. It also compares changes in involvement in religious practices and salience across religious affiliation groups.

Changes in Religious Practices and Salience

Table 6 presents the results for whether students' involvement in each of the religious practices, as well as religious salience, has increased, decreased, or stayed the same since coming to college.

Table 6. Changes in Religious Practice and Salience Since Coming to College

	<i>Service Attendance</i>	<i>Prayer</i>	<i>Scripture Reading</i>	<i>Religious Salience</i>
<i>No change</i>	53.4%	68.8%	80.8%	71.4%
<i>Decrease</i>	38.8%	15.7%	9.9%	9.0%
<i>Increase</i>	7.8%	15.5%	9.3%	19.6%
	100%	100%	100%	100%

The majority of respondents reported no change since coming to college for each of the practices and religious salience. The religious practice with the greatest decline was service attendance, with nearly 40% of students reporting a decrease in attendance since coming to college. Prayer was the next most likely practice to experience a decline at 15.7%, although nearly the same proportion of students reported an increase in prayer since coming to college (15.5%). Religious salience was the most likely to experience an increase, with nearly 20% of students reporting that the importance of religious faith or spirituality for how they live their life and make decisions has increased since coming to college.

Changes in Religious Practices and Salience by Religious Affiliation

The next question is whether or not the extent and direction of change in religious practice and salience differed across religious affiliation categories. The results of this analysis are presented separately for each practice and religious salience in Tables 6a through 6d. As seen in Table 6a, change in religious service attendance did differ significantly across the different religious affiliations ($\chi^2 = 72.77; df = 6; p < .001$). Roman Catholic students were the most likely to have reduced service

attendance with nearly 49% reporting a decrease since coming to college, while those with a religious affiliation of Other were most likely to report an increase, at 12.9%.

Table 6a. Change in Frequency of Religious Service Attendance by Religious Affiliation

	<i>Roman Catholic</i>	<i>Protestant</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>None</i>
<i>No change</i>	42.7%	47.1%	54.8%	80.1%
<i>Decrease</i>	48.7%	43.1%	32.3%	16.6%
<i>Increase</i>	8.6%	9.8%	12.9%	3.3%
	100%	100%	100%	100%

$$\chi^2 = 72.77; df = 6; p < .001$$

As seen in Table 6b, change in frequency of prayer did differ significantly across the different religious affiliations ($\chi^2 = 50.22; df = 6; p < .001$). At 25.8%, students with a religious affiliation of Other were the most likely to report a decrease in prayer since coming to college, while Protestant students were most likely to report an increase, at 22.1%, followed closely by Roman Catholics at 19%.

Table 6b. Change in Frequency of Prayer by Religious Affiliation

	<i>Roman Catholic</i>	<i>Protestant</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>None</i>
<i>No change</i>	62.6%	62.3%	64.5%	88.4%
<i>Decrease</i>	18.4%	15.7%	25.8%	8.8%
<i>Increase</i>	19.0%	22.1%	9.7%	2.8%
	100%	100%	100%	100%

$$\chi^2 = 50.22; df = 6; p < .001$$

As seen in Table 6c, change in frequency of scripture reading did differ significantly across the different religious affiliations ($\chi^2 = 33.49; df = 6; p < .001$). Although the vast majority of students across religious affiliations reported no change in scripture reading since coming to college, as with prayer, students with a religious affiliation of Other were the most likely to report a decrease, at 18.5%. However, they were also basically tied for most likely to report an increase in scripture reading, at 14.8%, with Protestant students at 14.9%.

Table 6c. Change in Frequency of Scripture Reading by Religious Affiliation

	<i>Roman Catholic</i>	<i>Protestant</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>None</i>
<i>No change</i>	81.2%	71.6%	66.7%	92.7%
<i>Decrease</i>	11.0%	13.4%	18.5%	2.2%
<i>Increase</i>	7.8%	14.9%	14.8%	5.1%
	100%	100%	100%	100%

$$\chi^2 = 33.49; df = 6; p < .001$$

As seen in Table 6d, change in the salience of religion did differ significantly across the different religious affiliations ($\chi^2 = 25.49; df = 6; p < .001$). Although, as with each of the specific religious practices, a majority of students across religious affiliations reported no change in the importance of religion or spirituality since coming to college, more than one-third of students with a

religious affiliation of Other did report an increase (37%). This is nearly 10 percentage points higher than Protestant students, who are the next highest group at 27.9%, and more than double the proportion of Roman Catholic students who reported an increase (18.2%).

