

REPORT 1 GRACE (Ireland) National Research Project 2021-2024 Findings



Global Researchers  
Advancing Catholic Education



REPORT 1

Leaders and Staff in Catholic Schools in  
Ireland: Demographics and  
Religious Profile



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# Report 1: Leaders and Staff in Catholic Schools in Ireland: Demographics and Religious Profile

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## About the GRACE (Ireland) Research Project

Global Researchers Advancing Catholic Education (GRACE) is an international research-based partnership between academics in universities and Catholic education bodies across three different continents (Mary Immaculate College, Limerick; Notre Dame University, Fremantle, Australia; Roche Center for Catholic Education, Boston College; St Mary's University, London; University of Glasgow; and the International Office for Catholic Education). GRACE provides an opportunity for scholars and practitioners of Catholic education and theology in their respective countries to affirm, study, collaborate, and respond meaningfully to challenges in Catholic education. Among its aims is to strengthen the argument for the importance of faith-based schools in a plural society.

This GRACE (Ireland)<sup>1</sup> research project – entitled *Identity and Ethos in Catholic Primary and Secondary Schools in Ireland, Exploring the Attitudes and Behaviours of Stakeholders* – aims to establish a clear baseline and a set of signposts for the advancing of Catholic education at primary and secondary levels in the Republic of Ireland. The objectives of the research are:

- to complete a stakeholder mapping that identifies all the relevant actors and assesses their vision and roles – actual and potential – in contributing to the provision of Catholic education at both primary and secondary levels
- to capture and classify the values that underpin stakeholders' approaches
- to establish stakeholders' capacity to progress and further Catholic education.

Four Irish ecclesial documents underpin this research:

- The Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference pastoral letter for Catholic schools *Vision 08* (ICBC 2008)
- *Share the Good News – The National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland* (IEC 2010)
- *Understanding and living the ethos in a Catholic voluntary secondary school: a process centred on conversations* (CSP 2016)
- *Understanding and living the ethos in a Catholic primary school: a process centred on conversations* (CSP 2019).

The Overview to the six reports considers in some detail the underlying vision for Catholic schools that is charted in these documents with reference to how identity and ethos are expected to be amplified in Catholic schools.

## Acronyms

- BoM** Board of Management
- CSO** Central Statistics Office
- DLR** Dún Laoghaire – Rathdown
- EEC** European Economic Community
- EU** European Union
- ESS** European Social Survey
- EVS** European Values Survey
- RE** Religious Education

<sup>1</sup> With the support of the Mater Dei Centre for Catholic Education DCU in the analysis of the data and write-up of reports.

## Key Findings

- At primary level, the vast majority of school staff (86%) confirm that their schools have mission statements based on Gospel values. Their Board of Management (BoM) members are less convinced: just three out of five of them (59%) can affirm this to be the case and only two out of five (40%) believe that school policy documents are linked to them.
- There are high levels of affiliation to Roman Catholicism across all personnel cohorts included in this survey. Roman Catholics constitute 94 per cent of those who responded to the survey questionnaire. The proportion of Roman Catholics, as a percentage of all personnel, ranges from almost 98 per cent of principals, deputy principals, and religious education teachers to 88 per cent of teaching staff.
- The proportion of respondents who believe in God (86%) is lower than the proportion of respondents who identify as Roman Catholic (94%), and among self-declared Catholics, just 91 per cent believe in God.
- Most self-declared Roman Catholics do not attend a religious service each week, although almost 60 per cent of them do so at least twice per month. Board of management (BoM) members attend religious services more frequently than do other personnel cohorts, while religious education teachers (at secondary school level) have the second highest level of attendance at services. Less than a quarter of teachers attend a religious service each week.
- Age emerges as a determinant of religious identity and religiosity across all personnel cohorts, and there are notable differences between younger and older personnel. Older people are more likely to adhere to Roman Catholicism and be religious, while younger people are less likely to believe in God, attend religious services, or identify as religious. The patterns that emerge from this survey in respect of the influence of age indicate that the make-up of personnel in Catholic schools is becoming increasingly non-Catholic, and this trend is likely to continue over the coming years.
- Secondary data on religious affiliation and religiosity in Ireland indicate that Catholic schools are operating in an increasingly secular environment, and whatever demand there may be for Catholic education, there is a declining pool of personnel from which to recruit the people who can give effect to it.

## Introduction

This report looks at the composition of the personnel who are involved in Catholic primary and secondary schools in Ireland. The personnel include voluntary BoM members as well as the professionals who work in Catholic schools. Drawing on our (GRACE) survey results, this report looks at school personnel in respect of their religious affiliation, religiosity and the role their faith plays in their everyday lives. These variables are important, given the roles and responsibilities of school leaders and staff in bearing witness and giving effect to Catholic ethos and values. The paper deals, in turn, with each of the main personnel cohorts who responded to our survey questionnaire. These cohorts are as follows: BoM members, principals and deputy principals, religious education teachers, classroom and subject teachers, and ancillary staff members.

The paper also reflects on the overall profile of our school communities, and drawing on other surveys, it examines how this profile compares and contrasts with that of Irish society in terms of belief, religion and religious practices. The data presented here seek to complement and add value to those presented in the 'profile of survey respondents' that is available in the publications' section of the GRACE Project website. That particular report provides an overview of the survey respondents in respect of their role, gender, age cohort, and religious affiliation, while this report provides much more detail in respect of each cohort of survey respondents.

## Methodology

This mixed-methods study employed an explanatory sequential design whereby a large body of quantitative data was initially gathered by means of an online survey. This process was followed by a smaller qualitative strand of semi-structured interviews designed to explain and elaborate on the quantitative results (Creswell 2022; Shorten and Smith 2017). This design allows the quantitative data to inform the questions to be explored during the qualitative strand; integration is further enhanced when qualitative analysis uncovers how the qualitative findings help explain the quantitative results in more depth (Creswell 2022).

Survey questionnaires were distributed to four cohorts of secondary and primary school stakeholders. At primary school level, these included members of BoMs, principals (including deputy principals), teachers, and other school staff (including ancillary, support, and administrative staff). In the secondary school context, these included BoM members, principals (including deputy principals), teachers of religious education and all other teaching staff.

To take account of the distinctions in the two contexts, the surveys incorporated a number of additional or differently worded questions specific to each environment. The table below gives a breakdown of the number of respondents at both levels.



*Table 1 Number of survey respondents at primary and second levels*

Cohort	Primary	Secondary	Total
Board of Management	1,162	95	1,257
Principal or Deputy Principal	1,111	117	1,228
Teachers - Classroom or Subject	794	302	1,096
RE Teacher		129	129
Other Staff	122	74	196
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,189</b>	<b>717</b>	<b>3,906</b>

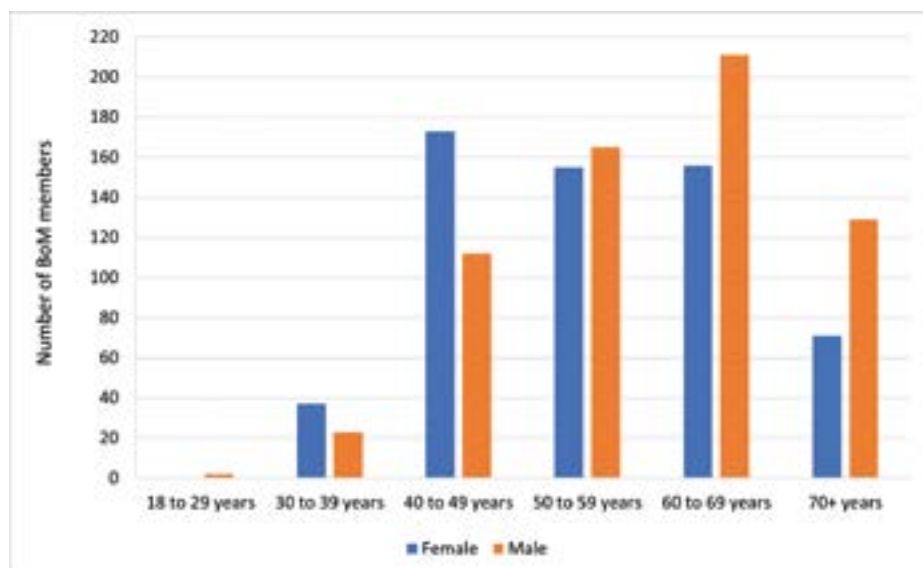
At the close of each questionnaire, respondents were invited to self-select for follow-up interviews by inserting their email address. All were assured that this information would be decoupled from their survey responses to protect anonymity. As a result, 52 interviews were conducted, 28 at primary level and 24 at second level.

Survey data were collated and analysed thematically by means of frequency tables and cross tabulations. Qualitative data were analysed thematically using NVivo software (for a more detailed methodology, see the Overview in this series).

## Boards of Management (BoM)

Over twelve hundred (n = 1,257) members of BoMs responded to our survey questionnaire. The cohort at primary school level (n = 1,162) was larger than at secondary school level (n = 95). Of the total, just over half (52%) are males, and almost half (48%) are females. As Figure 1.1 shows, over 70 per cent (72%) of BoM members are aged over 50 and 46 per cent are aged over 60. Thus, as later sections of this paper demonstrate, they have the oldest age profile of any cohort whom we surveyed. Figure 1.1 also indicates that male BoM members have an older age profile than do female members.

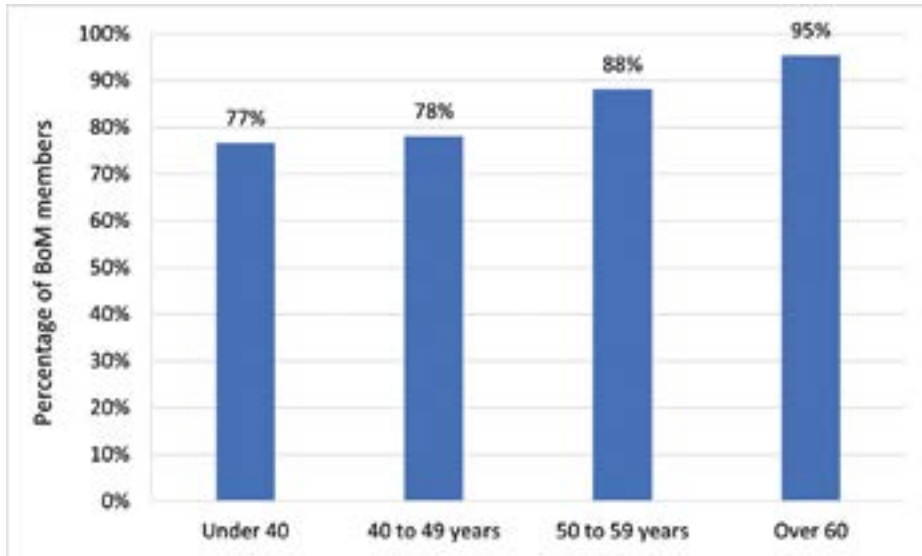
*Figure 1.1 Age and gender profile of BoM members<sup>2</sup>*



<sup>2</sup> Seventeen board of management members did not state either their age or gender.

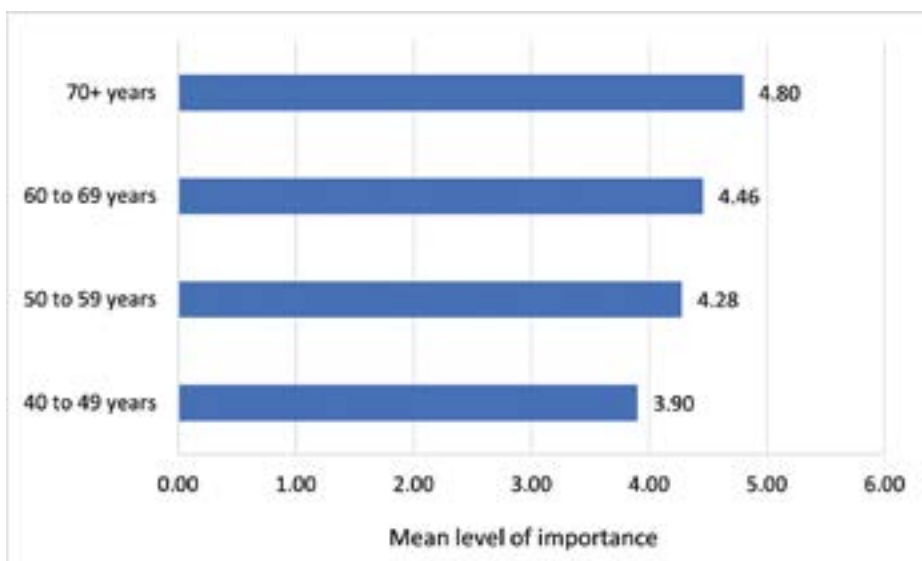
The vast majority (89%) of BoM members report that they believe in God. Almost 6 per cent report that they do not know if they believe in God, while a further 5 per cent state that they do not believe in God. As Figure 1.2 illustrates, belief in God is associated with age; older BoM members are more likely to believe in God.

*Figure 1.2 Percentage of BoM members, by age cohort, who believe in God*



BoM members were (as were all other cohorts) asked to indicate on a scale from 0 (not important) to 5 (very important) the importance of God in their lives. The mean values (presented in Figure 1.3) further illustrate the association between age and belief.

*Figure 1.3 Level of importance of God in the lives of BoM members – mean scores by age cohort<sup>3</sup>*



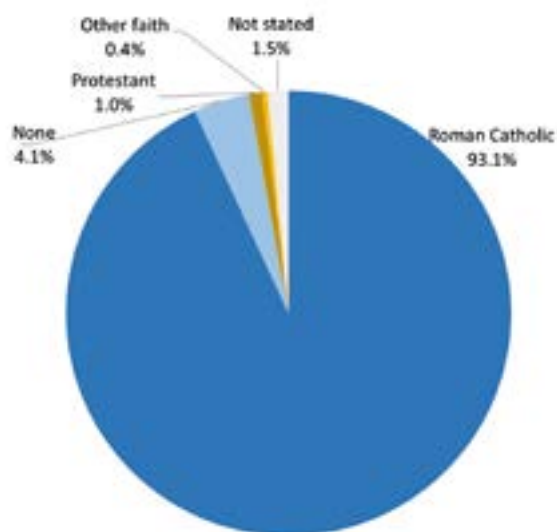
As the pie chart in Figure 1.4 shows, the vast majority (over 93% of the total and almost 95% at secondary school level) of BoM members describe themselves as Roman Catholics. A small proportion (1.4%) belongs to a Protestant church or other faith community, and 4 per cent report that they do not have any religious affiliation.

<sup>3</sup> The calculations include only those who stated that they believe in God. Age cohorts (18 to 29 and 30 to 39 years) have been excluded, as they contain less than 5 per cent of the valid cases for this computation.



Figure 1.4 BoM members by self-declared religious affiliation

When the responses in respect of religious affiliation are analysed by age, the calculations reveal that older BoM members are somewhat more likely to adhere to Roman Catholicism than are younger BoM members. Almost 96 per cent of those who are aged 50+ describe themselves as Roman Catholic, while among those aged under 50, the corresponding proportion is 87 per cent.

