

Participation and Commitment Among American Catholic Parishioners¹

Michael R. Welch

This chapter will help church leaders understand the factors that influence the participation of their parishioners. Such an understanding is important, given the changes that have occurred among the largest and most prominent religious denominations during the past thirty years. As transformations in mainline American Protestant denominations become increasingly evident (Chaves, 1989; Greeley, 1989:21-66; Iannaccone, 1990; Roof and McKinney, 1987; Wuthnow, 1988) and signs of some convergence between these mainline bodies and American Catholicism appear (Caplow, 1991:71), questions about the nature of Catholic piety and types of institutional religious commitment have also resurfaced. Many of these questions center around changes in the devotional practices of Catholics (e.g., the apparent decline in the use of "confession"). Several researchers (D'Antonio, Davidson, Hoge, Wallace, 1989; Hoge, 1981, McNamara, 1985), particularly Greeley (Greeley, 1989; 1991; Greeley, McCready, and McCourt, 1976), have focused on the historical declines in Mass attendance that occurred during the late 1960s through the middle 1970s (more specifically, 1968-75) to assess the impact and meaning of these events. In summary, Greeley indicates that Catholics' attendance rates have "restabilized" since 1975 and offers primarily a life-cycle explanation to account for the observed trends (1989:42-56).

Beyond these broad-scale interpretations of changes in Catholics' religious behavior, much remains to be learned about how specific aspects of parish and community environments influence the religious participation of parishioners. This task is complicated, however, by the fact that participation takes different forms, with some being more meaningful than others for certain parishioners; that some forms of participation receive greater emphasis, depending on the specific type of parish; and that many distinctly different influences on participation can be identified.

Taking these complexities into account, this chapter focuses on four kinds of religious participation that Catholic parishioners display, and on three different types of influences on participation—characteristics of individuals themselves, characteristics of their parishes, and characteristics of the community in which a parish is located. In particular, questions about the effects of such contextual properties, as the last two factors are called by sociologists, are important for at least two reasons.

First, parishes and their surrounding community environments are the central locus of religious activity for most Catholics. It is in these units that Catholics are schooled, worship, wed, and have fundamental moral values instilled and behaviors reinforced (see, Greeley, Durkin, Shea, Tracey, and McCready, 1981, for a supporting view). Thus, if we wish to understand better what shapes the religious behavior of parishioners, we cannot ignore the unique attributes displayed by specific parishes.

Second, the connection between contextual attributes and parishioners' religious participation helps pastors, church planners, and administrators understand what factors influence the vitality and mission of parishes. Without precise knowledge about those aspects of parish life that are most likely to foster the religious participation and commitment of parishioners, church leaders may be led to invest scarce resources in unproductive or marginally beneficial programs.

Because of the substantive and methodological complexity of the analysis, the sections that follow flow in what may strike some as a rather peculiar order. Specifically, I begin with the conclusions and then invite the reader to proceed through the detailed analysis that produced them. That is, I first summarize the findings' implications for church leaders, and then discuss the sources of information and measures of religious participation used in the study. Next, I summarize and test simple hypotheses about factors that relate to church participation and commitment among Catholic parishioners. Finally, I turn to an analysis of the relative importance of contextual and personal factors, concluding with an overview of the major influences on each of the four kinds of participation that were studied.

Implications for Church Leaders

The findings of the following analysis have several important implications for pastors and other church leaders. Although the conclusions listed here do not exhaust all possible implications that may bear on the development of church programs or pastoral practice, they do identify the more important sets of factors that relate to participation in the life of the parish.

1. Different aspects of religious behavior are not equally responsive to the same sets of forces. Thus, Catholic leaders should clearly recognize which aspects of religious commitment they wish to nurture when they design programs to enhance parishioners' levels of involvement. As will be seen from the data reported, particularly in the discussion of Table 16.4, few factors show uniform influence across the four religious behaviors that were analyzed.
2. Among the sets of variables that pastors or other church leaders can control most easily, two stand out as key factors for promoting the increased involvement of parishioners: the presence of specialized ministries and programs within a parish, and the level of faith sharing that occurs. Compared with other sets of institutional variables that leaders can manipulate, these variables make statistically significant and relatively important contributions in predicting different aspects of involvement when the remaining factors have been controlled. It might be advisable, therefore, to identify specific programs and ministries parishioners find most fulfilling and to implement activities, such as adult faith-sharing groups, which focus on the discussion of religious beliefs or other related issues. Although this mechanism is presently incorporated in some adult religious education programs, it may merit more serious attention on the part of pastors or diocesan administrators.
3. Most of the sets of variables that have the strongest linkages to religious behavior are not under the control of church leaders. We should be realistic and not expect substantial increases in parishioners' levels of involvement to flow from many changes that pastors initiate. In short, it appears that altering relatively ineffectual programs in a variety of ways is probably wasted effort.
4. If pastors or church planners wish to increase parishioners' involvement, they should focus on maximizing the overall social integration of parishioners within their parishes. This one set of individual-level variables, more than any other, appears to be the most critical factor for increasing commitment and involvement among rank-and-file parishioners. Thus, any efforts that enhance an authentic sense of belonging and a connection to fellow parishioners are not misdirected. However, such goals are sometimes difficult to implement. Too often merely a transitory illusion of *gemeinschaft* is achieved. A more enduring community evolves only after years of interaction have produced an abiding trust among parishioners, and between priest and people. Forced attempts at "easy" intimacy achieved through such simplistic, fash-