Table 6d. Change in Religious Salience by Religious Affiliation

	<i>Roman Catholic</i>	<i>Protestant</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>None</i>
<i>No change</i>	73.1%	62.7%	59.3%	79.8%
<i>Decrease</i>	8.7%	9.5%	3.7%	10.1%
<i>Increase</i>	18.2%	27.9%	37.0%	10.1%
	100%	100%	100%	100%

$\chi^2 = 25.49$; $df = 6$; $p < .001$

Section 4: Race/Ethnicity and Religious Affiliation, Practice, and Salience

This section will examine differences across the different racial and ethnic categories in terms of religious affiliation, practice, and salience.

Religious Affiliation and Race/Ethnicity

To begin, as Table 7 reveals, religious affiliation did differ significantly by race and ethnicity ($\chi^2 = 155.35$; $df = 12$; $p < .001$). African-American students were more than twice as likely as any other race or ethnicity to identify as Protestant, with more than 77% selecting this as their religious affiliation. African-American students were also the least likely to have no religious affiliation, with only 11.4% reporting no affiliation.

Table 7. Religious Affiliation by Race and Ethnicity

	<i>White</i>	<i>African-American</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Other</i>
<i>Roman Catholic</i>	49.5%	5.7%	39.1%	23.1%	26.1%
<i>Protestant</i>	24.4%	77.1%	34.8%	23.1%	26.1%
<i>Other</i>	1.9%	5.7%	0%	38.5%	13.0%
<i>None</i>	24.2%	11.4%	26.1%	15.4%	34.8%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

$\chi^2 = 155.35$; $df = 12$; $p < .001$

White students were the most likely to identify as Roman Catholic at 49.5%, followed by Hispanic students, 39.1% of whom identified as Roman Catholic. Asian students were equally split between Roman Catholic and Protestant (23.1% each), and were most likely to select a religious affiliation of Other (38.5%). Students who selected “Other” for race and ethnicity were the most likely to have no religious affiliation (34.8%), and slightly more than half identified as either Roman Catholic or Protestant (26.1% each).

Frequency of Religious Service Attendance and Race/Ethnicity

Frequency of religious service attendance also differed significantly across race and ethnicity, as shown in Table 8 ($\chi^2 = 48.49$; $df = 20$; $p < .001$). The clearest pattern in the data is that African-

American students reported attending services more frequently than any other race or ethnicity, with a total of 39.9% reporting attending a few times a month or more (i.e., either 2-3 times a month, once a week, or more than once a week). This proportion is nearly double the proportion for the sample as a whole who reported attending a few times a month or more (21.7%; see Table 2). Further, 11.4% of African American students reported attending services more than once a week, which is nearly three times as high as the next highest groups, Hispanic and Other, both at 4.3%, and more than five times as high as the sample as a whole (2.1%; see Table 2).

Table 8. Frequency of Religious Service Attendance by Race and Ethnicity

	<i>White</i>	<i>African-American</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Other</i>
<i>Never</i>	30.3%	17.1%	34.8%	3.8%	39.1%
<i>A few times a year</i>	42.8%	34.3%	47.8%	50.0%	30.4%
<i>Once a month</i>	6.7%	8.6%	0%	15.4%	0%
<i>2-3 times a month</i>	9.1%	11.4%	8.7%	19.2%	0%
<i>Once a week</i>	9.8%	17.1%	4.3%	7.7%	26.1%
<i>More than once a week</i>	1.3%	11.4%	4.3%	3.8%	4.3%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

$\chi^2 = 48.49$; $df = 20$; $p < .001$

Students who selected Other for race/ethnicity were most likely to report never attending services, at 39.1%, followed closely by Hispanic (34.8%) and White (30.3%) students. Asian students were the least likely to report never attending, at 3.8%, although those who did attend were most likely to attend only a few times a year.

Frequency of Prayer and Race/Ethnicity

As with religious affiliation and frequency of service attendance, students' reported frequency of prayer also differed significantly across race and ethnicity, as shown in Table 9 ($\chi^2 = 42.92$; $df = 20$; $p < .01$).