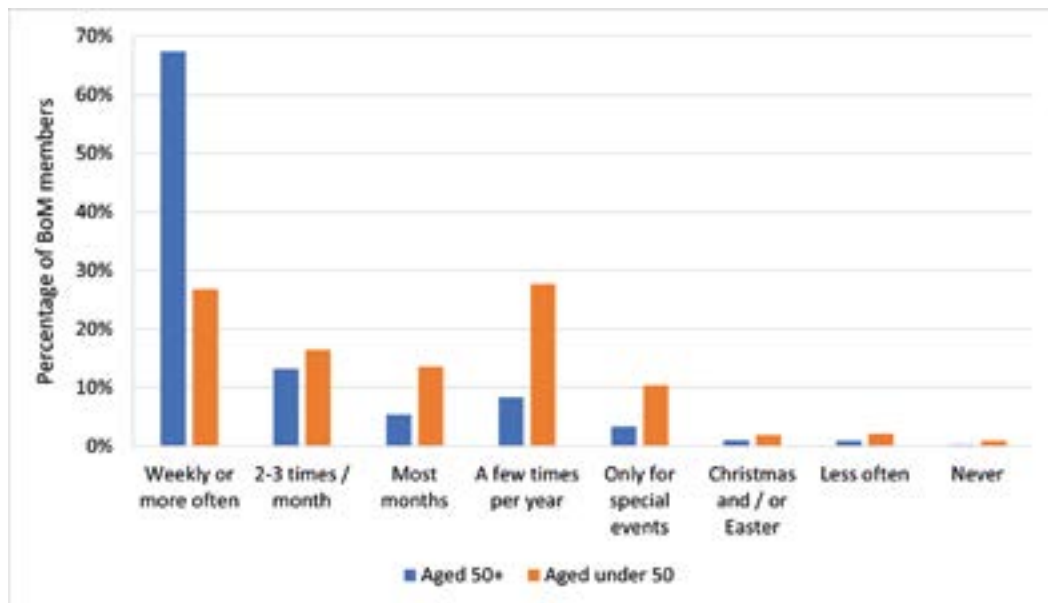


Among those who belong to a faith community, the majority (56%) report that they attend a religious service at least once per week. A further 14 per cent attend two to three times per month, while an additional 8 per cent attend most months. The figures are broadly similar at both primary and secondary school levels.

As Figure 1.5 shows, attendance levels are higher among older BoM members than they are among younger BoM members.



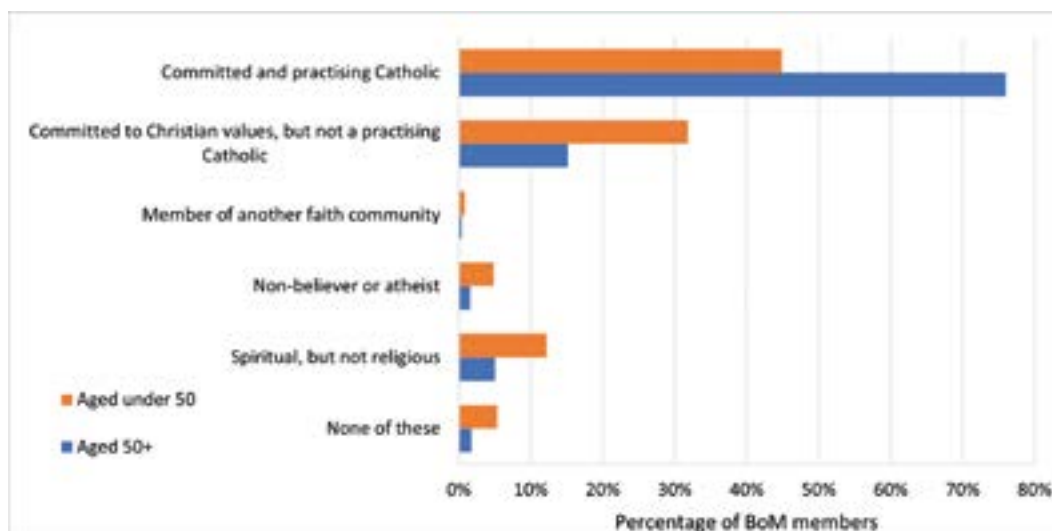
Figure 1.5 Frequency of attendance at religious services, among BoM members, by age cohort (<50, 50+)<sup>4</sup>



There are no notable differences with regard to gender in respect of attendance at religious services; rates are broadly the same for males and females across all age cohorts, and they are similar at both primary and secondary school levels.

Just over two-thirds of BoM members (at both school levels) describe themselves as ‘committed and practising Catholics’, and almost 20 per cent say they are ‘committed to Christian values, but not a practising Catholic’. Figure 1.6 shows how BoM members, aged up to 50 and aged 50+, describe themselves. It reveals that there is a gap of over 30 percentage points between the proportion of BoM members who are aged 50+ (76%) and those aged under 50 (45%) who describe themselves as committed and practising Catholics. The graph also shows that almost a third of BoM members who are aged under 50 describe themselves as ‘committed to Christian values, but not a practising Catholic’, while a further 12 per cent consider themselves to be ‘spiritual, but not religious’.

Figure 1.6: BoM members’ descriptions of their personal religiosity



<sup>4</sup> Respondents who stated they do not have a religious affiliation have been excluded from the figures presented here.

The survey findings, in respect of BoM members, reveal that:

- They have the oldest age profile and the highest proportion of males of the personnel cohorts covered by this study.
- While 90 per cent of BoM members report that they believe in God, this proportion is below 80 per cent among those who are aged under 50.
- There is a marked contrast in the level of religiosity between older and younger BoM members.



## School Principals and Deputy Principals

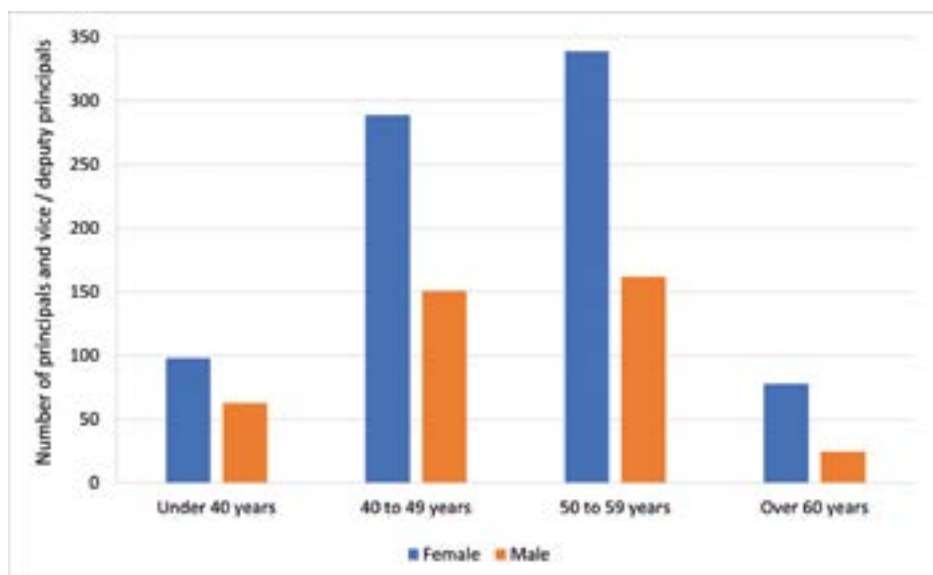
Report 4 in this series provides comprehensive and in-depth insights into the perspectives, experiences, roles and responsibilities of school principals – given their pivotal role in bearing witness and giving effect to the Catholic ethos in the daily life of schools. Deputy principals also play important leadership roles, while also supporting principals. This section looks at both principals and deputy/assistant principals, and it presents data in respect of their beliefs and religiosity.

*These figures indicate that in 15 years' time, school leadership will come almost entirely from those who are currently aged under 50. Thus, the religious outlooks of principals who are aged under 50 provide useful insights into attitudes and practices that are likely to pertain in our schools from the early 2030s onwards.*

*A large majority (90%) of principals and deputy principals report that they believe in God. Over 7 per cent report that they do not know if they believe in God, while a further 2 per cent state that they do not believe in God.*

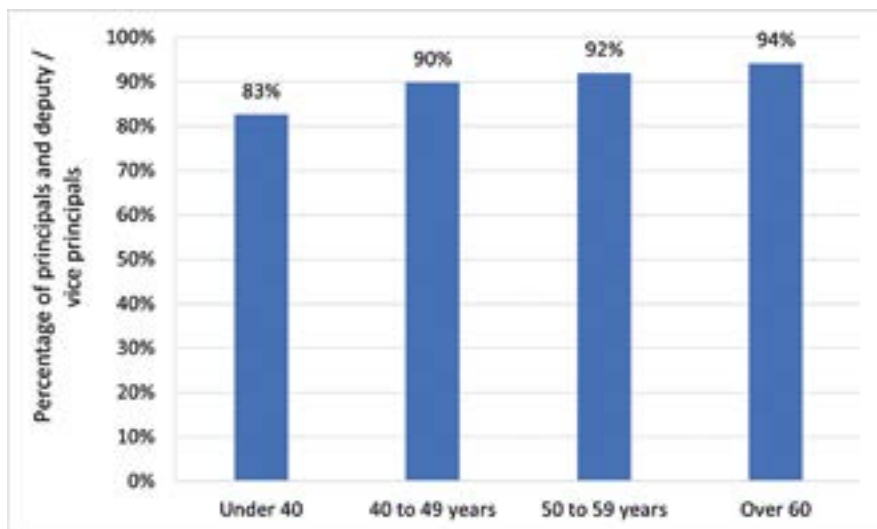
Over twelve hundred (n = 1,228; 1,111 primary and 117 secondary) principals and deputy principals responded to our survey questionnaire. Of these, almost two-thirds (66%) are females. As Figure 1.7 shows, just over half (50%) of principals and deputy principals are aged over 50, and almost 9 per cent are aged over 60. These figures indicate that in 15 years' time, school leadership will come almost entirely from those who are currently aged under 50. Thus, the religious outlooks of principals who are aged under 50 provide useful insights into attitudes and practices that are likely to pertain in our schools from the early 2030s onwards.

Figure 1.7 Age and gender profile of principals and deputy principals<sup>5</sup>



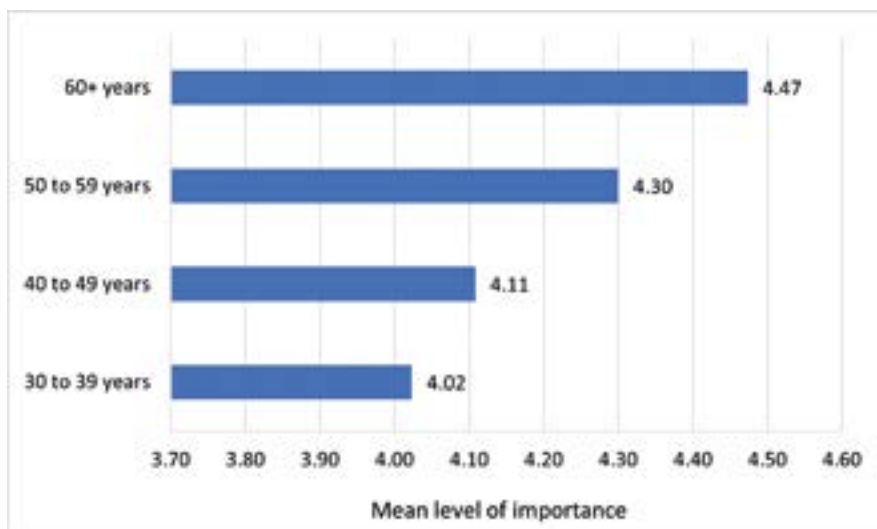
<sup>5</sup> Eighteen principals and deputy principals did not state either their age or their gender.

Figure 1.8 Percentage of principals and deputy principals, by age cohort, who believe in God



Principals and deputy principals were (as were all other cohorts) asked to indicate on a scale from 0 (not important) to 5 (very important) the importance of God in their lives. The mean values (presented in Figure 1.9) further illustrate the association between age and belief.

Figure 1.9: Level of importance of God in the lives of principals and deputy principals – mean scores by age cohort<sup>6</sup>

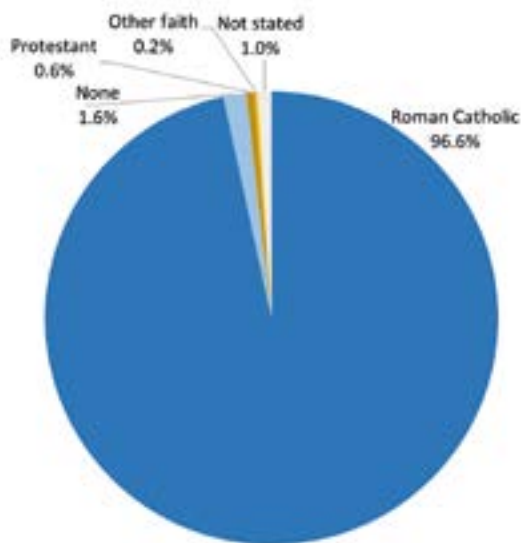


As the pie chart in Figure 1.10 shows, the vast majority (almost 97%) of principals and deputy principals describe themselves as Roman Catholics. A small number (0.8%) belong to a Protestant church (0.6%) or other faith community (0.2%). Under 2 per cent report that they do not have any religious affiliation.

<sup>6</sup> The calculations include only those who stated that they believe in God. The age cohort (18 to 29 years) has been excluded, as it contains less than 5 per cent of the valid cases for this computation.

*Figure 1.10 Principals and deputy principals by self-declared religious affiliation*

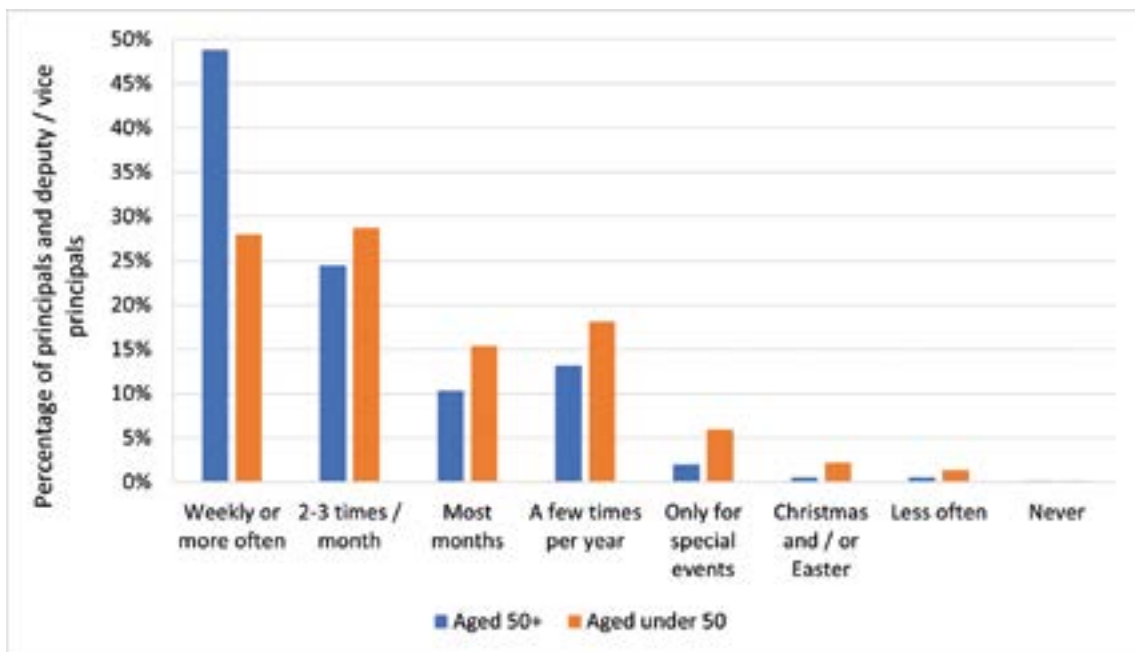
When the responses in respect of religious affiliation are analysed by age, the calculations reveal little difference among those aged under and over 50. Almost 98 per cent of those who are aged 50+ describe themselves as Roman Catholic, while among those aged under 50, the corresponding proportion is 96 per cent.



