

2022

# Canada's Spiritual Landscape



Canadian  
Bible Society

# Introduction

Today, Canada is increasingly multicultural, multiethnic and multireligious. As we look at Canada's spiritual landscape, there is a strong focus on secularization and declining church numbers - which may give us only a limited view of Canada's spiritual dynamic. The Canadian Bible Society in partnership with Cardus contracted with Angus Reid to survey a representative sample of the Canadian population to understand the type of spirituality that exists in Canada today, to equip faith leaders to minister to their communities. This study is based on data compiled from nine representative surveys of the Canadian population from 2017 to 2022.



**The Spectrum of Spirituality Index developed by Cardus and the Angus Reid Institute in 2017 has seven spiritual indicators.**

1. Belief in God or a higher power
2. Belief in life after death
3. How important is it for a parent to teach their children about religious beliefs
4. How often, if at all, a person feels they experience God's presence
5. How often, if at all, a person prays to God or a higher power
6. How often, if at all, a person reads the Bible, Quran, or other sacred text
7. How often, if at all, a person attends religious services (other than weddings or funerals)



## A Portrait of Spirituality in 2022

A brief snapshot into where Canadians land in their spirituality from 2017 to 2022 suggests a shift among younger Canadians, women, and certain income earners since 2017.



### Religiously Committed

- 16 percent of the population
- More female (58 versus 42 percent male)
- The most public about their faith (92 percent)
- 74 percent - Evangelical Christians, 50 percent - Muslims, 9 percent- Mainline Protestants and 14 percent- Roman Catholics
- 26 percent -immigrants and 34 percent - visible minorities.



### Privately Faithful

- 19 percent of the population
- 31 percent - women aged 55 years and older, an increase of 8 percent since 2017
- 42 percent Sikhs and 43 percent Hindus
- The highest percentage of lower income earners in the index
- 32 percent - annual\*HHI less than \$50,000.



### Spiritually Uncertain

- 47 percent of the population
- 49 percent of native-born Canadians
- 54 percent of Canadians not raised in a faith
- 56 percent of Mainline Protestants, 52 percent Roman Catholics and 48 percent of Jews.



### Non-religious

- 19 percent of the population.
- The highest percentage of younger Canadians (46 percent)
- 36 percent HHI more than \$100,000 a year, an increase of 15 percent since 2017
- Since 2017, the percentage of women aged 18 – 34 in this group has increased from 16 to 24 percent.