Table 9. Frequency of Prayer by Race and Ethnicity

	<i>White</i>	<i>African-American</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Other</i>
<i>Never</i>	26.8%	8.6%	21.7%	23.1%	39.1%
<i>Once a month or less</i>	20.0%	17.1%	30.4%	34.6%	13.0%
<i>2-3 times a month</i>	13.8%	8.6%	17.4%	3.8%	4.3%
<i>About once a week</i>	11.4%	8.6%	4.3%	11.5%	4.3%
<i>A few times a week</i>	13.6%	17.1%	4.3%	7.7%	0%
<i>Once a day or more</i>	14.4%	40.0%	21.7%	19.2%	39.1%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

$\chi^2 = 42.92$; $df = 20$; $p < .01$

African-American students were the most likely to pray, as only 8.6% reported never praying, a proportion that is approximately one-third or less that of the other racial and ethnic groups who reported never praying. Not only were they more likely to pray at all, but African-

American students also reported praying more frequently, with 57.1% reporting praying a few times a week or more (i.e., either a few times a week or once a day or more), compared to 39.1% of students who selected Other, 28.0% of White students, 26.9% of Asian students, and 26.0% of Hispanic students.

Frequency of Scripture Reading and Race/Ethnicity

As revealed in Table 10, students' frequency of scripture reading also differed significantly across race and ethnicity ($\chi^2 = 78.16$; $df = 20$; $p < .001$). There was a clear trend in the data of African-American students reading scripture more frequently than other students. Specifically, 40% of African-American students reported reading scripture once a week or more (i.e., about once a week, a few times a week, or once a day or more), a percentage that is nearly double the percentage for the next highest group, which was Hispanics at 21.7%. 17.3% of students who selected a race or ethnicity of Other reported reading scripture once a week or more, followed by Asian students at 11.5% and White students at 7.3%.

Table 10. Frequency of Scripture Reading by Race and Ethnicity

	<i>White</i>	<i>African-American</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Other</i>
<i>Never</i>	67.5%	37.1%	47.8%	57.7%	60.9%
<i>Once a month or less</i>	21.2%	17.1%	26.1%	19.2%	17.4%
<i>2-3 times a month</i>	4.0%	5.7%	4.3%	11.5%	4.3%
<i>About once a week</i>	3.7%	11.4%	0%	3.8%	13.0%
<i>A few times a week</i>	2.2%	8.6%	8.7%	0%	0%
<i>Once a day or more</i>	1.4%	20.0%	13.0%	7.7%	4.3%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

$\chi^2 = 78.16$; $df = 20$; $p < .001$

Religious Salience and Race/Ethnicity

Table 11. Religious Salience by Race and Ethnicity

	<i>White</i>	<i>African-American</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Other</i>
<i>Not at all important</i>	23.6%	5.7%	26.1%	15.4%	21.7%
<i>Somewhat important</i>	47.0%	34.3%	43.5%	50.0%	34.8%
<i>Very important</i>	18.9%	22.9%	13.0%	26.9%	17.4%
<i>Extremely important</i>	10.6%	37.1%	17.4%	7.7%	26.1%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

$\chi^2 = 32.19$; $df = 12$; $p < .01$

Although the majority of students, regardless of race and ethnicity, reported that religion or spirituality were at least somewhat important in their life, Table 11 reveals that religious salience differed significantly across race and ethnicity ($\chi^2 = 32.19$; $df = 12$; $p < .01$). African-American students reported the highest religious salience compared to other students, as 60% indicated religion or spirituality were either very or extremely important. This is nearly double the proportion for the sample as a whole who reported that religion or spirituality were either very or extremely

important (31.6%; see Table 5). The next highest group is students who selected a race or ethnicity of Other, with 43.5% answering either very or extremely important, followed by Asian students at 34.6%, Hispanic students at 30.4%, and White students at 29.5%.

Section 5: Discussion and Conclusions

As part of a larger survey research project conducted with Niagara University students in February and March of 2019, data were collected on undergraduate and graduate students' religious affiliation, involvement in religious practices, and religious salience ($n = 753$). Basic demographic information such as gender, race/ethnicity, age, and class standing were also collected. Analysis of these data provide a glimpse at one point in time, or a "snapshot," into the religious faith and practice of Niagara students.

In terms of religious affiliation, the largest group was Roman Catholics at nearly 45%, which is expected given that Niagara is a Catholic university. 24% of students reported no religious affiliation, a proportion that is in line with national estimates. For example, in its 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study, the Pew Research Center estimated that 23% of U.S. adults are religiously unaffiliated, including 36% of Younger Millennials who were born between 1990-1996 (Pew Research Center, 2015a).

