

Oct. 20, 2002 — Study #471

◆◆◆◆ LOS ANGELES TIMES® POLL ALERT ◆◆◆◆

HOW THE POLL WAS CONDUCTED

Overview

This survey is the 471st in a series of *Los Angeles Times* opinion studies designed to measure public attitudes on a number of critical issues. It is the second *Los Angeles Times* survey of Roman Catholic priests in the United States. The study takes a look at the attitudes of priests in the Roman Catholic Church in America today, in a period when the Church is undergoing public and private scrutiny. Although Catholic-affiliated surveys of the attitudes of priests have been done recently, no independent survey of this population has been taken since the Times Poll surveyed priests and nuns over a period of months in 1993 and 1994 (LAT surveys 321 and 323).

For this survey, 1,854 active and retired priests in 80 dioceses across the U.S and in Puerto Rico returned mail-ballot questionnaires over the period June 27–Oct. 11. Diocesan and religious priests were included in the sample. Spanish language questionnaires were provided for priests in Puerto Rico.

Sample Design and Coverage

The Times Poll selected 5,000 priests from a total population of 45,382 in the United States and Puerto Rico using a two-stage procedure. First, the *Official Catholic Directory* (OFCD), published by P.J. Kennedy & Sons, was used to compile a complete list of all the dioceses in the country as well as the total priest population in each diocese. The list was pre-stratified by regional geography. Eighty dioceses were randomly selected, proportional to priest population in each region.

For the second-stage sample selection, Times Poll researchers obtained directories for each of the sample dioceses wherever possible. When such directories were either unavailable or actively withheld, the OFCD was substituted as a source. In this way, a sample of 5,000 active and retired priests was drawn in proportion to priest population in each diocesan area.

At this point, two Tribune newspapers—the *Morning Call* in Allentown, Pa., and the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* in Ft. Lauderdale, Fl.—expressed an interest in oversampling dioceses in their areas for national comparison. In order to provide enough data for separate analysis of the three southern Pa. dioceses of interest to the *Morning Call* (Scranton, Allentown and Philadelphia, of which only Scranton and Philadelphia were in the first-stage sample pick) and the two dioceses of interest to the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* (Miami and Palm Beach, neither of which was in the original first-stage sample pick), every priest in those five dioceses was contacted. Note that the data set under analysis here includes only the Times Poll's original selected priests in the Scranton and Philadelphia dioceses.¹

The survey questionnaires were first mailed on June 27. This was after the Bishop's conference. Seven thousand two hundred and twenty-two questionnaires, cover letters and pre-paid return envelopes were sent. A second mailing of the same packet was sent to 5,878 non-responding priests on July 25. A reminder postcard was mailed to 5,707 non-responding priests on Aug. 5, and a final third set of 4,924 questionnaire packets was mailed to continuing non-responders on Sept. 4.² The end date of the survey was Oct. 11, making it a 16-week field period. In creating its design, the Times Poll followed the general guidelines for mail surveys found in Dillman's *Mail and Internet Surveys*.³

Research and field work for the 78 dioceses outside southern Pa. were completed by *Los Angeles Times* field staff⁴ under the supervision of Times Poll Field Director Roger Richardson and Times Poll Director Susan Pinkus. Data collection in the dioceses of Philadelphia and Scranton, Pa., was overseen for the *Morning Call* newspaper by Chris Borick, assistant professor of political science at Muhlenberg College.

Return Rates and Margins of Error

By the standard calculation for true random sample of a population of this size, one can say with 95% certainty that the margin of error for this sample is ± 3 percentage points. All population surveys, including this one, are subject to errors of many kinds. Bias may be introduced through coverage errors, survey non-response, question wording issues and other types of human error. Every attempt was made to reduce all of these through preliminary research and follow-ups on non-responders. Four attempts were made to convince priests to return their questionnaires.

Using a response-rate calculation that removes deceased, unqualified and reassigned priests from the sample, resulting in a total sample size of 4,965, the survey has a type A response rate of 37%. Additional removal of unavailable priests results in a sample size of 4,887 and a type B response rate of 38%. Type A response rates ranged from 30% among dioceses in the South to 44% in the Midwest.

Response rate on this survey may have been affected by a variety of issues. First, the Roman Catholic priest population has been subject to intense media scrutiny over the last few months. Many non-responding priests indicated that their refusal to cooperate was due to a concern that their answers would be sensationalized by the press. There were various negative publications about this survey in the Catholic community. Despite the negative publicity, response rates were acceptable in all dioceses and outstanding in some.

In addition to response rate issues, undetected flaws in the way the sampling and interviewing procedure were carried out could

have a significant effect on findings. Changing the wording of questions and the sequence in which they are asked can produce different results. Sometimes questions are inadvertently biased or misleading and people who respond to surveys may not necessarily replicate the views of those who refuse to participate. Moreover, while every precaution has been taken to make these findings completely accurate, other errors may have resulted from the various practical difficulties associated with taking any survey of public opinion.