Among those who belong to a faith community, almost 40 per cent (38%) report that they attend a religious service at least once per week. A further 27 per cent attend twice to three times per month, while an additional 13 per cent attend most months.

As Figure 1.11 shows, attendance levels are higher among older principals and deputy principals than they are among younger principals and deputy principals.

*Figure 1.11 Frequency of attendance at religious services, among principals and deputy principals, by age cohort (<50, 50+)<sup>7</sup>*



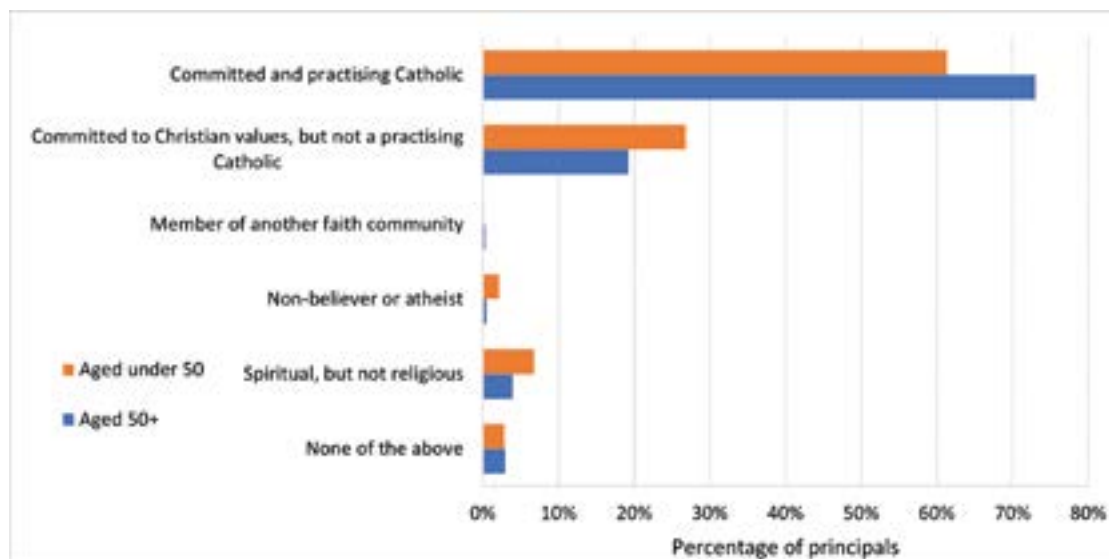
A further analysis of the figures indicates that there are some differences with regard to gender in respect of attendance at religious services. A slightly higher proportion (+5 percentage points) of females (40%) than males (35%) attend a religious service each week.

<sup>7</sup> Respondents who stated they do not have a religious affiliation have been excluded from the figures presented here.

Just over two-thirds (67%) of principals and deputy principals, across both school levels, describe themselves as ‘committed and practising Catholics’, and almost a quarter (23%) say they are ‘committed to Christian values, but not a practising Catholic’. Figure 1.12 shows how principals and deputy principals, aged up to 50 and aged 50+, describe themselves. It reveals that there is a gap of over 11 percentage points between the proportion of principals and deputy principals who are aged 50+ (73%) and those aged under 50 (61%) who describe themselves as committed and practising Catholics. The graph also shows that over a quarter of principals and deputy principals who are aged under 50 describe themselves as ‘committed to Christian values, but not a practising Catholic’, while a further 7 per cent consider themselves to be ‘spiritual, but not religious’. The percentages are broadly similar among primary and secondary school principals.

*Just over two-thirds (67%) of principals and deputy principals, across both school levels, describe themselves as ‘committed and practising Catholics’, and almost a quarter (23%) say they are ‘committed to Christian values, but not a practising Catholic’.*

Figure 1.12 Principals and deputy principals’ descriptions of their personal religiosity



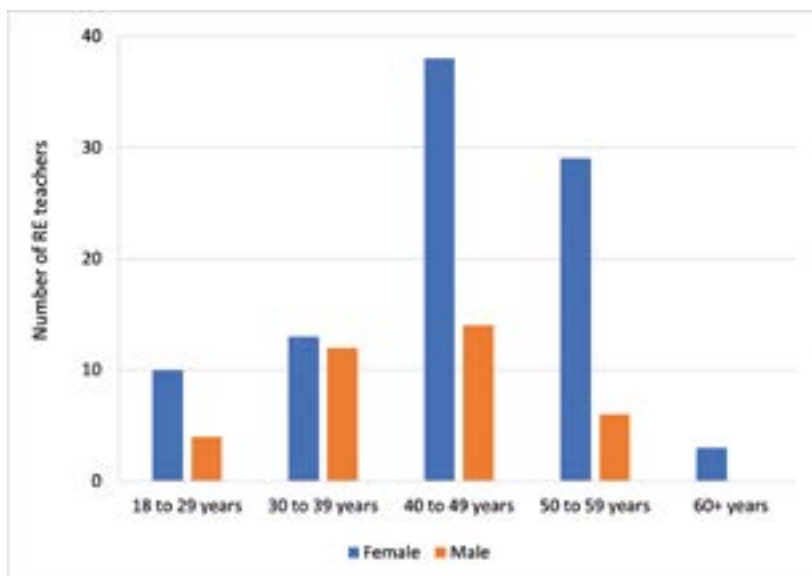
The survey findings, in respect of principals and deputy principals, reveal that:

- They have the second highest proportion of any cohort (after RE teachers) who describe themselves as Roman Catholic.
- Almost two-thirds attend a religious service at least every month.
- Age is less significant as a determinant of religiosity than is the case among other personnel cohorts.

## Religious Education Teachers

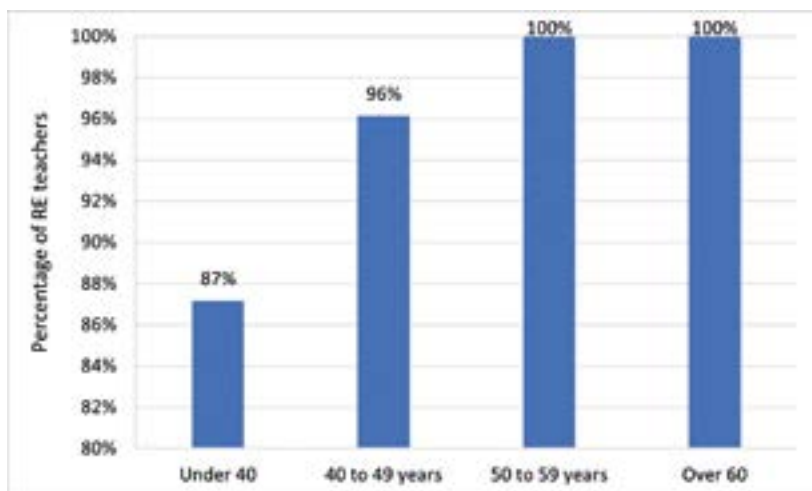
One hundred and twenty-nine (n = 129) Religious Education (RE) teachers in secondary schools responded to our survey questionnaire. Of these, a substantial majority (72%) are females. As Figure 1.13 shows, just over 40 per cent of RE teachers are aged 40 to 49 years, while approximately one-third are aged under 40 and a further third are aged over 50. Thus, 70 per cent of RE teachers are aged under 50.

Figure 1.13 Age and gender profile of RE teachers



A large majority (95%) of, but not all, RE teachers report that they believe in God, while the remainder state that they do not know if they believe in God. As Figure 1.14 illustrates, belief in God is associated with age; older RE teachers are more likely to believe in God.

Figure 1.14 Percentage of RE teachers, by age cohort, who believe in God

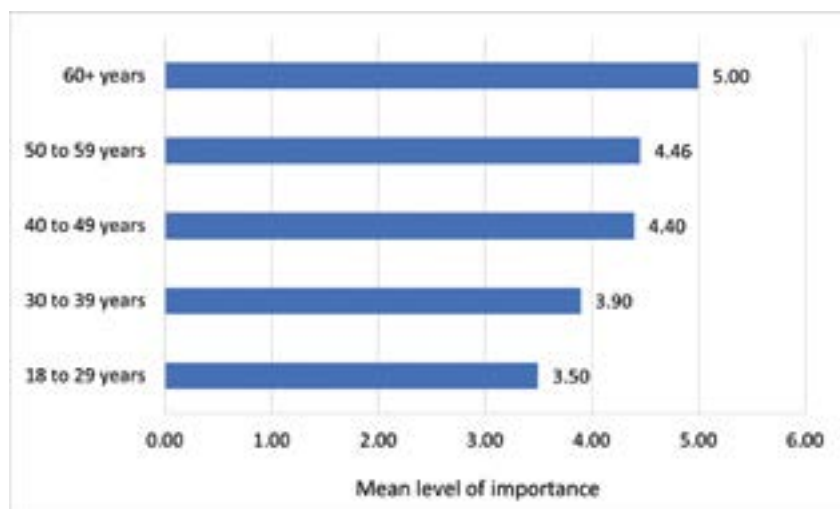


*A large majority (95%) of, but not all, RE teachers report that they believe in God.*



RE teachers were (as were all other cohorts) asked to indicate on a scale from 0 (not important) to 5 (very important) the importance of God in their lives. The mean values (presented in Figure 1.15) further illustrate the association between age and belief.

Figure 1.15 Level of importance of God in the lives of RE teachers – mean scores by age cohort

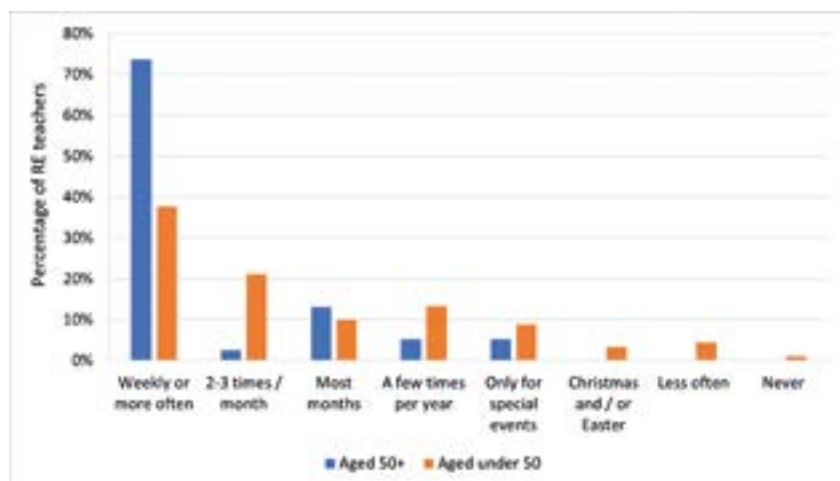


Almost all (98%) of RE teachers describe themselves as Roman Catholics. The remainder belong to other faith communities.

Just under half (48%) of RE teachers report that they attend a religious service at least once per week. A further 16 per cent attend twice to three times per month, while an additional 11 per cent attend most months. As Figure 1.16 shows, attendance levels are higher among older RE teachers than they are among younger RE teachers. The differences between those aged under 50 and 50+ are greater among RE teachers than among all other cohorts covered by this study; there is a difference of almost 36 percentage points between the proportion of RE teachers aged 50+ (74%) and those aged under 50 (38%) who attend religious services each week.

*Just under half (48%) of RE teachers report that they attend a religious service at least once per week.*

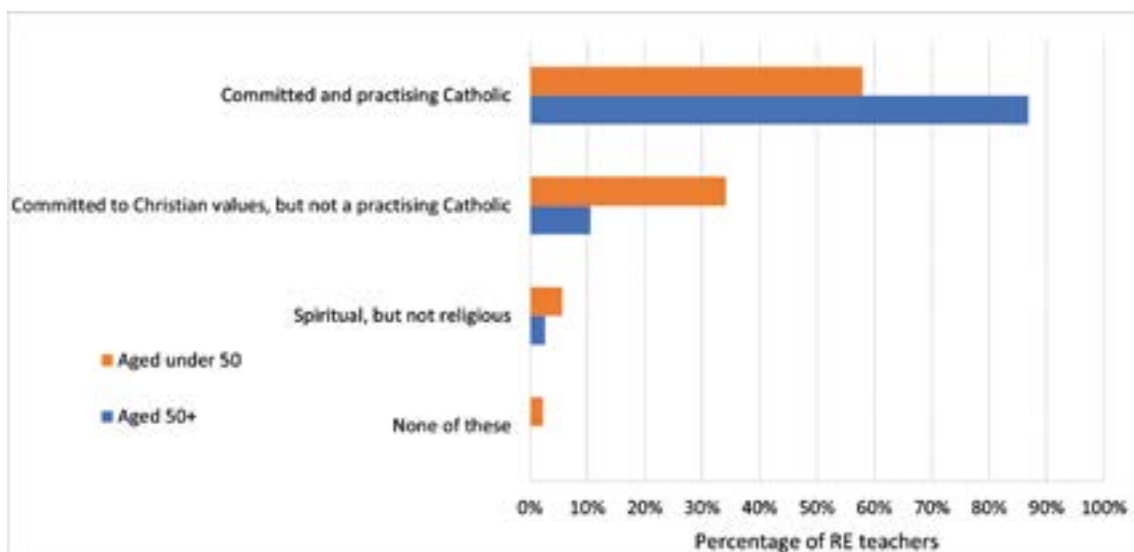
Figure 1.16 Frequency of attendance at religious services, among RE teacher, by age cohort (<50, 50+)



A further analysis of the figures indicates that there are some differences with regard to gender in respect of attendance at religious services. A higher proportion (+6.1 percentage points) of males (52.8%) than females (46.7%) attend a religious service each week. However, females are more likely than are males to attend a religious service on a monthly basis; the respective values are females 16.3 per cent and males 13.9 per cent.

Just over two-thirds (67%) of RE teachers describe themselves as 'committed and practising Catholics', and over a quarter (27%) say they are 'committed to Christian values, but not a practising Catholic'. Figure 1.17 shows how RE teachers, aged up to 50 and aged 50+, describe themselves. It reveals that there is a substantial gap of almost 29 percentage points between the proportion of teachers who are aged 50+ (87%) and those aged under 50 (58%), who describe themselves as committed and practising Catholics. The graph also shows that over a third (34%) of RE teachers who are aged under 50 describe themselves as 'committed to Christian values, but not a practising Catholic', while a further 6 per cent consider themselves to be 'spiritual, but not religious'.

