

MASS-GOING DURING AND AFTER THE PANDEMIC

**An Amarach poll commissioned
by The Iona Institute.**

Introduction

Many sectors of society have been very badly affected by the restrictions placed on public life as a result of Covid-19, this includes sport, the hospitality sector, the arts and, of course, churches.

Initially, places of worship had to close completely, although some remained open for private prayer. Then, on June 29, public Masses could take place again, although with a sharp limit on numbers who could attend. These limits are still in place as at September 2020.

The limits mean that Mass-going cannot currently return to pre-Covid levels.

What we don't know is roughly how many have returned to Mass again on a regular basis, and how many will return once the pandemic is over and limits are lifted. This opinion poll, commissioned by The Iona Institute, and conducted by Amarach Research is an attempt to throw some light on these questions.

We asked four basic questions:

1. Did you regularly attend Mass before the outbreak of Covid-19?
2. Are you attending again on a regular basis?
3. Why have you not returned?
4. If you have not returned, will you do so when the restrictions are lifted?

The answers to these questions are found below.*

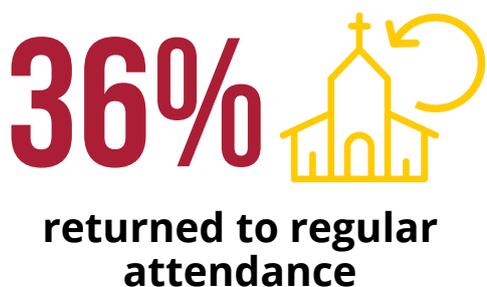
1 Did you attend Mass regularly before Covid-19?

27pc of Catholics said they did.

As we know, Mass-attendance in Ireland has declined steadily in recent decades, but it remains among the highest levels in Europe, although as in the rest of Europe, Mass-goers tend to be above the age of 65.



Attended Mass regularly before Covid-19



2 Are you attending again on a regular basis?

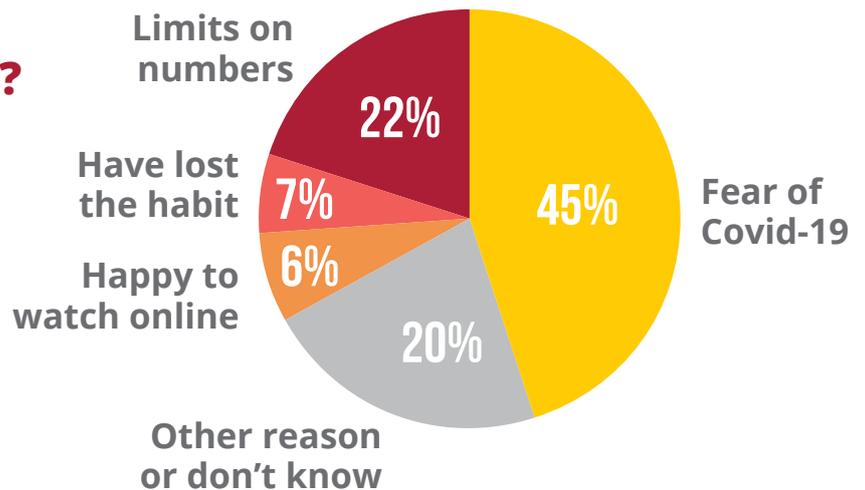
36pc of people who were attending before the outbreak, have returned to regular attendance again.

This may seem low, but we have to take into account the limits placed on attendance and also on the fact that older people in particular are vulnerable to the virus.

3 Why are you not currently attending?

Those who were attending before on a regular basis and are not doing so now (64pc of the total) were asked why they have not returned to Mass. Predictably, fear of the virus was the number one reason.

The answers were as follows:



4 Will you return to Mass when restrictions end?

As we can see, only 4pc said they do not intend coming back, but 19pc said they don't know if they will return. If, in fact, they do not return, then we will see a drop in Mass attendance when this is over of a fifth or more. Obviously we must hope that most of those who currently say 'don't know' do, in fact, return.



Conclusion

Many Catholics have already returned to regular Mass-going, and many more wish to do so. But as we can see, it is also likely that a significant minority will not return without a very significant outreach from the Church. This will need to involve not only priests and religious, but lay people reaching out to their neighbours and inviting them back to Mass.

* The poll is based on a nationally representative online sample of 1,000 people and was conducted in early September by Amarach Research.

About the Iona Institute

The Iona Institute promotes the place of marriage and religion in society. We defend the continued existence of publicly-funded denominational schools. We also promote freedom of conscience and religion.



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