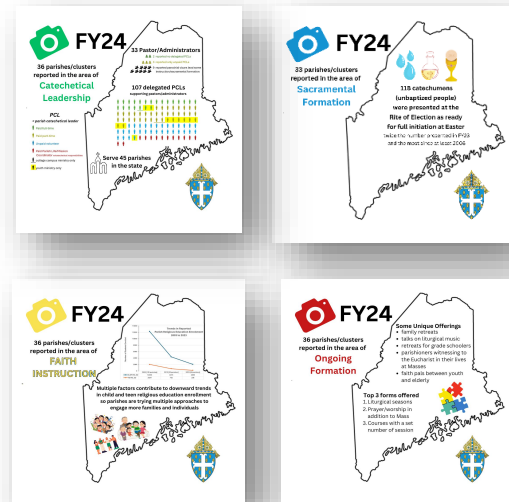
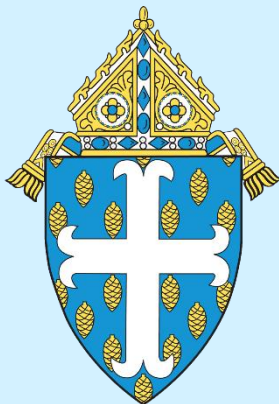


State of Parish Faith Formation in FY24

July 2023-June 2024

Summary of Submitted Annual Parish Faith Formation Reports



Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland
Office of Lifelong Faith Formation
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June 2024

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Executive Summary

The annual parish faith formation report is in the form of shared Excel workbooks customized for each parish or cluster of parishes with fields to describe the lifelong faith formation efforts offered or planned for July 2023 through June 2024 or Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24). The workbooks include five sections: Parish Information, Sacramental Formation; Faith Instruction; Ongoing Formation; Resources; and Catechetical Leaders.

In January 2024, pastors/parochial administrators and their designated catechetical leaders of all 48 parishes were reminded by US Post and email to complete the annual report by January 31. They were given digital access to the parish/cluster workbook then updated information previously entered for FY23 or added new information for FY24.

Data Set

Forty-five (45) of the forty-eight (48) parishes in the diocese reported for FY24, an increase of 3 parishes from FY23 reporting. Thirteen (13) parishes collaborate to offer opportunities in one of five regional clusters. Two additional parishes share catechetical staff while not necessarily sharing programming. The adjusted maximum number of parishes/clusters used in analysis and reporting is thirty-six (36).

Submitted reports varied in the details provided in each area. This is common for the few years of a new tool. Data from other diocesan-wide sources such as *The Official Catholic Directory* and registration for diocesan liturgical celebrations was

analyzed along with the data submitted through the annual parish faith formation reports. This allowed participation trends to emerge as well as indentify bright spots and ongoing challenges in evangelization and catechesis in Maine.