ionable mechanisms as after-Mass coffeehouses probably do little more than run up the parish's bill for doughnuts. Because efforts to build an authentic sense of community take time, it might also be wise for dioceses to reconsider mandatory policies that stipulate a pastor's maximum length of tenure in a specific parish.

5. All of the preceding suggestions underscore the benefits to be gained from conducting more frequent and intensive needs assessment studies within parishes. Such studies can help pastors assess the value of current programs, activities and ministries, and identify new opportunities for service. Only by collecting this type of empirical evidence can a local pastor reach informed judgments about how programs really work and whether they effectively promote involvement or commitment.

Measuring Religious Participation and Related Factors

Data and Measures

Information on the levels of religious participation and commitment displayed by American Catholics in and through their local parishes was obtained from the Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life (hereafter abbreviated as CPL). This study, funded by the Lilly Endowment, collected several kinds of information (e.g., surveys of individuals and parishes, ratings drawn from participant observations, census data for a subset of sampled parishes, and so on) on a representative cross-section of parishes within the United States during the winter and spring months of 1983–84 (see Leege and Welch, 1989, for a more complete description).²

The following four measures of religious participation constitute the dependent variables for all of the analyses: (1) number of parish activities in which a parishioner is involved (Parish Activities), (2) estimated amount of money the parishioner's family contributed to the parish during the year (Financial Giving), (3) frequency of participation in basic worship (e.g., Sunday Mass and Communion) activities (Basic Devotion), and (4) frequency of participation in traditionalistic (e.g., Stations of the Cross, Novenas, and so on) religious rituals (Traditionalistic Devotion).³

Because of the extensiveness of the data (more than 700 variables) a series of preliminary analyses was conducted to reduce the sets of predictor variables to a more manageable number that could be incorporated into the final analyses.⁴ These initial procedures were governed by both empirical and theoretical considerations. A complete list of variable wording and coding is available in the Supplemental Appendix.

Measures of Local Contextual Variables: Properties of the Community

Following Roof et al. (1979), several measures of the community environment in which a parish is located were included in preliminary analyses, and designated as "local contextual" variables. Only measures displaying significant and theoretically interpretable correlations with the measures of participation were retained. As a set, five variables were used to represent factors ranging from community ecology (e.g., urban environment), to factors that shape local community culture (e.g., number of families, decreases in younger segment of population) and opportunities for choosing a place of worship (e.g., presence of another Catholic church in the community). Measures of these variables are described in the Supplemental Appendix (Table A16.2).

Measures of Local Institutional Variables: Aggregate and Global Properties of the Local Parish

"Local institutional" variables refer to characteristics of the local parish church and its congregation (Roof et al., 1979:212). In some instances these variables represent congregations' attributes that are reflected in the mean scores (or relevant percentages) of individual members of each parish; hence, they refer to aggregate properties of the congregation. These properties differ from the constituent characteristics of individual parish members from which they are derived and represent aspects of the encompassing social or psychological "climate" of a parish (e.g., the social class standing of an individual parishioner compared to the socioeconomic composition of the parish as a whole). Other variables, however, represent institutional properties of the parish that are distinct from such congregational attributes (e.g., the presence of a parish school). Twenty-six simple measures of local characteristics are included in the final analysis, along with three more complex measures (see Supplemental Appendix, Table A16.1 for a complete description).⁵

Measures of Individual-Level Variables: Personal Attributes of Parishioners

Individual-level variables represent personal attributes of parishioners, such as race, gender, marital status, involvement in community organizations, and level of satisfaction with aspects of the parish—to name but a few. These, and other characteristics like them, shape the behaviors and activities of parishioners in both secular and religious spheres. Thus, twenty measures of these characteristics are included in the final analysis (see Supplemental Appendix, Table A16.1).

Selected Hypotheses Under Study: A Multi-level Approach

The sets of variables described in the preceding sections are linked to patterns of religious participation that American Catholic parishioners display. But the nature of these linkages remains to be formalized. In the remainder of this section I present several selected hypotheses, grouped by the kind of variables involved in the predicted relationship and by the theory from which the prediction derives. Simple hypotheses drawn from extant theories, or whose derivation is obvious, will simply be presented and not discussed, so I can devote sufficient space to new hypotheses.

Because the principal goal of this chapter is to examine the predictive ability of different types of variables related to religious involvement in one's parish, hypotheses are framed to reflect simple zero-order relationships. Examination of more complex (e.g., conditional or net) relationships involving specific predictors is beyond the scope of the chapter.