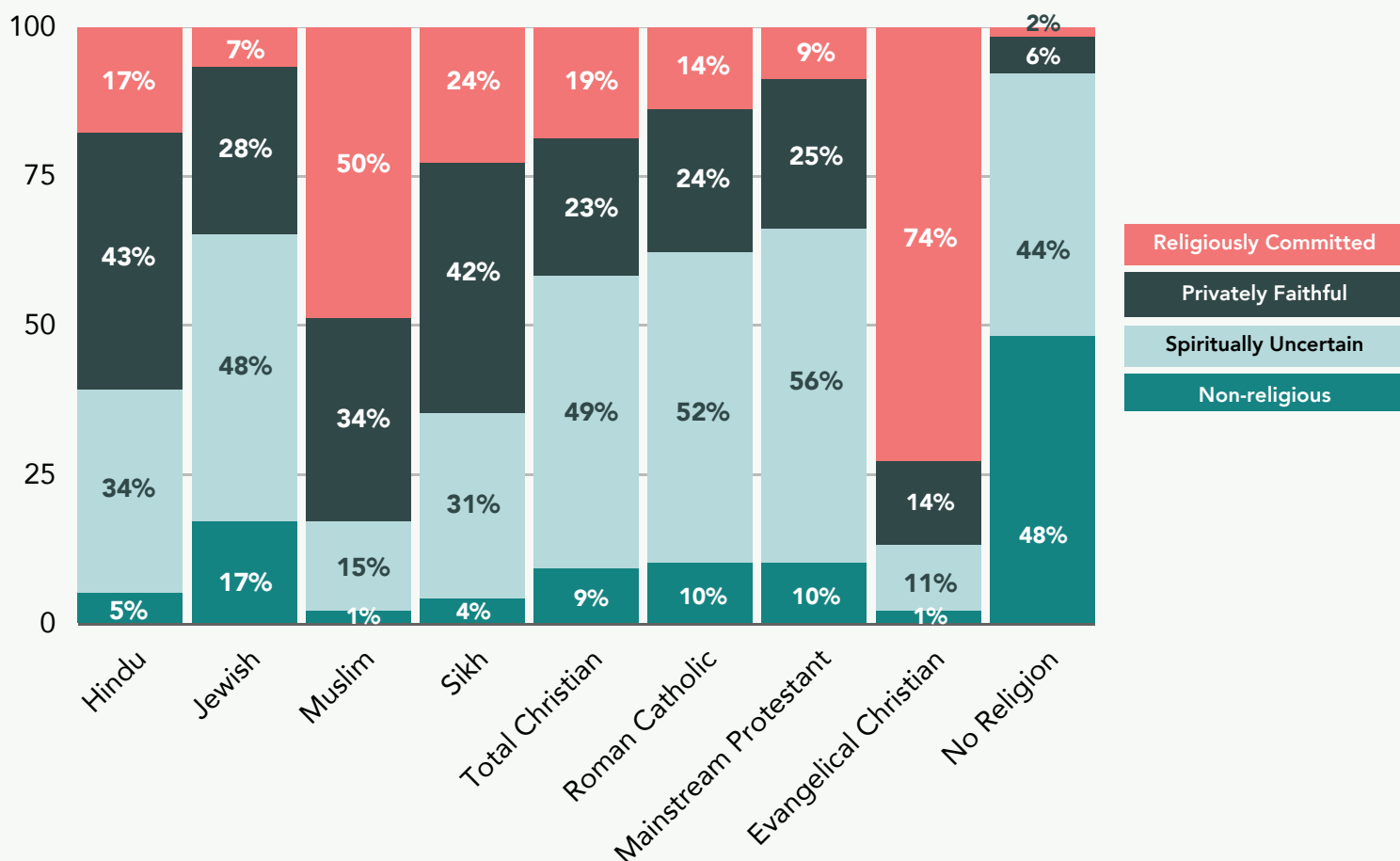
\*HHI - Household Income



While the percentage of Canadians who feature in the Religiously Committed and Privately Faithful has been in overall decline since the Spectrum’s inception, the Spiritually Uncertain group has seen the largest growth of any group since 2017 (up from 39 percent in 2018 to 47 in 2022).

In summary, in 2022, 74 percent of those who identify as Evangelical Christian fell into the Religiously Committed group, followed by Muslims (50 percent) and Sikhs (20 percent). Canadians who identify themselves as Mainline Protestants have the highest percentage of any other religious group in the Spiritually Uncertain category (56 percent) followed by Roman Catholics (52 percent) and Jews (48 percent).

## Spectrum of Spirituality Composite, by Religious Identity, 2022



# Canada's Spiritual Landscape: 2017 to 2022

## Belief in God or a Higher Power:

B.C (37) and Quebec (49) residents have the highest percentage of people who do not share this belief. Younger Canadians under 35 years of age are less likely than their older counterparts to share this belief (57 vs 67 percent, 2022). This belief jumped from 46 percent (2020, men under 35 years of age) to 56 percent (2022), as well as from 63 percent (2020, women, 35- 54 years) to 70 percent (2022).

## Belief in Life after Death:

54 percent of immigrants who have lived in Canada for 21 years or more hold this belief compared to 66 percent of more recent immigrants. This belief has increased among all income levels since 2020, with the most growth among the lowest income earners – 65 percent with a HHI less than \$50,000 a year.

## Importance of Parents to Teach Their Children Religious Beliefs:

While 69 percent of Canadians aged 55 and above indicated the highest agreement among age groups about the importance of teaching children about their religious beliefs, only 45 percent aged 35 or younger agree (54 percent, 2017). This belief is shared by 51 percent of Atlantic Canada residents and 67 percent Albertans.