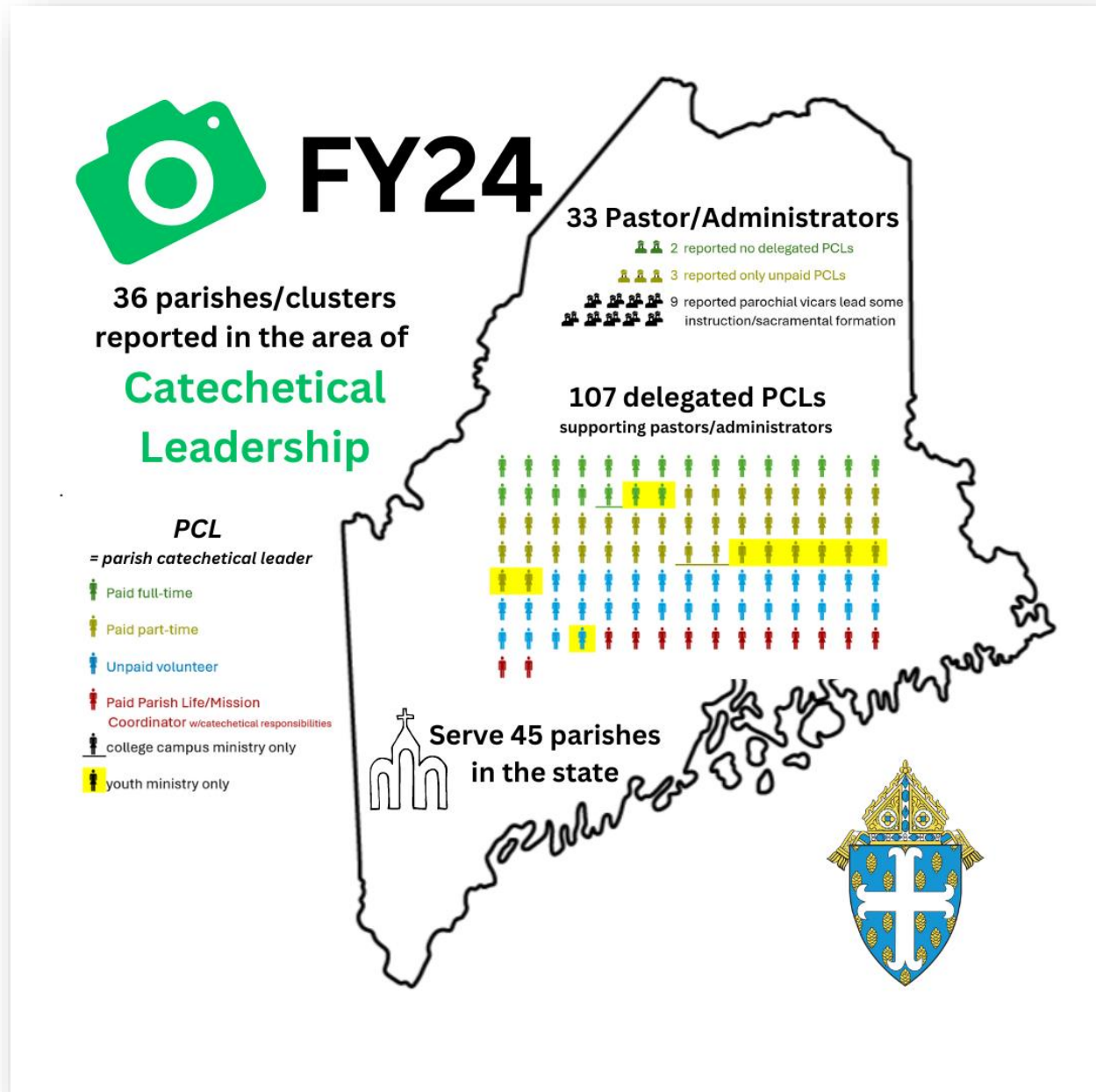
Four Snapshots of FY24

One of the aims of the annual parish faith formation report is to get glimpses of the overall process of evangelizing catechesis in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland. Four snapshots of Catechetical Leaders, Sacramental Formation, Faith Instruction and Ongoing Formation in FY24 bring out the complexity of echoing God's Word and making disciples in Maine. The snapshot graphics are followed by narrative details about the broader context of lifelong faith formation in the state.

Assessment & Recommendations

Being Catholic in Maine is not the cultural norm which makes catechesis complicated. People still yearn for God while engaging with parishes differently than they did 20 years ago. The large number of people who participated in the Rite of Election is a sign of hope that Catholics *are* witnessing to faith in their daily lives and attracting others to Christ and the Church. People of deep faith in Jesus Christ serve Maine parishes while often allotted too few resources or too little time to fulfill the expectations held over from a primarily clergy/leader focused schooling model of handing on the faith. Maine is once again missionary territory that requires a mindset that God is already at work in each person, so parishes focus on outreach, accompaniment, and formation of whole households toward maturing faith.

Snapshots of FY24



Pages 6 and 7 offer details about the broader context of this snapshot and other findings related to catechetical leadership.



FY24

33 parishes/clusters
reported in the area of

**Sacramental
Formation**



**118 catechumens
(unbaptized people)
were presented at the
Rite of Election as ready
for full initiation at Easter**
twice the number presented in FY23
and the most since at least 2008



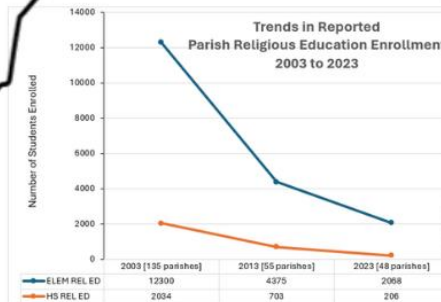
Pages 8 and 9 describe the broader context of this snapshot
and other findings related to sacramental formation.



FY24

36 parishes/clusters
reported in the area of

**FAITH
INSTRUCTION**



Multiple factors contribute to downward trends in child and teen religious education enrollment so parishes are trying multiple approaches to engage more families and individuals



Pages 10-13 describe the broader context of this snapshot and other findings related to faith instruction.



