

# INTERNATIONAL SURVEY OF CATHOLIC WOMEN:

ANALYSIS AND REPORT OF KEY FINDINGS

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**Content Warning:**

This report refers to experiences and impacts of gender-based violence in church contexts. If you need support, the website <https://safeinourworld.org/find-help/> will direct you to assistance in your geographic region and language.

This research publication was prepared and published on Awabakal, Dharawal, and Gadigal lands. We acknowledge the unceded lands on which we work, and we pay our respects to Elders past and present.



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# 1. Table of Contents

<b>1. Table of Contents</b>	3	<b>8. The impact of the COVID pandemic</b>	26
<b>2. Executive Summary</b>	5	8.1. Church closures	28
2.1. Key findings	6	8.2. Community engagement	32
2.2. Recommendations	8	8.3. Pastoral support and online worship	32
<b>3. Introduction</b>	10	8.4. Post-pandemic participation in parish life	32
<b>4. Literature review</b>	11	<b>9. Support for reform</b>	36
4.1. Introduction	11	<b>10. Issues in the Church</b>	41
4.2. Documenting women's participation	11	10.1. Women's leadership	42
4.3. Theological barriers to women's participation	12	10.2. Gender-inclusive language in liturgy	48
4.4. The crisis of sexual and spiritual abuse as a barrier to women's participation	12	10.3. LGBTIQ+ inclusion	48
4.5. Catholic teachings as barriers to women's participation	13	10.4. Marriage, reproductive decisions, and family	51
4.6. Governance barriers to women's participation	13	10.5. Misuse of power	56
4.7. The COVID Pandemic	14	10.6. Climate action	63
4.8. A summary of studies investigating Catholic women	15	10.7. Catholic social teaching	63
4.9. Conclusion	16	10.8. Inclusion of marginalised people	64
<b>5. Methodology</b>	17	10.9. Liturgical reform	69
5.1. Research design	17	10.10. Church leadership and governance	70
5.2. Recruitment	17	<b>11. Key findings and recommendations</b>	76
5.3. Instrument	18	11.1. Key findings	76
5.4. Storage, access, and disposal of data	18	11.2. Recommendations	78
5.5. Data preparation and analysis	19	<b>12. References</b>	80
<b>6. A snapshot of respondents</b>	21	12.1. Vatican documents	81
<b>7. Catholic identity and participation</b>	22	<b>13. Appendices</b>	82
7.1. Descriptions of current relationship	22	13.1. Appendix A: Abbreviations	82
7.2. Ecumenism	26	13.2. Appendix B: Glossary	82
		13.3. Appendix C: Survey instrument	84

# A snapshot of Catholic women

88%

agree with the statement  
'My Catholic identity  
is important to me'

79%

agree women should be  
fully included at all levels  
of church leadership

84%

agree reform is  
needed in the  
Catholic Church

85%

agree Clericalism  
is damaging the  
Catholic Church

83%

agree Catholic social  
teaching is a good resource  
for social justice action

82%

agree LGBTIQ persons  
should be fully included and  
respected in all church activities

80%

agree church leaders  
are not doing enough to  
address the perpetration  
and cover-up of sexual abuse

89%

agree with the statement  
'Church leaders need to do  
more to address other forms  
of abuse, including abuses of  
power and spiritual harm'

## 2. Executive Summary

The International Survey of Catholic Women (ISCW) was undertaken in response to the call for submissions to the 2021-2024 Synod of Bishops themed 'For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission'. It was devised and managed by researchers Drs Tracy McEwan and Kathleen McPhillips at the University of Newcastle, and Professor Emerita Tina Beattie at the University of Roehampton, London. An initial report for the commissioning body, the Catholic Women Speak (CWS) network was published in September 2022. This more detailed sociological report locates the survey in the research literature, describes the ISCW methodology, reports key findings from all questions, and provides a series of recommendations.

This report, *International Survey of Catholic Women: Analysis and Report of Findings* is based on the survey findings drawn from 17,200 responses from women in 104 countries. The survey instrument was available in 8 languages – English, Spanish, German, Italian, French, Polish, Mandarin,

and Portuguese – and open online from Tuesday 8 March 2022 (International Women's Day) to Tuesday 26 April 2022. The Executive Summary provides the key points and recommendations of the submission.

A strength of the ISCW is that it captured the complex diversity, insights, and shared concerns of thousands of Catholic women from around the world. Respondents came from a wide range of countries and language groups. They held diverse standpoints which often reflected the cultural and communal contexts within which their Catholic faith is experienced and practised. Responses revealed their joys, frustrations, fears, struggles, hopes, and dreams.

The methodology utilised non random sampling with respondents recruited across multiple networks and forums worldwide including dioceses, parishes, and women's networks and organisations. Respondents answered a series of 4 screening questions to determine eligibility. If eligible, they responded to 29 closed questions.

## 2.1 Key findings

We identify the following key findings based on the viewpoints of respondents expressed in open and closed questions:

1. Catholic identity was of great importance and a source of self-identity and meaning for a significant majority of respondents. Respondents' lived experience of Catholicism reflected the many different cultural and communal contexts within which their faith was practised.
2. Catholic identity was frequently described in terms of a relationship with Jesus and gospel values. Most respondents were supportive of ecumenism.
3. Respondents emphasised the importance of their faith, the centrality of the Eucharist to their lives, and their active participation in parishes and church communities, while also expressing high levels of frustration or dissatisfaction relating to their experiences.
4. There was a significant concern regarding the prevalence of sexual, spiritual, physical, and emotional abuse in church contexts.
5. Respondents highlighted the misuse and abuse of power as a central factor in historical and current sexual and gender-based harm.
6. Clericalism was identified by a substantial majority of respondents as an abuse of power and an indicator of a need for urgent reform measures.
7. Many respondents drew attention to a lack of accountability and transparency in church leadership and governance, particularly in the hierarchy's handling of sexual abuse allegations. This was a barrier to participation in church life.
8. Respondents varied in their priorities and perspectives, with age and region of residence playing a role in regard to particular issues. While most respondents sought some type of reform, there was a smaller group who were critical of change as a compromise with secular trends.
9. Inclusivity was identified and valued as a central Christian ethic.
10. Respondents conveyed concern for those who are marginalised by Catholic theology, doctrine, and liturgical practice, including LGBTIQ+ Catholics, divorced Catholics, and single parent Catholics. There were differing interpretations of what inclusion of LGBTIQ+ Catholics means in the life in the Church. A slim majority of respondents supported same-sex marriage.

- 11.** Respondents were concerned about racism in church contexts and expressed a desire for a culturally diverse and inclusive church for people of all needs, including those living with disabilities and mental health difficulties.
- 12.** There was strong support for the full inclusion of women in pastoral, liturgical, and governance leadership, as well as decision-making roles. This was connected with the need for recognition of women's contribution, particularly their unpaid labour to church life.
- 13.** Respondents expressed support for women preaching the homily during Mass and for their ordination to the diaconate and/or to the priesthood.
- 14.** Respondents strongly supported gender inclusive and culturally appropriate language in liturgical practices and church documents.
- 15.** Respondents sought greater respect for their freedom of conscience about sexual and reproductive decision-making. When respondents' agency was limited or dismissed it left them open to situations of gendered violence.
- 16.** Respondents noted apprehension about the future of Catholicism particularly when the contribution of women, young people, and families was not valued.
- 17.** Respondents called for greater action and commitment from church leadership to Catholic Social Teaching, particularly regarding issues related to climate change, economic justice, and poverty. Respondents expressed disagreement with priests and bishops promoting partisan political agendas.
- 18.** A less hierarchal and authoritarian model of church, with greater collaboration, dialogue, and shared responsibility between clergy and laity, was identified as urgently needed.
- 19.** Respondents were deeply concerned about economic justice in church affairs, including financial mismanagement, corruption, and the exploitation and lack of adequate pay for female church workers, both lay and religious.
- 20.** Despite disruptions, most respondents reported growth in faith and connection to community during the COVID pandemic.

## 2.2 Recommendations

The ISCW is one of the most extensive surveys of Catholic women ever undertaken. The substantial findings inform lasting and genuine change in church institutions, theology, and pastoral practices. We make the following recommendations:

- 1.** Recognise and respect the diversity of Catholic women in church leadership, documents, and organisational practices, including Synodal processes.
- 2.** Increase access for women and laity to leadership and decision-making roles across all levels of church governance, including equal representation in Synods.
- 3.** Prioritise and enact changes to Canon Law to permit women preaching the homily during Mass.
- 4.** Consider the ordination of women to the diaconate and/or priesthood as a legitimate expression of doctrinal development.
- 5.** Enact immediate reforms and produce guidelines to eliminate sexual, spiritual, physical, and emotional abuse in church contexts. Report perpetrators to civil authorities.
- 6.** Put in place ongoing formation, education, and professional supervision for clergy and laity in pastoral and leadership roles.
- 7.** Develop and enact practices and guidelines to respect the dignity and equality of all people in church contexts and to challenge all forms of discrimination and prejudice, including sexism, racism, and ableism.



- 8.** Ensure that church teaching is attuned to the lived realities of women's lives across social contexts and cultures.
- 9.** Respect women's freedom of conscience in matters of sexual and reproductive health and decision-making.
- 10.** Develop and enact changes to Catholic theology, doctrine, and liturgical practice to ensure women, LGBTIQ+ Catholics, divorced and remarried Catholics, and young people and families are valued and fully included in all aspects of church life.
- 11.** Address corruption and economic mismanagement by putting in place transparent and accountable decision-making and management practices. Ensure that all church workers are paid a fair and just wage.
- 12.** Encourage practices of synodality and respectful listening and dialogue to heal theological and ideological divides.
- 13.** Raise awareness of and promote theological and practical responses based on the precepts of Catholic social teaching to address issues including poverty, climate change, homelessness, war, and economic injustice.
- 14.** Prevent bishops and priests from preaching on and aligning the Church with partisan political issues.

### 3. Introduction

The International Survey of Catholic Women (ISCW) provides a powerful insight into the views and experiences of Catholic women from around the world. Commissioned by the international organisation Catholic Women Speak (CWS) in 2021, it explores the understandings of the key issues, insights, and experiences of women in the Catholic Church involving church reform and the COVID 19 Pandemic.

The ISCW has its beginnings in the global call for submissions from Catholic communities, parishes, and groups to the 2021-2024 Synod of Bishops themed 'For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission' (General Secretariat of the Synod 2023). The reform group - Catholic Women Speak (CWS), an international network of Catholic women focused on issues of church reform, commissioned the ISCW with the intention of listening to the voices of Catholic women across the world (CWS 2023). CWS were joined in their intent by 2 other international women's groups – the Catholic Women's Council (CWC) and Voices of Faith (CWC 2023; Voices of Faith 2023).

The ISCW research team is based at the University of Newcastle, Australia and developed the survey instrument in consultation with CWS members. The ISCW was distributed widely and collected 17,200 responses from Catholic women in 104 countries, making it the largest international survey of Catholic women carried out this century.

Respondents were recruited across multiple networks and forums worldwide

and the significant response rate and detailed answers to the open questions provides an important representation of Catholic women and their experience of contemporary Catholicism. That the ISCW engaged so many women from so many countries reflects a successful recruitment process and the shared concerns of women on the current state of church culture and gender politics. It represents an important database for future research and church organisations to understand the central issues and concerns of Catholic women across the world.

The results of the ISCW informed the CWS submission to the 2021-2024 Synod of Bishops (Beattie, McEwan, and McPhillips 2022). The first report was funded by Voices of Faith and published in September 2022. It was framed according to the requirements of submission documents which had a specific focus on theological reporting.

The report contains the full results of the ISCW in a readable layout. It details context and methodology and provides key findings and recommendations. The methodological approach includes in-depth qualitative and quantitative methods and follows the principles of social science research. These are premised on understanding social phenomena as culturally, historically, and socially constructed. The report is structured into sections that address the rationale informing the survey, a review of relevant literature, methodology, and results of survey questions. It provides key findings which emanate from the analysis of closed and open questions.

## 4. Literature review

### 4.1 Introduction

The International Survey of Catholic Women (ISCW) occurs within an historical trajectory of the study of women's participation in the Catholic Church. This review of the literature covers the published accounts of qualitative and quantitative studies of Catholic women in the 20th and 21st centuries. It aims to provide important background to the ISCW and give context to the responses that women have made. It is important to note that there have been very few studies of Catholic women at diocesan, country, and international levels and in general the examination of Catholic women's lived experience and faith participation is under-researched.

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### 4.2 Documenting women's participation

Much of the literature addressing the question of women's participation in the Catholic Church in the 20th century begins with the emergence of the second wave women's movement in the early 1960s. The rise of feminism in many societies generated hope for significant social change for the situation of women in society. In the Church, the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II; 1962-1965) and its agenda to respond to societal shifts and address the relevance of the Church in the modern world triggered a trajectory of hope for substantial change for the position of women in the Church (Hinsdale 2016; McEwan 2022).

While it initially appeared that Vatican II might be affirming of sexual equality (Luckman 2006; Sheehan 2000), the role of women in Church and society was not one of its explicit themes. The

council was male and clerically centred, and the documents it published make few statements about the status of women as a distinct group within the Church (Faggioli 2012; Luckman 2006). As a result, Vatican II failed to enact the changes that would have addressed the continuing inequality of women in Catholic culture and theology (Clifford 2014; Madigan 2019).

In the post-Vatican II era, theological debates about the role of women have divided the Church with some groups arguing for reform of theology, culture, and governance and others adopting more orthodox sets of Catholic traditions and teachings (Hunt 2020; McEwan 2022). This is particularly the case regarding issues concerning sexuality, morality, and reproductive healthcare (Beattie 2018; McEwan 2022; McEwan and McPhillips).

## 4.3 Theological barriers to women's participation

Since Vatican II, the Catholic Church's teaching on gender and sexuality has placed emphasis on the complementary role and nature of women and men in society and church (Beattie 2018; Case 2016; Ross 2013). This theological anthropology, often referred to as gender complementarity, situates maleness and femaleness as an ontological reality based on binary sex/gender positions. It affirms that men and women embody distinct human natures that correspond to biblically prescribed gender roles and responsibilities (McEwan 2022). Maleness is associated with rationality, order, and decision-making, and femininity or femaleness with receptivity, maternity, and nurturing roles (Johnson 2002).

During his papacy, Pope John Paul II (1978–2005) provided a theological analysis on human sexuality known as Theology of the Body in which he reflected on the corporal and spiritual significance of the body, including sexual difference

(John Paul II 2006). In his 1988 papal encyclical *Mulieris dignitatem* (The Dignity of Women), he declared that women, because of their biological capacity for motherhood, best exemplify the femininity of the Church through 'feminine' expressions known as the 'genius of woman' (MD, paras. 30-31). The Theology of the Body and feminine genius theology affirm gender complementarity and associate womanhood with the enactment and embodiment of the qualities of receptivity, sensitivity, and physical and spiritual maternity (Beattie 2006; Case 2016; Schüssler Fiorenza 2016). Gender complementarity as interpreted in the Theology of the Body and feminine genius theology is used in Catholic doctrine to limit women's participation in the public sphere and exclude women from equal participation in ritual leadership and church governance (Beattie 2018; CCL, canons. 120, 1379).

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## 4.4 The crisis of sexual and spiritual abuse as a barrier to women's participation

The crisis of institutional child sexual abuse, and more recently the reported abuse of vulnerable adults, has been a significant challenge for the global Catholic Church. Disclosures from survivors, revelations from world media, and multiple public inquiries and court cases have caused a serious legitimization crisis for the Church calling into question cultural and organisational practices (McPhillips 2018). The traumatic impacts and harm caused by child sexual abuse have left many victims exposed to a lifetime of psychological, physical, emotional, financial, and relational troubles. Many victims need ongoing medical and psychological care

(Blakemore et al. 2017). Sexual abuse perpetrated by clergy, consecrated persons, and church employees has typically not been adequately dealt with by church authorities, with many places, such as the US, Ireland, UK, Germany, Australia, and Chile struggling to manage the outcomes of abuse for survivors and communities. Many victims/survivors including men, women, children, and First Nations peoples have spoken publicly about their ordeals and helped to bring global attention to the mismanagement of institutional child sexual abuse to public awareness.

## 4.5 Catholic teachings as barriers to women's participation

Catholic teachings on sexuality, marriage, and reproductive and sexual health can limit women's agency in life decision-making and act as a barrier to participation. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that marriage is a life-long partnership between a man and a woman, with sexual pleasure 'morally disordered' outside its procreative purpose in such a union (CCC, para. 1601, 2351-2363). The use of artificial birth control is forbidden and fertility treatments, including surrogacy, ovum and sperm donation, and artificial insemination and fertilisation, described as 'gravely immoral' (CCC, para. 2376-2377; HV, para. 11). Prohibitions are absolute and ignore the realities of lived experiences (McEwan 2022). Missing are

the perspectives of women and couples who struggle with strained relationships, fertility issues, medical conditions, poor finances, and the consequences of gendered violence. Pastoral care of those struggling with issues related to reproductive health, single mothers, those who are divorced, and LGBTIQ+ people is often informal and dependent on the proclivities of local churches (McEwan 2022). Despite Pope Francis' call for mercy towards those most marginalised in the Church, Catholic theology and church teaching on reproduction and sexuality, and the status of divorced and remarried women, single mothers, and LGBTIQ+ people remains exclusionist and divisive (Hunt 2020; McEwan 2022).

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## 4.6 Governance teachings as barriers to women's participation

Since Vatican II, progress toward the recognition of the equal status of women in the Catholic Church has stalled. While the election of Pope Francis in 2013 renewed hope for greater equality for women in the Catholic Church with an emphasis on pastoral ministry and mercy there has been little evidence of real change (Case 2016). His decision to change Canon Law to give women access to the ministries of lector and acolyte, must be contextualised alongside his support of Canon Laws which make the ordination of women subject to the same severe and grave punishment as clerical sexual abuse (CCL, canon. 1379; Zagano 2021). Pope Francis' use of feminine genius theology and the

language of gender complementarity, suggests there will be little progress towards women's full inclusion during his papacy (McEwan 2022). Despite significant challenges to clericalism and calls for changes in church culture and governance by secular organisations investigating the child sexual abuse crisis, there is little evidence that church management is committed to cultural and organisational change (McPhillips 2020). Conservative and liberal Catholics continue to leave the Church in equal numbers in response to the failure of church leaders to address ongoing governance and culture issues (Zagano 2023).

### 4.6.1 Synodality

Under Pope Francis, church gatherings - known as Synods - have become one of the central mechanisms for governance concerning pressing issues of ecclesiology (Clark 2021; Faggioli 2020a). The revival of synods speaks to a renewed concern

with the relationship between the Church and the secular world and of building 'a new kind of relationship between centre and periphery, between clergy and laity, between different Catholic churches in the global world' (Faggioli 2020a, p. 353). Most

importantly, the process of synodality is central to managing the specific reform agenda under Pope Francis which has led to changes in theology, church culture, and Canon Law. The 'synodal path' is an attempt to engage the entire Church and particularly to raise the involvement and value the experience of lay people (Cornish 2022). How successful this is as a process is debatable especially in relation to women's participation and representation (Clark 2021; Hunt 2021). Although the 'synodal' process claims to be representative of the voices of all Catholics, the actual synod meeting and

decision-making process is led by bishops with very limited lay involvement. Lay participants have limited voting powers as opposed to bishops who have veto power in the decision-making process thus cancelling the processes of representation (Hunt 2021). This has led to significant dissatisfaction amongst Catholics, especially women. For example, during the Plenary Council meeting in Australia in July 2022, the voting system caused significant distress when bishops failed to support statements about the elevation of the status of women, agreed upon by a majority of representatives (Knott 2022).

## 4.6.2 2021-2024 Synod of Bishops:

The 2021-2024 Synod of Bishops themed 'For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission' is to be held in Rome in 2023-4 (General Secretariat of the Synod 2023). The Synod, which is known colloquially as the 'Synod on Synodality' is a significant gathering of modern Catholicism. Catholics across the world have engaged with its synodal process, including a 'consultation phase' where they were invited to take part in synodal listening and discernment (General Secretariat of the Synod 2023). As noted above, the ISCW

was designed and implemented to be part of the consultation phase, gathering the insights and experiences of Catholic women across key issues focused on participation and church reform (Beattie, McEwan, and McPhillips 2022). The scope and reach of the consultation process and the lack of lay participation, especially women, in the Synod is a focus of some disquiet (Hunt 2021; Zagano 2023). The involvement of women in continental stage holds some hope for better representation of women and laity.

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## 4.7 The COVID Pandemic

The COVID pandemic caused a devastating loss of human life worldwide. Alongside the unparalleled global challenge to public health, COVID caused severe disruptions to economic and social life (ILO, FAO, IFAD and WHO 2020). In some countries governments restricted public worship and closed places of worship (Faggioli 2020b; Majundar 2022). Many parishes and dioceses, including the Vatican, switched to online forms of worship and livestreamed Masses (Vatican News 2020). Pastoral activities normally carried out by parish priests were often suspended reducing faith practice (Arasa et al. 2022). In

response to the crisis, the Vatican announced special sacramental measures, including the facility for general confessions where necessary, and special plenary indulgences, to Catholics affected by the virus, including those who die without being able to receive final rites (McElwee 2020). The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and Pope Francis made statements urging Catholics to get vaccinated with approved COVID vaccines (CDF 2020; Gawel et al. 2021). Despite the barriers early international studies report either small increases or no change in faith following the COVID pandemic (PEW 2021).

## 4.8 A summary of studies investigating Catholic women

The ISCW occurs within a trajectory of studies on Catholics at international and national levels carried out by both church affiliated and secular research agencies. Most of the studies identified have been undertaken in Western English-speaking countries, particularly the US.

Some studies have surveyed only Catholic women, and some include women as a discrete cohort. There is insufficient space in this report to provide a comprehensive review of country-based studies. We focus on published global attitude surveys that include Catholic women as a cohort.

### 4.8.1 Global attitude surveys of Catholics

In 2013, in preparation for the October 2014 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on 'The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization' the Vatican surveyed the global Church to provide data and insight for the synod. The results, which were not made public, informed the preparatory document for the synod.

The 2014 Synod survey was not intended to be an opinion-based survey of the Catholic laity, but it did provide momentum and interest in the attitudes of Catholics towards church teachings. Unofficial opinion surveys were subsequently distributed in France, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. They revealed separation between Catholic teachings and the lives of laity (Heneghan and Pongratz-Lippitt 2014). In an attempt to gauge lay opinion, Univision (a TV network serving Hispanic America)

conducted a global survey in 2013-4. The survey polled a representative sample of more than 12,000 Catholics in 12 countries representing Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America. Just over half (52%) of all respondents were women (Univision 2014).

The Univision survey found that most Catholics worldwide disagreed with Catholic doctrine on divorce and remarriage, abortion, and birth control. Furthermore, in Europe, Latin America, and the US a majority disagreed with teaching on women's ordination and married priests. Younger Catholics were more likely to hold views that differed from church doctrine. In most countries surveyed, with the exceptions of Spain and US, most Catholics did not support same sex marriage. The survey found strong support for the papacy of Pope Francis (Univision 2014).

### 4.8.2 Global surveys of Catholic women

There have been very few global surveys of Catholic women. In 2017, Voices of Faith, a Catholic activist movement, conducted a flash online survey. The survey polled 173 young Catholic women from 22 countries from 6 continents and found that most respondents felt that issues affecting them were not addressed and they were unrepresented in church decision-making processes (Dankova et al. 2017). Most respondents favoured equal responsibility between men and women in church decision-making; ordination of women to diaconate and priesthood; the inclusion of marginalised

groups; and women in preaching and senior leadership positions (Dankova et al. 2017).

In preparation for Synod 2021-23, the group *Tras las huellas de Sophia* carried out a consultation process which included a survey. The survey, *Women, Church?* which was distributed in Spanish, polled 667 women from 16 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, US, and Europe (Switzerland and Spain); 70% of respondents self-identified as Catholic (*Tras las huellas de Sophia* 2022). A large portion (78%) of respondents were working in unpaid positions in their

church communities; only 4% reported they felt 'fully involved'. Respondents reported experiences of systematic and structural violence in the Church, including physical and psychological abuse, racism, rape, and exclusion. The most common responses were machismo (46%), invisibility (37%), hierarchical violence (33%), silencing (32%), and sexism (29%) (Tras las huellas de Sophía 2022).

The Catholic Women's Council (CWC) is a worldwide alliance of more than 60 Catholic organisations that recognise and are working toward the recognition of women's dignity and equality in the Church (CWC 2022). In preparation for the 2021-23 Synod, the CWC held a series of online global meetings which focused on various themes. The thematic sessions included: Situation of Women in the Church: led by women of Latin America, Spain, and the Caribbean; Power & Participation: prepared by women of Europe, and coordinated by leaders from Germany and Switzerland; Structures, Transparency

& Accountability: prepared by women of Asia, and coordinated by leaders from India; Sacramental Life: prepared and led by women of Australia and New Zealand; Resistance & Hope: prepared and led by women of North America (CWC 2022). An analysis of session dialogue found that Catholic women and LGBTIQ+ people are marginalised and oppressed in the Church, with key contributing factors being patriarchal theologies and ideologies, classism, colonialism, sexism, and racism. Analysis revealed that when participants spoke of their experience of church the most common term they used was 'frustration'. Many session participants reported feeling invisible and claimed women's full participation was hampered by abuses of power, clericalism, and male-only hierarchical, feudal, and pyramidal leadership (CWC 2022). Participants in sessions called for transparency and accountability, the inclusion of women in decision-making processes, and the recovery of the Church as a reflection of the gospel of Jesus (CWC 2022).

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## 4.9 Conclusion

The ISCW survey represents an important opportunity for leaders in the Catholic Church to hear the voices of Catholic women across a range of issues. In particular, the open responses provide important information about the experiences of women across many countries and cultures. Hearing the voices of women in this depth and breadth is long overdue and yields valuable insights that can guide the Catholic community in its future life.



# 5. Methodology

## 5.1 Research design

The ISCW used a self-administered online survey to gather the views and insights of Catholic women from around the world. Self-administered online surveys allow for anonymity and permit wide and diverse coverage of large populations (O’Leary 2010).

The ISCW sought to obtain the views and insights of Catholic women related to 4 central concepts: identity; possible need for reform in the Church; issues related to women in the Church; and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. To operationalise these concepts respondents were asked to respond to a series of closed and open questions.

The survey was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Newcastle (H-2021-0430) in February 2022.

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## 5.2 Recruitment

The ISCW opened online on 8 March 2022 (International Women’s Day) and collected responses until it closed on 26 April 2022. Survey participants were recruited using purposive, non-random sampling through the Catholic Women Speak (CWS) international network (CWS 2023), the Voices of Faith network (Voices of Faith 2023) and the Catholic Women’s Council (CWC) member groups (CWC 2023). The research flyers, which invited women to respond to the ISCW (available in 8 languages), were published on the CWS webpage with a link to the survey. People who followed the link could read the participant information statement and decide whether they wanted to participate. The ISCW had an upper limit of 30,000 respondents. Because non-random sampling was employed, the ISCW results cannot claim to be representative of Catholic women as a whole.

The ISCW was promoted via CWC and CWS social media (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) and the CWC webpage with a link to the CWS webpage. Snowball sampling is a technique of building a sample through referrals (Bryman 2016). Snowball sampling was implemented via an invitation to share the link to the research flyers on the CWS webpage from the CWS and CWC social media pages. Media outlets and various other groups shared the link.

The ISCW very quickly garnered international interest and was promoted in various countries by individuals and CWC member groups. For instance, in the UK several dioceses and parishes promoted the ISCW, as did Catholic reform organisations and the Centre for Catholic Studies in Durham University. International and local media outlets shared details of the ISCW on their webpages. A link to the ISCW was made available on the Vatican’s Synod Resources webpage (General Secretariat to the Synod 2023).

## 5.3 Instrument

The ISCW instrument was translated from English into 7 languages: Spanish, German, Italian, French, Polish, Mandarin, and Portuguese. Translators were sought through CWS and the CWC. The ISCW was hosted by Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap) – a secure, web-based software platform designed to support data capture for research studies (Harris et al. 2009). The ISCW was accessed via a single link. While this allowed for the ISCW to be anonymous, it also opened the possibility of respondents taking the survey multiple times. The ISCW was to be completed in a single session – respondents could not return to complete their survey later.

The ISCW used a mixed methods approach with closed and open questions. Closed questions are useful in surveys with large numbers of responses as they generate quantifiable, empirical data (Bryman 2016; O’Leary 2010). In closed questions respondents used a 5-point Likert Scale to measure their level of agreement with a statement (strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree). In such questions there is little room for a nuanced response and definite, unequivocal meaning is rarely fully achieved (Bryman 2016).

Methods that measure religious affiliation and participation using only closed questions tend not to reveal the complexities and contradictions of women’s lived experiences (Ammerman 2014). In open responses, respondents are asked to provide answers, express opinions, and give information on their experience in their own words. Open responses were used in the survey instrument so that respondents could elaborate on key concept areas or explore new areas not addressed in closed questions (Bryman 2016).

Respondents were first asked to complete 4 screening questions. If respondents answered ‘yes’ to all screening questions, they were asked to complete the full survey. A respondent’s identity was explored using 3 closed questions tapping different aspects of identity, as well as an open response question asking the respondent to record her current relationship with the Catholic Church. Four closed questions assessed general support for or opposition to reform in the Church. Level of agreement with various specific issues of reform in the Church was then assessed by means of 13 closed questions. An open response question was provided for the respondent to indicate other issues that they felt needed to be addressed. Level of agreement with 7 statements about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic was then requested. Two closed questions measured demographic information – age (under 25 years, 26-40 years, 41-55 years, 56-70 years, over 70 years) and country of residence. A final open response question gave respondents the opportunity to contribute additional information or insights. The ISCW instrument is provided in 13.3 Appendix C.

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## 5.4 Storage, access, and disposal of data

Currently, access to the anonymous ISCW data is permitted only to the research team. Any data that identifies survey respondents was not used for analysis. The ISCW data will be retained securely for a minimum period of 5 years from completion of the research and managed/stored in accordance with the University of Newcastle’s policies. Following this time period, access to the data base may be granted to external interested researchers.

## 5.5 Data preparation and analysis

### 5.5.1 Dataset preparation

There were 19,548 responses collected. The ISCW responses were collated and downloaded in Microsoft Excel format. Open-ended responses were machine-translated to English using Translator for Microsoft Office.<sup>1</sup> Translated open-ended responses were then merged into the data set alongside the corresponding untranslated responses to allow for text comparison and correction where necessary. The file was saved as a Comma Separated Values (CSV) file and imported into SPSS software.<sup>2</sup>

To prepare the raw data set for quantitative analysis, the responses that were fully blank or had answered only identity questions and/or demographic questions were eliminated. The screened SPSS data set contained 17,200 responses with missing data rates on each of the closed questions of less than 5.5%, with the exception of 3 questions: identification as an ecumenical Christian (6.7%), no longer identifying as Catholic (10.3%), age range (7.3%) and country (7.6%). Some 9.0% of the 17,200 respondents did not answer any open questions.

In-depth analysis of responses to the 3 open-text questions was desirable to maximise the potential of the qualitative data. However, the size of the dataset (15,648 cases with open-text data) was prohibitive. To achieve the potential of the data and maximise its demographic diversity (country and age), a stratified

random subsample was generated from only those cases who answered the open text questions. This is similar to the method used in Elsesser and Lever (2011). The subsample comprised: (1) all cases for countries with up to 100 respondents (who provided open text responses); (2) a simple random sample of 100 cases where country was missing;<sup>3</sup> and (3) a stratified random sample of 100 from each country with more than 100 respondents (who provided open text responses), with equal representation by age where possible (11 cases aged 18-25 years; 22 cases from each of the 26-40, 41-55 and 70+ years age brackets; and 23 cases aged 56-70 years). Where it was not possible to achieve this age profile due to insufficient cases in a given age category, extra cases were selected from the neighbouring age category/categories.

A new sample was taken for each open response question from those cases who answered the particular question, which meant that some cases in the subsample had open text responses on all three questions, while some didn't. This sampling strategy yielded a subsample of 4,220 cases on which the analysis of the three open-text questions was based (2,604 cases who described their current relationship with the Church; 2,084 who indicated other issues that church leadership needs to address; and 1,966 who added further information at the end of the survey).

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/translator/business/machine-translation/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ibm.com/au-en/products/spss-statistics>

<sup>3</sup> However, only 22 respondents who did not provide their country answered the final open text question "Is there anything else you would like to add?". All 22 were retained.

## 5.5.2 Analysis of closed questions

Univariate analysis – the examination of the simple frequencies on individual survey items – was undertaken on the responses to closed questions. The patterns in results across different items (for example, various issues of reform in the Church) were explored by means of graphical displays. Bivariate analyses were conducted to examine similarities and differences in the patterns of responses between country of residence and age groups. In this report, results are presented separately for age groups and countries with at least 150

respondents (Australia, Canada, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Poland, South Africa, Spain, UK, US). Because of the dominance of respondents from Western English-speaking countries in the sample (67% of the ISCW sample were located in Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, UK, US), age patterns were checked both in the full sample and in the sample with these respondents excluded. Tests of statistical significance were not undertaken due to the non-random sampling method.

## 5.5.3 Analysis of open questions

Open responses were analysed and interpreted using a modified grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Members of the research team used NVivo<sup>4</sup> software to code line-by-line themes that emerged from the subsample produced for each of the questions: (1) In a couple of sentences please describe your current relationship with the Catholic Church; (2) Are there any other issues that church leadership needs to address?; and (3) Is there anything else you would like to add?

This type of ‘open coding’ is intended to let abstract ideas and insights emerge from the data (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Shooter 2018). As themes and concepts emerged through the open-

coding process, a revision of connections and associations between codes was undertaken. During the coding process the research team regularly met to compare and explore connections and relations between thematic codes. Research notes documented emerging concepts, assumptions, and biases during the coding process. Data saturation (the point at which no new coded themes emerge) was achieved before all responses were analysed. While this indicated that the size of the sub dataset was sufficient (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Elsesser and Lever 2011), the research team made the decision to continue coding the full subsample to maximise demographic representation.

<sup>4</sup> <https://lumivero.com/products/nvivo/>

## 6. A snapshot of who participated

Two-thirds of women who responded to the survey were from Western English-speaking countries (67%), with 36% from the US alone. Outside of this grouping, the most common country was Germany (7.8%), followed by Italy (5.0%) and Spain (4.9%). The median – and most common – age group was 56 to 70 years old. Some 20% of respondents were aged 18-40. France and especially Poland had particularly young age distributions, while Ireland, Canada and the UK had older age distributions. Respondents from India, Italy, South Africa, Spain, Mexico, and Germany were more concentrated in their middle years.

Table 1: Country and age of respondents, showing individual countries with at least 100 cases (approximately).

Country		
	N	Percentage of valid (%)
Argentina	102	0.6
Australia	1845	11.6
Canada	677	4.3
France	270	1.7
Germany	1236	7.8
India	192	1.2
Ireland	198	1.2
Italy	797	5.0
Mexico	239	1.5
Poland	288	1.8
Portugal	96	0.6
South Africa	162	1.0
Spain	783	4.9
Switzerland	127	0.8
Taiwan	99	0.6
United Kingdom (UK)	2077	13.1
United States of America (US)	5723	36.0
Uruguay	119	0.7
Other Africa & Middle East	73	0.5
Other Europe	226	1.4
Other Central & South America	328	2.1
Other Oceania	99	0.6
Other Asia	132	0.8
Total valid	15888	100.0
Missing	1312	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17200</b>	

Age		
18 to 25 years	593	3.7
26 to 40 years	2572	16.1
41 to 55 years	3781	23.7
56 to 70 years	4896	30.7
Over 70 years	4103	25.7
Total valid	15945	100.0
Missing	1255	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17200</b>	

## 7. Catholic identity and participation

The ISCW was designed and distributed to be completed by women on the peripheries of the Catholic Church, as well as those actively participating in parishes and dioceses. Respondents were asked a series of closed questions which explored their Catholic identity, including an open question that asked them to describe their current relationship with the Church.

### **A significant majority (88%) of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'My Catholic identity is important to me',**

including at least 80% in each country (Figures 1 and 2). Similarly, 86% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that they 'no longer identify as

Catholic' (at least 75% in each country) (Figures 3 and 4). The small age-related variations for the full sample masked differences between Western English-speaking countries and the remainder of the dataset. Agreement/strong agreement decreased with age for the statement 'My Catholic identity is important to me' among those from Western English-speaking countries, but the opposite pattern was observed when these respondents were excluded (that is, increasing agreement/strong agreement with age). Older respondents from Western English-speaking countries were more likely to strongly disagree that they 'no longer identify as Catholic'. The nature of distribution of the survey, however, means that many respondents are likely to have been in a relationship with the institutional Church when they completed the survey.

### 7.1 Descriptions of current relationship

When asked about their current relationship with the Catholic Church in open responses, many respondents described high levels of involvement. A smaller proportion noted low levels of involvement or no engagement. Respondents ranged from women who labelled themselves as 'devout', 'active', 'practising', 'committed' or 'faithful' Catholics to those who used descriptions such as 'lapsed', 'critical', and 'cultural'. However, what 'active', 'practising', or 'committed' meant in terms of spiritual and liturgical practices and saliency varied considerably.