Selected Hypotheses Involving Individual-Level Variables (H1–H7)

Correlations between the measures of the individual-level variables and the four measures of religious participation are reported in Table 16.1 (only relationships in which $r > \pm .10$ and significant at $p < .05$ are reported).

Considering only the statistically and substantively significant correlations in the table, it is clear that all of the following individual-level hypotheses (H1–H7) receive support—but to varying degrees.

Child-rearing Theory (H1). Building on previous research (e.g., Carroll and Roozen, 1975; Hoge and Carroll, 1978; Nash and Berger, 1962), it is predicted that parishioners who have at least one child under the age of eighteen should be more involved in religious activities and show higher levels of commitment than parishioners who are childless or have older children. Support for this theory in our analysis, however, is rather weak (see Table 16.1), with only one relationship attaining the criterion levels of substantive and statistical significance. Among Catholics, the presence of younger children within a family is only moderately associated with participation in parish activities.

Boomer Cohort Hypothesis (H2). Because of the historical experiences that shaped their lives during a critical period in the process of religious development (teenage years to the middle twenties), parishioners who are members of the “baby boom” birth cohorts should be less committed and religiously involved than parishioners who are members of earlier cohorts (H2). Although some might contend that cohort effects do not explain variations in religious involvement among Catholics (see Greeley, 1989:42–56)

TABLE 16.1
Zero-order Correlations Between Individual-Level Variables and
Measures of Religious Participation*

Hypotheses	Individual-Level Variables	Measures of Participation			
		Basic Devotion	Traditionalistic Devotion	Parish Activities	Financial Giving
H ₁	Have child under 18			.108	
H ₂	WWII Cohort				.121
	Baby Boomers	-.147	-.253		-.167
H ₃	Moral Traditionalism	.180	.271		.151
H ₄	Theological Progressivism		-.203		
H ₅	Geographic Mobility		-.245		
	Conversations: Pastor	.223	.356	.289	.151
	Conversations: Parishioners	.226	.232	.344	.132
	Community Attachment	.264	.304	.301	.171
H ₆	Non-Catholic Spouse	-.161			-.131
H ₇	Satisfies Spiritual needs	.174	.210	.201	
	Rated quality: Liturgies				
	Rated quality: Homilies	.122	.194		
	Rated quality: Pastoral Care				
<i>Demographic Variables</i>					
	Gender (Male=1)				.147
	Presently married		-.137		.138
	Race (Black=1)		.106		
	Education		-.152	.111	.182
	Voluntary organizational memberships	.128	.111	.241	.133

*Only coefficients $\geq \pm .10$ and $p < .05$ are reproduced.

Roof and McKinney (1987) suggest that the Boomer cohorts function as carriers of a "new voluntarism" that may be reflected in the religious behavior of several denominations, including, perhaps, Catholicism.

This hypothesis (H2) receives a relatively high degree of support from the data presented in Table 16.1: the baby boomer cohorts show consistently lower levels of participation (on three of four measures of participation) compared to their Catholic counterparts of earlier generations.

Value Structure Theory (H3). Parishioners holding more traditionalistic social values should display higher levels of participation in religious activities and higher levels of commitment than parishioners holding less traditionalistic values (H3). We tested this prediction by examining relationships between the Moral Traditionalism scale and our four measures of religious participation. Support for the hypothesis is generally consistent, with positive relationships ranging from moderate to substantial (see Table 16.1).

Doctrinal Belief Theory (H4). Parishioners who hold the most conservative, orthodox beliefs about church doctrine or practices should be more religiously involved and committed than those who adopt more progressive, heterodox beliefs (H4). Support for this prediction should be manifest in a negative relationship between the Theological Progressivism scale and the measures of participation. Given the single significant relationship presented in Table 16.1, it seems clear that this hypothesis is only weakly supported. It appears only to be true for Traditionalistic Devotion.

Social Integration Hypothesis (H5). Parishioners who are more strongly integrated into the parish community should be more religiously active and committed (H5). This hypothesis predicts positive relationships between the variables representing Conversations with Pastor, Conversations with Other Parishioners, Community Attachment, and our measures of participation. Because migration disrupts social integration (Welch and Baltzell, 1984) a negative relationship between Geographic Mobility and our religious participation measures would also support the hypothesis. Results from our analyses provide relatively strong support for this hypothesis across each of the four types of participation (see Table 16.1).

Reinforcing Values Hypothesis (H6). Compared to nonmarried parishioners or those married to Catholic spouses, parishioners who are married to non-Catholic spouses should display lower levels of commitment and participation in religious activities (H6). The relative absence of shared religious values within a "mixed marriage" is thought to diminish intra-familial pressures toward Catholic participation of the Catholic partner. Actual conflicts over religious practices might also dissuade the Catholic partner from participating in religious activities more fully (see Welch, Johnson, and Pilgrim:188). As can be seen in Table 16.1, there is moderate support for H6. Respondents having non-Catholic spouses are less likely to show high levels of basic devotionism and financial giving than Catholics who are married to Catholic spouses or who are single.