FY24

36 parishes/clusters
reported in the area of

**Ongoing
Formation**

Some Unique Offerings

- family retreats
- talks on liturgical music
- retreats for grade schoolers
- parishioners witnessing to the Eucharist in their lives at Masses
- faith pals between youth and elderly

Top 3 forms offered

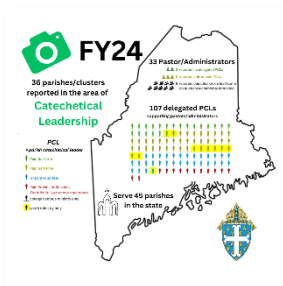
1. Liturgical seasons
2. Prayer/worship in addition to Mass
3. Courses with a set number of session



Pages 14 and 15 describe the broader context of this snapshot and other findings related to ongoing formation.



Catechetical Leadership



Complexity of catechesis in Maine is most evident in looking at who carries the responsibilities for leading faith instruction, sacramental formation, and ongoing formation in parishes. For example, 36 parishes/clusters reported on who oversees different components of lifelong faith formation. Breaking out the cluster data further represents service to 45 different parishes. Since most parishes offer formation in more than one location, the data also show leaders attending to programming in seventy-seven (77) different sites.

Pastors and parochial administrators, by nature of their assignment from the bishop, carry the primary responsibility for ensuring appropriate faith formation is available to the local people in his care. The term “parish catechetical leader” or PCL is a generic reference for the women and men whom a pastor/parochial administrator delegates with aspects of envisioning, planning, implementing, supervising, and assessing local catechesis. While PCLs often provide direct instruction, they are not typical catechists.

Figure C1

The FY24 reports identified thirty-three (33) pastors/parochial administrators leading catechesis in one or more of the 45 parishes giving data (See Figure C1). Two (2) pastors are the only person leading catechesis locally, having no PCLs. Three (3) pastor/administrators only have part-time, unpaid PCLs. Twenty-eight (28) reported at least one paid PCL in the parish with nine (9) among them also having parochial vicars leading some aspect of faith instruction or sacramental formation.

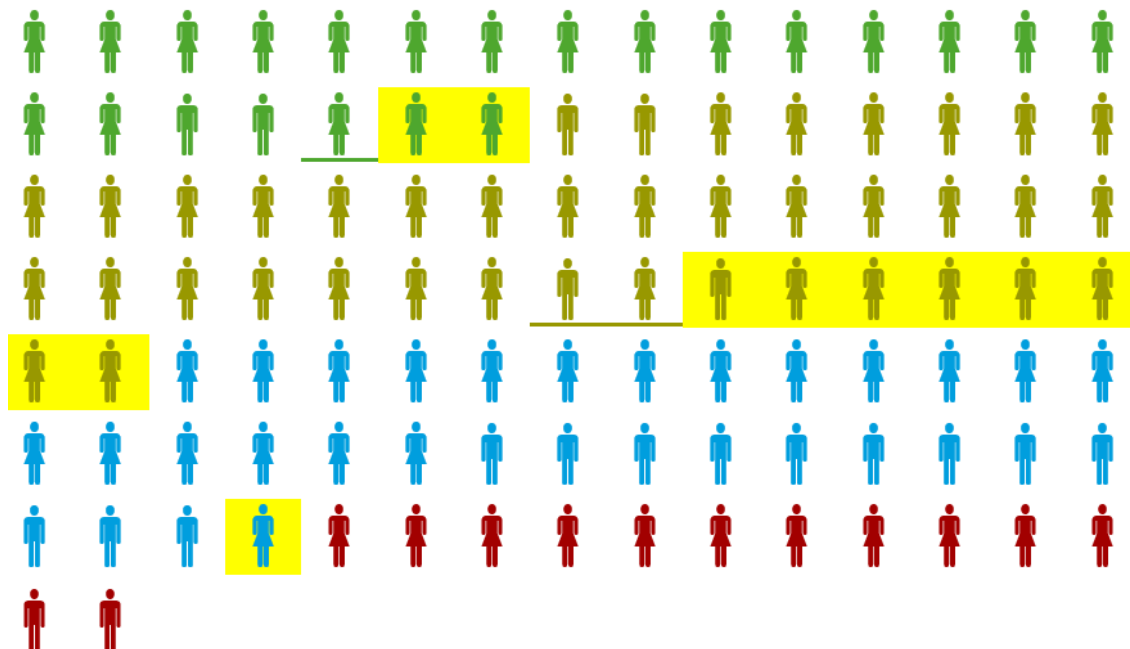
Reported Pastor/Administrators = 33 Total



Parishes reported a total of one-hundred-seven (107) women and men who serve as parish catechetical leaders [See Figure C2]. Job titles and responsibilities for PCLs vary widely, though it is common for one or two people to oversee multiple ministry areas that may or may not directly relate to evangelizing catechesis. The number of hours allotted for PCL duties also varies which makes planning for and provide training and development for all leaders challenging.