Many open responses described a high level of religiosity, including regular private prayer and Mass attendance alongside some type of parish or local church involvement. Some reported commitment to liturgical and/or ministry roles such as catechist, lector, eucharistic minister,

music ministry, and liturgy co-ordinator. A few mentioned the role of acolyte. For example, one respondent noted:

*I attend Mass regularly, have been a Proclaimer of the Word for 30 years and pray the Rosary (over 70 years, South Africa).*

Respondents who reported ministry involvement sometimes highlighted difficulties. One such respondent wrote:

*I am a catechist and I belong to a rural community. At the moment I am a little uneasy about the situation of the Catholic Church, but I take refuge in the Lord and in our mother Mary (41 to 55 years, Uruguay).*

A young respondent reported:

*[I have a] strong relationship, I help with youth ministry in my parish, ... [with the] restructure after the departure of the parish priest for abuse accusations, [and]*

sing in the choir. [I have] a bit of anger sometimes (18 to 25 years, France).

Some responses mentioned participation in women's movements and inclusive ecclesial communities as protest spaces and alternatives to Catholic parishes. For example:

I feel ill at ease in a conventional parish Mass. I find my current involvement in an ecumenical group led by an ordained Catholic Woman priest whose Masses and other services are mainly conducted online so participants pray together from all over the world (over 70 years, South Africa).

Many respondents expressed their ongoing commitment to the sacramental life of the Church, especially the Eucharist. They used terms such as: 'love', 'source of grace', 'central', and 'anchor' when explaining their relationship with the Eucharist. For instance, one respondent asserted:

I love the Sacraments of Communion and Reconciliation and attending Mass. Faith in God comes first, but I'm often troubled by ultra-conservative patriarchal points of view, attitudes to LGBTQ+ and women clergy and denying Communion to individuals (56 to 70 years, US).

Some respondents reported that Mass attendance and participation in the sacraments occurs despite the actions and attitudes of clergy. For example, a respondent wrote:

I cling on to the Church by my fingernails, because of the Eucharist and in spite of many of its clergy (41 to 55 years, UK).

Respondents' sense of belonging was often purposefully separated from the institutional Church. One respondent noted:

My relationship is one of belonging to the living body of Christ, not to a hierarchical, patriarchal, institution that displaces women (56 to 70 years, Argentina).

Even though most respondents indicated that their Catholic identity was important to them, it was common for open responses to describe strain, or a difficulty associated with Catholic identity and/or participation. Respondents tended to use words such as 'anger', 'conflicted', 'hurt', 'disrespected', 'crisis', 'disillusioned', and

'doubt' in when describing their current relationship with the Church. For instance, a respondent wrote:

Difficult, great loss of trust in the institution. But since faith and the local church are important to me, one is often faced with a dichotomy (26 to 40 years, Germany).

Another explained:

Being a woman in the church is hard - we walk the line of being valuable members of society but voiceless in many elements of the church. I am trying to find the path of being a modern woman and someone who fits within the role available.

I strongly believe that we should celebrate the difference between men and women ... but we need to recognize the role and value of women (26 to 40 years, Australia).

A respondent who identified as a religious sister wrote:

I am a religious sister but am strongly committed to working to change a patriarchal church. Frustration and disillusion are constant companions, but so is a deep belief in the power of Spirit to bring about change (over 70 years, Philippines).

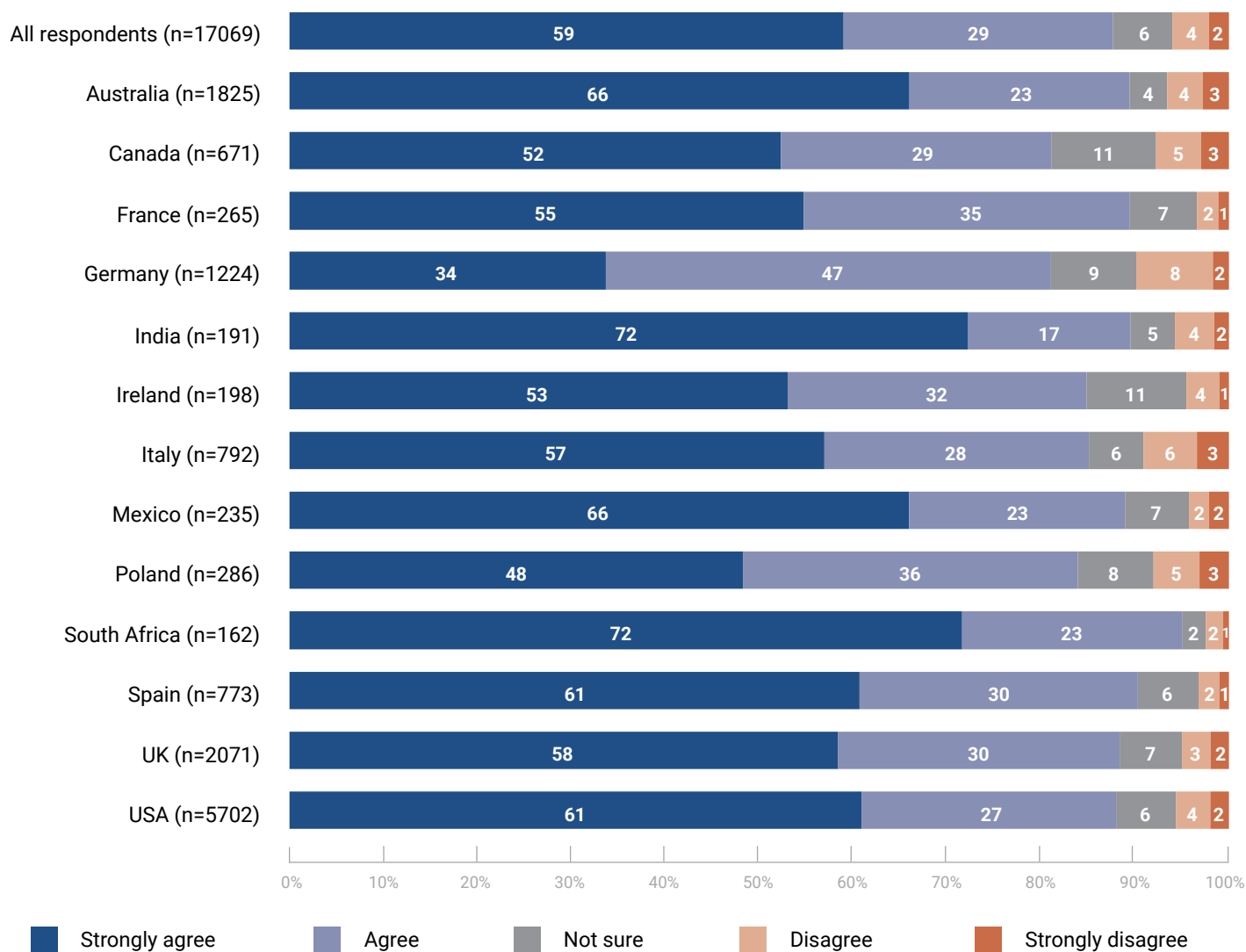
Many respondents told stories of being excluded and undervalued in their parish communities, often giving concrete examples of experiences of discrimination and sexism. Some women, including women religious, expressed distress because they felt isolated and excluded in their parishes. These respondents used words such as 'ostracized', 'ignored', and 'distanced' to express exclusion from parish life. One such respondent claimed:

I feel utterly ignored as a woman and as a lay person (over 70 years, India).

A few respondents who identified as single or unmarried in open responses, noted how complex it was to develop a sense of belonging and a space to grow spiritually in their parish. One such respondent claimed:

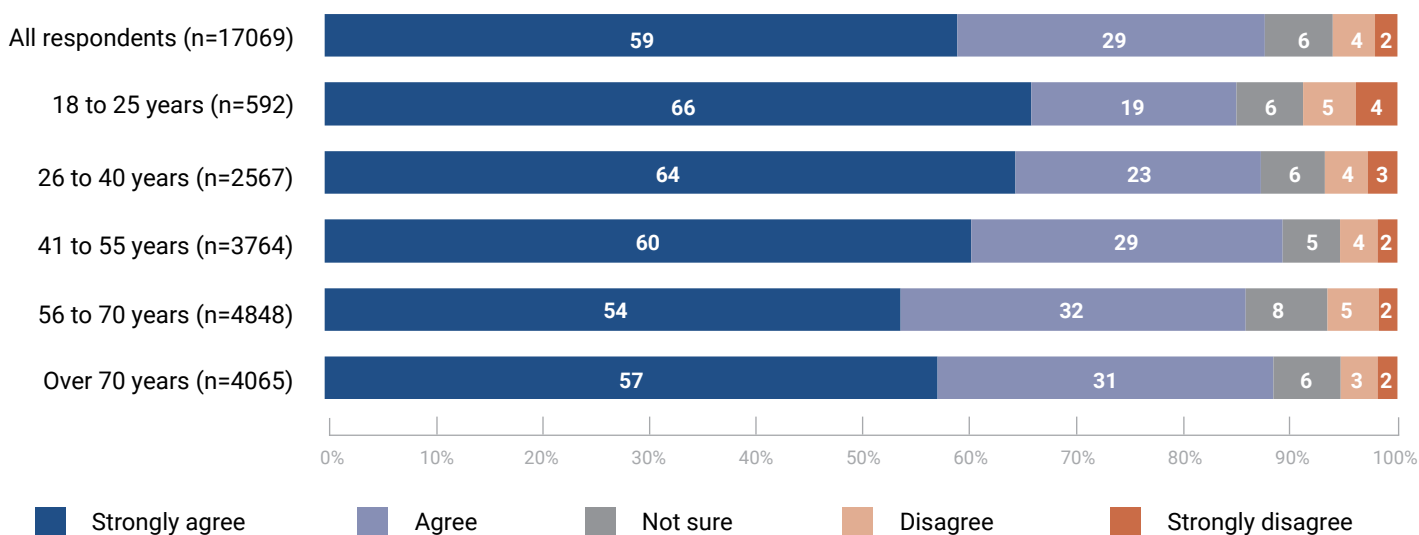
Sometimes it's a struggle to participate in church activities due to emphasis on family and youth. I completely understand the reason for the church focus on family and youth, but singles are mostly sidelined (26 to 40 years, Singapore).

**Figure 1: Percentage by country 'My Catholic identity is important to me'.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

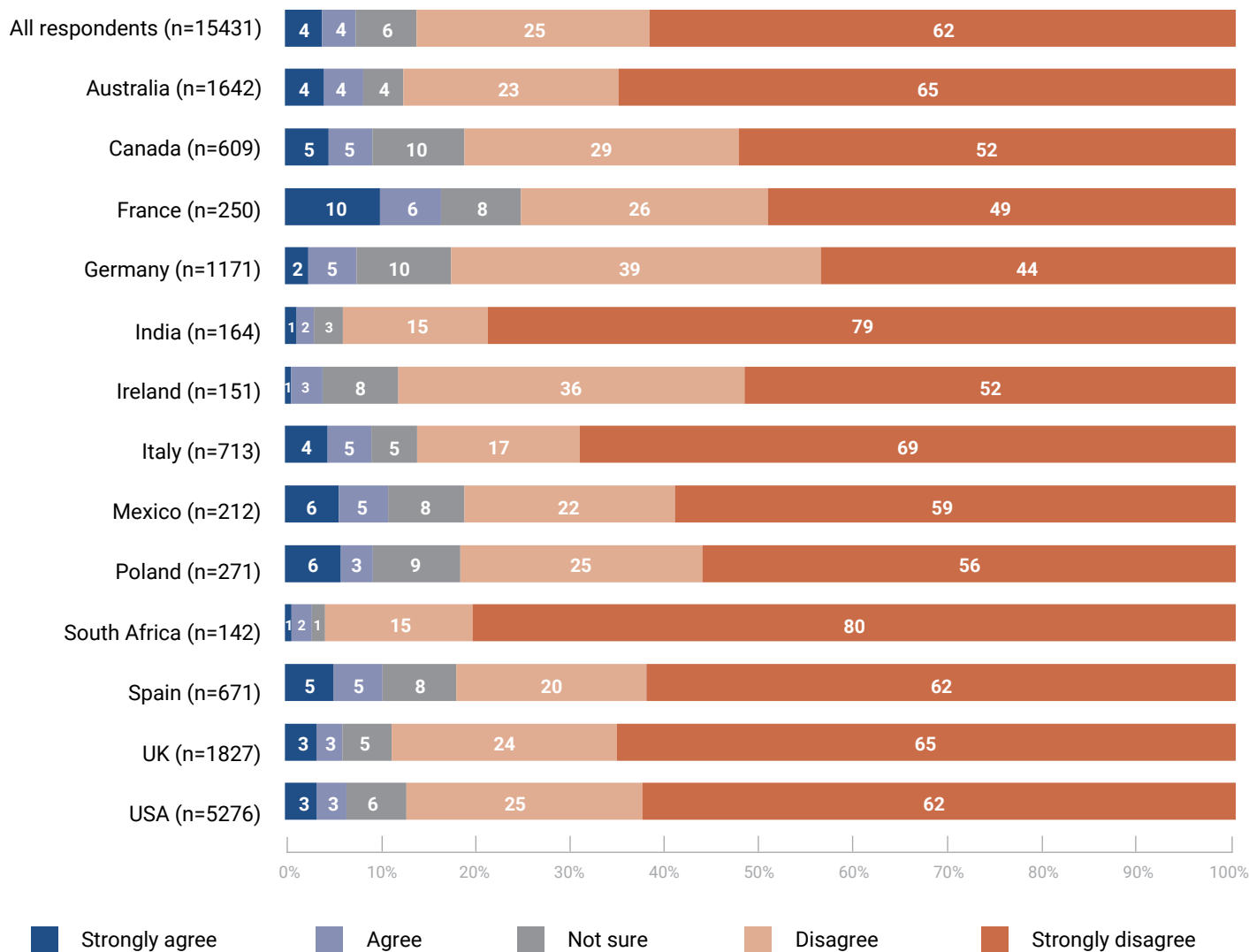
**Figure 2: Percentage by age 'My Catholic identity is important to me'.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

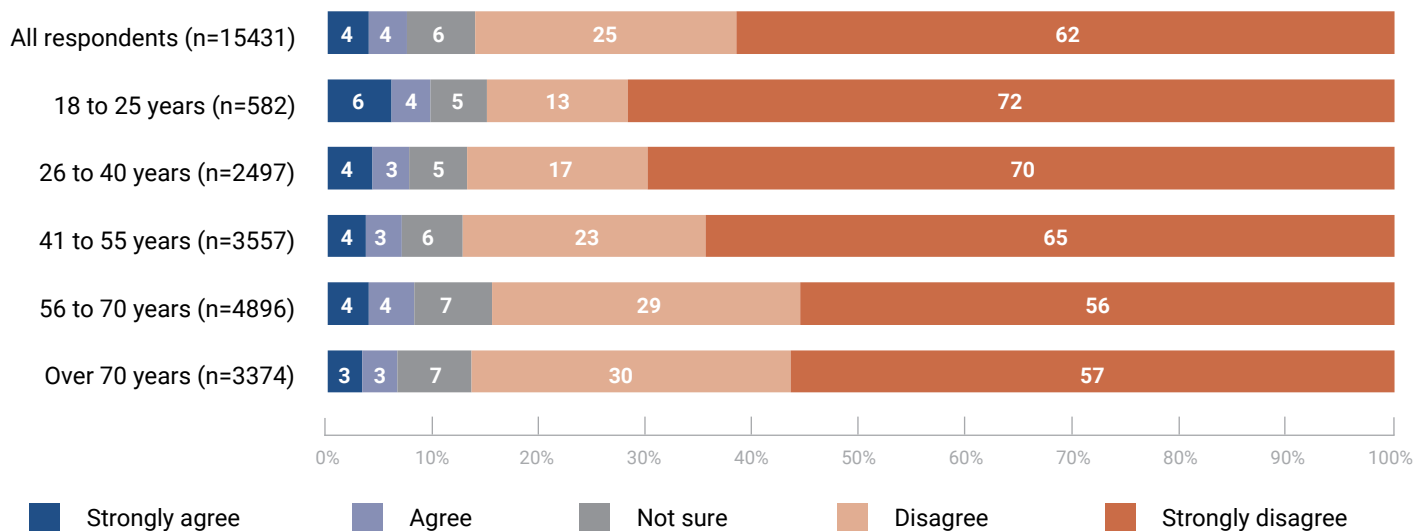


**Figure 3: Percentage by country 'I no longer identify as Catholic'.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 4: Percentage by age 'I no longer identify as Catholic'.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

## 7.2 Ecumenism

Most respondents identified as ecumenical Christians.

**Almost 2 in 3 (65%) either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'I identify as an ecumenical Christian'.**

There were variations in the level of agreement by country and age (Figures 5 and 6). In terms of country, those living in the US and Australia were least likely to strongly agree or agree, while those in Spain and Germany were most likely. Strong agreement/agreement increased with age.

Open responses expressed support for ecumenism. One respondent called for:

The equal recognition of other Christian denominations as a church. With full recognition of sacraments (Communion, Baptism, Marriage) including Eucharistic hospitality (41 to 55 years, Switzerland).

Another noted:

My hope is that this survey can contribute to our struggle for genuine Christian unity

and inclusiveness, mirroring God's own compassion, mercy, forgiveness and joyful love (over 70 years, Philippines).

There were some respondents that acknowledged the progress of other Christian denominations towards the full inclusion of women in ministry and decision making. A few cited they participated in non-Catholic Christian denominations or ecumenical movements because of their recognition of the equality of women. One such respondent said:

My Catholic roots are part of my skin and bone, past tense but I no longer practice as a Catholic and am part of a progressive Anglican community where I can fully share my theological education in collaborative leadership (26 to 40 years, Canada).

A very small cohort of respondents expressed a resistance to ecumenism, with one making the claim that:

In the name of ecumenicalism [sic], the true tenements of church are watered down and as such we lose the opportunity to convert and to keep the converted (18 to 25 years, UK).

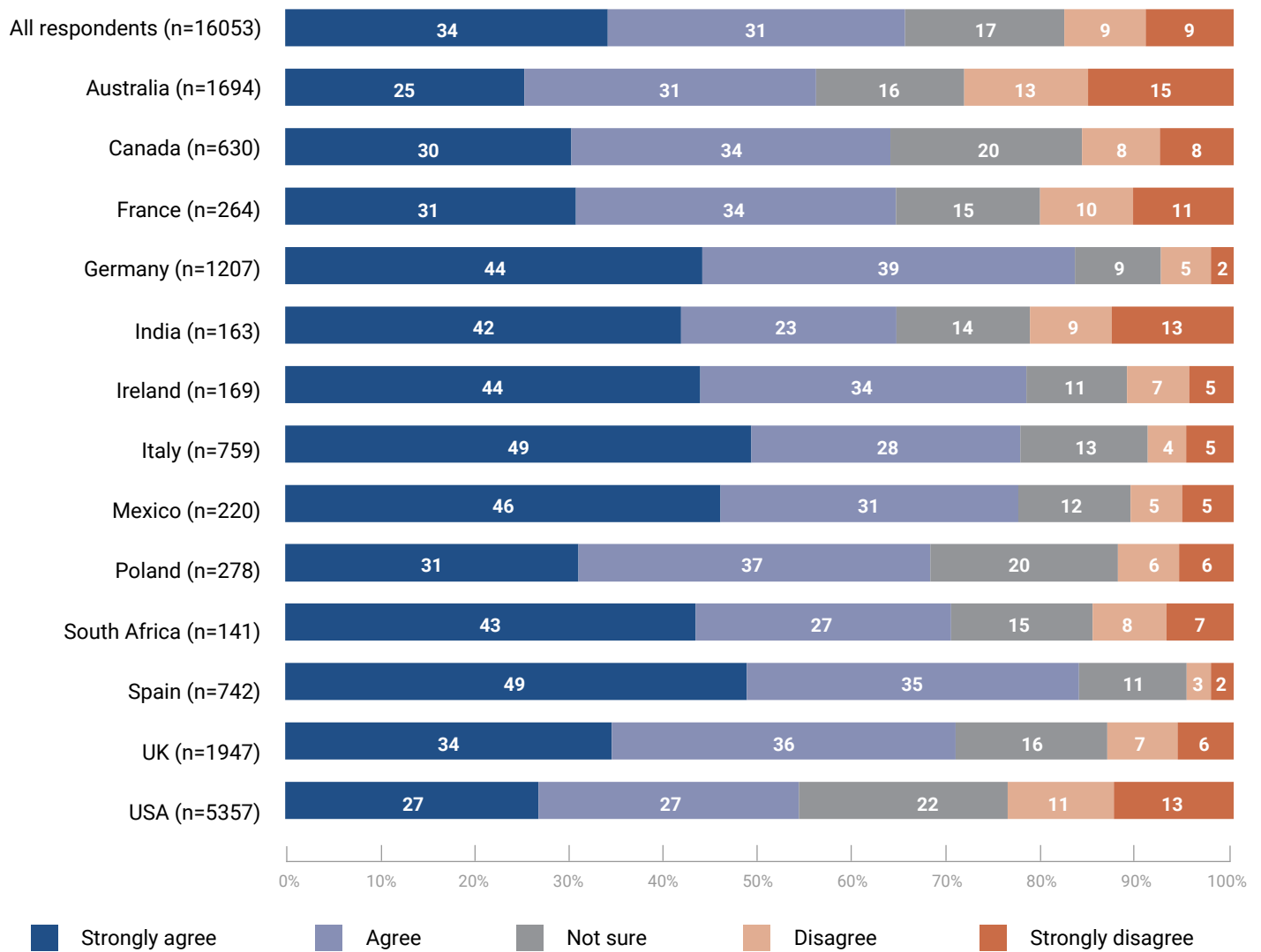
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## 8. The impact of the COVID pandemic

Respondents were asked a series of closed questions regarding the impact of the COVID pandemic on their faith and church participation. Open text questions did not specifically ask about the COVID pandemic. Some respondents, however, wrote about their experiences of and views about the pandemic. These responses varied significantly. There were

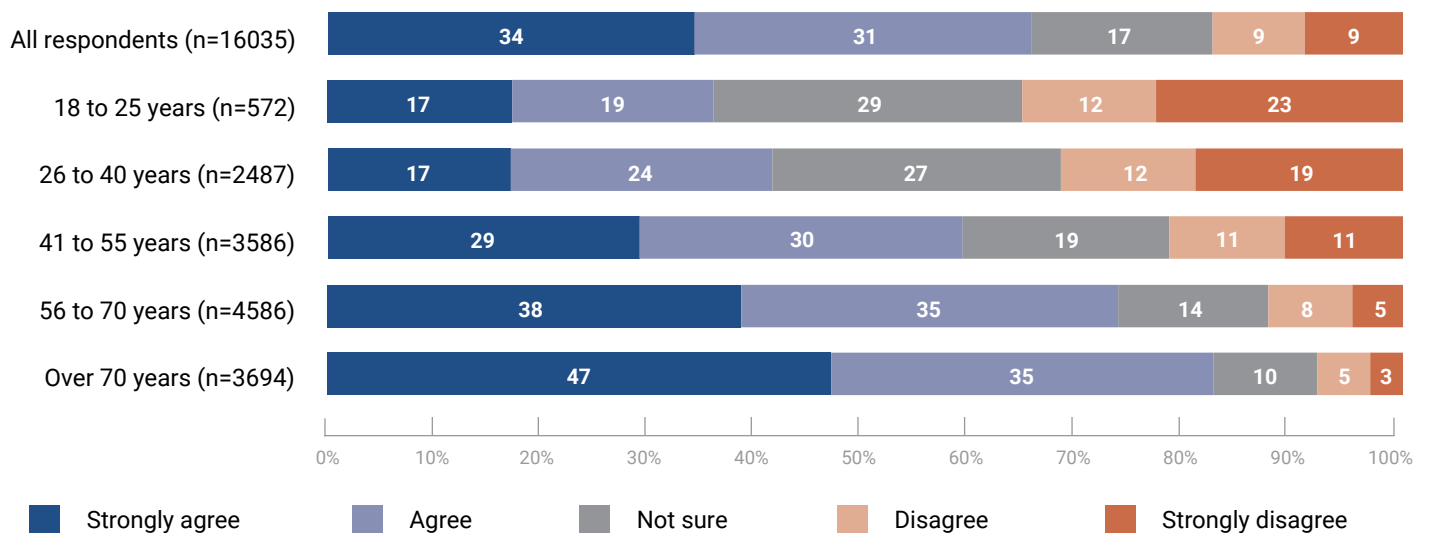
some respondents who explained how the pandemic had presented an opportunity to stop, reflect, and renew their faith and connection to community. Other respondent who ardently opposed vaccine mandates, shutdowns, and church closures, used open responses to express their anger and opposition.

**Figure 5: Percentage by country 'I identify as an ecumenical Christian'.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 6: Percentage by age 'I identify as an ecumenical Christian'.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

## 8.1 Church closures

When asked about the impact of not being able to attend Mass, responses were polarised.

**Just under a half (47%) of all respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement ‘I was deeply affected by not being able to attend Mass in person during the pandemic’,**

while a similar proportion disagreed or strongly disagreed (42%). Responses varied by country of residence, perhaps reflecting the way different civil states and episcopacies responded to the pandemic (Figure 7). For example, a third (33%) of respondents in Spain strongly agreed or agreed, compared with two-thirds (67%) in South Africa, although the 2 countries had similar age profiles. Younger respondents were more likely to strongly agree or agree with the statement than older respondents (Figure 8). However, this age-related trend was dominated by the pattern in the Western English-speaking countries; it was less marked once the Western English-speaking countries were excluded.

In open responses, there were respondents who expressed anger and hurt caused by church closures, the lack of access to sacraments, and vaccine mandates. One respondent wrote:

I was deeply wounded that our churches were closed and sacraments, like confession and last rites were ended, due to COVID. I am horrified that our hierarchy supports vaccine mandates (41 to 55 years, US).

Another claimed:

Please stop trying to make the Church in line with the world rather bring the world into line with the Church. The hierarchy of the Church needs to stop bowing to the false idol of the world and needs to protect and feed its children instead of closing the churches (over 70 years, South Africa).

A few respondents wrote that in closing churches the Church had caused spiritual harm. Some noting that the Church had prioritised physical health over emotional and spiritual health during the COVID pandemic.

By contrast, there were other respondents who reported that the COVID pandemic and shift to online worship positively impacted their faith and sense of community.

For example:

During the pandemic, I grew closer to God (26 to 40 years, Malaysia) and:

The pandemic strengthened my faith. The experience of working and celebrating my faith in community through Zoom showed that when our love for Jesus and our brothers and sisters is strong and authentic, there is no obstacle to it (over 70 years, Uruguay).

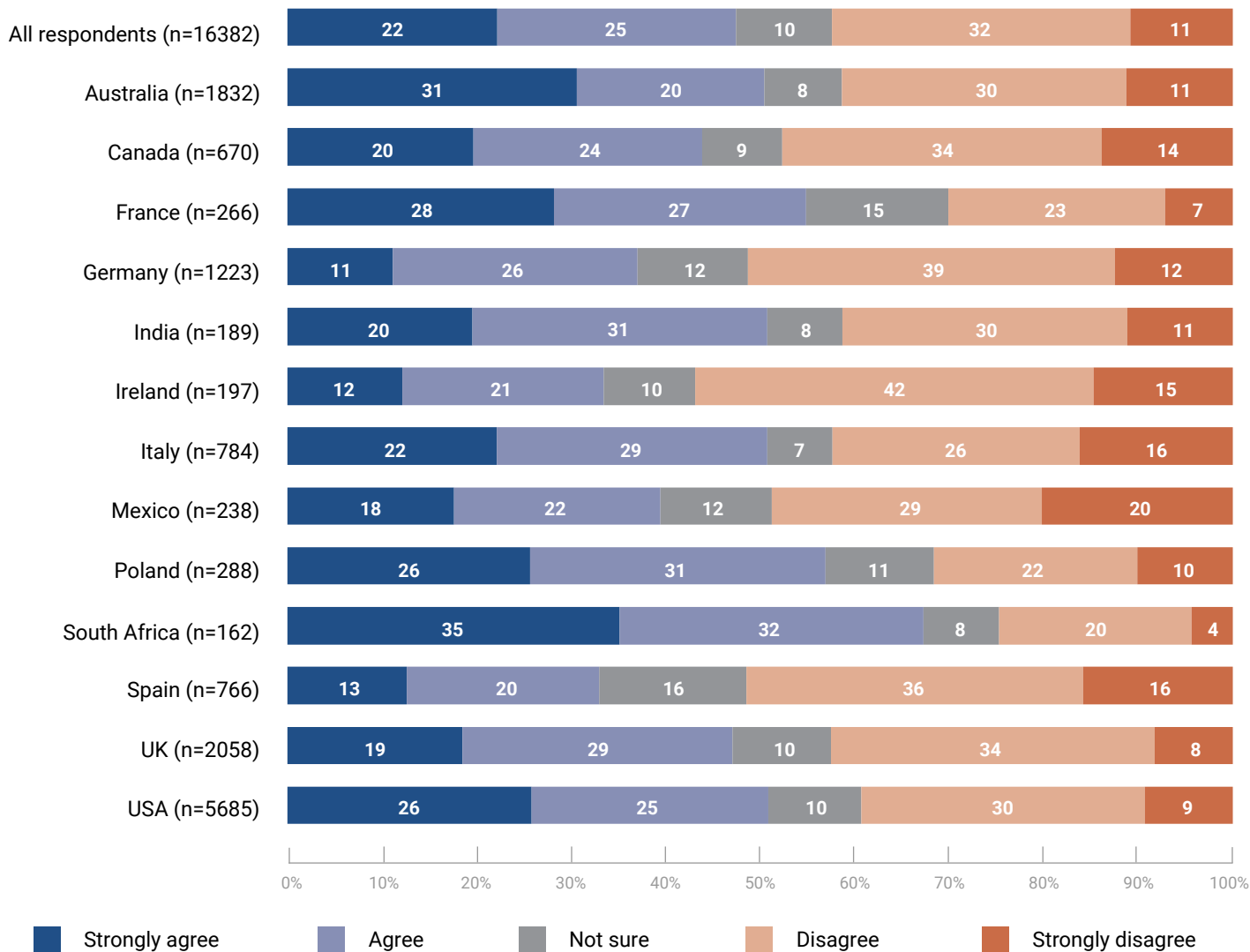
There were mixed responses to the closed question reporting the impact of the COVID pandemic on personal faith.

**Just over half (54%) of all respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement ‘My personal faith was deepened during the pandemic’.**

There were variations in responses by country of residences (Figure 9). Around 8 in 10 respondents in India (81%) and South Africa (80%) strongly agreed or agreed with the statement compared to just 1 in 3 (30%) in Germany and 1 in 4 (40%) in France. There were small differences present that were associated with age – increased agreement/strong agreement as age increased, beyond the 18-to-25-year group (Figure 10).

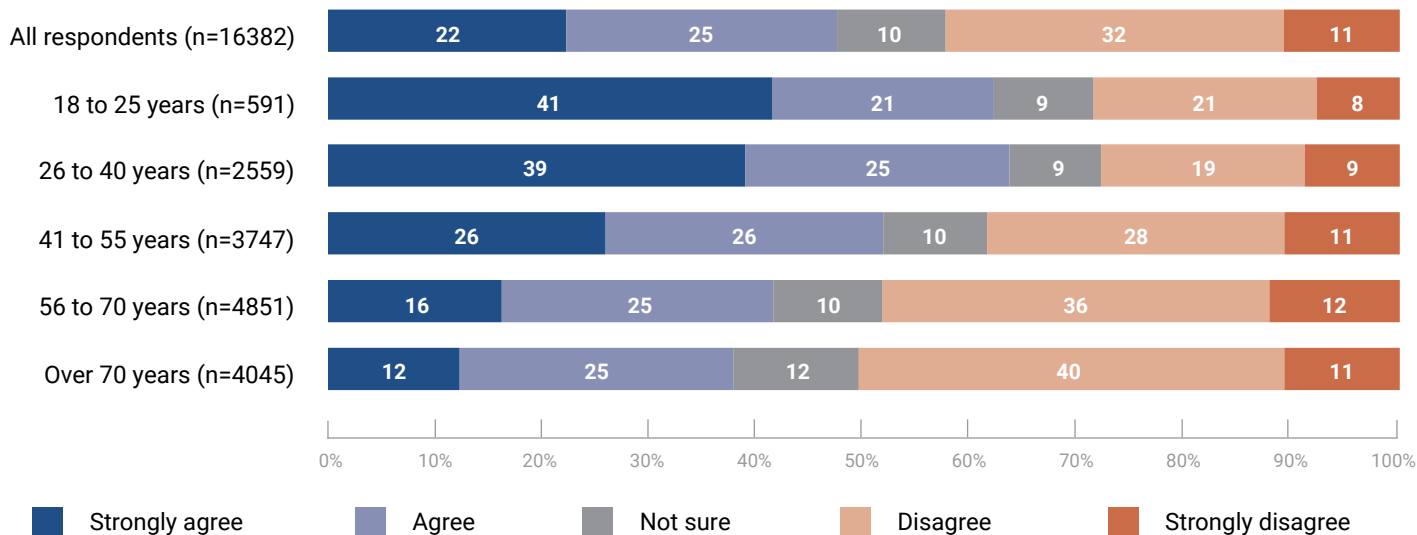
When it came to faith-sharing during the COVID pandemic there was a higher level of agreement. Just over two-thirds (67%) all respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement ‘I discovered new ways of sharing my faith during the pandemic’. Answers varied by country; respondents in Germany and Poland were least likely to strongly agree or agree (a slim majority), while those in South Africa were most likely to do so. There were also variations in responses associated with age, with younger respondents slightly less likely to strongly agree or agree than older respondents, a pattern that was a little more pronounced when respondents from Western English-speaking countries were excluded.