Member Satisfaction Hypothesis (H7). Parishioners who are more satisfied with the parish and its worship activities should be more likely to show high levels of religious participation and commitment within that parish (H7). This hypothesis, framed at the individual-level, is simply a corollary of aggregate-level hypotheses that were formalized and tested earlier by Roof, Hoge, Dyble, and Hadaway (1979:202). At the operational level positive relationships between the four measures of participation and commitment and the following variables would constitute supportive evidence: Parish Satisfies Spiritual Needs, Parish Satisfies Social Needs, Rated Quality of Liturgies, Rated Quality of Homilies, and Rated Quality of Pastoral Care.

There is very modest support for this hypothesis: only seven of the relevant twenty relationships are in the predicted direction and sizable enough to warrant consideration. In general, parishioners who feel that their social needs are being satisfied within a parish are more likely to participate at higher levels than less satisfied peers. Satisfaction of spiritual needs and the rated quality of preaching also show a moderate relationship to devotional styles parishioners display (Table 16.1).

Correlations representing relationships between several basic measures of demographic characteristics (gender, level of education, marital status, and race) and religious participation are also reported in Table 16.1, as are correlations between the number of memberships in voluntary organizations a parishioner reports and the levels of participation he or she displays. Education shows the strongest positive relationships to Parish Activities and Financial Giving, but shows a nearly equally strong negative relationship to Traditionalistic Devotion, as might be expected. Variables representing race, gender, and marital status also show a varying pattern of relationships to the different measures of participation. In contrast, however, parishioners who report a tendency to join various civic organizations are also consistently more likely to participate in a variety of devotional practices (both basic and traditionalistic) and parish activities, and to donate more of their annual family income to the parish.

Selected Hypotheses Involving Local Contextual Variables (H8–H9)

In this section, the focus shifts from hypotheses involving characteristics of individual parishioners (e.g., whether they are members of the “baby boom” generation, or are married to a non-Catholic, and so on) to hypotheses that predict how characteristics of the local community culture relate to the level of participation parish members exhibit. As a result, these hypotheses address questions about the extent to which geographically defined environments may shape the religious behavior of parishioners. Relevant correlations are presented in Table 16.2.

TABLE 16.2
Zero-order Correlations for Relationships Between Local Contextual Variables and Measures of a Parishioner's Level of Religious Participation*

Hypotheses Represented	Local Contextual Variables	Measures of Participation			
		Basic Devotion	Tradition-alistic Devotion	Parish Activities	Financial Giving
H ₈	Parish Competition				-.110
	Decline in % Population Under 18	-.102			-.131
	% Growth in Number of Families				
H ₉	% Growth in school-age population		-.173		
<i>Community Type Variables</i>					
	Urban		.101		.123
	Suburban		-.173		

*Only coefficients $\geq \pm .10$ and $p < .05$ are reproduced.

Opportunity-for-Selection Hypothesis (H8). Parishioners living in an area in which more than one Catholic parish is located should display higher religious participation and commitment than parishioners who live in a town or place in which there is only a single parish (H8). The presence of multiple parishes within a single town allows Catholics the opportunity to select the one parish that best meets their needs. If individual members are most likely to attend the parish that offers greatest overall satisfaction, it seems equally likely that their participation and commitment will be enhanced. This reasoning does not ignore canonical parishes and the status of parish boundaries, it merely recognizes what may be an important tendency among some younger and middle-aged Catholics to engage in "parish shopping" (see, Leege and Welch, 1989:142-44). Positive relationships between the Parish Competition variable and the measures of participation and commitment are predicted.

The results from Table 16.2 provide at best weak and mixed support for H8. Only one correlation is sizable and that relationship is negative rather than positive, suggesting that the availability of multiple parishes within a community may actually have an adverse influence on parishioners contributions to their "home" parish.

Family/Youth-oriented Subculture Hypothesis (H9). Parishioners who are served by parishes located in areas that are experiencing a growth in the school-age population and the number of resident families should be more religiously active and committed than their counterparts living in parishes not located in such an area (H9). This hypothesis posits that increases in the school-age population and the number of families residing in an area give rise to a salient familistic/youth-centered subculture that emphasizes involvement in community organizations (ostensibly to advocate the interests of families in the earlier stages of the family life cycle); intergenerational transmission of moral and religious values; and the promotion of a bourgeois, hygienic social environment favorable to family life. The normative focus of such a subculture should directly and indirectly reinforce churchgoing and religious commitment among all members within the area who are exposed to it. In addition, such cultural pressures may induce parishes to increase their repertoire of religious and social services, making them more attractive to all types of parishioners and not merely those with younger children. Such attractiveness would seem likely to promote relatively high levels of participation and support. Note, this is not a hypothesis about the individual participation of young families, but rather posits that the presence of young families creates an atmosphere that positively influences everyone's participation.

