

# CATHOLIC LEAGUE SURVEY ANALYSIS

**Bill Donohue**

*The following is an analysis of our survey of Catholics conducted for us by McLaughlin & Associates. They did a great job. Those who would like to see the raw data can access it on our website.*

*I had a hand in framing several of the questions; I put my sociological training to good use. Too often pollsters ask questions designed to elicit a response that dovetails with their own political leanings. Our survey asks a number of questions that other surveys of Catholics would never ask.*

*How accurate is the survey? If all Catholics were asked to respond, there is a 95% chance that the results of this survey would not be off by more than 3.4%, (higher or lower). Unlike other polls of Catholics, we made sure to include Hispanics (they were 35% of the respondents); we paid extra to have the answers of those who responded in Spanish translated. In short, we are proud of the scientific nature of the poll.*

*The numbers presented have been rounded and may not equal 100%.*

In terms of political preferences, 39% of the respondents were Democrats; 27% were Republicans; 34% were Independents. In terms of ideology, 30% were liberals; 36% moderates; 34% conservatives.

Respondents were asked what they thought about the pope, the president and the speaker of the house: 43% said Pope Francis made the Church better; 10% said he made it worse; 39% said it remained the same. When asked, "Joe Biden is a devout Catholic," 40% agreed and 32% disagreed; 28% said they didn't

know. Rep. Nancy Pelosi didn't do too well: 29% agreed she is "a devout Catholic"; 32% disagreed; 38% didn't know.

In terms of Mass attendance, 38% attend weekly; 13% monthly; 49% rarely. Those most likely to attend weekly are Hispanics (42%), African Americans (50%), Asian/Other (46%), men (45%), married (43%), Republicans (42%), and Catholics in the South (41%). The least likely include whites (34%) and women (32%).

Yet when asked how important your Catholic faith is in your life, 9-in-10 (88%) said it was important. One of the most encouraging findings was the large number of Catholics who rarely or never attend church who said that their Catholic faith was important to them: 78% said it was! Might they be persuaded to return to church more often?

Are the news media biased against Catholics? A majority (57%) agree that it is, and only 31% disagree. Republicans are more critical than Democrats: 74% said the media are biased; 46% of Democrats and 56% of Independents agree.

Does this matter? Yes. It no doubt helps to explain why 62% of Catholics agree that "it is getting harder to practice your faith and express your faith publicly in America." While two out of three practicing Catholics (weekly and monthly churchgoers) say it is getting harder, even 58% of those who rarely or never go to church agree that it is.

Is the Catholic Church an important voice of morality in America? You bet it is: 75% say it is. This includes 86% of weekly and 74% of monthly churchgoers; almost 7-in-10 (68%) of who those who rarely or never go to church also agree.

We know that the clergy sexual abuse scandal took its toll on Catholics, but now that the evidence shows it is mostly in the past—despite what the naysayers believe—it is heartening to learn that six-in-ten (59%) Catholics say "the Church has learned from its mistakes and is now doing everything it can to help keep children safe." Only 29% disagree. The more often

one goes to church the more optimistic that person is.

Respondents were given 13 issues to choose from regarding what they believe is the most important job of the Catholic Church. The top six answers were: promote family values; poverty/homelessness; Catholic values; religious liberty; Catholic education; and unborn/adoption services.

When asked if the Catholic Church should speak out more on moral issues, the results were auspicious: by a margin of 74% to 19%, respondents answered affirmatively. This is good news for those clergy members who may have been intimidated from speaking out more—the laity want you to speak out more!

More good news: 73% of Catholics identify as personally pro-life; 23% say they are pro-choice (most of them say their faith is not important to them). Church attendance matters: the figures for weekly churchgoers, monthly churchgoers and those who rarely or never attend are 68%, 52% and 41% respectively.

How does this play out? When asked to agree or disagree about the propriety of the government forcing Catholic doctors and Catholic hospitals to perform abortions or sex-transition services against their will, 72% said the government should not do so; 19% disagreed. Even seven-in-ten (69%) of those who rarely or never go to church say the government should not do so. Though pro-choice Catholics were the least opposed to government coercion, the majority of them (57%) said it was wrong.

Respondents were asked about gay and transgender issues. “While it is wrong for small businessmen to refuse services to gays, they have a religious right not to provide services that force them to approve of same-sex marriage.” While 47% agreed, almost as many, 42% disagreed. The answers were decided in a big way by church attendance—those who go to church the most were the most likely to agree (59%).