## How Often a Person Feels They Experience God's Presence:

Men aged 35-54 are less likely than any other age and gender group to feel God's presence (56 percent say they have never felt God's presence). 45 percent immigrants suggest they have this experience at least once a month compared to 25 percent of Canadian-born respondents.



## Frequency of Prayer to God or a Higher Power:

In 2022, 36 percent of the Canadian population reported that they pray once a month or more. The difference between women and men is 42 versus 30 percent. When 56 percent of immigrants pray at least once a month, only 33 percent of native-born Canadians do.

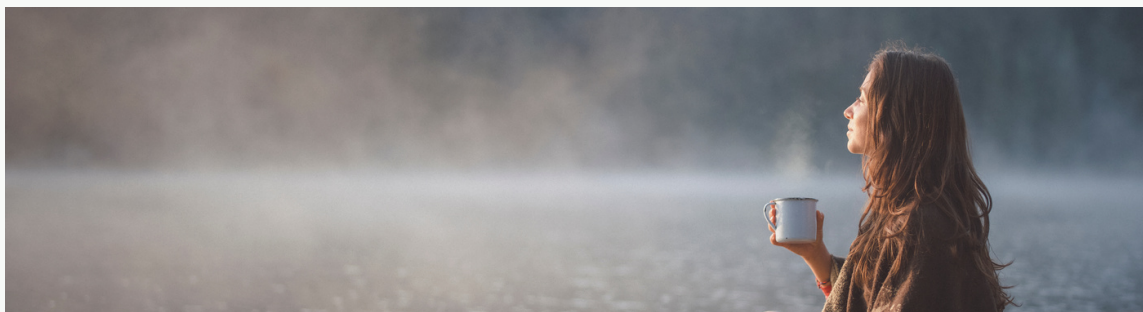
## Frequency of Reading the Bible, Quran, or Other Sacred Texts:

56 percent of Canadians and 73% of Quebec residents report they never read a sacred text. 60% of Canadians who make \$100,000 or more a year say they never read a sacred text.

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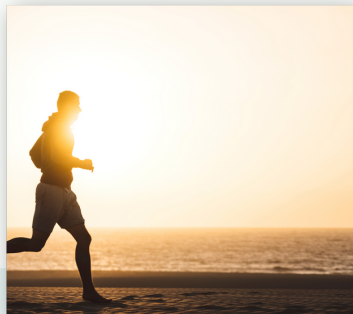
## Frequency of Attending Religious Services:

While 27 percent of those who identify as Muslim attend religious services weekly or more often, the percentages of people who identify as Jewish (8) and Christian (15) are low. The percentage of Christians who attend religious services weekly or more is low for Roman Catholics (9), Mainline Protestants (7) and 59 percent for Evangelical Christians.



# Journey of Faith in Canada

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## Lapsed & Converted:

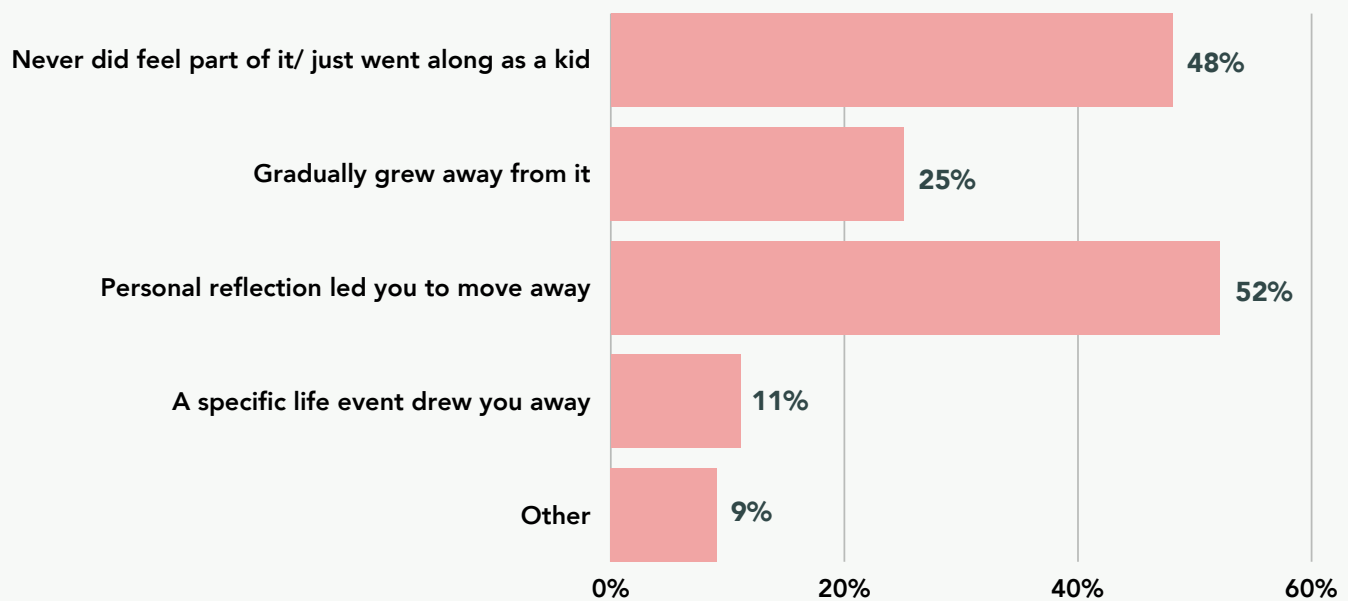
Survey data from 2021 and 2022 have been combined to answer questions relating to who is leaving, joining, or staying in their childhood tradition and the reasons for these shifts. While the research maps the faith journey of all key faith groups, for the sake of this report, faith journeys of Roman Catholics and Evangelical Christians are highlighted.

- Of those raised Roman Catholic, 77 percent identify as Roman Catholic in 2022, 17 percent no longer have a religious identity, 4 percent identify as either Evangelical Christian, Mainline Protestant or another Christian denomination and 2 percent left for a non-Christian faith.
- Of those who lapsed, the top two reasons for leaving were that of personal reflection (52 percent) and never feeling a part of it and just going along with it as a kid (48 percent). 72 percent indicated they did not miss anything about their Roman Catholic tradition and 95 percent expressed that they never planned to return to their childhood faith.
- Of those who were raised in an Evangelical Christian tradition, 63 percent stayed in the faith, while 17% left for no religion.
- 25% of self-identifying Evangelical Christians today converted from no religious tradition, compared to 18% of those who joined from a different Christian denomination.

*Of those raised in a Christian tradition, 71% stayed in the faith, while 7% changed denominations and 19% left for no religion, and 3% changed faiths entirely.*



# Reasons for Leaving Christian Tradition for No Religion



## Faith in Public Life:

- Canadians who identify as Evangelical Christians expressed the highest propensity to be public about their faith, followed by Muslims and Sikhs.
- When asked if they are public about their faith, the number of self-identifying Roman Catholics who agree decreased from 64% (2019) to 46% (2022).
- 81% of those who identify as Evangelical Christians tend to think Canadians who hold public positions should feel free to speak and act based on their religious beliefs, compared to 48% of Canadians who reported their religion as Muslim and 38% of Sikhs.
- **Younger cohorts are slightly more likely than other age groups to think Canadians in public life should be able to speak and act freely about their spirituality.**





# Conclusion

The most obvious finding to emerge is the **“shrinking middle:”** more Canadians find themselves in the Spiritually Uncertain category, rather than in the Religiously Committed or Non-religious groups. Since 2017, even the number of Canadians who find themselves as Privately Faithful is declining across Roman Catholics and Mainline Protestants. A broader theme of authenticity is apparent throughout Canadians’ journey of faith, particularly among younger generations, the immigrant population and those who convert to a new faith. Overall, those who identify as non-religious are increasingly intolerant of religion in public life.