This hypothesis also receives only weak and mixed support: only three of twelve relevant correlations surpass $\pm .10$ and the relationships vary considerably in both magnitude and direction across the different types of participation. Growth in the school-age population within a community is linked to lower levels of Traditionalistic Devotion, as might be expected; but such growth shows only negligible relationships to other measures of participation. Declines in the younger segment of the population (those under 18) are also linked to lower levels of Basic Devotion and Financial Giving; however, growth in the number of families present within a community bears no substantial relationship to these or any other forms of participation.

Although no specific hypotheses were presented regarding the type of community in which parishes are located, correlations relating urban and suburban location to levels of participation are also reported in Table 16.2. In general, parishioners from suburban parishes show higher levels of giving than their counterparts in rural and small town parishes (the comparison category) and lower levels of traditional practices. Parishioners from urban parishes tend to display slightly higher levels of Traditionalistic Devotion than their suburban contemporaries.

Selected Hypotheses Involving Local Institutional Variables (H10–H20)

Institutional parish variables denote characteristics of specific parishes, such as organizational features (e.g., number of registered members), parish programs, or aspects of the parish subculture (e.g., the level of moral traditionalism that exists within a parish). These variables represent a third level of factors that can affect the degree to which parishioners participate. Correlations involving these variables are presented in Table 16.3.

Status Group Theory (H10). Parishioners located in parishes whose congregations are characterized by high levels of socioeconomic status (SES) should display higher levels of religious participation than their counterparts in congregations having lower levels of SES (H10). Following Weber (Gerth and Mills, 1958:186), the aura of high status that attaches to such parishes may foster high levels of participation among many individual members principally because of their desire for vicarious identification with the life-style of the higher social classes.

The two substantial correlations reported in Table 16.3 provide moderate, but mixed, support for H10. Parish-level SES is positively related to Financial Giving, but the substantial, negative correlation between the measure of parish-level SES and Traditionalistic Devotion indicates that parishioners in parishes characterized by high status tend to show lower levels of traditional devotional activities than parishioners in lower status parishes.

Boundary-Maintenance or Closed Community Hypothesis (H11). Parishioners who are members of a parish congregation that is characterized by high levels of homogeneity and a concern for boundary-maintenance should display higher levels of religious participation and commitment (H11). Derived from Kelley's (1972) arguments, this hypothesis suggests that a strong sense of group boundaries and relative cultural homogeneity should promote a heightened group distinctiveness, and, accompanying it, an intensification of commitment expressed in higher levels of participation among parishioners.

Support for this hypothesis would be represented by positive relationships between the Index of Ethnic Homogeneity Within Parish, the Level of Religious Endogamy Within Parish, the Aggregate Level of Religious Boundary-Maintenance Within Parish, and our four measures of participation and commitment. As can be seen in Table 16.3, H11 receives little support. Only the measure of parish boundary-maintenance is positively related to one of the participation measures (Traditionalistic Devotion); the remaining eleven correlations are negligible in magnitude and mixed in their direction.

TABLE 16.3
Zero-order Correlations for Relationships Between Local
Institutional Variables and Measures of a Parishioner's Level of
Religious Participation*

Hypotheses Represented	Local Institutional Variables	Measures of Participation			
		Basic Devotion	Tradition- alistic Devotion	Parish Activities	Financial Giving
H ₁₀	Parish Level SES		-.190		.192
H ₁₁	Ethnic Homogeneity				
	Religious Endogamy				
	Religious Boundary- Maintenance		.210		
H ₁₂	Geographic Immobility among Parishioners		.202		
	Attachment to Parish		.168		
	Frequency of Conversations among Parishioners		.157	-.118	-.109
H ₁₃	Of Moral Traditionalism		.113		
H ₁₄	Theological Progressivism		-.222		
H ₁₅	Parish Complexity				.139
	Organized Planning Process Used in Parish				
	Number of Registered Families		-.109		.133
H ₁₆	School in Parish				.103
H ₁₇	RCIA				.162
H ₁₈	Evangelization Programs				
	Faith Sharing			.128	
H ₁₉	Bible Study				
	Ministry to Sick				
	Ministry to Elderly				
	Ministry to Divorced		-.153		
	Social Programs				
H ₂₀	Satisfaction with Religious Education		.150		
	Satisfaction with Spiritual Needs		.150		
	Satisfaction with Social Needs		.152		
	Satisfaction with Pastoral Care		.188		

Hypotheses Represented	Local Institutional Variables	Measures of Participation			
		Basic Devotion	Tradition- alistic Devotion	Parish Activities	Financial Giving
	Rating of Homilies		.131		
<i>Other Measures of Parish Climate</i>					
	Mean Age		.177	-.106	
	Average Organization Memberships			.100	
	% of Parishioners Holding Leadership Positions in Organizations			.109	

*Only coefficients $\geq \pm .100$ and $p < .05$ are reproduced.