Niagara students generally regarded religion or spirituality as important in their lives, although this importance does not necessarily translate into involvement in religious practices. Over 77% reported religion or spirituality were at least somewhat important, and nearly one-third (31.6%) reported they were very or extremely important. However, nearly 65% of students reported never reading scripture, and just over 70% reported attending services either a few times a year (42.4%) or never (29.1%). Students were more likely to pray than either attend services or read scripture, with a total of 41.2% reporting praying at least once a week and nearly 18% reporting praying at least daily.

These numbers are similar to those reported by Smith and Snell (2009) in their study of a nationally representative sample of emerging adults (ages 18-23), especially taking into account the fact that their survey was conducted more than ten years ago and the religiousness of young adults in general has declined over that time (e.g., Pew Research Center, 2015b). Specifically, 50% of Smith and Snell's respondents reported never reading scripture, 35% reported never attending services, and 30% reported praying at least daily (pg.112, Table 4.7). Thus, taking into account the decline we would expect to have seen in rates of involvement over the past decade, Niagara students are not dissimilar from a national sample of young adults in terms of involvement in religious practices.

Reported religious salience and practice did differ significantly among the various religious affiliations of the students, as expected from prior research (e.g., Smith and Snell, 2009; Pew Research Center 2015a). Students with a religious affiliation of Other had the highest religious salience and also reported reading scripture most frequently, followed by Protestant students in both cases. The order was reversed for service attendance, with Protestant students attending services most frequently followed by students with a religious affiliation of Other. These two groups were highly similar to each other in terms of frequency of prayer, and generally reported praying more frequently than the Roman Catholic students. Roman Catholics reported a higher religious salience

and involvement in practices than students with no religious affiliation, but had lower salience and were consistently less involved compared to students in the other religious affiliation groups.

Another question that arises is the extent to which, if at all, religious practice and salience decline while students are in college. Different trends have been reported in the literature (e.g., Smith and Snell, 2009; Stoppa and Lefkowitz, 2010; Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler, 2007), and this study provided an opportunity to get another look at this issue. Specifically, the survey included questions measuring whether or not a student's involvement in each of the practices or religious salience had changed since coming to college, and if so how.

A majority of the respondents reported no change since coming to college across the religious practice and salience measures. Of the change that did occur, service attendance was the most likely to experience a decrease with nearly 40% of students (and nearly 49% of Roman Catholics) reporting their frequency of attendance had decreased since coming to college. This is in line with the patterns seen in young adults in general (Pew Research Center, 2015b; Smith and Snell, 2009), and likely at least partly reflects the increasingly busy schedules of college students and their first "taste of freedom" from required service attendance with their parents. Religious salience was the most likely to increase, with nearly 20% of students (and 37% of those with a religious affiliation of Other) reporting an increase. This trend could again speak to a potential disconnect between religious salience and practice, whereby although religion or spirituality is important in students' lives they are not necessarily connecting with traditional practices, with the possible exception of prayer.

A consistent trend in the analyses regarding race and ethnicity is that African-American students reported more involvement in religious practices as well as higher religious salience, findings that are in line with prior research (e.g., Markstrom, 1999; Pearce et al., 2003). This could potentially be explained by the fact that 77.1% of African-American students identified as Protestant, which is more than double the proportion for any of the other groups (see Table 7), and prior research has shown Protestants to be generally more religious compared to Roman Catholics and adherents of other religions (e.g., Pew Research Center, 2015b; Smith and Snell, 2009).

Running a multivariate statistical model, using an individual's race/ethnicity to predict religiousness while controlling religious affiliation, would allow an examination of this issue. Such an analysis would separate the effects of race/ethnicity and religious affiliation, and would reveal whether or not there is an association between race/ethnicity and religiousness above and beyond any effect of religious affiliation. Thus, if African-American students scored higher on religiousness compared to other students in this statistical model, this would indicate that the greater involvement of African-American students in religious practices, and higher religious salience, was not simply due to the fact that they were more likely to be Protestant.

To that end, and following standard practice in the academic literature, a religiousness scale was constructed for each respondent by combining their responses to the four items measuring involvement in religious practices and religious salience. Specifically, each of the four questions was first standardized (i.e., z-transformed) to put them all on the same metric. The mean of these four standardized items was then calculated to arrive at an overall measure of religiousness for each individual.