Some of the best data available for comparison on this survey are surveys of priest populations conducted by Georgetown University's Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA). Comparing numbers of active and retired priests nationwide⁵ to those in our survey, one can see that this survey slightly overrepresents active diocesan priests and underrepresents religious priests.

	All US ⁵ Priests	LA Times Priests Poll 2002
Diocesan, Active	48%	54%
Diocesan, Retired	15	14
Religious, Active	31	28
Religious, Retired	6	4

Comparing sample population to the figures taken from the *Official Catholic Directory*, the sample slightly underrepresents priests in the East and Midwest and overrepresents those in the South. The sample figures have been adjusted slightly to account for this difference.

	All US Priests*	Unweighted LA Times Priests Poll 2002
East	38%	36%
Midwest	17	13
South	30	35
West	15	16

* Figures calculated from population totals in *Official Catholic Directory* 2001.

The Los Angeles Times Poll is directed by Susan Pinkus under the general supervision of Los Angeles Times Managing Editor Dean Baquet. Jill Darling Richardson is Associate Director, Roger Richardson is Field Director, Claudia Vaughn is Data Management Supervisor, and Ray Enslow is Publications Coordinator.

Further information regarding this study is available by writing to the Los Angeles Times Poll, 202 West 1st Street, Los Angeles, California 90012-4105, by calling (213) 237-2027 or by e-mailing timespoll@latimes.com.

This report conforms to the standards of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls and the American Association for Public Opinion Research.

1. Only the dioceses originally selected in the first stage and priests originally selected in the second stage of the sampling process are included in this data set. No interviews conducted in the dioceses of Allentown, Miami or Palm Beach have been included and the interviews with non-sampled priests are excluded as well.

2. Fifty-five percent of the total completed and refused questionnaires

had been returned by the date of the second mailing, 68% by the date of the reminder postcard mailing, and 88% by the date of the third and final mailing.

3. *Mail and Internet Surveys, The Tailored Design Method*, by Dillman, Don A., John Wiley & Sons, 2000 (2nd ed.)

4. The Times Poll would like to acknowledge supervisor Art Dodd and editors Walter Boxer, Debra Birgen and Cynthia Kirk for their diligence and hard work on this survey.

5. National study of priests conducted by CARA in 1999 for the Committee for Priestly Life and Ministry of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

NOTES

All answer frequencies are given in percentages.

Totals may exceed 100% in questions where more than one response was accepted. Totals may be less than 100% where some answer categories are not shown.

“ - ” indicates less than 0.5%.

The wording of some questions has been abridged.

SELECTED RESULTS FROM THE TIMES POLL SURVEY OF ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIESTS June 27–October 11, 2002

(A full summary of results will be available at a later date through the Los Angeles Times Poll)

GUIDE TO COLUMN HEADINGS

ALL	All Roman Catholic Priests in U.S. & Puerto Rico
<21	In priesthood 20 years or less
21–30	In priesthood 21 to 30 years
31–40	In priesthood 31 to 40 years
>40	In priesthood more than 40 years
LIB	Liberal on religion & morals, self-described
MOD	Moderate on religion & morals, self-described
CON	Conservative on religion & morals, self-described

Q3: How many years have you been a priest, that is, counting back to when you were ordained?

	ALL	LIB	MOD	CON
20 years or less	24	19	24	30
21–30 years	16	18	17	12
31–40 years	21	30	21	13
Over 40 years	39	33	37	45
Refused	-	-	1	-

Q13: All things considered, would you say you are satisfied or dissatisfied with the way your life as a priest is going these days?

	ALL	<21	21–30	31–40	>40	LIB	MOD	CON
Satisfied	91	92	90	89	92	86	94	93
Dissatisfied	6	7	8	9	4	11	4	4
Refused	3	1	2	2	4	3	2	3

Q50: Do you think the U.S. news media's treatment of the Catholic Church is:

	ALL	<21	21-30	31-40	>40	LIB	MOD	CON
Positive	2	-	1	2	2	3	1	1
Fair	22	16	17	29	25	36	19	14
Negative	73	82	80	68	68	60	78	83
Refused	3	2	2	1	5	1	2	2

Q51: Would you describe your views on most matters having to do with religious beliefs and moral doctrines as:

	ALL	<21	21-30	31-40	>40	LIB	MOD	CON
Liberal (Net)	30	24	35	43	26	100	-	-
Very liberal	4	2	4	4	4	12	-	-
Somewhat liberal	27	21	32	39	22	88	-	-
Middle-of-the-road	37	37	40	38	35	-	100	-
Conservative (Net)	28	35	22	17	32	-	-	100
Somewhat conservative	23	31	21	15	24	-	-	83
Very conservative	5	5	1	2	8	-	-	17
Refused	5	4	3	2	7	-	-	-

Some people have suggested that there are homosexual subcultures in some seminaries, dioceses and religious institutes. A "subculture" refers to a definite group of persons that has its own friendships, social gatherings and vocabulary.

