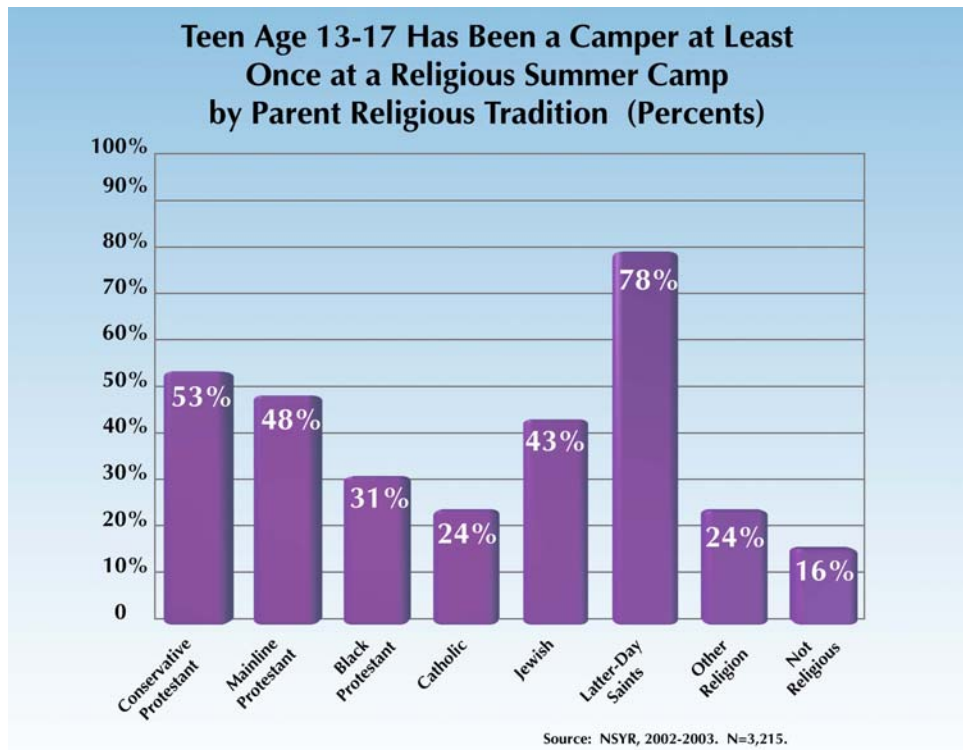


U.S. Teenagers’ Involvement in Religious Summer Camps

Spring is here and with it comes the time for many parents to plan summer camp options for their teens. So what do we know about teen religious camp attendance? Nearly 40 percent of U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 have been a camper at least once at a summer camp run by a religious organization with religious teachings or songs in its program, according to researchers with the National Study of Youth and Religion. Researchers also found large differences in religious camp attendance across religious traditions, even when controlling for the influence of family income. Teens of Mormon parents are the most likely to have attended (78 percent), followed by teens of conservative Protestant, mainline Protestant and Jewish parents (at 53, 48 and 43 percent, respectively). Catholic teens are comparatively much less likely to have attended religious summer camps (24 percent). The National Study of Youth and Religion is based at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



Religious summer camp attendance varies not only across religious traditions but also according to levels of family religiosity. As shown in the tables below, higher levels of parental religious service attendance and importance of faith correlate with a higher likelihood of teen attendance at a religious summer camp.

Family income also appears somewhat to influence camp attendance. Teens from families with higher household incomes are, as expected, more likely to have attended religious camps. For example, 35 percent of teens in families earning *less* than \$50,000 in annual income and whose parents attend religious services weekly have attended religious summer camp at least once. That number rises to 51 percent among weekly attending families with annual household incomes of *more* than

\$50,000. Among parents who attend religious services more than once a week, the percentages of religious camp attending teens are even higher — 54 percent for lower income families and 66 percent for higher income families.

But ability to pay for summer camp is only one factor involved. “Income appears to make some difference, but does not explain everything,” stated Dr. Christian Smith, principal investigator of the study. “There is clearly also an interesting difference among different religious traditions. Some traditions likely place more or less emphasis on the importance of their youth attending religious summer camp. Some religious traditions also appear to have developed better organizational infrastructures offering greater supplies of camps within their religious traditions.” Smith is Stuart Chapin Distinguished Professor and associate chair of sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

“It is interesting to note that even among teens in non-Christian and non-Jewish religious traditions, nearly one-quarter (24 percent) have attended a religious summer camp,” Smith observed. “That number is even higher (29 percent) among minority religion teens whose family incomes are greater than \$50,000/year. So it’s not just Christian, Jewish, and Mormon teens who attend religious summer camps.” In addition, Smith points out, 16 percent of non-religious U.S. teenagers have attended a religious summer camp.

Does attendance at religious summer camp strengthen the faith of teenagers? The data do reveal a simple correlation between attending religious summer camps and the strength of teenagers’ religious faith, as shown in the bottom table below. But it is not possible to isolate to what extent attending religious summer camp itself increases the religious commitments of teenagers versus to what extent already religiously serious teens choose to attend religious summer camp. “Most likely,” says Smith, “those influences work in both directions. Even so, going to religious summer camps appears to be one of a broader set of intentional practices that parents can pursue to help build up the religious faith of their teens.”

Readers should note that these findings imply no statement about the quality of any religious camping program, nor do they measure how much U.S. teens may participate in non-religious camping experiences, such as sports or science camps, Smith observed. These facts complicate evaluative comparisons across religious types on these summer camping measures. Leaders and parents in different religious traditions are advised to consider these findings primarily in light of their own expectations, interests, and standards.

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.

**Tables Showing Teen Participation in Religious Summer Camp
by Religion Variables and by Lower and Higher Family Income**

	Percent ever been a camper at a summer camp run by a religious organization with religious teachings or songs in its program		
Parent's religious tradition	All	<\$50,000 family income	> \$50,000 family income
Conservative Protestant	53	47	57
Mainline Protestant	48	45	50
Black Protestant	31	28	34
Catholic	24	18	28
Jewish	43	50	33
LDS	78	72	79
Other Religion	24	9	29
Not Religious	16	16	15
Parent's religious service attendance			
Never	19	17	21
Few or many times/year	28	26	30
1-3 times/month	37	35	38
Once/week	45	35	51
>1/week	61	54	66
Parent's importance of religious faith in day-to-day life			
Extremely important	56	50	60
Very important	45	36	52
Somewhat important	32	27	38
Not very important	22	19	23
Not important at all	20	15	20
Teen's importance of religious faith in day-to-day life			
Extremely important	50	42	56
Very important	33	28	36
Fairly important	28	23	31
Somewhat important	21	22	21
Not very important	26	19	29
Not important at all	18	13	19