*Figure 1.17: RE teachers' descriptions of their personal religiosity*



The survey findings, in respect of RE teachers, reveal that:

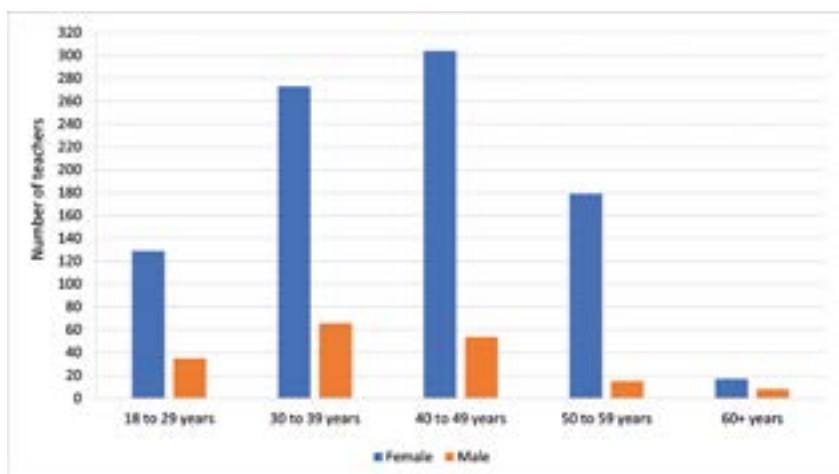
- They have the highest level of affiliation to Roman Catholicism of all cohorts.
- While almost half (48%) attend a religious service at least every week, there is a marked contrast between the proportion of those aged 50+ (74%) and those aged under 50 (38%), who do so.
- All RE teachers who are aged 50+ believe in God, but among those who are aged under 40, this proportion falls to 87 per cent.
- Less than 60 per cent of RE teachers who are aged under 50 describe themselves as committed and practising Catholics.

*All RE teachers who are aged 50+ believe in God, but among those who are aged under 40, this proportion falls to 87 per cent.*

## Subject and Class Teachers

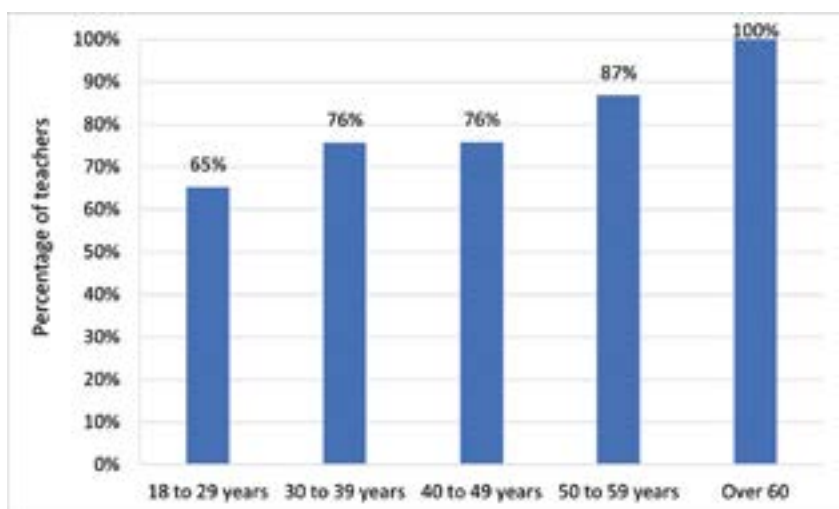
Over one thousand (n = 1,096) teachers, comprising 794 class teachers in primary schools and 302 subject (other than RE) teachers in secondary schools, responded to our survey questionnaire.<sup>8</sup> Of these, a substantial majority (82%) are females. As Figure 1.18 shows, almost 47 per cent of teachers are aged under 40, a third are aged 40 to 49 years, and a fifth are aged over 50.

Figure 1.18 Age and gender profile of teachers<sup>9</sup>



Just over three-quarters (77%) of teachers report that they believe in God, while 13 per cent state that they do not know if they believe in God and 10 per cent<sup>10</sup> state that they do not believe in God. Figure 1.19 illustrates, as is the case with other cohorts, that belief in God is associated with age; older teachers are more likely to believe in God.

Figure 1.19 Percentage of teachers, by age cohort, who believe in God



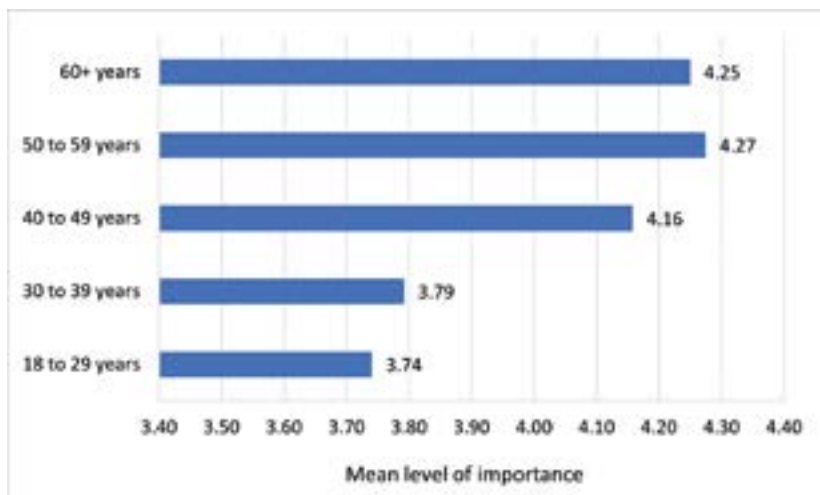
<sup>8</sup> Class (primary) and subject (secondary) teachers are referred to hereafter as teachers.

<sup>9</sup> Sixteen teachers did not state either their age or gender.

<sup>10</sup> While this figure is considerably higher than the 0.01% (n = 3,823 persons) recorded (among the general population) in the most recent census of population (2022), it should be noted that longitudinal trends show an increase in the number of persons in Ireland describing themselves as atheist – from 320 persons in 1991 to 7,769 persons in 2016. Another factor in respect of the census figures is that the CSO made changes to the question on religion for Census 2022. For Census 2022, the words ‘if any’ were added to the question about religion. In Census 2016, the responses to the question ‘What is your religion?’ were sequenced as follows: Roman Catholic; Church of Ireland; Islam; Presbyterian; Orthodox; Other (write in your RELIGION); and No religion. In Census 2022, the sequence of responses to the question ‘What is your religion, if any?’ was as follows: No religion; Roman Catholic; Church of Ireland; Islam; Orthodox Christian; Presbyterian; and Other, write in your RELIGION.

Teachers were asked (as were all other cohorts) to indicate on a scale from 0 (not important) to 5 (very important) the importance of God in their lives. The mean values (presented in Figure 1.20) further illustrate the association between age and belief.

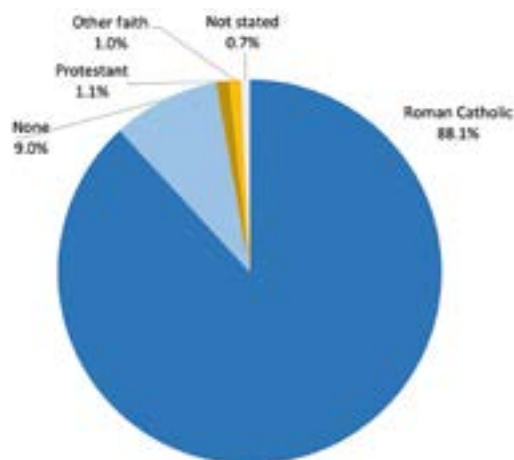
*Figure 1.20 Level of importance of God in the lives of teachers – mean scores by age cohort*



A large majority (88%) of teachers describe themselves as Roman Catholics. A further 9 per cent state that they have no religious affiliation, while smaller numbers belong to other faith communities. Less than 1 per cent of teachers declined to state their religious affiliation. The pie chart in Figure 1.21 presents teachers’ stated religious affiliations.

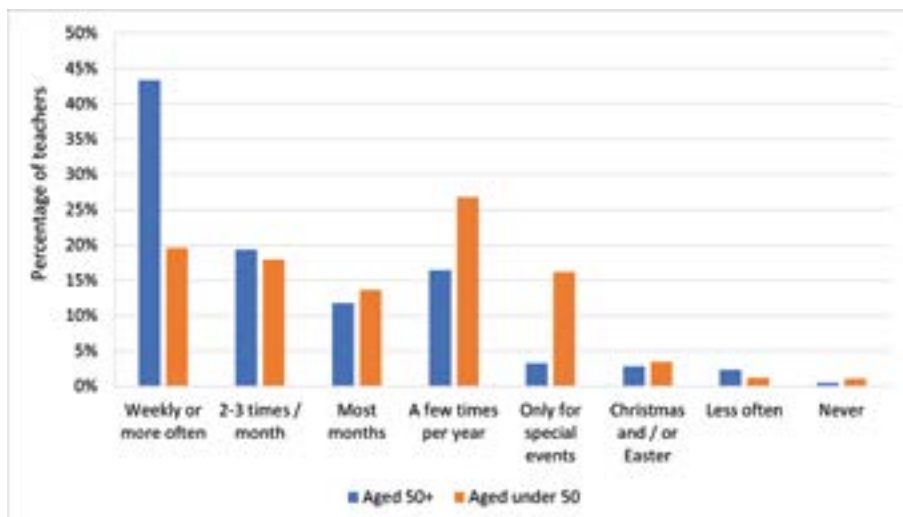
*Figure 1.21 Teachers by self-declared religious affiliation*

When the responses in respect of religious affiliation are analysed by age, the calculations reveal that older teachers are more likely to adhere to Roman Catholicism than are younger teachers. Almost 93 per cent of those who are aged 50+ describe themselves as Roman Catholic, while among those aged under 50, the corresponding proportion is 87 per cent.



Less than a quarter (24.8%) of all teachers who belong to a faith community report that they attend a religious service at least once per week. A further 18 per cent attend twice to three times per month, while an additional 13 per cent attend most months. Almost as many teachers (24.6%) attend a religious service ‘a few times per year’ as those who attend every week. As Figure 1.22 shows, attendance levels are notably higher among older teachers than they are among younger teachers. The differences between those aged under 50 and 50+ are greater among teachers than among all other cohorts covered by this study; there is a difference of over 23 percentage points between the proportion of teachers aged 50+ (43%) and those aged under 50 (20%) who attend religious services each week. These are the lowest levels of attendance among all of the cohorts covered by this study.

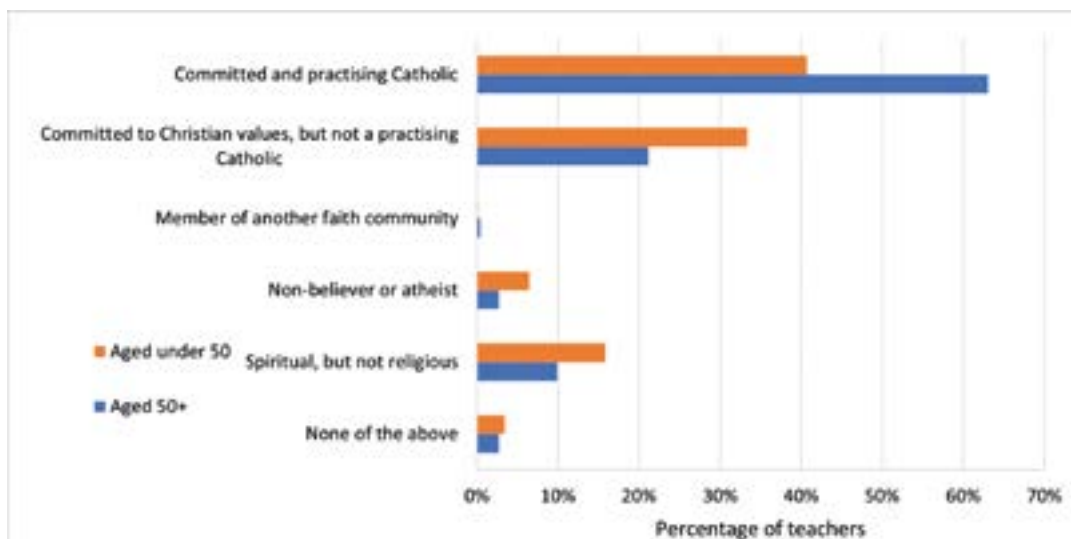
Figure 1.22 Frequency of attendance at religious services, among teachers, by age cohort (<50, 50+)¹¹



A further analysis of the responses reveals that there are some differences with regard to gender in respect of attendance at religious services. A higher proportion (+4 percentage points) of female teachers than male teachers attend a religious service each week. Females are also more likely than are males to attend a religious service on a monthly basis; the respective values are females 25 per cent weekly and 19 per cent at least monthly and males 21 per cent weekly and 13 per cent monthly.

Less than half (45%) of all teachers describe themselves as ‘committed and practising Catholics’, while just under a third (31%) say they are ‘committed to Christian values, but not a practising Catholic’. Almost 15 per cent of teachers state they are spiritual, but not religious. Figure 1.23 shows how teachers, aged up to 50 and aged 50+, describe themselves. It reveals that there is a substantial gap of over 22 percentage points between the proportion of teachers aged 50+ (63%) and those aged under 50 (41%) who describe themselves as committed and practising Catholics. The graph also shows that over 6 per cent (6.5%) of teachers who are aged under 50 describe themselves as a ‘non-believer or atheist’.

Figure 1.23 Teachers’ descriptions of their personal religiosity



¹¹ Respondents who stated they do not have a religious affiliation have been excluded from the figures presented here.

The survey findings, in respect of teachers, reveal that:

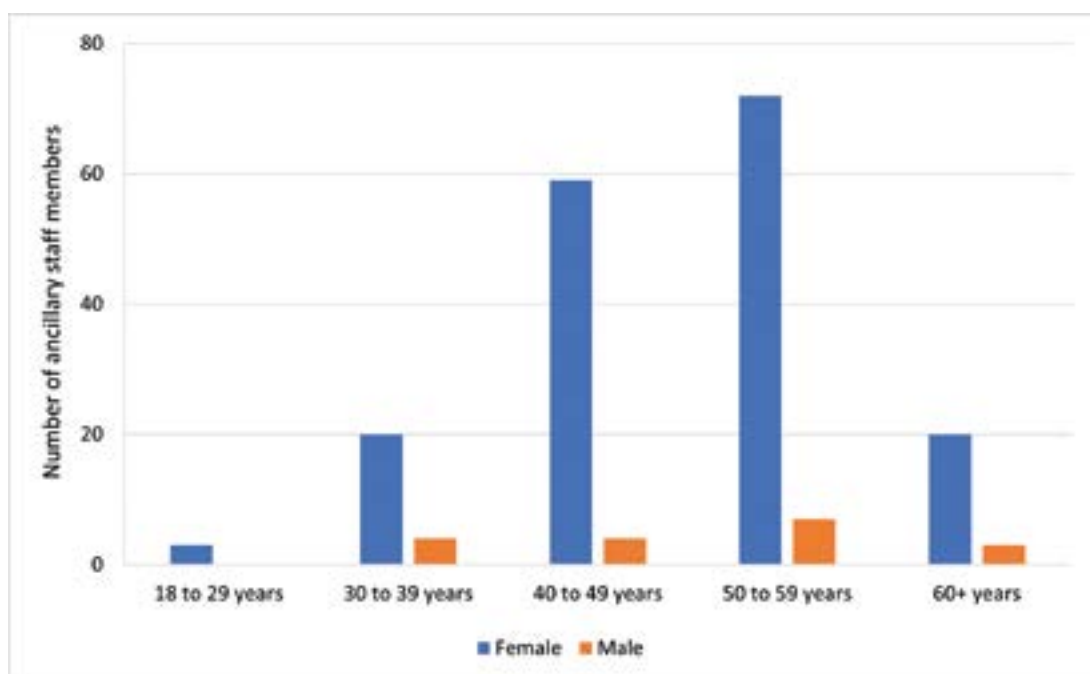
- Teachers have the youngest age profile of the cohorts surveyed here.
- While the vast majority (88%) describe themselves as Roman Catholics, less than a quarter attend a religious service each week.
- Teachers have the lowest levels of religiosity among the cohorts covered in this study



## Ancillary (Non-Teaching) School Staff

Almost two hundred (n = 196) ancillary staff members responded to our survey questionnaire. These include school secretaries/administrators, special needs assistants, caretakers, cleaners, pastoral workers, chaplains, guidance councillors and classroom assistants. The majority (62%, n = 122) of respondents in these roles work in primary schools, while the remainder (38%, n = 74) work in secondary schools. The vast majority (89%) of this cohort are females. As Figure 1.24 shows, just over half (53%) of ancillary staff members are aged over 50, and one in seven is aged under 40. Thus, their age profile is more similar to that of principals and deputy principals than of teaching staff.