**Figure 7: Percentage by country 'I was deeply affected by not being able to attend Mass in person during the pandemic'.**



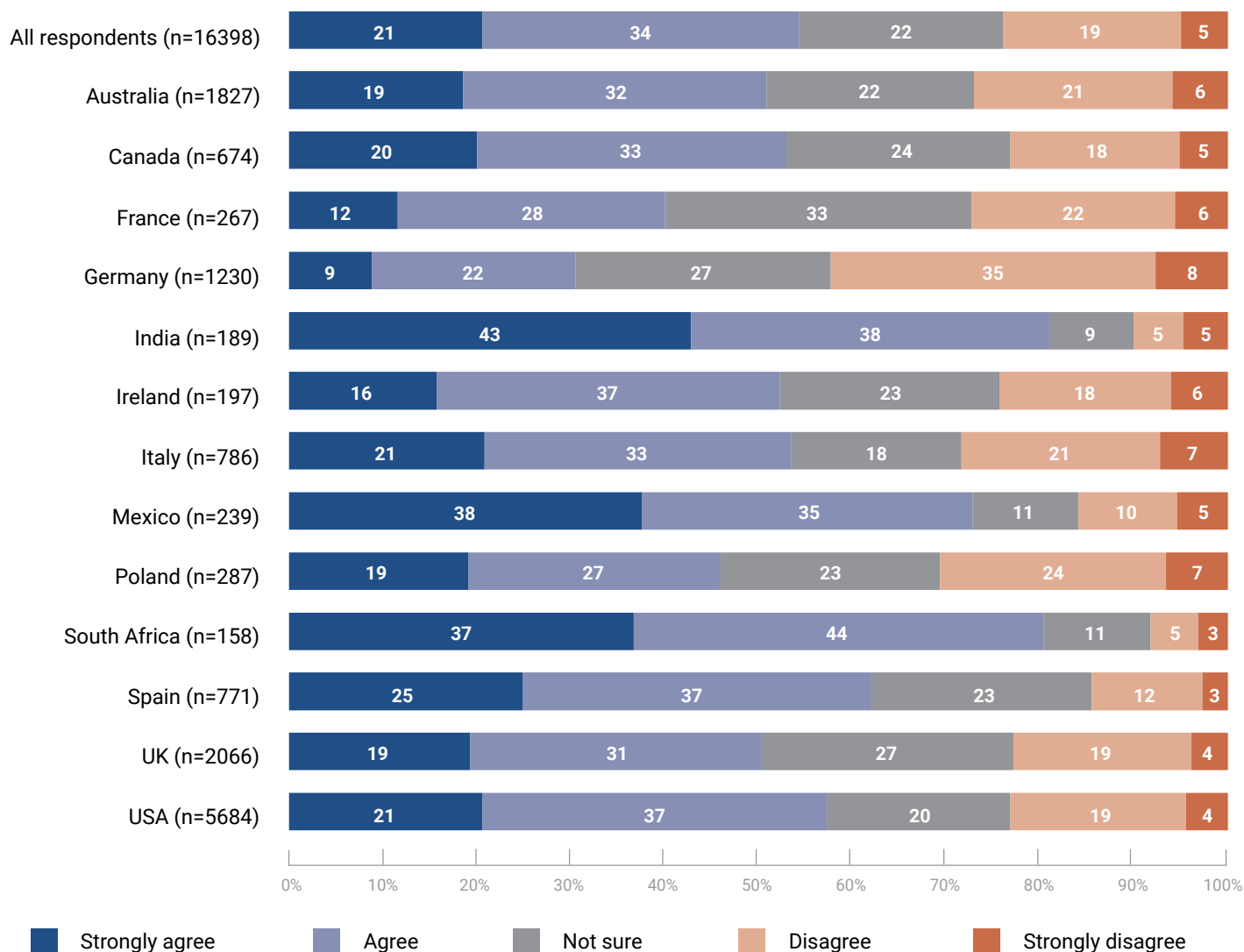
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 8: Percentage by age 'I was deeply affected by not being able to attend Mass in person during the pandemic'.**



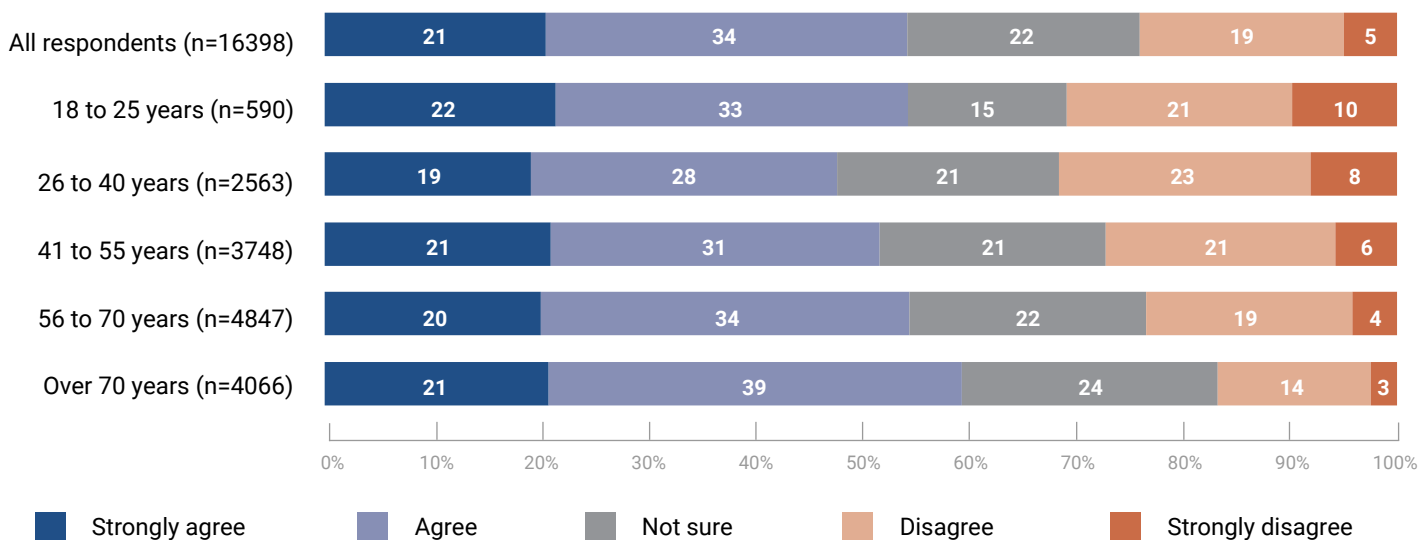
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 9: Percentage by country 'My personal faith was deepened during the pandemic'**



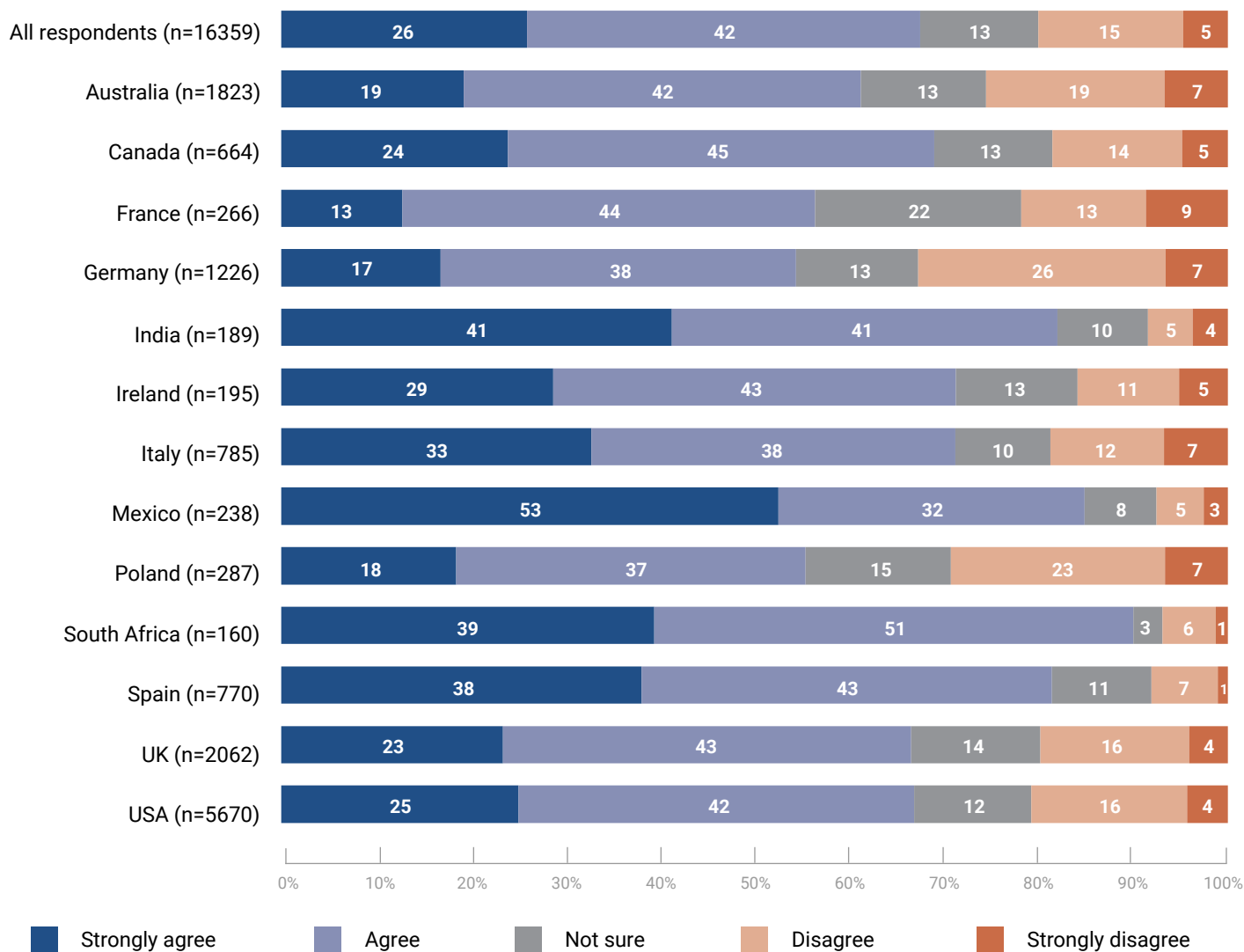
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 10: Percentage by age 'My personal faith was deepened during the pandemic'**



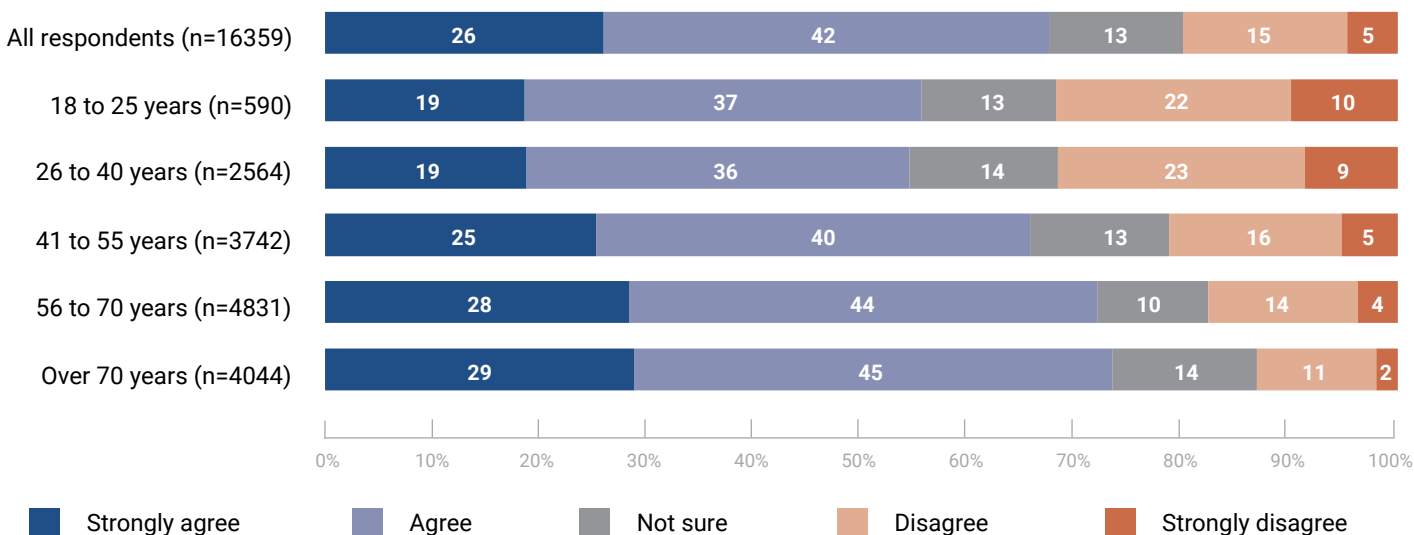
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 11: Percentage by country 'I discovered new ways of sharing my faith during the pandemic'.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 12: Percentage by age 'I discovered new ways of sharing my faith during the pandemic'.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

## 8.2 Community engagement

**Almost 6 in 10 (58%) of all respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement ‘I found new ways to engage with my community during the pandemic’.**

Approximately a third of respondents in France

(32%) and Poland (34%) strongly agreed or agreed, increasing to about three-quarters in South Africa (74%), India (75%), and Mexico (77%) (Figure 13). Once again there were variations associated with respondents’ age (Figure 14). Older respondents were more likely to strongly agree or agree that they had found new ways to engage than younger respondents.

## 8.3 Pastoral support and online worship

**About 7 in 10 (69%) of all respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement ‘I appreciated the opportunity to participate in worship online’.**

Notably, older respondents were significantly more likely to strongly agree or agree with the statement than younger respondents (Figure 15). Again, when it came to country, respondents in India and South Africa were especially likely to strongly agree or agree, with those in France and Germany least likely to do so (Figure 16).

In open responses some respondents expressed that a lack of succour impacted their faith in the Church as a means of support and sustenance. For instance, a respondent wrote:

The pandemic made me realize that my church let me down. I literally lost faith in church as an institution. I did not get a single sympathetic call from any priest or even basic Christian community. It was the non-Christian’s who reached out to me (over 70 years, India).

Other respondents reported that church closures and increased access to online worship alongside pastoral support resulted in growth and renewal of faith. Several respondents wrote about the benefits online worship presented for women, while others noted that online worship exacerbated clericalism. One respondent observed:

The pandemic gave us, in the community, greater visibility and leadership to women both socially and liturgically. That was a great learning (56 to 70 years, Chile).

## 8.4 Post-pandemic participation in parish life

The pandemic was highly disruptive of regular parish life in many places. What were the intentions of women to return in person?

**Around 1 in 3 (29%) of all respondents strongly agreed, agreed, or were not sure about the statement ‘I do not intend to return to regular Mass attendance’; with just less than half (48%) of all respondents strongly disagreeing with the statement.**

Around half (51%) of respondents in Germany disagreed or strongly disagreed that they wouldn’t return to Mass, compared with 87% of those living in South Africa (Figure 17). Younger respondents were significantly more likely to strongly disagree with the statement than older respondents, especially in Western English-speaking countries (Figure 18).

Many respondents wrote in open responses about how the COVID pandemic had fundamentally changed the way they participate in parish life. A few respondents wrote of a renewed and animated commitment to parish life. One young respondent wrote:

Although my faith deepened during the pandemic it was not because the Churches were closed. It was because I had to turn to God for strength. And I honestly would continue to go to Mass even if it meant certain death. I do not see any reason the churches should ever be closed again (18 to 25 years, Canada).

For others, distance created new difficulties. One respondent explained:

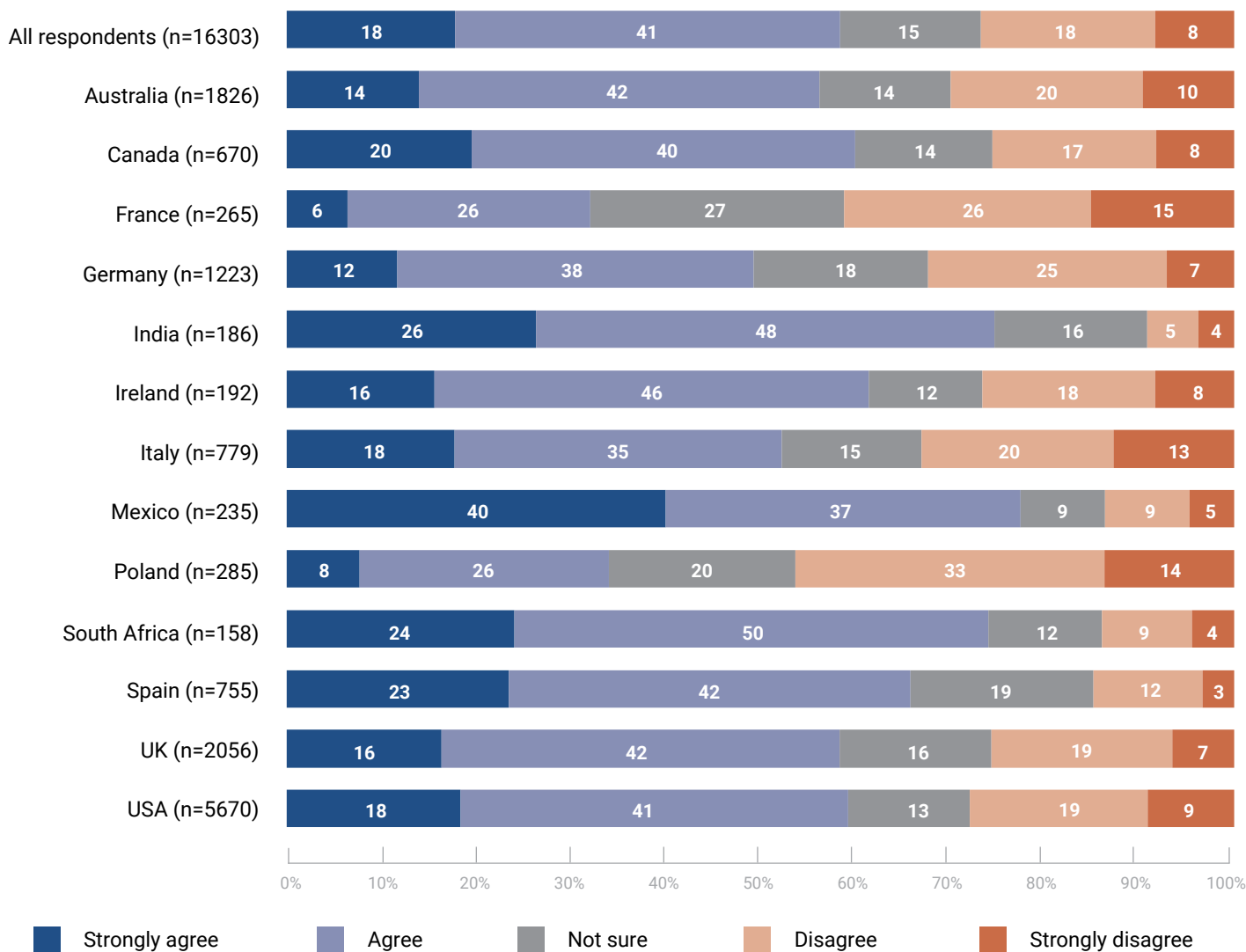
I love God, I go to Mass, I pray, but since the closure of the churches during the pandemic, I have found it difficult to know that I have been abandoned and I find it very difficult to participate actively in parish groups (26 to 40 years, Mexico).

Several respondents articulated that the separation they experienced could become permanent. For example, some respondents, such as this respondent in Ireland, found online Masses more welcoming than in person liturgies. She wrote:

I was listening to mass online during Covid and loved it, but I do not like the unwelcoming atmosphere in the Church so I’m in no rush to go back (56 to 70 years, Ireland).

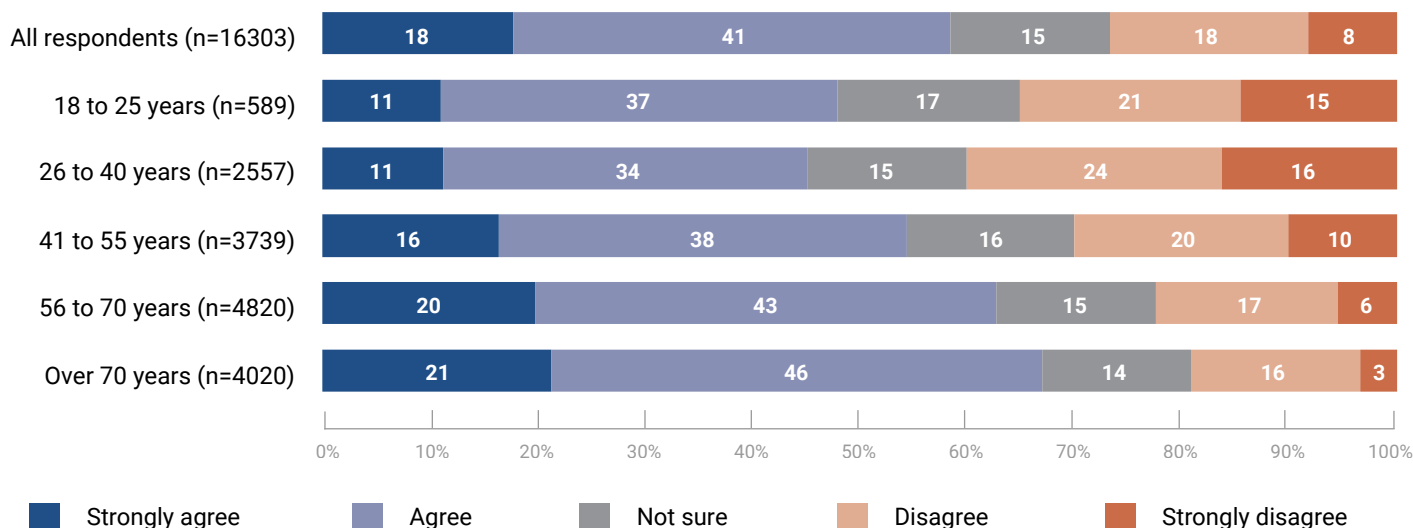


**Figure 13 Percentage by country 'I found new ways to engage with my community during the pandemic'.**



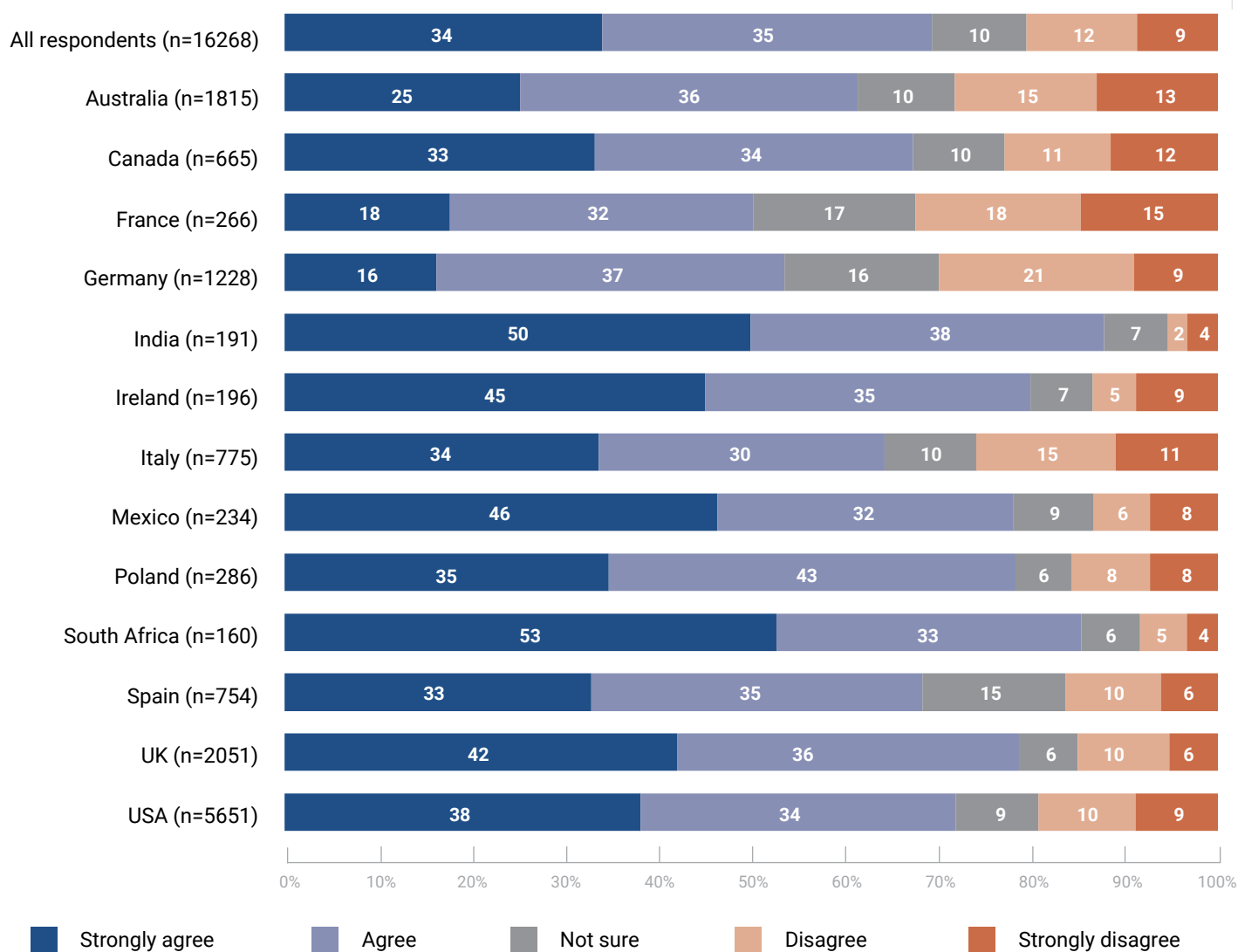
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 14: Percentage by age 'I found new ways to engage with my community during the pandemic'.**



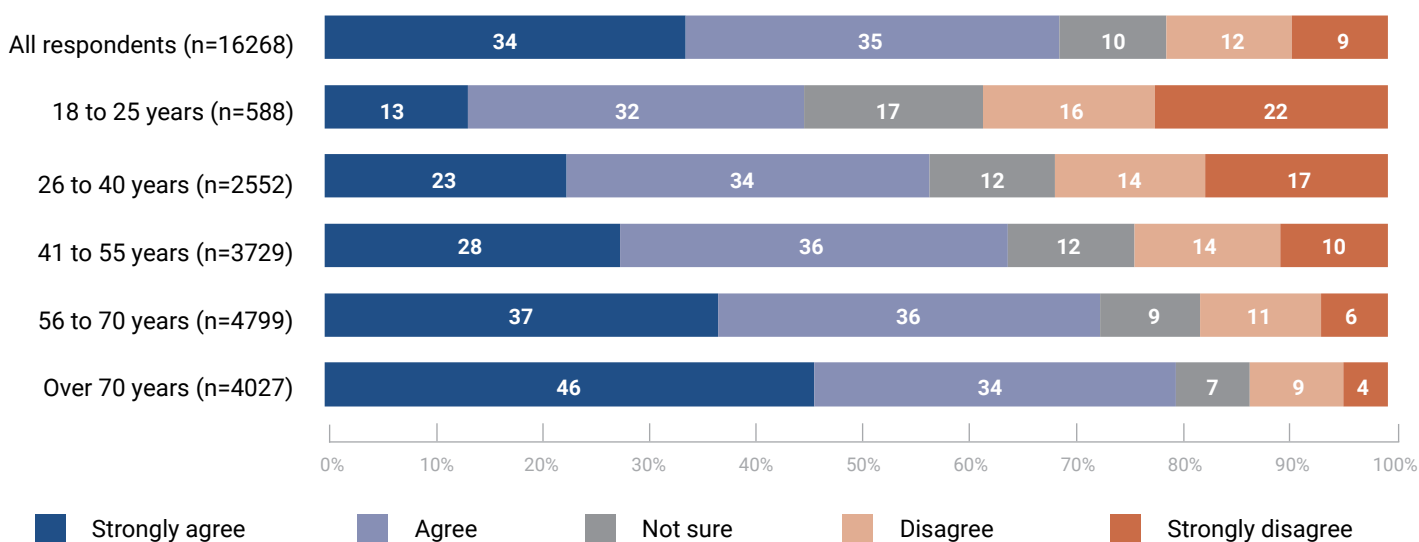
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 15: Percentage by country 'I appreciated the opportunity to participate in worship online'.**



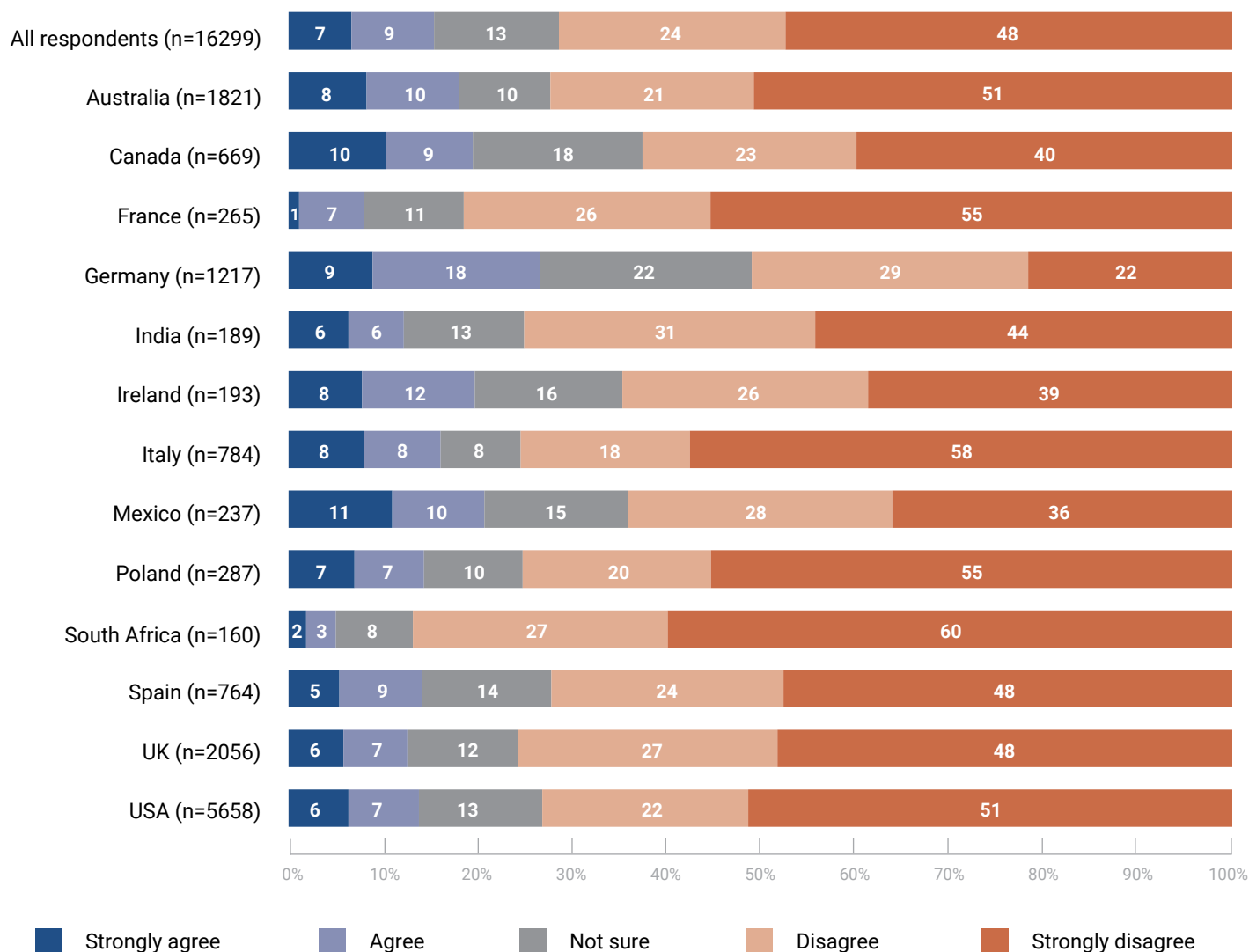
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 16: Percentage by age 'I appreciated the opportunity to participate in worship online'.**



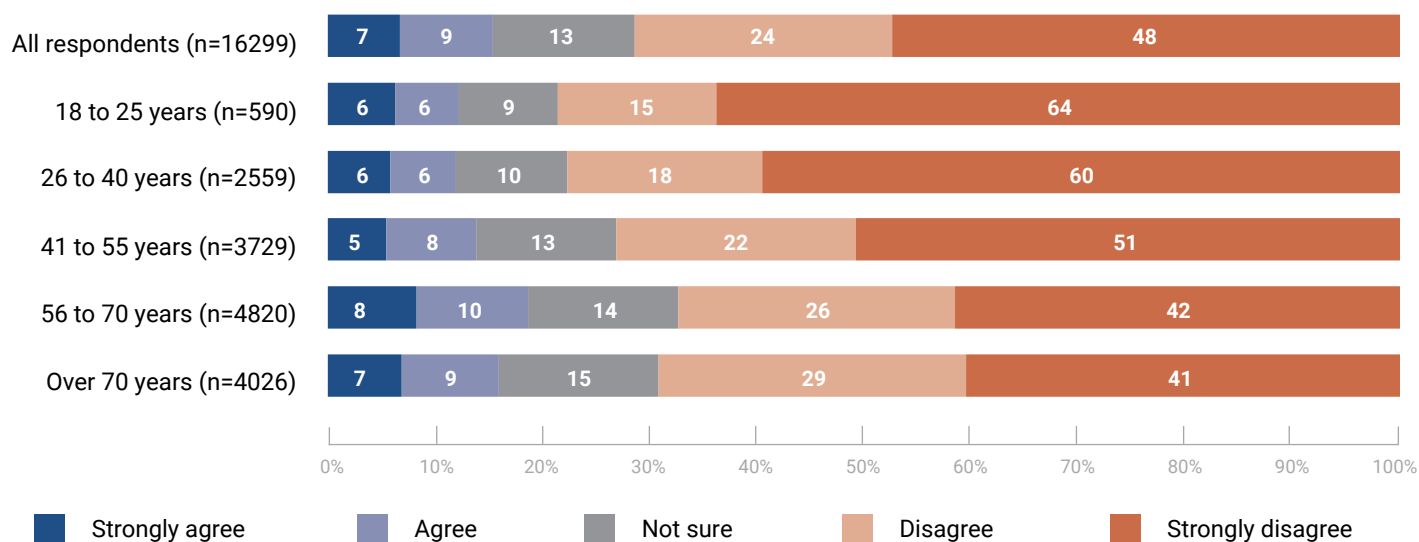
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 17: Percentage by country: 'I do not intend to return to regular Mass attendance'**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 18: Percentage by age: 'I do not intend to return to regular Mass attendance'**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

## 9. Support for reform

Respondents were asked 4 closed questions about reform in the Catholic Church. These questions comprised of whether they agreed or disagreed that: (1) they supported reform; (2) there was no need for any reform; (3) radical reform was needed; and (4) without reform there was no place for the respondent in the Church. A majority supported reform – even radical reform.

### **More than 8 out of 10 (84%) of all respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'I support reform in the Catholic Church'.**

Large majorities in all countries examined agreed or strongly agreed, ranging from 75% in Australia to 95% in Germany (Figure 19). Younger respondents were significantly less likely to strongly agree or agree (Figure 20). However, the trend was dominated by the pattern in the Western English-speaking countries; it was less marked once these countries were excluded. There was only a small group of respondents who claimed there was no need for reform.

### **Only 1 in 10 (10%) of all respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'There is no need for any reform in the Catholic Church'.**

Indeed, more than 8 in 10 (84%) of all respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Variations by country and age were generally in line with those found in responses to the statement 'I support reform in the Catholic Church' (Figures 21 and 22).

In open responses there was also strong support for reform in the Catholic Church. For instance, one respondent said:

*Time for radical reforms - we are losing too many people and have lost almost all our youth (56 to 70 years, India).*

Another wrote:

*I love and respect the Church very much, but there are issues with which I do not agree, and I believe that there must be more openness to change (41 to 55 years, Ecuador).*

Many respondents highlighted their opinion that reforms are needed for the Church to become an inclusive and welcoming place for women. One such response explained:

*The way women are presented in the Catholic faith context is one of the core reasons that there is no progress towards an inclusive and equitable church ... In current society many patriarchal systems are dissolving or have significantly changed in power balance. There is no evidence of this in the Catholic church. The church has hope in radical reform (41 to 55 years, Australia).*

Respondents often used words like 'major', 'urgent', 'thorough', 'radical', and 'fundamental' in their responses to illustrate the type of reform and change they understood needed to occur in the Church. There was, however, various ideas expressed about what reform might mean. On one hand, a large portion of those who mentioned reform, reported that change involved a return to gospel values, driven by principles of love of God and neighbour, equality, and justice. For instance, one respondent explained:

*A return to the gospel itself and what is most important – love of neighbor. I don't hear it in churches or from priests. I don't see respect for every, absolutely every, person (26 to 40 years, Poland).*

On the other hand, a smaller cohort of respondents who mentioned reform understood it to mean a denunciation of change and a renewal of what they recognised as authentic tradition. For example, this respondent wrote:

*The only reform the Catholic church needs is going back to its tradition, to its traditional teaching, to the Holy sacrifice of Mass of all ages (Tridentine mass) and of the saints. This is the reform young people need in the Church and want (26 to 40 years, Croatia).*

### **Two-thirds (67%) of all respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'Radical reform is needed in the Catholic Church'.**

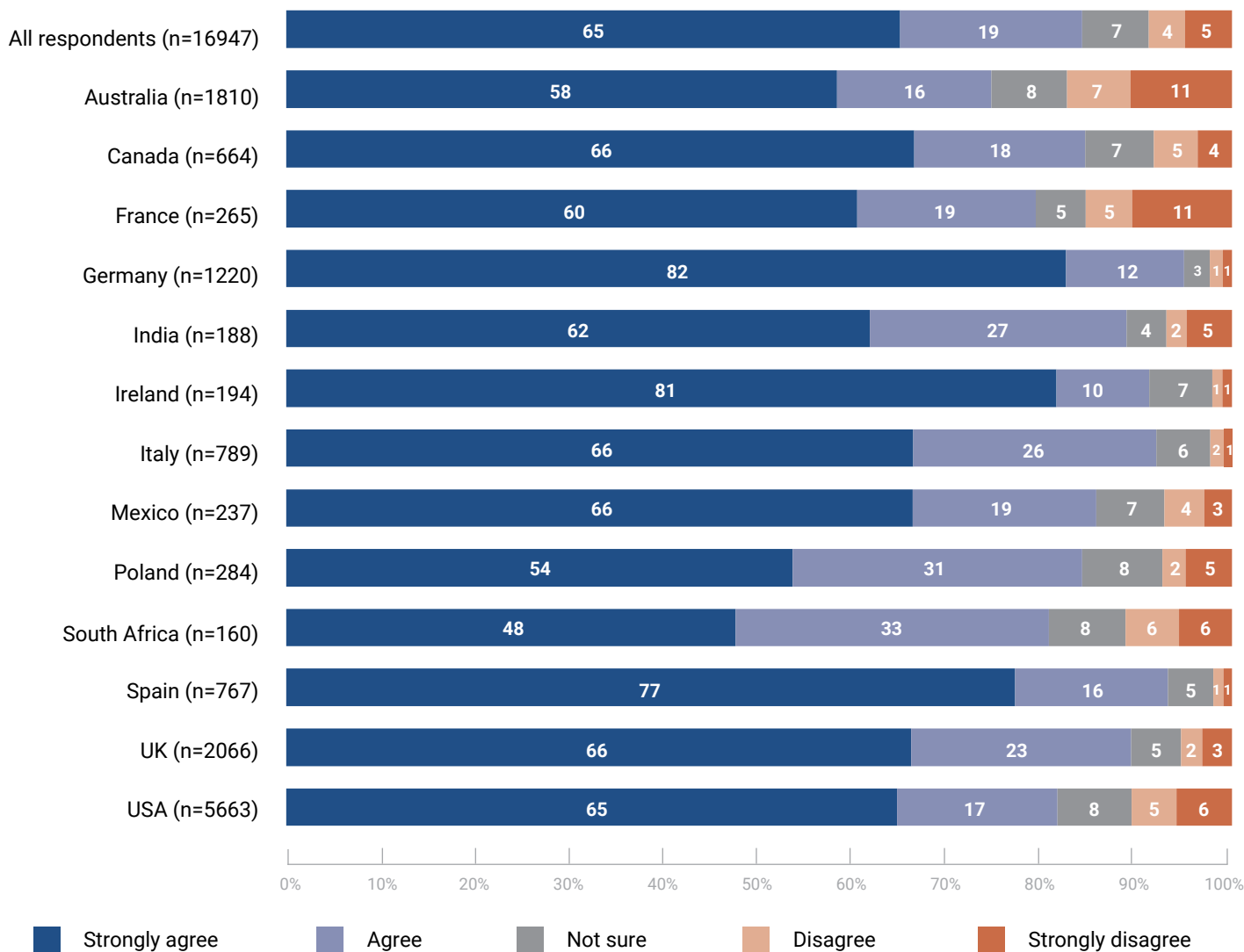
and a majority in all countries (Figure 23). South African respondents were least likely to strongly agree or agree (52%) and Germans most likely (89%). Again, there was a pattern of increasing strong agreement/agreement with age, which was less marked when the Western English-speaking countries were excluded (Figure 24).