This suggests that the more exposure a Catholic has to the secular culture, the more likely he is to take a liberal position on this issue. Blacks offered the most conservative response, with 70% defending the right of small businessmen not to affirm services for gay marriages.

"The Catholic Church should continue to teach that there are only two sexes, male and female, and should not change its teaching." Six-in-ten (59%) agreed and a third (32%) disagreed. On this question, Hispanics (73%) and blacks (70%) were the most likely to agree; the figure for whites was 61%. There was a huge difference between the sexes: 70% of the men and 50% of the women are in agreement that the Church should not change its teaching on this subject.

October 11 marks the 60th anniversary of the beginning of Vatican II. Did the Church go too fast or too slow in making changes, or were the changes just about right? There was no majority answer: 20% said the changes were too many and too fast; 37% said too few and too slow; 28% answered just about right.

Church critics say that the Church should get with the times and change.

Catholics were asked why it is that those religions which tailor their teachings to what is popular are losing members faster than those that keep to traditional moral teachings (this is undeniably true). Six-in-ten (59%) said it's because they went too far; 35% said they didn't go far enough. The most likely to say these religions went too far were weekly churchgoers (58%), pro-lifers (65%); blacks (65%); and men (58%).

I specifically wanted these last three questions included.

Is it a good thing or a bad thing for a religion to stick to its principles? A clear majority (56%) said it was best to stick to principles and beliefs; 33% said the religion in

question should conform to modern-day opinions. Now consider how the answers changed when the question was about the Catholic religion only.

The survey found that 66% of Catholics said that whether they agreed with most positions in the Catholic Church, or differed on some issues, the Church *should not* change its principles because of public opinion; only 27% said it should modernize. Even 55% of those who rarely or never go to church say the Church should not bend to what is popular! Weekly churchgoers (82%), pro-lifers (84%) and blacks (77%) were the most insistent on the Church sticking to its principles.

I wanted to take it a step further. "If the Catholic church did NOT change its positions as many have suggested, how would that affect your commitment to the church?"

Those who said they would be "more committed" totaled 29%; 41% said they would be "as committed." Which means that 70% of Catholics either would be more committed, or as committed, to the Church if it *did not* make the changes that many say it should make. Only 7% said they would be less committed.

### *Conclusion*

The survey clearly shows that Mass attendance is a key factor in explaining the level of fidelity to Church teachings. Leading the way are blacks and Hispanics, Republicans, pro-lifers and men. Trailing are white people, especially women, and Democrats. The situation with whites is serious, particularly among young women. It is serious because whites are in a better position to contribute to the Church than are blacks and Hispanics.

On a more positive note, the extent to which Catholics—even the non-practicing ones—find their faith to be important, is great news. That they also want the Church to speak up more on moral issues is something that cannot be punctuated enough. Our culture is in a state of crisis and if the Catholic voice

is silent, matters will only deteriorate.

The support for conscience rights is gratifying, but more must be done to articulate the Church's teachings on gays and gender ideology. Too many Catholic schools, especially colleges and universities, are failing us.

Most impressive is the degree to which Catholics admire the constancy of Catholic teachings, even if they may not always agree with everything the Church teaches—they do not want it to cave into public pressure. This needs to be taken to heart by the laity and clergy alike. Most polls would never tap this subject.

I have long argued that there is a big difference between a preference and a demand. It is one thing if Catholics say they are okay with married priests, women priests, etc.; it is quite another if they demand these changes be made.

By way of analogy, an example I often give is my stance on the National Anthem. Would I prefer "God Bless America" to the "Star Spangled Banner"? Yes. Am I going to join a demonstration demanding that the change be made? No. It really doesn't matter that much to me.

Moreover, it really doesn't matter to most Catholics—including those who prefer that the Church make some changes in its teachings—if the Church holds to tradition. In fact, they appreciate it when the Church stands fast on principle.

The public is being manipulated by pollsters and the media into thinking otherwise. That's because they want the Church to secularize.

We know that all of us are sinners and that bad decisions have been made by senior officials in the Church. We should remember, however, that none could have strayed had fidelity to Church teachings been paramount. We don't need to change the Church in any dramatic fashion, but we do need to change

the minds of Catholics and non-Catholics alike about the wisdom of those teachings.

Finally, the finding that Catholics feel it harder to practice and express their faith in public is hardly a surprise to those of us at the Catholic League. Trust us—we are not walking away from this issue.