Q53: Would you say there is a homosexual subculture in your diocese or religious institute, or not? How certain are you?

	ALL	<21	21-30	31-40	>40	LIB	MOD	CON
Yes, definitely	17	24	22	22	8	26	14	12
I think so but I'm not positive	27	26	28	29	27	29	28	26
I don't think so	40	37	38	39	44	36	45	42
No, definitely not	12	12	11	7	13	7	10	17
Refused	4	1	1	3	8	2	3	3

Q54: Thinking now about the seminary or seminaries you attended, was there a homosexual subculture there at the time, or not? How certain are you?

	ALL	<21	21-30	31-40	>40	LIB	MOD	CON
Yes, definitely	12	31	17	6	3	16	12	11
I think so but I'm not positive	14	22	21	14	7	17	13	12
I don't think so	37	32	43	44	33	38	38	35
No, definitely not	34	15	18	34	52	27	36	40
Refused	3	-	1	2	5	2	1	2

Q55: Some people think of themselves as heterosexual in orientation, while others think of themselves as homosexual in orientation and still others feel their sexual orientation lies somewhere in between. How about you?

1. Heterosexual orientation
2. Somewhere in between, but more on the heterosexual side
3. Completely in the middle
4. Somewhere in between, but more on the homosexual side
5. Homosexual orientation
6. Refused

	ALL	<21	21-30	31-40	>40	LIB	MOD	CON
1.	67	65	59	66	73	57	70	75
2.	8	6	10	9	8	10	6	8
3.	5	3	5	6	5	4	6	4
4.	6	8	10	8	3	9	7	4
5.	9	15	13	9	2	17	8	3
6.	5	3	3	2	9	3	3	6

Q56: Which of the following statements most closely describes how you feel about the role that celibacy plays in your life?

1. Celibacy is not a problem for me and I do not waver in my vows
2. Celibacy takes time to achieve and I consider it an ongoing journey
3. Celibacy is a discipline I try to follow, but do not always succeed
4. Celibacy is not relevant to my priesthood and I do not observe it
5. Refused

	ALL	<21	21-30	31-40	>40	LIB	MOD	CON
1.	32	31	22	22	43	17	34	44
2.	47	52	53	54	37	50	51	43
3.	14	11	17	16	12	24	11	8
4.	2	2	4	5	2	6	1	1
5.	5	4	4	3	6	3	3	4

Q57: Generally speaking, would you say celibacy is easier for priests with a heterosexual orientation, or is celibacy easier for priests who have a homosexual orientation, or would you say it is the same regardless of orientation?

	ALL	<21	21-30	31-40	>40	LIB	MOD	CON
Easier for heterosexuals	23	19	9	21	31	15	22	31
Easier for homosexuals	2	2	2	3	2	3	2	2
Same	69	77	87	72	56	79	74	59
Refused	6	2	2	4	11	3	2	8

The next few questions are about the current allegations of child sexual abuse by priests. Please remember that this is a confidential, anonymous survey. Your answers will be published only as a percentage of those answering.

If you are not comfortable in answering any one question, please skip it and move on to the next one. However, each of your answers is extremely valuable for the success of the survey and we hope you will want your opinions to be fully represented. Thank you.

Q59: Generally speaking, do you approve or disapprove of the way bishops have handled allegations of child sexual abuse against their diocesan priests?

	ALL	<21	21-30	31-40	>40	LIB	MOD	CON
Approve (Net)	32	28	33	27	36	23	36	37
Approve strongly	7	6	4	3	10	3	7	10
Approve somewhat	25	22	29	24	26	20	29	27
Disapprove (Net)	64	70	65	71	58	76	63	59
Disapprove somewhat	34	33	32	37	33	34	35	35
Disapprove strongly	31	37	33	34	25	42	28	24
Refused	4	2	2	2	6	1	1	4

Q60: Thinking now about the recent allegations of sexual misconduct by priests... Do you think that most, many, some or only a few of the allegations are true?

	ALL	<21	21-30	31-40	>40	LIB	MOD	CON
Most	19	22	18	24	16	26	18	16
Many	42	43	46	47	36	47	41	39
Some	28	28	30	23	31	21	33	30
Only a few	7	5	4	5	10	5	6	11
Refused	4	2	2	1	7	1	2	4

Q61: When it comes to disciplining priests accused of child sexual abuse, would you say the Church has:

	ALL	<21	21-30	31-40	>40	LIB	MOD	CON
Been too harsh	13	11	15	14	13	14	13	12
Been too lenient	53	58	49	58	49	57	52	54
Done just about the right thing	26	23	28	22	29	24	28	27
Refused	8	8	8	6	9	5	7	7

Q62: Thinking about the compact approved by the Bishops' Conference in June... Overall, how satisfied are you that the bishops' compact adequately addresses the issues dealing with child sexual abuse by priests?

