

# DON'T GIVE UP ON NON-BELIEVERS AT EASTER

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As Christians head to church this Easter weekend, they should pray for those who are struggling with their uneasiness over their apparent loss of faith. I say “apparent” because it appears many of them have not given up altogether.

Working at the Catholic League invariably means we get a chance to study, and occasionally interact with, agnostics, atheists and those who have no religious affiliation. Our impression is more negative than positive, but that may be due to the fact that we are dealing with activists, not ordinary non-believers.

Activists tend to be highly critical of people of faith, but from a recent public opinion survey of Vermont adults, “The Green Mountain State Poll,” conducted by researchers at the University of New Hampshire, it seems they are not representative of most non-believers.

Vermont is home to relatively few believers. Two-in-three *never* attend religious services. That is more than double the average number nationwide, which is 31 percent. Sixteen percent of Vermont adults are atheist; 14 percent are agnostic; and 16 percent have no religious affiliation.

Given this distribution, it is surprising to learn that half of them combined (50 percent) profess a belief in God, Gods, or a Supernatural entity or entities exist. Moreover, seven-in-ten believe in an afterlife. These non-believers are reachable.

If there is one finding that separates activist non-believers from ordinary non-believers, it is the response that non-

believers in this survey gave when asked about the following: "Religious people in the United States are often persecuted for their beliefs." Almost half of all agnostics (48 percent) agree with this observation; exactly half (50 percent) of atheists agree; and just over half (51 percent) of those with no religious affiliation agree.

If those with no religious convictions acknowledge that people of faith are "often persecuted for their beliefs," who might they think are to blame? It suggests they are conceding that much of the problem can be laid at the doorstep of the more militant members of their community. If this is true, and no doubt it is, this would confirm the notion that ordinary non-believers are not the problem; it's the activists in their ranks who are.

Ergo, we should not give up on non-believers at Easter. Many may, and clearly will, come back to the fold.