Respondents were asked to respond to the statement

### **'Without reform there is no place for me in the Catholic Church'. Close to 3 in 10 (29%) of all respondents strongly agreed or agreed.**

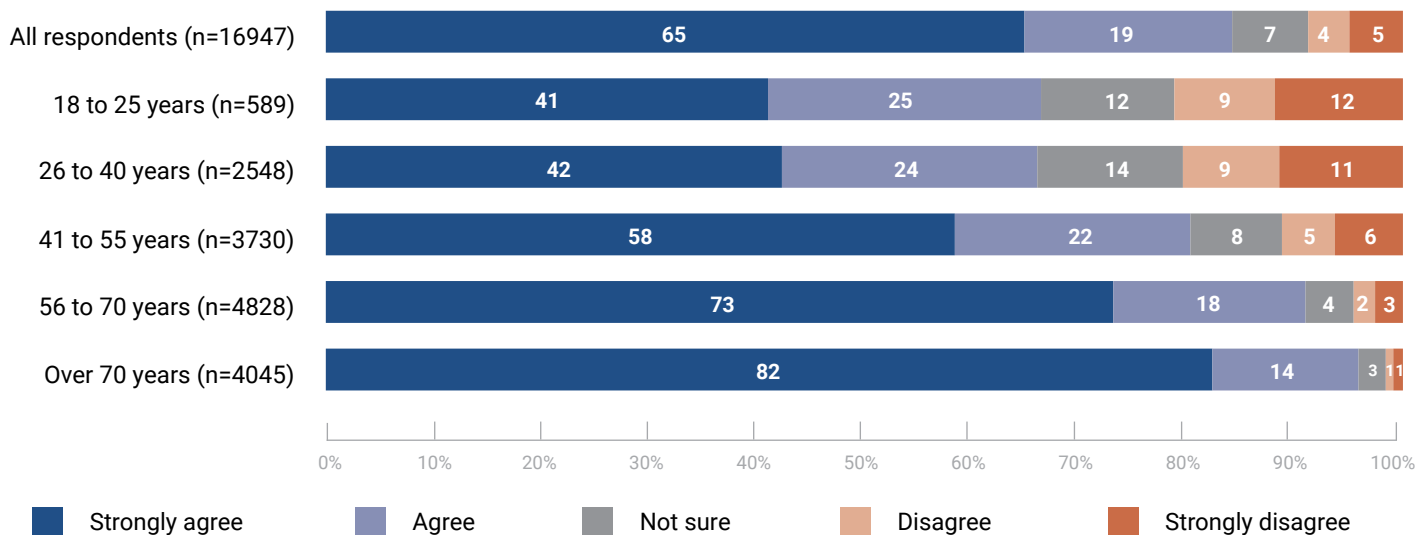
In terms of countries, respondents in South Africa were least likely to agree/strongly agree (16%) and respondents in Germany most likely (51%) (Figure 25). While strong disagreement decreased with age and disagreement and uncertainty increased, this pattern disappeared when the Western English-speaking countries were excluded (Figure 26). Respondents in all age groups and most countries were more likely to respond neutrally to the statement than strongly agree.

**Figure 19: Percentage by country 'I support reform in the Catholic Church'.**



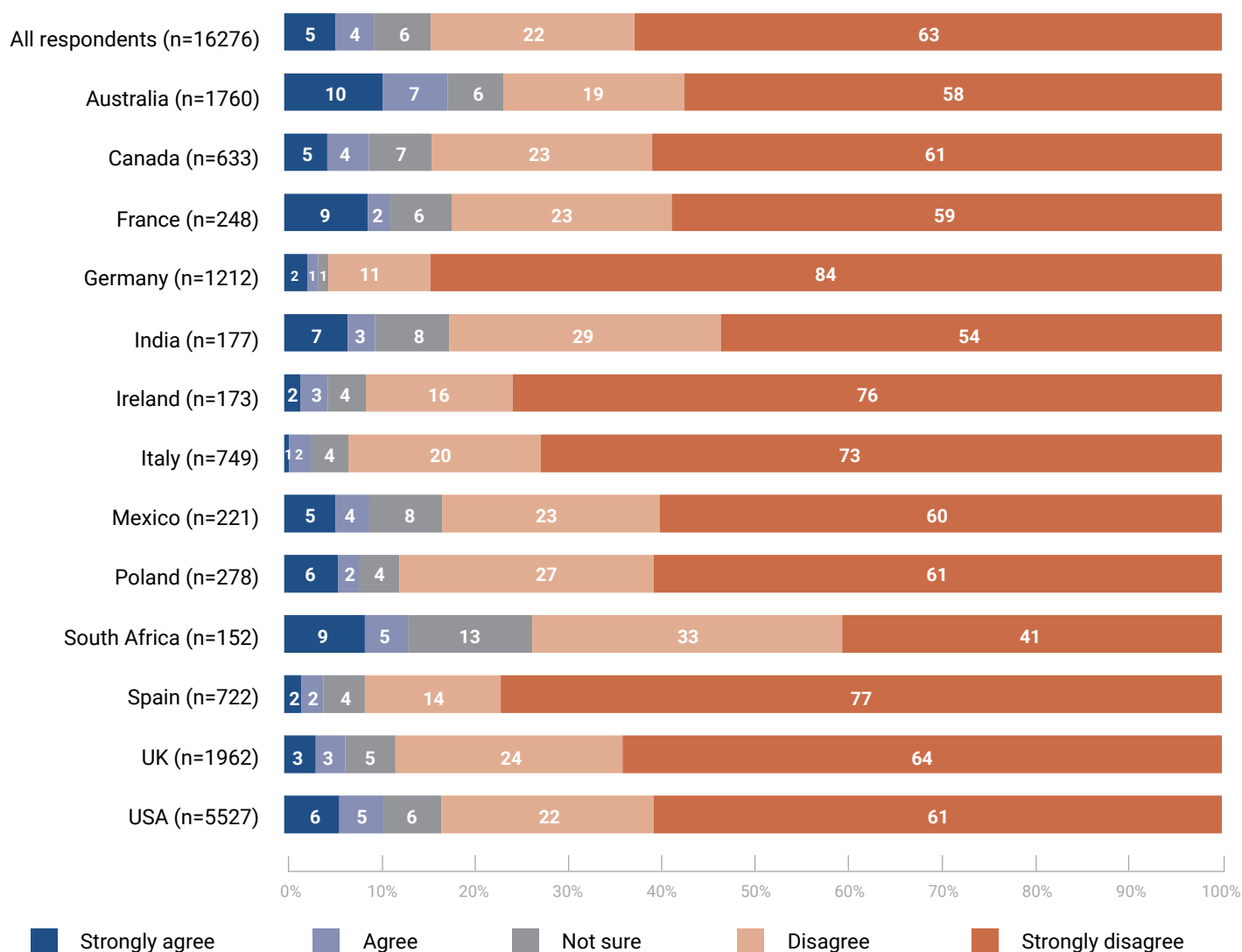
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 20: Percentage by age 'I support reform in the Catholic Church'.**



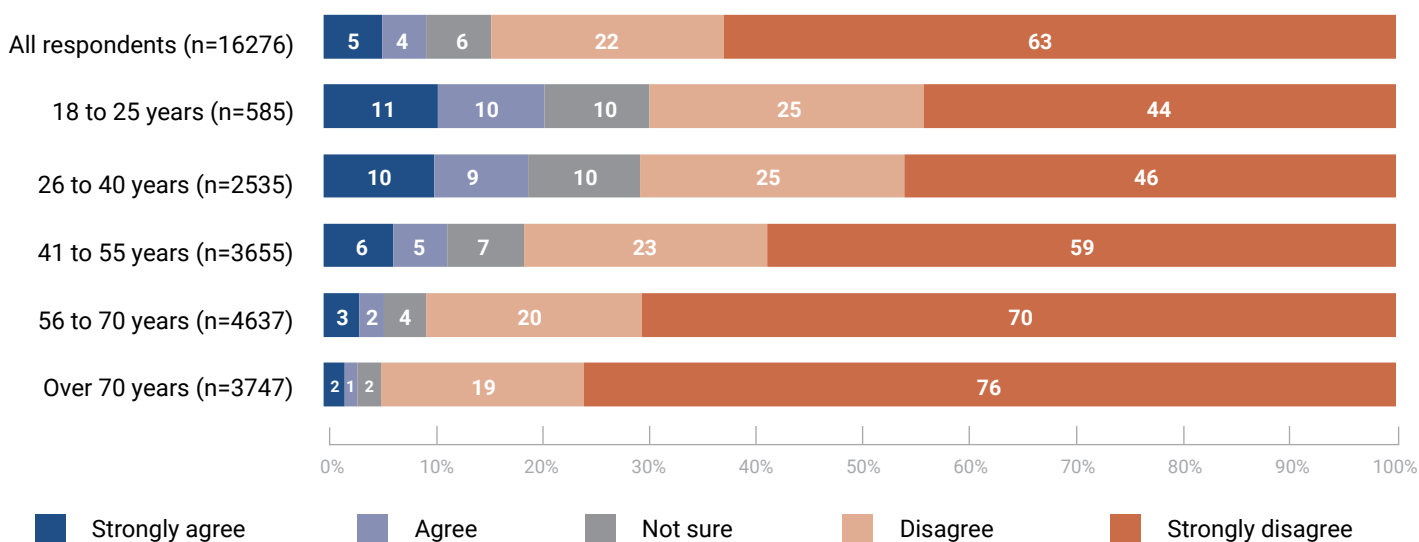
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 21: Percentage by country 'There is no need for any reform in the Catholic Church'.**



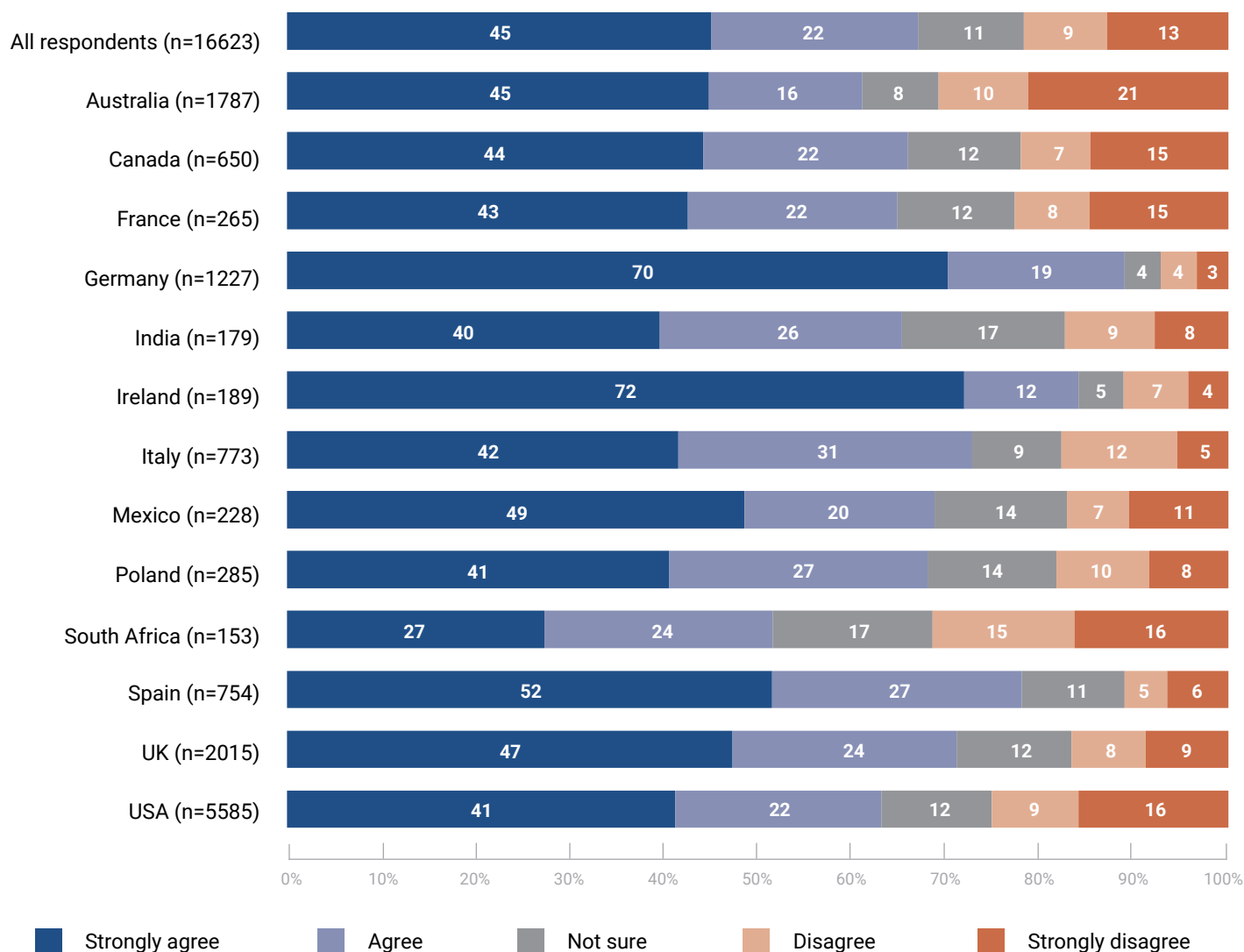
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 22: Percentage by age 'There is no need for any reform in the Catholic Church'.**



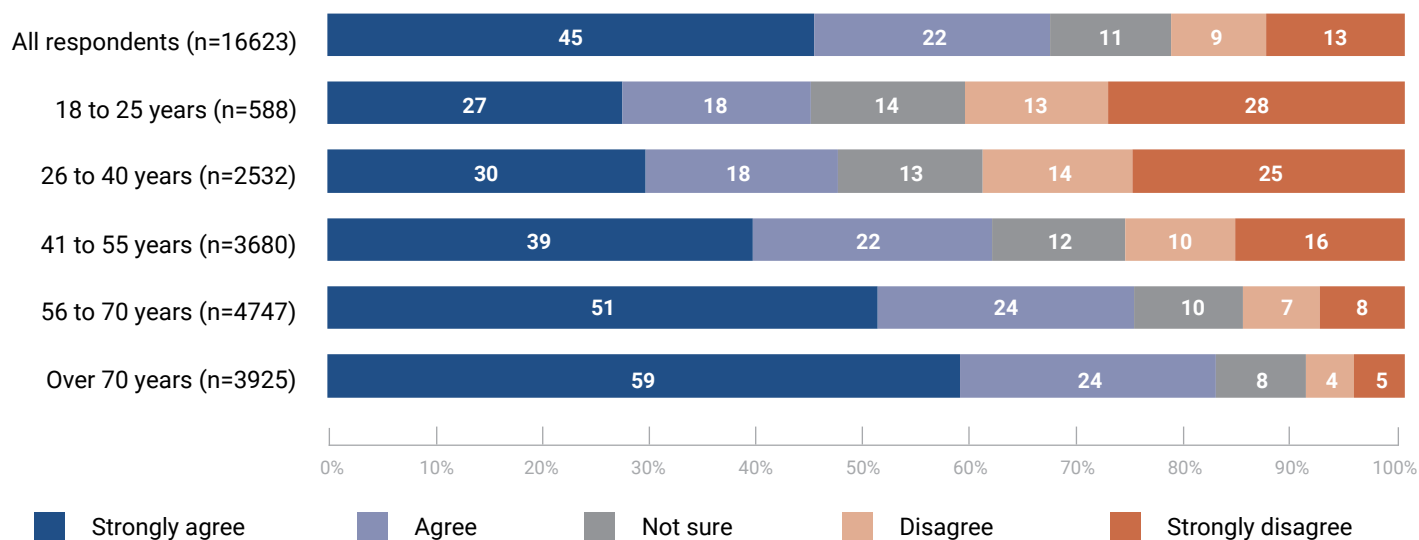
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 23: Percentage by country 'Radical reform is needed in the Catholic Church'.**



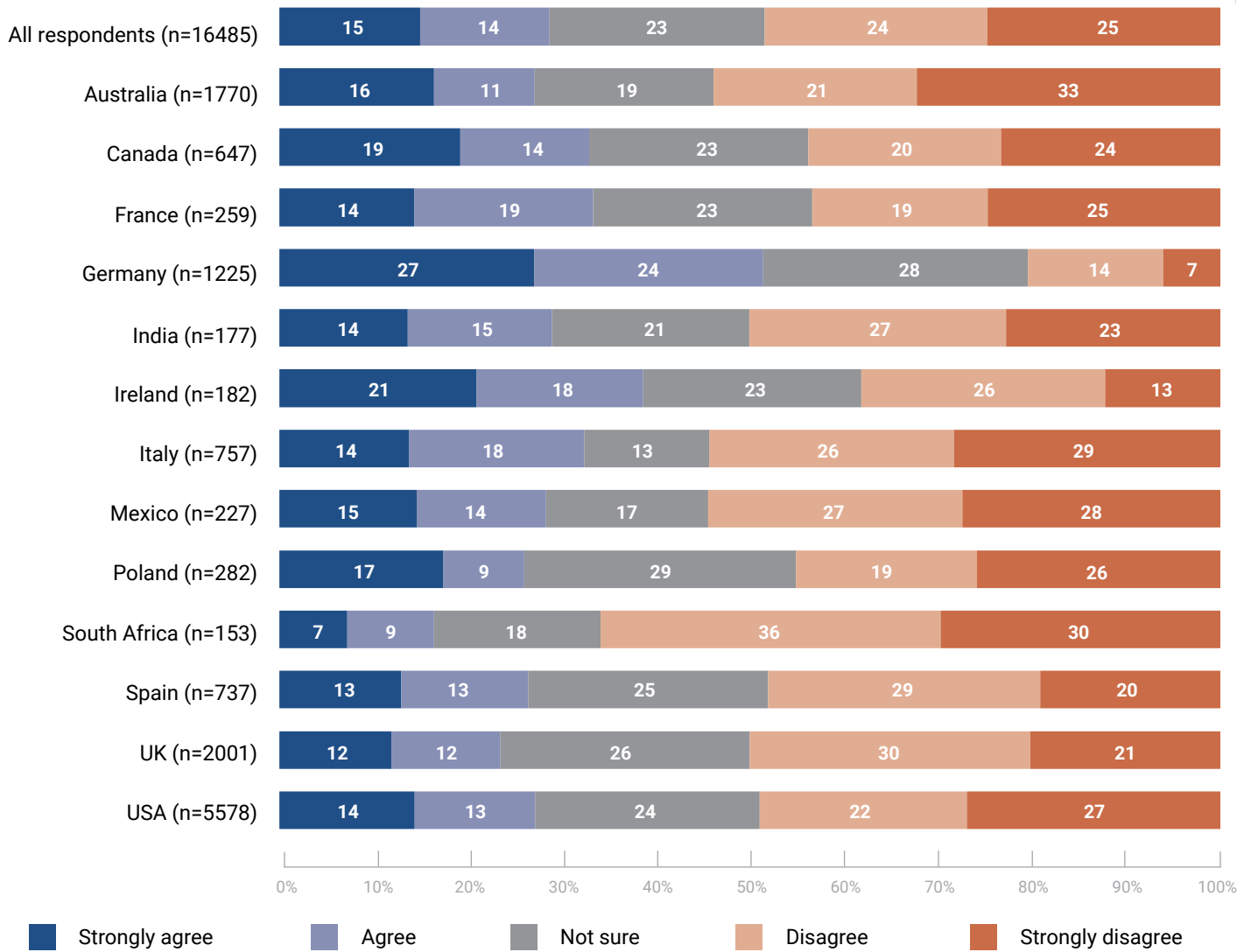
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 24: Percentage by age 'Radical reform is needed in the Catholic Church'.**



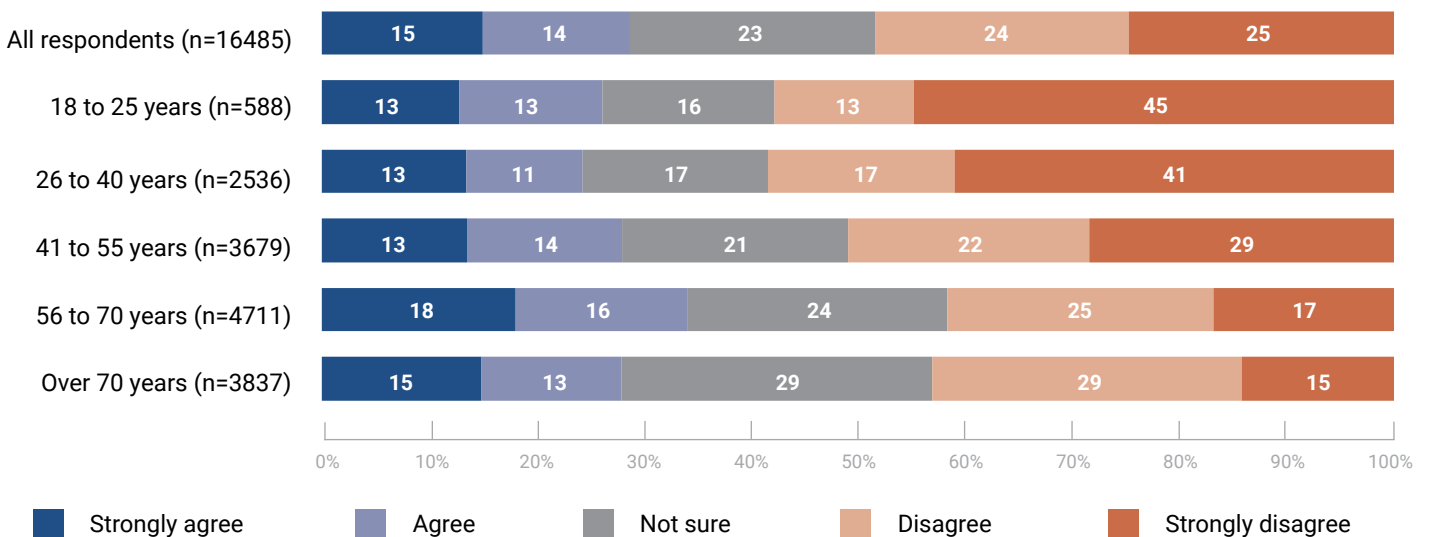
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 25: Percentage by country 'Without reform there is no place for me in the Catholic Church'.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 26: Percentage by age 'Without reform there is no place for me in the Catholic Church'.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).



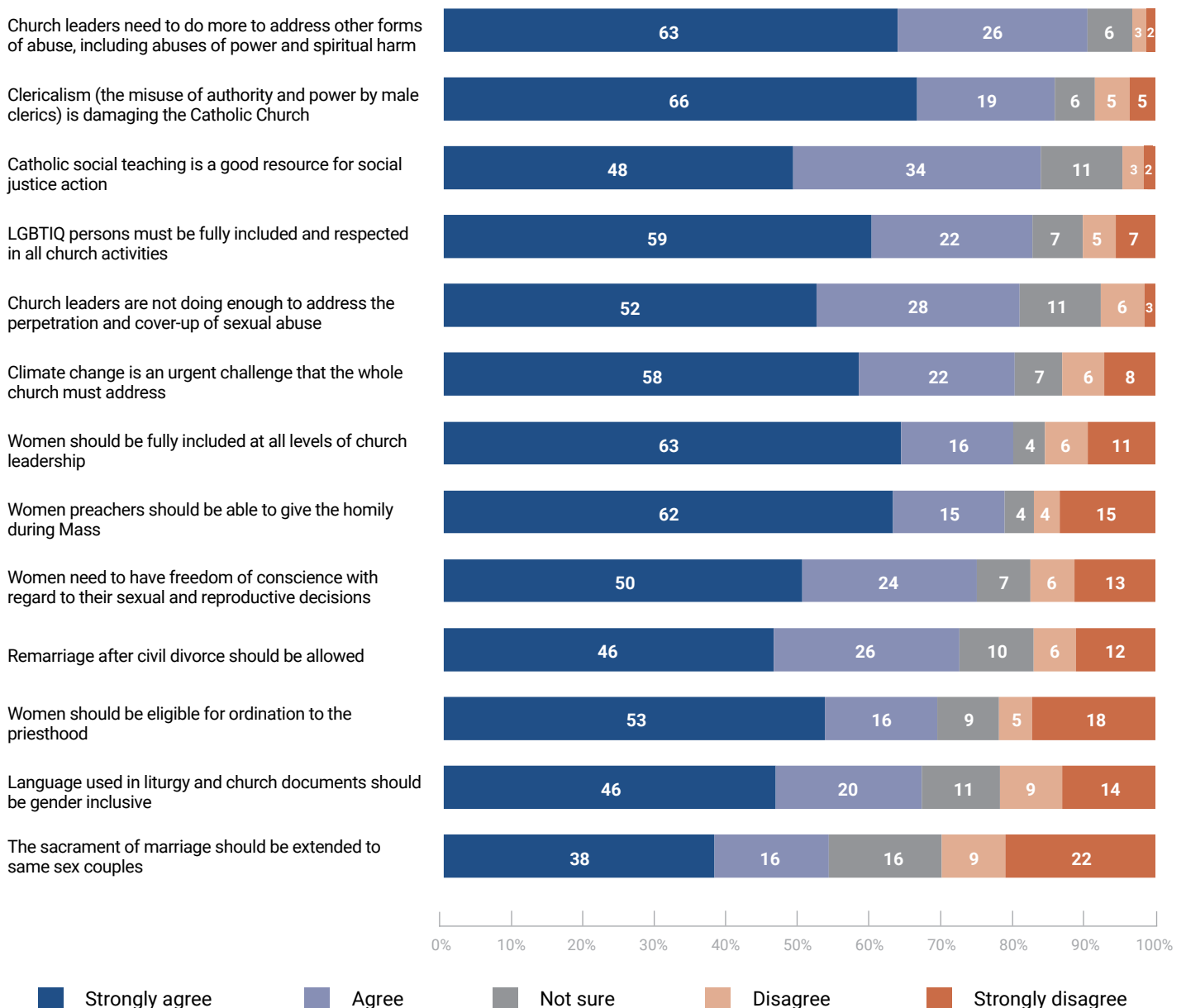
# 10. Issues in the Church

This section presents findings as they relate to issues of reform in the Catholic Church. Themes that emerged from the analysis of the subsample of open responses are co-located with the results for the closed questions where they relate to the same concerns. Additional themes and insights are reported under dedicated thematic headings. The interlocking nature of many issues however, means that there are overlaps between themes (for example, church governance and women’s leadership).

In addition to the issues that were included in closed questions (women’s leadership; gender inclusive language; the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ people; marriage, reproductive decisions and family; misuse of power; climate action; and Catholic social teaching), respondents raised issues in open responses about: inclusion of marginalised people in addition to women and LGBTIQ+ people; liturgical reform; and matters of church leadership and governance such as synodal leadership, transparency and accountability, and economic management.

There was majority agreement with each of the 13 closed question statements (Figure 27).

**Figure 27: Results for closed questions about specific issues of reform, ranked from highest to lowest strong agreement/agreement.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

## 10.1 Women's leadership

Respondents were asked several closed questions related to women's leadership in the Catholic Church. The inclusion of women in church leadership and more generally in parishes, dioceses, and Catholic organisations was also mentioned in open responses.

A substantial majority of respondents were supportive of the full inclusion of women in church leadership and governance.

### **Almost 8 in 10 (79%) of all respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'Women should be fully included at all levels of church leadership',**

including a majority in all countries (Figure 28). Support for women in leadership did, however, vary relatively strongly by country, ranging from 59% strong agreement/agreement in Poland to 95% in Germany. Support increased with age, mostly because of a strong relationship between support and age in Western English-speaking countries (Figure 29).

In open responses there was strong support for the inclusion of women in leadership and in the Church more broadly. Support came from respondents of all ages and in all regions.

Respondents repeatedly highlighted the need for the Church to include, respect, and listen to women. For example, one respondent wrote:

The Church, in particular priests and our male counterparts, need to be educated to respect women regardless of their status (divorced, single parent, married, single, etc.) and in turn teach their sons the same (41 to 55 years, Malaysia).

Another respondent said:

The voice of women should be heard at all levels and on all topics within the Church on a regular and frequent basis (56 to 70 years, South Africa).

Some respondents mentioned the need for a greater role for women in liturgical and pastoral leadership. For example, one respondent claimed:

The Church needs to rethink the way she perceives women. I feel ashamed of my Church when I see only men in procession and celebrating the Eucharist as they exclude women (41 to 55 years, Belgium).

What full inclusion for women in liturgical and pastoral leadership meant did vary among respondents. For instance, while some respondents linked women's full inclusion with the ordination of women into the diaconate and/or priesthood, most called for the gifts and existing ministries of women to be accepted and valued in their local parishes and dioceses. Several responses made claims of being unappreciated and overlooked in the Church despite holding a position of leadership. Some respondents mentioned the work of women in parishes, for example:

If every woman in every parish stopped cleaning, cooking, dusting, typing, directing, singing, working in the nursery, teaching classes, answering the phone, etc., for just ONE week, every parish would have to close. Yet, why do women have so little real power? i.e., financial, decision-making, leadership (over 70 years, Germany).

Those who commented on the lack of recognition of women's labour and leadership, consistently expressed the need to acknowledge women's leadership and participation beyond voluntary, so-called 'women's work'. Many drew attention to the limited roles allocated to women in comments such as:

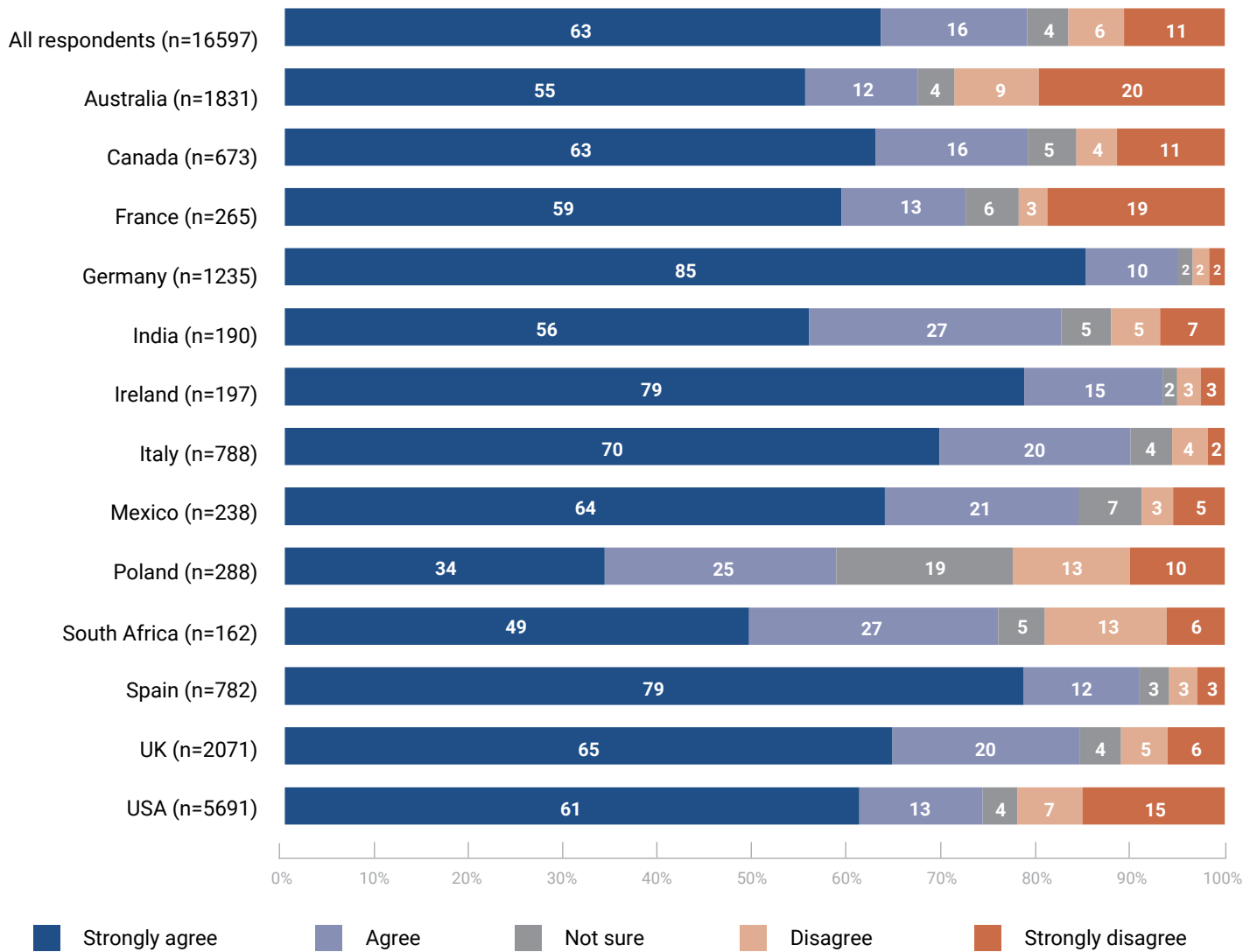
Males are presented as those with authority, eligible to positions of importance, setting directions and teaching, while females are expected to be humble, obeying, serving, persuaded that their worth is only in being mothers ... with a consecrated life as an alternative, thus limiting women's opportunities and choices (26 to 40 years, Czech Republic).

Another respondent wrote:

All human beings have the same dignity as daughters and sons of God. Women are not worthy only in our reproductive role (56 to 70 years, Paraguay).

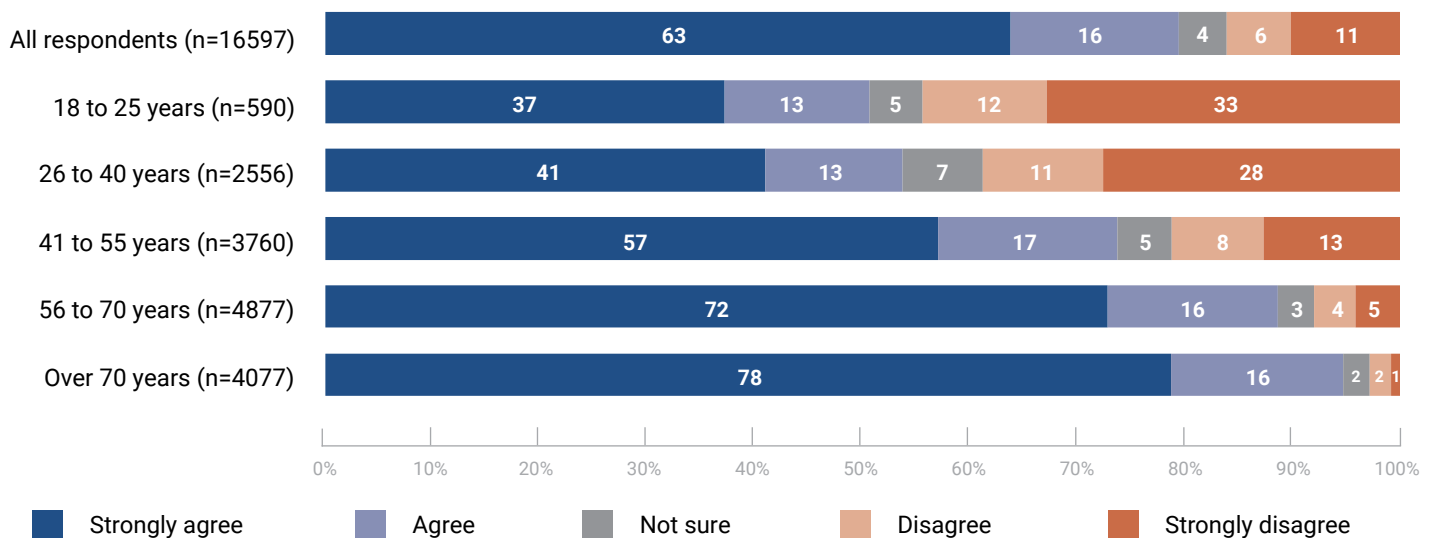
Some responses connected women's participation in church ministry, leadership, and governance with the Gospel and the ministry of Jesus. For instance, one respondent noted:

**Figure 28: Percentage by country 'Women should be fully included at all levels of church leadership'.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 29: Percentage by age 'Women should be fully included at all levels of church leadership'.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

The church must turn its gaze to the true meaning that Jesus had, otherwise we are letting him down. Women were one of the choices of Jesus' kingdom (41 to 55 years, Panama).

Another said:

Women have sustained the Church for centuries; to speak of following Christ without recognizing the substantive equality of women goes against the Gospel (26 to 40 years, Mexico).

Responses sometimes associated the limited roles available to women in church spaces to situations of violence against women, including domestic and family violence. For example, one respondent wrote:

Transform the ways in which women are seen in the Church and how their role and social role is disseminated. Because

violence against women and girls continues to be naturalized today and the hierarchical superiority of boys in the daily relationships of the family continues to be highlighted, thus perpetuating the vulnerability and justifications for violence against women and girls (26 to 40 years, Colombia).

A few respondents indicated that they felt strongly that women were already fully included and valued in church life. One respondent claimed:

Just because women are not priests or bishops or unable to give homilies it doesn't mean that women are excluded. The Church is pro woman (26 to 40 years, Australia).

This group tended to have negative attitudes towards those campaigning for greater inclusion and representation for women, which they associated with feminism and campaigns for women's ordination.

## 10.1.1 Preaching by women

**More than three quarters (78%) of all respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'Women preachers should be able to give the homily during Mass'.**

Views varied by country of residence, ranging from 61% strong agreement/agreement in Poland to 96% in Germany (Figure 30). Once again there were variations that could be attributed to respondents' age (increasing support with age, mostly due to a strong relationship between attitude and age in Western English-speaking countries) (Figure 31).