Figure 1.24 Age and gender profile of ancillary staff members<sup>12</sup>

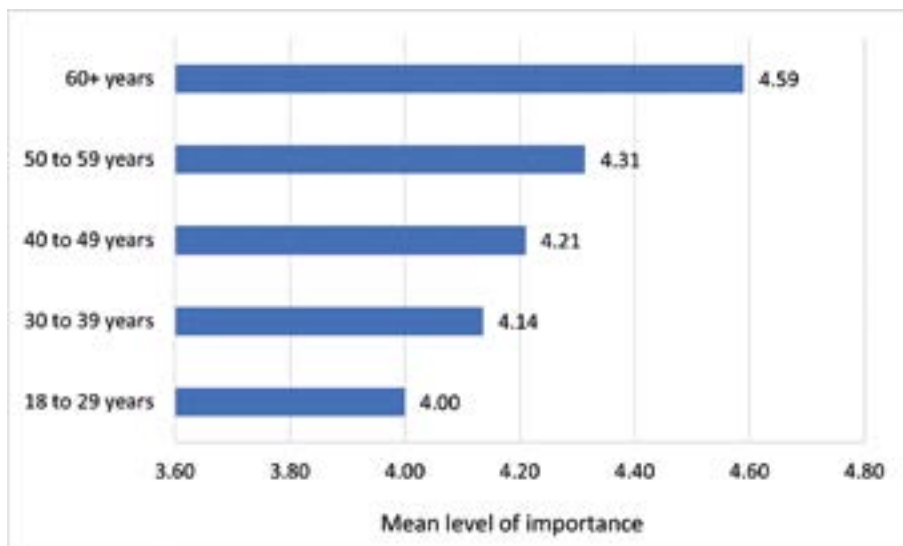


The vast majority of ancillary staff members (86% to 89% at primary school level and 94% at secondary school level) report that they believe in God, while 7 per cent state that they do not know if they believe in God and 4 per cent state that they do not believe in God. There are fewer differences, by age cohort, with respect to belief in God than is the case among others in the school community. The proportion of ancillary staff who believe in God ranges from 88 per cent among those aged 30 to 39 years to 91 per cent among those aged over 60.

Ancillary staff members were asked (as were all other cohorts) to indicate on a scale from 0 (not important) to 5 (very important) the importance of God in their lives. The mean values (presented in Figure 1.25) further illustrate the association between age and belief.

<sup>12</sup> Four ancillary staff members did not state either their age or gender.

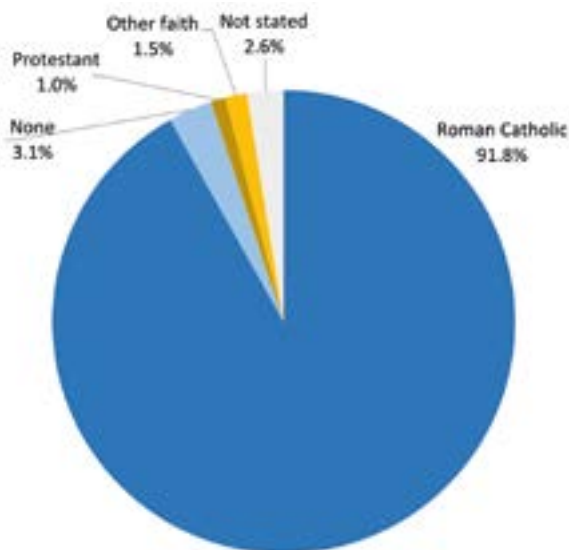
*Figure 1.25 Level of importance of God in the lives of ancillary staff members – mean scores by age cohort*



A large majority (92%) of ancillary staff members describe themselves as Roman Catholics. A further 3 per cent state that they have no religious affiliation, while fewer than 2 per cent belong to other faith communities. Just under 3 per cent of ancillary staff members declined to state their religious affiliation. The pie chart in Figure 1.26 presents ancillary staff members’ stated religious affiliations.

*Figure 1.26 Ancillary staff members by self-declared religious affiliation*

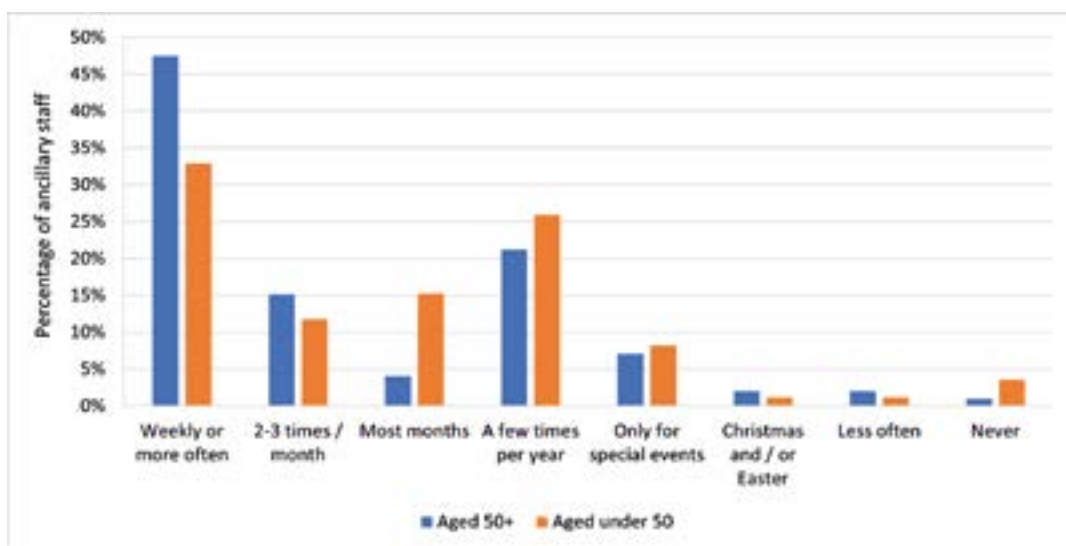
The survey findings indicate that age has no bearing on religious affiliation among ancillary staff members.



Just over 40 per cent (41%) of ancillary staff members who belong to a faith community report that they attend a religious service at least once per week. A further 13 per cent attend twice to three times per month, while an additional 9 per cent attend most months. Almost a quarter (23%) of ancillary staff report that they attend a religious service a few times per year. As Figure 1.27 shows, attendance levels are higher among older ancillary staff members than they are among younger ancillary staff members; there is a difference of almost 15 percentage points between the proportion of ancillary staff members aged 50+ (47%) and those aged under 50 (33%) who attend religious services each week. Values are broadly similar across the primary and secondary school cohorts.



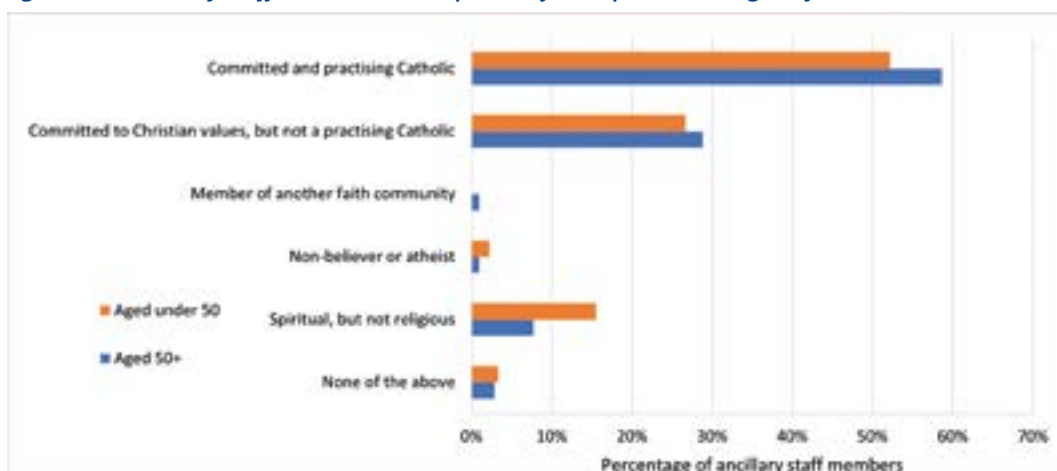
Figure 1.27 Frequency of attendance at religious services, among ancillary staff members, by age cohort (<50, 50+)¹³



A further analysis of the responses reveals that there are differences with regard to gender in respect of attendance at religious services. A far higher proportion (+41 percentage points) of males (78%) than females (38%) attend a religious service each week. Almost 15 per cent of female ancillary staff attend religious services less often than ‘a few times per year’ or not at all. Given the relatively small proportion of males among school ancillary staff, it is not possible to claim any statistical significance with respect to gender and its relationship with attendance at religious services.

Over half (56%) of ancillary staff members describe themselves as ‘committed and practising Catholics’, while just over a quarter (28%) say they are ‘committed to Christian values, but not a practising Catholic’. Over 11 per cent of ancillary staff members state they are spiritual, but not religious. Figure 1.28 shows that, among ancillary staff members, age is less significant as a determinant of religiosity than is the case among other cohorts who participated in this survey; the gaps between those who are aged under 50 and those who are aged over 50 are less pronounced among the ancillary staff members.

Figure 1.28 Ancillary staff members’ descriptions of their personal religiosity



¹³ Respondents who stated they do not have a religious affiliation have been excluded from the figures presented here.

The survey findings, in respect of ancillary staff members, reveal that:

- The vast majority (92%) are Roman Catholics, while slightly over half (53%) attend a religious service at least a few times per month.
- As is the case with other cohorts, the proportion who believe in God (89%) is lower than the proportion who describe themselves as Catholic.



## Overview of Personal and Religious Characteristics by Survey Cohort (Personnel)

The following set of tables provides a summary of the data that have been presented already throughout this report. They present a breakdown of the main findings in respect of religious affiliation, belief in God, frequency of attendance at religious services, and level of religiosity.

In summary:

- 94 per cent of personnel (voluntary and professional) are Roman Catholics. The highest values are among principals and deputy principals and among BoM members. The lowest values are among teachers.
- 40 per cent of personnel who are members of faith communities attend a religious service weekly. Values range from 48 per cent among RE teachers to 23 per cent among all other teachers.
- 86 per cent of personnel believe in God. Almost 6 per cent do not. The remainder do not know if they believe or not.
- 60 per cent of personnel describe themselves as committed and practising Catholics. The highest values are among BoM members, principals and deputy principals (both 67%) and RE teachers (66%).
- Of all the independent variables included in this survey, age emerges as having the greatest influence on religious affiliation, beliefs and practices; the findings reveal a clear linear relationship between youth and low levels of religiosity.

*86 % of personnel believe in God. Almost 6% do not. The remainder do not know if they believe or not.*

*Of all the independent variables included in this survey, age emerges as having the greatest influence on religious affiliation, beliefs and practices; the findings reveal a clear linear relationship between youth and low levels of religiosity.*

**Table 1.2 Religious affiliation by personnel cohort**

Religious Affiliation	BoM Member	Principal / DP	RE Teacher	Teacher	Ancillary Staff	All Respondents
Roman Catholic	94.51%	97.53%	97.67%	88.79%	94.24%	93.94%
Church of Ireland	0.48%	0.49%	0.00%	0.74%	0.00%	0.52%
Other Protestant	0.48%	0.08%	0.78%	0.37%	1.05%	0.36%
Islam	0.08%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.03%
Orthodox	0.16%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.05%
Other	0.16%	0.25%	1.55%	1.01%	1.57%	0.54%
None	4.12%	1.64%	0.00%	9.10%	3.14%	4.56%

**Table 1.3 Frequency of attendance at religious services (among those who are members of faith communities by personnel cohort**

Frequency	BoM Member	Principal / DP	RE Teacher	Teacher	Ancillary Staff	All Respondents
Weekly or more often	54.66%	37.99%	48.44%	23.46%	39.47%	39.82%
2 - 3 times / month	13.89%	26.18%	15.63%	17.31%	13.16%	18.76%
Most months	7.35%	12.64%	10.94%	12.50%	8.95%	10.65%
A few times per year	13.64%	15.46%	10.94%	23.46%	23.16%	17.31%
Christmas and / or Easter	1.23%	1.41%	2.34%	3.27%	1.58%	1.90%
Less often	1.23%	1.00%	3.13%	1.44%	1.58%	1.29%
Only for special events	7.11%	4.82%	7.81%	14.90%	8.95%	8.64%
Never	0.90%	0.50%	0.78%	3.65%	3.16%	1.64%

**Table 1.4 Levels of belief and unbelief in God by personnel cohort**

Belief in God	BoM Member	Principal / DP	RE Teacher	Teacher	Ancillary Staff	All Respondents
Yes	88.61%	90.20%	94.57%	76.65%	89.12%	85.97%
Don't know	5.93%	7.41%	5.43%	13.24%	6.74%	8.47%
No	5.45%	2.39%	0.00%	10.11%	4.15%	5.55%

**Table 1.5 Descriptions of their personal religiosity by personnel cohort**

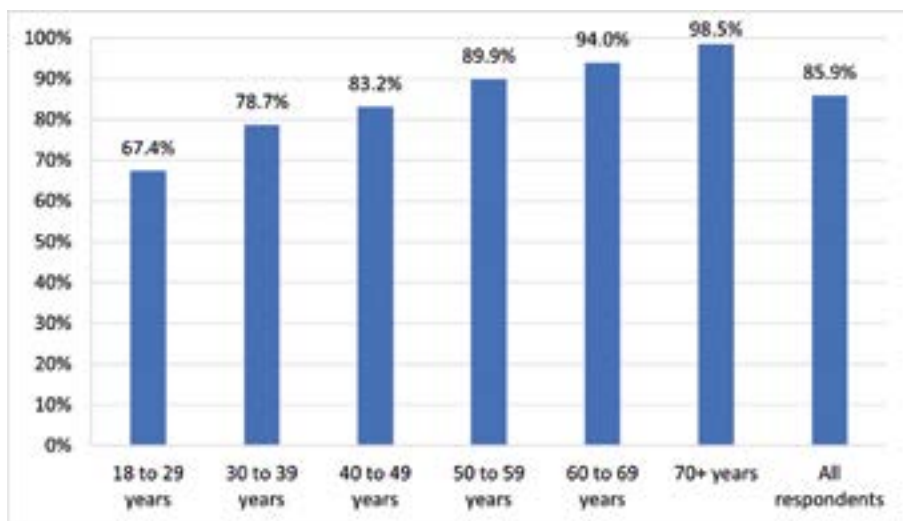
Description	BoM Member	Principal / DP	RE Teacher	Teacher	Ancillary Staff	All Respondents
Committed and practising Catholic	67.17%	67.16%	66.67%	45.27%	55.67%	60.42%
Committed to Christian values, but not a practising Catholic	19.94%	23.07%	26.98%	30.85%	27.84%	24.61%
Member of another faith community	0.56%	0.25%	0.00%	0.18%	0.52%	0.34%
Spiritual, but not religious	7.05%	5.34%	4.76%	14.60%	11.34%	8.77%
Non-believer or atheist	2.48%	1.31%	0.00%	5.79%	1.55%	2.92%
None of the above	2.80%	2.87%	1.59%	3.31%	3.09%	2.94%

## The Significance of Age

The data presented in this report point to the significance of age as a determinant of religiosity. While this relationship (between age and other variables) transcends all cohorts, it is most evident among teachers and members of BoMs. The following graphs provide further illustrations of the significance of age.