Group Cohesion/Gemeinschaft Hypothesis (H12). Parishioners who are members of parishes characterized by relatively high levels of group cohesiveness should display higher levels of religious participation and commitment (H12). Parishes that are characterized by stable networks of interacting parishioners have a greater opportunity both to transmit religious norms and to enforce them (see, Welch and Baltzell, 1984:77, 80; White, 1968; Wald, Owen, and Hill, 1990, for evidence in support of this reasoning), thus promoting higher levels of participation among members. Parishes that display such social integration are also likely to generate collective bonds of attachment that promote a *gemeinschaft*-like environment. This type of parish environment may, in itself, promote greater involvement because it is satisfying to many members who are searching for a sense of community. Indicators of group cohesion such as the Aggregate Level of Geographic Immobility, Mean Level of Attachment to Parish, and Mean Frequency of Conversations Among Parishioners should display positive relationships to the four measures of participation if the hypothesis is supported.

Five of the twelve correlations representing this hypothesis (see Table 16.3) are at least moderate in magnitude ($\pm .10 \pm .20$) and four of the five correlations are in the predicted direction. Measures such as the frequency of communications among members that reflect the extent of in-group interaction within a parish seem to be central in maintaining group integration—and are ultimately linked to religious participation. Overall, it would appear that H12 is at least moderately well supported by the data.

Subcultural Traditionalism Hypothesis: General Values (H13). Parishioners who are members of parishes characterized by relatively high levels of traditionalistic values should have higher levels of religious participation and commitment (H13). In parishes where highly traditionalistic moral values predominate, the normative climate should incline members toward high levels of involvement. This parish-level corollary to H3 is tested by the relationship between the Climate of Moral Traditionalism Within Parish and the four measures of religiosity. Positive relationships are predicted.

This hypothesis gains some weak support from the analysis, with parishioners from parishes that display a highly traditionalistic climate showing higher levels of Traditionalistic Devotion. None of the other three relevant relationships are both statistically significant and substantively important.

Subcultural Traditionalism Hypothesis: Doctrinal Values (H14). Parishioners who are members of parishes characterized by conservative or highly orthodox beliefs about church doctrine or practices should be more religiously involved and committed (H14). Conservative parishes should promote and enforce subcultural norms that reflect their orthodox views: e.g., frequent Mass attendance, reception of the sacraments, and a generally high level of involvement in parish life. The potential intolerance of these types of parishes may give them considerable normative power. A negative relationship between Aggregate Level of Theological Progressivism Within Parish and our participation measures would provide support for the hypothesis.

Again, there is only weak support for this hypothesis: one of four relevant relationships is in the predicted direction and sizable enough to merit examination (see Table 16.3). The linkage involves the climate of doctrinal progressivism and patterns of traditional devotion.

Anti-bureaucracy/Anti-impersonalism Hypothesis (H15). Parishioners who are members of larger parishes that have a more bureaucratic form of organization should be less religiously involved or committed than their counterparts in small, less bureaucratic parishes (H15). Consistent with elements in Dudley's reasoning (1977), parishioners may be repulsed by what they perceive to be the impersonalism and inauthenticity of larger, more complex parishes that often develop an emergent bureaucratic character. Thus, the relatively unattractive organizational aspects of these parishes may depress involvement and lead to defection on the part of some parishioners.

This hypothesis leads to the prediction that indicators of high levels of bureaucratic organization (Level of Parish Complexity and the presence of an Organized Planning Process Used Within Parish) would be negatively related to the participation and commitment measures. The Number of Reg-

istered Families in Parish should also be negatively related to the four religiosity variables. H15 receives only mixed and weak support from the data in Table 16.3. Only three of twelve relationships are at least modestly strong and one relationship is even inverse (Table 16.3).

Parish School-as-Magnet Hypothesis (H16). Parishioners who are members of parishes that have a school should be more religiously active and committed than their counterparts in parishes without schools (H16). Despite some ambivalence about the costs and relative drain that parish schools place on parish resources, it is often argued that schools produce a dynamism that attracts members and increases their involvement in parish activities. The extent of this involvement, however, is not well understood. Is this dual process of attraction and enhancement confined to the sector of social activities or does it extend to more purely religious activities as well? At the operational level, the hypothesis predicts a positive relationship between Presence of School in Parish and the measures of religious participation and commitment.

Support for H16 is also somewhat weak. The presence of a parish school is positively related, to a moderate degree, to higher levels of giving among parishioners, but it is not meaningfully connected to the other three types of participation.

Level of Demand Hypothesis (H17). Parishioners who belong to parishes that make relatively significant demands on their members should display higher levels of religious participation and commitment than their counterparts in less demanding parishes (H17). Kelley (1977) emphasizes the importance of a congregational environment that places demands on its members and he believes that such demands actually enhance commitment. In studying group dynamics, social psychologists have also contended that groups that impose relatively severe initiations on new members as evidence of their commitment often succeed in engendering a highly intense commitment. This enhanced commitment is usually viewed as a by-product of rationalizations used to relieve any cognitive dissonance that was associated with meeting the original demands. In short, many members may convince themselves that their initial effort was worthwhile by devoting even more time and energies to the group. Conversely, groups that require less of their members may be perceived as less worthwhile and, as a result, will be less likely to evoke strong commitment from members.

