

# NEW YORK TIMES SURVEY OF CATHOLICS

It's debatable whether someone who admits attending Mass only "a few times a year or never" can be considered Catholic, but their responses make interesting reading compared with those who "attend Mass weekly."

The majority of weekly attendees supported Pope Benedict; only a quarter of those rarely attending did so. While 72% of weekly attendees closely followed recent news stories, only 35% of those rarely attending did. The majority of weekly church-goers wanted Benedict's successor to continue his teachings or adopt more conservative ones. Among the latter, only 20% agreed (66% wanted more liberal teachings).

Weekly attendees considered the healthcare insurance debate a religious liberty issue, but nominal Catholics called it a matter of women's health. Regular church-goers wanted the next pope to oppose abortion (70%) and the death penalty (67%), but the figures for lax Catholics are 45% and 50% respectively. Basically, they're more inclined to oppose the death penalty for a convicted murderer than the killing of innocents!

Surveys about celibacy, women's ordination, and birth control have long found that most Catholics, including practicing ones, are open to change. In 1995, the Catholic League commissioned a survey on these issues. One question yielded a fascinating outcome: "If the Catholic church did not change its positions as many have suggested, how would that affect your commitment to the church?" An astonishing 83% said they'd be just as committed, if not more so (for weekly attendees the figure was 90%).

Basically, while most Catholics are ok with making some changes, they value more highly the continuity of settled

Church teachings.