In open responses there was strong support for greater opportunity for qualified lay people, especially women, to preach homilies during Mass. There were responses that simply said:

Why don't women have the right to preach? (41 to 55 years, France) and

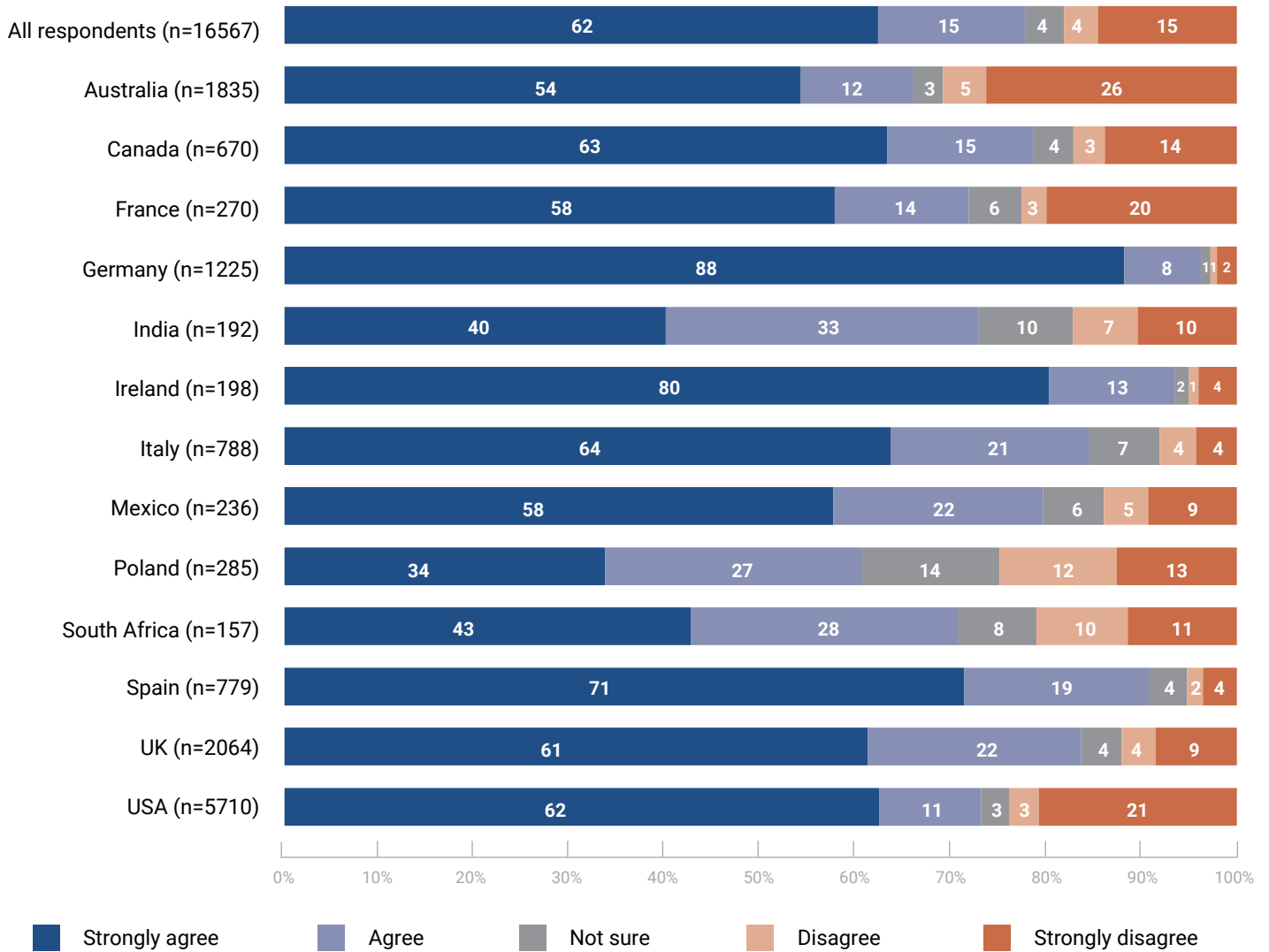
Open the interpretation of the Word to lay people (41 to 55 years, Argentina).

Some respondents mentioned that women, especially religious women, often had the theological qualifications and pastoral experience required to be effective preachers. Several mentioned the way Jesus accepted the ministry of women. One respondent who wanted acknowledgement of the discipleship of women in the early Church response noted:

The women followers of Jesus, need to be brought to the fore as we decentre the male disciples as exclusively normative. We must have women preachers! (41 to 55 years, Ireland).

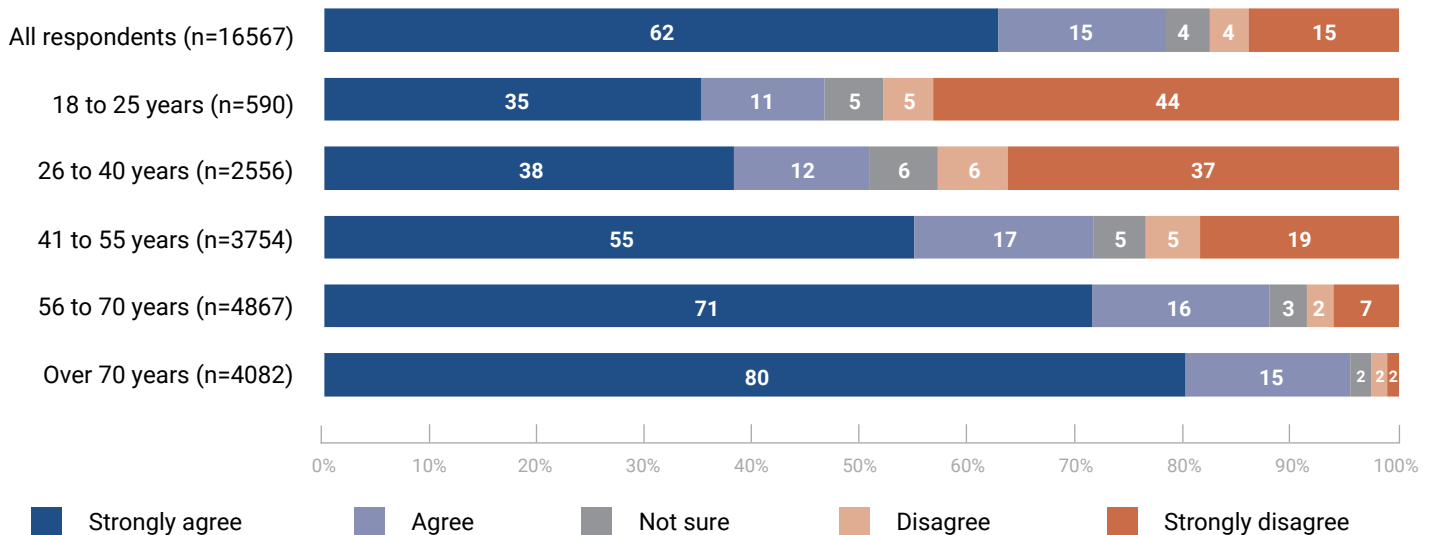
A few respondents strongly opposed women preaching the homily during the Mass. Many of these responses also called for reduced or no lay participation.

**Figure 30: Percentage by country 'Women preachers should be able to give the homily during Mass'.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 31: Percentage by age 'Women preachers should be able to give the homily during Mass'.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

## 10.1.2 The ordination of women

Support for the ordination of women was less than for preaching by women, but the issue was still endorsed by most respondents.

### **Two-thirds (68%) of all respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'Women should be eligible for ordination to the priesthood'.**

There was majority support in all countries except for Poland and South Africa (38% and 49% respectively), with particularly strong endorsement in Germany (91%), Ireland (86%), and Spain (84%) (Figure 32). Older respondents were more likely to support the ordination of women than younger respondents, especially in Western English-speaking countries (Figure 33).

In open responses many respondents strongly advocated for women's inclusion in the diaconate, and for their ordination as priests. For example, one respondent wrote:

Women's ordination should be understood, supported, and practiced (26 to 40 years, Taiwan).

Other responses simply said:

Women's participation in the priesthood (41 to 55 years, Mexico) or The female diaconate (56 to 70 years, Argentina).

There were respondents who used open responses to express their frustration about women's exclusion. For instance, one respondent noted:

What a bizarre, archaic notion that men are somehow more spiritual/ closer to God. Deeply frustrating (26 to 40 years, Singapore).

There were some respondents who positively acknowledged the recent opportunity for women to serve as acolytes, lectors, and catechists as progress, for most, however, it was not enough. Respondents who advocated for the ordination of women in open responses often made connections with baptism and the capacity of women

to stand '*in persona Christi*'. For some respondents however, their support was associated with a personal vocation or call from God. A few spoke tragically about impact of being unable to fulfil their vocations. For example:

My life sometimes feels wasted because I felt a calling to be a priest and could not become one as a woman ... Living outside of priesthood feels as if I cannot be myself in this life (56 to 70 years, Netherlands).

There were open responses that were highly critical of women's inclusion in the diaconate and/or their ordination of women. Opposition was often associated with polarising the Church and/or adding women to an already flawed clerical system. For example, one respondent stated:

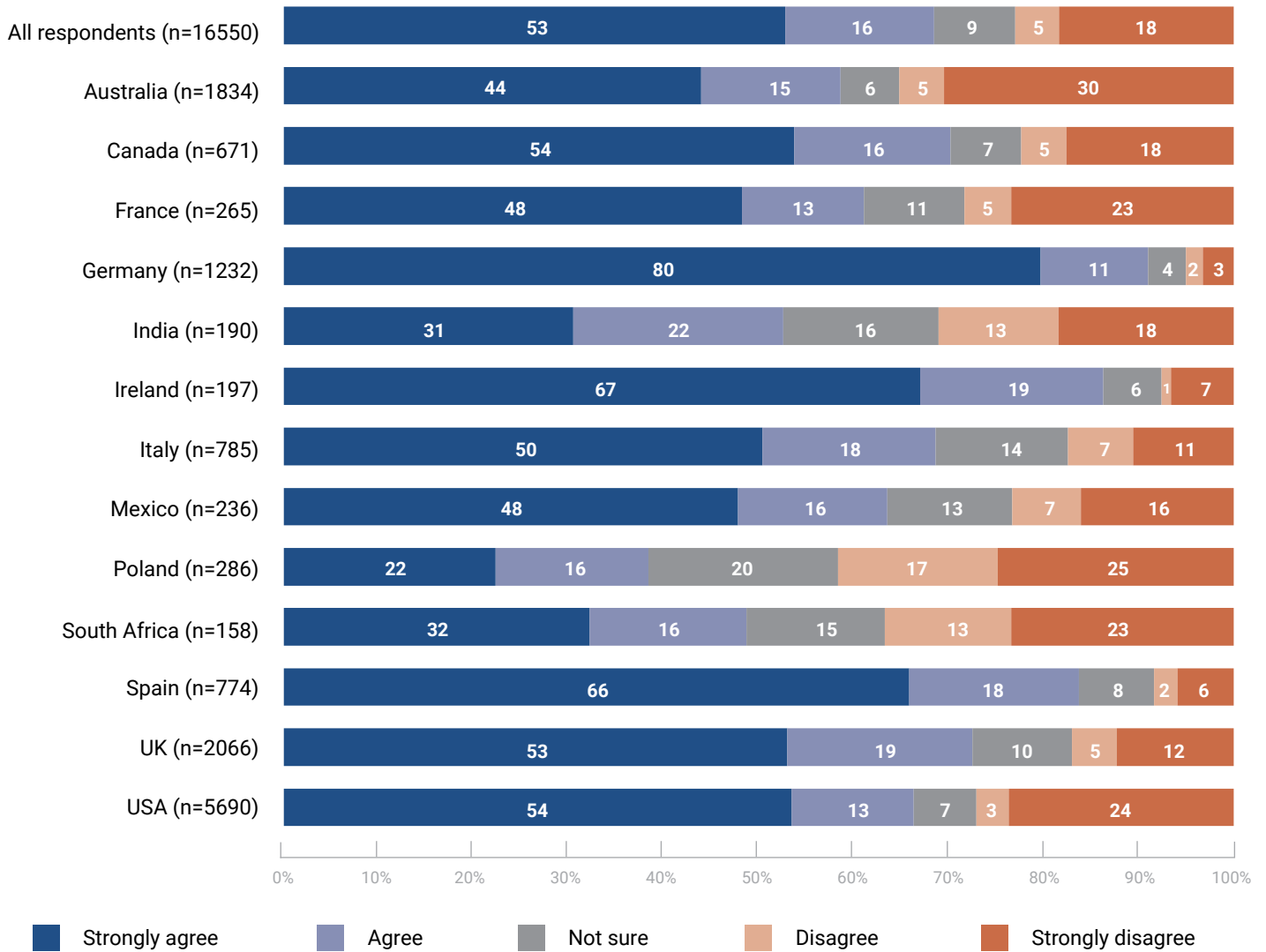
No need to ordain women if it is to increase clericalism. Also, it may be very divisive. Better increase role of lay people and women everywhere in the Church, in the hierarchy in the diocese, in the liturgy, in all decision making (56 to 70 years, France).

A few respondents objected on the basis of doctrine which refutes the legitimacy of the ordination of women. This was less common than other objections, with most respondents who expressed this view situated in Western English-speaking countries. For example, one respondent observed:

Women cannot be priests. That's not an opinion, that's the theological and Biblical reality. That doesn't demean women, it simply acknowledges differences between the sexes in their roles in the Church. Yes, there are certainly places for women to lead in our Faith, but not in *Persona Christi* (26 to 40 years, New Zealand).

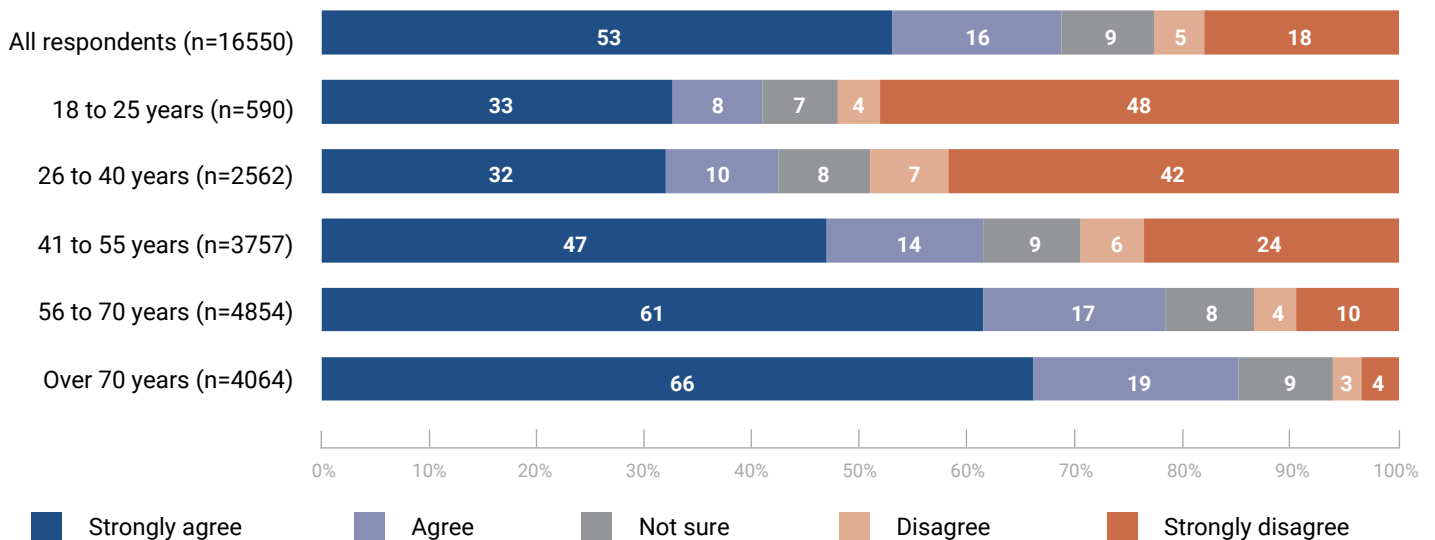
Many responses related to women's participation in liturgical and pastoral ministry did not raise the issue of the diaconate or ordination of women. Instead, respondents highlighted the necessity for greater recognition and visibility of the role women already play in church contexts.

**Figure 32: Percentage by country 'Women should be eligible for ordination to the priesthood'.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 33: Percentage by age 'Women should be eligible for ordination to the priesthood'.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

## 10.2 Gender-inclusive language in liturgy

**Respondents were asked for their level of agreement with the statement 'Language used in liturgy and church documents should be gender inclusive'. Some 66% strongly agreed or agreed with the statement.**

A majority of respondents in all countries strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, with the exception of France and Poland (48% and 45% respectively) (Figure 34). Strong agreement was particularly high in Ireland (76%). Again, younger cohorts were significantly less likely to strongly agree or agree with the use of inclusive language than older respondents (Figure 35). The association between increasing agreement and increasing age was especially strong in Western English-speaking countries.

In open responses, there was support expressed for gender inclusive language in liturgies, including an inclusive lectionary. For example, one respondent asserted:

*We need an inclusive lectionary and inclusive language to become absolutely normative throughout all our liturgies. Our Lectionary needs to include and foreground the many narratives detailing the faith lives and faithful lives of the many women in our scriptures (41 to 55 years, Ireland).*

It was more common, however, for respondents to discuss other forms of liturgical inclusivity. For instance, respondents called for Masses to be:

*More friendly to ordinary people (56 to 70 years, Uruguay) and Integrated into real life and culture and real issues like seeking peace, climate change (over 70 years, New Zealand).*

A few respondents used open responses to reject gender inclusive language in liturgies. One respondent stated:

*Liturgy language does not need to be coined to gender and we need to realise that we cannot personalise liturgy (41 to 55 years, Kenya).*

This cohort sometimes called for a return to tradition and Latin Mass. For instance, one respondent claimed:

*I am happy with the traditional church structure. If you change the beauty of the Mass and tradition in order to pander to little groups, then you are diluting the most essential aspects of worship. Also, I feel that we need to go back to what works and return to the extraordinary rite (41 to 55 years, Croatia).*

There is a more comprehensive discussion of how open responses dealt with liturgical reform below (section 10.9).

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## 10.3 LGBTIQ+ inclusion

Respondents were asked 2 closed questions concerning the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ people – a general question, and a question about the inclusion of same-sex couples in the sacrament of marriage. The issue of the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ people was a common theme in open responses.

**A substantial majority (82%) of all respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that 'LGBTIQ persons must be fully included and respected in all church activities'.**

Strong agreement/agreement ranged from 72% in Australia to at least 90% in Italy, Ireland, Germany, and Spain (Figure 36). Older respondents were more likely to be fully supportive of the respect and inclusion of LGBTIQ+ persons than younger respondents, a trend that was mostly due to

a strong age pattern among respondents from Western English-speaking countries (Figure 37).

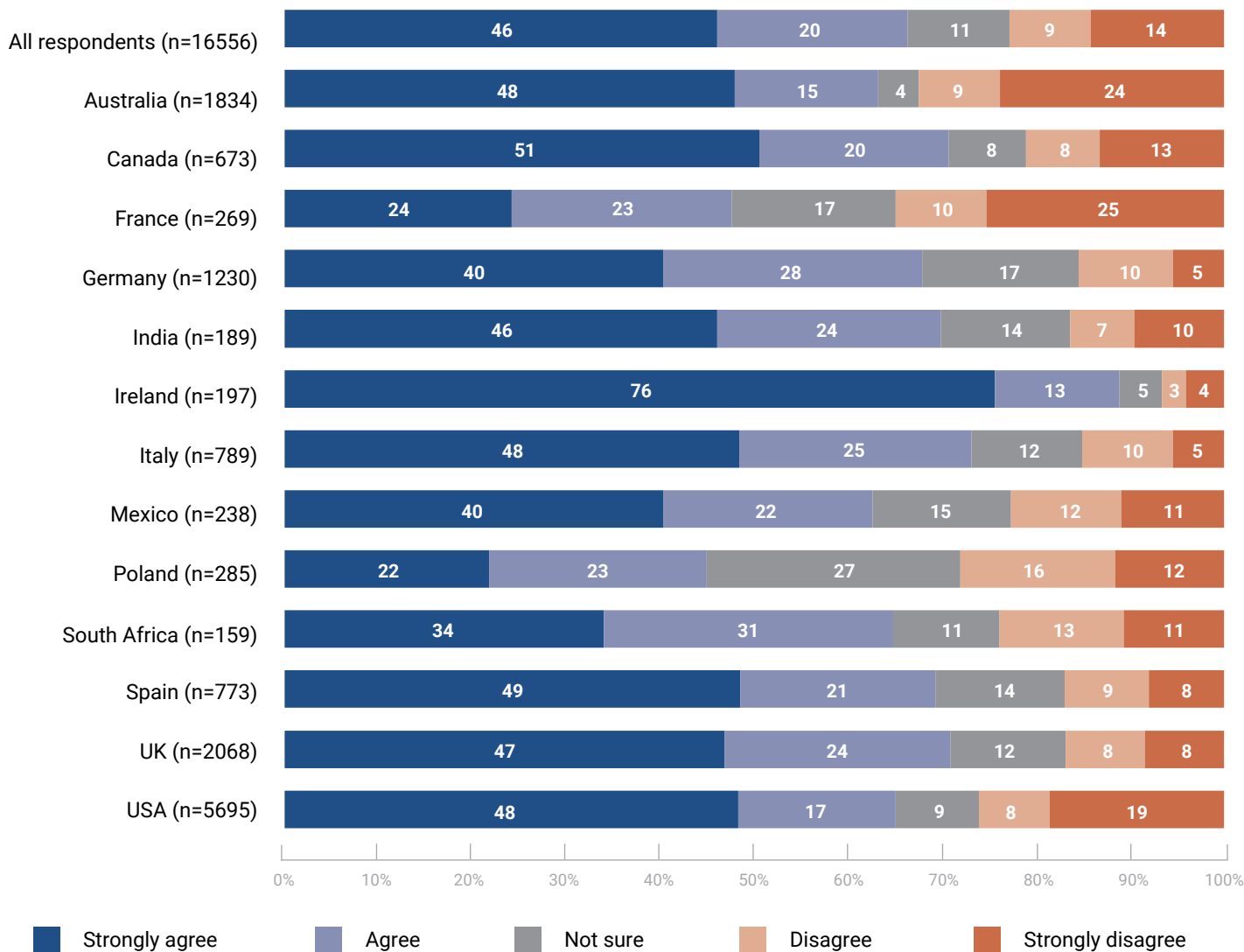
Support for the inclusion of same-sex couples in the sacrament of marriage was much less than for inclusion of LGBTIQ+ people in general.

**Just over half (53%) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'The sacrament of marriage should be extended to same sex couples',**

ranging from 25% of respondents in Poland to 78% in Germany. A trend of increasing support with age did not remain when respondents from the Western English-speaking countries were removed from the sample. In the sub-sample without respondents from the Western English-speaking countries there was majority

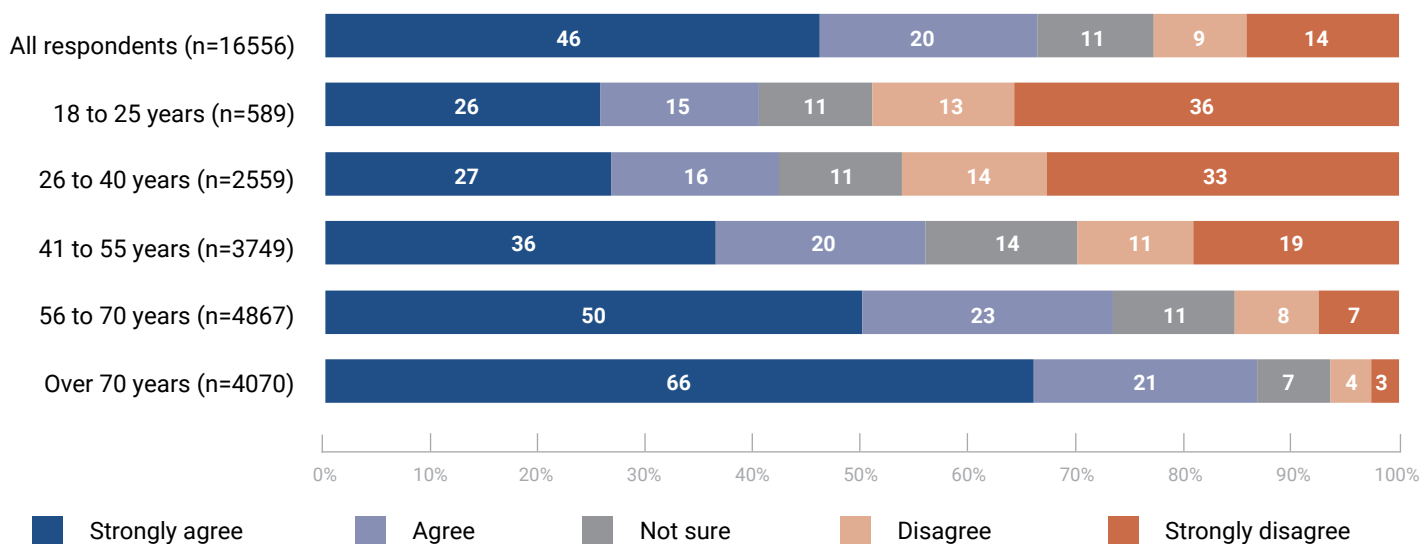


**Figure 34: Percentage by country 'Language used in liturgy and church documents should be gender inclusive'.**



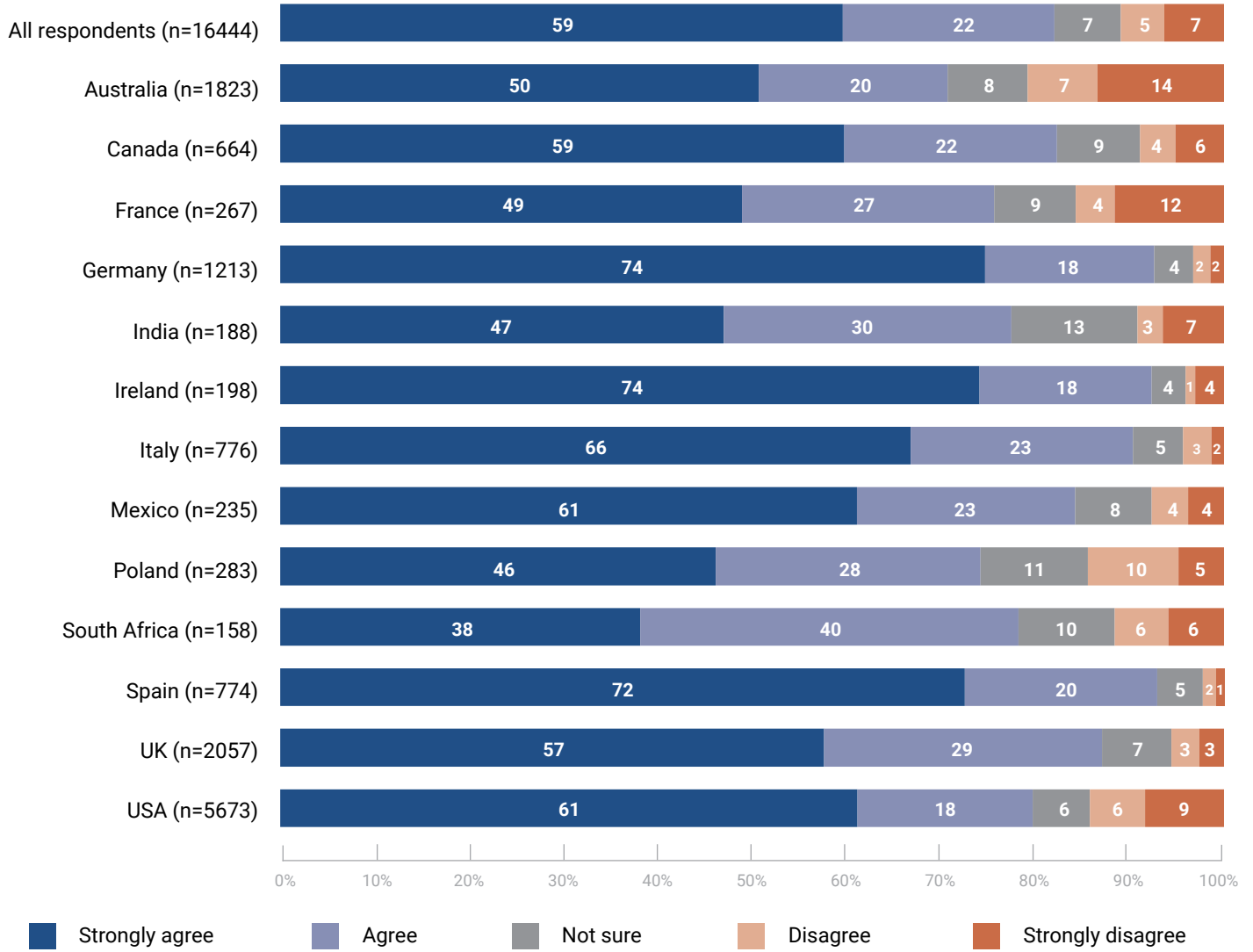
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 35: Percentage by age 'Language used in liturgy and church documents should be gender inclusive'.**



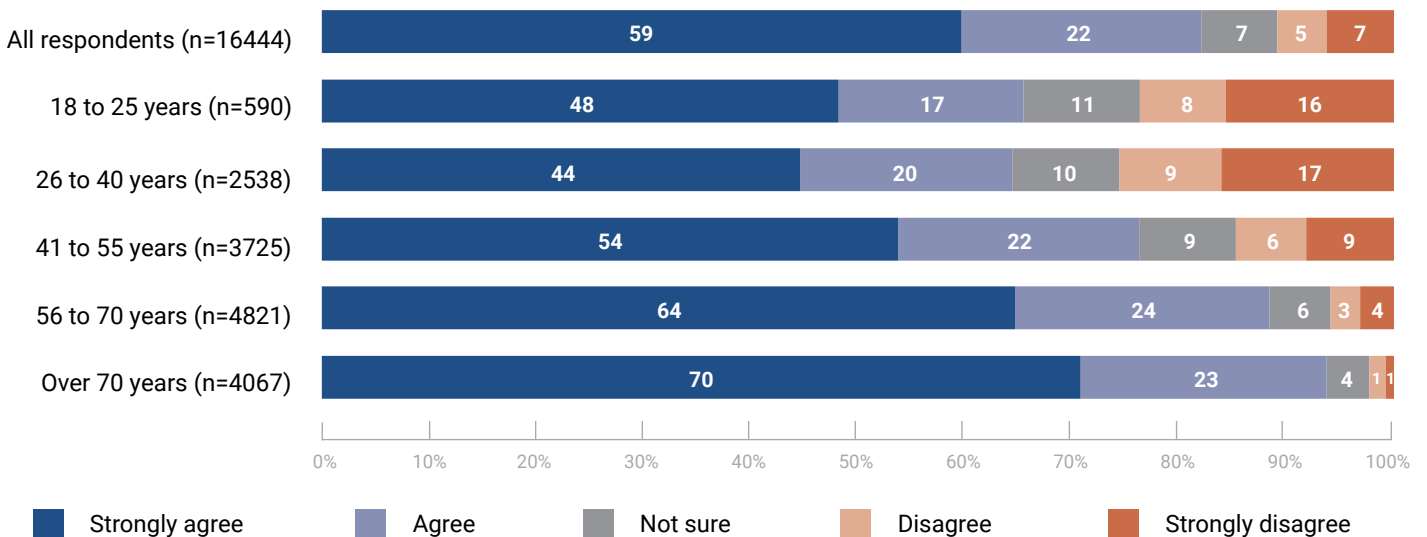
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 36: Percentage by country ‘LGBTIQ persons must be fully included and respected in all church activities’.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 37: Percentage by age ‘LGBTIQ persons must be fully included and respected in all church activities’.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

support in all age groups.

Open responses repeatedly highlighted the need to include, care for, and empower LGBTIQ+ people. For example, one respondent wrote:

Stop disciplining or stigmatizing feminist and LGBTIQ voices (41 to 55 years, China).

Another said:

All people, LGBTIQ or straight needs to be loved as human beings. Not because of their gender preferences but because they are humans and that is the right of every person (26 to 40 years, Philippines).

Many respondents rejected church teachings on homosexuality alongside other teachings related to sexual and reproductive rights. For instance, one respondent raised the issues of:

Misogyny, racism, sexist interpretations of the bible, LGBT-phobia (41 to 55 years, Brazil).

Several respondents indicated that, while being aware of problems with the institution, they had chosen their particular faith community because it was a safe and inclusive space for LGBTIQ+ people. Yet, respondents who identified as LGBTIQ+ consistently told stories of harm and exclusion that had deeply impacted their lives and faith.

When describing their participation and identity LGBTIQ+ Catholics used words like 'distanced', 'struggling', 'hurt', 'scared', and 'excluded'. For example, one respondent wrote:

As part of the LGBTQ+ community, I just don't feel welcome – it's an entire culture and I'm too scared to be myself at church so I don't go (18 to 25 years, UK).

Another claimed:

I am a theologian and an employee of the Catholic Church. It is a love that often hurts. At some points, church and I don't seem to fit at all (I'm a lesbian), at others we fit. I'm here. I'm church too! (26 to 40 years, Austria).

Yet another stated:

I am polyamorous and bisexual. I would like my identity to be accepted and recognised by the Church. I feel out of place (26 to 40 years, Italy).

Some women in their open responses sought only conditional acceptance and inclusion for LGBTIQ+ people. A relatively small cohort thought that the respect of LGBTIQ+ people was vital but that the Church should not bless same-sex unions or allow them the sacrament of marriage. For example, one respondent noted:

I could not care if priests are women or men. But while I fully respect every human being ... I am NOT in support of same sex Catholic marriages. That would be enough for me to leave the Catholic Church (41 to 55 years, South Africa).

A small group of respondents said that LGBTIQ+ people should not be included in the Church, or that their acceptance and inclusion should be conditional on their celibacy.

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## 10.4 Marriage, reproductive decisions, and family

Respondents were asked other questions that concerned matters of family life – namely, remarriage after divorce, and freedom of

conscience regarding reproductive decisions. Many respondents also mentioned these issues in their open responses.

### 10.4.1 Remarriage after civil divorce

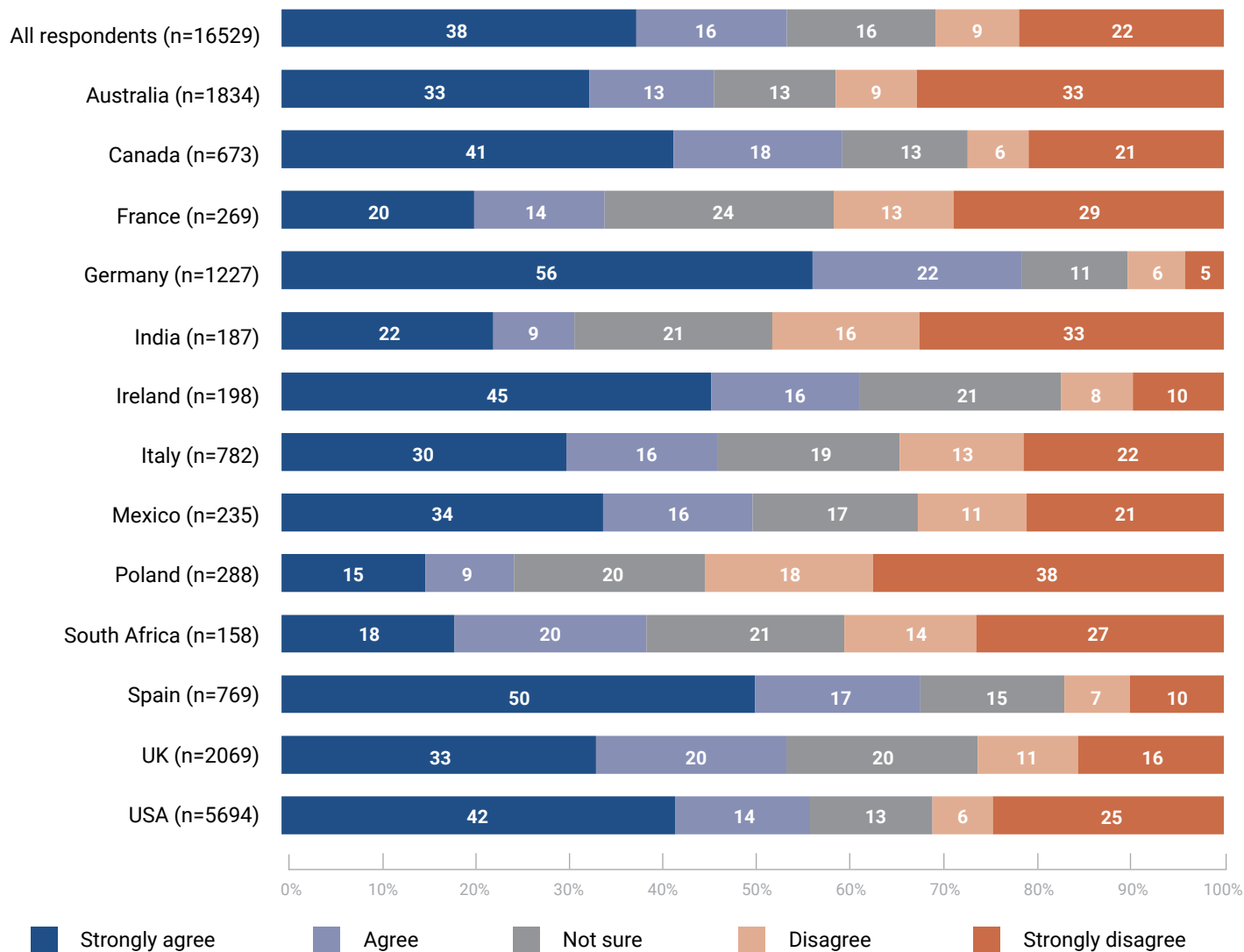
**Regarding the issue of remarriage, more than 7 in 10 (72%) of all respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'Remarriage after civil divorce should be allowed'.**

Results varied strongly by country, ranging from a third (33%) of respondents in Poland strongly agreeing or agreeing (the only country with minority agreement) to 9 in

10 (90%) respondents in Germany (Figure 40). In Poland, respondents were roughly split between agreement, being neutral, and disagreeing. Older respondents were more likely to strongly agree or agree with the statement than younger respondents (Figure 41).

