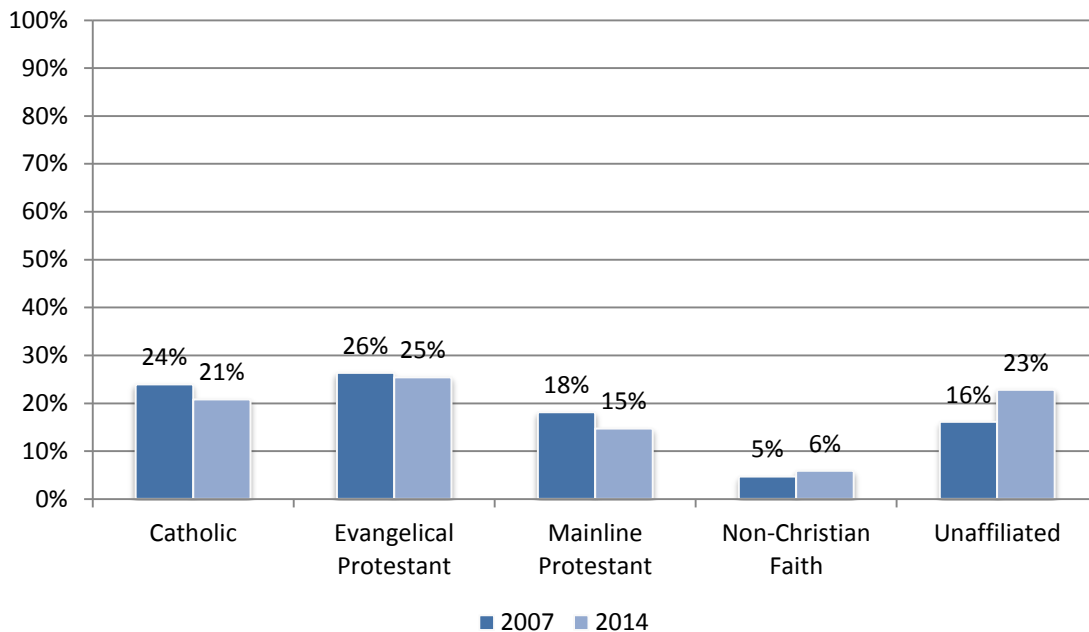


**Institutional Research Update (January 2016)**

This month's IR update focuses on a key demographic change in the US religious landscape which will likely have implications for Saint Mary's moving forward as recent evidence suggests changes are already underway to the religious identification of Saint Mary's undergraduates and at Catholic institutions nationally. From 2007 to 2014, the percentage of the US population not affiliated with any particular religion has grown from 16% to 23% an increase of 19 million people. Among Millennials born between 1981 and 1996, the growth in those unaffiliated with any particular religion is even starker growing from 25% in 2007 to 35% in 2014. The percentage of millennials identifying as Catholic has declined from 22% to 16% in that same seven year span. Perhaps not surprisingly, both Saint Mary's and other Catholic four-year institutions have seen declines in the percentage of its first-year undergraduates identifying as Catholic and increases in the percentage not identifying with any particular faith tradition during this time period.

The data presented in this study come from the Pew Research Center's 2014 Religious Landscape Study and the CIRP First-Year Survey from the Higher Education Research Institute. Links to the full Pew studies can be found at the end of this note.

