

CATHOLICS LARGELY FAITHFUL; SURVEY DEBUNKS MYTHS

The findings of the Catholic League-commissioned survey were made available just before we went to press; a more complete analysis will be offered in the October issue.

In the first week of August, The Polling Company, headed by Kellyanne Conway, conducted a nationwide scientific survey of 1,000 Catholics. They were randomly chosen from telephone sample lists, using both landline and cell phones. Sampling controls ensured proportional demographic representation on key variables. The findings are accurate at the 95% confidence level, with a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1%.

The survey was undertaken in anticipation of media surveys that will be released prior to Pope Francis' visit to the U.S. In addition to the usual questions, we asked about issues the media never do.

Roughly 68% of Catholics say their commitment towards their faith has not been altered in any significant way in the recent past. Fully 95% say their faith is important to their everyday life. Asked if they approve of the overall job done by Pope Francis, 83% answered yes, and 79% say he has changed things for the better. Most say the bishops should stick to internal issues, but a slight plurality think the pope should address public policy matters.

The majority say it is wrong for the media to focus heavily on priestly sexual abuse when a papal visit is made. When asked if they have ever heard of a poll that asks non-Jews and non-Muslims what they think about the teachings of Judaism and Islam, 90% said they never heard of such a survey. Yet non-Catholics are frequently asked to opine about our religion.

On abortion, marriage, and women priests, the more practicing

a Catholic is, the more he accepts the Church's teachings. Overall, 61% are pro-life, meaning that they believe abortion should not be permitted in all or most instances. Almost as many, 58%, believe marriage is between a man and a woman only. The same percent think women should be ordained. However, this last issue is deceiving: When asked if the Church should stick to its founding principles and beliefs, 52% say yes; 38% say it should change. In other words, some are conflicted.

By a margin of 2-1 (63% to 30%), Catholics oppose the government forcing a private business to provide services that violate their beliefs (they were specifically asked about gay marriage ceremonies). Even more, 68%, oppose the federal government forcing Catholic groups to pay for health plans that cover abortion-inducing drugs and contraception.

The results of our survey will be made public. We will put it to good use when the media call, debunking many myths.