Only one indicator of demands placed on members by a parish is available in the data: whether the parish has a program for the Rite of Christian Initiation (RCIA). Although this program applies to converts, its presence in a

parish provides at least partial evidence for assessing the membership requirements a parish imposes. As with H16, support for H17 is weak and rests on a single substantial positive relationship linking the presence of the RCIA program to financial contributions (see Table 16.3).

Faith Sharing and Outreach Hypothesis (H18). Parishioners who belong to parishes in which members frequently discuss religious beliefs should show higher levels of participation and commitment (H18). Discussing one's faith with others, usually in the context of small Bible study groups or other similar groups that operate within a congregation, has been viewed by some church growth scholars (e.g., Raines, 1961; Schaller, 1975) as a singularly important mechanism for promoting a dynamic congregational environment. In Catholic parishes, where faith-sharing practices have changed markedly since the influence of Vatican II reforms on parish life at the grass-roots level, the same patterns may now be promoting greater involvement among rank-and-file parishioners.

Two measures in our data can be used as indicators to test this hypothesis: whether Evangelization Programs (are) Used in Parish and the Aggregate Level of Faith Sharing Within Parish. Both measures should display positive relationships to the measures of religious commitment and participation.

This hypothesis receives only very weak support from the data. The use of evangelization programs within a parish is not connected to any of the measures of participation, at least not in any important way. Moreover, even a climate that promotes faith sharing among parishioners shows only a single, important, moderately positive relationship to one form of participation—Parish Activities (Table 16.3).

Program Specialization Thesis (H19). Parishioners who belong to parishes that offer a variety of specialized programs or ministries should display higher levels of religious participation and commitment (H19). The availability of specialized programs or ministries within a parish increases the likelihood that individuals will have their particular religious needs met and, as a result, are more likely to exhibit high levels of involvement.

This hypothesis leads one to predict positive relationships between the measures of religious commitment and participation and five binary variables that represent the presence or absence of the following parish programs: Bible Study, Ministry to Sick, Ministry to Elderly, Ministry to Divorced, and Presence of Social Service Programs Within Parish.

In Table 16.3, only two of twenty relevant correlations are of sufficient magnitude to consider, and only one of these correlations is positive. As a result, one can conclude that H19 receives only very weak support. A special-

ized program may enhance the activity level of the target group served by the program; but there is no evidence in our data that any particular kind of specialized programming creates a more general climate of participation.

Satisfying Parish Hypothesis (H20). Parishioners who belong to a parish that is viewed as highly satisfying by its members should be more religiously involved and committed than their counterparts from less satisfying parishes (H20). This hypothesis is simply the parish level corollary to H7 presented earlier. It predicts positive relationships between all sets of parish level measures of congregational satisfaction (e.g., Congregation's Level of Satisfaction with Religious Education, Satisfaction of Congregation's Spiritual Needs, Satisfaction of Congregation's Social Needs, Congregation's Level of Satisfaction with Pastoral Care, Congregation's Rating of Homilies) and our measures of religious participation and commitment.

Table 16.3 reveals an interesting, but weak, pattern of support for this hypothesis. Four of the five measures of satisfaction display moderately positive relationships as predicted, but with only a single type of participation: Traditionalistic Devotion. No other forms of participation are linked to the group-level measures of satisfaction in a consistent way.

Finally, Table 16.3 also presents correlations between the measures of participation and three other measures of parish climate: the average age of parish members, the average number of organization memberships held by parishioners, and the percentage of parish members who hold leadership positions in voluntary organizations. As can be seen from the table, each of these variables is related to an individual's participation in parish activities, but not to most of the other types of participation (the exception being the relationship between the average age of members and Traditionalistic Devotion). Mean age of parish members also exhibits a moderate negative relationship to Parish Activities, although the two measures that tap voluntary organization membership are positively related to this activities variable.

Comparing the Relative Explanatory of the Different Sets of Variables

To assess the relative importance of the different sets of variables for explaining variations in parishioners' patterns of religious participation and financial contributions, a hierarchical regression model was used. The model effectively summarizes the relative contributions made by each set of variables after the preceding sets of variables have been included in the analysis. Although this approach has some limitations, it is well suited to our analytical task.⁶

Sets of variables were entered into the analysis based on measurement level and presumed causal primacy. For this analysis, sets representing

attributes of local community contexts were treated as "givens" and entered into the regression analyses first, followed by sets representing characteristics of individual parishioners. Sets of variables representing characteristics of the local parish (i.e., local institutional variables) were entered last, because these characteristics seem to be most often shaped by the preceding blocks of variables and not vice versa. Within the larger blocks of individual-level, contextual, and institutional variables, the order of entry for the separate sets of constituent variables was again based on assumed causal primacy, but relative to variables within the same general category (e.g., individual-level variables were compared to other individual-level variables, local contextual variables were compared to other local contextual variables, and so on).