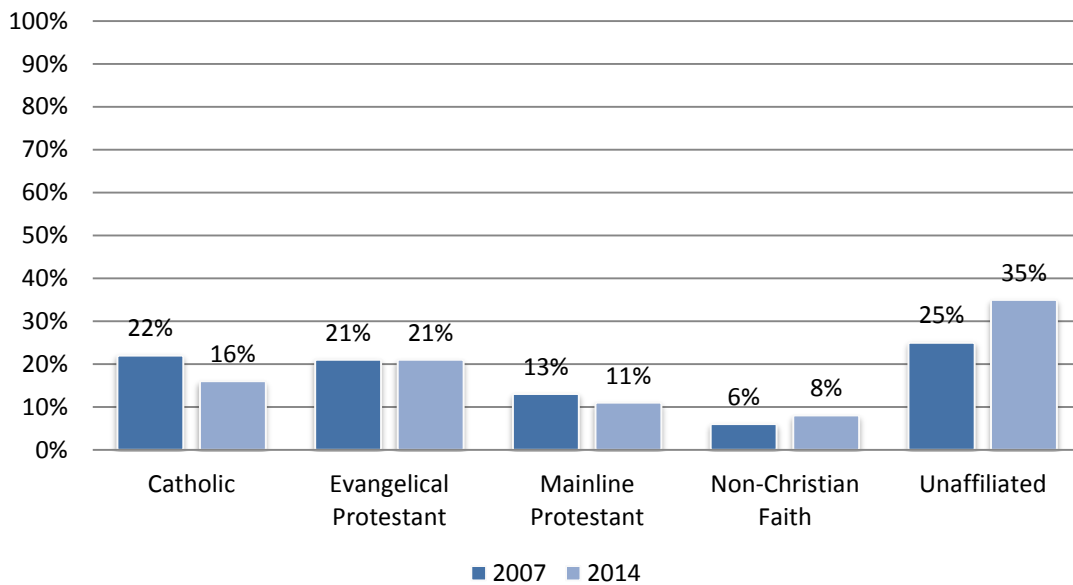
**Chart 1: Religious Affiliation of US Adult Population Between 2007 and 2014**



Source: 2014 Religious Landscape Study, Pew Research Center

- Among all US Adults, the share of Christians as a percent of the population has declined approximately 8 percentage points from 78.4% in 2007 to 70.6%.
- The share of Catholics among all US Adults has declined from 24% to 21% a decline of more than 3 million in total.
- Those not identifying with any particular faith tradition increased from 16% to 23% from 2007 to 2014, or about 19 million adults.

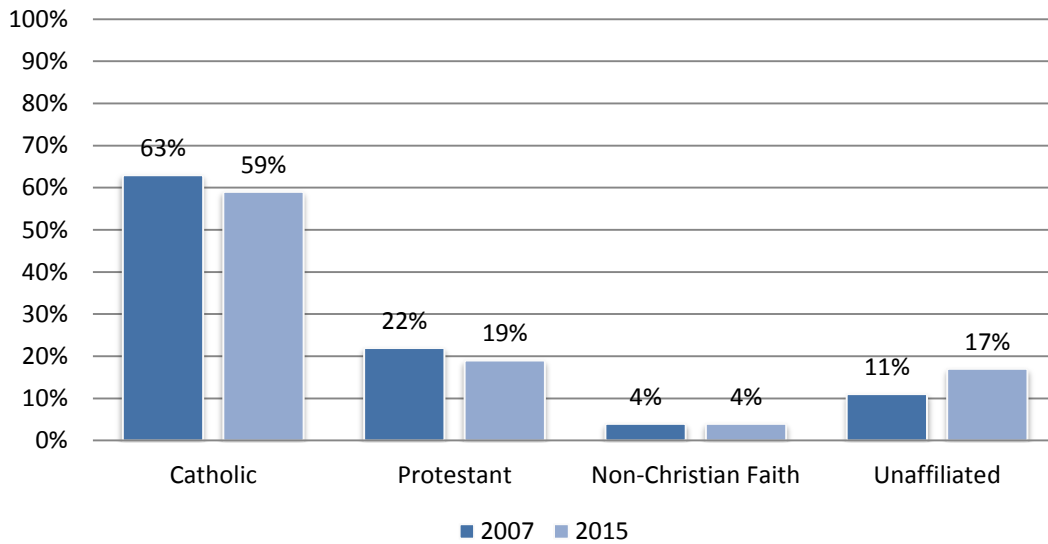
**Chart 2: Religious Affiliation of US Millennials (born between 1981 and 1996)**



Source: 2014 Religious Landscape Study, Pew Research Center

- Among US Millennials, the changes are even more pronounced. In 2007, about 25% of the Millennials reported not identifying with a faith tradition but by 2014, that percentage had swelled to 35%.
- Millennials who identify as Catholic have declined from 22% in 2007 to 16% in 2014.
- Increases in identification with non-Christian faiths have been seen among millennials from 2007 to 2014.