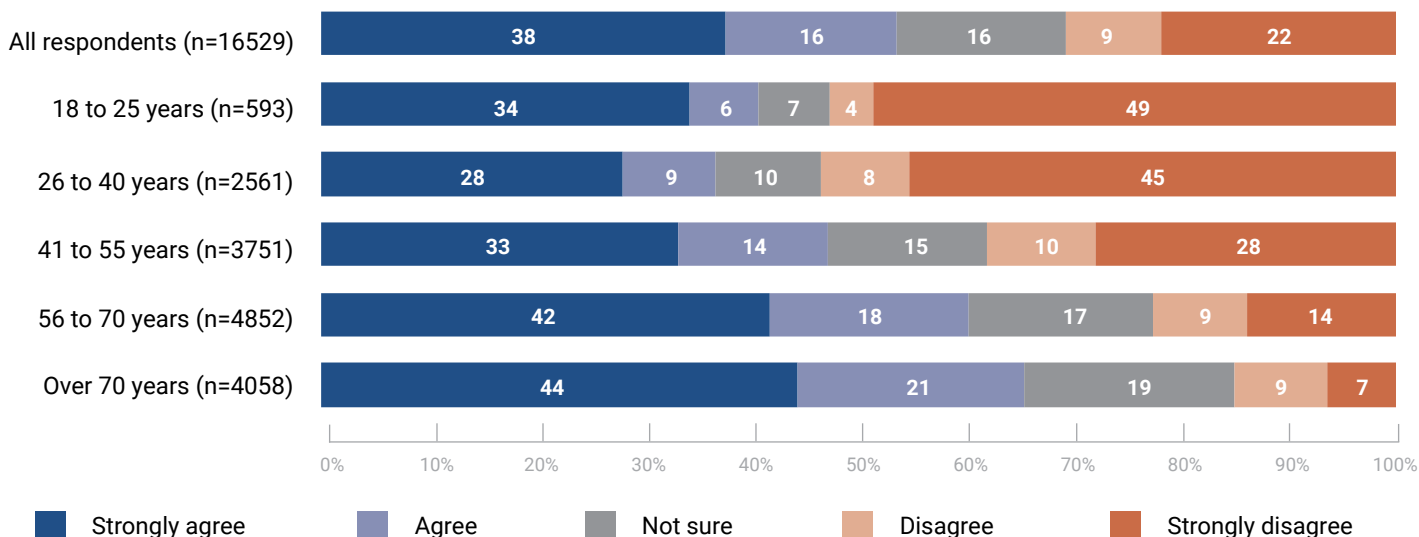
Many open responses spoke favourably about reform with regard to divorce and remarriage. For instance, one respondent noted:

**Figure 38: Percentage by country 'The sacrament of marriage should be extended to same sex couples'.**



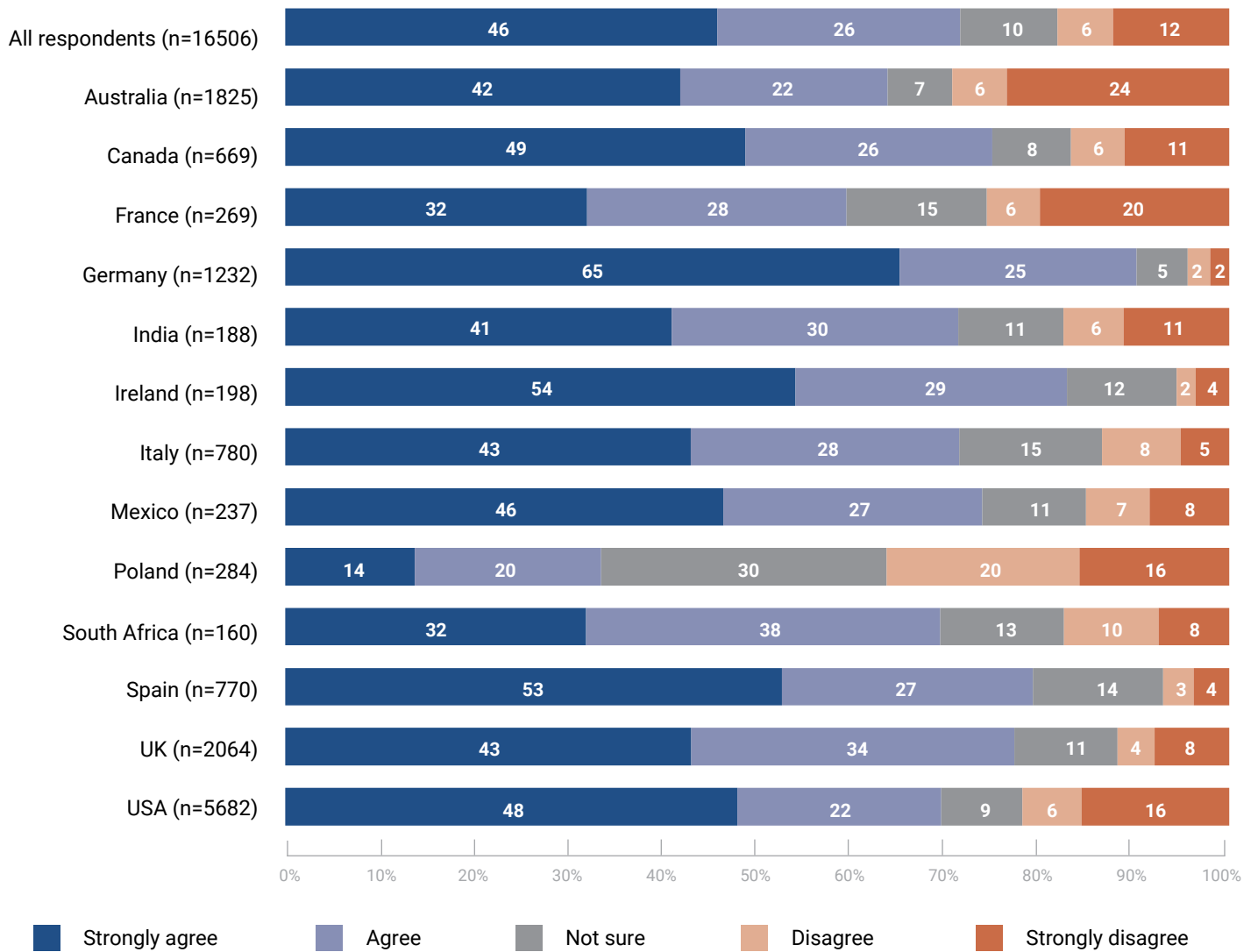
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 39: Percentage by age 'The sacrament of marriage should be extended to same sex couples'.**



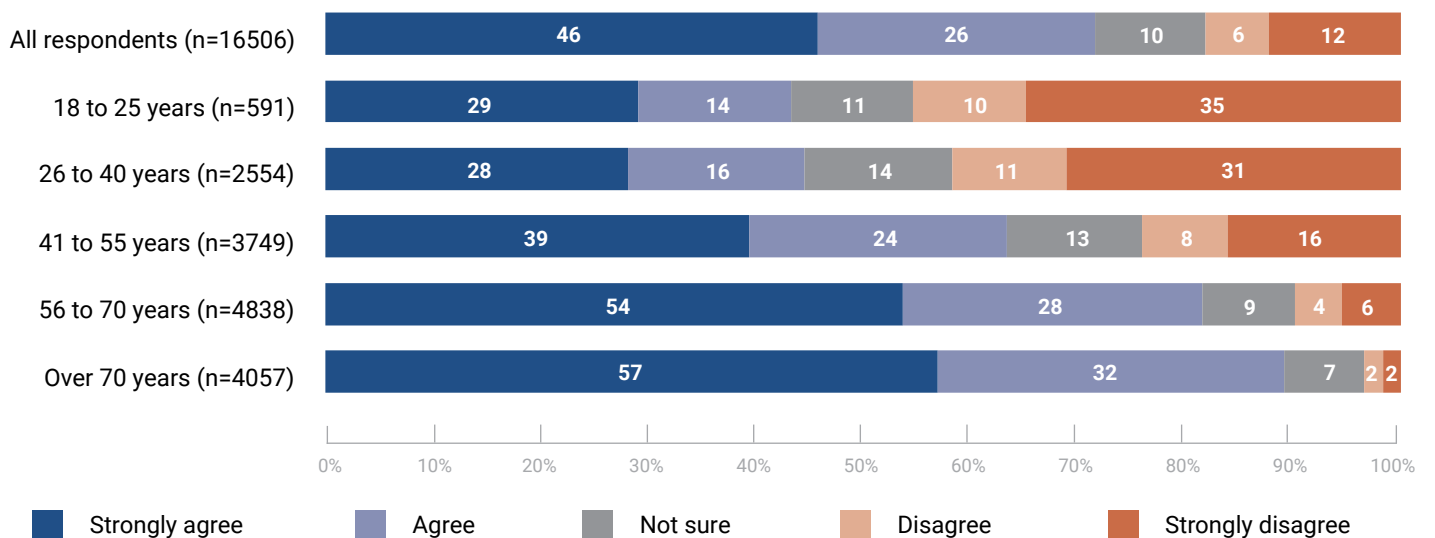
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 40: Percentage by country 'Remarriage after civil divorce should be allowed'.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 41: Percentage by age 'Remarriage after civil divorce should be allowed'.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

Where there's evidence that the marriage was false pretence from one partner, one who's not at fault must be allowed to remarry in the Church (56 to 70 years, Botswana).

Other respondents asked for greater availability and flexibility regarding the process of marriage annulment, particularly in situations of abuse. For example:

I would like the Church to be more receptive to annulment of marriages because of not only physical abuse but also financial abuse, mental abuse, starvation. No one can live in a marriage when one is deprived basic needs (41 to 55 years, India).

In some responses women reported personal experiences of being shunned as divorced women, highlighting the need for openness and dialogue. One respondent mentioned feeling not welcome in her parish:

I have not been very active lately for many reasons. Mainly, because I am divorced and felt that the discourse in my parish was not welcoming and accepting. Also, I identify myself as a Catholic feminist and that is not common nor accepted in my country (41 to 55 years, Guatemala).

A much smaller group of respondents used open responses to affirm church teachings on marriage as a union between a man and a woman which cannot be broken. For example, one respondent asserted:

The Church cannot redefine fundamental truths such as traditional marriage ... they need to publicly speak out and educate people on the Theology of the Body (26 to 40 years, Austria).

Respondents who expressed this view often referred to 'tradition', 'truth', and/or mentioned Theology of the Body.

## 10.4.2 Sexual and reproductive health and freedom of conscience

**When asked whether they agreed that 'Women need to have freedom of conscience with regard to their sexual and reproductive decisions', almost three-quarters (74%) of all respondents strongly agreed or agreed,**

ranging from 66% in Australia to 89% in Germany (Figure 42). Agreement with the statement increased with age, which was due to a strong age-related variation in the Western English-speaking countries (Figure 43).

In open responses, there was strong support for reform regarding church teachings concerned with sexual and reproductive health. One respondent explained:

As a companion to recognizing marriage for same-sex couples, the Church needs to look at its teachings on sexuality, sexual intercourse between couples and what are healthy forms of birth control and reproduction (IVF) (26 to 40 years, US).

Most respondents who mentioned this issue highlighted the possibility of psychological and physical harm when women's agency and freedom of conscience in life decision-making was ignored. One respondent claimed that the Church must become more aware that:

Banning premarital relationships ... over time, causes divorce and psychological harm (41 to 55 years, Italy).

Another, wrote:

I am particularly concerned about the non-hierarchical nature of the Church's sexual morality (everything is bad without distinction or scale of gravity: contraception, masturbation, adultery, rape, rape of minors) (26 to 40 years, France).

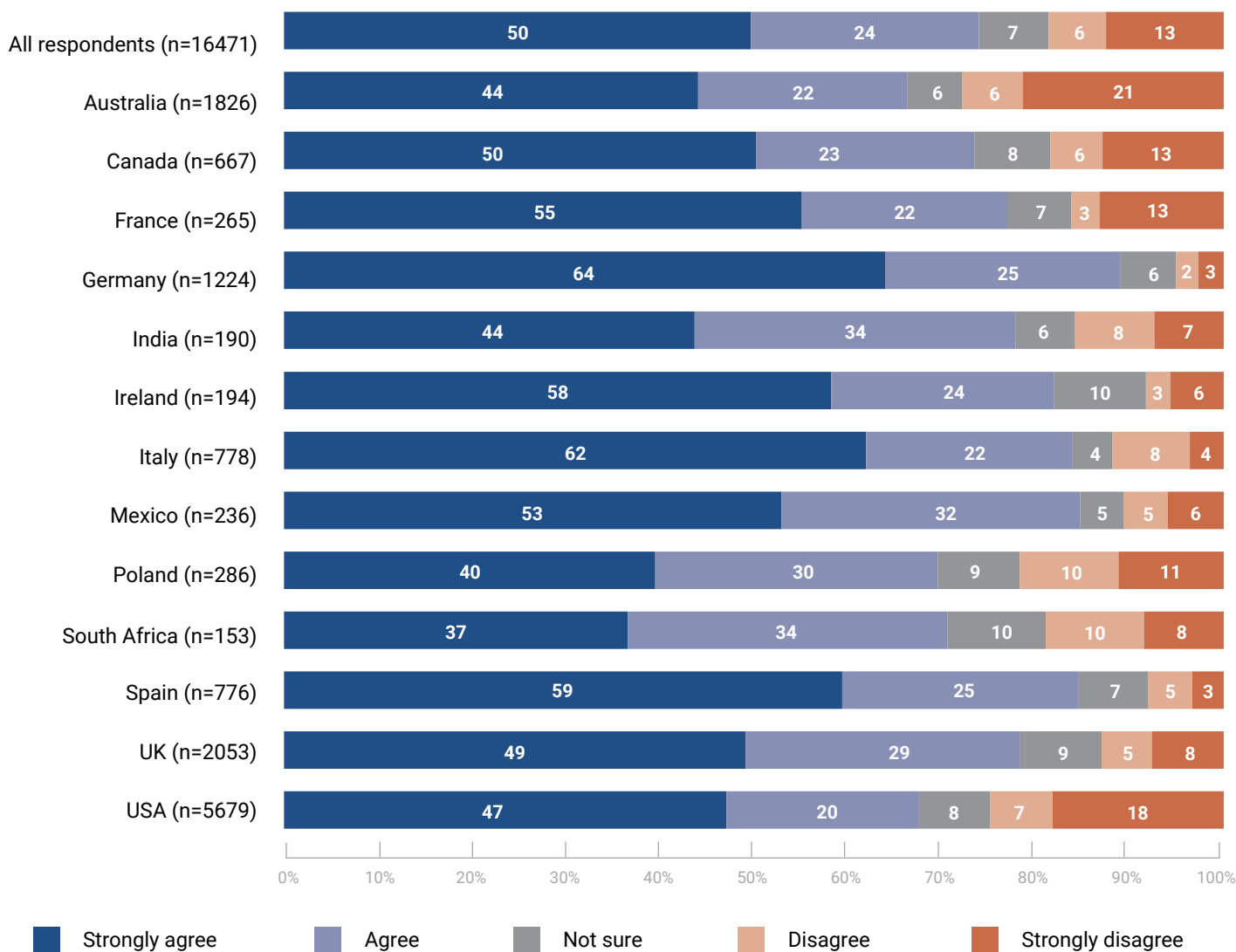
Responses often used terms such as 'outdated', 'harmful', and 'damaging' when referring to teachings related to sexuality, contraception, and premarital sex. They expressed a need for doctrine that could accommodate the complex reality of their lives in many different contexts. A few responses spoke of the harm that results when issues of sexual and reproductive health are understood as 'women's sins' and prioritised as 'more evil' than sexual violence against women. For instance, one respondent wrote:

In my parish group [there is a man who knows] that "I should not abort", but he does not know that he should not rape me. It is more, he does not even think about it ... Laymen harass the girls who come to the Church, which makes us feel uncomfortable and unsafe in the sacred spaces (26 to 40 years, Mexico).

Another raised the issue of the abuse of women and children and claimed:

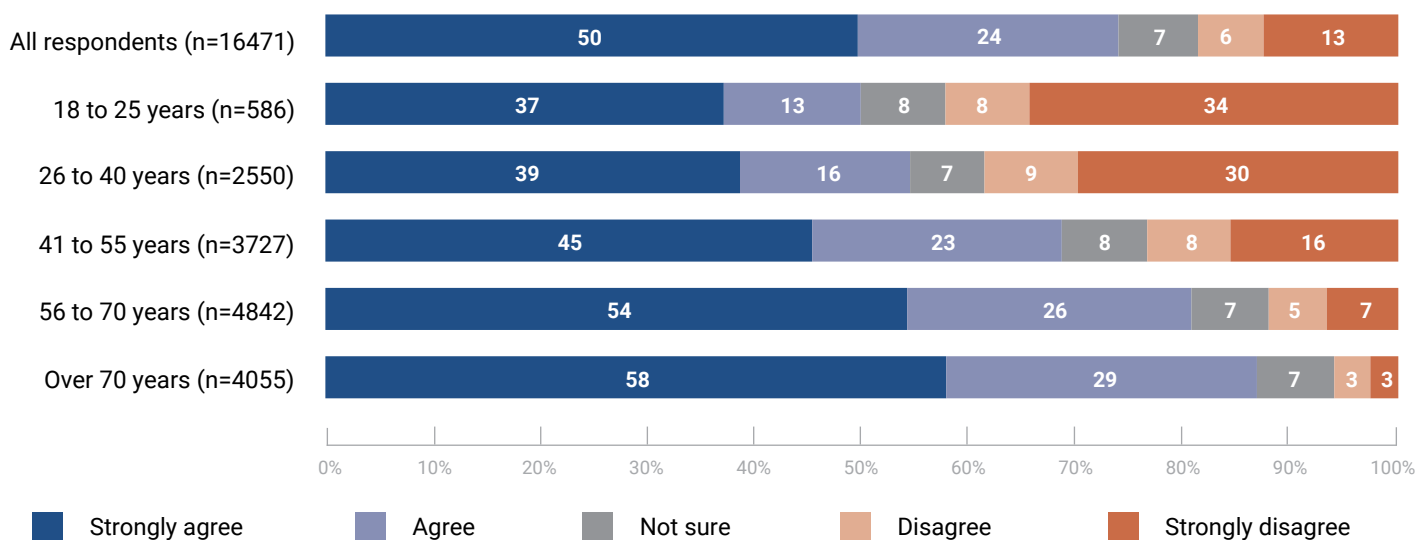
I am [over 70] years old and have never heard a homily about the abuse and rape of women. Forget talking about sinners and name sins!! (over 70 years, Chile).

**Figure 42: Percentage by country 'Women need to have freedom of conscience with regard to their sexual and reproductive decisions'.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 43: Percentage by age 'Women need to have freedom of conscience with regard to their sexual and reproductive decisions'.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

A few open responses mentioned a need for the Church to be more proactive and firmer in its defence of its teachings related to sexual and reproductive health. Some respondents called for better education regarding sex and contraception. For instance, one respondent noted the need for:

Affective and sexual education to children from pre-adolescence onwards, explaining the deep meaning (26 to 40 years, Italy).

Another explained:

I would like to see Natural Family Planning discussed more openly - I was not aware contraception was sinful until my 20s. Learning Natural Family Planning has changed my life ... People who wish for change in the Catholic Church should simply switch to a different religion / denomination

that better aligns with their beliefs (26 to 40 years, Canada).

Respondents who mentioned the need for the defence of church teachings often voiced opposition to abortion, artificial contraceptives, and sex outside heterosexual marriage unions; a few referred to the Theology of the Body. One respondent wrote:

The Catholic Church is for ALL PEOPLE already, it literally means "universal" so THAT doesn't need reform. What does need reform is people's understanding of the Church's teaching, reverence for the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the liturgy, etc. Some resources of interest to you: Theology of the Body by St JP II (26 to 40 years, Australia).

### 10.4.3 Children, young people, and families

Open responses revealed that the relationship between young people, children, and families and the Catholic Church was a significant concern for many respondents. Respondents often conveyed an apprehensiveness about the future prosperity of Catholicism. One young respondent wrote:

Unfortunately, it is very unattractive to young people at the moment (18 to 25 years, Germany).

Repeatedly, respondents suggested that the Church become more relevant for children, families, and young people. For instance, one respondent highlighted the need to keep:

Moving with the times while retaining values. Be relatable to the youth of this era and evolve. Approach should be different. Clergy/Religious should be able to get down to the level of today's youth and understand them better (56 to 70 years, Sri Lanka).

Several respondents called for 'innovative', 'child-centred', and 'age-inclusive' plans to bring young people and families back into church communities and schools. One respondent wrote:

It's not right for priests to be pro-life in the pulpit and object to children being children in Mass (26 to 40 years, UK).

Another claimed:

Children are often treated in an instrumental way in the Church, as pastoral examples on which the clergy project their ideas. Hardly anyone really wonders how to consider

[children] in the context of religious, spiritual, offers of practices and activities within communities as active entities (26 to 40 years, Poland).

Sound formation and catechesis was identified as critical. One respondent noted:

Ensure that catechism classes are in schools. Prioritise the message of a loving God who accepts and loves all human beings unconditionally, be it those who have sinned or those who are not Catholic. Children need to understand and respect all human beings as worthy of God's love (41 to 55 years, India).

Another respondent mentioned:

Strengthening religious education to introduce children and young people to the great message of Jesus (over 70 years, Germany).

A few respondents noted the importance of respecting young people and valuing their contribution to the Church. One respondent wrote of the need for:

Respect for everyone's opinion so that from a young age we can express our ideas, feelings, and opinions without having to ask for permission or being afraid to express ourselves (41 to 55 years, Venezuela).

The training of young people for leadership was a priority for some respondents. For instance, one respondent called for:

Programmes and leadership training of young adults for ministry. Opportunities for young people to serve within the Church (56 to 70 years, South Africa).



## 10.5 Misuse of power

Respondents were presented with 3 closed statements concerning abuse and misuse of power – namely sexual abuse, other forms of abuse, and clericalism (the misuse

of authority and power by male clerics). Comments on abuses of power and authority and their impacts were a strong theme in open responses.

### 10.5.1 Sexual and spiritual abuse

**Exactly 8 out of 10 (80%) of all respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement ‘Church leaders are not doing enough to address the perpetration and cover-up of sexual abuse’.**

There were variations in responses by country (ranging from 68% expressing strong agreement/agreement in Australia up to 89% in Germany) and age (increased strong agreement/agreement with age, which was due to the presence of this relationship in the Western English-speaking countries) (Figures 44 and 45).

Open responses were often used to speak out about the crisis of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. While many respondents expressed dismay and called for greater transparency and accountability, others disclosed situations of abuse, including sexual harassment and assault in Catholic workplaces and communities, including parishes.

Respondents repeatedly used phrases such as ‘loss of trust’, ‘crisis of faith’, ‘shameful’, ‘angry’, and ‘frustrated’ when writing about the crisis of abuse in the Church. Responses came from all age groupings and regions of the world.

A significant portion of open responses that mentioned the crisis called for greater transparency and accountability when it came to reporting and addressing abuse. One respondent wrote:

Transparency and accountability - sexual abuse, financial abuse, leadership abuse. No cover up. No blaming and shaming the victims. Adhere to sexual abuse law and defrock priests/ bishops/ cardinals if guilty- don't transfer abusers put in place accountability mechanisms to balance the unlimited power wielded by the clergy (56 to 70 years, India).

Many responses expressed disappointment and anger at the lack of specific and timely action on the part of the institutional Church

regarding situations of sexual abuse.

A young respondent asked:

Is it really moral or ethical to stand behind an organisation that has such huge flaws and covers up such horrific crimes like the abuse of children? (18 to 25 years, Germany).

Another respondent explained:

I feel totally betrayed following the exposure of the sexual abuse and especially the cover-ups. I will actively work for change (over 70 years, South Africa).

Yet another claimed:

I love being Catholic ... but I am ashamed of the lack of an energetic and categorical condemnation of sexual and power abuses (26 to 40 years, Peru).

Some respondents reported the impacts of having been groomed and sexually, physically, and/or emotionally abused by clerical perpetrators. For example, one respondent said:

I am affected by sexual violence by a priest in the Catholic Church. But my God is fortunately not Catholic. I assume, that the Catholic Church is in the midst of the greatest upheaval, since it existed. When something new happens, I want to be there (41 to 55 years, Germany).

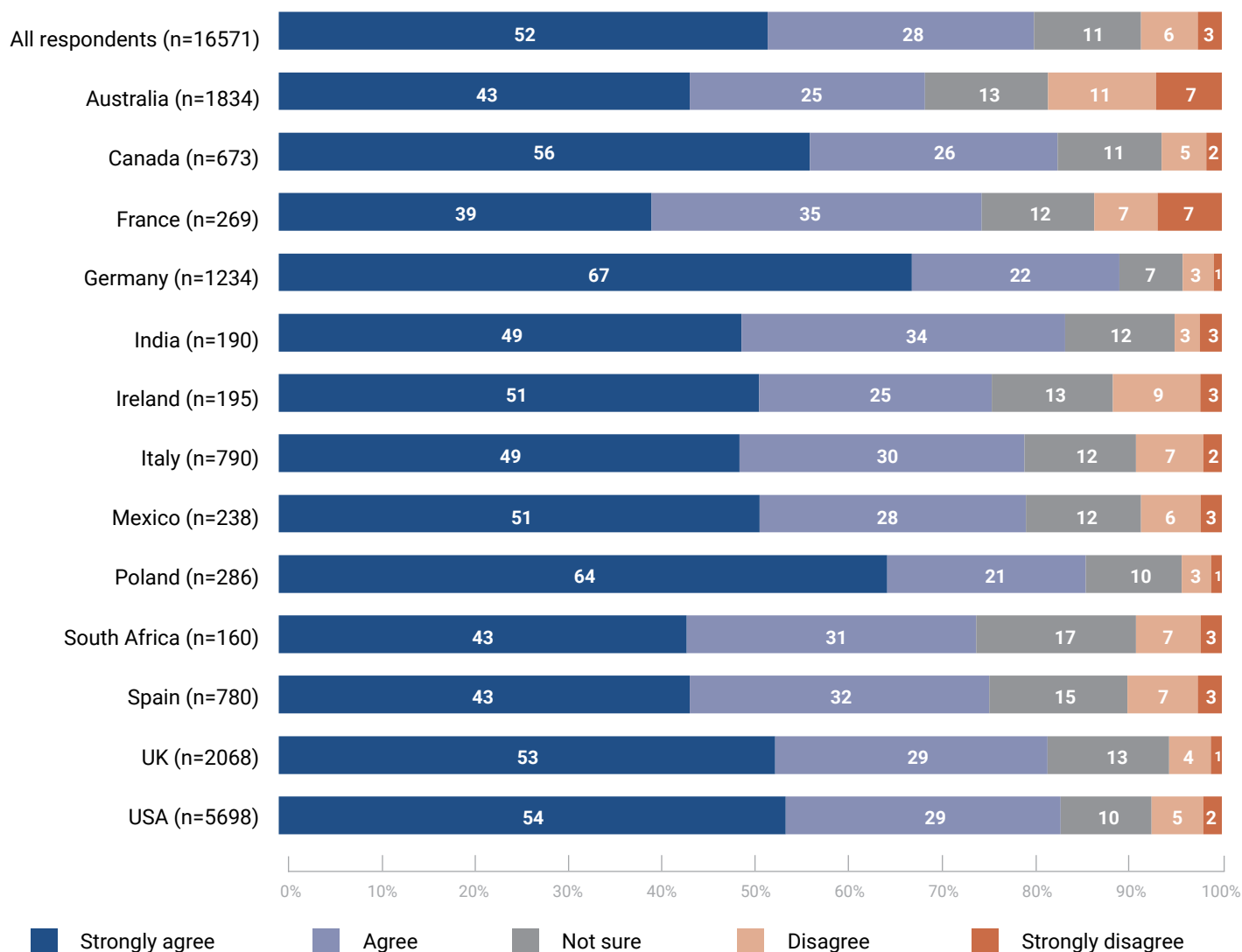
A respondent, who did not report her age or country of residence, wrote:

I feel cheated and emotionally abused into submission. The all-male leadership is unfair, unequal, and incapable of leading and representing women.

The call for action was even stronger when respondents were asked about other forms of abuse.

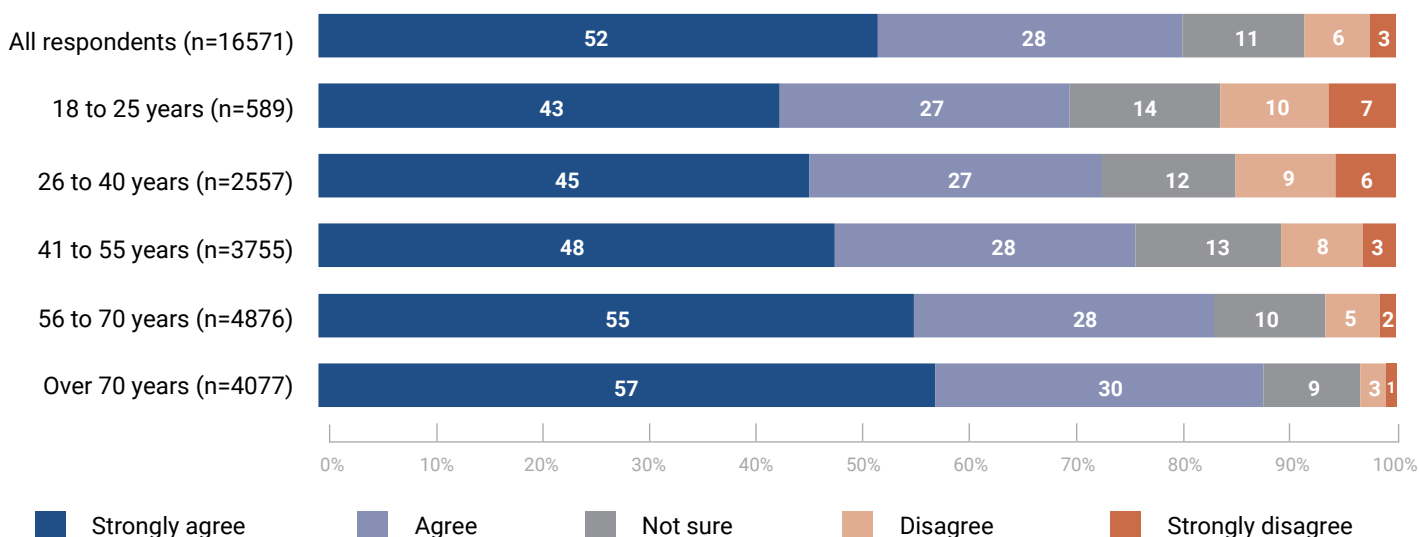
**Nearly 9 out of 10 (89%) of all respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement ‘Church leaders need to do more to address other forms of abuse, including abuses of power and spiritual harm’.**

**Figure 44: Percentage by country 'Church leaders are not doing enough to address the perpetration and cover-up of sexual abuse'.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 45: Percentage by age 'Church leaders are not doing enough to address the perpetration and cover-up of sexual abuse'.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

Strong agreement/agreement ranged from 80% in France and 81% in Australia up to 97% in Germany (Figure 46). Increasing strong agreement/agreement with age was largely dissipated when respondents from Western English-speaking countries were excluded (Figure 47).

There were very few open responses that rejected the notion that sexual and spiritual abuse were a problem in the Catholic Church. These respondents tended to minimise the crisis by suggesting the problem was related to media reporting or a couple of 'bad priests'.

Many respondents who mentioned abuse reported that they had begun to disaffiliate or distance themselves from Mass attendance and parish participation as a direct result of the failure of church leaders to take timely and effective action in managing abuse and reporting clerical perpetrators to civil authorities. Some expressed a lack of trust in the capacity of parishes and church organizations to provide safe environments for them or their children. One respondent explained:

I don't think I would want to expose my children, if I am lucky to have any, to the extreme risks involved in being Catholic. So much lip service is paid to improving things, but it never happens (26 to 40 years, UK).

Most respondents who wrote about abuse referred to clergy and church employees who had perpetrated violence. There were some respondents, however who mentioned other forms of gendered violence they experienced in their parish or Catholic workplace. For example, a few respondents shared experiences of workplace harassment. A respondent who had a post graduate qualification in theology wrote of being belittled and publicly corrected:

By the end I would feel physically ill entering our Cathedral. I would have sleepless nights; in the end I left my job and my career of 30+ years ... I know that there is no recourse for me in this band of brothers. I couldn't even participate in the synod in my diocese for fear of being recognized. Thank you for giving me this opportunity (56 to 70 years, New Zealand).

When other respondents shared their experiences, they used terms such as:

'broke my spirit', 'physically ill', and 'criminal actions'. One respondent wrote:

The abuses of power! I was a victim of that having worked with [a male religious order], they have arrogant and unevangelical attitudes. The double lives. The double standards of some (56 to 70 years, Colombia).

Some respondents acknowledged that women religious were sometimes involved in facilitating networks of abuse, providing clerical perpetrators with access to children, as well as abusing children emotionally, physically, and sexually. A former nun who disclosed bullying and psychological abuse from her superior wrote:

For a year I was unable to recover, let alone go to church – I denied my belief in the Catholic God and the institutions of the Catholic Church. Now, thanks to good people, I have managed to return to church (18 to 25 years, Poland).

Another cited the need to:

Address power abuses in women religious institutes in Africa. It is causing spiritual abuse (41 to 55 years, Kenya).

It was more common however for respondents to report concerns regarding the abuse of rather than by women religious, including nuns and sisters. One respondent disclosed:

Sexual abuse of nuns and relationships with women in parish is a major problem here. For instance, a bishop has been raping a nun for many years and when it came to light, the Church supports the bishop. This is absolute terrorism ... These kinds of bishops and priests must not be supported by the Church (56 to 70 years, India).

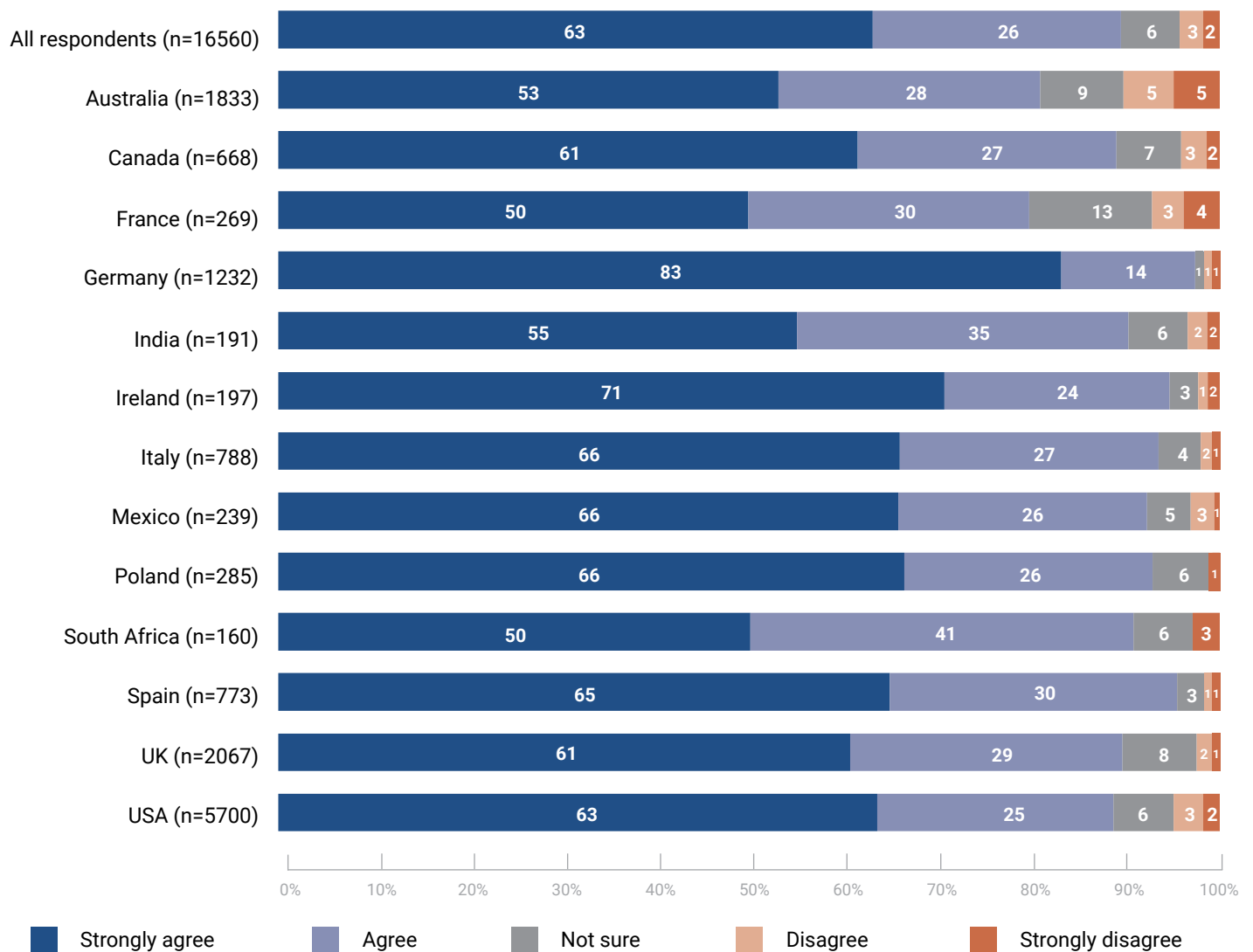
Open responses were highly critical of how the Vatican has reacted to the abuse of nuns. For example, one respondent wrote:

Abuse of religious sisters must be taken more seriously, also economic abuse and sisters' working conditions (56 to 70 years, Sweden).