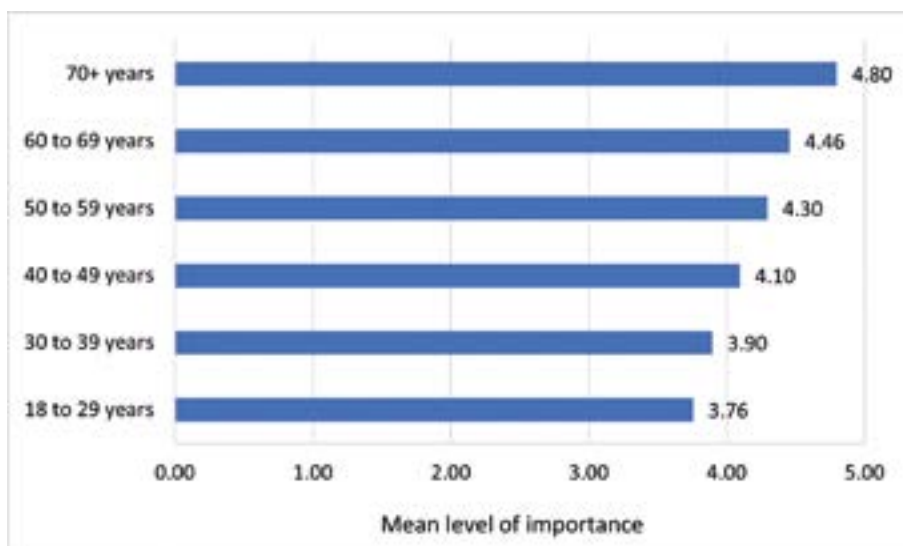
As noted earlier, the vast majority (86%) of survey respondents state that they believe in God. Yet, as Figure 1.29 shows, the proportion of persons who believes in God ranges from 67 per cent of those aged <30 to over 94 per cent of those aged 60+.

Figure 1.29 Proportion of respondents who believe in God, by age cohort



There is also a linear relationship between age and the importance of God in a person's life, as Figure 1.30 illustrates. The figures presented here relate only to those who state that they believe in God, and they reveal that on a scale from 0 (not important) to 5 (very important), the mean value among those aged 70+ is 4.80, while among those aged <30 the mean value is 3.76.

Figure 1.30: Mean level of the importance of God in their personal lives, by age cohort



The survey findings also reveal a correlation between age and the frequency of attendance at religious services. Survey respondents who are aged 50+ are more than twice as likely than younger respondents to attend a religious service each week. As Figure 1.31 shows, three-quarters of personnel who are aged 50+ attend a religious service at least twice per month. The corresponding proportion among those aged <50 is 46 per cent. Almost 40 per cent of those aged <50 only attend a religious service 'a few times per year', 'only for special occasions' or less often.

*Survey respondents who are aged 50+ are more than twice as likely than younger respondents to attend a religious service each week.*

Figure 1.31 Frequency of attendance at religious services, by age cohort (<50, 50+) (all personnel)

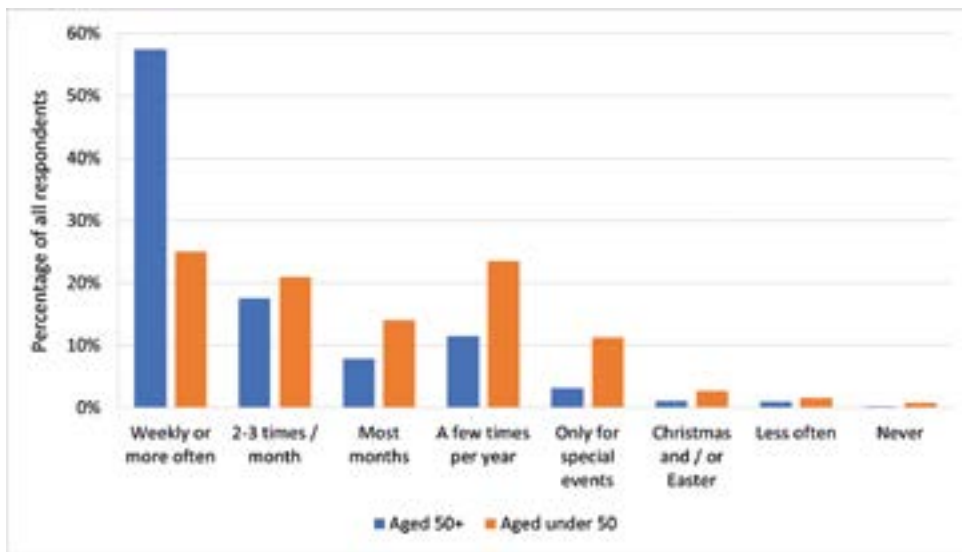
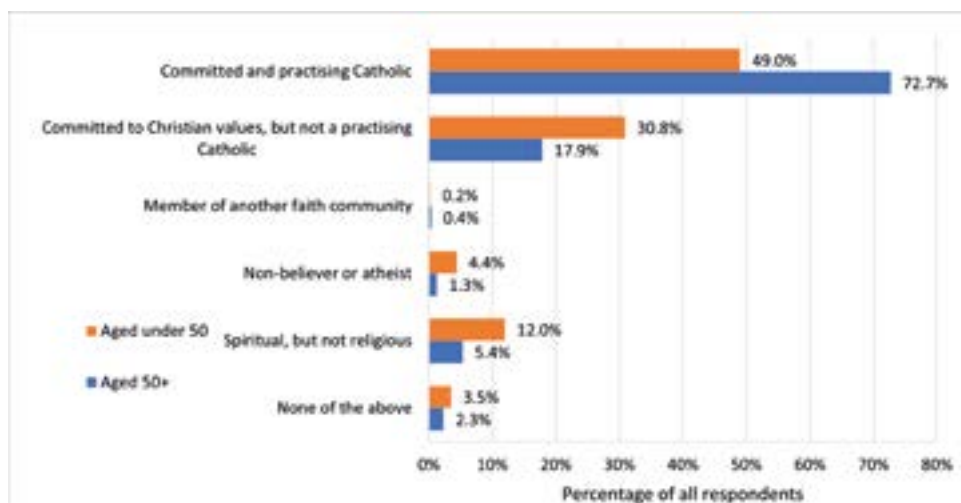


Figure 1.32 provides further information in respect of the link between age and religiosity. It reveals a difference of almost 23 percentage points between the proportion of persons aged 50+ and those aged <50 who describe themselves as 'committed and practising Catholics'. The graph also shows that those who are aged <50 outnumber those who are aged 50+ in respect of each indicator of secularism (for example, those who are spiritual but not religious, non-believers and atheists).



Figure 1.32 Descriptions of personal religiosity, by age cohort <50 and 50+ (all personnel)



The following table provides a more fine-grained overview of the association between age and religiosity. The data presented here relate to those who identify as Roman Catholics only. The figures show that more than half the Catholic personnel in Catholic schools who are aged under 40 do not identify as committed and practising Catholics.

Table 1.6 Descriptions of personal religiosity, by age cohort (all personnel)

Descriptions of Self	Age Cohorts						All personnel
	18 to 29	30 to 39	40 to 49	50 to 59	60 to 69	70+	
Committed and practising Catholic	37.7%	49.2%	58.7%	70.6%	79.4%	95.0%	64.9%
Committed to Christian values, but not a practising Catholic	44.7%	37.4%	28.4%	22.0%	14.4%	3.0%	25.2%
Spiritual, but not religious	14.5%	9.9%	10.2%	4.7%	4.0%	1.5%	7.3%
Non-believer or atheist	0.0%	1.5%	0.5%	0.2%	0.6%	0.0%	0.5%
None of the above	3.1%	2.0%	2.2%	2.5%	1.6%	0.5%	2.1%

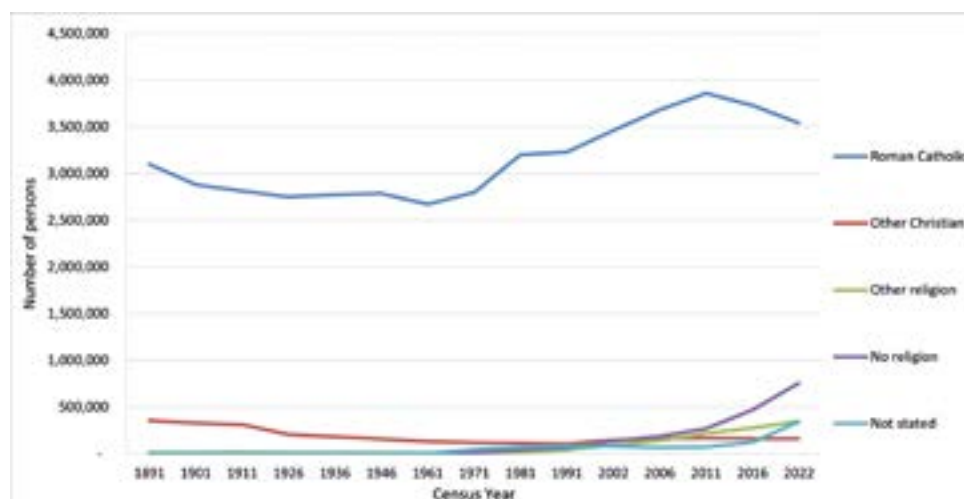
## The Socio-Demographic Context

Religious practices in Catholic schools and the faith lives, perceptions and experiences of school communities, are influenced by religious levels, practices and attitudes across society. Following the foundation of the State and up to the 1960s/1970s, Ireland's Catholic schools found themselves in a cultural, social and policy milieu that was predominantly Catholic and was largely supportive of their ethos, mission and expressions of religiosity. Indeed, Catholic schools assumed an influential role in the faith formation of the country's children. Over recent decades, however, and particularly since the 1980s, there has been a decline in religiosity in Ireland (Breen 2017; Breen and Healy 2016; Kenny 2022), and Catholic educators find themselves operating in a milieu that is increasingly secular and, at times, can be hostile to Catholicism in Ireland's schools (O'Flaherty et al. 2018; Turpin 2022).

*Catholic educators find themselves operating in a milieu that is increasingly secular and, at times, can be hostile to Catholicism in Ireland's schools.*

Figure 1.33 shows the changing religious composition of Ireland's population over the course of the past 130 years.

Figure 1.33 Number of persons, by religious affiliation, in Ireland (Republic), 1891–2022



Ireland's population and the number of Roman Catholics in the State contracted between the 1880s and 1960s, mainly due to out-migration. Since the late 1960s, Ireland has experienced significant demographic and social transformations. As the country's economy expanded, particularly after the State's accession to the EU (then the EEC) in 1973, Ireland's population increased continuously, and the number of Roman Catholics grew steadily. In-migration during the 1990s and early 2000s, particularly from Poland, Lithuania and other countries with Catholic populations, further added to the number of Roman Catholics in the State. However, the headline figures in respect of an increasing number of Roman Catholics masked a decline in Catholicism among Irish people, such that in relative terms, the State's Catholic population was declining. Furthermore, when the State's economy contracted in the years 2008–2014, there was a marked decrease in in-migration, and some migrants returned to their homes in other EU member states or migrated elsewhere. While in-migration has resumed over recent years, more migrants are coming here from outside the EU than was the case during the 1990s and 2000s, and they have a more diverse range of cultural and

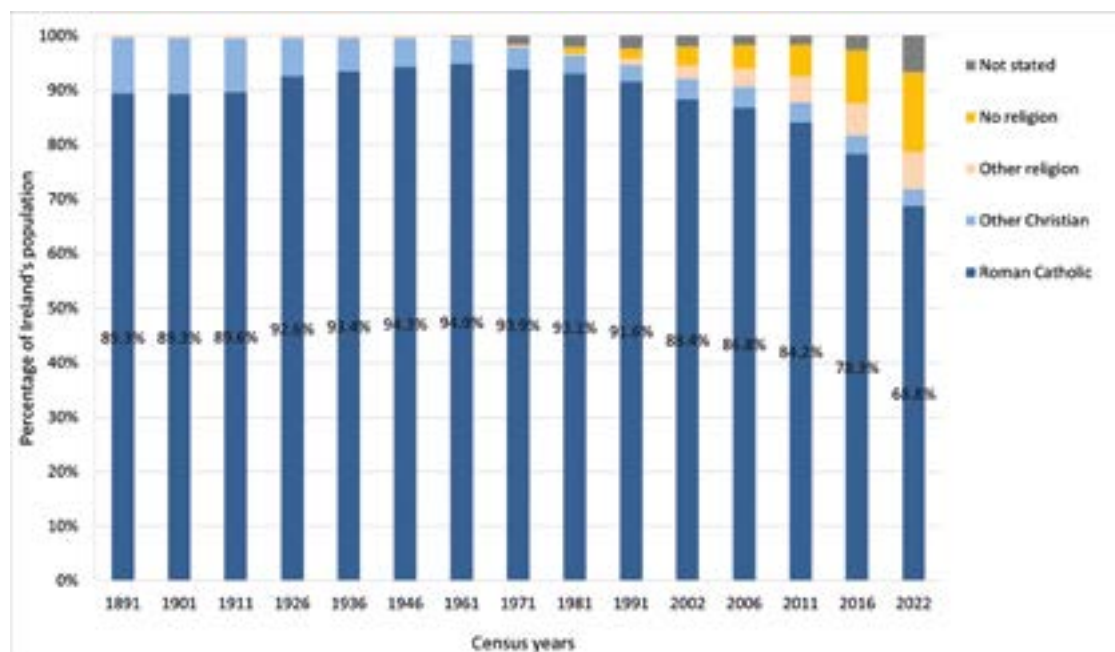


religious backgrounds than do migrants from Central and Eastern Europe. Thus, the increasing secularisation of Irish society, declining religiosity among the Irish population, and changing patterns of migration have resulted in the number of Catholics in the State peaking in 2011 and declining since then, as depicted in the graph (Figure 1.33).