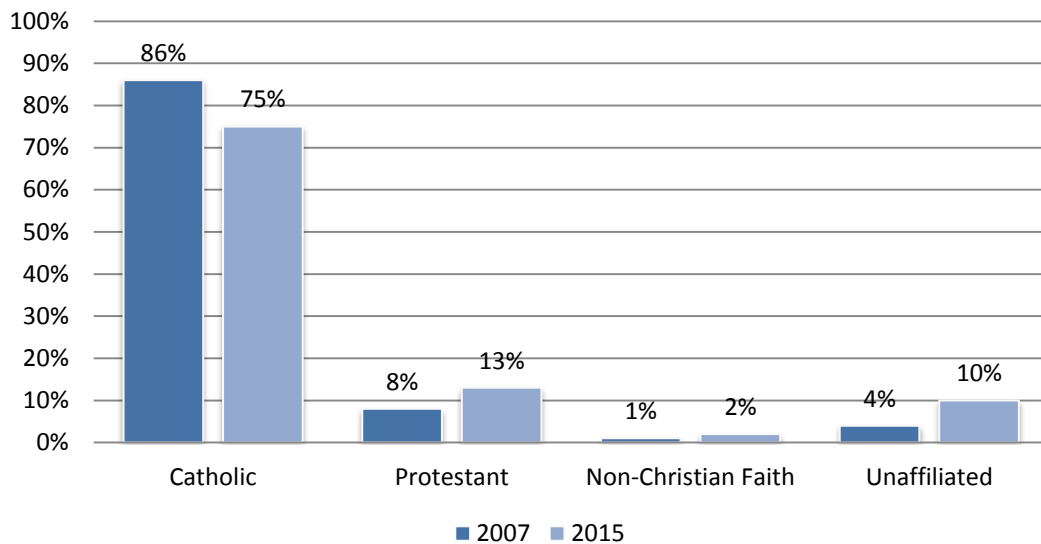
**Chart 3: Religious Affiliation of First-Year Students at Catholic Four-Year Institutions Nationally Between 2007 and 2015**



Source: CIRP First-Year Survey, Higher Education Research Institute

- The national trends documented by the Pew Study have also been documented at other Catholic four-year institutions as both declines in the percentage of Catholic and other Christians have occurred among first-year undergraduates while increases have been seen among those not identifying with a faith tradition.

**Chart 4: Religious Affiliation of Saint Mary’s First-Year Undergraduate Students Between 2007 and 2015**



Source: CIRP First-Year Survey, Higher Education Research Institute

- Changes in religious identification of first-year undergraduates at Saint Mary's have been documented during this same time period based on data collected in the CIRP First-Year Survey. In 2007, 86% of first-years identified as Catholic compared to 75% of the first-year class entering in 2015.
- Aligning with national trends, increases have been documented in the percentage of first-years not identifying with any particular faith tradition (4% in 2007 to 10% in 2015).

## **Conclusion**

Significant demographic changes as it relates to religious identification are occurring nationally among US Adults. These shifts point to a decline in identification with organized faith traditions and an increase in those not identifying with any particular faith tradition. Evidence of this shift nationally is now evident in the student religious identification at Catholic Colleges and Universities as well as Saint Mary's College. This presents unique opportunities and challenges for the College moving forward as the ways students relate to and interact with faith and spirituality continues to evolve.

## **About the Data**

*The 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study is a nationally representative telephone survey of 35,071 adults. This is the second time the Pew Research Center has conducted a Religious Landscape Study. The first was conducted in 2007, also with a telephone survey of more than 35,000 Americans.*

*Full reports and interactive data available online at:*

<http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>

<http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/>

*The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) CIRP First-Year Survey is the longest running survey of first-year students at higher education institutions nationally currently in its 50<sup>th</sup> year. Saint Mary's participates annually in this survey of first-year students conducted during orientation just prior to classes beginning.*