A multivariate linear regression model was then estimated using an individual's race/ethnicity to predict religiousness, controlling for religious affiliation, age, and gender. The results revealed that African-American students scored statistically significantly higher on the overall religiousness scale compared to other students even after accounting for religious affiliation, age, and gender ($\beta = .094$; $t = 2.585$; $p = .01$). Thus, the findings discussed above that African-American students were more involved in religious practices and reported higher religious salience than other students were not simply due to the fact that they were more likely to be Protestant. Future studies could include a more in-depth qualitative component along with the standard religious salience and practice questions to shed additional light on such findings.

Limitations

It is important to note a few limitations to the current study which should be kept in mind when interpreting the results. First, the sample is not a random sample of Niagara University students, and is not necessarily representative of the overall student body. Although the survey was sent to the entire population of undergraduate and graduate students, those who chose to respond are likely not representative of students overall. Especially since the topic of the survey was the sex abuse crisis and the Catholic Church's response, students who had more knowledge or stronger feelings about the issue were probably more likely to respond, leading to the possibility of selection bias in the sample. Related to this, it is possible that students with stronger feelings about this issue tend to be more religious (although this is likely not true for everyone), resulting in the current sample being potentially more religious than the student body as a whole. Regardless, this sample of 753 respondents is still a sizeable proportion of Niagara students and does include a good cross-section of religious affiliations, gender, race/ethnicity, and class standing.

One other limitation is that although the survey questions in the current study covered key religious practices as well as religious salience, and can provide important insights into the religious faith of students, they do not provide an exhaustive picture. The number of questions was limited in order to keep the survey manageable for the students, and also because they did not represent the main focus of the study. Future research, focused purely on religious faith and practice, could increase the number of questions asked and include a qualitative component to provide a more comprehensive assessment.

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Appendix A: Survey Instrument

Survey on the Issue of Sex Abuse in the Catholic Church

The purpose of this survey is to assess peoples' knowledge of and views about the issue of sex abuse in the Catholic Church. The survey is voluntary, and you may stop at any time without any penalty. Further, it is anonymous and individuals will in no way be linked with their responses. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate, and by completing this survey you give your consent to participate. There will be an opportunity to enter into a drawing to receive one of two \$50 Amazon gift cards at the end of the survey. Please contact Dr. Craig Rivera (cjr@niagara.edu), Associate Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice, or Dr. Paul Schupp (pschupp@niagara.edu), Director of the Niagara University Institutional Review Board, with any questions or concerns. Finally, while we are not asking questions about personal experiences, we recognize that some of the questions may be of a sensitive nature. Should you wish to speak with someone in counseling services, they can be reached directly at 716-286-8536.

Section I. Knowledge and Opinions

This first section contains questions about your knowledge and opinions concerning the issue of sex abuse in the Catholic Church. This includes alleged and substantiated cases of abuse committed by Catholic clergy. It also includes alleged and substantiated instances where bishops did not remove priests from active ministry despite credible accusations against them, and/or did not report the accusations to the appropriate civil authorities.

1. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 indicating "No Knowledge" and 5 indicating "Extensive Knowledge," how would you rate your level of knowledge about the issue of sex abuse in the Catholic Church?

1	2	3	4	5
(No Knowledge)				(Extensive Knowledge)

2. What are your sources of information about sex abuse in the Catholic Church? (check all that apply)
 - a. Local Media (including TV, print, or online)
 - b. National Media (including TV, print, or online)
 - c. Catholic Media (e.g., National Catholic Register, Catholic Digest, etc.)
 - d. Social Media
 - e. Family and/or Friends
 - f. Parish Priest
 - g. Other _____
 - h. None

3. How would you rate the importance of this issue to you, personally?
 - a. Not at all Important
 - b. Somewhat Important
 - c. Very Important
 - d. Not Sure

For questions #4 through #11 please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements, where 1=“Strongly Disagree;” 2=“Disagree;” 3=“Neither Disagree nor Agree;” 4=“Agree;” and 5=“Strongly Agree;” 6=“Don’t Know.”

4. In general, I think the leadership of the Catholic Church (such as bishops and archbishops) responds appropriately to allegations of clergy sex abuse.

