

COMMON THEMES

Q – What are your greatest fears for the Church in your area?

1. Parish Closures & Loss of Local Churches

The single most dominant fear

By far the most common fear is:

- Churches **closing or being merged**
- Loss of a **home parish**, often one tied to generations of family history
- Reduced Mass times or no weekend Mass
- Having to travel long distances, especially in rural areas

This fear is deeply emotional:

“I was baptized here. Married here. I want to be buried here.”

Closures are experienced not as logistical changes but as **loss of identity, memory, and spiritual home**.

2. Shortage of Priests & Sacramental Access

Closely tied to closures

Nearly as frequent as closures is fear of:

- Not enough priests
- Priests stretched across 3–5 parishes
- Fewer Masses, Confession times, and sacraments
- Burnout among good priests
- Losing beloved pastors through reassignment

Many express anxiety that:

“The Church may still exist—but without regular Eucharist.”

3. Loss of Youth & Future Generations

Fear of extinction, not just decline

Respondents repeatedly fear:

- Young people not attending Mass
- Teens leaving after Confirmation
- Young adults never returning
- Few children in pews (“no crying = no future”)

This fear is often expressed generationally:

“When we die, who will be left?”

The youth issue is widely seen as **the decisive factor** in whether the Church survives locally.

4. Declining Mass Attendance, Apathy & Lukewarm Faith

Internal erosion

Many respondents fear:

- Empty pews
- Catholics attending out of obligation, not conviction
- Cultural Catholicism without discipleship
- Faith becoming private, passive, or optional

Words that recur:

- *Apathy*
- *Complacency*
- *Stagnation*
- *Maintenance mode*

This fear is often described as **slow death rather than sudden collapse**.

5. Loss of Catholic Identity & Confusion About Belief

Fear of becoming “generic”

A major theme—expressed from multiple theological perspectives—is fear that:

- Catholic teaching is misunderstood or diluted
- Belief in the Real Presence is weak
- Catechesis is inadequate
- People don’t know *why* the Church teaches what it does

This appears in *both* directions:

- Fear of being too secular / watered down
- Fear of abandoning Vatican II or becoming rigid

Common thread: confusion and lack of clarity.

6. Polarization, Division & Ideological Conflict

Internal fracture

Many fear:

- Politics infiltrating the Church
- “Conservative vs progressive” battles
- Latin Mass vs Ordinary Form conflicts
- Judgmentalism and “circling the wagons”
- Loss of unity around Jesus and the sacraments

Several explicitly state:

“Division will paralyze us more than decline.”

7. Catholic Schools Closing or Becoming Unsustainable

Closely tied to youth and identity

Frequent fears include:

- Low enrollment
- Rising costs
- Loss of Catholic education as a formative pipeline
- Schools consuming resources while parishes weaken

For many, schools are seen as:

- A hope for renewal
 - Or a financial breaking point
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8. Aging Congregations & Volunteer Collapse

Who will replace us?

Respondents fear:

- Core volunteers in their 70s–80s aging out
- No younger parishioners stepping up
- Ministries collapsing quietly
- “The same 10% doing everything”

This fear often overlaps with youth disengagement and leadership gaps.

9. Irrelevance in a Secular Culture

Being ignored, not attacked

Many fear the Church will:

- Be seen as outdated or “not relevant”
- Lose moral authority
- Blend into society
- Be ignored rather than opposed

One repeated concern:

“If our church closed, would anyone notice?”

10. Leadership Decisions Without Listening

Fear of top-down change

Respondents express anxiety about:

- Decisions made without parish input
- Lack of communication around consolidation
- Feeling powerless or unheard
- Loss of trust in diocesan leadership

This fear intensifies grief around closures and priest reassignments.

One-Sentence Summary

The dominant fear is not change itself—but losing the Eucharist, the next generation, and the sense of being a living Catholic community before renewal takes root.

Critical Insight

These fears mirror—almost point-by-point—the *hopes* expressed elsewhere in the data:

- Fear of youth loss ↔ hope for young families
- Fear of closures ↔ hope for vibrant parishes
- Fear of confusion ↔ hope for deep formation
- Fear of division ↔ hope for mission-centered unity

This is not despair. It is urgency.