Another claimed:

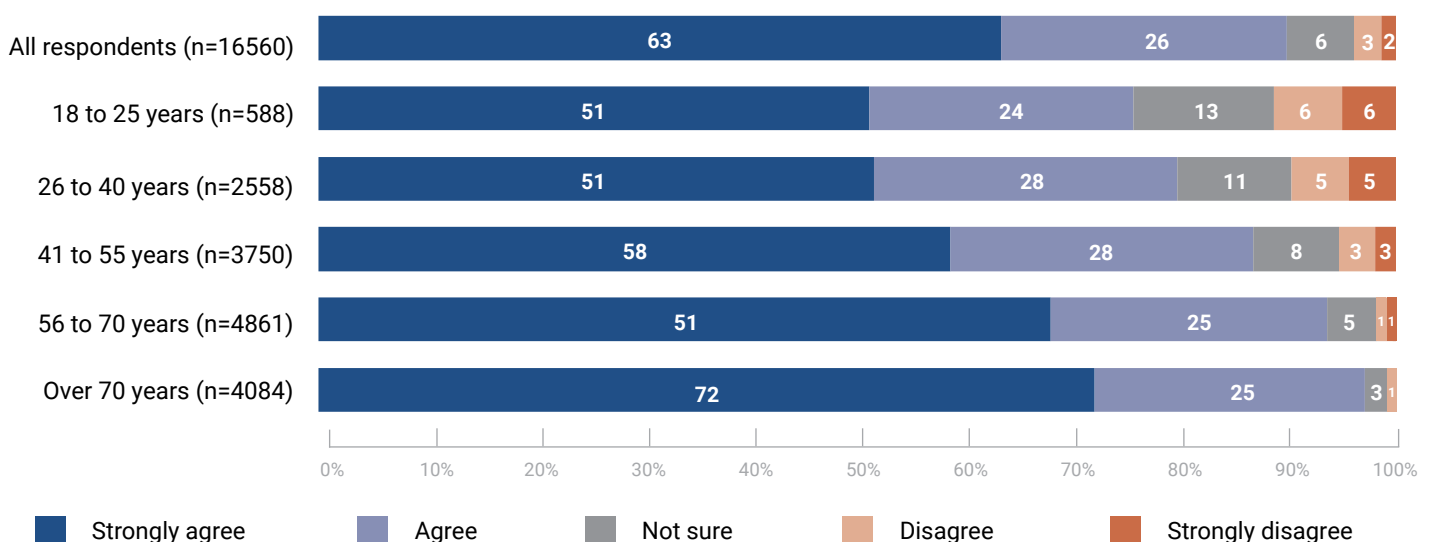
I am appalled by the abuse of nuns worldwide with the knowledge of the Vatican, and the bishops. This is a serious reason for me to think about leaving (over 70 years, Germany).

**Figure 46: Percentage by country ‘Church leaders need to address other forms of abuse, including abuse of power and spiritual harm’.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 47: Percentage by age ‘Church leaders need to address other forms of abuse, including abuse of power and spiritual harm’.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

## 10.5.2 Clericalism

**A significant majority (85%) of all respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement ‘Clericalism (the misuse of authority and power by male clerics) is damaging the Catholic Church’,**

ranging from about three-quarters in India and South Africa (74% and 75% respectively) to 97% in Germany (Figure 48). Older respondents were more likely to strongly agree or agree with the statement than younger respondents, a trend that was largely due to a strong relationship between attitude and age in the Western English-speaking countries (Figure 49).

Open responses were highly critical of clericalism. Many respondents noted the negative impact of clericalism on individual communities and the Catholic Church more broadly. One respondent wrote:

I see myself longing for the values of Jesus lived in the Church and find they are lost in heavy institutionalization, legalism, and clericalism (over 70 years, Vietnam).

Another claimed:

It is necessary to promote the laity and to eradicate clericalism! The real participation of women in decision making is vital and urgent with an open attitude and ongoing dialogue! (56 to 70 years, Chile).

Respondents repeatedly expressed how harm and disillusionment are often the result of clericalism and authoritarian leadership. One respondent explained:

I am fully committed to the Catholic Church, but I see many things critically: unfortunately, still the degradation of women and laity in general, the handling

of power, still rampant clericalism and of course the scandal of sexual and spiritual abuse by members of the Catholic Church (56 to 70 years, Austria).

Experiences of harm, including sexism and discrimination, were often understood to be part of a systemic culture of clericalism and misogyny. For example, one respondent claimed:

I belong to this community, but I live in disagreement with its power system, with its clericalism and with the fact that women are NOT considered equal (56 to 70 years, Spain).

Respondents used phrasing such as ‘clericalist mentality’ and ‘power system’ when referring to clericalism. One respondent claimed a need to understand and address clericalism as:

An all-encompassing ideology (26 to 40 years, UK).

Some open responses expressed concerns about the conflation of ordination with an elevation above a lay state. One such response noted:

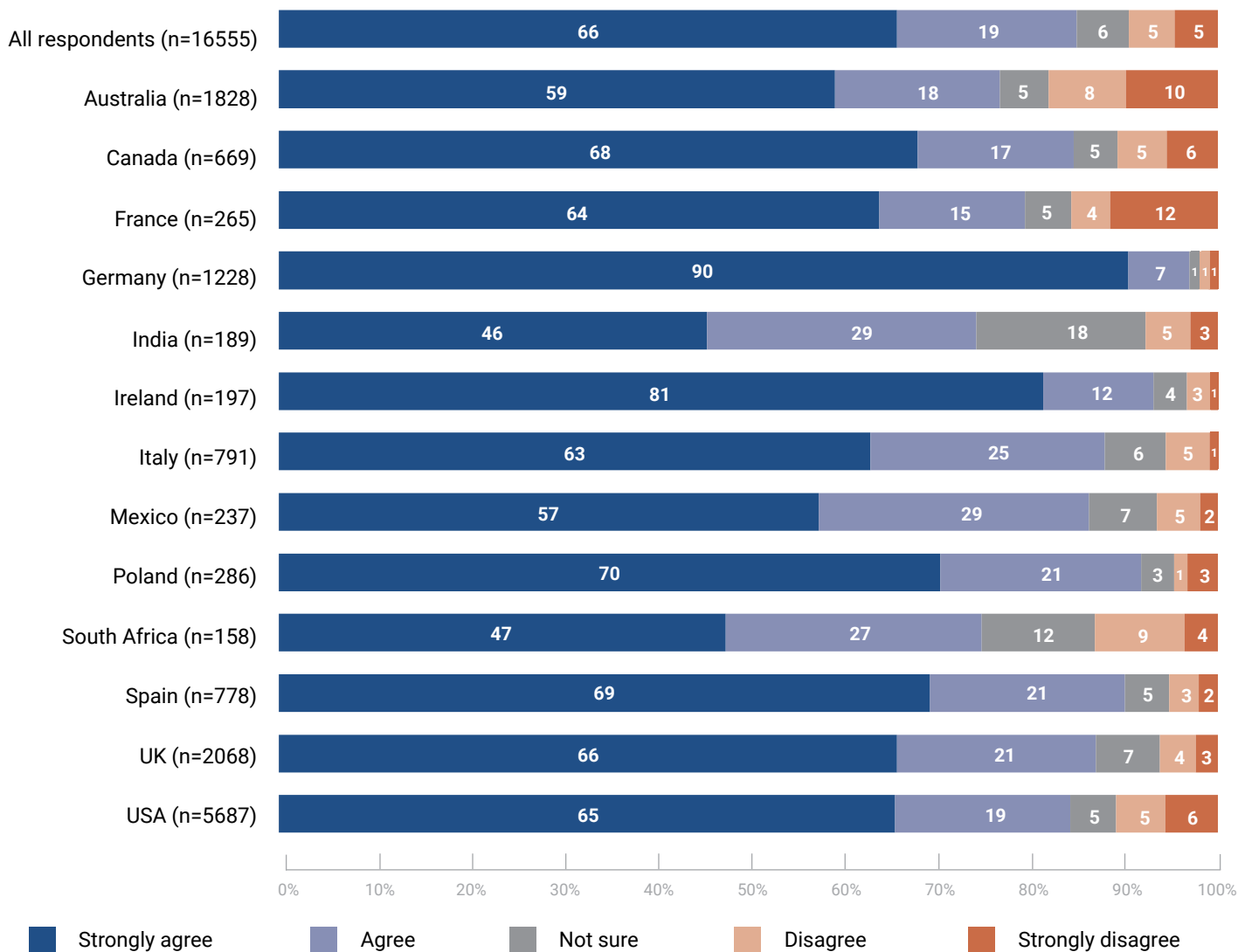
Clericalism is damaging and dangerous. While priests should be valued, honoured, and supported, the laity needs to be released into its role as priest prophet and king (56 to 70 years, South Africa).

Another respondent claimed:

The Church must shift its patriarchal and hierarchical attitudes and adopt a more inclusive stance so that all voices - women and men - are equal. I find many priests think they are themselves “infallible” and are leery of women in leadership (56 to 70 years, Malaysia).

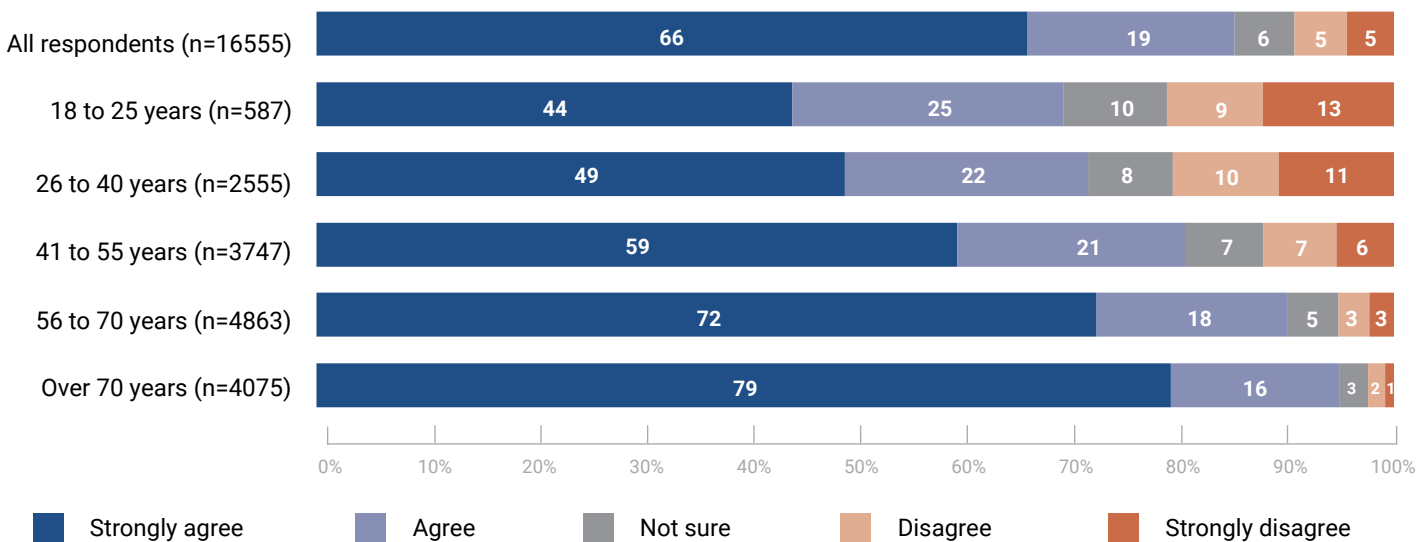
Some responses queried the need for ordination at all and instead recommended increased recognition of the authority of Baptism.

**Figure 48: Percentage by country ‘Clericalism (the misuse of authority and power by male clerics) is damaging the Catholic Church’.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 49: Percentage by age ‘Clericalism (the misuse of authority and power by male clerics) is damaging the Catholic Church’.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

## 10.6 Climate action

Respondents were asked about the importance of church action on climate change.

**Almost 8 in 10 (79%) of all respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement ‘Climate change is an urgent challenge that the whole church must address’.**

Strong agreement/agreement increased with age, especially in the Western English-speaking countries, and ranged from 66% in Australia to 93% in Ireland (Figures 50 and 51).

Open responses expressed support of urgent action in the Catholic Church to address climate change. Several respondents highlighted the need for the Church, including parishes and church organizations, to better address climate change. One respondent claimed:

There is much that the Catholic Church can further do in relation to sustainability/the environment (26 to 40 years, Philippines).

Some responses simply said:

Urgent issue of the environment (41 to 55 years, Colombia) or Focus on climate change (56 to 70 years, US).

One respondent noted they were:

Committed to a personal and diocesan approach to integral ecology (56 to 70 years, France).

There were respondents that reported participation in Laudato Si’ action groups in their parish communities. A few highlighted the need for instruction on and ways to practically address the teachings of Laudato Si’. One respondent wrote:

‘Laudato Si’ needs to be addressed in every parish. It’s important that there is participation in every diocese and parish (56 to 70 years, Ireland).

A few respondents rejected the idea that social action and environmental concerns should be addressed by the Church. For instance, one respondent claimed:

So many topics of spiritual importance are no longer preached, yet climate change, gender theory, medical choices around vaccines, wars in other countries, feminists’ causes are often preached about. The Church is there to save souls, not lead them to hell, which is exactly what is happening (41 to 55 years, Australia).

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## 10.7 Catholic social teaching

**Respondents were asked to evaluate whether ‘Catholic social teaching is a good resource for social justice action’. More than 8 in 10 (83%) of all respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement.**

Very few respondents (6%) disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement. Variation between countries was slight (between 79% and 87% strong agreement/agreement in all countries except for Poland, where the figure was a little lower

at 70%) (Figure 52). Older respondents were slightly more likely to strongly agree or agree with the statement than younger respondents (Figure 53).

In open responses, there was a strong and consistent call for greater action and commitment from church leadership to Catholic Social Teaching, particularly regarding issues related to the environment, economic justice, and poverty.

Respondents often linked their Catholic faith with some form of socio-political engagement grounded in Catholic social teaching. For example, one respondent

linked her Catholic identity with actively seeking:

A more just, equitable, world where everyone, everyone has a place (56 to 70 years, Chile).

Some respondents called for greater action by the Church. For example, a respondent said:

I find the silence of a large part of the Church with regard to the injustice in the world, the growing inequality and misery, etc., very serious. Today, there is a lot of talk about the war in Ukraine. What about the third world countries that are being bled dry by imperialist policies? (over 70 years, Argentina).

Another highlighted that:

The social teaching of the Church should address women issues. Clerical formation has to be more contextual and to address the pastoral and secular needs of the people (56 to 70 years, India).

Many responses connected speaking out about justice and equality within church and society with the necessity for change in the Catholic Church. One respondent wrote:

At a particularly traumatic moment in my life, I was introduced to social justice and to Catholic social teaching which changed my life and helped me open up to the need for transformation in the Church (56 to 70 years, New Zealand).

Some younger respondents stated that a lack of social justice action by the Church was the reason for their lack of participation. Examples included:

I am no longer an actively practicing Catholic. This was a decision reached

into my adulthood, following 12 years of Catholic Education, and being raised in an intensely longstanding Catholic family. The governing Body of the Catholic faith did not align to what I consider to be in essence the tenants of social justice, equality, and inclusion left by Christ (18 to 25 years, Germany).

Priests and Bishops ... in general do not follow the Bible, are poorly theologically and generally educated, bigoted, proud, greedy, and not in touch with the world. They tolerate, commit, or hide rapes on children and at the same time fixated on sexuality and chastity. They attack LGBT people instead of helping those in need. They have no love and no mercy in them ... I do believe in God. I do want to be a part of the Church. But ... I do not believe in this Church anymore. It has to change drastically (18 to 25 years, Poland).

A smaller group of respondents challenged Catholic social teaching and socio-political engagement as the politicisation of faith and doctrinal teaching. Some of this group viewed social justice concerns as a compromise with secularism. Others linked their opposition with a need for Catholicism to maintain its identity and reject cultural trends. These responses were likely to express a need to reject what they identified as 'leftist' or 'woke' agendas, including gender equality and climate action. One respondent claimed:

If by Catholic social teaching you mean climate change, sexual liberalism, and woke values then NO, the Church doesn't need these things. In fact, these things are an abuse of the faith and are used to abuse the faithful (26 to 40 years, Australia).

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## 10.8 Inclusion of marginalised people

Listening to, including, and embracing people and groups who are at the margins of church and society was highly important to many respondents. Some open responses simply said:

Be more inclusive (over 70 years Italy), or Inclusivity, compassion, and respect (56 to 70 years, South Africa).

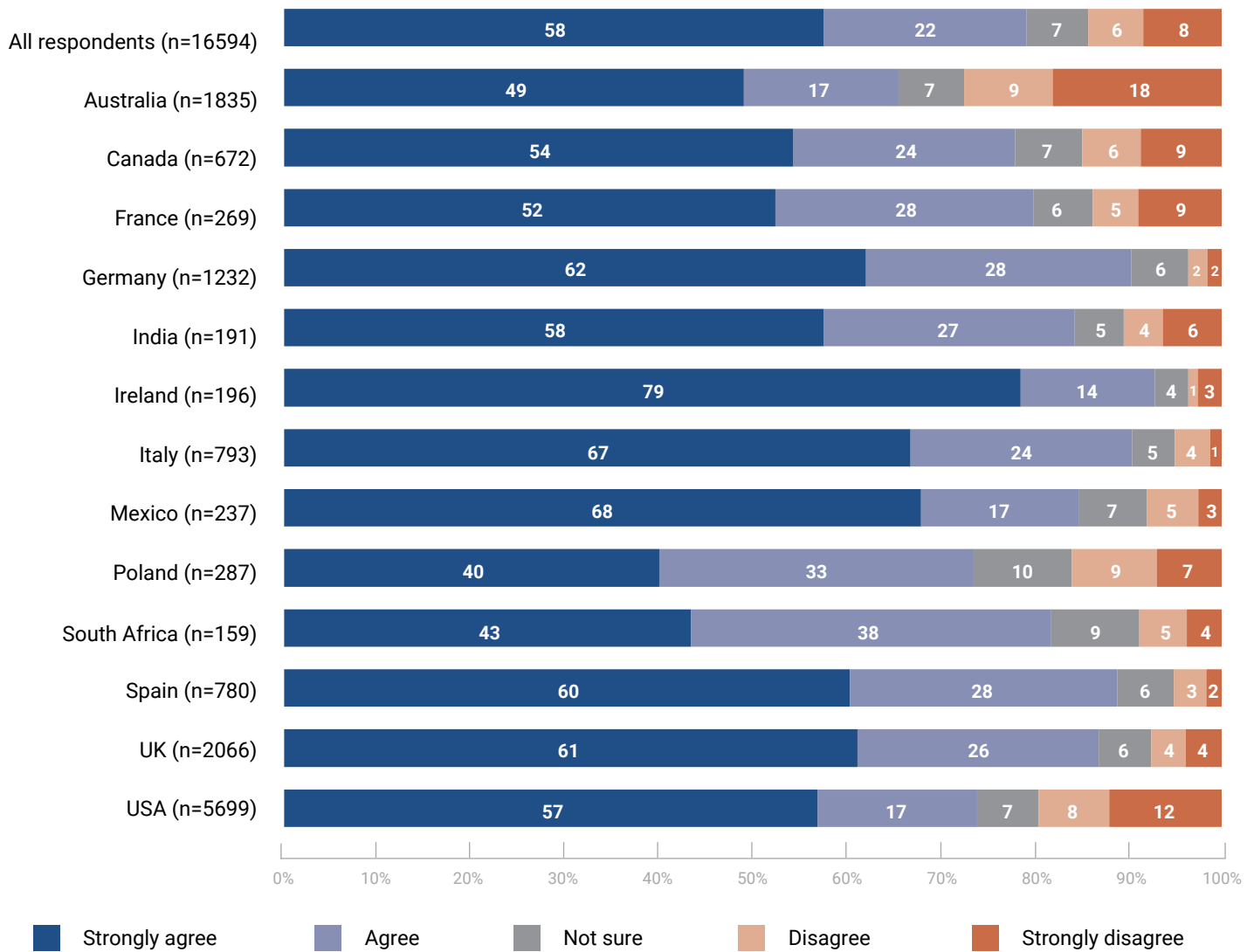
A respondent who identified as a religious sister wrote:

Inclusion of all people at the Eucharistic table, as Jesus did (26 to 40 years, Mexico).

In addition to raising concerns regarding women and LGBTIQ+ people, many respondents wrote about exclusion based on ability, race, and caste. Some explicitly noted the intersectionality of marginalisation in the Church. For instance, one respondent said:

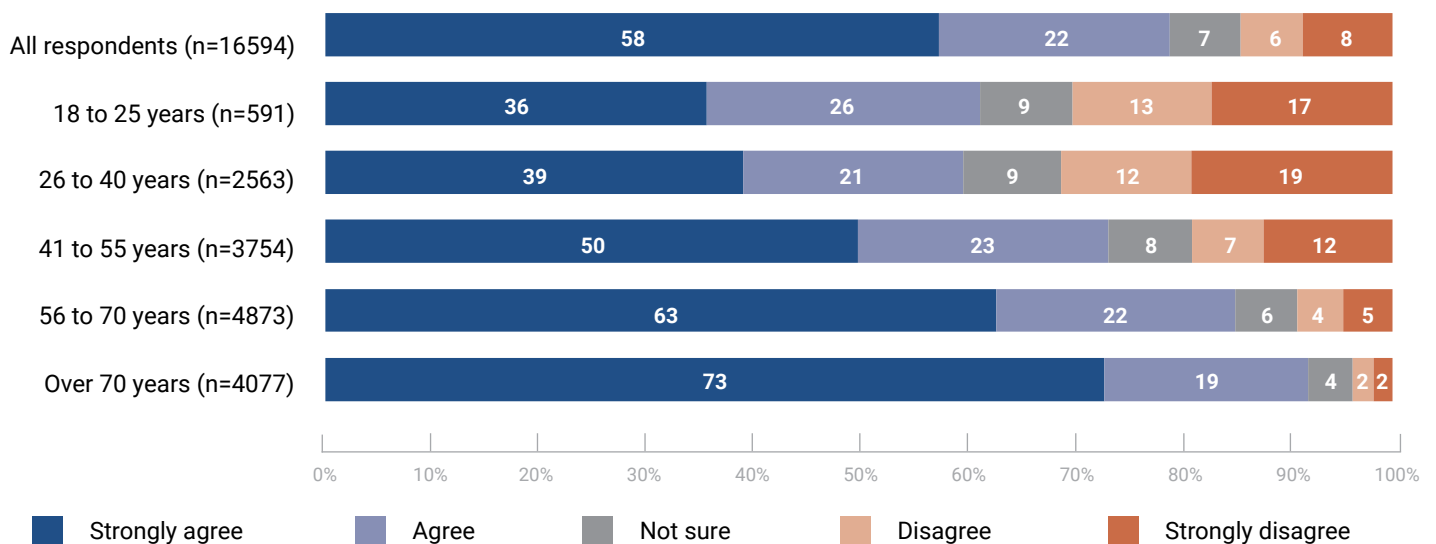


**Figure 50: Percentage by country 'Climate change is an urgent challenge that the whole church must address'.**



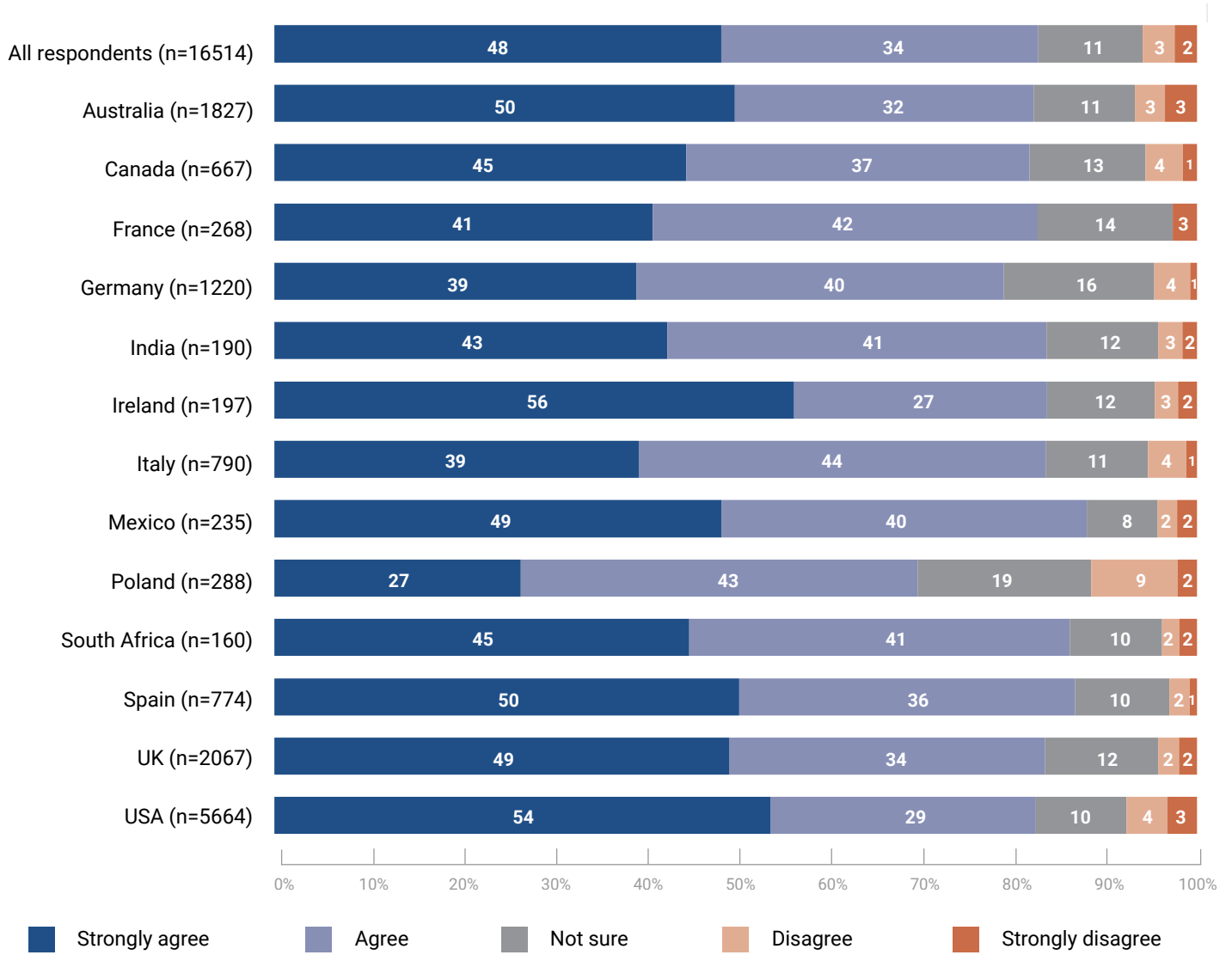
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 51: Percentage by age 'Climate change is an urgent challenge that the whole church must address'.**



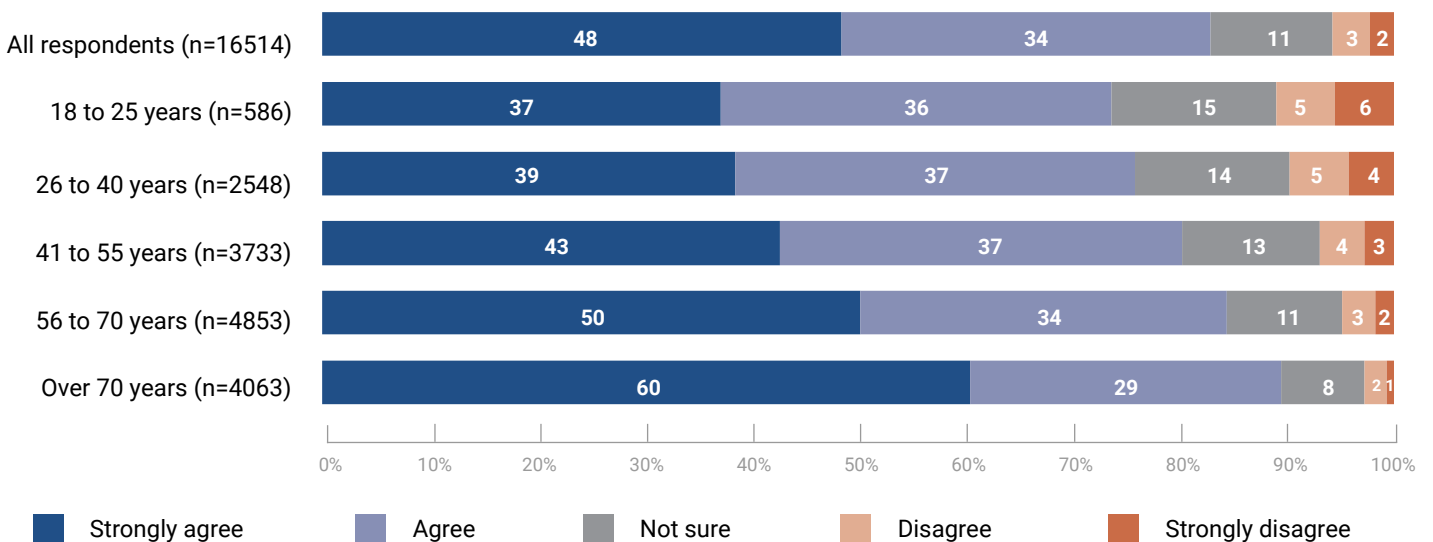
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 52: Percentage by country 'Catholic social teaching is a good resource for social justice action'.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 53: Percentage by age 'Catholic social teaching is a good resource for social justice action'.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

Not only a gender issue but also a generational and multicultural one (56 to 70 years, Argentina).

A smaller group of respondents used open responses to call for a church closed off from society. One young respondent cautioned:

## 10.8.1 Listening and dialogue

Many respondents expressed a desire to be part of a process of genuine dialogue and called for interactions that involve mutuality, humility, and openness. A significant proportion of respondents said that they completed the survey so that their voices would be heard. Some conveyed gratitude for the chance to speak out, with a few respondents writing that it made them feel included and less alone. One respondent wrote:

I filled this [survey] out as a Hail Mary to God, asking Him to fix things. I often wonder if this is the Church that God intended (26 to 40 years, US).

Another said:

I love the Church where, as God's people, all people must have a place. Thank you for allowing my voice to be heard at this time of needed change, we are at a point where it can no longer be avoided (41 to 55 years, Guatemala).

Equality and the inclusion of women and

The Church needs to be careful so as not to enter into seeking to appeal to the secular public. Her teachings are not about popularity or gender ideology (18 to 25 years, Austria).

other marginalised groups tended to be linked with 'acceptance', 'visibility', 'equality', 'respect', and 'being heard'. Deep and genuine listening was often connected with the Christian faith and the Gospel message. Misogyny, clericalism, and stereotypes assigned to women and other marginalised groups were understood as barriers to listening and dialogue. Women religious noted that in female religious congregations the vow of obedience can silence dialogue. For instance, a respondent who identified as religious sister explained:

The Church is hierarchical. Congregations of religious women are also hierarchical ... Destructive, military discipline is demanded in the name of the vow of obedience. Dialogue is discarded ... The Church needs to STRESS dialogue. Higher authorities need to allow the people of God to have a say in all matters concerning governance (41 to 55 years, India).

## 10.8.2 A humanitarian church

Open responses repeatedly made connections between Catholic faith and ministry with the poor. Several respondents expressed that the Catholic Church should be a church *of* and *for* the poor, relating their Catholic identity closely to ministry with the poor. For instance, one respondent described her Catholic identity in terms of actively seeking:

A more just, equitable, world where everyone, everyone has a place (56 to 70 years, Chile).

Those respondents who drew attention to poverty and humanitarian issues in their open responses tended to understand the Church as having an important and strategic role to play in global relations related to food security, homelessness,

violence, human rights advocacy, and situations of war and conflict such as in Ukraine. One respondent drew attention to issues of:

Human dignity, safety of vulnerable refugees (especially women and children) who flee their country because of war, and called for, Church leadership to work with government, non-government organisations, and other stakeholders to ensure protection from any form of exploitation or abuse, given their vulnerable state (41 to 55 years, Fiji).

In some instances, respondents used open responses to demand greater action by the Church to challenge injustices in their regional contexts. Many open responses, however, were critical of priests and bishops who engaged in

partisan political promotion during the homily, while disregarding issues of social justice such as poverty, racism, and violence against women and children. Many of these responses reflected the context of the respondent. For example, one respondent in Jordan critiqued:

Rising right-wing nationalism within the Church and using the Church and her symbols and culture to promote right-wing nationalism (26 to 40 years, Jordan).

A respondent in Ukraine wrote:

Church leaders should be loyal to their ministry and fully dedicated to serving the Church through their leadership. The political way of leading the Church will lead to destruction (41 to 55 years, Ukraine).

Another, in Turkey stated:

There should be NO place for any political

statements from church leaders. Nor should priests be telling their congregation how to vote (56 to 70 years, Turkey).

In some situations, however, respondents called for greater prayer and/or action by the Church to challenge injustices in their regional contexts. For example, one respondent wrote:

Please pray for freedom of worship for the Church in China, which is becoming more and more restrictive (41 to 55 years, China).

Another said:

I feel the Church should help the people in Nigeria for prayers, because genocide goes on each day in the country especially with the kidnapping and killing that has become a norm in the country and nobody seems to be doing anything about it (26 to 40 years, Nigeria).

### 10.8.3 Racism in church communities

Racial diversity and multi-cultural inclusion were concerns raised by respondents in all regions. Many open responses raised the issue of racism and expressed a desire for a more culturally inclusive Church. One respondent raised the issue of the:

Incorporation of African traditions. The teaching is that African traditions and customs are evil (26 to 40 years, South Africa).

Some respondents simply said, 'address racism' or 'racial diversity'. One respondent raised the issue of:

Biases towards caste, language, place where you belong, racism (26 to 40 years, India).

Another called attention to the needs of:

Indigenous people and migrant women (41 to 55 years, Democratic Republic of Congo).

Many respondents highlighted the need for local churches to be more proactive in their opposition to all forms of racism and nationalism, including the discrimination of ethnic minorities, migrants, refugees, and Indigenous peoples. One respondent claimed:

Racism is contrary to inclusive community, it is prevalent and largely unaddressed among current white-church concerns (over 70 years, Canada).

Yet another said:

The US Church needs to play a larger role in racial justice and address the harm it has caused having enslaved Black Americans without paying reparations for this sin (26 to 40 years, US).

In open responses there was broad recognition of the harms of colonialism. Many respondents expressed disappointment and anger at the role the Catholic Church played in the oppression of First Nations peoples and their cultures. For instance, one respondent wrote:

Redress and reparations for the abuse and destruction of indigenous lives, languages, belief (56 to 70 years, Honduras).

Several mentioned the harm perpetrated against Indigenous peoples in residential schools, particularly in North America.

Church leadership needs to address the Church's role in the genocide of Indigenous peoples in North America via residential schools. A meaningful apology, returning sacred objects currently being held at the Vatican, and action on the relevant calls from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission would be positive steps forward (26 to 40 years, Canada).

For many, colonialism and racism were recognised as part of a system of abuse in the Church.

## 10.8.4 People with diverse needs

Many open responses sought the full inclusion in of people with diverse needs, including people with disabilities. One respondent wrote:

The Church needs to help the needy ... I feel that's not being done. Every human being gay, lesbian, divorced, handicapped should be fully and open heartedly accepted by the Church (26 to 40 years, United Arab Emirates).

Several respondents highlighted, that in some contexts people are being excluded or denied sacraments because of disability. One drew attention to the need to allow:

Those who are physically and mentally challenged to receive the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. In some places this is not happening (26 to 40 years, Nigeria).

Another wrote:

I have mental health problems that

make it difficult to participate in parish life so sometimes I feel like the Church doesn't really want or have space for me. I particularly felt rejected when I was discerning a vocation to the religious life and was told I couldn't because of my mental health history. However, in the past faith, the sacraments and the liturgy have been a great source of strength (26 to 40 years, UK).

Many respondents noted that true inclusion involves genuine dialogue and engagement so that language and ritual contribute to a sense of belonging. Referring to the way marginalised people can struggle to find a place and be heard, one respondent wrote:

Engage with persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples to find ways how the Church can be a space where they sense belonging and inclusion. Listen to their voices and perspectives (41 to 55 years, Philippines).

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## 10.9 Liturgical reform

Open responses mentioned liturgy as a key issue to be addressed by church leadership. The responses that mentioned liturgical reform however, revealed division between respondents wanting what they see as a return to 'tradition', and those disappointed with the lack of progress towards a greater role for laity, especially women.

Overall, the call for renewal of liturgy and sacramental life was stronger. Many respondents called for revitalization of the liturgy, with a greater role for the laity and inclusive, everyday language. Some respondents made comments such as:

I find the Church and its rituals old and outdated (41 to 55 years, Mozambique) and The language of the missals is indigestible archaic and incomprehensible (41 to 55 years, Poland).