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

5. In general, I think the leadership of the Catholic Church is taking appropriate steps to prevent future incidents of clergy sex abuse.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

6. In general, I think the Pope himself has responded appropriately to the issue of sex abuse in the Catholic Church.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

7. I think lay-people (i.e., non-clergy) in the Catholic Church should have more influence and involvement in responding to allegations of clergy sex abuse.

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

8. This issue has negatively affected my opinion of the Catholic Church as an *institution*.

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

9. This issue has negatively affected my opinion of Catholicism as a *religion*.

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

10. I believe this issue has reduced the Catholic Church's credibility when speaking about matters of faith.

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

11. I believe this issue has reduced the Catholic Church's credibility when speaking about matters of morality.

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

12. If you have any additional thoughts about the issue of sex abuse in the Catholic Church, including the Church's response to it, or would like to elaborate on any of your answers above, please write in the space below.

Section II. Personal Religious Belief and Practice

This section contains questions about your personal religious or spiritual belief and practice.

13. Do you believe in God?

- No
- Yes
- Not Sure

14. Would you describe yourself as “spiritual but not religious?”

- No
- Yes
- Not Sure

15. What is your religious affiliation?

- Catholic – Roman Catholic
- Christian – non-Roman Catholic
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Other _____
- None

16. Other than for special occasions and ceremonies (e.g., weddings and funerals), how often do you attend religious services?

- a. Never
- b. A few times a year
- c. Once a month
- d. 2-3 times a month
- e. Once a week
- f. More than once a week

17. Has your attendance at religious services changed at all since coming to college?

- a. No b. Yes – decreased c. Yes – increased

18. Has it changed at all as a result of the sex abuse issue?
- a. No
 - b. Yes – decreased
 - c. Yes – increased
19. Other than during religious services, how often do you pray?
- a. Never
 - b. Once a month or less
 - c. 2-3 times a month
 - d. About once a week
 - e. A few times a week
 - f. Once a day or more
20. Has your frequency of prayer changed at all since coming to college?
- a. No
 - b. Yes – decreased
 - c. Yes – increased
21. Has it changed at all as a result of the sex abuse issue?
- a. No
 - b. Yes – decreased
 - c. Yes – increased
22. Other than during religious services, how often do you read the scriptures of your religious tradition?
- a. Never
 - b. Once a month or less
 - c. 2-3 times a month
 - d. About once a week
 - e. A few times a week
 - f. Once a day or more
23. Has your frequency of scripture reading changed at all since coming to college?
- a. No
 - b. Yes – decreased
 - c. Yes – increased
24. Has it changed at all as a result of the sex abuse issue?
- a. No
 - b. Yes – decreased
 - c. Yes – increased
25. How important is religious faith or spirituality for how you live your life and make decisions?
- a. Not at all important
 - b. Somewhat important
 - c. Very important
 - d. Extremely important
26. Has the importance of religious faith or spirituality changed at all since coming to college?
- a. No
 - b. Yes – decreased
 - c. Yes – increased

27. Has it changed at all as a result of the sex abuse issue?
- a. No
 - b. Yes – decreased
 - c. Yes – increased
28. How many of your closest friends would you describe as “religious” or “spiritual”?
- a. None of them
 - b. Some of them
 - c. Most of them
 - d. All of them

Section III. Demographics

This final section contains questions concerning basic demographic and descriptive information.

29. Sex
- a. Male
 - b. Female
30. With which Race/Ethnicity do you identify?
- a. White
 - b. African-American
 - c. Hispanic
 - d. Asian
 - e. Native American/Pacific Islander
 - f. Other
31. Age _____
32. Class Standing
- a. Freshman
 - b. Sophomore
 - c. Junior
 - d. Senior
 - e. Graduate student
33. In which college or program are you enrolled? (check all that apply)
- a. College of Arts and Sciences
 - b. College of Business Administration
 - c. College of Education
 - d. College of Hospitality and Tourism Management
 - e. Academic Exploration Program
34. If you have any additional thoughts or comments about any of the issues covered in this survey please write them in the space below.

Thank you for your participation!

If you would like to be entered into a drawing to receive one of two \$50 Amazon gift cards, please include your email address below. Your email address will not be linked with your responses to the survey questions.

email _____

Appendix B:

Religions Included in Religious Affiliation Category of “Other”

	# of Respondents
Buddhism	9
Eckankar	1
Hindu	2
Islam	13
Judaism	2
Native American	1
Pagan	1
Pastafarian	1
“In Transition”	1
	31