While the absolute decline in the number of Catholics in Ireland has occurred since 2011, the relative decline was evident in previous inter-censal periods (Meehan and O’Connell 2021). Figure 1.34 shows that there has been a relative decline in Catholicism in Ireland since the 1990s – as indicated by the absolute and relative number of self-declared Roman Catholics in the State. There has also been a decline (in absolute and relative terms) in the size of other Christian communities (particularly the Protestant churches). Meanwhile, there has been an increase in the number of persons with no religion. The most recent Census of Population (2022) records that Roman Catholics constitute 69 per cent of Ireland’s population, while persons with no religion constitute almost 15 per cent. The number of persons with no religion increased almost fivefold between 2011 and 2022 (from 72,914 to 345,165 persons), while the State’s population increased by 24 per cent (from 4.59 million to 5.15 million).

*The number of persons with no religion increased almost fivefold between 2011 and 2022 (from 72,914 to 345,165 persons).*

Figure 1.34 Proportion of persons, by religious affiliation, in Ireland (Republic), 1891–2022



Source: Central Statistics Office (CSO)

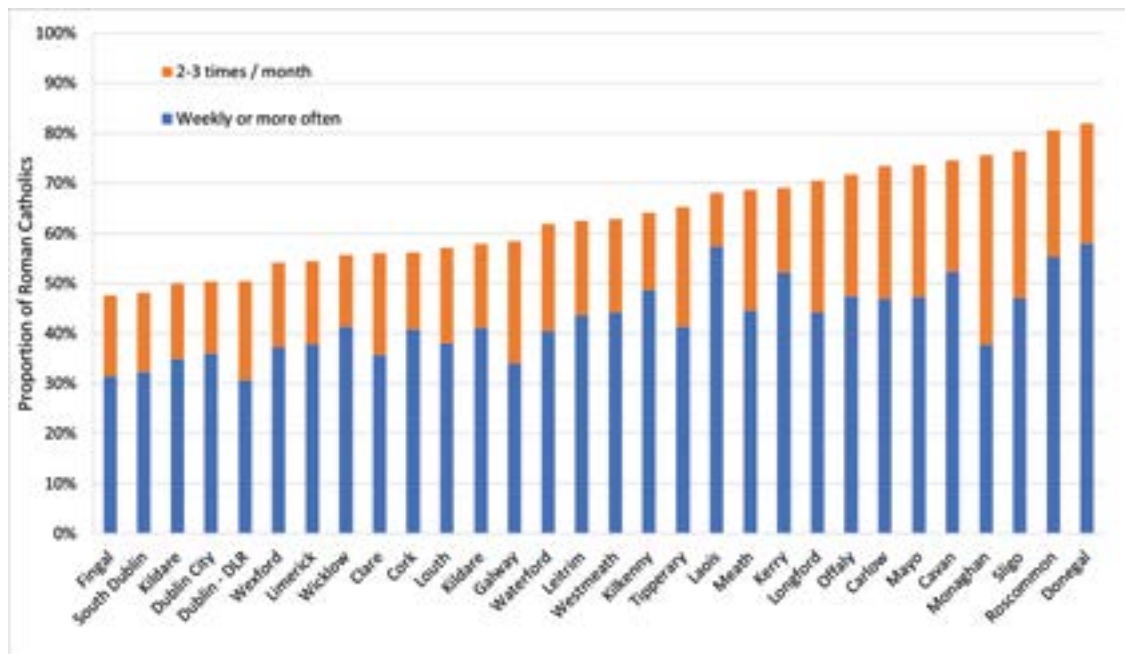
The aforementioned profile of GRACE survey respondents (please see the publications’ section of the GRACE Project website) and the data presented here reveal that the profile of personnel in Ireland’s Catholic schools shares several similarities with Ireland’s overall religious profile. Both profiles exhibit associations between religious practices, geography and age. Religious practices are more evident in rural locations and among older people, whilst they are less evident in urban locations and among

younger people. The 2022 Census of Population returns show that while Roman Catholics compose 69 per cent of the State's resident population (down from 78% in 2016), the proportion of Catholics (as a percentage of the habitually resident population) is considerably lower in urban and peri-urban areas. The counties in which Roman Catholics constitute the lowest proportions of the population are as follows: Dublin (57.4%); Wicklow (63.7%); and Kildare (69.8%). The counties in which Catholics constitute the highest proportions of the resident population are as follows: Kerry (76.2%); Leitrim (76.5%); Donegal (76.6%); Kilkenny (77.1%); Monaghan (78.1%); Roscommon (78.6%); Offaly (78.9%); Tipperary (79.3%); and Mayo (79.6%). The urban-rural gradient with respect to affiliation to Roman Catholicism is also evident in the GRACE survey sample. Among survey respondents, the proportion of persons describing themselves as Roman Catholic was lowest (under 90%) in the following local authority areas: Wicklow; Dublin City; Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown; Carlow; and Kildare.

*Religious practices are more evident in rural locations and among older people, whilst they are less evident in urban locations and among younger people.*

The GRACE survey findings also indicate an association between geography and attendance at religious services. Figure 1.35 shows that the proportion of Roman Catholics who attend a religious service at least weekly is highest in the more rural counties of Ireland. The lowest rates are in Dublin, the local authority areas adjoining Dublin, and the counties with large urban centres. Conversely, the highest rates of relatively frequent attendance at religious services were in counties with more rural populations.

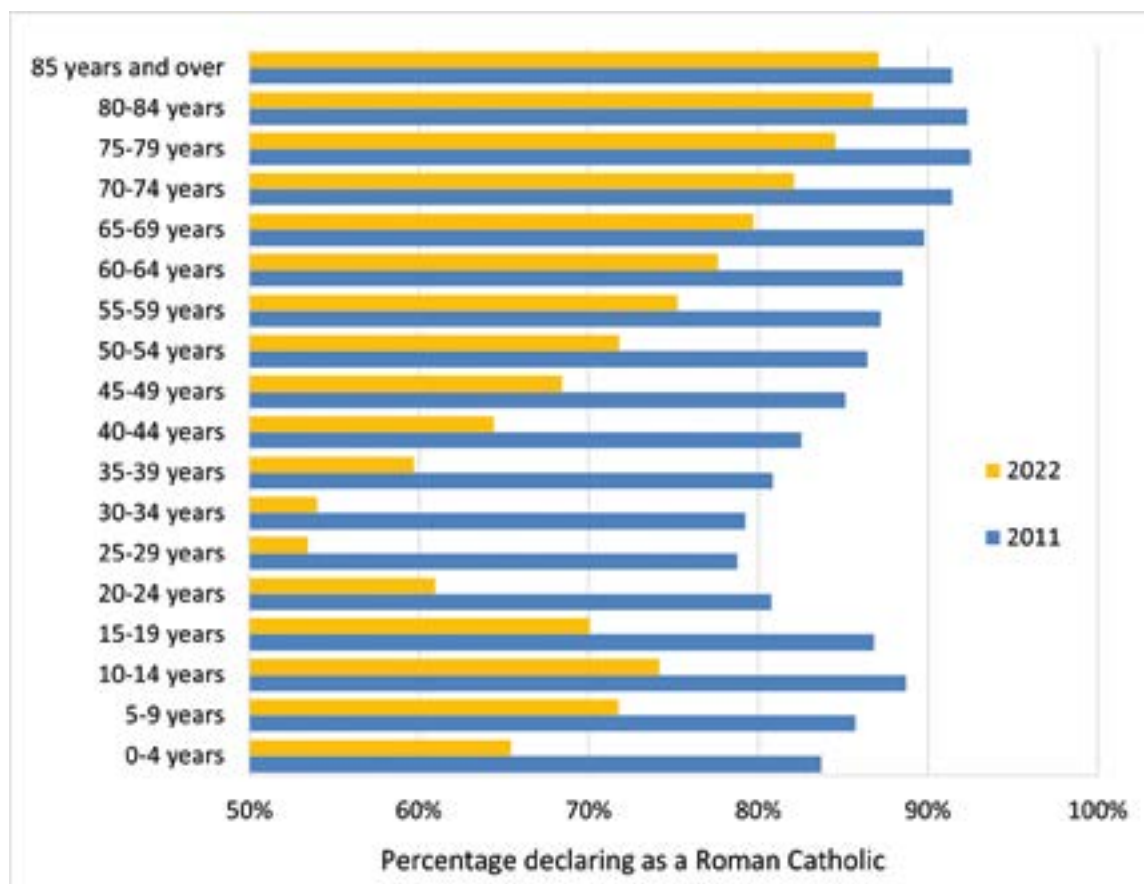
**Figure 1.35 Proportion of self-declared Roman Catholics, by local authority area, who attend a religious service at least once per week and 2 to 3 times per month**



## Age and Religiosity – Patterns in Ireland

Census of Population figures show a linear relationship between age and adherence to Roman Catholicism in Ireland. Figure 1.36 shows that the older people are, the more likely they are to be Catholic. This pattern mirrors the findings in relation to age that emerge in respect of each of the personnel cohorts (BoM members, principals and other school staff), as already presented in this report. The graph below also shows that there was a decline in the proportion of persons in all age cohorts who self-declared as a Roman Catholic between 2011 and 2022, thereby providing further evidence of the increasingly secular milieu in which Ireland’s Catholic schools are operating. This inter-censal decline is most pronounced among the 20- to 45-year-old age cohorts.

Figure 1.36 Proportion of persons who are self-declared Roman Catholics, by age cohort, 2011 and 2022



Source: Derived from CSO releases

The census figures also provide some insights into the religious composition of Ireland’s children. They show that Roman Catholics constitute a declining number and proportion of the country’s school-going population. Table 1.7 presents the relevant figures for the 11 years up to the most recent census (2022). It reveals that there was a decrease of 12 per cent in the number of Catholics and a decline of 15 percentage points in the proportion of Catholics among those aged 0 to 19 years. In 2011, there were 1,252,385 persons aged 0 to 19 years. Of these, 86 per cent (n = 1,078,635) were Catholics. By 2022, the total number of persons aged 0 to 19 had increased to 1,336,288, but the number of Catholics in this age cohort had contracted to 943,942 or 71 per cent of the total cohort.

*Table 1.7 Roman Catholics (absolute number and as a percentage of the population) by age cohort, in Ireland, 2011 and 2022*

Year		0 - 4 years	5 - 9 years	10 - 14 years	15 - 19 years
2011	No. of Catholics	296,886	273,547	266,386	241,816
	Catholics as a percentage of all persons	83.7%	85.7%	88.7%	86.9%
2022	No. of Catholics	191,571	244,104	275,397	232,870
	Catholics as a percentage of all persons	65.4%	71.8%	74.2%	70.1%
Change 2011 - 2022	No. of Catholics	105,315	29,443	9,011	8,946
	Percentage change	35.5%	10.8%	3.4%	3.7%

Source: Derived from CSO releases

The longitudinal Census of Population figures provide clear evidence of a reduction in the absolute and relative number of Roman Catholics in Ireland and of the increasingly secular nature of Irish society. While these trends are also evident in other Western and post-industrial societies, evidence from other countries indicates a sustained demand for places in Catholic schools (Wodon 2020). It is not necessarily the case, therefore, that a decline in Catholicism implies a decline in the demand for Catholic education or for places in Catholic schools. Indeed, the burgeoning demographics of many peri-urban zones in Ireland will require the competent authorities to increase the overall supply of school places.

## Catholic Schools and Civic Values

The governance of Catholic schools is underpinned by the commitment of voluntary members of BoMs. These voluntary boards fulfil the roles played by paid officials in schools that have State patronage. Thus, they make a valuable contribution to civil society and to the public purse, and it is in the interest of the State and of Catholic schools to sustain volunteerism in the education sector. During the 2000s, the Irish government supported a number of initiatives to promote community development and active citizenship. Over the past decade, however, many community-based initiatives have been brought under the remit of local authorities, and there is both anecdotal and statistical evidence of an associated decline in volunteerism in Ireland and a reduction in the technical, capacity-building, governance and community development supports available to volunteers (Harvey 2012, Forde et al. 2016, Farrell 2018, McCabe 2021). It should also be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated restrictions on community and social gatherings have had a dampening effect on volunteerism and civic engagement, especially among youth and older people, while at the same time the pandemic highlighted the importance of volunteers in Irish society, especially in the provision of frontline community services and supports for vulnerable groups (Department of Rural and Community Development 2021).

The most recent Census of Population (2022) provides a useful measure of the extent of volunteerism in Ireland. Respondents were asked to indicate if they participate in any 'voluntary activity' in respect of one or more of the following areas: community; political; religion; social/charity; and/or sport, and 14 per cent of the State's population (n = 711,379 persons) stated that they participate in at least one voluntary activity. Of these, 129,501 persons reported that they volunteer with a religious body/

organisation. Thus, Table 1.8 shows, 2.5% per cent of Ireland’s population participates in a voluntary activity that is based on religion (with a religious entity).

The figures presented here reveal that volunteerism with religious entities is more prevalent among the older age cohorts than is the case among young people.

**Table 1.8 Volunteerism, based on religious activities, by age cohort, 2022**

Variables	Age Cohorts					
	All ages	0 - 14	15 - 24	25 - 44	45 - 64	65+
Persons who volunteer with a religious entity	129,501	5,524	10,130	24,695	46,313	42,839
Population of Ireland	5,149,139	1,012,287	644,771	1,422,424	1,293,342	776,315
% of persons who participate in a voluntary activity with a religious entity	2.5%	0.5%	1.6%	1.7%	3.6%	5.5%

Source: CSO, Census of Population (2022)

Table 1.9, which is also based on the 2022 census returns, shows that over two-thirds of those who volunteer with a religious entity are aged over 45, and almost one-third are aged 65 or older. As the table shows, this is the oldest age profile across the various types of voluntary activities that were enumerated in Census 2022. As illustrated earlier in this report (Figure 1.1), the age composition of the volunteer members on the BoMs of Catholic schools is reflective of this older profile.

**Table 1.9 Number of volunteers, by type of voluntary activity, in Ireland (2022)**

Type of voluntary activity	Age Cohorts					
	All ages	0 - 14	15 - 24	25 - 44	45 - 64	65+
Religion	129,501	5,524	10,130	24,695	46,313	42,839
		4.3%	7.8%	19.1%	35.8%	33.1%
Political	17,295	241	1,515	4,503	5,947	5,089
		1.4%	8.8%	26.0%	34.4%	29.4%
Sport	286,887	15,362	37,402	94,335	113,625	26,163
		5.4%	13.0%	32.9%	39.6%	9.1%
Community	226,822	9,989	17,809	63,529	91,810	43,685
		4.4%	7.9%	28.0%	40.5%	19.3%
Social/charity	198,274	3,611	18,262	57,510	74,808	44,083
		1.8%	9.2%	29.0%	37.7%	22.2%
Total persons involved in one or more voluntary	711,379	30,133	73,813	209,760	270,688	126,985
		4.2%	10.4%	29.5%	38.1%	17.9%

Source: CSO, Census of Population (2022)

The 2006 Census of Population was the most recent one in which a similar question (about voluntary activities) was posed. The returns reveal that 143,133 persons (13,632 more than in 2022) volunteered with a religious entity. The 2006 returns also indicate that the age profile of volunteers with religious entities was younger than is currently the case.