Results of these multiple regression analyses are summarized in Table 16.4. A more detailed reporting is contained in Supplemental Appendix A16.2.

TABLE 16.4
Variance Attributable to Sets of Individual, Contextual, and Institutional Variables (Incremental Change in Adjusted R^2)^a

Sets of Variables	Basic Devotion	Traditionalistic Devotion	Parish Activities	Financial Giving
Local Contextual Variables	.019	.009	.015	.040
Individual Level Variables	.168	.260	.268	.176
Local Institutional Variables	.024	.026	.304	.250
Total R^2 for Model Including all Blocks of Variables	.211	.295	.304	.250

^aBlocks listed in the same order of entry used in the analysis.

Predicting Participation: What Influences Matter Most?

Several patterns in these results are most interesting. Overall, the multi-level models reported in Table 16.4 appear to do best in accounting for an individual's level of involvement in parish activities (total $R^2 = .304$) and participation in traditionalistic worship (total $R^2 = .295$), although the models are also fairly successful in explaining levels of basic devotion (total $R^2 = .211$) and the financial contributions one's family makes to a parish (total $R^2 = .250$). But it is also apparent that the eight sets of individual-level variables as a total block exert by far the greatest impact on all the measures of religious behavior. Data in Table 16.5 indicate that the individual-level

variables account for between 70% to more than 88% of the total adjusted variance explained for each of our participation measures. By comparison, selected features of the local context in which parishes are situated generally have the least impact on parishioner's religious behavior relative to the blocks of individual-level and local institutional variables (with only one exception). Institutional variables representing characteristics of the local parish exhibit more impact, but even then these sets of institutional variables do not account for much more than 12% of the total adjusted variance associated with any of the four models.

TABLE 16.5

Percentage of Adjusted Total Variance in the Measures of Religious Behavior Explained by the Set of Individual-Level, Local Contextual, and Local Institutional Variables*

Sets of Variables	Basic Devotion	Traditionalistic Devotion	Parish Activities	Financial Giving
Local Contextual Variables	9.0%	3.1%	4.9%	16.8%
Individual-level Variables	79.6	88.1	88.6	70.4
Local Institutional Variables	11.4	8.8	6.5	12.8

*Based on increments to adjusted R^2 reported in Table 16.4.

It is also clear that particular sub-blocks of variables are more important for explaining some aspects of participation than others. For example, although a parishioner's demographic characteristics and level of social integration into the parish community are important predictors of all types of religious participation (see Table 16.6), one's satisfaction with his or her parish is important, surprisingly enough, only for understanding a parishioner's involvement in parish activities.

Table 16.6 actually reveals more commonalities than differences, however, in those sets of factors that shape different kinds of participation. For each of the types of participation, individual characteristics of parishioners are by far the most influential predictors we can identify. Local context variables such as Family/Youth Culture Orientation and Community Type, appear to be helpful only for understanding variations in basic devotion and giving, but their explanatory contributions for the other participation measures, though often statistically significant, are rather inconsequential. Finally, relative to the other blocks of variables, measures of institutional characteristics appear to be relatively unimportant for predicting participation.

TABLE 16.6

Specific Blocks of Variables That Are the Strongest Predictors of Religious Participation
(Only Blocks That Account for $\geq 1\%$ of the Total Adjusted Variance Are Represented)

Measures of Religious Participation					
Basic Devotion		Traditionalistic Devotion		Parish Activities	
Financial Giving					
Variables	Variance Explained	Variables	Variance Explained	Variables	Variance Explained
Social Integration Demographic Characteristics	8.6% 3.2	Social Integration Birth Cohort	10.5% 5.3	Social Integration Voluntary Organization Memberships	15.6% 5.1
Birth Cohort	2.6	Demographic Characteristics	4.4	Demographic Characteristics Satisfaction with Parish	4.0
Family/Youth Culture Orientation	1.4	Moral Traditionalism	2.1	Moral Traditionalism	1.6
Voluntary Organization	1.2			Family/Youth Orientation	1.0

In summarizing the more specific patterns that appear for each of the types of participation represented in Table 16.6, it is clear that basic devotional participation is most responsive to such things as the parishioner's level of social integration, demographic characteristics and birth cohort, number of voluntary organizations to which he or she belongs, and prominence of youth and younger families within the local community. Traditionalistic devotion, however, is more strongly influenced by purely individual factors, such as a parishioner's degree of social integration, demographic characteristics, birth cohort, and the traditionalism of his or her moral values. Characteristics of individuals, particularly level of social integration, demographic characteristics, organizational memberships, and one's overall satisfaction with the parish, are also most influential in shaping participation in parish activities. Finally, although financial giving is indeed most responsive to individual-level factors (namely, demographic characteristics, social integration, birth cohort, and traditionalistic moral values), some influences from the local community context (type of community and the prominence of familial or youth-oriented segments of the community) are important in influencing what parishioners contribute.