



## TOO BUSY FOR CHURCH?

by [Ellyn von Huben](#) · May 09, 2016



Well, this was one factoid that didn't pop up in 100 Pop Culture Things that Make You a Millennial: 48% of Millennial Catholics don't attend Mass more often because of "family responsibilities." I recently saw a [disconcerting graph](#) of reasons the Millennials do or don't go to church as compiled by Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate and referred to the negative effect that soccer has on Mass attendance. Demographically that makes sense, since some Millennials are old enough to have soccer playing children while some are young enough to not be able to drive themselves to Mass and may well find themselves not only playing soccer but also being dragged along to siblings' activities.

The chart as a whole has some disheartening, even puzzling, statistics. Health reasons are cited by 29% of the survey's respondents as why they do not attend Mass. Having seen people wobble into church on walkers, wheel in by chair, and have their breathing assisted by portable oxygen, I beg to ask how sickly are the young Millennials? They must be suffering greatly if they can't make it to Mass but semi-paralyzed, gasping, ninety year-olds can. Or, thinking back to my young and foolish days, is "health reasons" putting a polite tag on what should be called a raging hangover? There are times when we all have something too sneezy, too coughy, just too communicable to be at Mass. But does this constitute enough people to be 29% of a given population at any one time? Just wondering. But I digress.

Hendey's post was titled "Skipping Mass for Soccer." I am not now nor have I ever been a soccer mom. But I *do* like sports. (I'd be glad to post a picture of the tennis trophies I won in my teen years, but I let some of my own Millennials play with them. Trophies are not particularly durable playthings.) So I am not writing to rant against sports. Sports—played and viewed—are part of a healthy, well-balanced life. Balance is what appears to have gone missing. And Mark 2:27—*The sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath*—has been given a multitude of bad, out of context, and very convenient interpretations.

The subject of sports schedules conflicting with religious obligations comes up often at my parish. There are multiple sports, multiple levels of team and league structure, and multiple schedules that parents are faced with. My middle-of-the-Boomer Generation age must be showing, because my first thought is always, "Who in their right mind schedules sports on Sunday morning?" Parents who disagree with sports infringing on more important family obligations, such as Mass attendance, find themselves in a difficult minority position. I think that if enough parents would tell the coaches, "No—we won't go," there would have to be some sort of capitulation from the coaches, leagues etc. At this point there are not enough parents to constitute a tipping point. The parent who refuses to go along with the current ways brings down a Gatorade-tinted white martyrdom upon his child. Skip practices, skip games—you're off the team.

I came up against a lot of this when I was in charge of altar server scheduling at my parish. We are blessed to have six Masses each weekend, and faithful, diligent parents trying to strike spiritual and sports balance have a lot of wiggle room. In parishes not so fortunate, sports may have the winning hand.

Part of that could be that team sports have structure and rules that have the respect, and even fear, that no longer belongs to the Church. Scheduling of altar server training in the spring was very complicated; so many parents calling to say one session or the other could not be attended because of sports, dance or similar 'serious' obligations. I would joke that if altar serving were declared to be part of the sports program there would be more cooperation from participants and parents. People expect understanding and forgiveness from the Church (especially the "nice lady" who handles the altar server calls) but not so much from the coach. If the coach expects you to be there, you are *there*.

Other reasons cited in the CARA survey for missing Mass are also open to discussion (boring, poor sermons, not a mortal sin) and strong rejoinder. Strong—as in sorry, "Sometime it's boring, but it's not meant to be entertainment. You're not just there for the sermon. And, yes, it is a mortal sin to miss Mass." Others reasons aren't great but deserve credit for a certain unvarnished honesty: I'm not a religious person, I'm too busy. But what makes 'family responsibilities' a reason for neglecting the pivotal obligation in

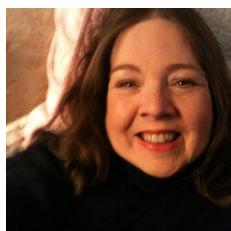
family life points to what the Millennial generation treasures most. What is important? Fun, social connections, success? Why is it so common for the most important need for a family – “the source and summit of the Christian life” CCC 1324 – to be overlooked when responsibilities and obligations are considered?

Family life is a great blessing. It also presents an awesome burden of obligation for parents who want to do what is best for their families in all areas. Some of these obligations are more fun than others. Sports and other recreational activities are among the most enjoyable moments in family life. Fresh diapers, flashcards, dental appointments and driving lessons... those are not exactly fun. And other obligations are so obvious we hardly think about them. We don't question that families need to be fed. Lunches are packed, dinners are served. It is an increasing lack of concern over spiritual sustenance that is disturbing.

Is it time for a brutal examination of what the Boomers may have taught the Millennials to treasure? If 48% of Millennial Catholics are missing Mass for 'family responsibilities' they are not treasuring what is most important. They are not storing up treasure in heaven nor are they teaching the next generation to do likewise. That is spiritually tragic. And just plain sad. *For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.* (Matthew 6:21).

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



### Ellyn von Huben

Ellyn von Huben is a native of Wisconsin, and has never lived more than five miles from the shores of Lake Michigan. She...

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Sidney Blanchet · 3 years ago
Kudos to TC for not playing his team on Sunday mornings This is teaching in action! As far as Sue's post regarding ignorance of the teachings of the Church, hmmm. Yes, there is a lot of shoddy teaching out there but even the most minimally informed Catholics know that missing Sunday mass is a sin. As for understanding the rich spiritual graces of mass look no further than Word on Fire. WOF is easily, easily accessible, super user friendly and informative. Seek (even a little bit) and you shall find.

Gern Blanstun · 3 years ago
Anything beginning with a marketing or demographic category cannot be taken seriously.

Sue West · 3 years ago
Sometimes when we point a finger at all those struggling with family responsibilities vs. attending Mass we need to look at ourselves (Church peeps). So many people adults and children are just ignorant to the teachings of the Church. It's not that they are making an informed choice. They are not. They have no clue about why they should attend Mass, they have a minimal relationship with their God, they don't understand what Jesus presence in th Eucharist means....because no one has told them in a way that makes sense to them. Before we criticize the sliver in their eyes, we should look at the board in our own eye.

Thomas Cronin · 3 years ago
With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I founded an evangelization campaign entitled, Pray 60. Pray 60's mission is to help families that are struggling to attend regular Sunday morning mass due to youth sports. We urge sports organizations to not schedule their games or practices before 1 PM on Sundays. More info can be found at www.Pray60.info.

T C · 3 years ago
I am a little league /travel baseball coach. I have caught much grief for my refusal to play on Sunday mornings. We do not play before 1pm or we forfeit. Most coaches are competitive enough to not take the forfeit. Our parents appreciate it, especially when we will not play on Mother's Day. Scores a lot of points from the moms.

Carolina Luque · 3 years ago
I have three kids and they all play or have played sports and have a million or two activities. We go to church every weekend. Sometimes we have to go to the Saturday evening Mass or to another church if we need more options. The important message is to go to Mass and as a family. Once in a blue moon one of my kids don't make it to church. I tell my kids that the Mass is a sacrifice and we need to sacrifice for God. My proudest moment was when my college kid told me she needed to hand up on me because she was as walking into Mass. The other two still fight me, but will remind me if we are running late. I cannot say it is great parenting because my parents barely took me to Mass. I believe it is God's grace and we should pray that more Catholics go back to Church.

Ryan Peters · 3 years ago
The Ironic thing here is that my brother plays soccer, and barely goes to church. Coincidence? I think not. This article is spot on.

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