Others used phrases such as, 'update liturgy' and 'renew the Mass'. There were many open responses that emphasised the need for better preaching of the homily during Mass, including the inclusion of women as discussed above. Respondents

used words such as 'robust', 'succinct', 'relevant', and 'engaging' to explain the type of homilies they sought.

A smaller group of respondents rejected post-Vatican II changes to Catholic liturgies, often affirming strong support for Latin Masses. In open responses when asked what other issues needed to be addressed this group tended to express opposition to societal change and modernism and used phrases such as 'end liturgical abuse', 'more reverence', and 'purify the liturgy'. One respondent wrote:

Communion on the hand, singing of Protestant songs during the liturgy, females wearing pants inside churches and chapels all need to be stopped (18 to 25 years, Philippines).

One raised the issue of:

Bad irreverent Liturgy. Lack of access for the faithful to the Traditional Latin Mass and sacraments. Lack of Faith in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist (26 to 40 years, Italy).

## 10.10 Church leadership and governance

One of the main themes of open responses was the organisation and culture of leadership and governance in the Catholic Church. Many respondents mentioned concerns related to transparency and accountability in decision-making. There was a high level of consensus that the way power and authority is shared between clergy and laity is very problematic.

Many respondents were critical of the hierarchical structure of the Church, and used words like 'authoritarian', 'patriarchal', 'clerical', 'machismo', and 'undemocratic' in their responses. When commenting on

the top-down nature of church leadership respondents often noted how women were completely excluded from the existing hierarchical-clerical model.

One respondent wrote:

[I feel] great discomfort with the way the official Church is constituted: dogmatic, top-down, masculinist ... Excluding women from the life of the Church is the greatest betrayal of Jesus (over 70 years, Italy).

A less top-down model, with shared leadership between clergy and laity was cited by many respondents as a step towards full equality for women in the Church.

### 10.10.1 Clerical leadership

The ministry, leadership, and governance of clergy, including deacons, priests, and bishops in parishes and dioceses was consistently identified in open responses as highly problematic and in need of urgent reform. Respondents wrote about the impacts of abuses of power and authority on individual communities and the Church more broadly. Some shared experiences of being overlooked and marginalised as the result of autocratic clerical governance. One respondent explained:

I see women in the parish fulfilling tasks - altar cloths and flower decorations in the Church, parish coffee, soup day, communion, and confirmation preparation, etc. I see weak, overburdened priests who do not give support, who are overburdened with social meetings, who do not take time for pastoral care and youth work. I see priests who feel threatened by the ideas and activities of women (56 to 70 years, Austria).

Many open responses described corruption, extreme clerical control, misogyny, poor financial management, incompetence, and a lack of moral authority. While some responses acknowledged the good work of priests and bishops, most told stories of authoritarian leadership expressing harm and disillusionment.

One respondent stated:

[I am] disappointed by [the Church's] unwillingness to reform. Women are usually not treated as equals. I am tired of talking to priests who cannot look me in the eye as a woman (41 to 55 years, Switzerland).

Overall responses illustrated priests and bishops as out of touch with the day-to-day concerns of lay people.

In open responses the gap between clergy and laity was often associated with the inability of priests to marry and the nature of compulsory celibacy. Repeatedly, respondents declared, 'end clergy celibacy' or 'allow married priests'. Some responses were highly critical of vows of celibacy and made connections between celibacy and inappropriate relationships, the lack of priestly vocation, and the crisis of sexual and spiritual abuse. These responses often emphasised the need for improved selection methods, better formation, and ongoing training for ordained members of the Church. For instance, one respondent stated:

The lack of intellectual and social training of young priests is alarming. I think the Church is desperately giving priority to numbers rather than genuine formation and vocation (26 to 40 years, Spain).

Many respondents highlighted the need for seminaries not to be closed off from the world. One respondent noted:

Seminarians must live in the real world and not removed from everyone's way of life. So, seminaries must be either closed or undergo a profound restructuring or women must have an important role as formators of future priests (56 to 70 years, Portugal).

Professional supervision, oversight, and the involvement of women were reported as critical aspects of priestly selection, formation, and accountability. One respondent wrote that the:

Top-down hierarchy needs to be changed to an equal dialogue with communal spirit of discernment. Some priests are not aware of their deficits or psychological inadequacies and are stumbling blocks to the parishioners (56 to 70 years, Singapore).

Another noted:

The faithful should be given the platform to meet their Parish Priest's superiors so as to discuss unbecoming lifestyles by priests. This will bring about prevention of the image of the Church being tarnished (41 to 55 years, Zimbabwe).

Many open responses called for a return to gospel values, noting that it was vital for ordained men to practice a servant style of leadership when pastorally serving the Church and parish communities. One respondent wrote:

Move away from all positions of controlling power, right down to parish level, and focus on being a prophetic voice spreading the Good News in a world which so badly needs it (56 to 70 years, Ireland).

Respondents used phrases such as 'leadership as service', 'servant leadership', 'sacrament of service' and 'leadership at the service of communities'. Some open responses mentioned that clergy should focus on pastoral matters rather than administration and financial management.

Several claimed that administrative management should be based on skills and qualifications rather than maleness and ordination. For instance, one respondent said:

The delivery of sacraments (the role of the priest) should be distinct from church leadership and management which should be open to all (41 to 55 years, US).

As stated above, many responses critiqued the pre-eminence of ordination and its elevation above a lay state. For example, one respondent reported:

The laity are not second-class Catholics, but even the code of canon law considers us as such. If a priest has committed a serious offence, he is "punished" by being "reduced" to the lay state. I wonder why the lay state is a reduction of the priesthood, it is something smaller or lesser? And if a layman commits an offence, will they punish him by ordaining him a priest? They should stop considering us as some lower-class Catholics (56 to 70 years, Argentina).

Many responses urged church leaders to rethink and reconceptualise the priesthood. For some respondents this was a turning towards the Gospel. One respondent wrote:

The whole priesthood has to change. Jesus did not institute the priesthood as it is today. Everyone is baptized as priest, prophet, and Leader, we have to encourage the priesthood of the people (over 70 years, India).

A very small set of open responses called for absolute authority and leadership to be placed in the hands of male-only clergy. Most of these responses mentioned gender complementarity and tended to argue for a 'return to tradition', 'strong priestly male hierarchy' and the removal of 'effeminate priests'. One respondent noted:

We need stronger male priests who will lead the people back to a deeper faith (41 to 55 years, Bosnia Herzegovina).

## 10.10.2 Co-responsibility with the laity

In open responses there was a consistent demand for a greater role of the laity, especially women, in leadership, governance, and decision-making. Respondents used terms like 'co-responsibility', 'synodal', 'dialogue', and 'collaboration' when describing the type of role lay people should have in decision-making processes. One respondent noted:

Much of the isolation of women in the Church is also experienced by men and by minority groups. Laypeople in general need more and better formation in faith and church ... We need a change of culture such that lay people are more respected, heard, and empowered in decision making and ministry (56 to 70 years, Australia).

For many respondents the role of laity in decision-making processes was highly important not just for the Church but also for its role in broader society and culture. A key point raised in open responses was the importance of modelling the inclusion of women, young people, and other marginalised groups in church decision-making structures and processes. One respondent claimed,

Women's empowerment should actually be paved in the Catholic Church ... The Catholic Church should strongly stand as an example for it (26 to 40 years, India).

Another noted:

Let the young people to be part of leadership and church. Not encourage class/status among people who hold positions in church (26 to 40 years, Malaysia).

Some responses mentioned the need for improved formation and leadership training for lay people, particularly women. For instance, one respondent wrote:

Allocate financial resources for lay progressive women and feminists to get advanced training to prepare for leadership positions (41 to 55 years, China).

Another stated:

More than catechesis, there should be vigorous lay formation done among the laity. In my work as a lay formator, I am discovering that the "ordinary" Catholic doesn't know much about church history, biblical theology, even about the Jesus of the Gospels, plus we cannot link faith and life (56 to 70 years, Philippines).

Some respondents mentioned better access to Biblical studies. One respondent claimed:

Churches should open up as centres of social and spiritual development ... stop living in fear (41 to 55 years, Mexico).

There were a few open responses that strongly opposed giving lay men and women co-responsibility in decision-making processes within the Church. The view expressed by this small group was that the preservation and renewal of the office of clergy, including a return to 'tradition' and lay submission to clerical authority, would eliminate issues related to mismanagement and corruption. Overall, however, more respondents urged church leadership to be more democratic.

Many open responses highlighted that a form of co-responsible leadership which used the gifts and skills of the laity could more effectively support the Church's mission. Respondents often connected democratic processes at the parish and diocesan level with improved transparency and accountability.

## 10.10.3 Synodal leadership

Synodality as a concept and experience was strongly supported in open responses. Many respondents noted that synodality in the Catholic Church was not something that would evolve organically, and instead situated it as a process that must be learnt and practiced. When describing synodality respondents used words such as: 'democratic', 'circular',

'collaborative', 'productive', 'equality', 'prophetic', and 'inclusion'. Some open responses reported high levels of engagement with activities and processes associated with the 2021-2024 Synod of Bishops. Others claimed that their parish and/or diocese had offered limited or no opportunity to engage. One respondent wrote:



I am [a religious woman], and it pains me that many priests are not involving communities in the synod. They disagree, they don't want to listen (41 to 55 years, Chile).

A few respondents highlighted the significance of the survey in facilitating an opportunity for women to practice synodality. Many expressed gratitude that their insights could be shared without prejudice or discrimination.

Open responses tended to convey a sense of hope and enthusiasm for an inclusive process and experience of sharing ideas and collaborating through synodality. Respondents used phrases like 'urgent', 'stop being afraid', and 'fervent hope'. Yet coupled with enthusiasm were serious misgivings regarding synodality and the processes of the 2021-2024 Synod of Bishops. Many respondents questioned the genuineness of the magisterium's invitation to speak out. Some expressed reservations as to the purpose of synodality if there would be no change implemented. The absence of women in decision-making, particularly in voting processes during synods was mentioned

in open responses as a particular barrier to operational synodality. One respondent wrote:

Synodality that does not have 50% of women at the final table will not be capable of holding its own authority or promise. It will become an information gathering and promulgating assembly, a lost opportunity (41 to 55 years, Ireland).

Very few open responses expressed direct opposition to the process of synodality or the 2021-2024 Synod of Bishops. Those respondents who did raise concerns tended to support existing church structures and teaching, with some seeking better catechesis.

For instance, one respondent wrote:

This synodal way is not what the Church needs. We need to be catechized in the traditional spirit and go back to embracing Jesus's teaching without trying to update or change it to suit modern ways of life (41 to 55 years, Poland).

Another claimed:

The synodal way is evil. The church has always been hierarchical and should remained the same (26 to 40 years, India).

## 10.10.4 Transparency and accountability

Open responses clearly and consistently placed emphasis on the necessity for Catholic Church leadership to transform culture and increase transparency and accountability in all matters. Respondents frequently mentioned the need for transparent and accountable decision-making and management at all levels of the Church: parish, diocese and in the Holy See. For example, respondents raised the issues of:

The lack of transparency, including in the management of money and resources in general: goods, people, etc. (26 to 40 years, France) and Increase lay decision-making, transparency of finances, paying all taxes and contributions normally (41 to 55 years, Poland).

One respondent called for:

Transparency in church governance in terms of finances and decision-making, and more importantly, the issue of

gender violence and sexual abuse (56 to 70 years, Philippines).

Another wrote:

Transparency in everything ... A parish must be heard and respected when complaining about priests or religious who mistreat or abuse power and money. Another way to maintain yourself other than sacraments that cost so much (over 70 years, Mexico).

When writing about other issues in the Church, respondents often added statements about transparency and accountability. Respondents mentioned 'management by competencies', 'consequences', 'transparency in governance', 'oversight', 'accountability of leadership', 'restoration of trust', 'power accountability', 'integrity', 'information sharing' and 'justice'. Statements came from respondents in all age groups and regions of the world. This issue is further addressed in the following sections.

## 10.10.5 Economic management

Economic justice was a theme of many open responses. Respondents repeatedly noted their frustration at the lack of accountability and transparency in financial decision-making. These responses often stressed the Catholic Church's obligation to address corruption and provide economic oversight. Responses addressed the necessity for transparent financial administration at a global, diocesan, and parish level. Some noted the harm caused by corrupt governance, particularly to those already marginalised. One respondent said:

Corruption needs to be denounced, it wounds and kills the post-poor, marginalised, quilombola life (41 to 55 years, Brazil).

While in open responses financial strength and security were acknowledged as resources for the Church's social mission, there were expressions of anger and disillusionment at the wealth and privilege displayed by clerics. For example, one respondent wrote:

Power and privilege has had a corrupting influence on certain clerics, religious, and lay Catholics. The Gospel messages have been unfortunately buried (over 70 years, Australia).

Another respondent claimed such displays of affluence are a:

counter-witness for a church that wants to be close to the poor (56 to 70 years, France).

Many respondents condemned overt displays of power and wealth associated with clergy lifestyles as counter-witness to the Church's mission. For instance, one respondent stated:

Church leaders should focus more on primary evangelization and catechesis

and not just the building of structures and accumulation of wealth as happens in some places (41 to 55 years, Kenya).

Some referred to luxurious cars and housing, expensive overseas trips, lavish liturgical vestments, and extravagant church buildings. One respondent wrote:

The Church needs to consider its approach to money. Bishops in palaces and other extravagances in 2022 when thousands of millions are starving, homeless, displaced and living in poverty or are without access to water, education, or healthcare. It is a disgrace (41 to 55 years, Ireland).

A respondent who identified as a religious sister urged clerics to live

A more evangelical lifestyle, poorer, closer to the majority of what God's people live (56 to 70 years, Uruguay).

Open responses that mentioned financial misconduct, often linked it with other forms of abuse. A respondent referred to 'poverty and obedience' and claimed:

In my country, some priests live a double-sided life. What's worse, they have inappropriate affairs with women (41 to 55 years, Taiwan).

Oversight was understood as key in addressing economic mismanagement and misconduct. One respondent called for:

Better control systems and reviews of finances, so that it is not so easy in the future, that priests or bishops squander money. For example: gambling debts or a luxury bishop's seat (26 to 40 years, Germany).

Many open responses mentioned the financial exploitation of laity and consecrated persons in church workplaces.

## 10.10.6 Employment reform

Open responses consistently called for urgent reforms to address the unfair and inequitable employment of lay and consecrated persons in liturgical, ministry, and pastoral positions in Catholic organisations and parishes. Many respondents that discussed the need for employment reform used terms such as 'urgent', 'exploitation', 'exclusion', 'discrimination', and 'inequality'. One respondent claimed:

The abuse and use of people in the Church structure without a fair wage needs addressing. There is an expectation that people should work for free (i.e., youth pastoral workers) or for very little even though some have families, which technically is not aligned with the Catholic Social Teachings. It's really an abuse (41 to 55 years, Malaysia).

Another highlighted the need to address the issue of:

Low wages and working conditions of lay staff; exploitation of nuns (who sometimes are treated like servants); the question of priests/bishops wages and all the extra payments they earn ... lay people do pastoral work without receiving a penny (at least, in my reality) (41 to 55 years, Portugal).

A key theme of responses was the exploitation of women and other marginalised groups. One respondent wrote:

Encourage women to be visible members of parish work and community life and pay them. Do not assume they should be volunteers without pay (56 to 70 years, US).

Under resourcing was also recognised as problematic. A respondent who worked in First Nations ministry noted:

Under resourcing puts pressure on the few Indigenous women that are in the Church in leadership roles (41 to 55 years, Australia).

Several respondents expressed concern about the exploitation of nuns and religious persons in church workplaces. For instance:

Abuse of religious sisters must be taken more seriously, also economic abuse and sisters' working conditions (56 to 70 years, Sweden).

There were very few respondents who expressed satisfaction with their employment within the Church. Several open responses, however, pointed out that church positions were often unstable and inadequately paid. Repeatedly responses referred to a lack of recognition of skills and talents, exploitation, low (or no) pay, and poor working conditions. One respondent wrote:

I worked for free as a lay woman for the Church for over 30 years teaching classes to women and children ... one day the bishop of the Archdiocese called me to tell me that my feminist theology was not adequate and that I was suspended from all work for the Church. From that moment, I decided to distance myself from the Church and fight for another way of being Church (56 to 70 years, Mexico).

Many respondents claimed a lack of acknowledgement of their theological training and academic qualifications. For example, one respondent claimed:

Because I am a woman, I have to give proof of my studies or qualifications in order to be taken into account (56 to 70 years, Argentina).

Employment injustices perpetrated against women were repeatedly acknowledged as a form of sex discrimination or inequality. For example, one respondent asserted:

The Church should end discrimination against women immediately. Sex discrimination in employment is illegal in other contexts (56 to 70 years, Switzerland).

# 11. Key findings and recommendations

## 11.1 Key findings

We identify the following key findings based on the viewpoints of respondents expressed in closed and open questions:

1. Catholic identity was of great importance and a source of self-identity and meaning for a significant majority of respondents. Respondents' lived experience of Catholicism reflected the many different cultural and communal contexts within which their faith was practised.
2. Catholic identity was frequently described in terms of a relationship with Jesus and gospel values. Most respondents were supportive of ecumenism.
3. Respondents emphasised the importance of their faith, the centrality of the Eucharist to their lives, and their active participation in parishes and church communities, while also expressing high levels of frustration or dissatisfaction relating to their experiences.
4. There was a significant concern regarding the prevalence of sexual, spiritual, physical, and emotional abuse in church contexts.
5. Respondents highlighted the misuse and abuse of power as a central factor in historical and current sexual and gender-based harm.
6. Clericalism was identified by a substantial majority of respondents as an abuse of power and an indicator of a need for urgent reform measures.
7. Many respondents drew attention to a lack of accountability and transparency in church leadership and governance, particularly in the hierarchy's handling of sexual abuse allegations. This was a barrier to participation in church life.
8. Respondents varied in their priorities and perspectives, with age and region of residence playing a role in regard to particular issues. While most respondents sought some type of reform, there was a smaller group who was critical of change as a compromise with secular trends.
9. Inclusivity was identified and valued as a central Christian ethic.
10. Respondents conveyed concern for those who are marginalised by Catholic theology, doctrine, and liturgical practice, including LGBTIQ+ Catholics, divorced Catholics, and single parent Catholics. There were differing interpretations of what inclusion of LGBTIQ+ Catholics means in the life in the Church. A slim majority of respondents supported same-sex marriage.

- 11.** Respondents were concerned about racism in church contexts and expressed a desire for a culturally diverse and inclusive church for people of all needs, including those living with disabilities and mental health difficulties.
- 12.** There was strong support for the full inclusion of women in pastoral, liturgical, and governance leadership, as well as decision-making roles. This was connected with the need for recognition of women's contribution, particularly their unpaid labour to church life.
- 13.** Respondents expressed support for women preaching the homily during Mass and for their ordination to the diaconate and/or to the priesthood.
- 14.** Respondents strongly supported gender inclusive and culturally appropriate language in liturgical practices and church documents.
- 15.** Respondents sought greater respect for their freedom of conscience about sexual and reproductive decision-making. When respondents' agency was limited or dismissed it left them open to situations of gendered violence.
- 16.** Respondents noted apprehension about the future of Catholicism particularly when the contribution of women, young people, and families was not valued.
- 17.** Respondents called for greater action and commitment from church leadership to Catholic Social Teaching, particularly regarding issues related to climate change, economic justice, and poverty. Respondents expressed disagreement with priests and bishops promoting partisan political agendas.
- 18.** A less hierarchal and authoritarian model of church, with greater collaboration, dialogue, and shared responsibility between clergy and laity, was identified as urgently needed.
- 19.** Respondents were deeply concerned about economic justice in church affairs, including financial mismanagement, corruption, and the exploitation and lack of adequate pay for female church workers, both lay and religious.
- 20.** Despite disruptions, most respondents reported growth in faith and connection to community during the COVID pandemic.

## 11.2 Recommendations

The ISCW is one of the most extensive surveys of Catholic women ever undertaken. The substantial findings inform lasting and genuine change in church institutions, theology, and pastoral practices. We make the following recommendations:

- 1.** Recognise and respect the diversity of Catholic women in church leadership, documents, and organisational practices, including Synodal processes.
- 2.** Increase access for women and laity to leadership and decision-making roles across all levels of church governance, including equal representation in Synods.
- 3.** Prioritise and enact changes to Canon Law to permit women preaching the homily during Mass.
- 4.** Consider the ordination of women to the diaconate and/or priesthood as a legitimate expression of doctrinal development.
- 5.** Enact immediate reforms and produce guidelines to eliminate sexual, spiritual, physical, and emotional abuse in church contexts. Report perpetrators to civil authorities.
- 6.** Put in place ongoing formation, education, and professional supervision for clergy and laity in pastoral and leadership roles.
- 7.** Develop and enact practices and guidelines to respect the dignity and equality of all people in church contexts and to challenge all forms of discrimination and prejudice, including sexism, racism, and ableism.

- 8.** Ensure that church teaching is attuned to the lived realities of women's lives across social contexts and cultures.
- 9.** Respect women's freedom of conscience in matters of sexual and reproductive health and decision-making.
- 10.** Develop and enact changes to Catholic theology, doctrine, and liturgical practice to ensure women, LGBTIQ+ Catholics, divorced and remarried Catholics, and young people and families are valued and fully included in all aspects of church life.
- 11.** Address corruption and economic mismanagement by putting in place transparent and accountable decision-making and management practices. Ensure that all church workers are paid a fair and just wage.
- 12.** Encourage practices of synodality and respectful listening and dialogue to heal theological and ideological divides.
- 13.** Raise awareness of and promote theological and practical responses based on the precepts of Catholic social teaching to address issues including poverty, climate change, homelessness, war, and economic injustice.
- 14.** Prevent bishops and priests from preaching on and aligning the Church with partisan political issues.

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## 12.1 Vatican documents

CCC	<i>Catechism</i>	1993	The catechism of the Catholic Church <a href="https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTML">https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTML</a> (accessed 13 February 2023)
CCL	<i>Code of canon law</i>	2021	Code of canon law <a href="https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/cic_index_en.html">https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/cic_index_en.html</a> (accessed 13 February 2023)
HV	<i>Humane Vitae</i>	1968	Encyclical Letter of the Supreme Pontiff Paul VI on the Regulation of Birth <a href="https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_hu-manae-vitae.html">https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_hu-manae-vitae.html</a> (accessed 13 February 2023)
MD	<i>Mulieris Dignitatem</i>	1988	Apostolic Letter of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on the dignity and vocation of women on the occasion of the Marian year <a href="https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html">https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html</a> (accessed 13 February 2023)

# 13. Appendices

## 13.1 Appendix A: Abbreviations

<b>CSV</b>	Comma Separated Values	<b>LGBTIQ+</b>	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning.
<b>CWC</b>	Catholic Women's Council	<b>REDCap</b>	Research Electronic Data Capture
<b>CWS</b>	Catholic Women Speak	<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>ISCW</b>	International Survey of Catholic Women	<b>US</b>	United States of America

## 13.2 Appendix B: Glossary

<b>Ableism</b>	Discrimination in favour of able-bodied people.
<b>Acolyte</b>	A minister appointed to assist at liturgical celebrations.
<b>Baptism</b>	A sacrament of Christian initiation through which a person receives remission of sin and embarks on a new life in Jesus Christ (CCC, para. 1213 ff.).
<b>Bishop</b>	A priest who has an episcopal ordination through the fullness of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. He is designated as a successor of Jesus Christ and is the leader of a particular church or diocese entrusted to him (CCC, para. 1557).
<b>Catechesis</b>	The education of children, young people, and adults in the faith of the Catholic Church through the teaching of doctrine (CCC, para. 426-229). The Catechism of the Catholic Church is a compendium of Catholic doctrine intended for use in catechesis.
<b>Catechist</b>	The formal term given to a person engaged in catechesis.
<b>Clericalism</b>	The misappropriation of male, clerical authority which functions to set ordained clerics apart as unique, superior, and closer to God than non-clerics.
<b>Canon law</b>	The canons or rules which provide the norms for the good order of the Catholic Church in society. The canon laws that apply universally are included in the Codes of Canon Law.
<b>Consecrated person</b>	Individuals and members of religious institutes who make a life-long commitment and consecrate their life to God via a public profession of vows including poverty, chastity, and obedience (CCC, para. 944). Members of religious institutes can be required to take additional vows.
<b>Diaconate</b>	A third degree of hierarchy of the Sacrament of Holy Orders that follows bishop and priest. A deacon is ordained to the diaconate as a ministry of service (not priesthood) (CCC, para. 1569, 1571).
<b>Diocese</b>	A particular church or faith community under the care of a bishop. A diocese is generally a geographic area or a group of people of the same rite or language.
<b>Ecumenical</b>	Relating to or representing Christian unity.
<b>Ecumenism</b>	Promoting the unity among all Christian Churches.

<b>Eucharist</b>	A sacrament of Christian initiation and the sacramental action of thanksgiving to God that represents the liturgical celebration of the pascal mystery of Christ, known as the Mass (CCC, para. 1322).
<b>Episcopacy</b>	The government of church by bishops.
<b>Feminine genius theology</b>	A particular theology that claims womanhood involves the embodiment of certain qualities, which include receptivity, sensitivity, generosity, and physical and spiritual maternity.
<b>Gender complementarity</b>	A theological anthropology that describes men and women as embodying contrasting human natures, social roles, and responsibilities that corresponds with physical sexuality.
<b>Lector</b>	A person instituted to proclaim the readings from Scripture, with the exception of the Gospel.
<b>Magisterium</b>	The official teaching office of the Catholic Church, which is exercised by the pope and bishops.
<b>Mass</b>	The principal communal ritual of the Catholic Church.
<b>Misogyny</b>	An ideology and social practice where women face hostility in social systems or institutions dominated by a culture of masculinity simply because they are women. Misogyny upholds the moral or social order employing hostile or adverse consequences on women and girls as norm enforcement mechanisms (Manne 2017).
<b>Nun</b>	Consecrated women who take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience (CCC, para. 914). In this report, the terms religious sister and nun are used interchangeably.
<b>Ordination</b>	The rite of the Sacrament of Holy Orders which confers the order of bishop, priest, or deacon (CCC, para. 1538).
<b>Parish</b>	A community of Catholic adherents who are established within a particular diocese and whose pastoral care is delegated (by the diocesan bishop) to a pastor, typically a parish priest.
<b>Priest</b>	The second degree of hierarchy of the Sacrament of Holy Orders that follows bishop. Catholic priests are the most common clerical position and generally located at Parish level.
<b>Racism</b>	Prejudice or discrimination by an individual, community, or institution against a person or people on the basis of their membership of a particular racial or ethnic group.
<b>Religious woman</b>	See nun.
<b>Sacrament</b>	A sign or instrument of grace, instituted by Jesus Christ and dispensed to humanity through the work of the Holy Spirit (CCC, para. 774).
<b>Second Vatican Council</b>	An ecumenical council of the whole Catholic Church held from 1962 to 1965; it is typically referred to as Vatican II.
<b>Sexism</b>	Prejudice or discrimination of an individual or community on the basis of their sex.
<b>Theology of the Body</b>	Theological analysis on human sexuality produced by Pope John Paul II and disseminated during his Wednesday audiences between 1979 and 1984.
<b>Vatican II</b>	See Second Vatican Council.

## 13.3 Appendix C: Survey instrument

# Catholic Women Speak International Survey

To begin the survey, please answer the following screening questions:

Do you self-identify as a woman? Yes  No

Do you currently self-identify or have you previously self-identified as Catholic? Yes  No

Are you aged 18 years or over? Yes  No

Some of the questions in this survey deal with potentially sensitive issues and there is a small risk of psychological harm. All questions are optional, and you can skip a question if it causes you distress. Do you still want to participate in this survey? Yes  No

## Section 1: Women and the Church

Question 1: Thinking about your identity, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My Catholic identity is important to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I identify as an ecumenical Christian.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I no longer identify as Catholic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Question 2: In a couple of sentences please describe your current relationship with the Catholic Church. (Open Response)

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## Section 2: Women and the Church: Do we need change?

**Question 3: Thinking about the possible need for reform in the Catholic Church, to what extent do you agree or disagree with following statements?**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I support reform in the Catholic Church.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There is no need for any reform in the Catholic Church.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Radical reform is needed in the Catholic Church.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Without reform there is no place for me in the Catholic Church.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Section 3: Women and the Church: What are the issues?

**Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Women should be fully included at all levels of church leadership.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clericalism (the misuse of authority and power by male clerics) is damaging the Catholic Church.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Catholic social teaching is a good resource for social justice action.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Climate change is an urgent challenge that the whole church must address.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Language used in liturgy and church documents should be gender inclusive.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Women need to have freedom of conscience with regard to their sexual and reproductive decisions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
LGBTIQ persons must be fully included and respected in all church activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The sacrament of marriage should be extended to same sex couples.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Remarriage after civil divorce should be allowed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Women preachers should be able to give the homily during Mass.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Women should be eligible for ordination to the priesthood.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Church leaders are not doing enough to address the perpetration and cover-up of sexual abuse.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Church leaders need to address other forms of abuse, including abuse of power and spiritual harm.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Question 5: Are there any other issues that church leadership needs to address? (Open response)**

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**Section 4: Women and the Church: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic**

**Question 6: Thinking about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your participation in the Catholic Church, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I was affected by not being able to attend Mass in person during the pandemic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My personal faith was deepened during the pandemic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I appreciated the opportunity to participate in worship online.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I do not intend to return to regular Mass attendance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I found new ways to engage with my community during the pandemic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Section 5: Women and the Church: Please tell us a little about yourself

### Question 7: What is your age range?

	Under 25 years	26-40 years	41-55 years	56-70 years	Over 70 years
What is your age range?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Question 8: What geographic region of the world are you currently residing in?

Afghanistan <input type="checkbox"/>	Albania <input type="checkbox"/>	Algeria <input type="checkbox"/>	Andorra <input type="checkbox"/>	Angola <input type="checkbox"/>	Antigua & Deps <input type="checkbox"/>
Argentina <input type="checkbox"/>	Armenia <input type="checkbox"/>	Australia <input type="checkbox"/>	Austria <input type="checkbox"/>	Azerbaijan <input type="checkbox"/>	Bahamas <input type="checkbox"/>
Bahrain <input type="checkbox"/>	Bangladesh <input type="checkbox"/>	Barbados <input type="checkbox"/>	Belarus <input type="checkbox"/>	Belgium <input type="checkbox"/>	Belize <input type="checkbox"/>
Benin <input type="checkbox"/>	Bhutan <input type="checkbox"/>	Bolivia <input type="checkbox"/>	Bosnia <input type="checkbox"/>	Herzegovina <input type="checkbox"/>	Botswana <input type="checkbox"/>
Brazil <input type="checkbox"/>	Brunei <input type="checkbox"/>	Bulgaria <input type="checkbox"/>	Burkina <input type="checkbox"/>	Burundi <input type="checkbox"/>	Cambodia <input type="checkbox"/>
Cameroon <input type="checkbox"/>	Canada <input type="checkbox"/>	Cape Verde <input type="checkbox"/>	Central African Rep <input type="checkbox"/>	Chad <input type="checkbox"/>	Chile <input type="checkbox"/>
China <input type="checkbox"/>	Colombia <input type="checkbox"/>	Comoros <input type="checkbox"/>	Congo <input type="checkbox"/>	Democratic Republic of Congo <input type="checkbox"/>	Costa Rica <input type="checkbox"/>
Croatia <input type="checkbox"/>	Cuba <input type="checkbox"/>	Cyprus <input type="checkbox"/>	Czech Republic <input type="checkbox"/>	Denmark <input type="checkbox"/>	Djibouti <input type="checkbox"/>
Dominica <input type="checkbox"/>	Dominican Republic <input type="checkbox"/>	East Timor <input type="checkbox"/>	Ecuador <input type="checkbox"/>	Egypt <input type="checkbox"/>	El Salvador <input type="checkbox"/>
France <input type="checkbox"/>	Gabon <input type="checkbox"/>	Gambia <input type="checkbox"/>	Georgia <input type="checkbox"/>	Germany <input type="checkbox"/>	Ghana <input type="checkbox"/>
Greece <input type="checkbox"/>	Grenada <input type="checkbox"/>	Guatemala <input type="checkbox"/>	Guinea <input type="checkbox"/>	Guinea-Bissau <input type="checkbox"/>	Guyana <input type="checkbox"/>
Haiti <input type="checkbox"/>	Honduras <input type="checkbox"/>	Hungary <input type="checkbox"/>	Iceland <input type="checkbox"/>	India <input type="checkbox"/>	Indonesia <input type="checkbox"/>
Iran <input type="checkbox"/>	Iraq <input type="checkbox"/>	Ireland <input type="checkbox"/>	Israel <input type="checkbox"/>	Italy <input type="checkbox"/>	Ivory Coast <input type="checkbox"/>
Jamaica <input type="checkbox"/>	Japan <input type="checkbox"/>	Jordan <input type="checkbox"/>	Kazakhstan <input type="checkbox"/>	Kenya <input type="checkbox"/>	Kiribati <input type="checkbox"/>
Korea North <input type="checkbox"/>	Korea South <input type="checkbox"/>	Kosovo <input type="checkbox"/>	Kuwait <input type="checkbox"/>	Kyrgyzstan <input type="checkbox"/>	Laos <input type="checkbox"/>
Latvia <input type="checkbox"/>	Lebanon <input type="checkbox"/>	Lesotho <input type="checkbox"/>	Liberia <input type="checkbox"/>	Libya <input type="checkbox"/>	Liechtenstein <input type="checkbox"/>
Lithuania <input type="checkbox"/>	Luxembourg <input type="checkbox"/>	Macedonia <input type="checkbox"/>	Madagascar <input type="checkbox"/>	Malawi <input type="checkbox"/>	Malaysia <input type="checkbox"/>
Maldives <input type="checkbox"/>	Mali <input type="checkbox"/>	Malta <input type="checkbox"/>	Marshall Islands <input type="checkbox"/>	Mauritania <input type="checkbox"/>	Mauritius <input type="checkbox"/>
Mexico <input type="checkbox"/>	Micronesia <input type="checkbox"/>	Moldova <input type="checkbox"/>	Monaco <input type="checkbox"/>	Mongolia <input type="checkbox"/>	Montenegro <input type="checkbox"/>
Morocco <input type="checkbox"/>	Mozambique <input type="checkbox"/>	Myanmar <input type="checkbox"/>	Namibia <input type="checkbox"/>	Nauru <input type="checkbox"/>	Nepal <input type="checkbox"/>
Netherlands <input type="checkbox"/>	New Zealand <input type="checkbox"/>	Nicaragua <input type="checkbox"/>	Niger <input type="checkbox"/>	Nigeria <input type="checkbox"/>	Norway <input type="checkbox"/>
Oman <input type="checkbox"/>	Pakistan <input type="checkbox"/>	Palau <input type="checkbox"/>	Palestine <input type="checkbox"/>	Panama <input type="checkbox"/>	Papua New Guinea <input type="checkbox"/>
Paraguay <input type="checkbox"/>	Peru <input type="checkbox"/>	Philippines <input type="checkbox"/>	Poland <input type="checkbox"/>	Portugal <input type="checkbox"/>	Qatar <input type="checkbox"/>
Romania <input type="checkbox"/>	Russian Federation <input type="checkbox"/>	Rwanda <input type="checkbox"/>	St Kitts & Nevis <input type="checkbox"/>	St Lucia <input type="checkbox"/>	Saint Vincent & the Grenadines <input type="checkbox"/>
Samoa <input type="checkbox"/>	San Marino <input type="checkbox"/>	Sao Tome & Principe <input type="checkbox"/>	Saudi Arabia <input type="checkbox"/>	Senegal <input type="checkbox"/>	Serbia <input type="checkbox"/>
Seychelles <input type="checkbox"/>	Sierra Leone <input type="checkbox"/>	Singapore <input type="checkbox"/>	Slovakia <input type="checkbox"/>	Slovenia <input type="checkbox"/>	Solomon Islands <input type="checkbox"/>
Somalia <input type="checkbox"/>	South Africa <input type="checkbox"/>	South Sudan <input type="checkbox"/>	Spain <input type="checkbox"/>	Sri Lanka <input type="checkbox"/>	Sudan <input type="checkbox"/>
Suriname <input type="checkbox"/>	Swaziland <input type="checkbox"/>	Sweden <input type="checkbox"/>	Switzerland <input type="checkbox"/>	Syria <input type="checkbox"/>	Taiwan <input type="checkbox"/>
Tajikistan <input type="checkbox"/>	Tanzania <input type="checkbox"/>	Thailand <input type="checkbox"/>	Togo <input type="checkbox"/>	Tonga <input type="checkbox"/>	Trinidad & Tobago <input type="checkbox"/>
Tunisia <input type="checkbox"/>	Turkey <input type="checkbox"/>	Turkmenistan <input type="checkbox"/>	Tuvalu <input type="checkbox"/>	Uganda <input type="checkbox"/>	Ukraine <input type="checkbox"/>
United Arab Emirates <input type="checkbox"/>	United Kingdom <input type="checkbox"/>	United States <input type="checkbox"/>	Uruguay <input type="checkbox"/>	Uzbekistan <input type="checkbox"/>	Vanuatu <input type="checkbox"/>
Vatican City <input type="checkbox"/>	Venezuela <input type="checkbox"/>	Vietnam <input type="checkbox"/>	Yemen <input type="checkbox"/>	Zambia <input type="checkbox"/>	Zimbabwe <input type="checkbox"/>

### Question 9: Is there anything else you would like to add? (Open Response)

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