	ALL	<21	21-30	31-40	>40	LIB	MOD	CON
Satisfied	66	62	59	68	70	64	70	67
Neither	6	5	7	5	6	4	7	7
Dissatisfied	25	32	32	26	17	31	22	21
Refused	3	1	2	1	7	1	1	5

Please rate how well the bishops' compact addresses the following issues:

Q63A: Restoring confidence in the Catholic Church.

	ALL	<21	21-30	31-40	>40	LIB	MOD	CON
Excellent/Good	55	53	52	49	59	45	59	63
Neutral	17	22	16	20	13	20	18	14
Fair/Poor	24	24	29	29	19	34	21	18
Refused	4	1	3	2	9	1	2	5

Q63B: Protecting minors from sexual abuse by priests.

	ALL	<21	21-30	31-40	>40	LIB	MOD	CON
Excellent/Good	75	76	76	78	73	75	78	77
Neutral	8	9	9	8	7	8	8	8
Fair/Poor	12	13	12	12	11	15	11	9
Refused	5	2	3	2	9	2	3	6

Q63C: Being fair to priests who are accused of abuse.

	ALL	<21	21-30	31-40	>40	LIB	MOD	CON
Excellent/Good	34	29	29	28	42	27	36	40
Neutral	16	18	15	20	12	16	18	15
Fair/Poor	45	51	53	50	37	55	43	39
Refused	5	2	3	2	9	2	3	6

Q63D: Providing for discipline of bishops who cover up for abusive priests.

	ALL	<21	21-30	31-40	>40	LIB	MOD	CON
Excellent/Good	15	14	9	10	21	11	13	23
Neutral	13	14	9	12	15	7	17	15
Fair/Poor	65	70	78	75	51	80	65	53
Refused	7	2	4	3	13	2	5	9

Q64: In your diocese, had an adequate procedure or mechanism been established before the Bishops' Conference for dealing with the issue of child sexual abuse by priests?

	ALL	<21	21-30	31-40	>40	LIB	MOD	CON
Yes	81	86	86	80	76	78	86	82
No	13	11	12	16	13	18	10	12
Refused	6	3	2	4	11	4	4	6

Q65: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The Catholic Church in America is now facing its biggest crisis in the last century"?

	ALL	<21	21-30	31-40	>40	LIB	MOD	CON
Agree	69	66	70	70	72	78	67	66
Disagree	27	33	27	28	21	21	31	29
Refused	4	1	3	2	7	1	2	5

Q66: Thinking about the recent allegations, what one aspect of the crisis bothers you the most, or aren't you bothered by anything in particular? (ACCEPTED UP TO FIVE REPLIES)
(TOP SIX RESPONSES SHOWN)

1. The way the bishops have responded to the crisis
2. Priests guilty until proven innocent/A single case many years ago, now priest has admirable record
3. The way the media have covered the crisis
4. Bishops covering up guilt on the part of abusive priests
5. Harm to victims/Harm to youngsters
6. Laity lost confidence in priest/Church because of allegations

	<u>ALL</u>	<u><21</u>	<u>21-30</u>	<u>31-40</u>	<u>>40</u>	<u>LIB</u>	<u>MOD</u>	<u>CON</u>
1.	21	28	22	23	16	26	21	17
2.	16	11	17	16	19	16	17	15
3.	14	17	11	15	12	9	17	16
4.	9	10	10	9	9	10	10	9
5.	8	6	9	13	6	10	8	6
6.	8	11	10	8	6	6	10	9

Q67: As you are aware, the Bishops' Conference did not address the issue of disciplining bishops. If a bishop is found to have protected a priest who has sexually abused a minor, what do you think should happen to the bishop? Should he:

1. Not apologize, impose new safeguards and continue to serve
2. Apologize, impose new safeguards and continue to serve
3. Apologize, impose new safeguards and resign his post
4. Be arrested for aiding and abetting a criminal
5. Refused

	<u>ALL</u>	<u><21</u>	<u>21-30</u>	<u>31-40</u>	<u>>40</u>	<u>LIB</u>	<u>MOD</u>	<u>CON</u>
1.	1	1	-	1	2	-	2	2
2.	34	25	27	30	44	28	35	41
3.	41	46	47	46	32	51	40	34
4.	11	15	15	12	7	14	10	8
5.	13	13	11	11	15	7	13	15

Tables compiled by RAY ENSLOW