Figure C2

Reported Parish Catechetical Leaders = 107 total

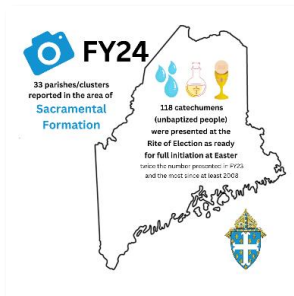


KEY

- Paid full-time = 22
- Paid part-time = 40
- Unpaid volunteer = 32
- Subsets college campus ministry only = 3
- youth ministry only = 11
- Paid Parish Life/Mission Coordinator w/catechetical responsibilities = 13



Sacramental Formation



While parish reporting on enrollment for sacrament formation was too uneven for meaningful analysis, the experiences of the Rite of Election in February 2024 and Neophyte Mass in April 2024 shown as bright spots in the process of evangelization and catechesis in Maine.

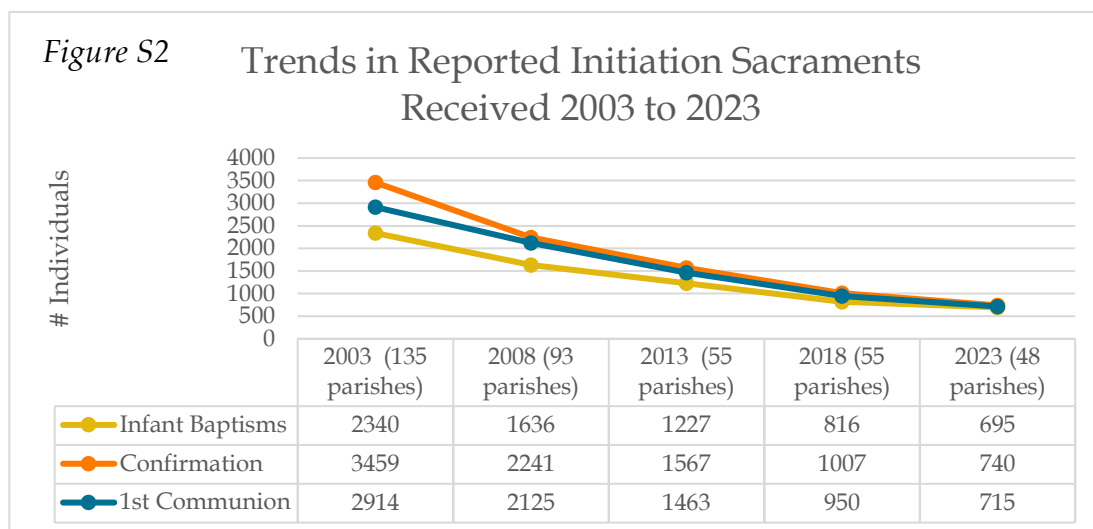
A total of 118 catechumens (unbaptized people ages 9 and older) from twenty-six (26) parishes were presented at the three regional celebrations of the Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversation in February 2024. This is the highest number of catechumens presented to a Bishop of Portland in a single year since at least 2008 when OLFF began tracking this data year to year. These catechumens-turned-elect went on to be fully initiated through baptism, confirmation, and receiving their first holy Communion at Easter. Two weeks later more than forty (40) of the newly initiated or received into full communion with the Catholic Church participated in the Neophyte Mass at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. This too was the largest number in the last seven years of those who chose to come to this diocesan-wide celebration.

Both experiences point to individuals and parishes joyfully living out the sacramental life of the Church and cooperating with the Holy Spirit in

forming people toward greater intimacy and communion with Jesus Christ. A possible contributor to the increased participation is leader and community-wide formation related to the National Eucharistic Revival. The focus on readiness to accompany newcomers along with emphasis on each person giving witness to their relationship with Christ in word and action each day anticipate that God is already present in each person’s life, so individuals and communities are ready to share the Good News of Jesus Christ person to person in ordinary ways, not just through programs.

The Official Catholic Directory (P.J. Kenedy & Sons) data allowed analysis for trends in the number of people receiving Sacraments (See Figures S1 and S2).

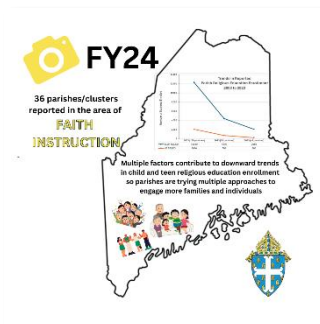
<i>Figure S1</i>	BAPTISM: Infant	BAPTISM: Minor (RCIA)	BAPTISM: Adult (RCIA)	REC'D into R.C. Church (RCIA)	1st HOLY COMMUNION	CONFIRMATION	WEDDINGS
Report Year (# of parishes)							
2023 (48 parishes)	695	63	54	104	715	740	245
2018 (55 parishes)	816	56	88	76	950	1007	357
2013 (55 parishes)	1227	140	68	91	1463	1567	456
2008 (93 parishes)	1636	105	107	149	2125	2241	652
2003 (135 parishes)	2340	n/a	282	298	2914	3459	1018



The downward trends look like those found in analyzing the data regarding children and teens enrolled in parish faith instruction.



