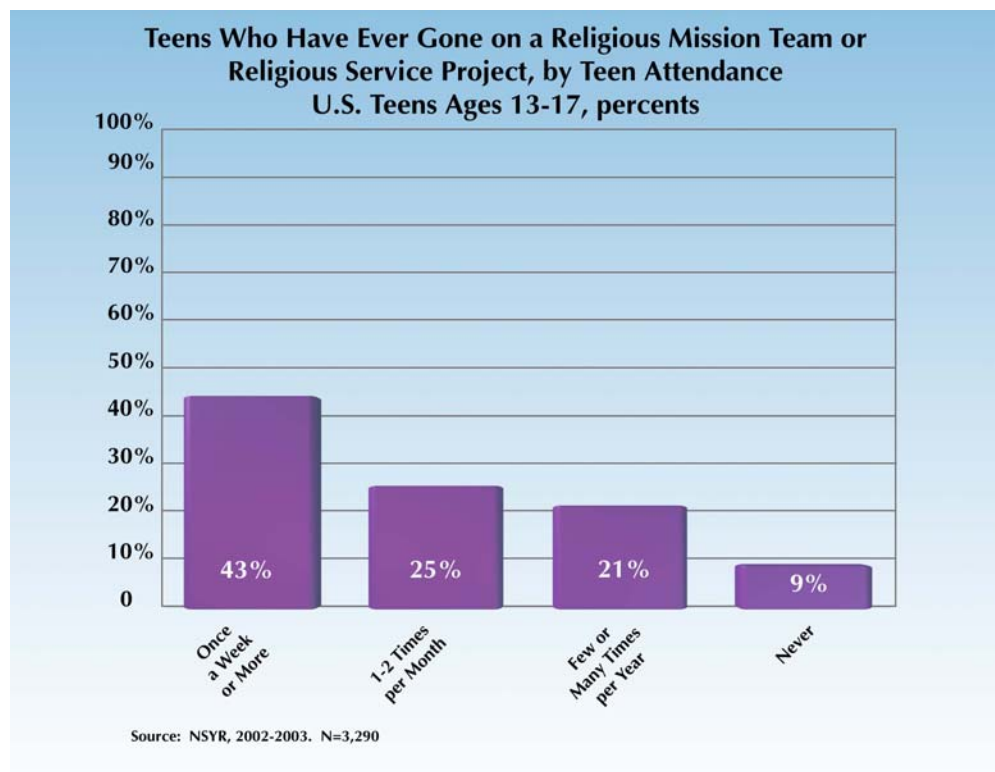


Teen Participation in Religious Mission Teams or Service Projects Examined

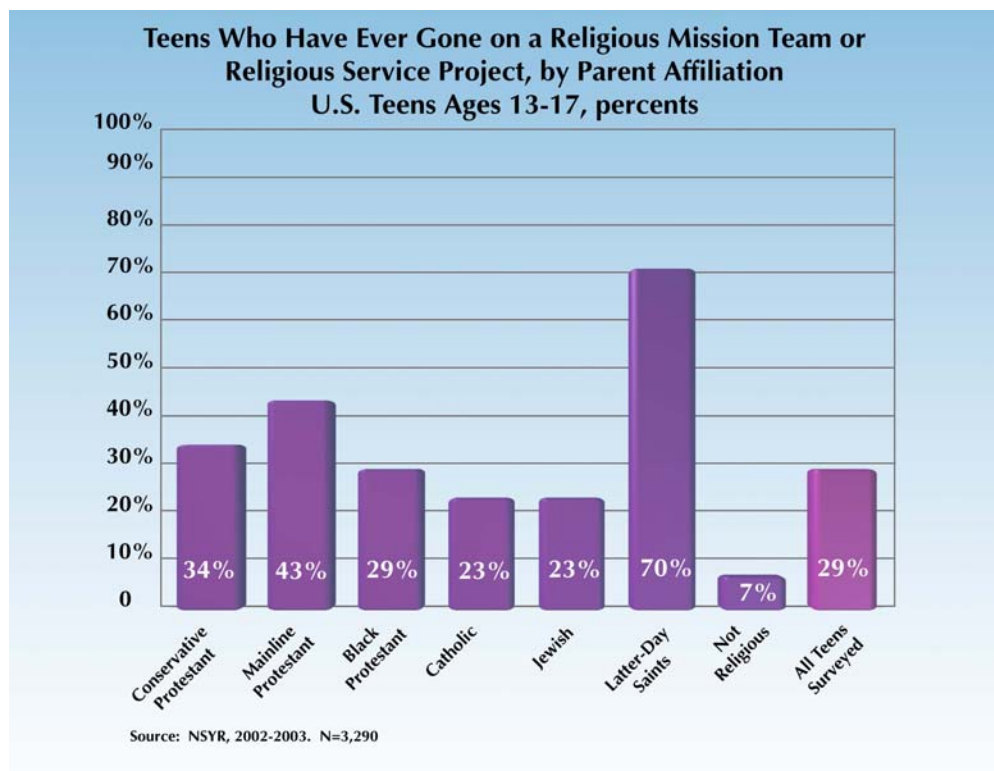
As summer winds down a familiar question emerges: “So what did you do on your summer vacation?” Some teens may have been working in service to others, according to researchers with the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR): In a survey of more than 3,000 U.S. teens age 13-17, 29 percent of all teens report that they have gone on a religious mission team or done religious service project at least once in their lives. Eighteen percent have been on two or more mission trips or service projects and 10 percent have been on three or more mission trips or service projects.