**Table 1.10 Volunteerism, based on religious activities, by age cohort, 2006<sup>14</sup>**

Variables	Age Cohorts							
	All ages	15 - 19	20 - 24	25 - 34	35 - 44	45 - 54	55 - 64	65+
Volunteers with religious entities	143,133	7,778	6,254	14,446	23,909	28,649	29,465	32,632
		5.4%	4.4%	10.1%	16.7%	20.0%	20.6%	22.8%
Population of Ireland aged 15+	3,375,399	290,257	342,475	722,439	623,434	521,813	407,055	467,926
Religious volunteers as a % of Ireland's population aged 15+	4.2%	2.7%	1.8%	2.0%	3.8%	5.5%	7.2%	7.0%

When these figures (Table 1.10) are analysed in the light of the data presented in the two preceding tables, they indicate that between 2006 and 2022, there was a contraction in, and an ageing of, the pool of persons who participate in religiously oriented voluntary activities.

## Changes in Religiosity and Religious Practice

The European Values Survey (EVS) provides a useful longitudinal view of religious beliefs and practices across Europe. Ireland has participated in the EVS since 1981, but as Ireland did not participate in the last wave of the survey (2017), the most recent data we can derive from the EVS for Ireland date from 2008. While the currently available EVS data are of limited value in respect of benchmarks for GRACE, they further substantiate the evidence already presented in this report in respect of declining religiosity and increasing secularisation in Ireland. The next wave of the EVS is due to take place in 2026–2027, and that should generate further data on the milieu in which Ireland's Catholic schools are operating. Table 1.11 provides an overview of the main EVS findings, for Ireland, in respect of four rounds (from 1981 to 2008).



<sup>14</sup> The 2006 data in respect of participation in voluntary activities were only recorded for persons aged 15+. In 2022, they were recorded for all persons. The CSO has not published data on the religious affiliation of volunteers.

*Table 1.11 Headline results from the EVS in Ireland, 1981–2008*

Indicators of Belief	Survey Years			
	1981	1990	1999	2008
Importance of religion		83.58	72.03	63.55
Membership in religious or church organisations	31.18	13.9	16.29	28.51
Religious services : Attend at least once a week	82.36	80.84	58.99	39.94
Religious services : Attended at least once a week when 12 years old			95.38	84.48
People who say they are religious	66.11	72.44	73.78	65.42
People who say they are not religious	32.62	26.95	24.52	33.07
People who say they are athiest	1.27	0.61	1.7	1.51
Belief in God	97.06	97.56	95.69	89.91
Belief in Life after death	84.58	83.33	79.69	71.58
Belief in Hell	60.54	52.59	53.52	50.21
Belief in Heaven	89.24	89.51	85.63	76.55
Belief in reincarnation	32.16	20.44	23.55	29.91
Belief in a personal God	75.84	67.2	65	57.57
Belief in some sort of spirit or life force	16.09	24.14	24.21	25.68
Not sure what they believe	6.35	7.24	7.64	12.04
Do not believe in any sort of spirit, God or life force	1.72	1.41	3.15	4.71
Importance of God	78.12	77.1	71.97	66.09
Prayer outside of religious services			61.68	52.69
Confidence in the Church	78.26	72.37	54.14	53.72
Confidence in the Education System	67.57	72.74	86.96	75.57

Derived from the EVS: <https://www.atlasofeuropeanvalues.eu/maptool.html>

The EVS findings reveal the following:

- downward trends in respect of the importance of religion, attendance at religious services, belief in life after death, belief in a personal God and confidence in the Church
- Upward trend in respect of not sure of what to believe and belief in some sort of spirit or life force
- greater confidence in the education system than in the Church

As outlined in Table 1.11, the most recent EVS results reveal that 58 per cent of people in Ireland believe in the existence of a personal God. The GRACE survey questionnaire that was circulated among primary school stakeholders included a specific question about perceptions of God, and the associated results are presented in Table 1.12. As the table shows, 64 per cent of all stakeholders believe there is a personal God. Values are highest among BoM members, principals and deputy principals. Among teachers and other/ancillary staff members, the proportion of persons who believe in a personal God is lower than is the case across the Irish population (as recorded in the EVS).

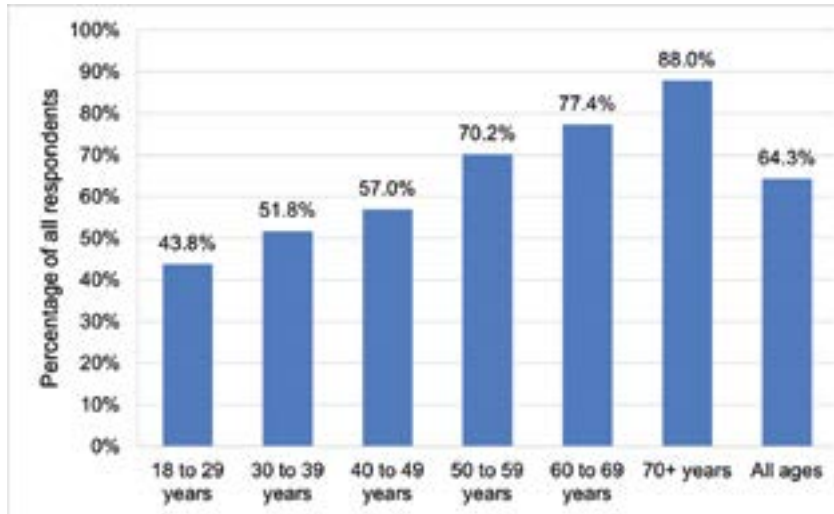
<sup>15</sup> The figures in this table are percentages of the population.

*Table 1.12 Perceptions of God, by cohort, among primary school stakeholders*

Belief	BoM Member	Principal / DP	Teacher	Other Staff	All
There is a personal God.	69%	68%	54%	55%	64%
There is some sort of spirit or life force.	22%	25%	35%	40%	27%
I don't really think there is any sort of spirit, God or life force.	4%	2%	5%	3%	3%
I don't really know what to think.	5%	6%	7%	2%	6%

As noted throughout this report, age is a determinant of religious perceptions and practices. Figure 1.37 provides further evidence in that regard. It illustrates that there is a linear relationship between age and belief in a personal God. Less than half of those aged under 40 who are involved (either as BoM members or staff) with Catholic primary schools in Ireland believe in a personal God. As the graph shows, proportions are higher in the older age cohorts, and those values are similar to the values that pertained across the population as whole, as recorded in earlier waves of the EVS.

*Figure 1.37 Percentage of persons, by age cohort, who believe in a personal God*



The European Social Survey (ESS) provides further longitudinal insights into religious beliefs and practices across Europe. As the following tables – derived from ESS databases – reveal, there has been a marked decline in religious belief and practices in Ireland over the past 20 years.

*Table 1.13 Frequency with which people pray (apart from at religious services), among Ireland's population, 2002–2020<sup>16</sup>*

Frequency of praying	2002	2008	2018	2020
Every day	43.9%	40.3%	29.7%	28.3%
More than one a week	14.6%	14.7%	10.4%	13.0%
Once a week	10.9%	10.0%	10.4%	8.2%
At least once a month	6.4%	7.5%	7.5%	5.2%
Only on special occasions	2.1%	2.1%	2.9%	2.2%
Less often	11.7%	13.9%	15.0%	16.3%
Never	10.4%	11.5%	24.1%	26.8%

Source: Derived from European Social Survey

<sup>16</sup> The table presents data for four selected years only – in order to illustrate the general pattern. Figures for other years can be accessed through the ESS website: [www.europeansocialsurvey.org](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org).



As Table 1.13 shows, the proportion of persons who pray at least once a week declined by 20 percentage points between 2002 and 2020. Over the same period, the proportion of persons who never pray increased by over 16 percentage points. If the trends presented in this table continue, the next wave of the ESS would record ‘never’ praying as having the modal value.

*As Table 1.13 shows, the proportion of persons who pray at least once a week declined by 20 percentage points between 2002 and 2020.*

Table 1.14 – also derived from the ESS – shows an incremental increase in the proportion of persons who describe themselves as ‘not at all religious’ or as having low levels of religiosity (as indicated by the scores of 0 and 1). During the same period (over the 18 years to 2020), there was a decrease in the proportion of persons who perceive their levels of religiosity to be moderate to high (as indicated by the scores of 5 or higher).

**Table 1.14: Level of religiosity (self-declared), among Ireland's population, 2002–2020**

How religious are you?	2002	2008	2018	2020
Not at all religious (0)	4.4%	5.3%	14.2%	16.7%
1	3.3%	3.3%	5.4%	5.8%
2	5.3%	4.8%	7.2%	7.1%
3	6.0%	8.7%	7.2%	6.2%
4	6.9%	8.3%	6.6%	6.1%
5	20.2%	19.0%	15.7%	13.6%
6	14.4%	14.1%	12.8%	10.3%
7	15.8%	16.7%	12.4%	13.2%
8	13.3%	11.7%	11.0%	10.9%
9	6.0%	3.9%	3.4%	5.4%
Very religious (10)	4.4%	4.1%	3.9%	4.6%

Derived from European Social Survey

These ESS figures in respect of self-declared religiosity are consistent with GRACE findings in respect of the link between age and religiosity. They indicate that higher levels of religiosity among older persons (as evidenced throughout this report) are associated with historically higher levels of religiosity among the Irish population than is currently the case.

The GRACE survey questionnaire asked a specific question about frequency of attendance at religious services, and the findings reveal that attendance is associated with both role and age. Attendance rates are higher among BoM members, RE teachers, and principals and deputy principals than among other staff members. They are also higher among older people. The association between age and frequency of attendance at religious services is linked to the reduction in the frequency of attendance that has occurred across Irish society – as captured in the ESS (among other sources), and as documented in Table 1.15. The ESS findings reveal that between 2002 and 2020, there was a reduction of 30 percentage points in the proportion of the population attending a religious service at least once per week. Over the same period, the proportion of people who never or infrequently attend a religious service increased considerably.

*Table 1.15 Frequency of attendance at religious services, among Ireland's population, 2002–2020*

Frequency of attendance at religious services	2002	2008	2018	2020
At least weekly	50.1%	39.3%	25.7%	20.6%
At least once a month	14.0%	18.2%	13.4%	10.5%
Only on special occasions	10.9%	13.7%	16.3%	12.8%
Less often	12.9%	16.0%	19.6%	27.0%
Never	12.1%	12.9%	25.1%	29.1%

Derived from European Social Survey

The ESS findings in respect of attendance at religious services can be directly compared with those that emerge from the GRACE research. Table 1.16 presents the relevant figures, comparing the most recent (2020) ESS figures with the GRACE findings. The data show that personnel involved with Catholic schools (covered by the GRACE research) who are aged 50+ attend religious services with a frequency that was typical among Ireland's population about 20 years ago. Younger personnel in Ireland's Catholic schools are less likely to attend a weekly religious service than are members of the general population. The table also shows that the proportion of persons who never attend a religious service is lower among all GRACE survey age cohorts than is the case across the general population, although it should be noted that the figures presented here in respect of the GRACE cohorts only relate to those who belong to a faith community (6 per cent of the GRACE sample either stated that they do not belong to a faith community or declined to specify the faith community to which they belong). When the entire GRACE sample is taken into account, the proportion of persons who never attend a religious service increases to 7 per cent among those aged 18 to 29 and to 2 per cent among those aged 30 to 49.

*Table 1.16 Frequency of attendance at religious services – GRACE findings and those from the European Social Survey*

Frequency	ESS		Age cohorts in the GRACE survey sample					
	2002	2020	18 to 29	30 to 39	40 to 49	50 to 59	60 to 69	70+
At least weekly	50.1%	20.6%	17.0%	17.9%	29.7%	47.1%	66.5%	91.1%
At least once a month	14.0%	10.5%	30.9%	31.6%	37.3%	31.8%	19.9%	4.9%
Only on special occasions	10.9%	12.8%	21.2%	18.8%	10.6%	5.3%	3.2%	1.5%
Less often	12.9%	27.0%	29.7%	31.3%	21.4%	15.4%	10.4%	2.5%
Never	12.1%	29.1%	1.2%	0.4%	1.1%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%

## Analysis and Conclusions

The headline findings from the GRACE survey suggest that Catholicism has a strong presence in Ireland's Catholic schools. Approximately 90 per cent of personnel state they are Roman Catholics, and as other reports in this series reveal, Catholic rituals take place and Catholic RE curricula are followed in schools. However, the profile of school personnel (voluntary and professional), as evidenced by the data presented in this report, reveals that there are several mismatches between those headlines and the perspectives and practices among school personnel. The proportion of self-declared Roman Catholics who attend a religious service at least once a week (as required by Catholic Church teaching) stands at 41 per cent, and among those aged under 40, it stands at 18 per cent. Almost 1 in 10 self-declared Roman Catholics does not know if they believe in God, or they do not believe in God. Among Catholics, who are aged under 30, the proportion who believe in God stands at just 76 per cent. These and other mismatches (presented in this report) between headline figures and personal perceptions and behaviours ought to be taken into account when reading, interpreting and analysing the data on Catholic ethos and actions, as presented in the other GRACE reports.

*Among Catholics, who are aged under 30, the proportion who believe in God stands at just 76 per cent.*

The survey findings also indicate considerable mismatches between many Catholic values and the perceptions of God and of their own religiosity expressed by school personnel. More than half of the teachers in Catholic primary schools do not believe in a personal God, and just under half (49%) state they are not 'committed and practising Catholics'. This profile has implications for children's faith formation and specifically for sacramental preparation. The GRACE survey findings in respect of religiosity (and its association with geography and age) indicate that the majority of children in Ireland's Catholic primary schools are being educated in Catholic teaching and are being prepared for the sacraments by personnel who describe themselves as being other than practising Catholics. The survey findings in respect of age indicate that this proportion will grow substantially over the coming years. There are similar challenges in Catholic secondary schools, given that one-third of RE teachers are not committed and practising Catholics. At the same time, however, most teachers agree that developing a personal faith in Jesus Christ is a central educational aim of their schools.

The data, in respect of school personnel, indicate that Catholic schools will face growing challenges should they wish to appoint Catholic principals as vacancies arise. At present, two-thirds of primary school principals describe themselves as committed and practising Catholics, while the corresponding figure among primary school teachers aged under 50 (the main cohort from which principals will be recruited) is 44 per cent. In second level schools, 73 per cent of principals say they are committed and practising Catholics, while the corresponding figures among RE teachers and subject teachers aged under 50 are considerably lower (58% and 31% respectively).

*The data, in respect of school personnel, indicate that Catholic schools will face growing challenges should they wish to appoint Catholic principals as vacancies arise.*

The secondary data from the CSO, EVS and ESS provide clear evidence of well-established trends towards secularisation and declining religiosity in Irish society. These secondary sources substantiate

the GRACE findings in respect of the significance of age as a determinant of religious identity and practice, and they provide insights into the social processes that will affect Ireland's Catholic schools over the coming decades. They indicate that, even if there is a sustained or possible increased demand for places in Catholic schools and/or an ongoing demand for Catholic education, schools are facing a declining and more diluted pool of Catholics from which to draw both voluntary and professional personnel. Thus, a considerable body of work needs to be done in order to support and sustain current and future personnel and to redress the mismatches between declarations and deeds.

*The secondary data from the CSO, EVS and ESS provide clear evidence of well-established trends towards secularisation and declining religiosity in Irish society.*



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