Faith Instruction



Faith instruction proclaims the faith of the Church through basic, essential catechesis that responds to initial faith. It roots learners' faith in the ordinary life of the Christian community, presents the Christian mysteries organically and systematically to shape distinctly Catholic knowledge, logic, and imagination, and helps learners internalize and integrate all the components of the Christian life.

Parish reporting on modes and resources for FY24 and FY23 were very similar. Reported enrollment varied widely between parishes. Drawing upon annual data submitted for *The Official Catholic Directory* (P.J. Kennedy & Sons) for 2003 through 2023 allowed analysis for trends in participation in religious education by learners in elementary school (grades 1-8) and high school (grades 9-12).

Figures F1 and F2 show reported parish religious education enrollment in five-year increments of 2003, 2008, 2013, 2018, and 2023. Both show obvious declines in total enrollment as well as the number of parishes in the diocese. The rate of decline is more dramatic among elementary school learners; the rate for high school students is more gradual, perhaps because of the smaller initial number.

Figure F1

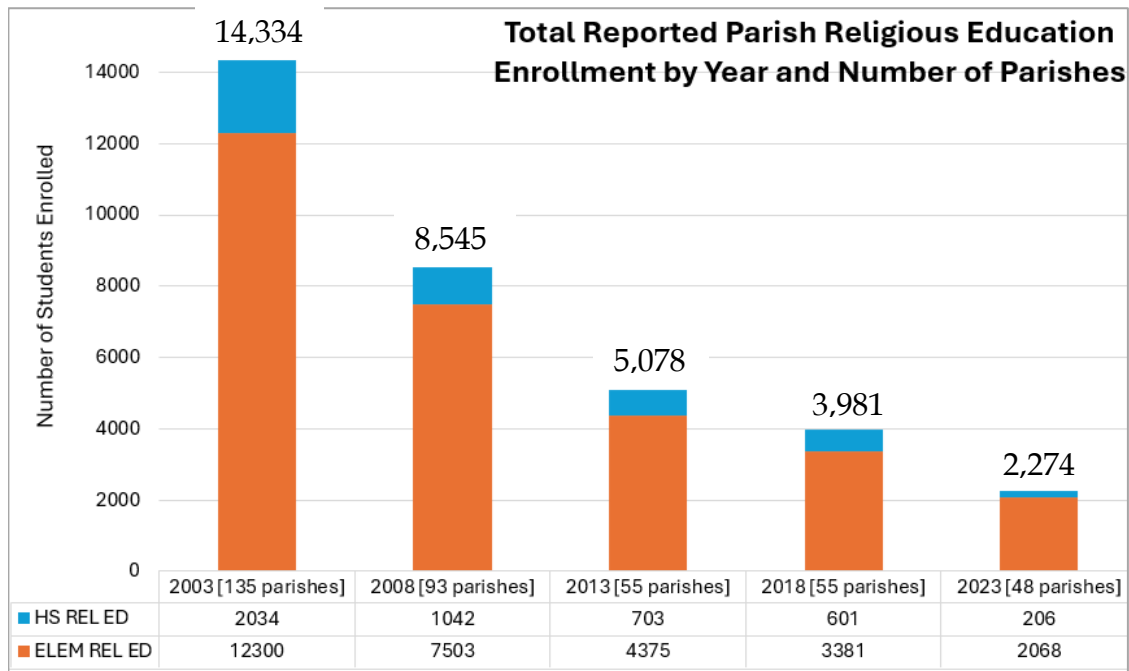
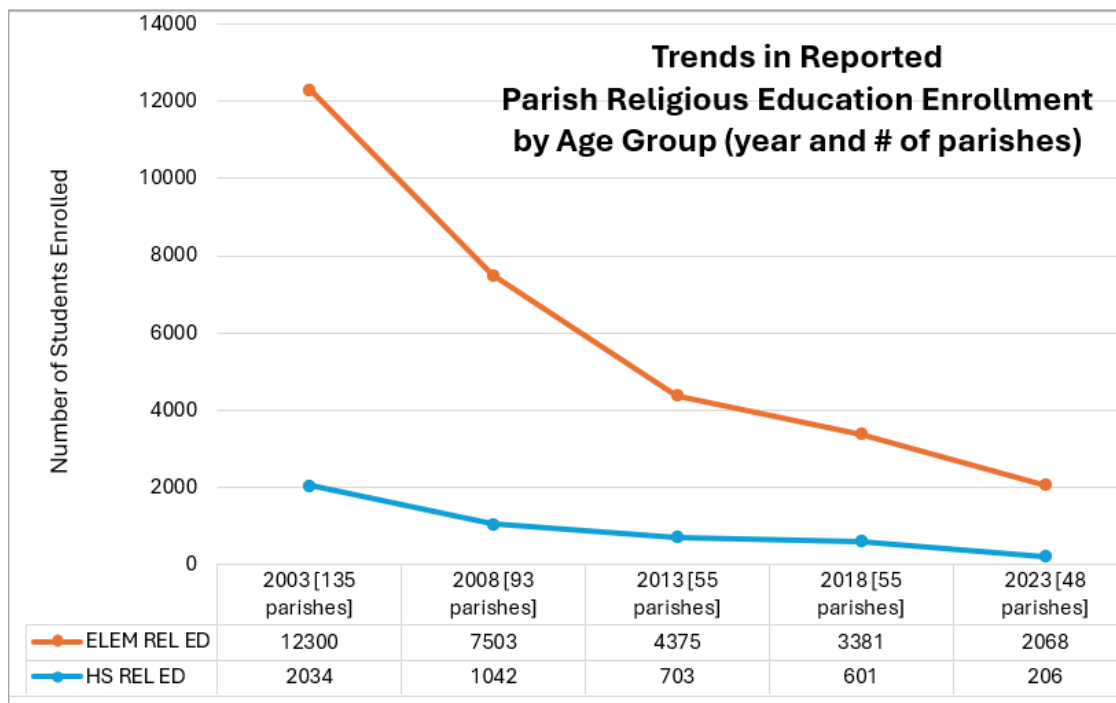
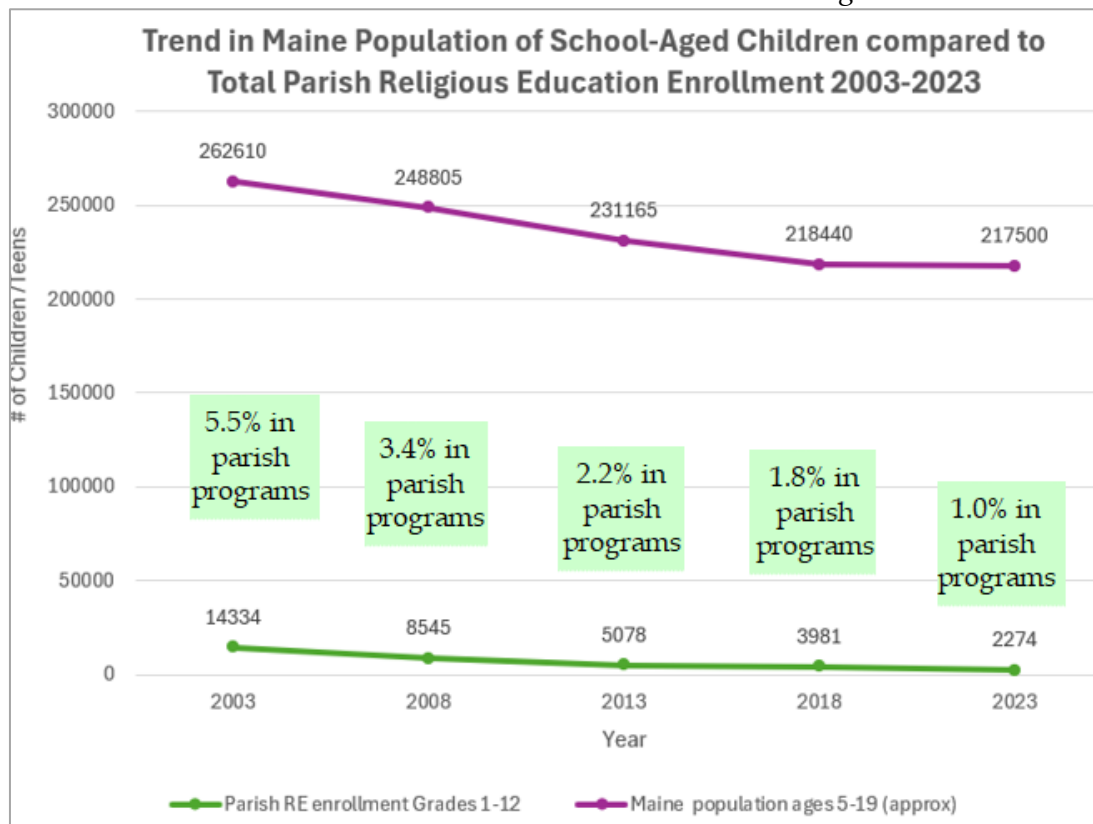