## Key points from panel discussions with a wide range of Canadian Christian leaders:

### 1. Demographics: Challenges & Opportunities:

The 18 to 34-year-old cohort is consistently religious and 70 - 80% of them are religiously committed. Several students are transferring to Christian Universities like Redeemer because of uncertainty about their ability to be explicit about their faith in a public institution. There's an increasing sense that one's faith should be private and shouldn't enter public dialogue in those spaces.

**Digitization of faith is a very vital aspect in today's world.** The millennials' sense of what it means to have a religious worship participation is much different than their parents'. Their own sense of identity is not first and foremost embodied in the flesh and physical, it's embodied in their digital spaces. Some suggest churches haven't fully wrapped their minds around what this digital identity means for young people.

The most impactful experience young people have in growing in or sharing the faith is peer-to-peer, and friendships and relationships have a lot to do with trust and open conversations. While engaging with millennials or students one on one; they're looking for authenticity. Even if one has a disagreement - say around issues of sexuality, people want to know that one is authentic and will be respectful. On the contrary, if one is inauthentic, it was observed that there's no ground for conversation.



## 2. The Lapsed & The Converted:

When many people left during the pandemic, it left church leaders thinking about what could be done about it. While there are no clear answers to this question, it was also observed that marriages and child baptisms are on the decline in some churches.

**Often leaders are focused on the institution and holding up stereotypes instead of studying Christ and the Gospels.** The priorities need to be about Christ and not about the diocese and related things.

Recalling the 1985 Supreme court decision in the Big M Drug Mart case which struck down the Lord's Day Act on the grounds that it contravened the freedom of religion and conscience provision, it was observed that with it the Sunday evening services disappeared quietly.

Sabbath keeping became an individual decision, and as people didn't have communities around them that were helping them do that, people stopped going to church, and it became less important in their lives. In due course of time, their attention and their community life lapsed. This led to a lapse of faith, because until then people had upheld each other.

Church leaders agreed that in our country today, it is the new Canadian churches that are the most active and they spend a lot of time with each other.

## 3. The Shrinking Middle:

Since 2018, the number of Spiritually Uncertain Roman Catholics has grown from 40 to 52 percent in 2022, while those who find themselves in the Religiously Committed and Privately Faithful groups combined have fallen by 13 percent. **For Mainline Protestants, the Spiritually Uncertain group has grown from 48 (2018) to 56 percent (2022).**

Some observed that even adult children who live in a secular world and have friends that have moved away to the Spiritually Uncertain group, when they start raising children, they shift towards a conservative mindset and think about how important faith is while raising a child.

One of the challenges going forward is getting back to what the church is supposed to be expressing and giving expression to the kingdom of God in our midst, and not simply being a place where people have a certain ethnic, linguistic, or cultural grouping.



## 4. How Do We Respond?

If we were to ask this question a hundred years ago, the answer would be 'to preach the Gospel.' Citing the analogy of the Australian ranches where people dig wells to keep sheep closer rather than build fences (which is daunting owing to the sheer size of the ranches), the wells were compared to the Gospel.

**Leaders must check if people are keeping closer to the well rather than checking if they are moving towards the fence.** We need to enable people to encounter God. Whether we're talking about the next generation or the elderly, what they want to notice is that God is real. Examples of refugees who came to Christ through miraculous encounters show that they encountered God as Emmanuel, before they encountered God as Saviour.

Some stressed the need to spend time and build relationships in the community and suggested that being authentic means being authentic about our faith in Christ. Citing the immigrant experience, it was observed that Canada is a pluralistic society today that's not Christendom. It's the reality and we need to understand the dynamics of the pluralistic society.

There's a dynamism in the diaspora churches, which goes to the second and third generation. There is a need to delve deeper into the dynamics of the diaspora churches to learn more about what holds them together – whether it's a cultural factor or if there is a spiritual element.



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