Teens who attend church once a week or more often are more likely to report that they have gone on a mission trip or service project (43 percent) than those who attend one to three times per month (25 percent). Not surprisingly, those teens who report never attending church report the lowest participation in a religious mission trip or service project (less than 10 percent).



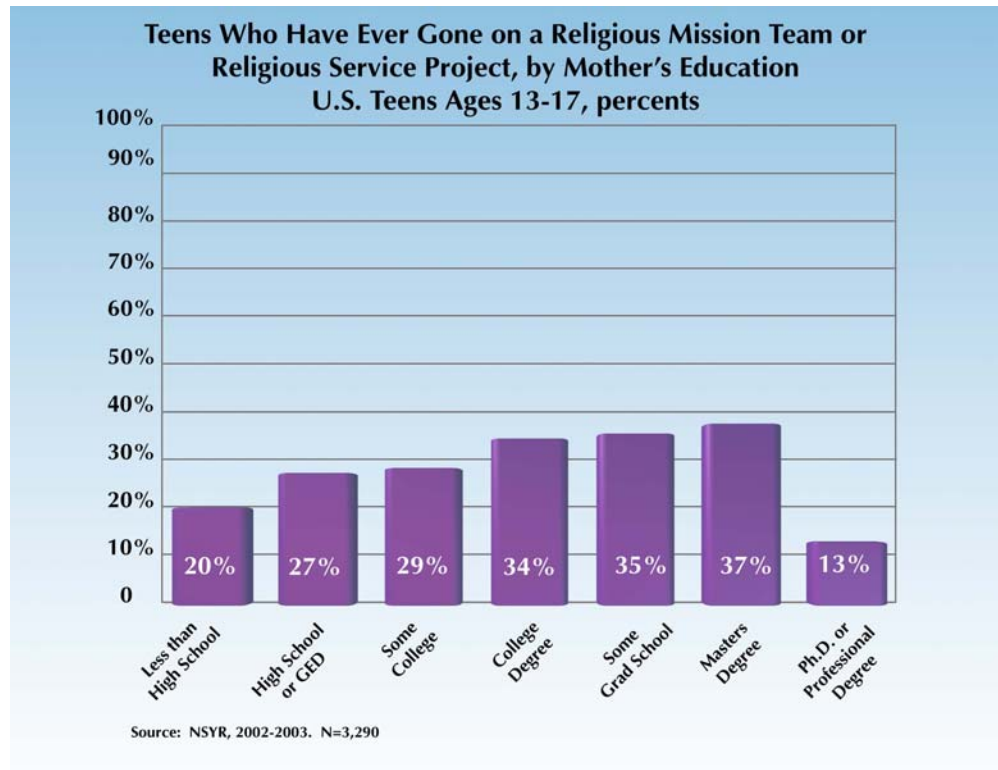
“While few teens are participating in multiple service projects or missions, it is worth noting that a significant proportion of those who rarely attend religious services have participated in at least one mission or service project,” stated Dr. Phil Schwadel. “In other words, religious service attendance is not a necessary precursor to mission and service project activity,” he commented. Schwadel is a postdoctoral research associate with the NSYR, which is based at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Compared across major U.S. protestant traditions, 70 percent of teenagers whose parents are Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) report going on at least one religious mission trip or service project. Among those teens whose parents identify as mainline Protestants, 43 percent have gone on at least one religious mission trip or service project. That number drop to 34 percent of teens of conservative Protestant parents and to 29 percent for teens whose parents affiliate with traditionally black Protestant denominations. Among teens of Jewish or Catholic parents participation is lower, at 23 percent each.



It is also interesting to note the relationship between teens’ likelihood of doing a religious mission trip or service project and the educational level of their mothers. About 20 percent of teens whose mothers have less than a high school education have gone on a religious mission trip or service project. This number increases for each level of the mother’s education through received a masters degree (37 percent). However, only 13 percent of teens whose mother has a Ph.D. or professional degree have ever done a religious mission trip or service project. Parental education seems to encourage teen missions and service project participation, except at the highest level.

It is important to note that teen survey respondents self-defined what constituted a religious mission or service trip. These findings also do not account for the value that particular denominations place on such activities. For example, some denominations may offer more possible activities or even require participation. The exact NSYR survey question wording for this item as asked of Protestant teenagers was: “How many time, if any, have you ever gone on a religious mission team or religious service project?”



These findings about U.S. teens doing religious mission teams or service projects are one small preview sample of a much larger body of findings about the religious and moral lives of U.S. Protestant teenagers scheduled to be published by the NSYR in early 2005. Interested readers can sign up at the NSYR website <www.youthandreligion.org> to receive notification of that report's publication.

The National Study of Youth and Religion is funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. More than 3,350 teens along with one of their parents participated in the random-digit-dial telephone study of U.S. parent-teen pairs. The purpose of the project is to research the shape and influence of religion and spirituality in the lives of U.S. adolescents; to identify effective practices in the religious, moral and social formation of the lives of youth; to describe the extent to which youth participate in and benefit from the programs and opportunities that religious communities are offering to their youth; and to foster an informed national discussion about the influence of religion in youth's lives to encourage sustained reflection about and rethinking of our cultural and institutional practices with regard to youth and religion.