Figure F2



It is natural to ask what caused these shifts in participation. A simple explanation would be that there are fewer school-aged children in Maine which results in fewer participants in parish religious education programs. Figure F3 compares U.S. Census data for school-aged children to total parish religious education enrollment from 2003 to 2023. While the lines shapes are similar, what is most telling is the drop from 5.5% of all school-aged children in Maine in 2003 enrolled in parish religious education to 1% of Maine school-aged children enrolled in parish religious education in 2023.

Figure F3



Another thought might be that the enrollment declines mirror the declines in the number of parishes offering religious education. If that were true, the 2003 average enrollment by age group would have remained constant at 106 elementary students/parish plus 15 high school students/parish with 135 parishes. The expected total enrollment for 2008 would be roughly 11,250 with 93 parishes, enrollment for 2013 and 2018 would be closer to 6,650 with 55 parishes, and 2023 totals would be near 5,800 with 48 parishes. This is not the case. Something more is going on to have total enrollment at 2,274 in 2023.

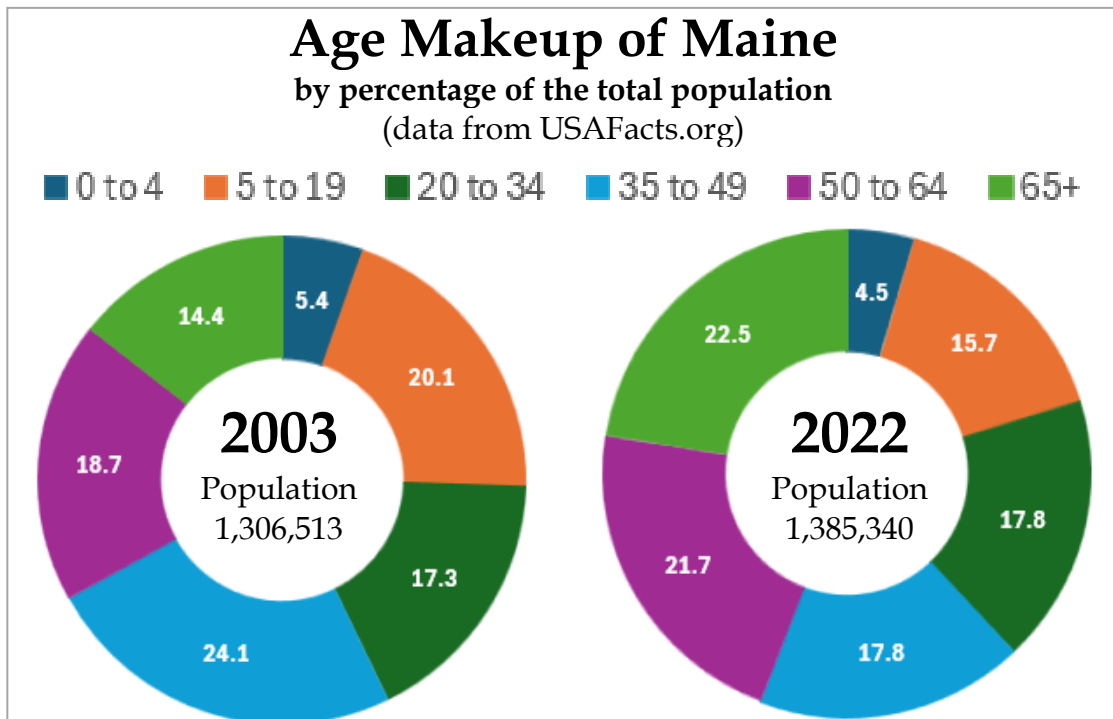
Here again, uncovering causal factors requires more information than the annual parish faith formation report or other quantitative measures can provide alone. Three broader shifts in the last two decades are likely to contribute to the decline in participation: differences in family life, easier access to more information through the internet, and the addition of digital

interactions between people. All three also weave into the change in what is expected of schooling (from teacher-focused to learning-focused) and how children learn (more visual with fewer ingrained efforts toward norms-based critical thinking needed for discernment).

A danger would be to look for someone or something to “blame” for the current situation or nostalgically try methods that worked for adults when they were children or teens. A more productive strategy would be to acknowledge the sadness or concern over the current situation while also recognizing God is present now in the people of this time and provides what is needed to share the Gospel and make disciples among real people. For example, rather than blaming parents as having different priorities than what one might say is ideal, celebrate that however parents/guardians do chose to participate they are responding to the Holy Spirit in some way and we have the opportunity to walk along with them for a while as a faithful companion like Jesus did on the road to Emmaus.

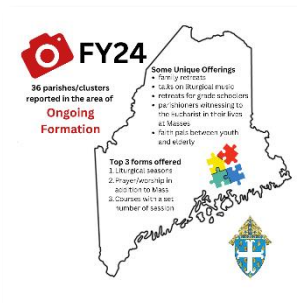
Interestingly, during this same period the overall population in Maine grew by 6%. Most of the growth was among people aged 50 and older. These conditions present opportunities to be more purposeful in ongoing formation as well as evangelization. As the aim of catechesis emphasizes, the intent is that the Church’s efforts in faith formation help all people grow in love, knowledge, intimacy and communion with Jesus Christs and share their encounters with him in the Church and the world

Figure F4





Ongoing Formation in the Christian Life



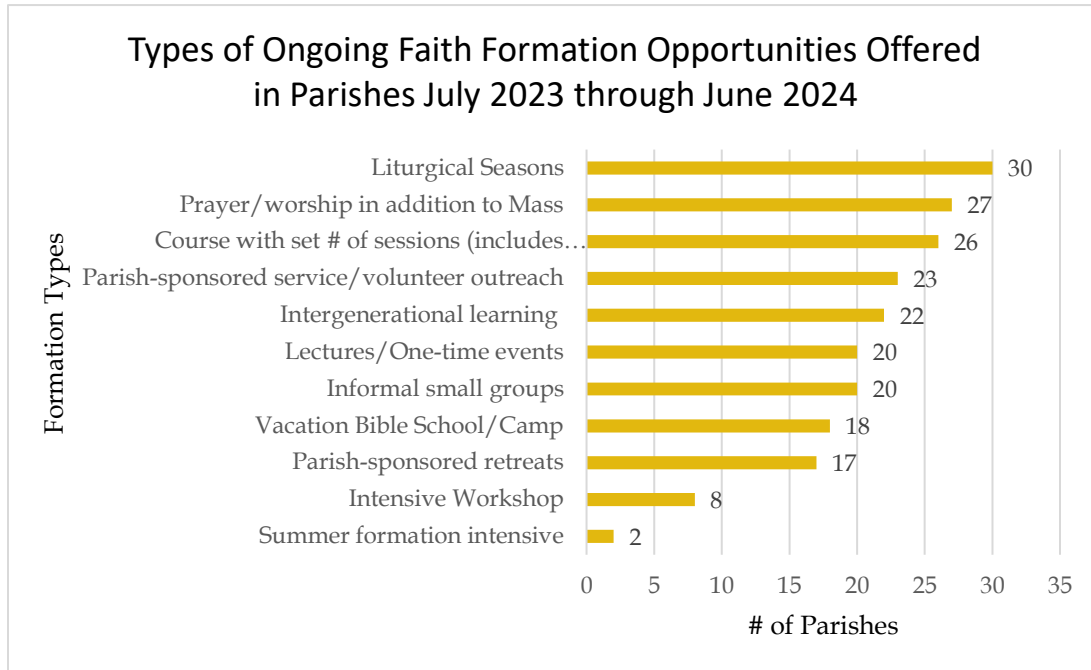
Ongoing formation of fully initiated Catholic children, teens, and adults aims to (a) mature the living, explicit, and fruitful faith of believers at each stage and phase of life, and (b) develop the attitudes, practices, and active participation of missionary disciples. Thirty (36) parishes/clusters reported on this area for FY24.

All but one parish/cluster reported two or more types of ongoing faith formation offered July 2023 through June 2024. (See Figure OF1).

The frequency of type was similar to that reported in FY23, with bible study/course with a set number of sessions being the only area of increase that could not be solely attributed to the larger sample size for FY24.

The three most frequently used forms of ongoing faith formation were offerings for liturgical seasons, prayer or worship outside of Mass, and courses with a set number of sessions.

Figure OF1



Some unique examples included:

- Retreats for families and retreats for grade-schoolers in addition to those offered during sacrament preparation
- Talks on liturgical music
- Parishioners witnessing to how the Eucharist impacts their lives in writing or in presenting at Mass
- Faith pals between youth and elderly for prayer, conversation, and connection

Conversations in the next rounds of parish visits should include the intentions behind the choices for offerings and how, if at all, the opportunities fit together to address the formation of the whole person at every age and stage of life. The goal is for ongoing formation to give attention to the organic yet systematic nature of maturing Catholic faith that is living, explicit, and fruitful and how generations interact with one another to learn with and from those of different ages.